Outlines of Scepticism

BOOK I

These are the Contents of the First Book of the *Outlines of Scepticism*:

Book I

i The most fundamental difference among philosophies

[1] When people are investigating any subject, the likely result is either a discovery, or a denial of discovery and a confession of inapprehensibility, or else a continuation of the investigation. [2] This, no doubt, is why in the case of philosophical investigations, too, some have said that they have discovered the truth, some have asserted that it cannot be apprehended, and others are still investigating.

[3] Those who are called Dogmatists in the proper sense of the word think that they have discovered the truth – for example, the schools of Aristotle and Epicurus and the Stoics, and some others. The schools of Clitomachus and Carneades, and other Academics, have asserted that things cannot be apprehended.[1] And the Sceptics are still investigating. [4] Hence the most fundamental kinds of philosophy are reasonably thought to be three: the Dogmatic, the Academic, and the Sceptical. The former two it will be appropriate for others to describe: in the present work we shall discuss in outline[2] the Sceptical persuasion. By way of preface let us say that on none of the matters to be discussed do we affirm that things certainly are just as we say they are: rather, we report[3] descriptively on each item according to how it appears to us at the time.[4]

ii The accounts constitutive of Scepticism

[5] The Sceptical philosophy contains both a general and a specific account.[5] In the general account we set out the distinctive character of Scepticism, saying what the concept of it is, what are its principles and

[1] The same is said of the Cyrenaics at I 215. For the New Academy see I 220–31; and note that other sources expressly say that the Academics did *not* 'assert that things cannot be apprehended'.

[2] ὑποτυπωτικῶς: the work is an outline or ὑποτύπωσις, and Sextus frequently reminds us of the fact: I 206, 222, 239; II 1, 79, 185, 194; III 1, 114, 167, 279. Note also his assurances that he is only offering 'few out of many' examples (I 58, note) and that he is concerned to be brief (I 163, note); and see I 94; II 84, 212; III 56, 71, 135, 168.

[3] For this use of the term 'report' see I 15, 197, 203.

[4] Cf. e.g. I 191; II 187.

[5] Cf. *M* VII 1.

what its arguments, what is its standard and what its aim, what are the modes of suspension of judgement, how we understand sceptical assertions, and what distinguishes Scepticism from neighbouring philosophies.[6] [6] The specific account is the one in which we argue against each of the parts of what they call philosophy.

Let us first deal with the general account, beginning our sketch with the names given to the Sceptical persuasion.

iii The nomenclature of Scepticism

[7][7] The Sceptical persuasion, then, is also called Investigative, from its activity in investigating and inquiring;[8] Suspensive, from the feeling that comes about in the inquirer after the investigation; Aporetic, either (as some say) from the fact that it puzzles over[9] and investigates everything, or else from its being at a loss whether to assent or deny; and Pyrrhonian, from the fact that Pyrrho appears to us to have attached himself to Scepticism more systematically and conspicuously than anyone before him.[10]

iv What is Scepticism?

[8] Scepticism is an ability to set out oppositions among things which appear and are thought of in any way at all,[11] an ability by which, because of the equipollence in the opposed objects and accounts, we come first to suspension of judgement and afterwards to tranquillity.

[9] We call it an ability not in any fancy sense, but simply in the sense of 'to be able to'. Things which appear we take in the present context to be objects of perception, which is why we contrast them with objects of thought. 'In any way at all' can be taken either with 'an ability' (to show that we are to understand the word 'ability' in its straightforward sense, as we said), or else with 'to set out oppositions

6 The programme (with which compare the resumé at I 209) corresponds well to the contents of *PH* I – except that I 13–20 do not appear to be covered.
7 With I 7 cf. Diogenes Laertius IX 69–70.
8 The verb translated 'inquire' is σκέπτεσθαι, cognate with σκεπτικός ('sceptical').
9 'Puzzle over' renders ἀπορεῖν, from which 'aporetic' derives.
10 On this explanation of the name 'Pyrrhonism' see BARNES [1992], pp. 4284–6.
11 See Diogenes Laertius IX 78 (reporting Aenesidemus).

among the things which appear and are thought of': we say 'in any way at all' because we set up oppositions in a variety of ways – opposing what appears to what appears, what is thought of to what is thought of, and crosswise, so as to include all the oppositions.[12] Or else we take the phrase with[a] 'the things which appear and are thought of', to show that we are not to investigate how what appears appears or how what is thought of is thought of, but are simply to take them for granted.[13]

[10] By 'opposed accounts' we do not necessarily have in mind affirmation and negation, but take the phrase simply in the sense of 'conflicting accounts'.[14] By 'equipollence' we mean equality with regard to being convincing or unconvincing: none of the conflicting accounts takes precedence over any other as being more convincing.[15] Suspension of judgement is a standstill of the intellect, owing to which we neither reject nor posit anything.[16] Tranquillity[17] is freedom from disturbance or calmness of soul. We shall suggest in the chapter on the aim of scepticism how tranquillity accompanies suspension of judgement.[18]

v The Sceptic

[11] The Pyrrhonian philosopher has been implicitly defined in our account of the concept of the Sceptical persuasion: a Pyrrhonian is someone who possesses this ability.

vi The principles of Scepticism

[12] The causal principle of scepticism we say is the hope of becoming tranquil.[19] Men of talent, troubled by the anomaly in things and

[a] Reading ἢ τῷ in place of ἢ καθ' οἱονδήποτε τρόπον, as Mau suggests. The sense is not in doubt, and Mau's emendation makes it clear.

[12] See I 31–2; *M* VIII 46.
[13] Cf. I 19.
[14] Cf. I, 190, 198, 202.
[15] See I 190; cf. 196, 198, 202.
[16] See I 196 (and cf. I 192, on non-assertion); and note esp. COUISSIN [1929].
[17] ἀταραξία: 'untroubledness' – the word is formed from an alpha privative and ταράττειν, 'to trouble'.
[18] I 25–32 (cf. 232).
[19] Cf. I 26; see STRIKER [1990a]; ANNAS [1993a], ch. 8.

puzzled as to which of them they should rather assent to, came to investigate what in things is true and what false, thinking that by deciding these issues they would become tranquil.

The chief constitutive principle of scepticism is the claim that to every account an equal account is opposed;[20] for it is from this, we think, that we come to hold no beliefs.

vii Do Sceptics hold beliefs?[21]

[13] When we say that Sceptics do not hold beliefs, we do not take 'belief' in the sense in which some say, quite generally, that belief is acquiescing in something; for Sceptics assent to the feelings forced upon them by appearances[22] – for example, they would not say, when heated or chilled, 'I think I am not heated (or: chilled)'. Rather, we say that they do not hold beliefs in the sense in which some say that belief is assent to some unclear object of investigation in the sciences;[23] for Pyrrhonists do not assent to anything unclear.

[14] Not even in uttering the Sceptical phrases about unclear matters – for example, 'In no way more', or 'I determine nothing', or one of the other phrases which we shall later discuss[24] – do they hold beliefs. For if you hold beliefs, then you posit as real the things you are said to hold beliefs about; but Sceptics posit these phrases not as necessarily being real. For they suppose that, just as the phrase 'Everything is false' says that it too, along with everything else, is false (and similarly for 'Nothing is true'), so also 'In no way more' says that it too, along with everything else, is no more so than not so, and hence it cancels itself along with everything else. And we say the same of the other Sceptical phrases. [15] Thus, if people who hold beliefs posit as real the things they hold beliefs about, while Sceptics utter their own phrases in such a way that they are implicitly cancelled by

[20] See I 202–5 (cf. I 18).
[21] The Dogmatists alleged that the Sceptics did in fact hold beliefs: see e.g. Aristocles, apud Eusebius, *PE* XIV xviii 9–12; Diogenes Laertius IX 102–4 (cf. IX 68). – On the controversy surrounding the issues raised by this chapter see FREDE [1979]; BURNYEAT [1980a], [1984]; BARNES [1988], [1990a], pp. 2617–49.
[22] Cf. I 29, 193, 229–30; II 10.
[23] Cf. I 16, 193, 197.
[24] See I 187–208.

themselves, then they cannot be said to hold beliefs in uttering them.[25]

But the main point is this: in uttering these phrases they say what is apparent to themselves and report their own feelings without holding opinions, affirming nothing about external objects.[26]

viii Do Sceptics belong to a school?[27]

[16] We take the same attitude to the question: Do Sceptics belong to a school? If you say that a school involves adherence to a number of beliefs which cohere both with one another and with what is apparent,[28] and if you say that belief is assent to something unclear, then we shall say that Sceptics do not belong to any school. [17] But if you count as a school a persuasion which, to all appearances, coheres with some account, the account showing how it is possible to live[b] correctly (where 'correctly' is taken not only with reference to virtue, but more loosely, and extends to the ability to suspend judgement[c]) – in that case we say that Sceptics do belong to a school. For we coherently follow, to all appearances, an account which shows us a life in conformity with traditional customs and the law and persuasions and our own feelings.

ix Do Sceptics study natural science?

[18] We say something similar again when investigating the question of whether Sceptics should study natural science. We do not study

[b] Deleting δοκεῖν, as Mutschmann suggested.
[c] We close the parenthesis after διατείνοντος rather than after ἀφελέστερον: the clause καὶ ... διατείνοντος is part of the gloss on ὀρθῶς and not explanatory of τοῦ λόγου.

[25] Cf. I 206.
[26] Cf. I 208.
[27] Some denied that Pyrrhonism constituted a school of philosophy: see Diogenes Laertius I 20; cf. Aristocles, apud Eusebius, *PE* XIV xviii 30; Clement, *strom* VIII iv 16.2. On the concept of a school see GLUCKER [1978].
[28] 'Cohere with' etc., here and in the section, translate ἀκολουθεῖν and its cognate noun. The verb literally means 'follow', and so we normally translate it (we also use 'follow' for the compounds κατακολουθεῖν and παρακολουθεῖν and for ἕπεσθαι); but, for the noun, 'implication' and 'validity' have sometimes been preferred, and the adjective ἀκόλουθος comes out as 'apposite'.

natural science in order to make assertions with firm conviction about any of the matters on which scientific beliefs are held. But we do touch on natural science in order to be able to oppose to every account an equal account,[29] and for the sake of tranquillity.[30]. This is also the spirit in which we approach the logical and ethical parts of what they call philosophy.[31]

x Do Sceptics reject what is apparent?[32]

[19] Those who say that the Sceptics reject what is apparent have not, I think, listened to what we say.[33] As we said before,[34] we do not overturn anything which leads us, without our willing it, to assent in accordance with a passive appearance – and these things are precisely what is apparent. When we investigate whether existing things are such as they appear, we grant that they appear, and what we investigate is not what is apparent but what is said about what is apparent – and this is different from investigating what is apparent itself. [20] For example,[d] it appears to us that honey sweetens (we concede this inasmuch as we are sweetened in a perceptual way); but whether (as far as the argument goes[35]) it is actually sweet is something we investigate – and this is not what is apparent but something said about what is apparent.[36]

And if we do propound arguments directly against what is apparent, it is not because we want to reject what is apparent that we set them out, but rather to display the rashness of the Dogmatists; for if reasoning is such a deceiver that it all but snatches even what is apparent from under our very eyes, surely we should keep watch on it in unclear matters, to avoid being led into rashness by following it?

[d] Retaining the MSS text: Mutschmann–Mau follow Heintz in adding ⟨ὅτι μέν⟩.

[29] See I 12.
[30] See I 10, 25–30.
[31] For the three parts of philosophy see II 12–13.
[32] See Diogenes Laertius IX 103–4.
[33] For other complaints of misrepresentation see I 200, 208.
[34] See I 13, 17
[35] The same Greek phrase occurs frequently elsewhere, and its meaning is usually plain; but here its import is obscure and different scholars have construed it in different ways: see BRUNSCHWIG [1990].
[36] Cf. II 72 (and on honey see I 101).

xi The standard of Scepticism[37]

[21][38] That we attend to what is apparent is clear from what we say about the standard of the Sceptical persuasion. 'Standard' has two senses: there are standards adopted to provide conviction about the reality or unreality of something (we shall talk about these standards when we turn to attack them[39]); and there are standards of action, attending to which in everyday life we perform some actions and not others – and it is these standards which are our present subject.

[22] We say, then, that the standard of the Sceptical persuasion is what is apparent,[40] implicitly meaning by this the appearances; for they depend on passive and unwilled feelings and are not objects of investigation. (Hence no-one, presumably, will raise a controversy over whether an existing thing appears this way or that; rather, they investigate whether it is such as it appears.)

[23][41] Thus, attending to what is apparent, we live in accordance with everyday observances, without holding opinions – for we are not able to be utterly inactive.[42] These everyday observances seem to be fourfold, and to consist in guidance by nature, necessitation by feelings, handing down of laws and customs, and teaching of kinds of expertise. [24] By nature's guidance we are naturally capable of perceiving and thinking.[43] By the necessitation of feelings, hunger conducts us to food and thirst to drink. By the handing down of customs and laws, we accept, from an everyday point of view, that piety is good and impiety bad.[44] By teaching of kinds of expertise we are not inactive in those which we accept.[45]

And we say all this without holding any opinions.

[37] On the notion of a standard or κριτήριον see STRIKER [1974], [1990b]; HUBY and NEAL [1989].
[38] Cf. *M* VII 29–31.
[39] See II 14–17.
[40] See Diogenes Laertius IX 106, reporting the view of Aenesidemus.
[41] With I 23–4 compare I 237–9 (cf. I 226, 231; II 102, 246, 254; III 2, 119, 151, 235); see e.g. BARNES [1990a], pp. 2641–9; ANNAS [1993a], ch. 8.
[42] On the question, Can the Sceptic Live? see *M* XI 162–166; Diogenes Laertius IX 104–105; Aristocles, apud Eusebius, *PE* XIV xviii 25–6; see e.g. BURNYEAT [1980a]; BARNES [1988a], [1990b].
[43] See e.g. *M* VIII 203.
[44] Cf. III 2; *M* IX 49.
[45] For types of expertise allegedly acceptable to Sceptics see *M* I 99; V 1–3.

xii What is the aim of Scepticism?

[25][46] It will be apposite to consider next the aim of the Sceptical persuasion. Now an aim is that for the sake of which everything is done or considered, while it is not itself done or considered for the sake of anything else.[47] Or: an aim is the final object of desire.[48] Up to now we say the aim of the Sceptic is tranquillity in matters of opinion and moderation of feeling in matters forced upon us. [26] For Sceptics began to do philosophy in order to decide among appearances and to apprehend which are true and which false, so as to become tranquil;[49] but they came upon equipollent dispute, and being unable to decide this they suspended judgement. And when they suspended judgement, tranquillity in matters of opinion followed fortuitously.

[27][50] For those who hold the opinion that things are good or bad by nature are perpetually troubled. When they lack what they believe to be good, they take themselves to be persecuted by natural evils and they pursue what (so they think) is good. And when they have acquired these things, they experience more troubles; for they are elated beyond reason and measure, and in fear of change they do anything so as not to lose what they believe to be good. [28] But those who make no determination about what is good and bad by nature neither avoid nor pursue anything with intensity; and hence they are tranquil.

A story told of the painter Apelles applies to the Sceptics.[51] They say that he was painting a horse and wanted to represent in his picture the lather on the horse's mouth; but he was so unsuccessful that he gave up, took the sponge on which he had been wiping off the colours from his brush, and flung it at the picture. And when it hit the

[46] With I 25–30 cf. III 235–8, *M* XI 110–67; Timon, frag. 841 Lloyd-Jones and Parsons (see BURNYEAT [1980b]); Diogenes Laertius IX 107–8. See esp. STRIKER [1990a]; ANNAS [1993a], chh. I, 17.

[47] A standard definition: e.g. Cicero, *fin* I xii 42 (Epicureans); Arius ap. Stobaeus, *ecl* II 77.16–17 (Stoics), 131.2–4 (Peripatetics).

[48] Again, a standard definition; see e.g. Arius ap. Stobaeus, *ecl* II 76.21–4 (Stoics), 131.4 (Peripatetics); Alexander, *an mant* 150.20–1, 162.34.

[49] See I 12.

[50] Cf. III 237–8; *M* XI 112–18, 145–6 (and below, I 215).

[51] On this paragraph see ANNAS and BARNES [1985], pp. 167–171.