

Essays in Ancient Philosophy

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The Skeptic's Two Kinds of Assent and the Question of the Possibility of Knowledge

Traditionally one associates skepticism with the position that nothing is, or can be, known for certain. Hence it was only natural that for a long time one should have approached the ancient skeptics with the assumption that they were the first to try to establish or to defend the view that nothing is, or can be, known for certain, especially since there is abundant evidence which would have seemed to bear out the correctness of this approach. After all, extensive arguments to the effect that there is no certain knowledge or that things are unknowable play a central role in our ancient sources on skepticism. And thus Hegel, Brandis, Zeller, and their successors were naturally led to take these arguments at face value and to assume that the skeptics were trying to show that nothing can be known. Closer consideration of the matter, though, shows that it cannot have been the position of the major exponents of ancient skepticism, whether Academic or Pyrrhonian, that nothing is, or can be, known. And this for the simple reason that the major ancient skeptics were not concerned to establish or to defend any position, let alone the position that nothing is, or can be, known. In fact, they went out of their way to point out that, though they produced arguments for it, they did not actually take the position that nothing can be known (cf. S.E., *PH* I., 200–1).¹ And they went on to criticize those who did claim that nothing can be known as being as dogmatic as those philosophers who claimed that something can be known, as being pseudo-skeptics (cf. S.E., *PH* I., 3, 226; Photius, *Bibl.* 212, 169^b).² Hence, in the following I shall call the position they criticize ‘dogmatic skepticism’, to distinguish it from the skepticism I want to attribute to the major ancient skeptics and which I shall call ‘classical skepticism’. I do not want to suggest by this that there are no important differences between Arcesilaus, Carneades, and the Pyrrhonian. It just seems to me that these differences are minor compared to the difference between classical and dogmatic skepticism.

If there should be a substantial difference between classical skepticism and

dogmatic skepticism, the questions arise (1) how did it come about that skepticism turned dogmatic, (2) how did it come about that skepticism was identified with dogmatic skepticism, so much so that even classical skeptics came to be interpreted as dogmatic skeptics, and (3) was something philosophically important lost because one was not aware of classical skepticism as an alternative to dogmatic skepticism? It is these questions I am primarily interested in, but since they only arise if there actually is a substantial difference between classical and dogmatic skepticism, I shall first turn to the question whether it can be made out that there is a significant difference.

Traditionally philosophers and historians of philosophy have not seen a substantial difference. For they have treated Arcesilaus, Carneades, and the Pyrrhoneans as if they, just like the dogmatic skeptics, had taken, defended, and argued for the position that nothing can be known. Now this only seems possible if one does not take seriously the classical skeptic's remark that he, unlike the dogmatic skeptic, does not take the position that nothing can be known. And the only reason I can see for not taking this remark seriously is the following: one has reason to believe that the classical skeptic, like the dogmatic skeptic, does have the view that nothing can be known; and thus one thinks that the classical skeptic only says that he does not take this position because he not only cannot consistently claim to know that nothing can be known, but cannot even take the position that nothing can be known, if he wants to preserve consistency with a main tenet of skepticism, namely the principle that one should not commit oneself to any position, that one should suspend judgment, withhold assent on any matter whatsoever. Hence, since I do want to take the classical skeptic's remark seriously, I have to argue either that the classical skeptic does in fact not have the view that nothing can be known or that there is a substantial difference between having a view, on the one hand, and taking a position or making a claim, on the other. Since I believe that there is some sense in which even the classical skeptic might have the view that nothing is, or can be, known, I shall try to argue the latter by distinguishing, following the classical skeptic, two kinds of assent such that having a view involves one kind of assent, whereas taking a position, or making a claim, involves a different kind of assent, namely the kind of assent a skeptic will withhold.

But before we turn to this distinction of two kinds of assent, it will be of use to consider the view that one should withhold assent. For it is this view which, supposedly, the classical skeptic tries to preserve consistency with, in denying that he takes the position that nothing can be known.

What, then, is the status of this view that it is wise to withhold assent? To start with, it is the conclusion of an argument the skeptic produces which is supposed to show that the wise man will always withhold assent. But it clearly is not the case that the skeptic, in arguing this way, thinks that he commits himself to the position that it is wise always to withhold assent. For to commit oneself

to this position would be to give assent. In this particular case it is easy to see why the skeptic is not committed to the conclusion of his argument. It is an argument drawn from premises which only his opponent, by granting them, is committed to: an argument designed to show his opponent that he is in a dilemma, that he is committed to conflicting claims and hence had better consider the matter further until he is in a position to decide between them. For it is central to the position of his opponent that the wise man often does have the kind of justification for his views which will allow him to give assent. To be shown then that he also is committed to the view that the wise man will never give assent puts him into a fundamental dilemma.

What is clear in the case of this argument, namely that the skeptic is not committed to its conclusion because he is just trying to show his opponent that he is committed to a claim which conflicts with his original claim, seems to me to be true of all skeptical arguments. The skeptic never tries to argue for a position, he never argues against a claim in the sense that he tries to establish a conflicting claim and thereby tries to show the falsehood of the original claim. He rather thinks of himself as following Socrates, submitting the claims of others to the kind of test Socrates had subjected them to. Socrates saw himself in the unfortunate position of lacking the knowledge and expertise in ethical matters which others claimed to have. He was more than eager to learn from those who were qualified to speak on these matters. But how, given his own ignorance, would he be able to tell whether somebody really had some special qualification to speak on these matters? The method he used was the following: he would ask the person whose qualification he wanted to test a question to which the person would have to know the answer if he were knowledgeable and expert, qualified to speak on the given subject-matter. He would then try to show by an argument drawn from assumptions accepted by his opponent that his opponent also was committed to a belief which was incompatible with his answer to the original question. In case Socrates succeeded, this would have the effect that the opponent would have to admit that by his own standards of rationality he did not have the required qualification, the expertise, or knowledge Socrates was looking for. For if he did have the knowledge he would have sufficient reason to reject one of the two conflicting claims. As it is, he, by his own standards does not even have any reason to maintain one rather than the other of the two claims. For he must have had some reason for his original claim. But this reason is now balanced by another reason which he is shown to have in support of the conflicting claim. And it is because he is not in a position to adjudicate between the two that he ends in an aporia, that he is in a dilemma, that he does not know what to do about the conflict.

For our purposes one crucial feature of this kind of Socratic argument is that all its premises are supplied by the opponent. Socrates does not have to know their truth, he does not even have to have any view as to their truth, nor does

he have to know the truth or have a view as to the truth of the conclusion of his argument, to achieve his aim of finding out whether his opponent can be trusted to know the truth on the matters in question. Another crucial feature is that it not only reveals that the opponent by his own standards lacks the knowledge in question, but that it also shows to the opponent that he would have to give the matter further consideration because, as it is, he does not seem to be even in a position to just make the claim.

What I want to suggest is that Arcesilaus and his followers thought of themselves as just following Socratic practice, and that they understood their arguments in the indicated way. In fact, I believe that they went one step further: they not only did not want to be committed themselves to the truth of the premises and the conclusion of their arguments, they also did not want to be committed to the validity of their arguments. More generally, they thought that their opponents had committed themselves to a certain view as to what counts as knowledge, good reason, sufficient reason, justification, and that their opponents had developed something called 'logic' to formulate canons and standards for argument and justification, canons whose strict application would guarantee the truth of the conclusions arrived at in this way. Since the skeptic wants to see whether his opponent at least by his own standards or canons has knowledge, he in his own arguments adheres to these standards. But this does not mean that he himself is committed to them. He is aware of the fact, e.g., that ordinarily we do not operate by these standards and that it is because his opponents want more than we ordinarily have that they try to subject themselves to these stricter canons; they want 'real' knowledge, certain knowledge.

For these reasons, then, the skeptics also would see no reason why their arguments that it is wise to always withhold assent would commit them to the position that one should always withhold assent. Their arguments just show that this is a conclusion their opponents are committed to. But the skeptics not only produce arguments to the effect that one should withhold assent, they also, as we can see from Sextus Empiricus, are in the habit of saying, at the conclusion of their various arguments against the various claims they address themselves to, that one ought to suspend judgment, to withhold assent on the matter. Since these remarks are not part of the skeptical arguments themselves, one might think that at least now the skeptics are committing themselves to a position in saying that one should withhold assent on this or that matter. And since the skeptics seem to be willing to make this kind of remark on any subject-matter whatsoever, one might even think that this reflects the general position that one should always withhold assent. But, of course, there is another interpretation of these remarks. Their aim might just be to point out to the opponent that by his own standards it would seem that he ought to withhold assent. But since the skeptic has not committed himself to these standards there is also no reason to think, just on the basis of these remarks, that he is committed to the claim that one ought to with-

hold assent on a particular subject, let alone to the generalization that one ought always to withhold assent.

What reason, then, do we have at all to assume that the skeptic thinks that one ought to withhold assent? I think that what may allow us to assume after all that the skeptic has the view that one ought to withhold assent is the fact that his opponents try to refute the skeptic by challenging this view and that the skeptic accepts that challenge. But one has to keep in mind that the fact that the skeptic accepts the challenge also admits of a different interpretation. The opponent, in challenging the view that it is wise to withhold assent, may be trying to remove one horn of the dilemma into which he has been put by the skeptical argument that the wise man will not give assent, and the skeptic may be taking up the challenge to show that his opponent is not in a position to rule out this possibility and thus to remove the conflict of his beliefs. In fact, I think that in classical skepticism this is one function of, e.g., the accounts of the so-called practical criterion, i.e., I think that it should not be taken for granted that the skeptical accounts of the practical criterion are just straightforward accounts of how a skeptic may proceed in real life. They, first of all, serve the purpose to show that the possibility that the wise man will not give assent cannot be ruled out just because it would be impossible to lead a life, let alone a wise life, without assent. The accounts of the practical criterion are supposed to show that even on the Stoics' own assumptions it might be possible to live without assent. Still, it also seems clear from the way the skeptic's opponents attack the skeptic on this point that they do not regard the skeptic's remarks as just a move in the dialectical game, but think that the skeptic does have the view that one ought to withhold assent. But in what sense could the skeptic have the view that one ought always to withhold assent without involving himself in immediate contradiction? If to have a view is to give assent a skeptic cannot heed his own precept without violating it. Thus we must assume that there is a kind of assent, namely the kind of assent the skeptic will withhold, such that having a view in itself does not involve that kind of assent, if we also want to assume that the skeptic does think that one ought to withhold assent and that he does not thereby involve himself in contradiction.

In what sense, then, could the skeptic have the view that one always ought to withhold assent? The only possibility I see is this: it turns out in his experience, having considered claim after claim, that given certain standards or canons it seems that one ought to withhold assent. And this might suggest to him, leave him with the impression that, given these standards, one ought to withhold assent. But this does not mean that he is ready to make the claim that one ought to withhold assent. For he knows too well that his claim would invite a skeptical counterargument. It would be pointed out to him that his experience was quite limited, that it was possibly quite idiosyncratic, that the future might be radically different, etc. Knowing all this he does not feel in a position to make the claim

that one ought to withhold assent, but he also still might have the impression that, given certain canons, one ought to withhold assent, just as he might still have the impression that there is motion, and yet not be ready to make that claim because he acknowledges that there are impressive arguments, like Zeno's paradoxes, on both sides of the question and that he is in no position to adjudicate between them. More generally, the reason why he does not feel like making a claim, let alone a claim to knowledge, is that he thinks that there is a philosophical practice of making claims, and in particular a practice of making claims to knowledge, and that to engage in this practice is to subject oneself to certain canons, and that he has the impression that, given these canons, one ought to withhold assent. To be more precise, according to these canons, one has to have some special reason to make a claim, and given what counts as a reason according to these canons, he does not see himself in a position to make a claim, and thus thinks he ought to withhold assent.

I want to emphasize that this view not only has a rather complicated, tenuous status, it also has this further complexity which tends to be overlooked. It is a view relative to the canons and standards of rationality espoused by dogmatic philosophy, which the dogmatic philosopher insists on applying to any claim whatsoever, whether it be in mathematics or in ordinary life. It is only given these standards that it seems that one should withhold assent. But they are not the skeptic's standards, though he does not reject them, either. And thus Sextus often qualifies his remark that we have to withhold assent by saying that we have to withhold assent as far as this is a matter of reason or philosophical reason (*hōson epi tō philosophō logō*; *PH* III, 65; I, 215; II, 26, 104; III, 6, 13, 29, 81, 135, 167). Thus there is room for another kind of assent, though one which will be threatened by the possibility that one ought to conform to the standards postulated by dogmatic philosophy if it should turn out that there is a choice in the matter.

On the basis of this one might try to make a distinction between just having a view and making a claim, taking a position. To just have a view is to find oneself being left with an impression, to find oneself having an impression after having considered the matter, maybe even for a long time, carefully, diligently, the way one considers matters depending on the importance one attaches to them. But however carefully one has considered a matter it does not follow that the impression one is left with is true, nor that one thinks that it is true, let alone that one thinks that it meets the standards which the dogmatic philosophers claim it has to meet if one is to think of it as true. To make a claim, on the other hand, is to subject oneself to certain canons. It does, e.g., require that one should think that one's impression is true and that one has the appropriate kind of reason for thinking it to be true. To be left with the impression or thought that *p*, on the other hand, does not involve the further thought that it is true that *p*, let alone the yet further thought that one has reason to think that *p*, that it is reasonable

that p . Even on the principles of Stoic logic the propositions (i) that p , (ii) that it is true that p , and (iii) that it is reasonable that p , are different propositions, and hence the corresponding thoughts or impressions are different thoughts. And though the propositions that p and that it is true that p may be necessarily equivalent, it does not follow from this that the impression that p involves, or is identical with, the impression that it is true that p .

Now it seems to me that there is such a distinction between having a view and taking a position, but that it is quite difficult to articulate it. And one reason for this seems to be that there is a whole spectrum of distinctions with a very weak notion of having a view at one extreme and a strong notion of taking a position at the other extreme. The problem is to draw the distinction in such a way that it does correspond to the distinction the skeptics actually made.

One way the skeptics draw the distinction is in terms of two kinds of assent, and since I think that it is a difficulty about the way in which the distinction is to be drawn in terms of two kinds of assent which historically give rise to dogmatic skepticism, I focus on the distinction thus drawn. But it is important to realize from the outset that this is just one way in which the skeptics draw the distinction, and that they draw the distinction in this way because their opponents speak about assent in such a way that they are in no position to assail the skeptical distinction.

A clue to how we might distinguish two kinds of assent for the classical skeptic, we get from Sextus. For Sextus, too, distinguishes two kinds of assent. Though at times he says that the skeptic invariably withholds assent, he also says that the skeptic does give assent to those impressions which are forced upon him (I. 13), or that the skeptic does not want to overturn those views which lead us, having been impressed by things in a certain way, toward assent without our will. The addition 'without our will' is crucial. For it guards this kind of assent against the threat that we might find out we ought to conform to the canons of rationality postulated by dogmatism. This kind of assent is not a matter of choice, unlike the assent of the Stoic wise man. In the first of these passages Sextus also uses the verb *eudokein* as a variant for the verb normally used in this context, *synkatatithesthai*. And indeed, the Suida, the Etymologicum Magnum, and the Lexeis Rhetorikai (*Anecdota Graeca*, I, p. 260³) treat *synkatatithesthai* as a synonym of *eudokein*. And if we consider the ordinary use of this verb, it turns out that it might refer to an explicit act of acknowledgment, approval, consent, acceptance, the kind of thing one does for a reason. Or it might refer to a passive acquiescence or acceptance of something, in the way in which a people might accept a ruler, not by some act of approval or acknowledgment, but by acquiescence in his rule, by failing to resist, to effectively reject his rule. Correspondingly there are two ways or senses in which one might accept or approve of an impression. When the Stoics speak of 'assent', they talk of an act of approval, the kind of thing one should do for an appropriate reason;

they think that to assent to an impression is to take it to be true, and that one should have good reason for taking something to be true. But there is also the other sense of 'assent'. One might, having considered matters, just acquiesce in the impression one is left with, resign oneself to it, accept the fact that this is the impression one is left with, without though taking the step to accept the impression positively by thinking the further thought that the impression is true. One might also not acquiesce in the impression one is left with and think that the matter needs further consideration. But whether one does or does not acquiesce in it is not by itself dependent on whether one takes the impression to be true. Assent may be a purely passive matter. It may be the case that human beings work in such a way that impressions are more or less evident to us. Evidence is a purely internal feature of our impressions. Now we also attribute different importance to different questions. We might be constructed in such a way that if we have an impression on a matter whose degree of evidence does not correspond to the degree of importance we attach to the matter, we naturally, unless we are prevented, e.g., by lack of time or energy or have decided to take a risk, go on to consider the matter further till we get an impression which has a sufficient degree of evidence. It would not even have to be the case that at a certain point we decide that we now have a clear enough impression and stop to consider the matter further. It may just be the case that as soon as we have a clear enough impression we, without any further thought, act on it. And this may be all acquiescence and assent consist in.

One might object that both cases of assent constitute some kind of acceptance, and that to accept an impression surely is to accept it as true. After all, how could somebody be said to have the view that *p* without thinking that it is the case that *p* or that it is true that *p*?

Here is at least one way in which this might be possible. It might be the case that action does not require that one take the impression one is acting on to be true. It might be the case that action does not, in addition to the impression that *p*, require a positive act of assent or the further thought that it is true that *p*. All that may be needed is one's acquiescence in the impression, and all this may amount to is that in the series of impressions one has reached an impression which produces an action rather than the kind of disquiet which would make one go on to consider the matter further till one reached an impression which one no longer resists and which produces an action. Indeed, one may have the view that *p* without even entertaining the thought that *p*, let alone the further thought that *p* is true. Things may have left us with the impression that *p*, and we may act on that view, without being aware of it. We may leave aside here cases in which something prevents us from realizing that this is the view we have (e.g., cases of suppression or self-deception). For even if we know that we have a certain view and on some occasion act on it, it is not necessary that in order to act on it we on that occasion have to entertain explicitly the corresponding thought

and to assent positively to it. An expert craftsman is still acting on his expert beliefs, even though he is not actually thinking of what he is doing when he is acting on them. Indeed thinking of them might interfere with his activity. But having finished his work he might well explain to us which views guided his activity. And for some of these views it might be true that this would be the first time he ever formulated them, either to himself or to somebody else. Nevertheless he could properly claim to have acted on them.

The skeptic might think that his opponents will have to grant that there are these kinds of cases and that they can be characterized in terms of assent to an impression. For even the Stoics assume that the wise man will often act, not on the basis of certain knowledge, but of wise conjecture. He is not omniscient, and his rationality and wisdom are characterized exactly by his ability to be rational or reasonable in his assumptions and actions even when he lacks knowledge, as he inevitably will, in the complex situations of everyday life. Nevertheless, he will do what is fitting or appropriate because he will be able, as the Stoics themselves say, to give a reasonable (*eulogon*) account of what he has done. I want to suggest that the past tense of 'what he has done' is to be taken seriously. The view is rather like Aristotle's; the person who has chosen to act in a certain way does not actually have to have gone through some moral reasoning and to have actually decided to act accordingly; what makes the action voluntary, rather, is that one correctly explain the action after the fact as being done for reasons of a certain kind. Similarly, the Stoic wise man, in order to do what is fitting, does not necessarily actually have to go through some reasoning, overtly accept or assent to the conclusion, and act on the basis of this. It, rather, is that his action in hindsight can be explained in terms of such reasoning. Thus even on the Stoics' theory there will be cases where the wise man, in fact, just acts on an impression of an appropriate kind and where, if we want to talk about assent, the assent consists in nothing but the fact that the wise man does not resist the impression he is acting on, but, in acting on it, implicitly accepts it. This, then, would seem to be a kind of case where acceptance of, or assent to, an impression does not involve taking it to be true. And if this is so, and if withholding assent is counted as an action, one might, e.g., say that the skeptic has the view that one ought to withhold assent in the sense that he might explain his withholding assent in terms of his acquiescence in this impression, pointing out that he is not resisting or fighting against this impression, but implicitly accepts it by acting on it.

Thus the skeptic may have views which account for his behavior. He behaves exactly in the way in which somebody who believed these views to be true would behave. But he insists that there is no need to assume that action, in addition to the appropriate kind of impression, requires the additional belief that the impression is true.

Now one might also ask the skeptic about his view on this or that matter. And

he might be ready to try to articulate his view. And in this case it might be objected that he now is taking a position about what he takes to be the truth of the matter. But, as we can see from Sextus, it is open to him to reply that he is merely trying to articulate the views which guide his behavior, he is merely, as it were, giving an autobiographical report, without taking a stand on the truth of his views.

At this point it is also worth taking note of another crucial fact. It is assumed by Greek philosophers that knowledge and truth are correlatives. For them those things count as truths which on the true account of things would come out as truths. But given that dogmatic philosophy has raised the conditions for what is to count as knowledge, it thereby has raised the requirements for what is to count as true. Now things which we ordinarily would count as true no longer necessarily qualify as such. We might think that it is true that this book is brown. But it might turn out that on the true theory of things this is a mere appearance, that, in fact, there only is a certain configuration of atoms which may, or may not, produce this appearance. And similarly for all other ordinary truths. It is in this way that dogmatic philosophy creates a global contrast between appearance and truth or reality. For dogmatic philosophy insists on calling into question all the truths we ordinarily go by.

And given this contrast, the skeptic, of course, does not take his impressions to be true, i.e., he does not think that his impressions are such that they will come out true on the true theory of things. For what reason would he have to think this? And he can point to the fact that not even the Stoic wise man takes all his impressions to be true in this way. The very point of the doctrine of the reasonable is that it allows the wise man to accept impressions and thus not to be reduced to inaction, without thereby taking them to be true. It is in this way that the Stoic wise man avoids having false beliefs, even though some of his impressions, however reasonable, may be false. For though he goes by the impression that *p*, he does not accept it as true, but only as reasonable.

Thus one may argue that the Stoics, given their own theory, can hardly reject the suggestion that there is a difference between having a view and taking a position, between just going by an impression and going by an impression because one takes it to be true, between two kinds of assent, merely passive acceptance and active acceptance as true.

There is one important difference between having a view and taking a position which was emphasized by the skeptics and which is still reflected by our ordinary notion of dogmatism. The skeptic has no stake in the truth of the impression he is left with. He is ever ready to consider the matter further, to change his mind. He has no attachment to the impressions he is left with. He is not responsible for having them, he did not seek them out. He is not out to prove anything, and hence feels no need to defend anything. For the dogmatic, on the other hand, something is at stake. It does make a great difference to him whether his impres-

sions really are true and whether he has made a mistake in taking them to be true. For in actively giving assent to them he has become responsible for them, and hence feels a need to defend them and to prove them to be true. The dogmatic, in taking a position, has made a deliberate choice, a *hairesis*, for which he is accountable. But because so much is at stake for him, he no longer is in a position openly to consider alternatives, to realize and accept the weight of objections; he has become dogmatic in his attitude.

If we now apply this distinction of two kinds of assent and correspondingly the distinction between having a view and taking a position to the question of knowledge, we might say that the classical skeptic perhaps comes to be left with the impression that nothing is, or even can be, known, whereas the dogmatic skeptic takes the position that nothing can be known. How could the classical skeptic come to have this impression? In his experience it turns out that claim after claim does not pass his scrutiny which, at least given the standards his opponents themselves are committed to, these claims should pass if they were made from knowledge. Thus he naturally is left with the impression that, given these standards, nothing will pass the test and hence that nothing is, or even can be, known. And in the course of time he might even acquiesce in this impression. He might stop to think that this cannot be right and that just some further consideration will change his impression. And yet he might not feel the slightest inclination to claim that nothing can be known. He knows the objections too well: limited experience, experience with the wrong claims, experience with the wrong opponents, one day we shall know, etc. And there is, of course, the troublesome tag 'given these standards'. He is not committed to these standards, but he does see their attraction. He himself originally had hoped that by following these standards he would arrive at certain knowledge and thus could adjudicate all the conflicts which were troubling him. But he also knows of powerful arguments against these standards, like the paradox of the liar. He cannot rule out the possibility that other standards would fare better. He is aware of the fact that in ordinary life and in ordinary language we do not subject ourselves to these standards. We do not ordinarily require of somebody who claims to know that he should have the kind of reason and justification for his belief which allows him to rule out all incompatible beliefs, that knowledge has to be firm or certain exactly in the sense that somebody who really knows cannot be argued out of his belief on the basis of assumptions incompatible with it. It seems that ordinarily we only expect satisfaction of these standards to an extent and degree which is proportional to the importance we attribute to the matter in question. And thus, following common usage, a skeptic might well be moved to say, in perfect consistency with his skepticism, that he knows this or that. There is no reason why the skeptic should not follow the common custom to mark the fact that he is saying what he is saying having given the matter appropriate consideration in the way one ordinarily goes about doing this, by using the verb 'to know'. This,

in fact, is what we find Sextus doing occasionally (cf. *Adversus Mathematicos* VIII. 157). Aenesidemus obviously was prepared to go so far as to say that a wise man knows that he does not know anything for certain and that if he does know something he is still going to withhold assent (Photius, *Bibl.* 212, 169^b 28ff.). A skeptic might take the view that all one could sensibly do was to follow this very complicated common practice. But if he would follow this practice it would be with the thought that what one said one knew could be radically otherwise, and that the whole practice of using the verb 'to know' the way we ordinarily do could be radically mistaken. For we cannot, e.g., rule out the possibility that we should subject ourselves to the rigorous standards and canons philosophers have been trying to impose, but which their own claims do not meet. There is the possibility that one day they will be able to formulate a set of canons which will find general acceptance. There is the possibility that one day they will make claims which meet these standards and which will pass the test.

It seems to me that this rather differentiated view is quite different from the dogmatic position that nothing can be known. It is a view the classical skeptic finds himself stranded with, not a position he is out to demonstrate, to establish, to defend, not a position he thinks he has reason to adopt and adopts for that reason. He is not out to show that some particular person, or some group of people, or people in general do not have knowledge, he is not out to show anything. He is willing to find out. But so far, all his search has left him with is the impression that nothing is known. If this is correct, then there is a substantial difference between classical skepticism and dogmatic skepticism, and the ancient representatives of classical skepticism were not just deluding themselves when they saw a difference between their own view and that of dogmatic skeptics. But if this is so, then the question does arise how this complex attitude of the classical skeptic collapsed into the dogmatic position that nothing can be known.

It seems that the major step in the direction of a dogmatic skepticism was already taken in antiquity. For, as we saw, in antiquity some skeptics accused other skeptics of being dogmatic in their assertion that nothing can be known. This is the charge Aenesidemus levels against the late Academics (cf. Photius, *Bibl.* 212, 169^b), and a charge, Sextus thinks, which might be leveled against the Academics in general (*PH* I, 226). We find evidence that some late Academics did, in fact, espouse such a dogmatic skepticism. At the end of Cicero's *Academica priora* (148), Catulus is made to say:

I return to the position of my father, which he said to be that of Carneades; I believe that nothing can be known, but I also believe that the wise man will give assent, i.e. will have opinions, but this in such a way that he is aware that he is only opining and that he knows that there is nothing which can be comprehended and known; hence I approve of this kind of with-

holding assent in all matters, but I vehemently assent to this other view that there is nothing which can be known.

These remarks reveal their dogmatism in the vehemence with which Catulus assents to the impression that nothing can be known, in the strong attachment which he has to this view, attachment of a kind which is quite alien to the classical skeptic and which is explicitly criticized by Sextus Empiricus (*PH* I, 230). Moreover, it reveals its dogmatism in that it allows the skeptic to have opinions, i.e., beliefs on how things are. This passage and its context also supply us with some crucial information about the source of this dogmatism. To start with, it is clear from Cicero's following remarks that he does not think that the view Catulus expresses is the general view of the Academy; Cicero himself thinks that this was not Carneades' view. Second, as we can see from Catulus' own remarks, this view is presented as an interpretation of Carneades, but as one which is controversial.

Now we know from the earlier parts of the *Academica* of at least one respect in which this interpretation of Carneades was controversial among Carneades' pupils. We are told that there was disagreement between Clitomachus, on the one hand, and Metrodorus and Philo, on the other, on whether, in reality and according to Carneades, the wise man will give assent and hence have opinions. The question is whether we can reconstruct enough of this controversy to see how it might have led to the kind of dogmatic skepticism which we find in the later Academy and which is represented by Catulus' remarks. In this case we also would have some explanation why later authors, like Sextus, entertain the possibility, or even assume as a fact, that Academic skeptics in general were dogmatic. For the view presents itself as an interpretation of Carneades and as the position of the Academy in general.

What, then, could have given rise to the view that according to Carneades the wise man will assent to what is not known, i.e., will have opinions, and how could this lead to the kind of dogmatic skepticism we are considering? The following seems to me to be a possibility. The notion of the probable (*pithanon*) plays a central role in Carneades. Among other things it is a matter of probability for Carneades that nothing can be known (Cic., *Ac. pr.* 110). Now there are two different interpretations of, and attitudes toward, the probable. These seem to correspond to two different interpretations of Carneades' so-called practical criterion. Asked how the skeptic will know what to do if he universally withholds assent, Carneades points out that he will just follow the probable, what seems to be the case, and that depending on the importance of the matter he will go through certain procedures to make sure that his impression is relatively reliable. It is clear that Carneades' account, first of all, is a dialectical move against a dogmatic objection and thus does not commit him to any view at all. But I also think that it does reflect Carneades' view of how people actually go

about gaining an impression they are willing to rely on. And taken this way, it admits of two interpretations. It may be taken in just the sense that this is how human beings in general seem to proceed, or it may be taken in the sense that this is how one ought to proceed if one wants to get a reliable impression, one which if not true, at least has a good chance to be true. Whereas on the first interpretation it is just noted that human beings, as a matter of fact, go about considering matters in a certain way when in doubt, on the second interpretation proper consideration is regarded as conferring some epistemological status on the impression thus arrived at: it at least has a good chance to be true. And thus, though it is agreed on all sides that the probable is that which seems to be the case, this is interpreted in two different ways. On one interpretation what on due consideration appears to be the case offers us some guidance about what is actually true. Though we are in no position to say that it is true, we may expect it to have a good chance of being true, to be like the truth (*verisimilis*), or else to be the truth itself (Cic., *Ac. pr.* 7; 32; 66; 99; 107). On the other interpretation, the fact that something appears to be the case goes no way to show that it is true; however much it appears to be the case, this does not itself make it any more likely to be true. The probable is just the plausible, and there is no reason to assume that plausibility and truth, or even evidence and truth, go hand in hand.

Another piece of relevant information seems to be the following: Carneades subscribed to the skeptic tenet that one should always withhold assent. But it also seems to have been agreed that Carneades did say that it is sometimes wise to give assent (*Ac. pr.* 67). Obviously, this needed interpretation, because it had to be made compatible with the general skeptical tenet to withhold assent, but presumably also because Arcesilaus had said nothing of the sort and hence Carneades' remark might be taken to indicate a significant departure from the position of Arcesilaus. Thus we find Clitomachus making a distinction of two kinds of assent, obviously trying to give an interpretation of the distinction which will not commit Carneades to the view that it is wise to have mere opinions (Cic., *Ac. pr.* 104). And it seems clear from Catulus' remarks that the opposing party similarly made a distinction of two kinds of assent, but exactly in such a way that Carneades would be committed to the view that the wise man will have opinions. For Catulus distinguishes between the universal withholding of assent and the vehement assent he gives to the view that nothing can be known and remarks that the wise man will give some kind of assent, i.e., will have opinions.

Now there is an obvious connection between the two interpretations of the probable and the two interpretations of the two kinds of assent Carneades must already have distinguished. To see this we have to notice that the skeptics sometimes speak of two kinds of assent; at other times they reserve the term 'assent' to the mental act, to something one does for a reason, to the positive acceptance of an impression because one thinks one has reason to take it to be true; and then

they refer to the other kind of assent by talking of just following or approving or accepting an impression. At this point they rely on an etymological and conceptual connection between *pithanon* (probable) and *peithestai* (to follow; cf. *PH* I, 230). It is this connection which Cicero tries to preserve when he renders *pithanon* by *probabile* to make it correspond to the verb for 'approve' or 'accept' which he likes to use, namely *probare* (Cic., *Ac. pr.* 99; 139). So the probable quite literally is that which invites approval or assent in the sense in which the skeptic is free to give assent. But now there is a disagreement about this sense, and hence about the way the probable is to be understood, and hence a disagreement about whether Carneades allows for mere opinion. This dogmatic skeptic seems to take the view that the only kind of assent which is illegitimate is assent of the kind where one takes something to be true, i.e., commits oneself to a belief about what will come out as true on the true theory of things, about what would turn out to be true if one really knew what things are like. And since it is one thing to take something to be true and quite another to take it to be probable, he thinks it is quite legitimate to give the kind of assent to an impression which would consist in taking it to be probable. And though we may not be able to ascertain what is to count as true, we can consider the matter with appropriate care and thus arrive at an impression which is probable and then assent to it as probable. But to take something to be probable is, on this interpretation of the probable, to take it to be either true or at least sufficiently like what is true. Thus somebody who does give assent in this sense does have beliefs about how things are, i.e., mere opinions.

Clitomachus' interpretation of the two kinds of assent, on the other hand, is very much along the lines of the distinction I earlier on attributed to Sextus, as we can see from Cicero (*Ac. pr.* 104), who spells out Clitomachus' view in some detail. On this interpretation, a view one acts on and a view one is willing to communicate do not presuppose either that one takes them to be true or that at least one takes them to be likely to be true, because one has considered the matter carefully. It is rather that, as a matter of fact, we sometimes only act on an impression, if we have considered the matter further, but not because we now think it more likely to be true. It surely is relevant to keep in mind in this connection, though this is not pointed out in our ancient texts, that sometimes we, quite reasonably, act on views which we ourselves find less likely to be true than their alternatives.

Now to take something to be true or at least likely to be true is not the same thing as to take it to be true. And thus even the kind of dogmatic Academic skeptic we are considering can insist that he, too, distinguishes between having a view and taking a position if to take a position is to take one's impression to be true, and that he does not take a position in saying that nothing can be known. This is what allows him to think that he is still a skeptic and not dogmatic. But since having a view for him might be a matter of actively adopting a view be-

cause he thinks that it is true or at least likely to be true, it is only a thin line which distinguishes him from the dogmatic who adopts a view because he takes it to be true. Both have views on how things are, both may be equally firmly convinced that they are true (remember Catulus' vehement assent), but one believes that the kind of justification or knowledge which would establish the truth of a view is available, whereas the other believes that it is not available. But as for the particular question we are concerned with, namely the possibility of knowledge, one cannot be more dogmatic than our dogmatic skeptic already is. For one cannot consistently claim that on the true account of things, i.e., if we really know how things are, it will turn out that nothing can be known. Thus, though there is a fine distinction between the dogmatism of the dogmatists and the dogmatism of late Academic skeptics, this fine distinction collapses when it comes to the view that nothing can be known. To preserve whatever distinction there is, one might distinguish between adopting a view and taking a position and contrast both with having a view. But I shall in the following use 'taking a position' in a wide sense to cover both, to emphasize the similarity which—in the eyes of the classical skeptic—dogmatic skepticism has with ordinary dogmatism.

If this should be correct, we can see what gives rise to dogmatic skepticism. Having considered a matter *carefully*, one finds oneself with a view which one finds persuasive. But this is *now taken* to mean that because one has considered the matter carefully the *view* has some likelihood of being true, though, of course, there is no *guarantee* or certainty that it is true. Thus Cicero can talk of the probable as the canon of truth and falsehood (*Ac. pr.* 32), and can talk of the Academic method of arguing pro and con, of considering a matter from all sides, as a method he pursues in the hope of finding what is true or at least very much like the truth (*Ac. pr.* 7). Thus the probability of the impression that nothing can be known, too, is interpreted as the likelihood, though not certainty, that nothing can be known, a likelihood one may be so convinced of that one vehemently assents. By contrast, the classical skeptic just finds himself with the view that nothing can be known and may finally acquiesce in it.

Thus a certain interpretation of the Carneadean criterion, and hence the probable, and along with it a certain interpretation of the distinction of two kinds of assent, is the first step on the road to dogmatic skepticism. It allows the skeptic to have opinions about how things are, as long as he is aware that his opinions are not a matter of certain knowledge. And it allows him to take the position that nothing can be known, if only it, too, is qualified by the proviso that it itself is not a matter of certain knowledge. For given his experience with skeptical arguments, it seems at least probable that nothing can be known.

Now the view that, in spite of all the skeptical arguments one has been producing and the effect they have had, one might still be left with an impression of how things are and that, on the basis of this impression, one may take a posi-

tion, has an effect on the way skeptical arguments in general and the arguments concerning the possibility of knowledge in particular are viewed. On the old view, the skeptical method to argue against any claim and—by implication—for any claim, since one would argue against the contradictory of a claim as much as against the claim itself, was seen as a purely negative, critical method. It might have been granted that the considerations pro and con might still leave one with an impression, that however much one argued for and against the existence of motion one might still be left with the impression that things move. But it was not assumed that this impression gained any epistemological status in virtue of the fact that one was still left with it after having gone through all the arguments pro and con. Now it comes to be assumed that the skeptical method of arguing pro and con is also a method of truth, a method which allows one to approximate the truth, though it does not guarantee the truth of the resulting impression (cf. Cic., *Ac. pr.* 7). And hence the dogmatic skeptic might well take the view that having carefully considered the Stoic arguments for the possibility of knowledge and the skeptical arguments against it, and finding, on balance, the skeptical arguments to be weightier, he is in a position to claim that nothing can be known.

Moreover, once the skeptic takes the liberty to take positions, his positions, given the eclecticism of the time, tend to become more or less identical to those of the Stoics, except on the question of knowledge itself. Thus he does come to believe in mental items like impressions and mental acts like assents. And he comes to believe in the premises of the arguments the classical skeptics had formulated to show that the Stoics themselves were committed to the view that nothing is, or can be, known. And now these arguments will have a pull on him, which is reflected by the quite unskeptical vehemence with which Catulus assents to the view that nothing can be known. Now skeptical arguments to the effect that nothing can be known can come to be interpreted as arguments which go some way, though not all the way, to establish the truth of the claim that nothing can be known. This, then, is the second major step on the road to dogmatic skepticism. The skeptic now, though qualifiedly, himself espouses the dogmatic framework of concepts and assumptions which seem to make knowledge impossible.

It should be noticed that at this point the classical and the dogmatic skeptic no longer differ only in the kind of assent they might feel free to give, but also in the impressions they give assent to. The difference between classical and dogmatic skeptics does not just consist in the different qualifiers attached to their views. For given his, albeit qualified, trust in the ability of philosophical arguments to get one somewhere, the dogmatic skeptic will have views induced by nothing but such arguments, whereas it would seem that in the case of the classical skeptic such arguments only threaten to undermine even those views which had been induced quite independently of philosophical argument.

Finally, the second step, the acceptance of the dogmatic framework, seems

to involve a third step. The classical skeptic had started out being attracted by certain knowledge. He certainly had not committed himself to the view that knowledge is certain knowledge. But the dogmatic skeptic now seems to accept the Stoic view that knowledge has to be certain. In fact, I am inclined to think that Philo provoked such an outcry among dogmatic skeptics because he maintained that though the kind of certain knowledge the Stoics were after was impossible this did not mean that knowledge as such was impossible, that this had never been the position of the Academy, and that hence the supposed break of the New Academy with the Old was an illusion.

In this way, then, we arrive by Cicero's time at the dogmatic skeptical position that since all we ever have are impressions of how things are and since there is nothing to ever guarantee the truth of an impression, nothing about how things are can be known for certain.

The next question I raised was how it happened that skepticism came to be identified with dogmatic skepticism, so much so that even classical skepticism was identified as dogmatic skepticism and that to the present day we associate skepticism with the dogmatic skeptical position. To understand this we have to see that skepticism of any form in antiquity soon came to be a dead issue. Dogmatic skepticism did not have a future in later ancient thought. Rather, it provoked a revival of classical skepticism. For it seems that Pyrrhonism is not so much a revival of Pyrrho's philosophy, but a revival of classical Academic skepticism under the name of Pyrronism, to distinguish it from the dogmatism which Aenesidemus and Sextus Empiricus associated with the later skeptical Academy. But neither form of skepticism suited the temper of late antiquity; later antiquity found some form of Platonism or other, in Christian or pagan garb, more congenial, and thus skepticism, with some odd exceptions like Uranius in the sixth century (cf. Agathias, *Historiarum libri quinque* II, 29, 7),⁴ came to be a historical position to be vehemently rejected, rather than to be carefully understood. Thus it was largely a matter of ignorance that in late antiquity skepticism came to be identified with dogmatic skepticism. In the Latin West this was, no doubt, in good part due to Cicero's influence, who himself was a dogmatic skeptic and who, moreover, would be the only substantial source concerning skepticism available to those who did not read Greek. And Cicero's influence was magnified by St. Augustine's authority, who for his attack on skepticism in his *Contra Academicos* primarily, if not exclusively, relied on Cicero, but unlike Cicero, gave no indication of the possibility of a nondogmatic skepticism and treated Carneades as taking the kind of position espoused by Cicero. And given Augustine's standing far into early modern times, it is not surprising that the Western view of skepticism should have been determined by him throughout the Middle Ages, especially since for a long time his *Contra Academicos* would have been the only readily available source which discussed skepticism in any detail. And the impression gained from Augustine would be confirmed by the odd re-

mark in the Latin Fathers, Arnobius (*Adv. Nationes* II, 9–10⁵ or Lactantius (*Div. Inst.* III. 6),⁶ for example. It may also be of relevance in this context that the question of knowledge became a live issue again in the late Middle Ages owing in part to Ockham's doctrine of intuitive cognitions. Ockham took the view that cognitions are entities. He also took the view that God, by his absolute power, can destroy any one of two separate entities, while preserving the other. Thus God could preserve a cognition we have while destroying the object of the cognition. Yet Ockham wanted to maintain that there are cognitions, namely intuitive cognitions, which warrant an evident judgment. Naturally his view raised questions. And at least one author, Nicolaus of Autrecourt, in his letters to Bernhard of Arezzo, took the view that, given the doctrine of cognitions or impressions and the doctrine of divine omnipotence he had to infer 'that every awareness which we have of the existence of objects outside our minds, can be false', and moreover that 'by natural cognitive means we cannot be certain when our awareness of the existence of external objects is true or false' (First Letter, p. 5 11).⁷ Thus the question of the possibility of knowledge came to be a live issue again more or less exactly in those terms in which dogmatic skepticism had formulated it. In fact it may well have been this debate kindled by Ockham which created an interest in Cicero's *Academica* and Sextus Empiricus. A fourteenth-century manuscript of a Latin translation of Sextus' *Outlines* and a fifteenth-century manuscript of the same translation in any case show a revival of interest in ancient skepticism which must have been generated by developments in medieval philosophy itself.

Thus the West came to think of skepticism as dogmatic and even thought of classical skeptics as dogmatic skeptics. And the influence of the East during the Renaissance did not change this view. For the Greek East, too, already in antiquity, had settled for a dogmatic interpretation of skepticism. This is true for secular authors as much as ecclesiastical authors. To take the latter first, nobody would be able to gather from Clement's discussion (*Stromateis* VIII, V, 15.2ff.)⁸ that not all skeptics asserted it as true that nothing can be known. Similarly, Eusebius (*Praeparatio Evangelica* XIV, 17, 10)⁹ talks as if the skeptics took the position that nothing can be known. A particularly striking example of how even classical skeptics are interpreted as dogmatic skeptics is offered by Photius in his report on Aenesidemus' *Pyrrhonian Arguments* (Bibl. cod. 212, 1169^b). Aenesidemus, in reaction to the dogmatism of the later Academy, had tried to revive classical skepticism under the name of Pyrrhonism. But though Photius tells us in the course of his report that Aenesidemus thought that the Academics had become dogmatic in claiming that nothing can be known, he starts out by telling us that Aenesidemus wrote his book to establish the thesis that nothing is known for certain. As for secular Greek writers one may compare the *Anonymous Prolegomena* (p. 21, 1ff.)¹⁰ and Olympiodorus' *Prolegomena* (3, 32ff.).

Thus it was part of the medieval heritage that skepticism should be thought

of as dogmatic skepticism and that even classical skeptics should be considered as dogmatic skeptics. But we have to ask why in early modern times, when most of the evidence concerning classical skepticism was available again, and when Cicero and Sextus Empiricus were reread with a new frame of mind, skepticism continued to be regarded as a dogmatical position, either as the extreme skepticism of the Pyrrhoneans or as the mitigated skepticism of the Academics.

I am not in a position to answer this question, but I do have some suggestions about how it might be answered. There is, first, mere inertia; this notion of skepticism, after all, was the notion inherited from the Middle Ages. Second, the early modern debate concerning the possibility of knowledge must have been a continuation of the medieval debate we referred to earlier. It surely is not accidental that the skeptical arguments against causality found, e.g., in Hume are very much like the arguments to be found in Nicolaus of Autrecourt or in Ghazali and Averroes' refutation of Ghazali. But at issue in this debate was a version of dogmatic skepticism. Third, early modern philosophy, in part in following the tradition of late medieval epistemology, in part in reaction to Aristotelianism and Scholasticism, came largely to adopt the framework of dogmatic Hellenistic epistemology and thereby invited dogmatic skepticism. The very term 'impressions', for example, may be due to Cicero's influence (*Ac. pr.* 58). Fourth, dogmatic skepticism satisfied various ideological needs of the time. It could be used to reject Aristotelian science, a curious preoccupation of that period. It could be used to point out the need for faith and revelation. Fifth, the attitude toward historical philosophical texts was very different from ours. Philosophers of the past were studied as paradigmatic philosophers, as authorities, as exponents of a philosophical position worth considering, i.e., they were approached with a preconception of what one expected from them which was determined by one's own needs. Obviously this attitude is not conducive to an understanding of the history of philosophy. One way in which this may be relevant for our question is this: at least on the face of it, classical skeptics seem to differ from dogmatic skeptics primarily in that the latter allowed the skeptic to have beliefs about how things are, whereas the former seem to require a life without beliefs. But this seemed so obviously to be such an untenable position that, until very recently, not even historians of philosophy gave it serious consideration. As a result one focused on the part of classical skepticism which was concerned with the possibility of knowledge, as if that part could be understood in isolation from the classical skeptic's attitude toward belief. But as we have seen, the difference between classical and dogmatic skepticism lies exactly in a different attitude toward belief or assent. Thus we can do justice to the classical skeptic's attitude toward knowledge only if we take his remarks concerning belief seriously. Sixth, when the texts were read again, it must have seemed that there were basically two forms of skepticism in antiquity, Pyrrhonian skepticism, going back to Pyrrho, and Academic skepticism going back to Arcesilaus.

Pyrrhonian skepticism seemed hopeless as a philosophical position because one misunderstood the Pyrrhonian attitude toward beliefs and thought that a Pyrrhonian was supposed to live without beliefs. Hence the mitigated skepticism of the late Academy seemed to be the only skeptical position of promise. But 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 of the Academic position, and Antiochus saw Carneades, perhaps Arcesilaus and Carneades, as dogmatic skeptics. Moreover, 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. Thus, if one concentrates on Academic skepticism as the viable skeptical position, and under the influence of Augustine and Sextus interprets Academic skepticism quite generally as dogmatic, one naturally arrives at a dogmatic conception of skepticism. But a more scholarly reading of Sextus or Cicero would have shown that this was never the position of the Academy.

To turn finally to our last question, it seems to me that early modern philosophy might have profited from a better historical understanding of ancient skepticism and the realization that dogmatic skepticism is only a degenerate form of skepticism. For it was because of this distorted notion of skepticism that the question at issue was understood as the question how we ever could be justified, on the basis of the impressions or ideas which are immediately given to us, to have any views about how things are, let alone to be certain about how things are. Descartes answered this question very much along the lines the Stoics had answered it, but Hume, in spite of an obvious tendency to go in this direction, was prevented from answering it in the way in which classical skepticism had answered it, since he to a good extent, too, accepted the dogmatic framework in which the question was posed by ancient dogmatic skepticism. But once we see that this framework in which the question is posed is the framework of dogmatic Hellenistic epistemology, and only thus comes to be the framework of ancient dogmatic skepticism, it is easy to realize that the classical skeptic will have no part of it. For all he knows it might be a mistake to distinguish quite generally and globally between how things appear and how they really are. There are some cases where it seems to be useful to make such a distinction, e.g., in the case of illusions, or in the case of deception. But for these cases we have ways to ascertain what really is the case which allow us in the first place to draw, for these cases, a reasonably clear distinction between how things appear and how they really are. But how are we supposed to know what is asked for when we are asked what things are really like in cases where we have not yet found that out? In short, I see no reason why a classical skeptic should accept the global contrast between appearance and reality. I also see no reason why a classical skeptic would believe in such mental entities as impressions or ideas. It is not that he is not willing to accept that people have impressions in the sense that one

may have the impression that all this is not very clear, or that people have a mind. He explicitly says that he accepts this. But it is one thing to accept this and quite another to believe in mental entities like impressions. There is no reason to think that he believes in mental acts like assents. It is true that he talks as if he accepted impressions and assents. But this is because his opponents believe in these things. And when, for a change, he does use this language to talk about his own attitude, he is careful not to commit himself to the dogmatic assumptions associated with this language. Thus the assent the skeptic is free to give becomes a matter, for example, of his being ready to say 'yes' or 'no' if asked (Cic., *Ac. pr.* II, 104). Moreover, he has no reason to think that impressions are immediately given and unquestionable. Anybody who has written a paper knows how difficult it is to be clear about one's impressions of the subject which one tries to articulate. Similarly, it is by no means easy to tell in detail what the impressions one is acting on actually are like. Again, it is true that the skeptic talks as if there were no question about what our impressions are when he addresses his opponents. Sextus explicitly says that how something appears to one is not an issue. But by good luck we know from two passages in Galen that a radical Pyrrhonian will also challenge reports of impressions if the question should arise (*De diff. puls.* VIII, 708ff.; cf. XIV, 628).¹¹ Moreover, there is no reason why the skeptic should accept what we do not accept in ordinary life, namely that there is a single answer to the question 'what is to count as knowledge?' What we expect from somebody who knows varies enormously from context to context. What counts as knowledge in an ordinary context may not count as such in the context of a scholarly or scientific discussion where we have higher demands. It also varies with the importance we attach to a matter.

So what in good part has happened is that, because one has failed to understand the classical skeptic's attitude toward belief, one also has failed to understand the peculiar nature and status of the arguments of classical skepticism, one has read and keeps reading them as if they represented the skeptical view of the problem of the possibility of knowledge. In fact, their primary function is to present the dogmatic with the difficulties which arise from the framework of notions and assumptions within which the dogmatic moves. And we should expect a proper skeptic to question not only the assumptions arrived at within this framework, but the very framework itself. This is what, from the point of view of classical skepticism, the later skeptical tradition failed to do. A better knowledge of the history of philosophy would have made this failure apparent.¹²