BRILL

A Relative Improvement

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Abstract

The Mode of Relativity in Agrippa's Five Modes does not fit with the other four modes, and disrupts an otherwise elegant system. We argue that it is not the familiar argument from epistemic relativism, but a formal condition on the structure of justifications: the principle that epistemic grounding relations cannot be reflexive. This understanding of Agrippan Relativity leads to a better understanding of the Modes of Hypothesis and Reciprocity, a clearer outline of the structure of Agrippa's system as a whole, and a new insight into the Two Modes that follow the Five.

Keywords

1   Introduction

The Agrippan Modes have enjoyed a renaissance of critical appreciation in the last few decades, and are now widely appreciated, both by historians of philosophy and by contemporary epistemologists, as a brilliant and permanent

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*   This article arose from work done in 2009, in connection with an undergraduate thesis (Lee *unpublished*) written by Lee with Brennan's supervision. Lee contributed the novel reading of DL's report of Relativity, and saw its relation to the Two Modes. Brennan worked on integrating it with the other Agrippan Modes, and added reflections on Aristotle. Brennan would like

contribution to epistemology in general, and to the study of Foundationalism in particular.[1]

Or at any rate, four of the five modes are so appreciated. One of them, the Mode of Relativity, is widely regarded as superfluous at best, and at worst as a failure and a disgrace: it should 'not be treated as a separate mode at all'; it 'breaks up' the elegant architectonic of the modes; it should be 'deliberately ignored' or simply 'banished' from the Modes altogether.[2]

Indeed, banishment is the fate that it suffers in the most extensive discussion of Agrippa's Modes. Jonathan Barnes' excellent monograph *The Toils of Scepticism* is a book-length investigation of Agrippa's system, which devotes one chapter to each of the other four modes (sc. Disagreement, Regress, Hypothesis, and Reciprocity), but devotes to the Mode of Relativity only the following comment, in the final chapter (Barnes 1995, 113):

> In addition, the previous chapters have deliberately ignored one important fact about the Agrippan modes; for, as I have said, the Four Modes I have discussed were part of a set or group of modes: they are four of the Five Modes of Agrippa. The fifth Agrippan mode is the mode of relativity, the mode *apo tou pros ti*. It is a strange beast, and it poses numerous and interesting problems; but it belongs—or so I think—to a different species from the other Four Modes, and I shall say nothing about it here.

And that is, indeed, everything that Barnes says about the Agrippa's Mode of Relativity in the entire book. In a study dedicated exclusively to the Five Modes of Agrippa, the third mode receives nothing more than that curt dismissal.

These harsh verdicts stem from a very natural reading of the description of Agrippa's Modes in Sextus Empiricus (*PH* 1.164-77). But Sextus is not our only source for Agrippa's Modes: Diogenes Laertius also describes them (DL 9.88-9). His description is briefer, and lacks the corroborative detail that Sextus adds, but there is no reason to think it is less reliable than the report in Sextus; indeed, it is only from Diogenes that we know Agrippa's name at all.

1   E.g. Fogelin 1994; Klein 2008; Williams 2010.

2   Quotes from Hankinson 1995, 163, 166; Barnes 1990, 113; and Woodruff 2010, 224.

The description of the Mode of Relativity in Diogenes Laertius makes possible an interpretation that looks, at first, far-fetched and implausible—indeed, it is quite incompatible with what Sextus says. But a full consideration of the difficulties that surround the traditional understanding of the Mode of Relativity should persuade the reader that desperate measures are justified in this case.

This paper has the following structure. In Section 2, we give a fuller view of the Agrippan Modes, first quoting the evidence for them from Sextus, and then presenting them as they are generally understood by contemporary students of Ancient Scepticism (e.g. Barnes, Hankinson, Woodruff, and Vogt). After that, we draw attention to the many difficulties and discomforts that attach to Agrippa's Mode of Relativity as it is currently understood, and argue that they should incline us to search for some viable alternative. In Section 3, we introduce our own reading of Agrippan Relativity,[3] showing how it solves the problems created by the current interpretation, and how it sheds new light on the structure of Agrippa's system. In particular, we show how Agrippan Relativity is distinct from the Modes of Hypothesis, Reciprocity, and Regress, but acts as a necessary supplement to them. In Section 4, we show how the new interpretation of Agrippan Relativity enables a better understanding of

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3 We employ the phrase 'Agrippan Relativity' to refer to our preferred interpretation of what Agrippa meant by *to pros ti* in the context of the third of his Five Modes, i.e., roughly, the thesis of the irreflexivity of epistemic grounding relations. We use the phrase 'epistemic relativity' to refer to the orthodox interpretation of the third of Agrippa's Five Modes, i.e. the thesis that perception and thought are radically defective because always relative to a perceiver, context, conditions, etc.—the kind of point made in the eighth of the Ten Modes. When we are not referring to our own interpretation of that mode (i.e. when we are referring to competing interpretations, or simply referring to the evidence prior to interpretation), then we say the 'Mode of Relativity'. The phrase 'Agrippan Relativity' does not mean 'what Agrippa thought about relativity or *to pros ti* in general'. We have no reason to doubt that Agrippa had the ordinary sceptical views about the nature of relations, e.g. that 'taller than' and 'brother of' are both instances of *to pros ti*. We also have no reason to think that Agrippa would have treated relativity of the ordinary sort any differently than Sextus did when it was employed as a sceptical mode of the ordinary sort, e.g. in the eighth of the Ten Modes. So it is no part of our proposal that Agrippa meant his use of *to pros ti* in the context of the Five Modes to involve any sort of replacement or repudiation of the understanding of *to pros ti* in other contexts. The 'Mode from the Relative' as Agrippa used it in the Five Modes, i.e. what we refer to as 'Agrippan Relativity', was not meant to be any sort of replacement for the ordinary 'Mode from the Relative' in the Ten Modes, and indeed the Two Modes have very little in common. Sextus reports in *PH* 1.177 that the Five Modes were not intended by their author to replace the Ten Modes, but to complement them: the independence of Agrippan Relativity from the eighth mode of the Ten is an example of that complementarity.

the Two Modes of Scepticism, that are reported only in Sextus (*PH* 1.178-9), and without attribution. One upshot of the new understanding of Agrippan Relativity will be that we can attribute the Two Modes to Agrippa with greater confidence. In Section 5, we look at the only two passages in which Sextus employs the Agrippan modes, and show that his own usage suggests problems and anomalies in his grasp of the Agrippan system. In Section 6, we consider the relation between Agrippa's Five Modes and a very similar system of arguments that Aristotle puts forward in *Posterior Analytics* 1.3. Agrippa designed his system in order to address what he took to be deficiencies in Aristotle. Finally, in Section 7, we consider objections to our interpretation. Some of these can be overcome successfully. Some cannot be overcome, but can be neutralized by pointing out that they apply equally to the standard interpretation. And some of the objections remain unanswered altogether. On balance, however, we argue that our proposal is worth serious consideration.

2   The Five Modes and the Difficulties that Attend the Mode of Relativity as Commonly Understood

Let us begin with the description of the Five Modes that we find in Sextus (*PH* 1.164-9):[4]

> The more recent Sceptics have handed down the following Five Modes of Suspension: first, the Mode of Disagreement; second, the Mode that Regresses to Infinity; third, the Mode from Relativity; fourth, the Hypothetical Mode; fifth, the Reciprocal Mode. (165) Now the Mode from Disagreement is the one by which we find that, in regard to the question set before us, there is undecidable strife both in life and among the philosophers; and on account of it we are unable to choose or reject anything, and so conclude with suspension. (166) The Mode from Regressing to Infinity is the one in which we say that whatever contributes to proof with regard to the question set before us is itself in need of a distinct proof, and that in turn is in need of a further one, and so on to infinity. The upshot is that, since we have nowhere from which we can make a beginning of our demonstration, suspension follows. (167) The Mode from Relativity is (as we have previously said), that in which the object appears to be this or that sort of thing only in relation to the thing judging it, or in relation to other things that accompany its consideration;

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4   Translations are our own, modified from Bury.

(168) but we suspend about what sort of thing it is in its nature. The Mode from Hypothesis arises whenever the Dogmatists, having been cast into an Infinite Regress, take their beginning from something which they do not demonstrate, but instead decide that they can simply and indemonstrably assume it as granted. (169) The Reciprocal Mode comes about when the thing that is invoked in support of the question under investigation is itself in need of proof from the thing being investigated. In that case since we cannot take either of the two for use in the establishment of the other, we suspend about both.

Sextus then proceeds to claim that every possible matter of dispute can be brought under the Five Modes, and will thus lead to suspension. He also makes it clear that the Five Modes are intended to be used, like chess moves, in combination with each other: the Dogmatist who flees from one will inevitably fall into another (*PH* 1.173):

> And if our disputant, in flight from those options [sc. Regress and Reciprocity], should claim to assume as granted and without demonstration some premise for the demonstration of the things that come after it, then the Hypothetical Mode makes its entrance; and it is a dead end.

This is the feature of the Five Modes that has earned Agrippa the admiration of later philosophers: the strategic cunning of his deployment of the modes in combination, and his crafting of them so that they interlock with each other in this way. These features are lacking, for instance, from the Ten Modes, which are a collection of independent argument-schemata, loose and separate.[5] Each one of the Ten, functioning as a self-standing argument, is intended to lead to suspension of judgment; but none of them support each other or contribute to larger, over-arching argumentative structures. The Five Modes by contrast are a system: they function synergistically because they were planned synoptically.

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5   There is a sort of arrangement to the Ten Modes, best studied by Striker 1983, but it is far less intricate than the Five. The Ten Modes are related to each other as variegated members of a genus, rather like the various knives in a chef's drawer: bread knife, paring knife, sushi knife, and so on. Each of the Ten does the same sort of thing, with slight variations, and there would seldom be reason to use two in combination (a chef with a cleaver in one hand and a peeler in the other will probably need to put one down before setting to work). The Five Modes, by contrast, are related to each other as knife to fork to cutting-board, or hammer to tongs to anvil. Their functions are disparate and complementary: some of them orient and immobilize, so that others can eviscerate and stun.

It Is for this reason that Barnes' book on the modes is such a pleasure to read. And it is for this reason that he omits the Mode of Relativity from his discussion. As Vogt comments, 'Scholars have observed that 5-3, the Mode of Relativity, does not really fit into the Five Modes' (2013, section 4.3).

Sextus says, in the quotation above, that he has already discussed the Mode of Relativity. This is a reference to his earlier account of the Eighth of the Ten Modes, the mode that claims that all judgments (or appearances, perceptions, thoughts, etc.) are relative to the person or animal judging, and relative to the contexts and circumstances of judgment, and so cannot reliably inform us about the nature of the object in itself (*PH* 1.135-40). And Sextus' illustrations of Agrippa's Mode of Relativity follows that model when he says that all objects of perception are relative, because they are relative to the perceivers (175), and all objects of thought are relative, because they are relative to the one having the thought (177). This sort of relativity of the object is contrasted with the object's being a certain way in its own nature (*tēi phusei toiouton*). Sextus claims that if the object itself really were a certain way in its own nature, then this would not be a matter of disagreement. Since it is a matter of disagreement, then, it must be a matter of relativity.

Here we can see that Relativity is not adding anything to the structure of the Five Modes that is not already secured by Disagreement. Disagreement by itself is sufficient to trigger the mechanism. Nor is Relativity woven into the fabric of the Sceptical net: Regress, Hypothesis and Reciprocity do the job as a tight-knit trio, and so earn the collective title of the 'Agrippan Trilemma'.

Thus, Relativity comes to be treated as the fifth wheel of the Five Modes, doubling up the work of Disagreement. Hankinson divided the modes into the 'material modes' of Disagreement and Relativity, and the 'formal modes' of Regress, Reciprocity, and Hypothesis (1995, 163). This is useful, and he has been followed by other scholars.[6] In a similar vein, Williams refers to Relativity and Disagreement together as the 'Challenging Modes' (2010, 296-7):

> . . . their point being to trigger a demand for justification. Once the need for justification is recognized, the sceptic deploys the remaining 'Dialectical' Modes to show that an attempt to justify a claim—any claim—faces an insuperable obstacle in the form of a fatal trilemma.

So the best that we can do with Relativity is to make it the superfluous partner of Disagreement, in contrast to the well-knit and brilliantly articulated Trilemma. But even this division of the Five Modes involves an embarrassment, since

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6   E.g. Woodruff 2010; Vogt 2013.

Agrippa himself seems to have put them in the wrong order: instead of making Relativity the second mode, along with Disagreement, he made it the third mode, after Regress. Hankinson is right to complain that: '[a]lthough Diogenes and Sextus preserve the same ordering (indicating that it was standard), there seems no rationale for it; and it breaks up the modes from Regress, Hypothesis, and Reciprocity, which form a coherent class' (1995, 163).

Can Agrippa, the architect of the Trilemma, have been so clumsy? Can he have failed to understand the structure and coherence of his own system? He could have given the world the Four Modes of Agrippa: Disagreement, Regress, Hypothesis and Reciprocity. This would have been economical, elegant, orderly, and rational; it would have perfectly suited the taste of Barnes and all other discerning critics of Ancient Scepticism. Instead he spoiled the picture by throwing in an irrelevance, and spoiled it further by placing it in the wrong order.

This is a very disappointing understanding of the Five Modes, and it should make us willing to consider other ways of understanding Agrippa's Mode of Relativity.

3   A New Reading of Agrippa's Mode of Relativity; How it Solves the Difficulties

Here we should turn to the description of the Mode of Relativity as it is transmitted by Diogenes Laertius (9.89):[7]

> The Mode of Relativity says that nothing is grasped by itself, but with something else; whence they are not known (ὁ δὲ πρός τι οὐδέν φησι καθ' ἑαυτὸ λαμβάνεσθαι, ἀλλὰ μεθ' ἑτέρου. ὅθεν ἄγνωστα εἶναι).

That is the whole of his report about Relativity (his reports of the other four modes are equally brief). It has always been read by critics as simply a verbal variant of Sextus' own report of the Agrippan Mode of Relativity, i.e. as an allusion to the kind of arguments recorded in the eighth of the Ten Modes. On this reading, the Sceptic is describing a kind of pervasive infirmity in our grasp, and contrasting it with an implicit ideal. Ideally, we would grasp each thing 'in accordance with itself', *kath' heauto*. But alas, we never do this. Instead, the Sceptic tells us, we inevitably grasp things 'with something else', *meth' heterou*,

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7   We use the most recent text, that of Dorandi. He follows Stephanus and Frobenius in writing *kath' heauto* for the mss.' meaningless *kata panta*.

and this prevents us from knowing them. The traditional reading thus assimilates Diogenes' qualification 'in accordance with itself' to Sextus' qualification of grasping something 'in its nature' (*pros tēn phusin*) in *PH* 1.168. This is the epistemic ideal: to know something by itself and in its nature. Since that ideal eludes us, the things are unknown.

This traditional reading is of course possible: indeed, if our overall view is correct, then Sextus himself read Diogenes' source in just this way. But it is by no means the only way to read it. And it is worth noting some minor problems with the traditional reading, in addition to the overarching problems with the argumentative architectonic that we have already noted.

To begin with, there is the welter of discrepant prepositions: this mode is called the mode 'in relation to' (*pros*) something, because nothing is grasped 'according to' (*kata*) itself, but rather 'with' (*meta*) something else. This is very odd: why should the claim that everything is grasped 'with' something else, and not 'according to' itself, be given the title 'The Mode In Relation to Something'? To make even minimal sense of the text, we must assume that 'in relation to something' and 'with something else' are being treated as rough synonyms, both of them roughly antonymous to 'according to itself.' And this much is common both to the traditional reading, and to the new reading that we will propose. From this, it follows that the 'something' in the mode's name is a second thing, i.e. 'something else', distinct from a first thing, 'the thing itself'. This point, too, is a point of agreement between our new reading and the old one.

However, unlike the report in Sextus, Diogenes' description of Relativity makes no contrast between how a thing is in relation to other things, and how it is in its own nature. Instead, it contrasts two ways of being grasped (*lambanesthai*), either being grasped by itself or being grasped with something else, and says that only the second is possible.[8] The assumption that Diogenes' 'in accordance with itself' is the same as Sextus' 'in its own nature' may be correct, but it is certainly not required by the text.

The assumption that Diogenes' 'with something else' is the same as normal Sceptical references to epistemic relativity is also possible, but entirely unprecedented: there is no place in either Diogenes or Sextus where that phrase is used to discuss the issue of epistemic relativity. When the sceptics in Sextus or Diogenes says that human beings should doubt their senses because we see *through* human eyes rather than dogs' eyes, or see *in* the morning light rather than evening light, or judge *from* Greek prejudices rather than from Persian ones, they never use the prepositional phrase 'with something'. If the *pros ti* in

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8   We shall see in Section 4 that, in the Two Modes, all varieties of epistemic grounding relations will be referred to as 'grasping', using *katalambanesthai*.

the name of the mode in Diogenes means the same thing as the *meth' heterou* that is used in its explication, then the fact that *meth' heterou* is never used as a way of referring to epistemic relativity ought to give us pause before we unthinkingly assume that the *pros ti* must mean epistemic relativity.

Here is where our proposal comes in. The three so-called formal or dialectical modes (Regress, Reciprocity, and Hypothesis) are all restrictions on grounding relations—proof, demonstration, warrant, support, etc.—which claim, respectively: that chains of grounding relations must be finite; that two objects cannot symmetrically ground each other; and that ungrounded assertions cannot provide grounding for other assertions.

We propose that the third mode, the Mode of Relativity, should be understood in this way as well. Its references to 'being grasped by itself' and 'being grasped with something else' are further characterizations of the grounding relations, and this mode asserts that nothing can be grounded by itself; anything that is grounded must be grounded by something distinct from it. In other words, epistemic grounding relations are irreflexive. If a Dogmatist claims that something can be known through itself—that an axiom is self-justifying, self-explanatory, self-evident, etc.—then the sceptic who employs the mode of Agrippan Relativity will counter that nothing can be known in this way. Whatever is epistemically grounded, must be grounded in something distinct from itself: thus, anything that is alleged to be grasped through itself is in fact unknown.

And indeed Diogenes gives us an example of this sort of argument in the next passage (9.90-4), in which he shows how the Five Modes may be used in the demolition of the dogmatic notion of 'demonstration' (*apodeixis*). We find the expected invocations of Regress, Reciprocity, Disagreement, and Hypothesis. But we also find this argument (9.91):

> But if they say that there seem to be certain things that require no demonstration, then they are remarkable for their wisdom if they do not understand that first this very claim requires demonstration, sc. the claim that there are things that have their credibility from themselves (*ex hautōn*). For we cannot establish (*ou bebaiōteon*) that the elements are four, from the fact that (*ek tou ... einai*) the elements are four. And when the particular demonstrations are implausible, then the demonstration of the general point will be implausible as well.⁹

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9 'The general point' is 'that there exist certain things that have their credibility from themselves.' 'The particular demonstrations' are exemplified by the attempt to demonstrate that the elements are four from the fact that the elements are four. The sceptic cannot directly

This argument is not explicitly called an Argument from Relativity. But it is deployed as part of an extended example of how to use the Five Modes, and it is not included among any of the other four, which are labeled explicitly.

The claim at the end of Diogenes' report, that the allegedly self-supporting propositions are not known (*agnōsta*) is very similar to the claim that Aristotle attributes to his sceptical opponents in *Posterior Analytics* 72b12. These are the opponents who claim that knowledge is impossible, because knowledge must be demonstrative, and there cannot be demonstrations of everything. They raise the problem of justificatory Regress, and then say:

> If it should come to a stop and there are beginnings/principles, then these are not known, because there is no demonstration of them—which, they say, is the only kind of knowledge (εἴ τε ἵσταται καὶ εἰσὶν ἀρχαί, ταύτας ἀγνώστους εἶναι ἀποδείξεώς γε μὴ οὔσης αὐτῶν, ὅπερ φασὶν εἶναι τὸ ἐπίστασθαι μόνον).

So Aristotle's sceptics argue as follows: in order for things to be known, they must be demonstrated from things distinct from themselves; these alleged *arkhai* are not demonstrated from things distinct from themselves; therefore these alleged *arkhai* are not known (*agnōstous*). Agrippa's third mode recapitulates this argument: a thing must be grasped with, i.e. grounded in, something else distinct from it; the things that are alleged to be grasped 'by themselves' are not grasped with something distinct from them; therefore they are not known (*agnōsta*).

This interpretation of the third mode—'Agrippan Relativity', as we call it—makes it different from either the Hypothetical or the Reciprocal Mode.

Agrippan Relativity differs from Hypothesis in the same way that Platonic self-movers differ from Aristotelian unmoved movers. When faced with the threat of infinite regress of moved movers, Plato offers to terminate it with a reflexive self-mover. It is a source of motion to others by being in motion itself, and the motion that it has is motion that it imparts to itself. Aristotle terminates his chain with an unmoved mover, i.e. something that is not in motion, and does not reflexively move itself, but that can nevertheless impart to other things a motion that it does not share. So too, Aristotelian axioms are unproved

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counter the general demonstration, because the dogmatist has not made one yet. But the sceptic can point out that particular cases of it are implausible, and that this augurs ill for the plausibility of any attempt at a general demonstration.

provers, and the natural targets of the Mode of Hypothesis.[10] The natural tar-
gets of Agrippan Relativism, by contrast, are self-proving provers: first prin-
ciples alleged to enjoy self-justification, self-evidence, self-explanatoriness and
so on. Nothing, it claims, can stand in that relation to itself.

Agrippan Relativity differs from the Mode of Reciprocity, because that
mode, the *tropos diallēlos*, targets pairs of distinct objects that are claimed
to support each other symmetrically. That the targets of the *diallēlos* are
distinct pairs is built into its name, i.e. the 'Through-One-Another' Mode.[11]
Readers will naturally think that Reciprocity could do the work of Agrippan
Relativity as we understand it; surely the bar on symmetry must entail a bar
on reflexivity as well. But the Mode of Reciprocity does not express a bar on
symmetry simpliciter (i.e. for all x, y: $xRy \Rightarrow \neg yRx$); rather, it expresses a bar
on symmetry between distinct objects (i.e. for all x, y s.t. $x \neq y$: $xRy \Rightarrow \neg yRx$).
Since Reciprocity covers the latter cases only, the reflexive cases (where
$x=y$) still remain to be addressed by Agrippan Relativity. What a different
theorist might have accomplished with a principle of unrestricted symmetry,
Agrippa accomplished with two complementary principles, Reciprocity and
Irreflexivity. As we shall see in Sections 4 and 6 below, Agrippa had prin-
cipled reasons for preferring this articulation of the cases.

Consider, on our reading, how the Five Modes work. Suppose that the
question before us—the object of initial investigation—is a proposition, P_1,
which the Dogmatist accepts. The Mode of Disagreement leads the Sceptic to
demand from the Dogmatist some epistemic grounding for the Dogmatists'
preference of P_1 over not-P_1. The Dogmatist takes up the challenge confidently
and without concern, offering P_2 in support of P_1. Then the Sceptic introduces
the Mode of Regress, forcing the Dogmatist to support P_2 by means of P_3, P_3
by means of P_4, and so on. Seeing where this will lead, the Dogmatist thinks to
avoid infinite regress by adducing some favored P_n in support of P_n: this partic-
ular proposition, he alleges, is self-justifying, self-explanatory, self-grounding.

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10   It is important to see that the application of the Mode of Hypothesis does not simply
      consist in asserting ¬P in response to the Dogmatist's assertion of P; on that model,
      it would be hard to see how it differs from Disagreement. Rather, to hypothesize is to
      arrogate to the proposition a certain originative status: to declare it a font of that *vis
      demonstrativa* that will cascade down the apodeictic pyramid. Other things gain their
      demonstrative force because they were demonstrated; the axioms do not. What gives
      them their title? '*Nous*,' says Aristotle, 'or *epagōgē*!' 'Alchemy,' says Agrippa, 'or *ex nihilo*—
      and my answers are no less informative than yours.'
11   One can no more say in Greek, e.g., *to axiōma bebaioutai di' allēlou*, than one can
      say in English 'the premise is grounded through one another'. Both are of dubious
      grammaticality, and do not successfully express self-grounding claims.

Now the Sceptic counters with Agrippan Relativity: there is no reflexive epistemic grounding; nothing can be grasped through itself, but must be grasped by means of grasping something else. The resourceful Dogmatist, seeing that both infinity and self-support are dead ends, seeks shelter in a starting point that is entirely unsupported, an Aristotelian unproved prover; and the Sceptic is ready with the Mode of Hypothesis. Finally, the Dogmatist thinks to re-use one of the propositions introduced at an earlier stage in the regress, perhaps P_{n-1}: he will base P_n on P_{n-1}. Thus P_n will not be entirely ungrounded (and so it will avoid Hypothesis), and will not be self-grounding (thus avoiding Agrippan Relativity), nor will it entangle him in the interminable provision of ever new terms (thus avoiding Regress). But, as we know, the Sceptic is ready here as well, with the Mode of Reciprocity.

Here we see elegance restored. There is a single entry-point to the Sceptical net (the Mode of Disagreement), and the Mode of Relativity in no way duplicates its function. There is no derangement of the architectonic: Agrippan Relativity is deployed at a perfectly intelligible point, just when Regress has exhausted the Dogmatist's confidence in generating novel grounds of support, but the Dogmatist still believes that premises must be supported by something or another.[12]

Another way of seeing the rationale of Agrippa's system, with our new understanding of Agrippan Relativity, is to imagine a Dogmatist who has been challenged to offer some support for their assertion (by Disagreement), and so is at the nth stage of a Regress, and is now challenged about the status of P_n. The Dogmatist has the following exclusive and exhaustive options:

> There either is or is not some number m, such that P_m grounds P_n:
> > if there is no number m such that P_m grounds P_n, then P_n is entirely ungrounded, and the Dogmatist faces the Hypothetical Mode;
> > if there is some number m such that P_m grounds P_n, then by Trichotomy, m must be greater than, less than, or equal to n:

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12   There is some room for flexibility in the order of invocation, depending on how the Dogmatist proceeds. A different dogmatist might have responded to disagreement over P and ¬P by moving straight to the claim that P grounds itself. Then the sceptic would have invoked Agrippan Relativity in order to force the Dogmatist to offer distinct propositions in support of P, which would then lead to later deployments of Regress, Hypothesis, and Reciprocity. Agrippan Relativity did not have to come third in order to function in the Tetralemma; but the fact that it comes third shows that it is one of the dialectical modes, and should not be treated as a second, superfluous, triggering mode external to a dialectical trilemma.

> if m is greater than n, the Dogmatist faces the Mode of Regress;
> if m is less than n he faces the Mode of Reciprocity;
> if m is equal to n he faces the Mode of Agrippan Relativity.

This, then, is the Agrippan Tetralemma.

## 4   How the New Reading Helps Us to Understand the Two Modes

Here is what Sextus tells us about the Two Modes, directly after his discussion of the Five Modes (*PH* 1.178-9):

> And they also hand down two other modes of suspension. Everything that is grasped [*katalambanesthai*] is grasped either from itself [*ex heautou*] or from something distinct [*ex heterou*]; so, by pointing out that it is grasped neither from itself nor from something distinct, it seems to them that they can introduce aporia about everything. And that nothing is grasped from itself, they say, is clear from the disagreement that arises among the physicists in regard to objects of sensation and objects of thought—all of them, as it seems to me—and this is undecidable, because we cannot employ any criterion, whether of sensation or of thought, since each one we take is a matter of disagreement and therefore untrustworthy. (179) And for this reason they concede that nothing can be grasped from something distinct, either. For if that from which a thing is grasped will always need to be grasped from something distinct (*ex heterou*), then they will impose the Mode of Reciprocity or the Mode of Infinity. But if someone wants to assume that something can be grasped from itself (in order that something else can be grasped from this), this will conflict with the fact that nothing is grasped from itself, for the reasons previously mentioned. We are at a loss to see how what is a matter of conflict could be grasped either from itself or from something else when no criterion of truth or cognition is in evidence, and when signs (even apart from demonstrations) have been overturned, as we shall find in what follows.

The rationale underlying the Two Modes is that things can either be grasped from other things or from themselves. With our new understanding of the Agrippan Tetralemma, we can see that the Two Modes organize Regress and Reciprocity on the side of 'from others', and Hypothesis and Agrippan Relativity on the side of 'from itself'. Hypothesis is a response to the claim that a putative axiom needs no support and is simply evident; Agrippan Relativity is a

response to the claim that a putative axiom is its own support. Either of these claims could be summarized by saying that the axiom is simply known 'from itself' (*ex heautou* or *aph' heautou*), i.e. that it either needs no explanation, or that it is self-explanatory.

Setting aside the 'triggering' or 'challenging' mode of Disagreement, which is needed to put either set of modes into action, we can align the Two Modes with the Five Modes in this diagrammatic way:[13]

Two Modes: From Itself   From Something Distinct

Five Modes: Hypothesis   Agrippan Relativity   Regress Reciprocity
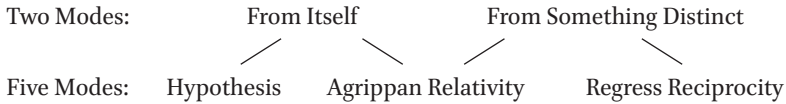
The relation between the Two and the Five is thus parallel to what Sextus says about one of the ways of grouping the Ten Modes into three more generic categories.[14]

Hankinson's discussion of the Two Modes is very good, and includes the following insightful comment (1995, 170):

> Furthermore, the author of the Two Modes shows himself aware of the need to deal with the possibility of self-supporting propositions (cases where p is invoked in support of p, which are not explicitly dealt with in the Five Modes, although which might be treated as the limiting case of Reciprocity).

This is along the right lines, but the suggestion of using Reciprocity cannot work: in the Two Modes, Reciprocity is clearly relegated to the cases where one thing is proved from a distinct thing (*ex heterou* four times) as opposed to from itself. Instead, Hankinson's desire for a way 'to deal with the possibility

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13   'But then the Two Modes really ought to have been called the Three, since Disagreement continues to play a role alongside the reduced pair of self-grounded and other-grounded.' Yes. That is an accurate description of the Two Modes as they stand, either in our reading or in the traditional reading; they still require some sort of 'challenging mode' or 'triggering mode' to sweep the victim into the Modes' maw. So it does not really tell against our reading of the Mode of Relativity—or for it, either.

14   After listing the Ten by name in *PH* 1.36-7, he says in 38: 'And superordinate to these there are Three Modes—the one from the subject who is judging, that from the object judged, and that from both.' He then lists the first four of the Ten under the first of the Three; the seventh and tenth under the second of the Three; and the fifth, sixth, eighth, and ninth under the third of the Three.

of self-supporting propositions' is exactly answered by our understanding of Agrippan Relativity.

This also helps to explain why Agrippa did not want to treat Reflexivity as a special case of a mode prohibiting symmetry simpliciter. As noted above in Section 3, a logically equivalent system could be constructed by replacing the current modes against Reciprocity (which targets pairs of distinct objects) and Reflexivity with a mode against Symmetry, where this covered both cases in which x=y and cases in which x≠y. But that re-parsing would cause Symmetry to straddle both sides of the fundamental dividing line in the Two Modes, i.e. the modes that treat the proposition by itself, versus the modes that involve its relations to others.

So if we accept the new reading of Agrippan Relativity, then we can show not only that 'the possibility of self-supporting propositions' was after all 'explicitly dealt with in the Five Modes', we can also more plausibly attribute the Two Modes and the Five Modes to the same author. If we follow the normal reading of Agrippa's Mode of Relativity, then Hankinson's point makes it hard to see how the author of the Two Modes could have left the Five Modes lacunose in the indicated way. But now we can see that Agrippa always thought that the Five Modes were internally organized into Disagreement plus the Tetralemma; the symmetrical Four naturally gave rise to the Two.

5   Two Concrete Examples of Sextus' Use of the Five Modes

Sextus discusses the Five Modes in general terms when he introduces them in *PH* 1.164-77. Does he ever employ them against particular targets? Of course many passages in Sextus feature arguments from infinite regress, or allegations of question-begging. But when these are used in isolation, there is no particular reason to think of them as Agrippan: arguments of both sorts predate Agrippa by many centuries. So it is the concerted deployment of several Agrippan modes that we should look for, to see how Sextus uses the Five Modes in practice.

And in fact, there are only two passages in Sextus that clearly employ multiple Agrippan modes in concert. The Five Modes are invoked by name at *PH* 1.185-6 against the 'aetiologists', i.e. people who offer explanations or causal accounts of the world. And at *PH* 2.20, Sextus does not say that he is using the Five Modes in so many words, but he does use arguments from Disagreement, Regress, Reciprocity, and Hypothesis (along with those verbatim labels) in combination, in a way that clearly owes its inspiration to the

Agrippan system.[15] These two passages repay close study, because each offers evidence for our claim that Sextus did not fully grasp the Agrippan system, and that he completely failed to understand the third Agrippan Mode, i.e. Agrippan Relativity.

5.1   *Concrete Use of the Five Modes in* PH 1

We begin with *PH* 1.185-6, the argument against *aitiai*, i.e. explanations or causal accounts.[16]

> But perhaps the Five Modes of suspension might suffice against the aetiologies. [*Setting the modes in motion: Disagreement*:] For suppose someone gives an explanation: it will either be in agreement with all of the philosophical sects, and with Scepticism, and with the appearances, or it will not. And for it to be in agreement is perhaps impossible; for all appearances as well as things non-evident are matters of disagreement. (186) And if it [sc. the explanation] is a matter of disagreement, then he will be asked for the explanation of this, too. [*The 'moving' modes, Regress and Reciprocity*:] And if he should take something apparent as an explanation of something apparent, or something non-evident as explanation of something non-evident, then he will fall into Regress. But if he should set about explaining them by alternating between them [sc. apparent and non-evident], then he will fall into the Reciprocal Mode. [*The 'standing' modes, Relativity and Hypothesis*:] But if he comes to a stand somewhere, then either he will say that he has composed an explanation (at least for the things that have been said), and then he will invite the Relative Mode, and destroy what is in relation to nature, or if he takes something by Hypothesis then he will be forced to suspend. So that this too may perhaps be a way to refute the rashness of the dogmatists in their aetiologies.

We say that the third section of this passage employs the 'standing' modes, because Sextus introduces it by saying that these are the modes that come into play if the dogmatist says that he has 'come to a stand somewhere'. By contrast, the earlier group are the 'moving' modes (our coinage), because here the idea

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15   Computerized word-searches confirm that no other passages in Sextus feature the strings *diallēl-*, *apeir-*, and *hupothe-* within five lines of each other. There are other passages in which Regress and Reciprocity are used together (with Disagreement presumably to be taken for granted from context), but without Hypothesis or Relativity.

16   Diogenes offers an Agrippan attack on the *aition* in 9.97-9, but both the target and the strategy are different.

seems to be that the dogmatist is always moving from one *aitia* to another when asked to explain his explanations or justify his justifications. Either the dogmatist will keep moving to new explanations that were not previously used, and so fall into Regress, or the dogmatist will move back and forth between two explanations, re-using the pair and so falling into Reciprocity.[17]

The superordinate structure of the Two Modes is easy to see here: the moving modes are those that try to justify an *aitia* X by reference to some distinct *aitia* Y (*ex heterou*); the standing modes are those that involve 'coming to a stand' with a single *aitia*, and attempting to ground it by itself (*ex heautou*), without seeking for some distinct *aitia* outside of it.

That much is clear. However, Sextus' description of the Relative Mode once again shows that he attempted to understand it in light of the eighth mode of the Ten, i.e. as epistemic relativity, and that this made for a bad fit with the framework of the Five Modes that he inherited.

On our understanding, the way to invoke Agrippan Relativity against an *aitia* is to argue that nothing can be self-explanatory or self-causing, or stand reflexively to itself in whatever the aetiological relation may be. We saw an example of this quoted in Diogenes Laertius, when the dogmatist was imagined attempting to demonstrate things from themselves (*ex heautōn*). This is one of the two options someone has when they 'come to a stand' with a single *aitia*, declining to support it by any distinct *aitia*. Their other option is to 'hypothesize' it, i.e. to treat it as an axiom, and claim that it can stand as an *aitia* for other things, without needing to have any *aitiai* underlying it, even itself: it is uncaused and unexplained, but can nevertheless cause and explain other things.

On Sextus' understanding, invoking the Relative Mode means claiming that the item in question is relative to something else, and thus we don't see its true nature. But why is the invocation of natures apposite in this context? To begin with, the relative status of every *aitia* is a harmless triviality: a cause is the cause *of* something, an explanation is an explanation *of* something, and it would be obtuse to allege this as an objection. Secondly, why should this issue arise only now, after the dogmatist has 'come to a stand'? Every link in the infinite regress, or each item in the reciprocating pair, could have been accused of relativity in the Aenesideman sense—indeed, the charge that we fail to know their true natures could have been made against them wholesale, and without regard to the tetralemmatic structure.

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17   The adverb *enallax* that describes the Reciprocal alternation is used by Aristotle to describe the crane's method of sleeping while balanced on one foot, periodically shifting from one foot to the other (*HA* 614b25).

Our proposal, then, is that this passage shows us once again that Sextus took over a framework that he did not fully understand. His sources had already directed the Five Modes against the target of aetiology, and had already done so in a framework that mapped the Five onto the Two, i.e. Disagreement followed by the 'From Something Else' pair of Regress and Reciprocity, followed by the 'From Itself' pair of Agrippan Relativity and Hypothesis. When Sextus came to fill out the framework, he mistook Agrippan Relativity for the unrelated issue of epistemic relativity, i.e. the eighth mode, and introduced an irrelevant reference to 'nature'.

5.2   *Concrete Use of the Five Modes in* PH 2

The only other passage in which we can see Sextus attempting to operate the machinery of the Five Modes comes in his general attack on the Criterion, in *PH* 2.20-1:

> Now of those who have pronounced on the criterion, some of them say that it exists (e.g. the Stoics and some others), whereas some say that it does not exist (in particular, Xeniades of Corinth, and Xenophanes of Colophon, who said 'seeming is wrought over all things'). We, however, suspend judgment as to whether it exists or not. [*Mode of Disagreement*:] So here is a point of disagreement: and they will say that it is either capable of being decided, or that it is undecidable. And if undecidable, then they will be conceding *ipso facto* that they should suspend judgement. But if they say that it is capable of being decided, then let them say by what means it will be decided, since we ourselves have no criterion that is agreed upon. Indeed, we do not even know whether one exists to begin with—that is a matter of enquiry for us. And again: in order that the disagreement that has arisen over the criterion may be decided, we need to have a criterion that has been agreed upon, in order that we shall be able to decide the disagreement. And in order that we should have a criterion that has been agreed upon, it is necessary that the disagreement concerning the criterion should previously have been decided. [*Mode of Reciprocity*:] And since in this way the argument falls into the Mode of Reciprocity, the discovery of the criterion becomes a dead end. [*Mode of Hypothesis*:] And neither shall we allow them to grasp a criterion by Hypothesis; [*Mode of Regress*:] instead, if they want to judge the criterion by a criterion, then we will throw them into Infinite Regress. [*Mode of Reciprocity, second instance*:] But as well, since demonstration requires a demonstrated criterion, and the criterion requires a demonstration that has been decided, they will fall into the Mode of Reciprocity.

Here we can see Sextus using Disagreement, Regress, Hypothesis, and Reciprocity in concert with each other. But the Mode of Relativity is notable by its absence—and perhaps more notable because of the presence of a second, somewhat redundant use of Reciprocity, as though Sextus still felt some urge to make his modes add up to five.[18]

Why is there no Relativity in this argument? If understood as Agrippan Relativity, there is a natural place for it: nothing can be its own criterion. Criteria, in the Hellenistic era, were a kind of epistemic ground, like justification, warrant, and the like. So Agrippa would have found it very natural to point out that the criterial relation, like other epistemic grounding relations, cannot be reflexive. But when Sextus lost this understanding of Agrippan Relativity, he lost his sense of how this mode fits into a general attack on the criterion.

Sextus, then, seems to have been the first in a long line of critics who want to 'banish' the Mode of Relativity from Agrippa's Five Modes. If our proposal is right, then Sextus was also the first in a long line of critics to misunderstand Agrippan Relativity.

6   Agrippa and Aristotle

At several junctures in the preceding discussion, we have had occasion to mention Aristotle, and in this section it will be useful to draw together the threads that connect Aristotle and Agrippa. In particular, we should consider a possible line of objection to our interpretation, based on Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics* 1.3.

Agrippa's achievement, brilliant as it was, owes its inspiration to Aristotle.[19] The Five Modes are manifestly a reworking of material from *APo.* 1.3, made

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18   The two Reciprocities are distinct, in that the earlier one involves alternating between criterion and agreement (we cannot have a criterion without agreement, or an agreement without a criterion), whereas the later one replaces agreement with demonstration, so as to alternate between criterion and demonstration. It then proceeds to embed an extra layer of reciprocity inside the two terms, in a kind of exuberant gesture towards the *mise en abyme*. It does not simply say that demonstration requires a criterion, while the criterion requires a demonstration (which would have been Reciprocity enough); it says that demonstration requires a criterion that had already undergone a demonstration, while the criterion requires a demonstration that was already decided by a criterion.

19   We assume that Agrippa was familiar with the arguments of *APo.* 1.3, and perhaps with the text itself. A referee pointed out that this assumption has consequences for the history of Aristotle's corpus and its study in the later centuries, and directed us to Moraux's

to serve a sceptical conclusion that Aristotle explicitly repudiates in his own discussion. We cannot trace how Agrippa might have come to know the material, or in what form—our ignorance about the man is nearly perfect—but it must still strike anyone who works through both texts, that their resemblances cannot be accidental.

In this portion of *APo.*, Aristotle argues for the acceptability of non-demonstrative knowledge of first principles, i.e. intuitive knowledge of axioms. He proceeds by arguing that the opposing view (that all knowledge is demonstrative) must lead either to the denial that anything can be known, or to a method of demonstration that runs amok and (quasi-)demonstrates all the falsehoods as well as the truths.

In making these arguments, he enunciates principles very like Modes of Regress and Reciprocity. His own unembarrassed embrace of undemonstrated axioms, in turn, looks very much like the inspiration for Agrippa's Mode of Hypothesis. Given that both men reject Regress and Reciprocity, the choice that each must face comes down to rejecting scepticism, and so accepting the need to posit immediate, undemonstrated axioms, or rejecting such bare undemonstrated Hypotheses, and so endorsing scepticism. Aristotle took the first path; Agrippa took the second.

This summary suggests that, in Aristotle's view, the dialectical landscape can be adequately captured with the three formal modes recognized by most interpreters of Agrippa (i.e. Regress, Reciprocity, and Hypothesis). This in turn suggests that our proposal to recognize a new, fourth formal mode runs counter to the natural reading of Aristotle, and to the most natural lesson that Agrippa would have learned from him.

That is one objection, starting from a broad overview of the structure of *APo.* 1.3; here is a related objection drawn from a more detailed reading of it.

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accounts of Sosigenes and Herminos (Moraux 1984, 339-44; 382-94). It is possible that they were rough contemporaries of Agrippa—our knowledge of his dates is extremely vague—and we have evidence of their work on the *APr.* from Alexander and Philoponus, but no remains of their writing on the *APo.* More promising is the testimony of Galen (*de lib. prop.* xix. 42.7 Kühn) that he wrote six books of commentary on the first book of *APo.*, and that these survived the fire that consumed many of his other works. His work on *APo.* presumably occurred during the time when he was studying the proof-methods of both the Stoics and the Peripatetics, and found them so unhelpful that (as he tells us: 40.5) he might have fallen into Pyrrhonism for all the help his teachers gave him, and was rescued from scepticism only by the early training in geometry he had received from his father. His confidence that geometrical demonstration can provide a bulwark against Pyrrhonism suggests that Galen either had not encountered the Agrippan attack on axioms, or that he followed Aristotle's lead in the dialectic of *APo.* 1.3.

One of Aristotle's arguments against Reciprocity (or 'Circular demonstration', as he calls it), turns on the rejection of a minimal circle in which A proves A. Aristotle considers a group of opponents who claim to know things, and to be able to demonstrate every item that they know, because they can demonstrate all of them in a circle. Aristotle responds by saying (in effect) that any rule that would allow circular demonstration through many propositions must also allow circular demonstration in a degenerate circle with only one proposition. And this, he says, would allow 'demonstration' of even falsehoods. But if Aristotle's rejection of circular demonstration already applies to the case of a single proposition grounding itself reflexively, then for this reason too it seems that Reciprocity should be able to suffice on its own, without the supplement of irreflexivity (i.e. our Agrippan Relativism).

Now we must answer these objections. Our general response is that Agrippa thought his new, four-mode system was clearer, more consistent, and more fundamentally rational than Aristotle's system. Aristotle's system combined unlike things, and Aristotle himself sometimes compounded the error by misdescribing his own views. Now we show that in detail.

It is amply clear that Aristotelian axioms cannot be reflexively self-grounded. That follows not only from his arguments against the advocates of circular demonstration, but also from the fact that his eventual attempt to provide some sort of support for his axioms (via 'induction' or 'intuition') still eschews reflexivity. Aristotle's rejection of reflexivity in his foundations is also highly probable given the analogy adverted to above, from his selection of an unmoved mover for the origins of motion.

And yet, when Aristotle describes his axioms, he sometimes uses language that irresistibly suggests reflexive self-grounding. Here in the *Topics*, for instance, he is sketching the distinction between scientific demonstration and dialectical syllogisms in his own system (100a25-b20):

> Now we have a demonstration (*apodeixis*) when the syllogism is from things that are true and primary, or when it takes the origin of its being known from things which themselves came about through things that are true and primary. A dialectical syllogism, on the other hand, is one that reasons from commonly accepted beliefs. Now things are true and primary that have their credibility (*pistin*) not through other things (*di' heterōn*) but through themselves (*di' hautōn*). For there ought to be no need, in the case of scientific principles, to ask the additional question 'through what?' (*to dia ti*); rather, each of the principles should be credible (*pistēn*) in accordance with itself (*kath' heautēn*).

This passage contrasts theorems and consequences in a science, which receive their grounding through other things (*di' heterōn*), and about which one can ask 'through what?', with the principles of a science, which receive their grounding through themselves (*di' hautōn*), and are each grounded in accordance with itself (*kath' heautēn*). Notice that the question 'Through what does this theorem get its grounding?' seems to be construed as asking 'Through what further, distinct thing?'—that is why it cannot even be asked of a principle that gets its grounding through itself.

It is worth contrasting the phrasing in this passage with the phrasing of Agrippan Relativity in Diogenes Laertius, which denies that anything is grasped in accordance with itself (*kath' heauto*), and uses the phrase 'the mode in relation to something' (*to pros ti*) in a way that, on our reading, must mean 'in relation to some further, distinct thing'. Aristotle thus gives us two confirmations of our reading of Agrippan Relativity: the distinctness of the 'something', and the use of *kath' heauto* to describe reflexive epistemic grounding (rather than knowledge of a thing's intrinsic or *per se* nature, as the orthodox reading has it).

So in this passage, Aristotle writes as though his axioms enjoy reflexive self-grounding: they all have their credibility *di' hautōn* and each has it *kath' heautēn*. But this clearly cannot be what Aristotle means: he cannot think of his axioms as self-provers, for the reasons that he laid out in his argument against the Circular Demonstrators.

So on the one hand Agrippa found in Aristotle some tendency to confuse unproved provers with self-proved provers: even when it is clear that he cannot intend his axioms to support themselves reflexively, Aristotle still lapses into the language of 'through itself' and 'by means of itself', using the very same prepositions that he elsewhere uses to describe the grounding of one proposition on a distinct proposition. On the other hand, Agrippa found in Aristotle's arguments against circular demonstration an unhelpful yoking of two sorts of case that Agrippa wished to keep distinct: cases where the circle has two or more distinct points on it, and so involves pure reciprocal support 'through one another' (*di' allēlōn*) and 'from distinct things' (*ex heterōn*); and the case of the degenerate, one point circle in which the support is reflexive and so 'from itself' (*ex heautou*).

Agrippa was right to think that Aristotle's terminology was bad. It is a mistake to blur the distinction between what is self-grounded and what is ungrounded. And it is a mistake to blur the distinction between a single item that is self-grounded and a pair (or larger n-tuple) of distinct items that are reciprocally grounded.

It is significant in this regard that Aristotle most often refers to his target as 'demonstration in a circle' (*kuklōi*), while also calling it demonstration 'from one another' (*ex allēlōn*) when he is not thinking about the degenerate circle. Agrippa, by contrast, never uses the term 'circle' or 'circular', and always refers to it as the mode 'through one another' (*diallēlos*, now lexicalized as a single word).[20] And as we have seen, the author of the Two Modes, whom we suppose to be Agrippa, places the 'through one another' mode, i.e. Reciprocity, firmly on the side of the modes 'from something distinct', thus refusing to include reflexivity as a case of Reciprocity. Aristotle's circle blurs the crisp dichotomy that Agrippa wanted, and he rejected that parsing of the logical possibilities, along with the name 'circular' for the mode itself.

The boundaries between the modes, in Aristotle, are unhelpfully unclear. When Aristotle meets someone who claims that their axioms are self-justifying, self-evident, and speak for themselves, what should Aristotle do? Should he attack him as a circular demonstrator, employing the degenerate circle of self-grounding? Should he welcome him as a comrade in arms, who has trivially mischaracterized a set of axioms that are in fact not grounded in anything, even in themselves? Aristotle's own categorizations cannot make his response clear. Agrippa, however, knows just what to do: against the radically ungrounded, he employs Hypothesis; against the self-grounded he employs Agrippan Relativity.

7   Objections to the New Reading; Why it should be Accepted Despite Them

The interpretation that we propose, according to which Agrippan Relativity is the principle of irreflexivity for epistemic grounding relations, is not without costs. We consider two of them: the charge of dogmatic assertion, and the conflict with the testimony of Sextus.

7.1   *Objection from Dogmatism*
Agrippan Relativity claims that no epistemic grounding relation is reflexive; nothing is grasped through itself, but only through something else. But isn't that claim itself a dogmatic one? Why should we believe it? (Let's hope we are

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20   Sextus never uses *kuklōi* in the relevant logical sense (as opposed to geometrical discussions of literal circles, or astronomical discussions of the Zodiac), and neither do the sceptical sources in Diogenes.

not expected to grasp it through itself.) Can we attribute it to a Sceptic, without making the Sceptic dogmatize? Three responses are available.

First, even if we conclude that Agrippan Relativity makes a dogmatic assertion, this will make our interpretation no worse than the traditional interpretation. Woodruff, for instance, accepts the traditional view, but is worried about its dogmatism (2010, 224):

> Some scholars would prefer to banish this [sc. the Mode of Relativity] from the Five, because they take it to be essentially dogmatic.[21] A strict Pyrrhonian would hold back from the dogmatic belief that things are relative.

So, if one thinks that sceptics are committed to the logical principles that they deploy in argumentation, our construal of the third mode commits him to the principle that epistemic grounding is irreflexive—but the traditional construal commits him to claims about natures and relativities that are equally dogmatic.

Secondly, there is no need for us to accept even this much, since we prefer the dialectical reading of neo-Pyrrhonism, according to which statements that look like Sceptical positing are really Sceptical parroting of dogmatic positions (Brennan 1999). Agrippa—and those who employ his modes—need not take any stance on epistemic grounding relations. They can simply address their modes to Dogmatists who themselves have views about the structure of epistemic grounding relations. And in this case, we have already seen that Aristotle is committed to the view that nothing can ground itself, so Agrippa can delegate responsibility for the view to at least one Dogmatist of note.

Thirdly, it is worth recalling the lesson of the Tortoise, that any rule of logic may be recast as an assertion (Carroll 1895). Admirers of the Agrippan Trilemma have not generally thought that the so-called 'formal' or 'dialectical' Modes of Regress, Reciprocity, and Hypothesis involve the Sceptic in dogmatic positing; but they do so as much as Agrippan Relativity does. They may be principles of logic but, as the Tortoise taught us: 'whatever Logic holds, Logic can be so good as to write down.' Each of these formal modes may be recast as an assertion, and when that has been done, each assertion will be open to the charge of dogmatism.[22] For this reason too, then, the new reading of Agrippan Relativity does not involve any more dogmatic commitments than the old reading did.

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21   Woodruff here has a footnote in which he cites Annas and Barnes 1985, 97-8 and 144-5.

22   It may of course be a difficult matter to decide exactly how to formulate the assertion that corresponds to a given mode (e.g. Hypothesis might be expressed by 'for any proposition P

7.2   *Objection from Sextus' Understanding*

Far more troubling is the conflict between our interpretation of Agrippan Relativity and Sextus' account of the third mode. There is no way to avoid the problem: if we are right, then Sextus was wrong. Sextus clearly understands Agrippa's third mode as part of the long history of discussions of epistemological relativism and its consequences, and his language and examples tie it firmly into that history. If we are right, then, we must assume that Sextus knew very little about the Agrippan Modes, perhaps only their names, which he then interpreted in ways that were traditional in the Sceptical literature. Everyone knew what Infinite Regress was, for instance, and once Sextus had heard that this was one of Agrippa's Five Modes, he could discourse on it copiously and without error.

Error crept in (if we are right) because Agrippa used *to pros ti*, 'the in relation to something', in a specific way that was not familiar to Sextus. Agrippa's use is not inaccurate or semantically deviant: if epistemic grounding is an irreflexive relation, then *a fortiori* it is a relation, just as much as 'taller than' or 'brother of'. And we cannot think of any other Greek phrase that would more accurately sum up a claim of irreflexivity (*ho tropos mē ex heautou*??) So the name may have struck Agrippa as a suitable one. But it misled his successors.

8   Conclusion

What are the benefits, and what are the costs, of accepting our proposal?[23] The costs are high: we must conclude that our most detailed evidence for Agrippa's

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that may be hypothesized, there exists a distinct proposition, not-P, which is truth-functionally incompatible with it and is equally capable of being hypothesized with equal resultant credibility'. Does that capture the logical principle or not?). But if we are unsure how to formulate the assertion, or if we disagree as between two competing formulations, then this simply shows that we are unsure about the content of the rule as well, and disagree as between two competing interpretations of the rule.

23   The question is directed to historians and those who care about history. To the contemporary epistemologist who has no interest in historical fidelity, and only wants to think about foundationalism and criticisms of it, it should make no difference whether the case against foundationalism is constructed as a trilemma in which reflexive cases are subsumed under Reciprocity (understood as a bar on symmetry), or a tetralemma in which they stand on their own. It is worth being clear about this point because we believe our proposal makes a very considerable difference to our historical understanding of the historical Agrippa and his relation to Aristotle and Sextus. We do not claim that it makes much difference at all to non-historical questions.

system is misleading, and resulted from a misunderstanding by Sextus of one of his Sceptical predecessors. The benefits, however, are significantly higher than the costs. Agrippa's third mode, as currently understood, is an inexplicable botch committed by an acknowledged master. Such things do occur, of course—even in philosophy—but we ought to be very keen to avoid concluding that they occurred if we have a good enough alternative. Our alternative restores order and elegance to the Five Modes. It sheds new light on the connection between the Five Modes and the Two. It explains anomalies in Sextus' own use of the Five Modes. It gives us insight into Agrippa's reworking of Aristotle's system, showing why Agrippa viewed his innovations as improvements. These are all desiderata that any future proposal must meet, and we hope that our discussion will, at the very least, provide a spur to further research. Our proposal is by no means perfect, but it is significantly better than the prevalent orthodoxy. By comparison to the current interpretation, it is a relative improvement.

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