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RENAISSANCE SCEPTICISMS

Edited by

GIANNI PAGANINI AND JOSÉ R. MAIA NETO



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Gianni Paganini and José R. Maia Neto

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Renaissance Scepticisms

Edited by

Gianni Paganini

*Università degli Studi del Piemonte Orientale,
Vercelli, Italy*

and

José R. Maia Neto

*Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais,
Belo Horizonte, Brazil*

 Springer

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In memory of Richard H. Popkin (1923–2005)

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CONTRIBUTORS LIST

Irena Backus

University of Geneva, Switzerland

Lorenzo Casini

University of Uppsala, Sweden

Vittoria Perrone Compagni

Università degli Studi di Firenze, Italy

Tristan Dagron

*CNRS/CERPHI, Ecole Normale Supérieure Lettres et Sciences Humaines,
Lyon, France*

Bernardo J. De Oliveira

Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, Belo Horizonte, Brazil

John Christian Laursen

University of California, Riverside, USA

Agostino Lupoli

Università degli Studi di Milano, Italy

José R. Maia Neto

Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, Belo Horizonte, Brazil

Gian Mario Cao

Florence, Italy

Emmanuel Naya

Université Lumière Lyon 2, France

x *Contributors*

Gianni Paganini

Università degli Studi del Piemonte Orientale, Vercelli, Italy

Nicola Panichi

Università degli Studi di Urbino, Italy

INTRODUCTION

Gianni Paganini and José R. Maia Neto

*Università degli studi del Piemonte Orientale,
Vercelli and Universidade Federal de
Minas Gerais, Belo Horizonte*

Et perinde ac gigantes, montibus montes accumulantes, bellum contra deos gerere videntur, dum aliquot instructi syllogismis, homines rixosi ac meretriculis loquatiores, [Sceptici] incunctanter audent quavis de re cum quovis linguam conferre; litigiosis enim quibusdam altercationum captiunculis ac sophismatum iaculis armati, omnium disciplinarum etiam sacrarum Literarum fores se posse diffringere et penetrare arbitrantur.

H. C. Agrippa, Oratio held at Pavia in 1515

Nam nulla secta eruditior, inter omnes aliorum philosophorum sectas diligentissime versata, et omnium experientissima; neque iracundiae aut superbiae causa, quando habiti sunt inter alias philosophorum gentium sectas, et humani, et mites.

Gianfrancesco Pico, Examen vanitatis doctrinae gentium III, i

There can be no doubt that the recent historiography of Renaissance and early modern scepticism had, as its founding fathers, Richard H. Popkin and Charles B. Schmitt. It may be said that, thanks to their writings, we contemporary scholars have regained knowledge of the importance of scepticism in the formation of European thought. For the first great philosophical historians at the turn of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, this awareness was already an acquired heritage, but it had been nearly lost after the Enlightenment, and even more particularly in the nineteenth century. To find treatises that are comparable in importance and intensity, despite the different standards applied, we must go back as far to some articles in Bayle's *Dictionnaire*, after that to Brucker's monumental *Historia critica* and Reimman's *Historia universalis atheismi*, and, at the end of the eighteenth century, to Stäudlin's *Geschichte und Geist des Skepticismus*. As well as producing an admirable monograph on ancient Pyrrhonian scepticism, which he clearly distinguished from that of the Academics, Brucker included in his *Historia* a section on the "modern sceptics" which, alongside Huet, Bayle, Gassendi and Glanvill, also dealt with Montaigne, Sanchez, Charron, Hirnhaym and La Mothe Le Vayer. Reimman investigated the doubtful view that writers of the Italian and French Renaissance – from Boccaccio to Postel, from Machiavelli

to B. des Périers, and even Campanella – were sceptics and irreligious.¹ After the eighteenth century and during the nineteenth, thinkers were not unaware of scepticism's importance for philosophy as the treatment of doubt in Hegel's *Phänomenologie des Geistes* or Kierkegaard's *Johannes Climacus* clearly show. It was only in the limited sphere of the historiography of philosophy that scepticism seems to have lost the appeal and the central place it had retained during the previous three centuries. This fact alone clearly illustrates the situation in which, starting from the 1960s, Popkin and Schmitt found themselves working. They had, indeed, to recreate the object of their studies *ex novo*, following the canons of recent historical research, rounding out and giving visibility to a movement that, throughout the development of historiography, had been relegated to a shadowy and marginal place compared to the great figures of the “dogmatists,” on which early modern philosophy had concentrated.

In the works of Popkin,² as is well known, a central role is played by the rediscovery of the Pyrrhonian branch of scepticism, as the writings of Sextus Empiricus began to be read and then published. Through the great figures of Gianfrancesco Pico, Montaigne and Charron, Popkin reconstructed a general prehistory of modern thought. Because one of the basic Pyrrhonian arguments is to challenge the existence of any criterion of truth, Pyrrhonian scepticism becomes crucial also in the religious controversies about the rule of faith, making Pyrrhonism – rather than Academic and Ciceronian scepticism – the driving force in early modern philosophy. Popkin saw Academic scepticism as a kind of negative dogmatism, deprived of the conceptual tools available in ancient Pyrrhonism such as the tropes, the discussion about the criterion of truth, and

¹ Johann Jakob Brucker, *Historia critica philosophiae a mundi incunabilis ad nostram usque aetatem deducta*, Pars II Lib. II cap. XIV “De secta pyrrhonia sive sceptica”, tomus I, Lipsiae: Literis et impensis Bern Christoph. Breitkopf, 1742, pp. 1317–1349. Id., *Historiacritica philosophiae a tempore resuscitatarum in occidente literarum ad nostra tempora*, tomi IV Pars I, Lipsiae: 1746 – Period. III Pars I Lib. III Cap. I “De scepticis recentioribus”, pp. 536–609. Jakob Friedrich Reimmann, *Historia universalis atheismi et atheorum falso et merito suspectorum*, Hildesiae: apud Ludovidum Schroeder, 1725 (anastatic reprint with an introduction by Winfried Schröder, Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann, 1992), section III (“De atheismo Christianorum”), ch. IV (“De atheismo Christianorum in Italia”) and ch. V (“De atheismo Christianorum in Gallia”), pp. 382–430; Carl Friedrich Stäudlin, *Geschichte und Geist des Skepticismus vorzüglich in Rücksicht auf Moral und Religion*, 2 vols., Leipzig: S. L. Crusius, 1794.

²We refer first and foremost to the *History of Scepticism*, which reached its third edition with the subtitle: *From Savonarola to Bayle*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003. For a brief overview of recent studies on modern scepticism, cf. G. Paganini, “Introduction” to G. Paganini (ed.), *The Return of Scepticism. From Hobbes and Descartes to Bayle*, Dordrecht, Boston and London: Kluwer, 2003, pp. ix–xix.

the notion of phenomenon; therefore Academic trend seemed to him less consistent with the sceptical goal of *epoché*.

Summarizing his view of modern scepticism in a three-fold scheme, Popkin wrote: “What I believe was crucial ... was, first, the form of the sceptical problem of the criterion of religious knowledge that arose in the early conflicts between Reformers and the Counter-Reformers; second, the availability of the texts of Sextus through their being printed in Latin in 1562 and 1569; and third, the forceful presentation of scepticism by Montaigne in his *Apologie de Raimond Sebond*.”³ In the second (1979), and much more in the third and last edition (2003), this historical framework was enriched with new aspects and details, doubling the length of the book. However, the essential elements of his evaluation of the first Renaissance and post-Renaissance phase of scepticism remained unchanged. By incorporating the results of later research (in particular by Schmitt, but also by Garin, Cavini, Cao and Floridi), Popkin was able to backdate the entrance of Sextus into modern culture to before the time of Savonarola,⁴ while still keeping at the centre of his *History* the moment of the publication of Sextus by Hervet and Estienne, which roughly coincided with the religious crisis of the Reformation and the personal re-elaboration of the ancient Pyrrhonism available in Sextus by Montaigne.

Indeed, Popkin saw Savonarola’s position as limited (“Savonarola and his followers did not challenge the Church’s criterion of religious knowledge”),⁵ while he considered the impact of the work of Gianfrancesco Pico to be marginal, despite Schmitt’s objections in this regard. Lastly, he reserved a relatively unimportant role for the Academic trend of scepticism. Nor did the other two principal figures of Renaissance scepticism (alongside Montaigne) fare any better in Popkin’s reconstruction: with regard to Agrippa of Nettesheim, his *History* stresses the “fundamentalist anti-intellectualism,” playing down *De incertitudine* which, according to him, does not contain “a serious epistemological analysis.”⁶ And although he held Sanchez to be “more interesting than any other sceptics of the sixteenth century, except Montaigne,” he stressed his “totally negative conclusion,” which is not, unlike Pyrrhonian scepticism, “the suspense of judgement as to whether anything can be known, but rather the more full-fledged negative dogmatism of the Academics.”⁷

³R. H. Popkin, *The History*, cit., p. 26.

⁴“Sextus Empiricus’ texts first became part of public discourse in Europe in 1488.” *Ibid.*, p. 26.

⁵*Ibid.*, p. 26.

⁶*Ibid.*, p. 29.

⁷*Ibid.*, p. 41. For a brief summary of Renaissance scepticism, see also the section “Scepticism” written by Popkin in the chapter “Theories of Knowledge” for the *Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy*, ed. by C. B. Schmitt, Q. Skinner, E. Kessler and J. Kraye, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988, pp. 668–684 (esp. pp. 678–684).

Charles B. Schmitt introduced two innovations compared to Popkin: on one hand, with his study on Gianfrancesco Pico he effectively placed the watershed of Renaissance scepticism before and not after the intellectual crisis represented by the Reformation; then, with an investigation into the fortunes of the “sceptical” Cicero, he rescued the Academic current compared to the Pyrrhonian trend emphasized by Popkin,⁸ even if he agreed with him that after the diffusion of Sextus the influence of Academic scepticism decreased drastically, and this for the same reason held by Popkin, namely, that Sextus’ *Outlines* and *Adversus Mathematicos* are much more philosophically interesting than Cicero’s *Academica*.⁹ Anyway, Schmitt shared Popkin’s conviction that a decisive factor for “the re-emergence of a sceptical tendency in the Renaissance period is primarily due to the recovery of the ancient sources.”¹⁰ As a result, he too developed a historiography that successfully blended philosophy with philology and the history of the classical tradition.

Schmitt’s and Popkin’s studies were a huge step forward compared to the previous phase of the scholarship on Renaissance scepticism, which was characterized by the much less convincing works of Owen and Busson, or others whose subject matter was more limited, such as those by Strowski and Villey.¹¹ Some ideas that had held sway in the body of previous historical writings emerged bitten from the new research, such as the conviction that the outcome of all scepticism was irreligion, or the idea that scepticism emerged from the final crisis of Italian Aristotelianism, or again that the new Pyrrhonism was closer to the themes of the Reformation. In particular it was Busson’s work that was demolished, though this was partly due to the attack by Lucien Febvre a bit earlier than Popkin’s.¹² With regard to the previous phase of scholarship, Popkin’s work produced a sort of reversal of the sides: actually, this reversal was so radical that there was a risk of

⁸We refer to the two important studies by Charles B. Schmitt: *Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola (1469–1533) and His Critique of Aristotle*, The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1967; *Cicero Scepticus. A Study of the Influence of the Academica in the Renaissance*, The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1972. The presence of this academic trend in modern scepticism was later pointed up in numerous studies by J. R. Maia Neto, such as “Academic Scepticism in Early Modern Philosophy”, *Journal of the History of Ideas* 58:2 (1997), 199–220.

⁹See C. B. Schmitt, *Cicero Scepticus* cit., pp. 73–74, 164.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, p. 11.

¹¹H. Busson, *Les Sources du rationalisme dans la littérature française de la Renaissance (1533–1601)*, Paris: Letouzet et Ané, 1922; Id. *La Pensée religieuse française de Charon à Pascal*, Paris: J. Vrin, 1933; J. Owen, *The Sceptics of the French Renaissance*, London: S. Sonnenschein, 1893; F. Strowski, *Montaigne*, Paris: F. Alcan, 1906; P. Villey, *Les Sources et l’évolution des Essais de Montaigne*, Paris: Hachette, 1908.

¹²L. Febvre, *Le problème de l’incroyance au XVI^e siècle. La religion de Rabelais*, Paris: A. Michel, 1942.

falling into the opposite extremity, no less one-sided than the previous scholarship. Thus the over-simple equivalence between scepticism and irreligion proposed by Busson was replaced in Popkin by an equivalence, equally excessive and generalized, of scepticism with fideism.¹³ Only later did numerous significant exceptions come to light, true counter-examples sufficiently relevant to limit and cast doubt on what had become an excessive use of the category of fideistic scepticism.¹⁴

It appeared, however, that the alliance between the two lines of research (Popkin's Pyrrhonian line and Schmitt's Academic line) could finally give rise to a "complete" historiography on early modern scepticism and, in particular, on that of the Renaissance. Unfortunately, up to now this hope has not come true, and the results concerning Renaissance scepticism have been particularly disappointing. Even if specific pieces of research (on the sources or on individual authors, such as Pico, Agrippa, Erasmus, Montaigne, Sanchez and so forth) have given and are still producing significant results, an overall synthesis comprising the entire Renaissance period has not been achieved yet. Strange as it might appear, no work yet exists that deals with the history of scepticism during the Renaissance as a whole, and this volume (with all the advantages and disadvantages inherent in collective works) is a first co-ordinated attempt to trace a history of sceptical currents, themes and discussions during the period from the fifteenth century to the death of T. Campanella.

¹³Popkin later revised his position, stressing contexts which favoured an alliance between scepticism and incredulity: cf. R. H. Popkin and A. Vanderjagt (eds.), *Scepticism and Irreligion in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, Leiden, New York and Köln: Brill, 1993; R. H. Popkin, S. Berti, and Françoise Charles-Daubert (eds.), *Heterodoxy, Spinozism, and Free-Thought in Early-Eighteenth-Century Europe*, Dordrecht, Boston and London: Kluwer, 1996. With regard to the Enlightenment, cf. also G. Paganini, M. Benitez and J. Dybikowski (eds.), *Scepticisme, Clandestinité et Libre Pensée/Scepticism, Clandestinity and Free-Thinking*, Paris: Champion, 2002.

¹⁴Through the works of Febvre (chiefly aimed against Charbonnel and Busson) the idea took root that the philosophical culture of the Renaissance was incapable of thinking of atheism and of an irreligious concept of the world and of man, for the simple lack of the necessary *outillage mental*. The edition of *Theophrastus redivivus (Editio princeps et critica)*, ed. by G. Canziani and G. Paganini, Firenze: La Nuova Italia, 1981–1982, 2 vols.) and the studies surrounding it have shown that it was possible, in the first half of the seventeenth century, to reach these results starting from the philosophical culture of the Renaissance and from a certain anti-Christian image of the classics. For a discussion and a confutation of Febvre's theses and of their development among contemporary historians, see: G. Paganini, "Un athéisme d'ancien régime? Pour une histoire de l'athéisme à part entière", in P. Lurbe and S. Taussig (eds.), *La question de l'athéisme au dix-septième siècle*, Turnhout: Brepols, 2004, pp. 105–130; Id., "Legislatores et impostores. Le Theophrastus redivivus et la thèse de l'imposture des religions au milieu du XVII^e siècle", in D. Foucault and J.-P. Cavaillé (eds.), *Sources antiques de l'irreligion moderne: Le relais italien XV^e – XVII^e siècles*, Toulouse: Collection de l'E.C.R.I.T., 2001, pp. 181–218.

The first chapters of Popkin's *History of Scepticism* and the two books by Schmitt still stand as the main reference works for today's research. It is also true that Renaissance scepticism has been much less studied than early modern scepticism: this can be clearly seen in the numerous collective volumes published in rapid succession over the last thirty years on the history of this philosophical movement, under the editorship of Popkin and/or others. Only a few of these have contained significant parts dedicated to the Renaissance, and even where they have done, it has been presented rather as the premise for more significant developments than as a topic worth studying in itself.¹⁵

The need to provide scholars with a rational map of Renaissance Scepticism emerged when we proposed a panel on this specific theme on the occasion of the annual meeting of the Renaissance Society of America (New York, 1–3rd April 2004): it is emblematic that, at that year's meeting, only one panel among almost 400 announced for the meeting was dedicated to this topic. On that occasion, in a first version, papers were presented by Emmanuel Naya (on Renaissance Pyrrhonism), Gianmario Cao (on Gianfrancesco Pico), José R. Maia Neto (on Charron), and Gianni Paganini (on T. Campanella). Subsequently, we called upon other scholars to collaborate with our project: our thanks go to all of them for the passion and care with which they have prepared their contributions.

¹⁵ Among the collective volumes that have at least in part treated the theme of Renaissance scepticism, we mention: M. F. Burnyeat (ed.), *The Sceptical Tradition*, Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1983 (articles by C.B. Schmitt and L. Jardine); R. H. Popkin and C. B. Schmitt (eds.), *Scepticism from Renaissance to the Enlightenment*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1987 (articles by C.B. Schmitt, N. Jardine, J.-P. Pittion); Richard A. Watson and James E. Force (eds.), *The Sceptical Mode in Modern Philosophy*, Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff, 1988 (article by Craig Walton); A. Mothu and Antonella del Prete (eds.), *Révolution scientifique et libertinage*, Turnhout: Brepols, 2000 (articles by A. Mothu, A. Del Prete, R. H. Popkin); P.-F. Moreau (ed.), *Le Scepticisme au XVI^e et au XVII^e siècle*, Paris: A. Michel, 2001 (articles by M. Granada, E. Naya, B. Besnier, H. Vincent, N. Stricker, C. Lévy, R. Schicker); G. Paganini (ed.), *The Return of Scepticism* cit. (article by J. R. Maia Neto); J. R. Maia Neto and R. H. Popkin (eds.), *Scepticism in Renaissance and Post-Renaissance Thought*, Amherst, MA: Humanity Books, 2004 (article by J. R. Maia Neto); V. Carraud and J.-L. Marion (eds.), *Montaigne: scepticisme, métaphysique, théologie*, Paris: PUF, 2004 (articles by J. Benoist, A. Compagnon, M. Conche, R. Imbach, C. Larmore, G. Paganini, A. Tournon, V. Carraud, J.-L. Marion); M.-L. Demonet and A. Legros (eds.), *L'Écriture du scepticisme chez Montaigne*, Genève: Droz, 2004 (articles by A. Legros, J. O'Brien, K. Sellevold, S. Giocanti, M. Habert, J.-C. Margolin, B. Pinchard, S. Geonget, O. Guerrier, K. Almquist, P. Desan, J.-L. Viellard-Baron, E. Naya, T. Gontier, N. Panichi, A. Tournon). The presence of sceptical themes in the work and circle of M. Ficino has now been studied by Anna De Pace, *La scepsi, il sapere e l'anima. Dissonanze nella cerchia laurenziana*, Milano: Led, 2002, ch. I.

It cannot be said that any predetermined idea of that complex historical subject that is Renaissance scepticism underlies our project, and even less did we want to sacrifice the complexity of movements, personalities, tendencies and interpretations to any sort of *a priori* unity of theme. We acknowledge unhesitatingly that we had always thought of “scepticisms” in the plural, and believed that the different contexts (philosophical, religious, cultural) in which these forms grew up must also be taken into account, just as we have decided that, given the transversal nature and provocative character of the sceptical challenge, the book should contain essays not only about authors proclaiming themselves to be Sceptics, but also on philosophers who, engaged in fighting scepticism, nevertheless took it into serious consideration. Dialectic philosophy *par excellence*, scepticism also contributed directly or indirectly to the formation of those philosophies that conceived themselves as going beyond doubt, and did so long before Descartes took the field in order to confute scepticism. Last of the great Renaissance authors, Campanella was certainly not inferior on this ground to the first of the great moderns.

Equally, we do not think that rigid barriers should exist between philosophical, scientific, religious and political discourse. On the contrary, we have willingly crossed these boundaries whenever our research into a subject or an author has so required. We do not pretend that this book is exhaustive. We are fully aware that other Renaissance figures who dealt in interesting and varied ways with sceptical issues remain outside our project. However, we are convinced that each of the essays gathered together here fills an important gap, and that they also throw new light on authors who, while already known, are focused here from different standpoints, which allow the correction of inexact or incomplete historiographical categories. Exemplary is the case of the essay on Campanella, possibly the author most neglected in historical research on scepticism, but who nevertheless wrote one of the fullest discussions and confutations of it. On each of these points the essays here collected provide new elements, original interpretations and further lines of research.

The first section of the book (“Before Reading Sextus”) has as subject matter the “prehistory” of Renaissance scepticism, since it focuses on the period prior to the *editiones principes* of Sextus. Nevertheless, as is shown in the article by Emmanuel Naya (“Renaissance Pyrrhonism: a relative phenomenon”) this first reception was important enough to condition subsequent interpretations. It was on the grounds of philology, even before religion, that the first battle of interpretation was fought. From this, the importance of Sextus as a source (in this preliminary phase) is downsized with regard to other classical and patristic *testimonia*, which already offer the humanists a “prism” of different interpretations. The subject of the article by Lorenzo Casini (“Self-knowledge, Scepticism and the Quest for a New Method: Juan Luis Vives on cognition and the impossibility of

perfect knowledge”) also lies before the re-reading of Sextus. By concentrating on Cicero and Augustine as sources for, respectively, sceptical and anti-sceptical arguments, Vives stressed the limits of self-knowledge, showing how difficult it is to perceive our mental operations in a self-reflexive manner.

The complex theme of the relations between scepticism, the sixteenth-century religious crisis and the Protestant Reformation is the subject of the second section (“Scepticism, Reformation and Counter-Reformation”). V. Perrone Compagni (“*Tutius ignorare quam scire: Cornelius Agrippa and Scepticism*”) interprets the violent demolition of knowledge in Agrippa of Nettesheim’s *De vanitate* as instrumental in a larger project for the reformation of culture, fostered by Platonism and *prisca theologia*. In this sense, Agrippa’s work should be classified neither in the category of “fideism” nor in that of epistemological investigation: rather it is a manifesto for Neoplatonic and Hermetic theology which adopts only a sceptical tactics. Through an examination of various figures, such as Erasmus, Beza and Castellio, I. Backus (“The Issue of Reformation Scepticism Revisited. What Sebastian Castellio Did or Did not Know”) returns to the *vexata quaestio* of the relationship between doubt and “fideism” to sustain that Renaissance Scepticism is not a religious issue before Montaigne. Erasmus was not a Sceptic, as Luther accused him of being, and Castellio abandoned the original fideism of *De haereticis* to espouse, in *De arte dubitandi*, an epistemology more aware of the role of the senses and the intellect. On the contrary, Pedro de Valencia’s *Academica* (J. C. Laursen: “Pedro de Valencia’s *Academica* and Scepticism in Late Renaissance Spain”) belongs to the context of Spanish Counter-Reformation. Laursen shows that Pedro de Valencia’s use of academic scepticism did not implicate a full allegiance to this trend, but rather involved a humanistic approach of the historical and theological type, sceptical only in the wider sense of critical exploration. Together, the three essays show that, in different ways, the tools of scepticism could be used with intentions that were not properly sceptical. Scepticism was at the service of positive goals: neo-Platonic philosophy (Agrippa), humanistic tolerance (Castellio), moderate politics (Pedro de Valencia).

The third section (“Four Renaissance Sceptics”) deals with some important thinkers who directly confronted sceptical themes, often in their pyrrhonian guise. In the first paper Gianfrancesco Pico’s scepticism is examined by G. Cao (“*Inter alias philosophorum gentium sectas, et humani, et mites: Gianfrancesco Pico and the Sceptics*”). Cao shows that Pico exhibited a certain independence with regard to his source (Sextus), not hesitating to criticize him in various points, but nevertheless praising his “mildness” and humanity compared to other dogmatic schools. The essay by A. Lupoli (“*Humanus animus nusquam consistit: Doctor Sanchez’s diagnosis of the incurable human unrest and ignorance*”) points out the therapeutic aspect of scepticism, making the diagnostics of that particular

disease which is the claim to possess “science.” Lupoli presents a portrait of Sanchez imbued with an existential unrest that runs throughout *Quod nihil scitur*. The essay by N. Panichi (“Montaigne and Plutarch. A Scepticism that Conquers the Mind”) links Montaigne to Plutarch’s neo-sceptical interpretation of Platonism. Montaigne places Socrates and Plutarch, whose attitude “is inquiry rather than instruction,” side by side. Overall what emerges is the image of an author who is more of a “new Plutarchian” than a “new Pyrrhonian.” The essay by J. R. Maia Neto (“Charron’s Academic Sceptical Wisdom”) casts light on Charron’s originality with regard to his Academic sources. Taking from Cicero the idea of *epoché* as a condition of “intellectual integrity,” the author of *Sagesse* stressed the fact that, by avoiding error and suspending judgement, man achieves his perfection and excellence because in this way human reason attains its full flowering. Furthermore, M. Neto underlines the decisive changes introduced by the *Sagesse* in the description of the Sceptic. Unlike the mobility and instability described by Montaigne, Charron intends to provide his sage with a solid moral and intellectual foundation.

The last section (“Three reactions to scepticism”) reveals how fertile was the contact with sceptical themes, including three authors who were anything but Sceptics. The case of Bruno (T. Dagron: “Giordano Bruno on Scepticism”) is emblematic. In his *Cabala* Bruno displays a precise knowledge of Sextus’s works, recently translated, and makes a distinction between “ephectics” (basically, phenomenists) and “Pyrrhonians.” The latter appear to him as having invented a sort of overturned dogmatism in which, according to Bruno, all the aporias of the Aristotelian concept of “power” as privation are exhibited. For Bruno, the Sceptics are right insofar as they denounce the circular character of the Aristotelian solution to the theory of knowledge, but go wrong when they conclude the “vanity” of all rational efforts. The illusion of scepticism would, for Bruno, be the same as Atteone’s one in *Eroici furori*, that is the mirage of knowing the infinite object as a naked truth to be possessed, but which, on the contrary, ends up by possessing the imprudent hunter. The case of Bacon (presented here by B. J. de Oliveira and J. R. Maia Neto: “The Sceptical Evaluation of *Techné* and Baconian Science”) is different because it is linked to the theme of the working and control of nature rather than to metaphysical speculation. Although Bacon is distant from Pyrrhonian themes, he knows and discusses Academic scepticism and shares with the Renaissance Sceptics some basic assumptions: the separation of rational inquiry from religious affairs; opposition to pseudo-science; reflection on the limits of knowledge (the question of “idols”); and an important constructive use of the “maker’s knowledge” argument, the restrictive sceptical argument that one can know only what one can make.

The case of Campanella is emblematic of the early modern reactions to scepticism. Campanella wrote the fullest discussion and confutation of sceptical

arguments at the time in Book I of *Metaphysica* (only published in 1638, but already completed in manuscript form as early as 1624). In this book he made constructive use of *dubitationes* before going on to overcome them, as was later attempted in a different way by Descartes in his *Discourse on the Method*. Nevertheless, Campanella has remained a borderline figure in the historiography of Renaissance and modern scepticism. The essay by G. Paganini (“T. Campanella: Reappraisal and Refutation of Scepticism”) intends to fill this serious gap, reconstructing for the first time in an analytical manner the use that Campanella made of sceptical arguments, to reach in the end a theory of possible knowledge based on a theory of sense perception as *perceptio passionis* and, more generally, producing a metaphysical doctrine based on the theory of the primacy of being.

The date of publication of Campanella’s *Metaphysica* (1638) is too close to that of Descartes’ *Discours de la méthode* (1637) to resist the temptation of taking both as the watershed between two ages: on the one side, the age of Renaissance scepticism, which concluded with the massive anti-sceptical work of Campanella’s and, on the other side, the age when, thanks to Descartes’ more nimble work, the new history of early modern scepticism begins.

What are the chief novelties of this collection of studies with regard to the Popkin-Schmitt thesis concerning the history of early modern scepticism? Alongside some significant confirmations (such as the importance of the philological rediscovery of the ancient texts, the awareness of the intersection between religious problems and epistemological problems, or again the significance of the notion of constructive scepticism in relation to scientific knowledge) we also point out some original aspects emerging from this new research. Firstly, while the role of the Pyrrhonian texts is not diminished, they are flanked by an entirely different tradition of scepticism, which both precedes the editions of Sextus Empiricus and continues after them, drawing from non-Pyrrhonian authors and lines of thought (Platonic, patristic, neo-academic, without neglecting the influence of Diogenes Laertius). One effect of this variety of references is that it makes it impossible to fix a single definition of scepticism, suggesting on the contrary that different definitions should be employed on different occasions, depending on the historical reference context (as the authors of the individual articles in this work have done). Secondly, taken together these studies tend to weaken the excessively close connection that Popkin saw between scepticism and its religious interpretations: in reality, Renaissance scepticism was “neither globally religious nor globally antireligious,”¹⁶ but rather lent itself to widely differing uses ranging from “fideism” (to use the anachronistic category employed by Popkin) to

¹⁶J. R. Maia Neto, “Panorama historiográfico do ceticismo renascentista: 1997–2007”, *Skepsis* 1:1 (2007): 83–97, esp. 88.

“criticism.” Thirdly, as well as downsizing the importance of the Pyrrhonian current and re-evaluating the alternative traditions (the academic alternative, but also Platonism and the internal criticism of sensism, as in the case of Campanella), the centrality of Montaigne¹⁷ (a centrality that is uncontested in Popkin’s *History*) is attenuated, or better flanked by a multiplicity of figures, who make the Renaissance a period so full of original personalities. Lastly, we believe that a dimension emerges from these essays, which in the “Popkin model” risked being squashed between the crisis of Aristotelianism and the advent of a new “constructive” science: this is the dimension of metaphysics that, on the contrary, emerges from the discussions of many figures involved in the debate on scepticism (Vives, Sanchez, Bruno, Campanella, to mention only the most important) as a new knowledge to be refounded, abandoning the old scholastic foundations but on the contrary welcoming the critical requirements of scepticism¹⁸. It is not by chance that the authors who addressed this task most diligently were those who had least to do with the Pyrrhonian and Sextan tradition, drawing instead from less “destructive” currents. Overall, the panorama that emerges from these studies is both more accurate in its analytical investigation and wider in terms of the perspectives it considers.

The reader will judge whether this volume has succeeded in meeting the *desideratum* from which we began, that is in providing a rational and detailed map of sceptical themes in the philosophical culture of the Renaissance. What is certain, though, is that this desire would never have arisen in us had we not frequented, first through study and then in direct discussion, that great figure of a scholar, and at the same time a great example of generous humanity, that was Richard H. Popkin. With him, disagreement and discussion, no less than consensus, were the salt of collaboration. For this reason, as a sign of gratitude and recollection, we dedicate this work to Dick, as we remember him in life

¹⁷ For recent research on Montaigne see: S. Giocanti, *Penser l'irrésolution. Montaigne, Pascal, La Mothe Le Vayer. Trois itinéraires sceptiques*, Paris: Champion, 2001; F. Brahami, *Le Travail du scepticisme. Montaigne, Bayle, Hume*, Paris: PUF, 2001. L. Eva, *A figura do Filósofo. Ceticismo e subjetividade em Montaigne*, São Paulo: Loyola, 2007.

¹⁸ On this aspect, see G. Paganini, *Skepsis. Le débat des modernes sur le scepticisme*, Vrin: Paris, 2008 (forthcoming).

PART I
BEFORE READING SEXTUS

1. RENAISSANCE PYRRHONISM: A RELATIVE PHENOMENON

Emmanuel Naya

Université Lumière Lyon 2, France

More than any other kind of philosophy, Pyrrhonism exalts relativity, if only, in the first place, by opening up the dogmatist's horizons to new aspects of familiar phenomena. But there is another relativity factor, a more extrinsic one: the very different textual elements of its diffusion in Europe in fragmentary texts of which the reception was unusually erratic. My purpose here is to resume briefly, without giving detailed demonstrations, the results of my work on the revival of scepticism in the sixteenth century,¹ consisting in an exploration of the relations between the different symptoms of the sceptical crisis during this period; this

¹We will use indifferently the terms "Pyrrhonian" and "sceptic": as shown in my doctoral thesis (see the note below), a strict differentiation between a dialectical relativism – Sextus – and an ontological relativism – Pyrrho – is inconceivable. Textual sources cannot support such a distinction: they require, as for Sextus (*P.H.* I, 7), that we admit the Pyrrhonian filiation, without tending to adopt any Heraclitean or Protagorean idea about reality. We think that such an affiliation does not presuppose an intentional deviation from a previous paragon of philosophy, or a false and anachronistic reading of previous texts, but is, on the contrary, a way of insisting on the appropriate reading protocol to be applied to any Pyrrhonian statement: sceptical contradiction must be conceived as a thought structure which is itself bound by its own rule. The lowest common denominator between the main Pyrrhonian texts from antiquity, which confer on scepticism as on Pyrrhonism a real philosophical unity, is the central and autosuspensive formula of the *ou mallon*, a formula which is, in spite of the confusion involved by the Greek homonyms "è" (at first a comparative tool, but also a coordinating conjunction), not tripartite but bipartite (see our *Vocabulaire des sceptiques*, Paris: Ellipses, 2002, pp. 35–37). In other words, it always creates an opposition before being itself carried away by a higher level of opposition between its own truth and its own falseness: it is only at this cost that such a formula produces the suspension of judgement and it is by virtue of this reflexive movement that it annihilates any kind of possibility of producing an ontological meaning, describing what is *in re*. This is why J. Annas and J. Barnes are fundamentally right in considering Sextus' use of relativity as a simple tool, or as a simple general description of the contradictory process which comes into play in all the ten modes of suspension of judgement (*The Modes of Scepticism*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985, pp. 96–98 and 130–145): just like any statement which expresses *skepsis* – or rather, like any *phônè skeptikè* – the observation of an *apparent* relativity is itself subjected to the

work was the object of a doctoral thesis,² and of a number of conferences and articles.³ I will present here the method of my enquiry as well as the results, insofar as the method may contribute to further research on the rediscovery of ancient philosophies in modern times. My method developed progressively as a means to overcome a seemingly insoluble preliminary problem: can progress be made in the examination of a question which Richard H. Popkin's work seemed to have covered exhaustively?⁴ If we concern ourselves exclusively with Popkin's chapters on the Renaissance, we can see that he explored this question in the wake of Pierre Villey and Henri Busson,⁵ whose starting-point was Pierre Bayle's presentation of modern Pyrrhonism in his *Dictionnaire historique*.⁶

same observation of higher rank; relativity is nothing but a tool which produces clashes which itself comes within the provisions of its own law. The sceptics' relativist statements are relative to the sceptics themselves (*P.H.*, I, 207), insofar as they are a simple way of "[recording] each fact, like a chronicler, as it appears to [them] at the moment" (*ibid.*, I, 4). Like any kind of statement, they are approximate, bound to appearances which cannot be assured with certainty. This rule, which comes into play in Sextus' *P.H.*, is also relevant in other major Pyrrhonist texts, if they implement the most central and general formula in Pyrrhonism: the auto-reflexive *ou mallon*. This seems to me to be the case in Timon (Eusebius of Caesarea, *Præparatio evangelica*, 18, 3–4), Favorinus (Aulus Gellius, *Attic Nights*, XI, 5, 5), Diogenes Laertius (*Lives of eminent philosophers*, IX, 74–75).

² *Le Phénomène pyrrhonien: lire le scepticisme au xv^e siècle*, vivaed on the December 15th 2000 at Grenoble 3 Stendhal University. Two books, to be published by Honoré Champion editions, will be taken from this doctoral thesis: one on the textual modalities of the rediscovery of Pyrrhonism (*Le Phénomène pyrrhonien: lire le scepticisme au xv^e siècle*), and another on Montaigne's use of scepticism and the possibility of sceptical fideism in the *Essays* (*La "loy de pure obéissance": le pyrrhonisme à l'essai chez Montaigne*).

³ Notably: "La Renaissance pyrrhonienne", *Magazine Littéraire*, "Le retour des sceptiques", janvier 2001, n° 394, pp. 35–37; "Le Scepticisme au XVI^e siècle: l'ombre d'un doute", *La Lettre clandestine*, 10, Paris, 2001, pp. 13–29; "Sextus à Genève: la Réforme du doute", *Libertinage et philosophie au XVII^e siècle*, publications de l'Université de Saint-Etienne, 2003, pp. 7–30.

⁴ My doctoral thesis was vivaed three years before the publication of the revised and expanded edition of Richard H. Popkin's work, *The History of Scepticism from Savonarola to Bayle*, Oxford: OUP, 2003: all quotations from this work in the present text will be taken from this new edition. As I suggest below, while R. Popkin's enquiry grew in breadth with the introduction of Savonarola, and became more accurate on Sextus' manuscript tradition by taking into account L. Floridi's research, the conclusions concerning the sixteenth century have not fundamentally changed: my attempt to develop these conclusions may not always appear necessary, but, in my view, it does seem legitimate.

⁵ P. Villey, *Les Sources et l'évolution des Essais de Montaigne*, Paris: Hachette, 1908, 2e éd. en 1933, rep. in Osnabrück, O. Zeller reprint, 1976; H. Busson, *Les Sources et le développement du rationalisme dans la littérature française de la Renaissance (1533–1601)*, Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1920.

⁶ Notably "Pyrrho" and "L'éclaircissement sur les pyrrhoniens", where Bayle suggests at the same time the useful apologetical use of scepticism, and the radical incompatibility

The main and decisive conclusion of Popkin's study of Renaissance scepticism consisted in rejecting traditional prejudice concerning the close link between Pyrrhonism and modern atheism, which prejudice was still the inspiration of Don Cameron Allen's research some years after the publication of Popkin's book.⁷ I will not examine in any detail Popkin's enquiry into the Renaissance – the centre of gravity of his work seems rather to be the reappraisal of scepticism in the classical age considered as a development of certain Renaissance trends – and even less all the progress that Popkin's work has allowed us to accomplish in the understanding of modern scepticism. In my eyes, the main interest of Popkin's masterly study is to paint a panoramic view of the reintroduction of ancient pyrrhonism into modern philosophy, and to show decisively that *skepsis* played a major role in the classical age. Popkin's approach has nevertheless imposed limits on the examination of the scepticism rediscovered and deployed during the Renaissance, as regards the dimensions of that movement, and above all as regards certain options in its interpretation. I would like to point out a few of Popkin's presuppositions or methodological options, which should lead us to undertake a re-examination of Renaissance Pyrrhonism:

1. The first presupposition lies in the definition of scepticism given by Popkin, a "philosophical view that raises doubts about the adequacy or reliability of the evidence that could be offered to justify any proposition".⁸ The philosophy thus defined would be nothing but a set of arguments intended to invalidate certain demonstrative processes. This definition excludes not only the internal diversity proper to scepticism but also sceptical ethics as we can perceive them in the sixteenth century.
2. The second postulate of R. H. Popkin's enquiry lies in a genealogy (or aetiology) of the sceptical phenomenon: the "motor" of the Pyrrhonian crisis is supposed to have been the criticism of Roman Catholic dogma by Luther, which is said to have reactivated Savonarola's attack on papal authority – and this previous rebellion is said to have depended on a Latin edition of Sextus Empiricus' work.⁹

of doubt with religion. This two-faced presentation is still perceptible in Villey's and Busson's pages about Montaigne: if they denote explicitly the difficulties of articulation between Pyrrhonism and the catholic faith in the *Essays*, they introduce and consecrate the notion of sceptical fideism, by reinvesting – in Busson's case – a term derived from nineteenth century intra-ecclesial debates. The category had been defended in a more univocal way by H. Janssen (*Montaigne Fidéiste*, Nijmegen-Utrecht: N.V. Dekker & Van de Vegt, 1930), before being used as the main mode of sceptical revival in the sixteenth century by R. H. Popkin.

⁷ *Doubt's Boundless Sea: Scepticism and faith in the Renaissance*, Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1964.

⁸ *The History of Scepticism from Savonarola to Bayle*, Introduction, xxi.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

While scepticism is mainly an argumentative arsenal intended to destroy any kind of dogma, the “Rule of faith” crisis is the main episode in which the sceptical revival first became an instrument of religious controversy. This genealogy reduces Renaissance Pyrrhonism to a phenomenon generated by an ecclesiological crisis, in which it operates simply as a dialectical tool. This definition of scepticism as a simple tool in religious controversies leads to another narrowing of perspective, insofar as Sextus’ *Outlines* are regarded as the main expression of Pyrrhonism, which is thus definitively reduced to a stock of dialectical arguments, the tropes of the *epochè*, these being the arguments nourishing religious controversy.

3. The corollary of this option is that the rediscovery of scepticism is reduced to the rediscovery of Sextus Empiricus: following the chronology of the textual tradition of scepticism as established by C. B. Schmitt, R. Popkin affirms that Pyrrhonism was known from the middle of the fifteenth century. He accepts with Schmitt that “information about ancient scepticism became available to Renaissance thinkers principally through three sources” (Sextus, Laertius, Cicero). In accordance with Luciano Floridi’s work on the rediscovery of Sextus Empiricus,¹⁰ Popkin insists, in the last edition of his book, on the significance of the manuscript tradition of Sextus’ works. However, for him, “no significant use of Pyrrhonian ideas prior to the printing of Sextus’ Hypotyposes has appeared, except for that of Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola”.¹¹ Two consequences: firstly, there are no significant symptoms of Pyrrhonism before the first printed edition of Sextus, with the exception of Pico¹²; secondly, the textual mediation – explicitly reduced to three authors – is implicitly related to and dominated by Sextus: the real impact of Diogenes Laertius, and of all the other writers who dealt with Pyrrhonism, is not examined.
4. Finally, the ultimate implication of this presentation lies in the idea that scepticism is mainly, throughout the century, a dialectical weapon that Catholics and Protestants wield against each another: Protestants in order to criticize the weakness of orthodox dogma, Catholics in order to undermine any possibility of rational reform of that dogma. Renaissance Pyrrhonism is thus reduced to “sceptical fideism”, a form of apologetics where ancient philosophy is no more than a preparation for faith, even though it is admit-

¹⁰ *Sextus Empiricus, The Transmission and Recovery of Pyrrhonism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.

¹¹ Popkin, *op. cit.*, p. 19. On the other hand, C.B. Schmitt accepted Popkin’s idea, more forceful in the previous editions of *The History of Scepticism*, that the diffusion of Pyrrhonism – regarded as an epidemic – broke out, after an incubation period, with the publication in 1562 in Geneva of the *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*.

¹² The Rabelaisian use of scepticism is said to have no philosophical meaning or importance; it is considered only as a comical master-piece of French literature.

ted that Montaigne introduced a more radical “revitalization of the Pyrrhonism of Sextus Empiricus.”¹³ This reduces Pyrrhonism to a dialectical weapon subordinate to theology – or more simply to faith; and there is also the risk – since Popkin admits that he uses the term “faith” in a Protestant rather than Catholic sense¹⁴ – of applying a priori a fideistic model to particular confessions with which it is incompatible. The confessional construction, its evolution and its diversity of religious trends, such as Augustinianism, Thomism or Paulinism, may invalidate such a representation.

On a methodological level, I therefore resolved:

1. Not to envisage Pyrrhonism simply as a dialectical practice, but as a specific philosophical process linked to a specific ethical doctrine, – in short, as a complex historical phenomenon. This entailed two consequences: firstly, not to found my enquiry upon syntheses concerning our present-day perception(s) of Pyrrhonism during the sixteenth century. My ambition was not to study the reception of a philosophical process as we have inherited it in the present day, but to see whether the conditions of reception of an ancient textual legacy directly determined the very nature of that legacy. All the philological details provided by historians of ancient philosophy could thus help to throw light on the history of ideas in the Renaissance. On the other hand, I had to rely on a certain interpretation of the Pyrrhonian philosophy, in order to judge the relevance of Renaissance readings and the theoretical changes that they introduced. Since, in this context, the variety of modern interpretations created difficulties – Pyrrhonism is perceived sometimes as a phenomenism with a scientific background,¹⁵ sometimes as a neo-mobilism with metaphysical significance,¹⁶ sometimes as a philosophy whose implications changed with the times and according to dialectical contexts¹⁷ –, I finally realized that it was possible and necessary to call into question the interpretation of ancient texts which postulate a Pyrrhonian coherence beyond the historical vicissitudes of its reception.
2. My second resolution was to refuse to regard scepticism as an abstract intellectual object without any concrete textual consistency. I could not perceive the different aspects of Pyrrhonism without founding my understanding of

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, Introduction, xxii.

¹⁵ See for instance J.-P. Dumont, *Le Scepticisme et le phénomène*, Paris: Vrin, 1985 (2nd edition).

¹⁶ M. Conche, *Pyrrhon ou l'apparence*, éditions de Mégare, 1973.

¹⁷ See for instance R. Bett, “Aristocles on Timon on Pyrrho: the text, its logic, and its credibility”, *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* vol. XII, C.C.W. Taylor ed., Oxford: Clarendon, 1994, pp. 137–182.

that philosophical process on an examination of the most famous witnesses to the textual tradition of scepticism: I thus had to take into account the re-editions of Pyrrhonian texts in the works of Gellius, Laertius, Eusebius of Caesarea, Ammonius, Cicero and Sextus Empiricus, between 1468 and 1610. In my approach to Pyrrhonism, this philological prism seemed to me primordial, more decisive than the religious one. The sixteenth century first rediscovered a scattered and fragmented textual corpus, a real jigsaw puzzle which was progressively organised. If we want to draw a portrait of the Renaissance reception of Pyrrhonism, that is only conceivable at a particular intersection defined by a specific state of the available corpus and the reader's interests. From the 1470s, the most important sceptical texts were published and countless re-editions then modified the understanding of the doctrine. Before being read in their original language in the 1530s,¹⁸ the Greek texts were first translated into Latin and became progressively richer with marginal annotations, glosses and indexes which help the understanding of the Pyrrhonian notions by establishing relations between this fragmented corpus and other textual testimonies. Thus each new re-edition, by introducing new documents into the sceptical haversack, lead to the enrichment of the following re-editions of the same text or of other sources. My aim was to try to depict a cultural phenomenon in movement according to its constant diversifications. Renaissance scepticism could then be apprehended in all its diversity, which consisted in readings as varied as those with which we are familiar today.

What conclusions can be drawn from the textual tradition which constitutes the first level of the reception of scepticism? Quite unexpectedly, encyclopaedias played a major role in the diffusion of scepticism, at two different levels: firstly, dictionaries and *thesauri* are objective witnesses of the assimilation of unknown notions in a new cultural setting. The assimilation of foreign terms is linked to an act of translation, and dictionaries contain the total available vocabulary at a given time: they thus become the best clue, the most neutral witness of the penetration of this philosophy into European culture. Secondly, dictionaries are certainly the products of the reception of scepticism throughout the sixteenth century, but they are also the instruments of that reception. The scholar of the Renaissance may thus find in an encyclopaedia the meaning given at a particular time to a term found in ancient texts. Dictionaries and *thesauri* not only give prefatory notes with a translation, but also refer the reader to other Pyrrhonian testimonies, which help to understand the notions by providing a doctrinal background. As suggested above, the major problem in the study of Renaissance Pyrrhonism lies

¹⁸ Notably with the Laertius' *editio princeps* (*Diogenis Laertii De vitis, decretis & responsis celebrium philosophorum libri decem*, Basileæ: Froben, 1533).

in its fragmentary corpus, which is not compensated by any cross-references from one text to another. These cross-references (or signposts) are supplied by encyclopaedias, in which the Pyrrhonian corpus gradually built up and accumulated from the beginning. By mutual compilation throughout the period, dictionaries collected the scattered pieces which contributed to the sceptical phenomenon. A newly discovered part of this jigsaw puzzle could be identified according to the indications supplied by dictionaries. Such cross-references supported philosophical reflection and had a deep impact on new translations and editions. Dictionaries and new editions of ancient texts thus enriched each other. My lexicographical study of about twenty families of dictionaries between 1470 and 1610 led me to a number of conclusions that can be summed up in the following points:

1. The rediscovery of scepticism consisted first in rediscovering the main figures of the Pyrrhonian school, from the 1480s onwards. These figures provided a general setting in which the doctrine itself could be conceived; this setting was sometimes neutral, sometimes biased and critical towards Pyrrho's illusory *apatheia*, as in N. Perotti's *Cornucopia*.¹⁹ This popularization of illustrious Pyrrhonian figures shows that the New Academy was not a major link in the rediscovery of scepticism between the end of the fifteenth century and the middle of the sixteenth: the main figure remained Pyrrho, and it is under his *ægis* that doctrinal elements were diffused and interpreted, until 1550, which saw a decrease in the importance of Pyrrho to the benefit of Sextus Empiricus.
2. The most important lesson to be drawn from this lexicographical study is a change in the chronology generally admitted. Pyrrho was known from the 1470s – well before the 1560s – and the major sceptical notions concerning the suspension of judgment (*epochè*, *épéchein*, *éphektikoi*) were progressively clarified between 1510 and 1530. Thus, from the middle of the century, there existed a critical consistency which contributed to an exceptionally rich textual corpus. During the following fifteen years, Pyrrhonism gained a real philosophical identity, as is shown by the article “*sceptica*” published by Robert Estienne in 1543.²⁰

¹⁹ *Perotus Nicolaus Cornucopie*, Venetiis: per P. de Paganinis, 1489; see also Giovanni Tortelli, *Ioannis Tortelii de Orthographia tractatus*, Venetiis: per B. de Zanis de Portesio, 1504. In these rewritings of Laertius (IX, 68–69) and Gellius, the impatient behaviour of Euryloque (Pyrrho's disciple) is ascribed to Pyrrho himself, in order to ruin his credibility by refuting his own theory of *apatheia*.

²⁰ *Dictionarium, sive latinæ linguæ thesaurus*, Paris: R. Estienne, 1543: “*Sceptica, scepticæ, pen. corr.: Philosophorum quorundam secta sic dicta quod semper quærat, & numquam inueniat. Hæc Diogenes Laertius in Pyrrhonis vita. Idem paulo post, Sceptici sectarum omnium dogmata evertere præstabant, nihil ipsi dogmatis afferentes, cæterorum tantum enuncianda dogmata atque enarranda proponentes nihil definiendo. Gell. II cap. 5. Quod Pyrrhonios philosophos vocamus, ii Græco cognomento σκεπτικοί appelluntur. Id ferme significat, quasi quæsitores & consyderatores. Nihil enim decernunt, nihil constituunt: sed in quærendo semper*

Scepticism was not considered as belonging to certain ancient philosophers only, but was conceived as an intellectual process which could have a modern application. At the same time, Conrad Gesner threw light on the major role played by Sextus Empiricus and listed the places where one could find his manuscripts. During the second half of the century, most of the notions concerning dogmatic attitudes were refined, such as dogma and assent. This was supported by the publication of the Ciceronian *thesauri* by the Estienne brothers, who diffused the main doctrinal articles of the New Academy, which, although C.B. Schmitt's traditional chronology presents it as the first step in the rediscovery of scepticism, did not really appear in dictionaries. The second half of the century produced no real novelty: the essential rediscovery of the notions had been accomplished before, as well as the definition of the Pyrrhonian corpus: Ammonius, Gellius, Laertius, Lucian, Cicero and Sextus, whose works were hard to find but nevertheless notorious, – these authors constituted the essential corpus in the sixteenth century. The examination of the encyclopaedic tradition thus threw light on the printed tradition, in the same way as, reciprocally, the printed tradition provided a better understanding of the penetration of Pyrrhonism into lexicographical works.

This tradition of the greatest textual witnesses reveals that Renaissance scepticism had several faces. As already suggested, the diffusion of ancient texts was absolutely fundamental, since it defined a first level of doctrinal re-elaboration and since it determined, like a prism, the authors' access to that philosophy²¹; Erasmus, Rabelais, and Montaigne, for example. Editions of ancient texts weighed on the meaning of those texts in several ways:

consyderandoque sunt, quidnam sit omnium rerum, de quo decerni constituique possit. Ac ne videre quoque plane quicquam, neque audire sese putant: sed ita pati afficique, quasi vel videant vel audiant: eaque ipsa, quæ affectiones istas in sese efficiant, qualia & cuiusmodi sint, cunctantur atque insistent. Vide ibidem multo plura."

²¹ Printed editions of ancient texts are not the only ways means of diffusion of original Pyrrhonism: some "rewritings", more or less philosophical adaptations of the Pyrrhonian texts, also played a part: while Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola's *Examen vanitatis* (1520) is a kind of *cento*, intermixing in thematic groupings Sextus' texts more than forty years before their publication, some authors like Giovanni Astolfi found in Pyrrho's life (Laertius, IX) all the picturesque episodes of an eccentric life – purely literary matter. Between such extremes, Rabelais found in Pyrrhonism a poetic structure based upon contradiction, the only structure suited to adapt the novel to his philosophical and anthropological point of view. By creating in the *Tiers Livre* a philosophical character (Trouillogan), he constructed a Pyrrhonian *chimera*, which links, efficiently and with doctrinal precision, the paradoxical and comic form of sceptical folly and the philosophical gesture of a radical criticism of reason.

1. The editors' forewords considerably altered the reception of Pyrrhonian texts. Thus, Camaldule's preface to his translation of the *Lives of eminent philosophers* by Laertius (1432) can be seen as one of the first texts that elaborated the model of sceptical fideism. In its numerous re-editions throughout the next century, this preface contributed to the fortune of that philosophical position, which was founded not so much on biographical examples as on the question posed to the whole community of philologists: how to publish pagan philosophy in a Christian cultural environment? In the prefaces and commentaries on Ciceronian texts, the probabilistic scepticism of the *Academica* was seen as the best way of renovating the dialectical foundations of philosophical practice. Thus Ciceronian scepticism did not lead to ignorance, but became a starting point on which to build the dogmatic acquisition of wisdom.²² Other prefaces, commentaries and glosses gave rise to doctrinal inflexions: and indices also distinguished particular points of doctrine and sliced up the philosophical doctrine into so many maxims of commonplace wisdom.
2. In addition, Greek translations often created the opportunity for theoretical misappropriations: Traversari's first translations of Laertius transformed suspension of assent (*retentio assensionis*) into suspension of assertion (*retentio assertionis*), a mere expressive restriction in a philosophy which thus became a purely rhetorical exercise. Translations sometimes transformed the source-text to such an extent that the Greek lesson was censured, as in the case of the *Præparatio evangelica*: Trebizonde's translation ended precisely when Aristotle's refutation of Timon's *ou mallon* started, and this witness to Renaissance Pyrrhonian testimony was thus unavailable until Robert Estienne's *editio princeps* in 1544.

Examination of the successive re-editions of the six most important sceptical sources throughout the whole century allows us to draw some conclusions: scepticism was not merely a mid-century rediscovery which occurred on the spur of the religious crisis; it had a real philosophical consistency from the end of the previous century, based above all on the printed publication of ancient texts, which defined a first degree of reception and appropriation. Thus, Renaissance scepticism was not a unified intellectual movement; there was not only one kind of scepticism in the sixteenth century, but a kind of Pyrrhonism for each

²² See for instance the *Audomari Talæi in Lucillum Ciceronis Commentarii*, ad Carolum Lotharingum Cardinalem Guisianum, Parisiis: ex typographia Matthæi Davidis, 1550, and his *Academia*, Parisiis: ex typographia Matthæi Davidis, 1547. Gentian Hervet falls victim to this confusion between the Neo-Academic *in utramque partem* process, derived from an assimilation by Antiochus of Ascalo of an Aristotelian procedure described in *Topica* VIII, and purely Pyrrhonian *skepsis*. For him, scepticism is a privileged way to renew our access to the Truth through probabilism.

decade, and even for each reader; founded on connections between scattered texts, it was little more than a jigsaw puzzle, of which the configuration depended on each reader's ability to find the pieces and to organise them. Finally, such a textual tradition allowed a confused reading of Pyrrhonism, worthy of Babel: the main tendencies were the following:

1. A syncretistic reading often confused Neo-Academics and Pyrrhonians²³; in such cases, scepticism used *époché* to clear the floor of all acquired knowledge, clearing the way for the establishment of probability (*verisimilitudo*). Two main readings followed from this superposition:
 - (a) Pyrrhonism often took on the appearance of a Neo-Socratism – Socrates was the most famous teacher in ignorance. That enables us to explain how, from Erasmus to Montaigne, Socrates was linked to the sceptical attitude and to Pyrrho, and Neo-Academic folly crossed paths with the divine wisdom of Silenus, a pre-figuration of Christ himself.
 - (b) Secondly, in such syncretistic interpretations, *skepsis* was superposed on and identified with the dialectical process evoked by Aristotle in book VIII of the *Topica* and which was imported by Antiochus of Ascalo into the Academy; in this reading, scepticism became a dialectical examination *in utramque partem* which attempted to attain the most plausible interpretation, in an Aristotelian sense. This was the most striking misappropriation of *skepsis*, insofar as it became a means to renew Aristotelian dialectical studies after several centuries of scholastic drifting. It is not surprising that Gentian Hervet, one of the greatest translators of the *corpus aristotelicum*, chose to publish those texts of Sextus with which Pico della Mirandola had attacked the Aristotelian system. After Omer Talon, Hervet saw in *skepsis* a way of attaining the probable and thus as a way of renovating the search for truth.
2. A third reading saw in Pyrrhonism a doctrine based on a relativistic theory of phenomena that could easily be refuted in Aristotelian terms. The best illustration of this interpretation is the annotation of *Attic nights* by Peter Schade alias Petrus Mosellanus, in the Parisian 1528 edition. The commen-

²³ “*Academici dicebantur, quod nihil certo, neque pronunciare, neque constituere de re aliqua volebant, more aliorum philosophorum, sed sententiam suam animo continebant, semperque se melius adhuc consultaturos dicebant: unde & σκεπτικοί alio nomine vocati sunt. Budæus cunctatores, & hæsitatores dici posse autumat. ἀπό τοῦ ἐπεχειν, quod assensionem retinere significat, authore Cicerone.*” This entry of Pierre Gilles’ *Lexicon Gæcolatinum* (Basileæ, 1532) can be found again in the Hadrien Junius’ *Lexicon Græcolatinum per Hadrianum Junium novissime auctum*, Basileæ, 1548.

tator, annotating the sceptical *pros ti*, declares that Pyrrhonism is a kind of relativism which founds the nature of things upon the relativity of external appearances. Without judging this proposition, he adds the Aristotelian definition of true science (“science concerns only necessary things”), and lets the reader conclude: scepticism is a phenomenalism which cannot attain the scientific knowledge of things: it cannot be extended into science or metaphysics.²⁴

3. In addition, a fourth reading transformed Pyrrhonism into a Heraclitean mobilism, prefiguring Marcel Conche’s modern interpretation. This reading was intimately linked to a Pyrrhonian textual witness now forgotten, mentioned by Guillaume Budé in his *Lexicon sive dictionarium græolatinum* in 1554 as a main reference for *époque* and *akatalèpsia*.²⁵ This textual witness to Pyrrhonism was published by Alde Manuce in 1503²⁶; it is a passage of the prologue to Ammonius’ *Commentary on Aristotle’s Categories* – or, rather, a text supposed to be that of Ammonius, but which could now be attributed to Philopon, according to A. Busse’s research at the end of the nineteenth century.²⁷ This text assimilates Heraclitism and scepticism, to the point that it designates Pyrrhonism as a doctrine which offers a metaphysical discourse, an interpretation which might permit an ontological reading of Timon’s testimony in the *Præparatio evangelica*. Heraclitus is also presented – without concern for chronology – as a disciple of Pyrrho who radicalised his master’s lessons. Although Sextus attempts to distinguish these two incompatible doctrines, Ammonius sees in Heraclitus a more Pyrrhonian sceptic than Pyrrho himself. In such a context, *époque* is no longer a suspension of assent, but merely a suspension of enunciation, which is simply indicated by a movement of the head.
4. In the opposite direction, a last reading insisted on the specificity of Pyrrhonism, which Sextus defended against Academics and Heracliteans; it drew from the various texts a deep unity defined by the insistence on the clashes and contrasts of reality, which lead to a total suspension of judgement.

²⁴ See *Annotationes Petri Mosellani protogensis in clarissimas Auli Gellii Noctes Atticas*, vœnundantur Iodoco Badio Ascensio, Parisiis, 1528. These notes were included in Sebastian Gryphe’s editions from 1537 to the end of the 1550s.

²⁵ “*Epoche, assensus, retentio, quam inuexit Pyrrho, commentus rationem, qua nihil percipi & comprehendere posse diceret, de qua multis Hammonius in commen. ad Aristot. Catag.*”

²⁶ One can read this testimony in a later edition, such as *Ammonii Hermiae in Aristotelis Prædicamenta commentarius*, Venetiis, ap. Aldi filios, 1546, f° 6r°-v°.

²⁷ A. Busse gave the first modern edition of this text previously attributed to Ammonius: see *Philoponi (olim Ammonii) in Aristotelis Categorias commentarium*, A. Busse ed., “*Commentaria in Aristotelem Græca*”, XIII/1, Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1898, pp. 1–2.

This reading, because of the central role played in sceptical philosophy by the autoreflexive *ou mallon*, a contradiction which contradicts itself, had a deep impact on editors such as Henri Estienne and on authors such as Rabelais and Montaigne.²⁸ This interpretation derived from a Renaissance reading of Pyrrhonism – by Gellius, Laertius, Sextus and Eusebius – as a unified movement based on an examination process described in the *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* as a capacity of contradiction which creates the empirical conditions of suspension of judgment.²⁹ Such a contradiction is implicitly referred to itself, and just as the purgative rhubarb evacuates itself, this contradiction falls subject to its own contradiction, and is no more true than false. Scepticism thus provides the opportunity of attaining *ataraxia en tais doxais*, just as Sextus promised. Fundamentally linked with the rediscovery, in 1544, of the end of the *Præparatio evangelica*, which had been suppressed in previous editions,³⁰ this definition of scepticism as an art of *antithesis* had a great impact, at two different levels:

Firstly, scepticism no longer allowed the elaboration of any kind of truth, as in the case of its assimilation with Neo-Academism. It remained a dialectical process and rejected any possibility of a rational truth which could be universally shared. It could no longer be considered as a mere strategy for refuting other theories, insofar as – in the auto-destructive logic of an uncertain uncertainty – it suspended its own significance. The power of scepticism is more dangerous for its users than appears, as Montaigne remarks in the “Apology”³¹: to see in this weapon fatal for discursiveness simply a subordinate tool that founds the conditions of true faith for some, and, for others, the conditions of a new empiricism suited to rebuild science, is to ignore the intimate comprehension of this philosophy by some of the Renaissance scholars.

²⁸See E. Naya, “Traduire les *Hypotyposes Pyrrhoniennes*: Henri Estienne entre la fièvre quarte et la folie chrétienne” in *Le Retour du scepticisme aux XVI^e et au XVII^e siècle*, ed. Pierre-François Moreau. Paris: Albin Michel, 2001, pp. 48–101; “ni sceptique ni dogmatique, et tous les deux ensemble”: Rabelais “on phrontistere et escholle des pyrrhoniens”, *Etudes Rabelaisiennes*, xxxv, Genève: Droz, 1998, pp. 81–129; *Les Essais de Michel Seigneur de Montaigne*, Paris: Ellipses, 2006.

²⁹For a unified interpretation of ancient Pyrrhonism linked with a unified conception of *ou mallon*, see E. Naya, *Le Phénomène pyrrhonien* mentioned above, and *Le Vocabulaire des sceptiques*, Paris: Ellipses, 2002, notably pp. 35–37 (reprinted in *Le Vocabulaire des philosophes*, “De L’Antiquité à la Renaissance”, Paris: Ellipses, 2002, pp. 269–313).

³⁰*Eusebius Pamphili Evangelikis Προπαρασκευης*, Lutetia: ex officina Roberti Stephani, 1544.

³¹*Essays*, P. Villey ed., Paris: PUF, 1965, II, 12, pp. 559–560.

Furthermore, the impact of such a reading goes beyond the philosophical domain³²: implications are also aesthetic. The *skepsis* that is presented and applied by Sextus Empiricus founds a new poetics – which we can define as a specific art of organising discourses. The “new kind of language” that Montaigne mentions in his “Apology” opens up meaning and cancels any dogmatic conclusion.³³ It is intimately linked with the kind of self-contradicting discourse which creates an equilibrium in the production of meaning.³⁴ I have published elsewhere studies to show the creative power of such Pyrrhonian poetics in Sánchez, Rabelais and Montaigne’s works. Francisco Sánchez asks the reader a riddle in his *Quod nihil scitur*, where the confession of ignorance is contradicted by the announcement of a future and fruitful *examen rerum*. This *examen rerum*, an accurate translation of the term *skepsis* as used by Sextus, is nothing more than the *contemplatio* that Sánchez practises from the start of his book; it then allows him to create the conditions of an *epochè* which frees the reader’s judgment and shows in a suggestive way, but no longer by rational argument, that *skepsis* has no end and always must be re-applied to itself: such is, to my mind, the proper sense of Pyrrhonian *zêtêsis*. In the same way, Rabelais makes use with insistence of this faculty of contradiction (*dunamis antithêtikè*), in order to throw traditional allegorical interpretations into confusion and to create in readers the conditions of a response which is no longer rational but emotional, inaugurated by a “Pantagruelistic” spiritual interpretation. Even the Pyrrhonian lesson of the *Tiers Livre* – which is repeated three times – is submitted to the contradictory interpretations of the characters. This poetics of contradiction encloses all truth in an irreducible *diaphônia*, according to Sextus’ own term; it allows the reader to perceive a probable coherence, perceived and attained by emotion rather than by reasoned argument. As in Sextus, scepticism cannot be rationalised in the *Tiers Livre*, and calls itself into question in the same moment as it is evoked. In Rabelais’ works, these poetics seem to spring from a quest for aesthetics suitable to our human condition: any revelation has to be veiled, always being subject to contradiction, but always accessible beyond the scope of reason.³⁵ Finally, the poetical impact of this reading of *skepsis* was deeper in Montaigne’s *Essays*

³² On the diversification of a philosophical tradition in heterogeneous fields of thought, see T. C. Cave’s *Pré-Histoires, textes troublés au seuil de la modernité*, Genève: Droz, 1999.

³³ III, 12, p. 527.

³⁴ E. Naya, “Les mots ou les choses: le langage à l’essai”, under press by H. Champion in the proceedings of “*La lingua di Rabelais e di Montaigne*” (Roma, 13–17 Sept. 2003; C. Clavel and F. Giacone ed.).

³⁵ On these suggestions concerning Sánchez and Rabelais, see respectively: “*Quod nihil scitur*: la parole mise en doute”, *Libertinage et philosophie au XVIIe siècle*, 7: “La résurgence des philosophies antiques” (Publications de l’Université de Saint-Etienne), 2003, pp. 27–43; “La science-fiction pyrrhonienne: des perles aux cochons”, *Littératures*, 47, Toulouse: Presses de l’U.T.M., 2002, pp. 67–86.

than anywhere else, and I would like to go into more detail on that point. The “art de conferer”³⁶ which is not only a kind of conversation with others but also a treatise about the poetics of the *Essays*, is an exact transposition of Sextus Empiricus’ explanations on *skepsis*; let us note, in particular, the *dunamis antithétikè* of Sextus,³⁷ which had been translated in 1562 by Henri Estienne as a “*facultas quæ confert atque opponit*” (the faculty which compares appearances and opposes them). “L’art de *conferer*” is precisely an art of *antithesis*, the faculty which “*confert atque opponit*”: by his use of the term “conference” (discussion, conversation), Montaigne transposes the Latin translation of Estienne; he proposes an inquiry for truth that proceeds from a systematic contradiction of others, but also of one’s own dogmatic affirmations. To expose oneself to one’s own criticism, and to submit one’s own contradictions to another level of contradiction seem to be, in the *Essays*, the best way to moral and intellectual progress: “the good that worthy men do the public by making themselves imitable, I shall perhaps do by making myself evitable.”³⁸ Montaigne encourages an education in reverse by provoking contradiction and repulsion rather than adhesion and imitation (a behaviour that reproduces on the behavioural level the granting of assent characteristic of dogmatism, *sugkatathesis*, if not actually based on dogmatism). Instruction relying on the application of a model that can be generalized is opposed to instruction emerging from a gesture of self-correction of the learner who seeks, invents and freely tests his own model. Instruction “by contrast”³⁹ is based on a weighing and comparing; it is an individual exercise. It forms the singular being through his/her own powers and ties him/her to a voluntary self-formation. This “backward [improvement], by disagreement [...], by difference” (*ibid.*) is a method of which the application is “the most fruitful and natural exercise of our mind, [namely] discussion” (*ibid.*). Its description has a three-fold value: it is one of the “three kinds of association” valued by Montaigne,⁴⁰ but “conference” also describes the discursive technique at the heart of the philosophical enquiry and of the writing of the *Essays*, envisaged as a fruitful exercise, adapted to the laws of nature that govern our mind, in which one improves by stepping backwards, by successive refusals. “Conference,” finally, refers to the association with oneself in the self’s entirety, which is what Montaigne puts into practice by publishing the portrait of a man “quite badly formed,” a portrait which, considered as an end-product and no longer as an investigative process, may help

³⁶ III, 8.

³⁷ The real definition of the Pyrrhonian *skepsis* in the *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, I, 8.

³⁸ Our quotations come from Donald Frame’s edition (*The Complete Essays of Montaigne*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1958, noted *F.* before Villey’s (noted *V.*). Here, III, 8, *F.* 703, *V.* 921.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, *F.* 703, *V.* 922.

⁴⁰ III, 3.

others who share Montaigne's "complexion" to practise the "art de conferer." This art will itself be one of the "imperfections" that a reader can contradict and "flee". The self-abolishing momentum of discourse in this chapter, flowing from the dynamics of contestation, is one of the Pyrrhonian strategies which Montaigne uses most frequently, and it shows once more that no single positive example can be imposed. It is up to the reader to try out the essay, even when the essay theorizes its own method, and to submit the "art de conferer" to an "art de conferer." As in Sextus' *Outlines*, Montaigne does not bring the enquiry to a standstill at the moment when he describes it: the enquiry remains an object of enquiry, and the uncertainty of its result remains uncertain. Montaigne, just as he is not someone who imposes his morality, redefines the aim of his own discourse: he will "sting, touch" in order to "arouse" a personal truth in the heart of his interlocutor by "conference", a perfect copy of the antithesis that sceptical examination generates for Sextus. Montaigne thus conceives a practice which, while it does not exclude certain modalities of the exercise of civility and conversation inherited from Italy,⁴¹ refers basically to a precise philosophical procedure.⁴² If Estienne most often uses the second term (*opponit*) in describing the practice of opposition, Montaigne prefers the first, in the sense that the weighing-up he suggests includes a greater semantic spectrum and notably the idea of "commerce" with others. Discussion is a mode of the search for truth which is based on an instinctive reaction to "stupidity" and which suits the fundamental vanity of the mind to the extent that it respects its perpetual movement. Montaigne even suggests imposing a constraint on discussion that would force the participants to pursue further the movement of contradiction: "It would be useful if we decided our disputes by a wager, if there was a material mark of our losses, so that we might keep an account of them, and my valet could say to me: "It cost you a hundred crowns twenty times last year to be ignorant and stubborn"."⁴³ The two final terms mark here the two reasons for abandoning the dynamics: lack of knowledge, fatal in sceptical enquiry in which the result is not a mere ignorance but "an ignorance that requires no less knowledge to conceive it than does knowledge,"⁴⁴ and the feeling

⁴¹ See M. Tetel, "Montaigne et Guazzo: de deux conversations", *Etudes Montaignistes en l'honneur de P. Michel*, Geneva: Droz, 1984 and N. Panichi, *La virtù eloquente*, Urbino: Montefeltro, 2nd ed. 2001, pp. 203–232.

⁴² This imitative choice of terms in Estienne's translation – a frequent occurrence in Pyrrhonian vocabulary – fully confirms the connection that E. Pesty makes between "conference" (discussion) and "sceptical diatribe" at the end of his semantic study of the term ("Conferer", *Bulletin de la Société des Amis de Montaigne*, January 2000, p. 119).

⁴³ III, 8, F. 705, V. 924.

⁴⁴ III, 11, F. 788, V. 1030. If discussion requires "ammunition", it also requires an aptitude to distrust any statement enunciated as definitive: "not all the remarks that seem good to us should be accepted immediately. ... We must not always yield to it, whatever truth or beauty it may have. We must either deliberately oppose it, or draw back

that we possess an excess of knowledge (a stubbornness synonymous for Montaigne with dogmatism): both render impossible the pursuit of the joust, be it for lack of ammunition or for lack of intention. The metaphor of fencing, opposed to the static quality of reading which entails a cold crystallization of knowledge, displaces the therapeutics offered by Sextus to the areas of honour and virile exercise, which, like the vocabulary of hunting, are more adapted to Montaigne's *ethos*. The improvement of others, evoked at the beginning of the essay, is surpassed in favour of a practice which turns back on itself and whose goal is shared by the opponent. Montaigne does not distinguish two instances separated by quest and knowledge. Because Montaigne is fully aware that sceptical enquiry is anchored in ongoing philosophical research – one might even say dogmatic research, an enquiry whose “cause of truth should be the common cause”⁴⁵ – he does not designate suspension of judgment as the end-product of his art of discussion, but rather assigns a dialectical effort tending toward a single goal: access to truth. Let us note that the discourses that are opposed are, just as in the Pyrrhonian logic of the auto-reflexive *ou mallon*, perfectly indifferent in their content. It is only the effort to create a resistance necessary to reorient research that counts, since one is led to suspension of judgement concerning each proposition: “I care little about the subject matter, opinions are all one to me, and I am almost indifferent about which opinion wins.”⁴⁶ This evaluation of content, similar to the equivalence of the “fancies” that constitute the *Essays* in III. 9, is associated with an open and indifferent attitude.⁴⁷ Montaigne can easily “let the other [scale of a balance] vacillate under an old woman's dreams”⁴⁸ and embrace a superstition that he will contradict three chapters further on, provided that he avoids the stubbornness and immobility produced by rational assent, this “obstinacy and

under colour of not understanding it, in order to feel out on all sides how it is lodged in its author. It may happen that we run on the point of his sword and help his blow to carry beyond its reach” (*ibid.*, F. 715, V. 936): this procedure of falsification in order “to feel out on all sides” theorizes the practice of the “specific discourses” that Sextus uses in the two last books of the *Outlines* and in the entire work *Against the Professors* in order to prove that any proposition can be reversed and contradicted dogmatically by the inverse proposition.

⁴⁵ III, 8, F. 705, V. 924.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, F. 706, V. 925.

⁴⁷ “No propositions astonish me, no belief offends me, whatever contrast it offers with my own. There is no fancy so frivolous and so extravagant that it does not seem to me quite suitable to the production of the human mind. We who deprive our judgment of the right to make decisions look mildly on opinions different from ours; and if we do not lend them our judgment, we easily lend them our ears.” (*Ibid.*, F 704, V 923).

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, F. 704, V. 923.

heat of opinion [that] is the surest proof of stupidity.”⁴⁹ If, following the logic of the essay, Montaigne may contradict himself, truth itself is not contradicted as long as the opinions wielded in the contradictory examination have an equal appearance of truth, are equally verisimilar in the Pyrrhonian sense of the word.

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In conclusion, all these readings of the Pyrrhonian philosophy were allowed by the ambiguity of ancient textual testimonies and by the plurality of combinations that thus became possible. Thus Scepticism became a multi-purpose tool: a machine for ruining rationalism, as for Pico or Estienne, and a way of rebuilding rationalism with more moderation and exactitude, as for Talon or Hervet. According to the degree of philological and philosophical accuracy of each Renaissance scholar, the links between scepticism and religion were extremely varied: while some authors, such as the Protestant Estienne or Hervet, who adhered to the conclusions of the council of Trent, promoted the concept of sceptical fideism⁵⁰ – which was, in fact, for both of them, a means to obtain approval from religious authorities –, Protestants such as Luther, Melanchton or Theodore de Bèze rejected it because of its intolerable ethics linked with an impossible and culpable *apatheia*; Trent Catholics like Melchior Cano, in his *Loci theologici*,⁵¹ also rejected it insofar as the Augustino-Thomist Catholicism of the Council could not abandon rational mediation: for him, to renounce one’s own natural light of reason was nothing other than to reactivate the error of Luther or Agrippa von Nettesheim, “*vir post hominum memoriam vanissimus*.”⁵² The connexion between scepticism and religion is much more complex than it might seem, and the religious sensibilities which held authority in the confessional construction of the 1520–1560s were *a priori* incompatible with such a philosophy. If the connection was sometimes possible, it was at the cost of theoretical inflexions that must be taken into account: sometimes scepticism was denatured and reduced to its Neo-Academic form, in order to render it compatible with the idea of “veiled truth”, a probabilism which gave intellectual access to faith by “motives of credibility”; at other times, religious doctrine was deeply transformed in

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, F. 717, V. 938.

⁵⁰ It is possible to understand Estienne’s promotion of the *naturalis instinctus* not in the Protestant meaning of strong and lively faith, but as a mere transposition of Sextus’ theory of piety, based on the will to follow the ordinary view, to “live in accordance with the normal rules of life”. If Estienne’s promotion of Pyrrhonism is in keeping with the general religious pattern of Geneva, his description of Pyrrhonism is all the more accurate since his philological and doctrinal annotations at the end of his edition are precise.

⁵¹ *D. Domini Melchioris Cani Episcopi Canariensis De locis Theologicis Libri Duedecim*, Mathias Gastius, Salamanticae, 1563.

⁵² *Ibid.*, Cap. 3, p. 290.

order to render it compatible with scepticism: it became a kind of anti-intellectual Paulinism as for Rabelais, allowing a real connection between faith and Pyrrhonian doubt through mysticism; or religion was drained of its theological substance, as in Montaigne's *Essays*, where faith, implicitly purified of most of its dogmatic articles, tended to become natural – like the piety described in the Isle of Dioscorides.⁵³ Just as Renaissance Pyrrhonism had many different aspects, according to its many variegated interpretations, the question of its connection to religion change, as with so many other phenomena, must be approached, if not sceptically, at least from an almost nominalist point of view.

⁵³ I, 56, p. 322.

2. SELF-KNOWLEDGE, SCEPTICISM AND THE QUEST FOR A NEW METHOD: JUAN LUIS VIVES ON COGNITION AND THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF PERFECT KNOWLEDGE

Lorenzo Casini
University of Uppsala, Sweden

Introduction

The Spanish-born humanist Juan Luis Vives (1493–1540) is remembered as an educational and social theorist who strongly opposed scholasticism and made his mark as one of the most influential advocates of humanistic learning in the early sixteenth century. Vives aspired at replacing the scholastic tradition in all fields of learning with a humanist curriculum inspired by classical education, and his endeavour to develop ways of presenting the goal and scope of knowledge in a methodical fashion for the purpose of instruction had considerable influence on later educational theory and practice. He was not a systematic writer, which makes it difficult to classify him as a philosopher, and his thought is often described as eclectic, pragmatic, as well as historical in its orientation.¹

The aim of the present study is to investigate a further aspect of Vives' thought: namely, his scepticism about the possibility of acquiring certain rational knowledge.² In his writings, Vives frequently stresses the limitations of human knowledge.³ In *De vita et moribus eruditi* (1531), for example, he maintains that

¹ For a general study of Vives' thought, see Carlos G. Noreña, *Juan Luis Vives*. The Hague: Nijhoff, 1970.

² One caveat that must be mentioned involves my use of the term 'scepticism'. This term may suggest a particular brand of scepticism, i.e., Pyrrhonian scepticism, which is characterised by a set of tropes or arguments aiming at the suspension of judgement (*epochê*) and tranquillity of mind (*ataraxia*). I use it, however, in a more broad sense, which not only has hostility to dogmatism in view, but also refers to the conviction that the human mind is principally incapable to grasp the true nature of things.

³ For an edition of Vives' collected works, see Juan Luis Vives, *Opera omnia*. Gregorio Mayans y Siscár, ed. Valencia: Monfort, 1782–1790; reprinted London: Gregg Press, 1964. References to this edition are preceded by the letter M.

“philosophy rests entirely upon opinions and verisimilar conjectures.”⁴ In what follows, I discuss Vives’ place among different currents of scepticism, along with an examination of links to other Renaissance figures.⁵ Special attention is paid to the connection of Vives’ psychology with his peculiar brand of scepticism. On account of his insights into human nature and conduct, he has occasionally been called “the father of modern psychology.”⁶ He avoided the systematic rigidity of scholastic philosophy, preferring a looser descriptive approach, which, according to modern scholars, marks the transition from metaphysical to empirical psychology.⁷ It is argued that an important aspect concerning the background of Vives’ descriptive approach to the study of the soul is his emphasis on the limitations of human knowledge.

Self-Knowledge and Scepticism

The increased and intensified interest in the investigation of human nature that characterised the Renaissance was closely connected with moral philosophy. Since the soul was considered the source of man’s thoughts and actions, as well as the seat of his ultimate perfection, the philosophical study of the soul was regarded as fundamental to ethics.⁸ As Jill Kraye has pointed out, ethics “concerned the formation of man’s moral character or, in the Latin terminology, his

⁴ M, VI, 417: “Philosophia opinionibus tota et conjecturis verisimilitudinis est nixa.”

⁵ Vives’ epistemological pessimism is also connected to his attitude to the so-called maker’s knowledge tradition, which regards knowledge as a kind of making or as a capacity to make. He often insists on the significance of the practical nature of knowledge (see, e.g., M, VI, 350 and 374), pointing out that “man knows as far as he can make” (M, IV, 63). A central tenet of the maker’s knowledge tradition is that man can gain no access into nature’s works, since these, as *opera divina*, are only known to their maker. I hope to be able to provide a more detailed discussion of this important aspect of Vives’ thought in a future study. On the maker’s knowledge tradition, see Antonio Pérez-Ramos, *Francis Bacon’s Idea of Science and the Maker’s Knowledge Tradition*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1988.

⁶ An important source behind this view is Friedrich Albert Lange (1828–1875), who in a long article on Vives calls him “the father of the new empirical psychology”. See Friedrich Albert Lange, “Vives” in *Encyklopädie des gesammten Erziehungs- und Unterrichtswesens*, 11 vols. K. A. Schmid, ed. Gotha: Besser, 1859–1878, IX, 770. Cf. also Foster Watson, “The Father of Modern Psychology”, *Psychological Review* 22 (1915), 333–356. In the view of Gregory Zilboorg, “Vives was not only the father of modern, empirical psychology, but the true forerunner of the dynamic psychology of the twentieth century”. See Gregory Zilboorg, *A History of Medical Psychology*. New York: Norton, 1941, 194.

⁷ See, e.g., Wilhelm Dilthey, *Gesammelte Schriften II*. Leipzig: Teubner, 1914, 423.

⁸ See, e.g., Domenico Bosco, *La decifrazione dell’ordine: Morale e antropologia in Francia nella prima età moderna*, 2 vols. Milano: Vita e Pensiero, 1988, I, 125–258, but especially 190–233.

mores. But before philosophers could even begin considering how to train man's character, they first had to understand his nature."⁹

Vives' philosophical reflections on the human soul are mainly concentrated in *De anima et vita* (1538).¹⁰ This treatise, which belongs to the late and philosophically more interesting and mature stage of his intellectual career, might be characterised as a prolegomenon to moral philosophy and, like most of the moral literature of the Renaissance, it is addressed to an audience of educated lay readers.¹¹ In the dedication to the Duke of Béjar, Vives maintains that no kind of knowledge is more excellent and useful than that of the soul, which is more noble and worthy of consideration than anything else on earth and in the heavens.¹²

These remarks bring to the reader's mind the famous letter in which Francesco Petrarca (1304–1374) describes his ascent of mount Ventoux. He writes that after having reached the peak of the mountain, he opened Augustine's *Confessions* at random and his eyes fell on the following passage:

Here are men going afar to marvel at the heights of mountains, the mighty waves of the sea, the long courses of great rivers, the vastness of the ocean, the movements of the stars, yet leaving themselves unnoticed.¹³

⁹ See Jill Kraye, "Moral Philosophy" in Charles B. Schmitt, Quentin Skinner and Eckhard Kessler, eds., *The Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988, 305f.

¹⁰ There is still no critical edition of Vives's *De anima et vita*. For an edition which can be called critical in the limited sense that it compares Mayans's text with the first edition of 1538, see Juan Luis Vives, *De anima et vita*. Mario Sancipriano, ed. Padova: Gregoriana, 1974. References to this edition are preceded by the letter S. All quotations from *De anima et vita* are taken from Sancipriano's edition. On the lack of critical editions of Vives's works see Jozef IJsewijn, "Zu einer kritischen Edition der Werke des J. L. Vives" in August Buck, ed., *Juan Luis Vives: Arbeitsgespräch in der Herzog August Bibliothek Wolfenbüttel vom 6. bis 8. November 1980*. Hamburg: Hauswedell, 1981, 23–34.

¹¹ Cf. also Helio Carpintero who has described Vives' psychology as a series of "preambula moralis." See Helio Carpintero, "Luis Vives, psicólogo funcionalista" in *Revista de Filosofía* 6 (1993), 320. The most recent studies of Vives' philosophical psychology are Carlos G. Noreña, *Juan Luis Vives and the Emotions*. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1989; and Lorenzo Casini, *Cognitive and Moral Psychology in Renaissance Philosophy: A Study of Juan Luis Vives' De anima et vita*. Uppsala: Universitetstryckeriet, 2006.

¹² S, 82; M, III, 298: "Nulla est rei alicuius vel præstabilior cognitio, quam de anima, vel iucundior, vel admirabilior, quæque tantum adferat ad res maximas utilitas. Nam quod anima excellentissima sit omnium, quæ sub cælo sunt condita, atque adeo cælis quoque ipsis potior atque excellentior, fit, ut quæcunque de illa possimus assequi, permagni æstimentur. Accedit tanta in illa varietas, is contentus, ornatusque, ut nec terræ ipsæ, nec cæli adeo sint depicti et descripti." Cf. Aristotle, *De anima*, 402a1–7.

¹³ Augustine, *Confessiones*, X.8. Quoted from Augustine, *Confessions*, transl. F. J. Sheed. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1993, 180.

Petrarca was astonished and closed the book enraged with himself because he was admiring earthly things when he ought to know that “nothing is wonderful except the human soul compared to whose greatness nothing is great.”¹⁴ Similarly, we read in his *De sui ipsius et multorum ignorantia* (1367):

And even if they were true, they would not contribute anything whatsoever to the blessed life. What is the use – I beseech you – of knowing the nature of quadrupeds, fowls, fishes, and serpents and not knowing or even neglecting man’s nature, the purpose for which we are born, and whence and whereto we travel?¹⁵

Like Petrarca, Vives insists that human problems should be the main subject and concern of philosophy. In *De causis corruptarum artium* (1531), a thorough critique of the foundations of contemporary education, he praises Socrates for having transferred his attention from the knowledge of the heavens, the elements and all other things, to himself, bringing thereby philosophy down from its lofty wanderings.¹⁶

According to Vives, self-knowledge is fundamental in order to improve our character. Since the origin of all our goods and evils is in the soul, nothing is as useful as the knowledge of it, so that, as he puts it, “having cleansed the source, all the actions that spring from it will be pure”. In his view, no one who has not explored himself can govern his soul and be the master of his conduct.¹⁷ This is why the ancient oracle, which was celebrated in the whole world, commanded that self-knowledge should be placed as the first step towards wisdom.¹⁸

¹⁴ Francesco Petrarca, *Le Familiari*, Vittorio Rossi and Umberto Bosco, eds., 4 vols. Firenze: Edizione nazionale delle opere, 1933–1942, I, 153–161. Cf. Seneca, *Epistolae morales*, VIII.5.

¹⁵ Francesco Petrarca, “On His Own Ignorance and that of Many Others” in Ernst Cassirer, Paul Oskar Kristeller and John Herman Randall, Jr., eds., *The Renaissance Philosophy of Man*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1948, 58f.

¹⁶ M, VI, 208f. Cf. Cicero, *Tusculanae disputationes*, V.4.10–11.

¹⁷ S, 82; M, III, 298: “Iam vero quod illic fons est atque origo bonorum omnium nostrorum, et malorum, nihil est conducibilis, quam probe nosci: ut purgato fonte, puri dimanent rivuli omnium actionum. Neque enim poterit animum gubernare, et semetipsum ad recte agendum habere in sua potestate, qui se non explorarit.”

¹⁸ S, 84; M, III, 298: “Idcirco vetustum illud oraculum toto orbe celebratissimum, in progressu sapientiae primum poni gradum illum iubebat, ut quisque sese nosset.” Vives describes self-knowledge as the first step towards wisdom also in the extremely popular *Introductio ad sapientiam*, a short handbook of morals blending stoicism and Christianity, which was first published in 1524 and translated into German, English, Spanish and French during the first half of the sixteenth century. See M, I, 48: “Hic est cursus absolutae sapientiae, cujus primus gradus est *Nosse se*, postremus *Nosse Deum*.”

But how do we come to know what the soul is? One approach, which is best exemplified by Augustine, consists in a first-person perspective that pays close attention to the phenomena of introspective consciousness. Augustine, using an argument later adapted by René Descartes, defended the possibility of knowledge against the sceptics by calling attention to the immediacy and self-evidence of the knowledge of our inner states, trying thereby to show that sceptical doubts concerning the reliability of sense perception do not affect the possibility of our search for truth.¹⁹ “Do not go abroad,” he writes in *De vera religione*, “return within yourself. In the inward man dwells truth.”²⁰

In *De civitate dei*, Augustine pointed out to the sceptic that the certainty of our own existence is irrefutable. The latter’s objection that I could be mistaken about my own existence does not make any sense, since if I do not exist then I surely can not be mistaken either. So, if I am mistaken I certainly exist.²¹ A similar line of thought can be found in *De Trinitate*:

Nobody surely doubts, however, that he lives and remembers and understands and wills and thinks and knows and judges. At least, even if he doubts, he lives; if he doubts, he remembers why he is doubting; if he doubts, he understands he is doubting; if he doubts, he has a will to be certain; if he doubts, he thinks; if he doubts, he knows he does not know; if he doubts, he judges he ought not to give a hasty assent. You may have your doubts about anything else, but you should have no doubts about these; if they were not certain, you would not be able to doubt anything.²²

A very different approach to the knowledge of the essence of the soul goes back to Aristotle and consists in a third-person perspective that starts from the observable behaviour of human beings. On this account, the fact that the real nature of the soul is imperceptible does not necessarily mean that we cannot still grasp it through its external operations. Thomas Aquinas, for example, maintained that definitive conclusions could be reached about the essence of the soul through its accidents:

¹⁹ See, e.g., Augustine, *De trinitate*, XV.12.21. For a thorough discussion of the similarities between Augustine’s concept of mind and that of Descartes, see Gareth B. Matthews, *Thought’s Ego in Augustine and Descartes*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992; and Stephen Menn, *Descartes and Augustine*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

²⁰ Augustine, *Of True Religion in Augustine: Earlier Writings*, transl. John H. S. Burleigh, The Library of Christian Classics. London: SCM Press, 1953, 39.72. For some other passages in which Augustine exhorts to introspection, see *Contra Academicos*, III.19.42; *De quantitate animae*, 28.55; and *De libero arbitrio*, II.16.41.

²¹ Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, XI.26.

²² Augustine, *De trinitate*, X.10.14. Quoted from Augustine, *The Trinity*, transl. Edmund Hill. New York: New City Press, 1991, 296f.

But because the essential principles of things are concealed (*ignota*) from us, we must use accidental distinguishing characteristics (*differentiis*) in designating essential characteristics. [...] It is through these accidental distinguishing characteristics, consequently, that we reach a cognition of essential characteristics.²³

A vindication for this approach can also be found in Gregor Reisch's *Margarita philosophica* (1503), one of the most influential textbooks published during Vives' lifetime.²⁴ According to Reisch, "all our knowledge is derived from the senses. But spiritual substances, including the soul that confers life and motion on living beings, cannot be perceived by the senses. Thus it is difficult to arrive at knowledge of it except through its operations."²⁵

Vives' epistemological pessimism can also be discerned in matters pertaining to psychological studies: "Nothing", he writes, "is more concealed than the soul, which is most obscure and ignored by all."²⁶ In what could be regarded as an implicit criticism of the Augustinian view that each one of us knows what the soul is simply and solely by knowing himself, Vives emphasizes how problematic it is to observe our mental operations by introspection. In his view, "it is very arduous, difficult and full of intricacies and obscurity to investigate what, how

²³ Thomas Aquinas, *A Commentary on Aristotle's De anima*, transl. by Robert Pasnau. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999, 11. A troublesome consequence of Aquinas' theory has been highlighted by Anthony Kenny, who writes that "Aquinas' general theory of knowledge [...] makes intellectual knowledge of any individual problematic. The reason is that the principle of individuation for material objects is individual matter; and our intellect understands by abstracting ideas from such matter. But what is abstracted from individual matter is universal. So our intellect is not directly capable of knowing anything which is not universal. If this is so, how can I have intellectual knowledge of myself? According to Aquinas I am neither a disembodied spirit nor a universal, but a human being, an individual material object. As an individual material substance, it seems, I can be no fit object for intellectual cognition." See Anthony Kenny, "Body, Soul, and Intellect in Aquinas" in M. James C. Crabbe, ed., *From Soul to Self*. London: Routledge, 1999, 41f.

²⁴ On this work and its author, see Charles H. Lohr, "Renaissance Latin Aristotle Commentaries: Authors Pi-Sm", *Renaissance Quarterly* 33 (1980), 685f.; Katherine Park, "The Organic Soul" in Charles B. Schmitt, Quentin Skinner and Eckhard Kessler, eds., *The Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988, 464–473; and Lucia Andreini, *Gregor Reisch e la sua Margarita Philosophica*. Salzburg: Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik, Universität Salzburg, 1997. Vives was familiar with Reisch's work and recommends the section on mathematics in *De tradendis disciplinis* (1531). See M, VI, 372.

²⁵ Quoted from Katherine Park, "The Organic Soul" in Charles B. Schmitt, Quentin Skinner and Eckhard Kessler, eds., *The Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988, 465ff.

²⁶ S, 86; M, III, 299: "Nam ut nihil est magis quam anima reconditum, magisque ad omnes obscurum atque ignoratum."

many and how the operations of the faculties of the mind are, which their origin, beginning, increasing, decreasing and end are, since we, above our mind, have not another one which can behold and judge the one below.”²⁷

Vives seems also to be less confident than Aquinas and Reisch about the possibility of making the real nature of the soul intelligible by reasoning demonstratively from its operations. In one of the most frequently quoted passages from *De anima et vita*, he even asserts:

We are not interested in knowing what the soul is, but rather how it is and what its operations are. Neither did he, who exhorted us to know ourselves, refer to the essence of the soul, but to the actions that mould our morals.²⁸

In this context, modern commentators tend to stress the novelty of Vives’ approach, represented in their view by the progressive elimination of the analysis of metaphysical aspects of the structure of the soul in favour of its phenomenological manifestations.²⁹ It might, however, be worthwhile to ask whether the statement quoted above is not better described as a consequence of his pessimistic views with regard to our cognitive powers. As Marcia Colish has pointed out, the “distinction drawn by Vives between man’s essence and his activity springs from his conception of man’s intellectual limitations. The essences of things may be objects of wonder; they are not, however, legitimate objects of knowledge.”³⁰ Moreover, although Vives is rarely mentioned in connection with Renaissance scepticism, much of the endeavour of the Spanish-born humanist can, in fact, be seen in the light of the tradition of Academic scepticism.³¹

²⁷ S, 216; M, III, 342: “Quæ sint harum facultatum actiones, quot, quales, qui earum ortus, progressus, incrementa, decrementa, occasus, perscrutari longe arduissimum ac difficillimum, plenissimumque intricatæ obscuritatis; propterea quod supra mentem hanc non habemus aliam, quæ inferiorem posit spectare ac censere.” Cf. also Seneca’s epistle CXXI where he maintains: “We also know that we possess souls, but we do not know the essence, the place, the quality, or the source, of the soul.” Quoted from Seneca, *Ad Lucilium epistulae morales III*, transl. Richard M. Gummere, Loeb Classical Library. London: Heinemann, 1925, 403.

²⁸ S, 188; M, III, 332: “Anima quid sit, nihil interest nostra scire: qualis autem et quæ eius opera, permultum; nec qui iussit ut ipsi nos nossemus, de essentia animæ sensit, sed de actionibus ad compositionem morum.”

²⁹ See, e.g., Valerio Del Nero, “Pedagogia e psicologia nel pensiero di Vives” in Juan Luis Vives, *Opera Omnia I: Volumen Introductorio*, Antonio Mestre, ed. Valencia: Generalitat Valenciana, 1992, 211.

³⁰ Marcia L. Colish, “The Mime of God: Vives on the Nature of Man”, *Journal of the History of Ideas* 23 (1962), 11.

³¹ For a noteworthy exception, see José A. Fernández Santamaría, *Juan Luis Vives: Esceptismo y prudencia en el Renacimiento*. Salamanca: Ediciones Universidad de Salamanca, 1990; and José A. Fernández Santamaría, *The Theater of Man: J. L. Vives on Society*. Philadelphia, PA: Transactions of the American Philosophical Society, 1998.

The Emergence of Scepticism in the Renaissance

The main sources for our knowledge of Academic scepticism are the writings of Marcus Tullius Cicero (106–43 BC), especially *Academica*, his dialogue on the nature and possibility of knowledge.³² In many of his works, Cicero employed the strategy of arguing both sides of a question. His aim, however, was not the suspension of judgement (*epochê*), but rather the weighing of opposite arguments as the most reliable route to probability or verisimilitude.³³

The sole object of our discussions is by arguing on both sides to draw out and give shape to some result that may be either true or the nearest possible approximation to the truth. Nor is there any difference between ourselves and those who think that they have positive knowledge except that they have no doubt that their tenets are true, whereas we hold many doctrines as probable, which we can easily act upon but can scarcely advance as certain.³⁴

From the point of view of the diffusion of sceptical ideas, the most important part of the dialogue is Cicero's final speech, where he delivers the sceptical rebuttal, arguing forcefully that knowledge requires certainty, but that certainty is neither attainable nor necessary for the rational conduct of life.³⁵

³² Cicero had embraced the sceptical stance of the Academy when he followed Philo's lectures in Rome (88–84 BC). Whether he remained an Academic sceptic throughout his life or changed affiliation before reverting to scepticism in his old age is a matter of dispute. See John Glucker, "Cicero's Philosophical Affiliations" in John M. Dillon and A.A. Long, eds., *The Question of "Eclecticism": Studies in Later Greek Philosophy*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1988, 34–69; Peter Steinmetz, "Beobachtungen zu Ciceros philosophischem Standpunkt" in William W. Fortenbaugh and Peter Steinmetz, eds., *Cicero's Knowledge of the Peripatos*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1989, 1–22; and Woldemar Görler, "Silencing the Troublemaker: *De Legibus* 1.39 and the Continuity of Cicero's Scepticism" in J. G. F. Powell, ed., *Cicero the Philosopher: Twelve Papers*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1995, 85–113.

³³ It is usually assumed that *probabile* and *veri simile* are the terms by means of which Cicero translated Carneades' *pythanon*. On this topic, see John Glucker, "*Probabile, Veri Simile*, and Related Terms" in J. G. F. Powell, ed., *Cicero the Philosopher: Twelve Papers*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1995, 115–143. On Carneades' notion of the persuasive or plausible (*to pythanon*), see Richard Bett, "Carneades' *Pythanon*: A Reappraisal of Its Role and Status", *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 7 (1989), 59–94.

³⁴ Cicero, *Academica*, II.7–8. Quoted from Cicero, *Academica*, transl. H. Rackham, Loeb Classical Library. London: Heinemann, 1933, 475.

³⁵ For a discussion of Cicero's personal brand of scepticism, see Woldemar Görler, "Cicero's Philosophical Stance in the *Lucullus*" in Jaap Mansfeld and Brad Inwood, eds., *Assent and Argument: Studies in Cicero's Academic Books*. Leiden: Brill, 1997, 36–57; J. C. Davies, "The Originality of Cicero's Philosophical Works", *Latomus* 30 (1971), 105–119; and Michael Buckley, "Philosophic Method in Cicero", *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 8 (1970), 143–154.

The sceptical arguments contained in Cicero's writings came to play an important role in the Renaissance criticism of the Aristotelian notion of scientific knowledge. Arguing that the discovery of truth implies great difficulties, and that the best thing we can work out is a method which makes it possible to attain the most probable knowledge, the humanist critics challenged the traditional treatment of logic, in an attempt to show the vacuity of syllogistic conclusions and the failure of Aristotelian logic in leading to concrete and genuine knowledge.³⁶

A tendency toward Academic scepticism can be discerned already in Petrarca's thought. He spoke several times with approval of the attitude of the Academics, particularly in his *De sui ipsius et multorum ignorantia*. It has also been argued that authors such as Lorenzo Valla (1407–1457) and Rudolph Agricola (1444–1485), far from being contemptuous of logic, emphasised a broader concept of logic, which encompassed the probabilistic arguments of Academic scepticism. According to this view, they drew inspiration from Cicero and championed the Academic stance, denying the possibility of certain knowledge and laying out a theory of probabilism as the basis of their epistemology.³⁷

The role of scepticism in the development of modern thought was for a long time completely neglected. It was not until Richard Popkin and Charles Schmitt started writing on the recovery of texts containing sceptical ideas and their use in philosophical discussions, that the importance of the revival of sceptical arguments

³⁶ See Richard H. Popkin, "Theories of Knowledge" in Charles B. Schmitt, Quentin Skinner and Eckhard Kessler, eds., *The Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988, 672f.

³⁷ This thesis has been strenuously argued by Lisa Jardine. See Lisa Jardine, "Lorenzo Valla and the Intellectual Origins of Humanist Dialectic", *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 15 (1977), 143–164; Lisa Jardine, "Humanism and the Teaching of Logic" in Norman Kretzmann, Anthony Kenny and Jan Pinborg, eds., *The Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982, 797–807; Lisa Jardine, "Lorenzo Valla: Academic Scepticism and the New Humanist Dialectic" in Myles Burnyeat, ed., *The Sceptical Tradition*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1983, 253–286; and Lisa Jardine, "Humanistic Logic" in Charles B. Schmitt, Quentin Skinner and Eckhard Kessler, eds., *The Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988, 173–198. Jardine's thesis has not remained unchallenged and it has been pointed out that Valla and Agricola are not sceptics in more than the weakest sense of the term. See, e.g., John Monfasani, "Lorenzo Valla and Rudolph Agricola", *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 28 (1990), 181–200; Peter Mack, *Renaissance Argument: Valla and Agricola in the Traditions of Rhetoric and Dialectic*. Leiden: Brill, 1993; and Lodi Nauta, "Lorenzo Valla and Quattrocento Scepticism" in *Vivarium* 44 (2006), 375–395.

in the Renaissance became acknowledged.³⁸ Nonetheless, a great deal of work remains in order to refine our understanding of the initial stages of the history of modern scepticism. The idea that there was not very much serious philosophical consideration of scepticism prior to the publication of Sextus Empiricus' works, represents a significant obstacle in this respect. On this received view, Henri Estienne's edition of his translation of *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* in 1562, and the publication of Gantier Hervet's translation of *Adversus mathematicos* in 1569, played a decisive role in the popularisation of sceptical ideas and the development of modern philosophy. This view, however, not only promotes a tendency to neglect sceptical manifestations that existed prior to the publication of Sextus' writings, but is also conducive to a propensity to understand all sceptical thinking of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century in the light of Pyrrhonism. The emergence of scepticism during the Renaissance seems to be a far more complicated and interesting story, and, thus, the received view needs to be reconsidered.³⁹

To begin with, although the works of Sextus Empiricus constitute what may be called the *summa sceptica*, it must be remembered that information on ancient scepticism, especially in its Academic form, could also be derived from

³⁸ Popkin's thesis that the rediscovery, translation, and publication of Sextus Empiricus' works in the Renaissance found fertile intellectual ground in the religious controversies raised by the Reformation, rendering scepticism central in the unfolding of modern philosophy, was first stated in 1960, repeated in later works and recently further defended in the third expanded version of *The History of Scepticism*. See Richard H. Popkin, *The History of Scepticism from Savonarola to Bayle*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003. For the reappraisal of the role of ancient scepticism in the Renaissance, see also Charles B. Schmitt, *Cicero Scepticus: A Study of the Influence of the Academia in the Renaissance*. The Hague: Nijhoff, 1972; and Charles B. Schmitt, "The Rediscovery of Ancient Scepticism in Modern Times" in Myles Burnyeat, ed., *The Sceptical Tradition*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1983, 225–251. For an account of Renaissance and early modern philosophy emphasising the role of scepticism, see, e.g., *The Return of Scepticism: From Hobbes and Descartes to Bayle*. Gianni Paganini, ed. Kluwer: Dordrecht, 2003; and *Scepticism in Renaissance and Post-Renaissance Thought: New Interpretations*. José R. Maia Neto and Richard H. Popkin, eds. Amherst, MA: Prometheus Books, 2004.

³⁹ For a recent contribution to the reassessment of the role of sceptical thinking in the emergence of modern thought, see Ian Maclean, "The 'Sceptical Crisis' Reconsidered: Galen, Rational Medicine and the *Libertas Philosophandi*" in *Early Science and Medicine* 11 (2006), 247–274. Unfortunately Maclean does not discuss how several sixteenth-century authors, such as Omer Talon (ca. 1510–1562) and Michel de Montaigne (1533–1592), saw the approach of Academic scepticism as offering an example of how philosophy can function as a free enquiry into truth. See Charles B. Schmitt, *Cicero Scepticus: A Study of the Influence of the Academia in the Renaissance*. The Hague: Nijhoff, 1972, 81–91; and José R. Maia Neto, "Epoche as Perfection: Montaigne's View of Ancient Scepticism" in *Scepticism in Renaissance and Post-Renaissance Thought: New Interpretations*. José R. Maia Neto and Richard H. Popkin, eds. Amherst, MA: Prometheus Books, 2004, 13–42.

the writings of Cicero, Plutarch, Galen, Diogenes Laertius, Eusebius, Lactantius and Augustine, among many others. Ignorance of the substance or essence of the soul is, for example, a common theme in the philosophical psychology of Galen of Pergamum (129–ca. 210), whose writings played a crucial role in the medical renaissance of the sixteenth century.⁴⁰ In *De placitis Hippocratis et Platonis*, which seems to have been one of Vives' sources, Galen repeatedly maintains that the existence of the soul and the location of its parts are known from its activities, but that question of the soul's substance at best admits of plausibility, and not certainty.⁴¹ As Phillip De Lacy has pointed out, according to Galen, "we know that the soul exists because we can distinguish its parts and its powers; and this knowledge is useful both for medicine and for ethical and political philosophy. But we do not know the substance (*ousía*) of [...] the soul, and such knowledge, even if we had it, would be of no help either for the promotion of ethical and political virtue, or for the cure of the soul's afflictions."⁴²

Secondly, although virtually unknown in the West in the Middle Ages, the writings of Sextus Empiricus became available during the fifteenth century and were read much more extensively than has been previously thought.⁴³ The first work in which philosophical use is made of the arsenal of sceptical arguments contained

⁴⁰ A general account of Galen's views and their afterlife can be found in Owsei Temkin, *Galenism: Rise and Decline of a Medical Philosophy*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1973. For Galen's influence in the Renaissance, see also Andrew Wear, "Galen in the Renaissance" in Vivian Nutton, ed., *Galen: Problems and Prospects*. London: The Wellcome Institute, 1981, 229–262; and Vivian Nutton, "The Anatomy of the Soul in Early Renaissance Medicine" in Gordon R. Dunstan, ed., *The Human Embryo: Aristotle and the Arabic and European Traditions*. Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1990, 136–157. For a comprehensive account of editions and translations of Galenic texts in the Renaissance, see Richard J. Durling, "A Chronological Census of Renaissance Editions and Translations of Galen", *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* XXIV (1961), 230–305.

⁴¹ See, e.g., Galen, *De placitis Hippocratis et Platonis*, 3 vols., *Corpus Medicorum Graecorum* V 4.1.2. Phillip De Lacy, ed. Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1978–1984, IX, 9.1–6. On this issue, see also Michael Frede, "On Galen's Epistemology" in idem, *Essays in Ancient Philosophy*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1987, 279–298.

⁴² Phillip De Lacy, "Galen's Platonism", *American Journal of Philology* 93 (1972), 36.

⁴³ The first Latin translation of *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* was established around 1300 and survives in three manuscripts. For a discussion of the authorship of the translator and the impact this text may have had on later discussions, see Roland Wittwer, *Sextus Latinus: Die erste lateinische Übersetzung von Sextus Empiricus' Pyrrōneioi Hypotyposis*. Leiden: Brill (forthcoming). By the end of the fifteenth century the interest for Sextus was considerable and Greek manuscripts were available in Rome, Venice and Florence. See Luciano Floridi, *Sextus Empiricus: The Transmission and Recovery of Pyrrhonism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002; and Luciano Floridi, "The Diffusion of Sextus's Works in the Renaissance", *Journal of the History of Ideas* 56 (1995), 63–85.

in Sextus' writings seems to have been Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola's *Examen vanitatis doctrinae gentium* (1520). The immediate attention it received after its publication was, however, very limited.⁴⁴

Finally, the increased attention paid to the problem of scepticism during the late Middle Ages is still in need of further investigation. In general, medieval thinkers were not inclined to scepticism, but the question of the limitations of human knowledge was debated upon occasion.⁴⁵ John of Salisbury (ca. 1120–1180) declared himself a follower of the tradition of Academic scepticism and paid some attention to the doctrine of probabilism in his *Policratus*.⁴⁶ Henry of Ghent (ca. 1217–1293) faced the fundamental problem of knowledge already in the first article of his *Summa*. Showing genuine concern for the sceptical arguments raised by the Academics, he questioned the reliability of sense experience and argued that divine illumination is necessary in order to attain certain knowledge. He seems to have had direct knowledge of Cicero's *Academica*, since he quotes passages that are not included in Augustine's *Contra Academicos*.⁴⁷ His theory of knowledge became extensively criticised, especially by John Duns Scotus (ca. 1265–1308). It is also worth noting that Gianfrancesco Pico met those objections in his *Examen vanitatis doctrinae gentium*.⁴⁸

The medieval formulation of the problem of knowledge became also intimately associated with the question of the foundation of the principle of causality. One of the most interesting controversies in this respect is the one that arose as a consequence of William of Ockham's discussion of the intuitive

⁴⁴ See Charles B. Schmitt, *Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola (1469–1533) and His Critique of Aristotle*. The Hague: Nijhoff, 1967.

⁴⁵ On medieval forms of scepticism, see Dominik Perler, *Zweifel und Gewissheit: Skeptische Debatten im Mittelalter*. Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 2006. For some shorter discussions, see also Michael Frede, "A Medieval Source of Modern Scepticism" in Regina Claussen and Roland Daube-Schackat, eds., *Gedankenzeichen: Festschrift für Klaus Oehler zum 60. Geburtstag*. Tübingen: Stauffenburg, 1988, 65–70; Pasquale Porro, "Il Sextus Latinus e l'immagine dello scetticismo antico nel Medioevo", *Elenchos* 15 (1994), 229–253; Mauricio Beuchot, "Some Traces of the Presence of Scepticism in Medieval Thought" in Richard H. Popkin, ed., *Scepticism in the History of Philosophy*. Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1996, 37–43; and Alan Perreiah, "Modes of Scepticism in Medieval Philosophy" in Ignacio Angelelli and María Cerezo, eds., *Studies on the History of Logic: Proceedings of the III. Symposium on the History of Logic*. Berlin: De Gruyter, 1996, 65–77.

⁴⁶ For an account of John of Salisbury and some remarks on his relation to Academic scepticism, see Hans Liebeschütz, *Mediaeval Humanism in the Life and Writings of John of Salisbury*. London: The Warburg Institute, 1950.

⁴⁷ See Charles B. Schmitt, *Cicero Scepticus: A Study of the Influence of the Academica in the Renaissance*. The Hague: Nijhoff, 1972, 39ff.

⁴⁸ See Charles B. Schmitt, "Henry of Ghent, Duns Scotus and Gianfrancesco Pico on Illumination", *Mediaeval Studies* 25 (1963), 231–258.

cognition of non-existent things.⁴⁹ Nicholas of Autrecourt (ca. 1300–1350) argued that if we admit that an effect can be produced supernaturally without its natural cause, then we have no right to posit natural causes for any effects whatsoever. Every appearance we have of objects existing outside our mind could be false, since the awareness could exist whether or not the object does. Jean Buridan (ca. 1300–1358) took account of these tenets and tried, in his commentary to Aristotle's *Physics*, to refute Nicholas of Autrecourt's arguments against the possibility of knowing causes or substances by their effects.⁵⁰

In this connection, it might also be observed that one can discern in late medieval psychology a development from the demonstration of the real nature of the soul on the basis of its evident operations to the simple explanation of the disparate functions of those operations. In this process, the philosophical study of the soul became eventually separated from metaphysics, and the question of the real nature of the soul, which was viewed as beyond the mandate of natural philosophy, was eventually abandoned.⁵¹ This development, which had its

⁴⁹ On Ockham's theory of intuitive cognition and the question of whether we can have intuitive cognition of non-existent things, see John F. Boler, "Intuitive and Abstractive Cognition" in Norman Kretzmann, Anthony Kenny and Jan Pinborg, eds., *The Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982, 460–478; Marilyn McCord Adams, *William Ockham*, 2 vols. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1987, I, 551–629; Katherine H. Tachau, *Vision and Certitude in the Age of Ockham: Optics, Epistemology and the Foundations of Semantics 1250–1345*. Leiden: Brill, 1988, 113–153; Elizabeth Karger, "Ockham's Misunderstood Theory of Intuitive and Abstractive Cognition" in Paul V. Spade, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Ockham*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, 204–226; and Elizabeth Karger, "Ockham and Wodeham on Divine Deception as a Sceptical Hypothesis", *Vivarium* 42 (2004), 225–236.

⁵⁰ For a discussion of this fourteenth-century controversy, see Ernest A. Moody, "Ockham, Buridan, and Nicholas of Autrecourt" in idem, *Studies in Medieval Philosophy, Science, and Logic*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1975, 127–160; Katherine H. Tachau, *Vision and Certitude in the Age of Ockham: Optics, Epistemology and the Foundations of Semantics 1250–1345*. Leiden: Brill, 1988, 335–352; Jack Zupko, "Buridan and Scepticism", *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 31 (1993), 191–221; and J. M. M. H. Thijssen, "The Quest for Certain Knowledge in the Fourteenth Century: Nicholas of Autrecourt Against the Academics" in Juha Sihvola, ed., *Ancient Scepticism and the Sceptical Tradition*. Helsinki: Acta Philosophica Fennica, 2000, 199–223.

⁵¹ See Katherine Park, "Albert's Influence on Late Medieval Psychology" in James A. Weisheipl, ed., *Albertus Magnus and the Sciences*. Toronto, ON: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1980, 510–522; Jack Zupko, "What is the Science of the Soul?: A Case Study in the Evolution of Late Medieval Natural Philosophy", *Synthese* 110 (1997), 297–334; and Jack Zupko, "Substance and Soul: The Late Medieval Origins of Early Modern Psychology" in Stephen F. Brown, ed., *Meeting of the Minds: The Relations Between Medieval and Classical Modern European Philosophy*. Turnhout: Brepols, 1998, 121–139.

roots in the naturalistic approach initiated by Ockham and was carried through by Buridan and several of his numerous followers, is perhaps best exemplified by Pierre d'Ailly's (ca. 1350–1420) *Tractatus de anima*.⁵² The organizing principle of this treatise is indebted to the approach of faculty psychology, in which the soul is described as being composed of a number of different faculties or powers, each directed towards a different object and responsible for a distinct operation.⁵³ The concept of the soul in d'Ailly's account, however, is, as Jack Zupko has pointed out, merely "an empty placeholder, whose real nature is not even relevant to psychology."⁵⁴

Scepticism and the Quest for a New Method

Vives' first encounter with a philosophical position that could be called sceptical may have occurred when, as student of the faculty of arts in Paris, he attended the lectures of the Fleming Jan Dullaert at the Collège de Beauvais. Dullaert had edited Buridan's *Subtilissimae quaestiones super octo physicorum libros Aristotelis* in 1509. Thus, during his course on natural philosophy, Vives might have become familiar with the arguments by means of which Buridan tried to refute the sceptical propositions propounded by Nicholas of Autrecourt.⁵⁵

Vives' knowledge of Cicero's *Academica* can also be traced back to his years in Paris. There are references to it already in his very first publications. He mentions the *Academica* in a *praelectio* to Francesco Filelfo's *Convivia mediolaniensia* (1514), saying that Cicero in this work "treats the most delicate problems of natural philosophy."⁵⁶ In *Christi Iesu Triumphus* (1514), a devotional work where Christian themes are framed in classical learning, he quotes

⁵² This treatise, which is one of the most important systematic works on philosophical psychology written in the fourteenth century, was widely read well into the sixteenth century and printed ten times between 1490 and 1518. For a recent study of this work, with critical edition, see Olaf Pluta, *Die philosophische Psychologie des Peter von Ailly: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Philosophie des späten Mittelalters*. Amsterdam: Grüner, 1987.

⁵³ See Pierre d'Ailly's scheme of faculties diagrammed in Olaf Pluta, *Die philosophische Psychologie des Peter von Ailly: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Philosophie des späten Mittelalters*. Amsterdam: Grüner, 1987, 3.

⁵⁴ Jack Zupko, "Substance and Soul: The Late Medieval Origins of Early Modern Psychology" in Stephen F. Brown, ed., *Meeting of the Minds: The Relations Between Medieval and Classical Modern European Philosophy*. Turnhout: Brepols, 1998, 137.

⁵⁵ See Enrique González y González, *Juan Luis Vives: De la escolastica al humanismo*. Valencia: Generalitat Valenciana, 1987, 148ff.

⁵⁶ Juan Luis Vives, *Praelectio in Convivia Philelphi* in idem, *Early Writings 2*. Jozef IJsewijn, Angela Fritsen and Charles Fantazzi, eds. Leiden: Brill, 1991, 150.

the first lines of the *Lucullus*.⁵⁷ Moreover, the writings of Cicero, together with Diogenes Laertius' *Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers*, constitute the main source of his *De initiis, sectis et laudibus philosophiae* (1518). Pyrrho and the sceptics are not mentioned in this work. A small section is, on the other hand, devoted to the New Academy:

For some of the philosophers have been called Dogmatists because they hold and teach certain definite doctrines, but others, holding nothing as certain, refute the opinions and formulations of others, something that Socrates himself did and that was also done in the New Academy. Lacydes and Carneades rose to the leadership of this school, arguing that things could not be understood and accordingly that nobody could rightly affirm or know anything, both because of the inherent difficulty of the things being studied and because of the frailty and obscurity of the human mind.⁵⁸

Cicero's idea that truth exists but that it cannot be perceived because of its concealment in nature and the weakness of the human intellect is a recurrent theme in Vives' thought.⁵⁹ According to the latter, things have two different layers: one external, consisting in the sensible accidents of the thing, and another, internal, and therefore hidden, which is the essence of the thing.⁶⁰ "The true and genuine essences of all things", he writes, "are not known by us in themselves. They hide concealed in the innermost part of each thing where our mind, enclosed by the bulk of the body and the darkness of life, cannot penetrate."⁶¹

Vives subscribes, on the one hand, to the Aristotelian principle that all of our knowledge has its origin in perception. In his view, we cannot learn anything except through the senses.⁶² But he also adds a Platonic dimension when he maintains that the human mind "must realise that, since it is locked up in a dark prison and surrounded by obscurity, it is prevented from understanding several

⁵⁷ Juan Luis Vives, *Christi Iesu Triumphus* in idem, *Early Writings 2*. Jozef IJsewijn, Angela Fritsen and Charles Fantazzi, eds. Leiden: Brill, 1991, 30.

⁵⁸ Juan Luis Vives, *De initiis, sectis et laudibus philosophiae* in idem, *Early Writings*. C. Matheussen, C. Fantazzi and E. George, eds. Leiden: Brill, 1987, 39.

⁵⁹ See, e.g., Cicero, *Academica*, II.73.

⁶⁰ M, III, 197: "Id quod *sensili* est tectum et quasi convestitum, quod appellemus sane *sensatum*, ut ab armis armatum, in eo est sensile, et *moles illa exterior*, quam sensile operit, tum quiddam *intimum* esse necessum est, quod nec oculis, nec ulli sensui est pervium".

⁶¹ S, 416; M, III, 406f.: "Principio rerum omnium veræ germanæque essentiae ipsæ per se non cognoscuntur a nobis, abditæ latent in penitissimis cuiusque rei, quo mens nostra in huius corporis mole et tenebris vitæ non penetrat".

⁶² S, 328; M, III, 378: "Prima ergo cognitio est illa sensuum simplicissima, hinc reliquæ nascuntur omnes". Cf. also M, III, 193: "ingredimur ad cognitionem rerum januis sensuum, nec alias habemus clausi hoc corpore".

things and can not clearly observe or know what it wants: neither the concealed essence of material things, nor the quality and character of immaterial things, nor can it because of the gloom of the body use its acuity and swiftness.”⁶³ In other words, since that which is incorporeal or hidden cannot be grasped by the senses, sense perception does not yield any knowledge of the essence of things but only of their accidents.

What is under discussion here is the question of how the essence of a thing can be known from its accidents. Aristotle’s remark in *De anima* that “the knowledge of the essential nature of a substance is largely promoted by an acquaintance with its properties: for, when we are able to give an account conformable to experience of all or most of the properties of a substance, we shall be in the most favourable position to say something worth saying about the essential nature of that subject” (402b21–25), was heavily debated among scholastic philosophers.⁶⁴ Referring to these debates in *De prima philosophia* (1531), Vives asserts that the question of how substances can be separated from their accidents “is discussed within several schools, urged by passion and not knowledge, which can not exist on this matter, because substance and accidents are so closely bound together that they can not be told apart in any way either by sense or thought. The reason is that whichever image we consider, it is obtained by our mind, a great creator of images, but since it is locked up in the body, it cannot grasp the image of naked substance stripped of its accidents.”⁶⁵

Vives’ view, however, is that sense knowledge must nonetheless be transcended. He writes:

If we have faith only in the senses, and if everything is included within their limits, as some people who settle those things too roughly seem to think, then we could not ascribe a soul to soundless animals, since we can not see it or

⁶³ S, 176; M, III, 329: “et assequitur, se clausam obscuro carcere, obseptamque tenebris, eoque a rerum plurimarum intellectu arceri, nec posse planius intueri ac cognoscere, quæ vellet: sive essentiam rerum materia contactarum, sive qualitatem ingeniumque immaterialium, nec posse per hanc corporis caliginem acumine ac celeritate sua uti.”

⁶⁴ Quoted from the revised Oxford translation in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, 2 vols. Jonathan Barnes, ed. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984. For a discussion of the scholastic debate, see Paul J. J. M. Bakker, “Knowing Substances Through Accidents: The Vicissitudes of Aristotle’s *De anima* 402b17–22 in the Medieval and Renaissance Commentary Tradition” (forthcoming).

⁶⁵ M, III, 201: “ita res in varias sectas est discissa, et agitata affectibus, non scientia quæ in ea re nulla esse potest, nam substantia et adhærens adeo sunt complicata, ut non modo sensu explicari non queant, sed nec cogitatione, ut imago utriusque capi separata possit ab animo nostro, tanto artifice imaginum; quippe mens nostra, clausa hoc corpore, subsistentiæ imaginem non assequitur nudam adjectis.”

perceive it with any sense, nor could we think that there are efficient forces or forms in natural things: nothing, in other words, except this matter that we observe and touch, which is contrary to every discipline and moreover, severely incompatible with, and opposite, to every judgement of the human mind.⁶⁶

Although we cannot grasp anything except through the senses, we must nonetheless try to infer the existence of something beyond the evidence of our senses. This step is meant to be taken by means of reasoning. However, one must not fail to notice that, according to Vives, the best thing human reason can accomplish in this process is to provide judgement with all the evidence available in order to increase the probability of the conclusion. Our knowledge of the essence of a thing is only an approximate guess based on the sensible operations of the thing in question. The knowledge of an essence is therefore nothing more than a conjecture.⁶⁷

According to Vives, the most reliable guide of human inquiry is represented by a natural propensity towards what is good and true. This light of our mind, as he also calls it, is always, directly or indirectly, inclined towards what is good and true. This is why the praise of virtue and the blame of vice exist, as well as laws and moral precepts, and the inner conscience of each person that blames and condemns his own faults, unless he completely lacks human sense and has degenerated into a brute.⁶⁸ It is without doubt, Vives argues, that, just as animals have received from God inclinations directing them towards their own good, so has man also inclinations towards his own good and, because of the good, also toward truth. But sin has spread great and dense mists before our minds, and thereby those right canons have been corrupted. The remnants of that great good, however, remain in us and are sufficient testimony to the greatness of what we have lost.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ S, 410 and 412; M, III, 405: "Si solis sensibus habetur fides, et intra illorum limites concluduntur omnia, ut quibusdam videtur, nimis crasse de rebus statuentibus, nec animas tribuimus mutatis animantibus, quipped quas nec cernimus, nec sensu ullo percipimus; neque *effectiones* sive *formas* esse in rebus naturæ censebimus, nihil denique præter molem hanc, quam aspiciamus, et attractamus; quod est disciplinæ omni contrarium, tum ab omni iudicio humanæ mentis vehementer alienum ac abhorrens".

⁶⁷ M, III, 122: "Essentiam vero cujusque rei non per se ipsam cognoscimus, sed per ea quæ de illa sensibus usurpamus."

⁶⁸ S, 262; M, III, 356: "Hæc mentis nostræ sive lux, sive censura, qua recte, qua oblique, semper tamen ad bonum et verum devertit, et fertur prona. Unde existit approbatio virtutum, et improbatio viciorum: atque hinc leges et præcepta morum, et intus in unoquoque conscientia, quæ delicta ipsa sua arguat, reprehendat, damnet, nisi penitus sensu humano careat, et degeneret in brutum." Cf. also S, 282; M, III, 363: "Veritas res est menti congruens, ut bonum voluntati: mendacium autem, aliena atque inimica, ut malum voluntati."

⁶⁹ S, 260 and 262; M, III, 356: "Nec est tamen dubitandum, quin ut muta animalia pronitates, et quasi regulas ad bonum suum quasdam a Deo acceperint: ita et homo ad bonum suum, et propter bonum ad verum; non enim meliore conditione existimandum

With Hellenistic theories of common notions or preconceptions (*prolepseis*) as a source of inspiration, Vives maintains that this natural inclination could be regarded as the beginning and origin of prudence and all sciences and arts. In other words, we are born suited to everything and there is no art or discipline of which the mind cannot give some proof, although rudimentary and inadequate. Moreover, this natural propensity can be perfected if it is subjected to teaching and exercise, just as the seeds of plants grow better if they are cultivated by the industrious hands of a farmer.⁷⁰

According to Vives, human knowledge can be nothing other than a finite participation into the creation. Because of the limitations that characterise man's fallen state, investigations in the realm of nature can only lead to approximations or conjectures, and not to firm and indubitable knowledge, which we according to Vives neither deserve nor need:

Human inquiry comes to conjectural conclusions, for we do not deserve certain knowledge (*scientia*), stained by sin as we are and hence burdened with the great weight of the body; nor do we need it, for we see that man is ordained lord and master of everything in the sublunary world.⁷¹

est fuisse procreatum a tanto artifice, id quod deterius est, quam id quo nihil est sub cœlo præstantius. Sed menti nostræ magnas et densissimas nebulas scelus offudit; itaque depravati sunt recti illi canones. Ex ignorantia multi errores nascuntur, quum ex illis universalibus ad species, et rerum singula iudicium deducimus. Sed restant nihilominus in nobis reliquiæ illius tanti boni, quæ satis testantur, quantum id fuerit quod amisimus.”

⁷⁰ S, 262; M, III, 356: “Philosophi quiddam tale sunt procul intuiti, qui anticipationes tradunt, et naturales informationes, quas non didicimus a magistris, vel usu: sed hausimus, et accepimus a natura, tametsi alij alijs pro magnitudine ingenij plures certerioresque sunt has regulas sortiti: tum excoluntur, elimanturque usu, experimentis, disciplina, meditatione”; and S, 264; M, III, 357: “Nam quemadmodum in ipsa terra semina sunt a Deo indita stirpium omnium, quos ipsa ultro quidem proferat, solertia tamen, diligentiaque hominum excoluntur, reddunturque ad usum aptiora: sic in mente uniuscuiusque semina sunt initia, origines artium prudentiæ, scientiarum omnium; quo fit, ut ad omnia nascamur idonei; nec ulla est ars, aut disciplina, cuius non specimen aliquod mens nostra possit edere: rude quidem et malignum, sed aliquod tamen. Perficitur autem id, cui doctrina et exercitatio accessit: ut in stirpibus ij sunt meliores alijs, quibus agricolæ addita est manus ac industria.” Cicero employed the two terms used by Vives, i.e. *anticipatio* and *informatio*, as translations of the Greek term *prolepsis*. See, e.g., Cicero, *De natura deorum* I.43. For a study of the role of innateness in ancient views on the formation of concepts and beliefs, see Dominic Scott, *Recollection and Experience: Plato's Theory of Learning and Its Successors*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.

⁷¹ M, III, 188: “in quibus conjecturas quasdam invenit hominum inquisitio, nam scientiam non meremur, et peccato contaminati, et proinde gravi mole corporis oppressi; sed neque est nobis necessaria, nam videmus omnium, quæ in hoc sublunari sunt mundo, principem esse, ac præsidem hominem constitutum quando non beluis sunt hæc parata, quæ uti nesciunt, finem vero quum aliquem etiam in minimis ac vilissimis esse rebus sit conpertum.”

Since man was endowed by God with as much power as he needs for the attainment of his end, it is completely satisfactory for a limited mind to operate on the basis of fragmentary and incomplete knowledge.⁷² Hereby Vives seems to agree with Cicero on that perfect knowledge is neither attainable nor necessary for the rational conduct of life.

Vives' position might be described as a blend of attenuated scepticism and a Christian form of anti-intellectualism, whose principal intention is to undermine excessive faith in human knowledge. As Carlos Noreña has pointed out, Vives "never ceases to emphasize the mysterious and hidden character of the essence of things, an essence that constantly eludes our efforts to comprehend it."⁷³ In this sense, his attitude is similar to that of many Renaissance appropriators of ancient scepticism, such as Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola and Cornelius Agrippa of Nettesheim (1486–1535), who did not see any intrinsic value in scepticism, but rather used it to attack Aristotelianism and disparage the claims of human science.⁷⁴ In this respect, Vives seems also to have a lot in common with the Portuguese philosopher and medical writer Francisco Sanches (1551–1623), whose fame rests mainly on *Quod nihil scitur* (1581), one of the best systematic expositions of philosophical scepticism produced during the sixteenth century.⁷⁵

⁷² M, III, 189: "sed hominem hunc, sive jam tantarum rerum dominum, sive tantis bonis destinatum, instructum fuisse præclarissimis a Deo ad tanta munera facultatibus credi par est, nam qui sapientissimus iussit finem peti, idem optimus facultatem et instrumenta finis consequendi voluit attribui, potentissimus tribuit."

⁷³ See Carlos G. Noreña, *Juan Luis Vives and the Emotions*. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1989, 75.

⁷⁴ Pico's *Examen vanitatis doctrinae gentium* (1520) and Agrippa's *De incertitudine et vanitate omnium scientiarum atque artium* (1530) have occasionally been ranked in the same category as Vives' *De causis corruptarum artium* (1531). See, e.g., Paola Zambelli, "Cornelio Agrippa nelle fonti e negli studi recenti" in *Rinascimento* 8 (1968), 178; and Nancy G. Siraisi, "Medicine, Physiology and Anatomy in Early Sixteenth-Century Critiques of the Arts and Sciences" in John Henry and Sarah Hutton, eds., *New Perspectives on Renaissance Thought: Essays in the History of Science, Education and Philosophy*. London: Duckworth, 1990, 214. Vives seems also to have praised Agrippa, calling him "the wonder of letters and of literary men". See Charles G. Nauert, Jr., *Agrippa and the Crisis of Renaissance Thought*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1965, 323.

⁷⁵ According to Carlos Noreña, "it would be false to characterize Vives as a forerunner of Sánchez [...], without further qualifications". In his view, "Vives' thought cannot fairly be related to the Pyrrhonian scepticism of Sánchez". Instead, he identifies Montaigne as one of Vives' intellectual heirs. See Carlos G. Noreña, *Juan Luis Vives*. The Hague: Nijhoff, 1970, 246 and 282. In a later work, however, Noreña maintains that "Vives [...]" and Francisco Sánchez were eloquent champions of the two basic principles of the modern scientific outlook: freedom from authority (even Aristotle's) and reliance upon observation". See Carlos G. Noreña, *Studies in Spanish Renaissance Thought*. The Hague: Nijhoff, 1975, 220.

Sanches does not belong to *les nouveaux pyrrhoniens*. Contrary to what has been conjectured, there is no evidence that his scepticism was the result of the new influence of Sextus Empiricus. In *Quod nihil scitur*, no reference is made to Sextus Empiricus, and nowhere in Sanches' works is there any mention of his adherence to Pyrrhonian scepticism either. Elaine Limbrick has argued that from an examination of the references and arguments used in *Quod nihil scitur*, one can only conclude that he had *not* read Sextus Empiricus.⁷⁶ Sanches was, on the other hand, thoroughly familiar with the philosophical works of Cicero and his sceptical attitude suggests rather that he considered himself to be a follower of the New Academy. In a letter to the Jesuit Christophorus Clavius (1538–1612) dealing with the problem of finding truth in physics and mathematics, he even called himself “Carneades philosophus.” His scepticism concerning the certitude of the mathematical sciences reveals also that he was aware of Carneades' arguments against geometry and mathematics as they are expounded in Cicero's *Academica*.⁷⁷

In an article on self-knowledge and Renaissance scepticism, Mikko Yrjönsuuri has argued that the originality of Sanches lies in the application of ancient sceptical methods to medieval epistemological theories, and that an important result of this strategy is the fact that he, diverging from his predecessors in the sceptical tradition, extended the sceptical attitude to concern also knowledge based on introspection.⁷⁸ In spite of Sanches' indisputable originality, his sceptical

⁷⁶ A marginal gloss in *Quod nihil scitur*, referring to Galen's *De optimo docendi genere*, is the only indication that Sanches might have read Sextus Empiricus. The reason for this conjecture is that Erasmus' translation of Galen's *De optimo docendi genere* was included both in the 1562 and the 1569 editions of Sextus Empiricus' works. These *marginalia* indicate, on the other hand, that the sources of Sanches' knowledge of ancient scepticism were, apart from Galen's *De optimo docendi genere*, Plutarch's *Adversus Colotem* and Diogenes Laertius' *Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers*. See Elaine Limbrick, “Introduction” in Francisco Sanches, *That Nothing Is Known Known (Quod nihil scitur)*, Elaine Limbrick, ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988, 64, 69 and 78. Henceforth *QNS*. For a discussion of Sanches' sceptical outlook, see also Gianni Paganini, “Montaigne, Sanches et la connaissance par phénomènes: Les usages modernes d'un paradigme ancien” in Vincent Carraud and Jean-Luc Marion, eds., *Montaigne: Scepticisme, métaphysique, théologie*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2004, 107–135.

⁷⁷ See Joaquim Iriarte, “Francisco Sánchez el Escéptico disfrazado de Carneades en discusión epistolar con Cristóbal Clavio” in *Gregorianum* 21 (1940), 413–451. For Sanches' criticism of the certitude of mathematical knowledge, see also Salvatore Miccolis, *Francesco Sanchez*. Bari: Pubblicazioni dell'Istituto di filosofia, 1965, 41–52. For Carneades' arguments against geometry and mathematics, see Cicero, *Academica*, II.116–118. See also Linda M. Napolitano, “Arcesilao, Carneade e la cultura matematica” in Gabriele Giannantoni, ed., *Lo scetticismo antico*, 2 vols. Napoli: Bibliopolis, 1981, 179–193.

⁷⁸ Mikko Yrjönsuuri, “Self-Knowledge and Renaissance Sceptics” in Juha Sihvola, ed., *Ancient Scepticism and the Sceptical Tradition*. Helsinki: Acta Philosophica Fennica, 2000, 225–253.

stance might, however, be compared to some extent with the views expressed by Vives. Many passages in *Quod nihil scitur* display a familiarity with the writings of the Spanish-born humanist. Sanches seems to have been well acquainted with *De disciplinis* (1531), and there are also indications that he might have been familiar with *In pseudodialecticos* (1519).⁷⁹

As we have seen, Vives stresses the problematic nature of introspection, maintaining that it is very difficult to investigate the nature of the human mind, since, above our mind, we have not another one that can observe the one below. Referring to this passage, the Italian humanist Julius Caesar Scaliger (1484–1558), in his *Exercitationes exotericæ* (1557) scorned Vives for holding the view that an investigation of the nature of the mind is full of obscurity. Sanches' *Quod nihil scitur* contains, interestingly enough, an explicit defence of Vives against Scaliger's allegations. Sanches writes that "if Vives' opinion is absurd, then I myself am inclined to be the most absurd of all, for I consider [the investigation of the nature of the mind] not merely full of obscurity but also murky, stony, abstruse, trackless, attempted by many and mastered by none – and not of a sort to be mastered at all."⁸⁰

Moreover, beside its critical aim, *Quod nihil scitur* has also a constructive objective which posterity has tended to neglect. It consists in Sanches' quest for a new method of philosophical and scientific enquiry that could be universally applied. "My purpose", he states on the very last page of the work, "is to establish, as far as I am able, a kind of scientific knowledge that is both sound and as easy as possible to attain."⁸¹ This method was supposed to be expounded in another book that was either lost, remained unpublished or not written at all.⁸² The few remarks to be found in *Quod nihil scitur* on the nature of this method

⁷⁹ Sanches' indebtedness to Vives has been stressed by Andrée Comparot, who traces several strands running through their thought, as well as that of Montaigne, back to Augustine. See Andrée Comparot, *Amour et vérité: Sebon, Vivès et Michel de Montaigne*. Paris: Klincksieck, 1983.

⁸⁰ *QNS*, 132/240: "Immerito proinde ille, licet doctissimus vir, Viuem absurdum vocat: quod mentis naturae perscrutationem obscuritatis plenam dicat. Imo ego, si illius opinio absurda est, absurdissimus esse volo: qui non solum obscuritatis plenam censeo, sed caliginosam, scabrosam, abstrusam, inuiam, pluribus tentatam, nulli superatam, nec superandam."

⁸¹ *QNS*, 163/290.

⁸² Sanches regarded *Quod nihil scitur* as an introductory treatise (*QNS*, 91/165f.). There are several references to philosophical works dealing with method, the nature of things and the nature of the soul throughout *Quod nihil scitur*. Whether these treatises were lost, remained unpublished or were not written at all, is not known. Sanches refers twice to a treatise on method (*QNS*, 155/275f. and 164/290). It has been claimed that it appeared in Spanish under the title *Método universal de las ciencias* (see *QNS*, 292).

deal with experience (*experimentum*) and judgement (*iudicium*). Sanches seems to suggest that, although scientific knowledge is beyond our cognitive capacities and nothing can be said about the nature of things, a continuing progress based on experience is still possible.⁸³

Although Vives' epistemological considerations lack the systematic character of Sanches' exposition, the two seem nonetheless to have several points in common. They both set out from contemporary scholastic epistemology, in particular the standard theory that sensory perception occurs through the reception of images, and they both argue that knowledge of substances and abstract entities therefore cannot be anything but a matter of speculation and opinion. In this sense, they still conceive the relationship between subject and object within the Aristotelian framework of the principle of similarity between representation and thing, rather than in terms of cause and effect. The sceptical problem of establishing a criterion for certain knowledge, which presupposes a clear separation between representation and object, never arises on their horizon.⁸⁴ They both question the possibility of attaining perfect knowledge, by which they mean the apprehension of the essence of things and of the intimate workings of nature. What they propound instead is a theory of knowledge based on provisional certitude. They both accept that, given the partial nature of human knowledge, in practice much of our knowledge is merely probable or conjectural. Certainty, however, is not a prerequisite for advances in science and philosophy. As a criterion for scientific progress and for the rational conduct of life they both advocate a method consisting in sound judgement based on experience.⁸⁵

⁸³ *QNS*, 157/278: "Duo sunt inveniendae veritatis media miseris humanis: quae doquidem res per se scire non possunt, quas si intelligere, ut deberent, possent, nullo alio indigerent medio: sed cum hoc nequeant, adiumenta ignorantiae suae adinuenere: quibus propterea nil magis sciunt, perfecte saltem sed aliquid percipiunt, discutuntque. Ea vero sunt experimentum, iudiciumque. Quorum neutrum sine alio stare recte potest [...] Experimentum fallax ubique, difficilique est: quod etsi perfecte habeatur, solum quid extrinsece fiat, ostendit: naturas autem rerum nullo modo. Iudicium autem super ea, quae experimento comperta sunt, fit: quod proinde & de externis solum utcumque fieri potest, & id adhuc male: naturas autem rerum ex coniectura tantum: quas quia ab experimento non habuit, nec ipsum quoque adipiscitur, sed quandoque contrarium aestimat."

⁸⁴ For a discussion of the notions of similarity and causality in scholastic theories of mental representation, see Robert Pasnau, *Theories of Cognition in the Later Middle Ages*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997, 86–124.

⁸⁵ An earlier draft was presented at a workshop on *Intellect, Knowledge and the Object of Thought from 1200–1700* held at the University of Oslo in November 2000. I wish to thank the participants in the discussion for their helpful questions and suggestions. I am particularly grateful to Lilli Alanen and Martin Gustafsson for their valuable comments and criticism.

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PART II
SCEPTICISM, REFORMATION AND
COUNTER-REFORMATION

3. THE ISSUE OF REFORMATION SCEPTICISM REVISITED: WHAT ERASMUS AND SEBASTIAN CASTELLIO DID OR DID NOT KNOW

Irena Backus

University of Geneva, Switzerland

Richard Popkin in his classic study¹ argues that the Reformation debates about the rule of faith instanced the more general problem confronted by Scepticism, that of justifying the criterion of truth. He therefore postulates that it is thanks to the Reformation that Scepticism became an extremely important issue in modern thought. He polarises the issue of the Reformation debates as taking place between those who thought that the church of Rome and its tradition constituted the only criterion of truth in cases of disagreement about a point of Scripture and those who thought that faith and individual conscience made up the only criterion of truth. If Popkin were correct in his basic assumption, this would indeed mean that the problem faced by sixteenth century theologians was the Pyrrhonian problem of justifying a criterion of truth for, as is well known, the Pyrrhonians argue that another criterion is necessary to justify any criterion of truth, and that this implies either a circularity of argument or falling into infinite regress. However, recent studies on Luther's and other reformers' recourse to church tradition in their polemic against the Catholics and on the specificity of the Catholic understanding of tradition² have shown that reformers relied on

¹ Richard Popkin, *The History of Scepticism from Erasmus to Spinoza* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: California University Press, 1979). Hereafter: Popkin, 1979. The book was first published in 1960 under the title Richard Popkin, *The History of Scepticism from Erasmus to Descartes*. Assen: van Gorcum, 1960 and was expanded two times, the last one in 2003 when it appeared under the title *The History of Scepticism from Savonarola to Bayle*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2003, hereafter: Popkin, 2003. I shall be referring to this edition for passages added between 1979 and 2003. The additions etc. do not affect the basic argument which remains basically unaltered from 1960–2003.

² See Leif Grane, Alfred Schindler, and Markus Wriedt eds. *Auctoritas patrum I. Zur Rezeption der Kirchenväter im 15. und 16. Jahrhundert*. Mainz: von Zabern, 1993; Leif Grane, Alfred Schindler, and Markus Wriedt eds. *Auctoritas patrum II. Neue Beiträge*

tradition in the sense of fathers and councils as interpreters of Scripture just as much as Catholics did. Thus both parties agreed on what the rule of faith was—Scripture as interpreted by tradition – and disagreed only about how it should be interpreted and applied. In other words, the rule itself “Scripture interpreted by tradition” was ambivalent and could imply either that the papacy was the legitimate spokesman for the tradition or that the tradition was confined to early doctors of the church who were closer to the original purity of the apostolic period. If we take the major protestant church history of the period, *The Centuries of Magdeburg*, the authors’ argument is just that Luther was not to be hailed as discounting the tradition but as resurrecting the very earliest tradition, close to apostolic purity in its interpretation of the Sacred Word. The Catholic response to the Centuries, the *Annals* of Caesar Baronius, did not argue for the legitimacy of interpreting Scripture via tradition but for the power of the papacy to act as spokesman for the tradition.³ Luther himself never denied the importance of tradition and would not countenance any suggestion that he was alone with the Scripture. In his dispute with Erasmus Luther refuted strongly Erasmus’ contention that he (Erasmus) had the entire tradition on his side whereas Luther relied on the Bible alone with only Valla and Wycliff as his non-scriptural guarantors for the truth of the Scripture.⁴ Nothing would have been easier for

zur Rezeption der Kirchenväter im 15. und 16. Jahrhundert. Mainz: von Zabern, 1998. Cf. Irena Backus ed. *The Reception of the Church Fathers in the West. From the Carolingians to the Maurists*, 2 vols. Leiden: Brill, 1997. See esp. contributions on Zwingli and Bucer by Backus, in vol. 2, 627–660 (argues that both these reformers saw Scripture and tradition as mutually dependent on one another) and on The Fathers in the Counter-Reformation by Ralph Keen, in vol. 2, 701–743 (argues that that the concept of tradition as represented by the papacy and the church of Rome was the main difference between Catholics and Protestants). See also Irena Backus, *Historical Method and Confessional Identity in the Era of the Reformation* (Leiden: Brill, 2003). For a brief general survey of the place of tradition in sixteenth century biblical exegesis, Catholic and Protestant, see Irena Backus, article “Patristics” in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Reformation*, 4 vols. ed. Hans Hillerbrand. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1996, vol. 3, 223–226 and literature cited *ibid*.

³ On this see esp. Enrico Norelli, “The Authority Attributed to the Early Church in the Centuries of Magdeburg and in the Ecclesiastical Annals of Caesar Baronius” in ed. Backus, 1997, vol. 2, 745–774 and literature cited *ibid*.

⁴ I shall be referring to Martin Luther, *Du serfarbitre suivi de Désiré Érasme, Diatribe du libre arbitre*, ed. Georges Lagarrigue. Paris: Gallimard, 2001. Hereafter: Lagarrigue, 2001. Here see Lagarrigue, 2001, 138–139: “On your side according to you have learning, intelligence, numbers, sainthood, miracles and I know not what else, but on my side there is apparently only Wyclif and Lorenzo Valla... With your preface you put me in a difficult position because unless I praise myself and condemn the church fathers in their multitude, I cannot find a suitable response. But I shall be brief. As regards their authority, their number, their erudition, their intelligence and all the rest, I acknowledge myself

Luther (or more natural, if Popkin's thesis were sound) than to claim at this stage that individual conscience was the criterion of truth in Scripture interpretation. However, what he did instead was to appropriate the tradition and try to show that Erasmus and the Catholic church were usurping it. Luther thus argued that none of the fathers alleged by Erasmus and the Catholic church in defence of freedom of the will did in fact defend free will. Therefore the church with the pope at its head was an impostor as spokesman for tradition.

Another problem raised by Popkin's thesis is linked to his apparent backdating of Pyrrhonism in his identification of the Reformation debates with the classic Pyrrhonian problem of how to justify a criterion of truth, without falling either into circularity of argument or infinite regress. Now he himself is aware that Pyrrhonism did not really become known until after Estienne's (1562)⁵ and Hervet's translations and editions, which means that Erasmus and Castellio could have been familiar only with Academic scepticism. To save Popkin's thesis one could say here that other sources of Pyrrhonism were available before the publication of Sextus such as Diogenes Laertius and Galen in which the Pyrrhonian problem of justifying a criterion of truth was also raised, albeit in a less developed form than in Sextus' works. However, there is no evidence of either Erasmus or Castellio ever relying on these sources in their religious debates or even raising the Pyrrhonian problem of the necessity for another criterion of truth to prove any criterion of truth. It is thus highly problematic to talk about sixteenth century religious debates in terms of reviving or promoting Scepticism.

Furthermore, Popkin's definition of the fideist either as one who thinks that persuasive factors can induce belief but not prove what is believed or as one who thinks that he can offer reasons for his faith but not prove it, is confusing in the context of sixteenth century religious debates. (Popkin in any case admits that redefining his basic terms can lead to different conclusions.) The term fideist was coined by a disciple of Schleiermacher, Auguste Sabatier, to describe his own position. Like Schleiermacher before him, he contended that religion was based on intuition and feeling and was independent of all dogma. He saw its highest experience in a sensation of human union with the

vastly inferior to them while you set yourself up in judgement... 144: "...all these saintly men that you and your fellow Catholics flatter yourselves with as your supporters...how often did they forget their own free will, despairing of their powers and calling upon nothing other than God's pure grace, which was nothing to do with their merits. This is true of Augustine and of Bernard ..."

⁵ *Sexti philosophi Pyrrhoniæ libri III, quibus in tres philosophiæ partes severissime inquiruntur, libri magno ingenii acumine scripti, variaque doctrina referti: Graece nunquam, Latine nunc primum editi. Interprete Henrico Stephano. Parisiis: excudebat H. Stephanus, 1562.*

infinite.⁶ Popkin's 2003 classification of fideists as (i) those who have blind faith and deny to reason any capacity to reach the truth, and (ii) those who give faith priority over reason is thus anachronistic in its application to the Reformation.⁷

More importantly, Popkin does not always distinguish between belief (in the sense of "I believe that it will rain tomorrow") and religious faith (in the sense of "we believe in God Almighty...") which also leads to confusion.

Without any pretensions to doing more than setting a question mark over Popkin's thesis, I therefore propose to reopen the question of the Reformation debates as promoting the revival of Scepticism by examining the concepts of knowledge, reason, faith, belief and not-knowing in the thought of Erasmus and Castellio, who, in Popkin's view, were the first to link the issue of the rule of faith debate with the Pyrrhonian issue of determining a criterion for truth. I shall place special emphasis on Castellio as an author whose views on knowing and not knowing have not been the subject of any detailed scrutiny since the appearance in 1981 of Elisabeth Feist-Hirsch's edition of *De arte dubitandi et confidendi, ignorandi et sciendi*.⁸ After analysing Castellio's doctrines, I shall say something about the intellectual and religious climate surrounding the publication of the Latin translation of Sextus Empiricus by Henri Estienne and Gentien Hervet.

Erasmus and De Libero Arbitrio

Popkin is quite right when he contends that Erasmus advocated simple piety and that he was shocked at the apparent incapacity of scholastic or intellectual theology to achieve any certainty.⁹ However, it is rash to conclude then that this led Erasmus to a sceptical justification of the Catholic rule of faith in his *De libero arbitrio* of 1524.¹⁰ The only mention of scepticism in the treatise is hypothetical and occurs in the context of rhetorical self-belittlement. Moreover, Erasmus is very careful to submit any hypothetical scepticism to which he might or might not subscribe to the authorisation of the Scripture and the church. This is what he says:

⁶ On Schleiermacher's system see e.g. Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Der christliche Glaube nach den Grundsätzen der evangelischen Theologie im Zusammenhang dargestellt*, ed. Martin Redeker. Berlin: De Gruyter, 1999. There he defines religion as the feeling of absolute dependence which finds its purest expression in monotheism.

⁷ Popkin, 1979, xviii–xix; 2003, xxi.

⁸ Sebastian Castellio, *De arte dubitandi et confidendi, ignorandi et sciendi*, ed. Elisabeth Feist Hirsch. Leiden: Brill, 1981. This edition is a slightly revised version of the text published by the Accademia Reale d'Italia in 1937. Cited hereafter as Castellio, 1937, 1981.

⁹ Popkin, 1979, 6.

¹⁰ Popkin, 1979, 6: "This attempt, early in the Reformation, at sceptical justification of the Catholic rule of faith brought forth a furious answer from Luther."

I take so little pleasure in assertions that I could easily side with the opinion of the Sceptics wherever the inviolable authority of the Holy Scripture and the decrees of the church allow it. To these latter I always submit my opinion whether I understand what the church ordains or not.¹¹

In fact, if we examine Erasmus' argument in his treatise, it turns out to be anything but sceptical nor does it reach any sceptical conclusion of the sort "it is impossible to know on the strength of evidence available whether we are free or determined and so we might as well accept the teaching of the church." Erasmus attacked Luther on this issue because Luther's insistence on the bondage of human will struck a blow at the humanist ideal of man. His feeling that Luther was making too widely known issues that were likely to confuse the less educated faithful stemmed from his aversion to scholasticism the existence of contradictory passages in the Scripture does not result in a sceptical conclusion to do either with suspending judgement or clear impossibility of knowing. He says quite clearly:

First of all, we cannot deny that there are many passages in the Holy Scripture which support unequivocally man's free will. As against that, there are in the same Holy Scripture some passages, which appear to abolish it altogether. But it is self-evident that the Scripture cannot contradict itself because all of it has the same Holy Spirit as its source.¹²

This leads Erasmus to examine in some detail the passages that seem to assert the freedom of the will and to confront them with those that appear to deny it. His conclusion is firm:

We could maintain freedom of the will without falling into an excessive faith in our own merit and similar pitfalls that Luther avoids... and, what is more, we could retain the advantages of bondage of the will, which Luther so admires. It appears to me that the most valid opinion is that which ascribes to grace the first attraction to God, which excites the soul. It is only in the follow-up process to this that a little should be ascribed to human will, unless of course it has ceased to act in accord with God's will. However, as any process has

¹¹ See Lagarrigue, 2001, I a 4, 465. As Bernhard Lohse points out in his *Luther. Eine Einführung in sein Leben und sein Werk* (3rd edition). München: Beck, 1997, 82, Erasmus repeats this in the *Hyperaspistes* part I quite unequivocally: "Wherever the meaning of the Scripture is clear I will allow no scepticism. The same goes for the decisions of the church."

¹² See Lagarrigue, 2001, I b 10, 480. On the question of bondage and freedom of the will in Luther and Erasmus respectively see e.g.: Georges Chantraine, *Érasme et Luther, libre et serf arbitre. Étude historique et théologique*. Paris, Lethieulleux: Presses universitaires de Namur, 1981.

three stages: beginning, middle and end, this view attributes the beginning and end to grace and admits that freedom of the will has a role to play only in the middle part and only in such a way that the two causes, grace of God and human will work together. However, grace is the main cause, the will is only subsidiary and cannot do anything without the main cause, while the latter is self-sufficient. Thus the fire burns by its natural virtue and yet God, who acts with and through it, is the main cause of it burning, which would suffice by itself and without which the fire could not burn.¹³

As was pointed out by André Godin, the opinion that Erasmus recommends is Thomist and has nothing sceptical about it.¹⁴ What might appear sceptical about Erasmus' view is his weighing up of several opinions before giving his preference to the one that is most valid. He does not, as Luther does, put forward one view discounting all the others from the outset. Instead, acting in accord with his professed dislike of assertions, he puts his readers on guard against attributing either too much to freedom of the will as Pelagius did or attributing too much to faith as the anti-Pelagian Augustine and Luther did.¹⁵ However, at no point does Erasmus suspend judgement. He is in fact firmly convinced that there is a correct middle view between Pelagianism and extreme determinism. This conviction is based on his conception of the nature of faith. According to him, faith makes no sense without charity or love, which is an expression of the human will. In other words, as he puts it:

I have no intention of fencing with those who consider that faith is the source and the capital point of everything even if it seems to me that faith and charity are born of one another and sustain one another. Surely charity nourishes faith just as oil nourishes the flame of a lamp. Indeed we are more willing to place our faith in someone we love very dearly. And there is no shortage of people who want faith to be the point of departure and not the final point of salvation. But that is not what we want to debate.¹⁶

This passage and Erasmus' treatise as a whole is full of qualifiers such as "I have no intention", "it seems to me," "I do not wish to debate." These, however, do not in any way point to scepticism or even to uncertainty. They are due to Erasmus' dislike of contentiousness, on the one hand, and to his striving for a particular rhetorical effect on the other hand. By appearing uncertain Erasmus can gain the trust of his readers who will take more notice of what he says. He can also hope

¹³ See Lagarrigue, 2001, IV, 8, 549.

¹⁴ See André Godin, "Le libre arbitre" in *Érasme*, eds. C. Blum, A. Godin, J.-C. Margolin and D. Ménager. Paris: Laffont, coll. Bouquins, 1992, 689–747. The image of the fire has as its source Thomas Aquinas, *S. Th.* IIa Iiae, q. 109, art. 1, *conclusio*.

¹⁵ See Lagarrigue, 2001, IV, 7, 548.

¹⁶ See Lagarrigue, 2001, IV, 6, 548.

to persuade Luther himself and his disciples that their views are not as opposed as all that. However, the demurrers, qualifiers, self-disparaging remarks etc. are no more than window dressing. Indeed, Erasmus' conclusion to his treatise is anything but sceptical. It is a product of firm conviction. Even more importantly, at no point does he suggest that he does not know; on the contrary he fears that he will be told that he is too dogmatic in his claim to support tradition and so too reliant on human knowledge. This is how he ends the *Diatribes*:

I know that I am going to be told: 'Erasmus should learn Christ and say goodbye to human wisdom. No one can understand these things if they do not have the Spirit of God.' If I do not yet understand what Christ is, that is surely because we have been wide off the mark in our search for him up until now. However, I would really like to know what sort of spirit guided all those doctors of the church and all those ordinary Christians (for the people were most likely in agreement with the teaching of the bishops) if they have not understood this for 1300 years.¹⁷

The final phrase would not have fooled his opponent. Although expressed in the usual Erasmian veiled terms, it is no more and no less than an accusation of innovation, which was tantamount to accusation of heresy.

Knowledge or the issue of what we know or what we do not know does not play any part in Erasmus' attack on Luther. Even though Erasmus grants that some biblical passages are obscure to the point of making the Bible appear self-contradictory, he repeatedly stresses that these contradictions are no more than apparent. As for his apparent rallying on the side of the Sceptics and his repeated qualifiers and disclaimers, they do not in any way affect his argument.

Castellio

The question of the status of faith as against knowledge of the world which proceeded from the senses did not become an issue until the 1560s and could be considered characteristic of Calvinism. The man who openly raised it and who sought to distinguish between knowledge and faith against Calvin and Beza (both of whom maintained that faith was God given knowledge) was Sebastian Castellio. Despite his enduring reputation as the sole sixteenth century defender of religious tolerance, he is slightly less well known than Erasmus and so requires a few words of introduction.¹⁸ His reception has been rather complicated

¹⁷ See Lagarrigue, 2001, IV, 17, 561.

¹⁸ The latest biography is an impartial study by Hans Rudolf Guggisberg, *Sebastian Castellio. Humanist und Verteidiger der religiösen Toleranz*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1997. Hereafter: Guggisberg, 1997.

by the fact that liberal Protestants to this day consider him as the incarnation of the “true Reformation” as opposed to Calvin’s dictatorial obscurantism.¹⁹ He was born in 1515, one of seven children in a peasant family of St. Martin-du-Fresne in the Haute-Savoie. After studies at the Holy Trinity College in Lyon, he converted to the Reformation in 1540 and left for Strasbourg to study under Calvin. On his return to Geneva in 1541, Calvin obtained for him the job of rector in the newly founded “Collège de Rive.” Castellio showed already at this time a pronounced interest in the Bible and its hermeneutics. In 1542 he published for the use of schoolboys his *Dialogi sacri*, a manual consisting of Bible stories in the form of dialogues. 1545 saw his first major quarrel with Calvin. Castellio thought that the *Song of Songs* was simply a pagan love poem and not, as Calvin would have it, an allegory of Christ’s love for the church. The other bone of contention was his view that Christ’s descent into hell in the *Apostles’ Creed* was literally that and not Christ’s abandon on the cross. As result of this quarrel Castellio left Geneva for Basel where he was to publish all of his biblical works.²⁰ After a period spent as proof-corrector, he obtained the chair of Greek at Basel University.

His second stand against Calvin and Genevan Calvinism dates from 1553 when he publicly opposed the execution of Michael Servetus on the grounds that capital punishment by a civil authority cannot be justified in cases of religious heresy. It was in the context of the controversy surrounding Servetus’ death that Castellio first formulated his theories of faith and knowledge which he later elaborated in *De haereticis non puniendis* and in *De arte dubitandi*. Both these treatises remained unpublished, the former until 1971,²¹ the latter until 1937.²² His stand on capital punishment for heretics as well as his theories of biblical interpretation, which he put into practice in his Latin and in his French translations of the Bible, made him into something of a thorn in the flesh to orthodox Calvinism, while winning him later a reputation as a precursor of liberal Protestantism. At the time Calvin and Beza accused him of various sins and heresies.

¹⁹ See Ferdinand Buisson, *Sébastien Castellion, sa vie et son œuvre, 1515–1563*, 2 vols. Paris: Cherbuliez, 1865. Reprint: Nieuwkoop: de Graaf, 1964.

²⁰ Castellio’s Latin Bible appeared in 1551 then in revised editions in 1554 and 1556. It was also the object of several posthumous editions. His French Bible was only published once in 1555 in his lifetime. See Guggisberg, 1997, 333 for full bibliography. The French Bible (*La Bible nouvellement translattée avec la suite de l’histoire depuis les tems d’Esdras jusqu’aux Maccabées e depuis Maccabées jusqu’à Christ...*) has been reprinted in 2005 with a critical introduction by Marie-Christine Gomez-Géraud (Paris: Bayard, 2005).

²¹ Sebastian Castellio, *De l’impunité des hérétiques. De haereticis non puniendis*, eds. Bruno Becker and M. Valkhoff. Geneva: Droz, 1971. Hereafter: Castellio, 1971.

²² See Castellio, 1937, 1981.

Among the charges were sympathies for the Islam, blasphemy, pride, cruelty and first and foremost Academic scepticism,²³ a charge that angered Castellio sufficiently to elaborate his theories on faith and knowledge.²⁴ Curiously, it was the accusation and not Castellio's reply that stuck with historians and that earned Castellio the reputation of a "mildly sceptical" as Popkin would have it²⁵ or "undogmatic" Christian, as Guggisberg put it.²⁶

Beza's and Castellio's Concepts of Faith and Knowledge

I shall now examine more closely Beza's accusations of scepticism and Castellio's epistemology as elaborated in his replies to Beza, *De haereticis non puniendis* and *De arte dubitandi*. The issue goes back to the anonymous compilation published in 1554 and generally known as the *Farrago Belli*, which Calvin and Beza recognised immediately as coming from Castellio's pen.²⁷ The compilation of theological opinions (including Luther's) on non-persecution of heretics contained a preface to Duke Christoph of Württemberg by "Martinus

²³These accusations figure very prominently in Theodore Beza, *De haereticis a ciuili magistratu puniendis libellus aduersus Martini Belli farraginem et nouorum Academicorum Sectam, Theodoro Beza Veselio auctore*. Geneva: Robert Estienne, 1554, 40, 42, 48, 51, 54, 63ff. etc. Hereafter: Beza, 1554.

²⁴See Castellio, 1971, 22 which I shall discuss at greater length below and Castellio, 1937, 1981, lib. I, cap. XVIII, 49: "Est enim genus quoddam hominum qui nihil dubitari, nihil nesciri volunt, omnia audacter affirmant et, si ab eis dissentias, sine vlla dubitatione damnant neque solum ipsi nihil dubitant sed ne quidem ab aliis dubitari patiuntur et, si dubites, non dubitant Academicum appellare, qui nihil certi, nihil explorati haberi posse putes. *Ego vero certi et explorati plus etiam habeo quam ipsi velint.*" (My emphasis).

²⁵Popkin, 1979, 10–11: "This mild, sceptical attitude and defense of divergent views elicited a nasty and spirited response. Theodore Beza saw immediately what was at issue and attacked Castellio as a reviver of the New Academy, and the scepticism of Carneades, trying to substitute probabilities in religious affairs for the certainties required by a true Christian."

²⁶Guggisberg, 1997, 124: "Im ersten Hauptteil enthält die Diskussion der ersten Grundfrage einen weit ausholenden Angriff auf das durch die "neuen Akademiker" vertretene undogmatische Christentum. Ohne klar definierte Dogmen gibt es für Bèze keinen Glauben, und zu den wichtigsten aller Dogmen gehört die Lehre von der Trinität....Diesem Vorwurf folgt derjenige des Relativismus: die "Akademiker" behaupten, dass viele Aussagen der Heiligen Schrift für die Menschen unverständlich seien und dass man bei der Beurteilung abweichender und irrender Auslegungen stets auf das göttliche Endgericht zu warten habe." Guggisberg does not investigate *De haereticis non puniendis* in detail and does not even mention *De arte dubitandi*. His summary of Beza's treatise, however, is useful and clear.

²⁷See Guggisberg, 1997, 89–101, 334. Guggisberg identifies and sets in context all the testimonies cited in the *Farrago*.

Bellius,” in other words by Castellio himself, who is also represented by two other sets of testimonies in the volume, those of Georg Kleinberg and Basil Montfort. None of the three pieces authored by Castellio himself under these names actually states in so many words that Scripture is unclear on such and such point. However, that is the implicit assumption behind them. In the preface particularly, Bellius insists that while any man’s morals can be the object of agreement, morality being based on clear criteria, the same cannot be said about a man’s faith. All faiths, Jews, Moslems and Christians, agree that theft is wrong because, according to “Bellius”, this is a part of the law of God which Paul says is written in the hearts of all nations.²⁸ By what criteria can we judge which faith is wrong? There is no clear answer. However, according to “Bellius”, one way of knowing that one’s faith is *right* is to be kinder, more understanding and more forgiving than the person whose faith is different from ours. Christians who persecute their fellow men and especially fellow-Christians in the name of Christ are guilty of the worst form of blasphemy. As Guggisberg quite rightly points out, Castellio’s viewpoint is the standard humanist one in the sense that he places human dignity and piety before any doctrinal agreement. In this he is a worthy follower of Erasmus.²⁹ To him the real heretics are those who behave cruelly and intolerantly towards their fellow-believers. “Georg Kleinberg” asserts in his testimony that far too many are killed because of disagreements over Scriptural passages the meaning of which is not established. He goes on to say that if their meaning were established, all the long-standing controversies in the church would have ceased a long time ago.³⁰ That being said, at no stage in the *Farrago* is the authority of Scripture contested and all three, Bellius, Montfort and Kleinberg, support their arguments by copious biblical references. All in all, the *Farrago* is best qualified as a humanist piece, pleading purity of heart as the sole criterion for a Christian, disclaiming the necessity of squabbling about details of dogma, and suggesting that Scripture contains no clear answer on issues such as the Trinity. It does not expound on knowledge and belief and does not defend the necessity of not knowing.

Beza saw a particular danger to Calvinism in the distinction Castellio made (as yet not very clearly) between knowledge via the senses and belief. This distinction implied that pious behaviour or, for that matter, impious behaviour such as stealing was perceptible by the senses and understanding and therefore

²⁸ See Martinus Bellius, *De haereticis an sint persequendi et omnino quomodo sit cum eis agendum...*[=*Farrago Belli*] (Magdeburg: Georg Rausch [= Basel: Johannes Oporinus] 1554), 23. Hereafter: *Farrago*, 1554.

²⁹ See Guggisberg, 1997, 96.

³⁰ See *Farrago*, 1554, 127–128.

a matter for universal agreement even between adherents of different religions such as Judaism or the Islam. Objects of faith, on the other hand, such as the nature of the Trinity, free will, infant baptism, presence of Christ in the eucharist could not be grasped by the senses and, even more seriously in Beza's view, could not be understood fully for want of adequate biblical testimony. They were therefore objects of belief and belief, according to Castellio's doctrine of it, could at any time be controverted by knowledge. Whether Castellio was aware in 1554 of the full implications of what he said, remains uncertain. I would like to suggest that he was not, given his subsequent efforts at clarifying the issue of knowledge and faith. However, in Beza's eyes, the slightest hint that there might be opposition between knowledge and faith meant a threat to the foundations of the Reformation. There was only one course left and that was to establish once and for all that faith in its orthodox Calvinist version was knowledge, and not only that but a form of knowledge superior to that gained by the senses and the understanding. The accusation of scepticism was not unjustified from Beza's point of view. Castellio implicitly made faith subordinate to knowledge of perceptible objects and to understanding thus rendering it uncertain and subjective, as close as it could come to a purely human act. Although the distinction is not applicable in Latin, we could say that Castellio in the *Farrago* made faith synonymous with belief. This was a blow not just against the Calvinist Reformation but against the standard Christian conception of faith as divinely given, albeit requiring the willing assent of the person.³¹ As Beza put it:

The licence you claim is such that... you think you can introduce any weird tale into the church and establish opinion in place of faith, and probability of the Academicians in place of necessity. But this must be alien to all those who are pious and who not only believe but understand what they believe and who are ready to account for their faith by referring to the word of God...³²

In place of the offending distinction, Beza proposed another:

It is true that faith should be distinguished from knowledge or understanding but in such a way that whoever posits faith, also necessarily posits understanding and not the contrary, because faith comes from hearing the preaching of

³¹ For a modern discussion of this see e.g. J. D. Hick, *Faith and Knowledge*, 2nd. edition. London: Macmillan, 1988.

³² Beza, 1554, 67: "Nempe haec est licentia quam captatis vt ...quaeuis portenta in ecclesiam Dei inuehere possitis et pro fide opinionem, pro veritate verisimilitudinem, pro necessitate probabilitatem Academicorum stabilire. Sed absit hoc a piis omnibus qui non modo credunt sed etiam intelligunt quid credant et parati sunt ad reddendam fidei suae rationem ex Dei verbo..."

the word of God and this act of hearing is such that it gives complete certainty and applies to each one of the elect a doctrine which is offered to all. Intelligence, on the other hand, although not natural (for *homo animalis* does not understand things which are of God), is nonetheless to be considered among those gifts which God imparts sometimes even to the impious and the reprobate for a particular reason.³³

In other words, Beza postulated categorically that faith was knowledge; it was knowledge of being saved for those whom God had predestined to salvation.

Castellio's Epistemology: De Haereticis Non Puniendis and De Arte Dubitandi

De haereticis non puniendis was a highly polemical reply to Beza. The treatise, which, as I said, remained unpublished until 1971 had no claims to being a fully-fledged theory of knowledge and faith. Castellio was above all concerned to refute his adversary's arguments one by one, referring with particular care to the Bible so as to show the basic agreement between his own teaching and that of the Holy Writ. I do not propose to analyse the work in its entirety and shall just concentrate on those sections, which throw a light on the author's supposed scepticism.

Castellio reacts violently to the title of Beza's work and more particularly to the phrase: "aduersus nouorum Academicorum sectam." He objects to the fact that Beza chooses to "thus defame an excellent school of philosophy."³⁴ Secondly, he objects to Beza calling "new" what is in fact very ancient. Thirdly, he asserts that Beza's charges against him are false, in other words that he is not an Academic sceptic although he approves of their system of thought because they were the only philosophers who overtly acknowledged the inferiority of their system to Christianity. Moreover, he argues that the name (not the system) "academic" fits Beza and his disciples much better than him, Castellio.

As befitted a professor of Greek, Castellio must have known what Academic scepticism was and why it came into existence. However, it is only its relationship to Christianity that he discusses in any detail. He explains that the intention of its

³³ Beza, 1554, 74: "Distingui enim debent intelligentia et fides, ita tamen vt qui hanc statuat, illam quoque necessario ponat, non contra; quia fides ex auditu est praedicati verbi et auditu quidem eiusmodi vt *plerophorian* gignat et doctrinam vniuersaliter oblatam singulis electis applicet. Intelligentia vero, quamuis et ipsa non sit a natura (homo enim animalis non intelligit quae Dei sunt) tamen inter ea dona recensetur quae interdum etiam impiis et reprobis certas ob causas Dominus impertit."

³⁴ Castellio, 1971, 22: "Hic ego multa reprehendo. Primum quod philosophicarum sectarum optimam in hoc titulo obiter vituperas."

adherents was to stop themselves asserting as certain, things that were not certain (and they thought nothing was certain) lest they gave their assent to something that was not the case with unfortunate consequences. Castellio singles out Socrates famous for his “I know that I know nothing.” According to Beza’s opponent, that was the wisest form of ignorance in a philosopher who was deprived of the light of Christ, and one which surpassed by far the rash knowledgeability of others.³⁵ He contrasts Socrates with Aristotle and the Peripatetic school. Aristotle, he notes, thought he knew everything and yet he asserted several monstrous errors some of which contradict the very principles of Christianity, e.g., he claimed that the world was not created, that a man bitten by a rabid dog would not catch rabies, that glory was something to be sought etc.³⁶

In other words, Castellio singles out Academic scepticism because, in his view, it is the only antique system of thought which admits that it cannot match up to Christianity. He has no wish to be counted as a Sceptic, which would be tantamount to being considered a pagan, worse still- hence his objection to the term “new”—an inventor of a new pagan system, whose name has resonance of “academia” or “schola” that is of scholasticism. He claims to find Academic scepticism in various New Testament injunctions not to judge too quickly, such as Luke 6, 37; I Cor 4, 5; II Cor 12, 2; I Cor 3, 18 and Gal 6, 3. The opposition he establishes between Socrates and Aristotle is a classic humanist opposition that would have found total support of Erasmus. He also plays on Beza occupying a post at the Academy of Lausanne to accuse him in turn of being an “Academician” or an “Academic sceptic”:

And how is it that you disgrace us with the hateful name of Academic and you yourself praise the Academy of Lausanne and call a Christian school just that, “an academy”, unless you yourself approve the opinions of the Academic sceptics? And if you do not, why do you deceive people with this appellation “academy”?³⁷

Thus while eloquent, Castellio’s reaction to being called an “Academic sceptic” is not ultimately revealing of anything other than the underlying conviction that all antique systems of thought are inferior to Christianity although only Academic Scepticism says that it is. This is coupled with routine humanist approval of Socrates and a dislike of Aristotle. The conceit of Beza’s “Academism” which in Castellio’s book is synonymous with neo-paganism recurs throughout the treatise. Castellio puts his opponent on guard against overthrowing Christian

³⁵ Castellio, 1971, 22.

³⁶ Castellio, 1971, 22–23.

³⁷ Castellio, 1971, 25.

religion “seeing as in your academies you learn, teach and lecture on those authors who openly conflict with Christian faith.” Who are these authors? This opportunity to take a dig at Beza’s youthful love poems that remained a thorn in the reformer’s flesh for much of his life would have been too good to miss. Castellio specifies: “I mean philosophers and poets some of whom teach things that go against Christian faith while others, such as Ovid or Theodore Beza and suchlike transmit the art of sinning and adultery.”³⁸

Also too good to miss would have been the opportunity to remind Beza of Luther’s dislike of Aristotle. At the same time Castellio returns the accusation not of scepticism but of “Academism” against Beza. It is he and his like, and not Castellio, who overturn religion with the stupid wisdom of their academies, which are no more than hotbeds of discord. At this point Castellio accurately cites several passages from Luther’s *Adventspostillen*, criticising academies with their reliance on Aristotle as inventions of Satan.³⁹ Lively though these pages are, their aim is not to defend scepticism but to refute the accusation of excessive pagan learning by returning it against Beza.

However, Castellio must have seen that his conception of faith in the *Farrago Belli* required some clarification in view of Beza’s spirited identification of faith with knowledge and also in view of the reformer’s accusation that he, Castellio, was reducing Christianity to the same level as the Islam. Still maintaining his polemical stance, Castellio therefore includes a theoretical explanation of his position.

He argues that it is faith that is the source of knowledge and not the other way around as Beza would have it. Referring to II Peter 1, 5–8 (‘supplement your faith with virtue, virtue with knowledge, knowledge with self-control’) he claims that this passage shows that knowledge has nothing to do with faith other than being its outcome. He uses the analogy of boyhood, adolescence and adulthood. Boyhood needs neither of the other two stages, but both adolescence and adulthood require boyhood as a preliminary stage.⁴⁰ He thus extends the scope of the concept of faith in reply to Beza’s contention that God has granted through faith a certain amount of knowledge to the true church, which enables its members to be assured of their salvation:

We bring faith not just to one sort of things which should be believed, such as the promises of our gratuitous salvation but to all truth revealed to us by God

³⁸ Castellio, 1971, 92: “Vide tu Beza ne vos potius religionem euertere velle videamini qui in academiis vestris eos authores discatis, ediscatis, doceatis qui cum christiana religione plane pugnant. Philosophos dico et poetas quorum nonnulli pleraque contra veritatem docent, alii etiam peccandi et adulterandi scortandique artem tradunt vt Ouidius, vt Theodorus Beza et eius generis alii.”

³⁹ Castellio 1971, 92–93.

⁴⁰ Castellio, 1971, 54.

through his prophets or his apostles, be it threats or promises, and we encompass this faith in the one and only Jesus Christ our Lord, who encloses all the treasures of heavenly blessings and indeed divinity itself which inhabits him physically. All these benefits are held forth to us in the Gospel as something that we are to fasten on and enjoy through faith.⁴¹

Thus defined, faith can no longer be knowledge in Castellio's view and disputations about issues such as the Trinity or real presence are no part of Christianity, which is founded on the *scala salutis* as defined in II Peter 1, 5–8: faith leading to virtue, leading to knowledge, leading to self-control etc.⁴² This brings him to Beza's point that if Christianity is to do with virtue and self-improvement, then there is no difference between Christians, Moslems and Jews. He retorts that only the faith (and the resulting virtue) of Christians can guarantee them salvation.⁴³ In order to point up the special status of Christians, Castellio has to distinguish between knowledge of God which is equivalent to obedience and justice and knowledge of Christ which is not knowledge in any strict sense of the word as Beza would have it but which is faith leading to virtue, which leads to knowledge.⁴⁴

What Castellio manages to do in *De haereticis*, is to clear himself of any suspicion of reducing Christian faith to religious belief. By insisting on the special status of Christian faith as a conviction that inevitably leads to virtue and by extending the concept to include all biblical truth which is divinely revealed, i.e. the sum of all threats and promises which are in some way encapsulated in Christ, Castellio confers a transcendental quality to faith, which did not come to the fore in the *Farrago*, where he insisted on the distinction between the certainty of knowledge of God via the senses and the intellect and the uncertainty of faith in Him. By conflating the issue of faith and knowledge in *De haereticis* Castellio restored the transcendental dimension of the former but forgot to assign any definite status to the latter. *De haereticis* might thus be considered a fideist treatise in Sabatier's or Popkin's sense of the term.

⁴¹ Castellio, 1971, 55: "Fidem nos non ad vnam aliquam duntaxat speciem rerum credendarum referimus, quales sunt promissiones salutis nostrae gratuitaе, sed ad omnem veritatem nobis diuinitus per prophetas et apostolos reuelatam, siue promittat siue minetur et hanc in vno Christo Iesu Domino nostro complectimur, quippe in quo omnes thesauri coelestium bonorum atque adeo diuinitas ipsa corporaliter habitat, quae beneficia omnia in euangelio per fidem nobis applicanda et fruenda proponuntur."

⁴² Castellio, 1971, 54.

⁴³ Castellio, 1971, 58, 59, 56.

⁴⁴ Castellio, 1971, 57.

De Arte Dubitandi

Obviously, Castellio did not feel that he had stated his position adequately or at least he felt that the issue of faith and knowledge required further elaboration once the heat of the controversy had died down. He wrote *De arte dubitandi et confidendi, ignorandi et sciendi* in 1563 just before he died. Still aimed against Calvin and Beza, it is a mature reflection on the issue of faith and knowledge. Although not very clearly structured and containing a certain number of repetitions as Elisabeth Feist Hirsch pointed out,⁴⁵ the treatise does confront the fundamental issue of faith and knowledge which had received only partial treatment in the *Farrago* and in *De haereticis*. Never having been the object of a detailed investigation, Castellio's last work fully merits our attention.

In the opening chapters he makes an attempt at distinguishing clearly between doubting, believing, not knowing and knowing. He also explains that he hopes to bring "those who think that they know everything" to a more reasonable view of their limitations:

There is a type of man that does not want anything to be unknown or doubtful: they will affirm anything with daring and, if you disagree with them, they condemn you without the slightest degree of doubt. And not only do they doubt nothing themselves but cannot bear others to doubt and if you do doubt, they do not have the slightest doubt or hesitation about calling you an Academician, because you seem to be certain of nothing. However, I am certain about many more things than they would have me. Suffice it to say that I am quite certain (as certain as they are in their own way) that they are rash in their assertions and in their audacious condemnations of people who do not share their opinions. I am sure that I shall bring it about with God's help that they who now think certain what they in fact ignore, will consider the matter more calmly having let go of their self-love, if only they will allow themselves to be led in that direction.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Castellio, 1937, 1981, 11.

⁴⁶ Castellio, 1937, 1981, lib. I, XVIII, 49: "Est enim genus quoddam hominum qui nihil dubitari nihil nesciri volunt, omnia audacter affirmant et, si ab eis dissentias, sine vlla dubitatione damnant neque solum ipsi nihil dubitant, sed ne quidem ab aliis dubitari patiuntur et, si dubites, non dubitant Academicum appellare, qui nihil certi, nihil explorati haberi posse putes. Ego vero certi et explorati plus etiam habeo quam ipsi velint. Nam, vt caetera taceam, eos in omnia affirmando et caeteros non suae opinionis homines tam audacter damnando temerarios esse certum exploratumque habeo idque vt ipsimet quoque, quod nunc ignorant certum exploratumque habeant, effecturum me Deo volente credo, si modo eo adduci se, sicuti debent, patientur, vt deposito amore sui rem ipsam aequis animis audiant atque considerent."

Castellio sees as doubtful that which is based on conjecture, or, to use his own terms, that which is *probable*. He puts in this category things which cannot be perceived by the senses or the intellect and which are not conveyed by trustworthy authors but which are not contrary to either sense or intellectual perception or to trustworthy authors. As an example he cites the question of whether the apostle John would eventually die or not, question which arose because Jesus says: ‘what is it to do with you if I want him to stay until I return?’ He considers that it is permissible to not know things that are neither ordained by God, nor necessary to men for knowing Him, nor necessary for either doing or justly avoiding their duty. He cites as emblematic the issue of the perpetual virginity of the Virgin Mary. As for things that can be known, according to Castellio, they can be grasped immediately by the senses or the intellect. He gives an example Jesus’ raising of Lazarus, which the Jews who were present would have perceived quite clearly. Things that we must know are God’s works and His demands from us as Christians.⁴⁷

Has Castellio changed his view of faith not being knowledge? The latter statement would lead the reader to believe that faith in God implies knowledge but it turns out that Castellio believes that this “compulsory” knowledge of God is available to all from sense and intellectual perception. As he puts it:

Therefore as regards knowledge I assert that it is man’s duty to know God and his precepts, that is his duty towards God. If he knows God and does his duty, he is blessed even though there may be great many things he does not know. And it is easy to have this knowledge. For the world, as it is God’s work, cannot be unknown to any man in the entire universe. And the precepts of love, on which rests the teaching of the law, the prophets and of Christ (who is the end-all of all teaching), are so clear, so natural and so familiar to man that even the most wicked people, who do not want to obey them, know them and give their assent to them whether they want to or not, when they have them explained. And the best proof of this is that even the wicked individual will agree if you say to him that he must love God and that he must do as he would be done by.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Castellio, 1937, 1981, lib. I, cap. XIX, 51.

⁴⁸ Castellio, 1937, 1981, lib. I, cap. XXI, 54: “Quare de scientia hoc dico, hominis officium esse Deum eiusque praecepta, hoc est officium suum cognoscere. Haec si nouit et officium suum facit, beatus est etiam si alioquin plurima ignoret. Haec autem scire facile est. Nam et mundus quod Dei opus est nulli homini in vniuersum ignotus esse potest et charitatis praecepta, a quibus et legis et vatum et Christi doctrina pendet et in quam vnam desinit, ita sunt perspicua, ita naturalia et homini cognata, vt etiam impii homines et qui eis obtemperare nolunt, tamen ea, velint nolint, sciant et, si eis dicantur, non possint non assentiri, cuius rei, vt caetera omittam, hoc argumentum est euidentissimum, quod, si vel sceleratissimo homini dicas et Deum esse amandum et alteri non faciendum quod tibi nolis fieri, fatebitur.”

Castellio appears to abandon his 1555 position by making God and virtue the object of knowledge. God's existence, his commands, our duty to Him are a matter not for contention or probability but for the senses and the intellect. The existence of the world and ethical norms constitute in Castellio's view an objective argument for God's existence.

Why then is faith not knowledge? Or to put the question more exactly: if God's existence and his basic demands on man are the object of knowledge, what is the object of faith according to Castellio? The question is not easy to answer, as he does not always distinguish clearly between belief and faith. Thus sometimes when he talks about faith he means "belief that" (as in a statement such as "I believe that there are camels in this desert") and at other times about "faith in" with the specifically Christian connotation of personal trust which is the foundation of the believer's relationship to God and Christ. The first example he gives of faith thus turns out to be an example of ordinary belief. He is thus unclear when he claims ironically that faith is in fact a very common concept familiar even to the most ignorant people but not to his opponents who claim to be learned:

For they said that faith was knowledge or conception thus showing themselves to be more ignorant than illiterate men, women and even children. For everyone understands what it is to believe and what faith is (the two being synonymous) as they understand nothing else. Therefore they carefully distinguish the two when they talk so that there is no ambiguity possible. For even children talk thus when they have heard some news: 'what did he say?' 'he said our father is back'. 'do you believe he is?' 'yes, I do.' 'do you know for certain?' 'I do not'. 'Then why believe that he is?' 'because I have always known him who told me as someone truthful.' Therefore to believe is to have faith or to give credence to an assertion which is either true or false. For we believe things that are false as often as we believe things that are true, which cannot be said of knowledge, for things which are false cannot be known although they can be believed. And no one will dispute that Christian faith is a virtue but I do not see how knowledge can be a virtue nor do I find it praised as a virtue anywhere in the Scripture...⁴⁹

⁴⁹ Castellio, 1937, 1981, lib. I, cap. 19, 52: "Fidem enim tradiderunt esse noticiam siue scientiam in quo plane sese ostenderunt minus sapere quam illiterati homines, quam foeminae, quam denique pueri sapiunt. Omnes enim quid sit credere quidue fides (quod idem est) ita intelligunt vt nihil magis. Itaque eam inter loquendum a scientia discernunt vt nihil prorsus habeat difficultatis aut ambiguitatis oratio. Nam vel pueri ita loquuntur dum noui aliquid nunciatur: - quid narrat ille? rediisse patrem. credisne rediisse?. credo. scisne certo? nescio. cur ergo credis?: quia semper veracem eum cognoui, qui narrat. - Est igitur credere dictis seu veris seu falsis fidem habere. Saepe enim non minus creditur

According to this view a statement such as “I believe that our father is back” appears to be formally identical with the statement “I believe in our salvation through Jesus Christ.” Furthermore, Castellio has not altered his position on the relationship between knowledge and faith, asserting that knowledge is the end of faith and/or belief. Obviously, the boys in his example will no longer need to believe that their father is back once they actually see him. Their belief will have given place to knowledge. Until that moment, however, their belief may well be false. This ought to imply that for Castellio Christian faith is susceptible to being contradicted in the same way as the little boys’ belief about the whereabouts of their father.

However, this is not the case, and here lies one of several paradoxes of Castellio’s thought. His definition of Christian faith, appearances to the contrary, has not undergone any changes since 1555. Faith is still the belief that all of God’s promises, accounts, precepts and prophecies in the Bible are truthful.⁵⁰ To qualify as someone having faith, a Christian must believe not just some but all of these to be truthful. While excluding the question of God’s existence or for that matter basic moral questions which we saw pertain to the realm of knowledge, faith in all of God’s threats and promises as conveyed in the Bible is in Castellio’s view a specifically Christian virtue, as its object distinguishes it from ordinary beliefs about things which may turn out to be true or false. This faith is common to all Christian groups, he adds, which is why none of them dispute the basic authority of the Bible. Problems arise when Christians try to misapply knowledge to certain propositions in the Bible which God meant to remain obscure, or which should be interpreted as they stand without any attempt to make them conform to any particular individual’s understanding of them. When Christ says ‘turn the other cheek’, affirms Castellio, he means just that: that we should not retort to violence with violence. Why then do the reformers support the violence of civil authorities against the Anabaptists? They allow their intellect to run away with them. There is no doubt, he also notes, that while the Bible states clearly that God is just and good, that we must love and worship Him while fleeing sin, it does not say anything clear about whether infants should be baptised, whether

falsis quam veris, id quod de sciendo dici non potest, quippe falsa quae sunt sciri non possunt at credi possunt. Denique fides Christiana virtus est, id quod nemo inficiabitur. At scientia quomodo virtus sit non video, nec eam in sacris Litteris vt virtutem laudari comperio...”

⁵⁰ Castellio, 1937, 1981, lib. I, cap. 19, 53: “Sed sic statuimus fidem non esse scientiam sed a scientia sic differre vt docuimus esseque Christianam fidem omnibus Dei dictis credere. Sunt autem Dei dicta aut narrationes aut praedicationes, aut praecepta, aut promissiones aut minae: his omnibus qui non credit is fidens non est etiamsi aliquibus credat...”

Christ is physically present in the sacrament, whether we are justified by faith and many other similar matters, which are constantly disputed.⁵¹

Whatever the modern reader may feel about Castellio's confusion or rather conflation between Christian faith and ordinary belief, his view of faith as an expression of general trust in the truthfulness of whatever God says and his point about the agreement among Christians on the basic issue of the authority of the Bible (distinctive characteristic of Christianity as a religion of the book, as we would say nowadays) convey something of the psychology of religious belief. His apparent expression of doubt with respect to the capacity of the human intellect to attain to total knowledge of divine matters through deciphering of biblical propositions against God's will, would thus seem to point to a fideism, already voiced in *De haereticis*.

At the same time, however, and this is another paradox in Castellio's system, he seeks to give the intellect as important a role as he possibly can in recognising God's existence and basic ethical concerns dictated by the Almighty. Why this emphasis on the importance of the intellect, given its fundamentally defective nature? The answer can only be that Castellio wants to give reason and faith equal weighting even if it means contradicting himself. Above all, he wants to overthrow once and for all Calvin's doctrine of man's reason being so thoroughly corrupted by the original sin that the most that man in his post-Redemption condition can use it for is to make him aware of his total dependence on God.⁵²

Still on the question of Scriptural passages and their interpretation, Castellio notes that Christ during his time on earth said things that accorded with reason and with the senses and that he would not have communicated anything to his public had he not appealed to their senses and reason as well as to their faith. It follows therefore that much of what Christ said is rational and therefore attainable by our reason. This shows in his view that man's senses and reason were not irretrievably damaged by the Fall and that the Genesis passage 'their eyes were opened' simply refers to Adam and Eve's awareness of their own nakedness and contains no negative connotations.⁵³ Admittedly, reason cannot grasp biblical propositions, which God intended to be obscure, but this is not a handicap as God intended them to remain obscure. Furthermore, reason, according to Castellio, is the only tool of biblical interpretation. As he puts it:

⁵¹ Castellio, 1937, 1981, lib. I, cap. 22, 57: "Primum omnium monendus est lector cum de scientia agimus, non agere nos de sacrarum Litterarum autoritate in quam fides intuetur, sed de mente siue sensu cuius est scientia. Constat enim inter omnes Christianas sectas (quarum causa nos hic laboramus) de autoritate, neque an veraces sint sacrae Litterae sed quomodo sint intelligendae quaestio est."

⁵² On Calvin's view of reason see Irena Backus, *Historical Method and Confessional Identity in the era of the Reformation (1378–1615)*. Leiden: Brill, 2003, 89–101.

⁵³ Castellio, 1937, 1981, lib. I, cap. XXVII, 69–70.

So reason is the seeker, the finder and the interpreter of truth that corrects or questions anything, which is either obscure or damaged by ravages of time in both sacred and profane writings, until such time as the truth shines forth or the matter is declared uncertain on a sounder basis.⁵⁴

Castellio is certainly not a sceptic with regard to knowledge. Human intellect, reason and senses know what God intended to be known. Faith is of no help in deciding on the correct exegesis of obscure biblical propositions. Christian faith, however, although apparently subject to the same limitations as ordinary belief, does provide the framework in which a Christian can exercise his senses and his intellect in such a way as to obtain knowledge of God and his works. However, in the second part of his treatise, Castellio argues that faith is not a product of the intellect but of the will. It is an emotional faculty apt to err. He notes that we tend to believe what we find congenial and not what we find unpleasant. As a perfect illustration of the distinction between faith and knowledge, he cites Jesus' healing of the blind man in John IX, *iff*. According to him, the fact that the blind man carried out Jesus' command to go and put mud on his eyes and then to wash it off in the pool of Siloa, shows that he believed he would see. Had he not had the faith, he would not have gone. Having regained his sight, however, he knew that he saw so that his faith had been replaced and superseded by knowledge.⁵⁵ It is plain, according to Castellio's schema, that the blind man would not have acquired knowledge of God unless he had had faith first. Where faith scores over intellect, is that it can have as object divine promises or commands which the intellect finds completely improbable. Castellio cites the example of Abraham who believed against all evidence and probability that he, an old man, would beget offspring from the aged and sterile Sarah. He sees this as pointing to the falsehood of Calvin's and Beza's position that faith is

⁵⁴ Castellio, 1937, 1981, lib. I, cap. XXV, 67: "Denique haec ratio illa est veritatis indagatrix, inuentrix, interpres, quae si quid in Litteris tum profanis tum sacris vel obscurum vel tempore vitiatum est, aut corrigit aut in dubium tantisper vocat donec tandem vel veritas elucescat vel saltem de re incerta amplius pronuncietur."

⁵⁵ Castellio, 1937, 1981, lib. II, cap. 3, 89: "De fide. Eam videlicet voluntatis esse non intellectus. Proximum est vt de fide dicamus. Fidem non esse notitiam vt quidam tradunt supra demonstraui et quid sit ea ostendimus. Atque id ipsius rationis iudicio facile percipi potest. Tam enim sciunt omnes ratione praediti quid sit credere, quam quid videre, audire, cogitare estque id cognitu facilius quam definitu. Adducam exemplum ex quo natura fidei plene et proprie perspici queat. Id erit ex Iohannis Euangelio [cap.9] vbi narratur quemdamodum Iesus illum caecum natum sanauerit, videlicet lutatis eius oculis et eo ire ad Siloam piscinam ad lauandum quo ille facto vidit. Quod enim iussus iuit, fuit credentis videlicet se visurum. Nisi enim credidisset, non iuisset. Quod autem lotus vidit, fuit scientis, scilicet se videre. Atque hic illa fides finem habuit, videlicet in aduentu scientiae."

knowledge. In his view Abraham's intellect could not possibly have assented to anything so improbable.⁵⁶

Faith thus is an act of the will, an expression of man's willingness to believe what God says, however unlikely. It is a faculty that Castellio considers as completely independent of the intellect and whose possession does not enable any man to make claims to knowing obscure biblical propositions such as those concerning the Trinity. What Calvin and Beza would have found equally, if not more, outrageous, was Castellio's assertion that faith is not a gift of God. To prove this the Basel scholar proposed his own interpretation of Eph. 2, 8ff.:

But they further allege passages in which faith is shown to be a gift from God, and this would suggest that it does not depend on man's will. For what is given to man by God, he cannot obtain it by his own will. And I am not even inclined to refer to the passage Eph.2, 8 ff. that is so frequently cited here: "For it is by his grace that you are saved, through trusting Him; it is not your own doing. It is God's gift, not a reward for work done." For the apostle calls 'gift of God' not faith but the fact that they are saved, in other words, salvation. Anyone who reads this passage with care (which cannot be done if we are too rash in accepting the general view), will see that it is salvation that is meant for three following reasons...⁵⁷

Castellio's contention that there is basic knowledge of God and his precepts, which is available to all of mankind via perception of creation and ethical awareness, is quite clear and poses no particular problems. His definition of faith, however, seems to function on two levels. Firstly, faith as a product of the will is

⁵⁶ Castellio, 1937, 1981, lib. II, cap. 4, 91: "Addunt haec: intellectus est facultas naturalis ideoque necessario assentitur aut dissentit aut dubitat prout est euidencia rerum quae ei obiiciuntur. Proinde sine euidencia non assentitur et porro neque credit. Respondeo. Imo saepe credit homo res minime euidentes minimeque probabiles, id quod de cognoscendo dici non potest. Credit Abraham se senem ex sene et sterili Sarah sucepturum prolem, id quod erat minime euidens minimeque probabile. Erat quidem probabile Deum qui promittebat vere dicere. Sed res ipsa quam promittebat Deus erat per se minime verisimilis. Nos autem hic non quaerimus an Abraham Deum cognosceret sed an eam rem quam illo promittente credebat, cognosceret, id quod negamus."

⁵⁷ Castellio, 1937, 1981, lib. II, cap. 6, 96: "Sed allegantur insuper quidam loci, in quibus fides donum esse Dei ostenditur, ex quibus effici videtur vt ea non sit arbitrii hominis. Quod enim homini diuinitus datur, id non ipse sibi homo sua voluntate parat. Neque vero huc adducere libet locum, qui in hoc argumento vulgo allegari solet, videlicet ex Pauli Epistola ad Ephesios, vbi sic loquitur: 'beneficio seruati estis per fidem idque non ex vobis. Dei donum est non ex factis, ne quis se iactet [Eph.2, 8ff]'. Ibi enim Dei donum vocat non ipsam fidem sed quod seruati sunt, hoc est ipsam salutem, id quod ex tribus rationibus deprehendet, qui locum illum non inconsiderate (vt fit dum vulgi opinioni temere assentimur) sed paulo attentius legerit."

formally identical to ordinary belief and therefore likely to err. On another level, Christian faith, although still a fallible product of the will, has a unique status as it enables man to believe those promises of God which his intellect and senses find improbable. It becomes superfluous once knowledge is gained. Castellio at no point specifies whether he means knowledge of God in this life or the next. Be that as it may, Castellio, contrary to what Popkin and others thought, cannot be thought a sceptic in matters of faith. Popkin conflated ancient, modern and early modern concepts of scepticism. If we replace them in their respective contexts, we can see that Castellio's firm belief in reason and its role as that which replaces faith puts him outside Academic scepticism and outside the Pyrrhonian criterion of truth problem. His distinction between reason and faith does not imply any doubt beyond the age-old theological debate about the truth value of rational propositions as against the propositions of faith. Arguing that faith and reason are distinct does not imply scepticism either in its Academic or in its Pyrrhonian form.

*Henri Estienne's and Gentien Hervet's Editions of Sextus Empiricus*⁵⁸

Before concluding, a word needs to be said about Henri Estienne's edition of Sextus Empiricus, which came out in 1562, a few months before Castellio began *De arte dubitandi*. If he ever consulted the edition or knew of its existence, he never referred to it. In any case, as we saw, the object of contention between him and Beza was not Pyrrhonian but Academic scepticism. In 1569 Estienne's text and annotations were republished by the post-Tridentine Catholic controversialist and humanist, Gentien Hervet (1499–1584) who added his own translation of Sextus' *Aduersus Mathematicos* as well as a new preface.⁵⁹ The intellectual climate which these two editions or rather their prefaces reveal throws an interesting light on Castellio's outlook while placing him outside the sphere of influence of the work itself. While granting that Sextus abuses sometimes his intelligence and criticises dogmatic philosophical positions which

⁵⁸ *Sexti Philosophi Pyrrhoniatarum hypotyposeon libri tres. Quibus in tres philosophiae partes seuerissime inquiritur. Libri magno ingenii acumine scripti variaque doctrina referti: Graece nunquam, Latine nunc primum editi. Interprete Henrico Stephano* (Parisiis) 1562. For details of edition, copies available and text of the preface see Jean Céard et al., *La France des humanistes. Henri II Estienne, éditeur et écrivain* (Europa Humanistica). Turnhout: Brepols, 2003, 89–94. Hereafter cited as Céard, 2003.

⁵⁹ *Sexti Empirici viri longe doctissimi Libri aduersus Mathematicos...Gentiano Herueto Aurelio interprete. Eiusdem Sexti Pyrrhoniatarum hypotyposeon libri tres...Graece nunquam, Latine nunc primum editi, interprete Henrico Stephano...Paris: Martin Le Jeune, 1569. Hereafter: Hervet, 1569.*

are correct, Estienne finds his *epoche* (suspension of judgement) preferable to certain assertions of ancient dogmatic philosophers, who deny the evidence of the senses for the sake of an abstract position.⁶⁰ As regards their attitude to God, he notes that many ancient dogmatic philosophers tend to set themselves up in judgement over divine providence thus ending up with an impious or an atheistic view of it. Sceptics for their part admitted suspension of judgement listening to philosophical arguments about God, but on the other hand said that their observation of everyday life led them to an instinctive belief in God's existence so that they were impelled to honour and worship him. His aim in editing Sextus is to cure dogmatic thinkers of his own era of their excessive attachment to particular philosophical positions.⁶¹ In other words, Estienne is worried that an increasing recourse to philosophical arguments in theology may lead to excessive dogmatism and he hopes that the text of Sextus will provide an antidote. In this he can be said to echo the position of Pico and the hope expressed by Savonarola, which, as we saw, play no role in either Erasmus' or Castellio's view of knowledge and faith.

Some seven years later Hervet expressed the same sentiments more clearly and far more polemically in his preface to Sextus:

...As he shows quite clearly that no human branch of knowledge is so solid as to be error-proof, and there is no exact science which will stand up to the attacks of arguments and reason, we must pass over lightly disciplines which inflate without edifying and we must give ourselves over to the one discipline which is particular to Christians, in other words that we should embrace and hold on to charity, having faith in what Christ revealed to us and relying on the hope of future blessings and obeying God.⁶²

In Hervet's view, Sextus and his system fulfill a triple function. He reminds Christians that charity, not scholasticism, should be their prime concern. He also provides ammunition against other pagan philosophers and, most importantly, he provides the Roman Catholic church with ammunition against their heretical i.e. protestant adversaries who try to systematise God and things pertaining to the divine realm, things they cannot understand.⁶³

The editions of Sextus Empiricus by Estienne and Hervet show how Castellio's universe was removed from either position. Working from their different standpoints, both Estienne and Hervet made Pyrrhonian lack of dogmatism about knowledge in general into a virtue. Castellio did not think that not

⁶⁰ Céard, 2003, 91–92.

⁶¹ Céard, 2003, 92.

⁶² Hervet, 1569, ā2r.

⁶³ Hervet, 1569, ā2v.

knowing was a virtue of any kind. In fact he thought that human knowledge was indispensable and that it provided incontrovertible evidence of God's existence. All that he denied was that belief and more specifically religious faith could be classed as knowledge although it did provide a preliminary and necessary stage in our quest for full knowledge of God.

Conclusion

At no point does Castellio cast doubt upon man's capacity to know. Reason, which produces knowledge, is, in his view, as important a quality as faith. It is directly linked to the divine Logos. God imparted it to all men, Christian or not, which explains why so many pagan authors echo Christian values. It is indeed reason and the senses that enable us to grasp the basic fact of God's existence from creation and to apprehend the fundamental moral values that God requires of us humans. Reason or intellect is also the tool for interpreting Scripture. If reason alone cannot make sense of a Scriptural passage, this means that God intended it to be obscure. Therefore, contrary to what Beza and Calvin claim, Scripture gives no man any right to be dogmatic about the nature of the Trinity, the eucharist or infant baptism. However, reason is separate from the will and from the emotions that produce faith. Unlike knowledge, faith like any belief, deals not with what is evident but with what is probable. It is therefore susceptible to err. Had Castellio put an end to his definition of faith at this point, he would have been easily classifiable as a sceptic, as Popkin and others suggest. However, Castellio's full definition of the concept Christian faith suggests that any suggestion of scepticism is inappropriate. Faith is what enables man to believe that God is truthful and to carry out commands which seem unlikely or absurd, as shown by the examples of Abraham and the blind man in John IX. As we said, faith also leads to man's knowledge of God, as, once God has fulfilled a divine promise, however unlikely, man knows the Almighty to be truthful and therefore no longer requires faith. Castellio is thus the contrary of a sceptic; he postulates both the total reliability of reason and intellect, which lead man to obtain knowledge of the world and the total reliability of faith, which is what leads man to know God.

Thus early modern scepticism has nothing to do with Reformation debates which focus on the status of reason in relation to faith. As we saw, the term sceptic as used by Castellio and Beza is merely a rhetorical ploy. If Pyrrhonism did revive in the sixteenth century, it did so independently of the confessional debates of the period.⁶⁴

⁶⁴ I should like to thank both the editors of this volume, particularly José Raimundo Maia Neto, for observations on the first part of an earlier version of this paper.

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Sexti Empirici viri longe doctissimi Libri aduersus Mathematicos... Gentiano Herueto Aurelio interprete. Eiusdem Sexti Pyrrhoniarum hypotyposeon libri tres... Graece nunquam, Latine nunc primum editi, interprete Henrico Stephano... Paris: Martin Le Jeune, 1569.

4. *TUTIUS IGNORARE QUAM SCIRE*: CORNELIUS AGRIPPA AND SCEPTICISM

Vittoria Perrone Compagni
Università degli Studi di Firenze, Italia

Translated by Crofton Black

De Vanitate: A Sceptical Crisis?

On 16 September 1526 Agrippa announced to his friend Jean Chapelain that he had completed a “rather dense volume” entitled *De incertitudine et vanitate scientiarum atque excellentia verbi Dei*.¹ It is not possible to establish whether the celebrated *declamatio invectiva* was really finished at this time; in any case, its publication, by Johannes Grapheus of Anversa, did not take place until 1530.² The work was reprinted many times and was soon translated into German, Italian, English, French and later Dutch.³ It granted Agrippa a long-lasting, but not altogether deserved, reputation as one of the sixteenth century’s foremost proponents of scepticism.

Gabriel Naudé placed Agrippa in his ideal library alongside Sextus Empiricus and Sanchez, among those “who made it their business to overturn all the sciences.”⁴ Modern bibliography, however, prefers to place him in the categories of anti-intellectualism, mysticism or biblical fundamentalism. This interpretation

¹ Cornelius Agrippa, *Epistolarum libri*, IV, 44, in *Opera*. Lugduni: per Beringos fratres, s.d., repr. Hildesheim and New York: Olms, 1970, II, pp. 821–822.

² The published version had been expanded and perhaps reworked, at least in some places, according to the author’s custom. Cf. Ch. G. Nauert jr., *Agrippa and the Crisis of Renaissance Thought*. Urbana (IL): University of Illinois Press, 1965, p. 108, n. 11; P. Zambelli, “Cornelius Agrippa, ein kritischer Magus”, in A. Buck, ed., *Die Okkulten Wissenschaften in der Renaissance*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1992, p. 81, n. 40.

³ In German in 1534; in Italian in 1543; in English in 1569; in French in 1582; in Dutch in 1651.

⁴ G. Naudé, *Advis pour dresser une bibliotheque*. Paris: Rolet le duc, 1644, repr. Paris: Aux amateurs des livres, 1990, pp. 44–45: “on ne doit pas negliger Sextus Empiricus, Sanchez, & Agrippa, qui ont fait profession de renverser toutes les Sciences.”

has the merit of calling into question the so-called ‘scepticism’ of *De vanitate*, but it remains a negative and partial reading. Since the invective, striking out indiscriminately at all the sciences and arts, does not contain “a serious epistemological analysis,”⁵ what are Agrippa’s intentions? And how can his final categorization in anti-intellectualism, mysticism or biblical fundamentalism be reconciled with his long-standing interest in precisely those products of reason which the appeal to *verbum Dei* should by then have swept away? The paradox is well-known. At the same time as preparing to print *De vanitate*, Agrippa was reworking and expanding the youthful draft of his *De occulta philosophia* (1510), which was eventually published in 1533, three years after *De vanitate*. *De occulta philosophia* is not an encyclopaedia assembled purely as a work of erudition, nor is it an esoteric text which tries to make up for the defeat of reason by taking refuge in the irrational. It is a work of philosophy, in which Agrippa justified the epistemological status of magic on the basis of Neoplatonic metaphysics. It is possibly true that “it may be wrong to expect a simple consistent interpretation of the thought of such figures as Agrippa,”⁶ but before making a catalogue of his supposed tensions and inconsistencies it is worth attempting an explanation.

Some scholars have proposed that *De vanitate* results from a profound personal crisis (psychological, religious or cultural), leading Agrippa to a radical critique of the system of occult doctrines, which then spread to a general critique of his own intellectual choices. This has not resolved the apparent contradiction, however. No doubt the circumstances of Agrippa’s life between 1526 and 1530 influenced the tone of the work which was in course of preparation, accentuating its harshness and aggression and inspiring the more polemical and audacious pages.⁷ But it is unlikely that Agrippa abandoned, in one fell swoop, all his intellectual convictions, simply on account of indignation at the treatment he suffered at the court of Luisa of Savoy. The psychological interpretation is insufficient.⁸ Likewise the hypothesis of intellectual upheaval remains conjectural as long as the times, reasons, witnesses and above all implications of this change have not been

⁵ R. H. Popkin, *The History of Scepticism from Savonarola to Bayle*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2003, p. 29.

⁶ S. Brown, “Renaissance Philosophy Outside Italy”, in G. H. R. Parkinson, ed., *The Renaissance and Seventeenth Century Rationalism*. London and New York: Routledge, 2003, p. 86.

⁷ Agrippa, physician at the court of Luisa of Savoy, had not duly satisfied the request of the Queen Mother to prepare a horoscope on the political fortunes of France, and had also expressed a severe judgement on his patron’s propensity for astrological superstition in a letter sent to the court steward Henry Bouhier, who had shown it to Luisa. This episode was followed by economic defaulting on the part of the court and an ever-increasing bitterness on the part of Agrippa.

⁸ A. Weeks, *German Mysticism from Hildegard of Bingen to Ludwig Wittgenstein. A Literary and Intellectual History*. Albany (NY): SUNY, 1993, pp. 120–124.

identified.⁹ If Agrippa no longer had any belief in science (and above all in astrology and magic) why would he have continued to work on *De occulta philosophia*, giving consistency to a project for the reform of magical tradition based on a new vision of science? There are no proofs for the cultural ‘crisis’ which is supposed to explain the composition of *De vanitate*, except for *De vanitate* itself. The interpretation that Agrippa was ‘disillusioned with the world’ is therefore entirely circular.

Nonetheless it is undeniable that serious motivations stood behind the violent attack on the bastions of knowledge¹⁰ – as if the awareness of grave and urgent historical circumstances drove Agrippa to refute, censure and pronounce anathema on human culture in all its manifestations. The reduction of *De vanitate* to a simple exercise of rhetoric in a fashionable literary genre, the paradox,¹¹ while having the merit of focusing on the work’s formal characteristics, does not take into account the philosophical intentions of the text; it reduces its subversive implications to the point where they become almost inoffensive. Although Agrippa acknowledged Erasmus as his model, *De vanitate* is very different from the *Laus stultitiae*. Firstly, the critique, which Erasmus had been developing with fine irony and an ever-increasing prudence, was opened out in *De vanitate* into harsh polemic, indignant condemnation and hand-to-hand combat (*monomachia*). Secondly, Agrippa’s project was broader, more complex and more radical than that of Erasmus, as well as being more unrealistic.

The hypothesis that I should like to examine is that the investigation into knowledge proposed in *De vanitate* is just one event in a broader philosophical, moral and religious meditation on the crisis of contemporary society, which Agrippa had been engaged in from his first works and which still remains central to his thought after the publication of the ‘sceptical’ declamation.¹² Fundamentally, the reflection on the basis and value of human knowledge which is formulated

⁹ M. H. Keefer, “Agrippa’s Dilemma: Hermetic Rebirth and the Ambivalences of *De vanitate* and *De occulta philosophia*”, *Renaissance Quarterly* 41 (1988), pp. 614–653; P. Zambelli, “Continuità nella definizione della magia naturale da Ficino a Della Porta”, in D. Ferraro and G. Gigliotti, eds., *La geografia dei saperi. Studi in memoria di Dino Pastine*. Firenze: Le Lettere, 2000, p. 41. Cf. V. Perrone Compagni, “Introduction”, in Cornelius Agrippa ed., *De occulta philosophia libri tres*. Leiden, New York and Köln: Brill, 1992, pp. 47–50; “Astrologia e filosofia occulta in Agrippa”, *Rinascimento* 41 (2001), pp. 93–111.

¹⁰ M. van der Poel, *Cornelius Agrippa, the Humanist Theologian and His Declamations*. Leiden, New York and Köln: Brill, 1997.

¹¹ B. C. Bowen, “Cornelius Agrippa’s *De Vanitate*: Polemic or Paradox?”, *Bibliothèque d’Humanisme et Renaissance* 34 (1972), pp. 249–256; E. Korkowski, “Agrippa as Ironist”, *Neophilologus* 60 (1976), pp. 594–607.

¹² V. Perrone Compagni, “Riforma della magia e riforma della cultura in Agrippa”, *I Castelli di Yale. Quaderni di filosofia* 2 (1997), pp. 115–140; T. Dagron, “Secrets de la nature et mystères divins: Corneille Agrippa lecteur de Pic”, in D. de Courcelles, ed., *D’un principe philosophique à un genre littéraire: les “Secrets”*. Paris: Champion, 2005, pp. 105–132.

in *De vanitate* is perfectly coherent with regard to the epistemology utilized in his other works. It does not conclude with the acceptance of the impossibility of reforming the system of knowledge, but rather with a proposal for a serious project of cultural reform. In this perspective, the recourse to scepticism assumes a paid-etic function: it becomes a critical tool for attacking and refuting Aristotelian philosophy. Agrippa does not intend to pronounce a vote of no confidence on science in general, but rather to pass judgement on the state, methods and practitioners of the philosophical school which dominated at that time. This judgement is undoubtedly very severe. Contemporary culture, lost in useless sophisms, is no longer able to fulfil its task of guiding the *respublica Christianorum*. In the absence of an intellectual elite who are seriously interested in moral and religious progress, the social fabric has become torn by corruption, by political and religious struggles and by heresies and superstitions. *De vanitate* proposes to identify the causes and the historical responsibilities for the general spiritual wreckage of Christian society; but it also proposes remedies.

Obviously, since Agrippa perceived the crisis in cultural terms, his solution turned on proposing an alternative model of knowledge and education. It is precisely this ‘reformatory’ intention of *De vanitate* which allows us to establish a continuity of ideas between this text – apparently purely negative – and the works which preceded and followed it. At the same time, the emphasis on the civic function of philosophy can be considered the characteristic and ‘original’ element of Agrippa’s work. As is well known, he composed his texts by gathering a broad range of citations, which became extrapolated from their original context and recomposed – like the pieces of a complicated mosaic – in a new explanatory structure. According to some scholars this excessive dependence on sources corresponds to an irrepressible desire for encyclopaedism. Others have seen it as reflecting a tendency towards popularization of culture; and others, more directly, as pure and simple plagiarism.¹³ Personally I think that Agrippa’s *modus operandi* should instead be considered in the light of a conscious ideological programme. On the one hand, the ‘re-writing’ of sources uncovered presuppositions and implications which the sources themselves often left unsaid. On the other, by arranging his citations and borrowings in a complex and diverse organization, Agrippa connected in a single coherent design arguments and points of view which remained separate in contemporary discussion. In this way,

¹³ Cf. respectively, P. Zambelli, “Introduzione”, in “Agrippa di Nettesheim: *Dialogus De Homine*”, *Rivista critica di storia della Filosofia* 13 (1958), p. 55; B. P. Copenhaver, “Natural Philosophy/Astrology and Magic”, in C. B. Schmitt and Q. Skinner, eds., *The Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988, p. 264; F. Secret, “L’originalité du *De occulta philosophia*”, *Charis. Archives de l’Unicorne* 2 (1990), pp. 57–87.

in the ‘new’ text produced by Agrippa, the multifarious aspects of the critique of university tradition and religious institutions took on the strength of a united movement and transferred the clash from a purely cultural context onto a plane which could be defined, at least broadly, as political.

The risks inherent in such an operation were made clear by both Lefèvre d’Étaples and Erasmus, who reacted with worry and agitation or circumspect coolness to the promises of Agrippa that he would become their ally and defender.¹⁴ From this point of view it is particularly instructive to read the articles of condemnation which attacked the heretical assertions of *De vanitate* in 1530¹⁵: the theologians of Louvain had understood very well that, in Agrippa’s work, philosophical and religious discussion had by then turned into an ideological battle, which undermined their hegemony in the name of a new cultural model.

Scepticism and Cultural Reform

The most striking aspect of *De vanitate* is undoubtedly its *pars destruens*. From grammar to dance, from theology to hunting, from ethics to dice-games, the all-encompassing polemical parade emphasizes the purely opinion-based nature, the instability and the dangers of human contrivances. Everything which reason invents and practises, relying on its strength alone, is fallacious, useless and harmful: “the sciences are ambiguous, full of errors and disagreements”; they “do not make their possessors nearer to felicity in any way,” because “true felicity (*vera beatitudo*) does not consist in the knowledge of the good things, but in a good life”; in sum, “if one must dare to speak truly, the structure of the sciences is so risky and unstable that it is much safer not to know anything than to know.” The happiest life is the life of ignorance.¹⁶ The discussion develops through a

¹⁴ Agrippa, *Epistolae*, II, 27–28; 30–31; 35–36, pp. 675–680, 682–683; VI, 31; 36; VII, 6; II, 17–19; 38; 40, pp. 987, 994, 999–1000, 1008, 1015–1017, 1064, 1066. Cf. also Erasmus, *Opus epistolarum*, ed. P. S. Allen. Oxonii: Clarendon, 1906–1958, X, 2800, pp. 209–210.

¹⁵ Cf. Cornelius Agrippa, *Apologia adversus calumnias propter Declamationem de vanitate scientiarum et excellentia verbi dei, sibi per aliquot Lovanienses Theologistas intentatas*. S. l.: 1533, s. t.

¹⁶ Cornelius Agrippa, *De incertitudine et vanitate scientiarum atque artium declamatio*, I, in *Opera*, II, pp. 4–5: “[scientiae] possessorem autem suum nihilo reddent beatiorem”; “Vera enim beatitudo non consistit in bonorum cognitione, sed in vita bona”; “Quod si audendum est verum fateri, tam est scientiarum omnium periculosa inconstansque traditio ut longe tutius sit ignorare quam scire”; p. 8: “omnes scientiae nil nisi decreta et opiniones hominum sunt, tam noxiae quam utiles, tam pestiferae quam salubres, tam malae quam bonae, nusquam completae, sed et ambiguae, plenae erroris et contentionis”; ep. ded., p. * 4: “nihil scire foelicissima vita”.

constant oscillation between moral or religious evaluation and epistemological critique. It is the moral angle, however, which is prevalent – not only because Agrippa also examines trades, professions, pastimes and social types, which are not susceptible to epistemological analysis, but also because, when he discusses science, he is interested in focusing on the ways in which it is used, and its consequences insofar as they have a concrete effect on society, rather than in investigating methods and subjects.

To maintain his confutation of the products of reason Agrippa makes systematic use of the traditional sceptical argument of *diaphonia*. That is, the discord which divides practitioners of each branch of science demonstrates the intrinsic weakness of the *inventiones* of natural reason; natural reason proceeds by undemonstrable conjectures (in the sense used by Lactantius, not that of Cusanus) and, above all, it cannot be applied to the realm of knowledge of God. The ultimate model for the compilation of the habitual lists of dissonant opinions is the texts of the sceptics of antiquity, but for the most part Agrippa makes use of more recent sources: Ficino, Reuchlin, Francesco Giorgio Veneto, but also Lactantius, who is a conduit for material from Cicero into *De vanitate*.¹⁷ The *Examen vanitatis doctrinae gentium* of Gianfrancesco Pico, on the other hand, is absent, as C. B. Schmitt showed.¹⁸ The absence of the *Examen*, that is, of the first detailed reading of the work of Sextus Empiricus,¹⁹ is significant and raises the suspicion that Agrippa had many reservations concerning the ‘sceptical’ and fideistic positions assumed by Gianfrancesco.²⁰

Nonetheless, the parade of philosophers’ *placita*, although careful and fastidious, does not succeed in hiding Agrippa’s own personal preferences. It simply makes them less immediately obvious, confusing them under the accumulation

¹⁷ According to L. Floridi, *Sextus Empiricus. The Transmission and Recovery of Pyrrhonism*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2002, p. 38, “Agrippa probably relied on Galenus and Aulus Gellius”.

¹⁸ C. B. Schmitt, *Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola (1469–1533) and His Critique of Aristotle*. The Hague: Nijhoff, 1967, pp. 237–242, rightly traced the verifiable similarity between Gianfrancesco and Agrippa to the use of common sources. Likewise, the passage in *De vanitate*, 7, p. 34, for which Schmitt, p. 241, n. 15, allowed a possible influence of the *Examen*, actually derives from Francesco Giorgio Veneto’s *De harmonia mundi* (see below, n. 27). Agrippa did make use of Gianfrancesco’s *De studio humanae et divinae philosophiae* (in *De vanitate*) and *De rerum praenotione* (in *De occulta philosophia*). In the first instance, however, he limits himself to culling some second-hand citations, while in the second instance he turns Gianfrancesco’s meaning completely upside-down.

¹⁹ G. M. Cao, “The Prehistory of Modern Scepticism. Sextus Empiricus in Fifteenth-Century Italy”, *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 64 (2001), pp. 230–280.

²⁰ Cf. *contra* M. di Loreto, “La fortuna di Sesto Empirico tra Cinquecento e Seicento”, *Elenchos. Rivista di studi sul pensiero antico* 16 (1995), pp. 337–339.

of authorities. So, with reference to the soul, despite the initial declaration (“If then one should go to ask philosophers about the soul one finds even less agreement”) and despite the successive citation of forty-one different opinions, in the end Agrippa does not uphold even the facade of scepticism: they all agree in recognizing that the soul is a force capable of movement, or else a sort of perfect harmony of the parts of the body, which however depends on the nature of the body. Even *demonic Aristotle* follows in their steps: in fact he invents a new word and defines the soul as ‘entelechy’, that is, “the perfection of a natural body endowed with organs which has life potentially,” of which the soul constitutes the principle of thought, sensation and movement. This is the empty definition of the soul of the most authoritative Philosopher, which does not declare its essence, nature or origin, but merely its action. Finally, *above and beyond* all these philosophers are those others who define the soul as a divine substance, complete and indivisible, present throughout the whole body and each of its parts, the product of an incorporeal Maker to the extent that it depends solely on the power of its Efficient Cause, not on the bowels of matter. This opinion has been upheld by Zoroaster, Hermes Trismegistus, Orpheus, Aglaophemus, Pythagoras, Eumenius, Ammonius, Plutarch, Porphyry, Timaeus of Lokri and *divine Plato*, who says that the soul is an essence which moves itself, and is endowed with intellect.²¹

Divine Plato, demonic Aristotle. It is clear that this note of dissent is not intended to lead to the suspension of judgement and the indifference of ‘neither this one nor that one’. Rather, it contrasts two different models of rationality, passing an explicit value judgement on them (“*supra hos omnes sunt alii*”).²²

²¹ Agrippa, *De vanitate*, 52, p. 108: “Quod si de anima ab illis aliquid sciscitemur, multo minus conveniunt”; pp. 109–110: “omnes quidem in hoc convenientes, quod anima sit vis quaedam agilis ad movendum, vel esse partium corporalium sublimem quandam harmoniam, sed tamen ab ipsa corporis natura dependentem. Atque horum vestigia sequitur daemoniacus Aristoteles, qui invento novo vocabulo animam vocat entelechiam, scilicet perfectionem corporis naturalis organici, potentia vitam habentis, dantem illi principium intelligendi, sentiendi et movendi. Atque haec receptissimi Philosophi animae futilis definitio, quae non essentiam, naturam, aut eius originem declarat, sed effectus [affectus *ed.*]. Porro supra hos omnes sunt alii, qui dixerunt, animam esse divinam quandam substantiam, totam ac individuum ac toto ac cuique corporis parti praesentem, ab incorporeo auctore taliter productam, ut ex sola agentis virtute, non ex materiae gremio dependeat. Eius opinionis fuerunt Zoroastes, Hermes Trismegistus, Orpheus, Aglaophemus, Pythagoras, Eumenius, Hammonius, Plutarchus, Porphyrius, Timaeus Locrus et divinus ille Plato, dicens animam esse essentiam sui motricem intellectu praeditam.” Cf. M. Ficinus, *Theologia Platonica*, VI, 1, ed. R. Marcel. Paris: Les Belles Lettres, I, 1964, pp. 223–225; Franciscus Georgius Venetus, *De harmonia mundi totius cantica tria*, I, II, 4; 14–15. Venetiis: in aedibus Bernardini de Vitalibus, 1525, ff. 28r; 37v–38r.

²² The adverb *supra* can be used not in an axiological sense but in an adjunctive one (“besides all these”), but Agrippa generally uses *praeter* to express this.

One might suspect that the adjective *divinus* has an ironic undertone, in revolt against the ‘Platonizing’ enthusiasm of some of Agrippa’s contemporaries – Ficino, above all, from whom the most part of the passage is derived. But this suspicion can only be valid if *De vanitate* really recognizes that there is no criterion for establishing truth in the conflict between philosophical schools; or if it states that truth is not attainable in any form. I shall discuss the problem in more depth below. For now I shall limit myself to pointing out an intimation of a solution which is contained in the same chapter:

There is still a raging discussion among theologians on the question of whether, when souls are detached from their bodies, they retain memories and sensations of the actions which they undertook during their earthly lives (which is the opinion of the Platonists); or if, instead, they completely lack any such knowledge, as the Thomists maintain firmly along with their Aristotle. ... But it is certainly clear that this conclusion [of the Thomists] is not so much opposed to the assertions of the Platonists, as to the authority of the Holy Scripture and to the Truth, since Scripture says that the impious will see and know that He is God, and they will render account not only of their actions, but also of their idle words and their thoughts.²³

The suggestion just made here is not unimportant. Scripture constitutes a *lydius lapis* on the basis of which one can pass judgement on different positions²⁴; one philosophical school is found to be consistent with the criterion of truth, at least on this matter.²⁵ I do not think it insignificant that this school should be identified with the tradition of *prisca theologia* to which elsewhere Agrippa, like Ficino, attached such prestige for its role as a prophecy of Christianity.

It seems debatable therefore whether Agrippa “like the ancient sceptics directly questioned human ability to know causes.”²⁶ In reality, he derived some

²³ Agrippa, *De vanitate*, 52, p. 113: “Quippe etiam gravis inter Theologos disputatio est an (quae Platoniorum opinio est) in animabus exutis eorum, quae in vita gesserint relinquerintque, memoria sensusque supersint, aut istorum cognitione omnino careant; quod Thomistae cum suo Aristotele firmiter tenent ... quod tamen manifeste est non tam contra Platoniorum assertionem, quam contra Scripturae auctoritatem Veritatemque, cum dicat Scriptura visuros et scituros impios, quia ipse Deus est, quin et omnium non modo factorum, sed et verborum ociosorum et cogitatum rationem reddituros.”

²⁴ Agrippa, *De vanitate*, 100, p. 298: “Igitur ad ipsum verbum Dei oportet nos omnes scientiarum disciplinas et opiniones tanquam ad Lydium lapidem aurum, examinare, atque in omnibus eo ceu ad solidissimam petram confugere atque ex eo solo omnium rerum veritatem venari ac de omnibus disciplinis, de omnium opinionibus et commentis iudicare.”

²⁵ See also Agrippa, *De vanitate*, 54, p. 123: “Platonici vero cum suo Platone et Plotino, divina semper redolentes, in unione cum summo bono felicitatem locaverunt.” Cf. Georgius, *De harmonia mundi*, I, 1, 17, f. 22v.

²⁶ Ch. G. Nauert, *Humanism and Culture of Renaissance Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995, p. 201.

points of sceptical inspiration which his contemporary sources (of a Platonic orientation) used as a means of questioning the capacity of *Aristotelian* epistemology to account for the nature of things. It is true that “he employs a major sceptical argument when he demonstrates the unreliability of sensory experience.” In chapter 7 Agrippa states that knowledge based on sense perception is not able to guarantee a sure and truthful experience, since the senses are fallible; nor does it succeed in revealing the causes and properties of phenomena or in knowing intelligibles, since these escape the grasp of the senses.²⁷ But the brusque statement of the untrustworthiness of sensory experience, which Agrippa derives from Francesco Giorgio Veneto, does not lead to the conclusion “that all human knowledge is open to question.”²⁸ Instead, it is the preliminary stage in proving that science cannot exist on the basis of a theory of knowledge derived from the senses; one which then serves to introduce another epistemology which is the foundation for true knowledge. From the cultural point of view, the destructive action of scepticism has the great merit of putting an end to the discussion between the schools by eliminating one of the two contenders, that is, all philosophers who draw their foundation from sensory experience. From the pedagogical point of view, however, scepticism is no more than a preliminary training. Sceptical interrogation of worldly reality demonstrates the inconsistency of that which is subject to the incessant flux of becoming and dissolves the illusory certainty offered by the immediate experience of the senses.²⁹ In this respect, too, the sceptical process of doubt (directed towards physical reality) could be numbered among the preliminary preparations which open for man the approach to felicity. Agrippa indicated this in chapter 1 of *De vanitate*: “disciplines applied from outside (*disciplinae foris adhibitae*) bring about a sort of condition of purification, which in a certain measure contributes to felicity,” even if they are not the cause “by which felicity is fully realized for us.”³⁰ I think that the ‘purification’ should be understood as relating to the idea of knowledge

²⁷ Agrippa, *De vanitate*, 7, pp. 34–35. Cf. Georgius, *De harmonia mundi*, proem., ff. 2r–3r; I, I, 8 and 17, ff. 11r; 22r–23r.

²⁸ Ch. G. Nauert, *Humanism and Culture of Renaissance Europe*, p. 202.

²⁹ This was the position which Agrippa’s two main sources, Marsilio Ficino and Francesco Giorgio Veneto, took on scepticism. On Ficino’s attitude to the sceptics, cf. A. De Pace, *La scepsi, il sapere e l’anima. Dissonanze nella cerchia laurenziana*. Milano: LED, 2002. On Francesco Giorgio, cf. C. Vasoli, *Profezia e ragione*. Napoli: Morano, 1974, pp. 129–403; *Filosofia e religione nella cultura del Rinascimento*. Napoli: Morano, 1988, pp. 233–256.

³⁰ Agrippa, *De vanitate*, 1, p. 5: “nec aliud efficiunt disciplinae foris adhibitae, nisi quia conditionem nobis quandam purgatoriam adhibent, ad beatitudinem aliquid conducentem, non tamen rationem ipsam, qua nobis beatitudo compleatur, nisi eis adsit et vita in ipsam bonorum translata naturam.”

and that among the *disciplinae foris adhibitae* should be included the employment of sceptical doubt.³¹ Systematic debate over sensory representation and the suspension of judgement concerning the appearances of the material world free the soul from false opinions. They demonstrate the inadequacy of the empirical dimension and direct the search for truth towards the intelligible.³² Purification leads to a new spiritual attitude which makes the philosopher capable of undertaking the route to true knowledge. In *De occulta philosophia*, Agrippa designates this sort of intellectual and moral renewal as a *dignificatio hominis*.

Beyond Scepticism: Platonic Epistemology

Although sceptical techniques of analysis of sensory knowledge are recognized as having a preparatory critical value, they still precede the actual process of attaining knowledge and remain ‘outside’ (hence *foris adhibitae*) the true and proper acquisition of truth. Truth, in fact, is grasped only by turning inwards to where the innate ideas which God implanted in the soul at the moment of creation are stored. The acceptance of a Platonic³³ theory of knowledge is positively expressed in the final peroration of *De vanitate*, when Agrippa invites the reader to abandon the schools of the sophists in order to regain the awareness of the cognitive inheritance to which every soul has the original title:

You, therefore,... if you wish to attain this true and divine wisdom – not that of the tree of the science of good and evil, but that of the tree of life – reject all the sciences of man and the investigation and discursive examination of flesh and blood. ... If you do not enter into the schools of philosophy or the gymnasia of the sophists, but into yourself, then you will know everything. In fact, the knowledge of all things was placed in you at the moment of your creation (*concreata est enim vobis omnium rerum notio*). The *Academici* affirm it and the Holy Scriptures attest it: God created all things in their greatest goodness, that is, in the highest grade of perfection which each one could attain. Just as God planted trees bearing fruit, so He created souls as rational trees, filled

³¹ The development of this theme by Ficino and Giorgio, undoubtedly Agrippa’s main sources of reference on this matter, lends weight to this interpretation.

³² Cf. Agrippa, *De occulta philosophia*, III, 3, pp. 406–408.

³³ I use the term ‘Platonic’ in the broad sense. Agrippa’s main source is Ficino’s version of Neoplatonism, which also includes a smattering of hermetic philosophy. On Ficino’s Platonism, cf. M. J. B. Allen, *Plato’s Third Eye. Studies in Marsilio Ficino’s Metaphysics and Its Sources*. Aldershot and Brookfield (VT): Variorum, 1995; *Synoptic Art. Marsilio Ficino on the History of Platonic Interpretation*. Firenze: Olschki, 1998.

with forms and with concepts. But the sin of the first man put a veil over all this and oblivion, mother of ignorance, made her entrance.³⁴

Agrippa cites the Academy alongside Holy Scripture to support the idea that man has an innate realm of knowledge which needs to be recovered by means of a suitable *paideia*. This was Augustine's interpretation of the *Academici* as guardians of Platonic teachings, which were not to be divulged.³⁵

Original sin is a veil which separates truth from the human intellect, a forgetfulness of the self and of the self's proper status as having been created *ad imaginem Dei*. It obscures the cognitive and practical capacity of man, impedes him from overcoming sensible appearances and turns him away from his destiny:

So now, 'you who are wrapped in shadows,' remove (whoever can!) the veil of your intellect. You who are drunk on forgetfulness, 'vomit forth' Lethe's chalice. 'You who are lulled by the sleep of irrationality,' 'awaken' to the true light. And soon, 'with face uncovered,' you ascend 'from splendour to splendour.' You have received an anointing 'from the Holy One,' as John says, 'and you know everything.'³⁶

The overlapping of phrases drawn from Scripture and the *Corpus Hermeticum* accentuates the religious and mystical tone of this exhortation. However, apart

³⁴ Agrippa, *De vanitate*, peror., pp. 311–312: "Vos igitur nunc ... si divinam hanc et veram non ligni scientiae boni et mali, sed ligni vitae sapientiam assequi cupitis, proiectis humanis scientiis omnique carnis et sanguinis indagine atque discursu ... iam non in scholis philosophorum et gymnasiis sophistarum, sed ingressi in vosmet ipsos cognoscetis omnia: concreata est enim vobis omnium rerum notio. Quod ut fatentur Academici, ita Sacrae Literae attestantur, quia creavit Deus omnia valde bona, in optimo videlicet gradu, in quo consistere possent. Is igitur, sicut creavit arbores plenas fructibus, sic et animas ceu rationales arbores creavit plenas formis et cognitionibus; sed per peccatum primi parentis velata sunt omnia intravitque oblivio, mater ignorantiae." Cf. Georgius, *De harmonia mundi*, III, 2, 6 and 9, ff. 22r, 25v.

³⁵ Augustinus, *Contra Academicos*, III, 17, 38. This interpretation had also been tacitly received by Ficino, *De voluptate*, in *Opera omnia*. Basileae: ex officina Henricpetrina, 1576, ripr. anast. Paris: Phénix, 2000, I, pp. 986. This reading was in any case completely in consonant with the conviction, shared by Ficino and Agrippa, that truth should be expressed *aenigmatice*.

³⁶ Agrippa, *De vanitate*, peror., p. 312: "Amovete ergo nunc, qui potestis, 'velamen' intellectus vestri, qui 'ignorantiae tenebris involuti' estis; 'evomite' lethaeum poculum, qui vosmet ipsos oblivione inebriastis; 'evigilate' ad verum lumen, 'qui irrationabili somno demulcti estis'; et mox, 'revelata facie', transcendetis 'de claritate in claritatem': uncti enim estis 'a Sancto', ut ait Ioannes, 'et nostis omnia.'" The phrases in inverted commas derive from tracts I and VII of the *Corpus Hermeticum*, *I Cor.* 15, 34, *II Cor.* 3, 18 and *I John* 2, 20, as indicated by Keefer, "Agrippa's Dilemma", pp. 636–637. But Agrippa's first-hand source is Georgius, *De harmonia mundi*, III, 2, 6 and 9, ff. 22r, 25r-v; III, VIII, 18, ff. 131v-132r.

from its formal appearance, the conceptual nucleus of the passage is clear. The removal of the “veil” of intellectual clouding takes its starting point from man and from a decision by his reason: it is an epistemological ascent. It is encouraged by the untying of the soul from terrestrial hindrances and articulated as a gradual passage from the lowest species to the highest genera (“de claritate in claritatem”), that leads to the reunification of all causes in the First Principle. The return to original perfection is an ‘illumination’; not a mystical illumination, but an intellectual one, a reminiscence, the reappropriation of self-knowledge. In the final analysis, it is the knowledge of the self as *mens* (or *intellectus*).

The doctrine of *mens* is without doubt the stable and permanent central structure around which Agrippa’s whole philosophical journey takes place.³⁷ In the tripartite division of psychological faculties, which Agrippa derived from Ficino and Reuchlin, *mens* represents the highest function, the *caput* or the *suprema portio* of the soul, the divine spark which is present in man. It is the storehouse for the innate ideas infused by God into the soul at the moment of creation, and it functions continually by means of a direct intuition of ideas in God. We are not always aware of this uninterrupted contemplation, however, because the activity of lower powers distracts the attention of our conscious glance. *Ratio* is an intermediate function between the mind and the *idolum* (that is, the sensory faculties which are connected to the material world). Its position between the two makes reason unstable, fluid and subject to error. In fact, reason, the seat of the will, is free to conform to either of the contrasting directions indicated to it by the other parts of the soul. When reason “silences” the sensory part (suspending, as it were, the empirical ego and its view of the world) and turns itself inwards to the mind, it becomes conscious of the constant illumination of the *mens* by God; it grasps essences by an act of intuition which is superior to the act of reason, insofar as it is “contact of the essence with God.”³⁸ God’s illumination, which acts on the *mens*, therefore constitutes the basis and the safeguard of human knowledge. Reason, attaining the innate contents of the *mens*, produces a science which is legitimized by its divine origins and therefore not susceptible to the assault of sceptical doubt.³⁹

³⁷ In the early draft of *De occulta philosophia* (1509/1510) the doctrine of *mens* constitutes the presupposition for the reform of magic; in *De triplici ratione cognoscendi Deum* (1516) it acts as the criterion of individuation of ‘true’ theology; in *De originali peccato* (1518/1519) it is applied as the key to biblical exegesis; in the final redaction of *De occulta philosophia* (1533) it is enriched by kabbalistic nuances and developed in an eschatological perspective.

³⁸ Cornelio Agrippa, *De triplici ratione cognoscendi Deum*, 5, in V. Perrone Compagni, *Ermetismo e cristianesimo in Agrippa. Il “De triplici ratione cognoscendi Deum”*. Firenze: Polistampa, 2005, pp. 140–144; *De occulta philosophia*, III, 43, pp. 358. Cf. Ficinus, *Theologia Platonica*, XIII, 2, ed. Marcel II, pp. 206–214.

³⁹ Cf. Ficinus, *Theologia Platonica*, XIII, 4, Marcel II, p. 170: “Unde et vera ratiocinatio nascitur ex intelligentia vera, et humana intelligentia ex divina.”

Although *De vanitate* does not dwell on the explanation of the doctrine of the three parts of the soul, it is certainly implied and put into effect in a passage from chapter 98, which deals with *theologia interpretativa*. Agrippa states that God has entrusted to man the task of clarifying the obscurity of the words of the prophets, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Interpretative theology is not based on perfect knowledge given by God in a prophetic vision (which is actually the object of study of this branch of theology); nor is it based on the discursive knowledge of the Peripatetics, who use procedures which are inappropriate to God (definition, division and combination). Instead the science of interpretation proceeds according to “*alia cognoscendi via*.” This third mode consists in Truth adapting itself to our purified intellect, as the key is with the lock. Indeed, as much as our intellect is very desirous of knowing the whole truth, so is it receptive to all intelligibles... Even if we do not comprehend by the full light of day that which the prophets and those who see divine things directly express, nonetheless by means of the intellect a door is opened before us. In this way, from the conformity of perceived truth with our intellect, and from the light, which illuminates us from this opened threshold, we acquire a much greater certainty than the apparent demonstrations of the philosophers, their definitions, divisions and combinations are able to offer.⁴⁰

This form of knowledge cannot be considered to be the result of a mystical experience, because Agrippa explicitly categorizes it as the epistemological procedure of a human science, distinct from prophetic vision. It is an intellectual experience, which has left the sense-based discursive knowledge of the Peripatetics behind (the intellect is thus defined as ‘purified’) and forms itself around a series of metaphysical intuitions: the recognition of the self and of other entities as created things, characterized by ontological deficiency and the deeply-rooted need for God, “beginning, middle, end and renewal”; the awareness of the innate and natural tension which pushes each existing thing to a reconjunction with its Beginning; the acceptance of man’s cosmic mission, which justifies his definition as “beginning and end” of all

⁴⁰ Agrippa, *De vanitate*, 98, p. 287: “Haec itaque divinorum interpretandi theologia non Peripateticorum more definiendo, aut dividendo, aut componendo, quorum modorum nullus ad Deum attingit, cum ille nec definiiri nec dividi nec componi possit, progreditur, sed alia constat cognoscendi via, quae inter hanc et propheticam visionem media est, quae est adaequatio veritatis cum intellectu nostro purgato, veluti clavis cum sera. Qui ut est veritatum omnium cupidissimus, ita intelligibilium omnium susceptivus est. ... Quo, etsi non pleno lumine percipimus ea, quae depromunt prophetae et hi qui ipsa divina conspexerunt, aperitur tamen nobis porta, ut ex conformitate veritatis perceptae ad intellectum nostrum et ex lumine, quod ex ipsis penetralibus apertis nos illustrat, multo certiores reddamur quam ex philosophorum apparentibus demonstrationibus, definitionibus, divisionibus et compositionibus.” Cf. Georgius, *De harmonia mundi*, I, VIII, 2, f. 116r-v; III, II, 10, f. 26r.

created entities, and as therefore superior even to angels. Indeed, this ontological *medium*, created in God's image and likeness, is the teleological link through which the *reditus* of all things to the source of being is fulfilled.⁴¹

It is through possession of this knowledge, which the reason finds in the *mens*, that the most profound meaning of Scripture can be comprehended. Interpretative theology is formed at the point of intersection between the philosophical perception of truth (necessarily partial) and the light which is reflected from the "opened door," beyond which lies the perfection of the world of archetypes. It is in this sense that Agrippa defines faith as the *fundamentum rationis*, that is, the criterion of guarantee and the firm basis of human knowledge. *Fides* does not provide new contents, but unveils the deep sense of the existing contents of the reason, which is operating in harmony with its *mens*.⁴²

It is also in this way that I interpret a passage from *De vanitate* which has generally been used as evidence of Agrippa's fideism. "All the secrets of God and of nature, the whole foundation of customs and laws, the whole knowledge of past, present and future, are confided in the sacred words of the Bible."⁴³ His attested familiarity with Giovanni Pico's *Heptaplus* makes it likely that Agrippa wished to emphasize the superiority and perfection of Revelation with respect to the products of human culture, but not its absolute otherness with respect to reason.⁴⁴ Revelation is without doubt the absolute and complete expression of Truth; but it originates from the same source as the contents of the mind of man, which the activity of reason is dependent on. Since God is the sole source of truth, the tradition of faith is homogeneous with philosophical contemplation, which finds its justification in Revelation. Through divine will, rationality and its higher level of 'spiritual intelligence' are able to establish a relationship of continuity. Agrippa reaffirmed this point on several occasions:

Faith – a power which is superior to all others, because it is not based on human constructions but leans completely on Revelation – illuminates everything all around. It originates from on high, from the first light, and it remains very close to the first light: so it is far and away more noble and excellent than the sciences, arts and opinions which move from lower things and gain access to our intellect *by means of the reflection which we receive from the first light*.

⁴¹ Agrippa, *De triplici ratione*, I, pp. 93–101; *De occulta philosophia*, III, 36, pp. 506–513.

⁴² Cf. *contra* Keefer, "Agrippa's Dilemma", p. 633.

⁴³ Agrippa, *De vanitate*, peror., p. 313: "Omnia enim Dei et naturae secreta, omnis morum et legum ratio, omnis praeteritorum, praesentium et futurorum notitia in ipsis sacris Bibliorum eloquiis traduntur." Cf. Georgius, *De harmonia mundi*, III, II, 9, f. 25v.

⁴⁴ Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Heptaplus*, aliud proem., ed. E. Garin. Firenze: Vallecchi, 1942, p. 199.

Finally, by means of faith man becomes in some way identical to the higher things and enjoys the same power.⁴⁵

Fides is the underlying premise of true knowledge and imparts the correct orientation to reason's activity. For this reason, rational science and all its practical applications gain authenticity and legitimacy if they develop in a theological framework. This does not mean that for Agrippa reason has to draw its contents directly from Scripture. Rather, it means that the contents of science, procured by the exercise of reason, are 'true' when they do not contradict divine design, do not hinder the spiritual progress of the Christian, and contribute to the good of man and the world. Certainly the architect will not seek in the Bible the technical instructions for how to put up his building. Instead, he and those who commission him need to seek there the indication of the *modus* and *finis* of this discipline – which would be that it is “extraordinarily necessary and beautiful” in itself and capable of making a large contribution to the well-being of the civil community, if men had not rendered it vain and noxious by using it excessively “for the simple exhibition of riches” and by heedlessly destroying the natural surroundings. In this case, then, the reform of the discipline can be limited to the adoption of a form of social behaviour which takes inspiration from the teaching of the Evangelist: money lavished on building ever-bolder bell-towers would be better spent in supporting the poor of Christ who are the true temples and the true images of God.⁴⁶

A Temporary Alliance

De vanitate does not put science in opposition to faith or the Holy Book in opposition to the books of men. It opposes Aristotelian philosophy, worldly science and the source of unbelief, to philosophy in a broadly Platonic sense, the journey

⁴⁵ Agrippa, *De occulta philosophia*, III, pp. 412–413: “Fides vero, virtus omnium superior quatenus non humanis commentationibus, sed divinae revelationi tota innititur, per universum omnia lustrat; nam, cum ipsa superne a primo lumine descendat atque illi vicinior existat, longe est nobilior atque excellentior quam scientiae et artes et credulitates a rebus inferioribus per reflexionem a primo lumine acceptam ad intellectum nostrum accedentes. Denique per fidem efficitur homo aliquid idem cum superis eademque potestate fruitur.” Cf. J. Reuchlin, *De verbo mirifico. Das wundertätige Wort (1494)*, I, eds. W.-W. Ehlers, L. Mundt, H. G. Roloff, P. Schäfer and B. Sommer. Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 1996, pp. 84, 290–292; Guilielmus Alvernus, *De fide*, I, in *Opera omnia*, ed. B. Leferon. Orléans: Pralard, 1674–1675, I, p. 6E.

⁴⁶ Agrippa, *De vanitate*, 28, pp. 64–65. On the confutation of alchemy and astrology, cf. V. Perrone Compagni, “Dispensa intentio. Alchemy, Magic and Scepticism in Agrippa”, *Early Science and Medicine* 5 (2000), pp. 160–177; “Astrologia e filosofia occulta in Agrippa” (quoted above, n. 9).

of the soul towards its supramundane source and the model of a Christian *scientia in verbo Dei*. I do not think that this expression is redolent of a fideistic attitude. Instead I think that Agrippa meant to refer to a religiously-orientated science: a science which can move freely in the sphere of the *visibilia Dei* in order to know His *invisibilia* and to trace the Beginning and origin. It does this in the knowledge of the harmony between faith and reason which another philosophy had disowned, infecting the world with a plague of *ratiunculae*, sophisms and impertinent questions about God.⁴⁷

There is, in sum, a divine path to knowledge, which is that of Plato, the science *of* man, founded on God and dealing with God; and there is a demonic path, which is that of Aristotle, the science *from* man, constituted merely on human abilities and dealing with lower things. It is demonic because it renews and perpetuates the sin of Adam, inspired by Satan, and his proud ambition to make himself equal to the Creator in the knowledge of good and evil. Every man renews the original sin when his reason overturns the natural hierarchy of the parts of the soul and, abandoning the *mens*, entrusts itself completely to the senses, ignoring God and investing the foundation of truth in a created thing. Original sin is repeated in the schools of the contemporary ‘theosophists’ who try to know God by the wretched means of their rebellious reason, constructing a “science of the flesh” which is uncertain and vain, deprived of stability, inert in its operation and morally pernicious. *Ignorantia Dei*, the original stain, is not a passive ‘not-knowing’ (which is, in any case, unthinkable, because God is not concealed in unfathomable transcendence, but makes Himself known and “shines everywhere” in nature, and, above all, inside man).⁴⁸ On the contrary, *ignorantia Dei* is an active *neglecting*, the will to turn away from God and the pride in being an end in oneself.

This distinction between different forms of rationality – diversely valued according to their basis and their final point of view – allows us to consider Agrippa’s *declamatio invectiva* as not being part of a true and proper profession of scepticism, of general anti-intellectualism or of rigorous fideism. Instead it can be realigned with the antiaristotelian and antischolastic critiques of Ficino, Reuchlin and Francesco Giorgio Veneto. Agrippa does not propose abandonment in God in the undifferentiated indifference of Sextus Empiricus’s *ou mallon outos he ekeinos*; rather, scepticism for him constitutes an exercise in education, necessary for pointing contemporary culture towards the apprehension of truth. He borrows the perspective, if not the words, of Origen in the *Contra Celsum*:

⁴⁷ Cf. *contra* van der Poel, *Cornelius Agrippa*, who unwaveringly interprets Agrippa’s antischolastic polemic as an “opposition of faith and reason” (p. 71), deriving from Neoplatonic influences.

⁴⁸ Agrippa, *De triplici ratione*, 3, p. 108.

By ‘the wisdom of this world which is stupidity in the eyes of God’ we understand all philosophy founded on false concepts, with idle and useless results... Certainly we do not call a Platonic philosopher, who believes in the immortality of the soul, stupid... It is much better to accept the arguments of faith by means of reason and wisdom rather than by means of faith alone.⁴⁹

The true intentions of *De vanitate* have to be picked out from deep inside in the text, hidden beneath more polemical and provocative statements. The sciences of their own accord “do not procure for us any divine felicity which transcends the capacity of man, except perhaps that felicity which the serpent promised to our ancestors”; but in itself “every science is both bad and good” and deserves whatever praise “it can derive from the probity of its possessor.”⁵⁰ Agrippa appropriates here, in a version *à rebours*, the Aristotelian principle of the ethical neutrality of science: it is the spiritual attitude of the knower, his *probitas*, which constitutes the moral criterion of the discipline and ensures good or bad usage.

It is true that the digression *Ad encomium asini* invites the reader to put down the baggage of the human sciences and return to being “naked and simple donkeys,” and thus newly capable of carrying on their own backs the mysteries of divine wisdom, like the donkey which carried Jesus into Jerusalem. But this ironic exhortation, packed with references to Erasmus’s *Adagia*, is thoroughly polemical: it is the “egregi scientiarum doctores,” who profess a purely human – or indeed, demonic – science, who must be subjected to the metamorphosis of the donkey. For these *asini cumani*, that is, the scholastic theologians who have borrowed the skin of the lion “which goes around roaring in search of a victim to devour” (the demon of 1 Peter 5,8), the motto *nihil scire foelicissima vita* is valid, since “an ignorant simpleton and country bumpkin sees what a scholastic doctor, whom human sciences have perverted, does not see.”⁵¹ Ignorance is only

⁴⁹ Origenes, *Contra Celsum*, I, 13, ed. M. Borret. Paris: Les éditions du Cerf, 1967, I, p. 110–112.

⁵⁰ Agrippa, *De vanitate*, I, p. 2: “scientias ipsas non tantis praeconiis extollendas, sed magna ex parte vituperandas esse mea opinio est, nec ullam esse quae careat iusta reprehensionis censura, neque rursus quae ex se ipsa laudem aliquam mereatur, nisi quam a possessoris probitate mutuatur”; p. 3: “id vos prius commonuero scientias omnes tam malas quam bonas, nec aliam nobis supra humanitatis metam afferre deitatis beatitudinem, nisi illam forte quam antiquus ille serpens pollicebatur primis parentibus.”

⁵¹ Agrippa, *De vanitate*, 102, p. 309: “Quin imo Cumanos asinos admonitos volo quod, nisi humanarum scientiarum depositis sarcinis ac leonina illa (non quidem a leone illo de tribu Iuda, sed ab illo qui ‘circuit rugiens et quaerens quem devoret’) mutuata pelle exuta, in nudos et puros asinos redieritis, esse vos portandis divinae sapientiae mysteriis omnino penitusque inutiles”; p. 310: “Sic, inquam, saepissime videt simplex et rudis idiota, quae videre non potest depravatus humanis scientiis scholasticus doctor.”

foelicissima when science has caused moral corruption: “There is nothing more fatal than a science stuffed with impiety.”⁵² Adam’s sin of pride (*impietas*) recurs every time that man does not direct his knowledge to the ends desired by God, but thinks of the world as a system endowed with its own significance, and takes himself to be a self-sufficient centre for the formulation of truth. Instead, philosophy should be religious progress – or, rather, a *regressus*, a return to the source of being.⁵³ Therefore, if the reason respects its subordination to the *mens*, that is, to the message which God has implanted directly in the soul, it fulfils the role which has been assigned to it in the scheme of creation, which is to know God by means of the book of nature. On the other hand, since the book of nature, too, is written *digito Dei*, the fundamental goodness of the world is implied; and it is also implied that man has the ability and, in fact, the task of reading these pages. Reason is therefore perfectly literate and legitimate when it comes to deciphering this bundle of communicative signs. Nonetheless, since the book is a means by which God has wanted to help men by supporting them in the return to their origin, the reading should be done with the eyes fixed on the author more than on the contents.⁵⁴ The knowledge of physical reality is merely a way of retracing in sensible objects the cosmic process of love, which is centred on the eternal Good, beginning, middle and end of everything which exists. Man’s greatness resides purely and simply in his capacity to grasp God by contemplating His works, the created symbol which bears witness to its creator.⁵⁵

The ‘paradox’ with which Agrippa confronts his readers lies in the simultaneous presence of two speculative currents which represent, despite their apparent incompatibility, the expression of a consistent train of thought. On the one hand, optimism concerning the nature of man and his potential to realise his own destiny; on the other hand, pessimism concerning the historical condition of culture in his own age and its realistic capacity to be a guide and instrument of progress for the human race. *De vanitate* delineates the separation between wisdom, which is also religion, and the science which proclaims its own self-sufficiency

⁵² Agrippa, *De vanitate*, I, p. 4: “Nihil autem inauspicatius, quam ars, quam scientia impietate constipata.”

⁵³ Cf. Hermes Trismegistus, *Asclepius*, in *Corpus Hermeticum. Asclepius*, eds. A. D. Nock and A. J. Festugière. Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1992⁵, II, pp. 312–313: “Puram autem philosophiam eamque tantum divina religione pendentem tantum intendere in reliquis oportebit, ut apocastases astrorum, stationes praefinitas cursumque commutationis numeris constare miretur; terrae autem dimensiones, qualitates, quantitates, maris profunda, ignis vim et horum omnium effectus naturam cognoscens miretur, adoret atque conlaudat artem mentem divinam.”

⁵⁴ Cf. H. Blumenberg, *Die Lesbarkeit der Welt*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1983², pp. 60–61.

⁵⁵ Agrippa, *De triplici ratione*, 3, pp. 108–110.

and takes no account of the sacred – the separation, that is, of true knowledge from false, and of the true use of knowledge from its abuse.

In waging its audacious *monomachia* against an ever-more-worldly reason, *De vanitate* found a powerful ally in sceptical doubt, the preliminary educative stage which opens the debate about the sensible knowledge of particulars and makes a start towards the intellectual knowledge of universals.

But Agrippa neutralizes Academic scepticism by inserting it into the Platonic tradition and accrediting it with the possession of a positive knowledge which coincides perfectly with Christianity. As far as Pyrrhonian scepticism is concerned, the material put forward by Agrippa is particularly scarce.⁵⁶ Pyrrho is cited only three times. While the initial epigram represents him in the attitude of *nescientia*, the chapters on the soul and on moral philosophy reproduce the doxographic sources with such sloppiness as to transform suspension of judgment into dogmatic paradox: Pyrrho was a *plebeius philosophus*, who refused the evidence of natural reproduction and denied happiness.⁵⁷ This attitude of contempt may explain why Agrippa skips Pyrrho's name while discussing the unreliability of sensory experience – whereas its source, Francesco Giorgio, openly recognized that was Pyrrho who had demonstrated with many arguments that senses are fallible.⁵⁸ Of Sextus Empiricus there is no mention. Perhaps Agrippa was still convinced by the judgement which he had passed on Sextus Empiricus's critical method fifteen years earlier, in the opening lecture to a course on the *Corpus Hermeticum* held at Pavia in 1515. On this occasion, he took on Ficino's aversion to Pyrrhonian and Sextan scepticism; the sceptics, he maintained, have no sure opinion to follow, but rather, all things are undifferentiated for them. Therefore they discuss everything, maintaining both contrary positions, and mixing and confounding things which in the natural order are separate and distinct. Like the giants, accumulating mountain upon mountain, they seem to wage war on the gods, when, fortified by a few syllogisms, they have the unbridled impudence (quarrelsome as they are, and more prone to chatter than a whore) to say what

⁵⁶ Too scarce to be able to see him as one of the sources of Pyrrhonism in the Renaissance, as suggested by S. Hutton, "Platonism, Stoicism, Scepticism and Classical Imitation", in M. Hattaway ed., *A Companion to English Renaissance Literature and Culture*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2003, p. 52.

⁵⁷ Agrippa, *De vanitate*, f. 4v: "Inter philosophos ... nescit quaeque Pyrrhias"; 52, p. 115: "Sunt qui generationem omnino negent, ut Pyrrho Eliensis"; cap. 54, p. 123: "Transeo reliquos plebeios philosophos, qui omnino felicitatem sustulerunt, ut Pyrrho Eliensis, Euricolus et Xenophanes." See also, 1, p. 7: "fuerunt Pyrrhonici et alii multi, qui quidem nihil affirmabant."

⁵⁸ Agrippa, *De vanitate*, 7, p. 34: "sensus omnes saepe fallaces sunt"; Georgius, *De harmonia mundi*, proem., f. 2r: "[sensus] fallaces sunt, sicuti multis rationibus probat Pyrrho Heliates."

they like about everything with everyone. Armed with a handful of argumentative cavils and the darts of the sophists, they think that they can break down the door of every discipline, even that of sacred Scripture, and penetrate to its interior. They are despised and spurned by all the more authoritative philosophers.⁵⁹

Only one year later, in *De triplici ratione cognoscendi Deum*, Agrippa directed the same words against contemporary theologians, the *teosophistae* and *philopompi* of the schools, sowers of discord and unbelief among Christians. He kept this characterization intact in *De vanitate*.⁶⁰

Agrippa's adherence to scepticism could not be anything more than a limited means to an end. In the framework of his cultural project, the preliminary *pars destruens* undertook the burden of demolishing the foundations of a cultural tradition which had made itself an instrument of power in the hands of "inn-keepers of the word of God."⁶¹ The *pars construens*, however, developed by proposing a different epistemology and by affirming the redefined role of the intellectual in society. More than an epistemological investigation, the *De vanitate* is a manifesto for Neoplatonic and Hermetic theology. As such it is an exhortation to re-appropriate the Christian foundation on which reason rests.

⁵⁹ Cornelius Agrippa, *Oratio habita Papiæ in praelectione Hermetis Trismegisti De potestate et sapientia Dei, anno MDXV*, in *Opera*, II, pp. 1099–1100: "Tertium vero disserendi genus Scepticorum est, quos penes nihil certum est quod sequantur, sed omnia illis indifferentia sunt. Ideoque de omnibus in utranque partem disputant et quae naturae ordine disiuncta distinctaque sunt, permiscent atque confundunt. Et perinde ac gigantes, montibus montes accumulantes, bellum contra deos gerere videntur, dum aliquot instructi syllogismis, homines rixosi ac meretriculis loquatiores, incunctanter audent quavis de re cum quovis linguam conferre; litigiosis enim quibusdam altercationum captiunculis ac sophismatum iaculis armati, omnium disciplinarum etiam sacrarum Literarum fores se posse diffringere et penetrare arbitrantur. Atque hi a quibusque consummatis philosophis ac theologis aspernantur respuunturque." The source is Ficino, *De voluptate*, p. 986, as indicated by van der Poel, *Cornelius Agrippa*, pp. 68–69. The simile of the giants, as far as I am aware, is Agrippa's own contribution.

⁶⁰ Agrippa, *De triplici ratione*, 5, pp. 138–140, 154–164; *De vanitate*, 97, pp. 282–286.

⁶¹ Agrippa, *De vanitate*, 97, p. 283.

5. PEDRO DE VALENCIA'S *ACADEMICA* AND SCEPTICISM IN LATE RENAISSANCE SPAIN

John Christian Laursen

University of California, Riverside, USA

Pedro de Valencia's *Academica*¹ of 1596 has been called "a quite objective history of ancient scepticism"² and cited as proof that "knowledge of the Academic position was certainly on a much better footing at the end of the sixteenth century than it had been at the beginning."³ But why did this Spanish humanist of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries write such a history? Was he a sceptic, and were his other writings sceptical? If not, what was his purpose in writing it? The plot thickens when we discover that he also wrote numerous manuscripts about social and economic issues ranging from the price of bread to the burning of witches; that he engaged in serious Bible scholarship; and that he was named Royal Chronicler in 1607. How did scepticism fit into his life and ideas as a humanist and eventually a court intellectual?

The short answer is that Pedro de Valencia was not a sceptic if that means a follower of either of the ancient traditions of Pyrrhonism or Academic scepticism, out to promote his school. Whether he might have been a sceptic in some more general meaning of the term will be explored below. We can add to the short answer that he wrote it because a friend asked him to, and by his own account he spent only 20 days on it. Since this one thin volume was the only substantial history of philosophy that he wrote, in an *oeuvre* of manuscripts that is expected to take up eleven thematic volumes (some of them in multiple sub-volumes) in the *Complete Works*,⁴ we cannot conclude that it was a very

¹*Academica sive de iudicio erga verum ex ipsis primis fontibus*. Antwerp: Plantin, 1596. Modern edition with Spanish translation facing Latin original: *Academica*, tr. and ed. José Oroz Reta. Badajoz: Diputación Provincial de Badajoz, 1987.

²Richard H. Popkin, *The History of Scepticism from Savonarola to Bayle*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003, 38.

³Charles B. Schmitt, *Cicero Scepticus: A Study of the Influence of the Academica in the Renaissance*. The Hague: Nijhoff, 1972, 75.

⁴Pedro de Valencia. *Obras Completas*, General Editor, Gaspar Morocho (León: Publicaciones de la Universidad de León, 1993-), seven volumes so far published (2007).

important part of his intellectual life. But such as it is, it gives us substantial insight into his work as a whole and into the state of knowledge of scepticism in late Renaissance Spain.

Pedro de Valencia's Life and Work

Pedro de Valencia was born in 1555 in Zafra, in what is now the Province of Badajoz in the Region of Extremadura.⁵ He studied Latin in Zafra, arts at the Colegio de la Compañía in Córdoba, and earned a bachelor's degree in law at Salamanca. Upon graduating, he retired to his hometown of Zafra for the quiet life of a scholar. He met and collaborated with Benito Arias Montano (1527–1598), an outstanding humanist scholar who was chiefly responsible for the great Antwerp Polyglot Bible of 1569–1572.

Pedro de Valencia wrote his *Academica* in 1590, to judge from the dedicatory letter, or in 1594, to judge from later scholarly opinion.⁶ It was printed in Antwerp in 1596 by the Plantin printshop at the behest of some of his friends: he claimed that he wrote it in 20 days and that they printed it without his permission and “against my will, or at least against my taste.”⁷ In the dedicatory letter Pedro de Valencia notes that he wrote it at the request of one of his friends from Zafra, García de Figueroa y Toledo, a high official – Gentleman of the King's Chamber – in Madrid. García de Figueroa had asked for an explanation of Cicero's *Academica*, presumably as part of an effort of intellectuals at the court to understand that fragmentary and complex work. Other scholars have affirmed that this was part of the European-wide response to the dual threats to accepted authority and truth of the Reformation and the rediscovery of Sextus Empiricus and Pyrrhonian scepticism.⁸

The rest of Pedro de Valencia's scholarly output was enormous. A brief outline of the writings expected to be included in his *Complete Works* includes his theological and biblical scholarship. He studied Greek with Francisco Sánchez

⁵See Gaspar Morocho, “Introducción a una lectura de Pedro de Valencia – Primera parte (1555–1587)” in Pedro de Valencia, *Obras Completas*, ed. G. Morocho, vol. 5.1, *Relaciones de Indias, 1. Nueva Granada y Virreinato de Perú*, 1993, 19–21. There is a time-line of Valencia's life and activities in G. Morocho, “Introducción a una lectura de Pedro de Valencia” in Pedro de Valencia, *Obras Completas*, ed. G. Morocho, vol. 5.2, *Relaciones de Indias, 2. México*, 1995, 15–64.

⁶Dedicatory letter in Pedro de Valencia, *Academica*, ed. J. Oroz, 63; editor Oroz's date of 1594 given at 11.

⁷Quoted by J. Oroz in his “Introducción” to Pedro de Valencia, *Academica*, ed. J. Oroz, 11.

⁸Juan Luis Suárez Sánchez de León, *El Pensamiento de Pedro de Valencia: Escepticismo y Modernidad en el Humanismo Español* (Badajoz: Diputación de Badajoz, 1997), 20, 66, etc.

de las Brozas and Chaldean, Hebrew, and even Arabic with Arias Montano, and worked with the latter on numerous projects. He wrote major manuscripts in defense of Arias Montano's biblical scholarship long after the latter's death. He also wrote short manuscript commentaries on St. Luke, the authors of the sacred books, grace, the books of the New Testament, and more.

One part of his theological writings consists of his spiritual writings: he translated Arias Montano's *Dictatem Cristianum*⁹ and Saint Macarius's "Homilies" and "Opusculas."¹⁰ Closely related, in turn, to his interest in Christian spirituality and retirement was an interest in Greek cynic retirement. He translated Dio Chrysostom's "On Retirement"¹¹ and drew on Epictetus for a manuscript on "Those who try to live quietly."¹² He wrote his own manuscript on "Examples of Princes, Prelates, and other Illustrious Men who Resigned their Offices and Dignities and Retired," in which he cited dozens of figures from Homer through Timon and Timoleon to Diocletian and various Popes on the merits of withdrawing from public affairs.¹³

Valencia's economic and political writings have been published in two volumes of the *Collected Works*. The economic writings include letters and speeches to various officials concerning matters such as taxes, the price of wheat and bread, inflation, poverty, the abuse of power, and the redistribution of land.¹⁴ In all of these he takes what might be called a proto-Enlightened position, concerned about the plight of the poor and the weakness of the country, and calling for substantial reform.

The political writings include a "Treatise on the Converted Moors of Spain" in which Valencia explores the problems created by the forced conversion of the Muslims in Spain in the early sixteenth century (1502, Granada; 1526, Valencia and Aragon). His solution is less radical and more humane than the one that

⁹Pedro de Valencia, *Obras Completas*, ed. G. Morocho, vol. 9.2, *Escritos espirituales*. La "Lección cristiana" de Arias Montano, 2002.

¹⁰Pedro de Valencia, *Obras Completas*, ed. G. Morocho, vol. 9.1, *Escritos espirituales*. 1. *San Macario*, 2001.

¹¹"Oración, o discurso de Dion Chrystostomo, que se intitula Perianachoreseos, esto es, del Retiramiento. Traducida del Griego", Manuscript 5586, Biblioteca Nacional, Madrid, 29r-34r.

¹²"Discurso fundado creo que en el Epicteto de Arriano sobre los que pretenden vivir con quietud", Manuscript 11160, Biblioteca Nacional, Madrid, 72r-76r.

¹³"Exemplos de Principes, Prelados, y otros Varones ilustres, que dexaron Oficios, y Dignidades, y se retiraron", Manuscript 5586, Biblioteca Nacional, Madrid, 11r-17r [also in Mss. 5585, 145r-152v]. See John Christian Laursen, "Scepticisme et cynisme dans l'oeuvre de Pierre de Valence", *Philosophiques* 35, 2008, 187-206.

¹⁴Pedro de Valencia, *Obras Completas*, ed. G. Morocho, vol. 4.1, *Escritos sociales*, 1. *Escritos económicos*, 1994.

was soon to be adopted: he proposes dispersion of the “moriscos” or converted Muslims throughout Spain in order to speed up their assimilation.¹⁵ In 1609, however, the government ordered the expulsion of the moriscos.

In another set of manuscripts Pedro de Valencia exposed the fraud of the Parchment and Leaden Books of Granada, also known as the Apocrypha of Sacromonte. The supposed Parchment was found in 1588 in the Torre Turpiana and the Leaden Books were discovered in a cave on Monte de Valparaíso in Granada. They were eventually exposed as a fraud, denounced as heretical by the Vatican, and prohibited by Carlos III in 1776. They represented an attempt by moriscos and Old Christians to forge a syncretism and an alliance between Christianity and Islam against Judaism and the judaizers among the New Christians.¹⁶

The Apocrypha of Sacromonte were very popular among the people and many political figures. They appealed to nationalism by claiming that Spain was the land of God’s Chosen People. Humanists who exposed the fraud were quickly attacked, and the issue became a hot political contest between the Spanish court and the Vatican, with the latter demanding to see them. Pedro de Valencia was asked to give his opinion in 1607, and he closely followed Arias Montano in denouncing them as a fraud. Among other arguments, he made the common-sense points that leaden books would not survive long uncorroded underground, that writings supposedly dating from the times of Nero would not be written in contemporary Spanish, that they use a name for Granada that was not used in those days, and so on.¹⁷ The Apocrypha were finally sent to Rome in 1643 and condemned as a fraud in 1682.

Pedro de Valencia also wrote memoranda on norms of government and public health.¹⁸ As royal chronicler in the years 1607–1620, he was responsible for compiling and editing the *Relations from the Indies*, covering many volumes. After a notable auto-de-fé in Logroño, he wrote a “Discourse on Stories about Witches,” treating most manifestations of witchcraft as explainable by naturalistic causes and effects. He advised that even those who confess are probably hallucinating, and deplored the burning of witches. His policies seem to have

¹⁵ Pedro de Valencia, *Obras Completas*, ed. G. Morocho, vol. 4.2, *Escritos sociales*, 2. *Escritos políticos*, 1999, 13–139. See also Pedro de Valencia, *Tratado acerca de los moriscos de España*, ed. Joaquín Gil Sanjuan (Málaga: Algazara, 1997).

¹⁶ Gaspar Morocho, “Estudio introductorio” in Pedro de Valencia, *Obras Completas*, ed. G. Morocho, vol. 4.2, *Escritos sociales*, 2. *Escritos políticos*, 1999, 141–357.

¹⁷ “Discurso sobre el pergamino y láminas de Granada” in Pedro de Valencia, *Obras Completas*, ed. G. Morocho, vol. 4.2, *Escritos sociales*, 2. *Escritos políticos*, 1999, 429–455.

¹⁸ Pedro de Valencia, *Obras Completas*, ed. G. Morocho, vol. 4.2, *Escritos sociales*, 2. *Escritos políticos*, 1999, 471–527.

been adopted by many Spanish authorities.¹⁹ Finally, Pedro de Valencia's historical and literary criticism includes the first substantial critique of the poet Luis de Góngora's flowery poetry.²⁰

One upshot of all this is that we see that Pedro de Valencia was a polymath, intervening in nearly every important issue in late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century Spain. All of this scholarly production raises the question: did Valencia's knowledge of ancient scepticism affect in any way his writings on other issues? Can we say that he was "sceptical" in his treatment of those issues, or was his work in each area insulated from the others? We shall return to these questions below, but for now let us return to Valencia's *Academica*.

The Content of Pedro de Valencia's Academica

A good summary of Pedro de Valencia's text can be made from the chapter titles that exist in some of the editions.²¹ The first chapter reviews the opinions of Plato about the criteria of truth, drawing on Alcinous, Plutarch, Plato's dialogues, Galen, Eusebius, and others as an introduction to what Cicero says about Plato in *Lucullus*. The second chapter discusses Arcesilaus and the Middle Academy, with sources in Lactantius, Sextus Empiricus,²² Diogenes Laertius, and more. The third chapter makes the case that Arcesilaus was a partisan of Pyrrho, with similar sources and a final reliance on St. Augustine. Chapter four is a summary of Pyrrhonism, relying largely on Diogenes Laertius and Sextus Empiricus.

The next two chapters take up the Stoic criteria of truth and doctrine of the *fantasia kataleptike*, since these were the dogmatic principles that provoked the sceptics. Chapter seven returns to the Academy, discussing Carneades and the New Academy. It quotes and explains numerous sentences from Cicero's *Academica*. Chapter eight explains Carneades's criterion of the *pithanon*, some evidence from Clitomachus, and more on arguments *in utramque partem*. Chapter nine deals with the successors of Carneades and chapter ten with Antiochus of Ascalon. Chapter eleven is about the Cyrenaic philosophers, chapter twelve about the criterion of truth of Epicurus, and chapter thirteen about the criterion of Potamon.

¹⁹ Pedro de Valencia, *Obras Completas*, ed. G. Morocho, vol. 7, *Discurso acerca de los cuentos de las brujas*, 1997.

²⁰ M. Pérez López, *Pedro de Valencia: primer crítico gongorino*. Salamanca: doctoral dissertation, 1988.

²¹ For example, Pedro de Valencia, *Academica*, ed. J. Oroz.

²² At the end of the book Pedro de Valencia says he has used Sextus Empiricus sparingly because he does not have the original Greek, but only the Latin translations, and he does not have much confidence in translations. Pedro de Valencia, *Academica*, ed. J. Oroz, 240–241.

In the last few paragraphs Pedro de Valencia ruminates about the obscurities and inadequacies of the history of philosophy and concludes that the best route to truth is through God. In a previous article, I observed that, based on the text of his *Academica*, “there is not much reason to believe that Valencia’s work is sincerely religious” and quoted another author on this sort of last paragraph: it is “similar to the final clause in modern works by which the author subjected his doctrine to the judgment of the church: nobody would take it at face value.”²³ But setting it in the context of the rest of his manuscripts, in which Catholic truth is taken for granted, explored in detail, and evidently relied upon with genuine faith, I think it is clear that Pedro de Valencia was indeed religious and that the final paragraphs can be taken at face value.²⁴

Pedro de Valencia had the philological training and language skills for sophisticated history of philosophy. But judging from the fact that the only other “history of philosophy” that he wrote were translations of Stoic and Cynic pieces on retirement and bits and pieces of ancient philosophy as relevant to his many practical interests, we may conclude that history of philosophy was simply not very important to him.

The Fortuna of Pedro de Valencia’s Academica

Pedro de Valencia’s *Academica* was reprinted in Latin several times in the eighteenth century. An edition of Cicero’s *Academica*, published in Paris in 1740, included Valencia’s text. The editor of the Paris edition, Joseph Olivet (Pierre-Joseph Thoulhier, abbé de Olivet, 1682–1768), wrote in a preface that “Pedro de Valencia... is the author who has best penetrated into the arcana of Greek philosophy... [He is] the only one who has understood the *Academica* of Cicero.”²⁵ That same year David Durand brought out in London his own French translation of Cicero together with the Latin text and Valencia’s Latin text. In the preface

²³J. C. Laursen, “Cicero in the Prussian Academy”, *History of European Ideas* 23 (1997), 121–122. The author quoted was Günter Gawlick.

²⁴As Suárez puts it, “One of the questions on which everyone who has studied any aspect of the life or work of Pedro de Valencia agrees is the profoundly sincere character of his religiosity” (Suárez, *El Pensamiento de Pedro de Valencia*, 28).

²⁵*M. Tullii Ciceronis Opera*, ed. Joseph Olivet. Paris: Coignard, et al., 1740, vol. 1, 16: “Petrus Valentia... Homo non vulgariter doctus, & qui, haud scio an omnium solertissimè, in veteris philosophiae adyta penetravet, *Academica* Ciceronis.” Also quoted (but misscited as vol. 3) by J. Oroz in his “Introducción” to Pedro de Valencia, *Academica*, ed. J. Oroz, 48. Valencia’s text is in vol. 3, 595–629.

he called Valencia's book "excellent in itself and necessary for understanding Cicero, and particularly these two fragments."²⁶ "He seems to incline himself to the side of doubt, although he professes to maintain a balance," he added.²⁷ A separate edition of Pedro de Valencia's text seems to have been published in London that year.²⁸

Durand's edition was well publicized in the pages of the *Bibliothèque Britannique*. In a proposal for a new edition of all of Cicero's philosophical works published in 1740 as an announcement of his edition of the *Academiques*, Durand mentioned that he had first heard of Valencia from Olivet's proposal for a new edition.²⁹ The next year the *Bibliothèque Britannique* published long excerpts from Durand's preface and commentary on Cicero in one issue, a further extract in another issue, followed by an almost complete French paraphrase translation of Pedro de Valencia's *Academica* in a third issue.³⁰ The latter also included a list of Valencia's publications, pointing out that none other than the *Academica* had been published.³¹

Valencia's *Academica* was also republished in later editions of Olivet's edition of Cicero's works in Paris (1742), Padua (1753), Geneva (1758),³² Oxford (1783), and Madrid (1797). It was also reprinted in Madrid in 1781 as part of a collection of works by eminent Spaniards.³³

²⁶ *Académiques de Cicerón, avec... le Commentaire Philosophique de Pierre Valentia, Juris. Espagnol*, ed. David Durand. London: Paul Vaillant, 1740, xvi: "excellent en lui-même, nécessaire pour bien comprendre Ciceron, & particulièrement ces deux fragmens."

²⁷ *Académiques de Cicerón*, ed. Durand, xvi: "Il paroît un peu pencher lui-même du coté du doute, quoiqu'il fasse profession de tenir la balance égale."

²⁸ *Academica sive de iudicio erga verum... Editio nova emendatio*. London: Bowyerianis, 1740. The copy I have seen was printed as the latter part of the Durand edition, but with its own title page and repaginated, suggesting that it may have been printed separately. It is also the subject of the translation/paraphrase in the *Bibliothèque Britannique*, tome 17, 1741, 60–139. J. Oroz misspells the publisher as "Boxyrianis" in his "Introducción" to Pedro de Valencia, *Academica*, 53.

²⁹ *Bibliothèque Britannique* tome 15, 1740, 392–416, at 402–403.

³⁰ *Bibliothèque Britannique* tome 17, 1741, 102–118; tome 17, 1741, 320–369; tome 18, 1741, 60–139.

³¹ *Bibliothèque Britannique* tome 18, 1741, 139–146.

³² *M. Tullii Ciceronis Opera*, ed. Joseph Olivet, Editio tertia. Geneva: Fratres Cramer, 1758. Valencia's text is vol. 3, 606–641.

³³ Francisco De la Cerda y Rico, ed., *Clarorum Hispanorum opuscula selecta et rariora*. Madrid: Antonium de Sancha, 1781, 157–252.

The *Academica* was also translated into French by Frédéric Castillon at the Prussian Academy in 1779.³⁴ Like Valencia, Castillon was a believing Christian, and the main reason he translated the piece may have been to smother in erudition the anti-Christian implications of Cicero's *Academica*, which he had been ordered to translate by the impious Frederick II.³⁵ Valencia's *Academica* and Castillon's notes on it took up 138 pages of volume I of a two-volume edition of Cicero's *Academica*.³⁶ This would make it too long and expensive for all but the most scholarly readers. One reviewer concluded that he would have shortened the introductory materials and omitted the Valencia translation "because we fear that they would seem too much to go through for most readers," but that may have been Castillon's purpose.³⁷

In the nineteenth century, James Reid wrote: "Of all the works on ancient philosophy before our time, Pedro de Valencia's *Academica* is by far the most important for the study of Cicero's *Academica*. The Spanish writer acquired a knowledge of post Aristotelian philosophy that has not been superseded until now."³⁸ It is surprising, then, that a century later the major scholarly study of Cicero's *Academica* of the end of the twentieth century, Carlos Lévy's *Cicero Academicus*, does not mention Valencia's work.³⁹

Was Pedro de Valencia a Sceptic?

Returning now to the question as to why Pedro de Valencia wrote his book on Academic scepticism, I have already mentioned that he wrote it for a friend. We naturally presume that if a historical figure writes on a particular philosophical

³⁴ *Les Livres Académiques de Cicerón*, tr. and ed. Frédéric de Castillon, 2 vols. Berlin: Decker, 1779, vol. 1. This has not been noticed by any of the other scholars cited in this article. Nor has it been noticed that Castillon's translation of Valencia was reprinted in a later edition of Cicero's *Academica*, along with Valencia's Latin text and Durand's translation of Cicero: *Académiques de Cicerón... Nouvelle édition*. Paris: Barbou, 1796. Giorgio Spini, "Giovanni Francesco Salvemini De Castillon tra illuminismo e protestantismo" in Enea Balmas, ed., *I Valdesi e l'Europa* (Torino: Brandoni, 1983), 318–350, reports that there was another edition of Castillon's translation in 1825, but I have been unable to find it.

³⁵ Laursen, "Cicero in the Prussian Academy", 117–126.

³⁶ *Les Livres Académiques*, tr. and ed. Castillon, vol. 1, 173–311.

³⁷ *Göttingische Anzeigen von gelehrten Sachen*, vol. 2, 141 Stück, 18 Nov. 1780, 1151–1152.

³⁸ Cicero, *Academica*, ed. James S. Reid. London: Macmillan, 1885, 72. In the National Library in Madrid there is also a manuscript translation into Spanish of Pedro de Valencia's *Academica* from 1873 by Francisco de Borja Pavón: cited by J. Oroz in his "Introducción" to Pedro de Valencia, *Academica*, ed. J. Oroz, 56.

³⁹ Carlos Lévy, *Cicero Academicus: Recherches sur les Académiques et sur la philosophie Ciceronienne*. Rome: École française de Rome, 1992.

school, then he might be sympathetic to that school, trying to promote its virtues. Especially if we do not know very much about what else he wrote, we may be especially inclined to think that Pedro de Valencia wrote on behalf of scepticism. And this has been one trend in the scholarship, even by those who do know more about his other writings.

One of the most influential scholars in Valencia studies was the great Spanish scholar Marcelino Menéndez y Pelayo. He knew a great deal about Pedro de Valencia's other writings, and assembled lists and summaries of them in two articles in 1875.⁴⁰ In those articles he did not attribute any sympathy with scepticism to Valencia: the *Academica* was simply a very fine piece of history of philosophy. But in a lecture of 1891 he wrote that Pedro de Valencia's own opinion was "transparent." He was "inclined enough to the thesis of Arcesilaus and the probabilism of the New Academy... his book was intended principally to vindicate, within certain limits, ancient scepticism."⁴¹ Menéndez y Pelayo's chief argument for this position was that Valencia had written that "When I hear that illustrious men are credited with ridiculous and irrational opinions... I refuse to believe they are faithfully interpreted: how is it possible that an absurdity that leaps to the attention of my very limited understanding could have been taught... by such great men?"⁴² But although the use of such a principle of interpretive charity may be a sort of vindication of ancient scepticism, it hardly proves that Valencia was inclined to the thesis of Arcesilaus and the probabilism of the New Academy. Nevertheless, many scholars following Menéndez y Pelayo took this as the lesson of his work.

Not long after Menéndez y Pelayo, M. Serrano y Sanz wrote that Pedro de Valencia was "one of the most sceptical men of the sixteenth century."⁴³ In 1972 Ben Rekers wrote that the *Academica* "clearly has sceptical tendencies," with a footnote to Menéndez y Pelayo.⁴⁴ In 1983 Alain Guy drew explicitly on Menéndez y Pelayo to write that Valencia displayed "a certain relativism" and was "above

⁴⁰ Marcelino Menéndez y Pelayo, "Apuntamientos biográficos y bibliográficos de Pedro de Valencia" [orig. 1875] in his *Ensayos de crítica filosófica*. Buenos Aires: Emecé, 1946, 309–334.

⁴¹ Marcelino Menéndez y Pelayo, "De los orígenes del criticismo y del escepticismo y especialmente de los precursors Españoles de Kant" [orig. 1891] in his *Ensayos de crítica filosófica*, 268.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 269.

⁴³ Manuel Serrano y Sanz, *Pedro de Valencia: Estudio biográfico-crítico*. Badajoz: Diputación Provincial, 1981 [orig. 1910], 19.

⁴⁴ Ben Rekers, *Benito Arias Montano (1527–1598)*. London: Warburg Institute and Leiden: Brill, 1972, 118.

all attached to the probabilism of Arcesilaus and Carneades.”⁴⁵ In 2001 Carlos Lévy pointed out that his attitudes toward Arcesilaus and Carneades should not be run together. Rather, Valencia rejects the dogmatic belief in *isosthenia* of the Pyrrhonism of Arcesilaus and approves of the probabilism of Carneades.⁴⁶

Nevertheless, even Lévy cannot point to an unequivocal confession of Valencia’s faith in Carneadean scepticism. Perhaps this was why Luis Gómez Canseco’s measured assessment mentions Valencia’s claim to provide no more than a commentary and insists that he did not identify with any school, but cannot resist adding that “one observes a certain nearness of the author to the object of his studies.”⁴⁷

In recent years, the scholar who has done the most to dispel the myth that Valencia accepted scepticism in any strong sense is Juan Luis Suárez.⁴⁸ I am going to suggest that he is wrong on a number of points, but may be right on the main issue. In two articles and a book, Suárez takes on the question head-on. He argues that Valencia could not have been a real sceptic because scepticism is inherently conservative and Pedro de Valencia’s many social, economic, and political writings often call for substantial and progressive change.⁴⁹ But this is a misunderstanding of the traditions of scepticism,⁵⁰ which do not have to be conservative. Living in accordance with custom, which Suárez thinks must always be conservative, can also include living in accordance with customs of change, customs that seek progress and improvement.⁵¹ In fact, of course, there is probably no custom on the face of the earth that has endured for any significant time without change.

⁴⁵ Alain Guy, *Histoire de la philosophie espagnole*. Toulouse: Université de Toulouse-Le Mirail, 1985 [orig. 1983], 68.

⁴⁶ Carlos Lévy, “Pierre de Valence, historien de l’Académie ou Académicien?” in Pierre-François Moreau, ed., *Le scepticisme au XVIIe et au XVIIIe siècle*. Paris: Albin Michel, 2001, 174–187.

⁴⁷ Luis Gómez Canseco, *El humanismo después de 1600: Pedro de Valencia*. Sevilla: Publicaciones de la Universidad de Sevilla, 1993, 97, 101.

⁴⁸ J. Paradiñas Fuentes also makes it very clear that Pedro de Valencia should not be understood as a philosophical sceptic across the board (*El pensamiento socioeconómico de Pedro de Valencia*. Salamanca: doctoral dissertation, 1986, 196).

⁴⁹ Juan Luis Suárez, “Era escéptico Pedro de Valencia?”, *Bulletin Hispanique* 99 (1997), 397; Suárez, *El Pensamiento de Pedro de Valencia*, 84, 127.

⁵⁰ Suárez also thinks that there is one sceptical tradition from Pyrrho to the Academy to Sextus (*El Pensamiento de Pedro de Valencia*, 86), but much later scholarship distinguishes the two traditions. See J. C. Laursen, “Scepticism”, in Maryanne Horowitz ed., *New Dictionary of the History of Ideas*. New York: Scribner’s, 2005, 2210–2213.

⁵¹ See J. C. Laursen, *The Politics of Scepticism in the Ancients, Montaigne, Hume, and Kant*. Leiden: Brill, 1992.

Suárez adds an additional argument that Pedro de Valencia could not have been a true sceptic because, according to José Ortega y Gasset, scepticism is self-refuting. In one of his writings, Ortega asserted that scepticism relies on a true notion of the “truth” in order to refute any truth.⁵² But again, this is just poor philosophy on Ortega’s part. Suárez even knows the sceptics’ answer to that: in his book, he points out that the ancient sceptics always answered to this objection that (1), no, they were not depending on a notion of truth, but just refuting other people’s notions of truth, and (2) they do not mind it if scepticism is self-refuting.⁵³ One of their favorite metaphors was that scepticism is a purgative that purges itself, or a ladder to be kicked away after climbing up. So, if it is not true that sceptics rely on a covert truth about “the truth”, then Ortega’s “refutation” does not refute them.

Yet another argument that Suárez makes for denying that Pedro de Valencia is a sceptic in the traditional sense is that Montaigne was a sceptic in the traditional sense and Valencia was very different from him. It follows that Valencia was not a sceptic. But this depends upon a very contentious interpretation of Montaigne. Over and over, Suárez characterizes Montaigne in very negative terms: he presents “a demoralized and desperate ethics, without energy, giving up to destiny,”⁵⁴ he “assumes as a fact the social and economic order as it has been conceived without criticizing or questioning it,”⁵⁵ his “humanism is a humanism that locks itself up in an impotent subject in order to preach from there a demoralized ethics of survival,”⁵⁶ and he represents “moral solipsism.”⁵⁷ But most major recent interpretations of Montaigne would disagree with all of this. Most recent scholars find Montaigne to be sociable, constructive, and even subversive to the point of revolutionary.⁵⁸ It would follow, then, that if Montaigne represents early modern scepticism, Pedro de Valencia’s social and economic ideas could fit very well under the rubric of such scepticism.

⁵²José Ortega y Gasset, “Investigaciones psicológicas” in *Obras Completas*, vol. 12. Madrid: Alianza, 1983, 413–423. Cited by Suárez, “Era escéptico?”, 402–405.

⁵³Juan Luis Suárez, *El Pensamiento de Pedro de Valencia*, 92–93.

⁵⁴Suárez, *El Pensamiento de Pedro de Valencia*, 125, cf. 174; cf. Juan Luis Suárez, “Trayectorias y estilo intelectual de Pedro de Valencia”, *Hispanic Review* 67, 1999, 71.

⁵⁵Suárez, *El Pensamiento de Pedro de Valencia*, 173.

⁵⁶Suárez, *El Pensamiento de Pedro de Valencia*, 228, cf. 230.

⁵⁷Suárez, *El Pensamiento de Pedro de Valencia*, 236.

⁵⁸To mention only a few, Jean Starobinski, *Montaigne en mouvement*. Paris: Gallimard, 1982; David Lewis Schaeffer, *The Political Philosophy of Montaigne*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990; Alan Levine, *Sensual Politics*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2001; Laursen, *The Politics of Scepticism*, chs. 4 and 5.

However, even if Suárez is wrong about the foregoing reasons why Pedro de Valencia is not a sceptic, he may be right in his characterization of Pedro's relation to scepticism. In one of his articles, Suárez argues that the only places in the text in which Pedro de Valencia's own opinions are clear are the dedication, prologue, and conclusion, and in none of them does he claim allegiance to scepticism. But scepticism as an "intellectual instrument" pervades his work with a "tendency to invade everything, to grow, to touch on all themes."⁵⁹ In the book, he spells out more of what this means: "the analytical rigor and critical character... of his socioeconomic studies betray a certain debt to some of the sceptical teachings," Menéndez Pelayo is right about "the eminently critical character of his thought."⁶⁰ Pedro de Valencia takes on all of the assertions of the witch hunters, the Apocrypha-mongers, and the defenders of corrupt economic systems with "arguments that the Academics used to dispute Stoic epistemology."⁶¹ Only one of these includes specific mention of the Academic sceptics in an argument against the witch hunters.⁶² But in all of his political, religious, and social writings, Suárez says, "the presence of concepts and techniques that come directly from a methodology derived from empirical scepticism is indubitable."⁶³ "Empirical scepticism," which Suárez derives in part from the medical scepticism of Galen and Francisco Sanches, is his term for Pedro de Valencia's use of critical reasoning in demolishing various dogmatisms and practices.

Let us be clear about what this means. Academic scepticism shows up in Pedro de Valencia's writings on other topics such as economics, witches, religious fraud, and colonial policy only in the attenuated sense of critical reasoning which is sceptical of supernaturalism and of conventional wisdom, not of common sense, religion, or morality. Valencia is a sceptic in the larger and more diffuse meaning of someone who explores things in depth, considers a variety of conflicting opinions, and then goes with what seems probable or beneficial. He is not a sceptic in the narrower sense of allegiance to a particular tradition, nor in settling for *ataraxia* as a goal nor embracing a dogmatic Carneadean criterion of probability.

Pedro de Valencia was not out to promote the scepticism he reviewed in his *Academica* in any exclusive way. He was willing to interpret it charitably and see its merits for particular uses in particular times and places. But this characterization

⁵⁹ Suárez, "Era escéptico Pedro de Valencia?", 408.

⁶⁰ Suárez, *El Pensamiento de Pedro de Valencia*, 21, 103.

⁶¹ Suárez, *El Pensamiento de Pedro de Valencia*, 115.

⁶² Pedro de Valencia, *Discurso acerca de los cuentos de las brujas*, in *Obras Completas*, ed. G. Morocho, vol. 7, 1997, 275.

⁶³ Suárez, *El Pensamiento de Pedro de Valencia*, 114.

applies to his attitude toward other Hellenistic traditions as well. Some of his beliefs and moral attitudes are Stoic and, as we have mentioned, some are Cynical. Each of these schools provided a set of tools for his intellectual workshop, but none claimed his full allegiance.

Conclusion

The upshot of this analysis of Pedro de Valencia's work is that we have seen that substantial and detailed knowledge of ancient scepticism was available in late Renaissance Spain and considered relevant to contemporary social and political issues. Full adoption of all of the techniques and attitudes of ancient scepticism might have been subversive and scandalous, but there was no reason, at least in Pedro de Valencia's case, to carry the study of ancient scepticism so far. Rather, it could form part of a humanist intellectual's repertoire of historical and philosophical knowledge and skills, as one of many available traditions. It did not trump religion or practical socio-economic policy, but rather complemented them.

PART III
FOUR RENAISSANCE SCEPTICS

6. *INTER ALIAS PHILOSOPHORUM GENTIUM SECTAS,
ET HUMANI, ET MITES: GIANFRANCESCO PICO
AND THE SCEPTICS*

Gian Mario Cao
Florence, Italy

Pico's context

The more heavily a Renaissance thinker drew upon the Ancient sources, the more closely his modern interpreters are expected to follow his practice. This article, part of a larger project to compile a catalogue of Gianfrancesco Pico's massive borrowings from Sextus Empiricus,¹ aims at providing an introductory map of Pico's treatment of Sextus, whose writings handed down Greek Pyrrhonism to both Renaissance philosophers and modern scholars. The concern here is limited to some arguments about Pico's encounter with Scepticism.

To begin with, a few words about the two characters of our story. Sextus Empiricus (late-second century AD), the most comprehensive source of Ancient scepticism, was recovered by Italian humanists as early as the 1440s²; nonetheless, both his *Pyrrhoniae Hypotyposes* [*PH*] and *Adversus Mathematicos* [*M*] remained unpublished until the Latin editions of the 1560s.³ Gianfrancesco Pico was born in 1469 – a contemporary of Machiavelli and Cajetan – and died in 1533, killed by a nephew in his hometown of Mirandola. His affair with Scepticism is recorded in the *Examen Vanitatis Doctrinae Gentium et Veritatis Christianae*

¹ I refer once and for all to Gian Mario Cao, *Scepticism and Orthodoxy: Gianfrancesco Pico as a Reader of Sextus Empiricus. With a Facing Text of Pico's Quotations from Sextus*. Pisa-Rome: Serra Editore, 2007.

² See Gian Mario Cao, "The Prehistory of Modern Scepticism: Sextus Empiricus in Fifteenth-Century Italy", *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, LXIV (2001), pp. 229–279.

³ See Richard H. Popkin, *The History of Scepticism: From Savonarola to Bayle*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2003, pp. 17–43.

Disciplinae, a massive four-hundred-page folio volume finished by the mid-1510s and eventually published in Mirandola in 1520.⁴ It was in the *Quaestio de falsitate astrologiae* of ca. 1510, however, that Pico mentioned Sextus Empiricus for the first time.⁵

In his pioneering monograph,⁶ Charles B. Schmitt primarily focused on Pico's critical attitude towards Aristotelianism by devoting an in-depth analysis to the relevant part of the *Examen Vanitatis* (books IV–VI). Furthermore, Schmitt reminded intellectual historians of Pico's commitment as a Christian reformer, influenced by Girolamo Savonarola's teachings. Scholars building upon Schmitt's work have tended to overstate this connection without, however, even raising the following question: did Pico really accomplish a Savonarolan mission when he linked Sextus' arguments to the clampdown on philosophical liberty carried out by Leo X (Giovanni de' Medici) during the 1510s? Pico's endorsement of the Medici pope's agenda, documented in several places, is well exemplified by his *Oratio de reformandis moribus*.⁷ This blunt speech, designed to be delivered at the Fifth Lateran Council (1512–1517), was on the same wavelength as Leo X's coeval bull *Apostolici Regiminis* (1513), which condemned "every proposition contrary to the truth of the enlightened Christian faith."⁸ In other words, Pico's sceptical attitude came about in a context that should be labelled as pre-Lutheran rather than post-Savonarolan. The *Oratio de reformandis moribus* gave voice to a scathing criticism of Roman Catholicism, whose impending crisis could not allow any backward-looking nostalgia. If anything, Pico allowed himself some outspoken remarks on the outrageous magnificence and luxury that thrived during Julius II's papacy.⁹ Of course, Pico worked on his hagiographic *Vita Hieronymi Savonarolae* down to the early 1530s and

⁴ Pico's *Examen Vanitatis* (hereafter *EV*, followed by capital and lowercase Roman numerals referring to books and chapters respectively [e.g., *EV* III vii]), will be cited from the *princeps* edited by the author himself (Mirandola 1520), according to the copy in the library of San Marco (now Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, 22.2.18).

⁵ See Walter Cavini, "Un inedito di Giovan Francesco Pico della Mirandola. La *Quaestio de falsitate astrologiae*", *Rinascimento*, XIII (1973), pp. 133–171: 140, 147, 148.

⁶ Charles B. Schmitt, *Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola (1469–1533) and His Critique of Aristotle*. The Hague: Nijhoff, 1967.

⁷ Now available in Gian Mario Cao, "Pico della Mirandola Goes to Germany. With an edition of Gianfrancesco Pico's 'De reformandis moribus oratio'", *Annali dell'Istituto Storico Italo-Germanico*, XXX (2004), pp. 463–525: 516–525.

⁸ Norman P. Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1990, p. 605.

⁹ Cao, "Pico della Mirandola Goes to Germany", p. 522, l. 205: "nostrae tempestatis Iulia aedificia."

continued to look after his fellow *Piagnoni* (the Friar's followers). Yet, neither his language nor his purposes show any trace of Savonarola's willingness to challenge papal authority. More importantly, on the eve of the Reformation the battlefield had become irreversibly European, and Gianfrancesco Pico himself can be singled out as exemplifying the dense web of intellectual relationships connecting northern to southern Europe,¹⁰ whose moving spirit was Erasmus of Rotterdam.

Pico's manuscript source

Even though Florence could no longer be the same elective homeland for Gianfrancesco Pico as it had been for his uncle Giovanni, it still remained an important source of rare manuscripts. As far as Scepticism is concerned, Cicero's *Academica* (45 BC) was available already to Petrarch's generation and Diogenes Laertius' *Vitae Philosophorum* (third century AD) was translated into Latin by the mid-1430s as well as being printed in the early-1470s,¹¹ but Sextus Empiricus was something of a rarity throughout the fifteenth century. In Florence, however, both the Medici private collection and the so-called 'Medicea pubblica' (the library of the Dominican Convent of San Marco) each preserved one manuscript exemplar of Sextus' works. In all likelihood, Gianfrancesco Pico was familiar with a mid-fifteenth-century codex (now Laurentianus 85.11) that formerly belonged to Giorgio Antonio Vespucci, who bequeathed a number of books to the library of San Marco on entering the Convent in 1499. Unlike Francesco Filelfo's early fourteenth-century codex (now Laurentianus 85.19), called codex *fenestratus* because of its large *fenestrae* or *lacunae*, and originally including only the five books of *M VII–XI*,¹² Vespucci's manuscript made the whole Sextan corpus available to its humanist readers. The manuscript arranges Sextus' writings as though they consisted of only ten books: the first three corresponding to *PH I–III*, the fourth to *M I*, the fifth to *M II–VI*, and the last five to *M VII–XI*. According to Hermann Mutschmann, the compilation of Sextus'

¹⁰ See Cao, "Pico della Mirandola Goes to Germany", pp. 463–498.

¹¹ See Charles B. Schmitt, *Cicero Scepticus. A Study of the Influence of the Academica in the Renaissance*. The Hague: Nijhoff, 1972; Marcello Gigante, "Ambrogio Traversari interprete di Diogene Laerzio", in Gian Carlo Garfagnini, ed., *Ambrogio Traversari nel VI centenario della nascita*. Florence: Olschki, 1988, pp. 367–459.

¹² See Cao, "The Prehistory of Modern Scepticism", pp. 242–248, which provides some illustrations as well as a list of both the *fenestrae* and the missing sections (partly filled in the sixteenth century).

writings took place at an early stage of their textual tradition and was probably related to the need to save paper; the ten books match the ten original papyrus rolls, each designed to include approximately 2,000 to 3,500 lines (στίχοι).¹³ The following table lists Sextus Empiricus' books according to the ancient numbering system and the recent one used in Mutschmann's critical edition:

Sextus' books		Papyrus rolls	Mutschmann's edition
Πυρρωνείων Ὑποτυπώσεων Α'	Pyrrhoniae Hypotyposes I	1	PH I
Πυρρωνείων Ὑποτυπώσεων Β'	Pyrrhoniae Hypotyposes II	2	PH II
Πυρρωνείων Ὑποτυπώσεων Γ'	Pyrrhoniae Hypotyposes III	3	PH III
Πρὸς Γραμματικούς	Adversus Grammaticos	4	M I
Πρὸς Ῥήτορας	Adversus Rhetores	5	M II
Πρὸς Γεωμέτρας	Adversus Geometras	5	M III
Πρὸς Ἀριθμητικούς	Adversus Arithmeticos	5	M IV
Πρὸς Ἀστρολόγους	Adversus Astrologos	5	M V
Πρὸς Μουσικούς	Adversus Musicos	5	M VI
Πρὸς Λογικούς Α'	Adversus Logicos I (Adversus dogmaticos I)	6	M VII
Πρὸς Λογικούς Β'	Adversus Logicos II (Adversus dogmaticos II)	7	M VIII
Πρὸς Φυσικούς Α'	Adversus Physicos I (Adversus dogmaticos III)	8	M IX
Πρὸς Φυσικούς Β'	Adversus Physicos II (Adversus dogmaticos IV)	9	M X
Πρὸς Ἠθικούς	Adversus Ethicos (Adversus dogmaticos V)	10	M XI

Given also that both Diogenes Laertius and the *Suda* lexicon (tenth century) mention Sextus' ten books,¹⁴ it is by no means surprising that Sextus Empiricus first appears in Pico's *Examen Vanitatis* as the author of ten books: "decem et ego Sexti sceptici libros perlegi."¹⁵ Unfortunately, this statement does not fully answer the question whether Pico's readings are consistent with the *mise en page* of Vespucci's manuscript. Two features of the manuscript are noteworthy

¹³ See Mutschmann's *Praefatio* [1912] in Hermann Mutschmann and Jürgen Mau, eds., *Sexti Empirici Opera. I: ΠΥΡΡΩΝΕΙΩΝ ΥΠΟΤΥΠΩΣΕΩΝ* Lipsia: Teubner, 1958, pp. xxiii–xxviii; see also Jerker Blomqvist, "Die Skeptika des Sextus Empiricus", *Grazer Beiträge*, 2 (1974), pp. 7–14.

¹⁴ In fact, Diogenes Laertius ascribes more than ten books to Sextus, namely, "other fine works": Ἡροδότου δὲ διήκουσε Σέξτος ὁ Ἐμπειρικός, οὗ καὶ τὰ δέκα τῶν Σκεπτικῶν καὶ ἄλλα κάλλιστα (IX 116). As for the *Suda*, see Ada Adler, ed., *Suidae Lexicon*. Lipsia: Teubner, 1928–1938, IV, p. 341, ll. 21–22 ([235 Σέξτος] ἔγραψεν Ἠθικά, Ἐπισκεπτικά βιβλία ι'), l. 29 ([236 Σέξτος] Σκεπτικά ἐν βιβλίοις ι').

¹⁵ *EV* I ii, fol. 7^v.

here: on the one hand, it has plenty of titles (most of which are in the margins, sometimes in addition to those usually present, but remarkably fewer in *M*); on the other hand, it does not distinguish headings from main titles in such a way as to prevent the reader from either overlapping or splitting books incorrectly. But let us consider some details here (for a complete list, see the Appendix).

Unlike books I and III of *PH*, book II lacks a table of contents.¹⁶ The title of book III of *PH* is written in black ink instead of the usual red, thereby running the risk of passing unnoticed. Interestingly enough, no title at all introduces the *Adversus logicos* II (*M* VIII), whose final inscription – *pace* Mutschmann – does not bear any reference to the seventh of the ten books (formerly papyrus rolls), as it does in other manuscripts.¹⁷ Equally unambiguous are three further elements: [1] the note ὑπομνημάτων θ' (ninth book), which manifestly concludes the *Adversus physicos* II (*M* X),¹⁸ followed by decorative devices in red and black ink; [2] the list of the contents of the *Adversus ethicos* (*M* XI), which expressly refers to a tenth book (τάδε ἔνεστιν ἐν τῷ ι') and [3] the final subscription, which ultimately establishes both that the *Adversus ethicos* is the tenth book and that Sextus' writings comprise ten books (ὑπομνημάτων ι' σέξτου σκεπτικού τῶν πρὸς ἀντίρρησιν α' β' γ' δ' ε' ς' ζ' η' θ' ι').¹⁹

Apparently Gianfrancesco Pico became confused when quoting from *Adversus Physicos* I (*M* IX): “idemque in nono libro πρὸς φυσικούς cum dixisset alios existimasse rerum elementa corporea esse, alios putasse incorporea, eorum explicaturus dogmata qui corporea censuissent, hisce verbis usus est, Φερεκίδης μὲν ὁ Σύριος γῆν ἔνεπε [*sic*] πάντων εἶναι ἀρχὴν καὶ στοιχείον [*M* IX 360].”²⁰ Although we currently identify the *Adversus physicos* I with *M* IX, nothing allowed Pico to

¹⁶ That would predictably be the following: “These are the contents of the second book of the *Pyrrhoniae Hypotyposes*.”

¹⁷ See Mutschmann's *apparatus* in *Sexti Empirici Opera. I: ΠΥΡΡΩΝΕΙΩΝ ΥΠΟΤΥΠΩΣΕΩΝ* p. 212: “G [*scil. codices omnes*] addunt σέξτου ἐμπειρικοῦ ὑπομνημάτων ζ' (vel τὸ ἔβδομον).”

¹⁸ But see Johann A. Fabricius, ed., *Sexti Empirici Opera graece et latine*. Lipsia: Gleditsch, 1718, p. 633, n.A: “... non decem libri sunt, verum undecim, et hic quem ordimur, non utique nonus numerandus, sed decimus. Nisi dicamus, ut sane est consentaneum, disputationem adversus Geometras et Arithmeticos non duobus sed uno libro complexum fuisse. Itaque et in Suidae quoque codicibus ἐπισκεπτικά (lege ἔτι σκεπτικά) βιβλία δέκα memorantur. Atque iterum: Σκεπτικά ἐν βιβλίῳ ι'.”

¹⁹ Mutschmann wrongly ascribes to Vespucci's manuscript (codex L) the variant reading σέξτου ἐμπειρικοῦ instead of σέξτου σκεπτικοῦ (see Hermann Mutschmann, ed., *Sexti Empirici Opera. II: Adversus dogmaticos libros quinque*. Lipsia: Teubner, 1914, p. 429).

²⁰ *EV* I x, fol. 15^v. It must be pointed out that Pico's quotation from Sextus bears a variant reading (ἔνεπε instead of ἔλεξε) not otherwise transmitted, not even by Vespucci's manuscript (fol. 282^r).

consider it as the ninth book; rather, he must have noticed the marginal addition of the numeral θ (ninth book) to indicate the beginning of the *Adversus physicos* II (M X) in Vespucci's manuscript (fol. 289^r). No doubt Pico read through Sextus Empiricus' writings; it is not by accident that his quotations draw on almost all of them, with the sole exceptions of the books *Adversus astrologos* (M V) and *Adversus physicos* II (M X). However, the *Examen Vanitatis* hardly conceals the author's puzzlement.²¹ Indeed, in the very same passage Pico correctly records Sextus' different treatments of dialectics in *PH* II and the *Adversus logicos* I–II (M VII–VIII), while he mistakes Aenesidemus' Πυρρώνειοι λόγοι (*Pyrrhonian Discourses*) for Sextus' Πυρρώνειοι ὑποτυπώσεις.²² Although we should not jump to conclusions whenever Pico nods, fresh doubts keep arising because of his misunderstanding of the main subdivisions of the Sextan corpus – for instance, whereas Pico is right to consider the *Adversus ethicos* (M XI) as the last book,²³ he is wrong to refer to the *Adversus physicos* (M IX–X) as a single book.²⁴

A step back from the text might possibly suggest an explanation. Pico apparently read both Sextus' *PH* and *M* but did not read the anonymous Δισσοὶ λόγοι (*Contrasting Arguments*),²⁵ which are often appended to the end of manuscript sources. Accordingly, we can rule out all the manuscripts including the Δισσοὶ λόγοι

²¹ An accomplished philologist such as Angelo Poliziano was even more disoriented than Pico: see Lucia Cesarini Martinelli, “Sesto Empirico e una dispersa enciclopedia delle arti e delle scienze di Angelo Poliziano”, *Rinascimento*, 20 (1980), pp. 327–358: 351–352.

²² *EV* III x, fol. 97^r: “In hanc certe plurima sunt moliti cum Aenesidemus in quarto praecipue Pyrrhoniarem hypotheseon [*sic*], tum et Sextus quoque Empiricus qui praeter libros πυρρωνίων [*sic*] ὑποτυπώσεων, in quorum secundo logicam sive dialecticam vexat acerrime, duo etiam per sese satis ampla volumina scripsit contra logicos...”

²³ *EV* III xiii, fol. 104^r: “et Sextus Empiricus inter eos cum acer tum copiosus author effecit, et in tertio Pyrrhoniarem cum adversus Ethicos disputat philosophos, et in libris quos particulatim scripsit contra diversas philosophiae partes, nam eum librum qui est adversus Ethicos ultimum esse voluit.” On the order of composition of Sextus' works see Luciano Floridi, *Sextus Empiricus. The Transmission and Recovery of Pyrrhonism*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2002, pp. 8–10.

²⁴ *EV* III xi, fol. 100^v: “haec et alia multa de causa et effectu tam in tertio Pyrrhoniarem informationum, quam in libro contra Physicos parte prima, disseruit Sextus ipse Pyrrhonius Graece. Ego Latine, ut tenerem libri ordinem, et servarem quod me facturum receperam, paucula haec attuli, reliqua omisi”; *EV* III xii, fol. 102^v: “aliaeque permultae et in tertio Pyrrhoniarem et in opere contra Physicos ab eo quem saepe citavimus Sexto ducuntur in medium.”

²⁵ On this collection of sophistic arguments “(questionably) dated around 400 BC”, see the relevant entry by Myles F. Burnyeat in Edward Craig, ed., *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. London: Routledge, 1998, III, pp. 106–107.

and/or excluding either *PH* or *M*.²⁶ It turns out that among the surviving candidates only Vespucci's codex was written before the making of Pico's *Examen Vanitatis*.²⁷ Although such a conclusion is not proof, it certainly suggests that Vespucci's codex could be Pico's source.²⁸

Pico's attitude toward Sextus

Whatever the case might be, Pico was aware that a close examination of Pyrrhonism would require a running comparison between Sextus' accounts in *PH* and *M*. He deeply regretted that no Latin translation of such a valuable source was available. This is the reason why the *Examen Vanitatis* more than occasionally provides quotations from Sextus' Greek text as well as Latin paraphrases of it ("itaque et hinc et inde quae ad propositum facere videamus decerpemus, e Graeco in Latinum quasi quadam transferentes paraphrasi").²⁹ Pico's treatment of geometry (*EV* III v) consists of a slavish rendering of Sextus' *Adversus geometras* (*M* III), a sort of translation meant to bridge the gap between the Greek source and Latin readers.³⁰ And unlike Francesco Filelfo, who had filled his *Commentationes Florentinae de exilio* (ca. 1440) with unacknowledged

²⁶ As suggested by Walter Cavini, "Appunti sulla prima diffusione in Occidente delle opere di Sesto Empirico", *Medioevo*, III (1977), pp. 1–20: 19–20.

²⁷ See Floridi, *Sextus Empiricus*, pp. 91–93, which lists at least four Greek manuscripts that do not include the *Δισσοὶ λόγοι* while including both Sextus' *PH* and *M*: Laurentianus 85.11 (completed in 1464, year 6973 of the Byzantine era), Londinensis gr. 16.D.XIII (sixteenth century), Madrilenus BN O-30 (dated at 1549), Vratislaviensis Rehdigeranus gr. 45 (sixteenth century, seriously damaged). The sixteenth-century codex Escorialensis E.III.1 ([2].II.7 then Z.VII.14) got lost in the fire at the Escorial in 1671. For further, and sometimes slightly different, descriptions of Sextus manuscripts, see Hermann Mutschmann, "Die Überlieferung der Schriften des Sextus Empiricus", *Rheinisches Museum für Philologie*, LXIV (1909), pp. 244–283, and Denise Davidson Greaves, ed., *Sextus Empiricus ΠΡΟΣ ΜΟΥΣΙΚΟΥΣ. Against the Musicians (Adversus Musicos)*. Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1986, pp. 35–97.

²⁸ No doubt can be raised on Pico's acquaintance with the so-called 'Medicea Publica'. When talking about Aristotle's *De anima* (*EV* V viii, fol. 153^v: "Et in primo De anima, quod in antiquis exemplaribus Graecis, et duobus praesertim admodum vetustis in Marciana Florentina Bibliotheca visitur..."), Pico refers to a couple of outstanding codices owned by the Library of San Marco, now respectively Laurentianus 81.1 (twelfth-thirteenth centuries) and Laurentianus 87.25 (thirteenth century).

²⁹ *EV* III xiii, fol. 104^r.

³⁰ See also *EV* I x, fol. 15^v: "quoniam libri horum authorum [*scil.* Sextus and Theodoretus] non omnibus noti, quia in Latinam linguam nunquam fuere (quod sciam) conversi."

quotations from Sextus' *Adversus ethicos* (*M* XI),³¹ Pico never concealed his borrowings. The sections devoted to physics in both *PH* and *M* play a role in the *Examen Vanitatis* that he did not fail to recognize.³²

To give to Sextus what belongs to Sextus, however, Pico did not take a scholarly approach. On only one occasion did he refrain from criticizing Epicurus, by urging himself to provide explanations rather than refutations: "sed explicandi nunc, non confutandi locus."³³ He also tried to establish which Sextus, among several possibilities, was the Sceptic philosopher; but, while not failing to take up the single reference to Sextus' *Empirical Commentaries* (ἐμπειρικὰ ὑπομνήματα [*M* I 61]),³⁴ unfortunately lost, he could not solve the riddle of Sextus Empiricus' identity. His biographical sketch deals with Sextus, Sextius, and Sestius,³⁵ mentioned by sources such as the *Suda*, Apuleius, Iulius Capitolinus, Galen, Quintilian, Seneca, Cicero, and Horace. A contemporary of Marcus Aurelius, Sextus Empiricus was also Plutarch of Chaeronea's nephew according to the *Suda* and Apuleius (*Met.* I 2).³⁶ Iulius Capitolinus (*Hist. Aug.*, *Aur.* III 2) confirms this identity, further claiming that Sextus Chaeroneus taught Marcus Aurelius, whereas the *Suda* refers to a second Sceptic philosopher called Sextus, in this instance 'Lybicus' instead of 'Chaeroneus'.³⁷ Pico's summary also includes the references to Sextus Empiricus supposedly made in Galen's *Institutio logica* and in his

³¹ See Gian Mario Cao, "Tra politica fiorentina e filosofia ellenistica: il dibattito sulla ricchezza nelle *Commentationes* di Francesco Filelfo", *Archivio Storico Italiano*, CLV (1997), pp. 99–126.

³² See *supra*, n. 24.

³³ *EV* II xix, fol. 50^r: "sed non animadvertit [*scil.* Epicurus] a sensu differre phantasiam, quod boni omnes philosophi volunt, et ipse uno de Imaginatione libro multis ab hinc annis edito satis ostendi, alium enim sensu, alium phantasia percipi potest; atque ubi sensus non uno tantummodo, sed sexcentis ita dixerim modis erraverit, toties aberrare phantasiam posse manifestum est. Sed explicandi nunc, non confutandi locus." Pico's passage corresponds to *M* VII 203.

³⁴ *EV* I ii, fol. 7^v: "Decem et ego Sexti sceptici libros perlegi, qui etiam empirica scripsit monumenta."

³⁵ On which see at least Hubert Cancik and Helmuth Schneider, eds., *Der Neue Pauly, Enzyklopädie der Antike*. Stuttgart and Weimar: Metzler, 2001, XI, cols 476–477, 490–495.

³⁶ *EV* I ii, fol. 7^v: "Fuit autem Sextus philosophus sub Marco philosopho Imperatore, Plutarchi consanguineus, qui sceptica scripsit, ut est apud Suidam in collectaneis et apud alios; atque is puto est Sextus cuius meminit Apuleius, nam et a Sexto philosopho ac Plutarcho maternas se originis fundamenta traxisse prodidit Apuleius." See *Suidae Lexicon*, IV, p. 341, ll. 18–20.

³⁷ *EV* I ii, fol. 7^v: "et in vita Marci Imperatoris atque philosophi Iulius Capitolinus scribit Sextum Cheronensem Plutarchi nepotem praeceptorem ipsius Marci fuisse, est et apud Suidam Sexti quoque Sceptici Lybici non Cheronaei mentio." See *Suidae Lexicon*, IV, p. 341, l. 29.

De sectis medicorum (where he would also be called ‘the African’, ‘Afer’).³⁸ Nonetheless, Pico correctly warns against mistaking any Sextus/Sestius for a Sceptic, citing P. Sestius, a Roman philosopher frequently referred to by Cicero (e.g. *Att.* 141 [VII.17] 2) and Quintilian (X i 124), among others.³⁹ And, to clear up any possible ambiguity, he maintains both the early Greek origin and background of Scepticism, and its lasting vitality.⁴⁰

Pico handled Sextus Empiricus neither as an organic whole nor as an independent authority; he was the writer, “qui sceptica scripsit.”⁴¹ Accordingly, Pico felt free to arrange Sextus’ doxographic materials in his own order.⁴² Furthermore, he did not hesitate to call into question Sextus’ reliability as well. Recounting the debate on apprehension (κατάληψις) between Arcesilaus and the Stoics, Pico did not spare his source the following, unjustified disclaimer: “haec dicentibus Stoicis, contradixit Archesilaus, ostendens comprahensionem non esse iudicatorium inter scientiam et opinionem, in hunc modum (*si vera a Sexto relata sunt*) argumentatus...”⁴³ In fact, Pico challenged Sextus’ authority only where a doctrinal reason called for it, accepting Sextus’ most questionable accounts as long as they did not undermine his own belief. A case in point is the following: Pico did not recuse his manuscript source where it credits Sextus with a criticism of Aenesidemus and an otherwise unknown Permedotus (*PH I* 222), both of whom held Plato to be purely sceptical, whereas “Sextus ipse Pyrrhoni nullo pacto dubitabundis Platonem adscribi volens.”⁴⁴ All of the manuscripts,

³⁸ *EV I* ii, fol. 7^v: “Certe Galenus in libro de Sectis Sexti Empirici Afri meminit, et in eius Isagogico Sexti etiam Empirici mentio est.”

³⁹ *EV I* ii, fol. 7^v: “Atque hinc fortasse possunt refutari qui arbitrantur illud Quintiliani in decimo huc pertinere, cum ait scripsisse non parum multa Cornelium Celsum Sextios secutum, nam quod alii legant Sceptios pro Sextios, mihi non facit satis quoniam et apud Senecam Sextiorum mentio, et apud Ciceronem in Epistolarum maxime libris ad Atticum Sextii saepe nomen citatur, et Horatius etiam scribit ad Sestium, et quidam potuere Sestii esse qui non Sceptici fuerint, quamvis aliquis qui Sextus diceretur, inter Scepticos reponatur.”

⁴⁰ *EV I* ii, fol. 7^v: “Ipse quoque idem Seneca ultimo naturalium quaestionum volumine [VII 32 2] inquit, Sextiorum nova et Romani roboris secta, inter initia sua cum magno impetu coepisset, extincta est. At neque Sceptica facultas nova, sed antiqua, nec Romana sed Graeca, nec extincta cum coepisset, sed diuturna.”

⁴¹ See *supra*, n. 36.

⁴² E.g., *EV II* i–xx, fols 37^v–51^r and *M VII* 25–260 (on the criterion of truth).

⁴³ *EV II* xiv, fol. 46^v: “haec dicentibus Stoicis, contradixit Archesilaus, ostendens comprahensionem non esse iudicatorium inter scientiam et opinionem, in hunc modum (*si vera a Sexto relata sunt*) argumentatus, ipsa consensio quam dicunt comprahensionem et phantasiam, vel in sapiente sit vel in stulto, sed si in sapiente sit scientia est, si in fatuo opinio, et nihil praeter haec potest inveniri, nisi nomen inane” (my emphasis). Pico’s passage corresponds to *M VII* 153.

⁴⁴ *EV I* iv, fol. 9^v.

including Vespucci's, bear the phrase κατὰ περιμήδοτον, an untenable reading that Sextus' modern editors correct as κατὰ τῶν περὶ Μηνόδοτον ("against the school of Menodotus", or "in opposition to Menodotus")⁴⁵ but that Pico trustfully embraced ("sicuti Permedotus").⁴⁶

Pico's strategy proves selective insofar as he intentionally neglected some of Sextus' reports. Any expectations for the chapter devoted to astrology (*EV* III viii) will dissolve into frustration upon reading Pico's warning: "non tamen ut Sceptici, qui ex geometria et arithmetica lacessita, eam loco se movisse crediderunt, sed propriis et peculiaribus rationibus, idque a nobis factum iri volo, et quod ita libri praesentis ordo postulat, et quia plura fortasse et explicatiora quam antea fecimus, sumus allaturi."⁴⁷ And when confronting Sextus' refutation of cosmic harmony, Pico's "own peculiar arguments" lead to an overt detachment from the so-called Ephectics (οἱ ἐφεκτικοί, the suspenders of judgement). Sextus says: "That the cosmos is ordered in accord with harmonia is shown to be false in various ways; even if it is true, such a thing has no power in reference to happiness" (*M* VI 37)⁴⁸; in Pico's view such a conclusion cannot withstand even the test of common sense.⁴⁹ In fact, "non Carneadis tormenta, non Ephecticorum philosophorum copiae, non Sexti Empirici machinae conficiant praelium."⁵⁰ Besides bringing out old arguments and focusing on their consistency rather than their background, Pico aims at making sense of them: "e Graeco in Latinum

⁴⁵As translated respectively by Benson Mates, *The Skeptic Way. Sextus Empiricus's Outlines of Pyrrhonism*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996, p. 120, and Julia Annas and Jonathan Barnes, *Sextus Empiricus, Outlines of Scepticism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, p. 58, who follow Mutschmann-Mau's edition (*Sexti Empirici Opera. I: ΠΥΡΡΩΝΕΙΩΝ ΥΠΙΟΤΥΠΩΣΕΩΝ*, p. 57).

⁴⁶*EV* I iv, fol. 9^r: "Praeter haec alii Platonem inter dogmaticos reponunt, alii dubitandum censent fuisse, alii partim quidem inter eos, partim etiam inter illos reponendum arbitrantur, sicuti Permedotus et Aenesidemus. Ii causam hanc sui sensus afferunt, quod in Gymnasticis dialogis, ubi maxime Socrates introducitur adversus sophistas aut ludens aut luctans, ambiguum videatur sermonis genus invehere, ubi vero quicquam affert serio et pensiculate, vel in persona Socratis, vel Timei, puta de idaeis, de providentia, vel de virtutibus et vitiis diligendis vitandisque, tum dogmata proferat, a quibus dissentit Sextus ipse Pyrrhonius, nullo pacto dubitabundis Platonem adscribi volens."

⁴⁷*EV* III viii, fol. 91^r (my emphasis).

⁴⁸*Sextus Empiricus ΠΡΟΣ ΜΟΥΣΙΚΟΥΣ. Against the Musicians*, p. 155.

⁴⁹*EV* III ix, fol. 96^r: "Nec admittunt Sceptici mundum harmonia gubernari, nec si admittant, confici ob id propterea volunt ut ipsa faciat ad felicitatem. Atque haec summam fere dicunt Ephectici, quibus eo non assentior in omnibus, quod sensu communi satis constat nullum pene posse inveniri tam barbarum et inhumanum hominem, qui aliqua etsi non omni mices oblectetur specie, quae ita sonorum et vocum concors discordia dici posset, ut concors discordia partium venustas, concors humorum discordia sanitas, concors discordia superiorum et inferiorum orbium mundi pulchritude."

⁵⁰*EV* V i, fol. 131^v; and see also Schmitt, *Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola*, p. 85.

quasi quadam transferentes paraphrasi; et addentes, impugnantes, interpretantes, respondentes....”⁵¹ In addition, Sextus could be charged with sowing the seeds of dangerous doctrines. Both his *Adversus ethicos* (M XI) and PH III provide unequivocal testimonies of the Ancient Greeks’ approach to incestuous love that could meet only with Pico’s condemnation. According to Zeno of Citium, the founder of the Stoic school, “there is nothing out of place in rubbing your mother’s private parts with your own – just as nobody would say that it was bad to rub any other part of her body with your hand” (PH III 205).⁵² Whereas Pico’s relevant translation is unpredictably literal, his opinion about this passage is predictably critical: Zeno is no longer a philosopher or even a human being, but someone far wilder than a beast (most of whom would reportedly either retreat from intercourse or become furiously insane).⁵³

Here it is definitely morality that is at stake, not ethics. “In absolutissimi Evangelii luce splendidissima” everything is illuminated, and perennial truths pave the way for moral behaviour and even happiness: “in quo [*scil.* Evangelio] quidquid praecipitur, id est, norma vivendi et ars comparandae felicitatis, quoniam Dei est verbum semper verum, semper sanctum, semper observandum.” Pagan philosophy is instead the domain of falsehood, profanity and (no matter whether always or often) harm; moreover, there is no “ars bene beateque vivendi”⁵⁴ left

⁵¹ EV III xiii, fol. 104^r (my emphasis).

⁵² *Sextus Empiricus, Outlines of Scepticism*, p. 198.

⁵³ EV III xiii, fol. 106^r: “Illis vero etiam philosophus Zeno, qui ita absurdum esse non putavit matris particulam filii particula, sicuti nec manu membrum aliud confricari, in hoc non philosophus (ut mihi videtur), non homo, sed bellua longe immanior, quando inter eas inventae sunt multae quae et maternum refugerint coitum, et in eo deceptae sese in praecipis dederint, et in ministros saevierint, si vera prodidit Aristoteles.” For a further example see EV III xiii, fol. 106^r: “Quare sileat Cytieus ipse, dum de puerorum educatione deque sanctitate filiorum in parentes agit, et Iocastae meminit et Oedipi” (which corresponds to M XI 191).

⁵⁴ EV III xiii, fol. 107^r: “O beneficium divinae legis maximum, quae quod certantes inter se Gentium philosophi nunquam per tot iam saecula sine controversia definiverunt, id paucis et pacate docuit et explicuit, quid bonum? Quid malum? Quid agendum? Quid declinandum? Ac primum quidem sub umbra Mosaici rudimenti, deinde in absolutissimi Evangelii luce splendidissima, quod qui praedicabant, non modo non evertabant contraria vitae ratione, sed pro eo tuendo etiam cruces oeculeos, ignes perpetiebantur. In quo quicquid praecipitur, id est, norma vivendi et ars comparandae felicitatis, quoniam Dei est verbum, semper verum, semper sanctum, semper observandum. Quae vero Gentes ex adverso tradidere, vel falsum, vel prophanum, vel aut semper aut saepe noxium... Mores autem philosophorum ut praeteream vulgus, si diversae fuerint sectae apprime diversi, si consecutanei quoque, non idem, sed et cum moribus quoque ipsis et vita eorum mirabiliter, ut ille inquit pugnabat oratio. Ars igitur bene beateque vivendi apud eos haberi non potest, quando nec ars ulla, quae plena non sit difficultatis et foeta rixarum eorum in studiis et scholis invenitur, neque enim una sed multae eaeque invicem pugnant, ergo omnes illas sequi homines nequeunt...”

to people engaged in never-ending disputes. A difference must be assumed, however, between someone such as Epicurus, who thinks that “the idea that God is eternal and imperishable and perfect in happiness was introduced by way of transference from mankind” (*M IX 45*),⁵⁵ and the Sceptics, who take a back seat in the controversy: “inter eos qui affirmarent et qui negarent, Sceptici quodam modo medii...”⁵⁶ Living without holding opinions (*ἀδοξάστως*), yet by the rules, seems to Pico not the worse possible attitude. Not by chance, the Sceptics stand out among the pagan philosophers for a diligent erudition and for their most commendable achievement, meekness: “et humani, et mites.”⁵⁷

Pico's attitude toward philosophy

Pico tells the reader that Scepticism did not take root among the Arabic and North African thinkers, who worshiped Aristotle while neglecting Plato and the other philosophical schools.⁵⁸ However, Scepticism was not a reaction to the concurrent rise of Aristotelianism. Both Aristotle (388–322 BC) and Pyrrho of Elis (ca. 360–270 BC), the originator of Pyrrhonism, flourished in the fourth century BC – the former being the tutor of Alexander the Great, whom the latter accompanied on his expedition to India. The *Examen Vanitatis* acknowledges Scepticism as a philosophical attitude that emerged before, and developed independently of, Aristotle: “eorum [*scil.* Scepticorum] multi et ante Aristotelem, et post Aristotelem fuerunt, et eius scripta vexaverunt acerrime, multique item cum Aristotele vixerunt.”⁵⁹ The Sceptics’ mission, if any, consisted of producing arguments to be used against the dogmatic kind of philosophy – a kind that Aristotle historically came to embody but did not invent.

⁵⁵ R. G. Bury, ed., *Sextus Empiricus*. Vol. III. London and Harvard: Heinemann and Harvard University Press, 1931, p. 25.

⁵⁶ *EV III xi*, fol. 99^v: “Ceterum inter eos qui affirmarent et qui negarent, Sceptici quodam modo medii se agere securius existimarunt, si deos reciperent ἀδοξάστως, ut eorum utar verbo, et secundum patrias colerent leges...”

⁵⁷ *EV III i*, fol. 76^v: “Nam nulla secta eruditior, inter omnes aliorum philosophorum sectas diligentissime versata, et omnium experientissima; neque iracundiae aut superbiae causa, quando habiti sunt inter alias philosophorum gentium sectas, et humani, et mites.”

⁵⁸ *EV I ii*, fol. 7^v: “Inde populata Graecia et Italia, crebris Barbarum nationum incursionibus devastata, et Mauros et Arabas philosophia pervenit. A quibus mirum est in modum cultus Aristoteles, Plato parum, alii omnino nihil. Cuius rei causam quantum assequi coniectura potuimus quarto huius operis libro referemus. Sed qualiscunque illa fuerit, Arabes ipsi et Mauri nunquam in porticu aut spatiantes disputarunt aut, quanquam multae in ea cellae, sedere voluerunt.”

⁵⁹ *EV I ii*, fol. 7^v (my emphasis).

Gianfrancesco Pico's critical attitude towards Aristotelianism has caused much ink to be spilled.⁶⁰ Any further consideration cannot help testing the Sceptical flavour of such criticism, however, by rejecting the distinction between the means and ends of Scepticism. Charles B. Schmitt was fully aware that Pico's technical arguments hardly draw on Sextus', although he sought to appreciate any "application of Pico's theoretical Scepticism to a more practical matter,"⁶¹ such as the authenticity of the *Corpus Aristotelicum*.⁶² In fact, Pico's sceptical philology leads solely to philological prudence; for uncertainty is not only what philologists deal with, but also precisely what they know. Fifteenth-century scholarship laid the foundations for textual criticism, a new discipline designed to cope with loss and recovery. This enterprise was a large part of the humanist legacy Pico inherited, along with the new library of classical texts he utilized when compiling the doxographical sections of the *Examen Vanitatis*.

It must be added, however, that Pico's chains of quotations and paraphrases from Sextus' *PH* and *M* are eventually interrupted at the beginning of book IV, where his anti-Aristotelian tirades start. Whereas scholars have noticed John Philoponus' and Hasdai Crescas' influence on Pico's critique,⁶³ little attention has been paid to his concomitant dismissal of a sceptical perspective. Pico's attack on Aristotle's reliability, which rests on a withdrawal from specific arguments, cannot be considered such a perspective. "Would we give our assent to a man who has proved to be mostly wrong?"⁶⁴ Such a strategy does not affect any distinct theory, while disclosing Pico's bias against any system other than Catholicism. And even when providing strictly philosophical refutations of Aristotle, the *Examen Vanitatis* does not fulfil what Sextus called "the chief constitutive principle of Scepticism," namely, "the claim that to every account an equal account is opposed."⁶⁵ The order of reasons within the *Examen Vanitatis*

⁶⁰ Recent contributions include Cesare Vasoli, "Giovane Francesco Pico e i presupposti della sua critica ad Aristotele", in Marianne Pade, ed., *Renaissance Readings of the Corpus Aristotelicum*. Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 2001, pp. 129–146, and Luca Bianchi, *Studi sull'Aristotelismo del Rinascimento*. Padua: Il Poligrafo, 2003.

⁶¹ Schmitt, *Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola*, p. 66.

⁶² Cesare Vasoli, "Giovane Francesco Pico e i presupposti della sua critica ad Aristotele", p. 145, speaks of "conclusioni estremamente scettiche."

⁶³ See Schmitt, *Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola*, pp. 128–159 (chap. V: The critique of Aristotle's Physics).

⁶⁴ *EV* IV xi, fol. 127r: "Sed certe qui errat in pluribus, sibi ipsi tollit fidem in paucioribus. An homini in plerisque erranti assentimur? Ita ut quemadmodum nos fefellit in illis, fallere quoque possit in aliis? An non magis suspendemus iudicium, et incertum quod relinquitur habebimus?"

⁶⁵ *Sextus Empiricus, Outlines of Scepticism*, p. 6.

reveals two different, if related, projects at work: an encyclopedic survey of pagan philosophy basically grounded in Sextus' doxographical reports (books I–III), and a critique of Aristotle deeply rooted in the long-established tradition of anti-Aristotelianism (books IV–VI). To go further, one may trace Pico's dual approach back to at least two patterns of criticism: the first aiming at a systematic yet non-historical assessment of Western thought, and the second taking seriously the historical primacy of Aristotle.

It is my suggestion that such a background makes it hard to keep Pico's parallel projects within a single framework. Once the historical fact of Aristotle's hegemony over the philosophical tradition has been acknowledged, no blame whatsoever can be put on human reason for being permanently and intrinsically inconclusive. In turn, once revealed truths have turned the past of philosophy into a single yet comprehensive testimony against philosophy itself, no specific refutations can be effectively carried out any more. In order not to collapse, Pico's approach must therefore range from the assumption that philosophy has typically, albeit unsuccessfully, resulted in Aristotelianism,⁶⁶ to the assumption that any given doctrine cannot but increase the inconsistency – *vanitas* in Pico's own language – of human knowledge.

Pico's attitude toward Scepticism

Pico ranked the Sceptics as the best of the worst, and the prominence they are given in the *Examen Vanitatis* entails no vocation for Scepticism by its author. In fact, Pico's refutation of the Aristotelian encyclopedia does not fall within the range of a Pyrrhonian campaign: "Aristotelem ipsum et ... Peripateticam sectam singulariter examinemus, non iam ... in acie cum Scepticis stantes..."⁶⁷ Provided that any book can be understood only by someone who has himself

⁶⁶Luca Bianchi, *Studi sull'Aristotelismo del Rinascimento*, p. 138, rightly reminds that Gianfrancesco Pico pointed out the never-ending dissension about Aristotle's doctrine: "Equidem possem duo magna volumina implere ex dissensionibus, variisque interpretationibus locorum Aristotelicae doctrinae, cuiuscunque facultatis ... Signum id evidentissimum, quod mille et eo amplius annis in Graecia super Aristotelis sensibus bellatum, et in Lutetia Parisiorum quadrigentis" (*EV* IV viii, fol. 123^r). Once again, however, such a dissension bears witness not only to Aristotle's theoretical weakness, but also to his pivotal role.

⁶⁷*EV* III epilogus, fols 109^v–110^r: "Age iam Aristotelem ipsum, et quae ab eo fluxit, Peripateticam sectam singulariter examinemus, non iam vel sedentes in porticu, vel recumbentes sub Academica platano, vel in acie cum Scepticis stantes, et circum quaque quod obstat urgentes. Sed ipso in Lycio cum Aristotele et sectatoribus deambulantes."

already had the thoughts that are expressed in it, I suggest that Pico's understanding of Sextus' writings cannot but betray his close-mindedness bordering, even, on bigotry. In this regard, it would be too easy, if not culpably lazy, to evoke Pico's Latin dialogues of *Strix, sive de ludificatione daemonum* (1523), as well as his role in the Inquisition's campaign of 1522–23 in the Mirandola area – a campaign that led to at least ten people (seven men and three women) being burnt at the stake.⁶⁸ What matters here is whether Scepticism affected Pico's intellectual world and made it more, less, or differently consistent.

By resorting to the first mode of suspension of judgement ascribed to Agrippa, the mode deriving from disagreement (ἀπὸ τῆς διαφωνίας),⁶⁹ Pico had at his disposal an unexpectedly catholic device. Its far-reaching effects enabled him to take advantage of an essential feature of philosophy, namely, its plurality. It is a single argument that makes the Sceptics both irrefutable and, indeed, appealing: the more they set arguments in opposition to each other, the more they acknowledge the lack of criteria of truth. Pico could employ what Sextus calls δύναμις ἀντιθετική, the ability to set out oppositions,⁷⁰ because of his very trust in the Sceptics' meekness. In his view, their criticism would straighten out any residual ambition among philosophers and support the unfolding of the only criterion of truth that could escape the regress *ad infinitum*: the Revelation.

What is striking about Pico's understanding of Scepticism, however, is not so much his unsuccessful forecast of a lasting alliance between Pyrrhonism and Christianity as his attitude toward the past of philosophy. His interpretation of the διαφωνία ends up ignoring the historical making of disagreement. Regardless of whether they are historically or logically undecided, Pico implicitly maintains that all disagreements are undecidable. Thus, he would include any dispute historically settled – such as the cosmological debate between the Aristotelian-Ptolemaic theory and Copernicanism.⁷¹ Pico's version of Sextus'

⁶⁸ See the introductory essay in Albano Biondi, ed., *Strega o delle illusioni del demonio, del Signore Giovanfrancesco Pico della Mirandola, nel volgarizzamento di Leandro Alberti*. Venice: Marsilio Editori, 1989, pp. 9–41; see also Alfredo Perifano, ed., *Jean-François Pic de la Mirandole, La Sorcière: dialogue en trois livres sur la tromperie des démons*. Turnhout: Brepols, 2007, pp. 5–33.

⁶⁹ *Sextus Empiricus, Outlines of Scepticism*, p. 41: “According to the Mode deriving from dispute, we find that undecidable dissension about the matter proposed has come about both in ordinary life and among philosophers. Because of this we are not able either to choose or to rule out anything, and we end up with suspension of judgement” (PH I 165).

⁷⁰ *Sextus Empiricus, Outlines of Scepticism*, p. 4: “Scepticism is an ability to set out oppositions among things which appear and are thought of any way at all” (PH I 8).

⁷¹ See R. J. Hankinson, *The Sceptics*. London and New York: Routledge, 1998, p. 30.

διαφωνία ultimately dismisses the very notion of historical development, by putting all the philosophers fighting each other on the flat arena of human reasoning. In brief, besides Aristotle's criticism of Plato, there also is Plato's criticism of Aristotle, even Ptolemy's criticism of Copernicus. One might say that Pico's *Examen Vanitatis* is Raphael's *School of Athens* upside down; and this suggestion would actually take into account the Vatican frame that encloses both Raphael's fresco and Pico's reading of Sextus Empiricus.

Appendix

This Appendix lists all titles and headings under which is distributed the text of both the *Pyrrhoniae Hypotyposes* and the *Adversus Mathematicos* as transmitted by the codex Laurentianus 85.11. The variant readings accepted in Hermann Mutschmann's edition are indicated in square brackets followed by 'ed.'. Words, phrases, and lines missing in the codex Laurentianus 85.11 are supplied in small round brackets (< >).

- τάδε ἔνεστιν ἐν τῷ πρώτῳ τῶν Πυρρωνείων ὑποτυπώσεων (fol. 2^v)
 Πυρρωνείων [*sic*] ὑποτυπώσεων τῶν εἰς τρία τὸ πρῶτον (fol. 3^r)
 α' <περὶ τῆς ἀνωτάτῳ διαφορᾶς τῶν φιλοσοφιῶν> (fol. 3^r)
 β' <περὶ τῶν λόγων τῆς σκέψεως> (fol. 3^r)
 γ' περὶ τῶν ὀνομασιῶν τῆς σκεπτικῆς (fol. 3^r)
 δ' τί ἐστὶ σκέψις (fol. 3^r)
 ε' περὶ τοῦ σκεπτικοῦ (fol. 3^v)
 ς' περὶ ἀρχῶν τῆς σκέψεως (fol. 3^v)
 ζ' εἰ δογματίζει ὁ σκεπτικός (fol. 4^r)
 η' εἰ αἴρεσιν ἔχει ὁ σκεπτικός (fol. 4^r)
 θ' εἰ φυσιολογεῖ ὁ σκεπτικός (fol. 4^v)
 ι' εἰ ἀναιροῦσι τὰ φαινόμενα οἱ σκεπτικοί (fol. 4^v)
 ια' περὶ τοῦ κριτηρίου τῆς σκεπτικῆς (fol. 4^v)
 ιβ' τί τὸ τέλος τῆς σκεπτικῆς (fol. 5^r)
 ιγ' περὶ τῶν ὀλοσχερῶν τρόπων τῆς σκέψεως [*ἐποχῆς ed.*] (fol. 5^v)
 ιδ' περὶ τῶν δέκα τρόπων (fol. 6^r)
 περὶ τοῦ πρώτου τρόπου (fol. 6^v)
 εἰ λόγον ἔχει τὰ λεγόμενα ἄλογα ζῶα (fol. 8^v)
 περὶ τοῦ δευτέρου τρόπου (fol. 10^r)
 περὶ τοῦ τρίτου τρόπου (fol. 11^r)
 περὶ τοῦ τετάρτου τρόπου (fol. 12^r)
 περὶ τοῦ πέμπτου τρόπου (fol. 13^v)
 περὶ τοῦ ἕκτου τρόπου (fol. 14^r)
 περὶ τοῦ ἑβδόμου τρόπου (fol. 15^r)

- περὶ τοῦ ὀγδοῦ τρόπου (fol. 15^v)
 περὶ τοῦ ἐνάτου τρόπου (fol. 16^r)
 περὶ τοῦ δεκάτου τρόπου (fol. 16^v)
 ιε' περὶ τῶν πέντε τρόπων (fol. 17^v)
 ις' τίνες οἱ δύο τρόποι (fol. 18^v)
 ιζ' τίνες τρόποι τῆς τῶν αἰτιολογικῶν ἀνατροπῆς (fol. 19^r)
 ιη' περὶ τῶν σκεπτικῶν φωνῶν (fol. 19^v)
 ιθ' περὶ τῆς οὐ μᾶλλον φωνῆς (fol. 19^v)
 κ' περὶ ἀφασίας (fol. 20^r)
 κα' περὶ τοῦ τάχα καὶ τοῦ ἔξεστι καὶ τοῦ ἐνδέχεται (fol. 20^v)
 κβ' περὶ τοῦ ἐπέχω (fol. 20^v)
 κγ' περὶ τοῦ οὐδὲν ὀρίζω (fol. 21^r)
 κδ' περὶ τοῦ πάντα ἐστὶν ἀόριστα (fol. 21^r)
 κε' περὶ τοῦ πάντα ἐστὶν ἀκατάληπτα (fol. 21^r)
 κς' περὶ τοῦ ἀκαταληπτῶ καὶ οὐ καταλαμβάνω (fol. 21^v)
 κζ' περὶ τοῦ παντὶ λόγῳ λόγον ἴσον ἀντικεῖσθαι (fol. 21^v)
 κη' παραπήγματα ὑπὲρ τῶν σκεπτικῶν φωνῶν (fol. 21^v)
 κθ' ὅτι διαφέρει ἡ σκεπτικὴ ἀγωγή τῆς Ἡρακλείτου [Ἡρακλειτείου *ed.*]
 φιλοσοφίας (fol. 22^r)
 λ' τίμ διαφέρει ἡ σκεπτικὴ ἀγωγή τῆς Δημοκριτείου φιλοσοφίας (fol. 22^v)
 λα' τίμ διαφέρει τῆς Κυρηναϊκῆς ἡ σκέψις (fol. 23^r)
 λβ' τίμ διαφέρει τῆς Πρωταγορείου ἀγωγῆς ἡ σκέψις (fol. 23^r)
 λγ' τίμ διαφέρει τῆς Ἀκαδημαϊκῆς φιλοσοφίας ἡ σκέψις (fol. 23^v)
 λδ' εἰ ἡ κατὰ τὴν ἰατρικὴν ἐμπειρία ἡ αὐτὴ ἐστὶ τῇ σκέψει (fol. 25^v)
 πυρρωνείων ὑποτυπώσεων τῶν εἰς τρία τὸ πρῶτον (fol. 26^r)
 «τάδε ἔνεστιν ἐν τῷ δευτέρῳ τῶν Πυρρωνείων ὑποτυπώσεων» (fol. 26^r)
 Πυρρωνείων ὑποτυπώσεων τῶν εἰς τρία τὸ δεύτερον (fol. 26^v)
 α' «εἰ δύναται ζητεῖν ὁ σκεπτικὸς περὶ τῶν λεγομένων παρὰ τοῖς
 δογματικοῖς» (fol. 26^v)
 β' πόθεν ἀρκτέον τῆς πρὸς τοὺς δογματικοὺς ζητήσεως (fol. 28^r)
 γ' περὶ κριτηρίου (fol. 28^r)
 δ' εἰ ὑπάρχει τι κριτήριον ἀληθείας (fol. 28^r)
 ε' περὶ τοῦ ὑφ' οὗ (fol. 28^v)
 ς' περὶ τοῦ δι' οὗ (fol. 31^v)
 ζ' περὶ τοῦ καθ' ὅ (fol. 33^v)
 η' περὶ ἀληθοῦς καὶ ἀληθείας (fol. 34^v)
 θ' εἰ ἐστὶ τι φύσει ἀληθές (fol. 35^r)
 ι' περὶ σημείου (fol. 36^v)
 ια' εἰ ἐστὶ τι σημεῖον ἐνδεικτικόν (fol. 37^r)
 ιβ' περὶ ἀποδείξεως (fol. 40^r)

ιγ' εἰ ἔστιν ἀπόδειξις (fol. 41^r)

[*in marg. sup.*] περὶ ἀναποδείκτων (fol. 42^v)

ιδ' περὶ συλλογισμῶν (fol. 46^v)

ιε' περὶ ἐπαγωγῆς (fol. 48^r)

ισ' περὶ ὄρων (fol. 48^r)

ιζ' περὶ διαιρέσεως (fol. 49^r)

ιη' περὶ τῆς ὀνόματος εἰς σημαινόμενα διαιρέσεως (fol. 49^r)

ιθ' περὶ ὄλου καὶ μέρους (fol. 49^v)

κ' περὶ γενῶν καὶ εἰδῶν (fol. 49^v)

κα' περὶ «κοινῶν» συμβεβηκότων (fol. 51^r)

κβ' περὶ σοφισμάτων (fol. 51^r)

περὶ ἀμφιβολιῶν (fol. 54^r)

πυρρωνείων ὑποτυπώσεων, β' (fol. 54^v)

τάδε ἔνεστιν ἐν τῷ τρίτῳ τῶν Πυρρωνείων ὑποτυπώσεων (fol. 54^v)

Πυρρωνείων ὑποτυπώσεων τῶν εἰς τρία τὸ τρίτον (fol. 55^r)

α' περὶ τοῦ φυσικοῦ μέρους (fol. 55^r)

β' περὶ θεοῦ (fol. 55^r)

γ' περὶ ἀρχῶν δραστηκῶν (fol. 55^r)

δ' περὶ αἰτίου (fol. 56^r)

γ' εἴ ἐστι τὶ τινὸς αἴτιον (fol. 56^v)

ς' περὶ ὑλικῶν ἀρχῶν (fol. 58^r)

ζ' εἰ καταληπτὰ τὰ ἀσώματα [*sic*] (fol. 59^r)

η' περὶ κράσεως (fol. 61^v)

θ' περὶ κινήσεως (fol. 62^v)

ι' περὶ τῆς μεταβατικῆς κινήσεως (fol. 62^v)

ια' περὶ αὐξήσεως καὶ μειώσεως (fol. 64^v)

ιβ' περὶ ἀφαιρέσεως καὶ προσθέσεως (fol. 65^r)

ιγ' περὶ μεταθέσεως (fol. 66^v)

ιδ' περὶ ὄλου καὶ μέρους (fol. 66^v)

ιε' περὶ φυσικῆς μεταβολῆς (fol. 67^r)

ισ' περὶ γενέσεως καὶ φθορᾶς (fol. 67^v)

ιζ' περὶ μονῆς (fol. 68^r)

ιη' περὶ τόπου (fol. 68^v)

ιθ' περὶ χρόνου (fol. 70^r)

κ' περὶ ἀριθμοῦ (fol. 71^v)

κα' περὶ τοῦ ἠθικοῦ μέρους τῆς φιλοσοφίας (fol. 73^v)

κβ' περὶ ἀγαθῶν καὶ κακῶν καὶ ἀδιαφόρων (fol. 73^v)

ὅτι τὸ ἀγαθὸν τριχῶς (fol. 74^r)

κγ' εἰ ἔστι τι φύσει ἀγαθὸν καὶ κακὸν καὶ ἀδιάφορον (fol. 75^r)
 κδ' τί ἐστὶν ἡ λεγομένη τέχνη περὶ βίον (fol. 76^r)
 κε' εἰ ἔστι τέχνη περὶ βίον (fol. 81^r)
 κς' εἰ γίνεται ἐν ἀνθρώποις ἡ περὶ τὸν βίον τέχνη (fol. 82^v)
 κζ' εἰ διδακτικὴ [*sic*] ἐστὶν ἡ περὶ τὸν βίον τέχνη (fol. 82^v)
 κη' εἰ ἔστι τι διδασκόμενον (fol. 82^v)
 κθ' εἰ ἔστιν ὁ διδάσκων καὶ ὁ μαθάνων (fol. 83^r)
 λ' εἰ ἔστι τις μαθήσεως τρόπος (fol. 84^r)
 λα' εἰ ὠφελεῖ ἡ περὶ τὸν βίον τέχνη τὸν ἔχοντα αὐτήν (fol. 85^r)
 λβ' διὰ τί ὁ σκεπτικὸς ἐνίστε ἀμυδροὺς ταῖς πιθανότησιν ἐρωτᾶν
 ἐπιτηδεύει λόγους (fol. 85^v)
 [*in marg. sup.*] πυρρωνείων ὑποτυπώσεων τὸ τρίτον (fol. 86^r)

Σέξτου ἐμπειρικοῦ πρὸς μαθηματικούς (fol. 86^r)

εἰ ἔστι μάθημα (fol. 86^v)
 περὶ <τοῦ> διδασκομένου (fol. 87^r)
 περὶ σώματος (fol. 87^v)
 περὶ τοῦ διδάσκοντος καὶ μαθάνοντος (fol. 88^v)
 περὶ τρόπου μαθήσεως (fol. 89^r)

πρὸς γραμματικούς (fol. 89^v)

ποσαχῶς λέγεται γραμματικὴ (fol. 90^r)
 τί ἐστὶ γραμματικὴ (fol. 91^v)
 τίνα μέρη γραμματικῆς (fol. 95^r)
 ὅτι ἀμέθοδόν ἐστὶ καὶ ἀσύστατον τὸ τεχνικὸν τῆς γραμματικῆς μέρος
 (fol. 95^v)
 <περὶ συλλαβῆς> (fol. 98^r)
 περὶ ὀνόματος (fol. 100^v)
 <περὶ λόγου καὶ μερῶν λόγου> (fol. 101^r)
 περὶ μερισμοῦ (fol. 102^r)
 [*in marg. dex.*] περὶ προσθέσεως καὶ ἀφαιρέσεως (fol. 102^r)
 [*in marg. sin.*] περὶ ἀφαιρέσεως (fol. 102^v)
 [*in marg. inf.*] περὶ προσθέσεως (fol. 102^v)
 περὶ ὀρθογραφίας (fol. 103^r)
 εἰ ἔστι τις τέχνη περὶ ἔλλητισμοῦ (fol. 104^r)
 [*in marg. sin.*] περὶ ἔτυμολογίας (fol. 110^r)
 εἰ σύστατον τὸ ἱστορικὸν (fol. 110^v)
 ὅτι τὸ περὶ τοὺς ποιητὰς καὶ συγγραφεῖς μέρος τῆς γραμματικῆς ἀσύστα-
 τόν ἐστὶν (fol. 113^r)
 σέξτου ἐμπειρικοῦ περὶ γραμματικῆς (fol. 119^v)

περὶ ῥητορικῆς (fol. 119^v)

[*in marg. sin.*] ὅτι Ζήνων ὁ κιπτιεὺς διὰ τῆς συστροφῆς τῆς χειρὸς καὶ τῆς ἐξαπλώσεως διαφέρειν τῆς ῥητορικῆς τὴν διαλεκτικὴν ἠμίξατο (fol. 120^v)

σέξτου ἐμπειρικοῦ περὶ ῥητορικῆς (fol. 130^r)

πρὸς γεωμέτρας (fol. 130^r)

σέξτου ἐμπειρικοῦ πρὸς γεωμέτρας (fol. 141^v)

πρὸς ἀριθμητικούς (fol. 141^v)

σέξτου ἐμπειρικοῦ πρὸς ἀριθμητικούς (fol. 144^v)

πρὸς ἀστρολόγους (fol. 144^v)

σέξτου ἐμπειρικοῦ πρὸς ἀστρολόγους ἦτοι μαθηματικούς (fol. 153^r)

πρὸς μουσικούς (fol. 153^r)

[*in marg. sin.*] ὄρος φωνῆς (fol. 156^v)

[*in marg. sin.*] ὄρος φθόγγου (fol. 156^v)

σέξτου ἐμπειρικοῦ πρὸς μουσικούς (fol. 159^r)

τῶν κατὰ σέξτον πρὸς τοὺς λογικοὺς τῶν δύο τὸ πρῶτον· περὶ φιλοσοφίας

περὶ κριτηρίου (fol. 159^r)

εἰ ἔστι κριτήριον ἀληθείας (fol. 161^r)

περὶ κριτηρίου (fol. 161^r)

περὶ ἀληθείας (fol. 162^r)

περὶ ἀνθρώπου (fol. 185^r)

τέλος τῶν κατὰ σέξτον σκεπτικῶν (fol. 202^v)

<πρὸς λογικούς Β> (fol. 202^v)

α' εἰ ἔστι τι ἀληθές (fol. 203^r)

β' εἰ ἔστι τι σημεῖον (fol. 215^v)

γ' πόσαι διαφοραὶ ἀδήλων (fol. 215^v)

δ' περὶ ἀποδείξεως (fol. 231^r)

ε' ἐκ τίνος ὕλης ἔστιν ἡ ἀπόδειξις (fol. 232^v)

ς' εἰ ἔστιν ἀπόδειξις (fol. 234^v)

σέξτου ἐμπειρικοῦ ὑπομνημάτων (fol. 248^v)

<πρὸς φυσικούς Α> (fol. 248^v)

περὶ θεῶν (fol. 279^v)

εἰ εἰσὶ θεοί (fol. 254^r)

περὶ αἰτίου καὶ πάσχοντος (fol. 267^v)

περὶ προσθέσεως (fol. 278^v)

περὶ ἀριθμοῦ καὶ προσθέσεως καὶ ἀφαιρέσεως (fol. 279^r)

περὶ ὅλου καὶ μέρους (fol. 279^v)

περὶ τῶν τοῦ λόγου μερῶν (fol. 281^r)

εἰ ἔστι τι σῶμα τῶν σκεψαμένων (fol. 282^r)

[*in marg. sin.*] ὅτι τὰ πέρατα τῶν σωμάτων ἀρχαί (fol. 282^v)

«πρὸς φυσικούς Β'» (fol. 289^r)

[*in marg. sin.*] θ' (fol. 289^r)

εἰ ἔστι τόπος (fol. 289^v)

εἰ ἔστι κίνησις (fol. 292^v)

εἰ ἔστι χρόνος (fol. 305^r)

περὶ ἀριθμοῦ (fol. 312^r)

περὶ γενέσεως καὶ φθορᾶς (fol. 317^v)

ὑπομνημάτων θ' (fol. 321^r)

«πρὸς ἠθικούς» (fol. 321^r)

τάδε ἔνεστιν ἐν τῷ ι' (fol. 321^r)

τίς ἔστιν ἡ ὀλοσχερῆς τῶν κατὰ τὸν βίον πραγμάτων διαφορά (fol. 321^v)

τί ἔστι τὸ ἀγαθὸν καὶ κακὸν καὶ ἀδιάφορον (fol. 323^r)

εἰ ἔστι φύσει ἀγαθὸν καὶ κακόν (fol. 325^r)

εἰ ὑποτεθέντων φύσει ἀγαθῶν καὶ κακῶν ἐνδέχεται εὐδαιμόνως βιοῦν (fol. 331^v)

εἰ ὁ περὶ τῆς τῶν ἀγαθῶν καὶ κακῶν φύσεως ἐπέχων κατὰ πάντα ἐστὶν εὐδαιμόνων (fol. 334^v)

εἰ ἔστι τις περὶ τὸν βίον τέχνη (fol. 336^v)

εἰ διδακτὴ ἐστὶν ἡ περὶ τὸν βίον τέχνη (fol. 342^r)

ὑπομνημάτων ι' σέξτου σκεπτικοῦ τῶν πρὸς ἀντίρρησιν α' β' γ' δ' ε' ζ' ζ' η' θ' ι' (fol. 345^v)

εὐτύχει ἐν πολλοῖς χρόνοις σοφὴ δέσποτα βίβλου τέλος ὁ ταῦτα γράψας θωμᾶς ὁ προδρομίτης· δόξα ὁ θεὸς ἡμῶν ὁ χριστός ,εἰλογ'

ἰνδικτιώνος ιγ' σεπτεμβρίω η' (fol. 345^v)

7. *HUMANUS ANIMUS NUSQUAM CONSISTIT*: DOCTOR SANCHEZ'S DIAGNOSIS OF THE INCURABLE HUMAN UNREST AND IGNORANCE

Agostino Lupoli

Università degli Studi di Milano, Italy

It is undeniable that one of the most conspicuous features characterizing seventeenth-century “modern or Cartesian philosophy”¹ is both the complete loss of interest in any consideration or discussion of Aristotelian-scholastic cognitive psychology² and a parallel new tendency to substitute traditional logic for an inquiry into the method of science.

It is therefore of historical interest to find these philosophical aspects already fully outlined in one of the exponents of sixteenth-century scepticism, Francisco Sanchez. The arguments he develops and expresses are very mature from a philosophical perspective. They represent a new epistemological approach which, whilst ignoring the objectifying Aristotelian-scholastic account of knowledge as a continuous process of actualisation, presents knowledge as a discontinuous and insuperably unknown relation between “res” and “spectra.” At the same time his work combines a radical criticism of Aristotelian logic with an insistence on the preliminary and primary importance of method. Only the titles are left of those texts that he refers to as being devoted to the method and science accessible to men³ (and in fact we do not know if they actually existed or were perhaps only drafts or even just ideas). Nonetheless, the philosophical works that are

¹ The expression is Robert Boyle's, see *Christian Virtuoso I* in *The Works of the Honourable Robert Boyle*, ed. Th. Birch, London: printed for J. and F. Rivington ecc., 1772, vol. V, p. 513.

² A fairly complete survey of medieval, Renaissance and modern followers of Aristotle's doctrines, up to the “elimination of the intelligible species in modern philosophy,” in Leen Spruit, ‘*Species Intelligibilis*’. *From Perception to Knowledge*, 2 vols., Leiden, New York and Köln: E.J. Brill, 1994.

³ These works would have constituted a trilogy composed, besides the *Quod nihil scitur*, also by a *Metodon universal de las ciencias* and by an *Examen rerum*. The loss of the *Metodon* could be explained by its exclusion from the *Opera omnia* edited by Sanchez's

still available to us describe this science which is accessible to men (*imperfecta scientia*) as strictly concerned with “res”, i.e. with things open to empirical observation and inquiry, as based in “experimentum iudiciumque”⁴ and proceeding according to what was to become none other than the shibboleth of the Royal Society: “nullius in verba.”⁵ Moreover, his attention to the impediments and “imperfections” – historical, human, personal, medical, cultural⁶ etc. – encumbering even this limited science seems to be a sort of a prelude or *destruens* part of the method, so that these latter methodological aspects of Sanchez’s philosophy may suggest a Baconian attitude towards science. However, more interestingly, the former – namely the sceptical themes concerning the criticisms of Aristotle and of the *logici* and the new epistemological approach – fully expanded in his *magnum opus*, are such as to suggest a clearer connection with two different seventeenth-century “ways of ideas” developments: the Cartesian metaphysical one, and the Lockean empiricist one (and for different reasons, addressed elsewhere,⁷ also with Hobbes’s epistemological materialism).

disciple Delassus in 1636 because it was written in Castilian, but the same hypothesis does not hold for the *Examen rerum* (See A. Spruzzola, “Francesco Sanchez alla luce delle ultime ricerche”, *Rivista di filosofia neoscolastica*, XXVIII (1936), pp. 384–385).

⁴ Franciscus Sanchez Philosophus et Medicus Doctor, *Quod nihil scitur*, Lugduni, Apud Ant. Gryphium, MDLXXXI (hereafter referred to as QNS), p. 90. The work was published six times between 1581 and 1665 (considering two editions in 1581). The work appeared in two Portuguese editions in 1955: in *Opera philosophica* (Nova edição, precedida de introdução, publicada por Joaquim de Carvalho, Separata da *Revista da Universidade de Coimbra*, vol. XVIII, Coimbra: Imprensa de Coimbra, 1955), pp. 1–53 and in F. Sanches, *Tratados Filosóficos*, Prefácio e notas de A. Moreira de Sá. Tradução de Basílio de Vasconcelos e de Miguel Pinto de Meneses, I vol., Lisboa: Instituto de Alta Cultura, Centro de Estudos de Psicologia e de História da Filosofia, anexo à Faculdade de Letras da Universidade de Lisboa, 1955, Portuguese translation with parallel Latin texts, pp. 2–156. After these 1955 Portuguese editions the *Quod nihil scitur* was published twice: in a French translation with parallel text – *Il n’est science de rien (Quod nihil scitur)*, édition critique latin-français, texte établi et traduit par Andrée Comparot, préface par André Mandouze, Paris: Klincksieck, 1984 –, and in the English edition which we shall refer to, *That Nothing Is Known (Quod nihil scitur)*, Introduction, Notes and Bibliography by Elaine Limbrick. Latin text established, annotated and translated by Douglas F.S. Thomson, New Rochelle, NY and Melbourne, Sidney: Cambridge University Press, 1988 (hereafter TNK). See this last edition (pp. 291–292) for other Spanish and French translations.

⁵ “Cum iis igitur mihi res sit, qui nullius addicti *iurare in verba magistri*, proprio Marte res expendunt, sensu rationeque ducti” (QNS, *Ad lectorem*, italics mine). TNK, p. 168: “I would address myself to those who, ‘not bound by an oath of fidelity to any master’s words’, assess the facts for themselves, under the guidance of sense-perception and reason.” (more literally: “Let the debate take place with them who, not doomed to swear by the word of any master, defend their stance by their own weapons, guided by sense and reason”. See also QNS, p. 84: “Nec enim sine dispendio veritatis quis potest iurare in verba magistri” (TNK, p. 272).

⁶ QNS, pp. 77 ff.

⁷ A. Lupoli, “Hobbes e Sanchez”, *Rivista di storia della filosofia* LIX (2004), pp. 263–301.

All these themes are developed particularly in a succinct but very dense work, the *Quod nihil scitur*, which explicitly waives any stylistic elegance and programmatically exploits to the utmost Latin's natural potential for conciseness. Further reading difficulties derive from the pseudo-dialogical form adopted by the author, which sometimes makes the thoughts expressed so terse as to border upon obscurity, perhaps beyond Sanchez's very intentions (given that, according to him, an excessive laconic style should be avoided for the sake of clarity).

This stylistic choice (less relevant in his other philosophical works) is not at all an extrinsic aspect of Sanchez's philosophy, since it is the first and most visible effect of the new intellectual and methodological direction the philosopher intends to promote (and which in some way he embodies). This new direction involves a radical reappraisal of all past knowledge, both in terms of content and form, justified by the author on the basis of his deep dissatisfaction and disillusion with all past philosophers, which led him to "withdraw into himself" and "to begin to question everything, and to examine the facts themselves as though no one had ever said anything about them, which is the proper method of acquiring knowledge."⁸ Thus Sanchez inaugurated that (intrinsically anti-humanistic) resetting pattern, so to speak, of philosophical reflection which was to characterize the Cartesian or "modern" approach to philosophy in the seventeenth century.

It is clear, then, that Sanchez's claims about the stylistic and narrative form of philosophical and scientific language are not consistent with the mainstream fifteenth century debate around Aristotle's logic and dialectic,⁹ but are deliberately placed outside it. In fact, Sanchez critically assesses the philosophical and scientific culture of the time, addressing topics such as the function of books and writing, the aims of the writer, and the role these play – and should or could play – against man's "inborn desire to know."¹⁰ What Sanchez actually claims to do is to prevent language and writing from hindering or distracting the reader (or tyro) from his main aim of acquiring knowledge (within, of course, the limits of those imperfections that inevitably affect human minds).

In line with this stated aim, Sanchez bans rhetoric from the field of philosophical or scientific communication and argues for the adoption of a "middle

⁸ "Ad me proinde memetipsum retuli; omniaque in dubium reuocans, ac si à quopiam nil unquam dictum, res ipsas examinare coepi: qui est verus sciendi modus" (QNS, *Ad lectorem*). TNK, p. 167. See also QNS, p. 96: "Ut vero ad res me converti, tunc reiecta in totum priore fide, potius quam scientia, eas examinare coepi, *ac si unquam à quopiam dictum aliquid fuisset*" (italics mine).

⁹ From this point of view it is no longer "surprising that in none of his philosophical works does Sanchez refer to Peter Ramus" (E. Limbrick, Introduction to TNK, p. 36).

¹⁰ TNK, p. 166. "Innatum homini velle scire" is the incipit of QNS, *Ad lectorem*.

way” (*medius modus*) in writing books, between the exaggerated “brevity” of obscure writers and the exhausting prolixity of those “who grow old and tired over its ‘first principles’ – and we along with them.”¹¹

Anyone who writes at moderate length – assuming that such a person should happen to exist! – is blamed by all of these ... for the middle way is contrary to both extremes; it is praised only by those who also have a liking for the middle way, and who in fact are themselves moderate in character. Such people are extremely rare, like all fine things, and men do not know of their existence.¹²

While he observes that both extremes produce the same ill effect of making us waste our time – the laconic because of their obscurity, the verbose due to their useless length – Sanchez seizes the opportunity to rank himself among the “extremely rare” (and destined to be ignored) moderate philosophers.

The rejection of rhetoric, the condemnation of its use in science in order to satisfy the writer’s vainglory and “self-love,”¹³ the polemic against authority in philosophy and science, the fierce attack on the deceitful syllogistic procedure of Aristotle’s followers, as well as against that “kind of person” who “mixes up and confuses everything in every place”¹⁴ (like Cardano), all belong to the critical or destructive part of his methodological strategy. A strategy designed to break the

¹¹ TNK, p. 270; QNS, p. 82. Aristotle is an example of repetitiveness and Galen himself is verbose (QNS, p. 32).

¹² TNK, p. 270. “Si quis medio scribat modo (si quis forsan sit) ab his omnibus improbatur: et quod non sat brevis, et quod iusto brevior. Medium enim utriusque extremo utrumque contrarium est. Ab iis solum commendatur, qui medio etiam gaudent, et ipsi medicos. Hi rari admodum, sicut et pulchra omnia, incognitique” (QNS, p. 83).

¹³ “Omnes aut ad laudem, aut dignitates, aut divitias: vix unus scientiam amplectitur propter seipsam: sicque tantum quisque laborat solum, quantum sufficiat ad acquirendum finem, non scientiae, sed ambitionis suae” (QNS, p. 77; TNK, p. 264). “Quis enim est tam sui iuris, qui aliquo illorum [i. e. *amor, odium, invidia* and others *animi affectiones*] non teneatur? Nullus. Quod si reliqua omnia evadat, illud minimè evadet saltem, *sui scilicet amorem*” (QNS, p. 95, italics mine). “[Scribentes sunt] Confusi, breves, prolixi, totque, ut si centena millium centum viveres annorum, non sufficerent legendis omnibus: quique in pluribus mentiantur, *saepissimè gloriae causa, aut fulciendae opinionis*” (QNS, pp. 92–93, italics mine; TNK, p. 282). Motives of this kind have degenerated Cardano’s science: “Trahit te gloriae cupiditas in absurda, ne aliquid ignorasse videaris, et non naturam ingenio superasse” (*De divinatione per somnum, ad Aristotelem*, in F. Sanchez, *Tratados Filosóficos, cit.*, p. 226).

¹⁴ TNK, p. 271; QNS, p. 83. For a passage that testifies to his critique towards authorities see QNS, *Ad lectorem*, “Nec à me postules multorum auctoritates, aut in autores reverentiam, quae potiùs servilis et indocti animi est, quàm liberi, et veritatem inquirentis. Solam sequar ratione Naturam. Auctoritas credere iubet; ratio demonstrat: illa fidei, haec scientiis aptior” (TNK, *cit.*, p. 172). Cf. also QNS 88 ff. (TNK, pp. 276 ff.).

“bewitching spells of Dialectic” which entangle young men aspiring to knowledge, so that they can “turn to Nature.”¹⁵ Thus issues about philosophical communication and writing should not be evaluated against a traditional frame of dialectical and rhetorical references, but should be viewed as part of the process of building a modern concept of method which includes a “cathartic” component (to use a Kantian expression).¹⁶

This methodological intent – which seems to link Sanchez far more to seventeenth-century empiricist philosophers than to Renaissance ones – was acknowledged by sporadic nineteenth and twentieth century literature on Sanchez,¹⁷ but has long been unacknowledged and unappreciated by the historiographic vulgate because it is incorporated in and, so to speak, hidden under the most systematically articulate epistemological argument of fifteenth-century scepticism.¹⁸

¹⁵TNK, p. 275 (“Atque ô tinam Mercurius ego essem nostris Aeneis, ut relicta infirma, incantatricéque Dialectica, ad naturam se converterent”, QNS, p. 87).

¹⁶*Kritik der reinen Vernunft, Transzend. Element.*, II Teil, *Die transz. Logik, Einleitung*, I (Hrsg. von Wilhelm Weischedel, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1990, p. 99).

¹⁷ Actually, already in 1864 the *Nouvelle Biographie Générale* argued against Bayle and links Sanchez to Bacon and Descartes: “C’est un grand pyrrhonien, a dit Bayle, qui l’â jugé légèrement, et sur le titre de son premier traité de philosophie: *De multum nobili et prima universali scientia quod nihil scitur* (Lyon, 1581, in 4°; Francfort, 1628, in 8°). Au lieu de placer Sanchez à côté de Montaigne et de Charron, il convient mieux d’en faire un précurseur de Descartes. ‘Mon dessein, dit-il, est de fonder une science solide et facile, purgée de ces chimères et de ces fictions sans fondements qu’on ressemble dans le but, non de nous instruire, mais de nous montrer l’esprit de l’auteur.’ Mais il s’est contenté de dresser contre la philosophie scolastique et la méthode d’argumentation un acte d’accusation en règle, et les objections qu’il met en avant se retrouvent plus tard avec plus force chez Bacon. Il définit la science *rei perfecta cognitio*; s’il veut rendre l’étude circonspecte, il ne conclut pas à l’impuissance de la raison. Son livre est d’une lecture agréable, écrit d’un style vif et animé; on regrette qu’il n’ait pas achevé sa tâche, en faisant connaître les véritables fondements de la science et de la méthode, et que les éclairs de son esprit, suivant l’expression de Tenneman, au lieu de dissiper les ténèbres, n’aient servi qu’à les rendre visibles [*Histoire de la philosophie*, IX, 508]”. See also J. Owen, *The Sceptics of the French Renaissance*, London: Sonnenschein, 1893; A. Coralnik, “Zur Geschichte der Skepsis”, *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* XXVII, N.F. XX (1941), pp. 188–222; E. Senchet, *Essai sur la méthode de Francisco Sanchez*, Paris: Giard et Brière, 1904; S. Miccolis, *Francesco Sanchez*, Bari: Tipografia Levante, 1965.

¹⁸ “Among the sceptics of the sixteenth century only one other writer besides Sanches made a major contribution to the diffusion of the sceptical ideas: Michael de Montaigne. The fame and influence of the *Essais de Michel de Montaigne* have tended to eclipse the modest success of the *Quod nihil scitur* and yet Sanches argues the case for philosophical scepticism far more cogently than did Montaigne in the ‘Apologie de Raimond Sebond’. The structure of Sanchez’s argumentation is far better organised, philosophically more satisfying, and ends on a positive constructive note” (E. Limbrick, Introduction, *cit.*, p. 79).

On the other hand, Pierre Bayle's lapidary comment – "étoit un grand Pyrronien"¹⁹ – was traditionally unchallenged, up until R.H. Popkin, who rightly questioned the direct influence on Sanchez of Estienne's translation of Sextus Empiricus and pinpointed the rather academic and dogmatic aspects of his scepticism.²⁰ Scholarly reassessment of his scepticism and the parallel acknowledgment of his methodological interests help to uncover the true relationship and conciliation between the two faces of Sanchez: between the sceptical (albeit not pyrrhonian) one, the radical and rigorous denier of science itself and, on the other hand, the constructive one, the theoretician of method. We shall see that this relation evolves along more or less the same lines as that from diagnosis to therapy in medicine (taking into due account the limits of the physician).

¹⁹ *Dictionnaire historique et critique*, tome second, second partie, Rotterdam, Reinier Leers, MDCXCVII, p. 1004. It is possible that Bayle's opinion was biased by the fact that some seventeenth-century authors had interpreted Sanchez's philosophy as the most dangerous form of scepticism (see R.H. Popkin, *op. cit.*, ch. 10, and E. Limbrick, Introduction, *cit.*, pp. 77–88).

²⁰ "By and large, Sanchez's totally negative conclusion is not the position of Pyrrhonian scepticism, the suspense of judgment as to whether anything can be known, but rather the more full-fledged negative dogmatism of the Academics" (R.H. Popkin, *The History of Scepticism from Erasmus to Spinoza*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1979, p. 56). E. Limbrick and G. Paganini agree with Popkin on the non-Pyrrhonian nature of Sanchez's scepticism, but with different remarks. "His scepticism was not," the former writes, "as many critics have conjectured, the fruit of his reflections on the works of Sextus Empiricus, recently made available in their Latin translations by Henri Estienne (*Hypotyposesis*, 1562) and Gentian Hervet (*Adversus Mathematicos*, 1569), but rather the consequence of his own refutation of Aristotelianism and the terminist logic of the Parisian Nominalists" (Introduction, *cit.*, p. 24, italics mine). The latter observes that "il medico portoghese passò alla storia per aver rinverdito piuttosto il lato negativo che non quello positivo del neoaccademismo, riproponendo in questo modo gli aspetti confutatori anziché le regole del metodo probatorio" (G. Paganini, *Sceptsi moderna. Interpretazioni dello scetticismo da Charron a Hume*, Cosenza: Busento, 1991, p. 36). Paganini more recently went back to the same subject reaffirming that "apparentemente non c'è alcuna traccia della fonte neopirroniana rappresentata da Sesto nell'opera di Sanchez" and claiming that "lo scritto di Sanchez dà un'eccellente idea di ciò che era lo scetticismo dei moderni prima dell'entrata in scena della teoria neopirroniana del fenomeno" (G. Paganini, *Montaigne, Sanchez e la conoscenza attraverso i fenomeni. Gli usi moderni di un paradigma antico*, in eds. M. De Caro, Emidio Spinelli, *Scetticismo. Una vicenda filosofica*, Roma: Carocci, 2007, p. 68). The basic thesis of this interesting and perceptive paper is that this pyrrhonian theory represents the real watershed between Sanchez's and Montaigne's scepticism: the former "costruisce i suoi argomenti scettici all'ombra della teoria aristotelica (anche se ne rovescia le conclusioni)" (*ibid.* p. 74), whilst the latter "concepisce le basi della conoscenza come completamente slegate dal paradigma aristotelico, che sussisteva invece come riferimento, quanto meno implicito, per il medico portoghese" (*ibid.* p. 75). My paper's conclusions by and large differ from Paganini's.

Even though Sanchez taught philosophy for twenty seven years at the University of Toulouse,²¹ he was really a physician, or more precisely, as he himself reminds us in the epistle to the reader of *Quod nihil scitur*, a “professor” of the “medical art” (a claim which assumes a more pregnant significance in view of the fact that he was to achieve his lifelong goal of being appointed to a chair in medicine only thirty-one years later, in 1612 at the age of sixty-one). He was educated as a physician: in his youth he decided to attend the most advanced and renowned medical schools of the time, and it was from medicine that he came to philosophy.

To examine “*graviora Philosophiae capita* to the end that from them other questions may more easily be deduced” is (as we read at the beginning of *Quod nihil scitur*) a necessary step to ensure a thorough examination of the “*principia*” of “medical art,” “which lie entirely within the realm of philosophical contemplation.”²² The function of philosophy seems to become, then, that of providing an outline of the general epistemological background in which the medical art is to be situated. But this background dramatically reveals the impossibility of science (in the true meaning of the word); in other words, it reveals human beings’ inevitable “ignorance” of reality. The rigorous assessment and demonstration of this condition necessarily implies representing it as anomalous, that is as a state of “imperfection” of the human being in its entirety, whether it is found to affect soul or body; and this anomaly or imperfection Sanchez conceives, describes and treats according to a physician’s *forma mentis*, that is as a pathology – indeed an incurable disease – which first requires a correct diagnosis and, then, the search for at least a palliative.²³

²¹ From 1585 to 1612 he held both the chair of philosophy at the University of Toulouse and the appointment of doctor at the Hôtel-Dieu: “One can only surmise that the relatively small number of publications in philosophy, as compared to the massive output of publications in medicine, does not represent the work of twenty-seven years as professor of philosophy, and it is regrettable that Sanchez’s other philosophical works have not been found. On the other hand, Sanchez himself may have preferred to devote himself to writing the many practical treatises on medicine, which were more relevant to his work as a doctor, and perhaps he considered that these publications would further his ambitions to obtain the chair of medicine” (Limbrick, Introduction, *op. cit.*, pp. 22–23).

²² TNK, p. 171. “A principiis rerum exordium sumentes, graviora Philosophiae capita examinabimus, ex quibus facilius reliqua colligi possint. Nec enim in his inmorari in votis est omnino: ad Medicam quippe artem viam affectamus, cuius professores sumus: cuiusque principia omnia Philosophicae contemplationis sunt” (QNS, *Ad lectorem*).

²³ This is interpreted by G. Paganini as a limiting character of Sanchez’s epistemology: “Gli ostacoli che impediscono la conoscenza sono in realtà ben più di fatto che di diritto; così l’acatalessia è essa stessa il risultato pratico di una condizione fisica o psicologica perturbata, e non un problema epistemologico nel senso forte del termine” (G. Paganini, *Montaigne, Sanchez e la conoscenza attraverso i fenomeni*, *op. cit.*, p. 76).

Thus the Renaissance alliance between medicine and philosophy²⁴ acquires in Sanchez a new and particular meaning by which philosophy helps medicine to diagnose the pathology of the human condition (“ignorance” i.e. “quod nihil scitur”) and medicine helps philosophy both in interpreting human ignorance correctly – so that ignorance itself and its consequences become symptoms of the “human misery” –, and in suggesting the palliative treatment (“adiumenta ignorantiae”):

For luckless humanity, there are two means of discovering truth, since men cannot know things in themselves. If they could acquire intellectual understanding of them as they should be able to do, then they would need no other means; but since they cannot do this, they have found additional ways of coming to the aid of their own ignorance [adiumenta ignorantiae = liniments of ignorance]. Consequently, although they have no more knowledge because of these aids (at least in the sense of perfect knowledge) yet they do perceive and learn something.²⁵

The pathological nature of “ignorance” is revealed in the above quotation by the fact that human beings “cannot do” what “they should be able to do,” namely, *res per se scire*. Underlying Sanchez’s appraisal of ignorance we find a maximalist definition of science of a metaphysical or Platonic kind, as we shall see, that only philosophy can formulate. This is in some ways even more ambitious than the Aristotelian one, for it identifies science with “the perfect understanding of a thing” (*rei perfecta cognitio*).²⁶ This implies such an exhaustive understanding of the *res* in all its aspects (substantial and accidental) “by which a thing examined from all sides, both inside and outside, is understood,”²⁷ as to be comparable to that of the Maker who “solus perfecte cognoscit.”²⁸ Consequently, though man

²⁴ A. Wear, R. K. French and I. M. Lonie, eds., *The Medical Renaissance of the Sixteenth Century*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985; I. Maclean, *Logic, Signs and Nature in the Renaissance: The Case of Learned Medicine*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

²⁵ TNK, p. 278. “Duo sunt inveniendae veritatis media miseris humanis: quondoquidem *res per se scire non possunt, quas si intelligere, cum deberent, possent*, nulli alio indigerent medio: sed cum hoc nequeant, adiumenta ignorantiae suae adinuere: quibus propterea nil magis sciunt, perfectè saltem, sed aliquid percipiunt, discuntque” (QNS, p. 90, italics mine).

²⁶ TNK, p. 200; QNS, p. 23.

²⁷ TNK, p. 241 “Divide denique omnem cognitionem in duas. Alia est perfecta, qua res undique, intus et extrà perspicitur, intelligitur” (QNS, p. 55).

²⁸ QNS, p. 54; TNK, p. 239. “Nec enim perfectè cognoscere potest quis, quae non creavit. Nec Deus creare potuisset: nec creata regere, quae non perfectè cognoscere praecognovisset. Ipse ergo solus sapientia, cognitio, intellectus perfectus, omnia penetrat, omnia sapit, omnia cognoscit, omnia intelligit: quia ipse omnia est, et in omnibus: omniaque ipse sunt, et in ipso” (QNS, pp. 53–54).

knows what true science is, he nevertheless finds himself unable to attain knowledge of even “the clearest and most obvious things which he eats and drinks, touches, sees, and hears,”²⁹ as well as “the self that is in him and with him.”³⁰ We can know the nature of science and define its requirements exactly, but this merely amounts to knowing that we are necessarily excluded from it; in other words this understanding turns immediately into an awareness of exclusion, which amounts to a deep malaise (“melancholy”³¹) deriving from the frustration of our “inborn desire to know.” Thus, innate desire for knowledge and the ability to understand the requirements of true science are the two factors which give rise to the “misery” of human beings, a perpetual frustration of a paradoxical nature; paradoxical since “ignorance of things *per se*” is as natural as the knowledge that “things *per se*” are the only true objects of science.

Sanchez’s doctrine revolving around this frustrating knowledge (of our ignorance and its relation to the definition of science) may justify Popkin’s interpretation of Sanchez’s scepticism as being of an Academic type.³² There can be good reasons for this, not least because Sanchez himself on several occasions squarely names Diogenes Laertius and Plutarch as his only sources on sceptical doctrines.³³ However, putting aside labels – which could become a mere problem of terminology –, two points should be highlighted in Sanchez’s basic assumption in order to make a comparison with the Pyrrhonian trend of fifteenth century scepticism.

²⁹ TNK, p. 239; QNS 54.

³⁰ TNK, p. 239. “Imperfectus autem, et miser homunculus quomodo cognoscet alia, qui seipsum non nosse potest, qui in se est, et secum?” (QNS, p. 54). Cf. Montaigne, *Les Essais*, L. II, ch. XII, éd. par Pierre Villey, sous la direction et avec une préface de V-L. Saulnier, pp. 556–557: “En voylà assez pour verifier que l’homme n’est non plus instruit de la connoissance de soy en la partie corporelle qu’en la spirituelle. Nous l’avons proposé luy mesmes à soy, et sa raison à sa raison, pour voir ce qu’elle nous en diroit. Il me semble assez avoir montré combien peu elle s’entend en elle mesme.”

³¹ “Sed erat hoc maturum Socratis consilium, et erat alias ille melancholicus, *ut fere sunt omnes studiosi, Philosophique*” (*De divinatione, cit.*, p. 176, italics mine). “Quod etsi his omnibus liberum demus iuvenem nostrum: tamen melancholicus tandem fiet, quod quotidiana ostendit experientia” (QNS, p. 94).

³² Cf. Limbrick, Introduction, *op. cit.*, p. 70 and *supra* n. 20.

³³ Sanchez’s references are to Books 9 and 10 of Diogenes Laertius’s *Lives*, and to Plutarch’s *Adversus Colotem*; that is to say to texts which furnish summary accounts of the epistemological doctrines of Heraclitus, the Eleatics, the atomists, Protagoras and Pyrrho, which are referred to as concurring in judging “accidentia nihil in se esse ... sed solum quaedam nobis apparentia, quae pro varia nostri conditione dispositioneque varia apparent” (QNS, p. 43, see also p. 52 and 64). Sanchez refers to the same texts for Heraclitus’s support for the doctrine of the self-unknowability of the soul which he maintains alongside Vives against Scaliger (QNS, p. 54; cf. Limbrick’s notes, TNK, p. 240).

First, the impressive demonstrative procedure displayed in his approach to the inquiry on (the possibility of) science: his definition of science (as we shall see) does not really appear to be a dogmatic assumption but rather constitutes a pre-condition made necessary by Sanchez's strictly demonstrative reasoning. This originates from the sole proposition – *nihil scitur* – which appears absolutely unconditional and independent of any other by virtue of being confirmed by its very negation. From this point of view, *quod nihil scitur*³⁴ does not represent a dogmatic truth, but merely a logical one by virtue of its status of being undeniable:

I do not know even this one thing, namely that I know nothing. I infer, however, that this is true both of myself and of others. Let this proposition be my battle colour – it commands my allegiance [*Haec mihi vexillum propositio, haec sequenda venit*] – ‘Nothing is known’. If I come to know how to establish this, I shall be justified in drawing the conclusion that nothing is known; whereas if I do not know how to establish it, then all the more so – for that was what I claimed.³⁵

Second, the diagnostic expressed by the proposition has the function of saving human beings from vain labours in searching after the truth in the hope that it might some day be found.³⁶ This does not mean that they can be cured of their ignorance, but only of the pathological and fatal effects carefully described by Sanchez as affecting those who fully feel and follow their “innate desire for knowledge.”

³⁴ In Book 9 of *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* (cf. QNS, p. 10), Diogenes Laertius ascribes the proposition to Metrodorus of Chios: “who used to declare that he knew nothing, not even the fact that he knew nothing” (9, 58, Loeb Classical Library ed., vol. II, p. 471). E. Limbrick adds Cicero's *Academica* II, 23 (“Is qui hunc maxime est admiratus, Chius Metrodorus, initio libri qui est de natura, ‘Nego’ inquit ‘scire nos sciamusne aliquid an nihil sciamus, ne id ipsum quidem, nescire (aut scire), scire nos, nec omnino sitne aliquid an nihil sit’” – Loeb Classical Library ed., p. 560) and Sextus Empiricus' *Adversus Mathematicos* I, 88. The *Academica* is never mentioned by Sanchez in *Quod nihil scitur*; as for Sextus Empiricus there seems to be no indisputable evidence of a direct use by Sanchez of the 1562–1569 Latin translations by Henri Estienne and Gentian Hervet. However, in Sanchez's renewed use the proposition *quod nihil scitur* seems to lose the character of *dogmatic truth* because it is assigned both the function of the most radical challenge to every foundation of science, and that of the only (paradoxical) possible premise for reasoning by virtue of its logical self-sufficiency – a status which renders it comparable to the *cogito*.

³⁵ TNK, pp. 172–173. QNS, p. 1: “Nec unum hoc scio, me nihil scire: Coniector tamen nec me, nec alios. Haec mihi vexillum propositio sit, haec sequenda venit, Nihil scitur. Hanc si probandi sciuero, meritò concludam, nil sciri: si nesciuero, hoc ipso melius: id enim asserebam.”

³⁶ QNS, p. 10: “Mihi enim humana omnia suspecta sunt, et haec ipsa quae scribo modò. Non tacebo tamen: saltè hoc liberè proferam, me nihil scire: ne tu in vanum labores veritatem inquirendo, sperans eam aliquando apertè tenere posse” (TNK, p. 185).

Notwithstanding the possible connection between Sanchez's *nihil scitur* and Cusanus's *docta ignorantia*,³⁷ the "vexillum" proposition hammering the reader on every page of his main work has no metaphysical or theological meaning or development, nor does it lead to any Renaissance "sagesse" in the style of Vives or Charron.

Ignorance and the consequent fruitless attempts to know "aliquid perfecte" epitomizes the drama of humankind's condition, but the only theological meaning that can be attributed to them is that they are "the worst of occupations" God wished to give "to the sons of men ... that they might be occupied therewith" and not "find out the work that God has performed from the beginning to the end."³⁸ This reduction of ignorance merely to a means used by God to drain all humankind's energy is only one of the clear signals that for Sanchez ignorance never seems to find a rational (theological, moral, natural) justification, i.e. it can never lose its intrinsic paradoxical nature. Therefore ignorance cannot become *docta* nor engender real wisdom or superior awareness. Far from making him wise, the ignorance he himself recognises puts Sanchez "cum stultis stultus."

Everyone believes himself to be extremely learned; to me, all men seem ignorant. It may be that I am the only ignorant man alive; but I should like to know this at least, and this I cannot do. What, therefore, can I go on to say that is free of the suspicion of ignorance? Nothing. *Why, then, do I write?* What do I know? With fools you will be foolish. *I am a human being* – what am I to do?³⁹

From a strictly rational point of view, the very fact of writing and affirming that *nihil scitur* is "stultitia," "folly," because silence would be in reality the only inescapable choice, consistent with the impossibility of coherently defining the meaning of words.

Very well then, let us assign names afresh; you have my permission. We shall then know that this word has this meaning. But this is false. You do not know what 'word' is, what, 'this' is, what 'meaning' is; therefore, you do not know that this word has this meaning.⁴⁰

Neither is there any *praise of folly* in Sanchez's identification of "sapientia" and "folly" because the state of the *sapiens* is merely that in which the pathology of ignorance flares up in its virulent form.

³⁷ "Nobis autem cum Deo nulla proportio, quemadmodum nec finito cum infinito" (QNS, p. 43).

³⁸ TNK, p. 235; QNS, p. 51.

³⁹ TNK, p. 201, italics mine. Far more effective is the Latin prose: "Quisque sibi doctissimus videtur: mihi omnes ignari. Forsan solus ego ignarus sum: sed id saltem scire vellem. Non possum. Quid igitur dicam deinceps quod ignorantiae suspitione vacet? Nihil. Cur ergo scribo? Quid ego scio. Cum stultis stultus eris: homo sum: quid faciam?" (QNS, p. 24).

⁴⁰ TNK, pp. 183–184. QNS, p. 9: "Dic, denuò verba imponamus. Permitto. Sciemus ergo iam verbum hoc, hoc significare. Falsum: nescis quid sit verbum, nescis quid sit hoc, nescis verbum hoc hoc significare."

We may quite properly compare our philosophy to the labyrinth of Minos: if we once enter it, we cannot go back, or get ourselves free of its mazes. If we go on, we encounter the Minotaur, who deprives us of life. This is the end of our studies, this the reward of fruitless and useless toil, of endless vigils: namely distress, anxiety, worry, solitude, and the loss of all life's pleasures – a life like unto death, a life to be spent in the company of the dead and in struggling, talking, thinking; to shun the living and lay aside the care of one's private interests; to destroy the bodily physique by training the mind. From this cause come diseases, often madness, and always death. Nor does 'unflinching toil all problems overcome' – except in the sense that it takes life away and hastens death, which frees a man from everything. In this sense, the dying man conquers all, and what Horace says is so far from being true that on the contrary exactly the opposite happens.⁴¹

Sanchez returns several times to the pathologies of the scholar or philosopher, i.e. of a person who, to combat his own ignorance, kills himself in the struggle.

What kind of life could be more unhappy or more unfortunate than this? Why did I say 'kind of life'? Rather, it is a kind of death – as I previously remarked. Well then, would you wish anyone to submit himself to such a disastrous way of living? Yet these are some who do so. Suppose our young man to be one of these. Then, even though he should possess an excellent constitution and perfect health, he will at once fall into a decline. When he has wasted his bodily strength by studying, he will have to battle with a host of diseases, or morbid conditions; cold in the head, catarrh, arthritis, weakness of the bowels, and hence bouts of indigestion, loss of appetite, diarrhoea, and obstructions, especially those of the spleen; he who devotes himself to his studies suffers from every kind of ailment. In the end, he dies prematurely. Again, these things disturb the mind, affecting its principal seat, namely the brain, whether initially this happens of itself, or transmitted from another. But even if we suppose our young man to be free from all these troubles, yet finally he will become melancholic, as everyday experience proves.⁴²

⁴¹ TNK, p. 234. QNS, p. 50: "Non immeritò Philosophiam nostram liceat conferre Monois labyrintho: in quem ingressi regredi non possumus, nec explicare nos: si pergamus, in Minotaurum incidimus, qui nobis vitam adimit. Hic finis studiorum nostrorum, hoc praemium irriti et vani laboris, perpetua vigiliae, labor, cura, sollicitudo, solitudo, priuatio omnium deliciarum, vita morti similis, cum mortuis degendo, pugnando, loquendo, cogitando, à vivis abstinere, propriarum rerum curam ponere, animum exercendo corpus destruere. Hinc morbi: saepe delirium: semper mors. Nec labor improbus aliter omnia vincit, nisi quia vitam adimit, mortem accelerat, quae ab omnibus liberat. Sic qui moritur omnia vincit: tantumque abest ut utrum sit quod ille dicit, ut contra omnino eueniat." Sanchez quotes Horace, *L. I, Epist. I*, vv. 105–108: "To sum up, the Wise Man is inferior only to Jove."

⁴² TNK, pp. 282–283. QNS, pp. 93–94: "Quo vitae genere quid miserius? Quid infoelicus? At quid dixi vitae genus? imò mortis genus est: ut superiùs dicebam. Quem ergo vis tam calamitosae vitae se submittere? Sunt tamen aliqui. Ex quibus sit iuuenis noster

An experience which in the first place concerns Sanchez himself, who, after proclaiming his rejection both of rhetoric and of the suffocating silence imposed by the awareness of ignorance – “*homo sum: quid faciam?*” –, openly confesses his uneasiness, which seems to be situated half way between Faust and Hume:

For my part, I have on many occasions thrown books away in a fit of temper, and I have run away from my little study; but in the public square, or on the Campus, I am never thinking of nothing, and I am ‘never less alone than when I am alone’, nor less idle than when I am idle. I have an enemy with me; him I cannot escape; and, as Horace says, ‘I avoid myself like a runaway and vagabond,/seeking to beguile Care, now by sociability and now by sleep,/in vain; for my gloomy companion is hard on my heels, and follows me as I try to flee’.⁴³

Further on, in an even clearer passage:

Had I understood anything completely, I should not have denied the fact – nay, I should have shouted aloud for happiness, since no better stroke of luck than this could possibly come my way. But as it is, I am tortured incessantly by grief, in despair of being able to know anything, completely.⁴⁴

unus. Hic quidem etsi optimè constitutus perfecta fruatur sanitate, statim marcescet: consumptisque studendo corporis viribus, pluribus conflictabitur morbis, aut morborum affectionibus, grauedine, destillatione, arthritide, ventriculi imbellicitate, unde cruditates, deiecta appetentia, lienteria, obstructiones, praecipuè lienis. Quid non patiat qui studiis incumbit? Moritur intempestiue tandem. Haec autem mentem perturbant, affecta eius praecipua sede, cerebro scilicet: sive id per se primò, sive ab alio accidat. Quòd etsi his omnibus liberum demus iuuenem nostrum: tamen melancholicus tandem fiet, quod quotidiana ostendit experientia.”

⁴³ TNK, p. 214, italics mine. QNS, pp. 33–34: “Ego saepius libros iratus proieci, aufugi musaeolum: at in foro, in campo, numquam nihil cogito, nec unquam minus solus, quàm cum solus: nec minus otiosus, quàm cum otiosus: mecum hostem habeo, non possum euadere: et ut ille it, meipsum vito fugitivus ut [=et] erro, iam sociis quaerens, iam somno fallere curam. Frustrà: nam comes atra premit, sequiturque fugacem.” Actually, Sanchez modifies these verses by Horace: “*teque ipsum vitas fugitivus et erro, iam vino quaerens, iam somno fallere curam; frustra: nam comes atra premit sequiturque fugacem*” (*Serm. II, Sat. 7*, vv. 112–115). As for Hume see, for example, the last section of the first book of the *Treatise*: “The wretched condition, weakness, and disorder of the faculties, I must employ in my enquiries, encrease my apprehensions. And the impossibility of amending or correcting these faculties, reduces me almost to despair ... I cannot forbear feeding my despair, with all those desponding reflections, which the present subject furnishes me with in such abundance. I am first affrighted and confounded with that forelorn solitude, in which I am plac’d in my philosophy, and fancy myself some strange uncouth monster, who not being able to mingle and unite in society, has been expell’d all human commerce, and left utterly abandon’d and desconsolate” (D. Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, I, IV, VII, ed. L.A. Selby-Bigge, Oxford: Clarendon, 1968, p. 264).

⁴⁴ TNK, p. 233. QNS, p. 48: “Nam si quid perfectè cognouissem, non negassem, imò vehementer clamassem prae laetitia: nil enim foelicius mihi euenire potuerit. Nunc autem perpetuo angor moerere, desperans me quid perfectè scire posse.”

The pathological consequences of seeking “perfect knowledge” – a hopeless search which is as much natural to human nature as it is man’s insuperable state of ignorance – are attentively described by Sanchez both in their physical and mental aspects. In all of his philosophical work he views body and mind from an antidualistic perspective; they are equally essential to the unity which constitutes a human being, whose identity depends no more on that particular *anima* than on that particular *corpus*.⁴⁵ The consequences for the body are the diseases mentioned above (“cold in the head, catarrh, arthritis, weakness of the bowels, and hence bouts of indigestion, loss of appetite, diarrhoea, and obstructions, especially those of the spleen”) and lastly death. The consequence for the soul is the presence of that “gloomy companion” (*atra comes*), already well known to ancient medicine,⁴⁶ culminating in terror of Nothingness which follows the certainty of inevitably being denied “perfection,” namely the knowledge of being (*ens*).

An end is perfection, and perfection has the first place among entities. Deprivation, destruction, disappearance, are merely the negation of an entity: they

⁴⁵ “Nec enim homo solus animus est, nec solum corpus, sed utrumque simul: ergo altero defectuoso, defectuosus homo erit: quare nec simpliciter homo: corpus enim de essentia eius est, quemadmodum et animus, *et non corpus simpliciter, sed tale corpus*” (QNS, p. 34, italics mine). Cf. also *De divinatione, cit.*, p. 230: “Quae enim esset hominis ista larva, si animus exire e corpore, et in id rursus subire posset, aut quae forma, si deserit subiectum? aut quod unum per se, si ex duobus per se? Moritur ergo, et regeneratur singulis diebus homo. Quid enim aliud est mors, quam discessio animae a corpore: et generatio quam introductio eiusdem in hoc? Incidimus in Platonis sententiam dicentis corpus nostrum esse animae carcerem, et me non esse Platonem, sed animum qui in me est, hunc esse verum Platonem. Si paulo plus procedas, ego nescio quid sim, nec quis omnino sim, imo et an omnino sim, si haec figmenta admittantur. Et quid, si dum ita vagatur spiritus meus, subducatur illi corpus, et alio transferatur? aut in id transeat animus pyraetae, aut Regis?”. The considerations added here by Sanchez on different souls dwelling in the same body call to mind Locke’s analogous thoughts in chapter 27 of the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, so much so as to suggest a relation between them. The theme is of great concern for Sanchez, who returns to it in his work on physiognomy: “Si quidem non esset tanta cognatio inter animam et corpus, posset utique fieri, ut quaelibet anima sub quacumque forma, et in quocumque corpore indifferenter manere posset, ut anima equi sub corpore et forma felis” (*In Librum Aristotelis Physiognomicon, Commentarius, in Tratados Filosóficos, cit.*, p. 252).

⁴⁶ Besides the classical doctrines of Hippocrates and Galen it should be noted that Aristotle first theorized the association between genius and melancholy and that his concept was revived in the Renaissance. Cf. R. Klibansky, E. Panofsky and F. Saxl, *Saturn and Melancholy. Studies in the History of Natural Philosophy, Religion, and Art*, London: Nelson, 1964; Jackie Pigeaud, *La maladie de l’âme: étude sur la relation de l’âme et du corps dans la tradition médico-philosophique antique*, Paris: Belles Lettres, 1981; *Aristote: l’homme de génie et la mélancholie: Problème XXX, 1*, traduction, présentation et notes par J. Pigeaud, Paris: Éditions Rivages, 1988.

are *nothing*. How else am I to describe nothing itself, save by the highly invidious term 'nothing'? It is absolutely opposite, and hostile, to perfection and to Being (*ens*). In the end, it is nothing. And who will intend or seek that? Everything naturally avoids it. Nothing terrifies or depresses me, or prostrates my mind, except this same 'nothing', when I reflect that one day I shall visit the court of Nothing (were it not that Faith, accompanied by Hope and Charity, destroyed this fear, together with its cause, Nothing, and comforted me by promising me an indissoluble union with Almighty God after the dissolution of this present compound of body and soul).⁴⁷

There is no composed stoic or epicurean reaction before "the court of Nothing," no *ars bene moriendi*,⁴⁸ or preparation for death by means of philosophy. Human-kind can only be reconciled with death through faith. Moreover, the hopeless state of scholars (who vainly seek for "perfect science"⁴⁹) aggravates the general human condition, dramatically depicted (mostly in *De divinatione per somnum*) as itself dominated by a keen sense of the precariousness of life and of the tragic ineluctability of death.⁵⁰ Sanchez describes a general human condition which, in turn, is set against the background of a nature that is perpetually instable and "consisting of contraries" (amongst which we notice that only human beings have their contraries in their peers).

The whole of nature consists in contraries, conserves itself by contraries, such as matter, form and privation; hot, cold; humid, dry; good, bad; generation, corruption; life, death; joy, mourning, summer, winter; south wind, north wind; happiness, misery; war, peace; wealth, poverty; fruitfulness, sterility; virtue, vice; pity, cruelty; and if we want to consider more details, by cat and mouse; fox and chicken; dog and hare; wolf and lamb; man and man; why should I

⁴⁷ TNK, pp. 260–261. QNS, p. 73: "Finis enim perfectio est: quae inter entia primas occupat. Nihil privatio, destructio, defectus, mera entis negatio, quo alio quàm infestissimo nihili nomine ipsum vocabo? omnino perfectioni, entique oppositum, inimicum. Nil denique. Quis illud intendet? quis quaeret? Omnia naturaliter id fugiunt. Nil me, praeter hoc nihil, perterret, tristat, animo prostrat: dum cogito, me aliquando illius aulam inuisurum: nisi fide, spe, et charitate comitata, metum hunc, nihilque, simul eius causam, destrueret, méque confirmaret, post compositi huius dissolutionem, indissolubilem cum Deo Opt. Max. nexum promittendo."

⁴⁸ Cf. Nicola Panichi, *I vincoli del disinganno. Per una nuova interpretazione di Montaigne*. Firenze: Olschki, 2004, pp. 81 ff.

⁴⁹ Which is not the one sought by Sanchez: "Neque vero credas me per *cognoscere*, intelligere perfectam scientiam" (*De divinatione, cit.*, p. 222).

⁵⁰ "Premitt mala suada fames a tergo, ante instat ensis, post ensem panis, fugienda est fames, exeundum per vulnus ad panem. Dicat nunc augur, ne conseras manum, morieris enim. Si iam fame pereoo, quid interest? imo malo gladio, quam fame. Multi ne dolorem ferrent atrocem, sibi manus intulerunt" (*De divinatione, cit.*, p. 234). Cf. *ibid.* p. 230.

mention others? There is nothing in the universe that has not its own contrary; the universe would not exist if all the contraries did not exist; the universe is no more conserved by good than by evil, or by either of the two contraries. It is in this that we observe the admirable fabric of the world and its beauty, that it consists in contraries; thanks to them it conserves itself; with them it lasts perpetually; and so with them it lasts so that neither can they last without it, nor it without them; neither has, for so many centuries, one of the contraries, strong and noble though it may be, overcome or extinguished the other at all, weak and vile though this may be, nor will it ever overcome or extinguish it. It is therefore necessary, where there are hunger, plagues, war, slander, crosses, swords, disputes, prisons and all other ills, for there likewise to be good too; and, in the end, where there is death, life too; where corruption, also generation. Therefore, for many to be happy, it is necessary for many to be unhappy; for one army to win, it is necessary for the other to be won.⁵¹

This doctrine can be considered an example of that “imperfect” and empirical science Sanchez believes to be within human means. Furthermore, if we take into account that every pair of contraries is linked to another⁵² – which again interrelates with another, and so on in an endless chain – this once more supports the fundamental thesis that *nihil scitur*. In fact, the knowledge that “the whole of nature consists in contraries” concerns one of those kinds of “connexiones”

⁵¹ “Tota enim natura constat ex contrariis, conservaturque per contraria, ut materiam, formam et privationem; calidum, frigidum; humidum, siccum; bonum, malum; generationem, corruptionem; vitam, mortem; gaudium, luctum; aetatem, hyemen; austrum, notum; foelicitatem, infoelicitatem; bellum, pacem; divitias, paupertatem; ubertatem, sterilitatem; virtutem, vitium; pietatem, impietatem; et si ad particularia magis accedendum, per felem et murem; vulpem et pullum gallinaceum; canem et leporem; lupum et agnum; hominem et hominem; quid plura refero? Nihil est in universo quod non habeat contrarium, et non esset universum, nisi essent contraria, et non magis conservatur universum bono, quam malo, aut alterutra alia contrarietate: et in hoc maxime spectatur admiranda mundi constructio, et pulchritudo, quod ex contrariis constet, per ea conservetur, cum iis perpetuo duret, et ita cum iis duret, ut nec illa sine illo, nec ille sine eis stare possit, neque per tot saecula unum contrariorum quantumcumque forte nobileque, aliud quantumcumque debile ignobileque omnino superarit, aut extinxerit, neque superaturum extincturumque unquam sit. Oportet ergo ut adsit fames, pestis, bellum, calumnia, crux gladius, lis, carcer, et reliqua omnia mala, aequae atque bona; et tandem mors aequae atque vita, et corruptio, atque generatio. Ut ergo sint multi foelices, necesse est etiam esse multos quoque infoelices: et ut acies una vincat, necesse est aliam vinci” (*De divinatione, cit.*, pp. 236–238). Cf. also *De longitudine et brevitate vitae liber* in *Tratados Filosóficos, cit.*, p. 276: “Quodcumque enim ibi corpus sit, non potest non ei esse contrarium.”

⁵² “De homine sufficet. Hic basiliscum odit: fertur enim eum hominis saliva ieiuni interfici: basiliscus hominem et mustellam, quae eum sola dicitur perimere: mustella basiliscum et murem: mus mustellam et catum: catus murem et canem: canis catum et leporem: lepus canem et viueram” (QNS, p. 29).

and “concatenationes” observable among things (perhaps the most important one, at least according to the *De divinatione per somnum*), and just like every knowledge of that sort, far from supporting the existence of the (perfect) science, it provides a strong argument against this possibility, because the knowledge of every thing comes to depend on that of all others linked and interrelated with it. In other words, since the variety of things is almost infinite, and for every thing we can observe links with many others, it follows that the knowledge of every thing remains inevitably unaccomplished because of the infinite implications it entails.⁵³ And to conceal this incompleteness by parcelling out science (which is *one*, or would be one, if it existed) into many compartments made up of non-communicating sciences (as the Aristotelians do) is only a deceitful epistemological trick:

All things are linked together in such a way that no single thing is detached from the function of hindering or helping another. Nay, one and the same thing was made by Nature to harm many others, and to help many others. Therefore, in order to understand any one thing perfectly we must understand everything; and who is capable of this? Such a person I have nowhere seen. And for the same reason, certain sciences assist certain others, and one science contributes to the understanding of another. Nay, what is more, one science cannot be known in isolation from others; and accordingly they are obliged to borrow, one from another. For the subject-matters of the sciences are such that they mutually depend on one another, and one subject-matter makes up another, turn and turn about.⁵⁴

On the one hand, Sanchez’s view of the links between things clearly displays a typical Renaissance attitude to nature, since the “concatenations” and “connections”

⁵³ A good example of this would be the case of man who “quia movetur motu recto et deorsum: illico quid sursum, deorsum: de centro mundi, de polis, partibus eius. Quia videt, et hoc media luce: statim de coloribus, de spiritibus, et speciebus, de luce, et luminoso; de Sole, astrisque. Quia corpus est, et est in loco: de corpore, de substantia, de loco, de vacuo. Quia locus finitus dicitur: de finito et infinito. Quia generat et generatur: statim de causis omnibus usque ad primam. Quia ratiocinatur, de anima intellectiva et eius facultatibus, de scientia et de scibili, de prudentia et reliquis habitibus, ut vocant. Quia interficit: quia nunquam contentus vivit: quia pro patria vitam morti exponit: quia sublevat aegros et egentes: de bono, et malo: de ultimo et summo bono: de virtute, et de vitio: de animi immortalitate” (QNS, p. 30).

⁵⁴ TNK, pp. 206–207, italics mine. QNS, pp. 28–29: “Talis autem concatenatio in rebus omnibus est ut nulla ociosa sit, quin alteri obsit aut prosit: quinimò et eadem pluribus et nocere, et iuvare plures nata est. Ergo omnia cognoscere oportet ad unius perfectam cognitionem: illud autem quis potest? Nusquam vidi. Et ob hanc eandem rationem scientiae aliae aliis favent, et una ad alterius cognitionem confert. Imò, quod magis est, una sine aliis sciri perfecte non potest: proindeque coguntur aliae ab aliis mutari. Earum namque subiecta sic etiam se habent, ut unum ab alio mutuò dependeat, et aliud etiam mutuò aliud efficiat.” Cf. also *ibid.* pp. 30 ff.

between things, far from revealing a crystallized, changeless, hierarchical order, show instead a metamorphic labyrinthine web of variations in every domain of reality (whether natural or human). On the other hand, the sceptical philosopher, unlike others, is careful not to let himself be captured by the exaltation and exhilaration produced by the spectacle of metamorphic nature characterized by contraries, mutations and “vicissitudines.” He keeps an open mind and can see that

There is such variety in things, that in this department Nature can be clearly seen to have played a trick and indulged her personal whim by promoting our confusion, so that she – albeit standing plainly in our view – might make fools of us, and laugh at us, as we seek her in this place or that.⁵⁵

From this point of view, both the Aristotelians and philosophers like Cardano are equally deceived by nature: the former purport to reduce the varieties of nature to their impossible (and actually circular) schema of syllogistically contrived sciences, the latter “mix up and confuse everything in every place,”⁵⁶ like Cardano in *De rerum varietate*, of which Sanchez writes:

when I read or reflect on them [i.e. its pages], I am almost possessed by an entrancement, an enthusiasm and, as he says, insanity; or rather I almost think him impelled and driven mad by the force of his star; so discordant and self repellent are the things he wrote.⁵⁷

Variety is a snare set by nature for those who pretend to understand her – “for no one can perfectly understand things he has not himself created”⁵⁸ – and who

⁵⁵ TNK, p. 271. QNS, p. 83: “Quis omnibus placuit unquam? Nec natura ipsa, ut quam quidam damnare, increparéque ausi sunt. Tanta est in rebus varietas, ut natura in his lusisse cernatur, confusionéque nostra sibi placuisse videatur: ut nos eam hinc inde quaerentes, coram nobis existens deluderet, irrideretque.”

⁵⁶ *Ibid.* The connections between names and natures of things on which etymologies are based are an important example of fictitious relations. Sanchez’s denunciation of their deceptions is very biting and humorous: “Adde frivolum aliorum sententiam verbis nescio quam vim propriam assignantium, ut inde dicant nomina rebus imposita fuisse secundum earum naturam. Quo ducti non minus stulte etiam quidem verborum omnium significationes ab aliquo trahere conantur: ut lapis, quia laedat pedem: humus ab humiditate, inquit. Et asinus unde? a te, quia sine sensu es: a enim Graece et Latine saepe privat; sinus, quasi sensus: ergo asinus, idem est quod sine sensu: et hoc idem tu” (QNS, p. 36). On Sanchez’s denial of natural language, *ibid.* p. 38.

⁵⁷ “Quae ego dum lego, aut cogito, parum abest quin in ecstasim, et enthusiasmum, ut ipse dicit, insaniamque trahar; aut putem potius eum astri vi sui impulsus, amentemque factum; tam dissona tamque sibi pugnancia scripsisse” (*De divinatione, cit.*, p. 188).

⁵⁸ TNK, p. 239. QNS, pp. 53–54: “Quam si perfectam [cognitionem homo] haberet, Deo similis esset: imo Deus ipse. *Nec enim perfecte cognoscere potest quis, quae non creavit. Nec Deus creare potuisset: nec creata regere, quae non perfecte praecognovisset.*”

(more or less blamefully) do not realize that nature “makes a fool of them.” The variety of species, whether infinite or not, leads to an infinite labyrinthine chain of implications which ends in a vicious circle or in infinite regression. The variety of individuals, whether infinite or not, erodes any definite border between the species (which, in any case, are only “imaginatio”).⁵⁹ The infinite multiplicity of forms could correspond to an unconceivable multiplicity of “matters.” Lastly, the perpetual “endless process of change”⁶⁰ due to time disintegrates the actual identity of every thing.

In many respects Sanchez’s considerations on variety and change are akin to Montaigne’s. Of particular interest are the similarities between the two authors regarding the variety of human beings in terms of customs, characters, opinions, dispositions,⁶¹ as well as the retrieval, through Plutarch, of the Heraclitean view of perpetual change affecting both “cognoscens” and “res cognita.”⁶² This latter

⁵⁹ “Vidisti iam difficultatem in speciebus. De individuis autem fateris nullam esse scientiam, quia infinita sunt. At species nil sunt, aut saltem imaginatio quaedam: sola individua sunt, sola haec percipiuntur, de his solum habenda scientia est, ex his captanda. Sin minus, ostende mihi in natura illa tua universalialia. Dabis in particularibus ipsis. Nil tamen in illis universale video: omnia particularia. In his autem quanta varietas conspicitur!” (QNS, p. 33). “Tanta quippe in diversis plagis eiusdem, ut vocas, speciei dissimilitudo est, ut diversas dicas species, et sunt” (*ibid.* p. 40).

⁶⁰ TNK, p. 229. QNS, p. 45: “Dixi identitati nihil mutandum, alias non idem omnino esse. Una forma unum facit. Eadem forsitan informat semper, sed non idem: in hoc enim *perpetua mutatio*, ut in corpore meo. At ex utroque componor, ex anima praecipue, ex corpore paulo minus, quorum aliquo variato, et ego varior” (italics mine). About identity see *supra* n. 45.

⁶¹ “Denique sunt homines quidam, quos maximè dubites an rationales, an potius irracionales vocare debeas. At contra bruta videre est, quae maiore cum ratione rationalia dicere possis quàm ex hominibus aliquos. Respondebis unam hyrundinem non facere ver, nec unum particulare destruere universale. Ego contra contendo universale falsum omnino esse, nisi omnia quae sub eo continentur ita ut sunt et amplectatur, et affirmet” (QNS, p. 34). Cf. also *ibid.* p. 39.

⁶² See the last pages of *Apologie pour Raymond Sebond (Les Essais, L. II, ch. XII, cit., pp. 587 ff.)* and QNS, p. 41 (“denique qui per instans solum vivit ac si non viveret, etsi quasi non esset, se sempiterno certo quid ostendere valeat?”), p. 44 (“Alia adhuc in rebus superest inscitiae causa nostrae, aliquarum scilicet perpetua duratio, rursus aliarum perpetua generatio, perpetua corruptio, perpetua mutatio”), p. 45 (“Inter ortum et interitum quod mutationes fiunt? Innumerae. In viventibus nutritio perpetua, auctio ad tempus, status, declinatio, generatio, variatio partuum, mutatio, defectus, additio, perfectio morum, actiones, opera diversa, contraria saepissime in eodem individuo: *denique nulla quies. Nec mirum si aliquorum sententia fuerit, de homine uno post horam non asseri posse eundem esse, qui ante horam, non omnino explodenda, imo forsitan vera*”, italics mine), p. 94 (“Nam et in eo continua mutatio est, quemadmodum et in omnibus aliis rebus”), and also *De divinatione, cit., p. 196*: “Quae autem fuerunt, ea iam non sunt; quae futura sunt,

is perhaps the most disturbing theory bequeathed by Renaissance scepticism to modern empiricism (mostly to Locke and Hume), where the problem of identity was to arise dramatically, paralleled by a crisis in the concept of substance.

This is not the only legacy Sanchez leaves to modern philosophy. It is in fact a very complex legacy (as already mentioned), whose far more significant side is the epistemological one, notably the critical attitude towards the pseudo-sciences which are impossible to reform or reappraise. On this issue, Sanchez stirs free of the main trend in Renaissance times: he thus attacks astrology in his work on the comet (1578)⁶³ – a significant parallel to Bayle –, critically analyses divination (*divinandi ars*) in all its forms and modalities in *De divinatione per somnum, ad Aristotelem* – mainly levelled against Cardano –, and denies any real ground for physiognomy in *In librum Aristotelis Physiognomicôn Commentarius*.⁶⁴

In Sanchez's eyes, Cardano personifies the *sapiens* lured (through no fault of his own, at least partially) into the trap of pseudo-sciences both by his natural desire for (perfect) knowledge, and by the seductive multitude of forms in nature. Furthermore, like Cardano, every man seeking knowledge is almost inevitably doomed to fall prey to nature and lose himself in its mazes (particularly when under the guidance of pseudo-science). Yet it is not science, which is part of the disease itself, which can rescue man, but rather a pitiless diagnosis

nondum sunt: quae nunc sunt instans tantum habent suae existentiae. Ita ut iam omnia huius inferioris orbis fluxa et mobilia tum parvum habeant esse, ut potius sint continuatione quam duratione, *et magis non sint, quam sint.*" On the theme, Giambattista Gori, *Montaigne, Descartes e le vicissitudini dell'eraclitismo* in M. Spallanzani (ed.), *Lecture cartesiane*, Bologna: Clueb, 2003, pp. 17–45.

⁶³ *Carmen de Cometa anni M.D.LXXVII* in *Opera philosophica*, cit., pp. 122–145. Previously a facsimile reproduction of the 1578 edition was published with parallel Portuguese translation: *O cometa do ano de 1577*, intr. e notas do dr. A. Moreira de Sá, Instituto para a Alta Cultura, centro de estudos de psicologia e de história da filosofia, Lisboa: Fernandes, 1950. It is the only composition in verse by Sanchez.

⁶⁴ These two tracts, together with a third entitled *De longitudine et brevitate vitae*, were published posthumously by Sanchez's disciple Raymundus Delassus who attached them to the complete *corpus* of his master's medical tracts: *Francisci Sanchez Doctoris Medici, et in Academia Tolosana Professoris Regij, Opera Medica. His iuncti sunt tractatus quidam philosophici non insubtiles*, Tolosae Tectosagum: apud Petrum Bosc, 1636. Another seventeenth-century edition was published (*Francisci Sanchez Doctoris Medici, et in Academia Tolosana Professoris Regij Tractatus Philosophici*, Roterdami: Apud Arnoldum Leers, 1649), and the work was republished with parallel Portuguese translation by A. Moreira de Sá in 1955 (*Tratados*, cit.). They relate to Sanchez's lectures on philosophy and are apparently a comment on Aristotle's tracts belonging to *Parva naturalia* (*De divinatione per somnum*, *De longaevitae et brevitate vitae*, the apocryphal *Physiognomicon* which Sanchez correctly recognizes as such, at least certainly the second part), but their intention is rather to wage a fierce polemic against superstition and credulity.

of his illness: *nihil scitur*; a diagnosis which stands as a radical antidote both to deceitful pseudo-science and to any illusion about a real one.

Sanchez claims to make this proposition his banner, his “battle colour,”⁶⁵ and declares that he does not intend to have “troops”⁶⁶ of words on parade marching under it just for show, as is the custom with “rhetoricians and dialecticians,” but to fight a real war with the real weapons of sharp logic.⁶⁷ *Quod nihil scitur* is perhaps the most brilliant (as well as the least studied) of the great works of Renaissance sceptical philosophy from an argumentative viewpoint, so much so that R. Popkin states: “Sanchez’s *Quod nihil scitur* almost reads like a twentieth-century text of analytic philosophy.”⁶⁸ Its argumentative procedure starts with the observation that the errors and false doctrines of all philosophers and *logici* whose texts he consulted regarding science justify complete doubt about any learning and doctrine and substantiate the claim that *nihil scitur*, a proposition which enjoys the peculiar status of being confirmed even by its negation. However, the systematic demonstration of this *vexillum* (“battle colour”) proposition is attained by showing the impossibility of disproving it by a plausible definition of science.

In other words, the proposition *nihil scitur* can be given a meaning only if “scitur” – or “scientia” – has one; therefore, the *vexillum* proposition requires that some definition of science be made explicit (and its truth depends on this definition). Therefore, to demonstrate the proposition it is necessary to be certain that no definition of science exists which can falsify it, because it is evident that, even if only definitions that confirm it are found, the existence of another capable of falsifying it cannot, in principle, be ruled out.

To overcome this difficulty, Sanchez proceeds as follows. First he considers Aristotle’s definition of science (“*habitus per demonstrationem acquisitus*”) as the one epitomizing all those hitherto proposed by the *dogmatici* (namely, by those philosophers

⁶⁵ TNK, p. 173. “Haec mihi vexillum propositio sit, haec sequenda venit, Nihil scitur” (QNS, p. 1).

⁶⁶ “Quid autem Rhetorica et Poëtica non pervertunt? Quibus non abutuntur modis? Atque hi omnes loquacitatem tantum exercent inutilem, sed ad libitum, soluteque, ut dicunt. At Dialectica seu Logica eandem etiam, sed non eodem modo: verba enim in ordinem disponit, in aciem parat, prohibetque disparata pugnare, sed coniunctim: dat leges: coërcet, permittit, cogit. Denique illa similes sunt eius qui turmas et castra effingunt in publicis ludis et spectaculis, in quibus plus decoris quam roboris desideratur: Hae contra eis qui ad Martem serio se comparant, quibus plus virium quam pulchritudinis inesse convenit. Omnibus autem verba milites sunt et obiectum” (QNS, p. 3). Cf. Hume: “Admist all this bustle ‘tis not reason, which carries the prize, but eloquence; ... The victory is not gained by men at arms, who manage the pike and the sword; but by the trumpeters, drummers, and musicians of the army (*A Treatise of Human Nature*, Introduction, *cit.*, p. xviii).

⁶⁷ V. *supra* n. 5.

⁶⁸ R. H. Popkin, *op. cit.*, p. 41. Cf. *supra* n. 18.

who believed in the existence of science) and he demonstrates it to be false.⁶⁹ This implies that he has demonstrated only that all known and false definitions of science confirm the proposition “*nihil scitur*”; therefore, in order to allow for the whole gamut of possible definitions, he also has to consider the true definition (if it exists); and the only person whose task it can be to formulate the true one (or the one that is assumed to be such) is no other than Sanchez himself.⁷⁰

Now it is evident that the truth of the new definition of science Sanchez proposes – “*rei perfecta cognitio*” – requires a new strategy, utterly different from that adopted against Aristotle’s false definition. Therefore, of course, the fact that the new definition fails to falsify the *vexillum propositio* (i.e. that *nihil scitur*) can no longer be demonstrated by refuting the new definition, given that this is assumed to be true. What Sanchez can do is to demonstrate that it is impossible for humankind to apply it, since it is beyond its capabilities. To that end he proceeds considering the three concepts inherent in it: *res scienda, cognitio, perfectum*.

As for Aristotle’s definition, he raises two kinds of objections: the former merely logical, the latter epistemological. Firstly he highlights the obvious self-contradiction involved in asserting that all knowledge may be “*per demonstrationem*” and that every term can be defined; secondly, he underlines the destructive consequences of a lack of “*first principles*” which serve as premises for a demonstrative or syllogistic science.

I also find remarkably foolish the additional claim made by some, namely that ‘demonstration draws conclusions and makes proofs, with inevitability and on the basis of eternal and inviolable principles’ – whereas perhaps none such exist; or if any do exist, they are entirely unknown, as such, to us men, who are in highest degree subject to decay in the first place, and extremely vulnerable in a very short span of time.⁷¹

⁶⁹ That the criticism against the *dogmatici*’s definition is limited to Aristotle’s definition of science entails, despite everything, a positive judgement on the Greek philosopher: “*Hunc enim (ut qui acutissimus fuit Naturae scrutator, quemque ut plurimum sequitur Philosophorum maior turba) pro omnibus aliis examinasse sufficiat: ne, si contra omnes pugnandum esset, in infinitum abiret opus, Naturamque item aliorum more dimitteremus*” (QNS, p. 4). Already in his epistle to the reader, he recognised that: “*Herculè Aristotelem inter acutissimos Naturae scrutatores plurimum valere iudico; unumque esse praecipuum ex mirabilibus humanae infirmitatis ingeniis*” (TNK, pp. 169–170).

⁷⁰ “*Huc usque enim aliorum ignorantiam, iuxta scientiae definitionem, cognitionemque subinde ostendi: nunc meam proferam, ne solus ego scire aliquid videar. Ex quo videre poteris quam inscientes scimus*” (QNS, p. 23).

⁷¹ TNK, p. 188. QNS, p. 13: “*Vnde & illud mihi stultum admodum videtur quod quidam astruunt, Demonstrationem ex aeternis & inuiolabilibus necessariò concludere & cogere: cùm forsán talia nulla sint, atque si quae sint, nobis omnino incognita ut talia sunt, qui tum maximè corruptibiles, paruoque admodum tempore violabiles multum simus.*”

Sanchez challenges the Aristotelian advocates of a syllogistic science to prove the existence of a “common science” capable of accounting for the principles of particular sciences.⁷² For his part, he returns many times and in different contexts to the paradoxical infinite regress, inevitably and more or less visibly involved in the attempts to reduce things to their principles through the mediation of categories.⁷³ He insists on the morally harmful nature of a “science of syllogisms” (*sylogistica scientia*), useful only for deceiving and quarrelling,⁷⁴ and concludes with a profession of nominalism.

But ‘species’ either are nothing, or (failing that) they are a kind of image-making. Individuals alone exist, and can be perceived; it is only of individuals that knowledge can be possessed, and only from individuals that it can be sought. If this is not so, show me where those ‘universals’ you speak of occur in nature; you will admit that they occur in the particulars themselves. Yet in those particulars I cannot see anything that is ‘universal’; everything in them is particular.⁷⁵

While Sanchez decidedly affirms, like Montaigne, his empiricist stance on several occasions,⁷⁶ he also polemically insists on the unity of the

⁷² “Nego tibi artis tuae principia: proba. Non est arguendum contra negantes principia, inquis. Nescis probare. Ignarus es, non sciens. At expectat ad superiorem seu communem scientiam aliarum probare principia. ... Sed quid communis illa scientia est? Mirum quomodo sibi officia partiantur artifices isti, ... sic tota vita litigant de subiecto scientiae cuiusque, nec est qui hanc litem (potius ignorantiam) dirimat. Hinc si quis de astris in Physica agat, aut in quantum Physicus, aut in quantum Astrologus, inquirunt, hoc facit: et alius, hoc ab Arithmetico mutuatur, sed et alius a Mathematico furatur illud. Quid hoc? An non puerorum fabulae?” (QNS, p. 25).

⁷³ “De verborum hac serie (Praedicamenta vocant) plura disputant, de ordine, de numero, de capite, de differentia, de proprietatibus, de reductione omnium rerum ad illa, haec reducunt ad rectam lineam, illa ad latus: Haec per se, illa ratione sui contrarij: Haec communia sunt duobus, illa male reducuntur ad illud: Hae non habent ad quod reducuntur. Ergo vel si sit coelum, si non obtinuit locum in praedicamento, iam nihil est. Quid dicam? In infinitas hinc trahuntur nugas” (QNS, p. 5).

⁷⁴ “Denique apud hos syllogizantes ille doctior est, qui melius garrit: ille verum protulit, qui decipulam optimè construendo, socium, aut adversarium vicit, eoque redegit, ut aut concederet infallibiles quas vocant consequentias: (quas negare esset ridiculum, et impium: plenae tamen sunt rimis, laqueisque, quos qui non videt, ab eis captus cogitur dare manus, concederéque quod alter volebat, falsum licèt) vel cum captum se videat, nec tamen dolum percipiat, ferè obmutescat. Hanc vocant scientificam syllogismorum doctrinam: qua nil ad scientias perniciosius” (QNS, p. 86).

⁷⁵ TNK, p. 213. V. *supra* n. 59.

⁷⁶ QNS, p. 2 (“Nec hominem intelligis totum, qui magnum quid est, crassum et sensu perceptibile: et in tam minima dividis, quae sensum effugiunt *certissimum omnium iudicem*, ratione indaganda fallaci et obscura!”); *ibid.* pp. 40–41 (“Hinc eorum quae in mari, quae in intima terra, quae in supremo aëre, quae denique in supremis corporibus fiunt et sunt, maxima dubitatio. Nec sine ratione, *omnis enim a sensu cognitio est*”); *ibid.*

“act”⁷⁷ of knowledge and denies that mere “impressions” or “images” upon the senses result in a “perception.”

For we notice that *those who fix their minds constantly on something* that presents itself to the senses still do not perceive anything, even though at that moment images are being impressed upon both eyes and ears.⁷⁸

For Sanchez too, as for Montaigne, the senses function merely as a means through which “impressions” are “presented” to the mind,⁷⁹ acting as an external medium, such as air does for sight.

[Knowledge] is divided into two sorts: one of these is external, and comes about through the senses (hence it is called ‘sensory knowledge’); the other is internal, and originates in the mind alone, but is just as fully ‘knowledge’. These matters have to be viewed in a different light. The human being, who is the ‘cognitive’ subject, is one thing. In all cases, ‘cognition’ (understanding) is one. For it is the same mind that ‘cognises’ external and internal objects. *The senses ‘cognise’ nothing, inasmuch as they make no judgment; they merely absorb impressions, so that they may present them to the mind which is to perform the act of cognition, just as the air does not see colours of light, although it absorbs them so that they may be presented to the sight.*⁸⁰

p. 51 (“Cognitio omnis a sensu trahitur. Ultra hanc, omnia confusio, dubitatio, perplexitas, divinatio: nil certum. Sensus solum exteriora videt: non cognoscit”); *ibid.* p. 52 (“Quae autem his [sensibus] magis propinqua, nobis magis cognita: non alia ratione, quam quia a sensu melior dependet cognitio nostra”); *ibid.* p. 58 (“Certissima omnium cognitio est, quae per sensus fit”); *ibid.* p. 59 (“Mens, de rerum substantia per fallaces sensus informatur, aut alias decipitur”). Cf. Montaigne, *op. cit.*, L. II, ch. 12, in particular pp. 587–588: “Or toute cognoissance s’achemine en nous par les sens: ce sont nos maistres ... Les sens sont le commencement et la fin de l’humaine cognoissance.”

⁷⁷ “Res cognita ..., cognoscens ..., cognitio ipsa, quae *actus* est huius in illam” (QNS, p. 53).

⁷⁸ TNK, p. 191. Thomson’s English translation is partially wrong and is modified in the italicized section (“those who form a fixed opinion concerning anything”). QNS, p. 15: “Videmus namque eos *qui aliquid fixè imaginantur*, quicquid se sensibus offerat, nil tamen sentire, quamvis tunc et oculis et auribus spectra imprimantur.”

⁷⁹ QNS, p. 51: “Sensus solum exteriora videt: nec cognoscit. Oculum nunc sensum voco. Mens à sensu accepta considerat. Si deceptus fuit, illa quoque: sin minùs, quid assequitur?”. The same consideration in Montaigne: “Les sectes qui combattent la science de l’homme, elles la combattent principalement par l’incertitude et foiblesse de nos sens: car, puis que toute cognoissance vient en nous par leur entremise et moyen, s’ils faillent au raport qu’ils nous font, s’ils corrompent ou alterent ce qu’ils nous charrient du dehors, si la lumiere qui par eux s’ecoule en nostre ame, est obscurcie au passage, nous n’avons plus que tenir” (Montaigne, *op. cit.*, L. II, ch. 12, pp. 590–591). On the deceptions of the senses, QNS, pp. 60 ff.

⁸⁰ TNK, p. 241, italics mine. QNS, pp. 55–56: “Hanc duplicem faciunt. Aliam externam, quae per sensus fit: sensualem subinde vocant. Aliam internam, quae à mente sola, sed nihil minùs. Aliter haec pensanda sunt. Vnum cognoscens homo est. Vna cognitio in omnibus his. Eadem enim mens est quae externa, et interna cognoscit. Sensus nil cognoscit: nil iudicat: solum excipit quae cogniturae menti offerat. Quemadmodum aër non colores, non

This consideration constitutes one of the crucial points of Sanchez's epistemological argument expanded to refute the second definition of science (the true one: "rei perfecta cognitio"). As we have seen above, the argument consists in revealing the structural impossibility for human beings of attaining the knowledge demanded by a true definition of science and focuses on the following four main points: first, the status of the *res sciendae*, i.e. the requirements that objects need to possess in order to be suitable to science (understood as "perfect knowledge"); second, the status of natural (i.e. "external") things within real human experience; third, a complete survey of all things ("external and internal") that are the objects of cognition; fourth, a comparison between "external" and "internal" things.

As for the status of *res sciendae*, it is determined by an implicit classical (Platonic) assumption equating the epistemological requirements of objects with their ontological ones. Thus the objects of "perfect understanding" (*perfecta cognitio*) must be only those things "more perfect, more endowed with Being, and less complex," "*perfectiora, magis entia, simpliciora.*"⁸¹ As was emphasized above, the fact that we know what the required characteristics of objects of "science" are – namely perfection as ontological completeness and immutability, being as absolute existence, simplicity as irreducibility – not only yields no knowledge of things capable of fulfilling these requirements, but demonstrates that nothing is known – or ever will be –, because all things that present themselves to the mind are devoid of those characteristics.

Another implicit assumption, essential for correctly interpreting Sanchez's theorem *quod nihil scitur* – an assumption no less interesting and, perhaps, important for the future development of epistemology –, is the equation of knowing (*scire*) with understanding (*intelligere, comprehendere*), so that in almost all occurrences (as the English translation testifies) the real meaning of *scire* is *intelligere*. Thus, especially in the light of the second definition, *nihil scitur* means that there is no perfect understanding of anything (nothing is perfectly understood).⁸² Sanchez presupposes that there is no true "act" of knowing without understanding, and, on the strength of this, he takes a stand both against

lucem videt: quamvis hos excipiat visui offerendos." On the "internal media" and "common" qualities (*ibid.* pp. 64–65 ff.) Sanchez follows Aristotle, *De anima* III, 424b–425a.

⁸¹ TNK, p. 238; QNS, p. 52.

⁸² This, taking into account how Sextus Empiricus differentiates Academics from Sceptics ("The adherents of the New Academy, although they affirm that all things are non-apprehensible yet differ from the Sceptics even, as seen probable, in respect of this very statement that all things are non-apprehensible (for they affirm this positively, whereas the Sceptic regards it as possible that some things may be apprehended)", *Pyrr. Hyp.*, I, 226, The Loeb Classical Library ed., vol. I, p. 139), seems to further confirm the *Academic* nature of Sanchez's philosophy; but before pronouncing the final judgement we have yet to consider other fundamental epistemological relationships between understanding (*comprehensio*) and certainty, see *infra*.

Aristotle's doctrine which identifies "scientia" with the possession (*habitus*) of "many things," and against Plato's theory of recollection.

To continue: had they said in their definition of knowledge that it was 'an accumulation of several things in the mind', that might have been a better way of putting it, yet it is not completely true, for knowledge can be knowledge of one thing only, or rather knowledge is only of each individual thing, taken by itself, not of many things at once, just as a single act of seeing relates only to one particular object; for as it is not possible to focus perfectly on two objects at once, so too it is impossible to have complete understanding of two things at once, but only of one after the other.⁸³

In conclusion Sanchez presupposes that *scire* (to know) is the same as *intelligere*, *comprehendere* (to understand)⁸⁴ and claims the simplicity of the act of the mind – "mentis actio simplex"⁸⁵ – as the necessary correlate of the "simplicity" of the object, i.e. the "simplicity" that qualifies the "thing that is to be known" as "perfect," that is, endowed with complete cognitive self-sufficiency and *per se et immediate* knowable (intelligible).

He shares with Montaigne the conviction that the mind cannot relate to things *per se*⁸⁶ and it is this impossibility that determines the insurmountable ignorance of human beings. Proceeding to the second of the four points listed above, what in fact characterizes the status of those things that fall within human experience is their lack of cognitive self-sufficiency. Their cognitive dependence on innumerable chains of "connections" and "concatenations," so that "omnia cognoscere oportet ad unius perfectam cognitionem,"⁸⁷ has been already elucidated. Moreover, Sanchez adopts the epistemological model according to which what presents itself to the mind in the perception of "external things" is only the "species" of their qualities. These "species" depend on the senses, as their existence for the

⁸³ TNK, p. 190. QNS, pp. 14–15: "Pergo. Si dixissent, plurium rerum congeriem in mente, fortasse melius: non tamen omnino verum. Vnius enim rei solum scientia esse potest. Imò unius cuiusque rei per se solùm est scientia, nec plurium simul: quemadmodum et unius solùm cuiusque obiecti visio una: nec enim duo simul licet perfectè respicere, sic nec duo simul perfectè intelligere, sed aliud post aliud." A critical and incidental remark against Plato's *Meno* *ibid.* p. 17, where Sanchez refers to his own "tractatus de Anima" for a more complete criticism.

⁸⁴ See, for example, QNS, p. 22 ("Deinde quid scientia aliud est, quàm intellectus rei? tunc enim scire aliquid dicimus, cum id intelligimus") and p. 24 ("Sed nescio quid sit cognitio, defini mihi. Dicerem rei comprehensionem, perspectionem, intellectionem, et si quid aliud est, quod idem significet").

⁸⁵ *Ibid.* p. 16.

⁸⁶ "Nous n'avons aucune communication à l'estre, par ce que toute humaine nature est toujours au milieu entre le naistre et le mourir, ne baillant de soy qu'une obscure apparence et ombre, et une incertaine et debile opinion" (Montaigne, *op. cit.*, II, 12, p. 601).

⁸⁷ V. *supra* n. 53.

mind is subordinate to the existence of a “sense organ apt to receive” them. They are connected only in an accidental way to real things since they are “*simulacra accidentium*.” Finally, they are totally unsuited and opaque to the mind.

Colour and sound and heat cannot be presented to the mind by themselves, so that the mind may ‘cognise’ (understand) them, unless they imprint an image of themselves (let us for the moment assume that sensory perception occurs through the reception of images) on an organ adapted to receive that image; *and the same image, or another like it, is presented to the mind so that it can ‘cognise’ it, or (through it) the object of which it is an image.*⁸⁸

However, far from being transparent objects (*perfectiora, magis entia, simpliciora*) perfectly adapted to the “*actio simplex*” of the mind, real things arrive in the mind through the senses – i.e. as *imagines, simulacra, spectra, species* – and, therefore, they are (as for Montaigne) the basis for a “judgement” which can never attain certainty.

it [the mind] makes judgments about things by means of images. Can its judgment then be correct? That would be a reasonable inference, if from our senses we received images of all the things we wish to know. But in fact it is the opposite situation: we have no images of particular things in themselves, only of their ‘accidents’; and these, as we are told, contribute nothing to the essence of a thing, which is the source of true knowledge; and in fact ‘accidents’ are the most commonplace of all existents. We have to use them in order to make inferences about everything else.⁸⁹

All that appears to the mind with regard to “external things” is what the senses present to it, i.e., “outward appearances,” however, these are something the mind does not “know,” that is, understand. There is a kind of Platonic attitude in Sanchez when he describes how irreducibly unfamiliar the mind finds them and how it is puzzled by them:

⁸⁸ “Color sonus, calor, non possunt menti per se offerri, ut ea cognoscat, nisi sui speciem (per receptionem specierum nunc sensationem fieri recipiamus) organo ei recipiendae apto imprimatur, *quae eadem, vel sibi similis alia menti offertur, ut eam cognoscat, aut rem, cuius illa est species, per illam*” (QNS, p. 56, italics mine). The italicized text in the English translation could perhaps be more faithfully translated as follows: “...*species*, that to the mind offers itself as it is, or as another similar to itself, in order that it [=the mind] may know itself [*eam* = the species] or, by it, the thing of which it is the species.”

⁸⁹ TNK, p. 237. QNS, p. 52: “Per simulacra de rebus iudicat. An ergo rectum potest esse iudicium? Tolerabile id esset, si omnium rerum, quas scire cupimus, simulacra à sensu haberemus. Nunc autem contrà, praecipuarum rerum nulla habemus. Solùm accidentium, quae ad rei essentiam, ut dicunt, nihil conferunt: à qua vera scientia est: vilissimaque sunt omnium entium. Ab his de aliis omnibus coniectari oportet.”

Let us come to our conclusion. All understanding is derived from the senses, and beyond this kind of understanding, all is confusion, doubt, perplexity, guesswork; nothing is certain.

The sense perceives only the outward appearance of things, and does not attain understanding (I am for the moment applying the word ‘sense’ to the eye). It is the mind that receives images from the sense, and considers them. If the sense was deceived, so is the mind; but if not, what follows next? The mind regards only the images of things, which the eye has taken in; it studies them from this side and from that, and turns them about, putting the questions ‘What is this?’ and ‘Whence comes its nature?’ and ‘Why’ – and no more than this, for it too sees nothing that is certain.⁹⁰

The idea of a nature jeering at human beings emerges again in the fables by Aesop used by Sanchez to illustrate how extraneous and inaccessible sensible things are to the mind. Offering itself to the mind through the senses, nature jeers at human beings just as the fox and the crane duped each other, when they offered each other food that was inaccessible because of the shape of the crockery containing it; or like the grapes painted by Zeuxis fool the birds, and the veil painted by Parrhasius deceived Zeuxis himself.⁹¹ “This is how Nature presents things to our understanding,”⁹² claims Sanchez; he then concludes with a comparison also used by Montaigne: “our intellect is disposed towards the natures of things just as the eye of the night-raven is towards the light of the sun.”⁹³

Having established the insurmountable imperfection (ontological-epistemological) of “external things,” as they offer themselves to the mind, Sanchez makes (and we

⁹⁰ TNK, p. 236. QNS, p. 51: “Concludamus. Cognitionis omnis à sensu trahitur. Ultra hanc, omnia confusio, dubitatio, perplexitas, diuinatio: nil certum. Sensus solùm exteriora videt: nec cognoscit. Oculum nunc sensum voco. Mens à sensu accepta considerat. Si deceptus fuit, illa quoque: sin minùs, quid assequitur? Imagines rerum tantùm respicit, quas oculus admisit: has hinc inde spectat; versat, inquirendo, *quid hoc? à quo tale? cur?* Et hoc tantùm. Nec enim videt aliquid certi” (italics mine). With these three questions that the mind asks of itself, Sanchez’s enquiry comes to a head, which seems to confute Paganini’s interpretation, according to which, unlike Montaigne, Sanchez does not situate himself “sul terreno di una filosofia in cui il rapporto tra l’oggetto e il soggetto non è più concepito secondo il principio della rassomiglianza o della copia, ma secondo lo schema di una relazione di causa-effetto” (G. Paganini, *Montaigne, Sanchez e la conoscenza attraverso i fenomeni*, cit., p. 77).

⁹¹ QNS, pp. 51–52.

⁹² TNK, p. 237. QNS, p. 52: “Sic nobis natura res obiicit cognoscendas.”

⁹³ “Et hoc dicebat ille [Arist.] alibi: intellectum nostrum ad rerum naturas, sicut nicticoracis oculum ad Solis lumen, se habere” (QNS, p. 52). Cf. Montaigne, *Les Essais*, L. II, ch. 12, cit., p. 552: “La veuë de nostre jugement se rapport à la verité, comme faict l’oeil du chat-huant à la splendeur du Soleil, ainsi que dit Aristote.”

now proceed to our third point) a complete survey of all the things the mind perceives and ends up by dividing them into three categories:

There are three kinds of objects that are cognised by the mind in different ways. Some objects are wholly external, requiring no action on the part of the mind. Others are wholly internal, and some of these are devoid of action by the mind, while others are not wholly devoid of it. Others again are partly external, partly internal. Then again the first class make their presence known through the senses; the second class, in no way through the senses but by themselves directly; the last class, partly through the senses and partly by themselves.⁹⁴

We have just seen that the first class of things, the “external,” are not known *per se* but through the “simulacra” of their accidents, and not immediately, but by the mediation of the senses. Therefore, what the mind immediately knows is their “images” or *spectra*: given their merely accidental link with substances, it is quite impossible to trace them back to their originals. In other words, Sanchez’s first class of “things” includes all things whose ideas will constitute for Locke the ideas of sensation.

The second class of things, the “wholly internal,” is constituted, firstly, by all those things that derive from a discursive or compositional activity of the understanding,⁹⁵ secondly, by the faculties of the mind, like the understanding itself or the will; thirdly, by the passions.⁹⁶ To continue our parallel with Locke, the second subclass of Sanchez’s “internal things” coincides with those things whose ideas constitute Locke’s “ideas of reflection.”

Finally, the third class of things is said to contain

a great many objects that partly reach the understanding by way of the senses and partly come into being by way of the understanding itself.

Take the nature of a dog, or of a magnet. This can by no means be grasped by the senses. Therefore, it is invested with colour, size, and shape by the senses, and

⁹⁴ TNK, pp. 241–242. QNS 56: “Tria tamen sunt quae à mente diversimodè cognoscuntur. Alia omninò externa sunt, absque omni mentis actione. Alia omninò interna, quorum quaedam sine mentis opera sunt. Alia non omninò sine hac. Alia partim externa, partim interna. Deinde, illa se per sensus produnt: ista nullo modo per hos, sed *immediatè per se*. Haec denique partim per hos, partim per se” (italics mine).

⁹⁵ “Talia sunt plurima quae sibi ipse fingit: ut etiam cum pluribus discursibus aliquid novi excogitat, concluditque: et cum intelligit ipse intellectionem suam: et cum coniunctiones, divisiones, comparationes, praedicationes, notionisque in se facit, ad eaque animum advertens cognoscit per se ipsa” (*ibid.*).

⁹⁶ “Omnia interna cum intellectu eadem, quae tamen sine eius opera fiunt, aut sunt: ut voluntas, memoria, appetitus, ira, metus, et reliqua pathemata, et quidquid aliud internum est, quod ab ipso intellectu cognoscitur immediate per se” (*ibid.*).

is thus presented by them to the mind. The mind strips it of these ‘accidents’, and considers what is left, looking at it from different angles and making comparisons. Finally, as best it can, it constructs out of that, for its own use, a kind of ‘nature’ expressed in general terms.⁹⁷

Ultimately, the third class contains the “nature” of things like “dogs” or “magnets,” namely of “external things.” It is well worth noting the elaboration of the concept of nature (substance) sketched by Sanchez in a few lines. Although he attributes this third kind of things (“natures”) both to the senses and to the understanding, he immediately adds that this means neither that the former can by any manner or means “grasp them,” nor that these are objects of the latter, like other “internal things.” Sanchez does not question the existence of these “things,” therefore this parallel connection is an inescapable choice due to the fact that they cannot be ascribed exclusively to either realm. The senses accomplish their function by presenting to the mind complex images of external things under whose qualities (*accidentia*) “nature” lies hidden. The mind merely “strips” the thing of all its qualities, but, after “considering, examining, comparing” what is left in each different case, all it can do is construct some idea “for its own use.” Of course, the way the mind gets an idea of the nature of things shows that it has no real idea of nature, so much so that it acts in the same way as when it is “forced” to “allow” something it does not understand.⁹⁸

Once again there is an evident similarity with Locke, namely, between Sanchez’s notion of “nature” as “what is left” after stripping the external thing of its qualities and Locke’s concept of substance.⁹⁹

Perhaps the considerations Sanchez makes in comparing the first two classes of things, i.e. “external” and “internal” ones (and here we come to the last of our four points), will prove more productive. These indeed contribute to opening the way for that new epistemological approach focused upon the perceptual event (“*quae in nobis aut sunt aut fiunt*”), which will be shared and developed in different ways by the so-called ideistic theories from Descartes to Hume.

⁹⁷TNK, pp. 242–243. “Sunt denique plurima quae partim per sensum ad eum [intellectum] deveniunt: partim ab eo fiunt. Canis, magnetis natura nullo modo sensu capi potest. Vestita ergo colore, magnitudine, figura, per sensus ad animum defertur. Hic eam illis spoliatur accidentibus. Quod reliquum est considerat, versat, confert: denique naturam quandam sibi fingit communem, ut potest” (QNS, pp. 56–57). Indeed Sanchez does not say that the senses “invest the nature [of things] with colour, size, and shape,” but only that they present it to the mind “invested with colour, size, and shape.”

⁹⁸QNS, p. 57.

⁹⁹“I confess there is another idea, which would be of general use for mankind to have, as it is of general talk, as if they had it; and that is the idea of substance, which we neither have, nor can have, by sensation or reflection” (J. Locke, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, I, IV, 18, ed. P.H. Nidditch, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975, p. 95).

The basic driving force of Sanchez's stance is his conception of "internal things" as mere data constituting the perceptual event, like will, thought or passion. As such, "internal things" are something the mind is absolutely sure to be possessed of and are akin to what Descartes will call "ideas." These, Descartes will say, if "[they] are considered only in themselves, and are not referred to any object beyond them, ... cannot, properly speaking, be false."¹⁰⁰ Like Descartes' ideas, Sanchez' internal things reveal themselves to be absolutely immune to doubt.

For I am more sure that I possess both inclination and will, and that I am at one moment contemplating this idea, at another moment shunning and abominating that idea, than I am that I can see a temple, or Socrates.

I have said that we are certain about the real existence of those things that either exist, or else originate, within ourselves [*quae in nobis aut sunt aut fiunt*].¹⁰¹

What Sanchez outlines here in a very concise form is the starting point for that general modern anti-scholastic epistemological approach characterized by the claim that a level of perfectly certain objects exists represented by "internal things," or "ideas." Of course, Sanchez's development follows a sceptical direction, for the certainty which accompanies internal things consists only in it being impossible to doubt willing, thinking, having passions, when we will, think, have some passion, but does not involve "comprehending" or "grasping" the thing.

Of this I am sure, that I am at this moment thinking of the words I am writing, and that I wish to write them, and long for them both to be true and to win your approval, yet do not set too much store by this last; when I try to reflect on what this thinking is, and this wishing, and this longing, and this indifference, then, my thinking quite fails me, my wishing is frustrated, and my yearning grows ever greater, while my concern increases also. I see nothing that I could seek to lay hold on, or might possibly grasp.¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ "Jam quod ad ideas attinet, si solae in se spectentur nec ad aliud quid illas referam, falsa proprie esse non possunt" (*Meditatio Tertia*, in *Œuvres de Descartes*, pub. par Ch. Adam et P. Tannery, nouv. prés., en co-édition avec le C. N. R. S., Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1964-1974, vol. VII, p. 37).

¹⁰¹ "Certior enim sum, me et appetitum habere, et voluntatem: et nunc hoc cogitare, modo illud fugere, detestari, quam templum, aut Socratem videre. *Dixi, de his quae in nobis aut sunt, aut fiunt, nos esse certos quod in re sint*" (QNS, p. 58). See Descartes's definition of "cogitationes": "Cogitationis nomine, intelligo illa omnia quae nobis consciis in nobis fiunt quatenus in nobis conscientia est" (*Principia Philosophiae*, I, 9, ed. cit., vol. VIII, p. 7). See also Locke's literal translation of the expression: "reflecting also on *what passes within it self*" (*Essay, cit.*, II, 21, p. 233).

¹⁰² TNK, p. 243. QNS, p. 57: "Certus quidem sum, me nunc haec, quae scribo, cogitare, velle scribere, et optare ut vera sint, et ut à te approbarentur: non tamen hoc nimis curare: sed cùm considerare nitor, quid sit haec cogitatio, hoc velle, hoc optare, hoc non curare, sanè deficit cogitatio, frustratur voluntas, increscit desiderium, augetur cura. Nil video, quod captare, aut apprehendere possim."

It was the task of the most important currents in modern epistemology to translate Sanchez's epistemological approach into an adequate and persuasive strategy able to solve the impasse deriving from the impossibility of "grasping" (i.e. comprehending) something we are "sure" (i.e. certain) of.

Sanchez resorts to the bright and beautiful metaphor of the invisibility of light to elucidate the cognitive limit of the "internal things," which consists in the impossibility of "*captare, aut apprehendere*" anything, that is, in the lack (or elusive nature) of the object (in other words, of the mind itself as thinking, willing and having passions).

How unhappy our situation is! We are blind in the midst of light. I have often reflected about light, but have always given up without thinking it through or understanding or comprehending it. It is the same if you should reflect on the will and the intellect and other objects that are not perceived by means of the senses.¹⁰³

On the contrary, the "external things," though they lack any certainty regarding their existence, cannot be perceived without a "comprehension" (a "grasping") of the "object" by means of the "shape" or the "image" the senses provide of it.

And indeed the kind of understanding (*cognitio*) that has to do with inward ideas, and does not depend on the senses, is in this respect inferior to the kind that is concerned with the external objects and operates through the senses; for in the latter kind the understanding has something it can grasp, namely the shape of a man or a rock or a tree, which it has derived from the senses – and, as it believes, it comprehends the man by means of his image. But in the former kind, which has to do with inward notions, the understanding finds nothing which it can grasp, and dashes this way and that, groping like a blind man to find if it can lay hold on anything: and no more than this. Per contra, however, the understanding of external objects acquired by means of the senses, is outdone in certainty by the kind of understanding that is drawn from internal objects that either exist, or originate, within ourselves.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³ TNK, p. 243. QNS, p. 57: "Misera est conditio nostra. In media luce coecutimus, saepe lucem cogitavi, semper incogitatum, incognitum, incomprehensibilem reliqui. Idem est, si voluntatem, intellectum, aliaque, quae sensibus non percipiuntur, contempleris."

¹⁰⁴ TNK, pp. 243–244. D. F. S. Thomson takes the liberty of using the term "idea," which does not occur in the Latin text: "Et quidem in hoc superatur cognitio, quae sine sensu de internis fit, ab ea, quae de externis per sensus habetur: in hac enim habet intellectus quid captet, hominis scilicet, lapidis, arborisque figuram, quam à sensu hausit: videturque sibi hominem comprehendere per eius imaginem. In illa verò, quae de internis sit, nil invenit quod comprehendere possit: discurritque hinc, inde, more coeci palpans, si quid tenere queat. Et id tantùm. Contrà autem certitudine vincitur cognitio, quae de externis per sensus habetur, ab ea, quae his, quae aut in nobis sunt, aut à nobis fiunt, trahitur" (QNS, pp. 57–58).

As a consequence, a sceptical question mark hangs over the modern epistemological approach inaugurated by Sanchez – an indeterminacy principle, so to speak – wherewith “comprehension” and “certainty” exclude each other. The former refers to the understanding of external things only, the latter exclusively to the understanding of inner ones. On the contrary, Descartes would subsequently believe that he had found the “substances” in the domain of what Sanchez called “internal things,” and Locke would try to establish a perfect epistemological symmetry between “ideas of sensation” – “external things” – and “ideas of reflection” (“internal things”).¹⁰⁵ These two great seventeenth-century philosophers’ doctrines indeed sound like two different answers to the sceptical impasse.

The epistemological impasse that is structural and insurmountable in Sanchez, and by which human knowledge is doomed to an irremediable crepuscular status, seems more pre-Pascalian than Academic. This status prevents us from defining Sanchez’ scepticism as nihilist – because of the acknowledgement of some knowledge, “imperfect” though it may be due to the lack of either certainty or comprehension. It also prevents us from taking the *vexillum* proposition in a dogmatic sense (in spite of its similarity with Academic scepticism),¹⁰⁶ because of the perpetual instability it produces in the mind, alternately inferring its being true from being false, and its being false from being true and so on. From this point of view the proposition *nihil scitur* constitutes, as it were, the epicentre of the instability and unclearness that no human knowledge can escape and which results in the perpetual unrest of the soul.

Human soul never is at rest, goes to heaven, cross the heavens, flies beyond them, runs through the empty space, returns again, everything it agitates, nowhere it reposes, not content with things it sees, which it does not know even the least of, it invents new ones, and thinks up; and if once accepted some error, it is surprising how far it carries on, for given one absurdity, a great deal of them follow, indeed infinite.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵ *Essay, cit.*, II, 23, 5, pp. 297–298.

¹⁰⁶ *V. supra* n. 81.

¹⁰⁷ “Humanus animus nusquam consistit, ascendit in caelum, permeat coelos, ultra eosdem volitat, discurret per inane, rursus remeat, omnia exagitat, nullibi quiescit, non contentus iis quae videt, quorum nec minimum cognoscit, nova excogitat, fingitque; atque ubi semel errori alicui adhaeserit, mirum quousque procedat, dato enim uno absurdo, plurima, imo infinita sequuntur” (*De divinatione, cit.*, pp. 206–208).

8. MONTAIGNE AND PLUTARCH: A SCEPTICISM THAT CONQUERS THE MIND

Nicola Panichi

Università degli Studi di Urbino, Italy

Describing the Passage: "I Must Adapt This Account to Passing Hour"

The breath-taking strength of Montaigne's scepticism – on which whole generations of scholars¹ have practised – is based on the opposition between human mind and divine mind. This opposition, which is a classical revival with strong

¹ I point out at least: R. H. Popkin, *History of Scepticism from Erasmus to Descartes*, Assen: Van Gorcum Wijsgerige Teksten en Studies; New York: Harper, 1968; *The History of Scepticism from Erasmus to Spinoza*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1979; M. Baraz, *L'être et la connaissance chez Montaigne*, Paris: José Corti, 1968; F. Gray, "Montaigne's Pyrrhonism", in R. la Charité, ed., *Mélanges Frame, O un amy! Essays on Montaigne*, ed. by, Lexington: French Forum, 1977, pp. 119–136; J. Barnes, *The Toils of Scepticism. Ancient Texts and Modern Interpretations*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990; E. Limbrick, "Montaigne et le spectre du pyrrhonisme au XVII^e siècle", in Cl. Blum, ed., *Montaigne, Penseur et philosophe (1588–1988)*, Paris: Champion, 1990, pp. 143–156; E. Limbrick, "Doute sceptique: certitude religieuse", in Plures, *Les mélanges à la mémoire d'Enzo Giudici*, Acta Universitatis Lodziensis, "Folia litteraria", 26, 1989, *Romanica* (Lodz 1990), pp. 35–54; S. Farquhar, "Les tactiques du scepticisme dans l'Apologie de Raymond Sebond", *BSAM* 23–24 (1991), pp. 19–44; A.-J. Voelke, "Soigner par le logos: la thérapie de Sextus Empiricus", in J. Voelke, ed., *Le Scepticisme antique. Perspectives historiques et systématiques*, "Cahiers de la Revue de Théologie et de Philosophie" 15 (1990), pp. 181–194; G. Paganini, *Scepti moderna. Interpretazioni dello scetticismo da Charron a Hume*, Cosenza: Busento, 1991; M. Conche, *Montaigne et la philosophie*, Mégare, 1992 (Paris: PUF, 1998); J. Ch. Laursen, *The Politics of Scepticism in the Ancients, Montaigne, Hume, and Kant*, Leiden, New York and Köln: E. J. Brill, 1992; K. M. A. Screech, *Montaigne et la mélancolie*, Paris: PUF, 1992; F. Cossutta, *Le Scepticisme*, Paris: PUF, 1994; R. J. Hankinson, *The Sceptics*, Routledge: London, 1995; I. Maclean, *Montaigne philosophe*, Paris: PUF, 1996; F. Brahami, *Le scepticisme de Montaigne*, Paris: PUF, 1997; F. Brahami, *Le Travail du scepticisme: Montaigne, Bayle, Hume*, Paris: PUF, 2001; J. Miernowski, *L'ontologie de la contradiction sceptique. Pour l'étude de la métaphysique des Essais*, Paris: Champion, 1998; A. Tournon, *La glose et l'essai*, Lyon: PUL, 1984, Paris: Champion, 2000 (second edition); A. Tournon, "L'argumentation pyrrhonienne. Structures d'essai dans le chapitre Des boiteux", *Cahiers Textuel* 2 (1986), 34/44, *Montaigne, Les derniers Essais*, pp. 73–85; A. Tournon, *Images du pyrrhonisme selon*

sceptical connotations, will interact and converge with all other resolves in the *Essays*.²

The *Apology*, in particular, ends on the dichotomy between divine being/mind (*immota mens*) and human being/mind (*mota mens*). As has been pointed out, the last pages of the *Apology* are in fact a rewriting of Plutarch's long passage taken from the booklet *De E apud Delphos*, read by Montaigne in Amyot's translation.³ The main thesis is that God has no mutation, declination, time, whereas man is, *intus et in cute*, mutation, declination, time. And it is for

quelques écrivains de la Renaissance, Paris: CNRS, 1987, pp. 27–37; E. Faye, *Philosophie et perfection de l'homme*, Paris: Vrin, 1998; S. Giocanti, "Histoire du fidéisme, histoire du scepticisme?" , *Revue de synthèse* 119: 2–3 (1998), pp. 193–210; S. Giocanti, *Penser l'irrésolution: Montaigne, Pascal, La Mothe le Vayer. Trois itinéraires sceptiques*, Paris: Champion, 2001; Th. Gontier, "Charron face à Montaigne. Stratégies du scepticisme", in M.-L. Demonet, ed., *Montaigne et la question de l'homme*, Paris: PUF, 1999, pp. 103–143; P.-F. Moreau, ed., *Le scepticisme au XVI^e et au XVII^e siècle*, Paris: A. Michel, 2001; G. Paganini, ed., *The Return of Scepticism, From Hobbes and Descartes to Bayle*, Dordrecht, Boston and London: Kluwer Academic, 2003; J. R. Maia Neto and R. H. Popkin, eds., *Scepticism in Renaissance and Post- Renaissance Thought*, New York: Amherst, 2004; V. Carraud and J.-L. Marion, eds., *Montaigne: scepticisme, métaphysique, théologie*, Paris: PUF, 2004; M.-L. Demonet and A. Legros, eds., *L'écriture du scepticisme chez Montaigne*, Genève: Droz, 2004.

² All quotations of the *Essays* are taken from M. de Montaigne, *The Complete Essays*, translated and edited with an Introduction and Notes by M. A. Screech, London: Penguin, 2003. See also the French editions by Pierre Villey, Paris: PUF, 1965 [Quadrige 1988] and by André Tournon, Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1998, 3 vols.

³ *Que signifioit ce mot E'i, qui estoit engravé sur les portes du temple d'Apollo en la ville de Delphes*, in *Les oeuvres morales & meslees de Plutarque, translatees du Grec en François par Messire Jacques Amyot, à present Evesque d'Auxerre, Conseiller du Roy en son privé Conseil & grand Aumosnier de France*, à Paris, de l'Imprimerie de Vascosan 1572, avec Privilège du Roy, XII, ff. 356–357A–E (anastatic reprint with *Introduction* by M. A. Screech, Mouton, Johnson Reprints Corporation, 1971). All Plutarch's quotations are taken from this edition. The emphasis is mine. Plutarch's passage taken from *De E apud Delphos*, in Amyot's translation, is also given in the appendix to, *Edition Municipale*, edited by Pierre Villey, pp. 275–276. See also the remarks by Isabelle Konstantinovic, *Montaigne et Plutarque*, Genève: Droz, 1989, p. 369. In Montaigne's eyes, Amyot has the great merit "d'avoir sçeu trier et choisir un livre si digne et si à propos pour en faire present à son pays. Nous autres ignorans estions perdus, si ce livre ne nous eust relevez du bourbier: sa mercy, nous osons à cett'heure et parler et escrire: les dames en regentent les maistres d'escoles; c'est nostre breviaire" (II, 4, 363–364A). "Most moral Plutarch," as Guazzo in *Dialoghi piacevoli* defined him, is for Montaigne "un philosophe qui nous apprend la vertu" (II, 32, 726A), "juge des actions humaines" (II, 2, 346A); "c'est mon homme" (II, 10, 416A) and "universal" (III, 5, 875B). See: R. Aulotte, *Amyot et Plutarque. La tradition des Moralia au XVI^e siècle*, Genève: Droz, 1965. On the meaning of

this reason that “We have no communication with Being” (Plutarch’s passage, in the faithful translation by Amyot, states: “...nous n’avons aucune *participation* au vray estre”).⁴ Change, movement, passage, metamorphosis connote the existing. With the phrase: “once we have gone outside our being we have no commerce (*communication*) with that which is” (I.3. 13C) Montaigne also introduces an oscillation of sense between being and existence. So, we have no communication with being. In his transcript of Plutarch’s passage, with a conscious change in meaning, Montaigne substitutes a key word with another: *participation* with *communication*. With this change in sense, it was believed that Montaigne placed the problem under the sign of hermeneutics more than that of ontology. In the place of the ontological question of being, he places the issue of *communication* with the divine.⁵ So at the centre of the *Essais* we find the issue of language, seen as “our soul’s interpreter” (II.18.757A) (“truchement de nostre ame”: II.18.667A), *sermo imago mentis*, and its dialogic ways that are the dialogic ways of reason. Certainly, if the booklet *De E apud Delphos* does offer the key to the understanding of the concept of sceptical reason, it does confirm all its importance in understanding Montaigne’s scepticism.

Besides the substitution of the term *participation* (the meaning of which I have discussed elsewhere)⁶ with *communication* – that correlates with “we are talking about the way you say it is not what you say” (III.8.1051B) in *De l’art de conférer* – the borrowing from Plutarch’s “Pythic” dialogue reveals even more the Heraclitean dimension of Montaigne’s ontology: reason cannot grasp anything substantial and permanent, everything is either about to be or still isn’t quite, or begins to die before it is born. Time is mobile, a sort of shadow of matter that moves in turn. ‘Then’, ‘before’, ‘has been’, ‘will be’, are words that constitute the admission of non-being, because saying what has not yet been found in being, or what has already ceased to be, is absurd. Reason urges, but then loses, the reality on which the notion of time is based (present, instant, now, *hic et nunc*). At the moment in which reason discovers time, it destroys it: it breaks it up immediately, dividing it into future and past.

Reason talks in premises and consequences, in a before-and-then dualism as if wanting, comments Montaigne, to see time necessarily split in two. The same thing happens to measured nature and to the time that measures it: it has nothing

the letter *E* found on the pronaos of Apollo at Delphi see *Introduzione* by Claudio Moreschini in the edition of *Corpus Plutarchi Moraliū*, Naples: D’Auria, 1997.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 356v H. (“we really have no part nor parcel in Being”: *The E at Delphi*, 392, 18 B, in *Plutarch’s Moralia*, London: Harvard University Press, V, translation by Frank Cole Babbitt, repr. 1957).

⁵ Cf. Sue Farquhar, “Montaigne et la théologie naturelle”, *BSAM* 4 (1996), pp. 17–28.

⁶ Cf. *I vincoli del disinganno*, Firenze: Olschki, 2004, in particular part V, 1. Plutarch, *De E apud Delphos*, 392A–394C.

stable or persistent; everything is born and dies according to its relationship with time. Of God we cannot say, given that He is the only one that is, that has been and that will be: “For those terms are transitions, declensions and vicissitudes in things which cannot endure nor remain in Being” (II.12.682B).⁷ God is not according to a measure of time but according to an immutable and immobile measure not measured by time or subject to change. Only in the perspective of the infinite are the differences cancelled: “Very religious conclusion of a pagan” (II.12.683A: “Conclusion si religieuse d’un homme payen”) comments Montaigne.

The sceptical origin of these propositions is beyond discussion. Much research has contributed to the clarification of Montaigne’s scepticism: Socrates in Plato, Cicero’s *Academica*, Sextus Empiricus’ *Hypotyposes*, Diogenes Laertius’ *Lives of Philosophers*. But another path, less explored, that may contribute towards the definition of Montaigne’s scepticism is in fact Plutarch’s *Moralia*: philosophy, *art de la vie*, as the medicine of the mind. Despite the large number of references to Plutarch in historiography, perhaps the authentic sense has not yet been grasped of the presence and the preference accorded and professed to Plutarch on so many occasions in the *Essais*, summarised in the key affirmation: Plutarch is he who “wins our judgement” (III.12.1177B: “gaigne” “nostre jugement”, III.12.1040B).

Such a presence not only implies a strong moral value, an opinion that is universally recognised, but it may be hypothesised that it helps Montaigne to construct his own point of view of a ‘tempered’ rather than a desperate scepticism. The motto “nothing too much” is valid here and leads to a sort of “conversion” of scepticism itself.

With regard to classical scepticism, Montaigne exercises his critical view:

The Academic philosophers accepted that our balance of judgement may be swayed one way or the other ... they had established that we are incapable of knowing anything and that Truth is swallowed up in deep abysses where Man’s vision cannot penetrate; to avoid them they admitted that some things are more likely than others and concede to judgement the power to incline towards one probability rather than another. They grant it this propensity, but they deny its conclusions (II.12.632–633A).⁸

⁷ “Car ces termes-là sont declinaisons, passages ou vicissitudes de ce qui ne peut durer ni demeurer en estre” (II.12.603B).

⁸ “Les Academiciens reçoivent quelque inclination de jugement ... ils établissent que nous n’estions aucunement capables de sçavoir, et que la verité est engouffrée dans des profondes abymes où la veüe humaine ne peut penetrer, si advouint ils les unes choses plus vray-semblables que les autres, et recevoient en leur jugement cette faculté de se pouvoir incliner plustost à une apparence qu’à une autre: ils luy [to jugement] permettoient cette propension, luy defandant toute resolution.”

He then adds: “The Pyrronists’ idea is bolder, yet, at the same time, more true-seeming” (*Ibid.*, 633A). In the editions published while Montaigne was still alive one reads: “more true and more firm. For...” (“quant et quant, beaucoup plus veritable, et plus ferme: car...”). In fact, he continues, this Academic inclination and this propensity towards one proposition rather than another is only the recognition of some clearer truth. If the human intellect were capable of discerning the form, features, bearing it would see it in all of its aspects. Montaigne urges:

But how can they bring themselves to yield to verisimilitude if they cannot recognize verity? How can they know there to be a resemblance to something the essence of which they do not know? We judge entirely, or entirely not. If our intellectual faculties and our senses have no foundation to stand on but only float about the wind, then it is pointless to allow our judgement to be influenced by their operation, no matter what ‘probabilities’ it seems to present us with, and so the surest position for our intellect to adopt, and the happiest, would be the one where it could remain still, straight, inflexible, without motion or disturbance (*Ibid.*).⁹

Montaigne refers above to the “human” *immota mens*, but this time we are dealing with the mind of a wise stoic free from passions.¹⁰ Montaigne depicts classical scepticism bound to this basic *aporia*.

Sceptical Plutarch: Search and Independency of Thought

But let us return to the events. On the tracks of Plutarch’s manuscripts, which Amyot himself most likely used for his translation of Plutarch’s *corpus*, Montaigne went to the Vatican Library whilst staying in Rome¹¹ and one evening, at supper with Muret and other scholars, discussed Amyot’s translation that he would always defend, even after the Roman conversations.¹² It was a visit “sans

⁹ “Mais comment se laissent ils plier à la vray-semblance, s’ils ne cognoissent le vray? Comment cognoissent ils la semblance de ce dequoy ils ne connoissent pas l’essence? Ou nous pouvons juger tout à fait, ou tout à fait nous ne le pouvons pas. Si nos facultez intellectuels et sensibles sont sans fondement et sans pied, si elles ne font que floter et vanter, pour neant laissons nous emporter nostre jugement à aucune partie de leur operation, quelque apparence qu’elle semble nous presenter; et la plus seure assiette de nostre entendement, et la plus heureuse, ce seroit cella là où il se maintiendroit rassis, droit, inflexible sans bransle et sans agitation.”

¹⁰ What follows is also interesting: II.12.561–562; but also II.12.503–505.

¹¹ *Journal de voyage*, édition présentée, établie et annotée par François Rigolot, Paris: PUF, 1992, pp. 113–114.

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 111–112. On 6 March 1581 Montaigne visited the “librairie du Vatican,” where he found “force livres escrits à main, et notamment un Seneque et les *Opuscules*

nulle difficulté,”¹³ admits Montaigne, who was easily able to consult the manuscript of the *Moralia*¹⁴ as well as other works that he himself talks of in *Journal de voyage*. Together with Seneca, Plutarch possesses a “way of writing ... doubtful in substance” and his “plan is to inquire rather than to instruct”¹⁵ (II.12.509A) – even if sometimes with “Dogmatic cadences” (“cadances dogmatiques”)¹⁶ and presenting things from different points of view, “now one way, now another.”¹⁷ In a phrase removed from the second edition of the *Essais*, Montaigne had noted: “How differently he treats the same subjects! How many times does he present us with two or three incompatible causes and divers reasons for the same subject, without selecting the one we ought to follow?” (II.12.568).¹⁸ This is phrase that recalls the one in I, 26, which refers to Plutarch’s allusive method and presents a complexity of levels and meanings.¹⁹

de Plutarque.” On this visit see in particular Franca Caldari Bevilacqua, *Montaigne alla Biblioteca Vaticana*, in *Montaigne e l’Italia*, Genève: Slatkine, 1988, pp. 363–390. Besides the manuscripts of Seneca and Plutarch, Montaigne sees, moreover, “un livre” of Tommaso d’Aquino “où il y a des corrections de la main du propre auteur, qui escrivoit mal, une petite lettre pire que la mienne.” The minute writing, worse than his own, was not however Tommaso’s. It was in fact the manuscript Vat. Lat 3804 of the *Sermones dominicales*. In Montaigne’s time it was believed that the marginal notes to the text were autographs and in the seventeenth century the opinion was accredited in inventories too. But the manuscript dates from after Tommaso’s death (confirming this, Caldari Bevilacqua refers to the catalogue of *V Centenario della Biblioteca apostolica vaticana, 1475–1975*, edited by Luigi Michelini Tocci, Citta del Vaticano, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1975, p. 13, n. 26).

¹³ Cardinal Sirleto, a Vatican librarian, Montaigne testifies, continued to deny the French ambassador access to the Seneca manuscript “ce qu’il desiroit infiniment.”

¹⁴ According to d’Ancona it may refer to the Greek manuscript of 1309, bought by Ciriaco d’Ancona on Mount Athos but Caldari Bevilacqua favours a manuscript of great value of 1477 (Vat. Lat. 1888) *De ira sedanda dialogus*, translated into Latin by Platina (*op. cit.*, p. 388)

¹⁵ See the translation by Donald Frame, *The Complete Essays*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1979, p. 337.

¹⁶ One reads in the previous editions: “...douteuse et irresolue, et un stile enquerant plustot qu’instruisant, encore qu’ils entresement souvent des traits de la forme dogmatiste.”

¹⁷ See translation by Frame, *op. cit.*, p. 377.

¹⁸ “combien diversement discourt il de mesme chose, combien de fois nous presente il deux ou trois causes contraires de mesme subjects, et diverses raisons, sans choisir celle que nous avons à suivre.”

¹⁹ “[C] J’ai leu en Tite-Live cent choses que tel n’y pas leu. Plutarque en y a leu cent, outre ce que j’y ay sceu lire, et, à l’aventure outre ce que l’auteur y avait mis ... [A] Il y a dans Plutarque beaucoup de discours, estendus, très-dignes d’estre sceus, car à mon gré c’est le maistre ouvrier de telle besongne; mais il y en a mille qu’il n’a que touché

Beyond the 'external' elements, the reception of a sceptical Plutarch in Montaigne seems clear and worthy of attention, starting from the method. Plutarch's method contains the principle of "opposed forces" ("forces opposées") and finds wide confirmation in Montaigne's own method: true education comes about "better by counter-example than by example" (III. 8. 1044B). Movements, words, images, *exempla*, concepts, are nurtured on contradiction that makes them come alive; chapter headings promise to speak of something and preach the opposite: they promise to speak of cruelty but they preach clemency ...

Quite obviously, Montaigne is anxious to underline how Plutarch's "manner is one of sustained doubt and indecision" (II.12.626A). Montaigne adds: "I can see that he occasionally relates the same differently" (II.32.818A); the interlocutor often has a blurred profile, "since Plutarch presents it, as he does hundreds of other things, in two opposite and contrasting manners" (III.12.1206C).²⁰ Moreover, "Our life is composed, like the harmony of the world, of discords as well as of different tones, sweet and harsh, sharp and flat, soft and loud. If a musician liked only some of them, what could he sing?" (III.13.1237B).²¹ And if contradiction in Plutarch seems to be reconciled in moderation, in Montaigne reconciliation comes about above all in time: "now...now" ("*tantost...tantost*") means non-simultaneity, something which does not happen at the same time, in short passing. In fact, Montaigne resolves sceptic contradiction with time. Not only do the winds of chance move him according to their inclination, but he himself moves because of the "instability of my stance" (II.1.377B).

Anyone who turns his primitive attention on to himself will hardly ever find himself in the same state twice. I give my soul this face or that, depending

simplement: il guigne seulement du doigt par où nous irons, s'il nous plaist, et se contente quelquefois de ne donner qu'une atteinte dans le plus vif d'un propos. Il les faut arracher de là, et mettre en place marchande. [B] Comme ce sien mot, que les habitans d'Asie servoient à un seul, pour ne sçavoir prononcer une seule sillabe, qui est Non, donna peut estre la matiere et l'occasion à La Boitie de sa Servitude Volontaire. [A] Cela mesme de luy voir trier une legiere action en la vie d'un homme, ou un mot, qui semble ne porter pas; cela, c'est un discours" (I.26.156–157). For a fuller discussion of this passage, see Nicola Panichi, *I vincoli del disinganno, Per una nuova interpretazione di Montaigne*, cit.

²⁰ "car Plutarque le presente en ceux deux sortes, comme mille autres choses, diversement et contrairement" (III.12.1063C).

²¹ "Nostre vie est composée, comme l'armonie du monde, des choses contraires, aussi de divers tons, douz et aspres, aigus et plats, mols et graves. Le musicien qui n'aymeroit que les uns, que voudroit il dire? Il faut qu'il s'en sçache servir en commun et les mesler. Et nous aussi les biens et les maux, qui sont consubstantiels à nostre vie. Nostre estre ne peut sans ce meslange, et y l'une bande non moins necessaire que l'autre" (III.13.1089–1090B).

upon which side I lay it down on. I speak about myself in diverse ways: that is because I look at myself in diverse ways. Every sort of contradiction can be found in me, depending upon some twist or attribute: timid, insolent; ... chaste, lecherous; ... talkative, taciturn; tough, sickly; clever, dull; brooding, affable, lying, truthful; ... learned, ignorant; generous, miserly and then prodigal – [B] I can see something of all that in myself, depending on how I gyrate; and anyone who studies himself attentively finds in himself and in his very judgment his whirring about and this discordancy. There is nothing I can say about myself as a whole simply and completely, without intermingling and admixture. The most universal article of my own Logic is *DISTINGO* (*Ibid.*).²²

And he continues: “I shall perhaps change soon, not accidentally but intentionally. This is a register of varied and changing occurrences, of ideas which are unresolved and, when needs be, contradictory, either because I myself have become different or because I grasp hold of different attribute or aspects of my subjects. So I may happen to contradict myself but, as Demades said, I never contradict truth” (III. 2. 908B).²³ Contradiction resolves with time, with subjective and objective relations.²⁴ Pyrrho’s philosophy, as Montaigne interprets it, is not only a destructive epistemology that ends in suspension of judgement because of the uncertainty of knowledge. In the form of *hypotyposis*, it is the refusal of the law of non-contradiction and the abandon of an all-absorbing concept of truth. Now Montaigne shows that truth can incorporate two opposites.

Contradiction is a dialectic movement: “because each holds his being dear: and being consists in motion and activity” (II. 8. 386C).²⁵ For Montaigne

²² “et qui y regarde primement, ne se trouve gueres deux fois en mesme estat: Je donne à mon ame tantost un visage tantost un autre selon la costé où je la couche. Si je parle diversament de moy, ce que je me regarde diversement. Toutes les contrarietez s’y trouvent selon quelque tour en quelque façon. Honteux, insolent [C] chaste, luxurieux, [B] bavard, taciturne; laborieux, delicat, ingenieux, hebeté: chagrin, debonnaire, menteur, veritable; [C] sçavant, ignorant, et liberal, et avare, et prodigue, [B] tout cela, je le voy en moy aucunement, selon que je me vire: et quiconque s’estudie bien attentivement trouve en soy, voiyre et en son jugement mesme, cette volubilité et discordance: je n’ay rien à dire de moy, entierement, simplement, et solidement sans confusion et sans meslange, ny en un mot. *DISTINGO* est le plus universel membre de ma logique” (II.1.335).

²³ “Je pourray tantost changer, non de fortune seulement, mais aussi d’intention. C’est un contrerolle de divers et muables accidents et d’imaginationes irresoluës et, quand il y eschet, cointraires; soit que je sois autre moy-mesme, soit que je saisisse les subjects par autres circonstances et considerations. Tant y a que je me contredits bien à l’aventure, mais la verité, comme disoit Demades, je ne la contredy point” (III.2.805B).

²⁴ For the meaning of these concepts see I. Maclean, *Montaigne philosophe*, Paris: PUF, 2000, p. 35.

²⁵ “D’autant que nous avons cher, estre; et estre consiste en mouvement et action” (II.8.386C).

contradiction is the richness of the world, its versatility, its being, its salt, because its essence is temporal: active acceptance of opposites. Dialectic conflict is the true source of dynamic energy, and dynamic energy ensures a balance between opposites. If one accepts the thesis that Plato speaks of himself when he speaks of Socrates, as Plutarch of Ammonius, then, perhaps, Montaigne speaks of himself when he speaks of Plutarch...

We cannot go into the historical and conceptual dynamics of the reception of a sceptical Plutarch. It is certain, however, that Plutarch's liking of Academic probabilism is widely witnessed in his works. We can briefly recall the main phases. After an initial interest for Pythagoreanism and mathematics, witnessed in a passage from *De E apud Delphos*, Plutarch is said to have been led by his master Ammonius, a scholar of the Academy, into the ranks of the sceptical Academics.²⁶ Plutarch's move towards scepticism is also supported by a passage from *Quaestiones convivales*, where Plutarch appears, among Ammonius' pupils, to be the one who better than any understands the master's methods: *young people must search and think independently*. With his young or very young pupils, including Plutarch himself, Ammonius behaves as a very authoritative person: "At this the young men, who were unused to Ammonius, were much embarrassed and quietly began to take off their garlands, but because I knew that Ammonius had tossed the topic into our midst for an exercise in discussion, I turned to Trypho, the physician...."²⁷ Plutarch underlines how Ammonius' attitude was in the interest "of practice and research,"²⁸ the very method of the sceptical Academy, whose seal was placed by Ammonius at the end of each lesson, with a quotation from a well-known verse by Xenophanes: "*Let this be our opinion, with the look of truth.*"²⁹ He used it to make his pupils understand that

²⁶ See D. Babut, "Du scepticisme au dépassement de la raison: philosophie et foi religieuse chez Plutarque", in *Parerga*, Lyon, Paris, 1994, pp. 549–581. The author recalls the fundamental work of R. Hirzel, *Der Dialog*, II, Leipzig, 1895, p. 124, in particular n. 1.

²⁷ *Table-Talk*, III, 1, 646 B, in *PM*, VIII, translation by Paul A. Clement, 1969 (tr. Amyot, *Le propos de table*, 379v G–H: "A ces paroles d'Ammonius, les jeunes hommes qui ne cognoissoient pas encore sa façon de faire, estant honteux, commencerent tout bellement à arracher les chapeaux de fleurs qu'ils avoient dessus leurs testes. Mais moy qui sçavois que c'estoit pour un exercice, et pour nous inviter à en chercher la raison qu'il avoit mis ce propos en avant, adressant ma parole au medicin Tryphon...").

²⁸ There are several witnesses of the probabilistic attitude of the philosopher Ammonius. See P. L. Donini, "Plutarco, Ammonio e l'Accademia", in F. Brenk and I. Gallo, eds., *Miscellanea plutarchea*, Ferrara (s.n.), 1986, *Quaderni del Giornale filologico ferrarese*, 8, pp. 97–110 (in particular p. 103).

²⁹ *Table-Talk*, IX, 14, 746 B, in *PM*, IX, translation by Edwin L. Minar, Jr., P.H. Sandbach, W. C. and Helmbold, 1961 (tr. Amyot, *Le propos de table*, 438r B: "A quoy Ammonius aiant acclamé, comme il avoit accoustumé, ces vers de Xenophane, *Cela tenu soit en quelque creance, / De la verité il y a apparence*").

the teaching given in that lesson was only probable, as can be seen in the passage just quoted from *Quaestiones convivales*. For Montaigne too, Xenophanes, like Plutarch and, later, Seneca, are part of the ranks of those who have a way of writing that reveals doubts in the substance and whose aim is to investigate rather than teach (although they sometimes intersperse their language with dogmatic tones). It is Xenophanes, Montaigne recalls, who in Diogenes Laertius,³⁰ thinks of a “Dieu rond,” a spherical god, as the pseudo-Aristotelian treatise *De M. X. G.* witnesses, having nothing in common with human nature (II.12.515C). Plutarch insinuates that it is not incidental that Ammonius seems more inclined to controversy than dogmatic teaching, a probabilistic attitude confirmed by the fact that Plutarch himself never drops discussion.

The problem is, then, to understand if the call towards the Heraclitean doctrine of the eternal flux of things, in contrast to the immutable existence of god, to which Plutarch refers in *De E apud Delphos* and which Montaigne uses to conclude the *Apology for Raymond Sebond*, goes in the direction of metaphysics constructed on sceptical bases. If this is the case, then for Plutarch Ammonius would represent the link between Delphi theology and Academic philosophy.³¹ Moreover, if the character of Ammonius is the personification of Plutarch, such a literary pretence is functional to the deep meaning of *Moralia*.

Plutarch seems to take the decisive step for his categorical profession of scepticism at the end of *De primo frigido*, a vigorous defence of *epoché*, where he turns to his pupil, Favorinus of Arelate, a declared follower of the New Academy. Plutarch invites him to compare the arguments with those put forward by the others: the suspension of judgement on what is obscure and uncertain is the proper philosophical attitude. The message is clear. A true philosopher is only he who suspends judgement: “Compare these statements, Favorinus, with the pronouncements of others; and if these notions of mine are neither less probable nor much more plausible than those of others, say farewell to dogma, being convinced as you are that it is more philosophic to suspend judgement when the truth is obscure than to take sides.”³²

Aulus Gellius³³ testimony is important because it also produces the distinction: “vetus ... quaestio,” an age-old problem, between the New Academy and

³⁰ *Vitae*, IX 23.

³¹ See P. L. Donini, *art. cit.*, 201.

³² *The Principle of Cold*, 955, in *PM*, XII, translation by Harold Cherniss and William C. Helmbold, 1957 (tr. Amyot, *Du premier froid*, 534r G: “Compare, Seigneur Favorin, ces arguments la avec les raisons des autres, et si tu trouves que les unes ne cedent ny ne surpassent gueres les autres en probable verissimilitude, laisse moy là l’opiniastreté d’espouser aucunes particulieres opinions, estimant que le surseoir et retenir son jugement en choses obscures et incertaines, est fait en plus sage philosophe, que non pas de prester et adiouster à l’une ou à l’autre partie son consentement”).

³³ *Noctes Atticae*, XI, 5–6.

Pyrrhonism. Having described the convergences, Aulus Gellius concludes: "...it is held that they differ, as well as for some other aspects, above all for this: that it is as if the academics did indeed grasp the fact that nothing can be grasped, and that they conclude that nothing can be concluded, whilst the Pyrrhonians say that not even this is true, in any way: because truth seems inexistent."³⁴ For Plutarch, the New Academy leaves in some way truth some *chance* (as *De stoicorum repugnantiis* and *Adversus Colotem* witness) even if truth remains inaccessible. However, the value that Montaigne gives to Pyrrhonian *zetesis* is still to be explained. Unlike other Academic sceptics, Montaigne attributes to Pyrrho the characterization of continual search (although acknowledging that truth will never be reached), whilst Plutarch seems to go in the opposite direction.

The reason of this different view is perhaps the fact that Montaigne's source here is not Plutarch but Sextus Empericus, and precisely a well-known passage from the first chapter of the *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*. Here Sextus expounds the tri-partition of philosophy that is re-proposed *à la lettre* by Montaigne in the *Apology*, and attributes to the Pyrrhonians the intermediate function between sceptics and dogmatists as well as the propensity towards *zetesis*. It remains to be assessed if the "desperate blow" of which Montaigne speaks is to be extended to Pyrrho or only to the Academics and if the secret, but desperate, shot is the blunt arm that the sceptics, including Pyrrho, use. If this were the case, it is clear that Plutarch would go beyond Pyrrho, and the concept of *zetesis*, as continuous search, would be saved precisely through Plutarch's revival. It is necessary to verify this decisive point because it seems that an exchange of roles takes place. Moreover, regarding Plutarch's position, a position that would seem to be strengthened in this case even if indirectly, it must not be forgotten that Aulus Gellius refers to Favorinus (fr. 26), Plutarch's pupil, as a source. Precise research into the sources by Plutarch himself must not be neglected either.³⁵ In the first hypothesis, the 'saved' Pyrronism – disaggregated by other sceptics who no longer searched for truth – would function in Montaigne as the New Academy functions in Plutarch. A passage discussed below from *Against the Stoics on common Conceptions* may be decisive.

³⁴ "... differre tamen inter sese et propter alia quaedam et vel maxime propterea existimati sunt, quod Academici quidem ipsum illud nihil posse comprehendendi quasi comprehendunt et nihil posse decerni quasi decernunt, Pyrronii ne id quidem ullo pacto verum videri dicunt, quod nihil esse verum videtur."

³⁵ From works that are lost, but listed in the Lamprias catalogue, we can infer that Plutarch also wrote on Pyrrho's tropes.

A Project of Permanent Education of the Mind: Sage Femme, Sage Homme

One point is unwavering. Plutarch's adhesion to the *epoché* of the New Academy is not incidental or polemical. On several occasions Plutarch clarifies that even the doctrines of his "divine" Plato, founder of the Academy, should be considered with a character of verisimilitude and probabilism, in contrast to the dogmatic and supposedly infallible science of the Stoics. In this sense Plutarch would present a neo-sceptical interpretation of Platonism. In *Adversus Colotem*, at the point where he defends Arcesilaus from Epicurean attacks, he affirms that the illusions of the senses make us understand that many philosophers prefer to reject sensible knowledge rather than admit that all sensations are real. How can one not suspend judgement, comments Plutarch, taking up disagreement as a sufficient motive of suspicion with regard to things, since they do not offer even the minimum guarantee, but only obscurity and confusion? The conclusion arrives rapidly: the suspension of judgement, far from being a pretence, a *mythos*, or a means of conquering the young "effrontés et ecervellés," is a position that is convenient for adults, and for *adult reason*:

And so this doctrine of withholding judgement is no idle tale, as Colotes thinks, or bait to fill the lecture hall with forward and flighty youth; it is a settled state and attitude of grown men that preserves them from error and refuses to abandon judgement to anything so discredited and incoherent as the senses or to be deluded as these people are deluded who call the seen the evidence of things unseen although they observe that appearances are so untrustworthy and ambiguous.³⁶

This is a thesis not felt by Plutarch to be incompatible with Plato, but which puts clearly in doubt the assumption of *De tranquillitate animi* referring to divinity (phenomena, the visible, witness invisible things).

Montaigne perceives this very aspect of Plutarch's position: scepticism is not that which makes "one lose oneself to lose another," but it is a disposition of the

³⁶ *Reply to Colotes*, 1124 C, in *PM*, XIV, 1986, translation by Benedict Einarson and Phillip H. Lacy. Amyot's translation (*Contre l'epicurien Colotes*, 597v E) runs as follows: "Ce n'est doncques pas une fable ni un esbat de ieunes gens temeraires qui ont envie de babiller et de causer, come le dit Colotes, que le propos de la retention ains est une habitude et disposition certaine d'hommes qui se veulent garder de mesprendre ny de tomber, et qui n'abandonnent ny ne iettent pas à la volee leur iugement à l'appetit des sentiments si decriez et si ambigus, et ne se laissent pas decevoir avec ceulx qui tiennent que les choses apparentes ont la foy, et doivent estre creuës comme certaines, voians une si grande obscurité et si grande incertitude és imaginations et choses apparentes...."

spirit that wants to stay free from error and which refuses to let itself be guided uncritically by sensations and prejudices and conceives the project of permanent education of the mind.

Indications in this direction are contained in other texts by Plutarch, well known by Montaigne, as in *De sera numinis vindicta*. Here Plutarch entrusts to his spokesman the invitation to the interlocutors to take on, as a starting point in the discussion, the attitude of reserve (suspension of judgement), which is considered “ancestral hearth” (“autel[s] paternel[s]”), “with the scrupulous reverence of the philosophers of the Academy for the Deity, we shall disavow any pretension to speak about these matters from knowledge.”³⁷ Then he adds: “These remarks are not a pretext for evasion, but a plea for indulgence, that the argument, as though with a haven and refuge in view, may the more boldly in its bark of plausibility keep head against the difficulty.”³⁸ The precise reference in *De defectu oraculorum* is also significant: “But if in any other place we have recalled the Academy to our mind, let us do so here as well, and divest ourselves of excessive credulity and, as if we were in a slippery place in our discussion about infinity, let us merely keep a firm footing.”³⁹ The philosophical tradition to which Plutarch is giving credit is undoubtedly the New Academy.

De E apud Delphos returns here, in all its centrality, in Plutarch’s indication about his belonging to the Academy. The meaning of the letter “E” consecrated to Apollo in the temple of Delphi is being discussed. The thesis put forward at this moment is that it represents the number 5, an important number for its relation to the universe, and so “lordly” that scholars took the term for “counting” on one’s fingers from it. At this point Plutarch adds the phrase: “These words Eustrophus addressed to us non in jest, but for the reason that at this time I was devoting myself to mathematics with the greatest enthusiasm although I was destined soon to pay all honour to the maxim ‘Avoid extremes’, when I had

³⁷ *On the Delays of the divine Vengeance*, 549 E–F, in *PM*, VII, translation by Phillip H. de Lacy and Benedict Einarson, 1959 (tr. Amyot, *Pourquoy la Iustice divine differe quelquefois*, 259r B: “par la reverence et crainte retenue des Philosophes Academiques envers la divinité, nous declarons que nous ne pretendons de parler, comme si nous en sçavions certainement ce qui en est”).

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 550 C–D (tr. Amyot, *Ibid.*, 259v F “...ce que j’en dis n’est pas pour un pretexte de fuir la lice, ains plustot un demander pardon, à fin que la raison regardant à son port et refuge plus hardiment se renga par verisimilitude à se deffier et douter”).

³⁹ *The Obsolescence of Oracles*, 431 A, in *PM*, V, cit. (tr. Amyot, *Des oracles qui ont cessé*, 348r B: “et si en aucun autre lieu, principalement en cestuy-cy, nous souvenans des preceptes de l’Academie, ostons de noz entendements le trop de creance, et comme en un lieu glissant et coulant retenons la fermeté de creance”).

once become a member of the Academy.⁴⁰ The ending of Montaigne's *Apology for Raymond Sebond* with Plutarch's passage, whose sceptical vein I have already highlighted, acquires an added meaning. It testifies Plutarch's sceptical belonging and philosophical reception towards which Montaigne could nourish no doubts, given Plutarch's declared profession of scepticism in this pamphlet. Montaigne could not doubt the word of his *homme*. And it is not incidental that he ends the *Apology* with a text in which there is proof, declared in the first person, of Plutarch's belonging to the Academy. Even if Montaigne had known just this single text concerning Plutarch's adhesion to scepticism (which is an absurd hypothesis), this would have been enough to convince him. In fact, the phrase, evocative of Plutarch's entrance into the Academy, functions as the declaration of an announced and professed scepticism.

In *De facie in orbe lunae*, the scene is occupied by the stoic Farnaces, by other participants and by Lamprias who has the main role as in *De defectu oraculorum*. Interrupting Lamprias, Farnaces affirms that he is once again up against the usual strategy practised by the Academy, which consists in never taking responsibility for one's own positions, but attacking straight away, forcing the adversary to defend his own position. Farnaces' accusation points directly at Plutarch's followers who supposedly used the same (predictable) sceptical tactic:

Here we are faced again with that stock manoeuvre of the Academy: on each occasion that they engage in discourse with others they will offer any accounting of their own assertions but must keep their interlocutors on the defensive lest they become the prosecutors. Well, me you will not to-day entice into defending the Stoics against your charges until I have called your people to account for turning the universe upside down.⁴¹

Lucius replies that "we express no opinion of our own now," where *we* stands for the neo-academics among which Lucius is included, together with Lamprias

⁴⁰ *The E at Delphi*, 387 F, in *PM*, V, cit. (tr. Amyot, *Que signifioit ce mot E'i*, 354r E–F: "...et adressoit Eustrophes sa parole, en disant cela, à moy, non point en se jouant, ains à bon escient, pour autant que lors i'estois fort affectionné à l'estude des Mathematiques: mais en sorte toutefois que en toutes choses i'estois pour observer le precept Rien de trop, mesmement estant en la secte de l'Academie").

⁴¹ *Concerning the Face which appears in the Orb of the Moon*, 922 F–923 A, in *PM*, XII, cit.) (tr. Amyot, *De la face qui apparoist dedans le rond de la lune*, 615r–v D–E: "Voyla derechef l'ordinaire ruze de l'Academie venuë en ieu alencontre de nous, qui est de s'amuser à tout propos à dire contre les autres, & ne donner iamais moien de pouvoir reprendre ce qui'il disent eulx, & rendre toujours defendans ceulx quilz parlent & disputent, non pas assaillans ny accusans: mais quant à moy, vous ne m'attirez d'aujourd'hui à rendre raison de ce que vous reprenez aux Stoiques, que premierement vous ne m'aiez vous mesme rendu compte de ce que vous mettez le monde dessus dessous").

and Plutarch. The doctrine they are laying claim to is directly attributable to Arcesilaus. The “manoeuvre” is the same as the sceptic Diadumenus in *De notitiis*, a work that carries the proof that a school had formed around Plutarch, as it had around Ammonius, that expressly referred to the sceptical Academy. Diadumenus is a fictitious character that represents Plutarch, but he seems to be, as Lampria in *De facie*, a spokesman of Plutarch’s followers. In a passage from *De stoicorum repugnantiiis*, in which Plutarch defends, against Chrysippus, the legitimacy of the typically neo-academic procedure consisting in supporting subsequently, on each argument, theses that are opposed one to the other, he refers to a writing on this theme which had previously been sanctioned. In any case, the method of contradictory discussion, together with the suspension of judgement, is typical of the New Academy. Plutarch writes a whole work in five books against the Stoics in which he uses the method of *disputatio in utramque partem*.

In *Quaestiones platonicae* the incapacity to doubt one’s own opinion blinds everything that does not agree with it, as the multiplicity of philosophical schools witnesses, where in the best of cases philosophy admits only one true one, all others being in conflict with the truth: “...begetting is a obstacle to it, for what loves is blinded about the thing it loves and nothing of one’s own is so beloved as is an opinion or an argument by its parent.”⁴² In the same essay Socrates, a philosopher of dialogue, is presented as he who searches for “la verité en commune.” Montaigne’s Socrates is Plutarch’s Socrates, the one “who takes the lead in the *Dialogues*” (II.12.567C), the inventor of “philosopher par dialogues,” who “always asks questions designed to provoke discussion: he is never satisfied, and never reaches any conclusions. He says that the only thing he knew how to do was to make objections” (*Ibid.*, 567–568C).⁴³ The mid-wife of thought, the *sage femme* in a *sage homme*. Socrate’s philosophy in *Platonic Questions* is that

with which by continually subjecting others to examination he made them free of humbug and error and pretentiousness ... So Socrates with his refutatory discourse like a purgative medicine by maintaining nothing claimed the credence of others when he refuted them, and he got the greater hold on them because he seemed to be seeking the truth along with them, not himself to be

⁴² *Platonic Questions*, 1000 A, in *PM*, XIII, 1, translation by Harold Cherniss, 1976 (tr. Amyot, *Les questions platoniques*, 540r D: “...l’engendrer empesche la faculté utile à juger, d’autant que l’amant est aveugle aslendroit de ce qu’il aime. Or n’y a il rien que lon aime tant au monde que les opinions et raisons que lon a engendrees et inventees”).

⁴³ “va tousjours demandant en esmouvant la dispute, jamais l’arrestant, jamais satisfaisant, et dict n’avoir autre science que la science de s’opposer.”

defending an opinion of his own.⁴⁴ For this reason Socrates was not engaged in teaching anything, but by exciting perplexities as if inducing the inception of labour-pains in young men he would arouse and quicken and help to deliver their innate conceptions.⁴⁵

Epoché not only protects judgement from error but it also has a cathartic value that keeps open the possibility of finding the truth.

Faith and Knowledge

Separating the domain of rational knowledge from religious belief, in *De facie in orbe lunae*, Lamprias claims that, where reason fails, it is necessary to search for other ways of showing the truth. The *impasse* reached by philosophy leads Plutarch to justify its surmounting. The New Academy scepticism, to which he adheres, leads him to separate the ground of rational knowledge from religious belief and to affirm its autonomy, as *Amatorius* witnesses:

Pemptides, he said, it is, I believe, a grave and dangerous matter that you are broaching; or rather, you are altogether violating our inviolable belief in the gods when you demand an account and proof of each of them. Our ancient traditional faith is good enough. It is impossible to assert or discover evidence more palpable than this faith, *Whatever subtle twist's invented by keen wit*. This faith is a basis, as it were, a common foundation, of religion; if confidence and settled usage are disturbed or shaken at a single point, the whole edifice is enfeebled and discredited.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 999 E–F (tr. Amyot, *Ibid.*, 540r B–D: “par laquelle examination et enquerant tousiours les autres, il les guarentissoit de toute presumptueuse fumee d’erreur et de vanité ... Socrates doncques aiant le discours et la parole propre à refuter, arguer et convaincre, comme une drogue laxative pour purger, estoit de tant plus creu en refutant les autres qu’il ne prononceoit ny s’asseuroit iamais rien de soy, et touchoit de tant plus avant au coeur escoutans, qu’il sembloit *chercher la verité en commune*, et non pas espouser ny favoriser à une siene particuliere opinion...”).

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 1000 D (tr. Amyot, *Ibid.*, 540v G: “Voyla pourquoi Socrates n’enseignoit rien, ains mettant seulement en avant aux ieunes hommes, des commencements, des difficultez, des doubttes, comme des trechez qui precedent l’enfantement, excitoit, esveilloit et pouloit les intelligences nees avec eulx...”).

⁴⁶ *The Dialogue on Love*, 756 A–B, in *PM*, IX, cit. (tr. Amyot, *De l’amour*, 604r A–B: “Tu me sembles, dit il, Pemptidius, toucher une grande et hardie question, ou pour mieux dire, remuer un point, auquel on ne deust aucunement toucher, c’est l’opinion et creance que nous avons des Dieux, en nous demandant la preuve et la raison de chacun d’icelleulx. Car l’ancienne foy et creance, que nous en avons de noz ancestres en ce pais, nous doit suffire, ne s’en pouvant dire ne imaginer de plus suffisante ne plus evidente preuve, *dont sens humain par subtil finesse, /N’inventa oncq la profonde sagesse*.”)

It will be necessary to find solutions to the contradictions before abjuring traditional, ancestral faith. Plutarch recalls Euripides' religious anticonformism in *Melanippe*, and the scandal in which he was involved, because of the first verse:

You have no doubt heard what an uproar burst upon Euripides when he began his *Melanippê* with this verse: *Zeus, whoever he is, for I know him only by report*. Well, he got another chorus (for he had confidence in the play, it seems, since it was composed in an elevated and elaborate style) and changed the verse to the present text: *Zeus, as the voice of truth declares*.⁴⁷

And regarding the existence of the gods, "If you are going to demand a proof of each one of them, probing every temple and attacking each altar with sophistic assault, not a god will you exempt from malicious prosecution and inquisition."⁴⁸ But clearly, at least in this passage, before the discussion on divine names (of divinity), Plutarch seems to refer more to the social use of religion and the danger for the people of submitting it to dubious scrutiny, than to exposing the real superiority of faith with respect to reason.

In Montaigne, the autonomy of philosophy from religion is claimed with a different spirit "in a lay not a clerical manner" (I. 56. 362C: "d'une maniere laïque," "non clericale"): philosophy and theology must stay apart and have nothing to gain by mixing: "Christian Doctrine holds her rank better when set apart, as Queen and Governor,"⁴⁹ without being related "to human reasoning" ("aux discours humains"). "The language of men has its own less elevated forms and must not make use of the dignity, majesty and authority of the language of God. I myself let it say – [C] *verbis indisciplinatis* [using undisciplined words] – [B] fortune, destiny, accident, good luck, bad luck, the gods and similar phrases, following its own fashion" (I.56.361).⁵⁰ Some complain, Montaigne insists,

Ains estat cette tradition, le fondement et la base commune de toute religion, si la fermeté et la creance d'icelle reçeuë de main en main vient à estre esbranlee et remuee en un seul point, elle devient suspecte et douteuse en tous les autres").

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 756 B–C (tr. Amyot, *Ibid.*, B–C: "Tu peux bien avoir ouy dire comment Euripides fut sifflé et rabroué pour le commencement de sa Tragedie Menalippe qu'il avoit ainsi commencee, *O Iupiter, car de toy rien sinon/Le ne cognois seulement que le nom*. Il se fioit fort de ceste Tragedie la, comme estant magnifiquement et exquisement bien escripte, mais pour le tumulte et murmure qu'en fait le peuple, il changea le premier vers ainsi comme il se lit maintenant, *Iuppiter, combien en verité/ Ce nom convient à ta divinité*").

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 756 D) (tr. Amyot, *Ibid.*, D: "...de chacun desquels tu veux avoir la demonstration et la preuve, mettant les mains sur chaque temple, e y appliquant la touche de sophistique argumentateur sur chacun autel, tu ne laisseras rien à regratter ny à domnier").

⁴⁹ "Que la doctrine divine tient mieux son rang à part, comme Roynie et dominatrice."

⁵⁰ "Le dire humain a ses formes plus basses et ne se doit servir de la dignité, majesté, regence du parler divin. Je luy laisse pour moy, dire, [C] *verbis indisciplinatis*, [B] fortune, d'estinée, accident, heur et malheur, et les Dieux et autres frases, selon sa mode" (*Ibid.*, 323).

that the more frequent fault is to see Theologians writing like humanists rather than humanists like Theologians (Philosophy, says St Chrysostom, has long been banished from School of Divinity as a useless servant judged unworthy of glimpsing, even from the doorway when simply passing by, the sanctuary of the holy treasures of sacred doctrine) ... I am offering my own human thoughts as human thoughts to be considered on their own, not as things established by God's ordinance, incapable of being doubted or challenged; they are matters of opinion not matters of faith: what I reason out *secundum me*, not what I believe *secundum Deum* – like schoolboys reading out their essays, not teaching but teachable, in a lay not a clerical manner but always deeply devout (*Ibid.*, 361–362).⁵¹

Montaigne, on the contrary, inverts the relationship, weakening religion: without morals, religion is an illusion. Religion on its own cannot suffice: “Any instruction which convinces people that religious belief alone, without morality, suffices to satisfy God's justice is destructive of all government and is far more harmful than it is ingenious and subtle” (III.12.1201C).⁵²

Here the difference from Plutarch marks perhaps all its distance – a distance that functions in Montaigne, paradoxically, as a further and coherent departure from dogmatism or from that form of Pyrrhonism “cloaked in affirmation,” even if at first sight it may seem not to be so. Apparently even I, 12 ends on fideism or on the fact that, if reason leaves us, we must leave room for faith in the “divine metamorphose.” However, divine help, faith – as he had pointed out in the heart of the *Apology* – does not always arrive and it is a gift that does not come to everyone. This is an affirmation that throws the ball of God's infinite goodness back into the court of the reader. Why does a good god give only to some and take away from others, not any old goods, not goods that are earthly, material and spiritual, but the very condition of eternal salvation, faith that alone gives access to grace? In fact Montaigne does not follow Plutarch on this point and perhaps the hint of dogmatic

⁵¹ “qu'il se voit plus souvent cette faute, que les Theologiens escrivent trop humainement, que cett'autre que les humanistes escrivent trop peu theologalement. La Philosophie, dict Saint Chrysostome, est pieça banie de l'escole sainte, comme servante inutile, et estimé indigne de la doctrine celeste ... *Je propose les fantasies humaines et miennes, simplement comme humaines fantasies, et separement considerées, non comme arrestées et réglées par l'ordonnance celeste, incapable de doute et d'altercation: matiere d'opinion, non matiere de foy: ce que je discours selon moy, non ce que je croy selon Dieu, comme les enfants proposent leurs essais: instruisables, non instruisants; d'une maniere laïque, non clericale, mais tres religieuse tousjours.*”

⁵² “Ruineuse instruction à toute police, et bien plus dommageable qu'ingenieuse et subtile, qui persuade aux peuples la religieuse creance suffire seule et sans les moeurs à contenter la divine justice” (III.12.1059C).

tracts he gives Plutarch can be better understood. The final solution given to the religious problem could be one of such tracts. Because Montaigne's reasoning seems to lead elsewhere, towards a veiled atheism...

As noted, we see in Plutarch a close relationship between Arcesilaus' aporetic and the platonic theme of human incapacity to reach absolute truth, accessible only to divinity: human knowledge *versus* divine knowledge. And if in Plato faith is the result of true knowledge, the prerogative of reason,⁵³ in Plutarch's *Amatorius* the autonomy, rather than superiority, of faith with respect of reason is affirmed.

Montaigne, however, seems to prefer Plutarch's "softer" scepticism, which brings him closer to Socrates, to his asking and answering, to dialogue, to the "science de s'opposer." A softer scepticism that is sensed in Theophrastus too: "Theophrastus said that the human intellect, guided by the senses, could go only so far towards understanding natural causes ... That is a moderate and modest opinion which holds that our intellect is adequate enough to bring us to the knowledge of some things but that there are definite limits to its power, beyond which it rash to use it" (II.12.631A).⁵⁴ The original sin of philosophy is that she "can only judge very vaguely where the middle point lies: she can descry neither of the limits linking too much and too little, long and short, light and heavy, since she can recognize neither their end nor beginning" (III.9.1104B).⁵⁵

Montaigne prefers a searching-reason (critical scrutiny) rather than a 'suicide'-reason. The inlay of Montaigne's scepticism (the complexities which are linked to the intertwining of sources: Socrates, Sextus Empiricus, Gianfrancesco Pico for the taking up of Sextus' theses, but also pseudo-Dionysius and Cusanus for the criticism of human knowledge) owes more to Plutarch than to the "tour d'escrime" of the sceptics (including Pyrrho) – where one loses oneself to lose another and one arrives at a sort of suicide of reason – and is enriched by other contributions taken by Montaigne from Cusanus and pseudo-Dionysius.

The idea of an immobile God, besides Plutarch who is directly recalled, evokes deep analogies with pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, for whom "immobile" is

⁵³ *Resp.*, VII, 534 1–5.

⁵⁴ "Theophrastus disait que l'humaine cognoissance, acheminée par les sens, pouvoit juger des causes des choses jusques à certaine mesure ... C'est une opinion moyen et douce, que nostre suffisance nous peut conduire jusques à la cognoissance d'aucunes choses, et qu'elle a certaines mesures de puissance, outre lorsqu'elles, c'est temerité de l'employer: Cette opinion est plausible et introduite par gens de composition" (II.12.560A).

⁵⁵ "ny l'un ny l'autre bout de la jointure entre le trop et le peu, le long et le court, le leger et le poissant, le pres et le loing, puisqu'elle n'en recognoist le commencement ny la fin ... elle juge bien incertainement du milieu" (III.9.976B).

the divine name which indicates God's stability, which however does not prevent him from moving in order to carry out his providential action.⁵⁶ But the difference with Montaigne seems to be flimsy precisely on this point: Montaigne's insistence on an immobile god, with no other concessions, might implicate, especially if related to Dionysius' passage, the negation of providence or, better, of the concept of God as providence, a thesis suggested in other essays. The use of Plutarch's passage seems to go in this direction. But a difficulty could arise here because of the presence of providence in Plutarch's Delphian theology and religion (see also *De providentia*). The attacks on Epicurean anti-providentialism are well-known. In this sense, then, Montaigne would belong to Epicurus' "flock".

Montaigne gives direct confirmation of having read Cusanus only in *Journal de voyage*. On the other hand, of pseudo-Dionysius and his negative theology of a "hidden god" ("dieu caché"), he gives indirect confirmation in the *Essais*, through reference to Paul in Aeropagus, the real source of *Legende de Saint-Denys*: "Of all the religions which St Paul found honoured in Athens, the most excusable, he thought, was the one dedicated to a hidden, unknown God" (II.12.5783A).⁵⁷ "We cannot condignly conceive those high, divine promises if we are able to conceive them at all. To imagine them condignly, we must imagine them unimaginable, unutterable, incomprehensible, [C] and entirely different from our own wretched experiences" (II.12.579A).⁵⁸

Turning to the dedicatee, Montaigne deplores the fact that she has chosen another defender of Sebond: "qui se fut servy à faire son amas, d'autres que de nostre Plutarque." The annotation disappears in the posthumous edition. It is certainly not incidental that Montaigne chooses Plutarch's long passage to conclude the *Apology*. Plutarch is linked to Seneca in a sort of nostalgia for transcendence, for the thirst of being, which is impossible to satisfy. Plutarch and Seneca, together with Anaxagoras, Democritus and Parmenides, become in Montaigne's eyes *mi-dogmatiques mi-dubitateurs* philosophers. The conclusion, the certain negation of every hope for the human being/mind to reach the transcendent being/mind, marks the ontological split between man and transcendent being, unless under the hypothesis, which has been recently supported, of a sort of *arrière-boutique ontologique* for man.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ *De divinis nominibus*, IX 9.

⁵⁷ "Et de toutes les religions que Saint Paul trouva en credit à Athenes, celle qu'ils avoyent desdiée à une autre Divinité cachée et inconnue luy sembla la plus excusable" (II.12.513A).

⁵⁸ "Nous ne pouvons dignement concevoir la grandeur: pour dignement les imaginer, il faut les imaginer inimaginables, indicibles, et incomphrensibles, [C] et parfaitement autres que celles de nostre miserable experience" (II.12.518A).

⁵⁹ Cf. Miernowski, *op. cit.*, p. 69.

Sceptical Families: Purges, Polyyps, Medusas

Montaigne makes the following interesting claim about the Pyrrhonians' language:

Pyrronist philosophers, I see, cannot express their general concepts in any known kind of speech; they would need a new language: ours is made up of affirmative propositions totally inimical to them – so much so that when they say 'I doubt', you can jump down their throats and make them admit that they at least know one thing for certain, namely that they doubt. To save themselves they are constrained to draw an analogy from medicine: without it their sceptical humour would never get purged! When they say I know not or I doubt that affirmation purges itself (they maintain) along with all the others, exactly like a dose of rhubarb, which evacuates all our evil humours, itself included (Scepticism can be best conceived through the form of a question: 'What I know?'/*Que sais-je?*, words inscribed on my emblem of a Balance) (II.12.590–591B).⁶⁰

The reference is to a well-known passage (I.28.206) of *Hypotyposes pyrrhonianae* by Sextus Empiricus, that points out the self-purgative (self-suppressive) mechanism of sceptical expressions to avoid the "mortal" contradiction to which they were exposed (Bruno, in *Cabala*, talks of self-suffocation)⁶¹: "And indeed, regarding all sceptical expressions, the following must be kept in mind: that we do not claim at all that they are true, in that we say that they can be annulled by themselves defining themselves by what they say; in this way the purging medicines not only chase away humours from the body, but they also expel themselves together with the humours." It is scepticism's self-limitation or self-destruction, to which Sextus will return later in *Adversos logicos* (II, *ad finem*). The same comparison is made in I, 13, 188: "That reasoning can, then, like purgatives that expel themselves together with matter lying in the body, also

⁶⁰ "Je voy les philosophes Pyrrhoniens qui ne peuvent exprimer leur generale conception en aucune maniere de parler: car il leur faudroit un nouveau langage: le nostre est tout formé de propositions affirmatives, qui leur sont de tout ennemies: de façon que quand ils disent: je doute, on les tient incontinent à la gorge pour leur faire avouër qu'aumoins assurent et sçavent ils cela, qu'ils doutent. Ainsin on les a contraints de se sauver dans cette comparaison de la medicine, sans laquelle leur humeur seroit inexplicable: quand ils prononcent. J'ignore, ou: Je doute, ils disent que cette proposition s'emporte elle mesme, quant et quant le reste, ny plus ne moins que la rubarbe qui pousse hors les mauvaises humeurs et s'emporte hors quant et quant à elle mesmes. Cette fantasie est plus seurement conceuë par interrogation: Que sçays-je? Comme je la porte à la devise d'une balance" (II.12.527A).

⁶¹ See N. Panichi, *La raison sceptique comme figure de l'éthique*, in *L'écriture du scepticisme chez Montaigne*, cit.

defines itself in a similar way together with the other so-called demonstrative reasoning. This is not absurd, since the expression ‘nothing is true’, too, not only annuls all others, but also subverts itself, at the same time.” It is a hydra which cuts its own head off, a polyp that eats its tentacles. Plutarch himself alludes in *De communibus notitiis* to this *topos*, even if he here seems rather to cite the opinion of the Stoics.⁶² On a careful reading of the text, the analogy of the self-eating polyp to scepticism is only figurative and not direct. In fact, the example of the polyp is introduced to stigmatize the attitude of the Stoic Chrysippus to whom the academic Diadumenus gives the same blame as the Stoics gave the Sceptics. Now if one keeps in mind the rhetoric course of the dialogue, it is undeniable that the blame which the Stoics gave the Academics (which then fell again onto the Stoics themselves) is presupposed. Plutarch wants to demonstrate the thesis that no philosopher more than Chrysippus subverted common sense in so much as his dialectic not only reaches negation of the proof of contradiction and the destruction of the concept of demonstration and the very notion of evidence, but makes every notion suspect.

Lamprias (Amyot,⁶³ or *hetairos, comrade*) goes to Diadumenus “full of tumult which, as it seems to me, is great and strange,”⁶⁴ because of the Stoics’ words who accused the Academics of being sophists and corrupters of those who turn to philosophy and disruptors of doctrines that proceed according to method. In short, according to the Stoics’ accusation, the Academics were thought to have brought confusion and revolution to common notions. His request is to be able to recover through Diadumenus’ “reasoning,” whose reply, at first, is sarcastic: if Lamprias wants to believe in poets’ fairy stories he can also convince himself that Chrysippus did not arrive by chance but as a man of providence (sent by providence), because nature wanted him to subvert and demolish common sense.

The octopus [scepticism] is said to gnaw off its own tentacles in winter-time; but the dialectic of Chrysippus docks and destroys its own most important parts, its very principles, and what conception among the rest has it then left free of suspicion? For surely they do not think that what is in fact the superstructure rests steady and solid if the foundations are not stable but are in such great

⁶² In the *Terrestriana an aquatilia animalia sint callidiora*, polyp that eats itself is considered to be provident in view of winter: “the octopus sits trough the winter devouring himself” (*Whether land or sea Animals are clever*. 965 E, in *PM*, XII, cit.; tr. Amyot, *Quels animaux sont les plus advisez*, 511v G: “Le Poulpe se mange soy-mesme, demourant tout l’hiver”).

⁶³ The interlocutor of Diadumenus is never named in the dialogue.

⁶⁴ “plein, ce me semble, de grand trouble et d’estrange perturbation.”

bewilderment and confusion. Yet just as people with mud or dust on their bodies when they are touched or brushed against by someone think that he has struck them with the thing that irritates them and not that he has just disturbed it, so these men blame the Academics in the belief that they are causing what they are proving them to be defiled with, - as they are defiled, since what men distort the common conceptions more than they?⁶⁵

Plutarch, as has been shown, defends the Sceptics in *Adversus Colotem*. To the Epicurean Colotes, who accuses the Sceptics of being “those who withheld judgement on everything ... This sect do not say that a man or horse or wall is, but say that it is them-selves who are ‘walled’, ‘horsed’, and ‘manned’. In the first place, like a pettifogger, he is unfair in the very terms he uses.”⁶⁶ Plutarch objects:

yet he should have presented the results as the school presents them in its teaching. For the terms they use are ‘sweetened,’ ‘turned bitter,’ ‘chilled,’ ‘heated,’ ‘illumined,’ and ‘darkened,’ each of these experiences possessing within itself, intrinsic and unchallenged, the manifest character that guarantees its truth; whereas the view that honey is sweet, the foliage of the olive bitter, hail cold, neat wine heating, sunlight luminous, and night air dark, encounters evidence to the contrary from many witness – animals, grains, and men alike ... Accordingly when opinion keeps within the bounds of our responses it continues to free from error; but when it strays beyond and meddles with judgements and pronouncements about external matters, it is forever getting

⁶⁵ *Against the Stoics common Conceptions*, 1059 F, in *PM*, XIII, 2, translation by Harold Cherniss, 1974 (tr. Amyot, *Les contredits des philosophes stoïques*, 574v G–H: “On dit que le Poulpe [the scepticism] en hyver mange ses pieds et ses fleaux pendentes, mais la Dialectique de Chrysippus ostant et subvertissant les principales parties d’icelle, quelle autre conception laisse elle qui n’en devienne suspecte? Car on ne sçaurait penser que cela soit leur et ne bransle point, qui est basti sur des fondemens qui ne demeurent point fermes, ains où il y a tant de doubtes et troubles. Mais tout ainsi que ceulx qui ont de la fange ou de la pouliere dessus leurs corps, s’ils touchent à quelques autres, ou qu’ils se frottent à eulx, ils ne s’ostent pas tant l’ordure, comme ils se l’attachent d’avantage: aussi y en a il qui blasment et accusent les Academiques, et pensent leur mettre sus des imputations et accusations, dont eulx mesmes se trouvent les plus chargez: car qui sont ceulx qui plus pervertissent les communes conceptions du sens commun que sont les Stoïques?”).

⁶⁶ *Reply to Colotes*, 1120 C–D, in *PM*, XIV, cit. (tr. Amyot, *Contre l’epicurien Colotes*, 595v E: “ceulx-cy estoient ceulx qui doubtoient de toutes choses ... Ceulx-cy (dit-il) nient que l’homme, le cheval, le mur soient, mais que eulx devient mur, deviennent cheval, deviennent homme, abusant en premier lieu malicieusement des termes, comme font ordinairement les calomniateurs”).

embroiled with itself and falling into conflict with others in whom the same matters give rise to contrary experiences and dissimilar impressions.⁶⁷

Colotes seems to Plutarch to be like a child who is learning to read from letters engraved on a wooden tablet: when he sees them written elsewhere he doubts and gets upset. Colotes does exactly the same: he does not recognise Epicurean theory any more when it is presented by others.

Plutarch's way of scepticism seems decisive, indeed always more decisive in Montaigne's eyes. Moreover, already in Plutarch, Montaigne could find the solution to the criticism of *desengagement* made against scepticism, an idea that in some way was to disturb Montaigne, in fact he even tries to free Pyrrho himself of the same accusation. Pyrrho is not, according to the doxographic stereotype, he who, regardless of the city and of men, runs against chariots and falls because he stumbles on the stones. Montaigne's Pyrrho does not want to become either stone or log, but live as man in midst of men. The figure of Pyrrho is described as being against the *vulgata*.

They describe him as emotionless and virtually senseless, adopting a wild way of life, cut off from society, allowing himself to be bumped into by wagons, standing on the edge of precipices and refusing to conform to the law. That goes well beyond his teaching. He was not fashioning a log or a stone but a living, arguing, thinking man, enjoying natural pleasures and comforts of every sort and making full use of all his parts, bodily as well spiritual – [C] in, of course, a right and proper way (II.12.505).⁶⁸

Montaigne was able to find in Plutarch the argument against the theory of incompatibility between suspension of judgement and action. In *Adversus Colotem*, in fact, Plutarch explains that after losing hope of defeating the principle of the “universal suspension of judgement” defended by Arcesilaus, the Epicureans

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 1120 E–F. (tr. Amyot, *Ibid.*: “Mais il falloit prendre le fait ainsi comme eulx l’enseignent: car ils disent que devenir doux, devenir amer, devenir lumineux ou tenebreux, se fait quand chaque chose a l’effect de ces passions la en soy, sans en estre distrait. Mais si le miel est doux, l’olivier amer, la gresle froid, le vin chaud, & l’air de la nuit tenebreux, il y a plusieurs animaux, plusieurs choses & plusieurs hommes qui tesmoignent le contraire ... Pourquoi l’opinion se contenant en ces passions se conserve sans faillir, mais quand elle sort dehors en jugeant & pronoinçant des choses exterieures, elle se trouble bien souvent elle mesme, & combat contre l’autres qui de mesmes choses peuvent de contraire passions, & de differents imaginations”).

⁶⁸ “[A] Ils le peignent stupide et immobile, prenant un train de la vie farouche et inassociable, attendant le heurt des charrettes, se présentant aux précipices, refusant de s’accommoder aux loix. Cela est enchérir sur sa discipline. Il n’a pas voulu se faire pierre ou souche: il a voulu se faire homme vivant, discourant et raisonnant, jouissant de tous plaisirs et commodités naturelles, embesognant et se servant de toutes ses pièces corporelle [C] et spirituelles en règle et droiture” (II.12.505).

had ended up taking from the Stoics themselves an argument which they waved around like a scarecrow, that is, the argument of “inaction.” Plutarch shows that the argument was directed at denying that there can be compatibility between suspension of judgement and action; every action, implying in turn consent to a representation, would impede the suspension of judgement.

Here is Plutarch’s argument against the “scarecrow” of inaction waved around by the adversaries of the Sceptics like a sort of petrifying Medusa:

So for his sake we are thankful to Colotes and everyone who shows that the Academic reasoning came to Arcesilaüs as an ancient tradition. The view that we should suspend judgement about everything was not shaken even by those who undertook elaborate investigations and composed lengthy and argumentative treatises to refuse it, but these men at last brought up against it from the Stoa like some Gorgon’s head the argument from total inaction and gave up the battle. For in spite of all their probing and wrenching, impulse refused to turn into assent or accept sensation as what tips the scale; it was seen instead to lead to action on its own initiative, requiring no approval from other quarters. For debates with those opponents are conducted according to rule ... gets from Colotes, I fancy, the response that a performance on the lyre gets from an ass (*Ibid.*, 1122 B).⁶⁹

The *apraxia* objection is basically a metamorphosis of scepticism, representing it as the repeated movement of the Danaïds (Bruno) who fill and empty without stopping. Montaigne perceives it as a double-edged instrument, given the inherent risks for the consequent Pyrrhonism: the Pyrrhonian argument is compared to a duel (“un tour d’escrime”) that brings with it the risk of self-destruction.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 1122 B (tr. Amyot, *Ibid.*, 596r C–D: “Or quant à cela ie rends graces à Colotes & tous ceulx qui disent et affirmation, que la doctrine Academique a esté introduite par Arcesilas: mais à retention & consentement & doubte de toutes choses, ny ceulx qui disent qui s’en sont beaucoup travailleez, & qui se sont rendus à en composer de gros livres, & grand traittez, ne l’ont iamais peu remuer, ains amenans à la fin de la doctrine des Stoiques, comme la fee Gorgonne, pour faire peur aux gens, la cessation de toutes actions, ils s’en sont lassez, apres qu’ils ont veu que combien qu’ils remuassent & assayassent toutes choses, l’instinct ou l’appetition ne leur obeissoit point pour faire un consentement, ny ne recevoit point le sentiment pour origine & principe de la propension, ains se toit d’elle mesme aux actions, n’ayant point de besoing de s’adioindre à rien, mais le combat & dispute est legitime & juste alencontre de tels adversaires ... car de parler à Colotes de l’instinct ou appetition & consentement, c’est autant comme, sonner de la lyre à un asne...”).

⁷⁰ *Obiter dicta*: it must be remembered that in Montaigne this very theme of *sceptsi* as an impossible measure and the idea of a curative thought that takes itself away together with the other, is rooted in negative theology. In contrast to classical scepticism, negative theology places the debate not only on the epistemological level but also on the metaphysical one. If rational and natural theology is the one that says “cela, c’est Dieu,” Montaigne produces its parody in a hyperbolic accumulation of statements and reasoning: “Si dieu est, il est animal ...” (II.12.538B).

We must go back to Montaigne's view of the Pyrrhonian move as "a desperate act of dexterity, in which you must surrender your own arms to force your opponent to lose his," "a covert blow which you should only use rarely and with discretion. It is rashness indeed to undo another by undoing yourself" (II.12.628B).⁷¹ The desperate blow makes one lose oneself, as if reason "had lost its mind ...": losing oneself in order to make another lose himself is the equivalent of losing one's reason, to the suicide and the death of reason through self-negation, self-elimination. It is similar to the sceptical purge that eliminates itself together with the illness: scepticism together with its opposite, dogmatism; the judging instrument together with the judged ("we have shown Man to himself – and his reason to his reason, to see what it has to tell us" II.12.628A).⁷² Montaigne continues to think that the measuring instrument, with its illnesses and its health, remains forever his being. And health is the scales, the capacity of the mind to measure the *what can I know, what must I say, what must I do?* of *Du pédantisme*. Montaigne insists: "Within me judgement holds the rector's chair" (III.13.1219B).⁷³ For this reason Montaigne places Pyrrho and Plutarch, whose attitude "is inquiry rather than instruction" (II.12.568A: "enquerant plustot qu'instruisant", II.12.509), side by side. As far as Plutarch is concerned "everywhere ... his manner is one of sustained doubt and indecision" (II.12.626A). Pyrrhonian *zetesis* is saved through Plutarch, whose writing "doubteuse en substance" teaches that "reason must stay within."

The purge works like cathartics, it is like a homeopathic cure: sceptical expressions (*phonai skeptikai*) are expelled with the unwanted humours and sceptical arguments (*logoi*) are eliminated together with the propositions that they contend. For the Sceptics, it is a sort of self-medication that prevents the assertion from falling into contradiction, maintaining the coherence of Pyrrhonian *zetesis*. Montaigne is well aware that the Achilles heel of Pyrrhonism is language: a new language is required to avoid falling into the trap of "Pyrrhonism cloaked in affirmation" (II.12.566A: "Pyrrhonisme en forme resoluteive," II.12.507A). Opinion, presumption, the claim of gathering the *res* under the *verba*, are pathological affections (typical of dogmatic thought) that the Sceptics would like to eradicate. With the self-purgative comparison, Sextus revives the antique *topos* of the cathartic

⁷¹ "coup desesperé auquel il faut abandonner vos armes pour faire perdre à vostre adversaire les siennes," "tour secret duquel il se faut servir rarement et reservément. C'est une grande temerité de vous perdre vous mesmes pour perdre un autre" (II.12.558A).

⁷² "nous l'avons proposé luy [man] mesmes à soy, et sa raison à sa raison, pour voir ce quelle nous en diroit" (II.12.557A).

⁷³ "le jugement tient chez moi un siege magistral" (III.13.1074B).

logos, since curative action is destined to turn against the very instrument that operates it. Montaigne does not endorse the violent self-medication of the purge aimed at “vuider le ventre,” that is at “vuider la raison” (*mens*).

Even if Montaigne does not like homeopathic cures, illness that treats itself with illness, he invokes the purgative metaphor against “tumultuous and dissident drugs” (II.37.874C: “drogues tumultuaires et dissentieuses,” II.37.775C): “Get them to prescribe an aperient for your brain; it will be better employed there than in your stomach” (II.37.868C).⁷⁴ How can we forget that the *Essais* themselves are defined as “droppings of an old mind” (III.9.1070B: “escremens d’un vieil esprit,” III.9.946B)? But the self-purgative cure is not accepted.

The approximately five hundred *emprunts* from the *Moralia* witness the pervasiveness of the moral project: “I want them to give Plutarch a fillip on my nose.”⁷⁵ Plutarch appears to Montaigne “so all embracing, so rich” (“si universel et si plain”). He is the one who holds out in the more difficult moments “a hand generous with riches” (“sa main liberale et inespuisable,” III.5.875B). His semantic density – “Plutarch is full of matter” (“Il est plein ... de choses,” II, 10.413A) –, his words of flesh and blood, are the focal point of a perspective from which his own philosophy is born. His idea of reason and his way of treating science “à pieces discoususes” (*Ibid.*) makes the job of disassembly and reassembly easier: “We must not judge what is possible and impossible according to what seems credible or incredible to our own minds” (II.32.821A).⁷⁶ If Plutarch continues to be he who distinguishes divine being and human becoming, there is still basically a strong dose of faithfulness towards Sextus’ aim: a sceptic is such because he loves humanity (“he wants, as far as he can, to cure with reasoning the Dogmatics’ presumption and temerity”).⁷⁷ This is why the aim of the sceptical project to place itself as the *pharmakon* of every philosophy can keep methodologically all its validity.

Undoubtedly Montaigne’s position is closer to Plutarch’s than is usually thought or admitted, closer than it is to Pyrrho’s position, considered to be more “desperate.” More than a “new Pyrrhonian,” Montaigne should be considered to be a “new Plutarchan” – a Plutarchism that is filtered by Pyrrhonian *zetesis* in the restoration of Sextus. In fact Plutarch, in *De cohibenda ira* frequently

⁷⁴ “faictes une purgation à vostre cervelle, elle y sera mieux employée qu’à vostre estomach” (II.37.768C).

⁷⁵ See translation by Frame, *op. it.*, p. 296 (“Je veux qu’ils donnent une nazarde à Plutarque sur mon nez,” II.10.408C).

⁷⁶ “Il ne faut pas juger ce qui est possible et ce qui ne l’est pas, selon ce qui est croyable et incroyable à nostre sens” (II.32.725A).

⁷⁷ *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, III, 32, 280.

discussed by Montaigne (and the first of the *Moralia* to be known in the Western world), expresses himself as follows, quoting (through Fundanus) the opinion of Musonius, a stoic philosopher, showing that he is of the same idea: “He that wishes to come through life safe and sound must continue throughout his life to be under treatment. For I do not think that reason should be used in one’s cure as we use hellebore, and be washed out of the body together with the disease, but it must remain in the soul and keep watch and ward over the judgements. For the power of reason is not like drugs, but like wholesome some food.”⁷⁸ He who wants to be healthy has to treat himself all his life. Plutarch believes that reason, the *logos*, unlike the hellebore, does not have to flow out together with the illness once the treatment has ended, but must remain in the soul in order to keep judgments in check. Its efficacy is not like that of medicine, but like that of healthy foods. Reason *has to stay within*, in order to measure, to weigh, *balancer et contrebaler* “for the whole of one’s life,” in a continual search. It must be the compass and the *pierre de touche* despite its falsities and illusions from which it must free itself: liberation from *idola*, from prejudices, from intolerance that tyrannize man; the rehabilitation of animals and the condemnation of the presumption that consists in “start talking about gods and demi-gods” (II.12.582B).⁷⁹ Man must continue to learn all this in intellectual search understood as permanent training. It is the return of Montaigne’s scales. Only in this way can philosophy completely realize its masterpiece, *vivre a propos*, that is to place itself as “formatrice des jugements et des meurs.” We are not dealing with “to blot everything out” (I.34.248A: “tout effacer,” I.34.221A) of the Plinian anecdote, as the painter Prothogenes would have liked, exasperated to the point of wanting to rub everything out with a sponge.⁸⁰

If Montaigne questions the legitimacy of the sceptical purge it is because he weighs up the *pour* and the *contre*, he submits the sceptical purge to a critical examination; he opposes arguments to the contrary, whilst approving the premises. If he declares he is against the too full and too empty, against extremes (as were Academic scepticism and dogmatism), it is for the “nothing too much.”

⁷⁸ *On the Control of Anger*, 453D–E, in *PM*, VI, translation by W. C. Helmbold, 1957 (tr. Amyot, *Comment il faut refrener la colere*, 56r E: “...ceux qui se veulent sauver ne font autre chose toute leur vie, que se curer et nettoier: non pas qu’il faille jeter hors la raison avec la maladie, apres qu’elle a achevé la cure et guarison, comme l’hellebore, ains fault que demourant en l’ame elle contregarde, et conserve le iugement, pour ce que la raison ne ressemble pas aux drogues medicinales, mais plutost aux viandes salubres”).

⁷⁹ “entreprenre de parler et discourir des dieux et des demy-dieux” (II.12.520B).

⁸⁰ The discovery of ataraxy by the Pyrrhonians is described in a sort of genetic story of the epoché related by Sextus Empiricus: “So what is said to have happened to the painter Apelles happened to the sceptics. They say that Apelles, on painting a horse, wanted to paint the foam with his brush. Not succeeding in any way, he gave up and threw the

Pyrrho is placed in II, 12, in the middle between the sceptics and the dogmatics, but his *milieu* is not sufficiently in the middle: “purgation” has to be undertaken only to “extreme necessity” (II.37.867C: “à l’extreme necessité,” II.37.767C). But how is one to understand whether the matter to be evacuated has to stay in the body or not? Montaigne substitutes the violent self-medication of the Pyrrhonian language with a reticent writing with respect to the purges, being more inclined to increasing additions in the text of the *Essays*.

Penser, peser forever: “If we do not soon start to dress our wounds, when shall we ever cure them and their evils? Yet Philosophy provides the sweetest of cures: other cures are enjoyed only after they have worked: this one cures and gives joy all at once” (II.25.783A).⁸¹ This is the very teaching of Plutarch and of his *art of life*⁸²; true masters are masters of life, not masters of truth. Philosophy of life as art of life pleases and cures at the same time: good cures with good. “Vraye et naïve philosophie” is a “tres douce medicine,” to form judgement and customs. This is a non-purgative medicine.

The reminder to the princess to pay attention to the desperate blow that makes one lose one’s reason through the reasons of dogmatics, recalls the use of this “preservatif” that is useful in the fight against the “dangereuse peste” of “ces nouveaux docteurs” (II.12.559A). The battle against the reasons of Pyrrhonism ends up strengthening the *zetetic* moment and the antiperistasis movement, as Cave has shown.⁸³

Montaigne’s very reading of the *Moralia* is that of a philosopher who, in turn, alludes, indicates, does not prescribe: it is possible to re-read the passage of *L’institution des enfants* from a sceptical viewpoint. But this, too, was precisely the sense of the Sextian title of Pyrrhonian “outlines.”

sponge, with which he cleaned the brush of the different colours, at the painting. The sponge, on touching the horse, left an imprint that looked like foam [29]. The sceptics too hoped that they could achieve imperturbability by resolving the disparity between the facts of sense and those of reason: but not managing to succeed, they suspended judgement, and imperturbability was hidden behind this suspension, like a shadow to the body” (I, 12). On the contrary Montaigne recalls Pliny and the anecdote of the painter Prothogenes. The problem that Montaigne wants to reply to is whether fortune is more astute than we are. At times it makes fun of us and competes with our miracles, it behaves like a doctor or is better than a painter in the knowledge of his art, rectifies projects and corrects them – at times it beats the norms of human wisdom in its predictions.

⁸¹ “Si nous ne commençons de bonne heure à nous *penser*, quand aurons nous pourveu à tant de playes et à tant de maus? Si avons nous une tres-douce medicine que la philosophie: car des autres on n’en sent le plaisir qu’après la guarison, cette-ci plait et guerit ensemble” (II.25.689–690A).

⁸² *Table-Talk*, I, 1, 613 B, in *PM*, VIII, cit. (tr. Amyot, *Le propos de table*, 359v F: “art qui nous montre comment il fault vivre”).

⁸³ *Pré-histoires*, Genève: Droz, 1999, pp. 23–50.

9. CHARRON'S ACADEMIC SCEPTICAL WISDOM

José R. Maia Neto*

Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, Belo Horizonte, Brazil

Introduction

Is sceptical wisdom, wisdom based on suspension of judgment (*epoché*), possible? A quick look at the history of philosophy seems to exclude this possibility since not only possession of knowledge, but certain possession of knowledge, appears to be an essential part of the concept.

One of the remarkable original aspects of Pierre Charron's *De la Sagesse* is his proposal of a consistent and fully developed sceptical wisdom.¹ The uniqueness of the project can be evaluated if we look both backwards and forwards in the history of scepticism. As far as I know, scepticism in the Renaissance was usually instrumental for scholarly, philosophical, or religious ends alien to scepticism itself.² Looking forward in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, that is, until Descartes's doubt took over completely the sceptical scene, the tremendous success of Charron's *Wisdom* was largely due to its proposal of a clear and systematic sceptical wisdom.³ Indeed, for those thinkers opposed to

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¹ Pierre Charron was born in Paris in 1541 and died, also in Paris, in 1603. *De la Sagesse*, his major work, was published in Bordeaux in 1601. Strong negative reactions lead Charron to review, extend, and "sweeten" some passages for a new edition which he did not survive to see published. It appeared in Paris in 1604 a few months after his death.

² An exception is Montaigne, who gave Charron the basic elements of his conception of wisdom. See in particular Montaigne's "Apology for Raymond Sebond," chapter 12 of book II of the *Essays*, in which, besides providing a sophisticated sceptical attack on basic philosophical doctrines, he attacks the connection of wisdom with knowledge by reviewing the history of philosophy from a sceptical viewpoint and by approaching Christianity from a fideist viewpoint.

³ Bayle reports—citing Sorel's *Bibliothèque*—Naudé's claim that he "estimait tant [Charron] qu'il le préférât à Socrate; que Socrate n'avait parlé à ses disciples que confusément, et selon les occurrences, au lieu que Charron avait réduit la sagesse en art."

dogmatism – and there were many at a time of crisis in Aristotelian scholasticism – Charron’s view that scepticism is not only a viable mode of life but the wise mode of life could not but appear attractive.

Charron’s sceptical wisdom is Academic. He takes above all from Academic scepticism (Arcesilaus and Carneades) the foundations of this wisdom, which he develops extensively in a way such that it can be applied in all circumstances of life. Book II gives the general rules of wisdom, stating the basic ancient Academic rules and adding some others necessary to adapt it to the philosophical and religious context of his time. Book III is an application of the basic rules to the many public and private situations available to a man of his rank and time.⁴

Ancient Academic Sceptical Wisdom

Charron’s philosophy has a historical base in antiquity if we do not go along with Pierre Coussin’s influential view of Academic scepticism as merely dialectical.⁵ Coussin’s interpretation has been attacked by recent scholars. A. M. Ioppolo has claimed that Arcesilaus held views of his own, denying that he argued always *ad hominem* against the Stoics. She provides nondialectical interpretations for all the main concepts of Arcesilaus’s position.⁶ R. Bolzani Filho has emphasized a topic of major interest for Charron, namely, that Arcesilaus did hold a positive view on wisdom. There are indeed a number of passages in Cicero’s *Academica* that can be cited in support of this interpretation. The first of these is Ac I.45 which, as Bolzani Filho points out, is very important because it states the reasons which lead Arcesilaus to introduce *epoché* in Plato’s Academy.

(*Dictionnaire*, article “Charron”, remark O). Note that for Naudé it was precisely Charron’s style that allowed him to elaborate the view of wisdom that Socrates could only point toward. There were a tremendous number of editions of Charron’s *Wisdom* during this period. See the list given by Vittorio Dini and Domenico Taranto in *La Saggezza moderna: temi e problemi dell’opera di Pierre Charron*. Napoli: Edizioni Scientifiche Italiana, 1987, pp. 421–423. The work was soon translated into English, Italian, and German, becoming immediately influential in England. See F. Charles-Daubert, “Charron et l’Angleterre”, *Recherches sur le XVIIe Siècle* 5 (1982), 53–56.

⁴ Book III contains chapters on private duties (in relation to one’s wife, children, friends) and public duties (mainly in politics).

⁵ Pierre Coussin, “L’origine et l’évolution de l’époque”, *Revue des Études Grecques* 42 (1929), 373–397 and “The Stoicism of the New Academy” in M. Burnyeat, ed. *The Sceptical Tradition*. Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1983, pp. 31–63 (originally published in French in the *Revue d’histoire de la philosophie* 3 (1929), 241–276).

⁶ A. M. Ioppolo, *Opinione e Scienza: Il dibattito tra Stoic e Accademici nel III e nel II secolo a. c.* Napoli: Bibliopolis, 1986.

It was entirely with Zeno, so we have been told, ... that Arcesilaus set on foot his battle, not from obstinacy or desire for victory ... but because of the obscurity of the facts that had led Socrates to a confession of ignorance, as also previously his predecessors Democritus, Anaxagoras, Empedocles, and almost all the old philosophers, who utterly denied all possibility of cognition or perception or knowledge, and maintained that the senses are limited, the mind feeble, the span of life short, and that the truth (in Democritus's phrase) is sunk in an abyss ... Accordingly Arcesilas said that there is nothing that can be known, not even that residuum of knowledge that Socrates had left himself—the truth of this very dictum; so hidden in obscurity did he believe that everything lies, nor is there any that can be perceived or understood, and for these reasons, he said, no one must make any positive statement or affirmation or give the approval of his assent to any proposition, and man must always restrain his rashness and hold it back from every slip, as it would be glaring rashness to give assent either to a falsehood or to something not certainly known, and nothing is more disgraceful than for assent and approval to outstrip knowledge and perception.⁷

Although the passage makes clear that Zeno's philosophy was what motivated Arcesilaus's position, the latter's position does not appear to be *ad hominem* in the passage. First we see Arcesilaus holding a view of the obscurity of things and of the weakness of the human understanding, a view held outstandingly by Socrates – this being the essential link between the Academy and scepticism – but also by Socrates's predecessors. Arcesilaus reacts to Zeno because the Stoic broke with this philosophical tradition when he advanced his epistemological theory of the cognitive impression. Second, as the other passages I cite below also make clear, Arcesilaus appears to hold a view of wisdom as contrary to opinion or belief (*doxa*), this being another connection between him and Plato. Assent to that which lacks indubitable evidence is mere belief and so contrary to wisdom.⁸ The following three positive views lead Arcesilaus to *epoché*: the obscurity of things, the weakness of human understanding, and the normative view that the philosopher should avoid any risk of erring.

Arcesilaus's commitment to intellectual integrity appears still more clearly when he is said to have considered the view that “it is possible for a human

⁷ Cicero, *Academica*, translated by H. Rackham for the Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979, first edition, 1933, p. 453.

⁸ This is the principle of intellectual integrity, alleged by sceptics and dogmatists alike but, according to the sceptics, actually held only by them. The principle rules that doctrines or propositions not fully warranted by reason shall not be held by the wise man, for if he did assent to them he might commit an error. Intellectual integrity is fully stated by Cicero in Ac II.8 (quoted below).

being to hold no opinions, and not only that it is possible but that it is the duty of the wise man' both true and also honourable and worthy of a wise man" (Ac II.77). According to Coussin, suspension of judgment would result from Zeno's own – not Arcesilaus's – conception of wisdom according to which a wise man shall suspend judgment when he cannot have a clear and distinct impression. But Ac II.77 makes quite clear that Arcesilaus actually agreed with this view of wisdom, the difference between him and Zeno lying only on whether there was any kind of assent that would not constitute mere fallible opinion.⁹ Such passages can be given as textual support for Bolzani Filho's claim that "there is a concept of *sapientia* for the Academic, a concept that does not introduce any dogmatism but what results from a rational and unbiased investigation: the suspension of judgment, the refusal of an affirmative definitive speech."¹⁰ Charron's *Wisdom* is a full-fledged development of this Academic sceptic concept of wisdom adapted to his time. Its foundation lies precisely on rational, unbiased examination which can be exercised fully only by those who have suspended judgment. *Epoché* is thus the crucial characteristic of the wise.¹¹ In this chapter, I explore this basic

⁹ See also Ac II.67. "‘If the wise man ever assents to anything, he will sometimes also form an opinion; but he never will form an opinion; therefore he will not assent to anything.’ This syllogism Arcesilaus used to approve, for he used to accept both the major premiss and the minor. . . . But the major premiss . . . both the Stoics and their supporter Antiochus declare to be false, arguing that the wise man is able to distinguish the false from the true and the imperceptible from the perceptible." Note that Arcesilaus is said to approve the minor premiss, that the wise man will never form an opinion. Agreeing with the Stoics on this conception of wisdom, Arcesilaus disagrees that man can have knowledge, that is, an intellectually clear and certain grasp of the truth, because of his view of the obscurity of things. The following statement also seems unequivocal in attributing this rational concept of wisdom to Arcesilaus: "the strongest point of the wise man, in the opinion of Arcesilaus, agreeing with Zeno, lies in avoiding being taken in and in seeing that he is not deceived—for nothing is more removed from the conception that we have of the dignity of the wise man than error, frivolity or rashness" (Ac II.66).

¹⁰ Roberto Bolzani Filho, *Acadêmicos versus Pirrônicos*, Ph.D. dissertation, USP, São Paulo, 2003, p. 46 (my translation).

¹¹ Many Charron scholars – for instance, Julien-Eymard d'Angers, *Recherches sur le stoïcisme au XVIe et XVIIe siècles*. New York: Olms, 1976; Maryanne Horowitz, "Pierre Charron's View of the Source of Wisdom", *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 9 (1971), 443–457; Manlio Iofrida, "A propositio della *Sagesse* di Pierre Charron", *Annali della Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa*, serie III, vol. 8, 1978, pp. 525–564 – have wrongly concluded from the Stoicism of Charron's *concept* of wisdom that the *content* of his wisdom is also Stoic. (I claim that although it has Stoic features, Charron's wisdom is fundamentally Academic sceptic). Now since Arcesilaus himself held this Stoic concept of wisdom, which was not originally Stoic but from the Old Academy, and which he defended in its original "sceptical" content, it is clear that the adoption of the concept does not imply by itself the adoption of its Stoic content.

foundation of Charron's wisdom and some of its main preconditions (parts of book I and, above all, of book II). I do not deal with its many applications (book III) and thus do not evaluate the coherence and full applicability of his sceptical wisdom.

Wisdom Does Not Require Metaphysical Knowledge

The first precondition of Charron's sceptical wisdom appears in the preface to the work, in particular in its extended version in the second edition. Charron dissociates the philosophical conception of wisdom from its entrenched dogmatic version. In fact, the successive development of Stoicism, neo-Platonism, and scholastic Aristotelianism that dominated the philosophical scene during the seventeen hundred years that separate Arcesilaus and Charron rendered the work of dissociating wisdom from dogmatic knowledge much harder to the Frenchman than it was to the Greek. Charron maintains that although wisdom is related to knowledge – against the popular view that reduces it to prudent behavior—it is not and cannot be related to knowledge of things that lay beyond human limited intellectual capacity. In the preface to the first edition, Charron says that he does not take “ce mot [wisdom] subtilement au sens hautain et eslevé des Theologiens et Philosophes (qui prennent plaisir à descrire et faire peinture des choses, qui n'ont encores esté veuës, et les relever à telle perfection, que la nature humaine ne s'en trouve capable, que par imagination) pour une cognoissance parfaicte des choses divines et humaines, ou bien des premieres et plus hautes causes et ressorts de toutes choses.”¹² Charron thus sets aside the traditional dogmatic view of wisdom as related to metaphysics and speculative theology. In the extended preface to the second edition, he distinguished divine from human wisdom, defining each as the proper subject of, respectively, theology and philosophy. The philosophical viewpoint is as inadequate to access divine wisdom as the theological viewpoint is inadequate to access human wisdom. Charron makes a double movement. On the one hand, he confines theology to what lies beyond human nature, the realm of the supernatural, thereby legitimizing only positive or revealed theology and excluding natural theology. On the other hand, he restrains philosophy to what lies within the natural grasp of human mind, thereby legitimizing only practical philosophy (in the large Lockean sense of what concerns man's life in man's natural condition in this world) and excluding dogmatic philosophy in general – which pretends to attain the truth – and metaphysics in particular, which pretends to deliver first principles and causes.

¹² Pierre Charron, *De la Sagesse*. Paris: Fayard, 1986, pp. 25–26.

The Limited Perfection and Excellence Required by Wisdom

Although Charron discards the elevated conception of wisdom of natural theologians and metaphysicians, he by no means gives up the idea that wisdom implies excellence and perfection. The excellence and perfection of something does not require its location in a high position in some questionable ontological hierarchy but the full flowering of its proper nature, even if this nature is limited. Applying this to man, and to man's essence, reason, this means that human excellence and perfection does not presuppose the attainment of certain knowledge as the dogmatist would claim but only full accomplishment of its integrity. This leads to the second major previous requirement for wisdom, indicated precisely as such by Charron: knowledge of oneself and of human nature, the title of book I. This is the knowledge that points out the limited nature of man's faculties, thereby showing that the kind of wisdom imagined by the dogmatists – certain knowledge of things human and divine – does not belong to man's nature.¹³ This justifies the “modest” Academic wisdom – as Charron often calls it – presented in book II. Given that man cannot achieve the truth, the point of wisdom becomes to avoid error. The passages cited in the beginning of this paper show that this is precisely Cicero's view of Academic scepticism. What is probably original in Charron is his view that once this recognition of the limits of the human faculties is reached and error avoided through *epoché*, man achieves his perfection and excellence because human reason attains its full flowering. Unlike Arcesilaus, Charron appears less troubled by the eventual accusation of holding positive views and much more interested in presenting his Academic sceptic wise man as achieving the summit of human limited perfection.¹⁴ Charron thus gives an anthropological base to his sceptical wisdom.¹⁵

Cette sagesse humaine est une droiture, belle et noble composition de l'homme entier, en son dedens, son dehors, ses pensées, paroles, actions, et tous ses mouvemens c'est l'excellence et perfection de l'homme comme homme, c'est à dire selon que porte et requiert la loy premiere fondamentale

¹³ We can locate here the “epistemological turn” in modern philosophy. The similarity of this position with Locke's is not a mere coincidence. There are a number of passages in Locke's *Essay* that clearly come from Charron's *Wisdom*.

¹⁴ I argue at the end of this chapter that the positive views present in Charron's wisdom, such as his view of man as a rational animal and that of perfection of a specific nature, though dogmatic in origin – in this case, Aristotelian – are not dogmatic in Charron's work.

¹⁵ The view that modern scepticism derives from anthropological views is held by Sylvia Gioconti – *Penser l'Irrésolution* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2001) and by Frédéric Brahami – *Le Travail du Scepticisme* (Paris: PUF, 2001). The anthropology here is, however, quite different from that proposed by them.

et naturelle de l'homme, ainsi que nous disons un ouvrage bien fait et excellent, quand il est bien complet de toutes ses pieces, et que toutes les regles de l'art y ont esté gardées: celuy est homme sage qui sçait bien et excellent faire l'homme: c'est à dire, pour en donner une plus particuliere peinture, qui se cognoissant bien et l'humaine condition se garde et preserve de tous vices, erreurs, passions, et defauts tant internes, siens et propres, qu'externes, communs et populaires; maintenant son esprit net, libre, franc universel, considerant et jugeant de toutes choses, sans s'obliger ny jurer à aucune.¹⁶

To be wise is to “faire l'homme comme homme,” that is, to fully develop human nature, neither leaving underemployed our intellectual faculties nor attempting to reach what is not proportional to them. The knowledge of human nature provided in book I is thus required for the achievement of wisdom provided in book II for at least three reasons. (1) It reveals what reason cannot attain – certain knowledge of things, in particular of the first principles and causes – and the precise limit of what reason can attain: the *phenomena*.¹⁷ (2) Knowledge of human nature also shows human proneness to assent in the absence of evidence, that is, the force of non-epistemic factors (passions, interest, education) over the mind.¹⁸ Awareness of this human tendency to rashness or precipitation allows the wise to contravene it by an effort of the will, by virtue of which he resists dogmatism by resolving not to take as truth that which strikes him as such.¹⁹ This active aspect of Charron's *epoché* has been remarked by scholars as a peculiar

¹⁶ Charron, *op. cit.*, pp. 32–33.

¹⁷ “l'homme ne sçait et n'entend rien à droict, au pur et au vray comme il faut, tournoyant tousjours et tatonnant à l'entour des apparences, qui se trouvent par tout aussi bien au faux qu'au vray: nous sommes nais à quester la verité: la posseder appartient à une plus haute et grande puissance.” Charron, *op. cit.*, book I, chapter 14, p. 138.

¹⁸ See Book I, chapter 14, in particular pp. 140–144. According to Pyrrhonians and Academics alike, *propotéïan*, which has been translated to English as rashness and precipitation, lies at the root of dogmatism.

¹⁹ What strikes or appears as true is what Carneades calls the *pythanos*, translated by Cicero as *probabili*. Sextus denies the probable presentation to which, however, Carneades does not assent but just approves in practical matters. (I return to this at the end). Likewise, Charron's sage men will rather “douter et tenir en suspens leur creance, que par une trop molle et lasche facilité, ou legereté, ou precipitation de jugement, se pai-tre de fausseté, et affirmer ou se tenir assurez de chose, de laquelle ils ne peuvent avoir raison certaine.” (*De la Sagesse*, I, 43, 291–292). This requires “preud'homie,” defined as “une droite et ferme disposition de la volonté, à suivre le conseil de la raison.” (II, 3, 429). The similarity with Descartes is not a mere coincidence; see J. R. Maia Neto, “Charron's *époche* and Descartes' *cogito*: The Sceptical Base of Descartes' Refutation of Scepticism” in G. Paganini, ed. *The Return of Scepticism from Hobbes and Descartes to Bayle*. Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2003, pp. 81–113; G. Paganini, *Sceptsi moderna: Interpretazioni dello*

feature of his scepticism and an important one to the extent that it leads to Descartes's methodic doubt.²⁰ However, this aspect can also be traced to ancient Academic scepticism: they argued that "facilius ab utraque parte ad sensum sustineratur" (Ac I.45), like Charron who gives "four or five" considerations which lead us to suspend judgment.²¹ (3) The result of the study of human nature in book I is not only negative. As the wise man finds what reason is not adequate for, namely, discovering the truth, he finds out what it is fitted for: unbiased rational inquiry. In this activity he finds the perfection of reason through which he gets rid of wisdom's enemies portrayed in the frontispiece of the book: opinion, science, superstition, and passion.²²

Doubt Everything, Assent to Nothing: The Grounds of Intellectual Integrity

In the summary of wisdom given in the passage quoted above from the preface, Charron indicates its foundation: "juger de toutes choses, sans s'obliger ny jurer à aucune." Charron claims in the *Petit Traité de Sagesse* that this expresses the traditional ancient conception of wisdom, that is, how the ancient Academic sceptics saw it; above all how they interpreted Plato, in whose books "nihil adfirmatur et in utramque partem multa disserentur, de omnibus quaeritur, nihil certi dicitur" (Ac I.46). This universal *zetesis* and *epoché* are detailed in chapter 2 of book II, "universelle et pleine liberté de l'esprit," in particular concerning the faculty of judgment.²³ The

scetticismo da Charron a Hume. Cosenza: Busento, 1991, pp. 26–32 and R. H. Popkin, "Charron and Descartes: The Fruits of Systematic Doubt", *The Journal of Philosophy* 51 (1954), 831–837.

²⁰ R. Popkin and G. Paganini (references in the note above).

²¹ *De la Sagesse*, II, 2, 407–409. Another source of Charron's move is Montaigne's translation of *sustinere* as *soutenir*, hold fast by oneself.

²² Opinion is the dogmatism of ordinary man, Science is the dogmatism of philosophers (in particular, the Aristotelians), and Superstition is the dogmatism of religious men. In the case of Passion, Charron builds on Sextus's argument that scepticism about values suppresses anxiety to get what one dogmatically considers as good, as well as – in case one already possesses what one takes to be good – the fear of losing it. See Sextus Empiricus, *Adversus Mathematicos*, translated by R. G. Bury for the Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, first edition 1936, book XI ("Against the Ethicists"), pp. 141–167.

²³ Attribution of *zetesis* to Charron's wise man does not distance him from the Academics, approximating him to the Pyrrhonians, because Sextus's claim that the Academics abandon the search after the truth to the extent that they hold truth to be inapprehensible has been widely challenged. "For even though many difficulties hinder every branch of knowledge, and both the subjects themselves and our faculties of judgment involve such a lack of certainty that the most ancient and learned thinkers had good reason for distrusting their ability to discover what they desired, nevertheless they did not give up, nor yet will we abandon in exhaustion our zeal for research" (Ac II.7).

two aspects work in conjunction in what could be characterized as a virtuous circle. On the one hand, suspension of judgment, absence of any previously held belief, is a necessary condition for the full exercise of man's reason: unbiased rational investigation. On the other hand, universal investigation is necessary for the maintenance of suspended judgment since an open, endless, and rigorous examination will inevitably undermine the plausibility of any belief or doctrine to which one might feel inclined to adhere.²⁴ Charron founds his wisdom on Cicero's concept of intellectual integrity, whose key passage (Ac II.8) he cites in this chapter: "hoc liberiores et solutiores sumus, quia integra nobis judicandi potestas manet." The integrity of man's capacity of rational examination is maintained in *epoché*. It is therefore in *epoché* that reason – therefore the human being – attains its fully fledged perfection and excellence.

The device of the sage, which figures in the frontispiece of the work, is "je ne sais." Charron points out that this is Socratic ignorance, Socrates being the main model of the wise man.²⁵ He says that the wise man says "Je ne sçay," which is "une sorte d'ignorance et de doute, plus docte et assurée, plus noble et genereuse que tout leur [the dogmatists's] science et certitude: c'est ce qui a rendu Socrate si renommé et tenu pour le plus sage: c'est la science des sciences et le fruit de tous nos études: c'est une modest, candide, innocente, et cordiale reconnoissance de la hautesse mysterieuse de la verité, et de nôtre povre condition humaine, plaine de tenebres, foiblesse, incertitude."²⁶ Charron rehearses the same points alluded to by Cicero in the passage cited at the beginning of this paper (Ac I.45) to explain Arcesilaus's introduction of *epoché* in the Academy. Two differences are, however, worth mentioning. (1) The "mysterious" obscurity of the truth and the weakness of man causing the disproportion between truth and human reason are reinforced by Christian doctrine in Charron's description.²⁷ (2) Charron departs

²⁴ "qui juge bien et sans passion de toutes choses, trouve par tout de l'apparence et de la raison, qui l'empesche de se resoudre, craignant de s'échauder en son jugement, dont il demeure indeterminé, indifferent et universal" (II, 2, 387–388).

²⁵ This is another view Charron finds in Montaigne, in the "Apology for Raymond Sebond" and in the last chapters of the third book of the *Essays*. "Après que Socrates fut adverti que le Dieu de sagesse luy avoit attribué le surnom de sage, il en fut estonné; et, se recherchant et secouant par tout, n'y trouvoit aucun fondement à cette divine sentence. ... Enfin il se resolut qu'il n'estoit distingué des autres et n'estoit sage que par ce qu'il ne s'en tenoit pas; et que son Dieu estimoit bestise singuliere à l'homme l'opinion de science et de sagesse; et que sa meilleure doctrine estoit la doctrine de l'ignorance, et sa meilleure sagesse, la simplicité" (II, 12, 408). "Le plus sage homme qui fut onques, quand on luy demanda ce qu'il sçavoit, respondit qu'il sçavoit cela, qu'il ne sçavoit rien" (II, 12, 501).

²⁶ Charron, *op. cit.*, II, 2, 402.

²⁷ Although Charron's scepticism is not Christianized like Pascal's and Kierkegaard's (Maia Neto, *The Christianization of Pyrrhonism. Scepticism and Faith in Pascal, Kierkegaard,*

from Arcesilaus's position in taking Socrates as the main model of the wise man, affirming his ignorance: "je ne sais."²⁸ Arcesilaus considered the obscurity of things so overwhelming that he could not know even whether or not he could really know. As I indicate above, Charron seems less worried than Arcesilaus with logical problems of consistency and more interested in giving to his wise man an assured intellectual and moral position, contrary to the irresolution usually associated with sceptical doubt. He thus introduces Socratic ignorance as opposed to the objection – referred to in the *Petit Traité* – that he teaches "icy une incertitude douteuse et fluctuante, telle que des Pyrrhoniens, laquelle tient l'esprit en grande peine et agitation." Charron distinguishes his position from that of the Pyrrhonians and argues that the *epoché* of his wise men "ne leur est point peine, ains au contraire un sejour, un repos, c'est la science des sciences, la certitude des certitudes."²⁹ The certain science in this case is not that of any external thing but of oneself, of the integrity of one's own reason.

Charron's Academic Versus Montaigne's Pyrrhonian Sceptical Wisdom

The association of Pyrrhonism with disquieting doubt was strengthened and spread after Montaigne's picture of the Pyrrhonians in his "Apology for Raymond Sebond,"³⁰ an essay that Charron uses extensively in the crucial chapter 2 of book II as in many others. As is well known, Charron has been charged with plagiarizing Montaigne since the first appearance of *De la Sagesse*.³¹ And indeed, a super-

and Shestov, Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1995), it receives a significant influence from Christian religion and theology. This theology certainly has a connection with negative theology (as Charron indicates in his *Trois Veritez* and in passing also in *De la Sagesse*). However, concerning morals, which is the basic subject and concern in *De la Sagesse*, its affinity is with Molinism, not with Augustinianism. I therefore disagree with Saint-Cyran's and Christian Belin's interpretations of Charron. (Duvergier d'Haurane, abbé de Saint-Cyran, *La Somme des fautes et faussetez capitales contenues en la Somme théologique du Pere Garasse*, Paris: J. Bouillerot, 1626 and Christian Belin, *L'oeuvre de Pierre Charron 1541–1603. Littérature et théologie de Montaigne à Port-Royal*, Paris: Honoré Champion, 1995).

²⁸ But note that Socrates is the main inspiration of Arcesilaus's Academic scepticism, as is clear in this very passage Ac I.45 on the obscurity of things, for Socrates is the first philosopher cited as avowing this obscurity.

²⁹ "il y a difference entre mon dire et l'avis des Pyrrhoniens ... puisque je permets de consentir et adherer à ce qui semble meilleur et plus vray-semblable" (Charron, *Petit Traité* in *op. cit.*, pp. 858–859).

³⁰ However, the view of *epoché* as perfection comes from this same Montaignean portrait of the ancient sceptics. See Maia Neto, "Epoche as Perfection: Montaigne's View of Ancient Scepticism" in J. Maia Neto and Richard H. Popkin, eds. *Scepticism in Renaissance and Post-Renaissance Thought: New Interpretations*. Amherst, MA: Humanity Books, 2004, pp. 13–42.

³¹ Bayle, who is most sympathetic to Charron, notes that "il y a dans les livres de la Sagesse une infinité des pensées qui avaient paru dans les Essais de Montaigne" (*Dictionnaire*,

ficial reading of the work does give this impression. In the case in point, Charron transcribes key terms and even whole phrases of Montaigne's description of the ancient Pyrrhonians in his own characterization of the wise. However, if we look closer at the two texts, crucial differences appear. Charron makes subtle but radical transformations in Montaigne's text for whereas Montaigne's interest in this section is to make an apology for the ancient sceptics, Charron's interest is to give a solid moral and intellectual base to his sage.³² In the following passage, Charron opposes the view that suspension of judgment is an unstable frame of mind, arguing that, on the contrary, it is the most stable frame of mind possible to man. (I italicize the words which appear also in Montaigne).

Mais, aux sages, modestes, retenus, c'est au rebours la plus seure *assiette*, le plus heureux état de l'esprit qui par ce moyen se tient ferme, *droit, rassis, inflexible*, tousjours libre et à soy. ... C'est un tres-doux, *paisible*, et plaisant sejour, ou l'on ne craint point de faillir ni se mesconter, l'on est à l'abry et hors de tous dangers, de participer à *tant d'erreurs produits par la fantaisie humaine*, et dont tout le monde est plain, de *s'infraquer en querelles, divisions, disputes*, d'offenser plusieurs partis, de se desmentir et desdire sa creance, de changer, se repentir se r'adviser: Bref c'est se sentir en repos et tranquillité d'esprit, *loin des agitations* et des vices *qui viennent de l'opinion de science que nous pensons avoir des choses, car de la viennent l'orgueil, l'ambition, les desirs immoderés, l'opiniastreté*, presumption, *amour de nouvelleté, rebellion, desobeissance*: d'où viennent les troubles, sectes, heresies, seditions que des fiers, affirmatifs et opiniastres, resolu, non des Academiques, des modestes, indifferends, neutres, sursoyans, c'est à dire sages?³³

Charron's source is the following passage from Montaigne's "Apology":

Or cette *assiette* de leur jugement, *droicte et inflexible*, recevant tous objets sans application et consentement, les achemine à leur Ataraxie, qui est une condition de vie *paisible, rassise, exempte des agitations que nous recevons par l'impression de l'opinion et science que nous pensons avoir des choses. D'où naissent* la crainte, l'avarice, l'envie, *les desir immoderez, l'ambition, l'orgueil*, la superstition, *l'amour de nouvelleté, la rebellion, le desobeissance, l'opiniastreté* et la pluspart des maux corporels. Voire ils s'exemptent par là de la jalousie de leur discipline. Car ils

article "Charron", remark B). In remark O of the same article, Bayle reports Sorel's view that "Charron n'était que le secrétaire de Montaigne et de du Vair," that he "a pris beaucoup de sentences philosophiques mot pour mot des Essais de Montaigne."

³² Charron says in the preface to the first edition that he has "questé par cy par là, et tiré la plus part des materiaux de cet ouvrage des meilleurs auteurs qui ont traité cette matiere." He adds in the preface to the second edition that the second book, from which the passage under examination was taken, "est plus mien que les deux autres" (*op. cit.*, p. 34).

³³ Charron, *op. cit.*, II, 2, 404.

debattent d'une bien molle façon. ... Ils ne mettent en avant leur propositions que pour combatre celles qu'ils pensent que nous ayons en notre creance. Si vous prenez la leur, ils prendront aussi volontiers la contraire à soustenir. ... Et par cette extremité de doute qui se secoue soy-mesme, ils se separent et se divisent de plusieurs opinions, de celles mesmes qui ont maintenu en plusieurs façons le doute et l'ignorance.³⁴

I want to call attention not to what Charron takes from Montaigne but to what he does not take or changes, appropriating Montaigne's text to his own purposes and views. To begin with, Montaigne's view of ancient scepticism is the main source of Charron's view of wisdom. But whereas Montaigne describes – or intends to describe – specifically the Pyrrhonians – even distinguishing them from the Academics – Charron's sage is modeled after the Academic sceptic. Accordingly, Charron omits the fact that Montaigne is here describing *ataraxia*, a concept specifically Pyrrhonian. Moreover, in the second half of the passage, where Montaigne is explicitly describing the Pyrrhonian dialectical approach – in contradistinction to the Academic – Charron not only omits this description but also explicitly attributes the wise sceptical position just described to “des Academiques.” For Pierre Charron – contrary to Pierre Coussin – the position of the Academics is not merely *ad hominem*, for they hold the view of the obscurity of things and of the inability of human reason to reach the truth. Charron adds that in this Academic *epoché* the human mind finds its perfection and excellence.³⁵ This perfection and excellence belongs to the concept of wisdom as also the view that the mind of the sage is stable in contradistinction to the flux of phenomena.³⁶ A doubt – such as the one attributed to the Pyrrhonians by Montaigne – that turns against itself cannot be the firm pedestal that supports Wisdom in the frontispiece of the book. On the contrary, it could be described as an “incertitude douteuse et fluctuante, telle que des Pyrrhoniens, laquelle tient l'esprit en grande peine et agitation.”³⁷ The general rules of wisdom given

³⁴ Montaigne, *Les Essais*, 3 vols., ed. Pierre Villey, Paris: PUF, 1988 (first edition: 1924), II.12, p. 503.

³⁵ We don't find this view of perfection in the ancient Academics. The closest to it is Sextus's report that Arcesilaus “declares that suspension regarding particular objects is good, but assent regarding particulars bad.” (*Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, translated by R. G. Bury for the Loeb Classical Library, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990, 1st edition 1933, I.233, p. 143).

³⁶ The flux doctrine is in a sense also Academic – of the old Academy – for it is presented in Plato's *Theaetetus* and according to some interpreters represent Plato's own view of the sensible world. See Francis M. Cornford, *Plato's Theory of Knowledge. The Theaetetus and the Sophist of Plato*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1935.

³⁷ *Petit Traité*, p. 858.

in book two are precisely the remedy to this pain and irresolution, so Charron confronts Montaigne, rejecting his dubitative device “Que sais-je?” and adopting his own affirmative one “Je ne sais.”³⁸

We see in the passage quoted from *De la Sagesse* that the wise man's Academic *epoché* – je ne sais – is the safe harbor from the stormy flux of the world. But as the description of *epoché* as perfection and excellence suggests, Charron's characterization of this Academic sceptic wisdom is not only negative. By withdrawing assent from external precarious beliefs the sage recovers the integrity and force of his intellect. To use anachronistic but acute Hegelian language, the negation of everything which is external to the mind or spirit (Charron says the sage judges everything and submits to nothing) expresses the affirmation of reason which entails liberation of the self. Reason finds thereby its autonomous pure nature, that is, its integrity. This appears, for instance, when Charron examines the way the wise deal with science.

L'esprit foible ne sçait pas posséder la science, s'en escrimer, et s'en servir comme il faut, au rebours elle le possède et le regente, don't il ploye et demeure esclave sous elle. ... L'esprit fort et sage la manie en maistre, en jouyt, s'en sert, s'en prevaut à son bien et avantage, forme son jugement, rectifie sa volonté, en accommode et fortifie sa lumiere naturelle, et s'en rend plus habile.³⁹

L'esprit foible in this passage is the dogmatic sectarian philosopher who subordinates his reason to some doctrine, thus compromising its perfect functioning. *L'esprit fort* is the Academic sceptic who affirms himself by denying any external doctrine, Christian revelation excepted.⁴⁰ The *esprit foible*, be he a dogmatist or a vulgar man – to quote Cicero's *Academica*, “clings as to a rock to whatever theory he is carried to by stress of weather” (Ac II.8), whereas the *esprit fort*, the sceptic, escapes from this stress affirming himself as rational inquirer. Replying to those who found his book “trop hardy et trop libre à heurter les opinions

³⁸ If it is in a sense right to say that Charron is a kind of disciple of Montaigne, he certainly is not a docile disciple. Charron's position here looks like a direct and explicit confrontation of Montaigne's: “quand ils prononcent: J'ignore, ou: Je doute, ils disent que cette proposition s'emporte elle mesme ... Cette fantasie est plus seurement conceuë par interrogation: 'Que sçay-je?', comme je la porte à la devise d'une balance” (II, 12, 527). Charron thinks that, on the contrary, the assured way is “Je ne sais” which he “fait graver sur la porte de ma petit maison que j'ay fait bastir à Condom l'an 1600” (II, 2, 402).

³⁹ Charron, *op. cit.*, Preface, p. 38.

⁴⁰ The exclusion of Christian authentic revelation from the scope of *epoché* is a quite controversial issue among Charron readers (from Charron's time to today). This is perhaps the sole point of disagreement between my view of Charron's sceptical wisdom and the very insightful one by Tulio Gregory's “La sagesza scettica di Pierre Charron”, *De Homine* 21 (1967), 163–182.

communes” and its propositions “trop crues et courtes, rudes et dures pour les simples,” Charron says that “les plus fortes et hardies propositions sont les plus seantes à l’esprit fort et relevé ... C’est foiblesse de s’estonner d’aucune chose, il faut roydier son courage, affermir son ame ... juger toutes choses: tant estranges semblent elles: tout est sortable et du gibbier de l’esprit, mais qu’il ne manque point à soymesme.”⁴¹ The relevance to modern philosophy of Charron’s affirmation “Je ne sais” is certainly much greater than it has been acknowledged. The sceptical epistemological criticism of philosophical doctrines that occur in the period is perhaps philosophically and historically less important than the affirmation of the self in Charron’s Academic sceptical wisdom conceived as rational pure inquiry.⁴²

Charron’s Carneadean Probabilism

Thus far I have argued that Charron’s wisdom develops (and adapts to his context) views held by Arcesilaus. I conclude with another Charronian Academic position which comes from Carneades: probability. I’ve already quoted Charron saying: “je permets de consentir et adherer à ce qui semble meilleur et plus vray-semblable.” As he says in this passage, this distinguishes his wisdom from the Pyrrhonian, and to this very extent associates him to Carneades’s Academicism.⁴³ Charron’s probabilism is also the ground of his reply to the classic objection: how can a sceptic present positive views?⁴⁴ Charron gives the status of probability to the views presented in his work. He says in the Preface that “tout ce que je propose, je ne pretends y obliger personne, je presente seulement les choses, et les estalle comme sur le tablier: je ne me metz point en cholere si l’on ne m’en croit, c’est à faire aux pedants.”⁴⁵ By considering the views contained in *Of Wisdom* as probable, he is aware they may be false so he does not assent to them

⁴¹ Charron, *op. cit.*, Preface, pp. 41–43.

⁴² I mean here first and foremost Descartes’s *cogito*. Other sceptics before and after Charron (Gianfrancesco Pico, Francisco Sanches, Pierre Gassendi) did a much better job than Charron in attacking Aristotle but were quite a bit less influential than he was.

⁴³ Carneades’s probabilism is one of Sextus’s main grounds for differentiating Pyrrhonism from the New Academy. “And as regards sense-impressions, we say that they are equal in respect of probability and improbability, so far as their essence is concerned, whereas they assert that some impressions are probable, others improbable” (PH I.227). Sextus recognizes that, unlike Carneades, Arcesilaus’ “way of thought is almost identical with ours” (PH I.232).

⁴⁴ The problem of the coherence of sceptic discourse is far more momentous in Charron – who presents a number of positive views – than in the ancient sceptics.

⁴⁵ Charron, *op. cit.*, Preface, p. 41.

as truth. Consequently, he is not attached to these views which, therefore, do not compromise his intellectual integrity. The presentation of the rules, presuppositions, and applications of wisdom, systematic as they are, does not contradict the content of the sceptical wisdom thus proposed.⁴⁶ Whereas taking a doctrine as true (believing it) causes attachment to this doctrine, taking it as probable implies detachment, preserving autonomy and freedom.⁴⁷ That this attitude with respect to his own position is seen by Charron as specifically Academic is clear in the Preface when he says that many of the objections raised against the first edition of the book resulted from the fact that the critics took for “resolution et détermination” what had been proposed “problematiquement et academiquement.”⁴⁸ Probability is thus the means to present views without compromising *epoché* and intellectual integrity.⁴⁹ Arcesilaus rejected Socratic ignorance probably because he feared that it contradicted suspension of judgment. The doctrine of probability was not yet available to him. This doctrine – another Academic view which mainly through Charron was quite influential in early modern philosophy – allows Charron to incorporate the original and major model of the Academic wise man (Socrates) in his own elaboration of wisdom.

⁴⁶ Contrary to Sylvia Giocanti, according to whom the systematic form of the work is incompatible with any genuine scepticism. See Giocanti, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

⁴⁷ Cicero's key passage on probability is the following: “The Academic school holds that there are dissimilarities between things of such a nature that some of them seem probable and others the contrary; but this is not an adequate ground for saying that some things can be perceived and others cannot, because many false objects are probable but nothing false can be perceived and known. And accordingly he [Clitomachus reporting Carneades's views] asserts that those who say that the Academy robs us of our senses are violently mistaken, as that school never said that colour, taste or sound was non-existent, but their contention was that these presentations do not contain a mark of truth and certainty peculiar to themselves and found nowhere else. After setting out these points, he adds that the formula ‘the wise man withholds assent’ is used in two ways, one when the meaning is that he gives absolute assent to no proposition at all, the other when he restrains himself from replying so as to convey approval or disapproval of something, with the consequence that he neither makes a negation nor an affirmation; and that this being so, he holds that one plan in theory, so that he never assents, but the other in practice, so that he is guided by probability, and whenever this confronts him or is wanting he can answer ‘yes’ or ‘no’ accordingly” (Ac II.103–104).

⁴⁸ Charron, *op. cit.*, p. 42. See also the *Petit Traité*: “en toutes telles choses, je n’y oblige personne, ny ne pretends les persuader, bien loing de les dogmatiser” (p. 863).

⁴⁹ “You, Lucullus, if you have accepted the views of your associate Antiochus, are bound to defend these doctrines as you would defend the walls of Rome, but I need only do so in moderation, just as much as I think fit” (Ac II.137).

PART IV
THREE REACTIONS TO SCEPTICISM

10. GIORDANO BRUNO ON SCEPTICISM

Tristan Dagron

*CNRS/CERPFI, Ecole Normale Supérieure Lettres et Sciences Humaines,
Lyon, France*

Giordano Bruno may not be a sceptic, but Scepticism marks an essential and formative stage of his philosophical thought. Rather a starting point than an end result, the sceptic's enquiry about the conditions and the possibility of knowledge never leads, for Bruno, to an actual challenge of the claims to knowledge, and even less so, to an ethics of *ataraxia*. On the contrary, the critical investigation into the instruments of knowledge, together with the acknowledgement of a basic defect of human knowledge with regard to its object, or the acknowledgement of a "blindness" natural to man, is tied to his praise of disquiet and infinite desire. There is a certain sense in which desire is vain if it never attains its object. But this desire, which cannot possess and which is the principle of infinite motion, defines the "infinite power" of the human being. Bruno, far from considering this endless desire as a "privation," identifies it as the "positive perfection" of the "heroic" person. The theme of "natural blindness," insofar as it directly refers to the disproportion between the human intellect and its infinite object, calls for a transformation of the notion of potentiality, and in particular of the potential intellect of the Aristotelian tradition. Bruno always presents the problem of knowledge at this radical level. In a sense, he merely takes up the paradoxes of "negative" theology or the "Platonic" theory of the eminence of the divine in contrast with the intelligible. But the infinite object refers not to a singular object, according to Bruno, but to the universal domain of nature or of being. Thus, obviously, the distinction imposes itself between an order of finite realities, suitable to become the object of scientific knowledge, and an order of an infinite principle which evades the instruments of knowledge. The distinction between forms of knowledge is no longer based on any ontological or real difference: it proceeds first and foremost from our way of knowing. The gap between the finite and the infinite is firstly epistemological. It is a matter not of the *modus essendi* of the objects in question, but of their *modus cognoscendi*: one and the same object is finite when conceived by the imagination, and infinite when grasped by the intellect. The architectonic structure, that is to say, the articulation which unites the different species of knowledge – and in particular the physical species with the

metaphysical one – into the form of a system, thus no longer has the function of distinguishing orders of *reality* – but rather “means of apprehension” or “means of speaking.” One discourse concerns “natural, corporeal, mobile realities” insofar as they are “sensible.” The other considers the “subject” of this physical science of appearances, i.e. a nature which is “eternal, unchanging, true, constant, simple, one and always identical, and everywhere the same.”¹

The Sceptic’s question (*an aliquid scitur*), as it is put by Bruno, not only pertains to the infinite object of a metaphysics understood as the “special science” of God, but in effect, concerns the whole system of our knowledge, whose real object is the infinite unity of being. Bruno’s immanentist reading, which refers Platonic hierarchy back to the Eleatic unity of being, does not therefore treat Scepticism as any ordinary form of dogmatism. If indeed the finite objects which form the object of our knowledge are first and foremost the effects of our “oblique” apprehension of the One, if every form of hierarchy is a matter of our *modus cognoscendi* and not of a structure of being, then we must conclude that the truth, as such, is out of our reach. The absolute object, insofar as it is infinite, necessarily evades our power of apprehension. The theory of the One, which is Bruno’s starting point for the apprehension of Platonism, leads to a dualism which opposes a single, unmoving reality, to the whole set of sensible things which are always becoming and which are reduced to mere appearances. Eleatism thus naturally leads to a form of phenomenalism, which is dealt with in different ways by Plato and Aristotle. Bayle strongly emphasizes this point in the entry on ‘Xenophanes’ (remark B), in his *Dictionnaire historique et critique*: “The entire Eleatic sect believed, together with him [Xenophanes], in the unity of all things and in their immobility. I would perhaps not be mistaken if I dared to say that it is from such a theory that dogma was born which the Sceptics have promoted so much: namely that our senses mistake us and we are not to trust them.” He claims “that nature always remains the same,” accordingly adding “that the changes that we think nature suffers are but illusions of our senses and mere appearances.”² And naturally Bruno perfectly measured the

¹ *Camoeracensis acrotismus articuli*, art. 1; *Opera latine conscripta*, eds. F. Tocco, H. Vitelli, V. Imbrani, and C. M. Tallarigo. Naples-Florence, 1879–1881, I, 1, pp. 83–84. The same distinction is found in the *Libri physicorum explanati*, between an “oblique” apprehension (*in oblico*) or “physical” of nature, and a “direct” apprehension (*in recto*), or “metaphysical”: *ibidem*, III, pp. 274–275. These texts comment on the epistemological distinction at the beginning of Aristotle’s *Physics* between the first knowables “for us” (*priora nobis*) and the first knowables “in themselves” (*priora naturae*) a distinction which Aristotle constantly highlights.

² This note in the article “Xenophanes” is another occasion for Bayle to highlight once again a fundamental contradiction in Spinoza’s “system”. Bayle has an analogous objection to Bruno (Article “Brunus”, D). Concerning Bayle’s genealogy of scepticism, see G. Paganini, *Analisi della fede e critica della ragione nella filosofia di Pierre Bayle*. Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1980, especially pp. 348–351.

difficulty, since, in his *Cabala del cavallo pegaseo*, he takes ancient Scepticism to proceed from the Eleatic Xenophanes, “who said that in all things and about all things, there is but one opinion.”³ In the same work, he also puts forward the paradoxical thesis according to which, “under the eminence of truth, we have nothing more eminent than ignorance and asininity.”⁴

Still, the question of the content of the “natural kinds of knowledge,” i.e. those which, as we have seen, come from a solely “oblique” understanding of their object, remains unsolved. Bruno may concur with the Sceptics’ view that our sensible and imaginative representations merely provide us with aspects or appearances. He may furthermore deny the possibility of directly apprehending the infinite. But he does not in any way endorse Scepticism, against which he directs his violent criticism.

Ignorance in the Cabala Del Cavallo Pegaseo

In the third part of the second dialogue of the *Cabala del cavallo pegaseo*,⁵ the most explicit allusions to scepticism can be found in outlines of “Ephetic” and “Pyrrhonist” theses, which reveal a precise knowledge of the works of Sextus Empiricus, translated by Estienne (*Pyrrhonian Hypotyposes*, in 1562) and by Hervet (*Adversus Mathematicos*, in 1569).⁶

The possibility of science, i.e. of saying the truth, rests thus on the “faith” in the information taken from the sensible world, a “faith” which, according to the *Summa terminorum*, is typical of “natural philosophy.”⁷ It is the Aristotelian doctrine of the premises of knowledge which suggest that this “faith” is primordial. This is also suggested by the treatment of the notion by Gianfrancesco Pico in his *Examen vanitatis*, whose aim is to uproot the presumption of all “natural philosophy.” He thus opposes “natural” knowledge, based on this faith in the sensible world, to “supernatural” knowledge, based on the original revelation which comes immediately from the primal source of truth.

Mentioning first the “Ephetics,” which he then distinguishes from the “Pyrrhonians,” Saulino, one of the interlocutors of the dialogue, says: “Amongst the philosophers of the various sects, there were some who were generally called

³ *Cabala del cavallo pegaseo*, ed. G. Aquilecchia, French transl. T. Dagrón, notes N. Badaloni. Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1994, p. 135. This edition of Bruno’s Italian works by G. Aquilecchia will be quoted as *OeC*: here *OeC*, VI, p. 135.

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 125.

⁵ *Ibidem*, pp. 125–143.

⁶ For Bruno’s modern sources, see *Examen vanitatis* by Gianfrancesco Pico, *De incertitudine et vanitate scientiarum* by Agrippa, and *Quod nihil scitur* by Sanchez.

⁷ *Summa terminorum metaphysicorum*, in *Opera latine conscripta*, op. cit., I, 4, pp. 99–100.

Academics, and more specifically Sceptics or Ephectics: they doubted that they could determine anything at all. Having banished all enunciation, they did not dare to affirm or to negate. They called themselves inquisitors, investigators and explorers of things.”⁸ This first Scepticism takes on the form of phenomenalism. The Ephectics distrust the power to define or to determine, that is to say, the power of language, which is capable of apprehending only a “confused and incomprehensible” truth. Indeed, this sort of truth, found in the natural things which are continually in the process of becoming, is not capable of forming an appropriate object of understanding.⁹ In contrast to many presentations of Sceptical positions, this first account lacks the traditional examples taken from Sextus. Rather the following speculative theses are attributed to this branch of scepticism: (1) truth is immanent to nature and it is confused because of the variety, the composition and the contrariety which characterise natural things; (2) there is no difference of substance, i.e. there is no *quidditas* to which the multiple appearances of things can be referred to as a principle of intelligibility (a rejection of substantial form); (3) grasping objects can therefore only reveal a connection or a relation but not an essence (a phenomenalist thesis). The relation itself varies, since the species or the images of things are part of the universal mixture: they “join together” and create new forms which are not, however, sufficient to grant knowledge of the objects of sense-experience. Thus Ephectic phenomenalism, before being an epistemological thesis, is first presented as a physical thesis.

But the “Pyrrhonians” abandon all physical theses, denying all affirmations from the very start. They therefore go further, according to Bruno, than the Ephectics:

The Pyrrhonians came after them, much less inclined than the Ephectics to give faith to their senses and to their intellect. For the Ephectics believed to have understood something and taken part in some judgment, since they were at least informed of the following truth: that nothing can be understood or determined. The Pyrrhonians were, in their own mind, lacking even such a judgment; and according to them, we could not be sure even of this, namely that nothing can be determined.¹⁰

⁸ *Cabala, OeC*, VI, p. 126.

⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 129: “These philosophers did not believe what they saw and heard. For them, truth is a confused and incomprehensible thing, situated in the nature and the composition of all variety, diversity and contrariety. For them, everything is a mixture. Nothing subsists in and of itself, nothing exists by its nature or own properties, and objects present themselves to apprehensive powers not as they are in themselves, but according to the relationship bestowed upon them by their species: by separating a bit, they join and create new forms in our senses.”

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, pp. 129–131.

While the phenomenism of the “Ephectics” is based on an analysis of the perceptible situation and the observation of the natural order of becoming, the “Pyrrhonians” push the sceptical thesis to the limit and go so far as to deny the lessons of perceptible experience. Their position is therefore utterly paradoxical since it comes down to a self-negation of the sceptical thesis.¹¹

Immediately following Saulino’s quick presentation, Sebasto, a second interlocutor in the dialogue, strongly criticises the Pyrrhonians for the purely formal arguments they put forward:

Measure the skill of this other Academy: having seen the way of thinking and observed the skill of the first one, which, with ease and idleness, wanted to crush the other philosophies, it armed itself with even greater cowardice, and by adding its own touch of insipidity, wants to chase away all philosophies, including its predecessor. It pretends to be all the more knowledgeable, in comparison with the others, since one wears its robes and becomes a doctor of it at lesser cost and with less effort.¹²

This attack does not target the sphere of theory, in which the problem of Scepticism was first put forward, but the Pyrrhonians’ ethics. The Pyrrhonians’ attitude is reduced to idleness (since they abandon the search for a solution of the doubts raised by the Ephectics) and to ambition (reading on, we learn that they want to appear as *archisapienti*).¹³ Sebasto avoids the epistemological problem by charging the Pyrrhonians with intellectual imposture. He identifies however, at least two important aspects of Scepticism according to Bruno:

1. The Ephectic thesis is not particularly original: it basically consists in picking up the general difficulties facing all natural philosophy. The Sceptics stop at the first hurdle: starting off with true premises, they draw a false conclusion, out of impatience and especially “idleness.”
2. The Pyrrhonians, according to Sebasto, add nothing to the thesis of the first Sceptics, and have simply emptied it of all philosophical content. While the Ephectics still envisage real difficulties, the Pyrrhonians merely invent a new kind of dogmatism on a purely formal and empty basis, refusing, from the outset, all manner of discussion or research. The additional contribution of

¹¹ Note that this presentation does not come from the Sceptics themselves, but from Aristotle’s presentation of Protagoras’ relativistic position (*Metaphysics*, IV, 5) and from the additions put forward by Cratylus who goes beyond the phenomenalist position in order to reject all language, restricting himself to merely “moving his finger about.” In Bruno as in Aristotle, we go from a “likely” thesis, albeit incomplete, to an extreme position, which is paradoxical and clearly false.

¹² *Cabala*, *OeC*, VI, p. 131.

¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 133.

the Pyrrhonians is therefore absurd and devoid of meaning, and comes down to a mere play on words which they repeat endlessly.¹⁴

Sebasto does not hesitate to attribute to the Ephectics the accusation of idleness and formalism¹⁵; the suspension of judgment is nothing other than a suspension of the problem, an effect of idleness. The formalism of which Sebasto reproaches the Pyrrhonians originates in the way the Ephectics, in abandoning the idea of a “better concept,” borrow from their dogmatic adversaries an impossible definition of truth without examining it.

Sebasto’s interpretation – or rather his moral condemnation – of Pyrrhonism is significant however philosophically weak it may be. It recalls the famous pages of the *Spaccio* on the *Ocio*, or Idleness, which for Bruno is the consequence of the contempt for the “works” and of the *Fatica* typical of the protestant theology of grace and justification.¹⁶ Scepticism would thus be the theoretical aspect of the ethical condemnation of a guilty nature, which leads to the depreciation of all efforts based on the natural dispositions of man. The thesis of the “vanity” of the sciences is thus directly linked to that of ethical activity, which takes “faith” alone to be the condition of salvation. Such is the possible meaning of the ironic eulogy to *sant’asinita* and *sant’ignoranza* which opens the *Cabala*.¹⁷ But beyond the Reformation, it is to Christianity as a whole that Bruno’s criticism of St. Paul is addressed.

¹⁴ This is evident in Sebasto’s violent conclusion: “Come on, let’s go on! And what should I do, if I nourish the ambition of founding a new sect and appearing more knowledgeable than everybody else, more even than the Pyrrhonians who are more knowledgeable than all the rest? I shall create a third chapel, I shall found an Academy, wiser still by my spending all the more. But if I keep checking my voice with the Ephectics and holding my breath with the Pyrrhonians, it may be the case that my mind shall cease to exhale, and I shall burst.” (*Cabala, OeC, VI, p. 131*).

¹⁵ *Cabala, OeC, VI, p. 132*.

¹⁶ *Spaccio, OeC, V/2, pp. 327–367*, with the sharp criticism of the “golden age” (in the form of a paradoxical praising of Momus).

¹⁷ *Cabala, OeC, VI, p. 21*: “O saint asininity, saint ignorance/Saint stupidity and pious devotion/You alone can improve the soul /More than human genius or study.” See as well the whole of the *Declamazione al studioso, divoto e pio lettore*. Concerning this aspect of Bruno’s thought, see M. Ciliberto, *La ruota del tempo. Interpretazioni di Giordano Bruno*, Rome, 1986, as well as *Giordano Bruno*, Bari, 1990, by the same author. See also A. Ingegno, *La sommersa nave della religione. Studio sulla polemica anticristiana del Bruno*, Naples, 1985, and by the same author, *Regio pazzia. Bruno lettore di Calvino*, Urbino, 1987, and N. Badaloni’s introduction to the *Cabala, OeC, VI*.

The Problem of Mediation: Privation and Potentiality

The ethical objections to Scepticism should not make us lose sight of the theoretical question of ignorance which is the basic theme of the *Cabala*. The problem put forward has far-reaching implications. Indeed, when Bruno states the paradoxical formula that ignorance is “the path by which wisdom unites with truth,” he is referring to a classic noetic and epistemological thesis: namely the thesis of the passivity of human intellect in face of the premises of science. This is clearly what Saulino highlights at the beginning of his presentation, when he recalls the “contradiction” between actuality and potentiality in order to explain the necessary mediation of ignorance:

The consequence is obvious from the fact that, in the rational intellect, there is no middle term between science and ignorance: necessarily, there is either one or the other, given that they are in opposition on this subject, just as privation and disposition (*abito*).¹⁸

Science in actuality is not immediately given and the human intellect is potential before it is actual. It follows that, if the intellect must have an “access to truth,” i.e. one which is actualised, such an actualisation is possible only in virtue of an initial potentiality. Saulino calls this potentiality “privation,” “ignorance” or “asininity.”

In spite of the *Cabala*'s paradoxical formulation, the question of ignorance goes far beyond the mere discussion of the Sceptic's theses. The questions focus on the possible meaning of the potentiality of the human intellect, and on the “opposition” between disposition and privation in the order of knowledge. The problem of Scepticism is thus brought back to a perfectly traditional difficulty which Saulino clearly states: the idea that in the order of knowledge privation and disposition are two opposites “is put forward by a great number of famous philosophers and theologians.”¹⁹ Saulino's remark must be taken in a wide sense: obviously, he is not only referring to the mystical tradition, which is spoken of elsewhere in the *Cabala*, neither is he referring to the noetics of illumination, but rather, more generally, it is the Aristotelian definition of the passive intellect as well as the doctrine of the scientific discourse of the *Posterior Analytics* which he is addressing. Thus, the formula according to which ignorance is a “means by which wisdom unites with truth” should not be taken for a Sceptical thesis, but rather as the expression, purposely paradoxical and equivocal, of a question or perhaps even of the big question of Aristotelianism. Whichever approach he takes, Bruno constantly dissolves the

¹⁸ *Cabala, OeC*, VI, p. 125.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 127.

specificity of Scepticism. And, to our mind, this is a typical attitude which Bruno shares with a large number of his contemporaries. At the heart of the noetic debate, there are the categories of potentiality and actuality. In pursuing this Aristotelian trail, we will attain a better understanding of the meaning of the *Cabala*. Aristotle's answer to the relativist objections of Book IV of the *Metaphysics* (on which Saulino's presentation was modelled) consisted in the distinction between the principle of knowledge and the demonstrative order properly speaking.

The mistake of the phenomenologists, according to Aristotle, lies in their demanding too much from demonstrative discourse from the outset (namely that it prove *everything*) only in order to deny it any credit at all at the end: "We have already pointed out their mistake: they seek the reason of that which has no reason, since the principle of demonstration is not itself a demonstration."²⁰ In the *Posterior Analytics*, to which this passage of the *Metaphysics* refers, Aristotle addresses the question of the principle of the demonstrative order by referring to the thesis of those who "maintain that because of the obligation we are in to know the first premises, there seems to be no demonstrative knowledge."²¹ At the origin of this idea lies the following assumption: "there is no way to know other than by demonstration."²² For this reason, Aristotle attributes this mistake to the apparently contrary *aporia* of those who claim to demonstrate everything: "For others, there must surely be one [i.e. scientific knowledge], but all the truths are likely to be demonstrated."²³ The demand of a "demonstration in an absolute sense" grounds the position of those who deny the possibility of demonstrative knowledge. Aristotle thus answers the two equally erroneous views: "Our own doctrine is that all science is not demonstrative, but rather that the science of immediate propositions, on the contrary, is independent from demonstration."²⁴ And he adds: "we say ... that apart from scientific knowledge, there exists a further principle of science which enables us to understand definitions."²⁵ The idea of the necessary mediation of ignorance merely translates the Aristotelian idea that the premises are external to scientific discourse properly speaking. The fault in the argumentation of the "misologists," which Aristotle points to in this passage, lies in that they abstractly conceive of "privation" as an absolute. They are thus trapped in the paradoxes of Plato's *Meno*. By interpreting privation as merely a "relative," it becomes possible to define ignorance as a

²⁰ *Metaphysics*, IV, 6.

²¹ *Posterior Analytics*, I, 3.

²² *Ibidem*.

²³ *Ibidem*.

²⁴ *Ibidem*.

²⁵ *Ibidem*.

“potentiality,” i.e. as a positive aptitude. Knowledge is not given, but it may be acquired. The intellect may be passive with regards to its premises, but it is not condemned to ignorance, since science consists precisely in the actualisation of potentialities. The Aristotelian solution consists therefore in considering “privation” as merely relative. It favours the intellectual effort necessary to acquire knowledge, against the fiction of an immediate relation to wisdom. Interpreted in this way, the thesis which makes ignorance a means of access to truth loses all sceptical meaning: it is no longer a question of refusing all scientific discourse, but rather of giving an account of the progressiveness of the learning process.

Thus, suspension of judgment proceeds from an abstract account of the opposition between disposition and privation. Since the Sceptics take this privation as absolute, they refuse to give a positive content to the realm of becoming or to the intellectual effort of acquiring knowledge. For this reason, their interpretation of the thesis of the mediation of ignorance is paradoxical: if ignorance may be considered as a means, it is insofar as real wisdom must end up by rejecting as illusory all mediation through which the dogmatists think they can appropriate the truth. This is what Sebasto underlines in his criticism of the Pyrrhonians’ asceticism: it is an illusory quest for an immediacy of a new sort, won back from the mediations of demonstrative and speculative knowledge. The Sceptics can thus apply the theological procedure of negations to the sphere of natural realities: the greatest possible determination of the object is the negation of all determination.

However, Bruno is far from agreeing with Aristotle against the Sceptics. Sebasto’s attacks meet with only partial agreement from Saulino, who has a more subtle attitude. For, indeed, the Aristotelian answer to the difficulties presented in the *Meno* is not more satisfying than the Platonic myth of reminiscence. In the *Posterior Analytics*, Aristotle maintains that “there exists a principle of science which enables us to understand definitions.” He therefore subordinates demonstration to a pre-knowledge which, in itself, begs the question. In order to interpret ignorance, which precedes the acquisition of science, as a merely relative privation, Aristotle, just like Plato, assumes that the intellect is previously informed of these “immediate propositions” which will serve as premises for demonstrations.

Bruno at least shares the following thesis with the Sceptics: our intellect does not have immediate access to the truth. In other words, no true idea is given to us. Thus, he is able to radicalise, along with the Sceptics, the difficulties concerning the question of mediation through which the potential intellect can become actually wise. This common, anti-dogmatic account, is obviously to be referred back to the crisis of the notion of intelligible species: this is one of the effects of the Humanists’ criticism of the *modi significandi* which is so significant for Renaissance thought. In this perspective, Scepticism is characterized, not so much by its distrust of reason and its claims to truth, but rather, according to

Bruno, beyond the ethical dimension Sebasto mentions, its abstract conception of “privation” and “potentiality” and its paradoxical search for an immediacy of a new sort. Such a form of Scepticism, on which Bruno focuses, is clearly doctrinarian and apologetic. Against its effects, which are ethically and theoretically disastrous in his view, Bruno uses Aristotle to bring to light, through irony, the purely abstract character of the Sceptic *aporiae*. He does not, however, adopt the Aristotelian position. It is not enough to say, with Aristotle, that the principle of science is external to the order of demonstration. For there remains to determine in what way the potential intellect can become actually knowledgeable. It is not enough to maintain that “privation,” which characterises the human intellect, must be considered as relative, and not as absolute, i.e. as a potentiality which is in becoming. There yet remains to define the status of the agent of such an actualisation and to ask how such an agent is able to actualise the passive intellect.

Bruno’s answer is clear. Repeating everywhere the formula through which Aristotle defines intellection as a “reflection on images,” Bruno interprets it to support the idea, which he believes to be a Platonic one, that “we do not really see ... the true forms of things or the substance of the ideas, but their shadows, their remains and their images.”²⁶ This is the idea on which the *Cabala* is based, pursuing the view, already put forward in the *Spaccio*, that “one only sees [the truth] from the outside, as a shadow, a semblance, a mirror and only on the surface and in the manner of a figure.”²⁷ Thus, clearly, the Aristotelian answer to the Sceptics’ objections remains inconsistent. The privation which characterizes the potential intellect is not “relative” in the sense that its actualisation could be possible. If there is indeed a “blindness” which no effort will ever succeed in curing,²⁸ then this privation is not relative in the Aristotelian sense of the term. The Sceptics are therefore right to expose the circular and even mythical character of the Aristotelian solution, but they are wrong to conclude from it the “vanity” of all rational effort.

Philosophical Heroism: Potentiality and Contrariety

The nodal point lies in the status of “potentiality.” Bruno puts Aristotle and the Sceptics back to back: he rejects the Aristotelian alternative between a relative privation – that of a potentiality capable of being actualised at the end of a process of becoming – and an absolute privation which characterises powerlessness understood as an “absolute impossibility.” Bruno does not undertake to pave a middle way or to resolve the contradiction but, on the contrary, to

²⁶ *De gli eroici furori*, *OeC*, VII, p. 455.

²⁷ *Spaccio*, *OeC*, V/2, p. 191.

²⁸ On blindness in the *Eroici furori*, see Part I, dial. 4.

position himself right at the heart of this contrariety. There are no solutions to the *aporiae* of the *Cabala*.

This is what the *Eroici furori* show, utterly devoted to accounting for the consequences of this crisis. Bruno explicitly takes up the problem expressed by Saulino, in order to create the brand new concept of an “infinite” potentiality:

Cic. How can our finite intellect pursue the infinite object?

Tan. Thanks to the infinite potentiality which it has.

Cic. Vain potentiality, if it is to have no effect.

Tan. It would be vain if it were related to a finite act, where infinite potentiality would be privation. But it is not, since it is related to the infinite act, where the infinite potentiality is positive perfection.²⁹

Cicada’s question is the same as Saulino’s who, in the *Cabala*, insisted on the disproportion between the human intellect and the eminence of truth. In both texts, intellective potentiality is doomed to remain “without effect.” No actualisation will cancel the privation. Saulino concluded that ignorance was the sole means left through which we may approach the truth. In the same way in the *Furori*, the potential intellect is unable to convert its ignorance into wisdom. However, although it is forbidden the actual possession of its “infinite object,” the intellect’s potentiality cannot be said to be vain. Just as Saulino, and especially Sebasto in the *Cabala*, Tansillo refuses the conclusion that all intellectual effort is vain. On the contrary, this infinite potentiality, far from being the sign of a sinning and fallen nature, gives the definition, according to Bruno, of the heroic nature of man, his fundamental dignity or his “positive perfection.”

Bruno’s criticism of Scepticism remains, in a certain sense, essentially ethical: he takes up the premises of the refutation of dogmatism, but refuses the ethical/religious meaning of apologetic Pyrrhonism. He goes further however: the value he attributes to effort (the *Fatica* in the *Spaccio*) proceeds from a reformed Aristotelian theory of potentiality and opposites. Aristotle’s mistake, in Bruno’s view, is to think of privation as a “contradiction.” Though it is to Aristotle’s credit to have defined privation as a physical principle of movement, this having subsequently made possible a natural science of becoming, Aristotle still did not go far enough, according to Bruno. He persists, together with the Platonists, in subordinating the sphere of becoming to an ideal and formal perfection. His theory of movement is modelled on a logical thesis, namely that of the principle of non-contradiction: opposites cannot exist at the same time in the same subject. For this reason, Aristotle takes privation to be a negative determination, close to, or even identical with – as a certain number of commentators would have it – the passivity of matter. Only the act is a positive principle of movement.

²⁹ *Furori*, I, 5; *OeC*, VII, p. 269.

For Bruno, unlike Aristotle, the driving principle is not the act alone, but the “contrariety.” The definition of becoming holds entirely within the thesis of the coexistence of contraries or the “composition of things.” This is what Bruno keeps repeating in the *Eroici furori*, where he tries to explain how contrary feelings can generate each other:

Nothing is pure and simple ...; everything is made of contraries: and, from this composition which is at the heart of things, there results that the affections which attach us do not lead us to any delectation which is not mixed with some bitterness. I will go further: if bitterness were not in things, the delectation would not be there either, given that it is getting tired which makes us find delectation in rest; separation makes us find delectation in conjunction; quite generally, if we look hard enough, we find that one contrary is the cause of the other contrary, that it stirs desire and that it pleases... Such are the consequences of the composition of things. Hence the fact that no one is satisfied with his condition, but for the case of some mad or stupid man, all the more satisfied in that he finds himself at the last degree of the dark stage of his madness.³⁰

Contrariety has a dynamic force. In this typical Renaissance account of psychology, affections are not determined by the properties of an exterior object: pleasure and pain, desire and aversion, are not regulated by an objective scale of ends. Affections are rather characterised by differences in intensity, and by deviations with respect to an equilibrium which it is impossible to reach. Aristotle may be right in thinking of movement as the passage from one contrary to the other, from a privation to a disposition, but he is consequently wrong to take the final form or the act to be the sole driving principle. Movement is rather the effect of a contrariety immanent in the subject who is in becoming, more than the result of the contradiction between privation and disposition. At the end of *De la causa*, Bruno gives a general formulation of this criticism:

There is a profound magic in knowing how to extract the contrary from a contrary, after having found their point of union. This is the direction of poor Aristotle’s thought in establishing privation (to which a certain disposition is associated) as the genitor, father and mother of form. But he did not succeed and could not be successful because in keeping to the genus of opposition, he was held back in such a way that, not having descended until the species of contrariety, he neither reached nor got a glimpse of the goal. Rather he completely deviated from it in claiming that contraries cannot agree within the same subject.³¹

³⁰ *Ibidem*, pp. 97–99. The same idea is found at the beginning of the first dialogue of *Spaccio*, *OeC*, V/1, pp. 55–59.

³¹ *Causa*, *OeC*, III, p. 315. This fundamental text is a paraphrase of the beginning of chapter 26 of *De Beryllo* by Nicolas of Cusa, who also criticizes Aristotelian “privation.” The two critiques are nevertheless very different, and have opposite consequences.

This criticism of Aristotle is very close to the mobilism of the Ephectics, who refuse to give to form the status of a law of becoming. Most probably, the originality of Renaissance philosophy can be found in the introduction of the notion of contrariety, in contrast to the negativity of contradiction. Be it in the case of human history or of natural reality, the immobile act is no longer the standard by which the generation of forms is conceived, but rather it is conceived by thinking of flux and “vicissitude.” Rest no longer means perfection, but death. Formal causality is put aside in order to meditate on the instability of all things. Thus, the productivity of the immanent material cause is held up against ideal causality and the fictions of metaphysicians.

In criticizing the Sceptics, Bruno does not intend, however, to restore a fixed point of anchorage or a metaphysics of the intelligible. On the contrary, he reproaches the Sceptics for the purely negative conclusions they draw from their criticism of Aristotelian essences. When he attacks the Pyrrhonians’ “idleness,” he is targeting the ideal of *ataraxia*. The impassive wise man is a fiction: it assumes that the human being can break free from the universal flux which carries away with it all human sentiments. For this reason, he can identify *ataraxia* with the catatonic state of madmen, and the bliss sought through asceticism, with the “garden of paradise for animals.”³² In contrast to the wisdom of the Sceptic, which consists, in Bruno’s view, in the quest for a paradoxical immediacy, philosophical “heroism” is the result of his thoughts on contrariety. Instead of being a purely negative determination, ignorance, or privation of the truth, is considered by Bruno as a dynamic principle. To abandon the fiction of an actual possession of truth does not mean to succumb to a mournful neglect like those who disdain works. Speaking of the “furious” man who takes the place of the traditional figure of the wise man, Bruno writes that “the contrary wakes in him ambition, emulation, suspicion and fear.”³³ The originality of Bruno’s thought is obviously not found in the fact that he insists on the disproportion between the knowable object and cognitive potentiality. Nor does it lie in his concluding from the latter the impossibility of an appropriate grasping of the truth: this argument is not particularly innovative, as Saulino clearly states in the *Cabala*. Bruno’s originality lies rather in that, acknowledging these points, he is not drawn to a noetic line of thought of illumination, which would make intellectual unification the height of human perfection. But on the contrary, far from valuing this intuitive contact which continues, with Gianfrancesco Pico, to serve as a theoretical model, Bruno praises the discursive effort by which the mind ceaselessly pursues its infinite object. Human perfection does not lie in the illumination which would

³² *Furori*, I, 2, *OeC*, VII, p. 99 (“Da qua si vede che l’ignoranza è madre della felicità e beatitudine sensuale, e questa medesima è l’orto del paradiso de gli animali”).

³³ *Ibidem*.

crown its quest, but in the activity itself, that is to say, in the movement itself rather than in its improbable end.

Thus in the *Eroici furori*, contrariety is defined as the tension between the desire to grasp the infinite object and the discursive character of the intellect. The paradox of the *Cabala* lies in that “our intellectual power can apprehend the infinite only through discourse, or through a certain manner of discourse, in other words, through a certain potential reason or aptitude.”³⁴ Always potential, the soul of the furious man is in perpetual motion: “Such that, whichever species be presented to it and understood by it, the soul, from the species presented to it and understood by it, concludes that another exists, greater still. Thus the soul is always in discourse and in movement (*in discorso et moto*).”³⁵ This perpetual movement of the soul is defined further on as a “metaphysical movement” which, in contrast to the limited “physical” movement, does not end with the perfection of the act. Tansillo responds in the following manner to Cicada’s argument about the “vanity” of the endless pursuit of truth:

Far from it! Most probably, it is contrary to the nature of the infinite to be understood; it cannot be finite, it would cease to be infinite; but on the other hand it is appropriate and natural that the infinite be endlessly pursued in a manner of pursuit which is not physical movement, but metaphysical movement; this movement does not go from the imperfect towards the perfect, but goes in circles through the degrees of perfection in order to end up at the infinite centre which is by no means formed, and which has no form.³⁶

In contrast to the traditional definition of “physical” movement, which is the passage from one state to another, this “metaphysical” movement knows no end, and is never concluded by any actualisation. It is infinite, has no limits, and proceeds, not from a “privation,” but from an “infinite potentiality.” Though Bruno often makes use of the metaphor of light, it is important to note that he detaches himself from the traditional noetic theories of illumination and from a metaphysics of scales. The driving principle is not the grace of the superior intelligences, it is not the gift of light. Bruno depreciates the “inspired” fury which he reserves for the ignorant, but he does so because this metaphysical movement does not proceed from the act, but from the contrariety and from the soul’s desire of affection “determined to love beyond that which it sees” and which “always considers that, beyond the degrees of the beautiful and the good represented by the species it can reach, there are others and more, *ad infinitum*.”³⁷ The infinity of potentiality never meets an infinite limit, which would be a

³⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 139.

³⁵ *Ibidem*, pp. 165–167.

³⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 167.

³⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 179.

principle of order. This “infinite potentiality” proceeds neither from contradiction nor from privation, nor, for that matter, from any of the negative determinations which are associated with all metaphysics of scales. Rather, it is the expression of the immanence of the “centre” which cannot be represented and which cannot be seen by reason. It is in this sense that we are to understand the definition of contrariety as the coexistence of opposites: it comes down fundamentally to the immanence of the infinite in the finite, to which the paradoxical expression of “infinite potentiality” refers when it is applied to the human intellect.

Truth and Knowledge in De Umbris Idearum

It is precisely around the notion of “potentiality” that Bruno lays out, in 1582, the principles of his noetic thought in the *De umbris idearum*. The text begins with a first “intention” in which Bruno gives an anthropological sense to the expression from the *Song of Songs* (2,3) (“I sat in the shadow of the one I desired”): the height of perfection which man is capable of reaching consists in staying in the shadow of the divine principle.³⁸ There is an immediate negative interpretation of the formula: our very nature is incapable of keeping to the realm of the truth. Here again, Bruno arrives at the notion of *vanitas* which is supposed to express the situation of a humanity removed from divine truth: “Non enim est tanta haec nostra natura ut pro sua capacitate ipsum veritatis campum incolat; dictum est enim: vanitas homa vivens, universa vanitas et id quod verum atque bonum, unicum est atque primum.”³⁹ The answer to that which appears here to be an objection is the same as the one given in the *Furori*: namely, it is enough to keep to the “shadows” of the good and the true.⁴⁰ Here, the metaphor of the shadow is supposed to account for the particular situation of the finite and natural intellect. Absolute truth, or the first principle of all things, is out of reach: it is the horizon out-of-bounds for all intelligible and imaginative species. The object of desire evades all effective enjoyment. This disjunction grounds the theory of universal vanity.

Bruno however, by developing the physical image of the shadow with the “second intention,” rejects the sort of Scepticism which ends by concluding the vanity of all human effort. The “shadow” must be distinguished here from

³⁸ *De umbris idearum*, ed. R. Sturlese, Florence, 1991, p. 25: “Hominis perfectionem, et melioris quod in hoc mundo haberi possit adeptionem insinuans Hebraeorum sapientissimus, amicam suam ita loquentem introducit: *sub umbram illius quem desideraveram sedi.*”

³⁹ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*: “Qui autem fieri potest ut ipsum cuius esse non est proprie verum, et cuius essentia non est proprie veritas, efficaciam et actum habeat veritatis? Sufficiens ergo est illi atque multum, ut sub umbra boni verique sedeat.”

“darkness” and “potentiality” from mere privation: “Once you will have considered this, I would like you to be able to distinguish between shadow and the notion of darkness. Shadow is not darkness, but the trace of darkness in the light, or the trace of light in darkness; or else the shadow participates in both light and darkness, or it is a composite of darkness and of light, or the mixture of light and darkness, or else it is neither the one nor the other, being distinct from light and from darkness. And this is because either it is not full light and truth, or because it is false light, or because it is neither true nor false, but the trace of what is true or false. We shall therefore take it that shadow is the trace of light, participating in light, and not full light.”⁴¹

By distinguishing shadow from darkness, Bruno sets knowledge in an intermediary space, which is neither light nor darkness, but participates in both extremes. In the “first intention,” Solomon’s formula opposed two terms, the first one with the whole of its subordinates. But here, Bruno gives the definition of a “middle term” which changes the sense of the “contradiction.” Between the pure act (light) and pure privation (darkness), there is a “middle way,” “mixed” or “composite,” participating in the extremes. In contrast with the model of the fall and of vanity, what is preserved here is the continuation of the gradual diffusion of light. The entire universe of forms is set up between these two formless extremes, both equally unattainable.

In the “fourth intention,” Bruno explains the ambivalent character of the shadow. All shadow is indeed double, participating in light and in darkness; it can be said to be both “shadow of darkness” and “shadow of light.” The explanation of this ambivalence creates then the opportunity to present the double dynamism consisting in procession, on the one hand, and conversion, on the other, through which the Platonists account for participation. Shadow can be thought of as the “shadow of darkness.” Through shadow, any reality can be defined in relation to two extremes, or as Bruno says further on, in relation to two “horizons.” The intermediary space – that of images and intelligibles – is not contradictorily opposed to truth: it is neither true nor false, being a mixture of the two. This double participation characterises the place of shadow as dynamically oriented.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*, p. 26: “Hoc ipsum cum consideraveris, illud quoque tibi occurrat velim, ut a tenebrarum ratione seiungas umbram. Non est umbra tenebrae, sed vel tenebrarum vestigium in lumine, vel luminis vestigium in tenebris, vel particeps lucis et tenebrarum, vel compositum ex luce et tenebris, vel mixtum ex luce et tenebris, vel neutrum a luce et tenebris, et ab utrisque seiunctum. Et haec vel inde quia non sit plena lucis veritas, vel quia sit falsa lux, vel quia nec vera nec falsa, sed eius quod vere est aut false, vestigium, etc. Habeatur autem in proposito, ut lucis vestigium, lucis particeps, lux non plena.” The theme is used again in *Eroici furori*: “All of the intelligences are signified by the moon, because they participate from act and power.” (I, 5, *OeC*, VII, p. 245).

Such is the sense of the interpretation suggested by Bruno concerning Solomon's formula: there is the "shadow which leads towards darkness" and the shadow which "leads towards light" since, "in the horizon of light and darkness, we can only conceive of shadow. It is in the horizon of good and evil, of truth and falsehood. It is here that can be found what may become good or bad, true or false. According to something's leaning towards this or that direction, it is said to be in the shadow of one or the other."⁴² This movement, which defines realities that follow the principle, cannot end with the perfection of the act: the limit does not belong to this intermediary space where the movement of conversion and procession are found. It rather is to be found at the horizon of this space, always out of reach. The lesson to be learnt here from Platonism is not a hierarchical representation of the orders of reality, but the definition of participation and of conversion that together order a universal dynamism, or in other words, which together are principles of an infinite "metaphysical" movement.

Against Scepticism and the theology of the Fall which, in his view, go hand in hand, Bruno establishes a philosophy of immanence and contrariety. We could say that in so doing he validates the contradiction that Aristotle, and later Bayle, attacked, between the thesis of the unity and the immobility of being on the one hand, and the phenomenalism of Xenophanes on the other. The contradiction is not resolved, quite the contrary, since it acquires a fundamental sense: if the "hero" is constitutively taken up in contrariety, it is because this contrariety creates a properly human order of signification. The infinite object of its desire, out of reach, frees, in effect, a multiplicity (which itself is infinite) of finite objects. These are all "lateral" and necessarily partial understandings of the absolute: a multiplicity that forms the order of meaning, the shadows, the traces or the remains of light. Far from maintaining the illusion of an immediate knowledge of the absolute, the nostalgia of a golden age free from contrariety, Bruno considers the infinite object of desire only as the condition of its dislocation, of its fragmentation in a universe defined as the intermediary space of the mixed or of the composite, of contrariety and of becoming. A meaning is to be found only through the absence and the void left by the infinite object; only because this void frees the infinite desire which characterises human nature. This is how Bruno explains the Platonic anamnesis: knowledge is only memory because it is considered through the dialectic of desire. The very meaning of the *Eroici furori* is, without any doubt, to bring the traditional dialogue between the intellect and the will to this fundamental level which connects the meaning of desire with the logic of desire. Thus

⁴² *Ibidem*, p. 28: "Illud est umbram incumbere in tenebras, hoc est umbram incumbere in lucem. In horizonte quidem lucis et tenebrarum, nil aliud intelligere possumus quam umbram. Haec in horizonte boni et mali, veri et falsi. Hic est ipsum quod potest bonificari, et malificari, falsari, et veritate formari; quodque istorsum tendens sub istius, illorsum vero sub illius umbra esse dicitur."

Bruno inherits and carries through the philosophy of love which neither Ficino nor Leone Ebreo had succeeded in unifying in the form of an anthropology.⁴³

The myth of Acteon, the hunter transformed into prey, then devoured by his own dogs, perfectly illustrates this inversion. Acteon's fate, i.e. the fate of the "intellect applied to the hunting of divine wisdom"⁴⁴ is by no means a punishment. The hunter is first changed into a prey, "because [the intellect] gives a form, according to their mode of being, to intelligible species and gives them the proportions appropriate to their capacity," because it "grasps things intelligibly, i.e. according to its mode of being."⁴⁵ Far from enabling it to grasp the divine, the rational species that the intellect creates are the expression of its own incapacity, powerlessness and ignorance. Obviously, were we to stop here, Acteon's metamorphosis should be interpreted as a failure: wanting to grasp the truth by fallacious means, the philosophers end up suffering a fate comparable to that of Narcissus, who fell in love with his own image. In fact, if Acteon is transformed into prey, it shows rather, on the contrary, that the intellect, captivated by its own thoughts, has transformed itself into the object of desire:

In this way, Acteon, with his own thoughts, his dogs which sought the good separately from himself, wisdom, beauty, the wild animal, attained it in this way, and once in his presence, captivated and beside himself by such beauty, became himself the prey, and was converted into that which he was pursuing; he then realized that of his thoughts, of his dogs, he himself became the coveted prey, because, having already in himself contracted divinity, there was no longer any need to look for it outside of himself.⁴⁶

Acteon's transgression fundamentally changes the classic theme of transformation or of mystical divinisation and cancels thereby the mirage of a possession of the infinite object, of the naked truth, the *pura et sincera veritas*, which, in Bruno's view, is the illusion of Scepticism.

⁴³ Leone Ebreo's *Dialoghi d'amore* are on the verge of such a doctrine of "human love," which should have been the subject of a fourth dialogue announced in the third, but lost, if we are to suppose that it was ever written: there, the deficiencies of Ficino's Platonism would have been looked into, whose limits had been examined in the dialectic of the third dialogue. On this point see [Isaac Abravanel] Léon Hébreu, *Dialogues d'amour*, transl. Pontus de Tyard, eds. S. Ansaldi and T. Dagron, introduction and notes by T. Dagron. Paris: Vrin, 2005. Bruno, in his way, completes an analogical program in his *De vinculis* which places human desire at the basis of a theory of social relationships.

⁴⁴ *Furori*, I, 4; *OeC*, VII, p. 155.

⁴⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 157.

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 159.

11. THE SCEPTICAL EVALUATION OF *TECHNÊ* AND BACONIAN SCIENCE*

Bernardo J. de Oliveira and José R. Maia Neto

Universidade Federal de Oliveira Minas Gerais, Belo Horizonte, Brazil

“Who yet knows how far and to what discoveries this invention may be improved?” This question regarding the magnet, asked by a sceptical member of the Royal Society, Joseph Glanvill, is key to understanding how scepticism about a metaphysical type of knowledge was combined with belief in a new way through which knowledge could develop. These two positions merge into what could be called “the technological turn” in early modern science. Given the lack of an answer to his question, Glanvill claims, “The Royal Society, by their Care and Endeavors in the using this Instrument [the magnet], give us hopes, that they will let none of its useful Applications to escape us.”¹

This paper analyses how early modern science combined scepticism and belief in the advancement of knowledge. We consider two questions: How did a sceptical perspective help to legitimise a practical shift in natural philosophy? And how was Francis Bacon, one of the main proponents of this shift, connected to the early modern history of scepticism? We argue that Francis Bacon’s work was an important step in the transition from the Renaissance scepticism developed by Sanchez, Montaigne and Charron to the mitigated and constructive scepticism of Wilkins, Boyle and Glanvill. We hold, against Richard H. Popkin and Henry G. van Leeuwen, that Bacon should not be placed in the company of those such as Descartes who tried to refute scepticism and establish a new certain science; and that the mitigated or constructive scepticism held by the early members of the Royal Society, Glanvill in particular, has Bacon as one of its sources and therefore that there is no inconsistency in Boyle and Glanvill’s holding a kind of mitigated scepticism and, at the same time, taking Bacon as their main patron in natural philosophy.

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¹ Joseph Glanvill, *Essays on Several Important Subjects in Philosophy and Religion*. 1676, III – “Modern Improvements of Knowledge,” 28.

Technê in the Philosophical Tradition and the Recovery of Scepticism

Before it came to the attention of sixteenth and seventeenth century natural philosophers, *technê* was usually considered an inferior form of knowledge. According to the general intellectual framework that prevailed until the Renaissance, the more theoretical knowledge was, the more highly it was regarded. The claim of effectiveness – *vita activa* – had more a moral and political meaning than an epistemological one. When humanists such as Alberti claimed the utility of knowledge, they were thinking in terms of happiness, in an Epicurean way, not in the control over nature or in the improvement of the material conditions of humankind.

Bringing publicity to different mechanical arts and drawing instruments, and apologizing for practical knowledge, Renaissance handbooks and treatises inaugurated the discourse on techniques, originating what we would later call technology.² Although already indicating the novelty, progress, and importance of this practical knowledge, these renaissance manuals and treatises seem somewhat diffident as compared to the better articulated late sixteenth- and seventeenth-century epistemological and political defences of technology such as Bacon's.³ Usually confined to the field in which the author worked, these first evaluations of technology in the Renaissance were primarily defensive, apologizing for their lack of philosophical background (Dürer), modestly suggesting some help for human needs (Biringuccio) or claiming that their experience would be enriched by the knowledge of other arts and sciences (Agricola). Even though authors such as Alberti, Vinci, and Dürer were closely connected to humanism, these writers hardly confronted the philosophical tradition that placed their knowledge on an inferior level. In fact, they were also constrained by their low social status.⁴

One among several different philosophical traditions recovered from antiquity in the Renaissance, scepticism was notable for its deliberate attack on the pretensions of philosophical knowledge. The sceptics presented their objections – the limitations of the senses and reason, equipollence of philosophical arguments, the sterility and impossibility of deciding philosophical controversies – within the philosophical tradition itself; i.e., they used the

² There is an important discussion of the technological dimension of modern science that cannot be addressed here. See Rossi, 1970; Mitchan, 1994; and Barry Jr., 1996. By technological turn we mean, roughly, the assignment of value to the crafts and mechanical arts and a concern with practical results (benefits to human beings), at least in the discourses aiming at legitimising scientific endeavours.

³ Bacon, Galileo and Descartes, despite their philosophical divergences, agreed that the necessary integration of practice with knowledge could not happen within the framework of the traditional conceptions of the sciences.

⁴ Rossi, 1970; Krohn, 1988.

same kinds of reasoning and conceptual tools employed by the dogmatist philosophers they endeavoured to refute in order to show the inconsistencies of their philosophical systems. They criticized the principles assumed in philosophy and liberal arts as ‘unjustifiable beliefs,’ but they did not reject all kinds of knowledge. For example, they did not question the knowledge of appearances or phenomena,⁵ within which practical sciences were possible, in particular medicine and navigation.⁶ When Sextus criticizes the liberal arts and their teachers, he targets the *theories* of music, grammar, and mathematics, not their common practice. Such practice might be carried out as well or better without universalistic pretensions or connections to alleged first principles. A fragment from the sceptical physician Diocles of Carystus is especially illustrative: “those who think that one should state a cause in every case do not appear to understand first that it is not always necessary to do so from a practical point of view.”⁷

Thanks to the work of Charles Schmitt and, above all, to that of Richard Popkin, the revival of scepticism in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries has been acknowledged as crucial in the shaping of modern thought. As confidence in the traditional intellectual world was undermined by the voyages of exploration, the disputes over the unity of religious truth, and the downfall of Aristotelianism, a common-sense distrust in human knowledge encouraged – and at the same time was reinforced by – the recovery of sceptical perspectives. Scepticism merged with other Renaissance streams of thought, combining criticism of rational ways with natural magic, hermeticism, alchemy and Kabbala as in Pico’s *Examen Vanitatis Doctrinae Gentium* (1520) and Agrippa’s *De Incertitudine et Vanitate* (1526).

⁵ Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, I.19–23.

⁶ “The task before us is to inquire concerning astrology or the ‘Mathematical Art’ – not the complete Art as composed of arithmetic and geometry (for we have confuted the professors of these subjects); nor yet that of prediction practised by Eudoxus and Hipparchus and men of their kind, which some also call ‘astronomy’ (for this, like Agriculture and Navigation, consists in the observation of phenomena, from which it is possible to forecast droughts and rainstorms and plagues and earthquakes and other changes in the surrounding vault of a similar character)” (Sextus Empiricus, *Against the professors*, V.1–2).

⁷ Diocles was looking for an epistemology of medical practice. The fragment continues as follows: “and second that many things which exist are somehow by their nature akin to principles, so that they cannot be given a causal account. Furthermore, they sometimes err in assuming what is unknown, disputed, and implausible, thinking that they have adequately given the cause” (Diocles *apud* Hankinson, 1995, 225).

Whether by means of Cicero's and Laertius' writings,⁸ through the impact of Sextus' translations and publications,⁹ or through medical schools,¹⁰ the spread of traditional sceptical arguments (*tropoi*) in the second half of the sixteenth- and the first of the seventeenth-century Europe has been identified as a sceptical crisis.¹¹ Serving mainly as a defence of fideism, these sharply contentious arguments were largely used to criticize scholastic and metaphysical speculations and soon became, in and of themselves, a major obstacle to erecting scientific knowledge on more solid grounds.¹²

In his recent revised edition of *The History of Scepticism*, Popkin expands considerably the scope of the philosophers related to the sceptical tradition in the period – which now runs from Savonarola to Bayle. He incorporates new research to show that virtually all primary and a large number of secondary figures in early modern philosophy were either (1) developing ancient sceptical views, (2) endeavouring to refute these views so that a new certain science could be built, or (3) partially accepting the sceptical challenge but trying to neutralize its negative effects by proposing a less pretentious view of science, which Popkin has called “mitigated or constructive scepticism.” Two issues in this new edition are worth mentioning in the present context. The first is the new chapter 13, on the philosophers of the Royal Society (Wilkins, Boyle and Glanvill). Popkin shows how their philosophical outlook fits in the third way aforementioned: the acceptance of the sceptical challenge as far as metaphysical certainty or foundation is concerned but rejection of an extreme scepticism that would deny any scientific (and religious) knowledge through the theory and practice of a hypothetical – but effective – experimental science. The second point to be made is that Popkin has not changed his earlier view of Bacon's position in the sceptical crisis of the period, placing him in group (2) above, that is, among those who, like Descartes, attempted to refute scepticism and propose a new certain science. These two positions held by Popkin, taken together, pose the following puzzle: if Glanvill and Boyle were mitigated sceptics (an interpretation with which we agree),¹³ and

⁸ Maia Neto, 1997.

⁹ Floridi, 2002.

¹⁰ “A general characteristic of medical learning in the Renaissance, in comparison with that of the preceding centuries was its blending of a philosophical speculation inspired by ancient sceptical texts on medical epistemology and of a new empirical knowledge gained through Galen” (Pittion, ‘Scepticism and Medicine in the Renaissance’, p. 111).

¹¹ For a recent collection of studies on the major philosophers who revived and modified scepticism in the period, see Moreau 2001.

¹² We know how extensive the modern philosophical debates over new foundations and methods of knowledge were. But the kind of foundation we are focusing on here is what we call today technology.

¹³ See Maia Neto, 2002 and Maia Neto and Pereira Maia, 2002.

Bacon was a new dogmatist, how can we explain their view of Baconian science as the main model of the Royal Society? Did they misinterpret Bacon's epistemological views or at least disregard some of its crucial aspects? We claim that they as mitigated sceptics were genuine disciples of Bacon and that Bacon should not be ranked among those who endeavoured to refute scepticism but among those who were trying to create a middle way between dogmatism and scepticism.¹⁴

Bacon's Attitude Towards Scepticism

Many passages in Bacon's work show favourable attitudes towards the sceptics.

Bacon refers to the major names related to ancient scepticism: Cicero, the Academics (Carneades and Arcesilaus), Socrates (whom the Academics considered their precursor), the ancient sophists and Pyrrho.¹⁵ He also knew and referred to Renaissance sceptics. Bacon ridiculed Agrippa in *The Masculine Birth of Time*, but in *A Letter and Discourse to Sir Henry Savile, touching helps for the intellectual powers* he recommends the reading of *De Vanitate*.¹⁶ Bacon disapproves of the excesses and implications of the sceptics' conclusions.

He condemns any interruption of progress because he takes it as crucial to knowledge.

However, if scepticism precludes progress, for Bacon dogmatism is the most harmful and persistent form of interruption. Although the sceptics presented 'respectful reasons' when combating dogmatism, for Bacon they were led by their "party and affection" to the extreme position of evading the search for new and fruitful discoveries.

The practical implications of their position were not much different from the sterility that Bacon identifies in the philosophical tradition as a whole. So, while recognizing the legitimacy of their motivations, Bacon rejects the way they carried them out, their *ars destruans*. Bacon interpreted their eloquent discourses as instruments of vainglory, and argued that their implicit goals were the same as those of their opponents.

¹⁴ Even assuming that Bacon's philosophy is fully anti-sceptic, we claim that it contains important elements that explain and justify Glanvill's and Boyle's reading of him as close to their mitigated scepticism.

¹⁵ Cf. *New Organon*, preface and Book I, aphorisms 37, 67, 75, 76, 126; Valerius Terminus, *The Masculine Birth of Time; Redargutio Philosophiarum; Dignitate Aumentis Scientiarum*, V, 2.

¹⁶ According to Vickers (1994, 659 and 718), Agrippa was the source of a passage in the essay *Of Truth* and another in *The Advancement of Learning* (1605), a work in which Ellis, one of the editors of the standard edition of Bacon's *Works* (V, 17), notes some parallels with Charron's *De la sagesse* (1601). This work of Charron's was soon translated to English and largely diffused in England at the time. It appears in the list of Bacon's library (cf. Charles-Daubert, 1982).

But in reality that which I meditate and propound is not *Acatalepsia*, but *Eucatalepsia*; not denial of capacity to understand, but provision for understanding truly; for I do not take away authority from the senses, but supply them with helps; I do not slight the understanding, but govern it. And better surely it is that we should know all we need to know, and yet think our knowledge imperfect, than that we should think our knowledge perfect, and yet not know anything we need to know.¹⁷

Bacon redirects the search for knowledge by proposing new goals, new procedures, and new criteria of assessment. Although he thought he had overcome scepticism with a solid base and secure method, his conception of the operative science exhibits significant aspects of scepticism.

The sceptical perspective helped to legitimise a shift in natural philosophy toward a more practical outlook, not just by undermining the Aristotelian type of science, syllogistically derived from first principles, but also by providing epistemological justification for the technological trends of early modern science. This combination of distrust of the possibility of knowing the inner principles of nature with a pragmatic view of science is more obvious in the so-called “mitigated” or “constructive scepticism.”¹⁸

The constructive sceptics (even though most of them did not consider themselves as sceptics in any sense) thought that a kind of valid and truthful science could be connected with sceptical criticism. This science would be based on probable truths concerning appearance, or on hypotheses that save phenomena and help to predict future events, or on practical and useful techniques. In all these cases knowledge was assumed to be limited, but capable of providing satisfactory truths that satisfied human needs.¹⁹

But how might Francis Bacon, the enthusiastic promoter of the advancement of knowledge, be linked to this movement? As indicated above, Popkin places him among those who launched a counter-attack on scepticism, because he interprets his epistemology as a variation of Aristotelianism. He attributes to Bacon the view that our perception and reasoning faculties, once functioning in proper conditions, would lead us to true knowledge.²⁰

¹⁷ Bacon, *New Organon*, 1: 126, Works, VIII, 158.

¹⁸ “Mitigated” because restricted to some realms of reality, notably that of substance and inner natures. “Constructive” because it proposes an alternative (more modest) kind of knowledge.

¹⁹ Popkin describes “mitigated or constructive scepticism” as “a theory which could accept the full force of the sceptical attack on the possibility of human knowledge, in the sense of necessary truths about the nature of reality, and yet allow for the possibility of knowledge in a lesser sense, as convincing or probable truths about appearances” (Popkin, 2003, 112).

²⁰ Popkin, 2003, 110–111.

In another important book on the history of early modern scepticism in England, Harry von Leeuwen follows Popkin presenting Bacon as searching for absolute certainty and, therefore, holding a position quite at odds with constructive scepticism, if not with the new science.²¹ Although the members of the Royal Society honoured Bacon as their patron and claimed to be his followers, Leeuwen claims that they diverged from him in a crucial aspect: the certainty of knowledge. According to Leeuwen, Bacon's theory of knowledge, though focused on the discovery of effects, also implied the possibility to obtain certain knowledge about inner natures. Because this was quite incompatible with the scientific endeavours of the Royal Society, its members remained silent about these epistemic aspects of Bacon's philosophy whenever they praised the chancellor. This is how Leeuwen interprets Bacon:

Bacon's passion for collecting factual data as the basis for generalization, his interest in unearthing the secrets of nature, and his concern to utilize such results for the improvement of human life, are all features of the theory of science for which he is held in esteem. ... His method aims at the discovery of necessary truth about the real forms of things, that is, their natures.²²

In this interpretation, the right method of investigation would secure certain knowledge, dispensing with any need for special talents. Although the theory of idols might show obstacles and limits to scientific knowledge, for Leeuwen the role of the theory of idols in Bacon's philosophy is equivalent to that of doubt in Descartes': a purifying catharsis preliminary for a new certain science. The purge is followed by a new method of inquiry through which the obstacles, if not completely eradicated, might be overcome.

Even though some of the idols were inherent to human nature and very hard to supplant, the procedure suggested is similar in many respects to Descartes': caution and attention to avoid precipitated conclusions and errors, precautions concerning the ambiguity of language, faculties fortified by instruments which would be progressively developed, and use of a new method of investigation that guarantees the discovery of simple forms.²³ This is a long and arduous way, but a secure one. Leeuwen thus concludes that Bacon's theory of certainty "is not the one later accepted by his scientific successors and thus, insofar as a theory of certainty is integral to scientific method, Bacon is not the founder of modern science."²⁴

²¹ "for Bacon scientific knowledge is demonstrative and is absolutely certain, a theme which in the sequel we shall see to be unacceptable to the leading members of the Royal Society" (Leeuwen, 1963, 5).

²² Leeuwen, 1963, 144.

²³ The method itself is, of course, quite different from Descartes'.

²⁴ Leeuwen, 1963, 144.

According to Leeuwen's interpretation, the constructive scepticism that characterizes a significant part of the discourse of the early Royal Society has nothing to do with Bacon's influence. Rather than developing Bacon's views, John Wilkins and Joseph Glanvill redirected to natural philosophy the answers to the sceptical challenges given by William Chillingworth and John Tillotson in a theological context.

Although we do not contest the influence of religious thinkers on the constructive sceptics, we claim that Bacon's works were an important step in the transition from the neo-scepticism developed by Sanchez, Montaigne and Charron to the mitigated and constructive scepticism of Wilkins, Glanvill and Boyle.²⁵ To show this, we will briefly indicate some similarities and dissimilarities between the sceptics' views and Bacon's conception of science as the latter has been reinterpreted in the last two decades.²⁶

Bacon and the Renaissance Sceptics

A number of the similarities were, in fact, stock positions held by many sixteenth century philosophers: criticism of bookish culture, in particular of scholastic teaching and Aristotelian syllogisms; rejection of the argument from authority; opposition to the sterility of the endless disputes that ensued from tradition; and

²⁵ There are only two brief references to Montaigne and none to Sanchez in Bacon's writings. However, it is unlikely that he did not know the Portuguese physician. As to the influence of Montaigne's *Essais* (1580, 1588); Villey (1913) argues that, if any, it was very little on the first version of the *Essays* (1597). Although this first version had already brought notoriety to Bacon, its ten topics were developed and substantially added to by another 58 items in the following editions of 1612 and 1625, in which Montaigne's influence is perceptible. Zeitlin (1928) examined this influence, showing that the style and approach of the work indicated a closer connection with, respectively, Cicero and Machiavelli. We think that Villey's interpretation, though fundamental to the study of Montaigne, is biased by the fact that he seeks to find in Montaigne an embryonic view of experimental science. The same charge may be raised against Sá's interpretation of Sanchez. In any case, our argument does not depend on establishing a direct influence of Montaigne and Sanchez on Bacon, though we think that it may have happened. The more likely is that the similarities that will be mentioned below derive from their use of common sources and reaction to similar intellectual dilemmas. A curious historical fact brings Montaigne close to the English thinker, suggesting a more personal acquaintance. Anthony Bacon, Francis' only brother and very close, in a spying activity for the English crown, surveyed and tried to connect Protestant families that were discontent with the Catholic reign in France (Bowen, 1963, 57–58). Among other cities, he stayed in Bordeaux when Montaigne was mayor. Anthony spent fifteen months there and was in contact with some of Montaigne's intimate friends (Villey, 1913, 128).

²⁶ We have in mind, in particular, the reinterpretation of the notions of "form" and "opera" proposed by Perez-Ramos (1988, 1993); of the role of hypothesis proposed by Urbach (1987); of probability by Cohen (1980); of induction by Horton (1973); and other issues and conceptions by Martin (1992), Doeuff (1995), Solomon (1998) and Rees (2000).

appeal to experience and observation of nature. Those were common positions held at the time, and it is pointless to associate them with a specific current of thought, although scepticism was closely associated with them, notably the defence of philosophical freedom against authority.²⁷ Nevertheless, only a few held the following four points.

The first was the separation of rational inquiry of nature from religious affairs – a position clearly defended by Montaigne, Sanchez, and Charron²⁸ before Bacon, although each had quite different goals. Renaissance scepticism, at least as proposed by Agrippa and Pico, was by and large a plea for the abandonment of rational inquiry and for the reliance on religious faith and customs since they considered true knowledge to be something beyond human reach. By contrast, although reserving to religion the right of the highest knowledge, Montaigne, Charron, Sanchez and Bacon argued that the search for knowledge should not meddle with religious or metaphysical speculations. In *The Apology for Raymond Sebond*, Montaigne argues that religious truths cannot be confirmed or criticized by experience given that they lie beyond the rational domain. For Montaigne and Charron ethics is the domain in which our knowledge should be analysed and rationally confronted with the diversity of human experience and its limitations. According to Bacon, “the senses discover natural things but darken and shut up the divine” (*Works*, III, 267). He argues that one of the main problems in the philosophical tradition was the confusion between religion and natural philosophy. Theology is concerned with knowing the book of the word of God; natural philosophy studies the book of God’s works. Scripture reveals the will of God, the book of nature, his power. The study of nature has nothing to say about God’s essence or will. So, one should “give to faith only that which is Faith’s” (*Works*, IV, 66). God’s design and intention are matters of faith about which science is of no help. The role of science is to endlessly investigate and control nature. Domination of nature, with the development of science, is the way to redemption.²⁹

Second, contrary to most Renaissance philosophers, all four opposed the vogue of astrology, numerology, hermeticism, and natural magic that had become

²⁷ This was in particular the case of Charron’s *Sagesse*, in which dogmatism (mostly Aristotelian) is held as one of the main enemies of wisdom to the extent that it compromises intellectual integrity, the key feature of ancient scepticism (cf., Charron, *De la Sagesse*, book II, chapter II: “Universelle et plaine liberté de l’esprit, tant en jugement qu’en volonté: seconde disposition à la Sagesse”).

²⁸ Charron’s *Sagesse* is a hallmark work in the history of the emancipation of ethics from religion (see Schneewind, 1998, 52–56).

²⁹ Milner (1997), in an article focusing on the theological foundation of Bacon’s natural philosophy, raises the question of possible sources of Bacon’s separation of knowledge from faith. He examines the possible influences of nominalism and Calvinism but does not consider a very likely one: scepticism. Funkenstein’s comment on the secularisation

so popular.³⁰ Furthermore, treating these trends as a kind of superstition, they analysed them epistemologically.

For what difference does it make whether one says ‘this results from a property hidden from my observations’ or ‘I do not know from what cause, or in what way, this happens?’ (Sanchez, 1988, 286).

Nobody keeps a record of their erroneous prophecies since they are infinite and everyday; right predictions are prized precisely because they are rare, unbelievable and marvellous. (Montaigne, *Essays*, I, 11: 1987, 44).

Men mark when things hit, and never mark when they miss; as they do generally also of dreams. (Bacon, ‘Essays’, *Works*, XII, 327).

The third point concerns the limits of knowledge. The theory of idols is Bacon’s account of the obstacles to knowledge and certainty. This theory has already been related to scepticism by scholars such as Whiley (1966) and Vert (1986). Besides pointing out the necessity to “put not wings on the human intellect, but plumbs,” Bacon affirms on many occasions that nature infinitely overcomes the senses and the intellect by the subtleties of its works. He retrieves the mechanical arts to provide new epistemological references. To prevent illusions, Bacon organizes and classifies the various weaknesses of human knowledge. Most of these limits and obstacles to human perception and judgement had already been examined by Sanchez, Montaigne and Charron. Bacon, however, does more than just organize them. He redirects his analysis towards those idols that affect

of theology and on the curriculum reforms in the late medieval period give us good clues to this interpretation: “The Catholic response to the secularization of the divine was seldom suited to restore the fine medieval balance between philosophy and theology. To the contrary, whenever sceptical or fideistic arguments were invoked to undermine the faith in unaided reason, the medieval understanding of theology as a rational endeavor was also undermined” (‘Scholasticism, Scepticism and Secular Theology’. In: Popkin and Schmitt, 1987, 51).

³⁰ “The invention of works and farther possibility was prejudiced in a more special manner than that of speculative truth; for besides the impediments common to both, it hath by itself been notably hurt and discredited by the vain promises and pretenses of alchemy, magic, astrology, and such other art, which, as they now pass, hold much more of imagination and belief, than of sense and demonstrations” (Bacon, *Filum Labyrinthi*, *Works*, VI, 428). Bacon, as is well known since Rossi’s classical *Francis Bacon: From Magic to Science*, adopts many important traits from the hermetic alchemical tradition, among them the goal to master nature. The more sceptical of his works – *Valerius Terminus* – is full of hermetic symbolism. Nevertheless, there and elsewhere magicians were strongly criticized, basically on account of their occult language (which precludes inter-subjective experiences) and of their hasty generalizations (avoiding the negative instances). This criticism over alchemy was also made by Boyle in his *Sceptical Chymist* (cf. Maia Neto and Pereira Maia, 2002).

the understanding and control of nature. Montaigne and Charron were not as concerned as Bacon was with the alchemists and natural magicians.

Bacon states that once the mind's mirror (which naturally distorts its images) is polished, once perception is purified and reason controlled, a new path would be taken. In fact, the reform that he proposes aims to create appropriate conditions for the advancement of knowledge, with instruments, careful practices and institutions that would control the mistakes, illusions, and prejudices. However, simultaneously with the expectation that the care taken might come to control them, there is also diffidence that they may be supplanted.

The new scientific ideal, the experimental procedures, the inductive perspective, and the institutional administration and organization of the progress of knowledge are instruments that must help men be careful about illusions and errors to keep them from stopping the advancement of knowledge.

However, if the purification of the theatre idols, relative to the philosophical tradition seems not to be a difficult task, the liberation of the idols of the tribe (social), the cavern (psychological), and overall of the market (language),³¹ is only partial. Language, even when under control (clear and objective), is something that one must distrust.

As the first two kinds of idols are hard to eradicate, so idols of this last kind cannot be eradicated at all. All that can be done is to point them out, so that this insidious action of the mind may be marked and reprovved.³²

³¹ "But the Idols of the Market-place are the most troublesome of all: idol which have crept into the understanding through the alliances of words and names. For men believe that their reason governs words; but it is also true that words react on the understanding..." (*New Organon*, 1:59. Works IV, p. 60-61)

³² It is worth taking up the passage in its entirety once more as it is somewhat intricate. The sequence of the citation seems to revert this image, suggesting that induction means purging all idols, while in the end of the paragraph our interpretation seems to prevail when it observes that there is no more hope of control. "And as the first two kinds of idols are hard to eradicate, so idols of this last kind cannot be eradicated at all. All that can be done is to point them out, so that this insidious action of the mind may be marked and reprovved (else as fast as old errors are destroyed new ones will spring up out of the ill complexion of the mind itself, and so we shall have but a change of errors, and not a clearance) and to lay it down once for all as a fixed and established maxim, that the intellect is not qualified to judge except by means of induction, and induction in its legitimate form. This doctrine then of the expurgation of the intellect to qualify it for dealing with truth, is comprised in three refutations: the refutation of the Philosophies; the refutation of the Demonstrations; and the refutation of the Natural Human Reason. The explanation of which things, and of the true relation between the nature and the mind, is as the strewing and decoration of the bridal chamber of the Mind and the Universe, the Divine Goodness assisting; out of which marriage let us hope (and be this the prayer of the bridal song) there may spring helps to man, and a line and race of inventions that may in some degree subdue and overcome the necessities and miseries of humanity" (*Plan of the work*, IV, 27).

For Bacon, men will continue imposing their own perceptions and innate ideas, learned and associated on language as a reality of nature. That is, they continue to tend to see an idealized order, paying attention only to the confirming instances and ignoring the contradicting ones, thus imposing on nature an uniformity much larger than it actually possesses. Bacon sees the very *foundational* aspiration as one of the natural inclinations of the human mind that leads to illusions. Thus, he ridicules the perspectives that leave us in search of the Archimedean point of support.

For the mind of man is strangely eager to be relieved from suspense, and to have something fixed and immovable, upon which in its wanderings and disquisitions it may securely rest... so do men earnestly desire to have within them an Atlas or axletree of the thoughts, by which the fluctuations and dizziness of the understanding may be to some extent controlled; fearing belike that their heaven should fall.³³

The awareness of this limitation and the distrust of the human possibilities for knowledge did not mean a refusal of the possibility of advancing knowledge and improving its condition, but such possibility and effort did not mean basing the new certainties on natural philosophy. According to Bacon, the new methods, instruments and institutions are valuable help in the search for knowledge, but they are not a guarantee that our psychological inclinations such as hurry and vanity, social impositions, and linguistic limitations may be overcome. However, his historical perspective suggests that we perceive the transformation of our own conditions of knowledge.³⁴ That is, our current conditions and limitations must not linger. And once the progress of knowledge is conceived as directly associated with the development of the investigation arts, it is expected that in the future the control of these idols may be made easier.

Differently from the demand for total clarity of what is real and true, the Baconian truth tolerates the possibility of a truth that is only partially visible. No gathering of supporting cases would afford a definite conclusion, since it would be vulnerable to the danger of confrontation with a contradictory instance. We cannot come to a conclusion on the veracity by discovering new particular points; in this case, as Vert observes (1986, 105), there is only an effort of supposition of truth.³⁵

³³ Bacon, *Dignity*, IV, 428–429.

³⁴ “Now among men we expect greater knowledge of affairs and more maturity of judgment from an old man in proportion to his experience and the multitude of things he has seen, heard and pondered; so from our modern age, if it but realized its powers and would put them boldly to the trial, far greater things are to be expected than from those distant days” (*Thoughts and Conclusions*, 94).

³⁵ “Il faut considérer qu’une connaissance établie inductivement n’est jamais immédiatement certaine et que chez Bacon le jugement des axiomes, la conclusion à leur vérité, est différé pour une durée indéterminée. Il faut en effet noter que le critère de vérité proposé

This subtle redirection, which marks an important shift in the discourse of natural philosophy, becomes more visible in our fourth point: the use of the maker's knowledge argument. Basically, the maker's knowledge argument is that only the maker can know what he has made or done. For instance, nature, as God's creation, can be known only by Him. However, human beings, as *imitator dei*, can know what they create. "The underlying idea of this tradition," says Hintikka, "may be said to be the idea that we can obtain and possess certain especially valuable kinds of theoretical knowledge only of what we ourselves have brought about, are bringing about or can bring about."³⁶

This idea often appeared as a presupposition or as a tacit assumption, but seldom as an explicit argument. Furthermore, it varied considerably depending on the philosopher and context in which the argument was proposed. Hobbes used it to show how geometry and civil philosophy could be known, others applied it to language and still others applied it to art, in the sense of craftsmanship. In a time that hailed so many inventions, it was reasonable to emphasize the technological dimension of an argument that linked the act of making and the act of knowing.

Like the idea of limit, the idea of the maker's knowledge has both a negative and a positive side. Boundaries that cannot be exceeded circumscribe the field to be worked. Although almost all early modern sceptics subscribed to this argument, it was not necessarily sceptical. The conception of knowledge as creation has a notable religious character.³⁷ It appears in alchemical works as well. The analogy between divine and human creation became, for many, the way to know inner nature. Ficino, as much as Hippocrates, believed that art, as imitation of nature, may illuminate the essence of nature through the knowledge of the reasons that guide our technical action.

Nevertheless the passage from phenomena to inner nature or general laws is quite problematic, even for those who recognize the value of experience. For Bacon this difficulty is solved by a shift in the conceptions of nature and laws (forms).

dans notre chapitre ne conclut définitivement que négativement. On peut conclure à la fausseté des axiomes n'y satisfaisant pas; mais on ne peut conclure à la vérité des axiomes découvrant de nouveaux points particuliers; il n'y a dans ce cas qu'un renforcement de la présomption de vérité issue de l'induction elle-même. Aussi la distinction entre l'invention et le jugement, en tant qu'elle signifierait distinguer entre une étape où le savoir est découvert et une étape où l'on conclut définitivement à sa vérité, n'est-elle plus pertinente. Non pas que la démarche inductive comporte une seule étape qui soit à la fois invention et jugement de la connaissance, mais parce que la démarche inductive proposée par Bacon comporte deux étapes où l'invention et le jugement sont tous deux présents. Si le moment de l'invention de l'axiome est en même temps un jugement fournissant une présomption de vérité; le moment du jugement l'axiome examine sa capacité à inventer du nouveau" (1986, 105).

³⁶ Hintikka, 1974, 80.

³⁷ Cf. Funkenstein, 1986; Hintikka, 1974.

The central point of the Baconian conception of science is the notion of form, which has an especially controversial meaning. The ambiguous treatment that Bacon gives it contributed to its being interpreted at times as efficient cause or formal substance (which for several scholars would attest to some Aristotelian traces), at times as essence,³⁸ and at times yet as rather general axioms, laws,³⁹ matter structures, of the movement of matter,⁴⁰ fundamentals or principles. Nevertheless, we think that it does not coincide with any of these concepts, as the quest for form is explicitly associated with the capacity of reproduction and transformation. Whatever the case, Bacon abandons the conception of form as an entity, as in Aristotle, and outlines it as a combination of material unities and movements, as intrinsic agents in the constitution of matter, thus leading the way for a mechanical or materialistic explanation of the natural world.

Bacon admits that although reaching the forms is the highest ambition of science, in practice we must be contented if we discover only some of the necessary and sufficient conditions for the production of the effects. As long as it is conceived as a process, the knowledge of these conditions in itself allows a practical action that, in turn, opens new paths to knowledge with new aspects associated with the manifestation of equivalent phenomena. Thus it is in itself a new criterion of knowledge (see Zagorin 39).

This position paved the way for the combination of scepticism with a pragmatic empiricism exhibited in Glanvill's works. Within this new framework, art is no longer considered as imitation of nature but as intervention, transformation and reproduction.⁴¹

³⁸ "For since the Form of a thing is the very thing itself, and the thing differs from the form no otherwise than as the apparent differs from the real, or the external from the internal, or the thing in reference to man from the thing in reference to the universe; it necessarily follows that no nature can be taken as the true form..." (*New Organon*, 2:13 Works, IV, p. 137).

³⁹ "Nor have I forgotten that in a former passage I noted and corrected as an error of the human mind the opinion that Forms give existence. For though in nature nothing really exists beside individual bodies, performing pure individual acts according to a fixed law, yet in philosophy this very law, and the investigation, discovery, and explanation of it, is the foundation as well of knowledge as of operation. And it is this law, with its clauses, that I mean when I speak of Forms; a name which I the rather adopt because it has grown into use and become familiar" (*New Organon*, 2:2 Works, IV, p. 120).

⁴⁰ *New Organon*, 1:51; 1:75; 2:1; 2:3; 2:5.

⁴¹ "But there is likewise another and more subtle error which has crept into the human mind; namely, that of considering art as merely an assistant to Nature, having the power indeed to finish what Nature has begun, to correct her when lapsing into error, or to set her free when in bondage, but by no means to change, transmute or fundamentally alter Nature" (Bacon, *Works*, VIII, 410–411).

In *Francis Bacon's Idea of Science and The Maker's Knowledge Tradition*, Perez-Ramos shows how central this issue was. To the extent that the reliability of natural knowledge depends on what the investigator has done or is capable of doing, the epistemological warrant of human knowledge of natural processes refocuses on the capacity to (re)produce the effects of nature.⁴²

The Baconian idea of science, epitomized in his notion of form, is that to know something is to be capable of (re)producing the same phenomenon in any material *substratum* capable of manifesting it.⁴³ As Perez-Ramos has observed, the production of effects cannot be easily accommodated within the general frame of the discourse of Western natural philosophy.

It mirrors the operative twist or knowing-how stress that Bacon gives to the ancient conception of Nature as the result of the combination of alphabetical units: the function of the alphabet is expressed in reading and *in writing*, that is, in producing or representing words at will, sometimes even in creating new ones.⁴⁴

Men have not created natural phenomena, but since they can reproduce or transform them through technology they may know them. This new operative science opens up a scope of knowledge which, for Bacon, bypasses the sceptics' view of the constraints limiting human knowledge.

The question of the boundaries of human knowledge is considered the main difference between Bacon and the sceptics. In *The Dignity* Bacon points out that "the only difference between them and ourselves is, they affirm that 'nothing can be known by any method whatever'; we that 'nothing can be perfectly known by the methods that mankind have hitherto pursued'."⁴⁵

Bacon thought it arrogant to believe that our cognitive circumstances are inalterable. For him, the history of knowledge reveals retrospectively how ignorance

⁴² It is instructive to contrast different kinds of identification of "doing" with "knowing." Like others, Mondolfo (1971) and Perez-Ramos (1988) took the Vician formula – *verum factum* – as a paradigm for maturity and clarity. It should be added that, contrary to Vico's expectations, "Man's mastery over his physical environment has opened a much larger scope for the maker's knowledge than the most rudimentary control he exercises over his society or his culture" (Hintikka, 1974, 83). In his book on Bacon, Zagorin observes that "nowhere in his writings, though, does Bacon ever discuss or even mention the theory of maker's knowledge" (1998, 38–39). However, Zagorin seems to agree with the interpretation of Pérez-Ramos that the *maker's knowledge* theory works, even though tacitly, as a regulatory principle of the Baconian science.

⁴³ The example of gold is paradigmatic. According to Bacon (*New Organon*, II, 5), whoever knows the way to produce the yellow, the weight, the ductility, the malleability, etc. in its grades and modes, and how to join them in a certain body, knows gold and may produce it.

⁴⁴ Perez-Ramos, 1996, 104.

⁴⁵ Bacon, *De Dignitate et Augmentis Scientiarum*, V, 2.

is conditioned by the grade and scope of man's access to information. Many discoveries – like that of America – were absolutely inaccessible before the invention and use of certain instruments. According to Bacon, the capacity of the human cognitive faculties is closely connected to the progress of the cognitive instruments, and thus “the art of discovery may advance as discoveries advance.” Further, by considering interest in the unknown as a vital spur to this progress, Bacon saw sceptical conformity to the limits of knowledge as a form of desperation. “They are ill discoverers, that think there is no land when they can see nothing but sea.”⁴⁶

For Bacon, resignation to the present situation means the abortion of future possibilities. The image of desperation fits Sanchez well, who confessed that “For a long time I have felt myself taken by despair of finding and knowing scientific truth.”⁴⁷ But this despair was not absolute. Charron considers traditional (mostly Aristotelian) science as arbitrary and a major obstacle to (practical) wisdom, but he does talk of ‘useful’ sciences worthy of being cultivated by the sage.⁴⁸ Sanchez and Montaigne are in fact ambivalent regarding the progress of the possibilities of knowledge. Montaigne charges the Academic sceptics – a charge equally applicable to Sanchez’ main work – with a kind of negative dogmatism for pretending that nothing can be known by man, for this presupposes a science of human faculties – and of what they can eventually attain – of which we are deprived.⁴⁹ At times both Sanchez and Montaigne consider experience as cumulative and partially transmissible. They celebrate the innovations of instruments, the discoveries and their lessons,⁵⁰ but, on the other hand, they do not believe in the possibility of significant advancement in human knowledge. Instead, in their view, the advancement of knowledge is, at best, the passage from one hypothesis to another slightly more solid. This brings constructive scepticism – at least the

⁴⁶ Bacon, *Advancement of Learning, Works*, III, p. 355.

⁴⁷ “Second consult-letter from Sanchez to Clavio” In: Sá, A. *Francisco Sanches, filósofo e matemático*. Lisboa, 1947, p. 363. Also in *That nothing is known*. p. 233: “For had I understood anything completely, I should not have denied that fact – nay, I should have shouted aloud for happiness, since no better stroke of luck than this could possibly come my way. But as it is, I am tortured incessantly by grief, in despair of being able to know anything completely.” According to McLean (1972, 228), a pessimistic scepticism, such as the one expressed in *Nosce Ipsum* written by John Davis, was more common in England.

⁴⁸ Charron, 1986, 365.

⁴⁹ Montaigne, 1987, II:12, 560.

⁵⁰ In an article about Montaigne’s “Journal de Voyage de Italie”, Tetel (1987) points out how impressed the French thinker was by the mechanical inventions he saw and wrote down his understanding of their components and movements.

one upheld by Boyle and Glanvill – much closer to Bacon than to these two thinkers from the previous generation.⁵¹

Bacon and the Constructive Sceptics of the Royal Society

Bacon considers the interest in what is not yet known as a vital impulse to the advancement of knowledge.⁵² Whereas the sceptics doubted the possibility of the knowledge of truth or the integrity of our faculties even under the best conditions, Bacon insists on the lack of knowledge of the future and therefore in the possibility of change. The same adventurous spirit of this bet on the investigation of the unknown seems to contradict Bacon's position on the role of hypothesis. In the historiography of science, the English empiricist is commonly depicted as opposing the use of hypothesis in investigation. However, hypotheses, as well as speculations, have an important role in the Baconian method – that of clarifying and guiding experiences – which must not be confounded with the method of anticipation of nature, which Bacon strongly criticizes.⁵³ Bacon's attacks on the anticipation method do not aim at supposedly illegitimate intrusion of speculation into science, but on the contrary, at the fact that theories that anticipate

⁵¹ In *De modo sciendi*, Sanchez seems to have developed a more positive view of a non dogmatic science. That is one of the reasons Popkin considers him an anticipator of the constructive scepticism of the seventeenth century. This work, however, did not survive and in the writings that were preserved he remains ambivalent about the advancement of knowledge, the use of instruments, the transmission and accumulation of experience, as we can see in the following quotations: "Much experience, then, makes a man both learned and wise. Hence it comes about that old men are more learned at least in terms of experience, and better adapted, therefore, for the conduct of human affairs than the young. ... In order, therefore, to deal with this disadvantage – namely lack of experience – men have made the additional discovery of the art of writing, so that what one or another person has learnt by experience, through an entire lifetime and in different places, another may learn in a short time. And in this way our ancestors served the interests of the men of our own generation, who by reading through the lives, the deeds, the discoveries, and the experiences of many men, without great expenditure of time, are adding something from their own resources to the total, as others in turn will do for them. Besides they pass judgement also on doubtful questions, and so the body of transmitted lore (ars) receives increase; and for this reason, posterity is compared (and rightly) to a boy standing on the shoulders of giant. But although this method clearly possesses some advantages for the conduct of human affairs, yet in no way does it further assist the sciences" (Sanchez, 1988, 281–282). "So what is our 'judge' to do here, even if he should live for ten thousand years? He will have experience of only a few things, and faulty experience at that; still worse will be the judgements he makes concerning these things; and he will know nothing at all" (Sanchez, 1988, 287).

⁵² His utopia *New Atlantis* was designed to provoke this kind of wish in the minds of men.

⁵³ *New Organon*, I:28.

nature are not speculative, as Urbach (1987) observes. It is exactly for their being contented with familiar facts, not keeping themselves open to new experiments and unknown effects, that Bacon criticizes them.⁵⁴

For Bacon, these hypotheses and the axioms derived from generalizations should not lose the sight of the particulars nor shield themselves in infallible, dogmatic, and stagnated systems. For this reason he prioritises axioms of medium generality, considering them more useful than general axioms which have almost no practical application.

For the lowest axioms differ but slightly from bare experience, while the highest and most general (which we now have) are notional and abstract and without solidity. But the middle are the true and solid and living axioms, on which depend the affairs and fortunes of men.⁵⁵

Nor again is it a less evil, that in their philosophies and contemplation their labour is spent in investigating and handling the first principles of things and the highest generalities of nature; whereas utility and the means of working result entirely from things intermediate. Hence it is that men cease not from abstracting nature till they come to potential and uninformed matter, nor on the other hand from dissecting nature till they reach the atom; things which, even if true, can do but little for the welfare of mankind.⁵⁶

For Bacon, openness to novelty reveals conviction that there are many important things to be discovered, a hope, historically founded, that learning about things unknown may be worthwhile. The Columns of Hercules on the boundary of the Mediterranean Sea in Gibraltar that traditionally represented limits that should not be trespassed – the *non ultra* to the navigator or investigator – signifies for Bacon an over-estimation of ancient science and an underestimation of human cognitive capacity. The great expectations that Bacon entertained concerning the progress of knowledge and its benefits are surely aspects that contributed to his image as a prophet of modern science as well as a kind of dogmatist. He considers the new science more valid, fruitful, useful, promising – and, to that extent, more true – than the knowledge proposed by diverse traditions and philosophical schools. Bacon sees knowledge not as an assurance but rather as an enormous possibility of (secular) salvation.

Bacon's belief in the advancement of knowledge and his image as a prophet of redemption through science distance him from scepticism. However, most early

⁵⁴ “They seize on experiments and effects already known and do no more than hold them together by a flimsy network of logic cut to the precise measure of the familiar facts” (*Thoughts...*, 86; Also *New Organon*, 1:8).

⁵⁵ Bacon, *New Organon*, 1:104.

⁵⁶ Bacon, *New Organon*, 1: 66.

modern sceptics were fideists and a number of Reformed millenarians combined sceptical doubts with prophetic certainty.⁵⁷ In Bacon's writings, Christian Reformed millenarianism appears secularised as a reformation of knowledge, pointing to the dawn of a new epoch through the ethical foundation of this new science.⁵⁸ According to him, if one walks just a little way within natural philosophy, one may become an atheist, but if one goes further one return to religion. The basic idea behind Bacon's proposed reform is the reversal of the consequences of the Fall of Man, with the restoration of prelapsarian conditions. More than just an aspiration, the growth of knowledge is a wager fundamental to his philosophy.

The truth that Bacon looks for is not that of the philosophical tradition, which he characterizes as sterile, but rather a kind of knowledge strictly connected with the operation and effective control of nature. Not the kind of pure and absolute knowledge sought by the metaphysical philosophers,⁵⁹ but a knowledge that one has no reason to distrust, since it permits a verifiable and progressive control over many natural phenomena.

To put the matter simply, I as much as a lame man on the road will outstrip an athlete who is off it. Remember that the question concerns the way to follow and not the forces, and that we defend here not the part of the judges but the guides.⁶⁰

⁵⁷This combination is another interesting aspect of early modern scepticism brought out by Popkin in his new edition of *The History of Scepticism* (see Popkin, 2003, 22–24 and 174–180).

⁵⁸As Granada (1982, 8) remarks, the Baconian reform “in its double sense of personal work and collective project was inserted in the eschatological-millenarian perspective, which not only echoes this kind of eschatological expectation widespread in the English society of the period, but also establishes the power of science as a decisive movement towards the realization of the expectation of the restoration of paradise.” We think one can talk about Bacon's millenarianism only in a broad sense, given that he did not venture in any previsions about the millennium or discuss its conditions by interpreting the prophetic books of the Bible.

⁵⁹Graham Rees, who has been working on a new edition of Bacon's complete works, including manuscripts unknown until recently, claims that there are two distinct philosophies in Bacon. Besides the well known methodological philosophy, there is another one that he characterizes as a speculative physical system. The Baconian system that Rees brings up is a *sui generis* cosmology derived from the medieval Arabic astronomy of Alpetragian articulated with Paracelsus' theory of matter. This system would be incompatible with Bacon's epistemological thoughts and even more so with the sceptical aspects of his reformation program that we are emphasizing. In an essay review of Rees' book, Pérez-Ramos gives what, in our view, is the only reasonable solution. Instead of irreconcilable, this speculative philosophy, as well as most of the positive doctrines presented by Bacon, should be taken as provisional: “The cosmological materials which we find in his books are, to quote Bacon's own words in *Distributio Operis*, ‘for temporary use only, pending the completion of the rest, like interest payable from time to time until the principal be forthcoming. For I do not make so blindly for the end of my journey, as to neglect anything useful that may turn up by the way’” (Pérez-Ramos, 1985, 609).

⁶⁰Bacon, *Refutation of Philosophies*, 118.

The advancement of knowledge depends on restricting investigation to a workable field, which Bacon claims to be quite wide. Bacon argues for the veracity and superiority of this field, pointing out the benefits that it will progressively bring to the human race.

The shift of natural philosophy to the “domain of the works” appears to have been Bacon’s main influence on the Royal Society’s constructive scepticism. The apologies for the early Royal Society make it plain that its main justification lies in the fact that, unlike the philosophical tradition, the scientific endeavours carried out by the members of the Royal Society have a utility that would bring benefits to the commonwealth. This can be seen in Sprat’s apology and Boyle’s response to Hobbes’ attacks on the Royal Society, and especially in the way Glanvill combines sceptical doubt with hopes for the advancement of knowledge. This combination made Glanvill a major target of the opponents of the Baconian program. They charged the Baconians – to the extent that they rejected traditional learning and self-confidently vindicated a new science – with being enthusiasts.⁶¹ The supporters of the Royal Society replied that instead of being a threat, the new learning would accomplish the aims of society. So Sprat and Glanvill, following Bacon, argue that the innovative character of their science does not represent any threat to the social order. Rather than promoting sectarianism, the Royal Society offers an antidote to this problem. The public and co-operative character of the scientific endeavours carried out by the members of the Royal Society make it universal: “a philosophy of mankind.” The experimental features and the sceptical cautions involved are reported as the best antidotes to the intellectual arrogance of dogmatic and speculative philosophy. Against the overindulgence of those who rely on the power of the imagination and its quick conclusions, one should engage in patient investigations and be humble.⁶² In his “Address to

⁶¹ Enthusiasm is a recurrent charge in seventeenth century England. Albeit originally addressed to the mystics and prophets who claimed to be divinely inspired, the charge was also raised against the practitioners and supporters of the new experimental science. The identification of the Royal Society’s members as enthusiasts arose from fears that criticism of the traditional learning authorities might lead to undesirable social changes (Heyd, 1995). Meric Casaubon and Henry Stubbe, two of the main critics of the Royal Society, claimed that the materialism of the new science was as harmful to society as the religious radicals.

⁶² “The spiritual repentance is a careful survey of our former Errors, and a resolution of amendment. The spiritual humility is an observation of our defects, and a lowly sense of our own weakness. And the experimenter for his part must have some qualities that must answer to these: He must judge aright of himself, he must misdoubt the best of his own thoughts; he must be sensible of his own ignorance, if ever he will attempt to purge and renew his reason it may well be concluded, that the doubtful, the scrupulous, the diligent observer of nature, is nearer to make a modest, a severe, a meek, an humble Christian, than the man of speculative Science, who has better thoughts of himself and his own knowledge” (Sprat *apud* Heyd, 1995, 156).

the Royal Society,” which prefaces *Scepsis Scienifica*, Glanvill takes the Royal Society as proof of his mitigated and constructive scepticism.

For if we were yet arriv'd to certain and infallible Accounts in Nature, from whom might we more reasonably expect them then from a Number of Men, whom, their impartial Search, wary Procedure, deep Sagacity, twisted Endeavours, ample Fortunes, and all other advantages, have renderd infinitely more likely to have succeeded in those Enquiries; then the floath, haste, and babble of talking Disputants; or the greatest industry of single and less qualified Attempters? ... if they ... confess the narrowness of humane attainments, and dare not confide in the most plausible of their Sentiments; if such great and instructed Spirits think we have not as yet Phaenomena enough to make as much as Hypotheseis, much less, to fix certain Laws and prescribe Methods to Nature in her Actings: what insolence is it then in the lesser size of Mortals, who possibly know nothing but what they glean'd from some little Systeme, or the Disputes of Men that love to swagger for Opinions, to boast Infallibility of Knowledge, and swear they see the Sun at Midnight!⁶³

Rather than an obstacle to society, mitigated scepticism not only promotes healthy sociability through the destruction of strongly held opinions that cause fierce disputes and controversies, but also stimulates an experimental science bestowed with a great technological potential. The expectation that the scientists of the Royal Society could expand the knowledge and control nature is vividly expressed by Glanvill: “perhaps no Age hath been more happy in liberty of Inquiry, than this, in which it hath pleased God to excite a very vigorous and active Spirit for the advancement of real and useful Learning” (Glanvill, 1970, III, 3). Few arguments served better than productive efficacy to prove how their efforts differed from the sterile philosophical tradition.

Nevertheless, both Popkin and Leeuwen take Bacon's view of attainable boundaries as a radical difference between him and the constructive sceptics.⁶⁴ Their emphasis on the mitigated sceptics' distrust of the human ability to achieve true knowledge of nature overshadows their concomitant acceptance of Bacon's methodological procedures of knowledge and his trust in the advancement

⁶³ Glanvill, 1978, preface not paginated.

⁶⁴ “The progress of modern science is not what Bacon envisaged, a march from knowledge of particulars to knowledge of the Forms or the real causes of things. Rather, for Glanvill, careful free experimental research lead to finding out more and more facts, and to the construction of hypotheses, which can never constitute final or complete knowledge of anything through its causes” (Popkin, “Introduction”. In: Glanvill, 1970, xviii).

of knowledge.⁶⁵ However, if one considers Glanvill's works such as *Modern Improvements of Useful Knowledge* and *Summe of my Lord Bacon's New Atlantis*, a different image emerges. Glanvill – and possibly other members of the Royal Society – saw the development of constructive scepticism as a continuation of Bacon's path.⁶⁶ The goals, methods, and institutions proposed by Bacon are embraced and their initial results celebrated. In doing so Glanvill clarifies the technological shift all too frequently hidden in Bacon's writings by the ambiguities of his vocabulary and by his political role.⁶⁷

Glanvill describes a historical catalogue of inventions and, in addition, a collection of scientific theories and experiments with light. These are presented as instrumental speculations or hypotheses in contrast to Galileo's realist theories. The instruments reported aid our senses, the methodological procedures assist our judgements, and the public discourse and cooperative institutions help the achievement of cumulative science, which should be pragmatic and operative

⁶⁵ Leeuwen admits that Glanvill, after writing *Scepsis scientifica*, reconsiders his earlier scepticism about the possibility of overcoming obstacles to knowledge through the design and use of instruments (1963, 80). However, this has no great weight in Leeuwen's overall view of Glanvill (1963, 144–145). He overlooks Glanvill's *Essays*, especially the third on the "Modern Improvements of Knowledge," in which Glanvill is exultant at the advancements that the moderns were achieving in knowledge and at what could be done in the future. Furthermore, Glanvill's optimism is already present in *Scepsis Scientifica*: "For by a skilful application of those notices, may be gain'd in such researches, besides the accelerating and bettering of Fruits, emptying Mines, draying Fens and Marshes ... and innumerable other advantages may be obtain'd by an industry directed by Philosophy" (Glanvill, 1978, preface not paginated).

⁶⁶ "As the Lord (Bacon) had noted the philosophy must not be the work of the mind turned in upon it self..., but it must be raised from the observation and applications of the sense and take its accounts from things as they are in the sensible word.... In order to which performances our senses must be aided; for themselves they are too narrow for the vastness of things and too short for deep researches ... I say therefore they must be assisted with instruments, that may strengthen and rectify their operations. And in these we have mighty advantages over Aristotle and the Ancients" (Glanvill, *Essays*, III, 23). Even granting that Glanvill cannot be considered a major representative of the Royal Society or that his ideas changed from a initial scepticism to a Baconianism in his last works, our point – namely, that the shift of natural philosophy to the domain of works appears to be the main influence of Bacon's thought on the constructive scepticism held by members of the Royal Society – does not lose its force.

⁶⁷ The distinction drawn by Glanvill (1970, 47–48) between *infallible* certainty – the assurance that it is impossible that things should be otherwise than we conceive them – and *indubitable* certainty – that of which there is no reason to doubt – helps to solve the puzzle of Bacon's paradoxical use of similar terms. A good discussion of Bacon's ambiguities can be found in Martin (1992) and Solomon (1998), who show how these ambiguities are related to his political career.

as Bacon proposed. The improvements to the arts and instruments are thus considered as reasons for great expectations (some of which, Glanvill confesses, “would appear ridiculous to say”) in the future advancement and new discoveries of this science-turned-technology.

With these considerations we want to bring to light some aspects in the history of early modern science and technology that have not been satisfactorily considered. These considerations show how scepticism was used to legitimate this technological turn of early modern science. Reasons for despair over the impossibility of acquiring knowledge are rewritten as reasons to expand the frontiers of technology and to wager on its progress. Sceptical doubts were not to be inflated by despair, nor methodically arranged in such a way as to be overcome with some indubitable principle (as in the Cartesian system) but, instead, something to be reduced by improving instruments and, above all, by redirecting natural philosophy towards a pragmatic and operative domain. More than just compatible with Glanvill’s and Boyle’s epistemological positions, Baconian philosophy seems to have been the major path through which scepticism could become constructive.

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12. TOMMASO CAMPANELLA: THE REAPPRAISAL AND REFUTATION OF SCEPTICISM

Gianni Paganini

Università degli Studi del Piemonte Orientale, Vercelli, Italy

Histories of scepticism are now much wider in scope than they used to be, and include not only the effects of this philosophical movement but also reactions to it. However, starting from Popkin's classic work,¹ they still fail properly to evaluate the role played by Campanella, although he dedicated the whole of the first book of his *Metaphysica* to a detailed analysis and confutation of sceptical doubts. This first book is fundamental to clarifying how scepticism acted as a stimulus to Campanella in drawing up his philosophy, and how it enabled him

¹ The case of Richard Popkin's *History of Scepticism* is exemplary. He introduced a wide and fertile concept of the history of scepticism. He has also tirelessly promoted this concept through numerous essays and as editor of collective works. In his *History*, now in its third edition, almost doubled in size to include the period "from Savonarola to Bayle," Campanella however is treated only briefly, and of his works only *Apologia pro Galilaeo*. Popkin argues that, for him, as for Descartes and Galileo, there was no doubt that the new science, being "true", could describe the true nature of the physical world. "There is no epistemological Pyrrhonism, but rather a kind of realism" (R. H. Popkin, *The History of Scepticism from Savonarola to Bayle*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003, p. 126). The numerous collective volumes whose publication has accelerated over the last 20 years, marking the progress of the history of modern scepticism, have perpetuated this oversight, with the single exception of the essay by Rudolf Schicker dedicated to a short analysis of book one of the *Metaphysica*. Rudolf Schicker, "Tommaso Campanella et le scepticisme. Quelques remarques sur le premier livre de la *Métaphysique*", in P.-F. Moreau, ed., *Le scepticisme au XVI^e et au XVII^e siècle*. Paris: A. Michel, 2002, pp. 188–201. This article grasps Campanella's attempt to "overcome scepticism by means of sceptical arguments" and attributes to him the merit of having indicated the conception of the ego as "the fundamental problem of scepticism"; however, it censures him for not having chosen between an empirical ego and "a transcendental ego." Clearly this is a completely anachronistic evaluation. Although it, too, is impregnated with neo-Kantianism, Ernst Cassirer's old interpretation is much more subtle and has more respect for the historical reality of the texts. See Ernst Cassirer, *Das Erkenntnisproblem in der Philosophie und Wissenschaft der neueren Zeit*. Berlin: B. Cassirer, Erster Band, 1922, pp. 240–257.

to return, in a somewhat critical form, to the question of its foundations. Campanella was familiar with many (but not all) aspects of the seventeenth-century sceptical revival and accepted the challenges he found there. In addition, his replies took some of its positions on board.

The Doubts of Scepticism

A first indication may be derived from the important architectural function that Campanella assigned to the problem of scepticism. He divided the subject-matter of “nova Metaphysica” into three parts and dedicated the first book of the first part (on the “principia sciendi”) to a sort of preliminary discussion that centered on the classic problems raised by the sceptics. To use the author’s language, we must recognize “the question of whether science exists, of how limited and partial it is, to the extent that only he who knows he knows nothing perfectly and totally, knows anything.”² The book begins with a detailed review of *dubitaciones* (fourteen in all), possibly the most extensive compendium put together by any non-sceptical seventeenth-century author. Although it was only published in 1638, the *Metaphysica* had a very long gestation period. The initial Italian text (1602) was re-written in Latin (1609), this version being immediately confiscated the following year by order of the Papal Nuncio of Naples. Hence the need for a third redaction, completed by early 1611 but felt to be inadequate by its author, who produced a fourth, almost definitive version in sixteen books and three parts, which was ready for printing in 1624. But the history of its publication was no less complex and difficult: a true odyssey. After the first attempt in Lyon had failed, Campanella turned back to the text and made numerous changes, further subdividing each of the first two books. The Sorbonne only approved the works of the philosopher in 1633, and their *imprimatur* was given in June of the following year. In actual fact, printing took place between June 1637 and 1638 in Paris, thanks to funding from Claude de Bullion, a secret adviser to the King of France.³

² Tommaso Campanella, *Universalis philosophiae, seu metaphysicarum rerum, iuxta propria dogmata, partes tres, libri 18*, Parisiis 1638 (anastatic reprint edited by Luigi Firpo. Torino: Bottega d’Erasmus, 1961; partial edition, with Italian translation, edited by Giovanni Di Napoli. Bologna: Zanichelli, 1967, in three volumes) – hereinafter cited as M. A new edition of book I is now available, with Italian translation: T. Campanella, *Metafisica*, Liber I, edited and translated by Paolo Ponzio, presentation by Ada Lamacchia. Bari: Levante Editore, 1994. The passage quoted: M I, I, Proemium, p. 5/42 (the first page number refers to the 1638 edition, the second to the 1994 edition): “Itaque in prima parte tractabimus, utrum sit scientia, et quam modica sit, et ex parte, ut is solus sciat, qui novit se nil scire perfecte, et ex toto.”

³ See Luigi Amabile, *Fra Tommaso Campanella ne’ Castelli di Napoli, in Roma ed in Parigi*. Napoli: Cav. Antonio Morano, 1887, t. I, pp. 148–149, 153, 157; t. II, pp. 10, 74–76.

The only manuscript of *Universalis Philosophia* that we have contains the fourth version of the work, which was completed in 1624, and shows no substantial changes with regard to the printed edition, as far as Book I goes⁴.

If we take the dates relating to its writing, which are fairly early, it seems clear that the first book of the *Metaphysica*, entirely dedicated to examining and resolving the doubts of scepticism, fits very well into the context of the rebirth of this philosophical movement, although some significant texts do predate it. Although it comes after the publication of Sextus Empiricus, Montaigne's *Essais*, and Sanchez's *Quod nihil scitur*, this is compensated for by the fact that it precedes other books that gave scepticism its fundamental function within modern thought. A particular instance is the first book of Gassendi's *Exercitationes paradoxicae*, published in 1624 (the author renounced publication of the second book due to disturbances caused by the de Clave affair and the decision of the Paris Parliament prohibiting the teaching of any philosophy other than that of Aristotle); between 1624 and 1625, the anti-sceptical works of Marin Mersenne were published in quick succession: *L'Impiété des Déistes, Athées et Libertins de ce temps* and *La Vérité des sciences. Contre les Septiques ou Pyrrhoniens*. Then *Quatre dialogues faits à l'imitation des anciens* by Orasius Tubero (pseudonym of La Mothe Le Vayer) appeared in 1630, with *Cinq autres dialogues* the following year, while Descartes's *Discours* (with its important anti-sceptical strategy) dates to 1637 (*Meditationes* to 1641).

Early with regard to its writing but late with regard to its publication, in reality the *Metaphysica* suffers the consequence of being badly out of step with regard to this sceptical circle. First and foremost, Campanella appears to ignore (as we will see) the typical Pyrrhonian arguments that had arisen with the *editiones principes* of Sextus Empiricus in 1562 and 1569, edited by Gentian Hervet and Henri Estienne, and which Montaigne brought to the notice of a wider public. But the second and more serious reason for the backwardness was caused by the radical change that came about in the philosophical climate with the Cartesian "revolution," which made a work like the *Metaphysica* appear to be completely outdated already at the time of its publication (1638).⁵ And we add that both

⁴ Archivio Generale dei Padri Predicatori, Santa Maria alla Minerva, Roma, Serie XIV, 285–287 (three large volumes, 1,200 pages in all). As the editor stresses (*Metafisica cit.*, p. XXI), the first volume of 549 pages, which contains the first part of the work subdivided into five books "essentially agrees with the text of the Paris edition." We thus have absolute documentary proof concerning the condition of the text, at least at the date of 1624.

⁵ However, the *Metaphysica* had some influence at least on Mersenne, who appropriated large parts of Campanella's work to give substance to the Pyrrhonian arguments that he confuted in *La vérité des sciences*. Cf. Gianni Paganini, "Mersenne plagiaire de Campanella ? Les doutes de la *Metaphysica* dans la *Vérité des sciences*", *Dix-septième siècle*, 57(2005), p. 747–767. About Campanella's hidden influence on Mersenne and Descartes, cf. also, by the same author, *Skepsis*, chap. III, "Le scepticisme et la métaphysique nouvelle. T. Campanella, M. Mersenne et R. Descartes", §§ 6–7 (Paris: 2008, forthcoming).

Mersenne and Descartes were authors with whom Campanella was to have epistolary and/or personal relationships.⁶

The *Metaphysica* includes well-known material, and Campanella did not claim any originality in reporting it. He rather aimed to offer a sort of encyclopedic completeness, and above all to include scepticism as a foundation for a new type of metaphysics. We therefore find many of the “commonplaces” of ancient and modern scepticism in the book, just as we do in Sanchez’s booklet, or in Montaigne’s *Apologie*. Senses only grasp the “surface” (“particulam exteriorem”), the “accidents” or “effects” of things, whereas the “inner parts” (“interiora”), the “substance” and the essence (“quidditas”), remain unknown to us.⁷ Even within these limits, though, the principle still holds that each person knows things differently depending on how they are affected (“alius aliter afficitur”). What we do know, we only know “secundum mensuram nostram, non secundum entis et veri.”⁸ Campanella further developed these arguments, which are particularly insidious for an author who had made the senses the principle and verification of every type of knowledge,⁹ in a sort of crescendo during the third *dubitatio*, where he shows that the sceptics do not even believe that partial and superficial knowledge is really possible. A painstaking review of the five

⁶ See the most recent and completest study on Campanella: Germana Ernst, *Tommaso Campanella. Il libro e il corpo della natura*. Roma-Bari: Laterza, 2002. On the *Metaphysica* above all pp. 128–137. More generally, see John M. Headley, *Tommaso Campanella and the Transformation of the World*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997. For an overview it is necessary to go back to Léon Blanchet, *Campanella*. Paris, 1920 (anastatic reprint: New York: Burt Flanklin; on metaphysics, pp. 263–328).

⁷ M I, I, I, art. 1, pp. 6/46–48: “Praeterea enim quae oculis nostris et sensibus exposita sunt, ignota sunt quoad quidditatem, et situm et quantitatem et relationem. ... Praeterea, quas videmus res, non ex toto videmus; sed tantum superficiem videmus, et tangimus: interiora vero ignota sunt. Quae autem gustamus, nec nobis pandunt nisi saporem. Colorem et quantitatem, et atoma, et materiam, et quidditatem, per saporem nescimus: quapropter rem nullam scimus, nisi particulam eius exteriorem.”

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 7/50: “Item, neque si intrinsecaremur rebus, saperemus, prout sunt, quoniam sapimus, prout ab illis afficimur; alius autem aliter afficitur. Ergo sciremus res secundum mensuram nostram, non secundum mensuram entis et veri, ut mox patebit.”

⁹ This sense-based model of knowledge, which had characterized works like *Philosophia sensibus demonstrata* and *De sensu rerum et magia*, is repropoed in the *Metaphysica* at the start of Doubt III, in contraposition to an abstract and intellectual way of knowing: “Quapropter solus his sensus intrinsecatur obiecto, et obiectum illi totum et propterea sapiens est, qui rem intrinsecus novit, non qui superficiem modum per intellectum. Sed intellectus nil intus legit, nisi deforis acceperit per sensum; sensus autem nullus sapit nisi gustus” (M I, I, I, art. 3, p. 11/74). I stress that, in the two works mentioned above, which date respectively to 1590 (date of writing of *De sensu rerum* in its Italian version) and to 1591 (date of publication of *Philosophia sensibus demonstrata*), Campanella draws no sceptical conclusion from the extreme empiricism, of the Telesian type, that he adopts.

senses, the usual analysis of illusions in perception (the broken oar, the faceted glass, the apparent movement of the earth and not the ship, and so on) lead him to conclude that “no sense perceives things as they are, but in the way in which that sense is affected”¹⁰ and, since sensations lie at the base of the entire edifice of knowledge, each person ends up by having “his or her own philosophy dependent on the perception of his or her senses.”¹¹ This is just a short step from confronting the sensory endowment of one man with others, but also that of man with those of the other animals. The obvious consequence is that animals must be superior to us; and even if man is better-tempered, this is true only for us and not for Nature.¹² The comparison between man and animals, with which Montaigne had also dealt in *Apologie*, actually groups both within a common horizon of ignorance. Every being only knows the superficial layer of things¹³ and thus the investigation will finally cast doubt on the sense-based paradigm itself, and not only on its concrete realisation in one or another sentient being: “Quod nec a sensu nostro, nec brutorum philosophandum sit, eo quod non sapit res, sed rerum imagines vel accidentales, exteriores a quidditate.”¹⁴

¹⁰ See the title of *dubitatio* III: “Quod non datur scire ex eo, quod non prout sunt sapiunt, quae sapere nobis dicuntur. Nullus enim sensus sentit res sicuti est, sed sicuti afficitur, et alii aliter; licet putent quandoque idem sapere, non sapiunt idem. Vel ergo nos non sapimus, aut res non sunt, uti esse videntur, aut aliis aliae sunt; aut nos non sumus, quod videmur” (M I, I, 1, art. 3, p. 11/75).

¹¹ M I, I, 1, art. 3, p. 13/86: “Praeterea de partibus obiecti, et gradibus nulla est convenientia aut certitudo sensibus. His autem sublatis, tollitur philosophia naturalis, Astronomia, Musica, Perspectiva, etc. et unicuique propria est sua philosophia pro sui sensus affectione a rebus: et nulla forte est vera, quoniam nullus rem sapit sicuti est, sed sicut ipse ab ea patitur.”

¹² See the title of *dubitatio* IV: “Si Philosophandum est secundum sensum, brutorum potius sensu Philosophandum, qui nostris praepollent sensibus cunctis, et pluralitate obiectorum, et sagacitate, et perspicacia. Ita ut et prophetia praestare nobis, et inventione scientiarum videantur” (M I, I, 1, art. 4, p. 13/88) and the start of the article: “Si autem secundum sensum philosophandum est, et hic incertissimus est, et non sapit, profecto nulla dicitur philosophia, sed videmus, si qua est philosophia rectius philosophari secundum sensum brutorum, quam hominum.” On the importance of temperament, see *ibid.*, pp. 14/90–92, and the conclusion: “frustra medici temperiem homini probiorem adscribunt: stultius Protagoras facit hominem mensuram omnium.”

¹³ See *dubitatio* V, whose title runs: “Quod nec a sensu nostro, nec brutorum philosophandum sit, eo quod non sapit res, sed rerum imagines vel accidentales, exteriores a quidditate” (M I, I, 1, art. 5, p. 15/98), and the start of the article: “Sed neque cum eis [brutis], neque nobiscum: cum enim neque capiamus res, neque prout sunt, frustra philosophamur. Nos enim ac bruta haud quaquam res percipimus sensu, sed simulachra rerum. Intellectu vero simulachra simulachrorum: non ergo res nobis sapiunt” (*ibid.*).

¹⁴ *Ibid.* On the problem of empiricism in Campanella, see L. Blanchet, *Campanella cit.*, pp. 174–186.

From the standpoint of philosophical sources, it is interesting that Campanella dedicates a lot of space to those parts of Plato's *Theaetetus* that stress the problematic and uncertain character of sensible knowledge: uncertain not so much for reasons of fact linked to the quality of the sensory endowment, but rather for reasons of principle pertaining to the phenomenal character of perception. Even the most perfect knowledge can only record sensory appearances,¹⁵ which in any case are "falsified and adulterated": before penetrating into the soul of the sentient being the "images" are "deformed by the joint effect of the organ and the medium through which we perceive."¹⁶ The crude material nature of sense perception, which in *Theaetetus* is the result of an interaction among the thing that is perceived, the external medium, the sense organ and the sentient's internal membranes (with all the combinations and disturbances to which this interaction gives rise), is further complicated by the more general Heraclitean mobilism, whereby all things are in a "continual state of flux."¹⁷ This part of the *Metaphysica* undoubtedly emphasises the sceptical outcome of the genesis of the "phenomenon" (although the term used is "simulachrum")¹⁸: "in *Theaetetus*, while Socrates attempts to resolve the doubt, he actually increases it".¹⁹ From

¹⁵ Plato, *Theaetetus*, 152 d. Cf. *M loc. cit.*, p. 15/100: "Cum ergo non res, sed imagines accidentales rerum percipiamus, consequens est, ut res ipsae non sapiant nobis, quod a Peripateticis affirmatur, non rerum, sed specierum facientibus sensum, Plato etiam in *Theaeteto* sensu affectiones, et imagines solas percipit. Protagoras nec obiecta constare, nisi quia apparent, affirmat."

¹⁶ See the title of *dubitatio* VI: "Quod eo minus secundum sensum philosophandum sit, quo nec rerum imagines, prout sunt, sapit, sed falsatas, et adulteratas, et non omnes, sed quasdam nec rerum omnium" (M I, I, I, art. 6, p. 15/102). See also the beginning of the article: "Praeterea neque sapiunt nobis imagines prout sunt: antequam enim penetrent usque ad sentientem animam adulterantur mixtione sensorij et medij, per quae sentimus. Siquidem vires summas rerum sentire non possumus, neque imas, quoniam non agunt in nos, ut dictum est, sed mediocres tantum; mediocres autem alterantur a medio, et organo" (*ibid.*).

¹⁷ See the title of *dubitatio* VII: "Quod res non possunt nobis sapere prout sunt, quoniam sunt in continuo fluxu, et refluxu, ut numquam eadem res bis sit nobis, neque enunciari possit antequam mutatur: et Aristotelis responsiones ad hoc argumentum vanas esse: similiter et Platonis" (M I, I, I, art. 7, p. 16/106).

¹⁸ See for example the beginning of art. 7: "Praeterea quod percipitur, sapimus: res autem nullae neque simulachra percipi possunt, quoniam versantur in continuo fluxu, refluxuque, et non sunt semper eadem, sed aliae atque aliae semper" (*M loc. cit.*, p. 16/106).

¹⁹ M I, I, I, art. 7, pp. 16/106–107: "Socrates in *Theaeteto*, dum soluit auget dubitationem; ait enim, si omnia sunt in motu, igitur vel in motu, et mutatione omni, id est, in generationis et corruptionis augmento, decremento, coloratione, calefactione, frigectione, et caeteris omnibus: vel in aliqua tantum. Si in omni, ergo nec nos videmus, nec visibile est, nam statim sensus ac sensibile transit: ergo non magis nos audire, et videre, quam non audire, nec videre, dicendi sumus, cum audimus et videmus: ergo simul tollitur sensus et sensuum veritas, ergo nec sensus est scientia. Hanc rationem concederet Heraclitus, qui scientiam aliquam esse negat, multo autem magis Sceptici." Cf. Plato, *Theaetetus*, 181; 210 b–c.

Plato's dialogue Campanella only takes the *pars destruens*, that is the demolition of the value of sensible knowledge: "hence at one and the same time perception and the truth deriving from the senses both fail; hence sense perception is not science." On the contrary, he rejects Socrates's attempt to safeguard those unalterable and ideal aspects, which alone would have enabled us to construct a certain science, from universal change.

In this respect heir to Platonism, Aristotle's epistemology was likewise based on permanent elements such as "the species and the whole, not matter and the individual parts," with the obvious consequence that, for him, "science concerns the species" and not the individual beings involved in the aporias brought to light by Heraclitus, Socrates, and Protagoras.²⁰ Together with the sceptics, as Sanchez had done before him, Campanella reacted to this approach by stressing the need for knowledge that reaches concrete and individual things, and denouncing Aristotle's science of the universal: "nulla sapientia . . . , nisi confusa et communis et extrinseca, non attingens intima rei". Following the example of the knowledge of God that reaches all the "particularitates,"²¹ the second *dubitatio* had already opposed a sort of total knowledge, that could not be reduced to the "communia, absque singularitatibus," to the model of knowledge by abstraction.²² Campanella's reasoning is in line with a radical nominalism whereby "universals do not exist except in the particulars."²³ But for this very reason, the re-evaluation of the particulars would in the end lead to a sceptical

²⁰ M I, I, I, art. 7, p. 16/108: "Aristoteles respondet, quod remanet secundum speciem et secundum totum, non autem secundum partes, et materiam: scientia autem de specie est. Sed hoc est declarare nos non vere scire, si enim partes influentes et defluentes ignoramus, quia scimus in eadem forma totum manere, nulla sapientia est, nisi confusa et communis et extrinseca, non attingens intima rei." For the reference to Aristotle: *Metaphysica*, IV, 1010 a.

²¹ M I, I, I, art. 2, p. 7/52: "Scire autem communia, absque singularitatibus, est scire confusum, languidum et imperfectum, ut probat D. Thomas: quod Deus esset ignarus nisi omnes particularitates nosset. Quapropter hoc est scire rerum communitatem, non autem entitatem."

²² For the Aristotelian model of incomplete induction, see M I, I, I, art. 2, p. 8/56: "Resp. aliter ab Arist. quod non est necesse omnia nosse individua, sed aliqua, quoniam ex his abstrahitur universale, quod scitur, et sempiternum est : sed profecto errat." The passage of Aristotle: *Analytica Posteriora*, I, 11, 77 a.

²³ M *ibid.*: "Item, universalia non sunt nisi in individuis, quae ignorantur, ergo et illa. Item sunt ens rationis, quod non potest esse obiect. scient. Realis." Immediately afterwards, Campanella examines Plato's conception of ideas, but his sceptic objects that ideas are much less known than things: "notificare autem notum per ignotum insipientis est" (*loc. cit.*, p. 8/54).

checkmate, since in that hypothesis “oportet infinita scire, et corruptibilia, quae non sunt scibilia; ad hoc quod sciamus aliquid; quod est impossibile.”²⁴

The pre-Pyrrhonian character, in all senses, of Campanella’s discourse is striking. Several decades after Sextus Empiricus’s *editiones principes*, Campanella appears not to be familiar with the peculiarities of these texts. He speaks generically of “sceptics,” without differentiating between Pyrrhonians and Academics,²⁵ and throughout the first book he never names Pyrrho and only once mentions Sextus Empiricus, correctly distinguishing his position from the negative dogmatism of Socrates and Arcesilaus.²⁶ If we look at the contents,

²⁴This is the title of *dubitatio* II: “Quod neque minimam partem rerum, quam putamus scire, sciamus; ex eo quod oportet infinita scire, et corruptibilia, quae non sunt scibilia; ad hoc quod sciamus aliquid; quod est impossibile. Item scire per universale Aristotelicum, aut Platonium non dari proprie, sed per simile et minus notum, et imperfecte, et a longe. Quod non est sapere. Item, neque unum individuum eorum, ex quibus universale venamur, posse cognosci, si infinita ad ipsum pertinentia ignorantur. Neque, ut putat Arist. posse ad propositiones immediatas deveniri: neque ad praedicata essentialia, neque ad causas primas certasque in omni genere rerum, et causarum” (M I, I, i, art. 2, p. 7/52).

²⁵ See for example M I, I, i, art. 7, p. 16/108. Among critics there is some uncertainty on the sources of Campanella’s sceptical arguments. For example Léon Blanchet, although he has the merit of taking the importance of sceptical arguments in the foundation of Campanella’s metaphysics very seriously, complains of “the general untidiness of the argumentation, further increased by the Scholastic mania of dividing and subdividing” (L. Blanchet, *Les antécédents historiques du “Je pense, donc je suis”*. Paris: Félix Alcan, 1920, p. 177). In truth, Blanchet did not grasp the well-organized and methodical nature of the sceptical strategy unfolded in Book I. However, he does clearly indicate the architectural function of doubt (*op. cit.*, p. 174). Although the author mentions Sextus, Agrippa von Nettesheim, and other sceptics as sources of *Metaphysica*, I feel that his analysis should be much more rigorous: for the reasons given below we may exclude any real influence of Sextus’s works. Agrippa is mentioned by Campanella above all for his work on magic (*De occulta philosophia*) and thus as a “pseudomagus,” rather more than as a sceptic: “Sunt enim qui de vita coelitus comparanda scripsere, ut Ficinus; sunt et qui de vita divinitus comparanda, ut theologi christiani: sunt et qui de vita diabolitus comparanda, ut Agrippa et alii pseudomagi” (M III, XIV, 7). It thus appears that the principal sources for Campanella’s knowledge of scepticism are the works that were available before the Hervet-Etienne publication: essentially Cicero, Diogenes Laertius, Lactantius, and Augustine’s *Contra academicos*. Among the moderns, the case of Campanella resembles that of Sanchez and differs from that of Montaigne, the latter being characterized by the influence of Sextus’s texts.

²⁶ Campanella only mentions Sextus Empiricus once in Book I: “Arcesilaus vero neque hoc se scire, quod nihil scire profitetur. Cum enim argueretur, utrum sciant, Sceptici, se nescire, ne cogerentur hoc fateri se scire, dixerunt, ut Sextus Empiricus ait: neque hoc scio, utrum sciam, vel nesciam, me nihil scire” (*Adv. Logicos*, II, 18 ff.). The Italian translation of the sentence “Arcesilaus...profitetur” is in error (M, It. transl. p. 177): in this case *quod* is not causal but declarative.

despite appearances to the contrary, the comparison is no less disappointing. To a superficial examination it might appear that the consideration of sense as affect and of its varieties corresponds in general terms to the substance of the first eight tropes of Sextus Empiricus.²⁷ Likewise, the distinction between “images” or “simulachra”²⁸ and the reality of things might appear similar to that made by Sextus between *phainomenon* and *hypokeimenon*. However, the analogies are weak because the specific Pyrrhonian tone typical of Sextus’s tropology is missing in the *Metaphysica*. Campanella prefers to use the Aristotelian and scholastic lexicon, speaking of “images” rather than “phenomena.” He is clearly more at home within Aristotle’s dichotomy between accidents and substances, and fails to grasp the novelty of the concept of phenomenon. Campanella’s sceptics, however doubtful and contentious, are clearly still dominated by Aristotelian metaphysical frameworks. Lastly, although his doxographies contain an echo of the *leit-motiv* of the *diaphonia* among philosophical opinions, other more technical arguments, typical of Sextus, are missing, such as the aporia of the criterion of truth and the figures of the “diallelon” and of the “infinite regress.”²⁹ All these were themes that had already been written about in a popular book, Montaigne’s *Apologie*, as well as by Mersenne. And again, the aporias of the sign (reproposed by Gassendi) or the eight tropes of Aenesidemus (paraphrased in *La Vérité des sciences*) do not appear in Campanella’s work.

Dreaming and Waking, Wisdom and Madness

In some more interesting pages, Campanella now looks at a number of *topoi* that, though already present in Sextus and Cicero, were to enjoy new and better fortune after Descartes returned to them in *Discours de la méthode*. He examines the doubt about distinguishing dreaming and waking and wisdom and madness,³⁰ to which he adds the more dramatic doubt about distinguishing life and

²⁷ Cf. Sextus Empiricus, *Pyrrhonianae Hypotyposes*, I, 36–140.

²⁸ See above all the text of *dubitatio* V (M I, I, 1, art. 5, pp. 15/98–99) and of *dubitatio* VI (M I, I, 1, art. 6, pp. 15–16/102–104).

²⁹ There is only one passage in this Book I in which Campanella appears to evoke the argument of infinite regress. This is M I, I, 1, art. 7, app., p. 19/120: “Praeterea ponenda esset species, qua noscitur scientia: et iterum scientia, qua noscitur species: et iterum in infinitum.” However, it is clear that Sextus is not the source of the argument, since Campanella uses the typically Scholastic term “species.”

³⁰ The use of dream images and hallucinations is a recurrent *topos* in all sceptical discussions concerning the impossibility of choosing a specific type of representation as a criterion. See for example M. T. Cicero, *Lucullus*, XXVII, 88 – XXVIII, 89 on dreams, the demented and drunkards; Sextus Empiricus, *Adv. Mathematicos* VII [*Adv. Logicos* I], 61–63 and 404–405.

death, taken from Euripides.³¹ However, these themes are amplified to the maximum in the *Metaphysica* and thus take on a particular significance deriving from the principle (entirely due to Campanella) that knowledge is “passio” since a true transmutation takes place in its process: “scientem in scibile mutari: ... ergo scire est alienari.” The tenth doubt is of particular importance: here Campanella stresses the fact that this type of alienation goes so far as to make the mind forget what it is and how it acts.³² With a clever move to the limit, the sceptic stresses the proximity of this “alienation” to madness (“alienatio est furor, et insania”), thus projecting the shadow of radical doubt onto human knowledge, onto its very constituent structure.³³ It is not by chance that the theme of human “delirium” was to return again in *dubitatio* XI, XII, and XIII: “the fact that

³¹ See above all *dubitatio* X, whose title is: “Quod sapere humanum sit desipere, quoniam per ipsum sapere animal ignorat se ipsum quid sit, et operationes, et actiones proprias. Item, ignorat homo utrum mortui sint vivi, et dormientes vigilantes, et stulti sapientes: an e contra: et illud verius esse. Quod multipliciter probatur ratione, experientia, et oraculis. Et Arist. responsio insufficiens, et falsa ostenditur” (M I, I, 1, art. 10, p. 21/132). But Campanella has already said this in *dubitatio* VIII: “... neque scimus utrum vere sciamus, aut somnietur, aut vigilemus; et utrum scire sit scire ...” (M I, I, 1, art. 8, p. 20/126). For the reference to Euripides, see M I, I, 1, art. 10, pp. 21–22/136: “Praeterea nescit homo, utrum vivus sit vel mortuus, liber, an captivus: quomodo ergo scit? Videtur ergo esse scire delirium, et quid est ignoramus, et utrum vere simus in mundo, et sicut qui somniat, putat se vere videre, vereque manducare, idem evenit cunctis vigilantibus.” Further on, Euripides is mentioned explicitly: “Sic et Euripides exclamat: *Quis scit an vivi sint mortui, et mortui vivi?* Et quidem exire de sepulchro et carcere, est ire ad vitam et libertatem: unde Petrarca appellat mortem finem carceris obscuri, et Theologi principium vitae et natalitia. Cum ergo simus in morte, non sapimus. Item, qui est in morte, videt umbras rerum, non ipsas res. Quapropter quae videmus non sunt.” The passage of Euripides is from *Polydes*, fragm. 639 N. (*cit.*, in Platon, *Gorgias*, 492e). On the significance and fortunes of this verse of Euripides, see the excellent book by Jean Salem, *Cinq variations sur la sagesse, le plaisir et la mort*. Fougère: Encre marine, 1999, chap. IV, pp. 219–241. Montaigne quotes him in *Apologie*, when he displays all the proof on human uncertainty: “Aux plus avisez et aux plus habilles tout sera donc monstrueux: car à ceux là l’humaine raison a persuadé qu’elle n’avoit ny pied, ny fondement quelconque, non pas seulement pour assurer si la neige est blanche (et Anaxagoras la disoit estre noire); s’il y a quelque chose, ou s’il n’y a nulle chose; s’il y a science ou ignorance (Métrodorus Chius noit l’homme le pouvoir dire); ou si nous vivons: comme Euripides est en doute si la vie que nous vivons est vie, ou si c’est que nous appelons mort qui soit vie” (*Les Essais*. Edition by Pierre Villey, with a preface by V.-L. Saulnier, collection Quadrige, 3 vol. Paris: PUF, 1999 (third corrected edition), vol. II, p. 526; we read in a note: Stobaeus, *Sermo*, CXIX).

³² See *dubitatio* X (M I, I, 1, art. 10, p. 21/132).

³³ See *dubitatio* IX, whose title is: “Ex eo quod scire videtur esse passio, et alienatio, et insania, vel totalis, vel partialis, videtur indignissimum nomine patientiae,” and the text of art. 9 (M I, I, 1, art. 9, pp. 20/128–130).

we sleep, that we rave, that we are in the shadow of death”³⁴ can be deduced from many signs, first and foremost from the recognition of philosophical “ravings,”³⁵ but also from the equally foolish contrasts surrounding the doctrine of “principles,” including the foundations of morality and religion. The pages that Campanella dedicates to this particularly treacherous theme provide a nice summary of the arguments produced by ethical scepticism (including a discourse from Carneades already mentioned in Grotius’s *Prolegomena*), whereas his lively notes on the disparity among religions and on their strange beliefs appear to echo the famous darts shot by the libertines and the early deists, who had taken a lesson of disenchanted scepticism from theological conflicts, as he had described them in his *Atheismus triumphatus*.³⁶ To cite the questions that Campanella brought into the field: “everyone thinks that his own religion will save him, and that the rest of the world will be damned, which appears unworthy

³⁴ M I, I, I, art. 11, p. 23/146: “Praeterea, quod dormiamus, deliremus, et in mortis regione simus ...”. He had repeated this many times before: “Quas ob res putare oportet, nos scire nihil, quando utrum vivi simus, vel mortui nesciamus; hinc Sceptici Philosophi profitentur se nescire, utrum sciant vel nesciant” (M I, I, I, art. 10, p. 22/138).

³⁵ *Dubitatio* XI: “Exempla delirantium, et oscitantium secundum Philosophiam hominibus traditam unde probatur quod scire sit desipere” (M I, I, I, art. 11, p. 23/146).

³⁶ This part of Book I of *Metaphysica* summarizes many of the arguments that Campanella had attributed to the libertines, deists, atheists, and Machiavellians in the work he wrote first in Italian (the text was ready in 1607, but could not be published) and then in Latin. A first Latin edition was published in Rome in 1631 (“apud haeredes Bartolomaei Zanetti”), a second in Paris in 1636, an enlarged and reworked edition to overcome the ecclesiastical censure that it had undergone (*Atheismus triumphatus*, Parisiis, Du Bray, 1636). G. Ernst discovered and published the original Italian text: *L’ateismo trionfato overo Riconoscimento filosofico della religione universale contra l’antichristianesimo macchiavellesco*. Scuola Normale Superiore: Pisa, 2004 (on the genesis and history of the text see the Introduction, pp. VII–LXIV). We note in this text the part that concerns the *Metaphysica* and above all the theme of scepticism. Campanella (p. 6) expounds in outline his *Metafisica* and states that *Ateismo* is only a “spark” of this work, to show that religion is natural and that is it not a “deception” (“furbaria”). But there are very meagre allusions to the sceptics’ arguments: men are only “grubs in cheese,” compared to the vastness of the world (pp. 3, 77); the sceptics are even irresolute over the most elementary actions, according to a consecrated *topos* of anti-sceptical polemic (“the sceptics are even irresolute in eating,” p. 21); faced with the extraordinary variety of religions, some philosophers profess the suspension of judgement (“stan sospesi nel darne sentenza,” p. 18); the verses from Euripides are mentioned (“And Euripides said the living were the dead, and not the dead”: “Et Euripide disse che li vivi eran li morti, e non li morti,” p. 78); our knowledge is obtained “through slits” (pp. 80, 33), since “our science is stupidity” (“la scientia nostra è una stoltitia,” p. 84). More in general, against the sceptics Campanella argues that deceit, errors, disagreements do not stop there from being an authentic philosophy and an authentic religion as “the sceptics” maintain, for whom “there is no true science whatsoever” (“che non vi sia scienza vera alcuna, come li scettici dicono,” p. 92).

of a God. Therefore either God likes all the religions, or He does not care about these things. Here, too, delirium unfurls its sails.”³⁷ Lastly, the thirteenth *dubitatio* adds a particular mystical and supernatural modulation, almost reproducing some aspects of “Christian Pyrrhonianism,” be they true or false. Many classical sources (Homer, Parmenides, Protagoras, Socrates, Plato, Plutarch, Arcesilaus) and some biblical figures (Solomon, David, Job, Saint Paul, Saint John) join forces to praise modest ignorance, exalting the humility of knowing that we do not know, whereas only Sextus Empiricus reaches the point of not even knowing whether he knows or not.³⁸

I have already said that, if we take a close look, Campanella’s arguments rest on a foundation that had not yet recorded the novelties of the neo-Pyrrhonian approach. After this brief overview there is further confirmation, not only *ex parte absentiae* but also *ex parte praesentiae*. Let us take the crucial argument of dreaming and waking, of sanity and madness. In this case, too, Campanella’s true interlocutor is neither the ancient sceptic (Sextus) nor the modern reviver (Descartes), but none other than Aristotle himself. Aristotle’s reply, which Mersenne was also to use in substance, evoked a model of normality, useful to discriminate between correct judgements and misleading judgements, thus dissipating the doubt raised by the apparent impossibility of distinguishing dreaming and waking. Campanella says that Aristotle “affirmed that in judging things we must believe more closely in he who is awake than in he who sleeps; more in the healthy than in the sick; more in he who looks closely than in he who sees from afar with regard to size and colour; more in the strong than in the weak with regard to weight.”³⁹ The objections of Sextus Empiricus did away with this presumption of normality. He argued that if all representations are only phenomena, only appearances, then there is no reason to prefer one over the others, since even the phenomena of healthy, watchful, willing, and strong persons are only the effects of a particular situation, constitution, environment, medium,

³⁷ M I, I, I, art. 12, p. 27/170: “Praeterea, inter se religiones divisae sunt in plures haereses absque numero, quoniam alij aliter idem dogma interpretantur. Ergo vel dogma illud est multiplex, et fundat contradictionem, vel homines omnes delirant, et sic neutro modo scientia datur. Item, credunt omnes propria religione salvari, et totum damnari mundum, quod Deo indignum videtur. Ergo vel omnes placent Deo religiones, vel Deus non curat de his. In hoc quoque delirium sua inflat vela.”

³⁸ See the whole of *dubitatio* XIII: “Probatur ex opinione Sapientum, et Oraculis sanctarum scripturarum, quod non sit scire, sed potius desipere; et quod neque scit homo, utrum sciat, vel nesciat.” Cf. also M I, I, I, art. 10, p. 22/138.

³⁹ M I, I, I, art. 10, pp. 22/138–140: “Item, neque Aristoteles videtur recte respondere, quod in rebus iudicandis magis sit credendum est vigilantibus, quam dormienti, et magis sano, quam aegroto; et magis prope, quam longe, spectantibus magnitudines, et colores; pondera vero robustis, non debilibus.” For the reference to Aristotle, cf. *De anima* I 3, 407 b.

exactly as occurs for the phenomena of those who are sleeping, ill, weak, or mad. Montaigne acutely observed that, in the search for a presumed objectivity, we should avail ourselves of a “judge” who is neither old nor young, neither healthy nor ill, neither asleep nor awake: a judge who is “free of all these qualities” and thus “indifferent.” In a word, he concluded, “a judge who has never existed.”⁴⁰ And if, on the contrary, we invoke a principle of discrimination (a criterion, indeed) able to distinguish and prefer one phenomenon over the others, then this criterion cannot be at the same level as the phenomena which are judged by it, but rather on a different plane that is in some way “higher.” This triggers the classical regression to infinity clearly described by Sextus, since a second criterion will be necessary to validate the first one, and so on. Alternatively, a circular argument will set in, the *diallelon*, whereby the judge will depend on the thing that is judged or vice versa, with all the aporias that derive from this.

With regard to this typical Sextus’s discourse (already briefly but effectively recalled in Montaigne’s *Apologie*),⁴¹ Campanella’s reply is entirely extraneous and, once again, his whole approach is pre-Pyrrhonian. Although he, too, holds that the assumption of “normality” invoked by Aristotle is unacceptable, Campanella nevertheless does not grasp the theoretical upshot of Sextus’s objection, and consequently loses himself in a minute factual confutation that records the practical unfeasibility of Aristotle’s model without rejecting it on principle. Thus, since he does not approach the themes of the phenomenon and the criterion, nor does he avail himself of a generalised *epoché* such as that which was to be typical of Descartes’s first *Meditation*, the author of the *Metaphysica* does not truly grasp the radical significance of the questions of dreaming and madness. That is the reduction of all knowledge to “phenomena,” in the sense of “appearances”

⁴⁰ M. Montaigne, *Essais cit.*, II, 12, p. 600: “Au demeurant, qui sera propre à juger de ces différences ? Comme nous disons, aux debats de la religion, qu’il nous faut un juge non attaché à l’un ny à l’autre party, exempt de choix et d’affection, ce qui ne se peut parmy les Chrestiens, il advient de mesme en cecy; car, s’il est vieil, il ne peut juger du sentiment de la vieillesse, estant luy mesme partie en ce debat; s’il est jeune, de mesme; sain, de mesme; de mesme, malade, dormant et veillant. Il nous faudroit quelqu’un exempt de toutes ces qualitez, afin que, sans præoccupation de jugement, il jugeast de ces propositions comme à luy indifferentes; et à ce conte il nous faudroit un juge qui ne fut pas.”

⁴¹ M. Montaigne, *op. cit.*, pp. 600–601: “Pour juger de ces apparences que nous recevons des sujets, il nous faudroit un instrument judicatoire; pour verifier cet instrument, il nous y faut de la demonstration; pour verifier la demonstration, un instrument: nous voilà au rouet. Puis que les sens ne peuvent arrester nostre dispute, estans pleins eux-mesmes d’incertitude, il faut que ce soit la raison; aucune raison ne s’establira sans une autre raison: nous voilà à reculons jusqu’à l’infiny.” These are essentially the second and the fifth of Agrippa’s so-called “speculative” tropes (see Sextus Empiricus, *Pyrrhoniae Hypotyposes*, I, 166–169).

or “mixed” product of the meeting between the subject, the object, and the medium. When Campanella uses the term “appearance,” the sense is usually that of the Platonic “shadow,” a pale and illusory reflection of things that, in their turn, are reflections of ideas: thus an image that is of the second degree, compared to the ideal reality.⁴²

And when he adopts a stronger line of reasoning he appears rather to be on the trail of Plato’s paradox. I mean the conviction that the soul is freer and stronger, and also able to know more freely and more strongly, just when it is not in “normal” situations but in exceptional ones. Trances, dreams, visions, faith, closeness to death, are here employed not so much to provoke sceptical doubt, but rather by comparison in order to diminish common sense, which remains within the “prison” of the body. Hence again the paradoxical and mystical nature that scepticism takes on in the final pages of this part of *Metaphysica*, for which undoubtedly the motto of Saint Paul holds true, reversing the roles of wisdom and folly, of culture and ignorance: “God has made the wisdom of this world foolish.”⁴³

The soul is like a prisoner in the body, shut in “like a blacksmith in a dark cave.”⁴⁴ Campanella refers to the well-known analogy from the *Republic* (“as though we were in a cave and could only watch the shadows of things passing by”),⁴⁵ and also to “the Platonists and Augustine” who teach “that all the things we see are images of other true things that exist in the world of angels and in God.”⁴⁶ Sprinkled generously throughout Campanella’s pages, all these themes show only too clearly the Platonic metaphysical background that underlies Campanella’s *dubitationes*. Two things further strengthen this context, which is more Platonic than Pyrrhonian: his repeated references to the model of Socrates, with his wisdom of *scire se nihil scire*, and the in-depth analysis of the

⁴² The Platonic myth of the cave recurs in this first book, since (following Plato) Campanella considers things in this world as shadows: “Ergo non vere sunt, sed sunt umbrae rerum verarum, quas Plato ideas vocat, et Basilus, et Augustinus perfectius res existere in angelico mundo, perfectissime autem in divino putant, apud nos vero umbratiles esse” (M I, I, I, art. 10, p. 22/138).

⁴³ *I Cor.* I, 20 quoted in M I, I, I, art. 10, p. 22/142.

⁴⁴ M I, I, I, art. 10, p. 21/134: “Porro videtur anima esse quasi faber intra domum tenebrosam laborans, qui nec videt seipsum, nec opus proprium, et per fenestras prospicit, et percunctatur alios, an ipse bene operetur: et utrum sit in carcere, vel extra: et quid ipse sit: et quis posuit eum ibi. Sic anima intra corpus opacum habitat: et has operationes operatur, non videns se, neque opus suum, et prospicit per fenestras oculorum, et inspicit anatomias et interrogat alios, quid ipsa anima sit, cur stat in corpore, quis posuerit eam ibi.”

⁴⁵ M I, I, I, art. 6, p. 16/104: “Ergo nos remotissimi sumus a sapientia rerum tanquam in antro positi umbras transeuntium solummodo conspicientes.”

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*: “Quin omnia quae videmus non esse imagines aliarum rerum verarum existentium in mundo angelico, et in Deo, recte docent Platonici, et Augustinus.”

arguments contained in *Theaetetus* against sensible knowledge,⁴⁷ whose objects (as we have seen) are considered to be “compounds of the action of things and the affection of the sense,”⁴⁸ and thus incapable of reflecting reality in themselves. Since “sensation perceives the passions of bodies and not the essences that represent the truth of them,”⁴⁹ Protagoras’s conclusion has a remarkably good chance of being true. This is a conclusion to which Socrates has no objection, “perhaps because it is true,” observes Campanella, it thus being demonstrated that “everybody has a true opinion, although not all are positive and pleasant.” It would be no hard thing to reveal the self-contradictory outcome⁵⁰ of this type of relativism, as the text of the *Metaphysica* stresses. But this is not the reason why Campanella appears willing to share the anti-sceptical strategy adopted by Socrates in *Theaetetus*. He rather counters the primordial character of sense – which even for reason is unavoidable and cannot be renounced: “no healthy person will say that science originates from the intellect, but from the sense; we must therefore philosophise starting from the sense, as the Creator of things has established” – to Plato’s claim to reach the “stable and intelligible category” using “reason” whose goal is “science.”⁵¹ If scepticism therefore has good arguments to denounce the limits and uncertainties of the senses, Platonism on the contrary is wrong to continue further, to the point of denying the need for sensible knowledge, there being no doubt that “the intellect knows nothing if it does not start from sense.”⁵²

⁴⁷ Campanella dedicates the whole of *dubitatio* VII and the long Appendix to this argument, with a reply in which the discussion between Socrates and Protagora in *Theaetetus* is examined in detail (M I, I, 1, art. 7, pp. 16–19/106–125). Campanella follows Socrates’s demonstration that science is neither false opinion nor true opinion; comments on Plato’s definition whereby science is intellectual knowledge of that which is stable and constant, thus “divinorum certa ratione comprehensio in mente residens, in ratione perfluens, a Deo menti inserta” (p. 19/124), but he is unable to accept that this rational knowledge can do without all that is sensible: “sentiens anima est magistra prima, et testis, et emendatrix totius sapientiae.” He reminds us that Tertullian had placed, “against Plato,” science “in sentiente anima” (*ibid.*).

⁴⁸ M I, I, 1, art. 7 app. p. 17/114: “Neque enim [color, sapor, odor] obiecta sunt, sed quid compositum ex rerum actione et sensus passione.”

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 18/118: “Tunc Plato probat, quod scientia non est sensus ob rationes iam dictas; et quia sensus percipit passiones rerum corporearum, et non essentias, quae est veritas de rebus.”

⁵⁰ See *ibid.*, pp. 18/116–118: “Praeterea omnes opinantur errare Prothagoram dicentem, omnia vera cuilibet, prout apparent. Ergo si vera opinatur omnis homo, Prothagoras fallitur. Si autem Prothagoras respondet affirmative, contendit se falli; si negative, dicat eos tamen falli, qui opinantur Prothagoram errare. Tunc nihilominus sequitur Prothaogorae dogma erroneum, quod videlicet *omnes vera opinantur, dum iudicant, sicut eis apparent*”.

⁵¹ M I, I, 1, art. 7, p. 19/122.

⁵² M I, I, 1, art. 7 app., pp. 19/122–124.

Paraphrasing the core of Campanella's remarks, we might say that the problem of sensible knowledge must of course be resolved, but not avoided and still less dispelled. This is the first great lesson of scepticism assimilated by the *Metaphysica*. And in this sense, though fortified with evident Platonic inspiration, the *dubitationes* when taken together reveal a decidedly anti-idealistic goal.

The Overcoming of Scepticism: "Perception of Passion" and Primalities

For his theory of perception from an anti-sceptical standpoint, Campanella earned a significant place in the gallery of "historical antecedents of *"je pense donc je suis"*," as the title of Léon Blanchet's book puts it. This book recognises Campanella's merit in having clarified that not only is sensation "passio," it is "passionis perceptio" and thus always accompanied by an element of self-awareness: "an act that judges the perceived emotion,"⁵³ grasping the other through changes in itself. If the doubts of scepticism had succeeded in dissolving the idea of objective knowledge (all knowledge consists in the subject that suffers, assimilating the action of the object that is the cause: doubt IX) and at the same time in destroying the idea of the subject's autonomous knowing (doubt X points out that the knowledge of our own spirit is cancelled or forgotten), Campanella's response must, on one hand, conserve the idea of an action exercised by the object, but on the other hand must rise up to the notion of an inner intuition that can escape from the total "alienation" denounced by the sceptics.⁵⁴ The response to this dual question is provided by the general principle of certainty implicated in the very doubt of the sceptics, a principle that enables Campanella to overcome all their objections: "It is not sensible knowledge that has the privilege of immediate and direct evidence, it is a thought whose only object is itself, an intuition through which the soul knows directly the reality of its existence, of its knowledge and of its love."⁵⁵ From here it was a short step to recovering the basic certainty of his own existence, and Campanella took that step almost

⁵³ This is a reply to sceptical arguments: "Nunc ad argumenta respondentem, dicimus ad primum, quod non propterea erit immutatio intentionalis, et non realis, quia realiter alterata non sentiunt: non enim sensus est ipsa passio nobis, sicut Peripateticis, sed perceptio passionis, immo actus est iudicantis de passione percepta" (M I, I, 4, art. 2, p. 35/216).

⁵⁴ The need to escape from "this devastating alternative" (to make the representation of outer realities intelligible or else to sacrifice inner knowledge) was stressed by L. Blanchet, *Les antécédents... cit.*, pp. 191–195 who, however, considers the two different needs as "contradictory": they may be from the Cartesian perspective, which Blanchet adopts as a term of comparison to "judge" Campanella's philosophy, whereas they are not at all contradictory in a theory of knowledge like Campanella's.

⁵⁵ L. Blanchet, *op. cit.*, p. 195.

naturally, following in the footsteps of Saint Augustine⁵⁶ and his famous warning: “enim non possum falli, si non sum. Nihil enim nec vere scit, nec fallitur.”⁵⁷ In truth, Campanella was rather more interested in the metaphysical implications of the Augustinian inference than in its epistemological significance, although the contrary was to be the case in Descartes’s *Discours*.

It is reflection on the primalities of being that underlies the certainty of the self, since the self-implication of *Sa* naturally also extends to *Pon* and *Mor*: “we can, we know, and we want other things because we can, and we know, and we want ourselves ... nor is it ever the case that a being can, knows, and wants anything unless because it can, it knows, and it wants itself affected by something.”⁵⁸ Just as the tendency to save itself is inborn in every being, so must a latent faculty exist in us (“notitia indita et abdita”) by means of which we can understand ourselves inwardly (“the being of the soul and of any conscious

⁵⁶ Campanella cites Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, 11, 26 in PL XLI, 339–340 (CC Lat. XLVIII, 345–346): “*Mihi certissimum est quod ego sum. Quod si asseris, habeo hanc certitudinem si negas; et dicis me falli? Plane confiteris quod ego sum: enim non possum falli si non sum. Nihil enim nec vere scit, nec fallitur. Item, ergo quod novi me esse, non fallor. Item, nosco me nosse, nec fallor. Sicut enim novi me esse, ita novi me nosse esse; et ista duo, scilicet, me esse, et me nosse diligo, amoque: ergo addo tertium, scilicet Amorem ipsi Esse et Notitia. Neque potest quis dicere me falli, cum dico me amare, esse, et nosse, cum in his quae amo probatum sit quod ego non fallor, videlicet in Esse, et Nosse: quamquam et si illa falsa essent, falsa me amare verum esset: nam quo pacto reprehenderet et prohiberet ab amore falsorum, si illa me amare falsum esset? Verum ergo est quod illa amem et infallibile. Nam sive sint falsa, sive sint vera, verus est amor. Nemo non vult se beatum esse: ergo nemo non vult esse, ergo certissimus est amor iste sicut Esse, et Nosse*” (M I, I, 3, art. 2, pp. 32/200–202). The context, for Augustine, is that of the confutation of the arguments of the “Academicians.” In the passage immediately before this one, he evokes the errors of the senses and in this connection “Academicorum argumenta.” But he observes that, when it is a question of the primalities (“Nam et sumus et nos esse novimus et id esse ac nosse diligimus”), there is no possibility for error or deceptive verisimilitude: “In his autem tribus, quae dixi, nulla nos falsitas veri similis turbat.” Commenting on these passages, Campanella observes that in this Augustine follows Ambrose, who had said: “Monotriadem aeternam per *Posse, Scire, et Amare*” (*ibid.*, p. 202).

⁵⁷ *Ibid.* On this argument see E. Bermon, *Le “cogito” dans la pensée de saint Augustin*. Paris: Vrin, 2001, pp. 77–104; É. Gilson, *Introduction à l’étude de saint Augustin*. Paris: Vrin, 1949, third ed., pp. 15–16, 49–52; G. B. Matthews, “Si fallor sum”, in R. A. Markus, ed., *Augustine. A Collection of Critical Essays*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1972, pp. 151–167; C. Kirwan, “Augustine against the sceptics”, in M. Burnyeat, ed., *The Sceptical Tradition*. Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1983, pp. 205–223; J. M. Rist, *Augustine. Ancient Thought Baptized*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994, chap. III “Certainty, Belief and Understanding”, pp. 41–91.

⁵⁸ *M loc. cit.*: “Porro nos possumus, scimus, et volumus alia, quia possumus, scimus et volumus nos ipsos ... nec unquam ens ullum Potest, aut Scit, aut Vult aliquid, nisi quia se ipsum illo aliquod affectum.”

subject is self-knowledge”).⁵⁹ This “innate self-knowledge” exists quite apart from time and operation, it has no need of an agent: “This is how all beings know themselves with a secret, in-born knowledge, which is not acquired and which is the first principle of their being, otherwise known as essentiality, Primality, like Power and Love.”⁶⁰ This gloss would of itself suffice to understand the radical difference that separates Campanella’s anti-sceptical strategy from that of Descartes. For the latter, doubt is overcome from within, as it were, by amplifying the *epoché* and suspending not only metaphysical presuppositions but also presuppositions of common sense (for example the certainties about the existence of the external world and of one’s own body). On the contrary, Campanella finds his way out of the labyrinth of doubt in the concrete certainty of a well-determined metaphysical and psychological programme. This programme is to equal extents anti-Platonic and anti-Aristotelian (although his opposition to Aristotle is much clearer and more radical than his opposition to Plato), and this fact alone provides us with some illumination about Campanella’s conviction that most of the aporias of scepticism derive from the inadequacy of the theory of perception and knowing that was adopted. Although this is not the time or place to list the main points of Campanella’s new psychology, I will briefly mention some elements as they are exhibited in the first book of the *Metaphysica*. The sensitive soul is corporeal and essentially consists of the *spiritus*, a thin and highly mobile body.⁶¹ It “does not receive images of things but their movement, by which it is struck.”⁶² It is therefore wrong to describe knowledge as a process of information,⁶³ just as the traditional “mediators” of sensation are excluded, be they Aristotle’s *species*⁶⁴ or Epicurus’s *simulacra*⁶⁵: “every action comes about in contact and every sense is touch.”⁶⁶ The sentient soul is unique,

⁵⁹ M II, VI, 8, art. 5, p. 64.

⁶⁰ M II, VI, 8, art. 4, p. 63: “... et hoc quidem modo esse norunt entia cuncta notione abdita innata, non acquisita, quae essendi est primordiale principium, seu essentialitas, primalitas, sicut potestas et amor. Et quidem si cunctae res amant proprium esse, norunt quoque notitia naturali, veluti amant amore naturali.”

⁶¹ See M I, I, 4, art. 3, p. 37/228; art. 5, pp. 39–41/242–252; 5, art. 2, pp. 45–46/278–284.

⁶² M I, I, 4, art. 5, p. 40/250: “non enim suscipit anima rerum species, sed motum, quo a rebus afficitur.”

⁶³ M I, I, 4, art. 7, pp. 42–44/260–270.

⁶⁴ M *loc. cit.*, p. 42/262: “at species, quas Aristoteles fingit, nullo pacto sunt, neque permanent.” “Utque hanc informationem defendant Peripatetici, dicunt, esse lapidis speciem in anima, non realem, sed intentionalem. Nos autem ostendimus, quod realiter movet, et anima realiter patitur: ergo realiter est.”

⁶⁵ M *loc. cit.*, p. 43/268.

⁶⁶ M *loc. cit.*, p. 43/266: “quod omnis actio sit tangendo, et omnis sensus est tactus.”

identifying itself with the *spiritus*,⁶⁷ and it also coincides with the soul that imagines, remembers, and reasons.⁶⁸ The model of knowing by images or copies is therefore sharply rejected and replaced by a somewhat mechanical model based on the transmission of movement: “the spirit retains everything it senses, not as images in a picture, but as movements in the air from which it judges the things that move.”⁶⁹ Reason does not differ from sense and from fantasy “really in the foundations,” but only in the “operations.”⁷⁰ Likewise, the intellectual soul, as Aristotle understands it, “is the same thing as the sensing one,” since “one and the same faculty receives objects and judges them, otherwise it would not receive them.” Even the universal is first perceived by the sense through the knowledge of particulars.⁷¹

In the light of this sense-based psychology, Campanella can only reject the Aristotelian epistemological model with all its Platonic heritage, especially where it declares that “wisdom does not concern sense and experiments” but only the universal and its causes. The requisites set by Aristotle to define the nature of science (summed up by Campanella in six short statements: science must know everything, know even the most difficult things, be more reliable than other knowledge, be able to teach anything, justify itself for itself and not for life, subordinate other sciences like handmaids)⁷² had been thought out for the purpose of privileging knowledge of the universal, and in particular metaphysics, the “first philosophy” *par excellence*. Nevertheless, Campanella overturns Aristotle’s scheme to demonstrate that only experience, and thus knowledge of the individual, can open the way to true wisdom. From this standpoint, Campanella participates in the great anti-Aristotelian cultural movement of the seventeenth century. He uses scepticism to counter the science of universal essences and of

⁶⁷ See above all M I, I, 6, art. 3, p. 51/314, entitled: “Unam esse substantiam sentientem in omnibus organis, et unum realiter sensum: sed plures sentiendi modos ob pluralitatem obiectorum, et non extare sensum communem a particularibus distinctum: sed eundem Spiritum esse, qui sentit obiecta communia, et particularia confert, et sentit se sentire, contra dogmata Peripateticorum.”

⁶⁸ See art. 5, whose title runs: “Animam imaginantem eandem esse sentienti, memoranti, et ratiocinanti; contra Aristotelem et Avicennam et eorum rationes contrarium probantes, vanas esse. Et quo pacto contingat veritas et falsitas in sensu imaginante” (p. 53/326).

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*: “Quoniam vero quaecunque sentit spiritus, retinet non sicut species in tabula, sed sicut motiones in aëre, ex quibus iudicat de moventibus.”

⁷⁰ M I, I, 6, art. 6: “Animam sentientem eandem esse ratiocinativam contra Peripateticos” (pp. 54–55/336–338).

⁷¹ M I, I, 6, art. 7: “Animam intellectivam ab Aristotele cognitam, esse ipsam sensitivam, nec distingui realiter ab invicem, et universale, et singulare ab utraque cognosci, et syllogizari esse, et essentiam.”

⁷² M I, I, 8, art. 2, p. 64/392.

ultimate causes with a concrete, individual, accidental knowledge, declaring the former to be impossible and unachievable. For this *pars destruens*, the author of the *Metaphysica* is not very far from Gassendi who, in *Exercitationes paradoxicae*, had declared that science was non-existent in the Aristotelian sense (“quod nulla sit scientia, et maxime aristotelea”). Nor is he distant from Sanchez, who had held “quod nihil scitur,” if knowledge must be that defined by Aristotle.

But there is also a *pars construens* that is no less significant and that consists in attributing to perception, faced with the object, not only the reality of the thinking subject, of which it is the modification, but also the inner activity of thought with which the spirit, interpreting this modification, attributes it to the external thing that has produced it. Every perception is not only “a perception of suffering,” as we have already seen, but also inference (“illatio”), discourse (“discursus”): the sensible inference, which is too immediate to be perceived, is followed by a sort of mental discourse, which also requires the intervention of the intellect (“intellectus”).⁷³

Anyone who has read *Philosophia sensibus demonstrata* or *Senso delle cose* and compared them to the corresponding parts of book one of the *Metaphysica* will inevitably be struck by the constancy and continuity of Campanella’s sensism, which acts as a backdrop for his entire reflection. From this standpoint, the empirical base of Campanella’s epistemology finds confirmation; no substantial difference was to be found in the work published in Paris at the end of a long and difficult philosophical career. From Telesio Campanella drew the theory of the subtle and material spirit (“spiritus”), as he did the representation of knowledge as a process that is based on the soul’s ability to suffer, to undergo changes, being of itself material: this change is essentially movement, and already for Telesio every form of feeling was a contact. The polemic against Aristotle’s doctrine of sensation as information and perfecting; the reform of the psychology of the faculties, which puts the transformations of feeling in their place (feeling changes to memory, evaluation, intellection, depending on whether the similarities or the diversities of things are felt clearly or confusedly, in a total or in a partial way): all these elements, which constitute the base of Campanella’s sensism, were already present in Telesio’s *De sensu rerum*. Above all, the cardinal principle of sensation as “perceptio passionis” was already present in Telesio. If sensation is neither action and impulse (“actio impulsioque”), nor simply “passion and change” (“passio ipsa ipsaque immutatio”), since movement shows itself to be a different thing from feeling and takes place independently of sensation, in Telesio’s words “it only remains to admit that sensation is the perception of the actions of things and

⁷³ M I, I, 5, art. 1, p. 44/274: “Datur enim et discursus mentalis, quo ex intuitu partis intellectus iudicat totumque ex sensibus, insensilia quod similia sunt.”

of the impulses of the air, and also of its own passions, of its own changes, and of its own movements, and above all the perception of the latter.”⁷⁴

Campanella made substantial transformations in this foundation, and he did it quite early, at least as early as the time of the first version of *Il senso delle cose e la magia* (which was written in Italian in 1590 but only published in 1620, after having been rewritten in Latin). In this work, Campanella re-elaborates Telesio’s materialistic sensism and makes significant corrections to it. He accepts everything that concerns the certainty and priority of feeling,⁷⁵ not hesitating to subscribe to the theory of sensation as “passion” and to reject Aristotle’s idea of information. But although he is still disposed to take on board Telesio’s reform of psychology, with its unitary bias concentrated on the material properties of the *spiritus*,⁷⁶ at the same time he enriches and makes more complex what was, in the hands of his maestro, an excessively simplistic and reductive model. On one hand, even with regard to the conception of feeling, with which he largely agrees, he stresses the fact that sensation is not only passion, but perception of passion, and that it also contains a discursive development; it is not immediate intuition but also inference, although too rapid to be distinctly perceived.⁷⁷ On the other hand, alongside this type of outward-looking sensation characterized by the action of objects, he also admits a form of self-knowledge that operates without passion, but through the self’s essential identity with itself.⁷⁸ This is a general property that concerns all beings: “everything that exists knows

⁷⁴ Bernardino Telesio, *De rerum natura juxta propria principia*, VII, ii (critical text and Italian translation by Luigi De Franco. Firenze: La Nuova Italia, 1976), p. 6: “Superest itaque ut rerum actionum aërisque impulsionum, et propriarum passionum propriarumque immutationum, et propriarum motuum perceptio sensus sit; et horum magis.” On Telesio’s theory of knowledge and psychology, see R. Bondi, *Introduzione a Telesio*. Roma-Bari: Laterza, 1997, pp. 89–103.

⁷⁵ I quote from the Italian text (indicated hereinafter as SC) which was published in 1925: T. Campanella, *Il senso delle cose e la magia*, edited by Antonio Bruers. Bari: Laterza, 1925, II, 30, pp. 143–144: “Ora io trovo che li sensi son certi più che ogni altra conoscenza nostra, tanto d’intelletto, come di discorso, come di memoria, poiché ogni lor notizia dal senso nasce, e quando sono incerte queste conoscenze, col senso s’accertano e correggonsi, et esse non sono altro che senso indebolito o lontano o strano.”

⁷⁶ SC II, 4, pp. 43 ss.; II, 9, pp. 56–62.

⁷⁷ SC I, 4, pp. 10 ss., entitled: “Il senso essere percezione di passione con discorso di cosa esistente in atto, e non informazione di pura potenza; e le sue differenze.”

⁷⁸ SC II, 15, pp. 83–84: “ogni senziente sente in quanto pate, e in quanto pate non è quella cosa ch’ei sente, ma ben è un’altra cosa che non sente di fuori così per accidente, ma per essenza, perché ogni cosa conosce sé stessa essere, e ripugna al non essere e ama sé stessa. Dunque sé stessa per sé stessa conosce, e l’altre cose non per sé, ma in quanto ella si fa simile a quelle, talchè sente quelle in quanto sente sé mutata e fatta quella che essa non è.”

itself and feels itself with certainty, and without discourse.⁷⁹ Indeed, a hierarchy between the two aspects may be established: just as the “true wisdom, without passion but active” that we see in God, likewise “the sensation of oneself comes first in us and in things, and operates naturally without discourse; the sensation of external things which is passion comes afterwards.”⁸⁰

Right from the time of *Il Senso delle cose* this new perspective was linked to other doctrines typical of Campanella: above all his panpsychism and the idea that “the whole world feels” in different ways depending on individual natures and places,⁸¹ and also the doctrine of the primalities (“all beings are made up of Power, Wisdom and Love”),⁸² as well as the theory of “mens”, whereby man becomes divine and affirms his superiority over the animals, although the immaterial spirit must always make use of the material *spiritus* as its “vehicle” to act.⁸³ What is not yet clear nor fully explicit in *Il senso delle cose* (and was not even to be clarified in *Atheismus triumphatus*, since the theory of knowledge is not expounded there) are the exquisitely metaphysical reasons for this departure from Telesio: these reasons were only to become explicit in the work published in 1638, in which Campanella affirms that self-knowledge, placing itself above action, above passion, and above discourse, “represents an intuitive knowledge whose perfection depends on the fact that nothing distinguishes it from being and from the thing known.”⁸⁴ *Il Senso delle cose* had introduced the example of the lyre player (who no longer needs to look at the strings, nor to think about the movement of his fingers),⁸⁵ in the intent to explain the concept of a science that is inborn and closely incorporated within

⁷⁹ SC II, 30, p. 146: “ogni ente sé stesso conosce e sente con certezza, e non con discorso, e le cose che fa, per sé naturalmente senza discorso le fa.”

⁸⁰ SC II, 30, p. 152: “Dunque vera sapienza senza passione, ma attiva, è quella di Dio, e in noi e nelle cose è il senso di sé stesso primamente per cui s’opera naturalmente senza discorso. Da poi è il senso delle cose esteriori ch’è passione, onde sapemo quel che per noi è buono, poiché non avemo in noi il bene nostro, come Dio, ma lo mendichiamo.”

⁸¹ There are numerous passages on this argument. See for example SC II, 12, p. 73: “e che il mondo tutto senta dove più, dove manco, siccome l’animale s’è visto sentire in varie parti variamente, secondo più o meno passibili sono.” II, 13, pp. 74 ff., whose title runs: “Ossa, pelli, nervi, sangue e spirito, tutti sentire, contra Aristotele.”

⁸² SC I, 7, p. 20.

⁸³ SC II, 18, pp. 93–95; II, 25, pp. 118–127; II, 30, pp. 153–155. Cf. p. 153: “L’anima dunque umana si appella mente quella che Dio infonde, quella che con le bestie abbiamo comune, spirito.”

⁸⁴ Thus Campanella links his doctrine of self-knowledge to his critique of Telesio: “Quapropter videtur Telesio esse perceptio passionis omnis cognitio. Nos autem aliter sapimus, videlicet sensum seu sapientiam pertinere ad ipsum esse rerum, et sentiri et cognosci unumquodque, quia est ipsa natura cognoscens. Nam cum sensatio sit assimilatio, et omnis cognitio fiat propterea quod ipsa essentia cognoscitiva fit ipsum cognoscibile, perfecte illud cognoscit, quoniam jam est illud: ergo cognoscere est esse” (M II, VI, 8, art. 1, p. 59).

⁸⁵ SC II, 30, p. 147.

the musician. The same example was to return in *Metaphysica* (in the fundamental treatise on the second primality),⁸⁶ but, so to say, on a much higher register, since the approach revolves around the “thesis of the identity between knowing and being.”⁸⁷ Since knowing a thing means becoming that thing itself, up to the limit of alienation, the *Metaphysica* adds that we would never have been able to become those things if, before suffering, we had not already been those things.⁸⁸ As Blanchet clearly understood, “it is from the knowledge of our soul that judgment and discourse will, by means of analogy, take the knowledge of other things. Receiving its being from the pure Primalities, our spirit in a certain sense comprehends in its own reality all the essences of which they are the fecund origin and that belong to the other beings, like him constituted of different degrees of power, wisdom, and love. Thus, without coming out of itself, it may know them in their true nature.”⁸⁹ This inherency of being to knowing, which in its turn is based on the implication of the primalities in the notion of being, is affirmed by Campanella when, in book six of the second part, he begins his reasoning from the general principle: “Igitur in cunctis videtur cognitio ad esse pertinere.”⁹⁰ Thus he attacks Telesio and Aristotle, who argue that knowledge does not depend on being but on becoming, and deny direct self-knowledge.⁹¹ Campanella on the contrary intends to confirm his fundamental intuition that “everything that exists knows itself, because it is itself.”⁹² Trying to show that no rational inference would be possible “without an obscure, unknown, but real presence of the ideas within our being,”⁹³ Campanella goes so far as to retrieve the doctrine of ideas, and that of their vision in God, according to Augustine.

⁸⁶ M II, VI, 8, art. 4, p. 63.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*: “Quapropter non video quid obstat quo minus asseramus identitatem inter sapere et esse.”

⁸⁸ M II, VI, 12, art. 5, p. 89: “Igitur obiecta nos movent in quantum habent aliquid nostri.”

⁸⁹ L. Blanchet, *Les antécédents... cit.*, pp. 205–206.

⁹⁰ M II, VI, 8, art. 2, p. 62.

⁹¹ M II, VI, 8, art. 3, p. 62: “Telesius quoque obiicit: cognitio fit per modicam immutationem, non per immutationem: ergo non per esse, sed per fieri et mutari. Nam si fieret esse alienum, perderet esse suum. Nullum autem ens mutatur a se ipso: nullum ergo sapit seipsum. Item sensus est perceptio passionis, et a se non potest pati; ergo neque iudicari; unde Aristoteles putat intellectum non intelligere seipsum, nisi quia se intelligere intelligit: et hoc intelligit per obiecta, a quibus patitur.”

⁹² M II, VI, 8, art. 4, p. 63: “ideo omne ens seipsum nosse, quia est idipsum: et animam seipsam nosse notitia abdita” (in the title of this article).

⁹³ L. Blanchet, *op. cit.*, p. 207. See also M III, XIII, 2, art. 5: “... dicimus ideas necessarias esse ad notitiam rerum: siquidem res nulla cognoscitur, nisi per assimilationem cognoscentis ad cognitum. Haec autem assimilatio est idea ac forma ... Ergo perfecta scientia non fit in nobis, ... nisi ad ideam pertingamus. Ideo ergo in omnibus licet ignota, confert ad scientiam ut quo, non ut quod.”

Against this background, which would be worth a closer examination (since the *Metaphysica* has yet to find a historian worthy of it), we can clearly understand why Campanella had to deal with the sceptical objections. Indeed, the most original aspect is undoubtedly the encounter, not only polemical, with the doubts of scepticism, never so prominent from the epistemological standpoint, even in a work that had dealt with libertines, deists, and heretics like the *Atheismus triumphatus*. The programme – already announced in *De libris propriis Syntagma* (as Campanella had written: “the metaphysician does not presuppose anything; rather, doubting, he investigates everything”⁹⁴) – for a radical revision of knowledge was only to take a concrete and systematic form in the *Metaphysica*. So it is not surprising that, here, the original and never discarded sense-based approach takes on a tone that could well be called critical in the sense of a clear awareness of the limits within which the validity of the sensible foundations of knowledge must be understood or reformulated. The positions of scepticism are thus accepted into Campanella’s epistemology, without invalidating it, but nevertheless limiting its extension. With his doubts, the sceptic brings some truths to light, and the philosopher who holds the sense-based model, too, must come to terms with them. Whereas *Il Senso delle cose* makes no allusion to the problems of scepticism, it is in the *Metaphysica* that Campanella can and must make explicit the entire *pars destruens* of his reflections, in his intent to reconstruct knowledge from its foundations. Thus scepticism is seen to be at one and the same time the truth and the reversal of Telesio’s sensism, which Campanella had previously embraced.⁹⁵

“*Scientia modica et exilis*”

If we examine the final part of Book I, which contains detailed replies to all the *dubitationes*, it is clear that, in each reply, Campanella takes hold of various aspects of scepticism, correcting them and integrating them into a positive and constructive view of human knowledge: a limited view, of course, but it is one that is effective and adequate within its own framework. Right from his first

⁹⁴ This text was published in Paris in 1642, but it had been dictated to Naudé in 1632. See Thomae Campanellae *De libris propriis et de nova ratione studendi Syntagma*. Parisiis: apud viduam Guilielmi Pelé, 1642, p. 53: “Metaphysicus qui communem cunctis scientiis philosophiam tractat, nihil praesupponit, sed omnia dubitando perquirat; nec enim praesupponet se esse veluti sibimet ipsi apparet, nec dicit esse vivum aut mortuum, sed dubitabit ... nec nomina ipsa putabit dicere quod dicunt.”

⁹⁵ L. Blanchet appears to have been the only person to (very briefly) suggest this relationship between the use of sceptical arguments and the abandoning of Telesio. See L. Blanchet, *Les antécédents... cit.*, p. 235.

reply, Campanella stresses both the partiality and the operative nature of knowledge: human science is “nothing compared to what has been said about it, but it is something in itself since it provides enough for human life.” Limited to sensible things, we may go further and say that knowledge at least grasps the essence (“quidditatem attingo”) “for those things that of themselves move sense, such as heat, cold, light.”⁹⁶ It will not really be necessary to know “all the particulars to reach the universal” (as on the contrary doubt II claimed).⁹⁷ Thus, if the ideal of a “complete, perfect and total science” remains unattainable, “a partial and imperfect one” will undoubtedly be available, and this is what our science is.⁹⁸

For Campanella, doubt III also contains an important truth, although one that remains to be completed: everyone suffers in different ways, but we may be equally certain that the interaction between objects and sentient being is a reality. Whereas the sceptic stubbornly insists on an impossible objectivity or neutrality, the metaphysician on the contrary comes to terms with reality: “it is useless to blame the senses for the fact that they do not perceive except thus. Nor can the nature of things be blamed for the fact that they are capable of presenting themselves only thus to those senses.”⁹⁹ Aristotle’s accusation aimed at those who relate sensation to appearance was shown to be unfounded, provided that one understands that the reality of phenomena is also a reality. “Distance,

⁹⁶ M I, I, 9, art. 1, pp. 66/406–408: “Est ergo nihil scientia humana in comparatione, sed aliquid in se, quia quantum vitae sufficit humanae.” “Quod autem dicimus, quidditates non innotescere sensibus, verum est de his, quae sensibus per suos effectus patent, ut Angeli et Deus: non autem de his, quae per se movent sensus, ut calor, frigus, lux; neque de his, quae una cum per se moventibus innotescunt. Nam et si hominis quidditatem ex solo calore non novi: tamen ex actionibus, operationibus, ratiociniis, sensationibus, figura, similitudine, differentia, quidditatem sentio. Haec saepe sentiendo, et ex his discurrendo ad interiora per rationem tanquam per pharetram ad scopum, atque per intellectum tanquam per iaculum, intus legendo, seu tangendo, quidditatem attingo. Quod autem semper aliquod eius ignotum sit, nemo neget. Neque enim Peripatetici profitentes sapere, ultimas differentias se scire affirmant.”

⁹⁷ M I, I, 9, art. 2, p. 67/410: “Ad secundam dubitationem conclusum recte dicimus, quod scire ex parthe adhuc sit imperfectissimum: et responsum Aristotelis recte improbatum esse. Hoc tamen adnotandum: quod non omnia singularia inspicere oportet ad universale concludendum, ubi affirmatur, aut negatur quid essentialiter.”

⁹⁸ M I, I, 9, art. 2, p. 67/412: “Caetera argumenta, quae ostendunt neque unum singulare sciri posse, bene concludunt de scientia completa, et perfecta, et totali, sed non de ex parte, et imperfecta. Et quod ad sciendum hanc chartam oportet omnia entia scire, et entium relationes usque ad Deum.”

⁹⁹ M I, I, 9, art. 3, p. 69/424: “Nil culpatis sensibus, siquidem non nisi ita sentiunt. Nec rerum naturis, quoniam non nisi sic talibus sensibus aptae sunt praesentari. Quando ex distantia secus apparet, corrigit se sensatione propinqua. Quando in aegritudine aliter videt, corrigit se in sanitate, eadem videns: et suo et aliorum sensibus emendatur.”

the organ, the medium, the variety of the object,” that is all the factors that influence appearance and make it diversified, were to become the subject of investigation, taking as framework for reality “the constitution of individuals on the basis of their degree of being or of sensing.”¹⁰⁰

This “scientia secundum nos” will certainly be “modica et exilis,” as the author repeatedly stresses. Nevertheless, it will make available a precise confirmation of reality. If we determine the factors that cause appearance to vary, even that variation will lend itself to verification and correction, following the principle that “although the senses err in many things, they nevertheless correct themselves through other sensations.”¹⁰¹ The comparison with animals (the subject of doubt IV) is resolved in favour of man if we look not at the organs each is equipped with, but at “the excellence of the spirit that senses in those organs”¹⁰² and at the human privilege of enjoying a “divine mind,” a privilege demonstrated by miracles, prophecies, and martyrs. These undoubtedly attest to “the divinity of man, not only his superiority in terms of constitution and of organs.”¹⁰³

Knowledge Is Always Knowledge of Oneself

One set of replies concerns more directly the cognitive role of sensible perception, which is at the same time the subject of knowledge and the path toward reality (“ut quod, et ut quo”).¹⁰⁴ Once again, Campanella’s replies (to doubts VI and IX) record first and foremost some elements of convergence with the themes of scepticism. In both these doubts, the sceptic tells the truth: knowing is not knowledge of the thing as it is, but almost an inference operated “adulterina

¹⁰⁰ *M loc. cit.*: “Non enim intelligunt illi [the Aristotelians], res non esse, nisi quia apparent, sed vere esse: et aliis aliter. ... Igitur distantia, et organum, et medium, et obiecti varietas causant accidentalem fallaciam non per se, sed propter gradum essendi et sentiendi aptum ita sentire ad sui utilitatem, ut quicumque alius modus inducat in utilitatem. Sapientia ergo est has varietates pernosse, et rem et relationem distinguere, et mensuram sciendi unicuique propriam esse intelligere, videlicet, propriam temperiem singulorum ex proprio essendi sentiendique gradu: idcirco unicuique suam: solumque Deum omnes omnium habere, et insuper veram propriamque, ne dum aliorum apparentes.”

¹⁰¹ *M I, I, 9, art. 3, p. 69/422*: “Porro licet fallantur sensus in multis, tamen corriguntur a seipsis per alias sensationes. Propterea si Platoni culpantur, Tertulliano inculpabiles videntur: siquidem, qui remum videt fractum in aqua, corrigit se per hoc, quod extra aquam experitur eundem visu, tactuque integrum. Quo facto, investigat causam deceptionis....”

¹⁰² *M I, I, 9, art. 4, p. 70/428*: “Ad quartum, quod praestantia sensus non consistit in organi bonitate, sed in spiritus excellentia, qui sentit in organo.”

¹⁰³ *M I, I, 9, art. 4, pp. 71/432–434.*

¹⁰⁴ *M I, I, 9, art. 5, p. 71/437*: this is the reply to *dub. V.*

ratione” from the known to the unknown.¹⁰⁵ The meaning of this highly cryptic statement will be better understood if attention is paid to the general background of Campanella’s psychology. As we have already seen, all knowledge (or more precisely, that which is acquired, not that which is “innata et abdita”) is always “perception and judgement around passion, and hence around the object that causes that passion.” It firstly consists of “feeling oneself modified in the [other things]” and only subsequently “with continual changes” in “getting used” to recognising external objects, almost “forgetting oneself.”¹⁰⁶ The process of inference (“adulterina ratio”), which is again a sort of “alienation,” consists just in this. On this point, scepticism therefore hits the mark, although guilty of excess. “Alienation” does not reach the degree of “madness” or “delirium” since, even when it appears to obliterate itself, “knowledge is always knowledge of oneself.”¹⁰⁷ This is a “notitia abdita” that appears to have been repressed because our soul, absorbed in organic operations and in the perception of external objects, is continually distracted and alienated from itself by the incessant impressions of things.¹⁰⁸ Thus what is important to show the sceptics, in order to confute their objections, is “less the affirmation of existence implicated in their doubt” (as Descartes was to do), than “the superiority of this primitive knowledge over all other knowledge” of the acquired type.¹⁰⁹

In this attempt at conciliation, Campanella does not even wholly reject “Heraclitean” and “Protagoran” arguments (expressed in doubts VII and VIII). Indeed, he holds both of them to be “true,” while stressing that knowledge does not for this reason become inaccessible to man. It is still an imperfect knowledge, and one that is different from that of God, which embraces all individual beings,

¹⁰⁵ M I, I, 9, art. 6, p. 72/440: “Ad sextum responderi non potest, quoniam veritatem concludit, unde patet, quod scire est nosse, quod nescimus res, sicuti est, sed quadam adulterina ratione ex notis argumentamur ad quod non sapienter novimus.”

¹⁰⁶ M I, I, 9, art. 9, p. 73/448: “Ad nonum dicimus, sapientiam formaliter non esse passionem, sed perceptionem et iudicium de passione, ac proinde de obiecto, passionem inferente. Quoniam suam entitatem effundit omne agens. Et quidem prius cognoscit seipsum omne ens, alioquin non amaret esse proprium ignotum. Cognoscit autem se, quia est id quod est: sentit autem deinde alia dum sentit se immutatum in alia: et adeo assiduis immutationibus assuescit alia nosse, quod sui obliviscitur, vel sui cognitionem mutat: propterea anima non videtur seipsam nosse. At hoc verum est de notitia superadita, non de innata et abdita.”

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*: “Fatendum ergo, quod scire sit pars alienationis: non autem est delirare;” “semper ergo scire est sui.”

¹⁰⁸ M II, VI, 6, art. 9, p. 36. Cf. M II, VI, 8, art. 4, p. 63: “Verum et hoc est pars causae oblivionis: quoniam multiplicitas suorum esse adventitiorum obnubilat esse nativum; et novitas sui, et cum novo esse adventitio, impedit collationem cum praeterito et unitatem entitatis; ergo et notitiam sui.”

¹⁰⁹ Here we follow L. Blanchet, *Les antécédents ... cit.*, p. 225.

but it is sufficient for the purposes of life (“the self-preservation of each being”), and is neither “superfluous” nor “insufficient” for this purpose.¹¹⁰ On the questions of sleeping and waking, life and death, health and disease, the author of the *Metaphysica* emphatically returns to the mystical vein he had already attributed to the sceptical arguments in doubt X. In his words: “we are in a theatre of madmen and of people who see through slits in an enigmatic and partial way. The example given by Plato can be accepted,”¹¹¹ with explicit reference to the example of the cave. Against this noble backdrop, the limit situations denounced by the sceptics (dreams, ecstasy, visions, death throws, etc.) reveal all the discomfort of a soul imprisoned in the body, and of its attempts to free itself from that prison. But in this case, too, doubt does not become as extensive as it did, for example, in Descartes’s *Discours*: “not because the things of this world are shadows of another world and they change, is there no science or is there no difference between he who is dreaming and he who is awake. Indeed, to know that things change and that they are like shadows is already to know something.”¹¹²

The discourse on the “delirium of philosophers” (the subject of doubt XI) again places positive stress on the ideal of “*libertas philosophandi*,” the capability to philosophise “*mente prorsus libera*,” fixing our gaze on the “divine code” and not on “human schools.”¹¹³ The reply to doubt XII (that concerning the “*deliria ... circa rerum principia*”) not only stresses the need for an examination that is not prejudiced by Aristotle’s authority or by that of any other philosopher,¹¹⁴ but also states Campanella’s intention to rebuild the edifice of knowledge completely. He adds a defence of the different branches into which it is subdivided: metaphysics, logic, mathematics (which also includes astronomy and astrology), physiology, morality, politics, and religion.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁰ M I, I, 9, art. 7, p. 72/444: “Nec natura superfluum scientiam, nec mancam distribuit rebus: sed quantum sufficit cuiusque conservationi: unde appetunt alia, et aliter, quia sapiunt aliter.” “Ad Protagoram tandem putantem, quidquid videtur esse cuilibet, sicuti videtur, verum esse dico: quod sic vere cuilibet res apparet, non autem quod sit in se sicut nobis apparet. Non enim homo est mensura rerum, sed Deus autor rerum, qui proprium cuilibet quem dedit essendi modum, optimo novit: nec ab eis accipit scientiam, quid, et quantae, et quomodo sunt. Sed dat, ut sint sic et tantae, et caetera.”

¹¹¹ M I, I, 9, art. 10, p. 74/455.

¹¹² *M loc. cit.*, p. 75/458: “At non propterea quod res huius mundi sunt alterius umbrae et mutantur, non datur scientia, et differentia inter somniantem et vigilantem. Nam scire quod mutantur et sunt sicut umbrae, est aliquid scire.”

¹¹³ M I, I, 9, art. 11, p. 76/466.

¹¹⁴ M I, I, 9, art. 12 p. 77/470: “Non enim philosophandum oculis Aristotelis, neque amici et fratris, neque inimicis neque avaris, neque ambitiosis neque invidis: sic enim numquam veritas elucescit.”

¹¹⁵ M I, I, 9, pp. 78–86/474–518.

Ernst Cassirer, who recognised in Campanella's work "a complete theory of scepticism," believes scepticism to be the result of the "conflict" between a sense-based epistemology of the Telesian type and Platonic-Augustinian metaphysics (centred around the doctrine of ideas and of primality) which integrates and corrects the former without ever achieving a true fusion with it.¹¹⁶ The fact that the "notitia indita" is never thrown into doubt, not even in the most radical *dubitationes*, tends to confirm this evaluation. A contemporary of Gassendi and Mersenne, Campanella, too, might be called a "mitigated or constructive sceptic" (Popkin) because of his "critical" awareness of the limits of sensitive knowledge, except that in his view the "scientific" dimensions of knowledge go far beyond the horizons of physics and natural phenomena to include the area of metaphysics. The "metaphysical" sceptic of the *dubitationes* does indeed correct Platonism with sensism, but he also opens the door to research leading in the opposite direction: moving from sensible data to derive judgements, and then to reach "reason" ("ratio") that, as he warns, "non est ens rationis."¹¹⁷

¹¹⁶ E. Cassirer, *Das Erkenntnisproblem in der Philosophie und Wissenschaft der neueren Zeit*, cit., Erster Band, 1922, pp. 240–257.

¹¹⁷ M I, V, I, art. 4, p. 344.

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