

WHAT GOD DIDN'T KNOW  
(SEXTUS EMPIRICUS AM IX 162–166)\*

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Could someone understand the word 'pain', who had *never* felt pain?—Is experience to teach me whether this is so or not?—And if we say 'A man could not imagine pain without having sometime felt it'—how do we know? How can it be decided whether it is true?

L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, § 315

It is sometimes wondered whether ancient philosophers ever entertained the idea that a person's access to his or her own mental states is radically different from the same agent's access to the external world. One way to try to answer this question is to consider their accounts of pain since pain is often offered as a good example of a mental state which is accessed only in this special and private way. Here I consider a passage of Sextus Empiricus that might be thought to come close to this notion but show that even here there is no sign of a radical division between a private and personal internal mental world and the world external to the agent.

I

At *Adversus Mathematicos* (AM) IX 162–166, Sextus offers an argument against the existence of god which depends on a notion of what it is to 'know what pain is like by nature'. The argument is based on the idea that if god exists then god must possess wisdom and therefore know which things are good, which are bad, and which are indifferent. He must therefore know pleasure and pain since these must both be classifiable in some way into those categories. Sextus insists that such a knowledge

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of pleasure and pain requires that god must have experienced pleasure and pain since such experience is the only way in which knowledge of these may be acquired. But if god must experience pain in order to have the wisdom essential to god's being the kind of being he is, and to experience pain is to be receptive of change and decay, then there is a central incoherence to the notion of god under scrutiny: god cannot be both unchanging and perfect and also wise. The argument in full is as follows:

πρὸς τούτοις· εἴπερ πάσας ἔχει τὰς ἀρετὰς ὁ θεός, καὶ φρόνησιν ἔχει. εἰ φρόνησιν ἔχει, (ἔχει) καὶ ἐπιστήμην ἀγαθῶν τε καὶ κακῶν καὶ ἀδιαφόρων. εἰ δὲ ἐπιστήμην ἔχει τούτων, οἶδε ποῖά ἐστι τὰ ἀγαθὰ καὶ κακὰ καὶ ἀδιαφόρα. (163) ἐπεὶ οὖν καὶ ὁ πόνος τῶν ἀδιαφόρων ἐστίν, οἶδε καὶ τὸν πόνον καὶ ποῖός τις ὑπάρχει τὴν φύσιν. εἰ δὲ τοῦτο, καὶ περιπέπτωκεν αὐτῷ· μὴ περιπεσῶν γὰρ οὐκ ἂν ἔσχε νόησιν αὐτοῦ, ἀλλ' ὄν τρόπον ὁ μὴ περιπεπωκώς λευκῷ χρώματι καὶ μέλανι διὰ τὸ ἐκ γενετῆς εἶναι πηρὸς οὐ δύναται νόησιν ἔχειν χρώματος, οὕτως οὐδὲ θεὸς μὴ (164) περιπεπωκώς πόνῳ δύναται νόησιν ἔχειν τούτου. ὁπότε γὰρ ἡμεῖς οἱ περιπεσόντες πολλάκις τούτῳ τὴν ιδιότητα τῆς περὶ τοὺς ποδαλγικοὺς ἀλγυγῆδος οὐ δυνάμεθα τρανῶς γνωρίζειν, οὐδὲ διηγουμένων ἡμῖν τινων συμβαλεῖν, οὐδὲ παρ' αὐτῶν τῶν πεπονθότων συμφώνως ἀκοῦσαι διὰ τὸ ἄλλους ἄλλως ταύτην ἐρμηνεύειν καὶ τοὺς μὲν στροφῆ, τοὺς δὲ κλάσει, τοὺς δὲ νύξει λέγειν ὅμοιον αὐτοῖς παρακολουθεῖν, ἢ πού γε θεὸς μὴδ' ὅλως πόνῳ περιπεπωκώς (165) (οὐ) δύναται πόνου νόησιν ἔχειν. νῆ Δί, ἀλλὰ πόνῳ μὲν, φασίν, οὐ περιπέπτωκεν, ἡδονῆ δέ, κακ ταύτης ἐκείνον νενόηκεν. ὅπερ ἦν εὐνηθεῖς. πρῶτον μὲν γὰρ ἐστὶν ἀμήχανον μὴ πειραθέντα πόνου νόησιν ἡδονῆς λαβεῖν· κατὰ γὰρ τὴν παντός τοῦ ἀλγύνοντος ὑπεξαίρειν συνίστασθαι (166) πέφυκεν. εἶτα καὶ τούτου συγχωρηθέντος πάλιν ἀκολουθεῖ τὸ φθαρτὸν εἶναι τὸν θεόν. εἰ γὰρ τῆς τοιαύτης διαχύσεως δεκτικός ἐστι, καὶ τῆς ἐπὶ τὸ χεῖρον μεταβολῆς ἔσται δεκτικός ὁ θεός καὶ φθαρτός ἐστιν. οὐχὶ δέ γε τοῦτο, ὥστε οὐδὲ τὸ ἐξ ἀρχῆς.

This is my translation, based on Bury's version but with some modifications:

In addition, if god has all the virtues, he also has practical wisdom. If he has practical wisdom, then he also has knowledge of goods and bads and indifferents. If he possesses knowledge of these, he knows what the goods, bads, and indifferents are like.<sup>1</sup> Since, then, suffering is one of the

<sup>1</sup> The argument would appear to demand this construal rather than the alternative: "he knows what sort of things are good, bad, and indifferent," since Sextus goes on to claim that there is some requirement for god not merely to be able to *categorize* different things but also to know something about their character.

indifferent things, he knows both suffering and what it is like by nature. And if so, he has experienced it; for without experience he would not have formed a notion of it, but, just as the man who has not experienced the colours white and black, owing to his having been blind from birth, cannot possess a notion of colour, so too god cannot have a notion of suffering if he has not experienced it. For given that we, who have often experienced pain, are unable to grasp distinctly the special quality of the pain suffered by gouty patients—neither when we meet people who tell us about it, nor when we listen to people who have suffered from it, since they explain it in conflicting ways, and some say that they find it to resemble twisting, others bending, others stabbing—surely, if god has had no experience at all of suffering, he cannot possess a notion of suffering. Truly, they reply, he has not experienced suffering, but pleasure, and from this he has formed a notion of the other. But this is silly. For, in the first place, it is impossible to acquire a notion of pleasure without having experienced suffering; for it is owing to the withdrawal of everything that gives pain that pleasure really subsists. And, in the next place, if this be granted, it follows once more that god is perishable. For if he is receptive of such a collapse, god will be receptive of change for the worse, and is perishable. But this is not (true), nor, in consequence, is the original supposition (true).

Sextus' opponent in this section is not determined with much clarity but clearly Sextus envisages that his argument will cause difficulties for a Stoic.<sup>2</sup> He has, after all, just spent a considerable time outlining the Stoic arguments in favor of the existence of god. Although it is not clear precisely where in book IX the Stoic material begins, much of the discussion from at least IX 88 is clearly in a Stoic vein and Sextus noted at IX 137 a transition from the exposition of positive arguments by concluding the material "gathered by the Stoics and the other schools" before moving on to his criticisms. Even within this smaller stretch of text concerned particularly with the knowledge of pain there are clear signs that Sextus has in his sights a Stoic target, whether or not he think that other schools ought also to be troubled by his concerns. Most notably, he begins with the premise that god, being wise, must know about what is good, what is bad, and what is indifferent and, furthermore, adds the

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<sup>2</sup> For further discussion of Sextus' opponents, see Long (2006). He takes Sextus' arguments to be targeted primarily at Stoic theological assumption but notes that they are nevertheless "quite general in their scope and will take in any philosophers or persons who hold, as the Stoics did, that gods are animate beings, and so on" (2006, 117). Long also notes (121–127) that the assumption of imperishability on which many of Sextus' arguments depend is not necessarily a Stoic premise.

premise that suffering belongs in the class of indifferents (ἐπεὶ οὖν καὶ ὁ πόνος τῶν ἀδιαφόρων ἐστίν, *AM IX 163*). It is hard to think that this could be anything but a Stoic premise.<sup>3</sup>

That the opponent is Stoic might be confirmed by comparing the parallel section of Cicero's *De natura deorum*. This also supports the view that the argument is originally Academic, and possibly Carneadean. At III 38 the Academic spokesman Cotta turns to arguments against god's possession of various virtues, including practical wisdom: *prudentia*, Cicero's Latin equivalent for φρόνησις.<sup>4</sup>

qualem autem deum intellegere nos possumus nulla virtute praeditum? quid enim? prudentiamne deo tribuemus, quae constat ex scientia rerum bonarum et malarum et nec bonarum nec malarum? cui mali nihil est nec esse potest, quid huic opus est dilectu bonorum et malorum, quid autem ratione, quid intellegentia; quibus utimur ad eam rem, ut apertis obscura adsequamur; at obscurum deo nihil potest esse.

But what kind of god can we imagine who possesses not one virtue? What then? Are we to attribute to god practical wisdom (*prudentia*), which consists in the knowledge of things that are good, things that are bad, and things that are neither good nor bad? But what need of the choice of goods and bads has someone to whom nothing is nor could be bad? What need has he of reasoning, or intelligence—things we use in order to pursue the non-evident via the evident? But nothing can be non-evident to god.

There are clear parallels between Cicero's argument and Sextus'. But there are also important differences.<sup>5</sup> Most important is the fact that Cicero's argument turns on the fact that since nothing can harm god he has no *need* of practical wisdom: there is nothing he has reason to avoid and therefore no need of the virtue which would identify what is good and bad and provide the means for making decisions concerning choice and avoidance. Sextus' version has a more ambitious conclusion in mind. It is Sextus' contention that it is not merely somehow superfluous to attribute these virtues to god; rather, it is impossible for god to have practical wisdom because god cannot meet at least one of the necessary pre-requisites for this virtue, namely the relevant kind of knowledge of goods, bads, and indifferents. Cicero, to be sure, begins with the same

<sup>3</sup> Sextus has already specified at *AM IX 163* that pain is indifferent, a Stoic thesis, but he needs only the weaker disjunctive claim that "pain is good or bad or indifferent."

<sup>4</sup> Cicero makes this equivalence explicit at *Off. I 153*.

<sup>5</sup> Pease (1958) has a very useful note *ad loc.* but he is not right to say that Cicero has simply "condensed" a longer version preserved by Sextus.

characterisation of the general subject matter of practical wisdom but his concern is not that god somehow fails epistemically such that the virtue is unobtainable for a divinity. Instead, Cicero's argument seems to claim that god is sufficiently impervious to harms that he has no use for this virtue, just as it goes on to claim that god's epistemic grip on things most generally is so penetrating that there is nothing *obscurum* to him such that would warrant his need of the virtues of reasoning to which we poor mortals might aspire. The conclusion of Cicero's argument, in other words, is compatible with the thesis that god still possesses all the virtues (that is, unless we further stipulate that someone can possess only the virtues that he *needs*), while Sextus' argument is stronger in so far as it rules out god's possession of these virtues.<sup>6</sup>

Although the principal target of Sextus' argument is likely to be Stoic, the claim that god is without pain or toil is not uncommon in Greek philosophical thought and can be traced back at least as far as Xenophanes (DK 21 B25). Sextus may feel that it has now become sufficiently central to a conception of divinity that, if he can demonstrate that it is incompatible with another common characteristic of divinity, namely that god is wise, then this inconsistency is extremely damaging for any dogmatic theist. (This argument therefore shares its general form with a number of arguments in this section of *AM IX*.)<sup>7</sup> He may have been encouraged to choose to put the argument in terms of god's knowledge of pain, therefore, at least in part because it is relatively uncontroversial to assume that if there is a god then god's life is pain-free. Contrast this with the question whether god will experience pleasure. This is a much more controversial and would provoke a great deal of disagreement even among dogmatic theists. One of the counter-arguments to Sextus' original claims does in fact rely on the idea that perhaps god experiences pleasure but not pain. Sextus rejects this as incoherent (see IV below). It is still telling, however, that in his initial argument, Sextus instead concentrates on the much safer ground that god cannot be wise without experiencing pain and therefore being perishable.

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<sup>6</sup> We might also compare Aristotle's comments at *NE* 1178b8–18 that certain activities, even those which would could be undertaken virtuously by a human, are “unworthy” of a god.

<sup>7</sup> Sextus names Carneades as a source at *AM IX* 140. For an analysis of the different arguments in this section, see Long (2006), 116 n. 5 and compare Long (2006), 120 on the form of the argument at *AM IX* 146–147.

## II

My primary interest in this argument is in Sextus' defence of the contention that the only way in which it is possible to acquire knowledge of what pain is like by nature is through experiencing it. In that case, Cicero's argument is of no significant further use to the inquiry in hand since it does not share this feature. Further, Sextus defends this important thesis about the only means of acquiring knowledge of pain through replies to two imagined counter-proposals, both of which suggest a way in which knowledge of pain may be acquired indirectly. Neither of these counter-proposals is to be found in Cicero, which suggests either that Sextus has presented a longer account of an original Stoic-Academic debate found only in summary in Cicero or else that Sextus himself or some intermediate source not used by Cicero has expanded the dialectic in this way.<sup>8</sup>

For Sextus to claim that the experience of pain is a necessary condition for someone to know, in some sense, 'what pain is like by nature' is interesting because it might be thought to anticipate in an important way a claim often made in some modern philosophical discussions of pleasure and pain, namely that they are essentially first-personal, private, and subjective experiences. Certainly, if that is indeed a correct account of the nature of pain, it would seem to offer a reasonably clear explanation of why what pain is like cannot properly be known about indirectly: it is just the kind of thing which is essentially first-personal and private and that is why knowledge of pain is not communicable from one person to another. Some modern philosophers also make the additional claim that experience of pleasure and pain of this kind is not just first-personal in this interesting sense, but it is also incorrigible: a person cannot be mistaken in his assessment of whether he is experiencing pleasure and pain.<sup>9</sup> Sextus, we should note at the outset, makes explicit no such additional claim and in any case need not do so for the purposes of this destructive argument.<sup>10</sup> He needs only the claim that in order to acquire

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<sup>8</sup> An originally Academic anti-Stoic source is also suggested by Sextus' claim that we are unable to "grasp distinctly" (τὸ ἀνῶς γνωρίζειν) the peculiar characteristic of the pain of gout. This adverbial characterization of knowledge that is clear and distinct is also prominent in his general criticisms of the Stoics' theory of *katalēpsis* (see e.g. *AM* VII 172, 404).

<sup>9</sup> For a helpful discussion of some modern philosophical treatments of pain see Aydede (2006b).

<sup>10</sup> Here we might contrast the Cyrenaics who do assert that the *πάθη*, including pain,

knowledge of pain it is necessary to experience pain. (The argument leaves aside the question whether experiencing pain is *sufficient* for knowledge of pain. If we wish to insist that knowledge of pain involves, roughly speaking, some kind of conceptual awareness that what one is experiencing is a pain then an infant, for example, may experience pain but not be aware that what she is experiencing is a pain.)<sup>11</sup>

Before pressing on, we should register two important caveats. Given the nature of this argument, it is not possible to read from the text here anything very secure about Sextus' own attitudes to a given philosophical issue. That is not solely because, officially at least, Sextus himself would not profess to have any beliefs about such matters. (Indeed, Sextus may feel that his outlook on the matter—such that it is—is made perfectly clear when at *PH* I 23–24 he lists the “necessity of the πάθη” as one of the criteria by which the skeptic lives ἀδοξάστως.) Rather, the problem in this case is compounded by the fact that this argument is clearly dialectical. We have to content ourselves, in that case, to paying attention to which elements Sextus does or does not himself choose to question or reject and then notice what he thinks he can rely on in such a dialectical exchange. These elements, whether accepted by Sextus or not, might at least give some indication of the generally assumed starting points in such a discussion. If this argument does strike home against anyone and if it relies on some notion of the knowledge of pain being related to pain's essentially subjective nature, then we can offer the argument as a whole as evidence for some such conception being reasonable at Sextus' time, whether or not Sextus himself shared it.

There are other clues in this passage which might help us to form a better picture of Sextus' working conception of pain. Above all, Sextus' reference here to “the peculiarity of pain from gout” (τὴν ιδιότητα τῆς περὶ τοὺς ποδαλγικοὺς ἀλγηδόνοϋς) is worthy of note. It is important for Sextus to establish that all the various reports from sufferers are indeed reports about one and the same subject in order to maintain that they are in fact in mutual conflict. It seems overwhelmingly likely that this

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are known incorrigibly; indeed, for the Cyrenaics the πάθη are the only things which are—borrowing the Stoic terminology—‘kataleptic’. Whether Sextus holds that he has incorrigible access to his πάθη is not clear; much depends on the interpretation of, for example, the controversial passage at *PH* I 13. According to Galen (*De diff. puls.* 8.711K), the “rustic Pyrrhonians” did not think they had secure knowledge even of their own πάθη.

<sup>11</sup> See e.g. Dretske (2006).

is meant to pick out the peculiar feel of the pain caused by gout, in the manner of contrasting this with presumably other peculiar feels of, for example, the pain caused by arthritis.<sup>12</sup> It is what makes this pain the pain of gout rather than any other particular kind of pain and rather than pain in general. In other words, Sextus seems to be appealing to the plausible idea of there being a peculiar feel to various different pains caused by various different physical ailments and forms of damage. He is not, it seems, appealing to there being a peculiar feel of pain most generally in contrast with, for example, the peculiar feel of pleasure most generally. Strictly speaking, for his argument to proceed he needs only to secure the thesis that in order to have any knowledge of pain at all god must have experienced *some* form of pain, since that will suffice to show that god must therefore be subject to change and decay. However, a stronger claim, namely that in order to know pain god must, in effect, have knowledge of the peculiarities of all the various possible distinct kinds of pain, will also suit his purpose. From a rhetorical point of view, it will suggest that in order to have ‘knowledge of pain’ god needs not only to have experienced some pain or other, no matter which, but will also need to have experienced gout, and arthritis, and all the various other forms of pain which each has its own peculiarity. This would be a pleasingly awkward conclusion for the theist opponent: god would as a result seem to turn out to be a very ailing and frail sort of being.

The question naturally arises whether the assumption of there being some kind of relevant peculiarity of the pain of gout such that it must be experienced to be known, is a Stoic tenet—since the argument appears to be aimed principally at a Stoic opponent—or alternatively might be traced back to any other known philosophical school. We might note at the outset that it is not absolutely clear whether Sextus assumes that (i) all pains are alike in some sense but different kinds of pains vary in various ways which are not essential to them being pains or (ii) different kinds of pains vary in ways that do not include a common qualitative nature for all pains. It would seem likely that he does argue on the assumption of the first alternative because of the nature of the *a fortiori* kind of argument he is proposing. The most reasonable assumption is that he is arguing as follows: even those of us who have experienced pain of some kind (and

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<sup>12</sup> Compare the use of the *ιδιότης/κοινότης* distinction at *AM VIII* 41–42.



perhaps, unfortunately, of many kinds) cannot come to know indirectly the particular nuances of the pain of a kind we have not yet experienced, for example: gout. It is therefore much less likely that a being such as god who, *ex hypothesi*, has experienced no kind of pain at all, might come to know pain. The argument would therefore appear to rest on the notion that various pains—of gout, of toothache, and the like—are similar *qua* pains but nevertheless sufficiently different that only direct personal experience can provide knowledge of their differing respective qualities. On this view, pain is a genus of which these various pains are species.<sup>13</sup> If that is right, then it seems to follow that we might know pain in general by knowing at least two of its species (provided, perhaps, one can recognise sufficiently their common character *qua* pains) but that this will not be sufficient to know any other species of pain in all its particularity.

We can also raise a question about what precisely is involved in possessing 'knowledge of pain' and about what Sextus' conception of this might be, since it is not difficult to see that there are various possible different ways to image what 'knowledge of pain' might amount to. Sextus is helpfully clear in his assertion that the kind of knowledge in question here is somehow qualitative: it is knowledge of "what pain *is like by nature*" (καὶ ποῖός τις ὑπάρχει τὴν φύσιν). The knowledge involved is apparently distinct from, for example, a knowledge of what the word 'pain' means; the question is not one of god's linguistic competence.<sup>14</sup> Nor is the knowledge involved the sort needed to be able to distinguish someone in pain from someone not in pain. Rather, what is at issue seems to be god's possession of some kind of understanding of the qualitative nature of pain *per se*. But even this is relatively under-determined as an account of precisely what, on this hypothesis, god cannot know, since it leaves plenty of room for different accounts of what this knowledge of

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<sup>13</sup> Is there in fact some general shared qualitative characteristic of all pains? Although many people will say that there is not a general way all *pleasures* feel—pleasures are more radically heterogeneous—there is no general consensus about what we should say about pains on this score. Certainly pains vary in various phenomenological ways. But do they all share at least some characteristics? For an argument that they do not, see Gustafson (2006). Goldstein (2000), on the other hand, does think that pain has a distinctive quale but that this is a second-order property that supervenes on a widely varied set of first-order properties of having a particular qualitative character. So burning and aching have different qualitative characters but in both there supervenes the character of being an intrinsically bad sensation, i.e. a pain.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Goldstein (2000), 101.

the qualitative nature of pain might amount to. Sextus' insistence that it is essential to experience pain in order to acquire this knowledge would be most plausible, we may think, if by 'knowledge of pain' he means us to understand something along the lines of 'knowledge of what it is like to be in pain' or, perhaps, 'knowledge of how pain feels' (what we might call *experiential knowledge*). Certainly, as we shall see, his supporting argument about the experience of gout would seem to make this way of understanding the notion of 'knowledge of pain' the most plausible. But there remain, of course, various ways to understand 'knowledge of what pain is like by nature'. For example, it might be possible to possess in some sense 'knowledge of what pain is like by nature' if one has a knowledge of the various biological or neurological processes involved when a person places his hand on an extremely hot piece of metal. This sort of knowledge would seem to be available to people who have not themselves, fortunately, ever experienced what it is like to put one's hand on an extremely hot piece of metal. Similarly, someone who has never experienced gout might know all about the pathology of gout and also about the neurology of nociception. Even before any first-hand experience of pain, such a neurologist might be said to have 'knowledge of what the pain of gout is like by nature' in some relevant sense. But all the same, once the neurologist experiences first hand some particular kind of sensation, perhaps by becoming gouty, there might still be a case for saying that the neurologist learns something new.

Sextus' first comment might encourage the thought that he is stipulating that direct personal experience is a necessary condition of possessing knowledge of this sort of experience, and therefore that he means to refer to 'knowledge of what pain is like by nature' in this second and stronger sense. His example of the congenitally blind stipulates that they *cannot* have knowledge of black and white since they have never experienced seeing black or white. On the face of it, this does seem to be a strong claim that personal experience is necessary for the relevant kind of knowledge, particularly since it does not merely claim that such congenitally blind people do not have such knowledge but rather surely implies that the reason why such knowledge is impossible for them to acquire is precisely due to their lacking the relevant and necessary ability, namely the power of sight. In other words, the only way to acquire knowledge of black and white in this sense is to be able to see black and white for oneself and, moreover, to have seen black and white for oneself. A blind person may, in other words, be able to acquire a comprehensive knowledge of the phys-

iology and anatomy of sight. Even so, it appears that simply being blind from birth is sufficient to rule out the possibility of having knowledge of the kind that Sextus is interested in here.

Similarly, the analogous claim in the case of god would be that the only way to acquire knowledge of pain is to be able to experience pain for oneself and, moreover, to have experienced pain for oneself. On this view, 'knowledge of what pain is like by nature' in Sextus' argument does seem to amount to knowledge of what it is like to experience pain and, furthermore, to be the sort of knowledge that can be acquired only through first-hand experience of pain. God stands to the relevant knowledge of pain like the congenitally blind man does to the analogous knowledge of color. Thus, he is to be contrasted with a different class of people imagined later in the text: those who have experienced pain but not the specific pain of gout. Although it is not possible for those who have experienced pain other than the pain of gout to come to know the pain of gout indirectly, such people still have a conception of pain in general terms. The blind man, however, does not merely lack a knowledge of black or white; Sextus is quite explicit that he has no knowledge of *color* (οὐ δύναται νόησιν ἔχειν χρώματος). The point is, presumably, that it is not simply the case that although he has the correct apparatus to acquire this knowledge he has not had the correct and direct personal experience necessary. He is unlike a person who has seen only orange, red, and blue and therefore has no knowledge of black and white. Rather, the congenitally blind man is entirely unable to acquire any such knowledge of color at all. God is like him, we are supposed to think, when it comes to knowledge of pain.

Sextus is not alone in insisting that if god is to be said to have the sort of understanding appropriate for a divinity, he ought not to be incapable of an important kind of understanding that we mortals all appear to be able to acquire. Concerns similar to that raised by Sextus are still offered by philosophers of religion. We might, for example, compare Sextus' argument with a concern raised by Richard Francks, which Francks relates to a demand to ascribe to god omniscience "in a strong sense":

My knee hurts, and I am aware of the fact. If a perfect physiologist examined my knee he would know it too. But there is a difference between my awareness and his. What kind of difference? I do not know anything which he does not know. On the contrary, he knows much more about my pain than I do—'I only know it hurts'. I do not even want to say that I know it better than he does. And, provided he is giving me his full attention, I do not want to say either that I am better aware of my pain

than he is. But there is still a difference between me and him: we know what we know in completely different ways. We might say: we know the same thing from different points of view. The question then is: is it enough for God to be the perfect physiologist, or must he somehow ‘feel my pain’? I think he must, because if not, then there is something which I know and he does not, viz. not my pain, but my view of my pain. Of course, God ‘knows just how I feel’, but that phrase is no more comfort here than elsewhere: his knowledge remains theoretical, derived, whereas mine is perceptual, immediate. Mine is not therefore better, but it is different. If God’s knowledge of my pain is only that of the perfect physiologist, then I have an awareness, a perspective, which God lacks. And that contradicts the spirit of the first requirement.<sup>15</sup> (1979, 396)

There are obvious ways in which the line of concern outlined by Franck might be supplemented by a more developed account of this “perspective” which god would appear to lack, perhaps by a full account of the what-it-is-like-ness of first-personal experience of things such as pain. But regardless of this further elaboration, Franck’s worry shows that there remains a plausible case for thinking that divine wisdom might require a first-hand experience of pain because that first-hand experience is thought to be a necessary condition of an appropriate understanding of suffering.

At this point, it might be tempting to think that Sextus’ argument must also share its central intuitions with some celebrated modern arguments in favor of there being a ‘what-it-is-like’, for example, to feel pain or see red or be a bat—sometimes referred to as *qualia*—which is then used as evidence for there being an irreducible first-personal element to consciousness. For example, consider the case of Mary, the scientist described in Frank Jackson’s famous thought-experiment.<sup>16</sup> She knows and understands the various scientific (physicalist) accounts of color perception, understands the physics of light, and so on. But she has

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<sup>15</sup> I can see no evidence that Franck is aware of the parallel argument in Sextus. Franck’s reaction to the argument is that god’s omniscience can be preserved by god’s immanent omnipresence: god does have my perspective on my pain because he is ‘in me’ and therefore can know it as I can, ‘from the inside’ as it were. For some other discussions of problems raised by the tension between divine omniscience and experiential knowledge, particularly of pain, see Sarot (1992), 70–77.

<sup>16</sup> See Jackson (1982, 1986). I refer to the case of Mary only for a convenient analogy and for the sake of attempting to clarify what I take to be Sextus’ position. I make no attempt to defend the idea that there is something which Mary did not know nor, if indeed there is something she did not know, do I intend to pin-point what precisely she did not know.

never herself seen anything red. Mary does not, like a blind person, lack the correct apparatus for acquiring the relevant knowledge; she merely happens to live in an environment in which the necessary conditions for acquiring such knowledge have never been met. She can see, and certainly can see black and white; but she has never seen something red. She is more like, for example, Sextus' imagined people who have experienced pain but have never experienced the pain of gout.

Although there are important points of similarity between what Mary did not know and what, on Sextus' argument, god did not know or the gout-free sufferers did not know, we ought to be cautious about attributing the same kind of explanation offered for Mary's ignorance to Sextus when we wonder what his explanation is for why people cannot know the pain of gout without experiencing it. The grounds for this caution are to be found in some of Sextus' supporting arguments. Sextus finds time to address two counter-objections, both of which try to show that god might acquire knowledge of pain without having to experience it. The first of these counter-arguments is the most important, since this is the occasion on which he responds to a claim that knowledge of pain might be acquired by interviewing, as it were, people about this kind of pain (οὐδὲ διηγουμένων ἡμῖν τινῶν συμβαλεῖν . . .). Immediately after the example of the congenitally blind, Sextus returns to the central case of knowledge of pain, seems to countenance an alternative and indirect method of acquiring this knowledge and expresses various concerns about the indirect acquisition of knowledge of pain, that is of acquiring knowledge of pain in any way which does not involve experiencing pain first-hand. These concerns are meant to cut-off this possible reply to Sextus' original denial that god can come to know pain without experiencing it.

### III

Sextus' response to the first counter-proposal takes the form of an *a fortiori* argument. Sextus wants us to think about how difficult it is even for us, who have at least experienced some pain, to come to know the pain of gout. (He assumes, therefore, that his audience are not themselves gouty.) The text at this point appears to offer a pair of alternative possibilities for the source of such indirect knowledge which are both rejected: (i) "people who tell us about it" (διηγουμένων ἡμῖν τινῶν) and (ii) "people who have suffered from it" (αὐτῶν τῶν πεπονθότων). It is

clear who the second group are: these are people who have themselves suffered from this ailment and who are rejected as a reliable source, as we shall see, on the interesting grounds that they give conflicting reports of the condition. The identity of the first group is less clear and it is not explicitly stated why they are not a useful source of information. One possibility is that this is a very general group. They are people who might tell you something about the pain of gout, perhaps including doctors or relatives or friends of people who have suffered from gout. Perhaps we are to assume that their reports are divergent too. It is not hard to see, in any case, how Sextus might reject them as an authority: either they speak on the basis of personal knowledge, in which case they ought properly to be classed among the second group, or else they are simply relating another second-hand account. If the latter, then they are no more reliable than their source, which again will be either repeating second-hand information or be an actual sufferer. One way or another, therefore, this first group can be rejected or made to collapse into the second group, whose reliability is then doubted. The overall picture is clear nevertheless. You might think that it is possible to know what it is like to feel the pain of gout by talking to people who are experiencing or have experienced that pain and discovering what it is like. But, Sextus argues, it is not possible for us to acquire such knowledge of the pain of gout in that way and, remember, unlike the hypothesised pain-free but knowing god, we at least have experienced some pain in our lives. If it is impossible for us gout-free but otherwise experienced sufferers to know the particular pain of gout, then *a fortiori* it is impossible for god, who has no experience of pain at all, to do so.

What is important and interesting is that these concerns about the indirect method seem not to be generated because he thinks that pain is such that it can be known only through direct first-personal experience. Sextus himself, of course, will profess no settled opinion of his own about the necessary and sufficient conditions for acquiring such knowledge. But it is striking nevertheless that he chooses not to undermine this counter-argument on the grounds that it implausibly accepts the very idea that such knowledge could be acquired indirectly. Instead, he says that it is impossible to acquire such knowledge indirectly because of the conflicting set of reports that any inquirer would receive from those who have directly experienced the pain of gout. The implication must surely be that were a consistent and reliable set of reports available, then such a form of inquiry might indeed be a reasonable method of acquiring this form of knowledge indirectly.

The following comparison might help to explain the important differences between Sextus' argument and the concerns raised about *qualia* by something like Mary's situation. Sextus' proposal that we might come to know the pain of gout by interviewing gout sufferers would seem to be akin to the idea that Mary might in some sense acquire 'knowledge of seeing red' by asking people what it is like to see red. Sextus seems to allow that it might be possible for Mary to come to have the required kind of knowledge provided only that she can collect a consistent and reliable set of reports. Without herself seeing anything red, therefore, she might nevertheless come to acquire knowledge of that kind of experience. Even then, Mary may not know 'all there is to know' about seeing red, just as in the analogous epistemic state our imagined god may still not know 'all there is to know' about pain. Perhaps Mary will find out something more on the first occasion she sees a red rose.<sup>17</sup> And perhaps Sextus' imagined goutless mortal will find out more about what the pain of gout is if he ever becomes gouty. Nevertheless Sextus implies that he might know what the pain of gout is like in some sense once he has a consistent and reliable set of reports from those who have suffered it. Similarly, perhaps god will find out more if ever—heavens forbid—he does experience pain first-hand; nevertheless he might know what pain is like if he can only acquire a set of consistent and reliable reports from those who have experienced pain. In other words, even without the additional awareness that might come from direct personal experience, god might know enough to be able to claim to have "knowledge of goods, bads, and indifferents" in a manner sufficient for him to be wise, if only he could get a consistent and reliable set of reports from others.

The problem Sextus outlines is not, therefore, based on the assumption that pain cannot be known except by direct, first-personal, acquaintance. Rather, he says that it would be impossible to acquire knowledge of pain through these indirect means because even those people suffering from the same ailment—gout, for example—will describe their experience in wildly differing ways. Some say it is like a kind of twisting; some say it is like a kind of bending; others say it is like a kind of stabbing. (A

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<sup>17</sup> Some of Jackson's comments (e.g. 1986, 294, where he says that Mary may, after her release and after experiencing seeing red, come to recognize why her friends thought her previously so deprived) suggest that Mary might even before seeing red have heard some account from others about the experience. Even so, Jackson insists that Mary acquires some new knowledge on herself seeing red for the first time.

brief look at ancient medical discussions of gout shows that they also tend to emphasise the fact that it manifests itself in different and sometimes conflicting symptoms.)<sup>18</sup> In fact, this is a powerful argument precisely because it does not require Sextus to rely on any particular account of the nature of pain. Instead, he makes the problem an further instance of a most general problem for the business of forming secure opinions about something which cannot be directly perceived. We can recognise here a very common form of Pyrrhonist argument: Sextus has outlined a general *διαφωνία* between gout-sufferers. This disagreement is, furthermore, impossible to resolve in favor of any one rather than the other proposed descriptions of what it is like to experience the pain of gout. The ‘twisting-gout sufferers’ are no more authoritative than the ‘stabbing-gout sufferers’. And since these descriptions are competitors, we cannot simply accept all of them as capturing some aspect of the phenomenon such that they can be combined to give a single informative account. The difficulty is not a difficulty in principle of the procedure of asking for sufferers to describe their pain but is instead a difficulty in practice associated with the problems faced in trying to get any reliable and useful single answer to the question being posed. As far as we can tell from Sextus’ chosen response to this counter-argument, there is no sign of the idea that it is immediately and obviously wrong-headed to try to understand what it is like to experience gout by asking a gouty person to describe it to you; rather, it just turns out that it is terribly difficult to get any single clear and reliable answer to the question: What is it like to suffer from gout?

It is telling that Sextus puts the aim of the supposed inquiry as the grasp of “what pain is like *by nature*” (*ποιός τις ὑπάρχει τὴν φύσιν*) since this casts the inquiry into the nature of pain in just the same form as many other imagined—and equally unsuccessful—inquiries throughout Sextus’ work. Usually, the required assumption is that in order for us to be able confidently to assert that something is F “by nature” it is necessary for it always to appear F, to appear F to all observers, to be unvaryingly F, and so on.<sup>19</sup> Given the success of the skeptic’s modes in generating *διαφωνία*

<sup>18</sup> See Celsus *De medicina* IV 31 and Ps. Galen *Def. med.* 292 (Kuhn vol. 19 427,6ff.): ποδάγρα ἐστὶ πάθος περὶ τοῖς ποσὶ γιγνόμενον πόνον ἐπιφέρειν πασχόντων τῶν νεύρων οἷς μὲν μετὰ πυρώσεως οἷς δὲ μετὰ ψύξεως.

<sup>19</sup> See, for example, *PH I* 93, 140 for the assertion that it is not possible to be sure about what some thing is “by nature” because of some variation in how it appears. Bett (1997),



this requirement is extremely hard to satisfy. The point to notice here, in that case, is that Sextus' imagined inquiry into what the pain of gout is "by nature" is no different in form from many other of his inquiries and it seems not to matter in the slightest that the item whose nature is being sought is a particular kind of pain.

#### IV

The second counter-argument which Sextus considers is similar to the first in so far as it too imagines an indirect method of acquiring knowledge of pain. This method might appeal to those who are prepared to allow god to experience pleasure but not pain since perhaps in that case god can be said indirectly to know pain through directly knowing pleasure. The treatment of this suggestion is extremely brief but it may still add something to the general picture outlined so far. Sextus rejects the idea that knowledge of pain may be acquired through experience of pleasure plus, presumably, some unspecified kind of act of imaginative contrast because he asserts once again that such a grasp of *pleasure* is impossible without direct experience of pain (πρῶτον μὲν γὰρ ἔστιν ἀμήχανον μὴ πειραθέντα πόνου νόησιν ἠδονῆς λαβεῖν). A necessary condition, in other words, of the possession of knowledge of pleasure is the experience of pain. This blocks the objection by asserting that in order to possess the knowledge of pleasure which the opponent thinks will allow someone to know what pain is like by nature it is already necessary to have experienced pain directly, precisely what the opponent is attempting to avoid. It is not clear, we should notice, whether Sextus also thinks that it is true that a necessary condition of the possession of knowledge of pain is the experience of pleasure.

Unfortunately, Sextus' grounds for asserting that the experience of pain is necessary for knowledge of pleasure are not particularly strong. At *AM IX* 165 he asserts that pleasure itself consists in the removal of all things painful (κατὰ γὰρ τὴν παντὸς τοῦ ἀλγύνοντος ὑπεξαίρεσιν συνίστασθαι πέφυκεν). As is depressingly common in many ancient discussions of pleasure and pain, it remains ambiguous whether "removal"

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xiv–xvi, discusses what he calls the "Universality Requirement" in the context of *AM XI*'s discussion of whether anything is good, bad, or indifferent by nature. See *AM XI* 69–78 and Bett's commentary *ad loc.*

(ὑπεξαίρεσις) refers here to the process of removing a pain or the endpoint of a pain-free state. If the former, then Sextus does indeed appear to have a telling point.

If Sextus intends his premise about pleasure being the “removal” of all pain to mean that pleasure is simply the state of the absence of pain—what results when all pain has been removed—then it is not clear why we should agree that someone must have experienced pain in order to experience pleasure. Some philosophers who might be attracted to Sextus’ account of the nature of pleasure’s relationship to pain are the Epicureans since they, notoriously, did define pleasure as the absence of pain. Indeed, Sextus seems consciously to be echoing Epicurus’ *Kyria Doxa* 3 (which begins: ὄρος τοῦ μεγέθους τῶν ἡδονῶν ἢ παντός τοῦ ἀλγοῦντος ὑπεξαίρεσις). That Sextus is well aware that this is an Epicurean claim is confirmed by a passage in *AM I* in which Sextus is discussing the accusation that the Epicureans stole the central planks of their philosophical view from earlier poets. At *AM I* 273 it is this very claim that the removal of all pain is the limit of pleasures which is thought by some, says Sextus, to have been stolen from Homer. The source text offered is *Iliad* 1.469, and Sextus quite rightly dismisses the accusation at *AM I* 283 by pointing out that the Homeric line is in no way equivalent to the strong Epicurean claim.<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, it is undeniable in that case that Sextus is relying in *AM IX* for this part of his answer to the objector on what he takes to be an Epicurean notion about the relationship between pleasure and pain. If we want to hold on to the thought that the primary opponent in this theological section is a Stoic then it is hard to imagine such an opponent would feel any great sympathy with this premise. And even the view that the range of opponents for this section is rather wider would have difficulty justifying this particular move; anyone inclined to disagree with this analysis of the relationship between pleasure and pain will feel that the present objection to Sextus’ overall argument has not been properly dismissed.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>20</sup> For a good discussion of this passage and on the general accusations of plagiarism against the Epicureans see Blank (1998), *ad loc.*

<sup>21</sup> Long (2006), 117, notes that it is unlikely that even a wider range of opponents would include the Epicureans. If Sextus is drawing on Academic arguments, Long thinks it very unlikely that Carneades wasted much time on the Epicureans. Long also notes that the Epicureans and skeptics would “constitute something of an unholy alliance” from the Stoic perspective.

Although Sextus is in no way prevented from reaching for such premises from any dogmatic philosophical school, the deployment of this Epicurean premise here certainly appears dialectically weak. One possibility is that the stretch of Sextus' text which deals with this counterargument may have been taken directly from an Epicurean source as a supplement to the Academic-inspired general thrust of this section. Certainly, the Epicureans were themselves involved in critical engagement with other rival theologies including the Stoics (see Velleius in Cicero *ND* I 18–56, especially 20–24 and 36–41) and it is not inconceivable that Sextus has adopted something of a 'cut-and-paste' approach on this occasion; while such a tactic will not show immediately that, say, the Stoics are fatally flawed in their attempt to respond, it still adds to the overall picture of a large-scale *διαφωνία* on these questions between the dogmatic schools.<sup>22</sup> At this point of Sextus' text, we might say, we find ourselves not so much engaged in the destructive dialectical inquiry into the coherence of a particular school's preferred set of theses; rather, we find ourselves enmired in the inconclusive disagreements and clashes of doctrine between the different dogmatic schools. The upshot appears to be that, even if in some last desperate move the Stoic were to try to defend himself by borrowing a thought from his bitter rivals the Epicureans, he will still have to concede defeat.

Sextus' argument remains sketchy nevertheless, even granted the unlikely truth of this Epicurean denial of an intermediate state between pleasure and pain. The Epicurean gods, for instance, live a constant pain-free life and thereby are always in a state of pleasure. They do so, apparently, without ever experiencing pain and do not have to experience pain in order to live a pleasure-filled life. Sextus can be fairly relaxed about this, however, since his claim is not that god cannot experience pleasure but that he cannot have the virtue which requires knowledge of what it is like to experience pain.

It is perhaps a shame that the textual evidence, particularly from *AM* I, overwhelmingly favors the Epicurean interpretation of Sextus' premise here. If we were able to offer an alternative interpretation of Sextus' premise according to which it asserts that pleasure can be experienced

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<sup>22</sup> Long (2006), 117: "Sextus uses an Epicurean analysis of pleasure as the absence of pain in one of his many arguments which turn the Stoic concept of virtue against their concept of god (*AM* IX 165–166)." At 117 n. 8 Long notes similarities between Sextus' expression here and Epicurean terms in *KD* 3 and Plutarch, *Non posse* 1092D.

only in the process of a pain or lack being removed (e.g. in the process of satisfying a painful hunger), then Sextus' argument would look rather more promising. Above all, it would rely on a more generally acceptable premise than the otherwise rather eccentric Epicurean view. This would allow the argument to be pertinent to a much wider range of potential opponents and it would indeed follow, on such a view of the relationship between pleasure and pain that god could not experience pleasure without also experiencing pain. We should recognise also that, interpreted in this manner, Sextus bypasses a further potential obstacle to the argument as it does appear in the text. We can ask whether it is impossible to recognise *that* one is experiencing pleasure (in the sense: to recognise that what one is experiencing *is pleasure*) without also having experienced pain. Even if it is impossible, this does not require that in order to experience pleasure (recognised as such or not) it is necessary to have experienced pain. In other words, a god may experience only pleasure without having experienced pain. There is a further question whether god can recognise that what he is experiencing is pleasure without also having experienced pain, but Sextus does not give this question any direct consideration. His argument, however, would on this interpretation cut through all such complications by directly asserting that what pleasure is in the removal of pain and, if "removal" here is the process of removal, then this settles the question straight away: any experience of pleasure will, given what pleasure is, also involve the experience of pain. (Indeed, this same point turned the other way round is a common anti-hedonist argument; for example, Socrates taunts Callicles with the thought that on his view of pleasure as a process of desire-satisfaction every pleasure will necessarily be accompanied by pain.)<sup>23</sup>

## V

We can now consider a more general philosophical question. The question whether and for what reasons Sextus thinks that to have knowledge of pain it is necessary to experience pain first-hand, so to speak, may turn out also to be relevant to a long-standing question about the scope of ancient skepticism and, more generally still, about the overall ancient treatment of what we might call subjectivity. On one influential

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<sup>23</sup> See Plato *Gorg.* 496c–497a.

interpretation of ancient skepticism, ancient skeptics are unlike their post-Cartesian counterparts in that they do not think that one's own bodily states and affections are the sort of things which can be subjected to the same procedure of doubt which is applied to questions about the world outside one's body.<sup>24</sup> An alternative view sees a less radical distinction between Sextan and, for example, Cartesian approaches to questions of knowledge and certainty, especially when those questions are applied to knowledge of one's own mental states.<sup>25</sup> A rough and ready account of 'subjectivity' holds that if there is such a thing as a subjective state then (i) there is a what-it-is-like to be in a given subjective state and (ii) a subjective state is something to which a given subject has a privileged mode of access, which might involve ideas such as (iia) the subject has incorrigible access to his subjective states and (iib) the subjective state is private to the subject concerned.<sup>26</sup>

We can ask two related questions about this passage in Sextus which might orient our inquiry in the right direction. First, is Sextus working with the notion that pain is what we might call a 'subjective state'? That is, does he consider pain to be a state such that there is 'something it is like to be in pain'? And does he offer any signs of thinking that a subject has some kind of privileged access to his or her own such subjective states? Second, does what Sextus says here suggest that there can be a reasonable question whether we can or indeed do have knowledge of such states?

The question of Sextus' attitude to pain would appear to be a good place to look for useful evidence in trying to answer these questions since he is certainly considering questions about the possibility of acquiring knowledge of pain in various ways. Furthermore, pain would seem to count as a particularly good example of a 'subjective state'. Pain, as we have already noted, is on at least one commonly-held view of its nature thought to have two characteristics often thought to belong to a 'subjective state', namely that it is (i) private and (ii) grasped only via some kind of introspection.<sup>27</sup> I certainly do not mean to claim that

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<sup>24</sup> See esp. Burnyeat (1982), and in particular: 39–43.

<sup>25</sup> For a recent account of the debate and an argument against seeing a radical break between ancient and early-modern approaches see Fine (2003).

<sup>26</sup> This account of 'subjectivity' is deliberately rough and ready since there is some considerable disagreement over how subjectivity ought to be characterized. Here I borrow the general approach of Fine (2003), 193–194.

<sup>27</sup> For a helpful guide to recent thinking see Aydede (2006b). For another helpful

there is anything like a universal agreement about the nature of pain among modern philosophers, but only that this notion of pain as a subjective state is one of the popular conceptions and can be supported by some strong intuitions. Indeed, these assumptions are precisely what generate some rather difficult modern problems in dealing with pain since they make it rather difficult to see what relationship pain in this sense can have with physical damage and to account for the plausible assumption that pain is physically localised in distinct parts of the body. For our purposes, however, we can leave these difficulties aside for the moment; it will be enough if it is sufficiently agreed that pain would be an interesting test case for Sextus' treatment of so-called subjective states and, in particular, whether and how he is at all concerned about the question of our knowledge of them.

Sextus does seem to be working in this passage with the notion that pain is in some sense private. At least, as we have seen, he claims more than once that knowledge of pain can be acquired only by experiencing it first-hand. But this alone need not mean that he holds anything like a modern notion of pain as a private and subjective state, since there are various ways in which the privacy of pain might be explained or understood. In fact, the comment about the impossibility of learning about pain through interviewing gout sufferers would seem to fall perfectly in line with the view that, from the point of view of this argument, pain is inaccessible to anyone who is not suffering not because it is somehow an ontologically special mental state, but rather because it depends on a particular internal state of the sufferer which is inaccessible to all bar the sufferer himself. Perhaps the most telling point of all is this: Sextus is evidently prepared to entertain the proposal of simply asking people to describe their feelings as a possible method of acquiring knowledge of pain. That he should do so, even for the slightest moment and even if it is simply for the sake of argument, seems to me to point to an important difference between his conception of the nature of pain and the kinds of account of pain more prevalent in modern discussions.

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survey and taxonomy of recent approaches see Hardcastle (1999), 93–95. She takes a generally critical view of philosophical accounts (93): “In some sense, it does not matter which side wins in the end, because my conclusion would be the same either way: philosophers (and others) have misunderstood the fundamental complexity of pain processing and, as a result, often say or write silly things about pain.”

Imagine that Sextus, or one of his sources, held the notion that pain in general and kinds of pain in particular are private in an interesting and special, perhaps a 'strong,' way.<sup>28</sup> In that case, in reply to the suggestion that someone who has never experienced the pain of gout (let alone someone such as god who has never experienced pain at all) might acquire knowledge of what the pain of gout is like simply by talking to people who have felt gout, we could easily imagine the following sort of response. It would be quite proper, on the basis of a strong notion of the privacy of pain, to reply simply that of course it is impossible to acquire knowledge of the pain of gout in the proposed indirect fashion. This is because pain is the sort of thing that is private in a strong way. Person X's pain is not hidden from Person Y in the way that the interior of Person X's private apartment is hidden from Person Y. Rather, pain is private in the sense that it is an essentially first-personal subjective experience. Since that is the kind of thing pain is, you cannot know what it is like to feel the pain of gout without yourself feeling gout, whether or not people generally describe their experiences in a consistent fashion.<sup>29</sup> Such a response can rely on the idea that pain has a certain irreducible what-it-is-like-ness (or *quale*) which cannot be accessed in any way other than through first-personal experience.<sup>30</sup> Nothing in Sextus' argument come even close to saying such a thing.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>28</sup> For an account of what this 'strong' sense of privacy might be see Tsouna (1998b), 249.

<sup>29</sup> Compare Locke (1964) and Taylor (1970). For much of the modern discussion of these issues, the impetus has been the various questions raised about the privacy of pain in Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*, § 246–315. Compare Kripke (1982), 119–145, on Wittgenstein's treatment of pain in the context of "the problem of other minds".

<sup>30</sup> This is the line of reasoning that leads some philosophers to argue that in order to save god's omniscience we must find some way of allowing him this kind of direct first-personal experiential knowledge. See above p. 51.

<sup>31</sup> Although it is tempting to generalise, not all modern approaches share that particular 'strong' notion of the private nature of pain. But even those that do not could nevertheless give their own account of why it is that the pain of gout cannot be known indirectly. Consider, for example, Ryle (1949), 199 (see also 196–200), on why it is that a cobbler cannot feel pain of the shoe pinching Ryle: "My tweak is not hidden from the cobbler because it is inside me, either as being literally inside my skin, or as being, metaphorically, in a place to which he has no access. On the contrary, it cannot be described, as needles can, as being either internal or external to a common object like myself, nor as being hidden or unhidden." For Ryle, the mistake is to think that such an experience is to be located somewhere, literally or metaphorically, internal or external, and that this is why we call it private. My pains are private only in the 'philosophically unexciting' sense that they are *my* pains rather than yours. That Ryle should be reacting against what might be thought of as a 'Cartesian' notion of privacy is of course not surprising given his general aim here of undermining Cartesian assumptions about the mental.

Let me be clear: I am not particularly interested in what seems to me to be the unsurprising result that in the most general terms Sextus does not think about pain as Wittgenstein, Descartes, or Ryle did, nor that he does not appear to have a notion of qualia such as appears in Frank Jackson's thought-experiment about Mary the scientist. There are evidently any number of important aspects of the way in which these discussions tackle the topic which are quite alien to Sextus' concerns. For example, often these modern accounts tend to approach the question by wondering about the possibility and procedure of moving from a personal and first-personal experience of pain to a confident or meaningful ascription of similar experience to others. In one way or another this is made problematic if pain is in a relevant sense 'private'.<sup>32</sup> Sextus, on the other hand, is interested in whether it is possible to acquire a conception of pain without the first-personal experience of pain. He is not in the least bit worried here about whether in fact gout-sufferers do experience pain. Instead, he assumes that they do and wonders how we might be able to come to know what they are experiencing.

Further, although not all modern discussions of pain are in agreement over the nature of its privacy, nevertheless, in one way or another, it is tempting to think that the reason why it is not possible to come to know how someone else is feeling when they feel pain is intimately connected with pain's being a certain kind of thing. Pain is perhaps an irreducibly first-personal kind of experience or else it is perhaps something which is not properly construed as an object of perception at all, whether internal and private or external and public. In the most general terms, we might say that such accounts of the privacy of pain, however they might differ from one another, base this privacy on some account of what pain is—whether they take it to be a sensation, a quale, a manner of behaving, or something else—and on some kind of notion of what it is to be an experiencing subject; they start by asking how we ought to make sense of the appearance each of us has of having an inner conscious life. The contrast between this *general* approach and what we find in Sextus is what I take to be important and worth greater emphasis.

Sextus' argument rules out the indirect acquisition of knowledge of pain on what in comparison might appear to be rather mundane grounds. Such acquisition is impossible because the reports of the peculiar nature of gout which we would receive from people who have directly experi-

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<sup>32</sup> See e.g. Malcolm (1958), 974–976.



enced this pain are such that no single, clear, and consistent authoritative picture will emerge. In a way, we might still say that it is because the gout is internal or, if we like, private to the gout-sufferer that no one else can access it in such a way as to be able to acquire knowledge of it. An external observer, Person Y, might see the external symptoms of Person X's gout, notice Person X's groans and the like and might ask X to tell him what he feels. But Y cannot in this way perceive or come to know the pain of gout. Sextus' argument does, after all, turn on the claim that in a case such as this we are reliant on the reports of those people to whom the pain of gout is evident, namely the sufferers themselves. Yet crucially, Sextus' treatment of this possibility suggests that he is not working with an idea that pain is private in a way which would render such a form of inquiry immediately wrong-headed. Instead the problem faced on this occasion is a very familiar and general one which appears time and again in his skeptical inquiries: it is a problem concerned primarily with disagreement and the apparently irresolvable nature of the conflicting appearances or reports. In this respect, the privacy in question is not a special form of privacy required by the simple nature of pain itself. The pain of gout plays a role in this argument much like other supposed non-evident (ἀδηλα) things, beliefs about which are subject to all the familiar problems of the skeptical modes.<sup>33</sup>

In terms of Sextus' account at *AM* VIII 145–147 of the senses in which something might be non-evident, we can perhaps wonder whether someone else's pain is “naturally” (φύσει) and permanently non-evident like the “intelligible pores” supposed by some doctors or the infinite extracosmic void supposed by the Stoics or else “absolutely” (καθάπαξ) non-evident such as whether the number of stars or grains of sand in

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<sup>33</sup> On questions of the privacy of the mental in ancient philosophy, perhaps the best evidence for an ancient acceptance of such a view comes from the Cyrenaic school. See, for example, the report at *AM* VII 196–197. For full discussion see Tsouna (1998b) who is cautious about making too close an assimilation between ancient and modern views. The privacy and incorrigibility in question in the ancient accounts seems to be related to the fact that the states in question are internal to the subject rather than simply to the fact that these are specifically mental states. (See e.g. her comment at 251: “[I]t is not the case that our neighbor's *pathē* are private to him if and only if they are mental. They are private because they are his experiences rather than ours, because they occur in him rather than us, and because ‘no *pathos* is common to us all.’”) Even in the case of the Cyrenaics, Tsouna concludes that they “operated with a much weaker notion of privacy than modern theories of language and meaning” (1998b, 252; her n. 13 refers specifically to the privacy of pain).

Libya is odd or even. But in the case of neither of these categories is the non-evidence based on the object in question having some special ontological status.

## VI

Sextus' theological argument is powerful and compelling if we accept the premise, which he thinks must be endorsed by his dogmatic interlocutor, that wisdom requires a particular kind of knowledge of what pain is like and we further agree that this knowledge can be acquired only via the experience of pain. I hope to have shown that the argument is worth exploring for at least two reasons. For those considering Sextus' methods, it is interesting because in the course of the argument Sextus seems to reach for a variety of different dogmatic positions, now relying on Stoic principles to undermine general Stoic conceptions of god, now relying on Epicurean premises to undermine possible Stoic replies. The dogmatists, in short, are engaged in a tangled and irresolvable set of disagreements over theology while all agreeing, as Sextus reminds us in the opening to this section, that getting theology right is an essential part of any positive philosophical position (*AM IX 13*). The more Sextus can emphasise the dogmatic *diaphōnia* and the apparent impossibility of reaching any satisfactory resolution of their difficulties, the less persuasive the overall project of dogmatic natural philosophy will appear.

For those considering the assessment found in this stretch of *AM* of the nature of mental states themselves, this argument is interesting because Sextus shows no sign whatsoever of sharing the notion of pain as by nature something essentially and strongly private and first-personal. Nor does he show any sign of thinking that he could ascribe such a view to his dogmatic opponents, despite the fact that it could aid his case considerably. On the other hand, he is prepared for the sake of argument to consider a means of acquiring a knowledge of what a particular kind of pain is like indirectly and in a third-personal fashion, even though he ends by characteristically declaring that this suggested means of indirect acquisition is not particularly plausible. Knowledge of pain is therefore best—and perhaps only—acquired through first-hand experience. It is still likely, for all this argument shows, that Sextus does not entertain the possibility that one might, once experiencing the pain of gout, doubt whether in fact one's body is damaged or causing pain. In that sense, perhaps Burnyeat, for example, is still right to claim that for

the Pyrrhonist skeptic and unlike the Cartesian skeptic, “one’s own body has not yet become for philosophy a part of the external world” (1982, 42–43).

Nevertheless, Sextus does not, at least for the purposes of this argument, appear to consider the view that one’s own states like the experience of the pain of gout are not ‘knowledge-apt’. From the point of view of this argument, at least, it seems that there is indeed a genuine notion entertained in this passage that it is possible to have *knowledge* of one’s own pain, for example of what it is like to feel the pain of gout. That knowledge may well be acquired only once one does experience the pain of gout and it may well be that feeling the pain of gout is both a necessary and sufficient condition of knowing what the pain of gout is “by nature”. Once again, this may be a notion borrowed or plausibly ascribed to the particular dogmatists under current scrutiny and we should therefore be wary about saying that it is something that Sextus himself shares. But, even so, it is important to remark that on this occasion Sextus seems prepared to mount an argument about god based on the hypothesis that the special quality of the pain of gout is something that someone may or may not know.

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