SCEPTICAL ARGUMENTATION AND PHILOSOPHICAL THEOLOGY:

TOPICS IN HELLENISTIC PHILOSOPHY

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I hereby declare that the thesis presented here contains no material accepted for any other degrees in any other institutions.

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Budapest, 12 June 2016

Abstract

In Chapter 1, I consider the objection that Pyrrhonism cannot be a kind of philosophy in any garden-variety sense of the term, since suspension makes one unmotivated or unable to engage in truth-oriented inquiry. In response, I show that Sextus provides a narrative accounting for the original motivations of inquirers, as well as for the eventual split among dogmatists and Pyrrhoneans. On this account, suspension does not do away with the possibility of inquiry, rather keeps one removed from dogmatic commitments that would terminate inquiry.

In Chapter 2, I examine the claim that Pyrrhoneans suspend about dogmatic theology, but engage in cultic practices of their societies without breach of their suspensive policy. I argue that the conformism advocated by Sextus is not dogmatic, and that possible hypocrisy is not his concern. Against the suggestion that ancient religion did not require beliefs subject to sceptical examination, I argue that this reading fails to provide a philosophically charitable account. In contrast, the general Pyrrhonean stance easily applies.

In Chapter 3, I turn to the arguments against theology in PH III. I analyse the arguments about the conception, existence, and providential activity of gods. I raise the possibility that these constitute an extended argument against the conceivability of god, as far as dogmatic arguments go. I also discuss the peculiarity of providential arguments, in that they indicate discomfort about dogmatic positions unaffected by the inconceivability claim, leading Sextus to a dialectical appropriation of ordinary standards of impiety.

In Chapter 4, I argue that the discussion of conceptual aetiology in M IX is compatible with the parallel discussion in PH III. While the arrangement of the material in M IX gives rise to worries about Sextus' editorial competence as well as about the fixity of his agenda, none of these worries proves substantial. I also argue that the contrast between 'more dogmatic' and 'more aporetic' parts of Sextan argumentation points to the different origin of materials incorporated into his position.

In Chapter 5, I argue that the stance of Cotta in Cicero's De Natura Deorum resembles that of Sextus. While both Cicero and Cotta represent a Clitomachean variant of scepticism, the character Cicero retains his commitment to an assumption of divine providence, which explains his provisional judgement in favour of Stoic theology. In contrast, the dialogue at large expresses Cicero's wavering generated by conflicting commitments, and is thus more a piece of sceptical stagecraft than a meticulous presentation of philosophical options of the day.

In Chapter 6, I argue that there is no principled way to decide the 'realist'-'idealist' debate concerning Epicurean theology. 'Realists' cannot offer an unproblematic account of the physical existence of gods, while 'idealists' endanger the criterial role of preconceptions. An innate disposition to conceive of god does not carry the day for 'idealists', though it highlights the ethical orientation of Epicurean theology. I suggest that Epicurus could have been genuinely uninterested in theological tenets not immediately relevant for the good life, and consider his theory of multiple explanation in this context.

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Introduction

Philosophical theology in the Hellenistic age was arguably more philosophical than it was theology. The term itself does not point to a clearly defined domain of inquiry, but rather to a coalescence of topics inherited from previous philosophical thought. Typical questions include the correctness of ordinary beliefs, the place of the divine in a complete physical description of the universe, or the origin of religious cult and practice, coupled with a concern for the best possible way of life available for humans.[1] Furthermore, most philosophers proposing theological ideas conceived of a peaceful co-habitation between popular religious cults on the one hand, and their own theories on the other hand, no matter how revisionist in spirit the latter happened to be.[2]

Reflection on the fact of religious variety nevertheless shaped the philosophical debate. An appeal to the fact of consensus or of disagreement, be it among philosophers or laymen, could figure as a motivation for inquiry, or as part of the justification of a given theological view. To put it somewhat crudely, the relationship between popular opinion and theoretical investigation could be conceived of in two – potentially incompatible – ways. On the one hand, popular disagreement can be taken to indicate the need for philosophical examination and, eventually, selection or rejection. On the other hand, once the flourishing of philosophical

[1] While the literature on particular topics is ever-growing, more comprehensive treatments of Epicurean and Stoic theology do not abound; but see Babut 1974: 137-201; Dragona-Monachou 1976; Mansfeld 1999; Algra 2003, 2007, 2009; Frede 2005; Meijer 2007; and Sedley 2007: 139-166, 205-238.

[2] Cf. Betegh 2006: 626: 'Thus, philosophers conceived their innovations and criticisms not as a rupture with traditional religiosity or a devastating attack from the outside, but as internal reforms grounded on a genuine understanding of the nature of the divine'; and Annas 2012: 80: 'Apart from Plato's theories, philosophers' theories about the divine are not taken to undermine, or to demand the removal or modification of, popular religious beliefs and practices. Everyday religious life is taken to be self-standing.' For a general discussion, see Parker 2011: 1-39.

theology gave rise to many differing accounts of the divine, tables could easily be turned: thinkers of a sceptical bent of mind could point out that philosophical dispute only added to the already prevalent cases of disagreement. Philosophical disagreement about theology could indicate that philosophers should retrace their steps to popular accounts of divinity.[3]

This is nothing but an instance of what one might call the Sceptical Diagnosis: the general recognition that philosophical inquiry has thus far failed to deliver the results it has promised.[4] Having received the Sceptical Diagnosis, one can respond in a variety of ways, from relaxing one's standards about the truth to a complete rejection and abandonment of the philosophical endeavour. One particular proposal advocates universal suspension of judgement coupled with ongoing inquiry and practical conformism. On this proposal, in response to those who would like to convince us to discard or revise our pre-theoretical beliefs, yet fail to deliver on the promise of rational persuasion, the safe thing is to suspend judgement and continue the search.

[3] In the words of Long 1990/2006: 280: 'Stoic and Epicurean theologies, for all their differences, blend tradition and rational innovation, and they do so in ways that are designed to provide content to religious sensibility without recourse to the crudities and superstitions that had discredited the gods in the eyes of the many. As to the philosophical sceptic, what he attacks in the doctrines of his rivals is not, or not primarily, the traditional features of the gods that the doctrinaire schools retain, but the rational innovations – the attempt to justify theological doctrines by appeal to experience, conceptual analysis, and argument.' Cf. Algra 2009: 228: 'Whereas ancient sceptics – both the Academic sceptics and the Neopyrrhoneans – argued that no such starting points were available, that rational philosophical theology was an impossibility, and that we should accept the tradition, simply because it is the tradition (or because it is convenient), the Stoics boasted a foundationalist epistemology offering a secure basis for their theology: the natural concept, or preconception (*prolepsis*) of god, which in principle any human being was capable of forming on the basis (directly or indirectly) of experience.'

[4] A predicament famously captured by a passage in Cicero's De Legibus (I. 53). According to this anecdote, a certain politician named Gellius, when proconsul of Greece, exemplified Roman pragmatism in the following way: 'he summoned all the philosophers who were then in Athens to one place and vigorously urged them to bring their controversies to an end. And if they did not want to waste the rest of their lives in disputes, some accommodation could be made, and he promised them his assistance in reaching some agreement.' (Tr. Zetzel.) (... *Gellium familiarem tuum, quom pro consule ex praetura in Graeciam venisset <esset> que Athenis, philosophos, qui tum erant, in locum unum convocasse ipsisque magno opere auctorem fuisse, ut aliquando controversarium aliquem facerent modum. Quodsi essent eo animo ut nollent aetatem in litibus conterere, posse rem convenire, et simul operam suam illis esse pollicitum, si posset inter eos aliquid convenire.*)

In this dissertation, I am interested only in this suspensive-conformist response, and especially in its application to the religious domain. This particular conjunction famously found its expression in both Pyrrhonean and Academic scepticism, as evidenced by the main authors to be discussed: Sextus Empiricus and Marcus Tullius Cicero.[5] This specific case and its comparative potential, though occasionally noticed in secondary literature, has not yet received the scholarly attention it deserves.[6] Thus the main contribution of my thesis is that it lays the groundwork for a comprehensive examination of the material, proposes answers to some of the main interpretive quandaries, and throws light on the perks of a comparative inquiry focused on a specific case study.

Furthermore, the bulk of this work also contributes to the controversy over the coherence of Pyrrhonean scepticism as presented by Sextus Empiricus. Students of Sextus Empiricus, much like Sextus himself, take pride in pointing out cases of apparent inconsistency – and not without good reason. Aiming to square what Sextus writes in different places about the same or related issues often seems to present his

[5] Even if scholars tend to mistake suspension for definite rejection. See e.g. Mansfeld 1999: 477: 'In fact, the Academics (just as, subsequently, the Neopyrrhonists) see no harm in following the custom of the land and acting in accordance with traditional religious beliefs. Philosophical theology is what they reject'; and Algra 2009: 228 n14: 'In these cases, in other words, the tradition was salvaged by showing the epistemological impossibility of a rational alternative. According to the sceptics there could be no connection between the accepted tradition and philosophical *truth* of any kind.' (Emphasis in the original.)

[6] On some or all Carneadean arguments concerning theology, see Vick 1902; Couissin 1937 and 1941; Burnyeat 1982a; Long 1990/2006; Warren 2011; and Sedley (forthcoming). On Sextus on religion, see Annas 2012; Bett 2009 and 2015; Thorsrud 2011. On Cicero's engagement with dogmatic theology, see especially Pease 1913; Schofield 1980, 1986, 2008; Denyer 1985; Beard 1986; Tarán 1987/2001; Brunt 1989; Linderski 1995; De Filippo 2000; Wynne 2014 and (forthcoming); and Woolf 2015: 34-92. On scepticism in the context of the history of atheism, see Sedley 2013b and Whitmarsh 2015: 251-277. Cf. also Knuuttila and Sihvola 2000; Drozdek 2005; Sihvola 2006. This sceptical attitude seems to have soon disappeared from among the mainstream philosophical options, possibly due to the changing religious landscape shaped by late antique universalism and the emergence of monotheism. One can nevertheless find traces of its influence. Some say that the Sceptical Diagnosis laid the groundwork for the emergence of dogmatic Platonism (Boys-Stones 2001: 123-150) and for Christianity understood as a kind of philosophy (Karamanolis 2013: 11-12, 36). The shared assumption seems to be that, given the fact of widespread disagreement, one can only hope to find the truth if one turns to some sort of doctrinal authority. For further discussions, occasionally quite speculative, of sceptical influence on Neoplatonism and on Christian theology, see e.g. dom Amand 1945, Wallis 1987, Armstrong 1989, Kendeffy 1999, Bugár 2006.

readers with irresolvable difficulties. At other times, one comes to suspect that the general philosophical framework that he has formed in his head is in tension with particular claims that he makes. As a result, when giving an account of his overall Pyrrhonean outlook, it seems to go almost without saying that one might not need to push too hard for ultimate coherence.[7]

There have been several proposals as to how to deal with this predicament. Presumed differences between the outlooks and agendas in the Outlines (PH I-III) and the two works preserved under the name Adversus Mathematicos (M VII-XI and I-VI) might be invoked to explain away at least some interpretive conflicts.[8] Not independently from this effort, the Sextan corpus can be presented as a compiler's failure, at least partial, at accommodating completely the material drawn from earlier sources into a unified philosophical position.[9] In another fashion, one could call on the so-called therapeutical character of his brand of Pyrrhonism, claiming that Sextus did not really intend to achieve logical and argumentative consistency, as opposed to offering an effective cure against rash belief.[10]

[7] Or, in a less cautious formulation, one might claim that the differences 'cannot be explained away or airbrushed out: they are collaboratively incoherent' (Barnes 2007: 326), or that anyone who takes up the task falls into the vice of 'oversubtlety': 'In my view, the reader of the *Outlines* should not strive too hard to iron out the creases' (Barnes 2000: xv). Cf. Perin who, offering the most ambitious recent interpretation, agrees that a comprehensive reading of Sextus cannot be vindicated (Perin 2010a: 5-6).

[8] On the division of, and chronological relations within, the Sextan corpus, see the introductions to Bett 1997, 2005, 2012 and 2015, as well as Barnes 2000: xiii-xiv. For philological groundwork, as well as a different view on chronology, see Janácek 1950 and 1972.

[9] This is usually taken to follow from the presumed fact that 'Sextus was a copyist – or at least, that he was more a copyist than an author', who sometimes seems to lack even 'a certain banal competence in assembling material' (Bett 2015: 33). This view has been influentially propagated by Barnes: 'I suppose that Sextus copied his sceptical arguments from different sources, and that his different sources presented him with different varieties of scepticism. Sextus did not notice the differences; or perhaps, since he wished to produce a general and catholic account of scepticism, the differences seemed to him to be unimportant.' (Barnes 2000: xv) Cf. also Barnes 1988b: 57 n11.

[10] The therapeutical aspect is accentuated, among others, by Nussbaum, who describes sceptical argumentation as 'responsive to the particular case' and 'value- or end-relative' (Nussbaum 1994: 298-300). She adds that the sceptic 'does not need to hold on to careful logic ... an argument should be only as sound and as well executed as it needs to be to counter what is, or might be, in the pupil's soul' (307). Barnes 1990b argues that therapy belongs to the 'urbane' side of Sextus' Pyrrhonism, as opposed to its 'rustic' side (432); Annas 1993: 246 points out that 'an instrumental attitude to reason and argument flows directly from the therapeutical model'. Perin 2010a contends that sceptical therapy 'is a form of psychotherapy that exhibits a fragrant disregard for the truth' (121); thus any stretch of text

All these proposals undeniably point to relevant features of Sextus' philosophical output. He does work from a variety of sources, belonging to different times and representing various philosophical outlooks, and he does intend his arguments to have a therapeutical effect. Yet one cannot help but feel that these explanations are sometimes used to justify the shelving of philosophical puzzlement. As a consequence, a certain tension emerges between the close reading of Sextan passages and the analysis of the logical space available to the philosophically sound Pyrrhonean. While the recent upsurge of interest in the latter has already resulted in important advances in the field,[11] a simultaneous attempt to look at less frequently discussed passages might offer complementary evidence for a better undertanding of Sextus' philosophical stance.

The discussion of religious dogmatism seems to be a prime candidate for such a case study, for the following reasons. First, the amount of text relevant for this inquiry is quite limited. Sextus dedicates a short and concise discussion to the conception and existence of gods in PH III. 2-12, and offers a much longer treatment of the topic in M IX. 13-194. However, the extended length of the latter chunk of text is mostly due to the vast doxographical material that Sextus draws on to illustrate the general point he makes.[12] Second, these claims made in this context can be discussed without having figured out all the 'big questions' of ancient Pyrrhonism beforehand.

belonging to this strand 'is an expression of a deviant, because clearly anti-rationalist, strand in Scepticism' (115). See also McPherran 1987, Voelke 1990, Hookway 1990: 6-7.

[11] Barnes has championed the project of constructing a coherent version of Sextus' position, while taking the liberty of neglecting or even excising certain tenets explicitly mentioned in the text. Barnes admits that the version of Pyrrhonism he presents is 'a notional scepticism ... to be discovered and invented' that 'Sextus does not embrace but which he could have embraced and would have been best advised to embrace' (Barnes 2007: 327). The spirit, if not always the views, of a broadly Barnesian approach has been carried forward by other significant interpreters; see especially the debate generated by the publication of Perin 2010a (with Brennan 2013, Machuca 2013, Perin 2014, and Perin 2015) as well as Corti 2009.

[12] One might add the bits and pieces of religious customs and laws and ordinary morality that occur elsewhere in PH (see especially I. 145-162 and III. 198-234), but these need not enter the analysis unless in a complementary fashion.

Indeed, they can offer a fresh angle on some of these issues, all the while presenting their reader with problems otherwise easily neglected. A third, if reactionary, reason for engaging with these texts is that other readers have presented them, forcefully though in my mind unjustly, as a complete mess.[13]

Therefore, in chapters 1 to 4, I attempt to provide an outline of Sextan scepticism and a case study of its application to dogmatic theology. In doing so, I discuss intensively a question that has been in the center of recent scholarly interest, the possibility and methodology of sceptical inquiry.[14] I do not, however, offer much of substance on further issues of intense debate, such as the question of the scope of sceptical suspension and the controversy about Pyrrhonean beliefs,[15] or the practical way of life advocated by Sextus and its ethical and political ramifications.[16]

All in all, I take the case at hand to present the following challenge. If a charitable interpretation of the Sextan take on theology emerges, it might support one or another reading of the general Sextan position, though obviously not in a decisive manner. At the same time, a failure might indicate that, even in such a narrow selection of texts and themes, the Pyrrhonism of Sextus cannot offer anything plausible to its interested reader.

[13] Most importantly by Bett 2015; cf. Bett 2009.
[14] See especially de Olaso 1988; Brunschwig 1994a; Loeb 1998; Brennan 1999; Harte and Lane 1999; Palmer 2000; Wlodarczyk 2000; Striker 2001; Vogt 2006, 2012b, 2012c; Barnes 2007; Grgic 2008, 2012; Machuca 2009, 2011; Marchand 2010; Fine 2014; and Olfert 2015.
[15] Besides the articles collected in Burnyeat and Frede 1997, see Barnes 1990b, 2007; Everson 1991; Barney 1992; Fine 1996, 2000b; Brennan 1999, 2000; Perin 2010b; Morison 2011; Vogt 2012d; Schwab 2013; Eichorn 2014; and Brennan and Roberts (forthcoming).
[16] Annas 1986, 1993: 207-213, 244-248, 351-363, 1996a, 1996b; Hiley 1987; Striker 1990; McPherran 1989, 1990; Laursen 1992, 2004, 2005; Bett 1993, 2010; Hankinson 1994; Tsouna-McKirahan 1996; Brennan 1999; Thorsrud 2003; Irwin 2007; Cooper 2007, 2012: 276-303; Spinelli 2008, 2012, 2015; Vogt 2010; Grgic 2011; Marchand 2014.

In chapter 5, I argue that the same suspensive-conformist attitude appears in Cicero's De Natura Deorum, both as Cicero's own authorial stance and especially as the position attributed to the character Cotta.[17] These claims might allow for various provisional suggestions. On the one hand, if Cotta's stance about philosophical theology and religious tradition is indeed quite similar, it could suggest that they are both influenced by a shared, perhaps Clitomachean, strand of scepticism. While I do not discuss this suggestion in detail, my reconstruction of Cotta's position goes a long way to motivate this suggestion. On the other hand, if Cicero's own position – despite the majority view of interpreters – is also Clitomachean, the apparently mitigated or dogmatising elements of ND need to be explained in this framework.

Thus I argue in the chapter that Cicero's own position should be understood against the background of the Clitomachean stance represented by Cotta. By way of the dialogue form, Cicero is able to dramatise his own vacillation between incompatible views, that is, to give a literary account of the way in which a sceptic of the suspensive-conformist kind might be temporarily swayed by pre-investigative commitments into positions not justified by the sceptical method. I argue, however, that the provisional judgements that Cicero occasionally formulates do not force him to abandon the Clitomachean position.

While chapters 1 to 5 thus share a thematic unity, chapter 6 is an obvious outlier. It is nevertheless connected to the previous chapters in at least three ways. First, it touches upon a sort of concern among later Epicureans that could have easily been provoked by the challenge of sceptical examination. In this respect, it clearly relates to the question of Cicero's trustworthiness as a source on Epicurean theology as well. Second, it is crucially derivative on an insight about the Sextan engagement

[17] Cf. De Filippo 2000, Wynne 2014, and Brittain 2015.

with Epicurean theology. Importantly, I put my finger on the Epicurean undercurrent of Sextus' arguments throughout chapters 4 and 5, and I point out especially that it contains a hint that Epicurus might have lacked the sort of theological account that other dogmatic thinkers were defending. Third, the last chapter also serves as an illustration of how a reconstruction of the dialectic of the original debate can contribute to matters that are of recent scholarly interest.

Chapter 1. Keep calm and carry on: Sextan Pyrrhonism as a kind of philosophy

According to Sextus Empiricus, suspension of judgement allows Pyrrhoneans to enjoy a state of tranquillity, all the while continuing their philosophical investigations. On a familiar reading, however, the Sextan project of reconciling Pyrrhonean suspension with the aspiration to offer a philosophical choice faces severe difficulties. Most importantly, as various objections go, becoming a Pyrrhonean makes one unmotivated or outright unable to engage in the kind of truth-oriented inquiry that is specific to any philosophy worthy of the name.[18]

These charges have been at the forefront of recent discussions, and have been at least partially rebutted.[19] In this chapter, I aim to complement the existing discussion from the point of view of sceptical conversion: that is, by developing the narrative as outlined by Sextus of an inquirer eventually becoming a Pyrrhonean. In doing so, I offer a reading on which eventual Pyrrhoneans need not reject the general framework of philosophical inquiry, yet they may differ from dogmatists in their assessment about the results of the investigations that have been carried out so far. Consequently, far from losing their motivation to inquire, Pyrrhoneans are Pyrrhoneans exactly by virtue of persevering in their search.

[18] Perhaps the most convincing version of this reading is presented by Striker, who maintains that 'Contrary to Sextus' initial claim that the Sceptic goes on investigating, philosophical investigations seem to be precisely what the Sceptic's way of life is designed to avoid' (Striker 2001: 121). Barnes, another major proponent of this view, says in various places that Pyrrhoneans inquire 'only in a Pickwickian sense' (Barnes 1988: 234), that Pyrrhonism is 'a form of folly rather than a form of philosophy' (Barnes 2000: xxi), and that 'It can be shown that real Sextan sceptics do not investigate' (Barnes 2007: 327). Barnes himself seems to be of two minds: sometimes he suggests that Pyrrhonists abandon inquiry ('since an emeritus professor is no longer a professor, surely a sceptical philosopher is no longer a philosopher. Sextan scepticism is not a philosophy: it is a retirement from philosophy', Barnes 2007: 329), other times that they – or at least Sextus himself – never seriously meant to engage in it in the first place ('It is difficult to believe that Sextus ever seriously searched for the truth', Barnes 2000: xxx).

[19] See especially Perin 2010a: 7-32, Grgic 2008 and 2012, Vogt 2012b. On Pyrrhonean investigation in Diogenes Laertius, see Olfert 2015. For an approach similar to mine, see Barney (forthcoming); for Section 3, see also Frede (forthcoming).

I proceed along the following lines. First, I make the case for the importance of philosophical inquiry for Sextus, and present the main charges against its possibility (Section 1). Second, I give a close reading of three passages in the Outlines that are relevant for the narrative of sceptical conversion (Section 2). Third, I analyse the conversion narrative both as an idealised biography and as an account of the emergence of a philosophical movement (Section 3). Fourth, I present the story of Apelles the painter as a model of sceptical conversion, that is, of the achievement of the Pyrrhonean stance (Section 4). Finally, I summarise my interpretation, and briefly discuss possible reasons to think that a Pyrrhonean will go on inquiring after suspension has been achieved (Section 5).

1. Philosophy and inquiry

Sextus Empiricus clearly conceives of his Pyrrhonean position as a kind of philosophy,[20] and opens his Outlines of Pyrrhonism by situating followers of his persuasion among other members of the philosophical community. In this opening section, he explains why 'the most fundamental kinds of philosophy are reasonably thought to be three: dogmatic, Academic and sceptical':[21]

[20] Throughout his presentation, he repeatedly adopts self-denominations that reflect this understanding, including ἡ σκεπτικὴ φιλοσοφία (PH I. 5, 236, II. 6), ὁ Πυρρώνειος δὲ φιλόσοφος (PH I. 11), and οἱ ἀπὸ τῆς σκέψεως φιλόσοφοι (M VIII. 191). See the nearly equivalent labels of τὸν ἀπορητικῶς φιλοσοφοῦντα (M VII. 30) or τὴν ἐφεκτικὴν ... φιλοσοφίαν (PH II. 9). On the Sextan understanding of Pyrrhonism as philosophy, see especially Ioli 2003; cf. Polito 2007 for the additional claim that his presentation reflects a struggle for institutional recognition and patronage.

[21] PH I. 4. ὅθεν εὐλόγως δοκοῦσιν αἱ ἀνωτάτω φιλοσοφίαι τρεῖς εἶναι, δογματικὴ Ἀκαδημαϊκὴ σκεπτική. Throughout this chapter, I quote the Outlines (PH) in the translation of Annas and Barnes 2000, occasionally modified.

> When people are investigating any subject, the likely result is either a discovery, or a denial of discovery and a confession of inapprehensibility, or else a continuation of the investigation. This, no doubt, is why in the case of philosophical investigations, too, some have said that they have discovered the truth, some have asserted that it cannot be apprehended, and others are still investigating.[22]

In this passage, Sextus casually offers a tripartite scheme of inquiry in general, then goes on to apply it with the same ease to the particular case of philosophical inquiry. Types of inquiry are thus said to display the same internal tripartition, in accordance with their alleged stances towards the state of inquiry: whether it is ongoing or has already come to an end, and if the latter is the case, whether its termination is due to discovery or to the eventual surrender of the inquirer.[23] Though Sextus does not mention any other contenders to the title of ζήτησις,[24] the passage seems to suggest that κατὰ φιλοσοφίαν inquiry is oriented towards the discovery of truth.[25]

[22] PH I. 1-2. Τοῖς ζητοῦσί τι πρᾶγμα ἢ εὕρεσιν ἐπακολουθεῖν εἰκὸς ἢ ἄρνησιν εὑρέσεως καὶ ἀκαταληψίας ὁμολογίαν ἢ ἐπιμονὴν ζητήσεως. διόπερ ἴσως καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν κατὰ φιλοσοφίαν ζητουμένων οἱ μὲν εὑρηκέναι τὸ ἀληθὲς ἔφασαν, οἱ δ' ἀπεφήναντο μὴ δυνατὸν εἶναι τοῦτο καταληφθῆναι, οἱ δὲ ἔτι ζητοῦσιν.

[23] Barnes 2007: 324 points out that there are other possible outcomes of inquiry: among other things, one could shelve the question, be distracted from search, or even die on the job. While it could be a problem for the general tripartition of any inquiry, I fail to see how it is an objection to the presentation of the kinds of philosophy: those who were distracted from it or died on the job simply do not show up on the map of available philosophical schools.

[24] Another kind of systematic inquiry that Sextus concerns himself with is the curriculum of the ἐγκύκλια μαθήματα (M I-VI), which also aims at a sort of truth and is part of philosophy broadly conceived. – For various senses of the word ζήτησις in Sextus, see Palmer 2000: 366-367 (with further references and discussion in 354 n3).

[25] The sense of τῶν κατὰ φιλοσοφίαν ζητουμένων is somewhat ambiguous: it could mean either inquiring into propositions that were posited as true, or targeting the things themselves that are the objects of such propositions. This difference, however, does not seem important in the present context (Brennan 1999: 85 n19). Cf. Ioli 2003: 402 for the distinction between philosophy as an abstract singular term denoting philosophy as such and philosophy as an abstract general term denoting particular philosophical schools. For a similar distinction in Stoicism between ἡ φιλοσοφία, a bodily disposition of the commanding faculty, and ὁ κατὰ φιλοσοφίαν λόγος, its incorporeal counterpart, a collection of true philosophical propositions that admits of division or partition, see Ierodiakonou 1993.

The upshot of the division in PH I. 1-4. is that Pyrrhonism is the only genuinely inquisitive kind of philosophy. This ambitious statement further breaks down into two claims that can be construed to respond to slightly different concerns. First, against those who maintain that after suspension one ceases to investigate, Sextus replies that Pyrrhonists can and do inquire into philosophical matters. Second, in response to the claim that a prospective inquirer is better-off following a non-sceptical school, Sextus makes the case that Pyrrhonism is in fact the only kind of philosophy whose followers are still in the business of inquiry.[26]

Leaving aside the latter, stronger claim, there are two main types of objections against the former, weaker proposition, i.e. that Pyrrhoneans can inquire. One type of objections – let us call it the Tranquillity Charge[27] – claims that, whether or not they could in principle inquire for the truth, Pyrrhoneans have no motivation to do so, since the goal of their activities is the acquisition and preservation of tranquillity achieved through suspension. The other type of objections – which I shall call the Unproductivity Charge – claims that, given their attitude and especially their argumentative armoury, discovery is ruled out for the Pyrrhoneans, and in that sense, investigation is impossible for them.[28]

[26] Sextus offers arguments of questionable merit for the stronger claim in polemical contexts (PH II. 1-11, M VIII. 337-336a); I return to this issue in Section 3.2. The same general idea informs his explanation of three out of four labels adopted by Sextans (PH I. 7): 'The sceptical persuasion, then, is also called investigative, from its activity of investigating and inquiring; suspensive, from the feeling that comes about in the inquirer after the investigation; and aporetic, either (as some say) from the fact that it puzzles over and investigates everything, or else from its being at a loss whether to assent or deny' (Ἡ σκεπτικὴ τοίνυν ἀγωγὴ καλεῖται μὲν καὶ ζητητικὴ ἀπὸ ἐνεργείας τῆς κατὰ τὸ ζητεῖν καὶ σκέπτεσθαι, καὶ ἐφεκτικὴ ἀπὸ τοῦ μετὰ τὴν ζήτησιν περὶ τὸν σκεπτόμενον γινομένου πάθους, καὶ ἀπορητικὴ ἤτοι ἀπὸ τοῦ περὶ παντὸς ἀπορεῖν καὶ ζητεῖν, ὡς ἔνιοί φασιν, ἢ ἀπὸ τοῦ ἀμηχανεῖν πρὸς συγκατάθεσιν ἢ ἄρνησιν). Note that the second label need not imply that the investigation is over, only that by the time of suspension, some investigation has already taken place (*pace* Barnes 2007: 328, cf. Mates 1996: 226, Perin 2010a: 14 n9); note also the odd epexegetic remark on the third label, which suggests that Sextus is so much at a discomfort about being identified as an unqualified aporetic that he insists on an etimologically incorrect connection between the sense of ἀπορητικὴ and inquiry.

[27] I borrow the name from Vogt 2012b.

[28] Some say that Pyrrhonean inquiry cannot lead to discovery because it is essentially second-order in nature (Palmer 2000: 367-368, Marchand 2010: 133), others that it cannot ever be more than the expression of a temporary state of mind (Barnes 1988b: 62 n17, Striker 2001: 123), again others that

In what follows, I shall be mainly concerned with the Tranquillity Charge.[29] This, in turn, can be formulated in two ways, depending on how one describes the original motivation of the inquirer – i.e. whether one thinks that these inquirers started out with a genuine interest in the truth. On the one hand, some think that Pyrrhoneans originally set out to inquire for the truth, even if they conceived it as a means to tranquillity, but once they have discovered a shortcut to tranquillity, they have lost their motivation to search for the truth. If finding the truth had ever been a genuine goal for them, they discarded it as dogmatic and adopted the goal of suspension instead.[30] Others suggest that someone prone to become a Pyrrhonean has never even embraced truth as a desideratum, but rather went looking for the most readily available therapy of anxiety.[31]

In other words, both versions of the Tranquillity Charge assume that Sextus fundamentally misunderstood or misrepresented philosophical inquiry. Eventual Pyrrhoneans either set out investigating on the wrong foot, not looking for real answers, or initially wanted to arrive at results, but gave up in the process and now rest satisfied with intellectually unsatisfactory conclusions. Due to this misconception of what philosophy is about, one has to conclude that Pyrrhoneans are not engaged in genuine inquiry.

Having presented these worries, I go on to introduce the Sextan narrative of becoming a suspender (Section 2), and to uncover the underlying notion of philosophy (Section 3), in order to formulate a response to the Tranquillity Charge.

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the arguments employed by a Sextan Pyrrhonist are simply too effective (Barnes 2000: xxvi-xxvii; Palmer 2000: 359, 365-366, 373; Striker 2001: 120; Barnes 2000: 137-138), but cf. Vogt 2012b: 137-138. For an attempt at rebuttal, see Perin 2010a: 27-31.

[29] Though I shall briefly return to the Unproductivity Charge in Section 3.2.

[30] Loeb 1998: 214: 'Pyrrhonian skepticism is an example of a position on which a higher-order desire for a psychological objective supplants the lower-level desire for truth.'; cf. Striker 2001: 117-118; Marchand 2010: 129 with n15, 135-137; Grgic 2012: 18. The remarks of Sedley 1983: 21 could be construed in a similar way.

[31] Barnes 2000: xxx; Palmer 2000: 369; but cf. Perin 2010a: 8.

2. The road to Pyrrhonism

Throughout the general presentation (καθόλου λόγος, PH I. 5) of Pyrrhonism, there are three passages where Sextus hints at the personal journey of an inquirer coming to suspend judgement. First, at PH I. 12, he offers an account of two 'origins' or 'principles' (ἀρχαὶ) of scepticism; then, at I. 26 and I. 29, he offers different formulations in the context of discussing the Pyrrhonean goal (τέλος).[32] In this section, I shall look at these three passages as together constituting the outlines of one and the same narrative.

2.1. The 'origins' of scepticism (PH I. 12)

Let us start by looking at the passage about the two 'origins' or 'principles' of scepticism. The first of these two origins, labelled by Sextus as 'originative' or perhaps 'aetiological' (αἰτιώδης), points to the desire for tranquillity:

[32] A fourth passage appears outside of the Outlines, at M I. 6, introducing Sextus' attack on various arts and crafts. Here we read that the epistemic situation and the suspensive outcome is similar, yet the promise of tranquillity is conspicuously missing: 'Rather they had the same experience in the case of the liberal studies as they had with all of philosophy. For just as they approached philosophy wishing to get at the truth but when confronted with a battle of equals and the irregularity of things they suspended judgement, in the same way they set out to grasp the liberal studies and sought to learn the truth here as well and when they discovered equally difficult problems they did not hide them.' (ἀλλὰ τοιοῦτόν τι ἐπὶ τῶν μαθημάτων παθόντες ὁποῖον ἐφ' ὅλης ἔπαθον τῆς (φιλο)σοφίας. καθὰ γὰρ ἐπὶ ταύτην ἦλθον πόθῳ τοῦ τυχεῖν τῆς ἀληθείας, ἰσοσθενεῖ δὲ μάχῃ καὶ ἀνωμαλίᾳ τῶν πραγμάτων ὑπαντήσαντες ἐπέσχον, οὕτω καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν μαθημάτων ὁρμήσαντες ἐπὶ τὴν ἀνάληψιν αὐτῶν, ζητοῦντες καὶ τὸ ἐνταῦθα μαθεῖν ἀληθές, τὰς δὲ ἴσας εὑρόντες ἀπορίας, οὐκ ἀπεκρύψαντο.Tr. Blank.) One explanation could be that the ambitions of these two fields are different: it is the specific promise of philosophy that finding the truth will bring happiness. This seems to be assumed by Machuca 2006: 112 n3, 125-127, who argues that tranquillity is not a proper goal of the Pyrrhonean, it is assumed only insofar as she is habituated into a socio-cultural context that values tranquillity as a philosophical goal. I would avoid this reading and suggest that tranquillity is not mentioned in this passage because Sextus is not giving an account of the *origin* of the liberal arts: should he do so, he would mention the worries specific to questions investigated in this domain.

> We say that the originative principle of scepticism is the hope of becoming tranquil. Men of talent, troubled by the anomaly in things, and puzzled as to which of them they should rather assent to, came to investigate what in things is true and what false, thinking that by deciding these issues they would become tranquil.[33]

According to the first 'origin', itinerant inquirers can be called οἱ μεγαλοφυεῖς τῶν ἀνθρώπων, a description that effectively selects them out from humanity at large without any immediate explanation of the selection criteria.[34] The passage then offers a step-by-step outline of the predicament in which such people find themselves.

First of all, we learn that at some point (i) they were troubled by various anomalies, that is, by the kinds of conflicts among appearances that are non-exhaustively catalogued by Sextus in his summary of the Ten Modes.[35] This provides a connection to the second point, namely, that inquirers (ii) were aiming at a decision (ἐπίκρῐσις) about the truth and falsity of anomalous appearances in order to give their assent (συγκατάθεσις) accordingly. Third, we learn that (iii) they anticipated that coming to such a decision would grant them the tranquillity of which they were deprived in their condition. To reiterate, this condition is characterised by an

[33] PH I. 12. Ἀρχὴν δὲ τῆς σκεπτικῆς αἰτιώδη μέν φαμεν εἶναι τὴν ἐλπίδα τοῦ ἀταρακτήσειν· οἱ γὰρ μεγαλοφυεῖς τῶν ἀνθρώπων ταρασσόμενοι διὰ τὴν ἐν τοῖς πράγμασιν ἀνωμαλίαν, καὶ ἀποροῦντες τίσιν αὐτῶν χρὴ μᾶλλον συγκατατίθεσθαι, ἦλθον ἐπὶ τὸ ζητεῖν, τί τε ἀληθές ἐστιν ἐν τοῖς πράγμασι καὶ τί ψεῦδος, ὡς ἐκ τῆς ἐπικρίσεως τούτων ἀταρακτήσοντες.

[34] Cf. the puzzlement of Mates 1996: 227: 'It seems a bit odd that the Pyrrhonists (or the Pyrrhonists and the Dogmatists, if that is what is meant) are described as *οἱ μεγαλοφυεῖς τῶν ἀνθρώπων* ('the better-quality people', '*die Bessere Leute*' – which I have watered down to 'talented'), and I have not found a good explanation of this.' Also Svavarsson 2011: 23: 'It is unclear what Sextus wants to convey by calling future skeptics 'of noble nature'. Perhaps he has in mind seriousness of purpose, or intense sensitivity to the conflict of appearances.' – Other notable translations include 'men of talent' (Bury, Annas and Barnes), 'men of noble nature' (Hallie and Etheridge 1964), 'gifted men' (Blank 1998: 82), 'die geistig Höherstehenden' (Hossenfelder 2002), 'able people' (Irwin 2007), 'great-natured' or 'smart and energetic people' (Cooper 2012), 'les hommes bien nés' (Pellegrin 1997).

[35] Sextus uses the term ἀνωμᾰλία in his discussion of the fourth (PH I. 112, 114), seventh (PH I. 132), and tenth (PH I. 163) Mode; see also the ethical (PH III. 198, 218, 220), theological (M IX. 191) and linguistic (M I. 154, 236, 240) anomalies he mentions elsewhere. The proper understanding of the Modes is not relevant for my purposes, but see e.g. Striker 1983, Annas and Barnes 1985: 19-171, Gaukroger 1995, Hankinson 1995: 139-162, Spinelli 2005: 27-60, Powers 2010, Woodruff 2010, and Morison (forthcoming).

awareness of undecided anomalies, a pronounced lack of a decision in matters of truth and falsity, and the hope of arriving at such a decision.

Having glimpsed at the first 'origin', we already have in place an inquisitive character as well as an epistemic condition that provides motivation for inquiry. At this point, Sextus goes on to introduce the second origin, the one that explains what 'sustains' or 'is constitutive of' (συστάσεως) the Pyrrhonean stance:

> The constitutive principle of scepticism is rather / most of all the claim that to every argument an equal argument is opposed; for it is from this, we think, that we come not to dogmatise.[36]

The second 'origin' thus adds two closely connected details to the profile of eventual Pyrrhoneans. At some point, they have come to the recognition that (iv) to every account an equal account is opposed. *Prima facie*, such recognition would seem to rule out any hope of future discovery. Sextus, however, carefully explains elsewhere that (iv) is merely a shorthand for a proper formulation of the recognition of equipollence: it only applies to arguments already reviewed by the investigator.[37] Furthermore, (v) this recognition inhibits any dogmatic views: in response to

[36] PH I. 12. συστάσεως δὲ τῆς σκεπτικῆς ἐστιν ἀρχὴ μάλιστα τὸ παντὶ λόγῳ λόγον ἴσον ἀντικεῖσθαι· ἀπὸ γὰρ τούτου καταλήγειν δοκοῦμεν εἰς τὸ μὴ δογματίζειν.

[37] 'Thus when I say 'Opposed to every account there is an equal account', I am implicitly saying this: 'To every account I have scrutinized 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'. Thus the utterance of this remark is not dogmatic but a report of a human feeling which is apparent to the person who feels it.' (PH I. 203. ὅταν οὖν εἴπω ‘παντὶ λόγῳ λόγος ἴσος ἀντίκειται’, δυνάμει τοῦτό φημι ‘παντὶ τῷ ὑπ' ἐμοῦ ζητουμένῳ λόγῳ, ὃς κατασκευάζει τι δογματικῶς, ἕτερος λόγος κατασκευάζων τι δογματικῶς, ἴσος αὐτῷ κατὰ πίστιν καὶ ἀπιστίαν, ἀντικεῖσθαι φαίνεταί μοι’, ὡς εἶναι τὴν τοῦ λόγου προφορὰν οὐ δογματικὴν ἀλλ' ἀνθρωπείου πάθους ἀπαγγελίαν, ὅ ἐστι φαινόμενον τῷ πάσχοντι.)

ἰσοσθένεια, these inquirers realise that assent on the basis of a perceived truth and falsity would be rash.[38]

Notice that tranquillity is not mentioned as an end-result of the journey as described in PH I. 12. Instead, due to the recognition of equipollence, inquirers are said to arrive at a prolonged state of suspension of judgement and thus to a lack of illicit δόγμα. It is in this sense that continuing to inquire can be an outcome of inquiry:[39] becoming aware of ἰσοσθένεια is a result – if provisional – of previous inquiry, which is at the same time constitutive of further investigation, insofar as one realises that the answer has not yet been found.

It is worth noting that the passage of 'origins' is placed in-between the presentation of two crucial characteristics of a Pyrrhonean: the possession of the δύναμις ἀντιθετικὴ, the capacity to set out oppositions leading to equipollence,[40] and the senses in which Pyrrhoneans do and do not hold any δόγμα.[41] The PH I. 12 passage is probably tailored to showing how the interplay of the two 'origins' of scepticism results in the achievement of such a stance. In this context, the resulting tranquillity is not of immediate concern for Sextus, or is perhaps something that needs further elucidation.

[38] It is not ruled out that something still *appears* to be the case; indeed, some such appearances constitute the practical criterion (PH I. 23-24).
[39] *Pace* Barnes 2007: 322. Cf. also the realisation that discovery has not yet taken place (τὸ νομίζειν ὡς οὐχ εὑρήκασιν, PH II. 11).
[40] PH I. 11, with 8-10 explaining what δύναμις ἀντιθετικὴ is. On equipollence, see Machuca 2009, Svavarsson 2014c.
[41] PH I. 13. This is perhaps the most important passage for the debate concerning the 'scope of suspension'; I cannot go into this debate here, even though my account is not completely neutral about it. For the most important contributions to the scope debate, see Burnyeat and Frede 1997, Fine 2000b, Brennan 2000, Schwab 2012, Brennan and Roberts (forthcoming).

2.2. The goal of Pyrrhonism (PH I. 26 and 29)

Later on, when discussing the goal (τέλος) of Pyrrhonism, Sextus offers two more versions of a story along the same lines.

The first version goes as follows:

> For they began to do philosophy in order to decide among appearances and to apprehend which are true and which false, so as to become tranquil; but they came upon equipollent dispute, and being unable to decide this they suspended judgement. And when they suspended judgement, tranquillity in matters of opinion followed fortuitously.[42]

This passage confirms that the 'anomalies' are indeed conflicts among appearances, and adds that the proposed art of adjudicating among them is philosophy. According to Sextus, one undertakes philosophy to decide which appearances are true and which ones are false, and the ultimate motivation for seeking such decisions is the hope of finding tranquillity (ὥστε ἀταρακτῆσαι). In this context, equipollence is rephrased as equipollent dispute (ἰσοσθενῆ διαφωνίαν), a qualifier that Sextus generally applies to the current state of dogmatic philosophising. It is against the background of dogmatic disagreement, then, that Pyrrhoneans can vindicate an achievement, namely, the achievement of tranquillity through the suspension of judgment in matters of opinion (ἡ ἐν τοῖς δοξαστοῖς ἀταραξία). Sextus adds that this tranquillity, which I shall call from now on 'suspensive tranquillity', came about fortuitously (τυχικῶς).

[42] PH I. 26. ἀρξάμενος γὰρ φιλοσοφεῖν ὑπὲρ τοῦ τὰς φαντασίας ἐπικρῖναι καὶ καταλαβεῖν, τίνες μέν εἰσιν ἀληθεῖς τίνες δὲ ψευδεῖς, ὥστε ἀταρακτῆσαι, ἐνέπεσεν εἰς τὴν ἰσοσθενῆ διαφωνίαν, ἣν ἐπικρῖναι μὴ δυνάμενος ἐπέσχεν· ἐπισχόντι δὲ αὐτῷ τυχικῶς παρηκολούθησεν ἡ ἐν τοῖς δοξαστοῖς ἀταραξία.

Then again at I. 29:

> Now the sceptics were hoping to recover tranquillity by deciding the anomalies in what appears and is thought of, and being unable to do this they suspended judgement. But when they suspended judgement, tranquillity followed as it were fortuitously, as a shadow follows a body. We do not, however, take the sceptics to be undisturbed in every way – we say that they are disturbed by things which are forced upon them; for we agree that at times they shiver and are thirsty and have other feelings of this kind.[43]

From this version, we further learn that anomalies are prevalent in 'what appears and is thought of' (τῶν φαινομένων τε καὶ νοουμένων), to which the Pyrrhonean's capacity for setting out oppositions is eminently applied.[44] Suspensive tranquillity is once again said to arise τυχικῶς, with the curious epexegetic remark that it follows suspension like shadow follows the body (ὡς σκιὰ σώματι). Importantly, the passage introduces a contrast between two domains: on the one hand, suspensive tranquillity in matters of opinion is efficient with regard to τᾰρᾰχή; on the other hand, the ὄχλησις arising in matters forced upon us (ὑπὸ τῶν κατηναγκασμένων) is unaffected by its achievement.[45]

[43] PH I. 29. καὶ οἱ σκεπτικοὶ οὖν ἤλπιζον μὲν τὴν ἀταραξίαν ἀναλήψεσθαι διὰ τοῦ τὴν ἀνωμαλίαν τῶν φαινομένων τε καὶ νοουμένων ἐπικρῖναι, μὴ δυνηθέντες δὲ ποιῆσαι τοῦτο ἐπέσχον· ἐπισχοῦσι δὲ αὐτοῖς οἷον τυχικῶς ἡ ἀταραξία παρηκολούθησεν ὡς σκιὰ σώματι. οὐ μὴν ἀόχλητον πάντῃ τὸν σκεπτικὸν εἶναι νομίζομεν, ἀλλ' ὀχλεῖσθαί φαμεν ὑπὸ τῶν κατηναγκασμένων· καὶ γὰρ ῥιγοῦν ποτε ὁμολογοῦμεν καὶ διψῆν καὶ τοιουτότροπά τινα πάσχειν. I render ἀναλήψεσθαι as 'recover', not 'acquire' (Annas and Barnes), in order to maintain the connection with pre-inquisitive tranquillity, instead of pointing forward to some kind of tranquillity previously unexperienced (see below).

[44] Cf. PH I. 8, 31.

[45] At PH I. 13, Sextus says that Pyrrhoneans assent to feelings forced upon them by the appearances (κατὰ φαντασίαν κατηναγκασμένοις πάθεσι συγκατατίθεται ὁ σκεπτικός); since Pyrrhonean appearances are not restricted to sensory perceptions, the scope of 'matters forced upon us' should extend beyond bodily affections. Thus ὄχλησις itself should not be limited to physical wear and tear. Whenever Sextus talks about ὄχλησις, there seems to be a physical element involved, but often with an added component of opinion: see his examples ranging from the suffering of a dog (PH I. 71) to the distress of hunger, thirst, being in love, but also of pursuing wealth (PH I. 71, III. 183, M XI. 82, 149),

These two passages figure in the section describing the goal of scepticism.[46] Sextus kicks off his discussion by offering two quasi-definitions of a τέλος, followed up by his statement on the goal endorsed by the Pyrrhonean *qua* Pyrrhonean: 'Up to now we say that the aim of the sceptic is tranquillity in matters of opinion and moderation of feeling in matters forced upon us'.[47] The adoption of this goal is an achievement for the inquirer, clearly differentiated from the original goal of tranquillity arrived at by discovering the truth. It accompanies the suspensive disposition, which was, in turn, achieved after the recognition of equipollence.

At this point, one could distinguish at least three types of tranquillity.[48] First, there is some form of tranquillity available before the investigation, something that is lost at the moment when 'men of great nature' start to worry about anomalies. This notion of pre-investigative tranquillity need not be cashed out in detail: it probably accompanies a state in which one is either unaware of or completely indifferent about conflicting appearances. Second, there is the type of tranquillity propagated by dogmatic philosophers: this is said to follow upon the acquisition of truth, a set of correct beliefs or rather knowledge, and is taken to be either a component of happiness, or to be happiness itself. Third, Sextus argues, there is an intermediary state between pre-inquisitive tranquillity and the philosophers' tranquillity: a state arrived at by inquirers who had once been troubled by the anomalies, then came to

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to the capacity of taste involving the capacity for distress, as well as the difficulty of obtaining things or the distress of being afraid of something (M IX. 141, 157, 160). (Elsewhere, the same sort of trouble – due to beliefs about wealth and poverty, glory, and other things – is described as τᾶρᾶχή: M XI. 82, 125, 145-146). At M II. 30, he says that someone in possession of the art of rhetoric will enter competitions and travel around, thereby wearing themselves out; and at M VI. 24, he gives the example of war music used to divert attention from the struggle and turmoil of soldiers on the battlefield. Finally, at PH I. 10, he defines tranquillity as ψυχῆς ἀοχλησία, once again indicating that ὄχλησις can involve a mental component.

[46] For discussions of this section, see Pohlenz 1904, Sedley 1983: 21-23, Hankinson 1997: 26-31, Moller 2004.

[47] PH I. 25. φαμὲν δὲ ἄχρι νῦν τέλος εἶναι τοῦ σκεπτικοῦ τὴν ἐν τοῖς κατὰ δόξαν ἀταραξίαν καὶ ἐν τοῖς κατηναγκασμένοις μετριοπάθειαν.

[48] For a different distinction between the kinds of tranquillity, see Svavarsson 2011: 25-27.

recognise equipollence, as a result of which they are not in possession of the truth – yet, miraculously, they enjoy a state of tranquillity.

Judging by Sextus' rather tentative definition of tranquillity, all three states can qualify: he says that it is a state of the soul in which it is free from disturbance and enjoys serenity (‘ἀταραξία’ δέ ἐστι ψυχῆς ἀοχλησία καὶ γαληνότης, PH I. 10). Now he clearly does not think that philosophers' tranquillity has been achieved, since he takes inquiry to have led to the recognition of equipollence, not to the discovery of truth.[49] Nor does he merely propagate a return to pre-investigative tranquillity: it is perhaps a practical impossibility for inquisitive people, who are already aware of the arguments on both sides of a given question, and cannot renounce their desire to find the truth.[50]

What remains is a state different from both, a state in which tranquillity is inexplicably present. The coming about of this state is twice described by Sextus as τυχικῶς, the meaning of which is quite unclear. It could mean either that its result was unintended, i.e. that the inquirer did not suspend judgement in order to achieve tranquillity; or perhaps that it is a sort of happy chance, an unexpected sort of relief from trouble.[51] It could also mean, however, that the link between suspension and tranquillity is inexplicable. While it is clear why the discovery of truth would bring about tranquillity, just as it is clear why one was tranquil before beginning to care

[49] Thus, I do not think that the position advocated by Sextus is a proposal about complete εὐδαιμονία; compare Moller 2004: 431-432, Vogt 2012b: 124-126. For different views, see Barnes 2000: xxx: 'Scepticism is offered as a recipe for happiness'; also Sedley 1983: 15, McPherran 1989 and 1990: 133-134, Striker 1990: 185-188, Annas 1993: 244-245, 352-354, Hankinson 1995: 310 n2, Hankinson 1997: 20 n30, Brunschwig 2006: 469, Irwin 2007: 245-248. Consequently, Sextus need not be worried about the objection that there is no consensus on what εὐδαιμονία is, nor should he argue that philosophers' tranquillity is achieved by suspension. As to the objection that suspension can at best show one way to tranquillity, not *the* way (Striker 1990: 192-193), one could reply that this is exactly Sextus' point.

[50] Allen 1990: 2607: 'From the philosophical point of view, which the Pyrrhonist adopts no less than his dogmatic opponent, there are radically different alternative possibilities which have not been properly examined and powerful opposed considerations which have not been silenced by argument.'

[51] See Svavarsson 2011, 2014b, 2015: 206-211, for translations opting for 'fortuitously', 'by chance', 'fortunately', or 'happily'; in the 2015 piece he also discusses the possibility that Sextus takes over the idea of a fortuitously discovered cure from medical Empiricism.

about the anomaly, the connection between suspending judgement and finding oneself in a calm state of mind is unclear, to say the least. Yet once the disposition characterised by suspensive tranquillity is achieved, it does seem intuitive that it would have a general effect on one's capacity to worry – which I take to be the meaning of the qualifier 'like a shadow follows a body': a general diminution of worry results from the suspensive disposition.[52]

One could object to this tripartition of tranquillity that Sextus nowhere makes any such distinction. This is admittedly true, but he does give us a story about the origin of philosophy with reference to the desire for tranquillity by discovering the truth, and clearly separates the original goal of tranquillity through truth from the goal actually achieved by a select few. Furthermore, he is clearly aware of the dogmatic project of doing away with τἄρᾰχή by way of finding the truth: in fact, he is arguing at length against this proposal.[53] While the tranquillity achieved after suspension needs to be continuous with the kind of tranquillity enjoyed before the conflict of appearances became troublesome, the kind of tranquillity proposed by various dogmatic thinkers is subject to disagreement, and the sceptic can suspend judgment about its possibility or efficacy.[54]

On this account, the tranquillity achieved is correlative of the worry aroused by a particular conflict of appearances of whatever sort. In the section on the goal of Pyrrhonism, Sextus goes on to suggest a seemingly different, more restricted explanation of τἄρᾰχή:

[52] The same image appears at DL IX. 107, without further explanation: τέλος δὲ οἱ σκεπτικοί φασι τὴν ἐποχήν, ᾗ σκιᾶς τρόπον ἐπακολουθεῖ ἡ ἀταραξία, ὥς φασιν οἵ τε περὶ τὸν Τίμωνα καὶ Αἰνεσίδημον.
[53] See PH III. 276-278, with the claim that instead of doing away with τἄρᾰχή, dogmatic proposals increase it (273); cf. M XI. 210-214.
[54] Cf. Brennan 2013: 289: '... Sextus presents his end as a kind of conservative hold-over from his earlier, pre-Sceptical days: he began philosophizing with this end in mind, and he has the same end now (*akhri nun*)', though he goes on to argue for a view different from mine.

> For those who hold the opinion that things are good or bad by nature are perpetually troubled. When they lack what they believe to be good, they take themselves to be persecuted by natural evils and they pursue what (so they think) is good. And when they have acquired these things, they experience more troubles; for they are elated beyond reason and measure, and in fear of change they do anything so as not to lose what they believe to be good. But those who make no determination about what is good and bad by nature neither avoid nor pursue anything with intensity; and hence they are tranquil.[55]

Readers often worry that this passage introduces a source of worry different from what we have seen in the conversion story. Instead of troublesome anomalies, here the source of worry is said to be a value judgement: the belief in something being good or bad by nature.[56] Once we realise, however, that Sextus is distancing himself from a dogmatic approach to tranquillity, one that is specifically concerned with inculcating a correct set of beliefs about things that are good and bad by nature, the two accounts can be seen as closely related to each other.

Accordingly, Sextus argues that a belief in something good or bad by nature causes intense pursuit and avoidance, which, in turn, leads to τἄρᾰχή.[57] Indeed, he attributes such disturbances to ordinary dogmatists as well (PH I. 30).[58] However, he also argues that dogmatic philosophers do nothing but replace one set of such beliefs

[55] PH I. 27-28. ὁ μὲν γὰρ δοξάζων τι καλὸν τῇ φύσει ἢ κακὸν εἶναι ταράσσεται διὰ παντός· καὶ ὅτε μὴ πάρεστιν αὐτῷ τὰ καλὰ εἶναι δοκοῦντα, ὑπό τε τῶν φύσει κακῶν νομίζει ποινηλατεῖσθαι καὶ διώκει τὰ ἀγαθά, ὡς οἴεται· ἅπερ κτησάμενος πλείοσι ταραχαῖς περιπίπτει, διά τε τὸ παρὰ λόγον καὶ ἀμέτρως ἐπαίρεσθαι καὶ φοβούμενος τὴν μεταβολὴν πάντα πράσσει, ἵνα μὴ ἀποβάλῃ τὰ ἀγαθὰ αὐτῷ δοκοῦντα εἶναι. ὁ δὲ ἀοριστῶν περὶ τῶν πρὸς τὴν φύσιν καλῶν ἢ κακῶν οὔτε φεύγει τι οὔτε διώκει συντόνως· διόπερ ἀταρακτεῖ.

[56] See Perin 2010a: 12-13, 24-25 for excluding the 'value argument' from Pyrrhonism as an instance of negative dogmatism.

[57] See PH III. 237-238, M XI. 116-117; the same disturbance is described as ὄχλησις at M XI. 126, 128 (just as he describes the disturbance remaining after suspension as τἄρᾰχή in M XI. 150-157).

[58] Grgic 2012: 7 thinks that Sextus conflated two independent discussions, one about philosophical and another about ordinary dogmatism.

with another; thus, it is part of his general understanding of dogmatic philosophy that it foists a belief in things good and bad by nature on its followers.

Thus, for someone who started worrying about conflicting appearances, dogmatic philosophy seems to offer a specific sort of relief, one that is especially connected to the assumption of natural values. Perhaps the discovery of truth can itself be seen as a natural good, while the state of confusion is taken to be by nature bad for a human being; someone having this belief might be especially worried when unable to deal with troublesome anomalies. However, since inquiry has not yet established any conclusion, rashly assenting to any such view is nothing more than replacing ordinary pursuits and avoidances with a different set of things to be pursued or avoided: instead of curing people, dogmatic philosophers replace one illness with another.[59]

Therefore, the goal of Pyrrhonism as described in PH I. 25-30 is a goal adopted *qua* a Pyrrhonean inquirer. It is a substitute for a state of tranquillity based on knowledge or true beliefs, since – contrary to dogmatic boast – the latter has not been discovered yet. While it seems that at some point Sextus was committed to the claim that this is a state of most complete happiness,[60] his overall position requires only the

[59] As argued by Sextus in M XI. 131-139.

[60] 'The dogmatic philosophers, then, claim that this is precisely how things are; for according to them, the person who achieves the good and avoids the bad is happy; hence they also say that practical wisdom is a science relating to life, which is able to distinguish good things and bad things and able to produce happiness. The sceptics, on the other hand, neither affirming nor denying anything casually but bringing everything under examination, teach that for those who suppose that there are good and bad by nature an unhappy life is in store, while for those who make no determinations and suspend judgement 'Is the easiest human life'.' (M XI. 10-112. Περὶ μὲν οὖν τοῦ μηδὲν εἶναι φύσει ἀγαθόν τε καὶ κακὸν αὐτάρκως ἐσκεψάμεθα· νυνὶ δὲ ζητῶμεν, εἰ καὶ συγχωρηθέντων αὐτῶν δυνατόν ἐστιν εὐρόως ἅμα καὶ εὐδαιμόνως βιοῦν. οἱ μὲν οὖν δογματικοὶ τῶν φιλοσόφων οὐδ' ἄλλως φασὶν ἢ οὕτως ἔχειν· ὁ γὰρ τυχὼν τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ κατ' αὐτοὺς καὶ ἐκκλίνων τὸ κακόν, οὗτός ἐστιν εὐδαίμων· παρὸ καὶ ἐπιστήμην τινὰ περὶ τὸν βίον εἶναι λέγουσι τὴν φρόνησιν, διακριτικὴν μὲν οὖσαν τῶν τε ἀγαθῶν καὶ κακῶν, περιποιητικὴν δὲ τῆς εὐδαιμονίας. οἱ δ' ἀπὸ τῆς σκέψεως μηδὲν εἰκῇ τιθέντες ἢ ἀναιροῦντες, ἅπανθ' ὑπὸ τὴν σκέψιν εἰσάγοντες διδάσκουσιν, ὡς τοῖς μὲν φύσει ἀγαθὸν καὶ κακὸν ὑποστησαμένοις ἀκολουθεῖ τὸ κακοδαιμόνως βιοῦν, τοῖς δ' ἀοριστοῦσι καὶ ἐπέχουσι 'ῥήϊστη βιοτὴ πέλει ἀνθρώποισιν'); 'But when reason has established that none of these things is by nature good or by nature bad, there will be a release from disturbance and a peaceful life will await us' (M XI. 130. λόγου δὲ παραστήσαντος, ὅτι οὐδὲν τούτων φύσει ἐστὶν ἀγαθὸν ἢ φύσει κακόν, λύσις ἔσται τῆς ταραχῆς καὶ εἰρηναῖος ἡμᾶς

claim that the suspender is better off than someone who subscribes to a dogmatic position.[61] Should the truth be discovered someday, which would set a different sort of goal for inquirers, Pyrrhoneans would have reason to abandon their current goal.

Suspensive tranquillity achieves something that dogmatic proposals cannot: it brings tranquillity in intellectual matters, which, in turn, diminishes the disturbance suffered in matters that are unavoidable. Keeping a distance from dogmatic belief thus results in a state that is preferable to that of dogmatic philosophers and a number of ordinary people as well. This is an empirical claim, and can only be accepted or rejected on an empirical basis. Sextus seems to recognise this in another context, using the example of bystanders at a surgical operation who are sometimes suffering more than the person who is actually being operated.[62]

Importantly, however, the kind of person who achieves suspensive tranquillity is described by Sextus as someone interested in finding the right answer. This person might adopt, for the time being, the goal of Pyrrhonism, but would still inquire into puzzling anomalies. Let us have a look at the profile of such an inquirer again.

ἐκδέξεται βίος); the teaching that nothing is good or bad by nature 'is certainly peculiar to scepticism; it is scepticism's achievement, therefore, to procure the happy life' (M XI. 140. τὸ δέ γε διδάσκειν τὸ τοιοῦτον ἴδιον τῆς σκέψεως· ταύτης ἄρα ἦν <τὸ> τὸν εὐδαίμονα βίον περιποιεῖν); see also M XI. 150-161, with the conclusion that 'the person who suspends judgement about all matters of opinion enjoys the most complete happiness, and during involuntary and non-rational movements is indeed disturbed ... but is in a state of moderate feeling' (οὐκοῦν ὁ περὶ πάντων [μὲν] ἐπέχων τῶν κατὰ δόξαν τελειοτάτην καρποῦται τὴν εὐδαιμονίαν, ἐν δὲ τοῖς ἀκουσίοις καὶ ἀλόγοις κινήμασι ταράττεται μέν ... μετριοπαθῶς δὲ διατίθεται).

[61] See Bett 2012 who argues that Sextus changed his mind from M to PH with regard to the overall position: while he formulates the Pyrrhonean position with reference to εὐδαιμονία in the former, he never makes a similar claim in the latter. One could suggest alternatively that here Sextus is merely developing the argument on the other side, in order to counterbalance the dogmatic proposal, aiming at suspension.

[62] PH III. 236-238, M IX. 159; cf. the story in DL IX. 67 about Pyrrho undergoing surgery.

2.3. Men of talent

Taken together, the three passages analysed thus far present us with a compressed version of the following narrative:

(i') When faced with conflicting appearances in what appears and is thought of, people of an inquisitive nature are troubled.

(ii') They approach the practice of philosophising as a method for coming to decide which appearances are true, and therefore meriting their assent (and, conversely, which ones are false, meriting rejection).

(iii') They also hope that such a decision would bring them tranquillity with regard to the troubles described in (i').

(iv') However, in their engagement with philosophy they have found that for any argument claiming to establish something, there is an equally convincing counterargument. Based on the evidence of the arguments reviewed so far, it seems to them that dogmatic philosophy has not yet proven capable of alleviating one's troubles as described in (i').

(v') Therefore they suspend judgement and, consequently, hold no dogmatic views.

(vi') Abstaining from dogmatic views fortuitously brings them into a state of suspensive tranquillity, which brings relief with regard to matters of opinion, but does not do away with all of their ὄχλησις.

Steps (iv') – (v') pertain to the second ἀρχή from PH I. 12, and are clearly specific to those inquirers who have ended up as Pyrrhoneans: these two clauses specify the reasons for persevering in inquiry. Taking this lead, one could also be tempted to ascribe the characteristics mentioned in the first ἀρχή, that is, (i') to (iii'), exclusively to non-dogmatic inquirers. The reader is presented, after all, with two

principles *of scepticism*: it only seems natural to take both principles to have the same explanatory scope.

There are, however, reasons to resist this temptation. To begin with, it would be implausible to claim that only those who end up becoming Pyrrhoneans have a talented and inquisitive nature.[63] All the characteristics associated with οἱ μεγαλοφυεῖς in (i') – (iii') seem apt to describe non-sceptical inquirers as well: they are all troubled by conflicting appearances, they all wish to come to a truth-oriented decision, and they all hope to regain their tranquillity. Indeed, Sextus does at various points indicate that the anomalies are a common starting-point of all philosophers;[64] where the Pyrrhoneans differ is that they stay with the anomalies and do not assent rashly – that is, in the second ἀρχή.[65]

Further evidence for including at least some dogmatists among the 'great-natured' comes from the Sextan use of the adjective elsewhere. At the only other place where he talks about the μεγαλοφυεστάτοις τῶν ἀνδρῶν, the term clearly applies to dogmatists, namely, various poets and natural philosophers holding dogmatic views about theology.[66] One might wonder, however, to what exactly this talk of someone being 'great-natured' amounts. I shall suppose that Sextus uses the term uniformly and not in a sarcastic manner, since that would make his remarks about the origins of his own position somewhat self-deprecating.

[63] One could object that, after all, Sextus does commit himself to the view that only sceptics are inquirers: why could he not hold another implausible view about the superiority of Pyrrhonists? Nevertheless, if one hopes to preserve the therapeutic or proselytising aspect of Pyrrhonism, it is not advisable to say that only full-fledged sceptics are great-natured. Instead, it serves Sextus' purposes if he can argue that some great-natured people are simply wrong about some matters, and his approach is the corrective that is needed to bring them to a state of suspensive tranquillity.

[64] As explicitly stated in the discussion of some neighbouring philosophies: Democritean atomism 'does begin from the anomaly in what is apparent' (καὶ ἀπὸ τῆς ἀνωμαλίας τῶν φαινομένων ἄρχεται); Pyrrhonism is not the same as Heracliteanism, since the πρᾶγμα or πρόληψις that contraries hold of the same thing is common to all men, philosophers or not: 'We all make use of common material' (PH I. 210-211: ἐπειδὴ πάντες κοιναῖς ὕλαις κεχρήμεθα;) Cf. Vogt 2012b: 126-128.

[65] PH III. 235, M I. 6.

[66] M IX. 63.

One could start by pointing to the trouble associated with recognising anomalies. There is nothing especially great-natured about recognising anomalies: becoming aware of conflicting appearances in various domains requires no more than ordinary capacities for perception and thought, capacities that Sextus takes to be naturally available.[67] However, it might be that not everybody is troubled by such anomalies: worry might be specific to inquisitive people who want to have an answer – that is why it makes sense to distinguish between inquirers and ordinary people in the first place.

Yet this might still not be enough. Recognising anomalies and being troubled by them indicates a certain character, but what is further specific to men of great talent is their desire to come to a resolution by correctly adjudicating among the appearances. This kind of anxiety – one could call it epistemic anxiety – can be diminished in various arbitrary, not reason-governed ways: by shrugging one's shoulder, rolling a dice, becoming a dogmatic conformist or a get-go relativist. The talented lot supposedly differs from the rest by virtue of not taking refuge in any such alternative. From among the conflicting views on offer, they want to accept the true one, only the true one, and because it is the true one – and this is why they enter philosophy.

In the three versions of the conversion story presented above, Sextus referred to ἐπίκρῐσις four times altogether.[68] He generally uses this term to indicate a decision in accordance with some standard or criterion of truth, or various conditions that

[67] PH I. 24. ὑφηγήσει μὲν φυσικῇ καθ' ἣν φυσικῶς αἰσθητικοὶ καὶ νοητικοί ἐσμεν ...

[68] ἦλθον ἐπὶ τὸ ζητεῖν, τί τε ἀληθές ἐστιν ἐν τοῖς πράγμασι καὶ τί ψεῦδος, ὡς ἐκ τῆς **ἐπικρίσεως** τούτων ἀταρακτήσοντες (PH I. 12); ἀρξάμενος γὰρ φιλοσοφεῖν ὑπὲρ τοῦ τὰς φαντασίας **ἐπικρῖναι** καὶ καταλαβεῖν, τίνες μέν εἰσιν ἀληθεῖς τίνες δὲ ψευδεῖς, ὥστε ἀταρακτῆσαι (PH I. 26); ἣν **ἐπικρῖναι** μὴ δυνάμενος ἐπέσχεν (PH I. 26); οἱ σκεπτικοὶ οὖν ἤλπιζον μὲν τὴν ἀταραξίαν ἀναλήψεσθαι διὰ τοῦ τὴν ἀνωμαλίαν τῶν φαινομένων τε καὶ νοουμένων **ἐπικρῖναι** (PH I. 29).

make such a decision unattainable.[69] On any charitable reading, the desire to make confusion go away by getting it right has to be common to every inquirer, dogmatic or sceptic, at least in the initial stages of the inquiry. Were their epistemic predicament not shared, were Pyrrhonean inquirers distinguished from dogmatists by some naturally given bent of mind, it would be quite difficult for Sextus to advertise his position as a viable way out of dogmatism.[70]

Similarly, Pyrrhoneans cannot rule out the possibility that inquiry will eventually lead to discovery, which then would cause them to abandon their suspensive disposition. The goal of Pyrrhonism is a goal adopted in the lack of a better alternative; and insofar as it does not do away with one's inquisitive nature, it does not do away with the motivation to inquire.

One could object that Pyrrhonism is not a sensible alternative for non-sceptical inquirers anyway, since it misrepresents the goal of inquiry. Even if Sextus is right about the practical effects of suspensive tranquillity, a proper inquirer would be more interested in finding the truth than in finding some sort of temporary solace. In the next section, I take a look at this objection and offer a reply to it.

3. The origin of Pyrrhonism

In the passages I have examined above, Sextus re-enacts for his reader the journey towards sceptical conversion, that is, towards the recognition of equipollence and the achievement of suspensive tranquillity. This story of origins admits of two

[69] PH I. 26, 29, 44, 59, 61, 67, 98, 112, 123, 172, II. 34, 53, 59, 64, 67-69, 77-78, 89-90, 92, 114, 183, 209-210, 254, and a curious use at III. 71; also M VII. 340, 351, VIII. 118, 268, 271, 379, 435, 437, 445, 448, 452; I. 9.

[70] Grgic seeks a reading similar to mine, but identifies the common core as the desire for tranquillity (mistakenly identified with happiness) in his 2006: 147, or, once again incorrectly, as the possession of the δύναμις ἀντιθετικὴ ('After all, were Sextus to deny such an ability to the dogmatists, he could not hope to bring them into the state of suspension') in his 2012: 14.

non-exclusive readings. On the one hand, it can be understood as applying to an individual investigator who eventually becomes Pyrrhonean. On the other hand, it could relate to us the origin of Pyrrhonism as a kind of philosophy emerging for the first time in history, offering a distinct alternative to the already prevalent dogmas of the day.

When read as the intellectual biography of an individual inquirer, the story seems designed to bring home a point about the preconditions of achieving suspensive tranquillity: it is available only to someone with an inquisitive nature who first becomes familiar with the project of philosophical inquiry (this being the originative principle), then displays a specific kind of reaction to the lack of success in securing tranquillity through the discovery of truth (as described in the constitutive principle). Pyrrhoneans are thus distinguished both from ordinary people, those who never even set foot in philosophising, and from dogmatic philosophers who are just as inquisitive by nature as Pyrrhoneans but have given rash, premature assent.

At the same time, it can be read as a piece of speculative history, offering us a plausible account of how the first generation of Pyrrhoneans appeared on the scene. On this reading, the troublesome anomalies and the correlative desire of tranquillity are mentioned in the first ἀρχή as the causal origin of all philosophising, not just of its sceptical variant. The constitutive origin, then, points to the endless disagreement among participants of the broader philosophical enterprise, and suggests that Pyrrhonism materialised as the correct response to this predicament: refraining from judgement, which then brings along some sort of unexpected relief.

3.1. The Partisan Premise

This latter, generalised reading exposes a major concern about the Pyrrhonean view of philosophy. In putting forward his formulation of the causal origin of philosophy, Sextus seems to assume what I shall call the Partisan Premise: the premise that philosophy as such is a response to some kind of disturbance (τἄρᾰχή) understood as emotional or psychological distress, and inquiry is aimed primarily at the removal of such a distress.[71] This seems at odds with what many, if not most philosophers would think, namely, that the original motivation for inquiry at the very least incorporates questions of purely intellectual interest.

Thus, many would argue that the Partisan Premise is a misunderstanding or perhaps a wilful mischaracterisation of philosophical inquiry as commonly conceived. What is more, those who understand the Pyrrhonean position in this way would point to a further problem. Once he has smuggled his biased premise in, Sextus can argue that his proposal of suspension does better at eliminating such worries than any other suggestion already on the table. Yet it is questionable whether he is right in maintaining this: it is quite implausible that genuine worries would be dispelled by suspension, and if they were, suspension would do away with the motivation for further inquiry. [72]

[71] Cf. Grgic 2006: 147-148: 'The reason why they began to philosophize was not the intellectual curiosity or simply a desire to understand the world. Rather, their puzzlement as to which of the conflicting appearances one should accept as true was preceded by the *disturbance* caused by the fact that one and the same things appears in conflicting ways. The conflict of appearances was primarily existentially, and only then intellectually, frustrating.'

[72] Cf. Mates 1996: 76-77; Barnes 2007: 328-329, with Perin 2010a: 16-17. It is unclear what exactly questions of a practical or instrumental value would look like: 'Have I contracted a lethal disease?', 'My comrade died on the battlefield; is that a bad thing?', 'Should we bury or rather burn the dead?', 'How does our understanding of this molecular compound contribute to the development of new medical therapies?', are examples used in the literature. In any case, it is clear that the Partisan Premise is in many ways connected to the Tranquillity Charge.

Now, the attack continues, Pyrrhonean suspension fares just as badly with regard to properly philosophical worries. Inquiry into such questions does not start from a non-intellectual worry, and people interested in finding answers to them would probably disagree about the prognosis of always ending up with suspension. All in all, it seems that, for people engaged in a genuinely philosophical quest for the truth, the Pyrrhonean option appears neither plausible nor pleasing.[73]

This seems to be a quite damning appraisal. Pyrrhonism targets the wrong sort of problems, seems inefficient in dealing with them, and whenever it does succeed, it leaves its follower without any drive for further inquiry. If this evaluation holds water, the Pyrrhonean position is completely discredited, or is found relevant for only a very specific type of people in search of a very specific type of relief. However, I am going to argue that this evaluation is based on a misunderstanding of the role of τἄρᾰχή in the Pyrrhonean conception of inquiry.

First of all, we have Sextus taking care of characterising his inquirers as those who wish to come to a reason-based decision about conflicting appearances, not giving in for rationally unsatisfactory alternatives. This in itself points to a worry intellectual in nature, a worry that prompts proper philosophical inquiry. One could still maintain, however, that genuine philosophers are not motivated by worries but rather by purely intellectual interest; hence the Partisan Premise would still misrepresent their overall project.

Yet, one could argue that the Partisan Premise is not as partisan as it seems.[74] The unpleasant experience of being at loss about what to accept as true is referenced

[73] Thus Barnes 2000: xxxi: "In brief, where suspension of judgement is accompanied by tranquillity, there is no anxiety to be allayed; and where anxiety prompts an inquiry, it is ridiculous to imagine that suspension of judgement will allay it.' See also Annas 1993: 245, Irwin 2007: 235-236, Mates 1996: 63.

[74] As my examples will show, there is no need to jump to Descartes and Hume for comparisons, *pace* Svavarsson 2011: 23 n12.

even in Aristotle's account of the origin of philosophy, building up to the conclusion that philosophers proper are in search of knowledge for knowledge's sake, and not for any practical benefit. As he writes in the first book of his Metaphysics,

> That it is not productive knowledge is clear, too, from those who first turned to philosophy. For it is because they wonder (θαυμάζειν) that human beings, both now and at first, began to philosophise. In the beginning they wondered about the curious things (τῶν ἀτόπων θαυμάσαντες) that were near at hand, and then gradually moving forward they started to puzzle over the larger matters too, e.g. about the phenomena of the moon, and those to do with the sun and the stars, and with the coming to be of the cosmos. Now he who puzzles and wonders takes himself to be ignorant (ὁ δ' ἀπορῶν καὶ θαυμάζων οἴεται ἀγνοεῖν); for that reason, the lover of wisdom is in a way a myth-lover too, since myth is composed of wonders. Hence, given that they turned to philosophizing because they were in flight from their ignorance (διὰ τὸ φεύγειν τὴν ἄγνοιαν ἐφιλοσόφησαν), they were evidently seeking to be knowers for knowing's sake, and not for any use to be made of it.[75]

This Aristotelian passage reminds us in many ways of Sextus' narrative, with the crucial difference that the main motivation is claimed to be the escape from ἄγνοιᾰ (τὸ φεύγειν τὴν ἄγνοιαν, 982b 20), not from τᾰρᾰχή.[76] Aristotle's description references marvel (θαῦμα) and puzzlement (ἀπορία) as elements of the original spur to philosophical inquiry, with the remark that anyone who finds herself in such a

[75] Aristotle, Metaphysics A 982b 11-21. Ὅτι δ' οὐ ποιητική, δῆλον καὶ ἐκ τῶν πρώτων φιλοσοφησάντων· διὰ γὰρ τὸ θαυμάζειν οἱ ἄνθρωποι καὶ νῦν καὶ τὸ πρῶτον ἤρξαντο φιλοσοφεῖν, ἐξ ἀρχῆς μὲν τὰ πρόχειρα τῶν ἀτόπων θαυμάσαντες, εἶτα κατὰ μικρὸν οὕτω προϊόντες καὶ περὶ τῶν μειζόνων διαπορήσαντες, οἷον περί τε τῶν τῆς σελήνης παθημάτων καὶ τῶν περὶ τὸν ἥλιον καὶ ἄστρα καὶ περὶ τῆς τοῦ παντὸς γενέσεως. ὁ δ' ἀπορῶν καὶ θαυμάζων οἴεται ἀγνοεῖν (διὸ καὶ ὁ φιλόμυθος φιλόσοφός πώς ἐστιν· ὁ γὰρ μῦθος σύγκειται ἐκ θαυμασίων)· ὥστ' εἴπερ διὰ τὸ φεύγειν τὴν ἄγνοιαν ἐφιλοσόφησαν, φανερὸν ὅτι διὰ τὸ εἰδέναι τὸ ἐπίστασθαι ἐδίωκον καὶ οὐ χρήσεώς τινος ἕνεκεν. (Translation from Broadie 2012.) On this passage, and on the debates about the notion of philosophy it reflects on, see also Frede 2004.

[76] As pointed out by Long 1981: 46-48.

situation takes herself to be ignorant – just as Sextan inquirers, faced with anomalous conflicts among appearances, take themselves to lack an answer to the question about their veracity.

Furthermore, the wording itself clearly has its ancestor in Plato's Theaetetus. In this dialogue, Socrates asserts that a feeling of wonder is the origin of philosophy, and Theaetetus' wonder is a sign that he is a philosopher indeed (μάλα γὰρ φιλοσόφου τοῦτο τὸ πάθος, τὸ θαυμάζειν· οὐ γὰρ ἄλλη ἀρχὴ φιλοσοφίας ἢ αὕτη, 155d). These words come right after Theaetetus' own admission that, when considering puzzles related to becoming, he is so much lost in wonder that in fact his head becomes dizzy (Καὶ νὴ τοὺς θεούς γε, ὦ Σώκρατες, ὑπερφυῶς ὡς θαυμάζω τί ποτ' ἐστὶ ταῦτα, καὶ ἐνίοτε ὡς ἀληθῶς βλέπων εἰς αὐτὰ σκοτοδινιῶ. 155c) – a description clearly coming close to a report of anxious indecision.

The point is made even clearer in another context, where registering conflicting appearances is said to lead to disturbances in the soul, with philosophy's task being specified as providing a method of dealing with such disturbances (Καὶ ταὐτὰ καμπύλα τε καὶ εὐθέα ἐν ὕδατί τε θεωμένοις καὶ ἔξω, καὶ κοῖλά τε δὴ καὶ ἐξέχοντα διὰ τὴν περὶ τὰ χρώματα αὖ πλάνην τῆς ὄψεως, καὶ πᾶσά τις ταραχὴ δήλη ἡμῖν ἐνοῦσα αὕτη ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ· ᾧ δὴ ἡμῶν τῷ παθήματι τῆς φύσεως ἡ σκιαγραφία ἐπιθεμένη γοητείας οὐδὲν ἀπολείπει, καὶ ἡ θαυματοποιία καὶ αἱ ἄλλαι πολλαὶ τοιαῦται μηχαναί, Republic X. 602c-d).[77]

[77] Cf. Republic 577e on the tyrannical soul. On these passages and their Platonic context, see Menn 2013 (esp. 209 n13). One could perhaps also think about the Platonic discussion of misology (Phaedo 88c-89e); being subjected to persuasive arguments on both sides of a question can put one into a disturbed state which, if repeated, leads to the formation of an expectation that no argument could ever make a difference (88c: Πάντες οὖν ἀκούσαντες εἰπόντων αὐτῶν ἀηδῶς διετέθημεν, ὡς ὕστερον ἐλέγομεν πρὸς ἀλλήλους, ὅτι ὑπὸ τοῦ ἔμπροσθεν λόγου σφόδρα πεπεισμένους ἡμᾶς πάλιν ἐδόκουν ἀναταράξαι καὶ εἰς ἀπιστίαν καταβαλεῖν οὐ μόνον τοῖς προειρημένοις λόγοις, ἀλλὰ καὶ εἰς τὰ ὕστερον μέλλοντα ῥηθήσεσθαι, μὴ οὐδενὸς ἄξιοι εἶμεν κριταὶ ἢ καὶ τὰ πράγματα αὐτὰ ἄπιστα ᾖ). On this, see Ryan 1989: 175: 'We can only understand the skeptic if we see him as a genuine Socratic who has found it to be his experience that up to now the truth eludes him but who has every reason to persist in this inquiry'; compare Morrison 1990: 209, and Marchand 2010: 139: 'Cette caractérisation du

Still within the Platonic tradition, one can find an aetiology of philosophy clearly pointing to the desire of escaping disturbance. According to a passage in pseudo-Galen's account of the history of philosophy, Xenocrates has said that philosophy was invented for the purpose of doing away with the worrisome things in life (τὸ ταραχῶδες ἐν τῷ βίῳ). This passage is even more interesting for our present purposes, since it gives an account of the origin of philosophy in terms of three ἀρχαὶ, the causal origin, the constitutive origin and the origin of proof (ἡ μὲν ὡς αἰτιώδης, ἡ δὲ ὡς ἐν τρόπῳ συστάσεως, ἡ δὲ ἀποδείξεως).[78] Sextus' version of the origin of philosophy clearly depends on accounts similar in form to this one, with the significant difference that he does not think philosophy has achieved a proof of any sort.

When considered in the context of these passages, the Sextan account seems much less of an outlier. The starting-point of inquiry can be seen as sufficiently similar in the accounts of Sextus and the representatives of the mainstream tradition mentioned above, and can be justifiably described as a sort of τἄρᾰχή. The motivation for Pyrrhonean inquiry is intellectual, even if Sextus argues that, in the absence of any better alternative, it can be temporarily resolved by a less intellectual move: suspension of judgement.

Sextus assumes that there is no third option: one either gives in to overconfidence and thus gives rash assent,[79] or falls in despair and eventually suspends judgement. The explanation for this is perhaps that being unable to come to

scepticisme néo-pyrrhonien traduit bien une tentation misologique: il formule le désir du vivre dans la transparence de la vie quotidienne ou 'non-philosophique', une vie où l'on ne se poserait pas de questions, et où nous n'aurions pas, par conséquent, à inventer des réponses.'

[78] [Galen], De Historia Philosophica 8: Ἀρχὴ δὲ λέγεται τριχῶς· ἡ μὲν ὡς αἰτιώδης, ἡ δὲ ὡς ἐν τρόπῳ συστάσεως, ἡ δὲ ἀποδείξεως. αἰτιώδης μὲν οὖν ἐστιν ἀρχή, ὅταν ζητήσωμεν, τί ποτ' ἐστὶ τὸ πεποιηκὸς εἰς ἐπίνοιαν τοὺς πρώτους ἐλθεῖν φιλοσοφίας. ἐν τρόπῳ δὲ συστάσεως, ὅταν ζητήσωμεν ποῖον μέρος πρῶτον [ἐκ] τῆς τέχνης συνέστηκεν· ἀποδείξεως δέ, ὅταν τὰ ὑφ' ἡμῶν κατασκευαζόμενα ἀποδεικνύωμεν. αἰτία δὲ φιλοσοφίας εὑρέσεώς ἐστι κατὰ <Ξενοκράτη> τὸ ταραχῶδες ἐν τῷ βίῳ καταπαῦσαι τῶν πραγμάτων.

[79] On the terminology of dogmatic confidence, see Machuca 2009: 103 n4 with Voelke 1990: 184-186.

a decision for an extended period of time or about a large number of worrisome questions is extremely unpleasant. In other words, Sextus assumes that sooner or later every inquirer will come to discover their personal breaking-points, and will be forced to resolve the situation one way or the other.

3.2. Who's a quitter?

The Sextan notion of philosophy thus proves ambiguous. On the one hand, there is a sense in which all sorts of philosophy, Pyrrhonean or dogmatic alike, is a shared undertaking. People of a similar psychological make-up are similarly incited to inquiry by the same sort of anomalies, and are looking for the same kind of reason-based decision about them. There is, on the other hand, another sense in which they are perfectly incompatible: one either claims or does not claim to have arrived at a set of views as a result of one's previous inquiry.

In this way, we arrive back to the tripartite division, as if by natural joints, of philosophical inquiry as presented at the very beginning of the Outlines. Some philosophers, failing to recognise the equipollence of opposing accounts, take themselves to have sufficiently justified certain views. Once they hold a significant number of such views, these can be arranged in more or less systematic ways, and offered to newcomers to philosophy as a body of knowledge that is on offer.[80] Someone who subscribes to at least one such view is considered by Sextus to be a full-blown dogmatic thinker.[81]

[80] Cf. M VII. 2-24 for alternative arrangements considered by Sextus before starting his counter-argumentation.
[81] Sedley 1983: 21: 'The least misleading translation of '*dogmatikos*' might be 'doctrinaire thinker', and the Skeptic would then be a mere inquirer in the sense that he is as yet unshackled by theoretical commitment.' Cf. Brittain 2001: 267-273.

It is in this sense that philosophy constitutes a target of Pyrrhonean argumentation. Sextus routinely talks about 'the so-called philosophy' or 'what they call philosophy' as his target, and his references to this go hand in hand with the specification of the parts of philosophy as conceived by his dogmatic opponents.[82] The encounter with this sort of philosophy and its discontents features as a formative experience in the sceptic's autobiography, but it need not imply that he rejects philosophy in the broader sense, as an inquiry into intellectually disturbing questions, an enterprise that has not yet brought forward any acceptable beliefs.[83]

Furthermore, since 'the so-called philosophy' is the intended target of Pyrrhonean argumentation, it need not follow that Pyrrhonean inquiry is second-order in nature. Sextus only says at PH I. 18 that Pyrrhoneans investigate the physical, ethical and logical parts of so-called philosophy with the aim of exercising their capacity for oppositions and thus to attain tranquillity.[84] It is often taken to be an

[82] Sextus separates the general account of his own position from the specific account in which he opposes the dogmatists in this way: εἰδικὸς δὲ ἐν ᾧ πρὸς ἕκαστον μέρος τῆς καλουμένης φιλοσοφίας ἀντιλέγομεν (PH I. 6), and signals on several occasions that his main activity is the opposing of the logical, physical and ethical doctrines of his opponents (ἕκαστον τῶν μερῶν τῆς καλουμένης φιλοσοφίας συντόμως καὶ ὑποτυπωτικῶς ἐφοδεύσωμεν, PH II. 1; Οὐκοῦν ζητητέον ἡμῖν ἐστι περὶ ἑκάστου μέρους τῆς καλουμένης φιλοσοφίας συντόμως ἐπὶ τοῦ παρόντος, PH II. 12); see also I. 18, II. 205, III. 1, 278). Cf. Ierodiakonou, 'The Stoic Division of Philosophy'. – This is why I think Striker 2001: 115-116 is wrong in claiming that Sextus arranges his presentation to give the appearance of a contemporary school: 'he follows the pattern that would be used for the account of a school that had doctrines in the three traditional 'parts' of philosophy ... It looks as though the Pyrrhonists had at least a quasi-system'.

[83] Even though many would think that a follower of the Pyrrhonean persuasion can hardly avoid coming to the at least tentative conclusion that engaging in the philosophical project is of no use. The sceptic would, then, be someone disillusioned with the philosophical project, who would be better off purged from the inclination to wonder and worry about intellectual puzzles once and for all. On such readings, the best one could hope for would be a deliverance from philosophy. See e.g. Hiley 1987: 209: 'In opposing the dogmatist, the sceptic is opposing the temptation to philosophy – the temptation to assert the truth beyond what appears at the moment'; Bailey 2002: the mature Pyrrhonean is 'the matchless embodiment of the rational standards advocated by dogmatic thinkers' (289) which leads to the ultimate unjustifiability of any claim (13), so he 'seeks to undermine the authority of reason' (263); Eichorn 2014: 129-130: 'The Pyrrhonian skeptical *therapeia* is designed to demonstrate philosophy's inability to justify not only *any and all* first-order beliefs and *any and all* second-order epistemological principles but also – and especially – the particular second-order doxastic principles needed to underwrite a commitment to philosophy itself.'

[84] PH I. 18. Παραπλήσια δὲ λέγομεν καὶ ἐν τῷ ζητεῖν εἰ φυσιολογητέον τῷ σκεπτικῷ· ἕνεκα μὲν γὰρ τοῦ μετὰ βεβαίου πείσματος ἀποφαίνεσθαι περί τινος τῶν κατὰ τὴν φυσιολογίαν δογματιζομένων οὐ φυσιολογοῦμεν, ἕνεκα δὲ τοῦ παντὶ λόγῳ λόγον ἴσον ἔχειν ἀντιτιθέναι καὶ τῆς ἀταραξίας ἁπτόμεθα τῆς φυσιολογίας. οὕτω δὲ καὶ τὸ λογικὸν μέρος καὶ τὸ ἠθικὸν τῆς λεγομένης φιλοσοφίας ἐπερχόμεθα.

admission that, after suspension, one can only investigate what has been posited by dogmatic thinkers as true, that is, that the only type of investigation open to a suspender is to argue against dogmatic tenets.

This is far from clearly established, however; perhaps Pyrrhoneans investigate parts of 'the so-called philosophy' only with the aim of providing equally convincing counterarguments, yet they could openly investigate questions on their own. Even if it is hard to conceive of another kind of investigation available for Pyrrhoneans, there are contexts where Sextus seems to suggest that they do engage in it occasionally.[85] At the same time, it is far from obvious that if the Pyrrhoneans are indeed confined to second-order inquiry, it could not be truth-oriented, or that it would in any way rule out the eventual discovery of the truth.[86]

In sum, Sextus makes the following claims about the implications of the state of dogmatic philosophy. First, given the equipollence of opposing accounts – and especially the equipollent accounts of the criterion of truth – the best one can do is suspend judgements. Second, a suspender is better-off in terms of tranquillity than someone who gives rash assent to an appearance. Third, rash assent rules out further inquiry. The first two of these claims have been discussed above; let's turn now briefly to the third claim.

The last claim is something dogmatists would clearly take issue with: there is no obvious way in which they would accept that they do not inquire anymore.[87] The Sextan allegation could be understood in two ways. On the one hand, it could be a

[85] See his distinction between 'inquiring about things on our own' (ἰδίᾳ περὶ τῶν πραγμάτων σκεπτομένους) and 'rebutting the dogmatists' (τοῖς δογματικοῖς ἀνταίροντας) at M VII. 1; cf. Grgic 2012: 4.

[86] Sometimes Sextus suggests that Pyrrhoneans inquire to find out whether it is legitimate to abandon suspension: M VIII. 118, 177, 259, 328, 401, IX. 436. Cf. Irwin 2007: 248 for the possible worry about whether suspension was the right course to take.

[87] For more specific discussions of this charge, see Grgic 2008, Grgic 2012: 16-19, Vogt 2012b and 2012c, and now Fine 2014: 320-368.

general claim allowing for no significant exceptions: that is, Sextus could claim that for any possible object of philosophical investigation, dogmatists take themselves to have found the answer or to have given up the search for good. On the other hand, he could make the less demanding claim that dogmatists think they have arrived at the answer with regard to at least one, but plausibly a number of objects of inquiry.[88]

It seems relatively uncontroversial that most philosophers take themselves to have discovered some truths. However, almost no philosopher would accept that they have stopped inquiring. There is hardly any suggestion around that everything has been figured out to everyone's complete satisfaction; even those who think they are on the right track to discovery suspect that there is still a significant job of work left to engage with.

This leaves us with the weaker reading which intuitively seems more plausible. Dogmatists often take themselves to have arrived at a number of fundamental views about, say, the criterion of truth, the goal of a specifically human life, or the ultimate constituents of reality. Maintaining such views is constitutive of membership in philosophical schools; individual philosophers belonging to the same school might differ on several issues, and their disagreement can be quite significant and pronounced, but they must adopt certain views by virtue of belonging to that particular school of thought.[89]

But even if commitment to certain fundamental philosophical views while they are still subject to ongoing controversy sets a limit on further inquiry, it does not make inquiry impossible *tout court*. One could still be undecided about various issues,

[88] 'Cf. PH I. 223: 'For anyone who holds beliefs on even one subject, or in general prefers an appearance to another in point of convincingness or lack of convincingness, thereby has the distinctive character of a dogmatist' (ὁ γὰρ περὶ ἑνὸς δογματίζων, ἢ προκρίνων φαντασίαν φαντασίας ὅλως κατὰ πίστιν ἢ ἀπιστίαν <ἢ ἀποφαινόμενος> περί τινος τῶν ἀδήλων, τοῦ δογματικοῦ γίνεται χαρακτῆρος). This could be perhaps because having one such view presupposes having accepted a criterion of truth.
[89] Cf. Sextus' comments on the sense in which Pyrrhoneans are no αἵρεσις (PH I. 16) and have no δόγμα (PH I. 13).

and the answers one has could still be in need of significant elaboration. It is also hard to understand why Sextus would not consider it a case of inquiry if someone hypothesises something and investigates into its possible consequences. In sum, whatever the merits of Sextus' arguments that dogmatists do not inquire anymore, his opponents are clearly engaged in activities that at least sufficiently resemble proper inquiry.[90]

Now, Sextus' argument is clearly dialectical in nature – it responds to a dogmatic argument against the possibility of inquiry by turning the table on them.[91] Furthermore, one could say that the Sextan angle on this issue is not that of a professional philosopher engaged in interschool debate, but rather of a newcomer to philosophy, an inquisitive soul who starts frequenting the lectures of someone considered a philosophical authority. Such a person would be immediately presented with a body of alleged knowledge, signing up to which would seriously diminish the capacity for further inquiry. Philosophers might insist that this is only an outline and that there is an ongoing technical debate about its nuances, yet the student might feel overwhelmed by the position on offer. In other words, the question is whether any view should be accepted in the first place.

Most importantly, Sextus contends, rash assent would make it impossible to enjoy the only kind of tranquillity currently available, the kind of tranquillity that follows upon suspension of judgement. This is why some prominent sceptics

[90] Another unwelcome outcome of Sextus' argument that rash assent makes inquiry impossible would be the following. Given that the sceptic can turn out to be rashly committed to suspension, if rash commitment rules out further inquiry, the sceptic could never find out that his or her assent to suspension was rash. This would be a reason to think that, just as Pyrrhoneans are motivated by their philanthropy to bring dogmatists to the recognition of equipollence, dogmatists could have a duty towards their fellow investigators to argue their side and, once discovery has been made, bring suspenders out of their wretched state.

[91] In fact, one could see his arguments as amounting to an Inverted Tranquillity Charge (dogmatists, once having a seemingly sufficient answer to their questions, stick to it in the face of contrary evidence) and to an Inverted Unproductivity Charge (once you hold a rash view, you lose all hope of discovering the truth).

formulated the injunction to oppose to every argument an equally persuasive counterargument:

> They make this exhortation to the sceptics to prevent them from being seduced by the dogmatists into abandoning their investigation and thus through rashness missing the tranquillity apparent to them, which (as we suggested above) they deem to supervene on suspension of judgement about everything.[92]

Based on this passage, one could think that Sextus prejudges the matter in favour of Pyrrhonists: it is always the non-sceptic who is rashly committed to a view. However, elsewhere it is made clear by Sextus that it is in fact a dialectical encounter, where at any moment it could turn out that it is in fact the Pyrrhonean proposal that has been rashly accepted. Concerning the criterion of truth, dogmatists and sceptics face each other off concerning the status of inquiry, asking whether the truth has been found:

> The investigation of the criterion is universally contentious, not only because the human being is by nature a truth-loving animal, but also because the highest-level schools of philosophy are here making judgements about the most important matters. For either the dogmatists' big solemn boast will need to be completely done away with, if no standard is found for the true reality of things, or, on the contrary, the sceptics will need to be convicted as rash and dismissive of common belief, if something comes to light which is capable of leading our way to the apprehension of the truth.[93]

[92] PH I. 205. παραγγέλλουσι δὲ τοῦτο τῷ σκεπτικῷ, μή πως ὑπὸ τοῦ δογματικοῦ παρακρουσθεὶς ἀπείπῃ τὴν περὶ αὐτοῦ ζήτησιν, καὶ τῆς φαινομένης αὐτοῖς ἀταραξίας, ἣν νομίζουσι παρυφίστασθαι τῇ περὶ πάντων ἐποχῇ, καθὼς ἔμπροσθεν ὑπεμνήσαμεν,σφαλῇ προπετευσάμενος. Perin 2010a: 10-11 argues that it in fact belongs to a different sort of Pyrrhonism, not fully embraced by Sextus. Cf. also Brennan 1999: 100-101.

[93] M VII. 27. Ἡ περὶ κριτηρίου ζήτησις οὐ μόνον διὰ τὸ φύσει φιλάληθες ζῷον εἶναι τὸν ἄνθρωπον, ἀλλὰ καὶ διὰ τὸ τὰς γενικωτάτας τῆς φιλοσοφίας αἱρέσεις περὶ τῶν κυριωτάτων βραβεύειν, πᾶσίν ἐστι

4. The story of Apelles (PH I. 28)

An oft-quoted passage of the Outlines offers a simile that supposedly helps us understand the road to the sceptic's main achievement, suspension of judgement and the resulting tranquillity. The story, otherwise unattested, is about the painter Apelles of Colophon, and its precise meaning eludes scholarly consensus.[94] In this section, I am going to argue that Sextus uses it to elucidate the transformation from troubled inquirer into someone with a sceptical disposition.[95]

The passage runs as follows:

περιμάχητος. ἢ γὰρ τὸ μέγα καὶ σεμνὸν τῶν δογματικῶν αὔχημα ἀναιρεῖσθαι ἄρδην δεήσει, μηδενὸς εὑρισκομένου κανόνος τῆς κατ' ἀλήθειαν τῶν πραγμάτων ὑπάρξεως, ἢ ἀνάπαλιν ὡς προπετεῖς ἐλέγχεσθαι τοὺς σκεπτικοὺς καὶ τῆς κοινῆς πίστεως κατατολμήσαντας, ἐὰν φαίνηταί τι τὸ δυνάμενον ἡμᾶς ἐπὶ τὴν τῆς ἀληθείας κατάληψιν ὁδηγεῖν. Tr. Bett.

[94] Some think it illustrates that happiness can be arrived at only indirectly (Annas 1993: 352); that the Pyrrhonean will always use for setting out oppositions to 'abandon the project of finding answers' (Striker 2001: 118); that Sextus tries illegitimately to separate the route – finding the truth – from the goal – tranquillity (Irwin 2007: 234-235); that it is a story about philosophical, as opposed to ordinary, tranquillity (Brunschwig 2006) or exactly the other way around: 'Here it is used only to elucidate tranquillity attained only by shedding positive beliefs about natural values' (Svavarsson 2011: 26). Closest to my reading, Perin 2010a: 17-18 gives two options: the story either accounts for the relation between suspension and tranquillity (i.e. that it is unattended), or is designed to show that the Pyrrhonean does not give up the search after suspension.

[95] One might wonder why Sextus or his source chose to illustrate such an important topic with a story about Apelles instead of Pyrrho or some other prominent suspender of the tradition. Here I can offer only two suggestions.

First, Sextus seems witness to an effort to distance Pyrrhonism from philosophical schools arranged around a doctrinal authority. Thus he explains the label Πυρρώνειος as an appearance-claim, deriving it 'from the fact that Pyrrho appears to us to have attached himself to inquiry more systematically and conscpicuously than anyone before him' (ἀπὸ τοῦ φαίνεσθαι ἡμῖν τὸν Πύρρωνα σωματικώτερον καὶ ἐπιφανέστερον τῶν πρὸ αὐτοῦ προσεληλυθέναι τῇ σκέψει), probably responding to the worry attributed to Theodosius that one might never know what Pyrrho actually thought (DL IX. 70). On this, see Ioli 2003: 418-421 with Polito 2007: 354-355; cf. also the observation that Pyrrho is never introduced (neither in Sextus nor in Diogenes Laertius nor in Photius) with περί (Ioli 2003: 414 n47). By focusing on Apelles, a near-contemporary of Pyrrho who also served Alexander the Great, Sextus can simultaneously remind us of Pyrrho and keep some distance from him, making the point that anyone can undergo such an experience. Note also that, according to Diogenes, Pyrrho himself started out as a rather unsuccessful painter (DL IX. 61-62).

Second, it is possible that a similar story about Apelles was already in circulation, and used for the purposes of a rival philosophical school. James Warren points to Chrysippus in Galen PHP 4.6.43-45 De Lacy: http://kenodoxia.blogspot.hu/2008/01/sponge-throwing.html

> A story told of the painter Apelles applies to the sceptics. They say that he was painting a horse and wanted to represent in his picture the lather on the horse's mouth; but he was so unsuccessful that he gave up, took the sponge on which he had been wiping off the colours from his brush, and flung it at the picture. And when it hit the picture, it produced a representation of the horse's lather.[96]

According to this story, Apelles achieved his original goal, a representation of the horse's lather, but not through the skills he acquired in the process of his professional training as a painter. Rather, he managed to administer this particular detail in a whimsical moment, when his frustration over his failed attempts led him to literally throw the towel in. The outcome of this passing moment of despair was exactly the achievement he has just been impelled to give up pursuing.

The story is introduced with the explicit remark that a similar experience befalls the sceptics, and is then followed by a version of the narrative of sceptical conversion. Insofar as the two cases are to be analogous, one might wonder about the suggested similarity.

Three points of comparison are worth pointing out. First, it seems that whatever the painter was looking for, at least in the very moments preceding suspension, has been eventually achieved. So what would be the goal aimed at by the sceptic?

Second, this achievement was not only inadvertent but also due to some unusual means. A certain method or set of skills was supposed to deliver the goal, yet in achieving it, the painter at least momentarily disregarded the tools of the trade. In the sceptic's case, what corresponds to the art of painting?

[96] PH I. 28. ὅπερ οὖν περὶ Ἀπελλοῦ τοῦ ζωγράφου λέγεται, τοῦτο ὑπῆρξε τῷ σκεπτικῷ. φασὶ γὰρ ὅτι ἐκεῖνος ἵππον γράφων καὶ τὸν ἀφρὸν τοῦ ἵππου μιμήσασθαι τῇ γραφῇ βουληθεὶς οὕτως ἀπετύγχανεν ὡς ἀπειπεῖν καὶ τὴν σπογγιὰν εἰς ἣν ἀπέμασσε τὰ ἀπὸ τοῦ γραφείου χρώματα προσρῖψαι τῇ εἰκόνι· τὴν δὲ προσαψαμένην ἵππου ἀφροῦ ποιῆσαι μίμημα.

Third, this momentary lapse came about as a reaction to the accumulated frustration over previous failures when complying with the rules of that specific craft. What kind of disappointment leads up to this moment of despair?

As to the first question, the goal of investigators is said to be a state of tranquillity, a state in which they are not bothered by the anomalies. The hallmark of their chosen route to this state, and thus the answer to the second question, is specified as making a judgement or decision about the anomalies. Thus the art promising to enable such judgements, philosophy, is for the sceptic what the art of painting was for Apelles: a would-be craft offering a methodical approach to overcome obstacles typical to a certain endeavour, thereby securing a reliable route to success not available without its mastery. If this is so, then the answer to the third question most probably points to an open-ended list of previous failed attempts to adjudicate among appearances by way of a technically proper use of one's reasoning capacities – failures that eventually brought the inquirer to a point of despair. All this seems to be perfectly in line with my reconstruction of the sceptical journey above.

However, people tend to worry about this analogy for various reasons. First, by claiming that resigned suspension brings forth exactly the kind of undisturbed state the lack of which prompted their intellectual journey, Sextus seems to suggest that the journey is essentially over, and further philosophical inquiry proves at best unnecessary, at worst dangerous. Should one find that suspension is a worthwhile means to tranquillity, there would be no further reason to be engaged in a genuine search for the truth.[97]

Notice that this is in essence a reformulation of the Tranquillity Charge. Yet we have found that the description of soon-to-be-sceptics includes a crucial reference

[97] Irwin 2007: 234, Striker 1990.

to their specifically inquisitive nature: they happen to be people who have an interest in figuring out certain puzzles. The objection would work only if we had reasons to believe that the only possible motivation for inquiry was the achievement of tranquillity – but this is clearly not the case.[98] Just as Apelles, one of the most renowned painters of antiquity, did not give up painting after this incident, Sextus can go on inquiring after suspension.

Second, the experience Apelles underwent is quite unique and merely happens to deliver the result. Were we to understand suspension on this model, it could hardly be argued that scepticism as a philosophy offers a reliable way to its promised outcome.[99]

This, again, rests on a misunderstanding of the analogy. The point is not that one should cease to inquire and learn to give up in every future case of possible inquiry, just as hardly anybody would suggest that from now on Apelles should paint only by throwing his sponge at the canvas. Were Apelles to adopt sponge-throwing as his trademark technique, and thereby become an early adherent of action painting, he would merely adopt another craft with the promise of a reliable success rate, and could still be worried about his future success in the profession.

Instead, the story illustrates the unique moment of discovering suspensive tranquillity. Before suspension, the inquirer was made to believe that there is only one way to tranquillity, namely, the discovery of the true answer. After suspension, one recognises that there is a kind of tranquillity available in the absence of truth.[100]

[98] *Pace* Striker 2001: 117.
[99] Striker 1990: 192; cf. Tsouna-McKirahan 1996: 72.
[100] Cf. Grgic 2012: 13: 'We can instead assume that their suspension must have been a sort of a cognitive transformation, a radically new attitude toward the world, which is characterized by the recognition that conflicts of appearances need not be settled by finding the truth.'

Third, the suggestion seems psychologically implausible. If I worry about a certain question, simply suspending judgement will not do away with my anxiety.[101] However, the Sextan claim is not that any particular case of suspension brings about a state of complete happiness. Rather, the claim is that the achievement of a sceptical disposition diminishes one's anxiety, while dogmatism – ordinary or philosophical – would increase it. After being driven into a suspensive disposition, one can still engage in inquiry, just as much as it remains to be seen whether Apelles will eventually master a more reliable technique for painting horse saliva.

At a moment of despair, after a sufficient amount of failed attempts at figuring it out, one suddenly realises that throwing the towel in takes them back to a state of tranquillity. In this moment, being in a tranquil state yet not knowing the answer, the inquirer realises that there is at least one counterexample to the dogmatic claim that 'There is no tranquillity without discovering the truth'.[102] This suggests that the inquirer has a semi-dogmatic belief that is renounced at the moment of suspension, though it is somewhat unclear in what exactly this belief consists.[103]

[101] This objection is closely related to the one discussed with regard to the Partisan Premise.

[102] For a similar account, see Brennan 1999: 95-99. Brennan accounts for the transformation in minimalistic terms: according to him, the sceptic never really arrives at suspension, since that is where she has been all along. What happens is that the sceptic formulates two evident propositions: first, that she finds herself tranquil, and second, that she has not yet found the truth, and combines them into a third proposition, namely, that tranquillity is not incompatible with ongoing search. My disagreement is that this minimalistic account fails to accommodate the Apelles experience, and makes it somewhat difficult to distinguish between Pyrrhoneans and ordinary people who have not achieved suspensive tranquillity (though Brennan reflects on this at 53 n2).

[103] Cf. Grgic 2012 for a variety of suggestions (that he seems to take to be more or less identical): the belief that one of the appearances must be true (9, 11); that the conflict is resolvable only by finding the truth (9-10, 12, 17); that truth is 'the only worthwhile epistemic goal' (16); see also Vogt 2012a: 115-118: when faced with disagreement, one should suspend judgement about the issue at hand as well as about the question whether or not it is decidable.

Conclusion

I have argued that the narrative of the sceptical conversion, when understood correctly, provides an account of the original motivations of all philosophical investigators, as well as of the eventual split among those who turn out to be rash assenters (i.e. dogmatists) and those who become Pyrrhoneans. This position is, at the very minimum, internally consistent, whether or not one finds it attractive. Furthermore, it can be seen as representing a notion of philosophical inquiry not that divergent from mainstream Greek alternatives.

According to my interpretation, a Sextan Pyrrhonist thinks that it is in principle possible to come to a rational decision about conflicting appearances, and therefore it is in principle possible to arrive at legitimate philosophical views. It just happens to be the case that, as a matter of fact, nothing like this has been achieved yet. However, nothing precludes further investigations.

The Sextan understanding of philosophy, albeit markedly antagonistic, does at least partially overlap with a familiar notion of philosophy. At the same time, it serves as the basis of his attack on those who philosophise in a non-sceptical way, with the aim of converting them or – should the truth be discovered – to abolish the sceptical stance once and for all.

Suspension does not give rational support to the belief that discovery is impossible, nor does it provoke inquirers into discarding their peculiarly reflective and inquisitive nature. As long as the anomalies are still there, and there is no premature commitment that would constitute an obstacle for inquiry, one can still investigate.

Furthermore, a Pyrrhonean has self-regarding and other-regarding motives to continue inquiry. Due to their famous philanthropic nature (PH III. 280-281), they are incited to offer therapy to their fellow inquirers who have so far failed to recognise equipollence. At the same time, maintaining the stability of their sceptical disposition might require constant revision of proposed arguments on both sides of a given question. At the very least, practice could make one a more perfect suspender; but it could also turn out that there is reason to abandon their suspensive disposition. Should they ever discover a view that they cannot oppose and which seems to bring those who hold it into a state of greater tranquillity, they would hardly have any motive to restrain from accepting it.[104]

In sum, the position I have attributed to Sextus in this chapter boils down to the following claims. From among all those who originally set out to inquire, only sceptics managed to achieve something that at least sufficiently resembles calmness of mind. Others, overly impressed by apparent results of inquiry, prematurely accepted views that fill their lives with unnecessary worries. For those who are interested in philosophy for the sake of achieving tranquillity, the suspensive disposition advocated by Pyrrhoneans seems to be the greatest benefit the philosophical enterprise has brought us so far. While it is possible that someday someone might discover an ever happier state, up to now it seems that only Pyrrhonism can help us both keep our calm in the face of equipollence and carry on searching for the truth.

[104] Cf. the two clauses of the Pyrrhonean goal at PH I. 25: perhaps it is a theoretical possibility to be 'happy on the rack', i.e. enjoy a state of complete tranquillity with regard to both matters of opinion and matters forced upon us. Insofar as this option has not been ruled out, the Pyrrhonean can inquire into its possibility.

Chapter 2. Religious life and intellectual safety in Sextus Empiricus

In his two extended discussions on matters of theology and religious belief (PH III. 2-12 and M IX. 13-194), Sextus Empiricus presents his ambitious case for withholding assent from any account concerning the conception and the existence of gods. Yet, in both places he adds the caveat that his opposition to religious or anti-religious dogmatism does not rule out a reliance on ordinary life; indeed, he claims that Pyrrhoneans will engage in the cult of their respective societies without any breach of their suspensive policy. In M IX, Sextus also claims that this position is safer than those held by other philosophers.

Scholars by and large agree that the Sextan position has a hard time renouncing one of the two following unwelcome characteristics: either the crime of quasi-dogmatic conformism or the blunder of proposing a life of utter hypocrisy.[105] Sextus either rules out that ordinary life is a possible target of Pyrrhonean criticism and forms various beliefs on its basis, or is aware of the full destructive force of his arguments but recommends a practical stance that will turn out to be inescapably disingenuous or insincere.

Since on a closer reading of the practical stance of Pyrrhonism the first horn of the dilemma can easily be avoided, the majority view settles for the second horn, i.e. the Insincerity Charge. Another thought that comes fairly naturally is to connect the alleged 'safety' of the Sextan position (the Safety Concern) to the Insincerity Charge.

[105] Richard Bett, who offers the longest scholarly treatment to date of Sextus' case against dogmatic theology, concludes thus: 'So despite his claim to be in tune with ordinary life, he cannot consistently hold some of the religious beliefs that, on his view, ordinary people hold. This is a disappointing conclusion: Sextus does not, in the end, have an acceptable story to tell about the relation between his relation to everyday religion and his sceptical discussions about God.' (Bett 2015: 65-66) For further references on dogmatic conformism or insincerity, see below.

On this reading, Sextus is aware of the alleged obnoxity of his position, and motivates religious conformism in the absence of conviction out of a concern for safety from persecution.

As a way out of this predicament, some interpreters have suggested that the kind of religion with which Sextus was familiar was independent from theoretical considerations, self-standing and autonomous, and thus unaffected by Pyrrhonean suspension of judgement. On the Autonomy Account, religious commitment in the ancient pagan context did not require the kind of belief that is subject to sceptical examination. If this is a correct description of his cultural and intellectual environment, then Sextus need not have been concerned either with insincerity or with safety from punishment.[106]

In this chapter, I shall argue for the following claims. First, Sextus is primarily concerned neither with external safety nor with disowning the label of insincerity. Second, the Autonomy Account fails to provide a complete and philosophically charitable account of the Sextan position. Third, once separated from the Insincerity Charge, the Safety Concern can be understood in the context of Sextus' general position concerning suspensive tranquillity. All in all, my aim is to lay the groundwork for a presentation in which the discussion of religion is a standard case of Sextan Pyrrhonism, not a unique one where his general position does not apply without modifications.

I start by looking at the two Sextan caveats. I argue that these two passages (PH III. 2 and M IX. 49) represent two attempts at describing the same overall Pyrrhonean agenda concerning theology (Section 1). Then I go on to tackle the dilemma concerning conformism and insincerity. I argue that the kind of conformism

[106] My discussion of the Autonomy Account is largely based on its defense by Annas 2012.

advocated by Sextus is not dogmatic, and that the Insincerity Charge is not as harmful as it seems (Section 2). Then I turn to the Safety Concern: I briefly present various options for understanding it as a concern with safety from external punishment, and argue that these proposals fail (Section 3). Then I turn to the Autonomy Account. I present its strongest formulation, and argue that it misrepresents the main motivation of Pyrrhonean investigation (Section 4). I conclude by connecting Sextus' appeal to safety to his general project of suspension and tranquillity (Section 5).

1. Sextan caveats: PH III. 2 and M IX. 49

At the beginning of the third book of his Outlines of Pyrrhonism, Sextus Empiricus, having just rounded up the discussion of the 'logical' part of philosophy, turns to questions of natural philosophy. He announces that he is going to deal first with candidates for first principles (ἀρξώμεθα δὲ ἀπὸ τοῦ περὶ ἀρχῶν λόγου) and, more specifically, with causes actively bringing about change (τῶν δραστικῶν τὴν ἀρχὴν).[107] This, in turn, leads him immediately to the issue of the conception and the existence of gods, a topic he introduces with a curious remark:

> Since the majority have asserted that god is a most active cause, let us first consider god, remarking by way of preface that, following ordinary life without opinions, we say that there are gods and we are pious towards the gods and say that they are

[107] PH III. 1. Cf. also the transition to the next section περὶ τοῦ ἐνεργητικοῦ αἰτίου. For Sextus as a testimony for the Stoic view on causation, see Frede, 'The Original Notion of Cause', esp. 126-127. On causal efficacy as a default assumption about gods in Greek theological thought, see especially Sedley 2007; cf. also Trépanier 2010.

provident: it is against the rashness of the dogmatists that we make the following points.[108]

In this passage, Sextus qualifies the sceptical procedure that follows in a number of ways. First, he sets out a binary opposition between the ordinary life (βίος) on which he relies and the dogmatic 'rashness' (προπέτεια) with which he takes issue. Second, as he makes it clear at the end of the passage, his arguments are meant to apply only against the latter, that is, against rash claims of dogmatism. Third, he suggests that Pyrrhoneans align themselves with ordinary life by doing and saying what is prescribed in their respective religious cults.

By implication, one might suppose that Sextus takes the domain of ordinary life to be immune to sceptical argumentation. What is more, one could identify the Pyrrhonean stance with an affirmation of ordinary life, albeit with an added combative element: unlike most ordinary people, Pyrrhoneans respond to the dogmatic challenge with vigorous counterarguments. After all, while exposing the rashness of the dogmatists, Sextans are said to live an ordinary life, a life in which religious conformism does find its place: 'By the handing down of laws and customs', Sextus has explained in his description of the practical criterion, 'we accept, from an everyday point of view (βιωτικῶς), that piety is good and impiety bad.'[109]

Yet, the divide between dogmatic theory and ordinary life is not as clear-cut as to allow the Pyrrhonean to side with the latter without further ado. Pyrrhoneans do acquiesce in courses of action allowed for by ordinary life, in this case by making utterances about the existence and providence of gods and about the appropriate

[108] PH III.2. Οὐκοῦν ἐπεὶ θεὸν εἶναι δραστικώτατον αἴτιον οἱ πλείους ἀπεφήναντο, πρότερον περὶ θεοῦ σκοπήσωμεν, ἐκεῖνο προειπόντες, ὅτι τῷ μὲν βίῳ κατακολουθοῦντες ἀδοξάστως φαμὲν εἶναι θεοὺς καὶ σέβομεν θεοὺς καὶ προνοεῖν αὐτούς φαμεν, πρὸς δὲ τὴν προπέτειαν τῶν δογματικῶν τάδε λέγομεν.
[109] PH I. 24: ἐθῶν δὲ καὶ νόμων παραδόσει καθ' ἣν τὸ μὲν εὐσεβεῖν παραλαμβάνομεν βιωτικῶς ὡς ἀγαθὸν τὸ δὲ ἀσεβεῖν ὡς φαῦλον. On Pyrrhonism and ordinary life, see Grgic 2011.

relation humans take toward them. Sextus, however, puts emphasis on the claim that they subscribe to ordinary cult only insofar as it is possible to do so while remaining ἀδοξάστως – a qualification that appears both in the caveat at PH III. 6 and in the passage on the practical criterion (PH I. 23).[110]

A similar reflection on the Pyrrhonean procedure can be found in the parallel discussion in his *Against the Physicists*:

> Since not everything that is conceived also shares in reality, but something can be conceived but not be real, like a Hippocentaur or Scylla, it will be necessary after our investigation of the conception of the gods to inquire also into their reality. For perhaps the sceptic will be found to be safer than those who do philosophy in another way; in line with his ancestral customs and laws, he says that there are gods and does everything that tends to worship of and reverence towards them, but as far as philosophical investigation is concerned, he makes no rash moves.[111]

[110] It is worth pointing out that ἀδοξάστως appears only in PH and never in M; it seems to characterise the activity and speech of a Pyrrhonean in opposition to dogmatic proposals, including the overall division of philosophy (PH II. 13), sign-inference (PH II. 102), dialectical sophisms (PH II. 246, 254, 258), number (PH III. 151) and the basic division of ethics among good and bad (PH I. 226, III. 235). With regard to each of these, ordinary life seems to offer an alternative to rely on without accepting illicit beliefs: 'in uttering these phrases they say what is apparent to themselves and report their own feelings without holding opinions, affirming nothing about external objects' (PH I. 15. ἐν τῇ προφορᾷ τῶν φωνῶν τούτων τὸ ἑαυτῷ φαινόμενον λέγει καὶ τὸ πάθος ἀπαγγέλλει τὸ ἑαυτοῦ ἀδοξάστως, μηδὲν περὶ τῶν ἔξωθεν ὑποκειμένων διαβεβαιούμενος). The way of life of a Pyrrhonean incorporates only such practices (PH I. 23-24, cf. 231); interestingly, Sextus makes the case that the teaching of the Methodic school of medicine can be integrated into a life following appearances (PH I. 239-240). Barnes 1990/2014: 448 n113 argues that its meaning cannot be determined without settling the issue of the scope of suspension; for further discussions, see Janácek 1972: 60-61; Fine 2000: 100-101 n65; Bailey 2002: 188-193; Vogt 2012d: 652.

[111] M IX.49. Ἐπεὶ οὐ πᾶν τὸ ἐπινοούμενον καὶ ὑπάρξεως μετείληφεν, ἀλλὰ δύναταί τι ἐπινοεῖσθαι μέν, μὴ ὑπάρχειν δέ, καθάπερ Ἱπποκένταυρος καὶ Σκύλλα, δεήσει μετὰ τὴν περὶ τῆς ἐπινοίας τῶν θεῶν ζήτησιν καὶ περὶ τῆς ὑπάρξεως τούτων σκέπτεσθαι. τάχα γὰρ ἀσφαλέστερος παρὰ τοὺς ὡς ἑτέρως φιλοσοφοῦντας εὑρεθήσεται ὁ σκεπτικός, κατὰ μὲν τὰ πάτρια ἔθη καὶ τοὺς νόμους λέγων εἶναι θεοὺς καὶ πᾶν τὸ εἰς τὴν τούτων θρῃσκείαν καὶ εὐσέβειαν συντεῖνον ποιῶν, τὸ δ' ὅσον ἐπὶ τῇ φιλοσόφῳ ζητήσει μηδὲν προπετευόμενος.

In comparison to the previous passage, we might notice a slightly different picture here.[112]

To begin with, the opposition is not between ordinary life and philosophical dogmatism anymore. Rather, Sextus positions himself within the philosophical community, as the follower of a specific kind of philosophy that supposedly makes him 'safer' (ἀσφαλέστερος) than those who are of a different persuasion (τοὺς ὡς ἑτέρως φιλοσοφοῦντας). Furthermore, he picks out the inherited customs and laws of one's land (τὰ πάτρια ἔθη καὶ τοὺς νόμους) as the source of utterances and actions available to a mature Pyrrhonean. The overall impression is strengthened further by the closing remark: the sceptic is someone who, in the process of philosophical inquiry, resists the temptation of rashness (ἐπὶ τῇ φιλοσόφῳ ζητήσει μηδὲν προπετευόμενος).

When taken together, PH III. 2 and M IX. 49 can be read as consistently characterising the Sextan position along the following lines.[113]

Sextus conceives of his fellow Pyrrhoneans as those who align themselves with ordinary life, yet consider themselves to be members of a broadly conceived philosophical community. Situated in a curious middle state between laymen and philosophers, Sextans are dissenters of both. On the one hand, they engage in certain practices and utter certain propositions insofar as doing so is part of ordinary life, but

[112] The summary that follows does not address two points concerning the M IX passage: first, that it makes a distinction between having a conception (ἐπίνοια) of something – in this case, god – and affirming its existence (ὕπαρξις); and second, that – unlike the PH III passage that precedes both parts of the argument – it is positioned in-between the discussion of the conception and the existence of gods. I will return to these points in the next chapter.

[113] Admittedly, there are ways to resist a unified reading. One could attribute different agendas to these two treatises, assuming that their author had access to different sources or perhaps had a complete change of heart about the overall project, or point out that there is no obvious cross-reference to be found. I shall nevertheless assume that a consistent reading would make any such arguments irrelevant, and go on to present a consistent reading.

all the while remain ἀδοξάστως.[114] On the other hand, they are investigating matters of philosophy, but refuse to commit themselves rashly to any result of their inquiry so far. Their resistance to premature assent makes them not only ἀδοξάστως but also 'safer' (ἀσφαλέστερος) than those who philosophise otherwise.[115]

At this point, one could argue that following religious customs as part of a life based on appearances is not unproblematic. On the one hand, since religion involves various beliefs, attachment to conventional forms of piety seems to violate the suspensive policy adopted by Pyrrhoneans. On the other hand, if her religious appearances do not qualify as beliefs, the life of the Pyrrhonean could easily qualify as a life of dishonesty and pretence.

2. Observant Pyrrhonism: thoughtless conformism or closet disbelief?

The consolidated position of the caveats outlined in the previous section seems to be perfectly in line with the general Pyrrhonean stance, as well as with the story of an inquirer becoming a suspender as presented in the previous chapter. In a narrative form, it could be presented along the following lines.

[114] Sextus mentions providence in PH III. 2, but not in M IX. 49. This need not cause any particular worry, for two reasons. First, Sextus probably does not intend to offer a definitive list of tenets acceptable for any and every Pyrrhonean, but rather uses specific assertions characteristic of him and his society as examples for such tenets. Second, insofar as his ancestral customs and laws vouchsafe for various claims, divine providence probably makes an appearance on their list, and is thus implicitly included here as well – especially given that Greek religious practice is based on an assumption about the reciprocity of divine and human favours.

[115] Note that there is no indication that the kind of safety involved in the comparison is meant to apply to ordinary believers as well. The contrast is drawn between ways of doing philosophy, not between philosophers and laypeople. Cf. Long 1990/2006: 116: 'Sextus Empiricus characterizes the sceptic as one who may be in a safer position than other philosophers: he abides by local traditions in saying that gods exist and in worshipping them. His refusal to commit himself is a philosophical attitude ..., albeit one that enables him to conduct his life equably and uncontroversially.'

Presumably, the Pyrrhonean was brought up in a given cultural setting that presented her with a certain view on religiosity. At a certain point, however, various anomalies started to worry this particular mind of a philosophical bent. These anomalies could include the encounter with rival religious traditions, or philosophical schools demanding and offering rational justification for a set of views at odds with other sets of views. Having inquired into the matter, and being unable to come up with decisive reasons to maintain or abandon her traditional belief system, the eventual Pyrrhonean came to suspend judgement.

After suspension, the Pyrrhonean adopts a position characterised by its opposition to dogmatism and by its observance of ordinary life. Tenets propagated in dogmatic theology, just like any other instances of dogmatism, are targeted for elimination by the Pyrrhonean, since they are insufficiently established by rational argumentation and since they increase – at least some of them and in principle – the anxiety of the person holding them. Meanwhile, in order not to be completely inactive, the Pyrrhonean inquirer falls back on the standards of conventional life, a life that at the same time offers her a state of calm and tranquillity.

According to various interpreters, the Sextan position concerning dogmatic theology and religious life faces the following dilemma. On the one hand, in his advocacy of a conformist life, Sextus seems to drift dangerously close to a dogmatic affirmation of ordinary life. This seems to be a problem in any domain where Sextus uses arguments against dogmatic theories that could just as well undercut beliefs widely held in ordinary life; and religion is a prime example of such a domain. Thus,

on this horn of the dilemma, Sextus seems to be a dogmatic conformist who fails to employ the arguments at his disposal to their full potential.[116]

Now it is clear enough that, according to Sextus, the Pyrrhonean cannot simply join forces with ordinary life, since the beliefs of ordinary people can be subjected to sceptical investigation.[117] It is clear that, in discussing religion, Sextus' main target is the dogmatic theology of rival philosophers, as indicated both in the caveats and by the fact that Sextus chose to include these discussions in his attack on natural philosophy.[118] It is also clear that these dogmatic theories are often revisionary in nature, and are often proposed as rationally preferable to ordinary views, even if there is a certain sort of continuity implied. Yet it is also clear that ordinary beliefs can turn out to be dogmatic enough to be opposed to other ordinary or philosophical views in order to induce suspension of judgement.

At various points in his discussion, Sextus explicitly includes the views advocated in ordinary life among the dogmatic opinions with respect to which a Pyrrhonean ends up suspending her judgement. Most importantly, he claims that

[116] This is the reading offered by Bett 2009: 183 and Bett 2015: 60-62 with n60. Bett thinks that Sextus wants to identify as an ordinary person in this respect, while his arguments in fact undercut ordinary belief. Bett adds that it seems further at odds with Sextus' recognition that ordinary people sometimes hold quite dogmatic beliefs, and that they clearly do not understand them as appearance-claims. Unlike Bett, full-blown dogmatic conventionalist readers of Sextus take him to positively recommend the rejection and abandonment of philosophical inquiry. Clear statements of this position include Hallie 1985: 8: 'The ultimate purpose of Scepticism is to make doubting unnecessary, to let the customs of our country, our needs for food and drink and so forth, and our plain everyday speech to take over the direction of our thought and life after the doubting is done'; and 29: 'You are a sceptic – in the classical, Greek sense of the word – in so far as you try to avoid fanaticism and endless bickering by sharply distinguishing an arbitrary fiction that grabs your imagination from a plain fact that grabs you by your common sense'; Drozdek 2005: 107: 'What the Sceptic advocates is really life (sic!) of conformism. ... Religion becomes just a part of social routine driven by a religious instinct and thus is reduced to the level of physical drive on the same level as hunger and thirst'.

[117] As pointed out by Tsouna-McKirahan 1996: 76; Bett 2009: 180-182; Bett 2015: 56-59; and Thorsrud 2011: 98-101.

[118] In the Outlines, the arguments against theology figure in the so-called special account (εἰδικὸς λόγος) of Pyrrhonism (PH I. 5-6). In the special account, he follows what he takes to be a paradigmatic exposition of philosophy as conceived by his dogmatic opponents, divided into its logical, ethical, and physical parts. He does so in order to systematically counterbalance dogmatic tenets with equally persuasive counterarguments, with the hope of bringing not yet committed inquirers or his fellow dogmatists to the recognition of equipollence. Books IX and X of Adversus Mathematicos correspond to the first half of PH III, the exposition of dogmatic physics including theology.

'most of the dogmatists, and the common preconception of ordinary life, says that there is [a god]',[119] and sets them up in opposition with those who hold an atheistic point of view.[120] In cases of such oppositions, the disagreement is always between views considered rash and dogmatic, and the proper sceptic ends up suspending about both candidates.

One could point once again to the qualifier ἀδοξάστως: it could be easily understood as intended to drive a wedge between the layperson who never sets out to philosophise but could hold illicit beliefs, and the Pyrrhonean who returns to ordinary life after having achieved suspension, thus lacking any such belief.[121] The return to ordinary life is facilitated not by newfound belief in its correctness, but rather by a need to act and to act in a way that is conducive to a state of tranquillity. Insofar as dogmatic proposals intended to revise ordinary standards, but ended up having an adverse effect on one's well-being, reliance on ordinary life after suspension should not involve any dogmatic beliefs; and Sextus clearly thinks that it is possible to live a

[119] καὶ εἶναι μὲν οἱ πλείους τῶν δογματικῶν καὶ ἡ κοινὴ τοῦ βίου πρόληψις ... M IX. 50.

[120] Other examples include M IX. 191, where 'lack of uniformity about gods in ordinary life' is mentioned as leading to suspension; just as the Tenth Mode proceeds from 'persuasions and customs and laws and beliefs in myth and dogmatic suppositions' (ὁ παρὰ τὰς ἀγωγὰς καὶ τὰ ἔθη καὶ τοὺς νόμους καὶ τὰς μυθικὰς πίστεις καὶ τὰς δογματικὰς ὑπολήψεις, PH I. 145) to suspension of judgement. Furthermore, Sextus does not fail to register disagreements inside the theistic camp: he says that 'Of those who believe in gods, some believe in the traditional gods, others in those invented by the dogmatists' schools' (καὶ τῶν εἶναι θεοὺς ἀποφηναμένων οἱ μὲν τοὺς πατρίους νομίζουσι θεούς, οἱ δὲ τοὺς ἐν ταῖς δογματικαῖς αἱρέσεσιν ἀναπλασσομένους, PH III. 218). Interestingly, the verb ἀναπλάσσω is also used for those dogmatic aetiologies of religious belief that are discussed and eventually rejected by Sextus at M IX. 14, 16 and 17; cf. also 33 and 42. Elsewhere, he uses it to refer to other philosophical notions such as the indicative (as opposed to the recollective) sign (PH II. 102, M VIII. 158), 'the generic human being' as opposed to the individual Dion (M VII. 222), and the things to be chosen and avoided (M XI. 157); but see also M VIII. 157 (a mad person imagining the Erynes) and PH II. 222, III. 155.

[121] In PH III. 2, ἀδοξάστως could go either with βίῳ κατακολουθοῦντες, as understood e.g. by Barnes 1990/2014: 458 n148, or with φαμὲν. As for the syntax, there is no clue as to which reading one should opt for. Barnes remarks that on the latter construal Sextus clearly asserts that he is insincere: he says that there are gods but does not actually believe so (459 n150). This reading, then, seems to support the Insincerity Charge (see below).

life with a marked religious component in the absence of such beliefs. Thus the danger of dogmatic conformism is happily avoided.[122]

This, on the other hand, casts doubt on the intellectual integrity of the Pyrrhonean stance on religion. Reading the qualification ἀδοξάστως in this way suggests that Pyrrhoneans participate in religious cult without sharing the beliefs that many, if not most ordinary believers associate with their cultic activities. One might worry, then, that Sextus openly advocates disingenuity for his fellow Pyrrhoneans. The proper weight of this accusation is unclear, but it is perhaps meant to minimise the appeal of following a Sextan lifestyle.

The Insincerity Charge

The accusation of hypocrisy is almost routinely formulated when discussing Sextus' attitude concerning religious observance. In its weaker form, the charge merely amounts to the suggestion that the kind of life available to a Pyrrhonean will be thoughtlessly conformist through and through. In a more judgemental fashion, some interpreters take the Pyrrhonean attitude to be deliberately deceptive, a pretence in order to conceal any sign of disbelief.[123]

[122] Tsouna-McKirahan 1996 has convincingly shown that Pyrrhoneans cannot hold what she calls an 'ideological commitment to the prevailing norms'; see especially 74-78, 86. Cf. Lévy 2003: 49: 'Tout comme le non-philosophe, le sceptique vit au fil des apparances, mais, contrairement à lui, il ne leur accorde aucune valeur absolue' (though at 54 he attributes to Sextus a commitment to the 'relativité universelle des choses').

[123] See the following examples: 'The Pyrrhonist who goes to church will do the customary things – he will bare his head, genuflect, cross himself, and so on; and he will also *say* certain things. Those utterances are parts of the ritual: they do not betoken belief any more than the Sceptic's other ritual gestures do.' (Barnes 1982/1997: 85) Also: 'Roughly, the Sceptic conforms to the ways of his own day, age, and culture, without any inner commitment to their being in conformity with some reality.' (Penelhum 1986: 135) 'If the Pyrrhonist does not have the belief that a divine being exists, then his participation in religious worship would seem to be little more than a piece of hypocrisy and dissimulation. Nevertheless Sextus is apparently not prepared to acknowledge the existence of this deeper disquiet. ... Sextus' discussion indicates that these reassuring statements really amount to nothing more than the claim that the Pyrrhonist can be relied upon, in the right cultural setting, to

This charge, if it stands, could challenge the desirability – though not the mere viability – of living a Pyrrhonean life. At any rate, the weaker formulation of the Insincerity Charge should not upset Sextus much. As we have already seen, his advocacy of religious conformism is in line with his overall practical stance: in the absence of sufficient reasons to accept a philosophical revision of ordinary practice, Pyrrhoneans stick to the customary ways of their respective communities.

Insofar as they manage to avoid both revisionary views on the basis of insufficient evidence and dogmatic commitment to the correctness of ordinary views, Pyrrhoneans fare just as well in the domain of religion as anywhere else. The outcome of sceptical investigation – that is, suspension of judgement and the rejection of illicit belief – is understood by Sextus to leave intact the possibility of living a life without opinions. It is of course a matter of legitimate debate whether and how such a life is possible, but the case of religion is by no means a special one.

Thus, the reader is left with the stronger objection. It is quite plausible that, compared to other, non-suspensive observers of religious tradition, a Pyrrhonean will turn out to be relatively disingenuous. Now, it is important to notice that the alleged disingenuity is philosophically neither here nor there. Should someone be looking for a philosophical position that provides the most adequate grounds for embracing a religious worldview, Pyrrhonism will be found lacking. But insofar as the Sextan position is motivated by a concern for a specific sort of tranquillity, and not by a search for the most authentic foundation of religious life, the Charge of Insincerity does not pose any threat to its philosophical credit.

perform the characteristic actions associated with religious believers.' (Bailey 2002: 193) And: 'So the Pyrrhonist will say this although he does not believe it. It is possible that he makes the statement merely as a report of his own present *pathos*, short for 'It seems to me that there are gods'. But from the tenor of the discussion here and elsewhere I suspect that it does not even *seem* to him that there are gods, and that he only says such things in order to avoid trouble.' (Mates 1996: 289)

Furthermore, insincerity about one's religiosity is relative to the standard imposed by one's cultural environment. It is true that, if acting the same way as others do without holding the same beliefs as theirs is frowned upon in a given society, then someone who proceeds in this manner will be seen as disingenuous. But the degree to which this could be seen as a problem mostly depends on extra-philosophical reasons: on the requirements of the neighbouring culture from an observant of religion to count as honest.[124]

Those who maintain that the Charge of Insincerity was after all a source of concern for Sextus tend to understand his appeal to the safety of his position as pointing to its safety from external retribution. Thus, we should have a look whether they can convincingly substantiate this claim.

External safety

Some would argue that the Safety Concern directly responds to the discomfort arising from the Insincerity Charge. An inquirer impressed by the argumentative armoury employed by Pyrrhoneans might easily come into conflict with generally recognised views about the gods, and thereby arrive at conclusions that undermine the rational as well as the psychological justification of religious belief.[125] Being aware of the irreligious potential of his arguments, Sextus is simply concerned with what one might call external safety, that is, safety from the possible retributive actions of external agents, human or divine.[126]

[124] Indeed, if it is considered disingenuous to engage in the kind of religious activities one was brought up with in the absence of any strong theoretical commitment, many religious believers of most, if not all times and cultures could easily turn out to be somewhat disingenuous.
[125] Cf. Sihvola 2006: 96.
[126] See Bett 2009: 179, 182; Bett 2015: 55-56 ('But the care Sextus takes, in both works, to remind the reader of his conventional piety at the start of his discussions of God's existence makes it look as if he

It is, however, surprisingly difficult to substantiate any such claim.[127] Remember that, on a natural reading of M IX. 49, the contrast was drawn between the Pyrrhonean position, characterised by suspension of judgement and conforming to ordinary life, and other – i.e. dogmatic – philosophers. The safety of Pyrrhonism thus derives either from suspension of judgement, or from conformism, or from a combination of these two.[128] However, conformism itself cannot quite do: if safety is merely a question of compliance with local traditions, then most dogmatists would be found just as safe as the Pyrrhonean sceptic claims to be. Generally speaking, most philosophers who criticised traditional cult nevertheless did, as a rule, participate in it, and even encouraged their followers to do so.[129]

Therefore, suspension has to play a part in the case made for preferring Pyrrhonism to other philosophies. Now, it is important to point out that Sextus and his fellow suspenders do not come to reject traditional views; all they do is not to endorse them dogmatically, i.e. they suspend about the question whether ordinary beliefs are ultimately correct as to the real nature of things. Dogmatists, on the other hand, often argue for a revision of ordinary belief, yet fail to substantiate the primacy of their revisionary views over what is traditionally taken to be the case.

Sextus argues, for example, that any dogmatic stance on divine providence leads to blasphemy (PH III. 10-11), and he makes a transitional joke at PH III. 13 to the effect that, by pushing their agenda, dogmatists try to implicate everyone else in

sees a possibility that these discussions will be read in the wrong way, as constituting an attack on ordinary religion'); and Sedley 2011: 50 n59 ('the Sceptic is likely to be playing 'safer' than other philosophers, since despite his self-restraint regarding the philosophical question whether there are gods he follows local convention in *saying* that the gods exist and in taking a full part in their worship').

[127] Cf. Bett 2015: 53-56.

[128] Given the reasons for safety as explained in M IX. 49, I fail to understand why Thorsrud 2011: 91 writes the following: 'it is surprising that Sextus does not say he will be safer as a result of having suspended judgement, rather than as a result of participating in orthodox [sic!] religious practice; for the skeptic's tranquillity depends, in general, not on his behaviour but rather the fact that he has suspended judgement.'

[129] See Betegh 2009: 625-629.

their impiety.[130] Going by these remarks, if anyone should be afraid of divine or human disapproval, it is actually those who assent to problematic claims about the nature and the activity of the gods, not those who suspend about matters of theology and remain engaged in ordinary cult.[131]

Furthermore, if the suspensive attitude constitutes a problem, it constitutes a problem across the board, not just in the case of religion. If the disapproval of fellow human beings constituted a real threat to the suspender, it could have already been instigated by the refutation of each and every statement that comes their way. One could perhaps argue that religion is a particularly sensitive issue; indeed, the claim that Sextus could have been motivated by a fear of dangerous opprobrium does seem to carry some evidential weight.[132]

Yet, anyone who puts much emphasis on assumptions about the environment will have a hard time accounting for uncertainties about Sextus and his sources. Since we do not know much about the time and place of his activity, nor about his exact relation to his sources, we cannot be quite sure about what kinds of debates are reflected in his presentation. One might add as a further consideration that arguments from an author's alleged mindset are generally shaky, especially in the absence of any clear textual indication. Furthermore, the larger debate about intellectual freedom in the ancient world is far from being settled in a satisfactory manner.[133]

[130] I shall analyse these passages in the next chapter.

[131] While it goes almost without saying, it is perhaps worth mentioning that there is no textual evidence that Sextus was concerned with divine punishment, and implying that he took divine beings to require any sort of cognitive state from humans would be to attribute to him a belief that is undeniably dogmatic.

[132] Cf. Bett 2015: 39: the odds are higher in this case than in the case of other core notions of dogmatic physics, such as place or motion.

[133] The debate is mostly revolving around the liberty of classical Athens, a place of which we can say almost with certainty that it was not the stage of Sextus' activity. Opinions range from that of Dover 1976/1988: 157 ('Tolerance of the free expression of intellectual criticism was at most times and in most circumstances a predominant characteristic of Athenian society') to that of Janko 2006: 57 ('there was an increasingly fierce anti-intellectual climate and ... it was centered on 'atheism'). A forceful version of the claim that 'in classical Athens, and no doubt well beyond', it must have been quite

Last but not least, even if one assumes, despite all this uncertainty, that Sextus' main concern with safety was the avoidance of any punishment for the anti-religious potential of his philosophical stance, it is surprising, to say the least, that he would openly announce this intention to his audience. If he believes that he actually destroys all rational basis for belief, and thinks it is a reason for persecution so much so that a Pyrrhonean should rather pretend to believe like anyone else, why would he give his readers a clue in describing this position as 'safer' than any other?

All that seems clear is that Sextus intends to vindicate the safety of following ordinary cult in the face of dogmatic peril. Taking him at his word, one can suppose that his interest lies in the achievement of suspension about claims of religious dogmatism, and whether or not it is compatible with further agendas of avoiding external harm is beside the philosophical point.

In the last section of this chapter, I shall offer a different account of the Safety Concern, one that explains it as a concern for intellectual safety. This provides a more charitable reading and points to a possible motivation that is internal to the Pyrrhonean philosophical project.[134] However, before turning to this alternative account, one should take note of a proposal according to which there are culturally specific reasons for a thinker of Sextus' time and place not to be worried about the dogmatic potential of ordinary belief.

dangerous to come out openly as an atheist, see Sedley 2013a: 335-341. For introduction to the literature on ancient atheism, see also Drachmann 1922, Kahn 1997 (esp. 259-261), Bremmer 2007, Sedley 2013b, and now Whitmarsh 2015.

[134] There are further possibilities, including comparisons with fideism in the vein of Pascal's wager, Wittgensteinian theories of religious expressivism (discussed and rejected by Bett 2015: 53, 64-65), or with Reformed Epistemology (apparently endorsed by Thorsrud 2011). I take none of these to get off the ground, given that as proposed explanations of what Sextus actually states they are both philosophically incongruent and anachronistic.

3. The Autonomy Account

In response to the Insincerity Charge, some interpreters propose the following account. When formulating his position, Sextus Empiricus could draw on a feature that supposedly characterised ancient pagan religion, namely, that its practice enjoyed a kind of autonomy from theoretical commitments. The autonomy of the practical side of religion consists in the fact that its performance was in itself deemed enough to satisfy the requirements of religious piety, irrespective of what, if any, beliefs the performer of the relevant acts shared. In such a cultural environment, the participation of Pyrrhoneans in religious cult could hardly be disingenuous, no matter how successful they are at eliminating dogmatic beliefs.[135]

The claim that Greek religion measured piety on the basis of orthopraxy, that is, correct performance, and not on the basis of orthodoxy, that is, correct beliefs, is a commonplace in the study of religious history.[136] It is not obvious, however, what its implications for Pyrrhonean suspension could be. The focal idea seems to be that the Pyrrhonean position was formulated in and reflected upon a culture that did not require more than conformity to tradition.

To begin with, the claim about this culture of orthopraxy, whether or not it holds water, could be understood in a stricter and in a looser sense. These, in turn, set different limits for possible interpretations of the Pyrrhonean stance.

[135] The most developed version of this interpretation has been offered by Annas 2012; in what follows, I will focus on her presentation. Sihvola (2006) already gestured towards a similar claim; he provides a birds-eye-view perspective on the ancient context in which 'religion as a practice was not dependent on the philosophical theory of the divine'. See also the remarks by Burnyeat 1980/1997: 36 with n26, who argues that εὐσεβεῖν and ἀσεβεῖν as mentioned at PH I. 23-24 are concerned with practice, not with attitude.

[136] For discussion, see Parker 2011, ch. 1. On p. 33, he sums it up as follows: 'All that was firm and established and secure, all therefore that it made sense to regulate, was the ritual act. The hubbub of conflicting claims dit not arise when old certainties broke down, but was the permanent and inevitable consequence of the lack of a basis for such certainties.'

On the strict reading, the claim would be that an ordinary religious believer of Sextus' time would hold no beliefs whatsoever about religious matters, as opposed to dogmatic theologians who would urge the acceptance of a set of beliefs. In this case, Pyrrhoneans would only oppose the dogmatic proposals, while maintaining the beliefless stance of ordinary believers. Such a reading puts too much emphasis on an implausible claim about the mindset of Greek believers. It could be invoked in order to maintain an interpretation according to which neither Pyrrhoneans nor ordinary people hold any beliefs. Since interpretations of this vein are neither appealing nor especially popular, the strongest version of the Autonomy Account should not be based on this possibility.

Reading the standard of orthopraxy more leniently, one would argue that ordinary believers were free to think whatever pleased them, insofar as they did everything that was required from them by law or by convention. On this reading, even if there are all sorts of beliefs held by ordinary people, these beliefs are not only distinguishable but also independent from dogmatic beliefs. In opposing the latter, Pyrrhoneans could settle either for a set of beliefs held by their non-philosophical contemporaries, or for a beliefless state from which even these ordinary beliefs are missing.

The latter is a more promising way to go. The beliefs targeted by Pyrrhonism are theological beliefs, beliefs that can be qualified as illicit δόγματα; while the beliefs of ordinary people are culturally specific religious beliefs.[137] The difference could be due either to their content or to the basis on which we accept them. If the former is the case, then the contrast seems to be between beliefs which are universal in scope and beliefs relative to a given divinity or religious tradition; if the latter, then

[137] My summary follows the account in Annas 2012: 76-83.

the contrast is between beliefs accepted on the basis of argument and beliefs accepted on the basis of local tradition and religious indoctrination.[138]

With that distinction in place, one can offer a comparison of ancient and modern configurations.[139] For an ancient pagan, religious beliefs do not imply theological beliefs: she can hold the former without having any of the latter. In the modern context, however, we are accustomed to thinking that religious beliefs imply theological beliefs. Thus, in the modern configuration, someone suspending judgement about theological beliefs would have to suspend about religious beliefs, or to introduce an 'arbitrary insulation' between the two;[140] while on the ancient pagan model, this does not seem to be the case.

There are, however, various considerations that render this explanation at least partially unsatisfactory. First, as we have already seen, Sextus does take ordinary religious beliefs to be subject to sceptical investigation. In response, one could drop the content-based distinction between religious and theological beliefs, and distinguish among them on the basis of one's attitude towards them.[141] This, in turn, would transform the distinction between theological and religious beliefs into a distinction between appearance-claims and dogmatic claims, something clearly not

[138] Throughout her discussion, Annas seems to waver between these two options. Note also that these two options produce different results with regard to suspension. One suspends judgement either about a certain domain, or about views held with a particular sort of attitude. On the former option, the religious beliefs one can hold after suspending on theological beliefs are beliefs about culturally embedded practices. This easily results in a reading similar to that of Bett 2009: 183-185, who thinks that here Sextus relies on vestiges of an earlier, relativising form of Pyrrhonism, which commits him to dogmatic beliefs sufficiently similar to this reading of Annas' 'religious beliefs'. Cf. Bett 2000: 235-236.

[139] Understood, of course, as archetypes, not as a universally applicable division between ancient and modern belief systems. Annas discusses examples of late antique universalism as well as emerging monotheism as contrast cases of the ancient pagan culture she talks about.

[140] Annas 2012: 81; cf. Thorsrud 2011: 93 n4.

[141] See the example of Frede 1979/1997: 23: 'For we can imagine someone who has been raised by Stoics and who thus has the Stoic concept of God. As a sceptic, he no longer believes that the Stoic proofs of God's existence entail their conclusion; since, however, his belief was not induced by these arguments, nothing about his belief need change even when the arguments no longer carry conviction.' Cf. Morison 2011: 266 on the distinction between believing in god as a result of having pondered the ontological argument, or because of one's religious indoctrination.

specific to the case of religion.[142] Furthermore, it would transform the overarching claim about the autonomy of religious beliefs into Sextus' claim that religious beliefs can be understood in appearance-terms, even if dogmatic thinkers tend not to understand it that way.

Alternatively, one could argue that Sextus only applies his oppositional method to these beliefs insofar as they could generate ethical worry; but insofar as they remain within the limits of ordinary life, they are not his concern.[143] Now, the claim that similar worries arise in the field of ethical inquiry is, strictly speaking, true. Yet, it is a strange distinction which is ultimately based on the assumption that one type of worry, namely ethical worry, is more genuine to the Pyrrhonean sceptic than another, namely worry about the correctness of one's physical theory or about the correctness of one's customary views. The sceptic as a philosopher can be worried about the correctness of her views in any domain of intellectual inquiry, and one should not try to limit the suspensive epidemic to the domain of ethics.[144]

This leads to my second objection. Suspensive tranquillity derives – if only indirectly – from suspension of judgement, which implies that by the time someone can arrive at it, the sceptical procedure must have already taken place. Such an inquiry concerns beliefs and not practices; what is more, it concerns beliefs that make

[142] Annas does, at several points, treat the distinction in this manner, see e.g. her wording in the following quote about what a religious belief is: 'It is just what arises in a pluralist pagan context, where ordinary life forces you to recognize several different religions, even if you have no intellectual interest in the divine, and thus no *dogmata* about it' (Annas 2012: 82). At other points, however, she seems to insist on a distinction between beliefs about, say, the cult of Athena, and beliefs about the divine *as such* introduced by philosophers in their physical theories.

[143] See Annas 2011: 84-88; e.g. on p. 85: 'Everyday pagan religious life may, then, contain a source of worry, but it is ethical, not theological; if it creates a problem for living the sceptical life, the source of the problem is not the nature of the gods but ethical worries which also occur elsewhere.'

[144] Annas seems to inadvertently admit this point in her discussion of what the sceptic's safety consists in: 'We can see why Sextus thinks that this is a 'safe' position in which to be. For if the worshipper is *antecedently* committed to a philosophical claim of this sort, this will produce worry and anxiety about the extent to which his particular cultural religious tradition provides an adequate and worthy representation of it, and hence he will begin to worry about the statues of what he is doing.' (Annas 1982: 82) This seems to imply that a theological belief can in principle generate worry about the correctness of one's religious beliefs, and can thus set the sceptical machinery into motion.

a claim on being true. Yet, the Autonomy Account presupposes the opposite: on this view, the Pyrrhonean can act according to local customs exactly because she need not even start considering her religious beliefs as possible objects of sceptical scrutiny.

Even if it is perfectly possible that one fails to realise the availability of certain theoretical options due to cultural conditioning, it is evidently not the case with Sextus who, as we have seen above, subjected religious beliefs to sceptical investigation. It is all the more plausible that a Pyrrhonean had in fact subjected her religious beliefs to the sceptical procedure and came to see her fellow ordinary believers as in some cases leaning towards the dogmatic camp. Suspending judgement about their position as well as about any other enables her to find temporary calm in suspensive tranquillity.

Finally, the Autonomy Account is rather uneconomical. It takes religious behaviour to be an exception rather than the norm of Pyrrhonean conduct. If it is possible for a Pyrrhonean to have a religious life only because of contingent cultural reasons, not only does it make the overall position more haphazard than one could wish for, but it also seems to draw on a rather artificial boundary.

It seems to me that the main possible motivation for pushing such a reading would be to maintain the possibility of an overall interpretation of Sextus with a radical understanding of the scope of suspension.[145] Yet, even a radical reading could easily be collapsed into a more general interpretation that marginalises the alleged special status of religion. Nothing seems to preclude the possibility of proposing similar distinctions between beliefs in other contexts: for any given x, perhaps the sceptic argues against the existence of x, but still proceeds as if x really existed, and can do so because of the surrounding cultural tradition that testifies for x. This is a

[145] In this respect, the Autonomy Account seems similar to another 'exceptionist' reading, Burnyeat's famous proposal that, on the ancients' understanding, there is no truth about subjective states. On this, see especially Burnyeat 1982b, with Fine 2000a, Fine 2003a and Fine 2003b.

perfectly possible reading of Sextus – indeed, this is the general outline of an alternative to the radical understanding.[146]

To sum up, despite its attractive features, the Autonomy Account is at best partially unsatisfactory as an explanation of the Sextan stance on religion. It rightly points to the peculiarities of Sextus' cultural milieu, and rightly emphasises that the sceptic does not come to positively reject ordinary views, but it fails to provide a philosophically viable alternative to any general interpretation that can show how ordinary views about the gods and piety can just as well serve as grist for the Pyrrhonean mill.

4. Intellectual safety

Returning to the question of the safety of the Pyrrhonean position, one can ask anew the question: from what, then, is the suspending philosopher safe? In this section, I shall argue that the relevant notion of safety is closely related to the aim of avoiding dogmatic rashness, the kind of rash assent that would prove an obstacle to the achievement of suspensive tranquillity (as described in the previous chapter).

In order to substantiate this claim, I start by examining whether there is a uniform use of the adjective ἀσφαλής in Sextus Empiricus which might or might not support this interpretation. Now, the evidence in this respect is not exactly overwhelming. Time and again, Sextus makes use of this common Greek term in describing certain positions, but no specifically Pyrrhonean use of it emerges. It is important to note, however, that even if Sextus uses the term in more than one way, it

[146] Cf. Thorsrud 2011: 93 n3: 'It would be implausible to maintain that the only sort of ordinary belief a skeptic might have is about the gods.'

does not necessarily harm my reading, if at least the core meaning seems connected to suspensive tranquillity.

Sometimes ἀσφαλής appears in the discussion of a certain dogmatic claim. For example, it is mentioned in the dogmatic argument that a good speech requires one to have a safe mastering of what is thought;[147] or that geometers take the method of hypothesis to make their efforts safe from error;[148] or again that, according to the Stoics, knowledge is a safe and solid apprehension that reason cannot overturn.[149]

On the other hand, when it is applied to the Pyrrhonean position, it always makes an appearance together with suspension of judgement. One example occurs in the discussion of endless disagreements about sign-inference. Here we learn that, faced with these disagreements, Pyrrhoneans safely suspend their judgement (τὸ δὲ οὐ μᾶλλον εἶναι ἢ μὴ εἶναι μετὰ ἀσφαλείας προφερομένους).[150]

Not long after this passage, Sextus turns to the discussion of demonstration, and makes a rather similar comment:

> But for the survey not to be unmethodical, and for the suspension of judgement and the rebuttal of the dogmatists to go ahead more safely, we should point out the conception of demonstration.[151]

[147] ὁ τοῦ νοουμένου πράγματος ἀσφαλῶς κρατῶν, M II. 52.
[148] ... οἱ γεωμέτραι συνορῶντες τὸ πλῆθος τῶν ἐπακολουθούντων αὐτοῖς ἀποριῶν εἰς ἀκίνδυνον εἶναι δοκοῦν καὶ ἀσφαλὲς πρᾶγμα καταφεύγουσι, τὸ ἐξ ὑποθέσεως αἰτεῖσθαι τὰς τῆς γεωμετρίας ἀρχάς ... M III. 1. Compare M VIII. 374.
[149] ... ἐπιστήμην μὲν εἶναι τὴν ἀσφαλῆ καὶ βεβαίαν καὶ ἀμετάθετον ὑπὸ λόγου κατάληψιν, M VII. 151.
[150] Πλὴν ἔστω γε καὶ τούτους τοὺς ὑπ' αὐτῶν κομισθέντας λόγους εἶναι σθεναρούς, μεμενηκέναι δὲ καὶ τοὺς τῶν σκεπτικῶν ἀναντιρρήτους· τί ἀπολείπεται τῆς καθ' ἑκάτερον μέρος προσπιπτούσης ἰσοσθενείας εἰ μὴ τὸ ἐπέχειν καὶ ἀοριστεῖν περὶ τοῦ ζητουμένου πράγματος, οὔτε τὸ εἶναί τι σημεῖον λέγοντας οὔτε τὸ μὴ εἶναι, τὸ δὲ οὐ μᾶλλον εἶναι ἢ μὴ εἶναι μετὰ ἀσφαλείας προφερομένους, M VIII. 298. On sign-inference, cf. Tor 2010.
[151] M VIII. 300 Τίνος μὲν ἕνεκεν περὶ ἀποδείξεως ἐπὶ τοῦ παρόντος ζητοῦμεν πρότερον ὑποδέδεικται, ὅτε περί τε τοῦ κριτηρίου καὶ τοῦ σημείου ἐσκεπτόμεθα· πρὸς δὲ τὸ μὴ ἀμεθόδως γίγνεσθαι τὴν ὑφήγησιν, ἀλλ' ἀσφαλέστερον καὶ τὴν ἐποχὴν καὶ τὴν πρὸς τοὺς δογματικοὺς ἀντίρρησιν προβαίνειν, ὑποδεικτέον τὴν ἐπίνοιαν αὐτῆς, M VIII. 300.

Then again, in order to answer the charge of self-refutation, they will secure suspension once again by pointing out that the argument against the existence of proof only seems convincing at the moment, but they do not actually assent to it dogmatically:

> However, if the sceptics have to answer for themselves, they will answer in a safe way. For they will say that the argument against demonstration is merely persuasive, and that for the moment it persuades them and induces assent, but that they do not know whether it will also be like this in the future given the fickle character of human thought.[152]

Doubtlessly, I would overstate my claim if I maintained that any of these excerpts is decisive proof for one or another interpretation of Pyrrhonean safety. Yet, the constant conjunction with suspension or tranquillity at least does not speak against the possibility that what is kept safe by the Pyrrhonean but endangered by the dogmatist is nothing but the possibility of enjoying suspensive tranquillity.

One could argue that as long as the Pyrrhonean suspends judgement about which of the competing popular and philosophical accounts of the gods and piety is correct, tranquillity is maintained. The safety of suspension would, then, consist in being free from the kind of intellectual and spiritual torment that comes with trying to figure out rationally, to no avail, whether or not one should follow the outlook on life with which one had been unreflectively presented, or sign up for a dogmatic revision of ordinary belief. While a sceptic of this sort could easily be seen as insincere in her

[152] M VIII. 472-473. οὕτω γὰρ ἀποδεικτικὸν θέλοντες ἀποδεῖξαι τὸν κατὰ τῆς ἀποδείξεως λόγον, οὐ μᾶλλον αὐτὴν τιθέασιν ἢ ἀναιροῦσιν. ὅμως δὲ καὶ τοὺς σκεπτικοὺς ἂν δέῃ ὑπὲρ αὑτῶν ἀποκρίνασθαι, ἀσφαλῶς ἀποκρινοῦνται. φήσουσι γὰρ τὸν κατὰ τῆς ἀποδείξεως λόγον πιθανὸν εἶναι μόνον καὶ πρὸς τὸ παρὸν πείθειν αὐτοὺς καὶ ἐπάγεσθαι συγκατάθεσιν, ἀγνοεῖν δέ, εἰ καὶ αὖθις ἔσται τοιοῦτος διὰ τὸ πολύτροπον τῆς ἀνθρωπίνης διανοίας. οὕτω γὰρ γενομένης τῆς ἀποκρίσεως οὐδὲν ἔτι δυνήσεται λέγειν ὁ δογματικός. On these passages, see also Castagnoli 2000.

religious observance – though the degree of her insincerity will greatly depend on one's criteria for genuine worship –, there is no need to suppose that the avoidance of this charge was a central concern in formulating the Pyrrhonean position.

Conclusion

In sum, the terminology of the Sextan caveats, in light of the considerations presented in the previous sections, strongly suggests that the kind of safety in which Pyrrhoneans are interested is a kind of intellectual safety. On my reading, Sextus makes the point that, by avoiding any dogmatic commitment that would rashly terminate philosophical inquiry, sceptics can safeguard the only kind of tranquillity available for those with an inquisitive nature who at the same time lack any satisfactory answer to the questions they are interested in – in this case, these being questions about religious matters.

It remains to be seen what kind of considerations specific to this particular domain could convince someone to suspend judgement on all theological matters whatsoever. In the next chapter, I turn to a discussion of Sextus' presentation for this case, that is, to the structure of his arguments against dogmatic theology that make him stick to suspension in the face of theological disagreement.

Chapter 3. Necessary impieties? The Sextan case against dogmatic theology in PH III.

In this chapter, I turn to the discussion of Sextus' case against dogmatic theology, that is, to his arguments aiming at suspension of judgement about the conception and the existence of gods as outlined in PH III. In presenting his case for a suspensive stance, I assume the background interpretation that has been developed in the previous two chapters. To reiterate: on my reading, Pyrrhonism is understood as an ongoing inquiry into philosophical matters that allows for a non-dogmatic reliance on the standards of ordinary life (Chapter 1), and the Pyrrhonean agenda concerning theology, far from being an exceptional case, is in fact perfectly consistent with the general position (Chapter 2).

In what follows, I shall give an overview and analysis of the argument presented at PH III. 2-12. I discuss and evaluate the Sextan arguments about the conception, existence, and providential activity of gods, giving due attention to the possible interconnections of these separate arguments. Throughout the discussion, I raise the possibility that the three parts together could constitute an extended argument against the conceivability of god as far as dogmatic arguments are concerned.

With this analysis in place, I will turn in the next chapter to the discussion of conceptual arguments in M IX, relating it to the argument as we have it in PH III.

The argument at PH III. 2-12.

The quite dense chapter devoted to theology at the beginning of PH III breaks down into three parts, each one offering its own interim conclusions. In these respective parts, Sextus considers, first, the way one might conceive of gods (III. 2-5), then their existence (III. 6-8) and, finally, the question whether they exercise providential care (III. 9-12). Throughout each part, we are led to conclusions that are detrimental for dogmatic theologians, exclusively and invariably on the basis of dogmatic arguments.

This reinforces, once again, that the general context for discussing theology is the dogmatic enterprise of physical inquiry. In this context, it is a crucial and widely shared assumption that god finds its place in a complete physical description of the universe as a causally efficient constituent of that very universe, or rather the prime example of a cause as such.[153] Even if notable dogmatists might opt out of this general understanding,[154] it does seem to apply to garden variety dogmatism as targeted by Sextus' criticism, and altogether it stands in clear contrast to ordinary beliefs that do not strive at a complete description of one's cosmic surroundings. Let us consider, then, each of the three parts of the arguments.

[153] Besides the caveats discussed in the previous chapter, see e.g. a specimen of dogmatic argumentation at M IX. 199: εἰ ἔστι θεός, ἔστιν αἴτιον· οὗτος γὰρ ἦν ὁ τὰ ὅλα διοικῶν. ἔστι δέ γε κατὰ τὰς κοινὰς ἐννοίας τῶν ἀνθρώπων θεός· ἔστιν ἄρα αἴτιον.

[154] The Epicurean exception is especially relevant for my present purposes. On any customary reading, Epicurus and his followers reject divine intervention into the affairs of the world (unless human engagement with divine images is to be construed as a sort of causal interaction). I shall argue below that Sextus is aware of and reflects on the Epicurean approach throughout his argument.

1. Conceptual arguments: PH III. 2-5.

First, Sextus sets out to show that dogmatic philosophers disagree over the proper way to conceive of god in three respects (III. 2-3). Conceiving of something, he tells us, requires that we conceive of something as in possession of (i) a certain substance (οὐσία), (ii) a certain form (εἶδος), and (iii) a certain place (ποῦ). However, the accounts on offer as to how we can conceive of god hold different views concerning each of these.

As for (i) divine οὐσία, some say that it is of a corporeal nature, others say that it is incorporeal; as to (ii) god's εἶδος, some say that it is anthropomorphic, others that it is not; and finally (iii), as far as the question of place is concerned, some say that god does not occupy any place, while others maintain that he does – and even those belonging to the latter group disagree whether the divinity resides within or outside of the cosmos.[155] As a result of this predicament, it seems impossible to arrive at an undisputed conception of god, at least as far as the dogmatic proposals go.

The fact that the conclusion as stated is meant to apply only to dogmatic affirmations is made pretty clear by Sextus himself. Not only does he introduce the various positions by saying that they are put forward by dogmatists (ἐπεὶ οὖν τῶν δογματικῶν ... φασιν), but he also formulates the conclusion with a straightforward qualification to that effect: given the disagreements among dogmatic thinkers,

> ... how shall we be able to grasp the conception of god (ἔννοιαν θεοῦ λαμβάνειν) if we possess neither an agreed substance for him nor a form nor a place in which he is? Let them first agree and form a consensus that god is of such-and-such a kind; and only then, having given us an outline account, let them require us to grasp the concept

[155] PH III. 3. ἐπεὶ οὖν τῶν δογματικῶν οἱ μὲν σῶμά φασιν εἶναι τὸν θεόν, οἱ δὲ ἀσώματον, καὶ οἱ μὲν ἀνθρωποειδῆ, οἱ δὲ οὔ, καὶ οἱ μὲν ἐν τόπῳ, οἱ δὲ οὔ, καὶ τῶν ἐν τόπῳ οἱ μὲν ἐντὸς κόσμου, οἱ δὲ ἐκτός...

of god (ἔννοιαν θεοῦ λαμβάνειν).[156] As long as they remain in undecidable dispute, we have no agreement from them as to what we should think.[157]

Apparently, Sextus seems to think that one should take dogmatists up on their offer of a revised conception of god only if the suggested conception is beyond disagreement. The overall Pyrrhonean position is based on a dialectical requirement: when being faced with troublesome anomaly, it is reasonable to abandon ordinary views only for an alternative that is beyond the kind of disagreement that initially motivated one to engage in inquiry in order to deal with the conflict of appearances. Along these lines, when urged by dogmatists to revise ordinary conceptions of the divine, ordinary believers and suspensive philosophers should yield to the dogmatic request only if the dogmatists have first managed to come to an agreement among themselves.

At first sight, the Sextan position makes sense. Theological inquiry is prompted by the experience that ordinary notions prove rationally indefensible in the face of disagreement. In order to remedy this situation, dogmatic philosophers offer their alternative notions, yet – so Sextus claims – they fail to live up to their own promise: they are themselves involved in widespread and unresolved disagreement. Dogmatists, however, would probably support their case with an explanation of why

[156] In the course of this one passage, Annas and Barnes 2000: 144 translate ἔννοιαν θεοῦ λαμβάνειν first as 'to acquire a conception of god' and then as 'to form a conception of god'. These options are more conducive to a reading on which one could not have a concept unless derived from dogmatic argumentation. This seems to prejudge the question of whether or not a Pyrrhonean could possess anything that counts as a concept of god, opting for the negative; but cf. the concluding sentence of the passage quoted which restricts the conclusion to the domain of dogmatic proposals.

[157] PH III. 3. πῶς δυνησόμεθα ἔννοιαν θεοῦ λαμβάνειν μήτε οὐσίαν ἔχοντες αὐτοῦ ὁμολογουμένην μήτε εἶδος μήτε τόπον ἐν ᾧ εἴη; πρότερον γὰρ ἐκεῖνοι ὁμολογησάτωσάν τε καὶ συμφωνησάτωσαν, ὅτι τοιόσδε ἐστὶν ὁ θεός, εἶτα ἡμῖν αὐτὸν ὑποτυπωσάμενοι οὕτως ἀξιούτωσαν ἡμᾶς ἔννοιαν θεοῦ λαμβάνειν. ἐς ὅσον δὲ ἀνεπικρίτως διαφωνοῦσιν, τί νοήσομεν ἡμεῖς ὁμολογουμένως παρ' αὐτῶν οὐκ ἔχομεν.

erroneous opinions arise, and hardly anybody would maintain that the anomaly needs to be univocally resolved already at the level of appearances.

In any case, here as elsewhere, Sextus takes the fact of disagreement to motivate suspension of judgement.[158] In the theological case, the relevant sorts of unresolved disagreement are classified by Sextus under the three headings of οὐσία, εἶδος, and ποῦ. This is a rather atypical grouping, probably adopted for sceptical purposes, and not endorsed by dogmatic theologians as a methodological declaration specifying the demands of a successful theory of the divine.

That being said, the dogmatist can make the following countermove: acknowledging that people disagree endlessly about these particular attributes of god, one could still maintain that there is a principled way of skirting the controversy and still arrive at a satisfactory notion of the divine. On this account, introduced by Sextus at III. 4, the theoretical task is rather simple. As a matter of fact, everyone is naturally capable of forming a proper conception of god: instead of focusing on definite ideas about god's substance, shape and habitat, one only needs to focus on the essential characteristics of divinity on which everyone agrees.

As Sextus presents it, the argument is rather short and simple:

> But, they say, conceive of something indestructible and blessed, and hold god to be that thing.[159]

[158] It is a far-leading question whether or not he is either charitable or ultimately justified in doing so. In any case, the requirement of universality – no matter how intuitively unappealing it is – is a recurrent feature of the Sextan analysis of dogmatic disagreement. For different discussions of the role of disagreement in Pyrrhonean inquiry, see especially Burnyeat 1979, Barnes 1990a: 1-35, Machuca 2011, Vogt 2012a, and Woodruff 2010.

[159] PH III.4, translation modified. ἀλλ' ἄφθαρτόν τι, φασί, καὶ μακάριον ἐννοήσας, τὸν θεὸν εἶναι τοῦτο νόμιζε.

The suggestion seems to be that one can steer away from the endless debate, and avoid the predicament of unacceptable disagreement, by turning to the minimal but quite essential notion of god that is naturally accessible to us.[160] According to the formulation, all one has to do is to conceive of something that, first, cannot possibly disintegrate and, second, enjoys the most blissful life possible; once in possession of this conception, one should ascribe to it the rank of divinity.

Sometimes, the proposed notion is understood as the common core of the rival dogmatic accounts of Stoics and Epicureans.[161] As we have it, however, it is easiest to associate it with an Epicurean formulation, insofar as it does not touch upon any sort of physical explanation and does not attribute operations of providential care to gods. Instead, the proposal focuses on exactly the same attributes that Epicurus was eager to emphasise as belonging to a criterial notion of the divine.[162]

Arguably, Epicurus and at least some of his followers were quite minimalistic about the physics of divinity, as opposed to the ethical significance of having a correct conception of them. A correct conception would be one according to which gods enjoy a perfect life of idle inoccupation (that notably involves no providential activity) and, in doing so, provide a model of happiness for mortal humans to approximate. Nevertheless, Epicureans remain quite insistent that there is a direct way

[160] The passage does not mention natural availability, but I mention it for two reasons. First, any plausible candidate for the dogmatic claim – that is, Stoic and Epicurean accounts of preconceptions, common conceptions, and natural conceptions – would take the concept at hand to be naturally available. Second, the mere fact that the passage calls for the rather ordinary cognitive operations of ἐννοεῖν and νομίζειν implies that they are, in a sense, naturally available.

[161] For example, Annas and Barnes 2000: 144 mention the Stoic concept of the cosmic god as provided by D.L. VII. 147, which, however, includes providential care (προνοητικὸν κόσμου τε καὶ τῶν ἐν κόσμῳ) and makes pronouncements, even if negatively, on divine shape (μὴ εἶναι μέντοι ἀνθρωπόμορφον). If this is the kind of account Sextus has in mind, the dogmatic move would require Stoics to simply drop two contested features of the conception they take to be quite fundamental. One might add further that prominent Stoics would be unwilling to label gods ἄφθαρτος, as implied by Plutarch, De Stoicorum Repugnantiis, 1051F. On this passage, see Long 1990/2006.

[162] See especially Ep. Men. 123: Πρῶτον μὲν τὸν θεὸν ζῷον ἄφθαρτον καὶ μακάριον νομίζων, ὡς ἡ κοινὴ τοῦ θεοῦ νόησις ὑπεγράφη; and compare KD 1: Τὸ μακάριον καὶ ἄφθαρτον οὔτε αὐτὸ πράγματα ἔχει οὔτε ἄλλῳ παρέχει; as well as Cicero, ND I. 45: Quae enim nobis natura informationem ipsorum deorum dedit, eadem insculpsit in mentibus ut eos aeternos et beatos haberemus.

of knowing gods, namely, by way of receiving images that they emit as a matter of physical regularity.[163]

If this is the target Sextus has in mind here, the decision to discuss this particular proposal in the context of physical inquiry could reflect an awareness of the perceived shortcomings of the proposed account. On this view, Epicurus (or anyone putting forward a similar view) is trying to have his cake and eat it too: have a go at the correct notion of god without delving into the kind of debate in which everyone else is engaged.[164] However, Sextus would insist that one cannot just walk away from the troublesome disagreement, and without success in inquiry, all one can propose is a private fantasy and not a vindication of the existence of a god thus conceived.

After introducing the claim, Sextus immediately offers two objections to it. First, he blocks the reductive move by saying that there is need for a more substantial account of the gods, at least if one is a dogmatist proper. This objection is connected to a general idea concerning the structure of inquiry. Second, he points out that disagreement pertains to even this limited set of attributes, therefore suspension is warranted once again.[165]

So, first, Sextus objects,

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[163] The proper understanding of the Epicurean position is heavily debated in modern scholarly literature. In the last chapter of this dissertation, I survey the evidence mobilised in this debate and argue for the claim that Epicurus himself was not committed to any position concerning the 'physics' or 'ontology' of the divine – i.e. the sense in which gods are said to exist.

[164] Which is not to say that the point cannot apply against the Stoics who try to proceed with a similar approach.

[165] It is clearly just an example of a more general argument-pattern that Sextus tends to use. Compare the case of the definition of good, bad, and indifferent (PH III. 169-178, M XI. 21-41), where he proceeds in three steps. First, (1) disagreement shows that there is no account at hand that succeeds in specifying the nature of the good, since the availability of such an account would put an end to the dispute. Second, (2) one could try to show that the disagreement is merely superficial, and there is an underlying agreement among the dogmatists – for example, that the good is choiceworthy, or that it is productive of happiness. But these are merely attributes of the good: it is not only that they do not enable us to pick out every instance of the good, and only of the good, but in fact (3) we cannot even know its attributes without knowing its nature or 'what it is'. And if somebody would try to argue that, say, the choiceworthy is in fact the good, then it is a merely analytic truth that does not settle the initial disagreement. Thus, suspension follows. On this argument, see Annas 1986: 7-8, and Hankinson 1994: 57-60.

> This is silly: just as, if you do not know Dio, you cannot think of his attributes as attributes of Dio, so, since we do not know the substance of god, we shall not be able to learn and to conceive of his attributes.[166]

It is unclear, however, on what basis can Sextus claim that it is not enough to conceive of certain core attributes as attributes of god without having a prior conception of god's οὐσία in place. Most probably, he alludes to a general understanding of inquiry, according to which the concept investigated has to be fixed first, so that one can inquire into the attributes and, ultimately, into the existence of the thing it is the concept of.[167] This, however, makes the dialectic less continuous than it would seem desirable.

The worry seems to be that, in the course of a few paragraphs, Sextus uses the term οὐσία in two different senses. Previously, in setting out the disagreement between proponents of corporeal and incorporeal conceptions of god (III. 3), he used the term in the sense of underlying stuff or matter; here, however, he seems to make use of a Socratic or even Aristotelian sense of οὐσία as the 'what it is' of a thing.

It is not at all clear whether Sextus viciously conflates the two. On the one hand, one could read these two arguments as utilising the same sense of οὐσία, which is presented first as subject to disagreement, an epistemic situation which is merely disregarded by various dogmatists despite their own methodological requirements. If so, the ambiguity of the term would clearly pose a problem. On the other hand, Sextus could simply follow up one level of disagreement about one type of question by

[166] τοῦτο δέ ἐστιν εὔηθες· ὥσπερ <γὰρ> ὁ μὴ εἰδὼς τὸν Δίωνα οὐδὲ τὰ συμβεβηκότα αὐτῷ ὡς Δίωνι δύναται νοεῖν, οὕτως ἐπεὶ οὐκ ἴσμεν τὴν οὐσίαν τοῦ θεοῦ, οὐδὲ τὰ συμβεβηκότα αὐτῷ μαθεῖν τε καὶ ἐννοῆσαι δυνησόμεθα. PH III. 4. For a similar move, see III. 173-174.
[167] I return to this problem in the next chapter.

pointing to another level of disagreement about a different sort of question. In that case, the second part of the argument does not rely on the previous part, and we have simply moved on from discussing the corporeality or incorporeality of god to the defining features of what it is to be a god.

The latter – 'what it is' – sense of the term sets out an argument that probably derives from a passage in Plato's Meno. At 71b3-4, Socrates suggests that one cannot know what a thing is like without first knowing what that thing is.[168] His proposal is, then, immediately accepted by the protagonist of the dialogue. The proper understanding of the Meno passage (and the question whether or not Socrates is in fact committed to the methodological position implied there) is subject to scholarly disagreement. At any rate, it is not obvious that it could help us understand what Sextus is doing in the present context.

Sextus might have considered the idea that having a conception in place is a prerequisite of inquiry to be generally agreed upon among his dogmatic opponents in the same nonchalant manner as the character Meno seems to have embraced it in the eponymous dialogue. In that case, he could be appropriating it for merely dialectical purposes: showing dogmatists that if they want to avoid theological disagreement by embracing a core notion of god, they disregard their own methodological strictures. However, if this is the case, it is unclear what Sextus could say to a dogmatist who disregards these methodological considerations.

[168] ὃ δὲ μὴ οἶδα τί ἐστιν, πῶς ἂν ὁποῖόν γέ τι εἰδείην; Plato, Meno 71b3-4. The connection is pointed out by Annas and Barnes 2000: 144 n9. Runia 2002: 281 suggests a comparison with Aristotle, Posterior Analytics B1, 89b 31-35: 'And knowing that it is, we seek what it is (e.g. so what is a god? or what is a man?" (γνόντες δὲ ὅτι ἔστι, τί ἐστι ζητοῦμεν, οἷον τί οὖν ἐστι θεός, ἢ τί ἐστιν ἄνθρωπος;) This, however, sets out a different investigative strategy: one can start out with a confident belief in the existence of something and inquire into its 'what it is'. With other things, e.g. centaurs, we cannot even ask questions without having a grasp on the concept, which suggests that at least sometimes inquiry can start with the τί ἐστι and look into the existential question. In any case, it is clear that the Aristotelian notion of τί ἐστι and Hellenistic notions of ἐπίνοια might not always cover the same ground. For a recent take on the influence of Meno-style questions in Hellenistic epistemology, see Fine 2014.

There is another connection worth considering. If I am correct in suggesting that the suggestion discussed by Sextus is particularly Epicurean, then the insistence on the primacy of the conception can be seen as a way of turning the table on Epicureans who, according to Sextus, insisted on exactly this division in their inquiries. Of course, the point applies against other Hellenistic epistemologies as well, but Sextus regularly attributes the general consideration to Epicureanism.[169]

Should it not be enough to secure suspension, Sextus goes on, secondly, to set out another level of disagreement. In this case, the divergence of opinions pertains to the meaning of 'blessed' (μακάριος). Prominent dogmatists, e.g. Stoics and Epicureans, would understand rather different things by that same label. Before hastening the acceptance of their account, dogmatic philosophers should decide first

> whether it is that which acts in accordance with virtue and provides for the things subordinated to it, or rather to be inactive and take no trouble to itself and cause none to others. They have had an undecidable dispute about this too, thus making blessedness – and therefore god – inconceivable (ἀνεννόητος) by us.[170]

Eventually, then, we arrive at the claim that, as a result of the insufficiency of dogmatic answers, god is ἀνεννόητος for us.[171] I take it to be the result, once again,

[169] M VIII. 337-336a is especially interesting in this regard. In this context, Sextus is responding to Epicurean objections concerning the possibility of demonstration, eventually turning the table on Epicureans in the same manner I suggest to apply in the present passage. See also M I. 57, M II. 1, M XI. 21, cf. M VIII. 300-301.

[170] PH III. 5 (tr. modified): χωρὶς δὲ τούτων εἰπάτωσαν ἡμῖν, τί ἐστι τὸ μακάριον, πότερον τὸ ἐνεργοῦν κατὰ ἀρετὴν καὶ προνοούμενον τῶν ὑφ' ἑαυτὸ τεταγμένων, ἢ τὸ ἀνενέργητον καὶ μήτε αὐτὸ πράγματα ἔχον μήτε ἑτέρῳ παρέχον· καὶ γὰρ καὶ περὶ τούτου διαφωνήσαντες ἀνεπικρίτως ἀνεννόητον ἡμῖν πεποιήκασι τὸ μακάριον, διὰ δὲ τοῦτο καὶ τὸν θεόν.

[171] At M IX. 47, a similar conclusion (god being ἀνεπινόητος) is arrived at by pointing to circularity, not to disagreement. 'For in order to conceive the happy human in the first place, and god by way of a transition from this, we need to conceive what happiness is – what the happy person is conceived as sharing in. But happiness, according to them, is a divine and god-like nature, and it is the one who had their deity well-disposed who was called happy. So that in order to grasp happiness in the human case, we first need to have a concept of god and deity, while in order to conceive of god we first need to

that the kind of grasp on the kind of concept that the dogmatists are proposing is unavailable. In other words, there is no uncontested notion of god, just as there is no uncontested notion of any of the divine attributes that some or all dogmatists take to be essential.

This conclusion need not leave the sceptic with a cognitive blank. After having come to suspend judgement on these issues, Pyrrhoneans continue to follow ordinary life, and as long as ordinary life provides appearances about matters of piety, Pyrrhoneans will continue to have such appearances. In this section on Sextus' conceptual arguments, there is no serious consideration in favour of the outcome that suspenders would have no access to religious appearances.[172]

2. Existential arguments: PH III. 6-9.

Sextus turns next to consider attempts at constructing a proof of the existence of god. He puts forward the claim that any such alleged proof will fail, since it will result either in contradiction or in infinite regress. The strategy he follows here does not rely on setting out oppositions among equally convincing counterarguments, but rather aims to show that any dogmatic argument thus far considered has failed to establish its intended conclusion. The negative conclusion is counterbalanced by the

have a conception of a happy human. Therefore each one, since it waits on the concept from the other one, becomes impossible for us to conceive.' (ἵνα γὰρ πρῶτον εὐδαίμονα νοήσωμεν ἄνθρωπον καὶ ἀπὸ τούτου κατὰ μετάβασιν τὸν θεόν, ὀφείλομεν νοῆσαι τί ποτέ ἐστιν εὐδαιμονία, ἧς κατὰ μετοχὴν νοεῖται ὁ εὐδαίμων. ἀλλ' ἦν γε εὐδαιμονία κατ' αὐτοὺς δαιμονία τις καὶ θεία φύσις, καὶ εὐδαίμων ἐκαλεῖτο ὁ εὖ τὸν δαίμονα διακείμενον ἔχων. ὥσθ' ἵνα μὲν λάβωμεν τὴν περὶ ἄνθρωπον εὐδαιμονίαν, πρότερον ἔχειν ὀφείλομεν νόησιν θεοῦ καὶ δαίμονος, ἵνα δὲ τὸν θεὸν νοήσωμεν, πρότερον ἔχειν ὀφείλομεν ἔννοιαν εὐδαίμονος ἀνθρώπου. τοίνυν ἑκάτερον περιμένον τὴν ἐκ θατέρου νόησιν ἀνεπινόητον γίνεται ἡμῖν.) Cf. similar circularities concerning 'horse and 'neighing' (PH III. 174) and the case of the good (M XI. 38-39).

[172] For a different evaluation, cf. Mates 1996: 290, who claims that the PH III. 3-5 argument applies to the common conception of god apparently endorsed by Sextus at M IX. 33. Despite appearances, the move at IX. 33 should be seen as purely dialectical: Sextus points out that a common conception proposed by dogmatists as naturally arising in all humans cannot explain the diversity of conceptions by various dogmatists. I will return to the topic of conceptions in Section 2.1.2.

restricted domain to which it is supposed to apply, thereby leading to suspension of judgement ὅσον ἐπὶ τοῖς δογματικοῖς.

Furthermore, the transition from the previous discussion to the present one is somewhat unclear. In the next sections, I will first consider different construals of the transition, and then turn to the analysis of the argument proposed by Sextus.

2.1. The transition

The move from conceptual to existential arguments is introduced by a transitional remark (PH III. 6):

> Ἵνα δὲ καὶ ἐπινοῆται ὁ θεός, ἐπέχειν ἀνάγκη περὶ τοῦ πότερον ἔστιν ἢ οὐκ ἔστιν, ὅσον ἐπὶ τοῖς δογματικοῖς.

It is not entirely clear how the two parts of the overall argument relate to each other, and the proper construal of the transitional remark is itself unclear. The uncertainty concerns the understanding of the first clause of the claim quoted above. I shall consider two possible translations of the clause, and then I will briefly mention a possible alternative to the Greek as we have it.

> READING 1.
>
> Further, in order to form a conception of god one must necessarily – so far as depends on the dogmatists – suspend judgement as to his existence or non-existence.[173]

[173] This is the reading adopted by Bury 1933.

Reading 1 offers a natural reading of the Greek which, however, initially seems to make less of a philosophical sense. Using ἵνα with the subjunctive, Sextus would be effectively suggesting that if one takes a definite position on the question of divine existence, it will make it impossible to form a conception of god. This could perhaps mean that, insofar as the issue of existence is not yet settled, one would include in one's conception of god a feature that is subject to disagreement, thereby leaving the conception itself in lack of rational warrant.

The idea could, then, be connected to Sextus' discussion of the possibility of inquiry. Perhaps it would be an application of Sextus' general stance on dogmatism and inquiry as discussed in Chapter 1: on his view, any definite position on a question which is currently being investigated will put an end to further inquiry. Thus, he could argue that one can only ask how to conceive of god if one has not already committed to any view concerning god's existence. This could perhaps be an indication of why having just one dogmatic view makes any further inquiry impossible: at least in this case, it is clear that two questions of inquiry, the conception and the existence of god, are closely related to each other, thus having a view about one could block inquiry into the other.

Let us see, however, whether a more plausible reading is available.

READING 2.

> Even granting that god is indeed conceivable, it is necessary to suspend judgement about whether gods exist or not, so far as the dogmatists are concerned.[174]

[174] This translation is offered by Annas and Barnes 2000.

On this reading, Sextus is building a cumulative case against dogmatic theology. He has just presented his reasons for thinking that dogmatists fail to offer an acceptable conception of god. However, on the counterfactual assumption that their attempt to this effect has proved successful, one could still block their move from the proposed conception to the affirmation of god's existence. Success in the former domain does not in itself vindicate their approach in the latter domain.

This reading makes more sense in terms of a continuous dialectic where Sextus is mainly concerned with a rejection of dogmatism across the board. It could also draw attention to a possible dogmatic move: prominent dogmatists would argue that the correct conception of god in itself implies god's existence. This would connect this bit of the argument back to the previous, conceptual stage, where a certain core concept of god was alleged to provide a way out of widespread theological disagreement.

More speculatively, one could push this particular chunk of the text even further. One could propose an emendation of the text from ἐπέχειν to ἐπικρίνειν, changing the point quite significantly.[175] With the proposed change, the passage reads as follows:

> READING 3.
>
> In order to conceive of god, it is necessary to come to a judgement about whether or not god exists, as far as the dogmatists are concerned.

The claim would be, then, that without judging god to be existent, one cannot claim to have the relevant sort of concept about the divine: one conceives of god on the basis of perceived divine activity in the world, and only an existent god can have

[175] This has been suggested to me by Charles Brittain.

such causal effects from which we can learn about divine existence. (Alternatively, if one judges god to be non-existent, it becomes possible to talk about his conception as nothing more than a conception, on a par with the chimaera and the like.) Far-fetched as it might seem, this is a point that will soon make its appearance in the Sextan argument, once Sextus turns to consider divine providence.

In order to motivate the adoption of this alternative reading, one would need to look at Sextus' use of similar constructions elsewhere.[176] It would have the obvious benefit of transforming the entire discussion into a conceptual one, making the existential discussion into an extension of the preceding bit. This could even extend up to the third part of the argument, introduced by Ἔτι καὶ τοῦτο λεκτέον at PH III. 9, which also seems to put emphasis on the proper ἐπίνοια of god. In this manner, the entire section on god in PH III acquires a structural unity.

2.2. The argument

Whatever the proper nature of the transition, Sextus goes on to propose an argument against dogmatic proofs of the existence of god. The argument makes use of the following assumption: one could assent to a claim without thereby becoming rash, i.e. a dogmatist, only if the claim was universally accepted and uncontested in the relevant sense – that is, if it was pre-evident (πρόδηλος).[177]

Unfortunately, it seems that agreeing to this much will be enough for Sextus to vindicate the case against dogmatic theologians:

[176] Unsurprisingly, similar constructions abound in Sextus. Staying within PH III, it does seem to introduce simple transitions from one topic to another (e.g. at 56, 168, 187), but also to point to 'for the sake of the argument'-type concessions (at 162, 242, 252 and 273), as well as circular arguments (conceiving of cause and effect: 22, 28, proof and criterion: 35, privation: 49). Without a more comprehensive examination, not much else can be said at this point.

[177] On the 'prodelic' and 'adelic' conception of the criterion of truth, see especially Brunschwig 1994a.

> For it is not pre-evident (πρόδηλον) that the gods exist: if the gods made a direct impression on us, the dogmatists would be in agreement as to what they are and of what form and where; but the undecidable dispute has made it seem to us that the gods are non-evident and in need of proof.[178]

It is the undecided dispute (ἀνεπίκριτος διαφωνία) that renders the existence of gods in need of a proof. Sextus mentions the alternative case in which gods themselves (ἐξ ἑαυτοῦ) would directly supply evidence about themselves (προσπίτνω), which would result in the universal agreement (συμφωνία) of the dogmatists and, one could guess, everyone else. Since this is not the case, as we can see by perusing the theological literature, those who want to reason their way through to the true account need to construct a proof, a task at which they have so far failed miserably.

At III.7, Sextus sets out the following dilemma for his dogmatic opponents. The existence of gods has to be proved either by way of what is evident or by way of what is non-evident. Yet, none of these two options is going to actually lead to the proof we are looking for.

Sextus turns to the consideration of the first horn:

> [i] Now, anyone who tries to prove that there are gods does so either by way of something pre-evident, or else by way of something non-evident. [ii] Certainly, not by way of something pre-evident; for if what proves that there are gods were pre-evident, then since [iii] what is proved is thought of in relation to what proves and is therefore also apprehended together with it, as we have established, it will also be

[178] PH III.6. τὸ γὰρ εἶναι τὸν θεὸν πρόδηλον μὲν οὐκ ἐστιν. εἰ γὰρ ἐξ ἑαυτοῦ προσέπιπτεν, συνεφώνησαν ἂν οἱ δογματικοί, τίς ἐστι καὶ ποδαπὸς καὶ ποῦ· ἡ ἀνεπίκριτος δὲ διαφωνία πεποίηκεν αὐτὸν ἄδηλον ἡμῖν εἶναι δοκεῖν καὶ ἀποδείξεως δεόμενον.

> pre-evident that there are gods, this being apprehended together with what proves it, which itself is pre-evident. [iv] But it is not pre-evident, as we have suggested; therefore it is not proved by way of something pre-evident.[179]

In this argument, [i] and [iii] are assumptions that the dogmatist might or might not accept.

As for [i], it states that one can prove something – in this case, the existence of god – either by way of something that is pre-evident (πρόδηλος), or by way of something that is non-evident (ἄδηλος), where the division is taken to be exhaustive. This is a dogmatic-sounding distinction, and it is an open question to what extent Sextus himself could be committed to it.

As for [iii], it basically states that the premises and the conclusion are apprehended together (συγκαταλαμβάνω), that is, on the same cognitive level, grasped in the same way and / or with the same sort of grasp, or perhaps grasped in such a way that they have the same status as the thing with which they were co-apprehended.[180] This amounts to the claim that the prover is relative to what is proved by it (τὸ ἀποδεικνυόμενον πρὸς τῷ ἀποδεικνύντι νοεῖται), taking relatives to be simultaneous with each other.

In other words, Sextus claims that merely looking at the evidence gives you the conclusion – in which case we are not even talking about arguments, properly speaking, but only about a quick-handed evaluation of the present pool of evidence.

[179] PH III.7. ὁ μὲν οὖν <ἀποδεικνύων> ὅτι ἔστι θεός, ἤτοι διὰ προδήλου τοῦτο ἀποδείκνυσιν ἢ δι' ἀδήλου. διὰ προδήλου μὲν οὖν οὐδαμῶς· εἰ γὰρ ἦν πρόδηλον τὸ ἀποδεικνύον ὅτι ἔστι θεός, ἐπεὶ τὸ ἀποδεικνυόμενον πρὸς τῷ ἀποδεικνύντι νοεῖται, διὸ καὶ συγκαταλαμβάνεται αὐτῷ, καθὼς καὶ παρεστήσαμεν, πρόδηλον ἔσται καὶ τὸ εἶναι θεόν, συγκαταλαμβανόμενον τῷ ἀποδεικνύντι αὐτὸ προδήλῳ ὄντι. οὔκ ἐστι δὲ πρόδηλον, ὡς ὑπεμνήσαμεν· οὐδὲ ἀποδείκνυται ἄρα διὰ προδήλου. Numbering added by me.

[180] Cf. See PH II. 116-117, 125 (cf. M VIII. 165-166, 168-170, 174-175), also argument: 169, also proof: 179 (cf. M VIII. 394), the intellect apprehending itself: M VII. 313.

Once a dogmatist goes on record denying this understanding of proof, Sextus' argument will simply crumble down.

Should someone make the mistake of agreeing to these two assumptions, the setup makes it extremely easy for Sextus to come to his desired conclusion. With [i] and [iii] in place, all he needs to do is to supply the additional premise [iv], which is not much else than a combination of [i] and [iii]: since we have already seen that the prover is relative to what it proves, and we have also agreed that the existence of god is non-evident, we conclude that it is not proved by anything pre-evident.

Turning to the second horn, one can see that Sextus is not prepared to let his dogmatist opponents off the hook:

> [v] Nor yet by way of something non-evident. [iii] For the non-evident item which is to prove that there are gods is in need of proof: [vi] if it is said to be proved by way of something pre-evident, it will no longer be non-evident but pre-evident. Therefore the non-evident item which is to prove that there are gods is not proved by way of something pre-evident. [vii] Nor yet by way of something non-evident: anyone who says this will fall into an infinite regress, since we shall always demand a proof of the non-evident item brought forward to prove the point at issue.[181]

With [i] and [iii] still in place, and having ruled out a proof from what is pre-evident, all that remains for Sextus is to point out that a proof from what is unclear would itself be in need of proof. The dilemma is then replicated here, with the two possible outcomes being either a contradiction or an infinite regress, as stated in [vii].

[181] PH III.8. ἀλλ' οὐδὲ δι' ἀδήλου. τὸ γὰρ ἄδηλον τὸ ἀποδεικτικὸν τοῦ εἶναι θεόν, ἀποδείξεωςχρῇζον, εἰ μὲν διὰ προδήλου λέγοιτο ἀποδείκνυσθαι, οὐκέτι ἄδηλον ἔσται ἀλλὰ πρόδηλον [τὸ εἶναι θεόν]. οὐκ ἄρα τὸ ἀποδεικτικὸν αὐτοῦ ἄδηλον διὰ προδήλου ἀποδείκνυται. ἀλλ' οὐδὲ δι' ἀδήλου· εἰς ἄπειρον γὰρ ἐκπεσεῖται ὁ τοῦτο λέγων, αἰτούντων ἡμῶν ἀεὶ ἀπόδειξιν τοῦ φερομένου ἀδήλου πρὸς ἀπόδειξιν τοῦ προεκκειμένου. οὐκ ἄρα ἐξ ἑτέρου δύναται ἀποδείκνυσθαι τὸ εἶναι θεόν.

1= [i] One can prove something either by way of something pre-evident or by way of something non-evident.

2 = [iii] The prover is relative to what it proves.

3 = [iv] It is not pre-evident that god exists.

4 = [vi] If the existence of god was proved by something pre-evident, it would be pre-evident that god exists;

Therefore the existence of god is not proved by something pre-evident.

5 = [vii] If it is proved by something non-evident, then this non-evident item is in need of proof just as well – which leads to infinite regress.

6 = [v] Therefore the existence of god cannot be proved by what is non-evident.

Now, on the basis of [i], [ii], and [v], the conclusion seems inevitable:

> The existence of gods, therefore, cannot be proved from anything else. But if it is neither pre-evident in itself nor proved by something else, then it will be inapprehensible whether or not there are gods.[182]

The concluding remark is formulated so that it is compatible with suspension of judgement, as opposed to the negative dogmatic conclusion that the existence of god is inapprehensible. Even this conclusion is further restricted to the domain of dogmatic arguments: on a dogmatic account, one cannot conceive of gods as existing entities.

[182] PH III.8-9. οὐκ ἄρα ἐξ ἑτέρου δύναται ἀποδείκνυσθαι τὸ εἶναι θεόν. εἰ δὲ μήτε ἐξ ἑαυτοῦ ἐστι πρόδηλον μήτε ἐξ ἑτέρου ἀποδείκνυται, ἀκατάληπτον ἔσται εἰ ἔστι θεός.

The overall Pyrrhonean stance, as reconstructed in Chapter 1, comfortably applies here. According to Sextus, if someone with an ordinary outlook on religion were to engage in rational theology in order to construct an argument with a theistic conclusion, our expectation would be a complete failure, and thus either doubt and perhaps even disbelief, or the admission of failure while still maintaining that there are gods, notwithstanding the recognition that this statement lacks the appropriate grounds. Remember that in his caveats Sextus went to a great length to emphasise that Pyrrhoneans will say that there are gods; barring some degree of insincerity, it seems that these pronouncements should be unaffected by the suspensive outcome of the existential arguments discussed so far.

In order not to do away with ordinary appearances, one needs to suspend judgement about the dogmatic proposals that claim to have settled these questions on the basis of rational argumentation. Pyrrhonean suspension as a stance offers the chance to overcome a state of permanent intellectual conflict and mental torment. In such a state, someone brought up in a religious society will utter the words 'There are gods' without claiming to provide theoretical reasons to affirm divine existence. One might wonder why a follower of the Sextan persuasion will not come to reject theology as a failed enterprise and simply give up on settling theological questions on the basis of reason and argumentation. The answer can be found in their inquisitive nature: they are the kind of people who are interested in finding the answers, and as long as they have no reason to believe that the answers cannot be found, they can continue the search.

3. Providential arguments: PH III. 9-12.

In the last part of his exposition in PH III, when discussing arguments about divine providence, Sextus argues that dogmatic theologians embarrass themselves on yet another level. In doing so, he aims to establish a slightly different conclusion than before. Without making the ambiguity clear, he effectively argues that dogmatic theology either makes god inconceivable for us or leads to impious conclusions. He needs to have such a licentious conclusion because he is aware that, unlike in the previous cases, he could not make all of his dogmatic opponents uneasy enough to bring them to suspension.

The argument that follows is sometimes said to originate with Epicurus' attempt to argue against the creationist cosmologies of his principal opponents. Though nothing like this argument actually survives in the extant works of Epicurus, a similar line of thought is explicitly attributed to him by Lactantius with such an aim specified.[183] Sextus, however, does not mention Epicurus here, although elsewhere he attributes to him the position that there is no providence.[184] Those who most expressly and prominently deny providence would not be inconvenienced by the conclusion that one cannot conceive of provident gods on the basis of dogmatic arguments; Sextus therefore has to design an argument that could make uncomfortable all dogmatic thinkers, not just a subset of them.

[183] 'Scio plerosque philosophorum, qui providentiam defendunt, hoc argumento perturbari solere et invitos pene adigi, ut Deum nihil curare fateantur, quod maxime quaerit Epicurus', De Ira Dei XIII. 22; the argument is summarised at 20-21. Doubts are sometimes expressed about the possibility of Epicurus having authored such an argument. Recently O'Keefe 2010: 48 argued, in my view mistakenly, that the argument as we have it in Lactantius targets omnipotence. This would be an argument against its Epicurean pedigree, since divine omnipotence does not seem to have been embraced by any of Epicurus' contemporaries; on this, see further below.

[184] See PH I. 155 and PH III. 219. Cf. also M IX. 58, the passage where Sextus reports on accusations of Epicurus' atheism: 'And Epicurus, according to some, admits a god when speaking to the many, but as far as the nature of things is concerned, not by any means' (καὶ Ἐπίκουρος δὲ κατ' ἐνίους ὡς μὲν πρὸς τοὺς πολλοὺς ἀπολείπει θεόν, ὡς δὲ πρὸς τὴν φύσιν τῶν πραγμάτων οὐδαμῶς).

As a first step, Sextus says that dogmatic existential claims about the gods are as a rule accompanied by similar claims about their providential care. The conjunction need not include an affirmation of providence. Sextus is aware that various thinkers with firm theological ideas rejected the idea that gods are involved in the daily operations of the cosmos. These thinkers – especially Epicurus and perhaps also Aristotle – would clearly count in his eyes as dogmatists. Accordingly, what Sextus claims is that dogmatists have to take a stand one way or another, not that they have to defend divine providence.

The argument kicks off in the form of a dilemma:

> Anyone who says that there is god says either that [1] it provides for the things in the universe or [2] that it does not – and that if it provides,[185] then either [1a] for all things or [1b] for some. But [3] if it provided for all things, there would be nothing bad and evil in the universe; but [4] they say that everything is full of evil. Therefore [5] god will not be said to provide for everything.[186]

God is, then, either said to be provident (option 1) or not (option 2). The first horn of the dilemma is then subdivided into two options, providence for all (πάντων, 1a) or for some (τινων, 1b). The first option (1a) is quickly ruled out as falsified by the general experience that everything is full of evil (κακίας δὲ πάντα μεστὰ εἶναι λέγουσιν, 4) which is incompatible with general divine providence:

[185] For the sake of convenience, despite the lack of a proper etymological connection, I shall use the verb 'to provide' as a shorthand for 'to exercise providential care'.

[186] PH III.9-10. ὁ λέγων εἶναι θεὸν ἤτοι προνοεῖν αὐτὸν τῶν ἐν κόσμῳ φησὶν ἢ οὐ προνοεῖν, καὶ εἰ μὲν προνοεῖν, ἤτοι πάντων ἢ τινων. ἀλλ' εἰ μὲν πάντων προυνόει, οὐκ ἦν ἂν οὔτε κακόν τι οὔτε κακία ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ· κακίας δὲ πάντα μεστὰ εἶναι λέγουσιν· οὐκ ἄρα πάντων προνοεῖν λεχθήσεται ὁ θεός.

[1] If god is provident, god either provides for everything or only for some things.

[1a] If god provided for everything, there would be nothing bad in the universe.

[4] But, they say (λέγουσιν), everything is full of evil.

[5] Therefore, it is not the case that god provides for everything.

One might wonder about the provenance of premise [4]. On the one hand, it could be a claim accepted by dogmatic philosophers as part of their overall theory.[187] On the other hand, it could be an expression of widespread popular opinion,[188] something that a theory has better to do some justice lest it be completely unappealing to its audience.

It is also important to consider the scope of the argument. The case is made against the position that gods provide for everything, which is deemed incompatible with the widely attested existence of evil. However, one could point out that general providence (1a) is only incompatible with the existence of evil on certain assumptions of divine omnipotence.

Omnipotence, however, is hardly an assumption shared by all dogmatic philosophers. For example, the main target of Epicurean criticism, the alleged creation or providential arrangement of the world as described in Plato's Timaeus, does not even come close to anything that we might recognize as omnipotence;[189] and

[187] The thesis itself could chime well with an Epicurean assessment of the state of the world. As for Stoics, one could wonder how much sense it makes to say that everything is full of κᾰκία, a term that could describe things that are bad only on an erroneous human description, as opposed to κακόν, a more standard term for proper – moral – vice. On this, see Long 1968; cf. also Frede 1999a.

[188] Annas – Barnes 2000: 145, n15.

[189] Compare also the theological τύπος at Plato, Rep. II. 379c2-7, which does not deny the existence of badness, only that it should be blamed on god: Οὐδ' ἄρα, ἦν δ' ἐγώ, ὁ θεός, ἐπειδὴ ἀγαθός, πάντων ἂν εἴη αἴτιος, ὡς οἱ πολλοὶ λέγουσιν, ἀλλὰ ὀλίγων μὲν τοῖς ἀνθρώποις αἴτιος, πολλῶν δὲ ἀναίτιος· πολὺ γὰρ ἐλάττω τἀγαθὰ τῶν κακῶν ἡμῖν, καὶ τῶν μὲν ἀγαθῶν οὐδένα ἄλλον αἰτιατέον, τῶν δὲ κακῶν ἄλλ'

the necessity of evil in the world is a well-known feature of Stoic cosmology as well.[190]

Instead, one could claim that all Sextus needs is that nothing in the cosmos could challenge the power of the divine; and indeed we shall see below that all he needs for his argument is to suppose that, according to the ἐπίνοια of god, there is nothing in the universe that is, all things considered, stronger than god.[191] Having this modification in mind, one can point out that at least some of the dogmatists would not see their conception of god threatened by the fact that certain imperfections need to be allowed for in the best possible world. On the other hand, they would perhaps be unwilling to admit that everything is full (πάντα μεστὰ) of evil.

Sextus, nevertheless, seems satisfied with his refutation of general providence. Thus, he proceeds to the second horn of the dilemma:

> But if [1b] it provides for some things, [6] why does it provide for these and not for those? Either [6a] it both wants to and can provide for all, or [6b] it wants to but cannot, or [6c] it can but does not want to, or [6d] it neither wants nor can. If [6a] it both wanted to and could, then it would provide for all; but [5] it does not provide for all, for the reason I have just given; therefore it is not the case that it both wants to and can provide for all.[192]

ἄττα δεῖ ζητεῖν τὰ αἴτια, ἀλλ' οὐ τὸν θεόν. One could also add the famous words of the myth of Er at X. 617e: αἰτία ἑλομένου· θεὸς ἀναίτιος.

[190] Ultimately going back to Plato's Theaetetus, 176A. Cf. Gellius, 7.1. 1-13 (SVF 2. 1169-1170) = LS 54Q.

[191] This is also one of the characteristics he mentions at M IX. 44: god, besides being imperishable and blessed, is said to possess the most power in the world (πλείστην δύναμιν ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ).

[192] PH III. 10. εἰ δέ τινων προνοεῖ, διὰ τί τῶνδε μὲν προνοεῖ, τῶνδε δὲ οὔ; ἤτοι γὰρ καὶ βούλεται καὶ δύναται πάντων προνοεῖν, ἢ βούλεται μέν, οὐ δύναται δέ, ἢ δύναται μέν, οὐ βούλεται δέ, ἢ οὔτε βούλεται οὔτε δύναται. ἀλλ' εἰ μὲν καὶ ἠβούλετο καὶ ἠδύνατο, πάντων ἂν προυνόει· οὐ προνοεῖ δὲ πάντων διὰ τὰ προειρημένα· οὐκ ἄρα καὶ βούλεται καὶ δύναται πάντων προνοεῖν.

Assuming that there is only special or particular providence in the world, there has to be a reason why gods provide only for some things. What is more, Sextus contends, the reason has to be given on the basis of divine characteristics, namely, their power (δύναμις) and will (βούλησις) to provide.[193] Given this restricted set of possible motivations, four options are available – however, as it turns out, one of them has already been ruled out:

[6a] Gods do not lack either the will or the power to provide for things, so they would provide for everything.

But we have already seen that [5] they do not provide for everything.

So Sextus proceeds to consider the remaining three options:

> If [6b] it wants to but cannot, it is weaker than the cause in virtue of which it cannot provide for the things for which it does not provide; but [7] it is contrary to the concept of god that a god should be weaker than anything. If [6c] it can provide for all but does not want to, it will be thought to be malign. If [6d] it neither wants to nor can, it is both malign and weak – and [8] only the impious would say this about god.[194]

There are three sub-arguments in this passage.

[193] Perhaps because if it were not something internal to god, his power would be challenged by something other than him. For a dogmatist playing along, the challenge would be to provide some further relevant internal characteristic or consideration that could influence divine activity. One candidate for overriding the need for general providence could be some link to 'free choice', but it is highly contestable whether that kind of defense is available for the thinkers that could be Sextus' targets here. For a recent discussion of the emergence of free will in ancient thought, see Frede 2011.

[194] PH III. 10-11. εἰ δὲ βούλεται μέν, οὐ δύναται δέ, ἀσθενέστερός ἐστι τῆς αἰτίας δι' ἣν οὐ δύναται προνοεῖν ὧν οὐ προνοεῖ· ἔστι δὲ παρὰ τὴν θεοῦ ἐπίνοιαν τὸ ἀσθενέστερον εἶναί τινος αὐτόν. εἰ δὲ δύναται μὲν πάντων προνοεῖν, οὐ βούλεται δέ, βάσκανος ἂν εἶναι νομισθείη. εἰ δὲ οὔτε βούλεται οὔτε δύναται, καὶ βάσκανός ἐστι καὶ ἀσθενής, ὅπερ λέγειν περὶ θεοῦ ἀσεβούντων ἐστίν.

First,

[6b] If gods do not lack the will but lack the power to provide, there is something stronger than them.

[7] But it is against the concept of god (παρὰ τὴν θεοῦ ἐπίνοιαν) that he should be weaker than anything.

Therefore [6b] is not the case.

Second,

[6c] If gods do not lack the power but lack the will to provide, they are malign.

But it is unacceptable – perhaps because it is impious to say so. Therefore [6c] is not the case.

Third,

[6d] If they lack both the will and the power to provide, they are both malign and weak.

[8] It is impious to say so.

Therefore [6d] is not the case.

There are, then, three interim conclusions to the three sub-arguments in (6b-d).

First, saying that there is anything stronger than god is against the concept of god; in other words, someone who is found to claim this either misidentified something as god, or does not properly understand what the term 'god' means.

Second, saying that gods are able to provide, yet they decide not to, is to claim that they are malign. The question is, then, whether it is παρὰ τὴν θεοῦ ἐπίνοιαν as

well. Sextus himself does not say so, and perhaps he could recognize it as a popular view that sometimes the gods are not entirely beneficent towards humans. However, insofar as the ἐπίνοια at hand serves as a normative standard, one could say that it is just as contrary to the concept to say that god is malign as it was to imply any weakness relative to others.

Third, whoever says that god is both malign and weak is said to be guilty of impiety (ἀσεβέω). It is somewhat surprising that this label suddenly appears at this point of the argument. It is far from clear what the difference between a claim that is incompatible with the concept of god and a claim that is effectively impious is supposed to be. It is also clear that Epicurus himself would not consider his rejection of divine providence impious; quite on the contrary, he maintains that insisting on providence is impious, insofar as it adds a characteristic to the concept of god that is incompatible with its essential features.[195]

If we remind ourselves of the possible Epicurean undercurrent discussed in the previous sections, that is, an appeal to the common conception of god by Epicureans, perhaps we could suspect that they would take different attitudes towards the three conclusions reached above. Or it could be that Sextus recognises the possibility that at least in some cases arguments do seem to lead somewhere, and therefore he comes up with a sort of precautionary measure: whenever one cannot find a reliable counterargument, the seeming absurdity of a position is itself enough for her to refrain from assenting to it.[196]

[195] Epicurus, Ep. Men. 123-124. ἀσεβὴς δὲ οὐχ ὁ τοὺς τῶν πολλῶν θεοὺς ἀναιρῶν, ἀλλ' ὁ τὰς τῶν πολλῶν δόξας θεοῖς προσάπτων. οὐ γὰρ προλήψεις εἰσὶν ἀλλ' ὑπολήψεις ψευδεῖς αἱ τῶν πολλῶν ὑπὲρ θεῶν ἀποφάσεις.

[196] On similar strategies, see Machuca 2011. A possible parallel could be a passage concerning intellectual safety when faced with sophisms and fallacious arguments. Sextus points out that sometimes arguments are not obviously false but lead us to something that is clearly unacceptable (PH II. 251). He says that one should not rashly assent to what is unacceptable because of its air of plausibility, and then he adds the following remark: 'If a road is leading us to a precipice, we do not drive ourselves over the precipice because there is a road leading to it; rather, we leave the road

At this point, he turns to the second option of the initial dilemma, that is, the denial of divine providence:

> God, therefore, [2] does not provide for the things in the universe. But [9] if it has providence for nothing and has no function and no effect, we will not be able to say how it is apprehended that there is god, since it is neither apparent in itself nor apprehended by way of any effects. For this reason too, then, it is inapprehensible whether there is god.[197]

At this point, Sextus has clearly abandoned any possible Epicurean blueprint of the argument, since he goes on to argue for a conclusion that would have been unacceptable to Epicurus. The problem with the only remaining alternative, the denial of divine providence, turns out to be that it supposedly renders god inconceivable.

This conclusion follows in virtue of the dogmatic approach to theological inquiry. According to Sextus, whoever wants to provide an account of god in physical terms has to say that god is apprehended either in itself (ἐξ ἑαυτοῦ) or by way of some of its effects (δι' ἀποτελεσμάτων τινῶν). We have seen, however, that the existence of gods is non-evident; and if we rule out their providential activity, then, apparently, we have no way of getting to know them, since they will have no function and no effect (οὐδὲ ἔστιν αὐτοῦ ἔργον οὐδὲ ἀποτέλεσμα) in the universe we inhabit.

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because of the precipice; similarly, if there is an argument leading us to something agreed to be absurd, we do not assent to the absurdity because of the argument – rather, we abandon the argument because of the absurdity' (PH II. 252. ὥσπερ γὰρ εἰ ὁδὸς εἴη ἐπί τινα κρημνὸν φέρουσα, οὐκ ὠθοῦμεν αὐτοὺς εἰς τὸν κρημνὸν διὰ τὸ ὁδόν τινα εἶναι φέρουσαν ἐπ' αὐτόν, ἀλλ' ἀφιστάμεθα τῆς ὁδοῦ διὰ τὸν κρημνόν, οὕτω καὶ εἰ λόγος εἴη ἐπί τι ὁμολογουμένως ἄτοπον ἡμᾶς ἀπάγων, οὐχὶ τῷ ἀτόπῳ συγκαταθησόμεθα διὰ τὸν λόγον, ἀλλ' ἀποστησόμεθα τοῦ λόγου διὰ τὴν ἀτοπίαν).

[197] PH III. 11. οὐκ ἄρα προνοεῖ τῶν ἐν κόσμῳ ὁ θεός. εἰ δὲ οὐδενὸς πρόνοιαν ποιεῖται οὐδὲ ἔστιν αὐτοῦ ἔργον οὐδὲ ἀποτέλεσμα, οὐχ ἕξει τις εἰπεῖν, πόθεν καταλαμβάνεται ὅτι ἔστι θεός, εἴγε μήτε ἐξ ἑαυτοῦ φαίνεται μήτε δι' ἀποτελεσμάτων τινῶν καταλαμβάνεται. καὶ διὰ ταῦτα ἄρα ἀκατάληπτόν ἐστιν εἰ ἔστι θεός.

However, Epicurus would have a way out of this predicament. Even if gods do not directly intervene in the world, and have nothing whatsoever to do with human life, they inadvertently make us aware of their existence by way of emitting certain images of themselves. Sextus is aware of this position: he attributes something of the sort to Democritus at M IX. 19 and to Epicurus at M IX. 25, just to reject these accounts as implausible and not accounting for the origin of the belief in the divine at M IX. 42-43. Here at PH III, he does not rely on this additional objection. Instead, he is content with what has been said thus far and proceeds to his overall conclusion:

> From this we deduce that those who firmly state that there is god are dragging us into impiety: if they say that god provides for everything, they will say that god is a cause of evil; and if they say that god provides for some things or even for none at all, they will be bound to say either that god is malign or that god is weak – and anyone who says this is clearly impious.[198]

All in all, this is much less impressive and not nearly as climactic as Sextus and his fellow Pyrrhoneans could have imagined. There are perfectly consistent dogmatic examples that escape his criticism. As an example, I have mentioned above Plato's claim that god is not to be made responsible for evil in the world as an alternative for the former option, and Epicurus' rejection of providence and his redefinition of impiety as an alternative for the latter. Neither of these options would make god 'inconceivable', just as both of these thinkers weighed carefully their options against the charge of impiety. Therefore it is hard to understand on what basis Sextus arrives at his conclusion.

[198] PH III. 12. ἐκ δὲ τούτων ἐπιλογιζόμεθα, ὅτι ἴσως ἀσεβεῖν ἀναγκάζονται οἱ διαβεβαιωτικῶς λέγοντες εἶναι θεόν· πάντων μὲν γὰρ αὐτὸν προνοεῖν λέγοντες κακῶν αἴτιον τὸν θεὸν εἶναι φήσουσιν, τινῶν δὲ ἢ καὶ μηδενὸς προνοεῖν αὐτὸν λέγοντες ἤτοι βάσκανον τὸν θεὸν ἢ ἀσθενῆ λέγειν ἀναγκασθήσονται, ταῦτα δέ ἐστιν ἀσεβούντων προδήλως. Tr. modified.

If we assume that he relies on a sort of ordinary conception of god as accepted in a given cultural setting, that might open up further avenues that he has not considered in the argument.[199] It is not at all obvious, for example, that ordinary people conceive of Greek gods as universally deathless and completely unchallengeable by anything else in the world, e.g. by other gods. If, on the other hand, he builds his objections on the dialectical appropriation of philosophical notions of god, he could be taken to ignore key elements of his opponents' views. All in all, his target seems to be a narrow set of dogmatic views, proponents of which would be somewhat unimpressed by the Pyrrhonean objections.[200]

Conclusion

In sum, we have seen that, in PH III. 3-12, Sextus Empiricus argues for the inconceivability of gods as far as dogmatic arguments go, and additionally for the unavoidable impiety of certain dogmatic tenets. Inclusion of the latter aim in Sextus' agenda seems to signal either a certain discomfort about various dogmatic positions that are unaffected by his inconceivability claim, or his reliance on what he takes to be an ordinary conception in refuting views that ordinary believers would take to be impious.

[199] Interestingly, Sextus does not set out a case of disagreement concerning divine immortality; the farthest he goes is his reporting on a series of possibly Carneadean arguments that infer the possibility of divine disintegration from various dogmatic tenets: see M IX. 139-180.

[200] But compare Bett 2009: 175: 'Sextus exploits some well-known difficulties in the notion of divine providence to argue that a firm assertion of the existence of God is necessarily impious, because the God asserted to exist must be either a cause of bad, as well as of good, or lacking in power. The exact purpose of this last argument is not absolutely clear. It might be seen as an argument for a kind of self-refutation on the part of dogmatists. Alternatively, it might be seen as one side of a pair of opposed arguments about providence, the goal again being suspension of judgement, and the unexpressed other side being a positive conception of God's providence, and of the piety of those who profess it (the Stoics being the most obvious source) ...'.

All this is consistent with the general interpretation I have developed thus far. Since the arguments are meant to counter dogmatic arguments only, suspension does not imply that the religious observance of the Pyrrhonean must be accompanied by an empty mental life. Furthermore, given that it is an open possibility that some future proposal might escape Sextus' criticism, a Pyrrhonean does not need to commit to the claim that rational theology is doomed to failure. The Sextan claim, here as elsewhere, is the following: in response to those who would like to convince us to examine and revise our pre-theoretical beliefs, yet fail to deliver on the promises of rational persuasion, the safe thing is to suspend judgement.

At this point, I shall turn to some interesting parallels and additional considerations in M IX.

Chapter 4. Dogmatic conceptions: The Sextan case against dogmatic theology in M IX.

In M IX, Sextus divides up the material of dogmatic theology into two main parts. First, he considers and promptly rejects several dogmatic accounts concerning the origin of the concept of god (M IX. 14–48). Second, he sets out a broad-ranging case of opposition between theists and atheists in extraordinary detail, thereby arguing for suspension of judgement about the existence of god (M IX. 50–191). According to his caveat at M IX. 49, the distinction is needed in order to show that, even granting that dogmatists would succeed in establishing a particular conception of god, it would be a matter of separate inquiry whether any existing entity falls under that concept. In this chapter, I shall focus my attention on the former part of this theological exploration. I am going to analyse the dogmatic accounts of conceptual aetiology in parallel to the conceptual arguments as they have featured in PH III.[201]

I will proceed along the following lines. I start out by providing an overview of the aetiological arguments and a summary presentation of the Sextan objections (Section 1). Then I turn to the distinction between conceptual inquiry and existential inquiry as presented in the second caveat. The distinction and the resulting arrangement of the material give rise to worries about Sextus' editorial competence as well as about the fixity of his agenda. I shall offer a reading on which none of the worries prove substantial (Section 2). Finally, I discuss the contrast between 'more dogmatic' and 'more aporetic' parts of Pyrrhonean argumentation, and argue that, by

[201] I do not discuss in detail the arguments for and against the existence of god as presented by Sextus. This lengthy and rich summary of dogmatic arguments simply presents discordant dogmatic and ordinary views, arguing from their disagreement that one should suspend judgement. In this respect, it does not reveal anything special about the Pyrrhonean approach.

adopting these labels, Sextus points out that he has incorporated material that originates with Academic sceptics whose agenda, according to Sextus, is dogmatic. This, however, does not disqualify their arguments, which can be used in favour of a properly aporetic and suspensive position (Section 3).

1. Conceptual aetiologies

In the conceptual part of Against the Physicists I (M IX. 14-48), Sextus considers and opposes some ten different historical suggestions about whence and how people came to believe in gods. In this section, instead of going over them in a linear fashion, I give a brief overview of the arguments and the objections, pointing to some important features of both.

Most importantly, I am going to make a case for the following claims. First, Sextus is not interested in the deflationary or affirmative potential of such accounts. In opposing them, he opposes the attempt at providing a causal history of theological concepts, not the attempt at establishing the existence or non-existence of corresponding entities. Second, at least some of his counterarguments derive from earlier dogmatic debates, and thus he relies on various beliefs about Greek prehistory or the concept of the divine only dialectically. In this respect, an Epicurean subtext is especially remarkable. Consequently, there is no need to suppose that these passages imply a Pyrrhonean commitment to any sort of views.

The arguments (M IX. 14-28)

The accounts considered by Sextus share two general features. First, they all appeal to people of the past, either to unqualified οἱ παλαιοὶ or to a more precisely circumscribed group of forebears.[202] Second, they take their starting-point from certain phenomena that are allegedly accessible in various – though not necessarily universally achieved – states and situations of ordinary life, locating the origin of the religious epidemic in the related sorts of experiences.

The theories point to different kinds of phenomena. The evidence to which they appeal can perhaps be classified along the following lines. The accounts Sextus goes on to discuss point either to (i) some condition of socio-political disorder in early society,[203] or to (ii) encounters with natural phenomena,[204] or to (iii) some kind of

[202] 'The ancients' feature in the description of the proposals of Prodicus (18) and Democritus (both 19 and 24). The theory of religion as invented for political purposes mentions 'the first guardians of human beings' (τοὺς πρώτους τῶν ἀνθρώπων προστάντας) but also those who 'first inquired into what was advantageous for life' (καὶ τὸ συμφέρον τῷ βίῳ σκεψαμένους, 14), without further specification. Then there are 'those who first looked up to the heaven' and observed the motion of the heavenly bodies (οἱ πρῶτον εἰς οὐρανὸν ἀναβλέψαντες καὶ θεασάμενοι ἥλιον μὲν τοὺς ἀπὸ ἀνατολῆς μέχρι δύσεως δρόμους σταδιεύοντα, 27), and also the first people who were born of the earth (τοὺς πρώτους καὶ γηγενεῖς τῶν ἀνθρώπων, 28) and thereby endowed with cognitive capacities far outweighing those of later generations. Even when there is no such mention of early mankind, as in the discussion of Epicurus' theory of dream images, we have independent evidence for a preference to construct the position in such a way (cf. Lucretius 5.1161-1225 = LS 23A). In his discussion, Sextus also makes heavy weather of poetic and mythological statements. Compare also Henrichs 1984: 142 with n15.

[203] M IX. 14-17 mentions two such accounts: one on which the belief in gods and Hades served the establishment of justice in society, and another – Euhemerianism – according to which outstanding human leaders claimed divine authority for themselves. For the latter, see Henrichs 1984: 148-152, who connects it to Prodicus' theory; Mayhew 2011; and Winiarczyk 2013, especially 27-69 (sources) and 99-108 (interpretation). According to Winiarczyk, Sextus takes Euhemerus to be an atheist (10 n57); I think this is at least unclear.

[204] Either with nature's bounty, as in Prodicus' version (M IX. 18), or with its fearsome and incomprehensible phenomena to which Democritus pointed. On Prodicus, see e.g. Guthrie 1971: 237-242, Kerferd 1981: 169, Henrichs 1975: 107-115, 1984: 140-145, Kahn 1997: 261, Mayhew 2011: 175-194, Sedley 2013: 330-331. Some think that the position was clearly atheistic (Henrichs 1975: 109 with n52, but cf. 1984: 157); but his account was in fact incorporated into theistic positions, not only by later thinkers such as Themistius (Orationes 30. 349a-b) or Epiphanius (Panarion 3: 507 Holl), but already by the Stoic Persaeus (Cicero, ND I. 38, cf. II. 62). Mayhew 2011: 182, somewhat confusingly, seems to argue that this makes Persaeus himself an atheist or agnostic of sorts. On Democritus, see Henrichs 1975: 97-106, Gregory 2013: 185-186. Interestingly, Sextus does not offer any objection to the 'fear and awe' theory; perhaps because he tackles Democritus in two parts, and takes his objection on one count to apply on the other as well.

more or less generally available cognition of an allegedly divine nature,[205] or (iv) to the apparent design of the world and especially that of the heavenly sphere.[206]

Insofar as these are all taken to be phenomena available in ordinary life, most, if not all of them, can be claimed to originate in a broadly construed domain of βίος. It is undeniable, however, that some pieces of the invoked evidence are *prima facie* more theoretical than others. From Sextus' point of view, however, all these accounts are equally dogmatic through and through: they profess to justify a certain conception of god based on an origin-story about its invention or recognition. Simply by virtue of providing an aetiological account of religious belief, these are all specimens of an enterprise that is quite dogmatic in spirit.

In terms of history, this type of explanation is usually associated with the sophistic theories of cultural development,[207] though – as the examples showcased by Sextus indicate – they are clearly not restricted to that context. We are provided with evidence for Presocratic aetiologies just as well as about Aristotelian and Hellenistic texts touching upon these issues. Taken together, the different accounts included here by Sextus constitute a sort of historical overview of religious aetiology from the beginnings of dogmatic thought up to the near-contemporaries of Sextus or his source.

[205] A theory of divine images is attributed to the main protagonists of the atomist tradition, Democritus (M IX. 19) and Epicurus (M IX. 25), though on different terms: Democritus is said to have prayed for receiving good images, while Epicurus allegedly talked only about images received in dreams. The question whether or not Democritus and Epicurus recognised actual divinities in the world fills libraries; on the former, let me here mention only Bailey 1928: 175, Vlastos 1945: 581 with n24, McGibbon 1965: 189-197, Eisenberger 1970, Taylor 1999: 154, 211-216, Warren 2002: 36-37, Gregory 2013: 192-197. On the latter, see the recent exchange between Sedley 2011 and Konstan 2011, as well as my last chapter. Furthermore, Sextus attributes to Aristotle a theory of prophetic dreams in which the soul 'takes on its own nature' (καθ' αὑτὴν γένηται, IX. 21), cf. his On Divination in Sleep 463b14-22; and a similar theory is credited to unnamed thinkers at IX. 23, and to younger Stoics at IX. 28.

[206] M IX. 26-27. This is another account, besides the one proceeding from fear and awe, that does not get its individual refutation.

[207] On this 'rational anthropology' or 'sociology and philosophy of culture', see Jaeger 1936/1947: 175, Barnes 1979: 456-461, Kerferd 1981: 168, Henrichs 1984: 141, Kahn 1997: 257-258, Algra 2003: 156-159, and now Betegh (forthcoming).

Keeping in mind this variety of origin, the general question whether any of these arguments originally formed part of an irreligious agenda proves irrelevant to the Sextan discussion. Even if such accounts tend to be deflationary, it need not be necessarily true that these accounts can only be used in order to explain away religious belief. One can just as well make use of such an explanation in order to offer a story about the initial recognition of the divine, and consequently to justify a certain way of conceptualising the gods.[208] What Sextus is interested in here is not dogmatism about the existence of divinities, but rather dogmatism about the emergence of religious belief.

The objections (M IX. 29-48)

Sextus formulates three different sorts of objections against these aetiological accounts. First, he appeals to the fact of disagreement which, as a matter of fact, seems to be already enough to suspend judgement about the truth or falsity of these accounts. The manner in which the point about the surplus of available explanations is formulated is quite significant:

> But there does not seem to be any point in providing counterarguments: for the manifold negations put a seal on their ignorance about everything – if all we have is a

[208] But cf. the general consensus that those who hold such accounts lean towards atheism or agnosticism: for those who introduce such an account, whatever their practical stance towards religion, there is 'always a conscious and fundamental theoretical doubt of its [i.e. religion's] absolute truth' (Jaeger 1936/1947: 189, cf. 174-175, 178); for these thinkers, 'The gods were dead or asleep' (Dodds 1973: 96-97); these accounts are meant to show that 'the *origins* of our religious beliefs are disreputable' (Barnes 1981: 461); 'Such views could easily involve the suggestion that the traditional gods were no more than a human invention – which indeed amounts to a form of atheism' (Algra 2003: 157); 'All such theories displace the gods from their traditional place in explanation. And displacement of that sort must have been disturbing to nonintellectuals – just as evolutionary theory is disturbing to many Christians today' (Gagarin and Woodruff 2008: 379). At the same time, there is ample evidence that theistic thinkers could incorporate their insights into their more positive outlook.

variety of possibilities of conceiving of god, then the only one that is true has not been grasped.[209]

To begin with, this formulation does not rule out there being a true account, as of yet undiscovered or ungrasped (τοῦ δὲ ἐν αὐτοῖς ἀληθοῦς μὴ καταλαμβανομένου). Sadly, Sextus does not elaborate on this statement, and on how exactly the inference from the diversity of explanations to complete ignorance about the matter should be made. Interestingly, however, the remark could be seen as a jibe at an Epicurean move: constructing a case of multiple explanations and thus not having to differentiate between the various proposed accounts.[210]

In short, an Epicurean could maintain that one need not take the trouble of figuring out which of these accounts is the correct one. Instead, one should rest content with the recognition that there is a variety of explanations that are all compatible with the relevant phenomena. People of an inquisitive nature can then find solace in the thought that some or even all of these proposed accounts could, in fact, be correct. Opposing such a move, Sextus would then point to the fact of disagreement as indicating that the truth has not yet been found, in accordance with his general understanding of inquiry.

Second, Sextus moves on to discuss the particular refutations. He points out that the accounts either shift the question one step further instead of giving an answer (i.e. how did those who deceived others into believing in gods acquire a concept of

[209] M IX. 29. οὐκ οἰόμεθα δὲ αὐτὰ χρείαν ἔχειν ἀντιρρήσεως· τὸ γὰρ πολύτροπον τῆς ἀποφάσεως τὴν ἀγνωσίαν τοῦ παντὸς ἀληθοῦς ἐπισφραγίζεται, πολλῶν μὲν δυναμένων εἶναι τρόπων τῆς τοῦ θεοῦ νοήσεως, τοῦ δὲ ἐν αὐτοῖς ἀληθοῦς μὴ καταλαμβανομένου. Compare Bett, who translates as follows: 'But we do not think that they need refutation; for the variety of their assertions puts a seal on their ignorance of the entire truth – while there can be many ways of conceiving god, the one among them that is true is not apprehended.'

[210] I do not claim that the arrangement of religious aetiologies as we have it in Sextus derives from an Epicurean source. All I argue for is that the objection alludes to a specific concern about blocking a possible Epicurean move. Compare the other two objections below that seem to reflect similar concerns.

god in the first place?),[211] or they do not account for a concept of *god*, as opposed to, say, a large-sized and long-lived human being, [212] or they involve circular reasoning.[213] In general, the first two types of objections amount to more or less the same: they point out that, even if the account succeeded in showing the origin of a concept, it need not be a concept of god. The third objection is used once in order to impede a possible dogmatic counterargument.

Third, in the course of his piecemeal refutation, Sextus adds a point which he claims will apply generally (καθόλου καὶ πρὸς πάσας τὰς ἐκκειμένας δόξας ἐνέσται λέγειν). Here, the explanandum is specified as a notion involving three essential characteristics of god, which might or might not be additional to a certain shape and size attributed to them:

> And we can say in general, against all the opinions that have been laid out, that it is not by way of the sheer size of a human-shaped animal that people acquire a concept

[211] See, for example, his objection to those who argue that religion is a political fiction: 'they go off track in saying that certain lawgivers instilled in people the belief in god; they do not realize that the original absurdity still awaits them, since someone could have asked from what source the lawgivers came to a conception of god, when no one had handed down gods to them' (M IX. 31. οἱ δὲ διαμφοδοῦντές φασιν, ὅτι νομοθέται τινὲς ἐνεποίησαν τοῖς ἀνθρώποις τὴν περὶ θεῶν δόξαν, μὴ εἰδότες, ὅτι τὸ ἀρχῆθεν ἄπορον αὐτοὺς περιμένει, ζητήσαντος ἄν τινος, πόθεν δὲ οἱ νομοθέται, μηδενὸς πρότερον παραδόντος αὐτοῖς θεούς, ἦλθον εἰς ἐπίνοιαν θεῶν;) The same point is then basically repeated at IX. 34, when discussing another version of the contrivance theory propagated by Euhemerus.

[212] As in his discussion of the atomist theory of dream images at M IX. 43.

[213] At M IX. 47. 'For in order to conceive the happy human in the first place, and god by way of a transition from this, we need to conceive what happiness is – what the happy person is conceived as sharing in. But happiness, according to them, is a divine and god-like nature, and it is the one who had their deity well-disposed who was called happy. So that in order to grasp happiness in the human case, we first need to have a concept of god and deity, while in order to conceive of god we first need to have a conception of a happy human. Therefore each one, since it waits on the concept from the other one, becomes impossible for us to conceive.' (ἵνα γὰρ πρῶτον εὐδαίμονα νοήσωμεν ἄνθρωπον καὶ ἀπὸ τούτου κατὰ μετάβασιν τὸν θεόν, ὀφείλομεν νοῆσαι τί ποτέ ἐστιν εὐδαιμονία, ἧς κατὰ μετοχὴν νοεῖται ὁ εὐδαίμων. ἀλλ' ἦν γε εὐδαιμονία κατ' αὐτοὺς δαιμονία τις καὶ θεία φύσις, καὶ εὐδαίμων ἐκαλεῖτο ὁ εὖ τὸν δαίμονα διακείμενον ἔχων. ὥσθ' ἵνα μὲν λάβωμεν τὴν περὶ ἄνθρωπον εὐδαιμονίαν, πρότερον ἔχειν ὀφείλομεν νόησιν θεοῦ καὶ δαίμονος, ἵνα δὲ τὸν θεὸν νοήσωμεν, πρότερον ἔχειν ὀφείλομεν ἔννοιαν εὐδαίμονος ἀνθρώπου. τοίνυν ἑκάτερον περιμένον τὴν ἐκ θατέρου νόησιν ἀνεπινόητον γίνεται ἡμῖν.)

of god, but by the addition of being blessed and imperishable and displaying the most power in the world.[214]

Out of these three characteristics, two are exactly the same as those said by Epicurus to belong to the πρόληψις of god. By adding the third characteristic, that is, the possession of the most power in the cosmos (πλείστην δύναμιν ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ προφερόμενον), Sextus simply disqualifies the Epicurean proposal, without thereby agreeing to any specific dogmatic alternative. If it weren't for this third characteristic, it would seem that in this particular context an Epicurean position could be vindicated.

A Pyrrhonean preconception?

Furthermore, in formulating his counterargument, sometimes it sounds like Sextus is actually advocating a particular conception of his own. The discussion of religion as a political fiction contains the most prominent example. In response to this account, Sextus points to the fact that religion is present across nations and cultures: 'Besides, all humans have a conception of god, but not in the same way; rather, the Persians, for example, deify fire, Egyptians water, and other things like that.'[215] To the possible counter-proposal that the core uniformity of all the known religious traditions could be due to one original foundational act, he responds by saying that

[214] M IX. 44. καὶ καθόλου καὶ πρὸς πάσας τὰς ἐκκειμένας δόξας ἐνέσται λέγειν, ὅτι οὐ κατὰ ψιλὸν μέγεθος ἀνθρωποειδοῦς ζῴου νόησιν θεοῦ λαμβάνουσιν ἄνθρωποι, ἀλλὰ σὺν τῷ μακάριον εἶναι καὶ ἄφθαρτον καὶ πλείστην δύναμιν ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ προφερόμενον. ἅπερ οὐ διδάσκουσιν, ἀπὸ τίνος ἀρχῆς ἢ πῶς ἐπενοήθη παρὰ τοῖς πρῶτον ἔννοιαν σπάσασι θεοῦ, οἱ τὰς ἐνυπνιδίους αἰτιώμενοι φαντασίας καὶ τὴν τῶν οὐρανίων εὐταξίαν.

[215] M IX. 32. εἶτα πάντες μὲν ἄνθρωποι τούτων ἔχουσιν ἔννοιαν, οὐχ ὡσαύτως δέ, ἀλλὰ Πέρσαι μέν, εἰ οὕτω τύχοι, τὸ πῦρ θεοφοροῦσιν, Αἰγύπτιοι δὲ τὸ ὕδωρ, ἄλλοι δὲ ἄλλο τι τῶν τοιούτων.

it is silly: for all humans, on the contrary, have a common preconception about god, according to which god is a blessed and imperishable animal, perfect in happiness and not receptive of anything bad, and it is completely unreasonable that everyone hit on the same peculiarities at random, and were not incited in this way naturally.[216]

Thus, in the course of a few passages, Sextus successively appeals to an ἐπίνοια (31), a πρόληψις (33) and an ἔννοια (34) of god. He similarly refers to commonly accepted attributes of the divine in refuting, not quite charitably,[217] those accounts that start out from natural phenomena that benefit humans. Those who hold such views, he claims,

in addition to promoting an implausible opinion are also finding the ancients guilty of the height of silliness. For it is not likely that they were so clueless as to assume that things that visibly perish are gods, or to ascribe divine power to things that were eaten and put an end to by themselves.[218]

[216] M IX. 33. ὅπερ ἐστὶν εὔηθες· κοινὴν γὰρ πάλιν πρόληψιν ἔχουσι πάντες ἄνθρωποι περὶ θεοῦ, καθ' ἣν μακάριόν τί ἐστι ζῷον καὶ ἄφθαρτον καὶ τέλειον ἐν εὐδαιμονίᾳ καὶ παντὸς κακοῦ ἀνεπίδεκτον, τελέως δέ ἐστιν ἄλογον τὸ κατὰ τύχην πάντας τοῖς αὐτοῖς ἐπιβάλλειν ἰδιώμασιν, ἀλλὰ μὴ φυσικῶς οὕτως ἐκκινεῖσθαι. As Sedley 2011: 44 n42 points out, this argument is 'of unmistakeably Epicurean origin'. Compare, however, his objection at IX. 42 to the Democritean theory of anthropomorphic images: 'he explains what is puzzling by what is unbelievable. For nature provides many various starting-points concerning the question how humans got the concepts of gods; but as for there being huge images in the surrounding area having human form and, in general, the kinds of things that Democritus wants to make up for himself, that is extremely hard to accept' (Ὁ δὲ Δημόκριτος τὸ ἧττον ἄπορον διὰ τοῦ μείζονος ἀπόρου διδάσκων ἄπιστός ἐστιν. εἰς μὲν γὰρ τὸ πῶς νόησιν θεῶν ἔσχον ἄνθρωποι πολλὰς καὶ ποικίλας ἡ φύσις δίδωσιν ἀφορμάς· τὸ δὲ εἴδωλα εἶναι ἐν τῷ περιέχοντι ὑπερφυῆ καὶ ἀνθρωποειδεῖς ἔχοντα μορφὰς καὶ καθόλου τοιαῦτα ὁποῖα βούλεται αὐτῷ ἀναπλάττειν Δημόκριτος, παντελῶς ἐστι δυσπαράδεκτον, tr. modified). This passage, in appealing to πολλὰς καὶ ποικίλας ἀφορμάς, clearly echoes a Stoicising theory of concept-formation.

[217] It is obvious that Prodicus, for example, did not argue for the divinity of a perishable substance, but rather for the source of recognition of the divine which itself is not taken to be perishable. Or, alternatively, his argument could point to the fact that the world is such that humans find various things useful to them. To which Sextus gives the entertaining answer that in that case, a whole lot of other things, including philosophers, should be considered divine (M IX. 41).

[218] M IX. 39. ... σὺν τῷ ἀπιθάνου προΐστασθαι δόξης ἔτι καὶ τὴν ἀνωτάτω εὐήθειαν καταψηφίζονται τῶν ἀρχαίων. οὐ γὰρ οὕτως εἰκὸς ἐκείνους ἄφρονας εἶναι, ὥστε τὰ ὀφθαλμοφανῶς φθειρόμενα ὑπολαβεῖν εἶναι θεοὺς ἢ τοῖς πρὸς αὐτῶν κατεσθιομένοις καὶ διαλυομένοις θείαν προσμαρτυρεῖν δύναμιν.

A case can be made for the following reading. In these passages, Sextus has specified the conditions for acquiring a concept of god in a markedly dialectical context, and reproached aetiologists on the basis that they failed to satisfy the very conditions that they have set for themselves. Since the concept of god as specified above can be agreed upon by all parties to the dispute, one can justifiably resist the dogmatic revision of ordinary life based on considerations about the origin of belief.

At first sight, this does not seem to be a way to arrive at suspension, but rather a blatant rejection of all the arguments that have been examined. It could even seem that, in arguing as he does, Sextus actually defends a particular conception of god against dogmatic proposals that are incompatible with it. This would, however, make it seem that he gets dangerously close to dogmatic conformism. On this reading, one could argue that the Pyrrhonean sceptic embraces the ordinary concept, and only resists its dogmatic rewriting, showing that dogmatists are wrong to insist that their proposals are in an important sense continuous with traditionally accepted views.

Alternatively, one could argue that Sextus is merely reporting an intra-dogmatic dispute, reflection upon which, in his view, shows the need for suspension of judgement about each and every one of the dogmatic proposals. For some reason, he adopts a method of exposition that misleadingly suggests his agreement with these counterarguments, when in fact all he does is to show once again the lack of agreement among dogmatic thinkers. In fact, however, he only appeals to common conceptions to the extent that dogmatists taking part in the dispute would do so.

In this manner, after having considered Sextus' arguments, one can maintain a suspensive disposition without having to believe in the veracity or superiority of certain ordinary conceptions. Once again, the Pyrrhonean resists dogmatic proposals,

but leaves open the door for future discovery of the truth, and falls back on the standards of ordinary life without acquiring any dogmatic commitment.

2. Conception and existence (M IX. 49)

According to the second Sextan caveat (M IX. 49), the one that follows the exposition of those dogmatic aetiologies that we have just discussed, one needs to devote attention separately to the conception and to the existence of god:

> Since not everything that is conceived also shares in reality, but something can be conceived but not be real, like a Hippocentaur or Scylla, it will be necessary after our investigation of the conception (ἐπίνοια) of the gods to inquire also into their reality (ὕπαρξις).[219]

Thus, in the first book of Against the Physicists, matters of theology are explored in two consecutive steps: one needs to first inquire into the conception of god, which will turn out to be a discussion about the origin of religious belief, and only then try and see whether anything of the sort exists or rather god is a figment of one's imagination (as suggested, perhaps not innocently, by the examples of a Hippocentaur or a Scylla).

The distinction itself is not unique to this particular work of Sextus. Even though it is not set out in so many words in the Outlines, the awareness of a contrast between conceptual and existential arguments is nevertheless reflected in the way

[219] M IX. 49. Ἐπεὶ οὐ πᾶν τὸ ἐπινοούμενον καὶ ὑπάρξεως μετείληφεν, ἀλλὰ δύναταί τι ἐπινοεῖσθαι μέν, μὴ ὑπάρχειν δέ, καθάπερ Ἱπποκένταυρος καὶ Σκύλλα, δεήσει μετὰ τὴν περὶ τῆς ἐπινοίας τῶν θεῶν ζήτησιν καὶ περὶ τῆς ὑπάρξεως τούτων σκέπτεσθαι.

Sextus organises his material, as evidenced by the transition at PH III.[220] Furthermore, the division among theological arguments is just a case in point of a more general consideration: as Sextus himself has remarked earlier in the same methodological preamble, the reason for starting out with religious aetiology is that 'in the case of every inquiry the concept of the subject investigated comes first'.[221]

Furthermore, Sextus could have found the distinction in at least some of his dogmatic sources, even if the evidence for such an arrangement is rather meagre.[222] Alternatively, though not exclusively, one could argue that it is introduced by the sceptic because it purposefully fits the sceptical agenda.[223] One could assume that, in observing this distinction, Sextus reasonably resists the inference from possessing a concept to affirming the existence of whatever falls under that concept.[224]

It could also indicate Sextus' attempt at being as comprehensive as possible, perhaps assuming a sort of Gorgiastic structure, leading our attention from one case of dogmatic failure to another. On this reading, Sextus is aware of the variety of dogmatic approaches that he opposes. Some dogmatists considered the origins of religious belief, others took their departure from considerations of pious speech, yet

[220] See Section 2.1 of the previous chapter.

[221] M IX. 12. ἀλλ' ἐπεὶ κατὰ πᾶσαν ζήτησιν προτάττεται ἡ τοῦ ζητουμένου πράγματος νόησις, ἴδωμεν πῶς εὐθὺς ἔννοιαν ἐλάβομεν θεοῦ. On the relevance of this distinction for the structure of Pyrrhonean inquiry, see especially Brunschwig 1994a: 232-233 and Grgic 2008: 442. Ideally, the Pyrrhonean philosopher proceeds in the following way. First, there is a state of 'setting the concept': in this 'exegetic' (Brunschwig) and 'conceptual or positive' (Grgic) section, Sextus shows (a) in how many senses the concept is used, and (b) what nature the dogmatists have assigned to it. This amounts to a survey of entities historically identified as falling under the concept at hand. Sometimes the fact of this 'conceptual surplus' (Brunschwig) is itself seen as sufficient for recognising disagreement and suspending judgement. Then, in a 'more aporetic' and 'substantive or negative' stage, Sextus goes on to examine whether anything exists matching the concept, and produces counter-arguments against dogmatic accounts.

[222] The only parallel mentioned by Runia 2002: 281 is Aëtius, Plac. I. 6-7.

[223] Dragona-Monachou 1976: 72 mentions that the distinction seems to be shared with Cotta's attack on dogmatic theology at ND III. 17: the Academic separates conceptual and existential issues in a manner similar to Sextus, while there is no obvious analogue in Balbus' presentation of Stoic theology. This could imply a common, perhaps Carneadean, source.

[224] On this strategy, see Brittain 2001: 118-128; but compare Schofield 1980: 303-304 for what he sees as 'an epistemological confusion' on Sextus' part for once assuming and elsewhere denying the existential implication of having a preconception.

others have engaged in a sort of conceptual analysis, and still others have constructed arguments on the basis of their observations about particular features of the universe and of human culture, and so on. Insofar as dogmatic theology encompasses such a variety of approaches, the rigorous Pyrrhonean has reasons to deal with all of them systematically.

Yet, the division and the resulting arrangement in M IX seem somewhat odd for a couple of reasons. Firstly, Sextus ends up dealing with some of the accounts twice, first in the section devoted to conceptual arguments, and then in the section on existential arguments, where he will recognise most – if not all – of the aetiologies as positively atheistic.[225] Lacking a substantive reason for doing so, one could suspect that Sextus could have done a better job at stitching together different materials from different sources.

Secondly, it is unclear whether Sextus' discussion in the M IX conceptual discussion is able to deliver the same result as the one in PH III. The former with its example-based method more obviously fails to motivate suspension of judgement across the board than the schematic argument offered by the latter. This seems to highlight a worrisome disanalogy between these two works.

Thirdly, and in consequence of the previous worry, one could argue that these two discussions actually represent different Pyrrhonean attitudes with different outlooks on ordinary life. In short, while PH III propagates universal suspension of judgement, M IX could allow for a qualified variant of dogmatic conformism, and perhaps the division of the material betrays this fact.

In the following three subsections, I shall look at these worries.

[225] Starting from M IX. 51, we learn that Euhemerus (51), Prodicus (52), Diagoras (53), Critias – the alleged author of the Sisyphus fragment (54) –, Protagoras (55-56) and Epicurus (58) are all listed as atheists. Once again, given the nature of Sextus' work, it need not reflect his own evaluation of these arguments, but rather the fact that all these people were considered by other dogmatists as propounding atheistic views.

2.1. Inexpert editing?

In my view, the fact that some of the accounts are included twice suggests not so much incompetent composition, but rather that there is a change of perspective from one section to the other.[226] Sextus first considers these accounts without their existential force, as far as they relate to his purposes in the conceptual part of his argument, and only then goes on to consider them as possible arguments against there being anything divine in the world. Perhaps the difference of the explanandum might go some way towards explaining why he omits certain examples from one to the other part of the discussion.[227]

Admittedly, I cannot offer any decisive reason against those who have a previous commitment to the unqualified incompetence of Sextus. On their reading, Sextus is perhaps following a dogmatic distinction between conception and existence, and therefore lists up his material twice. In my opinion, not only is this interpretation less elegant and charitable, but also it fails to point to examples of the allegedly widespread dogmatic distinction that our author merely copies into his work.

2.2. No uniform agenda?

The supposed disanalogy of the conceptual discussions and the apparent change of Sextus' target startled certain readers so much that they hesitate to attribute the same overall design to his two different explorations of dogmatic theology. The

[226] But compare Bett: 2015: 48: 'What is problematic, and a sign of inexpert editing on Sextus' part, is simply that more or less the same material appears twice in close succession, with no acknowledgement of the repetition.'

[227] The best-known instance of a clearly atheistic aetiology, the infamous Sisyphus-fragment, does not make its appearance until the second part of the discussion (M IX. 54; note, however, that Sisyphus-type accounts are clearly convered in M IX. 14-18), while from among those considered in the conceptual part, Democritus, Aristotle and 'certain Stoics' do not appear on the list of atheists. This is surprising to varying degrees.

worry seems to be that, while PH represents a version of Pyrrhonism aimed at suspension of judgement, in M IX he merely belabours the point that no account presented thus far of how people came to form a concept of god has succeeded at its task. However, presenting a series of refutations of various proposed explanations of the origin of religious belief does not imply the inconceivability of god.[228]

In other words, as some would argue, it is difficult to see the M IX conceptual discussion as a successful application of the Pyrrhonean's unique δύναμις ἀντιθετικὴ, insofar as Sextus here manages to oppose at best a couple of claims cherry-picked for the occasion. If this is the case, it is a source of concern for anyone attempting to provide a unified reading of the Sextan project: it seems that Sextus argues at different times for different conclusions, making use of different material.

Yet, if we restate the worrisome claim in a different way, it will become obvious that the M IX account is compatible with the suspensive project. Let us suppose that one reviews these arguments and suspends judgement about all the proposals discussed by Sextus; having come to this result does not rule out either the possibility of future discovery, should new considerations arise, or even the possibility that there is already a conception that escapes his criticism.

But this need not be a problem for Sextus. In accordance with his official line, he does not want to come to the dogmatic conclusion that there is no true account or that it can never be found. He does think that no account he has examined so far has been vindicated as the correct one; and given the impression that different dogmatists

[228] See Bett 2015: 46: 'But the inconceivability of God does not follow from what he has just argued; from the fact that no good explanation has been given of how we came to have a conception of God, it does not follow that there is not or cannot be any such conception.' And 47: 'A non-sceptical account of how our conception of God arose, as in Aëtius, would lead naturally into that transition [i.e. from conception to existence], and so would an argument, as in *PH* 3, to the effect that there is *no* clear conception of God. But an argument that there is no good explanation for why we have the conception that we have does not.'

are convinced by different arguments, he has an interest in effectively countering many different approaches.

Thus, I take it that the worry as formulated above stems from a peculiar understanding of the Pyrrhonean agenda which sees it as Sextus' only interest to come up with the most comprehensive, universally applicable counterargument that will rest his case for good. In PH III, he does present such a schematic argument against conceptions of god; but he also states clearly that he argues for inconceivability as far as the dogmatic arguments go (ὅσον ἐπὶ τοῖς δογματικοῖς, PH III. 6).[229] This remark indicates that his aim is to show that there is no dogmatic proposal on the table that would require us to abandon our ordinary notions. He offers a sort of 'master argument' against dogmatic proposals, much less dependent on the formulation of particular theological positions than a case-by-case engagement would require. What he does not claim is that his master argument has positively established that it is impossible to conceive of god; he just presents this claim in order to arrive at suspension of judgement.

As things stand, however, many people tend to be convinced not by master arguments but rather by more specific – even if philosophically somewhat less impressive – dogmatic proposals. Therefore, the Pyrrhonean, hoping to offer suspensive therapy, needs to address individual arguments just as much as she needs to present a challenge to the most refined among her dogmatic opponents. All the while, the intended outcome is effectively the same: undeterred by the efforts of dogmatic reformers, one should suspend judgement without positively ruling out any chance of future success.

[229] The proper understanding of ὅσον ἐπὶ τῷ λόγῳ, ὅσον ἐπὶ τοῖς δογματικοῖς and related expressions in Sextus Empiricus is subject to widespread debate. Almost every scholar has a take on the issue, but see especially the discussion by Janácek 1972: 13-20 and Brunschwig 1994b.

Someone sympathetic to the suspensive side might worry, of course, that it is easier for dogmatic opponents to deal with the challenge posed in one discussion (M IX) than by the other (PH III). But the interpretive worry arose from concerns about the uniformity of Sextus' philosophical intentions, not about the efficacy of his arguments. Thus, the alleged philosophical tension between the two accounts dissolves, leaving us with questions of no direct philosophical significance, including that of the order of composition, and the possible motivations for revising (if indeed) one of his presentations into the other.

2.3. Dogmatic conformism?

One could reply that the worry has not been entirely dissolved. Even if the interpretation offered above is correct, the aetiological discussion at M IX does not rule out the possibility of having a conception of god, perhaps concurrently with reviewing the dogmatic arguments. It only precludes that any account of the origin of this conception has been justified. Thus, nothing prohibits the Pyrrhonean from having embraced such a conception; in this respect, the argument in the Outlines is surely more ambitious than the one in M IX.

The contrast, once again, is merely apparent. Even the PH III account has to make room for something similar to a Pyrrhonean conception of god. At the very least, in saying that there are gods and that gods are provident, Sextus is reporting his having the appearance that there are gods and that these gods are provident.[230] This is the appearance with which he is left after suspending judgement about claims of

[230] Unless, of course, one takes this report to be completely feigned. In the previous chapter, I have offered my reasons for thinking that this is not the case: in the relevant sense, a Pyrrhonean brought up in a religious society is not disingenuous in reporting about such appearance-claims.

dogmatic theology, that is, as far as dogmatic arguments are concerned. Clearly, the PH III Pyrrhonean can have such an appearance just as much as the M IX Pyrrhonean is allowed to do so; it is an entirely different question what the status of this appearance will be.[231]

Even still, one could push the matter further by saying that the M IX account is tailored to admit the possibility that Pyrrhoneans can positively embrace ordinary conceptions; all they have to resist is the dogmatic revision of them. In defence of this view, one could point out that Sextus does occasionally talk about Pyrrhoneans being in favour of ordinary preconceptions,[232] even though in other contexts he clearly takes preconceptions to be potentially dogmatic.[233] But this is perhaps a manner of speaking that should not be taken too seriously. Sextus could be committed only to the position that various claims that are identified by the dogmatists as preconceptions are also available to the Pyrrhoneans when understood as appearance-claims.

A Stoic, say, can maintain that our preconception of god entails god's existence and providence; a Pyrrhonean, in response, can point out that she similarly says that gods exist and are provident, but does so on the basis of her appearances, perhaps deriving from traditional customs and laws on which she relies in leading her life. As it happens, Sextus resolves to use πρόληψις as if it was a common term of

[231] This is the debate about the scope of suspension and the nature of the appearance that remains after suspension. Without going into this debate, let me indicate here that a reading which takes Pyrrhoneans to embrace ordinary preconceptions would align well with either of the following two interpretations: first, with those who take Pyrrhoneans to have justified beliefs about their own appearances (see especially Fine 1996: 283-290, 2000a: 206-209, and Perin 2010a: 81-83); second, with those who argue that Pyrrhonism operates on a model of empirical justification (recently championed by Spinelli, e.g. his 2008, 2012, 2015). On the Empiricist background to scepticism, see Frede 1990a and 1990b. Cf. also Brittain 2003.

[232] He claims that Pyrrhoneans live in accordance with ordinary preconceptions (PH II. 246), defend these preconceptions against dogmatists (M VIII. 157-158), and if forced into a tragic dilemma by an evil tyrant, they will choose to act in accordance with the preconceptions deriving from the customs and laws of their communities (M VII. 443). Two problematic passages in this respect are M IX. 33 and III. 55-56, allowing both for a dialectical and a non-dialectical reading.

[233] Examples include preconceptions about gods and piety (M IX. 50, 60-61, 124, 138, 142-143, 178-179), ordinary and philosophical views about what is good and bad by nature (M XI. 44). Crucially, Sextus also says that all philosophical inquiry starts from ordinary views and preconceptions, but dogmatists go over what is allowed for by these preconceptions (PH I. 210-211).

ordinary usage, whatever philosophers mean by it: such a *de dicto* reference need not necessarily mean a *de re* commitment to the existence of preconceptions as conceived by the dogmatist. Pending further considerations, the dogmatic conformist reading can be resisted.

3. Against the Academics: Sources and methods of countering dogmatism (M IX. 1-13)

The distinction between stages of inquiry focused on conception and on existence is first introduced as part of a longer description of the method followed by Sextus. This methodological preamble provides further context for understanding the agenda Sextus follows, as well as it gives indications about some of the sources from which he gains material for his purposes.

As in PH III, the discussion proper in M IX starts from a general distinction between active (δραστήριος) and passive – here called 'material' (ὑλικός) – principles. Sextus follows up the introduction of this classification by a survey of various thinkers, from Homer up to the Stoics, who are thought to have observed it in some form (M IX. 4-11).

Then, on the basis of this dogmatic distinction, he offers us a puzzling remark about the Pyrrhonean procedure:

> ... so, since the classification of the best of the physicists is something like this, let us first create impasses (διαπορῶμεν) concerning the active principles, at one time inquiring as it were dogmatically about god, and at another time more in the spirit of impasse about there being nothing active or affected. But since in the case of every

> investigation the concept of the subject being investigated comes first, let us see what was the direct source from which we have gained the conception of god.[234]

In this passage, we have three different distinctions at play. First, the dogmatic distinction between two kinds of principles is introduced as part of the general framework of the 'so-called philosophy' resisted by Sextus. Second, the above-discussed distinction between conception and existence makes an appearance. Finally, and quite interestingly, Sextus remarks about his own practice that he will inquire about god, that is, an – or *the* – active principle in a somewhat dogmatic manner (σκεπτόμενοι ... οἷον δογματικῶς), and only then will he be more aporetic (ἀπορητικώτερον) when discussing whether there is anything that is active or, correlatively, is being acted upon.

The opposition between somewhat dogmatic and more aporetic parts of the Sextan argument has puzzled interpreters, and understandably so.[235] Remember that ἀπορητικὴ is one of the labels accepted by Sextus (PH I. 7), while 'dogmatic' can hardly prove acceptable for him as a self-description in any context. Furthermore, it is also worth noting that the contrast is drawn in comparative terms, which suggests that there need not be a clear-cut distinction between the standing of these two parts of his argumentation.[236]

Having this in mind, one could suggest that the qualification οἷον δογματικῶς introduces a part that crucially delves into other people's views, that is, makes use of

[234] M IX. 12. ἐπεὶ οὖν τοιαύτη τίς ἐστι παρὰ τοῖς ἀρίστοις τῶν φυσικῶν διάταξις, φέρε περὶ τῶν ποιητικῶν ἀρχῶν διαπορῶμεν πρῶτον, σκεπτόμενοι ὁτὲ μὲν οἷον δογματικῶς περὶ θεοῦ, ὁτὲ δὲ ἀπορητικώτερον περὶ τοῦ μηδὲν εἶναι τὸ ποιοῦν ἢ πάσχον. ἀλλ' ἐπεὶ κατὰ πᾶσαν ζήτησιν προτάττεται ἡ τοῦ ζητουμένου πράγματος νόησις, ἴδωμεν πῶς εὐθὺς ἔννοιαν ἐλάβομεν θεοῦ.

[235] Bett 2015: 41: 'I must confess that I fail to see what the 'dogmatic' aspect of the discussion of God is supposed to consist in, or why Sextus would admit to conducting any inquiry dogmatically ...; indeed, since *skepsis* is the name he gives his own, non-dogmatic approach, '*inquiring* ... sort of dogmatically' has the feel of an oxymoron.' Note that Bett 2013: 162-163 with n11 also touches upon the problem of these expressions, while in his earlier Bett 2006 he provides a broader context.

[236] As pointed out by Brunschwig 1994a: 232-233.

arguments of remarkably dogmatic origin.[237] A less dogmatic argument would then be a schematic argument devised by a sceptical philosopher to arrive at suspension without having to consider much of substance about the dogmatic proposals.[238] This statement, however, needs further refinement, since it would not in itself cut up the material appropriately: all the views discussed and opposed by Sextus are supposed to be equally dogmatic. But perhaps cases of opposition can be more and less dogmatic, depending on whether just one or both sides of the equipollent dispute are formulated by the dogmatists.[239]

In a somewhat similar vein, one could suspect that Sextus uses this qualification whenever he makes use of a counterargument which, in its original context, was proposed by a dogmatic thinker. Now, this is indeed a sense in which Sextus detectably uses the label on occasion. For example, when introducing his overall approach concerning the so-called 'liberal arts', he contrasts his suspensive motives with those of the more dogmatic Epicureans who have mounted disturbingly similar attacks against the very same arts.[240]

One of the differences on which Sextus puts emphasis concerns their respective goals. Epicureans, on the one hand, argued for the conclusion that the arts are useless to the seeker of wisdom. For Sextus, on the other hand, this is a dogmatic conclusion (δογματικὸς γὰρ ὁ λόγος), and therefore completely unacceptable. Instead, he maintains that Pyrrhoneans came to suspend judgement concerning claims made in

[237] Cf. Bett 2015: 42: 'Perhaps Sextus is drawing on sources some of which he regards, or some which announced themselves, as more dogmatic than others.'
[238] Perhaps this is what White 2015: 76 suggests: 'While it is far from clear what he means by 'more sceptical' discussion, one possibility is that he intends to emphasize that the following discussion will have wider and deeper sceptical implications concerning causation, in general – not just the sort of active causal principle represented by god or the deities.'
[239] This reading is attributed to Malcolm Schofield but not quite embraced by Bett 2015: 42 n22: '... this is not remotely the same as saying that his own inquiry concerning the gods is dogmatic (or even 'sort of dogmatic'); for placing dogmatic views in opposition to one another does nothing whatever to make one dogmatic oneself. So if this is what he means, his way of expressing it is singularly inept.'
[240] On this, see Barnes 1988b: 58-59.

the domain of liberal arts just as well as they came to suspension regarding matters of philosophy; and while Epicureans, on the basis of their dogmatic conclusions, abandoned the arts, the Pyrrhonean can go on practicing various arts all the while maintaining her characteristically suspensive stance.

Similarly, in his attack on dogmatic notions of music, Sextus makes a distinction between dogmatic and aporetic ways of resisting a dogmatic conception of this particular art.[241] According to him, those thinkers – probably the Epicureans – who argued in a dogmatic manner (δογματικώτερον) that music is not only not necessary, but in fact rather harmful for the purposes of happiness, came to hold a dogmatic tenet as a result of their argumentation; while those – and here he probably has in mind his Pyrrhonean predecessors – who have argued in a more aporetical fashion (ἀπορητικώτερον) have attacked the principal assumptions (τὰς ἀρχικὰς ὑποθέσεις) of a field in the hope that it will do away with the entire dogmatic edifice.[242]

This language can be familiar from Sextus' introduction to the discussion of the physical part of philosophy as conceived in a dogmatic spirit. As part of the transition from his counterargument to logical tenets, but still before narrowing down to the topic of god and of theology, Sextus has formulated his methodology in opposition to that of 'Clitomachus and other Academics' (οἱ περὶ τὸν Κλειτόμαχον καὶ ὁ λοιπὸς τῶν Ἀκαδημαϊκῶν χορός):

[241] Cf. Spinelli 2010: 257.

[242] M VI. 4-5. οἱ μὲν οὖν δογματικώτερον ἐπεχείρησαν διδάσκειν ὅτι οὐκ ἀναγκαῖόν ἐστι μάθημα πρὸς εὐδαιμονίαν μουσική, ἀλλὰ βλαπτικὸν μᾶλλον, καὶ τοῦτο δείκνυσθαι ἔκ τε τοῦ διαβάλλεσθαι τὰ πρὸς τῶν μουσικῶν λεγόμενα καὶ ἐκ τοῦ τοὺς προηγουμένους λόγους ἀνασκευῆς ἀξιοῦσθαι· οἱ δὲ ἀπορητικώτερον πάσης ἀποστάντες τῆς τοιαύτης ἀντιρρήσεως ἐν τῷ σαλεύειν τὰς ἀρχικὰς ὑποθέσεις τῶν μουσικῶν ᾠήθησαν καὶ τὴν ὅλην ἀνῃρῆσθαι μουσικήν. Cf. Blank 1998: liv-lv: 'All the same terms we have seen in *M* 1-6 are used here with explicit recognition of the general principle that, even though the sceptical arguments conclude to non-existence, they are none the less instances of equipollent arguments.'

> And here we will once again assemble the same method of investigation [as in M VII-VIII], not dwelling on the particulars, as Clitomachus and the rest of the chorus of the Academics have done (for by jumping into alien material and creating their arguments on the basis of concessions to the views of those who dogmatise otherwise they prolonged their counter-argument immoderately), but attacking the most important and all-encompassing points – by means of which we shall have the rest put into impasse as well. For just as in sieges those who undermine the foundation of the wall get the towers to come down along with it, so those in philosophical inquiries who have defeated the initial assumptions of a subject have in effect ruled out apprehension of the entire subject.[243]

Here, the more general method of bringing about ἀπορία concerning the most important and most comprehensive points (τὰ κυριώτατα καὶ τὰ συνεκτικώτατα) or the initial assumptions (τὰς πρώτας τῶν πραγμάτων ὑποθέσεις) about the thing inquired into is contrasted with the method of Academic sceptics. Academics, instead of bringing a counterargument jointly against everything, are stuck with the particulars (τὸ κοινῇ κατὰ πάντων κομίζειν ἀντίρρησιν τοῦ προσειλεῖσθαι τοῖς κατὰ μέρος). Apparently, the Academic method – here associated with Clitomachus 'and others' – is comparatively ineffective: they are not making a good use of their time and effort by arguing against others κατὰ μέρος.

[243] τὸν αὐτὸν δὲ τρόπον τῆς ζητήσεως πάλιν ἐνταῦθα συστησόμεθα, οὐκ ἐμβραδύνοντες τοῖς κατὰ μέρος, ὁποῖόν τι πεποιήκασιν οἱ περὶ τὸν Κλειτόμαχον καὶ ὁ λοιπὸς τῶν Ἀκαδημαϊκῶν χορός (εἰς ἀλλοτρίαν γὰρ ὕλην ἐμβάντες καὶ ἐπὶ συγχωρήσει τῶν ἑτεροίως δογματιζομένων ποιούμενοι τοὺς λόγους ἀμέτρως ἐμήκυναν τὴν ἀντίρρησιν), ἀλλὰ τὰ κυριώτατα καὶ τὰ συνεκτικώτατα κινοῦντες, ἐν οἷς ἠπορημένα ἕξομεν καὶ τὰ λοιπά. καθάπερ γὰρ ἐν ταῖς πολιορκίαις οἱ τὸν θεμέλιον τοῦ τείχους ὑπορύξαντες τούτῳ συγκαταφερομένους ἔχουσι τοὺς πύργους, οὕτως οἱ ἐν ταῖς φιλοσόφοις σκέψεσι τὰς πρώτας τῶν πραγμάτων ὑποθέσεις χειρωσάμενοι δυνάμει τὴν παντὸς πράγματος κατάληψιν ἠθετήκασιν. M IX.1-2. For a similar military metaphor, see M I. 40.

It would not be too surprising to find that Sextus considers his Academic colleagues as dogmatic thinkers.[244] In fact, this is exactly what he implies by his reference to their agreement with or concession to (συγχώρησις) the views of other dogmatists. His exact point is somewhat unclear,[245] but he obviously implies that, despite their arguments against dogmatic thinkers, Academics themselves are dogmatisers, too.

Sextus is clearly not being charitable here. The term συγχώρησις that he uses to flag this point can mean 'dialectically conceding a premise', as opposed to full-fledged 'agreeing' to anything. Therefore, even if Academics accepted this bit of terminology to describe their own practice, they would probably understand it as expressing the idea that they agree to the premises of their opponents only in order to bring out conclusions with which they are uncomfortable.

Thus, it seems that Clitomachus and the rest of the Academics (a description that fits well with the specification of the Third Academy elsewhere[246]) are said by Sextus to provide a material against the concept of god that is more dogmatic than various other arguments that could be used. Later on, he is going to mention

[244] He has claimed elsewhere that the Academics are dogmatists insofar as they hold things to be inapprehensible (PH I. 3), and that they go along with (πείθεσθαι) certain things by choice and by sympathy (μετὰ αἱρέσεως καὶ οἱονεὶ συμπαθείας, PH I. 229-230), which sounds rather like the claim we have here in M IX. On this, see Brittain 2001: 112 with n59, also 2001: 89 n23-24, 212 n69. Furthermore, see M II. 20-42, where Academics are represented as arguing for the conclusion that rhetoric is not an art.

[245] The translation of the relevant bit is not evident. Sextus links the ineffectiveness of their arguments to their συγχωρήσει τῶν ἑτεροίως δογματιζομένων. This in itself implies that they are themselves dogmatic thinkers, therefore I have translated it as 'concessions to the views of those who dogmatise otherwise'. The expression could also mean that they 'concede to arguments that they otherwise treat as dogmatic'. Bury translates: 'for by plunging into alien subject matter and framing their arguments on the basis of assent to dogmatic assumptions not their own they have unduly prolonged their counterstatement'; Bett's version reads: 'for by jumping into alien material and creating their arguments on the basis of agreement with the dogmatic views of others they prolonged their counter-argument immensely'.

[246] PH I. 220. Ἀκαδημίαι δὲ γεγόνασιν, ὡς φασι<ν οἱ> πλείους [ἢ], τρεῖς, ... τρίτη δὲ καὶ νέα ἡ τῶν περὶ Καρνεάδην καὶ Κλειτόμαχον· According to Ioppolo 2009: 76 (see also 13, 178, 232-233), Sextus' knowledge of the Academic positions derives mostly from Clitomachus; she also thinks that Sextus is keen to avoid facing up to Arcesilaus' position.

Clitomachus once again as the source of various sorites-style arguments which were originally proposed to Carneades, but committed to writing only by his disciple.[247]

So far, the contrast we have in M IX seems to be as follows. First, Sextus is going to use material taken over from his Academic colleagues. On his view, however, the Academic method of argumentation was flawed, thus they could not avoid arriving at an illicit δόγμα. Second, he will turn to mount an attack on the principal assumptions of the entire domain, doing away with (ἀναιρεῖν) the whole enterprise more efficiently, using material that is more appropriately suitable for his agenda.

Perhaps he is using both kinds of arguments because of the following reason. As to the Academic material, he could think that it is simply not in the right format, not presented as a sort of schematic argument for suspension; yet, despite its unattractive formulation, it could easily be rearranged into a properly sceptical form. A possible motive for not taking on the task of rearranging it could be that he has no scruples taking a hit at the Academics in this way.[248] Or, perhaps, his immediate source presented him with the arguments in this way, and he did not take the trouble to fully incorporate it into his own position. Or, once again, he could be concerned with the therapeutic effectiveness of his arguments: the more ways of opposing dogmatists a Pyrrhonean has, the merrier the she will be.

[247] M IX. 182. At 190, he points out that the outcome of these arguments is the claim that there are no gods (καὶ ἄλλους δὴ τοιούτους σωρίτας ἐρωτῶσιν οἱ περὶ τὸν Καρνεάδην εἰς τὸ μὴ εἶναι θεούς); if Sextus has these types of arguments in mind, perhaps his claim is that in constructing their arguments on the basis of views about the divinity of, say, Cronos, Rhea, Zeus and others, the Academics have fallen into dogmatism.

[248] This source could easily be a treatise of Aenesidemus, who at the same time championed the case against his erstwhile colleagues at the Academy. Sextus could be picking up on his criticism here. According to Photius, Bibl. 212. 169b36-170a17 (translated and discussed by Polito 2014: 74-113), Aenesidemus made a similar point about the Academics, on the basis of which he went on to say that Academics were in fact Stoics fighting Stoics: Καθόλου γὰρ οὐδὲν ὁ Πυρρώνιος ὁρίζει, ἀλλ' οὐδὲ αὐτὸ τοῦτο, ὅτι οὐδὲν διορίζεται· ἀλλ' οὐκ ἔχοντες, φησίν, ὅπως τὸ νοούμενον ἐκλαλήσωμεν, οὕτω φράζομεν. Οἱ δ' ἀπὸ τῆς Ἀκαδημίας, φησί, μάλιστα τῆς νῦν, καὶ στωϊκαῖς συμφέρονται ἐνίοτε δόξαις, καὶ εἰ χρὴ τἀληθὲς εἰπεῖν, Στωϊκοὶ φαίνονται μαχόμενοι Στωϊκοῖς (170a11-17). The verb συμφέρεσθαι chosen by Aenesidemus (or Photius) is meant 'not to report a state of affairs, but to hint at the idea that the Academics are essentially Stoics in disguise' (Polito 2014: 112).

In support of this last possibility, one could point to the immediate chapter head of the 'more dogmatic' discussion, a passage that highlights how the Pyrrhonean arguments against dogmatic theology contribute to an ongoing struggle about what philosophy is – that is, to Sextus' overall opposition to the 'so-called' philosophy:

> The account concerning gods seems absolutely most necessary to those who do philosophy dogmatically. This is why they say that philosophy is the pursuit of wisdom, and wisdom is the knowledge of divine and human affairs. Hence if we bring the investigation of gods to an impasse, we will in effect have established that wisdom is not the knowledge of divine and human affairs, nor is philosophy the pursuit of wisdom.[249]

The claim that Sextus takes this conclusion to have been established (κατασκευάζω) is once again worrisome. But Sextus' overall purpose is unchanged. At the very end of his discussion of dogmatic theology, he reiterates the contrast and points forward to the more aporetic discussion with the following words:

> Well, having established from this that suspension of judgement follows from the things said in dogmatic spirit concerning the active principles, after this let us teach more sceptically that the account of the affected matter is subject to impasse in common with that of the active cause.[250]

[249] M IX. 13. Ὁ περὶ θεῶν λόγος πάνυ ἀναγκαιότατος εἶναι δοκεῖ τοῖς δογματικῶς φιλοσοφοῦσιν. ἐντεῦθεν τὴν φιλοσοφίαν φασὶν ἐπιτήδευσιν εἶναι σοφίας, τὴν δὲ σοφίαν ἐπιστήμην θείων τε καὶ ἀνθρωπίνων πραγμάτων. ὅθεν ἐὰν παραστήσωμεν ἡμεῖς ἠπορημένην τὴν περὶ θεῶν ζήτησιν, δυνάμει ἐσόμεθα κατεσκευακότες τὸ μήτε τὴν σοφίαν ἐπιστήμην εἶναι θείων καὶ ἀνθρωπίνων πραγμάτων μήτε τὴν φιλοσοφίαν ἐπιτήδευσιν σοφίας. On this definition as being specifically Stoic, see Brouwer 2014: 8-41.

[250] M IX. 194. Πλὴν ἐκ τούτων παραστήσαντες, ὅτι ἀκολουθεῖ τοῖς περὶ τῶν δραστηρίων ἀρχῶν δογματικῶς εἰρημένοις ἡ ἐποχή, μετὰ τοῦτ' ἤδη καὶ σκεπτικώτερον διδάσκωμεν, ὅτι κοινῶς ἄπορός ἐστι τῷ περὶ τοῦ ποιοῦντος αἰτίου καὶ ὁ περὶ τῆς πασχούσης ὕλης λόγος.

The point of discussing the hypothesis of a causally efficacious god apart from the topic of there being an active cause thus served a suspensive purpose with a focus on historical developments. Sextus is interested not only in the master arguments about philosophical concepts, but also in a historical survey of the kinds of entities that dogmatists have identified as, in this case, gods. Only after having discussed this does he turn to the schematic, abstract, and more aporetic argument with a focus on existence, as opposed to received views about the proper conception.[251]

Conclusion

In this chapter, I gave an overview of the conceptual arguments as presented in M IX. In doing so, my primary aim was to show that its philosophical agenda is at the very least not incompatible with that of the related discussion in PH III. In my view, these passages work with different materials, with possibly diverging but not exclusive aims, and all in all they contribute to the same ongoing project of opposing dogmatism and vindicating the Pyrrhonean position. The examination of these issues throws light not only on Sextus' methods, but also on his relationship to neighbouring philosophical movements, especially the Epicureans and the Academics, as well as on his conscious effort at keeping them at a distance.

[251] For a manifesto in a similar spirit, see M VII. 28: 'Let us therefore take up the matter in order, as befits the fact that our inquiry is about the whole subject. Since the issue contains two parts, the criterion and the truth, let us discuss each of these in turn, sometimes indicating by way of explanation the multiple ways in which the criterion and the truth are spoken of, and what on earth their nature is according to the dogmatists, and at other times inquiring in more of a spirit of impasse into whether any of these things can be real.' τάξει τοίνυν ὡς ἂν περὶ τῶν ὅλων οὔσης τῆς σκέψεως ἀναλαβόντες, ἐπεὶ δύο μέρη ἐμφέρεται τῇ προτάσει, τό τε κριτήριον καὶ ἡ ἀλήθεια, ἐν μέρει τὸν περὶ ἑκατέρου τούτων λόγον ποιησόμεθα, καὶ ὁτὲ μὲν ἐξηγητικῶς ὑποδεικνύντες, ποσαχῶς λέγεται τὸ κριτήριον καὶ ἡ ἀλήθεια, καὶ τίνα ποτὲ κατὰ τοὺς δογματικοὺς εἶχε φύσιν, ὁτὲ δὲ καὶ ἀπορητικώτερον σκεπτόμενοι, εἰ δύναταί τι τούτων ὑπάρχειν.

Chapter 5. Lapsarian scepticism in Cicero's De Natura Deorum

In the previous chapters, I have presented Sextan Pyrrhonism as a form of scepticism that pertains to the religious domain in the following way. On the one hand, due to its general advocation of suspension of judgement, it recommends suspension about tenets of dogmatic theology. On the other hand, its followers fall back after suspension of judgement on the standards of ordinary life, standards which include – as a matter of contingency – the traditional cultic activities into which one has been habituated. In addition to developing a defense of this overall reading, I have analysed the arguments which Sextus uses to motivate such a stance concerning religious matters.

In this chapter, I shall argue that a similar position can be found in Cicero's De Natura Deorum, the most notorious portrayal of an encounter between ancient scepticism and dogmatic theology.[252] In the dialogue, notable representatives of Roman Epicureanism and Stoicism, Gaius Velleius and Quintus Lucilius Balbus, lay out impressive summaries of the position of their respective schools on the gods, just to be countered in their turn by Gaius Aurelius Cotta, an Academic sceptic, who at the same time claims to observe religious tradition on non-rational grounds. In my view, Cotta's position is closer to that of Sextus than it has been traditionally observed in the literature.

[252] I do not offer an overall interpretation of either Cicero's philosophical position or of this particular dialogue. However, I hope that the reading I develop would not be ultimately incompatible with a generic reading of the late philosophico-theological tetralogy (De Finibus, De Natura Deorum, De Divinatione, De Fato). For a general introduction to De Natura Deorum, see especially Tarán 1987/2001: 455-461, Woolf 2015: 34-62. See also van den Bruwaene 1937, Görler 1974: 45-50, Leonhardt 1999: 61-66, and especially the forthcoming book of Wynne, which is based on his 2008 doctoral dissertation.

Moreover, at the end of the dialogue, Cicero – whose literary stand-in has witnessed the entire conversation without actively taking part in it – reports on the appearance with which he had found himself. Despite being educated as an Academic himself, he parts ways with Cotta and casts his vote in favour of the Stoic position, which in his words is a better approximation of a semblance of the truth. The ending thus poses a challenge that has long exercised interpreters: it is unclear how exactly the difference between Cicero's and Cotta's position should be cashed out.

The discussion customarily focuses on the reconstruction of an intra-Academic debate about the proper interpretation of the Academic stance as espoused by Carneades, which opens up the possibility of attributing divergent views to Cicero and Cotta on the matter. In this chapter, I shall present a somewhat modified picture. In my view, Cicero does not dispute the correctness of Cotta's interpretation of scepticism; in fact, they both represent a Clitomachean stance. Instead, he directs attention to possible lapses from such a stance, due either to pre-philosophical commitments that one is unable to give up, or to a strong attachment to suspension of judgement that leaves the hope of future discovery rather feeble.

Agenda

I shall develop the argument along the following lines. First, I will discuss the significance of Cicero's concluding remark at ND III. 95 and the puzzle it presents to the interpreter. I quickly introduce and set aside readings that explain away Cicero's sceptical outlook, and I offer reasons for thinking that Cicero takes the Clitomachean reading to be the correct interpretation of the Carneadean position (Section 1).

Then, I turn to a discussion of how Cicero's pre-investigative commitments shape the structure of the dialogue. On the one hand, he presents a case of disagreement that is very much in line with what one might take to be a standard sceptical procedure. On the other hand, he is devoted to the idea that various virtues, as well as religious life and social order, would be dissolved if one did not assume divine providence. Due to this, his presentation of the dogmatic proposals turns out to be significantly biased (Section 2).

Following up on the results thus far, I argue that Cotta's position derives from a form of scepticism that bears a close resemblance to the Sextan sort. In my view, Cicero does not challenge the correctness of this position. He does, however, raise the possibility of lapsing from such a stance in at least two ways, due to different intellectual failings of those who profess to be persuaded by Clitomachean scepticism. At the end of the day, while his personal preference for Stoic theology makes him vulnerable to one of these blunders, his overall position as expressed through the dialogue is that of unwavering scepticism (Section 3).

1. Cicero's provisional judgement (ND III. 95)

Readers of Cicero's De Natura Deorum have lost much sleep over the dialogue's concluding remark and its apparent incongruity with the Academic stance. Once the theological discussion comes to a halt, Cotta states that his intention in providing a counterargument was never to pass judgement on Stoic tenets, but rather to further advance their discussion.[253] This remark perhaps complements his regular caveats about the endgame of Carneadean arguments against theology: according to

[253] ND III. 95. *Ego vero et opto redargui me, Balbe, et ea quae disputavi disserere malui quam iudicare*.

Cotta, Carneades has never meant to come to any conclusion about the existence of gods; his only concern was to show that it would be rash to commit ourselves to the Stoic side.[254]

In clear contrast to both Velleius, who dismisses Stoic theology as utterly inconsequential, and Cotta, who keeps a suspensive distance from it, Cicero, in his authorial voice, relates to us the pro-Stoic impression with which Cicero, the character, was left on the occasion:

> Here the conversation ended, and we parted, Velleius thinking Cotta's discourse to be the truer (*verior*), while I felt that Balbus approximated more nearly to a semblance of the truth (*ad veritatis similitudinem propensior*).[255]

This admission of Cicero has puzzled interpreters for two reasons. One of these reasons concerns the character of Cicero's usual role in the late philosophical works, while the other points to his supposedly Academic identification.

First, Cicero positioned his own character in the dialogue as nothing more than a witness to the conversation. He arrives somewhat late (ND I. 15) and sits through the debate without any significant intervention. This portrayal is consistent with his presence elsewhere in philosophical works of the same period: Cicero tends not to step on the stage, but rather to listen to the debates of others. Furthermore, he

[254] On these provisos, see Section III.2 below.

[255] ND III. 95. *Haec cum essent dicta, ita discessimus ut Velleio Cottae disputatio verior, mihi Balbi ad veritatis similitudinem videretur esse propensior.* (I quote ND in Rackham's Loeb translation.) Tarán 1987/2001: 461 n26 points out that one could take the sentence in another way (and that indeed it was read differently by the likes of Hume, Cudworth, and Reid): if 'Velleio' is read not as a dative but rather as an ablative, Cicero's verdict would introduce three levels of verisimilitude, finding the Velleian argument the least satisfactory, with Cotta's being 'verior' and Balbus' the most convincing. For grammatical and philosophical difficulties with this alternative reading, see also Pease 1913: 26-27. Cf. the paraphrase of Schofield 1986: 57: Balbus' defence of Stoic theology 'seemed to tip the scale when it came to judging what was most like the truth', and of Schofield 2008: 73: Balbus's position 'seemed to be more weighted towards approximation to the truth'.

occasionally emphasises that it is beside the point to ask for his own view about the matter at hand. In the preface to ND, as part of a general defence of his Academic persuasion, he reaffirms the policy of concealing his own view with the following words:

> Those, however, who seek to learn my personal opinion on the various questions, show an unreasonable degree of curiosity. In discussion, it is not so much weight of authority as force of argument that should be demanded. Indeed, the authority of those who profess to teach is often a positive hindrance to those who desire to learn; they cease to employ their own judgement, and take what they perceive to be the verdict of their chosen master as settling the question.[256]

Second, Cicero's judgement does not follow, at least not in any obvious way, from what has been going on before in the theological exchange. Even though he does maintain a certain intellectual distance from Cotta, the two are still reasonably expected to end up on more or less the same philosophical territory. Thus, insofar as Cotta is rather successful in producing counterarguments, even a neutral reader should be motivated to suspend judgement about the proposed dogmatic theories; and this reaction would be all the more expected from someone who is supposedly a fellow Academic sceptic, who has tacitly aligned himself – or so a careless reader could think – with Cotta all along.

In response to these worries, interpreters often point to possible non-sceptical motivations, including Cicero's alleged literary and educational agenda, his personal

[256] ND I. 10. *Qui autem requirunt quid quaque de re ipsi sentiamus, curiosius id faicunt quam necesse est; non enim tam auctoritatis in disputando quam rationis momenta quaerenda sunt. Quin etiam obest plerumque iis qui discere volunt auctoritas eorum qui se docere profitentur; desinunt enim suum iudicium adhibere, id habent ratum quod ab eo quem probant iudicatum vident.* For similar passages, see especially Div. II. 150; TD V. 11, 83; De Or. III. 68; Luc. 60.

or political incentives, or a dogmatic period of his life. In the following subsections, I shall first present my reasons for resisting such accounts, and then summarise the Ciceronian understanding of sceptical methodology.

1.1. Renouncing scepticism?

As we have seen, the reader is faced with two questions when reaching the dialogue's conclusion. First, one would like to know why Cicero chose to pass judgement on the matter in this particular case. Second, one might wonder whether the judgement he passes is compatible with his Academic standpoint. In order to answer the former question, various interpreters look for reasons, as it were, outside of the text itself. In doing so, they tend to come up with answers that imply a negative answer to the latter question.

These responses come in at least three flavours.[257]

First, some scholars point to Cicero's project of designing an encyclopaedic overview of Greek philosophy in Latin, and take ND to form part of this endeavour. This would perhaps imply that his philosophical works, including ND, are entirely descriptive and non-partisan in nature.[258] On this reading, Cicero has no intention of declaring one protagonist to be triumphant over all the others: instead, he jots down a conclusion with sympathies divided, so that none of the parties would have to face the

[257] These readings as they apply to Cicero's De Finibus are also discussed by Brittain 2015: 13-18, with additional references and arguments. I assume without further discussion that most of his claims about Fin. could be easily carried over to a discussion of ND. For further discussion of Fin., see especially Annas and Betegh 2015, and Brunner 2011.

[258] A key passage for the doxographical-encyclopaedic reading would be Cicero's enumeration of his philosophical works at Div. II. 1-4. Thus, Pease wrote (1913: 33): 'Yet I believe that if the work is to be regarded rather as descriptive in aim, and striving, in a somewhat unsuccessful way, for objectivity, some of the more important difficulties raised by its last sentence can be most easily met. Cicero's plan for constructing a sort of encyclopaedic philosophical library, which should put the essence of Greek philosophy before his fellow-countrymen in their own language, is too familiar to need more than mention. In such a scheme the philosophy of religion was to have its place.' Cf. Pease 1955 I: 7 and 28, and II: 35-36.

humiliation of being defeated.[259] If so, then Cicero is not an Academic himself, but rather a nonpartisan educator whose main goal is not to take sides but to 'teach the controversy'.

Notice that this is not so much an answer but rather a partial denial that there is a question to be answered. Even if the opinions of Velleius and Cicero diverge in a way that allows everyone to save some face, it is still unclear why Cicero himself would pass a judgement on the relative merits of the philosophical positions put forward in the dialogue, and especially why he would favour the Stoic option instead of the one advanced by his fellow sceptic. Furthermore, it is clearly not forbidden for the compiler of an introductory survey to make his preferences known, that is, to present the options available together with their strengths and weaknesses of each view.[260] Consequently, even granting Cicero's edificatory purposes, the questions posed above still stand unanswered.

Second, some would argue that Cicero either originally crafted the dialogue with a non-sceptical conclusion, or at some point significantly revised it and added the conclusion, due to the changing socio-political circumstances.[261] Similarly, his circumstances as a public figure and as a man of private grievances could have forced

[259] This is mentioned by Lévy 2010a: 61 as a possible explanation, though he ends up neither endorsing it nor providing any examples of such a reading. He adds that Cicero's understanding of philosophical inquiry is not bound by one's attachment to any school of thought. Somewhat similarly, one could argue that the division of opinions signals that the investigation did not come to an end: 'Cicero's final sentence is basically a narrative, describing a parting of the ways, mirroring the divergent reflections of those who had listened to the debate just terminated: provisional reflections, for there will always be room for further consideration of the issues – as is symbolised by Balbus' request for a rematch' (Schofield 2008: 74).

[260] As pointed out by Striker 1995: 58-60, who argues that Cicero could not possibly foresee that most of his sources would eventually be lost to his distant readers; and were we in possession of these sources, we could see clearly the modifications and points of emphasis introduced by him.

[261] See especially the rather ingenious theory of Levine, according to whom Cicero revised ND in a hurry, introducing elements to safeguard himself from charges of atheism. This revision would extend to the addition of the concluding remark, which is 'so curiously inconsistent with the rest of the dialogue that it appears to have been added as an afterthought to serve some immediate purpose rather than an integral part of the original plan' (Levine 1957: 18). Compare Pease 1913: 27-30. For a concise statement of the possible motives and remnant traces of such a reworking, see Levine 1958: 148-150; for reasons to resist his suggestion, see Tarán 1987/2001: 468-473.

him later to solemnly distance himself from a dogmatising attitude, a stand supposedly deriving from a dramatic change of mind.[262] One could, then, present the succession of the stages of Cicero's personal life trajectory as an explanation of changes in his philosophical outlook; and thus ND III. 95 finds its non-philosophical explanation as well.

At first hearing, such psychologising accounts have, indeed, some plausibility, and they might very well touch upon important aspects of Cicero's life and times. However, appeals to biography or individual psychology are generally not considered satisfactory when dealing with philosophical problems. If one would like to understand Cicero as not wholly plunged into the social and political or – at best – the intellectual history of his era, it is preferable to come up with an account that does justice to his proclaimed philosophical agenda as well.[263] Now, Cicero's philosophical commitments tie him to a kind of scepticism associated with the Academy of his time, and this is the context in which the choice at the end of ND should be understood.[264]

This last proposition is exactly what proponents of a third type of account dispute. On a possible reading, Cicero's philosophical alliance was simply not with the Academy at the time of writing some of his later dialogues, including ND. His approval of various dogmatic tenets is nothing less than a sign that he abandoned

[262] In this manner, one could make the case for a concealed or perhaps suppressed scepticism of Cicero's politically active years, or for his deep sorrow over his failed marriages and the loss of his daughter as reasons for abandoning doubt later in life (where emotional despair seems cursorily equated with philosophical doubt). See especially Momigliano 1984: 205 (pointing to Tullia's death), 210 (arguing that Cicero wanted to distance himself from Caesar), as well as Glucker 1988: 66-67 and Glucker 1992 (on his public involvements, political misfortunes, and personal tragedies). On the importance of political sensitivities, see also Schofield 2008: 71 with n23, 82.

[263] Compare the remark of De Filippo 2000: 171: 'Yet, if Cicero's final judgement is not motivated by extra-philosophical considerations, and is consistent with Academic scepticism, *ND* begins to look like a sophisticated reflection on the implications of doing (sceptical) philosophy in a highly traditional setting – in this case, Roman society.'

[264] Note also that at Div. II. 49 and 70, following shortly upon ND, Cicero rejects divination *in propria persona*: if he is a closet sceptic in ND, he is very much out in Div. (On Div., see especially Denyer 1985, Beard 1986, Schofield 1986, Timpanaro 1994, Linderski 1995, and Wardle 2006.) Furthermore, if he was worried about political repercussions, he could have simply decided not to publish the dialogue (Pease 1913: 29 and Tarán 1987/2001: 464).

Academic scepticism for a period of his life and came to adopt Stoicising or, more plausibly, Antiochean positions in various fields of inquiry. While nobody seriously disputes that there is a return to scepticism in the latest works of Cicero, ND could immediately precede this relapse. In this manner, Cicero's lurking dogmatism could serve as an explanation of motives such as Cotta's steadfast reliance on religious tradition, as well as of Cicero's final, pro-Stoic judgement.[265]

Without providing much detail, I take it that more satisfactory alternatives have been proposed in the literature, and thus the philosophical motivation for partitioning Cicero's philosophical career into alternating periods of dogmatism and scepticism has been successfully explained away. One could summarise the alternative in two clauses. On the one hand, it has been pointed out that there is ample evidence of Cicero's scepticism in the alleged Antiochean period, a scepticism of provisos that was to develop into a more salient structural feature of the later dialogues.[266] On the other hand, ND itself is a prime example of the later period in which Cicero composes dialogues with characters arguing each side of a given question.[267]

According to his official line, he adopts this method in order to master the teaching of each philosophical school, and to bring out their relative strengths and

[265] A reading along these lines has been championed independently by Glucker 1988 (see also Glucker 1992) and Steinmetz 1989, but its precursors include Hirzel and Pohlenz (see Görler 1995: 85 with n2 for references). For a summary, see Glucker 1988: 53: 'Cicero, then, changed his affiliations twice: once, from a youthful enthusiasm for Philo of Larissa and with a lingering respect for the Skeptical tradition – and then, some time in 45 BC, back to the Skepticism of Carneades and Philo'. Given the time frame as given, the position of ND in Cicero's intellectual development is somewhat pliable. Cf. also Schofield 1986, who argues that, in comparison to his earlier stance, 'Cicero found himself freshly attracted to the sceptical philosophy of the new Academy at the time he composed his philosophical encyclopaedia' (47).

[266] See especially Görler 1995, who shows convincingly that Cicero's peculiar provisos of scepticism appear without a hiatus throughout the supposedly Antiochean period just as much as in the later, unquestionably sceptical dialogues (see Görler 1995: 86-98). In earlier works, Cicero mostly uses them to qualify statements of personal conviction that he would not maintain in the presence of fellow Academics, and to mark 'the arguments and confessions [that are] not meant nor are fit to convince everybody – they are addressed primarily to those who find them congenial' (Görler 1995: 92).

[267] Görler 1995: 111.

weaknesses. By exercising this method, he supposedly gets closer to finding out the truth about the matters at hand. In doing so, he is able to emphasise the importance of forming one's own opinion, both in the sense that he himself does not need to conform to any school authority, and in the sense that his readers are free to form their own judgements.[268]

In addition to this point, it has been argued by scholars quite convincingly that there is an existential dimension to Cicero's sceptical dialogues. In other words, he makes heavy use of this literary genre in order to expose in dramatic form his personal vacillation between the conflicting views to which he finds himself drawn, either concurrently or at different points of his intellectual career.[269] Following up on this insight, one might pose questions about the sorts of commitments that generate the tension internal to ND. In my view, the assumption about divine providence and the need to be able to account for the uniformity in diversity of religious traditions will serve as commitments that clash with the results of sceptical examination.

Before turning to discuss these ideas, I shall give a brief summary of Cicero's understanding of Academic scepticism.

[268] See his regular appeals to his own *iudicium* and *libertas disserendi*, often contrasted with following *auctoritas*: e.g. at ND I. 17, Fin. I. 6, Div. II. 150, Luc. 8, 60, 115, 120, Leg. I. 36, Tusc. V. 32-33, 83, Off. III. 7. As Schofield 2008: 70 puts it: 'Above all, the practice of *argumentum in contrarias partes* gives readers the opportunity to exercise their own judgement after reflecting on systematically articulated positions ideally set out fully and elegantly, yet with requisite precision and complexity.' While it is sometimes maintained that this idea is due to Cicero's personal touch (Görler 1997, cf. Glucker 1995: 133), it is actually quite reminiscent of the Sextan criticism of following a school authority (as discussed in Section III.2 of my Chapter 1).

[269] For this interpretation of the dialogue form, see already Brittain 2006: xi, but now especially Brittain 2015: 26: 'Cicero's scepticism is an emergent property of the dialogue as a whole: it is the upshot of the dramatization of his attraction to several incompatible positions'. On Cicero's use of the dialogue form in general, see especially Schofield 2008, e.g. at 64: 'Philosophical dialogue is converted into an exploration of what it is for a Roman statesman forced from the political arena to grapple with disjunctions between politics and philosophy, and to try to bridge the gulf between public and private, acting and writing, concealment and disclosure.'

2.2. Cicero's scepticism

As long as one can resist the non-sceptical readings mentioned above, the next question to consider will concern the sort of scepticism to which Cicero is committed. Now, this is a rather delicate matter. To begin with, Cicero himself happens to be our most important source on the intra-Academic debate about the proper understanding of sceptical methodology, which is in fact a debate about the proper understanding of the philosophical stance espoused by Carneades. When trying to position Cicero in the debate, one is mostly confined to his own reports about the rival interpretations. However, whether or not he is a trustworthy source, his presentation provides clear outlines for understanding his own intentions and agenda.

Cicero reported on the intra-Academic debate in his fragmentarily extant Academic Books, of which I shall focus on the Lucullus. In this work, he positioned himself as an upholder of a stricter, more radical version of Academic scepticism.[270] On this view, attributed first and foremost to Carneades' disciple, Clitomachus, successful application of the method of arguing on both sides leads to the recognition that the truth has not been grasped, and thus one should suspend judgement.[271] This does not mean that one does not retain an appearance after suspension, which could serve as the basis of the sceptic's conduct of life. Rather, it implies only that this appearance is not endorsed as in any way rationally justified.[272]

[270] See the exposition at Luc. 64-146, with his indications in the preface (Luc. 7-9) that he is committed to the Academic cause. Cf. Fin. III. 31, where suspension of judgement is specified as the goal of Academic argumentation.

[271] See Luc. II. 40-42, 77. It is a further question, not to be dealt with here, whether it is a dialectical move against the Stoics or rather a position properly attributable to Clitomacheans. For the origin of the dialectical reading, see especially Coussin 1929a. From the literature on Carneades, see especially Allen 1994, Allen 1997, Bett 1989, Bett 1990, Obdrzalek 2006, and Burnyeat (unpublished). On Cicero's Academic Books, see Lévy 1992 and Brittain 2006.

[272] See e.g. Luc. II. 32, 103-104, 124, 134, 141. See also the apt summary of Allen 1990: 2596: 'The radical skeptic's engagement with the quest for philosophical wisdom – or at least his inability or unwillingness to give it up – conditions his response to the apparently unresolved status of the skeptical problems with which he has confronted his dogmatic opponent. For the radical skeptic is not left

It is the epistemological import of the appearance retained after investigation that marks a clear departure from one Academic stance to the other. As the rival, more mitigated view has it, the outcome of sceptical argumentation is not universal suspension of judgement. Instead, one can give provisional assent – under appropriate circumstances – to an appearance, thus allowing that it constitutes evidence for a view as rationally preferable to another, though crucially falling short of knowledge and certainty, and perhaps in need of further examination.[273]

In this debate, Cicero announces twice that he, in fact, favours the Clitomachean view.[274] Yet, as he hammers it home quite insistently, the Clitomachean view describes not any would-be sceptic but rather the ideal sage. Cicero accepts this description but – he himself not being wise but rather a *magnus opinator* – does not deny feeling the pull of certain views, and that he occasionally cannot resist assenting to them. See his laborious explanation at Luc. 65-66:

> How could I not desire to find the truth when I rejoice if I find something truth-like? But just as I judge this, seeing truths, to be the best thing, so approving falsehoods in the place of truths is the worst. Not that I am someone who never approves anything false, never assents, and never holds an opinion; but we are investigating the wise person. I am actually a great opinion-holder: I'm not wise. ... As a result, I err or wander farther afield. But it's not me, as I said, but the wise person we are investigating. When these impressions strike my mind or senses sharply, I accept them, and sometimes even assent to them (although I don't apprehend them, since I

without impressions and views by his practice of argument; he finds himself left with views on a great many issues, and he could go on to endorse these impressions and adopt these views, if he were able to repudiate the philosophical quest for wisdom.'

[273] I have presented a rather crude outline of the two positions as reconstructed by Brittain 2001: 73-129; cf. Brittain 2006: xxiii-xxxi, and see also Brunner 2011: 231-243, and Wynne 2014: 247-257. Brittain attributes the second, mitigated view to a group of Philonian / Metrodorean thinkers; for an attack on the notion of a specifically 'Philonian / Metrodorean view', see Glucker 2004. On Ciceronian scepticism, see also Görler 1974: 185-197 and Leonhardt 1999: 13-88.

[274] At Luc. 78 and 108; cf. also 99, where he reports on using a book of Clitomachus as his source.

> think that nothing is apprehensible). I'm not wise, so I yield to these impressions and can't resist them.[275]

It is in the context of this particular debate that the question whether Cicero the character is allowed to cast a tentative vote in favour of Balbus' position comes to the fore. In the preface of ND, Cicero the author refers back to the discussion in the Academica, clearly describing the ensuing discussion as an exercise in arguing on both sides of a question (*contra omnia disserendi*; *contra omnis philosophos et pro omnibus dicere*), a method that he takes to be characteristic of his predecessors from Socrates up to Carneades (ND I. 11-12). In this context, he summarises the Academic stance with the following words:

> Our position is not that we hold that nothing is true, but that we assert that all true sensations are associated with false ones so closely resembling them that they contain no infallible mark to guide our judgement and assent. From this followed the corollary that many sensations are probable, that is, though not amounting to a grasp they are yet possessed of a certain distinction and clarity, and so can serve to direct the conduct of the wise man.[276]

[275] Luc. 65-66. *qui enim possum non cupere verum invenire, cum gaudeam si simile veri quid invenerim? sed ut hoc pulcherrimum esse iudico, vera videre, sic pro veris probare falsa turpissimum est. Nec tamen ego is sum qui nihil umquam falsi adprobem qui numquam adsentiar qui nihil opiner; sed quaerimus de sapiente. Ego vero ipse et magnus quidam sum opinator (non enim sum sapiens) ... eo fit ut errem et vager latius. Sed non de me, ut dixi, sed de sapiente quaeritur. Visa enim ista cum acriter mentem sensumve pepulerunt accipio iisque interdum etiam adsentior. Nec percipio tamen: nihil enim arbitror posse percipi. Non sum sapiens; itaque visis cedo non possum resistere.* (I quote Luc. in Brittain's translation.) On these passages, see Brittain 2001: 81-82 with n14.

[276] ND I. 12. *Non enim sumus ii quibus nihil verum esse videatur, sed ii qui omnibus veris falsa quaedam adiuncta esse dicamus tanta similitudine ut in iis nulla insit certa iudicandi et adsentiendi nota. Ex quo exstitit illud, multa esse probabilia, quae quamquam non perciperentur, tamen, quia visum quendam haberent insignem et inlustrem iis sapientis vita regeretur.*

As we have seen, an Academic is allowed to retain an appearance after investigation on both readings presented above.[277] If this is true, the passage just quoted need not commit Cicero to either of the interpretive options, even if it easily lends itself to a fallibilist reading.[278] Furthermore, it would be preferable, for reasons of consistency, to see the Cicero of the ND as still committed to the Clitomachean position. If he is a Clitomachean when composing the dialogue, the decision to represent himself as a character somewhat impressed by Stoic theology could highlight a certain dilemma arising from commitments that he could not, at least at the time of the debate, let go of. Since these commitments are not the result of his inquiry, nor are they clearly attributable to his authorial self, they do not indicate that his scepticism is of the mitigated sort.[279]

Consequently, I turn next to the question why Cicero in ND would prefer, if reservedly, a dogmatic view to sceptical reliance on tradition and custom.

[277] Cf. De Filippo 2000: 171-175, who contrasts Velleius' dogmatic judgement (*verior*) to Cicero's appearance-judgement (*ad veritatis similitudinem propensior*). On the possible Greek originals of these terms, see Glucker 1995 and Görler 2002.

[278] Brittain 2001: 105-106 with n51 used to be of this opinion. Cf. his general assessment that Cicero is a Philonian / Metrodorean Academic throughout the late *philosophica*: Brittain 2001: 258-259, see also Görler 1995: 37 n4, Görler 1997: 51; cf. also Glucker 1988: 60-69, Glucker 1995: 133-137, Thorsrud 2012: 139-140.

[279] A similar reading is now defended by Brittain 2015. See e.g. 14 n6: '... since Cicero represents himself as a Clitomachian follower of Carneades, i.e., radical sceptic, in *Ac*., and since he refers readers back to his discussion there when the nature of his scepticism is in question (*Fin*. 5. 76; cf. *ND* I.11-12; *Div*. 2; *Off*. 2.8), the radical, Carneadean interpretation is preferable, *ceteris paribus*. ... I argue that the dramatization of Carneadean scepticism actually requires characters – such as the Cicero-character in *Fin*. 4-5 – who are torn, i.e., committed to incompatible views. This means that we can't infer from even the Cicero-character's apparent endorsement of a view that the view is endorsed by Cicero or the work as a whole. Thus I take it that, for example, the apparently strong endorsements of views by Cicero-characters at the end of some dialogues (*ND* 3.95 and *Div*. 2.148-150) are not evidence for the work's mitigated scepticism, but structural devices, designed to temper the inclination to rash assent to negative dogmatism inspired by the slashing critiques of Stoic theology by Cotta and 'Cicero".

2. Providence and inquiry: Cicero's theological hesitancy

In the following two subsections, I shall present the outlines of Cicero's wavering as it unfolds on the pages of ND. As indicated above, this wavering is due to conflicting commitments, some deriving from his Academic affiliation, others from his attachment to ordinary standards and ideas. In what follows, I will make the case that the latter include his – rather ordinary – understanding of religion as involving an assumption about divine providence.

First, I will have a look at Cicero's discussion of theological disagreement in the preface, where the author makes it clear that certain types of questions matter for him more than others.[280] Second, I will turn to the exchange between Velleius, Balbus and Cotta, pointing out how the presentation is informed by Cicero's non-philosophical preferences, and are biased towards the more inclusive stance advocated by the Stoics.

2.1. *Perdifficilis et perobscura quaestio:* The sceptical setup in the dialogue's preface (ND I. 1-14)

Cicero starts the preface by explaining why the question of the nature of the gods is an especially difficult one (*perdifficilis et perobscura quaestio est de natura deorum*). He plausibly links the difficulty of the topic to the then-current state of the debate: despite the efforts of the best and brightest thinkers of the ages, theology seems to be a collection of various questions that are subject to widespread disagreement.

[280] Importantly, the preface to ND is one of those few Ciceronian prefaces that is non-replaceable but was rather designed to introduce this specific dialogue (Schofield 2008: 77).

Cicero continues by claiming that this predicament of undecided dispute is also a strong indication that the starting-point of philosophy is ignorance (*causam et principium philosophiae esse inscientiam*), and that Academics rightly insist that one should suspend judgement (*prudenterque Academicos a rebus incertis adsenionem cohibuisse*, ND I. 1). Thus, he arrives to the present discussion as an impartial judge (ND I. 14), unbiased by any school authority – including that of Philo of Larissa, his Academic teacher (ND I. 17).

It goes almost without saying that pointing to the fact of disagreement and urging suspension of judgement forms part of an unremarkably sceptical setup. This impression is further strengthened when looking at the types of disagreements showcased by Cicero. He makes a distinction between the existence of the divine and the proper way of conceiving of gods, as regards their outward form, their dwelling-places and abodes, and their mode of life.[281] Having the distinction in place, he goes on to set out cases of disagreement about each. This is, of course, standard sceptical procedure; what is unusual, however, is that Cicero personally intervenes and cuts short the discussion of some of the issues mentioned.

First of all, he swiftly sets aside questions concerning divine existence. He does mention the fact of disagreement, though: while the majority holds that there are gods, there is the minority of those who doubt (Protagoras) or outright deny (Diagoras, Theodorus) their existence. Then, he quickly gives a sort of personal verdict in favour of the theistic view, declaring that it is 'the most probable view and the one to which we are all led by nature's guidance' (*quod maxime veri simile est et*

[281] ND I. 2. *Nam et de figuris deorum et de locis atque sedibus et de actione vitae multa dicuntur, deque his summa philosophorum dissensione certatur*. The disagreement is restated at I. 5 (*non solum indocti sed etiam docti dissentiant*) and at I. 14. Compare the classification of theological debates according to Sextus, PH III. 2-3: his εἶδος corresponds to Cicero's *figuris deorum*, and his ποῦ to *locis atque sedibus*, but it is not obvious that οὐσία would cover the same ground as *actione vitae*.

quo omnes duce natura venimus, ND I. 2).[282] Although the participants of the conversation represented here all contend that there are gods,[283] the urgency with which Cicero moves from this topic to that of the nature of the gods is still remarkable.

Second, he gives different weight to different questions that are debated within the theistic camp. As mentioned above, he does introduce the questions of the gods' appearance, abodes and course of life, but he makes it quite clear that all these take second seat to the question of divine providence. The dispute of highest importance, he says, is whether the gods are entirely idle and inactive, taking no part in the running of the world, or whether they have in fact created it and kept it in order and control from the very beginning (ND I. 2).

Notice that this would hardly do as a survey of the logically and historically available options. One could take positions in-between the extremes of a full-fledged creationist cosmology and a denial of any providential activity whatsoever. Cicero nevertheless chose to present the debate to his reader as if it concerned only these two candidates for belief.[284] In doing so, he is perhaps already preparing the ground for the encounter between Epicureanism and Stoicism – curiously omitting, for example, a Peripatetic protagonist.[285]

[282] On the expression *duce natura* as implying innate cognition due to providential design – a rather dogmatic trait –, see van den Bruwaene 1937: 164-171. On its Stoic or Epicurean connections, see especially Brunschwig 1986 and Inwood 2015.

[283] Though the possibility of Epicurus' closet atheism is flagged at ND I. 85-86, Cotta points out that his followers such as Velleius and Metrodorus are just as clear and emphatic about divine existence as Epicurus is. For further discussion of the existence of Epicurean gods, see my Chapter 6. On the consensus, see also the comment of Woolf 2015: 34: theism is the 'default option', even for a sceptic.

[284] Cf. also Balbus setting out a dilemma between either providential design of the cosmos or of chance at ND II. 87-88; cf. also 81 and 93. On Stoic notions of providential design, see also Acad. II. 30-31, and ND II. 133-153; for Clitomachean responses, see Acad. II. 87, 120-121, and ND III. 28.

[285] See Cotta's remark at ND I. 16, parroting the Antiochean claim that Stoics and Peripatetics hold the same views but formulate them in different words. On this curious remark, see especially Furley 1989b: 201-204. Furley mentions the differences of Stoic and Aristotelian theology, and shows convincingly that Cicero must have been aware of them. In response to the quandary caused by ND I. 16, he concludes that 'Cicero omitted a Peripatetic spokesman from his team of theologians, not because he was ignorant of Aristotle's theology, nor because he was unimportant, nor for reasons of

The dogmatic encounter that we observe is, however, already skewed in favour of the Stoics. At the very beginning of the preface, Cicero makes the claim that theological inquiry is not only difficult, but also rather important. To be precise, he claims that it is of special interest with regard to the study of the soul, and also of high importance for the regulation of religion (*quae et ad cognitionem animi pulcherrima est et ad moderandam religionem necessaria*, ND I. 1). It is unclear what he could possibly mean by giving the former reason,[286] but the latter rather naturally connects to the assumption of divine providence.

As Cicero explains, the practice of religion is commonly based on the assumption of exchanging divine and human favours, which implies that the gods appropriately care and provide for humans:

> For there are and have been philosophers who hold that the gods exercise no control over human affairs whatever. But if their opinion is the true one, how can piety, reverence or religion exist? For all these are tributes which it is our duty to render in purity and holiness to the divine powers solely on the assumption that they take notice of them, and that some service has been rendered by the immortal gods to the race of men. But if, on the contrary, the gods have neither the power nor the will to aid us, if they pay no heed to us at all and take no notice of our actions, if they can exert no possible influence upon the life of men, what ground have we for rendering any sort of worship, honour or prayer to the immortal gods?[287]

literary elegance, nor by chance. His reason was that he thought of theology as intimately connected with cosmology, and in cosmology he thought of two opposed sides: Epicureanism on the one hand, and an amalgam of Aristotle and the Stoics on the other. It was enough to expound these two positive theologies, and allow each of them to be criticised by the school that specialised in the criticism of others' (Furley 1989b: 204). Cf. also Woolf 2015: 125 for possible Aristotelian background to Balbus' description of the well-adaptedness of animal life (ND II. 125).

[286] For a proposal, see Dyck 2003: 57, who takes it to be a reference to a Platonic-style understanding of the affinity between the human and the divine soul.

[287] ND I. 3. *Sunt enim philosophi et fuerunt qui omnino nullam habere censerent rerum humanarum procurationem deos. Quorum si vera sententia est, quae potest esse pietas, quae sanctitas, quae*

As the reader is to find out soon after these words, Velleius defends the Epicurean theory according to which providential activity is incompatible with the blessed life enjoyed by the gods. In consequence, as we know already from the start, his account cannot carry the day; Cicero's stated preferences would allow neither atheistic nor providence-denying views to fit the bill. This, as I shall argue, is manifested in the structure of the dialogue as well.

2.2. *Quanto Stoici melius:* Consensus and dismissal in dogmatic theology

As I have argued above, the emphasis that Cicero puts on providence might go some way towards explaining an important feature of the dialogue: the uneven attention it pays to the dogmatic alternatives. While it starts out as a competition between Epicurean and Stoic theology, the former is rather quickly eliminated, so that a more substantive conversation between Stoicism and Cotta's Academic standpoint should emerge.

Since Cotta will vigorously maintain that he upholds traditional cult, including its affirmation of divine providence, the two options that are seriously considered agree on the existence of providential gods, even if their attitude towards this proposition is markedly different. Epicureans, on the other hand, deny that a perfect life is compatible with providential care (see ND I. 45 and 51), which makes their

religio? Haec enim omnia pura atque caste tribuenda deorum numini ita sunt, si animadvertentur ab iis et si est aliquid a deis inmortalibus hominum generi tributum. Sin autem dei neque possunt nos iuvare nec volunt, nec omnino curant nec quid agamus animadvertunt, nec est quod ab iis ad hominum vitam permanere possit, quid est quod ullos deis inmortalibus cultus honores preces adhibeamus? Immediately afterwards, Cicero goes on to explain how this would lead to the dissolving of all social bonds as well (I. 4). He provides further lists of things, including several virtues, religious practices, the existence of temples and shrines, and various social bonds, at I. 13-14. Compare Sextus Empiricus' list of absurd consequences of denying the existence of god at M IX. 123-135. Note that Sextus presents these as depending on the existence of gods, not on their providence – but obviously he means their existence *as conceived* in the relevant religious traditions and dogmatic philosophies that take them to be provident.

theological position a rather unattractive option from the start.[288] Indeed, at a particularly excruciating point of his criticism, Cotta contrasts the Epicurean option with the Stoic one with the following words:

> Epicurus, however, in abolishing divine beneficence and divine benevolence, uprooted and exterminated all religion from the human heart. For while asserting the supreme goodness and excellence of the divine nature, he yet denies to god the attribute of benevolence – that is to say, he does away with that which is the most essential element of supreme goodness and excellence. For what can be be better or more excellent than kindness and beneficence? Make out god to be devoid of either, and you make him devoid of all love, affection or esteem for any other being, human and divine. It follows not merely that the gods do not care for mankind, but that they have no care for one another. How much more truth there is in the Stoics, whom you censure![289]

It seems, then, that the question in which Cicero is interested is whether it is enough to rely on religious tradition without theory, or you need a dogmatic account to firmly ground your providential outlook. Apparently, the only dilemma he thinks

[288] Compare De Finibus, where Epicureanism is also abruptly rejected as incompatible with the commitment, deriving from ordinary life, that virtue is good. For the general structure of dramatising Cicero's sceptical wavering by pointing to conflicting philosophical and ordinary commitments, see Brittain 2015: 22. See also Schofield 2008: 65: 'Cicero could see all too clearly the attractions of both Stoic providentialism and Academic scepticism in theology, or in ethics both of the heroic Stoic stance on virtue and of Aristotelian recognition of the badness of pain and the power of fortune for good or ill. Working through the arguments on either side not only suited his tastes and skills as an advocate, but gave him the opportunity to enact and perfect the judiciousness and hesitation of the Academic method that were second nature to him.'

[289] ND I. 121. *Epicurus vero ex animis hominum extraxit radicitus religionem cum dis immortalibus et opem et gratiam sustulit. Cum enim optimam et praestantissimam naturam dei dicat esse, negat idem esse in deo gratiam: tollit id quod maxime proprium est optimae praestantissimaeque naturae. Quid enim melius aut quid praestantius bonitate et beneficentia? Qua cum carere deum vultis, neminem deo nec deum nec hominem carum, neminem ab eo amari, neminem diligi vultis. Ita fit ut non modo homines a deis sed ipsi dei inter se [ab aliis alii] neglegantur. Quanto Stoici melius, qui a vobis reprehenduntur*. See also 123: 'Epicurus is making fun of us, though he is not so much a humorist as a loose and careless writer. For how can holiness exist if the gods pay no heed to man's affairs?' (*Ludimur ab homine non tam faceto quam ad scribendi licentiam libero. Quae enim potest esse sanctitas si dei humana non curant?*)

worth considering arises from his pre-theoretical commitment to a certain kind of religious outlook and his philosophical outlook of sceptical colouring. As long as the latter does not allow for a rational acceptance of the former, he shall be irremediably torn between the two.

That Cicero's interests guide the dialogue as it unfolds can be further supported by pointing to the dialectic. The dogmatists, Balbus and Velleius, are never played out against each other so much as they are submitted to the evaluation of a third party, namely, the Academic interlocutor (and, one shall add, in the presence of an impressionable listener). In a certain sense, the focal question seems to be whether dogmatic proposals are convincing enough for a sceptic to abandon the suspensive stance.[290]

A further contrast between Stoicism and Epicureanism is provided by the role that common consensus plays in their respective theories. In Velleius' presentation, Epicureanism is overly concerned with showing why earlier views are fundamentally misguided and rightfully rejected, at the expense of providing a proper account that should replace ordinary views. Velleius spends nearly two-thirds of his exposition spelling out a doxography of conceptions proposed by earlier poets, mythologists and philosophers (ND I. 18–42),[291] and goes on to summarise Epicurean theology in a considerably shorter and more confusing span of passages (I. 43-56).[292]

[290] In this respect, compare those Sextan passages which claim that a Pyrrhonean investigates to find out whether abandoning suspension of judgement would be warranted (see n86 of Chapter 1, Section 3.2 for references).

[291] On the doxographical part, see especially McKirahan 1996, who argues that Cicero presents the Epicurean position in a way that it is discredited on matters of doctrine and on matters of style. In his words, 'There is no pretense to an inquiry after a true account since the truth is given; no attempt to show that earlier thinkers share views with Epicurus'. Instead, Velleius 'stresses the differences, just the opposite of the Stoic practice of *accommodatio* ... [His presentation is] marked by a tone of smugness, intolerance and disrespect. Finally, it attributes to some of the philosophers it mentions views hard to reconcile with other ancient evidence. In sum, [it] appears to be partisan, polemical and *prima facie* preposterous' (McKirahan 1996: 867-868).

[292] On the Epicurean position and its criticism in Book I, see especially the commentary of Dyck 2003.

The inconsistency of the Epicurean position as presented here is even more fundamental. According to Velleius' technical account (ND I. 43-45), Epicurus coined an argument from the πρόληψις of god – and, indeed, coined the very word 'πρόληψις' itself –, essentially offering an argument from consensus for the existence of god, while elsewhere putting emphasis on widespread error and impious conceptions. Over and above contradicting themselves on such a basic point, Epicureans also propose a revision of the concept of god by putting forward their own account which, as Cotta's merciless examination points out (ND I. 57-124), does not seem to make much sense.

In clear contrast to them, Stoics are presented as being much more inclusive in their approach. The highly elaborate system of Stoic theology, as presented by Balbus, is based on the possibility of reconstituted consensus, quite similar in vein to the one proposed in the Epicurean theory. Balbus' exposition starts out with an emphatic appeal to a certain notion of the divine being present in the mind of every rational inquirer as well as of ordinary people:

> Nothing but the presence in our minds of a firmly grasped concept of the deity could account for the stability and permanence of our belief in him, a belief which is only strengthened by the passage of the ages and grows more deeply rooted with each successive generation of mankind.[293]

What Balbus points to is not widespread error and endless confusion. Rather, he hits an optimistic note of general agreement, as well as of continuous progress in understanding. One could, of course, cast doubt on Cicero's formulation standing for

[293] ND II. 5. *Quod nisi cognitum comprehensumque animis haberemus, non tam stabilis opinio permaneret nec confirmaretur diuturnitate temporis nec una cum saeclis aetatibusque hominum inveterari potuisset.*

actual Stoic theology in any of its versions.[294] At any rate, the appeal to the mere dominance of a view would sound particularly strange from the lips of a Stoic, who probably takes it that most people hold confused and mistaken opinions anyway.[295] It is worth noting, however, that one can find examples for a similar move from widespread belief to the existence of god.[296]

One can suspect that Balbus relies on the Stoic theory of common or natural conceptions.[297] This particular theory forms part of the Stoic view on the development of reason, a process during which one acquires the concepts relevant for the rational functioning of one's soul.[298] These concepts supposedly derive from the presentations one receives from sense-perception, without involving any specialised instruction or inference, leading to the formation of preconceptions or naturally arising conceptions. While the latter make it possible for humans to attain higher levels of rational psychological functions, they are at the same time in need of philosophical analysis, in order to correct for the corrupt influence of errors transmitted through society and upbringing.

[294] I cannot discuss this question here. On Stoic theology, see Babut 1974: 172-201; Dragona-Monachou 1976; Sedley 2002; Algra 2003; Frede 2005; Sedley 2005; Sedley 2007; 205-238; Meijer 2007; Sedley 2009; and the papers in Salles 2009.

[295] The case that Cicero misrepresents the approach has been forcefully made by Obbink 1992. In his view, the Stoic theory does not assume actual consensus but rather 'a general tendency towards belief under appropriate ... procedures of reasoning' (Obbink 1992: 202).

[296] For a later example in Stoicism, see Seneca, Ep. 117.6, who argues that the widespread presumption in favour of the existence of gods tends to convince people that there are indeed gods. (*Multum dare solemus praesumptioni omnium hominum, et apud nos veritatis argumentum est aliquid omnibus videri. Tamquam deos esse inter alia hoc colligiamus, quod omnibus insita de dis opinio est nec ulla gens usquam est adeo extra leges moresque proiecta, ut non aliquos deos credit*.) See also his Ep. 120. 4-5; and compare Sextus' presentation of the argument from the common conception at M IX. 60-62; cf. Brennan 1999: 30-31.

[297] As argued by Obbink 1992. But cf. Woolf 2015: 48-49, who thinks it is merely an appeal to widespread belief, without offering any epistemological thesis. From the growing literature on the Stoic epistemological theory of natural conceptions, see further Sandbach 1930; Todd 1973; Jackson-McCabe 2004; Brittain 2005; Dyson 2009; and van Sijl 2010: 1-93. What follows in the main text is a crude summary of the sort of view that can be attributed to at least some Stoics. For a philosophically interesting but historically misinformed discussion of the epistemological relevance of consensus arguments, see Kelly 2011.

[298] See Frede 1994, Frede 1999a.

In Balbus' presentation, Roman tradition can be analysed in light of the Stoic account, and seen in this light, one can see the way in which tradition transmits a true account of various things (ND I. 60-72). This move, often presented as Cicero's attempt at giving Stoicism a Roman colouring, can be conveniently linked to the theory of common conceptions. For some particular Stoics, this epistemological theory also served as a basis for analysing cultural tradition in search of a comprehensive account that was partially lost.[299] Once again, a Stoic could insist on this count too that tradition is not self-standing, but rather invites – and indeed requires – philosophical revision and justification.

At the end of Cotta's thorough refutation of Balbus, both interlocutors reaffirm their previously adopted philosophical stance, and exchange courtesies about each other's rhetorical feats (ND III. 95). This outcome is quite different from that of the Epicurean-Academic clash: here, none of the interlocutors are shown to be obviously wrong, while the truth about their substantive disagreements is still up for grabs. Notably, on hearing them exchanging pleasantries, Velleius cannot help delivering a jibe about the absurdity of Stoic teaching – a reaction that singles him out from the otherwise fraternising group.

In sum, it seems that the real debate that has exercised Cicero in writing ND has been the one between a conformist reliance on religious tradition and the call for a rational justification of religious belief, preferably in the framework of a creationist and fully teleological cosmology.[300] As to the Epicureans, he not only found himself in complete disagreement with their denial of providence, but also depicted them as holding on to an unusually hostile and uncharitable philosophical position which nevertheless failed to make much sense.

[299] On this topic, see Most 1989, Long 2006c, and van Sijl 2010: 95-246.
[300] As pointed out by De Filippo 2000: 178; cf. Tarán 1987/2001: 475-477.

3. Cicero and Cotta: The lesser of two lapses?

It is time to return to the question of Cicero's own sceptical position, this time in comparison to that of his fellow Academic, Cotta. Based on their most salient characterisics, it would be easy to see Cotta as Cicero's mouthpiece in the dialogue. To begin with, both of them are explicitly said to have been Philo's disciples,[301] and both of them hold a high religious office.[302] Their prominent similarities, educational and societal, give reason to expect them to share more or less the same intellectual outlook.[303]

However, while admitting their shared educational background, Cicero ardently insists that he is not going to be biased in his judgement by their common affiliation:

> What we learned [from Philo], I rejoined, shall be Cotta's affair. But pray don't think I have come to act as his ally, but as a listener, and an impartial and unprejudiced listener too, under no sort of bond or obligation willy-nilly to uphold some fixed opinion.[304]

This remark could imply that Cotta and Cicero disagree about the correctness of Philo's teaching, and thus about the proper interpretation of Carneadean scepticism. In my view, however, there need not be such divergence among their views: in

[301] ND I. 17, 59, cf. Fin. I. 16. Undeniably, it is a problem for the Clitomachean reading I offer below that the immediate source of Cicero's source of information about Academic scepticism is Philo of Larissa, the champion of a mitigated view. Yet, we cannot be sure what exactly Cicero learned from Philo, just as there is no reason to believe that he had no access to information about the Clitomachean strand.
[302] ND I. 62, II. 2, 168, III. 5-6, Div. I. 25, 30, 72, 105, II. 28, 70, 148.
[303] For a reading that closely allies Cicero, Cotta and Sextus Empiricus, see Brunt 1989: 190-195.
[304] ND I. 17. *Tum ego: 'Quid didicerimus Cotta viderit, tu autem nolo me existimes adiutorem huic venisse sed auditorem, et quidem aequum, libero iudicio, nulla eius modi adstrictum necessitate ut mihi velim nolim sit certa quaedam tuenda sententia*.

principle, they are both Clitomacheans, and thus in favour of suspension of judgement. The question is, then, why else would Cicero drive a wedge between their positions. It is, some would argue, a convenient way of distancing himself from the anti-theistic case argued by Cotta,[305] or an indication that Cicero is in some sense unsatisfied with Cotta's position.[306]

In my view, this caveat is more about the actual dialogue as it unfolds than about the alleged difference of the protagonists' general philosophical standing. The character Cicero, as he appears in the dialogue, is a semi-fictitious representation of a particular temporal self of Cicero the author; he retains his freedom to form his opinion, and does, in fact, prefer a Stoicising account. As long as such an exercise of his freedom is compatible both with the Academic standpoint and with Cicero the author's sceptical wavering between conflicting views there is no real threat of looming dogmatism.

In what follows, I shall argue for the following claims. First, that Cotta's philosophical position is rather similar to that of Sextus Empiricus (Section 3.1). Second, that it is reasonable to suppose that Cicero reworked Clitomachean arguments against theology, in order to make them more pointedly anti-Stoic than they originally were, but it does not mean that he has thereby fundamentally changed their philosophical agenda (Section 3.2). Third, I summarise in what sense either Cicero and Cotta could lapse from the Clitomachean position (Section 3.3).

[305] Schofield 2008: 82.

[306] De Filippo 2000: 171: 'This difference underlines what I believe Cicero sees as a blind spot in Cotta's attitude towards the justification of religious belief, and it raises serious questions about the way in which the scepticism of the Academy ought to be integrated with Roman tradition.' Or Fott 2012: 175: 'Thus we have sufficient reason to judge that Cicero's verdict in favor of Balbus and against Cotta is not an exercise in dissimulation; Cotta is deficient as an Academic spokesman. ... He fails philosophically because he slips into dogmatic naturalism. He fails politically because his speeches have the effect, and maybe the purpose, of undermining support for religion.'

3.1. Cotta and Sextus

As for his philosophical allegiance, I have claimed already that Cotta is a professed sceptic of the Clitomachean sort, with no love lost for philosophical theology. Even though he is an elected representative of a prestigious Roman religious office, he declares that his position with regard to the gods has nothing to do with reasons offered in philosophical investigation. As far as rational inquiry goes, he comfortably positions himself as an upholder of suspension of judgement. When challenged by Balbus to give his opinion and to avoid arguing for a negative conclusion,[307] he responds by making a division between the warrant required in the domains of philosophical investigation and ordinary cult:

> This [i.e. Balbus' reminder that Cotta is a pontiff] no doubt meant that I ought to uphold the beliefs about the immortal gods which have come down to us from our ancestors, and the rites and ceremonies and the duties of religion. For my part, I shall always uphold them and have always done so, and no eloquence of anybody, learned or unlearned, shall ever dislodge me from the belief as to the worship of the immortal gods which I have inherited from our forefathers.[308]

[307] ND II. 168. 'And for your part, Cotta, would you but listen to me, you would plead the same cause, and reflect that you are a leading citizen and a pontiff, and you would take advantage of the liberty enjoyed by your school of arguing both *pro* and *contra* to choose to espouse my side, and preferably to devote to this purpose those powers of eloquence which your rhetorical exercises have bestowed upon you and which the Academy has fostered. For the habit of arguing in support of atheism, whether it be done from conviction or in pretence, is a wicked and an impious practice' (*Tu autem, Cotta, si me audias, eandem causam agas teque et principem civem et pontificem esse cogites et, quoniam in utramque partem vobis licet disputare, hanc potius sumas, eamque facultatem disserendi quam tibi a rhetoricis exercitationibus acceptam amplificavit Academia potius hus conferas. Mala enim et impia consuetudo est contra deos disputandi, sive ex animo id fit sive simulate*).

[308] ND III. 5. *quod eo credo valebat, ut opiniones quas a maioribus accepimus de dis inmortalibus, sacra caerimonias religionesque defenderem. Ego vero eas defendam semper semperque defendi, nec me ex opinione quam a maioribus accepi de cultu deorum immortalium ullius umquam oratio aut docti aut indocti movebit.*

Apparently, Balbus thinks that sceptical suspension runs the risk of doing away with religious tradition. Cotta defends himself against this charge by saying that his belief and participation in cult is independent from his philosophical position, and provides a catalogue of Roman religious authorities on whose opinion he can rely. He closes his opening statement by drawing a contrast between the sort of justification required by Balbus and himself:

> There, Balbus, is the opinion of a Cotta and a pontiff. Now oblige me by letting me know yours. You are a philosopher, and I ought to receive from you a proof of your religion, whereas I must believe the word of our ancestors even without proof.[309]

Cotta's stance has been regularly interpreted as a sort of fideism *avant la lettre*. He can be seen as a fideist insofar as he refuses to be moved by argument but nevertheless affirms his belief in the divine. Indeed, while Balbus addresses him as a philosopher and a pontifex, in his answer he assumes only the latter role.[310] In a similar vein, one could argue that Cotta not only conceives of philosophical inquiry and religious tradition as autonomous domains, but openly gives preference to the latter. In doing so, he could, perhaps, rely on the authority of the pre-sceptical Academy, and as a result understand Academic scepticism as a mitigated stance that is not compatible with universal suspension of judgement.[311]

[309] ND III. 6. *Habes Balbe quid Cotta quid pontifex sentiat; fac nunc ego intellegam tu quid sentias. A te enim philosopho rationem accipere debeo religionis, maioribus autem nostris etiam nulla ratione reddita credere.*

[310] As pointed out by De Filippo 2000: 180-181. For the fideist label, see his 182: 'It expresses a personal choice about how to live in the wake of philosophizing that has produced only doubt. Cotta's attitude is very much like that of a modern fideist, though occurring as it does in a pagan culture, it lacks the support of revealed authority, as well as the element of faith as a virtue in itself'. See also Schofield 1986: 60 who indicates a 'fideistic endorsement of *patrius mos* made by Cotta in *ND* III. 5' (which he also attributes to Cicero). On scepticism and fideism, see especially Penelhum 1986.

[311] This is the position for which Sedley argues powerfully (forthcoming). He attributes a 'Philonian and/or fideist' position to Cotta, and claims that 'His [i.e. Cotta's] Academic stance in this book is a form of fideism: in his eyes religious faith is superior to the use of reason, and it is Stoicism that

In my view, this is a partial misconstrual of Cotta position. In fact, his stance seems more like a close approximation of the position of Sextus Empiricus.[312] The connection, of course, has been already noted by scholars, who nevertheless failed to bring Sextus and Cotta as close as they could have, due to their misunderstanding of the Sextan position as either proposing an insincere stance or perhaps advocating a complete rejection of philosophical inquiry.[313] Having in place the interpretation of Sextus that I have proposed in the previous chapters, it is now easier to observe the affinity of the two positions and, indeed, the two characters.

On the affinity of their characters, perhaps the following brief summary will do. Both Sextus and Cotta are people of an inquisitive mind who spent a significant period of their life studying dogmatic philosophy. Furthermore, they both refuse to accept any dogmatic proposal that is already on the table. Nevertheless, they remain interested in philosophy, and spend a significant amount of their time reviewing and opposing philosophical tenets; indeed, Cotta even hosts philosophical conversations in his home, including the one that is eternalised in Cicero's dialogue.[314]

Most importantly, both of them are disillusioned with failed attempts of dogmatic philosophy to provide a convincing proof of particular theories, a disillusionment that bottoms out at suspension of judgement and a return to one's

epitomises the failed attempt to found religion on reason'. Furthermore, he points to a passage of Plato's Timaeus (40d-e) that could serve as a sort of religious authority, grounding Cotta's fideist position. I will return to some of Sedley's proposals in the next subsection (3.2).

[312] Let me note that I do not claim that it is indeed the exact same position, or that they derive their stance from the exact same sources. Given the historical links between Academic scepticism and a form of Pyrrhonism, there can be various chains of influence involved in the formation of their independent positions. Cf. e.g. Striker 1981; Lévy 1992: 24; Bailey 2002: 74-75; Striker 2010.

[313] De Filippo 2000: 179 with 20, followed by Wynne 2014: 254-255, 271. At 265, Wynne states the matter as such: 'The difference is this: on a very plausible interpretation Sextus' Pyrrhonist does not think of philosophy as a project which hopes to discover the truth, but it is quite clear that Cicero's Radical *does* think of philosophy that way. So the Pyrrhonist conceives of the goal of philosophy otherwise than the dogmatist, and this affords her insulation from dogmatist debates. The Radical, on the other hand, has never found cause to think any impression true, *but she wishes to*.' Given my analysis of Sextan Pyrrhonism in the previous chapters, I disagree with this 'very plausible interpretation' of Sextus. Cf. also Schofield 1986: 56 n15.

[314] A further similarity is suggested by Wynne 2014: 260, who proposes that Cotta's wide and in-depth learning serves a role similar to Sextus' δύναμις ἀντιθετικὴ.

paternal traditions. In defending his standards for living his life, Cotta refuses the role of a philosopher, very much like Sextus who, in a similar context, labels his way of life ἀφῐλόσοφος.[315] Yet neither of them positively turn away from philosophical inquiry. In sum, the sort of scepticism they espouse, whether or not it stems from the same sources, advocates essentially the same suspensive-conformist outlook, all the while allowing for future inquiry.

3.2. Philonian tampering?

In addition to the broad outlines presented above, a remarkable similarity between Cotta and Sextus is that they seem to employ a similar argumentative armoury. Both of them rely on arguments against theology that can be traced back to Carneades, arguably their common source. The similarity is most salient when it comes to the arguments against dogmatic theology as we have it, on the one hand, in Cotta's diatribe on Balbus' outline of the Stoic account (ND III), and, on the other hand, in Sextus' lengthy counterargument to dogmatic theology (M IX).[316]

However, it has been argued recently that, in Cicero's presentation, the arguments do not serve the original Carneadean or Clitomachean purpose. In this respect, the comparison of the Sextan and Ciceronian variants is quite telling.[317] It is reasonable to suppose that Sextus reports more faithfully – using Clitomachean

[315] M XI. 165. Sextus responds to a challenge to his practical stance: 'In saying this, of course, they do not understand that the sceptic does not live in accordance with philosophical reasoning (for as far as this is concerned he is inactive), but that in accordance with non-philosophical practice he is able to choose some things and avoid others.' (ταῦτα δὴ λέγοντες οὐ συνιᾶσιν, ὅτι κατὰ μὲν τὸν φιλόσοφον λόγον οὐ βιοῖ ὁ σκεπτικός (ἀνενέργητος γάρ ἐστιν ὅσον ἐπὶ τούτῳ), κατὰ δὲ τὴν ἀφιλόσοφον τήρησιν δύναται τὰ μὲν αἱρεῖσθαι, τὰ δὲ φεύγειν.)

[316] On bits and pieces of these arguments, see also Vick 1902; van den Bruwaene 1937: 83-92, 122-141; Coussin 1941; Burnyeat 1982a; Warren 2011, and Sedley (forthcoming); cf. also Woodward 1989: 31 n11.

[317] See Sedley (forthcoming). What follows is a summary of Sedley's much more detailed argument. Compare also Görler 1995: 102: in the Greek sources, Carneades is invariably destructive, and only Cicero presents him as having a constructive and dialectical aim.

sources – on the arguments as having a negative conclusion, that is, the conclusion that there are no gods. Of course, Carneades argued for this conclusion only in order to counterbalance the theistic consensus of a variety of dogmatic thinkers. The goal he aimed at was, most probably, not a denunciation of philosophical theology once and for all, but rather suspension of judgement about all tenets of dogmatic theology presently available.

In Cicero's version, however, the arguments have allegedly undergone a Philonian rewriting, tailoring them specifically against Stoic theology. These modifications would allow Cicero to conceal the atheistic potential of the Carneadean arguments. Unfortunately, however, the material is not quite apt for such a remodelling. As a result, not only the conclusion and thus the philosophical agenda is modified, but the original syllogistic structure is relaxed, while there is obviously nothing specifically Stoic about their targets: they are aimed at a more general theistic consensus, philosophical and ordinary.[318]

Besides tampering with the arguments themselves, Cicero also adds provisos about their proper understanding. Two of these passages merit particular attention. First, already in the preface, Cicero points out that sceptical arguments against providence are only intended to stimulate further investigation:

> This view was controverted at great length by Carneades, in such a manner as to arouse in persons of active mind a keen desire to discover the truth.[319]

[318] Sedley (forthcoming): 'No recognisably Stoic or anti-Stoic premises are invoked in them. The Stoics are treated as vulnerable merely because they are a school that assumes theology to be an area in which reasoned argument is possible, and the fallibilist and / or fideist Cotta intends to show what intractable difficulties that assumption gets them into.'

[319] ND I. 4. *Contra quos Carneades ita multa disseruit ut excitaret homines non socordes ad veri investigandi cupiditatem.*

Is this passage evidence of a modified agenda? Perhaps it can be read in the following manner. As the case for the affirmation of providence has already been made, Carneades thought it important to argue for its denial. He had done so in order to show that people rashly accepted the positive arguments, not realising that the matter is still unsettled and calls for further inquiry. Not being a negative dogmatic himself, he did not mean to rule out the possibility of discovering the truth. Yet, in persons of an active mind (*homines non socordes*), he could incite the zeal for further investigation.[320] This in itself does not seem to favour a non-suspensive agenda more than a suspensive one.

Second, Cicero explicitly prefaces the anti-theological arguments with a similar proviso:

> These arguments were advanced by Carneades, not with the object of establishing atheism (for what could less befit a philosopher?) but in order to prove the Stoic theology worthless.[321]

Once again, is this something we would not expect from a suspensive sceptic? In order to answer this question, it is worth asking first what it would be for the argument to establish that there are no gods. On the one hand, it could mean that, after reviewing the argument, one comes to believe that there are, as a matter of fact, no gods. From the point of view of a Clitomachean or a Sextan sceptic, this would count as dogmatism.[322] This clearly cannot be Carneades' original purpose, and thus Cicero

[320] With *homines non socordes*, compare Sextus' reference to οἱ μεγαλοφυεῖς in PH I. 12.
[321] ND III. 44. *Haec Carneades aiebat, non ut deos tolleret (quid enim philosopho minus conveniens?) sed ut Stoicos nihil de dis explicare convinceret*.
[322] Compare Cicero's urgency of avoiding dogmatic rashness (*temeritas*) in the preface: 'for what is more unbecoming than ill-considered haste? and what is so ill-considered or so unworthy of the dignity and seriousness proper to a philosopher as to hold an opinion that is not true, or to maintain with unhesitating certainty a proposition not based on adequate examination, comprehension and

does not need to mitigate his position here. On the other hand, it could imply that philosophers, Carneades included, could only prefer a theistic position. This could serve well Cicero's apologetic purposes; yet insofar as it does not imply that the sceptic assents to any particular system of theology, it is still recognisably close to a radical scepticism that allows for a non-dogmatic reliance on ordinary life.

All in all, it would be hard to deny that Cicero or his source presents a modified version of the Clitomachean arguments. It does not follow from this observation, however, that this modification serves peculiarly Philonian purposes. From Cicero's point of view, having surveyed the Roman intellectual life of his day, it made literary sense to direct his attention against his Stoic adversaries. Perhaps he wanted to be clear about not favouring atheism as well. Yet, he did not need to substantively change the philosophical agenda to achieve his goal. He did not even need to invent a Stoic target: remember that the discussion of theology in Sextus' M IX, as we have seen in Chapter 4, is introduced with a rather Stoic-sounding definition of philosophy as the Pyrrhonean's target.[323] In sum, his immediate choices about literary execution do not suffice to prove that the position he portrayed is a mitigated, Philonian one.

knowledge?' (ND I. 1. *Quid est enim temeritate turpius aut quid tam temerarium tamque indignum sapientis gravitate atque constantia quam aut falsum sentire aut, quod non satis explorate perceptum sit et cognitum, sine ulla dubitatione defendere?)*

[323] M IX. 13. 'The account concerning gods seems absolutely most necessary to those who do philosophy dogmatically. This is why they say that philosophy is the pursuit of wisdom, and wisdom is the knowledge of divine and human affairs. Hence if we bring the investigation of gods to an impasse, we will in effect have established that wisdom is not the knowledge of divine and human affairs, nor is philosophy the pursuit of wisdom.' (Ὁ περὶ θεῶν λόγος πάνυ ἀναγκαιότατος εἶναι δοκεῖ τοῖς δογματικῶς φιλοσοφοῦσιν. ἐντεῦθεν τὴν φιλοσοφίαν φασὶν ἐπιτήδευσιν εἶναι σοφίας, τὴν δὲ σοφίαν ἐπιστήμην θείων τε καὶ ἀνθρωπίνων πραγμάτων. ὅθεν ἐὰν παραστήσωμεν ἡμεῖς ἠπορημένην τὴν περὶ θεῶν ζήτησιν, δυνάμει ἐσόμεθα κατεσκευακότες τὸ μήτε τὴν σοφίαν ἐπιστήμην εἶναι θείων καὶ ἀνθρωπίνων πραγμάτων μήτε τὴν φιλοσοφίαν ἐπιτήδευσιν σοφίας.) Cf. Brouwer 2014: 8-41, who identifies the definition of philosophy included here as a Stoic formulation.

3.3. Cicero versus Cotta

One question remains to be considered. If, as I have claimed, both Cicero and Cotta are Clitomachean sceptics, yet they differ in some respect, one would like to know where their difference is supposed to lie. In response, I propose two possible readings on which one of them lapses from the Clitomachean sense. While I think that both readings can be supported by the text, I contend that a possible lapse attributed to the character Cicero is somewhat more explicit. Let us have a look at both possibilities in turn.

First, one might get overly attached to a suspensive-conformist stance.[324] A sceptic with an extensive experience of refuting philosophical arguments might find it more comfortable to sit on the fence than to continue searching for the true account. There are indications that, in Cicero's presentation, Cotta has a tendency to lapse from the proper stance and commit himself rashly to suspension of judgement. Thus, for example, he says that he finds it much easier to propose argument against views than in support of them.[325] It is especially the case, he says, in the domain of natural philosophy; thus he compares himself to Simonides who, reflecting on the nature of the gods, could not avoid having 'so many acute and subtle ideas come into his mind that he could not decide which of them was truest, and therefore despaired of truth altogether'.[326] Furthermore, he admits that he has doubts about divine existence, doubts that he could not make known, except in a private gathering:

[324] For a similar position, see the very end of Sextus, PH I. 30.
[325] ND I. 57. 'I always find it much easier to think of arguments to prove a thing false than to prove it true.' (*Mihi enim non tam facile in mentem venire solet quare verum sit aliquid quam quare falsum*.)
[326] ND I. 60. *Sed Simoniden arbitror (non enim poeta solum suavis verum etiam ceteroqui doctus sapiensque traditur) quia multa venirent in mentem acuta atque subtilia, dubitantem quid eorum esset verissimum desperasse omnem veritatem*. My reading of this passage is thus opposed to the one suggested by Wynne 2014: 257-261, who takes the Simonides analogy to establish Cotta's status as a sceptical sage.

> [According to Velleius,] 'It is difficult to deny their existence.' No doubt it would be if the question were to be asked in a public assembly, but in a private conversation and in a company like the present it is perfectly easy. This being so, I, who am a high priest, and who hold it to be a duty most solemnly to maintain the rights and doctrines of the established religion, should be glad to be convinced of this fundamental tenet of the divine existence, not as an article of faith merely but as an ascertained fact. For many disturbing reflections occur to my mind, which sometimes make me think that there are no gods at all.[327]

Seen in this light, even his remarks about the inefficiency of arguments appear to have a different import. In response to Balbus's challenge, Cotta has claimed that he cannot be persuaded out of his belief in the gods (ND III. 5). If taken at face value, this could imply that he has committed himself to a sort of dogmatic view that seriously limits the possible outcomes of his philosophical inquiry. When in doubt, he will take refuge in his suspensive stance; but he would be more than willing to abandon it for a convincing theistic proposal.

This interpretation of Cotta's stance is contentious, and it can also be consistent with what we have learned about the Cicero character in the dialogue. Cicero the character also favours a suspensive position, but cannot give up on the hope that the assumption of providential design can be rationally vindicated. If, for any reason, one does not agree with a lapsarian interpretation of Cotta, then the lapse needs to be attributed to Cicero.

Thus, the lapse could be a temporary failure of sceptical argumentation in the Herculean task of driving out rash assent. In some polemical situations, one might fail

[327] ND I. 61. *'Difficile est negare.' Credo si in contione quaeratur, sed in huius modi sermone et consessu facillimum. Itaque ego ipse pontifex, qui caerimonias religionesque publicas sanctissime tuendas arbitror, is hoc quod primum est, esse deos, persuaderi mihi non opinione solum sed etiam ad veritatem plane velim. Multa enim occurrunt quae conturbent, ut interdum nulli esse videantur.*

to give up on strong pre-theoretical commitments, even if these commitments fall prey to sceptical argumentation. Accordingly, we have seen that Cicero the character finds mere conformity with ordinary standards to be somewhat unsatisfactory. His wish is not simply to follow tradition; he would rather lean toward a philosophical theory which not only incorporates but also significantly reinterprets elements of that very tradition.

In other words, the young Cicero might feel that suspension of judgement tends to take away one's zeal for truth – an impression that the example of Cotta partially confirms. He thinks that Cotta's acceptance of tradition for non-philosophical reasons is insufficient; there is need for an approach in which tradition can be a proper subject of philosophical inquiry. As long as he believes so, he is prone to find dogmatic accounts, like that of Balbus, more compelling.[328]

At this point, it would seem that Cicero is, after all, a dogmatiser or a mitigated sceptic. Remember, however, that the lapse is characteristic of his former self, one who expresses a momentary preference for a certain view, and even then in rather restricted terms. It is also significant that, in the preface of the very same dialogue, Cicero the author reminded his readers that they should not be curious about his own view (ND I. 10). Furthermore, as we have seen in Section 2.2, having a preference for Balbus' account would not be incompatible with either sort of Academic strand.

Finally, and most importantly, the tension between Cicero's two selves might contribute to his general state of suspension. Cicero's overall endeavour seems to be to express his personal state of aporia, that is, the predicament in which he himself is being torn by different commitments and preferences. Starting out from a state in

[328] For a similar view, see De Filippo 2000: 178-183.

which he had various beliefs, he might not have immediately succeeded at doing away with every single case of rash assent – yet he might still be committed to the project of eventually arriving at such a state. Insofar as this is the case, his internal conflict with his former self might retrospectively allow him to exercise his oppositional capacity, and thus arrive at suspension once again.

4. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued for the following claims. First, the character Cotta in Cicero's De Natura Deorum is a Clitomachean sceptic. Second, Cicero the author's considered view is also Clitomachean scepticism, yet he makes use of the dialogue form in order to express his vacillation over time, generated by conflicting commitments which derive from theory and ordinary life. Third, the specific non-philosophical commitments that, at some point of his life, he could not let go of mostly concern the assumption of divine providence. Finally, and much in line with other dialogues of the same period, ND should be seen more as a dramatization of his personal wavering than as a meticulous presentation of philosophical options of the day. To conclude, even if, on a particular occasion, Cicero was somewhat persuaded by a rhetorically well-formulated verisimilitude, there shall always be a next discussion in which the state of equipollence can be easily restored.

Chapter 6. Theology, Innatism, and the Epicurean Self: A Discussion

1. Introduction

The evidence concerning the existence of Epicurean gods has invited ever-growing attention and has resulted in discussions of increasing sophistication. In this chapter, I aim to provide a roadmap to this controversy, and to argue for the following three claims. First, in the debate concerning 'realist' and 'idealist' readings of the Epicurean thesis that gods exist, there is no principled way of deciding which one to favour without having to compromise on some aspect of a minimally Epicurean position. Second, positing an innate disposition to form the concept of god is not going to carry the day for an 'idealist' reading, though it does capture an important insight about the ethical orientation of the Epicurean theory. Third, in accordance with this ethical orientation, we have reason to suspect that Epicurus was genuinely uninterested in what the correct ontological position might be.

Given the state of the available evidence, it is not surprising that conflicting interpretations have been developed around competing readings of the available texts. My aim is neither to settle textual questions nor to provide any new readings, but rather to engage with the main arguments that seem to be allowed for by one or another textual option. Since it is generally accepted that later representatives of the ancient Epicurean tradition are unequivocal realists,[329] I will be mostly concerned

[329] With the possible exception of Philodemus, though that is also debatable. For non-realist readings of Philodemus, see Sedley 2011: 50, followed by Obbink 1996, and Purinton 2001: 188-195, 209-221. See Wigodsky 2004: 212-200 (on Philodemus and Vergil) for a realist rejoinder, and a systematic

with those authors who are taken to provide key evidence for the 'idealist' reading, that is, Cicero – who allegedly transmits the evidence without being aware of its force[330] – and Epicurus himself, leaving the rest of the tradition aside. This attitude to the extant evidence is admittedly contentious; for one thing, it does not allow for the consideration of various technical issues addressed in other sources but missing from what we have of Epicurus himself.[331] Nevertheless, it is arguable that, whatever the proper reading of later Epicureans might be, their account is just as much an interpretation of Epicurus as anybody else's.[332]

In the next section, I will introduce the two main interpretations of the existence of Epicurean gods, and outline a minimal core which has to be accounted for by any successful reading.

2. 'Realism' versus 'idealism': what is it all about?[333]

Despite his reputation of a closet atheist,[334] it is clear that Epicurus signs up for the claim that there are gods. There is, however, significant disagreement as to how this claim should be understood. In modern scholarship, this debate came to be

rebuttal of the idealist reading in Essler 2011. Cf. also Schiebe 2003: 707, Babut 2005: 99-100, Konstan 2011: 60.

[330] Already Scott 1883: 212 maintained that Cicero simply did not understand what he found in his sources. Bailey 1928: 443 and Long–Sedley 1987 II: 148-149 agree, the latter taking Cicero's inability to understand the technical account as 'a fact which virtually guarantees the authenticity of his report'. (Purinton 2001: 182 n1 notably disagrees.) Nevertheless Sedley 2011 finds significant the way Cicero struggles to translate his sources into Latin, and argues that in a key respect – that of innatism – 'his understanding is correct' (Sedley 2011: 31).

[331] Cf. Mansfeld 1993: 174: 'One's interpretation of later reports or receptions of Epicurus' doctrines should be dependent on that of the *ipsissima verba*, not conversely.'

[332] None of this is to deny the importance they placed on doctrinal and personal loyalty (as analysed by Sedley 1989: 103-117). The idea of unquestionably following one's school orthodoxy is, however, not incompatible with having divergent ideas as to what the orthodoxy consists in.

[333] For generic overviews of the two options, see Lemke 1973: 23-41, Scott 1995: 190-191, Warren 2000: 231-236, O'Keefe 2010: 155-162, Sedley 2011: 29.

[334] See e.g. the report of Sextus Empiricus, M IX. 58; Cicero, ND I. 123 (citing a work of Posidonius); Plutarch, Adv. Col. 1112 D, 1119 D-E, 1123 E. For further passages and discussion, see Bailey 1928: 438, Babut 1974: 145-171, Obbink 1989, Giannantoni 1996: 41-48, Babut 2005: 101-105, Sedley 2013a: 145-147.

formulated in terms of 'idealist' and 'realist' readings of Epicurean theology.[335] To put it somewhat schematically, the disagreement between these two lines of interpretation pertains to the following issues: (A) the physical constitution of the gods, (B) the locus of their existence, and (C) the way we come to know about them.

According to this division, a typical realist reading would have it that (A_R) a god is a special kind of atomic compound, one which is somehow free from the change and inevitable decay that is the fate of any other atomic configuration; (B_R) gods inhabit the μετακόσμια or *intermundia*, isolated from the goings-on of any particular κόσμος; and (C_R) we know about them since they emit certain images (εἴδωλα or *simulacra*) of themselves that somehow find their way to our surroundings.[336]

An idealist, on the other hand, would construe the Epicurean position along the lines of quite different answers. An idealist would have it that (A_I) gods have no physical existence over and above either those εἴδωλα we receive from somewhere else that end up as the material for our concept of god, or whatever arises out of a stream of such images; (B_I) consequently, they have no habitat apart from these images, or our mind as it receives and grasps them; and (C_I) our knowledge of gods comes about merely as a result of the operations of our own cognitive faculties; and while these operations do involve certain images as their material, they do not require any divine entities to exist independently of these images.[337]

[335] The terminology might be somewhat unfortunate, insofar as it suggests that this particular debate can be linked to the more general issue that concerns the nature of reality. In what follows, I hope to make clear the sense of the terms 'realist' and 'idealist' in this context, and keep using these terms without quotation marks, as a shorthand for 'realist or idealist with regard to the existence of gods as conceived by Epicurus'.

[336] Some version of this interpretation is proposed by Kleve 1963, Salem 1989: 188-200, Mansfeld 1993 (though more restrained in Mansfeld 1999: 456-457), Scott 1995: 190-201, Giannantoni 1996, Santoro 2000 (on Demetrius of Laconia), Schwiebe 2003, Wigodsky 2004 (mostly concerned with Philodemus), Babut 2005, Drozdek 2007, Konstan 2011.

[337] Noteworthy ancestors of contemporary idealist readings are Lange 1866 and Scott 1883 (building on Lachelier 1877), whose ideas were taken up by Bollack 1976: 225-238, and thereby accepted as the

Not incidentally, realists and idealists tend to think differently about the purpose of Epicurean theology or, more precisely, about the need for providing a theological account in an Epicurean framework. If one believes that there is such a special kind of atomic compound out there in the world that gives rise to our images of gods, it seems necessary to include this entity as an *explanandum* in a proper physical explanation of the universe. However, if one is more inclined to believe that it is more a matter of human beings projecting their ethical ideals into the images of superhuman beings, the need for such an explanation appears less pressing, while more emphasis is placed on the role of gods as ethical paradigms.

Despite their differences, interpreters might agree on a core set of Epicurean commitments which, even if overly general, has a solid grounding in the remains of Epicurus' own writings. In the next section, I will describe two claims that, in my view, belong to such a minimal Epicurean position.

3. Minimal requirements

A successful interpretation, realist or idealist, has to account for Epicurus' insistence that gods serve as ethical paragons for human beings. At the very least, one has to mention the major promise of Epicurean teaching that following its precepts leads to freedom from disturbance and thus to a happy life, a life that can be characterised as 'godlike'.[338] At the core of this is the recognition of an ethical truth,

most sensible interpretation in Long 1977 (crediting it to Sedley at 152 n13) and Long–Sedley 1987 I: 144-149. Further idealist readings are provided by Obbink 1989, 1996, 2002, Schmid 1951, and O'Keefe 2010. Woodward 1989: 46-47 tends towards idealism but seems to waver on the issue. Purinton 2001 advocates a 'dualist' reading which accepts both A_R and A_I, as well as B_R and B_I, as observer-dependent truths about a dual-natured god (see esp. 186-187, 209, 230).

[338] See the concluding remarks of his Letter to Menoeceus: 'Practice these things and all that belongs with them ... and you will never be disquieted, awake or in your dreams, but you will live like a god among men. For quite unlike a mortal animal is a man who lives among immortal goods' (Ταῦτα οὖν

namely, that the ideal life is incompatible with certain kinds of activities; and the conviction that the idle state of flourishing is optimal for all rational beings, divine or human.[339]

There is, however, room for significant disagreement as to how this claim should be cashed out. One could take it to be nothing more than a manner of speaking, a traditionally available description of human flourishing;[340] but this runs the risk of ending up with a trivial position – so that whatever the best life consists in is labelled divine, and whenever we attain that kind of life, in that respect we are said to have become divine.[341] Alternatively, one might argue that the Epicurean position falls in line with a prominent trend of Greek ethical thinking, that is, with those theories that conceive of our τέλος in terms of 'becoming like god insofar as it is possible'.[342] At the same time, taking this option provides a kind of genetic account of how Epicurus might have arrived at his view: taking, say, the Platonic position as his starting-point, he came to reject demiurgic agency,[343] yet retained the role of gods as

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καὶ τὰ τούτοις συγγενῆ μελέτα ... καὶ οὐδέποτε οὔθ' ὕπαρ οὔτ' ὄναρ διαταραχθήσῃ, ζήσῃ δὲ ὡς θεὸς ἐν ἀνθρώποις. οὐθὲν γὰρ ἔοικε θνητῷ ζῴῳ ζῶν ἄνθρωπος ἐν ἀθανάτοις ἀγαθοῖς, Ep. Men. 135 = LS 23J). The first among the elements (στοιχεῖα) of a happy life is exactly the correct conception of the gods (Ep. Men. 123-124 = LS 23B); further references to a connection between divine and human happiness are found in a fragment of his letter to his mother (Diogenes of Oenoanda Fr. 52 Chilton) and the description of an ideal Epicurean community (Diogenes of Oenoanda new fr. 21.1.4-14 = LS 22S).

[339] See e.g. Epicurus, Ep. Hdt. 77 = LS 23C: 'For trouble, concern, anger and favour are incompatible with blessedness, but have their origin in weakness, fear and dependence on neighbours' (οὐ γὰρ συμφωνοῦσι πραγματεῖαι καὶ φροντίδες καὶ ὀργαὶ καὶ χάριτες μακαριότητι, ἀλλ' ἐν ἀσθενείᾳ καὶ φόβῳ καὶ προσδεήσει τῶν πλησίον ταῦτα γίνεται**)**; and KD 1 = LS 23E4: 'That which is blessed and imperishable neither suffers nor inflicts trouble, and therefore is affected neither by anger nor by favour. For all such things are marks of weakness' (Τὸ μακάριον καὶ ἄφθαρτον οὔτε αὐτὸ πράγματα ἔχει οὔτε ἄλλῳ παρέχει· ὥστε οὔτε ὀργαῖς οὔτε χάρισι συνέχεται· ἐν ἀσθενεῖ γὰρ πᾶν τὸ τοιοῦτον). For an analysis, see Warren 2000. See also Mansfeld 1993: 181.

[340] Compare the debate on the 'theistic' language of Democritus' fragments: Vlastos 1945/1946: 580-582, McGibbon 1965: 189-197, Eisenberger 1970, Taylor 1999: 211 n45, Warren 2002: 36-37.

[341] This has been pointed out by Warren 2000: 231-233 who goes on to provide an analysis of the ethical ideal and the sense in which it can be called divine. Contrary to Drozdek 2007: 226, it is implausible that the ethical ideal would depend on the existence of gods exemplifying it.

[342] On this line of thought, see especially Sedley 1997, Sedley 1999, Erler 2002; but also Schmid 1951: 127-140, Rist 1972: 159, Babut 1974: 167-168.

[343] A rejection that might be based on considerations either from natural philosophy (see the evidence in LS 13) or from ethics (see note 11 above) or both.

objects of human emulation and, together with it, an insistence on the need for thinking correctly about the gods.[344]

Another claim that a successful interpretation has to incorporate is that the existence and blissful life of the gods is in some sense evident to us. In the Letter to Menoeceus, Epicurus flatly states that our knowledge of gods is ἐναργής: 'For there are gods – the knowledge of them is self-evident.'[345] In this respect, one might come to notice a connection with the report of Lucretius on the religious experience of early mankind. According to this account, people since the early days of mankind were regularly confronted, both while asleep and when awake, with apparitions of anthropomorphic gods, as well as the apparent design of the heavenly sphere.[346] A promising way to go forward with Epicurus' claim would be, then, to say that insofar as there is a kind of experience that immediately lends itself to religious interpretation, the belief in gods has a veridical basis, and theism is thus epistemically sound.[347]

This might very well be the basis for two further claims credited to Epicurus. According to Velleius, the Epicurean spokesman in Cicero's De Natura Deorum, Epicurus put forward a novel argument for the existence of gods: 'For he alone perceived, first, that the gods exist, because nature herself imprinted a conception of them on the minds of all mankind'[348] and that 'this truth is almost universally accepted

[344] Long–Sedley 1987 I: 146-147, Sedley 2011: 29.
[345] θεοὶ μὲν γὰρ εἰσίν· ἐναργὴς γὰρ αὐτῶν ἐστιν ἡ γνῶσις, Epicurus, Ep. Men. 123-124 = LS 23B.
[346] Lucretius, RN 5.1161-1225 = LS 23A. It is worth pointing out, however, that Epicurus would not recognise the latter, that is, the apparent design of the κόσμος, as a legitimate source for the belief in gods. This, together with the suspicion that these apparitions could not have a veridical basis, might suggest that these passages describe the origin of erroneous views, and thus cannot be connected to the account of self-evident knowledge; cf. Tsouna 2010: 330.
[347] On the claim that every φαντᾰσία is true, see Everson 1990, Asmis 2009, and Purinton 2001: 221-231. Because of the prominence of dreams in this account, one should avoid talking exclusively about sense-perception.
[348] 'Solus enim vidit primum esse deos, quod in omnium animis eorum notionem impressisset ipsa natura.' Cicero, ND I. 43. We also learn from the same passage that Epicurus coined the technical sense of a preconception (πρόληψις) as that of 'a sort of preconceived mental picture of a thing, without

not only among philosophers but also among the unlearned'.[349] Even if there are reasons to suspect that Cicero was tampering with his sources, or that he confused one epistemological argument for another,[350] it does not seem implausible that the former claim – insofar as we have clear and infallible cognition of them, we are aware that there are gods – can set the stage for the latter – that the universal consensus about the existence of gods is indicative that there actually are gods. Even if consensus is neither necessary nor sufficient to infer the truth of the proposition that is agreed upon, it might as well be a corollary to the possession of the relevant πρόληψις.[351]

These are, then, two non-negotiable features of the Epicurean position: first, the claim that the existence of gods is in an important sense obvious (at least to mentally unimpaired cognizers), together with a grasp of the essential features of their nature;[352] second, that they represent the best possible way of life, thus our goal can be described as the approximation of the life of just such an idle god.[353] Abandoning or radically modifying any of these two traits, I contend, would result in a position that no hardline Epicurean would recognise as their own.

In the next section, I will present and briefly evaluate the merits of the four most important kinds of arguments usually put forward for one or another reading of Epicurean theology. I will come to the interim conclusion that the general result that follows from their interplay is a standoff.

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which nothing could be understood or investigated or discussed' ('id est anteceptam animo rei quandam informationem, sine qua nec intellegi quicquam nec quaeri nec disputari possit'). For discussions of Epicurean πρόληψις, see Long 1971, Goldschmidt 1978, Barnes 1996, Asmis 1999: 276-283, Glidden 1985, Hammerstaedt 1996, Morel 2007, Asmis 2009, Atherton 2009.

[349] 'Quod quoniam fere constat inter omnis non philosophos solum sed etiam indoctos': Cicero, ND I. 44.

[350] As it is carefully argued by Obbink 1992: 193-202.

[351] Further evidence for this connection might come from Philodemus' report that Epicurus called into question the sanity of prominent thinkers accused with atheism: Philodemus, Piet. 112.5-12 = LS 23H.

[352] On this aspect of the Epicurean appeal to consensus, see Boys-Stones 2009: 10-11.

[353] On the separate issue of individual divinisation and Epicurus as a 'mortal god', see Lucretius, RN V. 8-12, VI. 7, Cicero, ND I. 43, together with Long–Sedley 1987 I: 148, II: 151, Erler 2002. His status is emphatically linked to his insight into the nature of the universe, on which see also RN I. 146-155, II. 59-61, with Warren 2000: 253.

4. Arguments for and against

Having in mind the schematic characterization of idealist and realist readings I have offered above, one could imagine the following dialectical exchange between their proponents.

First, the realist might maintain (A_R), that is, the physical or biological existence of Epicurean gods. In order to cut short the discussion, the realist would then appeal to the literal sense of Epicurus' pronouncements: he quite straightforwardly maintains that there are gods and that they are living beings (ARGUMENT 1). In response, the idealist will point out that Epicurean physics does not seem to allow for any such immortal living beings (ARGUMENT 2), and if it is so, the best one could do is to reevaluate the sense in which gods might be existent, which means eventually adopting (A_I). In order not to concede this point, the realist will come up with alternative explanations of the habitat and constitution of divine beings (B_R). The idealist will maintain that this is not only lacking from Epicurus' account, but also does not manage to address their main concerns. At this point, the realist will resort to the argument from consensus and the claim of evident perception (C_R) that underlies it (ARGUMENT 3); what is more, this will be connected to the ontological considerations the debate started out with – given that we have images of the gods, there must be something that keeps emitting them (ARGUMENT 4). Finally, the idealist will hasten to provide alternative explanations for both, defending (A_I) and (C_I) instead. The exchange will ultimately prove fruitless: the arguments cannot do much more than reinforce the already existing interpretive bias of those who put them forward.

In outline, the individual arguments and rejoinders go as follows.

ARGUMENT 1. According to the first argument, the meaning of Epicurean pronouncements on the existence of divine beings is quite straightforward:[354] Epicurus clearly says that there are gods (θεοὶ μὲν γὰρ εἰσίν) and that a god is a living being (ζῷον).[355] Such a literalist approach gains further support if one considers Epicurus' insistence that words should be used in accordance with the πρόληψις that underlies them.[356] If so, there can be no doubt about the import of these seductively simple Epicurean claims: there are gods and they are living beings in the most straightforward sense available. Therefore, lacking extraordinary motivations, one should stick to the default realist understanding of Epicurean theology.

In response to this argument, idealists offer two kinds of considerations. On the one hand, they call into question the honesty of Epicurus' claim: given his cultural surroundings, the reply goes, he obviously had to formulate his position carefully in order to avoid unwanted attention and perhaps even persecution.[357] On the other hand, they point out that at least some of these pronouncements are put forward in an imperative mode, that is, not so much as a description of how things are, but rather as a call to think about the gods in a certain way.[358]

A realist can object, first, that an appeal to supposed psychological or cultural motives does not in itself carry much philosophical weight. More importantly, it seems hard to strike a balance between a sincere approval of the argument from

[354] This is the approach of Mansfeld 1993; compare Babut 2005: 107, Konstan 2011: 53 with n6.
[355] Epicurus, Ep. Men. 123-124 = LS 23B. Similar arguments can be put forward with regard to Lucretius' account of religious aetiology (Scott 1995: 191-193) as well as what one finds in Philodemus and Demetrius (Santoro 2000: 151).
[356] Mansfeld 1993: 179-181, 186. However, having in mind the primary sense of a word does not necessarily imply that it is used in its primary sense on every occasion.
[357] Sedley 2011: 50-51. Compare the discussion of the transparency of religious language in Sedley 2013b: 335-341.
[358] As Sedley 2011: 51-52 puts it: '... the advice he offers his reader is about a grammatically singular god, namely one's own. And the advice focuses on how to *construct* the conception of that god, a task in which the reader is given the active role.' Woodward 1989: 46 also talks about an 'unremittingly *a priori* method of characterising the gods', though he admits that a similar language is used in the case of the atoms (47 n84).

consensus and the suspicion of closet atheism. If he did not believe that there are gods, why did he suspect prominent candidates for atheism of mental derangement? The idealist will therefore be forced to reinterpret the self-evidence claim as a claim about the immediate availability of a moral truth that is available upon introspection to each and every one of us.[359]

Last but not least, the imperative reading of Epicurus' proposal can be made consistent with a realist reading, too: someone who believes in the existence of mind-independent divine beings also needs to think correctly about them. In fact, this is quite clearly part of Epicurus' claim that proper piety is required for happiness. The kinds of beliefs we have about the gods go a long way along determining their influence on us: 'It is through these that the greatest harms, the ones affecting bad men, stem from gods, and the greatest benefits too.'[360] This is also part of the rationale for the Epicurean to participate in religious cult with appropriate purification beforehand.[361] Therefore, even if the imperative mode of Epicurus' statement is significant, it is probably connected to the commonly accepted ethical core of the Epicurean position, and does not tell for or against any of the proposed interpretations.

The failure of the realist to vindicate his understanding as obvious provides an opening for the idealist to mount an attack by showing that there is motivation for a revisionist reading. The most important source of such motivation seems to come from Epicurean physics.

[359] As in Long–Sedley 1987 I: 146.
[360] ἔνθεν αἱ μέγισται βλάβαι [αἴτιαι τοῖς κακοῖς] ἐκ θεῶν ἐπάγονται καὶ ὠφέλειαι. Epicurus, Ep. Men. 124 = LS 23B. For analysis of this connection, see Warren 2009: 240-241, O'Keefe 2010: 161-162. For a Democritean parallel, see Warren 2002: 37.
[361] Philodemus, Piet. 105, IG I-56, cf. Lucretius, RN VI. 75-76. In fact, an argument goes, the more important correct beliefs are for achieving freedom from anxiety, the more one should favour a literal sense, making sure that the disciple would not be led astray (Mansfeld 1993: 181). See also Konstan 2008: 145 with n31, Penwill 2009: 101-103.

ARGUMENT 2. The second argument starts from the basics of Epicurean physics: unlike atoms, void and the universe itself, atomic compounds cannot be eternal. Since gods, on the realist understanding, must be atomic compounds, the idealist goes on to object that, insofar as they are conceived of as complex living entities, gods cannot consistently be taken to be immortal.[362]

The most notable realist replies to this concern are the following: either specifying a place where the gods can be safe from the physical processes of coming to be and passing away – that is, accepting what is usually called the theory of μετακόσμια –, or attributing to them a specific kind of physical constitution that makes them exempt from these very processes.[363]

The former option, the theory of gods' metacosmic habitat, was probably proposed by first-century Epicureans who thought that, since gods cannot possibly live inside any of the worlds destined for destruction, only the empty space in-between worlds could provide them with a location where they might enjoy a life relatively safe from the atomic clashes endangering their existence.[364] There are various problematic features of this theory. One concerns its provenance: it cannot be found in what survives from Epicurus, and does not seem to have been obvious for Cicero, whatever his sources for the Epicurean position were.[365] Another objection

[362] The kind of immortality involved in the realist claim is sometimes labelled 'biological' (Long–Sedley 1987 I: 148) in order to distinguish it from the kind of indestructability enjoyed by the basic items of the universe. See also Scott 1883: 225, Obbink 2002: 216. On the conditions for indestructability, see Lucretius, RN I. 526-539 and III. 806-823.

[363] For an overview of indestructability options, see Kleve 1960; cf. Babut 2005: 84-87, Purinton 2001: 219.

[364] See the descriptions of the divine way of life and habitat in Lucretius (RN II. 646-651, III. 14-24), together with the effect your conception of them has on your well-being (VI. 68-79).

[365] Cicero mentions the idea in his preamble (Cicero, ND I. 18), but it is disregarded by Cotta when he proceeds to give his refutation (I. 103-104). Lucretius at RN V. 146-155 promises to give a detailed account but never actually acts upon this promise. Long–Sedley 1987 I: 149 takes it to be an indication that he was unsuccessful in gaining illumination from Epicurus' writings, while Mansfeld 1993: 198

would be that the *intermundia* are supposed to be the places where new worlds form:[366] and what corporeal entity, of whatever constitution, would stay safe, let alone enjoy perfect bliss, in the midst of a Big Bang?[367]

The realist might not feel disconcerted by these remarks. One could very well qualify the initial claim by saying that new worlds form in metacosmic space provided that nothing hinders it happening; and that the ones inhabited by immortal living beings cannot give rise to new κόσμοι**.** Since the universe is infinite, this need not cause any logistical issues: even an infinite number of gods could live in an infinite number of *intermundia*, leaving room for infinitely many new worlds popping into existence each and every second.[368] The idealist will perhaps find this answer *ad hoc*,[369] but that in itself will not be enough for the realist to discard it offhand.

However, the idealist will turn to the attack on another front and argue that, even if gods are not threatened by atomic clashes from the outside, they are still endangered by what is going on inside. On a default realist reading, gods need to be constituted, like any other living being, out of atoms.[370] Thus the internal movements

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n63 points out that Lucretius' poem itself is unfinished. Some insist that there does not seem to be any reason to reject that the idea comes from Epicurus (see e.g. Babut 2005: 87).

[366] Epicurus, Ep. Pyth. 89. But compare the unsubstantiated suggestion of Woodward 1989: 37 that the *intermundium* is in fact not a location in physical space but rather the 'ethereal, paradisal Beyond' of 'pagan orthodoxy'.

[367] One quasi-argument that will surely not get off the ground is that the theory of *intermundia* is 'deeply wacky: do Epicureans seriously believe that there are races of immortal people floating in outer space?' (O'Keefe 2010: 157), even if prominent realists are prone to feel similarly about it (Konstan 2011: 59). However creeky this position is, it might very well be that of Epicurus.

[368] This might be one of the cases where the less than clear theory of ἰσονομία, attributed to Epicurus by Cicero (ND I. 50, cf. Lucretius, RN II. 569-576), might have a role to play; see Sedley 2007: 164-166. Other possible uses of ἰσονομία might include the endless availability of divine images (Purinton 2001: 219) or the self-preservation of gods (on which see below). See also Babut 1974: 161-162, Kleve 1979, Giannantoni 1996: 22-23.

[369] It is hard to pin down any suggestion of how gods could be protected from destructive forces: is it the physical body of a god or the atomic structure of these very *intermundia*? A realist could insist that a process of eternal distribution (see the note above) or the specific constitution and perhaps the outstanding virtue of the gods (see below) makes them safe, yet the idealist will not find it hard to resist any of these moves. What clearly cannot be the case is that the gods are 'perennially worried because destruction could befall them' (Drozdek 2007: 224-225).

[370] Mansfeld 1993: 189.

of the atoms making them up could still contribute to their eventual demise. [371] In fact, on some accounts this internal shaking is the very reason why they emit images of themselves. Because of this possibility, one who wants to go realist about immortal Epicurean gods needs to attribute a specific kind of constitution to them.

One way to disarm the objection would be to say that they enjoy a special kind of atomic equilibrium: 'The gods are thus endowed with a psychophysical composition capable of appropriating external matter in such a way as permanently to replace that which is lost, if for no other reason than at least by the emission of simulacra.'[372] Certain interpreters might be prepared to go one step further, and modify the original claim by saying that the body of the gods is constituted of a different, finer kind of atoms,[373] which would allow regular atoms to simply pass through them.[374]

Once again, an idealist could object that these ideas are not only a bit too *recherché* but also missing from what we have of Epicurus. Even if one is not entirely impressed by these routine objections, it is quite revealing to come to another realisation: apparently, the very same points that are meant to salvage the realist position could just as well be used by the idealist. Indeed, various scholars of a more or less idealist bent considered these very points to be in their favour:[375] what the realist takes to be a description of eternal replenishment might rather describe the

[371] O'Keefe 2010: 157.
[372] Konstan 2011: 57 (on Lucretius). Cf. Cicero, ND I. 49. See also Rist 1972: 144-152, Babut 1974: 162, Salem 1989: 197-200, Mansfeld 1993: 195-198, Babut 2005: 90-93, Wigodsky 2004: 217-220 (on Philodemus). Some of these accounts add that divine imperishability is due to or combined with their virtuous disposition: see e.g. Merlan 1933: 204-217, Rist 1972: 149-150, Wigodsky 2004: 213-214.
[373] A special kind of atoms is available in any case: as Furley 1989a: 163 shows, it was invoked for the explanation of dream-visions, creative imagination, and divine apparitions.
[374] Konstan 2011: 57.
[375] The hypothesis of continuous atomic replenishment was put forward as part of the proto-idealist approach of Scott 1883: 225-226: 'If our theory is correct, Epicurus' answer would have been, that the ceaseless flight of atoms to and from the gods (in the form of images), so far from being destructive to their immortality, constitutes their very being; and that they are eternal, just because they are undergoing a perpetual death and a perpetual birth. This doctrine, if it was that of Epicurus himself, must be supposed to have met with little notice in the more popular accounts of the Epicurean system, which are all that are preserved to us, on account of its comparatively recondite and technical nature ...'

continuous flow of images without the involvement of an entity they replenish and emit from. And if the very same argument supports opposing conclusions depending on one's previous commitment to one or another reading, then it is reasonable to admit that it cannot be sufficient to bring us out of our stalemate.

Yet the realist will not rest content with a draw, but will rather hope to defeat the idealist by way of appealing to Epicurus' theory of perception.

ARGUMENT 3. As we have seen, Epicurus states that our knowledge of gods is evident. A realist will take it to mean that we cannot fail to know the existence and nature of divine beings; in fact, this evident knowledge is the reason why it is generally agreed upon that and how the gods exist. Furthermore, it seems relatively clear that our concept of god is a πρόληψις, which suggests not only that it is built up from previous experience but also that it is veridical and serves a criterial role. While error has to be introduced into the account at a fairly early level, so that the divergence of religious beliefs and practices can be explained away, we cannot be fundamentally mistaken about gods insofar as we have a πρόληψις of them.[376]

In reply, an idealist will insist on a different construal of almost every step in the realist argument. First, the idealist will point out that gods are a special case of perception anyway: they are perceived not by any of the senses but by the mind alone.[377] This suggests that their concept does not derive from sense-perception, thus the kind of evidential status it enjoys needs to be re-evaluated: it is true 'in the sense

[376] See e.g. Salem 1989: 190, Giannantoni 1996: 27, Santoro 2000: 37, 96, Babut 2005: 106, Konstan 2008: 64 with n69, 87 n11. But cf. Bailey 1928: 439-441.

[377] Cicero, ND I 49 = LS 23E: 'Epicurus ... teaches that the force and nature of the gods is of such a kind that it is, primarily, viewed not by sensation but by the mind' (Epicurus autem ... docet eam esse vim et naturam deorum ut primum non sensu sed mente cernantur); Lucretius, RN V. 148-149: 'For the gods' nature is so tenuous and far-removed from our senses that it is scarcely viewed by the mind' (tenvis enim natura deum longeque remota sensibus ab nostris animi vix mente videtur). Cf. also Sedley 2011: 41-44 who, on the basis of passages from Philodemus, argues that 'the προλήψεις of gods are epistemologically unique on account of their purely intelligible content.'

of representing our natural goal.'[378] Additionally, an idealist could argue that the realist alternative does not even get off the ground: we cannot actually perceive the gods who live outside the boundaries of our world, and it is unlikely that their images would find their way through those very boundaries to us; and even if we allow for this, the movements and actions of gods that we are presented with cannot possibly be veridical. Thus our cognition of the divine 'can hardly amount to anything more than our intuitive grasp of a graphically visualized ideal, and could not possibly be, or depend on, telepathic access to a privileged extramundane life form.'[379]

At this point, a realist will be ready with various answers. First, the realist does not need to deny the special kind of access required by these particular images; all that is needed to counter the idealist is to maintain that the formation of the concept of god is sufficiently analogous to the formation of other concepts – the images we receive report on a certain state of affairs, and thus we are justified in forming the relevant concept.[380] Second, the sense in which the idealist wants to claim truth for our πρόληψις is unusual, to say the least; typically, 'true' is used of a real object or state of affairs. The more one is forced to disrupt the general link between perception – whether by the senses or the mind – and veridicality, the more one jeopardizes the criterial function of πρόληψις. Third, in response to the impossibility of having cognitive access to metacosmic entities, one could say that this is exactly where the genius of Epicurus comes in – he was the first to realize that theoretical

[378] Long–Sedley 1987 I: 146. Cf. Sedley 2011: 49: 'And the guaranteed truth of the πρόληψις may well be identifiable with the truth of our intuitive underlying conception of the best life.'
[379] Sedley 2011: 49. Cf. Long–Sedley 1987 I: 148: 'On the other hand, nothing in his theological theory in any way requires the existence of such beings, since even if they did exist they would play no causal part in our own mental apprehension of god.'
[380] Scott 1995: 190-198 insists that the concept of god, similarly to other veridical concepts, originates in and is justified in terms of perception. Compare Konstan 2011: 65 on the Lucretian narrative of images reaching us in a pure and uncontaminated state. This account can be criticized for bringing the case of gods too close to the model of ordinary perception, not doing justice to their specific status that is implicated in Cicero's account.

inquiry can, as it were, break the boundaries of particular κόσμοι and recognize some fundamental truths about the gods without proper perceptual access.

The idealist account downplays the analogy with ordinary perception and prefers to focus on the role of imagination. By doing so, realists object, it runs the risk of reducing the gods to the same status as that of obviously fictitious entities – say, giants or chimaeras;[381] and any such account would significantly weaken the criterial role of our preconceptions.[382] An idealist will nevertheless be satisfied with an account that translates the described process into an account of imagination. This is admittedly a key move for the the idealist: by pointing to the description of concept-formation in Sextus Empiricus, and connecting it to what we have in the case of the gods, idealists arrive at their slogan that 'gods, like giants, are thought-constructs'.[383] The concept of god is, then, evidently true, insofar as the product of our imagination truly represents the intuitive grasp of the natural good.[384] Additionally, the idealist could reconsider the scope of our evident knowledge: it need not include the independent existence of any beings, but rather refer to what the divine nature consists in. Insofar as one succeeds in conceiving of a god, one must conceive of a being that is indestructible and supremely happy; what one arrives at by way of perceiving the relevant images is a conception of such an entity.[385]

[381] This point is made by Cotta in Cicero, ND I. 38, 105-106.
[382] Konstan 2011: 69-71.
[383] Long–Sedley 1987 I: 145.
[384] Long–Sedley 1987 I: 147.
[385] '... cum maximis voluptatibus in eas imagines mentem intentam infixamque nostram intelligentiam capere quae sit et beata natura et aeterna.' Cicero, ND I. 49. Denyer (unp.) proposes an alternative on which we can embrace this point while maintaining that gods are not merely fictitious. As opposed to merely fictitious entities (e.g. chimaeras) that have no existing counterpart, and to ordinary entities that can exist and can be imagined (e.g. an elephant), a god is such that, if it can be imagined, it exists. This argument presupposes an account on which gods have no proper body nor the capacity to be affected nor any involvement with our world. 'In short, given Epicurus' theories of imagination and of gods, gods cannot be merely imaginary; what it takes for gods to be imaginable is all that is needed for them to be real.' Once we grant that this is how Epicurus conceives of gods, the argument works flawlessly; yet it is not beyond contention that this is indeed what it is like for a god to exist (see ARGUMENT 4 below).

In sum, considering the sense in which the existence of gods is evident does not yield any knock-down argument on either side. Insofar as idealists are willing to give prominence to imagination, even at the expense of downplaying the criterial role of the relevant concept, realists can object to no avail. There is, however, not much to convince someone who is in favour of a realist reading.

At this point, as a last attempt to convince their opponents, realists will direct the discussion back to where it started from; but instead of vindicating literalism, they will now argue that the idealist ontology cannot make sense of the availability of divine images.

ARGUMENT 4. Turning to the offensive, realists will point once again to consensus or, more precisely, to the ready availability of divine images: gods were perceived by human minds always and everywhere, which simply could not be the case if it were not for divine beings who emit such images of themselves.[386] Unless we simply take it axiomatic that all possible images are available under all circumstances, we have to suppose that they come from somewhere. Furthermore, some realists add, we could not come to the realisation that they are immortal if it were not for the endless stream of images that reaches us in our cosmic surroundings.[387]

Unsurprisingly, the idealist will not concede any of these points. First of all, the alleged inference to immortality is fallacious: no amount of empirical observation could justifiably warrant it. Second, accepting that the endless stream of images

[386] For a general description of how trustworthy images are produced by existing objects, see Epicurus, Ep. Hdt. 46-53 = LS 15A.
[387] Mansfeld 1993: 198: 'One comes to realize that the stream of images reaching humans can only go on *ad infinitum* if the source which sends them never dries up.'

comes from everlasting gods would presuppose that these gods have existed from infinite times past – that is, presumably, they never came into being; but given the realist assumption that they are made up of atoms, this claim is hardly acceptable.[388] It makes much more sense to assume, proposes the idealist, that images of other beings, especially humans, serve as the material on the basis of which we end up imagining eternal and blissful gods.[389]

The debate ultimately comes down to different readings of what is taken to be the most important technical account of Epicurean theology, Cicero's ND I. 49-50. This extremely problematic passage, the interpretation of which calls for various choices already at the textual level, has been dealt with by every contender in the debate over Epicurean theology.[390] Here and now, I shall focus only on one expression which is in the centre of this debate – the question whether Velleius means that we perceive images that have separated off from the gods, or rather images that flow to the gods. According to the manuscript reading, the claim is that the images arise from the atoms and flow to the gods (*ad deos*). This reading, while admittedly complicated, does not favour any of the rival interpretations: realists accept it as a

[388] Sedley 2011: 49. Perhaps it would be enough for them to be already existent whenever rational beings around to perceive them. But yielding this much will not make it any easier to work out the physics behind this claim. Also, lacking any providential arrangement, there might not be any guarantee that there will not be any gaps (*pace* Drozdek 2007: 225 who thinks that gods themselves are the guarantee that the world exists forever).

[389] Criticized by Mansfeld 1993: 192 and Purinton 2001: 187, accepted by O'Keefe 2010: 159, acknowledged as problematic by Sedley 2011: 47 n52. Note the slightly alternative assumption that all kinds of images are constantly and universally available, proposed by Purinton 2001: 219 and Denyer (unp.).

[390] I cannot claim to do justice to the various proposals put forward by these interpreters. Besides the individual references that follow, note especially Bailey 1928: 456-459, Kany-Turpin 1986, and Purinton 2001: 195-203.

description of how gods are continuously replenished,[391] while idealists tend to think that it tells us about the way we conceive of gods.[392]

Various emendations have been proposed by realists who were looking to bring Cicero's text closer to a description of ordinary perception. The most significant option is *ad nos adfluat*, originally suggested by Lambinus. [393] On this construal, then, we perceive the gods due to the images that are separating off and travelling away from them, so that they come inside the reach of our minds. This solution, however, would not be incompatible with an idealist reading: they could say that it describes the way we acquire the material for our concept of god, they would just disagree about the claim that the source of these images is a god that exists in the realist sense.

At the end of the day, the debate concerning the proper reading of Cicero's passage is derivative upon the connected debates about epistemology and ontology that we have discussed above, not to mention all the possible takes on Cicero's trustworthiness. Apparently, both interpretations can be supported by the text, and any reading of the evidence can be bent to sit well with any of the interpretations. Insofar as this is the case, the text itself cannot serve the purpose of deciding the dispute.

Considering the similar debate concerning the sense of *quasi corpus* at ND I. 48-49 shows that this is not a unique case. When it comes to this expression, some take it to mean only that the kind of body gods have is more than a mere image but less than solid bodies,[394] or that it is constituted out of extremely fine atoms,[395] or that

[391] Mansfeld 1993: 191 n47, reasoning that it is the *lectio difficilior* and – despite his overall caution with regard to external sources – that it can be made compatible with the scholion to KD 1. See also Lachelier 1877: 165 and Rist 1972: 144-146, 174.
[392] Long-Sedley 1987 I: 145, O'Keefe 2010: 159: 'But if we retain the manuscript reading, this gives us the surprising but satisfying notion that the gods just are the result of this process of gathering together these images. The gods exist, but as projected ideals of human perfection. Rather than the gods creating us, we create the gods.' Cf. Purinton 2001: 183, 196, 201-203.
[393] E.g. Lemke 1973: 25, Asmis 1984: 73.
[394] Mansfeld 1993: 208-209.
[395] Bailey 1928: 444-445, Giannantoni 1996: 22-23.

it is not made up of flesh and blood;[396] while prominent idealists think[397] that this is a clue that the gods have a body only insofar as we imagine them as being bodily, or insofar as the endless stream of images represents them as bodily.[398] Once again, the text that many hold to vindicate their reading is in fact hopelessly uninformative in itself, and seems to support one or another interpretation only if further elements of that are already in place.

INTERIM CONCLUSION. It seems, then, that there is no principled way of deciding between realist and idealist interpretations of Epicurean theology. This is not to say that any or both of these readings has to be discarded. They are both perfectly possible, and they can be established on the basis of the texts and with the use of one or more arguments mentioned above. But, at least at this state of the debate, there will be no argument available that can win over someone who is not already sympathetic to the other option.[399]

[396] Sanders 2004, Babut 2005: 97-99.
[397] Sedley 1979: 83, Long-Sedley 1987 I: 147.
[398] Some would go further and argue that Epicurus' antropomorphism is itself an argument for idealism: since the human body is a result of adaptation to our surroundings, and gods could not have undergone such a process of adaptation, there is no reason for them to have a human-like body; yet we imagine them in our image (O'Keefe 2010: 158-160). Realists, however, do not feel disconcerted by this: they go on to devise reasons for thinking that gods would have a human shape (Babut 1974: 154, Kleve 1978: 75-78). In fact, this particular debate is also concerned with something that need not belong to the original Epicurean position, as there is no mention of antropomorphism in what is strictly speaking from Epicurus (cf. Mansfeld 1993: 189).
[399] Cf. the anti-idealist conclusion of Schiebe 2003: 725: 'Wir gewinnen nichts, wenn wir eine Ungereimtheit mit anderen Umgereimtheiten ersetzen.'

5. Dispositional innatism in Epicurus

In presenting the most salient considerations for and against realist and idealist interpretations of Epicurean theology, my aim was to create the impression of argumentative equipollence. However, one's preference for any of the proposed interpretations could easily do away with this impression; it is probable that most of those who take a look at the debate as I have described it would come away with the impression that, despite its inconveniences, one of the competing readings rings truer than the other. On the basis of this impression, one could then proceed to establish what seems to be the correct interpretation by using some of the arguments showcased above (and perhaps seeking further confirmation in sources not mentioned in this paper).

It seems perfectly possible to provide a more or less consistent reading of the evidence along both lines. My point has been, however, that none of the considerations in favour of any reading proves to be decisive, and their proponents have to bite the bullet on some crucial issue. Most importantly, realists will have to adopt seemingly *ad hoc* modifications of the physical theory in order to accommodate immortal living beings, while idealists will have to reinterpret the role of πρόληψις in a way that threatens its role as a criterion of truth – an epistemological price deemed too high by most. In view of the role that pre-interpretive bias and the lack of a perfectly consistent reading plays in the debate, the general result is a stalemate.

The proposal of dispositional innatism, put forward and forcefully defended by David Sedley, is designed to overcome this predicament.[400] On this reading,

[400] To be precise, he calls it merely 'an aspect of the idealist thesis that received no more than passing treatment in the 1987 account' (Sedley 2011: 30, cf. Long–Sedley 1987 I: 146), but it is hard not to see his argument as more ambitious than to be merely complementary to the idealist thesis. In an important sense, it is intended to be a gamewinner for the idealist.

human beings are such as to be innately predisposed to form an idea of god – or, in a simple, non-technical formulation: 'If since the dawn of human history everybody, despite the virtually unlimited range of images to choose from, has dreamt of a certain kind of superhuman beings, it is probably because, consciously or unconsciously, they want to.'[401] This, then, is taken to be further evidence for the idealism of Epicurean theology.

The case for this reading is made in the following steps. First, Sedley argues that Velleius is committed to the thesis that humans have a πρόληψις of god that is literally innate. Second, he proceeds to show that this is not only compatible with what we have from Epicurus, but also provides the best way to make sense of most of our evidence.[402] Third, and this is merely implied by the previous steps, accepting that there is (or that we have an innate disposition to form) such an innate concept of god militates decisively against realist interpretations. The basis for arriving at this conclusion seems to be that the shortcomings of the realist reading – that it is hard to make sense of biologically immortal living beings somewhere out there –, combined with an alternative account of why we come to form a concept of them, rules out the need for a realist stance in the first place.

Admittedly, this approach has a huge appeal. It can explain not only the argument from consensus but also the role of gods as paradigms of human flourishing. It saves us the trouble of accepting seemingly *ad hoc* solutions about the 'science' of there being gods; it makes us understand why divine apparitions involve the same mechanism as dream images and imagination; and it offers us a coherent theory arising out of the consideration of various sources for the Epicurean position. There are, however, ways to resist the conclusion Sedley wants to arrive at.

[401] Sedley 2011: 47.
[402] Sedley 2011: 37.

The realist opposition to the idea of innatism mostly concerns the evidence as provided by Cicero. The discussion is generally focused on the question whether *innata* in Cicero can and does mean 'innate' in the relevant sense. While Sedley argues in detail for an affirmative answer, pointing out Cicero's struggle to come up with a proper translation that would bring exactly this sense out,[403] others have suggested that 'innate' here simply means 'natural' as opposed to 'conventional',[404] or something that is 'grown upon' or 'developed' as opposed to something 'inborn' or more genuinely belonging to the thing involved.[405]

The proper translation and the issue with the accuracy of the Ciceronian account is, I suggest, beside the point. It is more important to realise that dispositional innatism remains neutral with regard to the physical existence of the gods: it is a claim more about religious epistemology and less about the sense in which gods exist. In other words, even if certain Epicureans happen to be innatists, it does not *ipso facto* make them idealists. Accepting Sedley's proposal paves the way for idealism only together with proper anti-realist considerations, and only if those anti-realist considerations are stronger than our doubts about the idealist construal. As I have tried to argue above, this does not seem to be the case.

Furthermore, dispositional innatism is far from being incompatible with realism about the existence of gods. What the innatist hypothesis explains is the reason why, despite the availability of infinitely many other images, humans of all nations and all times universally – with the exception of mentally deranged individuals – happen to tune in to those images that serve as the basis of our concept

[403] One could point out a slight inconsistency between the general suspicion of Ciceronian misappropriation on the one hand and the emphasis on this struggle to translate correctly on the other. It is, however, perfectly possible that Cicero understood some bits and misunderstood others; and even if there is some inconsistency here, it is besides the philosophical point.
[404] Scott 1995: 198, Asmis 1999: 281. Cf. Brunschwig 1986: 125 with n32, Salem 1989: 190 n7.
[405] Konstan 2011: 67-68, who concludes that 'the participial adjective *innatus* retained the force of the verb *innascor*, and meant not so much 'innate' as 'growing' or 'implanted' on a thing'.

of god. A realist Epicurean needs to explain this just as much as an idealist one and, in the absence of any other possible rationale,[406] having a go at such a psychologizing explanation does not seem unacceptable.

What is more, herein lies the greatest appeal of Sedley's suggestion. To begin with, there is need to explain widespread religious belief; with the kinds of premisses that Epicurus and the Epicureans seem to have, it translates into a need for explaining why we focus our attention on certain kinds of images as opposed to others; and what the idealist and especially the innatist put their finger on is that our ethical concern, that is, our inborn interest in the best possible way of life, seems to provide us with an explanation for this universal phenomenon.

On both realist and idealist readings, we tend to filter out those images that cohere with our concern for reducing anxiety. The difference lies elsewhere, in the kind of solace that we seek: for some, it is more comforting to think that the source of these images exists independently of them, while others take the divine ideal to be something that ultimately derives from them and would not even exist if it weren't for rational beings concerned with their well-being. This leads to my concluding section in which I attempt, first, to elucidate this difference in terms of its implications for the Epicurean self, and then to relate it to the Epicurean acceptance of multiple explanations.

[406] Scott 1995: 197 argues that the reason why we favour these images lies in their extraordinary nature. This is convincingly rejected by Sedley 2011: 47 n50.

6. Disagreement and the Epicurean self

I have argued above that neither of the four most common arguments nor the hypothesis of dispositional innatism can carry the day for one or another interpretation of Epicurean theology. Supposing that my analysis has been somewhat convincing, one could be inclined to press for various conclusions of differing strength.

On the one hand, it could be the case that our problem is merely 'epistemic', that is, simply a reflection of the state of the evidence. Since we are not in possession of a sufficient amount of Epicurus' own writings, we lack a solid basis for deciding what Epicurus actually said and how his followers might have developed, distorted, or reinvented his position. Additionally, one could think that his original position, whatever it might have looked like, was hard to fathom or even flawed in some fundamental respect, so as to give rise to the ongoing debates.

On the other hand, we could just as well take a leap and say that the situation we find ourselves in is symptomatic of a more fundamental uncertainty. The abundance of argumentative engagements with the Epicurean position, already noticeable in antiquity, might be taken to indicate that Epicurus was not committed to any articulated position concerning the existence of gods. This possibility has already been raised by interpreters, though usually as part of an explanation of why the idealist reading has never been stated clearly by any member of the school.[407] In what follows, I am going to advocate a less committal version of the claim that Epicurus had no detailed ontological account of the gods.

[407] Notably Woodward 1989: 30 with n4 (who thinks that Epicurus failed to expound a proper theory) and Sedley 2011: 50-52 (who suggests that Epicurus might have been deliberately ambiguous about the idealist import of his teaching). Cf. the remark by Bailey 1928: 444 that the position reconstructed on the basis of Cicero and Philodemus has no link to Epicurus save for the problematic statement of the scholiast to KD 1.

There is a way in which my proposal is deeply unattractive. We are familiar with several persistent debates in the field of historical reconstruction where the opposing sides have developed highly refined arguments with sufficient textual and philosophical evidence to rely on. Nevertheless we would not be content with the general attitude of throwing in the towel every time and adopt the conclusion that, after all, what we were looking for was not there to be found. Generally, such a resolution would be regarded as lazy and intellectually unsatisfactory. In other words, it is still better to bite some bullets and have a view than to refrain from interpretation entirely. I admit that I cannot address this concern efficiently; yet I suggest that there are various ways to go about in substantiating my claim.

To begin with, this would hardly be the only instance where the lack of definite *ipsissima verba* leads to intra-school disagreements. It might be argued that we have reports of such inner divisions in Cicero on as fundamental topics as that of pleasure and pain,[408] the role of friendship in a good life,[409] or the kind of pleasure pursued by infants from the moment of birth.[410] These passages might be explained away in various ways, most importantly by writing them off as arising only from the dialectical interest of a sceptic, or by saying that followers of Epicurus imposed questions on his writings that were not formulated by him, and ended up constructing a view out of the material they had.[411] In response, one should show that in some sense the question of divine ontology was, similarly to that of rhetoric, not of a pressing concern for him.

[408] Cicero, Fin. I. 30-31. Importantly, in this passage, Cicero mentions innatism concerning the pursuit of pleasure and avoidance of pain as an improvement or refinement on the Epicurean position (cf. Brunschwig 1986: 122-128, Scott 1995: 200). Sedley 1996: 316-317 seems initially to accepts this, saying that the Epicurean protagonist cannot rely on an unmediated text of Epicurus, yet goes on to challenge this view in some respects.
[409] Cicero, Fin. I. 66-70. Cf. Frede (forthcoming).
[410] Cicero, Fin. II. 31-32. See Brunschwig 1986, Sedley 1996: 322, Tsouna 2001 with Erler 2001, Warren (forthcoming). Cf. the report by Sextus Empiricus, M XI. 96 on a related debate.
[411] A prime example of such a discussion concerns rhetoric.

One could point out that Epicurus does not seem to have any stakes in the ontological debate. Given his philosophical project, and despite his insistence on rational insight as well as attempts at somewhat technical accounts, he was clearly more interested in the practical effect of his teaching, possibly at the expense of its intellectual appeal.[412] Insofar as he believed that 'philosophy is an activity which by arguments and discussions brings about the happy life',[413] he might not have had scruples with the ethical tail wagging the metaphysical dog: ultimately, any position that is compatible with the fundamental truth about the happy life could have been acceptable for him.[414]

To push it even further, Epicurus might have been happy to allow for both realist and idealist tendencies among his followers, insofar as they do not conflict with the fundamental ethical tenets he propounded. Whether or not one prefers one interpretation of the gods to another, or whether one prefers to have a take at all, could depend on one's penchant for thinking of themselves in a certain way – that is, on the kind of Epicurean self they intend to cultivate.[415] Those who tend to think of themselves as passive observers receptive to the outside world, achieving a blissful state by way of understanding nature, will have different intuitions about the role of religious experience than those whose self-understanding is that of a cognitively

[412] Which is not to say that 'the intellectualist assumption', according to which fear and anxiety derive from false opinions and false value judgements (Warren 2004: 7-8), is compromised: we do need correct beliefs and judgements in order to live well, just not about every thing under the sun.

[413] Ἐπίκουρος μὲν ἔλεγε τὴν φιλοσοφίαν ἐνέργειαν εἶναι λόγοις καὶ διαλογισμοῖς τὸν εὐδαίμονα βίον περιποιοῦσαν, Sextus Empiricus, M XI. 169. = LS 25K.

[414] Compare the way Sextus Empiricus introduces what looks like an Epicurean sort of argument. After arguing that the disagreements concerning the substance, shape and habitat of the gods makes them inconceivable, at least as far as the argument goes, he goes on to discuss a possible dogmatic rejoinder to skirt these controversies: think of an imperishable and blessed being, and hold that to be god (PH III. 4-5). This is often taken to be a minimalistic, uncontroversial core of the Stoic and Epicurean πρόληψις of god; in any case, Sextus apparently takes Epicurus to have been at least initially uncommitted on the kinds of issues the realist-idealist debate is concerned with.

[415] I do not intend the talk of 'self' to be more than crude and minimalistic. Following Long 2006, one can say that 'The Epicurean self, ideally speaking, is a consistently trouble-free consciousness' (202) which is subject to the therapeutical efforts by way of which our capacity to live well is increased (218). See also Erler 2002: 179 on the Epicurean ideal as 'the perfect mortal self'.

active agent actively shaping their moral ideals and projecting them into images of superhuman beings. On both options, the connection between theology and the normative ideal of the self that Epicurus inherited from the ὁμοίωσις θεῷ tradition is reinstated.

7. Theology and multiple explanation

The kind of pragmatism touched upon above – a focus on ethically relevant beliefs and flexibility about the rest – features prominently in the Epicurean theory of multiple explanations. According to this theory, a distinction has to be made between things that admit of one single explanation only – these explananda are, not incidentally, the basic tenets required for happiness – and those in the case of which knowing the precise truth would not contribute to a good life. In the latter case, one should simply accept any account that is not in conflict with the appearances and rest content with the belief that one of the proposed explanations is true.[416]

As it turns out, the prime examples of the latter case are the celestial phenomena. Insofar as we accept that they are not under the control of any rational agent, since it would be incompatible with divine happiness to run the daily workings of a world,[417] we need not inquire into which one of their possible causes happens to be the actual one.[418] At first glance, given the state of the evidence, a positive

[416] On celestial phenomena and multiple explanation, see Epicurus, Ep. Hdt. 78-80. See also Ep. Hdt. 46-53 = LS 15A (several accounts can be consistent with the phenomena directly experienced); Ep. Pyth. 85-88 and KD 11 (there is no point going beyond what is sufficient for happiness – in fact, the only goal served natural inquiry is lack of disturbance). Cf. Hankinson 2013: 74.

[417] Denyer (unp.) shows convincingly that this argument is unsuccessful. Taking his departure from the Epicurean theory of multiple explanations, he points out that nothing precludes the existence of suprahuman yet non-divine rational entities responsible for various natural events but exempt from the restrictions concerning the divine way of life. Considering such loopholes might be grist for the mill of someone who insists that Epicurean arguments are intended more to be therapeutical than logically impeccable; but compare Hankinson 2013: 94-95.

[418] Giannantoni 1996: 48-53, Asmis 1984: 321, O'Keefe 2010: 103-106.

theology going beyond the essential characteristics of gods could appear sufficiently similar to these celestial explananda. Could it be the case, then, that realist and idealist interpretations are equally acceptable explanations of something that goes beyond our perceptual reach?[419]

There are, unfortunately, two major objections to this proposal. First, the acceptance of alternative explanations seems to require that they obtain in different possible worlds, but this could hardly be the case with entities like gods. Second, there are simply no adequate grounds to establish a similarity between intermundane gods and celestial phenomena, and the suggestion does not appear anywhere in the ancient Epicurean tradition as we have it.

As to the first objection, a crucial feature of the theory of multiple explanations is that all of the accounts compatible with our experience are by that virtue taken to be true.[420] This does not pose a problem in the case of, say, the formation of clouds, since some clouds may form in one way and others in another way. However, it is not easy to see how the same could be allowed for the nature of the gods: going along these lines, one would have to say that some of them exist in the realist sense while others in the idealist sense, both exemplifying the same divine

[419] The chapter of Asmis 1984 on Epicurean gods (316-320) leads up to the chapter on multiple explanations (321-330), but this particular suggestion is not raised. It is put forward, however, by Mackey (forthcoming), who takes it that the core explanandum for Epicurus is the experience of epiphany, and there is no need to stick with any of the possible ontological explanations.
[420] O'Keefe 2010: 105-106, Hankinson 2013: 90-93.

nature.[421] While there does not seem to be any explicit denial of this possibility, there is also nothing that could be used in order to endorse this application of the theory.[422]

This leads to the second objection. It is not only that the idea cannot be located in the extant works of Epicurus, but also that none of the later representatives of his school seem to have made any gesture towards it. Putting aside the possibility that they have simply missed out on the opportunity to put to good use their conveniently available theory of explanation, one should suspect that either the disciples or the master himself had good reason to exclude the gods from among the phenomena that can be explained in multiple ways. Perhaps they thought that the best possible way of life is not multiply realizable; or perhaps Epicurus' flexibility with regard to divine ontology and his allowance for multiple explanations derives from the same general methodological pragmatism. In any case, given our evidence, there is simply not enough to go by and accept this suggestion.[423]

[421] A way out of this predicament could be to point to an example in Lucretius. When discussing the possible causes of a murder, the poet offers various alternatives as to the possible causes of death, while insisting that only one of them needs (or indeed can) hold true (RN VI. 703-711). However, it will not do: as it was shown by Asmis 1984: 324-326, what is probably meant here is that there are several possible causes of death in general, where the different types of death correspond to one such cause and thus to one of the many multiple explanations; and all of them are true in the sense that there are individual instances of death due to each of these causes. The general requirement of truth is thereby not relaxed.

[422] Perhaps a far shot would be to connect it to Philodemus' claim that not only all the Greek gods exist but also many others beyond them (see Obbink 2002). It is, however, a position concerned not so much with the mode of existence but rather with the individual identity of gods.

[423] Alternatively, the device of multiple explanation could be understood as merely epistemic: asserting a disjunction of epistemically possible explanations, one need not thereby assert the truth of any one of them in particular. If so, the move that all of the possible explanations is true in one of many universes could have been invented by Epicureans in order to make true all the explanations included in the disjunction. Were that the case, one could argue that Epicureans did not invoke it in a theological context merely because the later tradition tended to be uniformly realist about the gods.

Conclusion

I have argued that the usual arguments invoked in the debate between realist and idealist interpretations of Epicurus' theology are ultimately unsatisfactory, and that both options leave important issues unsolved. Most importantly, realists cannot offer an unproblematic account of the physical existence of gods, while idealists endanger the criterial role of preconceptions. Then I went on to discuss the suggestion that Epicurus was a dispositional innatist and, without taking a stance in this debate, I attempted to show that this claim could sit well both with realist and idealist readings. In conclusion, I suggested that Epicurus might have been uninterested in and non-committal with regard to the core questions of this debate.

It is at least possible, then, that all the detailed interpretations put forward in the contemporary discussion between idealists and realists are nothing but the latest developments of the kind of interpretive struggle that ancient Epicureans were already engaged with. The fundamental ethical truth of Epicureanism is not subject to this disagreement; but there is a lot of intellectual effort aimed at restoring what various readers, due to their individual concerns, take to be Epicurus' intellectual integrity. Conversely, lacking a flawless account, different readers are willing to compromise at different points. In other words, if someone derives calmness of mind from accepting one or another view about the existence of the gods, while attributing to them nothing that is detrimental to the ideal of eternal happiness they stand for, I doubt that Epicurus would find much fault with taking comfort in such a position.

Concluding remarks

In this dissertation, I have presented a suspensive-conformist stance at work in selected works of Sextus Empiricus. I have argued that Sextus understands his brand of scepticism as a middle state between philosophising in a dogmatic manner on the one hand, and living an ordinary life without ever engaging in philosophical inquiry on the other. According to my interpretation, this position avoids dogmatic conformism and allows for ongoing philosophical inquiry.

In Chapter 1, I have analysed the Sextan narrative of a philosophical inquirer coming to achieve such a stance. On the reading I have arrived at, Pyrrhonism is a kind of philosophy that agrees with ordinary life where the dogmatist disagrees with it. All the while, the sceptic is aware of the possibility of ordinary dogmatism as well. Such a stance, I have argued, is available to someone who returns to ordinary life after a fair bit of philosophising that has eventually led to the sceptical conversion.

In Chapters 2 to 4, I have examined the way in which this stance applies to the domain of theology. According to Sextus, the Pyrrhonean argues against the claims of dogmatic theology but nevertheless participates in ordinary cult. The dismissal of theological tenets is part of a general opposition to dogmatism, paving the way for equipollence and thus to suspension of judgement. At the same time, Sextus maintains that the characteristic suspension he propagates need not make his fellow sceptics into non-observant members of their respective communities: they can participate in religious cult as part of their living a life following appearances.

In Chapter 5, I turned to Cicero's dialogue De Natura Deorum. I have argued that the Academic interlocutor of the dialogue, Cotta, occupies a philosophical position which closely resembles the suspensive-conformist stance I attributed to

Sextus. Furthermore, I have argued that, in the context of the intra-Academic debate, both Cicero and Cotta represent a Clitomachean interpretation of Carneadean scepticism. Finally, I briefly analysed the structure of this work, and argued that the dialogue at large is designed to express Cicero's hesitancy about a life of sceptical conformism and his attraction to a set of dogmatic theological beliefs. Thus, in my view, De Natura Deorum is consistently sceptical, and does not abandon Clitomachean scepticism.

In Chapter 6, I turned to the contemporary debate about the sense in which Epicurean gods are said to exist. I have argued that there is no principled way to decide between 'realist' and 'idealist' interpretations without giving up on crucial features of a minimally Epicurean position. In addition to the four main types of argument used in the debate, I have considered the proposal of dispotional innatism, in order to show that it is compatible with either of the two readings. Finally, I have pointed to Epicurus' methodological pragmatism, and suggested that he might have never put forward the kind of account that his ancient followers and contemporary interpreters were looking for.

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