

On Using the Past in Sextus Empiricus: the Case of Democritus*

“[Democritus said that] he would rather find a single causal explanation (αἰτιολογία) than gain the kingdom of Persia” (B 118 = LVIII; 29 L.)¹; this description could fit well a character of Goethe’s plays, unexhausted searcher in every aspect of reality and interested in giving a rational account of all the possible fields of knowledge. It could also explain why Thrasyllus, who edited genuine as well as spurious writings of Democritus, *subtilissimus antiquorum omnium*, as Seneca reminds us (cf. A 92 = 390; 416 L.), pronounced the following judgement: “And truly Democritus was versed in every department of philosophy, for he had trained himself both in physics and in ethics, nay more, in mathematics and the routine subjects of education, and he was quite an expert in the arts” (A 1 = DL IX 37 = T 18c Tarrant)². Unfortunately,

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Democritus’ testimonies (= A) and fragments (= B) will be quoted according to chapter 68 of H. Diels – W. Kranz, *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker* (Berlin 1961 = DK) and S. Luria, *Democritea* (Leningrad 1970 = L.). For Sextus’ and Diogenes Laertius’ (= DL) passages I will use respectively Bury’s and Hicks’ translations in the Loeb Classical Library.

¹ Tr. J. Barnes, *The Presocratic Philosophers* (London and New York 1982) 412. It is tempting to go on and suppose that Democritus’ passion for causal explanations was attacked by Aenesidemus in his *Eight Modes* against the “Aetiologists”: see therefore *Pyrrhoniae Hypotyposes* (= PH) I 180–5.

² For Thrasyllus’ similar attraction towards polymathy as well as for his personality “à la Faust” see F. Nietzsche, *Appunti filosofici 1867–1869. Omero e la filologia classica*, ed. G. Campioni–F. Gerratana (Milan 1993), esp. 117–20; for Thrasyllus’ attitude toward Democritus and his writings cf. now H. Tarrant, *Thrasyllan Platonism* (Ithaca and London 1993), esp. 85–9 and J. Mansfeld, *Prolegomena*.

philosophical schools and scholarly traditions saved only bits and pieces of Democritus' immense σοφία, as one can realize immediately by having a quick look through chapter 68 of *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*. His works were soon "dissected", quoted out of the original context, often imitated with no other intention but creating fakes, anyway used for different "hagiographic" or more frequently polemical reasons, particularly by authors hostile to atomism (for a schematic survey see *Appendix*). Sextus Empiricus is not an exception to this point of view. Although Sextus avoids those gratuitous, ironical attacks sometimes noticeable by other sources (cf. e. g. Aelianus' remarks in A 150a = 560 L.), he does not offer a detailed (and truly reliable) report of all, multiform – nowadays we would say: multidisciplinary – Democritean doctrines, but limits his selection to few, specific δόξαι.

With this paper I intend to trace back – though synthetically – Sextus' way of managing (and aptly inserting in his *corpus*) these relevant Democritean theses. This contribute aims at being therefore complete rather than absolutely original and is a sort of comprehensive survey and succinct commentary rather than a selective reading, which – guided by (external) theoretical reasons – focuses only on few significant places. I like to remember also that it is a "case-study" in a far-reaching project, which proposes reconstructing Sextus' global position in the background of a wider debate about the Sceptical tradition, which was taking place between the I and III centuries A. D.

Before entering *in medias res*, however, I would like to offer some preliminary remarks about the methodological principles I am going to apply.

1. I will collect all the passages in which Democritus is quoted either explicitly or, if there is evidence enough for an attribution (thanks to linguistic or conceptual clues and cross-references), implicitly.

2. I will group together the quotations *a parte Sexti*. That is, I will respect the way in which Sextus himself gathers up and arranges them according to his original plan of composition, which falls in with the scheme of general τόποι and wide monothematic sections. He collects material of different value and reliability, by excerpting many works not neutrally – though often with doxographical and even chronological care – but according to his theoretical "prejudice" and anti-dogmatic strategy. It is therefore obvious that I will focus more on the structure of Sextus' work

than on the specific content of each quotation, with the aim of underlining some traces of his originality.

3. Once grouped together Sextus' citations of Democritus under some general headings, I will try to throw light — if and where possible — on the specific sources of these quotations, or more broadly on the doxographical tradition through which they may have reached Sextus. This last attempt, which is (and is intended to remain, of course) highly conjectural, is based on the technical occurrence of conceptual as well as merely terminological cross-references. It will require then a massive dose of sceptical care in order to avoid glittering, but often thoroughly speculative solutions. On the other hand the hypothetical character of any conclusion becomes clear as soon as one reflects on the "desperate" task — although tempting for many scholars — of determining exactly Sextus' possible sources³.

Although Sextus gathers his material according to a traditional (Xenocratean-Hellenistic) tripartition in Logic-Physics-Ethics, it is more useful to order all Democritean citations in a less generic way. They will be divided into more comprehensive sections regarding specific problems and themes. In order to reach this goal, I deem it necessary to propose the following subdivisions, different from Sextus' "chapters" and clearly more effective for my reading.

- a – atomistic ontology;
- b – anti-empiric and "intellectualist" theory of knowledge;
- c – empiric-rationalistic theory of knowledge;
- d – atomistic cosmology;
- e – "theology";
- f – anthropology;
- g – (on time).

Taking for granted this schematic division, it is obvious that some quotations become irrelevant, either because they do not inform us about philosophical aspects of Democritus' thought (cf. e. g. *Adversus Mathematicos* (= *M*) VII 321: Democritus is simply mentioned among other thinkers (Plato, Zeno and Epicurus), who discovered the truth "when they had all become old"; *M* VIII 139: in order to show how different "the motion of the intellect" of various dogmatic philosophers is, Sextus enumerates simply the names of Democritus, Epicurus and Zeno); or

³ One cannot forget that both Sceptical "treatises" (which Sextus probably used as models: cf. e. g. the *συντάξεις* mentioned also in *DL IX 102?*) and handbooks (written according to schemes and doxographic conventions reasonably still at work in his writings) are lost.

because they contain a mere allusion, which cannot be read in its meaningful context and appreciated for its genuine value (the most dissatisfying passage is *M VIII 327=B 10b = 102 L.*, where Democritus is quoted, along with the Empirics (although doubtly, as the *τάχα* shows), because he denied – in his *Canons*, as Sextus sets out carefully – the dogmatic *ἀπόδειξις*, which he did not employ either in the solution of stereometric questions: cf. Archimedes' statement in the apparatus to *B 155 = 25 L.*); or finally because they, without naming Democritus explicitly, record *δόξαι* which present only a vague terminological similarity to genuine Democritean passages (cf. *PH I 56*, where the phrase “pigs find it more pleasant to wash in the most foul-smelling mud than in clear, pure water” seems to recall an observation attributed to Democritus (as well as to Heraclitus: cf. *DK 22 B 13*) by different sources in *B 147 = 581 a L.*: cf. esp. Clemens Alexandrinus' version).

a. Atomistic ontology

All the passages present the same basic Democritean doctrine, according to which atoms and void are *στοιχεῖα* of everything. This evidence does not differ from that offered by a solid scholarly *vulgata*. It is interesting to note, however, that a group of quotations (*PH III 32–3*; *M IX 363 = A 55 = 124; 169 L.*; *M X 318 = 183 L.*) puts Democritus and Epicurus together as supporting the above-mentioned atomistic thesis on the ontologic principles of reality. They seem to follow a scheme originated by the Peripatetic (Theophrastean) tradition. If we analyze closely one of the passages just quoted (*M IX 363*), however, we are informed that the atomistic theory⁴ had been attributed to a certain Mochus the Phoenician by Posidonius (fr. 286 E.–K.). This information could reasonably support the hypothesis according to which Sextus draws here on a Stoic rather than Peripatetic author⁵. The passage could be deemed

⁴ According to this doctrine atoms are described – and both Sextan places are not in *DK* – as “unlike and impassive” (*M X 318 = 183 L.*: *ἀνόμοια καὶ ἀπάθη*; Democritus is here explicitly opposed to Anaxagoras and Asclepiades) or as “indivisible and void of quality” (*PH III 33*: *ἄτομα καὶ ἄποια*; on this last feature other sources too insist: see *A 125*, *Aetius = 214 L.*, and *A 57*, *Plutarch = 179 L.*).

⁵ Cf. F. Decleva Caizzi, “Democrito in Sesto Empirico”, in F. Romano (ed.), *Democrito e l'atomismo antico: Atti del Convegno Internazionale, Catania 18–21 aprile 1979* (Catania 1980 = *Siculorum Gymnasium*, N. S. 33) 397; also the basic distinction between *ὕλικοι* and *δραστικοὶ ἄρχαι*, recalled e. g. in *PH III 30*, has probably a Stoic origin: see furthermore *Ps.-Gal. Hist. phil.* 18.

relevant, however, just because it shows Sextus' capacity of "melting" various and different sources for enriching his personal reconstruction. This seems evident both from the subdivision of ontologic principles in corporeal and incorporeal and from the mention of the air as Ideus' ἀρχή (*M IX* 360).

Anyway, Sextus insists often on the atomistic theory, a typical example of δογματικὴ ὑπόληψις inserted in the Sceptical tropology (cf. *PH I* 147), sometimes incidentally and anonymously (cf. *M VIII* 146 and *IX* 135, with no distinction, however, between Democritus and Epicurus; *X* 252), other times with a conscious polemic aim and by name (cf. *PH I* 214; *II* 24; esp. *M VII* 135 = *B* 6 = 55 L.).

Let us say more about these passages. For example, in his attack against a typical (Stoic and medical-dogmatic) partition, Sextus puts the infinite and extracosmic void supposed by "some physicists" among those things that are φύσει ἄδηλα (*M VIII* 146). The context is again undoubtedly Stoic in *M IX* 135. Here we find indeed the following argument proposed by Diogenes of Babylon⁶: if Gods had once existed, they exist now too, as happens also in the case of atoms "for according to the conception (ἔννοια) of such bodies, they are imperishable and uncreate (ἄφθαρτα καὶ ἀγένητα)". With regards to *M X* 252 we have to take into account that the general frame of reference, from *X* 248 on, is completely περὶ ἀριθμοῦ; that "the followers of Pythagoras" are continuously mentioned along with theses reasonably attributable to Speusippus and Xenocrates; that atoms are described as νοητὰ σώματα, that is as non-evident principles – and this is right – but bodily – and this is an error. All these features invite to suppose that Sextus depends here from neo-Pythagorean sources, which had worked out doctrines current in the Ancient Academy⁷. It is however noteworthy that Sextus (or once again his source?) tends to stress the dogmatic διαφωνία by differentiating Epicurus' position from that of other Atomists (and therefore from Democritus too, one could infer), since Epicurus himself admitted "that the intellegible bodies are composed of incorporeals" (*M X* 257).

Once we compare his quotations with that of another prominent source like Galen (cf. *B* 125=79/80 L.), we must recognize Sextus' doxographical care, since he reports κατὰ λέξιν the original Democritean

⁶ Some useful comments on its structure are in R. J. Hankinson, *The Sceptics* (London and New York 1995) 241–2.

⁷ This hypothesis, put forward by Margherita Isnardi Parente, is accepted by Declava (*supra* n. 5), 401, n. 13.

formula: only atoms and void are “in verity” (ἐτεῆ, a technical term, which is synonymous – as Sextus explains – with “in truth”, ἀληθεία: cf. *PH I* 214). This theory is not only criticized for its dogmatic weight (cf. *PH II* 24 and *infra*, f; *M VII* 135 and *infra*, b), but also considered as one of the signs (the other being a distorted use of the οὐ μᾶλλον clause: cf. *PH I* 213)⁸, which should prove Democritus’ distance from any genuine form of Sceptical attitude (that is, from authentic Pyrrhonism: cf. *PH I* 214). It is especially in the final paragraphs of *PH I* (cf. §§ 209–41), indeed, that Sextus’ strategy becomes evident, since they intend to exclude Democritus, as well as other thinkers (the list include also Heraclitus, the Cyrenaics, Protagoras, the Academy in its five stages – with a partial and surprising exception: Arcesilaus, – medical empiricism – with another qualified exception: the methodic school) from the choir of the genuine heirs of Pyrrho. Although it is reasonable to suppose different philosophical and historiographic targets (even neo-Pyrrhonian, as appears from *PH I* 210–2: against Aenesidemus’ alleged Heracliteanism) behind these attacks, it seems possible to conclude that in the case of Democritus Sextus wants to denounce a typical “vice” of the Sceptical Academy. Beginning with Arcesilaus, indeed, it had tried hard to put its suspensive philosophy under the aegis of great and famous thinkers of the past, to such an extent that it had enlisted among the Sceptics Empedocles, Anaxagoras, Parmenides, Xenophanes, Plato, Socrates and precisely Democritus⁹.

It is more difficult to establish Sextus’ possible source. Although one cannot exclude that he repropose in the specific case of Democritus a judgment formulated by Aenesidemus, it is nevertheless necessary to admit that Sextus’ attitude vis-à-vis past philosophic tradition is much more radical and therefore original in comparison with Aenesidemus’ attempt to insert at least some thinkers (for example, as already hinted, Heraclitus) in the “river” of ancient neo-Pyrrhonism.

⁸ On the function of this formula in Democritus’ thought see at least P. De Lacy, “Ὀὐ μᾶλλον and the Antecedents of Ancient Scepticism”, *Phronesis* 3 (1958), esp. 59–60; A. Graeser, “Demokrit und die skeptische Formel”, *Hermes* 98 (1970) 300–17; and, with regard to Plutarch’s evidence in B 156 = 78 L., R. Westman, *Plutarch gegen Kolotes* (Helsinki 1955), esp. 254 ff.

⁹ Cf. e. g. Cic. *Varro* 44; *Luc.* 14, 32 and 73.

b. Anti-empiric and “intellectualistic” gnoseology

The various quotations scattered in the Sextan *corpus* agree (apart from a significant exception: cf. therefore *infra*, c) in attributing to Democritus two fundamental theses:

A – senses betray the intellect and therefore should be marginalized or more exactly the value both of αἰσθήσεις and of αἰσθητὰ should be denied;

B – consequently only τὰ νοητὰ deserve the attribute of true.

What is more striking at a cross-examination of the Sextan evidence is the strange “couple-game” that is created. Democritus is associated indeed – frequently, although not always – to Plato, both as defenders of the above-mentioned theses A and B,¹⁰ while just as frequently he is opposed to Epicurus (and sometimes even to Protagoras and Aenesidemus).

The passage which is by far most interesting from this point of view is *M* VII 135–9 (broken up in various consecutive fragments in DK: B 6–11 = 55, CXVI, 48–50, 83 L.). It is built by Sextus thanks to the placement next to each other of quotations different not only due to origin (respectively drawn from Democritus’ *Confirmations, Concerning Forms, Canons*), but also perhaps due to thematic context. Sextus puts these *tesserae* together to the purpose of providing the image of a Democritus who, while he promises the contrary, devalues the function of knowledge of the senses, relegated to the role of δόξιν ἐπιρυσμίη¹¹ and unable to

¹⁰ Notwithstanding Aristoxenus’ bitter evidence (cf. DL IX 40 = fr. 131 Wehrli), it has been reasonably argued that there is no patent trace of a strong and preconceived hostility between Democritus and Plato (besides Sextus’ passages, see e.g. Stob. II 52, 13 = A 167 = 742 L. and Plut., *Adv. Col.* 1108 b). Rather, in the case of some theories (as for example the cosmological ones: see therefore R. Ferwerda, “Democritus and Plato”, *Mnemosyne* 25 [1972], esp. 337–51) there seems to be even a sort of similarity (see also V. E. Alfieri, “L’atomo come principio intellegibile”, in *Epicurea in memoriam Hectoris Bignone* [Genoa 1959] 61–8, who insists on the similar, “intelligible” character of Democritus’ and Plato’s first principles), while more evident differences are detectable in the case of other doctrines (ethical and political, for example: cf. again Ferwerda’s above-quoted article, esp. 359–78; *contra* see however Stobaeus’ report just mentioned = A 167).

¹¹ This expression, attested only by Sextus, seems to preserve an original Democritean formula, though out of any meaningful context and therefore open to various and conflicting readings (cf. e. g. that “eccentric” offered by H. Langerbeck, Δόξιν ἐπιρυσμίη. *Studien zu Demokrits Ethik und Erkenntnislehre* [Berlin 1935], esp.

grasp the object as it is “in truth”. Next to this “destructive” anti-perceptive gnoseology, however, Sextus’ account attributes to Democritus also a “constructive” form of cognitive intellectualism. Indeed, beyond (and against?) the obscure knowledge of senses (σκοτίη γνώμη), Democritus allegedly supported a genuine knowledge (γνησίη γνώμη), which is carried out by means of intellect and which should therefore constitute the true criterion inasmuch as it identifies with λόγος.

This long testimony is a typical example of Sextus’ method of work. Next to precious literal quotations which are worthy and even unique¹², one is able to identify traces of a deep reworking. They are particularly evident in the assimilation of Democritus’ attack against cognitive impotence of the senses to the refusal of any κατάληψις (cf. *M* VII 137) and in the conclusive identification of genuine knowledge with λόγος (cf. *M* VII 139). To whom can this evident freedom of utilization of the material available be attributed? In line of principle nothing excludes one from thinking to Sextus himself, who could have read directly Democritus’ writings¹³ and drawn from them *verbatim* those passages functional to a presentation of Democritean gnoseology as intrinsically contradictory and

113 ff.). For a different interpretation of the opening phrase in *M* VII 136 (and consequently of the relationship between senses and intellect in Democritus) see D. Sedley, “Sextus Empiricus and the Atomist Criteria of Truth”, *Elenchos* 13 (1992), esp. 36–8.

¹² Cf. e. g.: (1) in *M* VII 135 the formula νόμῳ γλυκύ, νόμῳ πικρόν..., which should report Democritus’ *ipsissima verba* more carefully than other sources (Plutarch, Galen, Diogenes Laertius; see also P. A. Vander Waerdt, “Colotes and the Epicurean Refutation of Skepticism”, *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 30 [1989] 250–1); (2) in *M* VII 139 the distinction between two kinds of γνώμη reported κατὰ λέξιν.

¹³ *In toto* or from an anthology? It is difficult to answer with certainty, although one cannot exclude *tout court* that Sextus read directly *and* completely at least some Democritean writings. The same hypothesis has been reasonably defended – admittedly with special regard to Democritus’ ethical works – in the case of Seneca (cf. *De tranq. an.* 2; *contra* see however P. Natorp, *Die Ethika des Demokritos* [Marburg 1893; repr. Hildesheim–New York 1970] 57) and especially in that of Plutarch (cf. J. P. Hershbell, “Plutarch and Democritus”, *Quaderni Urbinati di Cultura Classica* 39 [1982] 84–95). For a different explanation see R. Löbl, *Demokritos Atome* (Bonn 1976), esp. 12ff., who thinks that relevant gnoseologic quotations were excerpted from Democritus’ works and grouped together by some members of the Pyrrhonian and medical-empiric tradition.

dogmatically on the side of the anti-empiric and intellectualistic “party” against the “sensistic” one¹⁴.

If however one should not want to accept this hypothesis and since the entire section “on truth” in *M* VII seems composed by sewing together doxographic extracts of different value and origin, then it is possible to try to speculate about the source from which Sextus allegedly could have got the image of Democritus as enemy of sensations and supporter of the power of λόγος.

The candidatures seem to be the following.

1. In the first place one could think of an Epicurean mediation, perhaps identifiable with (or at any rate influenced by) Colotes. It aimed to polemically detaching Democritus’ doctrine from that of Epicurus in order to bring it near to Platonic idealism and in this way better highlighting the originality of radical sensism professed by the Garden.

2. As an alternative, exactly the will to assimilate the Democritean position to the praise of the cognitive role of λόγος in Plato could let allow one to suppose a source of Platonic “tone” (Antiochus?)¹⁵ or Medio-platonic milieu, which against the sceptic-like reading proposed by the Middle and New Academy wanted to identify in the predecessors of Plato hints of dogmatic and positive philosophy.

3. In re-examining the comprehensive structure of *M* VII 89–140, David Sedley hypotized a single source, not precedent to the late II century B. C. and not much later than the middle of the I century B. C., rather fitting in the “syncretistic tendencies” proper of the first half of the I century B.C. and for this and other reasons to be identified with

¹⁴ A similar, unfair method seems to be adopted by Plutarch, both in his defence of Democritus against Colotes (cf. e. g. *Adv. Col.* 1109 a = B 156 = 7; 78 L.) and more generally in his attack against the contradictions of the Stoics, whose writings he knew and read (and “dissected”!) at first-hand: see therefore H. Cherniss (ed.), *Plutarch’s Moralia* XII, 2 (Cambridge, Mass.–London 1976) 396–400 and now I. Kidd, “Plutarch and His Stoic Contradictions”, paper presented at the “Seminario Internazionale *La raccolta dei frammenti dei filosofi antichi. Problemi e metodi*” (1997, forthcoming).

¹⁵ One cannot forget, however, Cicero’s evidence (*Luc.* 55–6 = A 81 = 6; 350 L.) with its strong contempt of Democritus “sponsored” by Antiochus, whose hostile attitude was probably influenced by the Peripatetic tradition and clearly directed against the Sceptical Academy, as confirmed recently by L. Fladerer, *Antiochos von Askalon. Hellenist und Humanist* (Graz–Horn 1996), esp. 20–4.

Posidonius (and in particular with his writing, in truth lost, *On the criterion* or better with a part of it)¹⁶.

4. If we accept a suggestion already advanced by Einarson and De Lacy, we could think of (a fresh utilization of) a collection of *excerpta* from certain Presocratics, the distant origin of which should be placed in the tradition of the sceptical Academy of Arcesilaus and from which also Colotes allegedly drew¹⁷.

The image of Democritus who attacks the senses due to their ‘empty’ impressions¹⁸ (that is because they are deceptive, unreliable, unable to reveal the true nature of things) and at the same time denies the existence to sensible things and qualities – the above-mentioned thesis (A) – appears in Sextus constantly. We find both explicit references (cf. *PH I* 213 = 85 L. and *PH II* 63 = A 134 = 56 L.: in both passages we read the typical example of honey and of the perceptive opposition which seems to characterize it; the second one, furthermore, specifies *e contrariis* the Democritean position placing against it that of Heraclitus; *M VIII* 184 = 57 L. and *M VIII* 354–5, both not reported in *DK* and marked by the clear contrast to Epicurean views; *M VI* 53)¹⁹ and implicit allusions (cf. *PH I*

¹⁶ Cf. Sedley (*supra* n. 11), esp. 27–43. It should never be forgotten, however, what the editors of Posidonius’ fragments affirm in their commentary on *M VII* 93 (= fr. 85 E.–K.): “there would be severe difficulties in thinking that the whole section [scil. *M VII* 89–140] was orientated or coloured by Posidonius himself” (L. Edelstein – I. G. Kidd, eds., *Posidonius* [Cambridge 1972–1988] II, 1, 342). Both *M VII* 89–141 and Cicero’s passages (cited *supra* n. 9) should instead depend “von einer peripatetischen Dihairese” worked out by the Sceptical Academy according to Fladerer (*supra* n. 15), esp. 17 and 20.

¹⁷ Cf. B. Einarson – P. H. De Lacy (eds.), *Plutarch’s Moralia XIV* (Cambridge, Mass.-London 1967) 165; see also A. M. Ioppolo, *Opinione e scienza. Il dibattito tra Stoici e Accademici nel III e nel II sec. a. C.* (Naples 1986), esp. 48, n. 81.

¹⁸ The verb κενοπαθεῖν seems to be a technical term, since Sextus employs it only with regard to Democritus and his anti-perceptual gnoseology. Maybe also the nouns κενοπάθημα, κενοπάθεια and ἀνάπλασμα play in Sextus’ prose the role of terminological indications of Democritean doctrines.

¹⁹ This passage deserves closer attention. Sextus attacks Democritus and Plato, because they eliminate sensible things and therefore also the sound (φωνή), “which is held to be an object of sense”. It is impossible to know with absolute certainty whether Sextus is offering here his own inference (as supposed by Decleva, *supra* n. 5, 402) or following a possible Epicurean source, as happens in many places of his *Against the Musicians*. *Contra* see however A 127 = 439 L., where we read that the φωνή is ὥμα according to Epicurus, Democritus and the Stoics; cf. also A 128 = 316; 491 L.; Gell., *Noct. Att.* V 15, 8 = 492 L.

128; II 49 and 51, a place in which the example of honey reappears to show how senses are impressed in a contradictory way by the same object; *M* VIII 213).

The Democritean demolition of sensism is furthermore presented as a complete refusal of τὰ φαινόμενα (cf. *M* VII 369 = A 110 = 54 L., still in opposition to Protagoras and Epicurus) and as an indispensable presupposition to prove the self-contradiction of propositions of the kind “every impression is true” (cf. *M* VII 389 = A 114 and 8 = 76 L., Democritus and Plato associated in their criticism of Protagoras)²⁰ or “every impression is false” (cf. *M* VII 53 = B 163 = 75; 167 L., against Xenocrates)²¹. Its most important function nevertheless seems to be that of laying the foundations for the much more binding doctrine – the above-quoted thesis B – on the basis of which “according to truth” (ἐτεῆ) μόνα τὰ νοητά exist, as one can read e. g. in *M* VIII 61 (not reported in DK), with terminology that immediately betrays technical Democritean lexicon. Since the initial paragraphs of *M* VIII, which illustrate the deep διαφωνία which arose among dogmatic philosophers around what is true²², Sextus – as I already hinted – reports thesis B as an “opinion” (στράσις) common to Democritus and Plato (once again opposed to Epicurus and Aenesidemus; see also the same opposition anonymously reposed in *PH* I 170, not in DK). However, he concerns himself also with explaining – with remarkable accuracy – the different reasons that urged them to support it: in the case of Democritus the conviction that by nature no sensible thing exists, since atoms have a nature deprived of any sensible quality; in the case of Plato the observation of the perennial becoming of sensible things,

²⁰ For Democritus see also B 156 = 7; 178 L. (with Vander Waerdt’s remarks, *supra* n. 12, 249, n. 59), for Plato at least *Theaet.* 171 a. In the case of *M* VII 389 it seems possible to exclude a source of Peripatetic tradition, which tended rather to “assimilate” Protagoras and Democritus: cf. A 112=52; 73; 80 L. and A 113 = 69 L. (respectively from Aristotle and Philoponus).

²¹ See J. Bruntschwig, “Démocrite et Xéniade”, in *Proceedings of the 1st International Congress on Democritus, Xanthi 6–9 October 1983* II (Xanthi 1984) 109–23.

²² It is difficult to identify the source of these paragraphs. It has been supposed either an Epicurean mediation or an influence derived from the Sceptical Academy (cf. Declava, *supra* n. 5, 401, n. 14). What seems to be sure, however, is that Sextus does not depend from Aenesidemus, whose position is here differentiated from, but at the same time assimilated to, that of Epicurus and therefore strongly criticized. From this fact one could infer that this is another indication of Sextus’ originality and independence even from the Pyrrhonian tradition.

which, like the waters of a river, are never nor never remain identical to themselves (cf. *M VIII* 6–7 = *A* 59 = 57; 92 L.).

In any case Sextus does not limit himself to reporting this “strange” Democritean-Platonic theory, but criticizes it and shows that it is not logically “sound” or “healthy” (ὕγιής) in two different ways and from two different points of view. In *M VIII* 62 it is demolished by an application of the περιτροπή-argument overtly worked out by Sextus; in *M VIII* 56 ff. = 61 L. (this passage also is lacking in DK) instead it seems that he makes use of a different source, not a Pyrrhonian one. With their anti-“sensistic” and intellectualistic gnoseology – one reads indeed in this passage – Democritus and Plato “throw things into confusion” (συγχέουσι τὰ πράγματα) and “shake to pieces” (σαλεύουσιν) not only the truth of things, but also their concept or ἐπίνοια. The latter conclusion appears untenable, if we keep in mind that every νόησις arises from sensation (or is not given without sensation) or again from experience (or not without experience). Both the verbs used²³ and the conceptual structure of the counterargument²⁴ can reasonably make one think of an Epicurean source²⁵, the objections of which Sextus feels himself legitimated to take advantage of in a context of ἀπορία κατά μέρος against the existence of the true.

Sextus’ criticisms finally do not even spare the διάνοια in its role of criterion of the alleged intellectualistic Democritean gnoseology. Indeed, in *M VII* 349 (= *A* 107 = 456 L.) – in presenting the διαφωνία about the location of the intellect – he reports the theory of some who, following

²³ The verb συγχέω seems to be a technical term of Colotes’ criticism (on which see in general Westman [*supra* n. 8] *passim*; P. De Lacy, “Colotes” First Criticism of Democritus”, in J. Mau–E. G. Schmidt, eds., *Isonomia* [Berlin 1964] 67–77 and Vander Waerdt, *supra* n. 12, 225–67); cf. e. g. Plut., *Adv. Col.* 1108 f and Westman (*supra* n. 8), 47; cf. also *SV* 57, with useful observations in G. Arrighetti, “Un passo dell’opera *Sulla natura* di Epicuro, Democrito e Colote”, *Cronache Ercolanesi* 9 (1979) 8. For σαλεύω Declava (*supra* n. 5), 402, n. 15 reminds us many occurrences in Philodemus’ *De signis*. For the sake of completeness one should add that the term σάλος is used by Democritus in its physical-biological (and not metaphoric) meaning: cf. *A* 77 = 476 L. (about τὰ εἶδωλα) and *B* 148 = 537 L. (embryological context).

²⁴ Cf. e. g. *DL X* 32=36 Us. Note however that a very similar doctrine is attributed also to the Stoics in *DL VII* 52–3; and one should add that *M VIII* 56 ff. was accepted as truly Stoic by von Arnim: *SVF II* 88. On the question of this “double attribution” see E. Spinelli (ed.), *Sesto Empirico. Contro gli etici* (Naples 1995), esp. 402–5.

²⁵ Maybe Colotes, as supposed by Vander Waerdt (*supra* n. 12) 233.

Democritus (the Greek formula is: τινές κατὰ Δημόκριτον), place it ἐν ὄλφ τῷ σώματι and not in a single part of the body or even outside it (as wanted by Aenesidemus "according to Heraclitus"). In order to establish who are the τινές close to Democritus to whom Sextus hints in this passage, the parallel place in Tertullianus (*De an.* 15. 5), in which the name of the physician Moschion is explicitly quoted, seems to be decisive. The global structure of these passages and the fact that in both of them a polemic mention of Aenesidemus appears – he is indeed integral part of a διαφωνία – make one think of a source link to medical milieu (empirical and/or neo-Pyrrhonian?) of the I–II century A. D.²⁶.

c. Rationalistic-empiristic gnoseology

The information taken from Diotimus and reported in *M* VII 140 (=A 111 = 72; 81; 160; 734 L.; for a complete version of the passage see DK 76, 3) deserves a detailed analysis. It concludes the ἱστορία of the positions of ancient "natural philosophers" regarding the criterion of truth and presents the doctrine of knowledge of Democritus in a way very different (see the opening δέ) from the testimonies collected by Sextus in the immediately preceding paragraphs. Against any form of anti-sensism Diotimus in fact asserts that Democritus allegedly posed three criteria:

1. τὰ φαινόμενα, considered as the only way of knowledge towards cognition (or technically: "apprehension", κατάληψις) of τὰ ἄδηλα, that is "the sight of what is non-evident" according to the well-known saying of Anaxagoras, explicitly mentioned in our passage and praised – it seems – by Democritus himself²⁷;

²⁶ Cf. R. Polito, "I quattro libri sull'anima di Sorano e lo scritto *de anima* di Tertulliano", *Rivista di Storia della Filosofia* 49 (1994): 3, 454. In any case, the Democritean doctrine recalled in *M* VII 349, which is most likely influenced by a previous interpretation of Aristotle (cf. A 104 = 444 L. and W. K. C. Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy* II [Cambridge 1965] 433, n. 3), seems to find some correspondence in Epicurean contexts: cf. at least Lucr., *De rerum natura* III 139ff., not in DK (cited by Luria in note 1 to 455 L.), and its probable echo in A 105 = 455 L.

²⁷ It is anonymously recalled also: (1) in *PH* I 138, where the κατ' αὐτοῦς seems to refer strictly to all dogmatic philosophers (see the expression κατὰ τοὺς δογματικούς at the beginning of the passage); (2) in *M* VII 374, where the dictum is used against the Stoics. Cf. also Tert., *De an.* 12 and finally Barnes (*supra* n. 1), 538; 644, n. 5.

2. the concept (ἔννοια), indispensable starting-point for any research according to what has been also stated by Plato's Socrates (see *Phaedr.* 237 b);

3. affections as points of reference for every choice or avoidance.

On the plane of Sextus' subjective intentions, it is very probable that he reports this testimony both for scruples of completeness and because, since it is not in line with the image generally accepted of a Democritus contempting the function of knowledge through the senses, it helps to strengthen the διαφωνία even on a doxographic level. In any case the problem of the identity of Sextus' source remains: Diotimus. Having been considered the above-mentioned characteristics of content of the passage, one could think that he is an Epicurean, even though by comparing with other evidence the positive presentation of Democritean ideas this seems hardly likely, since they have been almost included without "traumas" in the system of the Garden. In this regard two more hypotheses have been formulated:

(A) it could be that Stoic Diotimus recalled in DL X 3 because he circulated 50 false letters of a scandalous content under Epicurus' name and on which the revenge of Zeno of Sidon fell harshly²⁸, his testimony would then sound "like an attempt, on the flimsiest evidence, to show that Epicurus' three criteria of truth – αἰσθήσεις, προλήψεις, and πάθη — were not original to him but anticipated by Democritus"²⁹;

(B) as an alternative the Democritean Diotimus of Tyre has been thought of: he allegedly leaves us the genuine Democritean gnoseology, retranslating it nevertheless according to the terminology proper of the Hellenistic debate on the criterion and presenting it as a consistent theory to which Epicurus – with little originality and no self-taught spirit – simply uniformed himself³⁰.

²⁸ Nothing allows us to suppose that Diotimus' letters contained charges of plagiarism: since they are explicitly described only as "scandalous", we can infer only that they were limited to specific biographical data of Epicurus' life.

²⁹ Sedley (*supra* n. 11) 44; this hypothesis, first formulated by Zeller and Natorp, has been accepted also by H. Tarrant, *Scepticism or Platonism? The Philosophy of the Fourth Academy* (Cambridge 1985) 105–6 (who sees however Antiochus behind *M* VII 140) and – although very cautiously – by Decleva (*supra* n. 5) 405.

³⁰ Cf. R. Hirzel, "Der Demokriteer Diotimus", *Hermes* 17 (1882) 326–8 followed by Langerbeck (*supra* n. 11), 119–20 and especially by M. Gigante, *Scetticismo e epicureismo* (Naples 1981) 82–5. Yet it is clear that the passage offers "an interpretation of Diotimus, who has recast Democritus's thought in a post-Aristotelian mould" (Guthrie [*supra* n. 26] 459).

This second hypothesis of attribution seems to me to better respond to the objective content of the information kept in *M* VII 140³¹. The intention of Diotimus appears indeed clear: he aims at attributing to Democritus, in addition to ethical theses which – as was already hinted – seem to anticipate (or, if one prefers, to echo) the positions of the Garden (see therefore B 188 = 734 L. and, notwithstanding its lack of terminological precision, A 166 = 738 L.), a doctrine of knowledge in line with an empirical-rationalistic method of inquiry close to Anaxagorean theses. Against any intellectualistic reading, Diotimus seems prepared to stress that sensible impressions are not the place of absolute obscurity, but rather represent the indispensable material on which *διάνοια* exercises its ordering and clarifying power. In any case this presentation of Democritus' gnoseology is not an *unicum*. The continuity or better the conscious collaboration between senses and reason is founded indeed on a coherent interaction attributed to Democritus also by Galen (see B 125 = 79/80 L.³² and A 49 = 215 L.)³³.

d. Atomistic cosmology

In addition to the evidence concerning the ontologic constitution of reality and the modality through which it can be legitimately known, Democritus is remembered also for some opinions on motion, of which he

³¹ One should note (and explain), however, the (problematic?) presence of the Platonic quotation in a Democritean thinker, as Laura Gemelli Marciano points out to me *p. l.* Sedley (*supra* n. 11) 44, n. 63 thinks instead of a Posidonian origin with regard to “the loose citation of *Phaedr.* 237 b”.

³² The interpretation of this fragment proposed by Brunschwig (*supra* n. 21) 122, according to which “dans le débat imaginé par Democrite, les sens font entendre la voix de Xeniaide”, seems to me highly speculative.

³³ The roots of this kind of reading are to be found probably in Aristotle himself (cf. e. g. A 112 = 537 L. and also DK 67 A 9 = 240 L.) and in the Peripatetic tradition (cf. e. g. A 105 = 74 L. and A 113 = 69 L., both from Philoponus). McKim, who ascribes to Aristotle's evidence a decisive role, belittles however Sextus' merits exceedingly, to such an extent that he misunderstands the real meaning of his testimony, as one can see from this conclusion: “Sextus' objective is to present Democritus, like several other past philosophers famous primarily for their dogmatic beliefs, as being in fact proto-Sceptic, in order to add prestige to the Sceptical school of Sextus' time at the expense of its contemporary dogmatic opponents” (R. McKim, “Democritus against Scepticism: All sense impressions are true”, in *Proceedings* [*supra* n. 21] I, 288).

decidedly stated the existence, and on that particular kind of motion which is at the origin of the formation of the κόσμος and which he indicated with the metaphor of the vortex.

The first of these testimonies is in the sections of the Sextan writings devoted to the analysis of transitive motion and to the confutation of the dogmatic theories relating to it (cfr. *MX* 37–168 and *PH* III 64–81). Here Sextus gathers material of various doxographic (and substantially Peripatetic) origin, but as of the beginning he organizes it according to a personal strategy of composition (cf. e. g. the insertion of the Sceptics in the διαφωνία and the use of the first person, οἶμαι, in *PH* III 65). Even before presenting in detail the single opinions, indeed, he fits them in according to three possible alternatives:

(A) motion exists, as wanted by common life, which follows τὰ φαινόμενα, as well as by most physicists (in *MX* 45 the following are explicitly quoted: Pythagoras, Empedocles, Anaxagoras and, with the addition of a significant “certainly”, Democritus and Epicurus, along with Peripatetics and Stoics; in *PH* III 65 instead no specific name appears);

(B) motion does not exist, as Parmenides, Melissus and Diodorus Cronus above all maintain (in *MX* 46–8 Sextus recalls *ad abundantiam* both the bitter criticism moved against the former by Aristoteles and the peculiarity of the theses defended by the latter);

(C) motion exists “no more” than it does not exist, a Pyrrhonian conclusion dictated by the equal strength of appearances on one hand and of philosophical reasoning on the other.

As to the evidence on the original and necessary vortex postulated by Democritus, it is instead included – almost incidentally – within the arguments “on gods” in *Against the Physicists*. We are faced with an entirely Stoic context (cf. esp. *M IX* 111–4), which aims at proving the existence of gods beginning with motion of the universe considered as κόσμος νοερός³⁴. Here the Democritean mechanistic thesis is also discussed and criticized according to which the universe itself is allegedly moved “by vortex and of necessity” (*M IX* 113 = A 83 = 23; 290 L.)³⁵. Beyond the reasonable hypothesis according to which the source of these paragraphs could be placed around the I century B.C. in a Stoic milieu,

³⁴ Cf. *DL* VII 142–3: the source is Posidonius (=fr. 99 a E.–K.).

³⁵ The alleged identity between necessity and δίνη is not admitted by all sources which deal with atomistic cosmology: on this topic see the critical analysis of L. Edmunds, “Necessity, Chance, and Freedom in the Early Atomists”, *Phoenix* 26 (1972), esp. 344–9.

another interesting element deserves our attention. In *M IX* 113, indeed, the Democritean vortex (δίῳνη) is presented as ἄτακτος and ὀλιγοχρόνιος. Although one cannot deny that these adjectives seem to exhibit linguistic choices proper to the Stoic source and its peculiar way of arguing, on which Sextus relies³⁶, it is nevertheless tempting to venture the suggestion that they keep traces of the original description of some of the characteristics attributed by Democritus to the vortex. Of the two adjectives we are examining, ὀλιγοχρόνιος is in fact a *hapax legomenon* in Sextus and is attested by other sources as typical of Democritus' vocabulary, although in the ethical field (cf. B 285 = 646 L.). As to ἄτακτος, instead, which appears two more times in Sextus³⁷, one should note that it is explicitly tied to the cosmologic theme of the formation of atomic compounds (which takes place διὰ ῥύμην ἄτακτων) at least in another doxographical account (cf. A 43 = 299 L.)³⁸.

Still within the context of cosmologic doctrines it should be finally recalled that several sources, different for their chronologic placement and philosophic *pedigree*, agree in attributing to Democritus (and before him to Leucippus) the following thesis: atoms, once subject to the vortex,

³⁶ See therefore *M IX* 112. As a matter of fact, τὸ πᾶν, that is the totality of universe and void presupposed by the Stoics, is presented – e. g. by Plutarch (*De comm. not.* 1074c = *SVF* II 525; cf. also J. Barnes, "Bits and Pieces", in J. Barnes–M. Mignucci, eds., *Matter and Metaphysics* [Naples 1988], esp. 247–9) – as ἀόριστος καὶ ἄτακτος δι' ἀπειρίαν (but note that the Epicurean cosmologic ἀπειρία too is attacked as ἄτακτος by Plutarch in *Adv. Col.* 1114 b and presented in *De fin.* I 6, 21 as a mere plagiarism from Democritus by Cicero, who creates a fascinating neologism: *infinitio*). And one cannot forget that this adjective was referred very frequently also to the second Platonic principle, ἡ δυνὰς ἀόριστος (which is called e. g. ἀπειρία, being στοιχεῖον of every ἀμορφία and ἀταξία, as we read in Plut., *De defectu orac.* 428f). For a possible Stoic occurrence of ὀλιγοχρόνιος cf. again Plutarch (*De comm. not.* 1062 a = *SVF* III 210), who refers it to virtue.

³⁷ In both occasions it is used to qualify "life in old times" and occurs in "atheistic" descriptions of the invention of the Gods: cf. *M IX* 17 (Euhemerus) and 15 (anonymous ἔνοι, behind which one could reasonably see Critias: cf. *M IX* 54 = DK 88 B 25).

³⁸ It is admittedly true that this passage seems to depend from (and work out freely?) Aristotle's *On Democritus* (cf. A 37 = 293 L.) and does not distinguish Democritus from Epicurus. At least the above-mentioned expression (διὰ ῥύμην ἄτακτων), however, seems to keep – faithfully enough – Democritean rather than Epicurean technical terminology.

aggregate according to the fundamental law of *simile simili*³⁹. Even Sextus reports with abundance of details this Democritean δόξα, although he includes it probably in a context which is – so to say – improper, that is in a section devoted not to cosmology, but to gnoseology and more exactly to the discussion “on truth” (see therefore *M VII* 116–8 = *B* 164 = 11, 316 L.)⁴⁰.

e. “Theology”

In Sextus’ *corpus* hints are not lacking to Democritus’ theologic conceptions, although they seem to provide a distorted image. In the section of *Against the Physicists* in which Sextus illustrates and criticizes various notions of divinity proposed by previous dogmatic philosophers, Democritus is in fact also mentioned. In this regard he allegedly provided two different explanations. On the basis of the first (cf. *M IX* 19 = *B* 166=472 a, 578 L.)⁴¹ men form the concept of god for themselves because they have come in touch with images having particular features both “moral” (ability to be beneficial or evil and to allow predicting the future) and “physical” (extraordinary greatness, difficult corruptibility, possibility of being contemplated and of uttering sounds). On the basis of the second one (cf. *M IX* 24 = *A* 75 = 581 L.)⁴² the notion of divinity came from the observation of particularly paradoxical celestial phenomena and from the fear that they generated in primitive men (cf. also Lucretius’ verses in *A*

³⁹ Cf. *DK* 67 A 1 §31 = 289 L.; and 68 A 38=318 L.; A 43 = 299 L.; A 128 = 316, 491 L.; see also 68 A 99 a = 318; 410 L. For additional evidence on this “old opinion” see C. W. Müller, *Gleiches zu Gleichem. Ein Prinzip frühgriechischen Denkens* (Wiesbaden 1965).

⁴⁰ Cf. *A* 128 = 316; 491 L. and *A* 38=318 L. Decleva (*supra* n. 5) 398 suggests Posidonius as source of Sextus’ passage.

⁴¹ The essential points of it are summarized by Sextus further ahead in *M IX* 42 and here attacked inasmuch as they were founded only on unacceptable “fictions”. On the global structure of *M IX* 13–194 cf. G. Giannantoni, “Epicuro e l’ateismo antico”, in G. Giannantoni–M. Gigante (eds.), *Epicureismo greco e romano: Atti del Congresso Internazionale, Napoli 19–26 maggio 1993 I* (Naples 1996) 42–3, n. 55.

⁴² One should nevertheless notice at least two things: (1) the caution of Sextus, who introduces the attribution to Democritus with a significant “it seems”; (2) the presence of an original Democritean formula, τὰ ἐν τοῖς μετεώροις παθήματα, on which see L. Pepe, “Problèmes de météorologie chez Démocrite”, in *Proceedings I* (*supra* n. 21) 510, n. 16.

75 = 581 L.; for a different explanation of celestial phenomena see A 91–3 = 417; 418; 416; 415 L.).

On the plane of historiographic reliability these two Sextan extracts are to be evaluated in a very different way. Indeed, it is necessary to admit that the testimony of *M IX 19* – concerned only in building a large “dissonant” picture – seems to report *tout court* some neutral attempts of interpretation of physiologic phenomena (cf. e. g. A 135, from Theophrastus, *De sens.* 51 = 478 L.) as if they were instead actual positive theologic doctrines of Democritus. If on one hand the religious and demonologic reading which is behind *M IX 19* seems confirmed (should one read other testimonies)⁴³, on the other it appears very probable that the actual field of application of Democritus’ theory of εἶδωλα were rather that of explaining dreams on the basis of the atomistic mechanism⁴⁴.

The evidence of *M IX 24* instead seems to exhibit a legitimate connection with some form of explanation of the birth of religious feeling⁴⁵. The interesting point in this case is the probable existence of a sort of doxographic *vulgata* regarding Democritean theology, since the double account reported by Sextus seems also confirmed by Cicero (cf. *De nat. deor.* I 43, 120 and I 12, 29 = A 74 = 472 L.). Although it is undeniable that the global structure of the section “on gods” in *M IX* seems to be highly influenced by Stoic and Sceptical-academic traditions⁴⁶, exactly Cicero’s texts allow formulating a different hypothesis on the

⁴³ Apart from Cicero’s texts quoted *infra*, cf. e. g. A 77 = 476 L., from Plutarch; A 78 = 472a L., from Hermippus, and A 79 = 572 L., from Clemens Alexandrinus. Another Plutarchean passage (A 77 a = 476; 579 L.) goes one further step in interpreting Democritus’ doctrine of τὰ εἶδωλα in terms of “evil eye”.

⁴⁴ Cf. G. Cambiano, “Democrito e i sogni”, in F. Romano (ed.) (*supra* n. 5) 437–50 and A. Montano, “La genesi della credenza religiosa secondo Democrito”, *Elenchos* 5 (1984) 365–90.

⁴⁵ Thanks to a cross-examination of other sources (cf. esp. B 30 = 580 L., from Clemens Alexandrinus and Eusebius) it is legitimate to suppose that Democritus postulated a second stage after that of the first, natural belief in gods generated from the fearful observation of meteorologic *paradoxa*. In it some λόγοι ἄνθρωποι (on whose function see G. Pfligersdorffer, “Ἄγιος und die λόγοι ἄνθρωποι bei Demokrit”, *WSI* 61–62 [1943–1947] 5–49 and Montano [*supra* n. 44], esp. 375–7) allegedly created a “positive theology”, for example by attributing the name and the powers of Zeus to the air.

⁴⁶ Hence, both Declava (*supra* n. 5) 399 (she insists on the presence in *M IX 42* of the Stoic technical term ἀφορμή, on which see *DL VII 89* and Cleanthes, fr. 566) and Montano (*supra* n. 44) 387 (he suggests the name of Posidonius) suspect a Stoic source behind Sextus (and Cicero).

possible Sextan source. Since in the *De nat. deor.* I 12, 29 criticisms of Democritus' theologic ideas are formulated by Velleius⁴⁷, spokesman for Epicureanism and probably debtor in this case either of the work *On the Gods* of the Epicurean Phaedrus the Epicurean or of Philodemus' *On piety*⁴⁸, it is probable that even the parallel Sextan exposition and his critical remarks depend on the same Epicurean source.

f. Anthropology

Dealing with the criterion "by whom", which coincides with man inasmuch as acting subject, Sextus recalls with irony and attacks with different arguments a rather well-known Democritean definition:⁴⁹ "man is that which we all know". This definition is simply enunciated in *PH* II 23 = 65 L. (it is lacking in DK), while in *M* VII 265 (= B 165 = 9; 65 L.) it is qualified as "a crude statement", which clearly clashes as compared to the high-sounding tone with which Democritus presented it, equating himself to the voice of Zeus and claiming to speak of all things. These last specifications correspond almost literally to those used by Cicero in his *Lucullus* (collected again in B 165 = 58 L.; cf. also a probable, fleeting Aristotelian hint in A 35 = 100 L.) and therefore allow one to suppose an identical source. In both Sextan versions, however, we also find a series of criticisms. In *M* VII 266 they aim on one hand to unmask the banality of the Democritean definition, on the other to underline that it falls in a *petitio principii*. It considers indeed as solved for man the problem that Delphic tradition already indicated as the hardest: the one of knowing oneself. In *PH* II 23-4 instead, in addition to insisting on the vagueness of Democritean anthropologic conceptions, Sextus justifies the non-sophistic character of his attacks by going back to the same atomistic doctrine. If only atoms and void are knowable "in truth" and if they are common to all

⁴⁷ They are repropounded and somehow amplified by the Academic Cotta in *De nat. deor.* I 43, 120: he seems however to defend Democritus' reputation (see the phrase: *quae quidem omnia sunt patria Democriti quam Democrito digniora*) according to a well-established attitude proper to his school, the Sceptical Academy (see therefore *supra* n. 9).

⁴⁸ Cf. A. S. Pease (ed.), *M. Tulli Ciceronis De Natura Deorum*, ll. I-II (Cambridge, Mass. 1955), esp. 39-42: he discusses also other - less convincing - hypotheses.

⁴⁹ Perhaps it was placed programmatically at the beginning of one of his lost writings, the *Lesser Diakosmos*, as suggested by V. E. Alfieri (ed.), *Gli atomisti. Frammenti e testimonianze* (Bari 1936) 247, n. 619.

bodily compounds, then in no way we will be able to grasp the peculiarity of the aggregate "man".

It is difficult to pronounce oneself with absolute certainty on the sources of these places; and in any case they are to be evaluated in their global meaning. It has been supposed that in the case of *PH* II 22–8 Sextus depends from an Academic-sceptical source, since he reports Plato's "probabilistic" (κατὰ τὸ πιθανόν) account for the definition of man (*PH* II 28). The fact that the same definition is criticized much more bitterly as absolutely dogmatic in the parallel passage of *M* VII 281–2 would induce one instead to think to a different source for paragraphs *M* VII 264–82⁵⁰. The positive evaluation of Socrates' doubts on the notion of man, common to both Sextan treatments, and the previously recalled diversity of the criticisms moved to the Democritean thesis, however, leave the way open for an additional hypothesis. It is perhaps Sextus himself who freely draws on the same (Academic?) source⁵¹ and just as freely uses it according to his polemic purposes and his intentions of composition.

Aristotle (cf. still B 165 = 65 L.) comes in to help us in partial defence of Democritus and in order to reassess the (hasty?) criticisms moved against him by Sextus. From his summary – in spite of his exaggeratedly critical tone – we can infer indeed that Democritus did not limit himself to say that man is what we all know, but he depicted human beings in a more specific way as a compound of color, figure, form. This definition, anonymously recalled in *M* VII 346, probably ended up by constituting the starting-point for Epicurus' position, who integrated it specifying that man is τοιοῦτονὶ μὶκρῶμα, but μετ' ἐμψυχίας, exactly in order to avoid Aristotle's critical remarks⁵².

⁵⁰ Cf. Decleva (*supra* n. 5), 409 and F. Decleva Caizzi, "Pirroniani ed Accademici nel III secolo a. C.", in H. Flashar – O. Gigon (eds.), *Aspects de la philosophie hellénistique* (Vandoeuvres-Genève 1985) 175-6.

⁵¹ A. M. Ioppolo, "Socrate nelle tradizioni accademico-scettica e pirroniana", in *La tradizione socratica* (Naples 1995), esp. 112–4 suggests however that this source is Aenesidemus rather than a member of the Sceptical Academy.

⁵² Cf. *M* VII 267 (=B 165 = 65 L. = fr. 310 Usener); see also *PH* II 25 and Gigante (*supra* n. 30), esp. 149–52.

g. (On time)

A fleeting mention – and as we shall see an incorrect one – is devoted also to the alleged Democritean doctrine relating to time. In *MX* 181 (= A 72 = 287 L.) Sextus reports indeed – although with much caution, as shown by the *δοκεῖ* that introduces it – the definition of the “physicists” Epicurus and Democritus according to which “time is a day-like and night-like phantasm”. While this definition finds confirmation in other Epicurean places and texts, which present time, to use the formula coined by Demetrius of Laconia, as “accident of accidents”⁵³, it does not find any correspondence in testimonies about Democritus available to us. The only feature that Democritus seems to attribute to time is in fact its being ἀγένητος, deprived of beginning, that is eternal inasmuch as substantially coessential to the motion of atoms (cf. e. g. A 71 = 21; 304 L. and A 56 = 15; 180 L.). It is therefore very likely that Sextus’ source assigned to Democritus that typically Epicurean theory, as confirmed by the fact that a little ahead – in the context of a set of Sextan critical counter-arguments (cf. *MX* 185) – it is attributed only to Epicurus.

If we try finally to draw the conclusions from this quick reconstruction of the presence of Democritean δόξαι in Sextus, we could underline that he seems to use them with the precise (and often explicit) intention of reaching at least two purposes, both functional to the attitude he constantly shows vis-à-vis philosophic past. These purposes are – it seems to me – the following:

a. the first one, that of taking advantage of Democritus’ doctrines as an integrating part of the διαφωνία that he builds (or that he inherits from the Pyrrhonian tradition which preceded him), always presenting Democritus as *a Dogmatist among other Dogmatists*;

b. the second one, immediately consequent to the first one, that of denying to Democritus any role as ancestor of true σκέψις and therefore of stressing the purity of the Pyrrhonian philosophic pedigree. He defends it from any dangerous intrusion and offers a strongly “exclusive” reading of the history of philosophy preceding him, quite different from the one

⁵³ Cf. *PH* III 137; esp. *MX* 219ff.; *DL* X 72–3; *Lucretius, De rerum natura* I 157 ff. and 459–82 and also *PHerc.* 1413, edited by R. Cantarella – G. Arrighetti, “Il libro «Sul tempo» (*PHerc.* 1413) dell’opera di Epicuro «Sulla natura»”, *Cronache Ercolanesi* 2 (1972) 5–46; for a negative evaluation of Sextus’ passages see however A. Barigazzi, “Il concetto del tempo nella fisica atomistica”, in *Epicurea in memoriam Hectoris Bignone* (Genoa 1959) 29–59.

provided by philosophic historiography fostered by Academic scepticism, which had systematically sought forerunners, above all among the so-called Presocratics.

APPENDIX

Democritus ad usum scholarum

Pyrrho (D.=maker of a great, phantastic, "poetic" representation of the universe)⁵⁴
Arcesilaus, Third and Fourth Academy (sources: esp. Cicero, *Academica*; Plutarch, *Adv.Col.*)
Epicureans (esp. Colotes in Plut. *Non posse* 1108e–1111e, but in a critical and negative sense: D. as enemy of the real *bios*⁵⁵; there are however traces of a different evaluation, not offensive, in Epicurus, Metrodorus, Philodemus, Lucretius, Diogenes of Oenoanda)⁵⁶.

tradition of the Old Academy, reinterpreted by some Neo-pythagoreans (cf. *M X* 252)
Peripatetic tradition (cf. several testimonies in DK, as well as many titles in DL = A 34 a=CXVII L.)
Stoic tradition [esp. Posidonius? see also Cleanthes and Sphaerus (cf. some relevant titles in DL=A 34 a=CXXIII; CXXVI L.?); and also Chrysippus (cf. B 155 = 126 L.?)]
Medioplatoonic tradition (Plutarch, esp. B 156–9 = 78, 728; 511; 576 L. and A 53 = XCVIII L.; A 57 = 42; 179 L.)
Sextus' neo-Pyrrhonism

a "Democritean" D. **DIOTIMUS** (cf. *M VII* 140) (?)

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⁵⁴ For this kind of interpretation I rely on F. Declava Caizzi, "Pirrone e Democrito. Gli atomi: un «mito»?", *Elenchos* 5 (1984) 5–23. On the poetic "taste" of ancient atomism see also Nietzsche (*supra* n. 2), esp. 72; 78; 88.

⁵⁵ Cf. esp. Vander Waerdt (*supra* n. 12).

⁵⁶ Cf. therefore P. Huby, "Epicurus' Attitude to Democritus", *Phronesis* 23 (1978) 80–6.

Статья представляет собой часть работы, в которой автор стремится определить специфические черты позиции Секста Эмпирика в полемике о происхождении и широте скептической традиции, развернувшейся в I-III вв. н.э. В данном исследовании автор показывает, как Секст использует учение Демокрита в своих явных и имплицитных суждениях об истории античной философии и, в частности, какую роль он отводит Демокриту в развитии скептического направления. Рассматривался ли Демокрит как предшественник скептицизма или как “догматический” писатель? Считает ли Секст его свободным от какой-либо приверженности к выводам, имеющим необходимый характер, или же рассматривает его как участника бесконечного диспута “догматических” направлений?

Автор учитывает все пассажи в сочинениях Секста, где либо Демокрит цитируется *expressis verbis*, либо существуют веские основания для атрибуции ему приводимых анонимных высказываний. Цитаты рассматриваются “*a parte Sexti*”, т. е. с учетом того, как подбирает и располагает их в соответствии с планом своего труда Секст. Вместе с тем цитаты из Демокрита группируются в соответствии с их содержанием по рубрикам: атомистическая онтология; антиэмпирическая и интеллектуалистская теория познания; эмпирическо-рационалистическая теория познания; атомистическая космология; “теология”; антропология; высказывания о природе времени. Автор пытается определить конкретные источники или доксографическую традицию, откуда заимствовал демокритовские цитаты Секст.

Автор приходит к выводу, что Секст использует демокритовские положения для достижения двух целей: а) для демонстрации непримиримых противоречий в лагере догматиков и б) для отрицания роли Демокрита как предшественника скептицизма и тем самым для демонстрации чистоты традиции, восходящей к Пиррону. В этом плане позиция Секста отличается от концепции истории философии, выработанной Академическим скептицизмом, который систематически искал своих предшественников, прежде всего среди досократиков.