

Ancient Skepticism: Pyrrhonism

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Abstract

Pyrrhonism was one of the two main ancient skeptical traditions. In this second paper of the three-part series devoted to ancient skepticism, I present and discuss some of the issues on Pyrrhonian skepticism which have been the focus of much attention in the recent literature. The topics to be addressed concern the outlooks of Pyrrho, Aenesidemus, and Sextus Empiricus.

In the first paper of this three-part series on ancient skepticism, I offered a general presentation of the ancient skeptical traditions as well as an overview of recent translations and general studies. With this framework in place, the present paper deals with some vexed questions concerning the stances of Pyrrho, Aenesidemus, and Sextus Empiricus. For reasons of space, the discussion will be selective and it will not always be possible to go into detail about the issues tackled.

1. Pyrrho

Most recent scholarship on Pyrrho of Elis (360–270 BC) continues to divide between two main interpretations of his outlook, which may be called ‘practical’ and ‘theoretical’. The first interpretation affirms that Pyrrho’s motivation was exclusively or mainly ethical.¹ This view finds support in some passages in Diogenes Laertius and particularly in Cicero, who does not refer to Pyrrho as a skeptic, but invariably portrays him as a moralist – as someone who considered virtue as the only good and who was admired for his lifestyle (*Academica* II 130; *On Moral Ends* III 11–2, IV 43, 49, 60; *On Duties* I 6). The second interpretation, by contrast, maintains that Cicero’s portrayal may well be inaccurate and that Pyrrho’s motivation was mainly either metaphysical or epistemological.² This view is based primarily on what is our most important source for his thought, namely, a passage from the *Preparation for the Gospel* (XIV xviii 1–5) of Eusebius, the fourth-century bishop of Caesarea. Eusebius in turn quotes the work *On Philosophy* by the late-first-century Aristotelian Aristocles of Messene.³ This passage ascribes to Pyrrho certain philosophical views in answer to three questions, namely: (i) what are things like by nature? (ii) what disposition should we adopt toward things? and (iii) what will be the outcome for those who adopt that disposition? Given that Aristocles is in general a reliable source and his text summarizes an unidentified work by Timon (possibly the *Pytho*), scholars tend to think that we should accept his account. Now, there has been much exegetical and philological discussion about whether the answer to question (i) should be construed as metaphysical or epistemological. The problem is primarily that the Greek *anepikrita* may mean either ‘indeterminate’ or ‘indeterminable’. On the former interpretation, Pyrrho would be talking about the nature of things by affirming that they are inherently ‘indeterminate’ – a view that of course has implications for our knowledge of

things.⁴ On the epistemological interpretation, by contrast, he would be referring to our cognitive access to things by saying that they are ‘indeterminable’ because we are unable to make any positive determinations about them.⁵ As far as I can see, there is no straightforward way of adjudicating this debate, given the meager and fragmentary state of our evidence on Pyrrho’s outlook. In any case, as interpreters usually recognize, on either interpretation he should be viewed as a Dogmatist from the perspective of the variety of Pyrrhonism found in Sextus Empiricus’ extant corpus. For Pyrrho would be violating suspension of judgment (*epochē*) by making assertions about the nature of things or our cognitive faculties – although the outlook ascribed to him by the epistemological reading is closer to that of the later Pyrrhonists. On the other hand, the fact that Pyrrho was taken as a forerunner or an inspiration by later Pyrrhonists can be explained by the state of tranquility or undisturbedness (*ataraxia*) he seems to have attained (which is the answer to question (iii)) and by his claim that our sensations and opinions are not to be trusted – unless one agrees with Jacques Brunschwig (1994, 1999) that this claim in the Aristocles passage should be ascribed to Timon.⁶

2. Aenesidemus

Aenesidemus of Cnossos was responsible for the revival, in the first century BC, of what he took to be Pyrrhonian skepticism. He was the author, or more likely instead the compiler, of the Ten Modes, which are arguments devised to induce suspension of judgment.⁷ Recent work on Aenesidemus has mainly focused on his so-called Heracliteanism, which is probably the most intriguing enigma for the student of ancient Pyrrhonism. In the chapter of the first book of the *Pyrrhonian Outlines* in which he explains the differences between Pyrrhonism and Heracliteanism, Sextus points out that it is clear that the two philosophies are distinct because Heraclitus ‘makes Dogmatic assertions about many non-evident matters’ (*Pyrrōneioi Hypotypōseis [PH] I 210*), whereas Skeptics do not. Sextus is nonetheless forced to expand on their differences because

Aenesidemus and his followers used to say that the Skeptical way of thought is a road towards the philosophy of Heraclitus, because [the fact] that contraries appear with respect to the same thing leads to [the claim] that contraries are real with respect to the same thing; and Skeptics say that contraries appear with respect to the same thing, while Heracliteans go from this also to [the claim] that they exist [with respect to the same thing]. (*PH I 210*)

The question is obviously how a skeptic like Aenesidemus could have said that Pyrrhonism is a route leading to an utterly Dogmatic philosophy. There are in addition other Sextan texts which ascribe views to Aenesidemus ‘according to Heraclitus’.

The scholars who in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries examined the puzzle in question proposed different solutions: Sextus (or his source) misrepresented Aenesidemus’ outlook; the latter did find a connection between Pyrrhonism and Heracliteanism; there was an initial or final Dogmatic phase in Aenesidemus’ philosophical development; he was merely arguing dialectically against the Stoics’ interpretation of Heraclitus.⁸ In recent years, there has been a strong revival of interest in Aenesidemus’ relation with Heracliteanism, as is shown by the publication of two books and a lengthy essay entirely devoted to unraveling this conundrum. The interpretations proposed in these new studies incorporate certain important elements of some of the aforementioned solutions.

On the basis of an examination of the use of the road metaphor in some texts of the Imperial age, Roberto Polito (2004) argues that Aenesidemus did not advocate Heraclitean doctrines or invoke Heraclitus as a forerunner, but only intended to offer an exegesis

of his philosophy. That is, Aenesidemus considered Skepticism an appropriate interpretive tool for understating Heracliteanism. The doctrines ‘according to Heraclitus’ are instances of such an interpretation. This hypothesis seems to be confirmed by Sextus himself, who construes Aenesidemus’ view in the sense that ‘the Skeptical way of thought helps towards the knowledge of the Heraclitean philosophy’ (*PH* I 211). In Polito’s view, Aenesidemus’ exegetical maneuver was possible because there were skepticizing ideas underlying some of the doctrines he attributed to Heraclitus, thus modifying the latter’s original views and making them partially compatible with Pyrrhonism.

Brigitte Pérez-Jean (2005) proposes an interpretation which differs from Polito’s in certain respects. She maintains that, in order to understand Aenesidemus’ appropriation of Heraclitus, one must look at the picture of this Presocratic painted in Plato’s *Theaetetus*, where the view about the coexistence of opposites is closely linked with the flux doctrine. Unlike Polito, she thinks that the idea of the flux of things should be taken into account in the examination of Aenesidemus’ interpretation of Heracliteanism. She claims as well that Aenesidemus did regard Heraclitus as an ancestor of Pyrrhonism – the point of contact being the emphasis on the conflict among contrary appearances – while at the same time recognizing the Dogmatic elements of Heracliteanism – especially the claim that contraries do hold of one and the same thing. That is, Aenesidemus would have noticed the existence of a road leading from Skepticism to Heracliteanism, but without following it himself simply because that would have meant a dogmatization of Skepticism. Finally, Pérez-Jean accepts much more than Polito the idea that, in offering his interpretation of Heraclitus, Aenesidemus was engaged in a dispute with the Stoics, who also viewed the Presocratic as a forerunner.

Like Pérez-Jean, Malcolm Schofield (2007) claims that Aenesidemus’ interest in Heraclitus is to be explained by his seeing a real similarity between the Pyrrhonian and the Heraclitean philosophies and also by his intending to show the Stoics that such a similarity was much greater than that which they believed to find between their philosophy and Heraclitus’. In his view, Sextus failed to see that the affinity in question is to be found in the fact that Heracliteans felt justified in making use of a typical Pyrrhonian form of inference – namely, ‘If and only if it is a common appearance that p , it is true that p ’ – to move from a report on how x commonly appears to people to a conclusion about how x really is. By pointing to this similarity, however, Aenesidemus was not endorsing Heracliteanism or claiming the two philosophies to be compatible.

It is finally worth noting that, in a discussion of Polito’s and Pérez-Jean’s studies, Mauro Bonazzi (2007) plausibly argues that Aenesidemus may have conceived his interpretation of Heraclitus in opposition not only to that of the Stoics but also to the skeptical Academy’s appropriation of this Presocratic.⁹ This hypothesis, which is alluded to by Pérez-Jean but which she does not pursue, fits in well with the general debate between Pyrrhonists and Academics during the Imperial period, a debate which we know included the heated quarrel about the skepticism of Plato.¹⁰

3. *Sextus Empiricus*

Until a few decades ago, most scholars of ancient philosophy used to approach Sextus’ substantial surviving works solely as a key source of information about the doctrines of thinkers and schools from the Presocratics to the Hellenistic age. Sextan Pyrrhonism was not deemed to deserve close analysis in its own right simply because it was regarded as a patently absurd or far-fetched form of skepticism. By contrast, nowadays even those who think that Sextus’ skepticism is in the final analysis incoherent or unlivable recognize its

philosophical import and subtlety, at least to the extent of deserving careful consideration and refutation. Sextan Pyrrhonism is at present of great importance also to scholars of early modern philosophy, since it is widely acknowledged – particularly thanks to Richard Popkin's various editions of his *History of Scepticism*¹¹ – that the Renaissance rediscovery of Sextus' extant writings played an important part in the formation of early modern thought. There has in addition been considerable interest in Sextus among contemporary epistemologists, who have focused attention on the so-called Five Modes of Agrippa,¹² recognizing the seriousness of the challenge posed by what they call 'Agrippa's trilemma' and proposing different ways to cope with it.¹³

In Sextus' extant corpus, several Pyrrhonian voices can be heard which speak sometimes slightly, sometimes markedly, different languages.¹⁴ This might lead us to think that he was not a real author but limited himself to reproducing what he found in his sources with no awareness of the inconsistency between the skeptical outlooks they expounded. However, nowadays scholars tend to agree that Sextus was neither a mere copyist nor a (completely) unintelligent author. For he often arranges the material he takes from both his Pyrrhonian and non-Pyrrhonian sources in order to fulfill a specific purpose, writes with a characteristic style and a distinctive terminology, and explicitly expresses on occasion his own outlook on the issues he is addressing and points out his disagreement with the views of others.¹⁵

The issue of the different types of skepticism detectable in Sextus' writings is intimately related to that of the scope of Pyrrhonian suspension of judgment, which is probably the thorniest exegetical question regarding Sextan Pyrrhonism. The reason is that some texts suggest that suspension of judgment is restricted to theoretical beliefs, while others indicate that it targets everyday or commonsense beliefs as well. This *prima facie* conflicting evidence explains the fierce and long-standing controversy among scholars about whether Pyrrhonism is a radical or moderate form of skepticism, i.e., whether or not all of the Pyrrhonist's appearance statements are 'non-epistemic', 'non-doxastic', or 'non-judgmental'. The general terms of the controversy were set more than two decades ago in a debate among Myles Burnyeat (for the radical interpretation), Michael Frede (for the moderate interpretation), and Jonathan Barnes (for a qualified version of the radical interpretation). Since then specialists have taken sides, trying to provide further and stronger arguments for the two conflicting views.¹⁶

The extent of Pyrrhonian suspension of judgment is closely related to the most complex philosophical question concerning Pyrrhonism (and ancient skepticism in general), namely, whether the Pyrrhonist can live his skepticism. Since antiquity a charge has been leveled against the Pyrrhonist according to which he is reduced to inactivity because action requires belief – the so-called *apraxia* objection (see *Adversus Dogmaticos* [AD] V 162–3).¹⁷ Now, if the Pyrrhonist adopts a mitigated form of skepticism, then the charge seems misguided since he may well argue that action does not require endorsement of theoretical beliefs. But if he advocates an extreme skepticism, then he must explain how action is possible in the absence of all beliefs or else recognize that he is inconsistent and holds some beliefs after all.¹⁸

To treat these heavily debated issues in detail would require a paper of its own. Let me merely point out that, in my view, the Sextan texts as a whole support the radical or non-epistemic interpretation of Pyrrhonism. For instance, it seems plain that the modes of suspension of judgment attack beliefs which are commonly held not only by scientists and philosophers but also by ordinary people, e.g., that honey is sweet and that incest is wrong. Regarding the second example, Sextus' discussion of the ethical part of philosophy (in both *PH* III and *AD* V) clearly shows that ordinary people are strongly

committed to the moral beliefs which the Pyrrhonist wants to rid himself of. The texts which suggest that Sextan Pyrrhonism is a moderate form of skepticism may be read as expounding views accepted only provisionally and for the sake of argument. As for the inactivity charge, I think that the Skeptic's criterion of action, which consists in following the various ways things appear to him, is complex enough for the conduct of life, since it includes the way things perceptually and intellectually appear to him (*PH* I 21–4). In this respect, it should be noted that, although the Pyrrhonist is not committed to the norms of rationality, there is a practical use of reason on his part which allows him to make decisions in his daily life.¹⁹

More recently, the question of the coexistence of distinct brands of skepticism in the Sextan corpus has been discussed anew thanks especially to the work of Richard Bett. He has claimed that, in the fifth book of *AD* entitled *Against the Ethicists*, it is possible to trace a type of skepticism which corresponds to an earlier, Aenesideman phase of the history of Pyrrhonism. This form of skepticism is at variance with the skeptical outlook expounded in *PH* and in the other four surviving books of *AD*, the main difference being that, whereas *AD* V defends a form of suspension of judgment which is compatible with both negative and relativized assertions, in the other aforementioned writings suspension of judgment is incompatible with any kind of assertion (Bett 1994, 1997, 2000). Lately, Bett has also argued that Sextus' use in the six books of the *Adversus Mathematicos* (*AM*) of negative arguments against the usefulness and the existence of the liberal arts (*mathēmata*) cannot be entirely explained by the Pyrrhonian practice of opposing positive and negative arguments which balance each other out.²⁰ Rather, those arguments derive from a source expounding the same version of Pyrrhonism as the source for the arguments against the existence of anything good, bad, or indifferent by nature found in *AD* V (Bett 2006a). Bett's interpretation of *AD* V faces a serious problem insofar as it forces us to accept that, without issuing any caveat, in *AD* Sextus uses the key notion of *epochē* in incompatible senses as well as that the state of mental undisturbedness (*ataraxia*) can be reached in different ways: in the logical and physical parts of philosophy (discussed in *AD* I–IV) *ataraxia* is attained by adopting a kind of *epochē* which is incompatible with all types of assertions, while in the ethical part *ataraxia* is attained by adopting a kind of *epochē* which is compatible with certain types of assertions. In addition, his interpretation entails that the Pyrrhonist of *AD* V endorses a type of ethical realism, but Sextus makes it clear that none of the Pyrrhonist's utterances are assertions about matters of objective fact (see *AD* V 18–20).²¹

Victor Brochard (2002) once distinguished between the 'dialectical' skepticism of Aenesidemus, which is merely destructive, and the 'empirical' skepticism of the physicians Menodotus²² and Sextus, which includes both a destructive and a constructive part. The former part is the attack against Dogmatism, whereas the latter part consists in the construction, in replacement of Dogmatic philosophy, of an art or science based exclusively on observation (*tērēsis*). Brochard's interpretation is problematic mainly because he takes this empirical skepticism to be a forerunner of nineteenth-century positivism. In any case, a similar interpretation of the *pars construens* of Sextus' Pyrrhonism has recently been defended by Emidio Spinelli particularly on the basis of his analysis of book 5 of *AM*, which is devoted to the attack against astrology.²³ In his view, Sextus accepts, much in line with contemporary empiricism, the legitimacy of those arts or *technai* which are based on a constant and repetitive observation and on general empirical regularities, as is the case of medicine, agriculture, navigation, and astronomy. These disciplines solely depend on the observation of phenomena and allow us to make predictions (see *AM* V 2, 104). This outlook fits in well with that of the ancient Empirical doctors – who emphasize the

role of observation and memory – and seems to be in consonance with the Skeptical criterion of action.²⁴ Sextus tells us that this criterion is ‘that which appears’ (*to phainomenon*) and that there are four factors which shape the way things appear to us. One of these factors is the ‘teaching of skills’ (*didaskalia technōn*), which is that ‘whereby we are not inactive in the skills which we acquire’ (*PH I 24*). If Spinelli were right, then at least in *AM* Sextus would advocate a moderate type of Pyrrhonism.

Spinelli’s interpretation invites some comments. First, although Sextus does refer to the practice of *technai*, this is not enough to support the view that the Pyrrhonist thinks there are certain *technai* which have a secure foundation in experience and observation, nor the claim that the construction of those *technai* is underlain by a tacit faith in the regularity of nature on the part of the Pyrrhonist – a claim repeatedly made by Spinelli.²⁵ By the teaching of skills Sextus merely refers to a know-how which the Pyrrhonist has in fact acquired and which in fact influences how things appear to him. Second, if there had been such an affinity between Pyrrhonism and Empiricism, it is not unreasonable to suppose that Sextus would have said so in the chapter of *PH* which examines whether they are the same (*PH I 236–41*) – unless one assumes that there was a change of perspective from *PH* to *AM*,²⁶ which is usually considered the last of Sextus’ surviving works. Finally, I think we cannot completely rule out the possibility that, in emphasizing the usefulness and the observational basis of certain *technai* in contrast to others, Sextus is simply arguing dialectically, his sole purpose being to attack more theoretically based *technai*. It is a characteristic trait of the Pyrrhonist’s chameleonic and parasitic argumentative practice to accept position P_1 in context C_1 as a premise in an argument attacking position P_2 , even though in context C_2 position P_1 is attacked by an argument using as a premise position P_3 .

Another topic of philosophical import which has received considerable attention in the past few years is the nature and purpose of the Pyrrhonist’s investigation (*zētēsis*) as described in Sextus. This issue is of central importance for understanding the origin and aim of Pyrrhonism as well as its status as a kind of philosophy. At the very beginning of *PH*, Sextus distinguishes between three types of philosophy according to the attitude adopted toward the object of a philosophical investigation: the Dogmatic, the Academic, and the Skeptical. Whereas the Dogmatists in the proper sense of the term affirm that they have discovered the truth and Carneades, Clitomachus, and other Academics claim that it cannot be apprehended, the Skeptics continue to investigate (*PH I 1–4*). Elsewhere, Sextus remarks that the Skeptics can consistently go on investigating because they agree that they ignore how things are in their nature and the purpose of their investigation is precisely to discover the answer they have not found, whereas for the Dogmatists, who claim to know the nature of things, the investigation has come to an end (*PH II 11*, cf. *AD II 321*).²⁷ In this connection, it must be noted that the Greek *skeptikos* means ‘inquirer’ and *skepsis* ‘inquiry’. In fact, Sextus tells us that the Skeptical philosophy is ‘called ‘investigative’ because of its activity concerning investigation and inquiry, and ‘suspensive’ because of the affection that comes about in the inquirer after the investigation’ (*PH I 7*). The first point that can be made on the basis of these passages is that characterizing the Skeptical investigation as endless, infinite, or lifelong and the Skeptic as a perpetual inquirer, as scholars often do,²⁸ is highly problematic; for it implies that the Skeptic believes that the quest for truth is forever doomed to failure,²⁹ and hence that in the end his outlook does not differ from the one Sextus ascribes to certain Academics.

The Pyrrhonist’s ongoing investigation seems to pose three problems which show that truth-directed inquiry and Skepticism are incompatible or that there is a gap between the

theory and practice of Skepticism,³⁰ and hence that Sextus is wrong in claiming that the Pyrrhonist continues to search for truth³¹ or that Skepticism is a kind of philosophy.³²

With regard to the first problem, it could be argued that the Skeptic is not able to continue the quest for truth once he has suspended judgment universally, since the activity of investigation presupposes both belief or confidence that there is a truth and hope that one will find it.³³ Now, it is plain that someone who believes that *x* exists and can be found searches for it more fervently than someone who suspends judgment about both its existence and its knowability. But the latter person may undertake such a quest because he is curious, enjoys the very activity of investigation, and is intellectually open-minded – i.e., he cannot exclude the possibility that he will eventually find the truth on the matter or realize that it is unfindable or discover that it does not even exist. Searching for truth would be senseless only to those who deny that there is a truth or that it can be known.

Concerning the second problem, from what is said at *PH* I 7 it seems that the labels ‘investigative’ and ‘suspensive’ are incompatible insofar as the state of *epochē* is attained *after* the investigation is over (cf. *DL* IX 70), and given that Pyrrhonism is defined by universal *epochē*, it is incompatible with the continuation of the investigation.³⁴ I think this problem is merely apparent because the Pyrrhonist’s inquiry should be understood as ongoing in the sense that he is prepared to open-mindedly consider new arguments and doctrines advanced by his rivals or old ones which are presented to him in a different light. After each and every inquiry he has so far undertaken, the Pyrrhonist has suspended judgment, but this should not be understood as something that happens once and for all. This open-mindedness is in perfect agreement with Sextus’ frequent remarks to the effect (i) that the disagreements he has considered have so far remained unresolved (*PH* III 70, *AD* II 257, 427–8, V 229), (ii) that up to now a criterion of truth has not been found (*PH* III 70) and that he is still investigating it (*PH* II 53), (iii) that when he says that everything appears undetermined or inapprehensible he is only referring to the matters he has investigated (*PH* I 198–200) and does not discount the possibility that some things may be apprehended (*PH* I 226), and (iv) that for the moment he refrains from affirming or denying any of the non-evident matters under investigation (*PH* I 201).

As for the third problem, Sextus tells us that the Sceptics started to do philosophy because they were disturbed by the anomalies they found in things and thought they would be able to rid themselves of such disturbance if they could determine which things are true and which are false. But when they could not make such a distinction and then suspended judgment, they unexpectedly achieved mental tranquility (*PH* I 12, 25–6, 29).³⁵ Now, what is the point of continuing the investigation once the Pyrrhonist has attained what he was looking for from the very beginning?³⁶ Moreover, the search for truth seems to have been conceived *only* as a means to becoming undisturbed, so after reaching his goal the Pyrrhonist is no longer interested in philosophical inquiries.³⁷ That question is more pressing if, as has been claimed, the disturbance experienced by the proto-Pyrrhonist was the product, not so much of the conflict among rival positions, but of the desire to find the truth.³⁸ To solve this problem, it has been argued that the object of the proto-Pyrrhonist’s investigation is different from that of the full-fledged Pyrrhonist’s investigation. The reason is that the latter is a second-order inquiry which consists, not in the search for truth, but in the examination of Dogmatic theories and arguments in order to construct conflicts between positions of equal force, because the state of equipollence (*isostheneia*) is supposed to lead to suspension of judgment and undisturbedness in matters of opinion. With the continuation of the investigation the Pyrrhonist seeks to maintain this state of mental tranquility which has been his goal from the outset of his philosophical journey.³⁹

This solution faces two problems. First, the beginning of *PH* does not say that Pyrrhonism differs from the other two kinds of philosophy in that the Pyrrhonist has stopped investigating the truth, but in that he is still investigating. The passage makes it clear that the champions of the three kinds of philosophy share the same object of investigation but differ in their attitudes toward it. Second, reading the passage in question along with the texts which describe the Pyrrhonist's philosophical journey shows, in my view, that what the full-fledged Pyrrhonist is still investigating are the matters he undertook to investigate at the beginning of that journey. Hence, the proto-Pyrrhonist and the full-fledged Pyrrhonist are in fact searching for the same thing, which allows us to make sense of the very idea of the *continuation* of the investigation.⁴⁰

It may be that even after the Pyrrhonist attains the state of *ataraxia* he continues to inquire into truth as something which is independent of that goal and which he might in fact find pleasurable.⁴¹ This is why I agree with Casey Perin (2006) when he claims that 'the Pyrrhonist has an interest in the truth that is independent of her pursuit of tranquility' (344). As he notes, Sextus' remark that the proto-Pyrrhonist looks for truth in order to attain tranquility neither amounts to nor entails the claim that the proto-Pyrrhonist looks for truth *only* as a means of attaining that state of mind. I think this view finds support not only in *PH* II 11 but also in *AM* I 6, where Sextus tells us that Pyrrhonists approached both philosophy and the liberal arts with the desire to learn the truth but suspended judgment when confronted with a conflict among equipollent positions. Sextus makes no reference in this passage to the search for and the attainment of undisturbedness. I think one may legitimately infer from this that the Pyrrhonist began to philosophize because he was also interested in the discovery of truth for its own sake.⁴²

Let me finally note that there is an at least apparent inconsistency in Sextus regarding the source of mental disturbance: whereas some texts state that this disturbance is induced by the anomalies one finds in things, other texts declare that it is the result of the holding of value beliefs.⁴³ I now think that the way to relate these two seemingly different sources of disturbance consists in interpreting that the proto-Skeptic is distressed because he believes that the existence of unresolved conflicts is something bad by nature, the reason being his regarding the discovery of truth as something objectively valuable.⁴⁴ Perin's (2006, 351) claim that the reason the Pyrrhonist was disturbed by unresolved conflicts is to be found in his interest in the discovery of truth for its own sake faces the problem that, after the Pyrrhonist becomes undisturbed, he is still interested in searching for truth. The only difference is precisely that he no longer holds the belief that discovering truth is inherently valuable, but merely finds, as a matter of fact, that investigation is a pleasurable activity – perhaps on account of his natural capability of thinking (*PH* I 24) and the influence of the cultural and philosophical milieu in which he was raised.

As already noted, Pyrrhonian skepticism as expounded particularly in Sextus' extant corpus played an important role in shaping early modern thought and it continues to exert a significant influence on current epistemological discussions. One finds, however, serious misunderstandings about the nature of this form of skepticism among historians of early modern philosophy and contemporary epistemologists. This is why careful study of the Sextan texts is necessary not only for those interested in ancient Pyrrhonism in its own right.

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Notes

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¹ Ausland (1989), Brunschwig (1994, 1999), and Hankinson (1998).

² Bett (2006b) and Long (2006), as well as the works listed in notes 4 and 5.

³ There is a recent edition, by Maria L. Chiesara (2001), of the extant fragments of Aristocles' works which includes all the texts on both Pyrrho and Aenesidemus.

⁴ Decleva Caizzi (1981), Ferrari (1981), Reale (1981), Sakezles (1993), Bett (2000), Chiesara (2001), Bailey (2002), and Clayman (2009).

⁵ Stough (1969), Barnes (1983), Brennan (1998), Svavarsson (2004, 2010), and, with caution, Lesses (2002) and Thorsrud (2009).

⁶ On Timon's outlook, see Di Marco (1989), Brunschwig (1999: 249–51), Bett (2002), Long (2006), and Clayman (2009). Di Marco (1989) offers an edition and Italian translation of the extant fragments from Timon's *Silloi*. Clayman (2009), whose approach is not philosophical but literary, provides an English translation of these fragments as well as of the extant fragments from the *Indalmoi* and the evidence relating to the *Pytho*.

⁷ The Aenesidemian Modes are expounded by Sextus (*PH* I 36–16), Diogenes (DL IX 78–88), and Philo of Alexandria (*On Drunkenness* 169–205). On these arguments, see especially Annas and Barnes (1985); also Striker (1996b), Gaukroger (1995), Hankinson (1998, ch. 9), Spinelli (2005b), and Woodruff (2010).

⁸ For a clear and useful taxonomy of these various solutions and their supporters, see especially Pérez-Jean (2005, ch. 1); also Polito (2004: 2–7).

⁹ It should be observed that Heraclitus is not mentioned in either of Cicero's two lists of the Academics' predecessors (*Acad.* I 44 and II 72–6), but only in a passage from the *Against Colotes* (1121f–1122a), in which Plutarch reports that Arcesilaus was accused by some of his contemporaries of ascribing his own views on suspension of judgment and inapprehensibility to Socrates, Plato, Parmenides, and Heraclitus. Cf. Lévy (2001: 307–9).

¹⁰ On this quarrel, see especially Bonazzi (2003a,b).

¹¹ See Popkin (1960, 1979, 2003).

¹² The Agrippan modes constitute another set of arguments by means of which suspension of judgment is supposed to be induced. These modes are disagreement, relativity, infinite regress, hypothesis, and reciprocity. They are expounded by Sextus (*PH* I 164–77) and Diogenes (DL IX 88–9). On these modes, see especially Barnes (1990b), also Hankinson (1998, ch. 10).

¹³ See, e.g., Fogelin (1994), Sosa (1997), Williams (2004), Klein (2008), and Lammenranta (2008).

¹⁴ For an overview of the distinct varieties of Skepticism detectable in Sextus' extant works, see Machuca (2008, section III).

¹⁵ On the issue of Sextus' originality and his reliance on earlier sources, see Brochard (2002: 335–40), Barnes (1988: 57 with n. 11; 2000: xv–xvi, xix), Spinelli (2000b: 35–6, 44–6; 2008a: 481, 487–8), Lévy (2001: 326), Svavarsson (2001), Bett (2005: xix–xx), Machuca (2008a: 39–40, 57), and Ioppolo (2009: 25–7).

¹⁶ For the original debate among Burnyeat, Frede, and Barnes, see the five papers collected in Burnyeat and Frede (1997). On the scope of Pyrrhonian *epochē*, see also Glidden (1983), Stough (1984), Barnes (1990a, 2007), Barney (1992), Brennan (1999), Fine (2000), Bailey (2002, chs. 7–9, 11), Thorsrud (2009, ch. 9), and Perin (2010).

¹⁷ On the *apraxia* objection, see Vogt (2010).

¹⁸ For the view that Sextan Pyrrhonism is neither consistent nor livable, see especially Burnyeat (1997); *contra* Johnsen (2001), Laursen (2004), and Corti (2009). The question of the consistency of Pyrrhonism is related to the question of whether the Pyrrhonist's outlook is self-refuting and whether Sextus himself accepts the charge of self-refutation. On this, see McPherran (1987), Bailey (1990; 2002, ch. 10), and especially Castagnoli (2000; 2010, ch. 3).

¹⁹ On the Pyrrhonist's lack of commitment to the canons of rationality and his practical use of reason, see Machuca (2009a: 119–20; forthcoming). For a contrary view, see Perin (2006).

²⁰ In *AM* one can detect at least three tensions: (i) although Sextus puts forth arguments that undermine all forms of teaching and learning and all *mathēmata* alike, at times he indicates that his assault is directed only against certain kinds of *mathēmata* or a certain way of conceiving them; (ii) although he considers the arguments purporting to establish the uselessness of the *mathēmata* to be Dogmatic and different from the Pyrrhonist's, at times he seems to appropriate them; and (iii) although he is supposed to suspend judgment on the *mathēmata*, some arguments, which he seems to adopt in *propria persona*, conclude that the *mathēmata* do not exist. For discussion of these tensions, see Cortassa (1981), Barnes (1988), Desbordes (1990), Sluiter (2000), Pellegrin (2002: 10–27; 2006), Machuca (2004; 2008b: 55–7; 2009b), Bett (2006a), and Spinelli (2008a, 2010).

²¹ For discussion of Bett's interpretation of *AD V*, see Annas (1999), Svavarsson (2004), and especially Machuca (2006: 119–23; 2008a). Strangely, Bett (2010) refers neither to the view about the two senses of the notion of *epochē* (which is key to his whole interpretation of *AD V*) nor, therefore, to the serious problems to which this view gives rise and which have been pointed out in some of the aforementioned studies.

²² Menodotus of Nicomedia was a Pyrrhonist and an Empirical doctor who flourished in the first part of the second century AD. He figures in Diogenes' listing of Pyrrhonian philosophers as the teacher of Herodotus, Sextus' teacher (DL IX 116). On Menodotus, see Perilli (2001, 2004).

²³ See Spinelli (2000a, 2005d, 2008a,b, 2010).

²⁴ Cf. Dye and Vitrac (2009: 161, 163).

²⁵ See Spinelli (2000a: 50; 2005d: 102; 2008a: 495; 2008b: 36; 2010: 260).

²⁶ See Janáček (1972: 87, 132–4), Dumont (1985: 164 n. 26), and Desbordes (1990: 170).

²⁷ *Pace* Palmer (2000: 368–9), it is plain both that at *PH II 11* Sextus is describing the goal of the Skeptic's own inquiry and not merely arguing *ad hominem*, and that that goal is to determine whether there is a truth about the matter being investigated. Cf. Perin (2006: 353 n. 22).

²⁸ See Cavini (1981: 540), Sedley (1983: 22), Annas and Barnes (1985: 1), Tarrant (1985: 26), Hankinson (1998: 14, 29, 300), Harte and Lane (1999: 158, 171), Barnes (2000: xxi; 2007: 327–8), Spinelli (2000b: 49; 2005a: 117; 2005c: 150), and Grgić (2006: 142–3, 156). Cf. Striker (2001: 114), Cooper (2004: 85 n. 7, 95, 97, 102), and Marchand (2010: 135).

²⁹ The claim that the Pyrrhonist rules out the possibility of eventually discovering the truth is made by Tarrant (1985: 26), Brunschwig (1995: 322 n. 1 (but see 339 n. 1)), and Palmer (2000: 355).

³⁰ See Janáček (1972: 28), Barnes (1990b: 11), and Marchand (2010: 129). Cf. Mates (1996: 240).

³¹ See Barnes (2000: xxx). This is also the view of Gisela Striker (2001), who argues in addition that the portrayal of the skeptic as someone who does not give up the quest for truth fits the Academic skeptics much more adequately than it fits the Pyrrhonists. John Palmer (2000), too, maintains that the Academic skeptic, not the Pyrrhonist, can be characterized as an inquirer into truth, although he does not think that Sextus claims to be looking for truth.

³² See Barnes (2007: 329). Cf. Striker (2001: 121–4) and Grgić (2006: 153).

³³ See Aubenque (1985: 101) and Marchand (2010: 126).

³⁴ See Janáček (1972: 28–9) and Barnes (2007: 327).

³⁵ The issue of the Pyrrhonist's search for and attainment of *ataraxia* in matters of opinion has been much discussed in the past few years: see Ribeiro (2002), Thorsrud (2003), Moller (2004), Grgić (2006), and Machuca (2006). For previous discussions, see McPherran (1989), Striker (1996a), and Nussbaum (1994).

³⁶ See Perin (2006: 338, 349) and Barnes (2007: 328–9). Cf. Hankinson (1998: 29).

³⁷ See Striker (2001: 117–8).

³⁸ See Barnes (2007: 329).

³⁹ See Palmer (2000: 355, 367–9), Striker (2001: 118), Grgić (2006: 143, 153, 156), Thorsrud (2009: 131, 135–6, 161), Bett (2010: 188–9), and Marchand (2010: 134–9). Cf. Hankinson (1998: 29, 300).

⁴⁰ Cf. Brennan (1999, 86).

⁴¹ See Machuca (2006: 136–7); cf. Brennan (1999: 93, 106).

⁴² On the basis of this and other passages, I have elsewhere argued, in contrast to the common view of interpreters, that the search for and the attainment of *ataraxia* should not be considered essential to Pyrrhonism. See Machuca (2006).

⁴³ See Machuca (2006: 115); cf. Grgić (2006: 148) and Perin (2006: 352).

⁴⁴ Cf. Brennan (1999: 92–3, 99).

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