Plato's Socrates, Sophistic Antithesis and Scepticism

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ABSTRACT

In some Platonic dialogues Socrates apparently shares significant characteristics with contemporary sophists, especially a technique of antithetical argumentation. Since sophists anticipated later Academic philosophers in arguing antithetically and a resultant form of scepticism, then, with Socrates' repeated claims to ignorance, Plato's depiction of him arguing antithetically suggests later Academics could plausibly appeal to Plato for evidence that Socrates and he were sceptics, as it seems they actually did.

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Later members of Plato's school, those we collectively call Academic sceptics, claimed consistency with both Socrates and Plato.[1] Several scholars in recent years have traced and interpreted the limited evidence for this ancient sceptic interpretation of Plato, and evaluated it more or less positively.[2] Moreover some scholars have advanced in their own names sceptic interpretations of both Socrates and Plato.[3] While it seems to me that the truth about Plato overall is more complex (although in a sense consistent with this view),[4] here I want to draw attention to another kind of support for the interpretation of Plato's depiction of Socrates as a sceptic, from the evidence of fifth century BC sophists.

I will argue that Socrates, in some Platonic dialogues concerned with both individual sophists and the nature of knowledge, shares significantly in a range of characteristics belonging (or at least attributed by Plato) to several sophists, including, significantly, a technique of antithetical argumentation.[5] Moreover independent evidence suggests some sophists anticipated the later Academic philosophers not just in arguing antithetically but also a form of scepticism, and that among these sophists antithetical argumentation probably led to their scepticism. Thus, in conjunction with Socrates' repeated claims to ignorance in the dialogues, in this sophistic context Plato's depiction of him arguing antithetically suggests that later Academics could indeed quite plausibly appeal to Platonic dialogues for evidence that Socrates was a sceptic.

I will initially restrict the detailed case to the plausibility of a sceptical interpretation of the Socrates presented by Plato in the *Protagoras, Hippias Minor, Gorgias, Meno, Lysis* and *Theaetetus*, and Plato as the author of these. The justification for focusing on these dialogues is merely that, on the basis of the evidence I shall discuss, the sceptical interpretation seems to me the most plausible for them individually and together, in virtue of their shared characteristics, although it is not meant to imply that they form an exclusive group, nor to deny the relevance of evidence from other dialogues.

Quite a number of other dialogues do not exhibit a predominance of either antithetic argumentation or Socratic refutations, but instead more or less systematically supported claims, often implicitly at least attributable to Socrates, or another main speaker, although certainly those of Socrates are often hedged about with warnings that they are only his beliefs (e.g. *Meno* 98a-b, *Rep*. 6.506c-e), or merely the implications of the current argument in a given dialogue (cf. *Crito* 46b, *Phaedo* 107b, *Rep.* 3.394d), or occur in highly rhetorical contexts (e.g. *Symp.* 211c-212a; *Phaedr*. 245c-57b).[6] Thus, finally I shall consider a problem for an Academic sceptic interpretation of Plato's Socrates, the problem of his belief statements, and present as briefly as I can an evaluation of some possible ways later Academics might most plausibly reconcile this significant common feature of many dialogues with a sceptical interpretation of Plato overall.[7]

ACADEMIC ARGUMENTATION AND SOCRATES

One argumentative technique that undeniably connects Plato's Socrates explicitly with the sceptical Academy is dialectical refutation. Cicero refers to Socrates' use of this against the sophists at *Fin.* 2.2, where he then reports that Arcesilaus (c.316-c.240 BC), who is said to have initiated the sceptic turn in the Academy when he became its scholarch (c.265 BC), revived this technique, which was no longer in use in his own day. Yet later in the same work Cicero shows that Arcesilaus also engaged in extended speeches designed to counterbalance an oppos-

ing dogmatic position (*Fin.* 5.10). As *Acad.* 1.45 puts it, he argued against everyone's opinions,

> so that when equally weighty arguments were found for contrary positions on the same subject, it was easier to withhold assent from either position (trans. Inwood and Gerson).

A.A. Long, who regards Arcesilaus as the originator of the conception of Socrates as a sceptic,[8] also states,

> Arcesilaus in effect was the founder of Greek scepticism, as a methodology for demonstrating that every claim to knowledge or belief could be met with a counter-argument of equal strength.[9]

In the following I aim to raise doubts about this claim.

Long rightly distinguishes between the production of arguments on either side of a case and arguing the opposite case to an opponent, noting that more reliable sources do not report Arcesilaus to have argued both sides of a case himself.[10] This was subsequently the practice of the later Academic scholarch Carneades (214-129/8 BC), who notoriously spoke publicly on successive days for and against the view that justice is intrinsically beneficial to the agent, while on the Athenian embassy to Rome in 155 BC.[11] Moreover Cicero, who used reports of these speeches in *De republica* Bk 3, structured most of the works of his retirement around this principle.[12]

Long himself acknowledges that Arcesilaus could justifiably claim to be practicing Socrates' own technique of refutation, and observes that the techniques of argument *contra*, or both *pro* and *contra*, owed something to the rhetorical tradition—that is, ultimately, to the sophists.[13] Yet as I shall show below, both the latter techniques seem also to be found repeatedly in Plato.

This will then raise the question of motive. A speech directed against another speaker's position might be considered in intention just *eristic*, or again *refutatory*, that is, designed to achieve either a merely verbal victory in the one case, or a seriously meant change of mind in the opponent. But a refutation, in the latter case, might aim at either the opponent's or audience's adoption of the opposite case (as formally also in a *reductio ad absurdum*, for instance), or merely the realisation of ignorance (as similarly in Socrates' dialectical refutations); the aim is then *aporetic*.

This recognition of ignorance (as apparently in many Socratic refutations) might involve the presupposition that neither foregoing case is correct, so motivating the search for a new account of the matter (*zetetic scepticism*), or if no further alternative seems possible, the presupposition will be that one or other of the two opposed foregoing cases must be correct and the other not (i.e., a *dilemma*), in which case either further inquiry is again required (again, *zetetic scepticism*), or the abandonment of either all opinions or just claims to certain knowledge (*ephectic scepticism*, *epochê*).[14] In what follows I will aim to locate sophistic, Socratic and Academic scepticism within these contours, and, with some further adjustments, trace their deeper similarities.[15]

SOPHISTIC ANTILOGY AND SCEPTICISM

Clearly fifth century sophists realised two things about speeches: firstly, that they can be more or less persuasive, and secondly that there is always a speech that can be made for the opposite case.[16] In the *Clouds* Aristophanes

presents the Right and Wrong Speeches as living teachers in Socrates' school.[17] Thus it was common knowledge by the late 420s BC that some sophists were teaching that every argument is opposed by another, and it is the power of persuasion, not the truth of a case, which determines which argument wins a case. Diogenes Laertius (9.51) states that Protagoras was the first to declare that there are two mutually opposed arguments on any topic, while Aristotle reports that Protagoras promised to make the weaker argument stronger (*Rhetoric* 1402a14-6). Plato's *Apology* 18b-d, 19b-c, has Socrates claiming this was the popular belief about himself as a result of the *Clouds*.[18]

The *Clouds* demonstrates that the popular perception was that one case is naturally right, while the sophists unscrupulously teach people to win with the naturally weaker, or unjust, case. But it seems Protagoras went further, drawing a conclusion that went beyond merely eristic or refutatory reasoning. If we depend on our own judgment to discern the truth, and if our judgment is subject to persuasion by *logos*, then we cannot ever affirm as a fact that one case is naturally right or wrong. All we know is that one appears right to us, and the other appears right to someone else. That seems to be the meaning of the famous fragment from Protagoras' book *Truth* which is quoted in Plato's *Theaetetus*:

> Of all things the measure is man, of the things that are, that they are, and of the things that are not, that they are not.[19]

Protagoras, and perhaps also Antiphon,[20] thus seem to deny that there is any objective truth to a matter. There are only the appearances, and so, according to Protagoras presumably, what appears true to me *is* true for me, and what appears true to you, even if it is the opposite, *is* true for you. This at least is the way Socrates interprets Protagoras both in the *Theaetetus* (152a, 161c) and *Cratylus* (285e-386a). Note that Socrates' subsequent depiction of Protagoras in the *Theaetetus* (166d-167d) as aiming to improve people by changing the way things appear to them, while implying that the latter's own rhetorical *practice* was indeed eristic-refutatory, does not contradict the proposal here that he recognised the *proto*-sceptical implication that no speech can be naturally right or wrong, since it presupposes just that.[21]

Fragment 4 from Protagoras expresses aporetic scepticism about the gods.[22] We can see this as another application of the same principle. If human *logoi* cannot attain any objective truth, it might seem that we can be assured what the truth is by the authority of the gods, communicated in prophecies and oracles, and the many famous mythical poems inspired by the Muses. But Protagoras denies knowledge of the gods as a source of truth. We cannot even say whether they exist or not, and if they do, what they are like. Thus, we cannot appeal to the gods in order to justify the assertion that there is any objective truth behind appearances.[23]

Gorgias fr.3 (*On What is Not*) demonstrates that the early fifth century philosopher Parmenides' putatively demonstrative logic can be reversed to produce the opposite conclusion.[24] His aims here, in principle, might be either merely eristic-refutatory, or perhaps something more (aporetic and so sceptical). But a refutatory aim seems to be excluded, since if Gorgias were to believe his own conclusion, that would involve him in self-contradiction (claiming to communicate comprehensibly a truth about what is and is not that, he argues, is incomprehensible and incommunicable). Assuming that Gorgias has a serious purpose then, he must be taken to aim to show that we cannot decide reasonably between his own and Parmenides' conclusions. This would not amount to claiming

to know whether there is any truth, but just to show that we in fact do not know it, by demonstrating that even a very carefully reasoned philosophical *logos* has an equally plausible opposite.[25] Thus I suggest both Protagoras and Gorgias are evidence for sophists recognising philosophical implications in the equipolence of antithetical speeches, while Gorgias most clearly seems to have thought that these implications are sceptical.

SOCRATES AND THE SOPHISTS IN PLATO

I aim to show that Socrates in Plato can very plausibly be seen as characterised by the same features, and so as anticipating Academic scepticism. First I will consider here some other characteristics in Plato's depictions of, and references to sophists that are apparently shared by Socrates, since these indirectly support, by association, the contention that Socrates might seem, to a sceptical reader of Plato, to share also in sophistic scepticism, since they demonstrate the extent to which Socrates' interests and practices are depicted generally as *formally* isomorphous with those of the sophists.[26]

It might seem bizarre to argue that Socrates is portrayed in Plato as like a sophist. Today philosophy is a distinct discipline, in a tradition deriving from Plato and Aristotle, whereas the sophists are often identified with a different discipline, rhetoric; we regard both Aristophanes and later Aeschines (*In Tim*. 173) as reflecting popular ignorance when they call Socrates a sophist. But this is entirely anachronistic. Xenophon (*Mem*. 1.2) calls the presocratic philosophers sophists, and at least since Kerferd (1981) the famous sophists have been recognised as contributing to the philosophical study of language, morality, and the polis.

Admittedly Plato distinguishes philosophy from sophistry,[27] yet his distinction cannot be one of discipline. The sophists claim expertise in the very things that interest Socrates.[28] Nor can the distinction be simply between the theoretical and the practical life (as in the *Gorgias* 484c-488b Socrates and Callicles initially seem to agree), since Socrates concludes by claiming himself to be the only true politician in Athens. Perhaps the best commentary on Plato's view is what Aristotle implies (*Metaph*. 4.2, 1004b25-6), that a sophist is not serious either about goodness or knowledge, including self-knowledge; in other words, according to Plato and Aristotle, the sophists' motives are generally merely eristic (notwithstanding the conclusions reached above from their own works about Protagoras and Gorgias). But this is an individual failing, and does not distinguish the formal features of their intellectual practices from those of Socrates.

Beginning with the least important for this purpose, these formally similar features include, first, the use of myth. Compare, for instance, Protagoras' great myth (*Prot*. 320c-323a), Hippias' reported use of epic mythology as a teaching tool (*Hippias Min*. 363a-c), and Gorgias' *Helen* with the myths Socrates expounds in *Gorgias* (493a-494a, 523a-527d) and his mythical introduction of recollection (*Meno* 81a-e), not to mention the closing myths of the *Phaedo* and *Republic*.

Secondly, in all such cases myths spoken by Socrates are used to advance moral doctrines. But Plato characterises the sophists as concerned with virtue: *Meno* 89e-92e depicts Socrates as proposing to an incredulous Anytus that Protagoras and others teach virtue; in the *Protagoras* that sophist himself claims to teach people to be better householders and citizens, not objecting when Socrates identifies this as the art of politics, and the product as virtue, going on to argue that virtue can be taught and

that he is the best teacher (318b-328d). Hippias also lectures on virtue (*Hipp. min*. loc. cit., cf. *Hipp. mai*. 283c-e).

Of course, the case in the *Gorgias* is more complicated. Initially Gorgias himself happily propounds that the province of his art is speechmaking about right and wrong (454b-455a), although it takes Socrates' own art to convince him that he would always teach morality to his students if necessary (460a-461a, cf. 459dff.). In the *Meno* Gorgias seems to be reported to be a moral sceptic: he does not claim to teach virtue, only speechmaking (95c), and perhaps he is behind Meno's paradox implying the impossibility of successful inquiry (80d). Nevertheless, on Socrates' account in the *Gorgias* sophists, who only differ insignificantly from rhetoricians (465b-c, 520a) are 'professional teachers of virtue' (519c, e), although in doing so they are mere imitators of legislation (in defining right and wrong). Socrates by contrast claims that he himself is the only true politician in Athens (521d), thus that he is what the sophists and rhetoricians are mere wheedling imitations of: he is like the good rhetoricians Callicles had mistakenly thought led Athens in the past (503a-504e, cf. 521a).

So here Socrates is explicitly compared and contrasted with the sophists and rhetoricians: his words aim to do what the sophists ought to do. Note though that the *theoretical* contrast is not made in terms of dialectical or rhetorical techniques, nor in terms of Socrates knowing what the sophists do not, but rather his willingness to confront people rather than flatter them (*loc. cit.*). Admittedly there is a *practical* contrast in dialectical ability, but this, I shall argue, merely confirms that Socrates, *qua* philosopher, is portrayed as the ideal to which sophistry aspires, not its antithesis. If so, this is all so far consistent with the view that Socrates anticipates the Academic sceptics.

My third point of comparison concerns the conception of sophists as failing to teach, i.e., to produce understanding, rather than merely conviction. This is the view of rhetoric Gorgias is led to admit (*Gorgias* 454b-455a) and it recurs in the *Theaetetus* (201a-c), in each case the difference being made by requirements of addressing a large group. In the light of the *Gorgias*' image of the sophistic orator as a flatterer aiming only at pleasure not the truth, we tend to assume that the implication here is that the sophist convinces by deliberately deceiving, a view encouraged by Aristotle's collection and analysis of *Sophistic Refutations*. But the only clear model in Plato of sophists deliberately engaging in logical deception is that of the clowns Euthydemus and Dionysodorus, who differ markedly from the important sophists Plato depicts.

It is in fact Socrates who most often provokes the reader's suspicion that his argumentation is deliberately flawed. Numerous arguments in the *Gorgias* (475c-d, 477a, 489b, 496e, 497e-499b) and *Protagoras* (331a-e, 350c-351b) can easily be construed this way.[29] But the implication would be that the conclusions Socrates reaches, for instance with Polus and Callicles, are not his own knowledge, at least not for the reasons given, but perhaps no more than beliefs he regards it beneficial for his interlocutors to adopt.[30] In this respect, then, Socrates would not be so different from a sophist, even if we assume his aims are not merely eristic. But perhaps, further, Plato presents such arguments to provoke further critical inquiry by the reader. Such a zetetic intention, too, is consistent with Academic scepticism, as I will show.

Fourth, there is mode of discourse. Admittedly Socrates seems to be presented, particularly in the *Gorgias* (447a-c, 448d-449c) and *Protagoras* (329a-b, 334c-335c, 336b-d, 337e-338a) as distinguishing himself by his preference for dialectical question and answer from the soph-

ists' tendency to launch into an extended oration; again at *Gorgias* 471d-472c he differentiates the method of refutation Polus' oratory applies from that of dialectic.[31] But in practice the difference is less than this suggests. Undoubtedly Socrates is demonstrated to be better at dialectic than the sophists, but Plato portrays him as better at oratory also. Distinguishing in the texts between a speech and a dialectical question or answer is a relative matter, but in relation to context I count nineteen long speeches by Socrates in the *Gorgias* and at least nine in the *Protagoras*. The longest in the *Gorgias*, his mythical peroration (523a-527e), is longer than Callicles' great speech on natural justice (482c-486c), while in the *Protagoras* Socrates' extended interpretation of Simonides' poem (342a-347a) is only outrun by Protagoras' immense discourse on the teachability of virtue (320c-328d).

Most of Socrates' other discourses in these dialogues are protreptic to dialectic, just as Protagoras' speech aims to recruit students, while at *Gorgias* 519d-e, concluding a speech begun almost three Stephanus pages earlier because Callicles refused to continue answering, Socrates admits this has turned him into a popular orator, acknowledging that he can speak without someone to answer. Even in the *Theaetetus* Socrates is given four long speeches (including one on behalf of Protagoras, 156c-157c, and the digression, 173c-174a and 174a-177b).

Moreover, both Gorgias and Polus are presented as advertising their willingness to answer questions, not merely make speeches,[32] and the same is true of Protagoras, who is even reported to teach brevity.[33] Protagoras agrees unwillingly to ask questions, but is not very skilled (*Prot*. 338c-339d). On the other hand, although no more skilled, Polus (*Gorgias* 462b-463d), followed by Gorgias himself (463d-e), is much more willing to attempt to question Socrates. It is unnecessary here to discuss the *elenchus* in detail, since it is no more than a tool a sophist too would use if he could, and any given application produces only a negative conviction, not knowledge, while knowledge as a cumulative result of refutations (for instance) is not anything Socrates ever claims.[34]

Thus, the differences in verbal technique between Socrates and these sophists are not in genre but differences in preference and skill. In summary, Socrates outshines the other sophists in each genre of discourse, according to Plato. He is the ideal sophist (not a flatterer, but what a flatterer imitates).

I turn finally to Socrates' possession of two features of the sophists adduced from their own fragments and other reports, that is, their concern with antithetical speeches and their scepticism, most conspicuous in the case of Gorgias.

SOCRATES' USE OF ANTILOGY

That antithetical argumentation is a sophistic practice is implicitly recognised at *Gorgias* 456a-457c, where Gorgias boasts of his ability to make the worst case stronger, that is, to defeat the expert in debate, an unmistakably eristic capacity. But although this implies that Gorgias could argue either side of a case, that is not yet arguing both. The clearest example of Socrates himself putting up equal and opposite cases is in the *Meno*, where he first argues (a) that virtue is teachable by the method of hypothesis (87a-89c), then (b) that virtue is not teachable, on the basis of the absence of experts (89c-96c), given that (i) Anytus denies the sophists teach it, (ii) Athenian gentlemen cannot teach their sons virtue, and (iii) supposed experts disagree on whether it can be taught.

Here it is natural to hesitate, rather than assume that Socrates too has eristic purposes. Perhaps the doctrine of correct belief (*orthê*

doxa, 96e-98c) is meant to reconcile the positions (a) and (b) above, by revising the implications of the former, (a), since what is beneficial (including virtue) need not then be knowledge, but only correct belief. It might seem paradoxical that Socrates states that one of the few things he does actually *know* is that correct opinion differs from knowledge (*Meno* 98b): but this is essentially just a logical distinction, between temporary and permanent states of mind (97d-98a); Socrates explicitly admits that he is only 'conjecturing' (*eikazôn*, 98b) in his interpretation of this distinction, including the guess that correct belief can ever become knowledge.[35] Nor does he argue that correct belief can be taught, as would be required if the distinction between that and knowledge were to succeed in reviving the claim (a) that virtue is teachable. In any case even the revised implication of the *Meno* remains sceptical: no knowledge of virtue is in sight. This kind of scepticism seems clearly zetetic, given Socrates' ultimate point, that only by finding the definition of virtue will it be possible to decide whether it is teachable (100c).

In the *Gorgias* Socrates leads Gorgias to opposite conclusions and self-contradiction (461a vis-à-vis 457a-c), and thereafter, faced with the articulate positions of Polus and Callicles puts up his own position opposed to both of them. Whether it can be said he refutes their positions (as opposed to just the men themselves)[36] depends on evaluation of the strength of his arguments, which have been criticised, as noted above. Thus, it is possible to see Socrates here as seeking to induce *aporia*, and so further inquiry, by presenting the opposite position merely to undermine the assumption of knowledge (particularly since he does not claim to know that his own position is the truth).

In the *Protagoras* at 361a-c Socrates notes that by the end of this dialogue he and Protagoras have exchanged positions on the teachability of virtue. Socrates, who initially denied it, now argues that virtue is knowledge, whereas Protagoras, who claimed to teach it, now (360d) refuses to continue assenting to Socrates' argument. This also seems clearly construable as a case of Socrates arguing both opposite positions. As in the *Meno*, he presents his motive as zetetic at 361c: the confusion will lead to further inquiry into the definition of virtue, as a prerequisite for establishing its attributes (e.g., teachability or the opposite). Again, this is quite consistent with Academic zetetic scepticism, given that the definition is as yet unknown.

Finally, the *Theaetetus* presents us with a systematic exploitation of the technique of antithetical argument, as Socrates first expounds and then refutes position after position.[37] Here, superficially at least, Socrates' motive seems to be dispositive refutation: certainly the effect is not immediately to create indecision as to whether a proposed position, in each case, or its refutation, is correct (rather the refutation is taken dramatically at least, as successful). Nevertheless, the overall aim is clearly deliberately aporetic, and implicitly zetetic (perplexity will lead to further inquiry): his repeated reformulations suggest that it has never been clearly shown that the resources of any position have at any point been completely exhausted (even when Socrates gives up on it). Thus the implication of the antithetical argumentation in *Theaetetus* is indeed a form of scepticism.[38] The *Lysis* has a similar structure, and, apparently, aim.[39]

SOPHISTIC AND SOCRATIC SCEPTICISM

As previously mentioned, the only hint of Gorgias' scepticism in the dialogues (as opposed to his *On What is Not*) would be his implied responsibility for the *Meno*'s paradox of

inquiry and the report there that he declined to teach virtue (95c), which would seem to be ephectic; on the other hand he is also reported there to have taught Meno the doctrine that virtue is relative to social role (71e-72a, 73a). Nevertheless, it seems more likely that the latter is not meant by Plato to express a positive doctrine, for instance an objective functionalism (as in Aristotle), but a poorly conceived, epistemologically motivated, anti-essentialism. This would be a negative dogmatism, rejecting the possibility of a definable object of knowledge, as is perhaps similarly Protagoras' doctrine of the relativity of the good in nature (*Prot*. 334a-c). If this is correct, given the inconsistency with the other evidence of Gorgias' ephectic scepticism, and Protagoras' proto-sceptical relativism, these particular claims would seem in context to be merely eristic.

The case for treating Plato's Socrates as a sceptic, and therefore Plato as promoting scepticism, requires a longer discussion. Firstly, the passages of antithetical argumentation identified in the series of Plato's dialogues discussed above display Socrates' adoption, and apparently Plato's recommendation, of an aporetic-zetetic form of scepticism. This, then, is to be contrasted in purpose with the apparently ephectic scepticism of Gorgias, and the proto-sceptical relativism of Protagoras, but in each case the implication of opposed speeches is functionally similar: fundamentally it implies an absence of objective truth, either in principle (Protagoras), generally in fact (Gorgias), or at least presently, in the case of Socrates, motivating further inquiry.

Nevertheless, in other dialogues' various statements of the theory of forms we seem to see a non-refutatory Socrates, an idealist metaphysician, presented in Plato. Yet even so, I shall argue, it is not clear that the position cannot be reconciled with at least some recognised forms of Academic scepticism, precisely because the forms are only proposed as possible objects of knowledge, and never claimed to be known.[40] This requires an account of the status of belief in the zetetic scepticism of Plato's Socrates.

But first we should be clear that the sceptic Socrates cannot be denied at least some role in Plato. I need not survey here all the professions of ignorance in the Socratic dialogues. Perhaps the only important point that needs to be made is that in the *Gorgias*, where Socrates claims his position is tied down with arguments of iron and adamantine (509a), he nevertheless denies he knows the facts of the matter, and allows that someone younger and more forceful than Callicles might be able to untie these bonds.[41] Again, although the interpretation of this is more controversial, at the end of the final argument of the *Phaedo* (107a-b) Socrates agrees with Simmias' doubts on the general grounds of human fallibility and suggests the argument needs further investigation, despite himself being presently convinced.[42]

ZETETIC SCEPTICISM, BELIEFS AND *EPOCHÊ*

This brings us to the depiction of Socrates claiming to hold beliefs in Plato, and the doctrine of correct belief (*orthê doxa*) in the *Meno*. These together might seem to be the main stumbling block for the case that there is a significant line of descent linking antithetical argumentation and scepticism from the sophists, *via* Plato's Socrates, to the later Academy. Someone could object that, if the Academic sceptics claimed philosophical consistency with Plato's Socrates, they must have been wrong, on the grounds that there is no evidence in the dialogues that Socrates espoused the goal of *epochê*, suspension of assent (*sunkatathesis*), that is, the avoid-

ance of opinions or beliefs (*doxai*), the terms in which our sources often characterise Academic scepticism.[43]

Nevertheless, as a preliminary to facing this problem, note two points which suggest strongly that Academic sceptics self-consciously adopted a zetetic form of scepticism directly from the presentation of Socrates in Plato's dialogues. At *Acad.* 1.45, where Cicero reports that Arcesilaus went that one step beyond Socrates in not even claiming to know that he knew nothing, he explains the motive for *epochê* as that there is nothing more disgraceful than for cognitive assent to outrun knowledge and perception.[44] While this is clearly phrased in Stoic terms, nevertheless it states a motive for scepticism quite consistent with Socrates' avowals: not just the desire for truth, but also the avoidance of the 'most shameful kind of ignorance', thinking you know what you do not.[45]

Secondly, even where later Academics, e.g. Cicero, apparently following Clitomachus' interpretation of Carneades' philosophy, treat *epochê* as an Academic requirement, nevertheless the motive for scepticism, and the response it generates, remain quite consistent with Socrates' zetetic ideals and practice. Cicero at *Acad.* 2.7-8 characterises sceptics as always continuing to search for the truth, while not assuming they know what they do not know; at 2.65-6, claiming to report Arcesilaus, he argues that the motive for *epochê* is that precisely because the wise person loves the truth the most, he hates error the most. This commitment to investigation (*zetêsis*) then implies that Academic sceptics must make a practice of seriously *considering* possible beliefs, and thus that while they argue one or other side of a case, in any instance, they at least hypothesize for the time being that a given belief is true.

Three kinds of explanation of Socratic belief claims seem possible here for an Academic sceptic who appeals to Plato's Socrates as an antecedent. Firstly, as would follow from the immediately preceding point, a sceptic could treat Socrates' positions in the *Gorgias* and *Phaedo* as ironically adopted counter-positions designed to undermine his interlocutors' assumptions of knowledge, respectively, that the immoral use of rhetoric is worthwhile, and that death is necessarily evil, and thus not expressing Socrates' or Plato's own committed beliefs. This might possibly have been the view of Arcesilaus, at least under some constructions of the limited evidence for the latter. Yet alone that does not explain the *Meno*'s doctrine of correct belief, nor the frequency with which the theories of forms and of the immortality of the soul arise in the dialogues.

Alternatively, the Academic sceptic could deny that the requirement for *epochê* was really a necessity within such a philosophy: one prominent, although disputed, modern interpretation of Academic scepticism treats *epochê* as only an embarrassing dialectical result foisted by Academic interlocutors on the Stoics.[46] Yet, while in that case Academics themselves would not be prevented from holding beliefs, this interpretation faces certain difficulties, not least for Arcesilaus.[47]

Thirdly, an Academic sceptic who adopts *epochê* (in the Socratic sense of recognition of ignorance), must still rely on what is reasonable (Arcesilaus),[48] or convincing appearances (Carneades)[49] in practical life; that requirement could be taken to allow for extensive reflection about what is good, as the goal of practical life, and its preconditions and circumstances.[50] A significant distinction here is between interpreting *epochê* as (i) refraining from all beliefs, and (ii) only from knowledge claims (see Cicero *Acad.* 2.104), which would allow beliefs to be adopted self-consciously as mere beliefs, without assuming they *must* be true.[51] Let us call

self-consciously held beliefs *conjectures*.[52] Conjectures in this sense (unlike most unreflective beliefs, i.e. *doxai*) would not be mistaken assumptions of knowledge, and so need not be the subject of *epochê* by an Academic sceptic.

Admittedly the support for such a view seems stronger in the case of Carneades and his followers and successors,[53] than the earlier Arcesilaus, who may not have thought it consistent with his own sceptical stance to even work out a *theory* as to how the former could be reconciled with this aspect of Plato's dialogues;[54] it is quite possible that Arcesilaus did no more than systematically maintain *epochê* himself, as his own radicalised interpretation of Socrates' regular acknowledgements of his ignorance, and attempt to refute or undermine the knowledge claims of others, again modelled on Socrates in Plato, while neither affirming nor denying any claims about the content of the dialogues. Nevertheless, at least in subsequent stages of the Academy, this third approach might have been seen by readers of the dialogues to allow a sceptical Socrates in Plato to hold beliefs of a certain kind more widely, including a theory of forms and of the immortality of the soul.[55] While this is not explicit even for Carneades, there are reasons to think that in order to adopt even certain perceptual appearances as convincing, he would have to admit that he also adopted certain intellectual appearances together with them.[56]

The doctrine of correct belief in the *Meno* suggests an explanation for such a state of mind, but of course in any given situation the believer cannot (by definition) *know* a belief is correct (cf. *Republic* 506c); consequently, it must be possible for him or her to recognise that the belief may *not* be correct (since *qua* belief, it does not satisfy a satisfactory criterion for knowledge), and so to hold the belief only *as* a belief, that is, as a conjecture.

Accordingly I propose, as at least plausible, that, if and when sceptics in the later Academy read and discussed Plato's dialogues,[57] it would have been consistent for them to adopt (in a weak sense) such a fallibilist account of the status of the philosophical doctrines they found there.[58] This plausibility, I suggest, also has support in the generally complex literary and non-demonstrative characteristics of the dialogues and is consistent with the positive claims about the origin of knowledge made within them.[59]

CONCLUSION

The pattern of antithetical argument by Socrates in Plato, once recognised is hard to miss, and the antecedents in sophistic practice are unmistakable. Clearly Plato works to demonstrate dramatically that, by contrast with Socrates' zetetic purpose, the motives of sophists are insincere, and in that sense merely eristic. On the other hand, we have independent evidence of serious reflection in some of their own fragments that suggests a proto-sceptic inference by Protagoras to the impossibility of any objective truth in *logos*, and adoption of ephectic scepticism by Gorgias. Given the connection of antithetical argument with scepticism in the sophistic context in which Socrates' philosophy emerged, and the ubiquity of Socrates' disavowals of knowledge in Plato and repeated use of this technique, it is not hard to see how plausible the view of Socrates as a sceptic would seem to the subsequent Academy.

Moreover, the attempt made here to explain how later Academic sceptics could reconcile this with the depiction of Socrates advancing beliefs in the dialogues has more general implications for our reading of Plato. It seems that what have regularly, since later antiquity, been taken as his firm doctrines might be consistently accounted

for, from an Academic perspective, as conjectures consistent with Socratic scepticism. In that case, perhaps our tendency is mistaken to think that Plato's fundamental aims in any given dialogue are doctrinal. Perhaps the pursuit of wisdom by examination of conjectures advances in a less straightforward way than merely by adoption and justification of these as doctrines.

But one final admission. While the *Meno*'s distinction of correct belief from knowledge does not seem to undermine a sceptical interpretation of that dialogue, and even metaphysical theories look like they can be accounted for as zetetic sceptical conjectures, nevertheless the *Lysis* 216c-e and *Symposium* 202a-e each introduce the conception of an intermediate between two contrary extremes. This is a logical move which suggests, at least, that Plato was not satisfied with a form of reasoning restricted to antithesis. Just as in the *Meno* the doctrine of recollection and the method of hypothesis break free from the negative dogmatism of Meno's paradox, so the doctrine of the intermediate suggests that Plato viewed the negative implications of antithetical logic as undesirable for the pursuit of truth. But that is not to say that this new conception guarantees its attainment. Nor is it to back down from the case, firstly, that Plato certainly depicts Socrates as using antithetical argument in the dialogues I have discussed, to stimulate sceptical inquiry, and, secondly, that it is at the very least still plausible today to consider apparently firm Platonic doctrines throughout the dialogues, in the way later Academic readers might well have, to be meant by the author just as reasonable conjectures consistent with, and in the service of, zetetic scepticism.

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NOTES

1 See, e.g., Cicero *Acad.* 1.44-6, 2.74, *De or.* 3.67. (Contrast with Academic scepticism the view of Antiochus, Cic. *Acad.* 1.17-18, that while Socrates, according to works by his followers, including Plato, was consistently sceptical but praised virtue, Plato himself taught a doctrine he shared with Aristotle and the Stoics.)

2 Bonazzi 2003, ch.3 (evaluation pp.132-6), Tarrant 2000, 10-16 and 58-61 (evaluation p.59) and Ioppolo 1986, 40-54 (evaluation pp.45-9); see also Ioppolo 1995, 91 and 108-15, Annas 1994 and Woodruff 1986. For a positive evaluation of Plutarch's later 'metaphysical scepticism' as an interpretation of Plato see Bonazzi 2015, 97-115.

3 See Vogt 2012, who does not discuss my concerns here, Frede 1992, and cf. briefly Miller 2015, 146-7, 159-60 with n.38, and 170-77 (Miller adopts a stringent conception of scepticism based on 'withholding assent': see by contrast below); while Hankinson 1995, 84, calls 'the figure of Plato Scepticus … bizarre'; see also Shields 1994.

4 Perhaps today the scholarly norm is no longer to think of Plato's dialogues exclusively or determinatively in terms of three stages of his own intellectual development (in which case the same character Socrates would fail, bizarrely, to be a unified point of philosophical reference throughout the dialogues): for a brief pointed discussion see Rowe 2006. This is not to deny that Plato introduces ideas and beliefs not explicitly attributable to the historical Socrates (although the latter, from the point of view of scholarship, is no more than an ideal object of historical knowledge), but rather to entertain the possibility that Plato perhaps does this in *all* dialogues featuring Socrates — nor to deny that Plato entrusts some of his most important ideas to other speakers, particularly in the dialogues convincingly shown to be late, but rather to suggest tentatively that even here perhaps nothing philosophically significant is affirmed as (putatively) *demonstrably* an unequivocal claim to knowledge, rather than at best a reasonable or convincing belief. Moreover if Plato can be said to depict wisdom, this is perhaps to be recognised rather in the point of view, aims and strategies of his primary speakers than exclusively in the content of what they say.

5 For the ancient sceptic claim that Platonic dialogues depict Socrates as arguing antithetically see esp. Anon. *Prolegomena in Platonis philosophia* 10.16-20, referring to *Lys.*, *Euthyd.* and *Charm.*, with Bonazzi 2003, 63, 93-5 and cf. 130-1, Tarrant 2000, 12 and Annas 1994, 327-30; cf. also Long and Sedley 1987, i.448. On antithetical arguments in Favorinus (ap. Galen *Opt.Doctr.* = fr.28 Barigazzi 1966, 179-90) see Ioppolo 1993, 188.

6 Another kind of argument has often in modern scholarship been taken as self-evidently presenting Plato's own firm doctrinal commitments, for instance, the recollection argument at *Phaedo* 73b-77a, and in particular that for the theory of forms (74a-e) and immortality of the soul (75e-77a). Yet that interpretation in this case requires all the following assumptions, (i) that Socrates, who only asks questions, would himself give the same answers in every case as Simmias does, (ii) that Plato, who does not write anything in his own voice means us to think that Socrates, who elsewhere claims not to know anything important, in this argument expounds Plato's own positive position, (iii) that it is irrelevant that the argument's extremely paradoxical conclusion concerning the soul is subsequently admitted to depend partly on a previous less plausible result (77a-e), (iv) that the following comparison with a charm (77e-78a; cf. *Charm.* 156d-157d, *Rep.* 10.608a) is not meant to imply that the argument aims primarily at psychic therapy (of fear of death), rather than certainty, (v) that it is irrelevant to the reliability attributed to it that it is next replaced by other arguments (78b-81a), (vi) and even objections and profound doubts (85a-88d, 91c-95e), and (vii) similarly that these doubts ultimately require a completely new start (95eff.), which introduces an explicitly hypothetical method (100a-c), in which

the theory of forms is just that hypothesis, and not affirmed as knowledge. Bear in mind that the overall plausibility of the given interpretation of the recollection argument here is the net plausibility of all these independent assumptions: if they each had a probability of 90%, the resultant probability that the recollection argument here presents Plato's firm doctrinal commitments would be below 48%; this merely indicates the general effect of combining separate assumptions. In any case, this shows that that interpretation cannot really be taken as self-evidently correct.

7 For other suggestions regarding possible Academic sceptic interpretations of individual dialogues see esp. Bonazzi 2003, 80 (on *Phaid*.) and 133-4 with ns.111 and 112 on *Parm*. (following Glucker 1978, 40-8), *Soph*., *Polit*., *Leg*. and *Tim*.; Tarrant 2000, 12-16 and 58-9, on, respectively, *Tim*., *Meno*, *Theait*., *Phil*., *Soph*., *Polit*., *Gorg*., *Crito*, *Phaid*., *Rep*., *Leg*., *Menex*., *Crat*., and *Parm*.; Schofield 1999, 329-330 on *Phaid*., *Meno*, *Lys*. and *Parm*.; and Long and Sedley 1987, i.449 on *Meno* and *Tim*.

8 Long 1988, 157-8; cf. similarly Ioppolo 1995, 90, commenting on the historical importance of this interpretation of Socrates.

9 Long 1986, 431. Similarly Ioppolo 1993, 45 and 189-90 with n.24, and Glucker 1978, 33 n.79 (cont'd pp.34-5),who denies the influence of Plato on Academic sceptic antithetical argumentation, with references to earlier discussion.

10 Long 1986, 444-7: Cic. *Fin*. 2.2 and Plut. *St. rep*. 1035f-1037c, contra D.L. 4.28.

11 Cicero *De re publica* 3.8, from Lactantius *Div. inst*. 5.15 Migne; Quintilian 12.1.35; cf. Philodemus *Acad.Ind*. col. 31.1-3 and Numenius ap. Eusebius *PE* 14.8.2, and Ioppolo 1986, 209-10.

12 See Bonazzi 2003, 130-1 (and cf. pp.63 and 93-5) on the centrality of antithetical argumentation to Academic scepticism, and cf. Cic. *Acad*. 2.7-8 and 60.

13 Long 1986, 446-7 and 449 respectively. The view that Arcesilaus learnt antithetical argumentation and scepticism during his early study with Theophrastus (cf. D.L. 4.22, 29, Numen. ap. Eus. *PE* 14.6.4, Philodemus *Acad.Ind*. col. 15.3-5), since it was practiced by the Peripatetics (Cic. *Tusc*. 2.9, *Fin*. 5.10, *De or*. 3.80, 107), for which see Ioppolo 1986, 150 (and cf. p.52) is rejected by Krämer 1971, 6-8 and 11-13; in fact Arcesilaus did not argue both sides of a case, while Cic. *Fin*. 5.10 distinguishes Arcesilaus' technique from Aristotle's, and the Aristotelian practice is likely to have come from the Academy in any case.

14 See Cicero *Acad*. 2.104, discussed below. Restriction of *epochê* to knowledge claims might allow self-consciously fallible theorising; this seems to be the position of both Cicero (himself), Plutarch and Favorinus, for instance, and to some degree Philo of Larissa, who seems to have attributed it also to Carneades. See Ioppolo 1993, 192-5, who with Donini 1986, 213, distinguishes Favorinus from Philo of Larissa on the grounds that the latter had no metaphysics. (Cicero's views of this kind seem to be adopted from Antiochus.)

15 For a partly similar conception of types of scepticism see Stewart 1990, ch.2, and contrast the kind of analysis in, e.g., Hankinson 1995, ch.2. Most treatments of ancient scepticism I have seen omit any such discussion, although on zetetic scepticism as such cf. Bonazzi 2003, 12, Tarrant 2000, 13, and Ioppolo 1986, 124-5 and 159.

16 On the whole I accept here the view of Cole 1991 and Schiappa 2003, that the fifth century sophists did not teach an analytical art of rhetoric (something only developed in the following century), but just a practice of speechmaking. Certain parts of Cole's position have been challenged by Usher 1992 and 1999, only to the extent of broadening his definition of what counts as sophistic rhetoric, i.e., including a non-theoretical division of speeches into parts and assembly of paradigmatic passages in circulated texts, and treating as historical the reports that rhetoric, in this sense, was founded by the Sicilians Corax and Tisias.

17 See Aristophanes *Clouds*, e.g., 112-18, and esp. 889-1104.

18 Compare also the contemporary *Dissoi Logoi* arguing antithetically on a range of issues, and Antiphon's *Tetralogies*. Of course this tradition has a background in the agonistic scenes of tragedy, from the middle of the fifth century, and old comedy, and is also represented by Thucydides' use of antithetical pairs of speeches.

19 Protagoras fr. 1 = *Theait*. 151e-152a = *Crat*. 385e-386a = Sextus Empiricus *M*. 7.60.

20 Antiphon (fr.1 = Galen *In Hipp. de off. med*. 18b.656.13-15 Kühn) seems to make the same point in a slightly different way: 'If you realise these things, you will know that there exists for it (*the mind*) no single thing of those things which the person who sees farthest sees with his vision, nor of those things which the person whose knowledge goes furthest knows with his mind' (trans. Freeman). The text is unsound but this apparently means that when we perceive with our eyes, or think with our minds, we take ourselves to be perceiving or understanding things that are objectively true, but what we see or know is not something independently real at all. Unfortunately the fragment does not give us his reasons for claiming this.

21 For a connection between the concept of 'proto-sceptical' ideas and arguments, as such, and Protagoras' relativism, see Lee 2010, 14, 19-22, and 26-9.

22 Protagoras fr.4 = D.L. 9.51.

23 Cf. *Theait*. 162e.

24 Gorgias' *On What is Not* exists in two versions (DK B3 = S.E. *M*. 7.65-87, and [Aristotle] *Melissus Xenophanes Gorgias* 979a-980b: see Hett 1936, 496-507).

Gorgias' *Helen* (esp. 8-15) again takes the point of view that appearances are all-powerful, although it does not imply immediately that we have no access to truth when we are not being assailed by emotive rhetoric. The implications of *On What is Not* are that even in the absence of such manipulation, *logos* still has no reliable access to truth, since by arguing in the same explicitly rational manner that Parmenides does, Gorgias can reach the opposite conclusions with just as much internal plausibility.

25 Cf. Wardy 1996, ch. 1, esp. 21-24.

26 The comparisons made by Woodruff 2006 touch incidentally on some of the points made here, but do not develop the deeper similarities and differences I discuss.

27 Nevertheless Taylor 2006 argues that by the time he wrote the *Sophist* Plato had come to a different conception of philosophy, as methodical acquisition of knowledge, and did interpret Socrates as a sophist (the 'noble sophist' of 226b-231b, by contrast with deceptive sophists).

28 See below regarding the *Gorgias* on sophistry as 'flattery' (*kolakeia*), and an imitation of lawmaking, as rhetoric is of justice (together, then, of statesmanship and morality, Socrates' interests).

29 Cf. Glucker 1978, 50 on fallacious arguments in the *Gorgias* with further refs. at n.131. The *Lysis* and perhaps the *Phaedo* among other dialogues might well seem most plausibly to involve deliberate fallacies, given the way earlier arguments in each of these dialogues are rejected and superceded by others on the same topic while each ends in statements of uncertainty.

30 This is not exactly the same point as that of Annas 1994, 316-22, that many of Socrates' arguments are *ad hominem*, not relying on premises he necessarily accepts himself, and merely designed to demonstrate to a respondent problems with the latter's beliefs. As Shields 1994, 362 observes, Socrates does often propose and gain assent to 'common sense' moral beliefs in a way that seems designed to recommend them to his interlocutors, and then persuade them to accept certain implications of these; nevertheless I do not adopt Vlastos' view that Socrates has developed a body of 'elenctic' knowledge to be differentiated from certain knowledge (Socrates never makes such a distinction). I suggest rather that, like a sophist, he inculcates useful beliefs, at least in those he cannot lead to a thoroughly reflective philosophical disposition.

31 Polus produces the audience as the speaker's witnesses, Socrates, his opponent himself.

32 Gorgias: *Meno* 70b-c, cf. *init*.; *Gorgias* 447c-448a, 449b-c, 458d, and Polus: *Gorgias* 462a.

33 *Protagoras* 329a-b, 334e-335a; cf. *Theait*. 167d.

34 On sceptic interpretation of Socrates' use of elenchus cf. Woodruff 1986, esp. 28-34, and for a more general, short and penetrating discussion of Socrates' method in relation to his acknowledgement of his ignorance and his beliefs see Weiss 2006, 243-53, and similarly on Plato's intentions Frede 1992.

35 Certainly other more epistemologically sophisticated dialogues such as the *Theaetetus* (187a-210b), *Republic* (476d-480a, 509d-518d) and *Timaeus* (27d-29d), might suggest opinion cannot become knowledge, since it has an ontologically different kind of object. While, on the other hand, the objects of mathematical opinions do seem to be forms (*Republic* 6.510d-e), as far as mathematical comprehension goes these are apparently merely hypothetical ('ideal') objects, not grasped by direct awareness, and so not known, or capable of being known, by mathematics itself; cf. Blyth 2000, 31.

36 For this distinction see, e.g. Frede 1992, 211.

37 In the *Theaetetus* Socrates first expounds his interpretation of Protagoras' theory (152a-160e), presents popular objections (161c-162c), answers these objections on behalf of Protagoras (162d-e), presents further 'controversialist' arguments against Protagoras (163b-164b), defends Protagoras against such controversialism with a speech on his behalf (164c-168c), presents serious objections: self-refutation and the objectivity of benefits and future events (169d-172b and 177c-180b), restates Heracliteanism as undermining the latter objection (179c-d), refutes the grounding of knowledge in Heracliteanism (181c-183c), and refutes the Protagorean definition of knowledge (184b-186e). Thereafter facing the definition of knowledge in terms of judgment he presents three conundrums showing false judgment is not possible (189a-190e), explains false judgment in terms of the image of a block of wax (191a-195b), shows the block of wax does not explain false judgment about numbers (195b-196c), explains this in terms of the image of an aviary (197a-199c), shows the aviary explanation does not work (199c-200c), and refutes the definition (200c-201c). In response to the definition in terms of an account he then reports his dream according to which an account is a complex of names (201c-202d), refutes the implied definition (202d-206b), and proposes and refutes three further interpretations of what an account is in the definition (206d-210b).

38 This is not to deny that the dialogue does suggest some positive proposals, but for the status of such things (proposed beliefs) in a Socratic scepticism, see further below.

39 In the *Lysis* Socrates argues that only those are friends who both love one another (212b-d), then that an unresponsive beloved is a friend (212d-213a), yet next refutes this too (213a-c); he argues that friends are alike (214a-b), then refutes this (214b-215c); he argues that friends are different (215c-216a), then refutes that (216a-b); he argues that what is neutral befriends the good because of the bad (216b-218c), then rejects the bad as the cause (218c-221d); he argues what is akin is the object of

friendship (221e-222a), then argues against it, as interpreted (222b-d).

40 Although tempting, perhaps, it seems too speculative to state, as most recently Miller 2015, 170 does, that for Socrates in Plato (even in the *Phaedo*) the immortality of the soul and the theory of the forms are beliefs of a special order, being 'conditions of the possibility of philosophy'; while no dialogues definitively contradict these beliefs, many are more explicitly sceptical (e.g. *Apology* 29a, cf. 40c-41c, and *Parmenides* 129a-135c, respectively).

41 Cf. Long 1988, 158, who follows the interpretation of this by Vlastos 1985, 20-2, which I reject here, on the grounds that Socrates never distinguishes two different kinds of knowledge ('elenctic' and 'certain'), and moreover makes no significant claim to any kind of moral knowledge. See Wolfsdorf 2004, where, following a comprehensive analysis of putatively relevant passages, Wolfsdorf demonstrates by reference to context that none of the six surviving genuine claims to ethical knowledge that Socrates does make in the so-called early dialogues has any doctrinal significance. Wolfsdorf does not extend his analysis to the scattered claims to non-ethical knowledge he also collects, but it seems likely they would fall to the same kinds of explanation, i.e., that they are *ad hominem*, and of no epistemological significance; cf. also Tarrant 2006.

42 Xenophon (*Mem*. 1.1.12-15), after reporting that Socrates regarded natural philosophy as of secondary importance to ethics and politics, alleges that Socrates drew the sceptical conclusion that the former was beyond human ability, on the grounds that its exponents disagreed on both procedure and doctrine, in addition regarding it as of no practical use (on the relation of the this passage to Academic scepticism see Long 1988,153 and 157). While Plato's Socrates in the *Phaedo* affirms the importance of the question of the immortality of the soul (as part of natural philosophy) and the value of pursuing it (see especially the discussion of *misology* 88c-91c) he is in a sense even more sceptical than Xenophon allows (esp. 1.1.13), by not claiming to know that the answer is beyond human understanding (and cf. *Timaeus* 28c). Although the historical Socrates is not my topic, it seems here that Xenophon's own suppositions have coloured his account of Socrates.

43 See Shields 1994, and Bett 2011, 333-4. Socrates is not portrayed by Plato as seeking to produce *epochê* as a result of equipollent antithetical cases (cf. *Republic* 7.538d-e), but rather further inquiry: see below. Cicero certainly reports it as the Academic sceptic view that in Plato 'nothing is stated definitely (*adfirmatur*) and on many topics both sides of the case are argued' (*Acad*. 1.46). On the other hand the Pyrrhonist sceptic Sextus Empiricus (*P.* 1.221-3, 225 and *M*. 7.141-4) argues that Plato was a dogmatist; cf. Woodruff 1986, 24 n.3.

44 On Socrates in Plato as a model for Arcesilaus see Cooper 2006 (e.g., p.181), Bonazzi 2003, 122-5, Tarrant 2000, 58 with n.18, Schofield 1999, 328-30, Ioppolo 1995, 90, 93-4 and 97-108, Annas 1994, Long 1988, 156-60 and Ioppolo 1986, 21, 44-6 and 182-4. Woodruff 1986, 26-7, 31-4, regards Socrates' claim to knowledge of his ignorance, which he thinks is inferred from the refutation of all proposed definitions, as the greatest challenge to a sceptical interpretation of his philosophy; he proposes to reconcile this with scepticism on the basis that it is self-knowledge, not knowledge about a subject of definition. It seems more likely to me that Socrates' ability to refute the definitions of others, and even their reformulations of his own ideas (cf., e.g., Nicias' definition of courage in *Laches*) derives from his knowledge of his ignorance, not *vice versa*. Cf. Bett 2006, 305, and Sakezles 2008 on the form and extent of Socrates' claims in the *Apology*, and see below here.

45 E.g., *Apology* 29a-b, on thinking death is an evil, without knowing what it is.

46 For Arcesilaus see, e.g., Striker 1980, 60, Couissin 1983, 33-5, and Couissin 1929, 390-2 and 396, and cf. Long 1986, 442 and 445; for Carneades, e.g., Brittain 2001, 77, and Couissin 1983, 46-51. This view is opposed systematically by Ioppolo 1986, and cf. Maconi 1988; for further references see Bonazzi 2003, 101-3 with n.17.

47 There are reports of Arcesilaus being committed to *epochê*, either just personally, as a habit or attitude, or even (in some sense) advocating it: as a personal attitude, e.g., Thorsrud 2009, 50, Brittain 2008, Pt. 6, Cooper 2006, esp. 182-3, Long 1986, 488, Ioppolo 1986, 62-3 (also 13, 26 with n.70, 29-34, 57-9, 64-9 and 158) and even Couissin 1983, 39; as a position Arcesilaus advocated: Hankinson 1995, 75-83, Sedley 1983, 11. 13 with n.19 and p.21 with n.66, and Shields 1994, 349-50, who cites what he claims is evidence that Arcesilaus himself asserted that the wise man should maintain *epochê* (D.L. 4.28, 4.32, S.E. *P.* 1.232 and Plut. *Adv. Col*. 1120c); yet Shields' evidence seems to me more like a later writer's interpretation of Arcesilaus' motives, so as to explain his practices, rather than a report of anything he said himself. Moreover Shields 1994, 346-7, misrepresents the implications of Arcesilaus' reported denial (Cic. *Acad*. 1.44-5, although not supported by Philodemus *Acad.Ind*. col. 20.2-4 or Cic. *De or.* 3.67-8), that one could even know that one knew nothing, which would be inconsistent with Shield's claim (and cf. Hankinson 1995, 85-6, and Annas 1994, 338-40) that Arcesilaus asserted two 'second order' propositions (that everything is undiscerned, and thus one should maintain *epochê*), since *Acad*. 1.44-5 makes clear there is no limitation on the scope of the primary 'denial' (and thus that it is not to be treated itself as a protected 'second order' knowledge claim). Moreover Cicero reports

the propositions Shields focuses upon in indirect discourse, but this is consistent with their being originally an interpretive explanation of Arcesilaus' practice. Cooper 2006, 180-7, in any case argues that these 'propositions' amount not to any specific cognitive commitments, but just a pre-cognitive (my term) commitment to reason itself.

48 S.E. *M*. 7.158 (but cf. Plut. *Adv. Col*. 1122a-e); see e.g. Hankinson 1995, 89-91, and Couissin 1983, 35-41 (arguing that reference to *to eulogon* is a consequence for the Stoics alone, although used dialectically by Arcesilaus to explain his own rational decisions), rejected by Ioppolo 1986, 121-45 and 161-2; cf. Brittain 2001, 270-2, and Woodruff 1986, 24, 29 and 32.

49 On Clitomachus' view, where 'what is convincing' (*pithanon*) does not lead to assent, only a weaker acceptance, see, e.g., Thorsrud 2009, 80-2, Tarrant 1985, 20 and 41, and Striker 1980, 67-9, 73 with n.49, 76-9 and 82-3; on the view of Philo and Metrodorus (where the *pithanon* does produce assent), see, e.g., Brittain 2001, esp. 102-5, Tarrant 1985, esp. 12, and Striker 1980, 55 and 74. On the debate see also Bonazzi 2003, 104-7.

50 Glucker 1997 is a careful study of Cicero's evidence on this point.

51 See Cic. *Acad*. 2.148, *adsensurum autem non percepto, id est opinaturum, sapientem existumem, sed ita ut intellegat se opinari sciatque nihil esse quod comprehendi et percipi possit* (the words of a follower of Philo, but they could be restated in Clitomachean terms); cf. Bonazzi 2003, 106, Schofield 1999, 335-6, Long and Sedley 1987, 460 and Ioppolo 1986, 196-7 and 208-9. Thus the implied definition of *epochê* by Bett 2006, 298, as 'withdrawal from definite belief' is prejudicial, and affects his evaluation (pp.305-6) of the plausibility of treating Socrates as a sceptic. Couissin 1929, 392-7, applies the distinction at Cic. *Acad*. 2.104 to Arcesilaus, not just Clitomachus (i.e. Carneades), to whom alone Cicero attributes it.

52 Cf. the use of *eikazôn* (*Meno* 98b1).

53 See, on Clitomachus' interpretation (whereby the wise maintain *epochê* regarding knowledge claims, but in some sense adopts beliefs), e.g., Striker 1980, 62, and Couissin 1929, 392, and on Philo's interpretation (whereby the wise give full assent to beliefs) cf. Couissin 1929, 395; see further with references Bonazzi 2003, 104-7.

54 Cf. Bonazzi 2003, 126-9, who notes, following Annas 1994, 335, that a systematic interpretation of Plato would only have become necessary at the time of Philo's dispute with Antiochus over the history of the Academy; also Tarrant 2000, 60.

55 Cf. Glucker 1978, 39-47 (although I remain unconvinced by his speculations regarding the forger of the *Second Epistle*); but note also his comment on Carneades and Plutarch (p.289), and cf. p.292 n.128.

56 Ioppolo 1993, 197 with n.53, restricts Carneades' acceptance of the *pithanon* to actions, citing Cic. *Acad*. 2.94 and 98, but this is reductively misleading: note the references to the result, in the two higher grades of conviction (S.E. *M*. 7.180-3), as a belief (*pistis*), or decision (*krisis*), in the latter case resulting from scrutiny (*dokimazein*), taking into account actual and possible circumstances, including, e.g. in the example of Menelaus and Helen, antecedent beliefs, *pisteuein*. Cf. Bonazzi 2003, 105 n.25, citing Cic. *Acad*. 2.32, *et in agenda vita et in quaerendo ac disserendo*.

57 For modern discussions of the importance of Plato for Academic sceptics see references in Bonazzi 2003, 119-21 with ns.69, 70 and 75. I agree with Bonazzi that in-house critical discussion of the plausibility of theories in the dialogues is probably the origin of the garbled reports of secret Platonic doctrines taught by sceptic Academics: see Cic. *Acad*. 2.60, S.E. *P*. 1.234, Augustine *C. Acad*. 3.38, Numen. ap. Eus. *PE* 14.6.6 and 14.8.12-14, with Glucker 1978, 301-6, and see now also Vessoli 2016. The evidence is rejected by Tarrant 2000, 59 with n.22, and Ioppolo 1986, 35 with n.45

58 If this does not seem adequate to the methodological principles of late dialogues which either refer to or employ the method of collection and division (especially *Phaedrus*, *Philebus*, *Sophist* and *Statesman*; *Parmenides* is methodologically unique), here I can only adumbrate the response that (a) the method of division is not clearly employed successfully or completely in any dialogue, and so its legitimacy and authority are left to be established, if anywhere, elsewhere, while (b) the results reached by other means in those dialogues are in some respects obscure and in others are not presented as of any more epistemically secure status than theories about forms or the soul.

59 Esp., e.g., *Republic* 6.511b-d, 7 *passim*, *Phaedrus* 275c-276a.