

LIVING IN DOUBT: CARNEADES' *PITHANON* RECONSIDERED

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I

THOUGH the interpretation of ancient texts is inevitably difficult, Carneades presents what one might call a worst-case scenario. In the first place, he wrote nothing. To complicate matters, Carneades' views were so obscure that his faithful disciple Clitomachus confessed that he could never figure out what Carneades actually believed (Cic. *Acad.* 2. 139). Showing remarkable fortitude in the face of such an obstacle, Clitomachus, attempting to play Plato to Carneades' Socrates, reportedly recorded Carneades' teachings in 400 books (D.L. 4. 67). Not one remains. None the less, Clitomachus' attempt to make a philosophy of Carneades' anti-theoretical stance was not a complete failure; Carneades had a tremendous influence on the later Academy as well as the Stoa, and his views (or lack thereof) have been handed down to us by both Sextus Empiricus and Cicero. These sources are, however, problematic. As a Pyrrhonist, Sextus was critical of the Academy and may have exaggerated what he took to be Carneades' dogmatism. Cicero, on the other hand, a student of Philo, was undoubtedly influenced in his interpretation of Carneades by his teacher's dogmatic scepticism. Carneades is perhaps best known for proposing the *pīthanē phantasia* (probable impression) as a criterion for life. However, the status of his theory of the *pīthanon* (probable) is completely unclear.¹ Was it merely a dialectical move against the Stoic charge of *apraxia* (inaction)? Was it a theory that Carneades himself en-

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¹ How one translates *pīthanon* is of necessity a contentious point. Proponents of what I shall call the weak interpretation tend to translate it as 'convincing' or 'persuasive'. However, according to my interpretation, the *pīthanon* is not just whatever

dorsed? Or was it perhaps meant to counterbalance the appeal of the Stoic cataleptic impression, or even Carneades' own arguments for the impossibility of knowledge?

In this paper I shall argue that the content of Carneades' position can be determined irrespective of its meta-theoretical status. Whether Carneades devised the *pithanon* theory simply as a dialectical ploy against the Stoics or whether he subscribed to it himself, his theory must meet a rather difficult challenge: in order to avoid complete self-refutation, Carneades must demonstrate that the *pithanē phantasia* can demolish the Stoics' *apraxia* charge, while peacefully coexisting with the Academics' commitment to *epochē* (withholding assent).

Interpretations of Carneades tend to fall into two camps. The first, which subscribes to what I shall call the weak interpretation, argues that assent to the *pithanon* involves no commitment to the objective truth of one's impressions, but rather consists in going along with whatever one finds convincing. The second, advancing the strong interpretation, claims that when one assents to *pithanai phantasiai*, one takes one's impressions to be probably true.² As my terminology perhaps suggests, I intend to come down on the side of the strong interpretation. However, though this interpretation

one happens to find persuasive, but, further, what one considers likely to be true—I believe that the term 'probable' better reflects this.

² Proponents of the weak interpretation include R. Bett, M. Frede, and M. F. Burnyeat, whose views I discuss in more detail in what follows, as well as J. Allen, 'Carneadean Argument in Cicero's Academic Books' ['Argument'], in B. Inwood and J. Mansfeld (eds.), *Assent and Argument: Studies in Cicero's Academic Books* (Utrecht, 1997), 217–56 at 241–3; C. Brittain, *Philo of Larissa: The Last of the Academic Sceptics [Philo]* (Oxford, 2001), 16, 74–5; P. Couissin, 'The Stoicism of the New Academy' ['Stoicism'], in M. F. Burnyeat (ed.), *The Sceptical Tradition* (Berkeley, 1983), 31–63 at 46; L. Groarke, *Greek Scepticism: Anti-Realist Trends in Ancient Thought [Anti-Realist]* (Montreal, 1990), 113–14; R. J. Hankinson, *The Sceptics* (London, 1995), 111–12; M. Schofield, 'Academic Epistemology' ['Epistemology'], in K. Algra et al. (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Hellenistic Philosophy* (Cambridge, 1999), 323–51 at 350; G. Striker, 'Sceptical Strategies' ['Strategies'], in M. Schofield et al. (eds.), *Doubt and Dogmatism: Studies in Hellenistic Epistemology* (Oxford, 1980), 54–83 at 78–81. Brittain's interpretation of Philo is not unlike mine of Carneades (see esp. 85–7). Advocates of the strong interpretation include V. Brochard, *Les Sceptiques grecs [Sceptiques]* (Paris, 1886), 135; C. Stough, *Greek Scepticism: A Study in Epistemology* (Berkeley, 1969), 61–2; and, more recently, H. Thorsrud, 'Cicero on his Academic Predecessors: The Fallibilism of Arcesilaus and Carneades' ['Fallibilism'], *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 40/1 (2002), 1–18 at 9 n. 27. A. A. Long and D. N. Sedley appear to endorse the weak interpretation, though they also provide considerations in favour of the strong (*The Hellenistic Philosophers [HP]*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, 1997), i. 458–9).

has greater textual support and offers a superior response to the *apraxia* charge than the alternative, I shall argue in the conclusion of this paper that it risks committing Carneades to the decidedly unsceptical claim that we have occasional infallible access to the truth.

II

In order properly to understand Carneades' *pithanon* theory, we must first situate it within an ongoing controversy between the Academy and the Stoa. The Stoics claimed that one should model oneself on the ideal of the wise man, who alone has infallible knowledge because he only ever assents to the cataleptic impression, and does so in a manner that is firm and unshakable by reason (S.E. *M.* 7. 151–2). The cataleptic impression is an impression which arises from what is, is stamped in accordance with what is, and is of such a sort that it could not arise from what is not (*M.* 7. 248). The Stoic wise man is able to identify the cataleptic impression because it possesses a special mark that distinguishes it from non-cataleptic impressions (*M.* 7. 252).

The Academics responded to the Stoic theory with the following argument (*Acad.* 2. 40):

- (1) There are true and false impressions.
- (2) False impressions are non-cataleptic.
- (3) True impressions are always such that false impressions could appear identical to them.
- (4) Among impressions with no perceptible difference between them, it is impossible for some to be cataleptic and others not.
- (5) Therefore, there are no cataleptic impressions.

Obviously, the controversy with the Stoics lay in the third claim, which denies that cataleptic impressions possess a distinguishing mark. The Academics attempted to demonstrate the potential indistinguishability of true and false impressions by arguing from cases of dreams, hallucinations, perceptual illusions, and resemblances between objects such as eggs (*Acad.* 2. 79–90).³ If false impressions can appear indubitably true when we are dreaming

³ Allen offers an illuminating discussion of the different arguments the Academics

or mad, then it cannot simply be the case that impressions which appear indubitably true necessarily are true. The conclusion of the Academics' argument against the cataleptic impression is that, given the non-existence of the cataleptic impression, the Stoic wise man will be forced either to withhold assent or to opine and thus risk erring.

Faced with this unpleasant prospect, the Stoics responded by unleashing the *apraxia* charge upon the Academy. Lucullus, speaking for Antiochus, outlines the Academics' pernicious deeds in no uncertain terms:

Therefore, those who deny that anything can be grasped tear away the very tools or equipment of life, or rather, they actually overturn the whole of life itself from its foundations and rob the animate being of the mind that animates it, so that it is difficult to speak of their rashness as the case demands. (*Acad.* 2. 31)

Striker suggests that the *apraxia* argument takes two forms.⁴ In response to the argument that there are no cataleptic impressions, the Stoic argues that without such impressions there can be no criterion of truth on which to base the decisions required to live an orderly and coherent life. In response to the argument that we should withhold assent, the Stoic argues that without assent we would not be able to act at all.

After expounding Carneades' initial attack on the Stoic position, Sextus claims that Carneades was effectively compelled to provide an alternative criterion for the conduct of life and attainment of happiness (*M.* 7. 166). This criterion is the *pithanē phantasia*—the impression that, without possessing a mark of truth, does possess the appearance of truth and can therefore serve as a basis for action (*Acad.* 2. 101). Following Bett, we can analyse Carneades' reply to the Stoic as follows.⁵ In response to the Stoic argument that without cataleptic impressions we shall have no criterion for conducting our lives, Carneades counters that the *pithanē phantasia* can serve as the necessary criterion. In response to the Stoic claim that action is impossible without assent, Carneades argues that action can be

offered for *akatalēpsia* in 'Argument', 246–9. See also G. Striker, 'The Problem of the Criterion', in G. Striker, *Essays on Hellenistic Epistemology and Ethics* (Cambridge, 1996), 150–65 at 159–60.

⁴ Striker, 'Strategies', 63–4. See also R. Bett, 'Carneades' *Pithanon*: A Reappraisal of its Role and Status' ['Reappraisal'], *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, 7 (1989), 59–94 at 62.

⁵ Bett, 'Reappraisal', 71.

motivated by approval, a form of assent which is compatible with *epochē*.⁶ These two arguments are, in fact, closely intertwined: the Carneadean sceptic can conduct his life by approving of *pithanai phantasiai*.⁷

Carneades situates the *pithanon* within a somewhat convoluted taxonomy of impressions (*M.* 7. 166–83).⁸ Impressions possess two aspects, one in relation to the object and the other in relation to the perceiver. In their objective aspect, impressions are either true or false; in their subjective aspect, impressions are either apparently true or apparently false. Those impressions that are apparently true are *pithanai*, or probable. Of probable impressions, some are vivid, while others are dim. The dim impressions, on account of the smallness of the object, its distance from the perceiver, or the weakness of the perceiver's vision, cause a confused impression and do not compel assent, whereas the vivid impressions appear true with great intensity.⁹ These vivid and probable impressions

⁶ I do not maintain a strict linguistic distinction between 'assent' and 'approval' in this paper, because such a distinction is not observed by our sources. Though both Sextus and Cicero frequently employ specialized terms for non-dogmatic assent, such as *adprobari* (*Acad.* 2. 104) and *ἔπειθεσθαι* (*M.* 7. 187) (see Striker, 'Strategies', 61 n. 21), they are not at all rigorous in their usage—Sextus, for example, frequently describes the Academics as assenting (*συγκατατίθεσθαι*, *M.* 7. 172, 188).

⁷ At points I refer to the Academics as 'sceptics', though this usage is, strictly speaking, anachronistic. It was the Academics' successors, the Pyrrhonists, who first referred to themselves as *skeptikoi*, or searchers (e.g. S.E. *PH* 1. 4). None the less, relatively early sources, such as Gellius (11. 5. 6), call both the Pyrrhonians and the Academics *skeptikoi*.

⁸ Sextus attributes a differing taxonomy to Carneades at *PH* 1. 227, placing the thoroughly explored impression at the second stage and the undiverted at the third. In what follows, I stick to the version presented in *Adversus mathematicos*, which not only is more detailed, but also makes better sense. An impression is undiverted if it does not conflict with one's other impressions, but it is thoroughly explored if one actually confirms the reliability of the perceptual conditions. While the former may occur automatically, the latter results from active investigation in pursuit of the highest degree of certainty available. On Carneades' taxonomy, see Bett, 'Reappraisal', 72–3; Long and Sedley, *HP* i. 458; Hankinson, *The Sceptics*, 110; and especially J. Allen, 'Academic Probabilism and Stoic Epistemology' ['Probabilism'], *Classical Quarterly*, NS 44 (1994), 85–113.

⁹ In what follows I argue that the *pithanē phantasia* is not merely whichever impression causes us to assent, but that it is whichever impression we take to best approximate the truth, and that it can be deliberately employed to justify our beliefs. This might call into question how I understand vividness: if to be vivid is merely to compel assent, then this would weigh against me. Carneades is far from clear on this point, but he seems to take impressions to be vivid when received in good perceptual conditions, the sort of conditions that are confirmed at the level of the thoroughly explored impression. This suggests that vividness is a perceptual feature of impressions, something like appearing clear or striking (implied by the use of

constitute Carneades' criterion. Significantly, there is no necessary relation between what appears true and what actually is true. The *pithanai phantasiai* encompass what appears true and actually is true as well as what appears true but is false, the common ground being what appears true. Carneades emphasizes, however, that the occasional occurrence of false but convincing impressions should not undermine our general confidence in probable impressions, since they tell the truth for the most part (*M.* 7. 175).

Carneades' *pithanon* is not solely the probable and vivid impression. In the first place, impressions do not exist in isolation, but depend upon one another like links in a chain. Thus, Carneades' second criterion is the impression which does not conflict with any of one's other impressions; he calls it the undiverted impression. Furthermore, just as (in Carneades' time, at least) citizens zealously cross-examine candidates for public office, so too, on occasion, we will choose to test some of our impressions closely (*M.* 7. 182). We might examine the size and distance of the object, the clarity of the atmosphere, and the competence of the perceiver. Should the impression withstand all of these tests, we will have arrived at the *pièce de résistance* of the *pithanon* theory—the convincing, undiverted, and thoroughly explored impression. Of course, it too can turn out to be false.

According to Carneades, the criterion we live by will include the merely probable, the probable and undiverted, and the probable, undiverted, and thoroughly explored impression; which impression we follow will depend on the importance of the matter at hand and the amount of time at our disposal (*M.* 7. 184). For example, a man, upon seeing what is actually a coil of rope in an unlit room, initially jumps over it because he takes it to be a snake (*M.* 7. 188). The man then returns to the room and, seeing that the object is motionless, assumes that it is not a snake. However, since he also knows that snakes can be motionless when numbed by frost, the man prods the object with a stick. After he sees that the object remains motionless, he then assents to his impression that the object is not a snake.

Examples of this sort suggest that, though Carneades' theory may appear recondite, it is actually meant to describe how ordinary people operate successfully in everyday life. When the man

πληκτικός at *M.* 7. 173). This perceptual quality may cause us to assent unthinkingly to the impression, but it is also an indicator (albeit an imperfect one) of very good reasons for assenting: the clarity of the atmosphere, proximity of the object, etc.

concludes that the object is not a snake, he does not claim to have infallible access to the truth about external reality; he is simply stating how things appear to him. In another example of Carneades', a wise man, upon boarding a ship, states that he will complete his voyage (*Acad.* 2. 100). Obviously the man is not claiming to know every possible eventuality. None the less, given that the voyage is a mere four miles, his crew and helmsman are reliable, and the weather is good, it appears probable to the man that he will make it, and he employs this probable impression in planning his voyage and making predictions about the future.

III

However intuitive Carneades' theory may appear, it faces an obvious challenge. How is it possible for Carneades to remain a sceptic while advocating the *pithanon* as a criterion for life? As an Academic, Carneades is committed to the view that one should always withhold assent. However, this view caused the Stoics to level the *apraxia* charge, to argue that were the Academic in fact to adhere to his commitment to *epochē*, he would be unable to live. In order to respond to this charge, Carneades is obligated to show that it is possible for the Academic both to withhold dogmatic assent and to conduct an orderly and successful life. In arguing that the Academic can accept and act upon impressions that seem probable to him, Carneades may appear to be fudging his response to the Stoics by advocating an inadmissible form of assent. Lucullus, for one, speaking for Antiochus, claims that Carneades backed down from his commitment to *epochē* (*Acad.* 2. 59). Following a principle of charity, I believe that the most successful interpretation of Carneades will find a way for him to navigate between this Scylla and this Charybdis, to avoid both the *apraxia* charge and the accusation that he has abandoned his commitment to *epochē*.

One might attempt to dismiss the problem I raise in three ways. In the first place, one might claim that Carneades was not in fact committed to the desirability of preserving *epochē*.¹⁰ There are two

¹⁰ D. N. Sedley, 'The Motivation of Greek Skepticism' ['Motivation'], in Burnyeat (ed.), *The Skeptical Tradition*, 9–29 at 17–18, and C. Lévy, *Cicero Academicus: recherches sur les Académiques et sur la philosophie cicéronienne* (Paris, 1992), 268–71, offer particularly thorough arguments in favour of Carneades' advocacy of *epochē*.

ways in which this argument might be made. First, one might maintain, as did some of Carneades' successors and opponents, that Carneades abandoned *epochē* in reverting to dogmatism.¹¹ At *Acad.* 2. 59 Lucullus accuses Carneades of being less consistent in withholding assent than Arcesilaus; according to some readings of the corrupt passage at 2. 148, here Catulus professes that Carneades' sage sometimes opines—as a consequence, Catulus himself rejects *epochē*. According to Eusebius, though Carneades argued in the same style as Arcesilaus, he differed from his predecessor in abandoning *epochē* (*PE* 14. 7. 15). Against this, it should be noted that Eusebius is reliant upon Numenius, who is a particularly hostile source, ultimately concerned to unmask Carneades as a hypocrite and a closet dogmatist. Lucullus, on the other hand, does not accuse Carneades of abandoning *epochē* altogether, only of being inconsistent. Carneades' offence, according to Lucullus, is to conclude his argument for *akatalēpsia* (inapprehensibility) with the proposal that the sage opine. Carneades' advocacy of opinion here is clearly directed towards the Stoic; in what follows, I shall argue that the mitigated assent which Carneades proposes on behalf of the Academic is consistent with *epochē*. Finally, the passage at 2. 148 is, as I mentioned, corrupt—depending on which emendation one favours, Catulus is either avowing his endorsement or declaring his rejection of *epochē*.¹²

The testimony offered by Carneades' follower and successor, Clitomachus, points us in a different direction: Clitomachus states that 'Carneades endured a Herculean labour in dragging out of our souls that wild and monstrous beast, assent, that is to say, opinion and rashness' (*Acad.* 2. 108). Furthermore, at *Acad.* 2. 104 Carneades develops a distinction between two forms of *epochē*—absolute *epochē* and a weaker variant—and proposes that the latter is compatible with action and qualified assent, and can be adopted by the sage in everyday life. On a more general level, the *apraxia* charge amounts to the accusation against the Academic that his commitment to *epochē* makes life impossible. To give up on *epochē* would be to cede victory to the Stoic, and there is no evidence that

¹¹ Brochard reaches this conclusion, with reservations (*Sceptiques*, 135).

¹² J. S. Reid favours the former, supplying *quare* (*M. Tulli Ciceronis Academica: The Text Revised and Explained [Cicero]* (London, 1885), 348). Long and Sedley argue in favour of the latter, preferring *parum*, but attribute the rejection of *epochē* to Philo's misinterpretation of Carneades (*HP* ii. 451).

Carneades did so. Indeed, if we allow that Carneades proposed the *pithanon* theory as a response to the *apraxia* argument, then this demonstrates that, far from abandoning *epochē*, Carneades was concerned to defend it.

The alternative version of the case against me assumes a stance exactly opposite to the first: according to this line of argument, Carneades was solely a dialectician and, far from advocating *epochē*, did not endorse any sort of philosophical position. That one should withhold assent is a conclusion that depends upon certain premisses, namely the Stoic assumption that to err is to sin. Carneades, as an Academic, has no view on the matter and no presuppositions that incline him to *epochē*—in arguing for *epochē*, he is merely showing the Stoic what follows from the Stoic's all-or-nothing commitment to an unattainable standard of knowledge.¹³ However, *epochē* cannot merely amount to a position that Carneades foists upon the Stoic *ad hominem*. Were that Carneades' strategy, he would have had no motive to respond to the *apraxia* charge. Instead, he might have scornfully replied, 'Indeed—look where your philosophical commitments landed you', or, in the manner of the hopeless Academics whom Lucullus derides, 'Blame nature' (*Acad.* 2. 32).¹⁴ That Carneades does not do so, but instead defends the Academic position in response to the *apraxia* charge, indicates his commitment to *epochē*. Furthermore, that Clitomachus—of Carneades' followers, the one most given to painting him as a pure dialectician—

¹³ See Allen, 'Argument', 222; M. Frede, 'The Sceptic's Two Kinds of Assent and the Question of the Possibility of Knowledge' ['Assent'], in M. F. Burnyeat and M. Frede (eds.), *The Original Sceptics: A Controversy* (Indianapolis, 1997), 127–51 at 129–31; Striker, 'Strategies', 59–60. Frede concludes that the way in which the Stoics raised the *apraxia* challenge indicates that *epochē* was, in fact, a position the Academics adopted *in propria persona*. Striker also allows that the Academics were committed to *epochē*, though only regarding philosophical issues, and not the evidence of the senses.

¹⁴ It is not clear from the passage which Academics count as the extremists, and which as the more reasonable probabilists. Reid equates the probabilists with Carneades (*Cicero*, 216); J. Glucker identifies them with Metrodorus (*Antiochus and the Late Academy* [*Antiochus*] (Göttingen, 1978), 78); Long and Sedley identify the hopeless Academics with Aenesidemus, the probabilists with Philo (*HP* ii. 441); Striker claims that neither Arcesilaus nor Carneades can be identified with the hopeless Academics ('Strategies', 64); Allen, by contrast, suggests that Carneades may have made both responses ('Argument', 219). Note, though, that the probabilists at 2. 32 distinguish the *incertum* from *id quod percipi non possit*; this is echoed in Eusebius, who describes Carneades as arguing for a difference between the *ἀδηλον* and the *ἀκατάληπτον* (*PE* 14. 7. 15). To my mind, this provides at least provisional support for following Reid and identifying the probabilists with Carneades and his school.

should praise Carneades for his success in promoting *epochē* gives further proof of Carneades' own endorsement.

The second strategy open to my would-be reducer is to turn the tables and argue that Carneades is not actually committed to the *pithanon* theory. This view—call it the dialectical interpretation of Carneades—has achieved general acceptance among his interpreters, and appears in many ingenious variations. These include the following: (1) Carneades' *pithanon* theory is meant to stand in equal opposition to his arguments against the existence of any criterion;¹⁵ (2) it is meant to counterbalance the Stoic theory of cataleptic impressions;¹⁶ (3) it is intended to destroy the theory of cataleptic impressions, by demonstrating that impressions which seem true (i.e. are *pithanai*) may in fact be false;¹⁷ (4) it is supposed to demonstrate the non-existence of any criterion of truth, by exposing that the *pithanon*, which is common to the true and the false, is the only available criterion;¹⁸ (5) it specifies one horn of a dilemma directed at the Stoic, that he must either withhold assent or opine, that is to say, assent to the *pithanon*;¹⁹ (6) it is intended to prevent the Stoic from deploying *apraxia* in order to reject the Academic's arguments for *akatalēpsia*;²⁰ (7) it is offered to the Stoic, who is concerned about *apraxia*, as a guide to action.²¹

Most versions of the dialectical interpretation tend to emphasize that the *pithanon* theory was advanced as part of a debate with the Stoics. There is certainly a great deal of evidence for this claim.²² Carneades himself famously stated, 'If there were no Chrysippus, there would be no Carneades' (D.L. 4. 62), and the Stoics grumbled that Carneades had stolen his ideas from the Stoa.²³ Carneades borrowed extensively from Stoic terminology in constructing his theory, and his taxonomy of the *pithanon* almost looks as though

¹⁵ Sedley, 'Motivation', 18.

¹⁶ Striker, 'Strategies', 62–3, 82.

¹⁷ Couissin, 'Stoicism', 49–50; Brittain, *Philo*, 101.

¹⁸ M. F. Burnyeat, 'Carneades was no Probabilist', unpublished manuscript.

¹⁹ Couissin, 'Stoicism', 45–6; Burnyeat (n. 18 above); Striker, 'Strategies', 76.

²⁰ Striker, 'Strategies', 71–3; Long and Sedley, *HP* i. 459; Brittain, *Philo*, 96.

²¹ Burnyeat (n. 18 above); Long and Sedley, *HP* i. 460.

²² On Carneades' exploitation of Stoic terminology, see Burnyeat (n. 18 above); Couissin, 'Stoicism'; Long and Sedley, *HP* i. 459. Allen cites ancient testimonia to the effect that the Academy and the Stoa hardly differed on the issue of the criterion, but responds by emphasizing that the Academy, though not the Stoa, treats the coherence of one's impressions as a condition of their credibility ('Probabilism', 104–7). On Carneades' originality, see also Striker, 'Strategies', 73 n. 49.

²³ Couissin, 'Stoicism', 42–3.

it were cribbed from the Stoic classification of impressions.²⁴ One might conclude on this basis that the *pithanon* is merely an *ad hominem* argument directed against the Stoics. There is no need for Carneades to endorse the theory himself, and consequently, no cause for concern if assent to the *pithanon* is at odds with *epochē*.²⁵

Against this, it is crucial to note that, whatever the status of Carneades' theory, it is undeniably intended as a response to the Stoic *apraxia* charge (*M.* 7. 166; *Acad.* 2. 99).²⁶ As such, it succeeds only if Carneades can demonstrate that assent to the *pithanē phantasia* enables the Academic to lead a reasonable life, while not compromising his commitment to *epochē*. If Carneades succeeds in meeting this challenge, then there is no reason why he should not himself employ the *pithanon*, and even endorse his own theory as probable.²⁷ In fact, the *pithanon* may have been advanced with various aims in mind—both as a positive description of human conduct and as a parry in Carneades' battle with the Stoics. The textual evidence is simply too scanty to rule decisively for or against any of these proposals. What is clear, though, is that the *pithanon* was raised, at least in part, to counter the *apraxia* argument.

Now for the final objection. In a generous moment, my hypothetical adversary allows that Carneades endorses both *epochē* and the *pithanon* theory. However, continues my opponent, potential conflict between *epochē* and the *pithanon* theory is not a problem for Carneades, since as a sceptic he is not committed to the canons of rational argumentation. In fact, self-refutation is one of the sceptic's tools in trade: Sextus, in *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, compares the beneficial effects of self-refutation to those of an emetic (*PH* 1. 206). In response, I would argue that even if Carneades himself need not endorse the canons of rational argumentation, in so far as he is engaged in a philosophical debate with the Stoics, he is obliged to abide by the rules of the game. I might add that certain forms of self-refutation are more dangerous than others. For example, the

²⁴ The Stoic taxonomy is described at *M.* 7. 241–8.

²⁵ Of course, this conclusion need not follow from the dialectical interpretation, and is indeed ruled out by some versions, notably (6) and (7) above.

²⁶ See Schofield, 'Epistemology', 348; Striker, 'Strategies', 70. Bett responds to the objection differently from myself, arguing that Carneades needs to endorse the *pithanon* theory (albeit in some non-dogmatic manner) for it to count as a response to the Stoics' *apraxia* charge ('Reappraisal', 84–8).

²⁷ Against the proposal that Carneades takes his own theory to be probable, see Striker, 'Strategies', 81–2. I raise considerations *pro* and *contra* in the final part of this paper.

paradox inherent in the statement that one knows that one knows nothing arguably serves only to strengthen the claim being made. However, should Carneades fail to establish that *epochē* is compatible with assent to the *pithanon*, he will simply have failed to respond to the Stoic. Finally, even if Carneades need not be bothered by charges of self-refutation, his attempt to reconcile assent to the *pithanon* with *epochē* at *Acad.* 2. 104 indicates that he was concerned with the internal consistency of his theory.

IV

Assuming that I have demonstrated that Carneades' *pithanon* theory must not be at odds with his commitment to *epochē*, it is now incumbent upon me to demonstrate how this is in fact possible. I therefore turn to the weak interpretation. Originally proposed by Couissin, this interpretation has become the dominant view in recent years. Its proponents include, among others, Bett, Burnyeat, and Frede. There are, of course, differences in their interpretations of Carneades. Burnyeat argues that Carneades' theory is simply a dialectical ploy against the Stoics,²⁸ while Frede²⁹ and Bett³⁰ claim that Carneades could and perhaps did endorse his own theory in some limited sense. Furthermore, Burnyeat does not take a stand on the nature of the Academic's assent, while Bett argues, in opposition to Frede, that the sort of assent permitted by Carneades can be at times explicit and active, provided that it involve no commitment to the truth of one's impressions.³¹ However, all three are committed to the view that the *pithanon* is whatever convinces us and is not tied to notions of objective truth or evidential support.³²

²⁸ See n. 18 above.

²⁹ 'Assent', 141. According to Frede, if Carneades did endorse the *pithanon*, it was only as a description of human conduct, and not as a prescription for how to approximate knowledge.

³⁰ 'Carneades' Distinction between Assent and Approval' ['Distinction'], *The Monist*, 73/1 (1990), 3–20 at 16.

³¹ 'Distinction', 14–15.

³² Perhaps a few additional words are in order on Burnyeat and Bett's theories. I believe that my arguments against the claim that the *pithanon* is simply whatever happens to persuade us could also be levelled against Burnyeat's interpretation of Carneades (n. 18 above). Burnyeat might respond to these arguments by claiming that Carneades is not attempting to provide a criterion that would meet Stoic demands; rather, Carneades is demonstrating to the Stoic that the *pithanon* is the closest available approximation to a criterion, and that since it does not succeed as a criterion, the Stoic should withhold assent. While Burnyeat's view is ingenious, I

To begin, I shall focus on Frede's argument in 'The Sceptic's Two Kinds of Assent', in part because it offers a particularly cogent and influential presentation of the weak interpretation.³³

As the title suggests, Frede's article centres on a distinction between two forms of assent. The first kind, which I shall term strong assent, consists in taking something to be true for a reason. The second sort, which I shall call weak assent, simply amounts to following one's impressions. This distinction can be illuminated by a parallel contrast which Frede draws between making a claim and having a view.³⁴ When a person makes a claim, he thinks that a proposition is true and that there are reasons to suppose it to be true. In so doing he commits himself to the canons of rationality. However, if that person has a view, he is merely left with an impression. It does not follow that he takes his impression to be true or that he thinks that there are reasons to suppose it to be true. According to Frede, Carneades' response to the *apraxia* charge is to propose that something along the lines of weak assent is sufficient ground for action. Frede therefore attributes the following position to Carneades:

... a view one acts on and a view one is willing to communicate do not presuppose either that one takes them to be true, or that at least one takes them to be likely to be true because one has considered the matter carefully. It is rather that, as a matter of fact, we sometimes only act on an impression if we have considered the matter further, but not because we now think it more likely to be true. ('Assent', 143)

believe that it ignores textual evidence, both to the effect that Carneades proposed his theory in good faith as a response to the *apraxia* charge, and to the effect that he considered the *pithanon* to constitute a criterion of truth and of action. As for Bett's theory, I am in agreement with Bett that the form of assent allowed by Carneades can be deliberate and explicit. Though Bett emphasizes, *contra* Frede, that the *pithanon* is a criterion that can be acted on deliberately, and even that it can guide the self-conscious and rational selection among impressions ('Distinction', 10), he also claims that assent to the *pithanon* involves no commitment to the truth of one's impressions. However, in the absence of some reason for assenting to one's impressions, such as a belief in their reliability, it is not clear how one's assent can actually be considered deliberate. Put another way, if the *pithanon* is simply whatever happens to convince the individual, then it does seem that the individual is passively acquiescing in, rather than consciously assenting to, his impressions.

³³ To be precise, Frede's article focuses on drawing a distinction between classical and dogmatic interpretations of Carneades, where the classical corresponds to what I have been calling the weak interpretation. Though Frede allows that both are present in Cicero, he treats the classical, not the dogmatic, interpretation as historically correct ('Assent', 140, 147, 149).

³⁴ 'Assent', 133.

Thus, in assenting to the *pithanon*, one in no way commits oneself to the truth of one's impressions; one simply goes along with whatever impressions happen to be convincing. The fact that we sometimes feel compelled to investigate before acting on our impressions should not suggest that we think that we are more likely to arrive at the truth by such means. Rather, it is a psychological fact that we act on different kinds of impressions under different circumstances; whichever impression ends up moving us to action is the one properly termed the *pithanon*.

It cannot be denied that Frede succeeds in rendering the *pithanon* theory compatible with *epochē*. Recall that the danger facing Carneades was that assent to the *pithanon* would amount to a form of assent violating the Academic's commitment to *epochē*. If Frede's interpretation is correct, then Carneades and his followers have no grounds for fear. Surely finding oneself compelled to act upon one's impressions could not be considered assenting to them in an un-sceptical manner. The primary textual evidence that Frede adduces in favour of his interpretation is *Acad.* 2. 104. Here Clitomachus, speaking on behalf of Carneades, attempts to delineate the sort of assent available to the Academic. Clitomachus claims that while the sage 'restrains himself from responding so as to approve or disapprove of something', he is also guided by 'probability', and 'wherever this occurs or is lacking he can respond "yes" or "no" accordingly'. Clitomachus continues: 'there remain³⁵ impressions of a sort that arouse us to action, and likewise answers that we can give *pro* or *contra* when asked, following how the matter appears to us, provided that we answer without assent'. This passage seems to support the claim that assent to the *pithanon* consists in passive acquiescence to one's impressions. The further claim, that assent to the *pithanon* does not involve a commitment to the truth of one's impressions, garners support from the fact that Cicero does not mention the true or the apparently true in his taxonomy, but rather separates impressions into two classes, probable/improbable and cataleptic/acataleptic (*Acad.* 2. 99), and from both Cicero's and Sextus' protestations that what is probable is not necessarily true (*Acad.* 2. 103; *M.* 7. 175).

³⁵ Here I follow Reid's emendation of the text to *relinqui* (*Cicero*, 300).

V

My prime cause for dissatisfaction with the weak interpretation is a suspicion that in attempting to reconcile the *pithanon* to *epochē*, it has deprived the *pithanon* of its original function, to meet the *apraxia* charge. The *apraxia* charge is not simply a demand that the Academic explain how it is that humans function. According to Sextus, Carneades was obligated to provide a criterion 'for the conduct of life and achievement of happiness' (*M.* 7. 166). Cicero, in turn, describes the *pithanon* as 'a standard both for the conduct of life and for investigation and discussion' (*Acad.* 2. 32). What Carneades is attempting to accomplish in advocating the *pithanon* is to explain how the Academic, while refraining from dogmatic assent, can lead a life that is ordered and successful, can attain happiness, and can even operate as a philosopher. The weak interpretation fails to meet this demand for two reasons: the form of assent it proposes is too weak and the criterion it offers is contentless.

To turn to the first objection, according to the weak view, the criterion proposed by Carneades is whichever impression moves the individual to act, and his assent to it consists in going along with his impression. One might say that the *pithanon* has assumed a causal but not a justificatory role in motivating judgement and action. This does not seem correct. As a criterion, the *pithanon* should function as a rule for conduct, a method of deciding what to do and what to believe.³⁶ The word *kritērion* is related to the verb *krinein* 'judge, distinguish, decide', and Carneades appears deliberately to draw attention to the connection between his *kritērion* and *krisis* (judgement). In *Adversus mathematicos* Carneades is said to compare the percipient employing the undiverted impression to a doctor testing symptoms against one another (7. 179); he goes on to compare using the fully tested impression to examining candidates for public office (7. 182); and finally likens our use of impressions of varying levels of probability to the cross-examination of witnesses (7. 184).

On a more general level, were it the case that the *pithanon* is a cause but not a justification for action, Carneades' theory would

³⁶ On this, see also H. Maconi's discussion of Arcesilaus' criterion, the *eulogon*, in 'Nova Non Philosophandi Philosophia: A Review of Anna Maria Ioppolo, *Opinione e scienza*', *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, 6 (1988), 231–53 at 251–2.

merely amount to a causal description of human behaviour. But if that were all that Carneades was up to, then there would have been no real need for him to advance such a detailed and even convoluted theory. Carneades could simply have responded to the Stoic that the *apraxia* charge is ill-founded since people's impressions do appear sufficient to cause them to act without a separate act of assent.³⁷ The problem with such a response is that it would not differentiate the deliberate, criterion-based behaviour of humans from the instinctual behaviour of animals. It should be noted that Carneades' opponents, the Stoics, were committed to distinguishing human and animal behaviour on just such grounds—maintaining this distinction is therefore essential to a successful response to the *apraxia* charge. If the *pithanon* were merely an impression that causes action, animals would also be employing *pithanai phantasiai* as their criterion, in so far as certain impressions do cause them to act.³⁸

Before concluding my first objection to the weak account, I would like to point to some further textual evidence in my favour. Carneades states that in the case of the thoroughly explored impression, 'we meticulously examine each impression in the concurrence', and we judge whether our impression satisfies a list of nine criteria, including whether one has good vision and whether the atmospheric conditions are satisfactory (*M.* 7. 182–3). This hardly resembles passive acquiescence to our impressions. Carneades also claims that we use different criteria depending on the importance of the matter at hand (*M.* 7. 184), suggesting a kind of self-reflexive awareness belied by the weak account. Finally, Sextus, in criticizing the Academy, distinguishes the sense in which the Pyrrhonists and

³⁷ Arcesilaus appears to have responded along exactly these lines (Plut. *Adv. Col.* 1122 B–D). For the attribution to Arcesilaus, see Long and Sedley, *HP* i. 456.

³⁸ One might counter that what distinguishes humans from animals is not their acts of assenting, but their reliance on the sorts of tests that Carneades arrays under the rubric of the fully explored impression. Against this, I would emphasize that Carneades is attempting to respond to the Stoic, who takes assent to play a distinguishing role in human action; as a consequence, Carneades attempts to delineate a form of assent that is acceptable to the sceptic. To assent is to choose to adopt an impression, to say 'yes' to it, as it were. What distinguishes assenting to an impression from being caused by it to act is that one accepts it for a reason; something counts as a reason only if one takes it to be true, or at least likely. If the weak interpretation rules out taking impressions to be true, or even probable, then it abolishes any form of assent. Furthermore, it is clear that animals, and for that matter machines, employ all sorts of tests in generating behaviour. What distinguishes humans from, say, barometers, is not their use of tests, but their choosing to use these tests for reasons, i.e. because they take these tests to be truth-conducive.

the Academicians can be said to be persuaded (*peithesthai*). While the Pyrrhonist goes along with his impressions without strong impulse or inclination, the school of Carneades and Clitomachus says that 'it is with a strong inclination that they are persuaded and that something is probable to them' (*PH* 1. 230). For them, being convinced is 'assenting to something with choice and a sort of affinity that comes from desiring it strongly'.

If I am correct in concluding that the *pithanon*, as a criterion, is something that one employs in choosing to act, then it must follow that there are reasons motivating this choice. In so far as our behaviour can be said to constitute intentional action, it must be subject to explanations in terms of reasons and not merely causes. But, as suggested above, the weak account offers a merely causal account of human behaviour; we are *caused* to act by our probable impressions, but these cannot be said to *justify* our actions. The reason that the *pithanon* cannot justify action and judgement under the weak account is that justification is typically linked to truth; I can adduce evidence in favour of my beliefs only if I take that evidence to be true. The weak account, however, explicitly denies that assent to the *pithanon* involves belief in the truth of one's impressions. I might add that if we divorce the *pithanon* from its connection to rationality and truth, then it is difficult to know what to make of Carneades' nine tests for the thoroughly explored impression. Why should the percipient test the quality of the atmosphere and not, say, dance a jig instead? His performance of the former, and not the latter, makes sense only if he supposes that it bears a stronger connection to the likelihood of his impression's being true.

This brings me to the second of my objections to the weak interpretation: the criterion offered by this interpretation is essentially contentless. The weak account offers what one might call a causal black box as Carneades' response to the *apraxia* charge. Some impressions just do cause us to act, and these impressions, whichever they be, constitute the criterion. It should be noted that this is a singularly uninformative and weak response to the Stoic's demand for a criterion. It is as if Glaucon, accused by Socrates in the *Republic* of loving boys indiscriminately (474D–E), were to deny the charge by claiming that he must have some criterion in choosing which boys to love, in so far as he chooses some boys and not others. Until Glaucon can describe what features he seeks in boys, he cannot be said to possess a criterion for boy-loving; similarly, until the

Academic can state what quality of impressions motivates him to act, he has not delineated a criterion for action. To respond that it is the quality of being convincing that motivates him to act is not satisfactory, in so far as by the weak account, being convincing amounts to the tendency to cause action. The argument would be circular.

As luck would have it, Carneades does describe the feature of impressions that renders them *pithanai* and that enables them to motivate action and belief. This feature is the quality of appearing true.³⁹ In Sextus, Carneades makes frequent mention of the fact that *pithanai phantasiai* seem true to the percipient. To mention a few, at *M. 7. 173* Carneades claims that the vivid and probable impression, ‘appearing true and appearing so fully’, constitutes ‘a criterion of truth’;⁴⁰ he later states that in the case of undiverted impressions,

³⁹ One might argue against me that just because certain impressions appear true to the sceptic, it does not follow that he takes these impressions to be true; all that is required of him is that he act as if they were true. He will do so because he has to get by, and, in the absence of truth, this is his most psychologically feasible alternative. Following this strategy, the sceptic can adduce evidence in favour of his beliefs: he can show that these true-seeming beliefs appear related to other true-seeming beliefs, all the while refraining from taking any of these to be actually true. This truth-averse sceptic, however, gives up too much, and, as a consequence, loses the resources he needs to respond to *apraxia*. Belief essentially involves truth-commitments; if one takes no stand either way on the truth of *x*, one can hardly be said to believe that *x*. In only ever pretending that certain propositions are true, and refraining from ever taking any to be true, the sceptic gives up on belief. With belief, however, also falls the practice of giving reasons: the sceptic cannot count as providing reasons for his hypothetical beliefs and consequent actions if he does not even believe in the evidence he provides. There is something perverse in claiming, say, ‘The reason why I am not drinking the coffee is that it is too hot; I do not, however, actually believe that it is hot.’ Furthermore, it is unclear to me what it means to say that an impression seems true, if not that one takes it to be true. There are, of course, cases where what we mean is that something merely possesses verisimilitude; this sort of usage, however, makes sense only against a background where we take many other things actually to *be* true. If the Carneadean never takes any impression to be true, it is not obvious what he means in saying that many seem true.

⁴⁰ The fact that this passage comes only a few pages after Carneades’ argument for the non-existence of any criterion of truth may appear problematic. One solution is to propose that in claiming that the school of Carneades calls the *pithanon* a criterion of truth, Sextus is distorting the position of the Academics in order to render them more dogmatic than the Pyrrhonists. Alternatively, one might conjecture that the arguments against any criterion of truth were Carneades’ own, the depiction of the *pithanon* as a criterion of truth Philo’s and Metrodorus’ innovation (Brittain, *Philo*, 96). What troubles me about both proposals is that they render the text internally inconsistent; Sextus does not attribute these contrasting positions to different Academic sources, and were it his intention to accuse Carneades of such glaring self-contradiction, surely he would have made this explicit. Instead, we should pay close attention to Sextus’ language: Carneades is said to establish that

all of the impressions with one accord appear true (7. 177). In fact, Carneades' entire taxonomy of the *pithanon* begins with the placement of the *pithanon* under the category of impressions that seem true to the percipient. In Cicero, the *probabile* is frequently paired with the *veri simile*, what resembles the truth: the reasonable Academics (presumably Carneades and his followers) allow that something is probable and like the truth (*Acad.* 2. 32); the Stoic sage is forced to follow what is probable and like the truth, though not cataleptically grasped (2. 99); the Academic sage takes many things to be true, though not possessed of the Stoic distinguishing mark (2. 101). Advocates of the weak interpretation would like to deny that the Academic takes his impressions to be true. However, if this is the case, it is very difficult to know what to make of Carneades' emphasis on the fact that *pithanai phantasiai* are impressions that seem true.⁴¹

VI

I would now like to turn to the strong interpretation. I was enticed into this somewhat unpopular view by the sort of textual evidence that I deployed against the weak interpretation. Namely, if Carneades himself emphasizes that the *pithanon* is what appears true and that it serves as a basis of judgement, then it seems reason-

οὐδέν ἐστιν ἀπλῶς ἀληθείας κριτήριον, nothing is *unqualifiedly* a criterion of truth (*M.* 7. 159). This leaves room for there being a criterion of truth in some limited, non-absolute sense (see G. Striker, 'Kritērion tēs Alētheias', in Striker, *Essays on Hellenistic Epistemology and Ethics* (Cambridge, 1996), 22–76 at 53 n. 43, 55). The *pithanon* is offered as a fallible criterion of truth; this is to be contrasted with the cataleptic impression, which is proposed as an infallible criterion.

⁴¹ One line of response is to concede that Carneades is often presented as claiming that the *pithanon* is what seems true, but to argue that this is an incorrect interpretation of Carneades, perpetuated by his dogmatic successors and his Pyrrhonian opponents. Proponents of this position tend to treat Cicero as a more reliable source than Sextus. The difficulty is, of course, that both Sextus and Cicero call the *pithanon* the apparently true. And if both of our major sources link the *pithanon* to the appearance of truth, then this evidence cannot be so easily dismissed. Frede, in fact, draws attention to this line in Cicero's interpretation of Carneades ('Assent', 141, 144), but distinguishes Clitomachean (classical) and Philonian/Metrodorian (dogmatic) strands within Cicero. While it is true that Cicero presents Clitomachus as opposed to Metrodorus and Philo at 2. 78, the issue at hand is whether Carneades allows that the sage will opine, not the nature of the *pithanē phantasia*. In fact, two of the passages where Cicero links the *pithanon* to the apparently true occur when Cicero claims to report Clitomachus' views (*Acad.* 2. 99, 101).

able to conclude that when the Academic assents to his impressions, he either implicitly or explicitly judges them to be true. Perhaps I have overstated matters. As an Academic, Carneades also emphasizes the possibility of error. Though many impressions appear true, none possesses the Stoic mark of truth, and on any occasion when we take ourselves to know something, we may be mistaken (*Acad.* 2. 101). Thus, while the Academic normally takes his impressions to be true, he is also constantly aware of the possibility, however remote, that they may turn out to be false. This can best be expressed by describing the Carneadean as one who takes his impressions to be probably, though not certainly, true. The difference between the Academic and the Stoic lies in this crucial restriction. While the Stoic criterion is the impression that is unmistakably true, the Academic employs the impression that is probably true.⁴²

⁴² This is not to say that the Academic is certain that his impression is merely probable; after all, as a sceptic, he is not certain of anything. My position can be elaborated as follows. What the Academic approves of are, first and foremost, perceptual experiences, impressions such as 'there is an apple on the table'. This entails his approval of corresponding second-level truth claims—'it is true that there is an apple on the table'; in both cases, the Academic's approval is conditioned by the allowance that he may be mistaken, that his impression may turn out to be false. The Academics' practice of making truth claims is attested to by Sextus, who states that when he sees something clearly, the Carneadean assents to it as true (*M.* 7. 179–80; see also 7. 188); their reliance on the aforementioned caveat is emphasized by Cicero, who writes that many things must be trusted by the senses, but with the proviso that nothing possesses the Stoic mark of truth (*Acad.* 2. 99). The form of belief I am describing can be termed provisional belief—belief in the truth of an impression, with the stipulation that the impression may be false. Provisional belief, in turn, implies belief in probability. If one believes that x is true, with the proviso that it may be false, then this entails the belief that x is probable. It is probable in two senses: x is, one believes, more likely true than false, and belief in x is warranted by the evidence. Thus, according to Sextus, the Academics say that something is good with the conviction that it is more probable that what they say is good actually is good than the opposite—what they approve of here is a probability claim (*PH* 1. 226). Of course, one's belief in the probability of x is, itself, qualified. Though this implies a regress, this is inescapable for any construal of belief as entailing truth commitment (full-fledged, qualified, or otherwise).

Against my equation of partial belief with probability claims, according to D. M. Armstrong, partial belief does not translate into belief in probability, because probability is relative to evidence, not so degree of belief (*Belief, Truth and Knowledge* (Cambridge, 1973), 108–9). However, as I understand Carneades' use of the *pithanon*, his criterion is designed precisely to rule out irrational, evidence-independent conviction. Striker goes so far as to claim that partial belief, which Carneades is proposing, does not involve taking to be probable, or even provisionally taking to be true; on Striker's reading, Carneades is proposing an alternative theory of belief, in which belief does not imply any connection to truth ('Strategies', 80–1). *Contra* Striker, I fail to see how, if one has a partial belief that x , one can have no commitment either way to the truth of x .

The Academic criterion I have outlined is just the sort of thing that we use in everyday practical reasoning. When an individual gets married, begets a family, or goes on a voyage, he is not indubitably sure of the outcome, but if he has investigated the matter with care, then he can follow what is probable.

I take it to be obvious that my version of Carneades' theory is not susceptible to the *apraxia* charge. The real challenge for my interpretation rests in whether it can marry such a strong version of the *pithanon* to the Academic's commitment to maintain *epochē*. As I suggested above, the Academic is to be distinguished from the Stoic by his awareness of his own epistemic fallibility. Thus, by my interpretation, *epochē* consists in the Academic's commitment not to adhere dogmatically to any view, not to take any impression to be unmistakably true. My understanding of *epochē* can perhaps be clarified by creating an artificial distinction between the degree of credence and the degree of explicitness of an act of assent. In any case when one assents to an impression, one can distinguish one's degree of certainty regarding the propositional content of the impression that one assents to (taking the impression to be true, taking the impression to be merely probable, etc.) from the way in which one holds that propositional content (implicitly, explicitly, etc.). I believe that the Academic does not differ from the Stoic in the degree of explicitness of his assent. Both can assent to impressions in a manner that is implicit, when they are simply led to act by their impressions, and in a way that is explicit, when they give deliberate and conscious assent to their impressions. The crucial difference lies in the degree of credence involved in their assenting. While the Stoic takes his impressions to be true, the Academic takes them to be merely probably true. I believe that my interpretation not only allows for the complexity of our perceptual and intellectual experience, but that it also makes the best sense of the text. After all, Carneades allows that the *pithanon* is employed both in the case when a man in flight thoughtlessly assumes that a ditch is ambushed (*M.* 7. 186) and when he painstakingly investigates whether a coil of rope is a snake. Again, the form of assent permissible to Carneades is described at one point as a matter of deliberate choice (*PH* 1. 229–30) and at another as merely following one's impressions (*Acad.* 2. 104).

It is my hope that my interpretation of Carneades makes clear the way in which his *pithanon* theory, though advanced in debate with

the Stoics, is not intended as a bizarre philosophical doctrine, but rather as a description of the way in which ordinary people function successfully. I believe that this is somewhat lost in the weak interpretation; the Academic comes across as avoiding commitment to his own beliefs in a manner that seems unnatural and even fanatical. This cannot have been Carneades' intention. He compares the Academic sage to such ordinary figures as a doctor diagnosing fever, a man fleeing his enemies, a person avoiding a snake, and a man setting off on a voyage. Carneades' sceptic does not claim to have knowledge as defined by the Stoic, unshakable assent to the cataleptic impression. However, the Academic does allow that he can probably get at the way things are, particularly if he employs a series of common-sense tests, such as examining the object closely and in full light. Through it all, he realizes the omnipresent possibility of error. Carneades uses several examples derived from myth and tragedy (for example, at *M.* 7. 170 he quotes Euripides' *Orestes*); one might say that he is exhorting the Academic to avoid a hubristic over-confidence in his powers of perception and judgement.⁴³

VII

It would be only fitting for a paper on scepticism to aim at equipollence; I shall therefore set out what I take to be the chief objections to my interpretation. The first I do not consider especially problematic; it consists of attempted textual refutation. The passage which appears to offer the strongest evidence against me lies at *Acad.* 2. 104; Frede uses this as the basis for his weak-assent theory. Recall that the Academic sage is described here as one who 'restrains himself from responding so as to approve or disapprove of something', and as one who, following probability, 'wherever this occurs or is lacking can respond "yes" or "no" accordingly'. This

⁴³ Does Carneades' scepticism then only amount to the commitment to follow every assertion with the tag-line 'But I might be mistaken'? If so, is it trivial? Yes and no. On the one hand, Carneades, I believe, takes himself merely to be describing everyday norms of conduct, not to be concocting some outlandish philosophical theory—in this sense, Carneadean scepticism is trivial. On the other hand, Carneades is undermining a long-held philosophical assumption to the effect that knowledge, understood to be infallible, is required for living well. In this sense, Carneadean scepticism is radical.

passage might seem to imply that taking one's impressions to be probably true would consist in affirming them, and that all that is permitted is to be swayed by one's impressions into responding in the affirmative or negative when asked.

However, I do not believe that such an interpretation of the passage is warranted. It relies on the assumption that in claiming that the wise man avoids assent and approval, Cicero employs the terms 'approve' and 'assent' to mean taking one's impressions to be either true or probably true. I could equally well respond that what Cicero really means by these expressions is taking one's impressions to be indubitably true. While my interpretation might be considered a stretch of the everyday sense of these terms, this would not be unusual for Cicero. After all, Cicero often claims that nothing can be perceived (e.g. *Acad.* 2. 28, 103), and his meaning is hardly that nothing can be detected by the senses; rather, he uses 'perceived' to mean subject to unshakably correct perception. In fact, it seems that Cicero must be using 'approve' and 'assent' in some sense that is stronger than their ordinary use, since otherwise in saying 'yes' or 'no' the Academic sage would violate his commitment to approve of nothing.

A more significant objection, perhaps, is that in treating the *pithanon* as the probable, I am importing ideas that were not present in Carneades' time. This argument involves two related claims: first, that the Greeks had no concept of probability, and second, that the word *pithanon* simply did not mean 'probable'.⁴⁴ To turn to the historical side of things, Hacking argues that there was no concept of probability in Europe prior to the seventeenth century.⁴⁵ Sambursky notes that, though the Stoics laid down certain foundations needed for a theory of probability, no such theory emerged.⁴⁶ Both scholars point to the rudimentary state of Greek algebra as a primary cause; Sambursky suggests that the general belief that terrestrial, as opposed to celestial, phenomena were irregular and even random may have played a contributing role, since this would have discouraged the sort of statistical analysis that is a precursor

⁴⁴ The argument is pursued most persuasively by Burnyeat (n. 18 above).

⁴⁵ I. Hacking, *The Emergence of Probability: A Philosophical Study of Early Ideas about Probability, Induction and Statistical Inference [Emergence]* (Cambridge, 1975), 1–10.

⁴⁶ S. Sambursky, 'On the Possible and the Probable in Ancient Greece' ['Possible'], *Osiris*, 12 (1956), 35–48 at 46.

to theories of probability.⁴⁷ On this basis, one might conclude that the Greeks possessed no concept whatsoever of probability.

This is a conclusion that I want to resist. While the Greeks certainly lacked a theory of probability, this does not preclude their having a loose, non-theoretical understanding of probability. The Greeks had games of chance, in particular dice, and employed methods of deciding by lot—that is to say, they employed both randomizers and generators of stable frequencies.⁴⁸ Aristotle writes in *De caelo* that to repeat the same throw of dice once or twice is easy, ten thousand times impossible (2. 12, 292^a29). The Athenian economy relied heavily on maritime loans with varying rates of interest, depending on the risk of the voyage. In fact, I believe that it would be very difficult for anyone to get by in life successfully without recognizing that certain events are more frequent than others and, consequently, certain outcomes more probable; this sort of ‘probabilistic’ thinking is indispensable to everyday practical reasoning.

It is this pre-theoretical conception of probability that is being exploited by Carneades in his criterion. It involves the thought that a statement is probable if it is more likely true than false, and that it is more probable than an alternative statement if, of the two, it is the one more likely to be true. It is the sense of probability one employs when making claims such as ‘It is probable that he will come to the party’—what one means is that, given the evidence (he said he would come, he is generally reliable, etc.), it is more likely true than false that he will come. This sense of probability is surely implied by practices such as laying wagers, and in prognostications such as that of Carneades’ sage, who thinks it probable that he will make the voyage given that both his crew and the weather are good. It is reflected in Zeno’s definition of a *eulogon* (reasonable, likely) proposition as one with a greater disposition to be true than false, such as the statement ‘I will live tomorrow’ (D.L. 7. 76). To turn to a later source, consider Cicero’s statement that the *probabile* is

⁴⁷ Sambursky, ‘Possible’, 46–7.

⁴⁸ Hacking, *Emergence*, 9. Sambursky emphasizes that the Greeks assigned the highest value to the Aphrodite throw, which was not the least probable (‘Possible’, 44–5). However, at most this indicates that the Greeks did not perform accurate probabilistic calculations; it is also possible that they valued the throw for reasons unrelated to its likelihood of occurring. I might add that many people today engage in irrational betting behaviour—this does not indicate that they lack any conception of probability, but only that gambling is a context in which their behaviour tends to deviate from the decision-making norms dictated by probability theory.

'that which happens for the most part, or which is held in opinion, or which has in itself a certain similarity to these, whether it is true or false' (*Inv.* 1. 46). Cicero's statement in fact brings together two senses of *pithanon*—that of persuasiveness (what is held in opinion) and that of probability (in this case, frequency). The *pithanon* is the persuasive, as well as the probable, but its persuasiveness is grounded in rational evidence such as the frequency of certain outcomes. I translate it as 'probable' in order to emphasize that the *pithanon* is not merely the subjectively persuasive; it could equally well be rendered 'credible' or 'likely'.

At this point it would not be unreasonable to ask whether this loose, non-theoretical sense of probability I have in mind corresponds better to modern frequency or degree-of-belief theories of probability. The answer is the latter. This is not because the former, but not the latter, is absent in antiquity. Both types of probability theory employ complex mathematical analyses that were absent to the Greeks—there were surely no Keynesians in second-century Athens. The reason is that what are *pithana* are impressions—that is to say, representative mental states. In both Sextus and Cicero *pithanon* and *probabile* are primarily used to refer to impressions, not states of affairs; this is witnessed by their use of the expressions *pithanē phantasia* and *probabile visum* (e.g. *M.* 7. 166; *Acad.* 2. 99). To call an impression *pithanē* is to claim that it warrants belief because it is grounded in reliable evidence and is more likely true than false. The sense here is not subjective; Carneades' frequent allusions to the sage imply normativity and call to mind, if anything, contemporary intersubjective degree-of-belief accounts of probability.

What about the linguistic evidence? According to the argument against me, *pithanon* simply does not mean 'probable' in Carneades' time. This is in fact correct. *Pithanon* comes from *peithein* 'persuade',⁴⁹ and correspondingly, its primary sense is 'persuasive' or 'convincing', particularly in rhetorical contexts (e.g. Arist. *Rhet.* 1. 2, 1355^b 25–6). However, this does not settle matters. Philosophers, particularly in classical antiquity, frequently adopt terms with one meaning, and assign other, technical meanings to them. *Katalēpsis*, for example, literally means 'seizure', but the Stoics use it to mean 'infallible cognition of the truth'. In developing such terms of art, philosophers, of course, select their words for a reason—Zeno, in

⁴⁹ See LSJ s.v. *πιθάνος*.

this example, is drawn to the image of grasping or seizing conveyed by *katalēpsis* (*Acad.* 2. 145).

Perhaps the same can be said of Carneades' use of *pithanon*, a term whose everyday meaning is 'persuasive', and which was already employed by the Stoics in philosophical contexts. What do the Stoics mean by *pithanon*? Zeno defines a *pithanon* judgement as one which leads to assent, and gives the example 'If someone gave birth to something, she is its mother' (*D.L.* 7. 75). As Zeno emphasizes, this proposition is, strictly speaking, false—a hen is not the mother of an egg. According to Sextus, the Stoics call *pithanai phantasiai* impressions which incline us to assent by producing a smooth motion in the soul—these include impressions that are true, false, and both true and false (*M.* 7. 242–4). What both of these sources indicate is that, for the Stoics, *pithanai phantasiai* possess two distinguishing features: they induce assent, and they can be false.

Carneades, as a sceptic, is eager to incorporate precisely these aspects of the meaning of *pithanon*. We do not have the infallible and direct access to external reality implied by the Stoic 'grasp'; all that can rely on is what we find convincing. As the sceptic makes all too clear, this can lead us astray—in Carneades' taxonomy as well, the *pithanon* is common to the true and the false. Carneades follows the Stoics this far. However, in constructing his sceptic criterion, he also improves upon and modifies the Stoic *pithanon*. In particular, he supplements the *pithanē phantasia* with the impression that is undiverted and thoroughly explored, refinements that are absent from the Stoic analysis. Carneades' criterion is what convinces us for a reason, in so far as it is grounded in evidence which renders the impression reliable, though not infallible. His point, *contra* the Stoics, is that, though certainty eludes us, we are not entirely epistemically impoverished. If we employ a series of sensible tests, and examine matters to the best of our abilities, then what persuades us turns out to be fairly reliable, and this is good enough.

There are two sources of evidence for my claim that Carneades uses *pithanon* to mean 'probable'. The first is Sextus' use of the term in describing Carneades' position. I have already argued for this above, by emphasizing the role of coherence and verification in Carneades' taxonomy of the *pithanon*. Even when Sextus treats Carneades' *pithanon* as what is persuasive, he invariably links this either to the presence of reliable evidence or to the appearance

of truth. The vivid impression 'persuades us and drags us to assent' (*M.* 7. 172), but what makes it vivid is that it is received under good perceptual circumstances, the very circumstances that are confirmed at the level of the thoroughly explored impression. Burnyeat (n. 18 above) cites *M.* 8. 51–4 as evidence that the *pithanon* is merely what is subjectively persuasive. The context is one in which Sextus is arguing against every possible criterion of truth, including that of the Academics; if the *pithanon* is equated with the true, then this will violate the law of non-contradiction, as different people find the same things convincing and unconvincing. Contrary to Burnyeat's interpretation, what is noteworthy about this passage is that the Academics are criticized for treating the *pithanon* as a criterion of truth, and even charged with identifying the *pithanon* with the true. The connection between what convinces and what appears true is fully explicit in Carneades' taxonomy: the impression that does not appear true is called *apithanos phantasia*, because it does not convince us (*M.* 7. 169).

Consider, by contrast, the difficulty of construing *pithanon* as the merely subjectively persuasive in the following passage: 'The Academics say that something is good or bad, not like us, but convinced [*pepeisthai*] that it is more *pithanon* that what they say is good actually is good than the opposite . . . while we say that something is good or bad without believing that what we say is *pithanon*' (*PH* 1. 226). Sextus' argument makes no sense if we replace *pithanon* with 'persuasive'—the Academics would then be guilty of taking what persuades them to be persuasive! Apart from the redundancy that would emerge from such a reading, it is vital to bear in mind that Sextus' point is that there is something objectionably dogmatic in taking one's impressions to be *pithanai*; in fact, Sextus goes on to criticize the Academics for taking some impressions to be *pithanai*, others *apithanoi* (*PH* 1. 227). Sextus has no quarrel with being convinced by one's impressions, if all that this means is being compelled by them to act—in fact, this weak form of conviction is exactly how Sextus proposes that the Pyrrhonist respond to *apraxia* (*PH* 1. 229–30). Sextus' objection to the Academics centres on their suggestion that there is a certain quality of impressions, *pithanotēs*, which justifies belief in them.

My second argument is more indirect. It relies on the connection between the *pithanon* and the *eikos*. The primary sense of *eikos* is

'reasonable' or 'likely';⁵⁰ Aristotle, for example, defines the *eikos* as *ὡς ἐπὶ τὸ πολὺ γινόμενον*, what happens for the most part (*Rhet.* 1. 2, 1357^a34; see also *Pr. An.* 2. 27, 70^a4–5). In rhetorical contexts the *eikos* is what appears true, though it may not be—Plato writes in the *Phaedrus* that the *eikos* comes about in the minds of the many by its resemblance to the truth (*Phdr.* 273 D 3–4). Given that it is just this cluster of meanings—what is reasonable, what occurs frequently, what seems true—that I am attempting to assign to Carneades' *pithanon*, then, if I can establish a connection between the *eikos* and the *pithanon*, my case will be considerably strengthened. In fact, Plato explicitly equates the two: the *pithanon* is, he writes, the *eikos* (*Phdr.* 272 D 8–E 1). According to Glucker, by the second century BC the distinction between these terms is largely blurred.⁵¹ When we turn to Cicero, things get interesting. Glucker claims that Cicero maintains a distinction between the *pithanon* and the *eikos*, translating the former as *probabile*, the latter as *veri simile*, but adds that, in discussing the criterion, Cicero treats the two as largely interchangeable, following his Academic sources.⁵² Reid, by contrast, argues that for Cicero, *veri simile* and *probabile* both translate *pithanon*.⁵³ In either case, my point remains: the *pithanon* is either paired with or identical to what seems true.

On a more general level, I believe that the unpopularity of the strong interpretation of Carneades in recent years stems from the general assumption that Carneades was solely a dialectician. Interpreters of this persuasion point to evidence of a disagreement among Carneades' successors concerning the correct interpretation of their former master. Clitomachus, assumed to be the more faithful interpreter of Carneades, understood Carneades' claims to be merely dialectical, while Metrodorus and Philo took Carneades to endorse his own epistemic proposals. Such interpreters typically distinguish three phases in the interpretation of Carneades: that of Clitomachus, that of Metrodorus and the early Philo, and that of Philo in his Roman period. The *pithanon* becomes connected to objective truth, they claim, only in the Philonian/Metrodorian stage; under Clitomachus, it is merely equivalent to the subjectively persuasive.⁵⁴ One might therefore object to my interpreta-

⁵⁰ See LSJ s.v. *εἰκός*.

⁵¹ J. Glucker, 'Probabile, Veri Simile and Related Terms' [*Probabile*], in J. Powell (ed.), *Cicero the Philosopher: Twelve Papers* (Oxford, 1995), 115–43 at 126–7.

⁵² 'Probabile', 128–33.

⁵³ *Cicero*, 216.

⁵⁴ Brittain, *Philo*, 11, 16.

tion by claiming that I am mistaking Philo's misinterpretation for Carneades' actual view.⁵⁵

This sort of objection stems from the failure to distinguish several interpretative issues. In the first place, one can raise meta-theoretical questions about Carneades. What positions, if any, does he endorse *in propria persona*? Is the *pithanon* merely a dialectical ploy, or is it Carneades' own epistemic theory? These are distinct from intra-theoretical questions, which include such issues as whether the *pithanon* is the persuasive or merely the probable and, relatedly, whether approval of the *pithanon* is merely passive, or whether it can also be active and explicit. My argument is concerned exclusively with the second class of questions, those pertaining to the content, and not the status, of Carneades' theory. This is the result of a deliberate interpretative strategy on my part—while the meta-theoretical issues are, I believe, largely insoluble, the content of Carneades' *pithanon* theory can be determined independently of these, if we allow that it is intended as a response to the *apraxia* charge and, correspondingly, as a defence of *epochē*.

Our evidence of an interpretative divide within the Academy is surprisingly scarce, and it all points to disagreement on the meta-theoretical level, with the possible exception of Carneades' position on *epochē*.⁵⁶ At *Acad.* 2. 78 Cicero writes that according to Philo and Metrodorus, Carneades accepted the view that the sage opines; Cicero, siding with Clitomachus, believes that Carneades merely advanced this in argument. At 2. 148 Catulus too states that, according to Carneades, the wise man opines. What is at stake here is not whether Carneades claimed that the sage opines, but whether he advanced this as his own position. Similarly, perhaps, concerning *akatalēpsia*. Catulus continues his Carneadean spiel, stating that the wise man may assent so long as he knows (*sciat*) that nothing can be perceived; according to Lucullus, Carneades denied that even this thesis can be perceived (2. 28).⁵⁷ However, these may not be entirely incompatible: at 2. 110 Cicero proposes that, though the Academic cannot perceive that nothing can be perceived, he

⁵⁵ For the claim that Philo and Metrodorus misunderstand Carneades, see e.g. Brittain, *Philo*, 74; Burnyeat (n. 18 above).

⁵⁶ In fact, the claim that Carneades abandoned *epochē* undoubtedly stems from a meta-theoretical assumption, that Carneades himself endorsed the *pithanon* theory, coupled with the erroneous supposition that this theory is at odds with *epochē*.

⁵⁷ Reid suggests that *sciat* may be a corruption of *sentiat*—this would alleviate the apparent self-contradiction in Catulus' statement (*Cicero*, 348).

can hold this as probable. Finally, there is divergence over whether or not Carneades reneged on *epochē*. As I discussed above, Clitomachus presents Carneades as committed to *epochē*; Catulus implies Carneades' rejection or endorsement thereof, depending on one's preferred emendation of *Acad.* 2. 148; according to Eusebius, Carneades abandoned *epochē* (*PE* 14. 7. 15).

We can therefore conclude that there was disagreement over three issues: whether Carneades himself held that the sage opines or merely advanced this dialectically; whether Carneades claimed to know that nothing can be perceived; and whether Carneades abandoned *epochē*. None of this has any bearing on the content of the *pithanon* theory. Our evidence only points to disagreement about its status. Of course, one might argue that these are not entirely disconnected. If the *pithanon* is, in fact, the probable, then one might ask why Carneades would hold back from endorsing the *pithanon* theory as itself probable. This question, though, can be turned against the weak interpretation as well: why should Carneades not find his theory of the persuasive itself persuasive? If Carneades did not endorse the *pithanon* theory as probable, the reason for this may have been that he was generally distrustful of philosophical theories. Though certain sense-impressions frequently struck him as probable, his experience in argumentation taught him that no philosophical position is more likely true than false, given all of the possible counter-arguments that may be raised.

Why do the weak theorists typically move from observations concerning the meta-theoretical dispute among Carneades' followers to speculations regarding intra-theoretical disagreement? Presumably because of a perceived internal inconsistency: Carneades appears to advocate *epochē* in good faith, all the while proposing that the sage approve of what is probable and what resembles the truth. Positing rival interpretations is one way to resolve this inconsistency. Another is to devise an interpretation under which this inconsistency is merely apparent (a course that I have been pursuing thus far); yet another is to reveal the inconsistency to be philosophically interesting (an option which I pursue at the conclusion of this paper).

One might protest that I have made a dogmatic sceptic out of Carneades, and rendered his position indistinguishable from that of Philo. Not so—my interpretation still leaves room for a substantial gap between Carneades' probabilism and the more dogmatic

position of his later followers.⁵⁸ Metrodorus appears to distance himself from *akatalēpsia* (Aug. *Acad.* 3. 18. 41), and Philo goes so far as to claim that, while objects are acataleptic in relation to the Stoic criterion, they are cataleptic in their real natures (*PH* 1. 235).⁵⁹ Conversely, I might well accuse the weak interpretation of erring in the opposite direction, of failing to distinguish the position of Carneades from that of Arcesilaus. Sextus (*PH* 1. 220) and Eusebius (*PE* 14. 4. 16) both draw a sharp distinction between the Academy of Arcesilaus and that of Carneades; while Sextus finds Carneades objectionably dogmatic, he exempts Arcesilaus from this charge (*PH* 1. 232). It was presumably the failure of Arcesilaus' criterion to meet the *apraxia* charge that forced Carneades to propose his stronger alternative, the *pithanon*. However, unless Carneades' *pithanon* is linked to justification, evidence, and, ultimately, truth, it will fail to differ substantially from Arcesilaus' purely causal criterion, the *eulogon*.⁶⁰

VIII

Enough said about textual difficulties and the like. I believe that the real problem for my interpretation is of a more philosophical nature. While the weak interpretation provides an unsatisfactory response to the *apraxia* charge, the strong runs foul in undermining the Academic's commitment to *epochē*. This is not as obvious as it might seem. The strong interpretation does allow for a clear gap between dogmatic and sceptical forms of assent: the Academic can approve of his impressions so long as he does not take them to be indubitably true. The real difficulty is more pernicious: Carneades is obliged by his own theory to employ the sort of assent that I claim he would consider dogmatic. This conflict is hinted at in the *Academica*, when Cicero describes the objection raised by Antiochus, which Philo was said to have found the most problematic for the *pithanon* theory

⁵⁸ See also Thorsrud, 'Fallibilism', 1–4.

⁵⁹ For detailed discussion of Philo's position, see Brittain, *Philo*; Glucker, *Antiochus*, ch. 1.

⁶⁰ On Arcesilaus' criterion, see Bett, 'Reappraisal', 65–7. Two factors favour taking the *eulogon* to be purely causal: Plutarch's report that Arcesilaus did away with assent as a necessary precondition for action (*Adv. Col.* 1122 B–D), and Sextus' claim that a *katorthōma* is an act which, once performed (*prachthen*), has a *eulogon* justification (*M.* 7. 158).

(2. 111). According to this objection, Carneades is guilty of two contradictory assumptions: that there are some false impressions, and that true and false impressions are indistinguishable. Philo was obviously being a bit obtuse; the Academic is not required to establish the existence of false impressions, only their possibility.⁶¹

Now imagine turning Antiochus' objection on its head. Carneades' problematic assumption is not that there are false impressions, but that there are true ones, and this cannot be established to anyone's satisfaction in the absence of infallible access to the truth. Why should Carneades be committed to the view that there are true impressions? Because they are required in order to enable the Academic to employ the *pithanon* as a criterion for life with any confidence. In order to induce *epochē* in his opponent, the Academic is required to emphasize and even exaggerate the possibility of error. But why then should he have any faith in his own impressions? As Lucullus claims for Antiochus, if Carneades' probable impression has a community with false impressions, it will contain no standard of judgement (*Acad.* 2. 33–4). Carneades' response is to reassure us that, while the *pithanē phantasia* occasionally counterfeits the truth, it reports truly for the most part (*M.* 7. 175). Cases of dreams and hallucinations are merely meant to throw off the Stoic; the ordinary man can feel confident in the knowledge that he usually detects his errors and that they are few and far between. The problem is, what makes Carneades so sure of this fact? It may appear to him that most people are not systematically deluded, but if any impression can be false, then why not this one? Thus, if Carneades' *pithanon* is to inspire the Academic with any confidence to act, Carneades must be sure of at least one thing: that the *pithanon* reports correctly for the most part.

It is true that this sort of objection was not and would not have been raised by Carneades' contemporaries, since Academic scepticism is not concerned with the possibility of systematic delusion. Both the Academic and his opponents accept that most of our im-

⁶¹ Brittain offers a more sympathetic reading of the objection (*Philo*, 131). According to Brittain, the real purport of Antiochus' argument is that, given the Academics' arguments for *akatalēpsia*, they cannot assume any impression to be true, including the impression that there are false impressions. Brittain goes on to pursue a line of objection against Philo similar to the one I raise against Carneades in what follows—Brittain focuses on the Academic assumption that some impressions are true (130–8), while I attack Carneades' claim that most of our probable impressions are true.

pressions are true;⁶² the Academic's challenge is not that they might all be false, but rather, that if any individual impression can be false, then we cannot claim certain knowledge in any instance. Should this historical fact alleviate our concern? I think not. Carneades tells us not to worry if some of our impressions are false, because most are true. But by his own argument, even this impression can be false. And if the purported fact that our impressions are true for the most part can itself be false, then we have grounds for concern. On the other hand, if Carneades advances this claim as unmistakable fact, then he has reneged on his sceptical commitment to always maintain some form of *epochē*.

There is a very natural response that one might raise on Carneades' behalf. Namely, why is probability not good enough? Is it not sufficient that it be probable that our impressions report truly for the most part? Why does *this* impression have to be infallible? In the first place, it seems that if there is a chance that we are systematically deluded, and if this possibility cannot be ruled out, then Carneades will have lost the basis for confidence that he needs to provide in response to *apraxia*. Carneades, in constructing his anti-dogmatic artillery, will have devised a weapon too strong for the task at hand, one that will destroy not only dogmatic but also everyday certainty. Suppose we allow, though, that all that Carneades needs to establish is that it is *probable* that the *pithanon* reports truly for the most part. The question is, how can he ever demonstrate this? Carneades cannot ground this claim in any of his other impressions, as this single impression is meant to serve as a foundation for all the rest—his strategy would be circular. The point is that radical sceptical scenarios call all of our impressions into doubt; in that case, we are left without evidence to which we can appeal in order to counter such scenarios.

One might, perhaps, maintain that Carneades does not need to prove that the *pithanon* reports truly for the most part; it is enough if it actually does. The suggestion, then, is that Carneades is a proto-externalist. Against this, it should be emphasized that the Academics themselves assume an internalist stance in arguing against the Stoics: 'How can you claim to know that this man before you is Cotta,' asks the Academic, 'when you can't rule out that, unbeknownst to you, he has an indistinguishable twin?' (*Acad.* 2. 84–5).

⁶² See Burnyeat (n. 18 above). *Contra*, see Brittain, *Philo*, 132 n. 5; Groarke, *Anti-Realist*, 102 n. 15.

Perhaps, though, Carneades' point is that if one adheres to internalist demands on knowledge, it will forever elude us; his innovation is to propose an externalist alternative (though he would refrain from calling the resultant state knowledge). This may be Carneades' strategy, but it would not provide much by way of a response to the *apraxia* charge. Carneades would be replying to the Stoic that so long as radical sceptical scenarios turn out false, then he does have an adequate guide for action and belief. The difficulty is that Carneades is not entitled simply to dismiss such scenarios; in fact, it was he who so dexterously conjured up their precursors! Furthermore, Carneades does seem concerned to establish, not merely that the *pithanon* might turn out to be a criterion, but that it actually is one. Presumably this is what motivates him to claim that the *pithanon* reports truly for the most part.

Alternatively, one might argue that it is unfair of me to foist a foundationalist epistemology onto Carneades. His second criterion, the convincing and undiverted impression, is the impression which does not conflict with any of one's other impressions, and this suggests a position close to coherentism. Much will depend on which version of coherentism we take Carneades to endorse. There is no textual evidence that he holds a coherence theory of truth, and I suspect that Carneades would take such a position to be over-recondite, to diverge too much from ordinary usage. In fact, Carneades' pronouncement that an impression is true when it is in accord with the object presented indicates that, if anything, he espouses a correspondence theory of truth (*M.* 7. 168). What about a coherence theory of justification? This may very well be what Carneades has in mind. However, if divorced from a coherence theory of truth, then it leaves open the possibility that our set of justified beliefs may turn out to be false, for all we know.⁶³ This, in turn, lends itself to the *apraxia* charge. I might add that Carneades advances arguments against reasoning itself, suggesting

⁶³ Among contemporary epistemologists, L. Bonjour offers a particularly well-thought-out reply to this line of argument (*The Structure of Empirical Knowledge* (Cambridge, 1985), ch. 8). Bonjour argues that correspondence is the most likely cause of coherence and that, consequently, a coherence theory of justification conjoined to a correspondence theory of truth is not vulnerable to sceptical attack. While a full response is outside the scope of this paper, I will mention that I do not think that Bonjour offers a sufficient defence of his claim that the facts of evolutionary biology are internal to the elaborated correspondence hypothesis, while considerations of the demon's motivation for generating beliefs that are coherent but false are external to the elaborated demon hypothesis.

that we cannot even know with certainty whether our beliefs are consistent.

Here is a very general way of raising my concern. Intentional action requires choice and choice, at least in most cases, requires the possibility of justification. Justification, in turn, involves truth claims. Perhaps it is sufficient to talk of probable truth here. But for something to be probably true, it must be more likely true than false, and it is not clear how the sceptic can ever demonstrate this. This problem is particularly aggravated by the sceptic's method of balancing arguments of equal strength for and against any given belief in order to undermine dogmatic assent. Carneades was, of course, the acknowledged master of this destructive art.⁶⁴

While this tension in my interpretation of Carneades' theory is philosophically problematic, I believe that it is also psychologically compelling. In *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* Sextus compares Carneades and his followers to profligates (*asōtoi*, *PH* 1. 230). Sextus claims that the Academics trust in the *pithanon* as a dissipated man believes him who approves of an extravagant lifestyle. The implication is, perhaps, that just as the dissolute should have an inkling that his flatterers' advice is unreliable, so the Academics should suspect that the *pithanon* is not a sound basis for conduct. The *pithanon*, after all, requires unsceptical and unjustifiable assumptions regarding the truth of our impressions. However, like a debauchee faced with the honeyed words of a sycophant, the Carneadean finds the illusion of certainty offered by the *pithanon* impossible to resist. I believe that this is an epistemic position that characterizes most of us. We are aware of our tendency to err, and the more philosophical among us countenance the possibility of systematic delusion. In my opinion, no satisfactory response has yet been found for scepticism about external reality. None the less, we continue to behave as though we do have access to certainty, or at least to probability. What is initially alluring about Carneades' theory is that it promises to explain how we can be sceptics on the street as well as in the office. Upon closer

⁶⁴ See Brochard, *Sceptiques*, 125–7. This raises an interesting difficulty: how can Carneades hold that certain impressions are more probable than others when he is generally committed to *isostheneia*? Striker's suggestion, that the Academics pursue only a mitigated equipollence, confined to theoretical disputes ('Strategies', 59), seems correct to me; such a restriction in scope is hinted at at *Aug. Acad.* 2. 5. 11. One might still wonder what stood in the way of their applying this methodology to perceptual judgements, as did the Pyrrhonists.

examination, I believe that its real interest lies in its revelation of our epistemic hypocrisy.⁶⁵

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⁶⁵ Here I follow Hume, who suggests that the real purpose of scepticism (Pyrrhonian, in this case) is to 'show the whimsical condition of mankind, who must act and reason and believe; though they are not able, by their most diligent enquiry, to satisfy themselves concerning the foundation of these operations, or to remove the objections, which may be raised against them' (*Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*, 12. 2. 128).

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