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ARCESILAUS: SOCRATIC SKEPTICISM IN PLATO'S ACADEMY*

ABSTRACT: The fundamental issue regarding Arcesilaus' skepticism is whether it should be understood as a philosophical position or as a strictly dialectical practice with no doctrinal content. In this paper I argue that it is both by providing an account of the epistemic principles informing his practice along with a positive doxastic attitude that he may consistently take towards those principles. I further show how Arcesilaus may have reasonably derived his Socratic project, including the epistemic principles and his distinctive cognitive attitude, from his reading of Plato's dialogues, and that this approach enables us to better understand the function of his practical criterion, the reasonable (*to eulogon*). And finally, I note that since Arcesilaus' great successor Carneades confronts the same problem regarding the coherence of his Socratic project, a similar interpretative approach may be taken to his practical criterion, the persuasive (*to pithanon*).

SOMMARIO: La questione fondamentale concernente lo scetticismo di Arcesilao è se esso debba essere inteso come una posizione filosofica o come una pratica strettamente dialettica senza alcun contenuto dottrinale. In questo articolo sostengo che lo scetticismo di Arcesilao è ambedue queste cose, fornendo un resoconto dei principi epistemici che fondano la sua posizione insieme a un atteggiamento doxastico positivo che egli assume costantemente in relazione a tali principi. Mostrerò, inoltre, come sia plausibile che Arcesilao possa aver derivato il suo progetto socratico, compresi i principi epistemici e il suo peculiare atteggiamento cognitivo, dalla lettura dei dialoghi di Platone, e come tale contatto con gli scritti platonici permetta di comprendere meglio la funzione del suo criterio pratico, il ragionevole (*to eulogon*). Infine, poiché Carneade, l'importante successore di Arcesilao, affronta lo stesso problema per ciò che riguarda la coerenza del suo progetto socratico, mostrerò come un simile approccio interpretativo possa essere adottato anche in relazione al suo criterio pratico, il persuasivo (*to pithanon*).

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KEYWORDS: Arcesilaus; Socrates; Plato; Academy; Skepticism

Arcesilaus initiated a skeptical phase in Plato's Academy sometime after taking over as head around 267 BCE. Like Socrates, he committed none of his thoughts to the page, so we must rely on the reports of others, often at quite a remove, to piece together his position or practice.¹ In fact, the fundamental issue regarding Arcesilaus' skepticism is whether it should be understood as a philosophical position in the first place, or whether it is better understood as a strictly dialectical practice, with no doctrinal content.²

The problem derives from certain propositions, which Cicero attributes to him in such a way as to suggest the following argument:

- (i) it is rash and shameful to assent to something false or unknown, but since
- (ii) nothing can be known (and obviously we shouldn't do what is rash and shameful),
- (iii) we should suspend judgment about everything (*Varro*, 44-45).

If Arcesilaus believes (i.e. assents to) (i) and (ii), he must also believe that he knows neither (i) nor (ii), since he believes nothing can be known. And if he knows neither (i) nor (ii) then by (i) he must admit that it is rash and shameful to believe either. Even if he somehow manages to overcome these difficulties, and believes (iii) on the basis of (i) and (ii), he must then admit that he should *not* believe (iii), or for that matter (i) and (ii), since he believes we should suspend judgment about everything. So there is quite a mess to clean up if Arcesilaus were to assent to these propositions as part of his own positive philosophical position. On the other hand, if he does not assent to these propositions we must explain why they are so closely associated with him, and what role they play in his skeptical practice.

¹ Fragments and testimonia for Arcesilaus are collected in H. J. Mette, "Zwei Akademiker heute: Krantor von Soloi und Arkesilaos von Pitane", *Lustrum*, 26, 1984, p. 41-94. And now see S. Vezzoli, *Arcesilao di Pitane: L'origine del Platonismo neoaccademico*, Turnhout, Brepols, 2016.

² For concise and informative introductions to the interpretative issues and options, see C. Brittain, "Arcesilaus", in E. N. Zalta (ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2008 (<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2008/entries/arcesilaus/> [11.11.2018]) and A. M. Ioppolo, "Arcesilaus", in D. Machuca-B. Reed (eds.), *Skepticism from Antiquity to the Present*, London, Bloomsbury, 2018, p. 36-50. For a more general overview of scholarship on the Skeptical Academy, see D. Machuca, "Ancient Skepticism: The Skeptical Academy", *Philosophy Compass*, 6 (4), 2011, p. 259-266.

Along these lines, Casey Perin has argued that we have so far failed to make good sense of Arcesilaus.³ Perin poses the problem as a dilemma: either Arcesilaus had philosophical views, as dogmatic interpretations maintain, or he did not, as dialectical interpretations maintain.⁴ The problem for dogmatic interpretations is to show how his endorsement of philosophical views is consistent with those very views, as I have just sketched.⁵ And the problem for dialectical interpretations is to explain why Arcesilaus bothers to argue against other people's views, and why he refuses to assent to what he does not know. If we cannot explain why he behaves this way and what he hopes to achieve, his practice is unintelligible. But if we attempt to explain his practice in terms of some epistemic principles, we confront the problems facing dogmatic interpretations once again. For assenting to these principles without knowing them to be true will be rash and shameful, which should lead him to suspend judgment. And if he suspends judgment regarding those principles, it is unclear how they can explain his practice.⁶

³ C. Perin, "Making Sense of Arcesilaus", *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, 45, 2013, p. 313-340.

⁴ For references to examples of these competing interpretations, see *ibid.* p. 314 n. 3. See also A. M. Ioppolo, *Opinione e scienza: Il dibattito tra Stoici e accademici nel III e nel II secolo a.C.*, Naples, Bibliopolis, 1986. Perin singles out the views of Frede and Cooper as being difficult to classify since they attempt to read Arcesilaus' skepticism as *both* a dialectical practice and a view, of some sort: M. Frede, "The Sceptic's Two Kinds of Assent and the Question of the Possibility of Knowledge", in M. Burnyeat-M. Frede (eds.), *The Original Sceptics*, Indianapolis, Hackett, 1997, p. 127-151, J. Cooper, "Arcesilaus: Socratic and Sceptic", in *Id.* (ed.), *Knowledge, Nature, and the Good: Essays on Ancient Philosophy*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2004, p. 81-103. I agree with Perin's assessment that these attempts fall short. Frede fails to fully clarify what it means for Arcesilaus to merely have a view in such a way that does not amount to giving assent. Cooper's Arcesilaus simply finds himself with certain substantive, action-guiding convictions that he is unwilling to assert or to defend. Even if we grant that these convictions were not arrived at philosophically and thus do not fall within the scope of (iii) when properly qualified, it is unclear why he is justified in exempting these convictions from dialectical scrutiny.

⁵ Another option, though not much defended today, is that Arcesilaus was a crypto-dogmatist – i.e. he merely posed as a skeptic in order to determine which students were worthy of secretly receiving the wisdom of his positive Platonic views (*PH*, I, 234), which he buried like a "golden treasure" to be discovered by those who could make proper use of them (August., *Contr. Acad.*, III, 17, 38).

⁶ Similarly, given that Arcesilaus makes use of reason and argument to call into question other applications of reason and argument, we confront the problem that Ioppolo sees as common to all forms of skepticism: "whether it is legitimate [or, we may add, even possible] for the skeptic to communicate his own non-position to others by drawing upon concepts such as reason, opinion, and truth" (Ioppolo, "Arcesilaus", p. 46).

Perin's insightful challenge highlights a persistent problem regarding what we, as well as our ancient sources, mean by 'belief' and how we may properly differentiate it from other similar or related doxastic attitudes. Ordinarily, belief is understood to be a matter of taking something to be true, or simply assenting to a proposition. This is clearly the attitude involved in (i) as well as (ii) insofar as we suppose that knowledge results from correctly or justifiably taking something to be true. But it is curious to note that the attitude described in (iii) must be more than merely *not* assenting, which, strictly speaking is all that would follow from (i) and (ii). Arcesilaus' advocacy of suspending judgment (*epoche*), as we will see, is an expression of his positive commitment to open-ended investigation. As such, the attitude of *epoche* implies being invested somehow in the truth of the relevant propositions. It is a matter of taking an interested, questioning attitude towards whether, for example, virtue is sufficient for happiness, rather than simply not having a belief either way.⁷ So, we will need to appeal to more than (i) and (ii) to explain why Arcesilaus is so intent on suspending judgment and leading his interlocutors to do the same (Diog. Laert., *VP*, IV, 28, Cic., *Varro*, 45), and why he continues to investigate even while consistently failing to establish anything.

What we need is a principled explanation for Arcesilaus' philosophical practice. Regardless of whether he ever articulated and defended these principles, his practice is the result of intensive reflection on the nature, value, and purpose of human life. So unlike the implicit principles expressed through patterns of ordinary linguistic and social behavior, it is reasonable to expect that the principles expressed through Arcesilaus' practice will be relatively precise and clear. We will also need to explain the attitude Arcesilaus takes towards these principles. In order to avoid the problems described above we will have to suppose it is something other than belief. This is speculative, given the lack of textual evidence, but it seems to be necessary if we are to make sense of Arcesilaus' skepticism.

Accordingly, in what follows, I present an account of the epistemic principles informing Arcesilaus' practice along with a positive doxastic attitude that he may have consistently taken towards those principles (section 3). To set the stage, I argue that he may have reasonably adopted this attitude, along with the project itself, from his reading of Plato's dialogues, and as a critical response to the direction the Academy had taken (sections 1-2). And I extend this approach in an attempt to explain Arcesilaus' advocacy of his practical

⁷ J. Friedman, "Why Suspend Judging", *Nous*, 51 (2), 2017, p. 302-326.

criterion, the reasonable (*to eulogon*, section 4). Finally, I briefly note that Arcesilaus' great successor Carneades confronts the same problem regarding the coherence of the Socratic project and that he responds by proposing yet another practical criterion, the persuasive (*to pithanon*, section 5).

1. *The Original Academic Position and Plato's Research Program*

Arcesilaus' skeptical innovations were seen as both a radical break with his predecessors *and* as a continuation of Platonic philosophy.⁸ Before instituting these innovations, Arcesilaus defended the position that had been maintained in the Academy from its founding by Plato, over one hundred years earlier in 387 BCE (Philod., *Acad. Hist.*, col. XVIII Dorandi). But what could this original Academic position have been?

Given the variety of incompatible metaphysical and ethical views attributed to Arcesilaus' predecessors, it cannot have been a single set of inter-related propositions supported by a collection of arguments – there is no single Platonism in this sense. Even so, it is important to note that these inter-Academic disagreements took place within a well-defined context, or research program. Lloyd Gerson has argued that the central problem bequeathed by Plato was to articulate an account of the structure of the intelligible world while respecting the constraints of certain non-negotiable principles constituting the 'big tent' that is Platonism – these principles or starting points include the rejection of materialism, relativism, and skepticism.⁹ This view of Plato's research program allows for a variety of outcomes, especially given the extraordinary difficulty of providing a coherent account of the structure of the intelligible world and its relation to the material world. Nevertheless, Gerson identifies the ultimate aim as the production of a "single, positive construct" founded on a metaphysical doctrine.¹⁰ The truth of the intelligible world is out there, so to speak, and the Platonist's job is to bring it to light through the construction of bold, metaphysical systems. So on this view, even if Arcesilaus' predecessors disagreed about the details they were all working within the Platonist tent on the same philosophical project.

⁸ J. Dillon, *The Heirs of Plato*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2003, p. 234 ff.

⁹ Gerson also includes the rejection of mechanism and nominalism among the basic principles, which he describes collectively as Ur-Platonism: L. Gerson, *From Plato to Platonism*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2013, p. 23, 138, 161.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 305.

However, this focus on system-building and the articulation of first principles tends to overlook the importance of personal intellectual and moral progress, and the elenctic, Socratic aspects of Plato's philosophy. Even if one of Plato's successors managed to produce an irrefutable metaphysical system, there would remain a crucial pedagogical challenge. For such a system could do us no good if we are unable to grasp its truth. And if the system turned out to be refutable after all we would risk making any further progress by accepting it as the truth. Indeed, Plato's careful distancing of himself from the views he explores in his dialogues along with his criticism of writing (*Phaedr.*, 274c-275b, *Ep. VII*, 341e) might be seen as a rejection of discursive exposition as a productive form of philosophy. Furthermore, Plato seems to have neither expected nor enforced any doctrinal orthodoxy in the Academy. Instead he engaged his colleagues in a method of inquiry, inspired by Socrates, which would lead to the truth in the only way he thought possible, namely by coming to grasp it for oneself.¹¹ Similar concerns may have motivated Arcesilaus' teachers, Polemo, Crates and Crantor, who stressed the Socratic aspects of Plato's philosophy in contrast with the system-building of their predecessors, Speusippus and Xenocrates, thereby paving the way for what would eventually appear to be a skeptical revolution within the Academy (Diog. Laert., *VP*, IV, 18).¹²

While none of this amounts to a rejection of metaphysical system-building, it does suggest a slightly different way of thinking about Plato's research program. If we suppose the ultimate goal is to attain virtue and happiness in practice, then the construction of metaphysical systems may or may not contribute to that end. It is a striking fact that Socrates never engages in any metaphysical speculation of his own in Plato's so-called early, aporetic dialogues, all of which end frustratingly in puzzlement. So it may be that Plato's research program grew out of these failures, which he himself so

¹¹ Dillon, *Heirs*, p. 16, E. Watts, "Creating the Academy: Historical Discourse and the Shape of Community in the Old Academy", *The Journal of Hellenic Studies*, 127, 2007, p. 109.

¹² A. A. Long, "Diogenes' Life of Arcesilaus", *Elenchos*, 7, 1986, p. 440, Gerson, *Platonism*, p. 161; Snyder argues that Polemo's objections to Zeno's ethics and its foundation in logic paved the way for Arcesilaus' skeptical turn, and specifically for the continued attack on the Stoic view of wisdom and the kataleptic impression on which it is built: C. Snyder, "On the Teaching of Ethics from Polemo to Arcesilaus", *Études platoniciennes*, 14, 2018 [forthcoming]. See also, Id., "Plato and the Freedom of the New Academy", in H. Tarrant-D. Layne-D. Baltzly-F. Renaud (eds.), *Brill's Companion to the Reception of Plato in Antiquity*, Leiden, Brill, 2017, p. 58-71.

brilliantly depicted. On this view, which I believe to be Arcesilaus', Plato offers his ambitious theories regarding the Forms, the tripartite soul, recollection, etc. to explain how it *would* be possible for human beings to achieve the kind of virtue and knowledge that Socrates supposed to be necessary if not also sufficient for happiness.

Indeed, we may also see the later development of Stoic epistemology and the account of wisdom it provides as yet another attempt to explain how to reasonably satisfy Socrates' lifelong ambition.¹³ After all, Zeno was inspired by the figure of Socrates in Xenophon's *Memorabilia* and he studied in the Academy for about twenty years before setting out on his own (Diog. Laert., *VP*, VII, 2-4). So even if he left the Academy, as Gerson might claim, because his materialism would not be welcome, he could still be understood to be working within Plato's research program. Dillon goes even further in arguing that by the time Arcesilaus began to lead the Academy, Zeno's Stoicism would have been seen as a logical development of positions adopted by the Old Academics. And in response, Arcesilaus had to either innovate within the Platonic tradition or "follow lamely after Zeno".¹⁴ No doubt Arcesilaus was under pressure to establish an institutional identity that would attract and retain students; however we should suppose that the prospect of offering something different and distinctive in the Academy was not his primary motivation but rather a happy consequence of his reading of Plato's dialogues along with other philosophical considerations and experiences.

2. A more Socratic Project

To account for Arcesilaus' continuity within the Academic tradition, we may suppose that he continued to engage in Plato's research program, as I have described it. And to account for his break with that tradition, we may suppose that he adopted a different cognitive attitude towards the theories being proposed and examined. Where his predecessors exercised their Academic freedom to arrive at and assent to metaphysical, epistemological, and ethical theories that were supposed to provide compelling solutions to the problems

¹³ M. Frede, "Stoic Epistemology", in K. Algra-J. Barnes-J. Mansfeld-M. Schofield (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Hellenistic Philosophy*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999, p. 295-296.

¹⁴ Dillon, *Heirs*, p. 237.

raised by Plato's research program, Arcesilaus exercised his freedom to delay such arrivals, and to persist, as Socrates did, in a life of investigation.¹⁵

While this attitude of *epoche* is enough to differentiate Arcesilaus' philosophical practice from his predecessors', it is not enough to fully explain that practice. For as I noted above, if he were to suspend judgment about whether to suspend judgment, it would be unclear as to why he should continue to suspend judgment. But if he were to assent to the proposition that we should withhold assent his position becomes untenable. So we need to identify something other than either withholding or giving assent to capture Arcesilaus' cognitive attitude towards the propositions that characterize his practice. This attitude must guide Arcesilaus to suspend judgment when he finds the opposing arguments to be equally balanced, but not because he takes it to be true that one should suspend judgment. We may think of this as a kind of provisional acceptance to serve as a basis for further inquiry or to provide an account to be subjected to further scrutiny. And for a model we may look to the attitude that Plato's Socrates takes towards a proposition that characterizes his own philosophical project, namely that virtue is a kind of knowledge.¹⁶

¹⁵ Arcesilaus' election to the scholarchy was not controversial among his colleagues (Diog. Laert., *VP*, IV, 32). So it is unlikely that he had been advocating for any dramatic changes in Academic practice at first. But after his innovations took root in the Academy, the transformation appeared extreme, as we can see in some overtly hostile descriptions: he abandoned the doctrines of Plato, establishing an alien, second Academy in its place (Eus., *PE*, XIV, 4, 5); he was first to meddle with the position handed down by Plato, establishing a Middle, more eristic, Academy in place of the Old (Diog. Laert., *VP*, IV, 28, I, 14, cf. Sext. Emp., *PH*, I, 232); he subverted the well-established philosophy of the Old Academy by falsely attributing skeptical views to Plato, Socrates, and other illustrious thinkers (Cic., *Lucull.*, 14-15); and his contemporary Aristo lampooned him as a philosophical chimera, advancing the skepticism of Pyrrho by means of the dialectic of Diodorus, with Plato merely as a cover (Diog. Laert., *VP*, IV, 32-33, Sext. Emp., *PH*, I, 234, Eus., *PE*, XIV, 5, 12-14). On this satirical comparison, see D. Sedley, "The Protagonists", in M. Schofield-M. Burnyeat-J. Barnes (eds.), *Doubt and Dogmatism: Studies in Hellenistic Epistemology*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1980, p. 11.

¹⁶ For a contemporary model, see L. J. Cohen, *An Essay on Belief and Acceptance*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1995. According to Cohen, "Belief carries no conceptual implications about reasoning, acceptance carries none about feelings" (p. 5, cf. p. 12-13). When we accept some proposition, we adopt it as a policy for guiding our actions or inferences, regardless of whether we also believe, and are thus inclined to feel, that the proposition is true. Cohen acknowledges that accepting *p* typically results in believing *p* in the long run, as Pascal hoped would be the case when he urges us to provisionally accept Catholic doctrine as a practical policy so that genuine belief may eventually take its place (p. 18). But this need not happen – one might continue to accept a proposition as a basis for further investigation without ever coming to believe or disbelieve it.

In the early dialogues, Socrates clearly proceeds on the assumption that virtue is knowledge. In fact, he also supposes that if S knows p, then S cannot be refuted regarding p. This enables him to test those who claim to have the sort of knowledge he seeks – if they are unable to consistently defend their view he concludes that they don't know what they think they know. In this respect the claim that virtue is a kind of knowledge serves as an action-guiding principle even while it is itself put to the dialectical test in a number of ways.

For example, in the *Laches*, Nicias proposes a view that he has often heard from Socrates, namely that courage is knowledge of what is fearful and hopeful (194d-195a). Socrates refutes this account by arguing that whatever enables one to have knowledge regarding future things enables one to have knowledge of the relevant past and present states as well. So Nicias has inadvertently identified the knowledge of all goods and evils, not just future ones, and thus has offered an account of the whole of virtue and not just a part. At the end of this exchange they agree that they have failed to discover what courage is (199e). Presumably we should suspend judgment with regard to Nicias' account. But this clearly does not dampen Socrates' enthusiasm for investigating the notion that virtue is, or rather *might be*, a kind of knowledge.

In the *Meno* we find an explicit instance of the attitude in question. Socrates agrees to examine the claim that virtue is teachable by means of hypothesizing that virtue is knowledge. If we suppose it is knowledge, it will immediately follow that it is teachable. But then we must obviously consider whether virtue *is* knowledge (87d). Socrates argues that if we suppose virtue is necessarily beneficial and that our actions are only beneficial when they are in accordance with knowledge, then virtue must be a kind of knowledge (88a-d, cf. *Ap.*, 38a, *Crito*, 48c-d, *Euthyd.*, 280b-281b). But he then immediately calls this conclusion into question by arguing that if virtue is knowledge, and thus teachable, there must be teachers of virtue; and yet he has never been able to find one (89d-e). Again, it seems the lesson is to suspend judgment regarding whether virtue is knowledge, even while continuing to act in accordance with this hypothesis by cross-examining those who claim to have the knowledge Socrates seeks.

One final example: in the *Republic* we find Socrates examining the notion that virtue is knowledge of all goods and evils when he introduces the form of the good. We are referred again to a view that his interlocutors have often heard, namely that it is by their relation to the form of the good that anything is useful or beneficial (505a). But when pressed for details, Socrates insists that it is not right to talk about things one doesn't know as

if he knew them because opinion without knowledge is shameful (506c). Not being up to providing an account of the good itself, he offers the Sun Simile, which we may see as a sort of hypothesis or heuristic: suppose the form of the good is like the sun so that we may discern the unfamiliar features of the former in terms of the familiar features of the latter (508a-509c). Plato seems to be asking us to entertain the notion as a resource for explaining evaluative matters in general. And if there were such a thing, it would certainly provide the metaphysical basis for wisdom to be a kind of irrefutable knowledge. But is there such a thing? The arguments against the theory of the forms in the *Parmenides*, not to mention the critiques of that other famous Academic, Aristotle, may well give us pause on this score. Nevertheless, we can readily imagine Socrates suspending judgment with regard to whether there is a form of the good, even while continuing to propose its existence as the basis for further investigation as a way of trying to understand whether or how virtue could be a kind of knowledge.¹⁷

In general, when one suspends judgment regarding whether p, he may nonetheless continue to accept that p as a basis for further investigation. If I were to suspend judgment regarding whether virtue is sufficient for happiness I will neither believe nor disbelieve it and yet may remain interested in whether it is the case. This does not conflict with my provisional acceptance of the claim since that acceptance does not amount to belief. I will not be inclined to feel that it is true even while proposing it as a possible truth for the sake of further investigation. In this way, *epoche* and provisional acceptance actually work together with the latter securing my ongoing interest in examining the claim about which I have so far refused to take a definite stand.

3. Arcesilaus' Epistemic Principles

In this section I aim to show that we should understand the propositions featured in the argument I started with as provisional or hypothetical

¹⁷ The proper understanding of the method of hypothesis that Plato describes in the *Phaedo* and its relation to the dialectic described in the *Republic*, and elsewhere is controversial. It is sufficient for my purposes to note that Plato's dialogues provide ample resources for reflecting on cognitive attitudes other than assent or belief, and for supposing that Socrates himself adopts such an attitude as a basis for further investigations. See M. Byrd, "Dialectic and Plato's Method of Hypothesis", *Apeiron*, 40 (2), 2007, p. 141-158.

principles that Arcesilaus derives from his reading of Plato's dialogues and his own dialectical experience.

(i) *It is Rash and Shameful to Assent to Something False or Unknown*

According to Cicero, Arcesilaus considered it rash to approve something false or unknown (*Varro*, 45). The disjunction 'false or unknown' is ambiguous. Is the shame simply in being wrong – assenting to something false – or is it in being incapable of defending one's views – assenting to something unknown? Cicero's immediate gloss suggests the latter: "... because nothing is more shameful than for assent to outstrip knowledge or apprehension" (*Varro*, 45). Since shame is essentially a public phenomenon, in order for an act to be shameful it must be possible for it to be observed by others. Thus it is reasonable to suppose that the shame lies in the failure to adequately defend the views one openly affirms in a dialectical exchange as if he knew them to be true (cf. *Div.*, I, 7, *ND*, I, 1, *Lucull.*, 66-68). Understood this way, there is a clear precedent in Plato's Socrates who claims that it is the most shameful ignorance to believe that one knows what he does not know. For example, many people fear death, shamefully supposing that they know it to be the greatest evil, while in fact it may be the greatest blessing (*Ap.*, 29a, cf. *Charm.*, 166c-d).

If we also suppose that whatever the wise person does is virtuous and what he refuses to do is rash and shameful, then we may infer a corollary to (i), namely that the wise person has no mere opinions. That is, he refuses to assent to anything he does not know to be true. And since he will never do anything shameful, he will never publicly affirm and defend a view that he cannot adequately justify. Insofar as we should all strive to be virtuous, it follows that we too should never affirm and defend views that we cannot adequately justify.

When we come to Arcesilaus' agreement with Zeno regarding (i), however, we must provide some important qualifications. Contrary to what I have claimed about its Socratic provenance, Cicero says that Zeno was the first to formulate the view that the wise person will have no mere opinions and that this seemed both true and honorable to Arcesilaus (*Lucull.*, 77; 66). Cicero appears to be simply mistaken about Zeno's originality with regard to (i) unless he is referring to the whole package of Stoic epistemology and ethics, of which (i) is an integral part. This makes the best sense of the dialectical context and it draws attention to the different ways in which Zeno and Arcesilaus understand and make use of (i). Directly after

registering their agreement, Cicero reports that Arcesilaus challenged Zeno to explain what the sage would do if he were unable to grasp anything with certainty (*Lucull.*, 77). Arcesilaus appears to be arguing from (i) in the following manner: “let us suppose for the sake of argument that the wise person holds no opinions and that it is shameful to assent to what is unknown. What if he is unable to apprehend anything?” The obvious consequence is the same as in the argument I started with, only in this case it is the sage who will never give his assent.

Such a consequence is unacceptable for Zeno however, since on his view assent is a necessary precursor of rational, intentional action. To be incapable of such action is far too high of a price to pay for the infallibility of the sage. In order to provide something worthy of the sage’s assent, Zeno invokes the central concept of his epistemology, the kataleptic impression. To qualify as kataleptic, an impression must originate from a real object or state of affairs, accurately preserve or represent the relevant features of its object or state of affairs, and it must be of such a kind as could not arise from what is not (Cic., *Varro*, 42, *Lucull.*, 77; Sext. Emp., *M*, VII, 151-152; 248-252; see also the articles by J.-B. Gourinat and F. Alesse in this special issue). By assenting exclusively to such impressions, the wise person will never err, for everything he assents to he will know to be true. Arcesilaus countered by arguing that no impression could satisfy all three requirements – for any candidate, we can imagine circumstances in which that impression is false and yet indistinguishable to us from a true one, either because we are mad, dreaming, or incapable of discerning the individuating features of the object (Cic., *Lucull.*, 88-90; 85-87; Sext. Emp., *M*, VII, 403-408). The ensuing controversy regarding the Stoic account of kataleptic impressions, and accordingly the very possibility of attaining Stoic wisdom, occupied Academics and Stoics right up to the time of Cicero (*Lucull.*, 78).¹⁸

¹⁸ And it continues to be debated today. For some relatively recent discussions, all of which contain further references to earlier, important discussions of these issues, as well as some relevant literature in contemporary epistemology, see S. Shogry, “Creating a Mind Fit for Truth: The Role of Expertise in the Stoic Account of the Kataleptic Impression”, *Ancient Philosophy* [forthcoming], T. Nawar, “The Stoic Account of Apprehension”, *Philosophers’ Imprint*, 14 (29), 2014, p. 1-21, C. Brittain, “The Compulsion of Stoic Assent”, in M. K. Lee (ed.), *Strategies of Argument: Essays in Ancient Ethics, Epistemology, and Logic*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2014, p. 332-355, H. Thorsrud, “Arcesilaus and Carneades”, in R. Bett (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Ancient Scepticism*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2010, p. 62-66, C. Perin, “Stoic Epistemology and the Limits of Externalism”, *Ancient Philosophy*, 25, 2005, p. 383-401, Id., “Academic Arguments for the

The crucial point here is that in initiating this challenge Arcesilaus reveals his willingness to submit a core Socratic principle to dialectical scrutiny. Its seeming true and honorable to him may be understood either as an overstatement on Cicero's part or a dialectical ploy to draw out Zeno's defense. In either case, Arcesilaus will suspend judgment with regard to the Stoic view that it is shameful to assent to what is unknown on the grounds that it violates our rational duty to assent only to kataleptic impressions. And he may continue to provisionally accept the notion that the sage has no mere opinions as a basis for further investigation into the nature of knowledge and virtue; for there are likely to be other ways to elaborate and defend (i). As a basis for further investigation, we may think of (i) not as a proposition, but as a question: is it ever *not* shameful to give one's assent? Or as a challenge: explain the conditions in which it would *not* be shameful to assent.

Treating this principle as a hypothesis also allows us to avoid the self-referential problem. Since Arcesilaus does not claim to know (i), it would be shameful for him to assent to it. But this does not preclude him from provisionally accepting (i). Note that a version of this problem remains for the Stoics: if Zeno does not claim to be a sage himself, he cannot claim to know (i), since only the sage has knowledge in the strict sense; consequently it would be shameful for him to assent to (i), or to encourage others to do the same.

(ii) *Nothing Can Be Known*

According to Cicero, Arcesilaus did not wish to merely criticize or refute his rival Zeno about the possibility of attaining certainty; he was motivated by a desire to discover the truth (*Lucull.*, 77). This desire led him, just as it had Socrates, along with Democritus, Anaxagoras, Empedocles and virtually all the earlier philosophers, to the recognition of the obscurity of things and a confession of ignorance, since opinion and custom prevail over the things we wish to understand, our senses our limited, our minds weak, and our lives brief (*Varro*, 44).

The claim that nothing can be known (*akatalepsia*) may be understood as a form of metaphysical indeterminism – there is no truth to be known – or as the epistemological claim suggested by our various limitations, that no

Indiscernibility Thesis”, *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly*, 86 (4), 2005, p. 493-517, B. Reed, “The Stoics’ Account of the Cognitive Impression”, *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, 23, 2002, p. 147-180.

justification can be conclusive. In either case, we should resist reading it as the negatively dogmatic assertion that knowledge is in fact impossible; for it is more likely part of Arcesilaus' dialectical strategy. For example, when the Stoics complain that if the Academics succeed in undermining the criterion of truth they make everything so uncertain that our rational faculties are useless (*Lucull.*, 31-32), Arcesilaus deflects the objection: if our faculties are useless for discerning the truth, we should blame nature for having concealed it in the abyss, as Democritus says (*Lucull.*, 32). This suggests, as Brittain and Palmer argue, that Arcesilaus is countering the Stoics' rational optimism with the pessimism of their illustrious predecessors, i.e. he is articulating equally powerful arguments for an opposing view to encourage us to withhold assent from either side.¹⁹ If so, he is not personally endorsing the view that nothing can be known, but rather drawing attention to persistent disagreements among authoritative and highly regarded philosophers regarding the possibility of knowledge.

However Arcesilaus does not seem to be engaged in this dialectical strategy when he adopts (*arripuit*) from Plato's dialogues the idea that neither the senses nor the mind enable us to grasp anything with certainty (Cic., *De or.*, III, 67).²⁰ What Arcesilaus picked out is not a specific argument against the possibility of knowledge, but rather a general inconclusiveness insofar as Plato never seems to affirm anything as certain but instead offers many arguments on either side of issues that seem to be perpetually under investigation (*Varro*, 46, cf. *Lucull.*, 74).²¹ In other words, Arcesilaus is reflecting on Socrates' dialectical experience in the early dialogues, as well as the contested attempts at metaphysical system building in the later dialogues. The variety of inconclusive attempts to articulate informative definitions of the virtues and to construct a metaphysical foundation for the knowledge Socrates sought would be grist for the skeptic's mill. Reflecting on the dialogues this way suggests an enumerative

¹⁹ C. Brittain-J. Palmer, "The New Academy's Appeals to the Presocratics", *Phronesis*, 46 (1), 2001, p. 38-72.

²⁰ For less sanguine views about the prospects of deriving skepticism from Plato's dialogues, see D. Sedley, "The *Theaetetus*: Three Interpretations", in C. Gill-M. McCabe (eds.), *Form and Argument in Late Plato*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1996, p. 86-89, J. Annas, "Plato the Skeptic" in P. Vander Waerdt (ed.), *The Socratic Movement*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1994, p. 308-340, C. Shields, "Socrates among the Skeptics", in Vander Waerdt (ed.), *The Socratic Movement*, p. 341-366. And for a defense of the compatibility of Socratic *elenchus* with skeptical *epoche*, see P. Woodruff, "The Skeptical Side of Plato's Method", *Revue Internationale de Philosophie*, 40 (156/157), 1986, p. 22-37.

²¹ Cooper, "Arcesilaus", p. 90-92.

induction: so far, no one's definition and none of the proposed metaphysical systems have been adequately defended; so, the next attempt will probably fail as well; and therefore, probably nothing can be known (specifically with regard to the knowledge Socrates sought).

Taking this last move as an inference however is problematic insofar it would then be meant to justify the claim that nothing can be adequately justified. A more attractive alternative is to suppose that by 'adopting' this view from the dialogues, Arcesilaus is provisionally accepting it, since if it were true, it would account for the accumulated evidence. But once again this provisional acceptance is part and parcel of his suspending judgment – he will neither believe nor disbelieve that nothing can be known while he continues to investigate whether that is the case. For there are bound to be ways to elaborate and defend the possibility of knowledge that he has not yet considered.

Accordingly, as with (i), we may think of (ii) as a question: can anything be known? Or as a challenge for those who claim to know something worthwhile: provide your reasons and defend them against objections and counterarguments. Read this way, this claim would not be a doctrine to be articulated and defended, but rather a hypothesis derived from his interpretation of Socrates' experience as well as the many inconclusive efforts of his Academic predecessors and Stoic contemporaries to show how it would be possible to acquire the knowledge necessary to flourish.

And again, as with (i), treating (ii) as a hypothesis similarly allows us to avoid the self-referential problem: if one assents to the proposition (ii) that nothing can be known, he will either claim to know (ii) or not to know (ii). The former option appears to be self-refuting. And while there are ways one might reasonably avoid this – e.g. by exempting the claim that I know (ii) from the scope of (ii) – Cicero tells us that Arcesilaus did not claim to know even that nothing can be known (*Varro*, 45). But if the only alternative is that Arcesilaus merely believes this without knowing it, then he is guilty of committing a shameful act in accordance with (i). The attitude of provisional acceptance allows us to say in what sense (ii) belongs to Arcesilaus without requiring his assent.

(iii) *We Should Suspend Judgment about Everything (but not in the Way the Pyrrhonists Do)*

Sextus claims that Arcesilaus' practice (*agoge*) is *nearly* the same as the Pyrrhonist's: they both suspend judgment about everything, never making positive assertions about reality, and never preferring one thing to another as being more convincing (*PH*, I, 232). For both Sextus and Arcesilaus, *epoche* is

the psychological outcome of confronting equipollent arguments. But unlike the Pyrrhonist who is led to suspend judgment simply by removing the psychological inclination to assent, Arcesilaus is also guided by his provisional epistemic principles.²² While accepting (i) does not amount to making an *assertion* about reality, it does involve taking a positive attitude towards a principle that, if true, has normative force for everyone. In other words, when Arcesilaus provisionally accepts (i) he is not merely acquiescing in the way things appear, as the Pyrrhonist does (*PH*, I, 13-15; 230) – he is proposing to act and reason on the basis of a proposition that if true, is true for everyone.

Sextus, by contrast, expresses a deep mistrust of rational inference since reason is capable of undermining even what is apparent (*PH*, I, 20), and once we suspect that reason may be unreliable it is unacceptable to appeal to that very instrument to correct itself.²³ So the Pyrrhonist would not be willing to even provisionally accept such principles as bases for further investigation. Appearances are sufficient for the Pyrrhonist, and they simply move us in whatever ways they do; they require neither assent nor acceptance.

Accordingly, Arcesilaus and anyone else who accepts (i) will suspend judgment as to whether *p* so long as the arguments for and against *p* are equally forceful, and thus as long as he does not know whether *p*. In this sense, suspending judgment is the outcome of each individual investigation and does not presuppose or rely on (ii). It requires instead the Socratic notion that in order to know *p*, we must be able to adequately defend it. But if the arguments for and against are equally forceful, it has not been adequately defended. In that case, we should not suppose that we know *p*, and in keeping with (i) we should not assent to *p*.

Insofar as we expect the future to resemble the past, however, the cumulative effect of these dialectical failures would be a *de facto* commitment to (ii) and the adoption of (iii) as a settled policy. After a lifetime of failing to arrive at the truth, how could it be reasonable to expect that the next inquiry will have

²² This characterization of Sextus' Pyrrhonism is itself controversial. For a vigorous defense of the view that the Pyrrhonist must also be guided by normative epistemic principles in his search for truth as well as in his suspension of judgment, see C. Perin, *The Demands of Reason, An Essay on Pyrrhonian Scepticism*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2010.

²³ This would be an instance of the skeptic's reciprocal mode – see *PH*, I, 61; 169, and for further discussion: H. Thorsrud, "Sextus Empiricus on the Siren Song of Reason and the Skeptical Defense of Ordinary Life", *Logos and Episteme* [forthcoming].

a different outcome? Why, in other words, does Arcesilaus persevere in searching for the truth?²⁴

To answer this question we need to appeal once again to Arcesilaus' Socratic inspiration. Ultimately what motivates his provisional acceptance of (i) and (ii) is his admiration for Socrates' lifelong devotion to the pursuit of truth and his uncompromising willingness to follow reason where it leads. If we suppose, along with Socrates, that virtue is a kind of knowledge that is necessary if not also sufficient for *eudaimonia*, we should allow nothing but the arguments to direct our assent or withholding of assent. Following reason in this way is our only hope for acquiring the knowledge that we need to flourish. And suspending judgment will be the only appropriate, principled response to inconclusive investigations – this explains why Arcesilaus thought that suspending judgment was in fact good (*PH*, I, 233).²⁵

4. *Arcesilaus' Practical Criterion*

The Socratic context also enables us to explain why Arcesilaus was compelled to investigate the conduct of life and what role his practical criterion may have played in his philosophy. Sextus claims that Arcesilaus offered the reasonable (*to eulogon*) as the criterion according to which one may achieve the *telos* of human life, which he identifies as happiness (*M*, VII, 158, discussed further below).²⁶ This raises some difficult questions: how are we to understand this criterion and what relation does it have to Arcesilaus' philosophical practice? Also, given the relatively modest nature of 'the reasonable' in comparison to the extraordinarily high standards set for knowledge and virtue, how can we possibly see the resulting life as flourishing and happy?

To begin we must note the dialectical context in which Arcesilaus offers his practical criterion. His opponents attempted to draw unacceptable consequences from the principles that (ii) nothing can be known and that (iii) we should suspend judgment about everything. If these were true, or even if we

²⁴ Cicero confirms the tenacity of the New Academics who refuse to abandon their enthusiasm for investigation despite the difficulties and well-grounded doubts about their ability to discover the truth (*Lucull.*, 7, cf. also *Lucull.*, 65).

²⁵ Cooper, "Arcesilaus", p. 95-102.

²⁶ So Sextus seems to be mistaken in claiming elsewhere that *epoche* is the goal of Arcesilaus' philosophical practice (*PH*, I, 232). In fact, for Arcesilaus, we should think of *epoche* more in terms of the unwelcome *aporiai* in which Socrates and his interlocutors find themselves than as a step along the way to the desired state of tranquility that it is for the Pyrrhonists – see Ioppolo, "Arcesilaus", p. 43.

believed them, the result would be *apraxia*, i.e. an inability to successfully engage in certain kinds of action.²⁷ These range from purposeful, voluntary action on one hand to rational and morally good action on the other. By deriving these absurd or unacceptable consequences, the Academics' opponents attempt to establish that their skepticism is either false or pernicious.²⁸

For example, according to Plutarch, the Stoics objected to Arcesilaus by arguing that one who withholds assent would be left with no impulse towards or away from anything and thus be frozen in inaction. According to the Stoics, the fact that something appears good to me has no motivating force by itself, except in a dispositional sense. So it is only when we assent to such impressions that voluntary action occurs. Arcesilaus responds, apparently in terms of the Stoics' own theory:

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 [...] So those who suspend judgment 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 judgment (Plutarch., *Adv. Col.*, 1122C-D = LS 69A).²⁹

Non-rational animals do seem to engage in voluntary action without assent – i.e., without affirming as true the propositional content of some impression. But the possibility of remaining active in the manner of non-rational animals should

²⁷ G. Striker, "Sceptical Strategies", in Ead., *Essay on Hellenistic Epistemology and Ethics*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996, p. 92-115.

²⁸ For a detailed taxonomy and illuminating discussion of the varieties of the *apraxia* objection levelled at both Academic and Pyrrhonian skeptics, see K. Vogt, "Scepticism and Action", in Bett (ed.), *Ancient Scepticism*, p. 165-180. Obdrzalek adds considerably to our understanding of these objections, as presented in Cicero's *Academica*, by dividing them further into an evidential form (which aims to show the skeptical claims are false by deriving absurd, impossible consequences) and a pragmatic form (which aims to show that assenting to the skeptical claims is inadvisable by drawing out possible but pernicious consequences): S. Obdrzalek, "From Scepticism to Paralysis: The *Apraxia* Argument in Cicero's *Academica*", *Ancient Philosophy*, 32, 2012, p. 369-392.

²⁹ A. A. Long-D. N. Sedley [= LS], *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, 2 vols., Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1987, I, p. 450.

have been as unappealing to the Socratic Arcesilaus as to the Stoics. For such non-rational action can never be virtuous for those who have supposed that virtue is a kind of knowledge.

It is more plausible to suppose that Arcesilaus offered this theory in the spirit of his ongoing effort to argue against whatever anyone is willing to defend. The purely dialectical nature of this argument is further suggested by both the reliance on Stoic concepts and by the intrusion of *akatalepsia* when he claims that those who suspend judgment avoid the falsehood and deception that arises from precipitately assenting. In other words, insofar as Zeno and the Stoics fail to show how the wise person could assent only to kataleptic impressions, they must embrace the conclusion that the only way their sage can preserve his infallibility is by suspending judgment (*Lucull.*, 66-67). The notion that this sage may still engage in non-rational action should not therefore be seen as a consolation but as further dialectical opposition to the tenability of the Stoic account of knowledge and wisdom.

Arcesilaus is responding to a different version of *apraxia* when Sextus attributes the criterion of the reasonable to him. In this version, the skeptic's rejection of the Stoic criterion of truth is supposed to make virtue and happiness impossible.

But since after this [viz. Arcesilaus' argument against the kataleptic impression as a criterion of truth] it was necessary to investigate the conduct of life, too, which is not of a nature to be explained without a criterion, on which happiness too, i.e. the end of life, has its trust dependent, Arcesilaus says that one who suspends judgment about everything will regulate choice and avoidance and actions in general by 'the reasonable' [*to eulogon*]; and that by proceeding in accordance with this criterion he will act rightly; for happiness is acquired through prudence, and prudence resides in right actions, and right action is whatever, once it has been done, has a reasonable justification; therefore one who attends to the reasonable will act rightly and be happy (*Sext. Emp., M, VII, 158 = LS 69B*).³⁰

Once again Arcesilaus seems to be employing the Stoics' technical terms, so we might think that a purely dialectical interpretation is also in order, one which draws unwelcome consequences for the Stoic by proposing a deflated, second-best view of right action and happiness.³¹ In this case, however, the resulting

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 450-451.

³¹ See Striker, "Sceptical Strategies", p. 101-103. Ioppolo convincingly argues to the contrary that neither Arcesilaus' promotion of *epoche* nor his practical criterion can be reduced to dialectical theses (Ioppolo, "Arcesilaus", p. 44-46). Snyder claims that Arcesilaus is aiming at a more positive outcome by assisting the Stoics in a cooperative, Socratic spirit to produce a more adequate and coherent view: C. Snyder, "The Socratic Benevolence of Arcesilaus' Dialectic", *Ancient Philosophy*, 43 (2), 2014, p. 341-363.

theory does not conflict with his Socratic project but rather reaffirms it. Following Socrates, the idea motivating Arcesilaus' investigations, is that in order to act virtuously and achieve happiness, we must know that our choices are good. So to attempt to act virtuously and achieve happiness we must attempt to provide reasonable justifications of the goodness of our choices. This only requires that we import the notion of reasonable justification to the Socratic requirement on knowledge: in order for S to know p, S cannot be refuted regarding p, which requires (at a minimum) a reasonable justification of p.

Dialectically there is another intrusion of *akatalepsia* in Arcesilaus' proposal. For what prompts his introduction of the reasonable as a criterion is precisely the gap left by the refutation of the Stoic account of apprehension. Note that Sextus says the conduct of life is not to be explained or accounted for without a criterion. The Pyrrhonist acts strictly in accordance with how things appear and is neither interested nor willing to offer an explanation for the goodness or appropriateness of his choices. The Academic, engaged in the Socratic project of examining his life, owes us an account of himself, one that is aimed at establishing the actual goodness of his choices. Since the Academic must still live his life, and decide what to pursue and what to avoid while he is searching for truth, he must be willing to articulate the grounds on which he makes these judgments. But rather than doing so in the spirit of metaphysical system-building, he may propose some account that, if true, would show that his actions were virtuous and his life happy. In this sense, providing reasonable justifications is a way of generating further hypotheses for the sake of examining our lives and continuing the Socratic project.³²

Is it, for example, reasonable to avoid politics and be unconcerned with money as Arcesilaus was? It should be unacceptable for a Socratic to merely observe that these *seem* good or reasonable and to act on that basis. These are momentous decisions that require thorough and detailed defense. And so, we may suppose that any candidate for reasonable justification would ultimately need to rely on some account of the way the world is and our relation to it, i.e. the very sort of philosophical theory that Plato and his doctrinaire successors develop in various ways in their written works.

³² Schofield anticipates this view when he suggest that Arcesilaus may have thought following the reasonable is like entertaining a hypothesis about some theoretical matter, which requires only a working assumption rather than an assent or judgment regarding the truth: M. Schofield, "Academic Epistemology", in Algra-Barnes-Mansfeld-Schofield (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Hellenistic Philosophy*, p. 334.

But what could count as reasonable in the absence of apprehension? I have already argued that it cannot be simply whatever happens to appear reasonable at the moment.³³ But on the other extreme, it clearly cannot be the standard of perfect rationality that characterizes the positive affective states of the sage (*eupatheiai*), for these reasonable (*eulogon*) attractions or avoidances require apprehension of the relevant evaluative truths (Diog. Laert., *VP*, VII, 115). Is it then something less demanding?

If Arcesilaus had been proposing his practical criterion as a doctrine it would be fair to demand a definition of *to eulogon* and examples of successful justifications. But as a proposal, any account whatsoever may be advanced and examined as a candidate. If so, the very question of what constitutes the reasonableness of a reasonable justification will be remain open to debate. In the same way, what constitutes knowledge remains an open question for Arcesilaus, even as he is motivated by his provisional acceptance that virtue is a kind of knowledge that is necessary, if not sufficient, for happiness.

5. Carneades' Practical Criterion

Arcesilaus' great successor Carneades took over as head of Plato's Academy sometime before 155 BCE.³⁴ He also refrained from writing (DL 1.16, 4.65), devoting himself instead to the Socratic project of seeking the truth by means of

³³ For defense of the notion that the reasonable *is* whatever happens to appear so at the moment, akin to the Pyrrhonist's undogmatic adherence to the customs of ordinary life: T. Brennan, "Reasonable Impressions in Stoicism", *Phronesis*, 41 (3), 1996, p. 318, 333-334, Hankinson, *Sceptics*, p. 89-91. Ioppolo roots *to eulogon* in nature by drawing on Plutarch's report to supplement Sextus' account: impulse naturally leads us to what is appropriate, which in turn makes it possible to provide a reasonable justification for the resulting action (Ioppolo, "Arcesilaus", p. 45-46). However, in assimilating Arcesilaus' reliance on *to eulogon* to the Pyrrhonists' reliance on nature, I believe she undermines the credibility of his Socratic allegiance to following reason. For summary and critique of Ioppolo's more detailed presentation of this view in *Opinione e scienza*, see J. Annas, "The Heirs of Socrates", *Phronesis*, 33 (1), 1988, p. 100-112.

³⁴ The most frequently repeated anecdote regarding Carneades is that the Athenians sent him, along with two other philosophers, as ambassadors to Rome in 155 B.C., where he supposedly scandalized the Romans by arguing for and then against a certain conception of justice on subsequent days (Cic., *De rep.*, III, 9). However, Powell has shown that this report is probably Cicero's fabrication, largely on the grounds that such a display would have undermined Carneades' diplomatic charge to seek a reduction in a fine levelled against the Athenians: J. Powell, "The Embassy of the Three Philosophers to Rome in 155 BC", in C. Kremmydas-K. Tempest (eds.), *Hellenistic Oratory: Continuity and Change*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2013, p. 219-248.

argument *pro* and *contra* (*Varro*, 46, *Lucull.*, 16; *ND*, I, 4; I, 11-12; *Tusc.*, V, 11; *Eus.*, *PE*, XIV, 7, 15).³⁵ Like Arcesilaus, he is closely associated with the ideas that it is shameful to assent to what is not known, that nothing can be known (for there is no criterion of truth), and that we should suspend judgment. So in order to understand Carneades we face the same interpretative challenge, namely to articulate the epistemic principles that inform his practice and to explain the cognitive attitude he takes towards those principles.³⁶

In one sense, Carneades' practice is more ambitious than Arcesilaus'. Rather than arguing against whatever an individual was willing to actually defend, Carneades produced systematic taxonomies of ethical and epistemological positions in an effort to argue against not merely the views that were actually held, but the views that could be held, given certain constraints.³⁷ Thus, Sextus remarks that Carneades targeted all of his dogmatic predecessors in arguing that nothing is without qualification a criterion of truth (*M*, VII, 159-165).

However, like Arcesilaus, Carneades was confronted with *apraxia* objections, and responded with a distinctive criterion for the conduct of life and for the achievement of happiness, the persuasive (*to pithanon*). Insofar as we have failed to discover a criterion that invariably picks out the truth, we must rely on one that tells the truth for the most part, the persuasive or convincing impression (*he pithane phantasia*, *M*, VII, 166-189, *PH*, I, 226-230, *Lucull.*, 98-110). It is controversial as to whether Carneades endorsed this criterion himself and relied on it both for the conduct of life and for philosophical investigation,

³⁵ Fragments and testimonia for Carneades are collected in H. J. Mette, "Weitere Akademiker heute: Von Lakydes bis zu Kleitomachos", *Lustrum*, 27, 1985, p. 39-148.

³⁶ For two recent attempts, see H. Thorsrud, "Carneades", in D. Machuca-B. Reed (eds.), *Skepticism from Antiquity to the Present*, London, Bloomsbury, 2018, p. 51-66, and J. Dillon, "Carneades the Socratic", *Dionysus*, 34, 2016, p. 27-45.

³⁷ On Carneades's epistemological arguments, see M. Frede, "Stoics and Sceptics on Clear and Distinct impressions", in *Essays in Ancient Philosophy*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1987, p. 170-175, J. Allen, "Carneadean Argument in Cicero's Academic Books", in B. Inwood-J. Mansfeld (eds.), *Assent and Argument. Studies in Cicero's Academic Books*, Leiden-New York-Köln, Brill, 1997, Schofield, "Academic Epistemology", p. 338-344. On his ethical arguments, see K. Algra, "Chrysippus, Carneades, Cicero: The Ethical *divisiones* in Cicero's *Lucullus*", in Inwood-Mansfeld (eds.), *Assent and Argument*, p. 120-138, J. Annas, "Carneades' Classification of Ethical Theories", in A. M. Ioppolo-D. N. Sedley (eds.), *Pyrrhonists, Patricians, Platonizers: Hellenistic Philosophy in the Period 155-86 BC, Tenth Symposium Hellenisticum*, Naples, Bibliopolis, 2007, p. 187-224.

as Cicero suggests (*Lucull.*, 32).³⁸ In any case, Carneades' skeptical practice and practical criterion inspired the eventual development of fallibilism in the Academy.³⁹ Depending on how the historical narrative is constructed, this development may be seen either as a degeneration or as a culmination of the originally uncompromising skeptical and Socratic spirit of Arcesilaus.

³⁸ Brittain accounts for such passages as a later intrusion of mitigated skepticism into Carneades' real position of universal *epoche* and exclusively dialectical engagement with dogmatists: C. Brittain, *Philo of Larissa*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2001, p. 95-96, 103-108. For a critical review of this position, see J. Gucker, "The Philonian/Metrodorians: Problems of Method in Ancient Philosophy", *Elenchos*, 25, 1994, p. 99-152. See also, S. Obdrzalek, "Living in Doubt: Carneades' Pithanon Reconsidered", *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, 31, 2006, p. 243-80 and H. Thorsrud, "Radical and Mitigated Skepticism in Cicero's *Academica*", in W. Nicgorski (ed.), *Cicero's Practical Philosophy*, Notre Dame, University of Notre Dame Press, 2012, p. 133-151.

³⁹ For later developments in the skeptical Academy: H. Tarrant, *Scepticism or Platonism? The Philosophy of the Fourth Academy*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1985, Brittain, *Philo*, p. 73-168, R. J. Hankinson, "Natural Criteria and the Transparency of Judgment: Antiochus, Philo and Galen on Epistemological Justification", in Inwood-Mansfeld (eds.), *Assent and Argument*, p. 161-216, G. Striker, "Academics Fighting Academics", in Inwood-Mansfeld (eds.), *Assent and Argument*, p. 257-276, C. Lévy, "The Sceptical Academy: Decline and Afterlife", in Bett (ed.), *Ancient Scepticism*, p. 81-104.

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