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Some Blunt Instruments of Dogmatic Logic: Sextus Empiricus' Sceptical Attack

1 The Feeble Power of Dogmatic Logic

Even without delving into the abundant historiographical and doxographical details to be found in the treatment offered by Sextus Empiricus in the parallel passages of his *Against the Mathematicians* (*Adversus Mathematicos* = *M* VII and VIII), it must be acknowledged that the more succinct and introductory analysis he presents in the second book of his *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* (= *PH*) may already satisfy the reader wishing to investigate questions of truth and falsehood, in relation to both dogmatic philosophies and the objections raised by the sceptics.

The underlying argument of Sextus' book systematically addresses a series of topics familiar to anyone seeking to establish the truth of those key epistemological tools exploited by currents of thought purporting to state 'how things really stand': an easy target for Pyrrhonian criticism.

Following a few introductory sections (*PH* II 1–12) of crucial importance for understanding—and especially justifying, against all sterile dogmatist polemics—a genuine form of sceptical *zetein*,¹ Sextus examines (and attempts to demolish) some central concepts in dogmatic 'logic.' The semantic field covered by 'logic' here is far broader than the one usually attributed to it, insofar as it extends to questions that may be seen to fall under the labels of epistemology, semiotics, the philosophy of language, and so on.

From first to last, Sextus pays special attention to the following notions:

1 See therefore: Jacques Brunschwig, "Sextus Empiricus on the κριτήριο," in idem, *Papers in Hellenistic Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994): 224–241; Emidio Spinelli, *Questioni scettiche. Letture introduttive al pirronismo antico* (Rome: Lithos, 2005): 114–117 (now also online: <http://scholarlysource.daphnet.org/index.php/DDL/issue/view/18>); Katja M. Vogt, "Skeptische Suche und das Verstehen von Begriffen," in *Wissen und Bildung in der antiken Philosophie*, eds. Christoph Rapp and Tim Wagner (Stuttgart: J.B. Metzler, 2006): 325–339; Filip Grgić, "Sextus Empiricus on the Possibility of Inquiry," *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 89 (2008): 436–459; Lorenzo Corti, *Scepticisme et langage* (Paris: Vrin, 2009): 185–206; Gail Fine, "Sceptical Inquiry," in *Definition in Ancient Philosophy*, ed. David Charles (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010): 493–525; eadem, "Concepts and Inquiry: Sextus and the Epicureans," in *Episteme, etc. Essays in Honour of Jonathan Barnes*, eds. Ben Morison and Katherina Ierodiakonou (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012): 90–114 [= now eadem, *The Possibility of Inquiry: Meno's Paradox from Socrates to Sextus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014): chs. 10 and 11]; and Anna Tigani, "A New Answer to an Old Puzzle: Νοεῖν ἀπλῶς (Sextus Empiricus, *PH* II 1.10)," *Logical Analysis & History of Philosophy/Philosophiegeschichte und Logische Analyse* 19 (2016): 188–211.

- criterion (*PH* II 14–79; cf. *M* VII 25–37 and 46–445);²
- the true and truth (*PH* II 80–96; cf. *M* VII 38–45; VIII 1–140);³
- sign (*PH* II 97–133; cf. *M* VIII 141–299);⁴
- demonstration (*PH* II 134–192; cf. *M* VIII 300–481);⁵
- syllogism (*PH* II 193–203);
- induction and definition (*PH* II 204 and 205–212);⁶
- division, whole/parts, genus/species, and accidents (*PH* II 213–228), examined in this contribution;
- sophisms (*PH* II 229–259).⁷

Within this conceptually homogeneous logical-epistemological arsenal that reflects a perspective marked by the dichotomy of true/false, I would like to focus on one of the 'logical' sections. These are unique in Sextus' work and hence find no parallels in the more meticulous analysis provided in *M* VII and VIII. This uniqueness does not merely concern the dogmatic theories pertaining to the notions of syllogism, induction/definition, and sophism, but extends to a range of points made with regard to logical-demonstrative argumentation, and which appear to play a leading role in the doctrines that Sextus seeks to refute.

2 See, Anthony A. Long, "Sextus Empiricus on the Criterion of Truth," *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies* 25 (1978): 35–49; Jacques Brunschwig, "Sextus Empiricus on the criterion: the Sceptic as Conceptual Legatee," in *The Question of 'Eclecticism': Studies in Later Greek Philosophy*, eds. John M. Dillon and Anthony A. Long (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988): 145–175; Tad Brennan, "Criterion and Appearance in Sextus Empiricus," in *Ancient Scepticism and the Sceptical Tradition*, ed. Juha Sihvola (Helsinki: Hakapaino O., 2000): 63–92; and Rosario La Sala, "Argumentative Strategien bei Sextus Empiricus. Das Beispiel des Kriteriums," *Acta Universitatis Carolinae, Philologica 1-Graecolatina Pragensia* 21 (2006): 63–75 [= idem, *Die Züge des Skeptikers. Der dialektische Charakter von Sextus Empiricus' Werk* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2005): 96–107].

3 See Emidio Spinelli, "Vero. verità. vita. Deficienze epistemologiche e soluzioni pragmatiche?," *Iride* 76 (2015): 625–639.

4 See, Theodor Ebert, "The Origin of the Stoic Theory of Signs in Sextus Empiricus," *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 5 (1987): 83–126; James Allen, *Inference from Signs: Ancient Debates about the Nature of Evidence* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001): 87–146; Pierre Pellegrin, "Scepticisme et sémiologie médicale," in *De Zénon d'Élée à Poincaré. Recueil d'études en hommage à Roshdi Rashed*, eds. Régis Morelon and Ahmad Hasnawi (Louvain and Paris: Peeters, 2004): 645–664; and Richard Bett, "Le signe dans la tradition pyrrhonienne," in *Signe et prédiction dans l'antiquité*, ed. José Kany-Turpin (Saint-Étienne: Publications de l'Université de Saint-Etienne, 2005): 29–48.

5 See Emidio Spinelli, "Non si dimostra il vero: la critica di Sesto Empirico ai procedimenti apodittici," *Elenchos* 36 (2015): 297–316.

6 See Spinelli, *Questioni scettiche*, ch. 3.

7 See Emidio Spinelli, "Dialectic and Sophisms: the Sceptical Dissolution of Dogmatic Logic" (forthcoming).

2 Logical Division and Its Four Aspects

Sextus' first target is the concept of division. Before discussing its more questionable aspects, in *PH* II 213 Sextus invokes the authority of 'some dogmatists' who considered dialectic 'the science of deduction, induction, definition and division,' apparently in an attempt to apply the same scheme to his own exposition. Sextus states that, in addition to his previous analysis of the notions of criterion, sign, and demonstrative *logoi*, he has already discussed syllogisms, inductions, and definitions. He now deems it appropriate to also examine, however briefly (*brachea*), the last section of dialectic: that pertaining to division (*PH* II 213–228), whose specific weight within the philosophical tradition embodied by Platonic and Peripatetic philosophers is undeniable.⁸

Presumably relying once again on the authority of the dogmatists mentioned at the beginning (*phasi*), Sextus presents—and sets out to criticise, what in his view seems to be easily (*rhadion isos*)—a distinction between four modes of *diairesis*, namely the division:

1. of the name into its relative meanings;
2. of the whole into its parts;
3. of the genus into its species;
4. of the species into individuals.⁹

If we start from the division of the name into its meanings, we will immediately notice an underlying feature of Sextus' argumentative strategy. The premise on which it rests in *PH* II 214 (= fr. 65 Hülser) is the acceptance—and perhaps not just *disserendi*

8 On this aspect, see Benson Mates, *The Sceptic Way: Sextus Empiricus's Outlines of Pyrrhonism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996): 285. One should also note that Sextus' 'thematic index'—apart from the inversion of the topic examined: division, definition, induction, and syllogism—corresponds to the partition attested by Alcinoos in his *Didaskalikos* (III, 153, 30–32 Hermann); cf. Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Scepticism*, trans. Julia Annas and Jonathan Barnes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000): 126, n. 313, where another passage of the *Didaskalikos* (156 Hermann), as well as Ammonius, in *Int.* 15, 16–18, are quoted. On some textual difficulties posed by these texts, see Whittaker's cautious observations in *Alcinoos. Enseignement des doctrines de Platon*, ed. John Whittaker (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1990): *ad loc.*, and also Michelangelo Giusta, "Due capitoli sui dossografi di fisica," in *Storiografia e dossografia nella filosofia antica*, ed. Giuseppe Cambiano (Turin: Tirrenia, 1986): 177–178, especially n. 60.

9 For a similar scheme of division, see also other sources: for example, Alcinoos, Seneca, Galen, and Alexander of Aphrodisias, as well as Ps.-Gal. *Hist. phil.* ch. 14 and Clement of Alexandria (on his treatment of the topic, see Riccardo Chiaradonna, "Definitions, Species, Wholes, Parts. Clem. *Strom.* VIII.6.19.2–20.2," forthcoming). On their structure and mutual analogies or differences, apart from some useful references offered in *The So-Called Eighth Stromateus by Clement of Alexandria* (Leiden: Brill, 2016): *ad loc.* and also by Jonathan Barnes, *Porphyrus: Introduction* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003): 339–342, see especially Jaap Mansfeld, *Heresiography in Context: Hippolytus' Elenchos as a Source for Greek Philosophy* (Leiden: Brill, 1992): 80 ff. and 125 ff., who insists on the comparison between *PH* II 219–227 and Ps.-Hippolytus, *ref.* VII 16–18.

causa, as the formula *kai eikotos* might be taken to suggest—of a widely accepted thesis in the dogmatist milieu (*phasin*): true knowledge, namely ‘science’ or *episteme*, is something firm and immutable. As such, it falls within the realm of *physei* entities and not of conventional products that are likely to undergo sudden changes and are subject to our judgement, which is to say—as Sextus points out—that it falls within the sphere of what is *eph’hemin*. May this thesis be traced back, first of all, to a Platonic Academic philosophical background, one also shared by Aristotle (see especially *An. post.* I 33)? The way in which it is presented, particularly the emphasis on the characteristic of immutability (*ametaptotos*, which like the following *eumetaptotos* is a *hapax* in Sextus), does not seem to suggest a Platonic echo and polemical target,¹⁰ but perhaps allows a further speculation. One might suppose that Sextus here has a Stoic thesis in mind, a ‘heterodox’ thesis, possibly because it was still too Socratic in its distinctive traits (see in particular *SVF* I 413). It might be the radical thesis upheld by Herillus, who identified *telos* with a form of science intended as ‘constant disposition.’¹¹

Leaving aside the question of the origin of this doctrine, the mentioning of it allows Sextus to strategically highlight the unscientific nature, or, if we like, the incapacity, of operating on the firm and incontrovertible level of truth of diairetic activity, which some scholars have taken to amount to a merely lexicographical exercise in the clarification of homonyms.¹² The semantic function of names is presented as a merely conventional product by means of arguments that also occur, albeit in relation to different polemical aims, in other sections of Sextus’ corpus: what we have is, on the one hand, the reciprocal linguistic incomprehension between Greeks and barbarians, and, on the other, the arbitrary and ever-changing connection between names and the things they signify.¹³

10 One may however remember the continuous reference to the *bebaios* character of the so-called *epistemonikos logos*, again in Alcinous’ *Didaskalikos* (see p. 154, 29, 30 Hermann = p. 5 Whittaker).

11 See therefore *SVF* I 409; 411; 414–417 and Anna Maria Ioppolo, “Lo Stoicismo di Erillo,” *Phronesis* 30 (1985): 58–78 [now in eadem, *Dibattiti filosofici ellenistici. Dottrina delle cause, Stoicismo, Accademia scettica*, eds. Bruno Centrone, Riccardo Chiaradonna, Diana Quarantotto, and Emidio Spinelli (Sankt Augustin: Academia, 2013): 119–135].

12 See Mates, *The Skeptic Way*, 285.

13 On the alleged Diodorean origin of this last *logos*, see Catherine Atherton, *The Stoics on Ambiguity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993): 430; more generally, on Diodorus Chronus’ theory of language, see Francesco Verde, *Elachista: La dottrina dei minimi nell’Epicureismo* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2013): 210 ff. For other passages, in which Sextus insists on forms of linguistic conventionalism, see *PH* II 256; III 266–268; *M* XI 239–243; *M* I 36–38 e 144–147, as well as some useful observations in David K. Glidden, “Parrots, Pyrrhonists and Native Speakers,” in *Language*, ed. Stephen Everson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994): 129–148; Sextus Empiricus, *Contro gli etici*, ed. Emidio Spinelli (Naples: Bibliopolis, 1995): 393–394; Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Ethicists (Adversus Mathematicos XI)*, ed. Richard Bett (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997): 244–248; and Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Grammarians (Adversus Mathematicos I)*, ed. David L. Blank (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998): 105–107.

On the doxographical level too this passage from Sextus offers some interesting insights: the final demolition of the definition of dialectic as the science of signifiers and things signified—here recorded in an anonymous form (*hos oiontai tines*)—can, and indeed must, be seen to find its remote yet certain origin in Chrysippus (see *DL* VII 62).

3 Splitting the Whole into Its Parts

After having demolished the notion of division in a terse and schematic way, in *PH* II 215–218 Sextus turns his attention to the issue of the relation between the whole and its parts. In these sections, leaving open the question of the existence or non-existence of the whole and its parts, Sextus exclusively directs his criticism 'against the possibility of dividing a whole into its parts, a topic with which he does not deal at all in *M* 9.331–358.'¹⁴ It is undeniable that this general question was very dear to the philosopher, since he repeatedly examines it, not merely occasionally in different sections of his works,¹⁵ but also under more specific 'rubrics,' such as, for instance:

1. in the sections devoted to 'physics,' as he himself mentions at the beginning of *PH* II 215;¹⁶
2. in the technical context of the 'grammatical' partition of a *logos* into its parts (see *M* I 132–141; cf. also *M* I 162–168);¹⁷
3. in the context of a more specifically 'arithmetical' discussion (see *M* IV 23–33).

14 Katherina Ierodiakonou, "Wholes and Parts: M 9.331–358," in *Sextus Empiricus and Ancient Physics*, eds. Keimpe Algra and Katherina Ierodiakonou (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015): 111.

15 See, for example, *PH* III 45–46 and 85–96; *M* III 35–36; IX 258–264 and 308–319.

16 The closest reference seems to be *PH* III 98–101. If this is true (and if therefore one should posit a coherent plan of composition behind Sextus' treatment of these topics), it is legitimate to refer not only to *PH* III 85–93 but also, on the one hand, to the 'parallel' section in *M* IX 297 ff. and, on the other, albeit the examples used are not always identical, to the above-mentioned relevant chapters in *M* IX 331–358. With regard to the latter, one can usefully read Ierodiakonou, "Wholes and parts," and especially the very stimulating analysis in Jonathan Barnes, "Bits and Pieces," in *Matter and Metaphysics*, eds. Jonathan Barnes and Mario Mignucci (Naples: Bibliopolis, 1988): 228, especially nn. 10–12. On some questions related to the doxographical (Stoic?) paternity of these Sextan passages, especially *M* IX 352, see also Dirk Baltzly, "Who are the mysterious dogmatists of *Adversus Mathematicus* ix 352?," *Ancient Philosophy* 18 (1998): 145–170 and the very cautious position adopted by Ierodiakonou, "Wholes and parts," 120–129.

17 See the careful commentary by David Blank in Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Grammarians*, 170–175, who rightly affirms: 'the topic of part and whole [...] was of capital importance for the dogmatists, who promised to speak truly about the "all" or "whole," that is, the universe, and then for the sceptics, who needed it as an example of the dogmatists' rashness' (*ibidem*, 170–171).

In the passage under scrutiny, Sextus embarks on a general investigation of one of the possible aspects of *diairesis* without ever losing sight of his aim: to disprove the logical devices commonly employed by the dogmatists so as to undermine their truth claims. Sextus resorts to a numerical example, the number 10 and its parts,¹⁸ in keeping with a mode of arguing that—as he himself consciously notes—is typical of the sceptics.¹⁹

The criticism unfolds along two distinct lines:

- (a) the impossibility of dividing 10 *into* its parts;
- (b) the impossibility of conceiving the parts *within* 10 in a non-contradictory way.
 - a. Let us suppose that we divide 10 into the following parts—1+2+3+4—and, clearly stretching the argument to some extent, let us consider division to be almost a synonym of subtraction.²⁰ The first of the divided parts, 1, will then be subtracted from 10, which will become 9 and hence lose its peculiarity as a whole, and the same applies to the other elements in the division/subtraction.
 - b. Given any division of the whole, moreover, its parts must necessarily be encompassed by the whole itself.²¹ However, taking once again our chosen numerical example, if 10 is divided into 9+1 and then into 8+2, 7+3, and so on, it must be admitted that 10 encompasses, in addition to itself, the full sum of its parts (9+8+7+6+5+4+3+2+1=45). We must therefore grant that ‘10 encompasses 45.’

These absurd conclusions—which also apply on the ‘geometric level,’ which is to say in the case of magnitudes, to be intended however as continuous and not discrete quantities—²² ought to show that it is impossible to divide a whole into parts. Faced with this unlikely claim, which seems to run against the most basic rules of common sense, one could raise some substantial doubts and objections, so as to highlight its ‘sophistic’ character, so to speak.²³ Sextus himself seems to be aware of this, since he introduces his polemical *logoi* with the kind of cautious language

18 Is this another implicit yet transparent allusion to the ‘holy’ Pythagorean decade? See Mansfeld, *Heresiography in Context*, 170.

19 *Hos ethos tois apo tes skepseos*, as we read in *M IX* 311; for a possible Platonic antecedent, see *Theaet.* 204b-c; see also Barnes, “Bits and Pieces,” 237, n. 27, and Ierodiakonou, “Wholes and parts,” 115–116.

20 See also *PH III* 85 and Eugen Pappenheim, *Erläuterungen zu des Sextus Empiricus pyrrhoneischen Grundzügen* (Leipzig: Meiner, 1881): 147.

21 On the meaning and textual distribution/diffusion of the verb *emperiechesthai* (or even of the simple *periechesthai*), see again Barnes, “Bits and Pieces,” 234, n. 21.

22 Sextus would here appear to overlook the evident difference between the two thematic fields, a difference which he himself admits elsewhere; see, for example, *M IV* 1.

23 This ‘sophistic’ spirit has been stressed by many scholars; see, for example, Mates, *The Skeptic Way*, 285 and especially Barnes, “Bits and Pieces,” 270 (with additional textual references to Locke and Leibniz).

that distinguishes Pyrrhonian formulations: he 'qualifies' them using semantically restrictive *phonai* (such as *tacha*, *PH* II 216, or *isos*, *PH* II 218) that are far removed from the dogmatist exposition of logical and linguistic statements as absolute, incontrovertible truths.

4 Genera and Species: Mental Concepts or Substantial Entities?

Sextus shifts the focus of his attack to a web of notions that carries even greater implications in terms of the claim of possessing the truth in the sections which he devotes to an examination of the dogmatist use of genera/species as a pair of terms (*PH* II 219–227).²⁴

At the very beginning, in § 219, we find a sort of cross-reference, a crucial element for anyone wishing to further investigate and better understand Sextus' overall argument, as well as the connections which might be seen to lend coherence to his polemical exposition. Sextus writes that he will be returning to the question of the relationship between genera/species in greater detail elsewhere (*platyteron men en allois*). However, the philosopher does not keep this important promise, at any rate judging from his surviving writings.²⁵ We must make do, then, with the succinct analysis he offers in his *Outlines*, an analysis that from the very beginning is marked by the explicit identification of two polemical targets:

- (a) A first group of dogmatists maintains that genera and species are merely conceptual products. Sextus regards the position of these thinkers—in all likelihood, Stoics—to have already been refuted through the aporias raised against the governing part (of the soul, the *hegemonikon*) and the notion of 'representation' (*phantasia*).²⁶

²⁴ For a clear and accurate analysis of these paragraphs, see Mansfeld, *Heresiography in Context*, 125–131, whose conclusions I shall accept in what follows. For a very peculiar application of the genera/species pair to the notion of *genike gramme*, see *M* III 92ff., and Wolfgang Freytag, *Mathematische Grundbegriffe bei Sextus Empiricus* (Hildesheim: Olms, 1995): 83–95.

²⁵ On this point, see *Sexti Empirici Opera*, recensuit Hermann Mutschmann, vol. I: Πυρρωνεῖων ὑποτυπώσεων *libros tres continens*, editionem stereotypam emendatam curavit, addenda et corrigenda adjecit Juergen Mau (Leipzig: Teubner, 1958): XXVII; one may however imagine that Sextus examined that question in one of the lost books antecedent to *M* VII–XI. For this hypothesis, see especially Karel Janáček, "Die Hauptschrift des Sextus Empiricus als Torso erhalten?," *Philologus* 107 (1963): 271–277 [now in idem, *Studien zu Sextus Empiricus, Diogenes Laertius und zur pyrrhonischen Skepsis*, eds. Jan Janda and Filip Karfik (Berlin and New York: De Gruyter, 2008): 124–131] and Jerker Blomqvist, "Die *Skeptika* des Sextus Empiricus," *Grazer Beiträge* 2 (1974): 12–24, as well as Mansfeld, *Heresiography in Context*, 130, who suggests that Ps-Hyppolitus too might depend on the same, more detailed Sextan passage.

²⁶ See *PH* II 70–71. The Stoic origin of the theses attacked here seems to be confirmed by the presence of some very technical terms belonging to their lexicon. This notwithstanding, *PH* II 219 is ab-

- (b) A second group of philosophers instead grants genera and species self-subsistence (*idia hypostasis*). Based on cross-references with texts by Seneca, Alcinous, and Clement of Alexandria, it has been reasonably suggested that this ‘second group consists of Middle Platonists (that is to say, inclusive of the Middle Platonist Plato and the *Aristoteles interpretatus*).’²⁷

The theses upheld by this second group of opponents may have struck Sextus as being more challenging or better argued, since he does not limit himself to providing a swift, terse refutation, but examines them in greater detail in *PH* II 220–222. Given the actual existence of genera (*disserendi causa*, of course), it thus seems as though those wishing to highlight their limits are faced with two possibilities:

- (a) there are as many genera as species;
 (b) there is only one genus, common to all the species that fall under it.

The first alternative forces us to deny the very possibility of a *diairesis* of the genus, i. e., of that process enabling us to acknowledge a multiplicity of species to be subsumed under the *single* and same *genos*. The second alternative, instead, entails a series of contradictions; in fact, it presupposes the creation of some real fictions (*eidolopoiesis*, *PH* II 222: a noun that constitutes a *hapax* in Sextus). In order to expose these contradictions, Sextus sets out to reveal certain dogmatic incongruities through a range of objections that carry considerable weight within the Pyrrhonian polemical arsenal and whose presence in this section of the corpus is certainly noteworthy.²⁸ At this point, one might also speculate: can Sextus’ formulation find an authoritative precedent in Plato’s *Parmenides* (see especially *Parm.* 131a ff.)? Or, at least, may it constitute a conscious counterpart to some sort of Middle Platonist reading of these Platonic pages?²⁹

The richness of the possible philosophical background of Sextus’ objections and the objective strength they display in their attempt to demolish two cornerstones of the much-flaunted dogmatist ability to build cogent arguments, as far as the identification of the truth is concerned, suggest that we should examine the development of Sextus’ polemic more closely. Sextus’ criticism revolves around two key points:

sent from *SVF* and also from Hülser’s collection; see Mansfeld, *Heresiography in Context*, 126, n. 50. The term *emoema*, attested only here and in *M* IX 355–356, would also appear to be Stoic; see *DL* VII 60.

²⁷ Mansfeld, *Heresiography in Context*, 126.

²⁸ In *PH* II 222, these Pyrrhonian *logoi* are labelled as *skeptikai ephodoi*, a formula used also in *PH* II 258, on which, see Theodor Ebert, *Dialektiker und frühe Stoiker bei Sextus Empiricus. Untersuchungen zur Entstehung der Aussagenlogik* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1991): 256–257, n. 22 and Fernanda Declava Caizzi, “Sesto e gli scettici,” *Elenchos* 13 (1992): 296, n. 41 (now also online: <http://scholarlysource.daphnet.org/index.php/DDL/article/view/130>). For similar objections, see also *PH* III 158 ff.

²⁹ See, for example, Alcinous, *Didask.* VI 159, 35 H. and Mansfeld, *Heresiography in Context*, 126–127; Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Scepticism*, 128, n. 323, referring back to *PH* III 158–162.

1. Not every species can participate in the whole genus, because otherwise it would exhaust that genus in itself, so to speak, and hence it could not be 'participated' in by any other species.
2. Not every species can participate even in a part of the genus, for at least for two reasons:
 - a. Because if it did, we would not find the whole genus in the species and would have to say, for example, that man is only substance, and not the other parts of the 'animal' genus (for example, animated or endowed with sensation);
 - b. Because not every species participates in the same part of the genus (for this would give rise to the same difficulties encountered under point 1), nor do different species participate in different parts. In the latter case, 'they will either be generically different, which conflicts with the notion of a common genus, or each genus will become infinite, being divided not only into entirely different species but also into entirely different empirical individuals.'³⁰

With no scruples about doxographical homogeneity, and with little concern about switching from one dogmatist family to another in his polemic, Sextus seems to shift from a remote Platonist or Middle Platonist terrain³¹ to one of his favourite targets. From *PH* II 223 (= fr. 718 Hülser), his polemical focus is yet another doctrine typical of the Stoics. The latter identify (*phasin*) 'something' (*ti*) as the supreme genus (see *PH* II 86). Purely by way of hypothesis and for the sake of argumentative completeness (*logou eneken*), Sextus puts forward three alternatives. This supreme category, the *ti*, is:

- (a) all things;
- (b) only some things;
- (c) no things.

Alternative (c) is immediately discarded, since it is tantamount to positing that the supreme genus is nothing at all. Hypothesis (a) also raises some glaring contradictions,³² for if the supreme genus is both corporeal/incorporeal, true/false, white/black, and so on, then the species and individuals 'in which it is found' also

³⁰ *Ibidem*, 126 and n. 53, where Sextus' correct form of argumentation is explicitly praised.

³¹ Although one should not forget the Platonic 'adoption,' in Severus, of the Stoic doctrine of the *ti*; see also David Sedley, *Stoic Metaphysics at Rome*, in *Metaphysics, Soul, and Ethics in Ancient Thought: Themes From the Work of Richard Sorabji*, ed. Ricardo Salles (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005): 117–142.

³² The example used here (§ 224: the animal as 'an animate sensitive substance') seems to be a standard, quasi-'scholastic' definition, possibly a 'common asset' of the Platonic, Peripatetic, and Stoic traditions at the time; see Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Scepticism*, 120.

ought to be such,³³ a conclusion obviously in contrast with reality. Finally, alternative (b) suggests that we can only identify the *ti* with, for example, the body or with rationality, which automatically implies the non-existence of ‘something’ incorporeal or non-rational (conclusions that openly conflict with established Stoic theses).

Faithful to his ‘diabolically ecumenical’ intention to spare no possible commentator who makes a dogmatic claim of possessing the truth, Sextus takes a sort of exegetical turn at the end of *PH* II 225 by focusing on the further dogmatist attempt to describe the genus as something that is all things *in potency* (*dynamei*) but not *in act*: an attempt that has a Peripatetic ‘flavour’ to it and carries markedly polemical implications.³⁴ Once again, this dogmatist suggestion, anchored in the dialectical relation between potency and act, proves fruitless in Sextus’ eyes. He plays with basic concepts that are well established in the philosophies he attacks, since he ‘jumps from the relative to the absolute sense of “not being.”’³⁵ For Sextus, the dogmatist (or possibly Peripatetic) is first of all forced to define what the genus itself is in act; yet as soon as he does so, he finds himself caught in the aporias already examined with regard to the aforementioned alternative (a), and hence is forced to abandon his hypothetical yet fragile way out.

In this progressive accumulation of polemical targets, attacked in relation to the alleged explicative or heuristic strength of the *genos*, there is another dogmatist short-cut which does not escape Sextus’ attention: the thesis that the genus coincides with some things in act and others only in potency. For example, if the *ti* is ‘actually’ (*energeia*) corporeal, it cannot be *dynamei* incorporeal. Sextus’ argument here proves particularly effective, insofar as it denies that the genus encompasses, at least potentially, the different qualities, or even opposite or contradictory qualities (white/black, true/false, etc.), of its species. The argument can apparently be applied to any opponent seeking to uphold this thesis.³⁶

Sextus’ last objection, put forward in *PH* II 227, concerns a well-known example that was no doubt widely used in dogmatist milieus. It revolves around the impossibility of regarding the word ‘man’ as being truly and unqualifiedly common to all the particular entities that ought to fall within it. Let us grant that statements such as ‘Alexander is taking a walk’ and ‘Paris is taking a walk’ are both either true or false, since the proper nouns used are absolutely homonymous. This is not the case when the subject of a statement is a common noun, as this would give a linguistic character to its genus. In his example, Sextus seems to be mocking the discussions and dialectical arguments typical of his opponents’ schools. If we say ‘a man is taking a walk,’ we must grant that this proposition is not always true or al-

³³ On this distinctive Sextan interpretation of the relationship between genera/species and individuals and for some parallels in Plotinus, see again *ibidem*, 127, n. 55.

³⁴ See Long, “Sextus Empiricus on the Criterion of Truth,” 48, n. 25.

³⁵ Mansfeld, *Heresiography in Context*, 129.

³⁶ As is later the case with Porphyry; see *Isag.* 10. 22–11–6.

ways false, but rather true in the case of Theon, who is indeed taking a walk, and false in the case of Dion, who is seated.

In this case too, then, Sextus' polemic combines notions more specifically related to the field of logic with what characterises the linguistic expressions exploited by the various dogmatist schools. The latter—judging at least from Sextus' cumulative and far from neutral reconstruction—all share an obstinate desire to assign our assertions an ontologically cogent value on the semantic level.

5 Common Accidents or Private Properties?

The set of criticisms advanced against the background of this complex logical, linguistic, and conceptual network culminates in *PH* II 228 with an attempt to disprove the notion of common accidents. Moving directly on from the objections examined in the previous sections, Sextus extends his criticism to those qualifications that seem to be transversally 'promiscuous,' which is to say common to several entities, when in fact in each case they turn out to apply only to one subject (the adjective used here, *idion*, may be an allusion to Stoic doctrine)—or, to be more precise, to a particular condition or situation in which the entity in question finds itself, as though these qualifications were an integral part of a sort of metaphysical *principium individuationis*.³⁷ The examples of *symbebekota* chosen by Sextus (sight and breathing) show that the apparently common predicability with respect to Dion or Theon, for instance, no longer applies the moment one of the two subjects radically changes his status. Sight and breathing 'perish,' so to speak, with the death of the subject in relation to whom they were enunciated; nor is it reasonable to suppose that they endure as self-subsistent entities.

6 Beyond Theory, but Towards Life ...

Retracing the steps of Sextus' attack on the various notions examined in certain sections of the second book of the *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*—often schematic or even inadequate steps, at times compelling or cogent ones—has proven to be a rather useful exercise in two respects. On the one hand, the analysis of Sextus carried out in these pages and the sharp *pars destruens* they deliver have enabled us—with obvious benefits on the doxographical level—to highlight some of the argumentative tools, or at any rate some of the main points of reference, in the reasoning developed by individ-

³⁷ The way in which Sextus here examines and solves the problem seems to justify the conclusion that 'the present section is very Leibnizian,' see Mates, *The Sceptic Way*, 286. The difficult question of a reliable *principium individuationis* was at any rate also a crucial topic for ancient medicine; see therefore Riccardo Chiaradonna, "Universals in Ancient Medicine," in *Universals in Ancient Philosophy*, eds. Riccardo Chiaradonna and Gabriele Galluzzo (Pisa: Edizioni della Normale, 2013): 381–423.

ual dogmatist currents. Each of these currents sought to consolidate its solid knowledge, its established *episteme*, as the unquestionable province of truth. On the other hand, behind Sextus' persistent arguments it has been possible to grasp a fully and distinctly Pyrrhonian *pars construens*: the progressive demolition of the cornerstones of the logical structure of dogmatism enables the true sceptic to fully exercise his most genuine *dynamis*. In *PH I 8*, this is praised as a crucial sceptical

ability to set out oppositions among things which appear and are thought of in any way at all, an ability by which, because of the equipollence in the opposed objects and accounts, we come first to suspension of judgement and afterwards to tranquillity.³⁸

This intellectual effort does away with all truth claims and, ultimately, probably rejects even the alleged primacy of the *bios theoretikos*.³⁹ In his critical enquiry, the Pyrrhonian philosopher does not investigate conflicting dogmatist theses on the level of the strict rules of Aristotelian logic, i. e., in the light of the alleged mutually exclusive contradictory status between what is absolutely true and what is absolutely false.⁴⁰ Rather, he bases the assessment of these theses on their credibility, which is psychologically experienced as being equipollent and hence capable of leading to a morally fruitful suspension of judgement.⁴¹ With this comes something capable of providing guidance in the complexity of everyday life, namely the acceptance of a series of apparent values and phenomena that prove pragmatically effective insofar as they are governed by the non-dogmatic four-fold rule for directing one's mind. Sextus sums it up as follows (*PH I 23*):

Thus, attending to what is apparent, we live in accordance with everyday observances, without holding opinions—for we are not able to be utterly inactive. These everyday observances seem to be fourfold, and to consist in guidance by nature, necessitation by feelings, handing down of laws and customs, and teaching of kinds of expertise.⁴²

In other words, if it is true that we can do without the truth, it will be useful to gaze at reality with different eyes, with a less presumptuously definitive or absolute per-

38 Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Scepticism*, 4.

39 For more details, see Emidio Spinelli, "Beyond the Theoretikos Bios: Philosophy and Praxis in Sextus Empiricus," in *Theoria, Praxis, and the Contemplative Life after Plato and Aristotle*, eds. Thomas Bénatouïl and Mauro Bonazzi (Leiden: Brill, 2012): 101–117.

40 In this case too, let me refer back to Emidio Spinelli, "Sextus Empiricus et l'ombre longue d'Aristote," *Philosophie Antique* 12 (2012): 275–277.

41 I focus on some crucial aspects related to the sceptical notion of *epoche* in Emidio Spinelli, "Sesto Empirico: iceberg scettico della nozione di ἐποχή," *Archivio di Filosofia* 83 (2015): 193–207. On the notion of equipollence, see also Diego Machuca, "Argumentative Persuasiveness in Ancient Pyrrhonism," *Méthexis* 22 (2009): 101–126 and Svavar H. Svavarsson, "Sextus Empiricus on Persuasiveness and Equipollence," in *Strategies of Argument. Essays in Ancient Ethics, Epistemology, and Logic*, ed. Mi-Kyoung Lee (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014): 356–373.

42 Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Scepticism*, 9.

spective. We can then shape our being in the world in the light of different criteria, criteria that may be weaker and less appealing perhaps, but are no less fruitful: *primum vivere, deinde philosophari* [...].⁴³

⁴³ In conclusion, let me warmly thank Riccardo Chiaradonna and Francesco Verde, who offered useful comments on a first draft of this paper.

