

MODERATE ETHICAL REALISM
IN SEXTUS' *AGAINST THE ETHICISTS*?

Diego E. Machuca

Several scholars familiar with Sextus Empiricus' Pyrrhonism who have attentively read his *Against the Ethicists* have gotten the impression that something strange is going on in this book.¹ For, at variance with the 'official' Pyrrhonian attitude of universal suspension of judgment, a number of passages of *AM XI* seem to ascribe to the Pyrrhonist both a type of negative dogmatism and a form of realism, which together amount to what may be called 'moderate ethical realism.' The purpose of this paper is to determine whether Sextus does embrace such a position in *AM XI*.²

I will begin by examining Sextus' treatment of the ethical part of philosophy not only in *AM XI* but also in the ethical section of the third book of the *Outlines of Pyrrhonism (PH)*. This will allow us to identify the type of ethical realism Sextus seems to espouse in *AM XI*. I will then present the views of the scholars who have examined the skepticism defended in this book, focusing on Richard Bett's interpretation because it is the most original, thorough, and controversial. Next, I will show that the tension between negative dogmatism and agnostic skepticism in *AM XI* is much stronger than Bett claims, and will discuss some problematic implications of his interpretation. I will then argue at length that

¹ Although *Against the Ethicists* is the fifth and last extant book of what we call *Adversus Dogmaticos (AD)*, scholars commonly refer to it as *Adversus Mathematicos (AM) XI*. The reason *AD I-V* started to be designated as *AM VII-XI* is that, in our manuscripts, it is attached to the six books of *AM*. To maintain consistency with the other papers of the volume, I will adopt the conventional designation *AM VII-XI*. Finally, let us note that the real title of *AD* was probably *Pyrrhonian* or *Skeptical Commentaries* (Πυρρώνεια/Σκεπτικὰ Ὑπομνήματα) (see Machuca 2008, 33–34).

² When talking about the 'Pyrrhonist' or 'Skeptic' (with a capital 'S'), I will be specifically referring to the Pyrrhonist as depicted in Sextus' surviving writings. I will not be concerned with the outlooks of earlier Pyrrhonists. Following Sextus, I use 'Dogmatist' to refer to anyone who makes positive or negative assertions about how things really are on the basis of what he considers to be evidence and rational arguments.

there is no real reason for affirming that Sextus embraces in that book a form of ethical realism. Finally, I will sum up the main points of my interpretation of the skepticism of *AM XI*.

I

What the Dogmatists call the “ethical” part of philosophy deals with the distinction among good, bad, and indifferent things (*PH III* 168, *AM XI* 2). These are not to be understood solely in the sense of what is deemed to be good, bad, or indifferent from a moral standpoint, but more generally in the sense of what is the object of a value judgment. This is why Sextus discusses, e.g., the disagreement about whether life and death are good or bad (*PH III* 229–232). In keeping with the definition of Skepticism found at *PH I* 8, Sextus sets out oppositions among ethical positions in order to see whether any one of them appears more persuasive or credible than the others. In the Sextan texts, we find three kinds of unresolved disagreements: (i) about the definitions of the good, the bad, and the indifferent (*PH III* 169–178, *AM XI* 22–41), (ii) about what things are to be called good, bad, or indifferent (*PH III* 179–234, *AM XI* 42–109; see also *PH I* 148–162), and (iii) about the existence of anything good, bad, or indifferent. Although Sextus does not explicitly mention disagreement (iii), the parties to disagreements (i) and (ii) believe that there exist things which are good, bad, or indifferent, whereas he expounds arguments that deny that anything is good, bad, or indifferent.³ Now, we should not assume that Sextus himself endorses these negative arguments, for his purpose is rather to advance negative arguments in order to counterbalance the positive arguments put forward by his dogmatic rivals, thereby inducing suspension of judgment. This is the picture we get from the ethical section of *PH III*, since although Sextus expounds several arguments against there being anything good, bad, or indifferent by nature (*PH III* 179–197), he makes it clear that he is merely reporting arguments which he does not endorse. Indeed, after presenting the disagreement about the definitions of the good, the bad, and the indifferent, and before expounding the negative arguments, he observes:

³ It should be noted that Sextus does not always include the indifferent in his discussion.

It is plain, therefore, that they [*sc.* the Dogmatists] did not put us on to the notion of each of the aforementioned things. But they have not experienced anything unlikely, since they err in things which are perhaps nonexistent (*ἐν ἀνυποστάτοις τάχα πράγμασι*). For that nothing is good, bad, or indifferent by nature some (*τινές*) conclude as follows.⁴

(*PH* III 178)

The first point to note is that Sextus ascribes the negative arguments he is about to lay out to some anonymous people. Most of the time he employs the pronoun *τινές* (as he also does with *ἔνιοι*) to refer to people who do not seem to be Skeptics.⁵ In some of the passages in which he makes use of *τινές*, this pronoun refers to individuals who put forward arguments leading to negative conclusions regarding the matters under consideration, and it seems clear that these people cannot be Pyrrhonists. The reason is that, in the course of his discussion of some of those matters and others, Sextus sometimes explicitly warns us that the Pyrrhonists subscribe to neither side of the dispute and suspend judgment.⁶ On the other hand, even if in some of the passages in question the individuals referred to by *τινές* are indeed Pyrrhonists, Sextus' warnings indicate that the arguments they put forward are dialectical and, hence, that the Pyrrhonists are not committed to their conclusions.⁷ Or, at the very least, they indicate that, unlike some of his fellow Pyrrhonists, Sextus himself makes a merely dialectical use of those negative arguments.⁸ Be that

⁴ Translations from the Greek are my own, but I have consulted Annas and Barnes (2000), Bett (1997, 2005), Bury (1933–1949), Mates (1996), and Spinelli (1995).

⁵ E.g., *PH* I 13, 188, 215, 220, 236, II 214, III 16, 38, 39, 72, 75, 102, 106, 115, 116, 140, 183, 192, 218; *AM* VII 38, 424, VIII 32, 137, 157, 171, 258, 281, 317, IX 105, 170, XI 7, 30. Two clear exceptions are *PH* I 180 and 204. A couple of times (*PH* I 30, 189) Sextus uses the expression *τινές τῶν σκεπτικῶν* to talk about the Skeptics (cf. Ioppolo 1994, 91).

⁶ E.g., *PH* III 11, 81, 82, 135, 139–140; *AM* VIII 298, IX 137, 191–192.

⁷ I use 'dialectical argument' to designate any argument used by the Pyrrhonist merely for polemical purposes, i.e., not because he endorses it, but only because it allows him to shake the Dogmatists' confidence in the correctness of their positions. An *ad hominem* argument is a type of dialectical argument, namely, an argument whose premises are accepted only by the Dogmatists against whom the Pyrrhonist is arguing, so that the unwelcome conclusions that follow from those premises impose themselves only upon the Dogmatists. But a dialectical argument may also refer either to an argument of a dogmatic school used by the Pyrrhonist to oppose an argument of another dogmatic school, or to an argument constructed by the Pyrrhonist himself with the sole aim of opposing an argument advanced by a given Dogmatist. In neither case is the Dogmatist addressed by the argument compelled to accept its conclusion, but the Pyrrhonist's sole purpose is to set out an opposition between arguments in order to show their apparent equal force or equipollence (*ἰσοσθένεια*).

⁸ Fernanda Declava Caizzi (1992, 297 n. 43) claims that, in passages such as *AM*

as it may, in the present case, it is plain that he does not endorse the conclusions of the negative arguments he is about to expound since he uses the adverb *τάχα*, which expresses the Pyrrhonist's suspension of judgment (see *PH I* 194–195). Sextus thus makes it clear that he suspends judgment about whether there exists anything good, bad, or indifferent by nature. The same suspensive attitude is clearly expressed in another key passage of *PH III*:

The Skeptic, then, seeing such anomaly among things, suspends judgment about whether anything is by nature good or bad or, in general, to be done or not to be done, here too abstaining from dogmatic rashness; and he follows without opinions (*ἀδοξάστως*) the observance of everyday life.

(*PH III* 235)

Besides explicitly saying that the Pyrrhonist suspends his judgment about whether anything is by nature good or bad, Sextus talks about the observance of everyday life. This refers to the various ways things appear to the Skeptic, *τὸ φαινόμενον* being his criterion of action (*PH I* 21–24). The use of the term *ἀδοξάστως* precisely indicates that the Skeptic refrains from making assertions about what things are really like, contenting himself instead with reporting how they appear to him.⁹ Similarly, Sextus concludes his exposition of the Tenth Mode of Aenesidemus, which especially bears on ethics, by observing that we must suspend judgment about the nature of things, limiting ourselves instead to saying how they appear (*PH I* 163).

At *AM XI* 69–98, we find four arguments that purport to show that nothing is by nature good or bad, which with some differences parallel those found in *PH III*. But in *AM XI* Sextus does not make a remark similar to the one made at *PH III* 178. Rather, at *AM XI* 68 he seems to ascribe to the Sceptics the arguments expounded at *AM XI* 69–98 when he says that “it will next be necessary to apply oneself to the things said by the Sceptics about the matter under discussion.” Also, at *AM XI* 110 Sextus observes: “We have, then, sufficiently inquired into nothing being good or bad by nature,” which could be interpreted in the sense that he has proven the nonexistence of anything good or bad

VIII 32 and 171, *τινές* refers to Sceptics who adopted a particular position within the Sceptical school. She also mentions *PH III* 183, but nothing in this passage indicates that *τινές* could possibly refer to Sceptics.

⁹ For the term *ἀδοξάστως*, see also *PH I* 231, 240; II 102, 246, 254, 258; III 2, 151. For the sense of this word, see Barnes (1990), n. 113 and Fine (2000), n. 65.

by nature. It is important to bear in mind, however, that the fact that a Skeptic expounds negative arguments in his investigation is not by itself problematic. For, in order to attain a state of equipollence, he may use both negative arguments propounded by Dogmatists and negative arguments which he himself has thought of in order to counter positive dogmatic arguments. In several passages in his extant corpus, Sextus explicitly cautions us that, when he puts forward arguments yielding negative conclusions, his intention is not to induce us to give our assent to them. Rather, his intention is to show that such arguments appear to be equal in force to their rivals, so we will have to suspend judgment about the truth of the theses that those conflicting arguments purport to establish.¹⁰ The fact that some of those passages belong to the other four extant books of *Adversus Dogmaticos* in principle licenses us to apply the same caveat to *AM XI*.¹¹ If so, we can argue that, given the predominance among philosophers and non-philosophers alike of the belief that things are by nature good or bad, Sextus only needs to focus on advancing arguments to the effect that nothing is by nature good or bad in order to counterbalance that belief and induce the Dogmatists to suspend judgment.¹² This kind of procedure is explicitly described by Sextus at *AM VII* 443 as that followed by the Pyrrhonist.

It is also possible that at least some of the negative arguments found in *AM XI* are *ad hominem*. The first of these arguments (*AM XI* 69–78), which is the main argument to the effect that nothing is by nature good or bad, uses as one of its premises the following principle: if x is by nature F , then x must be F for, or in relation to, everyone and not merely for, or in relation to, some people:

If, then, there exists anything by nature good and if there exists anything by nature bad, this ought to be common to everyone and be good or bad for everyone (κοινὸν εἶναι πάντων καὶ πᾶσιν ὑπάρχειν ἀγαθὸν ἢ κακόν). For just as fire, being by nature warming, warms everyone but does not warm some and chills others, and in the same way as snow which chills by

¹⁰ See *PH II* 79, 103; *AM VII* 443–444, *VIII* 159–160, 476–477. Cf. *PH II* 130, 133, 192, *III* 81, 82, 135, 139–140; *AM VIII* 298, 327–328, *IX* 206–207.

¹¹ For the hypothesis that the five books of *Adversus Dogmaticos* are the extant parts of a larger work, see Janáček (1963); also Blomqvist (1974) and Machuca (2008a), 31–35.

¹² Cf. McPherran (1989), 324 n. 75, and (1990), 132, 134–135; Hankinson (1994), 66, and (1998), 271. Cf. also Spinelli (1995), 240–241, who nonetheless elsewhere (297, 311) seems to think that Sextus does deny ethical realism.

nature does not chill some but warms others, but chills all alike, so too what is by nature good ought to be good for everyone and not good for some but not good for others. (...) So that if there exists anything by nature good, this is good in relation to everyone (πρὸς ἅπαντας), and if there exists anything by nature bad, this is bad in relation to everyone. But nothing good or bad is common to everyone, as we will establish; therefore, there exists nothing by nature good or bad. (AM XI 69, 71)

With variants, the absolutist principle in question (hereafter Π) is also found in the argument at AM XI 96–98 and in most of the negative arguments expounded in PH III: if x is by nature F , everyone would regard x as F , or everyone would be equally disposed towards x , or x would move everyone in the same way, i.e., would have the same effect on everyone (see also AM I 147).¹³ Now, it is probable that this principle, which plays an important part in the ancient Pyrrhonian argumentation,¹⁴ is used because it is endorsed by the Sceptic's dogmatic rivals.¹⁵ Indeed, we find versions of Π in, e.g., Aristotle (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1134b18–1135a6), in Polystratus (*On Irrational Contempt* 23, 26–25, 15), and in Galen (*On the Doctrines of Hippocrates and Plato* 9.1.11, 9.7.5); and Diogenes Laertius ascribes a similar idea to the Stoics (DL VII 103). It may be argued, however, that at the end of the quoted passage Sextus says that the fact that nothing good or bad is common to all is something that he himself will establish (παρ᾽αυτῆσομεν). But this is not really problematic, since many times he does express himself this way

¹³ For the purpose of the present paper, the differences and relations among these variants are not important. For some discussion of this, see Svavarsson (2004), 253–255.

¹⁴ Scholars have referred to this principle when discussing the skeptical outlooks of Pyrrho, Aenesidemus, and Sextus: Striker in her essay on the Ten Modes (1996b, 121, 125–126, 128–129); Woodruff in his study of Aenesidemus' Pyrrhonism (1988, 150–153) and in his discussion of the Ten Modes (2010, 216–219); Hankinson in his analysis of Sextus' attack on the notion of causality (1988, 243) and on the ethical part of philosophy (1994, 62–63; 1998, 268–270), as well as in his exposition of the Ten Modes (1998, 159) and of Aenesidemus' skepticism (1998, 129); Svavarsson (2004, 250–258) in his analysis of Pyrrho's thought; Polito (2004, 75–87) and Schofield (2007, 305–313) in their studies of Aenesidemus' so-called Heracliteanism.

¹⁵ Cf. McPherran (1990), 133–134; Svavarsson (2002), 253 n. 27, (2004), 249, 252, 257, 268, 286, (2010), 55, 57 n. 42. Cf. also Decleva Caizzi (1996), 43–44, who nonetheless, focusing her analysis on the claim that “fire warms by nature” (AM XI 69, AM I 147), prefers to interpret the notion of φύσις so as to make it compatible with the Skeptical stance. In her view, that notion merely refers to a phenomenological uniformity (1996, 47–52). It is however plain that, when Sextus talks about x being F φύσει, he is referring to what x is really like and not merely to the way it appears.

when arguing dialectically.¹⁶ Moreover, in three other passages from *AM XI* (188, 210, and 239), he uses the same verb and the argumentation also seems to be dialectical.

In addition, there are two passages from *AM XI* itself that make it clear that principle Π is held by at least some Dogmatists. The first is found at *AM XI* 64–67, where Sextus reports the third-century BC Stoic Aristo of Chios' rejection of the Stoic doctrine which draws a distinction within the class of the indifferent things. According to Aristo, it is not the case that

some of the [indifferent things] are preferred and some dispreferred by nature, but [only] in virtue of the different circumstances of the [various] occasions, [so that] neither do so-called preferred things turn out to be at all times ($\pi\acute{\alpha}\nu\tau\omega\varsigma$) preferred, nor are so-called dispreferred things necessarily dispreferred. (*AM XI* 65)

Hence, “in the things between virtue and vice there is no natural precedence of some over the others, but rather [a precedence] according to the circumstances” (*AM XI* 67). Sextus thus ascribes principle Π to a Dogmatist who uses it to attack a given doctrine. It is worth noting that the same argument against the Stoic doctrine of the indifferents is ascribed to $\tau\upsilon\nu\acute{\epsilon}\varsigma$ at *PH III* 192, which may be taken as partial confirmation that the anonymous people who in *PH III* endorse principle Π are non-Skeptics.

As for the second passage, after observing that what is by nature good or bad is common to all and using the warming action of fire to illustrate this point, Sextus remarks that Plato argued from similar cases in trying to establish that god is by nature good (*AM XI* 70; cf. *Republic* I 335d, II 379b). Here again Sextus explicitly attributes the absolutist principle Π to a Dogmatist.

It is finally worth noting that Sextus employs principle Π in the course of his exposition of one of the arguments directed against the existence of a cause at *AM IX* 237–245. He points out that, if a cause by nature produces an effect by itself and by its own power, it must produce it always and not only sometimes, since it possesses its own nature continuously (*AM IX* 238). In the case of fire, given that it burns some things and not others, “it does not burn by itself and using its own nature” (*AM IX* 242, cf. *AM VIII* 198–199). In this passage, Π is formulated in terms of causality: if an object possesses by nature a property that produces a

¹⁶ See, e.g., *PH* II 21, III 85, 158, 266; *AM* VII 78, 263, 364, VIII 17, 37, 391, IX 210, 227, 232, 246, 252, 309, 345, 376, X 189; *AM* I 10, 19, II 10, 26, 110, III 30, 44, VI 59, 61.

given effect, then it must produce the same effect always, independently of the circumstances. At *AM XI* 69 and at *PH III* 179 and 182, the principle is formulated in very similar terms. In general, in the arguments that use Π , the notion of φύσις takes on a causal sense.¹⁷ Now, it is clear that in the passage of *AM IX* under consideration Sextus is arguing dialectically, and for two reasons. First, at *AM IX* 195 he points out that “among those who inquired about [the general conception of cause], some declared that a cause of something exists, some that it does not exist, and some that it is no more existent than nonexistent.” The third outlook is the one adopted by the Skeptics. Second, after expounding at *AM IX* 196–206 the arguments in favor of the existence of a cause, Sextus observes that he will consider “the arguments of the Aporetics, for these will appear both equipollent to those expounded [by the Dogmatists] and not differing from them as regards persuasion (πειθοῦς)” (*AM IX* 207). These two points make it clear that Sextus’ intention is not to prove the nonexistence of causes, but to show that the arguments pro and contra their existence appear equipollent or equally persuasive. Therefore, the negative argument expounded at *AM IX* 237–245 is used by Sextus with the sole aim of counterbalancing the widespread belief in the existence of causes. This proves that the absolutist principle Π used at *AM IX* 238 and 242 is not endorsed by Sextus. Now, if in the third book of *Adversus Dogmaticos* he does not adhere to Π , but only uses it because it permits him to construct a negative argument to counter an argument in favor of the existence of a cause, then one can reasonably infer that neither does he adhere to Π in the fifth book of the same work. If this is so, then Sextus does not embrace the conclusion of the negative ethical arguments which make use of that principle.

In sum, it seems that the Skeptic’s use of principle Π , and hence of the arguments based upon it, should be considered *ad hominem* or dialectical in general. That is to say, Sextus seems to use that principle either because it is accepted by at least some of his dogmatic rivals or, when this is not the case, because it allows him to construct negative arguments which appear as persuasive as the positive arguments he is examining, thereby attaining a state of equipollence.

There are, however, passages from *AM XI* in which Sextus seems to adopt *in propria persona* the view that nothing is by nature good or bad.

¹⁷ See Hankinson (1988), 243, (1994), 62, and (1998), 269. Cf. Svavarsson (2004), 253, 264.

The first passage to be considered is found at *AM XI* 114, where Sextus presents three alternatives: either everything anyone deems to be good or bad is such by nature, or only a certain one of the things deemed good is good and a certain one of the things deemed bad is bad, or these things depend on their

being somehow in relation to something (ἐν τῷ πρὸς τί πως ἔχειν), and in relation to this person this thing is to be chosen or to be avoided, but in relation to the nature of things it is neither to be chosen nor to be avoided, but at one time to be chosen and at another to be avoided.

In talking about what is to be chosen or avoided, Sextus refers to what is to be regarded as good or bad. Now, we appear to obtain confirmation of the Skeptic's adoption of the third view from the fact that, after referring to the first two, Sextus points out that the third view is the one which leads to undisturbedness (ἀταραξία) and happiness (εὐδαιμονία), which are the states the Skeptic purports to have attained:

If someone were to say that nothing is by nature more to be chosen than to be avoided, or more to be avoided than to be chosen (since each thing which occurs is somehow in relation to something and, according to differing times and circumstances, turns out (καθεστῶτος) at one time to be chosen and at another to be avoided), he will live happily and undisturbedly. (...) This will be at his disposal from his holding the opinion that nothing is by nature good or bad (τοῦτο μὴν αὐτῷ παρέσται ἐκ τοῦ μηδὲν φύσει ἀγαθὸν ἢ κακὸν δοξάζειν). Hence, it is not possible to live happily if one supposes that some things are by nature good or bad.
(*AM XI* 118)

According to this passage, the Skeptic seems to hold three opinions which are at variance with a thoroughgoing ἐποχή: (i) nothing is by nature (i.e., invariably) good or bad (cf. *AM XI* 130, 140, 185), (ii) something can be deemed to be good or bad only in relation to certain variables, i.e., relative to particular moments and circumstances, and (iii) the attainment of ἀταραξία and εὐδαιμονία is possible thanks to the holding of (i) and (ii) (cf. *AM XI* 130, 140). If the Skeptic of *AM XI* does hold opinions (i) and (ii), then he embraces a type of ethical realism which rejects ethical absolutism but accepts that objects, actions, or states may be objectively good or bad depending on the context or the circumstances. That is to say, the form of realism in question rejects the absolutist view according to which that which is good or bad is such always, without exception, or regardless of the circumstances. But it accepts the weaker view according to which something can be deemed to be objectively good or bad only in relation to a particular context or situation. For

instance, in a given circumstance, only one action is really right or wrong and anyone reasoning correctly and with all the relevant information would judge, regardless of his society or culture, that the action is such. I call this view, sometimes referred to as ‘situational’ ethics, ‘moderate ethical realism.’ Now, if in *AM XI* Sextus does adopt such a metaethical position, then in that book he cannot be considered a ‘skeptic’ either in the official Pyrrhonian sense—because he does not suspend judgment about the truth of ethical absolutism and moderate ethical realism—or in the usual modern sense—because he does not endorse ethical anti-realism, i.e., does not deny the existence of objective moral properties or facts.¹⁸

Before concluding this presentation of the position Sextus seems to adopt in *AM XI*, it is worth noting that there is another possible translation of the penultimate sentence of *AM XI* 118. Emidio Spinelli translates it with the sense that the Skeptic will have a happy and undisturbed life because of not holding the opinion that anything is by nature good or bad.¹⁹ This translation has of course the advantage that the sentence may be read in the sense that the Skeptic suspends judgment about anything’s being good or bad by nature. However, it may also be read in the sense that the Skeptic denies that anything is good or bad by nature. For the proposition “S does not hold the opinion that x is by nature F ” is compatible with both “S suspends judgment about whether x is by nature F ” and “S denies that x is by nature F .” For instance, the reason for my saying “I do not hold the opinion that abortion is by nature bad” may be either my ignorance about whether it is by nature bad or my belief that it is not by nature bad. Now, the second reading of the sentence in question is compatible with my translation and is to be preferred because it is in agreement with the claim made in the first sentence of the quoted passage to the effect that nothing is by nature (i.e., invariably) more to be chosen than to be avoided and vice versa, which seems to be a clear denial of ethical absolutism. In addition, there are other passages in which Sextus seems to assert *in propria persona* that nothing is by nature good or bad

¹⁸ Ethical anti-realism is the position typically embraced by contemporary ethical skeptics. Varieties of this position are John Mackie’s moral error theory (Mackie 1977), Ian Hinckfuss’ moral nihilism (Hinckfuss 1987), Richard Joyce’s and Mark Kalderon’s versions of moral fictionalism (Joyce 2001, Kalderon 2005), John Burgess’ ‘anethicism’ (Burgess 2010), and Richard Garner’s moral abolitionism (Garner 2010).

¹⁹ “Ciò è in suo potere in virtù del fatto che non opina esser qualcosa per natura bene o male” (1995, 75). Cf. Hankinson (1994), 56–57 and Bett (1997), 137.

(*AM XI* 130, 140), that good and bad things do not exist (*AM XI* 185), and that it is the belief that nothing is by nature good or bad which makes it possible to attain undisturbedness and happiness (*AM XI* 140).

II

The specialists who have noticed the problems posed by *AM XI* have basically adopted either of two views. Some have maintained that, in the end, it is possible to reconcile the type of skepticism expounded in *AM XI* with the Pyrrhonism defended in *PH*.²⁰ Others, by contrast, have argued that the skeptical stance of *AM XI* is problematic because it is incompatible with the official Pyrrhonian attitude expounded in *PH*.²¹ Richard Bett has rejected both interpretations because the skepticism of *AM XI* does differ from that defended in *PH*, but there is no reason why it should not. He maintains that *AM XI* preserves a version of skepticism which predates the version found in *PH* and is consistent in its own terms. More precisely, Bett claims that *AM XI* is composed of two parts deriving from distinct sources corresponding to different phases of the Pyrrhonian tradition: part A comprises paragraphs 1–167 and part B paragraphs 168–257 (Bett 1997, xii–xiii). It is part A which differs from what we find in most of Sextus' extant corpus and which corresponds to the variety of skepticism which our sources ascribe to Aenesidemus.²² This is why *AM XI* is, more than any other Sextan book, "a relic of a phase in the history of Pyrrhonism far earlier than Sextus himself" (Bett 1997, xxxii).

²⁰ McPherran (1990), Annas (1993, 1998), Hankinson (1994), Nussbaum (1994), Laursen (2004), and Svavarsson (2004). Spinelli (1995) does not find any problems with the skepticism of *AM XI*.

²¹ Annas and Barnes (1985) and Striker (1996b, 1996c).

²² Bett contends that the skepticism found particularly in part A is in agreement with the skeptical stance found in two other ancient sources, namely, the summary of Aenesidemus' *Pyrrhonian Discourses* provided by Photius in his *Library* (169b18–170b35) and Diogenes' account of Pyrrhonism (Bett 1997, xix–xxii, 258–259; 2005, xxi–xxii). Although Woodruff (1988) proposes a reading very similar to Bett's, he does not mention any correspondence between Photius' summary and *AM XI* (see Bett 1994, 159 n. 58; 1997, xx n. 33). However, the relationship between the ethical skepticism of *AM XI* and Aenesidemus' skeptical outlook had already been suggested by Annas and Barnes (1985, 164). Cf. also Spinelli (1995), 210–211, 273. I should note that, in the present paper, I am not concerned with Aenesidemus' own form of skepticism or with its connection with the skepticism of *AM XI*.

According to Bett, the key difference between part A of *AM XI* and the ethical section of *PH III* consists in that, in the former, from (i) the mere disagreement about the good and the bad, and (ii) the requirement that for something to be by nature good or bad, it must be good or bad for everyone or in all circumstances, it is concluded that (iii) nothing is by nature good or bad, and that (iv) what is one or the other is always relative to people or circumstances. On the basis of the passages I have examined in the previous section, Bett affirms that the Skeptic of *AM XI* accepts conclusions (iii) and (iv) (1997, xiv). He calls requirement (ii) (which corresponds to our principle Π) the “Universality Requirement” or “Invariability Condition”, and explains it as follows:

[A]n object is by nature *F* only if it is *F invariably* or *without qualification*. Thus an object which is *F* only sometimes, or for some people, is *thereby not* by nature *F*.²³ (2000, 196; cf. 1997, xiv)

Given this condition, the propositions that affirm that something is good or bad relative to certain persons or circumstances cannot be deemed to be assertions about the nature of things (1997, xiv). Bett also holds that, in *AM XI*, Sextus uses as synonyms the expressions $\varphi\acute{\upsilon}\sigma\epsilon\iota$, $\tau\alpha\acute{\iota}\varsigma$ $\acute{\alpha}\lambda\eta\theta\epsilon\acute{\iota}\alpha\iota\varsigma$, $\acute{\omicron}\nu\tau\omega\varsigma$, and $\tau\acute{\omega}$ $\acute{\omicron}\nu\tau\iota$,²⁴ so that

in order for something to qualify as *in reality* good or bad ... it must be good or bad intrinsically (and hence, again, invariably). Thus the relativized assertions mentioned above not only fall outside the category of assertions about the nature of things; they also fall outside the category of assertions about how things really are.

(1997, xv; cf. 1994, 142–143, 145–146)

Concerning the relationship between parts A and B, Bett infers that they derive from different sources on the basis of several facts, among which are: (i) the issues addressed in the two parts have little in common; (ii) there are no cross-references between them, with the only exception of *AM XI* 185, which could in any case be deemed a later addition by Sextus; (iii) the two parts are connected clumsily; and (iv) the two parts employ different types of arguments (1997, xii–xiii). For instance, part B employs

²³ Roberto Polito thinks that Aenesidemus adheres to what Bett calls the “Universality Requirement” or “Invariability Condition” (see Polito 2004, 81–82, 86–88, 175). Polito even speaks of the “universality requirement” (76, 175) and the “requirements of agreement and invariability” (85, 88), but surprisingly makes no reference to Bett. Svavarsson (2004, 284–285), by contrast, claims that Aenesidemus’ use of principle Π is dialectical.

²⁴ Cf. Svavarsson (2004), 251 n. 3.

arguments which correspond to some of the so-called Five Modes of Agrippa: at *AM XI* 173–177, 229 and 230, we find arguments that present the disagreements as unresolvable, and at *AM XI* 183 Sextus says that, regarding the notion of *καταληπτική φαντασία*, the Stoics fall into the reciprocal mode (even though he does not use this technical expression). It is therefore plausible that the source for part B belongs to a later phase of the Pyrrhonian tradition (1997, xxiii).²⁵

Bett also supports his interpretation of the skepticism of *AM XI* with an analysis of the terminology employed in its two parts, A and B. First, the notion of *ἰσοσθένεια* is absent and the expression *ἀνεπίκριτος διαφωνία* only occurs in part B (*AM XI* 229 and 230). Second, the expressions *μη μᾶλλον* and *οὐ μᾶλλον* used at *AM XI* 118 and 147, respectively, do not express suspension of judgment but relativity: *x* is no more *F* than *G* because it is each one of them in specific circumstances. Third, Bett claims that one of the facts which support the view that *AM VII–XI* in general is earlier than *PH* is that the former gives a stronger impression of negative dogmatism than the latter.²⁶ For instance, the use in *AM VII–XI* of the verb *ἀναιρεῖν* (do away with) to refer to the Skeptic's attitude towards the existence of certain things has no parallel in *PH*, but is found in several passages in Diogenes (DL IX 90, 94, 96–101) and is in agreement with Aenesidemus' type of skepticism (1997, xxix; 2005, xxii, xxiv). Bett recognizes, however, that in several passages of *AM VII–X* Sextus points out that the arguments he has put forward lead to suspension of judgment, so it is reasonable to suppose that, in *AM VII–X*, he expounds negative arguments in order to counterbalance the positive arguments advanced by the Dogmatists (1997, xxix). This is why Bett thinks that the adaptation of arguments of an Aenesideman origin to a later variety of Pyrrhonism would have been conducted more ineptly in *AM VII–X* than in *PH* (1997, xxx; cf. 2005, xxiii–xxiv). This said, it should be noted that he maintains that *PH III* contains elements of the earlier brand of skepticism which Sextus does not successfully

²⁵ It is worth noting that Bett (2006) argues that Sextus' use in *AM* of negative arguments against the usefulness and the existence of the *μαθήματα* or liberal arts cannot be entirely accounted for by the Pyrrhonian practice of opposing positive and negative arguments in order to induce suspension of judgment. Rather, those arguments derive from a skeptical source which defends the same version of Pyrrhonism as the source for the negative arguments expounded in *AM XI*.

²⁶ Bett claims that *PH III* is the revised and improved version of *AM XI* (Bett 1997, xi, xxiv–xxviii, 257–271, 274–276), and reaches the same conclusion regarding the relationship between *PH II* and *AM VII–VIII* (Bett 2005, xxiv–xxx).

integrate to his own Pyrrhonian outlook. This is the reason why that book shows confusion and inconsistency (1994, 124–125, 154–156; 1997, 258–259).²⁷

III

Nowadays, students of Sextus are well aware of the fact that, in his extant corpus, different varieties of skepticism seem to coexist.²⁸ As Jonathan Barnes rightly observes, “A subtle reader can always, or almost always, explain away the anomalies which appear on the surface of most texts; but there is such a vice as oversubtlety, and it is a vice to which clever scholars are by temperament inclined” (2000, xv). Bearing this in mind, I still think it possible to *partially* mitigate the dogmatic look of *AM XI* without succumbing to such a vice or to an excessive use of the principle of charity.

I will begin my discussion by quoting a passage from what Bett calls part A of *AM XI*, in which Sextus seems to adopt an outlook similar to the one he defends in *PH*. Having mentioned the Dogmatists’ affirmation that believing in the existence of something that is by nature good or bad makes it possible to attain happiness (*AM XI* 110), Sextus tells us:

The Skeptics (οἱ ἀπὸ τῆς σκέψεως), neither affirming nor denying anything in vain (μηδὲν εἰκῆ τιθέντες ἢ ἀναιροῦντες), [but] subjecting all things to inquiry (τὴν σκέψιν), teach that for those who suppose something good or bad by nature there follows an unhappy life, whereas for those who make no determinations (ἀοριστοῦσι) and suspend judgment (ἐπέχουσι) “the easiest life is for humans” [*Odyssey* IV 565].

(*AM XI* 111)

We find here some key terms that Sextus usually employs when explaining the distinctive features of Pyrrhonism: the noun *σκέψις* and the verbs *ἐπέχειν*, *ἀοριστεῖν*, *τιθέναι*, and *ἀναιροεῖν*. At first glance, the very use of this terminology seems to indicate that the Pyrrhonism of *AM XI* does not differ from that of *PH*. However, the situation is more complex and requires a detailed analysis of the passage, beginning with the term *σκέψις*.

²⁷ For Bett’s interpretation of the peculiar form of skepticism of *AM XI*, see, besides Bett (1997), Bett (1994), (2000), ch. 4, (2005), xx–xxiv, (2006), 29–31, 33–34, and (2010b).

²⁸ For a presentation of the distinct forms of skepticism detectable in the Sextan corpus, see Machuca (2008a), sect. 3.

At *PH* I 8, σκέψις is defined as an ability to set out oppositions among things which appear and things which are thought of, one of whose results is suspension of judgment. Hence, ἐποχή is intimately bound up with σκέψις. The same connection is found in the quoted passage, since οἱ ἀπὸ τῆς σκέψεως are those who, unlike the Dogmatists, inquire into everything and suspend judgment. One may therefore conclude that, at *AM* XI 111, Sextus is referring to those who possess the same ability explained at *PH* I 8. Note, in this respect, that at *AM* XI 152 the Sceptics are referred to with the expression οἱ ἐφεκτικοί, i.e., “those who suspend judgment.” Note also that in *AM* XI Sextus speaks of suspension of judgment about all things (*AM* XI 168), and refers to the Sceptic as the person who suspends judgment about everything (*AM* XI 144, 150) or about all matters concerning opinion (*AM* XI 160),²⁹ which would in principle invalidate any ascription of negative metaethical claims to the Sceptic himself. And this is so even though, as Bett claims (2010b, 184), there is no mention of suspension of judgment specifically in relation to the existence of anything good or bad by nature. At *AM* XI 140, however, Sextus says that the teaching that nothing is by nature good or bad is one peculiar to Scepticism, a claim that is at variance with a thoroughgoing ἐποχή. In addition, we saw that in some passages of *AM* XI he remarks that the states of ἀταραξία and εὐδαιμονία are attained thanks to the belief that nothing is by nature good or bad. But at *AM* XI 111 it is the adoption of ἐποχή which makes it possible for the Sceptic to lead the easiest life. In general, in *AM* XI there is a tension between the way in which the Sceptic is supposed to attain those two states. Besides *AM* XI 111, in other passages we are told that only those who suspend judgment about everything are able to live undisturbed and happy (*AM* XI 144, 160, cf. 150 and 168).

In sum, *AM* XI presents two interrelated tensions. First, the Pyrrhonist suspends judgment about all things, but he also seems to hold the belief that nothing is by nature good or bad. Second, the attainment of ἀταραξία and εὐδαιμονία is said to be possible either through total suspension of judgment or through holding that negative belief. Bett is fully aware of this problem and, in order to avoid ascribing to Sextus a serious confusion, he claims that in *AM* XI the notion of ἐποχή has a weaker sense than in *PH*:

²⁹ Τὸν περὶ πάντων ἐπέχοντα (144), ὁ περὶ πάντων ἐπέχων (150), τὴν περὶ πάντων ἐποχήν (168), οἱ περὶ πάντων ἐπέχων τῶν κατὰ δόξαν (160).

The sceptic of *M XI* suspends judgement in the sense that he neither issues nor commits himself to any assertions claiming to specify the nature of things. The denial that anything is by nature good or bad does not violate suspension of judgement in this sense (to deny that X is by nature good is not to assert that X is by nature *other than* good); nor do the assertions of relativized claims about good and bad (because, given the Universality Requirement, relativized claims are not claims about the nature of things). (1997, xviii; cf. 1994, 141–142; 2005, xxiii)

Thus, neither the negative arguments expounded in the third chapter of *AM XI* nor the relativized assertions found at *AM XI* 114 and 118 are incompatible with ἐποχή περὶ πάντων (Bett 1997, 138–139). Similarly, principle Π does not violate this type of suspension because meta-level claims “about necessary conditions for a thing’s being good are not themselves statements to the effect that some particular object or set of objects is by nature good, or by nature of any other character” (1997, xviii n. 29). Therefore, when at *AM XI* 111 Sextus says that the Sceptic makes no determinations and suspends judgment, what he is saying is that the Sceptic refrains from specifying the nature of things, which is incompatible neither with the denial of the existence of anything good or bad by nature nor with the affirmation that something is good or bad in relation to particular circumstances (Bett 1997, 141–142).

Now, even if one granted that the notion of ἐποχή presents such a difference in sense between *AM XI* and *PH*, Bett’s interpretation still faces a serious difficulty, namely, that in the other four extant books of *Adversus Dogmaticos* there are quite a few passages in which ἐποχή consists in refraining from affirming or denying the existence of the object under investigation.³⁰ Bett takes this difficulty into account and offers two possible explanations (1997, xxx–xxx). According to the first, the sources used to compose *AM VII–X* are different from those used to compose (part A of) *AM XI*, and one may suppose that the former sources started to adapt the Aenesideman type of skepticism to the later variety of Pyrrhonism, whereas the latter sources did not. Although this possibility cannot be ruled out, Bett thinks it “attributes to Sextus a depressingly low level of autonomy over, or comprehension of, what he was doing in this work” (1997, xxx). And although something similar happens with the two parts that make up *AM XI*, Bett argues that in this

³⁰ E.g., *AM VII* 380; *VIII* 118–119, 258, 298, 363, 380, 428, 477; *IX* 191, 194; *X* 6, 69, 168.

case the divergences are few. He therefore tentatively suggests a second explanation according to which the difference between *AM VII–X* and *AM XI* is to be accounted for by the fact that the situation the Skeptic finds in the fields of logic and physics is distinct from the situation he faces in the field of ethics:

the difference is due to the fact that, according to Sextus at this time (perhaps according to his immediate source or sources as well), certain questions about good and bad admit of far more definite answers than any questions in the areas of logic and physics. In the case of good and bad, therefore, the negative conclusions, stemming probably from Aenesidemus, do not need to be modified; in the case of other parts of philosophy, they do.

(1997, xxxi; cf. Bett 1994, 161 n. 63, and 2000, 231 n. 87)

Let me first note that nothing of what is said at *AM XI* 111 indicates that the sense of the verb ἐπέχειν is different from the sense that ἐποχή and ἐπέχω have at *PH I* 10 and 196, respectively, or that the sense of the verb ἀοριστεῖν is different from the sense that the proposition πάντα ἔστιν ἀόριστα has at *PH I* 198–199. Now, in these passages from *PH*, suspension of judgment and indeterminacy make reference to the Skeptic's attitude of refraining from making any positive or negative assertion about non-evident things. It is also important to note that, in order to refer to the actions of affirming and denying, at *PH I* 10 and 198 Sextus employs the verbs τιθέναι and αἴρειν, while at *PH I* 196 he utilizes τιθέναι and ἀναιρεῖν. So on this point too the terminology employed is the same as that found at *AM XI* 111, and nothing said in this passage indicates that the verbs in question are used differently from the way they are used in *PH I*.³¹ In sum, in both *AM XI* and *PH I* Sextus says that the Skeptic suspends judgment and refrains from making determinations, which means to refrain from accepting or abolishing anything. Note that this comparison between the two works is not illegitimate because, far from presupposing that the perspective of *AM XI* is similar to that of *PH*, it discovers a similarity between them. It is also worth remarking that at *AM VIII* 298 the verbs ἐπέχειν and ἀοριστεῖν are used in the typically Skeptical sense explained in *PH*. Sextus points out that, because

³¹ It is plain that in the passages of *PH I* in question Sextus uses the verbs ἀναιρεῖν and αἴρειν as synonyms. In *AM VII–X* he also utilizes the verb αἴρειν in contexts in which he might have well employed ἀναιρεῖν: see *AM VII* 437, *VIII* 150, 398, *IX* 317, 318, 392, *X* 44.

of the equipollence of the arguments pro and contra the existence of the sign, one must suspend judgment and make no determinations about the question under investigation, i.e., one must neither say that the sign exists nor that it does not exist, but say only that it is no more existent than nonexistent. Now, bearing in mind the strong similarities between certain passages of part A of *AM XI* and other passages from the Sextan corpus, if in *AM XI* the statements about the nonexistence of anything good or bad by nature are assertions to which the Skeptic assents, then it is necessary to conclude that there are incompatible standpoints not only between part A of *AM XI* and other Sextan texts, but also within part A. The only way of avoiding this conclusion is to accept Bett's hypothesis that, in *AM XI*, the notions of suspension and indeterminacy have a *sui generis* sense. But besides having no textual support, this hypothesis has implications which are, as we will see in a moment, highly problematic.

A final remark regarding *AM XI* 111 concerns Sextus' claim that the Skeptic neither affirms nor denies anything εἰκῆ, which may mean 'at random' or 'casually'.³² In Bett's view, this "leaves open the possibility that some carefully considered affirmations and denials may be permitted" (1997, 131). If this is so, my interpretation of the passage in question faces a problem. However, the adverb εἰκῆ may also mean 'in vain' (which is the translation I chose), in which case one could interpret Sextus as saying that any affirmation or denial the Skeptic could make would be pointless because it would not be express a belief about how things are or are not.

Another important point regarding the type of skepticism defended in *AM XI* concerns the expressions μὴ μᾶλλον and οὐ μᾶλλον, which are used at *AM XI* 118 and 147, respectively. Bett claims that in these two passages those expressions do not convey ignorance about whether *x* is *F* or *G*, but indicate that *x* is neither *F* nor *G* (Bett 1997, 140, 164). This indeed seems to be the sense of "not more" at *AM XI* 118, a passage cited in Section I. The situation, however, seems to be different in the case of *AM XI* 147:

He who ranks wealth neither among the things by nature good nor among the things by nature bad, but utters the expression "not more," is neither disturbed at its absence nor full of joy at its presence, but in either case remains undisturbed.

³² This is how Spinelli (1995) and Bett (1997) translate the adverb.

Nothing said here forces us to assume that the person in question believes that wealth is by nature neither good nor bad, since the reason he refrains from ranking it among the things which are by nature good or bad may be that he suspends judgment about the nature of wealth. In any case, the sense of μή μᾶλλον at *AM* XI 118 does seem incompatible with the way in which Sextus employs these expressions in *AM* VIII–X, where οὐ μᾶλλον (*AM* VIII 298, IX 59, X 45) and μή μᾶλλον (*AM* VIII 328, IX 50, 195, X 49) convey the Skeptic's agnostic outlook that neither affirms nor denies the existence of *x* (sign, demonstration, gods, cause, motion). In these passages, then, such phrases express the same suspensive attitude as in *PH* (see *PH* I 188–191; cf. *PH* I 213 and *AM* I 315). The problem, of course, arises because at *AM* XI 118 Sextus seems to be speaking *in propria persona*. Now, this difference in the sense of “not more” can be taken as nothing more than an inconsistency which is the product of Sextus' failure to integrate a piece of dogmatism into his Pyrrhonian outlook. We do not need to go so far as to say that the difference in question is the result of his perceiving a dissimilarity between the areas of logic and physics, on the one hand, and the area of ethics, on the other.

Bett's account of the differences between the skepticism expounded in *AM* VII–X and the skepticism which, in his view, Sextus adopts in part A of *AM* XI poses a serious problem.³³ For it requires us to accept that, in the same work, Sextus used key terms and expressions in incompatible senses without any warning to the reader. This is particularly problematic in the case of the term ἐποχή. If this word does possess the two senses Bett suggests, could Sextus have not perceived their incompatibility and could he have not bothered to offer an explanation of the ambiguity of the term? To avoid ascribing such an implausible oversight to Sextus, one could hypothesize that, in the lost part of *Adversus Dogmaticos*, he cautioned the reader that he would use that word in two different senses. Besides invoking a text we do not possess (which is methodologically improper), this hypothesis is highly problematic for another reason. Given that the lost part of the work provided a general treatment of the Pyrrhonian philosophy in which its defining traits were explained, such a treatment must have been consistent both with the skeptical outlook expounded in *AM* VII–X and with that expounded in *AM* XI. Now, we

³³ The following considerations partially draw on Machuca (2008b).

know from *AM XI* 144 that, in the portion of the work which is no longer extant, there was a chapter on the τέλος of Skepticism in which it was claimed that ἀταραξία is attained by suspending judgment about everything. Acceptance of the supposition that Sextus distinguished between two senses of the notion of ἐποχή would commit one to assuming that, in that lost chapter, he indicated that ἀταραξία is reached in two different ways corresponding to two distinct forms of ἐποχή: in the logical and physical parts of philosophy, ἀταραξία is attained by adopting a kind of ἐποχή which, insofar as it is universal, is incompatible with all types of assertions, whereas in the ethical part ἀταραξία is attained by adopting a kind of ἐποχή which, although being universal, is compatible with both negative and relativized assertions. In addition, from *AM VII* 345 one may reasonably infer that, in the lost portion of the work, Sextus expounded the Ten Modes of Aenesidemus,³⁴ which are arguments designed to induce ἐποχή. Once again, acceptance of the aforementioned supposition would require one to assume that, in that lost portion, Sextus made it clear that the mode which especially bears on ethics (see *PH I* 145) induces a kind of ἐποχή different from that induced by the other nine modes. In general, if ἐποχή had signified things so distinct from one another in Sextus' own writings or in the different phases of the Pyrrhonian tradition, one would have most probably found some mention, explanation, or warning of the ambiguity of the term. For instance, Sextus would have said something in the passages of *PH* in which he explains the sense of ἐποχή (*PH I* 10, 196). This is all the more so if, as Bett claims, *PH* is later than *AM VII–XI*.

Now, if one thinks it highly unlikely for Sextus to have differentiated, in the lost part of *Adversus Dogmaticos*, between two varieties of skepticism in the way that has just been suggested, yet accepts Bett's view that he held there to be a difference between matters regarding ethics and matters regarding logic and physics, then one must—despite Bett's efforts—ascribe to Sextus an extremely low level of competence in composing the work. For he would have been incapable of integrating the form of skepticism defended in *AM XI* into his general account of Pyrrhonism in the lost part of the work, and hence incapable of making clear to his readers what his outlook was. I do think that *AM XI* contains elements of a

³⁴ For the basis of this inference, see Machuca (2008b), n. 13.

negative dogmatism which are in conflict with a thoroughgoing suspension of judgment and which may be deemed “relics” of an earlier form of skepticism. But I also think that the skepticism of part A is much less uniform than Bett claims, and hence that its degree of incompatibility with the official Pyrrhonian outlook is much lower than he claims. In particular, I believe there is no evidence whatsoever that, in Sextus’ surviving writings, ἐποχή and other related key notions take on radically different senses.

IV

In some passages of *AM XI* Sextus does seem to reject ethical absolutism, but does he anywhere embrace a form of ethical realism? The first thing to note is that there is no reason why *AM XI* 114 and 118 must be read as expounding a type of realism according to which things are to be chosen (i.e., are good) or to be avoided (i.e., are bad) only in relation to different persons, times, and circumstances. First, at *AM XI* 65–67, Sextus mentions circumstances as the factor in relation to which one can say that *x* is preferred or dispreferred. As we saw, he is reporting an argument by the Stoic Aristo of Chios against the claim that some indifferent things are by nature preferred and others dispreferred. The similarity in question might be taken as a reason for thinking that, at *AM XI* 114 and 118, Sextus is arguing dialectically. For he may be adapting an argument advanced by a Dogmatist to suit his purpose: the same argument against the view that indifferent things are by nature preferred or dispreferred can be used against the view that things are by nature good or bad. Alternatively, if we think that at *AM XI* 118 Sextus is speaking in *propria persona*, as he seems to be doing, then we may interpret him as talking about the distinct ways things *appear* to be in relation to different persons, times, and circumstances (cf. Spinelli 1995, 296). This interpretation is confirmed by two texts belonging to part A in Bett’s division: *AM XI* 18–20 and 162–166. I will examine them in order, taking carefully into account Bett’s *sui generis* interpretation of the first passage.

At *AM XI* 18–20, Sextus makes the following preliminary caveat:

[18] It will perhaps be appropriate to elucidate this point in advance (προδιαρθρῶσαι), namely, that the term ‘is’ means two things: one is ‘really is’ (ὑπάρχει)—as, at the present moment, we say “It is day” in place of “It really is day”—the other being ‘appears’ (φαίνεται)—as some of the

mathematicians are often used to saying that the distance between two stars is a cubit, saying this as equivalent to “it appears so but is not really so at all” (for perhaps it is really one hundred stades, but it appears a cubit on account of the height, that is, on account of the separation from the eye). [19] In consequence, given that the component ‘is’ is twofold [in meaning], whenever we say (ὅταν λέγωμεν) skeptically “Of existing things some are good, some bad, and some between these,” we insert ‘is’ as indicative not of reality (ὑπάρξεως) but of appearance (φαίνεσθαι). For concerning the existence in relation to nature (περὶ τῆς πρὸς τὴν φύσιν ὑποστάσεως) of things good and bad and neither we have quite enough dispute with the Dogmatists; [20] but we have the habit of calling each of them good or bad or indifferent according to how they appear (κατὰ τὸ φαινόμενον τούτων).

Bett maintains that this text “does *not* say that, *whenever* Sextus uses ‘is’, he is to be understood as meaning ‘appears.’ In fact, the opposite is implied; Sextus says that ‘It is day’ means ‘It actually is day’ (18), and he says that this is something that ‘we say’, without any hint that he, as a sceptic, might want to distance himself from this usage” (1997, 58). Rather, ‘is’ means ‘appears’ only in the case of the proposition “Of existing things, some are good, some bad, and some between these” (1997, 58).³⁵ Bett also claims that especially *AM* XI 68–78 and 112–118 show that “Sextus thinks that it is quite possible sometimes to make assertions (consistent with the sceptical outlook) in which ‘is’ does *not* need to be understood in the restricted sense ‘appears’” (1997, 58–59). In his analyses of *AM* XI 118 and 166, he also affirms that the Skeptic’s acceptance of relativized assertions is consistent with what we find at *AM* XI 18–20 (1997, 143, 177). The reason is that, in his view, the verb ὑπάρχειν does not necessarily refer to the nature of things, unlike the expressions ταῖς ἀληθείαις, ὄντως, and τῷ ὄντι, which are used at *AM* XI 68–78 and 114 as synonyms of φύσει (1997, 59). Bett explicitly ascribes an ambiguity to the verb ὑπάρχειν, since he thinks that, when εἶναι means ὑπάρχειν in the propositions “It is day” and “Of existing

³⁵ Bett also contends that, contrary to what is usually thought, *PH* I 135 does not allow us to affirm that, when Sextus uses ‘is’ to describe his own perspective, he always takes it in the sense of ‘appears’ (1997, 59; cf. 1994, 151 n. 42). For in that passage Sextus only points out that ‘is’ has this sense ἐνταῦθα ὡσπερ καὶ ἐν ἄλλοις. However, even if this is the case as far as *PH* I 135 is concerned, *PH* I 4 makes it clear that in *PH* the verb εἶναι always means φαίνεσθαι when used in texts that describe the Skeptical outlook. For at *PH* I 4 Sextus indicates that everything that he will say in *PH* must be understood as a report of the way things appear to him at the very moment he is describing them. See also Sextus’ explanation of how to interpret the Skeptical φωναί at *PH* I 187–208.

things, some are good, some bad, and some between these,” εἶναι has two clearly different senses. In the first proposition, it has the meaning “‘is in the full sense, rather than in the restricted sense “appears”’—with no implication that the *real nature* of things is necessarily at issue” (1997, 59). This proposition does not refer to the nature of things because Sextus points out that it is uttered “at the present moment” (ἐπὶ τοῦ παρόντος), so that it is a relativized assertion. By contrast, in the second proposition, εἶναι refers to the nature of things. Whether a proposition that employs εἶναι in the sense of ὑπάρχειν does or does not refer to the nature of things “depends on the character of the claim in question, not just on the use of *esti* in the sense *huparchei*” (1997, 59). According to Bett’s reading, therefore, Sextus thinks that, if the proposition “*x* ὑπάρχει *F*” is affirmed without restriction, ὑπάρχει has the sense of ‘is invariably or by nature’, whereas if it is restricted, ὑπάρχει takes on the sense ‘is in relation to certain variables’. Bett’s strategy is clear: if already at *AM XI* 18 Sextus accepts *in propria persona* a non-phenomenological use of εἶναι, and hence certain affirmations about what is objectively the case, then it is not strange that in other passages of *AM XI* he affirms that things can be considered good or bad in relation to certain persons and/or circumstances. In other words, at *AM XI* 18 Bett finds support for his interpretation according to which in *AM XI* Sextus adopts a non-absolutist or moderate type of ethical realism.³⁶ However, there are several strong reasons for rejecting his reading of *AM XI* 18–20.

The first reason is that, by saying that the verb ὑπάρχειν possesses two distinct senses, Bett commits himself to the controversial claim that Sextus is actually employing the verb εἶναι, not with two, but with three different senses, namely: (i) to be real in relation to the nature of the object, (ii) to be real relatively to a given person or to specific circumstances, and (iii) to appear. But if that is the case, why does Sextus not say so? He is very clear about what he is doing. He first distinguishes between two senses of the verb εἶναι and then applies this very distinction to the specific proposition “Of existing things, some are good, some bad,

³⁶ It should be noted that Bett does not say that Sextus embraces a non-absolutist or moderate type of ethical realism, but claims that Sextus’ position in *AM XI* could not be considered a form of realism according to the latter’s perspective. This, of course, does not mean that the position which, on Bett’s interpretation, Sextus endorses in *AM XI* is not a form of realism from our perspective. In any case, I will try to show that Sextus regards relativized assertions as claims about how things really are, and hence as claims about which he cannot but suspend judgment.

and some between these.” When this proposition is uttered by the Dogmatist, ‘are’ means ‘really are’, but when it is uttered by the Skeptic, ‘are’ merely means ‘appear’. If one adopts Bett’s taxonomy, one should ask: Why would Sextus explain sense (ii) of the verb ὑπάρχειν—that is, the sense it has in the proposition “It is day”—if, when he later says that the Skeptic does not use ‘is’ as indicative of ὑπάρξις, he has another sense in mind, namely, sense (i)? There is the possibility that he may be confused, but this seems far-fetched. Bett’s strategy here is the same as that followed with the notion of ἐποχή: in both cases, he ascribes two different senses to a key notion because otherwise the text would not (entirely) fit his interpretation. However, this is a forced reading of a text where there is no indication of such an ambiguity.

The second reason for rejecting Bett’s reading of *AM XI 18–20* is that nothing of what Sextus says in this passage indicates that he accepts that judgments of the type “*x* is good/bad/indifferent for a person *P* in circumstances *C*” may be true. Indeed, the passage does not introduce any distinction between the claim of *x* being good (or bad or indifferent) by nature or invariably and the claim of *x* so being in relation to a given person or in relation to particular circumstances. On the contrary, the passage only states that *whenever* the Pyrrhonist says, e.g., that an action is good or bad, we must understand him as describing a value appearance.³⁷ And, as we saw, this is made as a preliminary caveat to be borne in mind when reading what follows in the rest of the book.³⁸ *Pace* Bett (1994, 151 n. 42), I think that *AM XI 20* makes it clear that the Skeptic does not restrict his caveat to the dogmatic threefold ethical division, but to any claim, uttered by him, about anything being good, bad, or indifferent.³⁹ Accordingly, even if we granted that the verb εἶναι is threefold in meaning, this would not support Bett’s view that Sextus accepts that things may actually be good or bad in specific circumstances. In sum, according to *AM XI 18–20*, value statements are of two types: those which describe that which appears to the speaker and those which express what the speaker believes is really the case; the Skeptic restricts himself to the first type of value statements, and

³⁷ See Machuca (2006), 119–120, 122–123. Cf. Spinelli (1995), 164–167, 170.

³⁸ For the sense of the verb προδιαρθρώσαι, see Spinelli (1995), 169.

³⁹ *Pace* Spinelli (in personal communication), I do not think that *AM XI 20* licenses us to affirm that, when Sextus later says (to all appearances *in propria persona*) that nothing is by nature good or bad, ‘is’ is to be understood in the sense of ‘appears’.

hence does not embrace any form of ethical realism. It could be objected that, given that the distinction according to which things are good, bad, or indifferent is dogmatic, Sextus' warning that he will use 'are' in the sense of 'appear' is intended, not to express that he is reporting his non-epistemic appearances, but only to make it clear that he is not speaking *in propria persona* (Brennan 1999, 41–52). I am not persuaded by this reading because, first, if it were correct, Sextus would not have said that the Skeptic calls things good, bad, or indifferent according to how they appear to him, but rather that he calls them that way because his dogmatic rivals do so and he is arguing against them. Second, it seems to me that, when speaking of a habit, Sextus means a linguistic usage the Skeptic has acquired in both philosophical and everyday contexts, contexts within which people usually say that some things are good, some bad, and some neither. But, of course, when the Skeptic makes the same utterances, he is merely reporting the way things appear to him.

The third reason for rejecting Bett's reading is that it is by no means evident that, in the quoted passage, Sextus accepts *in propria persona* that the proposition "It is day," when uttered at the present moment, expresses what is objectively the case. For it is likely that, when explaining the two senses of the verb εἶναι and offering examples of each of them, he is simply referring to ordinary and scientific usages of language with the sole object of making clear the manner in which the Skeptic employs that verb. The fact that Sextus presents the proposition "It is day" as something that "we say" can perfectly be explained by the fact that the Skeptic adopts distinct linguistic usages depending on the context in which he finds himself: e.g., in philosophy he follows the linguistic practice of philosophers and in everyday life that which is more usual and local, for the sole reason that this makes communication easier (see *AM* I 232–235).

As for the final reason, I just noted that Sextus lines up with the usage of philosophers when he is in a philosophical context. In this regard, it should be observed that the proposition "It is day" is a typical example given to illustrate the dogmatic concept of what is evident (πρόδηλον), so that it is not strange that Sextus chooses this as an example of the first sense of the verb εἶναι at *AM* XI 18. Indeed, at the beginning of his discussion of signs in the second book of *PH*, Sextus points out that the Dogmatists divide things into two groups: those which are evident (πρόδηλα) and those which are non-evident (ἄδηλα) (*PH* II 97, cf. *PH* I 138). Evident things they define as "those which come to our knowledge by themselves" (*PH* II 97) or "those which are apprehended

by themselves” (*PH* II 99). Sextus mentions as an example the fact that it is day (*PH* II 97). The text gives the impression that the example is given by the Dogmatists, but in any case it is telling that the proposition “It is day” is used to illustrate the kind of thing which is considered to be evident by the Dogmatists. Now, at the end of the chapter that examines whether there is anything true by nature, Sextus says:

Given that the criterion of truth has appeared as subject to *aporia* (ἀπόρου), it is no longer possible to make assertions either about the things that seem to be clear (τῶν ἐναργῶν εἶναι δοκούντων), as far as what the Dogmatists say is concerned (ὅσον ἐπὶ τοῖς λεγομένοις ὑπὸ τῶν δογματικῶν), or about the non-evident things. For, since the Dogmatists suppose that they apprehend the latter from the clear things, how, if we are forced to suspend judgment about the so-called clear things, could we dare to make affirmations about the non-evident things? (*PH* II 95)

Whereas the Dogmatist affirms that there are clear or evident things⁴⁰ which are apprehended by themselves and which make it possible to apprehend those which are non-evident, the Skeptic suspends judgment about them. The reason for the Skeptic’s attitude is to be found in the disagreements concerning both apparent and non-evident things (see *PH* I 185).⁴¹ I therefore think that we have grounds enough for inferring that the Skeptic does not believe or disbelieve that the proposition “It is day,” which is an example of something evident, clear, or apparent, describes what is actually the case in relation to the present moment.

Bett could argue that it is not legitimate to use passages from *PH* to determine Sextus’ outlook in *AM* XI, precisely because the type of skepticism expounded in this book differs from that found in *PH*. This objection is not serious, since even if we grant it, there are some passages from the other books of *Adversus Dogmaticos* that also make it clear that Sextus does not assent to the proposition “It is day,” since he does not believe that this proposition describes what is actually the case at the present moment. First, when discussing the Stoics’ theory of

⁴⁰ Although this passage speaks of τὰ ἐναργῆ and not of τὰ πρόδηλα, Sextus uses these expressions as well as τὰ φαινόμενα, τὰ προσιπτόντα, τὰ προφανῆ, and τὰ συνεσκιασμένα as synonyms (see *PH* I 138, *AM* VII 25–26, VIII 141–149, 316–320).

⁴¹ This is not to say, of course, that the Skeptic rejects what is apparent altogether (see *PH* I 19–20), but only as it is conceived of by the Dogmatists, as the phrase ὅσον ἐπὶ τοῖς λεγομένοις ὑπὸ τῶν δογματικῶν makes clear. He acknowledges that things presently appear a certain way to him and takes τὰ φαινόμενα as a criterion of action (*PH* I 21–24), but refrains from taking it as an epistemic criterion, as Dogmatists do. See further note 42 below.

φαντασία in *AM VII*, he reports that they make a fourfold distinction: some appearances are persuasive (πιθαναί), some unpersuasive, some both persuasive and unpersuasive, and some neither persuasive nor unpersuasive. As examples of the first type, Sextus mentions the facts that, “now (νῦν), it is day and I am conversing and everything that has a similar obviousness (περιφανείας)” (*AM VII* 242). Given that Sextus is expounding a dogmatic theory, it is reasonable to assume that he endorses neither the taxonomy *nor* the examples that illustrate each type of φαντασία.

Second, when presenting the problems faced by the claim that all appearances are true, Sextus points out:

We are not moved in the same way, at the present moment (ἐπὶ τοῦ παρόντος), in relation to “It is day” and in relation to “It is night,” or in relation to “Socrates lives” and “Socrates is dead,” nor do these things in any way provide equal evidence (τὴν ἴσην ... ἐνάργειαν), but “It is now day” and “Socrates is dead” seem to be credible (πιστὸν ἔοικεν ὑπάρχειν), whereas “It is night” and “Socrates is alive” are not equally credible but appear to be among the unreal things (τῶν ἀνυπάρκτων φαίνεται).

(*AM VII* 391)

There is no reason to think that Sextus is speaking *in propria persona* when talking about evidence and credibility, for he may just be putting forward the argument that allows him to refute the specific dogmatic claim under consideration. In the end, Sextus suspends judgment about the truth of the claim “All appearances are true.” This is confirmed by the fact that he elsewhere observes that there is an undecidable dispute among those who affirm that all appearances or all perceptibles are true or existent, those who affirm that all are false or nonexistent, and those who affirm that some are true or existent and some false or nonexistent (*AM VII* 369, *VIII* 213–214, 354–355). I therefore believe that Sextus mentions the proposition “It is day” in the quoted passage because it is a typical dogmatic example of something that is allegedly evident. In addition, he is cautious enough to use the verbs ἔοικεν and φαίνεται as indications that he is not committed to any assertion about what is objectively the case, not even in the present moment. This, of course, is not to deny that, e.g., it appears to him that it is day at the present moment, but this appearance is non-doxastic or non-epistemic.

Third, at the outset of his discussion of signs in *AM VIII*, Sextus observes that “there is a certain highest twofold distinction among things, according to which some are evident, others non-evident” (*AM VIII* 141). The former are “those which manifest themselves immediately (τὰ

αὐτόθεν ὑποπίπτοντα) to the senses and to the intellect” (AM VIII 141) or “those which come to our knowledge by themselves, such as, at the present moment (ἐπὶ τοῦ παρόντος), the fact that it is day or that I am conversing” (AM VIII 144). Similarly, at AM VIII 316 Sextus says that clear things are “those which are grasped involuntarily by means of an appearance, that is, by means of an affection, such as now (νῦν) ‘It is day’ and ‘This is a man.’” Thus, in *Adversus Dogmaticos* too the proposition “It is day” is offered as an example of what the Dogmatists call τὸ πρόδηλον or τὸ ἐναργές. I think that here as well Sextus probably offers that example because it is used by the Dogmatists themselves in their distinction between two kinds of things.

Now, just as in *PH*, in *Adversus Dogmaticos* Sextus suspends judgment about what the Dogmatists deem to be evident or clear, as can be seen in three passages. The first is found in the chapter in which he investigates whether there is a sign. He observes that, given the distinction between evident and non-evident things,

the discussion of the criterion, directed towards [showing] the aporia regarding clear things (εἰς τὴν τῶν ἐναργῶν ἀπορίαν), has been expounded by us most methodically. For given that the criterion turned out to be uncertain (ἀβεβαίου), it also becomes impossible to affirm about the things that appear that they are in their nature such as they appear.

(AM VIII 141–142)

The reason the uncertainty about the criterion makes the Skeptic refrain from affirming that things are as they appear is that, according to the Dogmatists, what is clear is known immediately by means of a criterion. This is explained in our second passage:

Since it seems that clear things become known immediately by means of a criterion, while non-evident things are traced by means of signs and demonstrations through the transition from clear things, let us inquire in order, first, into whether there is a criterion of the things that manifest themselves immediately (τῶν αὐτόθεν . . . προσπιπτόντων) through sense-perception or thought, and after that into whether there is a way capable of signifying or demonstrating non-evident things. For I think that, once these have been abolished, there will no longer be any investigation about the necessity to suspend judgment, since nothing true is discovered either in apparent things (προφανέσι) or in obscure things (συνεσκιασμένοις).

(AM VII 25–26)

The third passage forms part of Sextus’ discussion of whether the senses, the intellect, or both can be deemed to be the criterion ‘through which.’ He observes that, if the intellect gets in contact with external things independently of the senses, then it has to

grasp the underlying objects as clear, but nothing is clear, as we will establish; therefore, it is not possible to perceive the truth in the underlying objects. For what is clear is deemed by our rivals to be that which is perceived by means of itself and does not need anything else to establish it. But nothing is of a nature to be perceived by means of itself, but all things are perceived by means of an affection, which is other than the object that appears (φανταστοῦ) which produces it. (...) Therefore, since what is perceived by means of another thing is, by everyone's agreement, non-evident, and all things are perceived by means of our affections, from which they differ, all external things are non-evident and for this reason unknown (ἄγνωστα) to us. (...) But if, in order for us to know what is true, there has to be something clear, but it has been shown that all things are non-evident, it must be acknowledged that what is true is unknown.

(*AM* VII 364–365, 366, 368)

Although particularly in this third text Sextus seems to espouse a negative dogmatic view according to which nothing is clear and known, at *AM* VII 443–444 he makes it plain that the Skeptic propounds arguments against the criterion in order, not to demonstrate its nonexistence, but to counterbalance the belief in its existence, thereby reaching ἰσοσθένεια (cf. *AM* VIII 159–160, 298, 327–328, 476–477, IX 206–207). Accordingly, the Skeptic does not deny the existence of τὰ ἐναργῆ or τὰ πρόδηλα, but rather suspends judgment about whether anything is known by means of itself. Now, given that he cannot affirm that things are as they appear to be, it is plain that he cannot affirm that the proposition “It is day” or any other proposition describes what is objectively the case in specific circumstances. Otherwise, he could indeed affirm that, in those circumstances, things are just as they appear to be.

The several passages from *AM* VII–VIII which have been analyzed make it clear that we should not assume that, at *AM* XI 18, Sextus takes the use of εἶναι in the sense of ὑπάρχειν as acceptable for the Skeptic. According to Bett, at *AM* XI 18 Sextus accepts the proposition “It is day” because it is a relativized assertion, i.e., it is limited to the present moment. However, at *AM* VII 242 and 391 as well as at *AM* VIII 144 and 316, Sextus uses the same temporal restriction employed at *AM* XI 18, but the passages examined make it clear that he suspends judgment about the truth of the proposition “It is day,” which is a typical example he gives to illustrate what the Dogmatists themselves conceive of as πρόδηλον or ἐναργές.⁴²

⁴² Tad Brennan maintains that “the ‘evidence’ that the skeptic attacks is the self-

AM XI 162–166 is the second passage from part A in Bett’s division that might be taken as evidence that the Skeptic does not believe that something can be objectively good or bad in relation to specific circumstances. In this passage, Sextus answers two objections directed against the Skeptic, namely: his outlook reduces him either to ἀνενηργησία or to ἀπέμφοσις. The reason why he would be inactive is that “as the whole of life consists in choices and avoidances, he who neither chooses nor avoids anything implicitly rejects life and stays still like a vegetable” (163). And the reason why he is inconsistent is that in case a tyrant ordered him to do something unspeakable, either he would disobey and accept death or, to avoid this, he would obey the order (cf. *DL IX* 108). In either case, he would choose one course of action and avoid the other, which shows that he has apprehended that there is something to be avoided and something to be chosen. Sextus points out that those who raise these objections do not understand the way the Skeptic acts, since he

does not live in accordance with philosophical reasoning—for he is inactive as far as this is concerned—but he is capable of choosing some things and avoiding others in accordance with the non-philosophical observance. (165)

Sextus then remarks that the Skeptic will choose one or the other course of action following “the preconception (πρόληψις) in accordance with his ancestral laws and customs” (166; cf. *AM IX* 49, *PH I* 23–24, *DL IX* 108).⁴³ Thus, the Pyrrhonist’s decisions are made according to the frame-

evident, foundational perceptions of certain broadly empiricist epistemological theories. It is only because ‘*enargeia*’ was posited as a criterion that the Skeptic attacks it; and he only attacks its use *as a criterion*” (1999, 13 n. 2). I agree that the Skeptic targets what is evident *qua* criterion, but, unlike Brennan, I think this means that he calls into question any claim which purports to describe immediately what is the case or from which one believes it is possible to infer what is the case. This is why, when leaving aside what is evident as a criterion of truth, what remains is the way things non-doxastically or non-epistemically appear to the Skeptic. This issue is, of course, related to the thorny question of the scope of Pyrrhonian ἐπιτοχή, a question I cannot address here. For the original debate on this topic between Barnes, Burnyeat, and Frede, see the five papers collected in Burnyeat and Frede (1997). See also Glidden (1983), Stough (1984), Barney (1992), Brunschwig (1995), Brennan (1999), Fine (2000), Bailey (2002), chs. 7–9, 11, Barnes (2007), Thorsrud (2009), ch. 9, and Perin (2010), ch. 3. This vexed issue is also tackled in Filip Grgić’s contribution to the present volume.

⁴³ For an analysis of the moral and political implications of Sextus’ example of the Skeptic’s response to the tyrant, see Laursen (2004). For a general analysis of *AM XI* 162–167, see Spinelli (1995), 326–334, and (2005), 141–145.

work of laws and traditions in which he finds himself, not according to “philosophical reasoning.” That is, in the specific situation described here, his decision will not be made on the basis of a rationally justified argument that determines, for example, what the morally correct course of action is or what the real nature of death is, but on the basis of the ideas about morality and death which prevail or are more common in his community. Even though the Pyrrhonist does not believe that what the laws and customs of his community say is true or false, he follows them because in order to act one must follow some rules, and so far he has not found any rationally justified reason which prevents him from guiding his actions by the preconceptions he has in fact acquired by virtue of those social norms.⁴⁴ Hence, not even in the *particular* extreme situation in question will the Skeptic claim that what he decides and does *objectively* is good or bad for him, but will act according to the *appearances* he has by virtue of certain factors.⁴⁵ That τὰ φαινόμενα are taken here as the criterion of action is clear from Sextus’ saying at *AM* XI 166 that the Skeptic will bear that difficult and unpleasant situation more easily than the Dogmatist, simply because he does not have any additional opinion (οὐδεν προσδοξάζει) about it (cf. *AM* XI 147–148, 158). I take this to mean that he does not believe that one of the alternatives is objectively bad not even in those specific circumstances, since otherwise he would have the belief or opinion that the situation is intrinsically harsh and to be avoided because in such particular circumstances he may choose the wrong course of action. There is then no ethical realism here, but the characteristically Pyrrhonian attitude of guiding action by the way things appear. In addition, one could argue that, if Sextus accepted that, in particular circumstances, certain things are good or to be chosen whereas others are bad or to be avoided, he could not respond adequately to the charge that he is inconsistent. Indeed, the person who presses the charge would argue that the Skeptic does accept that, in the particular situation in which a tyrant orders him to do an unspeakable deed, he apprehends that there is something to be chosen and something to be avoided. This is therefore another reason why the passage under consideration should

⁴⁴ In the present passage, the term προλήψις refers to a non-theoretical or non-epistemic notion or idea conventionally accepted by people. Cf. Spinelli (1995), 329 and Bett (1997), 177.

⁴⁵ It is worth noting that these factors may also include the education the Skeptic received and his own personal experiences, which may run counter to the laws and customs of his community.

be understood in the sense that the Skeptic's observance of the laws and customs of his community is nothing but his following the various ways things non-epistemically appear to him. Bett could perhaps claim that one must construe the objection as saying that the Skeptic actually apprehends that there is something "to be chosen and to be avoided *by nature*," so that the Skeptic's response would be adequate even if his observance of certain norms and customs implied the holding of beliefs about what things are like relative to specific persons or circumstances. However, as far as I can tell, there is no reason at all to read the text in this restricted way. In addition, my way of reading the text is in agreement with what Sextus tells us elsewhere in the same work. At the beginning of *AM VII*, he says that, in making his practical decisions, the Skeptic follows his appearances:

[B]y necessity those who philosophize in aporetic fashion, in order not to be completely inactive and ineffective in the actions of everyday life, had to possess a criterion both of choice and of avoidance, namely what appears (*τὸ φαινόμενον*). (AM VII 30)

Every decision on what to choose and what to avoid in daily life is made according to that which appears to the Skeptic at the moment he is making the decision. Hence, not even the decisions made in specific circumstances should be read as revealing that the Skeptic believes that certain things are objectively good or bad relative to him in those circumstances.

In sum, the passages from part A of *AM XI* that have been examined in this section show that the perspective adopted therein is not, as Bett's interpretation entails, a moderate form of ethical realism. Rather, the Skeptic of *AM XI* restricts himself to describing his non-doxastic value appearances. In this respect, part A is not, therefore, in dissonance with the Pyrrhonism expounded in both *PH* and *AM VII-X*.

V

It seems hard to deny that there is a strong tension between a number of passages of *AM XI* and the 'official' Pyrrhonian perspective expounded particularly in *PH*. At times, *AM XI* seems to ascribe to the Pyrrhonist both (i) the opinion that nothing is invariably good or bad, and (ii) the assertion that holding this opinion makes it possible to attain the states of *ἀταραξία* and *εὐδαιμονία*. Whereas the negative arguments put forward in *AM XI* that make use of principle Π could be taken as being

merely dialectical—as happens in the case of the negative arguments found in the ethical section of *PH* III—the dialectical reading does not explain the texts which seem to straightforwardly ascribe (i) and (ii) to the Pyrrhonist himself.

I think Bett is right in having insisted on the presence in *AM* XI of elements which seem incompatible with what we regard as genuine Pyrrhonism. However, as we saw, his interpretation faces two serious problems. The first is that this book deviates from the official Pyrrhonian stance to a much lesser degree than he claims. For there is a conflict, not only between what Bett calls parts A and B, but especially within the former part, which therefore does not expound a form of skepticism which is homogeneous and coherent. The reason is that in part A we detect two tensions. First, the Skeptic is said, on the one hand, to suspend judgment about everything and to restrict his discourse to the realm of his appearances, but on the other he seems to deny the existence of anything by nature good or bad. The claim that in *AM* VII–XI the notion of ἐποχή has two different senses creates, as we saw, a problem that is more serious than the one it intends to solve. Second, sometimes the Skeptic is said to attain the states of undisturbedness and happiness through universal suspension of judgment, but sometimes the attainment of these states is said to be possible only through the denial of ethical absolutism. Thus, some passages from part A expound a skepticism which is in perfect agreement with the Pyrrhonism defended in most of Sextus' extant corpus. One can interpret the tensions detected in part A of *AM* XI as a sign that also in this book (and not only in *AM* VII–X, as Bett claims) Sextus is trying to integrate, without complete success, an earlier version of skepticism into the later variety which he himself adopts. It seems difficult, and even impossible, to completely iron out those tensions.

The second problem faced by Bett's interpretation is that, in part A, Sextus makes it entirely clear that the Skeptic refrains from affirming (or denying) that things are objectively good or bad in relation to specific persons or circumstances. In other words, Sextus does not endorse (nor reject) a type of ethical realism similar to what we call situational ethics. Rather, he merely describes the various ways things appear to him by virtue of certain factors such as the laws and customs of his community, the manner in which he was raised, and the education he received. On this point, there does not seem to be any tension within *AM* XI or between this book and the rest of the Sextan corpus.

In conclusion, whereas at times in *AM XI* Sextus seems to deny ethical absolutism, he clearly does not espouse a moderate form of ethical realism.⁴⁶

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⁴⁶ An abridged version of this paper was presented at the Facoltà di Filosofia of the Università degli Studi di Roma “La Sapienza” on October 13, 2009. I am grateful to the audience for useful discussion. I also wish to thank Stéphane Marchand, Hal Thorsrud, and especially Emidio Spinelli for their constructive comments on earlier versions of this essay. I would finally like to express my gratitude to Dale Chock for correcting some infelicities of my English.

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