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Creating a Mind Fit for Truth:
The Role of Expertise in the Stoic Account of the Kataleptic Impression

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Abstract:

This paper offers a new defense of the externalist interpretation of the kataleptic impression. My strategy is to situate the kataleptic impression within the larger context of the Stoic account of expertise. I argue that, given mastery in recognizing the limitations of her own state of mind, the subject can restrict her assent to kataleptic impressions, even if they are phenomenologically indistinguishable from those which are not kataleptic.

1. Introduction

According to the ancient Stoics, human beings come equipped with a secure means to grasp facts about the world. By forming a kataleptic impression (*φαντασία καταληπτική*), and then giving our assent to it, we are assured to get things right.¹ Whatever the kataleptic impression says about the world reflects the way it actually is, and in accepting such an impression we thereby acquire knowledge (*κατάληψις*).² But which feature of an impression makes it kataleptic? In experiencing a kataleptic impression, is the subject necessarily aware of this characteristic feature? If not, how could the kataleptic impression serve as an infallible yet accessible guide to the world at large, as the Stoics claim?

We can immediately rule out one possible account of what makes an impression kataleptic: the impression's truth. After all, a hallucinating subject may form an impression in his deranged condition which happens to coincide with the way the world is. But the Stoics deny that such an impression, once accepted, brings about knowledge (SE M vii 247). What further feature, then, must a true impression possess in order for the Stoics to say that it is kataleptic?

According to the internalist interpretation, the Stoics hold that all and only kataleptic impressions possess a sensory character that is maximally clear and detailed. Commentators offering this reconstruction argue that the Stoics define the kataleptic impression so as to indicate that an impression is kataleptic if and only if it sensorily depicts its object with a high degree of exactitude and without any distortion such as blurriness or lack of focus.³ Any

¹ The translation of *καταληπτική* is a vexed issue. I have no objection to 'cognitive', the most popular rendering. However, I opt for the transliteration 'kataleptic' in order to avoid confusion between this technical term in Stoic epistemology and the more general use of 'cognitive' which appears elsewhere in my discussion. In transliterating, I follow Hankinson 2003, 60n1; Striker 1996; and Brittain 2014.

² In translating *κατάληψις* by 'knowledge', I follow Perin 2005, 383n1. For general discussion of the similarities between *κατάληψις* and contemporary views of knowledge, see Nawar 2014, 1n1; Annas 1990, 187; and Long and Sedley 1987, 157. Of course, the Stoics recognize a cognitive grasp yet more secure and comprehensive than *κατάληψις*, which they call *ἐπιστήμη* ('understanding') and credit exclusively to the Sage. However, my focus here is on *κατάληψις*, an achievement open to the Sage and non-Sage alike (Sextus Empiricus [= SE] M vii 152), and so I set aside any further discussion of *ἐπιστήμη*.

³ See Perin 2005, 398-399, and Reed 2002, 167-177. Sedley 2002, 136-137, argues that this is the view of Zeno but not of later Stoics such as Chrysippus. Annas 1990, 194-202, argues that the early Stoic view was indeterminate between an internalist and externalist position. See also Frede 1999, 308-313, which seems

impression that is not kataleptic will display some phenomenological tarnish.⁴ Thus, a true but non-kataleptic impression would be one which represents a true state of affairs indistinctly. Conversely, if an impression depicts its object with the requisite clarity and precision, it is thereby kataleptic. On this view, an impression wears its katalepticity 'on its sleeve', so to speak, according to whether it displays rich, non-defective qualitative phenomenology. The internalist can therefore provide a straightforward answer to whether the subject of a kataleptic impression recognizes its distinctive feature. For the internalist, every impression that is kataleptic is self-evidently so, since it presents its object with a unique level of perspicuity and clarity.

However, if the internalist is right, then the Stoics face the difficulty of accounting for false impressions whose phenomenology is equally sharp and detailed as those which are putatively kataleptic. Consider the impressions formed in dreams and hallucinations, which arguably display phenomenology just as rich as impressions formed in normal circumstances, but fail to track the way the world really is.⁵ If internalism is correct, the only reply the Stoics can make here is simply to deny the possibility of such phenomenologically untarnished, non-kataleptic impressions. On this view, the Stoics must take on the rather strong claim that no non-kataleptic impression possesses the degree of phenomenological clarity and detail which characterizes kataleptic impressions.

An alternative approach does not saddle the Stoics with this rather strong claim. According to the externalist interpretation, the Stoic definition of the kataleptic impression

to be committed to some form of internalism, in a departure from his 1983. Nawar 2014 has proposed what he calls a 'hybrid' view, combining elements of externalism and internalism, but given his commitment to the claim that all and only kataleptic impressions are clear, we can group his view as a version of internalism, as I have characterized the position here.

⁴ As I will use the terms, the 'phenomenology' or 'sensory character' of an impression includes both what we might call its clarity or sharpness (whether the impression sensorily depicts its object as out of focus or otherwise distorted) as well as what we might call its representational detail (the perceptible features of the object which are sensorily depicted in the impression). In embracing this multivalent usage of 'phenomenology' or 'sensory character', I follow Sedley 2002, 147-148; Brittain 2014, 339; Brennan 2003, 261n8 (see his discussion of 'sensory content'); Frede 1983, 155; and Frede 1986, 104-107. However, I will at times discuss phenomenological clarity and detail separately from each other.

⁵ Such cases seem to be common coin in classical and Hellenistic epistemological debate: already in Plato we find the possibility of phenomenologically unblemished, but false, sensory experiences (*Theaetetus* 157e-158e). For discussion of the influence of this dialogue on Zeno's epistemology, see Long 2002.

serves to distinguish these impressions solely by the causal process by which they are formed.⁶ On this view, a kataleptic impression differs from one which is not kataleptic simply by having the right causal connection with the state of affairs it represents.

In locating the mark of the kataleptic impression in its causal history, externalists can easily explain why the impression formed by a hallucinating subject is not kataleptic: even if it happens to be true, the hallucinatory impression arises from the deranged condition of the subject's mind rather than an actual encounter with the outside world. But this result seems to come at the cost of an account of how a subject could detect that he has formed a kataleptic impression. Some of the impressions he receives will be kataleptic, others will not, but there is no qualitative feature which, on the externalist interpretation, makes the kataleptic impressions stand out from those which are not. The worry, then, is that, if the externalist is correct, the kataleptic impression cannot serve as a useful criterion of truth.⁷

In what follows, I attempt to defend the externalist interpretation against this charge. My strategy will be to contextualize the doctrine of the kataleptic impression within a larger theme of Stoic epistemology, namely, the role of *expertise* in enhancing the operation of our perceptual apparatus, including the way we form impressions and give assent to them. Attending to these further aspects of Stoic theory provides additional resources to defend externalism, and thereby to avoid saddling the Stoics with the rather strong internalist claim that, as a general matter admitting of no exceptions, if an impression is not kataleptic, then it *must* possess some phenomenological flaw.⁸

According to my proposal, one domain in which a subject can become expert is in the circumstances which conduce to the creation of kataleptic impressions. What characterizes the

⁶ Striker 1990, 152, and Barnes 1990, 131-137, following Frede 1983, 169: 'it seems that the differentiating mark of cognitive impressions is a causal feature rather than a phenomenological character to be detected by introspection'.

⁷ Annas 1990, 195-196, Reed 2002, 156-157, Hankinson 2003, 66, and Perin 2005, 392, each level a version of this objection.

⁸ For statements of this internalist claim, see Frede 1999, 308-313, Nawar 2014, 16-20, and also Brittain 2014, 339: 'cataleptic impressions have maximal perceptual or representational detail... cataleptic impressions can't be false, because their distinctive perceptual or representational detail only occurs under the appropriate causal conditions'. Below I will show that, on the contrary, the Stoic view acknowledges that abnormal causal conditions give rise to non-kataleptic impressions whose phenomenology is equally clear and detailed as that of a kataleptic impression.

ideal epistemic agent, on the Stoic view, or at least as I interpret it, is her disposition to take such circumstances into account before giving her assent to an impression. Of course, it is easy to grasp that one's visual impressions are less trustworthy while the lights are off. But other circumstances bearing on the katalepticity of one's impression – such as the state of one's own mind, whether it has been developed enough to identify the sense-object, or whether it is suffering from a temporary derangement – are more difficult to monitor. Nevertheless, given mastery of the circumstances which conduce to forming kataleptic impressions, the ideal subject has available an effective means by which she can limit her assent to kataleptic impressions, even when they are phenomenologically indistinguishable from those that are non-kataleptic.⁹

Now, I will not argue that the phenomenology of an impression is *never* an accurate guide to its katalepticity. In some cases, the internalist is correct that an impression wears its katalepticity 'on its sleeve'. However, as I will explain, this is because the way in which a kataleptic impression is created – including both the perceiver's relationship to the sense-object and, crucially, the condition of her mind – *guarantees* that its phenomenology will be clear and detailed.¹⁰ Consequently, if an impression lacks this high-quality sensory character, then it also suffers from a deviant causal history and will be non-kataleptic. But I will also show that the Stoics envision cases in which a non-kataleptic impression displays *no* defect in its sensory character: the deviant causal history by which these non-kataleptic impressions arise does *not* register in their phenomenology. In the course of defending this interpretation, I will argue that it both makes good sense of the tenor of the Academic objections leveled against the doctrine of the kataleptic impression, and also affords a more nuanced understanding of the dialectical maneuvers available to the Stoics in the debate with their skeptical interlocutors.

⁹ One of my aims in developing this proposal will be to address the criticism of the externalist view articulated by Perin 2005, 392-393, who questions whether 'tracking the conditions that are conducive to truth and error in the formation of belief' could guarantee that the subject avoids all cases of error.

¹⁰ Nawar 2014, 19-20, adopts a similar strategy of explaining the kataleptic impression's phenomenological character by adverting to its causal history. However, his view does not sufficiently appreciate the role of the perceiver's *mind* in generating an impression -- a recurring theme of my treatment -- and so operates with a different conception of what an impression's causal history consists in, resulting in a different overall interpretation. Like Frede 1999, 308-313, and Brittain 2014, 339, Nawar 2014, 6-11 and 16-20, endorses the claim I dispute here, that kataleptic impressions possess unique phenomenology, a level of clarity and detail in their sensory character not found in *any* non-kataleptic impression.

2. Survey of Texts and Summary of My Interpretation

We should begin by taking stock of the main textual evidence shedding light on the Stoic theory of the kataleptic impression. Our ancient sources report that the school eventually settled on a canonical definition according to which an impression is kataleptic only if it meets the following three conditions.¹¹

- (i) ἀπὸ ὑπάρχοντος (the impression 'comes from what obtains')
- (i) καὶ κατ' αὐτὸ τὸ ὑπάρχον ἐναπομεμαγμένη καὶ ἐναπεςφραγισμένη ('and has been molded and stamped on the basis of the very thing that obtains')
- (ii) ὅποια οὐκ ἂν γένοιτο ἀπὸ μὴ ὑπάρχοντος ('of such a sort that it could not have come from what does not obtain').¹²

Presumably, these three conditions identify some feature or features shared by all and only kataleptic impressions, in virtue of which these impressions serve as criteria of truth (DL vii 54; Cicero *Acad.* i 41). An impression which succeeds in meeting all three clauses will possess the mark (*nota*) of being kataleptic (Cicero *Acad.* ii 33), differing from non-kataleptic impressions like a horned snake differs from other serpents (SE M vii 252).

As I read it, this definition locates the distinctive mark of the kataleptic impression solely in its causal history. On this interpretation – a form of *externalism* – kataleptic impressions are guaranteed to have true content because they are defined in terms of the conditions which create them. So for the impression that *p* to count as kataleptic, it not only has to be caused by *p* being true in the external world ('comes from what obtains'), but also to be caused in a way that is *peculiar* to *p* being true ('and has been molded and stamped on the basis of the very thing that

¹¹ Both Diogenes Laertius (= DL) vii 46 and SE M xi 183 each report a shorter definition than the one presented below, which includes clauses (i) and (ii) (or a close paraphrase of them) but not clause (iii). Moreover, there is evidence that clause (iii) was added only after Arcesilaus's initial skeptical assault on Zeno's doctrine, as a way of responding to his criticism (SE M vii 252; Cicero *Acad.* ii 77). It is not immediately clear, however, whether the Stoics, in adding this third clause, intend only to clarify the original definition, or whether they rather mean to amplify it by positing a feature distinct from those identified in the first two clauses. Here I agree with Frede 1983, 163-166, and Frede 1999, 308, that the third condition clarifies a feature already specified by the first two clauses and does not -- as Sedley 2002, 148-149, and Annas 1990, 195, claim -- introduce a new, distinct feature.

¹² My translation of SE M vii 248; see the main text for defense and elaboration. Cf. also SE M vii 402; SE PH ii 4; DL vii 50; and Cicero *Acad.* ii 77.

obtains'), thereby possessing a unbroken causal connection with its object, which any false impression would lack ('of such a sort that it could not have come from what does not obtain').

Clause (i), then, serves to rule out cases in which a subject forms the impression that p on the basis of a state of affairs where p is false. So for example, if I were to form the impression that there is an elephant present, although what is really there is not an elephant but instead a life-like elephant-cyborg, my impression would fail to be kataleptic, on the grounds that it fails to be formed on the basis of a true state of affairs, i.e., that in which a cyborg is present.¹³

Clause (ii) excludes cases in which an impression meets clause (i), and so represents a true state of affairs, but also originates in circumstances other than this particular state of affairs. Clause (ii) thereby imposes further constraints on the causal process by which a kataleptic impression comes about. Consider the absent-minded graduate student, who consults the Saturday train schedule and decides to catch the 12:15. Unbeknownst to him, however, it is actually Friday, when the train is scheduled to arrive not at 12:15 but 11:45. Moreover, given budget cuts by the tightfisted governor, infrastructure is crumbling, and so the Friday 11:45 arrives half-an-hour late. In this case, then, the graduate student's impression – with the content, 'if I arrive at the train station at 12:10, I will catch my train' – turns out to be true, but the causal process by which it came about is clearly defective. Two mistakes – one by the graduate student, another by the conductor (or perhaps the governor) – coincidentally cancel each other out (cf. Frede 1999, 304). Because such impressions only happen to be true, but are not guaranteed by their causal history to have this status, they cannot play the criterial role which

¹³ Thus I adopt the veridical reading of clause (i), along with Frede 1983, 164-165, Frede 1999, 303-304, and Brittain 2006, xx, rather than a weaker existential reading on which the phrase 'coming from what obtains' requires merely that the kataleptic impression be caused by an existing external body. In disagreement with both of these readings, Sedley 2002, 146-147, argues that since propositions are incorporeal (SE M x 218), and so causally inert (SE M ix 211, Stobaeus, Ecl. i 138), the requirement that a kataleptic impression ἀπὸ ὑπάρχοντος cannot refer to the impression's causal origins: propositions (the true states of affairs which 'obtain' [ὑπάρχειν]; see Stobaeus, Ecl. i 106 and SE M viii 10) cannot cause anything to come to be, much less an impression. But there is no need to assume that ἀπὸ is used in clause (i) so strictly as to point to the *proximate* causal agent of the kataleptic impression. On my reading of this clause – indebted to Frede 1999, 302-303 – to say that a kataleptic impression ἀπὸ ὑπάρχοντος is not to require that an incorporeal proposition cause the impression to be generated, for this would run afoul of Stoic metaphysics (SE M viii 263). Rather, the kataleptic impression ἀπὸ ὑπάρχοντος in the sense that the proposition which gives the content of the impression truly describes the external body (e.g. cyborg) which proximately causes the kataleptic impression to be generated in the perceiver.

Stoic theory requires of the kataleptic impression. By insisting on an accurate match between the content of a given kataleptic impression and the circumstances in which it is formed – a condition which every false impression will fail (clause (iii)) – this externalist interpretation provides a neat explanation of why all and only these impressions must be true.¹⁴

One complication with this picture is that, in addition to preserving the canonical definition, our ancient sources also describe the kataleptic impression with language pertaining to its sensory character. Thus Sextus Empiricus reports that kataleptic impressions are clear or evident (ἐναργής) and striking (πληκτική) (M vii 257-258), making salient to the perceiver the peculiar qualities (ιδιώματα) of their objects (M vii 251).¹⁵ Given that, paradigmatically, kataleptic impressions represent their objects in a sensory mode, such descriptions would seem to attribute to them a high degree of phenomenological clarity and detail.¹⁶ How, then, can the interpretation sketched above make sense of this aspect of the kataleptic impression?

On my reading, the causal history of a kataleptic impression *explains* why it possesses unblemished phenomenology. I thus endorse the claim that, if an impression is kataleptic, then it will represent its object clearly and in adequate detail, in virtue of the circumstances in which it is formed. However, I do not follow the majority of commentators in endorsing the stronger claim that the unblemished phenomenology found in every kataleptic impression is *unique* to such impressions: on the interpretation I defend here, to possess unblemished phenomenology is necessary but not sufficient for an impression to be kataleptic, since the Stoics acknowledge the possibility of non-kataleptic impressions which possess absolutely no phenomenological

¹⁴ Cf. the insightful remark in Striker 1990, 152, that the definition of the kataleptic impression 'tells us only what sort of impressions can lead to cognition in the first place', by emphasizing the causal process which guarantees the truth of their content. Indeed, there may be additional linguistic evidence for this reading in one attested use of καταλαμβάνω (LSJ ad loc A.V.3), where the verb has the sense of linking or binding two items together: here, the subject of the kataleptic impression and the true state of affairs the impression represents.

¹⁵ Cf. DL vii 46 and Cicero *Acad.* i 42. See Frede 1999, 313 for discussion of parallel usage of ἐναργής and ἐνάργεια in non-philosophical contexts. Note also the Epicurean (SE M vii 211-213) and Cyrenaic (Plutarch, *Against Colotes* 1120e-f) usage of ἐνάργεια to describe a certain class of impressions, which, as noted by Nawar 2014, 10n36, has the effect of predicating phenomenological clarity.

¹⁶ For discussion of the priority of perceptual kataleptic impressions to non-perceptual kataleptic impressions, see Hankinson 2003, 71; Striker 1996, 52; and Perin 2005, 383.

flaw but arise in a way that does not guarantee their truth.¹⁷ But before turning to this point, we need to understand more fully the connection between an impression's causal history and its sensory character. To this end, we should now consider additional evidence regarding the Stoic theory of perceptual experience.

3. The Mind's Role in Generating an Impression

Whenever an adult human undergoes a perceptual experience – that is, whenever she forms a perceptual impression (φαντασία αἰσθητική, DL vii 51) – such an experience involves more than just a passive change in her sense-organs: it also essentially involves the activity of her mind and intellect. More specifically, to form a perceptual impression, on the Stoic view, requires both an alteration of the subject's sense-organ – prompted by her interacting with an external object – as well as her mind's categorization of that object, which consists in the application of concepts (ἔννοιαι).¹⁸ In generating an impression of an external object, the subject's mind selects from its store of concepts, to process and articulate the way that the external object has altered the relevant sense-organ.¹⁹

Most relevant for our purposes here is a feature of this account not sufficiently emphasized by contemporary interpreters. On the Stoic view, the sensory character of an impression will depend on the way that the mind has categorized its object, that is, on the concepts the mind has deployed in generating that impression. More precisely, these concepts

¹⁷ In addition to Brittain 2014, 339, and Nawar 2014, 6-11 and 16-20, mentioned in the notes above, the majority view as described here is also held by Frede 1999, 312-313: 'Cognitive impressions are unambiguously identifiable as impressions of the object they are an impression of, and as representations of the fact which gives rise to them. And the claim is that an impression will be clear and distinct in this way **only if** it has its origin in a fact in such a way that the manner in which it comes about guarantees its truth' (emphasis added).

¹⁸ Interestingly, the Stoics do *not* hold this view regarding the impressions of *non-rational* animals, that is, all non-human animals and young children. See discussion in Inwood 1985, 72-74; Frede 1994, 56-57; and Brittain 2005, 170-171. Only the minds of rational animals are set up so as to use concepts to structure the nature of perceptual experience. Hence, the reconstruction of the Stoic theory of perception offered in this section will only aid our understanding of the kataleptic impressions formed by adult humans.

¹⁹ Here I am in broad agreement with the picture set out in Frede 1983, 153-155; Frede 1994, 57; Brittain 2002, 256-259; Brittain 2006, 14n25; Long and Sedley 1987, 240; and De Harven, forthcoming, 226-228.

will affect both the *clarity* and *detail* of the impression's sensory character. Let's begin with the claim about detail first and then examine clarity.

Consider an expert in classical music, listening to a piece of Beethoven. It seems plausible to think that her *perceptual experience* of the music differs from that of a non-expert, since it detects features of the piece lost on the amateur. The relationship of the chords in the melody and harmony, for example, is available to the expert *through her auditory experience* – as opposed to some further inferential activity – but not to the amateur. Indeed, the Stoics themselves call attention to this phenomenon. In Cicero's *Academica*, we find the character Lucullus marveling at how 'so much detail in song escapes us which practitioners in this study hear clearly: at the first notes of the flute, before we even have an inkling of it, they say that it is the *Antiope* or *Andromache*' (ii 20).²⁰

To explain why the auditory experiences of the expert and amateur differ in detail, the Stoics appeal to the specialized musical concepts which only the expert possesses, and which are called upon to generate the expert's impressions of music. Suppose that the expert and amateur are both listening to the same piece and both using the same high-quality headphones. As soon as the music begins to play, their sense-organs are altered in the same way. However, because of the difference in the two subjects' minds, the impressions they form will differ. The amateur's mind, in generating his auditory impression, will deploy the concepts 'classical music', 'violins', or maybe even 'intense' – layman's concepts which arise without any particular study of music. However, thanks to her prior training, the expert's mind contains specialized concepts over and above these, such as 'four-note motif', 'modulation', and 'harmony', on the basis of which she classifies the changes occurring in the sense-organ and creates an impression that is more detailed than the amateur's.²¹ Specifically, the expert impression discloses further

²⁰ Tr. Brittain 2006, modified. Strictly speaking, Lucullus espouses the views of Antiochus of Ascalon (Cicero *Acad.* ii 10), who, despite his institutional affiliation with the Academy, seeks to show the underlying similarities in the epistemological views of Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics (Cicero *Acad.* i 43). For discussion of his credentials as a Stoic source, see Perin 2005, 387, and Striker 1997, 258.

²¹ Cf. Epictetus, *Diss.* iii 6 8 and Philodemus, *On Music* iv 34 1-8. Note that, on the interpretation presented here, concepts are deployed in the formation of an impression, not after the impression has been formed. Otherwise, the theory could not explain the difference in the *impressions* of the expert and amateur: it is because their impressions of the same music make use of different concepts that the phenomenological

features of the musical piece, such as its motifs, modulations, and harmonies, as a result of being formed under the influence of the specialized concepts that only the expert possesses.

Because the mind relies on its store of concepts to generate every impression (cf. Plutarch *On Moral Virtue* 450d; Galen PHP ii 5.12-13), and because subjects differ in the concepts they have acquired (Aëtius SVF ii 83), the Stoic theory distinguishes between the impressions of experts and non-experts (DL vii 51). As we see in the classical music case, expert impressions make use of specialized concepts peculiar to the domain in question, while those of non-experts do not. Consequently, the sensory character of the former will be more detailed than the latter, in the sense that the expert impression reveals more perceptible features than the non-expert impression about the same sense-object.

One way, then, in which the phenomenology of an impression responds to the concepts which are used in generating it lies in the *detail* with which the impression sensorily depicts its object. Remarkably, however, the Stoics also characterize the *clarity* of an impression's sensory character as a function of the concepts called upon to create it. In other words, whether an impression sensorily depicts its object in a way free from distortions in color, shape, or level of focus – whether it is clear or not – depends on which concepts the mind uses to process and articulate that object. To see this, we will have to look beyond the classical music case, since there neither the expert nor non-expert impression was unclear, despite differing in detail.

According to the Stoics, unclear impressions arise because of the non-ideal circumstances in which they are formed (SE M vii 258). For example, suppose that a perceiver is standing in a field, straining to see an object in the distance, which is in fact a cow. Because of the distance between the object and the perceiver, her sense-organ will be affected abnormally by this object.²² Consequently, these changes in the sense-organ are of such a kind that, in generating the impression of the object, the perceiver's mind is unable to apply the concept

detail they display differs. For this reason I depart from Sorabji 1990, 309, and Lesses 1998, 7, who claim that the conceptualization occurs after the formation of the impression.

²² Unfortunately, our sources do not preserve a detailed account of how exactly, on the Stoic view, such conditions impair the functioning of the perceiver's sense-organs. Cf. Aëtius SVF ii 866 and DL vii 157. We are much better informed on the Epicurean account of this phenomenon: see Epicurus *Letter to Herodotus* 46-51; Lucretius *De Rerum Natura* iv 244-255, 337-353.

'cow' and its usual concomitant concepts, such as 'brown' or 'spotted', etc.²³ Rather, one possibility is that, in generating this impression, the perceiver's mind deploys a privative concept in addition to that of cow, such as 'lacking edges'.²⁴ The result will be a phenomenologically-compromised impression which sensorily represents a cow in the distance lacking edges (a blurry cow) – what the subject sees, in this case, is that 'there is a cow over there with indistinct edges'.

In an ordinary case of visual perception, by contrast, the Stoics think that the circumstances will allow the perceiver's mind to classify the object appropriately, and so to apply the concepts which, by the perceiver's lights, answer to this object. When viewed under normal lighting conditions, at a short distance, and so on, the perceiver has no trouble deploying the 'cow' concept, as well as the 'brown' and 'spotted' concepts, for example, in generating an impression of the cow, so that what the subject sees in this ordinary case is that 'there is a brown spotted cow'.

Before turning to the epistemological implications of this theory of perceptual experience, we should pause to consider two objections, one concerning the connection between an impression's clarity and the concepts deployed in its generation, and another concerning the connection between these concepts and the impression's phenomenological detail.

First, if concepts convey information of a universal or generic character – for instance, by acquainting us with features characterizing all or almost all cows – then, in using such a concept to generate an impression of a particular cow, e.g. Bessie, one may worry that the perceiver's mind will lack the kind of information that would serve to depict this particular cow clearly and

²³ These changes taken on by the sense-organ will occur below the level of the subject's awareness. See SE M vii 232-233, which reports that, for the Stoics, an impression is defined as an alteration not 'in any chance part of the soul... but in the mind, that is, in the ruling part, alone'. Since the impression is not formed in the sense-organs but rather in the mind, the changes taken on by the sense-organ will not feature in the subject's awareness – they will not be represented in an impression – before they reach the mind, the site where concepts are applied. See also Calcidius SVF ii 879.

²⁴ For evidence that the Stoics countenance such 'privative' concepts, see DL vii 53 where the Stoics are said to hold that one forms the concept of 'lacking hands' (ἄχρειο) on the basis of the psychological mechanism of 'privation' (στέρησις).

accurately. After all, Bessie may differ in various ways from the universal or generic representation of cow, which is presumably what the concept 'cow' conveys.²⁵

In response, we need not deny that concepts acquaint us with universal or generic characteristics of their objects. Rather, we should reject the claim that there is only *one* concept used to generate each perceptual impression. Thus, as a result of her encounter with Bessie, the perceiver's mind calls upon not only her 'cow' concept, but also concepts concomitant to this one, such as 'brown', 'spotted', 'friendly', 'large', and so on – those which her mind ascertains to adequately articulate the changes taken on by the sense-organ. Together, these concepts, even though each one has a universal or generic form, will serve to characterize the particular object represented in the perceptual impression in such a way that the perceiver becomes acquainted with the respects in which the particular (Bessie) differs from, and is similar to, its universal or generic counterpart (the 'cow' concept).²⁶

Now, even if one accepts this response to the first objection, one may still be unsatisfied with the claim that the phenomenological *detail* of an impression depends on the concepts used to generate it. Consider the case of an attentive but inexperienced perceiver. Such a subject, let's assume, has never encountered a peacock before and so has no concept for it. Nevertheless, we may think that he can still form an impression of the peacock which represents the peacock in full detail, for instance by carefully noticing and mentally 'sketching' the features of the peacock's body and behavior. The possibility of this kind of perceiver would seem to put

²⁵ The Stoics seem to assume that concepts are impressions of a certain kind. See Aëtius SVF ii 83 and Plutarch *On Common Conceptions* 1084f = SVF ii 847, which reports that a concept (ἔννοια) is φαντασία τις. On this point I follow Caston 1999, 173n64. See also Bailey 2014, 302-303. Moreover, DL vii 53-54 suggests that the concept serves as a generic representation of its object: for further discussion, see Brittain 2005, 171-174. However, nowhere do the Stoics seem to acknowledge the possibility of concepts for *particular* objects, e.g., Bessie or Socrates.

²⁶ Note that I am here assuming that no phenomenological feature of an object is so ineffable or fine-grained as to elude characterization in a perceptual impression by some generic concept or another. This is no doubt a controversial assumption, and, though I cannot defend it in detail here, it chimes well with a verbatim remark of Chrysippus that 'the rational animal is disposed naturally to use reason in all things and to be governed by it' (Plutarch *On Moral Virtue* 450d). Given that undergoing a perceptual impression is, on the Stoic view, an act of reason (DL vii 51), and given further that Chrysippus elsewhere analyzes reason as 'the collection of certain concepts and natural notions' (Galen PHP v 3), there is some reason for thinking that, according to Chrysippus, what a perceptual impression conveys does not outstrip the subject's rational resources, i.e., her conceptual repertoire. See Cooper 2004, 216. For a similar contemporary theory of perceptual experience, see McDowell 1994, 66-86.

pressure on the claim that the detail of an impression tracks the concepts employed in its generation: this subject's impression of the peacock seems to be adequately detailed despite his lacking the appropriate 'peacock' concept.

In response, recall that the same sense-object can be conceptualized differently according to the condition of the mind of the perceiver. This is one lesson of the classical music case, where the same sense-object – a Beethoven piece – creates different impressions in the expert and amateur: the expert impression conveys that 'here is a four-note motif', while the amateur impression cannot, and instead is limited to disclosing 'here are some violins playing' or 'this is the slow part'.

Let's now suppose that our amateur listener has resolved to pay close attention to the Beethoven piece. He thus forms impressions such as 'this pattern sounds different than before' or 'now those other instruments are playing'. But although the attentive amateur will discern more detail in the piece – in the sense of detecting changes in patterns of sound that a bored amateur would not notice – the attentive amateur will still fail to cognize or articulate such features using the expert's specialized concepts. So while it is open to an amateur to register in his impression *changes in pace*, he cannot perceive *a chord change* or *a four-note motif*: this is because the amateur possesses only the layman's concepts of 'change' or 'speed' but not the expert's specialized notions of 'chord' or 'motif'.²⁷

Returning now to the objection above, we can say that the attentive but inexperienced perceiver of the peacock would detect additional features of the peacock, compared to an equally inexperienced but careless perceiver. Even so, whoever lacks the concept 'peacock' will form impressions which fail to register the qualities of the peacock *as such*: in the best case, they will perceive that 'there is a bird with colorful feathers and a fussy attitude', but never that 'there is a peacock' or (in a different context, for instance) that 'these feathers resemble those of a peacock'. Consequently, a deficit in detail will remain in the impressions formed by the inexperienced perceiver, since they cannot reveal perceptible features concerning peacocks *qua*

²⁷ The Stoics will label such basic layman's concepts as 'primary notions' (πρωλήψεις), in contrast to the specialized concepts of the expert: Aëtius SVF ii 83. See Frede 1994, 51-53; Brittain 2005, 168-179; and Striker 1990, 153, for further discussion.

peacocks, even though their stock of layman's concepts will allow them to convey features of birds, colors, or feathers.

With the two objections answered, or at least allayed, we are now ready to turn to the epistemological implications of this reconstruction of the Stoic theory of perceptual experience.

One upshot will be that an amateur subject will be unable to form kataleptic impressions of a given object *qua* object in the expert domain. For instance, without the specialized concept 'peacock', the amateur perceiver could *not* form the impression that 'there is a peacock': *a fortiori*, he cannot form a *kataleptic* impression with this content. However, this does not entail that the amateur can form no kataleptic impressions upon encountering a peacock. Assuming that he perceives it under normal circumstances, the amateur possesses a mind ready to form the kataleptic impression that 'that there is a bird with colorful feathers over there', since he can draw on the layman's concepts 'bird', 'feather', 'color', etc. to generate this impression. So while a kataleptic impression of the peacock *qua* peacock will be out of reach for the amateur, he is not prevented from forming a kataleptic impression of the peacock *qua* colorful bird.²⁸

More generally, we have seen that the Stoics have good reasons to emphasize the character of the perceiver's mind as an epistemologically-salient aspect of an impression's causal history. What kind of kataleptic impressions a subject can form in a given scenario, if any, will depend upon whether his mind has built up the right kind of expertise, and whether it is free from any temporary malfunction. Assessing an impression's katalepticity therefore requires specifying the status of the mind where it is formed.

This expectation is confirmed by Sextus Empiricus, who records a list of five factors which, on the Stoic view, must concur in order for a (perceptual) kataleptic impression to arise (M vii 424). These are the (i) the sense-organ, (ii) the sense-object, (iii) the place, (iv) the manner, and (v) the mind. Factors (i) through (iv) indicate that, if an impression is kataleptic, then the sense-object is related to the sense-organs in such a way that the latter does not take on any unusual alterations from the sense-object: the place of the sense-object and the manner in which

²⁸ We will return to this point below in our discussion of the Veiled Argument (section 4.1).

it interacts with the sense-organs are non-defective.²⁹ Factor (v) requires that the subject's mind (διάνοια) be functioning correctly so that it will apply the correct concepts in generating an impression of the sense-object. Only when all five factors are in place will the resulting impression be formed in the right way, and so will represent its object clearly and accurately. One explicit commitment of this view is that whether one can form kataleptic impressions in a given scenario depends on the condition of one's mind.

4. Withholding Assent on Non-Kataleptic Impressions

To review, we now have on the table an account of what distinguishes an impression which is kataleptic from one which is not, as well as an explanation of why the distinctive feature of the kataleptic impression – namely, its causal history, crucially including the condition of the mind where it is generated – ensures that it will represent its object with unblemished sensory detail.³⁰ Because the concepts deployed in the generation of an impression determine its phenomenology, and because the causal history of the kataleptic impression ensures that the concepts so deployed are appropriate to the object, the kataleptic impression will represent its object clearly and in adequate detail. Consequently, just as the kataleptic impression's causal history guarantees its truth, so also does it guarantee the impression's non-defective phenomenology.

Recall that if a subject has formed a kataleptic impression, she does not yet possess knowledge (κατάληψις), since she must in addition give her *assent* to that impression (SE M vii 151). Forming a kataleptic impression is thus a necessary condition for possessing knowledge. But it's possible to entertain a kataleptic impression without endorsing it (SE M vii 253-257).³¹

²⁹ Thus the impression of the blurry cow considered above will fail to be kataleptic, on the grounds that it is formed in conditions where the sense-object is too distant, thereby violating factors (iii) and (iv). Cf. also the case of someone with a minor visual impairment such as astigmatism, which results in the visual perception of objects as blurry even in otherwise ordinary conditions. The Stoics would analyze this case as a deficiency in factor (i), the sense-organ.

³⁰ It is this more expansive, mind-inclusive understanding of causal history which distinguishes my version of externalism from those criticized by Nawar 2014 and Perin 2005.

³¹ See further discussion in Brittain 2014, which convincingly rejects the influential view of Frede 1983, 168-169, and Striker 1990, 152-153, that every kataleptic impression is met with assent, in both the Sage and non-Sage alike. Among other drawbacks, this view must explain away the text cited here (SE M vii

Moreover, it often happens that a subject will form, and then assent to, a non-kataleptic impression (Plutarch *De Stoicorum Repugnantiis* 1057a). As we have already seen, such an impression comes about in a way that does not guarantee that what it represents is true. It is no surprise, then, that the Stoics will characterize the result of accepting this kind of impression not as knowledge but rather as opinion (δόξα) (SE M vii 156-157; Plutarch *De Stoicorum Repugnantiis* 1056e). Therefore, in either rejecting a kataleptic impression, or accepting one which is not kataleptic, the subject goes wrong in her act of assent: in such cases, she does not rely on a criterion of truth in developing her views about the world, and so will fall short of acquiring knowledge.

Neither of these errors will occur in the Sage, however – that is, in the perfected agent who practices excellence at all times, in all ethical and epistemological matters – since such an agent assents *only* to kataleptic impressions and rejects all others (Arius in Stobaeus, Ecl. ii 111; cf. Cicero *Acad.* ii 66).

In the following sub-sections, we will consider the strategies used by the Sage for discerning whether her occurrent impression is kataleptic, and so worthy of assent, in cases where this determination is extremely difficult to make. By sketching the Sage's behavior in such circumstances, we will arrive at a model of the ideal epistemic agent which can be emulated by the non-Sage in her attempt to limit her assent to kataleptic impressions.

4.1 Impressions of Highly Similar Objects

In response to the Stoic doctrine that a kataleptic impression differs from one which is non-kataleptic, in virtue of meeting the three conditions laid out in the canonical definition, the school's skeptical opponents – beginning with Arcesilaus and continuing with Carneades – argue that, for any putatively kataleptic impression, there is a false one which differs from it in no respect (Cicero *Acad.* ii 40, 83; SE M vii 402 ff.). Consequently, clause (iii) of the canonical definition will never be satisfied.

253-257), which attributes to 'younger Stoics' the view that Menelaus, owing to his false beliefs about her whereabouts, withholds assent on the kataleptic impression that Helen is present.

One version of this attack centers around impressions of highly similar objects, such as eggs and identical twins (SE M vii 408-410; Cicero *Acad.* ii 54-57, 84-87). Suppose there are two eggs, Egg A and Egg B, the first of which being presented to a subject who then forms an impression of Egg A. The skeptic will claim that – given the normal perceptual conditions attending Egg A, and the Stoic view that, in general, one forms kataleptic impressions in normal perceptual circumstances (cf. Cicero *Acad.* i 42) – the subject's impression of Egg A should count as kataleptic. Next we are to imagine that, without the subject noticing, Egg A is swapped out for Egg B. Given that the impression the subject now forms of Egg B seems to be indistinguishable from her earlier impression of Egg A, differing in no way in its sensory character, the skeptic will declare victory. For the subject's impression caused by the presence of Egg B could have been caused from a state of affairs other than that in which Egg B is present, namely, that in which Egg A is present. And were the subject asked 'is this egg the same one as before?', the character of her impressions would lead her to say 'yes', and therefore to get things wrong about how the world really is. Because it is indistinguishable from an impression that is potentially false, the kataleptic impression cannot be a criterion of truth.

In response to this challenge – which, if successful, would have disastrous consequences for their overall epistemological theory – the Stoics (as I interpret them) can deny that the subject's impressions in this case are kataleptic. This is because, as we have already seen, to form a kataleptic impression requires that one's mind be in the appropriate condition (SE M vii 424). It is therefore open for the Stoics to hold that the subject envisaged in the egg case *fails* to meet this condition: either she lacks domain-specific concepts regarding egg identification, or fails to employ her more basic concepts in such a way as to generate impressions that would distinguish Egg A from Egg B.³² In other words, the Stoics can claim that she lacks the relevant *expertise* in identifying eggs.

³² By way of illustrating this re-arrangement of more basic concepts, consider a subject with expertise in identifying a particular pair of eggs. This subject would discriminate these eggs by forming impressions of Egg A that would involve the application of at least one basic concept that would *not* be found in his impressions of Egg B: despite their many similarities, the impression of Egg A would include a concept like 'oblong' while that of Egg B would not. The Stoics do not have to hold, then, that for every expertise there is a specialized concept for the domain in question.

Consider the passage in Cicero's *Academica* where Lucullus responds to this brand of skeptical challenge (ii 54-58). Here Lucullus's more general claim is that, because any two discrete objects must possess at least one dissimilar property – a metaphysical thesis the Stoics hold on independent grounds (cf. Cicero *Acad.* ii 85; Plutarch *On Common Conceptions* 1077c-e) – it is possible to form an impression which detects that property, provided that one attains expertise in the relevant domain. He then addresses the egg case specifically:

You see how the similarity of eggs to each other is proverbial? Nevertheless, we have heard that there were quite a few people on Delos, when things were going well for them there, who used to rear a great number of hens for their living. Well, when these men had inspected an egg, they could usually tell which hen had laid it. Nor does this work against us, since it is all right for us not to be able to discriminate those eggs: that doesn't make it any more reasonable to assent that this egg is that one, as if there were absolutely no difference between them (Cicero *Acad.* ii 57-58, tr. Brittain).

A subject can form an impression which captures the difference between any two distinct objects, if he has received training in the domain, for example, as the Delian farmers have of eggs. This is because the Delian farmer, insofar as he is an expert in identifying eggs, has available a wider array of conceptual resources which his mind can deploy in generating impressions of eggs.³³ By contrast, because the non-expert lacks concepts specific to egg-identification – or the ability to re-arrange more basic concepts in the proper manner, e.g., by predicating 'oblong' to Egg A but not Egg B – she cannot form impressions which distinguish Egg A from Egg B. And so, as the skeptic rightly points out, this conceptual deficit will have the consequence that the phenomenology of her impressions of Egg A and Egg B will *not* differ.

But far from undermining the Stoic view, all this example manages to show is that in these circumstances, for one particular amateur subject, kataleptic impressions of Egg A and Egg B are not available. By contrast, the egg farmer – the expert in egg identification – will form an impression which sensorily represents Egg A distinctly from the way in which his impression would sensorily represent Egg B. Because of the state of the expert's mind, his impression of Egg A could *not* have come from Egg B, and will therefore be kataleptic.

³³ Here I propose a similar but much more determinate interpretation than that found in Frede 1983, 174: 'the Stoics point out, not without plausibility, that if we just put our mind to it we would also learn to tell these [highly similar] objects apart'.

The underlying assumption here is that, in order to form a kataleptic impression of a highly similar object, the perceiver must have a mind capable of distinguishing this object from one which is genuinely different – either by possessing specialized concepts for the domain, or the ability to re-arrange more basic concepts in a way which the non-expert cannot. Because generating a kataleptic impression of Egg A – or of Twin A, or of one member of any other pair of highly similar objects – requires expertise in the relevant domain, the Stoics will describe the kataleptic impression as one formed 'expertly' (SE M vii 248), of such a sort to allow its possessor to discern the 'difference present in its object' (SE M vii 252).³⁴ If this reading is on the right lines, then, from the Stoic perspective, the egg case is *not* one in which a false impression is indistinguishable from one which is kataleptic, at least for the expert: his impression detects the difference between the two eggs, and so (e.g.) if one egg were replaced by the other, he would detect this difference, via his impression, and alter his assent accordingly.³⁵

Before leaving this topic, we should note that, even though his expertise will allow him to form kataleptic impressions in many situations where a non-expert could not, the Sage is still not omniscient: there are some domains of study in which he is *not* expert.³⁶ And in these cases

³⁴ M vii 248-249: καταληπτική δέ ἐστιν ἡ ἀπὸ ὑπάρχοντος καὶ κατ' αὐτὸ τὸ ὑπάρχον ἐναπομεμαγμένη καὶ ἐναπεσφραγισμένη, ὅποια οὐκ ἂν γένοιτο ἀπὸ μὴ ὑπάρχοντος. ἄκρως γὰρ πιστούμενοι ἀντιληπτικὴν εἶναι τῶν ὑποκειμένων τήνδε τὴν φαντασίαν καὶ πάντα τεχνικῶς τὰ περὶ αὐτοῖς ιδιώματα ἀναμεμαγμένην, ἕκαστον τούτων φασὶν ἔχειν συμβεβηκός.

M vii 252: ἐκεῖνοι (sc. οἱ ἀπὸ τῆς Στοᾶς) μὲν γὰρ φασὶν ὅτι ὁ ἔχων τὴν καταληπτικὴν φαντασίαν τεχνικῶς προσβάλλει τῇ ὑπόψει τῶν πραγμάτων διαφορᾶ, ἐπεὶπερ καὶ εἶχε τι τοιοῦτον ἰδίωμα ἡ τοιαύτη φαντασία παρὰ τὰς ἄλλας φαντασίας καθάπερ οἱ κερᾶσαι παρὰ τοὺς ἄλλους ὄφεις.

³⁵ One may question whether familiarity with a particular set of highly similar objects – e.g., two twins or two eggs – ought to count as a form of expertise, which seems to require a general domain – e.g., biology. Cf. here Zeno's formulation of τέχνη (SE PH ii 70, iii 188) and the discussion in Arius in Stobaeus, Ecl. ii 66-67. However, in their response to the egg case, the Stoics surely would not characterize the expert's grasp as being limited only to Egg A and Egg B. Rather, the egg-farmer's expertise pertains to a general domain – chicken's eggs – and is then activated, in the manner described in the main text above, whenever the subject forms impressions of the particulars, Egg A and Egg B. However, I concede that in the case of the twins it is much harder to see how the expert's grasp could be general. Perhaps someone who has mastered principles of fetal development could then apply these principles to the case of distinguishing Twin A from Twin B. If so, then Cicero's appeal to the mother's ability to discern her twins is somewhat misleading (*Acad.* ii 57), since not every mother is a biologist.

³⁶ This is a controversial point, but see Arius in Stobaeus, Ecl. ii 67.15-16, where some Sages are denied to be good prophets, on account of lacking 'a grasp of certain theorems' (τὸ προσδεῖσθαι ... θεωρημάτων τινῶν ἀναλήψεως) relating to prophecy. Consider also that, were the Stoics to think that every Sage is omniscient, she would no longer serve as the ideal, but rare, epistemic and ethical agent whose character

he will display considerable caution in his acts of assent. When faced with objects from a domain which he has not yet mastered, the Sage, like any other perceiver in such circumstances, forms impressions which fail to 'mark off' (*notare*) this object from another similar to it (Cicero *Acad.* ii 57).³⁷ As an example of such a situation, consider Sextus's presentation of the 'Veiled Argument' (ἐγκεκαλυμμένος λόγος).

If, once a snake has thrust out its head, we wish to establish the state of affairs which obtains in these circumstances, we will be plunged into great perplexity and will not be able to say whether it is the same snake that thrust its head out before or [whether it is] another one, since there are many snakes coiled up in the same hole. (M vii 410-411, tr. Bury modified)

Assuming the Sage is no herpetologist, his impression of the first snake surfacing from the hole will not differ, phenomenologically, from his impression of the second, because the Sage lacks the relevant herpetological concepts which would serve to distinguish one snake from another, or, alternatively, to verify that the first snake is identical to the second. Consequently, his impressions in this case will fail to be kataleptic, since they are indeterminate enough to arise from a state of affairs other than the one they represent. The appropriate response to such impressions is the suspension of assent, for otherwise the Sage would infect his mind with opinion, a cognitive state falling short of knowledge which results from giving assent to any non-kataleptic impression (SE M vii 156-157). Indeed, that response is exactly what Cicero's Stoic-Antiochean spokesman recommends in such circumstances:

I will even concede that the wise person himself — the subject of our whole discussion — will suspend his assent when confronted by similar things that he does not have marked off; and that he will never assent to any impression except one such that it could not be false. (*Acad.* ii 57, tr. Brittain)

one could possibly attain: she would rightly be considered a god, as opposed to god-like. Denying the Sage omniscience allows us to charitably reconstruct Stoic doctrine on this point. Here I endorse the view taken by Long and Sedley 1987, 252: 'the Stoics are not committed to the position... [that] even the wise man can expect cognitive impressions of every possible object.'

³⁷ I take it that such 'marking off' involves forming impressions of the object which draw on specialized concepts for the domain, or at least specialized patterns of more basic concepts, which only the expert could deploy and which therefore serve to distinguish two highly similar objects. Cf. the less committal proposal, in Brittain 2006 34n76: 'The skill of the wise consists in their highly developed recognitional ability... as Lucullus points out here, their recognitional ability is limited to some extent by their particular experience.' I make Brittain's suggestion more precise by explaining this 'recognitional ability' through the egg-farmer's possession of distinctive conceptual resources.

But this recommendation immediately invites the following question: how could the Sage detect that his impression (e.g., of a snake surfacing from a darkened hole) is one which fails to 'mark off' its object from one which is similar but different? How does he come to see that such an impression is non-kataleptic by dint of his lack of (e.g., herpetological) concepts?

Here we should note that, *qua* perfected epistemological and ethical agent, the Sage is said to possess *all* the virtues, and to exercise them in everything he does (Arius in Stobaeus, Ecl, ii 65.12-14; ii 66.14-15). As we learn from Diogenes Laertius, two of these virtues pertain to his acts of assent: 'freedom from precipitancy' (ἀπροπτωσία), defined as 'the knowledge of when to give and withhold assent', and 'level-headedness' (ἀνευκαιότης), or the knowledge of how to furnish 'a vigorous argument against what is merely likely, so as to refrain from giving in to it'.³⁸ Though one would like more specification in these definitions, they can be fleshed out by a remark in the *Academica* to the effect that the Sage will suspend assent 'if there is any heaviness or slowness in his own senses, or if his impressions are rather obscure, or he is prevented from examining them because of lack of time'.³⁹

Together, these texts portray the Sage as an epistemic agent constantly monitoring the conditions in which he finds himself, including whether he has time to reflect on his impression's provenance, a process which can involve checking whether he has obtained expertise in the domain pertaining to the object of his impression. By applying this kind of scrutiny to the state of his own body of knowledge, as it relates to the object in question – an impression-external consideration – the Sage can gain purchase on the reliability of an impression which is created without the relevant expertise, whose non-kataleptic status will not be detectable from its phenomenology alone.⁴⁰ To suspend assent on *these* impressions, the Sage

³⁸ DL vii 46-47: τὴν τ' ἀπροπτωσίαν ἐπιστήμην τοῦ πότε δεῖ συγκατατίθεσθαι καὶ μή· τὴν δ' ἀνευκαιότητα ἰσχυρὸν λόγον πρὸς τὸ εἰκός, ὥστε μὴ ἐνδιδόναι αὐτῶ·

³⁹ ii 53, following the translation of Brittain: '*si aut in sensibus ipsius est aliqua forte gravitas aut tarditas, aut obscuriora sunt quae videntur, aut a perspicendo temporis brevitatem excluditur*' (sc. *ipse sapiens ... ne adprobet falsa pro veris*).

⁴⁰ An internalist might object here that the Sage, finding himself in a situation like that of the Veiled Argument, could detect that his impressions *lack* the maximal level of detail present in the kataleptic impressions he forms of *other* objects. Cf. Perin 2005, 398-399: 'We assent to an impression only if we recognize that the impression in question represents its object in a way that distinguishes this object from

will have to look beyond their sensory character and take account of the (impression-external) circumstances in which they are formed, specifically, whether his mind has developed the relevant expertise.

Crucially, we should note that, in a situation like that of the Veiled Argument, there will still be some kataleptic impressions available for the Sage's assent, even if he is not an expert in herpetology. For example, the impression that 'there is a hole with at least one animal coming out of it' would seem to be both true and kataleptic, which, given the conceptual apparatus of the Sage, he could both form and give assent to.⁴¹ Thus, in the context where the Sage creates an impression which is non-kataleptic in virtue of his lacking the specialized conceptual repertoire relevant to some object in his environment (e.g., snakes), there will be *other* objects in the environment which *can* be represented in a kataleptic impression. The Sage's ignorance of some speciality science will not prevent him from obtaining knowledge of the non-specialized features of his surroundings. To deploy a layman's concept such as 'hole' or 'animal' is all that is required to form the kataleptic impression that 'there is a hole with at least one animal coming out of it', to which the non-herpetologist Sage could safely assent.⁴²

To conclude, then, the Stoics respond to skeptical challenges centering around impressions of highly similar objects with two claims: (1) with the relevant expertise, a subject will create far more impressions that are kataleptic in a given scenario as compared to a non-expert, including impressions which track the minute but real differences between highly

everything else'. But this is implausible. Although the Sage's impression of the first snake does not differ, phenomenologically, from his impression of the second snake, this fact alone does not shed any light on their relatively impoverished level of sensory detail compared to the impressions which a herpetologist would form in these same circumstances. Prior to achieving mastery over a given domain, how could a subject (even a Sage) be fully acquainted with the respects in which one object in that domain could differ from another, and so with the particular properties which an amateur impression would fail to represent?

⁴¹ Cf. the peacock example from section 3. There the amateur perceiver could form a kataleptic impression that 'there is a colorful bird', despite lacking the conceptual resources that would allow him to form a kataleptic impression of the peacock as such.

⁴² As this example suggests, the non-specialized feature being represented in a non-expert kataleptic impression will often be the sense-object's membership in a kind – e.g., 'there is an animal here'. Consider also the kataleptic impressions featuring in Stoic discussion of the Sorites, such as 'this is a heap' or 'ten is few' (cf. *Acad.* ii 92-94). I am indebted to Nawar 2017 129n39 for bringing these examples to my attention, though I see no reason to doubt their Stoic credentials. Nawar 2017, 154-157 also offers an alternative reading of SE M vii 410-411, which raises important issues.

similar objects; (2) even when a Sage's mind is not such as to furnish a kataleptic impression of an object in his surroundings, he will detect that he cannot form a kataleptic impression of that object. In making this second determination, the Sage consults an impression-external and objective feature, namely, the relationship between the sense-object before him and his body of knowledge. And there is nothing precluding him from forming kataleptic impressions of non-specialized items in his environment. These arguments suggest two corresponding remedies for the non-Sage seeking to attain epistemic virtue: (1) acquire expertise in a given domain, to enable the formation of a greater number of kataleptic impressions in those circumstances; (2) continually monitor the limits of one's understanding, to grasp the kinds of objects and features regarding which a kataleptic impression is out of reach.

4.2 Impressions with unclear phenomenology

To continue our survey of the methods employed by the Sage in withholding assent on any non-kataleptic impression, and thereby safeguarding his mind from the possibility of error, we turn now to impressions whose katalepticity is rather easy to detect, especially in comparison with the impressions considered above. Here I refer to non-kataleptic impressions possessing unclear phenomenology, i.e., those which sensorily depict their objects as being distorted in their color, shape, or level of focus. For example, consider again the blurry impression of the cow (section 3): due to its distance from the perceiver, this sense-object creates an impression with the content, 'there is a cow over there with indistinct edges'.

Here is a case where the phenomenology of an impression is, in fact, a reliable indicator of its katalepticity. As we have seen, the Sage will suspend assent on any occasion where 'his impressions are rather obscure' (Cicero *Acad.* ii 53), including, presumably, when they sensorily depict their objects as blurred or otherwise distorted. The Stoics seem to think that inspecting the sensory character of such unclear impressions is sufficient for verifying their non-kataleptic status, and so for withholding assent on them.⁴³

⁴³ On the internalist view considered in section 1, defended e.g. by Sedley 2002, 141-149 (or at any rate for Zeno), for an impression to have this kind of phenomenological defect *just is* for it to be non-kataleptic: this is the claim that an impression is non-kataleptic if and only if it displays some qualitative defect in its representation of its object. Now, on my view, it is true that, if an impression is unclear, then it is non-

4.3. Impressions which do not display a phenomenological defect

When faced with a non-kataleptic impression which contains some blemish in its sensory character, the Sage suspends assent by attending directly to its phenomenological blemish. In this final section, I will argue that, by keeping track of the times when he forms these unclear impressions, the Sage has the information needed to suspend assent on a *further* class of non-kataleptic impressions, namely, those which do *not* possess a defect in their sensory character. To see why, we must first investigate how the Stoics think that such phenomenologically unblemished, but potentially false, impressions come to be.⁴⁴

Consider a subject in the grips of a hallucinatory episode. The Stoics will say that, because of this abnormal condition, the subject's mind will malfunction as it generates impressions of external objects, including objects the subject has interacted with often in the past. In fact, these are the circumstances which befall Orestes when he encounters his sister Electra. The Stoics analyze this case as follows (SE M vii 249; cf. M vii 170, vii 67).⁴⁵ Because he is in a fit of madness (ἐπὶ τοῦ μεμηνότος Ὀρέστου), Orestes does not form the impression that Electra is present, but rather the impression that there is a Fury present. Of course, this impression is false, and so non-kataleptic, but there is good reason to think that it also possesses no defect in its sensory representation of a Fury. Because it makes use of the concept 'Fury' –

kataleptic (section 3). But I equally insist that if an impression is non-kataleptic, then it need not have a phenomenological defect. The Sage's strategy for dealing with these clear, non-kataleptic impressions is the topic of the next section.

⁴⁴ As far as I can tell, no other interpretation of the Stoic theory of the kataleptic impression explicitly recognizes this possibility. This is because commentators widely assume that, if an impression is maximally phenomenologically clear and detailed, then it is kataleptic – i.e., that unblemished phenomenology is sufficient for katalepticity. It is this assumption which I mean to oppose here: my view holds that unblemished phenomenology is merely necessary for an impression to be kataleptic.

⁴⁵ Given that the case of Orestes is mentioned in Sextus's positive presentation of Stoic doctrine (M vii 248-250), I suspect that this case is one that the Stoics themselves used as an example of an impression which is non-kataleptic. In other words, non-kataleptic impressions without phenomenological defects formed part of the Stoic exposition of their own doctrine, and were not merely problem cases that the School had to deal with to counter Academic criticism. Cf. Cicero *Acad.* ii 87, where Chrysippus is said to 'zealously seek out all the considerations that tell against the senses and their clarity', a report which suggests that cases of phenomenological indistinguishability were a main concern of early Stoic epistemology.

and *not* a concept like 'lacking edges' in addition – this false impression clearly depicts that a Fury is present, no differently than a kataleptic impression of a Fury would. (Indeed, it is plausible to think that the clarity and vivacity of this impression *explains* Orestes's reaction of quaking in fear [Euripides, *Orestes* 264-265].) Here Orestes's mind has applied a wildly incorrect concept to the object which is in fact Electra, with the result that his impression, although phenomenologically unblemished, fails to track the way the world really is.⁴⁶

Furthermore, in addition to this kind of impression, which is clear, false, and non-kataleptic, the Stoics also acknowledge the possibility of a non-kataleptic impression which is both clear and *true*. These impressions vividly represent a true state of affairs, but come about in a manner which does not guarantee that that fact obtains, and so are non-kataleptic. Regarding this kind of impression, Sextus reports the following:

And of true impressions, some are kataleptic and others not. Non-kataleptic are those which, on the basis of some disease, strike some subjects, for countless people suffering from frenzy or melancholy receive an impression, which, although true, is non-kataleptic, having occurred externally and by chance, and for this reason are often not certain about it and do not assent to it. (M vii 247-248, tr. Bury modified)

Though Sextus does not give an example of this kind of non-kataleptic impression, he (or his Stoic source) must have something like the following in mind: suppose the subject is suffering from a very particular hallucination, one which causes him to form impressions that there are pink elephants ahead, although there are no such objects there.⁴⁷ Then, in a strange

⁴⁶ See also SE M vii 406-407, which compares two of Hercules's impressions formed during a hallucinatory episode: one true, regarding the location of his bow and arrows, the other false, regarding the identity of his children. Both of these hallucinatory impressions are said to affect Hercules equally (*ἐπ' ἴσης οὖν κινουσῶν ἀμφοτέρων* [sc. *φαντασιῶν*]: SE M vii 407). The larger context of this passage is the skeptical ἀπαρραλλαξία objection, that kataleptic and non-kataleptic impressions are indistinguishable with respect to their being 'striking' (πληκτική, SE M vii 403). Given this context, I take it that Hercules's hallucinatory state is thought to be responsible for him forming non-kataleptic impressions displaying no deficit in clarity or strikingness in comparison to the non-hallucinatory, kataleptic impressions to which Hercules ordinarily assents. On my interpretation, the Stoic response need not dispute this claim.

⁴⁷ I take it that Sextus is imagining a case where the hallucinating subject's mind is not so impaired that it has completely lost its rationality. As Graver 2007, 115-116, points out, Chrysippus in other texts claims that an adult human can be robbed of her rationality through μελαγχολία (DL vii 127; Simplicius SVF iii 238; cf. Cicero, *Tusc. Disp.* iii 8-11). However, in our passage, Sextus describes the impression formed by the subject suffering from this condition as one that is true. Since only rational impressions are true or false (SE M viii 70), and only rational minds form rational impressions (DL vii 51), the melancholic subject

turn of fate, the circus comes to town and parades a pink elephant in front of him. The subject's hallucinatory impression of a pink elephant would then turn out to be true, but would have this status 'externally and by chance' (ἔξωθεν καὶ ἐκ τύχης; SE M vii 247). By 'externally', I take it that Sextus means 'external to the actual state of affairs': what caused the subject's hallucinatory impression was not the fact that there are pink elephants present but rather the defective state of his mind ('frenzy or melancholy'). The delusional impression turns out to be true 'by chance', since it fails to have the right kind of causal history. Moreover, there is nothing in Sextus's description that requires us to think that a hallucinatory impression of this kind contains any phenomenological defect, which would distinguish it from a non-hallucinatory, kataleptic impression of the same object.

Now, supposing that he has formed a non-kataleptic impression lacking defective phenomenology, how and why would the Sage withhold assent? Note that even if such a non-kataleptic impression were true (like that of the pink elephants), assent to any non-kataleptic impression is opinion, of which the Sage is entirely free.

On my interpretation, the Stoics can respond along the following lines: because the Sage detects whenever he *enters into* and *exits* a period in which his mind is malfunctioning, he can also reliably detect that the phenomenologically unblemished but non-kataleptic impressions formed during that time are not worthy of his assent. This is because he will keep track of the distinctive *transitional* impressions which signal the beginning and end of this period. So, for example, while undergoing a hallucinatory impression that there are pink elephants present, the Sage will recall that he earlier suffered an impression (e.g.) that the room is spinning. Because this transitional impression displays a phenomenological defect, it will stand out from the clear and non-kataleptic impressions which follow it. So, in the heat of his hallucinatory episode, in which no impression he forms possesses the kind of causal history that guarantees its truth, the Sage can rely on this earlier impression as a sign of the current unreliability of his cognitive and perceptual apparatus. And later, when his mind begins to recover, and the

envisaged in this case must still count as rational. Here I appeal to the scholarly consensus that all and only the impressions formed by rational animals are likewise rational, in the sense of having propositional content evaluable as true or false: see Shields 1993, 345; Brennan 2003, 260; Brittain 2002, 257; Frede 1994, 56; et al.

impressions of pink elephants cease, the Sage will form another distinct transitional impression that marks the end of his hallucinatory state, after which time his mind and senses will function normally.

This picture finds support in Cicero's *Academica*, where Lucullus claims that both Sages and non-Sages alike detect the transition into and out of a fit of madness.

The same thing happens to the insane (*insanis*), so that when they are beginning to go mad, they feel it and they say that they have impressions of things that are not the case; and when they're recovering, they realize it, and repeat that line of Alcmaeon's: "but my heart agrees with the vision of my eyes not at all." (ii 57, tr. Brittain)

For subjects suffering the kind of insanity described here, Lucullus claims that it is psychologically possible to notice both the onset and termination of the manic episode. He further suggests that if the insane recall this fact while in the grip of their delusional state, they can suspend assent on the phenomenologically untarnished, but potentially false, impressions formed during that time.⁴⁸ Of course, Lucullus admits that the non-Sage will often fail to do this, but it is peculiar of the Sage to suspend assent on these occasions, as well as any others preceding a time where 'there is any heaviness or slowness in his own senses' (ii 53). If this report accurately reflects Stoic doctrine – and there is no reason to think it does not – then the Sage will not only be able to notice when he is in fit of madness, but also any other time when his mind is operating defectively: because he will form phenomenologically defective impressions signaling the beginning and end of an extended time in which his mind and senses may mislead him, he has an accessible guide as to when to give and withhold his assent.

⁴⁸ Other interpreters (e.g. Brittain 2014, 342-344) hold that this passage (Cicero *Acad.* ii 51-54) envisions a kind of hallucinatory impression which *does* suffer from a phenomenological defect, presumably on the basis of Lucullus's remark (ii 51) that 'vacuous impressions' (*inania visa*) lack 'perspicuity' (*perspicuitas*), a term elsewhere serving as Cicero's translation for the Greek ἐνάργεια (ii 17). But as Brittain himself points out, 'this case is rather underdetermined by the evidence' (2014, 342): in particular, I would argue, it is not clear whether the lack of 'perspicuity' is accessible to the subject *at the time the hallucinatory impression is formed*, or rather, as the text seems to suggest, it is only revealed in retrospect, once the subject, having regained his senses, reflects on the sensory character of his earlier delusional impression (cf. Cicero *Acad* ii 88). In the latter case, the phenomenological defect would not serve as a reliable guide to the impression's katalepticity, for the simple reason that it is not accessible to the subject at the time when he is investigating its reliability. Hence, some other indicator (such as the sensory character of the transitional impressions, as I propose in the main text) will be needed for him to suspend assent.

We should note, however, that here the Stoics rely on two critical assumptions. First, they assume that, whenever one's mind begins and ceases to malfunction, there must be a phenomenological difference in one's impressions formed during that transitional period. When a subject falls into a fit of madness, his impressions created at that point will possess some sort of unclarity ('heaviness and slowness'). Consequently, they will indicate to the Sage that there will follow an extended period of time in which his impressions, although unblemished *phenomenologically*, are not to be trusted, since they will be formed at a time when his mind runs the risk of applying the wrong concepts to the objects he encounters. The second assumption is that the time in which one's mind fails to operate correctly is finite and of relatively short duration. The Stoics are not contemplating global skepticism, of the sort envisioned (e.g.) by Descartes in the *Meditations*.⁴⁹ Rather, using dreams and periods of intoxication as their paradigms, they assume that our mind malfunctions in only a limited extent of time, and will later recover completely.⁵⁰ If we grant the Stoics both of these assumptions, then they can plausibly hold that the difference between two phenomenologically identical impressions – where one is kataleptic and the other is not – is nevertheless detectible by the subject of these impressions.

Further support for this reconstruction can be found in a later passage of the *Academica*, where Cicero, criticizing the Stoic view, questions the utility of the Sage's practice of searching for impressions marking the transition into a period of mental malfunctioning – a practice he seems to refer to as 'recollection' (*recordatio*) (ii 90). Here Cicero, in his voice as an Academic

⁴⁹ See, e.g., AT 7:24 and the influential discussion in Burnyeat 1997. More recently, see Brennan 2005, 68, and Obdrzalek 2012, 388-390.

⁵⁰ I do not claim that the Stoics were unaware of long-lasting, permanent mental trauma. In such serious cases, they would no doubt describe the subject as having lost their rationality, and so as operating with the same kind of mind as a child or non-human animal: cf. DL vii 127 and Simplicius SVF iii 238, discussed in the note above. This fact helps to explain the emphasis on short-term episodes of mental malfunctioning that we find in our sources. The Stoics focus on subjects who are suffering a kind of mental malfunction that does *not* rob them of their rationality – a condition most obviously seen in hallucinating or dreaming subjects – on the grounds that they had already set aside the case of long-lasting permanent mental trauma: these subjects are no longer rational, and so the account of their epistemological success will be very different from a rational subject striving to become a Sage but temporarily deranged. Again, we must recall that the Hellenistic philosophers do *not* contemplate evil-demon scenarios in which the subject possesses her rationality but is systematically deceived.

skeptic, complains that it is implausible that those in the grip of a hallucination could perform such a recollection. It is not humanly possible, he asserts, to access a stored impression in the midst of a hallucinatory episode which casts doubt on the reliability of the impressions formed therein. After all, not even Hercules – a demigod whom some Stoics admit into the ranks of the Sage (Seneca *De Constantia Sapientis* 2.1) – could do so in the midst of his slaughter of his own children, which he mistook for those of Eurystheus (SE M vii 405-406, viii 67).

Here the Stoics can reply that, while certainly difficult, to perform a 'recollection' is the kind of activity which admits of improvement. Hallucinating subjects can become *better* at recalling a stored impression in the middle of their delusional episode, if they train their mind to attend to the features of the impressions formed before, during, and after such episodes. As we have already seen, while undergoing a hallucination, the impressions the subject generates will lack any phenomenological mark of their non-kataleptic status. But the impressions created both before and after such a hallucinatory state will display some phenomenological defect, e.g., by predicating 'spinning' of the object 'room'. Of course, these transitional impressions will be of no use to the subject if he has not yet learned to notice them as such. This suggests that a basic level of experience and expertise regarding the features of one's impressions created at the edges of a hallucinatory episode is required in order for a subject to suspend assent to clear but non-kataleptic impressions. Presumably, it is this experience and expertise which is lacking in Hercules (thereby undermining his claim to be a Sage). But despite the rarity of the circumstances which would enable one to acquire such expertise, it is nonetheless humanly possible to obtain. Stoic epistemology therefore takes seriously skeptical challenges to our claims of certainty, but meets these arguments by sketching a steep, albeit attainable, path to knowledge. And in doing so, the Stoics are not in any way appealing to the rather strong claim that every kataleptic impression is uniquely clear and distinct. Rather, they rely on a more circumscribed claim that, for the short-lived periods of insanity that are their paradigms, it is psychologically possible for rational subjects to detect the phenomenological defects of the impressions generated at the borders of their deranged state.

5. Conclusion

Because he locates the distinctive mark of the kataleptic impression in its phenomenology, the internalist assumes that the *only* reliable guide to the katalepticity of an occurrent impression consists in inspecting its sensory character, specifically for whether it is maximally clear and detailed. While this strategy will be sufficient for *some* non-kataleptic impressions (those that depict their object as blurry or otherwise distorted: section 4.2), we have seen that, in order to withhold assent on others – i.e., those which do not make use of a specialized concept (section 4.1) and those formed during a hallucinatory state (section 4.3) – some awareness of the circumstances in which they are formed is indispensable. The Stoa's skeptical opponents will reply that such awareness will be impossible to attain in every case. Whether the skeptics are ultimately vindicated on this point remains an open question, but at any rate I hope to have shown that, to defend their epistemological theory, the Stoics need not insist that in every case the phenomenology of an impression directly puts us in touch with its reliability.⁵¹

⁵¹ I am very grateful to have received incisive comments on earlier drafts from Hendrik Lorenz, Suzanne Obdrzalek, Benjamin Morison, Melissa Lane, Victor Caston, Ian Campbell, Domenica Romagni, Amy Berg, Rachel Cristy, Robbie Hirsch, Hal Thorsrud, and Alexander Nehamas. I would also like to thank an anonymous referee at *Ancient Philosophy* for their extremely helpful and extensive feedback.

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