

BOOK REVIEWS

Richard Bett (trans.): *Sextus Empiricus: Against the Physicists*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012, pp. xxiv + 178. £57, \$99.00 (hb). ISBN 978-0-521-51391-3.

With the present translation of the two books *Against the Physicists* (*AP*), Richard Bett completes his translation of the five extant books of Sextus Empiricus's *Against the Dogmatists*, which began with the translation of the book *Against the Ethicists* (OUP 1997), followed by that of the two books *Against the Logicians* (CUP 2005). These translations, together with those of the *Pyrrhonian Outlines* (*PH*) by Julia Annas and Jonathan Barnes (CUP 1994/2000) and Benson Mates (OUP 1996), are overall much more readable and faithful substitutes for the first three volumes of the four-volume classic English translation of the whole of Sextus by R. G. Bury, published between 1933 and 1949 in the Loeb Classical Library series. The reader will be interested to know that Bett is working on a new translation of the six books of Sextus's *Against the Professors* – better known by the Latin title *Adversus Mathematicos* (*AM*) – the first complete English version of this work since Bury's.

The topics dealt with in *AP* fall within what we might call natural philosophy: god, cause, body, space, motion, and time, among others. *AP* has not received much attention from specialists, who focus mainly on *PH*. This situation is expected to change considerably thanks not only to the present translation but also to the long-awaited publication of the proceedings of the Eleventh Symposium Hellenisticum (Delphi 2007), which was devoted to *AP*.¹

Following to a large extent the same layout as Bett's translation of *Against the Logicians*, the present book opens with a fine introduction, a note on the text and the translation, and a most helpful outline of the argument that presents the complex structure of *AP*. The translation is followed by an English–Greek and Greek–English glossary, a list of the persons referred to in *AP* with biographical information, a list of parallels between this work and other Sextan works, a four-page bibliography, and a general index.

After giving an overview of Sextus's life and work and presenting the nature of his scepticism, the Introduction examines the character of *AP*, the relation between this work and Sextus's other works, and his use of

¹Algra, K., and K. Ierodiakonou, eds., *Sextus Empiricus and Ancient Physics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014.

earlier sources. I will focus on some of the issues tackled by Bett. First, although according to the external evidence Sextus was an Empirical doctor, he explicitly distinguishes his Pyrrhonism from medical Empiricism (*PH* I 236–241). Bett defends a view that, to the best of my knowledge, was first proposed by Michael Frede (whom Bett does not mention): in the passage of *PH* in question Sextus would be criticizing only one variety of Empiricism (pp. vii–viii). What is surprising about this view is that it has no textual basis whatsoever: not only is it the case that Sextus, whenever he ascribes a position to the Empiricists, does so without making exceptions among them, but he also explicitly says that, of the medical schools, Methodism *alone* adopts a stance similar to Pyrrhonism (*PH* I 237).

The five remaining books of *Against the Dogmatists* are conventionally but mistakenly called *AM* VII–XI (*AP* being *AM* IX–X). I have avoided this inaccurate usage as much as possible and suggested that we abandon it for good because it still leads not only students but even some scholars to think that the eleven books called *AM* I–XI form a single work.² Bett once claimed that my suggestion is unrealistic because the convention is deeply entrenched.³ Although he continues to claim so, in the present book he at least tries ‘to do a little to subvert this usage’ (p. x, n. 11) by referring, in the notes to the translation, to the other books of *Against the Dogmatists* as *Against the Logicians* and *Against the Ethicists* in lieu of their conventional titles, which he nonetheless uses in the Introduction and the list of parallel passages at the end of the volume.

Finally, Bett still defends a view he first proposed a decade ago, namely, that to a greater or lesser extent the five surviving books of *Against the Dogmatists* preserve traces of a variety of scepticism earlier than, and incompatible with, the one found particularly in *PH* (pp. xxii–xxiv). Although any serious specialist is well aware that the ancient Pyrrhonian tradition was not uniform and that there are strong tensions in Sextus’s corpus, Bett’s view faces considerable difficulties. Since I have elsewhere expounded on such difficulties in detail,⁴ I will here limit myself to pointing out that it is regrettable that Bett has never addressed the objections raised by some scholars and that he sticks to a view that seems to pose at least as many problems as those it intends to solve.

The translation, which follows with a few exceptions Hermann Mutschmann’s standard edition of the Greek text, is fully annotated and conveniently arranged according to Bett’s outline of the argument. It is on the whole readable, elegant, and accurate, and certainly an improvement on

²See e.g. my review of Bett’s translation of *Against the Logicians* in *Bryn Mawr Classical Review* 2008.01.11. <http://bmcr.brynmawr.edu/2008/2008-01-11.html>.

³In his Introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to Ancient Scepticism*, 7. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.

⁴Besides the review mentioned in n. 2, see “Moderate Ethical Realism in Sextus’ *Against the Ethicists*?” In *New Essays on Ancient Pyrrhonism*, edited by D. Machuca, 143–78. Leiden: Brill, 2011.

Bury's. A general feature of the translation is the constant italicization of particular words; the reason (which Bett nowhere explains) is at least sometimes that the Greek contains certain words with an emphatic function, such as the particle γε, whose translation would be too clumsy.

I would like to mention a few points of disagreement about Bett's translation choices. The first concerns the rendering of ἀπορία ('impasse'), ἄπορος ('intractable'), and ἀπορητικός ('bringer of impasse'), which are used dozens of times in *AP*. I think that ἀπορία might be rendered simply as 'aporia' (which is not at all uncommon in philosophical writing); ἄπορος (which literally means 'without passage' or 'impassable') as 'subject to aporia'; and ἀπορητικός (used to refer to the sceptic or Pyrrhonist) as 'aporetic'. Likewise, ἀπορητικώτερον, which is contrasted with δογματικῶς (dogmatically) at *AP* I 12, could be translated simply as 'more aporetically' in lieu of the awkward phrase 'more in the spirit of impasse'. Such translations are preferable both because aporia is a key Pyrrhonian notion with a distinctive sense and because they make clear the connection between the group of cognate terms. A second disagreement concerns πάθος, which Bett renders as 'effect' (*AP* I 187–188, II 63) or 'feeling' (*AP* II 219). He considers the alternative 'affection', pointing out that it is the way in which πάθος is commonly rendered by Bury, in whose 'time it may have been possible to hear this as equivalent to "way in which someone or something is affected", but it is not possible now' (p. 121, n. 91). What Bett does not say is that 'affection' has more recently been used as a technical term by several specialists because it has the great advantage of making clear the connection between πάθος and its cognate verb πάσχειν ('to be affected'). Let me also note that, at *AP* II 225, συμπτώματα τῶν πασχόντων ἦτοι ἡστικῶς ἢ ἀλγεινῶς is translated as 'accidents of those who have pleasant or painful experiences', when it could have been translated more accurately as 'accidents of those who are affected either pleasantly or painfully'. Third, Bett renders ἐνάργεια, the cognate noun of ἐναργής (evident, plain), as 'plain experience' (*AP* I 339; II 62, 66, 68, 131, 133, 138, 166, 168, 340) instead of other common alternatives, such as 'evidence' and 'self-evidence'. Bett's translation is problematic because (i) 'plain experience' restricts the range of meaning of ἐνάργεια and (ii) the use of 'experience' may give the wrong impression that ἐμπειρία occurs in the text. Fourth, at *AP* I 331 Sextus tells us that the inquiry about the whole is necessary for the sceptics πρὸς ἔλεγχον τῆς τῶν δογματικῶν προπετείας, which Bett translates as 'for the purpose of showing up the dogmatists' rashness'. I think ἔλεγχος has here its usual meaning and should therefore be translated as 'refutation' ('with a view to the refutation of the dogmatists' rashness'), as Bett does at *AP* II 118. Fifth, Bett renders ἡγούμενον and λήγον, respectively, as 'leader' and 'finisher' (*AP* I 175, 205) because 'they derive from everyday Greek verbs for 'lead' and 'finish'' (p. 36, n. 116). Not only are these translations clumsy and obscure, but in this case there is no need to make clear the connection with the Greek verbs in question. I therefore

think that the usual renderings of ‘antecedent’ and ‘consequent’ are to be preferred. Finally, when I encountered the term ‘counter-intuitive’ (*AP* I 424; II 27, 33, 135, 187), I immediately checked the Greek: the word in question is ἀπεμφοῖνον, which specifically means ‘inconsistent’ or ‘incongruous’.

These disagreements aside, I am sure that, as with Bett’s previous translations of Sextus, the present one will soon become the standard English translation of *AP*.

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Desmond M. Clarke (trans., intro., and ed.): *The Equality of the Sexes: Three Feminist Texts of the Seventeenth Century*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013, pp. xiv + 220. £19.99 (pb). ISBN 978-0-19-967351-3.

Anna Maria van Schurman once observed that the noble deeds of historical figures are quickly enveloped by obscurity. ‘When one reads history’, she says, ‘often over a very long period of time, the monuments of our glory are like the trace of a ship that passes through the sea’ (97). The further one gets from the original object, the harder it can be to discern the impression left in its wake. The same observation might be made about early modern writings on the equality of the sexes. The further one gets from the original context, the harder it can be to discern the exact meaning of authors’ words, the true origins of their references, and the specific targets of their invectives. At this distance in time, a casual observer might think that seventeenth-century arguments for women’s equality with men must have been rather few and far between, or perhaps so lacking in philosophical sophistication that they hardly warrant our attention today. After all, it is often said that there have been only two ‘waves’ of feminism in the history of human thought: one in the late 1800s, and the other in the late twentieth century. What feminist value, one might ask, could these historical texts possibly hold?

The beauty of Desmond M. Clarke’s *The Equality of the Sexes* is that it explodes these prevailing myths about the history of feminism. With this volume, Clarke provides new and accessible English translations of three important feminist texts of the early modern period: Marie le Jars de Gournay’s *The Equality of Men and Women* (originally published in French, 1622), van Schurman’s *Dissertation on the Natural Capacity of Women for Study and Learning* (originally in Latin, 1641), and François Poulain de la Barre’s *Physical and Moral Discourse Concerning the Equality of Both Sexes* (originally in French, 1673). Clarke’s annotations shed light on