

JULIA ANNAS

## Hume and Ancient Scepticism

Hume's scepticism is difficult to understand, and it is not surprising that there have been widely differing interpretations of it. It does, however, have some striking features which have led many scholars to think of it as more akin to ancient than to modern scepticism. In modern debates scepticism is standardly assumed to be a position that denies the availability of *knowledge*; the sceptic is the person who goes round challenging knowledge claims, but is content to leave us with beliefs, as long as we admit that these do not measure up to the standard required for knowledge. Hume's scepticism is not thus limited; it extends to our beliefs about the external world, cause, and so on, applying to knowledge as a special case, but not regarding it as defining the sceptic's concern. Further, modern scepticism is often explicitly *local* in its scope; one can be a sceptic about abstract objects while fully accepting values, or about values while remaining unsceptical about the external world. Hume, on the other hand, again joins the ancient sceptics in that his scepticism is global; it is not defined by a set of objections to one area of the world in particular.<sup>1</sup> It may well seem, then, that comparing Hume with the ancient sceptics will be fruitful.

However, Hume's relation to the ancient sceptics is in fact elusive and problematic. In this paper I shall be looking at his relation to the main ancient schools of scepticism, and drawing mainly negative conclusions: Hume did not understand ancient scepticism correctly, and in its most important aspect his scepticism is not, in ancient terms, sceptical at all; it is dogmatic. I am not sure how novel, or welcome these conclusions will be to Hume scholars, of which I am not one. I put them forward in a co-operative, rather than negative spirit, as part of an attempt to understand Hume's form of scepticism as one which is neither characteristically ancient nor typically modern, but importantly different from either.

An obvious place to begin is with Hume's use of Sextus Empiricus, the major surviving source for ancient scepticism. As is well known, Hume shows no sign of acquaintance with Sextus in the *Treatise* or the *First*

*Enquiry*; but he does make some references in the *Second Enquiry*, in one of the *Essays*, and in the *Natural History of Religion*. There are two points that stand out, at least to someone well acquainted with Sextus. Firstly, what text was Hume reading?<sup>2</sup> He quotes from Sextus once in Greek,<sup>3</sup> so he had access to a Greek edition and not just the 1562 Stephanus Latin translation.<sup>4</sup> One would expect him to use the edition of Fabricius, which had been available since 1718. However, if we assume this, we run into difficulties. In the *Second Enquiry* section II he mentions an argument for the existence of gods as being in Sextus "lib. 8". If one were referring to modern editions since Fabricius, the reference would be to what we call *Math. (Adversus Mathematicos)* 9.18 (cf. 52). In *The Natural History of Religion* Epicurus's argument about the beginning of the world is ascribed to Sextus "lib. ix"; in modern editions of Sextus the reference is to *Math.* 10.18–19. And later in this work Hume refers Carneades's *sorites*-argument against the existence of the gods to Sextus "lib. viii"; in modern editions of Sextus the reference is to *Math.* 9.182–90. That is, Hume appears to get the reference wrong by one book three times. Worse, the mistakes twice put an argument about the gods in a book dealing with logic, whereas in the ancient division of philosophy the gods come under a distinct part of philosophy, physics. These very basic errors disappear, however, if we take Hume to be using the 1621 edition of the Chouet brothers, in which the modern books *Math.* 7. and 8. appear as two parts of book 7.; hence the Chouet "lib. viii" is the modern book *Math.* 9. and his "lib. ix" is the modern book *Math.* 10. The apparent vagueness of references is also explicable, since the Chouet edition does not divide these books into chapters.<sup>5</sup> We can absolve Hume of gross mistakes, then, at the price of concluding that he read Sextus in the out-of-date rather than a modern edition. (It is less easy to see why modern readers of Hume are still presented with his references to Sextus in a form which has made them, since 1718, impossible to track down by anyone without thorough independent knowledge of Sextus.)<sup>6</sup>

Perhaps this is trivial; do we all make every effort always to use the most up-to-date text? The second point is more worrying: Hume gets nothing out of Sextus about scepticism. He uses him as a source for two topics: arguments about the gods and extreme examples in ethics.<sup>7</sup> Further, his references treat Sextus as an author from whom information can be extracted as though he were a historian. But, although Sextus does give us much information, it is not neutral; it is always being used as part of an argument that is designed to lead the reader to suspension of judgment.<sup>8</sup> When Hume quotes from Sextus the Stoic view that the good is the useful,

in support of his own view about the usefulness of the virtues, he extracts it out of the context, as though unaware that the Stoics used "good" and "useful" in well-marked technical ways quite incompatible with the ordinary sense of the words. Sextus is perfectly aware of the artificiality of the Stoic position; indeed, he is stressing it, since his purpose is to demolish the theory. Hume seems to miss this, through treating Sextus as a source rather than as a philosopher.<sup>9</sup>

Again, we might say that this is not important; we are all guilty at times of treating great books, especially long and difficult great books, in this way: we turn only to the bits that interest us and pull out the references that are immediately relevant to us. But it is notable that Hume treats Sextus's material as being what Sextus is committed to. He even says once, "the sceptics assert, though absurdly" a view about the origin of religion.<sup>10</sup> This is what disturbs a student of Sextus most. For what above all defines the ancient sceptic is that he does *not* assert anything. It is the dogmatists who go in for assertions; the sceptic suspends judgment, when she is not arguing against the position of others. What might look like sceptical assertions are carefully explained away; the sceptic is not committed to what he says, but puts it forward as what he cannot help appearing to him to be the case.<sup>11</sup> Hume's use of Sextus, then, is selective and trivial, but most importantly seems to miss the point which Sextus makes at great length: the sceptic has no position of his own, but merely reports on and argues against those of others.

Hume's actual references to Sextus, then, are disappointing; they do not suggest that he had read and understood the parts of Sextus, notably *Pyr. 1.*, in which ancient Pyrrhonism is discussed at length and compared with other types of scepticism and other kinds of philosophy. Hume might, of course, have read those parts but simply never found it useful to refer to them. When, however, we look at Hume's understanding of Pyrrhonism, we find that he regards it throughout his work in a single way, to which the reading of Sextus appears to have made no difference. Whether he read the important parts of Sextus at some point, or whether he merely treated the work as a collection of information, Hume did not get, from Sextus, any understanding of ancient Pyrrhonism.

Hume mentions Pyrrhonism fairly frequently. The first question to ask might seem to be, what form of argument he takes to be characteristic of Pyrrhonian scepticism. For our ancient sources are very precise on this point. "Scepticism is an ability to set out oppositions among things which appear and are thought of in any way at all, an ability by which, because of

the equipollence in the opposed objects and accounts, we come first to suspension of judgment."<sup>12</sup> The ancient Pyrrhonist argues in such a way as to produce equipollence, the state where considerations for and against something are felt to have equal force. This occurs when the sceptic has produced an argument equal in force to an argument which the dogmatist accepts (that there are gods, for example) or equal in force to an assumption which we make without argument (that things move, for example). The result of producing considerations on each side that are equipollent is that the dogmatist can no longer assent to the original belief — nor to the competing one. He finds himself suspending judgment, unable either to assert or deny the original claim.<sup>13</sup> Hume, however, does not appear to identify Pyrrhonism with any particular form of argument. Rather, he identifies it with what he takes to be its extravagant conclusion,<sup>14</sup> suspension of judgment, the inability to commit oneself either to what one previously held to be the case or to the competing belief which dislodged the former.

Hume frequently characterizes Pyrrhonism as a way of thinking that is incompatible with action, and thus wholly impracticable; hence ludicrous as a sustained attitude. This comes out in some very famous passages: "So that on the whole nothing could be more ridiculous than the principles of the ancient Pyrrhonians; if in reality they endeavoured, as is pretended, to extend throughout, the same scepticism, which they had learned from the declamations in their schools, and which they ought to have confined to them."<sup>15</sup> He even compares the Pyrrhonists to the Stoics, on the grounds that they both assume (wrongly, in Hume's view) that we can do always what we can sometimes do: the Stoics think we can always rise above our passions, because we sometimes can, and the Pyrrhonists think that we can keep up, in everyday life the suspension of judgment which we achieve, if at all, rarely and with difficulty as a result of philosophical argument.<sup>16</sup>

Hume thus accepts the picture of Pyrrhonism that we find in one strand of the Diogenes Laertius account of Pyrrho: "(He declared) similarly about everything that nothing was in truth, but that humans acted in every case by convention and habit; for everything is no more this than that. He was consistent with this in his life, not turning out of his way for anything and not guarding against anything, but taking on everything — wagons, maybe, and precipices and dogs, and in general not trusting to his senses in anything. But he was kept safe by his acquaintances, who, as Antigonus of Carystus says, used to follow him around."<sup>17</sup>

This is a standard ancient objection to Pyrrhonism, couched in the form

of a hostile joke: Pyrrhonism is incompatible with action and life, so that someone who lives an ordinary life but claims to be a Pyrrhonist is covertly abandoning Pyrrhonism (if only in relying on non-Pyrrhonist friends). Cicero does not retail this objection, but he standardly dismisses Pyrrhonism as a sect that is now dead, regarding its failure as no surprise, given its extreme nature.<sup>18</sup>

However, by the time of Sextus this objection is regarded as simple-minded; the Pyrrhonists had long devised answers to it. Sextus tells us that we should “despise” those who think that the sceptic is condemned to inactivity because scepticism, by depriving him of a basis for choice, leaves him “denying life and suspending judgment, like some vegetable”.<sup>19</sup> And; “Those who say that the Sceptics reject what is apparent have not, I think, listened to what we say.”<sup>20</sup> Sextus gives us the sceptic’s answer at length in *Pyr.* 1. Argument leaves the sceptic suspending judgment and thus without belief<sup>21</sup>; but she is not left with nothing; she is left with the appearances. “Appearance” is simply the way that things are bound to appear, one way or the other, even when one realizes that neither opinion has rational support. Thus, even the sceptic who suspends judgment about values will (a standard example) defy a tyrant, if his upbringing has so disposed him as to resist tyranny. He will recognize that his decision cannot be rationally defended, and that the explanation of why he is acting as he does has to appeal to non-rational factors like habit, force of others’ opinion and so on. But he will still act; for he cannot help reacting to the tyrant’s demand in the way that he does.<sup>22</sup> So this objection to Pyrrhonism, that it is incompatible with action, is indeed unsophisticated; it fails to take into account the fact that argument pro and contra, and the resulting suspension of judgment, are only one part of Pyrrhonism as a philosophical attitude; there is also the fact that suspension of judgment does not lead to inactivity, because we in fact can (and successful Pyrrhonists do) live by appearances.

“Thus, attending to what is apparent, we live in accordance with everyday observances, without holding opinions — for we are not able to be utterly inactive. These everyday observances seem to be fourfold, and to consist in guidance by nature, necessitation by feelings, handing down of laws and customs, and teaching of kinds of expertise.”<sup>23</sup> Sextus’s list reminds us that “appearances” are not limited to what appears to the senses. A square tower can appear round; but an argument can appear valid, and a value can appear compelling. Pyrrhonism is a global attitude; the sceptic can be driven by argument from commitment to any belief, and left with a detached attitude to the corresponding appearance. Suspension

of judgment is not a case of shedding information, as Hume sometimes suggests. It is simply what happens when we have no more reason to believe that something is the case than to believe that it is not; we are familiar with the arguments on each side and find that neither side has the advantage, and so cannot commit ourselves to the position that one side is rationally superior. Philosophers are often in this state of mind as regards philosophical theses; and not only does inactivity not result, we find that we cannot help holding views on the subject, and frequently teach it the more successfully for being detached rather than committed.

Hume's own use of nature corresponds in many ways with the place of the appearances in ancient Pyrrhonism. It is all the more startling that he sees no analogy between what he is doing and the developed form of Pyrrhonism that we find in Sextus. Perhaps when he wrote the *Treatise* he had not read Sextus and did not realize that Pyrrhonism as a sceptical philosophy was not open to the simple-minded objection that we find in Diogenes Laertius. But even if he read the relevant passages of Sextus later, it does not seem to have affected his ideas. He still thinks of Pyrrhonism as a silly, unrealistic attempt to suspend judgment on matters on which one must act, with no option once judgment is suspended, except vegetative inability to act. He does not see the affinity between actual Pyrrhonism and his own position, namely that argument can destroy rational support for many of our beliefs, leaving only the fact that nature leads us to act and decide anyway, even in the absence of rational support.

Hume's view of Academic scepticism is also surprising, though in this case the surprise comes from a different direction. Hume regards Academic scepticism as a more 'mitigated' kind of scepticism than the Pyrrhonian kind. In the final section of the *First Enquiry* he presents as "Academic" or "mitigated" scepticism the attitude of the enquirer who has realized that on many issues the arguments against a thesis are as powerful as the arguments for it, and that few, if any, theses of any interest are undisputed, so that an attitude of dogmatic certainty is, on most topics, unwarranted. (Interestingly, this is quite like the attitude of actual ancient Pyrrhonists, except that they lay more weight on the role of positive investigation and the urge to look for answers to problems.) Clearly, Hume regards this as 'mitigated' because of his assumption that Pyrrhonism is the extreme, and plainly impossible, position of sustained willed suspension of judgment, where this is conceived of as leaving no basis for action. Why, however, does he regard it as "Academic"?

The Academy in question is Plato's Academy. Hume does not show

much interest in distinguishing the two strands of Plato interpretation in the ancient world: on the one hand, the New Sceptical Academy, which interpreted Plato as a sceptic, and which lasted from the headship of Arcesilaus in the third century B.C. until the end of the Academy in the first century B.C., and on the other hand the dogmatic interpretation of Plato, characteristic of the Middle Platonists and later the Neo-Platonists. Indeed, he uses "Academic" for both strands,<sup>24</sup> seemingly unaware that in the ancient world "Academic" was used only of members of the *sceptical* Academy, while those who interpreted Plato as a dogmatist were called "Platonists". However, his familiarity with Cicero's philosophical writings make it most likely that by "Academy" Hume predominantly has in mind the sceptical Academy, as a member of which Cicero writes. Many of Cicero's philosophical works have the form of sceptical argument: we get, for example, arguments for and against Epicurean ethics, Stoic ethics, divination, the existence of the gods and so on, with no conclusion drawn.

But we get a problem here, one that has not been noticed until recent scholarly work recovered a just understanding of the ancient Academy. In ancient terms there is no sense in which Academic scepticism is milder or more mitigated than Pyrrhonian scepticism. In both cases, the sceptic argues against the views of others, not from his own position. The sceptical Academy took this to be what Socrates did; being a full-blown philosophical school, they developed their criticisms of others in a detailed and sophisticated manner, and they argued against the dogmatists of their own age, mainly the Stoics; but they never lost sight of the crucial point, that the sceptic argues always *ad hominem*, that is, using only premises and forms of argument that the opponent accepts.<sup>25</sup> In Sextus we similarly find that the sceptic argues always against the positions of others. Sometimes this is not obvious, as when Sextus lays out generalized patterns of argument, like the sceptical Modes, which he might seem to be committed to. But the framework within which the oppositions are set up is always one that the opponent accepts; otherwise the argument becomes pointless. If the opponent rejects the premise, or the argumentative framework, then Sextus moves to a premise or framework that he does accept, and works from there.<sup>26</sup>

Indeed, it seems to be the Pyrrhonists who are the less radical of the two schools, since we find in Sextus two strands which are hard to combine with a consistent sceptical refusal to commit oneself to a position. One is the claim that suspension of judgment will lead to *ataraxia*, tranquillity, and that this is in fact the sceptic's goal. The other is that the sceptic has a therapeutic

mission, to save others from the disease of having beliefs. Both of these elements in Pyrrhonism lead to complicated problems,<sup>27</sup> which the Academy completely avoided.

Why, though, does Hume think that the sceptical Academy is milder and more reasonable than what he sees as the wild Pyrrhonists? One possible source of this mistake is Sextus himself, who has a lengthy discussion of how the Pyrrhonist form of scepticism which he puts forward differs from that of sceptical Academy.<sup>28</sup> Sextus claims that the Academic sceptics are negative dogmatists, since they claim that there is no knowledge; he ignores the point that the arguments he refers to are made within the framework of Stoic epistemology, and are supposed to be criticisms affecting the Stoics. He also says that the members of the Academy hold that some claims are more plausible than others, and goes on to claim (disingenuously, it would seem)<sup>29</sup> that the Academics do not argue *ad hominem* but are committed to their premises. Sextus's picture of Pyrrhonists as suspending judgment while the Academics are committed to premises they find plausible has been influential in leading to the thought that Pyrrhonism is the more radical approach; but it is not to be trusted. And with Hume there is a further puzzle: if he takes his picture of the Academy from Sextus, why does he not take to heart Sextus's presentation of a sophisticated version of Pyrrhonism?

There is an obvious answer: perhaps he took his information on ancient scepticism primarily not from the ancient texts themselves, but from Bayle's article on Pyrrho in his *Dictionary*. But even if this were true, it would not solve the present problem. Bayle does, in note (A), repeat Sextus's account of the alleged differences between the Pyrrhonists and the Academics. But Bayle is also critical of the simple-minded view of Pyrrhonism. In note (D) he follows La Mothe le Vayer in noting that Diogenes contains two traditions about Pyrrho, and in rejecting the hostile one (Antigonus of Carystus) in favour of the later Pyrrhonist view of Aenesidemus, namely that Pyrrho lived a normal life. Once again, a source that would supply Hume with his alleged distinction between Pyrrhonists and Academics is a source that should have alerted Hume to the inadequacy of his view of Pyrrhonism.

Hume seems to have been familiar only with the simple-minded view of Pyrrhonism, and with Cicero's contemptuous and dismissive attitude to it, coupled with the fact that Cicero himself in his philosophical works writes as a sophisticated Academic sceptic. For Hume, it may have seemed that the kind of argument pro and contra that he could find in Cicero represented a



reflective, philosophical approach, whilst Pyrrhonism appeared merely as a crude and untenable form of extremism. "Academic" scepticism seems to be the only form of developed philosophical scepticism that Hume is aware of, despite his having, at some point, read some parts of Sextus.

Hume's characterisations of both Pyrrhonism and Academic scepticism, then, are wrong: Pyrrhonism is not an extreme position incompatible with action, and Academic scepticism is in no important way milder or more mitigated than actual Pyrrhonism — in fact it is less compromised by commitment to a position than Pyrrhonism is, when the latter makes claims about its therapeutic function, and about leading to happiness.

But is this point itself merely an academic one? Granted that ancient Pyrrhonism and the sceptical Academy were more alike than Hume thinks, might he still not be right to see in his own position some analogue to the ancient forms of scepticism? Surely what Hume is stressing, in those passages where he talks of mitigated scepticism, is the importance of a detached and critical attitude to one's own positions and arguments, and the rejection of claims to dogmatic certainty. Perhaps we could say that there is a certain core position that Hume shares with the ancient sceptics of both schools: The sceptic realizes that dogmatic attitudes and claims to certainty are likely to be misguided. Positions, especially theoretical positions of any complexity, tend to be deeply disputed; arguments are to be found which dislodge us from what seemed to be firm beliefs, and arguments in turn can be found to dislodge those arguments. Nonetheless, we carry on acting and living according to what we thought formerly were firm beliefs, and the reflective person can realize that the content of our beliefs can remain even when we realize that we no longer have the rational grounds that we thought we had for holding them. We can live by the appearances, according to the Pyrrhonists, by nature according to Hume.<sup>30</sup> We recognize the force of the arguments both for and against our former firm convictions; the content of those convictions stays with us, but we are now detached from it in a way that prevents dogmatism and intolerance. Regardless of his mistakes about the ancient schools, Hume's view seems like theirs in an important respect.

However, one large difference remains between Hume and any ancient form of scepticism, a difference which he appears not to recognize. Ancient sceptics always argue purely *ad hominem*; the sceptic never has a position of his own. He has, of course, views, as just outlined; but he never puts these forward as a position, something that he argues from, or argues to. His views just are the way he cannot help but see the issue; but this is quite

distinct from committing himself to a position that is the basis of his arguments against others. In ancient scepticism argument, and what the sceptic thinks, are always quite distinct, since what the sceptic thinks is just what he cannot help appearing to him to be the case, and is not due to argument, but is simply what he is left with at the end of the day, when argument is over and the considerations for and against an issue have cancelled each other out.

Here Hume is decisively different. For he not only appeals to nature; he is a naturalist in a way that the ancient sceptics are not. He has a theory of human nature, in terms of which he explains our tendencies to retain beliefs even when we recognize that rational support for them is lacking. (It is indeed part of that theory that he develops a concept of *belief* that is divorced from the notion of rational support, something that would have been totally foreign to the ancients.) Hume sees the task of philosophy as being ultimately one of naturalistic description rather than destructive argumentation. For ancient sceptics, the point is simply to keep on investigating; because of human nature, we cannot help being left with some appearances, and so having some views, but this is just a fact about us that we bear in mind, not something that we study in its own right. But for Hume, studying human nature, the nature that impels us to philosophize and argue, is the main task; not for nothing does his major work have the title *A Treatise of Human Nature*.

Hume is therefore in ancient terms a dogmatist, although in his insistence on the importance of detachment from previous convictions he traces a path comparable to the ancient sceptics. For Hume, human nature is not just the way we unalterably are, the aspects of ourselves that are unmovable by argument, something about which there is nothing further to be said. Human nature is the subject of science; it can be studied in a way which is positive and cumulative. Hume aspires to a better understanding of it than his predecessors. Whether or not he succeeds, he undoubtedly has a theory on which he relies to explain the way we are moved to argue philosophically, then to undermine the results of that argumentation, and then to carry on anyway. And, as Sextus says, "anyone who holds beliefs on even one subject... or makes assertions about any unclear matter, thereby has the distinctive character of a Dogmatist".<sup>31</sup>

This explains, perhaps, why those of us who have spent time with the ancient sceptics find Hume's essay "The Sceptic" so peculiar. Hume tells us, at the beginning of the set of four pictures of "The Epicurean", "The Stoic", "The Platonist" and "The Sceptic" that "the intention ... is not so much to

explain accurately the sentiments of the ancient sects of philosophy, as to deliver the sentiments of the sects that naturally form themselves in the world, and entertain different ideas of human life and happiness". Accordingly, he sketches three types of what we would call intellectual personality. "The Sceptic" follows these, and is far longer, since it in part forms a commentary on them. The sceptic is presented as the person who, unlike the other philosophers, does not ascribe much influence to argument, but regards it as merely an expression of the intellectual personality. Unlike the others, he not only has a developed view, but recognizes it as *his* view, and his acceptance of it as due to factors that weigh with him, but not with others. He does so because he realizes that humans, including himself, are inclined to ascribe to the objects of their intellectual search a value that they do not in reality possess. Rather, it is we who make them valuable by pursuing them.<sup>32</sup>

Nothing could be less like ancient scepticism. Separated from actual sceptical argument, the attitude underlying Hume's scepticism is a straightforward case of ancient dogmatism. It is even a case of what Sextus regards as a classic dogmatic mistake.<sup>33</sup> The ordinary person is rendered open to unhappiness, according to Sextus, because of thinking that some things are more valuable than others. Philosophers try to improve matters by giving him a theory as to what things really are valuable. But relocating the source of value just relocates any problems he originally had; and, if he now thinks that he is better off because he now knows what things are *really* valuable, his situation is actually worse, because he now has a stronger commitment, and thus is now *more* exposed to unhappiness. The philosopher producing a theory about value has cured a cold by introducing pneumonia.<sup>34</sup>

Apart from one passage,<sup>35</sup> Hume is divided from the ancient sceptics by his dogmatic naturalism, his refusal to let sceptical argument do its worst without any backup theory. Ancient Pyrrhonists and sceptical Academics are both, then, more radical sceptics than Hume, though not in the particular way that Hume thinks. It is still true that Hume's scepticism is far more radical than modern forms of scepticism that focus entirely on knowledge claims in particular areas. And I have in this paper not had the scope to go into the question, what motivates Hume's naturalistic support for his sceptical practice. Perhaps it is connected to a general respect for science found in the early modern era and completely lacking in the ancient world. But tracing out this connection is, obviously, matter for another paper.<sup>36</sup>

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> However, the relation of Hume's scepticism about value to the rest of his scepticism is problematic. On this see Annas 1996, 239–254.
- <sup>2</sup> Richard Popkin, in 1993a, 137–41, points out that Hume would have access to easily available translations of Sextus in Latin, English and French, but never doubts that the text Hume used would be the Fabricius edition.
- <sup>3</sup> In the *Second Enquiry* section IV, in a footnote on the utility of chastity, Hume quotes from 'Sept (sic) Emp. lib. 3 cap 20', which must be a reference to the *Outlines of Pyrrhonism Pyr.* 169, in modern editions. The reference (to the Stoics) is problematic; see below, note 7.
- <sup>4</sup> Although Hume could certainly have used this, since it was reprinted in the Chouet brothers' 1621 edition, and in the 1718 Fabricius edition 'Fabricius criticizes, yet largely adopts, Stephanus's translation' (Floridi forthcoming).
- <sup>5</sup> I am very grateful to Jonathan Barnes for drawing my attention to these points about the Chouet edition. Barnes hopes in the near future to direct a project resulting in a new text of Sextus.
- <sup>6</sup> The modern edition of the *Second Enquiry* by J. Schneewind (Hackett 1983) modernizes the troublesome reference to 'lib. viii' in section II, though the reference to *Pyr.* in section IV is left unmodernized. Even in the electronic HUMETEXT the Sextus references are left in their original form, which guarantees that modern readers will be unable to find most of them in a modern text of Sextus.
- <sup>7</sup> Arguments about the gods: section II of the *Second Enquiry*, *The Natural History of Religion* section IV and section XII. Examples in ethics: the *Populousness of Ancient Nations* (Solon, 'the most celebrated of the sages of Greece', made it legal for parents to kill their children); *Second Enquiry* section IV (the Stoic view that only the good is useful is brought up to support Hume's claim that chastity is useful, given the need for parents to look after children, and the unwillingness of men to do this for children who are not their own).
- <sup>8</sup> On this aspect of Sextus, and the caution required when using him as a source, see Annas 1992.
- <sup>9</sup> Or, more charitably, Hume may in this case be joking. Since the Stoics identify the good with the morally good, they have to redefine 'useful' in such a way that only the morally good is useful, hardly the conclusion that Hume is after. If Hume did not misunderstand Stoic ethics entirely his point may be that even the Stoics, those well-known moral rigourists, agree with his position — at least verbally!
- <sup>10</sup> In the *Second Enquiry*, section II, in a passage actually giving a reference to Sextus. The word 'assert' is absent in the 1767 edition; but since it is present in the 1758 and the 1764 editions, I infer that Hume is responsible for it. I have not been able to consult the first edition.
- <sup>11</sup> See Sextus, *Pyr.* 1.13–15, 19–24.
- <sup>12</sup> Sextus *Pyr.* 1. 8. I use the translation in Annas and Barnes 1994.
- <sup>13</sup> For more on the structure of ancient sceptical argument, see ch. 3 of Annas and Barnes 1985.
- <sup>14</sup> 'Conclusion' only in a special sense, of course; for the ancient sceptic, suspension of judgment is not a conclusion from anything, but the actual result of finding the considerations for and against something to be of equal force.

<sup>15</sup> Part I of the *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*. (This is a point not in dispute among the protagonists.) Cf. *First Enquiry* section XII part II, end.

<sup>16</sup> *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* part 1.

<sup>17</sup> Diogenes Laertius 9. 61. But note that this is not the only tradition that Diogenes is aware of; he also notes that 'Aenesidemus says that he philosophized in accordance with the account of suspension of judgment, but did not perform particular actions without forethought.' Aenesidemus was the person who broke away from the sceptical Academy and founded a more rigorous form of scepticism under the name of Pyrrhonism, harking back to the legendary figure of Pyrrho. It was necessary for him to counter the hostile tradition about Pyrrho by showing that his life could be seen as compatible with a sophisticated form of scepticism.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. for example, *De Finibus* 2. 35, 43; 3.11-12; 4.43, 60; 5. 23. Cicero couples Pyrrho with Ariston of Chios, an early unorthodox Stoic, as examples of theories which (allegedly) deny that we have any basis for our decisions as to what to do. Scholars have noted that it is odd for Cicero to display such unawareness that Aenesidemus (who dedicated a work to a friend of Cicero's) had re-founded a sceptical movement under the title of Pyrrhonism.

<sup>19</sup> *Math.* 9.162-163, 165.

<sup>20</sup> *Pyr.* 1.19 (Annas-Barnes translation).

<sup>21</sup> There is a classic modern debate as to the scope of the sceptic's suspension of belief. See Burnyeat 1983; Barnes 1990; Frede 1987. The issue is complicated by the fact that the ancient notion of belief is more tied to the ideas of commitment to truth and rational support than any modern conception. Hume's notion of belief is quite different.

<sup>22</sup> I leave aside here the question of whether this is really satisfactory, especially in the case of value. See Annas 1997.

<sup>23</sup> Sextus, *Pyr.* 1.23 (Annas-Barnes translation).

<sup>24</sup> In the *Natural History of Religion* Hume talks of 'the principles even of MARCUS AURELIUS, PLUTARCH and some other *Stoics* and *Academics*', thereby classifying Plutarch as an Academic. Hume probably believed that all Platonists, even the dogmatic ones, could be called Academics because of thinking that the Academy did not end in the first century B.C., but continued its existence until closed by Justinian, a thesis which has been widely believed, but whose falsity is conclusively demonstrated by Glucker 1978.

<sup>25</sup> By the time the Academy came to an end, so much energy had been spent on arguing with Stoics that a splinter group, led by Aenesidemus, accused Academics of being 'Stoics arguing with Stoics', that is, of taking over the Stoic framework so thoroughly as to become hard to distinguish in argument from those who were actually committed to it. But no Academic would admit to being committed to a framework of premises and arguments in advance of arguing against the position of others.

<sup>26</sup> This is why, in the notorious final paragraph of *Pyr.*, Sextus says that the sceptic will sometimes deliberately use rotten or weak arguments; this may be all he needs, given what the dogmatist accepts. That the sceptic can see that the argument is weak needn't matter: he isn't committed to the argument.

<sup>27</sup> I trace some of these problems in chs 8, 11 and 17 of Annas 1993. The classic article on the relation between the positions of the sceptical Academy, properly understood, and Pyrrhonism is Striker 1996. Striker analyses very clearly the ways

in which failure to realize that the sceptical Academy always argued from the positions of others has led to their being regarded as philosophers with an epistemological position of their own.

<sup>28</sup> *Pyr.* 1.220–235. The Notes on this section in the Annas–Barnes translation refer the reader to both ancient and modern discussions on the topic.

<sup>29</sup> We should remember that Sextus's procedure is pragmatic; from his perspective there is no point in giving the reader disinterested information, and every point in persuading the reader that the genuine form of scepticism is Sextus's own. It is thus unwise to treat Sextus as a reliable source for the sceptical Academy here (cf. article cited in n. 6). It is interesting, however, that he admits that Pyrrhonism has more in common with the original sceptical Academy of Arcesilaus than with the later stages of the school, when the sceptics had got so involved in detailed debate with the Stoics that their detachment from the Stoic framework of debate seemed dubious.

<sup>30</sup> The Academics seem to have appealed to nature to explain how we can act and live even without making assertions, as dogmatists do. But there is little evidence, and the idea does not seem to have been developed very far.

<sup>31</sup> *Pyr.* 1.223 (Annas–Barnes translation).

<sup>32</sup> 'The inference upon the whole is, that it is not from the value or worth of the object which any person pursues, that we can determine his enjoyment, but merely from the passion with which he pursues it, and the success which he meets with in his pursuit. Objects have absolutely no worth or value in themselves. They derive their worth merely from the passion.'

<sup>33</sup> *Math.* 9.130–140.

<sup>34</sup> There are complications here arising from the odd fact that Hume is much more dogmatic about values than about other matters. When, for example, in part 1 of the *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, Hume has Philo give a naturalistic account of our impulse to philosophize, the claims about human nature are much more modest.

<sup>35</sup> A footnote in Part XII of the *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*: 'It seems evident, that the dispute between the sceptics and dogmatists is entirely verbal... No philosophical dogmatist denies, that there are difficulties both with regard to the senses and to all science; and that these difficulties are in a regular, logical method, absolutely insolveable. No sceptic denies, that we lie under an absolute necessity, notwithstanding these difficulties, of thinking, and believing... and even of frequently assenting with confidence and security. The only difference, then, between these sects... is, that the sceptic, from habit, caprice or inclination, insists most on the difficulties; the dogmatist, for like reasons, on the necessity.' This is the only passage in Hume in which I can find scepticism regarded in anything like the ancient way, namely as an attitude of arguing against others, distinguished from dogmatism not by the underpinning of any position, but simply by the sceptic's continuing investigation. The sceptic shares with the dogmatist the goal of pursuing the truth, and is distinguished (as by Sextus at *Pyr.* 1.1) by the fact that the dogmatist is satisfied and has called halt, while the sceptic is still investigating. Interestingly, Popkin finds this problematic. 'Who ever heard of such a dogmatist or such a sceptic?' (Popkin 1993b, 132). But the answer is that this is how ancient scepticism and dogmatism were standardly conceived: as detached and committed attitudes respectively to positions that they both investigated philosophically.

<sup>36</sup> This paper has been read at the Hume Society meeting in Rome in June 1994, and at the conference on ancient scepticism in Helsinki in August 1996. I am very

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