

## **The main primary Sources for Academic and Pyrrhonian Skepticism.**

T. Reinhard, *Cicero's Academici libri and Lucullus, Commentary with Introduction and Translations*, 2023, New York: Oxford University Press

C. Brittain, *Cicero: On Academic Scepticism*, 2006, Indianapolis and Cambridge, MA: Hackett.

**[Academica I and II or Academicus Primus and Luculus]**

J. Annas and J. Barnes, *Sextus Empiricus, Outlines of Scepticism*, 1994, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

**[PH I-III]**

R. Bett, *Sextus Empiricus: Against the Logicians*, 2005, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

**[M VII-VIII or Against the Logicians I-II]**

*Sextus Empiricus* (Loeb Classical Library), 4 volumes, R.G. Bury (trans.), 1933–49, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

### **T1. PH I 1-4**

i The most fundamental difference among philosophies

[1] When people are investigating (Τοῖς ζητοῦσι) any subject, the likely result is either the discovery, or the denial of discovery and confession of inapprehensibility, or else a continuation of the investigation. [2] This, no doubt, is why in the case of philosophical investigations (ἐπὶ τῶν κατὰ φιλοσοφίαν ζητουμένων), too, some have said that they have discovered the truth, some have asserted that it cannot be apprehended, and others are still investigating.

[3] Those who are called Dogmatists (δογματικοί) in the proper sense of the word think that they have discovered the truth – for example, the schools of Aristotle and Epicurus and the Stoics, and some others. The schools of Clitomachus and Carneades, and other Academics, have asserted that things cannot be apprehended.<sup>1</sup> And the Sceptics are still investigating. [4] Hence the most fundamental kinds of philosophy are reasonably thought to be three: the Dogmatic, the Academic, and the Sceptical (φιλοσοφία τρεῖς εἶναι, δογματικὴ Ἀκαδημαϊκὴ σκεπτικὴ). The former two it will be appropriate for others to describe: in the present work we shall discuss in outline the Sceptical persuasion (περὶ τῆς σκεπτικῆς ἀγωγῆς).

### **T2. PH I 7**

iii The nomenclature of Scepticism

[7] The Sceptical persuasion, then, is also called Investigative (ζητητικὴ), from its activity in investigating and inquiring (ζητεῖν καὶ σκέπτεσθαι); Suspensive, from the feeling that comes about in the inquirer after the investigation; Aporetic, either (as some say) from the fact that it puzzles over and investigates everything (περὶ παντὸς ἀπορεῖν καὶ ζητεῖν), or else from its being at a loss whether to assent or deny; and Pyrrhonian, from the fact that Pyrrho appears to us to have attached himself to

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<sup>1</sup> All terms derived from *katalambanein* (καταλαμβάνειν), such as *katálēpsis* (κατάληψις), *katalēptikós* (καταληπτικός), and *akatalēptos* (ἀκατάληπτος), are translated with cognates of either "apprehension" or "cognition."

Scepticism (τῆ σκέψει) more systematically and conspicuously than anyone before him.

**T3. *M VII (Against the Logicians I) 150-158***

[150] **Arcesilaus** and his circle did not, as their main goal, define any criterion; those of them who are thought to have defined one delivered this by way of a hostile response against the Stoics. [151] For the Stoics say that there are three interconnected things: knowledge (ἐπιστήμην), opinion (δόξαν), and the one positioned between these, apprehension (κατάληψιν). Of these, knowledge is apprehension that is unshaken and firm and immutable by reason, opinion is weak and false assent, and apprehension is the one between these, namely assent to an apprehensive appearance (καταληπτικῆς φαντασίας συγκατάθεσιν). [152] And according to them, an apprehensive appearance is one that is true and such as could not be false. Of these, knowledge subsists only in the wise, opinion only in the inferior, and apprehension is common to both; and this is the criterion of truth. [153] This is what the Stoics say, and Arcesilaus rebutted them by showing that apprehension is no criterion between knowledge and opinion. For what they call apprehension, and assent to an apprehensive appearance, takes place either in a wise or an inferior person. But if it takes place in a wise person, it is knowledge, and if in an inferior person it is opinion, and beyond these nothing has been substituted other than a mere name. [154] And if apprehension is assent to an apprehensive appearance, it is unreal, first because assent takes place not toward appearance but toward speech (for assents are to propositions), and second because no true appearance is found to be such as could not be false, as is witnessed by many diverse cases. [155] But if there is no apprehensive appearance, apprehension will not take place either; for it was assent to an apprehensive appearance. But if there is no apprehension, everything will be inapprehensible (πάντ' ἔσται ἀκατάληπτα). And if everything is inapprehensible it will follow even according to the Stoics that the wise person suspends judgment (ἀκολουθήσει καὶ κατὰ τοὺς Στωικοὺς ἐπέχειν τὸν σοφόν).

[156] Let us consider it like this: since everything is inapprehensible on account of the unreality of the Stoic criterion, if the wise person assents, the wise person will opine. For since nothing is apprehensible, if he assents to anything, he will assent to the inapprehensible, but assent to the inapprehensible is opinion. [157] So that if the wise person is among those who assent, the wise person will be among those who opine. But the wise person is not among those who opine (for according to them this goes with folly and is a cause of errors); therefore the wise person is not among those who assent. But if this is so, he will have to decline assent about everything. But declining assent is none other than suspending judgment; therefore the wise person will suspend judgment about everything.

[158] But since after this it was necessary also to investigate the conduct of life, which is not of a nature to be accounted for without a criterion, on which happiness too – that is, the end of life – (ἡ εὐδαιμονία, τουτέστι τὸ τοῦ βίου τέλος) depends for its trust, Arcesilaus says that, not suspending judgment about everything, he will regulate his choices and avoidances and generally his actions by the reasonable, and by going forward in accordance with this criterion he will act rightly. For happiness comes about through insight, and insight lies in right actions, and the right action is that which, when done, has a reasonable justification. The person who pays attention to the reasonable will therefore act rightly and be happy.

**T4. *Academica I 44-45***

[44] It wasn't a spirit of intransigence or rivalry (in my view, at any rate) that gave rise to Arcesilaus' extended disagreement with Zeno, but the obscurity of things that had previously led Socrates to his confession of ignorance—as even before him, it had led Democritus, Anaxagoras, Empedocles, and virtually all the early philosophers to say that nothing could be cognized, apprehended, or known, because the senses were limited, our minds weak, and the course of our lives brief, while the truth had been submerged in an abyss (as Democritus said), everything was subject to opinion and custom, no room was left for truth, and consequently everything was shrouded by darkness. [45] That's why Arcesilaus used to deny that anything could be known, not even the residual claim Socrates had allowed himself, i.e., the knowledge that he didn't know anything. He thought that everything was hidden so deeply and that nothing could be discerned or understood. For these reasons, he thought that we shouldn't assert or affirm anything, or approve it with assent: we should always curb our rashness and restrain ourselves from any slip. But he considered it particularly rash to approve something false or unknown, because nothing was more shameful than for one's assent or approval to outrun knowledge or apprehension. His practice was consistent with this reasoning (*rationi*), so that by arguing against everyone's views he led most of them away from their own: when arguments of equal weight were found for the opposite sides of the same subject, it was easier to withhold assent from either side.

#### **T5.** *Academica* II 76-78

[76] [...] But to see that Arcesilaus didn't fight with Zeno in the spirit of criticism, but because he wanted to discover the truth, consider this. [77] None of those who came before had ever explicitly formulated, or even suggested, the view that a person could hold no opinions—and not just that they could, but that doing so was necessary for the wise person. Arcesilaus thought that this view was both true and honourable, as well as right for the wise person. So he asked Zeno, we may suppose, what would happen if the wise person couldn't apprehend anything, but it was a mark of wisdom not to hold opinions. Zeno replied, no doubt, that the wise person wouldn't hold any opinions because there was something apprehensible. So what was that? An impression, I suppose. Well, what kind of impression? Then Zeno defined it thus: an impression from what is, stamped, impressed, and molded just as it is. After that, Arcesilaus went on to ask what would happen if a true impression was just like a false one. At this point, Zeno was sharp enough to see that no impression would be apprehensible if one that came from what is was such that there could be one just like it from what is not. Arcesilaus agreed that this was a good addition to the definition, since neither a false impression, nor a true impression just like a false one, was apprehensible. So then he set to work with his arguments, to show that there is no impression from something true such that there could not be one just like it from something false.

[78] “This is the one disagreement still outstanding. The view that the wise person won't assent to anything has no part in this controversy: he could fail to apprehend anything and yet still have opinions. In fact, this is said to have been the position approved by **Carneades**—although, since I trust Clitomachus rather than Philo or Metrodorus, I consider it a position he argued for rather than approved. But let's put this to one side. It is quite clear that once opinion and apprehension have gone, what follows is the suspension of all assent. Hence, if I show that nothing is apprehensible, you must allow that the wise person will never assent.

**T6. PHI 232-234**

[232] Arcesilaus, who we said was the champion and founder of the Middle Academy, certainly seems to me to have something in common with what the Pyrrhonists say – indeed, his persuasion and ours are virtually the same. For 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, which, we said, is accompanied by tranquility. [232] He also says that particular suspensions of judgment are good and particular assents bad.

Yet someone might say that we say these things in accordance with what is apparent to us, not affirmatively, whereas he says them with reference to the nature of things (ἐκεῖνος δὲ ὡς πρὸς τὴν φύσιν)– so he says that suspension of judgment is a good thing and assent is a bad thing. [234] And if one is to be convinced by what is said by him, they say that he appeared superficially to be a Pyrrhonist but in truth was a Dogmatist. Because he used to test his companions by his aporetic skill, to see if they were gifted enough to receive Platonic beliefs, he seemed to be aporetic; but to the gifted among his companions he would entrust Plato’s views. Hence Aristo called him

Plato in front, Pyrrho behind, Diodorus in the middle

Because he made use of dialectic in Diodorus’ fashion but was an out-and-out Platonist.

**T7. *Academica* II 66-67**

[66] [...] As for the wise person, however, Arcesilaus agrees with Zeno that his greatest strength is precisely to make sure that he isn’t tricked and see to it that he isn’t deceived. Nothing is farther from the picture we have of the seriousness of the wise person than error, rashness, and blind action. So what shall I say about the strength of the wise person? In fact, Lucullus, you, too, agree that he doesn’t hold any opinions. And since that’s something you approve—I’m sorry to deal with things back to front: I will get myself back in order shortly—tell me how strong you think this argument is first: [67]

- [1] If the wise person ever assents to anything, he will sometimes hold an opinion;
- [2] but he will never hold an opinion;
- [3] so he won’t ever assent to anything.

Arcesilaus approved this argument, since he supported the first and second premises. **Carneades** sometimes gave as his second premise the concession that the wise person would sometimes assent; And from this it followed that the wise person would hold opinions (a conclusion you won’t accept, and rightly, in my view). But the Stoics, with Antiochus in agreement, thought that the first premise—if the wise person were to assent, he would hold opinions—was false: they thought that he could distinguish false from true and inapprehensible from apprehensible <impressions>.

Arcesilaus

Carneades

$p \rightarrow q$

$\neg q$

—————  
 $\neg p$

$p \rightarrow q$

$p$

—————  
 $q$

