
ACADEMIC ARGUMENTS FOR THE INDISCERNIBILITY THESIS

BY

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Abstract: The Academics offered an argument from twins or perceptually indiscernible objects and an argument from dreams or madness in support of *the indiscernibility thesis*: that every true perceptual impression is such that some false impression just like it is possible. I claim that these arguments, unlike modern sceptical arguments, are supposed to establish mere *counterfactual* rather than *epistemic* possibilities. They purport to show that for any true perceptual impression ϕ , there are a number of alternative causal histories ϕ *might have had* which would not have resulted in any change in the way in which ϕ represents its object.

1. Introduction

The Stoics thought they could explain how it is that a human being comes to know, rather than merely believe, something about the world. According to the Stoics an animal becomes aware of an object in the world by receiving through the senses an impression ($\phi\alpha\nu\tau\alpha\sigma\acute{\iota}\alpha$) of that object. The perceptual impressions of a mature human being, unlike those of other animals, are impressions *that* something is the case: these impressions have propositional content and the Stoics identify them with thoughts which the mind can accept or reject.¹ The Stoics claimed that knowing, rather than merely believing, something about the world was a matter of entertaining and assenting to a particular kind of perceptual impression they called a ‘cognitive impression’ ($\kappa\alpha\tau\alpha\lambda\eta\pi\tau\iota\kappa\acute{\eta}\ \phi\alpha\nu\tau\alpha\sigma\acute{\iota}\alpha$).² A cognitive impression, according to the Stoics, possesses a feature which distinguishes it from any false impression.³

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The Academics, beginning with Arcesilaus and continuing to the end of the sceptical Academy in the first century BCE, challenged the Stoic claim that at least some perceptual impressions are cognitive impressions. This challenge was part of a larger effort to show that the principles of Stoic epistemology committed the Stoics themselves to the claim that a person ought to withhold assent from every impression and suspend judgment about everything. According to Cicero and Sextus Empiricus, the Academics argued that:

- (5) If the Stoic wise person assents to any impression, the Stoic wise person will hold a mere belief ($\delta\acute{o}\xi\alpha$).
- (6) But the Stoic wise person never holds a mere belief.
- (7) Therefore, the Stoic wise person does not assent to any impression.

The inference from the conjunction of (5) and (6) to (7) has the form of the Stoic second indemonstrable argument, and premise (6) is Stoic dogma.⁴ (5), in turn, will follow from the conjunction of:

- (3) No impression is a cognitive impression.
- (4) Assent to a non-cognitive impression yields mere belief.

(4) is Stoic dogma.⁵ (3) is taken by the Academics to follow from the conjunction of:

- (1) If every true impression is such that some false impression just like it is possible, then no impression is a cognitive impression.
- (2) But every true impression is such that some false impression just like it is possible.⁶

The inference from (1) and (2) to (3) has the form of the Stoic first indemonstrable argument, and the Stoics acknowledged the truth of (1).⁷ According to Cicero, the Stoics rejected (5), and they claimed that (5) is false because (3) is false, and (3) in turn is false because (2) is false.⁸ (2) is what I will call *the indiscernibility thesis*. It is the thesis that every true perceptual impression is such that some false impression just like it is possible.

The form of the Academic argument against the Stoic doctrine of cognitive impressions is clear.⁹ The Academics first argue that given the Stoic definition of a cognitive impression and the truth of the indiscernibility thesis, it follows that no impression is a cognitive impression. The Stoics believe that assent to a non-cognitive impression yields mere belief rather than knowledge and that, for this reason, a person ought to assent only to cognitive impressions. So the Academics argue that the conclusion that no impression is a cognitive impression in conjunction with Stoic norms for giving and withholding assent entails that at least the Stoics are committed

to the thesis that a person ought to withhold assent from every impression and suspend judgment about everything. But since the Stoics insist that assent to impressions is required for action, this policy is intolerable. So the Academic argument against the doctrine of cognitive impressions leaves the Stoics with two options. The Stoics can retain their view that knowledge consists in assent to a cognitive impression but alter the norms which they take to govern assent. Assent to non-cognitive impressions would no longer be prohibited because, as the Academic argument has shown, mere belief is the best epistemic condition a human being can attain. Or, alternatively, the Stoics can abandon their view that knowledge consists in assent to a cognitive impression. In this way the Stoics could detach the possibility of knowledge from the existence of cognitive impressions. But both of these options involve major revisions in Stoic epistemology.

The Academics offered two principal arguments in support of the indiscernibility thesis: an argument from twins or perceptually indiscernible objects (e.g. pomegranates, snakes, eggs) and an argument from the experiences of dreamers and those who are mad. These two arguments have received little detailed consideration, and as a result it is not at all clear how these arguments are supposed to show that every true impression is such that some false impression just like it is possible. Yet if these arguments fail to establish the truth of the indiscernibility thesis, then the Academic argument against the Stoic doctrine of cognitive impressions obviously fails as well.

In Section 2 I raise some questions about how the Academic appeal to twins and perceptual indiscernibles can generate a conclusion with the generality of the indiscernibility thesis. For the Academics appear to show at most that *if* two objects are perceptually indiscernible from one another, then it is not possible to form a cognitive impression of either object. But the Stoics would be the last to deny the truth of that conditional conclusion. In Section 3 I argue that it is a mistake to think, as commentators have, that the Academic appeal to twins and perceptual indiscernibles supports a conclusion of the required generality by establishing an epistemic possibility with respect to any true perceptual impression of any object in the world. I then introduce a distinction between epistemic and counterfactual possibility, and argue that the Academic argument, unlike modern sceptical arguments, is supposed to establish only certain counterfactual possibilities. But the Academics think that these counterfactual possibilities are sufficient by themselves to demonstrate the truth of the indiscernibility thesis. In Section 4 I suggest that we should understand the Academic argument from dreaming and madness as an attempt to establish the same kind of counterfactual possibilities. Finally in Section 5 I offer a brief assessment of how effectively these Academic arguments undermine the Stoic claim that at least some perceptual impressions are cognitive impressions.

2. *The appeal to twins*

The Stoics defined a cognitive impression as an impression,

- (C1) from what is (ἀπὸ ὑπάρχοντος);
- (C2) stamped and sealed in accordance with what is (κατ'αὐτὸ τὸ ὑπάρχον ἐναπομεμαγμένη καὶ ἐναπεσφραγισμένη)
- (C3) of such a kind as could not come from what is not (ὅποια οὐκ ἂν γένοιτο ἀπὸ μὴ ὑπάρχοντος).¹⁰

The interpretation of this definition is extremely controversial, but there is good reason to read (C1) as the requirement that a cognitive impression be true rather than as the weaker requirement that a cognitive impression have its causal origin in some object external to the mind. Reading (C1) in this way allows us to read (C3) as the requirement that a cognitive impression be an impression of a kind which could not be false. This reading of (C3) is the standard reading in our sources and is the reading of (C3) presupposed in the debate between the Stoics and the Academics over the existence of cognitive impressions.¹¹ Now Diogenes Laertius reports that (C2) is the requirement that a cognitive impression be clear (τρανής) and distinct (ἔκτυπος).¹² According to the Stoics, for any object (or kind of object) *O* and any impression ϕ , ϕ is a clear and distinct impression of *O* just in case ϕ represents its object as having a collection of properties such that *O* is the only object in the world which possesses that collection of properties.¹³

Suppose, then, two numerically distinct objects, e.g. Socrates and Socrates' twin brother, are perceptually indiscernible from one another. Suppose further that in looking at Socrates I entertain the true impression ϕ where ϕ is an impression that this person is Socrates. In this case, the Academics argued, my true impression ϕ will *not* be a cognitive impression. For in this case there will be some false impression ψ – namely, the impression that this person is Socrates entertained as a result of looking not at Socrates but at his twin brother – which is indiscernible from the true impression ϕ .¹⁴ Now the Academic argument from twins clearly targets those impressions whose content is given by an identity statement, e.g. an impression that this person before me is Socrates or that the object on the table is a pomegranate. These are the impressions on the basis of which we form identity beliefs about the objects we perceive. But the Academics seem to think that the argument from twins demonstrates that *no* perceptual impression is a cognitive impression, and they may take the argument to have this wide scope because they assume, or they understand the Stoics to be assuming, that the content of *any* perceptual impression includes, at least implicitly, a statement of identity. So, for instance, a perceptual impression that Socrates is pale – that is, an impression

I entertain as I look at someone whom I take to be Socrates and pale – is an impression whose full content, if made explicit, is that the person in front of me is Socrates and he is pale. And this impression is true just in case the person in front of me is Socrates and he is pale.¹⁵ If the person in front of me is not Socrates, then my perceptual impression that Socrates is pale is false. Given the assumption that the content of any perceptual impression includes an identity statement, it will follow from the fact that Socrates and his twin brother are perceptually indiscernible from one another that *any* true perceptual impression of Socrates will be indiscernible from *some* false perceptual impression of his twin brother. (And, of course, the converse holds: any true perceptual impression of Socrates' twin brother will be indiscernible from some false perceptual impression of Socrates himself.) So, for example, the true perceptual impression that Socrates is pale will be indiscernible from the false perceptual impression that Socrates is pale entertained as a result of looking at Socrates' pale twin brother.

Since the true impression ϕ where ϕ is an impression that this person is Socrates is entertained as a result of looking at Socrates, and the false impression ψ where ψ is an impression that this person is Socrates is entertained as a result of looking at Socrates' twin, the causal history of ϕ is different from the causal history of ψ . And as a consequence of this difference in their causal histories, the truth-value of ϕ (or, more accurately, of the complete assertoric λεκτόν or proposition which expresses the content of ϕ) is different from the truth-value of ψ . For the impression that this person is Socrates is true just in case the referent of the demonstrative is Socrates. In the case of ϕ the referent of the demonstrative is Socrates (since I entertain ϕ as a result of looking at Socrates), while in the case of ψ the referent of the demonstrative is Socrates' twin (since I entertain ψ as a result of looking at Socrates' twin).¹⁶ Now the Academics claimed that although the object from which the impression ϕ arose is not the same object as the object from which the impression ψ arose, there is nonetheless no difference in the way in which ϕ represents its object and the way in which ψ represents its object.¹⁷ That is, the difference in their causal histories does not yield any difference in the representational contents of the impressions ϕ and ψ . I use the term 'representational content' simply to refer to the way in which an impression represents its object. The indiscernibility thesis, then, is the thesis that for any true impression ϕ it is possible for there to be a false impression ψ whose representational content is indiscernible from ϕ . And the claim that the representational content of the impression ϕ is indiscernible from the representational content of the impression ψ will require, the Academics argued, only that the object which produces ϕ (Socrates) is itself perceptually indiscernible from the object which produces ψ (Socrates' twin brother).

What, then, would the Academics have accomplished by showing that any true impression of Socrates is indiscernible with respect to its representational content from some false impression of Socrates' twin? The Academic argument appears to establish at least this much: *if* two objects *A* and *B* are perceptually indiscernible from one another, then no true impression of *A* or of *B* is a cognitive impression. For any true impression of *A* will prove to be indiscernible from some false impression of *B*, and any true impression of *B* will prove to be indiscernible from some false impression of *A*. Hence, no true impression of *A* or of *B* will satisfy the third clause of the Stoic definition of a cognitive impression, *viz.* that a cognitive impression is an impression of a kind which could not be false. And in this case all of our true impressions of *A* or of *B* fail to satisfy the third clause of the Stoic definition of a cognitive impression because they fail to satisfy the requirement of distinctness expressed by the second clause of that definition. An impression ϕ of an object *O* is a distinct impression of *O* just in case ϕ represents its object as having a collection of properties such that *O* is the only object in the world which in fact possesses that collection of properties. But if Socrates and his twin are perceptually indiscernible from one another, then any true impression of Socrates represents its object (Socrates) as having a collection of properties such that both Socrates and Socrates' twin in fact possess that collection of properties. That is why any true impression of Socrates will be indiscernible with respect to the way in which it represents its object from some false impression produced by Socrates' twin.

But it is not clear whether or how, in establishing this much by appeal to twins or perceptually indiscernible objects, the Academics can claim to call into question the existence of cognitive impressions in general. If we think, as some commentators have, that the Academic argument from indiscernibles is designed to establish only that in the case of certain objects (e.g. twins, snakes, eggs, pomegranates) it is not possible for a person to entertain a cognitive impression of that object, then the Academic argument must appear curiously weak.¹⁸ The Stoics can easily concede that *if* two objects *A* and *B* are in fact perceptually indiscernible – that is, if *A* and *B* are so similar that whatever differences they do exhibit cannot be captured by any human perceptual impression – then no true impression of *A* or of *B* will be a cognitive impression. And the Stoic will by her own lights suspend judgment whenever she encounters an object she has reason to think is a member of a set of perceptually indiscernible objects. For if Socrates has a twin brother and the Stoic is aware of this fact, then the Stoic will be confronted with a certain difficulty whenever she entertains an impression ϕ where ϕ is an impression that this person is Socrates. She will assent to ϕ only if she can rule out the possibility that ϕ arose from Socrates' twin rather than from Socrates himself. Given the Stoic's exacting norms for assent, she must rule out a certain possibility – that

she is in fact looking at Socrates' twin rather than at Socrates himself – before she can assent to ϕ . The Academics will insist, however, that the Stoic cannot rule out this possibility, at least not on the basis of her impression ϕ alone. For all the Stoic knows on the basis of ϕ alone, the Academics argue, the person standing before her is Socrates' twin rather than Socrates himself. This possibility is itself sufficient to block the Stoic's assent to ϕ and to compel her to suspend judgment about whether or not the person standing before her is Socrates. But, and this is the important point, even if the Stoic is compelled by her own norms for assent to suspend judgment in this case, the Stoic's suspension of judgment in this case appears to be perfectly consistent with her regularly assenting to cognitive impressions in those far more frequent cases that do *not* involve a twin or a member of a set of perceptually indiscernible objects.

3. *Epistemic vs. counterfactual possibility*

It is therefore tempting to think that the Academics attempted to generalize from the case of perceptually indiscernible objects in something like the following way. In the case of Socrates and his twin, the Stoic is compelled to suspend judgment because the representational content of the impression ϕ where ϕ is an impression that this person is Socrates underdetermines the causal origin of that impression. The way in which ϕ represents the object in the world which produced it, i.e. the representational content of ϕ , is itself compatible both with ϕ having arisen from Socrates and with ϕ having arisen from Socrates' twin, and that is why the Stoic is unable to determine on the basis of ϕ alone that the person standing before her is Socrates rather than his twin. But, the Academics will now argue, it is the case with perceptual impressions generally that the representational content of an impression underdetermines the causal origin of that impression. Suppose I meet in the market Zeno, who is well known to me, and I entertain an impression that this person is Zeno. How, the Academics will ask, can I rule out the possibility that Zeno has a twin and that it is Zeno's twin, and not Zeno himself, who now stands before me? On this line of interpretation, the Academics will have argued that for any perceptual impression ϕ where ϕ is an impression that this is object O or that object O is F , it is possible for all I know that ϕ has arisen from an object numerically distinct but perceptually indiscernible from O . The Academics appeal to actual cases of twins or perceptually indiscernible objects in order to establish a certain *epistemic* possibility with respect to any true perceptual impression of any object in the world. In the case of any true perceptual impression ϕ I entertain where ϕ is an impression that this is object O or that object O is F , it is possible – possible relative to what I know – that ϕ has arisen from some object other

than O .¹⁹ If we are concerned, as the Stoics are, to rule out any possibility of error in assenting to impressions, then we will want to rule out the possibility that in assenting to an impression that this is object O or that object O is F we are assenting to an impression which has arisen from some object numerically distinct but perceptually indiscernible from O . But we cannot rule out this possibility. Let's call this the *epistemic interpretation*.²⁰

On the epistemic interpretation the Academic argument from twins or perceptual indiscernibles is philosophically very disappointing. For there is no reason to think, nor for the Stoics to have thought, that the epistemic possibility the argument is supposed to introduce does hold of any and every true perceptual impression. And that is because in the case of (for example) my true perceptual impression that this person is Zeno, the argument leaves intact claims to knowledge whose truth is *not* compatible with the possibility that the person before me is not Zeno but his twin. If I know that Zeno has no twin because (for example) I know that Zeno's mother reports that he has no twin and I know that Zeno's mother is a reliable source of information on the matter, then when I entertain an impression that this person is Zeno, it is simply not true that for all I know it is possible that the person before me is not Zeno but his twin. For the Academic argument does not by itself offer any considerations which call into question my claim to know that Zeno has no twin or the other claims to knowledge on which this claim is based. The Academic argument shows at most that *if* Zeno has a twin, then it is possible for all I know that the person before me is not Zeno but his twin. But the argument does not show, as the epistemic interpretation claims it purports to show, that it is possible for all I know that Zeno has a twin (and, therefore, that it is possible for all I know that the person before me is not Zeno but his twin). For how could the fact that Socrates has a twin or that two pomegranates are perceptually indiscernible from one another be a reason to doubt my claim to know that Zeno has no twin? Nor does the argument show that I cannot be *certain* that the person before me is Zeno himself and not his twin. For here lack of certainty can mean only that I have some reason to doubt that the person before me is Zeno. But if I know that Zeno has no twin, then for all the Academic argument has shown I have no reason to doubt that the person before me is Zeno. Given what else I know about the world, I know that no object other than Zeno possesses just those properties that my impression represents its object as having. So if the Academic argument does attempt to generalize from cases of actual indiscernibles in the way the epistemic interpretation claims, that attempt is a clear failure. But reasonable principles of charity dictate that if none of the texts in our sources require the epistemic interpretation of the argument, then we ought to seek another interpretation with better philosophical credentials.

And in fact none of the texts in our sources do require the epistemic interpretation.²¹ Cicero at *Acad.* 2.84 provides the most extensive account of the argument:

If someone looking at Publius Servilius Geminus thought he was looking at Quintus, he was experiencing an impression of the incognitive kind because there was no mark distinguishing the true from the false (*incidebat in eius modi visum quod percipi non posset, qua nulla nota verum distinguebatur a falso*). With that difference removed, what mark could he have of the kind which could not be false (*notam quae falsa esse non possit*) for recognizing Gaius Cotta who was twice consul with Geminus? You say that such a degree of similarity does not exist in things . . . we will allow that for sure. Yet it can certainly appear to exist and therefore deceive the sense, and if a single likeness has done that, it will have made everything doubtful (*dubia omnia reddiderit*). With that criterion (*iudicio*) removed which is the proper instrument of recognition, even if the man you are looking at is just the man you think you are looking at, you will not make the judgment with the mark (*nota*) you say you ought to, viz. one of a kind of which a false mark could not be. Since, therefore, it is possible for P. Geminus Quintus to appear [*viz.* when you are in fact looking at Publius Servilius Geminus], why is it not possible for someone who is not Cotta to appear to be Cotta – since something appears to be what it is not (*quoniam aliquid videtur esse quod non est*).

If Publius and Geminus are perceptually indiscernible, then for any true perceptual impression ϕ of Publius, there will be some false perceptual impression ψ of Geminus such that the way in which ϕ represents its object (Publius) does not differ from the way in which ψ represents its object (Geminus). Thus no part of the true impression's representational content can function as a mark (*nota*) of that impression's truth. According to Cicero's report, the argument then claims that if I form a true perceptual impression of a third person, Cotta, *that* impression will not have any mark of its truth and, consequently, I will not be using any mark of that impression's truth in forming the judgment that this person is Cotta. But this claim is puzzling for the following reason. The true perceptual impression ϕ of Publius does not exhibit a mark of its own truth because its representational content is duplicated in the false impression ψ of Geminus. This duplication occurs because Publius is perceptually indiscernible from Geminus. But Cotta has no twin – there is no object numerically distinct but perceptually indiscernible from Cotta. If I form a true and distinct impression of Cotta, I form an impression which represents its object as possessing a collection of properties which only Cotta in fact possesses. Why, then, can't the representational content of my true and distinct impression of Cotta function as a mark of that impression's truth? The last sentence of the passage seems to provide a clue. It is possible, the argument claims, for a person who is not Cotta to appear to me to be Cotta in just the way that someone (namely, Geminus) who is not Quintus appears to me to be Quintus. But *ex hypothesi* Cotta does not

have a twin. So in what sense is it *possible* for a person who is not Cotta to appear to me to be Cotta?

At this point it is important to distinguish *epistemic* possibility from what I will call *counterfactual* possibility. This distinction is in general marked by the mood of the embedded sentence in sentences of the form:

- (1) It is possible that *p*.

If the mood of the embedded sentence '*p*' is indicative, e.g.,

- (2) It is possible that it *is raining* in San Francisco now.

then (1) expresses an epistemic possibility. (2) expresses an epistemic possibility because the truth-conditions of (2) make reference to the epistemic position of the person who utters (2). If uttered by me (2) is true if and only if I do not know that it is not raining in San Francisco now.²² If the mood of the embedded sentence '*p*' in (1) is subjunctive, e.g.,

- (3) It is possible that it *should have been raining* in San Francisco now.

then (1) expresses a counterfactual possibility. The truth of (3) does not depend in any way on the epistemic position of the person who utters (3), but only on whether a certain state of affairs – its raining in San Francisco now – is a genuine counterfactual possibility.

This distinction between epistemic and counterfactual possibility can help us understand our passage from Cicero. Recall that according to the third clause of the Stoic definition of a cognitive impression, if ϕ is a cognitive impression, then ϕ is an impression of a kind which *could not be* false. But what exactly are the Stoics denying in denying that it is possible for a cognitive impression to be false? Suppose that ϕ is a perceptual impression that this person is Zeno. On the epistemic interpretation of the Academic argument from twins and perceptual indiscernibles, the Stoics deny that:

- (4) It is possible that the impression ϕ *is* false.

where, since ϕ is an impression that this person is Zeno, (4) is equivalent to:

- (5) It is possible that this person *is* not Zeno.

The denial of (5) is a denial of an epistemic possibility. For to deny (5) is to deny that the person who entertains ϕ is in a position in which it is possible for all she knows the person before her is not Zeno. But Cicero's

report at *Acad.* 2.84–85 makes much more sense if we take the Academics to have construed the Stoic claim that it is not possible for a cognitive impression to be false as a denial of counterfactual possibility. That is, it is the denial that:

- (6) It is possible that the impression ϕ *should have been* false.

What does (6) mean? (6) is the claim that it is possible for an impression which represents the object which produces it *in the way in which ϕ does* to be false. But in denying (6) the Stoics are not making a claim about any person's epistemic position. The Stoics are rather claiming that given the way in which impressions acquire content, it is not possible for an impression with the representational content ϕ has to be produced in circumstances which make that impression false. Thus the Stoics insist that if ϕ is a cognitive impression, then it is possible for a second impression ψ to represent the object which produces it as Zeno in the way in which the impression ϕ represents the object which produces it as Zeno *only if* ψ was produced in just the same way ϕ was produced (*viz.* by Zeno and in circumstances which make the impression true). Now the Stoics claim that at least some perceptual impressions are cognitive impressions. In making that claim the Stoics are denying that it is *counterfactually* possible for a false impression to represent its object in the way in which at least some true perceptual impressions *actually* represent their objects. The Academic task, then, is to establish that for any true perceptual impression it is at least *counterfactually* possible for a false impression to represent its object in the way in which that true impression *actually* represents its object. So, to return to the passage from Cicero, although Cotta has no twin, the Academics claim that it is nonetheless counterfactually possible for a false impression to represent its object in just the way any true impression of Cotta actually represents its object (because it is possible for Cotta *to have had* a twin who is perceptually indiscernible from him). But in that case no actual true perceptual impression of Cotta is a cognitive impression.

Suppose, again, that ϕ is a perceptual impression that this person is Zeno. ϕ is true just in case the object which produced ϕ , and so the referent of the demonstrative element in ϕ , is Zeno. If ϕ is a true impression, and if an impression ψ represents its object as Zeno in the way in which ϕ represents its object as Zeno, but ψ is false, then the causal history of ψ must be different from the causal history of ϕ . For only a difference in the causal histories of these two impressions will account for the difference in their truth-values: ψ is false precisely because the object which produced ψ , and so the referent of the demonstrative element in ψ , is not Zeno. My proposal is that the Academics understood the third clause of the Stoic definition of a cognitive impression as equivalent to the claim that if a

perceptual impression ϕ is a cognitive impression, then it is not possible for a second impression ψ *both* to represent its object in the way in which ϕ represents its object *and* to have a different causal history from ϕ . That is, a perceptual impression ϕ is a cognitive impression just in case the following counterfactual is true of ϕ :

- (C) If ϕ were to have a different causal history, ϕ would represent its object differently, i.e. ϕ would have a different representational content.

The Academic argument from twins and perceptually indiscernible objects was designed simply to show that no true impression satisfies this counterfactual requirement. The Academics argue that for any true perceptual impression ϕ , there is an alternative causal history ϕ *might have had* which would not have result in any change in the way in which ϕ represents its object.

The argument will proceed in this way. Suppose I have a true perceptual impression ϕ of Zeno. ϕ is a cognitive impression just in case ϕ satisfies the counterfactual requirement (C), i.e. just in case it is not possible for an impression to have the same representational content as ϕ but a different causal history. But, the Academics argue, it is possible for an impression to have the same representational content as ϕ but a different causal history. For even if there is in actuality no object numerically distinct but perceptually indiscernible from Zeno, nonetheless it is possible for there *to have been* an object which is numerically distinct but perceptually indiscernible from Zeno. That is, even if in actuality Zeno has no twin, nonetheless it is possible for Zeno *to have had* a twin. And in that counterfactual situation any true perceptual impression of Zeno will be indiscernible with respect to its representational content from some false impression of Zeno's twin. Now note that in arguing for the truth of the indiscernibility thesis and against the existence of cognitive impressions the Academics think they must show that for any object O , no perceptual impression of O can satisfy the counterfactual requirement. So the Academics think they must show that for any object O , even if there is in actuality no object numerically distinct but perceptually indiscernible from O , then at least it is possible for there to have been an object O^* numerically distinct but perceptually indiscernible from O . And in that counterfactual situation any true perceptual impression of O will be indiscernible with respect to its representational content from some false impression of O^* . But how can the Academics show that for any object O , if there is no object numerically distinct but perceptually indiscernible from O , then at least it is possible for there to have been an object numerically distinct but perceptually indiscernible from O ? That is, how can the Academics show that the state of affairs in which two numerically distinct objects are perceptually indiscernible

is a possible state of affairs? This can be shown, the Academics think, simply by appealing to the fact that there are in actuality pairs of numerically distinct but perceptually indiscernible objects, e.g. twins, eggs, snakes, pomegranates, etc. If two eggs or two snakes are in fact perceptually indiscernible, then it follows that for any object *O* it is at least possible for there to have been an object *O** numerically distinct but perceptually indiscernible from *O*. But if the state of affairs in which there is an object *O** numerically distinct but perceptually indiscernible from *O* is a genuine possibility, then no impression of *O* can satisfy the counterfactual requirement. Hence, no impression of *O* is a cognitive impression.²³

So never mind that Zeno, whom I've met in the market and know well, does not actually have a twin brother. And never mind that I know that Zeno does not have a twin (because there are straightforward ways of finding out this fact about Zeno). The point of the Academic argument is that it is nonetheless possible for Zeno to have had a twin brother who is perceptually indiscernible from Zeno himself, and in that counterfactual situation any true perceptual impression of Zeno would be indiscernible with respect to its representational content from some false perceptual impression of Zeno's twin. This counterfactual situation represents a genuine possibility if it is possible for two numerically distinct objects to be perceptually indiscernible from one another. The easiest way to prove that this is possible is to present a case of numerically distinct objects which *actually* are perceptually indiscernible from one another, e.g. a pair of snakes, eggs, or twins. That is why Cicero says that if a single pair of objects proves to be indiscernible to the senses, it will call everything into doubt.²⁴

The purpose of the Academic argument from twins, then, is to establish certain counterfactual situations as genuine possibilities. The Academics think that these possibilities alone are sufficient to undermine the Stoic doctrine of cognitive impressions. For by establishing these counterfactual situations as genuine possibilities, the Academics have shown that for any true perceptual impression it is at least possible for a false impression to represent its object in the way in which that true impression represents its object. Hence, no true impression satisfies the third clause of the Stoic definition of a cognitive impression – as the Academics understood that clause – and so no true impression is a cognitive impression. And *that* conclusion in conjunction with Stoic norms for assent compels the Stoic to suspend judgment about everything.²⁵

4. *Dreams and madness*

Both Cicero and Sextus Empiricus report that the Academics, in support of the indiscernibility thesis, invoked cases in which a person entertains false impressions while dreaming or mad. According to Sextus Empiricus,

A cognitive impression . . . is an impression from what is and stamped and sealed in accordance with what is, and of such a kind as could not come from what is not. Carneades claims that he will concede the rest of the definition to the Stoics, but not the clause 'of such a kind as could not come from what is not'. For impressions come from what is not as well as from what is. The fact that [both kinds of impression] are found to be equally clear and vivid is an indication of their indiscernibility (καὶ τεκμήριον τῆς ἀπαρραλλαξίας τὸ ἐπ' ἴσης ταύτας ἐναργεῖς καὶ πληκτικῶς εὐρίσκεισθαι); and an indication of their being equally clear and vivid is the fact that consequential actions are linked [to both kinds of impression]. Just as in waking states a thirsty man gets pleasure from drinking and someone who flees from a wild beast or any other terror shouts and screams, so too in dreams people satisfy their thirst and think they are drinking from a spring, and it is just the same with the fear of those who have nightmares . . . Just as in normal states too we believe and assent to very clear appearances, behaving towards Dion, for instance, as Dion and towards Theon as Theon, so too in madness some people have a similar experience (οὕτω καὶ ἐν μανίᾳ τὸ παραπλήσιον πάσχουσι τίνες). When Heracles was deranged, he got an impression from his own children as though they were those of Eurystheus, and he attached the consequential action to his impression, which was to kill his enemy's children, as he did. If then impressions are cognitive insofar as they induce us to assent and to attach to them the consequential action, since false impressions are plainly of this kind too, we must say that the non-cognitive impressions are indiscernible from the cognitive impressions.²⁶

How does the fact that at least sometimes when a person dreams or is deranged she entertains false impressions which induce assent, support the thesis that for any true perceptual impression it is possible for there to be a false perceptual impression indiscernible from that true impression?

Sextus Empiricus himself gives us one possible answer to this question. The Stoics claimed that only cognitive impressions displayed a certain clearness or vivacity where clearness and vivacity are objective features of an impression and not a matter of the conviction a person feels in entertaining an impression.²⁷ An impression which is clear and vivid is for that reason capable of inducing assent, and the Stoics claimed that cognitive impressions are capable of inducing assent because they are clear and vivid. On Sextus Empiricus' account, then, the Academics appealed to the false impressions entertained in dreams and madness in order to show that these false impressions are indiscernible from any true perceptual impression at least with respect to the features of clearness and vivacity. Thus after reporting the Academics' appeal to the false impressions entertained in dreams and madness, Sextus writes that "the indiscernibility of cognitive and non-cognitive impressions with respect to the property of clearness and vivacity is established".²⁸ If a true perceptual impression is a cognitive impression just in case that true impression is clear and vivid in a way no false impression can be, but the false impressions entertained in dreams and madness are no less clear and vivid than any true perceptual impression, then no true perceptual impression is a cognitive impression. What reason is there for thinking that the false impressions entertained in dreams and madness are no less clear and vivid than the

true perceptual impressions of ordinary waking experience? The Academics, according to Sextus, argued that a false impression of this sort induces assent and motivates action no less than true perceptual impressions do. Thus, for example, when Heracles in madness entertained the impression that the children before him are the children of his enemy Eurystheus (the impression is false as the children are in fact his own), he assented to this impression and murdered them.²⁹

Despite Sextus Empiricus' testimony, however, this interpretation of the Academic argument from dreams and madness leaves an important question about the argument unanswered. The purpose of the argument, on this interpretation, is to show that certain features (clearness and vivacity) which the Stoics claim belong exclusively to cognitive impressions are in fact exhibited by certain false impressions as well. And these false impressions are said to exhibit just the same clearness and vivacity as the true perceptual impressions of ordinary waking experience on the grounds that these false impressions are no less capable than any true perceptual impression of inducing assent and motivating action. But if the Academics are concerned to show only that certain false impressions can be no less clear and vivid than any true perceptual impression, *and* if the fact that a false impression induces assent and motivates action is a sufficient indication that that false impression exhibits the clearness and vivacity which the Stoics claim is distinctive of at least some true perceptual impressions, why should the Academics appeal to the false impressions a person entertains in the abnormal conditions of dreaming and madness rather than the false impressions a person at least occasionally entertains, assents to, and acts on in ordinary waking experience? What work is being done here by the fact that the false impressions to which the Academics appeal occur in *dreams* and *madness*? Sextus Empiricus' interpretation does not give us an answer to this question.

Sextus Empiricus' testimony is misleading, I want to suggest, to the extent that it presents the Academic appeal to the false impressions entertained in dreams and madness as intended to establish only that certain false impressions are indiscernible with respect to the features of clearness and vivacity from any true perceptual impression of ordinary waking experience. The Academics no doubt claimed that these false impressions are no less clear and vivid than any true perceptual impression of ordinary waking experience, but that claim will follow from the more general conclusion that certain false impressions entertained in dreams and madness are indiscernible with respect to their representational content from actual or at least possible true perceptual impressions.³⁰ The point of the Academic argument is *not* that at least some false impressions entertained in dreams and madness are no less clear and vivid than any true perceptual impression of ordinary waking experience. The point of the argument is, rather, that since at least some false impressions entertained in

dreams and madness are no less clear and vivid than any true perceptual impression entertained in ordinary waking experience – and the truth of that claim is established by the fact that the false impressions in question are no less capable of inducing assent and motivating action than any true perceptual impression – then these false impressions must be indiscernible with respect to the way in which they represent their objects from some actual or possible true perceptual impressions.

Now the third clause of the Stoic definition of the cognitive impression states that a true impression ϕ is a cognitive impression just in case it is not possible for an impression which represents its object in just the way ϕ does to be false. The Academics, I have suggested, take this third clause to be a counterfactual requirement on any cognitive impression: a perceptual impression ϕ is a cognitive impression just in case if ϕ were to have a different causal history, ϕ would have a different representational content. The Academic argument from dreams and madness, like the Academic argument from indiscernibles, is designed to show that no true perceptual impression can satisfy this counterfactual requirement. Suppose that when Socrates appears at my door in the afternoon I entertain the true perceptual impression ϕ where ϕ is an impression that Socrates is standing before me. The Academics will have argued that the true impression ϕ is indiscernible with respect to the way in which it represents its object from a false impression ψ , where ψ is an impression that Socrates is standing before me, which I could entertain if I were now dreaming or mad (and merely hallucinating Socrates). Therefore, the true impression ϕ cannot be a cognitive impression. More generally, for *any* true perceptual impression ϕ of ordinary waking experience, if it is possible to entertain in a dream or episode of madness a false impression ψ which is indiscernible with respect to the way in which it represents its object from ϕ , then ϕ cannot be a cognitive impression. But, the Academics can now argue, for *any* true perceptual impression of ordinary waking experience it is at least possible to entertain in a dream or episode of madness a false impression which is indiscernible with respect to the way in which it represents its object from that true impression. Hence, no true perceptual impression of ordinary waking experience can be a cognitive impression. The Academic argument, then, need not challenge any claim of mine to know that, in entertaining an impression that this person is Socrates, I am not now dreaming or mad. The argument contends only that in the counterfactual situation in which I am now dreaming or mad, I could entertain a false impression which is indiscernible with respect to its representational content from the true impression I am now actually entertaining. So it is a consequence of the Academic argument that if I do know that I am now not dreaming or mad, this knowledge is not based on or derived from the fact that my impression represents its object in a way that no false impression – and hence no impression entertained in a

dream or bout of madness – could. If I do know that I am not now dreaming or mad, this knowledge will be based somehow on considerations of the coherence of my current impression with my other recent impressions and background beliefs.

Understood in this way, the Academic argument turns on two claims. The first claim is that at least some false impressions entertained in a dream or episode of madness are indiscernible with respect to the way in which they represent their objects from some actual or possible true perceptual impressions. The Academics think this claim is established by the fact that at least some false impressions entertained in a dream or episode of madness are no less clear and vivid than any true perceptual impression. And this fact, in turn, is made clear by the fact that at least some false impressions entertained in a dream or episode of madness induce assent and motivate action no less effectively than any true perceptual impression. But the Academic argument also requires the second claim that for any true perceptual impression it is at least possible to entertain in a dream or episode of madness a false impression indiscernible with respect to the way in which it represents its object from that true impression. The Academics seem to have assumed that any impression a person entertains in waking experience is indiscernible with respect to the way in which it represents its object from an impression which a person could entertain while dreaming or mad. This assumption about dreams and madness would explain why in arguing against the Stoic doctrine of cognitive impressions the Academics appeal specifically to the false impressions a person entertains in a dream or episode of madness. For the Academics must show that for any true perceptual impression it is at least *possible* for there to be a false impression indiscernible with respect to the way in which it represents its object from that true impression. The phenomena of dreams and madness, the Academics claim, reveal that it is possible for the representational content of any true perceptual impression to be duplicated in a false impression.

5. *Assessing the Academic arguments*

It is difficult to assess these Academic arguments because it is difficult to understand the Stoic doctrine of cognitive impressions against which the arguments are directed. A cognitive impression is supposed to have some feature which distinguishes an impression of this type from any false impression. On what has become the standard interpretation – the so-called ‘externalist interpretation’ – the Stoics identify the distinctive feature of a cognitive impression with some feature external to the awareness of the person who entertains that impression.³¹ Candidates for this feature include a cognitive impression’s causal history or a causal feature in

virtue of which a cognitive impression has a distinctive effect on the mind. According to this interpretation, the Stoics are not committed to the view (as we might say) that a cognitive impression has a distinctive phenomenal or experiential property or that there is something “it is like” to entertain a cognitive impression, and “what it is like” to entertain a cognitive impression is different from “what it is like” to entertain a non-cognitive impression. The Stoics insist that we can learn to distinguish reliably our cognitive from our non-cognitive impressions, but doing so involves tracking the conditions which are conducive to the formation of true perceptual impressions rather than identifying some phenomenal or experiential property which cognitive impressions alone possess.

It is worth noting that neither of the Academic arguments appears to target the claim that at least some true perceptual impressions are distinguished from any false impression by a feature external to the awareness of the person who entertains a true perceptual impression of this kind. It might seem, then, that the Academic argument from twins is supposed to undermine the Stoic claim that a cognitive impression is *distinct* (where, again, an impression ϕ is a distinct impression of an object O just in case ϕ represents its object as having a collection of properties such that O alone possesses that collection of properties). Suppose I see Socrates and entertain a cognitive impression that this person is Socrates. If Socrates has a twin, and if when I see Socrates' twin I form a false impression that this person is Socrates, my false impression will represent its object (Socrates' twin) in just the way that my cognitive impression represents its object (Socrates). And in that case my cognitive impression of Socrates will not be distinct.³² But this cannot be the right way to understand the Academic argument from twins. For the Academics were ready to concede, as Carneades did, that some true perceptual impressions are distinct.³³ The Academics argue, however, that even in the case of a distinct true impression, it is at least possible for a false impression to represent its object in the way in which that distinct true impression represents its object. For that reason not even a distinct true impression is, as the third clause of the Stoic definition of a cognitive impression requires, an impression of a kind which could not be false.

The Stoics in fact responded to the Academic argument from twins by appealing to a basic doctrine of Stoic metaphysics. The Stoics drew a broad distinction between the kinds of intrinsic qualities (i.e. qualities not constituted by mere external relations) an individual possesses. A “common quality” (κοινή ποιότης) is signified by a general term, e.g. ‘human being’ or ‘horse,’ and it is a quality in virtue of which an individual is a member of a natural or artificial kind. A “peculiar quality” (ἰδίᾳ ποιότης), in contrast, is a uniquely identifying quality of an individual.³⁴ Now it is unclear just what a peculiar quality of an individual might be on the Stoic view. Since the peculiar quality of an individual, e.g.

Socrates, is for the Stoics the metaphysical criterion of Socrates' identity, Socrates' peculiar quality must be an *essential* property of Socrates which Socrates possesses from his generation to his destruction.³⁵ Socrates' peculiar quality might be either a single quality *F*-ness such that Socrates alone is *F* or a uniquely identifying collection of common qualities.³⁶ But the important point for our purposes is that the Stoics argued that every individual possesses a peculiar quality and is, for that reason, qualitatively unique. What, then, follows from the Stoic thesis that every existing individual is qualitatively unique?

It obviously does not follow that there is no possibility of misidentifying individuals. If I fail to notice or am unable to notice the differences between two qualitatively unique individuals *A* and *B*, then it is possible for me to misidentify *A* as *B* or *B* as *A*. More importantly, it will not follow simply from the thesis that every individual is qualitatively unique that it is possible to distinguish *in perception* one individual *A* from another individual *B*. The Stoic thesis will have that implication only if the qualitative differences between two individuals *A* and *B* are perceptually identifiable differences. Hence the thesis that every individual is qualitatively unique will not by itself be sufficient to counter that Academic argument from twins and perceptual indiscernibles. The Stoics require here the stronger thesis that non-identicals are perceptually distinguishable.³⁷ The Academics, then, need not deny the thesis that every individual is qualitatively unique, and the Academic argument from twins or indiscernible objects does not turn on rejecting a basic doctrine of Stoic metaphysics.³⁸ There is some evidence which suggests that the Stoics accepted, even if they could not offer arguments for, the thesis that non-identicals are perceptually distinguishable.³⁹ Cicero reports that the Stoics appealed to examples of persons who have learned to discriminate in perception objects which are qualitatively extremely similar, e.g. the family members of the Servilius twins or Delian egg farmers.⁴⁰ But this sort of appeal is clearly inadequate. It does not follow from the fact that I have learned to discriminate egg *A* from egg *B* in the past that it is not possible for there to be an egg *A** which is perceptually indistinguishable from *A*. That possibility requires only that objects like eggs have peculiar qualities which human beings are incapable of identifying in perception. And the Stoics have given us no reason to deny this possibility.⁴¹

Now if the Academic argument from dreams and madness is intended to show that the false impressions entertained in dreams or madness have just those phenomenal or experiential properties which are supposed to be characteristic of a cognitive impression, then at least on the externalist interpretation of the Stoic doctrine of cognitive impressions the Academic argument is simply an *ignoratio elenchi*. For on the externalist interpretation the Stoics do not claim that the distinctive feature of a cognitive impression is a phenomenal or experiential property. But in fact the

Stoics do not appear to have treated the Academic argument as an *ignotio elenchi*. On the interpretation of the argument I have presented here, the Academics claimed that certain false impressions entertained in a dream or in madness are indiscernible with respect to their representational content from true perceptual impressions. The Academics supported this claim by appealing to the fact the certain false impressions entertained in a dream or in madness induce assent and motivate action no less effectively than true perceptual impressions. In doing so, the Academics are making an inference to the best explanation: the fact that the false impressions entertained in a dream or madness induce assent and motivate action no less effectively than true perceptual impressions is best explained by the fact that these false impressions are indiscernible with respect to their representational content from true perceptual impressions. The Stoics can undermine this inference by providing an alternative and equally plausible explanation of the fact that at least some false impressions entertained in dreams and madness induce assent and motivate action, and the Stoics do just this. If a person assents to a false impression she entertains while dreaming or mad, she does so because in the abnormal conditions of dreaming or madness the mind and its faculty of assent are impaired and not functioning properly.⁴² So to the extent that the Academic argument from dreams and madness relies on the kind of inference to the best explanation I have described, that argument fails.

But why do the Academics need an *argument* for the claim that at least some false impressions entertained in a dream are indiscernible with respect to their representational content from true perceptual impressions? Isn't this just a fact about dreams that we can recognize with little or no reflection on the matter? The Stoics did not think so. They insisted that the way in which at least some true perceptual impressions represent their object is different from the way in which any false impression entertained in abnormal conditions represents its object. Chrysippus argued that a perceptual impression is a different kind of psychological state from the psychological state a person is in when she dreams or is mad. First, a perceptual impression has a different kind of causal history: it, unlike a dream or a hallucination, is directly produced by an object in the world. Moreover, the object which appears to the person who entertains a perceptual impression is the very object in the world which produced that impression. A perceptual impression is characterized by the fact that what an impression represents or makes apparent is its cause in the world. In this respect the Stoics carefully distinguished perceptual impressions from psychological states like dreaming or hallucinating: whatever a dream or hallucination represents or makes apparent is *not* its cause. Impressions reveal their causes while psychological states like dreams and hallucinations conceal their causes.⁴³

The Stoics appear to have argued that given the differences in their causal history – a true perceptual impression is produced by an object in the world while an impression entertained in a dream or hallucination is the product of an abnormal state of mind – it is not possible for the psychological state a person is in when she dreams or is mad to represent its object in the way in which a true perceptual impression represents its object. Some commentators find this argument plausible, or at least well motivated by the principles of Stoic physics.⁴⁴ But it seems to me that the Stoics are defending here a version of the view for which Austin famously, and implausibly, argued in claiming that dreaming that I am being presented to the Pope is qualitatively different from *actually* being presented to the Pope.⁴⁵ If this were the case, it would be difficult to understand the considerable philosophical interest that sceptical appeals to dreaming have commanded for so long.⁴⁶

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NOTES

¹ See D.L. 7.51 and the discussion in Michael Frede, “Stoics and Sceptics on Clear and Distinct Impressions,” (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987) pp. 152–157. I have used these (standard) abbreviations for the following ancient texts and collections of evidence: *Acad.* = Cicero, *Academica*, ed. J. S. Reid (London: Macmillan, 1885); D.L. = Diogenes Laertius, *Vitae Philosophorum*, ed. M. Marcovich (Leipzig: Teubner, 1999); *SR* = Plutarch, *De Stoicorum repugnantiis*, ed. and trans. H. Cherniss (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1976); *M.* = Sextus Empiricus, *Adversus Mathematicos*, ed. H. Mutschmann and J. Mau (Leipzig: Teubner, 1914, 1954); *PH* = Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, ed. H. Mutschmann and J. Mau (Leipzig: Teubner, 1958); *LS* = A.A. Long and David Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

² I use ‘to know’ and ‘knowledge’ to translate the Stoic technical term *καταλαμβάνειν* and its cognate *κατάληψις*, but I follow established convention in using ‘cognitive’ to translate the adjective *καταληπτική*. The Stoics used the ordinary Greek word for ‘to know’ (*ἐπίστασθαι*) and its cognates as a technical term for the cognitive condition of the Stoic sage or wise person.

³ At *M.* 7.152 and 7.164 Sextus describes the cognitive impression as “of such a kind as could not be false” (*οἷα οὐκ ἂν γένοιτο ψευδῆς*). At *M.* 7.252 Sextus reports that according to the Stoics a cognitive impression has a “peculiarly” (*ἰδιώμα*) which differentiates it from other impressions (both false impressions and true but non-cognitive impressions) in the way horned snakes are differentiated from other kinds of snakes. Lucullus at *Acad.* 2.34 describes a cognitive impression as “that which appears to me true in such a way that something false could not appear in the same way” (*quod ita mihi videatur verum ut non possit item falsum videri*). At *Acad.* 2.77 Cicero reports that Zeno, under pressure from Arcesilaus, added to the definition of a cognitive impression that it is an impression of such a kind as could not be false. And at *Acad.* 2.84 Cicero says that a cognitive impression is supposed to have a distinctive feature or characteristic (*nota*) which distinguishes it from any false impression. Cf. also *Acad.* 1.41 where cognitive impressions are said to have “a peculiar power of revealing their objects”

(*proprium quandam habent declarationem eorum rerum quae viderentur*). Where possible I have used the translations (sometimes altered) given in *LS*; otherwise, all translations are my own.

⁴ For the Stoic second indemonstrable argument – an argument of the form ‘If p then q ; but not- q ; therefore not- p ’ – see D.L. 7.80. For (6) as Stoic dogma see Sextus Empiricus, *M* 7.157; the excerpt from an anonymous Stoic treatise recovered as Herculaneum papyrus 1020 col.4, col.1 (= *LS* 41D); and Stobaeus, *Anthologium* 2.111.18–112.8 (= *LS* 41G).

⁵ Plutarch, *SR* 1056E; Stobaeus, *Anthologium* 2.111.18–112.8 (= *LS* 41G).

⁶ Cicero, *Acad.* 2.40–41, 2.77–78, 2.83; cf. Sextus Empiricus, *M*. 7.154.

⁷ For the Stoic first indemonstrable argument – an argument of the form ‘If p then q ; but p ; therefore q ’ – see D.L. 7.80.

⁸ Cicero, *Acad.* 2.67.

⁹ Thanks in large part to Pierre Couissin, “The Stoicism of the New Academy,” *The Skeptical Tradition*, ed. M. Burnyeat (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1983) pp. 31–63. This paper was originally published as “Le Stoïcisme de la Nouvelle Académie,” *Revue d’histoire de la philosophie* 3 (1929) pp. 241–276.

¹⁰ Sextus Empiricus, *PH* 2.4, *M* 7.248, 7.402, 7.426.

¹¹ For this point, see Frede, “Stoics and Skeptics on Clear and Distinct Impressions,” p. 165 who cites Sextus Empiricus *M* 7.152, 7.252, and Cicero, *Acad.* 2.42, 2.112.

¹² D.L. 7.46.

¹³ Thus Sextus Empiricus (*M*. 7.252) reports that “the Stoics say that one who has the cognitive impression fastens on the objective difference of things (τῆ ὑποῦση τῶν πραγμάτων διαφορᾶ) in a craftsmanlike way (τεχνικῶς)”. But it does not follow from the fact that ϕ is a distinct impression of O that ϕ represents *all* the properties, or *all* the properties of a kind accessible to a given sense modality, of O .

¹⁴ For accounts of the Academic argument from indiscernibles, see Cicero, *Acad.* 2.84–85 and Sextus Empiricus, *M* 7.408–410.

¹⁵ This assumption – whether made by the Academics or attributed by them to the Stoics – is consistent with the evidence about the truth-conditions of Stoic impressions provided by Sextus Empiricus, *M* 7.244. Sextus tells us there that according to the Stoics true impressions “. . . are those of which it is possible to make a true assertion (κατηγορίαν), e.g. at present ‘It is day’ or ‘It is light’”. For the Stoics an impression is true just in case the proposition which expresses the content of that impression is true. But what proposition do the Stoics take to express the content of a perceptual impression? Suppose in looking at the person in front of me I form an impression that Socrates is pale. This impression is different from an impression I form simply by being told by someone that Socrates is pale. In the first case but not in the second forming an impression that Socrates is pale involves identifying the person in front of me as Socrates. In this respect my impression in the first case is an impression that the person in front of me is Socrates and he is pale.

¹⁶ The fact that the propositional content of these two impressions includes an indexical element adds a complication to the picture. For as Frede, “Stoics and Skeptics on Clear and Distinct Impressions,” p. 174 has noted, since the reference of the demonstrative in ϕ is different from the reference of the demonstrative in ψ , the propositional content of ϕ will differ from the propositional content of ψ . I’m not sure how significant this fact is. The Academics might argue that even if as a matter of Stoic logic the propositional contents of ϕ and ψ differ because the referent of the indexical element in ϕ is different from the referent of the indexical element in ψ , nonetheless the way in which ϕ represents the object which produces it (Socrates) is indiscernible from the way in which ψ represents the object which produces it (Socrates’ twin).

¹⁷ Hence Sextus Empiricus at *M*. 7.408 takes this argument to demonstrate “indiscernibility with respect to character and imprint” (ἡ [*sc.* ἀπαρραλλαξία] κατὰ χαρακτῆρα καὶ [ἡ] κατὰ τύπον).

¹⁸ See *LS* vol. 1 pp. 251–252 and, apparently, Gisela Striker, “Academics Fighting Academics,” *Assent and Argument: Studies in Cicero’s Academic Books*, ed. B. Inwood and J. Mansfeld (Leiden: Brill, 1997) pp. 266–267.

¹⁹ For the definition of an epistemic possibility as a possibility relative to what someone knows, see Bernard Williams, *Descartes: The Project of Pure Inquiry* (London: Penguin Books, 1978) p. 53.

²⁰ Though she does not develop it in any detail, something like this appears to be the view advanced by Gisela Striker in “On the Difference between the Pyrrhonists and the Academics” and “The Problem of the Criterion,” both in her *Essays in Hellenistic Epistemology and Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) p. 139 and p. 160, respectively, as well as by David Sedley, “The Stoic Criterion of Identity,” *Phronesis* 27 (1982) p. 263. This may also be the way Michael Frede, “Stoic Epistemology,” *The Cambridge History of Hellenistic Philosophy*, ed. K. Algra, J. Barnes, J. Mansfeld, and M. Schofield (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) p. 310 construes the argument from twins, though I’m far from certain I’ve understood his remarks on the matter correctly.

²¹ Cicero, *Acad.* 2.77–78 tells us that Arcesilaus argued for a version of the indiscernibility thesis, but it does not tell us anything about *how* Arcesilaus argued for it. Sextus Empiricus, *M.* 7.408–410 is full of confusion. For Sextus reports there that if two objects *A* and *B* are perceptually indiscernible, then a cognitive impression of *A* will be indiscernible from a false impression of *A*. But if *A* and *B* are perceptually indiscernible, then *no* impression of *A* or of *B* will be a cognitive impression. And of course if the Stoic cannot distinguish *A* from *B*, then she will not assent to any impression of the form ‘This is *A*’ or ‘This is *B*’; she will suspend judgment about the identity of the objects in question. But the important point for our purposes is that nothing in this report requires the epistemic interpretation.

²² There is in fact some difficulty in specifying precisely the truth-conditions for sentences of the form ‘It is possible that *p*’ which express an epistemic possibility. For a discussion of the matter see Keith DeRose, “Epistemic Possibilities,” *The Philosophical Review* 100 (1991) pp. 581–605.

²³ So on the interpretation I offer here the Academics are *not* arguing (as, e.g. Sedley, “The Stoic Criterion of Identity,” p. 263 and Malcolm Schofield, “Academic Epistemology,” *The Cambridge History of Hellenistic Philosophy*, eds. K. Algra, J. Barnes, J. Mansfeld, and M. Schofield (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) p. 341 seem to suggest they are) for the extremely implausible claim that for every true perceptual impression of an object *O* there is a false perceptual impression of *some actually existing object O** indiscernible with respect to its representational content from that true impression.

²⁴ Cicero, *Acad.* 2.84.

²⁵ If the Academics themselves also endorse the Stoic norms for assent, then the conclusion that no perceptual impression is a cognitive impression will compel the Academics to suspend judgment about everything. Cicero, *Acad.* 2.67 appears to claim that Arcesilaus endorsed the Stoic norms for assent but Carneades did not. For Carneades sometimes (*non numquam*) granted that the wise person did assent to non-cognitive impressions and form mere opinions (cf. also Cicero, *Acad.* 2.59 and 2.78). It is plausible to think that Carneades’ understood the arguments against the cognitive impression as presenting the Stoics with a dilemma: *either* the Stoics are committed to suspending judgment about everything *or* the Stoics abandon their norms for assent and their conception of the wise person. Later Academics like Philo and Metrodorus, however, interpreted Carneades as claiming that it is rational under certain conditions to assent to non-cognitive impressions. And the conditions under which it is rational to assent to non-cognitive impressions are specified in Carneades’ account of the different kinds of ‘convincing’ (πιθανή) impression (Sextus Empiricus, *M.* 7.159–165). For an account of the epistemological position of Philo and

Metrodorus as a kind of evidentialism, see Charles Brittain, *Philo of Larissa: The Last of the Academic Sceptics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001) pp. 73–108.

²⁶ Sextus Empiricus, *M.* 7.402–405 with omissions. For Cicero's account, see *Acad.* 2.48 and 2.88–90.

²⁷ For this point see Frede, "Stoics and Sceptics on Clear and Distinct Impressions," p. 160. Sextus Empiricus at *M.* 7.402–408 suggests that the Stoics claimed that cognitive impressions are clear (ἐναργεῖς) and vivid or striking (πληκτικὰς or ἐντόνους) in a way in which non-cognitive impressions are not. According to Cicero, *Acad.* 1.41 cognitive impressions have "a peculiar power of revealing their objects" (*proprium quandam habent declarationem earum rerum quae viderentur*).

²⁸ Sextus Empiricus, *M.* 7.408: ἡ ἀπαραλλαξία τῶν τε καταληπτικῶν καὶ τῶν ἀκαταλήπτων φαντασιῶν κατὰ τὸ ἐναργεῖς καὶ ἐντονὸν ἴδιωμα παρίσταται. Modern commentators who have followed Sextus here include Frede, "Stoics and Sceptics on Clear and Distinct Impressions," pp. 172–175; Michael Williams, "Descartes and the Metaphysics of Doubt," *Essays on Descartes' Meditations*, ed. A.O. Rorty (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1986) p. 134; *LS* vol. 1 p. 251; Julia Annas, "Stoic Epistemology," *Epistemology* (Companions to Ancient Thought 1), ed. S. Everson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990) p. 192; Striker, "The Problem of the Criterion," p. 160; James Allen, "Carneadean Argument in Cicero's Academic Books," *Assent and Argument: Studies in Cicero's Academic Books*, ed. B. Inwood and J. Mansfeld (Leiden: Brill, 1997) pp. 233 and 246. Curiously, Striker, "Academics Fighting Academics," p. 267 appears to take the point of the Academic appeal to dreams and madness to be that in these conditions one cannot distinguish between cognitive and non-cognitive impressions.

²⁹ Sextus Empiricus, *M.* 7.403–405.

³⁰ And in fact even Sextus Empiricus at *M.* 7.403 writes that "The fact that they [both kinds of impression] are found to be equally clear and striking is an indication of their indiscernibility (ἀπαραλλξία), and an indication of their being equally clear and striking is the fact that the consequential actions are linked [to both types of impression]." And Cicero at *Acad.* 2.48 reports that given the impressions we entertain in dreams or madness, "it is likely that the mind is moved in such a way that not only cannot it not determine whether those impressions [*sic.* it entertains in dreams or madness] are true or false, but that there is no difference at all between them [*sic.* true and false impressions]." According to Cicero, then, the Academics claimed that there is *no* difference at all – either in clearness and vivacity or in representational content – between true impressions and false impressions entertained in dreams or madness. Michael Williams, "Descartes and the Metaphysics of Doubt," pp. 134–135 has claimed that indiscernibility with respect to representational content is *not* at issue in the Academic argument from dreams and madness. He supports this claim by arguing that "the Academic skeptics think of sensation in partly causal-physical terms, as an affection of the living organism" and hence that on the Academic view of sensation two impressions can have the same representational content only if those impressions are caused by the same or exactly similar objects in the world. But no object in the world causes a dream or hallucination. Hence, no dream or hallucination can have the same representational content as a perceptual impression of ordinary waking experience. However, the only evidence Williams cites for the Academic view of sensation is Sextus Empiricus *M.* 7.162, but there Sextus Empiricus (relying on Antiochus as his source) is reporting the *Stoic* (or at least the Antiochian-Stoic) view of perception. That view is presented in the course of a report of Carneades' arguments against a criterion of truth because at least some of Carneades' argument used Stoic assumptions about perception to show that no perceptual impression can be a criterion of truth.

³¹ See Frede, "Stoics and Sceptics on Clear and Distinct Impressions," pp. 167–168 and "Stoic Epistemology," pp. 315–316; and Striker, "The Problem of the Criterion," p. 159. I myself

find the externalist interpretation of the Stoic doctrine of cognitive impressions unconvincing, but that is a topic for another occasion.

³² See Frede, "Stoics and Skeptics on Clear and Distinct Impressions," p. 173 who writes that the Academic argument from twins is supposed to show that there are impressions "exactly like, or at least indistinguishable from, cognitive impressions in the way in which they represent their object." But this strikes me as a very odd way of construing the Academic argument. For of course the Academics did not argue that there are false impressions exactly like cognitive impressions in the way in which they represent their objects. The Academics do not think that there are any cognitive impressions.

³³ Sextus Empiricus, *M.* 7.402.

³⁴ D.L. 7.58.

³⁵ For this point see Stobaeus, *Anthologium* 1.777.21-179.17 (= *LS* 28D), Simplicius, *On Aristotle's Categories* 217.36-218.2 (= *LS* 28I), and Sedley, "The Stoic Criterion of Identity".

³⁶ Dexippus, *On Aristotle's Categories* 30.20-6 (= *LS* 28J) entertains both possibilities. For problems with the view of a peculiar quality as some sort of compound of common qualities, see Eric Lewis, "The Stoics on Identity and Individuation," *Phronesis* 40 (1995) pp. 94–95. Lewis himself argues that the soul of an ensouled individual is the peculiar quality of that individual.

³⁷ As Striker, "The Problem of the Criterion," p. 160 has noted.

³⁸ Allen, "Carneadean Argument in Cicero's Academic Books," pp. 246–248 has claimed that with the argument from twins and perceptual indiscernibles the Academics attempt to show that it is *not* the case that every impression that satisfies clause (2) of the definition of a cognitive impression is true. I do not here have the space to give Allen's interpretation the treatment it deserves – that would involve, *inter alia*, working through certain interpretative and philosophical issues raised by the Stoics' definition of a cognitive impression. But Allen's reconstruction of the Academic argument turns on the existence of at least one pair of qualitatively identical objects and not merely on the existence of perceptually indiscernible objects. (And cf. James Allen, "Academic Probabilism and Stoic Epistemology," *Classical Quarterly* 44 (1994) p. 86 where Allen describes the Academics as arguing "that distinct but precisely similar objects could give rise to impressions which, though perfectly similar in every detail, could nevertheless lead to errors of misidentification".) But the Academics themselves understood their argument as requiring only that two numerically distinct objects be perceptually indiscernible, and two numerically distinct objects can be perceptually indiscernible even though they are not qualitatively identical or "precisely similar". See especially Cicero, *Acad.* 2.85.

³⁹ Lewis, "The Stoics on Identity and Individuation," p. 91 argues that for the Stoics a peculiar quality must be a perceptible quality where I take him to mean that *if* the Stoics are to have a satisfactory response to the Academic argument from twins or indiscernible objects, then the peculiar quality of an individual must be a perceptible quality. But then the Stoic claim that a peculiar quality is a perceptible quality looks to be just an *ad hoc* move.

⁴⁰ Cicero, *Acad.* 2.57–58.

⁴¹ For a different, and more favorable, assessment of the Stoic response to the Academic argument from twins and perceptual indiscernibles, see Frede, "Stoics and Skeptics on Clear and Distinct Impressions," pp. 173–174.

⁴² Cicero, *Acad.* 2.52.

⁴³ See Aetius 4.12.1–5 (= *LS* 39B).

⁴⁴ See Frede, "Stoics and Skeptics on Clear and Distinct Impressions," pp. 174–175.

⁴⁵ J. L. Austin, *Sense and Sensibilia*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1964) pp. 48–49.

⁴⁶ For comments on earlier versions of this paper, I am very grateful to Janet Broughton, Alan Code, and Tony Long.