

Sextus on Academic Philosophy: Neither Dogmatism nor Pyrrhonism

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ABSTRACT: This paper criticizes the interpretation that Sextus considered Academic philosophy as a form of dogmatism, either negative or positive. First, it offers an interpretation of Academic philosophy as a third main kind of philosophy distinct from dogmatism. Next, it examines what Sextus says concerning each major Academic: Arcesilaus, Carneades, and Clitomachus. Finally, it holds that Academic philosophy is the closest philosophical neighbor to skepticism by developing a new interpretation of the final part of the *Outlines*. In each case, it is shown that, for Sextus, both Pyrrhonism and Academic philosophy are non-dogmatic, and that they differ in their specific ways of being non-dogmatic. The main thesis of this paper is that Academic philosophy is closer to skepticism than to dogmatism.

KEY WORDS: Academic philosophy, Carneades, Clitomachus, dogmatism, Pyrrhonian skepticism, Sextus Empiricus, suspension of judgment.

1. The Interpretive Issue¹

An important issue in understanding ancient skepticism is to assess the relations between Pyrrhonism and Academic philosophy.² I will focus on Sextus' relation to the Academics. But I want to narrow down the

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² By 'Academic philosophy,' I will refer only to that period of the Academy that goes from Arcesilaus to Clitomachus, as is usual. This period covers the so-called Middle Academy, that of Arcesilaus, and the New Academy, that of Carneades and Clitomachus (PH 1.220). Following Sextus, 'skepticism' will be used only for Pyrrhonism, unless otherwise indicated.

scope of this paper even more than that. I do not want to reconstruct Academic philosophy based on what Sextus attributes to it. This task demands a book on its own.³ Nor do I wish to investigate what Sextus borrows from the Academics, which is far more extensive and important than it might appear at first sight. My topic is only what Sextus has to say about Academic philosophy from the point of view of conceiving it as a main kind of philosophy and its relation to dogmatism and skepticism. What is Sextus' conception of Academic philosophy? How does he conceive Academic philosophy as a kind of philosophy?

Sextus is famous for being unfair to Academic philosophy, especially in PH 1. By perhaps adhering to a biased interpretation, he came not to think so highly of Academic philosophy. Moreover, he needed to find a place for Pyrrhonism, and so he had to push Academic philosophy away, demarcating his own territory. In doing this, maybe he was following Aenesidemus' footsteps, for the latter criticized Academics as dogmatists, at least those of his time, saying that Stoics combat Stoics.⁴ From this perspective, Academic philosophy was transformed into a kind of dogmatism.⁵

Not surprisingly, many scholars, if not most of them, attributed to Sextus a similar interpretation, according to which, for Sextus, Academic philosophy is nothing but *negative dogmatism*. Frede (1998b: 141) says that "later authors, like Sextus, entertain the possibility, or even assume as a fact, that Academic sceptics in general were dogmatic," commenting on PH 1.226–231 and PH 1.3, while Bett (2019: 39) says that "these Academics [Carneades and Clitomachus] assert as a definite conclusion that everything is inapprehensible, which makes them negative dogmatists." Though this passage does not imply that Bett sees the Academics as negative dogmatists, it suggests that this is Sextus' view.⁶

According to this view, Sextus not only sharply distinguishes Pyrrhonism from Academic philosophy, but he also considers Academic philosophy as a species of dogmatism. Academic philosophers hold dogmas as well, not only in the sense of *denying* what dogmatists affirm, but also in *affirming* some philosophical doctrines as more convincing or persuasive. In sum, if Academics deny that knowledge is possible (or

³ See Ioppolo (2009) and Bolzani (2012).

⁴ See Ioppolo (2009: 21).

⁵ See Frede (1998b).

⁶ See also Porchat (2013: 292) and Sienkiewicz (2019: 26, n. 30).

affirm that all things are inapprehensible) or if they claim that some views are more plausible than others, then they are dogmatists.

I reject this interpretation of Sextus' conception of Academic philosophy as dogmatic. It does not do justice to what Sextus says about it. In my view, his position vis-à-vis Academic philosophy is more nuanced. Casey Perin (2010: 3) said that "it is far from clear in our sources, and so a matter of interpretation, whether the Academics, and especially Arcesilaus and Carneades, were negative dogmatists." My point is that it is not clear even that Sextus conceives Academic philosophy as a negative dogmatism. Perhaps we find in Sextus some evidence that Sextus shares this more subtle view of Academic philosophy.

The main point of this paper is to show that, for Sextus, Pyrrhonism and Academic philosophy are varieties of anti-dogmatism, thereby repudiating the consensus among scholars in treating Academic philosophy as a species of dogmatism. But, of course, there are different kinds of anti-dogmatism. In defense of this interpretation, I propose five arguments.

In section 2, I examine the opening passage of the *Outlines* (PH I.1-4). I argue that this passage has not been well understood. Instead of seeing it as dividing the main kinds of philosophy into two: on the one hand, dogmatists (properly and improperly so-called) and, on the other, skeptics, or as three kinds based on three different attitudes toward a proposition, I propose to take Sextus seriously and explain the "logic" behind this tripartite distinction. Academic philosophy will emerge as closer to skepticism than to dogmatism, for it is also an anti-dogmatic philosophy.

The next sections will take in turn Sextus' views on the main Academic philosophers: Arcesilaus, Carneades, and Clitomachus. In section 3, I will argue that, for Sextus, Arcesilaus is so much closer to skepticism than to dogmatism that he is almost a perfect Pyrrhonist. This is not an original idea; I hope to offer new arguments in support of this conclusion.

Section 4 shows first that Sextus does not take Carneades as a dogmatist. A dogmatist is, by definition, a person who assents to something non-evident (PH I.13, I.16). The main point is that neither Pyrrhonists nor Academics assent to what is non-evident (*ἄδηλον*), for Academic philosophers assent deliberately and with intensity to appearances (*φαντασίαι*), but skeptics merely give in and follow what appears

(φαινόμενον). Once again, Academic philosophy and skepticism are closer to each other than any of them to dogmatism. Next, this section argues that both Clitomachus and the skeptic have a common enemy: they both fight against dogmatism (M 9.1). So, they are closer to each other than to dogmatism. However, they differ in method. While the Academic relies only on what is granted by the dogmatist, in a lengthy procedure, maybe even endless, the skeptic has a much more effective method, attacking dogmatism in a systematic way.

The last argument, in section 5, is more speculative, but, I hope, not uninteresting, about Academic philosophy as a neighbor philosophy (PH 1.226–234). The point is that Sextus' criterion is not only chronological, but also in terms of vicinity. My suggestion is that philosophical affinities are taken into account too, so that he sometimes changes the chronological order, treating closer philosophers, though older, later. Since this interpretation of the criteria for ordering neighbor philosophies fits well with previous arguments, it may have some force.

All these arguments show that Sextus considers Academic philosophy as much closer to Pyrrhonism than is usually accepted. By being 'much closer,' I mean that both Pyrrhonism and Academic philosophy initially oppose dogmatic philosophy. In this opposition, they share important features, and Academic philosophy may properly be called a form of anti-dogmatism. However, they are distinct in other ways, which, though very important, are less important than their distinction from dogmatism.

By showing the subtleties of Sextus' conception of Academic philosophy as a main form of philosophy on its own, with its history and development, I hope to contribute to doing full justice to Sextus' attitude towards Academic philosophy as a third main kind of philosophy on its own, and to outline a more complex picture of the relations between Pyrrhonism and Academic philosophy.

2. Is Academic Philosophy a Kind of Dogmatism?

Let me, first of all, reconsider the initial sections of the *Outlines*. Here is the full passage:

[1] The natural result of any investigation is that the investigators either discover the object of search or deny that it is discoverable and confess it to be inapprehensible or persist in their search. [2] So, too, with regard to the objects investigated by philosophy, this is probably why some have claimed to have discovered the

truth, others have asserted that it cannot be apprehended, while others again go on inquiring. [3] Those who believe they have discovered it are the ‘Dogmatists,’ especially (ἰδίως) so called—Aristotle, for example, and Epicurus and the Stoics and certain others; Clitomachus and Carneades and other Academics treat it as inapprehensible: the Sceptics keep on searching. [4] Hence it seems reasonable to hold that the main types of philosophy are three—the Dogmatic, the Academic, and the Sceptic. (PH 1.1–4; Bury’s translation)

Sextus is *arguing* for the existence of three main kinds of philosophy, and this conclusion is characterized as “reasonable.” If so, [1–3] presents the premises of the argument. First, Sextus makes a general remark about the possible results of any investigation; next, since philosophy is an investigation, he points out the possible results of a philosophical investigation; then, he offers examples of each possible philosophical result; finally, the conclusion [4] follows.

What is the ‘logic’ behind this reasoning (or behind this threefold classification)? How does Sextus arrive at the conclusion?

According to the traditional reading, Sextus focuses on finding truth. So, what matters is that, on the one hand, dogmatists claim to have found out the truth, and Academics declare that it cannot be found, and on the other, the skeptic makes no assertion at all. Academics are characterized as those who *have asserted* (ἀπεφάναντο) that things cannot be apprehended (PH 1.3). According to Sextus, the term “assertion” has two senses, and in one of them, to deny is to assert (PH 1.192). To deny something is as dogmatic as to affirm it (PH 2.79). Thus, on the one hand, there are those who make assertions (about how things are and that nothing can be known) and, on the other, those who suspend judgment. This seems to be Ioppolo’s (2009, 31) reading, for she says “first of all, it is not a threefold distinction, but rather a twofold one, in which dogmatists, positive and negative, are opposed to skeptics.” According to this reading of the logic of the argument, what Sextus does first is to distinguish skepticism from another kind of philosophy, dogmatism, and then, he distinguishes the rival view into two subspecies, positive and negative dogmatism.

But this explanation of the logic of the division seems inadequate to me. If Sextus wants to pick out skepticism, and the division between dogmatism (whether positive or negative) and skepticism suffices for this purpose, why move on in order to distinguish two species of the rival kind? Let them fight among themselves! Or, at least, let them present their own philosophies (PH 1.4). It doesn’t make sense to call

attention to Academics if they were just a kind of dogmatists. Not only is the number of positive dogmatists vast, whereas the number of Academics is small, but also the importance of positive dogmatism is by far greater than Academic philosophy. A correct reading of this passage must do justice to Sextus' conclusion that Academic philosophy is a third kind of philosophy as important a kind of philosophy as dogmatism and skepticism.

Note that these three are "the main (highest, most general: *ἀνωτάτω*) kinds" of philosophy. As I take it, philosophy is the genus, and dogmatism, Academic philosophy, and skepticism are the three species *immediately* below it. If the traditional reading were right, there would be only two main kinds, and between positive dogmatism and negative dogmatism, as subspecies, there would be dogmatism as a species. But, clearly, at least to me, dogmatism is a species of the genus philosophy, and Aristotelianism, Stoicism, and Epicureanism are subspecies of dogmatism as a species, whereas Academic philosophy is not. Academic philosophy is a species of its own, with perhaps these subspecies: the Middle Academy of Arcesilaus, on the one hand, and the New Academy of Carneades and Clitomachus, on the other.

Consider the argument used by the traditional interpretation: Academics are dogmatists, for they hold the negative claim that knowledge is not possible; negative claims are also a form of dogmatism (PH I.192, 2.79); therefore, Academics are dogmatics. In my view, the correct argument should be the opposite: if Academics were dogmatists, there would be only two main kinds of philosophy, not three; but there are three main kinds; therefore, Academics are not dogmatic. This interpretation is more adequate to the text.

Besides, if the traditional explanation were the right one, there should be an equivalence between the threefold distinction in PH I.1–3 and the threefold distinction in disagreement (Barnes 1990: 11–15). But there is no such equivalence. A triple disagreement has exactly this form: some affirm *p*, some deny *p*, some suspend judgment about *p* (e.g., PH 2.18–20, 2.31–33, 2.180, 2.259, 3.65, 3.119). If there were an equivalence, then the negative position would often be occupied by Academic philosophy. But the role of negative dogmatism is almost never played by Academic philosophy. In some cases, like the issue about the existence of gods (M 9.137–190), Carneades developed its negative side, as suggested by M 9.140. Should we conclude that Carneades was an atheist

denying the existence of gods? This conclusion seems inappropriate, for he was probably only arguing dialectically, and Sextus arguably knew it, since he did not include Carneades among the atheists (M 9.50–8).

Now, one might insist that the threefold distinction in PH 1.1–4 is a *particular* case of *the basic disagreement* among dogmatists, Academics, and skeptics. It does not concern those issues investigated in PH 2–3 or M 7–11, but it concerns the particular issue of whether knowledge is possible. Concerning the question “Is knowledge possible?”, dogmatists say that it is possible, whereas Academics say that it is impossible, and skeptics suspend judgment. And this very important question is what lies behind PH 1.1–4.

To this objection, I answer, first, that nowhere does Sextus examine this question. How could a non-investigated question lie behind the most important distinction among kinds of philosophy? Still, one might reply, there is a sense in which what is under investigation is whether we can apprehend things (criterion, signs, causes, etc.), and Academics do say that all things are inapprehensible. But, again, Sextus does not characterize the negative side of these questions as Academic. It is still dogmatism. But Academic philosophy is different from dogmatism. Thus, we still need an understanding of the specificity of the Academic position.

Here is a possible solution. Dogmatism is a kind of philosophy that has doctrines about what is non-evident (PH 1.13, 1.16); it describes how things are in their own nature. A doctrine says how many causes there are and what their kinds are. A philosophy that does not have doctrines in this sense is not dogmatic. Academics do not claim anything of this sort. They do not even affirm that there are no causes. What they say is that “one cannot know whether there are causes or not.” They are not committed to the negative side (“causes do not exist”), but what they affirm is that “we cannot tell which side is correct for good.” The first part of this sentence is very similar to what skeptics say (neither Academics nor skeptics have doctrines); where they differ is in its ending: ‘for good,’ since Academics think it is impossible to know anything about causes (even if they do exist or not), whereas skeptics think it might be possible to know them (PH 1.226).

Second, Sextus is not thinking of philosophy as a matter of taking an attitude towards a proposition. For Sextus, philosophy is, first and foremost, an *investigation*; it is the activity of searching for the truth

about non-evident things. Accordingly, what characterizes Academic philosophy is not to deny *p*, but the fact that Academic philosophers think investigation cannot discover what is being investigated, thereby giving up this investigation by declaring that the non-evident object under investigation is inapprehensible; they put a stop to investigation. Similarly, persistence in investigation is even more important to being a skeptic than suspending judgment, though, for Sextus, these go hand in hand. The suspensive attitude is the *result* of the investigation, not something that stands on its own. There are three doxastic attitudes, but they supervene on the three possible results of the philosophical investigation. In sum, the idea that philosophy is the activity of investigating what is true, not merely an attitude to a proposition, points to the right understanding of PH 1.1-4.

Why are there only three possible results? Here is the ‘logic,’ as I see it: in any investigation (*a fortiori*, in philosophical investigation), one is looking for something (truth). Now, one can find it or not. These two alternatives exhaust the logical possibilities of the outcome. Those who think they have found out what is true are properly called dogmatists, like Aristotle. What about those who think that they didn’t find it? Well, they are at least non-dogmatic philosophers. There are two, and only two, alternatives for these non-dogmatic philosophers: either they stop investigating or they do not stop investigating. Hence, there are two kinds of non-dogmatic philosophers: those who give up searching for what is true, i.e., Academics, like Carneades and Clitomachus; and those who continue searching, namely skeptics. So, besides dogmatic philosophers, there are two further main kinds of philosophers.

Now, this line of thinking explains why Sextus needs to distinguish a third kind of philosophy by drawing a new distinction among the non-dogmatic philosophers. Skepticism would not be sufficiently defined by the first exhaustive, logical distinction of the results of an investigation (finding or not finding truth). A second specific difference within the genus is needed, and what distinguishes the two subgroups of philosophers is whether one stops inquiring or not.

Let me summarize the logic of PH 1.1-4. (1) The dogmatist investigates the true, so he is a philosopher; and (2) she believes she has found it out; it makes no longer sense (3) to go on searching for what she thinks she has got. (1) The skeptic investigates the truth about non-evident things, so he is a philosopher; (2) he didn’t find truth, so he is a

non-dogmatic philosopher; and (3) he goes on searching for it, so he is a skeptical philosopher. A similar process of definition applies to Academic philosophers: (1) they seek truth (they are philosophers); (2) but they didn't find it; and (3) they give up searching. Dogmatists part company in (2), while skeptics and Academics share (1) and (2). They part company only in (3). Dogmatists stop investigating in (2) and Academics in (3). Thus, Academics are closer to skeptics, but they also share one characteristic with dogmatists.

If this is the correct explanation, then the thesis of this paper has a good argument in its favor: Academics are closer to skeptics than to dogmatists. The first important aspect to identify which main kind of philosopher one belongs to is whether one thinks one has found out what is true. Academic philosophers, just like skeptics, do not think they have found the truth. As such, they are not *at all* dogmatists. Only those who think they have found out what is true are to be considered dogmatists (PH 1.3). This shows, from the very beginning, a very important affinity between Academics and skeptics. Their joint opposition to dogmatism is what comes first, and then, despite their common anti-dogmatism, Sextus distinguishes the ways in which they relate to investigation: whereas one gives up investigation, the other goes on searching.

One may point out that, even if we consider investigation as the 'logic' behind the threefold distinction, one might hold that there are two basic positions: either one stops the investigation, or one continues the investigation. If this is so, Academic philosophy is closer to dogmatism, not to Pyrrhonism. To stop the investigation, one must be dogmatic.

In response to this objection, I say that one does not need to be a dogmatist to stop investigation, since one can stop for other reasons, not because she thinks she has found out truth. Academics interrupt their investigation, perhaps for two reasons. First, they seem committed to the idea that it is plausible (*πιθανόν*) that things cannot be apprehended. But this is not dogmatic: what Academics assent to is an appearance (*φαντασία*), not something non-evident (*ἄδηλον*) (PH 1.229–30). I will come back to this point. Second, since every attempt to discover has failed, disappointment ensues. It is not natural to persevere in an activity if it only brings about frustration. Perhaps, had he reached tranquillity, he would become a Pyrrhonist. These reasons, if correct, could be intertwined. Academics assent to the appearance that things are

inapprehensible because their investigations led to nothing but frustration. At least, so Sextus might have thought.

Now, against this interpretation, one might argue that Sextus characterizes Aristotle and the Stoics as dogmatists “in the proper sense (*ἰδίῳ*) of the word,” implying that Academics are also dogmatists, though improperly so-called. Sextus, following Aenesidemus, was interested in making room for Pyrrhonism, and in order to do that, he needed to distance Pyrrhonism from Academic philosophy. In fact, Aenesidemus said that the dispute between Academics and Stoics was “Stoics fighting Stoics.” If so, it is natural that Sextus saw Academic philosophy as a mere variation of dogmatic philosophy. According to Frede (1998b: 149), “Sextus himself had a vested interest in seeing the Academy in general as dogmatic. After all, the supposed dogmatism of the Academy is the main rationale for Pyrrhonism.” As Frede (1998b: 149) reminds us, “remarks in Sextus suggested that the dogmatic skepticism of the late Academy was the position of the Academy in general. For Sextus in part relied on Antiochus for his view on the Academic position, and Antiochus saw Carneades, perhaps Arcesilaus and Carneades, as dogmatic skeptics.” Thus, Academics were characterized by Sextus as improper dogmatists.

It is true that Sextus makes a sharp distinction between skeptics and Academics. But does this mean that Sextus saw Academics as improper dogmatists? What is the exact meaning of *ἰδίῳ* in the passage? This is usually translated as “properly” (Mates: “properly”; Annas and Barnes: “in the proper sense”; Pellegrin: “au sens propre”; Cao and Diego: “propriamente”) or in the strict sense (Hossenfelder: “im engeren Sinne”). All these translations seem to imply that there is an ‘improper sense of the word’ or a ‘wider meaning,’ and that Academics might be dogmatists in this improper sense. Most translations go hand in hand with the standard interpretation.

My point, however, is that by “in the proper sense of the word,” Sextus is not alluding to a secondary or enlarged meaning of “dogmatist,” as opposed to a strict or proper sense. However, he is perhaps only pointing out a defining characteristic of dogmatism. This is, for example, the sense we find in Aristotle, according to the dictionary Liddell-Scott: it may mean a “characteristic property of a species” (Aristotle, *Top.* 102a18) or a “distinguishing feature in a relative sense” (Aristotle, *Top.* 128b25). If so, there is no suggestion at all, by calling Aristotle and the

Stoics “proper dogmatists,” that Academics might be “dogmatists,” only improper ones. Sextus is merely saying that what qualifies a philosopher as a dogmatist is that she claims to have found the truth. A philosopher belongs to dogmatism as a main kind of philosophy only if she thinks she has discovered the truth. No other philosopher can be considered a dogmatist if she does not think so. Academics didn’t. So, “proper” probably means “peculiar” to them, and to no one else. That is why, it seems to me, Bury’s translation is still the best one: “specially so called.” In this sense, instead of reading that Aristotle and the Stoics are ‘properly’ called dogmatists and Academics are ‘improperly so called,’ one might read that each kind of philosophy has something ‘proper’ or ‘particular’ or ‘peculiar’ to it: what is ‘private’ to dogmatists is the belief to have discovered the truth, what is ‘private’ to Academics is considering truth as inapprehensible; what is ‘private’ of skeptics is that they go on searching for it.

Moreover, even if there were such an implication or suggestion, it is not clear that Sextus intended us to think of Academics, at bottom, as a kind of dogmatists, albeit ‘improperly so called’. His effort is to distinguish *three* kinds of philosophy, so why would he care to efface the distinction between two of them? Even if Sextus could have thought of Academics as improper dogmatists, the point remains: they are not ‘properly speaking’ dogmatists, and properly speaking, they constitute a third species of philosophers. To concede that Academics are dogmatists only ‘improperly speaking’ is to concede my point.

3. The Middle Academy: Arcesilaus as Almost a Skeptic

Though not original, it is an important point for my thesis to bring attention to the fact that Sextus considers Arcesilaus almost a perfect skeptic (PH 1.232–3). But there is one difficulty. “Almost” seems to entail that there is at least one point at which he is dogmatic. I meet this objection with a new suggestion (as far as I know). I also argue, more speculatively, but perhaps with some novelty, that Arcesilaus may be one of the “notable skeptics” alluded to by Sextus (PH 1.30). Thus, Arcesilaus is closer to skepticism than to dogmatism.

First, it is important to remember those passages on Arcesilaus, where these affinities are so extensive that he comes very close to skepticism. Ioppolo (2009: 33) even thinks that Sextus wants “to bring

Arcesilaus into the Pyrrhonian tradition.” Indeed, Sextus is on the verge of calling him a perfect Pyrrhonist:

Arcesilaus, who we said was champion and founder of the Middle Academy, certainly seems to me to have something in common with what the Pyrrhonists say, so that his way of thought is almost identical with ours. (PH 1.232)

Sextus mentions very important points shared by Arcesilaus and the skeptics, Pyrrho included.

For we do not find him [Arcesilaus] making any assertion about the reality or unreality of anything, nor does he prefer any one thing to another in point of probability or improbability, but suspends judgement about all. (PH 1.232)

Arcesilaus, therefore, is faithful to skeptical suspension of judgment about everything. He was so close to Pyrrho that Timon accused him of plagiarism (DL 4.33). Perhaps Sextus was aware of this accusation.

What does Sextus mean by ‘almost identical’? Where is, exactly, the difference that distinguishes, even if slightly, Arcesilaus from skeptics? As we saw, the dogmatic interpretation suggests that Arcesilaus held one dogma. Though the affinities are undeniable and no non-skeptic philosopher is so close to Pyrrhonism as Arcesilaus, one dogma suffices to say that his philosophy is not skeptical or perfectly identical (cf. PH 1.223). This is the crucial passage for our discussion:

He [Arcesilaus] also says that particular suspensions of judgment are good and particular assents bad. Yet one might say that whereas we make these statements not affirmatively (οὐ διαβεβαιωτικῶς) but in accordance with what appears to us, he makes them with reference to the nature of things (πρὸς τὴν φύσιν), so that he asserts that suspension itself (αὐτὴν) is good and assent bad. (PH 1.233)

Though both Arcesilaus and Sextus make the same statement, namely, that suspension is good and assent is bad, they differ in the way they do it. That is why this passage seems to attribute a dogma to Arcesilaus. First, whereas the Pyrrhonist says “these things in accordance with what appears to us,” Arcesilaus says them “with reference to the nature of things” (PH 1.233). This contrast between what appears and what is by nature is what distinguishes skeptics and dogmatists. Next, the skeptic “makes these statements not affirmatively,” implying that Arcesilaus asserted it affirmatively, and to assert affirmatively is the dogmatic way of making assertions. Perin (2010: 57) even translates οὐ διαβεβαιωτικῶς as “not dogmatically.”

Does this passage entail that Sextus thinks that Arcesilaus is a dogmatist? Perin (2010: 58) thinks so: “according to Sextus, Arcesilaus, unlike the Skeptic, has the *dogmatic belief* that suspension of judgment, as something required by reason, is good” (italics in the original). But how could Sextus take Arcesilaus as a dogmatist if he has just said that Arcesilaus suspends judgment about everything (περὶ πάντων)? Note, first, that the word *δόγμα* is not used by Sextus. Though not decisive, this should warn us not to jump to a conclusion. One should try to find an interpretation in which Arcesilaus is not a (complete) skeptic, for this is the point Sextus is making, but also not a dogmatist, for Sextus is also clear that Arcesilaus is almost a perfect skeptic. Can one make sense of Arcesilaus as neither a skeptic nor a dogmatist?

Here is one possibility. One might point out a distinction between suspension about a *particular* issue and suspension about *everything*. One might say that, despite the fact that a particular suspension about *p* is good, it does not follow that suspension of judgment about everything is good. The difference between the skeptic and Arcesilaus concerns only particular suspension, not the universal one. But it is not clear how this would solve the problem. Recall that Sextus agrees that particular suspension is a good thing. To distinguish between particular and universal suspension does not take us very far.

When Sextus attributes to Arcesilaus the idea that suspension is good “in relation to nature” (πρὸς τὴν φύσιν), is he thinking that suspension is good “by nature” (φύσει)? This interpretation is not compulsory. The contrast here seems to be, not that between being relative (πρὸς τι) and being by nature (φύσει), in which case the latter would be a form of dogmatism, but that between being good in relation to something else (namely, ἀταραξία) and being good not in relation to something else, but by itself. So, for Arcesilaus, “suspension *itself* (αὐτὴν) is good” (PH I.233; my italic).

Recall the context of this passage under discussion (PH I.233). Sextus had just said that, for Arcesilaus, ἐποχή is the goal, not ἀταραξία (PH I.232), as is the case in Pyrrhonism. Pyrrhonists think that everything is relative (πρὸς τι) (PH I.135–40), but not “by nature” (φύσει). So, one may wonder whether suspension appears good for the Pyrrhonist because it leads to his goal, namely, ἀταραξία. ἐποχή is good in relation to ἀταραξία. In Arcesilaus’ case, ἐποχή is good not in reference to ἀταραξία, but on its own. If so, there is no need to construe πρὸς τὴν φύσιν as meaning φύσει

(thereby making reference to something like “the nature of suspension”). Thus, we find an Academic position which is neither dogmatic nor Pyrrhonian, but a peculiar one.

Another possibility is the following. Arcesilaus’ idea was that, by claiming that suspension is good and assent is bad, he was making an evaluative, not a doctrinal, assertion. He was not affirming something about the *nature* of suspension and assent, if there is one, but merely recommending what one ought to do. If so, in recommending suspension, Arcesilaus was not advancing a piece of dogmatism, but merely stating an evaluative assertion. It is a *practical* attitude toward ἐποχή, not a theoretical one. This solution might strengthen my interpretation.⁷

Now, can one show that this normative, practical attitude, despite being non-skeptical, is also non-dogmatic? As Perin (2010: 57) notes, “one obvious possibility is that Arcesilaus thought that in certain circumstances it is *rational* for a person to suspend judgment *and* that it is good for a person to do what is rational for him to do” (italics in the original). But Perin rejects this possibility, at least partially. Since his interest is in Sextus, he does not dwell on Arcesilaus. Two arguments might show that Arcesilaus is not being dogmatic. First, he could be arguing merely dialectically, based on what the Stoics say: given that the wise person does not opine, he should not assent (M 7.156–7). Second, perhaps the notion of the reasonable (εὐλογον) might explain why Arcesilaus thought that suspension is good as something that is *reasonable* to do. Following the εὐλογον leads one to “act rightly and be happy (εὐδαιμονήσει)” (M 7.158). For Sextus, the εὐλογον is not a dogmatic notion, not only because Arcesilaus suspends judgment about everything (M 7.157), but also because this notion is merely a practical criterion of action, not a theoretical one.⁸ Still, it is not Pyrrhonian either, for while the Pyrrhonist follows what appears, Arcesilaus follows the reasonable. Such an interpretation is what we were looking for.

Perhaps the last two suggestions complement each other. For Arcesilaus, as Sextus sees him, suspension is itself good, without reference to

⁷ I thank one reviewer for calling my attention to this line of thinking.

⁸ See, however, Bett’s remark (2005: 34, n. 71). In the interpretation I am offering here, Arcesilaus can suspend judgment about everything and follow the reasonable, without being dogmatic or skeptical. But even if Bett is right in claiming that Arcesilaus does not suspend judgment about everything, it still can be argued that regulating one’s actions by the reasonable does not entail dogmatism.

ἀταραξία, for this is what the wise person should do, while εὐδαιμονία is reached through the reasonable, not through ἐποχή (and ἀταραξία).

Sextus considers a view on Arcesilaus as being in fact a dogmatist.

And if one ought to credit also what is said about him, he appeared at the first glance, they say, to be a Pyrrhonist, but in reality he was a dogmatist. (PH I.234)

Does Sextus agree with this picture of Arcesilaus? It is hard to say.

On the one hand, why remember it, if he didn't at least think there was something true in it? Moreover, he does not explicitly reject it. On the other hand, he is very cautious in reporting it: "if one ought to credit," "they say." The way he introduces and reports this image of Arcesilaus seems to imply that he didn't agree with it. Besides, the argument is that Arcesilaus seemed to be a Pyrrhonist, but he was in fact selecting those gifted for receiving Platonic dogmas. And Sextus does not appear to think that Arcesilaus had these hidden dogmas. According to Sextus, at most, he had only one (if it is a dogma; I argued that it is not). If so, he did not endorse this picture, nor did he go as far as to characterize Arcesilaus as a dogmatist, as these people, like Ariston, did.

What can we conclude from these remarks about Arcesilaus? First, Sextus states that the non-skeptical philosopher closest to Pyrrhonism is Arcesilaus: they have almost the same stance, but not entirely identical, for Arcesilaus went too far in his views concerning suspension itself as good. Second, he was not, properly speaking, a dogmatist, for he had no Platonic dogmas at all, despite what has been said about him. So, the conclusion must be: Arcesilaus was an Academic, not a dogmatist, and he was much closer to Pyrrhonism than to dogmatism.

Let me move to another, perhaps less well-known, argument to establish the latter point. I propose that in one passage concerning the goal, Sextus may be implying that Arcesilaus is a skeptic. Here is the passage:

Some notable skeptics have added the further definition "suspension of judgement in investigations." (PH I.30; Bury's translation)

Who are these notable skeptics? Sextus is silent about them. One solution is to look for names in other sources, such as Diogenes Laertius. There, we find that Timon and Aenesidemus held that suspension of judgement is the skeptical goal (DL II 9.107–8). Given what Diogenes

Laertius says, it is highly probable, if not certain, that Sextus had Timon and Aenesidemus in mind.

But this answer does not preclude us from speculating about other notable skeptics. For instance, did Agrippa think that suspension was also a goal? Of course, we will never know. But if one considers that Sextus is presenting in PH 1.25–30 the new skeptics' view (cf. PH 1.177), then one might guess that perhaps Agrippa did not think, like Timon and Aenesidemus, that suspension was a goal; for, were it also Agrippa's goal, then Sextus would have included it as a goal, since there would be agreement between all three, and that would be the official stance of skepticism. It is hard to believe that Sextus would introduce for himself such a big change without pointing this out.

What about Arcesilaus? My suggestion is that Arcesilaus might be another notable skeptic whose goal is suspension. For, as Sextus remarks, Arcesilaus takes suspension of judgment on all things as his goal in philosophy:

He [Arcesilaus] also says that the goal is suspension, which is accompanied, as we have said, by "imperturbability." (PH 1.232)

Note: Arcesilaus "also says." This implies that Sextus himself is aligning Arcesilaus with the goal of some notable skeptics, namely Timon and Aenesidemus. Though this passage does not establish the point, it is certainly not ruled out, and it is possible to think that Sextus had Arcesilaus in mind, among others, in PH 1.30.

There is, however, one argument that may prevent one from endorsing the idea that Sextus was thinking of Arcesilaus in PH 1.30. Pyrrhonists have always been interested in imperturbability and moderation. So, for Sextus, some of them, alongside imperturbability and moderation as goals, have *also* considered suspension of judgment as a third goal. In PH 1.232, Sextus points out a consequence of suspension: it causes imperturbability. Academics, Arcesilaus included, were never interested in this aspect of philosophy. They were interested only in the investigation and its result, namely, suspension.

This is, indeed, an important difference between skeptics and Arcesilaus. Now, in PH 1.30, suspension as a goal appears as a further goal, i.e., notable skeptics who held suspension as a goal also held that imperturbability and moderation were skeptical goals. But imperturbability and moderation were not considered by Arcesilaus as his goals in

philosophy. So, concerning the goal, the only thing that appears to exclude Arcesilaus from the group of notable skeptics is that he had no interest in imperturbability and moderation. But this difference hardly turns him into a dogmatist, even if it prevents him from being considered a skeptic from Sextus' point of view. As we just saw, suspension is the only goal for Arcesilaus, i.e., only a goal but not a means towards other goals.

In sum, it seems clear that, for Sextus, Arcesilaus is much closer to skepticism than to dogmatism. My point is not to say that Sextus considered Arcesilaus a perfect skeptic, which he clearly and explicitly did not, since Academic philosophy and Pyrrhonism are two distinct main kinds of philosophy, but to argue that the affinities are by far greater than the differences, i.e., their opposition to dogmatism is more important than their differences. Despite small differences concerning the goal (Arcesilaus did not consider ἀταραξία and moderation as goals; and, therefore, for him, ἐποχή was itself good, not good in relation to ἀταραξία), Arcesilaus shared the Pyrrhonian stance in almost everything. If so, the main thesis of this paper receives further confirmation: for Sextus, Academic philosophy, besides being a main kind of its own, is close to Pyrrhonism by also being a form of anti-dogmatism in the first place.

4. The New Academy: Carneades, Clitomachus, and the Skeptic

Let us now inquire how close Carneades is to skepticism, according to Sextus. There is no doubt that the affinities between Carneades and skepticism are not as close as those between Arcesilaus and skepticism. But does Sextus take Carneades as a dogmatist? Does he think that there are grades between the two main kinds of philosophy (dogmatism and skepticism) and Academics just fall in the middle, closer to one side or the other (Arcesilaus closer to skepticism; Carneades and Clitomachus closer to dogmatism)?

I have already argued that a close reading of PH 1.1–4 establishes that Carneades (and Clitomachus) are not dogmatists at all. Academic philosophy is a main kind of philosophy on its own, not merely a subspecies of dogmatism. In my view, this is a fact that should be

recognized by any adequate interpretation. I provided one such interpretation.

Now, I want to examine Sextus' other important passages on Carneades. The first group of passages is those in which Carneades seems to assume a form of dogmatism, whether negative, as in the case of his arguments for gods' non-existence (M 9.138–90; cf. M 9.140), or positive, like his doctrine of the criterion (M 7.159–89). In both cases, Sextus is merely using Carneades' arguments or doctrine for his own purpose, either to counterbalance those arguments in favor of the existence of a god or to give a complete account of the positions in favor of the existence of a criterion. This use does not entail that Carneades is an atheist or dogmatic about the criterion. Sextus probably knew that Carneades used to argue on both sides, but, more importantly, he also describes Arcesilaus' doctrine of the 'reasonable' (M 7.150–8) without ever considering it a dogmatic theory. Thus, these passages do not prove that Sextus saw Carneades as dogmatic, but only that Sextus used what Carneades said to his own Pyrrhonian purpose.

Moreover, it is not clear how Sextus takes the criteria to be: are the reasonable and the plausible merely criteria of action, or are they criteria of truth? In the case of Arcesilaus, it seems clear that he is only proposing a criterion of action, though Sextus presents it in the list of dogmatic criteria. The case of Carneades, however, is not so straightforward, for it was not clear that Carneades' criterion was a criterion of action or of truth or both. Sextus also denies that Carneades proposed a criterion of truth, for Carneades argued against its existence (M 7.159–165) and proposed instead a criterion of action (M 7.166–89). Just like skeptics who do not affirm any logical criterion of truth, but do have a criterion of action (PH 1.21–24, 2.14; M 7.29–30), the Academics seem to draw the same distinction. If M 7.166 expresses Sextus' view on Carneades, then both the Pyrrhonist and the Academic have a criterion of action, but no criterion of truth. It is true that in PH 1.173 Sextus presents the probable as a criterion of truth, but this passage, as Bett (2005: 36, n. 75) notes, is somewhat confused, and in my view cannot be taken as a proof that Sextus thought that the Carneadean criterion is dogmatic.

This hesitation surfaces again in M 7.435–438, where Sextus criticizes the "plausible" both as a criterion of action (M 7.436) and a criterion of truth (M 7.437). But, irrespective of the interpretation, Sextus thinks that in both cases "Academics are overcome by their own

refutations" (M 7.438). His interest, however, lies in criticizing the notion of *φαντασία* as a criterion of truth (M 8.370–438), not especially in the criteria of action.

But even if Pyrrhonists and Academics alike have no criterion of truth, but only criteria of action, it does not follow that their criteria of action are similar. Sextus points out that the criterion designed by Carneades is different from the one adopted by the Pyrrhonist (PH 1.231) and criticizes it for not enabling one to live well, because "none of these appearances can contribute by itself to the conduct of life" (M 7.436).

Thus, both the skeptic and Carneades are non-dogmatists, for what characterizes a dogmatist is to hold a criterion of truth. But Carneades is clearly different from the skeptic, for their criteria of action are different. Thus, despite important differences, Carneades seems closer to skepticism than to dogmatism, for his opposition to dogmatism is more fundamental than his difference from skepticism.

Let me move to a crucial passage on Carneades (and Clitomachus) in which Sextus points out another difference between skepticism and the New Academy. Here is the entire passage we need to look closely at:

And although both the Academics and the Sceptics say that they believe some things, yet here too the difference between the two philosophies is quite plain. For the word 'believe' has different meanings: it means not to resist but simply to follow without any strong impulse or inclination, as the boy is said to believe his tutor; but sometimes it means to assent to a thing of deliberate choice and with a kind of sympathy due to strong desire, as when the incontinent man believes him who approves of an extravagant mode of life. Since, therefore, Carneades and Clitomachus declare that a strong inclination accompanies their credence and the credibility of the object, while we say that our belief is a matter of simple yielding without any consent, here too there must be a difference between us and them. (PH 1.229–230; Bury's translation)

In my view, this passage has not been well understood. It has been discussed alongside PH 1.13, as if both passages treated the same topic, namely, belief. But PH 1.13 and PH 1.229–230 have different topics (and none, perhaps, should be translated simply as 'belief'). In PH 1.13, the topic is assent to a dogma, where Sextus is keeping his distance from dogmatism; and in PH 1.229–230, the topic is to distinguish Pyrrhonism and Academic philosophy (but not dogmatism), for each main kind of philosophy understands differently *τὸ πειθεσθαι* (to believe or to follow).

First, some remarks about PH 1.13. I don't want to go into the dispute over whether the skeptic has beliefs (Frede 1998a, Burnyeat 1998a). My point does not depend on translating *δόγμα* (but see Barnes 1998, Sedley 1983, Vogt 2011 for criticism of *δόγμα* as belief, and Burnyeat 1998b: 97, n. 13, for acceptance of this point). Whatever exactly its translation, it is clear that Sextus is explaining the sense in which the skeptic holds no *δόγματα*: given the main skeptical principle, the Pyrrhonist “comes not to dogmatize” (PH 1.12). Some think (like Frede 1998a) that skeptics hold *δόγματα* according to its first definition. But Sextus' point is precisely that of ruling out this definition; he simply rejects it as inadequate (Porchat 2013: 301, n. 11; for the interpretation that this first definition is Cyrenaic, see Smith 2022: 293). According to Sextus, the proper sense of *δόγμα* is the second one: assent to non-evident things (*ἄδηλα*) (PH 1.13, 1.16), and in this sense the Pyrrhonist has no *δόγμα* whatsoever.

Note that the words *δόγμα* and *ἄδηλον* do not occur in the passage above quoted (PH 1.229–30). This should be enough evidence that the topic is not the same as the one in PH 1.13. If Sextus were criticizing Carneades for being a dogmatist, he would surely use them, as he did when saying that Plato is a dogmatist (PH 1.223 for *δόγμα*, 1.225 for *ἄδηλον*). At least, Sextus does not explicitly criticize Carneades for being a dogmatist as he did in Plato's case (and Xenophanes'). For Sextus, the Academics also live without *δόγμα*. For a *δόγμα* depends on assent to something non-evident, and Academics do not assent to non-evident things. Assent to non-evident things is not what distinguishes the skeptic from the Academic, but what distinguishes both of them from dogmatists.

The fact that the skeptic does not assent to what is non-evident does not mean that he does not assent to anything at all, for he assents to his own *πάθος* (PH 1.13) or to his own *φαντασία* or *φαινόμενον* (PH 1.19, 1.21–2). As far as I can see, these words are also present in the Academic assent, for, as we have just seen, Carneades assents to a *φαντασία* (PH 1.227–9; M 7.166–89). Sextus seems to acknowledge some similarities here, for both skeptics and Academics believe or follow something. Both Pyrrhonists and Academics go along (*πείθεσθαι*) with certain things (PH 1.229). Once they are both distinguished from dogmatists, it is time to see their differences inside the domain of appearances. The

key point is that they share a general attitude of going along or believing, though not quite in the same way, as is clear from PH 1.229–30.

Academics follow persuasive appearance (*φαντασία πιθανή*), whereas skeptics do not think that one appearance is more persuasive than others (PH 1.227). And skeptics assent involuntarily to appearances (PH 1.19, 1.230), whereas Academics assent deliberately and with strong inclination (PH 1.230). Why does Sextus say Carneades and Clitomachus assent deliberately and with strong inclination? Academic assent is deliberate because the Academic has to examine the coherence of appearances and to test them; it is strong, because, from the first degree of plausibility to the highest one, the confidence increases and, therefore, assent becomes stronger (M 7.171). For Pyrrhonists, however, there is equipollence (*ισοσθένεια*) when we investigate the truth; since opposed sides match each other, they cancel out; no appearance is persuasive.

Annas and Barnes (2000: 61) offer a nice explanation of their translation of *πειθεσθαι* as “to go along.” According to them, *πειθεσθαι* + dative means either (i) “to obey” or (ii) “to believe.” According to them, Academics use *πειθεσθαι* as “to believe,” for they assent, but the skeptic uses *πειθεσθαι* as “to obey” what appears to him. The metaphor of the school boy and his tutor seems to support their interpretation. If they are right, then skeptics and Academics have some affinity, for they both *πειθεσθαι* something, though one merely obeys, while the other believes. The translation here is not important for my purposes. Since I think one can say that skeptics also believe some things, I will talk about skeptical beliefs and Academic beliefs. Even if this is not exactly what Sextus has in mind, it is clear that he is referring to two senses of *πειθεσθαι*. Still, it seems clear that, despite this difference, the distance between Academic philosophy and skepticism is shorter than between them and dogmatism.

Now, one might argue, the deliberative character and strong inclination of Academic assent may look like dogmatic traits. Isn’t dogmatic assent deliberate and intense? In reply, I offer two arguments.

First, we have to distinguish the intense (*συντόνως*) manner in which the dogmatist behaves (M 11.126) and the strong (*σφοδρὸς*) inclination of the Academic (PH 1.230, M 7.171). Besides, what is deliberate in the case of the dogmatist is the assent to something non-evident, whereas the Academic’s deliberation is a matter of yielding to appearances and their connections. It is not obvious to me that Sextus’

characterization of Academic assent is the same as his description of dogmatic assent; on the contrary, neither in content (non-evident vs. appearances), nor in form (intensity vs. strength) seems to coincide. If so, Academic assent is not dogmatic assent.

Next, the notion of an affection (*πάθος*) opens the door to understanding another difference between the Academic and the skeptical assent, for the discussion in PH 1.229–230 turns on the related words *προσπάθεια* and *συμπάθεια*. Both Academics and skeptics, I argued, go along with something, i.e., they assent to appearances in order to act. Skeptics assent to appearances because they are “forced on us,” to what he experiences (his *πάθος*) according to its appearance (PH 1.13, 1.19). But it is important to note that, when the skeptic assents to his experience (*πάθος*) and follows (*ἔπεται*) it, he does so without passionate attachment (*ἄνευ προσπαθείας*), whereas the Academic goes along with attachment or sympathy (*συμπάθεια*). So, the Academic adds (*συμ-*) something to his experience (*πάθος*), though not the same thing added by the dogmatists. The dogmatist adds an opinion (*προσδοξάζειν*) to his experience, that is why she suffers an evil twice (PH 1.30), but what the Academic adds is something different: not an opinion or doctrine, for he has none, but a desire. Even if Sextus points out a difference between the skeptic and the Academic, the difference is far greater between the skeptic and the dogmatist.

The upshot of my argument is, again, that Carneades is closer to Pyrrhonism than to dogmatism, i.e., both Carneades and the skeptic are anti-dogmatic in the first place, and their distinction comes only at the next level.

What does Sextus have to say about Clitomachus, Carneades’ disciple, mentioned in PH 1.3? Is Clitomachus a negative dogmatist or closer to dogmatism than to skepticism? The important passage to know what Sextus thinks of Clitomachus is this one:

And here we will again assemble the same method of investigation, not dwelling on the particulars, as Clitomachus and the rest of Academics have done (for by jumping into alien material and creating their arguments on the basis of agreement with the dogmatic views of others prolonged their counter-argument immensely), but by attacking the most important and all-encompassing points – by means of which we shall have the rest put into impasse as well. (M 9.1)

This is a remarkable passage. First, because Sextus refers only to Clitomachus, but not to Carneades. Does that mean that the method

described is restricted to Clitomachus? Does this imply that Carneades had a different method, for instance, arguing pro and con, like Arcesilaus and the skeptics? We cannot be certain, but the passage leaves that possibility open.

Second, because we see that, according to Sextus, Clitomachus argued against dogmatic views based on them. Far from being a dogmatist, he had as his main target dogmatism. So does the skeptic. They share the same enemy: dogmatists. Clitomachus' problem is not that of being a dogmatic philosopher (of course, for he is an Academic); his problem is the way in which he counter-argues against dogmatists.

Third, though Clitomachus and the skeptics share the same enemies, they use different strategies. Whereas Clitomachus used alien material and argued on the basis of what dogmatists say, skeptical arguments need not be based on what dogmatists say, and they do target the principles and fundamental points of dogmatic theory. Thus, Sextus criticizes Clitomachus for not knowing how to argue against dogmatists. He complains about the way the Academic does it: in a disordered way, without method, by criticizing each particular dogma, or dogmatist, at a time; this is a very long, tedious way of arguing and may never produce suspension of judgment about everything. Only skeptics know how to criticize dogmatism adequately, thereby putting an end to it. Bett (2012: xiv) captured this point nicely: "Sextus' criticism seems to suggest that he sees himself as having common ground with them [Academics]; he does better than they do, because he concentrates on first principles, but they are in some sense pursuing the same goals as he is."

Bett, however, seems to think that this passage on Clitomachus (M 9.1) does not fit well with other passages written by Sextus on Academic philosophy. Here is what Bett (2012: xiv) says: "One would not have expected this from other remarks of his about the Academics; elsewhere he talks as if they are not just inferior practitioners in the same enterprise as his own, but engaged in a quite different enterprise." What I am suggesting is that what Sextus says about Clitomachus' method in M 9.1 fits very well with what Sextus says in some other passages, especially what he says about Clitomachus in PH 1.3, if these passages are properly understood, as I am claiming here. In both passages, he brings Academics and skeptics close to each other by their difference, or even opposition, to dogmatists, and then, but only *then*, separating them into two main kinds of philosophy. They are both non-dogmatic philosophies,

with a common adversary, but each pursues this goal with different means.

Thus, the main difference between skeptics and Clitomachus turns out to be, from Sextus' point of view, the opposite of that usually held. Many scholars claim that the skeptic no longer searches for the truth but tries only to match opposed arguments in order to bring about suspension of judgment.⁹ Academics allegedly go on searching for the truth, for they have no worries about imperturbability, and so they don't have any previous intention to bring both sides to a tie; they do not deliberately argue on both sides so as to make them equally strong. When Pyrrhonists argue on both sides of an issue, they are merely pretending to investigate (for they merely want to balance both sides), whereas Academics are really investigating the truth (so, if one side seems to be more plausible, they adhere to it).

Whatever the merits of this interpretation, this is not how Sextus himself understood their respective positions. As Sextus presented them, Clitomachus seems committed to going on arguing against dogmatism, because his method is lengthy and piecemeal, since he may use only what is conceded by dogmatists. According to Sextus, Clitomachus no longer investigates the truth (PH 1.3), but he goes on endlessly arguing against dogmatists (M 9.1); if so, it seems that his refutation of dogmatism is not a search for truth. Skeptics, in their turn, both investigate the truth and reject dogmatism.

In sum, Clitomachus is an anti-dogmatic philosopher, but perhaps further away from skepticism than Arcesilaus and even Carneades. Still, the thesis of this paper holds for him.

5. Academic Philosophy as a Close Neighbor

I would like to present a last argument. Sextus distinguishes skepticism from many neighboring philosophies. It might seem that the sequence of similar philosophies follows their chronological order. Sextus begins with older philosophers and moves on to more recent ones: Heraclitus, Democritus, and the Cyrenaics. This idea is right, but it doesn't explain completely the order followed by him, for Sextus goes back in time, treating Protagoras, who is older than Democritus and Aristippus, after them.

⁹ See Palmer (2000) and Striker (2001).

Sextus's order of exposition of the Academy also seems to follow a chronological criterion, since he begins with Plato and ends with Philo and Antiochus. But, once again, he does not apply this criterion strictly, for he treats Carneades before he treats Arcesilaus, and the remarks on Xenophanes between Plato and the New Academy are a chronological break.

So, another criterion must also be in play. Here is my suggestion. Sextus moves from less similar philosophies to more similar ones. As he moves from Heraclitus down to Protagoras, the dogmatic philosophies compared to skepticism come closer and closer to his Pyrrhonism. So, if Sextus goes out of his chronological order and considers first Democritus and the Cyrenaics and then Protagoras, this may mean that he thinks that Protagoras is less distant from skepticism than Democritus and the Cyrenaics.

All are dogmatists in one way or another. Heraclitus is very dogmatic, for he "makes dogmatic statements about many non-evident things" (PH 1.210). Democritus is a dogmatist as well, not only in his different use of the phrase 'no more,' but especially when he affirms that there are only atoms and void (PH 1.214). As far as I can see, Sextus points out fewer dogmas. In their turn, the Cyrenaics are dogmatic about the goal (τέλος) and, if they are dogmatic about the external world, it is not because they have positive doctrines about it, like Heraclitus and Democritus, but because they claim that it cannot be known, a form of negative dogmatism. Again, negative dogmatism, though still dogmatism, is less dogmatic, for it does not hold any elaborate theory about the world. So, the order seems to go from the more dogmatic to the less dogmatic philosophies.

Finally, Protagoras is dogmatic because he has a theory about the flux and claims that the 'reasons' for opposed appearances are in matter (PH 1.217–9). Now, how dogmatic is he? Surely, what Sextus relates about Protagoras is false. As far as we can tell, it is probably based on what Plato added to his relativist position, namely, the dogmatic theory of the flux. It is Plato's presentation of Protagoras that makes him a dogmatist. Maybe Sextus was not aware of this point, but, on the other hand, he may have perceived it, for this is explicit in the dialogue *Theaetetus*. Though he does not point out this fact, it may explain why Protagoras' dogmatism could be perceived by him as less serious.

My point becomes stronger when we look at why they were perceived as neighbor philosophies. Heraclitus has in common with skepticism the starting point: irregularity (*ἀνωμαλία*) in things, but this is shared by all mankind (PH 2.211). So, this is not properly skeptical, but common material. Democritus, also starting from these, goes one step further, and claims that things are ‘no more’ (*οὐ μᾶλλον*) this or that; though he shares with skeptics the phrase ‘no more,’ he uses it in a dogmatic way (PH 1.214). Cyrenaics do not think, like Democritus, that things are no more sweet than non-sweet: they think that we apprehend our own *παθος* (experience), but things are unknowable, thereby not dogmatizing about external things; though, in their case, the latter is negative dogmatism,¹⁰ not skepticism, and this is closer to skepticism than Democritus’ positive dogmatism (PH 1.215).

Concerning Protagoras, though Bett (2019: 35) thinks that “there is no explicit acknowledgement of common ground,” it is clear that Sextus is in fact conceding that there is one: “And consequently he [Protagoras] posits only what appears to each individual, and thus he introduces relativity. And for this reason he seems also to have something in common with the Pyrrhonists” (PH 1.216). And this is indeed something shared with skepticism. First, we have to remember that the Relativity Mode is the highest one, encompassing all others Aenesidemian Modes (PH 1.39, 1.135–140). (Perhaps I should add a point about which Sextus shows no awareness. The skeptical main principle (PH 1.12) comes down from Protagoras and his doctrine that a weak discourse can become stronger. Not by chance, the text *Dissoi logoi*, inspired by Protagoras, was annexed to the *Outlines*. It is surprising that Sextus says no word at all about this extremely important affinity.)

In all three cases (Heraclitus, Democritus, Cyrenaics), Sextus regularly introduces his topic by telling us that the proximity is pointed out by someone: in the case of Heraclitus, this is due to Aenesidemus’ intriguing position; next, “it is also said that the Democritean philosophy has something in common with skepticism” (PH 1.213); and “some assert that the Cyrenaic doctrine is identical with skepticism” (PH 1.215). Clearly, Sextus moves from a difference that “is plain at once” (PH 1.210), to “something in common”, and to “identical with.” But in all cases, this is merely what others have said. In the case of Protagoras,

¹⁰ See Perin (2010: 3) and Bett (2019: 36).

however, the argument for proximity seems to come from Sextus himself. He remembers Protagoras' relativistic doctrine and concludes that Protagoras and skeptics share a similar position, for skeptics also can say only what appears to them. This implies that Protagoras is, in Sextus' view, closer to skepticism than the first three philosophers.

In sum, Protagoras' relativism is closer to skepticism than these other philosophies. Sextus moves from more differences to fewer differences: from many dogmatic ideas, to the dogma about atoms and void, to negative dogmatism, and to relativism. There is a progression here, not only in negative terms (each philosophy is less dogmatic than the former), but also in proximity (each philosophy adds something to the route of the skeptic). Perhaps, the stages in the path towards skepticism point out this progressive vicinity: from the common material (*ἀνωμαλία*), through the 'no more' (though used dogmatically, a kind of equipollence), then the Cyrenaic apprehension of one's own *πάθη* (one can avow one's own experience), down to the Protagorean principle that one can argue persuasively on both sides, which is the main skeptical principle. It is as if Sextus were clarifying skepticism from an external point of view, after explaining skepticism from an internal point of view (PH 1.5), i.e., explaining the difference between skepticism in its different stages towards its final position from dogmatic theories that are similar to one of these stages.

These speculations were meant to prepare my suggestion concerning what Sextus says about Academic philosophy in general, from Plato down to Antiochus. He does not follow exactly the chronological order, but he also takes into account the progressive affinity to skepticism. Let me spell out the case.

Even if some say Plato is dubitative or partly dubitative, Sextus thinks that he is a dogmatist, for he makes assertions about what is non-evident, e.g., about Ideas, Providence, and virtuous life (PH 1.222). It is enough to be a dogmatist if a philosopher dogmatizes even once. To show this point, Sextus mentions what Timon said about Xenophanes: though he was cautious in many topics, he dogmatized about all things being one and about God (PH 1.224). But Sextus seems to use Xenophanes as an example of the fact that few, and even one, dogmas are enough to turn a philosopher into a dogmatist. So, if Xenophanes, who was highly praised by Timon, was a dogmatist, let alone Plato. In my view, Plato, according to Sextus, is more distant from skepticism than

Xenophanes. That is why he refers to Xenophanes after talking about Plato, even if Xenophanes is older.

If my interpretation is right, Carneades and Clitomachus are not, properly speaking, dogmatists but Academics. So, they are closer to skepticism than Plato or Xenophanes. Obviously, Arcesilaus is even closer to skepticism than both Carneades and Clitomachus. Bett (2019: 45), however, thinks that Arcesilaus is treated out of chronological order to emphasize that he is an isolated figure. In my view, the reason why this is so is to make it clear that he is closer to Pyrrhonism.

At the end, Sextus deals with two major medical schools (PH 1.236–41). They come last partly because they are medical schools, not philosophical, partly because Empirical Medicine has been identified with skepticism. But Sextus does not think that this last point is correct. According to him, Medical Empiricism is as close to skepticism as Academic philosophy, since both affirm that things are inapprehensible. The Methodical school seems the closest of all to Pyrrhonism, at least as Sextus sees it. So, the order of Sextus' treatment of these schools is chronological for the most part, but also takes into account the greater similarity.

Perhaps there is a pattern that matches the scheme in PH 1.1–4. (1) See the sequence of the first philosophers: a) Heraclitus and Democritus are dogmatists; b) Cyrenaics, if we disregard the goal, deny that we can have knowledge of the external world; c) Protagoras' relativism is very close to skepticism. (2) Now, see the sequence of the Academy: a) Plato and Xenophanes are dogmatists; b) Carneades and Clitomachus are Academics (in the strict sense); c) Arcesilaus is an almost perfect skeptic. (3) Lastly, in medical schools, one can see that Sextus moves from b) Empiricism (close to Academic philosophy) to c) Methodism (close to skepticism); obviously, a) Rational Medicine is clearly dogmatic and no neighbor at all, so that there is no need to refer to it.

Therefore, there is a combination of these two criteria: the chronological criterion and the vicinity criterion. If this is correct, then we have another argument to say that Academic philosophy is close to Pyrrhonism. Among non-skeptical philosophers, Arcesilaus is the closest to skepticism and, next to him, Carneades.

I would like to suggest a new approach to the final chapters of Book I of the *Outlines*. Usually, scholars take a chapter-by-chapter approach in order to understand Sextus' position vis-à-vis a particular school. But

perhaps Sextus is not merely comparing Pyrrhonism to each one of them, as isolated systems, but also sketching a progressive path towards Pyrrhonism. There is a kind of relational model behind these final chapters. As we move from school to school, or from philosopher to philosopher, the relative distance to Pyrrhonism diminishes.

Sextus seems to have a conception of the history of philosophy in which one can trace this progressive movement towards Pyrrhonism. It is not merely a history of disagreement, as shown in his investigation or history (*ιστορία*; M 7.140) concerning the criterion (M 7.46–260), but one can introduce some order into it, not only chronological, but other kinds of order as well, such as criteria based on the sense, on the intellect, or on both. Of course, Sextus does not have a teleological conception of the history of philosophy, but he may have a relational one, according to which he may present some neighboring philosophies as one walks along the street to finally arrive at home.

This relational, progressive model fits with what Sextus says in the final chapter, where he distinguishes between philosophers severely afflicted by dogmatism and those only mildly so (PH 3.280–1). Sextus seems to think that not all philosophers are equally dogmatic. It is not the case that, merely by being dogmatic, they are all equally distant from Pyrrhonism. On the contrary, if a philosophy contains only one dogma and, therefore, is not skeptical, it does not follow that it is as far from Pyrrhonism as a philosophy full of dogmas. As a philosopher moves closer to Pyrrhonism, she will need fewer remedies.

6. Conclusion

The upshot of this discussion is not that Academics are skeptics, for patently Sextus is precisely distinguishing skeptics from them. We found many similarities: both kinds of philosophers didn't find the truth, do not assent to what is non-evident, and have no philosophical doctrines whatsoever; they both assent only to what appears, to what they experience, and to the appearances they have of things (that appear). Inside this major position, Sextus sharply distinguishes between Academic philosophy and skepticism. If so, his view on Academic philosophy, though perhaps biased in many points, is nonetheless subtler than usually held. Perhaps for its importance in the fight against dogmatism, Sextus thought that Academic philosophy, though not a form

of skepticism, deserves to be considered as one major kind of philosophy.

This conclusion has broader consequences. First, it reshapes our map of Hellenistic philosophy, compelling us to recognize the Academy as a genuine alternative to Pyrrhonism in ancient debate. Instead of simply dismissing it as a form of (negative) dogmatism, one should reassess its contributions against dogmatism. Nor should one assimilate it to Pyrrhonism, for Sextus did not think that Pyrrhonism was the sole alternative to dogmatism. Academic philosophy provided a neighboring form of anti-dogmatism. Sextus was well aware of the vicinity, and used against dogmatists a lot of arguments coming from the Academics.

Second, this relational model may help us to think *philosophically* about the relation between Academic philosophy and Pyrrhonism. Though it is true that negative dogmatism is a kind of dogmatism, Academic philosophy is not. Negative dogmatism may be conceived as an attack on everyday life (Smith 2022: 235–41), but Academic philosophy seems to be, just like Pyrrhonism, on its side. One might argue that Academics merely propose practical criteria that are perhaps already in play.

Stroud (1984) takes negative dogmatism as a kind of Cartesian attack on everyday beliefs. That is why he focuses on it, for it is the first step towards dogmatic verdicts. One might insist, like Fogelin (2011), that negative dogmatism should be treated just like positive dogmatism. Fogelin is right in pointing out that, from a Pyrrhonian point of view, negative dogmatism is as dogmatic as positive dogmatism, and one should oppose to one another. But there may be a point in Stroud's strategy. Focusing on philosophical criticism of everyday beliefs (taken as dogmatic) allows one to see a peculiar role for Academic philosophy, which is neither negative dogmatism nor Pyrrhonism. Accordingly, one might think that one route towards Pyrrhonism is the Academic attack on dogmatism. When dealing with the common material of anomalies, a philosopher might become suspect of dogmatic theories because of the Academic method against dogmatists. One may challenge the sense or the intellect using Academic arguments before turning into a Pyrrhonist. Negative arguments against everyday beliefs may lead at first to (positive) dogmatism, next to Academic philosophy, and, finally, to skepticism (Smith 2019).

A last remark. I argued that one has to do justice to Sextus' tripartite division of philosophy. We now see that this scheme is even more nuanced than I suggested in the beginning of this paper. Sextus's conception of philosophy proves subtler than one might expect at first sight. It integrates all philosophies into a scheme of three main kinds, but with complex relations between them. One might say that Arcesilaus and Carneades are between dogmatism and Pyrrhonism, the former being even closer to skepticism than the latter. But, more importantly, for Sextus, Academic philosophy is a main kind of philosophy on its own.

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