A Note on a new Polish translation of *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*

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*Outlines of Pyrrhonism* (in short “PH”) - a treatise in three books written by a sceptic, Sextus Empiricus (II/III century AD), can certainly be recognized as a masterpiece of philosophy. Its importance is rather due not to its direct influence on the philosophy of Sextus’ times, but because of its impact on two ground-breaking periods: firstly, the Renaissance as a historical epoch when Sextus’ works were discovered, translated and widely read by humanists. And secondly, due to Sextus’ influence on the “revival” of scepticism in the second half of the 20th century.2

There are very few traces of the influence of the *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* on other works before the Renaissance.4 The situation changed significantly when Henricus Stephanus (Henri Estienne), a great humanist, translator and editor of i.a. Plato's works, published a Latin translation of *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* in 1562.5 In 1569 Gentian Hervet published his translations of *Adversus dogmaticos* (in short “AD”) and *Adversus mathematicos* (“AM”), whereas

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1 The work on the project was financed by the National Science Centre and was approved by a decision no. DEC-2013/09/B/HS1/01996.
5 Sexti philosophi Pyrrhoniarum hypotypoœon libri III: quibus in tres philosophiae partes seuerissime inquiritur; libri magno ingenii acumine scripti, uariaque doctrina referiti; graecè nunquam, latinè nunquam primè editi / interprete Henricio Stephano. Anno M. D. LXII ([Parisiis]: Excudebat idem Henricus Stephanus, illustris viri Huldrici Fuggeri typographus.
6 Sexti Empirici viri longe doctissimi Aduersus mathematicos: hoc est, aduersus eos qui proshitentur disciplinas, opus eruditissimum, compliciencs vniuersam Pyrrhoniorum acutissimorum philosophorum disputandi de quibuslibet disciplinis & artibus rationem, Graecè nunquam Latinè nunquam primè editum, Gentiano Heraeto Aurelio interprete; eiusdem Sexti Pyrrhoniiarum hypotysoœon libri tres: quibus in tres philosophiae partes seuerissime inquiritur. Libri

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in 1621 a Greek edition of Sextus’ works was released with their Latin translation. Afterwards, Sextus’ texts had a profound influence on the development of modern philosophy and, to quote Diego Machuca, they are “the key to understanding the origin and development of early modern philosophy”. Thanks to these works, philosophical discussions that took place in the 17th century shifted their focus from metaphysics to epistemology. Even though the scope and strength of influence of the Sextus’ writings are still under debate, the presence of sceptic reminiscences in the works of such philosophers as Michel de Montaigne, René Descartes, Blaise Pascal, Pierre-Daniel Huet, François De La Mothe Le Vayer, David Hume is indisputable.

Undoubtedly, scepticism has been of particular interest among philosophers over the last few decades. The philosophical shift to epistemology and logical analysis has been a reason for intensification and widened scope of research on the works of Sextus Empiricus. Sextus started to be perceived not only as doxographer or the primary source of our knowledge on Pyrrhonism, but also as a representative of an important philosophical tradition that is interesting per se. Sextus’ works have been recognized for a large amount of argumentation and have been analysed from the perspective of their logical value, the correctness of argumentation and their persuasive power. The growing interest in Sextus has contributed to translations of his works into various languages.

Despite the great interest in Sextus around the world, Polish literature did not have much to offer. In the previous century a Polish reader could find only two full Sextus’ translations: of *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* by Adam Krokiewicz and *Against the Logicians* by...
Izydora Dąmb ska. Then, this list was extended with the translation of Against the Professors and of the remaining books of Against the Dogmatists, i.e. treatises Against the Physicists and Against the Ethicists.

The only Polish translation of Outlines of Pyrrhonism by Adam Krokiewicz came out in 1931. It created great controversy at the time of publication, followed by a discussion between the translator and another recognized Polish scholar Walter Auerbach. The discussion was generated by Krokiewicz’s translation style and his unique philosophical and philological insight, which was an incentive for him to do etymological research and experiment with word formation.

The presented translation is not so much marked by an individual approach to the text as Krokiewicz’s, as it aims at maintaining clarity and accordance with terminological tradition. Sextus’ style does not prompt translators to experiment with language. The style and the language of the Outlines is simple and adapted to its content. It is neither rhetorical nor complicated as regards syntax or vocabulary. Repeatability of schemas as well as an established scope of used terminology indicate that Sextus follows a certain tradition which developed its own linguistic, syntactic and argumentative convention. Extraordinary elements, such as wit, irony and literary quotes appear quite rarely. Sextus’ style is as impersonal and devoid of emotions as his self-presentation.

Nevertheless, it does not mean that translation of Sextus’ treatises is an easy task. The difficulty in translating Sextus’ works and philosophical texts from the late antiquity in general is caused by the rich and long-established philosophical tradition, a variety of sources from which they draw, and a multitude of texts they refer to. Hence, the philosophical terminology in Sextus’ works may seem sometimes confusing, ambiguous and inconsistent.

Our understanding of Greek thought, based on textbook rules, as well as adopted terminological conventions formed in us a habit of associating provided terms with an established tradition and widely accepted terminology. However, unambiguity and terminological consistency are not so obvious in Sextus’ work. Its reader must remember that

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18 Annas/Barnes, p. xiv–xv: “They are also well written. Sextus’ Greek is simple: his vocabulary is restrained, his syntax pellucid. Irony, and even sarcasm, are occasionally detectable; but the rhetorical trowel is not one of Sextus’ implements. Sentences are sometimes complicated (for Sextus sometimes has complicated arguments to express); but they are never convoluted, nor tortured. […] Sextus’ style is professional, and perfectly adapted to his matter".
many references to other texts or philosophical ideas are already based on a certain interpretational tradition. A number of texts which are referred to in PH had already been translated into another philosophical language or paraphrased long before Sextus. A perfect example here can be Gorgias’ treatise *On the Non-Existent* (there are numerous references to this work in Sextus’ *Outlines*), the language of which and the method of argumentation was fully adapted to the sceptical standards. It is also visible in the references to Plato’s *Theaetetus* (on the basis of which Plato is interpreted as a sceptic), or the reports on the Pythagorean and Platonic doctrine of monad and the indefinite dyad. In all these cases there is no doubt that Sextus refers to the texts which he does not know in the original versions, and which at some point were completely transformed, adapted and reinterpreted.

Sextus’ translator must always be aware of the duality of the terms used by Sextus: the terms of (usually) unknown original and the terms of paraphrase or interpretation presented in Sextus’ writings. Even if the used concepts may be immediately associated with a particular philosophical tradition, e.g. Platonic, Aristotelian etc., and consequently prompt to be translated in accordance with an established convention, it does not mean that Sextus uses them following such a tradition and that they are used in a consistent way in the whole text. That is why translation of such supposedly obvious terms as ou)si/a, upo/stasiv, du/namiv, ei)=nai, sumbai/nein, e[ν, mona/v etc. is often very challenging.

This terminological inconsistency applies also to the Pyrrhonian tradition, as a result of complicated process in which the ancient Pyrrhonism developed. Although Sextus uses sceptical terms in a seemingly consistent way, it should be borne in mind that his scepticism is not a single system, but a blend of various influences rooted in numerous sceptical traditions. Therefore, in Translator’s view, there is no hope of finding a coherent and consistent idea of scepticism in Sextus’ work. Moreover, clinging to this hope is a perfect example of a)niedwlopoi/hsiv (“humbug”) typical for some historians of philosophy, who take for granted that Sextus’ logical and argumentative standards must suit their own requirements as regards coherence and rationality. To understand Sextus better there is no other way as researching on the transmission of the philosophical works which are referred to in Sextus’ writings and thus unveiling the terminological dependencies and transformations of the concepts.

Work on the translation of *Outlines* was a source of reflection about some controversial issues relating to the form and content of Sextus’ writings, i.a. the problem of relative chronology of Sextus’ treatises, the structure of *Outlines* and the view of the history of philosophy depicted in PH.
The chronological order in which Sextus wrote his works is widely discussed. The thesis that a treatise *Against the Professors* was created later than *Against the Dogmatists* (“AD”) is rather widely accepted (despite some hardly justified objections), which is supported by references to *Against the Dogmatists* that are present in the former of these works.\(^{19}\)

The problem of relative chronology of PH and the preserved part of AD (*Against the Mathematicians*, in short “AM”, VII-XI) is much more controversial. Despite rich comparative material in form of numerous parallel passages in both texts, researchers remain divided over this issue: the majority of them refrain from expressing any opinion, others, in line with orthodoxy, claim that PH was written earlier than AD\(^ {20}\), whereas some put forward a thesis that AD is prior to PH.\(^ {21}\) On the basis of Translator’s experiences while working on translation of AM IX–XI (AD) and PH, it may be argued that PH was created later, as some argumentations used in *Outlines* are so compressed that it is in some cases necessary to compare parallel reasoning included in AD so as to understand their content. Thus comparison of parallel passages may suggest that most of the argumentation in PH is a compiled and compressed version of argumentation included in AD.\(^ {22}\)

Another observation concerns the structure of the *Outlines*. Sextus’ treatise in modern editions comprise three books, which are divided into chapters, and then into sections. Division into three books is definitely Sextus’ own idea, as he himself refers to it a few times\(^ {23}\). The sections were introduced by Fabricius in his edition of Sextus’ treatises\(^ {24}\) and became a standard way of giving references to Sextus’ works.

The origin of a division into chapters with their headings is a subject of controversy. J. Annas and J. Barnes claim that this division “is probably coming from Sextus himself.”\(^ {25}\) However, in Translator’s view, two counterarguments can be adduced against this thesis. Firstly, in PH we can find headings which are misleading and divide the text in a certainly incorrect manner\(^ {26}\). Secondly, Sextus personally comments on the construction of the PH and

\(^{19}\) Cf. D. Machuca, op. cit., p. 37; AM I 26, 29, 33, 35, 282; AM II 106; AM III 116; AM VI 52, 58, 61.


\(^{21}\) Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Ethicists*, p. xxiv.

\(^{22}\) Worth mentioning is also the argument advanced by Fernanda Decleva Caizzi (*Sesto e gli scettici*, in: “Elenchos” 13, 1992, p. 279–327, 284, annotation 11), who points out that if *Commentaries* mentioned in PH I 222 are “Sceptical commentaries” which are equated with AD, then we must consequently presume that AD is prior to PH.

\(^{23}\) Cf. PH I 241; PH II 258; PH III 279.

\(^{24}\) Annas/Barnes, xxxiv: “The section division is modern, first appearing (I think) in the elegant edition published by A. Fabricius in 1718.”

\(^{25}\) Annas/Barnes, xiv: “The discussion is divided into chapters, the division probably coming from Sextus himself.”, a także Annas/Barnes, xxxiv: “The book division certainly, and the chapter division probably derive from Sextus.”

\(^{26}\) Cf. e.g. a wrong heading in PH III 188 (“What is an art of living”) or a heading in PH I 36 (“The Ten Modes”), which Annas/Barnes advise to put before PH I 35.
The whole treatise is divided into “a general account” (Book I) and “a specific account” (Books II and III). The general account, according to Sextus, covers the concept of scepticism, its origin and principles, arguments, standard, aim, modes of suspension of judgement, how sceptical assertions are understood, and the distinction between scepticism and neighbouring philosophies. Nearly the same structure of Book I (with only one difference) is repeated by Sextus in PH I 209. This example derived from Book I shows that Sextus’ own idea of the division of the treatise differs from the one marked by chapters. The problem of “internal” composition of PH would require a separate study, but it should be underlined that a full reconstruction of Sextus plan would allow for revealing the original text structure, which, in Translator’s view, was lost due to the introduction of chapters that subdivide the text.

The last issue addressed in this short note is the view of the history of philosophy presented in Sextus’ work. In Sextus’ writings we can find many valuable quotes, paraphrases, or references that broaden our knowledge of Greek philosophy. Yet, Sextus is not only a doxographer. His treatises, especially PH, picture a particular view of the history of Greek philosophy, and, interestingly, it is a view that significantly differs from this which we regard as a standard exposition of the history of philosophy. It is no use applying the view of the history of Greek philosophy established by Hegelian school in the 19th century with its division into subsequent development stages and breakthroughs connected with Socrates’, Plato’s and Aristotle’s thoughts. There is only a passing reference to Socrates in PH, whereas Plato’s thought is mentioned only with regard to the theory of things in flux. Aristotle’s philosophy is also of minor significance, as it is referred to only three times in the overview of physical theories. Instead, in PH we find extensive presentation of Stoic and Epicurean ideas,
as well as the whole list of the figures which are also completely unknown to us or considered to be of lesser importance, such as Xeniades, Oenopides, Hippo of Rhegium, Onomacritus, Diodorus Cronus, Menodotus of Nicomedia and others.

Sextus’ view of the sceptic tradition is also far from textbook standards. Pyrrho is presented rather as a legendary founder of Scepticism than a prominent figure and philosopher, Aenesidemus is an exponent of unorthodox sceptical stance. Paradoxically this is a philosophy of Arcesilaus which is shown close to the sceptical tradition (with some differences pointed out). Sextus’ report demonstrates how questionable is a textbook discussion of the sceptical tradition and how many generalizations are required to build any universal and coherent history of Scepticism.

The above mentioned issues prove that the view of philosophy preserved in Sextus’ writings is an extremely interesting subject of research. The discrepancy between Sextus’ view and the standard of the history of Greek philosophy, applicable from the 19th century to date (which is a quite bizarre construction) should make us think about the prevailing schema and create some mistrust in clichés and “compelling” historical opinions and generalizations. The prerequisite for this is the rejection of belief in superiority of our absolutizing reconstruction and the rejection of conviction that Sextus’ view of the history of philosophy is a result of author’s ignorance or the character of his sources. Sextus certainly knows about the disputes that took place in antiquity more than we do on the grounds that he is their direct participant. Hence, Sextus’ treatises should be researched with a broad mind, with a firm conviction that they reveal a unique historical-philosophical perspective, which should not be adapted to our existing schemas, but rather should encourage us to ponder how much this perspective enriches and modifies our view on Greek philosophy.