

## Sextus Empiricus, Outlines of Pyrrhonism

Translated by Rev. R.G. Bury

### CHAPTER XXXIII.—WHEREIN SCEPTICISM DIFFERS FROM THE ACADEMIC PHILOSOPHY

Some indeed say that the Academic philosophy is identical with Scepticism; consequently it shall be our next task to discuss this statement. According to most people there have been three Academies—the first and most ancient that of Plato and his School, the second or middle Academy that of Arcesilaus, the pupil of Polemo, and his School, the third or New Academy that of the School of Carneades and Cleitomachus. Some, however, add as a fourth that of the School of Philo and Charmidas; and some even count the School of Antiochus as a fifth. Beginning, then, with the Old Academy let us consider how the philosophies mentioned differ from ours.

Plato has been described by some as "dogmatic," by others as "dubitative," and by others again as partly dogmatic and partly dubitative. For in his exercitatory discourses, where Socrates is introduced either as talking playfully with his auditors or as arguing against sophists, he shows, they say, an exercitatory and dubitative character; but a dogmatic character when he is speaking seriously by the mouth either of Socrates or of Timaeus or of some similar personage. Now as regards those who describe him as a dogmatist, or as partly dogmatic and partly dubitative, it would be superfluous to say anything now; for they themselves acknowledge his difference from us. But the question whether Plato is a genuine Sceptic is one which we discuss more fully in our "Commentaries"; but now, in opposition to Menodotus and Aenesidemus (these being the chief champions of this view), we declare in brief that when Plato makes statements about Ideas or about the reality of Providence or about the virtuous life being preferable to the vicious, he is dogmatizing if he is assenting to these as actual truths, while if he is accepting them as more probable than not, since thereby he gives a preference to one thing over another in point of probability or improbability, he throws off the character of a Sceptic, for that such an attitude is foreign to us is quite plain from what has been said above.

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The adherents of the New Academy, although they affirm that all things are non-apprehensible, yet differ from the Sceptics even, as seems probable, in respect of this very statement that all things are non-apprehensible (for they affirm this positively, whereas the Sceptic regards it as possible that some things may be apprehended); but they differ from us quite plainly in their judgment of things good and evil. For the Academicians do not describe a thing as good or evil in the way we do; for they do so with the conviction that it is more probable that what they call good is really good rather than the opposite, and so too in the case of evil, whereas when we describe a thing as good or evil we do not add it as our opinion that what we assert is probable, but simply conform to life undogmatically that we may not be precluded from activity. And as regards sense-impressions, we say that they are equal in respect of probability and improbability, so far as their essence is concerned, whereas they assert that some impressions are probable, others improbable.

And respecting the probable impressions they make distinctions: some they regard as just simply probable, others as probable and tested, others as probable, tested, and "irreversible." For example, when a rope is lying coiled up in a dark room, to one who enters hurriedly it presents the simply "probable" appearance of being a serpent; but to the man who has looked carefully round and has investigated the conditions—such as its immobility and its color, and each of its other peculiarities—it appears as a rope, in accordance with an impression that is probable and tested. And the impression that is also "irreversible" or incontrovertible is of this kind. When Alcestis had died, Heracles, it is said, brought her up again from Hades and showed her to Admetus, who received an impression of Alcestis that was probable and tested; since, however, he knew that she was dead his mind recoiled from its assent and reverted to unbelief. So then the philosophers of the New Academy prefer the probable and tested impression to the simply probable, and to both of these the impression that is probable and tested and irreversible.

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 Cleitomachus 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.

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Arcesilaus, however, who was, as we said, the president and founder of the Middle Academy, certainly seems to me to have shared the doctrines of Pyrrho, so that his way of thought is almost identical with ours. For we do not find him 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 judgment about all. He also says that the End is suspension—which is accompanied, as we have said, by "quietude." He declares, too, that suspension regarding particular objects is good, but assent regarding particulars bad. Only one might say that whereas we make these statements not positively but in accordance with what appears to us, he makes them as statements of real facts, so that he asserts that suspension in itself really is good and assent bad. And if one ought to credit also what is said about him, he appeared at the first glance, they say, to be a Pyrrhonean, but in reality he was a dogmatist; and because he used to test his companions by means of dubitation to see if they were fitted by nature for the reception of the Platonic dogmas, he was thought to be a dubitive philosopher, but he actually passed on to such of his companions as were naturally gifted the dogmas of Plato. And this was why Ariston described him as "Plato the head of him, Pyrrho the tail, in the midst Diodorus"; because he employed the dialectic of Diodorus, although he was actually a Platonist.

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