Academic Scepticism in the Development of Early Modern Philosophy

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ACADEMIC SCEPTICISM IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF EARLY MODERN PHILOSOPHY

Plínio Junqueira Smith
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Introduction

Richard Popkin, in his classic book *The History of Scepticism: From Savonarola to Bayle* (Popkin 2003) and in many other works, established that scepticism played an important role in the development of early modern philosophy. He showed that ancient sceptical texts were widely known to many philosophers, including Montaigne, Bacon, Descartes, Gassendi, Pascal, Bayle, and Hume, all of whom were deeply involved with the sceptical challenge. In the wake of Popkin's landmark study, it can no longer be doubted that early modern philosophers renewed ancient scepticism. In fact, from the sixteenth century to the eighteenth century, so many philosophers and theologians were engaged with scepticism that one wonders why the significance of modern scepticism took so long to be noticed.

Popkin also offered a nice account of the impact of scepticism on early modern philosophy. One of his main points was that in issues concerning religious truth, sceptical arguments were of central importance. Both Reformers and Counter-Reformers relied on sceptical arguments to criticize their opponents. Montaigne extended sceptical doubt to every area of intellectual pursuit, and there arose three basic reactions to the resulting *crise pyrrhonienne*. Some merely tried to reinforce Aristotelian dogmatism; others, like Descartes, sought a new philosophy that could withstand the sceptical challenge; a final group of philosophers tried to combine the new, emergent science with a sceptical outlook. In subsequent editions of his book (as well as in many other texts), Popkin refined his initial picture, gathering further information and incorporating into his own work the findings of the many scholars who followed in his footsteps (Laursen, Maia Neto, Paganini 2009a).

Historians of early modern scepticism improved on Popkin's basic picture by reexamining the period with fresh eyes and producing an astounding richness of information. Analyses of a multitude of thinkers came to light (Popkin 1996; Moreau 2001; Paganini 2003; Maia Neto and Popkin 2004; Laursen, Maia Neto and Paganini Laursen 2009b). Moreover, the scope of Popkin's initial research was broadened with scholars focusing on scepticism during both the Middle Ages (Bosley and Tweedale 1997) and the Enlightenment (Olaso, Popkin and Tonelli 1997; Charles and Smith 2013). Scepticism came to be perceived as crucial even to

literature, especially for tragedy in Shakespeare's time (Bradshaw 1987; Bell 2002; Hamlin 2005; Hillman 2007; Zerba 2012; Preedy 2013).

In pursuing the path opened up by Popkin, scholars progressively came to question his very views. The expanding literature led to an intense discussion of some of Popkin's main contentions, such as the interplay between faith and scepticism (Paganini 2008) and the sceptical reaction to Cartesianism (Watson 1966). According to Benítez and Paganini (2002, p. 10), "certain conclusions of the research in the last two decades have deeply modified the historical picture in which it is possible to integrate the sceptical themes of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries." One important criticism of Popkin's interpretation concerns the existence of distinct forms of scepticism.

Any study of ancient scepticism must make mention of its two distinct forms, Pyrrhonian and Academic, and explain their similarities and dissimilarities. However, in the case of early modern philosophy, the importance of the distinction is less clear. Popkin speaks only of a *crise pyrrhonienne* and does not seem to pay much attention to Academic scepticism. Perhaps one could say in his defense that he does not neglect the role of Academic scepticism, for he did not distinguish very carefully between these two forms. But even if that were true, that would only point out the need to go deeper into that issue. Therefore, an important question for historians of early modern philosophy is: What is the exact form that scepticism took in modernity?

Following Popkin, most historians of early modern scepticism emphasize the role of Pyrrhonism. After all, during this period, the works of Sextus Empiricus were translated into Latin, English, and French and were extensively read and discussed. According to this account, early modern philosophers were basically reacting to Pyrrhonism. Some, like Montaigne, adopted it (Eva 2004, 2007), while others, like Descartes, rejected it, and still others, like Bacon (Manzo 2009) and Pascal (Pécharman 2000; Bouchilloux 2004), had a more balanced position in the face of the Pyrrhonian challenge. Pyrrhonism was an ally against the dogmatism of the Aristotelians and helped pave the way for early modern science. Even in the case of literature, it seems, Pyrrhonism attracted most of the attention. Through very well-informed historical research in the spirit of Popkin's work, Hamlin (2005) traces the wide diffusion of a partial translation of Sextus into English: *The Sceptick*. On this showing, Academic scepticism had a minor role to play, and its significance could perhaps be neglected. At best, a study of Academic scepticism would not alter the general picture, but merely complement some explanation here and there.

The reality, however, is more complex. The revival of Pyrrhonism is certainly an important part of the explanation of how and why ancient scepticism was at the heart of early modern philosophy, giving to it its special twist. What is not so clear is whether it is correct to downplay the role played by Academic scepticism. Recent studies suggest that a complete account of the role played by ancient scepticism must include both the Pyrrhonian and the Academic traditions (Schmitt 1983). José Raimundo Maia Neto (1997, 2005) is among those who first called attention to the impact of Academic scepticism and tried to assess many of its implications. Some have even gone so far as to claim that Academic scepticism was more important

than Pyrrhonism (Naya 2009). Very recent scholarship seems only to strengthen the idea that the revival of Pyrrhonism cannot be the whole story (Maia Neto 2014).

Evidence for this can be found, for instance, in the number of editions of Cicero's *Academica* and Sextus' *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* and *Adversus Mathematicus*: while the former was printed no less than ten times, the latter works were published only once (cf. Schmitt 1972; Hunt 1998). Moreover, there had been great interest in rhetoric since the Renaissance, and Cicero's works conformed much more to the taste of those times (Inwood and Mansfeld 1997; Paganini and Maia Neto 2009). In fact, criticism of Aristotelian science and interest in rhetoric go hand in hand, in so far as the concepts of certitude and truth are replaced by the concepts of probability and verisimilitude (Spoerhase, Werle, Wild 2009). Instead of rigorous demonstrations or sheer authority, what one finds is an effort to convince by probable arguments. Whereas the Pyrrhonist tries to bring about suspension of judgment, the Academic tries to establish that one side of a given question has more probability than the other (Allen 1964; Sihvola 2000). Accordingly, we see that a number of major philosophers seem to have used Academic scepticism more than is usually recognized. Even before the early modern period, there is no doubt that Academic scepticism caught the attention of many philosophers, such as Nicholas of Autrecourt, Henry of Ghent, and Duns Scotus. What explains such attention is Augustine's *Contra Academicos* (Bosley and Tweedale 1997).

The present book explores some of the complexities brought about by the emergence of this new picture of early modern scepticism. Its purpose is not to substitute the idea of a *crise académicienne* for the idea of a *crise pyrrhonienne*. It is true that it is sometimes difficult, if not impossible, to distinguish the impact of Academic scepticism and of Pyrrhonian scepticism. Many authors simply do not make such a distinction or do not care much about it. Even so, we, as historians of early modern scepticism, should try to detect how both forms of scepticism were perceived and used throughout early modern philosophy. The purpose of this book is to offer a more nuanced framework for understanding early modern scepticism, one in which the full importance of Academic scepticism is duly acknowledged. More than generating a crisis, Academic scepticism was a tool for finding solutions, both from a humanistic point of view and from a scientific point of view. Borrowing from Hume, one could perhaps say that Academic scepticism not only presents us with sceptical doubts but also with sceptical solutions. As might be expected, the notion of probability plays a crucial role in many areas of early modern philosophy. This book provides material for further investigation in these areas, and it will have fulfilled its goal if the reader perceives that, whatever its exact significance and extent may ultimately prove to have been, Academic scepticism deserves closer attention from the historians of early modern philosophy. We hope to open up new paths that will lead to a better understanding of early modern scepticism as a whole.

The conception of this book is the same one that guides current historical research on the history of early modern philosophy. Nowadays, historians of early modern philosophy are no longer content to focus solely on epistemological issues, such as the debate between empiricists and rationalists, or on great philosophers, such as Descartes and Hume, preferring instead to trace connections between many areas,

such as theology and morals, and explore minor philosophers (Rutherford 2006). Many, if not most, of the key figures for understanding Academic scepticism in early modern philosophy are treated in this book. Each chapter aims to shed new light both on their philosophies and on their significance for Academic scepticism. The order of the chapters is mainly chronological, but also takes into account the philosophical relationship between the various thinkers.

The first four chapters are devoted to arguably the most notable sceptics of the Renaissance and early modernity: Sanches, Montaigne, Charron, and La Mothe Le Vayer. Without a clear understanding of how these thinkers understood and made use of Academic scepticism, it is unlikely that we will ever be able to grasp what modern scepticism became in the hands of later philosophers. Together, they set the stage for the subsequent role that would be played by Academic scepticism in early modern philosophy. Their reception, transformation, and use of Academic scepticism had not only a lasting effect but imprinted undeniable features on modern Academic scepticism.

Perhaps the most obvious example of the importance of Academic scepticism during the Renaissance period is Francisco Sanches' work *Quod nihil scitur* (*That Nothing is Known*). This work is Claudio Buccolini's topic in the first chapter. Many scholars have seen in Sanches' works some indication that he was familiar with Sextus Empiricus' works or that there is an established continuity with ancient Pyrrhonism, not with regard to theoretical subjects but in the practical side of his activity as a physician. Other interpreters, however, believe that Sanches' thought conformed mainly to Academic scepticism. Buccolini sides with the latter interpretation, for, on the one hand, Sanches never considered his own philosophical ideas to be in line with Pyrrhonian scepticism and, on the other, he proclaimed himself an Academic and was tied to Academic scepticism. Buccolini emphasizes Sanches' use of probabilism in his works as a physician, promoting a renewal of knowledge based on criticism of syllogistic and mathematical models of apodictic certainty and putting together Cicero's criticism and Academic probabilism with a new idea of "experience," with its roots in the senses, in repeated use (*usum*), in physicians' practices, and in the possibility of gaining a conjectural knowledge which tends to be "closer to truth."

Montaigne is arguably the pivotal figure for scepticism in early modern philosophy. Beginning with Pascal, he was perceived as a "pure Pyrrhonist." Most studies insist on Montaigne's debt to Sextus Empiricus, neglecting the *Academica* as one of the main sources for the scepticism presented in the *Essais*, except perhaps at the end of Montaigne's life. Sébastien Prat, in the second chapter, stresses the importance of the *Academica* as a source for Montaigne throughout the successive editions of the *Essais*. Sextus Empiricus exploits a systematic doubt, whereas Montaigne's sceptical doubt has more in common with that of Cicero. Moreover, Montaigne is closer to the intellectual freedom offered by the acataleptic doubt, using doubt as a way out of philosophy or philosophical constraint. Consequently, Montaigne's scepticism makes greater use of an inconstant criterion, like probability, as defended in Cicero's *Academica*. That instability of the probable in Montaigne and in Cicero is to be clearly opposed to "the stability of mind" of the Pyrrhonist

ataraxia. Thus, a reassessment of Montaigne's scepticism is of capital importance to a more balanced view of the role of Academic scepticism in early modern philosophy.

Pierre Charron, an important figure associated with Montaigne, was widely read in the seventeenth century. Anyone who wishes to understand the impact of Academic scepticism on early modern philosophy must pay close attention to his works. Fernando Bahr, in the third chapter, tries to develop an overall interpretation of Pierre Charron's huge, complex *Treatise on Wisdom*, emphasizing its pedagogical character and its aim of teaching the disciple a way of life that follows nature. In Bahr's view, while Charron's concept of nature is not sceptical, Academic scepticism gives him the main arguments for freeing the disciple from four cultural vices: passions, opinion, superstition, and science. These vices impede direct contact with the spontaneous and natural, whose model for Charron is the behavior of animals. In this sense, among the many philosophical lines that converge in the treatise, Academic scepticism seems to offer a key to understanding the Charronian system.

Though usually associated with Pyrrhonism, La Mothe Le Vayer's scepticism can only be fully understood in light of the sceptical Academy. As Sylvia Giocanti argues in the fourth chapter, the notion of probability plays a key role in Le Vayer's philosophy. The probable is not exclusively attached to a sceptical rule of action, as in the case of the Academic scepticism, but is mainly connected to the intellectual weight of arguments and their neutralization. More specifically, La Mothe Le Vayer seeks through the probable to distance himself intellectually from doctrines based on authority in order to moderate his adherence to them. This explains why he has no difficulty in avowing mistakes; on the contrary, he is happy to successively adhere to a variety of opinions. Thus, the probable, inherited from the New Academy, gives the sceptic his main characteristic: curiosity, for the sceptic willingly investigates all that appear probable rather than the true. One could say that the engine of his philosophy is this practice of uncertainty or that Academic probability is at the heart of La Mothe Le Vayer's scepticism.

It is worth pausing for a moment to review what has been achieved in these four initial chapters. The most important point that is worth stressing is that Academic scepticism is not conceived merely as a means to reject what has come before, but, above all, it furnishes tools for developing positive doctrines. This is clearly the case with Sanches and his scientific views. But Academic probabilism was also important for pedagogical and moral issues, as is obviously the case with Montaigne, Charron, and La Mothe Le Vayer. Intellectual freedom, the ability to explore and entertain new and different opinions, and right moral conduct were essential ideas of Academic scepticism in the Renaissance. Far from being a merely critical, negative doctrine, Academic scepticism seems to be a rich, positive stance.

The focus of the next set of chapters is on the role of Academic scepticism in the philosophies of thinkers whose main concern was the emergence of the new science, especially in its empirical aspects, such as Francis Bacon, the members of the Royal Society, and Pierre Gassendi. For these figures, as was the case of previous

philosophers, Academic scepticism was offering solutions rather than merely raising difficulties. This double aspect of Academic scepticism, already present in Sanches, is further and more deeply explored by them. On the one hand, Academic philosophy helped them to dislodge Aristotelian science by showing that, if one employs the methods commonly used heretofore, no stable knowledge would or could be achieved. On the other, they went beyond this criticism, suggesting that, in order to build a firm science, the intellect needs to assume some probable hypothesis, in the expectation it will eventually be replaced by better ones.

This is certainly the case with Francis Bacon. Though not a sceptic himself, scepticism is more important to Bacon's conception of science than might be thought at first sight. This can be seen not only from his careful discussion of the Academic formula that "nothing is known" or "nothing could be known" in conjunction with his rejection of tradition (Smith 2012) but also because in his conception of science, the notion of probability is crucial (Manzo 2009). In the fifth chapter, Silvia Manzo provides a reconstruction of Bacon's reception of Academic scepticism. Although Bacon refers more frequently to Academic than to Pyrrhonian scepticism, like most of his contemporaries, he often misrepresented and confused the doctrinal components of both traditions. Manzo then considers the assessment of ancient scepticism throughout Bacon's writings, arguing that, on the one hand, Bacon approved the state of doubt and suspension of judgment and, on the other hand, that he rejected the notion of *acatalepsia*. One important idea explored by Manzo is that Bacon's evaluation of scepticism relied on a Protestant and Augustinian view of human nature, a view that informed his overall interpretation of the philosophical schools across history, including the sceptical schools. In her view, Bacon's worries about scepticism must also be set in the context of religious ideas.

The Royal Society followed Bacon's paths in his conception of science and the crucial role attributed to experiments and probable hypotheses (Leeuwen 1970). Benjamin Hill, in the sixth chapter, argues that the form of Academic scepticism most amenable to the Baconians and experimentalists of the early Royal Society was Carneades' doctrine of probabilism. Carneades' doctrine of probabilism was understood in seventeenth-century Britain as a fallibilist account of practical knowledge. Accordingly, they gave to Carneades' hierarchical structures governing action and motivation a new use, since they fit the early Fellows' conceptions of experience and hypotheses. More specifically, Academic probabilism provided the early Fellows with resolutions to some conceptual problems that bedevil attempts to develop a workable eliminative induction and could even have provided them with a proto-version of confirmation theory. A crucial point made by Hill is that Academic scepticism furnished some basic concepts crucial to the development of modern science.

Returning to France, we find other philosophers who were also deeply concerned with Academic scepticism in connection to modern science. Of particular interest in this regard is Pierre Gassendi. In Chap. 7, Delphine Bellis challenges Popkin's twofold reading of Gassendi. On Popkin's account, Gassendi was first a Pyrrhonian and later in his career became a mitigated sceptic who tried to develop a specific epistemology in order to overcome the sceptical crisis of his time. Bellis shows that,

beyond the role played by Pyrrhonian arguments in rejecting Aristotelian theses, Academic philosophy (in particular as conveyed by Cicero) played a much more constructive role in the formation of Gassendi's own philosophy from the very beginning. Academic philosophy offered Gassendi a probabilistic model of knowledge which, contrary to Pyrrhonism, opened up the possibility of a natural philosophy conceived as a science of appearances, i.e., as based on experimentation on appearances, in line with the Academic notion of "inspected" or "scrutinized" appearances. By demonstrating the enduring importance of Academic philosophy as a source of inspiration for Gassendi's own philosophy, Bellis demonstrates how probabilism became central to his epistemology and natural philosophy. In addition to Gassendi's erudite interest in Cicero and Charron, Academic probabilism suited Gassendi's own practice as a natural philosopher in the areas of meteorology and astronomy. However, early in his philosophical career, Gassendi's preference for Academic philosophy over Pyrrhonism was motivated, first and foremost, by ethical concerns: the importance of preserving his *libertas philosophandi*, combined with his personal inability to refrain from inclining toward one opinion or another, led him to formulate his epistemological probabilism and to claim the freedom to revise his opinions from day to day as necessary.

The chapters on Bacon, the Royal Society, and Gassendi seem to confirm what the first four chapters had already shown. It is important to underline some ideas, for they tend to build a coherent picture of the role played by Academic scepticism. Academic scepticism was very important in the development of the ideas of autonomous thinking and intellectual freedom. In this respect, more than rejection of a traditional way of thinking, seriousness in the pursuit of truth was the hallmark of Academic scepticism. Specifically, the notion of probabilism was extended to new territories: instead of a practical guide to action, it became a model for understanding the new, emerging science. Thus, probability was transformed from a practical notion into a theoretical one.

Other philosophers equally concerned with the foundations and methodology of the new science, but perhaps less committed to its empirical aspect, were also deeply involved with scepticism. Of these, Descartes is, of course, the most important. His way of dealing with scepticism is a turning point in the history of scepticism in early modern philosophy. It is a turning point both because of his method of doubt and his solution to these doubts.

First, Descartes developed a new line of sceptical arguments, exploring an unprecedented way of raising doubts. As a result, early modern sceptics had even more weapons at their disposal. While older sceptics had used arguments based on the illusions of the sense and on dreams, Descartes put forward a new argument based on the idea that God may deceive us: if we don't know the origin of our being, we cannot trust our cognitive capacities. This new argument had a strong impact on many philosophers, such as Pascal. If, on the one hand, Cartesian methodological scepticism introduced a new argument, apparently making scepticism stronger and wider in scope (though this is questionable), on the other, it treated scepticism as something merely negative. The method of doubt is a way of ridding oneself of prejudiced opinions, not of building certain knowledge. The idea that scepticism

was mainly a destructive philosophy was to have a long career and (unfortunately) enjoys wide support even today.

Second, Descartes' positive doctrines were by no means sceptical, and thus, Cartesian metaphysics posed new difficulties for early modern sceptics. Modern sceptics were now forced to take aim not at Aristotelian metaphysics but at Cartesian metaphysics, which was a completely different target. In the face of this new kind of metaphysics, sceptics had to develop new arguments, adapting scepticism to new times. Rather surprisingly, however, Cartesian metaphysics also helped to shape a new form of scepticism. By making the distinction between primary and secondary qualities essential to the new philosophy, Descartes and other modern philosophers, such as Galileo, Hobbes, Locke, and Malebranche, gave a strong impulse to scepticism: if secondary qualities are only in the mind and if we cannot separate primary qualities from secondary qualities, then, as Berkeley and Hume insisted, matter is annihilated.

Popkin maintained that Descartes was responding to a *crise pyrrhonienne*. However, we can now see that in fact he was responding to a wider sceptical crisis and indeed that he was perhaps more concerned with Academic scepticism than with Pyrrhonism. It has been suggested that, when Descartes heaps scorn on sceptical doubt, he is referring in particular to the Pyrrhonists, not only of antiquity but also those of his own day, like La Mothe Le Vayer (Paganini 2008, 2011). Moreover, Descartes seems to show more respect for Academic scepticism. In the preface to the *Principles*, the history of philosophy is divided between those philosophers who, like Aristotle, search for truth and certainty and those, like Socrates and Plato, who think there is nothing certain and for whom it is enough to describe things as they appear probable or similar to the truth. Thus, for Descartes, there are two main kinds of philosophies throughout history: one calls everything into doubt, and the other holds that some things are certain. However, for Descartes, both held only probable opinions, and for this reason he launched an attack on both these "probable" opinions.

Richard Davies, in the eighth chapter, offers a commentary on Descartes' first meditation, paying special attention to its modes. Davies distinguishes between the material modes of the Pyrrhonists and the formal modes of the Academics. This distinction holds the key to his original reconstruction of the sceptical method of doubt. By calling attention to the formal aspect of the arguments, rather than to their material aspect, Davies shows what is due mainly to Academic scepticism. According to him, one can read *Meditation I* as a series of reflections on whole sets of beliefs, either in terms of their origins or in terms of the considerations that put all or some of their members in jeopardy. These operations can be regarded as formal insofar as Descartes' meditator recognizes that he cannot enumerate one by one the members of these sets. The meditator proceeds to identify the source of these errors in their coming to him either by direct perception or on the authority of others. Illusions are enough only to cast doubt on unfavorable perceptions. He then notices that, even in favorable conditions, it is possible to form false beliefs, for even sane people have dreams that resemble the delusions of the insane. Davies makes the suggestion that, on one reading of what a dream is, the set of beliefs that

are threatened by the dreaming hypothesis can be identified with the set of beliefs about the past. Even the deceiving God hypothesis, which appears to be indifferent to the distinction between Academic doubt and Pyrrhonian doubt (for it is a new argument), resembles a formal mode to the extent that it supplies a reason for doubting about entire sets of beliefs.

Not all major Cartesians thought that the method of doubt was especially important to philosophy. Though Leibniz and Spinoza did not pay much attention to it, the case is not obviously the same with Malebranche. For one thing, the first five books of *The Search after Truth* are nothing but an inquiry into all sorts of errors and prejudices of the mind. It is as if Malebranche had expanded one single, short meditation into a complex, exhaustive method of ridding oneself of false opinions. In Chap. 9, Julie Walsh examines Malebranche's views on sceptical thinkers. Malebranche engaged in a detailed discussion with the Academic sceptic Simon Foucher. Foucher presented the most serious sceptical challenge to Malebranche's system, by calling into question whether Malebranche can defend the claim that our ideas represent objects in the external world. She also looks to a much less often-discussed element of Malebranche's indirect engagement with scepticism: his comments on Montaigne. According to Walsh, scepticism is a position, like atheism, that is only possible if one has a disordered imagination. One of the merits of Walsh's contribution is to set Malebranche's debate with the Academic sceptic Foucher in a wider discussion of his criticism of scepticism as a whole.

While Malebranche engaged only occasionally with sceptical arguments, Pascal is among those early modern philosophers who were deeply involved with sceptical issues. It has often been noted that Pascal, in his *Entretien avec M. de Sacy*, sets up as contradictories the two rational anthropologies of men, illustrated by Epictetus' dogmatism and Montaigne's scepticism. This latter receives more extensive and sophisticated treatment than the former, indicating its significance in Pascal's thought. What has not so often been noticed is the nature of Montaigne's scepticism according to Pascal. That is Martine Pécharman's topic in the tenth chapter. One of her theses is that the *Entretien* presents an eclectic model of scepticism that denies that the distinction between Pyrrhonism scepticism and Academic scepticism is essential, even if Pascal qualifies that model only as Pyrrhonian. Pécharman shows first that the "pure Pyrrhonism" attributed to Montaigne is due to the subordination of all discourses in Montaigne's *Essais* to the principle of equipollence. By means of a subtle use of different passages from the "Apology" and from the *Essais* in general, Pascal is able to construe a universal doubt in Montaigne's scepticism. However, instead of deepening the distance between these two forms of scepticism, that reconstruction of equipollence, in which the principle of doubt doubts itself, allows Pascal to supersede the distinction between them. The main point of Pécharman's interpretation is that the *Entretien* substitutes the Academic principle that "everything is uncertain" for the Pyrrhonian principle of equipollence. In the *Entretien*, the Academic argument against Stoicism of the indiscernibility of the true and false in sense perception becomes the hyperbolic argument of the indiscernibility of the true and false in the very principles of rational knowledge. The sceptical

Montaigne of the *Entretien* transforms Academic doubt into an extreme form of scepticism.

Thus, in the hands of Descartes, Malebranche, and Pascal, Academic scepticism received an unexpected improvement. Descartes invented a new, more powerful kind of sceptical argument; Malebranche devoted five of six chapters to understanding the sources of all kinds of errors; Pascal constructed an extreme form of scepticism that was at least as strong as Cartesian dogmatism. In this way, scepticism was transformed within the deep, creative thought of these dogmatists, despite their opposition to it. In light of Cartesian metaphysics and some important reactions to it, modern scepticism was also developed along new lines of thought. Early modern sceptics, therefore, had to adapt their scepticism to the new state of philosophy that emerged in the wake of Cartesianism.

It didn't take long for some thinkers to align themselves with the sceptics in this new context by inventing a new form of scepticism that was developed from inside Cartesian philosophy. In fact, some of these sceptics even considered themselves as Cartesians, though not in the traditional sense of adopting a Cartesian metaphysics or a Cartesian method of truth. Rather, they insisted on the Cartesian method of doubt as a kind of heritage from Academic scepticism (Watson 1966; Maia Neto 2003, 2008a, b; Lennon 2008). This connection between Cartesianism scepticism and Academic scepticism is made explicitly by Simon Foucher, a French philosopher studied by Boudreault and Charles in Chap. 11, who regard him as the best representative of seventeenth-century Academism. It is important to note that Foucher is more or less the only philosopher at that time to claim to be a true disciple of Academism. He was attracted to this form of scepticism, not only because of its perceived usefulness in science but also because it can be reduced to an undogmatic "system of truth," valid not only in epistemology but also in theology or morality. From this perspective, it is possible to understand that Foucher assigns a specific place to Carneades' probabilism, in particular in the sphere of moral philosophy in a century where the foundations of moral philosophy constituted one of the *questions du jour*. In this sense, the teachings of Academic sceptics set Foucher on the road leading to the universality of Kantian duty, far from Pyrrhonian relativism.

Pierre-Daniel Huet, evoked by Charles in Chap. 12, never goes so far, and it is for this reason that Richard Popkin, in his celebrated *The History of Scepticism: From Savonarola to Bayle*, treats him as above all an heir to ancient Pyrrhonism. However, this interpretation could be counterbalanced by contemporary readings of the influence of Academic scepticism on seventeenth- and eighteenth-century philosophy, some of which go so far as to treat Pierre-Daniel Huet as a central figure in the revival of Academic scepticism. In his paper, Charles argues that it is difficult to treat Huet as a disciple of either Pyrrhonism or Academic scepticism, given that he made use of both kinds of scepticism in a purely strategic manner. To demonstrate this point, Charles shows that it is essential to approach Huet's scepticism by inquiring into the sources available to him and the use he made of them, in particular within his apologetic reflections focused on the relationship between faith and

reason. Only in this way is it possible to arrive at a clear view of Huet's relationship to ancient scepticism, whether Pyrrhonian or Academic.

As time went by, post-Cartesian scepticism grew stronger and stronger, culminating in the philosophies of Bayle and Hume. Bayle notoriously said that if ancient sceptics could return to life, they would find that the new context had made scepticism an even more formidable opponent. First, Christianity offered powerful arguments for scepticism, for its dogmas seem incompatible with reason, both in metaphysical and moral issues. Moreover, Bayle endorsed Foucher's idea that the new philosophy with its primary/secondary distinction strengthened scepticism and also appealed to Malebranche's argument that it is impossible to prove the existence of the external world. Finally, Bayle made an important contribution to scepticism by supplementing Zeno's argument against one mode of matter, namely, movement, with an argument against the very essence of matter, namely, extension. Hume, in turn, also relied much more on modern sceptical arguments than on ancient ones. For him, the ancient arguments are merely popular or trivial, whereas modern sceptical arguments, such as Berkeley's arguments against matter or his own arguments against causality, seem irrefutable. The fact is that early modern philosophy developed a number of new, powerful arguments that were strengthened and redeployed by Bayle and Hume.

From the beginning, both philosophers were perceived as sceptics. Hume seems to have thought that, next to Berkeley, Bayle was the greatest sceptic ever, and Kant and Reid thought that Hume was the most acute sceptic of all time. Traditionally, both Bayle and Hume were characterized as Pyrrhonists. However, recent scholarship has called this into question. As a result, it remains an open question as to what kind of sceptics each philosopher was.

Each paper on Bayle's scepticism addresses an important issue, and both attribute a qualified Academic scepticism to Bayle. In that sense, they complement one another. In Chap. 13, Michael Hickson modifies the interpretation of Bayle's Academic scepticism provided by Maia Neto (1996) and Lennon (1999). For them, Bayle was mainly interested in reporting the views of other authors in producing, both in himself and in his readers, Ciceronian Academic integrity. Hickson challenges this interpretation by arguing that Bayle was not a mere reporter but a very critical and original philosopher. Moreover, neither Maia Neto nor Lennon was able to demonstrate a strong connection between Bayle's and Cicero's works. Hickson reconstructs the Academic interpretation with respect to one of Bayle's most controversial philosophical works, the *Continuation des pensées diverses sur la comète*. Bayle's frequent citations of Cicero in that work and his careful application of Cicero's Academic style of presenting disagreements invite us to read it in the spirit of Academic scepticism.

Kristen Irwin, in Chap. 14, pays close attention to the implications of various readings of Bayle's scepticism for the possibility of moral knowledge within such conceptions. Her goal is to draw out such implications from a reading of Bayle's scepticism that she calls qualified Academic scepticism. There are two major implications of reading Bayle as a qualified Academic sceptic. First, insofar as moral beliefs are justified on the basis of *bon sens* ("good sense"), their justification is

merely *pithanós* (plausible), not certain; merely plausible moral beliefs will never be sufficient to justify any kind of persecution – including persecution on the basis of religion. Second, the well-foundedness of moral beliefs can only be derived from *la droite raison*, the aspect of reason that Bayle describes as "the natural light." Since Bayle claims on the basis of the natural light that any interpretation of Scripture requiring the commission of crimes is false, religious persecution is forbidden on the basis of the natural light. Reading Bayle as a qualified Academic sceptic provides two different lines of support for the position for which Bayle is perhaps best known: his defense of religious toleration.

Thus, one can see that scepticism, for Bayle, was not only a matter of merely reporting other people's opinions with intellectual integrity. Bayle's criticism was coupled with a positive agenda, both in metaphysical issues and in moral and religious issues. His Academic scepticism, therefore, involved more than merely destroying all forms of dogmatism, since it provided original philosophical doctrines, as well as a defense of definite views on morality and of controversial values such as toleration.

Is Hume a sceptic in the same sense as Bayle? Popkin (1993) supposed so, but that assumption has been challenged by Todd Ryan (2009, 2012). Ryan thinks that Bayle is a sort of "Cartesian sceptic," but that Hume is a sceptic of a different stripe. Clearly, Bayle's scepticism is not tied to the project of an empirical science of human nature, though he is a historian, who undertakes to present a vast critical digest of human achievements in general. Whereas Bayle used sceptical arguments to show that dogmatists could not know what they want to know, Hume thought he could provide solutions to many of those sceptical puzzles. Bayle's scepticism would show that no dogmatic theory is free of riddles; Hume's scepticism allows for the possibility of empirical science and mathematical knowledge. In Hume's terminology, Bayle is a Pyrrhonian sceptic, while Hume aligns himself with Academic scepticism.

The two papers on Hume focus on different parts of Humean philosophy. In his contribution, Todd Ryan examines the role of Pyrrhonian and Academic scepticism in the opening sections of Hume's *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*. At issue is whether the entire project of natural theology can be dismissed on general sceptical grounds without further ado. Drawing on Hume's discussion of Pyrrhonian and Academic scepticism, Ryan seeks to characterize the kind of scepticism employed by Philo and to assess its implications for natural theology. Ryan identifies two general sceptical arguments advanced by Philo. The first involves the "reasonable" sceptic's unwillingness to engage in "abstruse" and "remote" inquiries, such as those of natural theology. While acknowledging the similarity of this position to Hume's own characterization of Academic scepticism, Ryan maintains that Cleanthes offers a cogent and even compelling response to this sceptical consideration. Moreover, Ryan argues that the apparent success of Cleanthes' response at this stage of the *Dialogues* is in keeping with Hume's own assessment of the implications of Academic scepticism for experimental theology. The second involves a kind of scepticism with regard to reason that has no clear antecedent in Section 12 of the first *Enquiry*. This new argument attempts to show that unlike the beliefs of

ordinary life, belief in the conclusions of natural theology does not survive confrontation with Pyrrhonian arguments. Ryan argues that once again Cleanthes is able to meet this general sceptical challenge. Contrary to a number of recent commentators, Ryan concludes that Cleanthes offers a fully coherent response to the general sceptical objections of Part I of the *Dialogues*.

The second chapter on Hume, also the last chapter of the volume, serves as a kind of conclusion for the whole book. While Ryan focuses on a very precise text, Plínio J. Smith offers an overview of Hume's concerns about scepticism. His main goal is to show how Hume's mitigated scepticism fits into the modern French context. Smith argues that Hume didn't know ancient sources on scepticism very well, not even Cicero's *Academica*. Instead, Hume relied on early modern sources, mostly French ones, like Montaigne, La Mothe Le Vayer, Descartes, Pascal, Foucher, Huet, and Bayle. Faced with religious, scientific, and philosophical innovations, scepticism had to adapt itself to a new context and evolved in unpredictable ways. Though many early modern sceptics (like Montaigne, Huet, and Bayle) and philosophers (like Bacon, Malebranche, and Pascal) didn't think there was an important difference between Academics and Pyrrhonists, Hume (like Foucher) took the distinction very seriously, drawing sharp boundaries between them. Despite Hume's assertion that there were no real sceptics in life, Smith makes several suggestions as to who Hume had in mind when discussing these two kinds of scepticism. Next, Smith explains why Hume preferred to associate his own scepticism with Academic scepticism, despite his initial leaning toward Pyrrhonism. In this connection, Foucher's Academic scepticism appears to be more important than is usually recognized. Finally, Smith goes on to show how Hume's arguments against Pyrrhonism and in favor of a mitigated, Academic scepticism were based on his readings of Montaigne, Descartes, and Pascal.

The upshot of the whole is that early modern philosophers were deeply engaged with Academic scepticism, developing a rich, complex form of Academic scepticism applied to a variety of topics, ranging from metaphysics and science to morals and religion. Not only were ancient arguments adapted to a new context, but also many new sceptical arguments were invented precisely in response to this new context. Rather than merely presenting strong objections to early modern dogmatisms, Academic scepticism offered a solution to many of the challenges of the period. This does not mean, of course, that there is only one conception of Academic scepticism. Despite this lack of unity, there are some similarities that may begin to furnish us with a clearer idea of the many forms assumed by modern Academic scepticism.

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