Carneades argued for positions to which he did not subscribe. This is uncontroversial. According to Cicero, he defended the view that the end consists in the enjoyment of the first natural things, not because he was of the opinion that it did, but in order to challenge the Stoics (*Luc.* 132: *Fin.* II.35, V.20). Cicero also tells us that Carneades argued for the position of Calliphon—that the end is a combination of virtue and pleasure—so zealously that he almost seemed to approve it (*Luc.* 139). According to Cotta, the Academic spokesman in the *De natura deorum*, we are not to suppose Carneades embraced the consequences of his theological sorites, which appears to reduce theism to an absurdity; he argued in this way not to abolish the gods—what could become a philosopher less?—but to convict the Stoics of having shown nothing clearly about them (III.44).

And there are of course Carneades' notorious arguments that justice either does not exist or is the height of folly, which according to tradition were presented during the famous embassy of the philosophers to Rome in 155 BCE. Although questions can be raised about which of these arguments Carneades may have made while in Rome and against which schools of philosophy he directed them, there is little doubt that the arguments themselves were his and that his motives were, as tradition maintains, much the same as those already cited: not to convince his auditors that there was no such thing as justice or that prudence requires us to be unjust, but rather to expose the difficulties in the philosophers' theories of justice.¹

There are significant differences between the kinds of argument illustrated by these cases, but they have a characteristic in common that is at least as important: they set out from premises to which their author is not committed and draw conclusions to which he need, therefore, be no more committed. If we call

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arguments like these ‘dialectical’, it seems there is hardly anything Carneades could not have said while arguing dialectically. Yet ancient philosophers and modern scholars alike have tended to suppose that there were limits to what Carneades, or indeed any Academic before Philo or Antiochus, could consistently have said about epistemological matters. Very roughly speaking, they have imposed these constraints out of the conviction that the Academics from Arcesilas to Carneades were sceptics, who argued dialectically in order to drive home the sceptical moral that nothing can be known (ἀκαταληπτικά), of which, unlike the conclusions of their ethical and theological arguments, they were somehow convinced.

Such a view, I believe, lies behind the success enjoyed in recent times by an interpretation of a difficult passage in the Cicero’s Academic books. At Lucullus 34 the title character, who speaks for Antiochus, objects to the error, as he sees it, of some Academics who distinguish perspicua, or evident matters (ἐνωριγή), from percepta, or apprehended matters (καταληπτίκα), and maintain that there is something evident which is true and impressed in the soul and mind and yet cannot be apprehended. This passage follows closely on the heels of another, in which Lucullus attributes a range of views to the Academics, some apparently related to this one, others seemingly very different from it (32-4):

Nor indeed am I able sufficiently to determine what is their intention or what they wish. For sometimes when we put the case to them in this way, ‘if the conclusions for which you argue are true, then all things will be nonevident’, they reply: ‘but what is that to us; is it our fault? blame nature, which has, as Democritus says, hidden truth in the deep’. Others, however, reply in a more refined manner; they even complain because we accuse them of saying all things are nonevident and attempt to show how great a difference there is between the nonevident and that which cannot be apprehended and to distinguish them. Let us deal with these then who distinguish them; those who say that all things are as nonevident as whether the stars are even or odd in number let us abandon as hopeless cases. [...] They are caught in a similar error when, compelled by the reproach of truth, they wish to distinguish evident matters from those that are apprehended (perspicua a perceptis) and attempt to show that there is something evident, this is true and impressed in the mind and soul, but all the same it cannot be apprehended.

Despite the good reasons to which a minority of dissenters have pointed for supposing that it was Carneades who distinguished