



# Radicalism and Moderation in the New Academy

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## Abstract

A dispute in the form of rival interpretations of Carneades arose in the New Academy about whether the wise person is permitted to form (mere) opinions. One party rejected opinion; the other defended it. Because the terms enjoy a certain currency, the positions are here labelled ‘radical’ and ‘moderate’ respectively. This essay tackles the question whether and how they differed. It argues (a) that the disagreement was less about human epistemic capacities than about the standards and aspirations against which they should be measured and (b) that Cicero, our principal source, was a consistent adherent of the ‘radical’ party.

## Keywords

Cicero – New Academy – Scepticism – Clitomachus – Philo of Larissa

## 1

We owe the distinction between radical and moderate or mitigated scepticism, if not in precisely these terms, to David Hume (*Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*, 12. 126, 129–30). As described by Hume, the moderate sceptic is an attractive figure. Alert to the dangers of dogmatism, moderate sceptics avoid hasty, ill-considered or superstitious judgements. But they do so without succumbing to the opposite danger. Ever mindful of the possibility of error and willing to revise their views in the light of new evidence or further reflection, they nevertheless hold views, so avoiding the radical sceptic’s overreaction to uncertainty. In Hume’s own terms, the distinction is between mitigated or Academical scepticism, on the one hand, and Pyrrhonian scepticism, on the other. The debate that I aim to tackle was internal to the Academy, however.

Like the term ‘sceptic’, ‘moderate’ or ‘mitigated’ and ‘radical’ occur nowhere in Cicero’s testimony, but scholars have long distinguished two tendencies in the post-Carneadean Academy in these or similar terms.<sup>1</sup> For our present purpose, moderate and radical forms of Academic scepticism may be minimally defined by their attitudes toward two tenets.<sup>2</sup> Moderate scepticism embraces only the first, ἀκαταληψία, that there are no cognitive impressions or that all things are inapprehensible, which, in the framework within which the Academics are operating, implies that knowledge is impossible. But it rejects the second, which prescribes ἐποχή or universal withholding of assent. Since, according to the same framework, acts of assent to any save cognitive impressions are sufficient to generate (mere) opinions, it permits opinion. Radical Academic scepticism embraces both tenets, and by forbidding assent forbids opinion. (A question to which we shall have to return is what it means for a radical sceptic to *embrace* a view if not to assent to it or hold it as an opinion.) Both positions are framed in terms of what the wise person *does*, with the implication that this is what human beings more generally *should* do.

Though I follow custom in speaking of ‘radicalism’ and ‘moderation’, my object is to re-open the question what these terms could mean as applied to the Academy. If it is fair to speak of radical and moderate *Academic* scepticism in a way that goes beyond the stipulations of the preceding paragraph, seeing this will require us to revise some of the expectations created by these terms. I shall argue that the extremism that sets ‘radicalism’ apart from ‘moderation’ in the Academy is characterized neither by a restriction on the scope of the judgments the former permits nor a weakening in the kind or degree of the conviction that it sanctions.

The first indication that there is a puzzle here is that Cicero, whose words, both as author and as a character in his own dialogues, were the chief inspiration for Hume’s picture of the mitigated sceptic, was a professed radical so far as the distinction applies to the Academy. To be sure, a possible explanation is that Cicero drew on materials belonging to both tendencies without discriminating between them. According to the interpretation of the divide between

1 A ‘milder’ and a ‘stronger’ conception of ‘Carneadean scepticism’, Hirzel 1883, vol. 3. 169–70; so too Hartmann 1927, 44; ‘extreme scepticism’, Reid 1885<sup>a</sup>, 268; Metrodorus interprets Carneades in a ‘less forceful manner’ than Clitomachus, Tarrant 1985, 147 n. 7; describing the views of other scholars, ‘Carneades’ supposedly less radical position’, and the “softening up” of the sceptic position’, Striker 1980, 57; Brittain 2006, xxv–xxx; Thorsrud 2012; Clitomachus ‘radicalises’ Carneades’ teaching, Ioppolo 2017, 191; Wynne 2019, 38–40.

2 Cf. Striker 1980.

radicalism and moderation in the New Academy that I defend, however, Cicero was a consistently radical Academic sceptic.<sup>3</sup>

I begin with a review of the evidence for a difference of opinion in the Academy. As so often, it is thinner than one would like and not free of difficulties. Our principal source is Cicero's *Lucullus*, the second and only surviving book of the two-book first edition of the dialogue that we know as the *Academica*. (We also have part of the *Varro*, the first of four books of the revised second edition.)<sup>4</sup> The *Lucullus* presents a conversation between Cicero and the title character, who represents Antiochus, an erstwhile member of the New or sceptical Academy who broke away to found his own sect, which he dubbed the 'Old Academy' in order to signal, as he thought, a return to the true way from which the New Academy had strayed. His philosophy was heavily indebted to Stoicism, above all in epistemology. Cicero's character represents the New Academy, or one version of it as we can see from the presence of another character, Catulus the younger, whose stance Cicero the author seems to have intended to contrast with that of his own character. Though largely silent in the *Lucullus*, Catulus would have played a more prominent part in the lost first book, which bore his name.

Our first hint about the controversy comes in a passage of the *Lucullus* where Carneades is said to have departed from Arcesilaus' adherence to both sceptical tenets. Carneades did not always affirm that, if nothing can be apprehended, assent should be abolished; he sometimes maintains that the wise person opines (*Luc.* 59; cf. 67). The passage that seems to speak most clearly to this point, as well as telling us that some Academics agreed with Carneades on this point, while others interpreted his apparent endorsement of opinion in another way, is *Lucullus* 78.

[ἀκαταληψία] is the one contention that has persisted until now. For the other, that the wise person will assent to nothing (ἐποχή), did not pertain to this controversy. For it was permissible 'to apprehend nothing and to opine', which is said to have been approved by Carneades. For my part, putting my trust in Clitomachus rather than Philo or Metrodorus, I take this to have been a contention for which he argued rather than one that he approved.

3 Cf. Brittain 2016; Wynne 2014; Wynne 2019, 38–40 who hold that Cicero was a consistently radical Academic sceptic, following Clitomachus' interpretation of Carneades.

4 See Griffin 1997; Brittain 2006, xi–xix.

This seems plain enough: before defending a new position late in his career in the so-called Roman books by endorsing ἀκαταληψία but permitting opinion,<sup>5</sup> Philo was a moderate sceptic whose position was anticipated by his older contemporary, Metrodorus of Stratonicea. Cicero rejects this version of the Academic philosophy and favors Clitomachus' radical rejection of assent and opinion.<sup>6</sup>

In the Roman books, Philo defended two new, and to judge by the reactions described by Cicero, shocking contentions: first that the New Academics, including Carneades, had never meant to reject the possibility of apprehension, but only to argue that it was impossible on the Stoic conception of the cognitive impression; and second that the alleged break between the New and the Old Academy was an illusion (*Luc.* 11–12, 18; cf. Sextus Empiricus *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* [PH] 1.235). Many scholars have accepted Cicero's testimony interpreted in this way: Philo—before the Roman books—and Metrodorus were moderate sceptics.<sup>7</sup>

Our sources apart from Cicero suggest a different picture, however.<sup>8</sup> A sentence in Philodemus' *Index Academicorum* tells us that Metrodorus thought that everyone else had misunderstood Carneades and, before vanishing in a lacuna, seems to be on its way to saying that they went wrong in taking Carneades to have held that everything is inapprehensible (col. xxvi. 4–10). To be sure, the missing conclusion of the sentence may not have fulfilled this expectation, and Philodemus' point may have been quite different. But Augustine, who like Cicero treats Metrodorus as a precursor of Philo, takes Metrodorus to have anticipated not the permission to form opinions that moderate scepticism grants to the wise, but something more like the Roman books' rejection of the first sceptical tenet, ἀκαταληψία, which stance he—Augustine—interprets as a return to the Academy's authentic Platonic roots (*Contra Academicos* 3.18. 41).

Are Philodemus and Augustine right? About Philo? About Metrodorus? Or is Cicero right? Or is there another way of interpreting his testimony? It is impossible to say for sure. I take it that the evidence for a division of opinion along moderate and radical lines within the Academy is strong. I think it probable that Philo was for much of his career a moderate sceptic, but nothing in

5 More precisely by taking a statement of Carneades' to be his true view, Philo endorsed the same view.

6 Further evidence regarding Clitomachus' position and Cicero's commitment to it is discussed in section 4 below.

7 Hirzel 1883, vol. 3, 169–70; Hartmann 1927, 44; Dal Pra 1975, vol. 1, 297; Tarrant 1985, 147 n. 7; Striker 1980, 55–6; Burnyeat 1996, 305; Schofield 1999, 135–6; Brittain 2001, chapter 2; Brittain 2006, xxviii–xxx; Thorsrud 2012, 139–40; Ioppolo 2017, 210; Wynne 2019, 37.

8 On this issue, see Glucker 2004, 122–25.

what follows depends on being sure of the precise identity of the Academy's moderate sceptics.

At the end of the dialogue, Cicero appears to touch on the moderate sceptical position once again, making explicit a new detail. The passage is often—I believe rightly—taken this way.<sup>9</sup> But one sentence is plainly corrupt, and this reading requires a defense. The translation below incorporates widely adopted emendations that yield the interpretation I endorse. There follows a defense of this interpretation.

Asked to weigh in, Catulus the younger, about whose role in the dialogue we have very little evidence owing to the loss of the first part of the dialogue, says (148):

- (A) I return to the view of my father, which he used to say was Carneades', so as to suppose that nothing can be apprehended, but all the same I judge that the wise person will assent to what is not apprehended, i.e., will hold opinions, but in such a way that he understands himself to be opining and knows there is nothing that can be apprehended or grasped.  
 (B) (i) <for which reason> while I do <not> approve this universal withholding or suspension (scil. of assent), (ii) to this other view, that nothing can be apprehended, I assent vehemently.

Catulus' first sentence (A) tells us (a) that the view he is taking is an interpretation of Carneades; (b) that he endorses the contention, not disputed by radical and moderate Academic sceptics, that nothing can be apprehended; (c) that the wise person will nonetheless assent in these conditions, which (d) entails that the same wise person will form opinions. This squares with the position described at *Lucullus* 78 (cf. 59, 67). New is the self-awareness ascribed to the wise person, who in assenting realizes that his judgments are all mere opinions, though this was likely already implicit in earlier descriptions, which seems to envisage a wise person who endorses ἀκαταληψία, but permits assent despite the seeming impossibility of secure cognition and the consequent inevitability of opinion that it entails in these conditions. The second part of the second sentence (B.ii) names a contention worthy of assent, namely ἀκαταληψία itself.

There are two serious problems with the first part of the second sentence (B i) as we find it in the manuscripts, however. (i) *per epochen illam omnium rerum conprobans* (ii) *illi alteri sententiae, nihil esse quod percipi possit, vehementer adsentior*. The preposition *per* and the participle *conprobans* cannot

9 Hirzel 1883, vol. 3, 169–70; Striker 1980, 55 n. 4; Schofield 1999, 335–6; Burnyeat 1997, 305; Brittain 2001, 79–81.

both govern *epochen*. Even if we put aside the problem posed by *per*, the sentence seems to represent Catulus describing himself as in favor of withholding or suspension—of assent—though he has just pronounced himself in favor of a view according to which the wise person does assent and is just about to describe himself as assenting. Hence the attraction of emendations that render Catulus' remark here consistent with the rejection of suspension seemingly endorsed in the uncorrupted parts of the passage. The above translation is of the sentence as emended by Manutius and Madvig<sup>10</sup>

*(i) quare epochen illam omnium non probans (ii) illi alteri sententiae, nihil esse quod percipi possit, vehementer adsentior.*

But other emendations to the same effect have been proposed.<sup>11</sup> If they are on the right lines, the character Catulus was Cicero's spokesperson for moderate Academic scepticism.

The main alternative interpretive strategy connects Catulus' remarks here with Clitomachus' distinction between two kinds of suspension, described at *Lucullus* 104, to which we shall turn below.<sup>12</sup> There Clitomachus distinguishes two forms of suspension and approves one while rejecting the other. Perhaps, then, Catulus endorses suspension to be sure, but only the variety approved by Clitomachus, leaving the wise person free to endorse views in the way that would be excluded only by the form of suspension of which Clitomachus does not approve. The difficulty is that, though Clitomachus intends his distinction to show how the wise person is not prevented from acting and arguing by adherence to the approved form of suspension, the wise person he envisages is

10 Silently adopted by Hirzel 1883 vol. 3. 167; favored by Brittain 2006, 115.

11 See Long and Sedley 1987, vol. 2. 451; Burnyeat 1997, 306–307; Görler 1997, 55 n. 29; Brittain 2001, 80 n. 13.

12 See Görler 1997, 55 n. 29; Thorsrud 2012, 142 n. 15. Reid accepts *conprobans*, taking Catulus to endorse suspension in the abstract or in theory by contrast with practice, a distinction which he believes is drawn at *Lucullus* 104. He translates: 'I accept *your* ἐποχή in the abstract' (Reid 1885b, 91; cf. Reid 1885a, 348). Frede 1984, 267, though in the context of a different interpretation, translates the passage in a way agreeable to this interpretation (criticized by Burnyeat 1997, 307 n. 81). Schäublin 1995, 309 n. 487 excises the phrase specifying the content of the second view to which Catulus assents vehemently, *nihil esse quod percipi possit*. He takes the second view to be instead that, without betraying the suspension of assent approved at *Luc.* 104, the wise person can assent in another way by following probability. Glucker 1978, 396 holds that Catulus senior's view was different from both Clitomachus' stricter interpretation of Carneades, which Cicero endorses, and the position apparently associated with Philo and Metrodorus at *Luc.* 78.

explicitly described as proceeding *without assent*.<sup>13</sup> What is more, Clitomachus and Carneades as interpreted by Clitomachus are firmly opposed to opinion, but Catulus is not (cf. *Luc.* 108). There are good reasons, then, to conclude that Catulus speaks as a proponent of the moderate Academic scepticism that rejects suspension of assent.

The two positions originated in two lines of argument employed against the Academy's Stoic opponents by Carneades, the leader whose influence dominated the New Academy to such an extent that members of the New Academy after his time defended their own positions by arguing that Carneades was correctly interpreted as holding them (*Luc.* 59, 67, 78, cf. 112). I accept the so-called dialectical interpretation of Arcesilaus and Carneades. According to it, when they defended scepticism, they were arguing *ad hominem*, not expressing their own views *in propria persona* by setting forth proofs of conclusions they endorsed based on grounds they accepted. Among other things, this would explain how Carneades could defend different conclusions at different times.<sup>14</sup> But it is plain that some of his successors, the radical and moderate Academic sceptics with whom we are concerned, were in earnest; they somehow held the sceptical positions they defended. There need be nothing wrong with this. The stance of detachment assumed by participants in dialectical discussion is not a sacred duty, but the means to an end. Indeed one might think that the point of dialectic was, through a rigorous examination of the issues, to be in a position to take a position. The problem here is not with the simple taking of positions, but with the positions that the Academics take, which are peculiarly resistant to being taken.

## 2

Moderate and radical Academic scepticism arose in the late second century BCE in response to problems confronting proponents of the stance defended by the school from the time of Arcesilaus to that of Carneades. These problems become that much more pressing once *ἀκαταληψία* and *ἐποχή* were no longer the hypothetical tenets of a notional philosophical system defended for the sake of argument, but the constitutive principles of actually existing sceptical positions.

13 ... *qui de omnibus rebus contineat se ab adsentiendo ... sine adsensu* (104). The argument in its essentials is already in Hirzel 1883, vol. 3, 167–69. More in Burnyeat 1997, 303–4; Brittain 2001, 80–81. Cf. Görler 1997, 55 n. 29, who, though he cautiously entertains an interpretation that preserves *conprobans*, concedes that it requires a loose use of the term 'assent'.

14 Cf. Allen 1997.

The first of the difficulties to confront the Academic defense of ἀκαταληψία and ἐποχή is the standing of these propositions themselves. A passage from Plutarch's *Contra Colotem* hints that the opposition between sceptic and dogmatist is not as straightforward as we might expect (1121F–1122A):

So far was Arcesilaus from cherishing a reputation for innovation or claiming ancient ideas as his own that the sophists of his day accused him of foisting the *dogmas* of inapprehensibility (ἀκαταληψία) and suspension (ἐποχή) on Socrates, Plato, Parmenides and Heraclitus, who have no need of them ...

One would have thought that the possession of dogmas is the mark of dogmatism. What is more, as the Academy's opponents were quick to observe, the alleged Academic dogmas appear to undermine themselves: ἀκαταληψία, by depriving every proposition, not excepting itself, of grounds; ἐποχή, by forbidding the adoption of every principle including itself.

The possession of δόγματα was not a characteristic imputed to the Academics only by outsiders, however. Speaking for themselves, the New Academics affirm that they too have δόγματα. On behalf of the Academy, in reply to the charge that ἀκαταληψία can play the part of a dogma only if it, and therefore at least one thing, is apprehended, Cicero says (*Luc.* 109–10, in reply to Lucullus' argument at 29, cf. 27).

As though the wise person had no other *decretum* [=δόγμα] and was able to conduct life without *decreta*! But as he holds these as probable, not apprehended, so he holds this itself, that nothing is able to be apprehended. For if he had a mark of cognition in this, he would use it in other matters. But since he does not have it, he uses probabilities. Therefore he does not fear lest he seem to confound all things and render them non-evident. For when questioned about appropriate action (*officium*) or many other things with which he is occupied and with which he is practiced he will not reply that he doesn't know in the same way he does when asked whether the number of the stars is odd or even. For there is nothing probable in non-evident matters, but in those matters where there is [something probable], the wise person will not lack for something to do or something with which to respond.

The Academy's opponents charged that it needs δόγματα, but is not entitled to them, or alternatively that it can have them only at the cost of sacrificing its distinctive character. It needs them, in the first place, to count as taking a recognizable position at all. Cicero does not disagree, but he insists that the



Academy can have dogmas without betraying its principles, and he observes that that it also needs them for the conduct of life, forestalling his opponents' other main charge, that the Academic philosophy makes life and action impossible.

But what is a dogma? Like δόξα, δόγμα is derived from the verbal root δοκέω.<sup>15</sup> Both should mean something judged or believed. But though sometimes honored in the breach, there are differences in the way the two terms were used. Much of the time and in many hands, to call someone's views, including one's own, δόγματα is not to disparage them. Δόγματα are especially important beliefs, fundamental principles and, if true, basic truths like the principle—the exalted dogma (*praeclarum decretum*) Cicero calls it—that the wise are always happy (*Tusculan Disputations* [TD] 5. 84). Δόγματα *sunt placita sectorum*, dogmas are the doctrines of the schools, says Augustine (*Quaestiones evangeliorum* 1.11). Calling a view a dogma does not imply that it is, at best, mere opinion.<sup>16</sup> When philosophers like Plato, Aristotle and the Stoics want to refer to an epistemic condition inferior to knowledge, they tend to speak of δόξα.<sup>17</sup> Unsurprisingly, the Stoics and Antiochus argued that δόγματα must be grasped, apprehended and known (*Luc.* 27, cf. 109, 141). On behalf of the New Academy, Cicero maintains that δόγματα can discharge their essential function without being apprehended.

It is tempting to see his unapologetic admission that the New Academics have δόγματα as a sign of moderate sceptical inclinations. But though what he says here (*Luc.* 109–10) would perhaps have been less surprising coming from a moderate Academic sceptic, Cicero speaks as we have seen as a proponent of radical, Clitomachean scepticism. This is yet another clue that Academic radicalism may not answer to our expectations.

Radical Academics' δόγματα are, then, unlike those of their moderate Academic colleagues, not δόξαι or opinions, though not because they are knowledge, which—and this too is a δόγμα of theirs—is not to be had. The paradoxical character of this stance—δόγμα without δόξα—is only slightly obscured by Cicero's decision to Latinize δόγμα and δόξα as *decretum* and *opinio* respectively (*Luc.* 27, 29).

The standing of δόγματα, then, is both at the centre of the controversy between the New Academy and their adversaries, the Stoa and Antiochus, and crucial to an understanding of the intramural disagreement between moderate and radical Academic sceptics. Moderate sceptics apparently maintained

15 On the uses of the term δόγμα, see Barnes 1982.

16 Stobaeus reports a Stoic view according to which just as the health of the body is a good mixture (εὐχρασία) of hot and cold, dry and wet, so the health of the soul is good mixture of the dogmas in it (2.7.5b4 = SVF 3. 278); Epictetus calls the true beliefs that set us free 'dogmas' (*Discourses* 3.26.34–6).

17 See Moss and Schwab 2019, esp. 4–11, 25.

that mere opinions could discharge the function of δόγματα, radical sceptics—mysteriously—that δόγματα that were neither instances of knowledge nor opinion could do the same.

Though not immune to objection, the moderate sceptical position, which permits the formation of self-aware opinions including δόγματα in the absence of cognitive impressions, seems sensible enough. The strange-sounding position of the radicals, which makes a place for δόγματα that are neither known nor opined, less so. But as we shall soon see in more detail, while forbidding *assent*, radicals permit *approval* of, among other things, δόγματα. But if this makes their position more comprehensible, it does so by raising another problem. Now we might wonder whether the two forms of scepticism do not really come to the same thing.<sup>18</sup> One refuses to permit assent, but is happy to allow approval, the other allows assent, but with a significant qualification. It would be surprising and disappointing if the difference turned out to be merely verbal, however. I shall argue that in one way, perhaps the way we most expect them to differ, there was little or no difference between radical and moderate Academic scepticism and that the scholars who have said as much are right, but that in another way, significant enough to explain the existence of their disagreement, radicals and moderates did differ.

### 3

Moderate scepticism accepts the first dogma, ἀκαταληψία, but rejects the second, ἐποχή, and with it the ban on opinion. It permits the wise to form opinions, but naturally not any opinion on any or no grounds, and its adherents do not forfeit the right to fault—others or themselves—for hasty, ill-considered, rash or silly opinions. The opinions of the wise are thoughtful and well-founded. For the explanation of how this is possible without cognitive impressions, moderate sceptics turned (as did their radical colleagues) to Carneades' theory of probability. *Probabile* is Cicero's Latin for, among other terms, Greek πιθανόν, plausible or persuasive.<sup>19</sup>

With the aid of probability, the moderate sceptic holds views on a range of issues, possibly a wide range, perhaps as many as the dogmatist. And these

18 Zeller 1923<sup>5</sup>, vol. 3.1. 533 n. 3 (who describes the difference between the two interpretations of Carneades expounded at *Luc.* 78 as inconsequential); Hartmann 1927, 44–5; Dal Pra 1975, vol. 1. 298; Thorsrud 2012, esp. 146–47.

19 Cf. Allen 1994; Obdrzalek 2006; Reinhardt 2019 on the Sextus Empiricus' report of Carneades' theory of probable impressions, which, however, confines its attention to how probability can replace cognitive impression in the realm of the evident.

views may be held with a high degree of confidence. This appears to be the burden of the passage at the end of the *Lucullus* (148). If Catulus is representative, in some cases moderate Academic sceptics may assent vehemently, to among other things the doctrine of ἀκαταληψία. There is a hint of paradox here. Normally we associate vehemence with radicalism. Radicals are extremists, both in their views and in the fervor with which they affirm them. If I were to claim that I believe in the abolition of private property or the community of women and children, for example, but everything about my words and actions shows that I was more strongly attached to, and more passionately convinced of, my views regarding, say, Pindaric meter or the classification of rare orchids, the comrades would be entitled to wonder how much of a radical I really am. Yet vehement assent is available to moderate sceptics, who think the implications of ἀκαταληψία are relatively weak. Their situation resembles a seesaw, the side of which that measures the strength of the moderate sceptics' conviction can rise only if the other, which measures the seriousness of the implications that they take ἀκαταληψία to have, sinks.

There is a way in which moderate Academic sceptics are, if not radicals, then revisionists, indeed radical revisionists, that risks being obscured by Cicero's brief account of the choice between withholding assent and forming opinions by assenting that Carneades offered to his Stoic opponents. It would be a mistake to suppose that the assent that is suspended, if the ban on opinion is upheld, is the same as the assent that is bestowed, if the ban is relaxed (*Luc.* 78).

To see this, consider a cluster of anti-sceptical arguments to the effect that it would be futile or absurd to approve anything if ἀκαταληψία were the rule and the best human beings could hope for was to have impressions of different degrees of probability (*Luc.* 59, cf. 33, 36, 109). Thus when in *De finibus* [*Fin.*] 5 Cicero says that it is open to him to approve just what his interlocutor, Piso, does, Piso, who like Lucullus speaks for Antiochus, replies 'is anyone able to approve what he does not take for apprehended, comprehended, cognized?' (*Fin.* 5.76).<sup>20</sup> The immediate source is Antiochus, but the arguments likely owe something to the Stoics. The point is not that human beings are incapable of assenting to any but cognitive impressions. The Stoics and Antiochus think that they do so all too often, and they deplore the fact. Such acts of assent are sins, *scelera, peccata, ἀμαρτήματα* (cf. *Luc.* 133). Rather they held that assent would have no place in a world without apprehension and be impossible for

20 *Sed nonne meministi licere mihi ista probare, quae sunt a te dicta? Quis enim potest ea quae probabilia videantur ei non probare? An vero, inquit, quisquam potest probare, quod perceptum, quod comprehensum, quod cognitum non habet?*

someone who endorsed ἀκαταληψία (never mind how). Assent can and does give rise to opinion, but not to self-aware opinion.

On their view, assent is a simple, unadorned, uninflected act of taking for true, not one that admits qualification or variation in degrees of credence. If I assent to P and P is not the case, I am at fault, I have committed an unforced error for which I may be blamed. If I come to see that P was not in fact the case, I will now judge that I was wrong to have thought P. In assenting, I took the question to be closed, removed beyond the possibility of revision (*Luc.* 141, cf. 27). We understand that I can say ‘you’ or ‘Paul’ ‘thinks that P, but P is not the case’ or ‘Paul thinks P, but the balance of evidence is against P’ without raising hackles, but the same is not true of ‘I think P, but not P’ or ‘I think P though the evidence is against it’. The Stoic-Antiochean understanding of assent is such that I cannot sincerely assert that P, and so assent, while thinking ‘but for all I know not P’.<sup>21</sup> As Lucullus puts it, borrowing the language of ‘impediment’ from Carneades, according to whom we are entitled to accept impressions that are initially probable and remain unimpeded when they have been subjected to the possibility of being impeded by further checks, ‘how can you fail to be *impeded* when false impressions are not separated from true?’, i.e., impeded by the admitted epistemic possibility that any of them might be false (*Luc.* 59, cf. 33, 36, 109).

Moderate sceptics could not have rejected ἐποχή and relaxed the ban on opinion for the wise if they had retained this, the Stoic-Antiochean understanding of assent. If my assent is of the moderate kind, qualified by the proviso that I might be wrong, I can acknowledge in retrospect that P was not in fact the case without necessarily concluding that I was at fault in thinking P. If I made the best possible use of the evidence available to me at the time, then I was right to assent. Even in a world in which no impression, and therefore no judgment, is such that it could not be false, the wise person may assent without incurring reproach, to among other things ἀκαταληψία itself.

#### 4

Let us now turn to radical, Clitomachean scepticism. There are two expectations about how radicals differ from moderates that I mean to challenge. It would seem to follow from the radicals’ strict adherence to ἐποχή—never mind for the moment how they are in a position to adhere to anything at all—that

21 Lucullus maintains that to argue or offer proofs for a position one must approve the premises in a way that does allow for the possibility of error (*Luc.* 44).

they did not countenance as extensive a range of views as moderates did and that such approval as they did bestow was somehow weaker, thinner or more passive than the moderate sceptics' assent. These expectations are behind the tendency to suppose that Cicero was a moderate Academic sceptic despite his professions of allegiance to Clitomachus' version of the New Academic philosophy. Cicero holds views, and he plainly thinks there is nothing about being a New Academic that prevents him from doing so. We are not, Cicero insists, those to whom nothing seems true (*De natura deorum* [DND] 1.12). And he constantly emphasizes the fact that the Academics cultivated *in utramque partem disserere* as a means of discovering the truth, not or not merely as a technique for generating conflicting arguments (*Luc.* 7–8, DND 1.11, TD 2.9, 4.7, 5.11). To be sure, the result for the Academics for whom Cicero speaks is not the cognition or apprehension of the truth demanded by Antiochus and the Stoics. It is rather the view that emerges as the most probable or *verisimile*. There is an especially plain and representative statement of the point in the *praefatio* to the *Lucullus* (7–8).

... Our cause is an easy one, we who seek to discover the truth without contention, and we pursue it with the utmost care and dedication ... Nor do our arguments—by [our] speaking on and attending to both sides of the case—do anything other than elicit or as it were draw out something that is either true or approaches as closely to the truth as possible. And there is no difference between us and those who take themselves to know apart from the fact that they are not uncertain that the views they defend are true, while we hold many things to be probable (*nos probabilia multa habemus*), which we are able easily to follow, but scarcely to affirm as certain.

This is not the stance that the language of 'radicalism' leads us to expect.

To use the image of the seesaw again, it might seem reasonable to expect that as the seriousness of the implications radicals take ἀκαταληψία to have rises, the strength or degree of commitment or conviction, or whatever we choose to call it, that they permit themselves, including their commitment to ἀκαταληψία itself, must sink together with the number and variety of occasions on which they see fit to apply it. The extremism of their epistemological views would oblige radical sceptics to be cautious, hesitant and tentative in all their judgments, not least in relation to ἀκαταληψία itself. To this way of thinking, radical sceptical approval should, by comparison with moderate sceptical assent, be both restricted in scope, confined perhaps to narrowly practical considerations, and somehow passive, what one is left with or the residue that remains after the most strenuous efforts to stamp out the tendency to believe,

the inextinguishable minimum, equal only to the task of guiding conduct, and perhaps somehow not even concerned with truth or the way the world is at all.<sup>22</sup> Call this stance *doxastic minimalism*.

But this, I maintain, is a mistake. The Cicero whose remarks seem to count in favor of regarding him as a moderate sceptic affirms at every opportunity that he is a radical. Instead of second-guessing Cicero's professions, we should question this picture of radical Academic scepticism. The evidence against this picture and in favor of an alternative that sees Cicero's professions as consistent with Clitomachus' radical form of scepticism on which I shall draw comes mainly from the last parts of the speech by Cicero's character in the *Lucullus*, which is the context for his unembarrassed assertion that New Academics have *dogmata* that I have already cited (98 ff.).

Now, says Cicero: 'let us abandon these barbed arguments [by which he means the liar and the sorites and other dialectical puzzles on which he has just dilated] ... and reveal who we really are. Once Carneades' view (*sententia*) is set out for all to see, Antiochus' whole case will lie in ruins' (cf. 105). For his answer to the case against the New Academy, he cites Clitomachus as his authority, and this and succeeding passages are thick with references to Carneades as recalled by Clitomachus.<sup>23</sup> My interpretive hypothesis is that, even when he is not explicitly relying on Clitomachus to explain 'who we really are', Cicero means to be and is in fact a consistent exponent of Clitomachus' radical brand of New Academic scepticism.

The first cluster of arguments in Antiochus' case were to the effect that, by abolishing the cognitive impression and with it assent, the New Academics threaten to deprive us of our senses, blind us, plunge us into worse than Cimmerian darkness; or since the deliverances of the senses are often identified with *evident* matters, that 'they abolish the evident and render everything non-evident (*ἄδηλον*)' (*Luc.* 26, 29, 34, 54, 61; cf. 99, 103, DND I 11–12, Plutarch *De Communibus Notitiis* 1077C), indeed as non-evident as whether the stars are even or odd in number (110; cf. 32). Cicero and the Clitomachean wing of the Academy on whose behalf he speaks have a stake in countering this dark vision of the New Academic wise person's plight with a rosier picture, but even so it is surprising just how rosy the picture is.

'Evident' renders *ἐναργές*, Latinized by Cicero as *perspicuum*. Evident truths are indispensable not only as a basis for action, but also as the point of

22 Frede 1984, 270; Burnyeat 1997, 303, 308–9, Ioppolo 2007, 261; Ioppolo 2008, 40–42; Brittain 2016, 20, 37; Wynne 2014, 247, 265; criticisms of the view that the radical Academics' view is somehow not about truth in Thorsrud 2012, 145; Reinhardt 2019, 249–50.

23 *Luc.* 98, 102–4, 108, 137, 139.

departure for scientific inquiry. And the Academics stand accused not only of overturning life (the *vitae eversio*) (*Luc.* 31, cf. 39, 62, 99), but also undermining their claim to be inquirers in pursuit of the truth. Lucullus has charged that the abolition of assent takes away not only 'every possibility of action', but also 'every motion of the mind' (*motus animorum*) (62).

Contrary to expectation, Carneades' reply, for which Cicero cites the first of Clitomachus' four books (!) on the suspension of assent, is that the Academics do not reject the evident or do away with the senses.<sup>24</sup> The abolition of the evident follows from ἀκαταληψία only on an understanding of evidence or perspicuity that they contest.<sup>25</sup> The difference between impressions that are probable and those that are not is equal to the task of supporting the distinction between evident and non-evident, which does not require that we be able to distinguish cognitive from inapprehensible impressions; everything may be non-cognitive without all things thereby being non-evident.<sup>26</sup> Cicero therefore indignantly rejects the charges 'you discern nothing, you hear nothing, nothing is evident to you' (*Luc.* 102, cf. 34). And there are hints that inquiry, though possibly based on evident matters, is capable of leading to discoveries outside the realm of the evident. This at any rate is the implication of Lucullus' assertion that inquiry is impossible in the absence of apprehension, which would lose some of its bite if the Academics were in a position simply to reply that they had sworn off inquiry (26), so too his demand to know what discoveries the Academics have made by means of inquiry, implying that such had been promised (60). Above all, as we have seen there is the fact to which Cicero frequently directs his readers' attention that the Academics regarded *in utramque partem* argument as a method of discovery.

24 The point is anticipated at *Luc.* 34 and 54, where Lucullus maintains that the Academics render everything non-evident, *which they do not want*.

25 On *Luc.* 99 see Madvig 1876, lxv; Allen 1997, 239–41.

26 Cf. *Luc.* 32, where Lucullus says some Academics reject as false the accusation that they say everything is non-evident, insisting that there is a world of difference between the non-evident and what cannot be apprehended; likewise Numenius (fr. 26, 107–111 Des Places), who, however, connects the distinction between the non-evident and that which cannot be apprehended, which he ascribes to Carneades, with the permission moderate sceptics grant the wise to assent. Cf. also *De Officiis* [*Off.*] 2.7–8 where, without reference to perspicuity, Cicero maintains that probability is equal to meeting our epistemic requirements: 'as other people say that some things are certain, others not, so we say that some things are probable, others not.' The point in the context is that Academics may in perfect consistency maintain that nothing is apprehensible without forfeiting the right to inquire by discussing *inter alia* the precepts of duty.

## 5

Two paragraphs later Cicero turns to Clitomachus again, for an explanation of New Academic suspension (103–4). The task of the passage, as I noted above, is to distinguish two ways of understanding ἐποχή, rendered by Cicero as *adsensus sustinere*. It is, however, a difficult passage, which has been interpreted in different ways.

... [Clitomachus] adds that the wise person is said to withhold assent in two ways, in the first, when this is understood to mean that he doesn't *assent* to anything at all, in the second when he holds himself back from responding either that he *approves* of something or disapproves, so that he neither denies something nor affirms it. This being so, the one *pleases* him, so that he never assents, the other he *holds* so that following probability wherever this is either present or absent, he can reply either 'yes' or 'no'. <For since> it *pleases* the one who restrains himself from assenting about everything to be moved nevertheless and to do something, there remain impressions of this kind by which we are stirred to action, likewise those by following which when questioned *in utramque partem* we are able to answer provided that something appears so to us, yet without assent ...

... adiungit dupliciter dici adsensus sustinere sapientem, uno modo cum hoc intellegatur, omnino eum rei nulli adsentiri, altero cum se a respondendo ut aut adprobet quid aut improbet sustineat, ut neque neget aliquid neque aiat. id cum ita sit, alterum placere, ut numquam adsentiatur, alterum tenere, ut sequens probabilitatem ubicumque haec aut occurrat aut deficiat aut 'etiam' aut 'non' respondere possit. <Etenim cum> placeat eum qui de omnibus rebus contineat se ab adsentiendo moveri tamen et agere aliquid, relinqui eius modi visa quibus ad actionem excitemur, item ea quae interrogati in utramque partem respondere possimus, sequentes tantum modo quod ita visum sit, dum sine adsensu ...

The broad interpretation of the passage that I accept is due in its essentials to Rudolf Hirzel.<sup>27</sup> The Latin pair *adprobatio* and *probabilis* corresponds to

27 Hirzel 1883, vol. 3 168 n. 1. The title of Clitomachus' four book opus was probably Περί ἐποχῆς, so, e.g., Ioppolo 2007. The translation adopts an emendation proposed by Reid 1885<sup>a</sup>: *Etenim cum*, 'For since'.



πειθεσθαι and πιθανόν, being persuaded and the persuasive (cf. Sextus Empiricus PH 1.230). Clitomachus distinguished two forms of suspension (ἐποχή) with reference to the reaction suspended, the first of which, the suspension of assent, συγκατάθεσις, he approves on behalf of the Academy, the second of which, the suspension of any form of approval, he rejects. But Cicero is stuck; having rendered ἐπέχειν as *adsensus sustinere* and picked *adsensus* as his translation of συγκατάθεσις, he cannot do the same, so he switches constructions in mid-exposition. Academics who follow Clitomachus *endorse* one form of suspension, namely the suspension of *assent*, so rejecting assent, which is here a species of a broader genus of approval, but *hold to* the other, now meaning the other kind of *approval*, thus rejecting the other form of suspension. i.e., suspension of any form of approval.

We need to be on our guard. The word ‘assent’, which has entered our language, both philosophical and everyday, does not immediately suggest a precisely articulated element in a specific—in the present case Stoic—philosophical theory. Cicero appears to have coined both Latin nouns, *adsensus* and *adsensio*, on the basis of the verb *adsentiri*, the second specifically as a translation of συγκατάθεσις, which may itself have been a Stoic coinage on the basis of the already extant verbal construction (cf. *Luc.* 37).<sup>28</sup> It is, in any case, a highly theorized notion in the hands of the Stoics, who regarded assent as *sui generis*. Present day scholars who speak of a distinction between two kinds of assent legitimately employ our more generic notion.<sup>29</sup> But it more accurately reflects ancient philosophical usage if we distinguish *assent* from the wider genus, *approval*, that radical sceptics recognize in defiance of the Stoics.<sup>30</sup> When they abolish assent they abolish its genus only on the Stoics’ conception of that genus, but not otherwise.

Like moderate sceptical assent, the radicals’ approbation will presumably be by the relevant measures a more tentative, less whole-hearted commitment than Stoic assent. But the question remains: how does it differ from moderate sceptical assent? With this question in mind, let us see what light *Lucullus* 104 and the evidence we can find elsewhere in Cicero throws on the scope and nature of radical Academic approbation. (The two issues may interact, e.g., if approbation were suitable only to serve as a basis for action, then its scope would narrow.)

The distinction between approval and assent is followed by one between two varieties of impression (104).

28 Hartung 1970, 72–8.

29 E.g., Frede 1984.

30 So Bett 1990.

... there remain impressions of this kind (i) by which we are stirred to action, likewise (ii) those by following which when questioned *in utramque partem* we are able to answer provided that something appears so to us, yet without assent ...

The distinction between (i) and (ii) appears to correspond to that between the two spheres to which the impressions belong respectively, the practical and the theoretical. But while the impressions belonging to the realm of practice are specified by reference to the use to which they are put in the guidance of conduct, those in the theoretical realm are, it seems, introduced via the means by which results in this sphere are won, namely the Academics' favored method of inquiry by argument on both sides of the question (cf. *Luc.* 32).

If this is right, however, the distinction is a rough one. Argument on both sides of the question surely has a place in practical deliberation, where the merits of alternative courses of action are weighed in the balance.<sup>31</sup> Nor will the distinction align with that between evident and non-evident matters; though evident matters can be approved without argument, they have a part to play outside the practical realm as the point of departure for inquiry and conjecture in natural philosophy.

Another element of complexity is also in danger of being obscured. It is plain from other passages that there are two stages or moments in argument *in utramque partem*. The practice brings out what can be said on both sides and sometimes—there is no guarantee—it issues in an answer to the question that was the inquiry's original point of departure, the view that is *most* probable or *verisimile*. Making the best possible case on both sides is described in terms remarkably similar to those used to describe the recognition, as a result of making and assessing opposing arguments, of a view that can be endorsed and followed as probable, however. Thus Cicero speaks of *drawing out* (*expromere*) what can be said for opposing views in argument on both sides of the question (*De Divinatione* [*Div.*] 2.150); but also of *bringing out* what is true or approaches most closely to the truth (*exprimere, elicere*) by means of *in utramque partem* argument (*Luc.* 7; cf. *Off.* 2.7–8; TD 2.9).

The best cases to be made on different sides of a question are also, in a way *probable*, and their invention is, therefore, in its own way, an inquiry into the probable. To argue effectively on both sides of the question, one must be able to discover what is probable—persuasive or plausible to, and likely to win the approbation of, different people, from different points of view, given starting

31 Cf. Ioppolo 2007, 232, who wishes to restrict the contribution of the *in utramque partem* argument mentioned here to the practical sphere.

points of different kinds and so on. The language of probability as used by Cicero, and the Greek terms for persuasiveness and likelihood that are behind it, can be employed to a range of effects. To call a view probable may be to endorse it cautiously. This is where the emphasis usually falls in Cicero. It can be a way of disparaging it as superficially plausible, specious, a likely story, such as to persuade or be approved by incautious or credulous people. As Cicero remarks elsewhere, there is nothing so unbelievable that it cannot be made *probable* by speaking (*Paradoxa Stoicorum* 3). But calling something probable may also indicate that it has features that recommend it to more serious inquirers, that it is of some weight, worth serious consideration, not lightly to be dismissed and so on. Chrysippus had something like the last in mind when he held that three ethical views can be defended with probability (*probabiliter*) (*Luc.* 138–9).

This helps explain the otherwise surprising way in which Cicero's character responds to the charge of inconsistency at *Tusculan Disputations* 5.33. He has been defending the Stoic position that there is an equivalence between the two propositions: (i) that virtue is sufficient for happiness and (ii) that there is no good apart from virtue (5.18, 21). In response to his interlocutor's objection that he defended an incompatible view in *De finibus* 4, he says: 'we live in the day; we say whatever strikes our souls with probability; therefore we alone are free'.<sup>32</sup> Despite appearances, however, Cicero is not describing the freedom to flit capriciously from view to view as the fancy takes him. He means rather the freedom to argue on both sides of an argument, as it were *probabiliter*.

This is what he means elsewhere when he speaks of the *libertas disserendi*, freedom in argument (*Leg.* 1.36).<sup>33</sup> It is indispensable to masters of *in utramque partem* argument, the cultivation of which in turn makes possible the responsible exercise of the distinct but related freedom to which Cicero also attaches great importance, namely the freedom to use one's own judgment and make up one's own mind un-beholden to authority (*Luc.* 8, *Div.* 2.150, TD 4.7). The point emerges clearly again later in the same book of the *Tusculans*, when he appeals to this Academic liberty once again, before changing sides on the same

32 In *Fin.* 4, Cicero's character had taken the Antiochean line that the Stoics' preferred items were in truth no different from the *goods* of the Peripatetic and Old Academics. Combine this with the Stoic position he defends in TD 5 and it should be the case, says his interlocutor, that in all consistency Cicero is committed to acknowledging that Antiochus and his followers are no less entitled to the view that virtue suffices for happiness than the Stoics (cf. *Fin.* 5.78).

33 Cf. *De Legibus* 1.21–2, where Atticus puts aside his Epicureanism to avail himself of a similar freedom.

issue and defending the position that virtue may be sufficient for happiness even if there are goods apart from it (5.83).

To the two ways in which probability figures in inquiry by argument on both sides of the question, then, there correspond two kinds of question to which one turns to probability for answers. There is first of all, as I have already noted, the question in order to answer which one sets the inquiry in train. The answer to this question, if there is one, is the view that emerges as most probable as a result of the inquiry. Then there are the questions put forward in the course of the dialectical encounter that constitutes the inquiry; these become the premises of the arguments when affirmed by participants—real or notional—who take the part of answerer.

But which kind of question does Cicero have in view when expounding Clitomachus at *Lucullus* 104 he speaks of the impressions by following which we can answer when questioned in *in utramque partem* argument: the first, the second or both? The expectation that the passage has something to say about the scope of Clitomachean approbation accords with the emphasis Cicero lays on the value of *in utramque partem* argument as a method of inquiry able to discover what is most probable or *verisimile*, and this suggests the larger or inquiry-initiating question and the answers to it must be at least part of what he has in mind. Questions of this kind seem to be among those in view at *Lucullus* 110, which I have already cited and where Cicero again indignantly rejects the charge that the Academics render everything non-evident (cf. *Luc.* 32, 54). ‘So far as regards questions like whether the stars are even or odd in number’, he observes, ‘there is nothing probable, but elsewhere, where there is, the wise person ‘will not lack for something to do or something with which to respond’. In this passage, to which I shall return, it is hard not to suppose that the Academic’s ability to *respond* is not simply a capacity to participate in argument by answering questions, but the ability to profit from this participation by affirming settled, if not inalterable, views.

It must be conceded that *Lucullus* 104 reads as if it is the ability to answer questions in the course of argument that Cicero has in view, however. And if this were right, the point of focusing on the role of the dialectical answerer would be less to indicate the scope than to illuminate the *character* of Clitomachean approbation, especially in the practical realm.<sup>34</sup> But it then needs to be asked if the approval of impressions guiding conduct is of this character, and if so, whether and how it differs from the approbation bestowed on the results that emerge as most probable or *verisimile* from inquiry by argument *in utramque partem*. Presumably the latter is, by some measure, less uncommitted, more

34 So very plausibly Reinhardt 2019, 250–53, who cites Aristotle *Topics* 8 5 for comparison.

settled and more robust. This would have the odd result that it is the results of inquiry outside the practical realm to which the Clitomachean version of the Academic wise person is most strongly attached, which would, among other things, seem to be at cross purposes with the motive for imputing a form of doxastic minimalism to Clitomachus.

I suspect, then, despite the difficulties it presents, that *Lucullus* 104 does not exclude the responses the Academic is able to give after having discovered a probable view as a result of argument, i.e., the answers to the questions that set inquiry in train and not just those that are put in the course of the argument. Somehow, perhaps owing to the briskness and compression with which Cicero was writing, the two kinds of question with which *in utramque partem* argument is concerned and the different parts played by probability have not been as clearly distinguished as they might have been.

## 6

In any event, there is more evidence about the nature and scope of radical approbation in passages following *Lucullus* 104. Antiochus and the Stoics argued that, if they hold ἀκαταληψία as a *dogma* or *decretum*, the New Academics must grant that they apprehend it, and therefore that at least one thing is apprehensible. As we have seen, Cicero responds not by denying that the New Academy holds this dogma, but rather by saying that the New Academy has *dogmata* and lots of them at *Luc.* 109–10! According to the passage, the wise person holds *decreta* as probable not apprehended (*habet probabilia non percepta*; cf. *Luc.* 8, *Fin.* 5.76).<sup>35</sup>

Later, in the review of conflicting opinions, while discussing physics, Cicero's character faults the Stoics and Antiochus for confining themselves to a single, unvarying, perfectly uniform affirmative response to impressions, i.e., *assent* as they understand it (*Luc.* 119; cf. 128, 141. The Stoic wise person is obliged to approve everything as if he apprehended it (*adprobat quasi percipiat*) (128). As a result, the Stoics and Antiochus put every act of approval on a level. They are not able to affirm that it is light now more than that the world is an intelligent living being or that it is light now more than that the crow's cry conveys a divi-natory message. Later, in the review of ethical controversies, Cicero mentions a number of paradoxical Stoic views and maintains that Lucullus is duty bound

35 The only conviction that Cicero explicitly calls an Academic δόγμα is one forbidding assent to the non-cognitive, which he describes as a δόγμα he shares with Lucullus (*Luc.* 133).

to defend them like the walls of his city, whereas he—Cicero—can defend them to the extent that (*tantum quantum*) they seem to be correct (*Luc.* 137).

The burden of these observations is that radical Academic approval is suitable to a world in which there are no cognitive impressions, no impressions that could not be false, the world that the Academics, moderates and radicals alike, suspect is ours. To take something as probable in this way, then, is to react to an impression in a way that is proportionate to the claims that it exerts on us in such a world. Intriguingly there is a hint that those claims can vary in strength and that we can adjust our reaction accordingly. If we concentrate our attention on the radicals' disagreement with the Stoa, approbation can, and I think should, be understood not as the weakest possible reaction to impressions compatible with action, but, like the moderate sceptics' assent, by contrast with the doxastic maximalism of Stoic assent and as a rebuttal to the futility argument.

There is more to be said about the scope envisaged for radical Academic approval. Whether the stars are even or odd in number shows up elsewhere as an example of matters that are absolutely non-evident, set forever beyond the reach of resolution by the power of human reason (cf. *Luc.* 26, 109–10).<sup>36</sup> But these matters are sometimes contrasted with others that are non-evident because not susceptible to resolution by direct observation, but which are nevertheless fit subjects for inquiry, especially inquiry in natural philosophy (*Luc.* 26; 127; cf. Sextus Empiricus PH 2.97–8; M 8.145–47). New Academics in the Clitomachean mold reject the charge that they render everything as non-evident as whether the stars are even or odd in number because they countenance evident matters, but how do they stand with regard to non-evident matters of this, other kind?

Unsurprisingly, the section of the *Lucullus* that reviews conflicting opinions has much to say about questions where the apparent force of the considerations on opposed sides of the question is in balance. Cicero's character gives the debates about the nature of the soul as an example, where he seems to be talking about something very like Pyrrhonian equipollence (*Luc.* 124). 'While one view on this issue seems certain to the Stoic or Antiochean sage, the Academic wise person cannot even identify one that seems especially probable'. And in the same passage Cicero seems to observe that this is so in most cases (*in plerisque*). But this is not his last word on the subject. He also extolls the value of natural-philosophical inquiry into non-evident matters, where it

36 Cf. Sextus Empiricus PH 2.90, 91, 97; *Adversus Mathematicos* [M] 7.25; 8.25, 147, 317; Clement *Stromata* 5.1.5.3.

seems the possibility that it may lead to the discovery of probable views is not excluded (*Luc.* 127–8).

Inquiry into matters that are the greatest though also the most hidden is a source of delight. If something is found which seems truth-like the soul is filled with the most humane pleasure. Your wise person and ours, then, investigate these things, but yours so that he assents, believes, affirms, ours so that he is on guard against opining rashly and so that he thinks everything is going especially well if he should find something that is like the truth.

Perhaps radical Academic sceptics took themselves to be in a position to hold views less often than their moderate colleagues—perhaps—but a permission rarely exercised is not a prohibition adhered to imperfectly. If my argument so far is on the right lines:

- 1) The scope of radical Academic approval includes evident matters, unapologetically described as such.
- 2) But it is not confined to them. Though acutely aware of the difficulties in the way of the inquirer and disposed to regard many of the issues about which their dogmatic rivals pronounce confidently as matters of pure speculation, radical Academic sceptics do not reject inquiry into non-evident matters and they do not exclude the possibility that such inquiry may issue in—probable—results that can be endorsed as such, e.g., in natural philosophy.
- 3) Radicals have δόγματα, though it is not clear about how wide a range of issues. A question for another day is whether there is room for ‘individualized’ δόγματα apart from the core tenets of radical Academicism.<sup>37</sup>
- 4) And if I am right, radical Academic sceptics do not necessarily differ from moderates because the approbation they favor is, by the relevant measures, a weaker, less committed or more passive reaction than qualified, moderate assent nor one that is somehow not about the truth or objective reality.<sup>38</sup>

37 On Cicero’s creation of different Academic *personae* in the *De natura deorum*, see Wynne 2014.

38 Perhaps Sextus’ remark about the unbecoming passion with which Carneades and Clitomachus are attached to the views they take for probable is less tendentious than it seems (PH 1.230).

## 7

What, then, was the difference between radicalism and moderation in the New Academy? Those who suspect that it came to little would seem to have a point. Even Cicero sometimes treats the disagreement in the Academy over whether to bestow or withhold assent as of relatively minor importance (*Luc.* 112). The significance of the choice between qualified assent, on the one hand, and approbation, on the other, emerges, I suggest, when we consider the place each occupies in its respective system. To a large extent, the point of departure for both radicals and moderates was the Stoic framework, and each sceptical system is the result of decisions about what to retain, alter or reject from it. Those decisions reveal differences in outlook, attitude, even temperament.

Contrast two kinds of contrast. The first is between two views about what one thing, assent, is or ought to be; the second is between two forms of approval, only one of which is *assent*. Moderate Academic scepticism's difference with the Stoa should be understood in the light of the first, radical scepticism's in the light of the second.

Moderate Academics are revisionists as regards assent, who aim to replace Stoic assent. Replace it in two ways, in use to be sure, but also in their philosophical system, as the standard act of approbation. They believe they have taken the measure of humanity's epistemic potential and found it good if not perfect, and done so in the only way in which, to their way of thinking, one can discover anything at all, namely by finding it probable. The mental act we should employ, that the wise person does employ, is qualified, moderate-sceptical assent, which is the appropriate response in a world in which every impression could be false, a world that the moderates have every reason, the best possible reasons if they are right, to believe is ours.

To them there seems to be no point to preserving a special mental act, as their radical colleagues appear to do, gathering dust on the shelf, an act by forever refraining from which one avoids opinion. Since in the framework they share with both the Stoa and their radical colleagues, assent to any but cognitive impressions is an opinion, moderate sceptics endorse opinion—this is their most striking and novel departure. They think we should face the facts, be reasonable and accommodate the way things are by bringing our ideals into line with reality. If probable but non-cognitive impressions are the best we can hope for, and assent, revised to accommodate this fact, gives rise to opinion when given to them, then what is the point of sermonizing against it? Far better to get on with the business of forming the best opinions one can. One can be faulted for forming an opinion by assenting to an impression that is not probable or probable enough, but not simply for having opinions. Even the best people—the wise—have opinions, albeit the best opinions. Above I said,



‘what assent is or ought to be’. Moderate Academics may also have believed that the approval people in fact bestow is, or mostly is, qualified assent, i.e., that the Stoics are wrong as a matter of descriptive psychological fact to suppose that people assent, or assent only, in an unqualified way.

One way of contrasting the attitude of Academic moderates with that of the radicals, then, paradoxically assigns the latter the part of conservatives or traditionalists who, by standing with the Stoics on the nature of assent and the wickedness of opinion, cleave to the old ways that their moderate colleagues would consign to the dustbin. But from another angle, the moderation of the moderates can be contrasted with the radicalness of the demands Stoics and Academic radicals agree in placing on us. For radical sceptics stand with the Stoics in their attitude toward opinion: the rejection of opinion remains a point of supreme importance to both of them. I cited Cicero’s reference to the ‘common dogma’ he shares with the Stoics and Antiochus strenuously rejecting opinion (*Luc.* 133). Elsewhere Cicero approvingly cites Clitomachus’ praise of Carneades for accomplishing the Herculean task of freeing our minds from opinion, as from a wild beast’ (108).<sup>39</sup>

Approbation replaces assent in use, but—and this is all important—it does not usurp its place in the conceptual scheme that radicals take over from the Stoa. By refusing to countenance the revisionism of the moderate Academics on this point, radical Academic sceptics agree with Stoic tradition. Assent, as the Stoics understand it, remains the gold standard. The relations between assent and opinion, an ever-present danger, on the one hand, and between it and apprehension and knowledge, distant ideals, on the other, are likewise unaltered. This has the peculiar effect that we have already noticed: radical sceptics advocate a form of—here we search for a genus: belief?—that is not knowledge, apprehension or opinion, while it—opinion—now becomes a special, narrowly-defined, species of the same genus, whole-hearted commitment, acknowledging no possibility of error in a world in which the possibility of error is inescapable. Because of the common ground they share with the Stoics, the radicals hold that the reaction of approbation open to the Academic wise person, granted the absence of cognition, on which point they agree with their moderate colleagues, should not—contra the moderates—be dignified with the name or status of *assent*. But whether the reaction they permit differs from the assent endorsed by Academic moderates by being somehow weaker, more passive or more restricted in scope, is a separate question. The burden of my argument is that it need not be.

39 Earlier in the *Lucullus*, Cicero described himself as a great *opinitor*. But this is because he is not wise; it is a failing, a weakness, against which he must struggle (*Luc.* 66).

If assent—assent as radicals and Stoics understand it—is real, ubiquitous and an inescapable part of human nature, against which we must be constantly on our guard, *ought* there to be such a thing? We know why the Stoics think there should be, and why the moderate Academic sceptics think that it can and should be replaced by their revised version of assent, but what of the radical Academic sceptics? Do they think that, apart from our being stuck with it, there is a point to keeping forever in readiness a mental act for which, so far as they can tell, there is never an occasion? In other words, are they radical in a way that contrasts with the complacency of their moderate colleagues? Are they restless, discontented souls, impatient of so-called realism, dissatisfied with the existing order, which they regard as in a certain way provisional, prey to utopian fancies, perpetually hankering after something better than what we have? Radical Academic sceptics differ from moderates, I suspect, less in what think our powers of cognition are than about what they think they ought to be or about what the standards to which they should be held are.

If this is a good description of the radical Academic temperament, radical scepticism is not best captured by the image of a seesaw that I used earlier to describe moderate scepticism. Radical approbation is not the result of the side that measures commitment or strength of conviction sinking, pushed down by the rise of the other side, which measures the epistemic implications of ἀκαταληψία. The impetus behind radical scepticism is an unwillingness, shared with the Stoics, to accept any substitute for real knowledge. It is in this way, I suggest, that Clitomachus and those who followed him in the Academy were extremists. And if this right, it is possible to see how Cicero could have served as a model of the mitigated scepticism that Hume opposes to Pyrrhonism while remaining true to Clitomachus' version of the Academic philosophy, which abolishes assent.<sup>40</sup>

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