

MURDER OR NATURAL CAUSES? THE DEMISE OF PLATO'S ACADEMY³⁴¹

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Introduction.

History, operating imperceptibly, tends to provide us with an overview of the rise and fall of philosophical movements, an overarching perspective to which we are blinded when studying the key figures within the limits of their time and space. It is fascinating to observe how philosophical doctrines mutate or change course over time, for reasons whose significance for the evolution of the system as a whole become apparent only when that evolution has ended, but which go unnoticed in the heat and clamour of the dialectical battles that shaped it.

The moderate scepticism propounded by Arcesilaus³⁴² and Carneades marked the heyday of the Academy; under their followers, the philosophical stance of the Academy shifted towards a striking dogmatism which eventually prompted its downfall. Little by little, scepticism began to fade, giving way first to a semi-dogmatic outlook and later to the most unyielding dogmatism. This shift in position was the reason for the demise, first of Academic scepticism – which was later to be restored with certain

³⁴¹This paper forms part of the Research Project I + D + I FFI2012-32989 on skepticism, funded by the Ministry of Economy and Competitiveness.

³⁴² Arcesilaus is the key figure in the academic skepticism, made an innovative reading of Plato's dialogues, and where others saw a positive and systematic doctrine, the dialectical method looked a skeptical argument (to the impossibilities of clear definitions of concepts), cf. ROMAN, R., "The Skepticism of the New Academy: a Weak Form of Platonism?", *Philosophical Inquiry*, XXV, 3-4, (2003), p. 199-216, especially 205-207, the same argument is found in THORSRUD, H., "Arcesilaus and Carneades" in *The Cambridge Companion to Ancient Scepticism*, Ed Richard Bett, Cambridge University Press, 2010, pp. 58-80, especially 58-59. An interesting discussion of this issue appears in SOTO RIVERA, R., "Plato's dialogues: Middle Academy's Thesaurus", *Philosophia*, 42, (2012), p. 376-380.

distinctive features by Aenesidemus³⁴³, drawing on the more radical, technical tradition of Pyrrho of Elis – and eventually of the Academy itself³⁴⁴.

In his *De Oratore*, Cicero provides a brief, undifferentiated survey of the Academy's leading figures after Carneades. Amongst the immediate successors, he mentions Clitomachus, Aeschines, Charmadas, Metrodorus of Stratonice – all great men, though none achieved the master's greatness³⁴⁵. Others are little more than names, such as Melanthius of Rhodes, Aeschines of Neapolis, or Mentor³⁴⁶. Rather than offering a detailed, individual appreciation of each of Carneades' successors, this paper seeks to advance the hypothesis that the Academy was kept alive by the moderate scepticism of Plato and Carneades, and that an unswerving dogmatism could only lead – as indeed it did – to its demise. Thus, in examining the rise and fall of scepticism in Plato's Academy, one might justifiably speak of murder rather than of natural causes.

Clitomachus, the faithful interpreter of carneades.

Clitomachus of Carthage (187-110 BC) was the best known and most distinguished of Carneades' followers; according to the Index Herculensis³⁴⁷, however, he did not succeed him. Relations between Clitomachus and Carneades were apparently suspended in around 140 BC. While surviving texts give no clear indication of the grounds for their dispute, Clitomachus is thought to have left the Academy to start his own school, dismayed – one might surmise – by the master's tireless vitality and evident longevity (Carneades, after all, lived to the age of 90). Yet it was through the dogged loyalty of this quondam disciple that the doctrines of this most gifted of scholars were saved.

³⁴³ Aenesidemus (around 80-60 b.C.) is a contemporary of Cicero and Philo of Larissa and a fierce critic of pollution which once staid blurred the Platonic Academy. Therefore, rebuilt all the skepticism based on Pyrrho of Elis. From here there was a debate in a double line: accepting as a skeptic Pyrrho when tradition exclusively only recognized ethical value and, secondly to distinguish the differences that, in retrospect could recognize between the academic skepticism and the Pyrrhonian skepticism, that was abderita root.

³⁴⁴ Therefore, it is not surprising that the disciple of Pyrrho Timon of Phlius had a contradictory attitude with Arcesilaus despises one hand in his Satires (The Silloi) or in his Arcesilaus and then praise him because of its proximity with their master Pyrrho of which could have been some elements of his philosophy cf. Eusebius, Praep. Evang. XIV 5; DIELS Poet. 9 B 31 "Plato in front, Pyrrho behind, and Diodorus in the middle" or DL IV 33; DIELS Poet. 9 B 31-32, "I'll swim to Pyrrho and to the tortuous Diodorus".

³⁴⁵ Cf. CICERO, *De Orat.*, I, XI, 45 and Acad., II, XXXI, 98

³⁴⁶ BROCHARD provides a whole catalogue of names (see pp. 188-189) drawn from the Index Herculensis; it is of purely archival value. Cf. *Academicorum Philosophorum Index Herculensis*, Edidit Segofredus Mekler, Berlin MCMLVIII (henceforth Index Herculensis).

³⁴⁷ *Index Herculensis*, col. XXIV, 28; XXV, 1; XXV, 36; XXIX, 39 and XXX, 5.

Diogenes Laertius devotes no more than a paragraph to the biography of Clitomachus (IV, 67). His real name was Hasdrubal, and he was born in Carthage in around 187 BC; on arriving in Athens, he devoted himself to the study of the prevailing trends in philosophy. He is known to have spent four years familiarising himself with the Aristotelian views of the Peripatetics, and the tenets of stoicism which led him to join the Academy. He is known to have learnt at first hand the teachings of Carneades³⁴⁸ and to have been a highly prolific author. Diogenes notes that he composed over 400 books, including some aimed at setting down the doctrine of the master, who himself wrote nothing. According to Sextus³⁴⁹, he was fond of storytelling and of the analytical method, of which he made scrupulous and accurate use thanks to his thorough knowledge of the philosophical systems mentioned earlier. He died in 110 BC, at the age of seventy-five.

Cicero praises Clitomachus' diligence and industry³⁵⁰, and not only appears to be familiar with some of his original works, but even makes first-hand use of part of his treatise on the withholding of assent³⁵¹. Through Cicero, too, we learn that in 146 BC, following the destruction of Carthage, Clitomachus wrote a long treatise intended to comfort his fellow citizens in their loss: the *Consolations*³⁵². Here, recalling Carneades, he set out the arguments through which the wise man would avoid grief if his country were subdued by a foreign power. In the face of tragedy, we should not give way to despair, since this would lead us to an ethics free of both fate and consolation; rather, we should accept what has happened, not with a stoic resignation to the whims of fate but in the sceptical spirit of indifference and ataraxia.

For the historians of philosophy, Clitomachus has always been a valuable ally. He is a key source for our knowledge of Carneades, and it has often been wondered how far his philosophy is a faithful reflection of his master's doctrines. The eventual critical consensus is that he faithfully set down the thoughts of Carneades, interpolating notes

³⁴⁸ Diogenes Laertius notes that he taught philosophy in Carthage, in his native tongue, and later – at the age of forty – became a pupil of Carneades, who instructed him in the Greek language “and himself educated the man carefully” (D.L. IV, 67). This information, also followed by DORANDI, p. 3787, seems more likely than that suggested by BROCHARD, *op. cit.*, p. 186, who – drawing on the *Index Herculaneensis* – suggests that Clitomachus was 25 when he came to Athens; this seems too young, given that he had already taught philosophy in Carthage and written books.

³⁴⁹ SEXTUS, *M.*, IX, 1.

³⁵⁰ CICERO, *Acad.*, II, V, 16 and XXXI, 98; Cicero tells us that Clitomachus was a clever fellow, a brilliant and diligent scholar.

³⁵¹ Cicero states that he wrote four volumes on the withholding of assent (*Acad.*, II, XXXI, 98), adding that what he is about to say is drawn from the first volume.

³⁵² CICERO, *Tuscul. disp.* III, 54.

indicative of his own views that neither modify nor detract from their context. This hypothesis is grounded on two arguments: first, all his writings on the doctrines of Carneades were produced in the master's lifetime, meaning that the texts could be verified against the man; second, a philosopher like Carneades, who himself wrote nothing, would be sure to scrutinise whatever his disciple wrote about him.

Clitomachus' renown³⁵³, then, derives not from the originality of his doctrines, but from his role as a reliable reporter, a trustworthy interpreter of the philosophy of Carneades³⁵⁴. According to Sextus, he joined Charmidas in a lengthy polemic against the Rhetoricians³⁵⁵. Their argument, repeated insistently by Sextus, is that rhetoric is of little use for living, and thus cannot be recognised as an art. Rhetoric is not of use either to its possessors or to the cities, for the laws are what bind cities together, rather than the way they are expressed or artfully interpreted. Rhetoric, indeed, was introduced in opposition to the laws, in order to stretch and twist them in our favour. Hence – asserts Sextus – the Byzantine orator (a model of twisted rhetoric) when asked “How goes the Byzantians' law?” replied “As I choose”³⁵⁶. Rhetoric, then, is seen not just as useless in that it goes against the laws, but as pernicious because of its ability to modify them.

Had the diatribe ended here, it would be hard to salvage anything from rhetoric. However, Sextus adds that there are two forms of rhetoric: the one refined and in use among the wise³⁵⁷ and the other in use among the inferior people. The accusation is not made against the refined kind, but against that of the baser class. For this reason, one cannot be a good orator unless one has made a study of philosophical systems³⁵⁸. A distinction is drawn between the demagogic orators, who do not come forward for the

³⁵³ A selection of Clitomachus' writings is to be found in A. RUSSO, *Scettici antichi, op. cit.*, pp. 390-396.

³⁵⁴ Mario DAL PRA, *op. cit.*, p. 291, notes that the faithful Clitomachus played with respect to Carneades a similar role to that played by Xenophon with his *Memorabilia*, vis-a-vis Socrates. He bases his interpretation on a statement by CICERO in *Acad.*, XXXI, 98, noting that Clitomachus “was a companion of Carneades quite until old age, a clever fellow as being a Carthaginian, and also extremely studious and industrious”.

³⁵⁵ “And Critolaüs and the men of the Academy, including Clitomachus and Charmidas, (both disciples of Carneades) are wont to argue like this...” SEXTUS, *M.*, II, 20-43. Trans. R.G. Bury, Harvard University Press, 1971.

³⁵⁶ SEXTUS, *M.*, II, 38.

³⁵⁷ A highly Aristotelian element is reintroduced into this rhetoric: ethics. The good orator must be ethical. He will merely attempt to render his discourse as beautiful as possible; the bad orator, however, is deceitful, for in rendering his discourse beautiful, he cunningly seeks to modify the law.

³⁵⁸ Cicero accused Charmidas of expressing himself “with much more eloquence on these issues but without making clear their minds. Well this was the inveterate habit of the Academy always oppose all in the discussion” cf. *De orat.*, I, XVIII, 84.

good of the cities, and the statesmen. Philosophical rhetoric bears to common rhetoric the relation which the druggist bears to the physician. Demagogic rhetoric is harmful to individuals and to states, since it weakens the strength of the laws³⁵⁹ that give life to society. When a man that has practised rhetoric uses it against his country and its laws, he becomes an undesirable traitor not because of rhetoric but because of his own wickedness. A very similar example is used by Plato in *Gorgias*³⁶⁰: when a pugilist beats his father he does so not because he is a pugilist but because of his bad morals. Here the same example is extended to rhetoric; Plato, by contrast, makes no attempt to do so when - in the same text - he complains that an assembly would appoint a rhetorician rather than a doctor to the post of doctor, and a rhetorician rather than a member of any other profession for any other post. What Plato does not realise, however, is that in both cases the rhetorician acts immorally in seeking to persuade by deceit; he is therefore not an orator but a deceiver, unless he is a doctor or other professional who seeks to make use of the advantages of rhetoric better to set out his project.

With regard to the suspension of judgement, or *epoché*, Clitomachus took a radical view. According to Diogenes, he wrote four volumes in vehement defence of this stance. Cicero notes that Clitomachus agreed with Carneades' stress on probability, and rightly claimed that Carneades accomplished an almost Herculean labour in ridding our souls of assent, adding, however that this attitude did not extend categorically to all the opinions of daily life³⁶¹. This latter admission signalled a posture clearly different from the radical scepticism of Pyrrho or Arcesilaus himself, focussing as it did on the greater or lesser probability³⁶² of things. Thenceforth, and particularly under Philo, Academic scepticism gradually lost much of its rigour; this led Augustine of Hippo³⁶³ to suggest that the scepticism propounded by the Academy was wholly shaped not by any underlying theoretical outlook but by the need for an effective method by which to

³⁵⁹ A slight echo can be discerned here of PLATO'S *Crito*. In 50 a-e, for example, Sextus argues that "as the soul perishes when the body has perished, so the cities are destroyed when the laws are abolished".

³⁶⁰ PLATO, *Gorgias*, 456d.

³⁶¹ CICERO, *Acad.*, XXXIV, 109, a doctrine of *epoché*, filtered through a probabilistic outlook, would not prevent the taking of routine decisions such as "when to go on a voyage, when to sow, when to marry a wife, when to beget a family"... In such cases, one should do whatever one will; otherwise one will become totally inactive and living will become impossible.

³⁶² This stance with regard to *epoché*, and the acceptance of what was probable, would later lead Sextus (PH., I, 226), to assert that the clearest distinction between the Academics and the genuine scepticism of Pyrrho lay in the acceptance of the probable.

³⁶³ Cf. AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO, *Contra Acad.* III, XVIII, 41.

refute the Stoics. Academic scepticism, according to this view, was thus established purely as a method based – like the Cartesian scepticism of a later period – on doubt about things; not because things actually gave rise to any doubt, but because this was the most efficient way of waging the dialectical war against the Stoics.

On the death of Carneades, in short, Clitomachus faithfully assumed his doctrines, upholding the school of thought and culture begun by the master. This was a rich and plural movement, evolving through its disciples³⁶⁴ along a number of diverging lines. Cicero reports that some of these trends flourished outside the Academy³⁶⁵; a school was set up in Larissa, for example, under Callicles, while Zenodorus of Tyre opened a branch in Alexandria. This branching-out of Carneades' philosophy gave rise to multiple interpretations of the scope and tradition of Plato's Academy. It was in Athens, naturally enough, that these attained their greatest vitality and sophistication. The Academicians, faithful to their traditional philosophical approach – one which to unbending Stoics and Epicureans appeared anomalous – may be seen as the great hermeneuts of the ancient world³⁶⁶.

Metrodorus of stratonice from the garden to scepticism.

Amongst these minor Academic voices, special mention should be made of the “quasi-divergent” Metrodorus of Stratonice. Although little is known of Metrodorus' life, he appears to have espoused the Epicurean cause at an early stage, but later left the Garden to enter the Academy³⁶⁷. Philosophical defections of this kind were uncommon; indeed, when asked why pupils from other schools defected to Epicureanism, but converts were never made from the Epicureans, Arcesilaus' ironic, cruel or sarcastic reply was: “Because when one is man, one may become a eunuch; but if you are a eunuch, you cannot become a man”³⁶⁸. Cicero suggests that Metrodorus knew

³⁶⁴ Carlos Levy warns that it is very difficult to know when an institution begins its process of decline, and philosophical institutions are no exception to this rule, but in the case of the Academy can say that Carneades represented the culmination of academic philosophy and from here there were two sequels to the academy in opposite directions: the academy of Aenesidemus and the Middle Academy, cf. LEVY, C. "The skeptical Academy: decline and afterlife" in *The Cambridge Companion to Ancient Scepticism*, Ed Richard Bett Cambridge University Press 2010, pp. 81-104.

³⁶⁵ Cf. CICERO, *Acad.*, II, VI, 16; see also Index Herculaneensis XXII, 8, XXXIII, 8 and XXXV, 36.

³⁶⁶ Sextus Empiricus dismissed the members of the Academy as being no more than a chorus of mixed voices (see *M.*, IX, 1).

³⁶⁷ Cf. CICERO, *De orat.*, I, II, 45.

³⁶⁸ D.L., IV, 43.

Carneades well³⁶⁹, but that his interpretation of the master's views³⁷⁰ differed from that of Clitomachus, particularly with regard to an issue that was to prove especially sensitive for the future of the school³⁷¹. For Clitomachus, the suspension of judgement was something final; the wise man could hold no opinion, because the correct procedure was to abstain from all judgement. But Metrodorus – perhaps more in line with what we believe to be Carneades' view – argued that the suspension of judgement is valid only for those matters unrelated to practical concerns³⁷². For Metrodorus, in other words, assent was feasible, as long as it was not given with absolute certainty.

An interesting feature of this steadfast loyalty to Carneades' doctrine – that a wise man might hold opinions, provided they were not delivered with absolute certainty – is that, as Cicero also notes³⁷³, when Philo separated from his master Clitomachus, he chose to espouse the interpretations of Metrodorus. Brochard suggests that these interpretations gave rise to a traditional claim later to be taken up by Augustine of Hippo: that the Academicians, in their dialectical battle against the Stoics, included in their doctrine a certain veiled, esoteric dogmatism. Augustine's claim³⁷⁴ has been widely debated, and the consensus view is that this notion was a groundless personal conjecture, based on a faulty reading of some confused writings by Cicero. The overarching idea behind Augustine's critique of scepticism is that doubt can be equated with *desperatio veri*; the very notion of the suspension of judgement marks a soul impoverished and crushed by the negative burden of error. Put simply, doubt is a sin against God, against philosophy and knowledge, and against the teleological reasoning that seeks to evoke goodness in man. Doubt can only be seen as a transitory state in the passage of man's conscience from the unconscious error of sin to the certainty of true faith³⁷⁵.

³⁶⁹ CICERO, *Acad.*, II, VI, 16 and *De Orat.* I, XI, 45. when naming Carneades' disciples, Cicero makes explicit mention of Metrodorus as one who was familiar with the master's doctrines.

³⁷⁰ Cf. BROCHARD, V., *op. cit.*, p. 188.

³⁷¹ As noted earlier, Clitomachus was the source of the trend which later led Augustine of Hippo to claim that the scepticism of the Academy, rather than being ontological or – as we might now see it –gnoseological, was purely methodological: i.e. both doubt and the suspension of judgement were used purely as dialectical weapons against the Stoics.

³⁷² In my paper "El escepticismo antiguo: Pirrón de Elis y la indiferencia como terapia de la filosofía", *Daimon. Revista de Filosofía*, 36, 2005, pp. 27-43, I argue that this was also the view of Pyrrho of Elis. One may be indifferent to all things, except one's family and one's city (country). Although, he could not say that this attitude is true or necessary.

³⁷³ CICERO, *Acad.*, II, XXIV, 78.

³⁷⁴ AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO, *Contra Acad.*, III, VI, 37.

³⁷⁵ According to Augustine, scepticism belongs to the darkness of history; it is an error that must be overcome by any mind in search of the truth (see e.g. *Contra Acad.*, III, 8, 17).

As noted at the outset, Metrodorus is followed in the *Index Herculaneensis* by a list of names of Carneades' successors. Nothing is known of the doctrines they propounded, but it is generally assumed that their academic teachings embodied an eclectic blend of Aristotle, Zeno and the Academy³⁷⁶.

Philo of Larissa: The revival of sceptical Platonism.

In the race to further the philosophical syncretism that had started in the Academy under Carneades, the baton next passed to one of the best-known successors of his follower Clitomachus. Stobaeus tells us that Philo was born in Larissa in around 150 BC³⁷⁷, and died at the age of about 67 in around 83 BC. He succeeded Clitomachus as scholarch at the age of 38. Although scholars cannot agree on the precise date, perhaps the most accurate landmark for dating purposes is Mithridates' war against the Romans (88-85 BC). Cicero reports³⁷⁸ that when the war broke out, Philo left Athens with a number of leading citizens, and took refuge in Rome; he also notes that in 84 BC Philo had just published two books. Finally, Cicero mentions that on settling in Athens in 79 BC³⁷⁹, he took lessons under Antiochus – the fact that he makes no reference to Philo in this context suggests that he must have died some years before, since Antiochus was now scholarch³⁸⁰.

Philo's links with Carneades can be traced through Callicles, a direct follower of the master; although Philo later studied under Clitomachus, his outlook is closer to the probabilism of Carneades than the radical scepticism of Clitomachus. Plutarch speaks of Philo's fame in Rome, and Cicero counts himself one of Philo's followers. Unsurprisingly – given the profusion of schools operating at the time, according to the *Index*³⁸¹ - by the age of 38 Philo had studied under the Stoic Apollodorus, focussing more on the gnoseological issue of certainty than on the practical question of living.

³⁷⁶ Cf. D.L., IV, 67, which states that Clitomachus was familiar with several philosophical systems. It was arguably at this point that the Academy started out on the slow, inexorable march towards the unashamedly stoic dogmatism espoused by Antiochus.

³⁷⁷ The dates are uncertain: according to the *Index Herculaneensis*, (Col. XXXIII), he was 38 years old when he succeeded Clitomachus; BROCHARD, *op. cit.*, p. 189 places his birth in 148-150 BC, while DAL PRA, *op. cit.*, p. 301 puts it back to 160 BC, and GOEDECKEMEYER, *op.cit.* p. 103, suggests 159-160 BC; it all depends on the date of succession and that of Clitomachus' birth, neither of which will ever be known.

³⁷⁸ CICERO, *Brut.*, LXXXIX, 306.

³⁷⁹ *Ibid.* 315.

³⁸⁰ Antonio RUSSO, *Scettici Antichi*, p. 399, shares Mekler's view in *Index Herculaneensis*, XXXIII, giving Philo's dates as 160-79/8 (see note 1 on p. 399, which examines briefly all the possible dates).

³⁸¹ *Index Herculaneensis*. Col. XXXIII.

Unlike Clitomachus, and possibly having succeeded him as scholarch, Philo abandoned the orthodox position but also denied that there were two Academies. This denial is particularly significant in that, depending on how we interpret it, Philo must be seen either as a dogmatist or as a sceptic. Traditionally, the figure of Plato himself has always been left out of any discussion of the sceptical bias characteristic of the Academy under Arcesilaus and Carneades. If Plato the master had nothing to do with the scepticism and betrayal of his philosophy subsequently practised by his followers, then clearly Philo – in denying the existence of two Academies – must have sought to defend and restore the authentic Platonic Academy of old. Yet, as we have shown³⁸², Plato cannot be wholly excluded from the subsequent evolution of the Academy; indeed, the seeds of the scepticism propounded by Arcesilaus and Carneades are to be found in Plato's own philosophy³⁸³, or more precisely in part of his open, infinitistic philosophy. That being so, Philo was not in fact returning to the dogmatism of Plato; rather, he had succeeded in uncovering a strain of Platonic scepticism that guided the philosophy of the Academy.

In Philo's view, then, there had never been more than one Academy, stretching right back to Plato; he therefore denied that there had been any shift from, or metamorphosis of, Plato's philosophy. As a result of this stance – clearly countered by that of his successor Antiochus, who readily recognised two Academies³⁸⁴ – Philo has been seen as espousing a dogmatism that was not to be found in Clitomachus, and that provided the basis for Philo's attempt to revive Platonic thought³⁸⁵. This, I believe, is not the case. This interpretation stems from Saint Augustine's attempt³⁸⁶ to use Philo's denial of any rupture in the Academy – rather than as evidence that scepticism was already present in Plato, and that the Academy was simply the development of one

³⁸² Cf., ROMÁN, R., *El enigma de la Academia de Platón. Escépticos contra dogmáticos en la Grecia Clásica*, Ed. Berenice, Córdoba, 2007.

³⁸³ Cf. Note 2.

³⁸⁴ A full examination of this question is provided in my paper ROMÁN ALCALÁ, R., “La nueva academia: dogmatismo o sképsis”, *Pensamiento*, 51 (1995), pp. 455-465.

³⁸⁵ Claudio MORESCHINI, in his paper “Atteggiamenti scettici ed atteggiamenti dogmatici”, *La Parola del Passato*, 24, (1969), p. 433 argues that the reappraisal of Plato as dogmatist owes more to Philo than to Antiochus, and that Cicero's familiarity with the Platonic dialogues (Phaedrus, Phaedo, Meno, Apology) is proof of a decisive return to the internal Platonism of the old Academy. He concludes his argument by suggesting that Cicero's real master was not Antiochus – through whom Cicero learnt about the dogmatic Plato – but Philo. One page later, however, Moreschini himself advocates a certain unconvincing conciliation of dogmatism and scepticism.

³⁸⁶ AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO, *Contr. Acad.*, III, 18, 41.

aspect of Plato's philosophy – as grounds for dismissing those who, in his view, modified Plato's teaching by infusing it with scepticism³⁸⁷.

Philo sought to narrow the differences and the distance between the master and the later scepticism of Arcesilaus and Carneades, advocating a gradual return to core Platonism, yet without abandoning Academic scepticism. For Philo, the Academy had by no means strayed from the stance defended by Plato. Arcesilaus and Carneades had simply developed those areas of Plato's philosophy that lay closer to scepticism. Philo thus appears to have found the underlying link that bound the two tendencies: the admission that it was impossible either to know or to attain the truth, which for most of us would ever remain deeply buried.

The problem, therefore, was gnoseological rather than ontological; things appear to us in one way or another, but the true nature of things cannot be known through a conceptual, conclusive image. In other words, Philo argued that the problem lay in the realm of knowledge, not in the ontological or real world. Yet he adduced no real grounds for this belief; in practice, he accepted the probabilistic position adopted by Carneades, and his appeal to Plato can be seen as suggesting that while true knowledge can be attained in theory, in practice, we can only deal in possible and probable truths³⁸⁸. If Philo sought a return to Plato, it would be useful to see how he chose to interpret Plato's writings. For Philo, they contained a philosophy that evaded categorical assertions, seeking instead to clarify the pros and cons of all the philosophical issues discussed. Philo's Plato was certainly closer to the problematic, sceptical Plato than to the dogmatic Plato with whom we are more familiar³⁸⁹.

³⁸⁷ Philo was a leading philosopher of his time. Plutarch gives us an idea of his skills and his personality, which captivated many contemporary Romans. Cicero himself admits to a certain fascination, referring to Philo as "an excellent man" (*magnus vir*) and praising his wisdom. Stobaeus admires his talents, and Augustine of Hippo his prudence. See CICERO, *Acad.* I, IV, 13; STOBÆUS, *Ecl.* II, 40 and AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO, previous note. Such was his fame and influence that even Sextus Empiricus, in distinguishing Pyrrho's scepticism from the philosophy of the Academy (*Hypotyposes*, book 1), refers to Philo and Charmides as cofounders of a new, fourth Academy. See SEXTUS, PH., I, 220.

³⁸⁸ This is the thrust of the interpretation offered by A. LONG, *Hellenistic Philosophy*, University of California press, 1986, p. 222. SCHMITT, Ch., *Cicero Scepticus: A study of the influence of the Academia in the Renaissance*, The Hague, 1972, p. 160, also favours this Platonic tradition, though some of his claims carry sceptical echoes.

³⁸⁹ Diogenes Laertius III, 51, noted the controversy raging between those who claimed that Plato was a dogmatist (i.e. dogmatised) and those who denied that claim, adding that this division of opinion had itself been the object of much debate. For an analysis of the texts and accounts of the sceptical interpretation of Plato, see BONAZZI, M., *Accademici e Platonici. Il dibattito antico sullo scetticismo di Platone*, Milano, 2003, and by the same author "I Pirroniani, l'Accademia e l'interpretazione scettica di Platone", in *Platone e la tradizione platonica*, A cura di Mauro BONAZZI e Franco TRABATTONI, Milano, 2003, pp. 181-219. Cf. Along the same lines, see also the classics DAL PRA, *op. cit.* I, p. 306 and BROCHARD, 205 *et seq.*

Curiously enough, this appeal to Plato has always been seen – thanks largely to Saint Augustine – as proof that Philo professed a kind of dogmatism, and sought to trace the doctrine of the new Academy back to the master³⁹⁰. According to that view, this led to the shaping of a new dogmatic tendency that would eventually culminate in a form of stoicism. In my view, however, Philo was simply returning to Plato's sceptical maxim that things cannot be known by the senses; the stoic criterion is therefore ineffective and wholly irrelevant. It is thus wrong to argue, as Hermann does³⁹¹, that for Philo things can be known by the intuition of pure reason; this is an error prompted by a failure to understand the sceptical tradition and the role played in it by Plato himself.

It seems paradoxical that Philo should claim that truth can be known, yet at the same time deny the possibility of knowledge according to the stoic or indeed any other conception of it. Philo's reformist stance addresses a much larger underlying issue, which has proved virtually insoluble throughout the history of philosophy: the difference between truth and certainty. Cicero himself remarks that, for Philo, nothing can be known with certainty; things exist, they are known as such, but we can never be sure that we know them as they appear to be. To counter the Stoics' stubborn view of "complete representation", Cicero argued for *probabilem visionem*, the probable perception that translates the Greek *pithanon* of Carneades; Philo's probability³⁹² is a more quantitative translation: a Carneadian "persuasive" perception may appear more true or false than others. But Philo is unaware of the originality of this proposition, which he includes under the traditional Academic notion of persuasiveness or verosimilitude which was to be turned to such good account in rhetoric.

Philo simply notes that when the Academicians claim that false representations exist – thus implicitly admitting the existence of true representations – they do so not on the basis of any criterion by which the truth or falsehood of a perception may be verified, but rather on the basis that what appears admits a degree of hypothetical, probable or persuasive perception³⁹³. Philo is returning to the Platonic position of the

³⁹⁰ This argument, voiced by BROCHARD, *op. cit.*, p. 216, is very weak, and depends for its support on Cicero's assumption regarding mysterious, esoteric teachings by the Academicians, and specifically by Arcesilaus; this assumption is examined and rejected here in the section dealing with that author.

³⁹¹ *Ibid.*

³⁹² It should be recalled that Cicero himself, after setting out the sceptical theories propounded by Carneades and Clitomachus, notes that "these same doctrines that I am defending were studied [by Antiochus] in the school of Philo", *Acad.*, II, XXII, 69. BROCHARD, *op. cit.*, p. 197 claims to be sure that Cicero was repeating Philo's words.

³⁹³ As a follower of Popper might put it, the falsifiability of a theory is conclusive, whereas verification leaves the truth open. In other words, truth is probable, while falsity is certain. Sextus made this claim

Sophist, in which accepting appearance (δοκέω μοί) and presenting appearance (ἐγώ δοκέω) are dialectically necessary in order for the discourse to continue – albeit in an uncertain, vacillating manner – in its firm pursuit of the truth. Philo thus stakes his claim as a Platonist, and narrows the distance between the old Academy of Plato and the intermediate Academy of Arcesilaus and Carneades. This evolution of his point of view³⁹⁴ is what enraged Antiochus, as we shall see, and led him to criticise Philo and the scepticism of the Academy.

Philo's follower, Antiochus of Ascalon, was outraged by these theories, having read in Philo's works that his master claimed to be a faithful follower of Plato, that he denied the existence of two Academies and that he discerned a semi-dogmatic line running through the whole of Plato's philosophy. How could a sceptic like Philo accept the possibility of a Platonic certain and objective truth? What caused this change of view in Philo's books with respect to the opinions he had championed when explaining Carneades' philosophy? Since Antiochus was not surprised by Philo's teachings, but by what he read in Philo's books, we must assume that it was only after hearing his teachings that Antiochus resolved to reply to Philo's writings. This could be either because the books set out a new position with regard to Philo's earlier doctrines, or because Antiochus himself (the treacherous Antiochus) had opted to defect to Stoicism, and from that vantage point condemn the founding principles of scepticism. Whatever the case, after Philo the Academy went into decline. Philo, the last Academician, finally embraced the most sceptical aspects of Plato's teachings; in doing so, he brought unity to the Academy, but prompted the fierce criticism which eventually ridded it of its scepticism³⁹⁵.

with reference to Philo, in the case of logic and hypothetical syllogisms, observing: "Indeed, Philo observes that a sound conditional is one which does not begin with a true antecedent and end with a false consequent", Sextus, PH. II, 110. In *Against Mathematicians* he expanded this idea, arguing that there are three ways in which a conditional may be true, and one in which it may be false it is true when the antecedent is true and the consequent true, when the antecedent is false and the consequent true, and when the antecedent is false and the consequent false; a conditional is false only when the antecedent is true and the consequent false, cf. *M.*, VII, 112-114.

³⁹⁴ This evolution in Philo's views was so far-reaching that for many authors it was seen as marking the birth of a new stage in the Academic tradition, and even the start of a new "Fourth Academy". See EUSEBIO DE CESÁREA, *Praep. Evang.*, XIV, 4, 16 and SEXTUS, *P.H.*, I, 220, who refers not only to the Fourth Academy under Philo but also to the Fifth, under Antiochus.

³⁹⁵ In general terms, the Hellenistic development of the Platonic Academy from Arcesilaus to Philo of Larissa contributed to a powerful aporetic image of Plato, cf. TARRANT, H., *Scepticism or Platonism? The Philosophy of the Fourth Academy*, Cambridge, 1985, p. 77 and IOPPOLO, A.M., "Sesto Empirico e la Accademia scettica", *Elenchos*, 13, (1992), pp. 190-191.

It should, however, be stressed that – in Antiochus' view – Philo's position was scarcely tenable, in that it involved an uncomfortable compromise between a theoretical scepticism and certain concessions to dogmatism in the ethical or pragmatic realm. On one hand, Philo denied the possibility of certain knowledge by denying the existence of any mark distinguishing the true from the false; on the other hand, he claimed that it was tentatively possible to arrive at a weak moral certainty sufficient as a criterion for guiding our behaviour. This is the issue which Antiochus sought to resolve by a doctrine which dealt the final death-blow to Academic scepticism.

Antiochus: The sudden demise of the academy.

Although Antiochus (130/20-68 BC)³⁹⁶ saw himself as an Academician, his views marked the end of the sceptical outlook espoused by Plato's successors, from Arcesilaus to Philo of Larissa. Antiochus was the renegade: as an enemy of the so-called New Academy, he devoted his life – or so Cicero claims³⁹⁷ – to a forceful condemnation of its whole philosophical stance. It appears to have been during his time in Alexandria, in around 87 BC, that Antiochus read Philo's famous books, which sought to trace an unbroken line of thought from the ancient Platonic Academy to the new Academy under Carneades, a hypothesis which – paradoxically – led Antiochus to claim, for himself and the Stoics, the title of true Academicians, since in his view they were restoring the authority of Plato, the founder.

His book *Sosus* (Philosopher, friend and Stoic³⁹⁸) was an angry reply to his master Philo³⁹⁹. He also wrote a treatise on logic entitled *Kanoniká*⁴⁰⁰, another work dedicated to Balbus, in which he highlighted the substantial agreement between the Stoics and the Aristotelians⁴⁰¹, and finally a book entitled *Perì Theôn*, which he must have produced – according to Plutarch – towards the end of his life⁴⁰², since it mentions the battle of Triganocerta (69 BC); Cicero tells us that Antiochus died shortly

³⁹⁶ There is some controversy regarding his date of birth, cf. the extensive discussion in RUSSO, A., *Scettici antichi*, p. 411, note 1.

³⁹⁷ Cf. CICERO, *Acad.*, II, IV, 12.

³⁹⁸ He is likely to have been referring to Sosus of Ascalon, who figures after Antiochus in the list of Ascalonite philosophers, compiled by Stephanus of Byzantium, cf. DI STEFANO, E., "Antioco di Ascalona e la crisi dello scetticismo nel I secolo a. C.", in *Lo Scetticismo Antico, Atti del convegno organizzato dal Centro di Studio del Pensiero Antico del C.N.R. Roma, 5-8 Novembre, vol. I, 1980*, Napoli, 1981, p. 198.

³⁹⁹ Cf. CICERO, *Acad.*, II, IV, 11.

⁴⁰⁰ SEXTUS, *M.*, VII, 201.

⁴⁰¹ CICERO, *De nat. deor.*, I, VII, 16.

⁴⁰² PLUTARCH, *Lucul.*, XXVIII.

afterwards in Syria⁴⁰³. Cicero also notes that he wrote some works in support of Philo, but that these were unoriginal pieces produced in his youth, and that posterity did not see fit to save even their titles⁴⁰⁴. Sextus states that Antiochus brought Stoicism into the Academy, and even accuses him of teaching Stoicism there⁴⁰⁵, as well as of proving – erroneously – that Stoic doctrine was to be found in Plato and Aristotle. Cicero praised his ease of discourse, his brilliant arguments and his rhetorical skill, which heightened his affection and admiration for him⁴⁰⁶.

We must now turn to the question of why, having been such a loyal follower of his master Philo, Antiochus then broke with him, and introduced Stoicism – the enemy – and dogmatism into the sceptical Academy⁴⁰⁷. The major part of his philosophy was undoubtedly directed against the Academicians⁴⁰⁸, but largely against Philo's teachings in support of the sceptical homogenisation of the Platonic Academy. Antiochus was vehement in his condemnation of a doctrine that viewed Plato as explicitly and radically sceptical, and brooked no attempt to dilute his views with the scepticism of Arcesilaus. Di Stefano argues that on first opening Philo's books, Antiochus doubted their authenticity, peppered as they were with notions that were new both for Philo and for the Academy itself⁴⁰⁹.

Antiochus' great tragedy, as I see it, was his inability to rid Plato of a certain strain of scepticism that permeated his work. Through his attempts to expunge the sceptical aspects of Plato on which the sceptical outlook of the Academy had been built, the Academy itself shifted towards a very un-Platonic form of Stoicism. Put starkly, and indeed paradoxically: Plato was a sceptic or a dogmatist, but if we accept only the latter

⁴⁰³ CICERO *Acad.*, II, XIX, 61.

⁴⁰⁴ CICERO, *Acad.*, II, XXII, 69.

⁴⁰⁵ SEXTUS, PH, I, 235. Saint Augustine was not deceived, and though against scepticism, he believed that even the Academicians that secretly taught Platonic dogma were closer to the real spirit of Plato than their enemies the Stoics. In that sense, Antiochus was a traitor who abandoned the Academy to its enemy, Stoicism. AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO, *Contr. Acad.*, III, XVIII, 41.

⁴⁰⁶ Cf. CICERO, *Acad.*, II, 2

⁴⁰⁷ The reader will recall that Moreschini, in my view wrongly, held Philo himself rather than Antiochus responsible for this doctrinal shift in the Academy. See op. cit. pp.432-434

⁴⁰⁸ Cf. CICERO, *Acad.* II, VI, 18, AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO, *Contra Acad.* II, VI, 15.

⁴⁰⁹ Cf. DI STEFANO, op. cit., pp. 198-199, who defends the view that Antiochus, upset by this change of position and this attempt to portray Plato as a true Sceptic, appealed to Heraclitus of Tyre – another of Philo's followers then in Alexandria – who confirmed Philo's views, and agreed that they marked an unheard-of departure for the Academy.

possibility, then Platonic philosophy ceases to offer any room for play, and thus becomes a new Stoicism⁴¹⁰.

Antiochus was not in any sense a true Stoic⁴¹¹, even though he accepted the Stoics' doctrine of kataleptic phantasia (complete, undoubtable representation) and maintained – albeit erroneously – that the major Stoic theories derived from Plato and Aristotle. Though he was a prolific author, his thoughts have come down to us only indirectly, in the writings of Cicero and Sextus Empiricus⁴¹², both of whom appear to focus on his late work. Nothing is known of his early writings, in which he remained loyal to the teachings of his master Philo.

Most scholars believe that Antiochus gave way to the attacking arguments of the enemy; yet in my view there were internal reasons (it is always the closest traitor that kills) for this shift of the Academy's philosophy towards a sterile Stoic dogmatism. Antiochus' entire critique of Academic scepticism focused on the question of probabilism. That it was indeed a scrupulous, analytical, wide-ranging critique of probabilism is hardly surprising; only someone who had himself propounded that doctrine, and had so successfully rehearsed its arguments, could now undertake its vehement, rigorous demolition⁴¹³. It was this that marked the schism between the Old and new Academies⁴¹⁴.

This was clearly a watershed in the evolution of academic scepticism. My own view is that, at this point, the Academy was forced to side with either a sceptical or a dogmatic interpretation of Plato. Under Antiochus, the latter option was adopted, possibly leading Aenesidemus to claim another, non-Platonic – i.e. Pyrrhonic – source

⁴¹⁰ The same idea is successfully canvassed by SEXTUS EMPIRICUS himself (see *PH*, I, 221-224), who is able to argue convincingly only that there is a certain scepticism in Plato, although this does not mean that he was a Sceptic, since even when expounding some things in a sceptical manner, he was not sceptical in a radical sense.

⁴¹¹ Cf., for example, LUCK, G., *Der Akademiker Antiochos*, Noctes Romanae 7, Bern und Stuttgart, 1953, pp. 13-18, DAL PRA, *op. cit.*, I, 323-346, note 9, BROCHARD, V., *op. cit.*, pp. 217-220, and RUSSO, A., *op. cit.*, p. 412, note 5.

⁴¹² See the selection of texts in RUSSO, pp. 414-421. Perhaps the most interesting are the extracts from Sextus, M., VII, 162 and 201-202 on the criterion of truth bound up with sensation.

⁴¹³ This is the view expressed by DAL PRA, *op. cit.*, pp. 326-327.

⁴¹⁴ GLUCKER, J., *Op. Cit.*, p. 82, argues that Antiochus sought to be viewed as the authentic voice of the Academic tradition; as the heir to an unbroken tradition stretching right back to Plato, united in the conviction that there is in nature some criterion of truth, although this was neither the *phantasia kataleptiké* of the Stoics nor indeed any other that we could name; it was in short a sceptical position in practice but not in theory. SEDLEY, D., "The End of the Academy", *Phronesis*, 1981 (26), pp. 67-75, particularly, p. 73, rejects this hypothesis in favour of a much more plausible rupturist theory: Antiochus' display of outrage was disingenuous, and, using a rather twisted interpretation of the Timaeus, sanctioned philosophical speculation while maintaining the principle of *akatalepsia*, thus assimilating the epistemology of the Timaeus and the *katálepsis* of the Stoics.

for scepticism. Thenceforth, true scepticism was recognisable only in the line that started with Pyrrho and ended with Sextus. Academic scepticism, by contrast, came to be defined as a less radical, more pragmatic position, undoubtedly tainted by dogmatism.

Sextus himself introduces the discussion regarding Plato's affinity with scepticism, admitting that this question has prompted wide-ranging debate amongst philosophers. For some, Plato was a dogmatist, for others an aporetic, and for still others his philosophy was partly aporetic and partly dogmatic. Sextus does not take issue with the first group or the last: clearly, he comments, "it would be superfluous here to say anything about those who say that Plato is dogmatic or partly dogmatic, for they themselves agree on his difference from us"⁴¹⁵: i.e. from the scepticism which Sextus defends. His criticism is aimed at the followers of Menodotus and Aenesidemus, who regard Plato as an unmitigated Sceptic. This is a somewhat confusing text⁴¹⁶, in that we are unsure whether Aenesidemus and Menodotus defend Sextus' views or the radical scepticism of Plato.

I tend to favour the former hypothesis, since otherwise it is difficult to see why, in seeking to restore and revive scepticism, Aenesidemus should appeal to Pyrrho – a well-known Ethicist (at least in Cicero's view) – as a grounding force for scepticism. The revival of scepticism became necessary after Antiochus' flirtation with stoicism. The Academy lost its sceptical outlook, and the only hitherto-viable form of scepticism disappeared. It would seem plausible to assume that Aenesidemus' attempt to restore scepticism⁴¹⁷ was prompted by Antiochus' vehement condemnation of Academic scepticism. Aenesidemus made use of the Academy's increasingly dogmatic stance to seek a different source for scepticism. Given the chance to enquire into the

⁴¹⁵ SEXTUS., PH I, 222, see 221-225. Anna Maria IOPPOLO draws attention to a certain degree of confusion. In a paper on Sextus and the sceptical Academy, she argues that Sextus' views with regard to Aenesidemus are by no means clear: did Aenesidemus actually defend the view of Plato as a sceptic, or was Sextus using Aenesidemus' theory as a means of countering that view? See Ioppolo, "Sesto Empirico e l'Accademia scettica", *Elenchos*, 13 (1992), p. 191. See also DECLEVA CAZZI, F., "Aenesidemus and the Academy", *Classical Quarterly*, XLII (1992), pp. 176-189, on the subject of Aenesidemus' Academic affiliations.

⁴¹⁶ The statement by SEXTUS, PH I, 222 may be read in two different ways: *katà <tôn> o katà <toùs>*, *perì Mēnōdoton kai Ainēsīdēmo*, can either mean "in opposition to the view of Menodotus and Aenesidemus" or "taking into account the view of Menodotus and Aenesidemus". A useful examination of these possibilities is provided in BONAZZI, M., op. cit., p. 183-185, see *supra*, note 279.

⁴¹⁷ In my paper "Enesidemo: la recuperación de la tradición escéptica griega", *Pensamiento*, 52, (1996), pp. 383-402, I note that the term "Pyrrhonists" was used before Aenesidemus to refer to those who followed the ethical philosophy of Pyrrho, see p. 387, notes 9, 11 and 12.

philosophical precedents⁴¹⁸ for the radical sceptic position, he found that Pyrrho embodied better than anyone else – according to Sextus – the principles of scepticism.

Antiochus was inclined to favour the Academy's most dogmatic doctrines, forsaking its more sceptical teachings. His interpretation of the Academy's history differed markedly from that defended by Philo, and eventually eliminated the strong sceptical bias that had characterised Plato's successors. He maintained from the outset a finitist dialectic with Plato, propounding a perfect, finite, reliable and determinate system which had been passed on to the Peripatetics and the Academicians, who differed from each other – in his opinion – mainly in name, agreeing on a large number of philosophical positions.

Arcesilaus, in his view, was the scholar responsible for applying to Plato's doctrines a method of free interpretation that, drawing on Socrates' declaration of ignorance, had turned Plato's philosophy into something diffuse and uncertain. For Antiochus, there was a clear difference between the old and new Academies: the new had distanced itself from the old, and it was his mission to restore the original tradition. Neither Socrates nor Plato could be counted amongst the doubters, for the disciple had left a perfect, closed system, while the master's apparent modesty was merely a strategy intended to surprise his adversary through the use of pure irony.

The tense balance between the old and the new Academies, between the so-called dogmatic positions of Plato and the sceptical views of Arcesilaus and Carneades, was disrupted by Philo's attempt to weave them into a single whole; it was that disruption that prompted Antiochus' shift towards philosophical positions closer to those of Plato at his most dogmatic and least realistic: i.e. towards stoicism. As a result, while this exaggeration of Plato's scepticism may have damaged the master's thinking, the content and methods remained intact. Greater damage, however, was produced by Antiochus' leaning towards stoic doctrines, which not only represented a betrayal of Socratic-Platonic teachings, but even brought them to the verge of disappearance and oblivion. Thereafter, the Academy never regained its importance, and never boasted a major scholar.

⁴¹⁸ Indeed, the doxographical tradition with regard to scepticism has seen Pyrrho as the last link in a chain of thought stretching back to the Eleatics, cf. CALVO, T., "El pirronismo y la hermenéutica escéptica del pensamiento anterior a Pirrón", in *Mirar con cuidado, filosofía y escepticismo*, Ed. Marrades Millet y Sánchez Durá, Valencia, 1994, pp. 3-19. Calvo defends the idea of a Pyrrho closer to a certain persistent metaphysical dogmatism than to the scepticism ascribed to him by tradition.

Curiously enough, though the Academy was abandoned, scepticism survived⁴¹⁹; Platonism was weakened by the shift towards stoicism, and was revived only in the form of Neoplatonism, whose consequences are well known. After Philo, the Academy had no further representatives in Athens, although minor branches survived in Rome and Alexandria⁴²⁰. Antiochus, however, flourished in Rome, and with him the stoic doctrines of Varro, Lucullus, Brutus, Aristo, Dion and Arius Didymus. Stoicism rose up victorious on the ruins of the Academy. The betrayal was consummated in the search for a compromise position that would reconcile Zeno with Plato; the Academy was fully united with the Porch. Yet like major banking deals, this was not a merger but a takeover; one of the schools lost its own personality and assumed that of its rival. In the end, the true Platonic tradition – at once idealistic, dialectic and sceptical – was lost.

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⁴¹⁹ In fact the debate between Platonic and skeptics did not disappear with the end of the Academy, but moved out of the institution, as the debate continued among the various Platonic and new Pyrrhonian skepticism, introduced by Aenesidemus in the first century after Christ, as Diogenes Laertius himself justified in saying that there was a great division of opinion between those who said that Plato was skeptical and refused it, Cf DL III, 51; Mauro BONAZZI studies with accurate opinion this theme in "A Pyrrhonian Plato? Again on Sextus on Aenesidemus on Plato ", in *New Essays on Ancient Pyrrhonism*, ed. Diego E. Machuca, Brill, Leiden, Boston, 2011, p. 11-26.

⁴²⁰ Cf. BROCHARD, V., *op. cit.*, p. 221-225.

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