Controvert the Dead: Sextus Empiricus and Plutarch against the Stoics*

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To write about ancient esoteric texts at PRAGMA99 near the end of the second millenium seems out of joint and needs justification. However, there is a mysterious link between the texts I shall be dealing with and the present occasion. In circa 200 A.D. of the Christian era (House, 1980), one of the acknowledged precursors of semiotics, Sextus Empiricus, used the word πράγμα (pragma) for the signified (σημαίνομενον) of linguistic sign (Adversus Mathematicos, 8.12, or in Loeb, Against the Logicians, 2.12). According to the sceptic, or his account of the Stoics, a sign consists of two parts: the σημαία, and the σημαίνομενον--an opposition not unlike that proposed by Saussure in the 1910s. As with Saussure’s distinction of signifiant and signifié, the σημαία is the phonic part of speech, and the σημαίνομενον is what is indicated by the signifier, namely, pragma. Although pragma is “the actual thing,” it exists only as a sign function and should not be confused with the real thing or “the thing existing” (τούγραμμον) beyond the confines of sign. But this binary opposition is about the point where the two authors converge and diverge. An important concept of Sextus’ as well as a major difference from Saussure is that of corporeality. While utterance (σημαία) itself, as the interaction of voice and air, is corporeal, what is uttered (σημαίνομενον) or “sayable” (Long and Sedley, 1987, Annas and Barnes, 1994, Blank trans., 1998), known in Greek as λέκτον, cannot lay claim to any kind of material existence.

This etymology of the word pragma does not harbour an ill omen that our discussions here will be immaterial or will not be materialised, and the wordplay is more serious than it first appears. In fact, what I shall be trying to say in the pages that follow has much to do with, so to speak, the phenomenon of materiality/immateriality in philosophical controversies. What does it mean by materiality? There is an apparent shift of meaning from corporeality to (1) a looser sense of substantiality of materials and (2) a more specialised sense of...
evidentiality (ἐναργεία) which underlies Sextus's argument against sign and proof (cf. Bréhier 1970 [1908]). In the course of my exposition, I shall try to identify some difficulties in the representation of philosophical controversies in ancient texts, as a result of the “immateriality” of discursive situation, and examine how these difficulties are dealt with by writers who are engaged in such controversies.

Although almost all the difficulties are textual in nature, they belong to different orders. First we should put aside the problem of unavailability of essential texts because in such cases there is no material basis for communication studies. An example will bear this out. The philosophical controversy involving the Stoics and their critics is noted, among other things, for severe paucity of verifiable sources. In one of his three extant pieces attacking the Stoics, entitled, in the Loeb translation, "Stoic Self-Contradictions" (1040D), Plutarch (circa. 45-120) alludes to Chrysippus's (280-206 B.C.) criticism of Plato's concept of health and notes that he has given elsewhere a rejoinder in the latter's defense. The text has never been adequately identified except suggested lost (1976, 471, note e). This kind of immateriality of sources cannot be our concern though it does show the position of the speaker in relation to those he engages.¹

A more prevalent phenomenon is the absence of discursive situations which, albeit textualised, nonetheless require the participation of interlocutors--unless the texts under consideration were originally structured in dialogue form, such as the dialogues of Plato. The fact that some non-dialogic texts record philosophical disputes of major importance makes the challenge more tempting. An interesting case is the Stoics’ writings on signs. It is well-known that no complete work of any early Greek Stoic has survived, and that all the extant fragments appear as secondary materials in writings by later authors, most of whom, however, are found in dispute with the Stoics (e.g., von Arnim, 1903-05, Long and Sedley, 1987). Sextus Empiricus and Plutarch are only two notable examples, and the polemical nature of their writings can be gauged by such titles as Adversus Dogmaticos (i.e., Adversus Mathematicos) and De Stoicorum repugnantis.²

The polemics involving the Stoics and their post-Hellenistic biographers and critics rules out the possibility of “empirical” intersubjectivity. The reason is simple. The time gap between members of the opposing parties leaves no room for any verbal exchange characteristic of real conversations and the queries and responses essential to epistolary writings. In fact, the fragmentary base-texts of Zeno (335-263 B.C.), Cleanthes (circa. 331-232 B.C.), and Chrysippus are lost in the mediated meta-texts of Sextus and Plutarch, and there can be no dialogue whatsoever.³ From the perspective of pragmatics, Plutarch and Sextus are confronted, as it were, with a mission impossible: "How to communicate with the dead?" because the controversy in which they are engaged links the past with the present and crosses the borders between life and death. This also poses a difficulty for us: "How to represent this and other similar controversies involving the living and the dead when none
of the pragmatic rules like co-operation and implicatures applies?"

It would not be a problem for writers of imaginative literature, who have at their disposal a poetic licence which allows them to summon the deceased by using the rhetorical devices of apostrophe and invocation. Nor would it be a problem if the later critics could represent the Stoics "objectively," that is, as "objects," while subduing or totally erasing their own subjectivity. But this is hardly possible, given critical writings' discursive and polemical nature, that is, being situated discourse rather than language in the abstract.

There are two issues involved here. One is "How writers like Plutarch and Sextus engage the Stoics"; the other is "How their controversies can be studied by the pragmatist." Let me briefly address the two issues before embarking on the Stoic controversy itself. First, one observes that all the Post-Hellenistic biographers and critics make use of narrative and dramatic devices in representing the Stoics. Diogenes Laertius (circa. Third century A.D.) is probably the least personal writer for he gives an account of the Stoics in a matter-of-fact manner and an expository prose style characteristic of early biographical and historical writings. Almost all the other writers, especially Plutarch and Cicero (106-43 B.C.), have recourse to narrative and dramatic devices, such as emplotting events and reenacting them in discursive situations as if the participants, be they contemporaries or historically alienated, were actual interlocutors engaged in philosophical debate. One such device is the use of dialogue form, which has become a convention, from Plato down to Wittgenstein (Simley, 1995). Plato's "eristic" dialogues (Ryle, 1966, 193) have launched this genre history (Stokes, 1986, Brickhouse and Smith, 1991, Benson, 1987, 1995, Kahn, 1996), and the "confrontational dialectic" (Sedley, 1995) used in early dialogues is particularly relevant to philosophical controversies. On the topic under discussion are found Plutarch's Against the Stoics on Common Conception and Cicero's Academica; both, though quite removed from the Socratic "elenctic" dialogues, use contemporaries as dramatis personae in recapitulating the controversy as "fiction."

On the deeper pragmatic layer that involves the social and psychological aspects of language, polemical dialogism underlies the non-dialogic critical discourse of Sextus and Plutarch. To serve the purpose of polemics, their texts, like the dramatic examples mentioned above, share to different degrees a fabricating nature, with an effect of the real produced by a deictic present, thus conforming to the Stoic insistence on the sensible here and now.

Two roads then converge: One is the history of semiotics; the other--a less trodden one--that of controversy. The controversy is of a complex nature. It deals with epistemological and ethical issues, but instrumentally related to signs under the heading of logic. It would be misleading to say that the controversy was created by Plutarch or Sextus retroactively. More precisely, the latter two continued the debate between the Stoics, especially Chrysippus, and the critical sceptics Arcesilaus of Pitane (circa. 315-241
B.C.) and Carneades of Cyrene (circa. 213-129 B.C.) of the Middle and New Academy. Members of other rivalling schools, such as the Epicureans, were also involved (De Lacy and De Lacy, 1978, Asmis, 1984) The debate was linguistically transcoded by Latin writers like Cicero. Now Sextus' main target is of course the criterion of truth, including true and false, evident and non-evident. And sign is what the Stoics propose as an instrument to truth. The discussion of sign (Pyrr. 2.97 ff, Adv. Log. 2.151 ff.) follows Sextus’ refuting the Stoics’ criterion of truth in “apprehending” objects, of which the non-evident can be made available by sign and proof.5

Unlike Diogenes Laertius, both Sextus and Plutarch--Cicero’s case being quite different because in him there is linguistic transcoding from Greek to Latin--resort to the fictional device of "scene-setting," i.e., dramatisation, to situate the deceased allocutors as well as the locutors in a discourse which produces a presentist illusion. In their texts, the non-existent Chrysippus and the other early Stoics can be inferred to be existent by virtue of linguistic signs. This ironically justifies the apprehensive presentation (καταληπτική φαντασια) advocated by the Stoics, provided that they "subsist" negatively as dream-like δαιµονιον. 7

In the following, I will give some examples to show how Sextus and Plutarch fabricate discursive situations and by so doing get the upper hand of the Stoics. Let me quote Sextus once again on the non-existence of controverted things: "[F]or things controverted, in so far as controverted, are non-existent." Suppose we substitute "people" for "things," then whoever Sextus controverts does not exist. In fact, none of the Stoics exists in Sextus' monologic controversy except as fiction. However, Sextus never assumes that the Stoics are non-existent. Witness the following excerpts in which the sceptic challenges the Stoic criterion of truth:

(1) This dispute, then, they [the Stoics] will declare to be either capable or incapable of decision; and if they shall say it is incapable of decision they will be granting on the spot the propriety of suspension of judgement [like us], while if they say it admits of decision, let them tell us whereby it is to be decided, since we have no accepted criterion, and do not even know, but are still inquiring, whether any criterion exists. (Pyrr. 2.19)

(2) Regarding also the phrases used in support of the sign, let the Dogmatists [Stoics] themselves say in reply to our argument whether they signify something or signify nothing. (Pyrr. 3.13)

(3) To prevent the Dogmatists attempting also to slander us, because of their inability to refute us in a practical way, we shall discuss the question of the efficient Cause more at large when we have first tried to give attention to the conception of Cause. (Pyrr. 3.13)

The English translation by Bury suggests an intriguing discursive situation though it first...
appears quite normal: the "doubter" or "refuter" (Woodruff, 1988, 142, Mates, 1996, 221), as the sceptic would like to be known, is speaking on behalf of his fellow Pyrrhonists, and is appealing to his reader for belief. This kind of "external dialogism," in the words of M.M. Bakhtin, engages the reader's belief and evaluative system (Bakhtin, 1981, 283). The addressee here is expected to serve as a mediator for another indirect addressee, the Stoics, who, however, are referred to as the third person or, as Emile Benveniste would say, the non-person (1971, 217). The addressee here is expected to serve as a mediator for another indirect addressee, the Stoics, who, however, are referred to as the third person or, as Emile Benveniste would say, the non-person (1971, 217). The addressee here is expected to serve as a mediator for another indirect addressee, the Stoics, who, however, are referred to as the third person or, as Emile Benveniste would say, the non-person (1971, 217). The addressee here is expected to serve as a mediator for another indirect addressee, the Stoics, who, however, are referred to as the third person or, as Emile Benveniste would say, the non-person (1971, 217). The addressee here is expected to serve as a mediator for another indirect addressee, the Stoics, who, however, are referred to as the third person or, as Emile Benveniste would say, the non-person (1971, 217). The addressee here is expected to serve as a mediator for another indirect addressee, the Stoics, who, however, are referred to as the third person or, as Emile Benveniste would say, the non-person (1971, 217). The addressee here is expected to serve as a mediator for another indirect addressee, the Stoics, who, however, are referred to as the third person or, as Emile Benveniste would say, the non-person (1971, 217). The addressee here is expected to serve as a mediator for another indirect addressee, the Stoics, who, however, are referred to as the third person or, as Emile Benveniste would say, the non-person (1971, 217). The addressee here is expected to serve as a mediator for another indirect addressee, the Stoics, who, however, are referred to as the third person or, as Emile Benveniste would say, the non-person (1971, 217). The addressee here is expected to serve as a mediator for another indirect addressee, the Stoics, who, however, are referred to as the third person or, as Emile Benveniste would say, the non-person (1971, 217). The addressee here is expected to serve as a mediator for another indirect addressee, the Stoics, who, however, are referred to as the third person or, as Emile Benveniste would say, the non-person (1971, 217). The addressee here is expected to serve as a mediator for another indirect addressee, the Stoics, who, however, are referred to as the third person or, as Emile Benveniste would say, the non-person (1971, 217). The addresser has posed a series of questions and is pressing ludicrously for answers, "Let them tell us . . . ", knowing that they can never be resurrected to take the challenge, but somehow threaten, as it were, to strike back. For a pragmatic enquirer, the concern is, rather: "How are the Stoics engaged in absentia here supposed to respond?" and "How are we to understand a controversy without an allocutor?"

Such a concern can be easily refuted to be groundless by the commonsense which asserts (1) that the Stoics already had their say and now it's the sceptics' turn to respond, (2) that their response gives rise to the controversy, and (3) that their interrogation is purely rhetorical and carries little semantic value and illocutionary force. But this commonsense would have established in the first place that philosophical controversies are possible without actual exchange between the parties involved, and one can talk about them only after some kind of representational violence has been exerted to erase the temporal gap that separates the two parties and compress them on a flattened Jakobsonian axis of communication so that they appear as interlocutors. One notices there is a fictional element at work in such cases. This fictionality, a result of representation, is precisely what the afore-mentioned commonsense fails to explain.

Alternatively, one could say that the primary speech genre of dialogue has entered into the philosophical discourse of Sextus, which is an instance of the secondary speech genre (Bakhtin, 1986, 61-2), and that the function of the dialogue, rather than representing an actuality, serves as a rejoinder on the content-level of Sextus' text. This would complicate the issue by reinstating the problematic distinction between extra-textual pragmatics and intra-textual semantics, and what's worse, with the implication that pragmatics cannot deal with the issue of this paper.

It seems Cicero and Plutarch have found a solution to this pragmatic impasse by situating the Stoic controversy in their own times. Both Cicero's De Natura Deorum and Academica (1994 [1933]) are written in dialogue form, with contemporaries engaged in a conversation which, lacking the rapid exchange of Platonic or Lucianian dialogues, reads more like collage of lengthy monologues. Neither work deals directly with Stoics on signs, though in the first, Stoicism is one of the three schools participating in a theological contention. Here Cicero's dramatis personae consists of three characters, Quintus Lucilius Balbus, Gaius Velleius, and Gaius Cotta, representing, respectively, contemporary Stoicism, Epicureanism, and Academic scepticism. To the extent that contemporaries are used in
discussing current philosophical issues, Plutarch agrees with Cicero. However, in so far as rhetorical strategies are used in refuting the Stoics, Plutarch's case is quite different.

In his dialogue, "Against the Stoics on Common Conceptions" (ΠΕΡΙ ΤΩΝ ΚΟΙΝΩΝ ΕΝΝΟΙΩΝ ΠΡΟΣ ΤΟΥΣ ΣΤΩΙΚΟΥΣ), the debate is enacted by an unknown Academic philosopher Diadumenus and an unnamed interlocutor, addressed only as "comrade" (ΕΤΑΙΡΟΣ). The dialogue begins with this unnamed interlocutor, who has been confused by the Stoics' arguments over common conceptions, appears to Diadumenus for help: "Hurry and treat me either with arguments of some kind or with spells or if you know some other way of assuagement. I have been thrown into such confusion as you see and so distraught by Stoics who, though otherwise excellent gentlemen and intimates, by heaven, and friends of mine, are bitterly and spitefully vehement against the Academy" (1059A).

In addition to his characteristic display of learned allusions and figures of speech, Plutarch has his protagonist use some curious but effective strategies in refuting the Stoics. First, the interlocutor "Comrade" is introduced and staged rather as an allocutor. Throughout the dialogue, he poses but a few questions--only once more intensively (1072B), and he does so to conduct Diadumenus' disparaging harangues against the Stoics, mainly Chrysippus. In this sense, both interlocutors, in Stoic terms, are bodies in existence because they can be "subject and object of action" (1073E). What about Chrysippus who is not present, who cannot act and be acted upon, and whose antique "existence" is only alluded to? Well, he can only be no-body (ασοµατον) (cf. Long, 1971, 75). On several occasions, Chrysippus is misread and misrepresented; most of which has to do with the Stoic's concepts of physical sign (1077CD, 1078F, 1079A) (cf. Rist, 1971).

A most remarkable strategy of Plutarch's to dismiss the role of interlocutor is his argument on denying the latter the right to be heard at all. In the text entitled "On Stoic Self-Contradiction," Plutarch puts an argument on legal dispute between two speakers at a court-room. He appropriates Zeno's comment on the poetic fragment, "Nor give your verdict till you've heard both sides." Zeno is reported to be against this statement, and quoted as asserting:

(4) The second speaker must not be heard whether the former speaker proved his case (for then the inquiry is at an end) or did not prove it (for that is tantamount to his not having appeared when summoned or to having responded to the summons with more gibberish); but either he proved his case or he did not prove it; therefore, the second speaker must not be heard.' (1034E)

On this reported utterance Plutarch comments:

(5) After he had propounded this argument, however, he [Zeno] continued to write against Plato's Republic, to refute sophisms, and to bid his
pupils learn dialectic on the ground that it enables one to do this. Yet either Plato proved or did not prove what is in the Republic, and either way it was not necessary but was utterly superfluous and vain to write against it. . . . (1034E,F)

Zeno's argument has been glossed as "directed against the 'antilogistic method' of Arceselaus" (Plutarch, 1976, note a). Now supposing we transpose this reported statement of Zeno's to the situation under discussion, the first speaker is Zeno, and the second Plutarch--this is chronologically true, as is the order of (1) Plato, (2) Zeno, and (3) Plutarch--then there is no need of Plutarch's rejoinder. But if the first speaker is Plutarch, within the context of the controversy in the text, and the second speaker Zeno, then it is impossible to hear the latter. How very true is Zeno who has forestalled Plutarch's attack, and how ironical is Plutarch in quoting Zeno, to his own defeat!

Not conscious of the irony in which he is caught, Plutarch rather seriously extends his attack on Zeno to the latter's disciple Chrysippus, whose position is a revision of Zeno's and adheres more or less to the Socratic elenchus. Again, Chrysippus is reported.

(6) He [Chrysippus] says that he does not absolutely reject the practice of arguing the opposite sides of a question, but he recommends that this be used cautiously as it is in the court-room not by way of putting the case for them but by way of destroying their plausibility. ‘For,’ he says, ‘while that practice is incumbent upon those who in all matters observe suspension of judgment and is conducive to their purpose, it is, on the contrary, incumbent upon those who inculcate knowledge in accordance with which we shall live consistently to instruct their pupils in the principles and to fortify them from beginning to end by destroying the plausibility of the opposite arguments, just as is done in the court-room too, when an opportunity arises to mention them also.’ This he has said in so many words. (1035F, 1036A)

Plutarch's retort is two-fold. First, it is impossible for a philosopher to use his opponent's argument without having to agree with him; second, Chrysippus contradicts himself because he often agrees with those to whom he opposes. The issue under discussion is not our concern here though it has been observed that Plutarch often agrees with the Stoics and his critique can be levelled at himself too.

In this passage, Chrysippus speaks in quotation, and his utterance is embedded in the controversy that is Plutarch's. There is already a discursive tension between two positions, if not two voices. In an immediately following passage Chrysippus is first portrayed as a non-person "he" and then a personal "you"--an allocutor who is provoked to speak (or unable to speak).

(7) Well then, I should like to have the Stoics tell me whether they consider the
Megarian questions to be more cogent than those against common experience which Chrysippus composed in six books. Or should this question be put to Chrysippus himself? For look at the kind of things he has written about the Megarian reasoning in his treatise on Use of Discourse, to wit: ' . . . [T]heir reasoning has now redounded to their disgrace, some parts of it being considered clumsy and others manifest sophistry.' What, my dear sir, these arguments, which you deride and for their glaring defectiveness call the disgrace of their propounders, these you still fear may divert people from their apprehension but that you would yourself disturb any of your readers by writing against common experience so many books, where in your ambition to outdo Arcesilaus you added whatever you have invented, this did you expect? (1036 EF, 1037A)

In the text, there is a reported speech of Chrysippus, inserted into the utterance of Plutarch. The conflicting voices exemplify what Bakhtin describes as internal dialogism, which serves here to disharmonise rather than harmonise the heterogeneous discursive elements (1981, 283). It is this internal dialogism, which affects the allocutor's perception, that characterises almost all controversial discourse--be it in explicit dialogue form or not. Here again, as in the case of Sextus Empiricus, Plutarch also uses the rhetorical apostrophe to invoke the deceased opponent, but the latter, being an immaterial allocutor, cannot be expected to reply. Therefore, the locutor replies on behalf of the allocutor-turned-interlocutor: "Of course not!"¹⁰

By so doing, he manages to persuade the real allocutor, namely, the reader.

The examples of Sextus Empiricus and Plutarch may shed some light on the fact and fiction of philosophical controversies that necessarily cross the borders between life and death. This perhaps also accounts for the mysterious origin of the ancient genre called threshold dialogue, "a conversation at the gates of the other world" (Gary Saul Morson, ed. 1986, 9). Like real controversies involving living persons' verbal fencing--a proper demesne of pragmaticists, such controversies bear no less witness to the discursive practice that transforms internal dialogism into external dialogism, that brings signification as textual construction to the proper fold of communication.
Notes

1 Similarly, Sextus Empiricus cites a work of his, *Medical Memoirs*, which may account for the controversy between his Empirical School and Asclepiades' Methodical School, but the work is no longer extant (*Adv. Math.* 7.202).

2 All quotations from Sextus Empiricus, unless otherwise noted, are from the Loeb Classical Library edition, trans. R.G. Bury, 4 vols. 1983 (1935), and all quotations from Plutarch are from the same edition, in particular, *Moralia* 13.2, trans. Harold Cherniss, 1976. Citations from these two works follow the traditional practice of (1) in the case of Sextus, referring to the Latin title of *Adversus Mathematicos*, followed by chapter and verse numbers, and (2) in the case of Plutarch, referring to chapter and section numbers.

3 A common phenomenon is misreading on the part of the latecomers, be it intentionally or unwittingly. Long (1971) has identified at least two occasions on which Sextus Empiricus misreads the Stoic concept of sign. On one occasion, he confuses, deliberately, σημεῖον with σημαίνοντα; on another he fails to recognise an obscure
linguistic distinction in τπραχετι (86, 90).

4 I invoke Plutarch and Sextus Empiricus in particular, but bypass others like Cicero (106-43 B.C.), Galen of Pergamum (129-99? A.D.), and Diogenes Laertius (circa. Third century, A.D.) because the first two authors, for different reasons, are systematic critics of the Stoics and an examination of their polemics will shed light on the nature of philosophical controversy.

Cicero's dialogues, De Natura Deorum and Academica (1994), take a professed New Academic's position in refuting Stoic polemics on theology and epistemology. They should be studied separately, though within the same historical context, because of the linguistic transcoding not visible in the Greek writers. Galen's sporadic allusions to the Stoics and his work, as Mates comments, have "little independent value" (1961 [1953], 9. But see Gould, 1971, Kidd, 1971, for Galen and late Stoics, and De Lacy, 1991, for a comparison with Sextus.) Diogenes Laertius is more a doxographer than polemicist. He has left us ten books of Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers (1950), of which Book 7 is devoted to the Stoics. He gives more space to Zeno, Cleanthes, and Chrysippus, among the seven Stoics represented, and gives a general account of all the Stoic doctrines in the life of Zeno as "the founder of the School" (7.38). Diogenes' source book is Synopsis of Philosophers by Diocles the Magnesian (7.48), but he may have gone beyond this handbook for primary Stoic sources. There are two isolated references to the concept of signs: (1) that Chrysippus takes the subject of dialectic to be "signs [περι σημανοντα] and things signified [σημαινομενα]" (7.62); and (2) that dialectic's "doctrine of expressions" deals with "things as such and things signified" [περι των πραγματων και των σημαινομενων] (7.63).

It is interesting to note that in the Pléiade anthology of the Stoics (Schuhl, 1962) both Plutarch's and Cicero's writings, despite their hostility, are collected.

5 Contemporary historians of semiotics often trace its origin to the Stoics on language and sign. This archaeology of knowledge can be itself a matter of controversy (Phillip and Estelle De Lacy, 1978, Burnyeat, 1982, Sedley, 1982, Glidden, 1983, Asmis, 1984, Ebert, 1987). While Glidden seems content with Sextus, the De Lacys and Sedley go back to the Epicurean Philodemus of Gadara in the first century, B.C., Ebert to members of an early dialectical school, especially Philo of Megara (third-second century, B.C.), and both Burnyeat and Asmis, rightly, to Aristotle for his credit in initiating non-deductive inference, though Asmis is more interested in Epicurus and his legacy rather than the Stagirite.

Both Epicurus and Zeno flourished in the first century, B.C. and were to usher in two rich semiotic traditions. For Stoicism, tribute should be paid to French scholars at the turn of the century. One of the earliest discussions of Stoic concept of sign is found in Brochard (1892). Brochard interprets it in relation to the logic of John Stuart Mill. He is followed by Bréhier (1908), who coined the term "séméiologie" before Saussure for the
sign-function of \( \lambda \varepsilon \kappa \tau \omicron \nu \), and then by Goldschmidt (1953) for "la séméiologie stoïcienne" dealing particularly with the three phases of temporality (44).

The argument against sign and proof constitutes the sceptic's main contention with the Stoic logic. According to Sextus, the existence of both sign and proof is controversial. "Amongst our predecessors there existed a controversy, some declare that an indicative sign exists, others maintain that no indicative sign exists" (Pyrr. 2.121). And similarly "proof is a matter of controversy; for some declare that it does not even exist, as do those who assert that nothing at all exists, but others, including the majority of the Dogmatists, that it does exist; and we [Sextus and fellow Pyrrhonists] affirm that it is 'no more' existent than non-existent" (Pyrr. 2.180). A while later, continues the sceptic, "for things controverted, in so far as controverted, are non-existent" (Pyrr. 2.182).

Plutarch's unwilling but unwitting invocation of the early Stoics reminds us of his famous dialogue on the spirit (\( \delta \alpha \mu \omicron \nu \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \)) of Socrates (Plutarch, 1959, 1970, 1993). The irony lies here: Read with the dialogue, Plutarch's criticism of the Stoics in terms of linguistic pragmatics amounts to his being inspired by the spirit of the transcendental Stoic Sage who is the only human being capable of accurate perception, i.e., \( \kappa \alpha \tau \alpha \alpha \lambda \eta \pi \tau \iota \kappa \chi \alpha \omicron \omicron \) (καταληπτικη φαντασια). For discussions of the issue of the spirit, see Babut, 1983, Brenk, 1977, 1998, Soury, 1942, Rist, 1996, Stoike, 1975, and Verniere, 1977.

That Plutarch is a severe critic of the Stoics, in particular Chrysippus, has continued to puzzle scholars (Sandbach, 1940, Barrow, 1967, Babut, 1969, Cherniss, 1976, Hankinson, 1995). Stoicism was at its heyday in Plutarch's Rome, so it is curious that Plutarch should have failed to understand it. The attribution to his "staunch defence of Hellenism" (Barrow, 1967, 103) holds true only when this tradition does not include Stoicism, or more ethnocentrically, excludes all non-Athenian elements—a politicised reading worth further inquiry. One may note "On Stoic Self-Contradictions" opens with Plutarch's criticism of the three leading Stoics, Zeno, Cleanthes, and Chrysippus, for being foreign nationals residing in Athens without engaging in any kind of public service. "[I]n a foreign land [Athens] they tasted the lotus of leisure and spent all their lives, and very long lives too, with talk and books and strolling in the schools" (Moralia, 1033C). One is reminded of Brehier's old but still relevant observation: "Chrysippe, comme la majorite des philosophes stoiciens, etait d'origine orientale . . . " (1910, 16). At any rate, it is logical for Plutarch to defend, against Chrysippus, members of the Academy where he had studied. Not a sceptic.
by temperament, Plutarch the Platonist, however, was interested in the refutational argument practised by the Middle and New Academics (Hankinson, 1995, 140). And it is well-known that Chrysippus is a main target of Arcesilaus and Carneades (Pyrrh. 1.220, 226, 232-4, Diogenes Laertius, 1.19, 4.28, 59).

An interesting case is Plutarch's comment on Chrysippus' concept of substance and individuation (1077CD). That the two philosophers do not speak the same language has been pointed out by Rist, 1971. But the issue can be further enlightened by Peircian discussion of sinsign, qualisign, and logisign.

This shift of voice is apparent in the English translation as in the original. I owe a debt of gratitude to Dr Vassilis Vagios of National Taiwan University for his lucid analyses of all the Greek texts.

Works Cited


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About Sextus: Sextus Empiricus is one of the most important ancient philosophical writers after Plato and Aristotle. His writings are our main source for the doctrines and arguments of Scepticism. He probably lived in the second century AD. Eleven books of his writings have survived, covering logic, physics, ethics, and numerous more specialized fields. About Against the Ethicists: In this unjustly neglected and misunderstood work Sextus sets out a distinctive Sceptic position in ethics. About Sextus: Sextus Empiricus is one of the most important ancient philosophical writers after Plato and Aristotle. His writings are our main source for the doctrines and arguments of Scepticism. He probably lived in the second century AD. Eleven books of his writings Sextus Empiricus (Outlines of Pyrrhonism [generally referred to by the initials of the title in Greek, PH] 1.232) and Plutarch (Adversus Colotes 1120C) also attribute the suspension of judgment about everything to him. Determining precisely what cognitive attitude Arcesilaus intended by "suspending judgment" is difficult, primarily because we only have second and third hand reports of his views (if indeed he endorsed any views, see Dialectical Interpretation below). Similarly, we find Carneades arguing against the Stoic conception of the gods, not in order to show that they do not exist, but rather to show that the Stoics had not firmly established anything regarding the divine (de Natura Deorum 3.43-44, see also 1.4).