

ON THE MEANING OF INAPPREHENSIBILITY IN ACADEMIC ARGUMENT*

SOBRE O SIGNIFICADO DE INAPREENSIBILIDADE NO ARGUMENTO ACADÊMICO

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ABSTRACT *This paper maintains that the standard epistemological reconstructions of Academic argument against Stoic apprehension distort the meaning of “inapprehensibility” (ἀκαταληψία) and “the suspension of assent about all things” (ἐποχή περὶ πάντων). The paper therefore defends the few traces in recent scholarship of the ontological specifications of inapprehensibility and the suspension of assent. This paper’s purpose is to reinforce the view that the Academy’s attack on Stoicism extended to the latter’s ontological commitments.*

Keywords: *Academy. Stoicism. Inapprehensibility. Suspension of assent.*

RESUMO *Este artigo sustenta que as reconstruções epistemológicas padrão do argumento acadêmico contra a apreensão estoica distorcem o significado de “inapreensibilidade” (ἀκαταληψία) e “a suspensão do*

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assentimento sobre todas as coisas” (ἐποχή περὶ πάντων). O artigo defende, portanto, os poucos vestígios em estudos recentes das especificações ontológicas de inapreensibilidade e suspensão do assentimento. O objetivo deste artigo é reafirmar a visão de que a crítica da Academia ao estoicismo é extensiva aos compromissos ontológicos deste.

Palavras-chave: *Academia. Estoicismo. Inapreensibilidade. Suspensão do assentimento.*

Introduction

The rise of Arcesilaus as leader of the Academy (c. 268 BCE) coincides with the beginning of the Academic attack on Stoic epistemology. Ancient evidence concerning the Academy’s core argument against the Stoa is notoriously controversial and difficult to reconstruct. Reconciling the two most prominent Academic theses with the school’s opposition to Stoicism remains one of the more difficult tasks in the reconstruction of this debate. Take the first thesis associated with the Academy’s opposition. It is often designated by the Greek term ἀκαταληψία (Cic. *Att.* 13.19.3, Sext. *Emp. Pyr.* 1.1, 1.226, Plut. *Adv. Col.* 1122a, Gal. *Opt. doct.* 1, p. 42 Kühn, Numen. *apud* Euseb. *Praep. evang.* 14.7, Fr. 26 des Places (734d, 735a, 735b, 736a), Anon. *Proleg.* 10.4–12), or “inapprehensibility,” as it is most commonly translated.¹ The controversial second thesis, ἐποχή περὶ πάντων, emerges in the debate as a corollary of the core Academic argument against Stoic epistemology. The specification of the first thesis has decisive implications for how to understand the scope of universality involved in the notion of ἐποχή περὶ πάντων, which is typically rendered the “universal suspension of assent.”²

The present paper critically examines two common ways of deriving ἀκαταληψία from Academic argument. In doing so, the paper adopts a methodological principle. It takes for granted that an accurate specification of the meaning of ἀκαταληψία in the Academy’s polemic should be made prior to assessing whether Arcesilaus or any of his Academic successors actually believed, accepted, or were committed to ἀκαταληψία and ἐποχή περὶ πάντων.

1 Alternative English translations are: “non-cognition” (Long and Sedley, 1987 [vol. 1, hereafter LS 1]), 68H, Schofield, 1999, p. 329), “ungraspability” (Inwood and Gerson, 1997, p. 285), “non-cognitive” or “incognizability” (Brittain and Palmer, 2001, p. 48). I adopt throughout the terms “inapprehensibility” for ἀκαταληψία and “inapprehensible” for ἀκατάληπτος.

2 Brittain and Osorio, 2021, § 2.

Focused on this preliminary aim of correctly understanding the content of ἀκαταληψία, the paper argues that the standard reconstructions of the core Academic argument obscure its actual meaning.

Section 1 surveys the prevailing ways of specifying the thesis of ἀκαταληψία. Particular attention is given to studies that reconstruct the inferential steps of the ‘core Academic argument’ (hereafter CAA). The analysis demonstrates that prevailing specifications are conceptually deficient and that standard reconstructions of the CAA obscure an important dimension of ἀκαταληψία. An alternative definition of ἀκαταληψία is defended as the proper specification in light of ancient sources. Section 2 traces the conceptual deficiency in the standard reconstructions of the CAA back to Cicero’s *Academica*. The paper concludes in section 3 on a cautionary note for future research. With a proper specification of ἀκαταληψία in view, it is then shown how the standard reconstructions also misrepresent ἐποχή περί πάντων as “the universal suspension of assent.” The latter restricts universality to assent or belief without any strong evidential warrant for such restriction, and it overlooks the absurdity that the CAA deduces against the Stoa: namely, that the Stoic sage ought to suspend assent given the universal inapprehensibility of things.

1. CAA: Two Epistemological Reconstructions

In recent studies, the thesis of ἀκαταληψία is specified with the proposition that (1) “no impression is cognitive [apprehensive].”³ Other studies use different propositions for the thesis as it functions in Academic argument. For instance, one scholar prefers to define ἀκαταληψία with the proposition that (2) “no knowledge is possible,” whereas others prefer to identify it with the proposition that (3) “nothing can be known.”⁴ Setting aside differences in specification for a moment, first consider what the three propositions have in common. Propositions (1)–(3) take the negation of the alpha privative (α-) in ἀκαταληψία to signify, more or less explicitly, the denial of Stoic κατάληψις (“apprehension”).⁵ In

3 Castagnoli, 2019, p. 192. Cf. Cappello, 2019, p. 1.

4 For the proposition that (2) “no knowledge is possible” (“keine Erkenntnis möglich sei”) or “the thesis of the impossibility of knowledge” (“der These von der Unmöglichkeit der Erkenntnis”), see Striker, 1981, pp. 157–158 (reprinted, 1996, pp. 138–139), and for the French equivalent, “l’ἀκαταληψία universelle (l’inappréhensibilité),” which is also rendered “l’impossibilité de toute connaissance,” see Machuca, 2019, p. 53; cf. Couissin, 1983, p. 33. Striker alternates between the proposition that (2) “no knowledge is possible” and the proposition that (3) “nothing can be known” (Striker, 1981, pp. 54, 59) (reprinted in 1996, pp. 92 and 96). The proposition that (3) “nothing is, or can be, known” is more generally favored by Frede, 1984, p. 255; Maconi, 1988, p. 246; Bett, 1989, p. 62; Allen, 1997, p. 220; Burnyeat, 1997, p. 292; Brittain, 2001, p. 90; Brittain, 2006, pp. xxii–xxiii; Perin, 2013, pp. 315–316, 328–329; Ioppolo, 2018, p. 40; Brittain and Osorio, 2021, § 3.

5 Schwab, 2020, p. 185: “the thesis of *akatalēpsia* (non-existence of *katalēpsis*).”

other words, Academic arguments for the non-existence of apprehensive impressions entail the simple negation of the power of apprehension, or the simple negation of the power of giving assent to apprehensive impressions. Schofield (1999, 327) renders the simplicity of this negation clear and precise, qualifying the proposition that (3) “nothing is known” or “nothing is known for certain” with what is taken to be the more precise formulation: (4) that “there is no such thing as cognition [apprehension].” Likewise, Ioppolo (2018, 41) maintains “that Arcesilaus infers ἀκαταληψία [i.e., (3) ‘nothing can be known’] from his demonstration of the non-existence of the Stoic criterion,” which is to say, from his attack on the apprehensive impression. With the epistemic power of apprehension under Academic attack, early defenders of Zeno presumably found themselves under pressure to counter the negative conclusion that “nothing can be known” by defending the possibility of apprehension and the epistemic power of rational agents to give assent to the content of apprehensive impressions.

Propositions (1)–(4) also entail the same negative conclusion to the question of epistemic possibility.⁶ The notion of possibility here is designated epistemic because it poses the question of possibility relative to a purported rational agent, namely, whether it is possible for some hypothetical rational agent on any given occasion to know or apprehend something. In fact, in the context of Stoic-Academic debate, the question of epistemic possibility is relative to the impressions of a purported agent and whether the impressions of the rational agent can ever be, on any given occasion, apprehensive. Thus the proposition that (3) “nothing is, or can be, known” depends fundamentally on the negation of some agent’s impressions *qua* apprehensive impressions. The grammatical subject term “nothing” is usually understood to denote the sum total of what a purported agent knows or can know. Likewise, in proposition (1), the denial that “no impression is apprehensive” involves the denial or negative qualification of epistemic possibility, for without the apprehensive impression, it is implied that (2) “no knowledge is possible” for rational agents supposedly endowed with the epistemic power of giving or withholding assent to impressions.

In specifying the meaning of ἀκαταληψία, the negations in propositions (1)–(4) omit reference to the other beings involved, on the Stoic view, in the formation of true impressions: incorporeal beings, such as space and time, as well as corporeal beings that cause impressions to arise in rational agents. Taking this omission into account, I designate these propositions varieties of

6 For discussion of the notion of epistemic possibility, see Williams, 2005, pp. 38–39; Snyder, 2021, pp. 73–75.

epistemological specification, for each proposition is primarily if not exclusively concerned with a purported agent, i.e., their impressions and the epistemic power of apprehension or assent. Such concern with the purported agent signals the conceptual deficiency in standard specifications of ἀκαταληψία. Propositions (1)–(4) remove from the specification of ἀκαταληψία the negative qualification of the beings involved in the formation of impressions, according to Zeno’s theory of knowledge. The conceptual mechanics driving this removal will require further clarification.

Zeno’s theory of knowledge offers an empirically-based route to knowledge and wisdom. This route to knowledge involves a new psychological theory of belief-formation. The innovation of Stoic psychology is expressed in the following idea: “to form a belief of any kind is to give one’s assent to one’s occurrent thought or ‘impression’ (*phantasia*) about the matter” (Brittain, 2006, xx). Zeno expands on this idea with the additional claim that some perceptual impressions are “cataleptic” or “apprehensive” (καταληπτική), meaning that some impressions warrant assent such that assenting to them constitutes an apprehension or grasp of the external objects that produce true impressions. Zeno and his successors thought that rational (mortal) agents ought to restrict assent to apprehensive impressions because apprehensive impressions are the only impressions that make it possible to attain secure and stable knowledge.

Academic criticism first targets Zeno’s definition of the apprehensive impression. Challenging this definition, Arcesilaus and Carneades seem to argue that the Stoic theory of knowledge is reducible to the thesis that there is no apprehension, and thus that no knowledge is possible. On Zeno’s view, the apprehensive impression [a] “comes from what is present,” [b] “molded and sealed in accordance with that present object itself,” such that [c] “it would not come about from what is not present.”⁷ The basic strategy of Academic argument was to grant conditions [a] and [b], and focus the attack on condition [c]. Following this strategy, the Academics would supposedly use indiscernibility arguments to argue that it was always possible to have a false impression with exactly the same representational content as an impression ([a]) coming from the present object which also meets condition [b]. If no true impression could be self-warranting in virtue of its content corresponding to the present object, then conditions [a] and [b] are often met, while condition [c], as Brittain (2006,

7 ἀπὸ ὑπάρχοντος καὶ κατ’ αὐτὸ τὸ ὑπάρχον ἐναπομεμαγμένη καὶ ἐναπτεσφραγισμένη, ὅποια οὐκ ἂν γένοιτο ἀπὸ μὴ ὑπάρχοντος (Sext. Emp. *Math.* 7.248; cf. 7.402, 410, 426; *Pyr.* 2.4; Diog. Laert. 7.50). In a recent paper, Stojanović (2019, pp. 160–169) argues convincingly that the phrase ἀπὸ ὑπάρχοντος means “from what is present (in Σ),” where this clause is understood to refer implicitly to an *external object* that is spatiotemporally present for the purported agent in situation Σ in which the impression is being received.

p. xxi) states, never obtains. Brittain derives the consequence, “if the Stoic definition is correct, there is no apprehension, and thus no knowledge of any kind.” In this way, Academic argument against condition [c] generates the thesis of ἀκαταληψία. Let us now take a closer look at the sequence of steps in the CAA.

The standard way of reconstructing the CAA relies mainly (although not exclusively) on passages in Sextus Empiricus (*Math.* 7.150–159, esp. 154–157) and Cicero (*Luc.* 83, 66–67, 77). Citing these passages in particular, Castagnoli (2019, p. 192) reconstructs the argument [CAA-1] for ἀκαταληψία as follows:

CAA-1

- (1) Some impressions are false
 - (2) False impressions cannot be cognitive or apprehensive (*katalēptikai*)
 - (3) If impressions *p* and *q* are indiscernible, it is impossible that *p* is cognitive and *q* is not
 - (4) Every true impression *p* is such that there could be a false impression *q* absolutely indiscernible from *p* (*aparallaxia*, “Indiscernibility”)
 - (5) Therefore no impression is cognitive (ἀκαταληψία, “Inapprehensibility”).⁸
- Castagnoli registers the transition in the CAA from ἀκαταληψία to ἐποχή in the following way: “since cognition does not exist, and thus knowledge is impossible, the wise thing to do is to suspend judgement about everything.” The phrase “about everything” is then conceptualized as “any impression *p*” (2019, p. 201). I return to this transition in section 3.
- Brittain and Osorio (2021, § 3; cf. Brittain, 2001, p. 91; Brittain, 2006, p. xxii) reconstruct the argument [CAA-2] and specify ἀκαταληψία in a similar way:

CAA-2

- (1) Some impressions are true
- (2) False impressions are non-cognitive
- (3) If the content of a true impression is potentially indistinguishable or indiscernible from that of a false impression, it is non-cognitive
- (4) The content of all true impressions is potentially indistinguishable or indiscernible from that of false impressions
- (5) So, there are no cognitive impressions.

Brittain and Osorio summarize the CAA as follows: “since for Zeno knowledge itself depends on assent to cognitive impressions, this argument leads to the further conclusion that nothing can be known (ἀκαταληψία).” And so if the

8 For a nearly identical reconstruction, cf. Schofield, 1999, pp. 340–341.

argument consisting of steps (1)–(5) is successful, “they [the Stoics] are also committed to the conclusion that it is irrational to assent to anything (*universal suspension*).” By “anything,” Brittain and Osorio mean “any impressions at all,” and cite Sextus *Math.* 7.155–157 in support of this conclusion.

CAA-1 and CAA-2 specify the notion of ἀκαταληψία in pure epistemological terms. In CAA-1, steps (1)–(4) serve as the basis for the negation that “no impression is cognitive,” and the conclusion that “knowledge is impossible” follows from that single negation. In CAA-2, the conclusion that “nothing can be known” follows from steps (1)–(5). For CAA-2 (and CAA-1), the meaning of ἀκαταληψία is determined by the privation of a particular kind of impression: the privation stated in CAA-1 proposition (5) and CAA-2 proposition (5). Reducing the negation of ἀκαταληψία to the denial of apprehensive impressions, the core arguments exclude from specification a second negation, namely, the negation of things *qua* “in-apprehensibles” (ἀκατάληπτα, Sext. *Emp. Math.* 7.155, 156). Again, CAA-1 and CAA-2 both cite *Math.* 7.150–159 as evidence in support of this epistemological construal of ἀκαταληψία. However, *Math.* 7.155 refers explicitly to a second negation that is completely effaced from epistemological reconstructions (CAA-1 and CAA-2): the negation of things as relatively disposed to being in-apprehensible. The elimination of this negative qualification from the argument renders the specifications of the meaning of ἀκαταληψία in CAA-1 and CAA-2 purely epistemological. The only denial registered in the determination of ἀκαταληψία is the denial of the apprehensive impression, and thus the negation of the epistemic power of apprehension.

The key portion of text that is left out of CAA-1 and CAA-2 is the following reference to “all things” (πάντα) in the phrase “all things will be inapprehensible” (πάντ’ ἔσται ἀκατάληπτα). Sextus writes:

if there is no apprehensive impression, then apprehension will not take place, either; for it was assent to an apprehensive impression. And if there is no apprehension, *all things will be inapprehensible* (μη οὔσης δε καταλήψεως πάντ’ ἔσται ἀκατάληπτα). And if *all things are inapprehensible* (πάντων δὲ ὄντων ἀκατάληπτων), it will follow according to the Stoics that the wise person suspends judgment.⁹ (Sext. *Emp. Math.* 7.155).

The sequence of this argument is analyzed below. For now, recall that CAA-1 and CAA-2 cite this portion of text from Sextus, and yet both exclude

9 I adapt the translation of Bett, 2005, opting to retain in English the plural neuter noun in the proposition πάντ’ ἔσται ἀκατάληπτα (“all things will be apprehensible”). Bett’s translation, by contrast, renders the plurals πάντα and πάντων ὄντων with the English singular “everything.”

from reconstruction any mention of the negation of things as “inapprehensible.” Singularly focused on the first negation, i.e., the negation of apprehensive impressions or apprehension *per se*, CAA-1 and CAA-2 then specify the meaning of the Greek term ἀκαταληψία in purely epistemological terms. To be clear, I mean by purely epistemological in this context an analysis of the possibility of knowledge that focuses entirely on the epistemic powers of a rational agent.

The term for “impression” (φαντασία) in Greek is feminine. At *Math.* 7.155, the noun for “things” appears in the neuter (πάντ’ ἔσται ἀκατάληπτα and πάντων δὲ ὄντων ἀκατάληπτων), so one may effectively rule out reading the πάντα/πάντων δὲ ὄντων as a reference to “impressions,” namely, as a reference to “all impressions are ἀκατάληπτα.” The second negation signified by the term ἀκατάληπτα must refer to some being or thing in Zeno’s ontology other than impressions. What does this negation refer to here, if not impressions? CAA-1 and CAA-2 are reconstructed in such a way that this second negation is omitted. The only “thing” specified in the reconstructed core arguments in steps (1)–(5) is the impression, and the only recognized negation is the denial of apprehensive impressions. And it is this single negation that forms the basis of their partial specification of ἀκαταληψία.

But let us consider two ways of reading πάντα in πάντ’ ἔσται ἀκατάληπτα at 7.155. The first reading might offer a path for proponents of CAA-1 and CAA-2 to defend the elimination of this reference to ἀκατάληπτα from their formal reconstruction and from their specification of ἀκαταληψία. In other words, there could be a way for these proponents to maintain that there is in fact only one relevant negation (i.e., the negation of the apprehensive impression) in the cited passage from Sextus Empiricus. On this reading, the neuter plural πάντα picks up on a preceding reference at 7.154 to the neuter plural ἀξιωμαίων (“assertibles”). The ἀξίωμα holds a special relation to the impressions of rational agents. At *Math.* 7.154, Sextus writes:

And if apprehension is assent to an apprehensive impression, it does not obtain, first because assent takes place not toward impression but toward speech (for assents are to assertibles) (πρῶτον μὲν ὅτι ἡ συγκατάθεσις οὐ πρὸς φαντασίαν γίνεται ἀλλὰ πρὸς λόγον (τῶν γὰρ ἀξιωμαίων εἰσὶν αἱ συγκαταθέσεις)).

Arcesilaus seems to be criticizing Zeno here for stating that assent is given to the apprehensive impression when he ought to maintain that assent is given to the corresponding ἀξίωμα, for only the latter is capable of asserting what is true. The ἀξίωμα is according to the Stoa a type of “sayable” (λέκτον). The “sayable” is an incorporeal being that conveys meaning. It is defined as “that

which subsists in accordance with a rational impression” (Sex. Emp. *Math.* 8.70). But it is a particular type of sayable called the “assertible” (ἄξιωμα) that by saying one “asserts or declares something, which is either true or false” (DL 7.65–66). The “assertible” therefore specifies how the impression represents the world as it is. The “assertible” is the primary bearer of truth-value, and so if an impression is held to be true, it is considered a bearer of truth about the world in a secondary or derivative sense.¹⁰ Arcesilaus is likely taking advantage of a verbal inconsistency on Zeno’s part. Yet as Inwood suggests, Zeno may have spoken of assent to an impression for the sake of brevity; and really, this is just shorthand for saying that assent is to the content of an impression. Hence there is little more going on here than a trivial verbal inconsistency.¹¹ In any case, such criticism would presumably serve Arcesilaus’ general strategy of arguing that apprehension even on Zeno’s own view is “no criterion [of truth] between knowledge and opinion.” For if apprehension is assent to the apprehensive impression, and the impression itself is not the sort of thing to convey content and make a claim about the world, then apprehension cannot be the criterion of truth about beings in the world.

On the other hand, if apprehension is an epistemic power of the agent that grasps the contents of impressions, then assent to an impression really just means that the agent is assenting to the impression’s content. On the occasion that an impression is taken to be true, properly speaking the agent would therefore be assenting to the ἄξιωμα that specifies the world, or some part of the world, as it is. In the first reading of *Math.* 7.154, the surrounding context seems to suggest that πάντα refers to the contents of impressions, since the statement that “all ἄξιωματα are inapprehensible” supports the corollary that the wise person will suspend assent about “all ἄξιωματα.” Since assent and its suspension are attitudes of the agent relative to true or false ἄξιωματα, the πάντα of the corollary refers restrictively to ἄξιωματα, which implies that the πάντα of the preceding conclusion, that “all things are inapprehensible,” refers narrowly to all ἄξιωματα. Hence the line of argument against Zeno is that since all ἄξιωματα cannot be known, the wise person will suspend assent about them all. The phrase “all things will be inapprehensible” would then actually mean that “all ἄξιωματῶν will be inapprehensible.” This is one reason to eliminate the second negation from the core argument. That is, since this negation entails the denial of apprehensive impressions because their content would not be true, there is no other negation to take into account.

¹⁰ Bobzien, 1999, p. 92, n. 45.

¹¹ See Inwood, 1985, p. 57, n. 95.

As noted already, there is another way to read this πάντα in the statement πάντ' ἔσται ἀκατάληπτα. On this reading the neuter plural πάντα in the statement πάντ' ἔσται ἀκατάληπτα is the subject of a new and more comprehensive thesis derived from Academic argument. In other words, from the denial that there is apprehension, a new thesis is deduced. Call this interpretation the unrestricted reading. The grammatical subject πάντα in πάντ' ἔσται ἀκατάληπτα introduces a straightforward reference to “all things” without restriction on the type of thing (in the Stoic world) qualified as “inapprehensible.” The reference is unrestricted in the sense that it refers not to one specific sort of thing in Stoic ontology, e.g., the impression, the “assertible,” or any other being per se. Rather it refers generically to all beings in Stoic ontology. Instead of looking back to the neuter plural ἀξιωμαίων, this way of reading πάντα looks forward to help determine the correct scope of πάντα. Reading in the very next line πάντων [δὲ] ὄντων, the preceding πάντα is taken to imply no such restriction on the scope of “all things” such that it must only specify ἀξιώματα. “All things are inapprehensible” is therefore a conclusion that moves the argument against Zeno beyond the technical question of the proper object of assent and the negation of the apprehensive impression. The core Academic argument now moves along to the denial that on Zeno’s own terms “all things are inapprehensible.” We learn from Sextus not only that the statement and its neuter plural πάντα are common currency among Academics and Pyrrhonists, but we also learn from Sextus that the statement is never used restrictively to pick out only “assertibles.”¹² The idea that *Math.* 7.154–55 is the single exception to the general reference to (Stoic) things is implausible. The unrestricted reading presents a better case, it seems to me, for including the second negation alongside the negation of the apprehensive impression.

By eliminating this negation from the core argument, CAA-1 and CAA-2 fall short in their determination of ἀκαταληψία insofar as the thesis is taken to depend solely on the negation of the apprehensive impression. Instead of conceptualizing the second negation, CAA-1 and CAA-2 settle for purely epistemological formulations of ἀκαταληψία which involve a notion of possibility that is fundamentally epistemic. To reiterate, the notion of epistemic possibility makes focal reference to a purported epistemic agent, or the impressions of a purported agent and the awareness that the purported agent has of impressions in entertaining, on a given occasion, whether it is possible that some impression is apprehensive. The epistemic notion of possibility is

¹² For similar Greek terminology to qualify things or objects *qua* “inapprehensible,” see Euseb. *Praep. evang.* 14.4.15–16; Numen. *apud* Euseb. *Praep. evang.* 14.7.15, Fr. 26 des Places.

manifest in CAA-1 proposition (3) and CAA-2 proposition (3) cited above. Concepts of indiscernibility are then deployed in both versions of CAA to refer to the epistemic possibility of two impressions appearing indiscernible from one another for some purported agent who entertains, on a given occasion, whether it is possible that one of those two impressions is apprehensive. In other words, the thesis of the “impossibility of knowledge” and the thesis that “nothing can be known for certain” follow from nothing more than the eliminated possibility of a particular kind of impression, which Zeno considered the only possible route to knowledge and the only possible kind of impression worthy of an agent’s assent. The focus of epistemic possibility is squarely on the agent’s impressions.¹³ However, epistemic focus on impressions in both versions of CAA is based in part on a conceptual confusion manifest in Cicero’s Latin translation of Academic argument. This confusion has, in my view, cast a shadow over the ontological dimension of ἀκαταληψία. The alternative to the prevailing epistemological specifications uncovers the complex negativity of ἀκαταληψία.

In addition to the simple negation of the epistemic power of apprehension, an ontological conception of ἀκαταληψία qualifies the relative disposition of beings necessarily implicated in Zeno’s account of apprehension. By beings, I mean here not only those beings that partially depend on the existence of a rational agent, such as impressions, but all beings posited by Zeno, including those independent of, and external to, the agents supposedly capable of giving and withholding assent to impressions (or the content of impressions). This alternative specification is ontological insofar as it qualifies the beings that Zeno presupposes in his theory of knowledge.¹⁴ The notion of an extrinsic or relational property is used to qualify the relative disposition of those putative beings, and to recover the complex negativity of the alpha privative (*a-*) prefixed to the Greek term καταληπτός.

Similar to other feminine substantives in Greek ending in -ία, the abstract noun ἀκαταληψία expresses a property or quality that is semantically linked to the adjective ἀκατάληπτος. The passive adjective ἀκατάληπτος refers primarily

13 As the focus of epistemic possibility is squarely on the agent’s impressions, CAA-1 and CAA-2 also omit from reconstruction the ontological possibility of any two objects being in-discernible or in-apprehensible from one another. For a formulation of this ontological possibility as a “counterfactual possibility,” a notion of possibility relative to the objects themselves (independent of any agent’s actual impressions), see Perin, 2005, pp. 499–505.

14 On the ontological presuppositions informing the Stoic account of the apprehensive impression, see Snyder, 2020, pp. 470–477. Use of the term ‘ontological’ in this context refers to aspects of reality or of what there is in the world. For a structural account of Stoic ontology, see Bronowski, 2019, pp. 127–169, esp. 157 n.90 and 171, where the concept “ontological” is used in a similar way.

to external objects or a certain conception of object and its relation to the purported agents of apprehension. The Greek term ἀκατάληπτος thus designates an object or thing that is “inapprehensible” in virtue of its relation, or more precisely, its lack of relation, to some other thing or class of things, i.e., agents supposedly capable of giving or withholding assent to impressions. By contrast, the feminine substantive ἀκαταληψία, like other abstract nouns, denotes the kind of relative disposition at issue in Stoic-Academic debates, namely, the negative relational property of these putative objects. Relative disposition refers to an extrinsic property that certain beings have in virtue of their relation or lack of relation to some other class of beings.¹⁵ In the context of Stoic-Academic debate, ἀκαταληψία gives expression to the kind of relative disposition that the beings considered “in-apprehensible” (ἀκατάληπτον) have in virtue of their lack of relation to those beings capable of giving or withholding assent to impressions. The determination of objects *qua* “inapprehensible” entails that the objects necessarily involved in the formation of impressions have the relative dispositional property of “inapprehensibility” (ἀκαταληψία). Hence the negation implied by the alpha privative in ἀκαταληψία is taken to negate not only the epistemic possibility of the apprehensive impression, but also the disposition that corporeal beings purportedly have (*qua* apprehensible) in virtue of their relation to agents capable of giving or withholding assent.

In recent scholarship, traces of the original ontological conception of ἀκαταληψία do emerge. First, consider the explication of proposition (3) “nothing can be known” given by Allen. The proposition is analyzed in terms of a conjunction that disambiguates a significant semantic connection. Allen (2018, p. 180) states that “nothing can be known” means that “nothing can be apprehended ... or that all things are ἀκατάληπτα in the New Academic’s Greek.”¹⁶ Roberto Bolzani Filho (2011, p. 21), Marcelo Boeri and Leandro De Brasi (2023, p. 33) also capture this connection to “things” by observing that unlike the Pyrrhonists, certain Academics claim that “things cannot be grasped.” Epistemological reconstructions of CAA typically obscure this connection, but just as in Allen’s apt rendering, we see in these accounts an attempt to attach the concept of the qualified thing/object *qua* ἀκατάληπτον (“inapprehensible”) to the more general meaning of ἀκαταληψία. More plainly, Ioppolo identifies the ontological significance of ἀκαταληψία in the analysis of an important passage in Sextus (*Pyr.* 1.226–231). In this passage,

15 For a more in-depth discussion of relative disposition as it applies to ἀκαταληψία, see Snyder, 2021, pp. 7–9, 81.

16 Cf. Thorsrud, 2018, pp. 207–208; Vezzoli, 2016, p. 49; LS 1, 446.

Sextus presents his understanding of the difference between Academics and Pyrrhonian Sceptics. And Ioppolo (1992, p. 175; Ioppolo, 2009, p. 36) explains Sextus' view: "the difference between Academics and Sceptics regarding the problem of ἀκαταληψία manifests itself exclusively on the level of the value of language, which expresses for the Academics, according to Sextus, an *ontological intentionality*."¹⁷ Ioppolo thereby observes the ontological dimension of ἀκαταληψία in Academic argument, a notion that fuses together the two-sided negation of Stoicism: namely, on one side, the epistemological dimension of negation, 1. the negation of the power of apprehension, and on the other, the ontological dimension, 2. the negation involved in stipulating the negative relational property of things *qua* "in-apprehensible" (ἀ-κατάληπτα, Sext. Emp. *Math.* 7.155–156; cf. Numen. *apud* Euseb. *Praep. evang.* 14 7.15, Fr. 26 des Places). These traces suggest that the negativity of the Greek term ἀκαταληψία denotes not only the epistemic lack of a certain kind of impression, but also a property of the putative external things implicated in Zeno's account of apprehension. Fostered by a terminological simplification in Cicero's testimony, the standard epistemological reconstructions of CAA overlook this two-sided negation or complex negativity.

2. Cicero's Simplification

As Brittain astutely observes (2006, p. xlii), Cicero is responsible for "obscuring the distinction in the original Greek arguments between the active adjective 'cataleptic' (*katalēptikē*) and the passive adjective 'apprehensible' (*katalēptos*) [Brittain's italics]." In Greek, the active adjective qualifies the impression whereas the passive adjective qualifies the object. By contrast, Cicero's Latin periphrasis *quod percipi posse* (literally, according to Brittain, "what could be apprehended") is ambiguous because it could be taken to qualify an agent's impression or the object itself. For this reason, in a note appended to the CAA at *Luc.* 40, Brittain (2006, p. 26, n. 54, cf. xli) states that Cicero's usage of *quod percipi posse* in this context could mislead readers. According to Brittain, readers should take the Latin phrase at *Luc.* 40–41 as reference to Stoic impressions, not the objects or bodies capable of producing impressions on the Stoic account, because throughout the *Academici libri* Cicero "systematically applies" the periphrasis *quod percipi posse* to Stoic impressions. Citing *Luc.* 18, 77, 112–113, Brittain explains that Cicero does not seem to recognize the

17 Translation is my own.

importance of a conceptual distinction between external object and impression, which is nevertheless maintained in the original Greek arguments with the passive adjectives καταληπτός/ἀκατάληπτος qualifying objects and the active adjective καταληπτική qualifying a certain kind of impression.

In Greek, the passive adjectives καταληπτός/ἀκατάληπτος (“what can or cannot be apprehended”) are distinct in meaning from the active adjective καταληπτική (“what is able to apprehend”). The active adjective denotes fitness for a particular activity of the mind, just as other adjectives with -τικό or -ικό added to the verbal adjective ending τό- indicate a certain fitness for action. Cicero’s rendering of the Greek ἀκατάληπτον preserves the passivity of the Greek adjective with his use of the Latin passive infinitive *comprehendi*. To translate the Greek term ἀκατάληπτον, Cicero uses the Latin negation *negaret quicquam esse quod comprehendere posset* (*Luc.* 18). Brittain translates the Latin as “nothing is apprehensible.” Just a few lines prior (*Luc.* 15), Lucullus attributes a similar negation to Arcesilaus, comparing him unfavorably to seditious Roman politicians who enlist famous figures of the past with apparent populist leanings in an effort to undermine the stability of the Republic. Arcesilaus was, from this perspective, no better for philosophy than the troublesome Roman politicians were for the Republic. Supposedly he went about invoking famous philosophers of the past to subvert the stability of the Stoic system, with arguments that led to the denial “that anything could be known or cognized” (*negavissent quicquam sciri aut percipi posse*). The denial contradicts the Stoic view that “something can be apprehended and perceived” (*esse aliquid quod comprehendere et percipi posset*, *Luc.* 17). Here the aforementioned ambiguity in Cicero’s Latin surfaces. Readers are potentially misled by the ambiguity in the interpretation (and translation) of the Latin pronouns *aliquid* (“something”) and *quicquam* (“anything”). Commenting on this very ambiguity at *Luc.* 17, Reid (1885, p. 193, n. 11, and p. 152, n. 7) correctly notes that the pronoun *aliquid* should denote “the external object [καταληπτόν] which causes the κατάληψις in the mind of the person who perceives it,” but again in Cicero’s Latin “words denoting the object and words denoting the impression are readily interchanged.” According to Reid, Cicero is one of many ancient philosophers to carelessly confuse “object and perception.” The distinction is not always maintained in contemporary studies. For example, one commentator states: “To be *akatalēptos* is to deny that one has conclusive grounds for believing certain propositions to be true simply

because they derive from peculiarly clear and distinct impressions.”¹⁸ This contemporary view collapses the distinction between object and impression and transfers the qualification of the object as ἀκατάληπτος to a state of mind which denies conclusive epistemic grounds, given the lack of clear and distinct impressions. Reid asserts, in agreement with Brittain, that Cicero elides the distinction between object and perception or perceptual impression, that is to say, between the passive and the active forms of the Greek adjectives. For example, at *Acad. Pr.* 41 Cicero renders the special kind of impression that is qualified in Greek with the active adjective καταληπτική by using the passive Latin *comprehendibile*, which Brittain translates as what is “apprehensible.” And with the periphrasis *quod percipi posse* (“what can be apprehended”) systematically referring to Stoic impressions, the external objects causing Stoic perception no longer register as external objects for qualification, which is to say, for qualification as “apprehensible” or “inapprehensible.”

As a result of this confusion, the possibility of the external objects themselves being apprehensible or inapprehensible is suppressed in the reconstructions of CAA-1 and CAA-2, just as the epistemic notion of possibility becomes the central focus, namely, the possibility that the perceptual impressions of a purported agent might be epistemic. Brittain conjectures, more charitably than Reid, that Cicero may have had some considered reason for collapsing the distinction between object and perceptual impression. That is, Cicero may have “thought it was a negligible terminological simplification: his readers would understand that the question under debate is not whether we have reliable access to our own thoughts or impressions, but rather whether our impressions provide us with reliable access to the world” (Brittain, 2006, p. xlii). Brittain infers that if this is what Cicero presumed of his readers, he was mistaken; for “the most philosophically rewarding work of later students of the *Academica* (including Augustine) seems to be the result of misunderstanding his versions of the Stoic definition of apprehension.” In fact, the tendency of recent scholars to reconstruct the CAA for ἀκαταληψία in purely epistemological terms is an artifact of the original collapse in Cicero between object and impression. The application of the periphrasis *quod percipi posse* to impressions, which reduces the question of possibility to the epistemic possibility of apprehensive impressions, has encouraged recent scholars to overly simplify the CAA by rendering ἀκαταληψία in strictly epistemological terms. By simplify, in this context I mean the work of transposing a double or two-sided negation

18 Hankinson, 1995, p. 86.

involved in ἀκαταληψία into a simple epistemic denial of the apprehensive impression. On this reading, the simplification of standard epistemological reconstructions of ἀκαταληψία expunges the ontological negation, the one involved in negatively qualifying the external objects or things internal to the Stoic account of apprehension ἀκατάληπτα (“in-apprehensible”). Associating the passive adjective ἀκατάληπτος exclusively with impressions, while ignoring altogether the external objects causing the true impressions, is the key step to eliminating from CAA the ontological dimension of Stoic objects *qua* “inapprehensible” from the meaning of ἀκαταληψία. From there, simple epistemic denials (namely, that there is no apprehension or that there are no apprehensive impressions) are presented as making sense of ἀκαταληψία without any need to qualify the objects of Stoic apprehension.

To locate the Greek notion of ἀκαταληψία in Cicero’s writings, scholars typically cite *Acad. Pr.* 44–45 (Perin, 2013, pp. 315–316; Castagnoli, 2019, pp. 209–210; cf. Schofield, 1999, p. 328). It is worth pointing out that in a letter to Atticus (*Att.* 13.19.3), Cicero states that in the second edition of his four Academic books the character Varro defends the arguments of Antiochus “*contra ἀκαταληψίαν*” (“against inapprehensibility”). Evidently, when composing and editing the Academic books, Cicero had been aware of the Greek feminine substantive noun ἀκαταληψία, for he explicitly uses the Greek noun in the letter. However, in the extant *Academici libri*, Varro’s speech (*Acad. Pr.* 15–42) presents Antiochus’ views on the history of philosophy without explicit reference to the Greek term. At *Acad. Pr.* 44–45, the character Cicero responds to Varro by recalling what motivates the original debate between Arcesilaus and Zeno. As I say, absent explicit reference to the term in Cicero’s response, recent scholars nevertheless contend that there is implicit reference in Cicero’s response to ἀκαταληψία. Here Cicero associates Arcesilaus with Socrates’ confession of ignorance and with certain Presocratic philosophers (Democritus, Anaxagoras, Empedocles, *inter alia*) who were driven to declare that “nothing could be cognized, apprehended, or known” (*nihil cognosci nihil percipi nihil sciri posse*), given the weakness of intellect and the limitations of the senses.¹⁹ Such declarations imply the denial of the fitness of the mind or senses for knowledge, and seem to justify attributing to Arcesilaus a form of “epistemological pessimism” (Brittain, 2007, p. 297). The epistemological view of ἀκαταληψία as the simple denial of apprehension and knowledge seems to convey precisely this kind of pessimism.

¹⁹ On Cicero’s association of Arcesilaus with Socrates’ confession of ignorance at *Acad. Pr.* 45, see Snyder, 2021a, pp. 30–34.

Although Cicero's Latin tends to obscure the distinction between the Stoic faculty of perception and the objects causally generative of perception, there are indications of occasional recognition in the text that Arcesilaus questioned not only the power of epistemic faculties but also the knowability of things themselves. Cicero alleges that Arcesilaus was driven to disagree with Zeno by the "obscurity of things themselves" (*earum rerum obscuritate*, *Acad. Pr.* 44). In view of such obscurity, scholars ought to consider a more expansive kind of pessimism, one that extends beyond mental faculties to the "obscurity of nature" itself.²⁰ Additional passages in Cicero point in this general direction. For instance, Lucullus says that Academics brought arguments to the conclusion that "all things will be unclear" (*omnia fore incerta*, *Luc.* 32), and that certain Academics would follow up these arguments not with accusations against the faculties, but rather with accusations against nature itself. In fact, Lucullus says that they would "blame nature" (*accusa naturam*) for concealing truth in the abyss, whereby *all things* are unclear (not simply the impressions of things).²¹ Notice that "nature" is blamed here not because it imposes limits on the powers of rational agents; rather, it is blamed for making things "obscure." Moreover, Lucullus associates Arcesilaus with the negative (and "mentally disturbed") statements of Presocratic philosophers concerning the hiddenness of things (*Luc.* 14). Such statements issue negative or pessimistic judgments about the inherent limitations of epistemic faculties, but they also issue a certain pessimism about things themselves; for, according to such pessimism, truth is "submerged in an abyss" and "all things are shrouded by darkness" (*omnia tenebris circumfusa esse*, *Acad. Pr.* 44). The Latin expression that "all things will be unclear" resembles certain Greek formulations that recur in later sources: for instance, the passage in Sextus cited above, that "all things (are) inapprehensible" (πάντων [δὲ] ὄντων ἀκαταλήπτων, *Math.* 7.155, 156), the formulation that "all things are inapprehensible" (ἀκατάληπτα εἶναι πάντα, *Pyr.* 1.226), and finally that "all things are inapprehensible" (πάντα μὲν εἶναι ἀκατάληπτα, Numen. *apud* Euseb. *Praep. evang.* 14.7.15, Fr. 26 des Places).²²

From Lucullus' Stoic perspective, blaming nature for the obscurity of things is a rash and hopeless accusation unworthy of response. Yet there is another mode of Academic offensive. Lucullus considers it more sophisticated and worthier of rebuttal. Unlike the desperation of blaming nature for concealing

20 Cf. *Luc.* 147, in particular the phrase *de obscuritate naturae* ("on the obscurity of nature").

21 The unnamed here is plausibly Arcesilaus, and for the reasons that Ioppolo (1986, pp. 69–70) details.

22 See also *Praep. evang.* 14.8.3–4 (Fr. 27 des Places): διὰ τῆς ἀπαξάπάντων ἀναίρεσως χρημάτων ("through the total eradication of things").

truth in the abyss, this particular criticism denies the equivalence between what is ἀκατάληπτον (“inapprehensible”) and what is ἄδηλον/*incertum* (“non-evident,” “unclear” or “obscure”). It holds that things are “inapprehensible,” but it does not hold that things are “unclear” or “obscure.” This more sophisticated Academic charge distinguishes the quality of being “inapprehensible” from the quality of being “non-evident,” “unclear” or “obscure” and introduces, on the basis of this distinction, the clarity of “truth-like” impressions. Now it seems that Cicero’s Lucullus transfers the ἄδηλον/*incertum* qualification from a negative qualification of things into a negative qualification of impressions. Hence Lucullus credits Carneades with the innovation of identifying a particular kind of impression that is evidently or perspicuously truth-like. Lucullus’ brief discussion of this Academic variation occurs in a context that is prefaced as a critical treatment of the arguments of Arcesilaus and Carneades (*Luc.* 12), so it seems fair to identify the two Academics as Arcesilaus and Carneades and attribute the responses accordingly. The passage from Eusebius cited in the previous paragraph (see also n.12) further supports this attribution. It identifies Carneades’ way of conceiving the difference between what is ἄδηλον/*incertum* (“non-evident” or “unclear”) and what is ἀκατάληπτον (“inapprehensible”). However, this conception of the difference maintains the connection between the qualitative terms and things or objects, and it drops any reference to impressions:

After these [the immediate followers of Arcesilaus, Lacydes and Evandrus] Carneades inherited the school and established the Third Academy. He employed the manner of argumentation that Arcesilaus had, for he too used to practice dialectical reasoning and demolish the statements of others. He differed from him only in his account of suspension, saying that it is impossible for a human being to suspend judgment about things in general (φᾶς ἀδύνατον εἶναι ἄνθρωπον ὄντα περὶ πάντων ἐπέχειν), but that there is a difference between what is non-evident and what is inapprehensible, for *all things are inapprehensible* (πάντα μὲν εἶναι ἀκατάληπτα), but not *all things are non-evident* (Numen. *apud* Euseb. *Praep. evang.* 14.7.15).

Unlike Lucullus’ discussion at *Luc.* 32, there is no explicit mention here of impressions in distinguishing the “inapprehensible” from the “non-evident.” That is to say, in the context of reporting Carneades’ distinction between what it means for *things* to be “inapprehensible” and what it means for *things* to be “non-evident,” impressions (whether apprehensive or not) have no explicit role in articulating the distinction. (However, in consideration of the fact that for the Stoics an impression is a particular kind of corporeal thing or being, I take it that a tacit implication of impressions must be entailed by the explicit qualifications that “all things are inapprehensible” and that “all things are non-

evident”). But the key point to emphasize is that the generality of “all things” includes reference to the external objects purportedly capable of producing (true and false) impressions.

The testimony of Sextus Empiricus on Philo and his followers maintains the Academic qualification of things as apprehensible/inapprehensible. That is, the passive adjectives καταληπτόν/ἀκατάληπτον are explicitly predicated of things, not of impressions or apprehensive impressions:

Philo and his followers declare that as far as the Stoic criterion is concerned (i.e., the apprehensive impression), things are inapprehensible, but that as far as the nature of things themselves are concerned, they are apprehensible (ἀκατάληπτα εἶναι τὰ πράγματα, ὅσον δὲ ἐπὶ τῇ φύσει τῶν πραγμάτων αὐτῶν, καταληπτὰ). Sext. Emp. *Pyrr.* 1.235, LS 68T.

As Sedley (2012, p. 86) claims, the emphatic recurrence of “things” ([τὰ] πράγματα/[τῶν] πραγμάτων αὐτῶν) on both sides of the contrast – on one side, the anti-Stoic thesis that “things are inapprehensible,” on the other, the Philonian thesis that “the nature of things themselves” are “apprehensible” – is not a recurrence of contrasting epistemic statements; rather, here we encounter a recurrence of contrasting ontological statements “about the way the actual putative objects of the knowledge are: it is in virtue of those objects’ very own nature that they are knowable.” On this reading, the putative objects have what Sedley designates an “intrinsic capacity for being known” even if no agent will ever actualize that capacity. The juxtaposition in the testimony from Sextus upholds the precedent of applying the passive adjectives (καταληπτὰ/ἀκατάληπτα) to objects or things, whether it be the external objects associated with the Stoic criterial account of the apprehensive impression, or “the nature of the things themselves” (i.e., a conception of things independent of the Stoic criterial account of the apprehensive impression and thus independent of any purported epistemic agent receiving impressions). The predicate adjective “inapprehensible,” as a relative disposition of external objects in the Stoic account, qualifies the objects in virtue of their relation to agents purportedly capable of giving and withholding assent to impressions. Again, that relation is negative because, on the critical examination of the Stoic account of the apprehensive impression undertaken by Academics, external things do not causally interact with agents so as to produce the kind of impressions worthy of assent.

3. Suspension of Assent about All Things

To summarize the main argument, epistemological specifications of ἀκαταληψία simplify the notion by conceptualizing its content exclusively in terms of the access purported epistemic agents are unable to secure in the absence of the apprehensive impression. As a result, ἀκαταληψία is reduced to a thesis that concerns the impressions of rational agents and the epistemic access, or lack thereof, associated with the power of Stoic apprehension. This simplification is carried out in studies that either equate the notion of ἀκαταληψία with the proposition (1) that “no impression is apprehensive” or reduce proposition (3) that “nothing is known” to the anti-Stoic proposition (4) that “there is no such thing as cognition [apprehension].”

Epistemological specifications of ἀκαταληψία give rise to a second kind of simplification. Put another way, there is a tendency to mistakenly transfer the epistemological simplification into the specification of ἐποχή περί πάντων. Strictly epistemological specifications of ἀκαταληψία tend to restrict the universality involved in the suspension to the universality of assent or belief, such that ἐποχή περί πάντων is reduced to the recommendation of suspending all assent or all judgment/belief, even to suspend assent or judgment “all the time” (Cf. Sharples, 1996, p. 27). However, the passage in Sextus does not support this way of conceptualizing ἐποχή περί πάντων:

(156) πάντων ὄντων ἀκαταλήπτων διὰ τὴν ἀνυπαρξίαν τοῦ Στωικοῦ κριτηρίου, εἰ συγκαταθήσεται ὁ σοφός, δοξάσει ὁ σοφός· μηδενὸς γὰρ ὄντος καταληπτοῦ εἰ συγκατατίθεται τι, τῷ ἀκαταλήπτῳ συγκαταθήσεται, ἢ δὲ τῷ ἀκαταλήπτῳ συγκατάθεσις δόξα (157) ἐστίν. ὥστε εἰ τῶν συγκατατιθεμένων ἐστὶν ὁ σοφός, τῶν δοξαστικῶν ἐστὶ ὁ σοφός. οὐχὶ δὲ γε τῶν δοξαστικῶν ἐστὶν ὁ σοφός (τοῦτο γὰρ ἀφροσύνης ἦν κατ’ αὐτούς, καὶ τῶν ἀμαρτημάτων αἰτιον)· οὐκ ἄρα τῶν συγκατατιθεμένων ἐστὶν ὁ σοφός. εἰ δὲ τοῦτο, περί πάντων αὐτὸν δεήσει ἀσυγκαταθετεῖν. τὸ δὲ ἀσυγκαταθετεῖν οὐδὲν ἕτερόν ἐστιν ἢ τὸ (158) ἐπέχειν· ἐφέξει ἄρα περί πάντων ὁ σοφός (*Math.* 7.156–158).

(156) since all things are inapprehensible on account of the unreality of the Stoic criterion, if the wise person assents, the wise person will opine. For since no thing or being is apprehensible, if the wise person assents to something, he will assent to the inapprehensible, but assent to the inapprehensible is opinion. (157) So that if the wise person is among those who assent, the wise person will be among those who opine. But the wise person is not among those who opine (for according to them this goes with folly and is a cause of errors); therefore the wise person is not among those who assent. But if this is so, he will have to decline assent about all things. Declining assent is nothing other than to suspend, it will follow that the wise person suspends [assent] about all things.

In Sextus, the meaning of ἐποχή περί πάντων is not that the wise person “will *always* suspend judgment,” but rather that the wise person suspends assent

“about all things.” The passage in Sextus identifies ἐποχή with “declining assent” (ἀσυγκαταθετεῖν), and then infers that the wise person suspends or declines assent περὶ πάντων. The περὶ with the genitive πάντων conveys the sense not of the temporal adverb “always,” but more precisely the sense of “about” or “on account of.” That is, on account of “all things being inapprehensible,” the wise person will have “to suspend assent about all things.” The universality involved in ἐποχή περὶ πάντων follows from, or is conceptually bound to, the claim that all things are inapprehensible. This transition is often concealed in readings of *Math.* 7.150–157. For instance, citing more narrowly the passage *Math.* 7.155–157, Brittain and Osorio (2008, §3) treat “universal suspension of assent,” or “universal suspension,” as equivalent to the proposition that one should “suspend assent universally” (§ 2, § 5, § 5.3). They are not entirely wrong here; the problem, however, is that this explication in particular relies on Cicero while it ignores the content of the very passage from Sextus cited above, where the recommendation that one should suspend assent about all things follows from the ontological thesis that “all things are inapprehensible.” Again, textual support for the specification of ἐποχή περὶ πάντων as the recommendation to suspend all assent can be found in Cicero (*omnium adsensionum retentio*, *Luc.* 78; *sapientem adsensus omnes cohibeturum*, *Luc.* 68), but in the fashion of Cicero, Brittain and Osorio obscure the distinction between the object and the impression when connecting the universality of ἐποχή περὶ πάντων to impressions, or the belief in/assent to “any impression(s) at all” (§ 3), thereby losing sight of the reference to things or external objects.

To be more precise, what is concealed in this rendering of “universal suspension” in Sextus is recognition of the difference between the proposition that in opining the wise person would “assent to something” (συγκατατίθεται τινι, 7.156), which is to say, to something “inapprehensible” (τῷ ἀκαταλήπτῳ), and the proposition (preferred by Brittain and Osorio) that in opining the wise person would “assent to non-cognitive impressions.” In CAA-2, Brittain and Osorio (2021, §3) present proposition (6) as the claim that it is irrational “to assent to non-cognitive impressions (as the Stoics held).” But notice that there is no explicit mention of impressions in the passage from Sextus, nor is there any explicit mention of assent to impressions. Thus, if one is inclined to collapse the distinction between impression and object in favor of connecting assent to impressions, as Cicero tends to do, then one is likely to misread the phrase συγκατατίθεται τινι (“assenting to something”) at 7.156 in terms of assent to some “non-cataleptic” impression, as Brittain and Osorio do (see CAA-2 proposition (7) below). Instead, the phrase literally reads as assenting to something inapprehensible, i.e., some inapprehensible thing. Consider the

conclusion of the CAA as reconstructed by Brittain and Osorio. Arcesilaus supposedly turned the argument for the epistemological reconstruction of ἀκαταληψία, expressed in proposition (5) that there are no cognitive impressions, into an argument that it is irrational to assent to “any impressions at all.” The last three propositions of CAA-2 read as follows:

CAA-2

- (5) there are no cognitive impressions (as Arcesilaus has argued), &
- (6) it is irrational to hold “opinions,” i.e., to assent to non-cognitive impressions (as the Stoics held); therefore,
- (7) it is irrational to assent to any impressions at all (See Sext. Emp. *Math.* 7.155–157 & *Luc.* 66–67).

Specifying the universality of ἐποχή in relation to impressions or assent is, in one sense, perfectly understandable. Since suspension is the suspension of assent, and there are no apprehensive impressions, the CAA does seem to entail the suspension of assent to each and every impression. Yet, in another sense, CAA-1 and CAA-2 simplify the universality of ἐποχή περὶ πάντων and understate the extent of the absurdity that follows from anti-Stoic arguments for ἀκαταληψία. The restriction of ἐποχή περὶ πάντων to the universal suspension of assent eliminates from the notion of ἐποχή περὶ πάντων the ontological implication that each and every “thing” – implied by the reference to the genitive plural πάντων – is inapprehensible. That is to say, the restriction of universality to assent conceals the fact that πάντων in ἐποχή περὶ πάντων at 7.157 further specifies the πάντων in πάντων ὄντων ἀκαταλήπτων at 7.156, which refers to all beings or things as inapprehensible beings. To reiterate the main criticism, the simplification of ἐποχή περὶ πάντων is that it associates the universality of suspension only with impressions and the faculty of assent or belief. For instance, in CAA-1 propositions (7)–(9) are reconstructed as follows (Castagnoli, 2019, p. 192): “(7) Therefore, for any impression *p*, if the wise person gives his assent to *p*, he will hold an opinion; (8) It is necessary for a wise person not to hold any opinion; (9) Therefore, for any impression *p*, the wise person will suspend judgment about [impression] *p* (ἐποχή).” In this way, the standard epistemological reconstruction serves as the pretext for eliminating the ontological significance of ἐποχή περὶ πάντων and unduly minimizing the absurdity that the Academics deduce from the systematic commitments of Stoic philosophy, including their ontology. In other words, the CAA seemingly results in nothing more than a simple epistemic *reductio ad absurdum* of the Stoic notion of apprehensive impressions. For the Stoa, however, the absurdity is

doubly pernicious, for not only does the wise person lack the knowledge that is based on the apprehensive impression; but the so-called wise person now also seems to live in a world where all things are inapprehensible.

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