ΣΧΟΛΗ

Философское антиковедение и классическая традиция

Том 11

Выпуск 1

2017

ΣΧΟΛΗ (Schole)

ФИЛОСОФСКОЕ АНТИКОВЕДЕНИЕ И КЛАССИЧЕСКАЯ ТРАДИЦИЯ

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Учредители журнала

Новосибирский государственный университет,
Институт философии и права СО РАН

Основан в марте 2007 г. Периодичность – два раза в год

Адрес для корреспонденции
Философский факультет НГУ, ул. Пирогова, 2, Новосибирск, 630090

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Адрес в сети Интернет: **www.nsu.ru/classics/schole/**

ISSN 1995-4328 (Print)
ISSN 1995-4336 (Online)

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ΣΧΟΛΗ

Ancient Philosophy and the Classical Tradition

Volume 11

Issue 1

2017

ΣΧΟΛΗ (Schole)

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Established at

Novosibirsk State University
Institute of Philosophy and Law (Novosibirsk, Russia)

The journal is published twice a year since March 2007

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On-line version: **www.nsu.ru/classics/schole/**

ISSN 1995-4328 (Print)
ISSN 1995-4336 (Online)

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СТАТЬИ / ARTICLES

NO MORE THIS THAN THAT: SKEPTICAL IMPRESSION OR PYRRHONIAN DOGMA?

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Abstract. This is a defense of Pyrrhonian skepticism against the charge that the suspension of judgment based on equipollence is vitiated by the assent given to the equipollence in question. The apparent conflict has a conceptual side as well as a practical side, examined here as separate challenges with a section devoted to each. The conceptual challenge is that the skeptical transition from an equipollence of arguments to a suspension of judgment is undermined either by a logical contradiction or by an epistemic inconsistency, perhaps by both, because the determination and affirmation of equipollence is itself a judgment of sorts, one that is not suspended. The practical challenge is that, independently of any conceptual confusion or contradiction, suspending judgment in reaction to equipollence evinces doxastic commitment to equipollence, if only because human beings are not capable of making assessments requiring rational determination without believing the corresponding premises and conclusions to be true. The two analytic sections addressing these challenges are preceded by two prefatory sections, one laying out the epistemic process, the other reviewing the evidentiary context. The response from the conceptual perspective is that the suspension of judgment based on equipollence is not a reasoned conclusion adopted as the truth of the matter but a natural reaction to an impression left by the apparently equal weight of opposing arguments. The response from the practical perspective is that the acknowledgment of equipollence is not just an affirmation of the equal weight of arguments but also an admission of inability to decide, suggesting that any assent, express or implied, is thrust upon the Pyrrhonist in a state of epistemic paralysis affecting the will and the intellect on the matter being investigated. This just leaves a deep disagreement, if any, regarding whether equipollence is an inference based on discursive activity or an impression coming from passive receptivity. But this, even if resolved in favor of the critic (which it need not and ought not be), is not the same as confusion or inconsistency on the part of the Pyrrhonist, the demonstration of which is the primary aim of this paper.

Keywords: Pyrrhonism, skepticism, truth, assent, belief, equipollence, suspension of judgment.

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DOI: 10.21267/AQUILO.2017.11.4518

1. Epistemic Journey

The Pyrrhonist is on a journey.[1] This one is not over land and sea but through observation and argument. It is an epistemic journey. The Pyrrhonist is after the truth, not necessarily a profound universal truth, but the truth of the matter in whatever happens to be under consideration.[2] As with any journey, any number of things can go wrong. But only one thing does. The Pyrrhonist fails to discover the truth, any truth, ever. And we know the rest: The failure, or rather the acceptance of that failure, releases the Pyrrhonist from the frustrating burden of attaining knowledge, thereby putting an end to the aporetic distress accompanying the epistemic journey. The journey goes on (PH 1.1–3), but it continues in tranquility. The misery of unproductive inquiry gives way to a peace of mind as the hope of discovery is left behind.

All this from a single problem: the failure to discover the truth. This failure is not a real problem, of course, but a metaphorical interpretation of the skeptical journey as imagined from the perspective of the Pyrrhonist. The critics, however, find real problems as well. They challenge everything from the sincerity and quality of the pursuit of truth to the compatibility of the suspension of judgment either with the failed search occasioning it or with the tranquility resulting from it. Some of these challenges are about the logic of the Pyrrhonian position, others about the epistemology, yet others about the psychology. And they can be found directed at distinct parts or features of the epistemic process, or at different stretches of the journey, as with the introductory metaphor above. This makes for a rich collection of objections. The Pyrrhonists, remaining true to form, have yet to assent to a single one. So, the debate goes on.

Misgivings about the skeptical enterprise are as old as the first skeptics.[3] Neither the purported problems nor the suggested solutions are in a state of neglect.

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[1] References to original sources are to Sextus Empiricus's *Pyrrōneioi Hypotypōseis* (PH) and *Adversus Mathematicos* (M), following the standard convention of giving book and section numbers. Direct quotations, limited to PH, are from the Cambridge translation (2000). All quotations omit paragraph breaks, bracketed book/section numbers, and footnote reference markers in the original. References to secondary literature give the pagination of the edition listed first in the bibliography.

[2] See PH 2.80–84 for the difference between truth and truths, or what is the same, between *the truth* and *a truth*. I will not be using "truth" (even with the definite article) in an epistemically privileged sense to refer to an enlightened grasp of reality at a comprehensive level as if there were only one truth (nor even as if one outshone the rest in importance).

[3] Although I have already identified Pyrrhonism as the focus of this paper, making this explicit in the title, in the abstract, and in the introductory paragraph, this is a good place to reiterate that I am not concerned with any other type of skepticism, ancient or modern. Whenever I refer to skeptics or skepticism without qualification, I mean the Pyrrhonian variety in either case. And where I say "Pyrrhonism," I am talking specifically about Pyrrhonian skepticism, not any other aspect of

Ongoing efforts continue to clarify the central questions. Yet we still have nothing like a consensus on what to make of the Pyrrhonian journey. This is not because the quality of work has been inadequate. On the contrary, excellent contributions have been dividing us for decades.[4] But there is a more basic factor at play: The critic has good reasons to attack what the skeptic has good reasons to say or do. There is, after all, something suspicious about being unable to take a stand on any issue, while there is, on the other hand, nothing wrong with refusing to adopt a position without agreeing with it. Some of us side with the critic, others stand with the skeptic. It is time to step back and take stock.

What I have in mind is not a literature survey. That, too, can be useful. But what I have in mind is the opposite: a reconsideration of the skeptical outlook as if encountering it for the first time. The point would be to identify patterns or a common thread in both the natural attraction and the natural reaction to Pyrrhonian skepticism. Such unrefined clues may no longer be visible to us in the

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life as a Pyrrhonist. To be precise, my focus on Pyrrhonian skepticism is on late Pyrrhonism, corresponding to the revival marked by Aenesidemus's departure from the Academy, as distinct from both the early Pyrrhonism of Pyrrho and Timon and from the new Pyrrhonism emerging in the sixteenth century with the rediscovery and publication of the works of Sextus Empiricus. Even this may not be enough to satisfy the standards of accuracy Bett (1994, 2000a, 2000b) has introduced for specifying the brand of Pyrrhonism one proposes to discuss. I submit, hoping to approximate the specificity recommended, that the focus here is on the skepticism to be found in *Pyrrōneioi Hypotypōseis*, which should be an acceptable anchor since my intention is not to reconstruct a particular period in the history of Pyrrhonism but to work with its principal source.

[4] The best introduction to the literature is through a first-hand survey of a remarkably productive dialogue taking shape in the 1980s between prominent scholars reconsidering the central questions. Specifically, the contemporary roots of the debate extend to Barnes (1982, 1–29), who revives an ancient distinction between "rustic" and "urbane" Pyrrhonism (cf. n. 20 below); to Burnyeat, who not only anticipates that distinction (1980, 20–53), or rather its revival, but also frames it in his own terms, introducing the concept of "insulation" (1984, 225–254, cf. n. 34 below); and to Frede (1979, 102–129, 1984, 255–278), who opposes both Barnes and Burnyeat by rejecting their rustic reading of the Pyrrhonist and by aligning his own position with the urbane sense. Hackett has brought these contributions together in a collection titled *The Original Sceptics*, edited by Burnyeat and Frede (1997). While this captures the thrust of the 1980s renaissance, any survey of the period should also include the essays in two collections coming out early in that decade, the first, *Doubt and Dogmatism*, edited by Schofield, Burnyeat, and Barnes (1980), the second, *The Skeptical Tradition*, edited by Burnyeat (1983). Those who prefer a summary instead of a survey would benefit from Fogelin's (2004, 161–173) concise overview of the relevant distinctions (e.g., rustic versus urbane) and of the opposition around them (see especially: 163–164, 172, nn. 5–6). Brennan (2000, 63–92) may be consulted to the same end, with the additional benefit of terminology with greater intuitive appeal, as "rabid" versus "revisionist" skepticism replaces, or at least explicates, the opposition between "rustic" and "urbane" skepticism. A more elaborate scheme of classification can be found in Williams (2013, 1–36), but his concern is broader, laying out "the standard model" for the taxonomy of modern skepticism (after Descartes).

scholarly literature, which comes with interpretive paradigms that have outgrown their instinctive roots. We do not have to do everything over. All we need to do is to expose the root of the epistemic estrangement: What is it that might give a reasonable person pause in what comes naturally to the skeptic?

This is a good place to start. Not every pause will be meaningful. And not everything that comes naturally to the skeptic will be unassailable. But we need to separate the good from the bad in either case. With respect to the critical perspective, we need to develop a broad understanding of what is reasonable and what is not, both for the skeptic and for the critic, so that we can clearly distinguish proper challenges from unfair or unimportant objections. With respect to the defensive perspective, we need to experiment not just with what might work but also with what will not, and determine why, and why not, thus becoming familiar with both, so that we can focus our energies in the right direction. The purpose of this paper is to make a fresh start of this kind.

Starting with rational intuitions may indeed be a good way to rethink the Pyrrhonian enterprise, but where exactly should we begin? What part of the epistemic journey affords the greatest insight into the relevant tendencies, oriented either positively or negatively toward skepticism? The suspension of judgment is a good candidate because it is at the intersection of all disagreement. This is where objections converge. This is where the Pyrrhonist finds relief. And this is where critics concentrate. But it is the preceding step, the failure to discover the truth, that is at the root of the problem. The Pyrrhonist fails to reach the truth, suspends judgment, and lives happily ever after. This is the official account.[5] It is not an argument, nor even a claim. It is merely a report. Why would this report bother the critic? It bothers the critic because it is based on equipollence, the equal weight of arguments, the recognition of which the critic finds to be a judgment of its own. Equipollence thus becomes the epistemic cornerstone of Pyrrhonian skepticism.[6]

This leaves its recognition during inquiry open to critical attention as if it were a positive position: Is equipollence a conclusion reached at the end of careful deliberation? If it is, then is this not the opposite of suspended judgment? If it is not, then what justifies the suspension of judgment? These are related questions. The common denominator is that the identification of the

[5] See n. 9 below, together with the discussion occasioning it in the main text, for a fuller version with documentation (PH 1.8, 1.10, 1.26).

[6] Sextus leaves no room for doubt regarding the proper focus, be it in exposition, defense, or criticism: "The chief constitutive principle of scepticism is the claim that to every account an equal account is opposed; for it is from this, we think, that we come to hold no beliefs" (PH 1.12).

equal weight of arguments is itself a judgment, the making of which precludes the suspension of it.

Both the skeptic and the critic would, of course, have to agree that the judgment said to be suspended is about one thing, the judgment said to remain, about something else. The suspension of judgment is always on a specific point of contention (e.g., whether the soul is immortal, or from a modern perspective, whether consciousness survives death), while the only judgment remaining, if any, after the corresponding suspension of judgment, is the evaluative second-order judgment that the opposing arguments in that particular case are balanced (e.g., regarding the immortality issue), which is precisely what is required to suspend judgment in the first place.

A reasonable critic would understand and accept this. That agreement, however, need not silence the critic. The critical challenge is not that the residual judgment regarding equipollence is the very judgment that was supposed to have been suspended. The challenge, rather, is that any judgment, whether on equipollence or on something else, is one judgment too many for supposedly suspended judgment. The Pyrrhonian report, to be blunt, is not that all judgments except one are suspended. It is simply that judgment is suspended. What the critic understands from a state of suspended judgment is a state of fully suspended judgment, not a state of almost fully suspended judgment.

The main source of misunderstanding and disagreement between the skeptic and the critic is the status of equipollence as an episodic experience as opposed to a sweeping judgment of universal epistemic relevance. This is the skeptic's position (PH 1.202–203, cf. 1.204–205, 1.208). It is also a recurring reference driving the interpretive initiative in this paper. Equipollence, says the Pyrrhonist, is not deduced as a conclusion on the general possibility of knowledge and subsequently attributed distributively to every particular issue, none of which then requires a dedicated inquiry. If there is any connection at all, the process would be in the opposite direction: Equipollence is realized piecemeal, one issue at a time, as the inquirer encounters specific questions and considers relevant answers. This is what makes the Pyrrhonian experience an epistemic journey, which would otherwise be stripped of its iterative nature and reduced to a hasty generalization.

Again, any reasonable critic would have to agree, taking the Pyrrhonist's word on the episodic nature of inquiry and investigation, and consequently, also on that of any equipollence attached thereto. If each case is judged on its merits, then any associated equipollence will surely be specific to the case in connection with which it is recognized. This is because skeptical inquiry is aporetic, proceeding from puzzlement (PH 1.7, 1.12). Given that there is no generalized aporia,

only specific instances of it, both the corresponding investigation and the accompanying equipollence will be peculiar to the case on hand. The critic must accept the episodic nature of inquiry. It is a matter of fact, not of interpretation.

Yet this does not commit the critic to accepting, in addition, that Pyrrhonists would never come to think of their repeated exposure to equipollence, with no exceptions or deviations, as a reflection of the equipollence of all arguments on all matters. The narrow equipollence recognized in connection with each particular issue could, for all the critic knows, be nothing other than the instantiation of a broad equipollence suspected of all issues (distributively rather than collectively but exhaustively nonetheless).[7]

Such mistrust stems from the regularity of equipollence as an outcome: Equipollence may be intuitively appealing as a possibility, especially as a random one cropping up here and there with particularly divisive and difficult issues, but how does it so thoroughly dominate reality? How can it always be the case? If it is always the case, does it not engender loose expectations accumulating over time and coalescing at some point into a firm judgment, thereby contradicting the suspension of judgment reported to follow from the equipollence? Even if there is no logical contradiction, is it psychologically possible to suspend judgment without concluding, and *ipso facto* believing, that the opposing arguments are equally weighty? And if the psychology were to confirm the belief, would this not reveal an epistemic inconsistency between equipollence and the suspension of judgment, the first requiring a belief, the second repudiating any?

So many misgivings about such a simple impression: "No more this than that" (PH 1.188–191, DL 9.61). This is the essence of equipollence. The expression itself is one of several "skeptical phrases" (PH 1.187–209) the Pyrrhonist uses to report how things seem without asserting how they really are (PH 1.15, 1.206–208).[8]

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[7] This suspicion is not mere speculation disconnected from the evidence: Despite his resolve to emphasize the episodic nature of equipollence (PH 1.202–208), Sextus also tends to speak in terms of broad as opposed to narrow equipollence (PH 1.26). Without giving names, he even mentions certain eminent Pyrrhonists who had made the suspension of judgment a goal (PH 1.30), which would be consistent with a broad interpretation of equipollence. Although Sextus himself does not seem to approve of setting up the suspension of judgment as a goal, we are still left with the fact that at least some prominent figures did. On the testimony of Diogenes Laërtius (DL 9.107), the Cambridge translators of *Pyrrōneioi Hypotypōseis* (Annas and Barnes) place Timon and Aenesidemus among the anonymous Pyrrhonists mentioned by Sextus (2000, 11, n. 55).

[8] The "skeptical phrases" express assertion without commitment. While this is how the Pyrrhonist operates anyway, always working with how things seem, never confirming how they are, what makes the "skeptical phrases" special is that they are analogic vehicles demonstrating how nonassertorial discourse works. They are epistemic gloves enabling semantic manipulation without doxastic contamination. This does not make them less assertoric than the skeptic's other utterances, things said in the course of life as usual, but it does make them less of a liability. As

I single it out here because it embodies the spirit of equipollence (as well as providing the inspiration for the title of this paper):

> 'No more this than that' makes clear our feelings: because of the equipollence of the opposed objects we end in equilibrium. (By 'equipollence' we mean equality in what appears plausible to us; by 'opposed' we mean in general conflicting; and by 'equilibrium' we mean assent to neither side.) [PH 1.190, cf. 1.202–205]

An organizational scheme might help sort out the various misgivings. The one adopted here is a distinction between conceptual and practical problems. These are relatively fluid divisions that blend into each other as two aspects of the same problem or phenomenon. It is better to be sensitive to such differences, amorphous though they may be, than to ignore them.

The first division concerns the possibility of a conceptual confusion in how equipollence is supposed to facilitate the Pyrrhonian transition from a failure to reach the truth to the suspension of judgment. The challenge to the skeptic is that any suspension of judgment based on equipollence is thereby based on an epistemic commitment (to equipollence itself) and therefore not really suspended, or at least not fully so. This is to emphasize the emergence of equipollence as the result of deliberation, or of discursive activity, which makes it a reasoned conclusion as opposed to a passive realization. The Pyrrhonist's judgment, then, turns out to be suspended, rather paradoxically, when it is not suspended. And if at all suspended, it is suspended on questions other than whether the suspension is warranted, which the Pyrrhonist is sure it is.

The second division concerns a practical difficulty, specifically a psychological one, in suspending judgment while at the same time believing in equipollence, thus holding on to a belief while supposedly suspending judgment. The difficulty here goes beyond the logic or the epistemology. It is not merely about a conceptual inconsistency. It is about the practical challenge of being conditioned to believe something while trying to suspend judgment. Overlapping with the possible conceptual confusion, the practical difficulty is that equipollence requires some manner of doxastic engagement if not full epistemic commitment. The question is whether the doxastic engagement is strong enough to poison the suspension of judgment as it shapes the psychological orientation of the skeptic.

This classification provides the organizational basis for the defensive portion of the paper: one section for exploring possible responses to the conceptual challenge, another for doing the same with the practical challenge. These two sections

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utterances on those other utterances, the "skeptical phrases" come with a formal disclaimer: "these phrases are indicative of non-assertion" (PH 1.195). They are not statements of fact (other than the fact that things appear as stated).

bring out the most reasonable responses from the skeptical perspective, making full and fair use of the dialectical tools available to the Pyrrhonist. They are preceded by a section on the evidentiary context, where the relevant tools originate, followed by a section on the possibility of a deeper disagreement surviving the defense. The two defensive sections together demonstrate how the Pyrrhonist could and would respond to the charges examined here. The subsequent analysis considers whether the emerging response would be persuasive, that is, whether it would be sufficient to silence the critic.

The reason for pursuing the possibility of deep disagreement separately from the two defensive sections is that a response can be both reasonable and consistent without being satisfying. A position that is neither inconsistent from a conceptual perspective nor unworkable from a practical perspective might still be rejected for other reasons, perhaps for a fundamental philosophical or ideological rift extending beyond the clarification of misunderstandings and the resolution of disagreements. We do, after all, disagree with one another even without transgression of any particular rules of reasoning or contradiction of any established matters of fact.

2. Evidentiary Context

The evidence in question is the Pyrrhonist's understanding of fundamental epistemic concepts, such as truth, belief, and assent, jointly revealing the doxastic anatomy of skeptical interaction with the world. The sense in which this constitutes evidence in the context of this paper is that these concepts, or the skeptical conceptions thereof, are the building blocks of the scenarios in the defensive sections mapping out the skeptical journey. A preparatory section such as this one will help keep facts separate from interpretation, thus clarifying what we may sensibly argue about and what we have to agree on in order to achieve the requisite sensibility.

Proponents and opponents alike agree, or they ought to, that the Pyrrhonian journey is an epistemic process with several steps or stages: (1) *aporia* (ἀπορία), the distressing perplexity of conflicting appearances, inspires (2) *zētēsis* (ζήτησις), an inquiry into the truth of the matter, which results in (3) *isostheneia* (ἰσοσθένεια), or equipollence, the realization of the equal weight of the relevant theses and arguments, forcing upon the Pyrrhonist (4) *epochē* (ἐποχή), a suspension of judgment, followed fortuitously by (5) *ataraxia* (ἀτᾰραξία), a state of tranquility manifested as freedom from the anxiety and agitation associated with

seeking something in vain, in this case, the truth. This is not an exact formula.[9] But it is a good exegetical platform for reference and discussion.

The same journey can be a different experience for different people. This is because the process is a journey in at least two distinct senses. One is the journey through which a dogmatist (whether a philosopher or a layperson) becomes a skeptic. The other is the journey that the skeptic takes in the regular course of inquiry or exploration. The first is a process of conversion, the second of affirmation (the spiritual kind) or habituation. The first journey can be repeated as many times as necessary for conversion (which is not guaranteed). The second journey is, in fact, repeated indefinitely, for it becomes the Pyrrhonian way of life. We cannot reasonably hold the journey of conversion to the same critical standard as the journey of habituation. We must first allow the dogmatist to become a skeptic. Any epistemic transgressions along the way are best dismissed or overlooked as belonging to the unconverted dogmatist. It is the fully converted skeptic who deserves our critical attention.

The process of conversion may start and proceed with various convictions of varying intensity, none of which can fairly be condemned as undermining the suspension of judgment, or any other part of the skeptical journey, so long as they are all shed during conversion. The process of habituation, in contrast, can and should be judged in terms of whether the habituation itself, including any beliefs formulated along the way, is consistent with equipollence and with the subsequent suspension of judgment. The fact that the journey is repeated indefinitely — even if it does not, in any iteration, nor on the whole, include a doctrinal commitment as with convictions held prior to conversion — exposes a persuasion suspicious enough to invite and justify critical inquiry. Pyrrhonism thus becomes a source of curiosity and dispute for outsiders precisely because (not although) it is a way of life for practitioners.

The esoteric ignorance exhibited through this way of life, often with an apparent indifference, is the stuff of legend, and of misunderstanding, though also of rightful protest. The intellectual stasis associated with the suspension of judgment is not a cognitive vacuum. It is an enlightened detachment grounded in a vigorous, intelligent, and informed examination of the evidence resulting in equipollence and thereby in a suspension of judgment. It is shaped by doxastic vigilance, the essence of the celebrated tranquility of the Pyrrhonist. Was Pyrrho really in constant danger of being run over by oncoming carts, walking off cliffs, getting bit by dogs, and so on? Did his friends have to intervene each time to drag him out of harm's way? The evidence is mixed even in the earliest extant

[9] The essentials of this outline can be found in Sextus (PH 1.8, cf. 1.10, 1.26).

sources (DL 9.62).[10] But this does not matter. What matters is that this is the impression Pyrrhonism originally left on critics (and probably also on neutral observers) if only to inspire them to fabricate the wildest stories.

The impression is the same whether or not Pyrrho actually let rabid dogs bite him at will. To be sure, this is nothing like the Pyrrhonism we have come to know through Sextus, who assures us that Pyrrhonists are quite capable of going about their daily lives like ordinary people who know a mad dog when they see one, and who know, more importantly, to get out of the way (PH 1.16–17, 1.23–24).[11] Yet even if the story of a Pyrrho oblivious to the gravest risks and threats is false, the commitment implied therein to equipollence cannot be far from how things must appear to the critic (or to any other outsider). This places Pyrrhonists in the odd position of having to debate critics regarding their way of life.

The most challenging objections are indexed to the Pyrrhonist's orientation toward truth and the implications of this for skeptical claims or assertions and for the recognition of equipollence and the suspension of judgment: Can the Pyrrhonist acknowledge anything? Is assent ever acceptable? When are assertions dogmatic and when are they not?

Anyone expecting Pyrrhonists to tiptoe around these questions would be disappointed. They meet them head on. And they provide straight answers: Pyrrhonists may and do acknowledge how things appear and assert thereby that they do so appear. But they may not and do not contend, in addition, that the appearance corresponds to reality, that, in other words, what appears to be the case really is the case, which is different from affirming that it does appear the way it appears. The ontological distinction we all make between appearance and reality lends itself to an epistemological distinction the skeptic makes between what is clear and what is not. We are clear on how things appear (since they either do or do not so appear) and we may therefore assent to how they appear, while we are not clear on how things really are, which makes any acknowledgment of their reality unwarranted. The recognition of appearances is not optional. The Pyrrhonist cannot avoid it as a sentient being constantly receiving and processing

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[10] Diogenes Laërtius (9.62), in keeping with his modus operandi of sharing everything he knows and letting the reader sort it all out, reports the anecdote of a dangerously detached Pyrrho (as told by Antigonus of Carystus) together with testimony directly contradicting it (through Aenesidemus).

[11] We also learn from Sextus that what the Pyrrhonist avoids is not the acknowledgment of appearances but the formulation of judgments regarding those appearances, that is, judgments about whether they are good or bad (PH 1.29–30, 3.235–236, M 11.141–160). But avoiding judgment is no way to avoid being struck by a cart or walking off a cliff or getting bit by a dog. The fact that he lived to be about ninety (DL 9.62) suggests that Pyrrho was blessed either with exceptional common sense or with extremely attentive friends, possibly both, but certainly one or the other.

information, whether in the form of sense data from the world at large or in the form of claims made by others about the world at large.

This is the defining difference between what is dogmatic and what is not: Assent and assertions are dogmatic, and therefore problematic, if and only if they affirm the truth or reality of the matter under discussion, whether by formulating a proposition, advancing an argument, or defending a position. If nothing is affirmed about the truth or reality of the matter, instead going solely by how things appear, then neither the assent nor any assertion made in connection with it is dogmatic.[12] Can the Pyrrhonist believe anything?[13] Certainly not that what is believed is true, or that it coincides with reality, either of which would be dogmatic. Anything else is a natural part of life as a rational agent.

All this is straight from Sextus but not from a single passage. It is a combination of distinctions he draws between skepticism and dogmatism. The distinctions all revolve around one thing, assent, thus making it possible to trace the apparent associations to a unifying principle. Skeptical assent has three main features setting it apart from dogmatic assent:

- Assent without conviction (PH 1.3–4, 1.15, 1.18, 1.191–193, 1.206, 1.223, 2.79): This is assent to how things appear without commitment to how they really are. Skeptical agreement excludes acknowledgment of truth or reality.[14]

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[12] Sextus notes that assertion alone is not dogmatism, which instead requires "assertions with firm conviction about any of the matters on which scientific beliefs are held" (PH 1.18). Even affirmation will not do. What counts is not affirming something but "affirming that it is itself certainly true and firm" as opposed to "only saying how things appear to us" (PH 1.191).

[13] The distinction between dogmatic and nondogmatic "beliefs" can be tricky — unlike the case with dogmatic versus nondogmatic assent or with dogmatic versus nondogmatic assertions. "Dogma" (δόγμα), in the original sense, is nothing other than belief. In that sense, "dogmatic belief" is redundant and "nondogmatic belief" is incoherent. It is only the modern use of "dogmatism" to refer to a fanatically uncompromising advocacy of beliefs (which, as "dogma" in the modern sense, are not just beliefs but, more typically, sacrosanct doctrines) that enables a distinction between dogmatic and nondogmatic beliefs. That said, the spirit of the distinction was not entirely alien to the original skeptics: "When we say that Sceptics do not hold beliefs, we do not take 'belief' in the sense in which some say, quite generally, that belief is acquiescing in something; for Sceptics assent to the feelings forced upon them by appearances" (PH 1.13). So, there is a timeless difference between acceptable and unacceptable beliefs even if the terminological distinction between "dogmatic" and "nondogmatic" beliefs is a modern convenience. For Sextus, the difference is basically between reporting how things appear (nondogmatic) and insisting that this is how things really are (dogmatic). I make no special effort in this paper to avoid the modern terminology.

[14] I take it as obvious, and therefore assume without argument, that the stipulation covers both truth and falsehood (as it is patently true that whatever is false is false) and includes both affirmation and denial (as affirming any proposition amounts to denying its contradictory). The Pyrrhonist may not, and reportedly does not, affirm or deny anything to be true or false.

- Assent with clarity (PH 1.13–14, 1.16, 1.20, 1.193, 1.197–198, 1.201, 1.202, 1.208, 1.210, 1.223, 2.10):[15] This is assent to that which is clear and resistance to that which is not (anything susceptible of equipollent opposition).[16]
- Assent without choice (PH 1.13, 1.19, 1.22, 1.25, 1.193, 1.230, 2.10): This is involuntary assent as manifested in submission to appearances. Compliance is without protest but also without commitment, devotion, or endorsement.[17]

Sextus repeatedly invokes these features, but not all at once, and he never discusses the relationship between them, possibly because he finds it obvious. They are evidently not severally necessary conditions that are only jointly sufficient for skeptical assent. Nor do they all say the same thing. They seem to be related as variations on a theme, best articulated through the basic expression of skeptical assent as devoid of any acknowledgment of truth, with the other two conditions expanding on that one as different aspects of the same epistemic circumstances.

Parallel reconstruction in the opposite direction yields the Pyrrhonian perception of dogmatism. Sextus speaks of dogmatic assent in three different ways: (1) assent with conviction (acknowledgment as truth or reality); (3) assent without clarity (assenting to something susceptible of equipollent opposition);

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[15] Sextus does not actually say that skeptics assent to what is clear. What he says is that they do not assent to anything that is unclear (cf. PH 1.13, 1.19, 1.193, 1.197–198, 1.208). The epistemic contrast in play is not between what is clear (*dēlos* [δῆλος], *prodēlos* [πρόδηλος], *enargēs* [ἐναργής]) and what is unclear (*adēlos* [ἄδηλος]) but between what is apparent (*phainomenos* [φαινόμενος]) and what is unclear (*adēlos* [ἄδηλος]), though the former (and perhaps more intuitive) distinction is not thereby rejected or invalidated. In any event, we can reasonably construe clarity as a feature of skeptical assent, so long as we understand it as the clarity of appearances: Anything that appears to the skeptic appears exactly as it appears to the skeptic. There is nothing unclear about appearances. What is unclear is whether appearances correspond to anything in reality, but that makes the reality unclear, not the appearance (cf. PH 1.19, 1.22). Given that skeptics do not assent to what is unclear, what they do assent to must be clear, at least clear enough for skeptical assent. If appearances were unclear, skeptics would not, and could not, assent to them.

[16] Sextus seems to link the second feature to the first feature, or perhaps to derive it from the first, as he takes the truth to be unclear and the only thing that is unclear.

[17] Sextus probably associates the third feature with the first feature insofar as assent is more like compliance than like agreement unless it comes with a subscription to the truth of the matter commanding the assent. His notion of "yielding without adherence" is telling in this regard: "not resisting but simply following without strong inclination or adherence (as a boy is said to go along with his chaperon)" (PH 1.230). The third feature could, in addition, be a corollary of the second feature to the extent that involuntary assent suggests irresistibility and therewith clarity, as that which is unclear can hardly force itself upon the subject. Clarity reduces all competing possibilities to just one (namely to that which is clear) which is then forced upon the Pyrrhonist. The absence of clarity multiplies possibilities, an abundance of which requires and therefore implies choice.

(2) assent by choice (assent given voluntarily as opposed to being forced upon the assenter). One might thus say that Sextus takes dogmatism to consist in voluntary assent to the truth of that which is not clear. This is accurate, though it might also be redundant. It covers all three benchmarks, which work just as well severally if we go by how they come up in the course of discussion by Sextus.

Even though Sextus switches back and forth between different characterizations of skeptical assent, doing the same with dogmatic assent, his central concern in either case is with the truth. The very first thing he says about Pyrrhonian skepticism is that it is as far from affirming in any particular case that the truth has been discovered, or affirming in general that it can be discovered, as it is from denying in that particular case, or in any other case, that the truth can be discovered, or denying in general that it can ever be discovered (PH 1.1–3). The skeptic simply goes on searching. We must grant, then, that the Pyrrhonist neither affirms nor denies anything to be true, never formulating an opinion on anything unclear, instead assenting only to how things appear, while continuing to investigate how they are in themselves, and eventually, upon failure to discover the truth of the matter, coming to suspend judgment on how they might be in reality. Even the suspension of judgment is thrust upon the Pyrrhonist rather than reasoned out (PH 1.78, 1.121, 1.128–129).

But if judgment is suspended, whereupon tranquility sets in, what is there left to do? Does that not effectively terminate the Pyrrhonian journey? How can an epistemic process continue with suspended judgment? We know how it is supposed to continue: new puzzles, new inquiries. What we want to know is whether this is plausible. How can the tranquil skeptic with suspended judgment still be searching for the truth even if it is about an altogether different question? Tranquility is said to follow the suspension of judgment as naturally as a shadow follows a body (PH 1.29). How can the search program be maintained with such powerful and persistent epistemic and motivational inertia?

Most of us have a good idea what a judgment is and what its suspension might be like, and we must all understand tranquility since we often complain of not having enough of it in our lives. Just to check our general understanding against that of Sextus: "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). How can such a state sustain an epistemic journey? Does the journey not end with the judgment suspended and the tranquility achieved? And if it does not — if instead the skeptic, as per the *skepsis* (σκέψις) carried out by the skeptikós (σκεπτικός), goes on searching, forever investigating — when is there ever an occasion to abandon the search, the

continuation of which would seem to undermine both the suspension of judgment and the attainment of tranquility?

At least some of the apparent inconsistency is mere misunderstanding. This is where the episodic nature of the search comes in. As noted in the previous section, the Pyrrhonian journey proceeds with investigative episodes initiated by aporia. Much of the difficulty here depends on whether the search in question is initiated, abandoned, and resumed in connection with the same thing with the same scope of consideration. It also depends on whether the search (started, halted, resumed), the equipollence discovered, the judgment suspended, and the tranquility attained intersect at the same level of specificity or generality. It should be okay, for example, to move on to an investigation of one thing after having suspended judgment on another (or indeed to examine both at once). What would be inconsistent is to continue with a general pursuit of truth (or even with a special investigation) after having suspended judgment across the board. As it is, the pursuit of truth is neither conducted nor abandoned in a comprehensive sense, distributively covering every issue there is, any more than equipollence is recognized in a broad sense deciding all issues at once. And the equipollence realized, always one issue at a time, does not prejudice the outcome for the next issue, in connection with which the search is conducted until encountering equipollence on that issue.

Hence, the pursuit of truth is not disrupted in any way precluding further inquiry. What is abandoned upon the recognition of equipollence and the attendant suspension of judgment is not the pursuit of truth but the hope of discovery. This is probably what the critic mistakes for an abandoned pursuit which is somehow still supposed to be in progress. Any misunderstanding is understandable, for the hope of discovery is abandoned once and for all rather than over and over with each episode. It, too, starts out episodically, but it disappears altogether through constant erosion during the journey of conversion. What remains for the journey of habituation, taken repeatedly by an already converted Pyrrhonist, is just the search, not any expectations, positive or negative.

This is a derivative explanation. It draws on the mechanics of episodic investigations as collectively constituting an ongoing search for truth. We also need to know if these mechanics are feasible and sustainable. Aporetic restarts do explain how the journey goes on indefinitely, but how do we know that aporetic restarts are sufficient to keep the Pyrrhonist interested in further investigation, especially with the hope of discovery abandoned? What is to keep the tranquil skeptic with suspended judgment from coming to a point where further inquiry seems pointless? After any given inquiry, the Pyrrhonist will, no doubt, at some point encounter another aporia, requiring a new inquiry, which later ends in

equipollence, and so on. But the question is whether these aporetic restarts are sufficient to motivate the Pyrrhonist indefinitely.

They are sufficient. A good skeptic does not need the hope of discovery to initiate a search, which requires only a sense of responsibility not to overlook the truth should it happen to turn up in the course of inquiry. This is all the motivation required for conducting one search after another or for juggling any combination of simultaneous searches. It would be repugnant to the spirit of skepticism to decline individual searches. The question whether suspending judgment on one issue (or several or many in a row) leaves any motivation to investigate another is both hostile and misplaced. It assumes that the converted Pyrrhonist is still motivated by the prospect of a dogmatic resolution and therefore that the discovery of equipollence and the attendant suspension of judgment is a disappointment of sorts. The real disappointment would be just the opposite: a never-ending search presenting no good reason to accept one thing over another and thus defying resolution. What the skeptic has instead is a balance of equally good reasons making a specific choice arbitrary and the suspension of judgment compulsory.[18]

A true skeptic, one that has completed the journey of conversion, continues to search for the truth regardless of any and all past failures.[19] The search, presumably one for each issue, is necessary to avoid negligence. The skeptic cannot

[18] I am not denying that the suspension of judgment could be part of a dogmatic agenda (perhaps as in PH 1.30). I am denying that it cannot be otherwise if we are to be able to account for abandoning the hope of discovery in a search without resolution.

[19] My understanding of what the skeptic does with the truth is not the standard account in the literature. Nobody's understanding is. There is no standard account. Striker's Pyrrhonists, for example, have to give up the search for truth in order to attain tranquility (2001, 113–129, especially 117–118). Palmer's Pyrrhonists, on the other hand, do not even have to face that choice, as they are not engaged in the search for truth to begin with (2000, 355). Seeking a charitable interpretation, Grgić urges us to "abandon the idea that the object of the Skeptics' inquiries is truth" (2006, 143, cf. 153–157). Another charity case comes from Vogt, who distinguishes between two senses of investigation, one aiming "at the discovery of truths," the other "guided by epistemic norms that respond to the value of truth" (2011, 33–49). Her Pyrrhonists are safer in the second category. There is room for even further disagreement, as demonstrated by Perin, who retains truth not only as an end but also as an end in itself (2006, 358), while admitting that it is at the same time a means to tranquility, and thus characterizing the Pyrrhonist as subordinating truth to tranquility (2006, 338). The closest I have come to finding an ally, though I have not sought one out, seems to be in my acquaintance with Sedley: "What above all characterizes Hellenistic skepticism is, I would claim, its abandonment of that desire [for knowledge] — its radical conviction that to suspend assent and to resign oneself to ignorance is not a bleak expedient but, on the contrary, a highly desirable intellectual achievement" (1983, 10). Sedley maintains that "a Skeptic, although he might start out with this expectation, could hardly be recognized as a Skeptic until he either abandoned it or at the very least had some hopes of doing so" (1983, 21). Note that what Sedley says is to be abandoned is not the search for truth but any expectations of finding it. I am not suggesting that Sedley agrees with me, just that he precedes me in what I think is common ground.

afford to prejudge issues that have not yet come up lest one of them should happen to have a solution, which would otherwise be missed through what would then be a dogmatic decision to move on before equipollence is observed. There is nothing in the suspension of judgment to immobilize skeptics epistemically, or to demotivate them psychologically, with such a comprehensive effect and scope as to bring the ongoing Pyrrhonian journey (either of conversion or of habituation) to a complete halt, thus precluding further iterations.

Consider a hung jury in court or a cold trail in criminal investigation. Both are specific to a case. Neither makes it impossible, incoherent, or counterintuitive to take on other cases and to carry on in like manner, inquiring and searching until arriving at an answer or an impasse. The Pyrrhonian journey is like that.

A striking difference, however, is that the Pyrrhonian journey is always like that. Court trials and criminal investigations at least sometimes, one hopes, most of the time, end in discovery. Not so with the skeptical process. The jury is always hung, the trail always cold. And judgment, as it turns out, must always be suspended. The skeptical explanation is that equipollence, too, is a discovery, making it no fault of the Pyrrhonist that things turn out that way. The problem with this explanation is that the invariable tendency of things to turn out that way makes the journey seem rigged to discover equipollence, and the voyager suspiciously eager to suspend judgment, both of which serve the attainment of tranquility, which then looks more like a strategic mission than like an incidental benefit.

This is well worth discussing. Yet misgivings by one party are not necessarily mistakes by the other. The regularity of equipollence is a reflection of the deep disagreement taken up in section 5 below. The possibility of actual errors or defects, the kind that would be a win for the opposing party, takes precedence, observed over the course of the next two sections.

As indicated in the opening paragraphs, some people side with the skeptic, others with the critic. Although I sympathize with both and side with neither, situating the present undertaking in the context of mainstream literature may help orient readers accustomed to thinking in terms of positions considered authoritative today, especially by way of terminology. This paper happens to come down on the "urbane" side of a distinction between what are called "rustic" and "urbane" interpretations of Pyrrhonism.[20] Put crudely, the rustic interpretation takes the suspension of judgment to be absolute, or exhaustive, while the urbane

[20] The terminology comes from Barnes (1982, 20–21, nn. 13–16), reintroducing a distinction dating back to Galen of Pergamon (*diff. puls.* 7.711K; *praenot.* 14.628K; as cited by Barnes 1982, 20, n. 10), who, in turn, was talking about the skeptics of his day, which, of course, would have been the same as the skeptics of Sextus's day, if chronology alone were sufficient to compare one skeptic to another.

interpretation excludes the cognitive structure required to lead an ordinary life, or rather, to lead a life as close to ordinary as possible for a serious skeptic.

The remainder of the paper is devoted to the development and analysis of responses available to the Pyrrhonist on the charge that equipollence, once detected, acknowledged, and embraced, becomes a judgment like any other, thereby constituting an exception to the suspension of judgment while at the same time instigating the suspension of judgment. The next section is on the conceptual perspective, focusing on the logic and epistemology of the problem, while going through various dialectical scenarios in an effort to find viable defensive strategies on behalf of the Pyrrhonist. The one after that is on the practical perspective, examining the psychology of the matter to make sure that any strategy adopted on the basis of logical and epistemological considerations is also consistent with how the mind works. This is to ask whether it is psychologically possible to do the things said to be conceptually plausible.

The combined strategy is to separate what is workable from what is not in investigating, either with a critical agenda or from a sympathetic position, whether the skeptical process is both coherent and feasible. The overall aim is to motivate the scholarly community to join this fresh start toward forging a common understanding of what is fair and reasonable to say about the Pyrrhonian journey.

3. Conceptual Perspective

The conceptual challenge accuses Pyrrhonists of an inconsistency, be it logical or epistemological, in suspending judgment on the basis of equipollence. The objection is that skeptics must be convinced of equipollence in order to suspend judgment, the suspension of which then coexists with the judgment occasioning its suspension. It is not the fact of equipollence but the recognition of it that is the problem, specifically in revealing conviction, or illicit assent, which is at odds with suspended judgment. The recognition of equipollence is either itself a judgment or an observation requiring a judgment or a reaction based on a judgment. It does not matter which, so long as it involves a judgment constituting an exception to the suspension of judgment while also enabling and requiring the suspension of judgment.

The recognition of equipollence, then, is the culprit (PH 1.8, 1.10, 1.26, 1.190, 1.196, 1.202–205), but it is also representative of the "skeptical phrases" in general (PH 1.187–209) and of the discovery that there is no proof (PH 2.134–143, 2.144–192). Pyrrhonists, so the critic contends, degenerate into dogmatists in the way they handle metatheoretical tools like the skeptical phrases, including equipollence. The problem is that they must embrace equipollence with conviction in order to suspend judgment, which could not then be said to be suspended, at

least not fully, for that one bit of assent required to suspend judgment will instead weigh it down with a commitment.

Four strategies compete as responses to the conceptual challenge. Naming them is convenient for reference. Two that are rather tempting are "arrogant confession" and "leveraged equipollence." While these two are intuitively appealing responses, they do not turn out to be strong enough to overcome the challenge. Next in line are "direct confrontation" and "naïve denial." These are both promising approaches, but naïve denial is the more effective one. This section goes through each strategy, explaining the basic rationale and showing why each one succeeds or fails.

3.1. Arrogant Confession

The simplest strategy is to admit to being dogmatic about the recognition of equipollence while upholding its consistency with the suspension of judgment. Following confession, Pyrrhonists could ask arrogantly: "What now? We can still suspend judgment, dogmatically or otherwise. What difference does it make if we are dogmatic in this one sense that has nothing to do with the particular issues we normally investigate?"

Indeed, there is nothing further to press once skeptics own up to this single, special, unique instance of dogmatism. It is not as if the skeptical enterprise would collapse if they were to admit to this. They could even, to taunt the challenger, proudly proclaim to be "dogmatic skeptics," with an ever so strong commitment and assent to equipollence but only to equipollence. Furthermore, they could then suspend judgment with such a firm belief in its being the only sensible way of life that *ataraxia* would follow instantly and attach permanently to their suspension of judgment. What more could the victorious but baffled challenger say?

The challenger might possibly leave the Pyrrhonist alone. But the Pyrrhonist would hardly be worthy of the name. The term "dogmatic skeptic," used interchangeably with "negative dogmatist," is a common reference to Academic skeptics. The traditional distinction is between "positive dogmatists," namely, the Aristotelians, the Epicureans, the Stoics, and so on, who affirm that knowledge is attainable, and "negative dogmatists," the skeptics of the third (or "new") Academy of Carneades and Clitomachus, who affirm that knowledge is unattainable (PH 1.1–4, 1.220). This is not Sextus's terminology, but it is his distinction. The Pyrrhonists, the real skeptics, according to Sextus, fall in neither category, because they simply go on investigating, without a commitment either way (PH 1.1–4).[21]

[21] Frede (1984, 255–278) makes "dogmatic skepticism" a later development distinct from both Pyrrhonian and Academic skepticism, which he groups together as examples of "classical skepti-

So, as boldly appropriate as arrogant confession may seem from the outside, Sextus would not welcome it as a response, if only because the acknowledgment recommended contradicts his distinction that, unlike Academics, who deny that truth can be attained, Pyrrhonists continue searching (PH 1.1–4, 1.226). Admitting to dogmatic assent, even if the assent is only to equipollence, violates the spirit of Pyrrhonism: Sextus states explicitly that Pyrrhonists "neither reject nor posit anything" (PH 1.10, 1.192, 1.196). A strategy that alters the nature of Pyrrhonism in such a radical way is not a solution for anyone who wants to remain a Pyrrhonist while dealing with the challenge.

3.2. Leveraged Equipollence

An apparently infallible strategy is to meet the conceptual challenge with the sweeping appeal that, even though an adequate response does not seem available at the moment, the proper course of opposition may, in time, reveal itself and counter the original challenge. This is not a speculative suggestion as in the one entertained in the arrogant confession scenario but an actual skeptical approach to tough cases that resist resolution (though originally not, as in this subsection, with equipollence itself in mind as the topic of discussion). Sextus describes it as follows:

> [W]hen someone propounds to us an argument we cannot refute, we say to him: 'Before the founder of the school to which you adhere was born, the argument of the school, which is no doubt sound, was not yet apparent, although it was really there in nature. In the same way, it is possible that the argument opposing the one you have just propounded is really there in nature but is not yet apparent to us; so we should not yet assent to what is now thought to be a powerful argument.' [PH 1.33–34, cf. variant at PH 2.40–41]

This approach might be unpalatable for the modern philosopher, but discarding it without critical consideration should be no less disagreeable. What may seem like obvious problems are not all that problematic. The chief objections that come to mind are (1) that leveraged equipollence is too strong a response for its own good, (2) that it avoids the issue rather than addressing it, and (3) that it is a misguided and overrated response, not at all too strong but, quite the contrary, too weak.[22] A discussion of these objections would be useful not only to do justice to the strategy but also to elaborate on the notion of equipollence.

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cism." He admits to differences between Pyrrhonists and Academics but maintains that any dogmatic denial of the possibility of knowledge is a degeneration of skepticism alien to both.

[22] Palmer (2000, 351–375, especially 356) makes a shrewd observation which is not an objection in the sense that these three are but which deserves at least as much attention. He notes how strange it is for anyone supposedly seeking the truth to be avoiding it so diligently and resourcefully.

The first objection is that leveraged equipollence presents an inappropriately strong response. The strategy is unique in that it alone is sufficient to overcome all conceivable attacks on Pyrrhonism. If Pyrrhonists are granted the use of this tool, their position becomes impregnable. While it is no objection to complain of the remarkable strength of the opposition, one might be inclined to object that Pyrrhonists themselves recognize the logical impropriety of leveraged equipollence, given that they do not invoke it in debate. Even Sextus seems to be mentioning it only as a possibility rather than actually employing it as an argument to counter another argument.

However, Sextus also appears to be reporting active use of this strategy. The block quotation above shows him introducing the argument not merely as one that they could use but as one that they do use: "we say to him" (PH 1.34). The way he prefaces his account (again in the block quotation above) is also clear on whether or not they would stoop to taking a logical shortcut of this sort to a possibility not yet actualized. The answer is that they do, which confirms that they would: "we sometimes oppose present things to present things (as in the above examples) and sometimes present to past or future things" (PH 1.33). Still, Sextus himself never uses the argument in the context of a regular inquiry into a particular problem, that is, in the course of discussing anything other than the general nature of argumentation.

Although negative claims are difficult to establish, especially in this case, where not every debate Sextus entered into need have been recorded for posterity, the objection is an interesting one. Let us grant, for the sake of argument, the strong claim it makes that the strategy has not seen action. After all, if leveraged equipollence were an appropriate approach, why would Pyrrhonists ever bother with any of their multifarious dialectical tools known as "modes" (or "tropes")?[23] Why do the modes receive greater attention in general despite being

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Combined with other observations, he submits that the Pyrrhonist is not really after the truth. I address this systematic evasion of epistemic commitment, together with the suspicious regularity of the equipollence accompanying it, as part of the deep disagreement taken up in section 5 below, but I am not moved to deny altogether that the skeptic is concerned with the truth or that skeptical inquiry has anything to do with the truth. This is not to say that this is Palmer's position (since all he denies is truth as the goal of skeptical inquiry), just that it is not mine.

[23] There are twenty-five recorded modes in four classifications (PH 1.35–186). Eighteen of them are traditionally attributed to Aenesidemus, and either five or seven to Agrippa, though credit in each case is due more for compilation than for origination, as most of the modes have their roots in argument types or dialectical strategies extending further back, predating not just Aenesidemus but Pyrrho as well. The current practice is to focus on two main divisions: The Ten Modes of Aenesidemus (PH 1.35–163) and the Five Modes of Agrippa (PH 1.164–177) as they are called. Receiving less attention, a third category comprises eight ("causal") modes (PH 1.180–186), also attributed to Aenesidemus. The remaining two modes (PH 1.178–179), actually coming between the five and the eight

inferior to leveraged equipollence in at least the one hypothetical encounter otherwise stumping the skeptics? Why even consider any other argument if this one is a universally applicable *überstrategy* that works wherever the others do plus wherever they do not?

This last question has an original answer. Even if the ancient Pyrrhonists had never actively used leveraged equipollence, they could still have, without being inconsistent, regarded it as the strongest of all their strategies. Perhaps Sextus was content to carry a big stick without using it, thus flaunting leveraged equipollence as a fail-safe mechanism to get out of any contingency where other precautions and responses did not seem to succeed. Consider what he says about economizing in arguments:

> Just as doctors for bodily afflictions have remedies which differ in potency, and apply severe remedies to patients who are severely afflicted and milder remedies to those mildly afflicted, so Sceptics propound arguments which differ in strength — they employ weighty arguments, capable of vigorously rebutting the dogmatic affliction of conceit, against those who are distressed by a severe rashness, and they employ milder arguments against those who are afflicted by a conceit which is superficial and easily cured and which can be rebutted by a milder degree of plausibility. This is why those with a Sceptical impulse do not hesitate sometimes to propound arguments which are sometimes weighty in their plausibility, and sometimes apparently rather weak. They do this deliberately, since often a weaker argument is sufficient for them to achieve their purpose. [PH 3.280–281]

Recognizing the exceptional strength of leveraged equipollence, Pyrrhonists would not have been inclined to use this appeal if they were indeed sensitive to economizing in arguments. It is conceivable that the proper occasion for this response had never arisen, that a less compelling argument had always been strong enough to counter the theses encountered.

The second objection is that, let alone being too strong a response, leveraged equipollence does not even address the issue, instead avoiding confrontation and evading the challenge. Consider what Sextus would be doing in pursuing this strategy. This is the scenario: A powerful thesis is brought forth, Sextus is unable to find a counterargument at present, yet he appeals to the possibility that one might eventually emerge to counter the original thesis. Questions abound: If Pyrrhonists decline present debates, based solely on expectations of future insight and inspiration, what kind of dialogue is that? Are the two sides in such circum-

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in the text, can arguably be attributed to Agrippa, as Sextus identifies both the five and the two with more recent skeptics (relative to Aenesidemus), specifically naming Agrippa in the case of the five, though offering no names in the case of the two.

stances truly engaged in debate? Is it intellectually respectable to withhold assent when (and just because) the opponent has the better position?

Yet it is neither accurate nor fair to claim that leveraged equipollence avoids the issue. If one puts forth the thesis that a tossed coin always comes up heads because it has done so the past several times, it would be reasonable for Pyrrhonists to respond that they will suspend judgment on this because, in the future, with more tosses of the coin, the thesis might be overturned. Likewise, it is sensible for a judge or jury not to give assent immediately upon hearing the plaintiff's case, as it makes more sense to suspend judgment until hearing from the defendant as well. Similarly, in evaluating moral problems, such as abortion or euthanasia, assent to one thesis would be premature before examining the opposite thesis.

These examples show that both sides of an issue are relevant and that waiting to hear both is reasonable. They do not, however, come with even a rough estimate for a reasonable waiting period. They certainly do not establish that it is reasonable to suspend judgment indefinitely when faced with a thesis one cannot refute. Nonetheless, the point is not to specify a reasonable waiting period between now and forever. Deciding now and waiting forever are both unreasonable, but any line in between is arbitrary. This makes the uncertainty too vague to be held against either the skeptic or the critic.

Perhaps it is the title, "leveraged equipollence," that is vague and misleading. While it is true that, in Sextus's argument, equipollence is expected to occur in the future, it is also true that this very expectation brings equipollence in the present, equipollence that is fully owned and not at all leveraged. In response to a present argument, Sextus appeals to a possible counterargument that will bring equipollence in the future, but the mere possibility of this alternative makes the present argument questionable and the present context ambivalent, sufficiently so to bring about actual equipollence at present, at least in the mind of Sextus and, so we are told, in that of the typical Pyrrhonist (PH 1.202–205).

The application of this to the problem of equipollence (the conceptual challenge under discussion) is as follows: The challenger's present thesis is that Pyrrhonists are committed dogmatically to equipollence. The possible future antithesis the Pyrrhonist is counting on is the negation of this, something to the effect that it is not the case that Pyrrhonists are committed dogmatically to equipollence. But in light of the possible future antithesis expected, the Pyrrhonist's present antithesis is that it is uncertain now whether or not Pyrrhonists are committed dogmatically to equipollence. Thus, equipollence on this particular debate comes about immediately because epistemic equilibrium emerges as soon as the challenger's pre-

sent thesis is undermined, no matter that the vulnerability exposed therein is contingent upon future developments.

Indeed, the title is misleading. A more accurate one might have been "genuine equipollence brought about at present through an appeal to a possible future antithesis overturning a present thesis to which there currently seems to be no (other) respectable response." Even though this description best captures Sextus's position, for brevity, the better name is still "leveraged equipollence."

The third objection is that leveraged equipollence is a bad strategy because it suffers from its own equipollence due to its uncertain nature as a possibility. In other words, leveraged equipollence is a self-neutralizing position. If it is merely possible that an antithesis will be discovered in the future, then it is also possible that this will not happen. The alternatives are mutually exclusive and jointly exhaustive: Either an antithesis will be discovered or it will not be discovered. If there is presently no evidence or argument to help decide between the alternatives, then leveraged equipollence is insufficient to counter an unequivocal thesis, especially one so strong as to defy any of the standard countermeasures. Pyrrhonists usually counter positive dogmatic arguments by importing other positive dogmatic arguments without accepting either as establishing the truth of the matter. How effective can it be to respond to a positive dogmatic argument with a tentative expectation?

The response to the second objection applies here as well: The fact that the appeal is persuasive enough to make matters equipollent for the Pyrrhonist readily demonstrates that it is adequate to the task. We may add that Pyrrhonists are concerned not so much with developing counterpoints and counterarguments to the satisfaction of all interested parties as they are with discovering equipollence for themselves. They are not obligated to prove conclusively that the present thesis is untenable. Nor do they have to convince everyone, or really anyone at all, of the accuracy of the epistemic balance they observe. All they need to do is to recognize and acknowledge for themselves that the present thesis might be false. When Pyrrhonists realize that the possibility of discovering an antithesis in the future sufficiently undermines the present thesis, they do not suspend judgment nervously and then wait in distress for a future antithesis; rather, they suspend judgment with the peace of mind that comes from not having succumbed to dogma.

This is consistent with the Pyrrhonian conception of equipollence as an opposition of arguments of comparable value. The emphasis is on quality over quantity, thus making the suspension of judgment contingent upon the equal persuasiveness of the two sides (or all angles) of an issue rather than requiring a precise epistemic balance of arguments on both sides (or all angles). The number

of arguments, and even the number of good arguments, on each side is irrelevant to equipollence, which is an epistemic state assimilated holistically as an impression bringing the intellect to a standstill. An issue becomes equipollent for Pyrrhonists in the event that they are unable to choose sides. Just how close the two sides have to be in persuasive appeal (or the lack thereof) is not as important as the standstill.

In most cases, persuasion comes through powerful arguments designed by dogmatists defending one thesis to convince (or confute) dogmatists defending the opposite thesis, no doubt, also appealing to neutral parties either unacquainted with the two sides or still trying to choose between them. But it need not always be through a plethora of dogmatic arguments. Pyrrhonists must first discover the equipollence in question, especially in this case where equipollence itself is the question. Demonstrating it to others comes later if at all. While a greater number of arguments, or stronger ones, or both, may be required to persuade outsiders, what the Pyrrhonist finds persuasive is not up for debate.

Nevertheless, when a crucial point is not up for debate, the resulting dialogue can hardly be satisfying. Leveraged equipollence is unlikely to impress those who are not even impressed with regular equipollence. This being so, it would be best to move on to arguments whose relevance is not restricted to practicing Pyrrhonists.

3.3. Direct Confrontation

Another strategy is to confront the conceptual challenge directly, at least more directly than the other approaches:

— You just assented to equipollence.
— That doesn't prove anything.
— It does too!
— It does not!

That almost sounds childish. But we do actually debate such matters with a childlike devotion and only a bit more sophistication. The exchange may be easier to recognize if fleshed out beyond the skeletal recalcitrance:

— You just gave assent to equipollence.
— Assent, indeed, but not the dogmatic kind.
— There is no other kind.
— Of course, there is.

The disagreement is over the nature of assent to equipollence. The exchange is imagined for the sake of discussion. It is not authentic. But it can be authenticated through a corollary of equipollence, namely, through the Pyrrhonian impression that "there is no proof" (PH 2.134–143, 2.144–192). What makes this a

corollary is that, if all arguments are equally weighty, then there is indeed no proof. Perhaps it is not even a corollary but just another way of expressing equipollence. Either way, the same objection brought against the recognition of equipollence can be brought against the denial of proof. And the same defense would work just as well, or fail just as badly.

The objection to focus on, then, is the charge that it is dogmatic and self-contradictory to propose that there is no proof. Sextus himself responds to this challenge (PH 1.14–15, 1.206, 2.188, M 8.479–481). Equipollence and its "corollary" (let us keep calling it that) are related closely enough that we can examine Sextus's defense of the corollary with a view to ascertaining whether and how it can be imported to counter the objection that Pyrrhonists give dogmatic assent to equipollence.

Sextus employs some memorable metaphors in addressing the alleged self-refutation in the proposition that there is no proof (and in comparable propositions and positions mentioned at PH 1.14–15 and surveyed at PH 1.187–209). Three of them stand out in particular:

- Zeus Metaphor: It is just as erroneous to think that the proposition that "there is no proof" refutes itself as it is to think that the proposition that "Zeus is the father of gods and men" makes Zeus out to be his own father (M 8.479).
- Laxative Metaphor: Just as purgative drugs evacuate the body upon serving their purpose, so too, the position against proof (and any such position as recognized at PH 1.187–209) cancels itself out after precluding the possibility of proof (PH 1.206, 2.188, M 8.480).
- Ladder Metaphor: Just as it is possible to discard or destroy a ladder upon reaching the desired level, it is likewise possible to discard or destroy the proposition that "there is no proof" after making the desired point (M 8.481).

These are not redundant variations on a single theme. They operate on different levels. The Zeus Metaphor suggests that the proposition that "there is no proof" is inherently self-exempt, in other words, that it lies outside the class of arguments affected by the claim that there is no proof. The Laxative Metaphor suggests that the proposition destroys itself after serving its purpose. The Ladder Metaphor suggests that Pyrrhonists may safely discard the proposition after it has served its purpose. The metaphors represent independent analogies.[24] The

[24] These are not the only analogies Sextus uses in this context. He also invokes the example of fire burning out upon consuming the fuel sustaining it (M 8.480). While it is more common, as in McPherran (1987, 290–328) and Castagnoli (2000, 263–328), to take up the fire analogy together

failure of one is no indication against the utility of the others. Even if none of these metaphors is appropriate for all charges against Pyrrhonism, one or another often makes its way into attempts at exoneration from self-contradiction.

A defense can thus be pursued in three levels: first, the offending proposition might be inherently self-exempt; second, even if the relevant proposition is not self-exempt, it might be self-destructive; third, even if the proposition is neither self-exempt nor self-destructive, it could be discarded by choice after use.[25] All this can easily and legitimately be transferred from the domain of the corollary, where the metaphors actually originate, to that of equipollence, where they may be put to similar use.

But the metaphors may not be as telling as Sextus would have us believe. To begin with, the exemption of Zeus from being his own father has nothing in particular to do with Zeus, whereas the exemption of the denial of proof from being its own denial is precisely and entirely about that denial. The analogy breaks down because the proposition that "Zeus is the father of gods and men" does not refer to itself in the same way or to the same degree or with the same clarity as the proposition that "there is no proof." Strictly speaking, neither of these propositions refers to itself, certainly not directly (as in "this statement is false"), but the one about Zeus is not even apparently self-refuting without a frame of reference (Who's Zeus?) while the denial of proof is at least apparently so. The real analogy here is that the very concept of proof exempts any proof or proposition (including denials) from being its own denial just as the very concept of fatherhood exempts anyone (including Zeus) from being his own father (except in a causal loop). This is because the denial of proof is not authoritative without proof, which, in turn, undermines the denial of proof.[26]

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with the other three, this is neither strictly required nor particularly useful, as the case of fire does not enhance the existing spread. (See also n. 25 below.) Castagnoli's later work (2010, especially 95–120, 249–307) is illuminating in regard to the topic of self-refutation from a historical perspective. Among the purely analytic approaches, Mackie's (1964, 193–203) treatment has long been a standard reference, with some of its terminology and distinctions adopted by McPherran (1987) and noted by Castagnoli (2000, 266, n. 5, 287, n. 40).

[25] This progression of possibilities is fully captured by the three metaphors. The analogy with fire (M 8.480) does not add anything of substance here, in fact, largely duplicating the function of the Laxative Metaphor. Admittedly, this redundancy could alternatively be diagnosed in the opposite direction, making fire the primary metaphor and the laxative the redundant one, but the laxative has the advantage of a clear health benefit for the body, which naturally suggests, as the analogy goes, that skeptical processes (arguments, argumentative strategies, and so on) might have a therapeutic effect on the mind.

[26] The denial of proof is a version of the classical Liar's Paradox, but the fatherhood of Zeus is neither analogous nor even sensible without a backstory. The proposition nominating Zeus as the father of gods and men requires collateral information not just to contradict itself but also to

As for the other two metaphors, neither one has the authority claimed for it by Sextus. A laxative's being flushed out shows clearly that it was in fact used, and its medicinal value only adds to the urgency, which reflects on proof, or on equipollence, as an integral part of the mindset of the Pyrrhonist, who thereby seems to be eagerly incorporating dogma into the skeptical process. The Ladder Metaphor works much like the Laxative Metaphor, except for shifting disposal responsibility to the skeptic instead of leaving it to the course of nature. A ladder's being discarded shows that a ladder was in fact used no less than a laxative's being flushed out shows that a laxative was in fact used. Both the ladder and the laxative are dogma. Just as those who use drugs or tools cannot faithfully deny having used them, those who invoke dogma cannot deny that fact, whether or not they later abandon the dogma. What is wanted is not the proper disposal of questionable resources after use but a conscientious refusal to use them at all. If they were not questionable, their disposal would not be a priority. If their disposal is a priority, their utilization is an abomination. Once dogma is brought in, taking it back out does not restore the original purity. We all know the way virginity works. And that is not it.[27]

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have any legitimate claim to a reference to itself. And it requires more information to contradict itself than it does to refer to itself. But the real problem is that the contradiction is grounded in the nature of fatherhood rather than in anything special about Zeus. There is no paradox in the proposition that "Zeus is the father of gods and men" unless we know who Zeus is. Even then, perhaps especially then, we know that this is just shorthand for the proposition that "Zeus is the father of some gods and some men" — relatively few of each, excepting not just himself but also most gods and most men.

[27] Castagnoli (2000, 263–328) manages to keep the Pyrrhonist out of trouble despite the alleged experimentation with dogma. He contends that the metaphors of exemption are not about the self-destruction or self-refutation of claims, theses, or arguments employed in the Pyrrhonian dialectic but about their self-bracketing nature (2000, 286–289). The bracketing he has in mind is the ancient editorial practice of using round brackets to mark out any text to be deleted from a manuscript. The imagery of assertion with exemption, then, is not so much logical as it is philological. Such assertions are to be treated as enclosing themselves within brackets of expunction even as they are uttered. The advantage to this interpretation, according to Castagnoli (2000, 287), is that self-refutation involves falsification, thus requiring commitment to the logical contradictory of the thesis refuting itself, whereas self-bracketing has nothing to do with falsification, because the bracketed thesis is not refuted but rejected (deleted, removed, expunged), which imposes no logical commitment to an alternative. Self-bracketing, in short, leaves no dialectical residue. This interpretation is not limited to the metaphors of exemption, applying instead to all skeptical strategies in the repertoire of the Pyrrhonist, in fact, protecting the distinctive process of pitting one dogma against another (or of countering one argument with another). Castagnoli's point is not merely that the metaphors are self-bracketing but more importantly that they are metaphors about self-bracketing. His solution is both inspired and effective. But the one here works too.

This is a breaking point. No self-respecting Pyrrhonist would accept the charge that the metaphors are dogma or that their use is dogmatic, especially since they are not asserted as truths but invoked as tools for the establishment of equipollence through investigation without commitment. This is the response developed in the next subsection. It is still useful, though, to follow how the present confrontation might unfold, since the overarching aim of the paper is to sort through both attractions and reactions that naturally accompany the skeptical standpoint as rational intuitions.

Confronted with the charge of dogmatism even in nonassertorial metaphors, skeptical tools intended to illustrate abstinence from dogma, the Pyrrhonist may decide to take the offensive for a change. Perhaps there is something wrong with the charge itself. Absolving the Pyrrhonist of the charge of dogmatism may be as simple (or as difficult) as exposing a contradiction in the basic objection that the transition from the recognition of equipollence to the suspension of judgment is not logically or epistemically warranted. A reductionist deconstruction of the following sort might work toward this end:

(P1) Anyone assenting dogmatically to the proposition that "all arguments are equally weighty" cannot escape the implication that, if all arguments are equally weighty, then the argument concluding that "all arguments are equally weighty" has an equally weighty counterargument (because it is its own equally weighty counterargument) concluding that "it is not the case that all arguments are equally weighty."

(P2) For this reason, anyone assenting dogmatically to the proposition that "all arguments are equally weighty" is committed to recognizing, just as dogmatically, that "it is not the case that all arguments are equally weighty."

(P3) Thus, anyone assenting dogmatically to the proposition that "all arguments are equally weighty" must necessarily and forever suspend judgment on the question whether all arguments are equally weighty.

(P4) Hence, if it were the case (actually, it is not, but even if it were) that Pyrrhonists assented dogmatically to the proposition that "all arguments are equally weighty," they would then, necessarily and forever, have to suspend judgment on the question whether all arguments are equally weighty.

(P5) But the conceptual challenge maintains that Pyrrhonists assent dogmatically to the proposition that "all arguments are equally weighty."

(P6) Then the conceptual challenge entails that Pyrrhonists would, necessarily and forever, have to suspend judgment on the question whether all arguments are equally weighty.

(C) Therefore, the conceptual challenge is itself logically inconsistent with the conclusion it is intended to establish.

This is an attempt at reductio ad absurdum against the original charge. It does not so much remove any contradiction in the proposition itself ("all arguments are equally weighty") as it associates such contradiction with both assent to and denial of the proposition. The counterattack of the Pyrrhonist, then, is that there can be no dogmatic assent to the proposition that "all arguments are equally weighty." No one believing that all arguments are equally weighty can consistently deny that they are not equally weighty (an imaginary objection) or even believe, therefore, that they are. Dogmatic assent here is not just wrong but impossible. No one who understands the proposition can endorse it, at least not without the exemption denied by the critic. Hence, the objection does not pick out a committable error. It is an amusing riddle to be ignored, much like the question whether Zeus is his own father because he is the father of gods and men.

The challenger would not yet be silenced, even with checkmate one move away. In the third premise, the people committed to suspending judgment on the question whether all arguments are equally weighty are those starting out by giving dogmatic assent to the proposition that "all arguments are equally weighty." Since this, as argued above, is where the inconsistency of the conceptual challenge arises, the original challenger might concede that Pyrrhonists do not give dogmatic assent to equipollence, while reformulating the argument and turning it around on the Pyrrhonist. Specifically, the challenger might object that anyone assenting, dogmatically or otherwise, to the premise that "all arguments are equally weighty" would have to suspend judgment as to whether all arguments are equally weighty, which then removes the basis for equipollence. The revised charge would be that even if the Pyrrhonian approach to equipollence is not dogmatic, the recognition of equipollence requires suspending judgment on equipollence as a metatheoretical question, in which case Pyrrhonists cannot consistently suspend judgment on any particular issue, including the specific cases coming up as standard rather than metatheoretical problems, because they cannot arrive at equipollence at all.

This is a legitimate move in terms of the game in progress (going by the tit-for-tat interaction allowed so far), but it is not the winning move, nor even a very good one. Suspending judgment on equipollence in general would not rule out equipollence on particular issues any more than suspending judgment on causality in general would rule out causality in specific sequences. What is required to rule out anything is refutation, or at least rejection. Ambivalence, uncertainty, and confusion fall short of that requirement. As in any other suspensive resolution to equipollent inquiry, suspending judgment, even on equipollence itself,

would only withhold assent on the matter, thus leaving and thereby confirming equipollence as a possibility. Equipollence would then continue to be possible for any issue that may come up and would have to be appraised separately in each case.

Might the critic have one last recourse? Not along the same lines, for the game ends upon mate. But the critic could protest the game itself. That is to say, the critic could accuse the Pyrrhonist of treating the truth as if it were no more than a game, with the epistemic metaphors actually demonstrating a grievous lack of concern for the truth. Indeed, the metaphors invoked as argumentative tools are so systematically aligned with *isostheneia* and *epochē* as to make these stages of the epistemic process look like they are pursued actively as goals (presumably intermediate goals toward the achievement of *ataraxia*) rather than accepted passively upon a chance encounter. This strategy of direct confrontation, the critic could object, seems even more gimmicky than the supposedly fortuitous outcome of an effort in earnest as reported by Sextus.

But it is all Sextus. The direct confrontation approach is not a thought experiment I came up with while exploring where rational intuitions may take us in debate. Something very much like a confrontation of this sort, metaphors and all, can be found in countless scenarios envisaged by Sextus. His outlines (and his *Outlines*) come across as one long chain of dialectic alternating "and if they should say *this*" with "then we could well say *that*." In fact, he seems at times to be engaged personally in direct confrontation, even in regard to the metaphors:

> Thus, if people who hold beliefs posit as real the things they hold beliefs about, while Sceptics utter their own phrases in such a way that they are implicitly cancelled by themselves, then they cannot be said to hold beliefs in uttering them. [PH 1.15]

This is precisely what the critic would be protesting as a last resort: If truth is the ultimate end, or even if it is one of several ends, why steer away from all the means purportedly leading to it? Why go to so much trouble to avoid acknowledging the truth? Inquiries or discussions aiming at the discovery of truth cannot realistically be expected to provide so many opportunities for uttering "phrases in such a way that they are implicitly cancelled by themselves." Where this is the norm, one may suspect a rigged game: a hidden agenda to seek out equipollence rather than the truth.

The critic's protest of the game itself, while it does not reverse the win (or successful defense) for the Pyrrhonist within the rules and tools of the game, might point to a hollow victory. I discuss this further as it becomes relevant, commenting on it as needed throughout the remainder of the paper, but taking it up specifically in section 5, where a deep disagreement seems to survive all

clarification. Wrapping up the conceptual perspective, however, comes before that, and, in fact, blends into it.

3.4. Naïve Denial

The naïve denial strategy differs from the direct confrontation strategy in its mode of engagement with the charge of dogmatic assent to equipollence. Whereas direct confrontation tackles the charge, naïve denial rejects it. This is the difference between justifying the skeptical position as described by the critic and denying that the skeptical position is as described by the critic. The skeptic in direct confrontation is engaged with the charge at all levels and by any means necessary. The goal is to vindicate the Pyrrhonian position on specific points and, for good measure, to expose errors in the logic of the critical position on the same points. This approach is largely dialectical. The skeptic in naïve denial refuses to fight back on those terms. The goal is merely to explain the Pyrrhonian position, which is in no special need of vindication, and the focus is on the nature of skeptical assent as pertaining only to how things appear and not to how they are. This approach is largely expository.

The title sums up the strategy: a naïve and straightforward denial of dogmatic assent preceding the suspension of judgment. As they do not repudiate any impressions concerning how things appear to them, Pyrrhonists would not hesitate to admit that the reason that they suspend judgment on any particular question is that they find the opposing theses and arguments equally weighty or comparably persuasive. But is this reference to "finding" something to be the case a devious attempt to avoid referring to believing something to be the case? Is the "recognition" or "discovery" of equipollence really doxastically innocuous or is it just a crafty way of describing what is otherwise dogmatic assent to equipollence?

There is certainly observation, accompanied by experience, evaluated through reasoning. Still, there need not be anything dogmatic about this process. Pyrrhonists allow themselves all the mental content and conceptual tools necessary to function as rational agents, the only exception being the belief that they have discovered the truth through any part of their natural observations, experiences, and reasoning. Specifically, they see nothing dogmatic about acknowledging that they are affected by external stimuli, nor about admitting that they feel compelled to act, and do so act, in accordance with such impressions, so long as they do not assent, in addition, to the reality of those appearances, which would then, and only then, make the associated assent dogmatic (PH 1.13–15, 1.19–24, 1.192–193, 1.220–235, 2.10). The critic is free to reject these distinctions — discussed in detail in the part of this paper laying out the evidentiary context (sec-

tion 2) — but that is not the same as detecting a logical contradiction or epistemic inconsistency in the skeptical process described by the Pyrrhonist.

The naïve denial runs as follows: Suspending judgment on subjects with equally weighty arguments on opposing sides, always an episodic phenomenon, does not require devotion to equipollence as a universal truth about the possibility of knowledge. Nor does suspending judgment on a particular issue require commitment to any reality underlying the equipollence recognized in the issue investigated. All that is needed to suspend judgment in connection with any case is to be undecided about the matter after a careful and faithful review of the evidence. And this is indeed all that the Pyrrhonist does in suspending judgment when the relevant arguments appear to be equally weighty:

> For Sceptics began to do philosophy in order to decide among appearances and to apprehend which are true and which false, so as to become tranquil; but they came upon equipollent dispute, and being unable to decide this they suspended judgement. [PH 1.26]

The Pyrrhonist simply acts out an indecision shaped by equipollence. And that equipollence is apparent equipollence. This, at least, is what Sextus would have us believe (PH 1.203). But what exactly is apparent equipollence? Talk of appearance versus reality is an age-old distinction embraced by philosophers from all traditions. But is it appropriate in this context? The best way to answer that is to show where Sextus himself finds it appropriate:

> When we investigate whether existing things are such as they appear, we grant that they appear, and what we investigate is not what is apparent but what is said about what is apparent — and this is different from investigating what is apparent itself. [PH 1.19]

It thus seems perfectly reasonable to distinguish between the appearance and reality of things. This is evidently how it seemed to Sextus as well. It might be objected, however, that this is relevant only to our phenomenal experience of the physical world, that is, to our perception of how things appear to us as distinct from how they might be in themselves. With the scope of the distinction restricted in this way, any attempt to distinguish between arguments (or propositions) and their appearances could be held to be meaningless. Although there is no indication that Sextus is working with any such restriction in mind in the passage above, one might contend that the mere incoherence of an unrestricted distinction is enough to make it just as untenable for Sextus as it would be for anyone else.

Yet attempts to make opponents look sillier than they really are rarely ever get anywhere. As it is, Sextus includes more than the objects of sense perception

in his distinction between appearance and reality, predictably without making it sound very silly: At PH 1.197, he speaks of "what is apparent to them about the subject proposed," referring to the opposing views on the subject. At PH 1.203, he describes the skeptic's reaction to equally convincing arguments as "a report of a human feeling which is apparent to the person who feels it." At PH 2.103, he refers explicitly to "the apparent equipollence of the arguments." Even outright assertions are meant as reports of appearances, as evidenced by "is" being intended as "appears": "we use 'is' loosely, in the sense of 'appears'" (PH 1.135). "Thus when a Sceptic says 'Everything is undetermined', he takes 'is' in the sense of 'appears to me'" (PH 1.198).

If one interprets "appearances of arguments" to mean something like "images of arguments," a distinction between arguments and their appearances will seem vacuous. But this ignores another sense of "appearance" with respect to arguments. What Sextus has in mind is the persuasiveness of arguments which yet comes short of unquestionable cogency. This sense of the appearance of arguments accommodates the possibility of an intuitive though rational appeal extending beyond the validity and soundness of arguments. This is nothing more than the recognition that we are not all convinced by the same arguments even where we all agree on their logical content. In this sense, it is at least sensible and certainly not vacuous to draw a distinction between arguments and their appearances.[28] This is what Sextus identifies as the central issue:

> But the main point is this: in uttering these phrases [the "skeptical phrases" in general as discussed in PH 1.187–209] they say what is apparent to themselves and re-

[28] Barney offers a useful survey of "ancient discussions of appearances and impressions which must have informed the sceptic's use of them" (1992, 286–299). She uses this as groundwork for her own model of skeptical "appearances" as "judgmental" as opposed to "phenomenological" (1992, 299–313). This is her position on a distinction already drawn in the literature regarding "appearances" in this context (1992, 284): "Philosophers have spoken of a 'phenomenological' and a 'judgemental' use of the word 'appear': in the phenomenological sense, the verb expresses the ways things impress us, while in the judgemental sense, it expresses our beliefs" (Annas and Barnes 1985, 24). The relevance of this distinction to the discussion in progress is that Pyrrhonists might not be able to get away with an appeal to appearances unless they can rule out the wrong kind of appearance, the kind that expresses beliefs. Yet applying this distinction to the case of equipollence may present a special difficulty, as equipollence itself, whether apparent or real, is a judgment even if it is also an impression. And equipollence, as emphasized throughout this paper, is manifested no more as a judgment than it is as a failure to formulate a judgment. To focus on the judgment in the skeptic's detection of equipollence would be to miss or ignore the preclusion of judgment in and by this very equipollence, the detection of which arrests the skeptic's ability to formulate any opinions about the matter under investigation. Even if there is assent involved in the discovery of equipollence, this need not be dogmatic assent.

port their own feelings without holding opinions, affirming nothing about external objects. [PH 1.15]

This, however, is not the end of the matter. Even if the distinction is not vacuous, it may be untenable in some other way, unworkable for some other reason. It may be objected, for example, (1) that recognizing equipollence is the same as believing that the relevant arguments really are balanced, just as (2) being persuaded by an appealing argument (assuming that the argument has been understood and acknowledging that persuasion may require more than soundness) evinces a commitment to its soundness that is indistinguishable from the same commitment by the dogmatist, and just as (3) acting upon an observation (the equal weight of arguments) demonstrates a conviction regarding the truth of a propositional account of the observation ("The arguments are equipollent").[29] The objection, in short, is that persuasion is conviction: A persuaded Pyrrhonist is a dogmatic Pyrrhonist.

The critic has a point, especially when it comes to the invariable tendency of the Pyrrhonist to discover equipollence, but surely so much commitment as the critic suspects, layer upon layer of dogma, is not required just to function as a rational agent engaged in dialectic. The objection is a bit of a caricature: The Pyrrhonist cannot suspend judgment without commitment to equipollence, or commit to equipollence without commitment to the relevant arguments, or commit to the arguments without commitment to their premises, or commit to the premises without a prior standard of truth, and so on to the espousal of a distinctive notion of reality. This is not what goes on with actual Pyrrhonists. The objection makes it sound like the Pyrrhonist's problem is in being persuaded by too many things, including not just equipollence but also the various theses and arguments on which it is built, each indicating a commitment. That is not how it works. There is no persuasion. There is no commitment. The reason that Pyrrhonists submit to equipollence is not that they are persuaded by all the arguments on an issue but that they are persuaded by none of them. If they were persuaded by any, they would just pick a side. They are impressed, of course, by both sides, finding each persuasive, so much so as to be unable to decide between them. Finding opposing arguments equally persuasive, however, is not the same as be-

[29] Sedley suggests that one way Pyrrhonists can claim to be consistent in moving from argument to argument, and from assertion to assertion, on the road to equipollence is to show that they bring their "sceptical utterances within their own and each other's scope" by "simultaneously making and withdrawing an assertion" (Long and Sedley 1987, 472). In this way, Pyrrhonists may argue that all that matters is the psychological effect of simultaneity, which they attain by continuously and quickly alternating opposing propositions.

ing persuaded by each of them. Philosophical ambivalence is not doctrinal commitment. The outcome here is enlightened detachment.

Consider an actual philosophical problem: Does consciousness survive death? This is the question of personal immortality: Is the soul immortal? It does not matter that the question assumes the existence of the soul. I do not mean to prejudge the duality. I just want to know whether a sentient being continues life as a disembodied sentient being, or something close to that, after its phenomenal representation is no longer available through the familiar corporeal interface. I do not know the answer. But I do know all the positions that will be taken. Some will say that the soul is immortal, some that it is not, and the rest that they cannot decide one way or the other. Now, consider the people in the third category. Some of them, believing firmly that the arguments on both sides are balanced, could well declare the matter undecidable, asserting positively that the problem of personal immortality does not admit of a solution. But this does not exclude the possibility that there may be others in the same category who respond that, because the arguments seem to be equally weighty, they find themselves unable to agree with either side and compelled thereby to suspend judgment on the issue. This is how the Pyrrhonist responds. This is how the nondogmatic discovery of equipollence works (PH 1.197, 1.203, 2.103, M 7.444).

The conceptual challenge can thus be overcome through clarification of the nature and object of the assent involved in the positions taken. The naïve denial strategy turns out not to be so naïve after all. The sphere of reasonable objections to Pyrrhonism shrinks from charges of logical contradiction and epistemic inconsistency to disagreement over doxastic distinctions drawn by the skeptic and denied by the critic. The critic must either catch the Pyrrhonist on the wrong side of the distinction between dogmatic and nondogmatic assent or reject the distinction altogether. Either approach changes the nature of the debate. The disagreement is not just conceptual. It is also practical.

4. Practical Perspective

The practical challenge is directed at the same process as the conceptual challenge: the Pyrrhonian journey from the perception of the world to the suspension of judgment, followed allegedly naturally by tranquility. The most relevant question here is still the one posed decades ago by Burnyeat (1980): "Can the Sceptic Live His Scepticism?"

With regard to the problem under discussion, this is to ask whether the Pyrrhonist can move from equipollence to the suspension of judgment without being held back by the weight of dogma. Critics already know that Sextus takes Pyrrhonists to move nondogmatically from *isostheneia* to *epochē*. Their position, be-

yond any misgivings about the conceptual perspective, is that this is not psychologically possible. The challenge, then, is to show that Sextus, or any other Pyrrhonist, for that matter, is not fooling himself. A famous passage in Sextus, parts of it already referenced above, provides the context for discussing how and why the challenge arises:

> Thus when I say 'Opposed to every account there is an equal account', I am implicitly saying this: 'To every account I have scrutinized which purports to establish something in dogmatic fashion, there appears to me to be opposed another account, purporting to establish something in dogmatic fashion, equal to it in convincingness or lack of convincingness'. Thus the utterance of this remark is not dogmatic but a report of a human feeling which is apparent to the person who feels it. [PH 1.203]

What Sextus says seems reasonable enough. But oftentimes so does the typical reaction. Consider the one by Burnyeat:

> [W]e know perfectly well *why* it appears to the sceptic that any dogmatic claim has a contrary equally worthy or unworthy of acceptance. It is the result of a set of arguments designed to show, compellingly, that this is in fact the case. Such arguments can compel him to suspend judgement because they compel him to accept their conclusion — to accept, that is, that in each and every case dogmatic claims are indeed equally balanced and hence that one ought to suspend judgment. (Which is often enough, of course, the way Sextus does conclude his arguments.) But accepting the conclusion that *p* on the basis of a certain argument is hardly to be distinguished from coming to *believe* that *p* is *true* with that argument as one's *reason*. [Burnyeat 1980, 50][30]

Burnyeat's assessment fails to capture what the Pyrrhonist claims to be doing. It is nearly fully the opposite. Burnyeat knows that it is. That is the point he is making. His Pyrrhonists do not simply find equipollence, they seek it out, and they do not simply seek out equipollence, they create or facilitate it, somehow making sure it is there. This may not seem far from Sextus's Pyrrhonists, whose defining characteristic is an "ability to set out oppositions" (PH 1.8), but Sextus is clear about one thing: It is only "because of the equipollence in the opposed objects and accounts" that the ability in question works, leading the skeptic "first to suspension of judgement and afterwards to tranquillity" (PH 1.8).

Nevertheless, Burnyeat finds the engagement with equipollence, especially through a special ability serving that end, too strong not to involve belief. His reaction proceeds from the principle, which he introduces as a "well-worn, tradi-

[30] Burnyeat does not purport to be issuing an exclusively practical challenge as distinct from a conceptual challenge. His opposition covers both at once. That makes it relevant enough here. His use of "compel," twice as a verb and once in adverbial form, could just as well indicate a psychological necessity as it could a logical or epistemological one.

tional example," that "if the evidence of our senses is really shown to be unreliable and the inferences we ordinarily base on this evidence are unwarranted, the correct moral to draw is not merely that we should not claim to know things on these grounds but that we should not believe them either" (1980, 22). Sextus, in contrast, denies that the Pyrrhonist believes such things. The Pyrrhonist, says Sextus, simply acts in accordance with appearances. Burnyeat is not convinced: "The sceptic is supposed to content himself with appearances in lieu of beliefs, but it may be objected that, whatever Sextus may say, at least some of these appearances are beliefs in disguise" (1980, 43).

If I understand him correctly in the passage just quoted, the main reason Burnyeat restricts the scope of his protest there to "some of these appearances" is to grant the skeptical claim to be carrying on without beliefs in describing sense impressions and in acting in accordance with the corresponding experiences, while denying the same doxastic exemption to derivative judgments requiring interpretive or inferential engagement with phenomenal experience. This is what I gather from his supporting examples (1980, 43), where the exemption applies to simple experiential reports such as "Honey tastes sweet" (PH 1.20) but excludes complex judgments that require inferences from observational phenomena: "All things appear relative" (PH 1.135); "Let it be granted that the premisses of the proof appear" (M 8.368); "Some things appear good, others evil" (M 11.19).

The recognition of equipollence falls in the category of nonexempt skeptical reports, the kind that are "beliefs in disguise." Burnyeat is well aware that "assent in accordance with a passive appearance" (PH 1.19) is the sort of assent Sextus considers nondogmatic. Many of us tend to think of this, or at least to speak of it, in terms of a distinction between dogmatic and nondogmatic beliefs (as well as between dogmatic and nondogmatic assent). Burnyeat does not. For him, there is only one kind of belief, the kind the Pyrrhonist cannot hold without self-contradiction (1980, 43–49, cf. 26–27). He describes his position not as the rejection of a distinction Sextus makes between dogmatic and nondogmatic beliefs but as the rejection of the reading that Sextus ever made or intended such a distinction (1980, 46–47). Yet he also rejects the distinction independently of the question whether any Pyrrhonist ever makes it. What he does accept is that Sextus distinguishes between assent accompanied by belief (dogmatic assent) and assent devoid of belief (nondogmatic assent). But this, he submits, is not enough to exonerate the Pyrrhonist, because skeptical assent to complex judgments (those going beyond a report of sensations to inferences from those sensations) is not devoid of belief. Assent to equipollence, compelling though it may be, comes with belief in equipollence. That is how Burnyeat has it.

Burnyeat is right about his general assessment of a proper epistemic process but not about a corresponding impropriety on the part of the Pyrrhonist. He is right, in other words, that we should not believe what does not seem to be the case, or that we would not be warranted in believing it, though we might in fact believe it anyway. Also reasonable is his reading of the dogmatic/nondogmatic distinction as applying only to assent and not to belief, but I find it both convenient and acceptable to employ the familiar terminology of dogmatic versus nondogmatic beliefs, so long as the terminology itself is not taken to establish any position or prejudge any issue. However that may be, we do not have to use the terms "dogmatic" and "nondogmatic" to make the relevant point. The claim that the Pyrrhonist does not hold dogmatic beliefs can easily be reformulated as the claim that the Pyrrhonist assents to some things but believes nothing. The extension of this to the present case would be the reformulation of the claim that the Pyrrhonist does not believe in equipollence dogmatically as the claim that the Pyrrhonist does not believe in equipollence while assenting to it. I understand that Burnyeat finds the first claim incoherent, at least etymologically so, but the crux of the matter is that he finds the second claim inaccurate. I find him more convincing in his first objection than in his second.

The Pyrrhonist, Sextus tells us, has no beliefs about what may or may not be true and none again about how things really are in themselves. This just leaves appearances. About those, however, there is no question of truth or reality, just one of acknowledgment — and, where applicable, of compliance.[31] Yet Burnyeat ends up attributing an honest-to-goodness belief to the skeptical tendency to "yield to things which passively move us and lead us necessarily to assent" (PH 1.193), because the assent, passive or not, is based on a reasoned conclusion, which would not inspire anyone to act in conformity should they not believe it to be true. This is not a refutation of the skeptical position. Nor does Burnyeat claim that it is. It is a deep disagreement about what is going on in the epistemic process constituting the Pyrrhonian journey. The disagreement is not to be ignored, as it could conceivably be resolved in Burnyeat's favor. I am not con-

[31] Appearances *qua* appearances are not part of the skeptical inquiry: "We are not to investigate how what appears appears or how what is thought of is thought of, but are simply to take them for granted" (PH 1.9). Any sense of truth we may think to associate with appearances is so alien (or innocuous) to Sextus that he is able to embrace appearances as the "standard" of Pyrrhonism: "We say, then, that the standard of the sceptical persuasion is what is apparent, implicitly meaning by this the appearances; for they depend on passive and unwilled feelings and are not objects of investigation. (Hence no-one, presumably, will raise a controversy over whether an existing thing appears this way or that; rather, they investigate whether it is such as it appears.)" (PH 1.22)

vinced that it has to be, but I pick this up in the next section, proceeding here to consider the possibility of a refutation beyond mere disagreement.

The portion of Burnyeat's critique most relevant to the central themes of this paper comprises his claims, as quoted in their fuller context above, that the Pyrrhonist believes, in the worst way possible, of which there is only one way, (1) "that any dogmatic claim has a contrary equally worthy or unworthy of acceptance" and (2) "that in each and every case dogmatic claims are indeed equally balanced and hence that one ought to suspend judgment" (1980, 50). As for belief, Burnyeat contends that "Sextus has no other notion of belief than the accepting of something as true" (1980, 49). Hence, the Pyrrhonist, according to Burnyeat, believes in equipollence (accepts it as true), and not just one inquiry at a time, as equipollence happens to come up, but all at once for any inquiry, as equipollence is sure to turn up. But if there is an error to be made about equipollence, why not let the Pyrrhonist get it wrong one issue at a time? Even if it is not possible to act without belief, and even if there is only one kind of belief, the kind the Pyrrhonist denies yet holds, why could all these inconsistencies not be confined to episodic encounters with equipollence during specific inquiries?

This is a fairly representative account of the practical challenge. It fails in two respects. First, it ascribes beliefs to Pyrrhonists in a way in which they deny holding beliefs. Second, it construes Pyrrhonists as arriving at a broad as opposed to narrow recognition of equipollence (discussed in section 1 above, cf. PH 1.202–203). The connection between the two is Burnyeat's (1980, 49) characterization of Pyrrhonian assent to equipollence as a belief ("the accepting of something as true"), whereas what Pyrrhonists admit to is not assent in the sense of affirming truths but acknowledgment in the sense of reporting appearances, impressions, and experiences.

Regarding the first failure, the (unjustifiable) attribution of (unjustifiable) beliefs to the Pyrrhonist, we need not look any further than the testimony of Sextus, who rejects the imputation in the very terms used by Burnyeat:

> [W]e say that they [Pyrrhonists] do not hold beliefs in the sense in which some say that belief is assent to some unclear object of investigation in the sciences; for Pyrrhonists do not assent to anything unclear. [PH 1.13][32]

[32] Bett (2008, 143) finds in this passage, and more generally in the Pyrrhonian way of life, room for beliefs of a problematic variety. He grants, for example, that Pyrrhonists may consistently acknowledge sensations, professing that they feel hot or cold, when they do in fact feel hot or cold. But between confirmations of sense experience and the theoretical beliefs repudiated in the passage in question (PH 1.13–14), he notes that the Pyrrhonist "tells us nothing about beliefs such as my belief that my check book is in my brief case" (2008, 143). Bett's specific concern is with the kind of "self" the skeptic is consigned to in the absence of all beliefs other than a passive aware-

The parenthetical qualifications in the sentence introducing the passage just quoted reflect a fundamental disagreement concerning the nature, coherence, and permissibility of skeptical beliefs: Is the relevant question whether Pyrrhonists hold any beliefs at all or is it whether they hold any beliefs that undermine their general outlook? Do Pyrrhonists believe what they are not supposed to believe? Must Pyrrhonists not believe anything whatsoever in order to be consistent in the brand of skepticism identified with them?

I am not unsympathetic to Burnyeat's (1980, 43–49) rejection of a distinction between dogmatic and nondogmatic beliefs. I myself do not reject the distinction. But I also do not reject the rejection, which is based on sound etymological principles. I see Burnyeat's point both in regard to Sextus and as a general point of order. What I reject is what he says beyond that point. He is not just quibbling about words. His point is both terminological and conceptual. I find myself able to disagree even upon accepting his terminological and conceptual suggestions or corrections. Avoiding direct reference to beliefs, never once using the word, we could still disagree about whether the Pyrrhonist accepts equipollence as the truth of the matter.

As submitted above in the overview of the evidentiary context (section 2), the Pyrrhonist does not assent to anything unclear (PH 1.13–15, 1.19–24, 1.192–193, 1.220–235, 2.10). Everything else is fair game. Appearances are especially safe ground. They are, in fact, the only things that can be clear. Even in a state of insanity, even through the wildest hallucinations, even while watching the shadows on the wall in Plato's cave, we will most certainly perceive whatever we perceive. The appearances confronting us will be exactly those appearances and not in the least something else. All this is perfectly acceptable for assent.

This is because we do not shape the way things appear and we do not perceive what lies beyond the appearances. We do not know the truth. And so long as we do not claim to know it, we may consistently acknowledge how it appears. Our assent is not voluntary, our acknowledgment, not dogmatic. Even if we take

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ness of private sensations and perhaps of the phenomenal states corresponding to those sensations. Bett has his own solutions (2008, 139–154), and he does not leave the skeptic in a stupor, but the doxastic disparity he describes between rudimentary and sophisticated beliefs (which can also be fleshed out in various other terms, such as simple vs. complex, ordinary vs. philosophical, observational vs. inferential, and so on) is relevant here as well. The position taken in this paper is that the Pyrrhonian rejection of dogma need not keep skeptics from finding their checkbooks, nor even from balancing their checkbooks, any more than it should keep them from coming in out of the rain or avoiding mad dogs in the agora. This, of course, is not an argument or refutation but a synoptic reference to such in the main body of the paper. Still, warnings against polarizing reality into the ordinary and the philosophical, that is, warnings such as those by Bett (1993) and Fogelin (2004, 169–170), are well worth heeding.

Burnyeat's (1980, 26–27) advice to shift the dogmatic/nondogmatic distinction from belief to assent, thereby respecting the proper relation of belief (as species) to assent (as genus), the Pyrrhonist still need not be convicted of dogmatism in recognizing and reacting to equipollence.

Moreover, Burnyeat's rejection of a distinction between dogmatic and nondogmatic beliefs is not as damaging, or even as authoritative, as it may seem. Working around it is not the only option. Disagreement is also defensible. This is not just because there are hints of the distinction in Sextus (PH 1.13) but also because other eminent scholars are known to be comfortable with the distinction. Popkin (1960/2003), for example, insists in the introduction to his historical survey of skepticism that there is such a distinction:

> The sceptic, in either the Pyrrhonian or Academic tradition, developed arguments to show or suggest that the evidence, reasons, or proofs employed as grounds for our various beliefs were not completely satisfactory. Then the sceptics recommended suspense of judgment on the question of whether these beliefs were true. One might, however, still maintain the beliefs, even though all sorts of persuasive factors should not be mistaken for adequate evidence that the belief was true. Hence 'sceptic' and 'believer' are not opposing classifications. The sceptic is raising doubts about the rational or evidential merits of the justifications given for a belief; he doubts that necessary and sufficient reasons either have been or could be discovered to show that any particular belief must be true and cannot possibly be false. But the sceptic may, like anyone else, still accept various beliefs. [Popkin 2003, xxi]

Regarding the second failure, the misconstrual of narrow as broad equipollence, Burnyeat's (1980) characterization is wrong though not unreasonable. This is, in essence, a misidentification of narrow as broad assent. It is a reasonable inference to make on the basis of some of the apparent attributes of Pyrrhonism, but it just does not happen to be the right interpretation. The thrust of this approach is that, even though Pyrrhonism begins with aporia regarding a specific question followed by an examination of the relevant arguments, the relentless repetition of the same result, equipollence, leads to unavoidable habituation, which conditions Pyrrhonists so that they come to believe in equipollence dogmatically. After all, if Pyrrhonists did not believe in equipollence, why would they end up with it so frequently, which to quantify it, would be every single time they deliberate on any issue? This is not the track record of coincidence.

A response that is both natural and proper is to stick with the naïve denial: No matter how many inquiries they conduct, Pyrrhonists decide each issue on its merits, which means that they decide it on the basis of how strong or weak the arguments on each side seem to them. No other response is required. This one cannot be overturned. From this point on, there can only be disagreement, a re-

fusal to accept the response. Disagreement is also important, and deserves further analysis, which is offered in the next section, but its resolution, if possible, is a shared burden, not a strike against the Pyrrhonist. The Pyrrhonist can consistently refuse to admit that there is ever the slightest inclination to consider any truth or reality beyond the appearance of equipollence. If habituation directs the Pyrrhonist to equipollence, over and over, this is no reason that the latest among such inquiries should be about the true nature of equipollence, or of the underlying arguments, or of their connection with the way the world is in itself, any more than all this would be the case in the very first inquiry retired on the basis of apparent equipollence. The impression that the arguments seem to be equally weighty is enough to bring the Pyrrhonist's intellect to a standstill and thereby to force a suspension of judgment.

The compelling nature of equipollence, apparent though it may be, suggests an alternative response, one that speaks to the critic who refuses to accept that equipollence is the sort of thing that can have an appearance as distinct from what it is as it is in itself. A possible response on these terms is that, even if habituation and conditioning were to affect Pyrrhonists in such a way as to direct them to equipollence as a reality in itself and not just an impression, this would show only that their behavior becomes instinctive, like second nature. And Pyrrhonists cannot reasonably be accused of being dogmatic in their instinctive behavior. Sextus says as much in a passage where he discusses whether skeptics belong to a school (PH 1.16–17):

> For we coherently follow, to all appearances, an account which shows us a life in conformity with traditional customs and the law and persuasions and our own feelings. [PH 1.17]

The impetus of the practical challenge is that assent to equipollence is irresistible. If it is irresistible, then this is the response. If habituation and conditioning make it psychologically impossible to suspend judgment without believing that all arguments are equally weighty, this very impossibility suggests that the assent given to equipollence is not voluntary. And if assent to equipollence is not voluntary, then it is unreasonable to accuse Pyrrhonists of being dogmatic in a matter which they do not pursue with any special interest or with any degree of control.

Stough (1984, 137–164), among others, challenges the assumption that necessary assent is involuntary. She argues that "[a]ssent consciously granted in accordance with the rational faculty, and not contrary to desire, is not beyond one's rational control and so is not involuntary" (1984, 150). Stough is right that such assent is not involuntary in the sense of opposition to desire, but it is also not voluntary in the sense of initiation through desire. Pyrrhonian assent is nei-

ther opposed to desire nor determined by desire. Therefore, explicating psychological necessity in terms of desire, as Stough does, requires not just recognizing with Stough that necessary assent is not involuntary but also recognizing with Sextus that necessary assent is not voluntary.

Another possible response to Stough is to bypass talk of voluntary and involuntary assent to bring out a direct connection between necessary and nondogmatic assent. Consider what Sextus says concerning everyday observances:

> 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 by nature, necessitation by feelings, handing down of laws and customs, and teaching of kinds of expertise. By nature's guidance we are naturally capable of perceiving and thinking. By the necessitation of feelings, hunger conducts us to food and thirst to drink. By the handing down of customs and laws, we accept, from an everyday point of view, that piety is good and impiety bad. By teaching of kinds of expertise we are not inactive in those which we accept. And we say all this without holding any opinions. [PH 1.23–24]

The importance of this passage lies in Sextus's denial that an existence in conformity with everyday observances requires or indicates a commitment to dogmatism. Such an existence does not seem much different from what we might readily think of as an ordinary life, which Sextus reports carrying out without the aid of dogma. Here, if anywhere, the practical challenge is stripped of its force. The necessity invoked by the challenge turns out to be a part of living "in accordance with everyday observances," especially the "guidance by nature," under which might be subsumed the process through which we are "naturally capable of perceiving and thinking." If assenting to equipollence out of a psychological necessity is the way Pyrrhonists are naturally capable of sensation and thought, so be it. They are merely following the guidance of nature, and they cannot reasonably be accused of being dogmatic in doing so.

The defense, now complete, operates with two main anchors to Sextus: One is the glimpse he offers into what he considers an ordinary life (PH 1.16–17), discussed earlier in this subsection, the other, the breakdown of "everyday observances" (PH 1.23–24), invoked just now. These passages also fulfill the promise (in the paragraph introducing the last block quotation) to establish a direct link between necessary and nondogmatic assent.[33] This is not to suggest that critics

[33] Alternatively, the practical challenge can be met independently of these two passages while still being sensitive to Stough's restrictions. In a passage on *aphasia*, Sextus points to the nondogmatic nature of necessary assent when he says "we do yield to things which passively move us and lead us necessarily to assent" (PH 1.193). This is a straightforward recognition of the differ-

must accept defeat once we point out the difference between assent that is and is not consistent with the spirit of Pyrrhonism. They all know that distinction. They deny it. But this, as it turns out, is all they do. We are left, in the end, with opposition, not refutation.[34]

5. Deep Disagreement

The skeptic and the critic disagree about the nature of equipollence and consequently about what may reasonably be said in connection with it. The critic accuses the skeptic of suspending judgment upon discovering equipollence, while pretending that the equipollence is only apparent, as if there could be a difference between how premises and arguments and theories appear and how they are in themselves. The critic rejects that difference and accuses the Pyrrhonist of either delusion or deception but certainly failure.

Neither the skeptic nor the critic can say anything further, short of conceding the matter, that would satisfy the other. An important part of the disagreement over apparent versus real equipollence is about noticing equipollence versus believing in it. It is a question of the skeptic's commitment to equipollence, apparent or real. The critic's point is that any assent to equipollence, even if it starts out without belief, is transformed into genuine conviction, as habituation conditions the skeptic to expect equipollence as well as to accept it. The distinction between the narrow and broad senses of equipollence is at the center of this disagreement.

To return to this paper's ambassador of all critics, Burnyeat surely knows, and therefore ignores, that Pyrrhonists claim to recognize equipollence only in a narrow sense and not in a broad sense. He just does not buy it. His instinctive reluctance to go along with this grows, I suspect, because he does not believe that nar-

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ence between dogmatic and nondogmatic assent, not to mention a clear sign of awareness of the difference between acceptable and unacceptable conduct or disposition for a Pyrrhonist.

[34] Burnyeat, for example, develops what he calls the "insulation thesis" (1984, 225–254) in advancement of his earlier challenge (1980, 20–53) taken up here in section 4: "insulation" refers to keeping one's ordinary life and one's philosophical convictions separate, and the thesis is that insulation is a strictly modern development beginning with Kant's transcendental idealism. Burnyeat contends that "once upon a time scepticism was a serious challenge and no one thought to insulate it from affecting, or being affected by, the judgements of ordinary life" (1984, 227). Drawing on Burnyeat, Annas (1986, 3–29, especially 27) argues that, although "insulation" permits modern skeptics to lead ordinary lives, both believing in values and acting upon them, this was inconceivable for the ancient skeptics, who had no logical room for it. The challenge, then, if Burnyeat and Annas are correct, is that Pyrrhonists cannot hold beliefs because it did not occur to them to separate ordinary beliefs from philosophical speculation. But this is contradicted by typical expressions of insulation in Sextus's writings, such as his conception of an ordinary life (PH 1.16–17) and his account of "everyday observances" (PH 1.23–24).

row equipollence would do the trick, or possibly because he believes that narrow equipollence *is* a trick. Some such concern has already been raised above, both in the section on the epistemic journey (section 1) and in the one on the evidentiary context (section 2). This is the place to resolve it if at all possible.

The skeptic's report of a narrow recognition of equipollence, even with the accompanying repudiation of a broad recognition (PH 1.202–203, cf. 1.204–205, 1.208), does not in itself make clear how the skeptical journey can be completed with the presumably episodic suspensions of judgment and the concomitant experiences with tranquility that would seem to follow from taking up one issue at a time (or two or three separate ones, something far short of all). Can the Pyrrhonian journey ever be completed in an episodic manner? This is not to ask whether it can be completed in stages, moving from the recognition of equipollence to the suspension of judgment, and so on. Those are integral parts of a single process. The journey is not only possible with them but also impossible without them. The question, rather, is whether the stages themselves make sense as episodic developments.

To begin with the suspension of judgment, an episodic interpretation may seem counterintuitive if it is taken to imply that a certain part of each inquiry (the part prior to the suspension of judgment) takes place without suspended judgment, hence with an active faculty of judgment, and thereby possibly with dogma. This would not be unusual for the novice going through the journey of conversion, but it would be unacceptable for the skeptic going through the journey of habituation. Can judgment be switched on and off as the investigator finishes one inquiry and moves on to the next? We are told that the suspension of judgment is a "standstill of the intellect" (PH 1.10). What replaces that standstill where judgment is not suspended? What is the alternative to a standstill of the intellect? Is it not determination?

These questions reveal a confusion regarding what takes place before judgment is suspended. The answer is simple: The part of each inquiry preceding the suspension of judgment is the inspection and analysis stage where a dogmatic outcome would be just as premature as the suspension of judgment. Before a certain point, either impulse, skeptical or dogmatic, would be not just rash but out of place. There would be nothing to prompt a reaction of any kind without the information and analysis required to grasp the situation and assess the alternatives. The absence of suspended judgment in the run-up to the suspension of judgment is not demonstrative of the presence of dogmatic judgment. Since *epochē* (ἐποχή) is a *páthos* (πάθος) connected with equipollence, it is absent not just when one dogmatically assents to arguments instead of recognizing their

equipollence but also when one is still evaluating them prior to recognizing their equipollence, and further, when there is nothing yet to evaluate.

This is why no skeptical transgression is implied for the part of the inquiry preceding the suspension of judgment, even if judgment was previously suspended, and remains suspended, on one or more other issues. The intellect can be at a standstill about one thing while working on another and being oblivious to yet another. In fact, the intellect can be at a standstill about one thing even as it is certain about another. This is to acknowledge that narrow equipollence is so plausible that even the dogmatist may stumble upon it from time to time. The problem, of course, and what bothers Burnyeat, is that the skeptic stumbles upon it all time.

I have nothing to say to Burnyeat, or to any other critic, regarding the relentless recurrence of equipollence. They are right to have misgivings. The regularity is as suspicious as they claim. Yet it is no secret. Nor is it an oversight. Sextus proclaims it almost with pride. He even incorporates it into his definition of Pyrrhonism as a special expertise in doing exactly what Burnyeat is objecting to: "Scepticism is an ability to set out oppositions among things which appear and are thought of in any way at all" (PH 1.8). What Sextus is referring to here, as intimated in the previous section, is an ability to detect equipollence where it exists, not an ability to fabricate equipollence where it does not exist.

The best critical reaction in this context is not the purely contentious one that the Pyrrhonist is doing just the opposite but the more probing one that doing what is described is not conducive to recognizing the truth should it happen to turn up in one of the many inquiries the skeptic goes through. The ability in question seems inimical to the recognition of truth. The constant training to detect equipollence makes the skeptic poorly equipped to recognize the truth unless it came with teeth and a propensity to bite, like the proverbial dog of Pyrrho (DL 9.62). Even then, proper orientation seems to require a little help from one's friends.

This "skeptical ability," as it is acquired through practice rather than naturally at birth, is hard to take seriously as the best use to be made of the world of data we come across as we make our way through life. As a result, the skeptical process appears contrived and specious (at least to outsiders). Even if the apparent obsession with equipollence were actually nothing more than the fulfillment of an epistemic responsibility to consider every possible alternative or objection to any positive thesis or argument so that no conclusion is accepted in a haste that could possibly leave the investigator with an erroneous belief, this would explain only the unwavering motivation, not the unvarying outcome. The most construc-

tive forum of charitable interpreters will not make the Pyrrhonists look any less evasive in finding equipollence wherever they look.

Be that as it may, there are some issues that can be cleared up. No matter what we make of the shameless drive toward equipollence, there does not seem to be a serious problem with an episodic interpretation of the suspension of judgment, which, as explained above, can be started over with each inquiry. The problem, rather, would be with any adverse effects an episodic suspension of judgment may have on the rest of the process. Fortunately, the attainment of tranquility is all there is to the rest of the process. Although tranquility is not directly relevant to equipollence as the primary focus of this paper, the connection is strong enough to look for a viable explanation.

The suspension of judgment does not seem to be vitiated by the limited scope and intermittent schedule available for it in the episodic interpretation of the skeptical process. But does tranquility work that way as well? Can the mind be at peace about one thing while in agony over another? Maybe momentarily, or temporarily anyway, but is it not usually enough to ruin a perfectly good mood that just one thing should go wrong in our lives? How stable is episodic tranquility?

Like the questions above regarding episodic suspensions of judgment, this one concerning episodic tranquility is based on a confusion. The tranquility coming with the suspension of judgment on each specific issue is not the only tranquility available to the Pyrrhonist. There may indeed be a cumulative effect where each episode reinforces a standing base of tranquility (the accretion of episodic tranquility as it stands at the moment). But this does not make a full peace of mind a utopian dream never to be realized, perhaps to be approximated only at the end of a long and skeptical life. There is also the tranquility that comes from the suspension of judgment on general epistemic prospects, that is, on the possibility of knowledge, specifically the discovery of truth. At some point during the Pyrrhonian journey of conversion, successful voyagers find themselves forced to suspend judgment not just on this or that issue but more generally on whether the truth is something that can or cannot be discovered. This must bring a great deal of tranquility not to be had immediately, nor even very quickly, through the cumulative process indicated in episodic suspensions of judgment.

The Pyrrhonist need not exhaust the endless stream of specific issues in order to suspend judgment on whether the truth in general is something that can be discovered. That general question about truth is a question like any other, and the Pyrrhonist can take it up as a problem of its own, weighing both sides of the issue, and eventually, upon discovering equipollence, proceeding naturally to suspend judgment about the matter — all this without having to go through and retire every specific question ever known to have been asked. This

does not commit the Pyrrhonist to an additional suspension of judgment on issues yet to be examined. That would be a dogmatic move if the suspension of judgment were a rational decision as opposed to a natural reaction. And it would also be the fallacy of division if it were an inference based on deliberation. As it is, the suspension of judgment is submission to an epistemic necessity rendering the intellect inactive.[35] This being so, a suspension of judgment on truth in general is par for the course among the episodic suspensions of judgment on particular issues.

Any confusion here originates somewhere in the episodic interpretation of the Pyrrhonian journey as we attempt to distinguish between narrow and broad senses of the recognition of equipollence, the suspension of judgment, and the attainment of tranquility. What is meant by a "broad recognition of equipollence" is the recognition that all arguments on any issue are equipollent for that issue and that this holds for every issue. There is no alternative meaning: A general or collective equipollence corresponding, with no particular frame of reference, to all arguments everywhere would be incoherent since not all arguments are mutually relevant to all issues. The broad recognition of equipollence, then, in the only sense in which it is coherent, is denied both in the original sources (PH 1.202–208) and in this paper (from the first section onward).

This distinction between the narrow and the broad also applies to other stages of the journey: A broad suspension of judgment is the distributively exhaustive realization of all narrow suspensions of judgment. And a broad tranquility is the successive and cumulative realization of all particular experiences with tranquility. The full experience can only be had by the immortal Pyrrhonist at the end of time. What actual Pyrrhonists admit to doing, on the other hand, is suspending judgment on every issue they examine that has been found determinate by dogmatists. Both this acknowledgment and any corresponding tranquility are unproblematic. They may be broader than single episodes, but they are only partially, representatively, and nondogmatically broad, as they do not extend to any issue that has not yet been examined, nor apply to any that has not specifically been found unclear.

As against all this, a general outlook on truth may be formulated without specific reference to, or direct implications for, particular outcomes for particular issues. The equipollence required for a skeptic to suspend judgment on whether the truth is attainable is not the equipollence of all arguments on every issue. It is

[35] The suspension of judgment is "forced" upon the Pyrrhonist, who finds it "necessary" to suspend judgment (PH 1.61, 1.78, 1.128, 1.129, 1.140, 1.163, 1.170, 1.175, 1.177, 2.95, 2.134, 2.192, 2.258, 3.6, 3.29). Anyone wondering about the strength of this natural reaction to equipollence can rest assured that it can even be "absolutely necessary for us to suspend judgement" (PH 1.177).

the equipollence of specific arguments relevant to that particular question at that level of generality. The critic may certainly disagree on whether there are any such arguments. But this does not mean that none will occur to the skeptic, forced thereupon to suspend judgment on the matter. The skeptic readily admits to doing this (PH 2.18–20, cf. 2.80–84, 2.85–96) while denying moving from this to any inference concerning the equipollence of all arguments on all issues (PH 1.187–209).

If there is any connection between the suspension of judgment on this metatheoretical question and episodic suspensions of judgment on particular questions concerning particular issues, it is that the latter provide *ex post facto* points of reference for the former. Suspending judgment on the metatheoretical question whether the truth can or cannot be discovered is not the same as suspending judgment on specific issues. Nor does it in any way require suspending judgment on specific issues, any one of which could conceivably be decided one way or the other, and each of which must therefore be examined severally to make that determination and, failing that, to suspend judgment due to equipollence. The function of episodic suspensions of judgment is to corroborate the generic suspension of judgment on the metatheoretical question of truth. The function of episodic tranquility is to reinforce the general peace of mind that comes with suspending judgment on whether the truth is attainable.

Each stage of the Pyrrhonian journey can consistently proceed with episodic experiences that do not, either severally or collectively, indicate a transformation of the skeptical outlook into a dogmatic one. And the stages do hang together as an internally consistent process from the first appearance of curious anomalies about the world to the peace of mind that comes from suspending judgment about them.

6. Conclusion

The success of the Pyrrhonian journey depends on what we make of the challenges. What we have made of them so far, through centuries upon millennia of discussion, leaves us at a standstill, so much so that we would be a Pyrrhonist if we were one person. The inspiration for this paper has been the opportunity to make a fresh start at understanding the skeptical process. The closest we can get to the creative and critical origins is to reconsider the rational intuitions liable to inspire anyone either to adopt or to attack the basic principles and main features of the skeptical outlook. The one phenomenon most likely to explain the natural appeal of skepticism along with any natural aversion to it is equipollence. It has a natural attraction because there can be no skeptical outlook without an epistemic balance precluding assent, and it inspires a natural reaction because the

identification of that balance can seem like a judgment coexisting with supposedly suspended judgment. How can the skeptic suspend judgment while making and maintaining a judgment enabling the suspension of judgment?

Beginning with that question, the main concern of the paper has been the problem of skeptical equipollence, examined from two perspectives taken as separate challenges, a conceptual one focusing on the logic and epistemology of the matter and a practical one concerning the psychology. The guiding principle for responding to either challenge has been fairness to both the skeptic and the critic. The strategy adopted toward meeting the challenges has been to consider all tempting responses, whether ultimately successful or somehow problematic, so that we can better understand what might work, and what not, and what accounts for that difference, a strong feel for which would make us better prepared to propose solutions and to evaluate the ones proposed.

The response adopted in connection with the conceptual challenge is that there is no inconsistency, logical or epistemological, in suspending judgment based on equipollence. The suspension of judgment is consistent with the recognition of equipollence, because the latter is neither a judgment nor a belief in the standard sense, at least not of the dogmatic variety, just a report based on an impression. This position is supported by the fourth and last of several different defensive strategies discussed here as intuitively appealing responses that might occur to reasonable persons confronted with the challenge.

The first strategy, arrogant confession, calls for admitting to a dogmatic commitment to equipollence while insisting that the remainder of the epistemic process still constitutes an uncompromised skeptical approach. The second strategy, leveraged equipollence, appeals to the possibility of a future antithesis to overturn a present thesis that currently seems more persuasive than alternatives, with the appeal itself sufficing to restore epistemic balance at present. The third strategy, direct confrontation, claims an exemption from any tension between equipollence and the suspension of judgment by reinterpreting equipollence on the model of self-exempt and self-neutralizing modes of argument readily available in the dialectical arsenal of the Pyrrhonist. The fourth strategy, naïve denial, is a straightforward rejection of the charge that the acknowledgment of equipollence is dogmatic in any way.

A useful strategy must not just meet the challenge but also be acceptable to the Pyrrhonist. Only the last two strategies satisfy both conditions. The arrogant confession approach, whether or not it meets the conceptual challenge, is abhorrent to the Pyrrhonist. Leveraged equipollence might please the Pyrrhonist, but whether it actually works is an open question. The other two strategies satisfy both conditions but with a subtle difference: Although they both establish that

there is no conceptual confusion or self-contradiction in the Pyrrhonian position, the best we can conclude regarding the direct confrontation approach is that it might be acceptable to Pyrrhonists, whereas the naïve denial response is one that Pyrrhonists would themselves offer without prodding or assistance. This we know because Sextus himself is in perpetual denial (PH 1.202–203), so to speak, which provides grounds for confidence that the spirit of the naïve denial strategy best reflects the general picture of Pyrrhonism in Sextus's writings.

The practical challenge is to demonstrate that there is no psychological difficulty undermining what is thus absolved of conceptual problems. The problem, if there is any, would be that the Pyrrhonist suspending judgment on the basis of equipollence cannot help but grant the reality of equipollence. The proper response is an extension of the naïve denial from its conceptual origin to the practical perspective. The response, then, is that the suspension of judgment is based on the impression that the opposing arguments under consideration are equally persuasive, which is not a judgment about the truth of the matter but a confession, one serving as its own explanation, of being unable to decide the truth of the matter. The apparent equipollence is not voluntary and therefore also not dogmatic.

This can still leave a deep disagreement underlying both the conceptual challenge and the practical challenge. The disagreement would be over the accuracy and sincerity of the skeptic's report to experience equipollence as an impression left by theses and arguments examined in the course of an inquiry as opposed to an active inference based on the inspection of those theses and arguments. This would be difficult to settle in favor of either party without their cooperation and, better yet, their concessions through open dialogue. Otherwise, it remains a deadlock of assertions and objections. Nevertheless, we may gain insight into a possible solution by considering whether repeated iterations of the Pyrrhonian journey can and do transform mere recognition or acknowledgment into expectation and belief.

My own inclination is against such a presumption. I see no good reason why the skeptic cannot remain as skeptical on the last iteration as on the first. Although I myself am suspicious of the regularity of equipollence, I do not see anything logically, epistemologically, or psychologically wrong with the explanation that the skeptic feels a responsibility to uncover equipollence wherever it exists, lest we fool ourselves with falsehoods, thinking we have discovered the truth when we have not. This would explain the apparent predilection for equipollence in investigators otherwise supposed to be looking for the truth. What would explain the regularity of the outcome? Evidently nothing. But perhaps nothing about the regularity really requires an explanation.

To demand an explanation here is to ask what it is that accounts for the skeptic's phenomenal rate of success in finding equipollence in every investigation. But the Pyrrhonist could verily reverse the terms of this assessment to reposition success in finding equipollence as failure to discover truth. And the next step, switching from a defensive to offensive strategy, would be to question the dogmatist's remarkably productive pursuit of truth, which is somehow always close at hand. It is hardly more curious, after all, for skeptics to end up with equipollence on so many issues that dogmatists confidently answer one way or the other than it is for dogmatists to have so many answers, mutually inconsistent ones at that, to questions persistently stumping skeptics.

Why does every inquiry end in equipollence? That may be just the way things are. Or maybe not. It is hard to tell from the look of things: "No more this than that" (PH 1.188–191, DL 9.61). Pyrrhonists can safely stick to that answer so long as they do not subscribe to it as the truth. Saddling them with an underlying conviction here is neither fair nor reasonable, especially in the face of their trademark disclaimer: "And we say all this without holding any opinions" (PH 1.24).

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