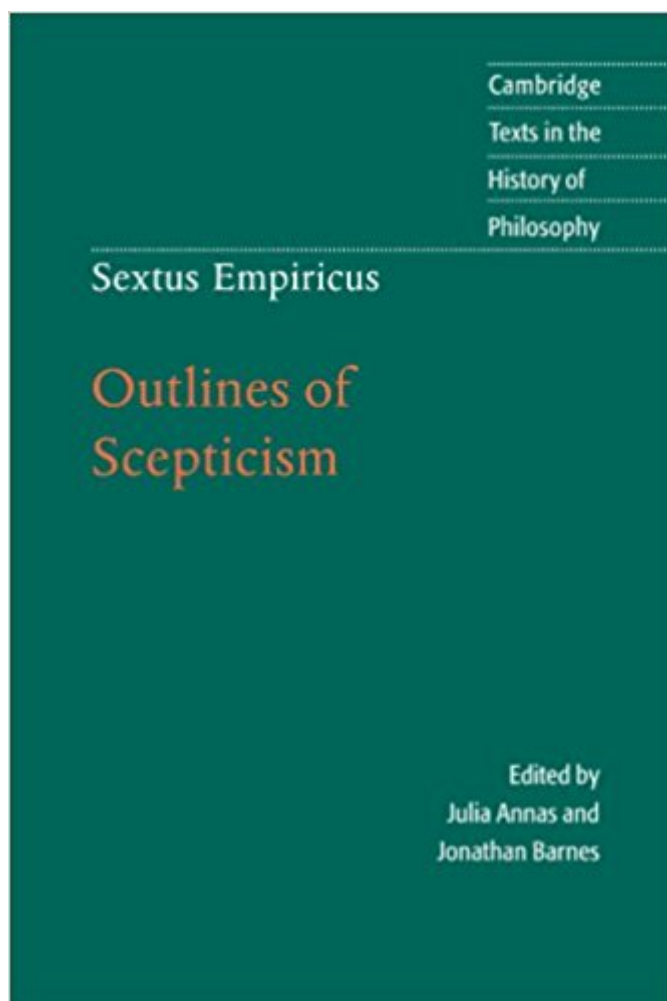


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Sextus Empiricus: Outlines Of Scepticism (Cambridge Texts In The History Of Philosophy)



Synopsis

Outlines of Scepticism, by the Greek philosopher Sextus Empiricus, is a work of major importance for the history of Greek philosophy. It is the fullest extant account of ancient skepticism, and it is also one of our most copious sources of information about the other Hellenistic philosophies. Its argumentative approach revolutionized the study of philosophy when Sextus' works were rediscovered in the sixteenth century. This volume presents the accurate and readable translation that was first published in 1994, together with a substantial new historical and philosophical introduction by Jonathan Barnes.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"Students and scholars have every reason to be grateful...." James Allen, *The Philosophical Review*

Text: English (translation) Original Language: Greek --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

OK

"Outlines of Scepticism is a great book, and one of the most important to survive from antiquity. But this translation is terrible. The translators are openly hostile. They render the text hard to follow due to a reflexive distaste for book's message. In the introduction Julian Barnes calls the author a

"quack" and says his thesis is false. Benson Mates' translation is far superior. The Skeptic Way: Sextus Empiricus' Outlines of Pyrrhonism.

Sextus Empiricus reveals the Sceptic m.o. of seeking opposing arguments with equal likelihood, resulting in tranquility of mind resting in indecision. Dogmatists, he states, are the ones who cannot live the blessed life; not finding equilibrium in indecision. Most readers will likely not buy that argument along with quite a few other opposing arguments presented as being equally likely. Empiricus still gives a lot of quality arguments from a unique perspective of thought. The book is a recommended read for its historical and novel thought process. The book is intellectually stimulating and at times even humorous - for example the time when a Cynic debates a Sceptic over motion: "One of the Cynics, when the argument against motion was propounded [from a Sceptic], gave no answer but stood up and walked away, establishing by his action and evidently that motion is real." Not being exposed previously to first hand Sceptic reasoning I was pleasantly surprised by its legitimate ideas and entertainment value. I believe those interested in history and philosophy will also feel the better for reading the book.

Many books have been written on skepticism. But this one is the best. The author not only outlines what skepticism is, but spares nothing from skepticism. This is a refreshing outlook from the skeptical books published recently that link skepticism and anti-god, psychic powers, and so forth. A skeptic is really a wise man who calls all claims into question including those of scientists and other skeptics. His only goal is truth. Something that the majority of so called "skeptics" today know very little about. This book is not biased, and clearly shows how a true skeptic thinks. Rather than being the kill joy of so many people, the book shows that the true skeptic is not a cynic, but rather a sincere individual who loves truth. This is why so many views on God, dogmatism, and so forth are attacked in the book. The skeptic is interested in seeing how the claims to truth stand up to his attacks. This book focuses on dogmatism in many subjects. This is the center of the skeptics attacks. We see that many views do not hold up to the skeptics critiques, this includes ironically the views of scientists and other philosophers. This is a classic book and deserves every bit of praise. I loved it.

This is a classic and priceless work. Along with the other extant works of S.E. it remains virtually the only surviving record of teachings attributed to the very influential 4th c. B.C.E. philosopher Pyrrho of Elis. As such, the book preserves a now largely forgotten body of thought that rivals anything

produced in the same vein since. I think there is nothing -- except a lot of multisyllabic obfuscation -- in the works of the phenomenologists, the existentialists, or the usually uneducated and thoughtless so-called "postmodernists" that can't be found in ancient skepticism. I think this particular translation is also the best for most readers. (If you are a serious scholar and can read the Greek yourself, then you are a better judge than I of whether it's a good translation. What I mean is that it is the most accessible for modern readers.) Numerous other translations are available and several are in print. Annas & Barnes, however, both noted classics scholars and both persons who deeply understand and seem sympathetic to the ancient skeptics, have set out a translation very accessible to modern English readers. They have also set out copious notes and cross references that are very useful to more serious readers. The previous reviewer from Colorado, incidentally, is off the mark on a few things. First, I doubt that S.E. was really interested that much in "truth." Though he may sometimes say or imply that that is his aim, I think he does so in a catty or coy way. I think he never thought he was going to find the truth; rather, he knew before he started writing that the skeptic simply cannot be answered -- there is no argument the skeptic cannot pick apart. As S.E. -- a professional doctor -- repeatedly says, skeptical arguments are like a doctor's medicine. They go in and dissolve the patient's illness, and then flow out with it to be disposed of. In other words, the skeptic argues not to discover truth, but only to dissect illusions. Moreover, in the spirit of full disclosure, S.E. is not as timely as the Colorado review implies. S.E. nowhere mentions God, contrary to what the previous review suggests, and is not in this book concerned with scientists as such. Rather, he attacks the prevailing *philosophical* schools of his day, namely the Stoics, the still-lingering corpse of the Academy, and a group he calls the Peripatetics (meaning Aristotelians). This book is largely a technical manual of arguments to be made in response to the arguments of those other groups, which in turn are technical themselves. That is not to say that this is not a fascinating book. For example, how interesting it is that S.E. solves riddles that would so traumatized Sartre and Camus 2000 years later!

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