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Preface

The bulk of the essays collected in this volume derive from papers presented at a conference on Pyrrhonian skepticism held in Buenos Aires on August 6–8, 2008. I am grateful to all the speakers who accepted the invitation to participate in the meeting. Other arrangements had been made for the publication of several of the papers, so these are not included here. By contrast, four additional essays by scholars who could not attend the conference have been incorporated. My thanks to them for being willing to contribute to the volume. I wish as well to express my gratitude to the Departamento de Humanidades y Artes of the Universidad Nacional de Lanús and to the Agencia Nacional de Promoción Científica y Tecnológica of Argentina for the financial support that made it possible to organize the conference. My thanks also go to Simo Knuuttila for agreeing to publish the volume in The New Synthese Historical Library, and to Willemijn Arts and Ingrid van Laarhoven from Springer for their help through the various stages of the project. Finally, I would like to thank the referee for Springer for his helpful comments on the manuscript.

Buenos Aires, Argentina | Diego E. Machuca
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Introduction

Diego E. Machuca

Among scholars of ancient philosophy there is today considerable interest in the extant works of the second-century physician Sextus Empiricus as our most important source for Pyrrhonian skepticism. Until not long ago, though, they used to regard his writings exclusively as an invaluable source of information about non-Pyrrhonian thinkers and schools whose positions would otherwise be more obscure or even utterly unknown. A radical change in the way of approaching Sextus' oeuvre started to take place since the late 1970s and early 1980s, when a group of scholars began to explore the complex history of ancient Pyrrhonism and the *sui generis* character of this form of skepticism. Although some have questioned its coherence, it is safe to say that most have recognized its philosophical import.

A fact that sometimes goes unnoticed even to this day regarding the Pyrrhonian tradition is that its history did not end with Sextus and his immediate successors, since it has had a tremendous impact on both modern and contemporary philosophy. As regards the modern period, a considerable number of historians of ideas have argued that the Renaissance rediscovery of Sextus' works played a key role in the formation of modern thought.[1] Richard Popkin in particular maintained that the revival of Pyrrhonism triggered a "Pyrrhonian crisis."[2] According to him, the history of modern philosophy should to a large extent be construed as the history of the various strategies which modern thinkers devised to deal with that crisis.[3] As for the contemporary philosophical scene, an important number of epistemologists have vigorously discussed the Pyrrhonian arguments against the rational justification of

[1]The resurgence of Pyrrhonian skepticism was due especially to the publication of Henri Estienne's Latin translation of Sextus' *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* in 1562 and of Gentian Hervet's Latin translation of *Adversus Mathematicos* and *Adversus Dogmaticos* in 1569.

[2]Popkin (1960) is the pioneering work on the impact of ancient skepticism (especially in its Pyrrhonian variety) on modern philosophy, covering the period from Erasmus to Descartes. Popkin (1979) extends the analysis to Spinoza, and Popkin (2003) reaches back to Savonarola and forward to Bayle. For the influence of Pyrrhonism, and ancient skepticism in general, on modern thought, see also Popkin (1993), Maia Neto and Popkin (2004), Paganini (2008), Maia Neto, Paganini, and Laursen (2009), Paganini and Maia Neto (2009), and Naya (2011).

[3]Some scholars have argued that Popkin overstates the part played by Pyrrhonism in shaping modern thought. See Ayers (2004) and Perler (2004).

our beliefs – what they now call "Agrippa's trilemma."[4] Coherentists, foundationalists, and infinitists, as well as externalists and contextualists have adopted different tactics to deal with that challenge. Moreover, some present-day thinkers have characterized their own philosophical positions as "(neo-)Pyrrhonian."[5] Thus, in parallel with the strong interest in Pyrrhonism aroused among ancient philosophy scholars, Sextus' writings have in recent years increasingly attracted the attention of historians of modern philosophy and analytic philosophers.[6]

Collections of essays dealing with skepticism can in general be divided into two groups, each of which has been the object of a criticism. Some collections are said to adopt an approach which is exclusively historical and exegetical and to overlook the current discussion of skepticism in systematic analytic philosophy, thus ignoring much of its philosophical import. By contrast, others are said to take an approach which is solely systematic and to explore certain skeptical arguments *in abstracto*, thus neglecting their origin and history, without which it is impossible to fully appreciate them. The present volume intends to avoid these criticisms by integrating the strengths and merits of both types of collections: it explores the history and significance of Pyrrhonism in ancient and modern philosophy and examines the Pyrrhonian outlook in relation to contemporary analytic philosophy. Moreover, going beyond the common distinction between a historical and a systematic approach, some of the essays combine specialized historical scholarship about the Pyrrhonian tradition with rigorous philosophical examination of the nature of Pyrrhonism and the challenges it poses. The reason for combining historical exegesis with systematic investigation is confidence in the viability and the desirability of exploring a philosophical stance both in its historical context and in connection with contemporary concerns.

By analyzing various aspects of Pyrrhonian skepticism as it was conceived of in its original Greek context and later on in the modern period, and as it is interpreted in the contemporary philosophical scene, the essays collected in this volume will allow the reader to witness the transformations undergone by the Pyrrhonian tradition. This tradition is complex and multifaceted, since the Pyrrhonian arguments have been put into the service of different enterprises or been approached in relation to interests which are quite distinct. It is thus impossible to find an entirely homogenous or monolithic picture of the Pyrrhonian outlook from the Hellenistic period to the present day. The diversity of uses and conceptions of Pyrrhonism accounts for the diversity of the challenges it is deemed to pose and of the attempts to meet them. This philosophical richness and adaptability should be borne in mind by anyone studying the Pyrrhonian tradition.

[4] See, e.g., Fogelin (1994), Sosa (1997), Williams (2004), Klein (2008), and Lammenranta (2008). Agrippa's trilemma is also known as "Münchhausen-Trilemma," as Hans Albert (1985) has called it.

[5] See Fogelin (1994, 2004), Porchat Pereira (2006), and Sinnott-Armstrong (2006).

[6] For an overview of Sextus' legacy in modern and contemporary philosophy, see Machuca (2008, 58–63).

Before introducing the twelve contributions that make up the present volume, it is perhaps necessary to account for the absence of essays devoted to the presence of Pyrrhonism in Latin medieval thought. The explanation is simple: although discussion of skeptical problems and arguments is well attested in Western Europe during the Middle Ages,[7] Pyrrhonism played a very small part, since direct acquaintance with Pyrrhonian texts was rare, with the result that knowledge of this brand of skepticism was extremely limited.[8] First, three manuscripts of an early-fourteenth-century Latin translation of Sextus' *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* probably by Niccolò da Reggio (*ca.* 1280–1350) survive, but this translation seems to have exerted no influence whatsoever.[9] One of these manuscripts also contains a partial Latin translation of Sextus' *Adversus Mathematicos* III–V, probably by the same author.[10] Second, it has recently been argued that, in Nicholas of Autrecourt's treatment of the infinite regress argument, it is possible to identify certain Pyrrhonian elements,[11] which would show that in the fourteenth century there was at least some knowledge of Sextus. Finally, a manuscript remains which contains a fifteenth-century Latin translation of the first four books of *Adversus Mathematicos* by Giovanni Lorenzi, but it does not seem to have had any circulation.[12]

In the Middle Ages, so-called Academic skepticism was better known than Pyrrhonism due especially to Augustine's *Contra Academicos*, and also to other works such as Cicero's *Academica*, *De Natura Deorum*, and *Tusculanae*.[13] But there were also important skeptical arguments peculiar to medieval philosophy, such as that which refers to an all-powerful God that could deceive us.[14] However, contrary to what happened before and after the Middle Ages, during this period there were no skeptics in either the Christian, Jewish, or Islamic traditions, with the only possible exception of John of Salisbury (*ca.* 1120–1180), who considered himself an

[7] It has recently been claimed that historians of skepticism have usually ignored the important part played by both epistemological and external-world skepticism during the Middle Ages, and that this has prevented them from realizing that medieval discussions of skepticism must be taken into account in order to fully understand the history of modern skepticism. In this connection, see the essays collected in Lagerlund (2010). For an overview of medieval skepticism from the thirteenth century on, see Perler (2006).

[8] See Schmitt (1983, 226–7), Porro (1994, 229–37), Floridi (2002, 13–25). Greek/Byzantine and Arabic scholars, by contrast, continued to read Pyrrhonian texts during Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages (see Porro 1994, 235 n. 16; Floridi 2002, 20–2, 24–5). For instance, in his *Myriobiblon* or *Library*, Photius, the ninth-century Patriarch of Constantinople, offers a summary of Aenesidemus' lost *Pyrrhonian Discourses*, which is now our most important source for his thought.

[9] See Schmitt (1983, 227), Porro (1994, 230–5). For a detailed analysis of these manuscripts, see Cavini (1977, 1–8), Floridi (2002, 63–9), and especially Wittwer (forthcoming).

[10] See Cavini (1977, 4, 8–9), Floridi (2002, 79–80).

[11] See Grellard (2007a).

[12] See Schmitt (1976), Porro (1994, 236), Floridi (2002, 80–4).

[13] See Schmitt (1983, 227), Porro (1994, 242–51), Grellard (2004, 114–5).

[14] See Gregory (1974, 1984), Perler (2010a).

Academic skeptic.[15] In any case, it is plain that there were no full-blown or radical skeptics advocating universal suspension of judgment or denying the possibility of knowledge. In general, although some thinkers adopted what might be deemed a skeptical position on certain specific issues, when skepticism was the object of discussion, in most cases the aim was to refute it.[16] In addition, such refutations were not produced in the context of a serious skeptical crisis, unlike what later occurred in the modern period. It must be noted, in this connection, that it has recently been claimed that an important number of medieval authors made a methodological use of skeptical arguments. This use consisted in employing them either to undermine a given conception of knowledge which was then replaced by another one immune to the challenges posed by those arguments, or to distinguish between types of knowledge and to determine the kind of certainty proper to each of them.[17] In the Middle Ages, skepticism seems to have been a logical construction independent for the most part of the historical skeptical movement, which is why it was understood as a reservoir of arguments to the effect that knowledge is impossible.[18] In this respect, the medieval conception of skepticism does not seem to differ much from the way skepticism is generally conceived of in contemporary analytic epistemology.

In sum, the role played by Pyrrhonism in Western medieval thought was both minor in relation to other forms of skepticism and insignificant in comparison with the part it has had in both modern and contemporary philosophical discussions.

The present collection falls into three parts, the first focusing on ancient Pyrrhonism, the second addressing its influence on modern philosophy, and the third dealing with the Pyrrhonian stance in relation to contemporary analytic philosophy. While the approach taken in the third part is, as expected, mainly systematic, some of the essays on ancient and modern Pyrrhonism combine historical and exegetical analysis with an assessment of the philosophical merits of the Pyrrhonian outlook. It should be noted that this collection does not aim to provide a comprehensive discussion of Pyrrhonism in ancient, modern, and contemporary philosophy. Rather, its goal is to open up stimulating new exegetical and philosophical perspectives on Pyrrhonian skepticism and to motivate further examination of certain issues.

Richard Bett opens the first part by examining a facet of the practical nature of ancient Pyrrhonism. As has frequently been noted, one of the aspects which differentiate it from the various forms of contemporary skepticism is that the Pyrrhonist does not view his philosophy as a merely theoretical stance with no implications for his life, but rather regards it as an ἀγωγή or way of living. This practical character does not consist solely in the assumption that it is possible to live one's Pyrrhonism, but also in the thought that the Pyrrhonist, by virtue of his skepticism, is better off

[15] On the skepticism of John of Salisbury, see Grellard (2007b).

[16] See, e.g., Grellard (2004) for a taxonomy of the thirteenth-century strategies against the skeptical argument based on the illusion of the senses.

[17] This view is fully advanced by Perler (2010b); cf. Grellard (2004, 128–9; 2007a, 342). Whether an author felt the need to refute a skeptical argument or merely made a methodological use of it seems to be, in principle, hard to determine with precision.

[18] See Grellard (2004, 113; 2007a, 328).

than other people. Bett's contribution focuses on an aspect of this further claim. Granting for the sake of argument that Pyrrhonism is livable, he asks whether the type of values the Pyrrhonian life includes and the adherence to them it allows make such a life ethically acceptable and desirable for us. He thinks they do not, since the Pyrrhonist's lack of commitment to the moral values that form part of his society's laws and customs and the passivity shown in his practical decisions reveal that he is not an ethically engaged agent.

Next, Svavar Hrafn Svavarsson offers an original interpretation of the notion of ἀταραξία (undisturbedness or tranquility) in Sextus' account of Pyrrhonism. In the *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, Sextus tells us that the reason the proto-Pyrrhonist began to philosophize was his hope of becoming undisturbed by resolving the disagreement among appearances, i.e., by determining which are true and which are false. Being unable to resolve it, due to the equipollence of the conflicting appearances, he suspended judgment. To his surprise, by doing so he became undisturbed in matters of belief. Svavarsson argues that, although Sextus often suggests that the skeptic's undisturbedness comes about through his not having beliefs of any kind, in his explicit explanation of skeptical undisturbedness he claims that it comes about only through not having positive beliefs about natural values. Hence there are two notions of undisturbedness at play in Sextus' account of Pyrrhonism.

Katja Vogt's essay examines a subject which has recently been a focus of much attention among scholars, namely, the nature of the investigation conducted by the Pyrrhonist. One common objection raised against his investigation is that it cannot be deemed genuine investigation, since it does not aim at the discovery of the truth. Rather, what the Pyrrhonist searches for is the attainment of the state of undisturbedness. Vogt argues that this objection is based on the questionable view that the sole goal of investigation is the discovery of the truth. This overlooks that there are other aims which philosophers strive for in their investigations, fails to distinguish between the motivational basis of philosophical investigation and its goals, and ignores that philosophical inquiry guided by the value of truth may not be immediately aimed at the attainment of the truth but rather at the avoidance of falsehoods. These three points are to be taken into account when trying to understand the Pyrrhonian sort of investigation.

For its part, my contribution explores whether the Sextan Pyrrhonist is committed to the law or principle of non-contradiction, a topic which has not received much attention among students of ancient Pyrrhonism. Although there are passages of Sextus' oeuvre which seem to show that the Pyrrhonist endorses that law, I argue that he actually suspends judgment about the truth of its different dogmatic formulations. However, this does not preclude him from following, without any conviction as to their correctness, certain qualified versions of that law when thinking and acting, even though he would not present these as versions of a *law* or *principle*. I also claim that the Pyrrhonist makes use of the dogmatic versions of the principle of non-contradiction only dialectically. Finally, after showing that both the uncommitted observance of qualified versions of that principle and the dialectical use of its dogmatic formulations are in agreement with other aspects of the Pyrrhonist's philosophy, I explore whether he is an anti-rationalist.

Peter Klein focuses on two of the so-called Five Modes of Agrippa, namely, the mode deriving from regress *ad infinitum* and the mode based on reciprocity. He maintains that, in keeping with his characteristic dialectical argumentation, the Pyrrhonist takes the premises employed in those modes from Aristotle's foundationalist conception of justification. This epistemological theory was the predominant one in Sextus' time and continues to play an important role in contemporary foundationalism. However, the fact that the Pyrrhonist's regress argument as well as his reciprocal mode work with a particular conception of epistemic justification significantly restricts both their generality and their power. For there are alternative theories – namely, contemporary infinitism and coherentism – which conceive of epistemic warrant in such a way that they reject some of the assumptions of the foundationalist conception of justification, and which therefore accept that regress and reciprocal arguments can produce conclusions which are epistemically justified. After some vacillation, Klein's paper has been placed in the first part. The reason is that, even though his purpose is to critically examine the epistemological presuppositions of Agrippa's trilemma using the tools of contemporary analytic philosophy, he deals at great length with Sextus' account of the Agrippan modes and Aristotle's foundationalist epistemology. His essay is a paradigmatic case of ancient texts being approached from the perspective, not of a classical philosophy scholar, but of a contemporary epistemologist concerned with assessing various theories of justification.

The second part of the volume, devoted to Pyrrhonism in modern philosophy, includes four papers dealing with the outlooks that Francis Bacon, Pierre Bayle, and David Hume adopted towards Pyrrhonism and skepticism in general. These essays take account of the specialized literature of the past decades and offer new interpretations, thus advancing the study of the presence of Pyrrhonian skepticism in modern thought.

Bacon's relation to skepticism has not attracted much attention from specialists, and hence the presence of Pyrrhonian elements in his philosophy has not been thoroughly studied. Accordingly, Luiz Eva's essay represents an important addition to the literature and will arouse further interest in exploring the role played by skepticism in the thought of the author of the *Novum Organum*. Bacon recognizes some important similarities between skepticism and his own philosophy, especially the skeptic's emphasis on the weakness of our cognitive faculties and his suspension of judgment. But there is also a key difference: although both affirm the impossibility of knowledge, the skeptic claims that nothing can be known *tout court*, whereas Bacon contends that this is the case only as far as the traditional way of attaining knowledge is concerned. Eva proposes to examine the affinities and differences between Bacon's philosophy and ancient skepticism, both Pyrrhonian and Academic, by focusing on a comparison between his doctrine of the idols and the arguments and themes found in the ancient and contemporary skeptical sources (in particular Montaigne's *Essais*) which he presumably read.

It has sometimes been said that, for any given claim made by Pierre Bayle somewhere in his oeuvre, it is possible to find a refutation of it somewhere else. Centering his analysis on Bayle's *Commentaire philosophique*, John Christian

Laursen examines the presence in this work of both arguments which purport to establish rationally the necessity of toleration and arguments which, by contrast, undermine reason's capacity to ground toleration. These latter are Bayle's famous arguments about the conscientious persecutor and the overwhelming force of custom and education. Laursen analyzes in detail the tension between the two kinds of argument, demonstrating that neither side wins and that Bayle finally turns to rhetoric to justify toleration. He thus takes issue with recent interpretations of the *Commentaire philosophique* which, ignoring or dismissing the arguments that undermine the reliability of reason in matters of toleration, maintain that Bayle's position in that work is wholly rationalist. Laursen's paper is therefore an important contribution to the more general debate about whether Bayle was a rationalist or a Pyrrhonian skeptic.

Hume's stance on Pyrrhonism, and on skepticism in general, is probably more complex than that of any other modern thinker, with the possible exception of Bayle. Due to this complexity, two essays are devoted to a careful examination of his skepticism, tackling both his overt disparaging attitude towards (what he took to be) Pyrrhonian skepticism and the philosophical connection between his own skepticism and the Pyrrhonist's. Although Hume's relation to skepticism has received considerable attention from scholars, these two essays provide fresh insights. In the first of them, Peter Fosl considers an at least apparent incoherence on the part of both the Pyrrhonist and Hume, namely, their appeal to nature. For it seems that skeptics should refrain from claiming to have understood nature, from making prescriptive or normative assertions based on the notion of nature, and in general from espousing any form of naturalism. Fosl analyzes the Humean conception of nature, arguing that it is characteristically skeptical and that, in Hume, skepticism should be understood, not as a theory, but as a non-dogmatic way of addressing theory. This is much in line with the ancient Pyrrhonist's outlook, even if the similarity may be only accidental. In this connection, Fosl thoroughly explores whether Sextus' texts were available to Hume and, if so, whether he read them and was influenced by them. He also considers in depth the similarities and differences between Hume's stance and the ancient forms of skepticism, and examines to what extent one can characterize his skepticism as either Academic or Pyrrhonian.

For his part, Plínio Junqueira Smith explores in detail Hume's treatment of skeptical arguments. On the one hand, there is Hume's distinction between two types of such arguments, namely, popular or weak and philosophical or strong skeptical arguments. On the other, there is the difference between two uses of these arguments, no matter whether they are weak or strong: the Pyrrhonist utilizes them to suspend judgment, whereas the Academic employs them both to restrict our inquiries to what is within the scope of our understanding and to show that we only have probable knowledge and beliefs. Hume only accepts the latter use, because it is impossible to abolish all belief as Pyrrhonists intend to do.

Present-day epistemological discussions of skepticism have mainly focused on so-called Cartesian skepticism – i.e., the view that knowledge in general, or at least regarding a very large area, is impossible. This view, which amounts to the one Sextus ascribes to the Academics Carneades and Clitomachus, differs from Pyrrhonism in both its formulation and its scope. First, the Pyrrhonist does not deny

the possibility of ever attaining knowledge, but suspends judgment about whether or not knowledge is impossible, restricting himself to saying that up till now he has been unable to affirm that anyone knows anything. Second, he does not merely call into question our knowledge-claims, but also casts doubt on whether we are in fact justified in preferring any one of our beliefs to its opposite.[19] This more radical and subtler form of skepticism has more and more been attracting the attention of epistemologists, and the three essays included in the third part of the volume are the result of careful study of the Pyrrhonian outlook in connection with contemporary analytic philosophy. They deal with the relationship between Wittgenstein's thought and Pyrrhonism, the challenges posed by the Agrippan modes to contemporary theories of knowledge and justification, and the question of whether Pyrrhonism is livable.

In the first essay, Duncan Pritchard explores Wittgenstein's radical new conception of the structure of reasons put forward in his posthumously published *On Certainty*. According to such a conception, all belief-systems require the existence of fundamental "hinge" propositions which are held to be most certain, but which can be neither rationally doubted nor rationally supported. Pritchard claims that this account of the structure of reasons gives rise to a type of restricted skepticism which bears significant similarities with the Pyrrhonian outlook. This is why he thinks one can legitimately characterize that kind of skepticism as "Wittgensteinian Pyrrhonism."

In present-day epistemological discussions, the problem of disagreement has lately regained part of the special relevance it has in Sextus' account of Pyrrhonism. Thinking that the philosophical import of this problem has not been fully appreciated yet, Markus Lammenranta proposes to offer, on the basis of Sextus' exposition of the modes of suspension of judgment and from the perspective of analytic epistemology, a reconstruction of the argument based on disagreement. He contends that this reconstruction provides us with a serious "skeptical paradox" which must be taken into careful consideration by modern-day theories of knowledge and justification. He reviews the epistemological theories of foundationalism, contextualism, coherentism, reliabilism and evidentialism, and claims that they all fail to satisfactorily respond to the Pyrrhonian argument from disagreement.

Probably the most vexed question regarding ancient Pyrrhonism concerns the scope of ἐποχή, namely, whether it is limited to philosophico-scientific beliefs or extends also to ordinary or common-sense beliefs. The vigorous debate among specialists about whether the Pyrrhonist disavows all, or only some, beliefs has been couched in different terms, e.g., whether his skepticism is "rustic" or "urbane," and whether or not all of his appearance-statements are "non-epistemic," "non-doxastic," or "non-judgmental."[20] This issue is intimately related to the

[19]The view, commonly accepted by scholars, that Pyrrhonism differs from Cartesian skepticism in that it does not merely calls into question knowledge-claims but beliefs in general is rejected by Brennan (1999).

[20]The classic papers on this question are the five essays collected in Burnyeat and Frede (1997). See also Glidden (1983), Stough (1984), Barney (1992), Brennan (1999), Fine (2000), Bailey (2002, chapters 7–9, 11), Thorsrud (2009, chapter 9), and Perin (2010).

long-standing charge that the Pyrrhonist is reduced to inactivity because action requires belief (the famous ἀπραξία objection). If he advocates a moderate skepticism, then the charge seems easily answerable, while if his skepticism is radical, he is required to explain how action is possible in the absence of all beliefs. Juan Comesaña's essay takes up this complex question, not from a historical perspective, but from an exclusively philosophical one. His purpose is to determine whether the urbane and the rustic Pyrrhonists' replies to the inactivity charge are theoretically acceptable. In his view, the rustic Pyrrhonist cannot successfully respond to the objection because it is plain that action does require belief. The urbane Pyrrhonist therefore seems in a better position. So Comesaña examines both whether this type of Pyrrhonist can respond to the charge by using traditional resources and whether the contemporary theories of contextualism and contrastivism can help him offer a philosophically satisfactory or plausible answer. His final verdict is negative.

We hope this volume will contribute not only to further showing that Pyrrhonism has played a crucial role in the history of philosophy since Antiquity, but also to highlighting the philosophical import of this brand of skepticism.

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Contents

Part I Ancient Pyrrhonism

1 **How Ethical Can an Ancient Skeptic Be?** 3
Richard Bett

2 **Two Kinds of Tranquility: Sextus Empiricus on *Ataraxia*** 19
Svavar Hrafn Svavarsson

3 **The Aims of Skeptical Investigation** 33
Katja Maria Vogt

4 **Pyrrhonism and the Law of Non-Contradiction** 51
Diego E. Machuca

5 **Epistemic Justification and the Limits of Pyrrhonism** 79
Peter D. Klein

Part II Pyrrhonism in Modern Philosophy

6 **Bacon's Doctrine of the Idols and Skepticism** 99
Luiz Eva

7 **Skepticism against Reason in Pierre Bayle's Theory of Toleration** 131
John Christian Laursen

8 **Skepticism and the Possibility of Nature** 145
Peter S. Fosl

9 **Hume on Skeptical Arguments** 171
Plínio Junqueira Smith

Part III Pyrrhonism in Contemporary Philosophy

10 **Wittgensteinian Pyrrhonism** 193
Duncan Pritchard

11 Skepticism and Disagreement 203
Markus Lammenranta

12 Can Contemporary Semantics Help the Pyrrhonian Get a Life? . . 217
Juan Comesaña

Name Index 241

Subject Index 245

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Part I
Ancient Pyrrhonism

Chapter 1
How Ethical Can an Ancient Skeptic Be?

Richard Bett

It is a commonplace that ancient skepticism differs from skepticism as discussed in contemporary philosophy – or at any rate, in contemporary epistemology – in being practical[1]; skepticism is supposed be an outlook that one incorporates into one's life, as opposed to simply discussing in the seminar room. In the Pyrrhonist tradition this is taken one step further: not only is it assumed that one will live in accordance with skepticism, but the skeptic's life is said to have special and unique advantages. Sextus Empiricus, in particular, emphasizes the ways in which the skeptic is (as we might put it) better off than other people; however, it seems clear that this was always an important feature of the Pyrrhonist position.[2] Now, the very possibility of a skeptical *life* has been questioned since ancient times; the so-called *apraxia* or "inactivity" objection, which came in several different forms,[3] maintained that skepticism and action – at least, action of any full-blooded human kind – are simply incompatible. Modern philosophers have also found versions of this objection persuasive; Hume is an obvious example, despite the power that he takes skeptical reasoning to have. And a new version was constructed in our own day in a now classic paper by Myles Burnyeat, "Can the Sceptic Live his Scepticism?" (Burnyeat

[1] I enter the caveat because one might at least expect that skepticism about ethics would be acknowledged to have practical ramifications. And it is possible to find suggestions along these lines; see, for example, Lear (1983), where the position Lear calls relativism can also be seen as a form of skepticism. For the most part, however, moral skepticism today is not taken to have any more in the way of practical implications than is epistemological skepticism. I have said a little more about this in Bett (forthcoming a).

[2] Both Pyrrho, the starting-point of the movement, and Aenesidemus, the founder of the later Pyrrhonist tradition to which Sextus belonged, emphasize the skeptic's happiness and contrast it with the torments experienced by other people. For Pyrrho, see Aristocles in Eusebius, *Praeparatio evangelica* 14.18.1–5; for Aenesidemus, see Photius, *Bibliotheca* 169b19–26.

[3] For a good account of the various different types of *apraxia* objection, see Vogt (2010).

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1980). Other scholars have come to the skeptics' rescue[4]; but it is clear that this is a major point of contention in the study of the ancient skeptical outlook.

My concern, however, is with an aspect of the other claim – confined, as I say, to the Pyrrhonist tradition of skepticism – namely, that the skeptic is better off than other people. Supposing we grant that the skeptical life, as the Pyrrhonist depicts it, is indeed possible, is it a life that we could reasonably welcome or aspire to? More specifically, I have in mind the question what kind of *values* the skeptical life can include and what kind of adherence to these values it can permit. Does the skeptic – and again, from now on by "skeptic" I mean "Pyrrhonist skeptic" – have the resources with which to live a life that the rest of us would consider ethically robust? I shall argue that there is room for considerable doubt about this. And, to the extent that this is so, many of us will find it difficult to accept that this life is as desirable as the skeptic tries to make it sound. Tackling these issues requires us to be clear about a number of points concerning the nature of the Pyrrhonist outlook – particularly, but not only, in ethics – and this is where I begin. For the rest of the paper, I focus on Pyrrhonism as represented by Sextus Empiricus, who stands near the end of the tradition and is the only Pyrrhonist of whom complete works survive.

Sextus describes skepticism as an ability to produce oppositions, among arguments or impressions on the same topic, in such a way as to produce suspension of judgment because of the "equal strength" (*isostheneia*) of the items opposed to one another (*Outlines of Pyrrhonism* [*PH*] 1.8). Faced with these opposing arguments and impressions, one cannot muster any inclination to accept any one of them in preference to the others; hence one has no choice but to withhold one's acceptance from all of them. This is not to say that one thinks any or all of them are false or misleading; one does not think anything definite about them at all – one simply refrains from having any view, one way or the other, about their correctness. Nor is this because one thinks suspension of judgment is the *rationally required* response to the situation. For that would itself amount to the holding of a definite view on the meta-level, about the nature of rational justification; but the topics on which the skeptic aims to produce suspension of judgment are quite unrestricted, and so would include second-order logical or epistemological topics like this. Rather, one's suspension of judgment must be understood as the inevitable psychological reaction to being faced with oppositions that the skeptic has set up so as to be of "equal strength." That we – that is, both the skeptics themselves and others confronted with their approach – experience this reaction in these circumstances is no doubt due to deep-seated features of our psychological make-up. Sextus does not deny this; one of his central explanations for our thinking and acting as we do is our natural perceptual and cognitive capacities (*PH* 1.23–4). He does not, however, attempt to theorize about these capacities, which would again be inconsistent with a skeptical outlook. If pressed to explain why we suspend judgment when placed in the position engineered by the skeptic – as opposed, say, to accepting both poles of a

[4]See, e.g., Morrison (1990), Ribeiro (2002), Vogt (1998).

contradiction[5] – his answer would simply be "that's the way we are." That there are characteristics with which we are born, and others inculcated through our experience, that shape the way we behave is a theme we will return to later. The important point to note for now is the intellectual passivity (as Sextus himself depicts the situation) of even the central move in the adoption of skepticism itself, the move to suspension of judgment.

In the area of ethics, Sextus' discussion mainly revolves around one central topic: is anything in reality – or, as he often puts it, "by nature" (*phusei*) – good or bad?[6] He deals with this topic in two works: in the third book of *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* (*PH*), and in *Against the Ethicists* (*M* 11), which is the final book of his partially surviving longer work. In *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* the result of the discussion is what one would expect from the general picture I have just sketched: Sextus says that we have no option but to suspend judgment as to whether anything is really good or bad (*PH* 3.182, 235). Some philosophers argue that there are really good and bad things (and they differ further among themselves, of course, as to what these are), while others argue that there are no such things; and we are in no position to choose between these options. In *Against the Ethicists*, on the other hand, although Sextus again speaks of the skeptic's suspending judgment (*M* 11.111) – and this suspension clearly has to do with the topic of things being good or bad by nature – it looks as if the outcome of the discussion is rather that *nothing* is by nature good or bad. There are complicated questions here about the development of Pyrrhonism and the development of Sextus' own outlook[7]; it may be that the picture sketched above – which is based on the only explicit treatment of the general principles of skepticism in Sextus' surviving work, and seems to conform to his actual practice most of the time – represents just one version or phase of the Pyrrhonist outlook, not the only one. But we need not worry about these questions here. For what the two works have in common is the idea that the skeptic refrains from positing anything that *is* good or bad by nature; and, as we shall see, it is this that is crucial for understanding the Pyrrhonist's own practical attitudes.

I said that the skeptic's suspension of judgment is unrestricted as to subject-matter. But this needs to be qualified. What Sextus says is that the skeptic suspends judgment about how things are, but does not question the fact that things *appear* to us in certain ways (*PH* 1.19–20). Honey appears to us sweet (most of the time,

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[5] As Aristotle says his opponents, on the issue of the primacy and inescapability of the Law of Non-Contradiction, claim to do. Note how Aristotle attributes to these people both the belief that propositions of the form "P and not-P" can be true, and the belief *that it is possible to hold* beliefs of this kind (*Met*. 1005b35–1006a2); a major part of his response consists of attacking the former by means of attacking the latter. For Aristotle, as for the skeptics and their opponents (see above), the possibility of incorporating a philosophical outlook into one's ordinary attitudes is important, as it typically is not for philosophers today. I have discussed this in Bett (1993).

[6] Or indifferent – that is, neither good nor bad. But Sextus does not consistently include the indifferent alongside the good and the bad in these discussions; and in any case, no issue of principle is affected by its presence or absence.

[7] I have discussed this in Bett (1997), introduction and commentary, and in Bett (2000, chapter 4). For other points of view see, e.g., Schofield (2007), Hankinson (2010).

anyway), and that it appears so is not up for discussion; what is subject to debate, and what the skeptic will eventually suspend judgment about, is whether it actually is sweet. And, with this proviso – that we are dealing with how things are, not with how they appear – the claim that skeptical suspension of judgment is unrestricted can stand. Now, there is a difficult question about how we are to understand this division; what exactly is supposed to fall on the side of "how things are," and what on the other side? Sextus is clear that theoretical questions of the kind investigated by the sciences are questions about which the skeptic does suspend judgment (*PH* 1.13). And it is possible to understand the honey example as falling under this heading; perhaps what Sextus suspends judgment about are questions such as honey's underlying molecular structure. But a great many everyday beliefs are not like this. Take my belief that I am now on the twelfth floor of an apartment building that is currently serving as the temporary headquarters for the humanities departments at Johns Hopkins, while their regular building is undergoing major renovations – as I can see from its scaffolding-covered exterior, which features prominently in the spectacular view that is my temporary office's one advantage over my normal workspace. Sextus gives no explicit answer as to how to classify a belief, or set of beliefs, such as this. It is, in any normal sense, about how things are, not how they appear; yet its subject or subjects are clearly not theoretical or scientific in character. Scholars have debated this point of interpretation without any clear resolution, and it may be that Sextus' text offers no single, clear and consistent answer on the question.

On the topic that interests us here, however, it is reasonably clear what Sextus means the skeptic to avoid. For he is quite explicit (*PH* 1.30) that the belief that there are things that are good, and things that are bad, by nature – the central ethical belief that the skeptic refrains from – is one that is held by ordinary people, not just by philosophers debating meta-ethical questions. Presumably what he has in mind, then, is not anything metaphysically subtle, but simply the common-sense thought that certain things are good and that others are bad. Now, by adding "really" or "by nature," Sextus indicates that he takes ordinary ethical thinking to include a commitment to some form of ethical objectivity. We may take issue with this assumption – or we may think it is no longer true today, whatever was the case in antiquity – but it is far from being absurd; essentially the same view was advanced in 1977 by J.L. Mackie, and has remained an important focus of interest in contemporary meta-ethics.[8] But there is no reason to think that Sextus (any more than Mackie) means to attribute to ordinary people any particular or determinate view of the nature or basis of this objectivity; that is the province of theorists. And Sextus' point here is that the skeptic will have nothing to do with either theoretically rarefied or common-sense versions of the belief that there are things that are really good or

[8] Mackie (1977). Reactions to this work included an important volume of essays, Honderich (1985); an indication of the continuing interest it excites is another volume of essays, Joyce and Kirchin (2010).

bad. This will be of some significance when we try to situate the skeptic's practical attitudes in relation to those of ordinary, ethically engaged agents.

Why is the skeptic supposed to be better off than other people? Sextus tells us (*PH* 1.8) that skeptical suspension of judgment has a further result, namely *ataraxia* or freedom from worry. He also says (1.12) that the starting-point of skepticism is the hope of *ataraxia*, to be attained (it is initially thought) by discovering the truth; one is bothered (*tarassomenoi*) by the divergence (*anômalia*) among arguments and impressions on the same topics, and one hopes to be freed from this worry by settling which of these arguments and impressions are true. But this, of course, is not what happens; rather, one comes to suspension of judgment instead, and it is *this*, not the discovery of the truth, that yields *ataraxia*. The point is made more explicit a little later in the simile of Apelles the painter (1.28–9). Like a painter who throws his sponge in exasperation at a canvas on which he has been trying unsuccessfully to depict the foam around a horse's mouth – and finds that the imprint of the sponge gives him just the effect he was aiming for – the skeptic achieves his aim, *ataraxia*, by giving up on the search for truth that he had originally (before becoming a skeptic) thought would lead to it. According to this story, then, it appears that the initial disturbance comes from the inability to decide among conflicting appearances or theories. The subject-matter of these appearances or theories would seem to be irrelevant; suspension of judgment on any topic contributes to *ataraxia*, because it frees one from the anxiety associated with not being able to choose between the alternatives. Moreover, it is consistent with everything Sextus says here that, had the original hope of discovering the truth been fulfilled, that too would have yielded *ataraxia*. There is no suggestion that the pre-skeptic was mistaken in thinking that discovery, were it to have been achieved, would have produced the result he was hoping for; the problem is rather that the attempt at discovery keeps on producing suspension of judgment instead (which turns out, in the end, not to be a problem after all).

However, this is not Sextus' only account of the matter. In several places he addresses more directly the question of why *ataraxia* results from suspension of judgment. And here a rather different picture emerges. It is not suspension of judgment in general that is now said to be responsible for *ataraxia*, but suspension of judgment specifically about things that are good or bad by nature. The central idea is that the person who does believe that certain things are good or bad by nature is thrown into an intense turmoil concerning these things. If one thinks that certain things are really in their nature good, one will be desperate to get or to keep them; if one thinks that other things are really in their nature bad, one will be desperate to avoid or get rid of them. In both *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* (1.25–30, 3.235–8) and, at much greater length, in *Against the Ethicists* (110–67), Sextus emphasizes the frenzy that surrounds the holding of such beliefs, and the great advantage that accrues to the skeptic from being free from all of them. (Again, that the skeptic holds no beliefs of the form "X is good/bad by nature" is common to both works, even if they differ in the way suggested above.) Here, then, the point is that the stakes are simply very much lower for the skeptic in a great many areas of life; whereas for the non-skeptic there are numerous things that matter very deeply, for the skeptic

nothing matters especially. Sextus does acknowledge that the skeptic experiences hunger, pain and other bodily afflictions. But even here, he suggests, the skeptic is in a better position than the non-skeptic; for although everyone feels pain in certain circumstances, the non-skeptic experiences the additional anguish stemming from the belief that pain is by nature a bad thing. There is an interesting point of contact here between skepticism and Stoicism. For the stability and calm of the Stoic sage's demeanor, as contrasted with the turmoil and instability of ordinary people, is also due to the sage's being free from large classes of unwarranted beliefs to the effect that certain things are really good or bad, beliefs that the Stoics designate as passions (*pathê*). The difference, of course, is that in the Stoic picture, the sage instead has *correct* beliefs about what is really good and bad, whereas the skeptic simply lacks such beliefs altogether.

Sextus' claim that beliefs to the effect that things are really good or bad are a source of trouble seems more convincing in some cases than in others. A star athlete who sets great value on athletic achievement might be hugely disappointed at not breaking the record in some race. And if she did break the record, she might be constantly worried that someone else might improve on her performance and snatch the record away from her.[9] Another athlete might not think such achievements were of any real importance in the scheme of things, and would be much less concerned about the results of any competition, whether they went in her favor or against her. (Of course, the second athlete would be much less likely to become a star. But the point about comparative levels of worry still stands.) But that this kind of pattern obtains in life in general, or among people in general, seems highly implausible. For it is equally true that those with firm beliefs about the moral order of things are often calmer than those whose minds on such matters are not made up. If you are firmly convinced that abortion is simply wrong (perhaps with certain exceptions), or if you are firmly convinced that early-stage abortion poses no moral problems at all, then you are likely to be much more secure and comfortable in your decision, in the first case, not to have an abortion (assuming none of those exceptions applies), or, in the second case, to have an early-stage abortion, than you would be whatever your decision was, if this was an issue about which you were seriously conflicted. Now, it might be replied that the latter situation is not that of the Pyrrhonist, who, as Sextus describes him, is not in the grip of conflicting or uncertain beliefs about ethical matters, but simply lacks such beliefs altogether. This is correct as far as it goes, but it does not close the issue. For, first, the idea that anyone could be so devoid of the relevant beliefs as to be unperturbed by, or oblivious to, the moral dimensions of *every* situation is difficult to swallow; I return to this point below, in the context of an example of Sextus' own. And second, part of the point of my example here is that definite moral beliefs are often not merely not a source of torment, but a positive source of comfort in difficult situations; and from comfort of this kind *both*

[9]Another point that Sextus makes in this context is that those who achieve what they take to be good "are irrationally and immeasurably excited" (*PH* 1.27, cf. *M* 11.116, 146), and that this too is something the skeptic is better off without. To us this may have a strange ring; but again, it is in line with Stoic opposition to the passions, this time on grounds of their excessiveness.

the conflicted, but ethically engaged agent *and* the person who lacks all beliefs to the effect that things are in reality good or bad would be equally excluded.

What is also problematic, as we have seen, is that Sextus seems to give us two different accounts of why suspension of judgment produces *ataraxia*. It is not easy to see how these two pictures are to be combined. In one case *ataraxia* is supposed to be achieved by suspension of judgment on all subjects, but in the other it is beliefs about good and bad that are the sole focus of attention. Moreover, in the latter account the notion of an initial attempt to discover the truth, or an inability to decide among alternatives, seems to play no role at all. For all that Sextus says in the present context, the beliefs about good and bad from which the skeptic is free might even be correct, and their holders might even know that they are correct. Sextus never suggests that this would make any difference to their capacity to drive one to a state of intense anxiety; for it is their content that is the problem, not their truth-value or degree of justification. It is particularly puzzling that in one place, his chapter on the skeptic's *telos* or aim in life (*PH* 1.25–30), Sextus appears to present both accounts together, as if there was no difference between the two. One can see how beliefs about good and bad might be connected with broader beliefs about the nature of the world. But on this last issue, the two accounts actually seem to be incompatible with one another.

On both accounts, though, we can hold on to the central point discussed earlier: the skeptic will be free from any beliefs to effect that anything is in reality, or by nature, good or bad. And this takes us to the topic that is my main concern: to what extent can the skeptic be an ethically engaged agent? In answering the broader question of how the skeptic acts and makes decisions of any kind, Sextus says (*PH* 1.21–4) that he follows the appearances, and then distinguishes four broad categories of "appearances" that shape the skeptic's life. These divide into what we can call, roughly, "natural" and "cultural" appearances. First (to return to something that came up earlier), we perceive things in certain ways and think in certain ways, and this is simply part of our nature. Second, we have certain natural drives that prompt us to action: hunger prompts us to eat, thirst to drink, and so on. Third – and now we move to the cultural side – we are raised in societies that have certain laws and customs, and that exert pressure on everyone to conform to those laws and customs; as a result, we become habituated in the patterns of behavior that they dictate. Fourth, we are trained in certain kinds of expertise, and this too shapes our behavior in myriad ways.

A number of questions may be raised about how we are to understand the skeptic's actions and decisions, as here described. Clearly the point of this list is to characterize in more detail what it is to "follow the appearances," as opposed to taking any stand on how things really are; yet, as we saw, it is controversial where precisely the boundary between these two is to be drawn. For our purposes, however, this is again less of a problem than it might appear. The most important for us of these four categories is clearly the third, laws and customs. Now, we have seen that the skeptic holds no belief to the effect that anything is good or bad by nature; we have also seen that Sextus takes ordinary people, and not just philosophers, to suffer from such beliefs. The skeptic's adherence to his society's laws and customs, then,

must be one that involves no commitment to anything being really good or bad. As an example of this kind of adherence, he says that skeptics "accept piety as good and impiety as bad, in terms of ordinary life" (*PH* 1.24). But this "acceptance" cannot involve endorsement of the propositions "piety is good" and "impiety is bad"; those would be examples of the objectionable beliefs that he takes both theorists and ordinary people to hold.[10] Rather, it must consist simply in *doing* the kinds of things that his society dictates concerning religious observances.[11,12] Other people do the same kinds of things, and if pressed to justify their behavior, would do so by way of such propositions. But the skeptic, not being in the business of justification at all, would simply say that he acts this way because his society raised him to do so – where the "because" is purely causal.

In *Against the Ethicists* (164–6) Sextus gives another example of what appears to be the same kind of thing. What if a tyrant ordered you to do something appalling, or something appalling will happen to you? The example is initially presented as an objection to skepticism. The objector is imagined as claiming that the skeptic is inconsistent; the thought seems to be that whatever the skeptic decides,[13] this decision, given the enormous stakes involved, can only be made on the basis of some kind of principles concerning what things are genuinely good and bad. The situation in which the tyrant has placed the skeptic forces a commitment. But Sextus responds that this is not true. The skeptic will decide whatever he decides (and there is no blanket answer on what this will be) "by the preconception which accords with his ancestral laws and customs" (166); we may fill out the thought along the following lines. If he has been raised in a society that encourages resistance to authority, or strict adherence to certain prohibitions that would be violated by the action the tyrant is commanding, he is more likely to refuse to perform the appalling deed. If, on the

[10]Unless we suppose a distinction between "piety is really good", which he takes both ordinary people and theorists to accept, and some weaker sense of "piety is good" that involves no commitment to ethical objectivity. But Sextus shows no sign of recognizing any such distinction.

[11]This must be the force of *biôtikôs*, translated "in terms of ordinary life". But in light of the previous point about the ethical beliefs of ordinary people, "in terms of ordinary life" cannot be understood to capture everything worth noting about ordinary people's attitudes. Perhaps the thought is that in the everyday business of life, ordinary people will simply act, as does the skeptic, but that when it comes to matters of good and bad (unlike many other matters that are solely the provinces of theorists), ordinary people *also* have a reflective side, and that it is here that their beliefs about what is really good and bad emerge.

[12]There are complicated questions about the skeptic's attitude towards religion, as portrayed by Sextus. I have discussed this in Bett (forthcoming b); for a partially opposed perspective on the same topic, see Annas (forthcoming). But these do not, I think, affect how we are to understand the nature of his "acceptance" of the goodness of piety and the badness of impiety; this "acceptance" must consist in something other than endorsement of the propositions "piety is good" and "impiety is bad", and this is the crucial point for present purposes.

[13]Which decision the skeptic makes is not relevant either to the objection or to Sextus' response to it. It is sometimes suggested that the objection is that the skeptic will not do the *right* thing, as judged by the objector. It may indeed be hard to imagine the skeptic standing up to the tyrant, and I return to this point below. But the question at issue here is, can the skeptic make *either* decision without inconsistently committing himself to beliefs about good and bad?

other hand, his society is one in which obedience to the ruler is very highly valued, or where toughness and endurance are not particularly encouraged, we can more easily imagine him bowing to the tyrant's demands. Either way, the outcome is simply a result of the dispositions inculcated in the skeptic by the environment in which he was raised. As Sextus says, the skeptic does not have any *opinion* about the comparative merits of the different courses of action – which is why, to return to an earlier theme, he is in a better position even here than other people. Others are bound to have a strong belief that what they are undergoing at the tyrant's hands (being forced either to do or to suffer something atrocious) is a bad thing; but the skeptic has no such belief – he simply lets his societally induced dispositions take him in whichever direction they will.

If this reconstruction is on the right lines, one is again struck by the passivity of the skeptic's response. And this leads to several questions or concerns.[14] When faced with a dreadful choice, the skeptic will simply do whatever his upbringing has disposed him to do, without having any convictions either way about the rightness or wrongness of his action. One might wonder, first, whether this is really possible; could anyone in such a crisis be expected to remain as detached from his own reactions as Sextus says the skeptic is? No doubt automatic responses shaped by habit can and do govern much of our lives; but a case like this does seem to force a conscious and deliberate choice, in which one identifies with certain values and rejects others, and in which one is invested as a *self*, not merely as a bundle of dispositions the unfolding of which one observes as if from afar.[15] In other words, the objection to which Sextus is responding seems to have a lot more intuitive appeal than he allows. Second, supposing such detachment is after all possible, it seems very implausible that which way the skeptic reacts to the tyrant's demand is really, as he presents it, an open question; if habitual dispositions are what determines the skeptic's response, it is overwhelmingly more likely that he will take the easier course – that is, submit to the tyrant's demand rather than stand up to him. Nor is it open to Sextus to suggest that which decision *counts* as easier is itself relative to one's societally induced dispositions. Thwarting the tyrant, in this example, will result in torture, and as we saw, Sextus concedes that the skeptic is affected by pain, regardless of what dispositions his society has inculcated in him. In such situations it is difficult to imagine that these dispositions – absent the extra motivational force that they would have if (contrary to the skeptical outlook) they took the form of definite moral commitments – would prove stronger than the skeptic's natural inclinations to avoid hardship.

Quite apart from the fraught circumstances of the tyrant's challenge, the more general conformism of the skeptic, as Sextus portrays him, is another unattractive feature. It is not that Sextus wholly identifies with the ordinary person in moral matters (as he claims to do in some other contexts). For, as we have seen several

[14]This paragraph and the next reuse material from Bett (forthcoming a). I thank the editor, Roger Crisp, and Oxford University Press for permission.

[15]I have discussed the skeptic's self in Bett (2008).

times, he is quite explicit that the ordinary person believes in things that are by nature good and bad (*PH* 1.30); in this respect the ordinary person and the non-skeptical philosopher are in the same boat. But the skeptic does *do* the same kinds of things as the ordinary conventional member of his society does, and this is no accident. Challenging the status quo would require one to have some dispositions at odds with the prevailing norms; but, as we saw, Sextus cites the prevailing norms of one's society as precisely one of the central influences on the character of the skeptic's dispositions. Besides, even if we depart from the letter of Sextus' account, and allow that other factors (such as very unconventional parents) might compete with those prevailing norms in shaping the skeptic's dispositions,[16] it is still unlikely that the skeptic will step far outside the status quo if (as will surely often be the case) that would be difficult or unpopular. This is because, again, the attitude that the skeptic has towards his own dispositions is peculiarly passive and unengaged; and this makes them far more liable to be overridden by the natural inclinations towards safety, absence of pain, etc. than they would be if they were convictions about which he cared deeply.

So how ethical can an ancient skeptic, as Sextus describes him, be? If being ethical consists simply in doing the right things at the right times (whatever we take those to be), then the answer is, it depends how well he has been brought up. A skeptic who was raised in a stable and ethically upright family and community might well have dispositions that would incline him consistently to act in the right way – that is, perform the correct behavior; one who was raised in a society in a state of disorder or collapse would presumably not. But this answer, of course, tells much less than the whole story. For one thing, as just suggested, if doing the right thing comes at great personal cost, as it sometimes will, then the skeptic's other natural inclinations may well override his ingrained dispositions to do that thing; in such situations doing the right thing may require the extra motivational force supplied by *the thought that it is* the right thing (together with some conception of why this is the case and why it matters) – and this is precisely what the skeptic does not have. Bernard Williams once accused the ethical agent, as portrayed by standard ethical theory, of having "one thought too many" in certain difficult situations (Williams 1981, p. 18); here the problem is that the skeptic will have "one thought too few" to stay on the ethically strait and narrow. And for another thing, even if we confine ourselves to cases where this ethically well programmed skeptic does *not* diverge from whatever it is that one should do, most of us would not be content with a conception of ethics in which the correct performance is all that counts. The main problem is that such a person is not, in the usual sense, an ethically involved agent; even when the skeptic's dispositions do yield the correct performances, one is still inclined to object that there is "one thought too few" in the process by which that occurs.

[16]The possibilities here were no doubt more limited in Sextus' time than they would be in ours, given the much more homogeneous nature of ancient society. But Sextus' picture of the factors influencing the skeptic's dispositions is perhaps still excessively limited.

The thought that is missing need not be the explicit thought, or even the implicit thought, that the action to be performed, or the object to be sought, is good by nature, or that whatever is thereby avoided is bad by nature. Sextus speaks as if the absence of *this* thought is the key thing that separates the skeptic from other people; and in the context of ancient Greek, and especially Stoic, ethical theory, this is understandable. But I do not think the fundamental issue is a commitment or lack of commitment to some form of ethical objectivism – whether the form that Sextus and, in our own time, Mackie take to be implicit in everyday ethical thinking, or some more philosophically articulate variety. The crucial thing about an ethically involved agent is that, for such a person, certain things *really do matter* (and not just for self-interested reasons), and for this reason, certain things *must* be done and other things *must not* be done; and those thoughts do not obviously depend on any particular metaethical assumptions. Now, if that is the case, one might wonder why someone who denies that anything is by nature good, or who suspends judgment about the truth of that proposition, cannot be an ethically involved agent. The answer is that, while *someone* with one or other of those attitudes could be an ethically involved agent – I will return to this in a moment – the skeptic portrayed by Sextus could not. The reason is simply that the advantage he claims for the skeptic's outlook is precisely that things do *not* matter to him, to anything like the same extent as they do to other people; it is involvement itself – taking certain things to be really important – from which he is glad to be released, and by which he takes other people to be afflicted. If it turns out that (contrary to the prevailing philosophical assumptions of his era) there are ways of being involved, or of taking things to be important, that do not carry with them a commitment to the existence of things good or bad by nature, those will be just as much anathema to him as the ones that do; the *importance* of anything, just as much as anything's being good or bad by nature, is something that he will want to deny or suspend judgment about.

So it turns out that the central issue is the goal of tranquility itself. If everything you do is directed, in the end, at your tranquility, then you had better not care about anything too much, because this runs the risk of your tranquility being disrupted; instead, you need to cultivate an attitude of withdrawal. In the particular case of the Pyrrhonists this practical withdrawal goes hand in hand with an intellectual withdrawal; and one can certainly see how ceasing to hold any definite views about how things are, and in particular, ceasing to think of anything as really good or bad, might lead to an attitude in which nothing seems to matter very much. (Whether this is a desirable state to be in, as Sextus thinks, is of course another question; to us, the thought that "nothing matters any more" may sound more like a symptom of depression than of tranquility.) But the connection between taking tranquility as your goal and freeing yourself from beliefs (especially on the subject of the good and the bad) is far from being a necessary one; and for our current purposes, it is the goal of tranquility, not the freedom from beliefs, that is crucial.

First, others have been equally free from the belief that things are good or bad in the nature of things, and yet have been passionate about ethical or political causes; nor is there anything inconsistent in this. Good twentieth-century examples would be Jean-Paul Sartre and A.J. Ayer. Sartre's existentialism denies the possibility of

any ultimate justification for one's actions. One simply has to make commitments, in the awareness that they have no fundamental basis, and thereby fashion oneself as a certain type of person; that is the point of his famous example of the young man torn between joining the Resistance and taking care of his mother.[17] As for Ayer, although he may not have held in every detail to his early emotivist theory of ethics, he clearly continued throughout his life to think of ethical discourse as non-descriptive.[18] And yet, whatever one may think of their overall personalities – both undoubtedly had their share of faults – there is no doubt that both men were ethically engaged agents as described just above: there were things that really mattered to them, and this affected how they acted and why.

A specific instance may help to bring the issue into focus. At the age of 77 Ayer confronted Mike Tyson at a party and successfully persuaded him to stop harassing the young Naomi Campbell;[19] whatever his exact motivation, I assume this was an instance of such ethically engaged behavior, prompted by some thought to the effect that "this kind of thing cannot be allowed to go on." In terms of the risk involved, this does not rise to the level of Sextus' tyrant example, but it is recognizably of the same type. Now, I am not saying that Sextus' skeptic could not have done the same thing – although in fact it is probably easier to imagine him simply observing the incident from a distance and filing it away for use in another series of ethical "oppositions." ("Heavyweight champions think it good to come on to any woman who attracts them, whereas Emeritus Oxford professors think this bad.") But even if the skeptic did intervene like Ayer – as he might, for example, if the society in which he was raised had very strong values concerning men's respectful behavior towards women – it would not be in an ethically engaged way. That is to say, the outcome of this confrontation would not be one in which he had any investment – because that, again, would have endangered his tranquility. And my point is that it is the skeptic's orientation towards tranquility, not the lack of beliefs about things being in reality good and bad, that is the fundamental thing standing in the way of his ethical engagement.

One can also come at the issue from the opposite direction. It is possible to make tranquility one's goal while thinking that the truth is perfectly attainable, and that certain things – tranquility preeminent among them – really are good; this is the position of the Epicureans. And it is notable that the Epicureans, too, face criticisms having to do with their lack of ethical involvement. This is not just because of their literal, physical withdrawal in the Garden (at least in the school's initial stage); the concern is with how a commitment to *ataraxia* is compatible with full-blooded engagement in *any* kind of community, even an isolated one. One issue that has aroused considerable interest is friendship, since the Epicureans give this a very

[17] See Sartre (1973, pp. 35–8).

[18] For Ayer's early emotivism, see Ayer (1936, chapter 6). For his later position on the status of ethics, see Ayer (1973, chapter 10).

[19] See Rogers (1999, p. 344).

prominent place in their ethical thinking. The question is how anyone can be a genuine friend without endangering his or her tranquility; for friendship, too, seems to require having certain things (besides one's own tranquility) *really matter* to one – this is one of several respects in which a capacity for genuine friendship seems to be connected with a capacity for ethically engaged attitudes in general. It may be possible to resolve this apparent conflict; some subtle interpretations, claiming to do this, have been offered in recent years.[20] But there is no denying that the issue is at least a pressing one, and for reasons similar to the ones we have been discussing in the case of Sextus. Once again, then, it is taking *ataraxia* as the *telos*, not a withdrawal from beliefs in things really being good or bad, that seems to threaten the prospects for a genuinely ethical life.

Should the Pyrrhonist be troubled about failing to be an ethically involved agent? The answer would seem to be "of course not." If tranquility really is one's *telos*, and one takes suspension of judgment to be the means to it, then the attitude that Sextus describes makes good sense; the fact that it is unpalatable to most other people is not something that need worry him. But there are two reasons why we might at least wonder whether this is the last word on the subject. First, in the closing chapter of *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* (*PH* 3.280–1) Sextus speaks of himself and his school as philanthropic and wishing to cure people of the afflictions associated with definite beliefs. If he is really interested in converting other people to skepticism, then the fact that skepticism's practical attitudes will strike most people as very unattractive is at least prima facie a problem. On the other hand, this closing chapter seems to be something of an anomaly,[21] and in general Sextus does not seem particularly concerned about whether non-skeptics pay attention to him.

Second, Sextus sometimes speaks of the skeptic as achieving happiness (*eudaimonia*). Now "happiness" was standardly understood by the non-skeptical schools as the most general term for a well-lived human life, containing all that a human being might reasonably hope to obtain or achieve – with the debate between these schools then centering on their particular conceptions of what such a life would look like. So it may look as if Sextus aspires to describe a life that would be generally recognized as fulfilling for a human being; and if this is the case, then its lack of full-blooded ethical involvement would seem to be an obstacle to his attaining that goal. If so, however, the goal is at any rate not one that he holds on to consistently. For it is a striking fact that his use of the term *eudaimonia* to describe the skeptic's life is confined to *Against the Ethicists*; in *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* the term never appears in this context.[22] As we saw at the beginning, Aenesidemus was willing to refer to the Pyrrhonist as happy; and the idea of aiming to be happy, as something shared by a Pyrrhonist along with everyone else, also appears in a cryptic text

[20] See in particular Evans (2004), with references to earlier articles.

[21] Mates (1996, p. 314), even proposes excising the chapter as a later interpolation (although not for the reason I am suggesting). In a work that is clearly in part a patchwork of material from earlier sources, this seems quite unwarranted – even if we are as impressed as Mates is by the incongruity between this passage and the rest of the work.

[22] This was first noticed by Striker (1990).

summarizing the thought of Pyrrho himself.[23] So it is when he avoids the term in connection with the Pyrrhonist's life, rather than when he employs it, that Sextus seems to be an innovator in terms of his own tradition. Be that as it may, it looks as if, in one frame of mind at any rate, he regards the term *eudaimonia* as carrying some kind of dogmatic baggage that a Pyrrhonist would do best to avoid. One may speculate about what this supposed baggage might be. But one possibility is that a life that would qualify as *eudaimôn* is one that would include a wide range of ethical attitudes – a great many virtues, for example – and the full-blooded ethical involvement that these carry with them.[24] Certainly *eudaimonia* as portrayed by Aristotle and by the Stoics would fit this description.[25] And if this is right, then clearly Sextus would want nothing to do with it.

If, then, Sextus sometimes shows indications of caring what others might think of the skeptic's life as he portrays it, this seems to be the exception rather than the rule. For the most part, it appears that he can quite consistently regard the skeptic's ethically impoverished attitude (as we might put it) as an advantage, whatever the rest of us might think. But then the rest of us can, with equal consistency, agree to disagree.

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[23] See again n. 2.

[24] I have discussed other possibilities in Bett (2003).

[25] Although there is of course a very great difference between Stoicism and common sense when it comes to the appropriate *objects* of this full-blooded concern.

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Chapter 2
Two Kinds of Tranquility: Sextus Empiricus on *Ataraxia*

Svavar Hrafn Svavarsson

Sextus Empiricus submits that Pyrrhonian skeptics are tranquil. He begins his explanation of skeptical tranquility by relating how people suffer anxiety when they are confronted with conflicting appearances. In order to alleviate this anxiety, and thereby gain tranquility, they seek ways of deciding which appearances are true and which false. They compare the accounts for these appearances, but find them equally believable, and are repeatedly forced to suspend belief. They nevertheless become tranquil through this suspension of belief. Sextus often suggests that the skeptics' tranquility comes about through their not having beliefs of any kind. But in his sustained explanation of skeptical tranquility (*PH* 1.25–30), he suggests that it comes about only through their not having positive beliefs about natural values. The two ideas about the sources of skeptical tranquility are in conflict.

1 The Skeptic's Life

There is a distinction between two kinds of claims that Sextus makes regarding the life of the skeptic. On the one hand he says that the skeptic can and does act consistently with her skepticism, and on the other that the skeptic is tranquil. The two claims are independent of each other. (1) Insofar as a skeptic, whether Academic or Pyrrhonian, suspends belief, she is open to the charge of being unable to act at all. For beliefs are necessary for action, the critics claim. If the skeptic acts, she believes, and if she does not believe, she dies. And even if she can act without beliefs, how will she decide what to do? Both Academics and Pyrrhonists meet this so-called inactivity argument.[1] Sextus states that the skeptic follows appearances. A discussion of the nature of Pyrrhonian appearances is beyond the scope

[1] For their strategies in meeting the argument, see Striker (1980) and Vogt (2010).

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of this paper.[2] In his elucidations, Sextus says that the skeptic follows a certain account which indicates how "it is possible [to seem][3] to live rightly, where the word 'rightly' is taken not as referring to virtue only, but in a wider sense, and extending to the ability to suspend belief" (*Outlines of Pyrrhonism* [*PH*] 1.17). A few paragraphs later he explains what leading a life following appearances actually means: "Thus, attending to what is apparent, we live in accordance with everyday observances, without holding opinions – for we are not able to be utterly inactive. These everyday observances seem to be fourfold, and to consist in guidance of nature, necessitation by feelings, handing down of laws and customs, and teaching of kinds of expertise" (*PH* 1.23–4). This is the sort of life that following appearances consists in.[4] No mention is made of tranquility. Tranquility does not result from, or consist in, following appearances, as opposed to suspending belief. Sextus also claims (2) that the skeptic is (or rather feels) tranquil: she is tranquil in matters of belief and moderately affected in matters of necessity.[5] In short: Sextus the skeptic states that the Pyrrhonist does not only live consistently with her skepticism (which many had reason to doubt), but that she lives her life tranquil. While it is incumbent upon all ancient skeptics to answer the inactivity argument, it is not similarly incumbent upon them to claim that the skeptic is tranquil. What are Sextus' reasons for making this additional claim?

He has no philosophical reasons for making substantive claims about the tranquility of skeptics. Sextus cannot consistently adduce philosophical reasons for his claims, since *in propria persona* he makes no philosophical claims. And sometimes he just describes this tranquility as a report of the skeptic's experience; having suspended belief she finds herself tranquil. But for what reason would he want to depict the skeptic as tranquil? It does not suffice to envisage Sextus offering a vaguely positive state of mind in a battle with other schools over followers. The reason, I submit, is historical. Sextus makes room for an important aspect of his Pyrrhonist heritage, and he makes a case for the tranquility of skeptics. The historical reason is this: Aenesidemus instigated a skeptical revival in the first century BC – a revival of a radical skepticism that the Academy (under Philo) had betrayed when succumbing to mitigated skepticism (or epistemic fallibilism).[6] He rejected the skepticism of the Academy in its entirety and turned to Pyrrho as the founder of consistent skepticism. He did not refer to Arcesilaus, the earliest skeptical Academic, whose philosophy is nevertheless portrayed by Sextus as virtually identical with his own Pyrrhonism (*PH* 1.232). There is one indication in Sextus' writing as to why this

[2]For different interpretations, see the papers gathered in Burnyeat and Frede (1997), and Striker (1981), Barney (1992) Fine (2000), Bailey (2002), Perin (2010); for an overview, see Svavarsson (forthcoming).

[3]It may be unnecessary to delete "to seem" (*dokein*), on the suggestion of Mutschmann. I follow the translation of Annas and Barnes, with minimal changes to preserve consistency.

[4]For discussions of this life, see Annas (1986, 1993, 1996), McPherran (1989), Hankinson (1994), Nussbaum (1994), Bett (2010b) and in Chapter 1, this volume.

[5]For the idea of tranquility or *ataraxia*, see Striker (1990).

[6]For Philo, and Aenesidemus' criticism, see Brittain (2001).

should be so, and that is Pyrrho's promise of a life of tranquility, a promise absent from Academic skepticism. He says: "Arcesilaus ... certainly seems to me to have something in common with what the Pyrrhonists say – indeed, his persuasion and ours are virtually the same ... And he says that the aim (*telos*) is suspension of belief, which, we said, is accompanied by tranquility" (*PH* 1.232). And we know that Aenesidemus himself suggested as much when he affirmed that the Pyrrhonist is happy in his skepticism, for he maintained, according to Photius' account, that "he who philosophizes according to Pyrrho is both happy in general and wise in knowing especially that nothing is firmly apprehended by him" (*Bibl*. 169b27–29).

By grafting the name of Pyrrho onto his radical and anti-Academic version of skepticism, Aenesidemus did more than revive and elaborate the epistemological arguments and methods of skepticism. He took over that aspect of Pyrrho's philosophy which had kept his name alive in the intervening centuries, namely Pyrrho's lifestyle characterized by indifference and tranquility. For it is thus that Pyrrho was remembered in the first century BC, as is evident from Cicero's few references to him; he does not refer to him as a skeptic, or an epistemologist of any kind.[7] But from the little we know of Aenesidemus, he does not explain in any precise way the tranquility of the skeptic. He only connects it with his self-confessed ignorance. Before we turn to Sextus' account, consider Pyrrho's original promise of tranquility.

It is difficult to interpret our sources for Pyrrho's thought, let alone how first century BC philosophers would have interpreted them. Many scholars believe that his skepticism was quite like that of Sextus, offering a naive version of Sextus' undecidability arguments. Others make him more dogmatic.[8] At all events, it is reasonably clear that he maintained that after one has realized that one cannot know the nature of things, for whatever reason, one should refrain from all assertions – he called this "non-assertion" (*aphasia*). This comes quite close to the suspension of belief (*epochē*) we know from Sextus. (There are two differences: Pyrrho's non-assertion is not based on undecidable equipollence in the same way as Sextus' suspension of belief is, and Pyrrho's non-assertion is universal, while Sextus' suspension of belief is particular, i.e. always directed at specific issues.) And once the attitude of non-assertion is acquired, one is tranquil. Tranquility is supposed to attend universal non-assertion. Timon says that his teacher Pyrrho acquired this state of mind by conquering what had overpowered all others, "affections, belief, and pointless legislation" (*PE* 14.18.19 = DC 58). Elsewhere Timon asks Pyrrho how he rid himself "from servitude to the beliefs and empty theorizing of sophists, and loosened the shackles of every deception and persuasion" (DL 9.64). His tranquility, Timon implies, consists in being "uniformly free from movement, paying no heed to the whirls of sweet-voiced wisdom" (*Adversus Mathematicos* [*M*] 11.1 = DC 61C). These passages imply that for Pyrrho it is the realization that we cannot know the nature of things, and the consequent attitude characterized by non-assertion that

[7] See Bett (2000, pp. 102–5).

[8] For a general account, see Bett (2000), and Svavarsson (2004), with references.

brings about this state of mind, tranquility. If that is so, having beliefs creates anxiety. According to yet another testimony (*M* 11.20 = DC 62), Pyrrho thought that those who hold beliefs falsely think that there is a nature of the good and the divine, and think that they can achieve "the most equable life" by acquiring the natural good.[9] This belief then precludes the gaining of tranquility, presumably because it breeds desire after supposed goods, and Timon remarks (rather dogmatically) that "desire is absolutely the first of all bad things" (Athenaeus 8.337A = DC 65). Such is Pyrrho's promise of tranquility, which must have influenced all those who called themselves Pyrrhonists. Timon may have added a dimension to Pyrrho's account. For there is an obvious objection to Pyrrho's insistence that one should lead a life without any beliefs, the inactivity argument: how is one to act? Timon introduced an answer: you follow appearances.[10] The two aspects of the skeptic's life, being tranquil and following appearances, seem to be introduced independently of each other.

Such seems to have been the early Pyrrhonist stance. Sextus' challenge is to integrate the promise of tranquility, inherited from Pyrrho through Aenesidemus, into his exposition of Pyrrhonism, and to explain how exactly Pyrrhonism leads to tranquility. Now consider how Sextus presents his claim, and the reasons he adduces, which he does both when explaining the general features of Pyrrhonism in the first book of the *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, and also when he argues against ethical dogmatism in the special accounts of the third book of the *Outlines* and in *Against the Ethicists*.

2 Sextus on Tranquility in *PH* 1

Central to his account of tranquility is Sextus' description of the skeptic's aim (*telos*) in *PH* 1.25.[11] According to Photius' account, Aenesidemus spent one book attacking "the end, allowing that neither happiness, pleasure, prudence nor anything else is the end, which any philosophical persuasion might believe, but rather that there is altogether no end lauded by all" (*Bibl.* 170b30–35). This testimony should warn us that Sextus is offering an aim in a way different from his dogmatic opponents. His is not a teleological exposition of human nature and happiness. It is offered as a description of what the skeptic aims at, regardless of what others aim at. And the object of the skeptic's aim is tranquility (*ataraxia*). Indeed, Sextus has already stated, in *PH* 1.12, that the "originating cause" of skepticism is the hope of becoming tranquil.

Sextus has more to tell us about the origins of the skeptic: "Men of noble nature (*megalophueis*), suffering anxiety (*tarachē*) because of the anomaly in things and

[9] See Svavarsson (2002).

[10] For speculations concerning Timon's contribution, see Bett (2000), and Svavarsson (2010).

[11] This idea of the skeptic's aim has received attention in recent years: Moller (2004), Machuca (2006), Grgic (2006), Perin (2006).

puzzled (*aporountes*) as to which of them they should rather assent to, came to investigate both what in things is true and what false, that they might become tranquil (*ataraktēsontes*) by judging these things" (*PH* 1.12). It is unclear what Sextus wants to convey by calling future skeptics "of noble nature." Perhaps he has in mind seriousness of purpose, or intense sensitivity to the conflict of appearances. Sextus envisages a person who starts out holding beliefs (there is hardly another position from which she could start: if she did not have beliefs, she would either be blank or already a skeptic). But when confronted with a conflicting belief that challenges her own belief, the person grows anxious. This anxiety does not arise because of any specific subject matter; it is general in scope. Call it *epistemic* anxiety. Whatever the exact status of this epistemic anxiety, it is intelligible as a kind of anxiety. Perhaps we should identify it with the state of intellectual perplexity (*aporia*), as Sextus suggests.[12] Example: A person starts out believing that God exists. Her reason for this belief may be well founded or not. Then she is confronted with reasons for the contrary belief. This challenge produces epistemic anxiety that sets her searching for the true belief: Does God exist or not? She hopes to find knowledge, and in so doing to release herself from this epistemic anxiety and gain tranquility, which would then be an epistemic kind of tranquility, tranquility in matters of belief. This kind of anxiety is not brought about by any specific subject matter. It is not the content of the belief that is supposed to release her of epistemic anxiety, but rather the calming certainty of the belief. The skeptic even studies natural philosophy for the sake of finding this epistemic tranquility (*PH* 1.18).[13]

But as we know, the skeptic does not gain knowledge, and by implication she does not find the epistemic tranquility that consists in having gained knowledge. In fact Sextus tells us that the skeptic is still engaged in the search for truth (e.g. *PH* 1.3). In his explanation of what skepticism is, Sextus tells us that what characterizes the skeptic above all, in her search for truth as in everything else, is her "ability to set out oppositions among things which appear and are thought of in any way at all, an ability by which, because of the equipollence in the opposed objects and accounts, we first come to suspension of belief and afterwards to tranquility" (*PH* 1.8). The skeptic's ability is general and topic-neutral. So far the skeptic, gradually sharpening her oppositional technique, has been unable to decide between the conflicting accounts of appearances, finding each of them equally believable. Her reaction has so far been to suspend belief on every account encountered. She has used her ability, and then suspended belief on specific issues.

[12] At the outset of his second meditation, Descartes confesses to being *ita turbatus … ut nec possim in imo pedem figere, nec enatare ad summum*. By referring to Descartes (and Cartesian anxiety) I intend nothing more than to point out possible historical parallels to Sextus' idea of epistemic anxiety. One could also point to Hume's epistemic despair in the *Treatise* I.iv.7 (Selby-Bigge 268–9).

[13] One might ask whether Sextus views the gaining of knowledge as a means to the attainment of tranquility. This question has received considerable attention. The gaining of knowledge is, for Sextus, instrumental in the attainment of tranquility. So Palmer (2000) and Striker (2001). Perin (2006) argues that it might also be an end in itself.

Sextus explains the continuation: "And when he suspended judgment, tranquility in matters of belief attended fortuitously" (*PH* 1.26). The skeptic does after all gain tranquility, although not in the way she hoped, by gaining knowledge, but by suspending belief. This claim is in harmony with what we find in Pyrrho and Aenesidemus. One presumes that this tranquility is epistemic, not in the sense of springing from knowledge, but in the sense of being an alleviation of the epistemic anxiety that the inquirer suffered. And it is as unclear as before. Before we consider Sextus' explanation, because he does offer an explanation, consider first what he means when he says that the skeptic becomes tranquil *when she has suspended belief*.

The skeptic does not suspend belief *tout court*. She suspends belief on individual issues, which are many, while considerations for and against each issue are numberless. For the skeptic there can be no universal suspension of belief, even if Sextus occasionally seems to say as much. In a passage immediately following his account of the tranquility of Pyrrhonists, Sextus says: "tranquility follows suspension of belief about all things" (*PH* 1.31), and later he says that the skeptics should not abandon their investigation, and "miss the tranquility apparent to them, which ... they deem to supervene on suspension of belief about everything" (1.205). Sextus is not declaring the finality of universal suspension of belief, but its topic-neutrality. Tranquility attends suspension of belief regardless of the provenance of the beliefs.

Does this topic-neutrality imply that the skeptic is tranquil with regard to the issue on which she suspends belief, whatever the issue is, for example God's existence. This seems to be the line sometimes taken: the skeptic reaches epistemic tranquility on a specific issue. But then the skeptic would gradually gain a series of demarcated chunks of tranquility. She would for example be tranquil with respect to the question of the existence of God. And if she were constantly searching, and continually suspending belief, would she forever be becoming tranquil in a qualified way, or simply becoming ever more tranquil?

Sextus could clarify the matter. He has defined the skeptic as one who has the ability to set out oppositions on any issue, which results in undecidable equipollence, which in turn produces the psychological reaction that the skeptic suspends belief on the issue in question.[14] It is this ability, which is general, and not the suspension of belief, which is specific, that characterizes the skeptic, for non-skeptics can and do suspend belief without possessing the ability that characterizes the skeptic. And this ability (Sextus could say) produces the epistemic tranquility that attends.

But whether or not Sextus could say this, he does something different. He decides to explain the tranquility that the skeptic experiences by claiming that it attends *only*

[14] According to most interpreters of Sextus, the inability to decide, or "standstill of the intellect," as Sextus calls it, does not *lead to* suspension of assent but rather *is* suspension of belief (*PH* 1.10); see especially Barnes (1990). It is open to question whether Sextus could be taken to have in mind, by the term *epochē*, not such a psychological reaction, but rather a rational conclusion; see Perin (2006).

suspension of belief within a certain domain, namely that involving good and bad. It is not epistemic in the way expected. In a surprising passage Sextus says:

> For those who hold the belief that things are good or bad by nature are perpetually anxious. When they lack what they believe to be good, they take themselves to be persecuted by natural evils and they pursue what (so they think) is good. And when they have acquired these things, they experience more troubles; for they are elated beyond reason and measure, and in fear of change they do anything so as not to lose what they believe to be good. But those who make no determination about what is good and bad by nature neither avoid nor pursue anything with intensity; and hence they are tranquil. (*PH* 1.27)

Here Sextus explains what he means by *tarachē*, the lack of which is *ataraxia*: If one believes *that something is by nature good or that something is by nature bad*, then one is anxious. Nothing is said or implied about other beliefs or anxiety caused by the general conflict of beliefs. It is the *content* of value beliefs that causes anxiety. And nothing is said about the tranquility that attends suspension of belief regardless of the content of the belief. But the statement is clearly offered as an explanation of what Sextus means by anxiety and tranquility. This is unlike the epistemic tranquility we expected. The maneuver leaves the possibility open that one could gain tranquility by suspending belief only on the issue of natural values (and disregard other issues), *and* it leaves the possibility open that one could gain tranquility by believing that nothing is good or bad. Scholars have suggested that on this account suspending belief on this issue is the *most important* part of gaining tranquility, or that the skeptic has to suspend belief on other issues *first* in order to gain tranquility.[15] Sextus does not offer such explanations.

3 Different Kinds of Tranquility

In order to preserve consistency between this new notion of tranquility and the idea of epistemic tranquility, Sextus could again suggest the following: the skeptic is defined as possessing the ability to set out oppositions, an ability whose exercise ultimately ends in suspension of belief; it is only as a person with this ability that she becomes tranquil when suspending belief on the issue of natural values, so that just suspending belief on the issue of these values is not sufficient for becoming tranquil. Although Sextus could suggest this line, he does not.

Sextus' description of "those who hold the belief that things are good or bad by nature" can be taken to refer to the skeptic *before* she has considered the question of what is good or bad by nature. This person believes that x is good and y is bad. When she lacks x, she believes that she is tormented by natural evils (y) and pursues x. Having acquired x, she is still disturbed in that she is overly elated and fearful that she will lose x. When, however, she suspends belief as to what is by nature good (whether x or something else), she ceases to pursue x (or anything else believed to

[15] See e.g. Bett (1997, pp. 131–2); cf. Machuca (2006, p. 114).

be good) with intensity or immoderate concern. When this intense pursuit ceases, she becomes tranquil.

The claim that the skeptic turns out to feel tranquil is indeed a report of what happens to the skeptic when she has suspended belief on the issue of natural values. As such it is not open to objection. But to carry force with his opponents, Sextus needs more. He needs an account of anxiety according to which holding beliefs about natural values invariably causes intense pursuit and avoidance, which in turn makes the agent anxious. And he offers such an account. This account may indeed also record what appears to Sextus the skeptic (and this appearance may be intuitively appealing or not). But his opponents may in turn simply beg to differ. Sextus' generalization of the skeptic's experience renders it an ineffectual tool against his opponents; its status becomes that of a stipulation: a person, who believes that something is by nature good or bad, pursues the one eagerly and avoids the other, and is in that sense anxious.

Sextus tries to distance himself from such a generalizing stipulation and returns to offering an autobiographical report of a skeptic's experience, which he elucidates by telling a story. When trying to paint foam issuing from a horse's mouth, the artist Apelles (actually a contemporary of Pyrrho) gave up and threw his sponge at the picture, thereby producing an image of foam. If this story is to illuminate Sextus' account, the point must be that seekers of tranquility hope to find it by arriving at the truth, but *unexpectedly* find it by suspending belief. They never thought that getting rid of beliefs would entail finding tranquility. As if to emphasize the element of unexpectedness, Sextus says that this happens "as if by chance" (1.29) or simply "by chance" (1.26). Perhaps this story was originally intended to elucidate epistemic tranquility. Here it is used to elucidate tranquility attained only by shedding positive beliefs about natural values.

Sextus also suggests that tranquility in matters of belief, i.e. epistemic tranquility, attends suspension of belief like a shadow attends a body. We find the same analogy in Diogenes (9.107), who attributes it to Timon and Aenesidemus. This claim is understandable, since suspension of belief (or rather the ability to set out oppositions and suspend belief in the wake of their undecidable equipollence) and tranquility are supposed to be intimately connected. Nevertheless Sextus introduces a confusing twist when he implies that shadows follow bodies as if by chance. Shadows do not follow bodies as if by chance. We may understand references to chance as attempts at explaining epistemic tranquility. They are distinct from and do not require the dogmatic claim that harboring positive beliefs about natural values produces anxiety, on which Sextus nevertheless relies in this explanation of skeptical tranquility.

What is one to make of Sextus' explanation? Recall that the tranquility at which the skeptic aims is the release from anxiety produced by the conflicts of beliefs. And the tranquility that the skeptic attains is usually conceived of as not confined to issues of natural values; it does not depend on the specific content of the beliefs, but is topic-neutral. It seems to be the same as the happiness Aenesidemus had in mind when he affirmed that the Pyrrhonist is happy in his skepticism, "and wise in knowing especially that nothing is firmly apprehended by him" (*Bibl.* 169b28–29).

It is also akin to the happiness promised by Pyrrho to those who would understand the nature of things, independently of subject matter (Aristocles in Eusebius, 14.18.1–5 = DC 53). This tranquility is not confined to questions of natural value. It is different from the tranquility that according to Sextus attends suspension of belief on those issues. But Sextus does not explain epistemic tranquility, except when he states that it arises from suspending belief in the face of conflicting accounts. One would suppose that the removal of the beliefs could be viewed as the removal of the sources of epistemic anxiety. It is unclear how that story would be told. It could be told as a report of what simply happens to the skeptic. And scholars have understood it thus: "Make yourself vividly aware of your helpless inability to mind either way. *That* is how the skeptic wants you to feel about everything, including whether what I am saying is true or false . . . That is *ataraxia*" (Burnyeat 1980, p. 45). And "his [the skeptic's] relations to his beliefs is permeated by the awareness that things are quite possibly different in reality, but this possibility no longer worries him" (Frede 1979, p. 23). Be that as it may, what is intriguing is the fact that Sextus has introduced a *new* sort of tranquility, one based on suspension of belief on natural values. It is new in the sense that it is not epistemic tranquility; it is, contrary to expectations, topic-dependent. And it is introduced at a cost, namely the stipulation that believing in natural values brings anxiety. In answering why Sextus compromises his skepticism in this way, one answer is that he wanted to tell a more compelling tale about skeptical tranquility. What is Sextus' source for this new sort of tranquility?

4 The Special Accounts: Arguments against the Ethicists

We find Sextus discussing the anxiety and unhappiness of those who believe in natural values in his attacks on the ethicists in *PH* 3 and *M* 11. The latter book begins with promises of destructive arguments, as is to be expected in the light of the previous books of *M*. Sextus intends to advance destructive arguments against ethical theories in the same manner as he has done against logical and physical ones. His framework is as usual decided by those against whom he raises the arguments. In chapter 3 (42–109) of the book, Sextus asks whether anything is by nature good or bad. His conclusion is that nothing is by nature good or bad. There are different views on the status of this claim; I believe that it shares the status of other such negative claims in Sextus' works, namely that it is dialectical.[16]

At the outset of the next chapter (110–40), Sextus proposes to examine whether one can live happily even granting that something is by nature good or bad. It is not unusual for him to employ such an argumentative strategy; first he "destroys" an item, but then concedes that there is such an item in order to "destroy" something

[16] See Bett (1997) for arguments for the claim that the first part of *M* 11 represents a version of skepticism that is negatively dogmatic (and an Aenesideman inheritance) and inconsistent with Sextus' skepticism as expressed elsewhere in his works. For a critique of this argument, see Svavarsson (2004) and Schofield (2007).

else. Dogmatists, Sextus continues, maintain that one attains happiness only if one attains the good and avoids the bad, and, further, that it is prudence that procures happiness, distinguishing as it does good things and bad. The second claim involves practical knowledge, and Sextus discusses this issue in later chapters, where he argues that there is no prudence. The skeptics, however, teach two things: On the one hand one is unhappy if one assumes that something is by nature good and bad. And on the other, one attains "the easiest human life," if one suspends belief (111). Sextus does not qualify this suspension of belief by confining it to issues of natural values. What he sets out to argue for in this chapter is the first claim that the skeptics teach, namely that one is unhappy if one assumes that something is by nature good and bad. And we find an argument (112–18) to this effect, a much extended version of the claim he makes in the first book of the *Outlines* to the effect that holding beliefs about natural values creates anxiety.

Now the plot thickens. Sextus can still only be doing one of two things. Either he is arguing *in propria persona* that having value beliefs creates anxiety, in which case he is dogmatizing. Or he is offering this as an *ad hominem* argument, which would be an impeccably Pyrrhonist procedure. But – and here is the rub – according to the general account for the sources of skeptical tranquility, this is precisely what he seems to believe, even if it is only an appearance; this is the general stipulation we found in *PH* 1. To complicate matters further, Sextus continues his argument with the claim that in fact one is tranquil if one actually believes that there are no natural values. This claim is glaringly inconsistent with Pyrrhonist suspension of belief, and must be dialectical. At any rate, both claims are evidently directed against those who claim that holding true beliefs about natural values leads to tranquility.

In the fifth chapter (141–67) Sextus then reverts to his former ways and sets out to explain in what sense the Pyrrhonist as a suspender of belief enjoys tranquility. At this point (*M* 11.144), Sextus claims to have already "established" (*parestēsamen*) that one who suspends belief *on all issues* leads a tranquil life in matters of the things which according to belief are good and bad. In what sense has he established this? He has only argued dialectically that the dogmatist must concede the claim that having value beliefs creates anxiety, and that either the absence of such beliefs, or the positive belief that there are no natural values, secures tranquility.[17]

The account offered in the third book of the *Outlines* (235–38), in the chapters that parallel *Against the Ethicists*, is somewhat different and much shorter. The skeptic suspends belief, Sextus says, on all issues, including the issue of natural values. Therefore she is "unaffected (*apathēs*) in matters of belief and moderately affected (*metriopathei*) in matters necessitated" (235). But again Sextus explains the skeptic's state by claiming that assuming that there are natural values creates anxiety (236–7). The difference between the two accounts is that in the *Outlines* Sextus never argues that the belief that there are no natural values creates tranquility.

[17] Sextus also refers to what he said in his discussion of the end in the presumably lost general account of the *Adversus Mathematicos*.

5 Conclusion

The ultimate conclusion of the arguments of both the special accounts is that having positive beliefs about natural values produces anxiety. This is the very stipulation we encounter in Sextus' account of the tranquility of the skeptic in *PH* 1.25–30. But in the special accounts, and glaringly so in *M* 11, it is an undisguised conclusion to an argument. It is clear enough where Sextus got his new sort of tranquility, namely from his arguments against the ethicists.

One could tell the following story. Standard skeptical arguments against ethicists surely included ones to the effect that nothing is by nature good or bad. Aenesidemus is on record for having argued thus. In the sixth of his *Pyrrhonian Arguments* he "deals with good things and bad, in particular objects of choice and avoidance, as well as preferred and dispreferred things, and drives them into the same quarrels, so far as he is able, and shuts them off from our apprehension and knowledge" (Photius, *Bibl.* 170b22–25). Sextus continues: even if something is good or bad, believing it produces unhappiness, while (contrary to the ethicists) believing that nothing is by nature good or bad rids one of intense desires accompanied by anxiety because it rids one of the positive beliefs that generate the anxiety. The skeptic would of course suspend belief on all these issues. And it is interesting that Sextus actually (and contradictorily) concedes that point in an aside directed against the Stoics in *PH* 3.238. But the idea that prevails is that it is the *content* of the belief that generates the anxiety, namely that something is by nature good or bad. One gets the desired conclusion just by depriving the belief of its content, that something is by nature good or bad. One can do this by maintaining either that nothing is by nature good or bad, or by suspending belief. In *M* 11 Sextus actually offers both ways. Insofar as he argues that nothing is by nature good or bad he reveals the dialectical character of his arguments, but insofar as he concludes that one ought to suspend belief he skirts negative dogmatism while depicting the skeptic as tranquil. In *PH* 3 he confines himself to suspension of belief, again skirting negative dogmatism, and portraying skeptical tranquility in terms of suspension of belief in issues of natural value.

One might suggest that Sextus wanted more than a vague (and somewhat paradoxical) promise of unexpected tranquility attending suspension of belief (or the ability to put in opposition conflicting beliefs and suspend belief in the wake of undecidable equipollence). He found what he wanted in the skeptical polemic against the ethicists. Sextus *uses* the claim that anxiety is the lot of those who believe in natural values in his explanation of skeptical tranquility. Thus he can both advertise the benefits of Pyrrhonism and unmask the allegedly inherent anxiety of dogmatism (although only ethical dogmatism). But the price he pays is twofold. The tranquility he offers attends only the rejection of positive beliefs about natural values (and is thus consistent with negative dogmatism). And he can only offer it by stipulating that holding beliefs about natural values produces anxiety.

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Chapter 3
The Aims of Skeptical Investigation

Katja Maria Vogt

Investigation, it has been claimed, must aim at the discovery of truths. I shall call this the Discovery Premise: investigation is only genuine investigation if it aims at the discovery of truths. As I shall argue, the Discovery Premise rests on too simple a notion of investigation. Instead, we should adopt the Truth Premise: investigation must be guided by epistemic norms that respond to the value of truth. The Truth Premise makes room for a broader and more compelling conception of investigation.

Adherents of the Discovery Premise raise an objection against Pyrrhonian skepticism.[1] They formulate the Tranquility Charge: skeptical investigation aims at tranquility, rather than at the discovery of truths; therefore it cannot count as genuine investigation. The Pyrrhonian skeptics describe themselves as investigators (*Outlines of Pyrrhonism* [*PH*] 1.1–2). If the skeptic's activity is not investigation, she is not a skeptic and her philosophy collapses.[2] Admittedly, tranquility is, with

[1]I am exclusively concerned with the version of Pyrrhonian skepticism that Sextus presents. For some earlier skeptics, Sextus reports, suspension of judgment is, in addition to tranquility, the end of investigation (*PH* 1.30). However, Sextus does not incorporate this view into his own account of the skeptic's end.

[2]For a forceful version of the Tranquility Charge see Striker (2001). See also Palmer (2000) and Perin (2006). The Tranquility Charge is not among the standard ancient anti-skeptical moves. It is a modern complaint against Pyrrhonism. Perin considers *PH* 2.1–12 an ancient instance of the objection (2006, p. 338 n. 2). But *PH* 2.1–12 raises a different problem (cf. *Adversus Mathematicos* (*AM*) 8.337–36a): the skeptic cannot investigate without mastering concepts and thereby, inconsistently, holding some assumptions. Cf. Brunschwig (1994), Vogt (2006), and Grgic (2008). Perin accepts the Discovery Premise and argues that the skeptic aims at two values: truth and tranquility. Palmer argues that skeptical investigation is second-order investigation: the skeptic does not search for the truth, but investigates the theories of the dogmatists. This way of untying the connection between investigation and truth does not seem compelling: what would be the point of investigating dogmatic theories? Even though different theories are critically explored, skeptical investigation must be concerned with thinking about the questions at issue, and thus must have some relationship to the truth.

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some qualifications, the end of skepticism (*PH* 1.25). But the skeptics aim at tranquility *as skeptics*, and that is, as investigators. Their activities thus can not simply be unrelated to truth. They aim at tranquility in matters on which one *could* have beliefs, and on which they would form beliefs, if they did not employ their skeptical methods of investigation.

The Tranquility Charge fails because the Discovery Premise is too limited. First, the idea that investigation aims at the discovery of truths may not adequately capture the many ways of doing philosophy that we and the ancients are familiar with.[3] Some might even find the idea that we as philosophers aim at the discovery of truths naïve. They might not expect to resolve any philosophical questions. But their ways of doing philosophy might still be guided by the value of truth. Second, we should distinguish between the motivational source of philosophical investigation and its aim. Suppose I feel restless if I am not exercising my mind by thinking about complex theoretical questions, or that I find philosophy pleasurable, even though I do not see much point in the whole endeavor. The Discovery Premise overlooks the possibility that someone could be motivated to engage in philosophy, but not seriously try to achieve anything by doing so. Third, it is a commonplace that the value of truth is associated with two aims rather than one: the acceptance of truths, and the avoidance of falsehoods. The relationship between these aims can be construed in several ways. Accordingly, there must be several different modes of investigation. Insofar as the avoidance of falsehoods reflects valuation of the truth, investigation that aims at the avoidance of the false should count as genuine investigation.[4]

Pyrrhonian investigation, as I shall argue, needs to be construed with all three considerations in mind. First, it inherits a rather complex conception of investigation, shaped by Socrates and Plato, whose philosophizing does not always immediately aim at the discovery of truths (Section 1). Second, it has a motivational source – the unsettling discrepancy between conflicting thoughts – that is distinct from any particular aim one might have (Section 2). Third, the value of truth figures importantly in Pyrrhonian investigation, though Pyrrhonian investigation is more immediately concerned with avoidance of the false than with discovery of the true (Sections 3, 4, and 5). Investigation must respond to the value of truth. The Truth Premise is crucial for any activity that claims to be a kind of investigation. But contrary to the Discovery Premise, the Truth Premise leaves room for different modes of investigation, among them Pyrrhonian investigation.

[3] Striker (2001) points out that the philosophizing of an Academic skeptic is much like what many of us do today as philosophers.

[4] I shall assume that truth is plausibly considered the epistemically fundamental value, in the sense that it explains other epistemic values. Cf. for example Sosa (2007, p. 54).

1 Socratic Investigation

Sextus draws on a complex conception of philosophy, developed most significantly in the Socratic tradition.[5] He describes phases of Plato's Academy by reference to how Plato and Socrates have been interpreted, thus showing that he is aware of a range of different approaches to philosophy within this tradition (*PH* 1.220–35). Some, according to Sextus, focus on the dogmatic side of Plato (including Socrates as main speaker), taking him to put forward theories about the Forms, the soul, recollection, and so on. Others focus on *aporia* – dialogues ending without any response to the question at hand. They see that Socrates is sometimes playing with people, and that at other times he is in contest with sophists. These interpreters claim that such dialogues are concerned with a kind of training. Furthermore, Sextus is aware of Socratic schools outside of the Academy, such as the Cyrenaics (*PH* 1.215), who interpret Socrates' investigations in yet a different fashion.

Arcesilaus, who according to Sextus begins a new phase of the Academy (*PH* 1.220), is inspired by Socrates' commitment to investigation. Arguably, Arcesilaus does not turn to Socrates by turning away from Plato. Rather, Arcesilaus is likely to have interpreted Plato (not just Socrates) as less dogmatic than other members of the Academy took him to be. Even in middle and later dialogues, which do not focus on *aporia* and refutation, Plato can be seen to investigate in a manner that speaks to the skeptics. For example, one might argue that Plato never fully formulates a version of the Theory of Recollection, or the Theory of the Forms, that he puts forward as his considered view. Rather, he explores different versions of these theories, thinking through their implications, including the difficulties attached to them.

Sextus is acquainted as much as we are with the many sides of Platonic and Socratic investigation. A wide range of activities figures in Plato's dialogues. Socrates can be seen to refute a series of proposals put forward by his interlocutor (for example, in the *Euthyphro*). He interrogates others who claim to have knowledge, arriving at the conclusion that they do not know what they think they know (for example, in the *Apology*). He examines with an interlocutor a range of ideas this person already had or was familiar with, seeing that all of them are problematic (for example, Meno's ideas about virtue in the *Meno*). He and his interlocutor present arguments for and against a given thesis, with no apparent resolution at the end of the conversation (for example, regarding the question of whether virtue is teachable in the *Protagoras*). At times, Socrates and his interlocutor jointly develop some theories, even if none of them is presented as fully compelling (for example, accounts of the immortality of the soul in the *Phaedo*, where even the final account is considered merely hypothetical). At other times, Socrates appears to emerge unchanged from a

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[5] I cannot explore all facets of the conception of philosophy that Sextus engages with. For example, Pyrrhonism seems in various ways inspired by Pre-Socratic philosophizing, where central ideas are often expressed in enigmatic, dense, and almost obscure ways. This mode of formulating one's ideas influences the so-called skeptical formulae, such as "no more," "I determine nothing," and so on (*PH* 1.187–209). However, for the present purposes, the Socratic-Platonic tradition seems most important.

conversation, while his interlocutor has genuinely made progress (for example, the examination of Meno's accounts of virtue in the first part of the *Meno*). Socratic investigation here seems to be concerned with the insights of an interlocutor, not with Socrates' own insights. But nevertheless, philosophical investigation seems to be a joint, dialogical enterprise: both Socrates and his interlocutor investigate together.

These various kinds of Socratic discussions are usually considered to be philosophical investigations. Scholars also agree in ascribing to Socrates a deep concern with the truth. Socratic investigations thus seem to meet the criteria that the Truth Premise sets up. But they may not meet the criteria of the Discovery Premise. It is not obvious how Socratic concern for the truth translates into the aim of discovering truths within a given investigation. For students of Platonic dialogues, it seems possible that philosophers spend years clearing away preconceived opinions and thinking through competing theories. Note that the clearing away of opinions need not and usually does not involve discovery of the truth that they are false. Socrates and his interlocutors often dismiss ideas because their proponent cannot adequately defend them. A better philosopher might be able to argue convincingly in favor of a claim that a beginner, who holds an unexamined belief, is unable to explicate. Accordingly, the fact that a given idea is dismissed does not mean that one discovered that it is false.

When asking whether the Pyrrhonian skeptics engage in genuine investigation, I think we should have this multifaceted picture in mind. We should hesitate to level a charge against the skeptics that we would not level against Socrates – that investigation that does not aim immediately at the discovery of truths can not qualify as investigation. It appears obvious that Socratic and Platonic investigations meet the Truth Premise: they are inspired and guided by the value of truth. But it is a complicated question how precisely Socrates and Plato respond to the value of truth. Surely, different answers would have to be given for different dialogues, and these answers would involve difficult interpretive concerns. This consideration should warn us against stipulating too straightforward an account of investigation when asking whether the Pyrrhonian is a genuine investigator.

2 The Motivational Source: Anomaly

Pyrrhonian investigation begins with the realization (*to nomizein*) that discovery has not yet taken place (*PH* 2.11). This realization comes with the experience of anomalies. The skeptic is disturbed by the conflicting impressions she has on a given issue. In *PH* 1.25–9, Sextus describes this turmoil and tells the story of the skeptic's conversion to skepticism[6]:

[6]I am adopting the term "conversion story" from Striker (2001). The term must, of course, be taken with some caution. It nicely captures that the skeptic undergoes a life-changing experience when she first becomes a skeptic. However, we need to keep in mind that skepticism is not a state of

> Up to now we say the aim of the skeptic is tranquility in matters of belief (*kata doxan*) and moderation of feeling in matters forced upon us. For the skeptic began to do philosophy in order to decide among appearances and to apprehend which are true and which are false, so as to become tranquil; but he came upon equipollent dispute, and being unable to decide this he suspended judgment. And when he suspended judgment, tranquility in matters of belief followed fortuitously. For those who believe that things are good or bad by nature are perpetually troubled. When they lack what they believe to be good, they take themselves to be persecuted by things naturally bad and they pursue what (so they think) is good. And when they have acquired these things, they experience more troubles; for they are elated beyond reason and measure, and in fear of change they do anything so as not to lose what they believe to be good. But those who make no determination about what is good and bad by nature neither avoid nor pursue anything with intensity; and hence they are tranquil. (. . .) So, too, the skeptics were hoping to acquire tranquility by deciding the anomalies in what appears and is thought of, and being unable to do this they suspended judgment. But when they suspended judgment, tranquility followed as it were fortuitously, as a shadow follows a body. (*PH* 1.25–9, tr. Annas & Barnes with changes[7])

Pre-skeptical investigation aims at settling what is true and what is false. The investigator looks at her views (the things that appear to her, i.e., her impressions), with the aim of settling which of them are true and which are false, which in turn puts her in a state of turmoil. Why is that? Consider two explanations.

(1) Eudaimonism. Sextus says that those who think that something is good or bad by nature are perpetually troubled. If they consider something good, they worry about getting it, or losing it. If they consider something bad, they worry about avoiding it, or getting rid of it. This worry can be called “eudaemonist”; it has something to do with the role of good and bad things in a well-going life, and with the desire for happiness. More specifically, the worry is characteristic of a certain kind of eudaimonism, the kind that focuses on the instability of human life. Even if I knew that having X is good, and even if I had X, I would be tormented by the thought that X can be lost. This is a long-standing Greek preoccupation, already prevalent in Herodotus’ *Histories*. Human life is unstable, and the so-called goods of fortune are characterized by the fact that they are not under our control. Children die, health is lost, houses burn to the ground. Whatever I consider good (family, health, wealth), and whatever I consider bad (illness, death, poverty), I shall be in turmoil. In a parallel passage in *M* 11, Sextus says that all disturbance comes from intensely pursuing and avoiding things, and pursuit and avoidance comes with value judgments (*M* 11.112–3). Stoic and Epicurean ethics capture versions of this traditional concern. Most importantly, they do so by arguing that what is truly good cannot be lost (virtue, according to the Stoics), or is available even under adverse conditions (the kind of pleasure that turns out to be good in Epicurean ethics).

While this kind of worry figures widely in Greek thought, it is ultimately not particularly relevant to the Pyrrhonism of the *Outlines*. Sextus may mention the

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mind acquired once and for all. The skeptic must continually produce her skepticism through a life of investigation.

[7] I differ from Annas and Barnes (2000) in translating *doxa* and cognates in terms of belief rather than opinion. All translations throughout this paper are, even though they are largely my own, indebted to Annas and Barnes (2000), as well as to Bett (1997) and Bury (1933–49).

eudaimonist concerns because they are likely to resonate with his interlocutors. The idea that human life is unstable and that all pursuit of goods comes with turmoil is intuitive for many contemporaries of the skeptic. But with respect to a general account of Pyrrhonism, the reference to eudaimonist concerns is misleading. The skeptic investigates all kinds of questions, not only questions of value. Further, it is not clear why, if one is given to the worry that one might lead one's life in a way that brings misery, one should be better off suspending judgment.[8] In leading her life, the Pyrrhonian skeptic adheres to appearances, and that is, to custom, tradition, and the ordinary ways of life (*PH* 1.21–4). If the worry regarding value beliefs is that they might be wrong, the same worry should arise for an agent who adheres to appearances. There is no presumption that conventions and customs get things right. One is likely to fare better with views that are examined or plausible, even if one still does not know that they are true. The kind of disturbance we should ascribe to Sextus' skeptic must be different – it cannot be rooted in the idea that, if one's value beliefs are false one is likely to act in ways that bring misery.[9]

(2) Anomaly. In *PH* 1.29, Sextus says that the skeptic, prior to her conversion, investigates in order to resolve the anomaly (*anômalia*) between different appearances and thoughts. This is the core of the disturbance that sets off skeptical investigation. Inconsistencies (or discrepancies and tensions) between the impressions available to the investigator cause disruption: one is confused because the views one holds or is acquainted with do not fit together. Pyrrhonian turmoil comes from the conflicts between several truth-claims. Anomaly arises in all domains, not only the domain of value. The skeptic can be confused with respect to all kinds of questions, if only several ways of seeing things are available to her. This is an important point. The eudaimonist reading fails in part because it can not account for the generality of Pyrrhonian investigation. The skeptic is not only confused with respect

[8]In *M* 11.110–67, a major part of one of Sextus' treatises on ethics, it appears as if skepticism were actually confined to ethics. Sextus invokes the dogmatic idea that happiness consists of having good things. Based on this premise, it is essential to the good life to know what is good and what is bad (110). Now add the premise that all unhappiness is disturbance, and that all disturbance comes from intense pursuit or avoidance of that which is deemed good or bad (112–3). The combination of these premises implies that life is inevitably miserable (at least as long as it is assumed that good and bad things can be lost). Perhaps this state of affairs could lead one to a kind of value-skepticism; only the absence of value judgments can prevent the turmoil of intense pursuit and avoidance. But as Bett (1997, pp. 128–81) argues, this is a distinctively different, and probably earlier strand of Pyrrhonism from the skepticism of the *Outlines*, which is the skepticism that we are most immediately concerned with here. Perin (2006, p. 342; cf. p. 352) too notes that *PH* 1.25–9 does not fit well into Sextus' skepticism.

[9]McPherran (1989, pp. 135–71, esp. 158) argues that the physiology of belief causes disturbance. He argues that the Stoics view the mind as actively in motion when it assents, and that the skeptics invoke this idea. Furthermore, he suggests that this goal-directed motion creates the disturbing experience of belief. Suspension resolves the disturbance and generates a smooth movement. McPherran seems right to me in emphasizing the physiology of thought. However, the disruption seems to come with conflict or *anômalia*, not with a particular cognitive activity like assent.

to questions of value, but with respect to any given question that arises for her. This account is also given in *PH* 1.12, a chapter entitled "The Source of Skepticism."[10]

> Men of talent, who were perturbed (*tarassomenoi*) by the anomalies in things (*en tois pragmasin anômalian*) and in confusion as to which of them they should rather assent to, came to investigate what in things is true and what is false, so that by deciding these issues they would become tranquil. (*PH* 1.12, tr. Annas & Barnes with changes)

The skeptic's mind is upset – it is pulled into different directions, because conflicting views or appearances induce her to assent. This is what puzzlement or confusion consists of: it is a state of being epistemically moved. Trains of thought are set in motion, and the subject experiences the tensions among the various views she is attracted to.[11]

Both Stoics and Epicureans, that is, both main interlocutors of the skeptics, conceive of the soul as a physical entity. Thoughts are physical movements in the bodily soul.[12] Sextus, of course, does not hold any dogmatic theory of the mind. But he exploits this picture insofar as he speaks about the way in which impressions *affect* the mind (this being a point that can be reported as an experience, rather than dogmatically stated). According to the picture that is thus invoked (though not defended), the motions that disturb one's peace of mind are conflicting thoughts.

When thoughts do not fit together, the mind is stirred up. Even though the confusion is rational (it is a confusion among several thoughts), this is a causal event in the bodily mind—the thoughts are physiological alterations of the soul. One way or another, we need to react to this movement. If we are, for example, like some interlocutors in early Platonic dialogues, we run away from the immediate source of confusion (Socrates), divert ourselves with other activities, and let it run its course until it dies out. New impressions or perceptions create fresher movements in the soul, and the alterations that were our earlier impressions wear off. However, if we do not run away from the cause of confusion, we need to do something else with the motion it creates. In this case, we need to respond rationally and try to clear up the confusion by thinking things through. That is, if we want to set the turmoil to rest in a rational fashion, we need to work through the confusing thoughts. The skeptic is

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[10] Annas and Barnes (2000) and Perin (2006, p. 343) translate "*archê*" as "causal principle." This translation suggests that the driving force behind skeptical investigation is causal, rather than rational. However, our translation should not prejudge this question. The Greek *archê* can mean "source" or "origin." In Hellenistic epistemology, where dogmatists think of the mind as physiological, any cognitive process can be described in causal terms, and Sextus' ways of putting things are often parasitic on this framework. However, this does not imply that such movements of the mind could not be described as rational.

[11] Sextus says that the experience that appearances are in conflict is not just the experience of the skeptics, or of philosophers. It is the experience of all of mankind (*PH* 1.210).

[12] The Stoics define impressions as imprints or alterations of a physical soul; rational impressions (i.e., the impressions of adult human beings) are a sub-class of impressions; they are thought processes (DL 7.49–51 = SVF 2.52, 55, 61 = LS 39A). Impression, impulse and assent are movements of the soul (Plutarch, *Against Colotes* 1122A–F = LS 69A); cf. Stobaeus 2.86, 17–87, 6 (= SVF 3.169, part = LS 53Q). Epicurus conceives of the soul as a fine-structured body, and of thought processes as occurring in this body (*Letter to Herodotus* 63–7 = LS 14A).

committed to rationality in this sense. She needs to sort out the confusion. Anomaly is – causally and rationally – the driving force of skepticism. Anomaly responds to a basic concern with the truth; if truth were not an end or value, then conflicting thoughts might not be disruptive. That is, whatever we go on to say about skeptical investigation, its motivational source reflects the value of truth.

3 The Truth-Directedness of Pyrrhonian Investigation

Anomaly thus is the motivational source of skepticism. Tranquility appears as a plausible correlate of the motivational origin of investigation. If one is moved to investigate because one is in turmoil, then this endeavor will be directed toward the quieting of turmoil. But by itself, this can not yet account for the complex investigative activities of the skeptic.

Pre-conversion, the skeptic wanted to resolve instances of anomaly by settling which of her impressions were true and which were false. But anomaly is not just the initial starting-point of investigation; it is also investigation's ongoing source. That is, being struck by anomaly, the skeptic is again and again caught in the attempt to settle what is true and what is false. She investigates conflicting positions with a view to their truth and falsity. She works her way through the individual theses, arguments, and so on, that together make up theories. If it came to the point that she found a given claim to be true, she would accept it.[13] That is, with a view to the examination of every given impression, and with a view to accepting or rejecting it or suspending judgment on it, the skeptic's activity is *truth-directed*.

Suspension of judgment follows for the skeptic from the equipollence of several positions, and it enables the skeptic not to accept or reject anything (*PH* 1.8–10). In describing equipollence (*isostheneia*), Sextus speaks about several accounts being equal as far as belief and disbelief are concerned – *kata pistin kai apistian*. Neither of several positions is "more believable" (*pistoteron*) than the other (*PH* 1.10). These expressions are difficult to translate, and it might seem that, in order to properly mark the difference between *pistis* and *doxa*, we should not translate in terms of belief. Annas and Barnes render the relevant phrases as "equality with regard to being convincing or unconvincing," and "more convincing."[14] This translation, however, suggests that Sextus invokes a category that is at least in part psychological: a position could be convincing in the sense of looking attractive; or it could be convincing because something about it speaks to one. But Sextus refers to a property that impressions are seen to have when assessed in terms of truth and falsity. The

[13]With a view to particular impressions, the skeptic engages in something like belief-formation, but gets stuck. Suppose that belief is an attitude to a proposition that is truth-directed: to believe a proposition is to accept it with the aim of thereby accepting a truth. (This is a formulation discussed by Velleman 2000, p. 251.) The skeptic never arrives at the point of actually accepting an impression. However, her attitude in examining theses and arguments is still truth-directed in the sense in which belief is truth-directed.

[14]This translation is an improvement over Bury, who translates in terms of probability.

skeptic examines competing *logoi* (*PH* 1.10), arguments or accounts. Doing so, she assesses impressions with respect to their truth or falsity, and that is, with respect to whether she should accept or reject them, or whether she should believe them.[15] But admittedly, "believability" is an awkward term, and there is a legitimate concern with keeping *pistis* and *doxa* apart. We might rephrase Sextus' point in terms of credibility: several positions fare equally in terms of their credibility, and neither is more credible than the other.

Accordingly, there is an important sense in which Pyrrhonian investigation is truth-directed, thus meeting at least in part the criteria that the Truth Premise sets up. But proponents of the Tranquility Charge might point to what could appear to be an unrealistic feature of Sextus' account of suspension of judgment. Why should several positions on a given question appear *equally* credible to the skeptic?[16] Suppose there is an issue for which there are two different, but seemingly quite plausible positions. While there are arguments on both sides, one side may still strike one as more credible. And since there are some strengths and some weaknesses in each position, one may find oneself drifting toward a new position, which aims to combine the views one has studied. Why should the skeptic end up with a standstill of thought (*stasis dianoias*; PH 1.10), as Sextus calls it, resting between competing positions that are each equally credible, and thus suspending judgment?

Some familiar points can be made in response. The skeptic does not only investigate positions that already exist, as fully-formulated positions. New positions, which combine strong points from several other theories, are also among the theories that are investigated. That is, we should think of standstill of the mind as provisional and temporary. The skeptic suspends with a view to a couple of theories; but then she finds herself drifting towards a new option, and investigation resumes; now she will explore the weaknesses of the newly conceived theory, or several revised theories; and so on. Sextus says that, even if the skeptic cannot come up with a counter argument to a given thesis right now, she is aware that other arguments were once not yet formulated, and later were put forward (*PH* 1.34). Thus, even if the skeptic should not be able to produce an objection on the spot, she would be inclined to expect that there is an objection. However, this point may seem to give further weight to the aforementioned objection. Is the skeptic realistically stuck between two equally credible ideas when, say, there are weighty objections on the one side, and merely the expectation of a future objection on the other side?

In order to address this question we must say more about the difference between the skeptic's experience of anomaly and the restful state of suspension. In both states, different appearances on a given issue are on the skeptic's mind. Why is one of these states a resolution of the other? The answer, I suggest, is that anomaly

[15]Paul Horwich writes: "there is no substantial difference between identifying a proposition as false and disbelieving it. So, refusing to believe what we identify as false is just refusing to believe what we *dis*believe" (2006, p. 354). I think that something like this is the core of how Sextus relates believability to truth and "disbelievability" to falsehood.

[16]I am grateful for feedback on this point to Nandi Theunissen, who raised some related concerns.

involves a mix of psychological and rational factors, while suspension is an attitude taken with a view solely to *argument*.

Consider an example drawn from a difficult philosophical problem, such as freedom and determinism. Suppose we are intuitively strongly committed to seeing our actions as originating in our deliberations, thinking that it is in some important sense up to us whether we choose one course of action or another. Insofar as we focus on our intuitions, we might never get to the point where several positions seem equally credible. However strong the arguments for determinism, we still conceive of our actions as we used to do. But insofar as we focus on the arguments that can be adduced for both sides (or rather, for multiple competing theories), we might arrive at a different attitude. We might genuinely get to the point where we see the strengths and weaknesses in several accounts, and find ourselves surveying them in a non-committal state of mind.[17] It is only through the focus on argument that the skeptic can arrive at this balanced state of mind.[18]

Prior to investigation, we are drawn to particular positions because they happen to speak to us; they are persuasive in a psychological, rather than an argumentative way. This kind of imbalance can be remedied by close study of the arguments. The skeptic investigates things "*hoson epi tô logo*" (*PH* 1.20). That is, in investigation, the skeptic looks at opposite positions *from the point of view of argument*. When she eventually suspends judgment on them, she does so with a view to the arguments she considered. Through the transition from confusion to suspension, the skeptic is no longer subject to the psychological pull of various positions that differ in strength (and which would, if investigation did not prevent this, eventually lead her to assent to the view that looks most attractive).

This proposal involves the interpretation of a much-debated expression: *hoson epi tô logô*. Scholars often take this formula to address the question of whether the skeptic has any beliefs, or beliefs of any kind. Michael Frede (1997) argues that, when Sextus says that the skeptic does not dispute that honey appears sweet to her, but investigates whether it actually is sweet *hoson epi tô logô* (*PH* 1.20), this means that Sextus only bans a dogmatic kind of belief from the skeptic's life. He translates the tag as "to the extent that this is a question for reason."[19] According to his

[17]Compare this to contemporary discussions about skepticism, which often proceed by setting out so-called skeptical paradoxa. That is, it is assumed that, on the one hand, we are committed to, for example, thinking that there are other minds, and on the other hand, there is a skeptical argument to the effect that there are no other minds. The argument looks valid, and thus we find ourselves in a paradox. We can only sustain this state of mind (of finding ourselves in a paradox) by focusing on the skeptic argument. Once we turn away and back into our ordinary lives and other concerns, it loses its grip on us, and we easily accept the thought that there are other minds.

[18]Hume (1999) makes a version of this observation with respect to the arguments concerning skepticism. He thinks that, once we stop focusing on these arguments, they lose their grip on us and we fall back into our ordinary knowledge claims. In some sense, this is lucky, since – according to Hume – all life would otherwise perish. But "[n]ature is always too strong for principle" (*Enquiry concerning Human Understanding* XII ii).

[19]Bury translates "in its essence" and "as far as what the dogmatists say is concerned." Perin compares the expression to qualifiers like "as of yet" (*achri nun*) (2006, p. 349), suggesting that

interpretation, Sextus is here distancing the skeptic from beliefs that are based on reason in a certain emphatic, dogmatic sense. However, Sextus uses the expression in order to paraphrase a distinction: in his investigations, the skeptic does not investigate that things appear a certain way; he investigates *what is being said* (*ho legetai*) about appearances. That is, the skeptic investigates statements, theses, accounts, arguments, and so on.[20] Sextus sometimes uses a longer version of the clause: *hoson epi tô logô tôn dogmatikôn*, which Bury translates as "as far as what the dogmatists say is concerned." This longer expression might appear to confirm Frede's reading, insofar as it might suggest that Sextus distances himself from a dogmatic kind of reasoning. But I think that it works even better with the interpretation I suggest. The skeptic investigates things with respect to the arguments that are put forward about them. These arguments, of course, are often formulated by dogmatists. The skeptic thinks through the arguments that different theorists offer and also formulates critical arguments of her own, making sure to arrive at suspension with respect to any particular position.

Sextus' skeptic does not move away from the use of reason. The skeptic is a reasoner, and she must be a reasoner. In her investigations, she thinks through the arguments that can be adduced for various sides of an issue. If she did not do this, she would not be testing these views in terms of their believability, assessing them for truth and falsity. As a reasoner – or, as an investigator who studies arguments – the skeptic arrives at suspension of judgment, in a way that reflects the value of truth. If she arrived at it in any other fashion, her suspension would be willful, rather than rational.

4 Epistemic Preferences and Injunctions

However, it is a difficult question how the truth-directedness that characterizes the skeptic's attitude to particular impressions relates to the more complex practices of her investigation. Also, it is not clear how the two aims of attaining truths and avoiding falsehoods are reflected in Pyrrhonian investigation. If one wanted only to accept as many truths as possible, one could just accept all impressions. If one wanted only to avoid falsehoods, one could just reject all impressions. But valuation of the truth must consist in a combination of both aims.

Even on the Discovery Premise, investigation does not aim at the acceptance of as many truths as possible. There are too many trivial truths for this to be a sensible goal. More plausibly, we aim to accept all the truths that are worth accepting (for practical purposes of ordinary life, or for purposes of understanding the world, or

the skeptic "only" suspends as far as the arguments are concerned. But that seems misleading – it is not as if the skeptic, in some other respect, did not suspend. Suspension is not qualified by relating to arguments. Rather, it is generated by focus on the arguments.

[20] For a similar interpretation of the expression, cf. Brunschwig (1995). Annas and Barnes translate "as far as the argument goes."

for making progress in a given field of study). A further aim of investigation (either taking the place of the aim to attain worthwhile truths, or combined with this aim) might be the best possible proportion of true as compared to false beliefs.[21]

However, if one aims for the best possible proportion of true versus false beliefs, one accepts that one will come to hold some falsehoods. That is, one proceeds on the assumption that, if one wants any beliefs at all, one cannot avoid that some of them shall be false. But this assumption might appear problematic. Why should one accept that one's practices of belief-formation will provide one with some false beliefs, mixed in with a greater number of true beliefs? Perhaps this is a plausible picture of belief-formation, at least in some domains of everyday life. But it is not obvious that, as investigators, we should be content with investigative practices that lead one to a favorable ratio of true versus false beliefs. One might devise strategies that reflect different epistemic values: values according to which, for any given question, it is preferable to acquire no view at all as compared to acquiring a view that could turn out to be false.

Sextus' skepticism builds on this intuition. Of course, unlike Stoic or Epicurean epistemologists, the Pyrrhonian skeptic cannot argue for a particular set of epistemic values. However, skepticism develops in conversation with Stoic and Epicurean philosophy. In these exchanges, the skeptics dialectically engage with a range of ideas about the value of truth. Consider for example the famous debates between Academic skeptics and early Stoics.[22] The Stoics put forward an ambitious criterion of truth, the cognitive impression. A cognitive impression arises from what is, and is stamped and impressed exactly in accordance with what is, thus being clear and distinct.[23] The Stoics formulate the epistemic norm that one should only assent if one has a cognitive impression.[24] Otherwise one should suspend. That is, the Stoics think that, to adequately respond to the value of truth is to withhold judgment in every case where an impression could turn out to be false. The Stoic attitude is radical: for any given impression, suspension is better than assent that comes with only the slightest risk of accepting a false impression. Every such assent, however slim the risk would be, is considered rash. From the point of view of the Academics, this means that the Stoics should end up as skeptics: they should always suspend their judgments.

Consider further the Epicurean claim that all sense perceptions are true, and the skeptic engagement with this view. This thesis is notoriously difficult to interpret. Roughly, it means that all sense perceptions are physiological events; as such, they

[21] These options are taken (roughly) from Velleman (2000, p. 251).

[22] The main arguments in this debate can be found in the following texts. Phase 1 (Arcesilaus): 7.46, 54; Cicero *Acad.* 1.40–1 and 2.77–8; SE *M* 7.247–52; SE *M* 7.402–10. Phase 2 (Carneades): DL 1.177; Cicero, *Acad.* 2.57 and 2.83–5; SE *M* 7.253. Many of the relevant passages are collected in chapter 40 in Long and Sedley (1987). Cf. Vogt (2010).

[23] DL 7.46 (= SVF 2.53, part = LS 40C); Cicero, *Academica* 1.40–1 (= SVF 1.55, 61, 60, part = LS 40B).

[24] Cicero, *Academica* 2.77–8 (= LS 40D).

are facts.[25] For example, a tower looks round from a distance and square from nearby. In the first case, the atomic image (emitted by the object and traveling toward the perceiver) is affected by its travel through the air; accordingly, the edges are eroded. But this does not mean that the former impression is false and the latter true. To expect otherwise is as if one thought that, when hearing a bell ring, one would hear its actual or true tone only from inside of the bell. Perceptions differ, but they are not in conflict: the differences between them can be accounted for by physics (SE *M* 7.206–9). Accordingly, there is no falsity on the level of perception. Falsity comes with judgment: "[. . .] we judge some things correctly, but some incorrectly, either by adding and appending something to our impressions or by subtracting something from them, and in general falsifying arational sensation" (SE *M* 7.210).[26] Note that perception here is characterized as arational, which means that it does not involve any active cognitive stance. Sense perceptions are not yet beliefs.

Epicurean epistemology focuses on the methods by which we should arrive at our judgments, and on the evidence we have for and against them. True beliefs are those that are attested (and that means, attested by what is evident), and those that are uncontested by self-evidence. False beliefs are those that are contested and those that are unattested by self-evidence (SE *M* 7.211–6). In order to arrive at true beliefs, we must on the one hand aim to adhere to the evidence of the senses, rather than doing what we are prone to do: add to or subtract from perceptions while we make our judgments. On the other hand, we must keep an open mind when the evidence is not conclusive. At times, we must list several possible explanations, rather than settle for one.[27] The Epicureans thus put forward a thought that greatly interests the skeptics: that falsity is introduced by judgment, and that prior to judgment, we have available to ourselves some mental content – the perception – to which our own cognitive activities have not yet added anything.

Based on these and other debates with dogmatic philosophers, the skeptics develop what I shall call their own epistemic preferences and injunctions. A

[25]One line of argument says: all sense perceptions are true because nothing can refute them (the senses cannot refute each other, no particular sense perception can refute another sense perception, reason cannot refute the senses because reason has its starting-point in the senses) (Lucretius 4.469–521 = LS 16A and DL 10.31–2 = LS 16B). Another line of argument is the one I am focusing on above – it ultimately seems more promising to me: every sense perception is true insofar as sense perception does not yet involve judgment; perceptions are facts, just like pain, and in this sense true (DL 10.31–2).

[26]When Epicureans explain the details of this conception, it is clear that they talk to skeptics, and with skeptical examples in mind (things taste differently to different people, the tower that looks round from a distance and square from nearby, and so on). Schofield (2007) suggests that there is an exchange of arguments between Epicurean epistemology and Aenesidemus' skepticism. While I cannot argue for this view here, I think that Pyrrhonian engagement with Epicurean epistemology is much underrated, and runs through several strands of Pyrrhonism. Skeptical arguments often target a philosophy that does not declare cognitive impressions to be criteria of truth, but more radically, sense perception – that is, they address themselves towards philosophers with Epicurean views.

[27]Epicurus, *Letter to Pythocles* 85–8 (= LS 18C) and Lucretius 6.703–11 (= LS 18E).

Pyrrhonian skeptic cannot argue for any epistemic values and norms. But at the same time, it is clear that no one would turn into a skeptic if she did not deeply care about avoiding falsehoods. Indeed, it seems that the immediate interlocutors of the skeptics are all committed to epistemic norms geared toward the avoidance of falsehoods. As one interlocutor among them, the skeptic seems to be part of this project. If the skeptic did not greatly prefer not to accept any falsehoods, she would cease to be a skeptic.[28]

Sextus picks up, as an injunction that captures the skeptic commitment to avoiding falsehoods, one of the Stoics' central epistemic norms; he continuously warns against precipitate assent.[29] Similarly, Sextus can cite Epicurean epistemic norms, without endorsing them, or offering his own arguments for them. Sextus employs the Epicurean distinction between the evident and the non-evident.[30] He says repeatedly that the skeptic investigates the non-evident, and does not call into question the evident. What is evident, in Sextus, are the skeptic's affections.[31] The skeptic can invoke the Epicurean thesis that everything that is added to or subtracted from the experienced is a potentially falsifying alteration. The skeptic leaves intact that which she passively suffers – she does not subtract anything (does not deny it), but also does not add anything (does not affirm it or formulate it in any way that goes beyond a report of the experience; *PH* 1.4, 19–20, 22). Similarly, the Epicurean instruction not to settle for any theory if several theories are equally well (or badly) attested by the evidence fits the skeptic's argumentative techniques (*PH* 1.181). Citing other skeptics (not dogmatic philosophers) Sextus also invokes the injunction to oppose an equally weighty argument to every argument.[32] Sextus says that the skeptic might be in danger of giving up skeptic inquiry, and might need to be reminded that she should oppose each argument with an argument – otherwise, she will fall back into dogmatism (*PH* 1.205).

[28]Horwich mentions (but does not endorse) a rationale for considering the value of avoiding falsehoods prior to the value of pursuing truth that seems rather similar to the skeptic preference: "[. . .] once someone has decided to investigate a certain question – whatever it may be – then his not getting the answer right would surely be subject to criticism. But are we really obligated to investigate *all* questions – to believe every single truth?" (2006, p. 348). Also, an unqualified "pursue truth" norm might be less plausible than an unqualified "avoid falsity" norm.

[29]The idea that one should avoid rashness comes up in a number of contexts, for example *PH* 1.205, 236–7, 3.235.

[30]This distinction is of course employed by different philosophers and schools. It would take up too much space and lead too far away from my topic to explore whether Sextus invokes, as I think he does, the Epicurean distinction. However, not much in my present argument hangs on this point.

[31]When the skeptic "is coldened" or "sweetened," he shall not say that he is not (*PH* 1.13). Such passive experiences are, in Sextus, the realm of the evident.

[32]"To every argument an equal (equally weighty) argument is opposed" is one of the skeptic's formulae. Sextus does not trace this to any dogmatic theories. However, if asked whether this kind of norm is a piece of dogmatism, he certainly could. It has a long ancestry in Socratic and sophistic disputations, as well as in Peripatetic practices of training in argument.

5 The Modes

But over and above the less formalized strategies, Pyrrhonian investigation employs so-called modes of argument. These are forms of argument which the skeptic can apply to different questions, thus leading herself or her interlocutor into suspension of judgment. The Ten Modes (Modes of Aenesidemus) provide her with a number of ways of setting appearances and thoughts into opposition (*PH* 1.36–163). For example, she can keep herself from assenting to "the honey is sweet" by reminding herself of the different physiology of different animals, which is likely to affect taste-experience; she can recall how it tasted differently when she was sick; and so on. The Five Modes help the skeptic investigate any thesis or theory put forward on a given issue (*PH* 1.164–77). She can ask whether some premises are not accounted for; whether the argument is circular; and so on. Or consider the modes employed against causal explanations (*PH* 1.180–6). For example, if a medical theory said that such-and-such symptoms are caused by such-and-such hidden processes in the body, the skeptic can point out that the theory explains matters in its own conceptual framework; that it neglects alternative explanations; that it postulates non-evident substances and events; etc. With these and similar techniques, the skeptic can produce suspension of judgment on any given matter (or at least, this is the aim). The Tranquility Charge – that the skeptic is not an investigator, because she aims at tranquility rather than at the discovery of truths – may appear particularly forceful when we consider the modes. The skeptic's argumentative practice might seem mechanical and exclusively geared towards suspension.

However, by now we have prepared the ground for the skeptic's response to this charge. For anyone with the epistemic preferences of the skeptic – as well as her dogmatic interlocutors – the modes may be just what she needs. Yes, it is true that the skeptic has an arsenal of argumentative techniques, designed to produce suspension of judgment. But that is rationally called for, and from the point of view of the skeptics, the dogmatists might implicitly be committed to adopting such techniques too. Impressions have the power to move us toward assent, and we need to constantly work against this if we want to make sure that we only assent when we should. Given that one is likely to have weak moments, where one is not sufficiently on one's guard, it is best to devise routine strategies – methods that can be applied when needed in a mechanical fashion.

The Tranquility Charge finds fault with something that is utterly needed: a reliable technique of critically examining any given impression. The Tranquility Charge says that, to apply this technique is to lack genuine commitment to the truth. But this is a misguided objection. For the skeptic's modes seek to draw attention to every problem that might lurk in a given theory. If one prefers not to assent to impressions that could turn out to be false, such modes are quite appropriate. The skeptic would happily recommend her methods to her dogmatic interlocutors, and it is not clear that her contemporaries would find this advice as unattractive as we would. The Tranquility Charge was not raised by the skeptic's contemporaries. Many of them share the skeptic's intuition that all must be done in order to avoid falsehood, even if this means that one will not form any beliefs at all.

6 Conclusion

The Hellenistic intuition that the false is seductive – that the mind assents easily when it should not, or adds and subtracts falsifying assumptions to the evident if we do not guard ourselves against this – resonates with the skeptics. One needs to work actively against these tendencies. Dogmatism is not a specific kind of theorizing, engaged in by some particularly confident thinkers, while others find it easy to keep an open mind. Dogmatizing is like swimming with the current. It is, in Sextus' characterization, the default mode of the mind: if the skeptic became lazy and forgot to investigate, she would turn into a dogmatist (*PH* 1.205). If one does not make a systematic effort, the movements of one's mind will lead one to accept falsehoods. So far, the Hellenistic interlocutors agree. The skeptic's techniques of steering away from assent go further than those of her dogmatic contemporaries. But they are inspired by the same intuitions.

Pyrrhonian investigation meets the criteria set up by the Truth Premise. Its motivational source – anomaly – arises due to the role that truth plays in thought. The skeptic's attitude toward particular appearances is truth-directed. Her epistemic preferences respond to the value of truth, and her epistemic injunctions are geared toward avoiding falsehoods. The modes of argument are an even more elaborate technique, designed with this aim in mind. Though Pyrrhonian investigators do not expect to discover that anything is true or false, they engage in a kind of investigation that reflects the value of truth.

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Chapter 4
Pyrrhonism and the Law of Non-Contradiction

Diego E. Machuca

The question of whether the Pyrrhonist[1] adheres to certain logical principles, criteria of justification, and inference rules is of central importance for the study of Pyrrhonism. Its significance lies in that, whereas the Pyrrhonist describes his philosophical stance and argues against the Dogmatists by means of what may be considered a rational discourse, adherence to any such principles, criteria, and rules does not seem compatible with the radical character of his skepticism. Hence, if the Pyrrhonist does endorse them, one must conclude that he is inconsistent in his outlook. Despite its import, the question under consideration has not received, in the vast literature on Pyrrhonism of the past three decades, all the attention it deserves. In the present paper, I do not propose to provide a full examination of the Pyrrhonist's attitude towards rationality, but to focus on the question of whether he endorses the law of non-contradiction (hereafter LNC).[2] However, I will also briefly tackle the question of the Pyrrhonist's outlook on both the canons of rational justification at work in the so-called Five Modes of Agrippa and the logical rules of inference. In addition, given that the LNC is deemed a fundamental principle of rationality, determining the Pyrrhonist's attitude towards it will allow us to understand his general attitude towards rationality.

In Section 1, I briefly present and analyze the LNC by distinguishing its three most common formulations. This provides the necessary framework for examining

[1] I will employ interchangeably the terms "Pyrrhonist" and "Skeptic" (with a capital "S") to refer to the philosopher whose outlook is described and defended in Sextus Empiricus' surviving writings. I will say nothing about the outlooks adopted by Pyrrho, Timon, or Aenesidemus. Also, following Sextus, I use the term "Dogmatist" (δογματικός) to designate anyone who makes positive or negative assertions about how things really are on the basis of what he considers to be evidence and rational arguments.

[2] I should note that, when using the language of adherence, endorsement, or espousal, I refer to commitment to logical principles and epistemological criteria. By contrast, when speaking of observance, I will not necessarily presuppose any such commitment: the observance of, say, a rule may consist in simple obedience without strong adherence.

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the Skeptic's alleged commitment to that law. In Section 2, I lay out the reasons why he is supposed to endorse those three formulations of the LNC in much the same way as the Dogmatist, and examine the passages of Sextus Empiricus' extant corpus that seem to show unequivocally that such is the case. These passages appear to make it clear that adherence to the LNC rests at very the basis of the Pyrrhonist's skepticism, since suspension of judgment (ἐποχή) seems to depend on commitment to that law. In Section 3, by contrast, I analyze a number of passages which can be taken as conclusive evidence that the Pyrrhonist is not actually committed to the three versions of the LNC presented in Section 1, but suspends judgment about their truth. I also speculate on some of the reasons for such a lack of commitment. In Section 4, I argue that the Skeptic's ἐποχή regarding the LNC does not imply that he does not observe, motivated by psychological and practical reasons, certain qualified versions of this law when thinking, speaking, and acting. In doing so, I consider some objections that could be directed against the Skeptic's suspending judgment about the truth of the LNC. I also contend that the reason he makes use of what may be called the "dogmatic" versions of the LNC has to do with the therapeutic and dialectical side of his philosophy: since he tries to cure the rashness and conceit of the Dogmatists by argument, he needs to use those versions of the LNC in his argumentation because they are endorsed by the majority of his dogmatic patients. Although others have arrived at a conclusion about the Pyrrhonist's observance of the LNC which is similar to mine in certain respects, they have neither carried out a thorough analysis of this subject nor provided the necessary textual support for the interpretation just sketched. In Section 5, I argue that neither the uncommitted observance of a psychological version of the LNC nor the dialectical use of this law are isolated cases in the Pyrrhonist's philosophy, for something very similar happens both in the case of his ἐποχή and in the case of his use of the Modes of Agrippa and the logical rules of inference. Finally, in Section 6, after summarizing the results of the previous analyses, I briefly address the question of whether the Pyrrhonist is an anti-rationalist.

Although in examining the issues addressed in this paper I sometimes go beyond what is explicitly said in Sextus' surviving writings, my conclusions are in keeping with the Pyrrhonian way of thought, since I draw on what I take to be its conceptual and argumentative resources.

1 Three Versions of the LNC

Three different versions of the LNC have been distinguished by scholars by examining Aristotle's discussion of this law in *Metaphysics* Γ.[3] These versions may be formulated as follows[4]:

[3]On Aristotle's discussion of the LNC, see Lukasiewicz (1971), Cassin and Narcy (1989), Wedin (1999, 2000, 2003, 2004a, 2004b), and Gottlieb (2007).

[4]The following taxonomy is based on Lukasiewicz (1971, pp. 487–8), and Gottlieb (2007, section 1). I must emphasize that, by offering the taxonomy, my sole purpose is to provide a useful and adequate tool for analyzing the Pyrrhonist's attitude towards the LNC.

Ontological version: it is impossible for the same attribute to belong and not to belong to the same thing at the same time and in the same respect (*Met.* Γ 3 1005b19–20; cf. Γ 4 1007b17–18, 6 1011b17–18, 21–22). In other words: it is impossible for x both to be F and not to be F at the same time and in the same respect.

Logical version: it is impossible for contradictory propositions to be true at the same time and in the same respect (cf. *Met.* Γ 6 1011b13–17, 20–21; 8 1012b2–3). This version is sometimes called "semantic" or "propositional." The symbolic form is: $\neg (p \ \& \ \neg p)$.

Doxastic version: it is impossible for two beliefs or opinions whose contents are expressed by contradictory propositions to exist simultaneously in one mind (cf. *Met.* Γ 3 1005b23–26, 1005b29–31).

Some remarks about these three versions of the LNC are in order. First, the ontological version tells us how things in the world can and cannot be, that is, what forms reality can and cannot take. This obvious remark will be important when examining the Pyrrhonist's attitude towards the LNC. Second, the logical version is commonly construed as depending on the ontological version. Indeed, given that a proposition affirms or denies that an object possesses a given attribute, the reason two contradictory propositions cannot be true simultaneously is that objects in the world cannot hold contradictory attributes at the same time. Third, the doxastic version may be interpreted either descriptively or normatively. That is to say, it may be interpreted as the empirical claim that it is in fact impossible to hold contradictory beliefs, or as the normative claim that one ought not to hold such beliefs because it is not rational to do so (cf. Gottlieb 2007, section 1). In its normative sense, the doxastic formulation seems to rest on the logical formulation, since the reason it is irrational to hold contradictory beliefs at the same time seems to be that the contradictory propositions which express them cannot be true simultaneously. Understood descriptively, the doxastic version makes an assertion about the nature of the mind, since it affirms that we are unable to believe contradictory propositions at the same time. Finally, although someone might argue that the doxastic version rests on the ontological version (cf. *Met.* Γ 3 1005b 26–32), it is clear that the doxastic version construed descriptively would still hold even if one proved the falsity of the ontological version. Indeed, it could be the case that, even if it were possible that contradictory attributes belong to the same thing at the same time and in the same respect, we would still not be able to conceive of such a state of affairs and, hence, to believe that the thing in question really has contradictory attributes.

This brief presentation of the three most common formulations of the LNC proves to be necessary for the examination of the Pyrrhonist's outlook on that law. It must be noted that Sextus speaks of τὰ ἐναντία (contraries) or τὰ ἀντικείμενα (opposites), not αἱἀντιφάσεις (contradictories). However, in Hellenistic (e.g. Stoic) jargon, τὸ ἀντικείμενον often refers to the contradictory, and not generically to the opposite. Also, in *Metaphysics* Γ Aristotle sometimes speaks of contraries rather than contradictories. We must bear in mind that the LNC governs both contradictory and contrary opposites, since neither contradictories nor contraries can both be true because they are inconsistent. In order to refer to both contradictories and contraries, I will often talk about "opposites."

2 The Pyrrhonist's (Alleged) Commitment to the LNC

At first glance, it seems obvious that the Pyrrhonist accepts the LNC *in propria persona* for at least three reasons. The first is that it is Sextus' observance of the LNC which makes it possible for us to understand the meaning of what he expounds in his writings. To begin with, if he did not observe that law, we would not be able to comprehend his account of the distinctive character of the Pyrrhonian philosophy in the first book of the Πυρρώνειοι Ὑποτυπώσεις (*PH*). Indeed, it is clear that Sextus relies upon our giving definite meanings to his explanations of the way in which we must interpret the Pyrrhonian stance. For instance, at the beginning of *PH* he cautions that, with respect to none of the things that will be said in that work does he affirm that it is certainly just as he says it is, but that he merely reports the way things appear to him at the moment (*PH* I 4). Similarly, in a number of passages, he points out that Skeptics use the verb "be" in the sense of "appear" (*PH* I 135, 198, also *Adversus Mathematicos* [*AM*] XI 18–20).[5] Also, an important portion of the first book of *PH* is devoted to making clear the sense of the Skeptical φωναί, i.e., the various expressions used by the Pyrrhonist for describing his experience and outlook. Sextus carefully explains the sense in which each φωνή must be interpreted so as to avoid ascribing dogmatic views to the Pyrrhonist: the Skeptical φωναί are not assertions about non-evident matters, but only reports of the Pyrrhonist's appearances (φαινόμενα) or affections (πάθη)[6] (*PH* I 187–208). These passages show that it is crucial for Sextus that his readers correctly understand the phenomenological character of the Pyrrhonian discourse if they do not want to form an inaccurate picture of the Pyrrhonian outlook.[7] It is also worth noting that, in some texts, he points out that certain objections directed against Skepticism are the product of misinterpreting what Pyrrhonists actually say (*PH* I 19, 200, 208). In those texts, Sextus explicitly urges us to attribute specific meanings to the terms and expressions used by the Pyrrhonist so as not to misunderstand his outlook. One could argue that he

[5] Although elsewhere I do not follow the common practice of using the title *Adversus Mathematicos* VII–XI to refer to the five extant books of *Adversus Dogmaticos*, I here do so to maintain consistency with the other essays in this volume.

[6] A πάθος is a state or condition someone or something is in as a result of being affected by an agent. Although in ordinary English the word "affection" does not have this meaning, it has become in the specialist literature a technical term to render the Greek πάθος.

[7] Rachel Barney (1992) rejects a wholly phenomenological (i.e., non-epistemic or non-judgmental) interpretation of the Pyrrhonist's discourse on the grounds that it cannot account for his consideration of arguments (see also Bailey 2002, pp. 221–9). Myles Burnyeat (1997) advances a similar objection but as a problem for the Pyrrhonist, since he adopts a non-epistemic interpretation of Pyrrhonism. Although I cannot discuss this issue here, I think that one flaw in the argument of these interpreters is that they fail to distinguish between believing/judging that *p* and having an inclination to believe/judge that *p* (see Machuca 2005, pp. 219–20; 2006, p. 134). For other interpretations which reject a wholly non-epistemic understanding of Sextan Pyrrhonism, see Frede (1997a, b) and Brennan (1999).

would, at least implicitly, agree with Aristotle in that, without the LNC, it is impossible to have a meaningful conversation or to make oneself understood, thereby being forced to accept that law. Aristotle maintains that, as soon as the person who rejects the LNC utters a word in order to signify something, he shows that he is committed to it (see *Met.* Γ 4 1006a21–31; cf. 7 1012a21–24, 8 1012b5–8). In the case of Sextus, it seems that as soon as he utters a phrase reporting any one of his appearances or affections, he shows that he consciously or unconsciously espouses the LNC in its different dimensions.[8]

In addition, the polemical discussion of both the three parts into which post-Aristotelian philosophy was commonly divided (*PH* II–III, *AM* VII–XI) and of the six μαθήματα or liberal arts (*AM* I–VI) requires observance of the LNC so as to be able to comprehend the sense and scope of both the doctrines discussed and the arguments directed against them. This is most clearly seen in the passages in which Sextus tells us how to interpret the arguments the Pyrrhonist directs against the dogmatic theories. On some occasions he explicitly points out that, when he advances arguments yielding negative conclusions, his intention is not to induce us to give our assent to them. Rather, he wants to show that those arguments appear to be equal in force to the opposite arguments, so that we will have to suspend judgment about the truth of the theses that the conflicting arguments purport to establish.[9] Also, in the final chapter of *PH*, Sextus explains that the Pyrrhonist propounds arguments which differ in their persuasiveness because, out of a philanthropic interest, he wants to cure by argument the rashness and the conceit of the Dogmatists. Hence, just as physicians employ remedies different in power to cure the different degrees of the disease that afflicts his patients, so too the Pyrrhonist employs arguments different in persuasive power to cure the different degrees of conceit and rashness that afflict his dogmatic patients (*PH* III 280–1).[10] In these passages, Sextus explains the intention of the arguments he puts forward and it seems plain that it makes a difference to him whether we interpret those arguments the way he asks us to or the opposite way or both ways at the same time. Sextus therefore seems to rely consciously or unconsciously on the LNC in order both that his negative arguments are not construed dogmatically and that his argumentative therapy is clearly understood, since without that law we would be unable to draw distinctions, which in turn would make rational discussion impossible.[11]

[8] I say "unconsciously" because it is possible for a person either to adhere to the LNC without being aware of the fact that it is a precondition for meaningful language or to deny the LNC without realizing this fact.

[9] See *PH* II 79, 103, II 130, 133, 187, 192, III 29; *AM* VII 444, VIII 159–60, 298, 476–7, IX 206–7.

[10] On this passage, see Machuca (2006, pp. 150–3; 2009, pp. 102–9).

[11] It could be argued that the fact that, in composing his writings, Sextus seems to rely on the LNC does not entail that the Pyrrhonist portrayed in those writings does. However, given that Sextus is describing his own outlook and is therefore a Pyrrhonist, one may claim that that fact shows that, when communicating his stance and discussing with others, the Pyrrhonist seems to be consciously or unconsciously committed to the LNC.

The second reason for maintaining that the Pyrrhonist adheres to the LNC is that belief in this law is in the origin of the road that leads to Skepticism: as the various views on a given topic cannot all be accepted or held together because of being conflicting or incompatible, it is necessary to carry out an investigation intended to make it possible to choose among them. If this is not in fact possible, then one must suspend judgment about which of the conflicting views, if any, is correct. For instance, given that (i) honey appears sweet to some people and bitter to others (*PH* I 211, 213, II 63), (ii) it cannot be both at the same time and in the same respect, and (iii) it is not possible for the Skeptic to decide whether it is sweet or bitter, then (iv) he must suspend judgment about how honey really is. In a word, belief in the LNC in its ontological dimension appears to be what makes it possible for the proto-Skeptic to become a full-fledged Skeptic: the former begun to philosophize in order to determine which appearances are true and which false (see *PH* I 12, 26) because opposite attributes cannot hold of one and the same thing at the same time and in the same respect. Given this apparent commitment to the ontological version of the LNC, it also seems clear that the proto-Skeptic thinks that it is impossible for opposite propositions to be true simultaneously and, hence, that it is not rational to hold opposite beliefs at the same time. One could also argue that part of the reason the proto-Skeptic suspends his judgment is that he believes that it is not in fact possible for opposite beliefs to exist at the same time in his mind.

Finally, the third reason for attributing to the Pyrrhonist a commitment to the LNC is that this law appears to continue to govern the full-fledged Skeptic's thinking. Indeed, he continues to suspend judgment about all the non-evident matters he has investigated because he can assent neither to any one of the positions in conflict because they appear equipollent, nor to all of them because they are incompatible.

With regard to the last two reasons for claiming that the Skeptic endorses the LNC, there are quite a few passages from Sextus' oeuvre which seem to support them explicitly. In the exposition of the Second Mode of Aenesidemus, Sextus observes that we cannot determine what things are by nature, but only report how they appear in relation to each of the differences among humans. The reason is that

> We will believe (πιστεύσομεν) either all humans or some of them. If all, we will be attempting the impossible and accepting the opposites (καὶ ἀδυνάτοις ἐπιχειρήσομεν καὶ τὰ ἀντικείμενα παραδεξόμεθα). But if some, let them say to whom it is necessary to assent. For the Platonist will say to Plato, the Epicurean to Epicurus, and the others analogously. Thus, since they quarrel in an undecidable way (ἀνεπικρίτως στασιάζοντες), they will lead us again to suspension of judgment. (*PH* I 88)[12]

This text presents two alternative roads which, in his search for truth, the Skeptic finds blocked: assent to all the positions in conflict and assent to one of them (cf. *PH* III 33–6). It is precisely because both roads are blocked that he is led to take a third, namely, suspension of judgment. In this passage, we seem to find a reference to the doxastic version of the LNC, since Sextus says that it is impossible to *believe*

[12]The translations of the passages from Sextus' works are my own, but I have consulted Annas and Barnes (2000), Bett (1997), Bury (1933–49), Mates (1996), Pellegrin (1997), and Spinelli (1995).

all humans because they have opposite opinions. Similarly, in the ethical section of the third book of *PH*, he tells us:

> If, then, the things which move by nature move everyone in the same way, whereas we are not all moved in the same way with respect to the so-called goods, nothing is good by nature. The reason is that it is not possible to believe (πιστεύειν) either all the positions expounded above, on account of the conflict [among them], or any one of them. (*PH* III 182; see also *AM* VIII 333a)

The reason the latter alternative is ruled out is that the person who says that one must trust one of the positions in conflict is a party to the disagreement, and hence cannot be taken as an impartial judge. He will therefore have to be judged along with the others, but given that there is no agreed upon demonstration or criterion, we end up suspending judgment (*PH* III 182). As for the former alternative – namely, to believe in all the conflicting positions – it seems to be ruled out because it violates the doxastic dimension of the LNC. Indeed, as in the previous quoted passage, Sextus refers to the impossibility of believing in all the positions in conflict. Given both this impossibility and the impossibility of believing in any one of those positions, ἐποχή is the attitude the Skeptic is compelled to adopt.

In the chapter of *PH* III devoted to a discussion of time, Sextus mentions the various positions about the nature and substance of time that have been adopted and remarks that "either all these positions are true, or all are false, or some are true and some false" (*PH* III 138). He then rules out each of these alternatives and concludes that "we will not be able to affirm anything about time" (*PH* III 140), i.e., we will have to suspend judgment. Now, the reason for rejecting the first alternative is that most of the positions reviewed conflict (*PH* III 138). Sextus seems to endorse the logical or semantic version of the LNC when he says that the positions which make conflicting assertions about time "cannot all be true" (*PH* III 138).

Finally, in the course of his discussion in *AM* XI of whether there is anything good or bad by nature, Sextus remarks:

> If, therefore, everything which appears good to someone is altogether good, then since pleasure appears good to Epicurus, bad to a Cynic, and indifferent to the Stoic, pleasure will be simultaneously good and bad and indifferent. But the same thing cannot be by nature contrary things (τὰ ἐναντία) – simultaneously good and bad and indifferent. (*AM* XI 74)

To all appearances, in this passage Sextus is espousing the ontological version of the LNC, since he excludes the possibility that the same thing may have contrary attributes at the same time.

The quotations could easily be multiplied, since in several other passages Sextus says that it is absurd (ἄτοπος) or impossible (ἀδύνατος, ἀμήχανος) for conflicting things to be equally real or true or credible (*AM* VIII 18, 25, 119), or for the same thing to be simultaneously true and false or real and unreal or existent and nonexistent or credible and incredible or evident and non-evident (e.g., *PH* I 61, III 113–4, 129; *AM* I 200; VII 67, VIII 36, 46, 52, 344). But the texts that have been examined are sufficient evidence for the Pyrrhonist's apparent commitment to the LNC in its ontological, logical, and doxastic dimensions and for the claim that the attainment

and maintenance of his ἐποχή rest upon such a commitment. In the next two sections, I will try to determine whether this is really the case. This is all the more important because most interpreters believe that Skeptics are indeed committed to the LNC.[13]

3 The Pyrrhonist's Suspension of Judgment About the LNC

The previous analysis has left us with the impression that there is conclusive evidence that conscious or unconscious acceptance of the ontological, logical, and doxastic versions of the LNC is a necessary condition for the communication, the emergence, and the maintenance of Pyrrhonism as well as for the Pyrrhonist's discussion of the dogmatic theories. If this is the case, then this law represents a limit to his suspension of judgment, i.e., his ἐποχή περὶ πάντων does not encompass the truth of the LNC. Close consideration of the conceptual resources of the Pyrrhonian outlook and careful examination of a number of texts from Sextus' writings show, however, that such a conclusion is hasty.

It is beyond doubt that the proto-Skeptic is committed to the LNC. However, his commitment to this law does not tell us anything about the scope of the Pyrrhonian ἐποχή, since he is still nothing but a Dogmatist. The fact that he suspends judgment and hence becomes a full-fledged Skeptic because he can assent neither to all the conflicting positions on a given topic nor to any one of them does not tell us anything about the Pyrrhonian ἐποχή either. For it is possible that, after suspending judgment, the full-fledged Skeptic realizes that he cannot actually exclude the possibility that opposites might hold of one and the same thing simultaneously, and hence that opposite propositions may be true at the same time. Similarly, he may also realize that he cannot discount the possibility that it might be rational and feasible to hold opposite beliefs at the same time.

Now, is there any textual evidence that the Pyrrhonist does not exclude such possibilities? Several texts of Sextus' writings clearly show that the Pyrrhonist considers the thesis that opposite attributes exist in the same object at the same time and in the same respect as one of the alternatives to take into account when confronted with a conflict of appearances, and hence that he does not take for granted that only one of the conflicting appearances corresponds to how the object really is. By the same token, those texts show that the Pyrrhonist does not rule out the possibility that opposite propositions may be true simultaneously and the possibility that it may be rational to hold opposite beliefs at the same time. The reason the Pyrrhonist does not discount such possibilities is that the existence of a conflict of appearances is compatible with three alternatives among which he cannot decide.

[13] See Rossitto (1981), Maia Neto (1995, p. xv), Harte and Lane (1999, p. 165 with n. 13), Polito (2004, p. 52), Long (2006, p. 54 n. 30), Trowbridge (2006, p. 262 n. 4). Cf. Frede (1996, pp. 6, 12–3 with nn. 47, 19).

The first alternative is that no more than one of the conflicting appearances corresponds to how the object really is. This alternative is in fact the outlook ascribed to the Skeptic by some interpreters when explaining why Skepticism is not the same as what we usually understand as relativism.[14] They claim that, whereas the Skeptic supposes that *x* is really either *A* or *B*, but cannot decide which one it is, the relativist affirms that *x* is in itself neither *A* nor *B*, but that it is one or the other relative to a given person in certain circumstances. As we will see in what follows, it is a mistake to think that the Skeptic assumes that only one of the conflicting appearances is true.

The second alternative which the Skeptic takes into account is that contrary attributes corresponding to conflicting appearances do subsist in the same object, which is the position Sextus ascribes to Heraclitus and Protagoras. It is important to examine the passages of *PH* in which he presents their views because therein he makes it clear that the Skeptic is not committed to the LNC.[15] In the chapter of *PH* I in which Sextus distinguishes Heracliteanism from Skepticism, he points out that the difference between the two philosophies is clear because Heraclitus "makes dogmatic assertions about many non-evident matters" (*PH* I 210), whereas Skeptics do not. Sextus is, however, forced to expand on their differences because

> Aenesidemus and his followers used to say that the Skeptical way of thought is a road towards the philosophy of Heraclitus, because [the fact] that contraries appear with respect to the same thing leads to [the claim] that contraries are real with respect to the same thing (προηγεῖται τοῦ τἀναντία περὶ τὸ αὐτὸ ὑπάρχειν τὸ τἀναντία περὶ τὸ αὐτὸ φαίνεσθαι), and Skeptics say that contraries appear with respect to the same thing, while Heracliteans go from this also to [the claim] that they exist [with respect to the same thing]. We declare against them that it is not a dogma of the Skeptics that contraries appear with respect to the same thing, but a fact (πρᾶγμα) which manifests itself (ὑποπίπτον) not only to the Skeptics, but also to the other philosophers and to all men. (*PH* I 210)

Sextus then explains:

> The Skeptical way of thought not only does not ever help to the knowledge of the philosophy of Heraclitus, but is an obstacle to it, since the Skeptic denounces all the things about which Heraclitus dogmatizes as being said rashly, thereby opposing the conflagration, opposing [the claim] that contraries exist with respect to the same thing, and with respect to each dogma of Heraclitus ridiculing the dogmatic rashness and, as I said before, uttering "I do not apprehend" and "I determine nothing," which is in conflict with the Heracliteans. (*PH* I 212)

This chapter of *PH* is crucial for the vexed question of the so-called Heracliteanism of Aenesidemus. Although this is an intriguing issue, it is beyond the scope of this paper.[16] The important point for my present purposes concerns both the

[14] See Annas and Barnes (1985, pp. 97–8), Bénatouïl (1997, pp. 232–3), Pellegrin (1997, pp. 552–3). Cf. Bett (1994, p. 149).

[15] Scholars have not noticed the importance of these passages for understanding the Pyrrhonist's attitude towards the LNC.

[16] For discussion of this issue, see Brochard (2002, pp. 284–301), Hankinson (1998, pp. 129–31), Bett (2000, pp. 223–32), and especially Polito (2004), Pérez-Jean (2005), Bonazzi (2007), and Schofield (2007).

reason Sextus opposes the Aenesideman interpretation of the relation between Heracliteanism and Skepticism and the attitude he adopts towards Heraclitus' claim that contraries hold of one and the same thing (cf. *Met.* Γ 3, 1005b24–25). Sextus rejects this claim because it is an assertion about a non-evident matter. Indeed, the Skeptic notices the fact that contraries appear to hold of one and the same thing, but given that from this fact by itself one cannot draw the conclusion that contraries do hold of one and the same thing or any other conclusion that goes beyond the realm of appearances, he is forced to suspend judgment. Thus, the Skeptic opposes the Heraclitean view, not because he considers it to be false, but only because he thinks that Heracliteans affirm it without sufficient evidence in its favor and without realizing that there are other possible views which appear to be as plausible as theirs. In other words, the Skeptic suspends judgment about whether Heraclitus' position is true. This is clearly seen in the fact that, to each of the Heraclitean dogmas, the Skeptic applies the phrases οὐ καταλαμβάνω and οὐδὲν ὁρίζω, which express the attitude of suspension of judgment (see *PH* I 201 and 197, respectively). The chapter under consideration thus makes it clear that the Skeptic does not adhere to the LNC in its ontological dimension, since he does not know whether Heraclitus' position is true or false. It also makes it clear that he is not committed to the logical dimension either, since he would refrain from affirming that contrary propositions cannot be true at the same time. If this is so, then it is plain as well that the Skeptic withholds his assent about whether or not it is rational to hold contrary beliefs at the same time.

Just as with Heraclitus, Sextus devotes a chapter of *PH* to discussing the differences between Skepticism and Protagoras' position (*PH* I 216–9). There Sextus expounds the elements of the Protagorean stance which determine that there is a fundamental difference between it and Pyrrhonism:

> [Protagoras] declares, indeed, that matter is in flux and that, given that it is in flux, additions continuously take place in lieu of the effluxions, and that the senses are rearranged and altered on account of the ages and the other constitutions of the bodies. He also says that the reasons (τοὺς λόγους) of all things subsist (ὑποκεῖσθαι) in matter, so that matter, insofar as it is itself concerned, can be all the things that appear to all (πάντα εἶναι ὅσα πᾶσι φαίνεται). Men grasp different things at different times, depending on their different conditions: someone in a natural state apprehends (καταλαμβάνειν) those things in matter which can appear to those in a natural state, someone in an unnatural state apprehends what can appear in an unnatural state. And further, depending on age, and according to whether we are sleeping or waking, and by virtue of each sort of condition, the same account holds. Therefore, according to him, man becomes the criterion of the things that are, for all things that appear to men also exist, and the things that appear to no men do not exist. We see, then, that he dogmatizes about matter being in flux and about the reasons of all things that appear subsisting in it, things which are non-evident and about which we suspend judgment. (*PH* I 217–9)

For my present purposes, it does not matter whether this account of Protagoras' position is historically accurate, or whether it is entirely compatible with that found at *AM* VII 60–4 in the course of the discussion of the criterion of truth. What does matter is Sextus' attitude towards the position he ascribes to Protagoras in the quoted passage. Like the Heraclitean and the Skeptic, Protagoras notices the conflict of

appearances, since he points out that things appear differently to people by virtue of the various states in which they find themselves. Like the Heraclitean but unlike the Skeptic, Protagoras goes beyond the realm of τὰ φαινόμενα, since he maintains that there is correspondence between what appears to a person by virtue of the state in which he finds himself and what is present in matter. That is to say, Protagoras takes τὰ φαινόμενα as an epistemic criterion, since anything that appears corresponds to an objective feature of reality, which is why Sextus uses the verb καταλαμβάνειν. Now, the beginning of the passage seems to suggest that the same thing possesses different attributes or properties only successively; that is to say, during its permanent change, each thing adopts different attributes or properties in parallel with the alterations experienced by the individuals which apprehend them. The rest of the passage, however, shows that, according to the Protagorean position, opposites coexist simultaneously in the same thing. Indeed, given that the individual man is the criterion of truth, everything that appears to anyone is real, and it is clear that things appear differently to different men at the same time by virtue of the different states in which they find themselves (cf. *Met.* Γ 4 1007b20–25; 5 1009a5–15). For instance, if a certain portion of honey appears at the same time sweet to a healthy person but bitter to a sick person, then one must infer that both appearances are equally true, i.e., that the same portion of honey is both sweet and bitter. Thus, in the quoted passage Sextus ascribes to Protagoras a position similar to that which he ascribes to Heraclitus. Just as in the case of the Heraclitean theory, Sextus does not oppose the Protagorean theory because he considers it to be false, but only because he takes it to be one view about the conflict of appearances which appears as plausible as the others. He explicitly points out at the end of the quoted passage that the Skeptic suspends judgment about that theory. Therefore, given that the Skeptic neither affirms nor denies the truth of the Protagorean position, we must conclude that he does not embrace the ontological, logical, or normative doxastic versions of the LNC. In addition, since the Skeptic is aware that Heraclitus and Protagoras affirm that contraries subsist in one and the same thing at the same time, he must also be aware that, to all appearances, there are people who are in fact able to hold contrary beliefs at the same time. Both thinkers believe, e.g., that honey is sweet and bitter simultaneously, and given that, unlike Aristotle (see *Met.* Γ 3 1005b23–26 in relation to Heraclitus), the Skeptic has no a priori reason for questioning the sincerity of what they claim to believe, he cannot adhere to the descriptive doxastic version of the LNC either.

The third possible view about the conflict of appearances which the Skeptic takes into consideration is that, e.g., honey is in itself neither sweet nor bitter, but appears to be one way or the other only by virtue of the diversity of species, individuals, or senses that perceive it or by virtue of any other factor. This kind of position is attributed to Democritus in the chapter of *PH* in which are expounded the differences between his philosophy and Skepticism. Sextus indicates that the two philosophies have been thought to be similar because Democritus' theory

> seems to make use of the same material as we do. For from the fact that honey appears sweet to some but bitter to others, they declare that Democritus concludes that the same thing is neither sweet nor bitter, but utters the expression "not more" (οὐ μᾶλλον), which is

> Skeptical. The Skeptics and the followers of Democritus, however, employ the expression "not more" differently, since the latter apply the expression to the fact that neither of the alternatives is the case (εἶναι), whereas we apply it to the fact of ignoring whether one of the things that appear is both or neither (ἀγνοεῖν πότερον ἀμφότερα ἢ οὐθέτερόν τι ἔστι τῶν φαινομένων). Hence with respect to this we differ. But the distinction becomes most evident when Democritus says "in reality atoms and void," since he says "in reality" instead of "in truth." And I regard it as superfluous to say that, when he says atoms and void exist, he has differed from us, even though he starts from the anomaly of the things that appear (τῆς ἀνωμαλίας τῶν φαινομένων). (*PH* I 213–4)

The alleged similarity between the Democritean and the Skeptical philosophies is based on two elements: both start from the conflict of appearances and both use the expression οὐ μᾶλλον. However, from the anomaly of the things which appear Democritus takes a road that leads him to a dogmatic thesis, which he expresses by way of that expression. Indeed, Democritus uses οὐ μᾶλλον in its usual sense, namely, to indicate that neither of the conflicting appearances corresponds to what the object is like in itself. By contrast, the Skeptic employs οὐ μᾶλλον to convey his ignorance about whether both appearances are true or neither is – that is to say, the Skeptical οὐ μᾶλλον is a way of expressing the state of ἐποχή. Taking also into account what Sextus says about the expression οὐ μᾶλλον at *PH* I 188–91, one should say that this expression expresses the Skeptic's ignorance about whether (i) only one of the conflicting appearances is true, or (ii) both are true, or (iii) neither is true. Hence, Sextus makes it clear that the Democritean position is one possible account of the conflict of appearances which goes beyond what the Skeptic has been able to establish, since he has noticed and described such a conflict but has not been capable of determining what things are really like. In sum, the chapter devoted to explaining the differences between Democritus and the Skeptic, too, shows that the latter is not committed to the LNC in its ontological, logical, and normative doxastic dimensions.[17]

The reason the Pyrrhonist suspends judgment about which of the three alternatives is true is that they strike him as equipollent or equally persuasive. Both philosophers and ordinary people, Sextus tells us at *PH* I 210–1, notice the conflict of appearances. Most of them adopt a dogmatic position in the face of this conflict, i.e., they make assertions which go beyond that which appears. By contrast, the Pyrrhonist cannot determine which one of the three alternatives is correct because, up to now at least, he has not found a criterion which would allow him to resolve the

[17] In several passages, Sextus jointly mentions the three alternative positions that have been examined and explicitly remarks that the Skeptic is unable to choose among them, which is of course to be understood in the sense that he suspends judgment about which one corresponds to the way things really are (see *PH* II 53; *AM* VII 369, VIII 213–4, 354–5). These passages and those examined in the main body of the text show that Sextus time and again makes it clear that the Skeptic is aware of the various positions the Dogmatists have adopted in the face of the disagreement among appearances, and that he does not incline to any one of those positions. The reason is simply that they are parties to a second-order disagreement he has not been able to resolve. Hence, once again, the Skeptic does not rule out the possibility that the ontological, logical, and doxastic versions of the LNC may be false.

dispute among them. This is why he limits himself to describing the various ways in which things appear to him. The mere existence of an as yet unresolved conflict among appearances points to no specific state of affairs, i.e., it does not establish that only one of the conflicting appearances is true, or that all are true, or that none is true. Thus, the Pyrrhonist refrains from endorsing any of these views because none of them follows from the mere fact that contraries appear to hold of one and the same thing. He cannot take a stand on the first-order conflict of appearances because he cannot settle the second-order disagreement among the three dogmatic positions that have been examined. We must therefore consider the Pyrrhonist's adoption of ἐποχή as a fourth alternative attitude one may adopt in the face of a conflict of appearances.

Besides his inability to choose among the three dogmatic positions just referred to because they are, so to speak, underdetermined by the mere conflict of appearances, there are deeper reasons for the Pyrrhonist's suspending judgment about the truth of the different versions of the LNC. The first that comes to mind is the disagreement about the truth of that law. Indeed, those who affirm that only one of the conflicting appearances can be true embrace the LNC. By contrast, those who affirm that all the conflicting appearances are true reject that law. The Pyrrhonist considers this disagreement to be as yet irresolvable because any attempt to justify one of the sides in dispute can be attacked by strong arguments. Against those who deny the LNC, the Pyrrhonist would make use of the Aristotelian arguments found in *Metaphysics* Γ. And against the attempt to justify endorsement of the LNC, he would take Aristotle's claim that the endeavor to demonstrate everything, including the LNC, leads to an infinite regress (*Met.* Γ 3 1006a8–9) as a recognition that the attempt to justify that law by inferring it from other premises is caught in the Agrippan mode deriving from regress *ad infinitum* (*PH* I 166). Unlike Aristotle, he would not regard this as a reason for accepting the LNC as a first principle which as such does not require a proof. Rather, he would argue that the mode deriving from regress *ad infinitum* represents a problem for the justification of the LNC. Similarly, to the Aristotelian claims that the LNC does not depend on anything else to be known (*Met.* Γ 3 1005b11–17) and that it cannot be apprehended by demonstration (*Met.* Γ 6 1011a8–13), the Pyrrhonist would respond by pointing out that they amount to an arbitrary assumption, that is, that they are caught in the Agrippan mode deriving from hypothesis (*PH* I 168). This shows once again that it does not seem possible to justify commitment to the LNC. Finally, Aristotle maintains that the LNC is the highest or ultimate principle of all demonstrations (*Met.* Γ 3 1005b32–33), which implies that every proof of the LNC which is not refutative, but intends to establish it directly, necessarily presupposes it. The factual impossibility of offering a direct demonstration of the LNC without making use of it would not be taken by the Pyrrhonist as evidence that it is a first principle which we must endorse. Rather, he would emphasize that this fact shows that it is not possible to demonstrate directly the LNC without begging the question, and that this, too, represents a problem for anyone trying to justify endorsement of that law.[18] It is worth emphasizing that the

[18] For the Pyrrhonist's use of the charge of *petitio principii*, see e.g. *PH* I 59 and II 36.

Pyrrhonist does not deny the truth of the LNC, but only observes that, given that its justification appears to be aporetic, we end up in suspension of judgment.[19]

4 The Pyrrhonist's Non-Dogmatic Observance of the LNC

As already noted, in *Metaphysics* Γ Aristotle argues that, as soon as those who reject the LNC say something meaningful, they show by this very act that they are committed to this law (see *Met.* Γ 4 1006a21–31; cf. 7 1012a21–24, 8 1012b5–8). Indeed, if a word or a proposition could have opposite meanings at the same time and in the same respect, then what it intends to convey would be unclear; and if this happened with every word or proposition, then communication would be impossible. Hence, even those who deny the truth of the LNC presuppose it in order to make clear what they mean by such a denial – otherwise their words would be understood both the way they intend them and the opposite way. One could maintain that this argument may also be effectively used against the person who suspends judgment about the truth of the LNC, since once the Pyrrhonist utters a meaningful word either when expounding his own outlook or when discussing a dogmatic theory, he shows that it is not possible for any and every word or proposition to have opposite meanings.[20] I think that the Pyrrhonist would respond that this argument does not prove that reality is such that opposite attributes cannot belong to the same thing at the same time and in the same respect, but at most that people cannot help observing the LNC when uttering words they take to be meaningful. Thus, Aristotle's maneuver at most shows that people observe, not the ontological version of this law, but what might be regarded as a variant of the doxastic version. The Pyrrhonist would explain his observance of the LNC when communicating his philosophical stance and arguing against the Dogmatists by saying that, as a matter of fact, he has been unable to communicate his thought and discuss with others without his observing that law.

[19]The ancient Pyrrhonist would also have had strong grounds for suspending judgment about the truth of the LNC as an all-embracing principle if he had witnessed the development of so-called paraconsistent logic since the second half of the twentieth century. First, he would have pointed out that there is a disagreement between the champions of traditional logic who endorse the LNC, on the one hand, and, on the other, the defenders of dialetheism who maintain that there are some true contradictions – as is shown by classic logical paradoxes such as those of the Liar and the Barber – thereby accepting that sometimes p and $\neg p$ may be true at the same time and in the same respect. Second, the Pyrrhonist would have observed that at least so far that disagreement appears unresolvable, so that he is constrained to suspend judgment about the status of the LNC as a fundamental logical principle. (The term "dialetheism" was coined by Graham Priest and Richard Routley in 1981. For a basic presentation of this logical theory, see Priest (2004), also Horn (2006, section 4). On paraconsistent logic in general, see Priest and Tanaka (2007).)

[20]It is worth noting that it is only a total denial of the LNC (i.e., the claim that all contradictory predicates equally apply and do not apply) that seems to lead to a breakdown of meaningful language. It may be argued that the acceptance of *some* contradictions is compatible with meaningful language. But the important point here is that the Pyrrhonist's linguistic practice seems to show that he does not endorse a total denial of the LNC and, hence, that in at least some cases he accepts the truth of this law.

His apparent endorsement of the LNC should therefore be interpreted as his following something that imposes itself upon him. That is to say, out of psychological constraint, he thinks and speaks in accordance with the LNC, even though he can conceive of and express the possibility that this law may not correspond to the way things really are, that is, even though he cannot rule out the possibility that things may have opposite properties or qualities at the same time and in the same respect.

Hence, of the three versions of the LNC presented at the outset, the doxastic version seems to be that which better describes the Pyrrhonist's observance of that law. It is clear, however, that he cannot endorse this version of the LNC because he does not affirm that it is irrational or unfeasible for anyone to hold contrary beliefs at the same time. Indeed, with respect to the normative doxastic version of the LNC, given that he cannot rule out the possibility that contraries may subsist in the same thing at the same time and hence that contrary propositions may be true simultaneously, he cannot affirm that it is irrational to hold contrary beliefs at the same time. As for the descriptive doxastic version, I argued in the previous section that it appears to him that certain people, such as Heraclitus and Protagoras, in fact hold contrary beliefs simultaneously. Therefore, the Pyrrhonist does not embrace a view about what humans in general should or can believe, i.e., he does not dogmatize about the nature of the human mind and the way it should or does function. In sum, although the Pyrrhonist is not committed to the truth of the LNC, in certain circumstances he feels psychologically constrained to think in conformity with this law and to assent to it in the sense of simply acquiescing in or yielding to it in a way similar to that in which he assents to the appearances or affections which are forced upon him (see *PH* I 13, 19, 29, 193). It seems we can formulate what we may call a "psychological" version of the LNC which the Pyrrhonist finds himself constrained to observe[21]:

> *Psychological version:* up to now I have, as a matter of fact, been unable to assent to two or more conflicting appearances at the same time.[22]

The reason I have expressly introduced subjective and temporal qualifications is that these kinds of restrictions are constantly used by Sextus in his account of the sense in which the Skeptical φωναί must be interpreted (*PH* I 187–208). Such qualifications manifest the Pyrrhonist's distinctive caution that makes him limit the range of his claims to his personal experience. He makes no normative claim, but a merely descriptive one. It is worth noting that his observance of the psychological version of the LNC would make it possible to reply to the following objection: the Pyrrhonist's adoption of ἐποχή after considering the second-order disagreement about the truth of the LNC depends upon endorsement of this law. For the reason he suspends judgment is that he can assent neither to one of the second-order positions in conflict

[21]Cf. McPherran (1987, pp. 315, 317–8) and Nussbaum (1994, p. 308). Spinelli (1995, p. 244) also seems to think that the Pyrrhonist suspends judgment about the truth of the LNC.

[22]This formulation encompasses both dogmatic assent to epistemic appearances and non-dogmatic assent to non-epistemic appearances. For a fine discussion of the distinction between two types of assent in both Pyrrhonism and Academic skepticism, see Frede (1997b).

because they appear to be equally persuasive, nor to all of them because they are incompatible. In other words, in this case the Pyrrhonist's appearance expressed in the proposition "It appears to me that not (*p* and ¬*p*)" must be epistemic. He would reply to this objection by saying that his reason for suspending judgment in the face of such a second-order disagreement between equipollent positions is rather that, in point of fact, he finds himself psychologically unable to give his assent to all the rival positions simultaneously. It is therefore not a matter of dogmatic commitment to the LNC.

Concerning the Pyrrhonist's observance of the psychological version of the LNC, it is also important to remember something Sextus says when explaining the Pyrrhonist's criterion of action. He tells us that τὰ φαινόμενα are such a criterion (*PH* I 21–2) and induce the Pyrrhonist's assent involuntarily (*PH* I 19). This criterion is fourfold, one of its parts being the "guidance of nature," which is that guidance by virtue of which the Pyrrhonist is naturally capable of perceiving and thinking (*PH* I 24). One may reasonably suppose that this natural capability of thinking includes the observance of the psychological version of the LNC, to which he assents involuntarily and non-dogmatically, i.e., without making any assertion about its epistemic credentials (cf. McPherran 1987, p. 318). This lack of dogmatic commitment is explicitly made clear by Sextus when he points out that the Pyrrhonist follows the appearances without holding opinions (ἀδοξάστως) – i.e., without believing or disbelieving that things are as they appear to him to be – and for the sole reason that he cannot remain utterly inactive (*PH* I 23–4).

As already noted, the Skeptic communicates in conformity with the LNC, which must be accounted for by his observing a linguistic version of this law. He would explain this as a convention that allows him both to make himself understood and to understand others, which does not presuppose any view about the real nature of things or about the nature of our mind.[23] This non-dogmatic version of the LNC could be formulated thus:

> *Linguistic version:* in order for me to have meaningful or intelligible communication within my linguistic community, I have so far been unable as a speaker to assign opposite meanings to every word at the same time and in the same respect, and as a hearer to interpret every word as having opposite meanings at the same time and in the same respect.

Observance of this linguistic version of the LNC on the part of the Skeptic does not represent a dogmatic commitment simply because he interprets it as an empirical claim which merely expresses a linguistic convention that makes communication possible among the members of his group. It is clear that this version of the LNC also exerts some kind of psychological constraint on the Skeptic.

Against those who reject the LNC, Aristotle also argues that, by choosing one course of action over another, they show that they believe that things are one way rather than another (*Met.* Γ 4 1008b12–27). For instance, a person does not jump

[23] Cf. Stough (1984, pp. 156–7). For a critical analysis of the Skeptic's general attitude towards language, see Cauchy (1986), Caujolle-Zaslawsky (1986), and Corti (2009).

out of a plane without wearing a parachute if he does not want to die. The reason seems to be twofold: (i) it is not the case that jumping out of a plane without wearing a parachute is and is not a cause of death, and (ii) a person cannot both believe and not believe that jumping out of a plane without wearing a parachute causes death. Thus, even though the refusal to say something on the part of those who deny, or suspend judgment about, the truth of the LNC prevents them from betraying their actual endorsement of this law, they cannot avoid that their actions do reveal their conscious or unconscious commitment to it. This argument does not seem to represent a serious difficulty to the Pyrrhonist, since his criterion of action seems to be complex enough to allow him to choose among different courses of action. The Pyrrhonist prefers one course of action to another, not because he believes that things are really one way rather than another, but simply because some appearances strike him as persuasive from a merely psychological point of view, so that he is not at the same time persuaded and unpersuaded by those appearances in such circumstances.[24] In other words, he acts one way rather than another because certain appearances strike him one way rather than another. It is precisely because he does not find conflicting appearances equally persuasive psychologically speaking that he can make decisions and act upon them. When conflicting appearances strike him with the same psychological force, he refrains from acting in accordance with either of them. From an external viewpoint, the Pyrrhonist's actions can be interpreted as though he was committed to the ontological and doxastic versions of the LNC, but this by itself is not sufficient evidence to ascribe such a commitment to him. It would also be necessary to prove that action is not possible in the absence of beliefs about how things really are.[25]

In relation to the previous remarks, it must be noted that there is also a practical reason for the Skeptic's non-dogmatic observance of the LNC. In the chapter of *AM* XI which examines whether it is possible to live happily if one believes that there are things good or bad by nature, Sextus points out:

> If, then, someone should assume that everything which is in any way pursued by anyone is by nature good, and everything which is avoided is by nature to be avoided, he will have a life which is unlivable, being compelled simultaneously to pursue and avoid the same thing – to pursue it insofar as it has been supposed by some a thing to be chosen, but to avoid it insofar as it has been deemed by others a thing to be avoided. (*AM* XI 15)

Similarly, in a later chapter in which he discusses whether there is a τέχνη relating to life, Sextus argues:

> The skill which is claimed to relate to life, and thanks to which they suppose that one is happy, is not a single skill but many and discordant, such as the one according to Epicurus, and the one according to the Stoics, and the one of the Peripatetics. Either, then, one must follow all alike or only one or none. And to follow them all is something impracticable

[24] On this non-epistemic kind of persuasiveness, particularly in relation to arguments, see Machuca (2009, pp. 116–23).

[25] This is not the place to address the vexed question of whether the Pyrrhonist can live his Skepticism. For discussion of this issue, see esp. Burnyeat (1997), also Bailey (2002, chapter 11) and Comesaña's paper in this volume.

owing to the conflict [among them]; for what this one commands as a thing to be chosen, that one forbids as a thing to be avoided, and it is not possible to pursue and avoid the same thing simultaneously. (*AM* XI 173–4)

The end of this passage clearly formulates what can be interpreted as a practical version of the LNC:

Practical version: it is impossible to pursue and avoid the same thing at the same time and in the same respect, i.e., it is impossible to perform and not to perform a given action at the same time and in the same respect.

This practical formulation of the LNC places a constraint on the epistemic or non-epistemic appearances we can accept as guides for action: it is not feasible to follow at the same time any two contrary epistemic or non-epistemic appearances when making practical decisions simply because we cannot act according to both. Now, the Pyrrhonist would clearly regard this formulation of the LNC as dogmatic, since it makes a universal claim about what kind of actions cannot be performed, which seems to presuppose the ontological version. Indeed, the reason one cannot eat simultaneously a piece of sweet and bitter honey is that it seems not to be possible for the same piece of honey to be sweet and bitter at the same time, and the reason one cannot simultaneously walk and stay still is that things seem to be by nature such that contrary actions cannot be performed at the same time. The Pyrrhonist would be more comfortable with the following qualified practical version of the LNC:

Qualified practical version: up till now I have, as a matter of fact, been unable to pursue and avoid the same thing at the same time and in the same respect, i.e., to perform and not to perform the same action at the same time and in the same respect.

The Pyrrhonist would point out that, even though he suspends judgment about the dogmatic versions of the LNC, he is still subject to the practical constraint in question because this seems to be independent of the truth of those versions. Indeed, his qualified practical formulation of the LNC is an empirical claim which does not necessarily presuppose the dogmatic assertion that the structure of reality is such that one cannot perform opposite actions at the same time and in the same respect. In keeping with his characteristic caution, the Pyrrhonist would say that, in stating the qualified practical version of the LNC, he is just reporting what has happened to him, without at the same time affirming that this version is universally true.

It is crucial to note that the Pyrrhonist would not present the versions of the LNC observed by him as versions of the *law* or *principle* of non-contradiction. The reason is simply that he does not assert that those versions are objectively and universally true, but merely presents them as descriptive reports of his own experiences. The nature and status of these phenomenological reports is the same as that of the Skeptical φωναί. Hence, I speak of the Pyrrhonist's observance of certain versions of the LNC only as a matter of convenience. Now, my account of these non-dogmatic reports might give rise to a worry about whether the Pyrrhonist can make modal claims, namely, claims about possibility and necessity. The reason is that there cannot be an appearance of a possibility or a necessity and the Pyrrhonist cannot say that such claims are descriptive reports of some of his πάθη. For instance, he can

say “I feel cold,” but not “It is impossible for me to feel cold and warm at the same time and in the same respect”; or “This argument non-epistemically appears sound to me,” but not “It is impossible that this argument non-epistemically appear both sound and unsound to me at the same time and in the same respect.” Likewise, he can say “As a matter of fact, I have used the LNC in communication,” but not “It has so far been impossible for me to communicate without using the LNC”; or “I have not performed opposite actions,” not “It has thus far been impossible for me to perform opposite actions.” The same holds in the case of claims about necessity, since it seems the Pyrrhonist can say “Up till now I have not assented to two conflicting appearances at the same time,” but not “Up till now I have been psychologically constrained not to assent to two conflicting appearances at the same time.” Similarly, it seems he can say “I suspend judgment,” but not “It is necessary that I suspend judgment” or “I am compelled to suspend judgment,” something which, as we will see in the next section, Sextus repeatedly says in his exposition of the Ten and the Five Modes. It is clear that the Skeptic cannot make modal claims about what is and is not objectively possible or necessary, since these would be dogmatic assertions about what is non-evident – and one may assume that, when Sextus does make such claims, he is merely arguing dialectically. But the Skeptic can make descriptive reports of both certain spontaneous reactions he has had and his past failed attempts. For instance, knowing about Heraclitus’ and Progatoras’ views, the Pyrrhonist might have unsuccessfully tried to, e.g., communicate with another person by ascribing opposite meanings to everything he and his interlocutor say. He might as well have tried to simultaneously assent to conflicting appearances but failed, or might have tried to also feel warm while he was feeling cold but still felt only cold. Likewise, he might have tried not to suspend judgment after the consideration of a disagreement among apparently equipollent arguments, but as a matter of fact still suspended judgment despite his attempt. Hence, when formulating the versions of the LNC observed by the Pyrrhonist in terms of a *de facto* inability or constraint to do something, I obviously do not mean to refer to an objective impossibility or necessity. Those versions are rather records of the Pyrrhonist’s past experiences.

Now, if the Pyrrhonist suspends judgment about whether opposite attributes can coexist in the same thing at the same time, about whether opposite propositions can be true simultaneously, about whether opposite beliefs should or may be held at the same time, and about whether it is objectively possible to perform opposite actions simultaneously, how are we to explain the passages which seem to show unequivocally that he is committed to the dogmatic versions of the LNC? That is to say, why does Sextus claim in those passages that it is absurd or impossible to violate the LNC in its ontological, logical, doxastic, and unqualified practical versions? One possible answer is of course that he is just being inconsistent. Another possible answer consists in interpreting those passages in the light of the *ad hominem* argumentation characteristic of Pyrrhonism.[26] Even though the Pyrrhonist does not

[26] Cf. McPherran (1987, p. 318; 1990, p. 140 n. 7).

accept the dogmatic versions of the LNC *in propria persona*, this does not in any way prevent him from employing them in the argumentative therapy by means of which he expects to cure his dogmatic patients (see *PH* III 280–1). The reason is simply that, since most of the Dogmatists are committed to the ontological, logical, doxastic, and unqualified practical formulations of the LNC, using these formulations in the therapeutic arguments intended to induce ἐποχή is the best way to cure the conceit and rashness that afflict the Dogmatists.

In Section 2, I presented three reasons for affirming that the Pyrrhonist is committed to the LNC. It is now time to determine whether the attitude towards this law that I have ascribed to him can explain away the evidence on which those reasons were based. With regard to the first of them, the Pyrrhonist would grant that conscious or unconscious observance of the linguistic version of the LNC reveals itself as a necessary condition for meaningful communication within his linguistic community. But he would also point out that this does not by itself imply that the ontological and logical versions of the LNC are true, nor that it is irrational or impossible for anyone to hold contrary beliefs at the same time.

As regards the second reason, he would observe that, when he approached philosophy and during the philosophical journey that led him to Skepticism, he was committed to the dogmatic versions of the LNC, but that once he became a full-fledged Pyrrhonist, he abandoned that commitment.

As for the third reason for maintaining that the Skeptic espouses the dogmatic versions of the LNC, he would make two remarks. First, he would say that his suspension of judgment does not actually rule out the possibility that contrary properties may belong to the same thing at the same time and in the same respect, since this is one of the alternatives he takes into account when dealing with the conflict of appearances. Second, he would observe that, when in his arguments against the Dogmatists he makes use of the ontological, logical, doxastic, and unqualified practical versions of the LNC, he does so only dialectically, because they are accepted by the Dogmatists against whom he is arguing.[27]

5 Ἐποχή, Agrippa's Modes, and Rules of Inference

The view that the Skeptic is not committed to the dogmatic formulations of the LNC and that he makes use of them solely for dialectical purposes is, as I will show in what follows, in keeping with his attitude towards ἐποχή and with his use of

[27]It could be argued that my interpretation of the Skeptic's observance of certain versions of the LNC is obvious as an extension of what Sextus says about the Skeptic's following the appearances, since the Skeptic's use of this law is just the law itself prefaced by "It seems to me that." This objection, however, overlooks two facts. First, there is still fierce disagreement about whether all of the Pyrrhonist's appearance-statements are non-epistemic (see n. 7), and hence we cannot simply take for granted that he is not committed to the truth of the LNC. Second, most scholars who have referred to the Pyrrhonist's attitude towards the LNC have assumed such a commitment without exploring the question in any depth (see n. 13).

the Agrippan modes and the rules of inference. If this is indeed the case, then the interpretation of the Pyrrhonist's observance of the LNC which I have proposed will gain further support.

With regard to the state of ἐποχή, the Pyrrhonist does not take it to be the conclusion of an argument he considers to be sound, i.e., he does not claim that, given certain true premises and certain argument schemes or inference rules, every rational person must draw a certain conclusion, namely, that he must suspend judgment. Such a claim would be problematic for the Pyrrhonist because it implies the existence of proof or demonstration (ἀπόδειξις), but Sextus explicitly points out that the Pyrrhonist suspends judgment about its existence (see *PH* II 134, 192; *AM* VIII 328; cf. *PH* I 60).[28] This is the reason he makes it clear that ἐποχή is rather a state psychologically imposed upon him, i.e., it is the psychological effect of being confronted with claims, arguments, or theories which appear equipollent or equally persuasive to him. Indeed, Sextus observes that the Skeptical way of thought is called "'suspensive' because of the affection that comes about in the inquirer after the investigation" (*PH* I 7). To the extent that it is a πάθος, suspension of judgment is something that imposes itself upon the Pyrrhonist and, hence, something he accepts involuntarily, in much the same way in which he accepts such πάθη as the feelings of hunger and thirst, and those of coldness and heat (*PH* I 13, 19). Hence, ἐποχή is a state that supervenes on him as a result of his own psychological constitution by virtue of which he cannot avoid withholding his assent whenever conflicting epistemic appearances strike him as equipollent.[29] It is also worth noting that, in his exposition of the Ten and the Five Modes of ἐποχή, Sextus usually says that because of what has been argued it is necessary (δεῖ, ἀνάγκη, ἀναγκαῖον) to suspend judgment or that we are compelled (ἀναγκάζεσθαι) to do so (*PH* I 61, 78, 89, 121, 128, 129, 163, 170, 175, 177). Although one could construe this necessity as rational, it is also possible to interpret it as merely psychological, i.e., as independent of whether the adoption of ἐποχή is a conclusion that validly and necessarily follows from a valid inference.

There is therefore a clear distinction between logical necessity and psychological constraint. The way in which the latter works independently of any rational requirement may perhaps be seen more clearly in the following case. Suppose that a person believes that it is rationally required to refrain from assenting to any one of the conflicting positions on a given topic when they appear to be epistemically

[28]This is why I find unacceptable Thérèse Pentzopoulou-Valalas' claim that the Skeptic has "une foi profonde en l'efficacité de l'argumentation ainsi qu'en la force du syllogisme en tant que moyen d'apodicticité" (1994, 240).

[29]This interpretation of the relation between ἐποχή and the arguments which induce it is generally accepted by scholars. See McPherran (1987, pp. 318–20; 1990, p. 140 n. 6), Barnes (1990, pp. 2610–1), Hankinson (1994, p. 49 n. 15), Pellegrin (1997, pp. 546–7), Annas (1998, 196), Palmer (2000, p. 372 n. 22), Striker (2004, p. 16), Grgić (2006, p. 142). See Annas and Barnes (1985, 49) and Barnes (2000, p. xxi) for the claim that the texts suggest that the relation may also be interpreted as a requirement of rationality. For the view that the relation must be understood this way, see Perin (2006, pp. 358–9 with n. 32). For the rejection of the psychological interpretation, see also Lammenranta (2008, pp. 15–9).

equipollent. One could argue that, if that person attempted to ground his belief, he would be caught in the web woven by the Agrippan modes of reciprocity, infinite regress, and hypothesis. It might well be the case that, despite his inability to provide a proof capable of establishing that it is logically necessary to refrain from assenting to any one of the theses in conflict when they appear equally credible, the person in question still finds himself psychologically compelled to suspend judgment. That is to say, even though he cannot provide a rational justification for his withholding of assent, this does not prevent him from ending up suspending judgment all the same. I think that that is the situation in which the Pyrrhonist finds himself and that he would say something like this: "Up till now this set of arguments have in fact been able to induce the state of ἐποχή in me and others, but I do not know whether those arguments are sound and, hence, whether ἐποχή is a conclusion that logically and necessarily follows from them." One could say that the Skeptic's suspensive attitude is rational only in the sense that ἐποχή is a reaction triggered after the careful consideration of arguments pro and con a given thesis, but not in the sense that he is committed to ἐποχή as the necessary conclusion of an argument or set of arguments he deems sound. If this interpretation is correct, then the factor which explains the Pyrrhonist's suspension of judgment is the same as that which accounts for his observance of the psychological version of the LNC. In this regard, it is also important to note that, just as the Skeptic does not maintain that everyone observes that version of the LNC, so too does he refrain from affirming that the kind of psychological constraint that compels him to suspend judgment affects every person who considers the Skeptical arguments. For just as it is a fact that there are people who claim to believe that contraries subsist in the same thing at the same time and in the same respect, so too is it a fact that most people continue to embrace dogmatic theories or assertions even after having been subjected to the Skeptical argumentative treatment.

In the case of ἐποχή, Sextus also distinguishes between the psychological and the ontological spheres and makes it clear that he does not believe that this state of mind has an ontological foundation. For he says that the φωνή "I suspend judgment" makes it clear that "objects appear to us equal in respect of credibility and incredibility. Whether they are equal, we do not affirm: we say what appears to us about them, when they manifest themselves to us" (*PH* I 196). Similarly, when explaining the notion of ἀφασία, which is a form of referring to ἐποχή, Sextus observes that "it is clear that we do not use 'non-assertion' to mean that objects are in their nature such as to move us necessarily to non-assertion, but rather to make it clear that now, when we utter it, we feel in this way with regard to these matters under investigation" (*PH* I 193). Thus, the Skeptic does not affirm that ἐποχή has an ontological foundation but only indicates that it is the result of the way things appear to him or the way he is affected. This is in perfect accord with his attitude towards the LNC, since he does not adhere to the ontological version of this law but merely observes a psychological version of it.

If we consider the *ad hominem* character of the Skeptical argumentation, it is possible to argue that, in the passages in which Sextus does make ἐποχή the conclusion of an argument or an inference (*PH* I 36, 99, 123, 135, 140, 144), what he is

actually saying is that, given the rational principles followed by the Dogmatists in their reasoning, they are obliged to suspend judgment. That is to say, given certain principles, one must refrain from making any assertions about what has so far been a matter of an undecidable dispute. If this is correct, then once again the interpretation of the Pyrrhonist's qualified observance of the LNC that has been proposed is in perfect accord with the attitude he adopts towards ἐποχή.

As regards the Pyrrhonist's use of the Five Modes of Agrippa – namely, disagreement, relativity, infinite regress, reciprocity, and hypothesis (*PH* I 164–77) – some interpreters have rightly pointed out that he is not committed to the conception of rational justification underlying the latter three modes. Rather, the Agrippan modes are parasitic on the Dogmatists' own theories of rational justification, so that they are essentially *ad hominem* arguments.[30] However, I think this is not all that can be said about the Pyrrhonist's attitude towards the Five Modes, since it may also be argued that there is a way in which he assents to them. Indeed, one may suppose that his philosophical and cultural milieu has influenced him in such a way that the conception of rational justification at work in the Agrippan modes still exerts some kind of psychological force on him. As noted earlier, the proto-Skeptic was a Dogmatist who was committed to certain logical principles and criteria of justification. It is likely that this past commitment still exerts an influence on the full-fledged Skeptic in such a way that in his daily life he spontaneously finds unacceptable a piece of reasoning which is circular or a chain of justification which does not come to an end or a claim made arbitrarily without any backing up. Of course, this kind of assent is not to be interpreted as dogmatic, but as a part of the Pyrrhonist's natural capacity to think and, hence, as a part of his general psychological or non-epistemic assent or yielding to the appearances. Thus, the Pyrrhonist's attitude towards the Agrippan modes is in perfect accord with his attitude towards the LNC, since he is not committed to them, but rather non-dogmatically assents to them and also uses them for dialectical purposes.

It remains to consider the Pyrrhonist's use of rules of inference in his arguments. It might be thought that, even though the use of *ad hominem* arguments permits the Pyrrhonist to avoid endorsing both their premises and conclusions and the Dogmatists' criteria of justification, it does not save him from endorsing the inference rules used in those arguments. This endorsement would be precisely what allows him to undermine the Dogmatists' theories by showing them that, given that they themselves put forward these theories, they must accept conclusions which are at odds with their most important tenets. This interpretation, however, overlooks the full extent of the dialectical character of the Pyrrhonist's argumentation. The reason is that, in his *ad hominem* arguments, not only the premises but also the inference rules are taken from the dogmatic theories. One could object that it is hard to believe that in his daily life the Pyrrhonist's thinking does not follow certain rules of inference. The reply to this objection consists in distinguishing, once again,

[30] See Williams (1988), Bailey (2002, chapter 10), Striker (2004, p. 16), Machuca (2007, pp. 156–7).

between logical validity and psychological constraint: even though the Pyrrhonist suspends judgment about what the Dogmatists call "logic," his thinking involuntarily follows certain rules of inference which have been inculcated in him by the education he received and his interaction with others, and which have turned out (and still turn out) to work in practical contexts. In this regard, one could argue that the Pyrrhonist's natural capability of thinking also includes the use of such rules. In a word, the Pyrrhonist's use of rules of inference such as *modus ponens* and *modus tollens* is to be explained in part as a dialectical maneuver and in part as a psychological constraint in much the same way as his use of the various versions of the LNC.

6 Conclusion

Let me sum up what has been argued in the previous sections. First, I have tried to show that, despite what one might tend to think, the Skeptic's observance of the LNC does not represent a commitment to the ontological, logical, doxastic, and unqualified practical versions of this law. Rather, it is based upon (i) a kind of psychological constraint on him, (ii) a linguistic convention shared by the group to which he belongs, and (iii) a practical unfeasibility. This is why I have argued that, when the Skeptic makes use of the dogmatic versions of the LNC, he does so simply as a dialectical maneuver in order to persuade his dogmatic patients and induce them to suspend judgment. Finally, I have contended that such an observance and such a maneuver are perfectly in keeping with those we find both in the case of the Skeptic's adoption of ἐποχή and in the case of his use of the Modes of Agrippa and certain rules of inference.

To conclude, I would like to briefly address the following question: is the Pyrrhonist's refusal to endorse the dogmatic formulations of the LNC, the inference rules employed in his arguments, and the conception of justification underlying the Agrippan modes a clear proof of his anti-rationalism? It depends on how one defines this position. If by anti-rationalism one understands the lack of commitment to the laws of logic, the rules of inference, and the criteria of justification for our beliefs, then the Pyrrhonist is an anti-rationalist. If, on the other hand, by anti-rationalism one understands the firm rejection or denial of such laws, rules, and criteria, then he is certainly not an anti-rationalist. As far as I can see, it is this latter sense which one has usually in mind when speaking of anti-rationalism and, hence, when saying that the Pyrrhonist adopts this position.[31] The reason one cannot portray the Pyrrhonist as an anti-rationalist in this strong sense is that he does not reject rationality, but only suspends judgment about whether the logical laws, inference rules, and standards of justification endorsed by the Dogmatists are well-founded or groundless. This does not prevent the Pyrrhonist from making a use of reason which has a merely instrumental or practical function and which allows him to conduct his life within the

[31] See Striker (2001, pp. 120, 122, 124–5). Cf. Striker (1996, p. 113; 2010, pp. 204–6).

limits of τὰ φαινόμενα (see *PH* I 17).[32] This use of reason is not normative insofar as the Pyrrhonist is not committed to what the Dogmatists regard as the canons of rationality. The fact that people find themselves following certain canons (or even the purported fact that people are built to follow them) does not entail by itself that these canons are epistemically justified.[33]

Now, given that the Pyrrhonist is neither a rationalist nor an anti-rationalist, it is more accurate to characterize him as an "a-rationalist" – taking this term in the sense of someone who is not a champion of rationality, without thereby being its opponent. On the other hand, it could be argued that rationality consists not only in the acceptance of the LNC, the rules of inference, and the conception of justification underlying the Agrippan modes, but also in withholding one's assent whenever one does not have, when confronted with conflicting positions on a given topic, enough evidence for preferring any one of them to the others. If this is so, then one should recognize the rationality of the Pyrrhonist's ἐποχή on this point. This is not to say, of course, that he suspends judgment because he thinks that it is rational to do so, but only that from the point of view of non-Pyrrhonists his attitude should not be condemned so rashly.

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[32] On this use of reason, see Machuca (2009, pp. 119–20).

[33] Both the view that ἐποχή is the rational result of the consideration of certain arguments and the underestimation of the actual scope of the Pyrrhonist's dialectical use of dogmatic logic and epistemology have led Pentzopoulou-Valalas (1994) to regard him as a "(crypto-)rationalist." Casey Perin (2006, pp. 358–9) and Katja Vogt (in her contribution to this volume) also claim that the Pyrrhonist is committed to certain canons of rationality.

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Chapter 5
Epistemic Justification and the Limits of Pyrrhonism

Peter D. Klein

1 Introduction

The argument in "chapter XV" of Book I of the *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* presenting Agrippa's five modes is puzzling.[1] Like all of the modes, the five modes are designed to induce suspension of judgment, but unlike any of the ten modes presented earlier in *PH*, the main argument in this chapter employs some general premises about the nature of justification that it seems a well-behaved skeptic should refrain from asserting. Rather, suspension of judgment about them seems called for. For example, Sextus writes:

> The Mode based upon the regress *ad infinitum* is that whereby we assert that the thing adduced as proof of the matter proposed needs a further proof, and this again another, and so on *ad infinitum*, so that the consequence is suspension as we possess no starting-point for our argument. (*PH* I 166–7)

This appears to be an enthymematic argument with this underlying form:

1. Suspension is the consequence of arguments that have no starting-points.
2. Arguments ad infinitum have no starting-points.
3. Therefore, suspension is the consequence of arguments ad infinitum.[2]

The skeptic can employ premise 2 with no difficulty because it seems to bear the mark of the evident, i.e., "apparent to all men equally, an acknowledged and uncontroverted fact" (*PH* II 8). It would be apparent and an acknowledged and

[1] All citations to Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* (*PH*) and *Against the Mathematicians* (*AM*) are to the translation by Bury (1933–1949).

[2] "Consequence" is ambiguous, but I take it that given the stress placed upon the effect of the modes on the skeptical practitioners or, possibly, on the dogmatists, what is probably meant here is that suspense of judgment is the causal consequence of employing the modes. That is why I left "consequence" in the first premise and in the conclusion rather than reconstructing the argument with the conclusion being preceded by some sort of consequence operator like the "$\vdash$".

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uncontroverted fact because the common understanding of what is meant by an "argument ad infinitum" is that such an argument is limitless and has no starting-point. But premise 1 does not seem to be evident. Is it obvious to all people and an uncontroverted fact that an argument with no-starting point leads to suspension?

Of course, premise 1 is ambiguous. If the lack of a "starting-point" means that the argument never started, suspension might ensue because no basis for assent would have been presented. But I think it is clear that Sextus means that an argument lacking a starting-point has premises which require further arguments with further premises because the initial premises are not self-evident, and the premises of the further argument need additional, new premises, etc. Thus, the argument appears to continue without limit. So, somewhat ironically, it is not the lack of a temporal starting-point, it is more the lack of an epistemically secure stopping-point that is characteristic of an argument ad infinitum. Once it becomes clear that what is lacking are self-evident premises, it seems very far from evident that such an argument would invariably lead to suspension.[3]

To see that it is not evident that providing a finite part of an infinitely long argument would lead to suspension, recall that the Pyrrhonians did not insist that one have significantly more evidence for a proposition as opposed to its denial in order for assent to be proper. It was only when the evidence for and against a proposition was equally balanced that suspense was appropriate. The Pyrrhonians were not proto-Cartesians demanding certainty or even something approaching it. Rather, their reported experience with non-evident propositions was that the more one inquired about them, the more it seemed that for every basis for assenting to such a proposition there was an equal basis for denying it. If there is even a smidgeon of better evidence for some proposition than there is against it, assent would be, *ceteris paribus*, epistemically permissible – perhaps even required.[4] Given this rather minimal requirement for assent, why wouldn't having the beginnings, so to speak, of an infinitely long argument provide some evidence, however minimal, for the conclusion? In order for suspension to be the appropriate attitude, there would have to be some good reason for believing that there was an equivalently strong "beginning" of an argument for the opposite conclusion. But Sextus does not play that standard Pyrrhonian card and claim that there will always be such a rudimentary argument for the opposite conclusion. Rather, he seems to be asserting that because an argument has not been completed by locating premises that need no further support, suspension of judgment will follow – as though the incomplete argument accomplished nothing whatsoever. In other words, he seems to be endorsing foundationalism! Strange behavior for a skeptic.

[3]I hope by the time the reader has finished this paper, premise 1 will not be seen as obviously correct. In fact, I hope it will appear to be false!

[4]The "ceteris paribus" qualification is required here because there might be some epistemic considerations that are important in determining when assent, denial or withholding is appropriate beyond the strength of the evidence for or against a proposition. For example, the effect of adding a belief on the overall coherence of a set of beliefs might be important. I add the "ceteris paribus" clause here to accommodate views that hold that the strength of the evidence is not the sole factor in determining which epistemic attitude is appropriate.

This the puzzle: Why should Sextus have thought he could employ a premise in his own reasoning that doesn't reach to the level of the self-evident? And why would he claim that an incomplete argument – one with no self-evident "starting-point" – provides no support at all for the conclusion?

The short answer is this: Sextus is engaged in an implicit reductio argument against the Dogmatist in "chapter XV" and is, thereby, entitled to use a premise that the dogmatist, in particular Aristotle, readily accepts. It is Aristotle's view that there are only three possible structures of reasoning: reasoning that begins with self-evident premises, reasoning that is infinitely long, and circular or reciprocal reasoning; and it is Aristotle's view about the nature of epistemic warrant that underlies the claim that an argument ad infinitum cannot provide any basis for the conclusion. (Aristotle's view of epistemic warrant also leads him to claim that circular reasoning cannot provide any basis for the conclusion. More about that later.) But once it is recognized that Sextus is beginning with premises that a particular dogmatist will accept, the generality of Sextus' regress argument is compromised. In particular, the most that can be claimed against dogmatism in general is that *if* one accepts the Aristotelian conception of epistemic warrant, an argument ad infinitum cannot provide a basis for its conclusion.[5]

The longer answer is the subject of this paper whose purpose is (1) to explore the general features of the Aristotelian conception of epistemic justification which underlie his own rejection of the argument ad infinitum and reciprocal (circular) reasoning and (2) to show how that conception of justification, once adopted by Sextus in the regress argument in *PH*, limits the generality and power of that argument. For only if one begins with an Aristotelian conception of epistemic justification will some of the steps in the regress argument seem plausible; and recognizing the limited applicability of the regress argument opens the door to formulating alternative ways of conceiving of epistemic justification. In particular, those alternative characterizations of epistemic justification make room for the possibility that arguments ad infinitum and reciprocal reasoning can produce conclusions worthy of assent. Those alternative conceptions are, today, called "infinitism" and "coherentism."

2 Sextus' Use of the Dogmatist's Rejection of Infinitism and Reciprocal Reasoning

It is clear from the outset of the *PH* that Sextus has Aristotle in mind as a primary example of a dogmatist. He says this:

> Those who believe they have discovered it [the truth] are the "Dogmatists," specially so called – Aristotle, for example, and Epicurus and the Stoics and certain others... (*PH* I 2–3)

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[5] I use "Aristotelian" to refer not just to Aristotle's writings but to the dominant dogmatist tradition that was prevalent when Sextus was writing. As will become evident, I hope, the core of the Aristotelian account of epistemic warrant, what I will call the "Transmission Principle," is still a prevalent aspect of contemporary foundationalism.

As we examine what Sextus says about the argument ad infinitum, I think it will become obvious that it is an Aristotelian conception of epistemic justification that Sextus has in mind when he employs the premise that such an argument cannot provide any basis for its conclusion.

Let us begin by asking why the Dogmatist (Aristotle) would think that limitless arguments could not provide a basis for the conclusion? First, recall basic ARISTOTLE 101: All properties are either essential or accidental. If they are essential (as circular motion is to celestial bodies or animality is to human beings), then they inhere in a substance (species, genus) as long as the substance (species, genus) exists. The substance can't acquire (or lose) the property – it's inherent. If it is accidental, then the substance can acquire it from some other substance that has it either accidentally or essentially. So, for example, if something is moving, it is either being moved by something that is moving or it has motion inherently. So, the origin of motion would seem to be mysterious if there were no "first" mover or "first" movers, i.e., movers that are not being moved by something else.[6]

One would think, on grounds of parsimony, that a property like "being known" would be like any other property, either it is inherent in a judgment, or it is acquired from another judgment that already is known.[7] The mechanism of inheritance would be what Aristotle calls "demonstration." In addition, there would have to be some basic judgments – judgments that are warranted but not as a result of inheriting the warrant from some other judgment – if there is to be an explanation of the origin of epistemic warrant. At least, that's the natural hypothesis. Let's see if the text supports it.

A good place to test that hypothesis is the discussion of the epistemic regress argument because that argument deals with the origins of epistemic warrant. Let us begin with locus classicus of the argument as stated by Sextus from the beginning of "chapter XV" and juxtapose it with a passage from the *Posterior Analytics* (*PA*). The similarity is striking. Here is the famous beginning of "Of the Five Modes":

> The later Skeptics hand down Five Modes leading to suspension, namely these: the first based on discrepancy, the second on the regress ad infinitum, the third on relativity, the fourth on hypothesis, the fifth on circular reasoning. That based on discrepancy leads us to find that with regard to the object presented there has arisen both amongst ordinary people

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[6] Although I am using the problem of the origin of motion as an analog with the problem of the origin of warrant in order to locate the Aristotelian account of warrant within his general view of properties, there is a significant disanalogy that might be somewhat misleading. Aristotle would have thought that pointing to an endless series of objects with contingent motion transferring the motion to each other (whether in an infinite chain or in a circle) would not answer the question concerning the origin of motion since, from his perspective, motion of non-celestial objects required an explanation whereas (for those objects) being at rest did not require an explanation. Since Newton, I think it is fair to say we no longer ask why a thing is moving or at rest, but rather why there is a change in motion, i.e., what we want is an explanation of acceleration or deceleration. The important disanalogy is that epistemology remains interested in the origin of warrant, not just change in warrant. Indeed, a basic point of this paper is that there are some alternative accounts of the origin of warrant that blunt the force of Sextus' regress argument.

[7] I use "judgment" throughout this paper to refer to a believed proposition.

> and amongst the philosophers an interminable conflict because of which we are unable either to choose a thing or reject it, and so fall back on suspension. The Mode based upon regress ad infinitum is that whereby we assert that the thing adduced as a proof of the matter proposed needs a further proof, and this again another, and so on ad infinitum, so that the consequence is suspension, as we possess no starting-point for our argument. The Mode based upon relativity... is that whereby the object has such or such an appearance in relation to the subject judging and to the concomitant percepts, but as to its real nature we suspend judgement. We have the Mode based upon hypothesis when the Dogmatists, being forced to recede ad infinitum, take as their starting-point something which they do not establish but claim to assume as granted simply and without demonstration. The Mode of circular reasoning is the form used when the proof itself which ought to establish the matter of inquiry requires confirmation derived from the matter; in this case, being unable to assume either in order to establish the other, we suspend judgement about both. (*PH* I 166–9)

Now, with your indulgence for another long citation, here is a passage from *PA*[8]:

> Some hold that, owing to the necessity of knowing the primary premisses, there is no scientific knowledge. Others think there is, but that all truths are demonstrable. Neither doctrine is either true or a necessary deduction from the premisses. The first school, assuming that there is no way of knowing other than by demonstration, maintain [sic] that an infinite regress is involved, on the ground that if behind the prior stands no primary we could not know the posterior through the prior (wherein they are right, for one cannot traverse an infinite series), if on the other hand – they say – the series terminates and there are primary premisses, yet these are unknowable because incapable of demonstration, which according to them is the only form of knowledge. And since thus one cannot know the primary premisses, knowledge of the conclusions which follow from them is not pure scientific knowledge nor properly knowing at all, but rests on mere supposition that the premisses are true. The other party agree [sic] with them as regards knowing, holding that it is only possible by demonstration, but they see no difficulty in holding that all truths are demonstrated, on the ground that demonstration may be circular and reciprocal. (*PA*, 72b5–18)

Almost immediately following the passage above, Aristotle rejects circular or reciprocal reasoning in the following:

> Now demonstration must be based upon premisses prior to and better known than the conclusion; and the same things cannot be simultaneously both prior and posterior to one another; so circular reasoning is clearly not possible... (*PA*, 72b25–28)[9]

Note the very close parallels between the passage from *PH* and the passage from *PA*:

1. Both Aristotle and Sextus consider only three possible structures of reasoning: foundationalism, infinitism and reciprocal reasoning.

[8]All citations to Aristotle are from McKeon (1941).

[9]Aristotle does qualify this claim by saying that in inductions there may be truths that are prior in an "unqualified sense" that are learned after truths that are only prior "to us." I think he has in mind something like this: My "scientific" knowledge that Socrates is animal depends upon the demonstration from the premises "Socrates is a human" and "All humans are animals"; but I could have learned that Socrates is an animal before knowing – scientifically – that all humans are animals.

2. Both Aristotle and Sextus reject the argument ad infinitum.[10]
3. Both Aristotle and Sextus reject circular reasoning.
4. Both Aristotle and Sextus recognize that if demonstration is required in order for any proposition to be known, only two patterns of reasoning are possible: infinitism or circular reasoning.

So, up to this point in "Of the Five Modes," Sextus seem to be employing the premises that Aristotle, the dogmatist, supplied. They part company when Sextus rejects what he calls the "mode of hypothesis" – i.e., what today we would call foundationalism. Sextus says that when the dogmatists recognize that they face the dilemma of infinitism or circular reasoning if they grant that demonstration is required for knowledge, they will "take as their starting-point something which they do not establish but claim to assume as granted simply and without demonstration." But appealing to basic propositions is a mere will-o'-the-wisp because, from the skeptic's point of view, there are no basic propositions which provide a basis for claims about what is not evident. (More about that later.)

My point here is that Sextus is merely employing the Aristotelian claim that infinitism and circular reasoning cannot provide any knowledge and he says, rather uncharitably, that the only alternative left to the dogmatist is to take as their starting-point something that is merely assumed. I say that this is uncharitable because the dogmatist – the Aristotelian – has a ready response to this objection. As we will

[10]In "chapter XV" Sextus does not give a reason for the implicit claim that arguments with no starting-point provide no basis for their conclusions, but there are other passages in which it seems that he deploys a general reason similar to the one stated by Aristotle, namely that some epistemological condition necessary for knowledge is missing. It must be granted that, as far as I can tell, he nowhere cites the *exact* reason that Aristotle gives for claiming that some necessary condition of knowledge cannot be fulfilled, namely that it is not possible to traverse an infinite series, but it is also not necessary that Sextus adopt Aristotle's specific reason because it is dialectically sufficient (for Sextus) that the archetypical dogmatist endorses the ad infinitum mode. For example, in *PH* II 85 Sextus says this:

> . . . and if he wishes to offer proof, he will be disbelieved if he acknowledges that his proof is false, whereas if he declares that his proof is true he becomes involved in circular reasoning and will be required to show proof of the real truth of his proof, and another proof of that proof, and so on *ad infinitum*. But it is impossible to prove an infinite series; and so it is impossible also to get to know that something true exists.

In other passages and for dialectical purposes, Sextus deploys the Aristotelian view that one cannot "grasp," "have knowledge of," "judge," or "experience" an infinite series (see *AM* VIII 16; *AM* I 224; *PH* II 89; *AM* I 66, respectively). Thus, for the sake of the argument, Sextus deploys the Aristotelian rejection of infinitism, but he does not cite or make use of the Aristotelian claim that an infinite series cannot be traversed. For Sextus' dialectical purposes, it is enough that THE dogmatist rejects infinitism. For our purposes, however, it will be important to discuss the basis for the Aristotelian rejection of infinitism because if some of Aristotle's assumptions about epistemic warrant are not universally applicable to all accounts of warrant origination and warrant transfer, the scope of the conclusion of the regress argument as employed by Sextus is limited. (See the discussion of the Transmission Principle in Section 4.)

see, they will say that (a) everyone employs undemonstrated premises in their arguments and, more importantly, (b) there is a mechanism inherent in all humans which reliably generates the basic premises. These first principles are necessarily true and we do not arrive at them by demonstration or, more broadly, reasoning. So, not only do some demonstrations begin with premises that are not demonstrated, all "scientific" demonstrations begin with necessary truths that cannot be demonstrated but are, nevertheless, known by a process that is inherent in all human beings.[11]

Sextus is correct in claiming that when Aristotle is faced with the dilemma of infinitism and circular reasoning, he will claim that not all knowledge is the result of demonstration:

> Our own doctrine is that not all knowledge is demonstrative: on the contrary knowledge of the immediate premises is independent of demonstration... The necessity of this is obvious; for since we must know the prior premisses from which the demonstration is drawn, and since the regress must end in immediate truths, those truths must be indemonstrable... Such, then, is our doctrine, and in addition we maintain that besides scientific knowledge there is its originative source which enables us to recognize the definitions. (*PA*, 72b18–24)

Thus, Aristotle has implicitly claimed that there are only three possible patterns of reasoning that result in knowledge. If all knowledge were the result of demonstration, then there would be only two possible patterns: infinite arguments or circular arguments. If not all knowledge is the result of reasoning, then some premises are self-evident and their warrant does not depend upon reasoning. For the sake of the argument, Sextus accepts that there are only those three possible patterns of reasoning.

Before turning to a more detailed examination of the Aristotelian defense of foundationalism, let me point out that we do have a partial answer to the initial puzzle, namely, how skeptics can (i) remain true to their practice of suspending judgment and (ii) still seem to make assertions about the nature of the requirements for the possession of a probative demonstration. The answer, to put it bluntly, is that Sextus is merely restating Aristotle's rejection of infinitism and circular reasoning.[12] He offers no new criticisms of these views. Indeed, in the argument presented in "Of the Five Modes" Sextus gives no reasons at all for thinking that arguments with no starting-points or reciprocal arguments lead to suspension. As we will see, this is in stark contrast to his treatment of foundationalism because he provides many reasons why such a pattern of reasoning will lead to suspension.

Sextus need do no more than cite Aristotle's objections to infinitism and reciprocal reasoning because he is using the very assertions of the archetypical dogmatist

[11] Keep in mind that for Aristotle "scientific" knowledge was a very broad notion and included what we now call math and physical science, as well as the life sciences, social sciences and much of what we now call humanities.

[12] I use the terms "circular reasoning" and "reciprocal reasoning" interchangeably. The latter is less pejorative.

against two of the three forms of dogmatism. This is a judo-style method of philosophizing: Use your opponents' view to impugn their views.[13] There is nothing inherently wrong with this method, but it does sharply limit the scope of the conclusion that can be drawn by employing it because the conclusion must always be circumscribed by the qualification that it applies only to the topic as understood by a particular, albeit prototypical, opponent.

To see that, consider this reconstruction of the main argument in "chapter XV".

1. There are only three patterns of reasoning available to the dogmatist to settle disputes: infinitism, circular reasoning and hypothesis. [from Aristotle]
2. Infinitism cannot provide a basis for settling disputes. [from Aristotle]
3. Circular reasoning (coherentism) cannot provide a basis for settling disputes. [from Aristotle]
4. Hypothesis (foundationalism) cannot provide a basis for settling disputes.
5. There is no way to settle disputes. (from 1 to 4)

Because premises 2 and 3 implicitly depend upon characterizations of epistemic justification that are adopted from Aristotle and are not applicable to all forms of epistemic justification, then they are more accurately stated as follows:

2*. Infinitism, as characterized by Aristotle, cannot provide a basis for settling disputes.
3*. Circular reasoning (or coherentism), as characterized by Aristotle, cannot provide a basis for settling disputes.

So stated, the conclusion could at most be:

5*. There is no way within the Aristotelian conception of justification to settle disputes.

Although viewing premises 2 and 3 in this way makes Sextus' use of them consistent with the general skeptical practice of suspending judgment on everything non-evident because he is merely repeating what his opponent asserted, doing so severely limits the scope of the conclusion. In addition, part of the initial puzzle remains because premise 4 looks like an outright assertion which would violate the skeptic's *modus operandi*. It certainly could not be repeating what Aristotle held!

The next section will examine the dogmatist's (Aristotle's) defense of foundationalism and show how Sextus' treatment of that defense is consistent with the general practice of Pyrrhonian Skepticism. The final section will show how infinitism and coherentism can escape the trilemma by rejecting some of the assumptions that Sextus borrows from Aristotle's account of epistemic justification.

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[13] Roy Sorensen uses that metaphor to describe an aspect of Hegel's philosophy, but it applies equally well here. See Sorensen (2003, p. 306).

3 Aristotle's Defense of Foundationalism and Sextus' "Equally Strong" Argument against Foundationalism

In the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle discusses a kind of epistemic perceptual relativism that he says has been employed by some philosophers for various metaphysical ends. He claims that Anaxagoras, Democritus, Empedocles, thinking that "that which is" is identical to the sensible world, used various examples of the relativity of perception to show that the world had the contrary properties exhibited in sensible objects. Here are some of the examples of perceptual relativity that Aristotle claims they used:

(i) the same thing is thought bitter by some and sweet by others (1009b5),
(ii) other species of animals have sensations contrary to ours (1009b7),
(iii) what appears to the healthy person is not the same as that which appears to the sick person (1010b7),
(iv) what appears one way when near does not appear the same way when distant (1010b6),
(v) things appear one way to those who are awake and another way to those asleep (1010b9).

Aristotle's reply to the relativistic metaphysician is twofold:

(1) These philosophers have confused the sensible with what is real independent of sentient beings:

> . . . if only the sensible exists, there would be nothing if animate things were not; for there would be no faculty of sense. . . For sensation is surely not the sensation of itself, but there is something beyond the sensation which must be prior to the sensation. (1011b30–35).

(2) These philosophers do not take their own views seriously enough to act on them and they have made one fundamental mistake:

> For obviously they do not think these to be open questions [i.e., the questions that are claimed to arise from the relativity of perception]; no one at least, if when he is in Libya he has fancied one night that he is in Athens, starts for the concert hall. (1010b10)

> . . . all such questions have the same meaning. These people demand that a reason shall be given for everything, for they seek a starting-point, and they seek to get this by demonstration, while it obvious from their actions that they have no conviction. *But their mistake is what we have stated it to be: they seek a reason for things for which no reason can be given; for the starting-point of demonstration is not demonstration.* (1011a1–14) [emphasis added]

Aristotle uses the examples, in part, to show that the basic propositions in a scientific demonstration are not those that arise directly from our sensations. Propositions which report our sensations are immediate in the sense that they do not rely on reasoning, but they are not the premises that play a role in scientific demonstration because such a premise must be "true in every instance of its subject" (*PA* 73a25). Examples he gives of such attributes/subjects in the basic propositions are

“animal/man” and “point/line” (*PA* 73a30–33) and “two right angles/triangle” (*PA* 73b30–31). In fact, he explicitly says that the basic premises are definitions:

> Moreover, the basic premisses are definitions, and it has already been shown [see *PA* 72b18–24 quoted above] that these will be found indemonstrable; either the basic premisses will be demonstrable and will depend upon prior premisses, and the regress will be endless; or the primary truths will be indemonstrable definitions. (*PA* 90b23–26)

It should be noted that Aristotle’s foundationalism is significantly different from the brand with which we are most familiar, namely the modern empiricist tradition that takes sensation-based propositions to be the basic ones. Rather, for Aristotle, the basic premises are universal definitions that predicate what is essential of a genus. (I might add, parenthetically, that modern empiricist foundationalism provides the basis for the Humean type of skepticism in which the mystery is how one could move from claims about sensations to claims about the real nature of objects through some process of non-circular reasoning.[14])

In discussing the ten modes, Sextus picks up the very examples of perceptual relativity that Aristotle mentions and adds others to show that sensation cannot provide criteria for distinguishing between how things appear and what they are in themselves (see *PH* I 36–8 for a summary of the ten modes). And Sextus clearly alludes to perceptual relativity in “Of the Five Modes” when he says that the Mode of relativity is “that whereby the object has such or such an appearance in relation to the subject judging and to the concomitant percepts, but as to its real nature we suspend judgement” (*PH* I 167). So, once again, Sextus has borrowed a plank from Aristotle to construct his skeptical edifice. The dogmatist, par excellence, has asserted that sensation cannot provide criteria that can be employed in demonstrations to settle disputes about the real nature of things because sensation is person and circumstance relative.

But if sensation cannot be the arbiter in such circumstances, will Aristotle claim that it plays no role at all in the genesis of our scientific knowledge of the basic propositions? The answer is that although Aristotle holds that sensations do not directly provide the content of basic propositions, they play a crucial role in bringing about our knowledge of the basic propositions. Aristotle says that perception is of the particular whereas the basic premises are about the universal (see *PA* 87b26–88a4). But sensation does provide the ingredients from which the mind reliably constructs the basic premises. He writes:

> We have already said that scientific knowledge through demonstration is impossible unless a man knows the primary immediate premisses... Therefore we must possess a capacity of some sort... and this at least is an obvious characteristic of all animals, for they all possess a congenital discriminative capacity which is called sense-perception. But though sense perception is innate in all animals, in some the sense-impression comes to persist, in others, it does not... and when such persistence is frequently repeated a further distinction at once arises between those which out of persistence of such sense-impressions develop a power of systematizing them and those which do not. So out of sense-perception comes to

[14]For a detailed discussion of the relationship between the tenants of modern empiricism and skepticism see Williams (1996).

> be what we call memory, and out of frequently repeated memories of the same thing develops experience; for a number of memories constitute a single experience. From experience again – i.e., from the universal now stabilized in its entirety within the soul, the one beside the many which is a single identity within them all – originate the skill of the craftsman and the knowledge of the man of science, skill in the sphere of coming to be and science in the sphere of being. (*PA* 99b20–100a9)

The details of this account of the origin of our knowledge of the first premises are not important. What is crucial to note for our purposes is that Aristotle here is appealing to innate capacities of human beings, which if properly employed, will result in knowledge of the first principles. So, although sensation does not directly provide us with the first premises, it does provide the input which when properly used by us will lead to knowledge of first principles. Thus, there is no reasoning that produces our knowledge of the first principles. Rather, Aristotle has put forth a proto-reliabilist account of the origin of our knowledge of first principles.

Aristotle has provided the first three premises in Sextus' regress argument, but he would reject step 4 [Hypothesis (foundationalism) cannot provide a basis for settling disputes]. He would argue that there is a type of first principle which does faithfully represent the world and for which there is no argument – but for which none is needed.

Does Sextus have counter arguments? Yes. And it strikes me that his answers are good enough for his purposes.

In addition to using the premises supplied by the dogmatists, Sextus is free to produce a counter argument to the dogmatist that is as equally strong as the dogmatists' argument. He does not have to endorse that counter argument. Indeed, he does not want to show that the dogmatist is wrong – for then suspension would not be appropriate regarding the claims made by the dogmatists because asserting the denial of the dogmatists' claim would be appropriate. Sextus merely wants to establish that there is an equally strong counter argument. Here are Sextus' recountings of Agrippa's five, short counter arguments to the foundationalist along with my equally short responses on behalf of the dogmatist:

1. "If the author of the hypothesis is worthy of credence, we shall be no less worthy every time that we make an opposite hypothesis" (*PH* I 173). *That hardly seems to capture common practice. We have methods of determining and even ranking degrees of expertise.*
2. ". . .if the author of the hypothesis assumes what is true he causes it to be suspected by assuming it by hypothesis; while if it is false, the foundation of his argument will be rotten" (*PH* I 173–4). *Aristotle would not sanction merely assuming a first premise. It would have to be arrived at through the process that he outlines*. (More about this point below.)
3. ". . . if hypothesis conduces at all to proof, let the subject of inquiry itself be assumed and not some other thing which is merely a means to establish the actual subject of the argument; but if it is absurd to assume the subject of inquiry, it will be absurd to assume that upon which it depends" (*PH* I 174). *It is only with the pejorative use of "assume," i.e., to assume with no basis whatsoever, that this*

objection holds. Aristotle has supplied a basis for thinking that first principles arrived at through the process he outlines are not mere assumptions.

4. "... if it should be said that it [the intelligible object] is a matter of unsettled controversy, the necessity of our suspending judgement will be granted. And if, on the other hand, the controversy admits of decision, then if the decision rests on an intelligible object we shall be driven to the regress ad infinitum, and to circular reasoning if it rests on a sensible" (*PH* I 175–6). *Aristotle could reply that the epistemic warrant for the first principles does not depend upon further demonstration or directly upon sensibles but rather it depends upon the way in which the judgment arose.*
5. "Moreover, objects of thought, or intelligibles, are relative; for they are so named on account of their relation to the person thinking, and if they really possessed the nature they are said to posses, there would have been no controversy about them" (*PH* I 177). *There can be controversy about what is necessary if the mind of one of the parties to the controversy is not functioning properly*. (More about this point below.)

Note that even with those replies available to the dogmatist, the Pyrrhonian has the upper hand since the inquiry into whether there are knowable first principles has continued – and that, according to Sextus, is what distinguishes the Pyrrhonian Skeptics from the Dogmatists and the Academic Skeptics.[15] For example, with regard to 2 and 5 (immediately above), Sextus could point out that what is being assumed in the dogmatist's reply is that we do, in fact, have a capacity to detect what is essential in real objects, and that, of course, is the very subject of inquiry. It can't simply be assumed, without argument, that we do have such capacities. But how would one go about showing that we have that capacity? Wouldn't it involve first providing a clear case of a basic principle and then showing that when we properly use our capacities, we do inevitably arrive at that first principle. But that, again, seems to assume the very thing at issue here – namely, that there are first principles which we can recognize without the aid of demonstration. In contemporary parlance, this looks like the problem of (too) easy knowledge or illicit bootstrapping.[16]

Let me sum up what I think has been accomplished thus far and what remains to be done. I hope it is clear that the main argument of "chapter XV" is consistent with the overall practice of Pyrrhonism. In every step Sextus either uses a premise

[15]Recall some of the opening lines of *PH*: "So, too, with regard to philosophy, this is probably why some have claimed to have discovered the truth, others have asserted that it cannot be apprehended, while others again go on inquiring. Those who believe that they have discovered it are the "Dogmatists,"... Academics treat it as inapprehensible; the Sceptics keep on searching" (*PH* I 2–4).

[16]The problem of (too) easy knowledge was developed by Cohen (2002). The related issue of bootstrapping was developed by Vogel (2000), and employed by Cohen as another purported instance of knowledge too easily obtained. I discuss the so-called problem in Klein (2004), and try to show that there is really no problem at all.

that the dogmatist, in the person of Aristotle, would accept or provides what he would take to be an equally strong argument against the claim made by a dogmatist. Thus, I think we can safely say that given the assertions made by the dogmatists and accepted, for the sake of argument, by Sextus, coupled with Sextus' counter arguments against foundationalism, the argument presented in "Of the Five Modes" *could* lead to suspension of belief with regard to everything non-evident *for a person who accepts some important aspects of the Aristotelian account of epistemic warrant.*

What remains to be done is (1) to examine some of the assumptions that inform the Aristotelian account of epistemic justification and that, therefore, underlie the Pyrrhonian's argument which leads to suspension and (2) to argue that there is an alternative account of epistemic warrant that does not succumb to the Agrippan five modes.

4 The Underlying Assumptions about Justification Made by Aristotle and an Alternative to Those Assumptions

In order for the regress argument to seem effective, Sextus adopted some of the Aristotelian assumptions about epistemic justification. In particular, he employed the following general picture of epistemic warrant: Either a judgment (believed proposition) is known or not known. If it is not known, it cannot be employed as a premise in an argument whose conclusion comes to be known on the basis of the argument. In other words, a sound argument from premises that are not known cannot produce knowledge. More generally, providing a reason for a belief cannot produce epistemic warrant for the belief unless the reason, itself, is warranted.[17] Warrant for a judgment cannot be greater than the warrant of the reason for the judgment.

A crucial aspect of this picture of warrant can be captured by one general principle, which I will call the Transmission Principle (TP):

TP: Reasoning can transmit warrant from the premises to the conclusion, but it cannot produce more warrant than that already located in the premises.

Given this principle, it is easy to see why foundationalism is the only *initially* plausible account of the structure of our reasoning that produces knowledge. If reasoning

[17] "Belief" is notoriously ambiguous. It can refer to the propositional content of a belief state, or it can refer to the belief state itself. Talk of "warranted belief" or "justified belief" inherits this ambiguity. We can be referring to propositional or doxastic justification. For a full discussion of the two forms of justification, see Firth (1978). Throughout the paper, when I speak of justified belief or warranted belief or warranted judgment, I intend to be referring to the belief state being justified. Thus, if Sally has a justified belief that p, she does believe that p and her believing that p is justified. I take it that it is doxastic justification that is referred to by the "justification condition" in the set of necessary conditions for knowledge.

cannot originate warrant, but can only transmit it, neither infinitism nor reciprocal reasoning could produce warrant in the first place. Regarding reciprocal reasoning, picture basketball players standing in a circle and passing the ball from one player to another. It would be possible to track how warrant was transmitted, but a basic issue in epistemology would remain unanswered: How does warrant originate?[18] The same mystery obtains if one imagined an infinitely long line of basketball players, each one receiving the ball from a previous member in the line.[19]

On the other hand, the foundationalist has a ready-made answer that can explain the origin of warrant: Warrant arises in the first principles because humans have a capacity that processes sensations in a manner which results in coming to know the first principles that track the truth. Warrant, having arisen in that fashion, is transmitted through reasoning to the non-basic judgments.

So, given TP, infinitism and circular reasoning are not initially plausible views about the status of our knowledge, and only two views remain at all plausible: foundationalism and some form of skepticism.[20]

But what if TP is not correct? What if there is a better account of the origin of warrant that could provide a basis for rejecting the anti-infinitism and anti-coherence premises that Sextus inherited from the Aristotelian picture of epistemic warrant?

This is not the place to develop that alternative view in any great detail especially because I have done so elsewhere.[21] But a sketch of that alternative picture is necessary in order to make clear the restricted applicability of Sextus' regress argument.

Let me begin with what I take to be a fundamental feature of how we provide (at least an important aspect of) justification for our beliefs. We use reasons to justify beliefs – including those beliefs that do not have an epistemically kosher causal

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[18] Some philosophers while defending coherentism have held that warrant can be increased through coherence. (See Van Cleve (2011). The paper contains (1) an excellent discussion of the history of various views concerning the ability of coherence to add warrant as well as (2) some original suggestions about that issue.) They will cite a standard case in which the warrant attached to what several witnesses testify to is increased whenever their testimony coheres. I do not find this kind of case convincing because I believe that the argument for the supposed fact, call it p, testified to by the witnesses is properly displayed as follows:

1. Witness 1 says that p
2. Witness 2 says that p (or something that coheres with what Witness 1 said) etc.
3. Therefore, it is likely that p.

But 1 and 2 are more warranted than the conclusion. I don't think there is a proper way of presenting this case in which the premises are less warranted than the conclusion. Perhaps coherence can generate warrant, but this kind of case does not show that it does.

[19] See note 6.

[20] Of course, if they are equally plausible, Pyrrhonism gets the nod, because suspension between the two positions would be the correct attitude – and we would be adopting a Pyrrhonian perspective by suspending judgment between the two initially plausible views.

[21] Klein (1999, 2000, 2004, 2005a,b, 2007a,b).

pedigree. And if the reasons are good ones, providing them makes the belief justified or at least better justified.[22] Here's an example of what I mean:

Suppose Mr. Impressionable often believes what he hears other people say – but he doesn't know that is the causal basis for some of his beliefs. One day he hears Ms Speaker utter the words "it will rain tomorrow" and he forms the belief that it will rain. Suppose that had he listened a bit more carefully, he would have heard Ms Speaker say, "The weather is like almost anything else, some people believe that it will rain tomorrow and some don't." Suppose further that Impressionable saw (rather than heard) a weather forecast that included rain for tomorrow on the aptly named Reliable Weather Website. When he is asked (by others or *sotto voce*) why he believes that it will rain tomorrow, he offers good reasons for his belief – namely his beliefs about the forecast on the Reliable Weather Website.

I take it that this is not an unusual situation. We all have many, many beliefs whose causal origins we can't trace; and we are often mistaken about the etiology of our beliefs – as was Mr. Impressionable. Some of those beliefs have an etiology that is such that beliefs produced in that way are likely to be true. Some of those beliefs have origins that are not at all truth-conducive. But regardless of the reliability of the process that brought about the belief, we can increase the degree of justification of many of our beliefs by locating and providing reasons. Whether, as some will claim, those reasons become the "sustaining" causes of the beliefs is really an empirical question best left to others. We, *qua* philosophers, are not in a position to determine if the offered reasons really are the originating or sustaining causes of the belief. But that the beliefs have become better justified by locating and citing reasons is part of our conception and practice of epistemic justification. In short, locating and citing reasons for a belief contributes to its degree of epistemic warrant regardless of causal ancestry of the belief.

The moral I wish to draw from the discussion of this case is that epistemic justification is a many splendored thing composed of a variety of distinct epistemic good-making features. Aristotle and contemporary reliabilists are correct that a belief's having a truth-conducive causal genesis is an important feature of justification. But so is locating and providing reasons for our beliefs. Thus, *ceteris paribus*, any belief is better justified when we have a reason for it than when we don't have a reason for it.

There are two important consequences to be drawn from what has been said so far regarding epistemic justification: (1) There is no basis for excluding so-called basic beliefs, i.e., beliefs that initially arose without reasoning playing a role, from the generalization that a belief backed by reasons is, *ceteris paribus*, epistemically better than one that is not back by reasons; (2) A reason, r, need not be justified (yet)

[22] What makes one belief a good reason for another is beyond the scope of this paper. But it is important to point out that every account of epistemic warrant will need to develop an account of good reasons; and I think that for the argument in this paper, any initially plausible account will suffice as long as it is not required that in order for a reason, r, to provide one of the epistemic good-making features for a belief, b, that r must, itself, have that good-making feature. Such a definition would not make it possible for reasoning to originate warrant.

by another reason in order for r to provide some warrant for a belief. Let me expand a bit on (1) and (2).

(1) Revisit Aristotle's account of basic propositions that arise in an epistemically reliable fashion and consider a person who is asked, for example, why she thinks it is true that all humans are animals. Consider two answers: "I don't have any idea why I think that's true" or "This belief was delivered by an innate, reliable cognitive process beginning with sensation." I take it as obvious that the second response helps to justify her belief that all humans are animals whereas the first does not help justify that belief.[23] Locating a reason for a so-called basic belief provides additional warrant for the belief. So, although so-called basic beliefs with truth-conducive causal pedigrees have one epistemic good-making feature, they lack another important epistemic good-making feature whenever there are no reasons for thinking that the causal process is truth-conducive. So-called basic beliefs are epistemically better off when backed by reasons.
(2) It is crucial to note that this view of epistemic justification does not have built into it the requirement that in order for a reason, r, to provide one of the epistemic good-making features for a belief, b, that r must, itself, have that good-making feature. A reason for r need not yet have been located or cited in order for r to be a reason for believing b. At least one type of epistemic justification emerges as we provide reasons. The process of reasoning produces some justification for our beliefs. Put another way, some type of justification is not transferred by reasoning, it originates with reasoning.

This emergent type of justification is inherent in contemporary coherentism and in infinitism. Coherentists do not see justification as principally located in individual beliefs but rather they hold that warrant emerges whenever the set of beliefs has a certain type of coherent structure.[24] Infinitists see an important type of justification as emerging when reasons are given for our beliefs.

Both infinitism and coherentism can avoid the criticisms that Sextus adopts from Aristotle. For the infinitist, each belief in the chain of offered reasons can have the type of causal pedigree that reliabilists require; and the causal process that leads to each belief in the chain is finite – or as finite as any causal chain is. And we need not reach a final stopping-point in order for a belief to have the type of warrant that arises when reasons are provided. Thus, it is not necessary to "traverse" an infinite series of reasons in order for the belief to be justified. A belief can have the requisite causal pedigree and enough warrant can emerge by reasoning to satisfy the justified belief condition of knowledge – as long as the standard is not absolute certainty. Recall that the Pyrrhonians did not require anything approaching certainty

[23] It is important to recall that I am here concerned with doxastic justification, not propositional justification. It is her believing that all humans are animals that is better justified rather than the propositional content of the belief that is better justified.

[24] BonJour calls this form of coherentism "holistic coherentism" and defends it in Bonjour (1985).

in order for assent to be warranted. Coherentists can point out that they, too, have an explanation of the origin of warrant. It emerges as the set of beliefs becomes more coherent. The causal requirement can be satisfied by each belief in the set of coherent beliefs, and warrant for each proposition arises when the set has a coherent structure.

Indeed, hybrid views are possible. One could hold that for a belief to possess all of the good-making epistemic properties it must (a) have the appropriate truth-conducive causal history and (b) be backed by a good reason and (c) belong to a set of coherent beliefs.

Whichever alternative view to the Aristotelian picture is correct, the basic point of this paper has been established, namely, that once the assumptions about epistemic justification underlying Sextus' regress argument have been exposed, it is clear that the conclusion is not as general as it may seem at first. The Pyrrhonian regress argument need not lead to the general suspension of judgment with regard to non-evident propositions (ones which need reasons for them to acceptable) because the regress argument is cast within an account of epistemic justification that presupposes that reasoning can only transmit, and not originate, any form of epistemic warrant. That presupposition is false. We do not have to traverse an infinite series of reasons in order for a belief to be warranted sufficiently to meet the standards for knowledge. No belief need be self-evident or immune to being questioned in order for us to have knowledge.

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Part II
Pyrrhonism in Modern Philosophy

Chapter 6
Bacon's Doctrine of the Idols and Skepticism

Luiz Eva

1 Introduction

The various texts in which Bacon compares his own philosophy with skepticism regularly exhibit a critical attitude, but almost as regularly they also stress some affinity between the two views. In *Novum Organum* I, §37, Bacon says that there is a complete opposition between his own method and those of the supporters of *acatalepsia* (that is, the Academic skeptics), insofar as their methods destroy the authority of our faculties, while his provides aids for these faculties. Bacon was aiming, not at *acatalepsia*, the conclusion that knowledge is unattainable, but at *eucatalepsia*, which is knowledge provided by the correct method, as he says at the end of the first book of the *Novum Organum* (henceforth *NO*).[1] But, as he points out in I, §37, this opposition only reveals itself "at the end," while "at the start" the two philosophies are rather alike: "For the latter [the holders of *acatalepsia*] insist simply (*simpliciter*) that nothing can be known, whereas I say that not much in nature can be known by the way now in use..." (Sp I, 162–3; OFB 78–9).

These affinities are not just superficial or misleading, according to Bacon himself. In a short work entitled *Scala Intellectus sive Fylum Labyrinthi*, this is how he refers to the same point:

> If there was not an opposition to a society between our philosophy and those of the ancients, *it is with this philosophical genre* [that is, those who praise the claim "nothing is known"] *that we would be most related*; we would be in accordance with the many cautious sayings and remarks on the variations of the senses and on the lack of firmness of human judgment, as well as on the contention and suspension of judgment. To these remarks we could

[1] *NO* I, §126 (Sp I, 219; OFB 189). In quotations of *NO*, we first give the reference for Spedding, Ellis, and Heath's edition (Bacon 1889), henceforth Sp (these references are to be read as Sp volume number, page number). We then give the reference for the Oxford Francis Bacon edition (Bacon 2004), whose translation we follow throughout, unless otherwise indicated. This edition is henceforth referred to as OFB. *Novum Organum* aphorisms will be referred to as volume number, § aphorism number (I, §126, in this case).

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> add many other of the same nature, up to the point that there remains only this difference between us and them: they affirm that nothing is known in a categorical way [*prorsus*] while we affirm that nothing can be known by the way followed until now by human race. (Sp II, 688)

This little known work of Bacon's is a short text, possibly written to be part of the preface of the fourth part of the *Instauratio Magna*. In spite of its brevity, it is conceived as a discussion on skepticism, which is conducted with the help of important Baconian methodological remarks that we can also find elsewhere in Bacon's writings.[2] And some of Bacon's methodological themes, as present in his major works, also appear to have a skeptical flavor. For example, at the start of *NO* he says: "The root cause of practically all the evils in the sciences is but one thing: that while we mistakenly admire and magnify the powers of the human mind, we fail to seek out true helps for it" (*NO* I, §9; Sp I, 158; OFB 67). And, in the next aphorism, he writes: "The subtlety of nature far surpasses the subtlety of the senses and intellect, so that all our choice meditations, speculations and controversies are mere madness, except there is no one by to perceive it..." (*NO* I, §10; Sp I, 158; OFB 67).[3]

The impact of skepticism on modern philosophy has received increasing attention in the last decades, especially since Richard Popkin's *History of Scepticism* was published. But we still lack a more systematic research on Bacon's relation to skepticism.[4] He is usually remembered as a prototypical optimistic philosopher, which seems far removed from a skeptical stand. But his frequent references to skepticism, as they mainly serve to clarify his own position, are only a first sign, as I will try to show, that Bacon's relation to skepticism is a more complex one, and may contain elements which are relevant for the interpretation of his philosophy, as well as for studies about modern skepticism. It is interesting to note that in *De Augmentis Scientiarum* (*De Aug.*) he mentions Socrates and Cicero as more moderate supporters of *acatalepsia*, which again he takes to be closer to his own view than that of the *scepticos* (presumably the Pyrrhonians), which denies our capacity for knowledge *simpliciter* or *sincere* (Sp I, 621–2). This text is arguably the first one in which we can find the concept of a "mitigated skepticism," accepted by the later thinkers of the Royal Society, such as Boyle or Glanvill.[5]

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[2] Bacon's text is published in the Spedding, Ellis, and Heath edition only in its original Latin version (Sp II, 687–9), and we were not able to find any translation into a modern language. In *Sképsis*, a Brazilian journal of philosophy devoted to skepticism, I have offered a translation into Portuguese (Bacon 2008).

[3] I follow Spedding's translation for *advertat*.

[4] Some important interpreters of Bacon's philosophy have commented on this topic, but only in passing. Jardine (1985), for example, detects an Academic skeptical tendency in the provisional status of Bacon's judgments. More recently, however, some work has been done to re-evaluate Bacon's relation to skepticism. See Oliveira (2002), Granada (2006), Eva (2006), Oliveira and Maia Neto (2008), and Manzo (2009).

[5] See Oliveira and Maia Neto (2008, pp. 249–73). According to these authors, Bacon's work is "an important step in the transition from the Renaissance skepticism developed by Sánchez, Montaigne and Charron to the mitigated and constructive skepticism of Wilkins, Boyle and Glanvill" (2008, p. 247).

Here I will focus mainly on Bacon's "Doctrine of the Idols," as presented in *NO*. This doctrine is where the affinities can be expected to be most clearly observable. Bacon arranged the progressive presentation of his new method in three main divisions (*NO* I, §115). He starts with a description of the main defects of the method that was then in use, as well as of the obstacles that must be surmounted to devise a new one, the *pars destruens* (*NO* I, §§5–115), followed by a *pars praeparans* (*NO* I, §§115–30) and then by a *pars informans* (Book II), where he presents his method in the positive dimension that it provisionally has. These obstacles are the *idola*, and although he had been mentioning them since *The Advancement of Learning,* the theory of the obstacles underwent many changes before arriving at the better known and more developed version in which it appears in *NO* (§37–67).[6] *Idola tribus*, or "Idols of the Race," are those arising from human nature, more specifically from our faculties of knowledge. *Idola specus*, or "Idols of the Cave," are those which arise from peculiarities in the nature of each individual, depending on the body, the soul, education, fortuitous circumstances, and the way each person is affected by the objects. *Idola fori,* or "Idols of the Marketplace," are derived from language. Finally, the *idola theatri*, or "Idols of the Theater," are present in philosophies and misguided methods.

However, is it possible to find in Bacon's doctrine the exposition of some sort of skepticism? (I will henceforth take the term "skepticism" to refer more generally to the outlooks of the different Greek skeptical schools, as well as to the skeptical aspects of later thinkers which can be related to them.) Usually this question is answered in a negative way, and the idols are instead related to other possible sources, such as Roger Bacon or Epicurus, but on the basis of scanty or superficial evidence[7] and without carrying out a more comprehensive and detailed comparison of Bacon's text with the ancient skeptical sources which would have been available to him.[8] There have been scholars such as Moody Prior, however, who have argued for more particular affinities between Bacon's idols and the Pyrrhonian tropes devised to produce suspension of judgment, as we find in Sextus Empiricus.[9] More recently, Popkin referred to Bacon's "doctrine" as an effort to expose the failures of our cognitive faculties which remained unperceived by the skeptics (Popkin

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[6] "Note C – On some changes in Bacon's treatment in his doctrine of Idols" (Sp I, 113–7).

[7] For more details, see Eva (2006).

[8] According to Van Leeuwen (1970, p. 7), Bacon's "Doctrine of the Idols" is equally related to the criticism of non-critical dogmatism (represented by the idols of the theater) and radical skepticism (which, according to him, originates from the other three idols). In fact, as we will see, Bacon rejects excess in assenting as well as in refusing judgment, but Van Leeuwen misses the similarities existing between this doctrine and skepticism (such as, for example, Bacon's criticisms of precipitation in generalizations, unjustified presuppositions, and defective logical procedures). Zagorin (2001, p. 386) maintains that Bacon "never attached much weight to the challenge of the sceptical philosophy and always maintained that knowledge could be firmly established and continuously enlarged."

[9] According to Prior, all the skeptical modes can be found in Bacon's idols, even though they lack the proper skeptical "deductions and conclusions" and are embodied in a new analysis (Prior 1968, p. 141).

2003, p. 111), but regrettably he made this remark only in passing. In this paper, I aim to provide further comparisons between Bacon's "idols" and some of his presumably skeptical sources. I think they can, at least in part, reinforce both of these two latter views, as well as the decisive role of Montaigne's *Essais* (Montaigne 1999) as a source of Bacon's idols. Even though the lack of more precise information concerning Bacon's sources forces us to rely solely upon formal parallels between the *Essais* and *NO*, these alone are sufficient to prove that Bacon's praise of skepticism in the passage above is reflected in the use of many skeptical reflections within his own "doctrine" – even in the case of the *idola tribus* and the *idola fori*, where the differences from ancient skeptical sources stand out most clearly. But even though he shared at least some of the skeptics' epistemic problems, he does not go on to share their conclusions. This is the consequence, as I will argue at the end of this paper, of the particular way in which the skeptical elements are adapted within his new doctrine, with a view to attaining a deeper level of criticism than theirs. I will also try to show that the closeness of Bacon's idols to skeptical themes is useful for showing that his criticism of the skeptics is essentially methodological. These two theses seem to bring Bacon closer to Descartes, but, even if this is to some extent correct, I will point out some crucial differences between their strategies (which may reveal, in my view, that Bacon was philosophically closer to the skeptics than was Descartes).[10]

Let us then consider the four genres of idols one by one, starting with the second genre in Bacon's own order of listing.

2 *Idola Specus* and Skeptical Remarks on the Differences Among Men

The reason why I start with these *idola*[11] is that they appear to be the ones most precisely connected with skepticism – at least with the Pyrrhonian tropes. According to the Second Trope of Aenesidemus, as presented by Sextus Empiricus (*Outlines of Pyrrhonism* (*PH*) I, 80ff), the differences among men in their bodily constitution (in relation to the diversity of preferences, to the way people are affected in their sense organs), as well as in their souls (as the great difference in opinions seems

[10] I do not therefore share Maia Neto and Oliveira's thesis according to which "Bacon should not be placed in the company of those such as Descartes who tried to refute skepticism and establish a new certain science" (2008, p. 249), although I am in agreement for the most part with their analysis. As I try to show here, Bacon's philosophical attitude towards skepticism cannot be properly described as a "refutation," as in Descartes' case. And I think that the quotations given at the start of this paper provide good evidence of Bacon's much more welcoming attitude towards skepticism if they are compared with Descartes' (cf. Popkin 2003, chapter 9–10). In any case, Bacon aimed to establish a new certain science and in both cases we could only speak, at best, of a "provisional skepticism," even if this expression is not exact for their "skeptical" strategies and has quite different meanings for them.

[11] They are presented in *NO* I, §41, §§53–8.

to show) seem to be a reason to refrain from judgment, because of the lack of any reliable criterion to decide the dispute. Bacon also points out the idiosyncrasies, or the particularity of men, as something that prevents us from reaching true knowledge. This means that, in some sense at least, he appears to be also aiming here at some kind of *epochē,* insofar as, by pointing out these Idols, he intended to show how men wrongly take for knowledge what is only an opinion which has arisen idiosyncratically.

One relevant difference, however, which has been noted by Prior,[12] is that Bacon does not address the problem of the criterion, as presented by Sextus, as he does not offer any other argument in support of his claim that we cannot choose between different men in order to say what truth is. Bacon limits himself to pointing out different aspects by which the particularities of individuals can engender cognitive problems, and these are quite different in content from those mentioned by Sextus under the scope of the Second Trope. Bacon mentions, for one example, how impassioned attachment to a particular science or opinion can lead one to overrate it as well as to arrive to distorted views in more universal speculations or in philosophy. As a second example, he finds another source of distortion in the discrepancies between individuals in identifying similarities or dissimilarities among things, especially when people have to deal with something that is far removed from their own field of knowledge.

Should this then be considered a misleading comparison? In support of this view one could also note that Bacon does not make any mention of the skeptics when dealing with these idols. Rather, he has chosen for these idols a name which is a clear reference to the Platonic allegory of the cave, which he mentions when presenting them in *De Augmentis.* But this reference is rather paradoxical, as it suggests that it is rather the Platonic myth itself which should be taken as an allegory of these Idols.[13] Maybe more importantly, in *NO* Bacon presents the general problem which lies behind these Idols by means of a quotation from Heraclitus ("men look for things in their own lesser worlds, not in the greater and common world") – which comes, according to Spedding, from Sextus' *Adversus Logicos* (*Adv. Log.*).[14] Spedding does not give further information about this point, but Bacon's formulation of Heraclitus' saying is strong evidence that Sextus is the source here.[15] In any case, it becomes easier for us to understand the meaning Bacon gives to this quotation once we see its original context in Sextus' work. Bacon does not intend to

[12] *PH* I, 87–8; II 22ff, 29–48.

[13] *De Aug.* V, iv (Sp I, 645; IV, 433).

[14] *NO* I, §52; Sp IV, 54. Cf. *Adv. Log*. I, 133.

[15] In the original, Bacon's quotation says: "…homine scientias quaerere in minoribus mundis, et non in majore sive communi." Richard Bett (2005) argued that Bacon's usage of *communi* to translate the greek *xunos* suggests that the source here must be Sextus, inasmuch as the identification between *xunos* (public) with *koinos* (common) is a peculiar mark of the latter's presentation of Heraclitus. Here is Bett's translation of Sextus' quotation of Heraclitus: "'Therefore it is necessary to follow what is common' (for 'public' is 'common'). But though reason is public, most people live as if they had private insight" (*Adv. Log.* I, 133).

propose any kind of Heraclitean criterion of truth, but only to support his remark about the differences among men as an obstacle to knowledge, along the lines of the Pyrrhonian criticism of Heraclitus.[16] And if Bacon has in mind here the Platonic allegory of the cave, maybe we should ask if he does not have in mind an interpretation of Plato's philosophy such as the one he offers in *NO* I §67, where he says that the school of Plato was the first to bring in the Academic's acknowledgment of the inapprehensibility of truth (*acatalepsia*), even if only as a witticism or irony against the ancient sophists. This is not surprising if we consider that this is a main interpretative trend of Academic philosophy in late Antiquity, supported by Cicero in his *Academica* (already a widely known text in that period). The same reading of Plato may be found also in Montaigne's *Apology of Raymond Sebond* (*Essais* II, 12), an essay largely composed of passages from Sextus, Cicero and Plutarch. Here Montaigne not only makes use of almost all the skeptical argumentative weapons which we find in Sextus and Cicero, but also offers an exposition of some central concepts of ancient skeptical doctrines, lauding them as the most useful and reasonable invention of human philosophy.[17]

Pierre Villey argues that a major philosophical source of *NO* is to be found in Montaigne's[18] (which he finds it likely that Bacon read in John Florio's translation[19]), compiling an impressive collection of similarities between the two texts which, even though they do not conclusively prove Montaigne's influence on Bacon, are striking.[20] Some of them will be mentioned below in relation to more specific aspects of this comparison. I think, however, that Villey did not fully recognize the extent to which Bacon's reflections may also be traced back to Montaigne's skeptical

[16] Sextus offers arguments against the different criteria of truth advanced by dogmatic philosophers, among them Heraclitus' criterion, in the same text from the first book of *Adv. Log.* from which this quotation is supposedly taken. According to Sextus, Heraclitus proposes "reason" as a criterion, meaning by that word not individual and varied reasons according to men, but common and divine reason, which all of us would share inasmuch as we are rational beings (see *Adv. Log.* I, 133ff). But Bacon's criterion of truth is related to a methodical work through experience that would make us capable of knowing the true nature of things, and that we could hardly identify with any kind of rational activity present in human nature by itself, as we will see when we consider the *idola tribus*. Bacon's quotation from Heraclitus points to the need for research in the "great world" which is common to men (the world whose nature he starts to reveal only from the second book of *NO* on). However, the distance between human understanding, in its present state, and the true knowledge of Nature is so radical as to give this remark the meaning of corroborating his criticism.

[17] *Essais* II, 12, 505, 506; cf. Popkin (2003, pp. 90ff, 103). References to *Les Essais* de Montaigne are made from the PUF edition, unless otherwise stated.

[18] Villey (1973, pp. 10–4); *Essais* I, 23, 111C.

[19] Villey (1973, pp. 47, 77ff, *et passim*). For an opposite view, see Zagorin (2001, p. 386): "If [Bacon] happened to be acquainted with Montaigne's sceptical comment that what is true on one side of the mountain is false on the other, he gave no indication that he took this view seriously. . ."

[20] According to him, while the literary criticism of the time mistakenly searched for influences in Bacon's *Essays* (the name of which, however, was probably taken from Montaigne's work, quoted in the chapter "On truth"), they are to be seen more clearly in the epistemological and methodological criticism of *NO* (Villey 1973, pp. 19ff, 47, 107).

sources,[21] even if they take on a different aspect as they are reinterpreted in his work.

Let us return to the *idola specus*. In spite of Bacon's originality in his own examples, I think they can be regularly related to other Pyrrhonian skeptical elements which *are not* among those of the Second Trope. These similarities appear once we move on to the specific content of the differences mentioned by Bacon. So the differences among individuals according to their education can be linked with the Tenth Trope of Aenesidemus, just as the differences in apprehension according to each circumstance can in turn be linked with the Fourth Trope. And even some other themes which appear to be far removed from skepticism could turn out to be much closer to it under a more careful analysis. Bacon, as we saw, considers the way men become passionately attached to their philosophy as a type of idol. This is much the same criticism as that which Sextus addresses to the dogmatic philosophers: their malady is *oi sis*, an immoderate pride in their presumed truths, caused by a hastiness of judgment (*propeteia*) about their value (*PH* III, 280). Still more clearly, Cicero despises the way the dogmatists become attached to doctrines for frivolous reasons during their youth, before they are capable of judging them correctly, and Montaigne takes up this Academic theme when he opposes the same attachment to the skeptic's freedom of judgment.[22] A similar remark is made in his own name, when he scorns the way in which the atheists refuse the reasons offered by Sebond to support religion:

> We are only too willing to couch other men's writings in senses which favour our settled opinions: an atheist prides himself on bringing all authors into accord with atheism, infecting harmless matter with his own venom. Such people have some mental prepossession which makes Sebond's reasons seem insipid... (*Essais* II, 12, 448CB)[23]

Another idol of the cave is the preference for a particular historical age, which is mentioned as a hindrance to the good judgment:

> We find that some intellects are captivated by admiration of antiquity, some by love and infatuation for novelty; but few are judicious enough to steer a middle course (*modum*), neither ruining what the ancients rightly laid down nor despising what the new men rightly put forward. Now this has done great damage for the sciences and philosophy since studies lean rather to antiquity and novelty than to considered judgments; for the truth should be sought not in the inconstant fortune of any particular age, but in the everlasting light of nature and experience. (*NO* I, §56; Sp I, 170; OFB 91)

On the other hand, in a different context the impressions produced by novelty are balanced with those which result from custom in the Ninth Trope of Aenesidemus

[21] Villey recognizes that Montaigne's influence on Bacon's methodology corresponds to "what is usually called Montaigne's skepticism" (1973, pp. 90, 105). Moreover, he suggests, on the basis of their criticism of the medical sciences, that Bacon probably included Montaigne among those "philosophers who declare themselves sceptics" (1973, p. 100). However, he did not go deeper by examining how his work could contribute to connect Bacon also with ancient skepticism.

[22] *Essais* II, 12, 504; cf. *Academica* (*Acad.*) II, iii.

[23] I here follow Screech's translation (Montaigne 2003), as I will do in the other quotations from the Montaigne's *Essais*.

(*PH* I, 141ff), and this theme is also broached by Cicero in his dialogue *De Natura Deorum* (*DND*), as part of his skeptical exposition: “How shameful it is for a naturalist, whose task is to search and to look into nature, to ask for proofs of the truth from souls imprisoned by custom” (I, 83; Rackham 1933). Cicero’s words lead us, in turn, to another main theme in *NO*. The delusive power of custom is included, not amongst the *idola specus*, but instead as an *idolum tribus*,[24] and is also the object of a telling remark at the end of the first book:

> (Men) make no inquiry into the causes of frequent events but take them as read and for granted. . . I do believe that nothing has got in the way of philosophy more than the fact that things cropping up commonly and constantly do not grab men’s attention, but get taken for granted, and generally without any inquiry into their causes, so we need information less often about things which are not known than attention to things which are. (*NO* I, § 119; Sp I, 213–4; OFB 179)

The same quotation from *DND* is also found in Montaigne’s chapter “On custom,” where he conducts a thorough critical examination of how custom determines our lives and our perceptions, creating a false apprehension of nature. Even though his criticism includes the usual humanist remarks about how men’s judgment is imprisoned by the authority of the ancients,[25] Montaigne’s case is again particularly interesting here. His insistence on this theme is more detailed than that of his skeptical sources, and he goes into considerations of the epistemic effect of the action of custom in a way which is very close to Bacon’s meaning (*Essais* I, 23, 111, 115–6; see also I, 27, 179–80; II, 30, 713).

But this is only one of many other ancient skeptical themes Montaigne takes up and develops in his *Essais.* As far as the *idola specus* are concerned, it is noteworthy that, at the end of the *Apology*, Montaigne connects the Pyrrhonian argument about the differences among men with the recognition of the weakness of our faculties: “. . .if we want to judge the activities of the senses we should agree with the animals and then among ourselves. We are far from doing that. Quarrels are constantly arising because one person hears, sees or tastes something differently from another. . .” (*Essais* II, 12, 598A). The study of human nature is actually the main concern of the *Essais*, and Montaigne’s discussions repeatedly approach it by considering our incapacity to obtain true knowledge, as well as the diversity of human actions, as in the essay *On physiognomy*: “Men are diverse in their taste and in their strength. So we must lead them to their good by how they are and by diverse ways. . .” (*Essais* III, 12, 1052B).[26]

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[24]“The human understanding is swayed most by those things which can strike and enter the mind suddenly and in one go, things by which the fantasy has grown used to be filled and inflated; and then the mind fancies and supposes (thought it does not realize it) that everything else somehow behaves in the same way as those few things currently laying siege on it. . .” (*NO* I, §47; Sp I, 166; OFB 85).

[25]*Essais* II, 12, 570–1; II, 17, 656–7; I, 25, 136ff; I, 26, 160. Villey acknowledges the same parallel between Bacon and Montaigne (Villey 1973, pp. 91–2).

[26]In the final part of “On the resemblance of children and their parents” (*Essais* II, 37), Montaigne relates the diversity of the habits of different people concerning what is good or bad for one’s

In short, even though the *idola specus* do not properly involve skeptical arguments, they invite us to outline a comparison with the Second Trope of Aenesidemus because of its general theme. And although this first impression might be deceptive, the similarity to skeptical elements manifests itself in many other skeptical criticisms that Bacon includes in this particular sort of idols. So the particular way Bacon subsumes general skeptical topics under this new genre of "idols" produced by the individual natures of humans may count as a first sign that, as Prior puts it, their criterion for classifying the problems is a different one. But as a whole the *idola specus* appear to sum up the philosophical goal of the skeptical arguments, insofar as they also foster a refusal to accept what is only the product of an individual person's approach to things *as if it were* true knowledge. On the other hand, they deal with examples and concepts which appear to be foreign to the skeptical sources, as they do not include skeptical arguments for the impossibility of knowledge.

Another difference between the idols and the skeptical modes may be found in Bacon's prescriptions on how to remove them. He affirms, for example, that the tendencies to consider things either in their "simplicity" or in their "composition" are equally harmful to our understanding. In order to avoid this, one has to adjust one's course of action in accordance with them, so as to make "an intellect at once penetrating and comprehensive" (*NO* I, § 57; Sp I, 170; OFB 91).[27] The skeptics did not offer anything like this strategy for rooting out our epistemic impediments. But even here we should be cautious not to overstate the differences. While Bacon proposed an opposition of idiosyncrasies as an antidote to the idols, the Pyrrhonian's philosophical practice was to develop antinomies, by which this type of philosopher thought he could be rid of dogmatism. And the hastiness with which the dogmatist takes a stand, one could say, may also correspond to a faulty use of the understanding when one is in search of the truth.[28] Moreover, even though the opposition Bacon had in mind was not intended to achieve *epochē*, it does not correspond to a suppression of the individual differences among humans. Bacon's answer to skepticism certainly does not pertain to determining which man is qualified, among the controversy of opinions, to speak the truth (as is required by skeptical arguments). On the contrary, once the problem is set forth in these terms, one should admit, according to him, the impossibility of attaining the truth. It is fundamental to Bacon's conception of research that it is a collective enterprise to be followed in the long term, its

health to the fact that there is no more similarity between human opinions than there is between two hairs or two grains, since "their most universal quality is diversity" (*Essais* II, 37, 786A). See also *Essais* II, 12, 20, 466, 673.

[27] Bacon refers here to how, on the one hand, Greek atomists paid attention only to the "particulars," without examination of the results of their connections, and on the other hand, other philosophers only pay attention to their compounds without being able to penetrate the simplicity of nature. Next, concluding this exposition, he claims that "speculative prudence" is necessary in order to banish the idols. "In general then anyone who contemplates the nature of the things should distrust whatever ravishes and possesses his intellect; and with such matters should be all the more careful to keep his intellect impartial and pure" (*NO* I, § 58; Sp I, 170; OFB 91–2).

[28] *PH* I, 12, 205; II, 251–3; III, 280–1. A similar remark is made by Montaigne, although in different terms, in *Essais* II, 12, 505.

effectiveness depending entirely on a method that leaves little room, according to him, for the capacities of individual talents (Sp I, 130, 133; OFB IV 20–1, 24–5).

A last feature of Bacon's idols which may be relevant here is the distinction between those which are "adventitious" or acquired (such as the *idola theatri*) and those which are "innate" (such as the *idola tribus* and the *idola specus*). While those which are acquired may be removed, the innate idols are impossible to eradicate:

> So all we can do is to point them out, and draw attention to and expose the mind's deceitful power, lest perhaps in extirpating the old errors, the shoot of the fresh ones immediately spring from that same corrupted complexion of the mind, with the result that we swap new errors for old instead of suppressing them all. (*Distributio Operis* (*Dist. Op.*), Sp I, 139; OFB 34–5)

Could Bacon only be pointing out the differences among persons here, which he did not mean to remove? In fact, they seem to offer a different sort of problem, as they are "active" impediments, a natural, permanent source of epistemic distortion. As he puts it, when introducing his doctrine in *NO*:

> The *Idols* and false notions which now garrison the human intellect and are well dug in there, do not just so obstruct the minds of men that the truth has difficulty gaining access, but even when access is granted and allowed, they oppose the actual instauration of the sciences and plague it, unless men are forewarned and arm themselves against them as far as they possibly can. (*NO* I, §38; Sp I, 63; OFB 78–9)

This could certainly stand as a relevant difference from ancient Pyrrhonism, insofar as the Pyrrhonists thought they could get rid of dogmatizing by suspending their judgment,[29] but it is hard to see where this difference comes from if we focus only on the *idola specus*.

3 *Idola Tribus* and Skepticism about Human Faculties of Knowledge

Bacon had more reasons for denying that a "purification" of our understanding could simply lead us to the truth. He was very distrustful of our faculties of knowledge, at least with regard to their natural activity when they work on their own. They are impaired by the idols which are the most deeply rooted in human nature, to such a degree that they cannot be removed at all. The intellect, he says, is continuously assailed by faults that cannot be thwarted by its own forces or by any of the existing methods (see *NO* I, §§41, 45–52). So the senses have to be viewed as the only possible source for knowledge of nature, "unless men mean to go mad." But they can only offer fortuitous experiences (*experientia*), which cannot be taken as bearing any true representation of things. In order to achieve true knowledge, we must follow careful and patient experiments (*experimenta*), according to a new method which is

[29] *PH* I, 12: "The main basic principle of the sceptics' system is that of opposing to every proposition an equal proposition, for we believe that as a consequence of this we end by ceasing to dogmatize."

to be progressively improved, towards the discovery of the true forms of nature (*NO* I, §50; Sp I, 138; OFB 32–3).[30]

Here again we may recall traditional skeptical themes, such as the opposition between conflicting perceptions according to the different human senses (proposed by the Third Trope of Aenesidemus), or according to the positions and situations (proposed by the Fifth Trope). Once again, none of the *idola tribus* could be more precisely identified with these *topoi*, but Bacon himself offers enough indications that he recognizes these problems to be akin to those offered by the skeptics, at least in their general outlook. As we saw, it is precisely the skeptical sayings "on the variations of the senses and on the lack of firmness of human judgment, as well as on the contention and suspension of judgment" that, according to him, deserved to be praised (*Scala Intellectus*, Sp II, 683). And in *NO*, these idols are accordingly related to the fact that we cannot take our immediate perceptions as exhibiting how things are. Sextus stresses that Pyrrhonian *epochē* does not abolish the *phainomenon,* but only forbids us to affirm that our representations (*phantasiai*) correspond to the way things really are (*PH* I, 91ff, 118ff). And the *idola tribus*, according to Bacon, produce a confusion concerning the mind and external nature which must be denounced if we aim to establish a fruitful marriage between the mind and things (Sp I, 139–40; OFB 34–7; cf. *PH* I, 19–20, 22).

However, the way in which Bacon's criticism is focused on the operations of the human faculties is arguably a relevant conceptual novelty in relation to ancient skepticism. Certainly Sextus argues against the senses and the intellect insofar as they are offered as criteria for knowledge by the dogmatic philosophers, but he puts forward his arguments as part of a dialectical attack upon the dogmatic conceptions of these faculties (*Adv. Log.* I, 343–68; *PH* II, 49ff). This means that those arguments were built upon the dogmatists' own assumptions in order to show their inconsistency, instead of advancing a conclusion for the sake of its own truth. And even if the other skeptical Tropes may entail consequences about the nature of the human faculties, Sextus never expresses himself on the nature of our faculties, as far as I know. Cicero, in turn, advances some formulae that are very like those we find in Bacon concerning the limited reach and lack of precision of our senses. But Academic arguments are still more clearly produced as dialectical weapons to be counterpoised to the dogmatic pretension to furnish a criterion of truth.[31]

Now, here again Montaigne and the other skeptical authors of the Renaissance take on special interest, insofar as they present arguments which can be interpreted as offering their own position on our natural faculties. It is particularly noteworthy that Montaigne's *Apology* employs one of Bacon's preferred metaphors to stress how things are "altered and falsified" by our senses: "When the compass, the set-square and the rule are askew, all the calculations made with them and all structures

[30] I think that these claims about the weakness of our faculties offer a strong reason for not enrolling Bacon's position among the Aristotelian answers to the skeptical crisis, as Popkin does (Popkin 2003, p. 111).

[31] *Acad.* II, 79–82, cf. II, 19–21, 45. In the same sense, see *PH* I, 20.

raised according to their measurements, are necessarily out of true and ready to collapse..." (*Essais* II, 12, 600A).[32] But this does not alter the fact that Bacon's comments on the *idola tribus* offer a clear mark of his intention to provide a deeper criticism than the one he takes as coming from the skeptics. Although he does not mention these philosophers when expounding on these idols in *NO*, in *De Augmentis*, published only three years later (in 1623), he writes that the great error of the ancients who professed skepticism "*simpliciter et integer*" was to decry sense perceptions, pulling out the sciences by their root. They should instead have criticized above all the "faults and contumacy of the mind," which refuses to be in accordance with the nature of things, as well as the defects of the usual forms of demonstration (*De Aug.* Sp I, 621; IV, 411–2):

> It was not without great evidence and reason that so many philosophers (some of them most eminent) became Sceptics and Academics, and denied any certainty of knowledge and comprehension, affirming that the knowledge of men extended only to appearances and probabilities... It is certain (...) that there were some here and there in both academies (late and new) who held this opinion in simplicity and integrity. But their great error was that they laid the blame upon the perception of the senses, and thereby pulled the sciences by their very roots. Now the senses, though they often deceive us or fail us, may nevertheless, with diligent assistance, suffice for knowledge; and that by the help not so much of instruments (though these too are of some use) as of those experiments which produce and urge things which are too subtle for the sense to some effect comprehensible by the sense. But they ought rather to have charged the defect upon the mind – as well its contumacy (whereby it refuses to submit itself to the nature of the things) as its errors – and upon false forms of demonstrations and ill-ordered methods of reasoning and concluding upon the perception of the senses. (*De Aug.*, Sp I, 621; IV, 411–2)

In order to explore this important remark further, I will first consider Bacon's idols concerning sense impressions, before going on to those concerning the intellect. The *idola* related to the senses are expounded in one single aphorism (*NO* I, §50), mainly dwelling on problems concerning their scope (which constrains the range of things that will be considered by the intellect) and their erroneous nature (which cannot be corrected by devices made to enlarge or sharpen them) (*NO* I, §50; Sp I, 168; OFB 86–7). The same twofold problem appears in the *Distributio Operis*, where Bacon separately refers to the way the senses "abandon us" (as they are not capable of reaching the subtlety of the movements and dimensions of the things) and the way they "mislead us" (as their testimony, most harmfully, cannot be taken as having reference to the Universe, but only to the men who perceive) (*Dist. Op.*, Sp I, 138–9; OFB 32–5). But, with regard to the misleading character of the senses (which is clearly the relevant point here), Bacon's remarks about them are quite close to those

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[32]In another text, Montaigne describes men as ignorant of the "natural sickness of their mind, which does nothing but range and ferret about, ceaselessly twisting and contriving and, like our silkworms, becoming entangled in its own works: *Mus in pice* [a mouse stuck in pitch]. It thinks it can make out in the distance some appearance of light, of conceptual truth: but, while it is charging towards it, so many difficulties, so many obstacles and fresh diversions strew its path that they make it dizzy and it loses the way... There is no end for our enquiries, our end is in another world..." (III, 13, 1068B).

presented by the skeptics. Therefore, if his aim is not to have a skeptical attitude towards the senses but to be a "true priest" and an interpreter of their oracles (*Dist. Op.*, Sp I, 138–9), we should accordingly expect to find the reasons for this different approach mostly among the intellectual *idola tribus.*

In fact, Bacon's treatment of the intellectual *idola tribus* is quite detailed and extended. And even though he takes the problems of the senses to be the most important, they are described as hindrances to our *intellect*,[33] as if they were just a kind of idol subordinated to this broader class of problems. How far, then, could we distinguish, among these Idols, a different approach to problems which are similar to those of the skeptics? Here again we may recall several points of agreement between Bacon and Montaigne already noted by Villey, including the way both of them blame our spirit for being incapable of confining itself to its true limits, as it always needs to go further, producing some explanation even about things it has no idea of.[34] Equally, Montaigne also remarks on how our intellect is inclined to find more regularity in our experience than in fact exists.[35] Also, the passions and the will, as Bacon notes, seize the understanding in an imperceptible way, while Montaigne stresses that our understanding is not strong enough to grasp things as they are, insofar as it is continuously led astray by imperceptible passions (*Essais* II, 12, 562–8).[36] In short, the similarities between the two criticisms are so great that we could hardly take Bacon's idols as being capable by themselves of overcoming skepticism as well as leading to a different conclusion.

However, Bacon is quite precise in what he takes to be the problem of the skeptical approach, namely, an insufficient criticism of the "contumacy and faults" of the mind. Indeed, he describes the obstinacy of the intellect among the *idola tribus* in these terms:

> The human intellect takes the conceptions which have won its approval (by general acceptance, credit, or simple charm) and pulls everything else into line and agreement with them, and although the abundance and strength of the contrary instances it encounters is greater,

[33]"But by far the greatest hindrance and aberration of the human understanding proceeds from the dullness, incompetency and deception of the senses" (*NO* I, §50; Sp I, 168; OFB 86–7). See also *Dist. Op.*, Sp I, 136; IV, 24.

[34]Villey (1973, p. 86); cf. *NO* I, §48; *Essais* III, 6 and III, 11.

[35]Cf. *NO* I, §45; *Essais* I, 48; II, 1.

[36]In 564–5A, for instance, he writes: "It is not only fevers, potions and great events which upset our judgment: the lightest thing can send it spinning... If apoplexy can dim and totally snuff out our mental vision, you can be sure that even a cold will confuse it. Consequently, there can hardly be found a single hour in an entire lifetime when our powers of judgment are settled in their proper place... Take a judge: however well-intentioned he may be, he must watch himself carefully (...) otherwise some inclination toward friend, relation, beauty, revenge (or even something far less weighty, such as that chance impulse which leads us to favor one thing rather than another, or which enables us to choose, without any sanction of reason, between two identical objects – or even some more shadowy cause, equally vain) will encourage some sneaking sympathy or hostility toward one of the parties to slip, unnoticed, into his judgment and tip the balance." See also Villey (1973, p. 86), where he mentions other moral developments of the same idea in *Essais* I, 17; II, 38; III, 10, 13.

> the intellect at enormous cost overlooks or despises them, and dismisses and rejects them by making distinctions to keep the conceptions just mentioned intact... (*NO* I, §46; Sp I, 166; OFB 82–3)

Now, this aphorism appears to be closely connected with Bacon's criticisms of existing philosophies. They are, according to him, committed by *anticipations of nature*, which lie in the conclusions reached in an "impetuous and premature way," as opposed to the true *interpretation of nature*, which is to be produced according to his new *induction* (*NO* I, §26). In fact, this is a classical theme, which also seems to anticipate the Cartesian criticism of the mind's hastiness, even if Bacon's approach to it is not Cartesian at all. According to him, this obstinacy is connected with an illusory exaltation of the power of the human mind to reach the truth, which leads men to abandon the search for true aids, which can only be provided by a genuine humbling of the human spirit:

> For before me all who put their minds to the discovery of arts, having briefly glanced at things, examples and experiences, as if discovery was nothing more than an intellectual exercise, instantly summoned up their spirits as to show them oracles..." (*NO*, Sp I, 130; OFB 20–1).

Bacon illustrates the effect of this idol by means of the anecdote of a man who was asked if the many vows offered by the survivors of a shipwreck were not proof enough of the power of the gods, to which he replied with another question, about the vows of the many others who actually drowned. This anecdote comes from Cicero's *De Natura Deorum*, where it is part of the skeptical argument which Cotta directs against the Stoic conception of Divine Providence (*DND* III, 89). Cicero's dialogue is explicitly mentioned by Bacon when he describes the same idol in *De Augmentis*, and there he makes use of an argument offered by the Epicurean Velleius against the Stoics (and, as it happens, improving it in such a way that it also turns against the Epicureans themselves).[37] The same example is also found in Montaigne, as Villey observed, and many other passages from *Essais* propose quite similar reflections, according to the same skeptical line of reasoning.[38] Actually, we find here just another aspect of the hastiness and presumption of the dogmatists – a

[37] The third example of *idolum* offered by Bacon in *De Aug.* is the one according to which man takes himself as the norm and the mirror of nature: "For it is not credible (if all particulars be gone through and noted) what a troop of fictions and Idols the reduction of the operations of the nature to the similitude of human actions has brought into natural philosophy; I mean, the fancy that nature acts as man does. Neither are much better than the heresy of the Anthropomorphites, bred in the cells of gross and solitary monks, or the opinion of Epicurus answering to the same in heathenism, who supposed the gods to be of human shape. And therefore Velleius the Epicurean needed not to have asked, "Why God should have adorned the heaven with stars and lights, like an aedile?" For if that great workmaster had acted as an aedile, he would have cast the stars into some pleasant and beautiful order, like the frets of the roofs of palaces; whereas one can scarce find a posture in square or triangle or straight line amongst such an infinite number. So differing a harmony is there between the spirit of man and the spirit of nature" (*De Aug.* V, iv, Sp I, 644–5; IV, 432–3). Bacon's quotation from Cicero comes from *DND* I, 22.

[38] Villey (1973, p. 84). Villey mentions particularly *Essais* I, 11 (for the example on the prophecies quoted by Bacon); I, 32; III, 13 and again II, 12, 539.

central skeptical theme which we mentioned in connection with aphorism I, 54.[39] Sextus refers to these philosophers as *philautoi*, because of the immoderate way they praise their own conceptions,[40] and this skeptical theme becomes central to Montaigne's *Essais*: not only is his *Apology* constructed around the criticism of different aspects of what he calls "human vanity,"[41] but the theme is also an object of many moral reflections in essays such as *On presumption* (II, 17), entirely composed around it.

We may draw two conclusions from these elements. If Bacon's reproach to the skeptics relies upon a problem which also has a skeptical origin, it must be seen as a kind of use of the skeptical criticism which goes beyond the way the skeptics used it themselves. But this is not to be taken as a refutation of the skeptics, at least insofar as it does not drive us directly to discover some truth – as is the case with Descartes' First Meditation. Bacon is instead adopting a skeptical concept (in line with his own refusal of the dogmatic philosophies) and suggesting only that the skeptics did not push the problems they pointed out far enough. Indeed, he compares himself to Alexander, as someone who could introduce a deeper criticism of human reason, so that it might be duly applied to a fresh examination of the particulars: "let no one accuse me of vanity till he has heard me out, for my words aim at the exposure of all vanity" (*NO* I, §97; Sp I, 201; OFB 155; see also I, §9). But how could this amount to surpassing the skeptical doubts? At first sight, this may appear as a paradoxical remark, in that Bacon seems to be suggesting that those who say that "nothing is known" did not give enough attention to the impediments to knowledge which arise from our understanding. But in fact Bacon's deeper criticism of human reason is understood as being capable of leading the skeptics to a different conclusion from the one they reached, by means of a new kind of research. As he says in *Scala Intellectus*:

> If (the sceptics) had abandoned their calumny (against our faculties), it would have became clear that the disputation itself were moved in an inopportune and contentious way, and then, beyond the truth that seemed to them inconceivable, a large field would open itself to truth by human industry, in a way that those things before advanced in a hasty way would be subverted and suppressed from the mind. . . (Sp II, 687)

Anyway, the reason why skeptics should "abandon their calumny" against our faculties must still be further investigated, and soon we will come to this.

A second point to be noted here is concerned with the structure of the "Doctrine of the Idols." As we saw, the skeptical criticism of the hastiness of the dogmatists is linked to two different idols, which are placed in different genres, so that we may have one kind of problem lying at the deepest level of our faculties which could be mirrored in another one which concerns our individual particularities. More precisely, the intellect (i) already assents to opinions without sufficient basis

[39] See notes 22 and 23 above.

[40] *PH* I, 20, 177, 186; II, 17, 21, 37; III, 280.

[41] Montaigne announces his criticism of the belief of the human race in reaching the truth as a too hasty evaluation of our powers in *Essais* II, 12, 448–9, and he very often returns to the theme.

as when it does do it "by general acceptance, credit, or simple charm" (I §46, *idolum tribus*), (ii) it forces everything to conform with what it accepts and ignores whatever appears to be contrary to this (ibid.), so that (iii) individual men, immoderately attached to some doctrines and sciences, have distorted overall philosophical perspectives.

Could this bear some relation to the "innate" problems which Bacon aimed to point out, and which would be missed by the skeptics? This would hardly be innovative in view of the way Montaigne describes our condition, insofar as he writes, for example: "The natural, original distemper of Man is presumption" (*Essais* II, 12, 452). And, at least for a while, we cannot yet see how it could lead the skeptics to "abandon their calumny" against our faculties and drive us to recognize some truth. Instead, it seems to reinforce the same conclusion that we find in Montaigne: "we are born to go in quest of truth: to take possession of it is the property of a greater power" (*Essais* III, 8, 928B).

4 *Idola Fori* and Skepticism about Language

Let us move on to the third genre, the *idola fori*, concerning the impediments produced by human language. According to Bacon, they are "the most troublesome," because they have crept into the understanding, as he puts it in *De Augmentis*, through "the tacit agreement of men concerning the imposition of words and names" (*De Aug.* V, iv; Sp I, 645; IV, 433) – or, in the terms of *NO*, because of the "alliance between names and things" (*NO* I §59, Sp I, 170; OFB, 92–3). These two formulae may well correspond to a distinction between two sorts of *idola fori* that we find in *NO*: those corresponding to invented words (which correspond to nothing), and those corresponding to falsely abstracted words (which name an invented relation between things that are themselves not alike). In this latter case, the idols produce deformation in different degrees: the words which refer to the names of substances being the most reliable, as opposed to those which refer to the qualities of things, the least reliable of all (*NO* I, §60).

Although these idols have already been mentioned as an example of a skeptical position in the Renaissance philosophical context,[42] Bacon never mentions them, to my knowledge, in relation to skepticism. His reflections here seem quite distinct from those we find in Sextus, which are mostly concerned with explaining how the skeptic can express himself without conflicting with his own philosophical state of suspension.[43] In fact, Sextus attacks the dogmatist's use of expressions lacking a clear meaning (*PH* II, 22ff), but he does so only briefly, as does Cicero when he pours scorn on verbal discussions around the notion of "*probabile*," claiming that the wise man is not a producer of words, but a researcher of things (*Acad.* I, frag. 19). Again Cicero's remark is much in the spirit of Bacon's criticism, but ancient skeptical texts do not focus in a systematic way on language as a source

[42] See Marcondes (2002).

[43] About the skeptical use of language, see *PH* I, 16, 182ff, 191, 195, 206–8.

of dogmatism, and so do not take it as an active impediment to knowledge, in the way Bacon does.

This picture must be revised once again as we take into account Renaissance skepticism. Bacon's reflections can be closely connected here with those of Montaigne[44] and, in this case, clearly with those of Sánchez as well.[45] Once more these idols appear to be, to a certain extent, a kind of rearrangement of skeptical materials we find in these two authors, leading us again to a conclusion which sounds like a skeptical one: the defects of our natural language show, as one reason among others, why we cannot obtain true knowledge. But this does not mean that we do not find original reflections added to these skeptical materials. In particular, the problems Bacon has in mind are not limited to a matter of choosing which words could more aptly represent the way things are. And he presents these idols also as "innate" ones in *NO*, after hesitating over how to place them throughout the different versions of his "Doctrine."[46] In any case, Bacon's considerations about them in this work seem to reinforce their historical dimension, inasmuch as they arise from the way the words are framed and applied according to the conceptions of the common people, and then perpetuating a general picture of the world according to those conceptions. If one tries to reform language to make it more in accordance with the nature of things, "words rebel" (*NO* I, §59; Sp I, 170; OFB, 92–3).

But how could they be at the same time "innate" and produced by the common people? Maybe we could take popular conceptions altogether as a product of the other innate idols, or in combination with them, but in this case it would be enough to refer only to these other problems as properly innate. Or else we could take the simple need to use words to communicate to be something inseparable from living our lives, and for that reason they would remain active even if we could discard the more adventitious *idola theatri,* as we read in a commentary proposed by Spedding (Sp I, p. 116). But in the same commentary, he writes: "For though [the *idola fori*] come from without, yet when they are once in, they naturalize themselves and take up their abode along with the natives, produce as much confusion and can as hardly be expelled." My suggestion here is that we should take Bacon's remarks about their "innate" dimension in a looser way, as indicating that we cannot recognize their origin anymore. Although they are socially produced, they are placed in between the consciously produced doctrines and methods and the other dimensions where the tendencies of our intellect and our individual nature influence the way they are produced. They can thus create an epistemic distortion which is strong enough to be compared with the properly innate ones, and for that reason they are as difficult as

[44] Villey (1973, pp. 93–4). As he observes, the three main problems considered by Bacon as related to the *idola fori* – namely, lack of sharpness of language, insolvable disputes arising from it, and the incapacity to remedy this problem by way of definitions – are equally present in Montaigne, especially in the *Apology* (see *Essais* II, 12, 499, 527–8) or *On Experience* (*Essais* III, 13, 1066–9, to which we could also add II, 16, 618).

[45] See Formigari (1988). According to Villey, Sánchez is arguably the source of some of Montaigne's reflections on language in III, 13, mentioned in the previous note.

[46] In *NO* they seem to be seen mostly as adventitious (see, for example, I §43), but in *De Augmentis*, they are included among the innate ones. Cf. *De Aug.*, V, iv; Sp, I 643; IV, 431.

the others to remove entirely. But, insofar as they can be called "innate," one may expect them to lead men to take the meanings which particular languages impose as if they were natural. In other words, even though language is endowed with meaning by a societal convention, it is taken as if it were capable of presenting things as they are by nature. These Idols can therefore act in such a way as to create, by means of language, a new picture of nature, maybe extending the illusions produced by the other two innate idols.

Bacon judges the force of these *idola* to be so great as to measure the historical success of the philosophical enterprise according to its power to remove the cognitive problems arising from language. The removal of the *idola fori*, he says, is in relation to the Interpretation of Nature as the Sophistic Refutations of Aristotle are in relation to traditional dialectic (*NO* I, §40). But he also remarks that his refusal of the traditional dialectic is based on the fact that it relies on words and notions of the mind: these are "as the souls of the word, and the basis of this whole fabric and structure," but when they are "ineptly and recklessly abstracted from things, and vague, insufficiently delimited and circumscribed, and finite, and then faulty in many ways, everything collapses" (*Dist. Op.*, Sp I, 136; OFB, 30–1).[47] On the other hand, Bacon himself devised a project of establishing an artificial language composed of "real characters," which should signify, not the sounds or the words, but notions and things – as presented in *De Augmentis*.[48] In this same work, we find a more detailed picture of what he calls the general doctrine of detection of fallacies (*de elenchis doctrina*),[49] divided into three parts: the detection of sophistical fallacies, of the fallacies of interpretation, and of the fallacies of false appearances or Idols. The first part he takes to have already been duly carried out by Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. But the second part, concerning the false and equivocal terms that degenerate into verbal disputes, did not, according to him, receive adequate treatment from traditional philosophy, and he illustrates this point through a criticism of Aristotle's *De Interpretatione*. But these are not yet the "deepest fallacies"; about them, Bacon says that one ought not to search for an Analytic, and neither can their Doctrine be reduced to an art: "all that can be done is to use a kind of thoughtful prudence to guard against them." (*De Aug.* V, chapter iv, Sp, I 643; IV, 431).

So, even though we also find here some skeptical elements in the composition of Bacon's "Doctrine," we may also wonder if the second level of problems mentioned above (which still remained unresolved, according to him) might not correspond to the skeptical arguments which Sextus directed against Aristotle, while the third level corresponds to the innate Idols. In any case, we must also conclude that, according to Bacon, skeptical criticism of language has been unable to reach a satisfactory result. Even though he does not mention this problem in connection with his critical remarks concerning the skeptics, we may however take it into account in order to offer a more comprehensive account of his position on skepticism.

[47] I have slightly modified the OFB translation.

[48] See Rossi (1968, pp. 166–77; 1992, pp. 274ff).

[49] *NO* I, §40; *De Aug.* V, iv (Sp I, 641ff; IV, 429ff).

5 *Idola Theatri* and Bacon's Replies to the Skeptics

How, then, might the *idola theatri* (those concerning the philosophical doctrines and their methods) be related to skepticism, if indeed they are? They are those which focus more precisely on the object that was the skeptic's concern, at least in its ancient versions (*NO*, I §62; Sp I, 173; OFB 96–7).[50] But even though Bacon aims to reveal their unjustified and fanciful character, as did the skeptics, his conceptual analysis is quite different from that proposed by them. So, if these *idola* are a novelty of the later versions of Bacon's doctrine, as Spedding suggests, maybe they could also be seen as evidence of an increasing awareness of the philosophical significance of skepticism – even though it serves here mainly to define his own perspective, as opposed to theirs.[51]

The differences can be readily noted in the very outline of how his Doctrine is presented. Sextus opens *PH* with a threefold division of the philosophical systems, which is also taken up by Montaigne: he separates the skeptics (namely the Pyrrhonians, who keep searching for the truth) from the Dogmatists (those who think they have found the truth) and the Academics (who concluded, according to him, that it is impossible to find it) (*PH* I, 1–4; cf. *Essais*, II, 12, 502). Bacon, in turn, employs a wholly different typology, which aims to describe how different genres of philosophies are sources of idols which "migrated into the men's souls from the dogmas of the philosophers and misguided laws of demonstration as well" (*NO* I, §44; Sp. I, 164; OFB 81–2). He seems to mean, then, that the different philosophies, once advanced and supported, can themselves act as idols, whether to entangle the philosophers themselves or other persons.

The first genre of idols is the "rational" or "sophistical," and the philosophers corresponding to this genre are metaphorically presented as spiders weaving their webs: they rely upon uncertain and non-rigorous observations and extract all the rest from their own minds. These appear to be those which best match the skeptical concept of "dogmatic philosophy" – or, at least, Bacon's interpretation of this concept.[52] Next, the philosophers of the "empirical" genre are compared to ants

[50]Besides showing the fragility of philosophical speculation on non-evident matters, Sextus also extends his criticism to the theories proposed by dogmatists about the phenomena (see *PH* I, 19–20). Also Montaigne, in spite of his peculiarities, seems to frame his criticism in the same way, as he offers the debate on the astronomical and cosmographic theories as examples of the uncertain nature of reason: "A thousand years ago, if you raised doubts on the sciences of cosmography, this would have been a Pyrrhonian attitude" (*Essais*, II, 12, 571; I have here slightly modified Screech's translation). See also *Essais* 563ff, 570–1.

[51]According to Ellis (*apud* Spedding, Sp I, 114–5), the "Doctrine of the Idols," in the form it receives in *NO*, prevents a more systematic division of the *pars destruens*, as it was conceived in the *Partis secundae Delineatio*. Spedding, in turn, argues convincingly that the main modification of the Doctrine, from the first version we find in the Advancement of Learning, corresponds to the way it acquires a fourth genre of Idols, namely the *idola theatri*.

[52]Bacon actually refers to this genre of philosophy as "rational" or "dogmatic" (see *NO* I, §95). But this is not to say that the traditional skeptical arguments could not be employed, in some measure, to counter the other types of theories he considers. The precise meaning Sextus gave to "dogmatize"

which endlessly collect objects but extract very little from them. They submit what they find to a small number of experiences, which do not allow them to advance far enough. The third genre is the "superstitious," the "more widespread" of them all, which mingles philosophy with theology and with traditions, and takes the intellect captive by deluding it, not by ensnaring it, as it is done by the first type (*NO* I, §§62, 65). Then he moves on to the defective speculation in natural philosophy (noting that the causes of its feebleness are due not only to the methods employed, but also to the lack of interest in this domain) (*NO* I, § 66).

We can still find here, although to a lesser degree than in the cases previously considered, some echo of Montaigne's critical remarks in the *Apology*, despite the author himself employing a Pyrrhonian conceptual scheme in his own analysis of the subject.[53] But the last aphorism from the "Doctrine of the Idols" (*NO* I, §67) is reserved for a commentary on the "recklessness with which philosophies grant and withhold assent, for recklessness of this sort seems to fix and in a way perpetuate the *Idols*, and stop us approaching and removing them."[54] Bacon thus opposes the supporters of *acatalepsia* to those who are ready to decide and make sciences "dogmatic and magisterial," starting with a brief historical description of this section. First introduced by the school of Plato as a sort of irony on the older sophists' intellectual arrogance, he says, it was transformed into a dogma by the New Academy. Yet in their favor he says that this is "the most honest philosophical way," when compared to those who indulge, to a certain degree, in arbitrary pronouncement (as seems to be the case with all the philosophers belonging to the abovementioned genres). Moreover, the skeptics claim not to destroy all investigation, but to allow some things to be followed as "probable," but even so they are not spared from the following criticism:

> Nevertheless once the human soul has lost hope of discovering the truth, everything becomes more supine; and the result is that they turn men to agreeable debate and argument, and roam as it were from object to object, rather than keep on a course of severe inquisition. But as I said at the start and constantly maintain, the authority of human senses and understanding, for all their weakness, be despised but furnished with help. (*NO* I, 67, Sp I, 178–9; OFB 108–9)[55]

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is a matter of controversy. According to Benson Mates, it corresponds to the philosopher who accepts beliefs, most of them categorically, to which they subscribe not only momentarily, but with firm conviction (1996, p. 60). We may also take it, however, in a more general way, as meaning every philosophical stand about how things actually are, as they are dealt with in philosophical discourse.

[53] Villey (1973, pp. 94–7). He notes this point, particularly stressing Montaigne's criticism of the praise of the Ancients' authority, notably Aristotle's, and of the confusion concerning the limits of science and faith.

[54] *NO* I §67; Sp I, 178–9; OFB 107–8, for this quotation and the next from the same aphorism.

[55] Here I have changed part of the OFB translation, following mostly the one which is offered in the Spedding edition (see Sp IV, 69).

Bacon's description of skeptical investigation sounds very similar to Montaigne's presentation of the method he follows in his *Essais*.[56] But again his critical remark is methodological. He is not rejecting the skeptical conclusion as far as its content is concerned, but only stating that it is not compatible with the investigation that is needed to provide true knowledge about nature. But could this remark be related to the various particular aspects of the idols we have mentioned here, contrasting them with what is found in the skeptical sources?

In the final part of this paper I will try both to offer evidence in support of this and to clarify the meaning of Bacon's distancing of himself from skepticism. A first point to be stressed here is that Bacon's method is a progressive one, starting from recognition of the precarious state of the present sciences, and advancing towards the achievement of the knowledge of Forms by means of induction. Aphorism I §37 seems to summarize this whole process, as it opposes Bacon's initial proximity to the skeptics to the complete opposition that emerges in the "end." But how exactly should we understand that final opposition? One might say that it corresponds to the positive dimension of the method, as it could offer true notions as they "inhere in the very core of things."[57] But this is a quite long way, as the *Novum Organum* is placed as the second part out of six that are planned in the *Distributio Operis*. It is only through the methodical work of many generations, on the basis of a new natural history, that the real Forms can be known by means of a *scientia activa*, in which Bacon has no hope of collaborating personally (*Dist. Op.*, Sp. I, 144; OFB 44–5). However, besides the fact that Bacon possibly wrote, as we saw, the *Scala Intellectus* to preface the fourth part of his *Instauratio Magna*, he asks the readers to accept the provisional nature of its fifth part in these words:

> All the same I declare that I do not in the least wish to be held to these discoveries of mine, since they have not been found out or proved by the true form of interpretation. But let no one be upset by this suspension of judgment (*judicii suspensionem*) in a doctrine which claims not merely that nothing can be known but that nothing can be known save by proper procedure and a certain way, and which nevertheless establishes in the meantime certain degrees of certitude for use and solace until the mind can come to rest in causes truly unraveled. For those very schools of philosophers who frankly argued for *Acatalepsia* were not inferior to those who arrogated to themselves the licence to lay down the law. Yet the former did not make helps ready for the sense and the intellect as I have done, but simply undermined their credit and authority – which is a quite different matter and almost the opposite. (*Dist. Op.*, Sp I, 144; OFB 45)

[56] *Essais* I, 50: "I take the first subject Fortune offers: all are equally good for me... Scattering broadcast a word here, a word there, examples ripped from their context, unusual ones, with no plan and no promises, I am under no obligation to make a good job of it nor even to stick to the subject myself without varying it should it so please me; I can surrender to doubt and uncertainty and to my master-form; which is ignorance..."

[57] "...quaeque rebus haereant in medullis" (*Dist. Op.*, Sp. I, 137; OFB 31).

At least at the time Bacon wrote this plan, he was not yet close to achieving a complete removal of skepticism, insofar as he could only offer different degrees of probability.[58]

On the other hand, in I §67 Bacon more openly criticizes these skeptics by reason of their method. Now, if all we have in between these two aphorisms is Bacon's presentation of the doctrine of the idols, we ought to examine whether this doctrine may represent a *part* of this long-term project of distancing himself from the skeptics (instead of being a simple recapitulation of the problems already offered by them). How far can this doctrine be taken as supporting the new approach we find in I §67, or else as collaborating towards making philosophical research stop going round in circles (indefinitely renewing the *epochē*) and start to achieve a progressive knowledge of nature? Is this role connected with the particular features of Bacon's doctrine?

In fact, the absence of skeptical arguments in Bacon's doctrine is also the product of a methodological decision. Bacon writes, at the end of the *pars destruens* of *NO*:

> This refusal (*redargutio*) [of the natural human reason left by itself, the demonstrations, and the received systems and doctrines of philosophy] has been only as it could be: which is by signs and the testimony of the causes, seeing that I (disagreeing with the others on both principles and demonstrations) had not other way of confutation (*confutatio*) open to me. (*NO* I, §115; Sp I, 211; OFB 173)[59]

The term he invariably uses to describe the negative part of his method is *redargutio*, that is, a simple refusal, and not *refutatio*; both of these should be taken, accordingly, as different forms of *confutatio*. In *Tempus Partus Masculus*, written before *NO*, this is the reason he offers for this alternative procedure: confronting madness, he says, will only serve to exacerbate it and to lead spirits to be closed inside themselves, while he is searching instead for a way to engage men in an entirely new scientific enterprise, by means of a new form of argument (*nova ratio*).[60] But the same procedure is present in the doctrine of the idols, as he states just before presenting it in *NO*:

> Borgia said of the French expedition into Italy, that they came chalk in hand to mark up their lodgings, not sword in hands with arms to break their way in. In the same way I plan to ease my doctrines into souls suitably qualified and capable of understanding them. For

[58]About this, see Jardine (1985) and Manzo (2009). Jardine's paper opposes two tendencies in Bacon's works that are, according to her, irreconcilable: the provisional results offered by the *experientia litterata* and the knowledge of essential definitions to be provided by true induction. Manzo carefully examines Bacon's concept of probability and argues persuasively that, in his real practice of science, he was basically sympathetic to this epistemic notion, in spite of his aim of achieving absolute knowledge. As she says, "*malgré lui*, Bacon shows himself developing in fact a kind of probabilistic science instead of surpassing the limits of knowledge posed by the skeptical arguments" (2009, p. 137). We may however conjecture that Bacon's probabilism represents a positive dimension of his provisional usage of skeptical elements, combined with a different methodological perspective, as I will try to show here.

[59]I have slightly changed the OFB translation.

[60]"*Nova est inuenienda ratio, qua mentis obductissimis illabis possimus*" (*Temporis Partus Masculus*, Sp III, 529).

> confutations (*confutationum*) cannot be employed when the differences are upon the first principles and the very notions, and even upon the forms of demonstration. (*NO* I, §35; Sp I, 162; OFB 77)

Here the term "confutation" cannot have the wider meaning it must have in I §115, but refers to a refutation made by arguments, which is precisely what Bacon refuses to do in his Doctrine. Instead of *arguing* against the existing methods, concepts and principles, he only *describes* their problems, and their connections with deeper ones from which they spring. Yet the changes applied to the skeptical materials, at least concerning this aspect, are mainly due to a rhetorical need. However, let us not think that this is a secondary matter, but one with deep philosophical consequences. Bacon is already indicating, albeit indirectly, that the skeptics, insofar as they remain attached to the task of refuting the dogmatic philosophers, are not able to go further in the direction of the truth.

As we said, Bacon's doctrine of the idols is followed by a critical analysis of the causes and signs of the existing doctrines and their methods (*NO* I, §§70–92). Here again, we may also find skeptical themes, such as the trope of *diaphonia*, or the conflict amongst philosophers (which Bacon takes, once again, as only a sign of the present state of science, and not as part of a proof that truth is not available).[61] But he also dwells largely on the historical and social dimensions of the origin of the available doctrines and methods. Ironically, Bacon remarks that the "sign" under which the science of that time was born was not an auspicious one, since the wisdom of the Greeks, who laid much of the foundations, was a magisterial one and mostly turned to disputations (*NO* I, §71). Accordingly, they mainly employed "anticipations," which are powerful means of obtaining agreement when opinion and dogmas are at stake (*NO* I, §§27–9). But what results from them is a method which is "full of words but barren of works," and a puerile one, inasmuch as it is incapable of generating anything, as it is incapable of a serious inquisition of the truth (*NO* I, §71; Sp I, 181; OFB 115). Bacon had already pointed out the immoderate preference for a historical age as a sort of *idola specum*; now he evokes it to stress that a harmful reverence of antiquity, authority and consent is usually shared by moderns. And this "childish" attitude, according to him, is "boosted by the craftiness and guile of those who have dealt with and handed down the sciences," as they worked to make them look "perfect and nicely finished off,"[62] when actually they were not. This is why Bacon praises the aphoristic form, used by those more ancient seekers (and

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[61] *NO* I, §§76–7; cf. *PH* I, 165; *Acad.* II, 114–5. This skeptical motive is current in Renaissance authors with a skeptical tendency, such as Agrippa von Nettesheim, Erasmus, and Montaigne. Bacon and Montaigne equally remark that the state of *diaphonia* among philosophers may be not so clear in their time because of the Aristotelian authority in philosophy. Cf. *Essais* II, 12, 538ff.

[62] *NO* I, §§85, 86 (Sp I, 193; OFB 138–9). In *Dist. Op.* he remarks, concerning the differences between the goal of his science and that of the traditional ones: "For the end set down for this science of mine is not the discovery of arguments but of arts; not what agrees with principles but the principles themselves; not probable reasons but designations and directions for works. And different aims beget different effects. For one aims to beat an opponent in debate, the other to bend nature to works" (Sp I, 135–6; OFB 28–9).

also by himself) as a way to prevent their wisdom from being "linked together by a rhetorical method" (*NO* I, § 86; Sp I, 193–4; OFB 138–9).

The skeptics did not aim to advance any opinion or dogmas, nor did they offer arguments to support their own position. They advanced their confutative arguments only to block the opposite arguments produced by the dogmatic philosophies in favor of their presumed truths, so that they could achieve suspension of judgment. Nevertheless, this did not prevent Bacon from mentioning the name of the Academic skeptic Carneades when referring to the whole set of the ancient Greek philosophers as "Sophists," because of their affinities with the rhetoricians (*NO* I, §71). We can here conjecture that Bacon took the skeptics' philosophical practice, insofar as their reflections are mostly a reaction against those of the dogmatists, as sharing with them the same patterns of rationality, and, broadly speaking, the same intellectual habitudes. This is why they act as "to fix and in a way perpetuate the *Idols*": all their philosophical effort could not but work as a kind of indirect argument to their conclusion that "nothing can be known." Even if they consider their conclusion as being a provisional statement, their method cannot help but make it a definitive one. This is probably the reason he removed from the idols the argumentative dimension of the original skeptical tropes and did not mention the problem of the criterion). He refuses to extend a debate which is grounded in insufficient methods, while the main work to be done involves a quite different investigation. Moreover, the argumentative dimension of traditional skepticism cannot but keep philosophy indefinitely tied to a skeptical diagnosis, which cannot itself be removed by means of argument.

Bacon's criticism of traditional philosophies for having relied too heavily on the power of argument could certainly sound unexpected to most readers, since it is provided by one of the main authors who championed the modern image of scientific research, in many influential ways. However, his analysis of how these philosophies are limited by their cultural context is certainly not to be mistaken for a plea for any sort of relativism, but part of a methodological reflection. Bacon is clearly not aiming to dismiss logic,[63] but is only critically assessing what he takes to be its limited reach insofar as it is used as a method for research into nature. And for the same reason, he distrusts what appears to be persuasive only by the force of an argument, as opposed to what can be produced by experience.[64]

[63] "I reject syllogistic demonstration, for it works haphazardly and lets nature slip through its fingers. For though no one doubts that things agreeing in a middle term agree with each other (which is a kind of mathematical certainty), yet this conceals sleight of hand, for the syllogism is made of propositions, propositions of words, and words are the tokens and signs of notions. Thus, if the very notions of mind . . . are ineptly and recklessly abstracted from things . . . everything collapses" (*Dist. Op*. Sp I, 136; OFB, 30–1).

[64] One of the problems his method has to face is related to the fact that "the subtlety of nature is greater many times over the subtlety of argument" (*NO* I, §24; Sp I, 51; OFB, 72–3), and to such an extent that even what he brings forward can hardly be accepted according to the criteria which are in use: "no judgment can be rightly formed either of my method or of the discoveries to which it leads, by means of anticipations (that is to say, of the reasoning which is now in use), since I cannot be called on to abide by the sentence of a tribunal which is itself on trial" (*NO* I, §34; Sp I, 52; OFB 52–3).

We have so far only dealt with Bacon's criticism of the argumentative dimension of the skeptical problems. But how is it connected with the need for a deeper criticism of the faculties of the mind, and with the need to blame the skeptics for having committed a calumny against nature? This is, however, how he blames indirectly the skeptics in aphorism I, §75, where he includes among the "signs" of the present state of the sciences the testimony of the authors who were mainly followed at that time:

> Even [the] authors who pronounce so confidently on the nature of things still change tack in their more sensible moments to grumble about the subtlety of nature, the obscurity of things, and the weakness of human wit. Now if this were all they did, other, less courageous people might perhaps be deterred from further investigation, while other again with quicker and bolder wits might be roused and incited to make further progress. But it is not enough for them to admit defeat on their own account, but whatever is unknown or untried by themselves or their masters, they set beyond the bounds of possibility, and decree, as if their art told them so, that the thing is impossible to know or achieve. This is the height of pride and malice, and turns the weakness of their own discoveries in a slander on nature itself, and reduces everyone else to despair. Hence the New Academy, which maintained *Acatalepsia* quite openly, damned men to everlasting darkness. Hence the opinion that forms or the true differences of things (which are really the laws of pure act) are impossible to discover and beyond man's grasp etc. (Sp I, 184; OFB 119–21)[65]

Could Bacon have in mind here Sextus' criticism of the Academics (also found in Montaigne), where he reproaches them for maintaining that truth cannot be found, while the Pyrrhonians remain in search of it? (*PH* I, 1–4; *Essais* II, 12, 502A) The answer is "no," since Bacon refers to Pyrrho and the "*Ephetici*" as the most radical skeptics who would have destroyed all investigation and, for that reason, were farthest from his own view (and this may suggest that he did not know Sextus' *PH*). But even if Bacon has not fairly captured the Pyrrhonians' appraisal of their own philosophical position, this does not seem to be an essential point of his criticism. He is suggesting that the skeptics, because of their own type of research, would fall into such problems in spite of their own intentions – as it would also be useless if they claimed not to destroy investigation, but to follow things as probable (see *NO* I, §67).

I think that Bacon's reproach here can be better understood in connection with another methodological feature of his doctrine of the idols, which can also be contrasted with skeptical arguments. Despite the various criteria by which the Pyrrhonian modes can be presented,[66] Sextus says explicitly that he does not intend to impose any hierarchy on their content as a result of the order in which they are expounded. His exposition does not take any stand about their number or validity, since "they may be unsound, and there may be more than those [he will] describe"

[65] Also in I §67 (Sp I, 178; OFB 109) Bacon writes that, while the Academy first introduced *acatalepsia* as a sort of jest and irony against the sophist, "the New Academy elevated it to a dogmatic status and openly maintained it."

[66] They may equally be classified according to their relation with the person that judges or the subject on which one judges (see *PH* I, 38–9).

(*PH* I, 35),[67] and that he just wants to offer as varied as possible an exposition of the antinomies between objects of perception and thought (*PH* I, 9–10, 31); the more fully they correspond to the different ways in which dogmatic presumption may show up, the more useful they can be for a skeptical therapy (*PH* III, 280).

These remarks may appear to be close to what Bacon writes about the *idola theatri*: he admits that his remark does not apply only to the existing philosophies, "for many such stories may be put together and concocted, seeing that very different errors can spring from causes pretty much identical" (*NO* I, §44; Sp. I, 164; OFB 83). Accordingly, from a skeptical point of view, one could multiply the arguments to be set forth against each new doctrine which could be offered upon the same faulty basis. But if we consider Bacon's doctrine in its entirety, it clearly appears to be arranged according to the different degrees to which the idols are rooted, according to him, in human nature. The *idola theatri* are the only ones which present themselves plainly through the writings of the philosophers, while the other three "steal into the understanding secretly" (*NO* I, §61; Sp I, 172; OFB 94–5). So they are just the more superficial effect of the way we are entangled by the *idola fori*, the meaningless and imaginary terms present not only in philosophies, but also in the common language. Human languages are but the creation of men and the product of their idiosyncrasies, although they all have in common the fact that they are misled by their cognitive faculties. Bacon's idols seem to be presented as offering a network of systematic illusions, actively articulated to imprison man in an image of the world produced *ex analogia homini* and not *ex analogia rerum*. This is why they are the "deepest fallacies of the human mind": "They do not deceive in particulars, as the other [fallacies] do, by clouding and snaring the judgment; but by a corrupt and ill-ordered predisposition of mind, which as it were perverts and infects all the anticipations of the intellect" (*De Aug.* V, chapter iv; Sp I 643; IV, 431). So, in one single movement, Bacon may both set forth the problems that lie beyond the prevailing philosophical doctrines (which largely parallel skeptical diagnoses) and indicate how the skeptical position is methodologically insufficient to overcome these problems. The skeptics missed a clear picture of their peculiar structure by which these problems can reinforce and preserve themselves. If the traditional methods and doctrines misleadingly offer a finished picture of the world which is composed in conformity with what appears to be reasonable, they reflect the way in which the Idols work in cooperation to produce it. But the skeptics also aimed to react in a more rational way according to the same notion of rationality adopted by the dogmatists.

More than this, they relied on a practical criterion in order to live their lives. The Pyrrhonians accept the *phainomenon*, which includes the "guidance of nature," by which the skeptical philosopher is capable of sensation and thought (*PH* I, 19),[68] and they accept their passive affections by which they are led to eat when they are hungry. This same acceptance of passive feelings is related to how they use language:

[67] I follow here Annas and Barnes' translation.

[68] The same point is noted by Montaigne in his interpretation: see *Essais* II, 12, 505A.

the skeptic states "what appears to himself and announces his own impression in a non-dogmatic way, without making any positive assertion regarding the external realities" (*PH* I, 15).[69] The Academics accepted as a practical criterion the *probabile* (as did Bacon, at least provisionally). At the same time, as we saw, this is why the Academics claimed they were not overthrowing research into nature, although their research was insufficient, in Bacon's opinion. But let us recall that, from the analysis of the first three kinds of idols, we concluded that Bacon's answer to the skeptic should be related to his concept of innate idols, which lie unperceived in the operation of our intellectual faculties; they cannot be gotten rid of, but have to be taken into account in order to stop repeating the same errors. And if the *idola fori* can count as innate, despite being produced by men, this seems to correspond to the way our language imposes on things some distinctions that become accepted as if they were natural. Now, this may also afford us some understanding as to why he criticizes the skeptics for having taken their own impossibility as a "calumny on nature herself." After all, is not this *phaenomenical* ground, which they occupy as far as practical life is concerned, as it were a philosophically neutral territory, the same which, in Bacon's view, appears as an image of nature created by the idols *ex analogia homini*? But if this is the case, these Idols are out of the reach of skeptical reflection because of their practical criterion. The skeptics follow what appears to them as a spontaneous image of nature, which is in fact produced by "innate idols," human creations which can no longer be recognized for what they are. This is why they could not take their conclusion as being only provisional in the full sense of this word; more precisely, they are unable to recognize to what extent the way things appear to them is only provisional.[70]

Certainly we cannot acquire true knowledge about nature if we do not start by following what is offered by the senses. But Bacon aimed to replace misleading *experientia* by careful *experimenta*. Nature does not reveal itself to us spontaneously, and our experience, since it is necessarily limited, gives rise to a distorted picture of nature. In order to overcome the limitation of our experience, we have to devise strategies to oblige nature to give up its secrets (*NO* I, §70). According to Bacon, the skeptics' conclusion is temporarily correct insofar as greater rational capacities than those we presently have are not yet available.[71] But these faculties

[69]Montaigne again remarks on this aspect of Pyrrhonism in *Essais* II, 12, 578A.

[70]Our understanding of Bacon's appraisal of Pyrrhonian skepticism could change in view of the more recent scholarship about it. Frede (1987) and Porchat Pereira (2006), for example, give a new evaluation of Sextus' relation to the empirical medical tradition. But again, it is not clear that this would lead him to step back from the same criticism.

[71]Bacon observes, in the *proemium* of the *Instauratio Magna* (*Sic cogitavit*), that human understanding on its own creates cognitive blocks that it is unable to overcome, and then he notes that, in consequence, "human reasoning as applied to the investigation of nature is not at all well sorted and set up, but like some stately pile with no foundations" (Sp I, 121; OFB 2–3) Again, in *Dist. Op.*, he remarks that the second part of *NO* aims to initiate the equipping of the intellect for the journey: "The purpose . . . of the second part is to expound the doctrine of improving and perfecting the use of reason in the investigation of things, and of the true helps of the intellect, so that in this way (as far as our human and mortal condition allows) we may raise up the intellect and amplify

are to be provided in the long run by means of a method devised to be renewed and adapted, as it goes beyond the illusions produced by the human mind in its spontaneous endeavor towards a true picture of things as they are in their own nature, through the collective work of several generations.

At the same time, we may take Bacon's conception of nature to be consistent with his own interpretation of the Christian doctrine of the fall, according to which the sin should be limited to man's presumption of moral knowledge, so that matters of faith and theology should not block or curb investigation of nature.[72] His stronger criticism of our innate intellectual capacities could be related only to our "second nature," a corrupted one, which does not correspond to the knowledge and power over nature to which man was originally entitled, and which could be restored by means of the right method. In this case, these capacities should correspond to the new faculties with which man can be eventually bestowed, as an artistic but legitimate extension of his true nature. But if this may explain how Baconian *Instauratio Magna* could be joined with Christian faith, it is important to stress that this parallel cannot have a justificatory dimension. Bacon intends to maintain a very sharp distinction between the realms of reason and faith, as he is equally careful about the philosophical requirements that such a hope of discovering the truth is supposed to meet.

By the end of his presentation of the "signs and causes," Bacon avows that the picture just offered is one that could also lead us to despair of knowing the truth. Then he compares himself to Columbus, who had to show that the project of his voyage was reasonable, before its true value was confirmed by experience (*NO* I, §92).[73] And the main reason for hope, according to him, is to "bring men to the particulars; especially to particulars digested and arranged in my Tables of Discovery . . . since this is not merely the promise of the thing, but the thing itself" (*NO* I, §92; Sp I, 199; OFB 148–9). Nonetheless, he feels the need to advance still more observations in support of his project, returning once more to the skeptics as if to regulate the philosophical requirements that would have to be met in order to foster such a hope:

> But we find that by far the greatest obstacle to the advancement of the sciences and the adoption of new tasks and provinces lies in men's despairing belief that the job is impossible. For in such matters prudent and rigorous men generally lack confidence, meditating on nature's obscurity, life's shortness, the senses' deceits, our fallibility of judgment, the intractability of experiments, and the like. . . Now, . . . we really must take care not to relax

its faculties [*facultate amplificetur*] for overcoming the dark and difficulties of nature" (Sp I, 135; OFB 28–9, slightly modified translation). See also *NO* I, §§ 95, 97.

[72]In the Preface of the *Instauratio Magna* (Sp I, 132; OFB 22–3), he writes that the Fall was not occasioned by "that pure and uncorrupted natural knowledge whereby Adam gave names to the creatures according to their property," but "ambitious and proud desire of moral knowledge to judge good and evil."

[73]Bacon says that, if he does not strengthen the reasons for hope, "the rest tends more to make men despondent (i.e., to think less and worse than they do now of what is currently available, and feel and know the wretchedness of their lot more fully) than to encourage any enthusiasm or appetite for trying their strength" (Sp I, 198–9; OFB 149, 151).

> the severity of ours, and get carried away by the love of the brightest and best; instead we must look intently for the dawning light of hope and from what quarter it shines and, ignoring its less substantial rays, we must thoroughly consider and concentrate on those which seem to shine more steadily... So now it is time to speak of hope, especially as I make no vain promises, and do not seek to force nor ensnare men's judgments, but to lead them by the hand and of their own accord. (*NO* I, §92; Sp I, 198–9; OFB 148–9)[74]

The doctrine of the idols thus aimed to transform skeptical materials so as to "purge, sweep and level the floor of the mind," collaborating in the effort to prepare men's intellect for what was to follow (*NO* I §115; Sp I, 211; OFB 172–3). We could apply here the same metaphor Bacon uses to describe the task of preparing minds for the new induction, in his *Redargutio Philosophiarum*: "Certainly one cannot write on signboards without having before effaced what was written, but on the spirits it is difficult to efface what is written without writing other things before" (Sp III, 558). Skeptical problems are then rewritten in a new doctrine which could avoid the way they passively anticipate an answer and thus leave the door open for a new genre of investigation. But it is important not to forget that, according to Bacon, his doctrine has essentially a negative role in this preparative task. It aims only to reshape the original skeptical problems so as *not to remove* entirely the hope of attaining the truth, and without denying that he is largely in agreement with these philosophers.

A final word must be said about the evident parallel one may certainly have in mind here concerning Bacon and Descartes, which would require another paper to deal with adequately. But it is not to be overlooked that, even though Descartes' methodical doubt has become the standard model for "modern skepticism," Bacon's idols clearly correspond to a wider recognition of the force of the original skeptical problems, despite their also being the result of a methodical treatment of them. Descartes employed skeptical doubts mostly to exhibit clearly his own metaphysics, which is at the same time a refutation of the skeptics. Bacon's idols are not a refutation of the skeptics, but an alternative presentation of problems that have the power to last by themselves and may only be removed through the effort of many generations working together to elaborate an adequate method. For the moment, all we can do, in Bacon's words, "is to use a kind of thoughtful prudence to guard against them." Descartes' "modern skepticism," or what has come to be so called, certainly owes much of its philosophical relevance to Descartes' ingenious new arguments and the new skeptical problems they seem to bring forth, as has been noted by Popkin (2003, p. 150). But this is precisely what should not be done, according to Bacon's own "new skepticism," if we are to achieve knowledge in a way that is

[74] A similar statement is found in *Scala Intellectus*: "it seems, for sure, that they wished, by means of the distinction between the true and the probable, to destroy the certainty but to retain the use. And, as far as concerns the active part, they want that the choice of things remains unharmed. Nevertheless, once they removed the hope of searching for the truth from men's soul, there is no doubt, they cut the nerves of human investigation and transformed the indifferent freedom of investigation and the activity of discovering in a certain exercise of judgment" (Sp II, 687).

really capable of overcoming real skepticism, since it aimed to offer a coherent picture of our epistemic situation. Should we take Bacon as a philosopher who simply missed the depth of modern skepticism? Maybe we could rather apply Bacon's own words, to some extent, to the reception of his own model of "skepticism": "Time (is) like a river, carrying down to us matter lighter and full of wind, while letting the heavier and solid stuff sink" (*NO* I, §71; Sp I, 181; OFB 114–5).

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Chapter 7
Skepticism against Reason in Pierre Bayle's Theory of Toleration

John Christian Laursen

Recent work on Pierre Bayle interprets him as a full-blooded rationalist (Mori 1999, Israel 2006). I am going to argue that he may just as well be interpreted as one of the opposites, a Pyrrhonian or Academic skeptic. There are indeed at least two sides of the argument in almost everything he wrote, and one can find refutations somewhere of almost everything he affirmed anywhere else. I think this can be understood as a distinct and valuable approach to philosophy, and one that is fairly comparable to the Pyrrhonian and Academic traditions because it is in many ways similar to the method of other writers in those traditions such as Carneades, Sextus Empiricus, and Montaigne.

Bayle's *Philosophical Commentary* of 1686, widely accepted as one of the greatest defenses of religious toleration in the history of philosophy, contains just such a tension between rationality and skepticism. From one point of view then, it is internally contradictory, and perhaps even incoherent. If philosophy depends on consistency and coherence, then as a matter of philosophy it may be a failure. But there may still be some lessons to be learned from this sort of failure. Let us turn to the background to Bayle's text.

One of the most fascinating pieces of interpretive agility in the history of religion concerns a parable of Jesus told in St. Luke, chapter 14. In that parable, a man prepares a feast and invites his friends. They are not available to come, so he orders his servant to "go out into the highways and hedges", find people, "and compel them to come in." This is ostensibly a story about inviting people to a feast, and yet it was used as early as St. Augustine to justify violent persecution of heretics. The "feast" was interpreted to mean the church, and the word "compel" (Augustine used the words "compelle intrare") was taken to justify use of the sword to bring people into the church. I call this "interpretive agility" because I assume I do not have to provide a list of all of the things that Jesus says about peace and gentleness. There are a few places where other things that Jesus says could be interpreted to

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imply that violence is a good means for converting people,[1] but in the seventeenth century Catholics relied on Augustine's interpretation to justify sending Protestants to the galleys, quartering troops in Protestant families until they converted, and many other measures. And as if their protests against the Catholics for misinterpretation of this passage had no effect on their own interpretations, when the Protestants had the power to use violence in order to convert Catholics, they relied on the same interpretation.

Bayle, a French Protestant by birth who was living in exile in Rotterdam, responded to Augustine and the Catholics with *A Philosophical Commentary on These Words of the Gospel, Luke 14:23, "Compel Them to Come In, That My House May be Full"* (Bayle 1686–8). It contains one of the most through-going arguments for religious toleration in the early modern Western tradition. Oddly enough, it has not received the attention that John Locke's shorter "A Letter Concerning Toleration" has received, even though it goes further, and was published earlier, than Locke's work (see Laursen 1998). One of the reasons for this comparative neglect could be English chauvinism: never underestimate the influence of nationalism in the historiography of philosophy and the history of ideas. Everyone wants their national or linguistic tradition to have most of the important works.

The Bayle literature is divided over the question of Bayle's rationalism. This essay will contribute to that debate. On the one side, Gianluca Mori and Jonathan Israel contend that Bayle was above all a rationalist, relying in the last instance on reason (Mori 1999, Israel 2006). On the other, Richard Popkin has described Bayle as a "superskeptic." These poles will set the terms for our analysis in the following. I will be arguing that on this issue and concerning this text, Popkin is closer to the truth than the rationalist interpretations.

Bayle's *Philosophical Commentary* is divided into four parts. The first two appeared in 1686, the third in 1687, and the fourth in 1688. The last one dealt at some length with the fascinating question of the erroneous conscience, with comparisons to judges and doctors who make good faith mistakes. The third one was a sentence-by-sentence refutation of St. Augustine's argument for the justification of violence based on the interpretation of the parable of the feast. The second one was an answer to objections, and it initiates the erroneous conscience analysis. I shall start with the first one, which laid out nine arguments against reading the parable as a justification of violence.

Bayle frames his argument by a claim for the priority of what he variously calls the "Light of Nature," the "first Principles of Reason" (1686–8, p. 65), "inward Light," "natural Light," and "interior Truth" (p. 70). All theologians, he asserts, rely on reason whenever they make arguments. That means "That Reason, speaking to us by the Axioms of natural Light, or metaphysical Truths, is the supreme

[1] Jesus overthrowing the tables of the moneychangers and chasing them out of the temple (John 2:15) or saying that "I came not to send peace, but a sword" (Matthew 10:34) might have been interpreted to justify violence.

Tribunal, and final Judg without Appeal of whatever's propos'd to the human Mind" (p. 67). Bayle's crucial move is to claim that reason naturally comes up with the idea of moral equality and fairness. It follows that "all moral Laws, without exception, ought to be regulated by that natural Idea of Equity" (p. 69).

This is going to be the ultimate guide for distinguishing the value of toleration. But that is the main problem here. Is there really a "Conscience of Right and Wrong imprinted on the Souls of all Men," an "interior Light which communicates it self immediately to all Spirits" (1686–8, p. 71)? Just as important, is this conscience or light the same in all men? Bayle's defense of toleration depends on this. Otherwise, something else that he says would undercut all such appeals, that "every one's determin'd by his own private Lights" (p. 74). If such lights are different from one person to the next, all of his arguments from natural light and philosophy can be answered by the claim that one person sees the issue differently from the next.

Bayle's first argument against a literal understanding of the word "compel" as justifying violence is that it is "repugnant to the purest and most distinct Ideas of natural Reason" (1686–8, p. 75). He starts from the claim that "by the purest and most distinct Ideas of Reason, we find there is a Being sovereignly perfect, who rules over all things, who ought to be ador'd by Mankind, who approves certain Actions, and rewards 'em" (p. 76). This may have been taken for granted by all or most of Bayle's readers, but it certainly would not be taken for granted by everybody today. Scientists would say that the "purest ideas of reason" say nothing about perfect beings ruling the world who ought to be adored nor about the merits or demerits of forcible conversions. It follows that "reason" cannot be used to reject forcible conversions. It was only a few decades later that one reader of Bayle, David Hume, wrote that "Reason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions" (Hume 1978, p. 415). Since for Hume reason depends on the passions, it cannot help us reject forcible conversions if they are motivated by one of the passions. Kant thought that there were ideas of pure reason, but much of the history of philosophy since Kant has contested that notion, saying that reason is always mixed with other things. Since it is mixed with other things, reason does not have the power to change behaviors that come with that mixture.

Bayle goes on to use his idea of reason to conclude that God only wants sincere conversions, not hypocritical ones, and violence only creates hypocrisy. But this is a contentious interpretation of what God wants. How do we know that God does not accept hypocrisy? Bayle's position also rests on a contentious interpretation of religion as a whole: "The Nature of Religion is, its being a certain Persuasion in the Soul with regard to God" (1686–8, p. 77). But my understanding of the more legalistic religions, which may include Judaism and Islam, is that the soul of the believer is not much pried into and evaluated as long as the laws are followed. Bayle is not relying on abstract reason and light, but taking for granted a Christian interpretation of religion.

Yet another point that Bayle makes is subject to debate. "Violence is incapable. . . of convincing the Judgment" (1686–8, p. 78), he asserts. But even John Locke recognized that it is not completely incapable of this. We are all familiar with so-called brain-washing. Enough violence and fear can (I do not say it must) change people's

minds. So Bayle is relying on a contentious psychology for what he claims is an argument from pure reason.

Bayle's second argument is that persecution is against the spirit of the Gospel. This is certainly a plausible interpretation. But it is only an interpretation. Bayle asserts that "natural Light distinctly inform[s] every Soul which attentively consults it, that God is just, that he loves virtue", etc. (1686–8, p. 81). A lot depends on what "attentively consults" means, but it is at least possible for a reasoning person to conclude that God is not quite fair and just. The Manicheans concluded that there must be two contending Gods, because there is too much suffering in the world for there to be only one God who is just. Bayle goes on to make a long list of such truths that are patently not truths to everyone. "That 'tis honest and praise-worthy to forgive Enemys" (p. 81) is not accepted world-wide. You could be taken for a weakling or a fool in many places for such behavior.

Bayle's seventh argument is a variation of the argument from the spirit of Christianity: it is the argument from the first centuries of Christianity. Theodosius and Augustine were innovating when they allowed violence: until then Christians did not rely on it (1686–8, p. 121). They do not have the authority of the original Christians behind them. Furthermore, his eighth argument also draws on this history, citing the complaints of the first Christians against violent persecution (p. 124).

Bayle's third argument is that the literal sense of the parable, justifying violence, would confound justice and injustice and virtue and vice, and dissolve society. This is a variation on Thucydides' argument that civil war leads to reversing the meanings of words. Bayle points out that this doctrine would convert violence and vice into kindness, equity, and justice, as long as they are exercised against heretics. There is "no Crime that does not become an Act of Religion" (1686–8, p. 89). And since "each Sect looks upon it self as the only true Religion", each one is self-authorized to change the meaning of words (p. 89). Bayle calls this "the most abominable Doctrine that ever enter'd into the Heart of Man" (p. 88). He also takes the opportunity to point out that kings will never be safe if this becomes accepted: they may use it to justify violence against subjects, but the doctrine also justifies the violence of subjects against them (p. 90).

Bayle's ninth argument is a kind of corollary of the third: it is that true Christians, whoever they are, would be involved in continual bloodshed. As "each Party believes it self the Orthodox... each Sect wou'd think it self oblig'd to obey [Jesus] by persecuting all the rest" (1686–8, p. 133).

Bayle's fourth argument turns to a global perspective. If Christians have the right to make violent conversions, then so do "Infidels." He argues for a right to missionize based on the "Duty of all" to listen to the opinions of others in order to find out if they are the truth (1686–8, p. 94). This might be a demanding duty, requiring a lot of time spent listening. But in his view, you would still reserve the right to disagree after having listened. But taking the example of the Chinese, he says that if they find out that Christianity changes the meanings of robbery, murder, and rebellion at will, they will be justified in expelling its missionaries right away (p. 96). Bayle adds the rather ironical conclusion that what is wrong with this is that it would deprive the Chinese of finding out about the truth from those missionaries. In consequence, the literal interpretation of the word "compel" must be false.

Bayle's fifth argument is that the literal interpretation justifies crime. Even if it is limited to government power, and thus cannot justify mob violence, it will always be carried too far, and any unnecessary violence is a crime. One of his chief examples is the quartering of soldiers. Because of human weakness and selfishness, of which we have "moral Certainty" (1686–8, p. 107), it cannot be done without inevitable inequity. (In contemporary terms, the abuses at Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq in 2003/4 were inevitable; you cannot send soldiers anywhere without some residual failures of discipline, unauthorized violence, and abuses of power.) Yet another crime will be the hypocrisy that violence extorts. Using the language of Christianity, he says that it would be "Blasphemy in the highest degree" to interpret Jesus' language to condone this (p. 107).

It is not enough, Bayle asserts, to say that violent conversion is justified by law. "All laws which oblige against Conscience, are made by a Person, having no Authority to enact it, and who manifestly exceeds his Power," and are thus unjust (1686–8, p. 113). Conscience… "is the Voice and Law of God in" each "particular Man" (p. 113). Princes have "no Power, either from God or Man, of enjoining their Subjects to act against Conscience" (p. 114). Note that this is a Protestant definition of conscience, not shared by most Catholics. We shall return to Bayle's further development of the defense of coercion to the effect that it saves people from an erroneous conscience. For now, I will just observe that Bayle does justify such saving of a person from him- or herself "from Reasons of State," that is, where a sect is "obnoxious, with regard to the publick Good" (p. 114–5). But that is not the case in France. At this point Bayle refers to Basilides, Great Duke of Muscovy, as an example of tyranny (p. 116). Ordering his subjects to sweat on a cold morning was just as impossible as ordering people to believe something they do not believe.

Bayle's sixth argument is that allowing Christians to make forcible conversions deprives them of one of their chief objections to the Muslims. Christians had always claimed that false religions relied on force where the true religion could rely on truth. If they rely on force, they are conceding that theirs might not be true.

Part Two of Bayle's book deals with objections to these arguments. But I do not see that Bayle's replies to these objections answer the critical points that I have made above. He continues to refer to "the Dictates of right Reason" (1686–8, p. 195) and the "clearest principles of Metaphysics" (p. 220) as if these were unproblematic. What if the light of nature, reason, inward truth, and all such labels do not in fact lead ineluctably to equality, liberty, and toleration? Bayle has made a philosophical argument – not a utilitarian or theological or reasons-of-state argument – against the use of violence in religious matters, and it must fail if there are philosophical answers to it. That means that if we can redefine religion as nothing to do with conscience – maybe obedience to God's law is enough – and God as caring little about hypocrisy – how do we know he does? – and public authority as trumping individual rights – most of the world has always believed this – Bayle's conclusions will not follow. I am not arguing that we should do any of the above, just pointing to the fragility of Bayle's case. He has a particular understanding of reason, light, and truth. He says his understanding is universal, but that is partly an empirical question: is it?

If Bayle did realize that his claims about natural reason, natural light, and the universal acceptance of his moral principles are problematic, then his assertions may be part of a rhetorical argument, designed to persuade those who are inclined to believe it anyway. He may have had reason to think that these would be successful arguments in his francophone environment or in the Republic of Letters at large of his time. But then it is not a philosophical argument in his sense; it is merely a rhetorical argument, an *ad hominem* or dialectical argument. If Bayle is indeed using such arguments, then this is one way in which he is close to the Academic and Pyrrhonian practices of arguing for the sake of therapy, not for the sake of truth.

So far I have been presenting Bayle's rationalist arguments and my own critical appraisal. So far, the interpreters of Bayle who find him to be a rationalist are vindicated. But now we arrive at the more interesting part: Bayle's own critical undermining of his own assertions of the rationality of religious toleration. I am going to show that chapters 8–10 of Part Two pursue a skeptical strategy instead of a dogmatic strategy in order to argue against the idea that Jesus intended us to persecute in order to compel people to join his church. Bayle may have no better reason for this stance than his own gut feelings, but that is an accepted Pyrrhonian justification. There had been a few earlier places where he had reminded people about how they had been wrong before, and might still be wrong now. But now there is full-blown appeal to human ignorance and ineptitude. This is Bayle's famous analysis of the erroneous conscience (see Laursen 2001).

Recall that Bayle has been relying on a strong notion of truth. Now he argues that "whatever a Conscience well directed allows us to do for the advancement of Truth, an erroneous Conscience will warrant for advancing a suppos'd Truth" (1686–8, p. 220). But if erroneous consciences exist and have rights, how can we ever have a single truth? As he puts it, "the Law of never violating the Lights of our Conscience is such that God himself can never dispense with"; this is an "eternal and immutable Law" (p. 227). But what stability or unity can we have if consciences can call for opposite truths and lights?

Bayle recognizes that his arguments justify conscientious persecutors. His answer is only that "it does not follow, that they act without Sin", and that "this ought to not hinder our crying out loudly against their false Maxims, and endeavoring to enlighten their Understandings" (1686–8, p. 242). But they are still justified in acting on their wrong understandings, and even required to do so. We would say that his assertions that no one would ever preach "Sodomy, Murder, and Rapine" because they are patently against "natural Rectitude" and scripture (p. 244) are simply wrong: people have relabeled those actions as justifiable.

Worst of all for a doctrine that relies on "truth" and "light" are the epistemological arguments, especially in chapter 10. "God has not printed any Characters or Signs on the Truths which he has reveal'd, at least not on the greatest part of 'em, by which we might certainly and infallibly discern 'em" (1686–8, p. 259). If "Conscience is given us as a Touch-stone of Truth" and our consciences err, then we will not agree on truths (p. 261). Granted any notion of the Fall, we have to conclude that "God in the present Condition of Man exacts no more from him than a sincere and diligent Search after truth", not the actual achievement of it (p. 264). Bayle even

concludes that consciences are not very different from matters of taste: "No matter whether this Conscience presents to one Man such an Object as true, to another as false… Does not one man's Tast tell him that such Food is good, and the Tast of another tell him it's bad?" (p. 271). But truths and light made up the whole edifice of his claims for toleration until this point in the *Philosophical Commentary*, and now they are just like matters of taste?

I hope it is already clear that this line of argument is going to undermine all of what Bayle has said about reason and rationality. I want to argue here that it is a line of argument that is very close to, and indeed probably indebted to, ancient skepticism. Here, I am going to focus on the branch of ancient skepticism known as Pyrrhonism. It includes a number of strategies, attitudes, and ways of dealing with belief and knowledge claims that ostensibly go back to Pyrrho of Elis and are best captured for our purposes in the writings of Sextus Empiricus (see Laursen 2005b). One of them is that we should suspend judgment about beliefs and claims to know the truth behind appearances because our best reasoning does not give us any confidence in them, and another is that the different customs we find all around the world undermine any claim that any of them is right or wrong in a fundamental sense. Pyrrhonism was not philosophically incoherent nor necessarily immoral (see Laursen 2004, 2005a). My overall argument is that Bayle has a lot in common with this tradition, and that Bayle's Pyrrhonism undermines his rationalism.

Now, it will take some work to make the case that what Bayle says about the erroneous conscience and the force of education and custom is Pyrrhonian. He does not label it Pyrrhonism explicitly in this text. There are good reasons for that. Pyrrhonism was closely associated in Bayle's day with immorality and atheism, and he later had to add a "Clarification concerning Pyrrhonism" to the second edition of his *Historical and Critical Dictionary* (1702) in order to deflect charges that his work was subversive.

The argument from the force of education and custom was an argument Bayle had made many times before. Here is an example from his *Diverse Thoughts on the Comet* of 1682: most of the time, one does not live by one's principles, but according to one's "temperament, the natural inclination toward pleasure, the taste one contracts for certain objects, the desire to please someone, a habit gained in the commerce of one's friends" (Bayle 1682, Section 136). There is some evidence that this sort of argument came from Bayle's exposure to the skeptical traditions. We know he had studied them early because in a letter to Minutoli of 1673 he paraphrases Sextus Empiricus to the effect that "the most general division between all of the sects of philosophers is between those who think they have found the truth, those who think it cannot be found, and those who think they have not yet found it and keep searching", and reviews various teachings of the Academics and Pyrrhonians (Bayle 1999, vol. 1, p. 185).

The book in which Bayle spelled out the meaning of Pyrrhonism at greatest length was his *Diccionaire historique et critique [Historical and Critical Dictionary]* of 1697, written well after the *Philosophical Commentary*. His article on Pyrrho surveys some of the chief elements of Pyrrhonism. They can be usefully divided into the critiques of reason and the claim that custom and education

determine most of what we think. Pyrrhonism supplies a series of underminings of reason: “the minds of men are unstable”; “the inconstancy of human opinions and passions is so great that it might be said that man is a small republic that often changes its magistrates” (Bayle 1991, article “Pyrrho,” p. 209 [note F]); the Pyrrhonians “were always seeking, and always unsteady, and ready at all times to reason after a new manner, according to the various occurrences they met with” (Bayle 1734–8, article “Pyrrho,” 4:657 [note F]). On the role of custom and education, “Pyrrho maintained that there was not really any one thing that was this or that, and that the nature of things depended upon laws and customs; that is to say, that men by their laws and customs made some things good, laudable, ill, blameable &c” (Bayle 1734–8, article “Pyrrho,” 4:658 [note I]).

Bayle’s article on Pyrrho also supplies us with a warrant for looking for his understanding of skepticism elsewhere, too. Of Pyrrho, he says “His opinions did not differ much from those of Arcesilaus,” one-time head of the Academy and one of the founders of Academic skepticism (Bayle 1991, p. 194). There was only one difference, that the Academics affirmed the incomprehensibility of things where the Pyrrhonians suspended judgment even about that: “in every thing else they were perfectly alike” (Bayle 1734–8, article “Pyrrho,” 4:653 [note A]). So when the article on Carneades, Arcesilaus’ successor, says that he “allowed of nothing but Probabilities for the use of Life; and beyond that he believed there was no Certainty or Evidence” (Bayle 1734–8, 2:326 [note B]), we may take that as a skeptical critique of claims about truth and reason such as those that Bayle made about toleration in the *Philosophical Commentary*. When he says of the Academics, “their Speculation hung betwixt two Contraries; but their Practice stuck fast to one of them” and goes on to observe that “It is the way of the World: Men do not live up to their Principles,” this is yet another undermining of the rationalism of the first half of the *Philosophical Commentary* (Bayle 1734–8, 2:320 [note G]).

Pyrrhonism is mentioned or discussed in many other articles, usually to make one of the above points about the weakness of reason and the strength of custom and education (Bayle 1734–8, 5:103 [Index]). And often enough, the same points are made without reference to Pyrrhonism. In one article he notes that “our reason is suitable for making everything perplexing and for raising doubts about everything. No sooner has it built something than if provides the means for destroying it” (Bayle 1991, article “Bunel,” p. 42): this can stand as an analysis of Bayle’s own text in the *Philosophical Commentary*. Rather than depending on reason, our “ideas of virtue depend on education and custom” (Bayle 1991, article “Jonas,” p. 106). In observations on the Manicheans he insists that human reason “is a principle of destruction. . . [and] is only fit to make man aware of his own blindness and weakness” (Bayle 1991, article “Manicheans,” p. 151). In discussion of Spinoza, he notes that “there is no contradiction between these two things: (1) The light of reason teaches me that this is false; (2) I believe it nonetheless because I am convinced that this light is not infallible” (Bayle 1991, article “Spinoza,” p. 298). Finally, his critique of the Socinians is that their reliance on reason is “hardly suitable for converting the people. . . [and] is more appropriate for leading persons. . . into *pyrrhonisme*” than anything else (Bayle 2000, article “Socin, Faustus,” p. 266).

Such observations are repeated in an almost infinite set of variations on the theme in Bayle's vast texts.

So when we return to the *Philosophical Commentary* I hope we can recognize the vocabulary and way of thinking that Bayle was later to describe as Pyrrhonian, Academic, or at least as skeptical. The truth is, Bayle insists, we believe what we believe based on our education. "Education is undoubtedly capable of making the Evidence of Truths of Right utterly disappear" (1686–8, p. 275). Then what has happened to his enterprise of teaching us that truths and light lead to toleration? If some "truths" are wrong and some are right, and education determines which ones we think are right, we cannot rely on such beliefs. He is trying to educate us to believe the ideas about toleration that he thinks are right, but he has no more warrant than the persecutors.

Part four, the Supplement, reinforces this side of Bayle's argument. He demonstrates over and over that it is "the imperious Force of Education" (1686–8, p. 470), "Custom and Education" (p. 471) that determines beliefs (see also pp. 473 ff.), not reason, a universal conscience, and natural light. Even within reason, it turns out that there are reasons on both sides of every issue. Yet another reason to doubt the universality of reason as such is that we do not know why one set of reasons can appeal to one person and another to another person: all Bayle can say is that "naturally his Turn of Understanding is such, that he's struck much more by one sort of Reasons than by another" (p. 490). Each person may be attracted to one set of reasons "by an odd Turn of Understanding" or by a "relish" (p. 490). As Bayle puts it, "I can't for my part see, that there must necessarily be a criminal Passion at heart, to make a Man prefer the Reasons which are alleg'd against some Points of Orthodoxy, to the Reasons which support 'em" (p. 490). But if "reason" can go either way, what of all the appeals to reason and natural light at the beginning of the book?

One answer to this point would be to distinguish religious orthodoxy, justified by theological reason only (if that is not a contradiction in terms for Bayle), from the grand claims about truth and justice of the beginning of the book, which might be drawn from philosophical reason. But Bayle has also conceded that philosophical reason can also err. Theological and philosophical reason can both be wrong.

Yet another chapter of the supplement, titled "Whether the Arguments for the Truth are always more solid than those for Falsehood" (1686–8, pp. 531 ff.), undermines any claims for philosophical reason even more. There are, he says, "necessary truths... [that are] so evident... [that they] carry their own Reason along with 'em which no one contests" (p. 531). But these are, quite literally, only the points that no one contests. The persecutors not only obviously contest the ideas of the people they persecute, but they just as obviously contest the idea that persecution is wrong. So these are cases "when a necessary truth is not evident" (p. 531). And people decide what these are according to the way "they are determin'd by Temper and Complexion to some Notions rather than others" (p. 533). In all cases, "each have had their Patrons and Partys in different Countrys, and different Ages of the World" (p. 533). If a person "inclines to one, 'tis more from some Prevalence of Temper than that of the Arguments" (p. 534). That means, of course, that on contested issues like the value of persecution, it is not abstract and universal reason,

but rather temperament that determines which way we will go. It is easy to see why Walter Rex concluded that "There seems to be nothing left but ruins. One wonders if even the idea of tolerance remains" (Rex 1965, p. 185). Bayle has reduced himself to claiming that if one wants to – and Bayle does – one may be tolerant, but there does not appear to be any reason why one ought to be tolerant.

The dilemma here is that on the one hand, Bayle has talked about the clearest truths of reason and natural light, and so forth. But he has also raised epistemological barriers to knowing what they are in many cases, and argued that we are pretty much captive to our consciences, whether right or erroneous, and products of our education. Can you have it both ways? There is a general pattern in Bayle which is that anything he says in one place he takes back in another. Following that pattern, grand and strong claims for settling the issue of toleration and persecution set forth at the beginning of the *Philosophical Commentary* are undermined by the end of the book.

It is very perplexing that Bayle concludes his key tenth chapter of Part II by saying that conscience helps us reject those "who without it might tell us there was no certainty in any thing" (1686–8, p. 277). But he has just as good as demonstrated that. Did he not realize what the implications of what he was arguing were?

Much of what Bayle says would seem to vindicate Richard Popkin's judgment that "Bayle's all-out attack on everything that is said and every thing that is done carried scepticism to its ultimate extreme" (Popkin 2003, p. 300). Popkin is aware of recent reinterpretations that see Bayle as a "positive moralist" (2003, p. 294) relying on reason, and recognizes that he "adopted positive moral views" (2003, p. 297). But set in the context of recognition of the rights of the erroneous conscience the fact that some consciences are right and some are wrong does not get much traction. Bayle may believe his reason has taught him some truths, but he also recognizes that other people's reason teaches them different truths. This may be interpreted as a sort of suspension of judgment about the universal truth of moral ideas, and amount to following the traditional skeptical reliance on customs and education in determining how to live.

I hope my analysis has made at least a prima facie case that Bayle carried out the Pyrrhonian skeptical project in his *Philosophical Commentary*, even though he did not explicitly say that that was what he was doing. Later, in explicit discussions of Pyrrhonism he described, often with the same words, what he had done in the *Philosophical Commentary*. The upshot is that a book which starts out taking for granted universal truths and conscientious morals ends up arguing that one reason we cannot be meant to persecute the people who are wrong is the good Pyrrhonian reason that we can rarely tell for sure who is right and who is wrong. Good Pyrrhonian reasons justify this conclusion: reason is weak and works itself into paradoxes, and we are products of our education. So which is the real Bayle, the dogmatic rationalist or the Pyrrhonian who recognizes the weakness of reason and the overwhelming power of education and conscience?

None of what has been said requires the conclusion that Bayle's rationalist arguments for toleration were insincere, or that he was just posturing. He might very well have set out to write a dogmatic rationalist defense of toleration, but then found

himself admitting and bringing out the arguments that justify a conscientious persecutor based on the overwhelming power of custom and education. He might have preferred that we all be rational on this point, but had to admit that we are not: hence the persecuting conscience.

Rainer Forst thinks that Bayle saves himself from this dilemma by "a return to his normative argument for an independent morality of mutual respect and justification combined with the argument for epistemological restraint" (Forst 2008, p. 100). He relies on a statement at the end of Bayle's Part II (ignoring what Bayle says in Part IV, the Supplement) where Bayle returns to the "revealed light [which is] so clear that few people can mistake it, when in good faith they are seeking out what it is" (Forst 2008, p. 101). Bayle has just given us many reasons to think there is no such universal revealed light wherever there are contested issues. The good-faith requirement is one which the Catholics had used against the Protestants, and begs the question of how one person can know when another is in good faith. So it does not appear to be one of Bayle's better arguments, and is more charitably interpreted as a throw-away echo of the rhetoric that had driven the first part of the book before he thought through to the second part (chapters 8 and 10 of Part Two and the Supplement).

Forst goes on to try to use some of Bayle's arguments in the *Dictionnaire* to justify "a refined explanation of the epistemic coexistence of faith and reason within and at the same time above reason" (Forst 2008, p. 102). Observe that it may not be entirely clear what "within and at the same time above reason" means. Bayle is credited with the view that "reason has to recognize its 'frailty' and trust a 'better guide, which is faith'. Faith is based on trust and a kind of moral certainty and its reasonableness consists to an important extent in the awareness of that" (Forst 2008, p. 102). This argument "completes the epistemological component of Bayle's justification of toleration" (Forst 2008, p. 102). It is again not entirely clear what this means, but one can wonder how moral certainty and trust can create reasonableness. Faith based on trust and a kind of moral certainty was, of course, what had led to the interpretations of the language of Jesus in St. Luke that led to the persecutions that Bayle is arguing against. Does reflexive "awareness" of moral certainty make it reasonable? I do not see how these assertions overcome the dilemma Bayle has identified in the *Philosophical Commentary*. These pages of Forst's argument read like the Emperor's new clothes: does a rhetorical assertion that Bayle saves himself really convince us that he does?

I conclude that Forst is engaged in interpretive charity at best. It might well be a reconstruction of what Bayle could have said, if he had only figured out how to get out of his bind, as Forst thinks he has. But maybe it is just Forst's theory, not Bayle's. Can Forst have it both ways? Is there a rational standard that is accessible only through faith and non-rational moral certainty? Can all that Bayle has said about ignorance, conscientious persecutors, and the role of education in creating differences of opinion be ignored? Maybe Forst's position is just wishful thinking, based on an optimistic philosophy of history that thinks that all contradictions, paradoxes, and aporias can be reconciled and resolved. But what if Bayle found that they cannot, and what if he is right?

Forst comes from a Kantian and Habermasian tradition that thinks, following Kant, that there is one rationality and one philosophy which will never be superseded (i.e. Kant's). But what if the real story is more complicated? Two decades ago Alasdair MacIntyre came out with a book entitled *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (MacIntyre 1988). I do not think he would endorse many of MacIntyre's positions, but I do think that the Bayle of chapters 8 and 10 of Part Two and of the Supplement would endorse the questions. How can we know there is one rationality? Kant himself asked the questions, "What can I know? How can I know it?" But he never asked himself "How can reason critique itself, and when it does so is it reliable?" Ordinarily, as Bayle pointed out, we do not accept the judgments of interested parties to controversies, and that is what Kant and Forst are doing here. If Bayle was smart enough to avoid that mistake, then it may be that his aporias are not resolved.

One of the many remarkable aspects of Jonathan Israel's massive work, *Enlightenment Contested*, is that all he can see is the rationalist side of Bayle. "For Bayle. . . philosophical reason *more geometrico* is the only criterion of what is true" (Israel 2006, p. 72). "Bayle actually bases his thought. . . on a radical Cartesian mathematico-historical rationalist foundation" (Israel 2006, p. 77). "On the fundamental rationality of human morality. . .. Bayle refuses to compromise and is never skeptical" (Israel 2006, p. 558). Israel says that Bayle's toleration theory is "based solely on philosophical reason and notions of 'equity'" and he seems to accept completely Bayle's assertions to the effect that reason must lead to "equity, equality, individual liberty, and a comprehensive toleration" (Israel 2006, pp. 147, 680). But he forgets the places where Bayle says that reason may tell us other things, too.

Israel is an up-beat, optimistic, almost stereotypical Enlightener who thinks it is obvious that if people will only think rightly, they will agree with him on the democratic virtues. But what of Bayle's Part Two, chapters 8–10? What of the Supplement? What of Bayle's deconstruction of reason and recognition that we are blinded by our education? What if things are much more complicated, and the same corrosive reason that undercuts the claims of Christianity and monarchy also undercuts equality and democracy?

Israel's interpretation requires ignoring Hume's characterization of reason as a slave of passions, and also ignoring Nietzsche's observation that "reason" probably suggests inequality and privilege to the strong. It also requires ignoring Bayle's own critique of *les rationaux* (Jaquelot, Le Clerc, and Bernard), who argued that reason brings us straight to Christian principles. Bayle argued that it does not, and that from the point of view of reason there are serious paradoxes in Christianity (Brogi 1998). It is hard to believe that he did not realize that there are paradoxes in liberal equality and democracy as well: to take one example, they mean treating evil people the same as good people. If we start down the road of saying that one must treat equally good people equally, we will have Aristotle's problem of deciding what is the relevant equality for justice: merit, strength, virtue, ancestry? As it is, few people – even few philosophers – agree on what the relevant equalities are today. Too many of Bayle's texts undermine reason, and may be fatal to Jonathan Israel's project of placing Bayle and reason at the heart of the Radical Enlightenment.

Israel has read the Supplement and mentions Bayle's discussion of the erring conscience (Israel 2006, pp. 149–54). But he does not seem to believe that it has any serious implications. He treats it all as part of his argument for Bayle's rationality. "Nothing could be less Pyrrhonist than Bayle's system of moral, social, and political thought," he insists (Israel 2006, p. 670). But at one place he has to interpret Bayle by supplying something that is missing: when he recognizes the power of education in Bayle's analysis, he adds that this, "presumably, means the reader to infer, without his spelling it out, that education itself must therefore be fundamentally reformed" (Israel 2006, p. 569). And yes, I suppose Bayle's problems would be solved if all erring consciences were educated into not having wrong opinions. But Bayle himself does not show any confidence that this can be done, and that may be the reason he does not supply the recommendation for educational reform that Israel suggests he should.

This is part of the larger picture of the overall interpretation of Bayle. Recent work has emphasized the corrosive nature of reason in Bayle's work (Delpla and de Robert 2003). If it is true that somewhere in his writings Bayle contradicts and undermines everything else that he has said in his writings, any attempt to harness him to a straightforward, one-dimensional "Enlightenment project" of reason and natural light risks failure. Maybe he really is a Pyrrhonist. But maybe that is not all bad. A book of arguments against persecution – and he is against it, even against persecution of persecutors; which may leave them free, but does not endorse their persecution – even if at the end they undermine the beginning, certainly could have the effect of encouraging toleration. Maybe the Pyrrhonian undermining even has the effect of preventing toleration from becoming a rigid dogmatism. To those who think it through, it may even reveal how fragile toleration is, and therefore how much in need of support it is. Since he cannot provide unassailable philosophical arguments for toleration, Bayle falls back on rhetoric, dialectic, and any strategy he can to embarrass persecution and promote toleration.

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Chapter 8
Skepticism and the Possibility of Nature

Peter S. Fosl

1 Introduction

One of the most provocative remarks of Sextus Empiricus' *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* for those of us trying to determine the character and meaning of skepticism is his quasi-prescription that skeptics should defer to the "guidance of nature."[1] The remark calls forth streams of questions. On what basis, for example, can a skeptic enlist any form of normativity in making prescriptions, especially in light of apparently clear repudiations of making prescriptions per se?[2] How is this so-called "guidance" expressed or made manifest in nature? By what means or methods or capacities can one apprehend this guidance? Is this guidance the skeptics' version of the "natural law" apprehended by reason described by their adversaries, the Stoics?

It seems audacious, indeed, and perhaps inconsistent for a skeptic to appeal to nature at all. In the face of skepticism, it would seem that nature, or at least claims to having apprehended or understood nature, must recede in just the same way

[1] "Adhering, then, to appearances we live in accordance with the normal rules of life, undogmatically, seeing that we cannot remain wholly inactive. And it would seem that this regulation of life is fourfold, and that one part of it lies in the guidance of Nature, another in the constraint of the passions, another in the tradition of laws and customs, another in the instruction of the arts. Nature's guidance is that by which we are naturally capable of sensation and thought; constraint of the passions is that whereby hunger drives us to food and thirst to drink; tradition of customs and laws, that whereby we regard piety in the conduct of life as good, but impiety as evil; instruction of the arts, that whereby we are not inactive in such arts as we adopt. But we make all these statements undogmatically" (*Outlines of Pyrrhonism* (*PH*) I 23–4, Bury's translation).

[2] At *PH* I 28, Sextus describes the skeptic as "the man who determines nothing as to what is naturally good or bad"; in *PH* I 197 he writes that the skeptic merely announces "undogmatically what appears to himself regarding the matters presented, not making any confident declaration, but just explaining his own state of mind." Sextus, in short, seems to cast the activity of skepticism as merely *describing* what *appears* to be the case to a particular *individual* (making first-person reports, as it were) rather than *prescribing* what *really ought to be* the case for *everyone*. Cf. *PH* III 179.

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that the external world recedes in the face of Descartes' methodological doubt in Meditation I. Should not one who has abandoned or at least placed in abeyance dogmatic claims through the *epochē* (suspension of judgment) of skepticism also suspend judgment about how nature, if there is such a thing as nature, guides or does not guide us? Should not one who advocates *aphasia* (silence) about things dogmatic refrain from making assertions about nature? More generally, how can skepticism be consistent with any form of naturalism?

The work of David Hume (1711–76), of course, seems to present a similar kind of incoherence. Hume's work advances arguments that reach deeply skeptical conclusions, and these conclusions in his work remain rationally undefeated. He refers to himself as a skeptic in *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739 and 40) and characterizes his position in the first *Enquiry* (1748) as one of "mitigated" or "academical" skepticism.[3] Yet, Hume's work also appeals powerfully to "nature," and the terms of his analysis are nothing if not naturalistic. Scholars like Norman Kemp Smith and Richard H. Popkin, of course, have characterized nature as somehow opposing or over-coming skeptical doubt.[4] Others, like Donald W. Livingston, James Beattie, and many of Hume's early interpreters read his skeptical doubt as ascendant. Interpreters like David Fate Norton and John P. Wright have labored to have it both ways – Norton arguing that to Hume's "mitigated scepticism" must be paired a "mitigated naturalism" and Wright maintaining that Hume's is a "sceptical realism."[5] It is clear, as many have come to recognize, that *Hume Studies* editor Don Garrett is right in maintaining that the relationship between Hume's skepticism and his naturalism marks "one of the most fundamental and controversial issues in the interpretation of his entire philosophy." Moreover, as Garrett rightly remarks, "few commentators have tried to state with precision what Hume means by this term [i.e. "skepticism"] or in what his skepticism consists" (Garrett 2004, p. 68).[6]

In my own work, I have labored to understand Hume's skepticism by situating his thought in the Pyrrhonian and Academic skeptical traditions that preceded and

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[3]Hume (1978), hereafter "*T*": see *T* 224, 269, and 273 for examples of places where Hume describes himself or his philosophy as skeptical: e.g., "in this blind submission I shew most perfectly my sceptical disposition and principles" (1.4.7; *T* 269). Famously in section XII of the *Enquiry concerning Human Understanding* (*EHU*), Hume outlines his "Academical or Sceptical Philosophy" (in Hume 1975).

[4]Kemp Smith and Popkin, of course, reach different conclusions about whether or not Hume is best characterized as a skeptic. Kemp Smith (1905, 1941) argues that Hume appeals to nature in order to overcome skepticism, while Popkin reads that appeal as exhibiting the truly Pyrrhonian character of Hume's work (because Pyrrhonists submit to the guidance of nature). Both, however, read Hume as appealing to nature to defeat skeptical doubt. My position, by contrast, is that for Hume the reassertion of natural beliefs does not restore them to the same condition they held before the believer's engagement with skeptical arguments. In the wake of the skeptical arguments Hume philosophically assents only to non-dogmatic beliefs, and in this way for Hume belief becomes consistent with skepticism.

[5]Norton (1982) and Wright (1983).

[6]Garrett's crystalline work, of course, follows a decade after Fogelin (1994).

surrounded him. My findings lead me to conclude that it is misleading to characterize Hume as a strict adherent to either form of skepticism, as his thought exhibits characteristics of both. It may be most accurate, therefore, to characterize Hume's thought as a Pyrrhonian and Academical hybrid.

In what follows I intend to attempt to lay out what one might call this "hybrid thesis" in more precise terms. I will subsequently enlist the hybrid thesis to address a number of interpretive questions or what Garrett calls "puzzles" regarding Hume's naturalism. Most particularly, I wish to show that Hume's conception of "nature" is a distinctively skeptical conception, that it does not transcend or, in Popkin's terms, present a "critique" of skepticism. That is so because the conception of nature Hume finds to be available to "true philosophy" in the wake of his skeptical arguments does not repudiate skepticism but rather, properly understood, embraces it.

Skepticism is not itself, strictly speaking, a doctrine but rather a discipline or way of life.[7] In order to understand Humean skepticism it is important to keep this in mind. In Hume's case, skepticism presents a distinctive way of theorizing, a way of using and responding to theory, a posture which the philosopher adopts towards the beliefs generated by theory – what I wish to call a "non-dogmatic engagement" with theory. In a sense, one should not speak therefore of Humean skepticism substantively (as if it were itself a philosophical doctrine) but rather in adjectival or, more precisely, adverbial terms. The naturalistic theoretical terms of Hume's philosophy, therefore, must be read in a way different from the way one properly reads the terms of non-skeptical forms of naturalistic theory. Hume's, as we will see, is a skeptical naturalism or a naturalism advanced skeptically (a skeptical way of engaging naturalism), not a naturalistic skepticism.

To grasp this more completely, let us begin by taking a look at the relationship of Hume's thought to ancient skepticism. There are a number of different and easily conflated issues here. The first let us call the "Historical Issue." The second call the "Critical Issue." The historical issue itself has two parts: Did Hume have access to texts by Sextus Empiricus? And did he read and use those texts? The critical issue, as well, may be delineated through in a series of questions: Was Hume actually influenced by ancient skepticism, in particular the skepticism of Pyrrhonists like Sextus Empiricus? Whether by design or by accident, how is Hume's philosophical thought similar to and different from Pyrrhonian and Academic skepticism? And, in what sense is it proper or improper to characterize his thought as either Pyrrhonian or Academic?

[7] Sextus describes it as a capacity or an *agogē* or discipline for living (*PH* I 7). R. G. Bury writes: "Probably, then, the main, if not the only interest of Pyrrho was in the ethical and practical side of Scepticism as the speediest cure for the ills of life" (1933, p. xxxi). David Sedley says: "The practical model which this unopinionated life-style offered was, I believe, Pyrrho's unique contribution to Hellenistic skepticism" (1983, p. 115).

2 The Historical Issue

2.1 On the Historical Question of Access

I have undertaken to answer in detail the historical questions elsewhere (Fosl 1998). My findings show that Hume did enjoy access to Sextus' texts but remain inconclusive with regard to questions regarding use. To summarize those findings: Hume clearly had access to Swiss mathematician Claude Huart's 1725 translation of the *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* as well as to Thomas Stanley's *History of Philosophy*, which not only contains brief accounts of the lives and works of Pyrrho of Elis and Timon of Phlius, but also an English translation of all three books of Sextus' *Outlines* in their entirety (Groarke and Solomon 1991). Hume also had access to the standard edition of Sextus' *Outlines* of his day, Fabricius' 1718 *Opera Græce et Latine* as well as possibly to both the Paris and the Antwerp pressings of Hervet's edition of *Adversus Mathematicos* (1569).[8] Library press marks indicate that a volume containing considerable portions of text and commentary on skepticism was acquired by the Library of the Faculty of Advocates[9] sometime between 1728 and 1776.[10] Edited by Jacob Thomson, the text was entitled *Primus Scientiarum Elementis* (or *First Elements of Knowledge*) and was published in Königsberg in 1728.[11] Brief references, chapter headings, and selections from Sextus Empiricus are also included in Fabricius' periodical, *Bibliothecae Græcæ*, especially in Book 4.[12] So much for access.

[8]The Library of the Faculty of Advocates seems to have acquired the text in 1723. The inclusion of a Latin translation in the Fabricius text may be significant if Cavendish's claim that Hume's "knowledge of Greek was inadequate for the purpose" of reading Sextus in the Greek is true (Cavendish 1958, p. 175 n. 1; Groarke and Solomon 1991, p. 650); using this text Hume would have been able to consult the text as it appears in both languages, thereby compensating for any weakness he may have had in Greek.

[9]As Popkin points out, Jean LeClerc published a lengthy and detailed review of Fabricius' 1718 edition in the popular *Bibliotèque ancienne et moderne* XIV (1720), 1–113 (Popkin 1993, p. 139). Hume hailed from a family composed of many successful advocates, including his father (Joseph Home) and maternal grandfather (David Falconer); there are indications that Hume himself may have studied law, most likely from 1725/1726 to 1729. Hume became keeper of Edinburgh's Library of the Faculty of Advocates from 1752 to 1757.

[10]The character of some of the press-marks used by the Library of the Faculty of Advocates makes it impossible to determine the exact date of acquisition. It is possible to determine, however, the range of years over which individual press-marks were employed. This book contains the old (cancelled) press mark, "H.2.10," which was used by the Advocates from the 1720s onward; we may infer that this mark was changed in the later part of the eighteenth century, as a marked up copy of the 1776 catalogue gives the press mark still used today in this text, "z.5.15(1)."

[11]This volume includes Book I, chapters One through Four, of Fabricius' 1718 folio volume of Sextus' *Hypotyposes*, accompanied by Estienne's Latin translation and commentaries. The present day NLS press-mark of this volume of Thomson's text is: "z.5.15(2)."

[12]Confusingly, this text has been bound in the NLS collection in volume 3 of the *Bibliothecæ*. This volume also contains summaries and reviews of the *Outlines* and *Adversus Mathematicos*, together

2.2 On the Historical Question of Use

Suggestively, Hume's writing includes not only mention of Sextus Empiricus but also direct citations. With citations first appearing in sections II and IV of the second *Enquiry*, the *Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals* (1751), Hume specifically cites *Adversus Mathematicos* and the *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*.[13] Hume subsequently also cites passages from *Adversus Mathematicos* in sections IV and XII of "The Natural History of Religion" (1757) as well as in his important essay, "On the Populousness of Ancient Nations" (1752; written in 1750).[14] In all, Hume presents, then, 5 specific citations to the work of Sextus Empiricus.[15]

There is, however, something strange about Hume's citations, perhaps something that indicates Hume's did not actually consult Sextus' texts themselves. The peculiar form of his citations reveals that they were drawn from the then-outdated Chouet brothers edition of 1621 and not to the then up-to-date 1718 Fabricius edition, at least when he cites *Adversus Mathematicos*. If Hume was seriously interested in Sextus, why did he not use the then most widely accepted and most current edition? Could it be that Hume consulted only Sextus indirectly, through other authors who used Chouet? Or, was it just that while researching skepticism he consulted Fabricius, but when it came to making citations, for accidental reasons he consulted Chouet? Perhaps, for example, Chouet was simply the edition that happened to be on hand for Hume when he was writing.[16]

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with lists of editions of Sextus' work. See pp. 590–9: chapter (*Caput*) XVIII, "De Sexto Empirico." Records indicate that the Edinburgh University Library acquired the same text sometime prior to Hume's death. Edinburgh University also held copies of *Bibliothecæ Græcæ* (Hamburg) from the period, 1705–26.

[13]Hume refers to *Adversus Mathematicos* "lib. viii." at *Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals* (1751) section II, p. 142 n. 1 [p. 180 n. 1]. In the passage to which Hume refers (*Against the Physicists* I 18), Sextus quotes the sophist Prodicus of Ceos (late 5th and early 4th centuries BCE), who asserted that: "The ancients accounted as Gods the sun and moon and rivers and springs and in general all the things that are of benefit for our life, because of the benefit derived from them, even as the Egyptians deify the Nile" (*PH* III, p. 11). Hume also refers to *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* "lib. iii, cap. 20" at *Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals* (*EPM*, in Hume 1975), section IV, p. 166 n. 1 [p. 207 n. 1]. Section II of the second *Enquiry* is titled, "Of Benevolence"; section IV is titled, "Of Political Society." Hume's abbreviations may be translated as follows: "lib." for *liber* (book) and "cap." for *capitulum* (heading or chapter).

[14]Hume (1985, p. 399 n. 58) hereafter "*Essays*". Hume refers here to "SEXT. EMP. lib. iii. cap. 24." Hume's essays first published as *Essays: Moral and Political* (Edinburgh: Alexander Kincaid, 1741, 2nd edition 1742, 3d edition 1748); *Political Discourses* (first and second editions 1752, 3d edition, 1754); *Essays and Treatises on Several Subjects* (1753–77). Hume's reference in the first edition of the *Political Discourses* appears in Arabic rather than Roman numerals.

[15](1) *Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals* II (1751): "Sext. Emp. adversus Math. lib. Viii"; (2) *Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals* IV (1751): "Sext. Emp. lib iii. cap. 20"; (3) "On the Populousness of Ancient Nations" (1752): "SEXT. EMP. lib. iii. cap. 24"; (4) *The Natural History of Religion* IV (1757): "lib. Ix"; (5) *The Natural History of Religion* XII (1757): "lib.viii".

[16]Which copy of the Chouet edition that might have been, however, is difficult to establish, since inspection of the records of National Library of Scotland (NLS) and the Edinburgh University

Inspection of Edinburgh's library holding at the time, however, fails to turn up a candidate volume. Hume, of course, may well have used a personal copy or a copy held by a private library in Scotland, England, or France – possibly at Ninewells (his family's estate), or possibly at La Flèche. But there is some reason to doubt this possibility, too.[17] Another possibility may be that Hume simply drew his citations from other authors, older authors, who themselves used Chouet. Perhaps tellingly, as Tom Beauchamp pointed out to me, Hume drew from Malebranche. Malebranche refers in his *Éclaircissements* of 1674–5, a text that Hume owned, to precisely the same passage of *Adversus Mathematicos* Hume cites.[18] Another indicator that Hume used Malebranche's citations is that in same passage from the *Éclaircissements* where he cites Sextus, Malebranche also refers to a passage in Cicero's *De Natura Deorum*; and perhaps unsurprisingly Hume refers to this same passage, albeit with less precision, in the second *Enquiry*. These would seem a rather stunning set of coincidences. But, of course, they explain only one of Hume's five citations to Sextus. And to say Hume was drawn to certain passages in Sextus by a third party does not mean he did not also read those passages in the first person.[19]

Library indicates that Hume could *not* have had access to a Chouet edition through either the university library or through the Library of the Faculty of Advocates since neither collection held a copy of the text at that time.

[17] Although Hume purchased many books himself and in 1751 boasted of possessing a library worth £100, David Fate Norton and Mary J. Norton's recent *The David Hume Library* does not indicate that Hume owned any edition of Sextus' work. On the other hand, as it is based upon the 1840 catalogue of Hume's nephew, we cannot be sure of the completeness of Norton's list; and in any case the Norton's list does not include the Ninewells holdings. Based as it largely is on the 1840 catalogue of Hume's nephew, Baron David Hume, the character of Norton and Norton's text is, however, somewhat speculative and does not definitively rule out the possibility that Hume had acquired Sextus' text but that the text was removed from his collection sometime before the Baron's catalogue was prepared. Also, as they acknowledge (p. 42), Norton and Norton's findings do not exclude the possibility that Hume made use of texts not in his own private collection. See Norton and Norton (1996), hereafter "*DHL.*" Indeed, the *DHL* does not contain texts by a number of philosophers whose works we can be reasonably sure that Hume read – e.g. Descartes, Locke's *Essay*, Bayle's *Dictionnaire*, and Pascal's *Pensées* (*DHL* 42).

[18] *Éclaircissements sur la recherche de la vérité* accompanying the third edition of his *De la recherche de la vérité* (1674–5; 3d ed. 1677–8). In the same footnote, Malebranche refers to both Cicero's account of the Egyptian deification of the sun and moon ("c. liv. I. De natura Deorum") and to Sextus' discussion of the same phenomenon ("Voyez Sextus Empiricus, l, 8. ch. 2."); see "Elucidation Fifteen," "Seventh Proof," "Reply," in Malebranche (1980, 684n'a'). Hume refers to Cicero's *De Natura Deorum* ("De Nat. Deor. lib. I") at *EPM* II, p. 142 n. 1 [p. 179 n. 1]. The likelihood of Hume's taking these references from Malebranche is strengthened insofar as Hume apparently owned a copy of the 3d edition of *De la recherche* with the accompanying *Éclaircissements* (Lyons 1684). *DHL*, pp. 18, 42.

[19] Groarke and Solomon, following Cavendish, have presented yet another reason to think Hume did not draw directly from Sextus by arguing that his "knowledge of Greek was inadequate for the purpose" (1991, p. 650; see Cavendish 1958, p. 175 n. 1). I have my doubts about this.

3 The Critical Issue

Let us, in any case, turn now to the critical questions relating to Hume and Pyrrhonism: Whether directly or indirectly, was Hume actually influenced by ancient skepticism, in particular Pyrrhonism? Whether by design or by accident, how is Hume's philosophical thought similar to and different from Pyrrhonian and Academic skepticism? And in what sense is it proper or improper to characterize his thought as either Pyrrhonian or Academic?

3.1 Hume's Self-Proclaimed Academicism and Anti-Pyrrhonism

We know that Hume was deeply influenced by Cicero and Cicero's skepticism. He himself acknowledges Cicero's influence on his moral philosophy, writing in a letter to Francis Hutcheson that: "Upon the whole, I desire to take my catalogue of Virtues from Cicero's *De Officiis*, not from the *Whole Duty of Man.* I had, indeed, the former Book in my Eye in all my Reasonings."[20] As I and others have argued, Hume's *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion* draws heavily upon the *Academica*, Cicero's text on Academic skepticism and one of the main conduits of skeptical thought to modernity, as well as on Cicero's *De Natura Deorum* (Fosl 1994).

Hume of course also uses the term "Pyrrhonian" and terms commonly regarded as Pyrrhonian to articulate the character of his own philosophical work – but of course, and for many interpreters crucially, he does so negatively. That is, in apparently explicit terms, Hume distances his own work from Pyrrhonism. Hume refers to a Pyrrhonian-like, or at least Cartesian, "total" and "extravagant" skepticism in the *Treatise*, but he does so in a disparaging manner, contrasting this type of skepticism with a more "modest" and "moderate" species. The advertisement or "Abstract" Hume produced for the *Treatise*, moreover, describes Pyrrhonism as somehow contrary to nature or natural belief: "Philosophy wou'd render us entirely *Pyrrhonian*, were not nature too strong for it."[21] So for Hume, at least on the surface, it would seem that the "guidance of nature" ought not properly be thought of as a Pyrrhonian characteristic of his thought. In the first *Enquiry*, Pyrrhonism, of course, appears in

[20]Letter #13, in Hume (1932, p. 34, vol. I). A passage in his essay, "Of Eloquence," shows that Hume regarded Cicero (106–43 BCE) as one of the ancient world's two greatest orators (Demosthenes being the other): "It is observable, that the ancient critics could scarcely find two orators in any age, who deserved to be placed precisely in the same rank, and possessed the same degree of merit. CALBUS, CÆLIUS, CURIO, HORTENSIUS, CÆSAR rose one above another: But the greatest of that age was inferior to CICERO, the most eloquent speaker, that had ever appeared in Rome" (Hume 1985, p. 98). *The Whole Duty of Man* was a then-popular didactic and devotional work now attributed to Richard Allestree, first published in 1658. Hume's remark in this letter, thus, distances his own moral theory from religion.

[21]David Hume, *An Abstract of a late Philosophical Performance, entitled A Treatise of Human Nature, &c. Wherein the chief Argument and Design of the Book, which has met with such Opposition, and been represented in so terrifying a Light, is further illustrated and explain'd* (London: Charles Corbet at Addison's Head in Fleet Street, 1740); published anonymously (*T* 657).

a prominent and similarly negative way. There Hume replaces the distinction he had made in the *Treatise* between (a) "total" and (b) "modest" skepticism with the distinction between (a') "excessive" (*EHU* 158, 159, 161) or "Pyrrhonian" skepticism and (b') a "mitigated" or "academical" counterpart.[22]

Pyrrhonian skepticism, according to Hume's description in the *Enquiry*, characterizes the thought of skeptics who, both "antecedent" (*EHU* 149) and "*consequent*" (*EHU* 150) to philosophical investigation, call for the assumption of a "universal doubt" (*EHU* 149) or claim to have reached a negative determination with regard to knowledge – that is to have "discovered, either the absolute fallaciousness of their mental faculties, or their unfitness to reach any fixed determination in all those curious subjects of speculation, about which they are commonly employed" (*EHU*, p. 150). In the *Dialogues* Philo says the aim of this form of skepticism is to "entirely renounce all belief and opinion" (I:132).

These illicit, "Pyrrhonian" (*EHU* 158, 160, 161) skepticisms are not only "*excessive*," we are told. They are ineffectual and impossible to maintain (*EHU* 150; *Dialogues* I 132); they "*admit of no answer and produce no conviction*" (*EHU* 155n1). Only capable of being sustained for brief moments, their "only effect is to cause . . . momentary amazement and irresolution and confusion" (*EHU* 155n1).[23] Pyrrhonian, total, or excessive skepticism may even, according to Hume, be perilous: "this resolution," says Hume, "if steadily executed, wou'd be dangerous, and attended with the most fatal consequences" (*T* 267). In short, then, we might say that for Hume Pyrrhonism is characterized as: (a) impossible, (b) unanswerable, (c) momentary, and (d) dangerous.

These characterizations of Pyrrhonism seem, however, hyperbolic and misleading caricatures when compared to the actual texts of ancient Pyrrhonism. Groarke and Solomon, in fact, suggest that Hume's identification of Pyrrhonism with the repudiation of all belief in the *Treatise* and the denial of the possibility of knowledge whatsoever elsewhere indicates that he had not read (or at least assimilated) any of Sextus by the time he composed that text (Groarke and Solomon 1991, p. 658 with n. 37). After all, the *Outlines* repudiates a total denial of knowledge or the possibility of knowledge and, in fact, associates such a total epistemic rejection with Academic skepticism (*PH* I 29–30, 230). David Fate Norton suggests that Hume's

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[22]*EHU* 128–30 [159–62].

[23]Consider also this passage from the *Dialogues*: "In reality, *Philo,* continued he, it seems certain that though a man in a flush of humour, after intense reflection on the contradictions and imperfections of human reason, may entirely renounce all belief and opinion; it is impossible for him to persevere in this total scepticism, or make it appear in his conduct for a few hours. External objects press in upon him: Passions solicit him: His philosophical melancholy dissipates; and even the utmost violence upon his own temper will not be able during any time, to preserve the poor appearance of skepticism" (Hume 1947, I 132; hereafter "*D*"). Compare Cleanthes's remark with Hume's at *T* 269: "Most fortunately it happens, that since reason is incapable of dispelling these clouds, nature herself suffices to that purpose, and cures me of this philosophical melancholy and delirium, either by relaxing this bent of mind, or by some avocation, and lively impression of my senses, which obliterate all these chimeras . . . Here then I find myself absolutely and necessarily determin'd to live . . ."

caricature of Pyrrhonism may have been drawn from the similar account presented by Diogenes' *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* (IX 61–108), where Diogenes recounts tales of Pyrrho having to be saved by his followers from run away carts and cliff ledges – though Norton also concedes that Hume's view does appear to have "*some* foundation" (Norton 1982, pp. 266ff). Of course, Hume's caricature of Pyrrhonism resembles not only Diogenes'. It is also thoroughly agrees with Cicero's caricature in the *Academica*.[24]

If Hume does not seem to have been influenced by Sextus' account of Pyrrhonism, perhaps he simply adopted the views of Pyrrhonism common at his time. Pyrrhonism was a popular topic in early modern thought and was broached in popular works by Montaigne, Mersenne, La Mothe Le Vayer, Huet, Bayle, Fénelon, Ramsay, and Crousaz – not to mention Descartes. As Richard H. Popkin rightly maintains, "it would not have been difficult for an alert, critically minded person in the 1720s and 1730s to have learned the skeptical arguments of Sextus Empiricus"; indeed "it would have been difficult to avoid some knowledge of them" and of related texts (1993, p. 140). Moreover, even a critically minded person of the 1720s and 30s might have acquired a distorted view if he had only drawn upon secondary sources. In any case, whether Hume drew his understanding of Pyrrhonism from Sextus Empiricus proper, from ancient secondary sources like Diogenes and Cicero, or from modern interpreters, if we focus only upon Hume's direct remarks about Pyrrhonism, it seems clear that he presents a negative and caricatured view of it. In the terms through which Hume's texts portray a self-understanding, his work seems decidedly non-Pyrrhonian.

3.2 Hume's Deeper Pyrrhonism and Modified Academicism

There are, however, I think, alternative ways of interpreting Hume's texts that render his thought more Pyrrhonian, or at least more consistent with Pyrrhonism. One option for interpreting Hume as a Pyrrhonian is to argue that his understanding of Pyrrhonism proper is mistaken, and that despite the explicit rejection presented by his texts, Humean thought is actually remarkably similar to Pyrrhonism properly understood. As this approach turns upon correcting Hume's reading of Pyrrhonism, let us call it the *corrective approach*. Another possibility is that Hume's texts

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[24] "Therefore those who assert that nothing can be grasped deprive us of these things that are the very tools or equipment of life, or rather actually overthrow the whole of life from its foundations and deprive the animate creature itself of the mind that animates it . . . " (*Acad.* II, x, 31 [pp. 508–9]; see also *Acad.* II, xxxi, 99 [595]). Hume, as we have seen, regards such "total" skepticism impossible, but he also suspects it of being downright dangerous: "this resolution [to reject all the trivial suggestions of the fancy], if steadily executed, wou'd be dangerous, and attended with the most fatal consequences" (*T* 267). Two important articles assessing the ancient skeptics' understanding of the range of *epoch* are: Myles Burnyeat's "Can the Skeptic Live His Skepticism?" and Jonathan Barnes' "Ancient Skepticism and Causation." Both appear in Burnyeat (1983). Another influential article which answers these is Frede (1984).

are intentionally misleading about his Pyrrhonism. Hume may have been aware that his characterization of Pyrrhonism is not historically accurate. He may have both understood and embraced Pyrrhonism more than he was willing to admit. We may, accordingly, designate a second option for reinterpretation, with a nod to Paul Ricoeur, the *suspicious approach*. Why consider either option seriously? The case I will advance provides circumstantial but not trivial reasons for the suspicious approach. It also offers, I think, somewhat stronger reasons for the corrective approach. My argument rests upon two planks:

- That Hume had good rhetorical reasons for distancing himself from Pyrrhonism (the suspicious plank);
- That the content of Hume's philosophical work resembles Pyrrhonian thought as described by Sextus Empiricus in a sufficient number of important ways to merit the characterization (the corrective plank) in spite of his explicit rejection of Pyrrhonism.

3.2.1 The Suspicious Approach: Circumstantial Reasons

Hume's autobiographical essay, *My Own Life*, makes it clear that Hume was ambitious and sought popular success for his work. Hume was disappointed when the *Treatise* fell still-born from the presses, and when it did he turned to more popular literary forms in the *Essays* and *History*. Hume also understood or at least believed that his work was radical. About the *Treatise* he wrote that its principles are "so remote from the vulgar Sentiments on this Subject, that were they to take place, they wou'd produce almost a total Alteration in Philosophy." In the *Abstract* he claims that, "were his philosophy receiv'd, we must alter from the foundation the greatest part of the sciences" (*T* 643).

Advancing a radical doctrine and simultaneously aspiring to literary success is a dodgy affair, especially if one's philosophical touchstone is commonly rejected as absurd and dangerous. We know that Hume was prepared to suppress and modify his work in order to avoid provoking too much condemnation. Hume suppressed essays on suicide and the immortality of the soul. Although refusing to suppress *The Natural History of England*, Hume altered *Four Dissertations.* Hume withheld the publication of the *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion* until his death. The claim to being radical, of course, disappears in the *Enquiries.*

Furthermore, many contemporaries found Hume's work to be threatening, and Hume suffered from it. He was twice rejected from professorial appointments, once by the University of Edinburgh and once by Glasgow, despite defensive efforts in *A Letter from a Gentleman* (1745).[25] James Beattie excoriated Hume in his enormously popular "Castle of Scepticism" (1767) – a narrative that depicted Hume as

[25] Hume wrote the epistle in defense of his work as opponents solidified their case against his candidacy for the Professorship in Moral Philosophy at the University of Edinburgh about to be vacated by John Pringle. The epistle, perhaps not intended for publication, was collected by Hume's friend

the lord of a forbidding castle who lured the unsuspecting into his clutches only to subject them to hideous (skeptical) tortures. One of Hume's opponents in the Kirk, the Rev. John Witherspoon, went on to become not only the only clerical signatory to the *Declaration of Independence* but also president of the College of New Jersey, now Princeton, where he transplanted his disapprobation of Hume into the Americas. The old skeptic's argument against warrant for belief in miracles became notorious and the subject of scores of hostile pamphlets. Even when Hume died, crowds gathered to see whether the supposed atheist would convert on his deathbed.

Would an ambitious but radical author struggling against powerful critics cloak some of the most radical dimensions of his work in order to advance it? Perhaps the answer lies in the motto Hume draws from Tacitus and affixes to the *Treatise*: "Seldom are men blessed with times in which they may think what they like, and say what they think."[26] It is an ironic remark that instructs the reader, I think, to read between the lines.

But how would Hume calling his work "Academical" rather than "Pyrrhonian" serve this oblique purpose? Hume's disparaging characterization of Pyrrhonism as radical and excessive was not unique. It was, rather, during the early eighteenth century, a common view. Academicism, by contrast, was thought to be a more moderate and less subversive stream of thought. Understanding this, it would not be unreasonable for a suspicious mind to read Hume's characterization of his work as Academical as a rhetorical device deployed to deflect criticism and convey a sense of restraint and legitimacy.

As an analogy, consider the use of the term "communist" in recent political discourses in the United States and elsewhere. An ambitious American author who wishes to achieve both influence and popular success would be a fool to characterize her work as communist, even though she might be well aware that communist authors had deeply influenced her and that many dimensions of her work may properly be characterized as socialist.

3.2.2 The Corrective Approach: Textual and Interpretive Reasons

Having established circumstantial grounds to suspect that Hume may have masked the extent to which his thought is Pyrrhonian, let us consider to what extent it might, as a matter of correction, be characterized as truly Pyrrhonian (as well as truly Academical). Note that this corrective interpretive approach does not require that Hume intentionally masked his Pyrrhonism or that he was even aware of the truly

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and kinsman – Henry Home, later Lord Kames – together with a list of charges that had been compiled and distributed by the Rev. William Wishart (the younger), principal of the university, who regarded Hume's candidacy as posing "a great danger." Kames published the letter and charges as a pamphlet under the title by which it is known today, *A Letter from a Gentleman to his Friend in Edinburgh*. See Stewart (1994, p. 13).

[26] Tacitus, *Histories*, chapter 1: "Rara temporum felicitas, ubi fentire, quae veils; and quae sentias, dicere licet." Spinoza uses a similar quotation at the start of the final chapter of the *Theological-Political Tractatus*, as well as in the work's Preface.

Pyrrhonian nature of his work. A corrective approach is consistent with Hume's thought having been only accidentally Pyrrhonian, as well as with the possibility that the Pyrrhonism of his work surfaced as the logic of Pyrrhonian ideas operant in his intellectual milieu exerted its effect on his thought, whether he was aware of it or not. This investigation will consume the lion's share of the rest of this essay; and my excursus will be divided into the following parts: (1) The Problem of the Criterion; (2) The Problem of Non-Dogmatic Belief; (3) Indicative and Recollective Signs; and Nature and the Remainder of the Skeptical Fourfold – (4) The Technical Arts, (5) Custom, and (6) Constraint of the Passions.

The Problem of the Criterion

A good place to begin with a corrective project is by considering the ancient skeptical problem of "the criterion" – the issue of whether or not criteria can be determined that would make it possible for people to distinguish truths about reality from falsehoods. One might alternatively call these "truth criteria," "knowledge criteria," "reality criteria," and "goodness criteria." Hume's philosophy appears to resemble ancient Academicism in two principal ways: by virtue of both (1) developing probabilistic criteria of this sort and (2) by virtue of developing a positive philosophical theory. Distinguishing Pyrrhonism from Academicism, Sextus writes (*PH* I 231):

> Furthermore, as regards the End (or aim of life) we differ from the New Academy; for whereas the men who profess to conform to its doctrine use probability as the guide of life, we live in an undogmatic way by following the laws, customs, and natural affections.

Hume's probabilism, however is strictly speaking not "Academical" in the way that Sextus defines Academic skepticism. Hume's skepticism neither denies comprehensively or totally the very possibility of knowledge[27] (which is better called nihilism), nor does it dogmatically assert probabilistic realism (that is, it does not hold that probabilities are metaphysically speaking real features of the world, and it does not maintain that what seems more probable really is so).[28]

David Owen's work, in fact, has emphasized that Hume's argument for skepticism with regard to reason does not show that reason cannot yield truth but only that reason cannot ground our belief that it does (Owen forthcoming). Reason may disclose truth, but we cannot know by reason whether or not it does; and hence it cannot serve as a criterion for truth, at least not in a dogmatic sense. If Hume's argument proved that reason cannot yield truth, his argument would be nihilistic and, in Sextus' sense, Academical not Pyrrhonian. But the Pyrrhonian skeptic, like Hume, maintains neither that truth has been apprehended nor that truth cannot be apprehended; he or she merely defers to what appears to be the case.

This is not the case for classical Academic skeptics. Whether or not they were merely argumentative gambits, Arcesilaus' conception of *to eulogon* (the reasonable) and Carneades' conception of *to pithanon* (the convincing) do advance criteria

[27] See Klein (2001, 2004).

[28] As Sextus accused the Academics of maintaining; see *PH* I 29–30 and 230.

purportedly enabling people actually to determine the true features of reality *and know that they have done so*, even if only in a probabilistic manner rather than with the sort of certainty the Stoics claimed with their criteria for catalepsis. Hume's skeptical naturalism, by contrast, develops probabilistic criteria for belief, not dogmatic truth. His usage of the term "probability," unlike that of modern theorists such as Pascal, determines what is more or less satisfactory to be believed, not what is more or less likely to be true. When Hume argues that p is more probable, he means only that it is more easily and durably believed, and in ways consistent with the most careful scrutiny of the mind. Hume's probabilism is, one might say, a subjectivist criterion of belief not a realist criterion for the good, the true, and the real.

In Hume's skeptical theory, our relationship to the world is, as Stanley Cavell might say, not most basically one of knowing (either with probability or with certainty); and it is in this that we can see perhaps most clearly that Hume remains Pyrrhonian. With Robert Fogelin and Donald Livingston I concur that Hume's skeptical arguments concerning reason and the senses remain unanswered on rational grounds. No rationalistic answer to Hume's skeptical account of causation is advanced. And Hume's theory of simple and complex ideas, as Gilles Deleuze shows, undermines the internal relations among ideas necessary for rationalistic doctrines like those of Leibniz and Clarke (Deleuze 2001). At the end of the day, no criteria of truth remain on the field, and so analysis of the problem of the criterion leads to the conclusion that in its own terms Hume's texts remain Pyrrhonian.[29]

The Problem of Non-Dogmatic Belief

Another way of seeing Hume's Pyrrhonism is by examining his concept of belief. After a kind of *aporia* is reached with the skeptical arguments, Hume goes on theorizing anyway – and in particular theorizing in a naturalistic way. How is it that without answering the skeptical arguments Hume goes on to endorse the warrant of reason, or what Garrett calls the "Title Principle"?[30] Similarly, why does Hume endorse proportioning belief to the evidence, experimental methods, and why as a skeptical thinker does he articulate vast and complex theories about mind, perception, ethics, politics, economics, and history? Garrett answers this by denying that Hume is what Fogelin would call a general, unmitigated, theoretical skeptic.

Garrett argues that Hume's endorsing belief for a specific range of propositions (among them those of natural science) while still excluding other beliefs (among

[29]Robert Fogelin seems on the verge of recognizing Hume's Pyrrhonism along these lines when he writes: "The final point I wish to make about Hume's presentation of scepticism is that he offers no independent *arguments* for the moderate scepticism that generally characterizes his position. Instead, his moderate scepticism is literally a mitigated Pyrrhonian scepticism" (Fogelin 1983, p. 399).

[30]Garrett's "title principle" is taken from Hume's remark: "Where reason is lively and mixes itself with some propensity, it ought to be assented to. Where it does not, it never can have any title to operate upon us" (*T* 1.4.7.11).

them those of theology) manifests the mitigated and Academic character of his skepticism. But Garrett's argument depends upon the idea that belief for Hume is simply a matter of degree and that all beliefs include implicitly dogmatic claims about the true, the good, or the real. To believe p about the world is, according to Garrett, to hold a belief about reality. Hence to believe p about the world is not consistent with an unmitigated or Pyrrhonian skepticism.

But what if belief admits differences in kind as well as degree in such a way that dogmatic beliefs can be separated off from a non-dogmatic sort? In Sextus' terms, beliefs may be distinguished according to the way in which they arise; and this does distinguish Pyrrhonism from Academicism. For Academics like Carneades, belief arises through (a) choice following (b) a strong desire (*PH* I 229). By contrast, belief for Pyrrhonians is a more passive thing, a mere yielding to assent rather than deciding to believe (*PH* I 229–30).

Hume's position is a hybrid of these Academical and Pyrrhonian approaches to belief, incorporating both (a) decision procedures for choosing among beliefs and (b) a basic assent to the natural beliefs of common life. The norms and decision procedures that Hume develops do not by themselves establish belief, rather as Hume says in the first *Enquiry*, elaborate upon beliefs that arise on their own, that we find in ourselves in the course of lives naturally. Dogmatic philosophers pretend to establish belief through autonomous reasoning, and their putatively independent reasoning may itself generate strong, "enthusiastic" desires to hold certain beliefs, for example religious beliefs. But for Hume, "philosophical decisions are nothing but the reflections of common life, methodized and corrected" (*EHU* 130 [162]). Hume resists the desire to embrace beliefs about the transcendent, the divine, and the metaphysically real, but he also acknowledges and defers to the beliefs of natural, "common life." As author of normative decision procedures for belief, Hume is Academical. As a reflective philosopher, however, who acknowledges that those procedures cultivate, methodize, and correct just the natural beliefs to which most basically we merely yield or assent, Hume remains Pyrrhonian.

Reasoning, however, for Hume is not simply a decision procedure for belief, deciding which beliefs to accept and not accept. Reasoning that reaches skeptical conclusions also alloys, inflects, or retunes beliefs in a way that renders them non-dogmatic. As David Fate Norton writes: "It is true that our escape from 'total scepticism' depends upon a trivial suggestion of the fancy. But it does not follow from these facts that reason – reflective reason, consciously chosen analysis, conscientiously undertaken critical examination – is without function and effect, or that the interludes of reason are entirely insignificant when compared to the interludes of backgammon" (Norton 1982, p. 235).

Hume's way of skeptically believing may therefore be distinguished from dogmatic modes of belief not only insofar as skeptical beliefs are sieved by the Academical decision procedures that separate natural from non-natural belief. Hume's skeptical beliefs are also different from dogmatic beliefs because skeptical beliefs are alloyed by his Pyrrhonian meta-theory, or rather, in his own terms, by the Pyrrhonian "spirit" in which he theorizes. Having run but not defeated the skeptical arguments, Hume remains cognizant that any theory and system of beliefs

he might establish has (so far as he can tell) not been validated through an ultimate criterion of truth.[31] The beliefs allowed through his skeptical theorizing must be therefore different *in kind* from the beliefs of dogmatists, different in the sense that they do not make claims about ultimate truth or reality. One may, along these lines, believe p dogmatically or non-dogmatically. The content of the belief p does not change, in this regard, but on a secondary level p is believed in a different manner, with a different meta-understanding of what it is to hold a belief that p is the case.

Hume gives a clear indication that he thinks just this in the adverbial terms and phrasing with which he closes Book I of the *Treatise*. There he tells us that, like Sextus, he "makes all" his "statements undogmatically" – all of them. Hume advances different statements and holds them as beliefs, but he does not advance those statements or hold those beliefs in a dogmatic manner.

> I here enter a *caveat* against any objections, which may be offer'd on that head [i.e. the charge of dogmatism]; and declare that such expressions were extorted from me by the present view of the object, and imply no dogmatical spirit, nor conceited idea of my own judgment, which are sentiments that I am sensible can become no body, and a sceptic still less than any other (*T* 274).

If beliefs may be held dogmatically and undogmatically, then there is a way to interpret Hume's skepticism as simultaneously Pyrrhonian and Academic – as both (1) *unmitigated* and *Pyrrhonian* to the extent that no criterion for truth is advanced in response to the skeptical arguments and (2) *mitigated* and *Academic* to the extent that it employs its own *eulogoi* (or decision procedures) in discriminating between, on the one hand, natural and rationally supported and, on the other, unnatural and unsupported beliefs. This approach has the advantage of both resolving a number of interpretive puzzles using categories Hume himself deploys and, in addition, explaining how Hume's skepticism carries features of *both* Academic and Pyrrhonian skepticism (contra Kemp Smith 1905, 1941, and Popkin 1951).

Indicative and Recollective Signs

Hume's representationalism may not be the strongest dimension of his philosophy, but it does exhibit and become more intelligible as a dimension of his larger skepticism.[32] Hume's arguments for skepticism with regard to the senses, *pace* John P. Wright, are poorly interpreted as a form of representational realism, simply because Hume acknowledges that he can find no ultimate grounds for justifying the claim that our perceptions accurately represent the real, independent world to us. Rational interrogation of perception, in Hume's view, would subvert belief in the external world itself if it were not for the non-rational insistence of the imagination and of common life as they create in their conflict with reason the "monstrous offspring" of representationalism (*T* 215).

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[31] This is, of course, very different from maintaining that no theory can possibly be validated or justified.

[32] My thanks to Plínio Smith for a number of important suggestions animating this section.

Representations themselves, however, carry no intrinsic content to warrant a claim to really representing independent reality. And no science based wholly upon perception can lay claim to making rationally justifiable assertions about the nature of the external world. To the extent science may make claims about independent reality, then, it can only be in a non-dogmatic way. Causal laws cannot be thought of as describing the *world in itself*, but merely as describing the way our *perceptions of the world* (or the *world as it appears to us*) coordinate with one another – smoke and heat coordinating with fire, in our experience, for example (contrast Ayer 1956 and Popper 1959).

Pyrrhonian skeptics make a similar distinction between "recollective" (or "suggestive" signs) and "indicative" signs.

> They call a sign recollective if, having been observed together with the thing it signifies, at the same time as it makes an impression on us--and while the other thing remains unclear--it leads us to recall the thing which has been observed together with it and is not now making an evident impression on us (as in the case of smoke and fire). A sign is indicative, they say, if it signifies that of which it is a sign not by having been observed evidently together with the thing it signifies but from its proper nature and constitution (as bodily movements are signs of the soul) . . . There being two different sorts of signs, as we have said, we argue not against all signs but only against indicative signs, which seem to be a fiction of the Dogmatists. For recollective signs are found convincing by everyday life: seeing smoke, someone diagnoses fire; having observed a scar, he says that a wound was inflicted. (*PH* II 99–103; Annas and Barnes 2000 translation.)

Humean science, then, may be thought of along Pyrrhonian lines as a science of recollective rather than indicative signs. Causal reasoning comprises for Hume not laying claim to having acquired knowledge of an independent causal order but, rather, recollecting, through the natural relations of ideas, resembling and contiguous past perceptions. Yes, Hume's "monstrous" representational doctrine of double existence does grant what Sextus refuses, namely that in ordinary common life we naturally take our perceptions to be perceptions of an external world. But, having run through skeptical arguments concerning the veracity of the senses, the Humean philosopher and natural scientist merely acknowledges and assents to those beliefs undogmatically, all the while understanding that there remains no rational justification for the monstrosity (cf. Gilson 1941, Paine 1945, Capaldi 1975, Fosl 1999).

Nature and the Fourfold: Technical Arts

The "guidance of nature" is the first element of the skeptical fourfold. As we have seen, for Hume theorizing in accordance with the guidance of nature is more than simply restricting one's terms to those that can be defined empirically, limiting one's theoretical labor to methodizing and correcting natural belief, or developing explanations of phenomena only in terms of the observed causal order. Humean skeptical naturalism is a humble kind of theorizing that acknowledges human finitude. Perhaps at our best, Hume writes in the *Treatise*, "we might hope to establish a system or set of opinions, which if not true (for, perhaps, that is too much to be hop'd for) might at least be satisfactory to the human mind, and might stand

the test of the most critical examination" (*T* 272). The *Enquiry concerning Human Understanding* follows suit, describing the results of philosophical activity in terms of being "durable" and "useful" rather than true (*EHU* 161 [129]; section XII, Part III). Hume does not rule out the possibility of grasping or representing the nature of independent or transcendent reality; but neither does he demand the achievement of that sort of truth as a criterion of good theorizing. Hume instead is content to leave determinations of that sort in abeyance, in suspense.

The deep importance of what is found to be "satisfying" and "useful" in Hume connects his thought to the Pyrrhonian Fourfold's instruction to embrace the technical arts, whose goal is to determine "what works," rather than "what is"; and in doing so it offers another decision procedure, criterion, or test for acceptable belief. We might call this "test" Hume's "satisfaction test." Connecting doxastic concerns about naturalistic theories and explanations with issues of use connects the epistemological with the practical. Along these lines, in the following sections I wish to argue that for Hume the philosophical use of "nature" and "naturalism" also presents itself as a *moral* possibility for philosophers, or rather a doxastic philosophical possibility Hume embraces for what I wish to argue are moral reasons.

Nature and the Fourfold: Custom

A large part of what establishes the "satisfaction conditions," if you will, for the human mind according to Hume is custom, habit, and history – whether in the formation of causal beliefs, virtues, or political norms. While conservative commentators like Donald Livingston have figured this dimension of Hume's thought as associating him with thinkers like Edmund Burke, to my own ear Hume's appreciation of custom, habit, and tradition connects Hume's to the skeptical Pyrrhonian Fourfold's prescription to defer to the customs and laws of a society. But the distinctive character of Hume's regard for custom and convention in human thought also points to something of the special skeptical character of "nature" as it functions in his work. In particular, far from being fundamentally distinct from one another, Hume maintains that nature actually completes itself in convention, or rather that we discover our nature, realize (in both senses of "realize") it in the historical process of forming and observing conventions (in both senses of "observe," too).[33] The development of rules governing the stability and transference of property (*T* 256) does not, for example, entail for Hume the imposition of artifice upon alien nature. Rather, for Hume, the progress of convention marks a change in nature itself, a change from an "*uncultivated*" (*T* 488) to a "methodized" and "corrected" nature (*EHU* 130 [162]). Hume depicts this continuity between the conventional and the natural more emphatically when he describes the achievement of certain "fundamental" (*T* 526) conventions as, in fact, the invention of new "laws of nature."

[33] About the partiality and selfishness of humanity, Hume writes, for example: "The remedy, then, is not deriv'd from nature, but from *artifice*; or more properly speaking, nature provides a remedy in the judgment and understanding, for what is irregular and incommodious in the affections" (*T* 489).

> Tho' the rules of justice be *artificial*, they are not *arbitrary*. Nor is the expression improper to call them *Laws of Nature*; if by natural we understand what is common to any species, or even if we confine it to mean what is inseparable from the species. (*T* 484)[34]

One might, therefore, upon Humean lines, distinguish (1) basic and unchanging human nature from (2) artificial but non-arbitrary "laws of nature" and contrast these two against (3) a third, more superficial or "surface"-type of convention, that is the more contingent arrangements made by human society.[35] It is one thing, for example, to produce different conventions governing the proper manner of laying out silverware (perhaps, e.g., laying the knife at the top of the plate rather than to the right side). It is another to create different prohibitions governing sexual relationships and private property. It would be something else, yet again, as Stanley Cavell points out, to expect that our actions will not have consequences in the world, to count entirely different expressions (and not those we now count) as expressions of pain, or to "be bored by an earthquake or by the death of [one's] child or the declaration of martial law, or . . . quietly (but comfortably?) sit on a chair of nails."[36]

"Surface" conventions by contrast are agreements or alignments that offer less resistance to revision, or at least remain revisable in ways that would not fundamentally disrupt what we recognize as or what appears to us as our human ways of being. What is crucial, then, is not whether or not such conventions are grounded in metaphysical essences or even in an independent, external natural order that reason or perception lay hold of. The distinguishing feature, rather, is resistance – what Sartre describes as a "coefficient of adversity" – the extent to which we find in experience that certain practices or beliefs are not plastic, revisable, or open to revision. Along just these lines, for Hume the "natural" signals not an independent causal order but, rather, the stable, the useful, the common, the easy (when we go along with it) or resistant (when we do not), the not easily revisable and regular features

[34]Heraclitus is recorded as having said: "Man's *ethos* [character] is his *daimon* [fate, spirit, divinity, fortune]" (CXIV, D.19). See Kahn (1979). See also Martin Heidegger's comments on this passage in his "Letter on Humanism" (Heidegger 1977). The Latin *natura* is related to *nascí*, to be born, and hence "nature" bears the sense of what one is born to, what is natal, i.e., one's fate.

[35]Echoing what Wittgenstein calls "surface grammar" (Wittgenstein 1953, hereafter *PI*, #664), a notion related to Wittgenstein's search for fundamental or "grammatical" propositions (*PI* #232, 251, 293, 295, 371, 373, 458, 496, 497. "Essence is expressed by grammar" (*PI* #371)).

[36]Concerning such fantastic revisions of human convention, Cavell observes: "That human beings on the whole do not respond in these ways is, therefore, seriously referred to as conventional; but now we are thinking of convention not as the arrangements a particular culture has found convenient, in terms of its history and geography, for effecting the necessities of human existence, but as those forms of life which are normal to any group of creatures we call human, any group about which we will say, for example, that they *have* a past to which they respond, or a geographical environment which they manipulate or exploit in certain ways for certain humanly comprehensible motives. Here the array of "conventions" are not patterns of life which differentiate human beings from one another, but those exigencies of conduct and feeling which all humans share" (Cavell 1980, p. 111). I also take it that this is the type of convention or agreement to which Wittgenstein refers to at *PI* #355: "the point here is not that our sense-impressions can lie, but that we understand their language. (And this language like any other is founded on convention [*Übereinkunft*].)"

we recognize of the world and ourselves, and what is natural to us can at least in part be artificial.[37]

Curiously then our investigation of the Fourfold's deference to custom as it might be read in Hume winds back around to an investigation of what he means by the natural. In the face of the skeptical dilemmas Hume writes that he does not "know" – does not have knowledge of – what ought to be done, or how he can respond, but can only "observe what is commonly done" (*T* 268). This observation includes recognizing what he is "inclin'd" to do and what "propensity" may affect him in such circumstances (*T* 265) – circumstances where he might lose "hope" and be "disappointed" (*T* 266–7), circumstances where he may become "affrighted and confounded with that forelorn solitude" (*T* 264), full of "hesitation" and "dread" (*T* 265), "confounded" and "in the most deplorable condition imaginable, inviron'd with the deepest darkness, and utterly depriv'd of the use of every member and faculty" (*T* 269).[38]

Having despaired of reaching what I would like to call a dogmatic resolution to the skeptical arguments in the apprehension of ultimate truth or independent reality, Hume "observes" what is commonly even customarily done, not simply in the way a scientist makes observations but in the sense in which one "observes" or follows the laws and customs of a society. In observing the beliefs and practices of common life in an undogmatic way, Hume acknowledges paths of thought that remain for him, even in the face of dogmatism's despair, "natural and agreeable" (*T* 270), "safest" (*T* 271), promising to yield the sort of "mild and moderate sentiments" (*T* 272) and "innocent satisfaction" (*T* 273) charted by the skeptical Fourfold's advocacy of *metriopatheia* or moderate emotion.

When, therefore, Hume sounds his deference to common life and its customs as something which is "natural" to him, he acknowledges that he has found it to be what suits him, something with which he feels comfortable, something easy, useful and effective – as one might say, for example, that the grip and weighting of a familiar and well crafted fishing rod feels "natural" in one's grasp. But this is not all. Hume also expresses the sense in which the customs and practices of common life are those he finds himself bound to. In this he conveys the sense of the natural as what he was born to, what might be called the fatalities of our natality, our human finitude.[39]

[37]Wittgenstein writes that in following rules we ultimately do so "*blindly*" (*PI* #219) and "act, without reasons" (*PI* #211): "If I have exhausted the justifications I have reached bedrock, and my spade is turned. Then I am inclined to say: 'This is simply what I do'" (*PI* #217). Like those who have discussed Hume's use of "natural," many have understood this suggestion to mean something like the claim that our acts are really just "automatic," "instinctive," and "determined." For more on the meanings of "nature" as Hume uses it, see McCormick (1993). David Bloor (1976, 1983), for example, largely understands Wittgenstein in mechanistic and deterministic terms. See also Malcolm (1982).

[38]Cavell argues that something like this despair in the face of skepticism can easily translate into violent, world-consuming revenge (Cavell 2003, pp. 125–43).

[39]The *OED* tells us that the Latin *natura*, from which "nature" is derived, refers to the character, constitution, or course of things. In Cavellian terms we might say that for Hume what constitutes

Nature and the Fourfold: Constraint of the Passions

Hume's skeptical naturalism, of course, did not sit well with his contemporaries, and he was excoriated as a dangerous skeptic. From a Humean point of view, however, the danger lay not with skeptical philosophy but in the dogmatisms of what he called "false philosophy" (*T* 223).[40] Rather than skeptical thinking, it is the misguided attempts to overcome skepticism (to establish divine or rationalistic foundations for science and philosophy) that lead to tumult, disturbance, and suffering – both (a) the Tantalus-like suffering of not being able to ground dogmatic claims and (b) the violence wrought by religious and political enthusiasms grounded in philosophical dogmatism. Hume shares in the diagnosis of the dangerous potential of philosophical dogmatism Montaigne describes when he writes: "They want to get out of themselves and escape from the man. That is madness: instead of changing into angels, they change into beasts; instead of raising themselves, they lower themselves. These transcendental humors frighten me" (1958, p. 856).

To these dangerous dogmatic humors, Hume's skeptical naturalism of human finitude recommends a moral remedy. Registering something very much like the positive moral vision of Hume's skeptical naturalism, Montaigne writes in the same essay that: "There is nothing so beautiful and legitimate as to play the man well and properly, no knowledge so hard to acquire as the knowledge of how to live this life well and naturally; and the most barbarous of our maladies is to despise our being" (1958, p. 852). The normative force of this moral vision depends upon seeing in skeptical naturalism some hope for settling dogmatism's philosophically rooted disturbances. Ending dogmatism's tumultuous suffering through skeptical naturalism's peaceful acknowledgment of human finitude connects Hume to the Pyrrhonian ends of *ataraxia* and *metriopatheia*.

Generally speaking, two kinds of rest or peace exist for philosophers (qua philosophers). The first, call it "dogmatic peace," finds end and settling in the acquisition of truth and knowledge, in having conquered and subdued ignorance and doubt. Having followed out the consequences of sound argument, assessed and reassessed the evidence at hand, reaching the truth secures and satisfies philosophy in unassailable certainty and confidence. For philosophers or scientists in the possession of this sort of truth, all challenges to the established claim can be repelled, and whatever problems or conditions of dis-ease led them to search for the truth in the first place have been put to rest, ameliorated and healed forevermore.[41]

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founding a genuinely philosophical way of thinking includes *finding* the ways of thinking that one is born to, what one is compelled to inherit and take over as a human being (Cavell 1989).

[40]For an expansive articulation of Hume's theory of true and false philosophy, see Livingston (1998).

[41]Bertrand Russell gives a similar account of what I have called the first of philosophy's possible modes of rest. He writes: "When there are rational grounds for an opinion, people are content to set them forth and wait for them to operate. In such cases, people do not hold their opinions with passion; they hold them calmly, and set forth their reasons quietly. The opinions held with passion are always those for which no good ground exists; indeed, the passion is the measure of the holder's lack of rational conviction" (1948, p. 13, quoted by Hallie 1985, p. 34 n. 2).

The second form of rest, "skeptical peace," by contrast suspends and in some cases abandons the philosophical search for truth. For the skeptic the relentless search for ultimate truth comes to seem a source of ill-ease. In the face of disappointment in the aspiration to dogmatic peace, the skeptic either comes to accept the philosophical search as futile and vain, an empty quest for perhaps a nonexistent Holy Grail, or the skeptic simply decides that life is perfectly livable and complete without the fruits dogmatic philosophy promises to yield, that other projects are more worth the time of one's life to pursue. The *ataraxia* of which Sextus writes clearly shares in this second, skeptical kind of peace, and it displays elements of both the acceptance of dogmatic philosophy's vanity and the decision that life is satisfactory without dogmatic philosophy.[42]

But Sextus' account does not end there. He also offers us a diagnosis of the inclinations and passions characteristic of dogmatic philosophical investigations. According to Sextus' narrative, philosophically inclined people set out initially with the "object of passing judgement on ... sense-impressions [*phantasias*]," much in the way that Hume's account of philosophy begins with the desire to scrutinize the "vulgar" beliefs of naive realism.[43] The motive Sextus attributes to the philosopher in this is the desire for "ascertaining which of them [i.e., the appearances] are true and which false, so as to attain quietude [*ataraxia*]," what I have called "dogmatic peace." The enquirer, however, according to Sextus, if thorough in the search and honest in self-criticism, discovers "contradictions of equal weight." Conflicting arguments or antinomies arise which conclude that some set of appearances is both veridical and deceptive. Sextus suggests that the person who attempts to solve this dilemma but remains gripped by the desire for ultimate truth will be "for ever ... disquieted," unable to untie the Gordian knot of dogmatic dispute. According to Hume the irresolvability of dogmatic philosophical dispute leads to forlorn, disconsolate despair.

Sextus continues his story by arguing that even one who believes him or herself to have apprehended truth will fail to achieve tranquility both "because of his irrational and immoderate elation, and in his dread of a change of fortune he uses every endeavour to avoid losing the things which he deems good." Hume adds to Sextus' analysis of the disquietudes of dogmatism the idea that dogmatism in addition leads to political party rage and the violence of religious enthusiasm (the practical and social correlate to the clash of contrary philosophical positions).

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[42]The suggestion of a philosophically educated rest or pause accompanying or resulting from such ways of thinking connects Sextus not only with Hume but also with Wittgenstein, who writes in *Philosophical Investigations* of "breaking off" [*abzubrechen*] from (false) philosophy (or at least from the relentless (and futile) self-questioning of philosophy) through a discovery that gives philosophy peace ("*die Philosophie zur Ruhe* [quietude or rest] *bringt*. . ..") [#133] (Wittgenstein 1990, p. 305).

[43]*PH* I 25–30; 19–20. Remaining quotations in this and the succeeding paragraph are from this passage of *PH.*

The solution, then, for the skeptic, is to escape from the restlessness of false philosophical thought by happening upon, by finding not proving, the *ataraxia* sought for all along in the skeptical *epochē* and in a deference to the elements of the Fourfold, disengaging oneself from all and any matters upon which dogmatism might focus its unsettling gaze. Concerning philosophical thought in general, Hume remarks time and time again upon its "difficulty" (e.g., *T* 268), its strain and effort. In engaging in dogmatic philosophical inquiry the mind, Hume says, "becomes forc'd and," importantly, "unnatural" (*T* 185) in its operations. Thinking becomes "*intense*" (*T* 268) and not relaxed (*T* 269). This unnatural, intense, and forced thinking is cousin to the sort of political rage and religious enthusiasm rooted in dogmatic philosophy.

The solution for Hume, like Sextus, is a form of *epochē*, to suspend judgment deliberately on the claims of false philosophy and to abandon or forego rather than to falsify its fruitless projects; the solution is dissolution not disproof. "I am convinced," writes Hume, "that, where men are most sure and arrogant, they are commonly the most mistaken, and have there given reins to passion, without that proper deliberation and suspense, which can alone secure them from the grossest absurdities" (*EPM* 278, cf. 227).[44]

Time and time again – whether considering the existence of the causal connection, the existence and nature of God, or the existence and features of an external natural world that our perception accurately represents – Hume embraces an *epochē* concerning the relevant metaphysical issues, endorses *aphasia* about contesting metaphysical conclusions, and defers non-dogmatically to appearances and to common life. By such conduct, and perhaps by such conduct alone, are, according to Hume, the torments and sufferings of false philosophy put to rest.

Hume's "true philosophy," then, repeats in important ways the central features of ancient *Pyrrhonism* – an abandonment of ultimate criteria for truth, a refusal of dogmatic belief, the endorsement of something like "recollective signs," adherence to the elements of Sextus' Fourfold, the moral end of *ataraxia* or *metriopatheia*, and *epochē* and *aphasia* about ultimate truth and matters transcendent. By also,

[44] After being stung by the sarcasm of John Stewart in an article criticizing the anti-Newtonian work of Kames, Hume wrote, in a letter to Stewart: "All Raillery ought to be avoided in philosophical Argument; both because it is unphilosophical, and because it cannot but be offensive, let it be ever so gentle. . . . This Spirit of the Inquisitor is in you the Effect of Passion, and what a cool Moment wou'd easily correct. But where it predominates in the Character, what Ravages has it committed on Reason, Virtue, Truth, Liberty, and every thing, that is valuable among Mankind?" Kames's article was "Of the Laws of Motion," the first article published in *Essays and Observations, Physical and Literary, Read before a Society in Edinburgh and Published by Them* (1754). The work was a collection of articles read before the Philosophical Society, later the Royal Society of Edinburgh (chartered as such in 1783). Hume co-edited the volume with Alexander Monro the Younger, as they were joint secretaries of the society at the time (Mossner 1954, p. 257). Stewart, then Professor of Natural Philosophy at Edinburgh, published his criticism in the same collection as "Some Remarks on the Laws of Motion, and the Inertia of Matter." The abusive sections seem to have been inserted into the article only just prior to it being printed and apparently were not included when the piece was first read (Mossner 1954, p. 259).

however, creating along *Academical* lines a non-dogmatic decision procedure for theoretical belief, Hume's "true philosophy" espouses a satisfying, easy, durable, pleasant, moderate, and undisturbed way of theorizing. Hume's skeptical naturalism provides the terms through which he, like Sextus Empiricus, presents moral and epistemic possibilities for life to us. The normative force of Hume's invitation to engage skeptical practice depends upon the extent to which we too find natural and fitting the unsponsored possibilities for thinking and acting that his skeptical naturalism describes.

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Chapter 9
Hume on Skeptical Arguments

Plínio Junqueira Smith

1 Introduction

We are used to talking about "skeptical arguments." However, it is not clear what is meant by this expression. What are they? What do they establish? Are skeptics committed to their arguments? How many kinds of skeptical arguments are there? I will not deal with such questions generally, but I will focus on how Hume addresses this topic, in order to shed some light on it. This paper will be divided into two parts: the first will deal with kinds of skeptical arguments, and the second with their uses.

In the first part, I will show that Hume mainly distinguishes two *kinds* of skeptical arguments. On the one hand, there are popular, weak skeptical arguments; and, on the other, philosophical, strong skeptical arguments. Each kind of skeptical argument has its own characteristics. It is important to note that these kinds do not correspond to the division of skepticism into Academic, or mitigated skepticism, and Pyrrhonism, or excessive skepticism. Skeptics all share the same argumentative arsenal, independently of the specific form of skepticism they adopt. A related point is that the weaker skeptical arguments are mainly derived from ancient skepticism, both Academic and Pyrrhonian, whereas the stronger skeptical arguments are derived from modern philosophy, especially from Hume's own empirical science of human nature.

In the second part, I will show the difference, as Hume understands it, between Academic (or mitigated) skepticism and Pyrrhonism (or excessive skepticism). Though Hume employs this historical distinction between two ancient sects, one should not suppose that his intention is to employ it rigorously as a historian of ancient skepticism would do. On the contrary, this ancient distinction serves his own purposes and I will be concerned with it only within Hume's philosophy, without regard to the ancient forms of skepticism. So, what is the difference between Academic skepticism and Pyrrhonism as they are construed by Hume? The difference, I suggest, lies in the *use* made of skeptical arguments by each form of

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skepticism. A given skeptical argument can be used to suspend judgment; this is the Pyrrhonian use. But it can also be used instead to change our attitude towards knowledge, or to affirm or restrict the scope of our inquiries; this is the Academic use. Two considerations are crucial for a skeptic to reach this Academic stance: the realization that these skeptical arguments admit no answer and the awareness that nature has implanted in us certain faculties and beliefs that resist the force of skepticism, which is devastating in relation to all other beliefs. Were we not persuaded of the great force of skeptical arguments, we would never acknowledge nature's (much) superior force.[1]

2 Kinds of Skeptical Arguments

Hume offers a typology of skeptical arguments, especially in section XII of *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding* (hereafter *EHU*).[2] In the first part of this section, he draws a distinction between antecedent and consequent skepticism. Antecedent skepticism is a doubt entertained before any science or knowledge, whereas consequent skepticism is a doubt acquired through science and knowledge. This distinction is very important, since it helps us understand how Hume saw skeptical arguments.

Antecedent skepticism is best represented by Cartesian doubt and has as its purpose the avoidance of error and precipitate judgment. How do we reach antecedent skepticism? Do we need arguments to get there? Hume refers to the "Cartesian doubt," even though he does not explicitly mention errors derived from sense perception, the dream argument, or the deceiver God (*EHU*, p. 116).[3] It seems, therefore, correct to say that antecedent skepticism is more an attitude adopted by the philosopher before any enquiry than a stance arrived at after a rational investigation.

The second species of skepticism is characterized by being posterior to science, since its arguments are based on some kind of knowledge of the world. Like antecedent skepticism, this form also consists in an attack on our human faculties: in particular, reason and the senses. But, as we shall see, Hume also considers the

[1]Recent scholarship has increasingly acknowledged that Hume's position combines both sides (skeptical arguments and natural beliefs). This is certainly progress. Previous scholarship tended to divide these two sides into a "skeptical side" and a "naturalist side," leading to various misunderstandings. They separated these two sides, even though they are intimately combined in Hume or, more properly speaking, there are no two sides. Stroud is a notable example of this evolution, from Stroud (1977), in which he talks of a "negative phase" and a "positive phase," to Stroud (1996). See Smith (1990) for a general interpretation of the unified character of Hume's "logic," and Smith (1995) for a detailed account of this interpretation. Smith (2005) applies this idea to Hume's conception of reason.

[2]The editions of Hume's works used in this paper are Hume (1985, 1986a, b, 2006a, b).

[3]Later, he will refer to "counterpoising arguments" (*EHU*, p. 129) that will check natural human dogmatism. Here, he seems to allude to the ancient practice of arguing on both sides of a question. But it is not immediately clear that he is thinking of antecedent skepticism in this passage.

skeptical attack on morals and aesthetics. In all these cases, Hume recalls what is usually said by skeptics against our knowledge, morality, or taste. There seems to be a pattern in all these arguments, a pattern to be found among ancient skeptics, both Pyrrhonists and Academics.[4]

Concerning the senses, we find Hume exhibiting an argument, invoked by skeptics from all ages, based on the imperfections of the senses (*EHU*, p. 117). This argument is based on a number of common observations: if we press our eyeball, we see a double image; if we partially submerge an oar in water, it will look crooked; the appearance of an object changes according to the distance; and so on. Hume does not consider this argument in detail, but it seems that, if the argument is intended to prove that the senses are not to be trusted, it is on the grounds that they represent their objects in different ways, and that not all these appearances can be true at the same time. So, it seems, there is a *diaphonia* among sense perceptions, and the senses cannot establish which is the true appearance.

Concerning reason, we see that consequent skepticism is also based on "skeptical arguments," that is, that skeptics aim "to destroy *reason* by argument and ratiocination" (*EHU*, p. 124). The same pattern is present here, at least in respect to "popular," though not to "philosophical," objections. Popular objections rely on *contradictions of opinions* and our impossibility of discovering the true one among so many conflicting views (*EHU*, p. 126).

This kind of argument may be applied in other instances, such as morals and aesthetics. Skeptics are wont to notice the diversity that reigns among men. We have only to open our eyes to see how people differ in their moral opinions. We need but travel a little to know the variety of laws and customs. And some reflection on this diversity makes us aware of the difficulty in establishing what is the correct way of life.

> By this diversity of sentiment, observable in human kind, nature has, perhaps, intended to make us sensible of her authority, and let us see what surprising changes she could produce on the passions and desires of mankind, merely by the change of their inward fabric, without any alteration on the objects. ("The Sceptic" [S], p. 166)

Hume's discussions of aesthetics point in the same direction. One may argue, in a skeptical spirit, that no standard of taste can be found among the *diaphonia* that reigns among men. Observation of the difference of opinions is, for a skeptical stance, the first step:

> The great variety of Taste, as well as of opinion, which prevails in the world, is too obvious not to have fallen under every one's observation... But those who can enlarge their view to contemplate distant nations and remote ages, are still more surprised at the great inconsistence and contrariety. ("Of the Standard of Taste" [ST], p. 231)

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[4] Thus, the distinction between antecedent and consequent skepticism does not correspond to that mentioned earlier between Academic and Pyrrhonian skepticism. There is no correspondence between the former distinction and the distinction between kinds of arguments, since consequent skepticism includes both weak and strong arguments.

Now, amidst all this diversity, one should choose which is the correct opinion, and identify a standard. But how could we? asks the skeptic. "There is a species of philosophy, which cuts off all hopes of success in such an attempt, and represents the impossibility of ever attaining any standard of taste" (ST, p. 234). At the end of the same paragraph this species of philosophy is identified as "the sceptical kind" (ST, p. 235). According to this kind of philosophy, "Among a thousand different opinions which different men may entertain of the same subject, there is one, and but one, that is just and true; and the only difficulty is to fix and ascertain it" (ST, p. 234).

What does this kind of skeptical argument establish? What are its conclusions? Typically, skeptical arguments are meant to lead to suspension of judgment. First, it is established that "the senses alone" do not show us the truth, that the senses are not, "within their sphere, the proper *criteria* of truth and falsehood" (*EHU*, p. 117). The conclusion of the argument concerning matters of fact is that we should not trust our reason, since it would "destroy that evidence" (*EHU*, p. 126). In other words, were this kind of argument powerful, we should conclude that no rational evidence would establish any opinion concerning matters of fact or that, like the senses, reason is not a criterion of truth. Since we do not have such a criterion, we should suspend judgment among conflicting perceptions and opinions.

Concerning morals, the skeptical argument of conflicting opinions has, as its conclusion, the negative thesis that "there is nothing, in itself, valuable or despicable, desirable or hateful, beautiful or deformed; but that these attributes arise from the particular constitution and fabric of human sentiment and affection" (S, p. 164). Hume states this conclusion in a very clear, concise way: "Objects have absolutely no worth or value in themselves" (S, p. 169). In the *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* (*EPM*) Hume seemed to identify "those who have denied the reality of moral distinctions" (*EPM*, p. 133) as skeptics. They are "disingenuous disputants who really do not believe the opinions they defend, but engage in the controversy, from affectation, from a spirit of opposition" (*EPM*, p. 133). By defending the opposite of what a dogmatist thinks, without really believing what they defend in the controversy, skeptics try to show that moral distinctions have no reality at all.

The case in aesthetics, according to the skeptic, is as bad as in morals. On the one hand, there is an epistemological problem, since we cannot identify a standard, and on the other, there is an ontological problem, since there may be no standard at all to be found, once we acknowledge that we are dealing only with subjective properties. "To seek the real beauty, or real deformity, is as fruitless an inquiry, as to pretend to ascertain the real sweet or real bitter" (ST, p. 235). It is not only the case that we cannot discern, among so many opinions, which is the correct one, but also there is no standard of taste to be discerned. The skeptical argument has, as its conclusion, this negative verdict. In both cases, morals and aesthetics, there is nothing objective that we could try to discover, i.e., no perceiver-independent ground for labeling objects good or bad, beautiful or ugly.

In all these cases, Hume does not think that the skeptical argument based on the variety of opinions establishes either suspension of judgment or the intended negative conclusion. This ancient skeptical argument from *diaphonia* is, according

to Hume, a "popular" or "weak" argument, when applied to both the senses and reason. Let us see how this weak argument can be answered.

Hume says that it is easy to reply to the arguments concerning the senses, for it is enough to correct the evidence of our senses by reason (*EHU*, p. 117). If the senses cannot discover the truth, this means that they cannot alone discover the truth; aided by reason, it is easy to know why the oar looks bent, by pressing the eyeball the object looks double, why objects appear smaller as we move away from them. So, by using our reason, we may choose one sense perception as the correct one.

In the case of the *diaphonia* concerning opinions of matter of fact, Hume also thinks that skeptical arguments won't do the job. They are weak, according to Hume, since common life and action put them aside. The principles of nature are too powerful for skeptical principles (*EHU*, p. 126). We will keep on believing and employing our reason, despite the fact that people may entertain different opinions. It is as though the practical efficiency of our reasoning faculty is enough for us and, therefore, we may choose among some opinions at least, and prefer those opinions that help us live our lives.

In the case of morals, Hume thinks that this skeptical argument, which relies on *diaphonia* or variety of opinions and sentiments, is not very convincing; at least it will not convince philosophers. The reason for that is not very clear. This is what Hume says: "The vulgar may be convinced by this argument [from the diversity of sentiment]. But men, accustomed to thinking, may draw a more convincing, at least more general argument, from the very nature of the subject" (S, p. 166). It seems that the problem with this skeptical argument is that it does not get into "the very nature of the subject." One way of reading it is this: the skeptical argument of conflicting opinions is too formalistic, since it can be applied to any topic, without regard to its specific content. Another interpretation is the following: it is too superficial because it does not discuss the particular arguments used by dogmatists, but merely points to different opinions and states that we have no criterion of truth.

Perhaps it should be remembered here that Hume, in the second *Enquiry*, examines a controversy concerning the foundations of morals, whether it is based on reason or sentiment, in which "both sides of the question are susceptible of specious arguments" (*EPM*, p. 135). Hume will not, in the manner of the ancient skeptic, suspend his judgment based on this *diaphonia*. Rather, he observes that "these arguments on each side (and many more might be produced) are so plausible, that I am apt to suspect, they may, the one as well as the other, be solid and satisfactory, and that reason and sentiment concur in almost all moral determinations and conclusions" (*EPM*, p. 137). Once again, conflict of opinions does not lead to suspension of judgment. In the face of this opposition, Hume will develop his own philosophical view.

According to Hume, there is a species of common sense opposed to the skeptical conclusion concerning beauty and taste, and, once it is adopted, "the principle of the natural equality of tastes is then totally forgot" (ST, p. 235). Once more, there is no equipollence; in this specific case, no equipollence among different tastes and opinions concerning beauty. A careful inquiry into how we form aesthetic judgments may permit Hume to conclude that "it appears, then, that amidst all the variety and

caprice of taste, there are certain general principles of approbation or blame, whose influence a careful eye may trace in all operations of the mind" (ST, p. 238). So, if we study human nature to determine on what basis we judge beauty, we realize that "the judgment of one man [would have] been preferable to that of another" (ST, p. 241), and that "though the principles of taste be universal, and nearly, if not entirely, the same in all men; yet, few are qualified to give judgment on any work of art, or to establish their own sentiment as the standard of beauty" (ST, pp. 246–7).

We should not be too quick to condemn this kind of skeptical argument as simply weak and useless. If Hume recalls them in relation to so many topics, it is because they deserve to be remembered; and if he weighs their strength, it is because they do have some strength. At the very least, common people will be swayed by them (S, p. 166). And, in philosophy, they still have their place, even if not the main one. Skepticism is still a subject that deserves a detailed account, and those traditional arguments helped put skeptics at center stage. It should also be noted that Hume does not propose a new, different argument concerning taste, as he does in all other cases. This may mean that, in aesthetics, the argument from *diaphonia* is the best skeptical argument to be found and the most powerful challenge to objectivity, though it may meet an answer, since there is a standard of taste.

Moreover, there are some cases in which Hume thinks that opposition or contradiction enjoys a better fate. For example, when he first mentions skepticism in the *Treatise of Human Nature* (*T*), he says that "the sceptics may here have the pleasure of observing a new and signal contradiction in our reason, and of seeing all philosophy ready to be subverted by a principle of human nature, and again saved by a new direction of the very same principle" (*T*, p. 150). There is, in the Conclusion of the *Treatise*, a second occurrence of this skeptical argument from opposition. "But tho' these two operations [the principle which makes us reason from causes and effects and the principle which convinces us of the continued existence of external world] be equally natural and necessary in the human mind, yet in some circumstances they are directly contrary, nor is it possible for us to reason justly and regularly from causes and effects, and at the same time believe the continu'd existence of matter" (*T*, p. 266; cf. *T*, p. 231). Also in the first *Enquiry*, we see Hume referring to this opposition between the senses and reason as a most powerful objection: "The second objection goes further, and represents this opinion [of external existence or evidence of sense] as contrary to reason" (*EHU*, p. 123). Here is perhaps the most challenging argument philosophy can display against our opinion that things exist independently of our minds.[5] But these two kinds of antinomy or opposition are new, and nowhere to be found among ancient skeptics. It is Hume's contribution to this ancient kind of argument, but in a new light or with a new twist, as we shall presently see.

[5] Another example of opposition in the *Treatise* is that between reason and prejudice, concerning taste and extended objects. "Here then we are influenced by two principles directly contrary to each other..." (*T*, p. 238), "but if ever reason be of sufficient force to overcome prejudice; 'tis certain, that in the present case it must prevail" (*T*, p. 239).

If skepticism were to rely only on the argument from *diaphonia*, it wouldn't be a powerful challenge to philosophy and dogmatism. However, Hume does not stop at collecting old skeptical arguments but moves on to propose some new ones. It is important, in my view, to stress the contribution made by Hume to skepticism.

First, Hume improves on ancient *diaphonia* when he appeals to an argument according to which there is an opposition between our senses and reason in the case of the external world. Instinct makes us believe that external objects exist and that we perceive them through our senses. However, reason persuades us that we do not see the objects themselves, but have only images of them through the senses. However, reason is incapable of justifying our belief in these external objects. Third, "modern inquirers" admit that sensible qualities exist only in the mind; and, as Berkeley has shown, primary qualities are inseparable from sensible qualities; therefore, primary qualities must also exist only in the mind (*EHU*, p. 122). In this case, the skeptical argument admits of no answer (*EHU*, p. 123).

Hume's improvements are not limited to new, better applications of *diaphonia*. The skeptical assault on reason is also strengthened by Hume. Skeptical arguments may be given against relations of ideas (*EHU*, pp. 124–5) or matters of fact (*EHU*, pp. 126–8). Skeptical objections against mathematics are drawn mainly from Bayle's (2001) reflections on the notion of extension: "Reason here seems thrown into a kind of amazement and suspence" (*EHU*, p. 125). However, even if this is a better argument, it is still possible "to avoid these absurdities and contradictions" by denying that we have abstract ideas (*EHU*, p. 125 note). As we just saw, objections against matters of fact were divided into "popular" and "philosophical."[6] Those objections that rely on contradictions of opinions are weak, but the skeptic may have recourse to a stronger argument. The philosophical objection is based on Hume's theory of causality: since our inferences rely on instinct – habit or custom – and instincts are fallible, we can never trust them (*EHU*, p. 127).

In his essay "The Sceptic," Hume also proposes a deeper skeptical argument, after acknowledging that the skeptical argument derived from the diversity of opinions is somewhat popular and weak: "The vulgar may be convinced by this argument [from the diversity of sentiment]. But men, accustomed to thinking, may draw a more convincing, at least more general argument, from the very nature of the subject" (S, p. 166). By "the very nature of the subject," I think Hume is referring to the manner in which judgments are produced by our nature on each topic, in this case how we form moral judgments. So, Hume goes on to attribute to the skeptic an argument in which the latter compares moral predicates with both beauty and

[6] A similar distinction is drawn by Pascal (1962, p. 131). After having shown "les principales forces des pyrrhoniens," which are those arguments used by Descartes in his first *Meditation*, the dream argument and the evil genius, Pascal refers to those traditional Pyrrhonian arguments found in ancient skeptics and in Montaigne: "Voilà les principales forces de part et d'autre, je laisse les moindres comme les discours qu'ont faits les pyrrhoniens contre les impressions de la coutume, de l'éducation, des moeurs des pays, et les autres choses semblables qui quoiqu'elles entraînent la plus grande partie des hommes communs qui ne dogmatisent que sur ces vains fondements sont renversés par le moindre soufflé des pyrrhoniens."

knowledge. This kind of comparison is very similar to what we find in Hume's other writings to establish his moral theory.[7] The conclusion of this more philosophical skeptical argument is the same as the more popular skeptical argument: "Objects have absolutely no worth or value in themselves. They derive their worth merely from the passion" (S, p. 169).

Thus, there are two kinds of skeptical arguments employed by consequent skepticism: those based on antinomy, that is, conflicting opinions and conflicting sense perceptions, and those based on empirical knowledge of our faculties and how they produce beliefs and judgments. The first kind of argument can be applied to any subject, since conflicting opinions are found in every subject and may convince ordinary men; the second is more philosophical and persuasive, since it goes into the heart of the matter and demands a specific knowledge in each philosophical subject.

Hume dismisses arguments coming down from ancient skepticism, like the argument from *diaphonia*, applied both to the senses (*EHU*, p. 117) and reason (*EHU*, p. 126). As we saw, these traditional skeptical arguments are held by Hume to be "popular" (*EHU*, p. 126) and "weak" (*EHU*, p. 117), in opposition to the "more profound" (*EHU*, p. 117), "more philosophical" (*EHU*, p. 126) skeptical arguments. Skeptics of all ages, according to Hume, insist "upon the more trite topics" (*EHU*, p. 117). Those strong skeptical arguments are not offered by ancient skeptics, but by modern philosophers. Hume, following in this respect Bayle,[8] thinks that skepticism is much stronger after the "new philosophy" that emerges from the writings of philosophers like Montaigne,[9] Descartes, Pascal, Locke, and Malebranche. As we saw, included among modern skeptical arguments are: Cartesian doubt, Bayle's attack on the notion of extension and infinite divisibility, Berkeley's criticism of the distinction between primary and secondary qualities, Hume's own theory of causation and doubts concerning external existence. Berkeley, for instance, is considered by Hume a "very ingenious author," who gave us "the best lessons of scepticism, which are to be found either among the ancient or modern philosophers, Bayle not excepted" (*EHU*, p. 123 note). However, Hume gives a twist to modern skeptical arguments. How shall we understand Hume's own way of developing these modern skeptical arguments?

The fundamental idea is this: Hume's strong, philosophical skeptical arguments are developed within an empirical science, whose subject is the human mind, thereby resulting from a careful scrutiny of the operations of our understanding. Once we see how our understanding works, we realize that we cannot trust it, we cannot be sure of anything we perceive or think about the world around us. Skepticism, as created by Hume, is the product of the application of empiricism

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[7] See, e.g., *T* III, i, sections 1–2, pp. 458, 471, and III, iii, section 1, paragraphs 8–9; *EPM*, pp. 134–8, 170–3, and Appendix 1, pp. 242, 291–3.

[8] Bayle, in his famous article "Pyrrho," remark B, says that the "new philosophy" leads to skepticism.

[9] Mossner (2001, p. 79) notes, with surprise, that Montaigne's name is absent in the *Early Memoranda* of the pre-*Treatise* period, but he is sure that this French skeptic is a main source for Hume.

to philosophy. It emerges, above all, as a consequence of science. In order to feel the strength of skepticism, one must be fully convinced in advance that one has an adequate description of the workings of the human understanding. It is the imperfections found by this empirical science of the human understanding that prompts skepticism.[10]

This characteristic is more manifest in the *Treatise* than in the first *Enquiry*. A brief look at its three main skeptical arguments will show how they are predicated on empirical science. The first is drawn from an inquiry into the mechanism of causal inference; the second, from an investigation of reason's working on relations of ideas; the third, from an examination of the vulgar system, that is, the mechanisms by which we are led to the belief in bodies (as well as the philosophical system of double existence). In all three cases, the skeptical argument depends on Hume's discoveries (or hypotheses) of the workings of the human understanding, especially the numerous errors, fallacies, illusions, and fictions committed by it. Once we realize how precarious the workings of our mind are, it is impossible not to lose our confidence in it. If our basic beliefs are produced in such a manner, how can we trust them? There is no connection between them and what is true or real, in the sense that we hold them irrespective of what is true about the world. They may indeed be true, but that is not the reason why we hold them. Moreover, there are no good reasons for them. On the contrary, if we have these beliefs it is only because our imagination works without any regard for consistency or any other rational standard. If all our beliefs are, in the light of this empirical science, the result of an unreliable process of belief formation, then there is no reason why we should accept them. It is natural for us humans to be disappointed after a careful research into this process of belief formation. The Conclusion of Book I of the *Treatise* does nothing more than summarize, organize, and deepen this total skepticism that results from the application of empirical science to the human understanding. The impact of this empirical science with its discoveries of the very imperfect mechanisms of our mind is that we tend to abandon the very beliefs that this empirical science tried to explain.

We are now in a position to understand one sense according to which traditional skeptical arguments are weak, while those skeptical arguments invented by Hume are strong. Traditional skeptical arguments are weak because reason may correct our senses and must be employed in common life. The mere observation of diversity of perceptions, as circumstances differ, does not imply that the senses cannot be corrected, so truth may be reached. In the same vein, a mere consideration of the diversity of opinions does not impede the proper workings of our reason in common life. Think of the case of morals and aesthetics. We may reach a standard, despite all varieties in opinions; reason may correct and improve our tastes and manners. In

[10] Annas (2000, pp. 279–80) makes the following remark concerning the difference between Hume and ancient species of skepticism: "Ancient skeptics always argue purely *ad hominem*; the sceptic never has a position of his own. . . Here, Hume is decisively different. For he not only appeals to nature; he is a naturalist in a way that the ancient sceptics are not. He has a theory of human nature, in terms of which he explains our tendencies to retain beliefs even when we recognize that rational support for them is lacking."

all these cases, senses and reason continue to be trustworthy and reliable faculties. Skeptical arguments based on an empirical science of the human understanding are strong because, showing how our understanding really works in common life, we realize that its fallacious workings *cannot be corrected by reason*. No matter how defective the process of belief formation, we will stick to these beliefs.[11] It is not possible for reason to correct the senses, memory, imagination or itself, for it is the natural, inevitable mechanisms that are being discovered by Hume's empirical science. Hume's science of human nature would furnish the best skeptical arguments since it would show imperfections that we cannot avoid. The imagination cannot but operate in the manner described by Hume's empirical science, and the errors, fallacies, illusions, and fictions will always remain with us. Isn't that a depressing result?[12] Philosophy, when it tried to correct the vulgar system, for instance, only multiplied difficulties and furnished more weapons to the skeptics.

It is important to insist on this point to understand the exact nature of Hume's skepticism and his contribution to the history of skepticism. Hume's skepticism, far from being or representing a threat to empirical science,[13] is entirely dependent on such a science. Though total skepticism results from his analysis of causation, the senses, reason, and memory, never for one moment does Hume consider his description and explanation of the workings of the understanding to be wrong or false. He does not even show any hint of changing his mind about the results achieved so

[11] For Garrett (1997, pp. 238–9), "popular" arguments are weak "because it [this skeptical objection] in fact has little tendency to weaken our belief or produce skeptical sentiments," since "it leads the mind immediately back into the consideration of common life, where we cannot refrain from employing probable reasoning," while philosophical skeptical arguments would be strong "because it draws the mind's attention away from ordinary topics of everyday life onto the inner workings of its own cognitive processes." According to Garrett, these are psychological observations, not epistemological.

[12] Contemporary epistemology tends to connect skepticism with internalism, that is, with the thesis that the justification of a belief must be given by the person who has the belief (and not by an external observer). It is also common to attribute to Hume a form of mentalism, that is, the thesis according to which the mind has access only to its own, internal perception. So, it is widely believed that Hume's philosophy is another example of how internalism (in the form of mentalism) leads to skepticism. However, a close examination of the matter shows precisely the contrary, for Hume's empirical science is but an externalist approach to the mind, that is, Hume is a scientist raising hypotheses as to how the mind works, and this empirical science leads to skepticism by producing the strongest skeptical arguments. According to Hume, the triumph of skepticism resides precisely upon the analysis of the processes of belief formation made by an external observer, once this external observer reveals the total lack of trustfulness of these processes.

[13] Garrett (1997, p. 205) acknowledges that, "in the Treatise I, iv, ('Of the sceptical and other systems of philosophy'), however, Hume considers a number of skeptical arguments that seem, when taken together, entirely destructive of any 'system of the sciences'." A bit further, Garrett (1997, p. 206) mentions the question that appears to him the most important one in the interpretation of Hume's philosophical works: "Can Hume's positive 'system of the sciences' properly withstand his own skeptical arguments and conclusions?" Just like Garrett (1997, pp. 205–41), I try to answer, at least in part, precisely this question.

far.[14] The Conclusion of the *Treatise* is nothing but an overview of what his empirical science has shown us. In the face of these new, strong skeptical arguments, even Hume (a rigorous philosopher) may be momentarily led to total, excessive skepticism,[15] but this does not mean that he must correct his science of human nature. On the contrary, he is confident he has described and explained our understanding to his full satisfaction. So, the emerging skepticism does not destroy empirical science, but depends upon a full trust in it. Empiricism applied to “logic” produces unavoidable skepticism.[16] There is, thus, complicity between empiricism and skepticism.[17]

3 Uses of Skeptical Arguments

Now, to what purpose would a philosopher use these skeptical arguments? What should we conclude from these arguments? What moral should be drawn from them? This is, I think, a main worry Hume had when considering them. His own investigations concerned not only the kinds of skeptical arguments, but also their purpose. The crucial difference between Academic skepticism and Pyrrhonism, from Hume’s point of view, is the use that each species of skepticism makes of the same arguments.[18]

[14]One exception is in the *Appendix*, where Hume shows some dissatisfaction with his explanation of personal identity. However, in the *Dialogues*, he still seems to endorse the view presented in the *Treatise*.

[15]We saw that weak arguments may sway the vulgar, but not the philosopher. Strong arguments, however, may sway the profound philosopher as well.

[16]In ancient Pyrrhonism, skepticism leads to empiricism, and not the other way round, since Sextus Empiricus’ empiricism comes after suspension of judgment, and not before.

[17]Passmore (1980, p. 41; cf. p. 151) sees a tension between empiricism and skepticism in Hume’s philosophy: “But this tendency in his thinking, however congenial it may be as a stick with which to beat the physicist, threatens the whole conception of a science based upon experience; it emphasizes man, at the cost of making science of man impossible; it destroys the positive methodology of the *Treatise*.” Garrett (1997, p. 208), on the contrary, concludes that “Hume can, indeed, reconcile his aim for a positive system of the sciences based on human cognitive psychology with his use of skeptical arguments.” Owen (1999, p. 191) believes that Humean theory provides the answer to skepticism: “Hume seems to think that his account of belief and belief formation is uniquely able to deal with sceptical results; unless a theory treats belief as analogous to sensation, the result will be perpetual contradiction and absurdity.” According to him, “The problem is not so much with reason or reasoning, but with a failure to recognize the nature of belief” (1999, p. 193).

[18]The idea of a use of skepticism is not altogether original. Garrett (1997, p. 205) says: “As the authority of Aristotelian explanations decayed and the writings of ancient skeptics became better known, European philosophy became increasingly interested in the use of skepticism and the status of skeptical arguments. Descartes used such arguments strategically, to motivate his own epistemological innovations and to certify their superiority. Some philosophers arrayed skeptical arguments against religion, while others used them fideistically, to defend religion against the encroachments of science. David Hume stands among the post-Cartesian philosophers most concerned with the uses and status of skepticism.”

First, let us see how *Pyrrhonists* would use skeptical arguments. All skeptical arguments, in their Pyrrhonian use, lead to *suspension of judgment*. Pyrrhonists use them in order to suspend judgment and to *abolish belief*: "While the sceptic insists upon these topics, he... seems, for the time at least, to destroy all assurance and conviction" (*EHU*, p. 127). That is why, for example, popular arguments against matters of fact are weak and philosophical arguments ineffective: we must act, reason, and believe in ordinary life (*EHU*, p. 128). Pyrrhonists use skeptical arguments to suspend judgment, abolishing all beliefs. When a philosopher employs an argument and, by this use, ends up annihilating our beliefs, he has made a Pyrrhonian use of the argument. Indeed, even when a philosopher intends to criticize skepticism, as in the notorious case of Berkeley, but his argument has the opposite effect, then this philosopher is, according to Hume, a skeptic (*EHU*, p. 123 note) or, more precisely, a Pyrrhonist. Any use of an argument leading to suspension of judgment is a Pyrrhonian use of the skeptical argument.[19]

A related use of skeptical arguments is to destroy our confidence in our faculties. In the case of Cartesian antecedent skepticism, "it recommends a universal doubt, not only of all our former opinions and principles, but also of our very faculties; of whose veracity, say they, we must assure ourselves" (*EHU*, p. 116). The reason why we cannot escape such a universal doubt is precisely because the veracity of our faculties is at stake, and we need them if we want to deduce anything, especially their own veracity. Even if there were an original, self-evident principle, we could not "advance a step beyond it, but by the use of those very faculties, of which we are supposed to be already diffident" (*EHU*, p. 116).

Consequent skepticism tries to discover "the absolute fallaciousness of their mental faculties" (*EHU*, p. 117). Pyrrhonists have two main targets when they deploy their arguments: the senses and our reasoning faculty. In both cases, we cannot rely on the evidence we have. The fact is that Hume's empirical science of human nature shows that our beliefs may not be true, since their formation depends on so many errors, fallacies, illusions, and fictions. Beliefs are produced by the imagination rather than reason or the senses, so we seem not to have proper evidence for what we believe. Moreover, some of our natural beliefs are inconsistent (like causal reasoning and belief in the external world) and therefore some of them must be false. So, at least in this respect, the Pyrrhonist's and Hume's arguments are similar and that is one reason why both are classified as skeptical arguments.[20]

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[19] Garrett (1997, p. 218) seems to understand that a main characteristic of skepticism is to denounce our beliefs as actually *false*: "How skeptical does Hume intend this conclusion to be? It seems to be a very skeptical conclusion indeed, for it seems to entail that one set of fundamental beliefs – either our causal conclusions or our beliefs in continued and distinct bodies – must be false."

[20] Owen (1999, pp. 178–9) explains why these arguments displayed by Hume can be called skeptical arguments: "If it turns out that the products of reason lose their force and vivacity, then they will cease to be beliefs. That is, they will cease to be ideas which we assent to as true. That would be a skeptical result, but not because it is a matter of showing beliefs to be unjustified. It is a matter of showing that they cease to be beliefs, i.e., they cease to be things to which we assent as true." Thus, according to Owen, an argument is skeptical when it takes away, from the products of reason,

Does Hume use skeptical arguments with the same purpose as the Pyrrhonists? Certainly not. Pyrrhonism, for Hume, is an untenable stance. However strong an argument may be, nature will always be stronger. Not only is it impossible to abolish some beliefs established in us by nature, but also we cannot but employ our faculties in our lives. In one of his most famous passages, Hume says that "Nature, by an absolute and uncontroulable necessity has determined us to judge as well as to breath and feel" (*T*, p. 183). Nature, however, imposes on us not only beliefs, but also those very faculties questioned by Pyrrhonists. Less emphasized is the next sentence, in which Hume refers to our confidence in our faculties: "Whoever has taken the pains to refute the cavils of this total scepticism, has really disputed without an antagonist, and endeavour'd by arguments to establish a faculty, which nature has antecedently implanted in the mind, and render'd unavoidable" (*T*, p. 183). Therefore, no such use can be made of skeptical arguments. If they were to prevail, we would be led to inaction followed by death. But they will never prevail over nature. This consideration prevents Hume from using skeptical arguments with Pyrrhonian intentions.

Why can those skeptical arguments endorsed by Hume not have a Pyrrhonian use? At first, they are very strong and we tend to abandon our beliefs after reviewing them. However, this tendency never really amounts to a rejection of belief, even at the very moment of intense philosophical reflection. And even if, for a moment, we could have no beliefs at all, this lamentable state would not last. As soon as we come back to common life, skepticism will "vanish like smoke" (*EHU*, p. 126). Skeptical arguments are too subtle to have a strong impact on us.

This is clear in the two main skeptical arguments in Part IV of Book I of the *Treatise*. In the important section "Of scepticism with regard to reason," the skeptical argument that tends to reduce all probability to zero is inefficacious: "As the emotions of the soul prevent any subtile reasoning and reflection... No wonder, then, the conviction, which arises from a subtile reasoning, diminishes in proportion to the efforts, which the imagination makes to enter into the reasoning, and to convince it in all parts" (*T*, p. 186).[21] Why does the mind retain its belief, even when faced with a strong skeptical argument?

> I answer, that after the first and second decision; as the action of the mind becomes forc'd and unnatural, and the ideas faint and obscure; tho' the principles of judgment, and the balancing of opposite causes be the same as at the very beginning; yet their influence on the imagination, and the vigour they add to, or diminish from the thought, is by no means equal. (*T*, p. 185)

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their strength and vivacity, while suspension of judgment would be only the mere conception of an idea, without any strength or vivacity.

[21] Owen (1999, p. 195) says that "Hume's claim in general is that long and complex patterns of reasoning have less and less influence on us, in proportion to the length and the abstruseness of their subject matter. And as the number of steps required to reduce the probability of our judgements to zero approaches infinity, so its influence on our beliefs gets vanishingly small."

To a standard objection to skeptical arguments, Hume answers that this objection is wrong and useless:

> If the sceptical reasonings be strong, say they, 'it's a proof, that reason may have some force and authority; if weak, they can never be sufficient to invalidate all the conclusions from the understanding. This argument is not just; because the sceptical reasonings, were it possible for them to exist, and were they not destroy'd by their subtility, would be successively strong and weak, according to the successive dispositions of the mind. (*T*, p. 186)

In the conclusion of the following section, "Of scepticism with regard to the senses," the interpretation that skeptical arguments are too refined to have a lasting impact upon the mind is confirmed: "As the sceptical doubt arises naturally from a profound and intense reflection on those subjects, it always increases, the farther we carry our reflections, whether in opposition or conformity to it. Carelessness and in-attention alone can afford us any remedy" (*T*, p. 218). In the Conclusion of Book I, Hume makes the same point: "Very refin'd reflections have little or no influence upon us" (*T*, p. 268). Even if he changes his mind in the next paragraph, the truth remains that nature will soon dispel the melancholy they seem to throw on us. Most of the time, nature "cures me of this philosophical melancholy and delirium, either by relaxing this bent of mind, or by some avocation, and lively impression of my senses which obliterate these chimeras" (*T*, p. 269).

In the first *Enquiry*, however, Hume dismisses skeptical arguments for different reasons. Subtlety is no longer the only, or the main, reason why we cannot use skeptical arguments in order to reach suspension of judgment and to question the veracity of our faculties. Concerning traditional skeptical arguments, none of them is considered by Hume as subtle, but popular, trivial, and weak. As we saw, Hume finds answers to all of them. Concerning the strong, philosophical skeptical arguments, Hume never says they do not lead to suspension of judgment *because they are too subtle*. He only says that they are ineffective because, and only because, they are opposed to nature's much superior force. Pyrrhonism, that is, the use of skeptical arguments with the intention of suspending judgment, is incapable of overcoming nature, irrespective of its subtlety, for "nature will always maintain her rights, and prevail in the end over any abstract reasoning whatsoever" (*EHU*, p. 34). "Nature is always too strong for principle. And though a Pyrrhonian may throw himself or others into a momentary amazement and confusion by his profound reasonings; the first and most trivial event in life will put to flight all his doubts and scruples" (*EHU*, p. 128). Therefore, subtlety is no longer the reason why skeptical arguments may not have a Pyrrhonian use. Any argument that would oppose nature would not reach its purpose, subtle or not.

This does not mean that skeptical arguments have no impact on us, but only that they do not have the impact desired by Pyrrhonists. What effect do skeptical arguments have upon us? What use can be made of them?

First, let us take notice of what results from antecedent skepticism. The attitude that recommends universal doubt would be excessive, if, like Descartes, we thought that we could escape from it only by knowing a first principle from which we could

deduce truths. This is certainly not, for Hume, the only way to avoid rash judgments. On the contrary, if this were the only way not to be precipitate, we would never make any positive assertion about anything, since we would never be able to use our rational faculties while they are under suspicion. A moderate antecedent skepticism, however, is beneficial and constitutes "a necessary preparative to the study of philosophy, by preserving a proper impartiality in our judgments, and weaning our mind from all those prejudices, which we may have imbibed from education or rash opinion" (*EHU*, p. 116). Caution and modesty are the proper attitude of a just, exact enquirer or of a moderate skepticism (*EHU*, p. 129).

Now, let us consider consequent skepticism. In the *Treatise*, skeptical arguments exercised a powerful, if short-lived, influence upon Hume. We have already seen that Hume retracts his opinion that they have no impact because of their subtlety: "But what have I here said, that reflections very refin'd and metaphysical have little or no influence upon us? This opinion I can scarce forbear retracting, and condemning from my present feeling and experience" (*T*, p. 268). Pyrrhonists have a point, because "the intense view of manifold contradictions and imperfections in human reason" leads Hume at least to be ready "to reject all belief and reasoning" (*T*, p. 268). The same change of mind is admitted by Hume when he finishes his analysis of the causes of our belief in bodies. At the outset, he said that it is "vain to ask, *Whether there be a body or not*?" (*T*, p. 187) because this belief is unavoidable. The only sensible question is "*What causes induce us to believe in the existence of body*?" (*T*, p. 187). However, as we saw, this very inquiry into the causes of our belief furnishes the Pyrrhonist with his most powerful argument. This powerful argument may not dislodge belief, but it is not without effect on us:

> I begun this subject with premising, that we ought to have an implicit faith in our senses, and that this would be the conclusion, I shou'd draw from the whole of my reasoning. But to be ingenuous, I feel myself *at present* of a quite contrary sentiment, and am more inclin'd to repose no faith at all in my senses, or rather imagination, than to place in it such an implicit confidence. (*T*, p. 217)

Even if it is restricted to the moment of intense reflection, skeptical doubt, once it arises, persists for a surprisingly long while, since "both with respect to reason and the senses, [scepticism] is a malady which can never be radically cured, but must return upon us every moment, however we may chace it away, and sometimes may seem entirely free from it" (*T*, p. 218). There is an impact that skeptical arguments have upon us: they tempt us to momentarily abandon all belief and, in the long run, we will continue to be influenced by it.

Do we abandon all beliefs? No, some beliefs implanted by nature will remain unshaken, since nature is always superior to any argument or philosophical principle. Do we, then, retain all our former beliefs? Absolutely not, for skeptical arguments are very strong and only what is more strongly implanted in us by nature can resist them, all other beliefs being destroyed by them. There is a sense in which all beliefs may be momentarily destroyed, but not when we return to common life; however, when we return to common life, only natural beliefs withstand the force of this philosophical, Pyrrhonian moment. Thus, with respect to

non-natural beliefs, the impact of skeptical arguments is lasting.[22] It is a mistake to think that, because nature's principles are stronger than Pyrrhonian principles and, consequently, Pyrrhonism is an untenable stance, Pyrrhonism has no durable effect on us. On the contrary, it has an undeniable impact on us. It is also a mistake to think that, since Pyrrhonism would lead us to lethargy and death, no good effects could result from a momentary acceptance of its principles. On the contrary, there may be something good in acknowledging its strength. Let us look closer into the advantages that can result from a proper use of skeptical arguments.

What is the impact of this progression through skepticism in all its forms to the Humean empirical science of human nature? Some have thought that Hume's science would be threatened, if not destroyed, by skepticism. However, as we saw, Hume's use of skeptical arguments is not aimed at empirical reasoning, nor at a science based on the "experimental method" (*EPM*, p. 138). Those scientific beliefs are safe from skeptical attack, since they are just "the reflections of common life, methodized and corrected" (*EHU*, p. 130). However, it would be wrong to say that Humean empirical science is left untouched by skepticism. Hume does not retract a single line of his descriptions and hypotheses, so skepticism does not imply a revision of his empirical doctrines; but he seems to be less sure of what he says, at least he must be cautious and prudent in what he advances. He may be "positive and certain," but must

> guard against that assurance, which always arises from an exact and full survey of an object. On such an occasion we are apt not only to forget our skepticism, but even our modesty too; and make use of such terms as these *'tis evident*, *'tis certain*, *'its undeniable*; which a due deference to the public ought, perhaps, to prevent. (*T*, p. 274)[23]

[22]As Stroud (1996, p. 123) notes, "the 'excessive' position which Hume calls 'Pyrrhonism' can have good and lasting effects even if it cannot be permanently believed or followed." And, a bit further: "We cannot continue to endorse or express those conclusions in the ways we live our lives, but they nevertheless continue to have certain effects." Fogelin (1983, p. 406) defends a similar interpretation, when discussing skepticism in the *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion* (*D*): "But Philo not only invokes the radical (theoretical) skepticism of the *Treatise* in a general way, he also shows genuine sophistication concerning it. This comes out, for example, in his response to an attack upon skepticism offered by Cleanthes. Skeptical reflections generate uneasiness when they are undertaken and have no lasting effects (good or bad) when they are terminated. So Cleanthes asks for what reason the skeptic imposes 'on himself such a violence', adding that 'this is a point, in which it will be impossible for him [the skeptic] ever to satisfy himself, consistently with his sceptical principles' (*D*, p. 383). Philo's response does not deny the uneasiness that skeptical reflections may produce; instead it rejects the claim that skeptical reflections have *no* lasting effects."

[23]One might say that the danger of skepticism for Hume's empirical project is that this project rests on the epistemic credentials of natural belief. But since our natural beliefs are in conflict, and so some of them must be not only doubtful, but false, what good are natural beliefs if we know some of them must be false? The answer to this objection is that what is in contradiction are *principles*, not beliefs. A principle may be unreliable, but, properly speaking, not false. So, custom or habit may be fallible, but hard enough to sustain scientific beliefs. Moreover, our science, according to Hume, does not aim at truth, but only at right prediction and usefulness.

There seem to be two main benefits resulting from this passage through skepticism or from a proper use of skeptical arguments. First, not only are many beliefs simply eliminated, but many areas of research are likewise abandoned. For example, superstitious and religious beliefs implanted by education are entirely eliminated by skeptical arguments.[24] Also, philosophical beliefs, such as Aristotelianism or Cartesianism, should be swept away by the superior force of Pyrrhonism. This use of skeptical arguments, not against natural beliefs, but against superstition, religion, and dogmatic philosophy, is indispensable for a healthy way of philosophizing.[25] Therefore, Hume attributes an important role to skeptical arguments in its corrected, moderated, and restricted Pyrrhonian use.

There is yet another role, perhaps even more important than the one just mentioned, reserved for skeptical arguments. How could one discover nature's force, if not by comparison with the very strong, but not as strong, Pyrrhonian principles?[26] Only after we are conscious of the power of skeptical arguments, that is, after we feel inclined to reject all belief, can we be made aware of the even greater strength of

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[24]Fogelin (1983, p. 404) adopts the same interpretation: "There is a final feature of Hume's treatment of skepticism that is at least broached in the *Treatise* and becomes an important theme in his later writings. Skeptical doubts, no matter how intense, are no match for the beliefs that come back upon us when we return to daily life, but not all the beliefs that antedate our Pyrrhonian catharsis have a like tendency to be restored. Those, for example, that are the product of a mere education, indoctrination, fashion and so forth, will not inexorably force themselves back upon us. For this reason, Pyrrhonian exercises will have a tendency to curb the *enthusiasm* that Hume so much despised."

[25]Stroud (1996, pp. 126–30) explains why a skeptical life would be superior or better than other lifestyles. Among other reasons, Stroud suggests that mitigated skepticism rejects the politician's and the priest's manipulation, which thrive on superstition, as well as dogmatic philosophies, which abuse our nature. Thus, "we will be better off with it [philosophy]: less disturbed, more content, and more balanced. . . And section XII makes a case for the superiority of mitigated skepticism in securing those advantages" (p. 128). Owen (1999, pp. 205–23) also explains "Hume's preference for philosophy over superstition, for reason over bigotry, and for scepticism over dogmatism. It is the same as his, and our, preference for virtue over vice. In each case the former is more pleasant and useful for ourselves and others" (1999, p. 222). Owen does not attribute to skeptical arguments any role in the destruction of beliefs coming down from education, non-philosophical probability, religion, superstition, and dogmatic philosophy. According to him, when these beliefs conflict with "sceptical reason" (1999, p. 220), one should prefer rational beliefs, based on pleasure and utility propitiated by Academic skepticism, in opposition to disturbance and danger from superstition and religion.

[26]Owen (1999, p. 177) seems to imply that it would be enough, for Hume, to explain how the mind retains a belief in the face of skeptical arguments. "The issue is *the explanation of the presence of beliefs*, and not the justification of beliefs whose presence is unproblematic. . . Hume explains how, given his theory of belief, the relevant ideas manage to retain enough force and vivacity, even in the face of sceptical arguments, to remain beliefs." Garrett (1997, pp. 232–41), who also criticizes those interpretations centered on the question of justification, realizes that this is not enough to reject the threat of Pyrrhonism in Hume's philosophy: "Only in the *Treatise* I, iv, however, does he begin to allow himself to consider potentially skeptical implications of any of his discoveries; only in the first half of *Treatise* I.iv7 does he survey these implications systematically; and only in the latter half of *Treatise* I.iv.7 does he explore the question of what cognitive attitude should be taken toward those implications" (1997, p. 232).

nature's principles, and so avoid Pyrrhonian uses of skeptical arguments and instead employ them in a more moderate, Academic manner. Without this contrast, or comparison, no one would ever imagine how strong nature is, nor how differently we should react to natural beliefs and to superstitious, religious, and dogmatic beliefs. They would all be on a par, and no one would be a mitigated skeptic, just a normal, dogmatic human being, full of prejudices. Such a use of skeptical arguments is no longer a Pyrrhonian use, for we no longer aim at suspension of judgment, but only at discrediting some beliefs, not all, and at limiting our inquiries to proper fields of investigation.[27]

This philosophical stance that uses skeptical arguments with a different purpose from Pyrrhonism is called by Hume Academic, mitigated, or moderate skepticism.[28] A mitigated skeptic is someone who, conscious of the force of Pyrrhonism, realizes that skeptical arguments demolish *most* of our beliefs, and, conscious of the superior force of nature, realizes that these arguments cannot have a Pyrrhonian use against *all* beliefs, thereby attributing to them a different use, namely, to change our natural, precipitated, dogmatic attitude into the attitude of a rational, just, and exact enquirer, and to circumscribe properly the adequate fields of research, in which we can reach some determination, even if with modesty and some doubt.[29] This Academic stance is not reached by two *causal* factors,[30] but from the *conscious* and *argued* adoption of a consistent position in the face of Pyrrhonian virulence and the necessities of life.[31]

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[27] Annas (2000, p. 276) suggests, concerning this subject, an approximation between Hume and ancient Pyrrhonists: "Hume's own use of nature corresponds in many ways with the place of the appearances in ancient Pyrrhonism. It is all the more startling that he sees no analogy between what he is doing and the developed form of Pyrrhonism that we find in Sextus." Later, she comes back to the same idea: "We can live by the appearances, according to the Pyrrhonists, by nature according to Hume... Regardless of his mistakes about ancient schools, Hume's view seems like theirs in an important respect" (2000, p. 279).

[28] As Stroud (1996, p. 125) says, "This living in the acknowledgement of, or acquiescing in, both the profound philosophical 'doubts' and the natural 'solution' of those doubts is what Hume calls 'mitigated skepticism.' It is something that is '*consequent* to science and enquiry'. It is a 'natural result of the Pyrrhonian doubts and scruples', and it could not have been achieved without them. And it is therefore a state we can find ourselves to be in all the time. It is not just a passing mood; it can be a way of life." Cf. Garrett (1997, pp. 205–6).

[29] Ainslie (2003, p. 268): Hume "suggests that there is an internal relation between Academic and Pyrrhonist scepticism, in that the former emerges when the 'undistinguished doubts' of the latter 'are, in some measure, corrected by common sense and reflection'."

[30] This is Fogelin's interpretation (see Fogelin 1983, pp. 399, 404, 410).

[31] Stroud (1996, p. 124) says that "What is required for the kind of scepticism Hume recommends is not just following nature, but following nature while at the same time acknowledging or realizing nature's inescapable force."

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Part III
Pyrrhonism in Contemporary Philosophy

Chapter 10
Wittgensteinian Pyrrhonism

Duncan Pritchard

1 Introduction

In his final notebooks, published as *On Certainty* (Wittgenstein 1969, hereafter OC), Wittgenstein argues that the standard conception of the structure of reasons is radically mistaken and must be rejected. In its place he offers a new picture of the structure of reasons that poses a standing challenge to much of our received epistemological thinking. Indeed, one can think of this proposal as generating a kind of restricted skepticism which has some affinities with central themes in Pyrrhonian skeptical thought. With these affinities in mind, I propose that we think of the sort of skeptical view that is generated by Wittgenstein's radical new conception of the structure of reasons as a kind of *Wittgensteinian Pyrrhonism*.

2 Wittgenstein on the Structure of Reasons

Wittgenstein's final notebooks are fragmentary affairs, unedited by the man himself for public consumption and almost certainly concerned in places with distinct (though superficially similar) philosophical issues.[1] There is thus a limit to the extent to which we can reasonably extract an argument from these remarks which we can attribute with full confidence to Wittgenstein. Nonetheless, there is one particular train of thought in *On Certainty* that can be delineated and which, as we will see, is arguably in keeping with Wittgenstein's wider quietistic approach to philosophy in his later work. Accordingly, while our confidence that this line of argument should be attributed to Wittgenstein may not be as high as we would like, there is a

[1]For example, as Williams (2004) persuasively points out, the earlier sections (§§1–65) of *On Certainty* are in fact concerned with a very different kind of skeptical problem than much of the rest of the text.

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reasonable basis on which we can call it a *Wittgensteinian* proposal. With this *caveat* in mind, let us begin exploring the moving parts of this argument.

One key strand in this argument is the idea that there are certain important restrictions on legitimate doubt. He argues that doubts have to be grounded if they are to be made sense of (e.g., OC, §§458–9), but it is not this claim, which is relatively uncontroversial, which generates the significant restrictions on legitimate doubt that he has in mind but rather a further thesis. This is that in order for something to be a ground for doubt it is essential that it be more certain than that which it is calling into doubt, since otherwise one would have a better epistemic basis for rejecting the ground for doubt than for rejecting the belief which is the target of the doubt. Consider:

> If a blind man were to ask me "Have you got two hands?" I should not make sure by looking. If I were to have any doubt of it, then I don't know why I should trust my eyes. For why shouldn't I test my *eyes* by looking to find out whether I see my two hands? *What* is to be tested by *what*? (OC, §125)

Wittgenstein's point here is that since nothing is more certain (in normal circumstances) as that one has two hands, so one cannot ground a doubt in this proposition, as any such ground (e.g., that one cannot see one's hands) will be at least as open to doubt as the target proposition. A consequence of this way of thinking about doubt is that those propositions which we are most certain of – what Wittgenstein refers to as "framework" or "hinge" propositions,[2] for reasons that will soon become apparent – are logically immune to rational doubt since by definition any ground for doubt in these propositions would be itself more dubitable than the target proposition itself.

One immediate consequence of this claim is that it directly undermines any form of skepticism – such as Cartesian skepticism – which is explicitly aimed at fostering universal doubt, since on this view such universal doubt is impossible. As Wittgenstein puts the point at one juncture, "a doubt that doubted everything is not even a doubt" (OC, §450). Indeed, on this basis one might be tempted to read Wittgenstein as using this point about the need for doubts to be grounded in this specific way as a way of motivating a general anti-skepticism. Wittgenstein is quite clear, however, that the anti-skeptical import of this thesis concerning doubt is in an important extent limited, and here is where a second key strand in his thinking becomes important. For Wittgenstein argues that the constraints that apply to doubts also apply, *mutatis mutandis*, to beliefs. That is, just as grounds for doubt need to be more certain than the target proposition that is doubted, so grounds for belief need to be more certain than the target proposition which is believed since otherwise they can't be coherently be thought to be playing the required supporting role. A direct consequence of this point is that just as one cannot with good reason doubt that

[2] See, for example, OC, §§341–3. Although the "hinge" metaphor is the dominant symbolism in the book, it is accompanied by various other metaphors, such as the following: that these propositions constitute the "scaffolding" of our thoughts (OC, §211); that they form the "foundations of our language-games" (OC, §§401–3); and also that they represent the implicit "world-picture" from within which we inquire, the "inherited background against which [*we*] distinguish between true and false" (OC, §§94–5).

which one is most certain of, so one cannot with good reason believe it either, and this, as Wittgenstein notes, undermines a certain kind of anti-skepticism.[3]

Take, for example, G. E. Moore's (1939; cf. Moore 1925) famous commonsense defense of his anti-skeptical beliefs. Moore thinks that he has an adequate rational basis for his beliefs in those propositions which he is most certain of – so-called "Moorean" propositions, such as that he has two hands – but Wittgenstein argues that this is incoherent. As he puts it:

> My having two hands is, in normal circumstances, as certain as anything that I could produce in evidence for it.
>
> That is why I am not in a position to take the sight of my hands as evidence for it. (OC, §250)

If one's belief that one has two hands could be rationally supported by one's beliefs about what one presently sees – which are *ex hypothesi* less certain – then were one not to see one's hand when one looks for them then this would be a reason to doubt that one has hands. But of course in normal circumstances not seeing your hands when you look for them is more of a reason to doubt your eyesight than to doubt that you have hands. This shows, claims Wittgenstein, that that which we are most certain of is not rationally supported at all, but is rather the hinge relative to which we rationally evaluate – and thus "test" – other propositions.

Moreover (and note that this is a key strand in his thinking, one that is often overlooked), Wittgenstein is very explicit that it is not an incidental part of our epistemic practices that there are these hinge propositions which, in virtue of being maximally certain, are immune to either rational doubt or rational support. Instead, he claims that it is *essential* to any belief-system that there are propositions which play this hinge role, since the very practice of offering reasons, whether in support of belief or as a basis for doubt, presupposes these hinge commitments. Indeed, this is the whole point of the hinge metaphor:

> [. . .] the *questions* that we raise and our *doubts* depend upon the fact that some propositions are exempt from doubt, are as it were like hinges on which those turn.
>
> That is to say, it belongs to the logic of our scientific investigations that certain things are *in deed* not doubted.

[3]Note that I talk of believing/doubting "with good reason" here, rather than simply talking of rational belief/doubt. The reason for this is that while Wittgenstein certainly sees no distinction between a groundless doubt and an irrational doubt, there's nothing in *On Certainty* to suggest that he would make a similar claim about belief. Indeed, it is consistent with Wittgenstein's remarks on rational belief in *On Certainty* that a belief that has not been subject to a legitimate challenge may be rationally held even though the agent lacks any positive rational basis for that belief (see, e.g., OC, §550). As we will see, however, this asymmetry between doubt and belief does not affect Wittgenstein's argument and so we may legitimately set this distinction to one side here. The reason for this is that Wittgenstein surely does hold that in order for a belief to be rationally held it should be *possible* for it to be grounded in reasons, and yet Wittgenstein's claim is precisely that those propositions which we are most certain of can never be grounded in reasons, and so can never be rationally held. I am grateful to Diego Machuca for pressing me on this point.

> But it isn't that the situation is like this: We just *can't* investigate everything, and for that reason we are forced to rest content with assumption. If I want the door to turn, the hinges must stay put. (OC, §§341–3)

Wittgenstein's claim is thus that there is no prospect that there might be a belief-system which somehow managed to avoid such commitments, for just as a door needs hinges in order to turn, so rational evaluation requires these hinge commitments in order to be possible at all. That is, "it belongs to the logic of our scientific investigations that certain things are not doubted" (OC, §342). The upshot of this point is that there simply is no such thing as a universal rational evaluation of our beliefs, whether positive (/anti-skeptical) or negative (/skeptical), since all such evaluations must take place in the light of hinge propositions which are themselves immune to rational evaluation.

This is a key point which marks out Wittgenstein's treatment of the Cartesian skeptical problem from superficially similar treatments, such as the "ordinary language" response offered by J. L. Austin (1961). For while Austin clearly shows that our ordinary practices of rational evaluation are very different from the austere practices employed by the Cartesian skeptic who engages in universal doubt, this is not enough to defuse the skeptical threat from this quarter. After all, the Cartesian skeptic is not claiming that her doubt is something that would arise in the context of a normal inquiry, since it is precisely part of her view that normal inquiries lack the kind of epistemological generality that generates the relevant skeptical conclusion. But so long as the Cartesian skeptic's conception of rational evaluation is a "purified" version of our ordinary practices of rational evaluation, as she maintains, then it seems that she is on very strong ground to resist the claim made by proponents of the ordinary language response to this skeptical problem that we should privilege our ordinary practices of rational evaluation over the practices that she employs.

Indeed, if anything, this way of thinking about the Cartesian skeptic's practices of rational evaluation would privilege *them* over our ordinary practices (i.e., if only we were more thorough, had more time, had less practical limitations etc., then we would employ the Cartesian skeptic's practices of rational evaluation rather than our own).[4] It is in this context that Wittgenstein's claim that it is part of the very logic of our practices of rational evaluation that we are committed to hinge propositions becomes so important, since it entails that the Cartesian skeptic's practice of engaging in a universal rational evaluation is ruled-out *tout court*.[5]

We can more formally express Wittgenstein's argument in this regard as follows[6]:

[4]See Stroud (1984, chapter 2) for a subtle defense of this objection against ordinary language responses to the skeptical problem, as exemplified by Austin (1961).

[5]I explore this point more fully in Pritchard (2011; cf. Pritchard 2005c).

[6]I discuss this argument in more detail in Pritchard (2010), where I also specifically consider the question of whether such an argument provides a basis for epistemic relativism (I contend that it does not). See also Pritchard (forthcoming).

Wittgenstein on the Structure of Reasons

(P1) All rational doubts are grounded in reasons. (Premise)
(P2) In order for reason R to count as a rational ground for S's doubt in the proposition p, it must be more certain for S that R than p. (Premise)
(C1) So, those propositions which are most certain cannot be rationally doubted. (From P1, P2)
(P3) For a belief to be rationally held it must be possible to offer rational support in its favor. (Premise)
(P4) In order for reason R to count as a rational ground for S's belief in the proposition p, it must be more certain for S that R than p. (Premise)
(C2) So, those propositions which are most certain cannot be rationally believed. (From P3, P4)
(P5) But all belief-systems must include propositions which are held to be optimally certain. (Premise)
(C3) So, one's belief-system requires the existence of propositions – hinge propositions – which one's commitment to, while optimally certain, is immune to rational doubt or rational support. (From C1, C2, P5)
(C4) So, a universal rational evaluation, whether positive or negative, is impossible. (From C3)

With this argument Wittgenstein is offering us a challenging new conception of the structure of reasons, such that our reason-giving practices presuppose a class of fundamental hinge commitments which are by their nature immune to rational evaluation. A direct ramification of this argument is that there cannot be a satisfactory rational way of terminating the regress of reasons, since at some point in the regress one will inevitably encounter those propositions which one is most certain of – the hinge propositions – and yet these propositions by their very nature cannot be rationally supported and hence are not even in the market for rational belief. Reasons come to an end, but they do not come to end with further reasons of a special foundational sort. Instead, when we reach bedrock we discover only a rationally groundless "animal" commitment (OC, §359), a kind of "primitive" trust (OC, §475).

Although this new conception of the structure of reasons undermines Cartesian skepticism due to its dependence on universal doubt, it does raise a skeptical worry of its own. As Wittgenstein puts it, the "difficulty is to realize the groundlessness of our believing" (OC, §166). The skeptical challenge in play is very restricted, however. For one thing, since the challenge is posed specifically at the rational standing of our beliefs, it need not undermine our ability to have widespread knowledge of much of what we believe. After all, most epistemologists agree that knowledge often (if not always) consists at least in part of some degree of non-rational epistemic support, such as the satisfaction of a reliability condition, or a modal condition.[7] Indeed,

[7] McDowell may be an exception in this regard. See, for example, McDowell (1995). For discussion of this proposal, see Pritchard (2008; cf. Pritchard 2003).

many epistemologists are content to allow that quite often knowledge is possessed even in the absence of positive rational support for the target proposition.[8] If this way of thinking about knowledge is right, however, then it follows that the conclusion of Wittgenstein's argument, (C4), is entirely consistent with the widespread possession of knowledge.

Moreover, although Wittgenstein is rejecting a standard conception of the structure of reasons he is not thereby denying that there is such a thing as rational support. His point is rather that rational support is inevitably *local*, in the sense that it always presupposes arational hinge commitments. Strictly speaking, then, it is not that our believing is groundless as that it is *ultimately* groundless which is the skeptical concern here. Indeed, building on the previous point, one could argue that it is consistent with the conclusion of Wittgenstein's argument not just that knowledge is widespread, but that such knowledge also enjoys local rational support of this variety.

Still, even though this skeptical challenge is very specific, it is nonetheless a *bona fide* form of skepticism, in that it demonstrates a fundamental epistemic limitation that we face. Given that in normal quotidian contexts the rational support we can offer for our beliefs seems entirely adequate for the purposes at hand, we are inclined to extrapolate from this to the conclusion that our reasons can, as it were, "go all the way down." In effect, what we are doing in making this extrapolation is imagining that we are able to exhibit a kind of *rational autonomy*, such that where we are cognitively successful (i.e., where we believe truly) we can regard such success as fully creditable to our rational agency. The success of our local practices of offering reasons, which never raise the more general question about the ultimate structure of reasons, lead us to believe that such rational autonomy is at least possible. Wittgenstein's claim, in contrast, is that it is impossible.

This generates an *epistemic angst*, or as I prefer to call it these days, an *epistemic vertigo*.[9] This is the light-headed dizzying recognition, when the ties of context are relaxed and one starts to float free (to a limited extent) from the normal epistemic practices of quotidian contexts, that one is far more rationally exposed than one ever imagined. I want to suggest that this limited form of skepticism that is generated by the Wittgensteinian account of the structure of reasons shares some important themes with Pyrrhonian skeptical doubt. We can thus think of the form of skepticism generated by Wittgenstein's remarks on the structure of reasons as a kind of *Wittgensteinian Pyrrhonism*.

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[8] Such is the defining feature of epistemic externalism. See Kornblith (2001) for a good collection of articles discussing the epistemic externalism/internalism distinction. Note, however, that one does not need to be an epistemic externalist in order to hold that knowledge can be possessed in the absence of appropriate positive rational support for the target belief, since even some prominent epistemic internalists, such as Williams (2001) and Wright (2004), maintain that a belief can amount to knowledge even in the absence of positive rational support (in both cases because they argue that at least some beliefs enjoy a default entitlement). For discussion of these proposals in light of Wittgenstein's *On Certainty*, see Pritchard (2005c).

[9] I discuss the skeptical problem in terms of epistemic *angst* in Pritchard (2005a, chapter 9, 2005b).

3 Wittgensteinian Pyrrhonism

We noted above that Wittgenstein's conception of the structure of reasons was straightforwardly antithetical to Cartesian skepticism due to how it ruled out the possibility of universal doubt. Indeed, we also noted that this conception of the structure of reasons might also be consistent with the widespread possession of knowledge; if it is, then it is also inconsistent with Cartesian skepticism on this score too. By the same token, Wittgenstein's conception of the structure of reasons may also be inconsistent with the closest ancient analogue of Cartesian skepticism, Academic skepticism, since on one reading of this form of skepticism it too seeks to maintain that knowledge is impossible and in doing so engages in universal doubt.[10]

Crucially, however, Pyrrhonian skepticism does not trade on universal doubt in the way that Cartesian and (arguably) Academic skepticism does. Instead, its doubts are applied piecemeal. That is, it consists of skeptical techniques (modes) which can be applied, piecemeal, to a wide range of beliefs, but it does not consist of a universal doubt in the Cartesian sense, since it doesn't attempt to call a large body of our beliefs into question *en masse*. As one commentator has usefully described it, Pyrrhonian skepticism is "*distributively* universal, but *collectively* non-universal" (Ribeiro 2002, p. 325). As a result, that Wittgenstein's conception of the structure of reasons excludes Cartesian and Academic doubt does not mean that it thereby excludes Pyrrhonian doubt as well.

Indeed, there are some key aspects of Pyrrhonism which fit very well with the kind of restricted skepticism that Wittgenstein's conception of the structure of reasons gives rise to. First, consider the target of Pyrrhonian doubt. On at least one interpretation of Pyrrhonian doubt, such skepticism for the most part leaves commonsense belief alone.[11] Here, for example, is how Robert Fogelin characterizes the scope of Pyrrhonian doubt in a recent paper:

> [...] the attacks of the Pyrrhonian skeptic are directed against the dogmas of "Professors"—not the beliefs of common people [...] the Pyrrhonian skeptic leaves common beliefs, unpretentiously held, alone. (Fogelin 2004, p. 163)

Michael Williams characterizes the target of Pyrrhonian doubt along similar lines, arguing that Pyrrhonian skeptics do not object to agents assenting to propositions just so long as such assent is not, as Fogelin would characterize it, of a "pretentious" sort:

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[10]This is certainly how Sextus Empiricus (Bury 1933, p. 3) characterizes Academic skepticism at the beginning of his *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* anyway, since he claims that they "have asserted that [*knowledge*] cannot be apprehended", and others have followed him in this interpretation (see, e.g., Klein 2005, §§2–3). Still, there are grounds to suspect the reliability of Sextus' interpretation of this form of skepticism. For a more subtle discussion of the nature of Academic skepticism, particularly with regard to its relation to Pyrrhonian skepticism, see Groarke (2008).

[11]Note that this interpretation is far from being uncontentious. I discuss some of the key proposals that have been made in this regard at some length in Pritchard (2000, 2005a, chapter 8).

> [. . .] the Pyrrhonian has a distinctive *style* of assent: spontaneous, involuntary submission to his unrationalised impulses. Assent is a *pathos*, something that comes over one. (It is tempting to see Sextus as ironically inverting the Stoic rule of overcoming the affections, *pathoi*, in order to live by reason, *logos*: Sextus neutralises reason in order to live by his affections). Ordinary life, as Sextus sees it, is much more a matter of impulse and habit than of judgement properly so-called. (Williams 1988, pp. 561–2)

On this conception of Pyrrhonian skepticism, ordinary belief is excluded from skeptical challenge because it doesn't aspire to have the rational basis which the Pyrrhonian skeptical techniques are targeted at undermining.

I think we can cash-out what is going on here in terms of the Wittgensteinian conception of the structure of reasons. I noted earlier that there is a sense in which Wittgenstein's skepticism need not undermine the possibility of "local" reasons, of the sort that we might ordinarily unselfconsciously offer in normal contexts of inquiry. What makes these reasons local is that there is no pretence that they are part of a wider structure of doxastic support which is fully rational throughout. That's not to say, of course, that we self-consciously suppose in normal contexts of inquiry that this is *not* the case; the point is rather than in normal contexts the matter simply doesn't arise one way or the other.

What prompts the application of the Pyrrhonian skeptical modes is thus not ordinary expressions of belief but rather expressions of belief which presuppose the kind of rational autonomy described earlier, whereby one's cognitive success, where it occurs, is fully creditable to one's rational agency. It is the natural inclination of the intellectual—and especially the philosopher—to regard such autonomy as possible; indeed, to regard it as actual. But when the style of assent involved in the expression of belief reveals this kind of commitment, then the Pyrrhonian skeptical modes are brought into action to remind the agent of the futility of this aspiration.

What I am suggesting, then, is that it is no accident that the piecemeal skeptical techniques employed by the Pyrrhonian are applied in such a selective manner, for their aim is to generate a recognition on the part of the agent targeted that the rational support that she supposes is available for her beliefs is necessarily unavailable. The success of the Pyrrhonian skeptical modes is thus a reflection of what Wittgenstein was claiming about the real nature of the structure of reasons.

Of course, there is, on the face of it at any rate, one key difference between Wittgenstein skepticism and Pyrrhonian skepticism. For whereas the former proceeds via philosophical argument to put forward a concrete philosophical thesis which has skeptical ramifications, the latter was an ethical stance which laid claim to no non-self-evident theses at all.[12] One might well argue that this difference is so fundamental that it calls into question the plausibility of combining these two stances in any meaningful way.

On closer inspection, however, it becomes apparent that there are grounds for supposing that these forms of skepticism can be reconciled on this point. Wittgenstein, after all, has long been associated with a kind of quietism that is very

[12]For an excellent recent discussion of the therapeutic function of Pyrrhonian skepticism, see Machuca (2009).

much in the spirit of the ethical aspirations of Pyrrhonism. What Wittgenstein seeks through his philosophical examinations is a way of seeing things aright so that the urge to philosophize subsides. The aim of philosophy is, as he puts it at one point, "to shew the fly out of the fly-bottle" (Wittgenstein 1953, §309). So construed, philosophy is both the malaise and the cure. As Wittgenstein expresses the matter, what we seek from our philosophical explorations is that the problems that concern us "dissolve," where this "means that the philosophical problems should *completely* disappear" (Wittgenstein 1953, §133).

Relatedly, it is part of Wittgenstein's quietism to contend that since it is philosophy itself which generates philosophical problems, so it would be better not to be led into such reflections in the first place. In short, we should avoid philosophical reflection if we can, but if we undertake it and are led into the dead-ends that it presents us with then we may use philosophical reflection to find our way back out again. Crucially, however, we are returned to where we began; we cannot make progress with philosophy.[13]

But of course in a very real sense Pyrrhonians are also quietists. This is not just because they regard the kind of intellectual aspirations of philosophers as being predicated on an illusion regarding the scope of human reason, but also more specifically because they regard these aspirations as representing a barrier to the good life. So while we are creatures who are inevitably prone to philosophical reflection, the good life is on this view the unexamined life, and certainly not the life of the philosopher. On this point, however, the (later) Wittgenstein would whole-heartedly agree. Thus, the mere fact that Wittgenstein has left behind his fragmentary notebooks from which we can extract a philosophical argument need not be a barrier to conceiving of the kind of skepticism that his remarks license as being broadly aligned to Pyrrhonian skeptical doubt.

4 Concluding Remarks

I have argued that Wittgenstein offers a challenging conception of the structure of reasons in *On Certainty*, one that generates a restricted form of skepticism which has some important affinities with several key themes in Pyrrhonian skepticism, at least on certain interpretations of this stance. There are thus grounds for supposing that we can usefully regard these two forms of skepticism as broadly complementary. That is, we can plausibly think in terms of there being a skeptical position deserving of the name "Wittgensteinian Pyrrhonism."

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[13] For a recent discussion of Wittgenstein's quietism, see McDowell (2009).

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Chapter 11
Skepticism and Disagreement

Markus Lammenranta

The most significant feature of ancient Pyrrhonian skepticism was its reliance on disagreement. This aspect of skepticism has been widely neglected in contemporary discussion on skepticism, and indeed had hardly been mentioned until it became a hot topic quite recently. Even now, the skeptical power of disagreement is not fully appreciated. At most, it is thought to warrant suspension of belief in very restricted circumstances,[1] which is in sharp contrast to ancient Pyrrhonian skepticism, which appeals to disagreement in inducing the global suspension of belief.

My aim is to reconstruct the skeptical reasoning that is based on disagreement. I will endeavor to show that this rational reconstruction provides a genuine skeptical paradox that we should take seriously in constructing our theories of knowledge and justification. It also accounts for the close connection that skepticism has traditionally been assumed to have with relativism.

As Sextus Empiricus explained, the skeptical strategy consists of three stages: The skeptic first points out or argues that there are disagreements on some question, then tries to show that these disagreements cannot be resolved, and finally concludes that we should suspend belief about the matter. This strategy is apparent both in the ten modes of Aenesidemus and in the five modes of Agrippa (*PH* 1.35–177).

Suppose there is a question to which there are just two possible answers, p and $\sim p$, and we disagree: I believe that p, and you believe that $\sim p$. The skeptical argument then takes the following form:

1. I believe that p.
2. You believe that $\sim p$.

[1] It is thought that only disagreement between people who take themselves to be epistemic peers may have skeptical consequences. Epistemic peers are supposed to share the relevant evidence and to be equally competent in evaluating it. It is clear that such disagreements are not very common. See Gutting (1982, p. 83), Kelly (2005), Feldman (2006), Christensen (2007), Elga (2007).

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3. At most one of us is right.
4. The disagreement between us is rationally irresolvable.
5. I should suspend belief about *p*.[2]

The skeptic propounds this as an *ad hominem* argument.[3] It is directed against one of my beliefs, and the idea is to get me to accept each premise and step of it and to force me to accept the conclusion. Furthermore, the skeptic claims to be able to construct a similar argument against any of my beliefs about the nature of reality.

When Sextus described the skeptical strategy – especially in the ten modes – he put a lot of effort into showing that there were disagreements, that there were other human and even nonhuman subjects to which things appeared differently, or that at least there could be such subjects. One could raise some doubts about whether all the cases in the literature are cases of genuine disagreement in which one party affirms and the other one denies one and the same proposition, or in which they attribute incompatible properties to the same object. I do grant, however, that there are enough such cases to which the skeptic can appeal. Indeed, it is enough if there is only one such case for each of my beliefs.

I also grant that lemma 3 follows from premises 1 and 2, although there may be relativists who deny this because they think that we can both be right: *p* is true for me, and $\sim p$ is true for you. According to such alethic or Protagorean relativism, we can both rationally retain our beliefs. Relativism thus avoids skepticism in denying that there is genuine disagreement between the disputing parties.[4] Although this is one possible response to the skeptical argument, I will leave discussion about relativism for another occasion[5] and merely assume that it is not an intuitively attractive position. If anyone is attracted to it after considering all possible responses to the Pyrrhonian argument, I take this to confirm my point that the argument forms a genuine paradox.

The epistemologically interesting part of the strategy is premise 4 and the question whether the conclusion follows from it. Let us focus on this part and reformulate the skeptical argument as follows:

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[2]In my reconstruction of skeptical reasoning I understand the conclusion normatively. Many scholars read Sextus rather as talking about some sort of causal or psychological necessity: my awareness of disagreements forces me causally to suspend belief (see for example Annas and Barnes 1985, p. 25). There is textual evidence for both readings. My reason for preferring the normative interpretation in my rational reconstruction is that the causal interpretation does not provide a serious skeptical problem. See Lammenranta (2008) and the comments on Williams below.

[3]I formulate the argument in the first person, because it is not necessary that there is an actual skeptic. I can simply imagine such a skeptic, or just pose the argument to myself. What is essential is that the argument has plausible premises and an implausible conclusion, that it forms a paradox.

[4]Of course, there is disagreement in the sense that one party affirms and the other denies one and the same proposition. Yet, according to relativism, this is not a genuine disagreement in the sense that they can both be right.

[5]However, see Lammenranta (2008, pp. 26–9).

1. There is a serious rationally irresolvable disagreement about *p*.
2. If there is a serious rationally irresolvable disagreement about *p*, then I should suspend belief about *p*.
3. So I should suspend belief about *p*.

My claim is that this argument forms a skeptical paradox. The skeptic manages to make the premises very plausible, and the conclusion follows deductively from them. However, because *p* may be any proposition about the nature of reality, the conclusion can hardly be accepted. Therefore, both of the premises and the denial of the conclusion are all plausible, but they cannot all be true because they form an inconsistent set.

In order to establish the plausibility of the premises we must clarify the argument at three points. First, we need to be clear about what the skeptic means by an irresolvable disagreement. Sextus also refers to equipollent opposition, and sometimes explains it in psychological terms:

> By equipollence we mean equality with regard to being convincing or unconvincing. (. . .) Suspension of judgement is a standstill of the intellect, owing to which we neither reject nor posit anything. Tranquillity is freedom from disturbance or calmness of soul. (*PH* 1.10)[6]

In his paper "Skepticism without Theory," Michael Williams (1988, pp. 554–5) based his interpretation of the Pyrrhonian problem on passages like this, arguing that Pyrrhonian skepticism is an ability to oppose any thesis or argument with a countervailing thesis or argument of equal force. He emphasized that no epistemological commitments are buried in this notion of equal force, which is to be understood as equal convincingness or plausibility. Equipollence is thus to be understood purely psychologically.

The problem is that this understanding of Pyrrhonism hardly provides a serious skeptical problem. There are not many cases in which we find contradictory propositions equally plausible and are therefore forced to suspend belief. Thus it would be too easy for the dogmatist to reject the first premise. If he or she just sticks to this belief, there is nothing that the skeptic can do.

Furthermore, this interpretation makes it hard to understand why Sextus emphasized dispute or disagreement. In a simple disagreement one party finds one proposition plausible and the other finds its negation plausible. It is not the case that both find the proposition and its negation equally plausible. If it were, there would be no dispute. Both would suspend belief.

Indeed, in many passages Sextus made it clear that the problem was not psychological:

> For we shall not be able ourselves to decide between our own appearances and those of other animals, being ourselves a part of the dispute and for that reason more in need of someone to decide than ourselves able to judge. (*PH* 1.59)
>
> When the self-satisfied Dogmatists say that they themselves should be preferred to other humans in judging things, we know that their claim is absurd. For they are themselves a part

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[6] All quotations of Sextus are from Annas and Barnes (2000).

> of the dispute, and if it is by preferring themselves that they judge what is apparent, then by entrusting the judging to themselves they are taking for granted the matter being investigated before beginning the judging. (*PH* 1.90)

Here he was not claiming that we could not resolve a disagreement because the contradictory answers to some question were equally plausible, but because as participants in the dispute we should not prefer our own appearances or judgments to those of the other participants. That would beg the question. We would need some impartial grounds or judge in order to resolve the dispute. It is clear that Sextus was not referring to the psychological inability to judge. He was quite ready to acknowledge that dogmatists did judge the appearances, and that they preferred their own to those of others who disagreed with them. The point is that they could not do this without violating the rules of dialectic.

It seems clear that Sextus took our inability to resolve disagreements to be a dialectical failure. What, then, is needed for the rational resolution of a disagreement in this dialectical sense? Suppose I believe that p, and you believe that $\sim p$. I could resolve this disagreement if I had an argument for my belief that you considered sound. You would accept its premises and take it to be (either deductively or inductively) valid, and this would be enough to rationally convince you. I could also resolve the disagreement more indirectly by putting forward an *ad hominem* argument starting from premises that you accepted and arriving at the conclusion that your belief was false. In either case you would be rationally required to give up your belief. And of course, the disagreement would also be resolved if you could do either of these things to me. If neither of us succeeded in this, our disagreement would be rationally irresolvable.

Perhaps, there are irresolvable disagreements of this sort that nobody takes seriously. They may be cases in which one party is irrational or in some other way deficient and cannot therefore be rationally convinced, which is why I add the qualification "serious" to the skeptical argument. In serious cases of disagreement the situation is dialectically symmetric in that both sides are rational, have reasons for their views, understand each other's reasons but still cannot rationally convince each other. I am not ruling out cases in which my opponent is a nonhuman animal, because it does not really matter whether the dispute is an actual one or not. It is enough that I can imagine someone – be it an animal or a human being – whose appearances differ from mine but could in principle be defended just as well as mine. It is not necessary for my opponent to be an actual one: I can go through the dialectic solely in my head.

The second point is that we must distinguish two different cases of such irresolvable disagreements. In one case I am not a participant in the disagreement. I have no beliefs about the matter under dispute, neither do I have reasons for preferring either side. I am in the position of an impartial judge. If the disagreement is serious in the way described, it is clear that I should suspend belief. Choosing one of the disputing parties and declaring it the winner would be completely arbitrary.

In the other case I am a participant in the dispute. I have my own beliefs about the matter, there are others who disagree with me and we cannot rationally resolve our

disagreement. Assume that the situation is otherwise the same as in the first case, the only difference being that I am now a participant. The question is why should these cases be normatively different? If I should suspend belief in one case, I should do so in the other. I should give up my belief and not prefer one side of the dispute simply because it is mine. I should look at it from an impartial point of view and suspend belief. This is exactly what Sextus demanded in the two quotations above.

Now we can also understand why serious irresolvable disagreements must be dialectically symmetric. Serious disagreements are such that an impartial judge is not able to decide them. The skeptic asks me to imagine a disagreement of a certain kind and to adopt an impartial point of view. If the disagreement is dialectically symmetric I cannot decide from that point of view who is right and who is wrong, so I should suspend belief about it. It does not matter whether or not I was originally a participant in the dispute. As soon as I take a detached position, I see that my reasons are not good enough and realize that I should suspend belief.

The third and final point is that this "should" must be understood epistemically. The skeptic argues that it is not epistemically rational or justified for me to retain my belief. If I am an inquirer interested in truth, I should suspend it. This is not to deny that it might be practically rational for me to retain it. It may be psychologically impossible for me to give it up, but as a truth-seeker, I should do so.

These three points make the premises of the Pyrrhonian argument at least initially quite plausible. Take any of my beliefs about the nature of reality. The skeptic points out that there is a serious irresolvable disagreement about the matter. I believe that p, but there are others who believe that $\sim p$. I cannot convince them in any rational way, neither can they convince me. Our disagreement is rationally irresolvable. It seems that it would be quite arbitrary for me to prefer my own belief in such a situation. Assuming that I am a sincere inquirer who is solely interested in truth, I should give up my belief. This all seems quite plausible. However, because the skeptic can use the same argument against any of my beliefs about reality, this conclusion is quite unacceptable. It means that I should give up all inquiry.

How, then, should I respond to the argument? If I want to avoid skepticism, there are two options: to deny either the first or the second premise. I must explain to myself why, contrary to initial appearances, one of the premises is false. I must explain how I can be justified in believing that p, in spite of being aware of apparently irresolvable disagreements about it. There are two basic approaches. First, I could grant that justification does require that I be able to resolve all or at least all serious disagreements about p, and then explain how I can rationally resolve them. I could thus deny the first premise, that there are serious rationally irresolvable disagreements about p. Second, I could deny that justification requires dialectically effective reasons and explain how I can be justified in believing that p, in spite of being aware of the existence of irresolvable disagreements about p. In this case I would deny the second premise.

Thus there are two possible epistemological approaches to the Pyrrhonian problem. On the one hand, justification and knowledge are taken to be dialectical notions requiring me to defend my belief in a dialectically effective way and thus to resolve disagreements about the truth of it. I take this to be the traditional approach in

epistemology that derives from Plato and Aristotle. It is evident in Descartes, and also in otherwise very different philosophers such as Peirce, Hegel, Wittgenstein, Sellars, Rorty, Brandom and Williams. On the other hand, things are very different from the perspective of contemporary analytical epistemology, the received view being that justification and knowledge are independent of dialectic. It is one thing to be justified in one's beliefs and to know, but it is quite another to be able to defend oneself in the public arena. Justification and knowledge are non-dialectical notions.[7]

What I aim to do now is to show that neither of these approaches offers an intuitively plausible resolution of the Pyrrhonian problem. If this is the case, the argument from disagreement constitutes a genuine skeptical paradox, there being no completely satisfactory resolution of it.

The dialectical conception seemed to be widely accepted in Ancient and early Modern Philosophy. Descartes, for example, apparently did so, according to the following passage from *Rules for the Direction of the Mind*:

> Whenever two persons make opposite judgments about the same thing, it is certain that at least one of them is mistaken, and neither, it seems, has knowledge. For if the reasoning of one of them were certain and evident, he would be able to lay it before the other in such a way as eventually to convince his intellect as well. (CSM I, p. 11)

Descartes thus seemed to accept the dialectical conception of justification and thereby the second premise of the Pyrrhonian argument. In order to reject the first premise he therefore had to show how disagreements could be resolved, which was the task he set himself in *Meditations*.

Descartes began by trying to find propositions that could not be rationally doubted, and then used them in order to show that God existed and that clear and distinct perceptions were true. This was done in steps that were also rationally indubitable, so that any rational being following these meditations would become convinced of the conclusion.[8]

If Descartes were successful in his project, he would be able to show how all possible disagreements between rational beings could be resolved, and these are the only disagreements we need to care about. It would be hopeless to try to rationally convince someone who is not rational. Unfortunately, it seems there are not enough rationally indubitable propositions and inferential steps for accomplishing the task. Thus the Cartesian project seems to land in skepticism.

Charles Peirce claimed that Descartes' hypothetical doubts were artificial, and suggested that we should start inquiry (and argument) from propositions that were not actually doubted.[9] However, it seems that we still lack a sufficient number of

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[7]Robert Audi (1993, p. 145) expresses this common view in this way: "It would seem that just as a little child can be of good character even if unable to defend its character against attack, one can have a justified belief even if, in response to someone who doubts this, one could not show that one does."

[8]Because the first premises concern Descartes' own thoughts, it is assumed that everybody goes through the meditations in his or her own thoughts.

[9]See especially Peirce (1958, p. 40).

uncontested propositions that would lead all inquirers to an agreed view of reality. Furthermore, is it well motivated to restrict the scope of serious disagreements to the actual ones? This would mean that we could gain knowledge by killing our opponents. Then there would no longer be actual disagreements.

One could still enlarge the starting point to propositions that are not and perhaps cannot be doubted in a particular context of inquiry. They are and can be doubted in other contexts, but this does not affect inquiry that is directed by the context in question. According to this sort of contextualist view we can resolve local disagreements that arise within a particular context. Justification is thus always relative to a context. In every context there are some propositions that cannot be legitimately doubted or challenged, and that can therefore be used for resolving disagreements about other matters.[10] However, this leaves us with irresolvable disagreements between different contexts. Why are these supposed to be less serious? Of course, one could convert to some form of relativism that denies the possibility of disagreement across contexts, but we assumed that relativism is problematic.

If the dialectical conception of justification leads to insurmountable problems, why cannot we reject it and with it the second premise of the Pyrrhonian argument? The two most popular contemporary theories of justification that are non-dialectical are reliabilism and evidentialism, both of which make justification a function of factors that have nothing to do with dialectic. Reliabilism takes it to be a function of the reliable causal origin of belief, whereas according to evidentialism, a belief is justified to the extent that evidence – composed of the subject's mental states – supports it. Both allow knowledge and justified belief even if one cannot defend oneself without begging the question. Knowledge and justified belief do not require dialectically effective reasons. What is wrong with this view?

Reliabilism entails that, in an irresolvable disagreement, one party may still be justified in his or her belief. Which one? It is the one whose belief is, in fact, based on reliable sources. If the sources of my belief are reliable, then I am justified in retaining it; and if there are no such sources for your belief, then you should give it up.[11] This seems absurd. Neither of us is necessarily aware of these sources. Perhaps, we have no beliefs about their nature and reliability. Thus we are both in the dark about the reliability of our sources. In such a case it seems intuitively right that both of us should suspend belief about the matter under dispute and continue inquiry – in spite of the fact that one of us really has reliable sources. Thus, simple reliabilism does not seem to resolve the problem.

What happens in the case of evidentialism? I assume here an internalist form of evidentialism because with externalist forms the situation would be same as with reliabilism. Thus, if we assume that evidence is understood internally, as being composed of non-factive mental states, it seems that both parties in an irresolvable

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[10] For this sort of dialectical contextualism inspired by Wittgenstein (1969), see Annis (1978), Brandom (1994, pp. 176–8) and Williams (2001).

[11] Because reliability does not entail truth, it is possible – though improbable – that we have both reliable sources, in which case we are both justified in our beliefs.

disagreement may have evidence that supports their beliefs and thus be justified in retaining them. Does this internalist view explain why the second premise is false, and why I can justifiably retain my belief about the matter under dispute? It seems that if I am really interested in truth, I cannot be happy with this explanation, according to which we are both justified in our disagreeing beliefs. This sort of justification does not decide who is right, and I should therefore not, as an inquirer, be happy with it. I should rather suspend belief and continue inquiry.

An example serves to show the problems of these non-dialectical views more clearly. It may be somewhat artificial but it closely resembles the situation that Sextus describes in the first of the ten modes,[12] and illustrates more generally the structure of serious irresolvable disagreements. Assume that I have a thermometer that I trust and that you have another thermometer that you consider trustworthy, and we stick our thermometers into the same bucket of water. Mine shows that the temperature is 18°C and yours shows that it is 20°C. Let us suppose that we both initially trust our own thermometers, and that I believe that the temperature is 18° and you believe that it is 20°. So we disagree. Let us assume that we have no other evidence than our thermometers about the temperature, and that we cannot thus rationally resolve our disagreement.

I think we have the intuition that in such a situation we should both give up our beliefs about the temperature. Yet, it seems to follow from reliabilism and evidentialism that one or even both of us may be justified in retaining our beliefs. If my thermometer is, in fact, reliable then according to reliabilism my belief about the temperature is justified, and if your thermometer is, in fact, unreliable then your belief is not justified and you should give it up; or it may be the other way around. On the other hand, if justification depends on evidence rather than reliability, as internalist evidentialism posits, we may both be justified. The evidence provided by my thermometer supports my belief, and the evidence of your thermometer supports yours. We are both justified in retaining our beliefs. Both views are extremely counterintuitive. They allow justified beliefs too easily.

These non-dialectical accounts of justification may avoid skepticism, but the problem is that they do so by allowing justified beliefs and knowledge in a way that is intuitively too easy. They allow me justified beliefs and knowledge about the temperature in spite of my being aware that your thermometer gives you contrary evidence. Things might be different if I were justified in believing that my thermometer was reliable, or that my evidence was indicative of the truth. It seems that I cannot rationally prefer my belief to yours unless I am justified in believing that my sources rather than yours are reliable, or that my evidence rather than yours is indicative of the truth. This is quite compatible with reliabilism and evidentialism in that they allow that my awareness of the disagreement defeats my justification. If this is the case I can defeat this defeater and regain the justification only if I am justified in believing that my source or my evidence is reliable, rather than yours.

[12] Sextus (*PH* 1.40–78) argues that, because of the differences in the sense organs of animals of different species, things appear differently to their senses. Non-human animals cannot naturally argue with us, but we can very well imagine how they would defend the reliability of their sensory faculties if they could. This sort of possible disagreement may be enough for the skeptic's purposes.

How, then, can I attain justification for my belief that my sources rather than yours are reliable? Suppose I reason in the following way:

1. My thermometer reads that the temperature is 18°C.
2. The temperature is 18°C.
3. So my thermometer is reading accurately on this occasion.

According to reliabilism I can very well thereby gain a justified belief. My belief in premise 1 is based on my reliable vision. Because my thermometer is in fact reliable, my belief that the temperature is 18°C is also justified. Further, because deduction is a reliable process I gain a justified belief by concluding that my thermometer is reading accurately – that it gives the right temperature. I can even conclude by deduction that your thermometer is not reading accurately and that there must be something wrong with it.

If simple evidentialism is true, I can attain a justified belief in the same way. The only difference is that evidentialism, unlike reliabilism, allows that you can also attain a justified belief that your thermometer is reading accurately. Once again, both allow justified beliefs in a way that is intuitively too easy. It seems clear that I cannot attain a justified belief that my thermometer is accurate simply by looking at it, and I cannot form on this basis a further justified belief that yours is not. Neither can I know that mine is accurate even if, in fact, it is.

Reliabilism and evidentialism also allow that I can easily attain a justified belief about the global or general reliability of my thermometer. Suppose that I have earlier gathered evidence of its reliability and that I now remember this evidence. Let us assume that this evidence is also based on my trusting my thermometer. I infer in the following way:

At t_1, my thermometer reads that the temperature is 15°, and the temperature is 15°.
At t_2, my thermometer reads that the temperature is 13°, and the temperature is 13°.
At t_n, my thermometer reads that the temperature is 19°, and the temperature is 19°.

So my thermometer is reliable.

Assuming that my memory, vision and inductive reasoning are reliable processes and that my thermometer is, in fact, reliable, it follows from reliabilism that I can thereby gain a justified belief. Further, if evidentialism is true we can both gain justified beliefs in the reliability of our thermometers. Here I am using my thermometer to obtain evidence of its reliability. William Alston (1986) calls arguments of this sort epistemically circular. The intuition is that such arguments allow justified beliefs and knowledge about reliability too easily.[13]

[13] Jonathan Vogel (2000) uses the case of a gas gauge for arguing in this way against reliabilism. See also Fumerton (1995, p. 177).

Stewart Cohen (2002, pp. 309–11) argued recently that we can avoid easy knowledge based on epistemic circularity by accepting the following principle, which he calls the KR principle:

(KR) A potential knowledge source K can yield knowledge for S, only if S knows that K is reliable.

The principle concerns the general or global reliability of a source. If we understand the reliability in question in the local sense, it may also be possible to avoid easy knowledge in the case concerning the accuracy of the thermometer on a particular occasion. Furthermore, an analogous principle concerning justification might avoid cases of easy justified belief. However, this is not quite right.

Let us focus on the KR principle in the sense of global reliability. It denies that I can know the premises of the epistemically circular track-record argument for the reliability of my thermometer prior to knowing the conclusion. Thus it may seem that I cannot come to know the conclusion by reasoning from the premises. In order to know the premises I must already know the conclusion. However, this is not quite right because the principle allows that I come to know the premises and the conclusion simultaneously.

According to holistic coherentism, knowledge is generated simultaneously in the whole system of beliefs once a sufficient degree of coherence has been achieved. As James van Cleve (2003, pp. 55–7) points out, this does not avoid the problem of easy knowledge, but rather allows that we gain knowledge through epistemically circular reasoning. The steps by which we gain such knowledge may be exactly the same as in the foundationalist version. The only difference is that when, according to foundationalism, knowledge is first generated in the premises and then transmitted to the conclusion, coherentism makes it appear simultaneously in both. It thus accepts the KR principle but still makes knowledge about reliability too easy.

In the thermometer case it is assumed that I have trusted my thermometer in the past. I therefore believe the premises of the track-record argument. If I now deny the conclusion or even suspend belief about its truth, my system of beliefs is not coherent, but if I also come to believe the conclusion, it becomes coherent. According to coherentism, this coherence provides justification both for my beliefs in the premises and my belief in the conclusion simultaneously. Yet this is still too easy a way to attain knowledge about the reliability of the thermometer.

Ernest Sosa (1997) suggests that we can resolve the Pyrrhonian problem if we use his distinction between animal knowledge and reflective knowledge, but as both Cohen (2002, p. 326) and van Cleve (2003, pp. 55–7) point out, this account also too easily allows knowledge about reliability. Animal knowledge is knowledge as it is understood in simple reliabilism: it merely requires a true and reliably formed belief. It therefore does not satisfy the KR principle and thus allows easy knowledge. We can attain animal knowledge about the reliability of the thermometer through epistemically circular reasoning.

Sosa's point is that reflective knowledge satisfies the principle. It requires, in addition to animal knowledge, a coherent system of beliefs that includes an epistemic perspective on the reliability of the sources of belief. Thus a source gives me reflective knowledge only if I know that it is reliable. However, it is still true that the epistemically circular track-record argument provides me with all the necessary ingredients for such reflective knowledge: I attain animal knowledge about reliability through reasoning from my animal knowledge about the truth of the premises. Once I have attained this knowledge, my system of beliefs also achieves a sufficient degree of coherence to transfer my animal knowledge into reflective knowledge. All this still happens too easily, however. In fact, it happens as easily as before. The only difference is in the points at which different sorts of knowledge are attained. The reasoning is exactly the same.

It seems that we can avoid allowing easy knowledge only by strengthening the KR principle. It must require that knowledge of the reliability of source *K* be prior to knowledge based on *K*. We must know that the source is reliable independently of any knowledge based on it. The problem with coherentism and Sosa's account seems to be that they reject this strengthened KR principle, and this is why they make knowledge too easy.

However, by affirming the strengthened KR principle we avoid the problem of easy knowledge but we are in danger of falling into skepticism. This strengthened principle leads to the following of criterion problem:

1. We can know that a belief based on source *K* is true only if we first know that *K* is reliable.
2. We can know that *K* is reliable only if we first know that some beliefs based on source *K* are true.

Assumption 1 is a formulation of the strengthened KR principle. Together with assumption 2 it leads to skepticism: we cannot know which sources are reliable nor which beliefs are true. To be sure, 2 does not require us to know that beliefs based on *K* are true through *K*; we can rely on some other source. However, 1 posits that this other source can deliver knowledge only if we first know that it is reliable, and 2 that, in order to know this, we need to know that some beliefs based on it are true. In order to know this, in turn, we may once again have to rely on some third source, and so on. However, because we cannot have an infinite number of sources, sooner or later we have to rely on sources already relied on at some earlier point. We are thus reasoning in a circle, and circular reasoning is unable to provide knowledge.

The circle we are caught in is not epistemic. It is a straightforwardly logical circle. It is clear that a logical circle does not produce knowledge. Such a circle is nowhere connected to reality. Thus in trying to avoid epistemic circularity and easy knowledge we become caught in a more clearly vicious circle – a logical circle.

Can we avoid this circle? I have shown that denying the first premise leads to easy knowledge. We could deny the second premise if we had basic or non-inferential knowledge about the reliability of our sources, but how is that possible? That a

source of belief is reliable is a contingent generalization. We cannot have basic a priori knowledge about it, but what other basic knowledge about it could there be?[14] It thus seems that if we are to have any knowledge about reliability it must be based on reasoning. However, then the second premise is true and we are in the circle.

In sum, it seems that all our attempts to respond to the Pyrrhonian argument lead to a dilemma: the suggested accounts of knowledge or justification either make knowledge or justified belief intuitively too easy or they make them impossible. Because the resulting accounts are all counterintuitive, it does not matter whether we understand epistemic terms dialectically or non-dialectically. None of them offers what a sincere truth-seeker needs: an impartial way of deciding between competing views. This shows that the argument from disagreement forms a genuine skeptical paradox.

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[14]Even if our theory allowed basic reliability knowledge, the KR principle would require that we also have basic knowledge about the reliability of the source of that basic knowledge, and such knowledge would also be intuitively too easy. See Lammenranta (2009).

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Chapter 12
Can Contemporary Semantics Help the Pyrrhonian Get a Life?

Juan Comesaña

1 Introduction

Under one interpretation, Pyrrhonian skeptics advocate universal suspension of judgment. This gives rise to an ancient and influential objection, nicely encapsulated in the title of Myles Burnyeat's famous paper, "Can the Sceptic Live His Scepticism?" Because Hume famously pushed this objection in the *Enquiry*, I will call it "Hume's objection." Hume's objection, in a nutshell, is the following: life requires action, and action requires belief. But, given that the Pyrrhonian advocates universal suspension of judgment, and thus universal absence of belief, the Pyrrhonian is condemned to inaction, and therefore to suicide. In principle, two answers are available to the Pyrrhonian: he can deny that action requires belief, or he can reject the interpretation of his position according to which it advocates universal suspension of judgment.[1] Both interpretations have been resourcefully advanced as historically correct. In this paper, however, I am not interested in the (anachronistically stated) historical question: how did the Pyrrhonians answer Hume's objection? Rather, I am interested in the philosophical question: are any of the answers available to the Pyrrhonian theoretically satisfying? I am particularly interested in whether some contemporary developments in the semantics of knowledge attribution (such as contextualism and contrastivism) can help make any of those answers more plausible. My answer, I'm afraid, is "No."

[1] He could also deny that life requires action or that suspension of judgment with respect to a proposition requires lack of belief in that proposition. Insofar as I can understand what these alternatives would amount to, I take them to be terminological variants of the answers in the text.

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2 Suspension of Judgment

The notion of suspension of judgment plays a crucial role in the treatment of skepticism. Surprisingly, however, it doesn't usually receive a detailed examination. Before moving on to characterizing the kind of skepticism that I will be interested in here, I will briefly discuss how best to understand suspension of judgment. My reason for doing so is two-fold: first, the issue of how best to understand suspension of judgment is of intrinsic interest; and second, some of the discussion in this section will be taken up later.

There are two contrasting approaches that philosophers have taken with respect to the classification of doxastic attitudes in general. The first one is a *coarse-grained* approach according to which there are three (or maybe two, depending on how you count) doxastic attitudes that we can adopt towards propositions: we can believe them, we can disbelieve them (that is, we can believe their negations) or we can suspend judgment with respect to them. The picture guiding the coarse-grained approach is that, asked whether a proposition is true, we can answer "Yes," "No," or "Unsure." The second one is a *fine-grained* approach according to which we can invest different degrees of confidence in a given proposition (these degrees of confidence are not to be confused with full belief in a probabilistic proposition). The picture guiding the fine-grained approach is that, asked our opinion about a proposition, we can answer "I'm highly (pretty, not very, somewhat, etc.) confident that it's true (false)." Both the coarse-grained and the fine-grained approach agree that our doxastic attitudes can be epistemically justified or unjustified.[2] Some philosophers hold that, fundamentally, there are only coarse-grained attitudes, and that degrees of confidence are a surface effect of change in belief with no psychological reality.[3] Others believe that, fundamentally, there are only fine-grained attitudes, and that belief, disbelief and suspension of judgment are merely rough approximations to psychological reality.[4] Still others think that coarse and fine attitudes both have psychological reality.[5] These latter philosophers face the daunting task of explaining how coarse and fine attitudes are related to each other. Without presuming to answer *that* question, we can still discern three different *ranges* of fine-grained attitudes: high degrees of confidence, low degrees of confidence, and middling degrees of confidence.

It is easy to figure out which attitude is suspension of judgment in the coarse-grained framework: it is suspension of judgment. But which attitude should we identify with suspension of judgment in the fine-grained approach? One particular implementation of the fine-grained approach is Bayesianism, according to which

[2] Epistemic justification is to be distinguished from practical, or prudential, or moral, or even other kinds of justification one might have for belief. In what follows, justification is assumed to be epistemic unless explicitly said otherwise.

[3] Harman (1973).

[4] Jeffrey (1983).

[5] Kaplan (1996) and Sturgeon (2008).

our degrees of confidence can be represented by a probability function *f*. The *credence function*[6] for a subject S, C_s, takes as arguments propositions and gives as values a number between 0 and 1, which represents S's degree of confidence in the proposition in question (S has more confidence in p than in q iff $C_s(p) > C_s(q)$ and S has equal confidence in p and q iff $C_s(p) = C_s(q)$). That C is a probability function means that it satisfies the usual Kolmogorov axioms for the probability calculus.[7] Under this implementation of the fine-grained approach, two things may be said about which attitude constitutes suspension of judgment. First, we may say that S suspends judgment with respect to p iff $C_s(p) = 0.5$. Second, we may say that S suspends judgment with respect to p iff $0.5 - \varepsilon \leq C_s(p) \leq 0.5 + \varepsilon$ for some appropriate ε. In the first case, we identify suspension of judgment with *one* precise degree of confidence, whereas in the second we identify suspension of judgment with *any* degree of confidence in a given interval.

One usual objection to the idea that degrees of confidence can be represented by a single probability function is that sometimes our evidence justifies a *thick* distribution of confidence, as opposed to a point-specific degree. Suppose, for instance, that you are certain that between 80 and 90% of the balls in an urn are red. I reach in and grab a ball from the urn. How certain should you be that the ball in my hand is red? Any precise degree of confidence will go beyond what the evidence warrants. You should be 80–90% confident that the ball in my hand is red, but no more specific confidence in that range will be justified.[8] One way of modeling the metaphor of "thick confidence" is by claiming that degrees of confidence can be represented not by a *single* probability function but by a *set* of probability functions (sometimes called your "representor"). A subject's credence in a given proposition, then, will be represented by a function C_s which takes as arguments propositions and gives as values *ranges* of numbers. Thus, in the example above, your representor for the proposition that the ball I'm holding is red includes infinitely many probability functions, one for each real number between 0.8 and 0.9, and your credence in that proposition is [0.8, 0.9]. This alternative way of modeling degrees of confidence opens up a new way of thinking about suspension of judgment: not as any specific credence, but as a spread-out, thick confidence centered around 0.5 (or perhaps centered around 0.5 plus or minus some suitable, perhaps "fuzzy," number). The maximally thick confidence [0, 1] will represent an extreme way of suspending judgment.

However we define suspension of judgment, it is important to recognize the distinction between suspension of judgment as so far characterized and simply not

[6] "Credence" is Lewis's term for point-valued degrees of confidence.

[7] The following three axioms are a usual base for the probability calculus: (i) For any proposition p, $0 \leq C(p) \leq 1$; (ii) For any tautology p, $C(p) = 1$; and (iii) For any mutually exclusive propositions p and q, $C(p \wedge q) = C(p) + C(q)$. Another usual component of Bayesianism is that credences should be updated by "conditionalizing" on the new evidence acquired—where a function C^* is the result of conditionalizing on e from a previous function C iff, for any p, $C^*(p) = \frac{C(p \wedge e)}{C(e)}$

[8] The terminology of "thick confidence," as well as the example, is from Sturgeon (2008).

taking any attitude whatsoever towards a proposition. Suspension of judgment is on a par with the other doxastic attitudes (regardless of whether we think of them in terms of the coarse-grained or the fine-grained approach) insofar as it too represents a *commitment* (however implicit) on the part of the subject towards that proposition. In believing (or assigning a high degree of confidence) I am committed to the claim that the evidence supports the proposition more than its negation; in disbelieving (or assigning a low degree of confidence) I am committed to the claim that the evidence supports the negation of the proposition more than the proposition itself; and in suspending judgment (however we think of it) I am committed to the claim that the evidence supports the proposition and its negation to (roughly) the same extent.[9] Suspending judgment is a way of sticking your neck out. In failing to adopt any attitude at all towards a proposition, however, I am not committed to any claim regarding how the evidence bears on the proposition. Think, for instance, of the proposition that Hillary Clinton is taller than my older sister. In all probability, you never thought about that proposition before I told you about it – you didn't adopt any doxastic attitude whatsoever towards it. So before hearing about that proposition, you did not hold any attitude towards it. A fortiori, you did not hold an attitude that could have been unjustified. But now, after I told you about it, in all probability you suspend judgment with respect to it. This represents a commitment on your part, a commitment to the effect that the evidence at your disposal tells equally for and against the proposition. That you are indeed undertaking a commitment can be seen by reflecting on the fact that you may be wrong in adopting this attitude – it may well be that there is evidence available to you that tells for or against the proposition (perhaps you have some founded suspicions about the likely age of my older sister, and perhaps you also know more than I do about the relative height of American vs. Argentinean women).

Now, some may argue that a better interpretation of skepticism is as advocating not what I here call suspension of judgment, but rather not taking any attitude whatsoever towards a proposition. Indeed, this interpretation may better fit the *practical* goal of the Pyrrhonians of achieving tranquility. It all depends on what it is about belief that, according to the Pyrrhonian, induces anxiety. If it is the mere fact that belief represents a commitment on the part of the subject, then suspension of judgment as so far interpreted will also produce anxiety, for it too represents a commitment (albeit a neutral one) on the part of the subject. There is, however, an important objection to the identification of suspension of judgment with the absence of any attitude whatsoever. According to this objection, it is not possible to not take any attitude whatsoever towards a proposition once the proposition is considered. It may happen that you consider a proposition and have no idea which way the available evidence points to. Wouldn't you, in that case, be able to refrain from taking

[9] Of course, in believing and disbelieving (or in assigning degree of confidence 1 or 0) I am also committed to the truth of the proposition and its negation, respectively. There is no analog of this commitment in the case of suspension of judgment.

any attitude towards the proposition? According to the objection under consideration, you wouldn't. What *looks like* refraining from taking any attitude is in reality perhaps a thick confidence maximally spread between 0 and 1, but it is not the absence of any attitude.

To sum up, then, how we understand suspension of judgment depends on whether we take a coarse-grained or a fine-grained approach to the doxastic attitudes. Within the coarse-grained approach, suspension of judgment is simply identified as the attitude which is neither belief nor disbelief. Within the fine-grained approach, we must first decide whether we will model confidence with a single or with multiple probability functions. If we do it with a single one, then we may identify suspension of judgment with any credence in a range tightly centered around 0.5. If we model confidence instead with multiple probability functions, then we may identify suspension of judgment with thick confidence with the center of gravity around 0.5 Finally, we may wish to identify suspension of judgment not with any attitude at all, but with the *absence* of attitude. In that case, we must face the objection just raised that absence of attitude is impossible once a proposition is considered.

3 Rustic Pyrrhonism and Agrippa's Trilemma

With options about how to understand suspension of judgment in hand, we can now turn to the characterization of a version of Pyrrhonian skepticism. A usual definition of skepticism with respect to a range of propositions goes as follows:

> *Skepticism with respect to a range of propositions R*: the only justified attitude with respect to propositions in R is to suspend judgment.

It is worthwhile to note that this definition differs both from the ordinary meaning of "skepticism" as the claim that disbelief is the only justified attitude as well as from one philosophically common way of understanding skepticism as the claim that we lack knowledge of the propositions in question.[10]

We can distinguish between different kinds of skepticism by their scope, the range of propositions over which suspension of judgment is claimed to be the only justified attitude. There are two extremes in the spectrum of possible skepticisms. On the one extreme, we have absolutely general non-skepticism, according to which suspension of judgment is *never* justified. Perhaps surprisingly, this view has not received much attention (any attention at all that I know of) in the literature. I will

[10]In one sense, the definition in terms of suspension of judgment is stronger than the one in terms of lack of knowledge: under the assumption that knowledge entails justified belief, that the only justified attitude with respect to proposition *p* for subject *S* is suspension of judgment entails that *S* doesn't know that *p*, but the entailment in the other direction doesn't hold. However, a skeptic need not accept that knowledge entails true belief (in fact, if his skepticism is general enough, he will also suspend judgment with respect to *that* proposition), and so commitment to skepticism in the sense adopted here doesn't *by itself* entail commitment to skepticism in the lack-of-knowledge sense.

continue that tradition of ignoring extreme anti-skepticism in this paper. The other extreme, by contrast, the position according to which suspension of judgment is the only justified attitude with respect to *any* proposition, has indeed received a lot of attention. Following a terminology that goes back at least to Galen, we will call it "rustic Pyrrhonism":

Rustic Pyrrhonism: suspension of judgment is the only justified attitude regarding any proposition.

As a matter of historical fact, the Pyrrhonian seeks suspension of judgment only as a therapeutic cure from philosophically-induced anxiety. Therefore, theoretical objections to Pyrrhonism – objections, for instance, to the effect that some of the arguments deployed by the Pyrrhonians are obviously bad, or that the position is self-undermining – will matter to the Pyrrhonian himself only to the extent that they prevent him from suspending judgment. If the Pyrrhonian manages to ignore an objection and suspend judgment, even if he thinks that the objection is a good one, then he has achieved his goal. I am not interested in this practical aspect of Pyrrhonism here, but let me just point out that the idea that arguments that are not recognized as good can nevertheless lead one to suspend judgment strikes me as doubtful at least. Even if suspension of judgment just is a causal consequence of the contemplations of arguments on either side, those causes cannot operate in any old way, and it is doubtful that they will operate through anything other than what is recognized to be a *good reason* (this recognition, of course, need not be explicit or even conscious). As Pascal noticed, convincing yourself of the truth of a claim with respect to which you have no evidence inevitably involves putting yourself in a position where you *do* have evidence for it, even if, from your present point of view, that evidence is misleading. It is doubtful, then, that the Pyrrhonian will be able to simply shrug-off objections to the soundness of the arguments that lead to suspension of judgment as irrelevant to his goal, because, no matter how practical the nature of the goal is, it is not achievable through the use of what is not reckoned to be a good reason.

But whether the Pyrrhonian himself is able to simply ignore theoretical objections to his position or not, surely there is *a* philosophically interesting issue that has to do with the existence of arguments for Pyrrhonism, as opposed to with the alleged ability of Pyrrhonism to rid us of anxiety. One of the most philosophically interesting arguments in the Pyrrhonian arsenal derives from the so-called "modes of Agrippa." There are five modes associated with Agrippa, but three of them are the most important: the mode of hypothesis (or unsupported assertion), the mode of circularity ("reciprocal"), and the mode of regression to infinity. The three modes of Agrippa function together in the following way. Whenever the dogmatist (Sextus refers to those who are not skeptics as "dogmatists," and we will follow him in this) asserts his belief in a proposition p_1, the Pyrrhonian will challenge that assertion, asking the dogmatist to justify p_1, to give reasons for thinking that it is true. The dogmatist will then either decline to answer the challenge or adduce another proposition p_2 in support of p_1. If the dogmatist refuses to answer the challenge, the Pyrrhonian will be satisfied that the only justified attitude to take with respect to p_1 is to suspend judgment, because no reason for it has been given (thus appealing

to the mode of hypothesis). If p_2 is different from p_1, then the Pyrrhonian will ask the dogmatist to justify his assertion of p_2.[11] And now either the dogmatist offers no reason in support of p_2, or offers p_1 as a reason, or adduces yet another proposition p_3, different from both p_1 and p_2. If the dogmatist offers no reason for p_2, then the Pyrrhonian will invoke the mode of hypothesis again and suspend judgment in accordance with it; if p_1 is offered as a reason to believe in p_2, then the Pyrrhonian will invoke the mode of circularity and suspend judgment in accordance with it (because no genuine chain of reasons can loop back onto itself); and, finally, if the dogmatist offers yet another proposition p_3, different from both p_1 and p_2, as a reason to believe p_2, then the same three possibilities that arose with respect to p_2 will arise with respect to p_3. The dogmatist will not be able to continue offering different propositions in response to the Pyrrhonian challenge forever – eventually, either no reason will be offered, or a proposition that has already made an appearance will be mentioned again. The Pyrrhonian refers to this impossibility of actually offering a different proposition each time a reason is needed as "the mode of infinite regression." The three modes of Agrippa, then, work in tandem in order to induce suspension of judgment with respect to any proposition whatsoever.

The Pyrrhonian use of the three modes of Agrippa in order to induce suspension of judgment can be presented in the form of an argument, which has been called "Agrippa's trilemma." It is at least somewhat misleading to present the Pyrrhonian position in terms of an argument, because when someone presents an argument they are usually committed to the truth of its premises and its conclusion, whereas Pyrrhonian skeptics would suspend judgment with respect to them. Nevertheless, presenting the Pyrrhonian problematic in the form of an argument doesn't do much violence to this skeptical position, because what is important is not whether the Pyrrhonians themselves accept the premises or the validity of the argument, but rather whether we do. If we do, then it seems that we ourselves should be Pyrrhonian skeptics (and if we do become Pyrrhonian skeptics as a result of this argument, we can then start worrying about what to do with respect to the fact that an argument whose premises we believed – and perhaps still believe – to be true convinced us that we are not justified in believing anything).

Before presenting a reconstruction of Agrippa's trilemma we need to introduce some definitions. Let's say that a belief is inferentially justified if and only if it is justified (at least in part) in virtue of its relations to other beliefs. A justified basic belief, by contrast, is a belief that is justified but not in virtue of its relations to other beliefs. An inferential chain is a set of beliefs such that every member of the set is allegedly related to at least one other member by the relation "is justified by." Agrippa's trilemma, then, can be presented thus:

1. If a belief is justified, then it is either a basic justified belief or an inferentially justified belief.
2. There are no basic justified beliefs.

[11] If p_2 just is p_1, then the Pyrrhonian will presumable once again invoke the mode of hypothesis and suspend judgment accordingly.

Therefore,

3. If a belief is justified, then it is justified in virtue of belonging to an inferential chain.
4. All inferential chains are such that either (a) they contain an infinite number of beliefs; or (b) they contain circles; or (c) they contain beliefs that are not justified.
5. No belief is justified in virtue of belonging to an infinite inferential chain.
6. No belief is justified in virtue of belonging to a circular inferential chain.
7. No belief is justified in virtue of belonging to an inferential chain that contains unjustified beliefs.

Therefore,

8. There are no justified beliefs.

Premise 1 is beyond reproach, given our previous definitions. Premise 2 is justified by the mode of hypothesis. Step 3 of the argument follows from premises 1 and 2. Premise 4 is also beyond reproach – the only remaining possible structure for an inferential chain to have is to contain basic justified beliefs, but there are none of those according to premise 2. Premise 5 is justified by appeal to the mode of infinite regression, and premise 6 is justified by appeal to the mode of circularity. Premise 7 might seem to be a truism, but some philosophers with Wittgensteinian inclinations would have doubts about it. In any case, it is not my purpose here to pass judgment on Agrippa's trilemma, but rather to display it as the basis on which Pyrrhonism is supported. In this regard, it is interesting to note that Agrippa's trilemma is perfectly general; in particular, it applies to philosophical propositions just as much as it applies to ordinary propositions.

4 Hume's Objection and Urbane Pyrrhonism

A notorious (and ancient) objection to rustic Pyrrhonism was famously put by Hume in these words:

> [A] Pyrrhonian cannot expect, that his philosophy will have any constant influence on the mind: or of it had, that its influence would be beneficial to society. On the contrary, he must acknowledge, if he will acknowledge anything, that all human life must perish, were his principles universally and steadily to prevail.[12]

I will take the objection to be the following: Action requires belief. If I am to be truly described as, say, drinking a beer (as opposed to, e.g., my body's being caused to move by some external influence in exactly the same way as it moves when I'm drinking a beer), then it must be that my bodily movements are appropriately related to some mental states of mine, and these mental states must crucially include belief. Perhaps the belief in question is that the liquid in this glass is beer, or perhaps it is the belief that *this* (mentally pointing towards a possible movement of my body) is a way of drinking beer, or perhaps it is yet another different belief. As hard as it may

[12] David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, XII.

be to identify the precise belief in question, there is no denying that I must have *some belief or other* related to the beer if I am to genuinely count as drinking a beer. But the rustic Pyrrhonian claims that belief is never justified. Therefore, someone who lived according to the precepts of rustic Pyrrhonism will fail to *act* at all. Therefore, rustic Pyrrhonism is not a livable philosophy.

Hume's objection may not sound as severe to us as it did to Hume and the ancients. For the ancients, a philosophy was as much a "way of life" as it was a set of doctrines, and an objection to the effect that a given philosophy was not livable was taken very seriously indeed. To us, however, Hume's objection may sound hollow. After all, we might think, the fact that Pyrrhonism is not livable, even if it is a fact, doesn't have any bearing on whether Pyrrhonism is *true* or not – that is, we are likely to take Hume's objection as a mere ad-hominem against the Pyrrhonian.

But ad-hominem objections need not always be fallacious: they may indicate the need for more argument on behalf of the position objected to, even if they don't demonstratively entail its falsity. In any case, there is a close cousin of Hume's objection which is not *merely* ad-hominem. The claim is not simply that we act and live, and that rustic Pyrrhonism is incompatible with this practice. The claim rather is that it is *rational* for us to act and live, and that Pyrrhonism entails that it isn't. It is true that this point, that life is rational, goes well beyond the mere observation that we do live, and Hume may well have wanted nothing to do with it, but I take it to be nevertheless warranted, and I will hereafter understand Hume's objection in this way. We are not apt to think that we do live and act, but that we would cease to do it if we were rational. Hume's objection, therefore, doesn't just suggest that rustic Pyrrhonism is "pragmatically self-defeating." More importantly, it suggests that it is false.

Notice that the objection was put in terms of *belief*. Couldn't the rustic Pyrrhonian escape it, therefore, by insisting that we adopt a fine-grained approach to the doxastic attitudes? No, he couldn't: the objection can also be put in terms of the fine-grained framework. Take, first, the implementation of the fine-grained framework according to which degrees of confidence can be correctly modeled by a single probability function. If I am to be truly described as drinking a beer, then it must be that my bodily movements are appropriately related to some mental states of mine, and these mental states must crucially include *high degree of confidence* in some proposition or other related to the beer. The claim is not that degrees of confidence around 0.5 cannot *ever* rationalize actions: on the contrary, they most obviously can.[13] Rather, the claim is that *some* actions can only be rationalized by high degrees of confidence. But the rustic Pyrrhonian claims that high degrees of confidence are never justified. Therefore, again, someone who lived according to the precepts of rustic Pyrrhonism will many times fail to *act* at all. Therefore, rustic Pyrrhonism is not a livable philosophy.

[13]Example: my not boarding that taxi may well be rationalized by, *inter alia*, my assigning a degree of confidence of 0.5 to the proposition that it will be involved in a fatal accident.

Take now the implementation of the fine-grained approach according to which degrees of confidence sometimes include thickly-spread confidence, and therefore can only be modeled by a set of probability functions. We can now say that suspension of judgment is not to be identified with any specific credence, but rather with a more or less thick confidence spread around 0.5. Will this approach help the rustic Pyrrhonian eschew Hume's objection? Again, no. A notorious problem for the very idea of thickly-spread confidences is *precisely* that it is not at all clear which actions (if any) thick confidences rationalize. We may say that they rationalize any action that would be rational for a subject with a precise credence that could be represented by *any* of the functions in the representor. Call this the "liberal" policy. As long as your thick credence is spread in the right way, this policy may rationalize, for the Pyrrhonian, the same actions that the non-skeptic undertakes. But there is a serious problem with this strategy. The liberal policy also rationalizes *many other* actions, most of which do not lead to a livable life (for instance, if my confidence that the glass contains cyanide and not beer is [0.3, 0.7], then the liberal policy rationalizes both drinking the stuff and not drinking it). If this policy is to help the skeptic answer Hume's objection, then, he must pick and choose among all the rational actions precisely those that make for a livable life. This seems like cheating, and, in any case, a related objection still stands: even if rustic Pyrrhonism is compatible with a livable life, it is also compatible with an unlivable life. That is, there is nothing in rustic Pyrrhonism under this interpretation that prevents the skeptic from being unable to live his skepticism.

We could instead adopt a "conservative" policy of minimizing risk, acting as if we had a precise credence in the worst-case end of our thick-confidence spread (thus, if my confidence that there is cyanide in the glass is thickly spread over [0.1, .09], then I should act as if I had 0.9 credence that there is a cyanide in the glass). But there is again a serious problem with the conservative policy. The conservative policy will be of no help whatsoever to the rustic Pyrrhonian, for it will fail to rationalize actions that are necessary for survival (like drinking that glass of water).[14] So, moving from a coarse-grained framework to a fine-grained one doesn't help with Hume's objection. For that reason, for now on I will talk in terms of the coarse-grained framework exclusively.

Hume's objection as I am taking it, then, is that, given that we are justified in acting and that acting requires belief, and given also that the Pyrrhonian advocates complete lack of belief, Pyrrhonism has two defects: first, it is not a livable philosophy; second, and relatedly, it is not true. There are therefore two ways in which the Pyrrhonian can avoid the objection: he can deny that life requires belief, or he can deny that Pyrrhonism advocates complete lack of belief. Both moves have been advanced as correct interpretations of Pyrrhonism as depicted in Sextus' *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*. Thus, M. F. Burnyeat argued that, according to that text, life doesn't require belief – and so much the worse for Pyrrhonism, for life does require belief. Jonathan Barnes has argued also that rustic Pyrrhonism prevails in the *Outlines* and that, moreover, "a rustic Pyrrhonist might argue, with some show

[14] For more on problems with thick confidence, see White (2010).

of plausibility" that life doesn't require belief. Michael Frede and Robert Fogelin have argued that, on the contrary, *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* advocates a *limited* kind of Pyrrhonism, and thus leaves space for the Pyrrhonian to have beliefs and, therefore, a life.[15] Again, I am not here interested in the interpretative question about what kind of Pyrrhonism is on display in *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, but rather in the philosophical question whether there is any kind of Pyrrhonism that can deal with Hume's objection. Without further argument, I will side with Burnyeat against Barnes on the issue whether beliefs are required to have a life – that is, I will assume without further argument that they are. Rustic Pyrrhonism, therefore, has no good answer to Hume's objection – to the extent that Hume's objection is effective, rustic Pyrrhonism is defective. In what follows, then, I will be concerned with an interpretation of Pyrrhonism according to which no general policy of suspension of judgment is advocated. In contrast with rustic Pyrrhonism, and following Barnes' terminology, I will call this alternative interpretation of Pyrrhonism, urbane Pyrrhonism. The urbane Pyrrhonian, therefore, doesn't advocate suspension of judgment in general, but only with respect to certain beliefs. I will here follow another by now traditional terminology, and call the beliefs regarding which the Pyrrhonian advocates suspension of judgment, "philosophical" beliefs, and those beliefs that the Pyrrhonian is happy to acquiesce in, "ordinary" beliefs. Urbane Pyrrhonism can therefore be defined thus:

> *Urbane Pyrrhonism*: suspension of judgment is the only justified attitude with respect to philosophical beliefs, but ordinary beliefs can be accepted.

Of course, until we have in hand a characterization of the distinction between philosophical and ordinary beliefs, urbane Pyrrhonism will only be a skeleton of a theory. Because urbane Pyrrhonism is supposed to answer Hume's objection to Pyrrhonism, we can characterize ordinary beliefs as those that are required in order to live an ordinary life – such as the belief that there is beer in the glass, that there are sharks in the water, etc. The question that will occupy us in the rest of this paper, then, is whether urbane Pyrrhonism is defensible. I will be particularly concerned with whether some recent developments in the semantics of knowledge attribution (contextualism and contrastivism) can help us make sense of urbane Pyrrhonism. But before inquiring into whether contemporary semantics can help the Pyrrhonian get a life, we must first briefly see whether the Pyrrhonian needs help at all or whether, on the contrary, there are more traditional resources available to him.

5 Traditional Interpretations of Urbane Pyrrhonism

5.1 Two Kinds of Belief?

"Belief" is notoriously ambiguous between the mental act of believ*ing* and that which is thereby believ*ed*: between attitude and content. When the urbane

[15] See Barnes (1982), Burnyeat (1980, 1984), Frede (1984, 1987), and Fogelin (1994).

Pyrrhonist distinguishes between ordinary and philosophical beliefs, therefore, he might mean to be distinguishing between ordinary and philosophical *propositions*, or he might mean to be distinguishing between ordinary and philosophical *ways* of believing the same propositions. Let us first examine whether by making a distinction between ordinary and philosophical *ways* of believing the same proposition urbane Pyrrhonism can be made tenable.

What does this difference between different ways of holding the same proposition come down to? According to the version that I wish to consider, it comes down to whether the proposition is held on the basis of *grounds*, or *evidence* that allegedly justifies it. A proposition is believed in the philosophical way just in case it is held on that basis, whereas the ordinary person will hold beliefs without pretending that the propositions so believed are backed by reasons. It's not that the ordinary person thinks that the propositions he believes are *not* backed by reasons: rather, the question whether they are so backed doesn't arise for the ordinary person. The urbane Pyrrhonian, then, thinks that there is nothing wrong with holding beliefs in this unreflective way; but, when we try to ground our belief in reasons, we engage in a philosophical, and ultimately futile, project. According to the Pyrrhonian, there are no adequate reasons with which to back beliefs (this is what Agrippa's trilemma shows), and so if a proposition is held under the pretense that it is backed by reasons, then it is incorrectly held. Once engaged in the philosophical project of grounding our beliefs, the only possible outcome is suspension of judgment. But we can refuse to engage in the project to begin with, and there is nothing wrong with beliefs thus unpretentiously held.

This interpretation of urbane Pyrrhonism as a kind of skepticism about philosophy (as opposed to a kind of philosophical skepticism) has found widespread appeal among philosophers. Some claim to see it in Wittgenstein; different forms of it can certainly be found in Michael Frede, Barry Stroud, Robert Fogelin and Michael Williams, to name a few.[16] Widespread as it is, I think that this form of urbane Pyrrhonism is untenable. Ultimately, this version of urbane Pyrrhonism fails because it relies on an artificial distinction between philosophical and ordinary inquiry.

The claim, then, is that *if* we require reasons for our beliefs, then Agrippa's trilemma shows that there aren't any, but that beliefs for which no reasons are sought are untouched by Agrippa's trilemma. It is against the dogmatist, who claims to hold his beliefs on the basis of reasons, that the Pyrrhonian arguments are wielded; against the ordinary person, who makes no such claims, they have no force. A crucial question that the urbane Pyrrhonist needs to answer, though, is the following: what is the status of the ordinarily held beliefs? Are they justified or not? It seems to me that the urbane Pyrrhonian has two options here, neither of which is satisfactory. First, he may say that the question of justification just doesn't arise for ordinarily held beliefs. Second, he can say that, precisely because they are ordinarily held,

[16] See Frede (1984, 1987), Stroud (1984), Fogelin (1994), and Williams (1992).

ordinary beliefs *are* justified without the need of justify*ing* reasons. Let us take these options one at a time.

First, then, how plausible is it to claim that the question of justification doesn't even arise for ordinarily held beliefs? It seems to me that whatever plausibility this claim may have derives from an illegitimate move from a true and innocuous observation to a false one. The true and innocuous observation is that (often enough) the question about whether his beliefs are justified just doesn't arise for the ordinary person. The false claim is that, therefore, the question whether his beliefs are justified is somehow defective. The move, once pointed out, is obviously invalid. Consider an analogy: the ordinary person doesn't usually consider whether his beliefs can be expressed in sentences with less than ten words. This has absolutely no tendency at all to indicate that, therefore, the question whether the ordinary person's beliefs can be expressed in sentences with less than ten words is defective. Why would the case of justification be any different?

The second option is perhaps more promising. The idea here is not that the question whether ordinarily held beliefs are justified is somehow illegitimate but, quite to the contrary, that the answer is guaranteed to be "Yes." *Because* ordinary beliefs are held without the pretension that they are backed by reasons, they need not be backed by reasons in order to be justified. But, although this line of thought is indeed more promising insofar as it doesn't rely on some dubious charge of category mistake, it is nonetheless wildly implausible. For one thing, even the urbane Pyrrhonian must grant that *some* ordinarily held beliefs are unjustified. Some ordinary folks believe the most bizarre things. Merely not claiming that a belief is backed by reasons, therefore, cannot be *sufficient* for making the belief justified. But then, what else is necessary? Without an answer to this question, no strict distinction between ordinarily and philosophically held beliefs can be sustained (perhaps the something else that is necessary is something that plays the same theoretical role as being backed by reasons, in which case no deep difference between ordinary and philosophical beliefs has been uncovered). Second, and relatedly, it seems bizarre that the mere fact that one doesn't claim that one's beliefs are not backed by reasons is enough to make it the case that no reasons are necessary in order for them to be justified. Consider an analogy with action: some people believe that their actions (at least some of them) are backed by reasons, some other people don't even consider the question. Now, either those actions need to be backed by reasons or not. It is also a possibility that *some times* an action needs to be backed by reasons and *some other times* that very same action need not. What is not an open possibility, it seems to me, is that what *determines* whether an action needs to be backed by reasons or not is whether the subject of the action considers the question. And what goes for actions goes for beliefs, unless some argument is given to distinguish the two cases.[17]

[17] The fact that belief is non-voluntary (to the extent that it is a fact) cannot ground a relevant difference. At most, the unvoluntariness of belief gives us an *exculpation*, not a *justification*, for holding it.

5.2 Appearance and Reality

If distinguishing between different *ways* of holding the same propositions doesn't give us a tenable interpretation of urbane Pyrrhonism, perhaps distinguishing between ordinary and philosophical *propositions* will. One interpretation of the distinction between ordinary and philosophical propositions is as follows: philosophical propositions are propositions as to how things *really* are, whereas ordinary propositions are propositions as to how things *appear* to be. Thus, the urbane Pyrrhonist suspends judgment regarding *all* propositions as to how things really are, but he is happy to believe and disbelieve (as the case may be) propositions as to how things *appear* to be.

This interpretation seems to me to be a non-starter, for two related reasons. First, notice that it is highly doubtful (to put it mildly) that the distinction between propositions as to how things really are and propositions as to how things merely appear to be is even coextensive with the distinction between ordinary and philosophical propositions. Ordinary propositions are those propositions that are needed in order to live an ordinary life. Ordinary people do not confine themselves to the belief that honey *appears* sweet, or that they are *sweetened-honey-ly* by something (Sextus' example). They really do believe that honey is sweet. Second, and more importantly, what is needed for action is a belief that honey *really is* sweet, not merely that it appears sweet. Suppose that, as a good urbane Pyrrhonist, I believe merely that honey appears sweet but I suspend judgment on whether it is sweet. Suppose now that I need to ingest something sweet quickly, and there is some honey on the table. Will my Pyrrhonian beliefs rationalize my eating honey? Not at all. If I really do suspend judgment about whether honey is sweet, and if what I want is something sweet, and not merely something that appears sweet, then my Pyrrhonian belief that honey appears sweet is neither here nor there with respect to my ingesting something sweet.

But maybe that was too quick. Maybe the Pyrrhonian distinction between appearance and reality is not a distinction between, so to speak, *ordinary* appearance and reality, but between how things ordinarily are taken to be and how philosophers take things to *really* be. That is, in saying that he merely believes that honey appears sweet, and not that it really is sweet, the Pyrrhonian need not be claiming that, for all he knows, his sense of taste is out of touch with reality. Rather, the Pyrrhonian may be instead claiming that, in committing himself only to the claim that honey appears sweet, he intends to disown any particular *deep philosophical explanation* of the real sweetness of honey. A good model for this interpretation is the alleged distinction between primary and secondary qualities. Ordinary people think that honey is sweet. Dogmatic philosophers claim that sweetness is a surface effect of the interaction between the *fundamental* properties instantiated in the outside world and our sensory apparatus. The urbane Pyrrhonian sides with the ordinary folk, and believes that honey (really) is sweet – but he suspends judgment as to whether dogmatist philosophers are right about the real nature of sweetness.

This more subtle interpretation of the distinction between appearances and reality is promising. For one, it does seem to track better the distinction between

philosophical and ordinary beliefs – ordinary people don't have opinions about the primary quality/secondary quality distinction. And, crucially, it does seem to allow the Pyrrhonian to get a life. In order to rationalize my eating honey, I need only believe, in the right circumstances, that honey is sweet – I need not have any opinions whatsoever regarding the deep explanation for the sweetness of honey.

But, despite being more promising, this interpretation of the distinction between appearance and reality does not really help the Pyrrhonian get a life. I reserve my objections for later, however, because they apply also to more sophisticated versions of the idea that there is a difference between ordinary and philosophical propositions. I turn now to those more sophisticated versions.

6 Contemporary Interpretations of Urbane Pyrrhonism

6.1 Invariantism, Contextualism, and Contrastivism

Contextualism and contrastivism are theses about the semantics of knowledge attributions. They are best introduced against the background of a more traditional semantics.

According to what has come to be known as insensitive invariantism (hereafter simply "invariantism"),[18] a statement of the form "S knows that p" expresses the same proposition relative to any context of attribution – very roughly speaking, the proposition that S has a true belief that p that is justified to a specific degree and that is free from Gettier-style complications.[19]

According to contextualism, by contrast, a statement of the form "S knows that p" can express different propositions in different conversational context. When made in an ordinary context, for instance, a knowledge attribution expresses the proposition that S has a true and un-Gettierized belief that p that is justified to a modest degree. When made in a philosophical context, it expresses the different proposition that S has a true and un-Gettierized belief that p that is justified to a very high degree. Thus, speaking about the very same subject, two people can, in different conversational contexts, express a true and a false proposition by uttering the very same sentence. For instance, someone may be right in asserting "George knows that he has hands" and somebody else may also be right in asserting "George doesn't know that he has hands" even if they are both referring to the very same George in the very same situation. One of them is saying that George has a true and un-Gettierized belief that he has hands that is justified to a modest degree, whereas the other is saying that

[18]"Invariantism" because it holds that the semantic contribution of "knows" to a knowledge attribution is not contextually variant, "insensitive" because that invariant contribution is independent of the practical interests of the subject of the attribution. I will not be concerned here with sensitive invariantism.

[19]See Gettier (1963). Which degree of justification is invariantly attributed by a knowledge attribution is a matter for epistemology to decide, not semantics, according to this traditional picture.

George has a true and un-Gettierized belief that is justified to a very high degree. If George has a true and un-Gettierized belief that is justified to a modest, but not very high, degree, then the first person said something true if his conversational context was ordinary, and the second person also said something true if his conversational context was philosophical.

According to *both* invariantists and contextualists, then, "knows" expresses a binary relation between a subject and a proposition. The difference is that whereas according to the invariantist there is a unique relation that is always expressed by "knows," according to the contextualist there are multiple knowledge relations, and which one of those "knows" expresses depends on the conversational context. According to contrastivism, however, there is a fundamental mistake that is common to both invariantists and contextualists: the assumption that "knows" expresses a (or many different) *binary* relation (or relations). For the contrastivist believes that there is indeed only one knowledge relation, but it is a *ternary* one: the locution that best reflects the deep structure of knowledge attributions is therefore not "S knows that p," but rather "S knows that p out of a specified contrast class C," or perhaps "S knows that p rather than q." When a knowledge attribution doesn't explicitly mention the contrast class relative to which the attribution is made, then the specification of the contrast class is left to the context to determine. Thus, although the contrastivist agrees with the invariantist that there is a unique knowledge relation, he also agrees with the contextualist that knowledge attributions often need help from the conversational context in order to express a complete proposition.

Both contextualism and contrastivism can plausibly be held to offer ways of understanding urbane Pyrrhonism. The contextualist interpretation of urbane Pyrrhonism would run along the following lines. Justification comes in degrees. *How* justified must a proposition be for a subject in order for that subject to properly believe it? There is, for the urbane Pyrrhonian, no context-independent answer to that question. In an ordinary context, propositions need only be moderately justified for a subject in order for that subject to be truly said to know (and, thus, be truly said to be justified in believing) the proposition. In a philosophical context, propositions need to be justified to a very high degree for a subject in order for that subject to be truly said to know (and, thus, be truly said to be justified in believing) the very same propositions. The urbane Pyrrhonian thinks that, in general, the propositions that are needed in order to live an ordinary life are indeed moderately justified, although he suspends judgment on whether they are justified to the high degree required by philosophical contexts. Therefore, the urbane Pyrrhonian is happy to assent to those propositions in ordinary contexts, whereas he will suspend judgment on them in philosophical contexts.

There is also a contrastivist interpretation of urbane Pyrrhonism, to which I now turn. I return to contextualism after addressing contrastivism.

6.2 Sinnott-Armstrong's Contrastivist Urbane Pyrrhonism

An analogous contrastivist interpretation of urbane Pyrrhonism has been given by Walter Sinnott-Armstrong. Instead of being a contrastivist about knowledge,

Sinnott-Armstrong is a contrastivist about justification. The general idea is nevertheless the same.

Sinnott-Armstrong gives the following definition of what it is to be justified in believing a proposition out of a specified contrast class:

> Someone, *S*, is justified in believing a proposition, *P*, out of a contrast class, *C*, when and only when *S* has grounds that rule out every other member of *C* but do not rule out *P*. (Sinnott-Armstrong 2004, p. 190)

There are two questions that need to be answered before assessing Sinnott-Armstrong's version of contrastivism. First, what are *grounds*, and what is it for a subject to *have* those grounds? Second, when do some grounds that a subject has *rule out* a proposition?

I propose to understand the notion of "grounds," and of what it is to have them, in evidentialist terms.[20] Thus, grounds are evidence, understood as mental states – such as justified beliefs, experiences, ostensible memories, rational insights (if there are such things), etc. Moreover, a subject has a piece of evidence just in case he is in the corresponding mental state. I adopt evidentialism not because it is uncontroversial (it clearly isn't), but because whether it or some rival theory of what grounds are is true is independent of the issues I want to raise in this paper.

What is it for some grounds to *rule out* a proposition, then? About this notion Sinnott-Armstrong doesn't say much, but he does say that "inductive grounds are covered, since grounds can rule out a member of C without entailing that it is false." In order to make sense of this notion of ruling out, we need to make sense of the *propositional content* of some evidence. If entailing the negation of a proposition is one way for a piece of evidence to rule out that proposition, then it must be possible to describe the evidence propositionally, for the notion of entailment is defined as a relation between sets of propositions. The same must be said about the case where a piece of evidence inductively rules out a proposition, if this relation is to be understood as holding between propositions as well. Let us say, then, that for every body of evidence *e* there is a proposition p_e that captures the propositional content of *e*. We can then offer the following definition:

> **Ruling out**: *S*'s evidence *e* rules out the proposition that *p* if and only if:
>
> EITHER
> (i) p_e entails that *not–p*;
>
> OR
> (ii) p_e constitutes good inductive grounds for believing that *not–p*.

Notice that, because of clause (ii), the above definition of ruling out can hardly be incorporated into a *reductivist* account of justification, for what it is for a proposition to constitute *good* inductive grounds for believing in another proposition is obviously an epistemically normative matter. We will come back to the non-reductive nature of this particular version of contrastivism below.

[20] See Conee and Feldman (1985).

Consider now attributions of justification that are *not* explicitly relativized to a contrast class (let's call them "naked" attributions). According to Sinnott-Armstrong, naked attributions are normatively loaded in a way in which explicitly relativized attributions are not. Sinnott-Armstrong's urbane Pyrrhonian wants to avoid commitment to propositions that are normatively loaded in that way, but has nothing against normatively neutral propositions.

There are, then, two main theses that Sinnott-Armstrong advances. The first one is that what defines urbane Pyrrhonism is the desire to avoid normative commitments of a specific kind. The second thesis is that naked attributions of justification are normatively committed in the problematic way, whereas explicitly relativized attributions are not.

Now, in what way, precisely, are naked attributions normative? According to Sinnott-Armstrong, naked attributions of justification involve a commitment to there being a *relevant* contrast class, a contrast class that *ought* to be eliminated by the evidence. Explicitly relativized attributions, by contrast, carry no such commitment to relevance, claiming only that the evidence eliminates this or that contrast class, but not that it ought to eliminate any particular contrast class.

7 Contemporary Semantics Cannot Help the Skeptic Get a Life

We have before us two different contemporary semantic theses that promise to help develop urbane Pyrrhonism into a position that is both plausible and immune to Hume's objection to rustic Pyrrhonism. In this section I argue that the promise cannot be made good. I turn first to Sinnott-Armstrong's contrastivist interpretation of urbane Pyrrhonism.

7.1 Against Contrastivist Pyrrhonism

Although Sinnott-Armstrong doesn't unambiguously say it, he leaves the impression that explicitly relativized attributions of justification are not *really*, or not *fundamentally* normatively committed. This is seriously misguided. Explicitly relativized attributions of justification are *really* and *fundamentally* normatively committed.

One way to see the normative involvement of explicitly relativized attributions of justification is to consider clause (ii) in the definition of ruling out. That clause has it that I'm justified in believing that *p* out of a contrast class *C* provided that my evidence constitutes *good inductive grounds* for eliminating every proposition other than *p* in *C*. If that clause is not superfluous, then there must be cases where a subject *S* is justified in believing some proposition *p* out of a contrast class *C* in virtue of the fact that *S*'s evidence provides good inductive grounds for ruling out at least some of the members of *C* – that is, if clause (ii) is not superfluous, then it must be the case that not all the work is being done by *S*'s evidence being logically incompatible with all the members of *C* except *p*. Therefore, in accepting that *S* is justified in believing

p out of *C*, we are committing ourselves to the claim that *S*'s evidence provides *good inductive grounds* for disbelieving certain propositions. Obviously, the claim that a piece of evidence provides good inductive grounds for disbelieving a proposition is as normative a claim as any. Notice, for instance, that many non-contextualist anti-skeptics will disagree with Sinnott-Armstrong regarding some of his judgments – they will think that we have good non-deductive grounds for thinking that radical skeptical hypotheses are false, whereas Sinnott-Armstrong thinks that we do not. And even if in a particular case what makes it true that *S* is justified in believing that *p* out of *C* is the fact that *S*'s evidence is logically incompatible with every member of *C* other than *p*, in *accepting* that *S* is justified we are leaving it open that this is so because of *S*'s possession of good inductive grounds. Therefore, in accepting any claim to the effect that a subject is justified in believing anything out of any contrast class, the urbane Pyrrhonist is indeed committing himself to a normative claim.

But what if the urbane Pyrrhonist provides a purely *deductive* definition of ruling out, by removing clause (ii) in our previous definition? In that case, in claiming that *S* is justified in believing *p* out of *C*, the urbane Pyrrhonist will apparently only be committing himself to the claim that *S* has evidence that is logically incompatible with every member of *C* other than *p*, and that is not a normative claim.

But that is not all that the urbane Pyrrhonist would be committing himself to in making an attribution of justification. In addition to committing himself to the fact that S's evidence is incompatible with certain propositions, he would also be committing himself to the claim that *this incompatibility has epistemic significance* – that logical incompatibility can ground an epistemically loaded notion of "ruling out." It is easy to see that this normative commitment is in place by considering the fact that many philosophers think that logical incompatibility is neither necessary nor sufficient for a body of evidence to rule out a proposition. Thus, many philosophers would argue that if a body of evidence possessed by a subject is in fact incompatible with a certain proposition but the subject is completely oblivious about this (if, for instance, the subject lacks the logical acumen necessary to see the incompatibility), then the subject would not be justified in ruling out the proposition in question. This is an argument that logical incompatibility is not sufficient for ruling out. And, of course, any non-deductivist would argue that it is not necessary. Thus, in claiming that logical incompatibility is enough for ruling out propositions, the urbane Pyrrhonist would be committing himself to obviously normative claims. Sinnott-Armstrong seems to see that there is a problem here. First, in a footnote, he says the following:

> [Explicitly relativized attributions of justification] might seem normative conditionally in much the same way as "This tomato is good for the winter." However, although this sentence could be used to recommend that tomato during the winter, an utterance of the same sentence during the late summer would not recommend it (even if the sentence referred to the same tomato in the same condition). Thus, this sentence is not essentially normative, even if it can be used to make recommendations in some circumstances. The same goes for [explicitly relativized attributions]: They cannot be used to recommend belief without presupposing that the mentioned contrast class is appropriate or relevant, but [explicitly relativized attributions] by themselves make no such normative claim about the mentioned contrast class. That is all I mean by calling them non-normative. (Sinnott-Armstrong 2004, p. 206 n. 6)

And later in the same paper he adds:

> [W]e need not suspend belief about [explicitly relativized attributions], which say only which claims are justified out of specified contrast classes. As I admitted, these claims are still normative in a way, for they tell us what we ought to believe within a limited set of alternatives. Such limited claims can create controversies, some of which might even be unresolvable. Nonetheless, those controversies do not seem senseless in the same way as disputes about which contrast class is relevant epistemically. (Sinnott-Armstrong 2004, p. 204)

As far as I can see, there are two claims being made here. First, it is claimed that there is a difference between naked and explicitly relativized attributions of justification – a difference in the *kind* of normativity that these claims involve. Explicitly relativized attributions are said to involve only a "conditional" kind of normativity, whereas, presumably, naked attributions involve an unconditional kind of normativity. Second, it is claimed that this difference accounts for why the urbane Pyrrhonist can happily accept or reject explicitly relativized attributions whereas he doesn't want to commit himself either way with respect to naked attributions: even though conditionally normative claims can create unresolvable controversies just as easily as non-conditionally normative claims do, the controversies that surround non-conditionally normative claims are "senseless," whereas those that surround only conditionally normative claims are not. Both claims are wrong. There is no relevant difference between naked and explicitly relativized attributions; and, even if they were different in the way envisaged, that wouldn't be enough to ground the different attitudes that, according to Sinnott-Armstrong, the urbane Pyrrhonist takes towards them.

First, then: conditional normativity is just as normative as its non-conditional cousin. Take Sinnott-Armstrong's example of the tomato, and compare it with a non-conditionally normative claim about tomatoes:

(A) Tomato A is good for the winter.
(B) Tomato B is good.

Sinnott-Armstrong is right that, in uttering (A), one need not be recommending the tomato (compare with "He is a very good thief"). But why draw the conclusion that this somehow lessens (A)'s normative bite? For (A) to be true, tomato A really must be *good* for the winter. The same kind of normative property (and maybe even the same property, depending on how you count properties) that we ascribe to tomato B in uttering (B) we ascribe to tomato A in uttering (A).

Maybe Sinnott-Armstrong had in mind a case like the following. Suppose that Mary wants to buy tomatoes without driving more than two miles. She asks John where to go, and (knowing that Pete's is the only place that sells tomatoes in a two-mile radius) John answers:

(C) If you want to buy tomatoes without driving more than 2 miles, then you ought to go to Pete's.

Let's call claims such as (C) "instrumental" claims. The view that instrumental claims are only superficially normative may be widespread among some philosophers. Perhaps the most candid expression of this view comes from Quine who, speaking of epistemology as engineering where the goal is true beliefs, said "The normative here, as elsewhere in engineering, becomes descriptive when the terminal parameter is expressed."[21] It may well be true that claims of the form "the most efficient way of φ-ing is to ψ" (let's call them "efficiency" conditionals) are descriptive, but the descriptive nature of *that* claim entails nothing about the nature of instrumental conditionals. Some people think that not every instrumental conditional is true. They may well be wrong (indeed, I think that they are wrong), but they need not be denying that well-constructed efficiency conditionals are true. That is, some philosophers accept claims such as "The most effective way of buying tomatoes without driving more than two miles is going to Pete's" but reject (C). What they are rejecting in rejecting (C), therefore, is not an efficiency conditional. They are rejecting a normative claim, the normative claim embedded in the instrumental conditional.[22]

But even if Sinnott-Armstrong is right and conditionally normative claims really are only superficially normative, that would still not warrant the different attitudes that the urbane Pyrrhonist is said to take towards naked and explicitly relativized attributions, because naked attributions themselves are only conditionally normative. If explicitly relativized attributions are only conditionally normative because they are relativized to a given contrast class, then naked attributions are also only conditionally relative, because *they too* are relativized to a contrast class. The only difference between naked and explicitly relativized attributions is that the latter specify a contrast class in situ, whereas the former leaves the specification up to the context of utterance. According to Sinnott-Armstrong, that makes naked attributions unconditionally normative – but why? Take again the case of Mary, who wants to buy tomatoes without driving more than two miles. Suppose that, instead of uttering (C), as before, John instead utters:

(D) If you have the desires that I think you do, then you ought to go to Pete's.

If (C) is only conditionally normative, then so too is (D) – the fact that, in (D), the desires that the normative claim is relativized to are specified only contextually is neither here nor there with respect to its conditionality. The same goes for naked attributions of justification.

Finally, remember that, according to Sinnott-Armstrong, what bothers the urbane Pyrrhonist about naked attributions of justification is their commitment to the *relevance* of a specific contrast class. It is the kind of normativity encapsulated in such relevance-related claims that is anathema to the urbane Pyrrhonist. Now, I am highly doubtful that, in making naked attributions of justification, ordinary speakers

[21] Quine's reply to Morton White, in Hahn and Schilpp (1986, p. 665).

[22] Christine Korsgaard might be making this point in Korsgaard (1986).

do commit themselves to any such claim about relevance. But let's grant to Sinnott-Armstrong that they do, for the sake of argument. So what? What is it specifically about relevance that Sinnott-Armstrong's urbane Pyrrhonist doesn't like? The picture seems to be the following: issues about which contrast classes get ruled out by which evidence should be (even if they are not) uncontroversial, whereas issues about which contrast class *should* be eliminated are hopelessly controversial (disputes about this, Sinnott-Armstrong says, are "senseless"). For instance, it is obvious that our ordinary evidence when we are facing the zebra cage rules out the everyday contrast class (which includes alternatives such as that there is an antelope in the cage) and it is similarly obvious that it doesn't rule out some of the more inclusive contrast classes (such as the contrast class which includes skeptical alternatives). What is not obvious, and what for Sinnott-Armstrong would involve us in a "senseless dispute," is which contrast class *should* be ruled out in order for a justification attribution to be true simpliciter. But I think that Sinnott-Armstrong is doubly mistaken here. First it is not true that it is, or even that it should be, uncontroversial which contrast classes are ruled out by which evidence. The majority of non-skeptical epistemologists would disagree with Sinnott-Armstrong that our evidence is not good enough to rule out skeptical alternatives. They would go about explaining how our evidence does this in different ways, of course (and some ways may involve getting clearer about what evidence is, etc), but they would nevertheless disagree strongly with Sinnott-Armstrong's position here. Second, it is not true either that disputes about which contrast classes ought to be eliminated in order for an attribution of justification to be true simpliciter are "senseless." On the contrary, it seems to me that the consensus among non-contrastivist and non-contextualist non-skeptic epistemologists is that it is the *unlimited* contrast class that has to be eliminated (the contrast class that contains *all* the alternatives incompatible with the proposition in question) in order to know a proposition. So, whereas Sinnott-Armstrong's picture is that although it is clear which contrast classes our evidence eliminates, it is not at all clear which ones should be eliminated, the truth seems to me to be the precise contrary: there is a clear (even if by no means complete) consensus that the contrast class that matters is the unlimited one, and that the action regarding skeptical arguments lies in whether our evidence does or does not eliminate *that* contrast class.

7.2 *Against Contextualist Pyrrhonism – and Appearance and Reality Revisited*

Let us now go back to the contextualist interpretation of urbane Pyrrhonism. Remember that, according to this interpretation, the urbane Pyrrhonist is happy to concede that our ordinary beliefs attain a moderate level of justification, whereas he suspends judgment on whether they attain high levels of justification. Accordingly, the urbane Pyrrhonist is happy to count as true knowledge attributions made in ordinary conversational contexts, whereas he won't accept knowledge attributions made in philosophical contexts.

It is relatively clear how the contextualist interpretation is supposed to help the urbane Pyrrhonian get a life. In ordinary contexts belief is unproblematically held, because knowledge attributions made in those contexts express propositions that are unproblematically true. In philosophical contexts, however, the propositions expressed by knowledge attributions are *not* unproblematically true, and therefore the Pyrrhonian withholds belief in those contexts.

But although it is more or less clear how contextualism is *supposed* to help, I don't think that it helps at all. The reason is simple: the Pyrrhonian master argument, Agrippa's trilemma, is insensitive to the *content* of the propositions in question. Agrippa's trilemma succeeds, if it succeeds at all (and I have said nothing about this latter question here), thanks to focusing on *structural* features of belief, features that are present regardless of the subject-matter of the beliefs in question. Therefore, no interpretation of urbane Pyrrhonism according to which the distinction between ordinary and philosophical beliefs is a distinction in content, in the kind of proposition believed, is going to help the Pyrrhonian meet Hume's objection.

The point is disarmingly simple, and applies widely. In addition to destroying the contextualist interpretation of urbane Pyrrhonism, it also destroys the contrastivist interpretation (in addition to the specific problems for Sinnott-Armstrong's particular contrastivist implementation of Pyrrhonian contrastivism discussed above). For, according to the contrastivist interpretation, the urbane Pyrrhonist believes propositions of the form "S is justified in believing that p rather than q." But Agrippa's trilemma applies to *that* belief as well. The point applies also to more traditional ways of distinguishing between ordinary and philosophical propositions, such as the distinction between propositions about the sweetness of honey vs. propositions about the deep philosophical explanation of the sweetness of honey. The urbane Pyrrhonist is supposed to believe that honey is sweet without committing himself to any particular philosophical explanation as to the deep nature of sweetness – but, again, Agrippa's trilemma applies to the belief that honey is sweet as well, whether it is accompanied by a deep philosophical explanation or not.

8 Conclusion

My main point in this paper has been negative: there is no tenable version of Pyrrhonism. Rustic versions founder on Hume's objection. Urbane versions make distinctions between ordinary and philosophical contexts or propositions where there is no relevant difference. Moreover, contemporary theses about the semantics of knowledge attributions don't help make these distinctions any more substantive. I conclude, therefore, that, to the extent that the Pyrrhonian has a life, it is based on invidious distinctions that can't stand scrutiny.

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Name Index

A

Aenesidemus, 15, 20–22, 24, 26, 29
  and Heraclitus, 59
Agrippa von Nettesheim, 121n61
Ainslie, Donald, 188n29
Albert, Hans, viiin4
Alston, William, 211
Annas, Julia, 10n12, 20n4, 37n7, 39n10, 40n20, 56n12, 59n14, 71n29, 179n10, 188n27, 204n2
Annis, David, 209n10
Arcesilaus of Pitane, 20, 35, 138, 156
Aristotle, xii, 5n5, 16, 52–53, 55, 61, 63–64, 66, 81–95, 116, 142, 208
Audi, Robert, 208n7
Augustine, ix
Austin, J. L., 196
Ayer, Alfred, 13
Ayers, Michael, viin3

B

Bacon, Francis, xii, 99–128
Bailey, Alan, xivn20, 20n2, 54n7, 67n25, 73n30
Barnes, Jonathan, 20n3, 24n14, 37n7, 39n10, 40n20, 56n12, 59n14, 71n29, 153n24, 204n2, 227
Barney, Rachel, xivn20, 20n2, 54n7
Bayle, Pierre, xiii, 131–143, 150n17, 153, 177–178
Beattie, James, 154
Beauchamp, Tom, 150
Bénatouïl, Thomas, 59n14
Bett, Richard, xi, 3–16, 20n4, 21n7, n8, 22n10, 25n15, 27n16, 37n7, 38n8, 56n12, 59n14, n16, 103n15
Bloor, David, 163n37
Bonazzi, Mauro, 59n16
BonJour, Laurence, 94n24
Boyle, Robert, 100
Brandom, Robert, 208, 209n10
Brennan, Tad, xivn19, n20, 54n7
Brittain, Charles, 20n6
Brochard, Victor, 59n16
Brogi, Stefano, 142
Brunschwig, Jacques, 33n2, 43n20
Burke, Edmund, 161
Burnyeat, Myles, xivn20, 3n2, 27n7, 67n25, 153n24, 217, 227
Bury, R. G., 37n7, 40n14, 42n19, 56n12, 147n7

C

Carneades of Cyrene, xiii, 122, 131, 138, 156
Cassin, Barbara, 52n3
Cauchy, Venant, 66n23
Caujolle-Zaslawsky, Françoise, 66n23
Cavell, Stanley, 157, 162
Cavendish, Anthony, 148n8, 150n19
Cavini, Walter, ixn9
Christensen, David, 203n1
Cicero, ix, 21, 100, 104–105, 109, 112, 114, 150–151, 153
Cohen, Stewart, 90n16, 212
Comesaña, Juan, xv, 67n25, 217–239
Conee, Earl, 233n20
Corti, Lorenzo, 66n23
Crousaz, Jean-Pierre de, 153

D

Deleuze, Gilles, 157
Delpla, Isabelle, 143
Democritus, 61–62, 87
De Robert, Philippe, 143
Descartes, René, 23n12, 102, 113, 127, 146n17, 153n6, 178n18, 184, 208
Diogenes Laertius, 26, 153

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E

Elga, Adam, 203n1
Erasmus of Rotterdam, 121n61
Estienne, Henri, viin1, 148n11
Eva, Luiz, xii, 99–128
Evans, Matthew, 15n20

F

Fabricius, Johan, 148
Feldman, Richard, 203n1, 233n20
Fénelon, François, 153
Fine, Gail, xivn20, 20n2
Firth, Roderick, 91n17
Floridi, Luciano, ixn8, n9, n10, n12
Florio, John, 104
Fogelin, Robert, viiin4, n5, 146n6, 157n22, 187n24, 188n30, 199, 227–228
Formigari, Lia, 115n45
Forst, Rainer, 141–142
Fosl, Peter, xiii, 145–167
Frede, Dorothea, 58n13
Frede, Michael, xivn20, 20n2, 27, 42n7, 65n22, 125n70, 153n24, 227–228
Fumerton, Richard, 211n13

G

Garrett, Don, 146–147, 157n11, n13, 181n17, n18, 182n19, 187n26, 188n28
Gettier, Edmund, 231
Glanvill, Joseph, 100
Glidden, David, xivn20
Gottlieb, Paula, 52n3, 53
Granada, Miguel, 100n4
Gregory, Tullio, ixn14
Grellard, Christophe, xn15, n16, n17, n18
Grgić, Filip, 22n11, 33n2, 71n29
Groarke, Leo, 148, 152n10
Gutting, Gary, 203n1

H

Hankinson, Robert, 5n7, 20n4, 59n16, 71n29
Harman, Gilbert, 218n3
Harte, Verity, 58n13
Hegel, G. W. F., 86n13, 208
Heidegger, Martin, 162n34
Heraclitus, 59–61, 65, 69, 103n16, 162n34
Hervet, Gentian, viin1, 148
Horn, Laurence, 64n19
Horwich, Paul, 41n15, 46n28
Huart, Claude, 148
Huet, Pierre-Daniel, 153
Hume, David, xiii, 3, 133, 145–167, 171–188, 217, 225

I

Israel, Jonathan, 131–132, 142–143

J

Jardine, Lisa, 100n4, 120n58
Jeffrey, Richard, 218n4
John of Salisbury, ix
Joyce, Richard, 6n8
Junqueira Smith, Plínio, 7, 171–188

K

Kahn, Charles, 162n34
Kant, Immanuel, 133, 142
Kaplan, Mark, 218n5
Kelly, Thomas, 203n1
Kemp Smith, Norman, 146
Kirchin, Simon, 6n8
Klein, Peter, viiin4, xii, 79–95, 156n27, 199n10
Kornblith, Hilary, 198n8
Korsgaard, Christine, 237n22

L

Lagerlund, Henrik, ixn7
Lammenranta, Markus, viiin4, xiv, 71n29, 203–214
La Mothe Le Vayer, François de, 153
Lane, Melissa, 58n13
Laursen, John Christian, viin2, xiii, 131–143
Lear, Jonathan, 3n1
LeClerc, Jean, 148n9
Leibniz, Gottfried Wilhelm von, 157
Livingston, Donald, 146, 157, 161n40
Locke, John, 132–133, 150n17, 178
Long, A. A., 44n22, 58n13
Lorenzi, Giovanni, ix
Lukasiewicz, Jan, 52n3

M

Machuca, Diego, vii–xv, viiin6, 22n11, 25n15, 51–75, 200n12
MacIntyre, Alasdair, 142
Mackie, John, 6, 13
Maia Neto, Raimundo, viin2, 58n13, 100n4, n5, 102n10
Malebranche, Nicolas, 150, 178
Manzo, Silvia, 100n4, 120n58
Marcondes, Danilo, 114n42
Mates, Benson, 15n21, 56n12, 118n52
McCormick, Miriam, 163n37
McDowell, John, 197n7, 201n13
McKeon, Richard, 83n8

McPherran, Mark, 20n4, 38n9, 65n21, 66n26, 71n29
Middle Ages, skepticism during, ix–x
Moller, Dan, 22n11
Montaigne, Michel de, xii, 100, 102, 104–107, 109–115, 117–119, 121, 123, 153, 164, 178
Moore, G. E., 195
Mori, Gianluca, 131–132
Morrison, Donald, 4n4
Mossner, Ernest, 166n44, 178n9

N
Narcy, Michel, 52n3
Naya, Emmanuel, viin2
Niccolò da Reggio, ix
Nicholas of Autrecourt, ix
Norton, David Fate, 146, 150n17, 153, 158
Norton, Mary, 150n17
Nussbaum, Martha, 4n4, 65n21

O
Oliveira, Bernardo, 100n4, n5, 102n10
Owen, David, 156, 181n17, 182n20, 183n21, 187n25, n26

P
Paganini, Gianni, viin2
Palmer, John, 23n13, 33n2, 71n29
Pascal, Blaise, 150n17, 157n6, 178, 222
Passmore, John, 181n17
Peirce, Charles, 208
Pellegrin, Pierre, 56n12, 59n14, 71n29
Pentzopoulou-Valalas, Thérèse, 71n28, 75n33
Pérez-Jean, Brigitte, 59n16
Perin, Casey, xivn20, 20n2, 22n11, 23n13, 24n14, 33n2, 38n8, 39n10, 42n19, 71n29, 75n33
Perler, Dominik, viin3, xn17
Philo of Larissa, 20
Photius, ixn8, 21–22
Plato, 34–36, 104, 116, 208
Plutarch, 39n12, 104
Polito, Roberto, 58n13, 59n16
Popkin, Richard, vii, 100–102, 104n17, 109n30, 127, 132, 140n4, 147, 153
Porchat Pereira, Oswaldo, viiin5, 125n70
Porro, Pasquale, ixn8, 9, n12, n13
Priest, Graham, 64n19
Prior, Moody, 101
Pritchard, Duncan, xiv, 193–201
Protagoras, 59, 61, 65
Pyrrho of Elis, 16, 20–22, 24, 148

Q
Quine, Willard, 237

R
Ramsay, Andrew, 153
Rex, Walter, 140
Ribeiro, Brian, 4n4, 199
Ricoeur, Paul, 154
Rogers, Ben, 14n19
Rorty, Richard, 208
Rossi, Paolo, 116n48
Rossitto, Cristina, 58n13
Routley, Richard, 64n19
Russell, Bertrand, 164n41

S
Sánchez, Francisco, 100n5, 115n45
Sartre, Jean-Paul, 13
Schmitt, Charles, ixn8, n9, n12, n13
Schofield, Malcolm, 5n7, 27n16, 45n26, 59n16
Sedley, David, 44n22, 147n7
Sellars, Wilfrid, 208
Sextus Empiricus, vii, 3, 19–29, 52, 101–102, 131, 137, 147, 149, 153–154, 167, 181, 203
  Latin translations of, ix
  Renaissance rediscovery of, vii
Sinnott-Armstrong, Walter, viiin5, 232–239
Socrates, 34–36, 39, 83, 116
Solomon, Graham, 148, 152
Sorensen, Roy, 86n13
Sosa, Ernest, viiin4, 34n4, 212
Spinelli, Emidio, 56n12, 65n21
Stanley, Thomas, 148
Stewart, Alexander, 155n25
Stough, Charlotte, xivn20, 66n23
Striker, Gisela, 15n22, 19n1, 20n2, n5, 23n13, 33n2, 34n3, 36n6, 71n29, 73n30, 74n31
Stroud, Barry, 172n1, 186n22, 187n25, 188n28, n31, 196n4, 228
Sturgeon, Scott, 218n5, 219n8
Svavarsson, Svavar Hrafn, xi, 19–29

T
Tanaka, Koji, 64n19
Thomson, Jacob, 148
Thorsrud, Harald, xivn20
Timon of Phlius, 21–22, 26, 148
Trowbridge, John, 58n13

V
Van Cleve, James, 92n18, 212
Van Leeuwen, Henry, 101n8

Velleman, David, 40n13, 44n21
Villey, Pierre, 104–106, 111–112, 115n44, n45, 118n53
Vogel, Jonathan, 90n16, 211n13
Vogt, Katja, xi, 3n1, 33–48, 75n33

W

Wedin, Michael, 52n3
White, Roger, 226n14
Williams, Bernard, 12
Williams, Michael, viiin4, 73n30, 88n14, 193n1, 198n8, 199, 205, 208n10, 228n16
Wittgenstein, Ludwig, 162n35, 163n37, 165n42, 193–201, 208n10
Wittwer, Roland, ixn9
Wright, Crispin, 198n8
Wright, John, 146, 159

Z

Zagorin, Perez, 101n8, 104n19

Subject Index

A

Ad hominem argument, 28, 69, 73, 204, 206
Agrippa's trilemma, viii, xii, 70, 221–224, 228, 239
Aphasia, 21, 146, 166
Appearances
  adherence to, 38
  assent to, 65, 72
  conflicting, 7, 19, 23, 55, 57, 58–59, 62–63, 67, 69
  epistemic, 68, 71
  following the, 9, 19–20, 22, 66
  non-epistemic, 65n22, 68
  versus reality, 230
Assent, 39, 42, 44, 46, 55, 58, 65, 69, 71, 73, 75, 80, 81, 95, 118, 158, 199, 232

B

Bayesianism, 218, 219n7
Belief(s)
  about how things really are, 67
  about natural values, xi, 19, 26, 28–29
  about the nature of reality, 204, 207
  and action, xv, 19, 66, 217, 224, 230
  coherent, 95, 212
  commonsense, xiv, 199
  conflicting, 25–26, 29
  contradictory, 53
  contrary, 60–61, 65
  disagreeing, 210
  dogmatic, 158–159, 166, 187
  everyday, 6
  in the external world, 159, 182
  freedom from, 13
  justification of, 180n12, 187n26
  justified, 209–212, 214, 223, 233
  life without, 22
  natural, 151, 158, 160, 182, 185, 187
  opposite, 56, 58, 69
  ordinary, 200, 227, 229, 231, 238
  philosophical, 187, 227, 228–229, 239
  religious, 158, 187
  skeptical, 158
  as source of anxiety, 22, 25–29
  in things by nature good or bad, 6–9, 13, 15

C

Coherentism, xii, xiv, 81, 86, 94, 212
Confidence, degrees of, 218–219, 225–226
Contextualism, xiv, xv, 209, 217, 227, 231–232, 239
Contrastivism, xv, 217, 227, 231–234
Criterion
  of action, 66–67
  the problem of the, 103, 122, 156–157
  of truth, 44, 60–61, 104, 109, 159, 174–175

D

Demonstration, 57, 63, 71, 82–85, 87–88, 110, 117
Dialectical
  argumentation, xii, 27, 73, 136
  conception of justification, 208–209
Disagreement, 57, 62, 66, 210
  among appearances, xi
  among arguments, 69
  irresolvable, 63, 204
  mode of, 73
  the problem of, xiii
  Pyrrhonian argument from, xiv, 203, 207, 214
Dogmatists, 28, 33, 43, 51, 52, 55, 64, 69, 70, 73, 74, 75, 84, 89, 90, 105, 109, 112, 113, 117, 122, 124, 159, 175, 206
Doubt
  Cartesian, 172, 178, 208
  Pyrrhonian, 198–199, 201
  skeptical, 146, 185

E
Epicureans, 14, 39, 45, 112
Epochē, xii, 4–7, 9, 15, 21, 23–29, 40, 43, 47, 52, 56, 58, 60, 64, 70, 79, 103, 107, 109, 120, 146, 166, 174, 182, 184, 188, 217–221
  universal, x, 24, 217
Equipollence (*isostheneia*), xi, 21, 23, 24, 26, 29, 40, 175, 205
Evidentialism, xiv, 209–211

F
Five Modes of Agrippa, xii, 47, 51, 69, 71, 73, 79, 82, 84–85, 88, 91, 203, 222
  mode of relativity, 88
Foundationalism, xii, xiv, 80–81, 83–89, 91–92, 212

H
Happiness (*eudaimonia*), 3, 15–16, 22, 26–28, 37–38

I
Idols, doctrine of the, 99–128
Inactivity (*apraxia*) objection, xv, 3, 19–20, 22
Inactivity argument, *see* Inactivity (*apraxia*) objection
Inference, 51–52, 70–75, 179
  rules of, 51–52, 70–71, 73–75
Infinitism, xii, 81–92, 94
Invariantism, 231–232

K
Knowledge, 88–92, 108–113
  animal, 212–213
  easy, 90, 212–213
  faculties of, 101, 108–114
  impossibility of, xii, 107
  practical, 28
  probable, xii
  reflective, 212–213

M
Middle Ages, skepticism during, ix–x
Münchhausen-Trilemma, viiin4

N
Non-contradiction, law of, 51–75
  doxastic version, 53, 56, 58, 61–62, 64–65, 67
  linguistic version, 66, 70
  logical version, 53
  ontological version, 53, 56–57, 64, 68, 72
  practical version, 68
  psychological version, 52, 65–66, 72
  Pyrrhonist's acceptance of, 58–63
  Pyrrhonist's commitment to, 66–67, 70, 73–74
  Pyrrhonist's dialectical use of, 52, 69–70, 73–74

P
Paradox, 29, 103, 113, 140–142
  skeptical, xiv, 42, 203, 205, 208, 214

R
Rationality
  canons of, 51, 75
  commitment to, 42
Reasoning, circular, 81–86, 88, 90, 92, 212–213
Relativism, 59, 87, 122, 203–204, 209
Reliabilism, xiv, 209–212
Rustic Pyrrhonism, 221–227, 234

S
Skepticism
  academic, xi, 21, 138, 147, 151–152, 156, 159, 171, 181, 199
  antecedent, 172, 182, 184–185
  consequent, 172–173, 178, 182, 185
Stoics, 8, 16, 29, 37–38, 39, 44, 46, 67, 81, 112, 145, 157
Suspension of belief, *see Epochē*
Suspension of judgment, *see Epochē*

T
Ten Modes of Aenesidemus, 47, 69, 203, 204
  Second Mode, 56
  Tenth Mode, 105
Tranquility (*ataraxia*), xi, 7, 19–30, 33–34, 37, 40–41, 165, 220, 913–915

U
Urbane Pyrrhonism, 227–239