though the Stoic theory is foundationalist, being an account of knowledge, it is an account of the wise man's knowledge, since only he according to the Stoics has any knowledge. And this knowledge is a rather elevated kind of knowledge which involves an understanding of what is known. It certainly meets much more stringent demands than what we ordinarily call knowledge.

Finally, though the Stoics give an account of how knowledge and thus wisdom is attainable, it is an account which is very much focused on this abstract theoretical possibility. If we expect a consideration of the details of actual scientific knowledge of the kind we get in Aristotle's *Analytica posteriora*, we will be disappointed. But we have to remember, however paradoxical this may sound, that the Stoics did not think that they themselves had any knowledge of the kind whose possibility they tried to assure us of. And they seem to have taken a very dim view of our ability to understand the actual workings of nature. Even the wise man is far from omniscient.[15] Being wise for the Stoics, after all, is just a matter of knowing those things one needs to know to live well. In this too they were following Socrates, though perhaps, unlike Socrates, they assumed that this involved a basic understanding of the world, for instance of the fact that the world, down to the smallest detail, is governed by divine reason and providence.

[15] Cf. Kerferd 1978a.

The Cambridge History of Hellenistic Philosophy, K. Algra, J. Barnes, J. Mansfeld, M. Schofield, (eds.), CUP 1999.

10

Academic epistemology

MALCOLM SCHOFIELD

1 Introduction

Early in the Hellenistic period the Academy went sceptic.[1] Sceptic it remained until the two leading figures in the school at the beginning of the first century BC, Philo of Larissa and Antiochus of Ascalon, adopted more sanguine positions on the possibility of cognition – albeit mutually incompatible positions.[2] The philosopher who effected this change of outlook in the Academy was Arcesilaus, scholarch from *c.*265 BC until his death around twenty-five years later, and reputed as a dialectician whose employment of the Socratic method led him to suspend judgement about everything. He impressed the contemporary polymath Eratosthenes as one of the two leading philosophers of his time.[3] And in his assaults on the Stoic theory of cognition he established the principal focus of argument between the Stoa and the Academy for the best part of the next two hundred years.

The most notable of Arcesilaus' sceptical successors[4] was Carneades, the greatest philosopher of the second century BC. Although like Arcesilaus – and in similar emulation of Socrates – Carneades wrote nothing, his pupil Clitomachus published voluminous accounts of his arguments on issues across the whole range of philosophical inquiry; and it is principally to this source that – albeit indirectly – we owe our knowledge of a subtle system of thought.[5] In the course of his engagement with both

[1] The principal ancient sources for Academic epistemology are Cicero, *Academica* and Sextus Empiricus, *Adversus Mathematicos* VII. There are useful collections of the Greek and Latin texts which constitute the basic evidence for Academic views in Mette 1984 (Arcesilaus) and Mette 1985 (Carneades). General surveys: Brochard 1923, Stough 1969, dal Pra 1975.

[2] Study of the views of these philosophers lies outside the scope of the present volume. For discussion see Glucker 1978, Sedley 1981, Tarrant 1985, Barnes 1989c, Görler 1994b.

[3] Str. 1.15; the other he named was the Stoic Aristo of Chios.

[4] Lacydes, his immediate successor as scholarch, maintained the Academy in scepticism. The evidence about him (conveniently assembled in Mette 1985) is biographical and anecdotal. For an attempt to extract some philosophy from it see Hankinson 1995, 92–4.

[5] Like Socrates neither put any philosophy in writing: Plu. *Alex. Fort.* 328a; cf. D.L. 1.16, IV.32. Although Philodemus' *Academicorum historia* (*PHerc.* 1021) claims that a pupil of Arcesilaus

Stoicism and Epicureanism Carneades worked out for the first time in Greek philosophy an alternative non-foundationalist epistemology, sometimes misleadingly dubbed 'probabilism' in modern discussions of his views – although whether Arcesilaus or Carneades *had* any views of their own, or were simply dialecticians intent on undermining the positions of others, is a disputed question.

II Arcesilaus: the problem of interpretation

It has proved difficult to come to terms with the complexities of the evidence about Arcesilaus' stance in epistemology.[6] Some of the more general characterizations of his philosophical position in the sources portray him as a proto-Pyrrhonist. 'Arcesilaus', says Diogenes Laertius (IV.28), 'was the first to suspend his assertions owing to the contrarieties of arguments.' Sextus Empiricus sees a very close affinity between Arcesilaus' philosophy and his own Pyrrhonism:

> He is not found making assertions about the reality or unreality of anything, nor does he prefer one thing to another in point of convincingness or lack of convincingness, but he suspends judgment about everything. And he says that the aim is suspension of judgment (*epochē*), which, we said, is accompanied by tranquillity. (S.E. *PH* I.232; translation Annas and Barnes)

Although Sextus goes on to accuse him nonetheless of exhibiting unPyrrhonist signs of dogmatism, he is more willing to see a genuine sceptic in Arcesilaus than he is in the case of any other Academic.

On this reading of Arcesilaus, what leads him and his interlocutors to *epochē* is the realization that there is as much to be said on one side of the issue debated in an argument as on the other. Other texts, however, represent Arcesilaan *epochē* not as the outcome of weighing equally balanced trains of reasoning, but as the conclusion of *one* particular line of reasoning, namely his attack on the Stoic theory of the cognitive impression. This polemic is in fact the best attested piece of philosophizing attributed to Arcesilaus.[7] The sources give no indication that he regarded its conclusion as one to be balanced against the Stoic viewpoint. Rather the opposite: they suggest that he took *epochē* to be a more reasonable position than Stoic commitment to the cognitive impression. So there is a problem of reconciling the evidence about his arguments against the Stoics with his proto-Pyrrhonist appeal to contrarieties of arguments.

There is also a problem about evaluating those anti-Stoic arguments in themselves. Is their conclusion – that the wise person will suspend judgement or assent – represented as something to which Arcesilaus himself subscribes? Or is it meant to work solely *ad hominem*, as the outcome of a dialectical manoeuvre designed to corner the Stoics into admitting that on their own principles, together with premisses they cannot reasonably deny, *epochē* is the only tenable posture where questions requiring judgement or assent are concerned? It might be argued in favour of this second alternative that a dialectical interpretation fits neatly with the evidence of Arcesilaus' proto-Pyrrhonism, yielding the following story about his overall stance: if attacks on the doctrine of the cognitive impression convince the Stoics of the need for *epochē*, that is their affair. If the production of opposing arguments that are equally convincing or unconvincing convinces others of it, that is *their* affair. Arcesilaus need not take a view himself on whether either or both of these routes to *epochē* is reasonable, even if he employs a general argumentative strategy of getting people to draw the conclusion that there is a need for *epochē*, and even if he finds himself taking the second-order view that it is a good thing that people should conclude that there is such a need – as Sextus (*PH* I.233) suggests he did.

The dialectical interpretation can also appeal to Arcesilaus' well-attested revival of the Socratic method.[8] In the Socratic elenchus it is in the first instance the interlocutor, not Socrates, who is brought to an acknowledgement of ignorance, perplexity (*aporia*), and numbness 'in both soul and mouth' (*Men.* 80a–b). Again, in the fullest surviving report of Arcesilaus' argument against the cognitive impression, Sextus emphasizes the *ad hominem* status of the reasoning. Arcesilaus' first move was to prove that there *are* no cognitive impressions, that is, no impressions

Footnote 5 (*cont.*)
called Pythodorus made a written record of his discussions (*Acad. hist.* XX.43–4), most of the philosophical arguments ascribed to him in the sources derive from accounts which relate his views to Carneades', and may well depend on an oral tradition transmitted through Carneades. For Clitomachus' literary activity: D.L. IV.67; Cic. *Acad.* II.16. But a rival account of Carneades' philosophy was espoused by another pupil, Metrodorus, whose version was for a time espoused by Philo of Larissa: *Acad. hist.* XXVI.4–11; cf. Cic. *Acad.* II.16, 78. And unClitomachean 'dogmatist' interpretation has certainly left its mark e.g. on Sextus Empiricus' presentation of Carneades' epistemology: see nn. 36, 72 below.

[6] One dispute – prominent in the literature and pursued further in this chapter – is whether Arcesilaus argues solely *ad hominem* or adopts scepticism *in propria persona*. For versions of the first view see Couissin 1929, Striker 1981, Frede 1984; for versions of the second Ioppolo 1986, Maconi 1988, Bett 1989, Hankinson 1995, ch. V. The suggestion in some sources (e.g. S.E. *PH* I.234, Numen. in Eus. *PE* XIV.6.6, Aug. *Acad.* III.38) that Arcesilaus was an esoteric Platonic dogmatist is generally and rightly rejected nowadays: see e.g. Glucker 1978, 396–406, Lévy 1978.

[7] It is the centrepiece of the presentation of Arcesilaus' philosophy in both Sextus (*M* VII.150–8) and Cicero (*Acad.* I.43–6, II.59–60, 76–8).

[8] See Cic. *Fin.* II.2, *ND* I.11.

which satisfy the Stoics' definition of cognitive impression. He famously offered 'many and varied considerations' for 'why no true impression is to be found of such a kind that it could not turn out to be false' (*M* VII.154).[9] If this is so, then 'it will follow, according to the Stoics too, that the wise person refrains from judgement' (*M* VII.155). The conclusion is argued as follows:

> Given that everything is incognitive, owing to the non-existence of the Stoic criterion, then if the wise person assents, the wise person will hold opinions. For given that nothing is cognitive, if he assents to anything, he will assent to the incognitive, and assent to the incognitive is opinion. So if the wise person is among those who assent, the wise person will be among those who hold opinions. But the wise person is certainly not among those who hold opinions (for they [sc. the Stoics] claim this to be a mark of folly and a cause of wrongdoing). Therefore the wise person is not among those who assent. And if this is so, he will have to withhold assent about everything. But to withhold assent is no different from suspending judgement. Therefore the wise person will suspend judgement about everything. (S.E. *M* VII.156–7)

This star example of Arcesilaus' dialectic is plainly designed to make a sceptic of his Stoic interlocutor, not (or not in the first instance) to explain how he comes to a position of *epochē* himself.

So it is not in doubt that Arcesilaus sometimes argued *ad hominem*. The question is whether the whole of his philosophical activity was conceived as a dialectical enterprise in which argument proceeded *always* and *exclusively* from the principles of some opponent, or at any rate from premisses with which such an opponent could be persuaded to agree.[10] The evidence we have been reviewing already gives reason to answer: No. Arcesilaus' claim that the Stoics 'too' must agree to the rationality of *epochē* suggests an attempt to recommend that position to all and sundry, as one that *even* the Stoics – the most deeply entrenched dogmatists – ought to see that they are committed to accepting.[11] And his assault on

[9] Sextus gives no details; but this kind of argument remained the standard weapon used by Academics against the Stoics, and the sorts of example they used are recorded at length by both Sextus and Cicero: see section VI below.

[10] The 'many and varied considerations' (S.E. *M* VII.154) by which Arcesilaus sought to show that there were no impressions which satisfied the Stoic definition of a cognitive impression were plainly *not* derived from Stoic principles alone; and the Academics' success in getting the Stoics to agree to them was limited. See further section VI below.

[11] Sextus' καί could be read not as 'too' but as 'even' or 'actually' (Maconi 1988, 241 n. 32). But it is not obvious that these renderings make the implications of the text any different. Maconi also notes (ibid. 244) that Cicero clearly takes Arcesilaus to be himself committed to both the premisses and the conclusion of the anti-Stoic argument recorded by Sextus: see *Acad.* II.67, 77.

the cognitive impression is most obviously construed as designed to show principally that the Stoics are *wrong*, rather than that they ought to accept that they are wrong. Moreover the bulk of the rest of the evidence portrays Arcesilaus as holding a definite position for which he presented on his own account a variety of arguments, as the next two sections of this chapter will document.

III Arcesilaus' position

The main thesis to which Arcesilaus is said to have subscribed is the claim that nothing is known for certain, or more precisely that there is no such thing as what the Stoics called cognition. Two brief quotations will illustrate the centrality of this thesis in his thought, as well as giving some idea of its probable motivation. Cicero tells us:

> Arcesilaus was the first who from various of Plato's books and from Socratic discourses seized with the greatest force the moral: nothing which the mind or the senses can grasp is certain. (Cic. *De Orat.* III.67)

Numenius is one of several authors who confirms that Zeno's doctrine of cognition was the principal target,[12] although his colourful interpretation of the controversy in terms of competition for public status is more idiosyncratic:

> Seeing that Zeno was a rival in the art and a credible challenger, Arcesilaus launched without hesitation an attempt to demolish the arguments which were being produced by him. . . . And observing that the cognitive impression, that doctrine which he [sc. Zeno] was the first to discover, was highly regarded in Athens – both it and its name – he used every possible resource against it. (Eus. *PE* XIV.6.12–13)

It is readily intelligible how someone steeped in the writings of Plato (as Arcesilaus doubtless was) might be aghast both at Zeno's doctrine of the cognitive impression and more generally at the Stoics' attempt to appropriate Socrates, and indeed elements of Plato's own thought.[13] In part we should suppose such a response to have been a function of incompatible philosophical styles. The aporetic manner and agnostic outcome of Socratic questioning, as exhibited in many of Plato's Socratic dialogues,

[12] This is notably the explicit focus of Cicero's account of Arcesilaus: see e.g. *Acad.* I.44, II.16, 66, 76–7. So also Lact. *Inst.* VI.7 (no doubt dependent on Cicero). Sextus (*M* VII.150–8) speaks generally of the Stoics as the target, but chronological considerations alone make Zeno far the likeliest author of the views he represents Arcesilaus as attacking.

[13] On Stoic appropriation of Socrates see e.g. Schofield 1984, Long 1988b; and for Platonic elements in Stoicism e.g. Kramer 1971, 108–41.

are far removed in spirit from Zeno's insistence that everyone has cognitive impressions which can form the basis of knowledge or understanding (*epistēmē*). And we know that Arcesilaus associated himself quite specifically with Socrates' disavowal of knowledge:

> So Arcesilaus was in the practice of denying that anything could be known, not even the one thing Socrates had left for himself – the knowledge that he knew nothing. (Cic. *Acad.* 1.45)

There is also scope for the suspicion that some of his particular objections to the doctrine of the cognitive impression may owe something to arguments Plato had developed in the dialogues, although the case cannot be put more strongly than that. For example, people who have what Zeno calls cognitions must on Stoic premisses be either wise or foolish. But if they are wise, said Arcesilaus, cognition (*katalēpsis*) for them must simply be the same thing as knowledge or understanding (*epistēmē*); if they are foolish, it is merely opinion (*doxa*). The reasoning he presented is not recorded by our source (Sextus Empiricus, *M* VII.153), but the outcome is reinstatement of the familiar Platonic dichotomy of epistemic states. Again, Sextus informs us that Arcesilaus attempted to rebut Zeno's thesis that cognition is assent to a cognitive impression: 'assent relates not to impression but to *logos* (for assents are to propositions)' (*M* VII.154). The point at issue between them is not clear from this brief report. One plausible interpretation takes Arcesilaus to be re-using Plato's argument in the *Theaetetus* against the idea that truth is accessible to perception: if perceptions are passive affections (as on Stoic theory they seem to be conceived), they cannot be true or false, and cannot therefore be proper objects of assent – truth and falsehood will have to be the domain of the propositions which are expressed in reasoning *about* perceptions (cf. *Tht.* 184–6).[14]

It is often suggested that if Arcesilaus represented his scepticism as something consistent with or derived from a reading of Plato, then the reading he offered must have been at best selective and at worst implausible and disingenuous.[15] But his critique of Zeno's theory of cognition is at least along the sorts of lines one might have expected of Plato himself.

[14] So Ioppolo 1990. Other treatments of Arcesilaus' Platonic inheritance: von Staden 1978, Glucker 1978, 31–47, Ioppolo 1986, 40–9, Annas 1992c. A useful summary in Görler 1994b, 821–4.

[15] Whether Plato was in some sense a sceptic (in which case Arcesilaus' 'New Academy' might not be new after all) was already debated in antiquity: see e.g. Cic. *Acad.* 1 and 46, S.E. *PH* 1.221–5. Modern literature exploring the case for seeing him in this light includes Woodruff 1986, Annas 1992c, Frede 1992.

Nor is there any sign that he rejected Plato's *conception* of what systematic knowledge or understanding (*epistēmē*) consists in. If he thought it humanly unattainable, he could appeal to the *Phaedo* to support the view that in this life we must content ourselves with a cautious and painstaking method of hypothesis. Indeed the witness of philosophical authorities is just what Arcesilaus did invoke in confirmation of his position.[16] Plutarch alleges that 'the sophists of his time accused him of rubbing off his doctrines about suspension of judgement and non-cognition on Socrates, Plato, Parmenides and Heraclitus, who did not need them, whereas it was in fact as if he was acknowledging his indebtedness to some famous men and trying to claim confirmation from them' (*Col.* 1121e–1122a).

Given that attack on the Stoic doctrine of cognitive impressions was one route to *epochē*, how did it relate to the other which is attested for Arcesilaus: suspension of assent owing to contrarieties of arguments? There is one passage in our sources which indicates an answer to this question. After remarking that Arcesilaus went beyond even Socrates in what he said about the impossibility of knowledge, Cicero continues:

> Such was the extent of the obscurity in which everything lurked, on his assessment, and there was nothing which could be discerned or understood. For these reasons, he said, no one should maintain or assert anything or give it the acceptance of assent, but he should always curb his rashness and restrain it from every slip – for it would be extraordinary rashness to accept something either false or incognitive, and nothing was more regrettable than for assent and acceptance to run ahead of cognition and grasp. His practice was consistent with this theory: by arguing against everyone's opinions he drew most people away from their own, so that when reasons of equal weight were found on opposite sides on the same subject, it might be easier to withhold assent from either side. They call this Academy new, though I think it is old if we count Plato as one of the old Academy. In his books nothing is asserted and there is much argument pro and contra, everything is investigated and nothing is stated as certain. (*Acad.* 1.45–6; translation after Long and Sedley)

According to Cicero Arcesilaus' argumentation against the Stoic cognitive impression provided the *theoretical* basis for *epochē*: the production of equally balanced contrary arguments on philosophical subjects was the way he attempted to *implement* the theory in practice – in order to

[16] Arcesilaus' citation of authorities is a feature of his philosophizing particularly difficult to explain on a purely dialectical reading of his arguments in epistemology.

encourage people actually to suspend assent. In other words, on Cicero's interpretation his proto-Pyrrhonism is not the core of his philosophy, but the application of some non-Pyrrhonist theorizing.

As described by Cicero Arcesilaus' practice is characterized by a certain complexity. It is suggested that (i) he regularly argued against people, (ii) so as to get them used to being weaned from opinion, so that (iii) when reasons of equal weight were discovered they would find it easier to withhold assent from *either* side. Other texts associate (i) with Arcesilaus' revival of the Socratic elenchus;[17] and the rationale supplied by (ii) is a familiar rationale of the elenchus. (iii) is not nowadays seen as its ulterior motive. This is where Arcesilaus appears to innovate, although Cicero is right to point out that argument *pro* and *contra* is a feature of Platonic dialogues, as, for example, in the considerations advanced in the last part of the *Meno* for and against the view that virtue is teachable, or in the antinomies worked out in *Lysis* and (on a grand formal scale) *Parmenides*.[18] It is not hard to see how Arcesilaus might think of (iii) as no less Socratic than (ii). For if with him we interpret the elenchus as inspired by the conviction that nothing can be known, we shall expect Socrates in conducting it to be trying not only to purge his interlocutors of unfounded opinion, but to help them develop a frame of mind in which they refrain altogether from opinion, and therefore assent, with regard to *any* theoretical questions. For it is not just that people happen to be wedded to their own unjustified opinions. If they assent to any theoretical proposition at all, they will inevitably succumb to any unjustifiable opinion.[19]

Sextus claimed that Arcesilaus made *epochē* 'the aim' (*telos*), and in particular that he said *particular* suspensions of judgement were good and *particular* assents bad. Cicero's evidence suggests an interest on his part in the intellectual habituation of his interlocutors which makes sense of this stress on particular cases. As with the Socratic elenchus, the underlying aim will have been ethical as well as intellectual: the false conceit of knowledge is regarded as morally debilitating, and philosophy must bend all efforts to do away with it.[20]

[17] See Cic. *Fin.* II.2, *ND* I.11.

[18] Arcesilaus is sometimes thought to have borrowed from Aristotle the practice of arguing either side of the case (e.g. Weische 1961, Krämer 1971, 14–58); but Cicero stresses the differences between Aristotle's and Arcesilaus' uses of the method (*Fin.* V.10).

[19] For further discussion of how far Arcesilaus' use of the elenchus may be regarded as Socratic in spirit see Annas 1992c, Shields 1994.

[20] Modern scholarship has found Sextus' assertion that Arcesilaus made *epochē* the *telos* hard to evaluate: see e.g. Sedley 1983a, Ioppolo 1986, 34–40, 157–65, Annas 1988b. No doubt it was not his express 'doctrine', but if the account of his philosophical strategy at *Acad.* I.45 is correct his argumentative practice was systematically designed to induce *epochē*. (Sextus' reminder that according to Pyrrhonism *epochē* is accompanied by tranquillity is gratuitous – there is no evidence of Academic interest in tranquillity, nor does Sextus mean to suggest the contrary.)

Arcesilaus' contemporary, the maverick Stoic Aristo of Chios,[21] is credited with adapting Homer's description of the Chimaera to characterize his philosophical make-up (D.L. IV.33):[22]

> Plato in front, Pyrrho behind, Diodorus in the middle.

'That is', as David Sedley aptly comments, 'behind his formal pose as Plato's heir in the Academy lay Pyrrho's philosophy, while Diodorus' dialectical technique held the heterogeneous creatures together.'[23] Aristo's quip is not easy to evaluate. It gives no intimation of any Socratic inspiration for Arcesilaus' thought, so strongly emphasized by Cicero, our main (although much later) authority on the motivation of his scepticism. No other source elaborates on debts to Pyrrho or Diodorus. In default of further evidence, we are in no position to adjudicate on whether any similarities with Pyrrho and Diodorus were superficial or, as Aristo presumably meant to suggest, constituted evidence that Arcesilaus was an eclectic intellectual parasite – or, as is a priori more plausible, represented real influences which he absorbed and made his own.

IV Two objections to Arcesilaus

In conclusion it is appropriate to consider two objections to Arcesilaus' position, one theoretical, one practical. The theoretical objection complains that if Arcesilaus is interpreted as claiming on his own account that nothing can be known and consequently that it is wise to refrain from assertion on all matters, then he refutes himself. To be sure, he explicitly denied that he *knew* that nothing could be known. But on his own principles, if he does not know it, he should not assert it at all.[24]

Three main strategies for dealing with this difficulty deserve consideration. The first is to propose that we should after all prefer the dialectical interpretation of Arcesilaus, which makes all his arguments nothing but *ad hominem* manoeuvres against opponents. But while this way out would

[21] See Long 1986a for the argument that philosophical debate with Aristo formed a significant part of Arcesilaus' philosophical activity.

[22] Similar jibes carrying the same philosophical point were made by Timon of Phlius, in lines also reported at D.L. IV.33 (cf. Numen. in Eus. *PE* XIV.5.12–14, 6.4–6).

[23] Sedley 1983a, 15. He finds more truth in the imputation of dependence on Pyrrho than is allowed by Long and Sedley 1987, I.446.

[24] The ancient text in which this line of objection is pressed against Arcesilaus in particular is Lact. *Inst.* VI.10–15, probably drawing on a lost section of Cicero's *Academica*. The discussions about the epistemological status of the Academic position Cicero records in surviving passages relate to debates dating to the second century BC: see *Acad.* II.28–9, 109–10.

dispose of the problem, the fact remains that it runs counter to the great body of ancient evidence about Arcesilaus. A second strategy would be to credit him with one or other of the subtle devices deployed by later sceptics, Academic as well as Pyrrhonist, for qualifying their own sceptical claims. For example, Arcesilaus might have represented his position on the impossibility of knowledge not as something he asserted, but simply as the way things appeared to him. This suggestion runs the danger of anachronism: sceptic self-qualification was very likely the outcome of later debate. Moreover Sextus implies that so far as he was aware, Arcesilaus did *not* enter disclaimers of this sort, for example, in his evaluations of particular assents or suspensions of judgement (*PH* 1.233). It might be better to suppose that Arcesilaus conceived his own position in Platonic fashion as a *hypothesis*, i.e. as a theory advanced for consideration as the best explanation we have of human cognitive performance. If this solution seems unduly speculative, one might finally and glumly conclude, in default of any evidence to the contrary, that he *had* no position on the status of his own position.

The other and principal ancient objection pressed against Arcesilaus was the charge of *apraxia*, 'inability to act'.[25] If wholly rational persons never assent, how are they to act? The Stoics made this question their major counter-weapon against the Academic critique of the cognitive impression throughout the Hellenistic period, and it was also levelled against Arcesilaus by the Epicurean Colotes. From Plutarch we have details of an Academic answer to it. It consists in an explanation of action as the outcome of impression and impulse alone, without the additional need – insisted on by the Stoics – for assent. This is usually interpreted as an *ad hominem* stratagem, not a theory the Academics advanced on their own account. However that may be, Plutarch does not expressly ascribe it to Arcesilaus. Conceivably it is the work of Carneades or Clitomachus.[26]

The defence against the *apraxia* criticism which *is* attested for Arcesilaus is recorded by Sextus:

> Arcesilaus says that one who suspends judgement about everything will regulate choice and avoidance and actions in general by 'the reasonable' (*eulogon*); and that by proceeding in accordance with this criterion he will act rightly and successfully – for (1) happiness is acquired through prudence, and (2) prudence resides in right and successful actions, and (3) right and successful action is whatever when done has a reasonable justification: therefore one who attends to the reasonable will act rightly and successfully and be happy. (S.E. *M* VII.158)

[25] On Academic defences against arguments of this kind see Striker 1980, Bett 1989.

[26] See Plu. *Col.* 1120c, 1121e–1122f. The main reason why the Academic rebuttal of the charge of *apraxia* reported at 1122b–d is usually attributed to Arcesilaus is simply that it is introduced in the context of Colotes' attack on his position (for supplementary considerations see Striker 1980, 65 n. 29). But Plutarch probably implies that it was a reply to *Stoic* criticism (1122a–b), as its exploitation of Stoic conceptual apparatus confirms; and elsewhere he suggests that such Stoic criticism belonged mainly to a later phase of debate, being principally the work of Chrysippus and Antipater (*Stoic. Rep.* 1057a). Against Arcesilaan authorship see e.g. Mette 1984, 92 n. 1, Lévy 1993, 266–8; also below, p. 333 n. 30.

The status of Arcesilaus' theory is hotly debated. The notion of 'the reasonable' (*to eulogon*) was one Zeno employed, and Arcesilaus' premiss (3) predicates of 'right and successful action' (*katorthōma*) Zeno's definition of an *appropriate* action (*kathēkon*) as 'whatever when/if done has a reasonable justification'.[27] Since premisses (1) and (2) are also Stoic, it seems likely that Arcesilaus is replying to the Stoic challenge by exploiting theses and concepts central to the Stoics' own ethics.[28] This has inevitably suggested to some scholars that Arcesilaus' argument is meant to function only as *ad hominem* dialectic against the Stoa: 'He did not teach the doctrine of the *eulogon*; that was a thesis he derived from Stoicism in order to attack and wound it in its weakest part. He behaved as a nihilist, a fifth columnist inside the Stoa.'[29]

The suggestion labours under a difficulty. Arcesilaus' argument was conceived as a *defence* in the face of Stoic criticism. It will only work as a simultaneous counter-attack provided that the Stoics abandon their standard account of right and successful action (*katorthōma*) as 'appropriate action which possesses all the measures' (Stob. *Ecl.* II.93.14–15 [= *SVF* III.500]), or more simply as a 'perfect appropriate action' (Stob. *Ecl.* II.85.18–20 [= *SVF* III.494]). For as things stand, the Stoics would insist that following the course that is 'reasonable' will not guarantee that one performs a *perfect* appropriate action, even if it will prove to be *true* of any such action that it was a or the reasonable thing to do. But Sextus records no reasons Arcesilaus put forward as to why the Stoics should give up their ordinary definition of *katorthōma*.[30] It might therefore seem better to accept that Arcesilaus is replying rather more directly on his own account to the Stoic challenge to show how action is compatible with *epochē*. Yet it then becomes hard to understand why he should have opted for just the Stoic-sounding rationale he is represented as advancing, and why there is no obvious trace of its being adopted or adapted by any other Academic sceptic.[31]

[27] D.L. VII.107, Stob. II.85.13–15. No account survives of how the Stoics would have defined 'reasonable' in this context; nor does it appear that Arcesilaus sought to supply the omission.

[28] So Goulet-Cazé 1979, Bett 1989, 62–9; *contra* Ioppolo 1986, 120–34.

[29] Goulet-Cazé 1979, 38; cf. Striker 1980, 64–6.

[30] Cf. Maconi 1988, 247–52, Bett 1989, 62–9.

[31] But see n. 66 below.

On either interpretation there is a further difficulty. How will those who regulate their conduct by 'the reasonable' thereby avoid assent? Someone who says of the course of action *A* he proposes to adopt: '*A* is the reasonable thing to do' does not claim or imply that he is opting for *A* on the basis of cognition. But nor is he suspending judgement about it or the reasonableness of pursuing it. Compare the Stoic Sphaerus, who when tricked into taking wax pomegranates for real ones, and charged with assenting to something false, replied: 'I didn't assent to the proposition that they are pomegranates, but to the proposition that it is reasonable to think they are pomegranates' (D.L. VII.177). Perhaps Arcesilaus thought that doing something because it is the reasonable course to follow was like entertaining a hypothesis about some theoretical matter: reliance on what is reasonable similarly requires only a working assumption about what should be done, not an assent or a judgement about truth. If so, his proposal turns not (as Sextus suggests) on the idea of the reasonable, but on the unexpressed notion of a working assumption.

v Carneades on opinion and assent

'I agree with Clitomachus', says Cicero (*Acad.* II.108), 'when he writes that it was a labour of Herculean proportions Carneades went through in dragging from our minds that wild and savage monster assent – i.e. opinion and rashness.' Not every Academic would have wanted to describe Carneades' achievement in these terms. Cicero elsewhere makes a contrast between Arcesilaus and Carneades.[32] Arcesilaus argued against the Stoic cognitive impression (1) that there is no true impression such that there could not be a false impression indistinguishable from it. From this he further argued (2) that in that case if the wise person assents, what he will be holding is an opinion – since cognition is impossible. And he held (3) that it is necessary for the wise person not to hold opinions, and so not to assent. But Carneades appeared to allow (contrary to (3)) that sometimes the wise man *will* assent, and so will hold an opinion:

> This [sc. (1)] is the one argument which has held the field [sc. within the Academy] down to the present day.[33] For the thesis: 'The wise person will assent to nothing' [i.e. (3)] had nothing to do with this dispute[34]

[32] See *Acad.* II.59, 66–7, 76–8.

[33] So the Loeb translates *haec est una contentio quae adhuc permanserit*. Long and Sedley 1987, 1, 243 have: 'This is the one controversial issue which has lasted up to the present.' But that makes Cicero claim something false and apparently inconsistent with what immediately follows.

[34] Cicero overstates the case, perhaps because he wants to indicate that the *apraxia* argument is the principal context for a discussion of (3) (so Striker 1980, 75). He has in mind the sound point that (3) does not follow from (1) directly, only from the conjunction of (1) and (2). At II.68 he makes it quite clear that the existence of controversy over (3) *presupposes* that a case for (1) – and for its consequence that cognition is impossible – has been made.

> [i.e. over the possibility of cognition]. For it was permitted for the wise person to grasp nothing cognitively but yet hold an opinion – a thesis Carneades is said to have accepted, although for my part, trusting Clitomachus rather than Philo or Metrodorus, I think that this was not so much something he accepted as something he put forward in debate. (Cic. *Acad.* II.78)

Carneades and the Academy in general agreed with Arcesilaus in arguing against the cognitive impression. But as Cicero here records, it became a matter of controversy among Carneades' heirs what conclusions he was prepared to derive from that generally agreed position. And according to the interpretation of Philo and Metrodorus he took a different line on (3) from Arcesilaus: the wise person *might* sometimes hold an opinion. On their view any Herculean labour ascribed to Carneades must have had an outcome other than the wholesale extrusion of assent from the mind.

The conflict in the assessment of Carneades' treatment of opinion attested by Cicero is easily explained. Once again the crux is a choice between a dialectical reading of a position and one which attributes to its author views that are in some sense his own. If Clitomachus is right,[35] Carneades will have varied Arcesilaus' anti-Stoic dialectic by saying in effect: given (1) and (2), *either* the wise person will never assent to anything (as in (3)) *or* – supposing he does assent – he will sometimes hold opinions. The point would be to insist that the Stoics are confronted with a dilemma. If they regard the option of *epochē* with horror, as forcing them into Arcesilaus' camp, then they can of course allow that the wise person will sometimes assent, but at the heavy price of having to agree to exactly what Arcesilaus supposed their Stoic principles would never permit them to accept: that the wise person will sometimes hold mere opinions.

The alternative interpretation of Carneades advocated by Philo and Metrodorus is amplified a little by Catulus, the Philonian speaker in *Academica* Book II, in the closing lines of the dialogue:

> I am coming round to my father's view, which he used to say was Carneades' in fact. I think nothing can be grasped cognitively. Yet I also

[35] Most modern scholarship supposes with Cicero that he is: see e.g. Long and Sedley 1987, 1, 448–9, 455–6, following Couissin 1929, 45–6. For arguments in favour of this verdict see e.g. Bett 1989, 70 n. 24. Note in particular that according to Cicero Carneades only *sometimes* pursued the second option, of granting that the wise person sometimes assents (*Acad.* II.67): which strongly supports the view that this was a dialectical ploy.

> think that the wise person will assent to what is not grasped cognitively, i.e. he will hold opinions – but in such a way that he understands he is holding opinions and knows that there is nothing which can be grasped cognitively. (*Acad.* II.148)

This tantalizingly brief construal of Carneades' stance in epistemology does a little to explain what on the Philonian view holding an opinion would add up to for a wise person. A number of Hellenistic attempts to characterize opinion are recorded, but the one that seems to shape Catulus' formulation is the Stoic conception of it as 'yielding to an incognitive impression' (Plu. *Stoic. Rep.* 1056f). His way of removing anything objectionable from opinion so conceived is to suppose it may involve a second-order mental attitude: the wise person does not just hold an opinion, but is also aware *that* it is merely an opinion and not something cognitively grasped. What he is presumably assuming is that the reason for *avoiding* opinion is because it is ordinarily accompanied, as Socrates so often pointed out, by the false conceit of knowledge: not merely do people holding opinions believe (truly or falsely) that *p*, but they falsely believe that they know that *p* – falsely, because there is nothing that *can* be grasped cognitively. Catulus' wise person is not infected by the false conceit of knowledge. Although he believes that *p*, he does so well aware that he does not *know* that *p*. Therefore he is free of what is debilitating about opinion. So construed, the Philonian interpretation of why Carneades said that the wise person will sometimes hold an opinion differs from the Clitomachean in two fundamental respects. First, it takes him to have accepted the claim himself. It was not just something he propounded as one horn of a dilemma for the Stoics. Second, it attributes to him a sanitized notion of opinion, such that a perfectly rational person need not seek to avoid holding opinions.

Did Clitomachus represent his dialectical Carneades as holding no views of his own of any kind on this issue of opinion and assent?[36] Far from it. Here are two pieces of evidence which favour the opposite conclusion. First, the passage about Carneades' Herculean labour quoted at the beginning of this section. If it was a great achievement to 'drag from our minds that wild and savage monster assent' (*Acad.* II.108), Clitomachus is very likely supposing that Carneades himself assumed that

[36] Much modern discussion of Carneades denies him any such views on this or any matter: so e.g. Couissin 1929, 50–1, Striker 1980, 82–3 (*contra* e.g. Bett 1989, 76–90). Many of the texts which portray him as having views of his own derive from sources that have an axe to grind (e.g. Numen. in Eus. *PE* XIV.8.1–10, S.E. *PH* I.226–31, *M* VII.159–84 (where he perhaps follows Antiochus: so Sedley 1992a, 44–55)). But Clitomachus' evidence that he did needs more careful attention (however note also Clitomachus' remark, conceivably made with a specific reference to ethics, that he could never understand what was 'approved' (*probaretur*) by Carneades: *Acad.* II.139).

the wise person will refrain from assent. His implication will be that that assumption motivated much of Carneades' philosophical activity – as on our account it did Arcesilaus' before him. Second is some information about a distinction between two meanings of the thesis that 'the wise person will refrain from assent' which Cicero reports a few pages earlier on.[37] The report makes most readily intelligible sense if Clitomachus took the thesis to be one which represented Carneades' own position. For the distinction Clitomachus drew between different ways of taking it indicates a concern on his part to rebut the charge of *apraxia* ('inability to act') levelled against the Academy: a response which is difficult to interpret unless Academics did in some sense themselves advocate the view that the wise person will not assent.

Cicero's account of the two meanings is unfortunately compressed, and probably at one or two points textually corrupt. But there seems to be a contrast between refraining from *judgement*, which the wise person will always do, and refraining from *saying* 'Yes' or 'No' to a question, where his position will be more nuanced. Here the wise man *will* say 'Yes' or 'No', but without thereby expressing a judgement, that is, without meaning that he takes something to be true or false. He will simply be signalling that he is 'following' or 'going along with' an impression which he finds persuasive in one direction or another.[38] The contrast is a perfectly general one, not restricted to questions relating to how a person is to act. However Cicero suggests that the idea of 'following' an impression without forming a judgement was for Clitomachus particularly relevant to the problem of how someone who refrains from assent 'nonetheless does move and does act' (*Acad.* II.104): the wise man 'goes along with' those impressions by which he is roused to action. When Plutarch gives his account of the Academic rejoinder to the charge of *apraxia*, he may well be reproducing a more detailed version of this response by Clitomachus to the problem:[39]

[37] Clitomachus' distinction is discussed by Frede 1984, Bett 1990.

[38] Cf. S.E. *PH* I.230: 'Carneades and Clitomachus say that they go along with things – and that some things are persuasive or convincing (*pithanon*) – with an intense (*sphodrās*) inclination.' 'Intense inclination' would no doubt be the natural and appropriate response to 'the intensity of its appearing true' which is a feature of convincing impressions, according to Carneades (S.E. *M* VII.171). Sextus implies that Arcesilaus was closer to Pyrrhonism than Carneades because he did not rank impressions according to whether they were more or less deserving of conviction: *PH* I.232. An unsafe inference: Arcesilaus did not work with the conceptual apparatus of the *pithanon* at all.

[39] Note particularly the correspondence between Clitomachus' talk of 'impressions by which we are aroused to action' (*Acad.* II.104) and the account of impulse as 'aroused by that [sc. the movement] of impression' in Plutarch's report. The role of nature implied in the report perhaps finds an echo in Clitomachus' claim that it is 'contrary to nature that nothing should be acceptable (*probabile*)' (*Acad.* II.99). For discussion of the philosophical content of Plutarch's text see Striker 1980, 66–9.

> The soul has three movements – impression, impulse and assent. The movement of impression we could not remove, even if we wanted to; rather, as soon as we encounter things, we get an impression and are affected by them. The movement of impulse, when aroused by that of impression, moves a person actively towards appropriate objects, since a kind of turn of the scale and inclination occur in the commanding-faculty. So those who suspend judgement about everything do not remove this movement either, but make use of the impulse which leads them naturally towards what appears appropriate. What, then, is the only thing they avoid? That only in which falsehood and deception are engendered – opining and precipitately assenting, which is yielding to the appearance out of weakness and involves nothing useful. For action requires two things: an impression of something appropriate, and an impulse towards the appropriate object that has appeared; neither of these is in conflict with suspension of judgement. For the argument keeps us away from opinion, not from impulse or impression. So whenever something appropriate has appeared, no opinion is needed to get us moving and proceeding towards it; the impulse arrives immediately, since it is the soul's process and movement. (Plu. *Col.* 1122b–d; translation Long and Sedley)

VI Carneades on the impossibility of knowledge

Why on Clitomachus' view did Carneades conclude in the first place that the wise person should refrain from assent? Just as with Arcesilaus, the answer lies in his rejection of the Stoic cognitive impression. Cicero stresses that the whole question of whether the wise man assents or holds opinions becomes a problem precisely because (as the Academics argue) nothing can be cognitively grasped: 'if I succeed in proving that nothing can be cognitively grasped, you must admit that the wise man will never assent' (*Acad.* II.78).[40] And Clitomachus' differentiation between two sorts of assent is worked out in the light of the claim that impressions differ in persuasiveness even though they have no mark of truth and certainty peculiar to themselves and found nowhere else (*Acad.* II.103).

It was not just the Stoic cognitive impression that Carneades attacked. In the most general and comprehensive account of Carneades' epistemology preserved in our sources his entire position is represented as founded on rejection of *any* infallible criterion of truth. 'On the subject of the criterion', says Sextus (*M* VII.159), 'Carneades marshalled arguments not only against the Stoics but also against all previous philosophers.' Two particular arguments are summarized, the first very briefly. This consisted in showing that there *is* no such criterion as philosophers claim – not reason, not sensation, not impression, not anything: 'for all of these alike deceive us' (S.E. *M* VII.159). *How* exactly Carneades showed this Sextus does not record, nor just what he meant by 'criterion' in this context.[41] Perhaps his contention amounted to the claim that we have no psychological faculty such that every use of it which appears to result in our grasping thereby some true state of affairs as 'evident' actually does give us thereby a grasp of just that state of affairs as 'evident'. In what sense would such a claim constitute an attack 'aimed at all of them [sc. previous philosophers] jointly'? Probably only because Carneades supposed that the different candidates for criterial faculty he considered effectively included every basis for cognition so far proposed by philosophers.

The second Carneadean argument recorded by Sextus is reported in greater detail (S.E. *M* VII.160–5). Carneades started by supposing for the sake of argument that (1) there *is* after all some criterion. But if so (2) our ability to grasp what is evident must be a function of how what is evident affects us as we employ some criterial faculty (as assumed in (1)). And once it is accepted that (3) an affection (in this instance an impression) is one thing and the evident state of affairs it is taken to reveal another, the possibility has also to be accepted that (4) some impressions which appear to reveal what is evident are deceptive – the match is imperfect. Therefore (5) not every impression can be a criterion of truth, but (if any) only the true impression. But (6) there is no true impression of such a kind that it could not turn out false, so the supposed criterion will turn out to consist in an impression which spans true and false. (7) Such an impression is not cognitive, and cannot therefore be a criterion. Therefore (8) no impression is criterial. But in that case (9) reason cannot be a criterion either, since reason derives from impression. Therefore (10) neither irrational sensation nor reason is a criterion. (10) does not formally contradict (1); but (8) to (10) between them eliminate the favoured candidates for what the criterion hypothesized in (1) might be.

Sextus is not explicit about which philosophers are the target of this complex sequence of reasoning. There is much to be said for the view that Epicurus is the principal opponent in view. Two features of the argument

[40] Cf. *Acad.* II.59, 68, and see p. 344 n. 34 above.

[41] On the notion of a criterion in Hellenistic philosophy see Striker 1974, Brunschwig 1988b, Striker 1990.

in particular support this interpretation. First, most space and effort are devoted to proving (5), which hits at the Epicureans, who believed that *all* impressions are true – there is no such thing as a false impression. (5) is something the Stoics, by contrast, take for granted; and indeed in recommending (2) by the argument that sensation cannot register or reveal anything unless it is altered by what it registers or reveals, Carneades follows the Stoics, and borrows from Chrysippus in particular the idea first that such an alteration is what an impression is, and second that impressions are like light in simultaneously revealing themselves and something external to them.[42] Secondly, in formulating the conclusion of the whole argument in the terms in which (10) is couched he rounds off the proof in a way calculated once more to address a specifically Epicurean position. The articulation of (10) as a disjunction between irrational sensation and reason corresponds to the Epicurean conception of the division of labour between perception and reason, not the Stoic – for the Stoics insist that cognitive impressions are *rational* impressions.[43] Of course steps (6) and (7) of the argument are standardly reported as anti-Stoic manoeuvres in our accounts of Academic scepticism. But Carneades' point here is doubtless that once Epicureans are persuaded to accept (5), the only way they can sustain belief in a criterion of truth is in effect to accept the Stoic doctrine of the cognitive impression – which succumbs to the considerations advanced in (6) and (7).

Sextus' evidence that Carneades argued about knowledge and the criterion of truth over a broader front than Arcesilaus is indirectly confirmed by what Cicero tells us of 'the Academy's' approach to the topic. 'The Academics', he says (*Acad.* II.40), 'embody their entire case in the reasoning of a single argument.' The argument he goes on to set out turns out to be a portmanteau proof, designed to demolish with a single sequence of strokes the epistemologies of Stoics and Epicureans alike. It is impossible to decide whether the idea of such an all-purpose demonstration was Carneades' own or something his concern to deal comprehensively with other schools inspired his pupils to attempt. Here is the argument, which has obvious affinities with the proof recorded by Sextus we have just been examining:

> (1) Of impressions, some are true, some false. (2) A false impression is not cognitive. But (3) every true impression is such that a false one just like it can also occur. And (4) where impressions are such that there is no difference between them, it cannot turn out that some of them are cognitive but others not. Therefore (5) no impression is cognitive. (Cic. *Acad.* II.40)

[42] Cf. *SVF* II 54.

[43] So Long and Sedley 1987, II, 453. The Epicurean view: D.L. X.31–2; the Stoic: D.L. VII.51.

Cicero comments as follows:

> Of the premisses which they adopt in order to reach their conclusion, they take two to be conceded to them, since no one raises an objection. These are, first, (2) that false impressions are not cognitive; and second, (4) that when impressions do not differ at all it is impossible that some of them should be cognitive, others not. But the other premisses they defend with a long and wide-ranging disquisition. Here again there are two of them: first, (1) that of impressions some are true, others false; second, (3) that every impression arising from something true is such that it could also arise from something false. (*Acad.* II.41; both translations by Long and Sedley)

The 'long and wide-ranging disquisition' needed to defend (1) presupposes principally Epicurean opponents;[44] (3), on the other hand, is as noted above the Academics' classic anti-Stoic move. Some indication of the sorts of consideration that were adduced in support of (1) is given in *Acad.* II.79–83, where Cicero runs through a battery of now familiar sceptical arguments[45] questioning the reliability of the senses: they represent the sun as a foot in diameter and an oar in water as bent; their scope is limited and species-relative; etc. As expected Epicurus is mentioned as the chief proponent of the 'credulous' view that 'the senses never lie' (ibid. 82). By contrast the Academics worked out what they had to say on (3) by attacking the Stoic definition of the cognitive impression. Both Arcesilaus and Carneades took as their specific target the third clause of the definition: which provided that a cognitive impression is 'of such a kind as could not arise from what is not'.[46]

Two main lines of objection were developed by the Academics in this context, both aimed at showing that there are false impressions indistinguishable from the true impressions which satisfy the other two clauses of the Stoic definition, namely that they arise from what is, and are stamped and impressed exactly in accordance with what is. They are referred to in our sources as arguments from 'indiscernibility', *aparallaxia*. Falling under the first of the two were appeals to the experience of dreamers, those suffering from hallucinations, etc. Such persons are moved by their impressions in just the same way as people normally respond to the sorts of

[44] As is explicitly remarked at *Acad.* II.83; cf. 101.

[45] Cicero tells us they were *communes loci*, stock arguments, in his own day: *Acad.* II.80.

[46] Arcesilaus: S.E. *M* VII.154, Cic. *Acad.* II.76–8; Carneades: S.E. *M* VII.401–11.

impression the Stoics believe to be cognitive. The second and perhaps subsidiary type of *aparallaxia* argument focused on cases where even healthy persons in full possession of their senses find it impossible to tell two things apart – two twins, two eggs, two applications of the same seal.[47]

Sextus' report of the arguments derived from dreaming and the like makes their logical structure transparent. What they are intended to establish is that there are false impressions indistinguishable from true impressions inasmuch as they are equally evident and striking. This conclusion is taken to follow from the fact that e.g. hallucinations move those who experience them to the same *behaviour* as supposedly cognitive impressions move those who experience them:

> Just as in normal states too we believe and assent to very clear appearances, behaving towards Dion, for instance, as Dion and towards Theon as Theon, so too in madness some people have a similar experience. When Heracles was deranged, he got an impression from his own children as though they were those of Eurystheus, and he attached the consequential action to this impression – killing his enemy's children: which [sc. killing the children] was what he did. If then impressions are cognitive in so far as they induce us to assent and to attach to them the consequential action, since false impressions are plainly of this kind too, we must say that incognitive ones are indiscernible from the cognitive. (S.E. *M* VII.404–5; translation after Long and Sedley)

Similarly dreamers get the same pleasure or feel the same terror at what they are experiencing as waking persons do, for example, when quenching their thirst or running screaming from a wild animal (S.E. *M* VII.403). Here the claim that dreaming behaviour is identical with waking behaviour seems harder to sustain: the Academics must be arguing that there is the same *impulse* and accordingly the same assent, and that these constitute identical behaviour.

So on Sextus' account the Academics do not claim that there is any direct way of establishing the nature of dreaming or hallucinatory experience. They make a proposal about what it *must* be like – namely (in the cases discussed) 'evident' and 'striking' – on the basis of inference. Cicero's treatment of the dispute between the Stoa and the Academy over this issue does not present the Academics' line of reasoning with the same clarity.[48] Nonetheless his evidence can be interpreted as consistent with

[47] These arguments are discussed from the Stoic point of view in chapter 9. Cf. also Frede 1983, Annas 1990b, Striker 1990. Arguments from dreaming etc. are given pride of place in Cic. *Acad.* II.47–58, S.E. *M* VII.401–11, although the case of twins etc. gets more prominence at Cic. *Acad.* II.83–90. [48] See Cic. *Acad.* II.50–4, 88–90.

Sextus'. He suggests that the Academics' key point was that so far as the assent of the mind is concerned, there is no difference between the false impressions experienced by dreamers and the insane and the true impressions of sane wakeful persons (*Acad.* II.90). So when he represents them as stressing that 'what we are asking is what these things [sc. dreams, hallucinations, etc.] looked like at the time' (*Acad.* II.88; cf. 52), this should be seen as a way of putting the challenge: if there is the same assent, must we not suppose that the impressions which prompt the assent are equally evident and striking when they occur?

The reply of the Stoicizing Antiochus as documented by Cicero may be interpreted as resisting the Academic argument so construed at two points in particular. First, he stressed that when dreamers wake or the insane recover they dismiss their dreaming or hallucinatory impressions as feeble and insubstantial (*Acad.* II.51). Here Antiochus can be read as capitalizing on the inferential nature of our understanding of such experiences (conceded by the Academics). His rejoinder in effect says: the self-conscious judgement of those who recover their normal senses provides a sounder basis for deciding how evident and striking their abnormal impressions were than the appeal to assent proposed by the Academics. Second, Antiochus disputed that dreamers or the insane *do* assent to their impressions in the same way as waking or sane persons. For example, he appealed to the similar phenomenon of inebriation:

> Even men acting under the influence of wine do not act with the same kind of approval as when they are sober. They waver, they hesitate, they sometimes pull themselves back. They give a feebler assent to their impressions. And when they have slept it off they realize how insubstantial those impressions were. (Cic. *Acad.* II.52)[49]

But in reminding us[50] of how the mad Heracles transfixed his own sons with his arrows when in the grip of hallucination the Academics had the better of the argument on both points. Perhaps a single example (such as Heracles' insanity) where assent to a false impression is best explained by its being as evident and striking as any true impression is not sufficient to make their case, but the ball ends up in the Stoic court.[51]

[49] See also S.E. *M* VII.247. [50] Cic. *Acad.* II.89, S.E. *M* VII.405.

[51] Carneades' articulation of the dreaming and hallucination examples in terms of 'evident and striking' impressions (as Sextus represents him) suggests that he was directing his argument specifically against the position of the 'younger Stoics' (*M* VII.253), for whom the cognitive impression is not the criterion of truth unconditionally, but only when it has 'no impediment'. For 'this impression, *being evident and striking*, all but seizes us by the hair, they say, and pulls us to assent, needing nothing else to achieve this effect or to establish its difference from other impressions' (*M* VII.257)

The other principal problem for the cognitive impression developed by the Academics is described by Sextus as 'proving indiscernibility with respect to stamp and impress' (*M* VII.408).[52] It focused principally on the powers of discrimination of the wise. Even a wise person is unable to say infallibly which of two exactly similar eggs he is being shown; and he will 'get a false impression, albeit one from what is, and imprinted and stamped exactly in accordance with what is, if he has an impression of Castor as though it is of Polydeuces' (ibid. 410) – which since identical twins are coins from a single mint he very well might.

The Stoics' reply to this objection has already been explained in an earlier chapter. The Academics were unmoved by their rejoinders. Against the Stoic appeal to the metaphysical principle that no two individuals – not even two grains of sand – are qualitatively identical, they pitted Democritean metaphysics. Democritus held that some whole worlds 'completely and absolutely match each other in every detail, so that there is no difference between them whatever' (Cic. *Acad.* II.55). Why should not the same be true of individuals within one and the same world? But the Academics believed the more important issue concerned the wise person's powers of discrimination.[53] If someone has impressions of two individuals which satisfy the first two clauses of the Stoic definition but which he cannot successfully tell apart – even if (for the sake of argument) we grant that they *do* differ – then it follows according to the Academics that neither is 'of such a kind as could not arise from what is not'.

In order to see why they think this we need to notice an interesting assumption they are making about the third condition of the Stoic definition: if an impression is to count as being of such a kind as could not arise from what is not, the person who has it must be able to make discriminations which reflect the fact that it is of that kind. Someone whose impression of Castor was such as could not arise from Polydeuces must be able to tell that it could not – and his impression would therefore have to carry a 'mark' (*nota*) giving him that ability (Cic. *Acad.* II.84). It seems that the Stoics came to agree with this characterization of their position.[54]

The dispute about twins and eggs seems inconclusive. The Academics rightly insist that if they could produce cases of impressions the Stoics would have to count as cognitive, but which even a wise person could not distinguish, then on reasonable assumptions about the nature of the Stoic theory its idea of a cognitive impression would be fatally undermined. The Stoics simply deny that there are any such cases. If a wise man could not discriminate between his impressions of eggs or twins, those impressions are not cognitive and he would be right to withhold assent. Perhaps that means that the Stoics are requiring a higher standard of *exactness* in cognitive impressions than might have been supposed. But if the higher standard makes its demands felt as stringent only in exceptional cases it is not clear that nature turns out to be less generous and providential in its *general* supply of reliable information.[55]

The Academics deployed many other *aparallaxia* arguments against the cognitive impression than the two examined in detail here. The whole critique was launched, according to Cicero, with more a priori considerations (*Acad.* II.47–8). For example, there was appeal to the likelihood that just as exactly the same state of shivering can be brought on either by internal imagining or by external threat, so exactly the same impression of the mind can be caused either by the imagination (as in dreams or madness) or by external causes. Another line of reasoning was given a soritical form. If some false impressions are persuasive, why not those that approximate very closely to true ones? And if these, why not those capable of being distinguished from true ones only with extreme difficulty? And if these, why not those which are no different from them at all? The critique was apparently rounded off with proofs that nothing could be cognitively grasped by reason or inference any more than by the senses.[56] Thus the Academics attacked the view that reason, for example, as employed in dialectic could discriminate between true and false. This seems to have been the context in which they used paradoxes like the Sorites and the Liar against the Stoics. Even a wise person cannot tell the difference between a cognitive impression that some number n is few and a non-cognitive impression that some other number $n+1$ is few.[57]

VII Carneades' 'probabilism'

Is the conclusion that nothing can be grasped cognitively itself something grasped cognitively? Arcesilaus said: No. Carneades conducted a debate on the question – no longer fully capable of reconstruction – with his

[52] Cicero's discussion is fuller and richer: *Acad.* II.54–8, 84–6.

[53] See Cic. *Acad.* II.40, 57; cf. S.E. *M* VII.409–10.

[54] According to Sextus (*M* VII.252) the Stoics hold that a cognitive impression has a 'peculiarity' (*idiōma*; translated by Cicero as *nota*) which enables the person who experiences it to fasten on the objective differentia in things in a 'craftsmanlike way' (*technikōs*). This notion was evidently taken over by Antiochus: see e.g. *Acad.* II.33–6, 58.

[55] For further discussion of the issues raised in this paragraph see above, pp. 306–11; also Annas 1990b.

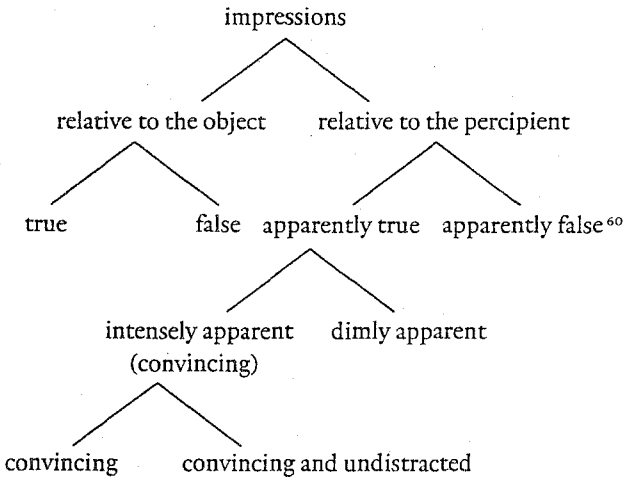
[56] *Acad.* II.42; cf. 91–8.

[57] See *Acad.* II.91–8; cf. S.E. *M* VII.415–21. For discussion see Barnes 1982b, Burnyeat 1982b.

Stoic contemporary Antipater.[58] He too said: No. Cicero suggests a way in which a Carneadean might wish to elaborate on that answer. It is to say that the wise person has the impression that nothing can be grasped 'in just the same way as he has those other impressions that are acceptable but not cognitively grasped' (*Acad.* II.110). That is, his acceptance of the second-order proposition that nothing can be cognitively grasped is a matter of 'going along with' or 'following' without assent the acceptable impression that this is the case, just as his acceptance of first-order propositions consists simply in 'following' without assent the corresponding acceptable impressions.

In proposing this solution to the problem of the Academics' own stance, Cicero draws on Carneades' highly developed theory of impressions in general and 'acceptable' (*probabilia*) or 'convincing' (or 'persuasive': Greek *pithana*) impressions in particular. He has earlier informed us that the Academics began their exposition of their epistemology 'by constructing a sort of expertise concerning what we are calling "impressions", defining their power and their kinds, including among them the kind that can be cognized and grasped' (*Acad.* II.40). 'Their account', he adds, 'is as full as that given by the Stoics.' Sextus ascribes just such a detailed scheme to Carneades by name.[59]

The schema is most conveniently presented by a diagram:



[58] See *Acad.* II.28, 109; discussion in Burnyeat 1997.

[59] See *M* VII.166–75. The diagram below does not attempt to capture all the distinctions Carneades drew.

[60] Carneades called the apparently true impression an 'appearance' (*emphasis*: following Stoic usage, D.L. VII.51), the apparently false an 'anti-appearance' (*apemphasis*), as being *un*persuasive and *un*convincing: *M* VII.169. Cicero seems to be rendering *emphasis* as *species* at *Acad.* II.38.

There is more to say about the last line of the right-hand division, since Carneades also spoke of impressions which were 'convincing and thoroughly examined'. But for the moment we may note the broad resemblance between the division as a whole and the Stoic classification of impressions, which was elaborated by permutations of the categories of the convincing and the unconvincing, the true and the false.[61] The key feature of Carneades' scheme is the fundamental distinction between truth and falsehood, which obtain with respect to the relation between impressions and the things or facts they purport to represent, and *apparent* truth and falsehood, which are merely functions of the way impressions seem to those who experience them. For Carneades there always remains an epistemological as well as a logical gap between the two sorts of assessments of impressions – they concern utterly different relations in which impressions stand.

That basic distinction is what Carneades exploits in his argument against Epicurean epistemology. As section VI of this chapter demonstrated, his chief complaint against Epicurus is effectively that he confuses what the Epicureans call 'evidence' (*enargeia*), which as properly understood is apparent truth, with truth. His further inference that *no* impression can be a criterion was derived, as we saw, from the consideration – fundamental to his critique of the Stoa – that for any true impression there can be an indiscernible false impression: which led him to say that the supposed criterion is merely an apparently true impression which 'spans [literally: 'is common to'] both true and false', and so is no criterion at all.[62] That formula recurs in Carneades' discussion of his classificatory scheme. It represents one of three ways of taking 'convincing' or 'persuasive': sometimes when we call an impression convincing or persuasive we mean to imply that it is true, sometimes that it is false, sometimes that it might be either. And Carneades comments that 'might be either' or 'spanning true and false' is what fits the supposed criterion of truth (S.E. *M* VII.173–5).

But Carneades also put his schema to more constructive work. Sextus claims that in some sense he *accepted* that convincing impressions 'spanning true and false' *were* after all the criterion of truth.[63] One way of construing

[61] Cf. S.E. *M* VII.242–52.

[62] See *M* VII.164; cf. Cic. *Acad.* II.33–4.

[63] See *M* VII.166; cf. 173–5. Sextus implies that Carneades took this position (as the Pyrrhonists did too: *PH* I.21–4, *M* VII.29–30) out of concern for 'the conduct of life and the attainment of happiness' – i.e. to meet the *apraxia* argument. Antiochus likewise claimed that the Academics made the *pithanon* their criterion, although 'both in the conduct of life and in inquiry and discussion' (*Acad.* II.32; cf. S.E. *M* VII.435–8). But while Clitomachus agrees in making 'following the *pithanon*' the Academic response to the charge of *apraxia* (Cic. *Acad.* II.104), he says nothing about its being the criterion of truth. It seems likely that it was Philo of Larissa (probably the target of the critique launched at *Acad.* II.32: see e.g. Sedley 1983a, 26) who first construed the *pithanon* as Carneades' *own* criterion.

this apparent *volte face* is to see it in terms of controversy with the Stoics. On this view what Carneades is saying is: *your* criterion of truth is simply misdescribed by you. The kind of impression you take to be the criterion is not a *cognitive* impression (there is no such thing), but a particularly striking form of apparently true impression which might be true or false. So either the kind of impression you identify as cognitive is not a criterion (because *not* in fact cognitive), or – if you insist that it *does* work as a criterion – what your position really reduces to is the view that *convincing* impressions are the criterion.

But Carneades was not simply showing something about Stoic epistemology and its collapse into a form of 'probabilism', even if the specific evidence of Carneadean endorsement of a 'criterion' is best interpreted as belonging to a dialectical context of that sort. On Clitomachus' presentation of the topic too, it was Carneades' own position that the wise person 'will make use of whatever impression acceptable in appearance he encounters, if nothing presents itself contrary to the acceptability of that impression, and his whole plan of life will be governed in this manner' (Cic. *Acad.* II.99).[64] Otherwise the *apraxia* argument against the Academy would succeed. If there were no acceptable or convincing impressions life would indeed be impossible, because there would be nothing that could incline us (rightly or wrongly) to one course of action rather than another. As will have been clear from the discussion in section V, this position is not in conflict with the Academic view that the wise man does not assent. The point is rather that he does not *need* assent or a criterion to live his life: 'following' convincing impressions without assent will suffice.

Carneades had a good deal to say about what 'following' convincing impressions involved.[65] It would often be a more active and critical business than talk of 'following' initially suggests. If there is time and the matter at issue sufficiently important, the wise person will put his impression through a series of checks – presumably because he is by hypothesis a perfectly rational person, and this is the rational thing to do.[66] The checking procedures described are compared to the cross-questioning of witnesses in court or to the scrutiny of candidates for political or judicial office; or

[64] At *Acad.* II.99–101 Cicero says he is drawing on the first volume of Clitomachus' four-book work on *epochē*. II.99 continues by *contrasting* Carneades' wise person with 'the person whom your school [sc. the Stoicizing Antiochus] bring on stage as the wise man'.

[65] See *M* VII.176–89, *PH* I.227–9; cf. *Acad.* II.35–6.

[66] That this is conceived as a *rational* procedure is argued e.g. by Bett 1989, 76–90; note that the outcome of the fullest testing is said to 'make the judgement most perfect' (*M* VII.181). On this interpretation Carneades' prescription of proper method may be construed as an elaboration of Arcesilaus' recommendation to follow what is rational (*eulogon*, *M* VII.158), and not simply as a description of *actual* practice in ordinary life – to which however it is compared (*M* VII.184)

again to the use by doctors of the examination of a syndrome of symptoms, for 'an impression never stands in isolation, but one depends on another like links in a chain' (S.E. *M* VII.176). An impression which passes such tests 'undistracted' (*aperispastos*) becomes more convincing, even though the possibility that it is in fact false can never be excluded. All Sextus' examples actually involve cases which *fail* examination: e.g. something which on a quick look leaves us convinced that it is a snake 'appears as a rope in virtue of an impression that is convincing *and* scrutinized' (*PH* I.228).[67]

So much is clear about the theory. Accounts of its details given by our sources are confused and confusing. Cicero operates with a single contrast between acceptable impressions and impressions that are acceptable and 'not impeded' (*quae non impediatur*, *Acad.* II.33:[68] his rendering of *aperispastos*, 'undistracted'). But Sextus thinks Carneades had a tripartite scheme: as well as satisfying himself that an impression is 'undistracted' or 'unimpeded' by the outcome of his checking, the rational person will want to ensure that it is 'thoroughly examined' (*diexhōdeumenē* or *perihōdeumenē*). Hence a convincing impression can become not only (at a second stage) more convincing, but (at a third stage) even more convincing. Unfortunately in the two versions of the theory he presents Sextus gives contradictory identifications of the second and third stages he introduces, and on both occasions other aspects of his treatment are also unsatisfactory.[69]

A better if necessarily conjectural interpretation takes Carneades to be envisaging not two possible *stages* in an inquiry into an impression, but simply two *sorts of testing*.[70] One focuses on its compatibility with other associated impressions, and may be taken as what Cicero's expression 'looking around' (*circumspectio*, *Acad.* II.36) refers to. Here what will have been important is the *content* of the impressions examined. The analogy of a syndrome of medical symptoms seems appropriate to this form of scrutiny. The other kind of test focuses on the *background circumstances* involved: when the person having the impression had it, how far he was from the object represented in it, what condition his sensory equipment was in, how long he had to look or hear, etc. This is perhaps what Cicero means by talking of 'elaborate consideration' (*accurata consideratio*, ibid.),

[67] The version of this example in *M* VII.187–8 claims that after his tests the person following the method 'assents to the fact that it is false that the body presented to him is a snake'. This is one of several places where the account in *M* VII forgets that Carneades' wise person *refrains* from assent, i.e. judging that something is true, and simply 'goes along with' his convincing impressions.

[68] Cf. e.g. *Acad.* II.99, 101, 104.

[69] Cf. e.g. Mutschmann 1911b.

[70] The following interpretation is due to Allen 1994

and what corresponds to the analogy of cross-examination of witnesses or candidates.[71] Contrary to what Sextus implies, one might expect that in testing a convincing impression both these forms of scrutiny would be employed simultaneously. And it would be when an impression survives the application of the two together that it would count as 'undistracted' or 'unimpeded' by possible counter-evidence.

Partly because Cicero translated the Greek *pithanon*, 'convincing', into Latin as *probabile*, acceptable, the theory described above has often been construed as a form of probabilism. Denying as he does that we can ever conduct either our lives or our theoretical inquiries on the basis of knowledge, Carneades is seen as proposing that we should take probability as our guide – that is, we should work out what has more chances of being true than not, and let that govern our thoughts and actions. Little in the evidence supports this reading of the theory.[72] Cicero's choice of *probabile* is designed to connect with use of the verb *probare*, 'accept' or 'approve', as applied to the wise person's 'acceptance' of convincing impressions without assent. The process of testing by which such impressions are to be examined is certainly conceived as a *rational* procedure. But it is entirely focused on ensuring that the impressions on which we place reliance in important matters are internally consistent and not suspect on account of some abnormality in the circumstances in which they are experienced. It is not articulated as a form of calculation of the likelihood that they are actually true. No doubt an impression which fails some element of the scrutiny might seem less likely to be true, but that is not how Carneades puts the point. He says that what then happens is that some other impression drags or distracts us away from conviction.

VIII Conclusion

The framework of Carneades' thought is entirely Hellenistic: the major presences in his philosophizing are Epicurus, Chrysippus and Arcesilaus. We get no sense, as we do with Arcesilaus, of someone standing on the shoulders of Socrates and Plato. But like Arcesilaus Carneades rejected

[71] Allen 1994, 98–9, suggests that *circumspectio* may correspond to *perihōdeumenē phantasia*, *accurata consideratio* to *diexhōdeumenē phantasia*.

[72] But Sextus makes Carneades say that we should not distrust the impression 'which tells the truth for the most part [sc. that which spans true and false]: for both judgements and actions, as it turns out, are regulated by what holds for the most part' (*M* VII.175). 'As it turns out' suggests that this is not an account of a *calculation* we make in our response to a convincing impression. This may be another point at which the dogmatist assumptions of Sextus' source are showing through: see p. 336 n. 36 and p. 349 n. 67.

principally Stoic claims about knowledge. Like him, he shared the general Hellenistic hostility to assertion based on mere opinion. And like him he tried to show that it was possible nonetheless to do philosophy and to live one's life in accordance with reason. What Carneades offers is a model of rationality – testing convincing impressions and then 'following' them without assent to their truth provided they survive the scrutiny – which constitutes an ingenious and attractive alternative to the foundationalist epistemologies which prevailed in the other schools.[73] Whether the idea of a rationality without the commitments of assertion is a coherent notion remains a matter for debate.[74]

[73] He suggested that on Stoic premisses reason destroyed itself like Penelope undoing her web (Cic. *Acad.* II.95) or the octopus devouring its own tentacles (Plu. *Comm. Not.* 1059e, Stob. II.2.20): discussion by Burnyeat 1976, 62–5.

[74] For a sceptical exploration of this question see Burnyeat 1980a; cf. Bett 1989.