

ARGUMENTATIVE PERSUASIVENESS IN ANCIENT PYRRHONISM

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The present paper has two, interrelated objectives. The first is to analyze the different senses in which arguments are characterized as persuasive in the extant writings of Sextus Empiricus. The second is to examine the Pyrrhonist's therapeutic use of arguments in the discussion with his Dogmatic rivals – more precisely, to determine the sense and basis of Sextus' distinction between therapeutic arguments that appear weighty and therapeutic arguments that appear weak in their persuasiveness. Although Pyrrhonian argumentative therapy has been a subject of analysis among scholars, it has not received all the attention it deserves and one still finds certain misunderstandings about the Pyrrhonist's therapeutic use of arguments. Accordingly, I will discuss at some length several of the interpretations that have been proposed by scholars.

In Section I, I examine the only passage of Sextus' extant works that presents the Skeptic's¹ therapeutic use of arguments and I deal with one of the problems that this passage seems to pose for the coherence of his Pyrrhonism: the Skeptic appears to make assertions about the objective features of his therapeutic arguments as far as their persuasiveness is concerned. In the course of the analysis of that passage, I discuss the interpretations put forward by some specialists. In Section II, I attempt to identify the factor that causes therapeutic arguments to be characterized as strong or weak in their persuasiveness by the Skeptical psychotherapist. In Section III, I address a second problem posed by Sextus' account of the Skeptic's therapeutic practice: the Skeptical doctor seems to disregard the equipollence of rival arguments on which his suspension of judgment rests. In Section IV, I analyze how certain arguments may appear persuasive to the Skeptic himself without this implying any commitment on his part as to how things really are. Finally, in Section V, I sum up the results obtained in the previous analyses and identify the type of persuasiveness at issue in the Skeptic's therapeutic argumentation.

It is my contention that a close examination both of the different types of argumentative persuasiveness distinguished by the Pyrrhonist and of his therapeutic use of arguments will make it possible to gain a better understanding of the nature of Sextan Pyrrhonism. For it will allow us to obtain a more accurate picture both of the Pyrrhonist's peculiar way of conducting discussion with the Dogmatists by means of arguments and of how it is possible for him to make decisions and act without this implying any commitment as to the way things are.

¹ Following Sextus, I will use the words 'Pyrrhonist' and 'Skeptic' interchangeably.

I

In the famous final chapter of the Πυρρώνειοι Ὑποτυπώσεις (*PH*) entitled “Why does the Skeptic sometimes deliberately propound arguments feeble in their persuasiveness (ἀμυδροῦς ταῖς πιθανότησιν)?”, Sextus presents the Skeptic’s therapeutic use of λόγοι, which is motivated by a philanthropic attitude:

The Skeptic, because he is philanthropic, wishes to cure by argument (ἰᾶσθαι λόγῳ), as far as he can, the conceit and the rashness (οἷσιν τε καὶ προπέτειαν) of the Dogmatists. Hence, just as the doctors of the bodily affections (παθῶν)² possess remedies different in power, and apply severe ones to those who are severely affected and milder ones to those who are mildly affected, so too the Skeptic propounds arguments which differ in strength (διαφόρους...κατὰ ἰσχύν). He employs weighty (ἐμβριθέσι) arguments, capable of vigorously healing the affection of conceit of the Dogmatists, in the case of those who are afflicted by a severe rashness, but milder (κουφότεροις) ones in the case of those who possess the affection of conceit superficial and easy to cure, and who are capable of being healed by a milder persuasiveness. This is why he who is motivated by Skepticism does not hesitate to propound sometimes arguments which [appear] weighty in their persuasiveness and sometimes, too, arguments which appear weaker (ὅτε μὲν ἐμβριθεῖς ταῖς πιθανότησιν, ὅτε δὲ καὶ ἀμαυροτέρους φαινομένους...λόγους). [He does this] on purpose, since often the latter are sufficient for him to achieve his aim. (*PH* III 280–281)³

At first glance, this passage poses two problems for the coherence of Pyrrhonism: the Skeptic seems to hold beliefs about how things really are and he also seems to deny that rival arguments appear equally persuasive. If this is so, then the passage runs counter to Sextus’ account of the Pyrrhonian philosophy, since according to this account the Skeptic limits himself to describing how things appear to him and reports that none of the arguments he has so far considered appears to be more persuasive than those with which it conflicts. The first of the aforementioned problems will be examined in this section, while the second will be tackled in the third.

Before addressing the first difficulty, it is important to remark that, although it is the Dogmatist who may be persuaded by a therapeutic argument put forward

² I render πάθος as ‘affection’ because, although in ordinary English this word does not have the meaning of the Greek word, it has become in the specialist literature a technical term to translate πάθος.

³ The translations of the passages from Sextus’ oeuvre are my own, but I have consulted ANNAS-BARNES (2000), BETT (2005), BURY (1933–1949), MATES (1996), and PELLEGRIN (1997).

by the Skeptic, it is the latter who characterizes that argument as weighty or weak in its persuasiveness according to whether the Dogmatist persuaded by it was afflicted by a high or low degree of conceit and rashness. That is to say, when labeling his therapeutic arguments as ‘weighty’ and ‘weak’, Sextus is not speaking from the perspective of the Dogmatists, but from that of the Skeptical psychotherapist. This will become clearer, I hope, in the course of the paper.

The first problem posed by the final chapter of *PH* lies in that the Skeptic appears to believe that some of the arguments he employs to cure the Dogmatists of their conceit and rashness really are weighty or vigorous whereas others really are weak or mild in their persuasiveness. This objective difference in the arguments available to the Skeptical physician is precisely what would make it possible for him to cure the different degrees of οἷσις and προπέτεια that afflict his Dogmatic patients.⁴ If this were the case, then *PH* III 280–81 would pose a serious problem for the coherence of Pyrrhonism. Indeed, to claim that some arguments are objectively weighty while others are objectively weak is to make assertions about how things really are or about what they are like in their nature, which is something the Pyrrhonist claims to refrain himself from doing, limiting himself instead to reporting how things appear to him (see, e.g., *PH* I 4, 19–20, 59, 78, 93, 112, 123, 140, 144, 163). If the Pyrrhonist made such assertions about the therapeutic arguments he employs, he would be adopting the conceited and rash attitude he considers to be characteristic of his Dogmatic patients. The passage in question, however, does not actually create a problem for the consistency of Pyrrhonism. To see this, it is necessary to notice and emphasize Sextus’ use of the participle φαινόμενος at *PH* III 281: he does not say that some arguments are weighty and others are weak in their persuasiveness, but only that they appear so. In fact, nowhere at *PH* III 280–81 does he speak of how arguments are. In this regard, it must be noted that in the passage the verb εἶναι is employed only once, at its very beginning: ὁ σκεπτικός διὰ τὸ φιλόανθρωπος εἶναι. Far from being a mere terminological or stylistic consideration, the emphasis on these points captures the abovementioned phenomenological aspect of the Pyrrhonian discourse: the Skeptic restricts himself to describing the way things appear to him, so that his discourse does not in any way intend to affirm what things are like in their real nature. Hence, Sextus’ account of the Skeptic’s argumentative treatment should be interpreted from this phenomenological point of view. The

⁴ Regarding the relation between οἷσις and προπέτεια, one might consider the former as the cause of the latter, even though Sextus does not explain what this relation is and even though, given his Skeptical stance, he would refrain himself from giving a causal account of it (see VOELKE 1990, 185–86). It is reasonable to assume that the reason the Dogmatist rashly gives his assent to a thesis which does not appear to be stronger than those that conflict with it is that he is too confident about his capacity to apprehend the nature of things to ponder the force of all the conflicting theses. By contrast, since the Skeptic does not believe that he has found the right answers and is then open to taking into account all the views advanced on a given topic, he is not exposed to the ‘disease’ of making rash judgments.

outlook adopted at *PH* III 280–81 then seems clear: there are arguments that *appear* strong and others that *appear* weak to the Skeptic as far as their ability to persuade his Dogmatic patients is concerned. In other words, we must interpret the adjectives employed to characterize the different types of therapeutic arguments (namely, ἀμαυρός, ἀμυδρός, ἐμβριθής, and κοῦφος) phenomenologically and not as expressing objective features of these arguments.

It is important to note that, even if in the final chapter of *PH* Sextus had said that some arguments *are* weighty and others *are* weak, this would not by itself allow us to ascribe to him a view about how these arguments really are, since we would be overlooking some cautious remarks he makes elsewhere. In a well-known passage at the very beginning of *PH*, we find a key preliminary caveat: Sextus tells us that with respect to *none* of the things that will be said in his outline of the Pyrrhonian philosophy does he affirm that it is certainly just as he says it is, but that he merely reports the way things appear to him at the moment (*PH* I 4). Hence, the taxonomy of arguments at *PH* III 280–81 should be interpreted as a mere report or description of Sextus' own appearances, even if he had used the verb εἶναι in his characterization of the two types of therapeutic arguments. In this regard, in other passages he explicitly indicates that, when the Skeptic uses the verb εἶναι, it must be interpreted in the sense of φαίνεσθαι (see *PH* I 135, 198; *Adversus Dogmaticos* [*AD*] V 18–20).⁵

Alan Bailey offers a different interpretation of the Pyrrhonist's assessment of the arguments he employs to cure the Dogmatists. He rightly claims that the Pyrrhonist himself is not persuaded by the arguments he puts forward, but uses them only because they are able to persuade his Dogmatic rivals. Bailey also maintains, however, that at *PH* III 280–81 "Sextus seems to be openly admitting [...] that the Pyrrhonist will sometimes make use of arguments that the Pyrrhonist himself considers to be fallacious or constructed around premisses that have no rational justification" (2002, 138). According to Bailey, the Pyrrhonist "views [certain arguments] as mistaken with the result that they have no persuasive force for him" (2002, 139).⁶ By saying that certain arguments do not persuade the Pyrrhonist, Bailey may here mean either (i) that the Pyrrhonist does not endorse those arguments in the sense of affirming that they are valid or rationally justified, or (ii) that the arguments have no psychological influence on him. In either case, Bailey's interpretation of the Pyrrhonist's stance on the arguments he uses is erroneous. In the case of (i), the reason the Pyrrhonist does not endorse an

⁵ Richard Bett holds that neither *AD* V 18–20 nor *PH* I 135 license us to interpret Sextus as saying that, whenever the Pyrrhonist employs the verb εἶναι, it must be understood as φαίνεσθαι (1997, 58–59). In any case, what seems to be beyond all doubt is that the remark made at *PH* I 4 indicates that that is the way in which the verb εἶναι must be understood throughout *PH*. On *AD* V 18–20, see also SPINELLI (1995), 164–66.

⁶ The view that, at *PH* III 280–81, Sextus admits that the Pyrrhonist will sometimes use 'fallacious', 'invalid', or 'logically weak' arguments is also held by ANNAS (1998), 201 n. 14; THORSRUD (2003), 235 n. 9; and O'KEEFE (2006), 388, 402.

argument is not that he considers it to be invalid or to lack rational justification. The reason is rather that he does not know whether or not that argument is logically valid or rationally justified – he suspends judgment on the matter. One might argue that the Pyrrhonist even suspends judgment about whether or not logical validity and rational justification are objectively desirable or should be taken as criteria for assessing whether an argument is acceptable. In the case of (ii), the reason an argument has no psychological persuasive force for the Pyrrhonist is not that he views it as fallacious or unjustified, since as we will see later on, the psychologically persuasive effect an argument may have on him has nothing to do with whether it is deemed to be valid or justified. In addition, viewing some arguments as objectively fallacious or unjustified is clearly Dogmatic and, hence, utterly incompatible with the Pyrrhonian way of thought. Note that I am not denying that, in a given context or set of circumstances, an argument may non-epistemically appear to the Pyrrhonist as fallacious or unjustified, but only that he believes that the argument is such objectively speaking, which is what Bailey is saying – if I interpret him correctly.

Whereas Bailey reads *PH* III 280–81 as recognizing that the Skeptic employs arguments which he considers to be invalid, Jonathan Barnes proposes the opposite reading. He rejects the interpretation according to which the only thing that matters to the Pyrrhonist is the therapeutic power of arguments, so that he may use fallacious arguments provided that they succeed in curing the Dogmatists. In Barnes' view, nothing of what Sextus says in the last chapter of *PH* allows us to assume that "he is explaining, and excusing, the practice of advancing bad arguments" (2000, xxix). Barnes instead maintains that the Pyrrhonian doctor considers his arguments to be good arguments, since the fact that he adjusts them to the condition of his patients

does not for a moment suggest that the sceptic will try to gull his patients; that he will use on them – on some of them – arguments which he knows are faulty but which he believes will effect the therapy. If I set out to prove Euclid IV 17, I shall look for an argument which starts from true premisses and which concludes, by way of valid inferences, to IV 17. If I set out to prove to you that IV 17 is true, then I shall do exactly the same thing – with an addition: I shall look for premisses which are not merely true but also accepted by you as being true; and I shall use forms of inference which are not merely valid but also recognized by you as being valid. When I prove something to you – when I play the part of intellectual therapist – I do not relax my standards of proof in the interest of effective therapy. On the contrary, the therapy depends on the fact that the arguments are good arguments; and it places a further constraint on them: they must not only be good but also appear to you to be good. (2000, xxviii–xxix)

Elsewhere, Barnes strongly emphasizes “that [its efficaciousness in curing men of temerariousness] is only one virtue of a therapeutic argument. We need not suppose – and Sextus does not say – that on the Pyrrhonian view the sole mark of goodness in arguments was their therapeutic power” (1988, 76 n. 43). He also maintains that “philosophical drugs cure by affecting the reason, and that fact will suggest that they must be compounded from plausible premisses and with reasonable inferences. Not all cures are philosophical cures; and the Pyrrhonist, though a therapist, is also a philosopher” (1988, 77). Barnes is right in that, by characterizing some arguments as feeble, mild, or weak, Sextus is not affirming that they are logically invalid or unsound. However, just as nothing in *PH* III 280–81 suggests that Sextus is explaining why the Pyrrhonist deliberately employs bad arguments, so too nothing indicates that he takes his arguments to consist of true or plausible premises and valid or reasonable inferences. Indeed, the only attribute of arguments referred to in the passage is their therapeutic power, since there is no mention of their objective validity and soundness but only of their effects upon those who suffer from different degrees of conceit and rashness. And this is not unreasonable. For it is possible that a therapeutic argument with true premises and a valid form of inference according to the standards of traditional epistemology and logic would be regarded as unsound by a given patient, who would therefore remain unpersuaded, and hence uncured. And it might even happen that this patient would remain unpersuaded by all the sound arguments on a given topic one could advance. By contrast, another argument, in spite of being faulty by the aforementioned standards, could be deemed sound by the same patient, who would thereby be persuaded and cured.⁷ In such cases, if one’s sole aim is to persuade the person with whom one is discussing because on this persuasion seems to depend his well-being, then it seems that the only attribute of arguments that really matters and, hence, that one has to take into account is their therapeutic effects. In this respect, it is important to note that the comparison Barnes draws between the Pyrrhonist’s arguments and the proofs of Euclid’s theorems is inaccurate for two reasons. First of all, those who offer a proof of one of these theorems do not consider the person to whom they are proving the theorem to suffer from a disease which may be cured by means of such a proof. By contrast, it appears to the Pyrrhonist that the Dogmatists have contracted the diseases of conceit and rashness and that they may be cured by argument, so that his concern is to find arguments capable of effecting the cure. Second, the person who offers a proof of one of Euclid’s theorems believes that its premises and conclusion are true and that its logical form is valid. By contrast, the Pyrrhonian psychotherapist who employs an argument to persuade his Dog-

⁷ It seems clear that there are other factors, besides the validity and soundness of an argument, which determine whether it persuades a person or not, such as the temperament and reputation of the individual who puts forward the argument, the relevance or interest of the subject for the person to be persuaded, his educational and intellectual level, and his emotional state.

matic patients does not believe (or disbelieve) that its premises and conclusion are true and that its logical form is valid. What must be borne in mind with regard to the Pyrrhonist's therapeutic arguments is that objective truth, logical validity, and rational justification are not the criteria he uses to select a given argument to effect the therapy. Indeed, the Pyrrhonist employs certain premises and inference rules in his argumentative treatment, not because he is committed to their truth and validity, respectively, but only because they are accepted by the Dogmatists he wishes to cure.⁸ As specialists in Pyrrhonism have usually noted, the arguments used by the Pyrrhonist are dialectical, i.e., they are arguments whose premises, conclusions, and logical forms he does not accept *in propria persona*. It is precisely the dialectical character of the Pyrrhonist's therapeutic arguments which makes it clear that the only thing in these arguments that matters to him is their efficaciousness in persuading his Dogmatic patients.⁹ And this is no surprise, since, as I have just noted, the Pyrrhonist suspends his judgment about whether the premises and conclusions of his arguments are true and about whether the rules of inference employed in those arguments are valid.

There is another point that should be noted regarding the Pyrrhonist's cautious attitude towards his therapeutic arguments. At the beginning of *PH* III 280, Sextus indicates that the Pyrrhonist wishes to cure by argument his patient's rashness and conceit "as far as he can" (κατὰ δύναμιν). Sextus is therefore recognizing that the arguments the Pyrrhonist employs have failed, or might fail, to induce certain people to abandon their beliefs and adopt suspension of judgment.¹⁰ Perhaps some Dogmatic patients were not cured by the Skeptic's argumentative drugs; or perhaps Sextus is leaving open the possibility that in the future there might be patients who will not be cured by them – there is nothing which *a priori* assures him that his therapy will be effective in all cases. It is also possible to interpret Sextus' caveat as meaning not only that the Skeptical thera-

⁸ I partially agree with Donald Morrison when he says that Sextus "was a philosophical nature writing for philosophical natures, and that he realized that only philosophers, or those with strong philosophical natures, would be suitable candidates for this therapy. This is *not* to say that only philosophers *need* this therapy; as we will see, the ancient sceptic thinks that ordinary people, too, would profit from conversion to skepticism. But unfortunately, the sceptic's methods are such that ordinary people have dim prospects for treatment" (1990, 209). Although Sextus' surviving works were addressed both to philosophers and to specialists in the 'liberal arts' (μαθήματα), I believe that nothing prevents the Skeptic's argumentative therapy from being effective in the case of the laymen, since he would adapt his therapeutic arguments to their various beliefs and backgrounds.

⁹ It is perhaps worth noting that, in the passages quoted, Barnes is rejecting an interpretation he himself once adopted. For together with Julia Annas he claimed that the Pyrrhonists "do not concern themselves with the *soundness* of their arguments but with their *efficacy*. A 'good' argument, for the Pyrrhonists, is an argument which works – an argument which is efficacious in producing suspension of judgement" (ANNAS–BARNES (1985), 50).

¹⁰ This point is missed in the French translation in PELLEGRIN (1997): "Le sceptique [...] veut guérir par la puissance de l'argumentation la présomption et la précipitation des dogmatiques" (emphasis added).

peutic arguments have failed, or might fail, to induce some Dogmatists to abandon their beliefs, but also that they may indeed have succeeded, or might indeed succeed, in reducing the degree of conceit with which certain beliefs are held, yet have not succeeded in dislodging them.¹¹ The reason for acknowledging the actual or possible failure of the Skeptical argumentative therapy is that to affirm that there is always some therapeutic argument capable of persuading a given Dogmatist would be clearly Dogmatic.

I would like to end this section by considering two unusual interpretations of the character and the authenticity of *PH* III 280–81. The first is that proposed by Victor Brochard, who thinks that Sextus is not being serious when advancing the philanthropic explanation of the Pyrrhonist's therapeutic argumentation. He maintains:

À côté d'arguments très profonds, d'objections sérieuses et de grande portée, on trouve des sophismes ridicules [... Sextus] n'est pas toujours dupe de ses arguties; parfois il se moque lui-même de ses arguments: ses *Hypotyposes* se terminent sur une sorte de ricanement. [...] Aussi bien, en sa qualité de sceptique, il n'a pas à faire de choix entre les bonnes raisons et les mauvaises: il ne doit pas savoir, et il ne sait pas, s'il y a entre elles une différence. Il pousse à ses dernières limites l'impartialité à leur égard, et il explique ironiquement qu'à l'exemple des médecins, qui proportionnent l'énergie des remèdes à la gravité des cas, le sceptique doit se servir également de raisons fortes et de raisons faibles. (2002, 335)

Brochard also asserts that, if Sextus “commet parfois de pitoyables sophismes, ce n'est pas, on l'a vu, par ignorance ou par faiblesse d'esprit, mais de propos délibéré et par dilettantisme” (2002, 340). The first thing that is surprising about Brochard's position is the claim that Sextus' explanation of the Skeptic's use of different kinds of arguments is due to an ironic attitude, since there is no hint at *PH* III 280–81 that indicates that his remarks are motivated by this sort of attitude. Brochard's position is even more surprising given that he recognizes that the Skeptic is unable to determine whether the arguments he uses differ with respect to their soundness. If this is indeed the case, why is it ironic for Sextus to say that the Skeptic's choice of arguments is determined by the effects they have upon those he wants to persuade, given that his aim is precisely to persuade them? If the arguments cannot be judged by the Skeptic with respect to their objective validity or invalidity, their only value left for him is, given his therapeutic aim, their 'curative' effect upon his patients. In addition, if the Skeptic cannot assert anything about the validity of the arguments he employs, how could Sextus be aware of his supposed sophisms? Brochard's account of the Skeptical strategy is then highly inconsistent. Finally, it is not at all clear why he

¹¹ I am grateful to Luca Castagnoli for discussion on this point.

thinks that Sextus purposely employs invalid arguments “par dilettantisme”, since there is nothing in the last chapter of *PH* to suggest that this is the case.

The second unusual interpretation of *PH* III 280–81 which I wish to discuss is that put forward by Benson Mates, who holds that Sextus is not the author of the last chapter of *PH*:

It seems to me quite obvious that these two final sections, with their odd and silly claim that weak arguments have been included for the benefit of those who do not need strong arguments, are not genuine but have been tacked on by someone during the long twelve centuries between Sextus and our earliest MSS. (1996, 314)

Unfortunately, Mates does not explain why the final sections of *PH* must be deemed a later addition, and why its content is “odd and silly” – perhaps it is too ‘obvious’ to him to need explanation. What must first of all be noted is that, as Mates himself acknowledges, there is no textual reason for excising the chapter as a later interpolation, since it is found in all our manuscripts. Mates’ view is perhaps the result of wrongly interpreting Sextus’ remarks as meaning that the Skeptic sometimes puts forward arguments which he recognizes as being objectively weak. This, however, does not seem to be the reason for his view, since even if the Skeptic considered some arguments to be objectively fallacious or invalid, there would still be no grounds for characterizing Sextus’ claim as ridiculous. Indeed, if his avowed intention is to cure his patients of their disease of Dogmatism, then his only criterion for choosing certain therapeutic arguments is their persuasive efficaciousness. Bearing this in mind, it would not have been odd or silly for Sextus to use weak arguments insofar as they had the desired effect upon his patients. Perhaps Mates’ view is rather to be accounted for by the fact that the final chapter of *PH* is, as noted earlier, the only passage of Sextus’ extant writings which presents the Skeptic’s therapeutic use of arguments and its philanthropic motivation. Still, although it is true that in his works Sextus is mostly concerned with explaining what Skepticism is and with attacking the Dogmatic theories, this by itself does not prove that the chapter in question is a later addition. The reason is that, even though I do think that the Skeptic’s philanthropic concern for the Dogmatists’ well-being is not essential to his philosophy (see MACHUCA (2006), sect. 4), the content of *PH* III 280–81 is not incompatible with, or does not run counter to, the picture of Skepticism we get from the rest of Sextus’ work. Despite the alleged obviousness of his view, Mates would need to provide an explanation for denying the authenticity of the final chapter of *PH*, since as things stand such a denial is unfounded.

II

At this point, a question naturally arises: what is the Skeptic's criterion for distinguishing between weighty and weak therapeutic arguments? From what has been argued in the previous section, it is clear that such a criterion is not the objective features of arguments, since this is something about which the Skeptic suspends judgment. Another possible criterion is their *de facto* capacity to persuade a large or small number of patients. That is to say, the force of arguments would seem to depend upon the number of patients they are able to persuade, so that some arguments are considered weak because they can persuade only a part of the patients, whereas those which are able to persuade most or all of them are considered weighty. This interpretation seems to be favored by Barnes, since he claims:

Some of [the Pyrrhonist's] arguments will be feeble – in the sense that they will be appropriate only to a few patients (only, say, to those who have read the first three books of their Euclid). Other arguments will be more powerful, capable of convincing anyone who has even a smattering of geometry. (2000, xxviii)

Now, how does this way of understanding the distinction between therapeutic arguments fit in with the distinction between different degrees of conceit and rashness drawn at *PH* III 280–81? Given that in this passage we are told that the arguments which appear weighty are those able to persuade the patients severely affected by conceit and rashness, whereas those which appear weak are those capable of persuading the patients mildly affected by such conditions, the interpretation under consideration forces us to conclude that the former arguments are able to persuade a large number of patients, whereas the latter are capable of persuading only a small number of them. This conclusion is problematic because nothing rules out the possibility that an argument capable of persuading highly conceited Dogmatists may be unable to persuade those Dogmatists who are less arrogant – i.e., nothing assures us that such an argument will persuade a large number of Dogmatic patients. In fact, nothing said in the closing paragraphs of *PH* indicates that there is a correspondence between an argument that is capable of persuading a highly conceited Dogmatist and an argument that is capable of persuading many Dogmatists, nor between an argument that is capable of persuading a mildly conceited Dogmatist and an argument that is capable of persuading only a few Dogmatists. I therefore think that Sextus does not take the number of patients persuaded by an argument as the factor which determines how powerful that argument appears to be.

Another possible criterion for distinguishing between strong and weak therapeutic arguments is the number of beliefs they target. Such is the suggestion made by Jim Hankinson, who is “inclined to think that what Sextus really means

[at *PH* III 280–81] is that the scope of some arguments is much broader and more inclusive than that of others. Some arguments attack, say, judgements of value: others work, if they work at all, against absolutely anything” (1994, 68). This interpretation seems to be influenced by the analysis of *PH* III 280–81 proposed by Barnes (1990) in his explanation of the coexistence of an ‘urbane’ and a ‘rustic’ type of Pyrrhonism in *PH*.¹² The former type is that whose attack is restricted to philosophico-scientific beliefs, while the latter extends its assault to all beliefs, including those held by ordinary people in everyday life. Now, Barnes maintains that, if Sextus had been asked about the extent of the Pyrrhonist’s ἐποχή, he would have answered that whether ἐποχή is broad or narrow and whether Pyrrhonism is rustic or urbane “depends on the state of the particular patient” (1990, 2691). Given that Barnes’ interpretation explicitly draws on *PH* III 280–81, what he seems to be saying is that the arguments which are limited to some specific set of beliefs are those which appear to be of low persuasive power, whereas the arguments which are more comprehensive are those which appear to be of high persuasive power. The problem with this interpretation favored by Hankinson and Barnes is that it forces us to assume that the Dogmatists who are mildly affected by conceit and rashness are those who may be cured by arguments that attack only certain beliefs, whereas those who are severely affected by such conditions are those who may be cured by arguments that attack all beliefs. There is, however, no necessary reason for thinking that this is the case. Imagine a person who is affected by a high degree of conceit only as far as religious beliefs are concerned, so that his rash judgments are mostly limited to the area of religion. In this case, the Skeptic would probably first deploy from among his battery of arguments all those that call into question religious beliefs and see if they are persuasive enough to counterbalance the patient’s beliefs. Suppose also that another person holds beliefs in several areas, say, religion, ethics, and metaphysics, but that he holds them with a low degree of conceit, so that he does not make many rash judgments. In this case, the Skeptic would probably use a few wide-ranging arguments in order to dislodge such beliefs. Now, while in the former example the arguments used by the Skeptic should be deemed weighty according to the taxonomy of *PH* III 280–81 – since they are those which are able to cure the high degree of conceit and rashness that afflict the Dogmatist – they should be deemed weak according to the interpretation proposed by Hankinson and Barnes – since they are limited to beliefs of a specific area. Also, while in the latter example the arguments utilized should be deemed weak according to the taxonomy of the passage under consideration – since they cure a Dogmatist who is mildly conceited and rash – they should be deemed weighty according to interpretation in question – since they are wide-

¹² Hankinson does not mention BARNES (1990), but only refers the reader to BARNES (1988) for a discussion of the therapeutic function of the Skeptic’s argumentation (see HANKINSON (1994), 67 n. 58).

ranging. Therefore, the reading of *PH* III 280–81 favored by Hankinson and Barnes does not seem to fit in well with Sextus' distinction between arguments drawn in that passage. The only thing explicitly mentioned at *PH* III 280–81 is a parallelism between the persuasive force of the arguments employed by the Skeptical doctor and the degree of conceit and rashness that affect his Dogmatic patients.

From what has been argued, it follows that we should not interpret the categorization of arguments as strong and weak in their persuasiveness as depending on their objective validity and soundness, or the number of patients whom they are able to persuade, or the range of beliefs which are targeted by them. Rather, the Skeptic notices both (i) that the Dogmatists who are highly conceited and have a strong tendency to make rash judgments are hard to persuade, so that the arguments which are capable of persuading them appear strong as far as their persuasiveness is concerned, and (ii) that the Dogmatists who are more humble and proceed with a certain degree of caution when making judgments are more easily persuaded, so that the arguments which are able to persuade this latter group of Dogmatists, but not the former, appear weak as far as their persuasiveness is concerned. The Skeptic does not try to explain why arguments have these different therapeutic effects, but just notices and reports that they do. When the Skeptic encounters a mildly conceited Dogmatist, he employs some of the therapeutic arguments which have so far proved capable of persuading that kind of Dogmatist. When he comes across a highly conceited Dogmatist, he uses some of those which have so far proved capable of persuading that type of Dogmatist. Proceeding thus, the Skeptic does not affirm with any certainty that what has happened in the past will continue to take place in the future. Rather, his argumentative treatment is guided by the way things appear to him, since he has to follow what appears to him about how persuasive the arguments he employs might be for his patients.

III

Even if one stresses the phenomenological character of the taxonomy of therapeutic arguments so as to show its compatibility with the Skeptic's refusal to make assertions about how things really are, a problem seems to remain. Nothing of what is said at *PH* III 280–81 rules out the possibility that there may be an argument A that appears weak and another argument A_2 that appears weighty, and that A and A_2 are conflicting. That is to say, it is possible that an argument capable of persuading a mildly conceited patient and an argument capable of persuading a patient severely affected by conceit might be conflicting. According to *PH* III 280–81, the latter argument appears to the Skeptic to be weightier in its persuasiveness than the former. The problem arises because, as we will see in a moment, in a number of passages Sextus indicates that the rival arguments which

the Skeptic has so far considered appear equipollent, which means that they appear equally persuasive or credible to him, so that any hierarchy among rival arguments seems to be at odds with the Skeptical outlook.

As already noted, there are quite a few passages in which Sextus refers to the equal persuasiveness or credibility of conflicting arguments. In the first book of *PH*, he offers the following definition of σκέψις:

The Skeptical [way of thought] is an ability to set up oppositions among things which appear and things which are thought in any way whatsoever, an ability from which we come, through the equipollence in the opposed things and arguments (λόγοις), first to suspension of judgment and after that to undisturbedness (ἀταραξίαν). (*PH* I 8)

The notion of ἰσοσθένεια is defined as “the equality with respect to credibility and incredibility (τὴν κατὰ πίστιν καὶ ἀπιστίαν ἰσότητα), so that none of the conflicting arguments takes precedence over any other as more credible (πιστότερον)” (*PH* I 10). Also, when explaining the Skeptical expression οὐ μᾶλλον, Sextus says that ἰσοσθένεια is “the equality with respect to what appears persuasive (πιθανόν) to us” (*PH* I 190; cf. Diogenes Laertius [DL] IX 79).¹³ In addition, he tells us that the phrase “I suspend judgment” indicates that “things appear to us equal (ἴσα) in respect of credibility and incredibility” and that “suspension of judgment is so called from the fact that the intellect is suspended so as neither to accept nor to reject anything because of the equipollence of the matters investigated” (*PH* I 196). Finally, Sextus points out that the phrase “to every argument an equal argument is opposed” is to be understood as meaning “to every argument investigated by me which establishes something Dogmatically, there appears to me to be opposed another argument, which establishes something Dogmatically, equal to it in respect of credibility and incredibility” (*PH* I 203). A clear example of conflicting arguments that appear equally persuasive is found at the end of Sextus’ discussion of the criterion according to which (καθ’ ὅ):

We do not intend to assert that the criterion of truth is unreal (for that would be Dogmatic). But since the Dogmatists seem to have established persuasively (πιθανῶς) that there is a criterion of truth, we have opposed to them arguments that seem persuasive, affirming neither that they are true nor that they are more persuasive (πιθανώτεροι) than their opposites, but inferring suspension of judgment because of the apparent equal persuasiveness (τὴν φαινομένην ἴσην πιθανότητα) of these arguments and

¹³ *PH* I 10 and 190 show that Sextus uses the terms πιστός and πιθανός as synonyms (see also *PH* I 222, 227). So I will do the same.

those propounded by the Dogmatists. (*PH* II 79; cf. *PH* II 130, 133, 192; III 29; *AD* I 444; II 159–60, 298, 476–77; III 206–07.)

The taxonomy of arguments presented in the final chapter of *PH* seems to be at odds with the very notions of ἰσοσθένεια and ἐποχή, which constitute the heart of the Skeptical philosophy. First, the Skeptic's report that the conflicting arguments he has so far considered appear equipollent to him, and hence equally persuasive and credible, seems to be at variance with that taxonomy, since the arguments that can cure a high degree of conceit do not appear equal in therapeutic force to those that can only cure a low degree of conceit, so that the former appear to be weightier in their persuasiveness than the latter. Second, insofar as suspension of judgment is attained through the awareness of the apparent equipollence of conflicting arguments, that taxonomy would run counter to the adoption of a thoroughgoing ἐποχή.

In the chapter of the first book of *PH* in which he discusses the differences between Pyrrhonism and the philosophy of the Academy, Sextus also makes it clear that preferring one argument to another as being more persuasive or credible is incompatible with being a Pyrrhonist. First, when examining whether Plato can be considered a Skeptic, Sextus indicates that, if he assents to the assertions he makes about the Forms, Providence or the virtuous life, then he holds beliefs and is not therefore a Skeptic. Sextus then adds that, if Plato commits himself to such assertions "as being more persuasive, he has abandoned the Skeptical character, since he gives preference to something in respect of credibility and incredibility" (*PH* I 222). Sextus also explains that, even if Plato sometimes speaks in Skeptical fashion, he cannot be deemed a Skeptic simply because the person "who dogmatizes about a single thing, or in general prefers one appearance (φαντασίαν) to another in respect of credibility and incredibility, or makes assertions about any non-evident thing, adopts the distinctive character of the Dogmatist" (*PH* I 223). Thus, being a Skeptic is incompatible both with making assertions about what things really are and with preferring one appearance or one assertion to another as being more persuasive (see *PH* I 225). The reason for the second incompatibility is that, in the final analysis, it amounts to the first. Indeed, the affirmation that one appearance or assertion is more persuasive or credible than another implies that it is closer to the truth than the other, and hence amounts to an affirmation about what things are like in their real nature: because one knows how things are, one can determine how persuasive or plausible an appearance or an assertion is. This is made clear in the section devoted to the examination of the differences between Pyrrhonism and the position of the New Academy. Besides differing from the Pyrrhonists in affirming that everything is inapprehensible, Sextus tells us that the neo-Academics

declare that something is good or bad, not as we do, but persuaded (μετὰ τοῦ πεπεῖσθαι) that it is plausible (πιθανόν) that what they say is good

rather than its contrary really is so (and likewise in the case of bad), whereas we say that something is good or bad, not with the thought that what we say is plausible, but without opinions we follow ordinary life in order not to be inactive. And we say that appearances are equal in respect of credibility and incredibility, as far as reason is concerned (ὅσον ἐπὶ τῷ λόγῳ), whereas they declare that some are persuasive and others unpersuasive. (*PHI* 226–27)

Finally, Sextus indicates that a third difference between the Pyrrhonists and the neo-Academics concerns the τέλος: the neo-Academics “make use of the persuasive in ordinary life, whereas we live without opinions (ἀδοξάστως) following the laws, the customs and the natural affections” (*PH I* 231). By following τὸ πιθανόν in their judgments of value and, more generally, in all the judgments they make in everyday life, the neo-Academics are committed to a view about what things really are.¹⁴ For they believe that their judgments are more likely to be true than the judgments of those who disagree with them – i.e., they believe that their judgments are closer to offering an accurate account of the nature of things. By contrast, the Pyrrhonist refrains from making *any* kind of assertion about what things are like. In this regard, it is worth noting that one of the reasons Sextus regards Arcesilaus’ way of thought to be almost the same as the Pyrrhonist’s is that “he does not prefer any one thing to another in respect of credibility and incredibility, but suspends judgment about everything” (*PH I* 232). Once again, to consider an appearance, a claim, or an argument as more persuasive or credible than others is incompatible with universal ἐποχή, so that it seems that a Pyrrhonist cannot consistently establish a hierarchy among arguments as regards their persuasiveness, as Sextus does in the final chapter of *PH* (see VOELKE 1990, 182).

In reality, this inconsistency is merely apparent. First of all, one can argue that, when speaking of the equipollence of conflicting arguments, Sextus is referring, not to particular arguments pro and con any given thesis, but to the arguments collectively. Hence, even if individual arguments belonging to one group may appear stronger or weaker than individual arguments belonging to the opposite group, the groups taken together appear equipollent.¹⁵ If this is so, then it is not at all problematic for the Skeptic to establish a hierarchy among individual arguments. Although I find this view plausible, some of the passages quoted above seem to suggest that none of the conflicting arguments on a given topic

¹⁴ At this point a caveat is in order: when referring to the positions of the neo-Academics, I restrict myself to the views Sextus ascribes to them, without making any claim about the historical accuracy of what he says. The reason is simply that, when referring to those thinkers, my aim is not to determine what views they actually held, but only to make use of what Sextus says about them in order to understand the Pyrrhonian outlook. On Sextus’ testimony on the so-called skeptical Academy, see IOPPOLO (2009).

¹⁵ I am indebted to Richard Bett for discussion on this point.

appears to the Skeptic as more credible or persuasive than any other (see esp. *PH* I 10, also 223, 232). But even if this is not the case for all arguments, it is still possible that, given two opposing arguments which appear equally persuasive to the Skeptic, one of them may be considered weighty and the other weak according to the taxonomy expounded at *PH* III 280–81. I therefore think that the final solution to the problem under consideration consists in noting that, in the various passages in which Sextus speaks of the apparently equal credibility or persuasiveness of the rival arguments the Skeptic has so far examined, what he means is that none of those arguments appears to be more credible or persuasive than any other as far as its ability to explain the nature of things is concerned. That is to say, the context of those passages is epistemic, since therein credibility and persuasiveness refer to truth. By contrast, as I argued in the previous section, at *PH* III 280–81 the difference in the persuasiveness of arguments is not based on the extent to which they capture the nature of things, but on their *de facto* ability to persuade highly or mildly conceited Dogmatists. In other words, the taxonomy of arguments is not epistemic, but is based on a description of their curative force. For the Skeptic makes no assertions about whether the premises and conclusions of his therapeutic arguments are true and their logical forms are valid, but only reports that there is a difference in those arguments as far as their efficaciousness in curing the various degrees of conceit and rashness that affect the Dogmatists is concerned. In sum, given that epistemically rival arguments appear equipollent, but therapeutically some may appear stronger than others, at *PH* III 280–81 Sextus does not contradict what he says elsewhere about conflicting arguments appearing equally persuasive to the Skeptic.

IV

In this section I want to examine the way in which certain arguments whose function is not therapeutic appear persuasive to the Skeptic himself. The kind of persuasiveness in question is distinct from that referred to in the passages that were examined in the previous section, i.e., it is not epistemic. Sextus deals with this non-epistemic kind of persuasiveness in the paragraphs of *PH* I in which he presents the differences between Pyrrhonism and the philosophy of the New Academy. After referring to the three types of persuasive appearance distinguished by the neo-Academics (*PH* I 227–29), Sextus observes that, when the Sceptics and the neo-Academics say that they are persuaded of certain things (πειθεσθαί τισιν), they are speaking in distinct senses. For the verb πείθεσθαι can mean either (i) “not resisting but simply following without strong propensity or inclination” (μη ἀντιτείνειν ἀλλ’ ἀπλῶς ἔπεσθαι ἄνευ σφοδρᾶς προσκλίσεως καὶ προσπαθείας), or (ii) “assenting to something by choice and, as it were, sympathy due to strong desire” (μετὰ αἰρέσεως καὶ οἰονεὶ συμπαθείας κατὰ τὸ σφόδρα βούλεσθαι συγκατατίθεσθαί τι) (*PH* I 230). Now, the neo-

Academics “say, with a strong propensity, that they are persuaded and that something is persuasive”, whereas the Skeptics “say so in the sense of simply yielding (τὸ ἀπλῶς ἔκειν) without inclination” (*PH I* 230). This difference in sense was clear to the Greek reader, since *πείθεσθαι* + dative means either ‘obey’ or ‘believe’: the former corresponds to sense (i) above and the latter to sense (ii) (see ANNAS–BARNES 2000, 61 n. 253).

The passage under consideration is intimately related to the chapter of *PH I* in which Sextus addresses the question whether the Skeptic *δογματίζει*. There he points out that the Skeptic *δογματίζει* only if *dogma* means “acquiescing (*εὐδοκεῖν*) in something; for the Skeptic assents to the affections forced upon him by an appearance (*φαντασίαν*) – for example, when heated or chilled, he would not say ‘I think I am not heated or chilled’” (*PH I* 13, cf. *PH I* 29). Referring back to this passage, in a later chapter Sextus tells us that Skeptics do not overturn “the things which, in accordance with a passive appearance, lead us involuntarily to assent – and those are the things which appear (*τὰ φαινόμενα*)” (*PH I* 19, cf. *PH I* 193). This kind of assent consists merely in acknowledging that things presently appear to one in certain ways (see BURNYEAT 1997, 43). By contrast, the Skeptic does not *δογματίζει* if “dogma is assent to one of the non-evident matters investigated in the sciences” (*PH I* 13, cf. *PH I* 16).¹⁶ Sense (i) of the verb *πείθεσθαι* therefore is related to the sense of *δόγμα* which does not imply any assertion about non-evident things (*τὰ ἄδηλα*), whereas sense (ii) is related to the sense of *δόγμα* rejected by the Skeptic. We can therefore say that, whereas the Skeptic’s assent to what appears persuasive to him is forced and involuntary, the neo-Academic’s rests on a voluntary choice; and whereas the Skeptic assents to his *πάθη* or *φαινόμενα*, the neo-Academic assents to non-evident things, since he affirms, as we saw in the previous section, that what he says is persuasive is really so.

In sum, *PH I* 230 makes it clear that there is an ambiguity in the meaning of *πίθανον*, and that Sextus rejects this notion only when it is used in its strong, epistemic sense. Therefore, when he says that, unlike the neo-Academics, in everyday life the Skeptics do not follow τὸ πιθανόν but the laws, the customs, and the natural affections (*PH I* 231), he is solely rejecting the Dogmatic sense of that notion. In the same way must be read Sextus’ claim that the Skeptics “say that appearances are equal in respect of credibility and incredibility, as far as reason is concerned, whereas [the neo-Academics] declare that some are persuasive and others unpersuasive” (*PH I* 227). What Sextus is saying is that, as far the theoretical use of reason is concerned, all appearances appear equally persuasive or credible to the Skeptic, since their epistemic status seems to be the same (cf. BRUNSCHWIG 1995, 332–33). By contrast, from a merely psychological point

¹⁶ For a valuable discussion of the distinction between two types of assent both in Pyrrhonism and in Academic skepticism, see FREDE (1997). For a detailed analysis of *PH I* 13 and the main interpretations of the Pyrrhonist’s *δόγματα* that have been proposed by scholars, see FINE (2000).

of view, some appearances in fact appear persuasive to him whereas others do not. As we will see in a moment, it is this non-epistemic inequality among appearances which allows the Skeptic to decide what to do and not to do in everyday life.

To understand how and why some arguments can appear persuasive to the Skeptic from a merely psychological point of view, we need to look at the chapter of *PH I* which deals with the criterion of Skepticism. There Sextus distinguishes between the criterion of reality and unreality and the criterion of action, and observes that Skepticism's practical criterion is τὸ φαινόμενον. It is by attending to this criterion that in everyday life the Skeptic performs some actions and not others (*PH I* 21–22, cf. *PH II* 14, *AD I* 29–30). Sextus then indicates that, adhering to τὸ φαινόμενον, the Pyrrhonist lives in accordance with the observance of everyday life (ἡ βιωτικὴ τήρησις), which seems to consist of four parts: guidance of nature, necessitation of affections, handing down of laws and customs, and teaching of skills (*PH I* 23, cf. *PH I* 17, 231, 237). Thus, the various ways things appear to the Skeptic are shaped or determined by those four factors. In introducing this fourfold observance of everyday life, Sextus makes two key remarks. The first is that the Skeptic acts in accordance with it ἀδοξάστως, which means that he restricts himself to what appears without making any assertion about what things are like in their real nature.¹⁷ The second remark is that the only reason the Skeptic follows the observance of everyday life is that he cannot be utterly inactive (*PH I* 23, cf. *PH I* 226, *AD I* 30). In other words, the Pyrrhonist acts in accordance with the four aspects of that observance without any epistemic commitment to them, and he does so only for a practical reason, since if he wants to live he must guide his actions by some criterion, and the only criterion he is left with after suspending judgment about all non-evident matters is τὸ φαινόμενον.

Now, the fact that the Pyrrhonist cannot affirm that the appearances he has by virtue of the four parts of the observance of everyday life correspond to how things really are does not prevent him from being involuntarily affected by such appearances as long as those four factors continue to have an effect on him.¹⁸ The necessitation of affections is the factor by virtue of which “hunger leads us to food and thirst to drink” (*PH I* 24). Thus, the Skeptic can avoid neither feeling hunger or thirst nor having the desire to eat or drink, although he can avoid believing that such feelings are bad by nature (*PH I* 29–30). This is the same factor under whose influence the Skeptic grants that he feels hot or cold (*PH I* 13, 29) and that it appears to him that honey sweetens (*PH I* 20), although he suspends

¹⁷ For the term ἀδοξάστως, see also *PH I* 231, 240; II 102, 246, 254, 258; III 2, 151, 235. For the sense of this term, see BARNES (1990), 2636–37 n. 113, and FINE (2000), 100–01 n. 65.

¹⁸ Cf. ANNAS (1993), 209, 355, 357–58; (1998), 196, 209; MCPHERRAN (1987), 322, 324–25; (1989), 144, 154, 156, 159 n. 42, 161–62; (1990), 135–36; MORRISON (1990), 211, 217–19; BURNYEAT (1997), 45.

judgment about whether, e.g., fire and ice really are hot and cold, respectively, and about whether honey really is sweet. Similarly, the Pyrrhonist cannot help experiencing some things as good and others as bad by virtue of the laws and customs of his community (*PH* I 24), even though he suspends judgment about whether anything is by nature good or bad (see *PH* III 182, 235; *AD* V 111, 144, 160; also *PH* I 28, 226, III 178; *AD* V 147, 150, 168).¹⁹ For its part, the teaching of skills is the factor “whereby we are not inactive in the skills which we acquire” (*PH* I 24), which means that Sceptics have some kind of know-how (see BARNES 1990, 2644–45). Again, the Sceptic cannot prevent things from appearing to him in certain ways by virtue of the education and training he has received, even though he cannot assert that the skills he has acquired have any epistemological foundation. Finally, the “guidance of nature” is the factor by virtue of which “we are naturally capable of sensation and thought (φυσικῶς αἰσθητικοὶ καὶ νοητικοί)” (*PH* I 24). Thus, the Pyrrhonist cannot help having sensations and thoughts, even though he suspends judgment about whether their contents correspond to how things really are. Given that the guidance of nature is one of the factors that shape the way things appear to the Pyrrhonist, then his appearances are not only perceptual, but also intellectual. It seems plain both that among the Pyrrhonist’s intellectual appearances one must include the various ways arguments phenomenologically strike him and that there is a use of argument which does not exceed the limits of the realm of his φαινόμενα (cf. MORRISON 1990, 214). This is confirmed by the chapter of *PH* which examines the question whether Sceptics belong to a αἵρεσις, since therein we are told that they “follow a reasoning (λόγος) in accordance with what appears that shows us a life in conformity with traditional customs, laws, ways of life, and [our] own affections” (*PH* I 17). There is therefore a practical λόγος which is used by the Sceptic to conduct his life within the limits of τὰ φαινόμενα (cf. STOUGH 1984, 145–47). Now, it seems clear that, if such a λόγος is to be effective to guide one’s actions through the complex affairs of life, it must include both the consideration and the production of arguments, even if, as already noted, the Sceptic is committed neither to the truth of their premises and conclusions nor to the validity of their logical forms. In order to make it possible for the Sceptic to choose what actions to perform in certain situations, the arguments produced in accordance with such factors as the customs and laws of the community to which he happens to belong must appear persuasive, psychologically speaking. Otherwise, there would be no motive at all for choosing some actions over others in particular circumstances. In sum, this use of reason does not imply any beliefs about matters of objective fact; rather, it has solely an instrumental or practical func-

¹⁹ In an important recent book in metaethics, Richard Joyce has adopted an outlook similar to the Pyrrhonist’s. For he claims that skepticism about the epistemic justification of our moral beliefs does not prevent us from having moral thoughts and emotions and from making practical deliberations on the basis of them (see JOYCE 2006, 225–27).

tion that makes it possible to carry on with the affairs of daily life. In this respect, it is worth noting that, at *AD V* 165, Sextus tells us that the Skeptic “does not live in accordance with philosophical reasoning (κατὰ τὸν φιλόσοφον λόγον) – for he is inactive as far as this is concerned – but he is capable of choosing some things and avoiding others in accordance with non-philosophical observance (κατὰ τὴν ἀφιλόσοφον τήρησιν)”. This passage must not be understood as meaning that philosophy *tout court* has no influence upon the life of the Pyrrhonist, for Pyrrhonism is a kind of philosophy (*PH I* 4) that produces significant changes in the actions, thoughts, and feelings of the person who adopts it. Rather, what Sextus calls ‘philosophical reasoning’ in the quoted passage is the kind of theoretical reflection which purports to grasp the structure of reality or the real nature of things. This sort of reasoning is useless to the Pyrrhonist when it comes to practical decisions, simply because the conflicts among the apparently equipollent arguments he has so far examined do not permit him to reach a rationally justified conclusion about what he ought to do. This is why if theoretical reasoning were the only available criterion for deciding among conflicting courses of action, the Pyrrhonist would remain inactive. However, there is also, as already noted, a use of reason which, insofar as it does not go beyond the realm of that which appears, allows him to decide what to do in certain circumstances. This practical reason forms part, as we saw, of the βιωτική τήρησις, which is to be identified with the ἀφιλόσοφος τήρησις referred to at *AD V* 165.²⁰

How is all this compatible with the Skeptic’s ἐποχή περὶ πάντων? As Sextus makes it clear at *PH II* 10, the Skeptic suspends his judgment about the reality of non-evident things, whereas his thoughts (and hence the arguments he considers) appear evidently to him, so that acknowledging such appearances does not violate his ἐποχή. In this regard, when explaining the Skeptical notion of non-assertion (ἀφασία), Sextus points out that “we say that we neither posit nor reject some one of the things which are said Dogmatically concerning the non-evident; for we yield to the things which passively move us and lead us necessarily to assent” (*PH I* 193; cf. *PH I* 197–98, 200–02). We saw earlier that τὰ φαινόμενα are those things which lead us involuntarily to assent (*PH I* 19). Given that at *PH I* 19 Sextus talks about τὰ φαινόμενα in general and that among the Skeptic’s φαινόμενα are those shaped by the four aspects of the observance of everyday life, these various kinds of φαινόμενα do not fall within the scope of ἀφασία or any other Skeptical φωνή. The reason is that these φωναί are not used “about all objects universally, but about those which are non-evident and investigated Dogmatically” (*PH I* 208). Hence, when Sextus indicates that the phrase οὐ μᾶλλον means “I do not know to which of these things it is necessary to assent and to which not to assent” (*PH I* 191), he is specifically referring to assent to the non-evident. The Skeptical φωναί give expression to the Pyrrhonist’s refusal to give his assent – in the Dogmatic sense of this notion – to any non-evident

²⁰ On Sextus’ use of the notion of τήρησις, see SPINELLI (2008).

thing; they are not, and cannot be, employed to talk about τὰ φαινόμενα (cf. BRUNSCHWIG 1997, 314). This is why Sextus remarks that Skeptics do not investigate τὸ φαινόμενον (*PH I* 19–20) and that φαντασία is not a matter of investigation (ἀξήτητος) (*PH I* 22; cf. *DL IX* 77). Rather, what is investigated is what is said about τὸ φαινόμενον or whether τὸ ὑποκείμενον is such as it appears (*PH I* 19–20, 22), so that the Skeptic’s ζήτησις solely consists in trying to determine whether it is possible to make assertions about what things are like in their real nature. The reason is that “no one, probably, disputes about whether the underlying object appears this way or that” (*PH I* 22; cf. BURNYEAT 1997, 40–41, 43).²¹

Hence, at the psychological level, some πάθη appear persuasive to the Skeptic in the sense that, if e.g. he feels cold, he experiences this affection in such a way that it is not possible for him to say that he does not feel cold but hot (*PH I* 13). Likewise, some arguments strike the Skeptic as persuasive in such a way that, in his daily life, he will act on the basis of them, even though he is committed neither to the truth of their premises and conclusions nor to their logical validity. This is confirmed by Sextus’ explanation of the Skeptical φωνή “to every argument an equal argument is opposed”, where he explicitly says that the word λόγος is used to refer to the arguments which “establishes something Dogmatically, i.e., about the non-evident” (*PH I* 202, see also 203–04). This passage makes it clear that conflicting arguments appear equally persuasive to the Skeptic insofar as they involve assertions about τὰ ἄδηλα, but they differ in their persuasiveness as far as, as it were, the psychological effect they have upon him is concerned. Certain arguments strike the Pyrrhonist as persuasive under the influence of factors such as his psychological makeup, his education and professional training, his philosophical background, and the social and cultural context in which he happens to live, even though from an epistemological point of view those arguments appear to him to be as persuasive as those which conflict with them. More generally, although conflicting appearances are equally persuasive from an epistemological point of view, some of them are persuasive while others are not from a psychological point of view. In sum, the Skeptic ‘assents’ to the

²¹ Sextus thus seems to think that it is clear – and hence not open to doubt – how one is appeared to (cf. FINE (2000), 96–97). It is true that he never explicitly claims “that the skeptic can be *certain* of ‘appearing’-statements or that he *knows* his own experiences [πάθη]” (BURNYEAT (1982), 27; see also BURNYEAT (1997), 41 n. 31; BARNES (1990), 2626 n. 63). Still, it is suggestive, as FINE (2003), 208 points out, that when at *PH I* 215 Sextus examines someone else’s claim that Cyrenaicism and Pyrrhonism are identical because the former “too says that only affections are apprehended (τὰ πάθη μόνα φησὶ καταλαμβάνεσθαι)”, he says nothing about whether this claim is correct. In this regard, note that Diogenes tells us that Pyrrhonists claim to know only the affections (μόνα δὲ τὰ πάθη γινώσκομεν) (*DL IX* 103). Galen, however, reports that some of the “aporetics”, “whom they reasonably call ‘rustic Pyrrhonists’, say that they do not know their own affections certainly (οὐδὲ τὰ σφῶν αὐτῶν πάθη βεβαίως γινώσκειν)” (*De pulsuum differentis VIII* 711). Although Diogenes’ and Galen’s passages are of the first importance to the study of the scope and the history of ancient Pyrrhonism, they cannot be taken by themselves as evidence that the Sextan type of Pyrrhonist does or does not suspend judgment about his φαινόμενα or his πάθη.

various kinds of perceptual and intellectual φαίνόμενα he has by virtue of the fourfold observance of everyday life only in the weak sense of the term and find them 'persuasive' again only in the weak sense of the term.

There is a passage in which Sextus refers to the psychological kind of persuasiveness in relation to arguments. At the end of the second book of *AD*, he tells us that, in reply to the Dogmatic objection that the Skeptical arguments against demonstration are self-refuting, the Skeptics

[473] will say that the argument against demonstration is only persuasive and that at present it persuades them and induces assent, but that they do not know whether it will also be so in the future due to the variability of the human intellect. When the answer is of this kind, the Dogmatist will not be able to say anything further. For either he will teach that the argument brought against demonstration is not true, or he will establish this: that it does not persuade the Skeptic. [474] But if he shows the first, he is not in conflict with the Skeptic, since the latter does not assert that that argument is true, but only says that it is persuasive. [475] And if he does the second, he will be rash, wishing to overthrow another person's affection by argument. For just as no one can, by means of argument, persuade the person who is glad that he is not glad and the person who is in pain that he is not in pain, so neither can one persuade the person who is persuaded that he is not persuaded (τὸν πειθόμενον ὅτι οὐ πείθεται). [476] In addition, if the Skeptics strongly affirmed, with assent, that demonstration is nothing, perhaps they would be dissuaded by the person who teaches that demonstration exists. But as it is, since they make a bare statement of the arguments against demonstration without assenting to them, they are so far from being harmed by those who establish the opposite that, rather, they are helped. [477] For if the arguments introduced against demonstration have remained unrefuted, and the arguments adopted in favor of there being demonstration are in their turn strong, let us agree to suspend judgment, subscribing neither to the former nor to the latter.

It is plain that in this passage Sextus is not talking of persuasiveness in an epistemic sense, but rather in a merely psychological sense, since he says that, if the Dogmatist intended to establish that the argument against demonstration does not persuade the Skeptic, he would be trying "to overthrow another person's πάθος by argument" (*AD* II 475). It is precisely because being persuaded is a πάθος that it is not possible, by means of argument, to persuade someone that he is not persuaded, just as it is not possible to persuade the person who is glad or in pain that he is not in such states (cf. *AD* V 148–49, *DL* IX 108). The reason is that a πάθος is not the conclusion of an argument the Skeptic accepts as true, but something that imposes itself on him. In other words, since a πάθος is not the result of

the Skeptic's holding beliefs about non-evident matters, it is not epistemic. Hence, by describing the state of being persuaded as a *πάθος*, Sextus makes it clear that the kind of argumentative persuasiveness referred to at the beginning of the quoted passage should be interpreted as non-epistemic. The reference, at *AD* II 473, to the variability of human thought seems to mean that the psychological factors that influence one's *πάθη* vary with time, so that what non-epistemically persuades us now may not persuade us later on. If this is correct, then the assent which, according to *AD* II 473, is induced by that type of persuasiveness is non-Dogmatic and is therefore distinct from the type of assent mentioned at *AD* II 476, which is the product of the belief that the argument against demonstration is true. The interpretation under consideration fits in well with what has been seen in the present section: the fact that rival arguments appear equally persuasive to the Skeptic from an epistemological perspective, thereby inducing him to withhold his assent, does not prevent some arguments from appearing persuasive to him from a psychological perspective and, hence, does not prevent him from non-Dogmatically assenting to them.

From what has been argued, it follows that how a given argument appears to the Skeptic depends on the context under consideration, i.e., on whether the context is theoretical or practical. Given that living involves choosing what to do and not to do, if the Skeptic does not want to forego taking part in the affairs of daily life, he needs a criterion both of choice and avoidance, which as we saw is *τὸ φαινόμενον* (*AD* I 30). He bases his choices on that which appears persuasive to him and his avoidances on that which appears unpersuasive to him psychologically speaking. For example, even though no moral view appears to the Skeptic to have precedence over any other, if in his daily life he follows the moral norms adopted by the members of his community and inculcated in him by his upbringing and education, in that practical context he will think and reason according to such norms. There will therefore be ethical arguments that will appear persuasive to him, but only within the framework established by the social norms he non-Dogmatically follows for the sole reason that he cannot remain wholly inactive. Suppose that, faced with a murder or a rape, the Skeptic spontaneously and involuntarily experiences a feeling of dislike because such acts are judged as morally wrong by the norms of his community. If the Skeptic decides to live by those norms, then in everyday life the ethical arguments against murder and rape will appear persuasive to him from a merely psychological point of view. Nevertheless, if he is asked or if he wonders whether there is any objective reason for affirming or denying that such acts are morally wrong and hence for endorsing or rejecting the norms that condemn them, he will reply that up to now he has not been able to arrive at a decision on the issue because, e.g., the arguments pro and con moral realism appear to him equally persuasive from an epistemological point of view. Hence, within the context of everyday life, certain arguments appear persuasive to the Skeptic by virtue of factors that do not confer a higher epistemic status on them.

v

In the previous sections, two types of argumentative persuasiveness have been identified, namely: (i) the epistemic persuasiveness of the rival arguments the Pyrrhonist examines in his continuing investigation of the truth, and (ii) the psychological persuasiveness of the arguments he employs in his everyday life in order to decide what to do in certain situations. With regard to (i), the Pyrrhonist reports that conflicting arguments appear to him equipollent, i.e., equally persuasive epistemically speaking. As for (ii), certain arguments appear to him to be persuasive while others do not from a merely psychological point of view, so that such persuasiveness does not involve any commitment to assertions about the nature and existence of non-evident things.

Now, what kind of persuasiveness is that which is at issue in the final chapter of *PH*? As far as I can see, it is the epistemic type of persuasiveness. Indeed, in order for an argument to be therapeutically efficacious, i.e., to succeed in persuading a Dogmatist, it must be deemed to be epistemically persuasive by him. More precisely, the therapeutic argument must appear to the Dogmatist to be as epistemically persuasive as the opposite argument he himself advances, since it is this state of equipollence which, to all appearances, will make it possible to induce him to suspend judgment. Of course, this does not mean that the distinction between weighty and weak arguments at *PH* III 280–81 is a distinction between arguments which differ in their epistemic persuasiveness. Rather, as was argued in Section III, a therapeutic argument is regarded by the Skeptical doctor as weighty or weak in its persuasiveness depending on whether the Dogmatist whom it succeeds in persuading is highly or mildly conceited, respectively. That is to say, a weighty therapeutic argument is one which strikes a highly conceited Dogmatist as being as epistemically persuasive as the opposite argument he advances, whereas a weak therapeutic argument is one which strikes a mildly conceited Dogmatist as being so. The distinction between two types of arguments is not epistemic, but therapeutic.²²

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²² A previous version of this paper was presented at the Université de Paris X–Nanterre in June 2008. I would like to thank Jean-François Balaudé and Stéphane Marchand for the invitation to deliver the paper, which obliged me to clarify and defend my interpretation of the issues here discussed. I am also grateful to Richard Bett, Luca Castagnoli, and an anonymous referee for their comments on earlier versions of this article. Finally, I thank Dale Chock for correcting my English.

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