One of the most intriguing features of Early Imperial philosophy is the renewal of interest in the ancients. From the end of the first century BC onwards it is as if philosophers of all schools were persuaded that philosophy somehow came to an end and that the task was now to restore the ancient truth of the great philosophers of the past. This was basically the only point of agreement, the main divergence being about who was the most important master, with each school pleading the cause of the founder of his own school. A consequence of this attitude was that controversies and debates among schools were not restricted to arguments and theories, but also involved historiographical and exegetical problems. The example of Plato is probably the most remarkable. The rich and oscillating history of the Academy provoked hot debates among Platonists on both the real value of his thought and his philosophical allegiances. And it was not only the Academy, for other schools as well claimed a special link with Plato, often in open opposition to Platonists. Such is surely the case of Panaetius and Posidonius, both trying to present Plato as a predecessor of Stoicism. Interesting parallels can also be detected in Aristocles of Messenes’ attempt to show that Plato was a predecessor of Aristotle or in the Neopythagoreans’ appropriation of him as a follower of the original Pythagorean truth.

Moreover, Plato was not appealing to dogmatists only. On the contrary, in the first Imperial centuries an equally (if not more) controversial issue was his compatibility with skepticism. This issue arose in the Hellenistic Academy from Arcesilaus to Philo of Larissa, who repeatedly insisted on the mutual link between their allegiance to Plato and

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their commitment to skepticism. But the problem did not end with the demise of the Hellenistic Academy. On the contrary, the debate later continued both in the Platonist schools and outside them, in relation to the new form of skepticism inaugurated by the Neopyrrhonist Aenesidemus; and in the third century AD Diogenes Laertius observed that on the issue there was a “great division of opinion (πολλὴ στάσις) between those who affirm and those who deny that Plato was a dogmatist” (DL III 51). As already remarked, this question was not merely of historical interest, for the controversy on Plato’s views was a way to discuss the philosophical consistency of skepticism. The standard view of most Platonists, from Antiochus to Numenius, was clear: given that philosophy basically consists in doctrines organized in a coherent system, skepticism has nothing to do with it; and given that Plato is the most important philosopher, the inevitable consequence is that he has nothing to share with skepticism either. Neoplatonists will later insist on the same point. In the same direction, but from different assumptions, goes Sextus, our best known Neopyrrhonist. For Plato is a dogmatic philosopher, and thus he has nothing to share with skepticism, or better with the only legitimate form of skepticism, that is Pyrrhonism.

But what about Sextus’ predecessors? Was Sextus reacting against different interpretations or was he rather following in their footsteps? This problem is especially serious with regard to Aenesidemus, and there exists considerable disagreement among scholars regarding his views on Plato. The aim of this paper is to return to this vexed question in order to provide, if not the definite solution (on this issue suspension of judgment is a tempting alternative), at least a plausible reconstruction of the philosophical arguments and their historical context.

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3 See Bonazzi (2003a), 57–95. Plutarch of Chaeronea and an anonymous commentator on the Theaetetus (on whom see below) adopted a different view, less hostile to Academic skepticism. But since they clearly reject Pyrrhonian skepticism and account for the compatibility between Platonist metaphysics and Academic skepticism, it is not necessary to discuss their interpretation here; for a more detailed analysis see Bonazzi (forthcoming).
4 Cf. Outlines of Pyrrhonism (PH) I 225 to be discussed below.