

# The Cyrenaics vs. the Pyrrhonists on Knowledge of Appearances

Tim O’Keefe, Georgia State University

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## 1. Introduction

In *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* I 209-241, Sextus Empiricus takes pains to differentiate the skeptical way of life from other positions with which it is often confused, and in the course of this discussion (*PH* I 215),<sup>1</sup> he briefly explains how skepticism differs from Cyrenaicism. It is sometimes alleged, says Sextus, that the two are the same because both say that we “apprehend (*katalambanein*) only our feelings (*pathê*).” Sextus points to two important differences between the Cyrenaics and the skeptic. First, he says, the Cyrenaics posit pleasure as the end, whereas the skeptic aims at tranquility, and does so in a way that involves no commitment to tranquility being by nature good. Second, the Cyrenaics state that the ‘external existing things’ (*tôn ekstos hupokeimenôn*) cannot be apprehended, thus making them ‘epistemological negative dogmatists’ instead of true skeptics, since the true skeptic suspends judgment about everything, including whether in the future one may be able to apprehend the nature of external things.<sup>2</sup>

Surprisingly, Sextus does not mention a third apparent difference between the two. In addition to their ‘negative dogmatism’ regarding the impossibility of apprehending the nature of objects external to the perceiver, the Cyrenaics have a positive epistemic commitment—that we *can* apprehend our own feelings. Although we cannot know whether the honey is really sweet,

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<sup>1</sup> Henceforward, references to this and other texts will be made using the following abbreviations: *PH* = *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, *M* = *Against the Professors*, *Adv. Col.* = *Against Colotes*. Translations (sometimes with slight modifications) of *PH* are from Annas and Barnes (2000), and of *Adv. Col.* from Tsouna (1998).

<sup>2</sup> The terminology of ‘epistemological negative dogmatists’ is not Sextus’, but comes from the taxonomy of possible skeptical and dogmatic positions laid out in Hankinson (1995) 13-30. Sextus calls people who deny that knowledge is possible Academics (see *PH* I 1-4).

we can know infallibly that right now we are being sweetened (*Adv Col.* 1120e-f). By contrast, Sextus says explicitly that, as skeptics, Pyrrhonists apprehend nothing whatsoever (*PH* I 200-201). It might be suspected, however, that Sextus does not mention this difference because, on this matter, there really isn't an important difference between the two. Sextus does disavow knowledge, which would, it seem, include knowledge of one's own perceptual and cognitive states. However, he adds that the skeptic is perfectly able to report how things appear to him, e.g., that the honey *seems* sweet (*PH* I 19-20), and it is crucial for the skeptic that he not abolish the appearances (*ta phainomena*), as following them allows him to live even without having any opinions. So the following two questions arise: (1) Is there a significant difference between the way in which the Cyrenaics think they apprehend their own feelings and the relationship a Pyrrhonist has with his appearances that allows him to report on them, or is the difference merely verbal? (2) If there is a significant difference, what is its source?

I will argue that, even though many considerations seem to point to the difference between the two being merely verbal, there actually is a significant difference between their positions, and that uncovering it will help us to increase our understanding of both the Cyrenaics and the Pyrrhonists. First, I will give the arguments for why we should think that the Cyrenaic and Pyrrhonist positions do *not* differ significantly. Then, I will rebut these arguments and show why there are important differences between the two.<sup>3</sup>

## *2. The case for the Cyrenaics and Pyrrhonists not differing significantly*

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<sup>3</sup> When I speak of the 'skeptic,' the 'Pyrrhonist position,' and the like, I mean to refer to the version of Pyrrhonian skepticism that Sextus lays out in *PH*. I am not concerned with, and I will not argue about, how the position of *PH* relates to the positions that Sextus lays out in his other works, or with the skeptical position of the historical Pyrrho or Aenesidemus. See Bett (2000) for extended consideration for those sorts of issues.

The way in which Sextus describes how the Cyrenaics and Skeptics *do* differ in *PH* seems to indicate they do *not* differ when it comes to our acquaintance with our own affections. Sextus starts out this section of *PH* by observing that some think that the Pyrrhonists and Cyrenaics are the same because both affirm that only one's feelings can be apprehended, and then he lists two ways in which they do differ, without saying that the original point of identification is inaccurate. This gives the strong impression, as Tsouna puts it, that Sextus is "willing to concede that a common point between the two groups of philosophers is that they both consider the *pathê* alone apprehensible, *katalêpta*" (Tsouna (1998) 58; see also Fine (2000) 206-8 and (2003) 379-380).

Sextus never states that he himself shares the view that the Pyrrhonist and Cyrenaic are the same in this regard, so this argument from silence is not decisive. This purported similarity between the two need not be one that Sextus himself accepts. Instead, it could simply be what *others* say about them. Nonetheless, it gives a good *prima facie* reason to think that Sextus doesn't see the two as differing on this matter. Furthermore, the Pyrrhonian and Cyrenaic positions seem to share many important similarities, when it comes to the *pathê/phainomena*:

- *Characterization of the pathê/phainomena.* The Cyrenaics say that the *pathê* have an intrinsic and irreversible clarity (*enargeia*) (*Adv. Col.* 1120e). Sextus says that the skeptic is happy to concede that honey *appears* sweet (*PH* I 19), and that nobody argues over whether things *appear* to be this way or that; instead they argue over whether things *are* as they *appear* (*PH* I 22). In a number of places (e.g., *PH* I 13 and I 20), Sextus contrasts the *phainomena*, to which the skeptic acquiesces, with the *adêla*—the unclear or non-evident objects of scientific investigation and dogmatic theorizing—about which the skeptic suspends judgment. This contrast implicitly paints the *phainomena* as clear and evident.

• *Refusal to go beyond the pathê/phainomena.* The Cyrenaics say that we run into problems when we go beyond the *pathê* and try to make inferences on their basis about the objects that are the cause of the *pathê* (*Adv. Col.* 1120c-f, *M VII* 191-2, 198-9). Pyrrhonists say the same thing about the *phainomena*, that we have no good reason to draw inferences about how things are on the basis of how they appear (e.g., at *PH I* 13-15, I 19-20, and the discussion of the Ten Modes at *PH I* 35-163, among many other places). Furthermore, the Cyrenaics and Pyrrhonists give similar types of considerations to undermine these inferences. For instance, they appeal to the relativity of perceptions caused by the same object and the apparent dependence of one's perceptions on one's bodily state (such as honey tasting sweet to me but bitter to somebody who is ill), and the lack of any criterion on which to judge which (if any) of the conflicting appearances is veridical. They even draw similar conclusions from arguments that proceed from perceptual relativity. Unlike Democritus, they do not say that the honey itself is neither sweet nor bitter, and unlike Protagoras, they do not say that the honey is sweet for me and bitter for the ill fellow.<sup>4</sup> Instead, both the Pyrrhonists and Cyrenaics profess ignorance about which property, if either, the honey itself has—although the Pyrrhonist says merely that for now which it has is unknown to him, whereas the Cyrenaic claims it is unknowable.

• *Epistemic embrace of the pathê/phainomena.* The flip side of the eschewal of beliefs regarding the nature of external things is an embrace of what is apparent: one's own *pathê* or the *phainomena*. Although Sextus does sometimes say that the skeptic will not opine at all, or will have no beliefs, at other points he is ambivalent about the scope of his skepticism. At *PH I* 13, Sextus admits that the skeptic does have beliefs in the sense of assenting to his own *pathê*, which are forced upon him by the appearances, and the example he gives is that the skeptic wouldn't

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<sup>4</sup> O'Keefe (1997) contains a brief discussion of these different sorts of arguments. Lee (2005) is the best

say that he isn't feeling cold when he feels cold—exactly the same sort of thing that the Cyrenaics claim, that it is evident that you are warmed, even if you cannot know that the wine causing this affection is by nature warm (*Adv Col.* 1120e). And at *PH I* 200-1, Sextus says that the skeptic, when he claims that everything is inapprehensible or that he doesn't apprehend anything, really means by this that he doesn't apprehend any of the non-evident things under investigation. This leaves open the possibility that the skeptic *does* apprehend what's evident, i.e., his appearances.

It is for these sorts of reasons that Chisholm characterizes Sextus Empiricus as a forerunner of “purely phenomenalist epistemology” (Chisholm (1941) 376). Chisholm, pointing to *PH I* 13 and *PH I* 15, says that Sextus recognizes the importance of “the given” in epistemology, and does not deny that the given *is* given.<sup>5</sup> Tsouna draws similar parallels between the Cyrenaics and foundationalist epistemologists like Chisholm himself, who are concerned with characterizing correctly what is immediately given in experience, in order to inquire about what (if anything) can be known on the basis of this given (Tsouna (1998) 42-53).

But if the preceding is correct, how does the Pyrrhonian skeptic differ from the Cyrenaics at all? Why do the Cyrenaics claim that they apprehend the *pathê* alone, while Sextus says that the skeptic apprehends nothing? Here, it seems, the literature gives us a ready answer. It's become almost a commonplace that the ancient philosophers are almost all realists about truth. ‘Truth’ (for them) must mean ‘mind-independent truth,’ i.e., when ancient philosophers are inquiring about what we can have knowledge of, and what is true, they're almost always talking about knowledge of what is the case about the properties that mind-independent objects have.<sup>6</sup>

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extensive recent treatment.

<sup>5</sup> Perin (2010) also defends a view along these general lines: the Pyrrhonist does have both beliefs and knowledge of what is evident to him, i.e., of his own *pathê*, such as its appearing to him that honey is sweet.

<sup>6</sup> In fact, the stronger claim is often made that for *x* to be ‘really’ F, or F ‘by nature,’ (where F stands for some property such as being sweet), it would have to be F invariably and non-relatively. See Hankinson

The Cyrenaics are the only obvious dissenters from this consensus. On this reading, what is really distinctive about the Cyrenaics is that, unlike all other Greek epistemologists, but like Descartes, Berkeley, Hume, and other modern philosophers, the Cyrenaics think that one's own subjective states of awareness can also be objects of knowledge.<sup>7</sup>

But this purported difference between the Cyrenaics and Pyrrhonists appears fairly trivial—the two positions differ merely verbally, over whether they're willing to grant terms like 'apprehension' or 'knowledge' also in relation to one's own states of awareness, or only in relation to mind-independent states of affairs. Insofar as there is a dispute here (on this reading of what's going on), most contemporary philosophers would side with the Cyrenaics, granting that one can have knowledge of things like *I am currently feeling cold* or *I seem to be tasting something bitter now*.

### *3. The case for the Cyrenaics and Pyrrhonists differing significantly*

Now that I've presented what (I hope) to be a strong case for thinking that the Cyrenaics and Pyrrhonists have, more or less, the same position when it comes to our epistemic relationship

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(1995) 129-131 and Bett (2000) for arguments that Aenesidemus uses this sort of claim to argue for skepticism (or, better, for negative epistemic dogmatism), Bett (1997) for the claim that Sextus argues this way *in propria persona* in *Against the Ethicists*, and O'Keefe (1997) for the Epicurean rebuttal of this sort of skeptical argument from relativity.

<sup>7</sup> See Burnyeat (1982) for more on realism and idealism in ancient Greek philosophy, and Tsouna (1998) for much more on Cyrenaic epistemology generally, but especially 9-25 for proper precautions about interpreting the *pathê* for the Cyrenaics in overly mentalistic or Cartesian terms. Everson (1991) 128-135 also gives a clear account which nicely points that the differences between the Cyrenaic and Cartesian characterizations of one's affections. However, Fine (2000), esp. pp. 206-9, contains an extended argument that Sextus also allows subjective states to be objects of truth and knowledge. If Fine is right, and if the Cyrenaics and Sextus do have basically the same position with regard to our acquaintance to the appearances (as she also holds, but which I argue against below), this would reopen the question of why Sextus doesn't admit that the skeptic apprehends his appearances. The simplest answer, I think, would be that Fine succeeds in showing that what Sextus says *allows* for appearances to be objects of truth and knowledge, but it does not *commit* him to the position. Thus, Sextus need not say he apprehends his affections (even if his position is substantially the same as the Cyrenaics), especially when dialectically

to our own appearances, let me try to knock it down. In order to knock it down, however, I will take a fairly indirect route, first talking about the Cyrenaics on truth and appearances in more detail than I have above.

First, I'd like to note that it's misleading to say that all other Greeks are realists about truth but not the Cyrenaics. After all, they think (as much as other Greek philosophers, with the possible exception of Protagoras) that ordinary statements about the properties of ordinary objects, in order to be true, have to be true in virtue of mind-independent objects and properties. If the statement "the wind is hot" is true, it's true because there exists a mind-independent object, the wind, which has the mind-independent property of heat. If the Cyrenaics were not realists about the semantics of these types of ordinary-object statements, they wouldn't be skeptics (or, better, negative dogmatists) about the possibility of knowing such things. On this question, they're with Descartes and Hume, and against Berkeley and Kant. (Whereas Protagoras, or at least the *Theaetetus* version of Protagoras, is with Berkeley and Kant, and hence is not a skeptic about our ability to know things like whether the wind is hot.)

However, it *is* true that the Cyrenaics differ from other Greeks in thinking that one can apprehend/know one's own subjective states. But there is more to this—i.e., there are further reasons as to why they think this—than the brief discussion above suggests. This is not merely a terminological dispute, or a relic of the distinction between appearance and reality.

In order to get at these reasons, let me take a slight detour into the topic of the contorted neologisms the Cyrenaics coin in order to describe the *pathê* correctly. For example, at *Adv. Col.* 1120e Plutarch reports that, according to the Cyrenaics, we should say that we are "whitened" or "sweetened," instead of saying "I am tasting something sweet" or even "It seems to me that I am

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interacting with dogmatists whose own standards assume that knowledge must be knowledge of mind-

tasting something sweet.” It gets even worse, from the standpoint of linguistic felicity: According to the Cyrenaics, a person with jaundice (to whom things supposedly look yellow) is “moved yellowly” (Sextus *M* VII 192). Why do the Cyrenaics disfigure the language in this way? Their motivation is similar to the reason modern foundationalist epistemologists like Chisholm have for coining locutions like “I am appeared to redly” (see Chisholm (1982) 15-18 and Tsouna (1998) 45-53). Such statements are supposed to report only what is immediately given in one’s experience, and not to go beyond it.

On this point, the Cyrenaics can be contrasted with the Stoics and Epicureans on the perceptual states that are the criteria of knowledge. For the Stoics, the *phantasia katalêptikê* (the graspable, or apprehensible, impression) is the principal criterion of truth. Such an impression, in addition to being infallible, is a representational state—it has propositional content about its cause, and it (accurately) represents the characteristics of the object which is its cause. The Epicureans say that *all* impressions are true (or real—the term *alêthês* can mean either). Exactly how to understand this claim is highly controversial, but all interpreters agree that the Epicureans are interested in affirming that impressions are effects of objects in the environment, that thereby give us information about their causes and can be used as the basis for making inferences about what is not evident.<sup>8</sup> The Epicureans mock the Cyrenaics’ notion that we can have knowledge only of our own states of awareness and not of their causes (*Adv. Col.* 1120d). The Cyrenaics use their contorted neologisms in order to avoid entirely any reference to objects or states of affairs beyond the content of the *pathê* themselves. This is because their project is to give an analysis of our awareness of our own internal states, which gets us down to what is immediately given.

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independent states of affairs.

<sup>8</sup> See Tsouna (1998) 34-38 for a brief overview of the Stoics and Epicureans on impressions and how they differ from the Cyrenaics, chapter 10 of O’Keefe (2009) for an overview of the controversies on the truth



The Cyrenaics wish to get down to what is immediately given because they share the criteria of other Greek epistemologists as to what can be apprehended, and they think that a proper analysis of our *pathê* will show that the *pathê*, and the *pathê* alone, meet these criteria. We can apprehend only the *pathê* because only the *pathê* are intrinsically and irreversibly clear (*enargê*, which Tsouna translates as ‘self-evident,’ *Adv. Col.* 1120e), and “establish their own content as incontrovertibly true *of something*” (Tsouna p. 37)—as it turns out, true of themselves—so that we can make assertions about them infallibly (*adiapsuestôs*) and irrefutably (*anexelenktôs*, *M VII* 191). Thus, we can apprehend the nature of our own *pathê*—that’s why it’s proper to use the language of *katalêpsis*, of intellectual apprehending, when discussing the subject’s relationship to his own *pathê*.

To sum up: the Cyrenaics think that our *pathê* can be characterized in ways which strip away any purported representational content referring to objects external to the perceiver—in ways that refer only to what is immediately given. So characterized, their content is both self-evident to the perceiver, and sincere statements which report this content are infallible.

I hope that this description of the Cyrenaics’ position, and of their project, should already be enough to raise the suspicion that a Pyrrhonist, whatever he thinks of the appearances, isn’t doing what the Cyrenaics are doing. I shall now try to reinforce this suspicion.

Let’s return to the different vocabularies which the Cyrenaics and Pyrrhonists use to describe their appearances. Instead of the contorted neologisms of the Cyrenaics, the standard way that Sextus uses to describe appearances is simply that “*x* seems *F* to me.” This is a way, primarily, of describing how *the object* seems to be, not merely the internal states of the percipient, although it can also include internal states, such as my feeling chilly. In reporting how

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of impressions for the Epicureans, and Everson (1990) and Striker (1991) for some influential treatments

the objects appears to be, of course, the skeptic is not committed to the object actually *being* the way it appears to be—but equally, the skeptic is not incorrigibly reporting the contents of purely subjective states. As Hankinson notes,

[A]n appearance in this sense is not a private, internal phenomenon. It is not a distant ancestor of the sense-datum. When Sextus does wish to refer to purely mental phenomena, he employs the language of impression, *phantasia* (see [PH 1 19]), and *phantasiai* are caused by the *phainomena*, which are their intentional objects. An appearance, then, is not something we have of objects: it is something that objects themselves have (as I might compliment you upon your appearance). That is, the Sextan Sceptic does not restrict what can be strictly talked about to purely mental items—he is no phenomenalist.<sup>9</sup>

Tsouana makes a similar point: the terminological difference between the Cyrenaics and Pyrrhonists “reflects a deep philosophical difference between them.” The Cyrenaics use the terminology they do because they wish to isolate what is immediately given in experience, whereas the Pyrrhonist has no such agenda (Tsouana (1998) 57).

This difference is underscored by the Pyrrhonian skeptic’s promiscuous willingness to fill in his formula “*x* seems *F* to me” with almost any items. The wind may seem warm to me, but equally, because of the customs of my society, cannibalism can seem impious (PH III 207, see also PH I 148 ff.), and arguments powerful. As Burnyeat notes, “Time and again Sextus warns that sceptic formulae such as ‘I determine nothing’ and ‘No more this than that’ (PH I 15) or the conclusions of sceptic argument like ‘Everything is relative’ (PH I 135), or indeed the entire contents of his treatise (PH I 4), are to be taken as mere records of appearance” (Burnyeat

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of the question.

<sup>9</sup> Hankinson (1995) 25; cf. Annas and Barnes (1985) 23-4) and Everson (1991). However, *pace* Everson, this way of conceiving of appearances need not presuppose (nor commit the skeptic to believing) that these objects (or the external world in general) exist. See Fine (2003): as she points out (pp. 350-1),

(1980/1997) 39). The Cyrenaics, by contrast, confine the *pathê*, strictly speaking, to what we may want to call “raw feels”—“being reddened,” “being chilled,” “being soured,” and the like. I take it that this restriction is meant to exclude any content that represents states of affairs external to the percipient’s present state, whereas the Pyrrhonist isn’t interested in practicing this particular brand of theoretical hygiene.

This difference fits in well with the overall Pyrrhonian position. The Pyrrhonist is not in the business of putting forward analysis and theory; doing so would be antithetical to him. This aversion to theory applies even to his statements about himself and the skeptical way of life. When describing skepticism as an ability to set out oppositions and produce suspension of judgment, Sextus quickly notes that that he doesn’t mean ‘ability’ in any fancy or technical sense, “but simply in the sense of ‘to be able to’” (*PH* I 9). And when he asserts that skepticism does have an account of how to live correctly, he qualifies that ‘correctly’ here “is not taken only with respect to virtue, but more loosely” (*PH* I 17). After going through how the skeptic uses various phrases such as “things are no more this way than that,” Sextus states: “We say too that we do not use the phrases strictly, making clear the objects to which they are applied, but indifferently and, if you like, in a loose sense—for it is unbecoming for a skeptic to fight over phrases...” (*PH* I 207) Insofar as the Cyrenaic has a theory about the immediate content of our perceptual states, and uses this theory in order to show how these states (and only these states) can be objects of *katalêpsis*, he dogmatizes in a way that the Pyrrhonist would not. The Pyrrhonist is happy to report how things seem to him, but in doing so, he has no theory about the contents of his own awareness that he is relying on to justify this practice, because he has no

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Macbeth could say that the dagger’s handle seems to be pointed toward his hand, while still doubting that there really is a dagger there: the ‘dagger’ need be only an ‘ostensible object.’

theory or exact account to justify *any* part of his skeptical practice, as opposed to simply describing (in a loose and popular manner) how his practice goes.

So the Cyrenaic, when he says that he apprehends that he is chilled, and the Pyrrhonist, when he says that he seems cold, are actually doing very different things with their utterances. The Cyrenaics are well outside the mainstream of Greek epistemology in restricting what we can know to the immediate contents of one's own affections. Nonetheless the Cyrenaic evinces the same epistemic attitude toward his *pathê* that other dogmatists have toward what they think they know. The Cyrenaic is perfectly willing to judge that he is in this state or that state, and he is committed to its being true that the contents of his own awareness are exactly as he thinks they are. As noted, the Cyrenaics think that sincere statements regarding the *pathê* are infallible and irrefutable. The Pyrrhonist does not think that statements about one's affections are self-evidently true, even if they're 'obvious' in some loose and popular sense. And if statements regarding one's feelings like "I'm feeling chilly now" are undeniable, or, as Sextus puts, not subject to investigation (*PH* I 22), this isn't because their content is *epistemically* self-evident, but because, as a matter of *psychological* fact, the Pyrrhonist is unable to deny them, any more than, as just another human being, he can avoid shivering when feeling cold. (See *PH* I 13 and *PH* I 29: both the assent to feelings which produces skeptical utterances such as "I am feeling chilled," and the shivering when chilled, are described as involuntary, as being 'forced upon' (*anankein*) the skeptic.)<sup>10</sup>

So if the skeptic doesn't claim to know he's chilly, what *is* he expressing when he says "I'm feeling chilly"? The answer is not entirely straightforward, because it's highly controversial

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<sup>10</sup> This attitude extends also to arguments themselves, which the skeptic regards primarily in terms of their psychological force—their force in both moving the skeptic to action and in curing the dogmatists of their afflictions—as opposed to their epistemic cogency in establishing their conclusions as true. See Machuca (2009) for more on this topic.

whether skeptics (on Sextus' account) have beliefs, and if so, what they are about and what they're like. For the sake of this paper, I wish not to settle or even to enter into this controversy in any detail, but I cannot avoid it entirely. Scholars mainly divide into two camps: proponents of the 'rustic' interpretation (that the Pyrrhonist strictly speaking has *no* beliefs at all, although he'll have dispositions to act as if certain things are the case) and of the 'urbane' interpretation (that the Pyrrhonist can have some ordinary, garden-variety beliefs about things but eschews philosophical or scientific theorizing about the way things 'really' are, or are in their nature).<sup>11</sup> The position of this paper should (I believe) be acceptable to either camp. On the 'rustic' view, the skeptic has no beliefs, but he can be suitably moved around by the appearances and thereby live well. (A hungry skeptic seeing a banana in front of him may be moved to reach out for the banana without assenting to the statement that there is a banana in front of him.) The ways in which the skeptic can be moved around includes not only his actions generally, but also his utterances, which express these appearances but do not manifest beliefs about them. (See Barnes (1982) 63-67 and Hankinson (1995) 295, who compare such 'avowals' regarding one's appearances to the cries of children in pain, which *express* pain but do not *state* that *I am in pain*.) On the 'urbane' view, the skeptic can have beliefs about his appearances just as he can about other things, but in both cases he eschews dogmatic theorizing about their nature. So he can believe that he is feeling chilly, just as he can believe that the tower is round or cannibalism impious—as long as in none of these cases does he think e.g., that he is *really* or 'by nature' feeling chilly, or the tower really round, or cannibalism really impious, based upon some argument or theorizing. On either interpretation, 'rustic' or 'urbane,' the appearances themselves

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<sup>11</sup> See Burnyeat and Frede (1997) for a collection of some of the most influential papers on this debate, and Thorsrud (2008) 173-200 for a recent overview and treatment.

do not constitute some specially privileged class of items which are exempt from either the eschewal of beliefs *tout court* (rustic) or the eschewal of dogmatic or scientific belief (urbane).

The skeptic, then, can report how things appear to him without thereby presupposing any commitment to a theory about what appearances are or his relationship to them when he does so. We can imagine a conversation between a Pyrrhonian skeptic and a dogmatist going something like the following:

*Dogmatist*: “What color is the table over there?”

*Skeptic*: “It seems red to me.”

*Dogmatist*: “Well, do you think that the table is red, or at least that probably it’s red?”

*Skeptic*: “I’m not committed one way or the other.”

*Dogmatist*: “Well, at a minimum you’re committed to thinking that you know *how things currently seem to you*, right? You *must* concede this in to be able to state intelligibly that the table *seems* red to you. Don’t you see that?”

*Skeptic*: “Well, the table does seem red to me—I don’t deny that, since it’s quite obvious—but I don’t have any opinion about those sorts of further questions you’re asking me. But if you’d like to work out a theory regarding how one should answer them, I’ll be happy to chat with you about it.”

The dogmatist will think that the skeptic is not entitled to make such statements about how things seem to him unless he has some sort of commitment, at least implicitly, as to what sorts of characteristics his experiences have and how he has access to them. But this parallels the dogmatist’s complaint that the skeptic is not entitled to act unless, at least implicitly, he has some sort of commitment to the way things are and what things are to be sought and avoided. In the case of the *apraxia* argument, whether or not the dogmatist’s complaint is justified—and I will

not address that question here—Sextus does not concede the dogmatist’s point. Consistent with his overall practice, I think that Sextus could, and should, make a similar maneuver when it comes to his attitude toward his own appearances. He can be moved by them, and he is willing to avow how things seem to him, without thinking that this practice requires any further theoretical underpinnings.

If Sextus were to think that, as a skeptic, he can unproblematically assume that there is a given in experience, whose content we know incorrigibly and judge of infallibly, he would simply be mistaken. Wherever one comes down on the philosophical issues at stake, the recent literature on the ‘myth of the given’ certainly shows that the accounts of experience assumed (or argued for) by, e.g., the Cyrenaics, Descartes, A. J. Ayer and Chisholm are not free of heavy (and perhaps dubious) theoretical commitments about our experiences: for instance, that our experiences are ‘transparent’ to us (we can know exactly what it is that we are experiencing), and that we can get beneath all of the judgments *about* our experiences and based upon our experiences (such as “the wall is white”) to something non-judgmental and immediately given (such as “white patch here now”).<sup>12</sup> At the very least, it’s controversial to say that one can know with certainty exactly the content of one’s own affections. So Sextus, as a Pyrrhonist, should *not* blithely assume that one cannot be mistaken about the content one one’s experiences, that they are immediately ‘given’ in this sense.

In any case, I see no reason to think that Sextus *does* assume the sorts of things that the Cyrenaics do. Although questions about the nature of our acquaintance with our own experiences have become particularly controverted in 20th-century epistemology, they were also disputed

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<sup>12</sup> See Sellars (1956), and Alston (1971) and (1983), for a few prominent attacks upon and defenses of the ‘given.’

over by the ancient Greeks.<sup>13</sup> Sextus would be quite happy to hear about the modern disputes about the Myth of the Given as undermining the theoretical pretensions of all dogmatic philosophers, including the pretensions of the Cyrenaics about the incorrigibility and infallibility of beliefs about one's *pathê*.

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<sup>13</sup> For example, in Socrates' attacks on the Protagorean and Heraclitean positions in *Theaetetus* 179c-186e, Aristotle's discussions of the 'common sensibles' (qualities such as shape which are not proper to any one of the senses), and Aristocles' attack on the intelligibility of the Cyrenaic position that only the *pathê* can be apprehended (quoted in Eusebius *Preparation for the Gospel* XIV.18.31-19.7, trans. in Tsouna (1998) 152-154).



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