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Stoic epistemology

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It is by now a commonplace that ancient epistemological concerns are very different from our post-Cartesian ones. Modern theories of knowledge are apt to focus on the question of how we can in some way secure the truth of our various beliefs, and guarantee our processes of acquiring more; if we have knowledge then we cannot be mistaken, and can fend off the sceptical challenge that we might be wrong. Ancient theories, in contrast, focus on the *understanding* of bodies of beliefs, and pay less attention to the possibility of being wrong than to the process whereby mere isolated true beliefs are transformed into knowledge by discovering systematic interconnections which bring insight into the whole.

Like many commonplaces, this one contains a salutary truth, but not all the truth, and can lead to a distortion of the ancient evidence. It is true that Plato and Aristotle are by and large concerned with understanding bodies of true beliefs rather than with securing us against particular errors. But this is not the whole story.[1] And the prominence of scepticism in Hellenistic

1 Plato's concern with knowledge is, in the main, a concern with understanding, but the third suggested sense of *logos* as what turns true belief into knowledge, at *Theaetetus* 208c4–210a5 is that of having the mark (*sēmeion*) that differentiates the object from anything else. Knowledge, on this view, which is said to be 'what most people would say' (208c7) is in many ways reminiscent of the Stoic apprehensive appearance. It is (allegedly) commonsensical, it is empirical (the examples are the sun and Theaetetus) and Plato is clearly concerned with grasp of particular facts, not with systematic understanding of a body of beliefs (as he is elsewhere in this section). Plato rejects this third suggested sense on the basis of a problem not with knowledge but with *belief* (the same problem, I believe, though I do not have space to develop it here, as dogs the long section of the dialogue that considers false belief). The reason that 'most people' would find this a plausible way to define knowledge seems to have affinities with the thoughts lying behind the definition of knowledge as perception considered earlier in the dialogue: if you have this then *you can't be wrong*, and thus you have knowledge. Plato (unlike the Stoics) nowhere distinguishes this concern from his more dominant concern with understanding.

philosophy would make it surprising if Hellenistic theories of knowledge simply dispensed with the concern to avoid error. One of the most striking things about the Stoic theory of knowledge is that it is concerned with both the officially ancient and the officially modern issue: both with grasp of particular facts, of a kind designed to exclude error, *and* with systematic understanding of a body of beliefs.

Like all Hellenistic theories, the Stoic theory is empiricist: it focuses on how we acquire information through the senses, assuming optimistically that with this start from the senses the mind can eventually grasp everything that we recognise to be knowledge. The Stoics have no doubt that we do have knowledge of the truths of logic and mathematics, though they put surprisingly little effort into showing how we get to these from the mind's operations on the data of sense.[2]

We start with the 'appearances', that is, with the way that the world appears to us, and impinges on us through the senses.[3] Why do we have to start here?

> The Stoics like to start with the theory of appearance and perception, since the criterion by which the truth of things is recognized is in the genus appearance, and since the theory of assent, and that of apprehension and thinking, which precede the rest, cannot be put together without appearance. For the appearance leads the way, and then the articulating thinking which is present brings out in words what the effect is on it of the appearance. (Diogenes Laertius VII.49) (Long and Sedley [288] (*LS*) 33D)[4]

The way things appear to us makes a kind of 'imprint' on us. Since it is an

2 The only step in this direction seems to be the puzzling theory of 'common notions', by which philosophical theories at least are judged to be, in our terms, counter-intuitive or not according to whether they do or do not accord with our reflective understanding of concepts. As a method this would seem to have some affinities with 'reflective equilibrium' as discussed by Rawls and others; but it would still seem a mystery how this would be a good method to employ with scientific and mathematical theories. See Todd [349].

3 I agree with Striker [294] that there are no apprehensive appearances that strike the mind without the mediation of the senses. This does not narrow their scope as much as it might in some modern theories; for the Stoics apprehension of value, even of obligatoriness, is empirical, since we perceive that some item is good, or that some action is what we should do. This should not surprise us; there is no need for empiricist theories to be narrow or restrictive, if they accept a natural and intuitive notion of what experience is, rather than one narrowly limited, for example by modern philosophical conceptions of what science requires. (The Stoics have a further support for their empiricism in their materialism: for them virtues and values are, strange as it may sound, really physical. But this is a theoretical backing not really required by the intuitive position.)

4 *LS* numbers refer to the translation with comment of the passage (or part of it) in [288], vol. 1.

imprint on the 'governing part' of the soul, that is, the mind,[5] it is a mental event as well as a physical event. What the Diogenes passage brings out is that it is a mental event with what we would call *content*. It is not the reception of an unconceptualised sense-datum; for the appearance is naturally structured in ways which the mind can articulate and reflect on, and state in propositional form.[6]

In any perception, there will be not only an appearance, but some kind of acceptance by the person's mind of the propositional content of the appearance. The weakest form of this is assent (*sunkatathesis*). The next strongest is belief (*doxa*).[7] The Stoics are not very concerned about belief; indeed many parts of their philosophy depend on drawing a sharp contrast between the wise, who have knowledge, and the fools, who are ignorant, making it problematic how belief is to be fitted in. Belief is characterised as assent to what is not apprehended – i.e. it is introduced by contrast with apprehension (which will shortly be explained). This can take two forms: assent to what is false, and rash assent to what is unclear.[8] The latter is presumably assent to what is true, but as far as the person goes might have been false, since his assent was rash, and did not spring from the firm and systematic grasp of the subject-matter characterising the person with knowledge.[9] Thus for the

5 The 'governing part' (*hēgemonikon*) is the centralising and directing part of the soul. The content of sense-perceptions and all appearances is relayed to it from the sense-organs; it interprets this and then assents (or not) to it with varying degrees of firmness. If the appearance is a 'hormetic' one the response will involve a reaction of some kind, from simple desire or aversion to acceptance of duty. At Stobaeus II.65.2–3 the 'ruling part' is called thought (*dianoia*), and in many ways the *hēgemonikon* is like a modern, non-dualist notion of the mind. It is reasonable to call it the mind if this does not import unsuitable dualist or Cartesian associations. For more detail see my chapter on Hellenistic philosophy of mind in the forthcoming *Cambridge History of Hellenistic Philosophy*.

6 Thus for the Stoics there is no point at which we 'finally' distinguish the data from our conceptual structures imposed on them. But this does not imply that we cannot change and develop the concepts that we have. For a clear and convincing genetic account of this, see pp. 153–5 of Frede [341].

7 *Doxa*, as can be seen, is in many ways different from our notion of belief: having knowledge, for example, excludes having *doxa*, whereas we find it odd for knowledge to exclude belief. Because of this it is sometimes a good idea to translate *doxa* as 'opinion' rather than 'belief'. I have not done so here because this might suggest, wrongly, that there is no overlap between our concerns with belief and the Stoic concerns with *doxa*. The oddities of Stoic *doxa* are sometimes important (see, for example, Ioppolo (n. 9)), but they do not affect this chapter.

8 This emerges clearly from a passage of Plutarch, *On Stoic Self-contradictions* 1056f. (=SVF II.993), which is well discussed in Goerler [342].

9 One passage of Arius Didymus ap. Stobaeus (112.2–4) has created problems, since it says clearly that there are two kinds of belief: assent to what is not

Stoics knowledge, far from implying belief, *excludes* it, and it is clear that for them true belief is not an interesting or important state. This emerges also in the frequent characterisation of belief as *weak* assent. This is a surprising choice of characterisation in view of the constant association of belief, elsewhere in the Stoics and generally in ancient epistemology, with rash confidence and opinionated pomposity. It is probably meant to signal two features of belief.[10] Firstly, that the assent itself is weak; apprehension is characterised as firm (Zeno in a famous simile likened it to a closed fist) and an appearance which is apprehensive[11] is said to allow no resistance and all but drag one by the hair to assent. And secondly, that it is an assent made from weakness, from the state of a person whose beliefs lack what someone with knowledge has, coherence, stability and system, all of which are characterised as degrees of firmness. It is notable that ignorance is also characterised as 'assent which is changeable and weak',[12] thus blurring the line again between ignorance and belief, as is bound to happen if one focuses primarily on false belief.[13]

We now expect a further stage, which is an improvement on belief and gets us to knowledge; but we find two – apprehension (*katalēpsis*) and knowledge (*epistēmē*). Apprehension is the stage at which you could not be wrong. It is assent to an appearance which is 'apprehensive' (*phantasia katalēptikē*); unlike belief, this kind of assent is guaranteed to get things right. We might think that we now had knowledge – and so we would if knowledge is a grasp of particular facts which excludes error.[14] But *epistēmē* or knowledge proper is actually a further stage, and this is not achieved until the particular facts are grasped in systematic interconnection, something which no one can do but the ideal 'wise person'. Apprehension, requiring less, can be done by anyone.

apprehended, and weak supposition. Ioppolo [351] bases on this text an argument that the Stoics started with the latter notion of belief and had the former forced on them by Arcesilaus' arguments. For arguments against this thesis see Maconi [353].

10 As Goerler argues in [342], 91–2.

11 'Apprehensive appearance' sounds somewhat comic in English; nevertheless I have stuck to it as a translation for *phantasia katalēptikē*. We know that Stoic terminology often did strike people as comic and pedantic. Other scholars (e.g. G. Striker in this volume) use 'cognitive impression'. However, 'appearance' captures better the fact that a *phantasia* is just the way things appear to one, while 'apprehension' retains to some extent the metaphor of grasp in *katalēpsis*.

12 Arius Didymus ap. Stobaeus, *Eclogae* II.111.18.

13 As arguably happens in Plato's famous argument about knowledge in *Republic* v. See Arthur [340] for a different view.

14 Cf. Long and Sedley [288], 1, 257: 'It would be possible to translate *katalēpsis* by "knowledge" in many contexts.'

> [Zeno] located that apprehension I mentioned between knowledge and ignorance, and counted it as neither a good nor a bad thing, but said that it alone should be trusted.
> (Cicero, *Varro* 42) (SVF I.60, 69, LS 41B)[15]

Knowledge proper is characterised as follows:

> Knowledge is apprehension which is safe and unchangeable by argument. Alternatively: knowledge is a system made up of apprehensions of this kind,[16] such as the reasoned [knowledge] of particulars which exists in the good person. Or again: a state, receptive of appearances, which is unchangeable by argument, which they say consists in a certain tension and capacity.
> (Arius Didymus ap. Stobaeus, *Eclogae* II.73.19–74.3) (SVF I.68; LS 41H)

The references to argument recall Plato's stress in the central books of the *Republic* on knowledge as the outcome of successful argument, and a state invulnerable against counter-arguments (because it can meet them, that is, not just because of stubbornness). The Stoics also stress the idea of knowledge as the result of a building-up of beliefs: the nearer you get to knowledge the more coherent, cohesive and mutually supporting are your beliefs.

A famous passage sums up vividly many of these points.

> You say that nobody but the wise person knows anything – and this Zeno used to demonstrate by a gesture. He would hold out his hand with outstretched fingers, and say, 'An appearance is like this'; then he closed the fingers a bit and said, 'Assent is like this'; then he squeezed them right together, making a fist, and said that that was apprehension – it was from this example that he even gave the thing its name of *katalēpsis*, which had not existed before. But then he brought across his left hand and squeezed the other fist tightly and firmly; knowledge, he would say, was like that, and nobody was in possession of it but the wise person.
> (Cicero, *Lucullus* 144) (SVF I.66; LS 41A)

Knowledge is the culmination of a process starting with the person's reaction to the way the world appears; it is important that there are two stages, apprehension and knowledge proper; and the Stoics seem comparatively indifferent to belief: it does not even appear in this passage, and the Stoics seem never to have made up their mind whether apprehension lay between knowledge and ignorance or between knowledge and belief. (We can understand this given their lack of interest in *true* beliefs.)[17]

15 SVF numbers refer to the passage in the original language in von Arnim [327].

16 Following Wachsmuth's conjecture *katalēpseōn* for *epistēmōn*. But the text is difficult: see pp. 69–70 of 'Le Modèle conjonctif' by J. Brunschwig (who defends the MSS reading) in Brunschwig [334].

17 At *Varro* 42 apprehension is between knowledge and ignorance; at Sextus, *M* VII.151 it is between knowledge and belief.

Knowledge proper, *epistēmē*, is important to the Stoics in many parts of their theories. But from the epistemological point of view the interesting stage is apprehension, assent to an appearance which is apprehensive. For it is here that we find the crucial point: you couldn't be wrong. And so we are not surprised that for the Stoics, apprehensive appearances are the 'criterion of truth'.[18] A criterion of truth gives us a guarantee that things are one way rather than another. If the appearance I assent to is apprehensive, then things *are* the way they appear to me to be; for I couldn't be wrong.

If the theory is to be epistemologically interesting, then the Stoics should be able to tell us something about these appearances, assent to which constitutes one kind, at least, of knowledge, if not knowledge proper. And the Stoics do have a precise theory on the matter.

> There are many distinctions between appearances . . . Some are convincing, others unconvincing, some both, some neither . . . Of the convincing appearances some are true, some false, some both, some neither . . . Of the true ones some are apprehensive and some not. The non-apprehensive ones are experiences in virtue of the way one is affected; countless people when delirious or depressed draw in an appearance which is true but not apprehensive; it occurs to them in that way externally and by chance, so that often they are not even confident about it and do not assent to it. An apprehensive appearance is one from a real object, in accordance with the object, stamped and sealed, such as could not come from an unreal object.
>
> It is because they make this appearance highly perceptive of things and with all their peculiarities skilfully impressed on it that they say that it has all these properties.
>
> First: it comes from a real object; many appearances are experienced which do not come from real objects (as with mad people) and these will not be apprehensive.
>
> Second: it comes both from and in accordance with a real object. Some,

18 Diogenes Laertius VII.54. 'Criterion' means originally only a means or way of finding the truth (hence the Diogenes passage contains a number of other candidates as criteria, such as intellect and right reason, which are criteria in this weaker sense). Only apprehensive appearances are a criterion in the sense of guaranteeing that what they represent is as they represent it. It is not part of what 'criterion' means that a criterion is something that the agent can make use of, but the idea seems usually to be present. Our fullest source is Sextus Empiricus, who retails many arguments about criteria of truth, and whose arguments would misfire if he were using 'criterion' in an unusual way, or one rejected by his opponents. In the passages where he is more explicit about what a criterion involves, he associates it with: something the agent can *use* (e.g. *M* VII.317, 444) or follow (*M* I.186); something which enables us to *say* various things (*M* VII.29) or to judge (*Outlines of Pyrrhonism* (*PH*) II.53, 64, 88, *M* VII.105, 317); something enabling the agent to make a distinction (*M* VII.64, VIII.19); something enabling the agent to *test* the relevant items (*M* VIII.3, I.182); something that produces credibility (*pistis*) (*PH* I.21).

again, are from a real object, but do not picture that object, as . . . with Orestes when mad. He drew in an appearance from Electra, who was a real object, but not in accordance with it, for he supposed her to be one of the Furies . . .

Also: it is stamped and sealed, so that all the peculiarities of the thing whose appearance it is can be skilfully impressed on it. Just as carvers check all the parts of their completed works, and just in the way that seals in rings always impress all their features accurately in the wax, so those having an apprehension of objects ought to discern all their peculiarities.

They added, 'such as could not come from an unreal object' since the Academics, unlike the Stoics, did not suppose it impossible that another appearance could be found, indistinguishable in all respects. The Stoics say that the person with the apprehensive appearance skilfully discerns the difference existing between things, since such an appearance has a peculiarity as compared with the other appearances, just as the horned snakes do as compared with the other snakes. The Academics, on the contrary, say that it is possible that, given an apprehensive appearance, another can be found, indistinguishable but false.

The older Stoics say that this apprehensive appearance is the criterion of truth. But the later Stoics added, 'if it has no obstacle'. For sometimes an apprehensive appearance is experienced, but is not credited because of external circumstances . . . When Menelaus on the way back from Troy saw the true Helen at the house of Proteus, having left on his ship the phantom Helen over which the ten years' war had been fought, he received an appearance that was from a real object, and according to the real object, and stamped and sealed, but he did not give way to it. So that the apprehensive appearance is a criterion when it has no obstacle, but this, while apprehensive, had an obstacle . . . for Menelaus considered that he had left Helen guarded on the ship, and that it was not unconvincing that the woman found in Pharos was not Helen, but a ghost, something supernatural. Hence the apprehensive appearance is not the criterion of truth simply, but when it has no obstacle. For then, being evident and striking, it all but grabs us by the hair, they say, and drags us to assent, needing nothing further to be experienced as such or to suggest its difference compared with the others.

(Sextus, *adversus Mathematicos* (*M*) VII 241–58) (SVF II.65; LS 39G, 30F, 40E, 40K)

Although Sextus gives us our fullest and most precise account, there are two points in which we should bear in mind what is said by our other main source, Cicero. Firstly, Sextus expresses the definition in terms of a relation of the appearance to a real or unreal object. (The word in question, *huparchein*, does not have to mean this, but reality is what Sextus standardly uses it for.) The parallels in Cicero (see *Lucullus* 19, 36, 77 ff., 112) make it clear that for

the Stoics what was at stake was not the object's existence but its being the way it was represented as being: if I have an apprehensive appearance of an object then not only will there be that object, it will be just as the appearance represents it as being.

Secondly, Cicero's testimony differs from Sextus' on an important point.

> [Zeno] ascribed reliability to the senses, since he thought the apprehension produced by the senses both true and reliable, not because it apprehended all the features that were in the thing, but because it left out nothing that could be relevant to it; and also because nature had granted it as a standard, as it were, of knowledge. (Cicero, *Varro* 42) (SVF I.60; LS 41B)

There is no way of reconciling Cicero's claim that the apprehensive appearance represents its object only in part with Sextus' claim that it represents the object in every detail. We shall see that it matters that Cicero ascribes this view only to Zeno, the founder of the Stoa.

It is striking that the Stoic theory combines two features which epistemological theories seldom hold together. It is robustly commonsensical. Apprehensive appearances are *normal*. Anyone, clever or stupid, can have them. They are those perceptions which you have when not drunk, dreaming, etc. (*M* VII.247). The conditions establishing normality are gathered under five headings: the condition of the sense-organ, that of the object, its placing, the way the object is sensed and the agent's state of mind must all be in a normal condition. It is notable that apprehension is never *defined* via the notion of normality, though it seems from the sources that normal conditions are necessary and sufficient for its production.

They are also *representational* items, as the second and third clauses of the definition make clear; they are not just caused by the object, but are caused in a way that represents the object to the person's mind.

There is no direct conflict between these two features of the theory; but the combination seems to make the theory immediately vulnerable to an obvious kind of objection. A common-sense theory that is robust enough will usually be direct realist, claiming that normal perception puts us right in touch with the world. But the Stoic theory explicitly interposes a representational object – the appearance – between the person and the world. And when this is coupled with the claim that some, indeed most of these appearances can be relied upon to give us knowledge about the world, the gap between person and world is going to seem crucial, and the representational nature of the item bridging it, problematic. A sceptic will always be moved to ask: what entitles us to be so confident that what we grasp, the representational item, really does represent things to us as they actually are?

Some modern versions of this worry do not touch the Stoics. The appear-

ance is not thought of as a mental event which has to battle for room in an otherwise completely physicalist picture; it *is* a physical event, and the Stoics did not regard the relation between the mental and the physical as a problematic one. Nor do the Stoics regard the appearances as all we are *aware* of; in grasping them we are aware of what they represent, and they do not give rise to modern 'veil of perception' problems of the form: how can we go beyond what we are aware of to the objects? Nor is it a problem for them how we can get content out of 'mere' physical events. That appearances already have content is a basic part of Stoic theory, embedded in several areas of their philosophy – logic, psychology and physics. Nonetheless, the fact that perception involves assent to the propositional content of a representational item seems to invite sceptical attack. For we are told that we are entitled to confidence that things are indeed as they are represented as being; but *why* are we entitled to this confidence?

This familiar problem exercised ancient sceptics too, particularly the sceptical Academy, the Stoics' major philosophical opponents. They differed from modern sceptical counterparts in that they were not themselves wedded to any theses about appearance and reality. Rather, their arguments were *ad hominem*,[19] making their attack as hard as possible for the opponents to avoid by arguing as much as possible from their own premises. They thus did not challenge the basis of the Stoics' account of the apprehensive appearance. Rather, they accepted it, and then tried to show that on the Stoics' own ground the account could not work.

Two of the Academy arguments and the Stoic responses to them are preserved in Sextus and Cicero, in a way which makes it clear that these were the crucial arguments in what turned out to be a long debate, starting with Arcesilaus and still familiar to Cicero after the end of the Academy.[20]

Argument A

An apprehensive appearance has in itself a guarantee that things are as they are represented as being (*M* VII.252). But there can be appearances with all the distinguishing marks of the apprehensive ones – notably, being striking and evident – which are false, since things are not as they are represented as being. Standard examples of such appearances are the experiences of madmen, dreamers and the drunk. These people react to their false appearances exactly as normal people react to theirs, acting on them despite their falsity (*M* VII.403–8).

19 A feature of all ancient sceptical reasoning, Academic and Pyrrhonist. In arguing this way Arcesilaus made a noted change in Academy teaching: see Cicero, *de Oratore* III.67, 80; *de Finibus* II.2, V.10; *de Natura Deorum* I.11.

20 For a different account of these arguments see G. Striker's chapter 'The problem of the criterion' in this volume.

The Stoic response is to deny the truth of the counter-claim. There *is* a difference between normal perceptions and those of the sick or deranged (Cicero, *Lucullus* 51–3, 88–90). How are we to understand this? The Stoics might be claiming (like Austin) that there just is a *phenomenological* difference (as in Austin's example) between being presented to the Pope and dreaming of being presented to the Pope. Or they might rather be pointing not to a feature of the actual experience but to a feature of the state that the experience is had in: the state of dreaming, or being drunk, is an obvious source of the defective character of the experiences had while in it. Experiences had in abnormal states do not undermine the credentials of the normal person's normal experiences.

The sceptics' rejoinder (Cicero, *Lucullus* 88–90) is to renew their insistence that, at the time when the experience is had, there is no phenomenological difference between an apprehensive appearance and one which has all the marks of one (vividness, and so on) but is false.

Argument B

The Academics also appeal to cases where conditions are not abnormal, but where there are objects which we cannot distinguish apart – two eggs, say, or two twins. Someone has an apprehensive appearance of one egg or twin; but then has an indistinguishable appearance of a different object, namely the other egg or twin. An apprehensive appearance, then, cannot possess a mark which distinguishes it from one which is like it except in not being apprehensive (*M* VII.408–11, *Lucullus* 33–4, 54–8, 85–6).

The Stoics have two responses.

(1) No two things in the world are exactly alike qualitatively, so appearances from two distinct things which are apprehensive and represent their distinguishing features will reflect *some* difference, and so will not be indistinguishable (*Lucullus* 85). The identity of indiscernibles is a part of Stoic physical theory on independent grounds, so that, as Frede rightly insists, this is a reasonable and not a merely *ad hoc* move for a Stoic.

(2) We *could*, if we tried hard enough, distinguish the two objects, thus showing that their appearances did have some distinguishing feature. Mothers can tell twins apart; poultry farmers (allegedly) can tell eggs apart. *We* cannot do this, usually; but this does not show that they are in fact indistinguishable (*Lucullus* 57–8).

These two arguments dominate a long debate, one which was obviously of continuing interest to serious philosophers. It seems to me that we only do justice to this fact if we interpret the debate in such a way that it does not obviously end in round one. Interpretations of the Stoic theory often make it

appear that it is irrecoverably damaged by the Academic criticisms[21] or, on the other hand, that the sceptical attacks clearly misfire, since the Stoic theory is already armed against them.[22] But if either Stoics or sceptics emerge as clear winners, we have not done justice to the fact of continuing *debate*, or to the fact that it ended with a petering-out of interest, and no clear winner. Cicero's *Academica* shows us a stand-off, a position where each side, rehearsing familiar arguments, regards itself as adequately meeting the other side's points, and establishing its case. This is a familiar enough situation in philosophy: realists and anti-realists, consequentialists and deontologists continue to regard their own side as winning debates which to an outsider seem inconclusive. So, even if *we* find a clear winner, our account should make clear how the argument could go on for so long with each side claiming superiority.

For this to be possible, in a debate between intelligent philosophers, the Stoic theory must have had some degree of indeterminateness, or at least room for diverging kinds of interpretation; or the Stoics must have shifted their position on some issues; or both. I shall argue that both are in fact the case. On the second point indeed we have unusually good evidence that the Stoics did shift their position. Developmental accounts are often the refuge of those who have not tried hard enough to make philosophical sense of a complex body of evidence. But in the evidence already laid out we have found: (a) the final clause in the definition was added in response to Academic argument; (b) Zeno originally claimed that the apprehensive appearance did not represent its object in every detail; the Stoic account Sextus reports insists that it does; (c) 'the later Stoics' added a further condition (there being no 'obstacle') for an apprehensive appearance's being the criterion.

If we look at each of these changes with care we shall find that the Stoics were not just patching up their theory by adding, so to speak, another brick to the wall. In each case the change signals the fact that Stoics and sceptics were focussing on a point of philosophical interest, on which it is plausible that both sides should see themselves as winning; so it is plausible that the debate should continue.

(a) The final clause

Cicero tells us (*Lucullus* 77–8) that it was the first Academic critic, Arcesilaus, who forced this addition to Zeno's original definition.[23] The

21 See Sandbach [345]; Kerferd [343].

22 Frede [341]; Long and Sedley [288], 1, 252–3.

23 Zeno's definition had of course a weaker third clause than the one reported by Sextus (this is point (b)), so the addition of the fourth clause should be something well motivated even with the weaker third clause.

whole weight of the argument, Cicero says plausibly, rests on this point: given the Stoic definition of the apprehensive appearance, can an appearance be found which meets this definition but is not apprehensive? This is just Argument A, and without the fourth clause the theory does look to be wide open to obvious counter-examples: appearances which have all the marks of normal ones but which are in fact experienced by the mad, the drunk, etc. Now we have seen that the response to Argument A on the Stoics' part requires some interpretation. Is Zeno insisting that there is a phenomenological difference between a normal appearance and one had in an abnormal state? If so, the added clause will insist that an apprehensive appearance declares itself as such; not only does it represent its object exactly as it is, but it could not be confused with one which does not. This will seem a weak response; the sceptics could retort that it simply misses the point of the criticism, since all it does is to restate the point that was under attack.

The addition makes a powerful point if we take it, as Frede suggests,[24] as insisting rather that an apprehensive appearance is distinguished by its causal history – the fact that it is produced in a normal state. A non-apprehensive appearance, on this interpretation, could not be indistinguishable from an apprehensive one because they are produced in different ways, and are the outcomes of different states in the person. An apprehensive appearance could not come from an abnormal state, because what distinguishes it just is the fact that it is produced in one way rather than another. This feature of it, its causal history as a product of normal conditions, is not, of course, one that the person need be aware of; so there need be no phenomenological difference that the person is in a position to point out.

Taken in this way, the additional clause seems to meet the sceptics' attack. Their charge was that there could be a non-apprehensive appearance which the person could not distinguish from an apprehensive one. (So there could be no such thing as the apprehensive appearance with its intrinsic distinguishing mark.) The Stoic response is most plausibly taken as claiming that what the person can do is not the issue; there *is* a (causal) difference between apprehensive and non-apprehensive appearances, so what the person can or cannot distinguish is not to the point.

This would seem to settle the matter.[25] But the debate continued. The Academics went on pressing the point that *at the time* the dreamer or drunk

24 Frede [341], 159–63. Frede allows that apprehensive appearances are supposed to have a qualitative distinctness, but treats this as being 'the effect of the kind of history they have', which is discernible only by the wise man, who will discern any relevant differences, and so is not in question as part of normal everyday experience.

25 And it does, for Frede. On Frede's view the sceptical attack fails so completely that it is hard to see how the Stoic–sceptic debate lasted as long as it did.

can point to no feature of his appearance disqualifying it from being apprehensive (*Lucullus* 88: cf. 52). If the distinguishing feature is the causal origin of the appearance, then this retort is irrelevant, for of course we cannot always *tell* at the time whether an appearance's force and vivacity is veridical or misleading. That the sceptics went on making this retort, and regarding it as decisive, shows that it cannot have been obvious that the Stoics were *entitled* to interpret the fourth clause in this kind of way. The Academics regard the Stoics as obliged to come up with a distinguishing mark which is phenomenologically available to the person at the time.

The Academics are not likely to have been merely ignorant of the Stoic theory. (Some of them studied in the Stoa, after all.) It is more likely that Zeno's original position was indeterminate; possibly Zeno intended an apprehensive appearance to be distinguished both by its particular causal ancestry and by the fact that the person would recognise it as apprehensive. The latter idea was probably more prominent, since it seems to be the target of the sceptics' argument. This is, after all, what we would expect, given that apprehensive appearances are the criterion of truth; for we would expect a criterion to be something that we can put to use.[26] The Stoic response is utterly feeble if it merely restates the position found open to attack. It meets the attack if taken as shifting the focus to the particular causal ancestry of the apprehensive appearance; the criticism is now met. But at a price. For an apprehensive appearance is now the criterion of truth in a strange sense; someone could be in possession of it and be quite unaware of this, and so unable to use it as a criterion. And it is also not clear that the spirit of the original proposal has been retained. The sceptics press the latter point: they continue to demand a distinguishing mark of an apprehensive appearance that is available to the person, and in so doing they make it clear that they do not regard the Stoics as meeting the original objection.

We can see how this is a debate that might continue; much can be said on both sides. The Stoics can develop the point that an appearance in abnormal circumstances is precisely not similar to a normal one, whether or not the agent can tell at the time. The Academics can continue to insist that this is evading the problem, not meeting it: if an apprehensive appearance has an intrinsic distinguishing mark, then this ought to be available to the agent. To use Cicero's example, of course Iliona knows *after she wakes up* that it was not her son she saw, and that she was dreaming; the question is: *at the time* what distinguished that dream from a normal perception (*Lucullus* 88)?

The debate can continue because both sides are pressing something central to knowing (and we have seen that it is reasonable to regard

26 And this expectation seems to be borne out: see above, n. 18.

apprehension as a kind of knowing). The original Stoic position, I have suggested, did not sharply distinguish between two ideas:

(i) apprehension requires that the person is in the right relation to the object known (the causal ancestry of the appearance must run from the object to the person in the right way); and

(ii) apprehension requires that the person is in the right relation to the object known, and this fact is in some way available to her (she is or could become aware of it).

The sceptic arguments press on (ii), since they try to construct a case where there is a fact available to the person who is not in the right relation which is indistinguishable from the fact available to the person who is in the right relation to the object. The Stoics have an answer to this, as we have seen, and it is best construed as being the claim that there could be no such fact, since any attempt to produce such a fact produces nothing but a case of a person who is, in fact, not in the right relation to the object, and thus not apprehending the object.

When the Academics retort by continuing to focus on what is available to the person – what his experience represents to him as being the case – are they just missing the point? Whether they are will depend on whether the Stoic response is in fact adequate. Does (i) in fact give strong enough conditions for knowledge, or is something stronger along the lines of (ii) required? Which of these is true is not a simple matter (much recent work in epistemology, for example, has hinged on this question). If (i) is on the right lines, then the Stoic response will clearly do, and the Academics will be missing the point. But if something like (ii) is required, then the Academics will be insisting on something important which the Stoic response has missed. For what it is worth, (ii) is certainly the more intuitive view. And since the Academics were concerned to argue from their opponents' premises as much as possible, the effectiveness of their criticism will hang on how intuitive the Stoic theory was originally intended to be.[27]

Both sides have a case here. It is not, of course, part of my case that either side recognised clearly and explicitly the crucial difference between (i) and (ii). (If they had, the debate would have taken a different form, one closer, incidentally, to some modern debates.) But clearly we do not have a simple-minded Academic mistake about Stoic theory, but rather a serious diver-

27 This issue is raised in my [339]. This chapter reaffirms the claim made in the earlier article, that the Stoics did not sufficiently distinguish the issues of whether we can have such things as apprehensive appearances, and whether they can constitute knowledge; but I now think the earlier article mistaken in locating the Stoics' problem as that of confusing conditions for truth with conditions for knowledge. The problem is one that falls entirely within epistemology.

gence as to what knowledge (of the apprehensive kind) requires. Are the Stoics entitled to abandon some form of (ii) in favour of (i)? It is not at all clear that they are; and doubtless this is a large part of the reason why the debate lasted so long.

(b) Partial or total representation?

Sextus in what is meant to be an account of orthodox Stoic theory tells us that an apprehensive appearance represents *every* feature of its object. But Zeno said originally that it represented only some. What might motivate this change?

The obvious answer is: Argument B. Zeno's original thought was simply that a normal perception has to enable the person to distinguish what he is perceiving. You don't need to be able to pick out *every* feature of the table in front of you to be confident that, in normal circumstances, you are seeing a table. (Indeed, in normal circumstances, the notion of distinguishing *every* feature has no obvious application.) But then the Sceptics produce some version of Argument B. Given Zeno's definition, I could have an apprehensive appearance of one egg – and another indistinguishable appearance of another, exactly similar egg; so the first one can't have had the distinguishing mark that an apprehensive appearance should.

The account we find in Sextus meets this point: if you do have an apprehensive appearance of *that* egg, then your appearance *has* a distinguishing mark which reflects *that* egg's individual peculiarities – everything that makes *that* egg different from every other egg in the world (indeed everything else in the world). So any putative counter-example will just be ruled out; there will turn out to be some relevant divergence in the appearance's causal history (there has to be, if it comes not from *that* egg but another)[28] so that the two appearances are not in fact indistinguishable. Strengthening Zeno's account by insisting that the appearance represent *all* its object's features enables the Stoics to insist on this. If the appearance represents its object in every detail, and if no two objects are exactly similar qualitatively, then an appearance that is apprehensive will in fact have a distinguishing mark (though, of course, this may not and usually will not be available to the person).

But again the debate continues. Once more we must ask what the Academics could possibly have left to say. Here we recall the Stoics' curious double response to Argument B. On the one hand they claim that there is a

28 It should be noted, however, that the theory is in danger of triviality, if the distinction in causal history of two appearances is so understood that two eggs are held necessarily to produce two *distinguishable* appearances. See Striker, this volume, pp. 152f.

difference between the appearance of one egg and that of another. Given the strengthened definition, this claim hinges entirely on the thesis of the identity of indiscernibles. Further argument here can only focus on the plausibility of this thesis, which it does (*Lucullus* 54, 85). But we also find the Stoics making the claim that the distinguishing mark *can* in fact be discerned, at least by experts. This is a strange claim for the Stoics to make. Whyever would they appeal to an (alleged) actual poultry farmer on Delos who could tell eggs apart? The Academic response was predictable; they were, rightly, sceptical about the alleged examples (*Lucullus* 86). Why did the Stoics not take the considerably more plausible line that there was indeed a distinguishing mark in the apprehensive appearance of any egg, reflecting that egg's individuality, but that of course nobody (except the ideal wise person) could discern such a mark? It is tempting to suggest that the Academics continued to press the question of whether the distinguishing mark of the apprehensive appearance was *available* to the person experiencing it. And the Stoics, instead of dismissing this as irrelevant, let themselves be cornered uncomfortably into providing alleged examples of people able to do this discerning, and thus to tell eggs apart.

Some such story is needed to explain the Stoics' recourse to mythical Delian poultry-farmers and the like. In other areas they were content to appeal to the 'wise person', the ideal person who represents the possibility in principle of doing something or being a certain way. If only the wise person is rich, a king and so on, as the Stoics were ready to say, and if the wise person sets the standards for perception,[29] then why not say that only the wise person can distinguish eggs? This is all the Stoics need to show that they are discernible in principle. The Stoics clearly felt that they had to argue against the Academics as to the question of whether some people at least could put the distinguishing mark of their apprehensive appearance to some actual use, regardless of what could or could not be done in principle.

Again it is natural to reconstruct the debate in such a way that the Stoics are shifting and uncertain over the crucial point, the point that we would formulate by asking whether (ii) or only (i) is sufficient for apprehension. And again the issue is a serious philosophical one: is it sufficient for knowledge that I should merely be in the right relation to the object of knowledge, or is it also required that this relation should be something available to me? Zeno's original demand will have been that an apprehensive appearance should enable the person to distinguish its object. The sceptics respond with Argument B. The Stoics strengthen the condition for an apprehensive appearance, and appeal to the identity of indiscernibles.

29 Arius Didymus ap. Stobaeus, *Eclogae* II.112–19–113.3.

But this only meets the sceptics' point about apprehension if the conditions for apprehension have been tacitly weakened from some form of (ii) to some form of (i). So the Academics continue to press the question, Will the apprehensive appearance, thus strengthened, enable the person to distinguish one object from another? And instead of consistently rejecting this as irrelevant to what apprehension requires, the Stoics let themselves be forced into the additional claim that sometimes some of us can in fact, and not just in principle, use the apprehensive appearance to tell eggs apart, and the like. Given the implausibility of their examples, they would have done better not to argue in this second way. That they are forced to it probably reveals again the continuing pull of (ii). And the fact that the Stoics go on arguing in both these ways suggests that their theory was indeterminate on this point; the strengthening of conditions for an apprehensive appearance from Zeno to the theory we find in Sextus does not show a clear recognition of the difficulties, but rather develops the theory in a way which is still open to both kinds of interpretation.

(c) Removal of an obstacle

We have seen two ways in which the Stoics seem to meet an Academic objection by making a move which meets the objection, but at the cost of weakening what is required for apprehension from (ii) to (i). We have also seen that they do not seem clear and single-minded about this move, since sometimes they are forced by the Academics into arguing about whether the person is not just in the right relation to the relevant egg, say, but can actually make some use of being in this right relation – whether it is, as I have put it, available to the person.

If I can have apprehensive appearances without being aware of this fact – if I can be in the right relation to the relevant objects but this fact is unavailable to me – then there is a problem how these appearances can be the criterion of truth. The sceptics certainly always assume that a criterion of truth is something that I can make use of to determine what is and is not true. Many of Sextus' arguments depend on this, and would make no sense if someone could have a criterion but be wholly unaware of it. It is possible, of course, that the sceptics are here begging the question, using against the Stoics and others a use of 'criterion' which they would not themselves accept. But it is surely more likely[30] that this is the more intuitive notion of criterion. And in any case, sceptical arguments, whether Academic or Pyrrhonist, depend on the opponent's premises, not the sceptic's, so that it would be perverse for sceptics to use against opponents a concept of criterion which they rejected.

30 See above, n. 18.

The Stoics thus have good reason to be unhappy at being forced back on (i) as sufficient for apprehension; for this brings with it the corollary that someone can have a criterion of truth and be unable to use it, since it is apprehensive appearances that are the Stoic criterion of truth, and the Stoic response to Academic arguments tends to take the form of weakening the conditions for these to (i). It is not surprising, then, that 'later Stoics' saw a need to adjust the claim that apprehensive appearances are the criterion of truth. We find them adding that there must be no 'obstacle'. This notion of obstacle suggests unhappiness with the idea that one might be in possession of a criterion and be unable to use it.

The Stoics, however, are embarrassed in two distinct kinds of case: in the case of vivid, etc. appearances in abnormal situations, and in the case of our inability to tell apart eggs, etc. in normal situations. The single notion of removing an obstacle will help only with the former. What 'obstacle' prevents my telling apart two eggs in a normal situation? An 'obstacle' will only be plausibly present where the person is in an abnormal situation but does not know that he is.

The Stoics appeal to 'external circumstances' for the obstacle to the person's acceptance of the apprehensive appearance as such (*M* VII.254). Sextus himself later (424–5) identifies this with unusual or abnormal circumstances involving the having of the appearance, and actually explicates absence of an obstacle with normal perceptual conditions. This cannot be right, however, as it would simply turn apprehensive appearances with an obstacle into non-apprehensive appearances. Moreover, the example of Menelaus is not a case of abnormal perceptual conditions, but of *normal* perceptual conditions coupled with a preponderance of *beliefs* in the agent that prevent his acceptance of the apprehensive appearance as such.

It seems likely, then, that the reference to external circumstances should not be taken as Sextus takes it, but that it has reference to a normal appearance in conditions where the person's beliefs form an obstacle to his accepting the apprehensive appearance as such. For cases of this we have to go to far-fetched stories like that of Helen on Pharos,[31] since in most normal

31 On his return from Troy, where the Greeks have spent ten years trying to destroy the city in order to win back Helen, Menelaus discovers that Helen spent the ten years innocently in Egypt, and that the Helen fought over in Troy was a phantom sent by the gods. The origin of this twist on the legend is probably a desire to underline the tragic futility of the human struggle in the ten years' war; but in the extent to which it renders the human perspective pointless it moves from the tragic to the comic, and both Euripides' *Helen* and Strauss' *Die aegyptische Helena*, based on this story, are comedies rather than tragedies. The Helen example seems to originate from Carneades (another indication of lateness in the Stoic tradition), who used the story as an example of the way appearances may be 'diverted' by unsuspectedly wrong beliefs; the

cases the person will have fairly coherent beliefs. Indeed it is hard for the Stoics to find such examples, since they lay stress on increased coherency of beliefs as a sign of progress towards rationality and knowledge. To get an example of beliefs blocking acceptance of an apprehensive appearance, that is, systematically wrong beliefs, where the person is normal, not mad, drunk, etc. and the circumstances are normal, not grossly illusory, etc., they have to bring in, as in the case of Menelaus,[32] some powerful and rather irresponsible gods.

That there could be cases like this seems plausible (we have our modern analogues to the gods). But there are two drawbacks to this late Stoic attempt to rescue apprehensive appearances as the criterion of truth. Firstly, it is not clear how the 'obstacle' idea helps in the cases where the person is in abnormal perceptual conditions but does not realise that he is; and these are the cases that matter, being more common and plausible. Secondly, in the Menelaus type of case the 'obstacle' can be removed only by removing the person's false beliefs. But if this is required then apprehension seems to lose its position as a kind of knowledge that we can have and put to use whatever the state of our other beliefs. The interesting distinction between apprehension and knowledge proper will become blurred if it depends on the overall coherence of your beliefs whether you can here and now use your apprehension as a criterion of truth. Apprehension was originally put forward as a criterion accessible to all, whatever the state of their other beliefs.

Conclusion

The Academic arguments are, I have suggested, neither fatal to nor based on a misconception of the Stoic position. Rather, the arguments, and

'undiverted' (*aperispastos*) appearance is one that we can trust as being reliable (*M* VII.180–1). (Both this and the Alcestis example (see next note) would have been regarded by Carneades as fictions, akin to thought-experiments, rather than as serious actual counter-examples.) Long and Sedley [288], 1, 259 say that the additions of the late Stoics 'read like actual importations from Carneades, gratefully accepted as improvements to the original Stoic doctrine in response to his criticisms'. Unfortunately this is of no help with our present problem, since both Carneades and the later Stoics are concerned with the blocking effect that the agent's beliefs can have on accepting the upshot of a normal perceptual appearance; and this goes nowhere towards suggesting a way they might have coped with Arguments A and B.

32 For simplicity I have used only one of Sextus' examples. The other one that he gives is that of Admetus, whose wife Alcestis has died; on seeing her brought up from the underworld by Heracles he does not believe that it is her; he believes that the dead do not rise, while some *daimones* (spirits) do wander the earth – reasonable beliefs (by contemporary standards), but forming an obstacle to his accepting his experience as veridical when it in fact is. This example also derives from Carneades; see *PH* I.226–9.

responses to them, illuminate the Stoic theory for us. One of its most interesting features is its distinction of apprehension from knowledge proper and its claim that something short of knowledge proper, namely apprehension, is the criterion of truth. Since apprehension is a normal achievement of normal people, we have here an epistemology based on commonsense, though using an articulated and sophisticated account of perception. But the Stoics are, I have suggested, not determinate initially as to whether apprehension requires only a weak causal condition (the person must be in the right relation to the object) or the stronger and more intuitive condition, that this right relation be in some way available to the person. The Academics attack the theory by pressing it in the more intuitive understanding. The Stoic response tends to withdraw to the weaker conditions; this evades the attacks, but at the cost of making the theory less commonsensical, and also of losing the role of the apprehensive appearance as a usable criterion of truth. The Stoics also, however, argue, or at least some of them do, on the original more intuitive grounds. The point at issue (the difference between (i) and (ii)) is never explicitly formulated in a decisive way by either side, though it clearly underlies the continuing debate.

The Academic arguments, then, like all good philosophical arguments, force the Stoics both to defend and to reconsider their theory. They force some modifications to the theory – and, more interestingly, a deeper probing on both sides of what matters in a theory of knowledge. *Is* it enough just to be in the right relation to the relevant object? Or must the person be in some way able to *use* the fact of being in this relation? These issues are not settled today. The Stoics do not give us a single satisfactory answer; but both in their ambitious theory and in their diverse ways of defending it they raise points of fundamental importance for epistemology, points which had not been raised before in this form in the ancient world.[33]

33 I am grateful for helpful comments and discussion to Jonathan Barnes, Stephen Everson and Gisela Striker.