

# Colotes and the Epicurean Refutation of Skepticism

*Paul A. Vander Waerdt*

**M**Y OBJECTIVE here is to map out the successive stages of development in the Epicurean refutation of skepticism. It is widely assumed that Epicurus himself developed in full the orthodox battery of Epicurean anti-skeptical arguments,<sup>1</sup> but I will try to show that these arguments originated at different stages in the history of Epicureanism to meet the challenge posed by different varieties of skepticism. The common assumption that Epicurus himself undertook to refute the skepticism of Pyrrho or of the Academic Arcesilaus rests on questionable conjecture rather than solid evidence: this is nowhere attested, and Epicurus' only recorded anti-skeptical argument, in fact, is directed against his Democritean predecessors. In this case he simply modifies the atomist theory of perception so as to disarm its skeptical implications, employing neither of the strategies (the self-refutation and *apraxia* arguments) usually attributed to him by modern scholars.

Epicurus' strategy against the atomists, however, is not effective against the more powerful version of skepticism practiced by the Academic skeptic, who advances no δόγματα (not even his skeptical practice of ἐποχή or of suspending assent in all matters) as true in his own name, but merely adopts his dogmatic opponent's prem-

<sup>1</sup> These arguments are set out in most detail by Lucretius in *DRN* 4.469–521. "It is agreed on all sides that Lucretius in the argument of 469–521 is following Epicurus," says M. F. Burnyeat ("The Upside-Down Back-to-Front Sceptic of Lucretius IV 472," *Philologus* 122 [1978] 197–206 at 200), but he offers as argument only "compare 483–499 with D.L. X 31f" (see *contra* 241 *infra*). A. Barigazzi, "Epicure et le scepticisme," in *Actes du VIII<sup>e</sup> Congrès, Assoc. Guillaume Budé* (Paris 1970) 286–93, concludes that "Epicure eut la constante préoccupation de combattre le scepticisme," but only by attributing all Epicurean anti-skeptical arguments to Epicurus himself—most implausibly, since some of these arguments are directed against forms of skepticism not yet current in Epicurus' day. The first part of Marcello Gigante's *Scetticismo e Epicureismo* (Naples 1981) 25–106 discusses many relevant texts but does not consider the development of the Epicurean refutation of skepticism; summary and discussion in D. Fowler, *OSAP* 2 (1984) 237–67.

ises in order to show that he contradicts himself and thus had better, by his own arguments, suspend assent.<sup>2</sup> Since this skeptical conclusion rests solely on the dogmatist's own premises, there are no skeptical δόγματα against which he can argue. Thus, to discredit the skeptic, he must attack his argumentative practice, typically (a) by alleging that the skeptic refutes himself by inconsistently advocating his skepticism in contravention of his recommendation that one suspend assent in all matters, or (b) by arguing that the practice of *epoche* makes human action impossible and so throws life into confusion. It was Epicurus' young contemporary Colotes, I shall argue, who first brought these arguments to bear against skepticism, thus developing an anti-skeptical case which became so much a part of orthodox Epicureanism that its origin in his controversy with the skeptical Academy has been forgotten.<sup>3</sup> And once the origin of these arguments is understood, their philosophical significance will emerge more clearly.

Since antiquity a monolithic picture of the development of Epicurean philosophy has prevailed that seems to be based on little more than the authority and reverence Epicurus commanded with-

<sup>2</sup> For a better understanding of classical skepticism, I am much indebted to Michael Frede's pioneering "Des Skeptikers Meinungen," *Neue Hefte für Philosophie* 15-16 (1979) 102-29, and "The Skeptic's Two Kinds of Assent and the Question of the Possibility of Knowledge," in *Philosophy and History*, edd. R. Rorty et al. (Cambridge 1984) 255-78, both now available in his *Essays in Ancient Philosophy* (Minneapolis 1987) 179-222. I have also learned much from recent work on the New Academy: A. M. Ioppolo, *Opinione e Scienza: il dibattito tra Stoici e Accademici nel III e nel II secolo a.C.* (Naples 1986); J. Annas, "The Heirs of Socrates," *Phronesis* 33 (1988) 100-12; G. Striker, "Sceptical Strategies," in *Doubt and Dogmatism*, edd. M. Schofield et al. (Oxford 1980) 54-83; D. N. Sedley, "The Motivation of Greek Skepticism," in *The Skeptical Tradition*, ed. M. F. Burnyeat (Berkeley 1983) 9-29; J. Annas and J. Barnes, *The Modes of Skepticism* (Cambridge 1985); J. Glucker, *Antiochus and the Late Academy* (Göttingen 1978), with Sedley, "The End of the Academy," *Phronesis* 26 (1981) 67-75; H. Tarrant, *Scepticism or Platonism? The Philosophy of the Fourth Academy* (Cambridge 1985).

<sup>3</sup> For previous work, discussed below, see P. DeLacy, "Colotes' First Criticism of Democritus," in *Isonomia*, edd. J. Mau and E. G. Schmidt (Berlin 1964) 67-77, and the introduction to his Loeb edition of Plutarch, *Adversus Colotem*, with B. Einarson, *Moralia XIV* (Cambridge 1967) 153-87; also: R. Westman, *Plutarch gegen Kolotes* (Helsinki 1955) 45-107, 293-95, 302f, 310; DeLacy's review, *AJP* 77 (1956) 433-48; G. Arrighetti, "Un passo dell'opera 'Sulla Natura' di Epicuro, Democrito e Colote," *CronErcol* 9 (1979) 5-10; Fowler (*supra* n.1) 256-67.

in his school.<sup>4</sup> Modern scholars habitually assume, often uncritically, that arguments found in Epicureans as late as Lucretius or Diogenes of Oenoanda derive from the Master himself. This assumption is not, of course, a discovery of philology: as Seneca tells us in contrasting Epicurean subservience with Stoic freedom of thought, *apud istos quidquid Hermarchus dixit, quidquid Metrodorus, ad unum refertur* (*Ep.* 33.4; cf. Numenius *ap.* Eus. *Praep. Evang.* 14.5.3f); and the difficulties of attribution philologists face in establishing the patrimony of specific Epicurean sayings provide striking confirmation of Epicurus' success in teaching his companions to master his doctrines through memorization.<sup>5</sup> The conventions of philosophical argumentation in antiquity, which generally did not allow the imputation of authority to anyone but the founder of one's school and his own acknowledged authorities,<sup>6</sup> no doubt also encouraged Epicurus' followers to clothe their philosophical innovations in well-worn garb. But the assumption of doctrinal conservatism has, unsurprisingly, contributed to a very misleading view of the historical development of Epicurean philosophy. In recent years some progress has been made in recognizing the important innovations introduced by Epicurus' colleagues and successors, but much remains to be done.<sup>7</sup> The present paper is offered as a small contribution in this attempt to individuate the innovations of early members of the school. The present subject offers, I think, an ex-

<sup>4</sup> For the reverence bestowed on the Founding Fathers (οἱ ἄνδρες) of Epicureanism, see F. L. Auricchio, "La scuola di Epicuro," *CronErcol* 8 (1978) 21–37; Colotes was not reckoned among them, but this proved no bar to influence in the later tradition.

<sup>5</sup> See D. Clay, *Lucretius and Epicurus* (Ithaca 1983) 76–81.

<sup>6</sup> See D. N. Sedley, "Philosophical Allegiance in the Greco-Roman World," in *Philosophia Togata*, edd. J. Barnes and M. T. Griffin (Oxford 1989) 97–119.

<sup>7</sup> On tradition and innovation in Epicureanism, see F. Longo Auricchio and A. Tepedino Guerra, "Aspetti e problemi della dissidenza epicurea," *CronErcol* 11 (1981) 25–40; D. Clay, "Individual and Community in the First Generation of the Epicurean School," in *Συζήτησις: Studi ... Marcello Gigante* I (Naples 1982) 255–79; Sedley (*supra* n.6). For an attempt to show that Epicurus' successor Hermarchus introduced important innovations into Epicurean anthropology in response to contemporary Stoics, see P. A. Vander Waerdt, "Hermarchus and the Epicurean Genealogy of Morals," *TAPA* 118 (1988) 87–106. Clay's work is exceptional in its attention to the specific cultural, rhetorical, and philosophical problems faced by later Epicureans: *supra* n.5; "The Cults of Epicurus," *CronErcol* 16 (1986) 12–28; "A Lost Epicurean Community" (313–35 *infra*), and the paper cited in n.66 *infra*.

ceptionally clear illustration of the way in which they developed their philosophy in original ways to respond effectively to contemporary challenges.

### I. Colotes and the Skeptical Academy

On chronological grounds alone, it would be surprising had Epicurus undertaken to counter Academic skepticism: he died in 271, before Arcesilaus' accession as scholarch during the Olympiad 268/4. In fact, there is no evidence that Epicurus ever took an interest in Arcesilaus.<sup>8</sup> The only version of skepticism he is attested to have combatted is that of his atomist predecessors (on which see 236ff *infra*). Shortly after Epicurus' death, however, the philosophical terrain in Athens changed dramatically as Arcesilaus, upon his accession as scholarch, turned the Academy skeptical. Academic skepticism differs radically from its precursors, such as Pyrrho, in that it does not present itself as a δόγμα, a positive thesis the truth of which the skeptic advances in his own name. As Cicero reports (*De or.* 3.67, *Acad.* 1.44f; cf. *Fin.* 2.2, *Nat.D.* 1.11), Arcesilaus rather conceived of his skepticism as the authentic interpretation of Socrates' dialectic: he did not advance any doctrine of his own (*Acad.* 2.17), but like Socrates he found, upon examination of interlocutor after interlocutor, that none possessed the special expertise or knowledge to which he laid claim, even by his own premises and canons of logic.<sup>9</sup> Thus Arcesilaus found himself, in case after case, forced into *epoché* or the suspension of assent (συγκατάθεσις). He

<sup>8</sup> In the only apparent exception, *Adv.Col.* 1121E (=Us. 239), which Usener as well as DeLacy and Einarson take as a testimonium about Epicurus (τοῦ δὲ Ἀρκεσίλαου τὸν Ἐπίκουρον οὐ μετρίως ἔοικεν ἢ δόξα παραλυπεῖν), W. Crönert's emendation Ἐπικούρειον for Ἐπίκουρον (*Kolotes und Menedemos* [Leipzig 1906] 13 n.54), not mentioned by DeLacy, is preferable because it avoids the harsh transition that would make Colotes the unnamed subject of the next sentence. (Dirk Obbink adds: "And if the emendation seems harsh, cf. *Plut. De sera numinis vindicta* 548A where the mss universally corrupt ἐπικούρειος to ἐπικούρος [see Pohlenz in his 1929 Teubner]; here the un-named individual cannot be Epicurus himself, as he is said to be a contemporary of Plutarch.") Usener counts *Adv.Col.* 1121E as a fragment of Epicurus on the unsupportable claim (348) that Lucr. 4.469–521 records Epicurus' reply to Arcesilaus.

<sup>9</sup> This interpretation of Arcesilaus requires defense: see 260ff *infra*; for his interpretation of Socrates, see especially Julia Annas, "Plato the Sceptic" (forthcoming in *OSAP* Suppl. 3); also Glucker (*supra* n.2) 31–47; Frede (1984 [*supra* n.2]); and section V below.

did not advocate *epoche*—or any other thesis—as a dogma, but merely drew upon his opponent’s premises for purposes of debate.<sup>10</sup> Thus the Academic skeptic is not vulnerable, as the dogmatic skeptic is, to the charge of self-refutation as characterized above. Now, Arcesilaus’ popularity is well-attested (a source of grief for Colotes: *Adv. Col.* 1121E, 1124B; cf. Strab. 1.2.1, quoting Eratosthenes; D.L. 9.44), and so it became particularly important, given the oral and agonistic character of Hellenistic philosophical discussion, for contemporary Epicureans to develop a new line of argument that took into account the philosophical resources of his version of skepticism.

This task was undertaken by Epicurus’ young contemporary Colotes, whose book, *On the point that it is not possible even to live according to the doctrines of the other philosophers* (περὶ τοῦ ὅτι κατὰ τὰ τῶν ἄλλων φιλοσόφων δόγματα οὐδὲ ζῆν ἐστὶν, *Adv. Col.* 1107E), developed a new battery of anti-skeptical strategies for use against Arcesilaus, strategies which he turned against some of his dogmatic opponents as well. Colotes’ book so offended Plutarch four hundred years later that he composed two treatises in reply,<sup>11</sup> the first of which, *Against Colotes*, provides all of our named testimony concerning Colotes’ arguments.<sup>12</sup> Plutarch so divorces

<sup>10</sup> I am assuming that Arcesilaus did not, as some sources suggest, advocate *epoche* as a positive dogma, but this is controversial; see section VI *infra*.

<sup>11</sup> Since no Academic prior to Plutarch is attested to have answered the Epicurean *apraxia* argument, it is unlikely that he is relying upon some earlier Academic source. Plutarch plainly has Colotes’ book before him, and I see no reason to doubt his claim that his refutation originated in oral discussion within his school (*Adv. Col.* 1107D–1108B, *Non posse* 1086C–D). For his method of composition, see esp. Harold Cherniss’ remarks in the Introduction to his edition of *De Stoic. Rep.* in the Loeb *Moralia* XIII.2 (Cambridge [Mass.] 1976) 396–400; for his habit of keeping “notebooks” (ὑπομνήματα, *De tranq.* 464F), cf. *De cohibenda ira* 457D with H. Martin, *GRBS* 10 (1969) 69f. If there had been an earlier Academic reply to the Epicurean *apraxia* argument, we can expect Plutarch to have recorded it, for he was deeply interested in the history of skepticism: among the nine works on this subject whose titles are preserved in the Lamprias catalogue (collected by DeLacy and Einarson [*supra* n.3] 187) we find Εἰ ἄπρακτος ὁ περὶ πάντων ἐπέχων (Lamprias no. 210).

<sup>12</sup> Colotes wrote two other books, *Against Plato’s Lysis* and *Against Plato’s Euthydemus*, intended to discredit Academic skepticism. For texts, see Crönert (*supra* n.8) 5–7, 163–70, with the new readings of A. Concolino Mancini, “Sulle opere polemiche di Colote,” *CronErcol* 6 (1976) 61–67; for discussion, see Westman (*supra* n.3) 31–39, and 257 *infra*.

Colotes' arguments from their original context (his own complaint about Colotes: *Adv.Col.* 1108D; cf. *Non posse* 1086D) that it is often difficult to reconstruct the original motivation or meaning of particular arguments; and much of our effort in the present paper will be devoted to this task.

It is also difficult to ascertain what Colotes' motives were in selecting the philosophers and schools he chose to include in his book. Beginning with Democritus, who takes pride of place as the father of atomism, and concluding with certain unnamed contemporaries whom Plutarch identifies as the Cyrenaics and the Academic followers of Arcesilaus, who suspend assent on all matters (οἱ περὶ πάντων ἐπέχοντες, *Adv.Col.* 1120C-D), Colotes attacks in chronological order Parmenides, Empedocles, Socrates, Melissus, Plato, and Stilpo.<sup>13</sup> It is often supposed that Colotes attacks philosophers other than Arcesilaus (whom he never explicitly names: *loc. cit.*) simply because they had been claimed as authorities by the skeptical Academy, but this view cannot stand without substantial qualification.<sup>14</sup> In the first place, the list of philosophers whom Colotes attacks does not correspond exactly to any list of Academic authorities. Secondly, Colotes makes no mention of Pyrrho,<sup>15</sup> an omission that is most difficult to explain if, as some contemporaries thought (Ariston of Chios and Timon: D.L. 4.31f), he importantly influenced Arcesilaus' philosophical development.<sup>16</sup> Either Colotes

<sup>13</sup> Plutarch avowedly departs from Colotes' order for his own polemical purposes (*Adv.Col.* 1113E); see DeLacy and Einarson (*supra* n.3) 155f.

<sup>14</sup> So DeLacy and Einarson (*supra* n.3) 156: "The book is an attack on Arcesilaus. The other philosophers are singled out because the skeptics of the Academy regarded them as predecessors." I doubt A. A. Long's similar thesis (*ap. Sedley* [1983 (*supra* n.2)] 24 n.27) that Colotes derived his list of opponents from Arcesilaus. Plut. *Adv.Col.* 1108B implies nothing about Arcesilaus' own authorities, and 1121E-F is a report of the charges of unnamed contemporary sophists and need not reflect Arcesilaus' own claims at all; in any case, Colotes does not attack Heraclitus, so he is unlikely to have simply taken over his list of opponents from Arcesilaus. As for Cicero, *Acad.* 2.14 is not a list of Academic authorities (note that Colotes does not attack Anaxagoras or Xenophanes), and the same applies to 2.72-76. *Acad.* 1.44-46, which does appear to be a list of Socrates' skeptically inclined predecessors, possibly deriving from Arcesilaus, includes Democritus, Anaxagoras, Empedocles, and *omnes paene veteres*.

<sup>15</sup> For the possibility that Colotes is silent about Pyrrho because he did not consider him a skeptic, see 235f *infra*.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. n.32 *infra*.

did not consider Pyrrho a precursor of Academic skepticism, or he is not attacking Arcesilaus' authorities. Thirdly, it is unlikely that Arcesilaus would have claimed Stilpo or Colotes' other contemporary opponents, the Cyrenaics, as authorities to establish a pedigree for his advocacy of *epoche*. Finally, since Colotes' purpose is to show (as his title announces) that it is impossible to live according to the doctrines of the other philosophers, he has no reason to restrict his attack to Arcesilaus and his acknowledged authorities.

What is striking in the list of Colotes' opponents is that all of them somehow reject the Epicurean tenet that all impressions are true (*cf.* n.37 *infra*). I suggest that Colotes' purpose is to discredit those opponents who cast doubt upon the plain evidence of the senses, regardless of whether Arcesilaus claimed them as authorities for his skepticism. If this is so, we can easily see why Colotes discusses figures like Stilpo or the Cyrenaics, who cannot plausibly have been claimed as authorities by Arcesilaus, but who did cast doubt on the evidence of the senses, and why he takes no account of the Stoics or Peripatetics, the contemporary schools whose epistemology was least likely to be accounted skeptical. It is far more likely that Colotes attacked such comparatively minor figures as Stilpo and the Cyrenaics because Epicurus had already put them on the roster of the school's rivals,<sup>17</sup> than that Colotes sought to discredit them as skeptical authorities. Of course, Colotes may well have considered Arcesilaus his most important opponent: Colotes is reported to have been most annoyed by his reputation (*Adv.Col.* 1121E), he puts him last in his book, and his attack on Socrates, I shall argue, certainly is intended to discredit Arcesilaus' use of him as an authority for *epoche*.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>17</sup> For Epicurus' criticism of the Megarian Stilpo, see *Sen. Ep.* 9.1, 8, 18 (=fr.173–75 Us.). It is a puzzle to me why Colotes takes no account of Diodorus Cronus and the *Dialektikoi*, since Diodorus importantly influenced Arcesilaus' dialectical technique (and was seen to have done so: Ariston of Chios and Timon *ap.* D.L. 4.32f; *cf.* Sext. *Emp. Pyr.* 1.234, Numenius *ap.* Eus. *Praep.Evang.* 14.5.11–6.4) and since both Epicurus (*On Ambiguities; De Nat.* 28 fr.13 col. v .6–9) and Metrodorus (*Against the Dialecticians*: D.L. 10.24) had written books against him; on this see Sedley, "Diodorus Cronus and Hellenistic Philosophy," *PCPS* N.S. 23 (1977) 74–120. As for Epicurus' criticism of Cyrenaic doctrines of pleasure, see D.L. 10.136f (quoting several works by title), fr.449–53, 509 Us.

<sup>18</sup> There is ample precedent in Hellenistic philosophical argumentation for Colotes' tactic of responding to a contemporary opponent by refuting his authorities. Thus in his *Against Empedocles* Hermarchus discredits the use certain unnamed

Colotes' principal anti-skeptical strategy is to adapt an argument that featured prominently in Stoic attacks on Arcesilaus, that universal *epoche* actually makes it impossible to live. Colotes naturally modifies this *apraxia* argument (a version of which Epicurus had already used against the ethical determinist in *On Nature*) to serve Epicurean rather than Stoic epistemology, and against opponent after opponent he argues that to deny the truth of all impressions is to abolish knowledge, and that without knowledge life becomes impossible.<sup>19</sup> In putting his case, Colotes is given to rather graphic illustrations: of Arcesilaus, for instance, he asks, "how is it that the man who suspends judgment does not go running off to a mountain instead of to the bath, or why does he not get up and walk to the wall instead of the door when he wishes to go out to the agora?" (*Adv. Col.* 1122E; discussed 262ff *infra*). This colorful polemic well serves Colotes' rhetorical purpose of discrediting his opponents by making them appear ridiculous. The alleged inconsistency between an opponent's views and conduct was a common argumentative strategy in Hellenistic philosophy, one especially useful in silencing him in public debate. Colotes characterized the doctrine of *epoche* as bait for bold and flighty youth (*Adv. Col.* 1124B), and no doubt sought to turn the tables against Arcesilaus by discrediting *epoche* through its inconsistency with living. But his *apraxia* argument, as we shall see in detail in the next section, does pose a serious challenge to the Academic to show how universal *epoche* is consistent with the requirements of life itself.

Colotes influenced the subsequent history of Epicureanism much more than has been recognized. His attacks on Academic skepticism quickly became orthodox. The third scholarch, Polystratus, who succeeded Hermarchus in the mid-third century, wrote a pamphlet entitled *Against those who unreasonably despise popular beliefs*;<sup>20</sup> his polemic against contemporary Academic skeptics

---

contemporary rivals—in this case Peripatetics and Stoics—were making of Empedocles as an authority for their own views about the natural kinship among human beings; see Vander Waerdt (*supra* n.7) esp. 89f.

<sup>19</sup> For the variants in how Colotes puts this charge, see DeLacy and Einarson (*supra* n.3) 157 note a.

<sup>20</sup> *Polistrato: Sul disprezzo irrazionale delle opinioni popolari*, ed. G. Indelli (= *La scuola di Epicuro* II [Naples 1978]).



draws upon Colotes.<sup>21</sup> The arguments that Colotes developed to counter Academic skepticism came to feature prominently in such later sources as Lucretius (4.507–10; cf. *Adv. Col.* 1122E) and Diogenes of Oenoanda (fr.6 col. II Chilton), and were even adopted by Sextus (*Math.* 8.56) in his own attack on Democritus.<sup>22</sup> These arguments thus became part of the Epicurean anti-skeptical arsenal. Nor is this the only way in which Colotes' work proved influential: he is responsible for putting Socrates on the map of the Epicurean school's philosophical opponents, and for defining the terms in which he is criticized. Finally, Colotes' extensive attacks on Plato's use of myths led to considerable discussion in antiquity: Colotes had wondered, in the case of Er in the *Republic*, how a dead man can come back to life;<sup>23</sup> and Cicero, according to Macrobius (*Com. Somn. Scip.* 1.9–2.4), preferred in consequence to have his tale related by one roused from a dream. Colotes' other objections led to extensive replies by Porphyry and Proclus as well as Macrobius, and this debate over the proper philosophical uses of myth would well repay study.<sup>24</sup>

We shall begin with the problem of Epicurus' relation to skepticism; then turn to Colotes' adaptation of the *apraxia* argument for use against his atomist predecessor Democritus, against the principal authority of his Academic opponents, Socrates, and against Arcesilaus himself; and conclude by considering the effectiveness of Colotes' argument as a refutation of Academic skepticism.

<sup>21</sup> For evidence linking Polystratus to Colotes in the anti-skeptical polemic signalled at *De cont.* xxiv.2–7, see Indelli (*supra* n.20) 55–71, who calls attention to the similarity between Colotes' characterization of Arcesilaus (μάχεται τοῖς ἐναργέσι, *Adv. Col.* 1123A) and Polystratus' of his opponent (μάχεσθαι τοῖς φανεροῖς, xxv.8). On Polystratus' target, see Sedley, *CR* n.s. 33 (1983) 335f; Fowler (*supra* n.1) 244f.

<sup>22</sup> See 242 n.48 and 252 *infra* for these claims. Although some scholars have attributed Diogenes' account of Aristotle as a Heraclitean skeptic (fr.4 Chilton) to Colotes (see C. W. Chilton, *Diogenes of Oenoanda: The Fragments* [Oxford 1971] 40–43, for the controversy), this seems to me very unlikely: there is no suggestion in Plutarch (who purports to reply in full) that Colotes attacked Aristotle (in fact, his claim [*Adv. Col.* 1115A] that all the Peripetetics followed Plato's doctrines suggests that such an attack would have been superfluous).

<sup>23</sup> Procl. *In Rem publ.* 2.113.12f, 116.19–21 (Kroll).

<sup>24</sup> Proclus 2.105.23–06.14, 109.8–12, 111.6–9, 113.9–13, 116.19–21, 121.19–25. Translation with notes available in *Proclus: Commentaire sur la République*, ed. A.-J. Festugière (Paris 1970).

## II. Epicurus and Dogmatic Skepticism

Epicurus' interest in skepticism is far more problematic, and less well attested, than seems to have been recognized. In the generation before Epicurus the foremost proponent of dogmatic skepticism was Pyrrho, and he is generally assumed to be a target of Epicurus' anti-skeptical arguments.<sup>25</sup> According to his student Timon, Pyrrho bases his recommendation that we should be uncommitted in our opinions upon the positive metaphysical thesis that things are equally indifferent, unmeasurable, and inarbitrable.<sup>26</sup> Such dogmatic skepticism immediately invites the objection that its proponent cannot consistently exempt his recommendation from his claim that the nature of things is unknowable (for the Academic debate, cf. *Acad.* 2.28f).<sup>27</sup> If Epicurus were concerned to answer Pyrrho's skepticism, he could have used the self-refutation argument that he brings against the ethical determinist in *On Nature* (discussed 239ff *infra*). But this move is not reported in any source, and we should be cautious about imputing it to Epicurus.

Scholars assume that Epicurus must have been concerned to

<sup>25</sup> So e.g. Barigazzi (*supra* n.1) 290f; Indelli (*supra* n.20) 65; A. A. Long, "Aristotle and the History of Greek Skepticism," in *Studies in Aristotle*, ed. D. J. O'Meara (= *Studies in Philosophy and the History of Philosophy* 9 [Washington 1981]) 97.

<sup>26</sup> Aristocles *ap.* Eus. *Praep. Evang.* 14.18.1–5=fr.53 Declava Caizzi: Τίμων φησὶ δεῖν τὸν μέλλοντα εὐδαιμονήσῃν εἰς τρία ταῦτα βλέπειν· πρῶτον μὲν, ὅποια πέφυκε τὰ πράγματα· δεύτερον δέ, τίνα χρῆ τρόπον ἡμᾶς πρὸς αὐτὰ διακεῖσθαι· τελευταῖον δέ, τί περιέσται τοῖς οὕτως ἔχουσι τὰ μὲν οὖν πράγματά φησιν αὐτὸν ἀποφαίνειν ἐπ' ἴσης ἀδιάφορα καὶ ἀστάθμητα καὶ ἀνεπίκριτα· διὰ τοῦτο μῆτε τὰς αἰσθήσεις ἡμῶν μῆτε τὰς δόξας ἀληθεύειν ἢ ψεύδεσθαι. διὰ τοῦτο οὖν μηδὲ πιστεύειν αὐταῖς δεῖν, ἀλλ' ἀδοξάστους καὶ ἀκλινεῖς καὶ ἀκραδάντους εἶναι, περὶ ἐνὸς ἐκάστου λέγοντας ὅτι οὐ μᾶλλον ἔστιν ἢ οὐκ ἔστιν ἢ καὶ ἔστι καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν ἢ οὔτε ἔστιν οὔτε οὐκ ἔστιν. For the interpretation, see F. Declava Caizzi, *Pirrone: Testimonianze* (Naples 1981) 218–34 (accepted by A. A. Long, *CR* n.s. 34 [1984] 220, as against his previously published view); also Timon *Silloi* fr.822 (= D.L. 9.64) in *Supplementum Hellenisticum*, edd. H. Lloyd-Jones and P. Parsons (Berlin 1983).

<sup>27</sup> It is not known how Pyrrho argued for his thesis (for a conjecture, see A. A. Long and D. N. Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers* [Cambridge 1987] II 9), but his claim that our sensations tell us neither truths nor falsehoods seems to be a consequence drawn from his thesis rather than a premise upon which the argument for the thesis rests. Thus Epicurus would face a rather different task in refuting Pyrrho than the skeptical atomists, whom he answers simply by revising the atomist theory of perception in such a way as to preclude skepticism.

counter Pyrrho's skepticism because his interest in Pyrrho is well attested in his intellectual biography. After his service as an ephebe in Athens in 323, Epicurus studied under the Democritean Nausiphanes of Teos (see 75A-B D.-K.),<sup>28</sup> where he certainly learned about Pyrrho. Nausiphanes urged his students to follow his own doctrines, but Pyrrho's way of life; "and he often said that Epicurus also admired Pyrrho's way of life and was always asking him about Pyrrho" (D.L. 9.64). Epicurus' study with Nausiphanes clearly influenced the development of his thought,<sup>29</sup> and his keen interest in Pyrrho might be thought sufficient evidence of a confrontation with dogmatic skepticism.

There is reason to doubt, however, that our Pyrrho was Epicurus'. It is striking that no Epicurean text ever refers to Pyrrho as a skeptic. Epicurus plainly admired his way of life and his tranquility (his ἀπραγμοσύνη, D.L. 9.62–69; cf. fr.551, 555 Us.), but may not have attributed these to skepticism. It was Timon, after all, who established the tradition that Pyrrho was a skeptic,<sup>30</sup> and this tradition did not win out entirely in antiquity, for Cicero knows of Pyrrho only as a moralist who, like Ariston of Chios, admits no distinctions of value between virtue and vice.<sup>31</sup> Most importantly, Colotes takes

<sup>28</sup> I here follow the chronology advocated by C. Bailey, *The Greek Atomists and Epicurus* (Oxford 1928) 222, and D. N. Sedley, "Epicurus and his Professional Rivals," in *Etudes sur l'épicurisme antique* (= *CahPhil* 1 [Lille 1976]) 121 and 149 n.2.

<sup>29</sup> There are a few tantalizing indications that Pyrrho was interested in atomism (he was an avid reader of Democritus: D.L. 9.67; see also Long and Sedley [*supra* n.27] I 16f, 24), but no evidence that he was himself an atomist. Our evidence for Nausiphanes' own philosophical position is scanty, but three points do seem clear: first, he influenced Epicurus' thinking on the *summum bonum* (his advocacy of ἀκαταπληξία [Clem. Al. *Strom.* 2.130=75B3 D.-K.] sounds like a clear antecedent to Epicurean *ataraxia*); second, he was interested enough in atomist epistemology that Ariston (apparently the Peripatetic biographer and successor to Lycon as scholar: cf. D.L. 7.164) could claim, in his *Life of Epicurus*, that Epicurus' work *The Canon* derived from Nausiphanes' *Tripod* (D.L. 10.14); and third, Seneca, in the sole report about Nausiphanes' own epistemology, represents him as a skeptical atomist who claimed that "nothing is any more this than that" (Sen. *Ep.* 88.43–45).

<sup>30</sup> See A. A. Long, "Timon of Phlius: Pyrrhonist and Satirist," *PCPS* NS. 24 (1978) 68–91.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Cic. *Acad.* 2.130, *Fin.* 2.43, 4.43 (= fr.69a–c Decleva Caizzi, who assembles further testimonia). For the possibility that Cicero's understanding of Pyrrho is influenced by the *divisio Carneadia*, see Decleva Caizzi (*supra* n.26) 268–70.

no account of Pyrrho, and this omission seems inconceivable if he was widely regarded as a precursor of Arcesilaus' skepticism (as suggested by two hostile witnesses, Ariston of Chios and Timon: D.L. 4.33f; cf. Numenius *ap.* Eus. *Praep.Evang.* 14.6.4–6; Sext. Emp. *Pyr.* 1.232–34), or was claimed by the Academy as such.<sup>32</sup> We cannot suppose that Colotes omits mention of Pyrrho because Epicurus had already refuted him, since Colotes does attack Democritus, against whom Epicurus had argued (though not, so far as we know, for skepticism). Colotes' silence about Pyrrho implies, as David Sedley first suggested to me, that he was not even considered a skeptic in the Epicurean tradition. If that is so, we have no reason to assume that Epicurus had need of a self-refutation argument to use against him.

Thus there is no solid evidence to support the common assumption that Epicurus was concerned to counter the skepticism either of Pyrrho or of Arcesilaus, nor that he developed the orthodox anti-skeptical strategies (the self-refutation and *apraxia* arguments) familiar to us from later Epicureans. Epicurus does deploy similar strategies against the ethical determinist in *On Nature* but he has no need of them in his sole attested anti-skeptical argument.

This is directed against his atomist predecessors, against whom Epicurus sought to rehabilitate the atomist theory of perception as a

---

Epicurus' attitude towards Pyrrho is summed up in his description of him as ἀμαθής and ἀπαιδευτος (D.L. 10.8). According to Sedley (*supra* n.28) 136f, Epicurus "was not calling him an ignorant yokel but praising him as untainted by any μαθήματα or παιδεία"; reservations in Gigante (*supra* n.1) 41–43.

<sup>32</sup> Sedley (1983: *supra* n.2) 15, suggests that "nothing less than Pyrrho's practical model of a life without beliefs could have suggested to Arcesilaus the positive value that he found in *epoche*." I doubt this, because (a) to find positive value for *epoche* in Arcesilaus Sedley has to attribute to him the hope that it "would take on an autonomous model which the status of his premises did not strictly warrant," not an attractive philosophical aim (for an alternative, see 260ff *infra*); (b) Arcesilaus could not have found Pyrrho's dogmatic skepticism congenial, with its disincentive to engage in the Socratic dialectic for which Arcesilaus was famous; (c) I am unpersuaded that political considerations can account for the Academy's conspicuous silence about Pyrrho; and (d) the hostile satires of Timon and Ariston of Chios (D.L. 4.33f) fall far short of proof that in the eyes of contemporaries "Pyrrho was the chief inspiration" of Arcesilaus' skepticism. See now the review of the question by F. Decleva Caizzi, "Pirroniani ed accademici nel III secolo a.C.," in *Aspects de la philosophie hellénistique*, edd. H. Flashar and O. Gigon (= *Entr.Hardt* 32 [Vandoeuvres-Geneva 1986]) 147–83.

reliable guide to knowledge. Metrodorus, Anaxarchus, and his own teacher Nausiphanes (cf. Sext. Emp. *Math.* 7.87f) apparently drew skeptical conclusions from the fallibility of and apparent conflict among the senses. They seem to have adopted a reductionist atomism according to which atoms and void alone truly exist, while all phenomenal properties are merely arbitrary constructions formed by the interaction between atomic configurations and human sense organs;<sup>33</sup> since these constructions are merely conventional, we cannot have certain knowledge about them. This position clearly represents an extension of certain well-known features of Democritus' own thought.<sup>34</sup> For Democritus, also, all compounds and perceptible qualities are simply reducible to atoms and void and hence have no genuine existence—they are merely “by convention.”<sup>35</sup> Accordingly, our senses offer no genuine knowledge of the phenomenal world: “in reality we know nothing about anything, but our belief in each case is a changing of shape” (55B7 D.-K., expanded in 9). Democritus distinguishes two forms of knowledge: “dark” knowledge which comes by way of the senses and which is illustrated (in 11a) by sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch; and “genuine” knowledge, which is somehow entirely “distinct” from the senses. Unfortunately, the relevant text breaks off before explaining how one can know independently of the senses, and so we have no idea of how Democritus might have thought it possible to escape the skeptical implications of his theory of perception.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>33</sup> For the difference between Epicurus and his Democritean predecessors on this point, see especially Sedley's fundamental paper, “Epicurean Anti-Reductionism,” in *Matter and Metaphysics*, edd. J. Barnes and M. Mignucci (Naples 1989) 297–327; also, and independently, P. Mitsis, *Epicurus' Ethical Theory: The Pleasures of Invulnerability* (Ithaca 1988) 129–66, who well explains why Epicurean ethics requires a non-reductionist metaphysics. Different interpretations of the difficult texts from *On Nature* are proposed by S. Laursen, “Epicurus, *On Nature* XXV,” *CronErcol* 18 (1988) 7–18, and (more compellingly) J. Annas, “Epicurus on Agency” (forthcoming in the *Proceedings* of the Fifth Symposium Hellenisticum); neither develops an alternative to Sedley's account of Epicurean metaphysics. Laursen (*CronErcol* 17 [1987] 77f) suggests that these texts belong to Book 25, but his evidence is hardly compelling; for convenience, I retain the traditional reference to *On Nature*, section 34 Arrighetti.

<sup>34</sup> See W. Guthrie, *History of Greek Philosophy* II (Cambridge 1965) 454–65, and E. Asmis, *Epicurus' Scientific Method* (Ithaca 1984) 333–50.

<sup>35</sup> See A49, B9, 117, 125 D.-K.

<sup>36</sup> The proposal of D. J. Furley, *The Greek Cosmologists* I (Cambridge 1987) 134f, rests on the report of Aristotle that for Democritus “what is true is what ap-

Perhaps he offered no simple answer: there is some evidence that he discussed this question in a dialogue in which the senses reply to the mind's charge by asking: "Poor mind, do you take your evidence from us and then try to overthrow us? Our overthrow is your fall" (B125, from Gal. *Medic. empir.* 15.7f). In any event, Democritus' followers interpreted the atomist theory of perception to have skeptical consequences.

Now, Epicurus himself certainly denies that the mind can attain knowledge except through the senses. To disarm the skeptical implications of the apparent conflict among sensations, which led even Democritus to hold that they are no more this than that (ὀ μᾶλλον: Arist. *Metaph.* 1009b7–15), Epicurus holds that "all impressions are true." Thus he argues that none of the senses can bear witness against any other, that there is no common object of perception about which different senses could disagree, and that any error is to be found solely in opinion or judgment, never in sensation (D.L. 10.31f; Lucr. 4.483–99).<sup>37</sup> He says: "If you fight against all sensations, you will not have a standard against which to judge even those of them you say are mistaken" (*KD* 23, cf. 24, *Ep. ad Her.* 50–52). By arguing that all impressions are true, Epicurus disarms the skeptical conclusions that his predecessors believed to follow from their apparent conflict.<sup>38</sup> And more generally, he revises atomist theory so as to hold that compounds possess emergent properties that are not simply reducible to atoms and void (cf. *supra* n.33).

---

pears" (*De an.* 404a27f), but this is an Aristotelian formula without parallel in the fragments, and moreover is inconsistent with *Metaph.* 1009b7–15 (see 248 *infra*), where the reference to ὀ μᾶλλον clearly precludes the construction Furley places on ἄδηλον.

<sup>37</sup> The section on "the truth of all impressions" in Long and Sedley (*supra* n.27) I 78–86 is especially illuminating on these questions; see also G. Striker, "Epicurus on the Truth of Sense Impressions," *AGP* 59 (1977) 125–42, C. Taylor, "All perceptions are true," in Schofield *et al.* (*supra* n.2) 105–24, and Sedley, "Epicurus on the Common Sensibles," in *The Criterion of Truth*, edd. P. Huby and G. Neal (Liverpool 1989) 123–36, who discusses the Epicurean treatise on this subject, *P.Hercul.* 19/698, perhaps by Philodemus.

<sup>38</sup> It has been supposed that Epicurus needs a self-refutation argument to discredit the possibility that *all* sensations are false (Long and Sedley [*supra* n.27] I 83). But *DRN* 4.469–521 does not consider this thesis explicitly (*pace* Long and Sedley), and *KD* 23 shows that Epicurus does not have to resort to a self-refutation argument to dispose of this thesis.

Epicurus is able to disarm atomist skepticism simply by revising the theory of perception only because he can argue against his predecessors on the basis of shared premises. Atomist skepticism is dogmatic rather than dialectical;<sup>39</sup> and since Epicurus takes no account of Arcesilaus, he has no need to develop such strategies as the *apraxia* argument to refute a version of skepticism that does not itself rest on dogma. This task, as I shall argue, falls to Colotes. In developing his own case against Arcesilaus, however, Colotes employs certain forms of argumentation that parallel those used by Epicurus in his polemic against the ethical determinist in *On Nature*,<sup>40</sup> and so we must pause to consider these.

Epicurus' target in this passage is a Democritean determinist who maintains that all his actions are due to accident and necessity (εἰς τὸ τὴν ἀνάγκην καὶ ταύμοτατον πάντα αἰτιᾶσθαι, *De nat.* 34.26–30=20C.50f L.-S.; cf. SV 40) and, hence, that he is not responsible for them. He even attributes praise and blame, which for Epicurus establish a preconception of responsibility (τῆς αἰτίας πρόληψιν, 20f), to "accidental necessity" (κατὰ τὸ αὐτόματον ἀνάγκη, 14f). In reply, Epicurus advances a form of self-refutation argument,<sup>41</sup> holding that there is an inconsistency between his opponent's argument and his conduct: by claiming that he, rather than Epicurus, is arguing correctly, the opponent claims responsibility for his argument in contradiction of his thesis. The relevant part of the passage reads as follows (lines 23–28 L.-S.):

περικά[τω] γὰρ ὁ τοιοῦτος λόγος τρέπεται, καὶ οὐδέποτε δύναται βεβαιῶσαι ὡς ἐστὶν τοιαῦτα πάντα οἷα τὰ κατ' ἀνάγκην καλούμενα· ἀλλὰ μάχεται τινι περὶ αὐτοῦ τούτου ὡς δι' ἑαυτοῦ ἀβελτερευομένῳ. κὰν εἰς ἄπειρον φῆι πάλιν κατ' ἀνάγκην τοῦτο πράττειν ἀπὸ λόγων

<sup>39</sup> The Democritean Metrodorus of Chios (see 57A D.-K.), who opened his *On Nature* by saying "we know nothing, nor do we even know this, whether we know or do not know" (B1 D.-K.=Cic. *Acad.* 2.73; Eus. *Praep.Evang.* 14.19.8; D.L. 9.58; Sext. *Emp. Math.* 7.88), might be considered an exception to the dogmatism of the pre-Academic skeptics. But Epicurus may have considered him refuted simply by his revisions in the atomist theory of perception (Metrodorus is reported to have held that bodily sensations are entirely trustworthy [so Eus.], a doctrine that might be held to sit uneasily with his skepticism).

<sup>40</sup> This text is edited and discussed by Sedley, "Epicurus' Refutation of Determinism," in *Συζήτησις* (*supra* n.7) II 11–51; the Greek text is also available in Long and Sedley (*supra* n.27) II 104–08.

<sup>41</sup> For the form of this argument, see M. F. Burnyeat, "Protagoras and Self-Refutation in Later Greek Philosophy," *Philosophical Review* 85 (1976) 44–69.

ἀεί, οὐκ ἐπιλογίζεται ἐν τῷ εἰς ἑαυτὸν τὴν αἰτίαν ἀνά[π]τειν τοῦ κα[τὰ τ]ρόπον λελογίσθαι εἰς δὲ τὸν ἀμφισβητοῦντα τοῦ μὴ κατὰ τρόπον.

This sort of account is self-refuting, and can never prove that everything is of the kind called “necessitated”; but he debates this very question on the assumption that his opponent is himself responsible for talking nonsense. And even if he goes to infinity saying that *this* action of his is in turn necessitated, always appealing to arguments, he is not reasoning it empirically so long as he goes on imputing to himself the responsibility for having reasoned correctly and to his opponent that for having reasoned incorrectly.<sup>42</sup>

Epicurus’ claim here is not that the ethical determinist’s position is refuted by the content of his thesis; it is, rather, refuted by his conduct in arguing it. He imputes responsibility to his opponent for reasoning badly, and takes credit himself for reasoning correctly: thus his thesis that necessity, rather than he, is responsible for his actions is refuted by the very way in which he advances the thesis. In Epicurean terms, the ethical determinist fails to employ ἐπιλογισμός, the empirical reasoning which, Epicurus explains in the concluding section of *On Nature* 28, enables one to assess the truth of a view with reference to the advantageousness of the actions based upon it.<sup>43</sup> Consistency between an agent’s views and his actions thus is required by Epicurean epistemology, and the imputation of such inconsistency to an opponent alone suffices to convict him of false reasoning.

The argumentative strategy that Epicurus employs against the ethical determinist thus rests on a cardinal tenet of his epistemology. Hence it is not surprising that this strategy turns up in a very different context, when Epicurus claims that if an agent fails to refer every action to nature’s *telos*, his actions will not follow upon his views.<sup>44</sup> A similar strategy is evident in Epicurus’ criticism of Democritus (*De nat.* 34.26–30=20C.51–56 L.-S., quoted 253 *infra*).

<sup>42</sup> This is Sedley’s text and translation; some modifications are proposed in Laursen (1988 [*supra* n.33]).

<sup>43</sup> See esp. fr.13 vi.10–xii.20 in Sedley’s edition, “Epicurus, *On Nature* Book XXVIII,” *CronErcol* 3 (1973) 5–83, with commentary 65–79.

<sup>44</sup> *KD* 25: εἰ μὴ παρὰ πάντα καιρὸν ἐπανοίσεις ἕκαστον τῶν πραττομένων ἐπὶ τὸ τέλος τῆς φύσεως, ἀλλὰ προκαταστρέψεις εἴτε φυγὴν εἴτε δίωξιν ποιούμενος εἰς ἄλλο τι, οὐκ ἔσσονται σοι τοῖς λόγοις αἱ πράξεις ἀκόλουθοι.



In fact, since an Epicurean can always enquire whether an opponent's views accord with ἐπιλογισμός, the tactic of imputing an inconsistency between these views and his conduct could be employed in virtually any case.

Now, it has been supposed that Epicurus himself used this tactic in refutation of skepticism: Lucretius' peculiar image of the skeptic as one who has himself stood with his head in his own footprints (4.469–72), it is claimed, must spell out the meaning of Epicurus' term περικάτω τρέπεσθαι (*De nat.* 34.26–30=20C.25 L.-S.; cf. [35] 11 Arrighetti). "Epicurus used περικάτω τρέπεσθαι to charge the skeptic with self-refutation and Lucretius translated his master's prose into precise poetic detail."<sup>45</sup> Against this, it must be repeated that Epicurus' target in *On Nature* is not a skeptic, and that he is not attested to have used the self-refutation argument against skepticism. As we saw earlier, there is no evidence of an effort on his part to counter Pyrrho's skepticism or Arcesilaus'. The parallels between *DRN* 4.469–521 and *On Nature* are not, in my opinion, close enough to sustain the claim that the refutation of the skeptic exactly parallels that of the ethical determinist;<sup>46</sup> and we should not attribute to Epicurus himself an elaborate critique of skepticism merely on account of a verbal parallel that could just as well be explained in other ways.<sup>47</sup> For instance, Lucretius' image could be based on the anti-skeptical arguments of one of Epicurus' followers, or it could represent his own application of Epicurus' argument in *On Nature* to the case of the skeptic. In either case, there is no necessity to attribute Lucretius' entire argument at 469–521 to Epicurus himself. In fact, this argument may include attacks

<sup>45</sup> Burnyeat (*supra* n.1) 204, endorsed by Sedley (*supra* n.40) 26f.

<sup>46</sup> I depart from Sedley's excellent discussion (*supra* n.40) in finding no exact parallel between the argument of *On Nature* 34.26–30 and *DRN* 4.469–521: (a) the targets of these passages are very different, the former being directed against the ethical determinist and the latter against the skeptic; (b) Sedley himself admits (27) that the appeals to preconception in *DRN* 4.473–77 and *On Nature* 34.38–41 are advanced on different grounds; (c) the criticism of Democritus for being blind to the practical consequences of his actions and Lucretius' arguments (4.500–21) that none of the senses is false seem to me so different as to provide no parallel at all. *Lucr.* 4.507–10, I suggest, draws on Colotes (see n.48 *infra*), and this is the only real parallel to Epicurus' criticism of Democritus.

<sup>47</sup> I offer this consideration in response to Sedley's claim (*supra* n.40: 18) that the source of *DRN* 4.469–521 "can hardly be doubted to be Epicurus."

on varieties of skepticism not developed until after Epicurus' death.<sup>48</sup> So we should be wary of taking any part of it as evidence for an otherwise unattested attack by Epicurus on skepticism.

It is Colotes, I shall now argue, who first introduced the standard Epicurean rejoinder to the Academic skeptic—the *apraxia* argument, which challenges him to show how, if he does invariably practice *epoche*, he can actually draw the distinctions among external objects that are necessary to live. We must distinguish this *apraxia* argument from the self-refutation argument that Epicurus uses against the ethical determinist. In the case of self-refutation, the opponent's thesis is refuted not necessarily by its content (Democritus provides an example: see 247ff *infra*), but by its failure to accord with *epilogismos* as evidenced by an inconsistency between thesis and some act that follows from commitment to the thesis.<sup>49</sup> This inconsistency suffices, for Epicurus, to invalidate the thesis.

<sup>48</sup> The question of Lucretius' target in this passage is a difficult one. Burnyeat (*supra* n.1: 204), assuming uncritically that it is taken over directly from Epicurus, argues that the *quis* of line 469 is Metrodorus of Chios—but Epicurus does not need a self-refutation argument to dispose of his position (see *supra* nn.38f). Barigazzi (*supra* n.1: 291f), on the other hand, sees the skeptical Academy as Lucretius' target. Of course, since the Academic skeptic does not assert 'nothing is known' as a claim the truth of which he accepts in his own name, he can escape Lucretius' objection at 469f (*denique nil sciri siquis putat, id quoque nescit an sciri possit, quoniam nil scire fatetur*) by pointing out that he argues from his interlocutor's premises and canons of logic, but that he is no more committed to these than to the conclusion that nothing is known. But Lucretius, like Colotes before him, might nonetheless choose to treat the skeptic's argument as a dogmatic claim (see 262 *infra*), in which case we cannot rule out an Academic target. Certainly 507–10 closely parallels Colotes' arguments: the claim *vita quoque ipsa concidat extemplo* recalls Colotes' attacks on his opponents for abolishing life or throwing it into confusion (e.g. *Adv. Col.* 1108D, F); and Lucretius' claim that the skeptic could not avoid precipices recalls Colotes' polemic against Arcesilaus (1122E). Since the argument of *DRN* 4.469–521 appears to apply to a broader range of skeptical positions than Epicurus himself was concerned to refute, I am inclined to see it as a composite of arguments developed originally to counter different varieties of skepticism rather than as a translation of a single text by Epicurus himself (the case against regarding Lucretius as a simple paraphrast of Epicurus is eloquently set out by Clay (*supra* n.5: 13–53).

<sup>49</sup> Burnyeat's failure to take account of this consideration leads him to conclude (*supra* n.1: 204–06) that Epicurus' self-refutation argument is "patently invalid" and to postulate that "the Greeks had a wider and more hospitable concept of self-refutation than any we are familiar with in present-day philosophy." In fact, Epicurus leaves no doubt in *On Nature* 34 (quoted *supra* 239f) that the self-refutation argument relies on appeal to *epilogismos*.

If the opponent can avoid the charge of self-refutation, the Epicurean can still have recourse to an *apraxia* argument. This argument invalidates the thesis in a rather different way, by holding that one could not even act on the basis of the thesis: thus why does the skeptic go to the door rather than the wall en route to the marketplace, if he does consistently practice *epoche*? It is sometimes claimed that this objection does not by itself prove the skeptic's skepticism false, but for the Epicurean *epilogismos* enables one to assess the truth of a view with reference to the advantageousness of the actions based upon it (see *supra* 240). Thus, to discredit the skeptic's skepticism, it suffices for Colotes to point out the possibility that *epoche* may kill you. Moreover, the Epicurean can also argue, by an application of "counterwitnessing" (ἀντιμαρτύρησις), that since we do manifestly act, the skeptic in fact cannot invariably suspend judgment in consistency with his thesis. These points deserve emphasis in view of the doubts sometimes expressed about the logical validity of the *apraxia* argument.

What then is the Academic skeptic's task in replying to the *apraxia* argument? It clearly is not to demonstrate that his thesis is internally consistent or even consistent with other theses he holds,<sup>50</sup> since this is not directly under attack. His task is rather to show that he can act without contravening his *epoche* in all matters. In other words, he needs to show that action is possible without assent. If he can succeed in establishing this, he has not only answered the *apraxia* argument, but also refuted the premises on which relies the further conclusion that his thesis too is false. We shall explore below (VI) the alternatives available to the Academic skeptic in formulating an account of *praxis* without recourse to rational assent.

It is a difficult problem, to which we must now turn, to determine what philosophical influences led Colotes to choose the *apraxia* argument for use against the Academic skeptic. But Colotes found this argumentative strategy itself so useful that he brought it

<sup>50</sup> I simply mean theses he upholds for the purposes of debate—of course, the skeptic is not committed to their truth. Many later Academic skeptics in fact hold that one may develop quite elaborate theoretical views, provided that one does not mistake them for theoretical knowledge—on this see especially the fundamental study of Tarrant (*supra* n.2), and M. Frede, "The Method of the So-Called Methodical School of Medicine," in *Science and Speculation*, edd. J. Barnes et al. (Cambridge 1982) 1–23, and *Galen: Three Treatises on the Nature of Science* (Indianapolis 1985) ix–xxxvi.

to bear against nine different philosophers and schools in making his case that it is impossible actually to live in conformity to the doctrines of the other philosophers (*cf. Adv. Col.* 1118c, 1124c).

### III. The Origins of the *apraxia* Argument

Colotes did not invent the *apraxia* argument. It has an antecedent already in Aristotle's criticism in the *Metaphysics* of those who advocate *ou mallon* and deny the principle of non-contradiction.<sup>51</sup> It is obscure when the *apraxia* argument was first applied to skepticism: if we are to believe D.L. 9.104f, Timon already had to answer it; and the Stoics early on employed the *apraxia* argument as a rejoinder to Arcesilaus' attack on the cognitive impression. Priority in the use of this anti-skeptical strategy, I shall now argue, belongs to the Stoics rather than Colotes, though he could also draw upon the example of Epicurus' argument against the ethical determinist in adapting this strategy for use against the Academic skeptic.

The Stoics first employed the *apraxia* argument as a rejoinder to Arcesilaus, who had attacked Zeno's definition of the cognitive impression ("an impression stamped and reproduced from something which is, exactly as it is") in order to show that the Stoic sage could not distinguish true from false impressions and hence, by his own principles, had better suspend assent (*Cic. Acad.* 2.77f).<sup>52</sup> Since Arcesilaus advocated no δόγματα of his own, but merely took over his opponent's premises for purposes of argumentation, the Stoics had to discredit him without being able to argue against any positive views to which he was committed. Their strategy, at least as early as Cleanthes, was to allege an inconsistency between Arcesilaus' argument and his conduct (D.L. 7.171). The purpose of this strategy is to confront the skeptic with the following dilemma: either to accept that impressions do somehow provide a criterion of truth, in which case one cannot suspend assent when faced with a cognitive impression, or to admit that his action (which according to the Stoics does require rational assent) conflicts with his argument (universal

<sup>51</sup> *Metaph.* 1008b14–19: Aristotle's target is not a skeptic; but the form of his argument, in appealing to the observed conflict between his opponents' views and actions, provides a clear antecedent to the *apraxia* argument. It is unclear whether the early Hellenistic thinkers drew upon Aristotle in developing their argument.

<sup>52</sup> On this controversy, see especially M. Frede, "Stoics and Sceptics on Clear and Distinct Impressions," in Burnyeat (*supra* n.2) 65–93.

*epoche*), in which case he falls into self-contradiction.<sup>53</sup> Since impressions are the basis for apprehension and knowledge in Stoic epistemology, the Stoics put the *apraxia* argument in the form of a charge that the skeptic, in denying that there are cognitive impressions to which one may assent with certainty, deprives man of his mind and thereby overturns the very foundations of life. As Cicero puts it (*Acad.* 2.31f):

Those who assert that nothing can be grasped deprive us of these things that are the very tools or equipment of life, or rather actually overthrow the whole of life from its foundations and deprive the animate creature itself of the mind that animates it, so that it is difficult to speak of their rashness entirely as the case requires.

In order to answer this charge, the skeptic has to show that action is indeed possible without assent, by following the εὐλογον as criterion, such that one can suspend judgment in all matters and still act; hence one can live happily without knowledge as defined by the Stoics. We shall investigate this line of reply later, when considering how Arcesilaus might have answered Colotes' attack.

Now, Colotes seems to have taken over this Stoic argument, adapted it to the terms of Epicurean epistemology, and turned it against those philosophical opponents, including Arcesilaus, who somehow called into question the truth of all impressions. On chronological grounds there is no reason why the Stoics could not have borrowed the *apraxia* argument from Colotes. My reason for doubting this possibility is that Arcesilaus is never attested to have answered the Epicurean criticism, and that his reply to the *apraxia* argument is formulated in terms of the *eulogon* (Sext. Emp. *Math.* 7.158), clearly an anti-Stoic rejoinder. When Plutarch himself recounts the Academic response to the *apraxia* argument (*Adv. Col.* 1122A-D), he casts it solely in *Stoic* terms; and in introducing this response, he says that those who wrote at length against the proponents of *epoche*,<sup>54</sup> "at last brought up like a Gorgon from the

<sup>53</sup> For this argument see D.L. 9.107f; Cic. *Acad.* 2.25f, 31f, 53, 99; Plut. *Adv. Col.* 1122A-D; and, for the Gorgon that turns men to stone, Cic. *Fam.* 9.8.1 and Epictet. 1.5.1-3. The classic statement of this objection is that of David Hume, *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, section 12.

<sup>54</sup> Chrysippus is known to have written a book refuting Arcesilaus' method (D.L. 7.198), and traces of his rejoinder to the early Academic argument at *Adv. Col.* 1122A-D are preserved by Plutarch at *De Stoic. Rep.* 1036A-B, 1057A-B (see

Stoa the *apraxia* argument.<sup>55</sup> This seems clear evidence that use of the *apraxia* argument against Arcesilaus originated in the Stoa.<sup>55</sup> Since Plutarch in this passage wishes to defend the proponents of *epoche* against Colotes, it would be far more effective for him to quote a reply that turned the Epicurean criticism against itself.<sup>56</sup> His failure to do so suggests that no reply from Arcesilaus to the Epicureans was available.

Priority in the use of the *apraxia* argument thus belongs to the Stoics. And it is unlikely that Colotes arrived at it entirely independently, for his use of the *apraxia* argument parallels that of the Stoics very closely. He even uses the Stoic term συγκατατίθεσθαι in its technical sense in his second charge against Arcesilaus (*Adv. Col.* 1123A-B; cf. n.92 *infra*). The only significant difference between Colotes and the Stoics involves the epistemological terms in which he formulates the argument. Whereas the Stoics distinguish between true and false impressions, the Epicureans are committed to the position that all impressions are true. Hence, for Colotes, it is not

---

Cherniss [*supra* n.11] 436 note a, 601 note b). The provenance of 1122A-D requires closer consideration. Its argument is often assumed to belong to Arcesilaus (e.g. Long and Sedley [*supra* n.27] I 456f; Striker [*supra* n.2] 65-69), but it is noteworthy that Plutarch fails to attribute it to him in the very passage in which he introduces the Academic defense against the *apraxia* argument. In fact, while Arcesilaus was famous in later antiquity, there seems to have been little knowledge of his actual arguments—unsurprisingly, given that he wrote nothing (D.L. 4.32). Since Plutarch, who wrote a book on the *apraxia* argument (see *supra* n.11), is so vague about its origins and the Academic rejoinder, the most we can say is that 1122A-D reports an early Academic argument. I read the chronology of the evidence as follows: certain men wrote at length (οἱ πολλὰ πραγματευσάμενοι καὶ κατατείναντες εἰς τοῦτο συγγράμματα), but unsuccessfully, against *epoche*; then (and now Plutarch identifies them as Stoics) they brought forth the *apraxia* argument, but (Plutarch says tendentiously) gave up the battle, because *horme* was seen to lead to action by itself, without assent (1122A-B). Plutarch then sets out this argument in detail at 1122C-D, and records the rejection of it by Chrysippus and Antipater at *De Stoic. Rep.* 1056 A-B. This reading of the chronology seems to rule out DeLacy's argument, *AJP* 77 (1956) 74, that Plutarch is here dependent upon Antiochus.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. esp. Cic. *Acad.* 1.44f. Note the rejoinder to the *apraxia* argument (1.45): *huic rationi quod erat consentaneum faciebat*.

<sup>56</sup> Plutarch attempts such an argument at *Adv. Col.* 1117F-1118B, starting from the premise that nobody but the sage is unalterably convinced of anything, but this is clearly modelled on a Stoic argument (*Acad.* 2.145), and there is no reason to think that Plutarch is drawing upon Arcesilaus here. Similarly, the reply to the Epicureans in *Adv. Col.* 1122D-1124B seems to me Plutarch's own work (see 264 *infra*).

the cognitive impression to which the skeptic must assent in contravention of his *epoché*, but rather “plain evidence”—the impression which is ἐναργές, therefore self-evident (*Adv. Col.* 1123A–B, discussed 264 *infra*). Except in this respect, the Stoic and Epicurean uses of the *apraxia* argument appear not to differ significantly. Thus it makes sense to suppose that Colotes drew upon the contemporary debate between the Stoics and Academics in formulating his own anti-skeptical strategy. Of course, this strategy well accords with the central tenets of Epicurean epistemology, as we observed earlier, and Epicurus himself, in his criticism of Democritus (253 *infra*), had already provided a precedent for calling into question the consistency of another’s *logos* and *doxa*. So adaptation of the *apraxia* argument to fit the terms of Epicurean epistemology would have seemed to Colotes an entirely suitable strategy. If I am correct in thinking that the *apraxia* argument was adapted by Colotes from the Stoics, this would provide further evidence, albeit indirect, of serious interest on the part of early Epicureans in Stoicism.<sup>57</sup>

With this background in mind, let us now turn to consider how Colotes employs the *apraxia* argument against three of his most illustrious philosophical opponents.

#### IV. Colotes versus Democritus

Colotes opened his book by bringing two charges against his atomist predecessor Democritus (*Adv. Col.* 1108E). These charges merit our attention, because they well illustrate his use of the *apraxia* argument, and because we can compare them with Epicurus’ own criticism of Democritus.

(a) Plutarch reports Colotes’ first charge against Democritus as follows (1108F–1109A):

ἐγκαλεῖ δὲ αὐτῷ πρῶτον ὅτι τῶν πραγμάτων ἕκαστον εἰπὼν οὐ μᾶλλον τοῖον ἢ τοῖον εἶναι συγκέχυκε τὸν βίον. ἀλλὰ τοσοῦτόν γε Δημόκριτος ἀποδεί τὸ νομίζειν μὴ μᾶλλον εἶναι τοῖον ἢ τοῖον τῶν πραγμάτων ἕκαστον ὥστε Πρωταγόρα τῷ σοφιστῇ τοῦτο εἰπόντι μεμαχῆσθαι καὶ γεγραφέναι πολλὰ καὶ πιθανὰ πρὸς αὐτόν. οἷς οὐδὲ ὄναρ ἐντυχῶν ὁ Κωλώτης ἐσφάλη περὶ λέξιν τοῦ ἀνδρός, ἐν ἧ

<sup>57</sup> We have virtually no information concerning the early relations between the Epicureans and Stoics, but see Vander Waerdt (*supra* n.7) 91 n.19 for the scanty evidence. Colotes does mention Zeno and the Stoa Poikile by name in his work on the *Lysis*, col. viii (Crönert [*supra* n.8] 7).

διορίζεται μὴ μᾶλλον τὸ “δεν” ἢ τὸ “μηδὲν” εἶναι, “δεν” μὲν ὀνομάζων τὸ σῶμα, “μηδὲν” δὲ τὸ κενόν, ὡς καὶ τούτου φύσιν τινὰ καὶ ὑπόστασιν ἰδίαν ἔχοντος.

Colotes first charges that, by saying that each object is no more of this sort than of that, he throws life into confusion. But Democritus is so far from considering an object to be no more of this sort than of that sort that he attacked the sophist Protagoras for saying this and set down many persuasive arguments against him. Colotes, who had not read them even in a dream, was misled by an expression of Democritus, in which he argues that “aught” no more is than “naught,” calling body “aught” and void “naught,” holding that this [void] too has a certain nature and extension of its own.

Plutarch does not tell us exactly how Colotes argued that Democritus’ use of *ou mallon* throws life into confusion. Plutarch denies that Democritus applied *ou mallon* to sensible objects, on the grounds that he had argued against Protagoras’ use of this term, and some modern scholars have believed him.<sup>58</sup> But there is good evidence that Democritus did apply an *ou mallon* argument to the senses. Aristotle in the *Metaphysics* (1009b7–15) tells us that, because animals receive contrary impressions from the same things, and indeed a single individual sometimes sees the same things differently, “So it is unclear which of them is true or false; for there is no more reason for this to be true than for that—they are on par. That is why Democritus says that either nothing is true or to us at least it is unclear.” This testimony is confirmed by Sextus’ account (*Pyr.* 1.213f) of how the Pyrrhonian skeptic’s use of *ou mallon* differs from that of the Democritean. Thus there is no reason to accept Plutarch’s claim that Colotes simply misread the text of Democritus. Democritus certainly did use *ou mallon* in the sense Colotes found objectionable.

What then was at stake in Democritus’ polemic against Protagoras? We have independent evidence (Sext. Emp. *Math.* 7.389f) that Democritus and Plato employed a self-refutation (*peritrope*)

<sup>58</sup> The evidence adduced in this paragraph disposes of the objections of DeLacy (1964 [*supra* n.3]) 74. The fact that Democritus attacked the Protagorean view of sense-perception does not entail that he did not himself apply *ou mallon* to the senses; and Colotes introduces his objections to Democritus’ statement that perceptible qualities are “by convention” not in this charge but in his second one.



argument<sup>59</sup> to discredit Protagoras' claim that every impression is true: if every impression is true, the judgment that not every impression is true, since it is based on an impression, will also be true; thus the view that every impression is true refutes itself. This is an example of a thesis refuted by its content, a thesis which contradicts itself. On the subjectivist interpretation of Protagoras' position that predominated in antiquity, Democritus has an easy case against him: if every impression is true not just to its percipient, but true simply, then a single example of conflicting impressions proves Protagoras false.<sup>60</sup> The formula that every impression is true does of course admit of different interpretations: thus the Epicureans, for instance, advocate this thesis, but admit that we can err in our judgments about external objects through mistaken interpretations of what the senses disclose to us.<sup>61</sup> But Democritus seems not to have envisaged this possibility, which is not suggested by Protagoras' own position.

We are now in a position to consider why Colotes thinks that the doctrine of *ou mallon* throws life into confusion. Democritus himself accepts that impressions do conflict, and draws from this the conclusion that an object is no more of this sort than that: hence truth does not reside in the senses. In objecting to this use of *ou mallon*, Colotes may have reasoned as follows. If Democritus denies the truth of all impressions, he abolishes knowledge, since knowledge can originate only in the senses; and Epicureans prefer to accept a bad explanation rather than admit the falsity of an impression (*DRN* 4.500–06). Now Democritus, in abolishing knowledge, throws life into confusion by making it impossible to draw distinctions (e.g., between doors and walls) among perceptible objects. But we all see that life is possible. Hence, by an application

<sup>59</sup> Burnyeat (*supra* n.41) 47 claims that the name and presentation of this argument "bespeak a more sophisticated consciousness of logical form" than is to be found in Democritus' own day. I fail to see why Democritus could not have set out the simple argument presented in Sextus; and I should think that if we want to look for antecedents to the first attested use of *peritrope* as self-refutation in Epicurus' *On Nature* (see Burnyeat's Appendix), Democritus would be a fitting candidate.

<sup>60</sup> See Burnyeat (*supra* n.41) 59–62.

<sup>61</sup> See chapters 5–6 of *Adv. Col.* for evidence of how the Epicureans might answer the skeptical reply that this doctrine makes them proponents of *ou mallon* in the same way that they find objectionable in Democritus.

of the principle that what conflicts with experience must be false (ἀντιμαρτύρησις, *Ep. ad Her.* 50f),<sup>62</sup> Democritus must be mistaken in denying that any impressions are true.<sup>63</sup>

(b) Let us now turn to Colotes' second charge. Plutarch's report (1110E-F) reads as follows:

ἀλλ' ἔτι μᾶλλον ἐν τῷ δευτέρῳ τῶν ἐπιτιμημάτων λέληθε τῷ Δημοκρίτῳ τὸν Ἐπίκουρον ἐκ τοῦ ζῆν συνεξωθῶν. τὸ γὰρ “νόμῳ χροίην εἶναι καὶ νόμῳ γλυκὸν” καὶ νόμῳ σύγκρισιν καὶ τὰ ἄλλα, “ἔτεῃ δὲ τὸ κενὸν καὶ τὰς ἀτόμους” ἀντειρημένον φησὶν ὑπὸ Δημοκρίτου ταῖς αἰσθήσεσι, καὶ τὸν ἐμμένοντα τῷ λόγῳ τούτῳ καὶ χρώμενον οὐδ' ἂν αὐτὸν ὡς [ἄνθρωπος] ἐστὶν ἢ ζῆν διανοηθῆναι.

In the second of his charges he fails even more to notice that along with Democritus he expels Epicurus from the company of the living. For he says that Democritus' sayings that “color is by convention, sweet by convention,” a compound is by convention, and so the rest, “what is real are the void and atoms” are an attack by Democritus on the senses; and that anyone who abides by this reasoning and uses it will not even be able to conceive of himself as [a man] or as alive.

In the final line, ἄνθρωπος is Pohlenz's supplement to fill the lacuna in MSS. E and B. Colotes alters Democritus (A 9, B9, 117, 125 D.-K.) by reversing the order of atoms and void and by interpolating the Epicurean word σύγκρισις into Democritus' list of things

<sup>62</sup> On this principle of Epicurean logic, see Sedley, “On Signs,” in Barnes (*supra* n.50) 263–72.

<sup>63</sup> DeLacy (1956 [*supra* n.3]) 434 and (1964) 74–76 advocates a different interpretation of Colotes' first charge: calling attention to Democritus A38, in which μηδὲν μᾶλλον is used to support the view that atomic shapes are infinitely varied, he points out that the Epicureans rejected this view because it upsets the order of nature (*DRN* 2.496–521) and suggests that “Colotes began with the charge that an infinite variety of atomic shapes would throw life into confusion.” Of course, Plutarch does not understand the charge in this way, nor does he say anything in his long reply (1109A–1110B) that suggests he considered this question relevant. Certainly Democritus did, *pace* DeLacy, use the *ou mallon* argument in the way that Plutarch understood it (see *supra* n.58). Moreover, I very much doubt that Colotes would have opened his book—which after all was written to persuade the public that the doctrines of non-Epicurean philosophers make life unlivable—with such a minor point of technical atomism. Colotes' second charge is much more general in scope, and his polemic would be much more powerful if it called attention from the start to a fundamental problem with Democritean theory—as, on my interpretation, it does.

that are "by convention." This interpolation will prove to have a serious point.

In this case Plutarch cannot accuse Colotes of misconstruing Democritus' text (*cf.* 1111A-B). Colotes is quite right to take Democritus' views about the conventional character of perceptible qualities as an attack on the senses: as we saw above (237), Democritus takes these qualities to be simply reducible to atoms and void and hence not to have reality in their own right. Epicurus, on the other hand, considers perceptible qualities to be accidental properties of compound bodies; and these qualities are not reducible to atoms and void, which themselves lack perceptible qualities. This difference may explain Colotes' interpolation of σύγκρισις into the Democritean passage: for Democritus, Colotes may mean to suggest, even the compounds that generate the perceptible qualities to which Democritus refers are merely conventional and without real existence. If this is correct, part of Colotes' criticism is directed against the reductionist character of Democritus' views about perceptible qualities.<sup>64</sup> Democritus' view that perceptible qualities are merely conventional is due to his failure to recognize that they are the emergent properties of compound bodies and have an existence of their own over and above their atomic configurations.

On this interpretation, it is not hard to see the force of Colotes' second charge against Democritus. Since he denies any reality to perceptible qualities, Democritus concludes that knowledge is not to be found in them—in direct opposition to the Epicurean view that all impressions are true and that there is no knowledge that does not originate in them. Colotes' charge, therefore, is that by denying that compounds are real, and attacking the senses, Democritus makes it impossible to live. If Pohlenz's supplement in *Adv. Col.* 1110F is correct, Colotes, in saying that by his reasoning one cannot conceive of himself as a man, is turning Democritus' claim that "man is what we all know" (B165 D.-K.) against him. In adding "or as alive" Colotes suggests that Democritus' metaphysics does not allow him even to conceive of his own existence.

One question that remains concerns the relation between Colotes' first and second charges. On the foregoing interpretation, both

<sup>64</sup> Colotes' interpolation provides contemporary evidence, I suggest, that Sedley's interpretation of Epicurean metaphysics (*see supra* n.33), or something like it, must be right.

employ the same general argumentative strategy: by denying that any impressions are true, Democritus destroys the capacity for discrimination among perceptible objects that is necessary for our life. DeLacy suggests that the first charge “affects sense-objects, the second ourselves as well”; and he rightly points out that this distinction can be found in Colotes’ criticism of other thinkers.<sup>65</sup> On the other hand, the first charge does conclude that Democritus’ views about perceptible objects throw life into confusion, so it too concerns us as well as the objects of our perception. I doubt that we are to draw a firm distinction between the two charges: each targets a particular Democritean position and argues to the same conclusion on the basis of the same argumentative strategy. Some support for this view is provided by the adaptation of Colotes’ two charges by Diogenes of Oenoanda (fr.6 II.2–12 Chilton):

ἔσφαλη δ’ ἀναξίως ἑαυτοῦ καὶ Δημόκριτος τὰς ἀτόμους μόνας κατ’ ἀλήθειαν εἰπὼν ὑπάρχειν ἐν τοῖς οὖσι, τὰ δὲ λοιπὰ [ν]ομιστεῖ ἅπαντα. κατὰ γὰρ τὸν σὸν λόγον, ὦ Δημόκριτε, οὐχ ὅπως τὸ ἀληθὲς εὐρεῖν, ἀλλ’ οὐδὲ ζῆν δυνησόμεθα, μήτε τὸ πῦρ φυλαττόμενοι [μήτε τ]ῆν σφαγῆν....

Democritus also made a mistake unworthy of himself when he said that only the atoms really exist in objects, all the rest merely existing by convention. For according to your argument, Democritus, far from discovering the truth we shall not even be able to live, being unable to guard ourselves either against fire or slaughter or....

Diogenes quotes the text to which Colotes’ second charge responds, but draws the conclusion of his first, namely that Democritus’ view throws life into confusion, making it impossible even to live.<sup>66</sup> Of course, we do not know whether Diogenes drew directly on Colotes’ book or on some intermediate source. But the fact that he combines the two charges suggests that they were not considered fundamentally different in form and intention.

Our final question is how Colotes’ criticism of Democritus compares with that of Epicurus. In concluding his polemic against the

<sup>65</sup> DeLacy and Einarson (*supra* n.3) 159 with note a.

<sup>66</sup> The fact that Diogenes fr.6 Chilton draws upon Colotes’ criticism of Democritus (so also Chilton [*supra* n.22] 46) is no surprise, since he also preserves an extensive criticism of Democritus’ (and the Stoics’) views on dream interpretation which cannot go back to Epicurus himself; for texts and discussion, see D. Clay, “An Epicurean Interpretation of Dreams,” *AJP* 101 (1980) 342–65.

ethical determinist in *On Nature*, Epicurus argues that his Democritean predecessors had to turn a blind eye to themselves "in order to hold necessity and accident responsible for everything." He then says of Democritus (34.26–30=20C.51–56 L.-S.):

ὁ δὲ λόγος αὐτὸς ὁ τοῦτο διδάσκων κατεάγνυτο καὶ ἐλάνθανεν τὸν ἄνδρα τοῖς ἔργοις πρὸς τὴν δόξαν συνκρού[ο]ντα· καὶ εἰ μὴ λήθη τις ἐπὶ τῶν ἔργων τῆς δόξης ἐνεγείνεται, συνεχῶς ἂν ἑαυτὸν ταράττοντα· ἦι δ' ἐκράτει τὸ τῆς δόξης κἂν τοῖς ἐσχάτοις π[ε]ριπεύοντα· ἦ[ι δὲ] μὴ ἐκράτει στάσεως ἐπιμπλάμενον διὰ τὴν ὑπεναντιότητα τῶν ἔργων καὶ τῆς δόξης.

Indeed, the actual account promoting this view came to grief when it left the great man blind to the fact that in his actions he was clashing with his doctrine; and that if it were not that a certain blindness to the doctrine took hold of him while acting he would constantly be perplexing himself; and that wherever the doctrine prevailed he would be falling into desperate calamities, while wherever it did not he would be filled with conflict because of the contradiction between his actions and his doctrine.

Epicurus claims that Democritus is saved from desperate calamities by his "blindness," which causes him to overlook his doctrine that necessity and accident alone are responsible for everything. Since this passage is the conclusion of Epicurus' argument against the ethical determinist, the discrepancy between Democritus' doctrine and his action presumably is offered as evidence that the doctrine itself is false. Colotes, in the charges we have just considered, inverts this argumentative strategy. He attempts to show that Democritus' views about the senses and the nature of atoms and void do in fact entail *apraxia*, that one who acted on the basis of them could not even live. He does not attribute "blindness" to Democritus in order to save him from the calamity of consistency to his doctrines.

## V. Colotes versus Socrates

Colotes' attack on Socrates holds an especial interest for this period of Hellenistic epistemology. As I shall try to establish, Colotes undertakes to discredit Socrates because he had been claimed by Arcesilaus as an authority for his own practice of *epoche*. Colotes' polemic provides our fullest, albeit indirect, evidence concerning this skeptical portrait of Socrates, one that provided the

Hellenistic Academy with its most illustrious authority until Antiochus countered by treating Socrates' profession of ignorance as itself ironical.<sup>67</sup> The conclusion that Colotes is attacking Socrates as portrayed by the skeptical Academy will turn out to have important implications for the subsequent history of Epicurean discussion of Socrates. For it is Colotes who puts Socrates on the list of the Epicurean school's philosophical rivals, and the fact that he attacks a skeptical Socrates has an enduring effect on the terms in which he is discussed in the later Epicurean tradition.

As we saw above (228), Arcesilaus represents his own practice of *epoche* as the proper interpretation of Socrates' dialectical practice. There is clear evidence that Colotes is responding specifically to this skeptical portrait of Socrates. Plutarch says that Colotes began by dismissing as entirely "sophistical and vulgar" the story of Chaerephon's return from Delphi with his oracle about Socrates.<sup>68</sup> Plato's story of Socrates' *elenchos* of the oracle (*Ap.* 20E–23B) appears to have been one of the central texts in Arcesilaus' portrait of Socrates as a skeptic.<sup>69</sup> In fact, no Socratic text provides a better pedigree for Academic dialectical practice than the conclusion of this passage, in which Socrates states that "even now" he goes around searching and enquiring in obedience to the god, coming to his aid by discrediting others' pretensions to wisdom. Arcesilaus apparently cited this very passage as the origin of Socrates' skepticism, for Colotes replies that it is "ridiculous" to make the Delphic command "know yourself" the starting-point of Socratic

<sup>67</sup> Cic. *Acad.* 2.15.

<sup>68</sup> *Adv. Col.* 1116E–F: εὐθὺς οὖν τὸν ἀφ' ἱερᾶς κекίνηκεν ὁ Κωλώτης, καὶ διηγησάμενος ὅτι χρησμὸν ἐκ Δελφῶν περὶ Σωκράτους ἀνήνεγκε Χαιρεφῶν ὃν ἴσμεν ἅπαντες, ταῦτα ἐπέιρηκε· "τὸ μὲν οὖν τοῦ Χαιρεφῶντος διὰ τὸ τελέως σοφιστικὸν καὶ φορτικὸν διήγημα εἶναι παρήσομεν."

<sup>69</sup> Arcesilaus probably is drawing specifically on this text of Plato's *Apology*: (a) he is reported to base his advocacy of *epoche* on interpretation of Plato: *Arcesilaus ... ex variis Platonis libris sermonibusque Socraticis hoc maxime arripuit* (Cic. *De Or.* 3.67); (b) we can exclude Xenophon as a source, since he traces Socrates' *zetesis* not to the Delphic oracle but to the time when he first began to understand speech (*Ap.* 14–17); (c) Plutarch refers to Plato's account (*Ap.* 21A) immediately after his citation of Colotes (quoted n.68); (d) Arcesilaus' interpretation of Socrates as one who knows that nothing can be known (Cic. *Acad.* 1.45) might be based on *Ap.* 21B; and (e) Eriphanius' report (Ἄρκεσίλαος ἔφασκε τῷ θεῷ ἐφικτὸν εἶναι μόνῳ τὸ ἀληθές, ἀνθρώπῳ δ' οὐκ, *Adv. haeres.* 3.29=Diels, *Dox. Graec.* 592) might rely on *Ap.* 23B. On Socrates' *elenchos* of the oracle, see the discussion of T. G. West, *Plato's Apology of Socrates* (Ithaca 1979) 105–26.

*zetesis*, as Plutarch attests in a clear reference to *Ap.* 23B.<sup>70</sup> By ridiculing Socrates' referral of his *zetesis* to a divine command, Colotes seeks to discredit the skeptical interpretation of Socrates from its very starting-point.

According to this interpretation, there is nothing certain that the senses and mind can grasp, leaving one no choice but to practice *epoche* (so Cic. *Acad.* 1.43–46, *De or.* 3.67). To judge from Plutarch's counter-claim (*Adv. Col.* 1117F), Colotes replied by charging Socrates with distrusting τὸ ἐναργές, the plain evidence of the senses.<sup>71</sup> Since he brings the same objection against Arcesilaus (1123A–B; see 263 *infra*), it is likely that Colotes construed Socrates' search for self-knowledge (*cf.* 1118F–1119 A) as a skeptical rejection of the knowledge readily available from the senses. This rejection in turn leads to the collapse of life (*cf.* 1118F–1119 C), as one who rejects τὸ ἐναργές has no basis on which to draw the discriminations among external objects necessary to survive. As ever, Colotes puts his objection as graphically as possible. He asks why Socrates puts food in his mouth rather than his ear (1108B), and argues on the basis of the senses that we eat food rather than grass. As Plutarch reports (1117D):

καὶ δῆτα καὶ προθεῖς ὁ Κωλώτης τὰ σοφὰ ταῦτα καὶ καλὰ περὶ τῶν αἰσθήσεων, ὅτι “σιτία προσαγόμεθα καὶ οὐ χόρτον, καὶ τοὺς ποταμούς, ὅταν ὦσι μεγάλοι, πλοίοις διαπερῶμεν, ὅταν δὲ εὐδιάβατοι γένωνται, τοῖς ποσίν,” ἐπιπεφώνηκεν· “ἀλλὰ γὰρ ἀλαζόνας ἐπετήδευσας λόγους, ὦ Σώκρατες· καὶ ἕτερα μὲν διελέγου τοῖς ἐντυγχάνουσιν, ἕτερα δὲ ἔπραττες.”

Again Colotes, setting out these wise and noble sayings about the

<sup>70</sup> *Adv. Col.* 1118c: ἐν οἷς δὲ κομιδῇ διαγελαῖ καὶ φλαυρίζει τὸν Σωκράτην ζητοῦντα τί ἄνθρωπός ἐστι καὶ νεανιευόμενον, ὡς φησιν, ὅτι μηδὲ αὐτὸς αὐτὸν εἰδεῖν, δῆλος μὲν ἐστὶν αὐτὸς οὐδέποτε πρὸς τοῦτω γενόμενος, ὁ δὲ Ἡράκλειτος ὡς μέγα τι καὶ σεμνὸν διαπεπραγμένος, “ἐδιζησάμην,” φησίν, “ἑμεωτόν,” καὶ τῶν ἐν Δελφοῖς γραμμάτων θειότατον ἐδόκει τὸ “γνώθι σεαυτόν,” ὃ δὴ καὶ Σωκράτει τῆς ἀπορίας καὶ ζητήσεως ταύτης ἀρχὴν ἐνέδωκεν, ὡς Ἀριστοτέλης ἐν τοῖς Πλατωνικοῖς εἶρηκε· Κωλώτη δὲ γελοῖον δοκεῖ. This reference to Aristotle (fr.1 Rose) probably is added by Plutarch, perhaps to add authority to this interpretation of Socrates' *zetesis*; I doubt that F. H. Sandbach's skepticism about his direct knowledge of Aristotle (*ICS* 7 [1982] 207–32) is justified: for one argument against it, see Vander Waerdt, *GRBS* 26 (1985) 379f n.23.

<sup>71</sup> Epicurus uses this term to refer to what is self-evident, not in need of demonstration (e.g. our knowledge that the gods exist, *Ep. ad Men.* 123; a *prolepsis*, D.L. 10.31).

senses, that “we eat food, not grass, and when rivers are high we cross them by boat, but when they have become fordable, we cross them on foot,” follows up with this: “your arguments, Socrates, were charlatans; you said one thing to those you encountered in discussion, but you did something else.”

Colotes’ further charge that Socrates’ arguments are ἀλαζόνες deserves special notice. Presumably he means that in speech Socrates rejects the plain evidence of the senses, even though he acts on the basis of them. Such an inconsistency, as we have seen, suffices to discredit him according to Epicurean doctrine. But Colotes’ characterization of Socrates as ἀλαζών has a further point (*cf. Non posse* 1086E-F). As Philodemus makes clear in a memorable passage of his *On Vices* (cols. XXI.37–XXIII.37), Socrates is the paradigm of the εἴρων and ἀλαζών, two of the most objectionable traits in the Epicurean catalogue of vices.<sup>72</sup> Culling his examples from a wide variety of Xenophontic and Platonic texts, Philodemus portrays Socrates as one who praises the man he censures, deprecates himself but is well aware of his own cleverness at deception, ascribes his own displays of wisdom to others, is flattering at parties, and engages in a host of other activities inimical to the Epicurean practice of παρρησία or frank speech.<sup>73</sup> This is an essential feature of Epicurean educational therapy, one which characterizes even the friendly relations among sages (Περὶ παρρησίας VIIIa9–b5). In branding Socrates an ἀλαζών, Colotes means to exclude him from the community of those who improve one another’s lives through the kindness of frank speech. This criticism may provide further evidence that Colotes’ Socrates is the skeptical authority of Arcesilaus, for Socrates’ irony is little emphasized by the early Hellenistic

<sup>72</sup> This passage is translated by K. Kleve, “*Scurra Atticus: The Epicurean View of Socrates*,” in Συζήτησις (*supra* n.7) 227–53 at 246f; *De vitiis* is edited by C. Jensen (Leipzig 1911). On the negative characterization of these terms, used interchangeably, since the εἴρων is an ἀλαζών (*De vit.* XXI.37f; *cf. Arist. Eth. Nic.* 1127b27–29), see M. T. Riley, “The Epicurean Criticism of Socrates,” *Phoenix* 34 (1980) 55–68; the Epicureans probably drew on Aristophanes’ *Nubes* 445–51 (*cf.* 362 with the scholion). Philodemus bases his portrait on τὰ Σωκρατικά μνημονεόμενα (*De vit.* XXIII.36f), and his examples show that he is relying in the first instance on the Socratic writings of Xenophon and Plato. The Xenophontic Socrates himself is much concerned to combat ἀλαζονεία among his associates: *Mem.* 1.7.

<sup>73</sup> On its rôle in Epicurean educational practice, see Philodemus Περὶ παρρησίας, ed. A. Olivieri (Leipzig 1914); the Epicurean objections to Socrates on this point are set out by Riley (*supra* n.72) 65–68.



dogmatic schools,<sup>74</sup> but it could have proved very useful to Arcesilaus as a way of disarming apparent positive claims to knowledge on Socrates' part. Colotes might well have meant to turn Arcesilaus' interpretation of Socrates against him by rejecting his irony as a vice.

The cumulative effect of this evidence is to leave little doubt that Colotes is attacking the portrait of Socrates which Arcesilaus drew in seeking an authority for his own practice of *epoche*. It seems likely that Colotes' interest in Plato's dialogues has a similar motivation. He wrote two anti-commentaries, if we may so call them, *Against Plato's Lysis* and *Against Plato's Euthydemus*, of which substantial papyri are extant.<sup>75</sup> There can be little doubt that the purpose of these works is to discredit Academic appeals to Socrates' conversations as support for his alleged skepticism. For in one passage of *Against Plato's Euthydemus*, Colotes plainly refers to his opponents as practicing *epoche* (χιϰ3-5, ἢ [φῶμεν ὡς] οἱ ἐπόχως [*scil.* πράττοντες] τῶν ταχέων ἐλάττω πράττουσιν), and in many passages of *Against Plato's Lysis* he criticizes Hippothales for failing to take τὸ ἐναργές into account.<sup>76</sup> It is unclear how fully Colotes elaborated this charge, but the term ἐναργή is an Epicurean catchword that could by itself imply that Colotes' opponents cast skeptical doubt on the plain evidence of the senses.

Thus Colotes' interest both in Socrates and in Plato's representation of him is due to the attempt of contemporary Academics to appropriate its authority for their own skeptical practice. This conclusion has considerable historical importance. For it is Colotes, I suggest, who makes Socrates one of the Epicurean school's principal philosophical opponents, and who defines the terms and tone in which he is discussed in the later tradition. Though it has

<sup>74</sup> Cf. A. A. Long, "Socrates in Hellenistic Philosophy," *CQ* n.s. 38 (1988) 150-71 at 151f. In view of Xenophon's importance in forming the Epicurean view of Socrates (Philodemus' *Περὶ οἰκονομίας*, ed. C. Jensen [Leipzig 1906], responds point-by-point to Xenophon's *Oeconomicus*), it is a pity that Long (152) misrepresents Xenophon's "often stodgy Socrates" as "no ironist"; this myth is finally put to rest by D. Morrison, "On Professor Vlastos' Xenophon," *Ancient Philosophy* 7 (1987) 9-22. I shall argue elsewhere that Xenophon was a fundamental source for philosophical reflection on Socrates during the Hellenistic period, contrary to Long's claim that "it was Plato's Socrates, rather than any other, that stimulated serious philosophy" (154).

<sup>75</sup> Cf. *supra* n.12.

<sup>76</sup> These are collected by Concolino Mancini (*supra* n.12) 61-63.

gone unnoticed in the scholarly discussion,<sup>77</sup> Epicureans prior to Colotes take virtually no interest in Socrates. Epicurus himself does not mention Socrates.<sup>78</sup> A work *Against Plato's Euthyphro* circulated under Metrodorus' name, but Philodemus questioned its authenticity, and it is unclear whether the main target of this work was Socrates or Plato.<sup>79</sup> The only Epicurean work concerned with Socrates from this period is Idomeneus' *Περὶ τῶν Σωκρατικῶν*, in one book.<sup>80</sup> Like most ancient biography, this rumor-mongering work took no serious interest in Socrates' philosophy.<sup>81</sup> In our surviving testimonia, Idomeneus contends that Crito's arguments urging Socrates to escape from prison belong to Aeschines, and that Plato transferred them to Crito because Aeschines was more a friend to Aristippus than to himself (D.L. 2.60, 3.36); or that Aeschines' dialogues really were written by Socrates, and were given to Aeschines by Socrates' wife Xanthippe after his death (Ath. 611D-E; cf. D.L. 2.60). It is doubtful that Idomeneus' work had any influence on serious philosophical discussion.

Thus Colotes alone among the early members of the school wrote in detail against Socrates. To later Epicureans (such as Philo-

<sup>77</sup> Neither Kleve nor Riley (cited *supra* n.72) consider the origins of Epicurean interest in Socrates, thus missing the philosophical significance of much of the Epicurean criticisms. Long (*supra* n.74) 156 notes "the general probability that Epicurean attacks on Socrates had a contemporary rather than a historical target," but oddly takes no account of the best evidence for this, the criticism of Socrates in *Adv.Col.* 1116E-1119C.

<sup>78</sup> In a brief doxographical passage (*Brut.* 292), Cicero in passing attributes to Epicurus a rejection of Socratic irony (*nec Epicuro, qui id reprehendit, assentior*), but no extant quotation of Epicurus confirms this. Perhaps Cicero (or his source) simply foists on the Master himself a view well known to belong to such contemporary Epicureans as Philodemus (see *supra* n.72).

<sup>79</sup> *De piet.* col. XIII.1-13 (text courtesy of Dirk Obbink): οὕτωι δὲ μακρὰν ἀφελήκασι τοῦ μὴ τὸν ἀ[γνεύ]οντα λόγον ἐν τοῖς περὶ θεῶν λέγειν ὥστε καὶ Σωκράτην Μητρόδωρος ἐν τῶι Πρὸς Εὐθύφωνα τὸν Πλάτωνος (εἴπερ ἐπόει τοῦτο) καταμέμ[φε]ται "τί ὄ[σιον ἐ]στὶ" λ[έ]γον[τα: "and so far are they [*scil.* the Epicureans] from rendering an impious account in their writings on the gods that Metrodorus in his treatise *Against the Euthyphro of Plato* (if indeed he wrote it) attacks Socrates for asking 'What is holy?'"

<sup>80</sup> For the (rather meager) evidence concerning this work, see A. Angeli, "I frammenti di Idomeneo di Lampsaco" *CronErcol* 11 (1981) 41-101 at 56-61, 68-70 (fragments), and 92-94 (commentary); also F. Jacoby, *FGrHist* 338FF16f, with commentary.

<sup>81</sup> For a characterization of this literature, see J. Mejer, *Diogenes Laertius and his Hellenistic Background* (=Hermes Einzelschr. 40 [Wiesbaden 1978]) 90-93.

demus)—who could hardly avoid debate with other schools over the proper interpretation of Socrates, given his importance as an exemplum throughout the Hellenistic period—only Colotes provided guidance for criticism of Socrates. His characterization of Socrates as an ἀλαζών features prominently in later discussion, as in the passage from Philodemus' *On Vices* mentioned above. Colotes may also have initiated the Epicurean practice of writing 'anti-commentaries' on specific Socratic works, a practice continued in *Against Plato's Gorgias* by Zeno of Sidon<sup>82</sup> and in the *Oeconomicus* of Philodemus. In an extended passage of the latter work (cols. IV-VI), Socrates is criticized for failing to employ *prolepsis*; since *prolepsis* enables one to assent to plain evidence (D.L. 10.31), this passage may bear the echo of Colotes' polemic against the Hellenistic Academy.

Colotes therefore clearly set the agenda for the Epicurean school's criticism of Socrates, both in doctrine and in tone. Colotes' criticism of Socrates for his irony and charlatanism are constantly echoed in the later Epicurean sources, and this can be no accident since Socrates' irony was not much stressed by early Hellenistic thinkers other than Colotes (*cf. supra* n.74). His characterization of Socrates as an ἀλαζών perfectly suits the strategy of an *apraxia* argument, with its alleged inconsistency between arguments and deeds. More generally, the personal tone Colotes adopted in his attacks on philosophical rivals may well explain why later Epicureans uniformly displayed such hostility toward Socrates.<sup>83</sup> The catalogue of abuse attributed to Epicurus, Metrodorus, and Colotes by Plutarch at *Non posse* 1086E–1087A recalls that of Timocrates at D.L. 10.6–8, and suggests that Timocrates' representation of Epicurus as virulently hostile to his philosophical rivals is entirely appropriate for Epicurus' colleagues if not, perhaps, for himself. In the case of Socrates, then, Colotes added a major figure to the Epicurean roster of philosophical rivals as a result of his polemics with contemporary Academics.

<sup>82</sup> Zeno fr.25 in *P.Herc.* 1005 col. viii, edd. A. Angeli and M. Colaizzo, *CronErcol* 9 (1979) 80.

<sup>83</sup> Socrates does not figure in Sedley's study (*supra* n.28) of Epicurus' views about his professional rivals, since Timocrates does not mention him. If I am right, though, the virulent and personal way in which these rivals were attacked is not just a distortion by Timocrates, but is well attested for Epicurus' own colleagues, such as Colotes and Metrodorus.

## VI. Colotes versus Arcesilaus

We come finally to Colotes' attack on Arcesilaus. Plutarch taunts Colotes with cowardice for failing to name the proponents of *epoche* (*Adv. Col.* 1120c), but it was a convention of Hellenistic philosophical polemic not to identify a living opponent by name (*cf. supra* n.18). Plutarch has no doubt that these proponents are Academic followers of Arcesilaus, and indeed all the evidence points in this direction.<sup>84</sup> Colotes' use of the *apraxia* argument against Arcesilaus follows the familiar pattern we have observed, but he also flatly denies the possibility of *epoche* and charges Arcesilaus with advocating *epoche* as a dogma. To appreciate the status of these objections, we need to consider Arcesilaus' philosophical practice in more detail.

There are certainly ancient sources which suggest that Arcesilaus advocated *epoche* as a positive dogma the truth of which he was committed to defending in his own name. Thus Sextus, in setting out the differences between Pyrrhonism and the so-called Middle Academy, says that Arcesilaus made *epoche* the ethical *telos*, that he pronounced particular acts of *epoche* good and of assent bad, and that he makes these statements not on the basis of what appears, but "with reference to nature, so that he claims that *epoche* itself is good, and assent bad."<sup>85</sup> In truth, Sextus concludes, Arcesi-

<sup>84</sup> It is necessary to make this point since DeLacy (1956 [*supra* n.3] 437) identifies Colotes' target as "the school of Pyrrho" and proposes a re-dating of his work from 268 or so to thirty years earlier. These claims are tacitly withdrawn in his later publications.

<sup>85</sup> Sext. Emp. *Pyrr.* 1.232–34: ὁ μὲντοι Ἄρκεσίλαος, ὃν τῆς μέσης Ἀκαδημίας ἐλέγομεν εἶναι προστάτην καὶ ἀρχηγόν, πάνυ μοι δοκεῖ τοῖς Πυρρωνείοις κοινωνεῖν λόγοις, ὡς μίαν εἶναι σχεδὸν τὴν κατ' αὐτὸν ἀγωγὴν καὶ τὴν ἡμετέραν· οὔτε γὰρ περὶ ὑπάρξεως ἢ ἀνυπαρξίας τινὸς ἀποφαινόμενος εὐρίσκεται, οὔτε κατὰ πίστιν ἢ ἀπιστίαν προκρίνει τι ἕτερον ἕτερον, ἀλλὰ περὶ πάντων ἐπέχει. καὶ τέλος μὲν εἶναι τὴν ἐποχὴν, ἢ συνεισέρχεσθαι τὴν ἀταραξίαν ἡμεῖς ἐφάσκομεν. λέγει δὲ καὶ ἀγαθὰ μὲν εἶναι τὰς κατὰ μέρος ἐποχὰς, κακὰ δὲ τὰς κατὰ μέρος συγκαταθέσεις. [ἤτοι] πλὴν εἰ μὴ λέγοι τις ὅτι ἡμεῖς μὲν κατὰ τὸ φαινόμενον ἡμῖν ταῦτα λέγομεν καὶ οὐ διαβεβαιωτικῶς, ἐκεῖνος δὲ ὡς πρὸς τὴν φύσιν, ὥστε καὶ ἀγαθὸν μὲν εἶναι αὐτὴν λέγειν τὴν ἐποχὴν, κακὸν δὲ τὴν συγκατάθεσιν. εἰ δὲ δεῖ καὶ τοῖς περὶ αὐτοῦ λεγομένοις πιστεῦειν, φασὶν ὅτι κατὰ μὲν τὸ πρόχειρον Πυρρωνείως ἐφαίνετο εἶναι, κατὰ δὲ τὴν ἀλήθειαν δογματικὸς ἦν· καὶ ἐπεὶ τῶν ἐταίρων ἀπόπειραν ἐλάμβανε διὰ τῆς ἀπορητικῆς εἰ εὐφῶς ἔχουσι πρὸς τὴν ἀνάληψιν τῶν Πλατωνικῶν δογμάτων, δόξαι αὐτὸν ἀπορητικὸν εἶναι, τοῖς μὲντοι γε εὐφύεσι τῶν ἐταίρων τὰ Πλάτωνος παρεγγεῖναι.

laos was δογματικός. Aenesidemus comes to a similar conclusion in his *Pyrrhonian Arguments*, claiming that the Academics (especially contemporary ones) sometimes agree with Stoic opinions, so much so that they “appear to be just Stoics in conflict with Stoics” (*ap. Photius Bibl. cod. 212, 169b–170a*). Aenesidemus and Sextus certainly were not alone in interpreting the Academic practice of *epoche* dogmatically,<sup>86</sup> even if they have the most obvious motives for doing so. The difficulty with this interpretation, of course, is that it turns Arcesilaus into a negative dogmatist who inconsistently exempts his own ethical recommendation from his practice of *epoche*. But we have Cicero’s testimony (*Acad. 1.45*) that Arcesilaus departed from Socrates in acknowledging that he does not even know that he knows nothing: *Arcesilas negabat esse quidquam quod sciri posset, ne illud quidem ipsum, quod Socrates sibi reliquisset*. Since this move presumably is intended to forestall the charge that the skeptic claims to know nothing in contravention of *epoche*, a different interpretation of Arcesilaus’ philosophical practice seems necessary.

In recent years, scholars have favored a view first advanced by Pierre Coussin,<sup>87</sup> who holds that all the known arguments of Arcesilaus work from Stoic premises and are *ad hominem* attempts to show the Stoic that, by his own principles, he had better suspend assent. In the case of *epoche*, Arcesilaus couples his argument that there is no cognitive impression (see *supra* 244) with the Stoics’ view that the sage will never assent to a non-cognitive impression (*Cic. Acad. 2.77*), producing the conclusion that, “according to the Stoics,” the sage suspends assent (*Sext. Emp. Math. 7.150–58*). This argument is evidently *ad hominem* in character, and the same may be said of Arcesilaus’ practice of *epoche* in general. In recommending that one suspend assent, Arcesilaus most probably is not advancing a dogma in his own name, but merely undertaking “to articulate the views which guide his behavior ... as it were, giving an

<sup>86</sup> Numenius *ap. Eus. Praep. Evang. 4.15, 7.14*; August. *Contra Acad. 2.5.11*; *cf. Cic. Acad. 1.45, 2.28f, 2.59, 77f*. For the sense of δόγμα in skeptical texts, *cf. the evidence assembled by J. Barnes, “The Beliefs of a Pyrrhonist,” PCPS N.S. 28 (1982) 1–29, with the discussion of Tarrant (supra n.2) 29–32.*

<sup>87</sup> “Le Stoicisme de la Nouvelle Academie,” *Revue d’histoire de la philosophie* 3 (1929) 241–76 (English translation in Burnyeat [*supra* n.2] 31–63); also “L’origine et l’évolution de l’ἐποχή,” *REG* 42 (1929) 373–97. The available alternatives for interpreting Arcesilaus’ advocacy of *epoche* are well canvassed in Long and Sedley (*supra* n.27) II 446–48.

autobiographical report, without taking a stand on the truth of his views."<sup>88</sup> Now, this interpretation of Arcesilaus' practice of *epoche* is not uncontroversial. In particular, Anna Maria Ioppolo and Julia Annas have recently claimed vigorously that Arcesilaus argues from certain Stoic premises because he accepts them as true, and that, accordingly, he has a positive case to make for *epoche*. Their case has undeniable attractions, though in my opinion it is not sustained by the evidence.<sup>89</sup>

In any case, Colotes does resort to the tactic of branding his Academic opponents as dogmatists by characterizing their advocacy of *epoche* as itself an inconsistently held dogma. Of course, the δόγματα in Colotes' title by itself implies that he construes Arcesilaus' practice of *epoche* dogmatically. This strategy enables him to insinuate that Arcesilaus' deeds do not match his words, and he makes his point through a series of cutting puns. Plutarch's comment (*Adv. Col.* 1121E) that Colotes was grieved by Arcesilaus' reputation (*doxa*) may preserve a suggestion by Colotes to the effect that one could not have acquired such *doxa* (to which Colotes alludes elsewhere: 1124B) without holding *doxai*—in which case Arcesilaus refutes himself, since he accepts that the sage has no (mere) *doxai* (*Cic. Acad.* 2.77). This suggestion is confirmed by the immediately ensuing remark, attributed to Colotes, that Arcesilaus, while he said nothing of his own (a reference no doubt to his advocacy of *epoche*), gave the unlettered the assumption and belief (*doxa*) that he had—thus his words and actions do not match. Plutarch defends Arcesilaus against the charge of being fond of any reputation (*doxa*) for novelty by citing certain sophists who claimed that Arcesilaus attributed the "doctrines of suspension of judgment" (τὰ τῆς ἐποχῆς δόγματα) to his predecessors: so, Plutarch concludes, thanks are due to those who pass along the pedigree of Academic reasoning (1122A–B). Thus Colotes characterizes Arcesilaus' advocacy of *epoche* as a dogma in order to impute to him an inconsistency between his views and his conduct.

Unfortunately, Plutarch preserves only two traces of the polemic Colotes directed against Arcesilaus, and so leaves it unclear why

<sup>88</sup> Frede (1984 [*supra* n.2]) 264.

<sup>89</sup> Their case relies principally on two texts, *Adv. Col.* 1122A–D and *Sext. Emp. Math.* 7.150–58, both of which seem to me clearly anti-Stoic rejoinders; moreover, I have already argued that we cannot confidently attribute the former passage to Arcesilaus himself (see *supra* n.54).

Colotes chose to interpret his practice of *epoche* as itself an inconsistently held dogma. We quoted the first charge earlier (*supra* 232): Colotes asks why the proponent of *epoche* does not dash off to a mountain rather than a bath, or walk to the wall rather than the door when he wants to go to the marketplace. This seems to be a straightforward claim<sup>90</sup> that falls well into the pattern of the *apraxia* arguments we have examined. To judge from Plutarch's reply, Colotes holds that such discrimination requires assent, so that the skeptic either must assent to a proposition about a perceptual object in contravention of *epoche*, or, if he withholds assent, must admit that he is unable to draw the distinctions among perceptible objects that are necessary to live. Plutarch undertakes to disarm this dilemma, on behalf of Arcesilaus, by restricting the scope of *epoche* to the realm of opinion: calling attention to the Epicurean doctrine that all impressions are true, he claims that sensation alone suffices for action, and that *epoche* "eliminates only our *doxai*, and deals with the others [sensations and irrational affections] as is natural."<sup>91</sup> Plutarch therefore needs to show that the elimination of opinion does not reduce the skeptic to *apraxia*.

There can be no doubt that Colotes rejects such a move. For in his second charge he flatly denies that *epoche* is possible in all cases: "But it is impossible not to give assent to plain evidence" (ἀλλὰ ἀδύνατον τὸ μὴ συγκατατίθεσθαι τοῖς ἐναργέσι, 1123A-B).<sup>92</sup> His

<sup>90</sup> DeLacy and Einarson (*supra* n.3) attempt to find significance in Colotes' choice of examples here, but I find the interpretations proposed far-fetched.

<sup>91</sup> Plutarch's response to Colotes' question (1122E-F): τοῦτο ἐρωτᾶς ἀκριβῆ τὰ αἰσθητήρια λέγων εἶναι καὶ τὰς φαντασίας ἀληθεῖς; ὅτι φαίνεται δήπουθεν αὐτῷ βαλανεῖον οὐ τὸ ὄρος ἀλλὰ τὸ βαλανεῖον, καὶ θύρα οὐχ ὁ τοῖχος ἀλλὰ ἡ θύρα, καὶ τῶν ἄλλων ὁμοίως ἕκαστον. ὁ γὰρ τῆς ἐποχῆς λόγος οὐ παρατρέπει τὴν αἴσθησιν οὐδὲ τοῖς ἀλόγοις πάθεσιν αὐτοῖς καὶ κινήμασιν ἀλλοίωσιν ἐμποιεῖ διαταράττουσαν τὸ φανταστικόν, ἀλλὰ τὰς δόξας μόνον ἀναιρεῖ, χρῆται δὲ τοῖς ἄλλοις ὡς πέφυκεν. For ὡς πέφυκεν cf. Sext. Emp. *Pyrr.* 1.22-24.

<sup>92</sup> My reading of this passage differs from that of DeLacy and Einarson: I suggest that the quotation from Colotes ends with ἐναργέσι, and that we read τὸ γὰρ ἀρνεῖσθαι ... τοῦ μήτε with mss E and B rather than Shorey's emendation τοῦ ... τὸ. Plutarch's rebuttal to Colotes on behalf of Arcesilaus then reads: if it is impossible to withhold assent from the accepted (taking ἐναργέσι=πεπιστευμένα), then it is even more unreasonable to deny the accepted (as Epicureans do) than neither to deny nor accept it (as the Academics). And who, Plutarch goes on to ask, upsets the accepted and battles with plain evidence but the Epicurean? (The foregoing interpretation originated in discussion with David Sedley, whom I thank warmly.)

argument presumably is that there are certain impressions which are ἐναργεῖς and which, once confirmed by *prolepseis*, are such that one cannot withhold assent from them; hence the skeptic, when confronted by one of these, cannot possibly practice *epoche*. Plutarch unfortunately, if typically, records none of Colotes' supporting argumentation. Colotes might have drawn on the model of a Stoic argument,<sup>93</sup> a possibility strengthened by his use of the Stoic term συγκατατίθεσθαι here, but he might also have thought his claim follows directly from the self-evident character of impressions characterized as ἐναργεῖς (cf. D.L. 10.33). These impressions compel one's assent; and presumably Colotes will have offered examples of them in order to show that the skeptic in fact cannot invariably practice *epoche*.

The skeptic's task in answering Colotes, accordingly, is to show that he can withhold assent from all classes of impressions and not yet fall into *apraxia*. The strategy Plutarch offers on behalf of Arcesilaus, as we noted, is to claim that *epoche* eliminates only *doxai*, and that the skeptic naturally follows his sensations and irrational affections as they move him to action. Now, there is no evidence that this is *Arcesilaus'* strategy since, as we have seen, no Academic before Plutarch is attested to have answered the Epicurean *apraxia* argument. But it is a plausible strategy for Arcesilaus, and worth exploring as an example of how he might have tried to disarm Colotes' criticism. It is obviously modeled on the earlier Academic rejoinder to the Stoic *apraxia* argument, recorded by Plutarch at 1122B-D (cf. *supra* n.54). And it faces the same difficulty as its model.

Both these rejoinders to the *apraxia* argument presuppose that sensation and impulse alone suffice to explain human action, that an agent need not assent to a cognitive impression or to plain evidence in order to act. It is easy to see how irrational affections might stimulate certain kinds of action without recourse to rational assent. For example: one drinks when thirsty, or recoils from the touch of a burning object; the agent who does so habitually may develop a disposition that guides his impulses even independently of sensation. One might try to extend this approach, as Sextus does in explaining how the skeptic lives undogmatically according to the rules of

<sup>93</sup> For the Stoic claim that there are certain impressions, namely clear and distinct ones, which are such that one cannot withhold assent from them (*Acad.* 2.38), cf. Frede (*supra* n.52).



everyday conduct (*Pyr.* 1.22–24), to encompass not just the compulsion exercised by our bodily states, but even traditional laws and customs, and the teaching of the crafts.<sup>94</sup> But even if the dogmatist grants the skeptic this strategy, he still wants to know how to account for voluntary or intentional action, that is, action which the dogmatist believes cannot be explained just as an instinctive response to irrational affections. Thus the dogmatist might argue that in any case in which these affections conflict—when desire for honor, for instance, conflicts with desire for self-preservation—the skeptic must have recourse to reason to adjudicate between the conflicting courses of action available to him. But how can he do so if *epoche* eliminates all opinion, leaving him entirely dependent upon irrational affections to guide his action?

Yet a number of counter-arguments remain available to the skeptic. He might persist in the claim that the dogmatist can explain all kinds of human action just in terms of irrational affections: in the case of conflicting desires, it is simply the stronger one (whether, e.g., honor or self-preservation) which wins out, and the agent need not have recourse to reason in order to adjudicate between them. And he might maintain that the dogmatist simply begs the question by classifying certain kinds of action as voluntary or intentional, and then distinguishing these from other kinds of action on the grounds that they require rational assent. Such a distinction presupposes what the skeptic questions, namely that there are certain impressions from which one cannot withhold assent. The status of the skeptic's rejoinder to the *apraxia* argument thus turns upon the debate about rational assent. It is this debate, of course, which engaged the attention of generations of Stoics and Academic skeptics from the time of Zeno and Arcesilaus to the end of the Hellenistic era.<sup>95</sup> Once one sees that the skeptic's rejoinder to the *apraxia* argument in fact relies on his rejection of the Stoic and Epicurean claim that there are certain impressions to which one cannot avoid giving rational assent, one understands why he finds no need to account for voluntary or intentional action which the dogmatist claims must be explained in terms of rational assent.

Nor is it the case that the skeptic himself is committed to the account of human action that he offers as a rejoinder to the dog-

<sup>94</sup> For the notion of passive assent on which Sextus here relies, see Frede (1984 [*supra* n.2]) 261–65.

<sup>95</sup> On this debate, see Frede (*supra* n.52).

matist's *apraxia* argument. For while he accepts the challenge of explaining, in his dogmatic opponent's own terms, how action is possible without rational assent, he is by no means committed to the premises or canons of logic on which that account relies. He merely accepts these for the purposes of argument, to show the dogmatist that, by his own principles, he had better suspend assent. Thus the option of disowning the dogmatic framework which he accepts in any given dialectical context always remains open to the skeptic. In this sense no argument can finally refute his skepticism, unless it be one that establishes as true a certain dogmatic framework—in the context of our debate, an argument that proves that there are certain impressions from which one cannot withhold assent. Thus the dogmatist can finally lay to rest the skeptic's rejoinder to his *apraxia* argument only by establishing the truth of the central tenets of his epistemology.

## VII. Conclusion

Our purpose has been to reconstruct a neglected but important chapter in the history of Hellenistic epistemology. To judge from the surviving evidence, Epicureans prior to Colotes had been concerned with skepticism only in the dogmatic form in which it had been advanced by their Democritean predecessors. Colotes therefore faced a considerable challenge in developing argumentative strategies to counter the much more powerful skepticism of Arcesilaus. Since the Academic skeptic advocates no δόγματα of his own, Colotes had to counter his advocacy of *epoche* by discrediting the way in which he argued his case. His favored strategy is the *apraxia* argument, which challenges the skeptic to show how he can invariably practice *epoche* and still act—how, that is, he can even live without drawing distinctions among perceptible objects, distinctions which in Epicurean theory presuppose acts of assent.

We do not know precisely how Arcesilaus answered Colotes' challenge, since neither he nor any Academic skeptic prior to Plutarch is attested to have answered the Epicurean *apraxia* argument. The Academic skeptic, of course, does not have recourse to the more modern strategy of disregarding an alleged inconsistency between one's views and conduct as irrelevant to the truth of his

skepticism.<sup>96</sup> Arcesilaus' most likely counter-move, we may conjecture following Plutarch, would have been to construct an account, in Epicurean terms, of how action is possible without rational assent. Such an account, of course, is no more likely to explain what the dogmatist construes as action presupposing rational assent than the early Academic reply to the Stoic *apraxia* argument recorded at *Adv. Col.* 1122A-D. This objection need not worry the skeptic, however, since he questions the dogmatist's claim that there is such rational assent, that is, that there are certain impressions from which one cannot withhold assent. And since the skeptic can disown, at any stage, the premises and canons of logic that he borrows from his dogmatic opponent for the purpose of argument, no argument short of one that demonstrates the existence of this disputed class of impressions can actually refute his skepticism. The status of the *apraxia* argument thus turns, in the end, on the debate over the possibility of rational assent. No doubt Colotes was certain, as he asserts in his second charge against Arcesilaus, that the plain evidence of the senses does compel assent in the relevant sense. And by calling into question the skeptic's ability invariably to act according to his own recommendation of universal *epoche*, Colotes casts doubt on the consistency, and thereby the desirability, of a life without rational assent.<sup>97</sup>

DUKE UNIVERSITY  
October, 1989

<sup>96</sup> See J. Annas, "Doing Without Objective Values: Ancient and Modern Strategies," in *The Norms of Nature*, edd. M. Schofield and G. Striker (Cambridge 1986) 3-29 at 26-29.

<sup>97</sup> My interest in Colotes was awakened by the opportunity to read Plutarch's *Against Colotes* with David Sedley while I was a visitor at Christ's College, Cambridge, during the Lent and Easter terms of 1988. I profited enormously from the stimulus of our weekly discussions about Colotes, and also from Sedley's detailed and penetrating criticism of successive drafts of this paper, which has led to numerous improvements. I should also like to thank Julia Annas, Phillip Mitsis, and John Rist, as well as my student Howard Brodie, for their helpful suggestions, and the Duke University Research Council, whose award of a Major Grant enabled me to work at Cambridge during July and August of 1989.