



Scepticism and Eclecticism

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The Stoics and Epicureans had endeavoured to secure a scientific basis for their theory of happiness by assuming certain fundamental theoretical principles. Scepticism abandoned this method, asserting that the supreme good and highest happiness could be attained by man only under condition of foregoing all dogmatical principles, and withholding all definitive judgment as to the nature of existent things. To disclaim all knowledge was therefore a first principle with the Sceptics.

There were three successive schools of Sceptics, or three sections of philosophers whose teaching was sceptical in its tendency: (a.) Pyrrho of Elis and his early followers; (b.) the so-called Middle Academy, *i.e.*, the Second and Third Academic Schools; and lastly (c.) the later Sceptics, subsequent to AEnesidemus, who again reverted to the teachings of Pyrrho. We shall notice the representatives of these three schools of Scepticism in order.

Pyrrho of Elis, who lived about the time of Alexander the Great (B.C. 330), followed the teaching of Democritus, and, despised the other philosophers as Sophists. He held the view that speculative thought cannot lead to any result. "In reality," he said, "there is nothing beautiful and nothing hateful; in itself everything is just as much the one as it is the other, everything depends on human institution and custom." (Diog. Laert., IX. 61.) This is the celebrated *ouden mallon*, which became a shibboleth among the Sceptics. According to Pyrrho's teaching, "things are inaccessible to our faculties of knowledge, inapprehensible (*akatalépsia*) and it is our duty to abstain from all judgment regarding them (*epochê*). This *epochê* is the first condition of happiness, for happiness consists in imperturbable peace of soul (*ataraxia*). "All the external circumstances of human life are of their nature indifferent (*adiaphoron*), it becomes the wise man to preserve in every event complete tranquillity of mind and to permit nothing to disturb his equanimity."

Among the friends and pupils of Pyrrho were Philo of Athens and Nausiphanes of Teos, and, more remarkable than the others, Timon of Phlius (B.C. 325-335). He was the author of certain satirical poems (*silloi*) in three books, in which he treated the Dogmatic Philosophers as sophists and babblers. His own peculiar views may be thus stated:

(a.) Perception and mental apprehension give us no certain knowledge of things. For in order to decide conclusively with regard to objects apprehended by our minds we must not only perceive what things are and how they exist, but we must also know what is their relation to us and what their influence upon us. But neither knowledge is possible to us. Not the former, for there are no fixed differences between existing things, they are unstable, and therefore beyond the reach of knowledge. Not the latter, for the senses themselves are deceptive. We have therefore no means of deciding whether an object possesses the properties which are manifested to us or not. We cannot, in consequence, trust either our perceptions or mental apprehensions of things.

(b.) Nor is any certain judgment regarding things possible. For in favour of every proposition which we enunciate, and in favour of its contradictory, the grounds are equally cogent, *i.e.*, there are as many reasons against the proposition as for it. Certain knowledge is

therefore, unattainable, we cannot even know with certainty that we have no certain knowledge of things.

(c.) Nothing then remains but to refrain from all judgment, to take up a position of non-decision (*aphasia*). This is the position assumed by the wise man. By this means, and by this means only, he secures that tranquillity of soul (*ataraxia*), which is the highest good. This state follows the suspension of judgment (*epochê*) as the shadow follows the body. We must renounce the craze of knowledge, and spare ourselves the futile labour of inquiring into the nature of things; it is only by acting in this wise that we shall attain to tranquillity of soul, and the true happiness which it involves.’

It will be observed that the Scepticism [of the Middle Academy] is not so radical as that of Pyrrho. The Academics acknowledged at least an apparent knowledge, and in this knowledge they furthermore recognised differences of degrees. The Middle Academy directed its teaching chiefly against the dogmatism of the Stoics. It refused to admit the Stoic *Catalepsis* as the criterion of truth, but it set up no other criterion instead; it renounced certainty altogether, and acknowledged only probable opinion.

The Scepticism of Pyrrho was revived at a later date by Aenesidemus of Gnossus, who, as it appears, taught at Alexandria towards the end of the last century before Christ, or in the beginning of the first century of the new era. He composed the *Purrôneiôn logôn oktô biblia* (Diog. Laert., IX. 116). His theory is not a thorough scepticism. The purpose of his sceptical teaching was to establish the Philosophy of Heraclitus. Scepticism was, in his view, not a system in itself but the introduction to a system (*agôgê*). The distinctive character of Scepticism consists, according to Aenesidemus, in this, that whereas the Dogmatists maintain that they have found truth, and the Academics assert that it is impossible to find it, the genuine Sceptic does not assert the one or the other; he refrains from judgment on this question.

To justify this Scepticism Aenesidemus invented the ten “grounds for doubts” (*tropous tês skêpseôs*). They are the following:

(a.) The first ground for doubt is found in the general differences existing between animated beings and more especially in the structural differences in their organs of sense. The same object must appear differently to these different beings according as their organs are differently formed, and there is no means of determining which of them perceives the object aright or whether it is manifested to any one of them all as it really exists.

(b.) The second reason for doubt is furnished by the differences between men both as to body and as to soul. As a result of these differences sensation and mental apprehensions are different in different men, and we can never decide in which case they represent things as they really are.

(c.) The third reason for doubt is given us by the differences of sense in the same subject. The different senses perceive one and the same object differently, or perceive different qualities in the same object, and we have no means of determining which is the true sensation, or whether the object really possesses the qualities which we perceive.

(d.) The fourth reason for doubt is taken from the differences caused by passing changes taking place in the knowing subject, owing to which a certain knowledge of the object is impossible.

(e.) The fifth consists in this that the objects according to their different position and distance present to us wholly different appearances, and thus the conclusion is again arrived at that a certain judgment is impossible.

(f.) The sixth reason for doubt is supplied by the circumstance that with all our sensations is mingled some element derived either from other objects or from the sensitive subject itself.

(g.) The seventh consists in this that objects excite different sensations and mental

apprehensions according as their quantity and structure change.

(h.) The eighth is given in the fact that we perceive things as they are related either to the subject knowing, or to other things, and that all our knowledge is thus relative.

(i.) The ninth is drawn from the circumstance that things appear differently to us according as the sensation and the object are something habitual or something unusual.

(j.) The tenth reason for doubt is furnished by the opposition prevailing amongst human opinions as to justice and injustice, good and evil, religion and law, &c., as well as by the opposition between philosophers in their opinions. By this, as by the other reasons, the conclusion is warranted that there is nothing certain in our knowledge.

In addition to these general reasons for Scepticism AEnesidemus (according to Sext. Empir. *adv. Math.* IX. 207) adduces special reasons against the principle of Causality. "Cause," he says, "belongs to the category of Relation, and relation is not anything real, it is something created by our thought. Furthermore, the cause must be synchronous with the effect, or it must precede the effect, or follow it. It cannot be synchronous with it, otherwise both would exist together, and there would be no reason why one should be called the producer and the other the product. The cause cannot precede the effect, for it is not a cause so long as its effect does not exist. It is clear that it cannot follow it. The notion of causality is thus wholly meaningless."

To the later Sceptics belong Agrippa, Menodotus of Nicomedia, and notably Sextus Empiricus (A.D. 200). Saturninus was the pupil of Sextus. The grammarian and antiquarian Favorinus of Arles (under Hadrian) belongs to the same school. The later Sceptics reduced the "reasons for doubt" laid down by AEnesidemus to five:

(a.) The differences of opinion among philosophers.

(b.) The necessity of a *regressus in infinitum* in every demonstration, since every proposition has to be proved from another proposition.

(c.) The relativity of all our notions, since the object appears different, according to the constitution of the individual perceiving it, and according to its relations to other objects.

(d.) The arbitrary character of the assumption by the dogmatists of certain first principles, which they assume in order to escape from the *regressus in infinitum*.

(e.) The circle which is unavoidable in every demonstration since the proposition on which the proof rests (major) requires for its truth the truth of the proposition to be established (conclusion).

The later Sceptics directed their attacks in a special manner against the teaching of the Stoics regarding God and Providence, The existence of Evil, which God either will not remove or cannot remove, they held to be at variance with the very notion of God.

With regard to Sextus Empiricus, two works are still extant in which he has expounded his Sceptical theory: *Pyrrhon. Institut.*, Libri. 3.; and *Adv. Mathematicos.*, Libri. 11. He examines critically the dogmatic systems of Greek Philosophy, and endeavours to show that all their principles are untenable. He makes a large use of sophisms in this criticism. These works of Sextus Empiricus are, however, of much importance for the student of the history of Greek Philosophy.

Along with Scepticism we find in this period of the decline of Greek Philosophy an Eclecticism which borrowed from the several systems what seemed most probable in each. We have called attention to the eclectic tendency manifested by many of the philosophers we have noticed, notably by some of the Stoics. But the most distinguished representative of this phase of thought was Cicero.

M. Tullius Cicero (B.C. 106-43) had pursued the study of philosophy at Athens and at Rhodes. In his early youth he attended the lectures of Phaedrus the Epicurean, and of Philo the Academician, and was intimate with Diodotus the Stoic; subsequently he followed the teaching

of the Academician, Antiochus of Ascalon, of Zeno the Epicurean, and of Posidonius the Stoic. We are not concerned with his career as an orator and a statesman. In his old age he again devoted himself to philosophy; it was the chief occupation of the last three years of his life.

Of the philosophical writings of Cicero the following have come down to us: (a.) Academicarum Quaestionum, Libri 4, of which, however, only the first and fourth books are extant; (b.) De Finibus Bonorum et Malorum, Libri 5; (c.) Tusculanarum Quaestionum, Libri 5; (d.) De Natura Deorum, Libri 3; (e.) De Divinatione, Libri 2; (f.) De Fato, of which only a part is preserved; (g.) De Legibus, an unfinished treatise of which only fragments, in three books, are preserved; (h.) De Officiis, Libri 3; (i.) Cato Major seu De Senectute; (k.) Laelius sive De Amicitia, and Paradoxa Stoicorum sex; (l.) Consolatio, of which only fragments are extant; fragments of the Hortensius; (m.) and lastly De Republica, Libri 6, of which only a third part has come down to us, first published by A. Mai from a palimpsest in the Vatican Library. We may add to this list the rhetorical works: De Oratore, Libri 3; Brutus sive De Claris Oratoribus, Liber 1; and Orator, Liber 1.

Cicero's services to philosophy consist less in original inquiry than in the zeal and ability which he exhibited in rendering Greek Philosophy, especially the Stoic doctrines, acceptable to his countrymen, and introducing it among the cultured classes at Rome. To effect this he modified Greek theories in many material points, softened down some of their more repulsive tenets especially those regarding the Highest Good, and the character of the Sage, and in his exposition was at once easily intelligible and attractive. He admits that knowledge is valuable for its own sake, and that it confers genuine pleasure on its possessor, but he is at the same time convinced that the end to which it leads is action, and that action is therefore of more importance than theory.

In his theory of cognition Cicero follows the Middle Academy. The differences between philosophers on the most essential points lead him to despair of certainty in knowledge, and to content himself with probability. According to his view, probability is enough for the purposes of practical life. Probability, he holds, may be best attained by a comparison and criticism of different views. Hence his Eclectical Method, his comparison of the opinions of the several philosophers, and his adoption of the view which seems to him most probable. He is not, however, without certain guiding principles in his choice of opinions. He holds fast by the evidence of the senses and of consciousness, and in the domain of higher rational knowledge he appeals to the immediate evidence furnished by the moral faculty, to the *consensus gentium*, and to certain fundamental principles which, according to his view, are innate in man (notiones innatae, natura nobis insitae).

In Physics, Cicero's attitude is one of doubt; he admits, however, that investigation on this subject is an agreeable and worthy field of exercise for the human mind. He asserts the existence and the spiritual nature of God, and insists that everything unworthy of the gods shall be excluded from mythology. He esteems highly the belief in the providence of God and in His government of the world. He sets forth, indeed, the grounds on which the Academy rejected the belief, as well as the grounds on which the Stoics adopted it, but he is distinctly in favour of the latter. He regards the human soul as a being of supramundane origin, and enters at length into the proofs of its immortality.

In his Ethics Cicero is a Stoic, but he blends the rigid theories of Stoicism with Platonic and Peripatetic elements after the fashion of the later Stoics, and thus mitigates their severity. The question whether virtue is of itself sufficient for happiness he is inclined to answer affirmatively, but remembering his own weakness and that of mankind generally he hesitates, and seems to look with favour on the distinction made by Antiochus of Ascalon between the *vita beata* assured by virtue in all circumstances, and the *vita beatissima* which is enhanced

by the enjoyment of external goods (De Fin., V. c. 26). Virtue, however, he holds to be the good compared to which all others are only of secondary worth. “He combats the Peripatetic doctrine that virtue is nothing more than the reducing of the *pathê* to due order; he holds with the Stoics that the wise man has no *pathê*.” In political philosophy his ideal of government is a constitution which combines monarchical, aristocratic, and democratic elements — an ideal which he finds to have been approximately realised in the Roman State (Be Rep., I. 29; II. 23).

He also asserts the freedom of the human will. He would rather admit that a proposition may be neither true nor false, than admit that everything happens by Fate. Without liberty there could be no room for praise or blame, for reward or punishment. If you object that the freedom of the will contradicts the principle that nothing happens without a cause, he answers that the freedom of the will only excludes an external antecedent cause of our actions, but not all cause, for the will is itself the cause of our actions. Cicero will, however, permit such concessions to popular superstition as auguries and the like.

An Eclecticism of the same kind as Cicero’s was adopted by the Sextian School founded by Q. Sextius (born about B.C. 70). Amongst the followers of Sextius were his son Sextius, Sotion of Alexandria the teacher of Seneca, Cornelius Celsus, L. Crassitius of Tarentum, and Papirius Fabianus. This school seems to have held an intermediate position between Pythagoreanism, Cynicism, and Stoicism. Abstinence from animal flesh, daily self-examination, metempsychosis, exhortation to moral excellence, to fortitude of soul, and to independence of all external things seems to have been the chief points in their teaching. The school had only a short existence.

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