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Sextus Empiricus and Greek Scepticism

Mary Mills Patrick

Imprint

This book is part of the TREDITION CLASSICS series.

Author: Mary Mills Patrick
Cover design: toepferschumann, Berlin (Germany)

Publisher: tredition GmbH, Hamburg (Germany)
ISBN: 978-3-8491-7185-8

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PREFACE

The following treatise on Sextus Empiricus and Greek Scepticism has been prepared to supply a need much felt in the English language by students of Greek philosophy. For while other schools of Greek philosophy have been exhaustively and critically discussed by English scholars, there are few sources of information available to the student who wishes to make himself familiar with the teachings of Pyrrhonism. The aim has been, accordingly, to give a concise presentation of Pyrrhonism in relation to its historical development and the Scepticism of the Academy, with critical references to the French and German works existing on the subject. The time and manner of the connection of Sextus Empiricus with the Pyrrhonean School has also been discussed.

As the First Book of the *Hypotyposes*, or Pyrrhonic Sketches by Sextus Empiricus, contains the substance of the teachings of Pyrrhonism, it has been hoped that a translation of it into English might prove a useful contribution to the literature on Pyrrhonism, and this translation has been added to the critical part of the work.

In making this translation, and in the general study of the works of Sextus, the Greek text of Immanuel Bekker, Berlin, 1842, has been used, with frequent consultation of the text of J.A. Fabricius, 1718, which was taken directly from the existing manuscripts of the works of Sextus. The divisions into chapters, with the headings of the chapters in the translation, is the same as Fabricius gives from the manuscripts, although not used by Bekker, and the numbers of the paragraphs are the same as those given by both Fabricius and Bekker. References to Diogenes Laertius and other ancient works have been carefully verified.

The principal modern authors consulted are the following:

Ritter, *Geschichte der Philosophie*, II. Auf., Hamburg, 1836—38.

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Lewes, *History of Philosophy*, Vol. I., London, 1866.

Ueberweg, *History of Philosophy*, IV. ed., translated by Morris, 1871.

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Chaignet, *Histoire de la Psychologie des Grecs*, Paris, 1887-90.

Haas, *Leben des Sextus Empiricus*, Burghausen, 1882.

Natorp, *Forschungen zur Geschichte des Erkenntnisproblems bei den Alten*, Berlin, 1884.

Hirzel, *Untersuchungen zu Cicero's philosophischen Schriften*, Leipzig, 1877-83.

Pappenheim, *Erläuterung zu des Sextus Empiricus Pyrrhoneischen Grundzügen*, Heidelberg, 1882.

Pappenheim, *Die Tropen der Griechischen Skeptiker*, Berlin, 1885.

Pappenheim, *Lebensverhältnisse des Sextus Empiricus*, Berlin, 1887.

Pappenheim, *Der angebliche Heraclitismus des Skeptikers Ainesidemos*, Berlin, 1887.

Pappenheim, *Der Sitz der Schule der Griechischen Skeptiker*, *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie*, I. 1, S. 47, 1887.

Maccoll, *The Greek Sceptics from Pyrrho to Sextus*, London, 1869.

My grateful acknowledgments are due to Dr. Ludwig Stein, Professor of Philosophy in the University of Bern, for valuable assistance in relation to the plan of the work and advice in regard to the best authorities to be consulted. Thanks are also due to Dr. Louisos Iliou, of Robert College, Constantinople, for kind suggestions concerning the translation.

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CHAPTER I.

The Historical Relations of Sextus Empiricus.

Interest has revived in the works of Sextus Empiricus in recent times, especially, one may say, since the date of Herbart. There is much in the writings of Sextus that finds a parallel in the methods of modern philosophy. There is a common starting-point in the study of the power and limitations of human thought. There is a common desire to investigate the phenomena of sense-perception, and the genetic relations of man to the lower animals, and a common interest in the theory of human knowledge.

While, however, some of the pages of Sextus' works would form a possible introduction to certain lines of modern philosophical thought, we cannot carry the analogy farther, for Pyrrhonism as a whole lacked the essential element of all philosophical progress, which is a belief in the possibility of finding and establishing the truth in the subjects investigated.

Before beginning a critical study of the writings of Sextus Empiricus, and the light which they throw on the development of Greek Scepticism, it is necessary to make ourselves somewhat familiar with the environment in which he lived and wrote. We shall thus be able to comprehend more fully the standpoint from which he regarded philosophical questions.

Let us accordingly attempt to give some details of his life, including his profession, the time when he lived, the place of his birth, the country in which he taught, and the general aim and character of his works. Here, however, we encounter great difficulties, for although we possess most of the writings of Sextus well preserved, the evidence which they provide on the points mentioned is very slight. He does not give us biographical details in regard to himself, nor does he refer to his contemporaries in a way to afford any exact knowledge of them. His name even furnishes us with a problem impossible of solution. He is called Σέξτος ὁ ἐμπειρικός by Diogenes Laertius [1]: Ἡροδότου δὲ διήκουσε Σέξτος ὁ ἐμπειρικός οὗ καὶ τὰ δέκα τῶν σκεπτικῶν καὶ ἄλλα κάλλιστα' Σέξτου δὲ διήκουσε Σατορνίνος ὁ Κυθῆνας ἐμπεικός καὶ αὐτός. Although in this passage

Diogenes speaks of Sextus the second time without the surname, we cannot understand the meaning otherwise than that Diogenes considered Sextus a physician of the Empirical School. Other evidence also is not wanting that Sextus bore this surname. Fabricius, in his edition of the works of Sextus, quotes from the *Tabella de Sectis Medicorum* of Lambecius the statement that Sextus was called Empiricus because of his position in medicine. [2]

Pseudo-Galen also refers to him as one of the directors of the Empirical School, and calls him Σέξτος ὁ ἐμπειρικός. [3] His name is often found in the manuscripts written with the surname, as for example at the end of *Logic II*. [4] In other places it is found written without the surname, as Fabricius testifies, where Sextus is mentioned as a Sceptic in connection with Pyrrho.

[1] Diog. Laert. IX. 12, 116.

[2] Fabricius *Testimonia*, p. 2.

[3] Pseudo-Galen *Isag.* 4; Fabricius *Testimonia*, p. 2.

[4] Bekker *Math.* VIII. 481.

The Sceptical School was long closely connected with the Empirical School of medicine, and the later Pyrrhoneans, when they were physicians, as was often the case, belonged for the most part to this school. Menedotus of Nicomedia is the first Sceptic, however, who is formally spoken of as an Empirical physician, [1] and his contemporary Theodas of Laodicea was also an Empirical physician. The date of Menedotus and Theodas is difficult to fix, but Brochard and Hass agree that it was about 150 A.D. [2] After the time of these two physicians, who were also each in turn at the head of the Sceptical School, [3] there seems to have been a definite alliance between Pyrrhonism and Empiricism in medicine, and we have every reason to believe that this alliance existed until the time of Sextus.

[1] Diog. IX. 12, 115.

[2] Brochard *Op. cit. Livre IV.* p. 311.

[3] Diog. IX. 12, 116.

The difficulty in regard to the name arises from Sextus' own testimony. In the first book of the *Hypotyposes* he takes strong ground against the identity of Pyrrhonism and Empiricism in medicine.

Although he introduces his objections with the admission that "some say that they are the same," in recognition of the close union that had existed between them, he goes on to say that "Empiricism is neither Scepticism itself, nor would it suit the Sceptic to take that sect upon himself", [1] for the reason that Empiricism maintains dogmatically the impossibility of knowledge, but he would prefer to belong to the Methodical School, which was the only medical school worthy of the Sceptic. "For this alone of all the medical sects, does not proceed rashly it seems to me, in regard to unknown things, and does not presume to say whether they are comprehensible or not, but it is guided by phenomena. [2] It will thus be seen that the Methodical School of medicine has a certain relationship to Scepticism which is closer than that of the other medical sects." [3]

[1] *Hyp.* I. 236.

[2] *Hyp.* I. 237.

[3] *Hyp.* I. 241.

We know from the testimony of Sextus himself that he was a physician. In one case he uses the first person for himself as a physician, [1] and in another he speaks of Asclepius as "the founder of our science," [2] and all his illustrations show a breadth and variety of medical knowledge that only a physician could possess. He published a medical work which he refers to once as *ιατρικὰ ὑπομνήματα*, [3] and again as *ἐμπειρικὰ ὑπομνήματα*. [4] These passages probably refer to the same work, [5] which, unfortunately for the solution of the difficult question that we have in hand, is lost, and nothing is known of its contents.

In apparent contradiction to his statement in *Hypotyposes* I., that Scepticism and Empiricism are opposed to each other, in that Empiricism denies the possibility of knowledge, and Scepticism makes no dogmatic statements of any kind, Sextus classes the Sceptics and Empiricists together in another instance, as regarding knowledge as impossible [6] *ἀλλ' οἱ μὲν φασιν αὐτὰ μὴ καταλαμβάνεσθαι, ὥσπερ οἱ ἀπὸ τῆς ἐμπειρίας ἰατροὶ καὶ οἱ ἀπὸ τῆς σκέψεως φιλόσοφοι*. In another case, on the contrary, he contrasts the Sceptics sharply with the Empiricists in regard to the *ἀπόδειξις*. [7] *οἱ δὲ ἐμπειρικοὶ ἀναρροῦσιν, οἱ δὲ σκεπτικοὶ ἐν ἐποχῇ ταύτην ἐφύλαξαν*.

- [1] *Hyp.* ii. 238.
- [2] *Adv. Math.* A. 260.
- [3] *Adv. Math.* vii. 202.
- [4] *Adv. Math.* A. 61.
- [5] Zeller *Op. cit.* iii. 43.
- [6] *Adv. Math.* viii. 191
- [7] *Adv. Math.* VIII. 328.

Pappenheim thinks that Sextus belonged to the Methodical School, both from his strong expression in favor of that school in *Hyp.* I. 236, as above, and also because many of his medical opinions, as found in his works, agree with the teachings of the Methodical School, more nearly than with those of the Empiricists. Pappenheim also claims that we find no inconsistency with this view in the passage given where Sextus classes the Sceptics with the Empiricists, but considers that statement an instance of carelessness in expressing himself, on the part of Sextus. [1]

[1] *Lebensverhältnisse des Sex. Em.* 36.

The position of Pappenheim is assailable for the reason that in dealing with any problem regarding an author on the basis of internal evidence, we have no right to consider one of his statements worthy of weight, and another one unworthy, on the supposition that he expressed himself carelessly in the second instance. Rather must we attempt to find his true standpoint by fairly meeting all the difficulties offered in apparently conflicting passages. This has been attempted by Zeller, Brochard, Natorp and others, with the general result that all things considered they think without doubt that Sextus belonged to the Empirical School. [1] His other references are too strong to allow his fidelity to it to be doubted. He is called one of the leaders of Empiricism by Pseudo-Galen, and his only medical work bore the title ἐμπειρικὰ ὑπομνήματα. The opinion of the writers above referred to is that the passage which we have quoted from the *Hypotyposes* does not necessarily mean that Sextus was not an Empiricist, but as he was more of a Sceptic than a physician, he gave preference to those doctrines that were most consistent with Scepticism, and accordingly claimed that it was not absolutely nec-

essary that a Sceptic physician should be an Empiricist. Natorp considers that the different standpoint from which Sextus judges the Empirical and Methodical Schools in his different works is accounted for on the supposition that he was an Empiricist, but disagreed with that school on the one point only. [2] Natorp points out that Sextus does not speak more favourably of the medical stand of the Methodical School, but only compares the way in which both schools regarded the question of the possibility of knowledge, and thinks that Sextus could have been an Empiricist as a physician notwithstanding his condemnation of the attitude of the Empirical School in relation to the theory of knowledge. This difference between the two schools was a small one, and on a subtle and unimportant point; in fact, a difference in philosophical theory, and not in medical practice.

[1] Brochard *Op. cit.* Livre IV. 317; Zeller *Op. cit.* III. 15; Natorp *Op. cit.* p. 155.

[2] Natorp *Op. cit.* 157.

While we would agree with the authors above referred to, that Sextus very probably recognized the bond between the Empirical School of medicine and Pyrrhonism, yet to make his possible connection with that school the explanation of his name, gives him more prominence as a physician than is consistent with what we know of his career. The long continued union of Empiricism and Scepticism would naturally support the view that Sextus was, at least during the earlier part of his life, a physician of that school, and yet it may be that he was not named Empiricus for that reason. There is one instance in ancient writings where Empiricus is known as a simple proper name. [1] It may have been a proper name in Sextus' case, or there are many other ways in which it could have originated, as those who have studied the origin of names will readily grant, perhaps indeed, from the title of the above-named work, ἐμπειρικὰ ὑπομνήματα. The chief argument for this view of the case is that there were other leaders of the Sceptical School, for whom we can claim far greater influence as Empiricists than for Sextus, and for whom the surname Empiricus would have been more appropriate, if it was given in consequence of prominence in the Empirical School. Sextus is known to the world as a Sceptic, and not as a phy-

sician. He was classed in later times with Pyrrho, and his philosophical works survived, while his medical writings did not, but are chiefly known from his own mention of them. Moreover, the passage which we have quoted from the *Hypotyposes* is too strong to allow us easily to believe that Sextus remained all his life a member of the Empirical School. He could hardly have said, "Nor would it suit the Sceptic to take that sect upon himself," if he at the same time belonged to it. His other references to the Empirical School, of a more favorable character, can be easily explained on the ground of the long continued connection which had existed between the two schools. It is quite possible to suppose that Sextus was an Empiricist a part of his life, and afterwards found the Methodical School more to his liking, and such a change would not in any way have affected his stand as a physician.

[1] Pappenheim *Leb. Ver. Sex. Em.* 6.

In regard to the exact time when Sextus Empiricus lived, we gain very little knowledge from internal evidence, and outside sources of information are equally uncertain. Diogenes Laertius must have been a generation younger than Sextus, as he mentions the disciple of Sextus, Saturninus, as an Empirical physician. [1] The time of Diogenes is usually estimated as the first half of the third century A.D., [2] therefore Sextus cannot be brought forward later than the beginning of the century. Sextus, however, directs his writings entirely against the Dogmatics, by whom he distinctly states that he means the Stoics, [3] and the influence of the Stoics began to decline in the beginning of the third century A.D. A fact often used as a help in fixing the date of Sextus is his mention of Basilides the Stoic, [4] ἀλλὰ καὶ οἱ στωϊκοί, ὡς οἱ περὶ Βασιλείδην. This Basilides was supposed to be identical with one of the teachers of Marcus Aurelius. [5] This is accepted by Zeller in the second edition of his *History of Philosophy*, but not in the third for the reason that Sextus, in all the work from which this reference is taken, *i.e.* *Math.* VII. — XI., mentions no one besides Aenesidemus, who lived later than the middle of the last century B.C. [6] The Basilides referred to by Sextus may be one mentioned in a list of twenty Stoics, in a fragment of Diogenes Laertius, recently published in Berlin by Val Rose. [7] Too much importance has, however, been given to the relation of the mention of Basilides the Stoic to the question of the date of Sextus. Even if

the Basilides referred to by Sextus is granted to have been the teacher of Marcus Aurelius, it only serves to show that Sextus lived either at the same time with Marcus Aurelius or after him, which is a conclusion that we must in any case reach for other reasons.

[1] Diog. IX. 12, 116.

[2] Ueberweg *Hist. of Phil.* p. 21.

[3] Hyp. I. 65.

[4] *Adv. Math.* VII. 258.

[5] Fabricius *Vita Sexti.*

[6] Zeller *Op. cit.* III. 8.

[7] Brochard *Op. cit.* IV. 315.

The fact that has caused the greatest uncertainty in regard to the date of Sextus is that Claudius Galen in his works mentions several Sceptics who were also physicians of the Empirical School, [1] and often speaks of Herodotus, supposed to be identical with the teacher of Sextus given by Diogenes Laertius, [2] but makes no reference whatever to Sextus. As Galen's time passes the limit of the second century A.D., we must either infer that Sextus was not the well-known physician that he was stated to be by Pseudo-Galen, and consequently not known to Galen, or that Galen wrote before Sextus became prominent as a Sceptic. This silence on the part of Galen in regard to Sextus increases the doubt, caused by Sextus' own criticism of the Empirical School of medicine, as to his having been an Empiricist. The question is made more complicated, as it is difficult to fix the identity of the Herodotus so often referred to by Galen. [3] As Galen died about 200 A.D. at the age of seventy, [4] we should fix the date of Sextus early in the third century, and that of Diogenes perhaps a little later than the middle, were it not that early in the third century the Stoics began to decline in influence, and could hardly have excited the warmth of animosity displayed by Sextus. We must then suppose that Sextus wrote at the very latter part of the second century, and either that Galen did not know him, or that Galen's books were published before Sextus became prominent either as a physician or as a Sceptic. The fact that he may have been better known as the latter than as the former does not sufficiently

account for Galen's silence, as other Sceptics are mentioned by him of less importance than Sextus, and the latter, even if not as great a physician as Pseudo-Galen asserts, was certainly both a Sceptic and a physician, and must have belonged to one of the two medical schools so thoroughly discussed by Galen—either the Empirical or the Methodical. Therefore, if Sextus were a contemporary of Galen, he was so far removed from the circle of Galen's acquaintances as to have made no impression upon him, either as a Sceptic or a physician, a supposition that is very improbable. We must then fix the date of Sextus late in the second century, and conclude that the climax of his public career was reached after Galen had finished those of his writings which are still extant.

[1] Zeller, III. 7.

[2] Diog. XI. 12, 116.

[3] Pappenheim *Lebens. Ver. Sex. Em.* 30.

[4] Zeller *Grundriss der Ges. der Phil.* p. 260.

Sextus has a Latin name, but he was a Greek; we know this from his own statement. [1] We also know that he must have been a Greek from the beauty and facility of his style, and from his acquaintance with Greek dialects. The place of his birth can only, however, be conjectured, from arguments indirectly derived from his writings. His constant references throughout his works to the minute customs of different nations ought to give us a clue to the solution of this question, but strange to say they do not give us a decided one. Of these references a large number, however, relate to the customs of Libya, showing a minute knowledge in regard to the political and religious customs of this land that he displays in regard to no other country except Egypt. [2] Fabricius thinks Libya was not his birth place because of a reference which he makes to it in the *Hypotyposes*—Θρακῶν δὲ καὶ Γαιτοῦλων (Λιβύον δὲ ἔθνος τοῦτο). [3] This conclusion is, however, entirely unfounded, as the explanation of Sextus simply shows that the people whom he was then addressing were not familiar with the nations of Libya. Suidas speaks of two men called Sextus, one from Chæronea and one from Libya, both of whom he calls Sceptics, and to one of whom he attributes Sextus' books. All authorities agree in asserting that great confusion exists in the works of Suidas; and Fabricius, Zeller, and

Papenheim place no weight upon this testimony of Suidas. [4] Haas, however, contends [5] that it is unreasonable to suppose that this confusion could go as far as to attribute the writings of Sextus Empiricus to Sextus of Chæronea, and also make the latter a Sceptic, and he considers it far more reasonable to accept the testimony of Suidas, as it coincides so well with the internal evidence of Sextus' writings in regard to his native land. It is nevertheless evident, from his familiarity with the customs, language, and laws of Athens, Alexandria and Rome, that he must have resided at some time in each of these cities.

[1] *Adv. Math.* A. 246; *Hyp.* I. 152; *Hyp.* III. 211, 214.

[2] Haas *Op. cit.* p. 10.

[3] *Hyp.* III. 213.

[4] Papenheim *Lebens. Ver. Sex. Em.* 5, 22; Zeller *Op. cit.* III. 39; Fabricius *Vita de Sextus.*

[5] Haas *Op. cit.* p. 6.

Of all the problems connected with the historical details of the life of Sextus, the one that is the most difficult of solution, and also the most important for our present purpose of making a critical study of his teaching, is to fix the seat of the Sceptical School during the time that he was in charge of it. The *Hypotyposes* are lectures delivered in public in that period of his life. Where then were they delivered? We know that the Sceptical School must have had a long continued existence as a definite philosophical movement, although some have contended otherwise. The fact of its existence as an organized direction of thought, is demonstrated by its formulated teachings, and the list given by Diogenes Laertius of its principal leaders, [1] and by references from the writings of Sextus. In the first book of *Hypotyposes* he refers to Scepticism as a distinct system of philosophy, καὶ τὴν διάκρισιν τῆς σκέψεως ἀπὸ τῶν παρακειμένων αὐτῇ φιλοσοφῶν. [2] He speaks also of the older Sceptics, [3] and the later Sceptics. [4]

Pyrrho, the founder of the school, taught in Elis, his native village; but even as early as the time of Timon, his immediate follower, his teachings were somewhat known in Alexandria, where Timon for a while resided. [5] The immediate disciples of Timon, as given

by Diogenes, were not men known in Greece or mentioned in Greek writings. c the well-known testimony of Aristocles the Peripatetic in regard to Aenesidemus, that he taught Pyrrhonism in Alexandria [6]— ἐχθὲς καὶ πρώην ἐν Ἀλεξανδρείᾳ τῇ κατ' Αἴγυπτον Αἰνῆσιδημὸς τις ἀναζῶπυρῆν ἤρξατο τὸν ὕθλον σοῦτον.

[1] Diog. XI. 12, 115, 116.

[2] *Hyp.* I. 5.

[3] *Hyp.* I. 36.

[4] *Hyp.* I. 164.

[5] Chaignet *Op. cit.* 45.

[6] Aristocles of Euseb. *Praep. Ev.* XIV. E. 446.

This was after the dogmatic tendency of the Academy under Antiochus and his followers had driven Pyrrhonism from the partial union with the Academy, which it had experienced after the breaking up of the school under the immediate successors of Timon. Aenesidemus taught about the time of our era in Alexandria, and established the school there anew; and his followers are spoken of in a way that presupposes their continuing in the same place. There is every reason to think that the connection of Sextus with Alexandria was an intimate one, not only because Alexandria had been for so long a time the seat of Pyrrhonism, but also from internal evidence from his writings and their subsequent historical influence; and yet the *Hypotyposes* could not have been delivered in Alexandria, as he often refers to that place in comparison with the place where he was then speaking. He says, furthermore, that he teaches in the same place where his master taught. [1] βλέπον τε ὅτι ἐνθα ὁ ὑφηγητῆς ὁ ἐμὸς διελέγετο, ἐνταῦθα ἐγὼ νῦν διαλέγομαι. Therefore the school must have been removed from Alexandria, in or before the time of the teacher of Sextus, to some other centre. The *Hypotyposes* are from beginning to end a direct attack on the Dogmatics; therefore Sextus must have taught either in some city where the dogmatic philosophy was strong, or in some rival philosophical centre. The *Hypotyposes* show also that the writer had access to some large library. Alexandria, Rome and Athens are the three places the most probable for selection for such a purpose. For whatever reason the seat of the school was removed from Alexandria by the master of Sextus, or