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SEXTUS EMPIRICUS ON THE POSSIBILITY OF INQUIRY

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Abstract: In this paper I discuss Sextus Empiricus' response to the dogmatists' objection that the skeptics cannot inquire into philosophical theories and at the same time suspend judgment about everything. I argue that his strategy consists in putting the burden of proof on the dogmatists: it is they, and not the skeptics, who must justify the claim to be able to inquire into the nature of things. Sextus' arguments purport to show that if we consider the dogmatists' inquiry, we should conclude either that it is impossible or that it does not supply the skeptics with satisfactory starting-points for further inquiry.

At the beginning of the second book of the *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* [*PH*], immediately before he begins to scrutinize the theories of his dogmatic opponents, Sextus Empiricus discusses the objection that the skeptics can neither inquire into nor think about the objects of the dogmatists' theories. The objection is framed in the form of the so-called Meno's paradox and says that the skeptics either apprehend the statements of the dogmatists, in which case they cannot be puzzled about them – so that, consequently, they cannot maintain the skeptical disposition of suspending judgment about everything – or they do not apprehend them, in which case they cannot even talk about, let alone inquire into, them. Sextus is here confronted with a particular case of a general objection which has standardly been brought against the Pyrrhonists since antiquity, according to which they are unable to conform to the requirements of their view, so that their position is fundamentally inconsistent or incoherent. The denial of the possibility of inquiry must be a particularly serious challenge for those who credit themselves with the name *skeptikoi* ('inquirers') and whose central theoretical activity consists in perpetual inquiry against all those who claim to have found the truth. The dogmatists' objection, and

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Sextus' response to it, are important in that they bring to light some of the central problems with skeptical position in general.

Sextus' general strategy in dealing with the charges of incoherence is based on the idea that the skeptics just follow the ways things appear to them, or appearances (*phainomena*). Sextus is convinced that following appearances does not commit the skeptics to dogmatizing, i.e. to asserting that what appears to them to be such and such really is such and such, so that they may engage in both the philosophical and everyday practices without the threat of self-refutation. We might expect that the skeptics would follow the same line of thought to account for their approach to inquiry against the dogmatists' theories and to answer the objection that they cannot refute them without falling into dogmatism. That is, we might expect that the skeptics would insist that they do not have to apprehend the dogmatists' theories to argue against them, and that the life of following appearances provides them with sufficient conceptual and other resources necessary to engage in philosophical discussions.

As we will see in Section 2, something like this is indeed Sextus' position. He seems to be convinced that the explanation of the skeptics' theoretical activities lies in the so-called 'guidance by nature' (*huphēgēsis phusikē*), on the basis of which the skeptics are able to perceive things and to think about them (*PH* I.23–24, 237). Some of his statements suggest that he thinks of these abilities as by themselves sufficient for skeptical purposes: they are sufficiently rich to provide the skeptics with the cognitive tools necessary for inquiry, and yet their exercise does not include the apprehension of external objects, since it amounts to the passive acceptance of appearances. Thus, if the skeptic wants to argue against *p*, he does not have to apprehend *p*. All that is needed is that it appears to him that *p*, i.e. that he is involuntarily affected by *p*, without also assenting to *p* as true. This holds good whether *p* is a perceptual proposition like 'Honey is sweet' or a more abstract proposition like 'Everything is false'.

As a response to the objection, such an approach seems problematic, and in Section 3 I will consider some possible dogmatic counterarguments. Most generally speaking, it is not clear how inquiry which relies on such thin resources can say anything substantial about theories which are supposed to be based on a firm grasp of reality. The skeptics want to demonstrate that we must suspend judgment about the truth of the dogmatists' theories. Now the point of the dogmatists' objection can be seen to be based on the idea that you cannot claim to suspend judgment about truth and at the same time insist that you do not know what it is for the object of inquiry to be true or real, that is, insist that you have not, during the course of your inquiry, accepted it as true or real. For, the skeptics' procedure does not consist in assenting to the truth of *p*, and then, in the next step, withdrawing the assent because of the equal force of the opposing considerations. Were this the way in which the skeptics proceed, then

they could perhaps assert that it is the *truth* of *p* about which they suspend judgment, for in this case they did have (temporary) access to the truth. But if they assert, as they in fact do, that their inquiry into *p* is based only on how things appear to them, then it seems that they owe us an explanation of how it is possible, as a result of such an inquiry, to suspend judgment about truth or reality. In other words, it seems that they have to explain why the move from 'It appears to me that *p*' and 'It appears to me that not-*p*' to 'I suspend judgment whether *p* is true' can be justified.

The skeptics may retort by arguing that the way in which a thing appears is, as it were, a guide to how it really is, so that the conflict of appearances is sufficient to induce suspension concerning reality. Alternatively, they can argue that their understanding of what is included in the 'guidance of nature' is the correct one, so that our natural equipment, contrary to what the dogmatists might say, simply does not include also the ability to discover how things really are. Consequently, we must content ourselves with following appearances, and any claim made about reality, whether skeptical or dogmatic, is unwarranted – due to our cognitive shortcomings, any 'is' should be taken as 'it appears'.

As we will see in Section 5, if we take a closer look at Sextus' immediate response to the dogmatists' objection, we can see that, instead of trying to provide a direct justification of the skeptics' credentials to inquire against the dogmatists, he adopts a different strategy. It consists in putting the burden of proof on the dogmatists: it is they, and not the skeptics, who must justify the claim to be able to inquire. Thus, the dogmatists are asked to show first that we are indeed able to discover how things really are, and that we are able to do that by nature's guidance, and only then to argue that those who maintain the skeptical disposition are not entitled to inquire against them. If we appreciate why the dogmatists fail to provide justifications for their claims, we will realize that the skeptics' idea that inquiry should be based on how things appear to the inquirer is just a move in a dialectical game with the dogmatists. Of course, to say that the skeptics' procedure is dialectical is nothing especially new and it cannot by itself show that their position is coherent or worthy of acceptance. In this respect, the aim of this paper is fairly modest: I hope to show that the fact that Sextus proceeds dialectically in this particular case as well can help us understand some deeper problems with the skeptical position in general.

1.

Sextus discusses the objection on two occasions. The more general discussion is found in *PH* II.1–11, while in *Adversus Mathematicos* [*M*] VIII.337–336a he is considering a particular case, according to which the skeptics

cannot inquire into what the dogmatists say about demonstration.[1] There are some important differences between these two passages, both with regard to the formulation of the objection and with regard to the arguments used in response to it. I will base my account mostly on the *PH* version, but I will also point at some important similarities between the two versions.

In *PH* II.1–3 Sextus says:

> Since we have reached our investigation of dogmatism, let us inspect, concisely and in outline, each of the parts of what they call philosophy, having first answered those who persistently allege that the sceptic can neither investigate (*zētein*) nor, more generally, think (*noein*) about the items on which they hold beliefs. They say that the sceptic either apprehends (*katalambanei*) what the dogmatists talk about or does not apprehend it. If he apprehends it, how can he be puzzled (*aporoiē*) about what he says he apprehends? If he does not apprehend it, he does not even know how to talk about what he has not apprehended. For just as someone who does not know what, for example, the removal argument or the theorem in two complexes is cannot even say anything about them, so someone who does not recognize (*ginōskōn*) any of the items the dogmatists talk about cannot conduct an investigation in opposition to them about things which he does not know. In neither case, therefore, can the sceptic investigate what the dogmatists talk about.[2]

Sextus does not say who is the author of the objection. One of the examples mentioned ('the theorem in two complexes') and the terminology (*katalambanein*) are Stoic, so one might suppose that here he has Stoics in mind.[3] This, however, is far from conclusive, for at least two reasons. First, it is not clear what is meant by 'the removal argument': this need not refer to a piece of Stoic logic.[4] Second, and more importantly, a little later Sextus distinguishes two senses of the word *katalambanein*: a stronger, which is the Stoic technical sense (assent to the apprehensive impression [*phantasia katalēptikē*]), and a weaker (mere thinking without implying that the object of thought exists), which cannot be ascribed to the Stoics. In contrast with this, the authors of the similar objection in *M* VIII are explicitly identified as the Epicureans.[5] Even though it might be attractive to assume that *PH* II and *M* VIII discuss two versions of the same anti-skeptical argument – the Stoic and the Epicurean – it seems much safer to suspend judgment on this issue.[6]

More important than the question of the authorship of the objection is the question of its form. As is obvious at the first glance, the objection is stated in the form known as Meno's paradox. As presented in Plato's *Meno* (80D5–E5), this paradox says that you cannot inquire either into what you do not know, for in that case you do not even know what is the object of your inquiry, or into what you already know, for you know it and then there is no need for inquiry. This problem was taken very seriously by philosophers after Plato, and they admitted that it posed a serious threat to the possibility of the acquisition of knowledge. In their attempts to solve it, they agreed that inquiry presupposes an antecedent

knowledge of the object to be inquired, but they disagreed over the exact character of that knowledge. Very roughly speaking, the common ground seems to be the following. To deny the first arm of Meno's dilemma (you cannot inquire into what you do not know), they seemed to assume that the required antecedent knowledge must be such as to allow the inquirer, first, to identify the object of inquiry, and, second, to reidentify it when she encounters it if the inquiry turns out successful (even by chance), or to be able to say that it has not been found. To deny the second arm (you cannot inquire into what you already know), such knowledge must be, as it were, thin or unarticulated, not a full knowledge of the object of inquiry, for otherwise the inquiry would be superfluous. Thus, to take Aristotle's example, we can inquire into thunder beginning with knowledge of 'something of a thing [i.e. thunder] itself' (*Posterior Analytics* II.8 $93^{a}22$) – say, with knowledge that thunder is a certain noise in the clouds – and proceed with articulating that knowledge into a full definition. Such knowledge should be sufficient to avoid the trap of the dilemma and to articulate what was not known at the beginning of the inquiry, i.e. that thunder is a noise in the clouds due to quenching of fire.

The details of the approach to the problem proposed by Sextus' main opponents, the Stoics and the Epicureans, are not completely clear. A fragment of Plutarch suggests that their way out of the dilemma was to suppose that the required antecedent knowledge is embodied in the inquirer's possession of a certain class of concepts – 'natural concepts' (the Stoics) or 'preconceptions' (the Epicureans).[7] These concepts are starting-points for any inquiry, and it is with reference to them that the inquirer is able to identify and reidentify the object of inquiry.

More about the dogmatists' concepts will be said below. To return to Sextus' text, it suggests that his opponents, assuming that taking the skeptical disposition is incompatible with engaging in philosophical inquiry, thought that the most efficient way to show this is to argue that the skeptics, as opposed to other inquirers, are not able to solve such a serious problem as Meno's paradox. Sextus writes as if his opponents are the authors not only of the objection but also of the specific form in which it is presented (cf. 'They say . . .' in the second sentence [II.2]). In *M* version he is even more explicit about this: 'Indeed some people, especially those of the Epicurean school, tend to resist us in a rather crude way, saying "Either you understand (*noeite*) what demonstration is, or you do not. And if you understand it and have a conception (*ennoia*) of it, there is demonstration; but if you do not understand it, how can you investigate what you have not the slightest understanding of?" ' (VIII.337).[8] Thus, Sextus' texts present his opponents as using basically the same form of argument against the skeptics. In both cases, the idea is that inquiry presupposes grasping of something in reality, whether by having *katalēpsis* or by having *ennoia* that implies the existence of its object.[9]

As we will see, Sextus' strategy consists in an attempt to show that the dogmatists are unable to solve Meno's dilemma in their own terms. Hence, it may be the case that stating the objection in the form of Meno's dilemma is his own move; a first step in the argument which is intended to show that the dogmatists fall into a kind of self-refutation. Likewise, Plutarch's fragment 215 discusses less the manner in which the Stoics, the Epicureans, and the Peripatetics approached the problem of Meno's paradox than their inability to solve it by their theories, and a similar strategy seems to be at work in Sextus.[10] We should bear in mind, in addition, that Sextus is particularly fond of the *Meno*-style arguments. Such an argument figures, for instance, in a related attempt to show the usefulness of definitions: if you do not know a thing, then you cannot define it, and if you know it, then you do not need a definition (*PH* II.207). In addition, the problem in the *Meno* probably influenced Sextus' long arguments against the possibility of learning and teaching found in several of his works.[11] Hence, we should be at least open to the possibility that it is Sextus who speaks on behalf of the dogmatists here, drawing a consequence from what was originally perhaps a simple point: that if you inquire into *p* by producing an equally persuasive not-*p*, you should have some cognitive access to what is stated in *p*.

2.

When we look at the procedures that Sextus uses in his inquiries in the treatises collected under the title *Adversus Mathematicos*, we can see that he is aware of the possible doubts that may occur concerning the very possibility of his inquiries. We can also see, however, that he is confident that he has a simple and obvious answer to such doubts. His comments on his own procedures often suggest that he endorses the dogmatists', notably the Epicureans', requirements for successful inquiry, according to which the inquirer must begin by making clear what she is talking about, i.e. with the specification of the concept or conception (*ennoia*, *epinoia*), or preconception (*prolēpsis*) of the object under discussion.[12] For instance, at the beginning of his inquiry against the dogmatic ethical theories in *M* XI he says: 'Since the controversy in which we are engaged with the dogmatists on this topic has as its most important element the distinguishing of good things and bad things, it will be fitting before all else to fix the conception (*tēn epinoian stēsai*) of these things; for, according to wise Epicurus, it is not possible either to investigate or to raise difficulties (*aporein*) without a preconception' (XI.21).[13] Then, as a first step of inquiry, Sextus specifies and fixes the conception of the object to be inquired into by presenting a relevant dogmatic theory. Similar procedure is found in various other contexts in the treatises which make up *Adversus*

Mathematicos and which derive from different phases of Sextus' career.[14] Thus, he assumes that the skeptics are able to inquire since they possess the relevant starting-points as is required by the dogmatists. He insists, however, that the fact that there is a conception of the object to be inquired into does not commit the skeptics to assert that the object exists or is real. In the next step, the skeptic proceeds with an inquiry into whether there is something which corresponds to the concept. Thus, after the presentation of the Stoic definitions of the good, the bad and the indifferent, Sextus announces the next task: '[L]et us move on and enquire whether good and bad also really exist by nature in the way in which they are conceived' (XI.41). Likewise, for instance, in *Against the Grammarians*, having presented the conception of grammar, he says: '[L]et us consider, as we promised, whether in the final analysis grammar can exist, at least on the present conception' (I.65).[15] The result of such a procedure is, of course, always negative: there are no such things as demonstration, cause, time, place, or any other thing discussed in philosophical theories.

Sextus' strategy is not always as straightforward and simple as this account might suggest. For instance, the very specification of the concept may include raising some objections to it.[16] Furthermore, the conceptual discussion usually reveals that there are many different concepts of the same object of inquiry. This is something that can be expected, given that the dogmatists are always in disagreement. In such a case, the skeptic may go on with an inquiry into each concept separately, as is found in the discussion of the body (*M* IX.366–367), time (X.169–188) or god (IX.30–48). Alternatively, the skeptic may insist that conceptual disagreement is a sufficient proof that none of the dogmatists' concepts is instantiated, so that the next phase of the inquiry is unnecessary.[17] (More on this later, in Sections 3 and 4.) Despite these variations, however, it seems that in all these various contexts we can discern a single answer to the worries about the possibility of skeptical inquiry: the skeptics should only accept the dogmatists' idea that inquiry is preceded by a specification of the concept, with the proviso that the possession of a concept does not entail any ontological commitment. Thus, the skeptical inquiry is a two-step activity: it consists of a conceptual or positive step, the specification of the concept by presenting a dogmatic theory, and a substantive or negative step, in which the skeptics demonstrate that there is nothing real that corresponds to the concept.

Such a solution seems to accord not only with the actual skeptical practice in *Adversus Mathematicos* but, more importantly, with the skeptics' general approach to the charges of self-refutation. Sextus insists that the skeptics can consistently maintain their disposition, i.e. suspend judgment about everything and withdraw from holding any belief, both in theory and in practice, simply by following appearances. Thus, in answering the charge that he contradicts the skeptical disposition when announcing the results of the skeptical inquiries, he insists that when the skeptic says things like

'Opposed to every proposition there is an equally convincing proposition', this does not mean that he holds any belief, but only that he reveals what appears to him. Having considered a group of propositions, it appears to him that opposed to every proposition there is an equally convincing proposition, and by saying this he just reveals or reports his *pathos*, or a state which has involuntarily occurred in him, without his interference.[18]

It seems that the same line of thought may be applied to the explanation of the manner in which the skeptics approach the dogmatic theories, the starting-points of their inquiries. Sextus, however, is not quite explicit on this point. Occasionally, when he tries to give some justification of why the skeptical inquiry is a two-step inquiry, he insists that the skeptics may begin with concepts because a concept is 'a mere movement of thought' (*M* VIII.336a) which 'holds of a thing equally whether it is real or not real' (II.1). He does not say what exactly is included in the skeptics' having such a concept. However, some conclusions can be drawn from what he says near the end of the discussion of the possibility of skeptical inquiry in *PH* (II.10):

> For a sceptic is not, I think, barred from having thought (*noēsis*), if it arises during the discussions which give him a passive impression and appear evidently to him and not at all imply the reality of what is being thought of – for we can think, as they say, not only of real things but also of unreal things. Hence someone who suspends judgement maintains his sceptical condition while investigating and thinking; for it has been made clear that he assents to any impression given by way of a passive appearance insofar as it appears to him.[19]

Strictly speaking, this passage does not discuss what it is to have a skeptical concept of something, but only gives a general account of the skeptics' ability to think. Moreover, as we will see, in *PH* Sextus does not follow the two-step procedure as explained above, so that he need not be interested in providing an explanation of the sense in which the skeptic can be credited with concepts or conceptions of the items he is going to discuss in *PH* II–III. However, the passage may be of some help in understanding what is involved in the skeptics' conceiving an object of their inquiry, and we may reasonably suppose that something like the above account lies in the background of the two-step procedure.

Sextus argues that the same account that has been given of the skeptics' ability to perceive (cf. *PH* I.13 and I.19–20) applies to their ability to think and, consequently, to engage in inquiry. Thus, when tasting a piece of honey the skeptic becomes 'sweetened', i.e. it appears to him that honey sweetens. His being sweetened is a *pathos* that is, first, evident to him, i.e. it is not the result of an inference or inquiry, and, second, forced upon him, since he has received the impression involuntarily and cannot but acquiesce in it. As such, his impression is not subject to inquiry (I.22); what is subject to inquiry is only the inference that the honey is actually

sweet. Likewise, in the case of thoughts, Sextus seems to be arguing, the skeptic may claim that from what is said by the dogmatists it appears to him, thanks to his natural ability to think (I.24), that, say, demonstration is so-and-so. Thus, by reading or listening to the dogmatists he gets the passive impression and forms a thought, or a sort of a concept, of demonstration.[20] Such a concept shares the characteristics possessed by perceptual appearance: it appears evidently to the skeptic, since it is not acquired through the process of learning or inference from something else, and it is passive, since its formation does not require an exercise of any special intellectual ability except the skeptics' natural ability to understand other people's words. In addition, the process of concept formation should not be said to originate in an actual thing, e.g. demonstration or argument, just like the process of one's becoming sweetened should not be said, according to the skeptics, to originate in the actual sweetness of honey, for it is a subject of inquiry whether there is such a thing at all. Rather, all we are entitled to say is that it originates 'during the discussions which give him a passive impression and appear evidently to him', that is, in the dogmatists' written or spoken words. Since the skeptic has a natural ability not only to understand but also to communicate his thoughts to others, he is able to report the *pathos* that has arisen in him and meaningfully say that demonstration is so-and-so.

Thus, the skeptic's concept is as passive as his being sweetened and, as such, it is not subject to inquiry. Hence, just as he will not infer that honey is actually sweet, so in the case of concepts and thoughts, the skeptic admits that it appears to him that demonstration is so-and-so but does not assert that it really is so-and-so or that it exists at all. So he must proceed with an inquiry, and he is able to do that because he has conceptual resources required by the dogmatists: he has the concept that demonstration is so-and-so, and further inquiry should reveal whether it actually is so-and-so. And when, as a result of inquiry, he finds out that demonstration is not so-and-so, or that it does not exist, his conclusion is not, strictly speaking, 'Demonstration does not exist' – for, this would be a dogmatic belief, assertion of a negative dogmatist – but 'As far as the dogmatists' concept is concerned, demonstration does not exist', or 'As far as this appears to me from what the dogmatists say, demonstration does not exist', or something similar. As in other cases, he just reveals his *pathos* that demonstration does not exist, but the question is still open. This is what makes him a perpetual inquirer.

3.

It seems, then, that the skeptics have a simple answer to the dogmatic worries about the possibility of skeptical inquiry, an answer which accords with

(a) the requirements of the dogmatists themselves; (b) actual practices in *Adversus Mathematicos*; and (c) the skeptics' general position. However, there are some serious difficulties with such a view.

To begin with, the dogmatists may retort that such an account of inquiry misses the point of the original problem. It is true that they insist that the inquirer should possess the relevant concepts. But these preinvestigative concepts, as well as the fully articulated concepts which are obtained as results of inquiry, are not to be taken as mere thoughts without ontological implications. Notice that in *PH* II.1 (quoted above), the dogmatists say that the skeptics cannot even think about the items on which they hold beliefs, which implies, among other things, that the skeptics are even unable to form the concepts from which they allegedly start in their inquiries. From the dogmatists' point of view, what have been described as skeptical concepts are not concepts at all, for they are not concepts *of* anything in the world; at any rate, they are not such as to serve as springboards for a successful inquiry. Sextus himself discusses the dogmatists' view of the process of concept formation, according to which the concepts should have a firm empirical basis: everything that is conceived is conceived either by direct acquaintance through the senses or by derivation from things known through the senses, that is, by processes like diminution, enlargement, composition, etc. (*M* IX.393; cf. *M* VIII.58). Since the skeptics suspend judgment about reality, their concepts do not have the required origin to serve as starting-points for inquiry.

The details of the Stoic and the Epicurean accounts of the role of concepts in inquiry are not quite clear, but we may safely assume that they would insist that taking concepts as mere thoughts without ontological implications is not sufficient to resolve Meno's dilemma.[21] For, they may reply that if you inquire into x and take as a starting-point a concept of x which is a mere appearance formed on the basis of what others have said or written about x, then you are able to do neither of the two things which are necessary to perform a meaningful inquiry into x. First, you are not in a position positively to assert that it is x that you are inquiring into, for your thought about x is so removed from an actual thing and so dimly connected to it, if at all, that there is always a possibility that the object of your inquiry is something else or nothing at all. Second, for the same reason, you are certainly not in a position to recognize x if the inquiry turns out successful. In other words, the dogmatists may use the argument which is analogous to the one that Sextus mounts against them in *M* VIII.322–326. There he compares the dogmatists' inquiry, which concerns the so-called non-evident things (*adēla*), with shooting a target in the dark. Since the non-evident things are in the dark, then, even if the dogmatists hit the object of their inquiry and show that it is such and such, they will not be able to say that they have been successful. Likewise, if the skeptics inquire into x and take as their starting-point the concept of x

which is a mere appearance, then perhaps they may say that they have shown that *x* is so-and-so, but they are not able to say with certainty that it is *x* that they have been talking about, and not something else.[22]

The skeptics might reply that such an objection is based on a misunderstanding of their intentions. They may claim that their inquiry into *x* should be taken as inquiry into *x as seen by the dogmatists*. They are not interested to show that there is no demonstration, but only that there is no demonstration as conceived by the dogmatists, and to reach this conclusion, it is sufficient that they base their inquiry on what they have heard the dogmatists saying about demonstration. This is why they usually qualify the result of their inquiry by 'as far as what the dogmatists say about *x*' or 'as far as the dogmatists' conception of *x* is concerned' and the like.[23]

Such a qualification, however, can be taken in at least two senses.

(a) It may be taken as a reminder that the skeptics are not interested in inducing suspension of judgment about the reality of *x* itself, but only about what the dogmatists say about it, i.e. about how they conceive of it. If the skeptics' qualification is taken in this sense, however, then this leaves the possibility that their inquiry is only second-best as compared to the dogmatists', for the latter is based on an empirical content which is not accessible to the skeptics. Regardless of the strength and persuasiveness of skeptical arguments, they do not reach sufficiently far to be considered stronger than anything that the dogmatists might propose. In other words, the skeptics can never say that they have successfully demonstrated that *x* as conceived by the dogmatists is not real or that we should suspend judgment about it, since the dogmatists' conception of *x* is based, as it supposedly is, on resources which are not available to the skeptics.

(b) The skeptics' qualification may be taken as applying to the scope in which they are suspending judgment about the reality of *x*. Thus, when they say things like 'As far as the dogmatists' conception of *x* is concerned, we should suspend judgment about *x*', they *do* mean to say that their suspension concerns the reality of *x*, but only given a certain description of it (and that it is possible that a further inquiry would reveal that such a description is wrong). Taken in the this sense, however, the skeptics' qualification does not help to avoid Meno's dilemma, for the dogmatists may still insist, as above, that any statement about the reality of *x* presupposes some cognitive access to reality.

Regardless of all this, it is not clear how the skeptical procedure as presented in Section 2 can lead to the intended final result of skeptical

inquiries, i.e. to the suspension of judgment concerning truth and reality. Suspension of judgment is supposed to be the natural outcome of the recognition that the opposing thoughts and appearances are equipollent. Thus, to induce suspension of judgment about the question whether *x* is real or not, the skeptics should present arguments pro and contra its reality and demonstrate their equipollence. In the procedure presented in Section 2, however, they fail to offer the argument in favor of reality, for they insist that what we find at the positive side is a thought that is neutral with regard to reality. Hence, what their inquiries actually amount to is just the demonstration that we should see the dogmatic objects as having the same status as things like centaurs or unicorns, not the suspension of judgment about them. And even if the skeptics reply, as above, that they suspend judgment only as far as the dogmatists' concept is concerned, their argument could hardly be taken as demonstrating the suspension even in this qualified sense. For, to suspend judgment whether there are unicorns as conceived by mythologists, you still need positive arguments in favor of their existence; but the first step in the skeptical procedure is not meant to provide arguments in favor of existence, but just to fix the concept of the object to be discussed. Hence, if Sextus wants to stick to his idea that the specification of the concept should precede any inquiry, he needs to use a three-step procedure, in which positive and negative arguments are of the same status. Such a procedure is indeed found in his writings, e.g. in the discussion of place in *M* X.1–36. Having first specified the conception of place by presenting the Epicurean and the Stoic doctrine (1–5), he goes on with expounding the arguments on both sides: positive ones, which affirm the existence of place (7–12), and negative ones, which deny it (13–36). This, however, is an exception compared to Sextus' regular practice.

4.

A further group of difficulties arises from the fact that in Sextus we can also find a different strategy. We can frequently find him purporting to show that there can be *no* concept of the object to be inquired: what the dogmatists talk about simply cannot be conceived; neither the dogmatists nor the skeptics can form a concept of it. Since the inconceivability entails inapprehensibility and unreality, there is no need for the next step, an inquiry into the reality of the dogmatic objects. In such cases, however, Sextus makes a provisional concession and demonstrates that even supposing that the dogmatists' objects were conceivable, there would be arguments to show that they are not real.

Such a procedure is characteristic of the *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*.[24] In this treatise Sextus usually does not use the two-step procedure, that is, he

does not work under the assumption that the skeptics have the relevant concepts. In *Adversus Mathematicos*, on the other hand, he is not so consistent: while his standard procedure seems to be the one in which he admits that the skeptics possess the concepts of the objects under discussion, we find him saying, just as in *PH*, for instance, that human being is inconceivable.[25] Things are even more complicated in *Adversus Mathematicos*, however, since Sextus does not hesitate to use both procedures within a single discussion. A typical example is his treatment of demonstration. Sextus first shows how the dogmatists have specified its concept (VIII.300–315), and stresses that the skeptics have this concept (336a). But a little later he insists that the concept of demonstration is impossible (381) and that demonstration is inconceivable (390). There is a sense, then, in which there is a concept of demonstration, and a sense in which there is no such concept. The case of demonstration will be discussed more fully in the next Section. For the time being, let me try to explain what can be meant by saying that the same thing both has and does not have a concept. To begin with, we may consider the following passage from *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*:

> So far as what the dogmatists say goes, no one could even conceive of a cause, since, in addition to offering disputed and strange concept of cause, they have also actually made the subsistence of causes undiscoverable because of their dispute about them. (III.13)

What Sextus is saying here is that in one sense there is a concept of cause, but in another sense there is not, and no one can conceive of a cause. Now, we may safely assume that the sense in which there is a concept of cause is the one discussed in Section 2: such concept is a mere 'movement of thought', or a passive impression which is neutral with respect to the reality of its origin. Taken in this sense, everything, including the dogmatists' objects, is conceivable insofar as the subject does not assume that what is conceived of exists or is such as it appears to her, however muddled or strange her concept may be. And even if there are many such concepts of an object which are mutually inconsistent, as is normally the case, this is by no means the reason to call an object inconceivable. For, given the present assumption of what it is to have a concept, each of these disputed concepts may count as a concept of something.

On the other hand, there is a stronger sense in which something can be called a concept of an object, and in this sense, there is no concept of cause. Suppose that each of the concepts of cause proposed by the dogmatists is to be understood, not as a mere thought which is neutral as to the reality of cause, but as a concept *of* something real, formed on the basis of something real, and, moreover, as a concept which enables its possessor to definitely discover the real cause. This is the way in which the dogmatists want their concepts to be understood. Since each of the

proposed incompatible concepts has equal right to be called *the* concept of cause, it is not possible to discriminate between them, and, consequently, none of them can be taken as the concept of cause, so that cause is, in this sense, inconceivable. For, if the skeptic wants to follow the dogmatists' rule and begin his inquiry by specifying the concept, he can retort that there is no concept to which he can stick and proceed to see whether he can discover the real thing of which it is a concept, since any concept is as good as any other. The full significance of this will be seen in Section 5.

Thus, in the passage quoted, Sextus says that no one can conceive of a cause, not only because there is a plurality of concepts of cause, which are strange or even incoherent, for if these concepts are taken without any ontological commitment, they can still count as concepts of cause. Conceptual dispute would imply the inconceivability in the stronger sense if it is the reason why the cause cannot be discovered, i.e. if the inquirer is left with no criterion against which she could judge whether the object is really a cause. And a conceptual dispute would have such an implication if it is a dispute among those who claim to have formed the concepts which derive from and are of a real cause.

A perhaps clearer example of such a view of what it is to have a concept in the stronger sense may be found in Sextus' discussion of god. The skeptics notoriously accept the existence of gods, but only as a matter of following appearances, i.e. passive observation of laws and customs of their society (*M* IX.49; *PH* III.2). Thus, the skeptics may be credited with the concept of god in the weaker sense: it is a thought of something which is worshiped in their society, a thought which has arisen in them without their interference, simply as the result of their upbringing. Yet Sextus also says that god is inconceivable, and it is the dogmatists' dispute about its reality which is responsible for that, for some of them say that he is a body, others that he is incorporeal, etc.: 'As long as they remain in undecidable dispute, we have no agreement from them as to what we should think' (*PH* III.3). Thus, if they go by what the dogmatists demand of the concept of god, the skeptics do not have anything from which they can start their inquiry into gods. If they want to have some concept, they should suspend judgment about the reality of god and thus deprive any thought about god of its claims to be about objective properties of god.[26]

5.

What we have thus far, then, is the following. The skeptics are faced with the problem how to inquire into philosophical theories and suspend judgment about everything. We have considered an obvious skeptical solution, which is confirmed by their actual practice in *Adversus Mathematicos* and supported by some more general considerations, according to which the

skeptics follow the dogmatists' advice that inquiry should be preceded by specification of the concept of the object to be inquired into. These concepts are provided by the dogmatists' theories, but the skeptics take them as mere appearances without existential import. We have seen that such a view involves some difficulties and that there is also an alternative skeptical procedure, prominent in the *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, in which concepts are not taken as mere appearances, but, more in line with the dogmatists' view, as concepts *of* something real. The former procedure, while appearing to fulfill the dogmatists' requirements for a successful inquiry, does not pay due justice to what the dogmatists take to be the force of their theories, i.e. to the fact that they are theories of reality. On the other hand, the latter procedure does take this into account, but at a price of breaching the settled condition for successful inquiry. In other words, it turns out that the skeptics either know what they are inquiring into, but 'know' it in a sense which does not guarantee a successful inquiry, or they demolish the object of inquiry even before it has begun.

Now I want to show that Sextus' immediate argument in response to Meno's dilemma in *PH* II.4–10 suggests that both procedures can be seen as moves in a dialectical encounter with the dogmatists. Unfortunately, Sextus' position is left underdeveloped and is not made explicit in his actual treatments of the dogmatists' theories. I will also try to show that the discussion in *M* VIII.337–336a can, despite some differences, be read in a similar fashion.

So let me turn to the original objection as stated in *PH* II. As we have seen, Sextus puts it in the form of Meno's paradox, and immediately afterwards (II.4–10) he answers that the force of the objection depends on how we take the word *katalambanein*, so that:

(1) If *katalambanein* is taken in the technical Stoic sense, as assent to the apprehensive impression, then the dogmatists cannot inquire (II.4–9).
(2) If *katalambanein* is taken in the sense 'to think', without implying that the object of thought is real, then the skeptics can inquire, and the dogmatists cannot (II.10).

Several things are puzzling with such an answer. Apart from the obvious problem of how to understand the inferences in (1) and (2), it is not clear what is the precise conclusion that Sextus wants to draw and how this conclusion fits in with the methodology used in *PH* II–III. Before we address these problems, however, it may be useful to make some refinements. For, it seems that (1) and (2) do not contain everything that Sextus ought to assert, given his overall position.

As for (1), given the technical sense of *katalambanein*, Sextus is obliged to assert that the skeptics are also precluded from inquiry, for the same

arguments that demonstrate the dogmatists' inability to inquire must apply to the skeptics as well. Thus, we should restate (1) as:

(1′) If *katalambanein* is taken in the technical Stoic sense, as assent to the apprehensive impression, then both the dogmatists and the skeptics cannot inquire.

A similar revision should be made in (2). For, if the skeptics are entitled to engage in inquiry provided that it is preceded by *katalēpsis* in the sense of mere thinking, then there is no reason why the same would not apply to the dogmatists as well. Rather, Sextus can mean only that the dogmatists cannot inquire *further*, since their inquiry is already at its end.[27] Hence, (2) should be restated as:

(2′) If *katalambanein* is taken in the sense 'to think', without implying that the object of thought is real, then both the skeptics and the dogmatists can inquire, but the skeptics can inquire further than the dogmatists.

Now that we have (1′) and (2′) as steps that Sextus is using in his response to the dogmatists' objection, we can consider the argument itself. Obviously, Sextus' tactic is based on the maxim that attack is the best defense: if the dogmatists urge that the skeptics cannot solve Meno's dilemma, they are asked to solve it themselves. As it turns out, they cannot solve it [(1′)], and if they can be credited with a sort of solution, the same solution is available to the skeptics as well [(2′)]. Let me consider each of the steps in turn.

In *PH* II.4–9 Sextus offers two considerations in favor of (1′). In the first (II.5–6), he sets out to show that if *katalambanein* is taken in the strong sense, the various dogmatic schools cannot inquire against each other. Then (II.6–9), he points to some reasons why, given this sense of *katalambanein*, every inquiry is impossible. This is not to say that he distinguishes between two kinds of inquiry: the second-order inquiry (which concerns others' statements about x) and the first-order inquiry (which concerns x itself). Rather, he just wants to address the objection in the form in which it is presented – that the skeptics cannot inquire *against the dogmatists* – and then move on to some more general conclusions.

So, Sextus' first move is to claim that if the dogmatists want to insist that inquiry should be preceded by *katalēpsis* in the strong sense, then they must first demonstrate their ability to inquire against the opposing schools under this condition and only then ask the skeptics to do the same. It turns out that they are trapped in Meno's dilemma themselves: if the Stoics argue against the Epicurean thesis that p, then, if they did not have the strong *katalēpsis* that p, they do not even know what is the

object of their inquiry, and if they did have the strong *katalēpsis*, this means that they assent to the apprehensive impression that *p* (for this is what having strong *katalēpsis* amounts to), and, in effect, accept the Epicurean thesis.

At first glance, this does not sound convincing. If the Stoics want to oppose the Epicurean idea that god is not providential, why is it necessary that they have apprehended that god is not providential to have the object of inquiry? They can insist that the object of their inquiry is what they take to be a natural concept of god and that their possession of that natural concept provides them with the firm starting-point from which they can show that the Epicurean idea is untenable. In the parallel passage (*M* VIII.335a) the same point is made about the Epicurean inquiry against those who hold the theory that the world is constructed out of four elements: Sextus argues that if the Epicureans insist, as they do, that inquiry should be preceded by possession of a conception of thing to be inquired into, then, by possessing the relevant conception, they must admit that the four elements theory is correct. According to Sextus' own account of Epicurean methodology (including the methodology of arguing against others), however, this is certainly not so. The Epicurean method in this case would be to consider whether something evident, i.e. something of which one can have a firm knowledge, ought to be excluded by the non-evident (four elements), that is, whether there is a contestation (*antimarturēsis*) of non-evident by the evident (cf. *M* VII.214).

The skeptics might reply that such answers miss the point of their complaint and insist that whatever else may be included among the prerequisites for a successful inquiry against those who claim that *p*, the strong *katalēpsis* that *p* must be among them, for this was, according to Sextus' formulation of the dogmatists' objection, the requirement of the dogmatists themselves. The Stoic inquiry against the Epicurean thesis that god is not providential may presuppose various things, but the only thing that is relevant here is having the strong *katalēpsis* that god is not providential, and having such a *katalēpsis* blocks the further inquiry. If they do not have the strong *katalēpsis* that god is not providential, then they do not know what they are inquiring against, even if they have all resources that are necessary to conclude that god is providential. Hence, any cognitive attitude toward *p* that falls short of assenting to it as to an apprehensive impression should count as ignorance in the relevant sense. This holds also for assenting to it as to something non-apprehensive, for in this case too the inquirer is left without knowledge of what she is inquiring against.

As a second step in his arguing for (1′), Sextus wants to show that 'pretty well all of their dogmatic philosophy will be confounded and the sceptical philosophy vigorously advanced if it is granted that you cannot investigate what has not been apprehended in this way' (*PH* II.7), i.e. if the prerequisite for inquiry is having strong *katalēpsis*. In other words, his

idea is that such a requirement renders impossible not only arguing against the doctrines of the opposing schools but inquiry in general. His argument is quite simple. The objects of inquiry are non-evident things, i.e. things that are not apprehended by themselves, but 'by way of some inquiry and investigation' (II.7). Now the dogmatists require that the object of inquiry must previously be apprehended; but since the object of inquiry is non-evident, it must previously be inquired into in order to be apprehended, so that the dogmatists are trapped into Agrippa's reciprocal mode of *aporia*.

This argument, taken by itself, will certainly not convince the dogmatists. It is based on the idea that if you want to inquire into *x*, you must have previously apprehended *x* itself, which certainly involves circularity. The dogmatists may argue, however, as in the previous case, that this is by no means necessary, and that a successful inquiry into *x* may take as a starting-point the apprehension of something else, which may provide a firm basis for the discovery of *x*. They may also insist that the initial apprehension may be of something evident, which would prevent the threat of an infinite regress. The skeptic, on the other hand, may put forward various arguments to show that any inquiry into something non-evident which takes as its starting-point the firm grasp of something evident is doomed to failure. For instance, he may insist that such an inquiry requires a settled idea of what can count as valid inference from the evident to the non-evident, and then point to the fact that the validity of inference is a matter of disagreement among the dogmatists and thus itself non-evident.

None of this is found in *PH* II.7–9. In this text, Sextus does not attempt to give a full refutation of the possibility of dogmatic inquiry. While this may undoubtedly be seen as a weakness of his discussion, notice that at this juncture of the argument, he does not need to go as far as that. Sextus wants to answer the objection that the skeptics cannot inquire against the dogmatists if they have not apprehended what the dogmatists say. To this end, he transfers the burden of proof to the dogmatists and insists that they are not able to fulfill their own requirement. Notice, however, that he has at his disposal another strategy. He may grant to the dogmatists that they *are* able to inquire, even if inquiry presupposes strong *katalēpsis*, and then proceed by showing that the *results* of their inquiry are not such that they can be apprehended, so that the skeptics do not even have an object of inquiry as is specified by the dogmatists' requirement. While this is not the way Sextus proceeds in *PH* II.7–9, such strategy is at work in *M* VIII.337–336a. In this passage, instead of attempting to give a direct proof that the dogmatists cannot inquire, Sextus insists that the nature of the dogmatists' theories is such that they cannot be subject to inquiry if it requires a firm grasp of these theories.

In *M* VIII.337–336a Sextus discusses the Epicurean objection that if the skeptics, as they themselves say, have the concept of demonstration,

then they cannot proceed with inquiry into the reality of demonstration (that is, move to the second step of the skeptical inquiry as is described in Section 2). Obviously, the Epicureans assume that possession of a concept implies ontological commitment, just as apprehension of an object, in the strong sense of *katalēpsis*, implies its reality. This is not to say that they hold the view that anything that is conceived of must exist, but rather that the preinvestigative concept must be instantiated if it is to serve as the starting-point of inquiry.[28] The skeptics insist that they have a concept of demonstration, which is provided by the relevant dogmatic theory: demonstration is an argument that by means of agreed-upon premises uncovers by way of conclusive reasoning a consequence that is non-evident (*M* VIII.314). If they want to inquire into the reality of demonstration by following the Epicurean advice, then, from the Epicurean point of view, they simply cannot go further, because by claiming that they possess the concept they are committed to its reality. Sextus is quick to add that such an objection is in a way self-refuting (331a), for it must equally apply to the Epicureans as well. This, however, is not what he is interested in here, as opposed to *PH* II.7–9, where he builds his answer on the assumption that the objection is self-refuting, i.e. that the dogmatists themselves cannot inquire if inquiry is to be preceded by *katalēpsis* in the strong sense. Instead, he concedes to the Epicureans ('So that we give them this point', 332a). Obviously, the concession consists in accepting both Epicurean assumptions: that the inquirer should possess the relevant concept *and* that concept possession entails ontological commitment. This is obvious from the following passage:

> Actually, we are so far from saying that we do not have a conception of the entire object being investigated, that on the contrary we maintain that we have many conceptions and preconceptions of it, and thanks to our being unable to discriminate these and to find the one with the most authority we come round to suspension of judgment and equilibrium. For if we had just one preconception of the object being investigated, then sticking closely to this we would believe that the matter was such as it struck us in virtue of that one conception; but in fact, since we have many conceptions of this one thing, which are also varied and conflicting and equally trustworthy (both on account of their own persuasiveness and on account of the trustworthiness of the men who support them), being enable to trust all of them because of the conflict, or to distrust all of them because of having none other that is more trustworthy than them, or to trust one and distrust another because of their equality, we necessarily arrive at suspension of judgment. (VIII.332a–333a)

Thus, if the skeptics accept both Epicurean assumptions and then go on with inquiry, they will soon realize that there is nothing they can inquire into. They reach this conclusion via two steps. (a) First, they notice that there are many relevant concepts that can serve as starting-points, which are mutually incompatible. In Sextus' view, conceptual plurality and disagreement are the main characteristics which surround the dogmatic

doctrines. This is not to say, of course, that there is an actual disagreement over every dogmatic doctrine, but only that such a disagreement can be reasonably expected. This is due to the fact that the dogmatic doctrines are about non-evident things, which necessarily provoke disagreement. However, as I have already suggested, conceptual plurality by itself does not induce suspension of judgment. (b) It is only if the skeptics accept the second Epicurean assumption, i.e. that concept possession entails ontological commitment, that they are forced to admit that they should suspend judgment without further inquiry. Thus, if the skeptic is offered incompatible concepts of demonstration, he cannot take any of them as the starting-point for his inquiry *and* accept the dogmatists' suggestion that they are instantiated.[29] As a result, he is left with no starting-point which fulfills the dogmatists' requirement. Were the dogmatists offered a single concept instead of plurality of concepts, the skeptics could stick to it; but disagreement is an inevitable feature of dogmatic philosophy.

If I am right, Sextus in *PH* II and *M* VIII offers two different answers to the dogmatic worry about the possibility of inquiry in the absence of the antecedent grasp of the object of inquiry: such an inquiry is either impossible or, assuming that it is possible, it does not supply the skeptics with satisfactory starting-points for further inquiry. He can take the dogmatists' concepts as his starting-points only if he abandons the ontological implication and assumes that they are mere thoughts which need not be instantiated. But then it turns out that he is capable of inquiring without having the firm grasp of the object of inquiry.

In *PH* II, this is further developed in (2′), which says that inquiry is possible only in the weaker sense, i.e. if it is not preceded by strong *katalēpsis*, but by *katalēpsis* taken as mere thinking (*noein haplōs*, II.4; cf. *noēsis haplōs*, II.10), where 'thinking' obviously refers to a private mental event which does not imply the existence of anything external. Likewise, in the *M* passage, Sextus says that the Epicureans will in defense (*apologoumenoi*, VIII.336a) admit that they conceive of the object of their inquiry but that they do not have a grasp of it as of something real. Thus, his idea is that the dogmatists are forced to accept a weaker sense of *katalēpsis* or having a concept: this is left as the only way out after the inquiry in the stronger sense has been shown to be impossible. If they accept that, however, they must also accept that their inquiry has the same status as skeptical inquiry, for they must admit that the skeptics have the same preinvestigative resources.

Thus, Sextus' arguments in *PH* II.4–11 and *M* VIII.331a–336a purport to show that if we consider the dogmatists' attempts to inquire into how things really are, we can conclude one, or both, of the following: that such an inquiry is impossible because it can be shown to be trapped into one or more of Agrippa's modes, and that even if we concede that it is possible, its results are not such that they can be apprehended.[30] This does not

mean that these arguments provide us with a clue to the understanding of Sextus' approach to the dogmatists in general. His treatises do not manifest a unity that would allow us to draw such general precepts. However, the proposed interpretation of these passages may explain some vacillations that can be detected in Sextus' approach to the theories of the dogmatists. On the one hand, the skeptic may take these theories on the assumption on which they are proposed by the dogmatists, in which case he can insist that their objects are inconceivable or that we should immediately suspend judgment about them. This is the strategy at work in most of *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* and occasionally in *Adversus Mathematicos*.[31] On the other hand, he may grant the results of the dogmatists' inquiries, but since there are independent arguments to show that they cannot be about reality, the skeptic may take them as the dogmatists' private thoughts, and then produce arguments in favor of equally persuasive opposing thoughts. This is the two-step procedure as is explained in Section 2. It turns out, then, that the achievement of the skeptics' goal, the suspension of judgment, may require much less effort then it might seem: in effect, a mere pointing to the dogmatists' disagreement would be sufficient, and any further inquiry can be taken as a concession to the more stubborn among them. This does not mean, however, that we can conclude that the skeptic has won his case. Even granting that Sextus has demonstrated that the dogmatists are self-refuting and that the skeptics do not have to apprehend their theories to argue against them, the dogmatists may still insist that such a thin conception of thinking that he ascribes to the skeptics is not sufficient to demonstrate that.[32]

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NOTES

[1] On the latter passage, see Brunschwig, 1994, pp. 226–228. I agree with most of what is said in this paper; on some important differences, see below, n. 30. The problem is also discussed in Vogt, 2006, and Mates, 1996, pp. 24–25; see also Bett, 1997, pp. 62–64.

[2] Unless stated otherwise, all translations from *PH* are by Annas and Barnes, 2000, occasionally modified.

[3] For Sextus' examples, see Annas and Barnes, 2000, note *ad loc*., and Mates, 1996, p. 265.

[4] Kayser's emendation *kritērion* for *periairoumenou* in II.3 seems attractive, but is unsupported.

[5] Perhaps we should be cautious in this regard, too, since Sextus does not hesitate to use the Stoic terminology (*katalambanein*, *katalēpsis*) when discussing Epicurean objection (see VIII.334a–336a).

[6] See also Vogt, 2006, p. 331 n. 13.

[7] Fr. 215f. Sandbach (Damascius, *In Plat. Phaed.* I.280 Westerink = *SVF* II.104 [part]): 'That it is puzzling whether it is possible to inquire and to make discovery, as is suggested

in the *Meno*. Namely, [we cannot inquire into or discover] either what we know – for this is pointless – or what we do not know: for even if we come upon things that we do not know, we will not recognize them, like things that we come upon accidentally . . . The Stoics explain this by natural concepts (*phusikai ennoiai*). But if they are potential, we will say the same [i.e. the same as what he said to the Peripatetics]; if they are actual, why should we inquire into things that we know? The Epicureans explain this by preconceptions (*prolēpseis*). But if they say that they are articulated, inquiry is superfluous; and if they are unarticulated, how can we inquire something else other than the preconceptions, which we did not apprehend beforehand?'

[8] All translations from *M* VIII are by Bett, 2005, occasionally with slight modifications.

[9] See also Diogenes Laertius IX.102, and Aristocles *ap*. Eusebius, *Preparatio Evangelica* XIV.18.10–11, where it is argued that the skeptics must have known beforehand what is evident if they want to assert that everything is non-evident. For a short discussion of the historical background of Sextus' arguments in *PH* II.1–10 and *M* VIII.337–336a, see Striker, 1996, p. 164 n. 19.

[10] Which is not to say that they did not have this problem in mind. See the references in note 13 below.

[11] *PH* III.252–269; *M* I.9–40; XI.216–257. See also the refutation of the idea that argument signifies by convention in *PH* III.268.

[12] It seems that there is no important difference in Sextus' use of the terms *ennoia*, *epinoia* and *noēsis* (see Mates, 1996, p. 22). As for *prolēpsis*, it is sometimes used synonymously with them (as in, for instance, *M* VIII.337, 331a; XI.21), but sometimes it refers to an everyday notion of a thing, common to all human beings (cf. e.g. *PH* II.246; *M* VIII.158; IX.51, etc.).

[13] This and the following translation from *M* XI are by Bett, 1997. Almost the same words are found in *M* I.57. Cf. Epicurus, *Letter to Herodotus*, 38: 'For it is necessary that we look to the primary conception (*to prōton ennoēma*) corresponding to each word and that it stand in no need of demonstration, if, that is, we are going to have something to which we can refer the object of search or puzzlement and opinion' (Inwood and Gerson, trans., 1994). See also Diogenes Laertius X.33; Cicero, *De Natura Deorum* I.43. In *M* VII.140 the idea that the conception (*ennoia*) is a criterion in investigation is ascribed to Democritus.

[14] See, for instance, *M* VII.263; VIII.321; IX.12, 49, 195, 366; X.6; I.57; II.1; III.6; IV.14; VI.3.

[15] Translation is by Blank, 1998.

[16] A typical example is the discussion of the concepts of good and bad in *M* XI.21–41. See Bett, 1997, p. 62.

[17] See, for instance, the conclusion of the discussion of the various concepts of god in *M* IX.29.

[18] See *PH* I.14–15, 187, 191–193, 196–203, 208.

[19] I retain the manuscript *logōn* in the first sentence, for which Mutschmann-Mau have *logōi*, and which is omitted by Annas and Barnes. The word is translated as 'discussion' by Mates, while M. Hossenfelder has 'Reden' (Hossenfelder, 1968). For a different construction of the sentence (with *logōn*), see Pellegrin, 1997. For a discussion, see Vogt, 2006, p. 331, who reads *logōi*.

[20] 'He "catches on", to some extent, to what the Dogmatists are talking about; or at least he learns, again to some extent, how to talk in their way' (Mates, 1996, p. 25). For a useful discussion of the skeptics' concepts, see also Johnsen, 2001, pp. 555–558.

[21] For the Epicureans, see Asmis, 1984, esp. Part I, pp. 19–80; for the Stoics, see Brittain, 2005.

[22] An example from Aristotle (*Posterior Analytics* II.7 92^b19–34) might be appropriate here. Suppose that you are inquiring into circle and stipulate at the beginning that the word 'circle' means 'a plane figure all of whose extreme points are equidistant from its center'. And suppose that, in the next step, you go on to demonstrate that there is something with all of its extreme points equidistant from the center, so that, in the final step (following Aristotle's rules of inquiry), you may give a real definition. Even if you have been successful, Aristotle insists, you are not entitled to assert that you have demonstrated that there is a circle, and, consequently, that you have given the real definition of *circle*. The most you are in a position to say that you have demonstrated is that there is something whose extreme points are equidistant from the center, but this might as well be something else, e.g. a mountain-copper (92^b22).

[23] See e.g. *PH* II.22, 80, 95, 104; III.6, 29, 56, 153; *M* I.90; VII.283; VIII.3; IX.49.

[24] See II.22 (human being is inconceivable), 70 (impression), 104, 118 and 123 (sign), 171 and 177 (demonstration); III.5 (god), 13 and 22 (cause), 62 (mixture), 114 (natural philosophy).

[25] *M* VII.236. See also VIII.390; X.50, 215, and Bett, 1997, pp. 63–64.

[26] 'In order to conceive of god, it is necessary to suspend judgment about whether he exists or not, so far as the dogmatists are concerned' (*PH* III.6; my translation).

[27] With II.10–11 cf. the account of the difference between the skeptics and the dogmatists in I.1–3.

[28] For a discussion of this passage, see also Asmis, 1984, pp. 28–30.

[29] Strictly speaking, Sextus does not work with many concepts of demonstration, since he has specified just one such concept (cf. *M* VIII.314, mentioned above, p. 27), and the disagreement concerning demonstration that is discussed in 327–336 is not a disagreement concerning its concept but concerning its existence (327–328) or its constituents (329–336). Hence, Sextus' insistence that the skeptics are always offered many concepts of the object of inquiry should be taken as a general point.

[30] In a seminal paper on this topic, Brunschwig says: 'I think this passage [*M* VIII.337–336a] shows clearly that two different and, indeed, incompatible answers to the same objection are put side by side. The first one accepts the ontological inference and is based on a supposed fact of conceptual *diaphōnia*; the second one rejects the "ontological" inference and admits that the different dogmatists, and the Sceptic himself, have the same concept in mind. The difference is great enough, I think, to prevent us from construing them as *alternative* strategies, to be adopted as occasion requires. For they do indeed presuppose philosophical assumptions, and those assumptions are at the same time heavy, contradictory, and crucial ones for the determination of the proper Sceptical attitude' (Brunschwig, 1994, p. 227). He goes on to say that in *PH*, Sextus adopts the second solution from *M*, and that 'on this point the *PH* version is clearer and more decided than the *M* version' (p. 228). As I have tried to show, what seem to be alternative strategies are actually two steps in the dialectical game, the second step being just a concession to the dogmatists. I agree that the *PH* version is clearer, but on two other grounds: first, because the steps of the argument are more clearly distinguished than in the *M* version; and second, because *PH* is in general more consistent than *M*, for the reasons given in Section 4 above.

[31] See notes 24 and 25 above.

[32] An earlier version of this paper was presented at Central European University in Budapest in January 2007. I am grateful to the audience for their questions and remarks. My gratitude is also due to Péter Lautner, John Christian Laursen, Pavel Gregoric and an anonymous referee for their helpful comments. Research for this paper was supported in part by Central European University Special and Extension Programs.

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