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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO

Unmitigated Skepticism: The Nature and Scope of Pyrrhonism

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in

Philosophy

by

Andrew David Wong

Committee in charge:

Professor Monte Johnson, Chair
Professor Casey Perin, Co-Chair
Professor Samuel Rickless
Professor Donald Rutherford
Professor Edward Watts

2017

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The Dissertation of Andrew David Wong is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically:

Co-Chair

Chair

University of California, San Diego

2017

DEDICATION

To my mother and father

EPIGRAPH

By way of preface let us say that on none of the matters to be discussed do we affirm that things certainly are just as we say they are: rather, we report descriptively on each item according to how it appears to us at the time.

Sextus Empiricus

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- Acad.* Cicero, *Academica*
- Diff. Puls.* Galen, *De Differentiis Pulsuum*
- DL Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*
- LS Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*
- LSJ Liddell, Scott, and Jones, *A Greek-English Lexicon*
- M* Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Mathematicians*
- PH* Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*
- Praen.* Galen, *De Praegnotione ad Epigenem*

LIST OF SYMBOLS

- \neg Negation
- \wedge Conjunction
- \vee Disjunction
- \rightarrow Material Conditional
- \leftrightarrow Material Biconditional
- \forall Universal Quantifier
- \exists Existential Quantifier
- \in Set Membership
- \Rightarrow Logical Implication
- \Leftrightarrow Logical Equivalence
- \mathbb{N} The Set of Natural Numbers
- \mathbb{Z} The Set of Integers

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Unmitigated Skepticism: The Nature and Scope of Pyrrhonism

by

Andrew David Wong

Doctor of Philosophy in Philosophy

University of California, San Diego, 2017

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The “scope” of Pyrrhonian Skepticism refers to the extent to which Sceptics bear epistemic commitments. There are two respects in which the debate between unmitigated and mitigated interpretations of Skepticism is significant. First, there is the philosophical question of which version of Pyrrhonism is more coherent and compelling when considered on its own merits. Second, there is the historical question of which sort of interpretation accurately characterizes Pyrrhonism itself,

as it is presented in the works of Sextus Empiricus.

My own arguments proceed accordingly. On the philosophical front, I argue (primarily in Chapters 2 and 3) that when the force of the Skeptical modes is fully understood, they are unmitigated in scope. On the historical side, I argue (primarily in Chapters 1 and 4) that an unmitigated interpretation of Pyrrhonism is consistent with the Sextan corpus. Throughout, my ultimate aim is to present a vision of unmitigated skepticism that is, if not an expression of the historical reality of Pyrrhonism, at least a direct descendant of it.

The central argument concerns the Five Modes of Agrippa, which are widely regarded as comprising the most powerful argument of Pyrrhonian Skepticism: the “Pyrrhonian Problematic.” The intuitive force of the Problematic lies in its generality. It threatens to cast into doubt every claim that can be advanced on every subject. According to the standard interpretation, the Problematic achieves this by constituting a declarative argument that consists of appealing premises and the conclusion that epistemic justification is impossible.

I argue that this interpretation fails to capture the intuitive force of the Problematic in two ways: First, it is a mistake to interpret the scope of the Problematic as being narrowly restricted to the concept of epistemic justification. Second, and more importantly, it is a mistake to assume that the Problematic is an *argument* in the first place. Understanding its full potential requires that we instead interpret the Problematic *procedurally*, as a set of instructions that the Skeptic implements in engaging dialectically with an interlocutor’s claims.

Introduction

In speaking of the *epistemological scope* of a philosophical position, I refer to the extent to which that position entails epistemic commitments. Interpretations upon which Pyrrhonian Skepticism¹ is *mitigated* in scope are those upon which Skepticism entails some quantity of epistemic commitments, e.g., holding some nonempty set of beliefs.² By contrast, interpretations upon which Skepticism is *unmitigated* in scope are those upon which Skepticism entails no epistemic commitments whatsoever. Thus, there exists a *continuum of mitigation* in so far as positions may entail greater or fewer epistemic commitments. This continuum terminates in (absolute) unmitigation at one end and (absolute) mitigation at the other.³

Traditionally, philosophers have discussed the scope of Pyrrhonism in terms of two competing interpretations: the rustic and the urbane. These interpretations

¹ Throughout this work, I shall frequently refer to Pyrrhonian Skepticism as “Pyrrhonism” or simply “Skepticism.” In the latter case, the initial capital letter distinguishes a proper noun from the common noun denoting (in the present work) philosophical skepticism in general. For consistency, the orthography of these words has been standardized in quotations of translations of ancient sources (e.g., “Pyrrhonean” to “Pyrrhonian” and “scepticism” to “Skepticism”). I beg the translators’ forgiveness for this imposition.

² I will speak here of the scope of *interpretations* of Skepticism, but it should be clear that the same considerations apply to skeptical *positions* in general.

³ One might assume that, since the number of possible beliefs is countably infinite, there exists no point of absolute mitigation. However, it would not be unreasonable to identify this point with that of *doxastic trivialism*. (Trivialism is the view that every proposition is true; a doxastic trivialist holds every possible belief. I revisit this concept in Section 2.5.) Of course, doxastic trivialism would not be a Skeptical position at all, but a Dogmatic one. (We sometimes use the adjectival forms “Dogmatic” and “Skeptical” to refer to more or less mitigated positions.)

occupy limited respective regions on the continuum of mitigation. Their precise boundaries are a matter of dispute, even among proponents of each respective interpretation.

Proponents of the *rustic* interpretation, as Galen called it (*Diff. Puls.* 7.711K, *Praen.* 14.628K as cited in Barnes 1998, n. 10), tend to view Sceptics as holding few, if any, beliefs. On some rustic interpretations, Sceptics are restricted to beliefs only in what is evident or only in appearances, while on others, Sceptics hold no beliefs whatsoever. The scholarly articulation and defense of the rustic view in recent times is attributable primarily to Barnes (1998) and Burnyeat (1998a,b).

Proponents of the *urbane* interpretation, as coined by Barnes (1998, 61) and most prominently defended by Frede (1998a), tend to view Sceptics as holding a substantial (or at least not insignificant) class of beliefs. One common way of specifying this class is to say that Sceptics suspend judgment on theoretical (i.e., philosophical, where this is understood to include scientific) matters while holding the practical beliefs of quotidian life. Another approach favored by some proponents of the urbane interpretation is to draw the distinction in a content-neutral way, as a distinction between evident and non-evident matters. On this view, Sceptics are permitted to hold beliefs about what is evident, but they suspend judgment about what is non-evident.

Because different philosophers have drawn the distinction between the rustic and urbane interpretations in different (and sometimes contradictory) ways, this distinction is poorly suited as a tool for elucidating the nature of Scepticism. Moreover, it is apparent that the rustic and urbane interpretations fail to jointly exhaust the logical space that constitutes the entire continuum of mitigation. Any discussion of Scepticism that limits itself to the traditional boundaries imposed by the rustic/urbane distinction thereby forecloses the possibility of exploring these

hitherto uncharted lands. Furthermore (and most significantly for our present purposes), if the rustic interpretation is thought to entail that Skeptics hold some number of beliefs, then this excludes, in particular, the concept of a genuinely unmitigated form of Skepticism. For all of these reasons, I shall proceed to discuss the scope of Skepticism as being unmitigated or mitigated, rather than rustic or urbane.

There are two respects in which the debate between unmitigated and mitigated interpretations of Skepticism is significant. First, there is the philosophical question of which version of Pyrrhonism is more coherent and compelling when considered on its own merits. Second, there is the historical question of which sort of interpretation accurately characterizes Pyrrhonism itself, as it has been handed down to us by Sextus Empiricus. My own arguments will proceed accordingly. On the philosophical front, I will argue that when the force of the Skeptical modes is fully understood, they are unmitigated in scope. On the historical side, I will argue that an unmitigated interpretation of Pyrrhonism is consistent with the Sextan corpus.⁴ Throughout, my ultimate aim is to present a vision of unmitigated skepticism that is, if not an expression of the historical reality of Pyrrhonism, at least a direct descendant of it.

⁴ The epistemological arguments primarily occupy Chapters 2 and 3, while the historical arguments loom larger in Chapters 1 and 4. However, both strands of argument are interwoven throughout the dissertation.

1 Sextus Empiricus and Pyrrhonian Skepticism

1.1 A Brief History

By “Pyrrhonian Skepticism,” I refer to a philosophical position that dates back at least to the Hellenistic period. It is typically agreed that Skepticism, in the general incarnation with which we are here concerned, originated with its eponym, Pyrrho of Elis (c. 365/360–275/270 BCE), a younger contemporary of Aristotle about whom little is known. Pyrrho accompanied Alexander the Great on an expedition to India, where he is thought to have acquired several important skeptical ideas. Although Pyrrhonian Skepticism owes its name to Pyrrho, it is important to understand that Pyrrho may not have qualified as a Pyrrhonian Skeptic, as we presently understand the latter.¹ For example, Aristocles allegedly wrote:

According to Timon, Pyrrho declared that things are equally indifferent, unmeasurable and inarbitrable. For this reason neither our sensations nor our opinions tell us truths or falsehoods. Therefore for this reason we should not put our trust in them one bit, but we should be unopinionated, uncommitted and unwavering, saying concerning each individual thing that it no more is than is not, or it both is and is not, or it neither is nor is not. The outcome for those who actually adopt this attitude, says Timon, will be first speechlessness,

¹ Bett (2000) argues particularly forcefully that Pyrrho was no Pyrrhonian Skeptic.

and then freedom from disturbance; and Aenesidemus says pleasure.
(LS 1F = Eusebius 14, I8.I–5; Caizzi 53)

The problem, in short, is that Pyrrho apparently espouses a particular *Dogmatic view* about the nature of things, viz., that they are “indifferent, unmeasureable, and inarbitrable.” (I shall refer to this idea as “metaphysical indeterminacy.”) Other reports of Pyrrho’s views suggest that metaphysical indeterminacy is essentially an ontological claim about the fundamental nature of reality—that there is no particular way things are.² While a belief in metaphysical indeterminacy might well lead to psychological and behavioral outcomes that are similar to those of the Skeptic, it is the fact of holding the belief (if it is a fact) that precludes Pyrrho from being a Skeptic.

Although Pyrrho wrote nothing, his disciple Timon of Phlius (c. 320–230 BCE) recorded the former’s words. Only controversial fragments and hearsay reports survive. The interpretation of Timon’s works is a complex matter from both a philological and a philosophical perspective, since many of Timon’s extant writings are poems and satirical accounts of various philosophers, rather than straightforward descriptive reports.³

Following Timon by over a century was Aenesidemus, who lived in the first century BCE. Aenesidemus was the first major figure in the history of Skepticism to emerge from the ruins of Academic Skepticism, which had itself developed out of Plato’s Academy. Just as the head of the Middle Academy, Arcesilaus (316/315–241/240 BCE), sought to return the Academy to (what he took to be) its skepti-

² It is natural to question the coherence of such a view. Such a claim appears to entail that there is, at the very least, *one* way things are, namely that they are *indeterminate*. This aspect of the issue has interesting parallels to Skepticism, as we shall see in Chapter 3, and some of the Skeptic’s self-referential strategies for dealing with objections of this type could easily be employed by a follower of Pyrrho. However, further analysis of Pyrrho’s metaphysical position lies outside the scope of our present endeavor.

³ For a detailed analysis, see Bett (2000).

cal roots, so too Aenesidemus sought to hearken back to the truly Platonic (and therefore, in his view, skeptical) school of his forebears and to shun the permissive Stoicism that had come to dominate it.⁴ Although Aenesidemus' writings are lost, there is sufficient second-hand evidence to attribute the Ten Modes of suspension of judgment (commonly referred to as the "Ten Modes of Aenesidemus") to him.⁵

At some point following Aenesidemus was Agrippa, about whom we know virtually nothing. The importance of Agrippa lies in the fact that the Five Modes of suspension of judgment (commonly referred to as the "Five Modes of Agrippa"), arguably the most powerful and sophisticated Skeptical argumentative devices, are attributed to him.⁶

Finally, we come to Sextus Empiricus, who appears to have been active around the latter part of the second century CE (Annas and Barnes 2000, xi–xii). Sextus probably lived in Rome, but based on conflicting reports, he may have lived in Alexandria or Athens. Although we know little about him, his works indisputably constitute the most complete extant source for Skepticism by far.⁷ So predominant is his influence that virtually nothing is lost in simply stipulating that by "Pyrrhonian Skepticism" I refer specifically to Pyrrhonian Skepticism *as presented by Sextus*. Fortunately for us, Sextus was a diligent philosophical author (or at least compiler), although he was a medical doctor by trade. Indeed, it is perhaps unsurprising that Sextus was a physician, given the affinity between philosophy and medicine in his time. Two of the main medical schools in this period were the Methodic and the

⁴ This traditional historical account comes to us from Diogenes Laertius and gives an impression of a rather tidy succession of discrete figureheads, which several scholars have called into question (see Hankinson 1995).

⁵ See LS 71C, 72L = Photius, *Library* 169b18–170b35. The Ten Modes are covered in further detail in Appendix A.

⁶ The Five Modes of Agrippa are addressed specifically in Section 2.2 and more generally throughout Chapters 2 and 3.

⁷ On the unfortunate dearth of evidence pertaining to Sextus' life, see House (1980).

Empiric schools (Walzer and Frede 1985). The name “Sextus Empiricus” suggests that Sextus was a member of the Empiric school, and there appears to be further evidence of this affiliation in Galen’s *Introductio seu medicus* (XIV 683 K).⁸ It is surprising, then, that Sextus himself identifies the Methodic approach to medicine as being more akin to Skepticism than that of the Empiric school, arguing that the Methodic school’s emphasis on following appearances bears a closer resemblance to Pyrrhonism than the Empiric school’s commitment to the derivation of knowledge from experience (*PH* I 236–241).

Although he was uncelebrated in his time, Sextus would have a profound impact on the direction of philosophy and broader culture centuries later, sparking an “epistemological turn” in philosophy and what came to be known as a *crise de pyrrhonisme* in European society more generally. In the 16th to 19th centuries, in particular, he deeply influenced the works of Montaigne, Hume, and Hegel. His influence continued to be recognized in modern times, as documented in Popkin’s *History of Scepticism from Erasmus to Descartes*.⁹ More recently, Forster (2010) has argued that Kant’s transcendental idealism is properly understood as an attempt to answer the skeptical challenge posed uniquely by Sextan Pyrrhonism. Indeed, one might plausibly argue that the growth of Western philosophy as a whole has been not insignificantly shaped by the continual pressure exerted by the Pyrrhonian challenge.

⁸ Galen here refers to a person named “Sextus” and identifies him as an Empiric. While many have assumed this to be a reference to Sextus Empiricus, Dye (2004, n. 1) points out that it may have instead been a reference to someone named “Sextus Afer,” about whom nothing is known.

⁹ Popkin’s seminal work was originally published in 1960 under the title *The History of Scepticism from Erasmus to Descartes*. It was then expanded in 1979 and titled *The History of Scepticism from Erasmus to Spinoza*. Finally, it was revised and expanded a second time and published in 2003 as *The History of Scepticism from Savonarola to Bayle*.

1.2 The Works of Sextus Empiricus

Our principal extant sources of Pyrrhonian Skepticism are three works of Sextus Empiricus: *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* (Πυρρωνείων ὑποτυπώσεων) (*PH*), *Against the Mathematicians* (Πρὸς μαθηματικούς) (*M*) VII–XI, and *M* I–VI.¹⁰

PH is divided into three books. While Book I consists of a general, positive account of Pyrrhonism, Books II and III consider—and offer multifarious arguments against—various Dogmatic views within the standard Hellenistic tripartite division of philosophy into logic, physics, and ethics.

At some point in the manuscript tradition, the latter two of Sextus’ three extant works were incorrectly grouped together under the single name *Adversus Mathematicos*.¹¹ While it is now standard to refer to both of these works by this title, this convention can be misleading. For, not only does *M* I–VI fail to precede *M* VII–XI textually as part of a larger unified work, as their respective numerals suggest, but *M* VII–XI almost certainly precedes *M* I–VI chronologically.¹² *M* VII–XI largely treats the same topics as *PH* II–III, though in greater detail.¹³ As such, it is further divided into three works, again following the standard Hellenistic tripartite division: *Against the Logicians* (*M* VII–VIII),¹⁴ *Against the Physicists* (*M* IX–X),

¹⁰ The standard convention, which I follow, is to refer to Πυρρωνείων ὑποτυπώσεων and Πρὸς μαθηματικούς by their respective transliterated initialisms, “*PH*” and “*M*.” All quotations from *PH* in the present work are from Annas and Barnes (2000). In addition, note that Πυρρωνείων ὑποτυπώσεων, which is frequently referred to by its Latin title, *Adversus Mathematicos*, is sometimes translated *Against the Learned*. (See, e.g., Perin 2010, 1 n. 2).

¹¹ See n. 10.

¹² The evidence for this, in brief, is that there exist in *M* I–VI references to *M* VII–XI, but not vice versa. See *M* I 35, III 116.

¹³ *M* VII–XI is, in fact, the latter part of a larger unified work, but the portion of it that precedes *M* VII–XI is lost. Just as *M* VII–XI corresponds to *PH* II–III, the lost portion was a general treatment of Pyrrhonism that corresponded to *PH* I. See Bett (1997, x).

¹⁴ *M* VII–XI is sometimes referred to as *Against the Dogmatists* (*Adversus Dogmaticos*) (*AD*) I–V, after the Latin subtitle of the 1914 Mutschmann edition. In addition, both Bett (1997, x) and Perin (2010, 1 n. 2) note that Sextus appears to refer to this work as the *Skeptical Treatises* (τὰ σκεπτικὰ ὑπομνήματα) at *M* I 29, II 106 and VI 52 (cf. DL IX 116). Furthermore, Bett (1997,

and *Against the Ethicists* (*M XI*).¹⁵ By contrast, *M I–VI* is a complete, independent work that does not correspond to any part of *PH*. Instead, each of its six books addresses one of the parts of the “liberal arts,” as they were understood in Sextus’ time. These include two out of three parts of the *trivium* (grammar and rhetoric; logic is addressed in *M VI–XI*, as we saw above) plus every part of the *quadrivium* (geometry, arithmetic, astronomy, and music). The six books, along with the *Proemium*, are typically titled as follows:¹⁶

- *Against the Professors* (*Proemium*) (*Pr*)
- *Against the Grammarians* (*Adversus mathematicos et grammaticos*) (*M I*)
- *Against the Rhetoricians* (*Adversus rhetores*) (*M II*)
- *Against the Geometers* (*Adversus geometras*) (*M III*)
- *Against the Arithmeticians* (*Adversus arithmeticos*) (*M IV*)
- *Against the Astrologers* (*Adversus astrologos*) (*M V*)
- *Against the Musicians* (*Adversus musicos*) (*M VI*)

Unlike the chronology of *M VII–XI* and *M I–VI* with respect to each other, the chronology of each of these with respect to *PH* is a matter of debate. Indeed, much of the dispute over the scope of Pyrrhonian Skepticism, particularly with

x n. 10) credits Blomqvist (1974) with showing that the *Skeptical Treatises* is, indeed, the work referred to in the aforementioned passages. Similarly, Machuca (2008, 33–34) (cited in Machuca 2011, 1 n. 1) remarks that “the real title of *AD* was probably *Pyrrhonian* or *Skeptical Commentaries* (Πυρρώνεια/Σκεπτικά Ὑπομνήματα).”

¹⁵ All quotations from *M XI* in the present work are from Bett (1997).

¹⁶ *M I–VI*, as a whole, is often titled *Against the Professors*. For an example of a translation of *M I–VI* that employs both this title and the seven other specific English book titles given above, see Bury (1949). It is worth noting that Blank (1998) diverges from this scheme in grouping together *Pr* and *M I* under the single title *Against the Grammarians* while assigning to *Pr* alone the more specific title *Against the Professors of the Liberal Studies*.

respect to ethics, hinges on the question of whether *PH* came before or after *M* VII–XI—and hence whether *PH* might represent a later historical development of Pyrrhonism with a different set of commitments than those entailed by *M* VII–XI.¹⁷

1.3 The Skeptical Approach to Philosophy

Sextus begins the *Outlines* by addressing what he takes to be the most fundamental difference between Pyrrhonian Skepticism and all other kinds of philosophy: Skepticism’s relationship with inquiry (*PH* I 1–4). Sextus writes that there are three possible outcomes of any inquiry: either the object under investigation is discovered, or it is discovered that the object under investigation cannot be discovered, or the investigation continues. These outcomes correspond, respectively, to the Dogmatic, Academic, and Skeptical philosophies. Dogmatists are those who take themselves to have discovered the truth about some matter; Academics are those who take the truth to be undiscoverable;¹⁸ and Skeptics are those who continue to inquire, neither taking themselves to have discovered the truth, nor taking the truth to be undiscoverable.¹⁹

The Skeptic is foremost an inquirer. Whatever else she might do, she continues to inquire into matters in search of the truth. For inquiry, in this sense, is an activity that necessarily aims at truth. This is why Dogmatists, who take themselves already to have found the truth, see no need to continue to inquire. Indeed, it would be quite irrational to continue to look for something after one has already

¹⁷ We shall return to this in Chapter 4. See also Annas and Barnes (2000, xiii–xiv) and Bett (1997, x–xi).

¹⁸ The accuracy of Sextus’ characterization of Academic Skepticism is disputed (see Lammenranta 2008; Thorsrud 2009).

¹⁹ What of those who cease to inquire, not because they take themselves to have discovered the truth or because they take the truth to be undiscoverable, but for some unrelated reason, e.g., boredom? The implication seems to be that such individuals are simply not philosophers.

found it. (As a Dogmatist once quipped, “It’s always in the last place you look.”) For the same reason, the Academics, who take the truth to be undiscoverable, see no need to continue to inquire. It would be equally irrational to attempt to find something that one sincerely believes cannot be found.

If a Skeptic were to cease to inquire, either because she takes herself finally to have found the truth, or because she takes herself finally to have discovered that the truth is itself undiscoverable, she would cease to be a Skeptic and instead become either a Dogmatist or an Academic, respectively. Conversely, a Dogmatist or an Academic who gives up the truth she thought she had in order to resume inquiring would cease to be a Dogmatist or an Academic *pro tanto* and might instead become a Skeptic.²⁰ Philosophical membership is not necessarily for life.

While all Dogmatists take themselves to have discovered the truth about some matter or other, hardly any Dogmatists take themselves to have discovered the truth about *all* matters (or even to have successfully divided all matters into those about which the truth has been discovered and those about which the truth is undiscoverable). Few Dogmatists, in other words, take themselves to have discovered their own omniscience. Rather, most Dogmatists take themselves to have discovered many truths, but they continue to inquire into those matters about which

²⁰ In other words, a Dogmatist who gives up the truth she thought she had about some specific, circumscribed matter would cease to be a Dogmatist with respect to that matter, though she might remain a Dogmatist *tout court* in virtue of continuing to hold other beliefs. By contrast, a Dogmatist who gives up (a certain subset of) her beliefs in order to resume inquiring might thereby become a Skeptic. (Note that the previous sentence was carefully worded in an attempt to remain neutral on two points of controversy. The first is over the scope of the Skeptic’s suspension of judgment. Do Pyrrhonian Sceptics hold certain kinds of beliefs (or beliefs about certain domains), or do they suspend judgment on everything? The second point of controversy is over the nature of inquiry. As I argue in Section 1.4, Sextus describes Scepticism as a distinctive ability, and the exercise of this ability either presupposes or is (at least partially) constitutive of inquiry. Thus, it is conceptually possible for someone to (a) suspend judgment to the same extent as the Skeptic and (b) be an inquirer, yet not to be a Skeptic (according to Sextus’ account), if the manner in which she inquires does not involve the exercise of the Skeptic’s distinctive ability. I wish to thank Casey Perin for alerting me to this possibility.)

they have yet to discover the truth (or have yet to find it undiscoverable). Are such individuals partially Dogmatic and partially Skeptical (and perhaps also partially Academic)? Are they Dogmatic with respect to some matters and Skeptical (or Academic) with respect to others? While such descriptions may be innocuous, Sextus and those following him have almost exclusively referred to such individuals as Dogmatists, likely for the sake of simplicity. Such individuals are categorized as Dogmatists either because they take themselves each to have discovered at least one truth, or because their relationship with inquiry is predominantly that of ceasing to inquire on account of having found the truth.

By contrast, Sextus seems to reserve the title of Academic only for those who hold *all* truths to be undiscoverable (hopefully with the exception of the truth—if it is a truth—that all *other* truths are undiscoverable). Skeptics, in contrast to the other two groups, are conceived by some as those who only continue to inquire and by others as those who continue to inquire into some matters but to have found the truth about others. These two different ways of conceiving of Skepticism represent the two major sides in the debate over the scope of Pyrrhonian Skepticism.

1.4 How Skepticism Operates

Sextus describes Skepticism as “an ability to set out oppositions among things which appear and are thought of in any way at all, an ability by which, because of the equipollence in the opposed objects and accounts, we come first to suspension of judgment and afterward to tranquility” (*PH* I 8).²¹ In what follows,

²¹ Did Sextus intend for this statement to be a mere description, or a positive definition, of Skepticism? We do not know. If it is merely a *description* of Skepticism, then it may merely tell us what one aspect of Skepticism is like. It may simply tell us that Skepticism is this sort of ability without implying that it is *essentially* an ability and not essentially something else (e.g., a set of beliefs). (If, on the other hand, it is a *definition* of Skepticism, then Skepticism cannot essentially be, e.g., a set of beliefs.) In referring to it as a description, I do not mean to imply that it is not,

we will analyze each part of this statement in detail. In doing so, we will come to an understanding of how Skepticism works.

1.4.1 Skepticism is an ability.

Often, it is assumed that Skepticism, being one among many philosophical views, is (like those other philosophical views) a kind of theory or doctrine—that it is, strictly speaking, a set of propositions, and that those who are properly called Skeptics are those who hold the propositions in this set as beliefs. But Skepticism is neither a theory nor a doctrine. It is an ability (δύναμις). Moreover, Sextus emphasizes that it is “an ability not in any fancy sense, but simply in the sense of ‘to be able to’” (*PH* I 9).²² Like all abilities, it lacks propositional content. Thus, it is inaccurate to say, in a semantic sense, “Skepticism entails that *p*.” This is a simple category mistake, just as it is a category mistake to say, in a semantic sense, “Running entails that *p*.” While we might commonly say that my act of running “assumes” or “entails” various *facts*, e.g., that I have legs, that I am not unconscious, and that the force of gravity exerted upon my body is within a certain range, all this means is that certain conditions must hold in order for me to exercise my ability to run. Likewise, it might well be the case that various conditions must hold in order for the Skeptic to be able to exercise her ability to set out oppositions among things, but this says nothing about the semantic entailments of Skepticism.

in fact, a definition. Rather, I simply respect the fact that definitions tend to be significantly more substantial—and more constraining—than descriptions.

²² In saying this, Sextus is providing us with a certain degree of clarity regarding what he means by an “ability,” viz., that he means it in a simple or plain, as opposed to a fancy or technical, sense. But this is only of limited usefulness, since we still do not know what constitutes a simple or plain sense to Sextus. For example, “to be able to,” being a simple or plain sense of “ability,” may mean “to have the freedom to,” “to have the intellectual ability to,” or “to have the means to.” But these are all, of course, quite different senses of “to be able to.” Thus, although Sextus presents this as an obvious matter, it merits further investigation. I thank Monte Johnson for bringing this problem to my attention.

We must be careful to note, then, that although Skepticism is almost universally referred to as a “philosophical view,” this usage is accurate only if the term “view” is understood not necessarily to entail a theory or doctrine. In particular, if a “philosophical view” is taken in a more literal sense, as a particular “view upon philosophy,” i.e., as a particular way of *looking* at philosophy and at philosophical problems, then this usage is permissible. Perhaps a term less prone to misunderstanding is “philosophical position,” given that the word “position” invokes a spatial metaphor—in this case of occupying a certain region of logical space relative to others. In this sense, Skepticism occupies a unique position within the logical space of philosophical positions. It is unique not only in the way that many Dogmatic positions are unique (viz., by being constituted by different sets of propositions from those that constitute other positions). Rather, it is unique in the very way in which it is unique (viz., by not being constituted by a set of propositions at all).²³

1.4.2 The Skeptic’s ability is the ability to set out oppositions among things.

When speaking of “setting out” oppositions, Sextus often refers to the general dialectical activity of presenting opposing arguments about a given disputed matter. However, as we shall see below, the opposed things may be any object of appearance or of thought. There are two questions here that must be answered: (1) What are objects of appearance and of thought? (2) What does it mean for such objects to be opposed to one another? We shall answer each in turn.

²³ Alternatively, we might characterize Skepticism as unique in being constituted solely by the *empty set*. One might wonder whether this description would not also apply to the Madhyamaka school of Buddhism (see Kuzminski 2008). However, according to Hayes (2015), the Madhyamaka school is characterized by the “doctrine” or “conviction” that “all things are . . . empty of inherent natures,” which is itself a substantive philosophical view, rather than the absence of one.

First, what are objects of appearance and of thought? The key to understanding what Sextus means here is to understand that Skepticism is essentially a *dialectical* activity. “Dialectic,” in this context, refers simply to the use of logical discussion and argumentation in the investigation of the truths of claims. Dialectical activity, in this sense, is pervasive both inside and outside of philosophy. It is commonplace in virtually all academic disciplines, as well as outside the academy, e.g., in legal settings. Indeed, dialectical situations (i.e., situations in which dialectical activity occurs) are also common in everyday life, as claims are made, discussed, and disputed about almost every conceivable topic. Dialectical situations range from the trivial (e.g., asking and receiving and answer to the question of what time it is) to matters of life and death (e.g., telling a doctor whether a patient who is unable to communicate wishes to be resuscitated or not). Hence, the purview of Skepticism is extremely broad.²⁴

Just as all dialectical activity is ultimately concerned with propositions, Skepticism, in so far as it is a type of dialectical activity, is ultimately concerned with propositions. Propositions constitute the expressible contents of claims, assertions, opinions, thoughts, beliefs, assumptions, premises, and conclusions. These, in turn, constitute the raw materials of dialectical activity. (Note that a dialectical situation may be internal, as when one argues with oneself; see Section 3.2.) The “objects” of appearance and of thought to which Sextus refers are, therefore, propositions.

But why do I say that Skepticism is principally concerned with dialectic? Is it not more accurate to say that Skepticism is principally concerned with *belief*? Dogmatic interpreters of Skepticism are prone to overlook the subtle distinction at work in this case. This oversight typically manifests itself in the erroneous allega-

²⁴ This helps to explain why the range of topics with which Sextus concerns himself is itself so broad, as we saw in the discussion of his works in Section 1.2.

tion that Skepticism is the view (or that at least some Skeptical arguments have as their conclusions) that no one ought to hold any beliefs (or that no one reasonably or rationally holds any beliefs, or in terms of knowledge, that no one (really) knows anything). While it might be true, in an ultimate sense, that no one rationally holds any beliefs (see Section 3.3), it is inaccurate to attribute any of these claims to Skepticism. Although Sextus occasionally uses language that suggests that the Skeptic aims to alter the Dogmatist's beliefs, there is nothing in the content of Skepticism itself that mandates that the Skeptic attempt to change anyone else's beliefs (see Section 3.4). Thus, when Sextus writes that "Skeptics are philanthropic and wish to cure by argument, as far as they can, the conceit and rashness of the Dogmatists" (*PH* III 280–281), there is no basis for assuming that he is describing an intrinsic, rather than contingent, property of Skeptics. There is nothing contradictory about a nonphilanthropic Skeptic. In light of this, I see no good reason to take Sextus literally here. (In fact, it seems rather obvious to me that he here speaks with tongue in cheek.)

What distinguishes an object of appearance from an object of thought is the kind of relationship that holds between a given proposition and a cognitive being. If it appears to me that honey is sweet, then a particular kind of relationship (call it the "appearing that" relationship) holds between me and the proposition "Honey is sweet." Note that we are not saying that a particular relationship holds between me and *honey itself* (i.e., the physical stuff). This is because what appears to me is *that honey is sweet*. In other words, my appearance has the propositional content "Honey is sweet." Contrast this with the situation in which honey *tastes* sweet to me. If it is the case that honey tastes sweet to me, then honey is stimulating my taste buds in a certain way. This is a relationship that holds between me and honey itself (i.e., the physical stuff). If, on the other hand, it *appears* to me that honey

is sweet, then there may or may not be any relationship between me and honey *qua* physical stuff. In fact, honey *qua* physical stuff may not even exist. It may only *appear* to me that honey *qua* physical stuff exists (and is sweet). Therefore, an object of appearance (i.e., what appears after the word “that” in statements of the form, “It appears to me that...”) is a proposition.

Now, an object of thought is also a proposition, though this is considerably more apparent. If I have the thought that honey is sweet, then I think that honey is sweet. And if I think that honey is sweet, then the object of my thought is simply the proposition, “Honey is sweet.” Thus, what distinguishes objects of appearance from objects of thought is the kind of relationship that holds between me and the object (i.e., the proposition). In the case of appearances, the relation is that of *appearing that*. In the case of thoughts, the relation is that of *thinking that*. This explains how Sextus can coherently claim that Skeptics oppose objects of appearance to objects of thought and vice versa. If the objects of appearance were not propositions, then they could scarcely be opposed to objects of thought, let alone to other objects of appearance. If, for example, objects of appearance were merely phenomenological experiences or sense data, then there would be no way to directly compare the objects of appearance experienced by one being to that of another. Moreover, even if such a comparison were possible, objects of appearance would necessarily be relativized to the perceiver. It would be that honey appears sweet *to you*, but honey does not appear sweet *to me*. But then there is no opposition to be had. For honey appearing sweet *to you* is perfectly compatible with honey appearing sweet *to me*. There is no inconsistency in this, and hence no basis for an opposition. Thus, it cannot be the case that the objects of appearance are phenomenological experiences or sense data.

Sextus writes that “by ‘opposed accounts’ we do not necessarily have in

mind affirmation and negation, but take the phrase simply in the sense of ‘conflicting accounts’” (*PH* I 10; echoed at 190, 198, and 202). While one sense of “opposition”—what we might call the *strict* sense—is limited to the logical operation of negation, there is a more capacious sense of “opposition”—what we might call the *loose* sense—that also includes mere mutual incompatibility. As Perin (2010) puts it:

Given any candidate for belief p , the Sceptic is described as someone who is able to identify a conflicting candidate for belief q (where q is or entails the negation of p) *and* to offer an argument that purports to show that there is no reason to believe p rather than q , and vice versa. (19)

In other words, in the strict sense, only arrangements of the form

$$p \text{ vs. } \neg p$$

are genuine oppositions. In the loose sense, by contrast, arrangements of the form

$$p \text{ vs. } q,$$

where

$$q \Rightarrow \neg p,$$

also count as genuine oppositions. However, while this may be a natural way of interpreting Sextus’ remarks, it does not explain how, precisely, we ought to understand the entailment relation. Presumably, Sextus does not have in mind the material conditional, which is false if and only if p and q are both true. For this would have the absurd consequence that entirely unrelated propositions could be

said to stand in opposition to one another, e.g., that

p : “Honey is sweet.”

is opposed to

q : “Water is black.”

(The material conditional is true if either honey is not sweet or water is not black.) An equally unlikely candidate is strict logical entailment, since this would rule out intuitive semantic (“If I am standing in the Parthenon, then I am standing in Greece”), metaphysical (“If x is red all over, then x is not green all over”), and scientific (“If x is immersed in a fluid, then the upward buoyant force exerted upon x is equal to the weight of the fluid that x displaces”) entailments.²⁵

I contend that we can resolve this by recognizing that the “opposed things”—whether objects of appearance or objects of thought—must be *candidates for belief*. After all, the point of the Skeptic’s efforts in setting out oppositions among things is to control what she ends up believing so that she does not fall into error.²⁶ The question, then, is what kinds of entailment relations—or, more to the point, what kinds of *oppositions*—are relevant to belief. The answer is not straightforward, since that which is relevant to belief depends upon many factors, especially *what one antecedently believes*. It is plain that what is relevant to one person’s potential to believe something may not be relevant to another’s. But this simply means that the Skeptic must tailor her manner of setting out oppositions among things (e.g., by presenting arguments) to her interlocutors, and this is a task to which Sextus assiduously attends.

²⁵ I am grateful to Sam Rickless for making this point.

²⁶ However, this is not yet the *whole* story, as we shall see.

To see this, we must first understand the Skeptic's attitude toward "opposed accounts." Near the beginning of *PH*, Sextus writes, "The chief constitutive principle of Skepticism is the claim that to every account an equal account is opposed; for it is from this, we think, that we come to hold no beliefs" (I 12). Much later in the same book, he writes:

When we say "Opposed to every account there is an equal account," we mean by "every" every one we have inspected; we speak not of accounts in an unqualified sense but of those which purport to establish something in dogmatic fashion (i.e., about something unclear)—which purport to establish it in any way, and not necessarily by way of assumptions and consequence; we say "equal" with reference to convincingness and lack of convincingness; we take "opposed" in the sense of "conflicting" in general; and we supply "as it appears to me." (202)

The Skeptic proceeds by opposing every account with an *equal* account, where this equality refers to equal convincingness. Thus, the Skeptic does not seek simply to pulverize every argument with the strongest counterargument she can muster. Rather, she opts for a proportionate response, calibrating her attack to the magnitude of the opposing force (Annas 1993; Nussbaum 1986). At the very end of *PH*, Sextus addresses the question, "Why do Skeptics sometimes deliberately propound arguments of feeble plausibility?" He answers:

Skeptics are philanthropic and wish to cure by argument, as far as they can, the conceit and rashness of the Dogmatists... Skeptics propound arguments which differ in strength—they employ weighty arguments... against those who are distressed by a severe rashness, and they employ milder arguments against those who are afflicted by a conceit which is superficial and easily cured and which can be rebutted by a milder degree of plausibility. This is why those with a Skeptical impulse do not hesitate sometimes to propound arguments which are sometimes weighty in their plausibility, and sometimes apparently rather weak. They do this deliberately, since often a weaker argument is sufficient for them to achieve their purpose. (III 280-281)

Thus, a proper understanding of the “oppositions” set out by the Skeptic takes into account the wide range of possible opposed objects in addition to the wide range of relations such an opposition might instantiate.

For the sake of completeness, we should note that there is a further reason to be dubious of any proposal for a straightforward entailment relation of the form $q \Rightarrow \neg p$. Under such a proposal, it is difficult to see how any practical benefit can be realized from a distinction between “strict” and “loose” senses of opposition. Presented with p , the Skeptic must present q , if she is to be successful in setting out an opposition in the “loose” sense. However, such an arrangement will be recognized as a genuine opposition only if it is clear (or can be further argued) that $q \Rightarrow \neg p$.²⁷ But if it is clear (or can be further argued) that $q \Rightarrow \neg p$, then there is no need to stop at presenting q , for it is then a trivial matter of applying *modus ponens* to present $\neg p$. The real work has already been done.

1.4.3 The opposed things are those which appear and are thought of in any way at all.

Sextus here relies on a distinction between appearances (*φαινόμενα* or *φαντασίαι*) and thoughts. As he explains, “Things which appear we take in the present context to be objects of perception, which is why we contrast them with objects of thought” (*PH* I 9). Hence, the objects of perceptual experiences, or sense-objects (*τὰ αἰσθητά*), are distinguished from the objects of thoughts (*τὰ νοητά*), with appearances consisting only in the former. Moreover, this dichotomy is treated (pre-

²⁷ At the very least, such an arrangement must be recognized as a genuine opposition by the Skeptic herself, even if not by the Dogmatist, or else she will not have taken herself to have set out a genuine opposition and will, presumably, continue to endeavor to do so. Conversely, the relevant sense of “can be further argued” here clearly refers to those arguments to which the Skeptic’s interlocutor is amenable. Indeed, the Skeptic constructs her arguments only out of the raw materials furnished by the Dogmatist’s own assumptions (see Section 2.1).

sumably as a Dogmatic assumption *ex concessis*) as exhaustive.²⁸ For example, in his discussion of the Two Modes (see Appendix B), Sextus writes:

That nothing is apprehended by means of itself is, they say, clear from the dispute which has occurred among natural scientists over, I suppose, all objects of perception and of thought—a dispute which is undecidable, since we cannot use either an object of perception or an object of thought as a standard because anything we may take has been disputed and so is unconvincing. (*PH* I 178)

If the perception/thought dichotomy were not exhaustive, then there would exist some possible object from outside these two categories capable of serving as a standard and thereby deciding the dispute. Given that the proponents of the Two Modes deem the dispute to be undecidable, we may conclude that, as far as they are concerned, the dichotomy is exhaustive. Thus, every object that is the kind of thing that could be opposed to another thing (in the sense explained above) is either an object of perception or an object of thought. It follows that the Skeptic’s ability is applied to everything to which it can possibly be applied. The Skeptic does not artificially restrict the domain of objects to which she applies her ability, e.g., for the sake of respecting sacrosanct objects of appearance or thought. The exercise of the Skeptic’s ability is the paradigm of radically disinterested intellectual honesty.

However, it is still not clear what Sextus means by the phrase “in any way at all.” He explains:

“In any way at all” can be taken either with “an ability” (to show that we are to understand the word “ability” in its straightforward sense, as we said), or else with “to set out oppositions among things which appear and are thought of”: we say “in any way at all” because we set up oppositions in a variety of ways—opposing what appears to what appears, what is thought of to what is thought of, and crosswise, so as to include all the oppositions. (*PH* I 9)

²⁸ Skeptics often argue from premises that they do not themselves accept but that their Dogmatic opponents believe or assume (see Section 2.1).

In the former sense, “in any way at all” signifies that Sextus is referring to a normal ability, as opposed to an ability in a “fancy sense.” In the latter sense, “in any way at all” signifies that the Skeptic’s ability is not restricted to opposing only objects of the same type to one another (appearances to appearances, thoughts to thoughts), but rather that all combinations are possible (appearances to thoughts and vice versa). Sextus provides examples of these various kinds of oppositions.

We oppose what appears to what appears when we say: “The same tower appears round from a distance and square from nearby.” We oppose what is thought of to what is thought of when, against those who seek to establish that there is Providence from the orderliness of the heavenly bodies, we oppose the view that often the good do badly while the bad do well and conclude from this that there is no Providence. We oppose what is thought of to what appears, as Anaxagoras did when to the view that snow is white, he opposed the thought that snow is frozen water and water is black and snow is therefore black. (*PH* I 32)

Since opposition is symmetrical, only three examples are needed to demonstrate all possibilities. (The final example is a case both of an appearance being opposed to a thought and of a thought being opposed to an appearance.) It is important to note that, contrary to the restriction of appearances to objects of sense perception in the present case, Sextus more generally uses “φαινόμενα” and “φαντασίαι” to refer both to perceptual appearances (e.g., “It appears to me that honey is sweet”) and also to non-perceptual, intellectual appearances (e.g., “It appears to me that pleasure is good”) (Perin 2010, 33–34, n. 2).

In this more general sense, appearance is distinguished from reality. Finishing his discussion of the Skeptical phrases (on which see Section 4.4), Sextus writes, “But the main point is this: in uttering these phrases they say what is apparent to themselves and report their own feelings without holding opinions, affirming nothing about external objects” (*PH* I 13–15). Hitherto in *PH*, Sextus has taken

pains to make it clear that Skeptics non-Dogmatically report their own appearances (τὸ ἑαυτῷ φαινόμενον) and feelings (τὸ πάθος). However, this is the first time we encounter a reference to “external objects” (τῶν ἔξωθεν ὑποκειμένων). Sextus goes on to make similar references at two other locations in *PH*. First, at I 208:

You must remember that we do not use [the Skeptical] phrases about all objects universally, but about what is unclear and investigated in a dogmatic fashion, and that we say what is apparent to us and do not make firm assertions about the nature of externally existing things.

Here, as in the prior passage, Sextus reminds us that the Skeptic only reports what is apparent to her, and he again contrasts what is apparent (τὸ φαινόμενον) with “externally existing things” (τῶν ἐκτὸς ὑποκειμένων). Second, at II 72:

Even if we grant that appearances are apprehended, objects cannot be judged in virtue of them; for the intellect, as they say, sets itself upon external objects and receives appearances not through itself but through the senses, and the senses do not apprehend external existing objects but only—if anything—their own feelings. An appearance, then, will actually be of the feeling of a sense—and that is different from an external existing object. For honey is not the same thing as my being affected sweetly, nor wormwood as my being affected bitterly: they are different.

Once again, Sextus states that an appearance (ἡ φαντασία) is different from an external object (τοῦ ἐκτὸς ὑποκειμένου). In all three of these instances, Sextus distinguishes between the apparent and τῶν ἐκτὸς ὑποκειμένων, literally “the outside underlying things” (LSJ), which is to say, external reality. The distinction is clarified in a further example.

It appears to us that honey sweetens (we concede this inasmuch as we are sweetened in a perceptual way); but whether (as far as the argument goes) it is actually sweet is something we investigate—and this is not what is apparent but something said about what is apparent. (*PH* I 20)

That honey appears sweet to me is, *eo ipso*, apparent, and this is a matter of what occurs internally, i.e., inside of me (hence Sextus’ emphasis on τὸ πάθος). But

whether honey is really sweet is not apparent. It is not a matter of what is the case with respect to any appearance. Rather, it is a matter of what is the case with respect to that which is outside of me, which underlies the appearance, viz., honey itself.²⁹ While Skeptics concede (συγχωροῦμεν) that honey *appears* (φαίνεται) to be sweet, they make no such concession about whether honey *is* (ἔστιν) sweet. It is the external, underlying reality about which they suspend judgment.

1.4.4 The exercise of the Skeptic's ability, in conjunction with equipollence, results in suspension of judgment.

Let us begin with an examination of equipollence before turning to suspension of judgment. “By ‘equipollence’ (ἰσοσθένειαν),” Sextus explains, “we mean equality (ἰσότητα) with regard to being convincing (πίστιν) or unconvincing (ἀπιστίαν)” (*PH* I 10). Equipollence is thus the state that obtains when two or more objects (of appearance or of thought) that are opposed to one another (in the sense explained above) are equally “convincing” or “unconvincing” relative to one another. The question, then, is in what senses the words “convincing” and “unconvincing” are here being used.

One possibility is that convincingness and unconvincingness are matters of individual psychology. Whether a given object, *o*, strikes me as convincing depends upon my particular psychological makeup. For example, if *o* is a view about some matter about which reasonable people may disagree, e.g., “that there is Providence from the orderliness of the heavenly bodies” (*PH* I 32), then I might find *o* convincing, given certain beliefs I antecedently hold, while someone with

²⁹ It is important to note, however, that what Annas and Barnes here translate as “is actually” (in the phrase “whether it is actually sweet”) is merely the verb ἔστιν, which is, strictly speaking, ambiguous with respect to any sense of “actuality.” Sextus *himself* does not explicitly contrast the appearance of sweetness with the actuality or reality of sweetness, though this seems to be the most plausible construal of his meaning by far.

a substantially different psychological makeup from my own—who therefore lacks those beliefs—might find *o* unconvincing, even if we do not differ in general intelligence, access to information, or epistemic circumspection. Let us call this the “individual–psychological” interpretation.

Alternatively, we might suppose that whether a given object, *o*, is itself convincing or unconvincing depends not on what any actual, idiosyncratic evaluator happens to think of it, but rather what a perfectly rational evaluator *would* think of it. If an ideal evaluator would find *o* convincing, then *o* is convincing. If not, not. (Of course, one would need an account of how, exactly, all of this works.) Call this the “ideal–psychological” interpretation.

Lastly, there is what we might call the “non-psychological” interpretation, according to which convincingness is not a psychological matter at all. On one form of this view, objects are objectively (i.e., mind-independently) convincing or unconvincing by virtue of their non-relational properties. For example, it seems plausible to say that, among purportedly deductive arguments, logically valid arguments are intrinsically more convincing than logically invalid arguments. Here we would be appealing to the normative sense of the word “convincing” that is concerned with the extent to which arguments are worthy of belief (due to considerations of the properties they possess) rather than the descriptive sense that is concerned with the tendency of arguments to succeed psychologically in persuading people. If the latter sense were all there were to the word “convincing,” then it would literally be nonsense for us to remark to a friend who is persuaded by, e.g., a fallaciously enthymematic political argument, that the argument is actually not convincing, and that he is simply mistaken in finding it to be so. But sensible actions of this kind seem so commonplace as to be banal.³⁰

³⁰ One might object that all we are doing in making this remark to our friend is asserting that

While Sextus is not explicit about how we are to understand “convincingness” at *PH* I 10, there is some support for the individual–psychological interpretation at *PH* I 190, where he notes that “by ‘equipollence’ we mean equality *in what appears plausible to us*” (emphasis mine).³¹ This statement is significant in two respects. First, it entails that *convincingness* is a matter of what appears plausible to us, rather than to some ideal evaluator. Thus, it speaks in favor of the individual–psychological interpretation and against the ideal–psychological interpretation. Second, this statement equates convincingness to what *appears plausible*. Recall from our discussion above that appearances may exist in this intellectual, rather than perceptual, form. (In particular, it appearing plausible to me that *p* is not a perceptual matter, but an intellectual one.) More importantly, the implicit contrast between appearances and reality entails that the *appearance* of the plausibility of the argument is to be contrasted with the *reality* of the plausibility of the argument. But the “reality of the plausibility” of an argument is simply the soundness or correctness of that argument.³² Therefore, the implicit contrast is between the way the argument appears to the Skeptic (i.e., seeming sound or unsound) and what the argument is in reality (i.e., in fact sound or unsound), which speaks in favor of a psychological rather than non-psychological interpretation of convincingness.

Thus, we can state that two or more arguments exhibit equality, in this sense, if and only if they appear to the Skeptic in the same way (i.e., as sound or as unsound, to the same extent), regardless of whether any disparity in soundness

the argument is not convincing *to us* in the psychological sense, which is perfectly consistent with the argument being convincing to our friend in the psychological sense. The disagreement over the convincingness of the argument thus amounts merely to a kind of non-cognitive dispute.

³¹ See also *PH* I 196, I 198, I 202, I 227, I 232.

³² Since soundness applies only to deductive arguments, I here include “correctness” as a catch-all for whatever conditions make non-deductive arguments correct. Henceforth, I will refer only to soundness for the sake of brevity.

exists between the arguments in reality. The type of situation in which this equality obtains is referred to as “equipollence.”

With an understanding of equipollence in place, we now turn to suspension of judgment. Suspension of judgment (ἐποχή) is the hallmark of Skepticism. As Sextus defines it, “Suspension of judgement is a standstill of the intellect, owing to which we neither reject nor posit anything” (*PH* I 10). To suspend judgment about the truth of a given proposition is to refrain both from rejecting it as false and from positing it as true. This is the characteristic Skeptical response to disputes about the truth of a given proposition. As we saw above, Sextus contrasts this response with the characteristic Academic response to disputes about the truth of a given proposition, which is to claim that the truth is unknowable. Indeed, the Pyrrhonian Skeptic could not consistently exhibit the Academic response to a given disputed proposition, p , since doing so would entail failing to suspend judgment about the further proposition that p is unknowable. This, presumably, is why Sextus distinguishes the Academic philosophy from both Dogmatism and Skepticism. From his perspective, Academics are less Dogmatic than the Dogmatists but more Dogmatic than the Skeptics in so far as their Dogmatism is restricted to a particular class of meta-propositions.³³

Recall that Sextus states that Skepticism “is an ability *by which, because of* the equipollence in the opposed objects and accounts, we come first to suspension of judgment...” (*PH* I 8, emphasis mine). There are at least two ways to read this passage. On the first, the Skeptic comes to suspension of judgment by means of exercising her ability in circumstances in which some latent form of equipollence exists, i.e., in which the objects are antecedently equipollent relative to one another prior to the application of the Skeptic’s ability. Upon exercising her ability,

³³ See n. 18.

the Skeptic then “uncovers” this equipollence, resulting in suspension of judgment. This suggests that, in principle, if the Skeptic were to exercise her ability in circumstances devoid of latent equipollence, the exercise of that ability might not uncover any equipollence, and hence might not result in suspension of judgment.

On the second reading, Sextus means to include the production of equipollence in his description of the Skeptical ability.³⁴ In other words, the Skeptical ability is to be understood as the ability to produce *equipollent* oppositions, rather than oppositions that may or may not turn out to be equipollent depending on the presence of latent equipollence between objects. This interpretation rules out, in principle, the possibility of the Skeptic’s ability being exercised yet failing to result in equipollence.

I shall argue in Chapters 2–3 that certain of the Skeptics’ methods, properly understood, are always capable of resulting in equipollence (and thus in suspension of judgment). The argument will be neutral between the alternative interpretations of *PH* I 8 I have laid out here. Either latent equipollence exists in every dialectical situation (in which case certain of the Skeptics’ arguments can always, in principle, uncover it), or certain of the Skeptics’ arguments, when properly deployed, are capable of ensuring that the Skeptic’s ability can always be exercised.

1.4.5 Suspension of judgment is followed by tranquility.

Sextus defines tranquility (*ἀταραξία*), or peace of mind, as “freedom from disturbance or calmness of soul” (*PH* I 10). The precise role tranquility plays in Pyrrhonian Skepticism may initially seem unclear. On the one hand, Sextus explicitly defines the aim of Skepticism at least partially in terms of tranquility.³⁵

³⁴ I wish to thank Casey Perin for bringing this to my attention.

³⁵ At *PH* I 30, Sextus notes, “Some eminent Skeptics have added as a further aim [of Skepticism] suspension of judgment in investigations.” Diogenes Laertius identifies these “eminent Skeptics” as

On the other hand, Sextus is keen to emphasize that it is not the case that the Skeptic sets out to obtain tranquility and is successful through diligent striving, but rather that the Skeptic chances upon tranquility by luck.

In identifying the aim of Skepticism, Sextus thinks it important first to explain what he means by an “aim”:

Now an aim is that for the sake of which everything is done or considered, while it is not itself done or considered for the sake of anything else. Or: an aim is the final object of desire. (*PH* I 25)

Sextus appears simply to be borrowing from his Dogmatic opponents the standard Hellenistic conception of an end (τέλος), which originated with Aristotle and had its roots in Plato.³⁶ With respect to the aim of Skepticism in particular, he continues:

Up to now we say that the aim of the Skeptic is tranquility in matters of opinion and moderation of feeling in matters forced upon us. For Skeptics began to do philosophy in order to decide among appearances and to apprehend which are true and which false, so as to become tranquil; but they came upon equipollent dispute, and being unable to decide this they suspended judgement. And when they suspended judgement, tranquility in matters of opinion followed fortuitously. (*PH* I 25–26)

Sextus distinguishes between “matters of opinion” and “matters forced upon us.” This distinction is important, since the Skeptic’s characteristic ability can be applied only to the former. Sextus defines the “standard” of Skepticism as “what is apparent, implicitly meaning by this the appearances; for they depend on passive and unwilled feelings and are not objects of investigation” (*PH* I 22). Appearances, being passive and unwilled, are “forced” upon us by nature, Sextus reasons. We cannot help but experience them. Hence, they are not objects of investigation.

Timon and Aenesidemus at IX 107.

³⁶ Note that in the present context, “borrowing” carries no Dogmatic implication. Sextus often uses Dogmatic concepts and assumptions to which he is not himself committed, provisionally granting their use for the sake of discussion and argument. This is closely related to Skeptics’ general use of nonfallacious *argumenta ad hominem* (understood as a species of *argumenta ex concessis*; see Section 2.1).

Hence, they are not matters of opinion, and the Skeptic's ability is not applicable to them.

It is difficult to discern what, exactly, is going on in this line of reasoning. One possibility, which we will explore further, is that Sextus is implicitly assuming that there is some kind of direct, incorrigible epistemic access to such experiences—that appearances are, in some sense, indubitable, and hence not subject to the methods of the Skeptic. *Prima facie*, this limits the scope of Skepticism considerably, as it implies that the Skeptic cannot suspend judgment about her own appearances.

For present purposes, we simply note the distinction between matters of opinion and matters forced upon us. One practical advantage of being a Skeptic, according to Sextus, is that while non-Skeptics suffer both from the matters forced upon them and from their opinions about those matters, the Skeptic suffers only from the former:

For those who hold the opinion that things are good or bad by nature are perpetually troubled. When they lack what they believe to be good, they take themselves to be persecuted by natural evils and they pursue what (so they think) is good. And when they have acquired these things, they experience more troubles; for they are elated beyond reason and measure, and in fear of change they do anything so as not to lose what they believe is good. But those who make no determination about what is good and bad by nature neither avoid nor pursue anything with intensity; and hence they are tranquil. (*PH* I 27-28)

For non-Skeptics, mental life is a highly volatile affair. All of us—Skeptics and non-Skeptics alike—are subject to that which nature forces upon us. This is simply an unavoidable aspect of the human condition. However, mental life is considerably more volatile for non-Skeptics than for Skeptics, since the perceived good or ill of that which nature forces upon the former is magnified by the beliefs they form about it. Although a starving Skeptic suffers from starvation itself, she does not

in addition suffer from the belief that starvation is a bad thing or that food is a good thing that she lacks, while the starving non-Skeptic suffers from all three. In this sense, the Skeptic's pain is less in an absolute sense than the non-Skeptic's pain, despite their shared plight. If the pair were to be elevated into conditions of plenitude, they would both benefit from nourishment itself, but while the non-Skeptic would additionally form the belief that prosperity is good and that the loss of his newfound wealth would be an evil that he must now take care to avoid, the Skeptic would assent to neither appearance. At least with respect to the former belief, the amount of pleasure the Skeptic would experience is less, in an absolute sense, than that which the non-Skeptic would experience (*PH* I 29-30). Thus, on the whole, the Skeptic's mental state exhibits less volatility than the non-Skeptic's.

Of course, low volatility in one's mental life entails neither higher total nor higher average lifetime pleasure or happiness (the distinction between which is unimportant for our purposes). But this is of no concern to the Skeptic, who aims neither at pleasure nor at happiness, but at tranquility. Since tranquility is defined simply as freedom from disturbance, it would suffice never to experience any pain or any pleasure, any sadness or any happiness, to perfectly satisfy this aim. Actual Skeptics, who must live in the real, vicissitudinous world, rarely, if ever, perfectly satisfy their aim. But in this respect they are no worse off than their Dogmatic rivals (cf. the Stoic sage).

While Sextus thus describes tranquility as (at least partially) the *aim* of the Skeptic, he goes on to describe it as something that *happens* to the Skeptic, as it were, by luck:

A story told of the painter Appelles applies to the Skeptics. They say that he was painting a horse and wanted to represent in his picture the lather on the horse's mouth; but he was so unsuccessful that he gave up, took the sponge on which he had been wiping off the

colours from his brush, and flung it at the picture. And when it hit the picture, it produced a representation of the horse's lather. Now the Sceptics were hoping to acquire tranquility by deciding the anomalies in what appears and is thought of, and being unable to do this they suspended judgement. But when they suspended judgement, tranquility followed as it were fortuitously, as a shadow follows a body. (*PH* I 28-29)

Those who eventually become Sceptics start out as individuals who are “troubled by the anomaly in things and puzzled as to which of them they should rather assent to” (*PH* I 12). Presumably, these individuals begin as Dogmatists, if only because it is exceedingly unlikely that a human being born into a natural society can develop into an individual capable of reasoned inquiry without acquiring a great many beliefs along the way (no doubt with the encouragement of her well-meaning Dogmatic teachers and guardians; see Frede 1998a, 7). At some point, these individuals become disturbed either by the uncertainty of things, or by the vociferous disagreement they witness over seemingly all matters, or both. The world is a strange and confusing place, filled with different people telling us to believe different things. All the more troubling is the fact that equally intelligent, authoritative, and apparently trustworthy individuals can be found defending opposite positions on every matter of consequence, such that we find we cannot simply delegate our epistemic responsibilities to “those who know better” without a creeping sense of disingenuousness. Earnest thinkers find this situation deeply troubling and resolve to make sense of the world around them. They expect that finding out the truth about important matters will assuage their troubled minds. In this sense, their aim is to acquire tranquility.³⁷

³⁷ But is the Sceptic's aim really tranquility? Or is this just an approximate way of expressing the Sceptic's aim of acquiring knowledge (i.e., the truth about matters that trouble her)? She may hope or expect that by finding the truth, she will become tranquil. But this is not equivalent to tranquility being her *aim*. Indeed, if forced (hypothetically) to make a choice between truth and tranquility, we would expect the earnest truth-seeker to pursue the former *at the expense of* the latter. After all,

Initially, it may seem that progress is being made—that each new excavation brings them one layer closer to unearthing the truth. But once they have dug well beneath the surface (deeper, perhaps, than others who were eager to rest their shovels and present their pyrite to dazzled onlookers)—once they have plunged to the deepest reaches their bodies and tools will allow, and the sky is but a faint point of light—they find, everywhere, the impenetrable bedrock of equipollence. In this sense, they fail in the direct pursuit of their aim. They are forced to suspend judgment. However, upon suspending judgment, something unexpected happens. Although they have not found the truth they sought, they are no longer disturbed by the beliefs they previously held.³⁸ Hence, they find themselves tranquil. Although tranquility was their aim, they did not *choose* to suspend judgment *in order* to become tranquil. Nonetheless, tranquility has found them. In this way, tranquility is simultaneously the Skeptic’s aim and a merely fortuitous outcome.

1.4.6 Summary and Conclusion

Let us consolidate the foregoing analysis of the particulars of the operation of Skepticism with an overview of it (see Fig. 1.1; cf. Burnyeat (1998a, 29) and Barnes (1998, 59)). The operation of Skepticism begins with the Skeptic exercising her *ability*, viz., the ability to set out *oppositions* among things. If the opposed things are of equal strength, a state of *equipollence* thereby obtains. Equipollence causes *suspension of judgment* in the Skeptic, which is followed, fortuitously, by *tranquility*. But the story cannot end there for the Skeptic. For the Sceptics, in contrast to the Dogmatists and the Academics, are the ones who always continue to inquire. But

the pursuit of truth is often uncomfortable. But how, then, to make sense of Sextus’ account of the Skeptic as having the aim of tranquility? I return to this matter shortly in Section 1.5.

³⁸ In particular, they are no longer disturbed by the belief that not knowing the truth about matters is a bad situation to be in, and one that must be remedied.



Figure 1.1: An overview of the operation of skepticism.

why would the Skeptic continue to inquire once she has found tranquility? Once she has suspended judgment about matters, she no longer believes that the truth can be found (which is not to say that she believes that the truth *cannot* be found—she is not an Academic), nor does she believe, as she once did, that finding the truth will bring her tranquility (which she now possesses anyway). Since the Skeptic’s desire to find the truth derived from her desire for tranquility, it can no longer be the case that she is motivated to inquire by a desire to find the truth.³⁹ What reason, then, is there for her to continue to inquire?

This question, I believe, rests on a misconception about the nature of the Skeptic’s suspension of judgment. Suspension of judgment, recall, is a *result* of the exercise of the Skeptic’s ability in conjunction with equipollence. Suspension of judgment is not itself an *ability* of the Skeptic. The Skeptic may not simply suspend judgment at will. Rather, the exercise of the Skeptic’s ability to set out oppositions among things must result first in equipollence if it is to result subsequently in suspension of judgment. Once the Skeptic has embarked on an inquiry into some matter, she can rationally reach a state of suspension of judgment about that matter only after exercising her ability to set out oppositions among the relevant objects with respect to that matter.⁴⁰ But *this* activity itself either *presupposes* or

³⁹ Once again, the key question is which of the Skeptic’s two apparent aims has priority: truth or tranquility? I here provisionally cede to an uncritical reading of Sextus’ description of the Skeptic.

⁴⁰ This is not to say that the *only* way for a Skeptic to reach a state of suspension of judgment *under any circumstances* is through exercising her ability. Rather, the condition applies in cases in which the Skeptic has embarked on an inquiry. Naturally, this leaves open the possibility that suspension of judgment might obtain independently of inquiry. For example, a Skeptic who has never considered the parity of the number of stars might very well be in a state of suspension of judgment with respect to that matter despite never having inquired into it.

is (at least partially) *constitutive* of inquiry. One cannot set out oppositions among, e.g., arguments about a given matter, without inquiring, or having inquired, into that matter. The very ability to set out genuine oppositions among such arguments requires that one have some understanding of those arguments (or at least their conclusions), or to be in the process of understanding them. One must inquire into a matter in order to discover that the dialectic of its dispute is one in which equipollence obtains.

Moreover, the Skeptic's position with respect to inquiry is not equivalent to that of the Dogmatist. Recall that the Dogmatist takes herself to have found the truth. Thus, it would be straightforwardly irrational for her to continue to search for what she believes she has already found. By contrast, there is no irrationality in the Skeptic searching for something she has not (or, at least, does not take herself to have) found.⁴¹ The mere fact that she has no *independent* reason to inquire into matters does not render the activity irrational if it is a *necessary condition* of a state of mind that she continually sustains, whether by habit or by nature.

The sustainment of suspension of judgment requires equipollence, which in turn requires the exercise of the Skeptic's ability to set out oppositions among things, which is itself inextricably bound with the activity of inquiry. Thus, the Skeptic (if she is to remain a Skeptic) may cease to inquire only when inquiry itself comes to an end. But it never does. There is always a further argument.

This final claim stands in need of both clarification and defense. Briefly, there are at least two main ways of interpreting it: (1) There is always a further argument about *any given matter of dispute*. (2) There is always a further argument about *some* matter that is capable of being a subject of inquiry. It is unclear to me whether the claim is true under the first interpretation. Although it might

⁴¹ Perhaps it is possible for *S* to believe that *p* without *S* *believing that S* believes that *p*.

seem initially obvious that there are at least *some* matters of dispute in which all arguments decisively terminate, we should be reticent to discount the ability of a clever interlocutor to devise an endless stream of new arguments about even a single matter of dispute (e.g., by repeatedly shifting the discourse into a meta-argument or by continually making very subtle adjustments to previous arguments). At any rate, in making this claim, I have in mind the second interpretation. My point is simply that the Skeptic always continues to inquire because inquiry itself never terminates, in the sense that it is always the case that there exists something into which one may inquire and into which one has not previously inquired. Strictly speaking, this can be the case even if it is false that “there is always a further argument,” since, as we saw above, the Skeptic’s ability to oppose things may be applied not *only* to arguments (though, to be sure, arguments are a chief concern of the Skeptic) but to any object of appearance or thought. Nonetheless, if it is the case that there is always a further argument in the second sense, then it follows that inquiry never comes to an end. The claim that there is always a further argument in the second sense is satisfied if there exists an infinite number of possible arguments about *all* inquirable matters *in general*, but this is trivially true, as the number of inquirable matters is itself infinite.⁴²

1.5 The Search for Truth

Some have argued that the Skeptic’s aim is not the discovery of truth, but rather the attainment of ἀταραξία (tranquility). They view Sextus as explicitly

⁴² One way to see this is to consider that the existence of any given object is an inquirable matter. Since we can easily imagine an infinite number of objects (and claim their existence), this alone suffices to supply us with an infinite number of inquirable matters. Let us further note the fact that a possible argument becomes an actual argument by the simple act of someone advancing the argument. Hence, the Skeptic may dispense entirely with her Dogmatic interlocutor and pose this infinite succession of arguments solely to herself (see Section 3.2).

admitting as much in his description of the Skeptic's aim at *PH* I 25–26, which we analyzed in Section 1.4.5. On this view, the Skeptical practice of setting out equipollent arguments that induce suspension of judgment is a matter of therapeutic self-medication rather than intellectual self-improvement. The Skeptic does not impartially seek out the best arguments for every view and incidentally discover that they are equipollent. Rather, she intentionally orchestrates equipollent outcomes, cherry-picking the arguments she needs (no matter how fallacious) and thereby rigging the game so as to evade the burden of belief. The Skeptic consciously prioritizes her own mental comfort over the truth, deliberately subordinating (and in some cases sacrificing) the pursuit of the latter to the acquisition and preservation the former.

Unsurprisingly, many philosophers find this account of the Skeptic's aim and conduct disappointing, if not downright disturbing. Barnes, for example, expresses his disappointment in Sextus' apparent lack of interest in intellectual exploration:

Sextus makes no attempt to find the best, or the clearest, or the most plausible interpretation of a Dogmatic position. It is for the Dogmatists to state their opinions as best they can: Sextus will then destroy them. Why should a sceptic hold out a hand to his enemies? Well, he should do so in the interest of truth. But—this is my chief criticism of him as a philosopher—it is difficult to believe that Sextus ever seriously searched for the truth. (Annas and Barnes 2000, xxx)

I am not as certain as Barnes that this interpretation of Sextus is correct, but if it is, I share his disappointment. One might argue that, while most philosophers would have a similarly negative reaction, this should come as no surprise. After all, philosophy tends to attract individuals with a certain type of personality and an inclination toward a certain set of intellectual values. In particular, those attracted to philosophy tend to value the truth and, consequently, to view the discovery of truth as an important aim (and, in many cases, the *most* important aim). However,

one could argue that this is the result of some sort of cognitive bias concomitant with a philosophical temperament. The high emphasis on truth-seeking in philosophy might simply be a self-selection effect. Perhaps the discovery of truth is not actually a valuable aim (much less the *most* valuable) and it ought not to be our primary motivation. Perhaps most philosophers, in their overintellectual zealotry, perversely fetishize the truth.

Thus, let us take a step back from this dispute over whether our aim ought to be the discovery of truth, ἀταραξία, or something else entirely. Let us follow the Skeptic's example and, suspending judgment, unpresumptuously ask: What should our aim (or aims) be? Immediately, we encounter a difficulty. For in order to attempt to find out the answer to this question, we will have to search for the truth about the matter in question, just as we would with any other. It appears that we cannot completely distance ourselves from the search for truth, even in attempting to conduct an unbiased investigation into a role for which it is a candidate. It is an aim we must adopt, at least provisionally and instrumentally, in order to find out what our aim ought to be. (Of course, we cannot at this point rule out the possibility that we will discover that our aim ought, in fact, to be the discovery of truth, so this aim may turn out to be more than *merely* instrumental.) Thus, the discovery of truth will continue to be our aim unless or until we discover the truth about what our aim ought to be.

When it comes to the Skeptic, however, it is reasonable to think that such a discovery will never occur.⁴³ *A fortiori*, she will never come to hold the belief that any particular thing ought to be her aim. As a practical matter (if not a

⁴³ In particular, if the Pyrrhonian Procedure operates in the manner for which I will argue in Sections 3.2–3.3, it follows that the Skeptic will never come to hold any belief. Even if the Skeptic happens to stumble upon the truth about what her aim ought to be, she will not *believe* that she has done so. She will be like a treasure hunter who has seized upon gold in a dark room (*M* VII 52).

philosophical one), the Skeptic will have no choice but to continue to search for the truth about what her aim ought to be.⁴⁴ Thus, the Skeptic will be one who always continues to search for the truth.

Note that this is compatible with the Skeptic's actual aim being ἀταραξία. Recall that an aim (τέλος) is “that for the sake of which everything is done or considered, while it is not itself done or considered for the sake of anything else.” Alternatively, it is “the final object of desire.”⁴⁵ Ἀταραξία may *in point of fact* be that for the sake of which the Skeptic does everything, and it may be what *in point of fact* the Skeptic ultimately desires. In other words, there may exist a true description of the Skeptic's behavior and psychological makeup such that ἀταραξία features in these roles. But it does not follow that the Skeptic will *believe* that ἀταραξία is her ultimate aim.

As a psychological matter, it is now commonly accepted that people regularly have subconscious motivations and desires of which they are not consciously aware. While this might be the case with respect to some Sceptics and their ultimate aims, it is more likely that most Sceptics are consciously aware of their motivations and desires. The relevant mental attitude for Scepticism, however, is not *conscious awareness*, but *belief*. If it is possible for the Skeptic to suspend judgment on the question of what her ultimate aim is, then the Procedure ensures that she will do so (if she ever inquires into the matter). And, for the reason we have just considered, it is quite possible to suspend judgment on this matter, even apart from the applica-

⁴⁴ In the course of searching for the truth about what one's aim ought to be, one will inevitably have to search for the truth about a great many other things. For example, one will have to evaluate whether happiness ought to be one's aim (as many philosophers and non-philosophers throughout history have claimed), but this will require investigating the truth about what happiness is, what causes it, whether the goal should be the *maximization* of happiness (and if so, whether it should be the maximization of one's *own* happiness or of happiness *in general*), and so forth.

⁴⁵ As I explained in Section 1.4.5, Sextus appears simply to be going along with the standard Hellenistic usage of this term.

tion of the Procedure. For Skeptics (and even many Dogmatists) may reason that since some desires are subconscious, they themselves might have a different (subconscious) ultimate desire than that which they consciously appear to themselves to have. Faced with this equipollent opposition, they will suspend judgment.⁴⁶

What are we to make of all of this? The upshot is that the Skeptic, if she inquires into her own aim, will come to suspend judgment about it, just as with every other inquiry she undertakes. Whether this has any bearing on her actual aim is an empirical, psychological matter, as is the question of whether and to what extent her actual aim affects her behavior. (The Skeptic may wonder about these issues but will, ultimately, suspend judgment about them, as with all other empirical inquiries.) As a practical matter, however, the Skeptic has no choice but to make the discovery of truth her instrumental aim, since this is an unavoidable consequence of attempting to find out what her aim ought to be (among innumerable other matters). Thus, the only thing at which the Skeptic, *qua* Skeptic, consciously and unavoidably aims will be the discovery of truth.⁴⁷ It is, in this sense, a kind of *de facto* ultimate aim.

⁴⁶ Of course, the inquiry may yet continue before equipollence is reached. Perhaps there are psychological methods, such as hypnosis, for attempting to discern one's true ultimate desire. By now, however, we should be familiar enough with the patterns of Skeptical argument to anticipate the manner in which the Skeptic will cast doubt upon these methods and eventually reach suspension of judgment.

⁴⁷ Of course, a Skeptic may adopt other instrumental aims in addition to the discovery of truth. For example, it may appear to some Skeptics that their practice of inquiry requires certain resources the attainment of which they consequently adopt as instrumental aims. Things may not appear this way to other Skeptics, who consequently shun such resources. Thus, it would not be in virtue of being a Skeptic that one aims at the attainment of such resources, since not all Skeptics aim at them. The aim of discovering the truth is unique in this respect.

1.6 The Role of Belief

The first point at which we glimpse an implicit suggestion regarding the scope of Skepticism is *PH* I 8, a passage we analyzed extensively in Section 1.4. Here, Sextus states that Skepticism “is an ability to set out oppositions among things which appear and are thought of in any way at all.” If we are correct in thinking that the thought/appearance dichotomy is exhaustive, then it follows, as we discussed, that the Skeptic’s ability is applied to everything to which it can possibly be applied. This lack of domain restriction initially suggests an unmitigated version of Skepticism.

However, we find a more explicit discussion of the scope of Skepticism in turning to Sextus’ discussion of the Skeptic’s relationship with belief. This occurs in the seventh chapter of *PH* under the apt title “Do Skeptics hold beliefs?” Sextus begins:

When we say that Skeptics do not hold beliefs, we do not take “belief” in the sense in which some say, quite generally, that belief is acquiescing in something; for Skeptics assent to the feelings forced upon them by appearances—for example, they would not say, when heated or chilled, “I think I am not heated (or: chilled).” Rather, we say that they do not hold beliefs in the sense in which some say that belief is assenting to some unclear object of investigation in the sciences; for Pyrrhonists do not assent to anything unclear. (I 13)

Before considering his remarks on belief itself, let us briefly note the distinction Sextus here employs between clear (*δῆλον*, “visible, conspicuous, manifest, evident,” LSJ) and unclear (*ἀδῆλον*, “unseen, invisible, unknown, obscure, non-evident,” LSJ) matters. This distinction is not obviously identical to the aforementioned distinction between practical and theoretical matters. In the present passage, it is not clear whether Sextus is implying that all objects of investigation in the sciences are unclear objects, or whether he is simply taking the set of objects of investigation in

the sciences that are unclear to exemplify the class of unclear objects. (Presumably, investigation in the sciences is especially rife with unclear objects, making reference to this set apropos, but this does not by itself entail that all such objects are unclear). It is an open question whether the domain of the clear is coextensive with that of the practical and whether the domain of the unclear is coextensive with that of the theoretical. One might be tempted argue that the fact that Skeptics suspend judgment on all objects in the latter but not the former pair of domains constitutes evidence of each pair's respective coextensivity, but this would, of course, beg the question we presently seek to answer.

Turning to the matter of belief, we note first that, according to Sextus, the Skeptics *do* say that they do not hold beliefs or, more precisely, that they do not dogmatize (μη δογματίζειν). Of course, the significance of this statement lies entirely in what they mean by the word “belief” (ὁ δόγμα), and Sextus rightly proceeds directly into a clarification of this. Sextus seems to be operating under the impression that there are at least two senses of the word “belief” in Dogmatic usage. Moreover, he seems to be perfectly willing to go along with this, though not to assent to it (see Sections 1.4 and 2.1). The first, he says, is the “general” or “common” (κοινότερον) sense in which belief is “acquiescing in something” (τὸ εὐδοκεῖν τινι πράγματι). Εὐδοκεῖν means literally “to be well pleased” or “to be content with” something, though it sometimes takes on the more active meaning “to consent” or “to approve” (LSJ). A lightly clothed Skeptic who sits in the snow cannot help but feel cold. As Sextus would put it, the appearance of coldness forces itself upon the Skeptic. It is something that happens to the Skeptic without her taking any active role. Given that the Skeptic has no say in the matter, she simply acquiesces, thereby forming a belief in this first sense.

Thus, the Skeptic does not claim to be exempt from involuntary “belief” in

the form of forced acquiescence. She is content with that which she cannot control. One might go so far as to say that it would be *unreasonable* for the Skeptic to claim to be exempt from something involuntary that is forced upon her, since, by definition, one cannot be exempt from such a thing, despite one's best efforts.

The second sense of the word "belief" is that of "assenting to some unclear object of investigation in the sciences" (τήν τινι πράγματι τῶν κατὰ τὰς ἐπιστήμας ζητουμένων ἀδήλων συγκατάθεσιν), and it is in this sense that Skeptics claim not to hold beliefs. Sextus is referring to the Stoic concept of συγκατάθεσις, which is typically translated "assent." According to Long (1999):

The function of assent is to evaluate impressions, to adjudicate on the truth-value of their propositional content, to decide whether or not they represent something one has good reason to endorse as one's judgement of the way things are. (577)

Importantly for Sextus, the Stoics take συγκατάθεσις to be a requirement for action. The fact that Sextus rejects συγκατάθεσις on behalf of the Skeptic is thus at least one major source of the controversy over the Skeptic's very ability to act.

We are thus presented with a distinction between two senses of the word "belief." Εὐδοκεῖν is largely involuntary and passive. It entails no positive mental act of commitment on the part of one who merely "acquiesces" to an impression. Συγκατάθεσις, on the other hand, is both active and voluntary. It is the positive mental act of deciding that an impression is veridical and therefore choosing it. One makes this commitment after evaluating one's reasons pro and contra doing so and determining the net balance to be sufficiently good.

The rejection of συγκατάθεσις is consistent with both the unmitigated and the mitigated interpretations of Pyrrhonism. However, some scholars take Sextus' apparent endorsement of belief in the sense of εὐδοκεῖν to be an admission of mitigation on Sextus' part. After all, they reason, the unmitigated view states

that Skeptics hold no beliefs whatsoever. Yet here Sextus tells us that Skeptics do hold beliefs, albeit in the sense of εὐδοκεῖν. On their view, this eliminates the unmitigated interpretation, leaving only the mitigated interpretation.

There are several problems with this line of reasoning. First, it is not obvious that Sextus' statements at *PH* I 13 entail an outright endorsement of belief in the sense of εὐδοκεῖν. Moreover, even if they do, it is not at all clear that belief in the sense of εὐδοκεῖν is equivalent to belief in the sense shared by the unmitigated and mitigated interpretations. Hence, quite independently of the fate of the unmitigated view, it is questionable that belief in the sense of εὐδοκεῖν is sufficient to satisfy the requirements of a mitigated interpretation.

A literal interpretation of *PH* I 13 has it that, according to Sextus, Skeptics hold beliefs. This alone would be sufficient to discount the unmitigated view, were it not a mistake to interpret Sextus literally. Sextus is clearly pointing out what he takes to be two different senses in which “ὁ δόγμα” is used *by Dogmatists*. We cannot infer from this any approval of the distinction on Sextus' behalf; he may be content merely to go along with it for the sake of argument. Thus, when he states that Skeptics hold beliefs in the sense of εὐδοκεῖν, we cannot infer from this that he thinks the sense of εὐδοκεῖν is an accurate sense of “ὁ δόγμα.” He is merely pointing out that many people speak this way. Thus, Sextus “admits” that Skeptics hold beliefs only in the nominal sense that he recognizes that many Dogmatists use the word “belief” when describing the Skeptic's observable behavior. Whether this amounts to belief in any sense substantive philosophical sense is another matter entirely.

Moreover, even if we accept that Sextus is here endorsing belief on behalf of the Skeptic, belief in the sense of εὐδοκεῖν is incredibly weak. If we are correct in interpreting εὐδοκεῖν as a largely passive, involuntary matter, then it is dubious that

εὐδοκεῖν can be that in which the beliefs of everyday life consist. For the beliefs of everyday life seem routinely to entail making active, voluntary judgments, as Barnes (1998) points out:

Consider the ordinary bath-time belief that the water is tepid. That belief makes no reference to τὰ ἄδηλα, nor is it a δόγμα. For all that, we cannot affirm that the water is tepid unless we have a criterion of truth—a way of judging that the πάθος with which the water affects us corresponds to the actual state of the water. The criterion is needed not to infer that the water is tepid (there is nothing to infer it from) but rather to judge that the water is tepid; we require not reasons for an inference but grounds for a judgement—and unless we have such grounds we are not warranted in making the judgement. (77–78)

Barnes argues that such a judgment requires a criterion of truth, which is an example of precisely the kind of δόγμα the Skeptic rejects. If the beliefs of ordinary life require judgments to be made, and if making judgments requires the possession of a criterion of truth, then the Skeptic's lack of belief in any criterion of truth entails the Skeptic's lack of any of the beliefs of ordinary life. On this basis, Barnes concludes that the mitigated interpretation is incorrect.⁴⁸

This is an admirable argument on Barnes' part, but it is important to realize that we need not accept it in order to show that *PH* I 13 fails to constitute meaningful evidence for the mitigated view. Notice that the argument turns on a potentially controversial premise, viz., that making the judgments of everyday life requires that one be in possession of a criterion of truth. In fact, we can cast just as much doubt on the mitigated interpretation without relying on this premise. All we need is to show that the beliefs of everyday life require that one make active, voluntary judgments, and this is established by the *uncontroversial* portion of Barnes' argument. If it is the case that the beliefs of everyday life require that one make active, voluntary judgments, and if we are correct in interpreting εὐδοκεῖν to be

⁴⁸ In fact, Sextus recognizes *two* conceptions of a criterion of truth: Stoic and Epicurean (see Brunschwig 1994). I am grateful to Casey Perin for pointing this out to me.

passive and involuntary, then beliefs in the sense of εὐδοκεῖν *cannot* be the beliefs of everyday life. But if beliefs in the sense of εὐδοκεῖν are not the beliefs of everyday life, then Sextus is not admitting that Skeptics possess such beliefs by his remarks at *PH* 1.13. Hence, he is not admitting anything favorable to the mitigated view. Acknowledging this does not require accepting Barnes' further claim that a criterion of truth is required in order to make a judgment. So much the better, since one might reasonably think that no such criterion is required in order to make any judgments, or that all such judgments fail to be true (a kind of error theory that would not render these judgments any less active or voluntary).

2 The Force of Pyrrhonism

2.1 The Skeptical Modes

The sets of Pyrrhonian “modes” or “tropes” (τρόποι)¹ are best understood as Skeptical *field manuals*. Just as field manuals in other areas of practical human activity contain instructions for performing the essential tasks associated with those activities, the Pyrrhonian modes detail a variety of procedures by which Sceptics can readily and efficiently generate the claims and arguments required in order to set up oppositions among things in any dialectical situation, thereby enabling the operation of Skepticism.²

Sextus presents us with four main groups of modes in the first book of *PH*:

- The Ten Modes of Aenesidemus (§§35–163)
- The Five Modes of Agrippa (§§164–177)
- The Two Modes (§§178–179)
- The Eight Aetiological Modes (§§180–186)

¹ At *PH* I 36, Sextus notes that “the older Sceptics” who handed down the Ten Modes also “use ‘arguments’ and ‘schemata’ as synonyms for ‘modes’ ” (...οὐς καὶ λόγους καὶ τύπους συνωνύμως καλοῦσιν). On “the older Sceptics” and the Ten Modes, see Appendix A.

² For the details of how Skepticism operates, see Section 1.4.

I will here be concerned primarily with the Five Modes of Agrippa, but allow me briefly to address a potential misconception regarding the nature of the modes in general.³

In preparing to set out the modes, Sextus issues an important caveat about them, writing, “I make no affirmation either about their number or about their power—they may be unsound, and there may be more than those I shall describe” (*PH* I 35). If, as usual, Sextus is here speaking on behalf of Skeptics generally (and it seems clear that he is), then this remark means that we should understand the modes as things that are *used* but not necessarily *endorsed* by the Skeptic. A similar distinction is at work in the Skeptics’ employment of nonfallacious *argumenta ad hominem* (understood as a species of *argumenta ex concessis*), i.e., arguments the premises of which are believed (or assumed) *not* by the Skeptics but rather by their Dogmatic interlocutors. Such arguments are *ad hominem* in so far as they depend upon the beliefs or assumptions of particular (groups of) interlocutors, but they are not *fallaciously ad hominem* since they are not directed toward personal properties of the interlocutors that are irrelevant to the matter in dispute.

The aim of such arguments is to show that some conclusion follows from the Dogmatist’s own beliefs or assumptions, where this conclusion is a member in an opposition that the Skeptic is attempting to set up. Typically, the other member of the opposition will be another claim made by the Dogmatist. Often, this other claim will be what prompted the Skeptic to exercise her ability to set up an opposition in the first place. In such cases, the Skeptic’s strategy is, in effect, to induce suspension of judgment about a claim by exposing its involvement in a latent contradiction in the Dogmatist’s own commitments. (But in whom is suspension

³ The other groups of modes are briefly addressed in appendices: the Ten Modes in Appendix A, the Two Modes in Appendix B, and the Eight Modes in Appendix C.

of judgment supposed to be induced? The Skeptic, the Dogmatist, or both? This, it turns out, is a complicated and contentious matter. We will return to it in due course.) In general, then, we must refrain from assuming that the Skeptic argues *in propria persona*, since it is quite possible—and, in the Skeptic’s case, customary—to present an argument without being committed to its legitimacy or efficacy.⁴

2.2 The Five Modes of Agrippa

Sextus attributes the Five Modes to “the more recent Skeptics,” whom Annas and Barnes (2000, 40 n. 168) note are contrasted with “the older Skeptics” associated with the Ten Modes (*PH* I 36) and whom Diogenes Laertius (IX 88) identifies with Agrippa. The Five Modes are the most powerful weapons in the Skeptic’s arsenal. For when deployed in concert, as we shall see, they constitute a highly generalized system capable of operating on any claim.

At *PH* I 164, Sextus sets out the Five Modes as follows:⁵

1. The mode deriving from dispute. (The disputational mode.)
2. The mode throwing one back *ad infinitum*. (The regressive mode.)
3. The mode deriving from relativity. (The relative mode.)
4. The hypothetical mode.

⁴ In speaking of the “legitimacy” of an argument, I have in mind the permissibility of the argument according to whatever standards of logic or dialectic are relevant. In speaking of the “efficacy” of the argument, I have in mind the argument’s ability to convince or be persuasive, where this can be understood either in a normative sense (i.e., whether one *ought* to be persuaded by the argument or whether a perfectly rational thinker would be persuaded by the argument) or in a descriptive sense (i.e., whether the argument tends to have a certain psychological effect). In short, I here attempt to remain neutral with respect to the manner in which the quality of an argument ought to be evaluated. Properties of arguments that may here be substituted (at the reader’s discretion) include validity and soundness (in the case of deductive arguments), and strength and cogency (in the case of inductive arguments).

⁵ For ease of reference, I shall often refer to the first three modes by the names given in parentheses.

5. The reciprocal mode.

The disputational mode, Sextus explains, arises in cases of undecidable disagreement (ἀνεπίκριτος στάσις),⁶ wherein “we are not able either to choose or to rule out anything, and we end up with suspension of judgment” (*PH* I 165). Given an undecidable disagreement over whether it is the case that p , with one side claiming that p and the other claiming that $\neg p$ (or q , where $q \Rightarrow \neg p$),⁷ we cannot rationally (i.e., without arbitrarily favoring one party to the dispute over the other) assent to either p or $\neg p$.⁸ Hence, we must suspend judgment.

A disagreement is said to be “undecidable” just in case there is nothing capable of deciding the dispute in favor of one side or the other. In other words, if we lack a sufficient reason to accept either p or $\neg p$ (but not both to the same degree),⁹ then the dispute between p and $\neg p$ is undecidable. Notice that the reason for accepting one of the claims must itself be such that we can accept it. This may not be the case if, for example, the reason is itself in dispute (as in the reciprocal mode, below).

⁶ Although στάσις is the word here used to convey disagreement, Barnes (1990, 2) notes that there were several Greek words for disagreement, with διαφωνία being the most common.

⁷ Henceforth, in stating “ $\neg p$,” I mean implicitly “ $\neg p$, or q , where $q \Rightarrow \neg p$.”

⁸ There may be more than two parties to a given dispute. However, for simplicity, I shall speak as though there are at most two parties to a given dispute. This should not affect the arguments in any substantial way.

⁹ It may be the case that a given reason is a reason for accepting both p and $\neg p$ individually. (By including the word “individually,” I mean the following: A reason may be a reason for accepting p , and it may be a reason for accepting $\neg p$. However, I make no assumption about whether it follows that it is a reason for accepting the conjunction $p \wedge \neg p$.) However, it may be a greater reason for accepting one than the other. In other words, the strength of reasons admits of degrees. If, on the one hand, a reason is an equally strong reason for accepting both claims, then it will not serve to decide the dispute, since it will result in an equal balance of reasons for and against each claim (assuming equilibrium prior to consideration of the reason). If, on the other hand, the reason is a stronger reason for accepting one claim over the other, then it will serve to decide the dispute, since it will shift the balance of reasons in favor of one of the claims (assuming both equilibrium prior to the consideration of the reason and the absence of any new counterbalancing reasons). Henceforth, I shall often write as though the strength of reasons does not admit of degrees, but the reader is hereby warned not to take this literally. It will be done only for the sake of simplicity, since accommodating these and other details at every turn would result in an unbearably complicated discussion.

“The mode throwing one back *ad infinitum*” is the case of infinite regress. Suppose that our interlocutor advances a claim, p_0 , and in support of this claim she offers another claim (i.e., a reason for accepting it), p_{-1} . In support of this reason, she offers another reason, p_{-2} , for accepting it, and so on. For each new reason provided, another reason is provided in support of it, such that the chain of reasons does not end. We refer to this never-ending chain of claims as an infinite regress.

There are at least two ways in which such an infinite regress may be thought to be problematic. The first is that it is impossible actually to *give* a never-ending chain of claims, precisely because it never ends. Since, *ex hypothesi*, the chain of claims has no end point, the claimant will never reach an end point. Yet the acceptance of each claim depends, *ex hypothesi* on each subsequent claim that supports it. Consequently, the initial claim, p_0 , depends upon the rest of the chain in its entirety. Therefore, the impossibility of *providing* the rest of the chain entails the impossibility of providing that which is necessary for the acceptance of the initial claim. Lacking that which is necessary for the acceptance of the initial claim, we must suspend judgment on it.¹⁰

The other way in which an infinite regress is problematic is that it is unclear whether an *actual infinity* of reasons can exist. An “actual infinity” denotes an infinite number of objects that actually exist, while a “potential infinity” denotes a *potentially* (but never *actually*) existent number of objects defined by some non-terminating process (e.g., “beginning with the number 1, add 1, and continue to add 1 to each subsequent sum”).¹¹ A non-terminating process, by definition, never

¹⁰ In this discussion of the modes individually, I assume that the only support available for a given claim is that which is explicitly under consideration. Hence, in this case, I assume that the only support available for p_0 is the aforementioned single, unending chain of supporting claims. I consider complex cases of multiple supporting claims in Sections 3.1 and 3.2.

¹¹ The distinction between actual and potential infinities dates back at least to Aristotle (*Physics*

completes. Hence, the infinite set of objects that we inductively infer it *would* produce will never *actually* exist. In the case of an infinite regress of supporting claims, it follows that the total set of reasons that is required for the acceptance of the initial claim, p_0 , cannot actually exist, in which case there is—in a literal sense—*no reason* to accept the initial claim.

The relative mode appears to be borrowed almost directly from the Ten Modes (see Appendix A). Its inclusion in the Five Modes is a source of some puzzlement, as it appears to be somewhat superfluous (for reasons I shall explain below). Sextus tells us that the relative mode is that in which “the existing object appears to be such-and-such relative to the subject judging and to the things observed together with it, but we suspend judgment on what it is like in its nature” (*PH* I 167). We do not have direct epistemic access to the natures of things. Rather, we must infer their natures from our appearances of them (see Section 1.4.3). But sometimes these appearances conflict with one another. Since multiple conflicting appearances cannot all be veridical, it follows that at least some appearances are misleading. Thus, if we are to distinguish veridical from unveridical appearances, we require some standard or criterion that we know to be trustworthy. This cannot be another appearance, since there is a risk that it, too, is unveridical. If we could compare the nature of a thing to any appearance of it, we could immediately tell whether the appearance is veridical. Of course, if we could do that, then we wouldn’t have to bother with a comparison at all, since we would already have access to the nature of the thing itself. So, we are out of options. Since no suitable standard or criterion is available, the fact that there are conflicting appearances leaves us no choice but to suspend judgment about the natures of things.

It is important to note that the relative mode is triggered only in cases

and *Metaphysics*).

in which there are, in fact, conflicting appearances of a thing. If, somehow, all appearances (belonging to a single or multiple subjects) of a thing are mutually consistent, the relative mode does not apply.

In explaining the hypothetical mode, Sextus writes that “the Dogmatists, being thrown back *ad infinitum*, begin from something which they do not establish but claim to assume simply and without proof in virtue of a concession” (*PH* I 168). By this Sextus means the following: When the Skeptic points out that the Dogmatist is attempting to endorse an infinite regress of reasons, the Dogmatist seeks to avoid this undesirable state by presenting some initial claim (or set of claims) as the foundation upon which the remaining structure of reasons rests. This initial claim (or set of claims) is not itself supported by anything. Indeed, it *cannot* be. For, if it were, it would cease to be foundational, and instead whatever supports it would constitute the foundation. Hence, the foundational claim (or set of claims) is merely assumed. But this assumption will not be shared by the Skeptic. Since the Skeptic has not already accepted the foundational claim (or set of claims), she will not have sufficient reason to accept the claim at issue (i.e., p_0). As we shall see below, the hypothetical mode may be fruitfully combined with the disputational and relative modes.

Lastly, we have the reciprocal mode. Sextus writes that “the reciprocal mode occurs when what ought to be confirmatory of the object under investigation needs to be made convincing by the object under investigation; then, being unable to take either in order to establish the other, we suspend judgment about both” (*PH* I 169). The reciprocal mode is a codification of the unacceptability of circular reasoning, which includes question-begging arguments. In the case of the latter, “the object under investigation” is (the truth of) some conclusion, and “what ought to be confirmatory” of this is a set of premises that purportedly entails this conclusion.

Classically, begging the question occurs when the premises *assume* the conclusion, i.e., when we must first accept the conclusion in order to find the premises acceptable. Here, Sextus uses the almost identical (but perhaps broader) condition that what ought to be confirmatory of the object under investigation “needs to be made convincing” by it. In order to be convinced of the object under investigation, we must be convinced of some reasons or evidence adduced in support of it. If, however, in order to be convinced of this support, we must first be convinced of the object under investigation, then we are trapped in a circle. In order to be convinced of either, we must first be convinced of the other. Since this is impossible, we will never be convinced of either. Hence, we have no choice but to suspend judgment.

2.3 The Pyrrhonian Problematic

Although the Five Modes are presented as a collection of discrete items, their true power becomes apparent only when they are combined into a single, unified system. At *PH* I 170–177, Sextus provides us with a prototype of such a system:

What is proposed is either an object of perception or an object of thought, and whichever it is it is subject to dispute. For according to some, only objects of perception are true, according to others, only objects of thought, and according to yet others, some objects of perception and some objects of thought are true. (*PH* I 170)

Sextus begins by stipulating the distinction that every object of investigation must be either an object of perception or an object of thought. As I indicated above, it would be inappropriate to infer from this sort of stipulation that Sextus—or, by extension, Skeptics—bear any sort of Dogmatic commitment to the distinction stipulated. Rather, it is far more likely that Sextus is non-Dogmatically assuming this distinction as part of a nonfallacious *argumentum ad hominem*, and this is further

supported by Sextus' explicit attribution of certain views to others here ("For according to some..."). Nonetheless, it is interesting that Sextus chooses to place such a controversial distinction at the heart of his explanation of the Five Modes as a single system, and it is natural to ask whether this distinction is an essential part of the system. As I shall explain below, there does not appear to be any reason to think that the distinction is essential. Rather, it appears to be an explanatory device that Sextus is using in order to frame his explanation of the Problematic in terms of a series of logically exhaustive dichotomies.

For this purpose, it is a useful device. For, as Sextus explains, there appears to be a diversity of Dogmatic views about the veridicality of objects of perception and of objects of thought:

Now, will they say that the dispute is decidable or undecidable? If undecidable, we have it that we must suspend judgment; for it is not possible to make assertions about what is subject to undecidable dispute. But if decidable, we shall ask where the decision is to come from. For instance, is an object of perception (for we shall rest the argument on this first) to be decided by an object of perception or an object of thought? If by an object of perception, then since we are investigating objects of perception, this too will need something else to make it convincing; and if this further thing also is an object of perception, it too will again need something further to make it convincing, and so *ad infinitum*. But if the object of perception needs to be decided by an object of thought, then since objects of thought are also in dispute, it too, being an object of thought, will need to be judged and made convincing. (*PH* I 170–172)

Having invoked the distinction between objects of perception and objects of thought, Sextus now invokes a further distinction between decidable and undecidable disputes. This latter distinction is explicitly attributed to the Dogmatists. Recall that a dispute is *undecidable* just in case there is nothing capable of settling the dispute in favor of one side or the other. For example, a dispute over whether it is the case that p is undecidable just in case there is insufficient reason to accept either p or $\neg p$

(but not both to the same degree).¹² Thus, it follows rather straightforwardly that if a dispute is undecidable, we are left with no choice but to suspend judgment. It is noteworthy that Sextus here says that “it is not possible” (οὐχ οἶόν τε ἔστιν) to make assertions about undecidable matters in dispute. It seems clear that he does not mean that it is *logically* or *physically* impossible. Rather, it is most likely that he means that it is not *rationally* possible. After all, to make an assertion about an undecidable matter in dispute would be to make an assertion about a claim such that one has no more reason to accept the assertion than to accept its contrary. This would be tantamount to saying, “I have no more reason to accept p than $\neg p$. Nonetheless, p .”¹³

If, on the other hand, the dispute is *decidable*, then there must be something that accounts for the shift in the balance of reasons in favor of one side over the other. This further thing must itself be an object of perception or an object of thought. If it is an object of perception, then there is a problem, for Sextus noted at the outset that the veridicality of objects of perception (and of thought, for that matter) in general are in dispute. Thus, if this further object is to be efficacious in shifting the balance of reasons, we require some reason to accept it. But since this further thing must in turn be an object of perception or an object of thought, we encounter an infinite regress if the chain of support is constituted exclusively of either objects of perception or objects of thought.

We are spared of the regress if the object of perception is supported by an object of thought, or *vice versa*, but in that case, the new object will require its own support, since it will, in either case, be in dispute:

Now, where will it get its conviction from? If from an object of

¹² See note 9.

¹³ It is very likely that all of Sextus’ Dogmatic interlocutors would agree that such assertions cannot rationally be made. Thus, it is quite plausible that Sextus is here again arguing *ad hominem* by resting his case on his interlocutors’ assumptions.

thought, the business will proceed *ad infinitum* in the same way; but if from an object of perception then, since an object of thought was adduced to make the object of perception convincing and an object of perception for the object of thought, we have brought in the reciprocal mode. (*PH* I 172)

Given that any supporting object will always be either an object of perception or an object of thought, it appears inevitable that we will encounter either an infinite regress or an unacceptable case of circularity. In order for our object of perception to be acceptable, we must accept the object of thought that supports it. But since objects of thought are in dispute, we must accept an object of perception to support our object of thought. But this only brings us back to our original position of requiring some support for a disputed object of perception.

There is a third and final option open to the Dogmatist, as Sextus explains:

If to avoid this our interlocutor claims to assume something by way of concession and without proof in order to prove what comes next, then the hypothetical mode is brought in, and there is no way out. For if he is convincing when he makes his hypothesis, we will keep hypothesizing the opposite and will be no more unconvincing. And if he hypothesizes something true, he makes it suspect by taking it as a hypothesis rather than establishing it; while if it is false, the foundation of what he is trying to establish will be rotten. Again, if hypothesizing something achieves anything towards making it convincing, why not hypothesize the object of investigation itself rather than something else through which he is supposed to establish the object about which he is arguing? If it is absurd to hypothesize the object under investigation, it will also be absurd to hypothesize what is superordinate to it. (*PH* I 173–174)

The Dogmatist may avoid both infinite regress and circularity by assuming some foundational claim. However, since this claim is necessarily an assumption with no support of its own, the Skeptic can easily dispute it by simply claiming the opposite. It is important to understand that the Skeptic is not doing anything illegitimate here. Since the Dogmatist's foundational claim is assumed with absolutely no support (if

it has support, it is not foundational), then the Skeptic needs exactly as much support to claim the opposite (namely, none). Since the Dogmatist has no reason for his foundational claim, then by the Dogmatist's own standards, the Skeptic needs no reason for hers.¹⁴

This simple maneuver has a devastating effect: It instantly and effortlessly neutralizes any Dogmatic attempt at establishing a foundation. Crucially, this maneuver is typically unavailable to Dogmatists to use when engaging with each other, as they often wish to rely on their *own* (sometimes *shared*) foundational assumptions.

Sextus goes further in criticizing the act of hypothesizing (i.e., assuming) in general, pointing out that merely assuming a truth makes it suspicious (“If it’s true, then why do you have to *assume* it? Why can’t you *prove* it?”), whereas assuming a falsehood fails to provide any genuine support for claims that ultimately rest upon it. There is a legitimate question here (which we shall explore in greater detail below) of whether some truths are incapable of being discursively proven, and whether the absence of such proof prevents these truths from successfully justifying beliefs.

Lastly, Sextus points out that if merely hypothesizing something makes it at all convincing, then one might as well hypothesize the very thing at issue, rather than hypothesizing some foundational claim upon which a superstructure of supported claims rests. Of course, the reason Dogmatists do not actually do this is that their assumed foundational claims are thought to be *more* convincing than all other claims—often to the point that they are alleged to be self-evident or indubitable. We shall return to this matter in due course.

¹⁴ Of course, the Skeptic’s claim is made only for the sake of argument. We should not think that she actually *believes* any claim she makes in the course of deploying the hypothetical mode. Rather, the claim she makes is offered as a *candidate* for belief that is to be considered against that which has been offered by the Dogmatist.

With this, Sextus has offered a complete sketch of how a subset of the Five Modes can work in concert to ensnare any object of dispute. Note that although the relative mode has been omitted from this description, the system as it stands appears to be sufficient to compel any Dogmatic interlocutor to commit himself either to an infinite regress, circularity, or an assumption. It is in this sense that the relative mode is oddly superfluous. Nonetheless, Sextus goes on to include it, writing:

That all objects of perception are relative is clear: they are relative to those perceiving them. It is thus evident that whatever perceptible object is proposed to us may easily be referred to the Five Modes. We make similar deductions about the objects of thought. For if the dispute about them is said to be undecidable, they will have granted us that we must suspend judgment about them. But if the dispute is to be decided, then if this comes by way of an object of thought, we will throw them back *ad infinitum*, while if by an object of perception, we will throw them back on the reciprocal mode. For the object of perception is itself subject to dispute, and, being unable to be decided through itself because of the infinite regress, it will require an object of thought in just the same way as the object of thought required an object of perception. Anyone who, for these reasons, assumes something as an hypothesis will again turn out to be absurd. And objects of thought are relative too: they are called objects of thought relative to the thinker, and if they were by nature such as they are said to be there would have been no dispute about them. Thus objects of thought too are referred to the Five Modes—and for that reason it is absolutely necessary for us to suspend judgment about the object proposed. (*PH* I 175–177)

This passage is oddly discontinuous from the previous discussion in two significant ways. First, the previous system, which Sextus just finished describing in *PH* I 170–174, was already sufficient by itself to induce suspension of judgment about any disputed object.¹⁵ Thus, the unprompted introduction of a new system in

¹⁵ At least according to the Dogmatist's own apparent standards (about which more below). Also note that we have still not yet specified in whom suspension of judgment is to be induced. These matters will be clarified throughout the remainder of this chapter.

this passage seems strangely superfluous. Rather than continuing to explain his previous system, Sextus appears to be presenting a parallel system with the relative mode taking the place of the disputational mode.

Second, Sextus has hitherto shown considerable self-restraint in avoiding making any claims about the efficacy of his system. In prior passages, he even seemed to go out of his way to describe the deployment of his system in neutral terms. In *PH* I 172–173, he spoke of modes being “brought in” (εἰσάγεται) and described how the Skeptic behaves in response to Dogmatic assertions, rather than claiming that any Dogmatic assertion was refuted or any Skeptical conclusion proven by the deployment of his system. Here in *PH* I 175–177, however, Sextus makes several explicit claims about his new system and its efficacy: “That all objects of perception are relative is *clear* (δῆλον)... It is thus *evident* (φανερόν) that whatever perceptible object is proposed to us may easily be referred to the Five Modes” (emphasis added). We know from Sextus’ prior explanation of these terms that they are to be understood as particularly strong evidential indicators; hence, it is quite surprising that he uses them so liberally here.

In fact, Sextus goes on to make even bolder claims, writing that Skeptics “make similar *deductions* (ἐπιλογιζόμεθα) about the objects of thought,” which suggests that Skeptics make logical inferences about the objects to which their system applies. Furthermore, he states that if the dispute about such objects “is said to be undecidable, *they will have granted us that we must suspend judgment about them* (δοθήσεται ἡμῖν τὸ δεῖν ἐπέχειν περὶ αὐτοῦ)” and, finally, that if objects of thought are also referred to the Five Modes, then “for that reason it is *absolutely necessary* (διόπερ ἀνάγκη) for us to suspend judgment about the object proposed” (emphasis added). This is a shockingly strong set of claims for Sextus to make, and they seem jarringly out of character given the manner in which he presented the first version

of his system in *PH* I 170–174. Whereas Sextus before refrained from making any definitive statements regarding the system’s efficacy, he here explicitly attributes to himself and his fellow Skeptics the view that their system, when applied, results inexorably in the conclusion that suspension of judgment is necessary.

What are we to make of this? There are several possible explanations. For example, some commentators have raised the possibility that Sextus, far from being an independent thinker, was in fact a mere *compiler* of preexisting Pyrrhonian ideas (see Barnes 1988; Hankinson 1995). This seems to be precisely the sort of passage that supports such a conjecture. After all, if Sextus did not fully understand the nature of the philosophical system he was propounding, he may not have recognized the tension between *PH* I 172–174 and 175–177.

Another possibility, which is more charitable to Sextus, is that he fully realizes that there are significant differences between *PH* I 172–174 and 175–177 and that those differences constitute a deliberate attempt to present the system in a variety of different ways. Recall that Sextus frequently describes the Skeptic as someone who values *variety* in argumentation. It could be that Sextus is here varying both the content of his system (by replacing the disputational with the relative mode) as well as the manner in which it is presented (by using language more familiar to Dogmatists at *PH* I 175–177). Such interchangeability could have the advantage of rendering the system more versatile and robust.

Ultimately, however, the text itself provides insufficient evidence to speak conclusively in favor of any one explanation or to pin down in a precise way Sextus’ own understanding of the Five Modes and the unified system they comprise. Perhaps this, too, was intentional on Sextus’ part. Perhaps his aim was merely to present the tools of the Skeptic’s trade and to refrain from theorizing about them.

Of course, this has not prevented a deluge of subsequent theorizing about

them thanks to other philosophers. In particular, the unified system comprised by the Five Modes has received particular scrutiny and has undergone repeated refinement over time. It is now commonly referred to as “the Pyrrhonian Problematic” (Greco 2006, 2013; Lammenranta 2008; Sosa 1997; Williams 2011).¹⁶ One way of interpreting the Problematic has become particularly pervasive and is exemplified most prominently in Robert Fogelin’s (1994) influential account of it as an argument for the impossibility of epistemic justification.

Two of Agrippa’s modes, discrepancy and relativity, trigger a demand for justification by revealing that there are competing claims concerning the nature of the world we perceive. Given this competition, it would be epistemically irresponsible for the Cliffordian [i.e., one who subscribes to W. K. Clifford’s (1879) famous dictum that “it is wrong always, everywhere, and for anyone, to believe anything upon insufficient evidence”] to choose *without argument* one of these competing claims over the others. Thus the modes of discrepancy and relativity force anyone who makes claims beyond the modest expression of opinion to give reasons in support of these claims. . . . The task of the remaining three modes—those based on regress *ad infinitum*, circularity, and (arbitrary) hypothesis—is to show that it is impossible to complete this reason-giving process in a satisfactory way. If the Pyrrhonists are right, no argument, once started, can avoid falling into one of the traps of circularity, infinite regress, or arbitrary assumption. (116)

Fogelin’s interpretation of the Pyrrhonian Problematic is an example of what I will call a *declarative* interpretation, according to which the Problematic is a *declarative argument*: a set of one or more propositions the parts or wholes of which are purported to adhere to some logically acceptable pattern such that one or more

¹⁶ The Pyrrhonian Problematic also goes under many other names, such as “the System of the Five Modes” (Barnes 1990) and “Agrippa’s Trilemma” (Gerken 2012; Klein 2008; Williams 1988). As these names suggest, different interpretations of the Problematic include different numbers (i.e., proper subsets) of the Five Modes while remaining functionally congruent. I use the term “Pyrrhonian Problematic” as a way of remaining deliberately neutral among interpretations that differ with respect to (a) whether the system is “declarative” or “procedural” (as defined below) and (b) which Modes are included in the system.

propositions are consequently purported to be true.¹⁷

This definition is not intended to be novel. It is what most philosophers refer to simply as an “argument.” But that is precisely the point. The presumption that the Pyrrhonian Problematic must be, at bottom, just another philosophical argument appears so obvious to most commentators on Pyrrhonism that they never entertain any other possibilities, presumably since no viable alternative has ever been clearly presented.

I will argue that interpreting the Problematic as a declarative argument severely and needlessly abridges its force. Any declarative argument can be controverted in many ways, most obviously by denying one or more of its premises. In the case of the Pyrrhonian Problematic, however, there is an intuitive sense in which any such attempt to controvert the Problematic misses the point of it. It may be ineffective, for example, to advance an argument against one of the (supposed) premises of the Problematic if the Skeptic can rationally redeploy the Problematic against *that very argument*. I aim to show that the Skeptic *can* rationally redeploy the Problematic against arguments that target it and, moreover, that interpreting the Problematic declaratively fails to capture this intuitive aspect of its force. Instead, I propose that the Problematic be interpreted *procedurally*, as a systematic method composed of a set of instructions for making and responding to claims.

Unlike the declarative interpretation, the procedural interpretation focuses

¹⁷ Several remarks on this definition are in order. The phrase “parts or wholes,” as applied to propositions, entails the inclusion both of arguments that utilize propositional logic as well as arguments that utilize predicate logic. The phrase “purported to adhere to some logically acceptable pattern” serves multiple purposes. First, the word “purported” indicates that what is important is the *intent* of the entity who advances the argument, rather than success relative to some objective standard. Second, adherence “to some logically acceptable pattern” is an intentionally general phrase that encompasses arguments that utilize various different kinds of reasoning, (e.g., deductive, inductive, and abductive). Finally, the phrase “such that one or more propositions are consequently purported to be true” indicates that declarative arguments present their conclusions as being true *as a logical consequence* of their premises.

on the Skeptic's *dialectical activity*, by which I mean actions such as making and responding to claims. Focusing on this activity allows the procedural interpretation to capture the aspect of the Problematic's force that lies in the Skeptic's ability to suspend judgment rationally in the face of any claim. The idea is that, while the Dogmatist can advance any kind of argument on any subject, the Skeptic can in all cases follow the procedure that constitutes the Problematic and, in the course of doing so, mire the conclusion of the Dogmatist's argument in an inescapable system of dispute such that the Skeptic (and, in some cases, the Dogmatist) ultimately suspends judgment about that conclusion. More importantly, however, the procedure that constitutes the Problematic results in suspension of judgment for reasons we will recognize as *rational*. Thus, the true force of the Problematic lies in what it reveals about any (and hence, every) claim: that a perfectly neutral, rational inquirer would never come to believe it.

2.4 The Problematic as a Declarative Argument

Even a cursory review of the literature on Pyrrhonian Skepticism will reveal the pervasiveness of the presumption in favor of a declarative interpretation of the Problematic. For example, Burnyeat (1998a) writes:

The sceptic then argues, often at some length, that there is no intellectually satisfactory criterion [of truth] we can trust and use—this is the real backbone of the discussion, corresponding to the modern sceptic's attempt to show that we have no adequate way of telling when things really are as they appear to be, and hence no adequate insurance against mistaken judgments. Assuming the point to be proved, the sceptic is left with conflicting appearances and the conflicting opinions based upon them. . . . (29)

Frede (1998b), meanwhile, describes the status of the Skeptic's view that it is wise to withhold assent as, in part, "the conclusion of an argument the sceptic pro-

duces which is supposed to show that the wise man will always withhold assent” (129). Hankinson (1995) explicitly asks, “Do the Sceptics then actually *argue* for the rational necessity of *epochē*?” (192). He answers that “the later Modes [i.e., the Five and the Two] are presented as arguments for a conclusion, and *epochē* is more than merely their psychological outcome.”¹⁸ Striker (2001) specifically criticizes the Five Modes of Agrippa as “a piece of negative dogmatism designed to convince dogmatists that no judgment can ever be sufficiently justified to count as an instance of knowledge” (120). She asks, “Why should we not consider [the Skeptic’s] argument as a *reductio ad absurdum* of its premises?” (121). Similarly, as Perin (2010) explains:

Some commentators have claimed that ... the Agrippan modes purport to show, and are taken by the Sceptic to show, that for any value of *p* to which they apply, there is not and cannot be a reason to believe that *p*. But *this* conclusion is simply the negative dogmatic thesis that for a range of values for *p*—those to which the Agrippan modes apply—it is not possible to know whether *p*. (27)

These philosophers, along with many others, interpret the Pyrrhonian Problematic as having (or uncritically assume that it has) the structure of a declarative argument. Many of them even attribute to it a negative Dogmatic conclusion. My concern, however, is not with what *kind* of conclusion the Problematic is interpreted as having, but with whether it should be interpreted as being *the type of thing that has a conclusion at all*. I contend that it should not be interpreted in this way and that doing so subverts its force. Realizing the full potential of the Problematic requires interpreting it in a different, procedural, way. To see why this is the case, let us start by taking a closer look at the standard declarative interpretation, as presented in Fogelin’s account.

¹⁸ Hankinson rightly qualifies this statement by pointing out that “the conceptions of rationality in play, according to which (if the Modes go through) a Dogmatist will be compelled to suspend judgement, are the Dogmatists’ own; the argument can be interpreted entirely dialectically” (29). This is an important point to which we will return below.

As I noted above, Fogelin presents the Problematic as an argument against the possibility of epistemic justification. He claims that it poses a challenge to Dogmatic epistemologists who exhibit two traits (114–115):

1. A commitment to a strong *normative* principle of epistemic justification.
2. The belief that knowledge does exist or at least could exist.

The first trait is not by itself enough, Fogelin explains, since merely having very high “Cliffordian” epistemic standards might simply lead one *into* skepticism rather than on a campaign *against* it. In order for the Problematic to pose a *problem*, he says, the second trait—the belief that knowledge does or could exist—is also required. This is because genuine knowledge entails genuine justified belief, which in turn entails genuine justification, which is itself possible only if the Cliffordian standard can be satisfied. “The assumption, then, that drives justificationalist programs in both their foundationalist and nonfoundationalist modes is that we do (or could) possess knowledge that conforms to Cliffordian standards,” Fogelin explains. “The task of a theory of empirical justification is to show how this is possible” (115). On this interpretation, the Pyrrhonian Problematic is an argument that begins from a set of Cliffordian epistemological premises and ends in the conclusion that every attempt to justify any claim will inevitably fail by falling into circularity, infinite regress, or arbitrary assumption.

In advancing this interpretation, Fogelin does not, to his credit, commit the fundamental error of assuming that the Skeptic, by relying on these epistemological assumptions in order to make her argument, thereby endorses them. On the contrary, he writes:

It is important to see that the Pyrrhonists themselves are not engaged in the Cliffordian project, for the Pyrrhonist does not hold that it is

epistemically irresponsible to believe things on insufficient evidence. As always, the Pyrrhonist simply takes the standards of the dogmatist at face value and holds the dogmatist to them. The Pyrrhonist invokes the Five Modes and similar devices for dialectical purposes. (115–116)

On Fogelin's view, the Pyrrhonian Problematic is an *ad hominem* argument that shows that the Dogmatic goal of epistemic justification fails according to Dogmatic epistemologists' own standards. We should acknowledge that the Problematic is, on this interpretation, quite powerful, and credit is due to Fogelin for having aided the Pyrrhonian tradition in arriving at this point. Nonetheless, this interpretation imposes serious limitations on the Problematic, as we will see shortly.

The most compelling argument against Fogelin's account is, in my estimation, one advanced by Michael Williams (2004). Although he specifically targets *Fogelin's* interpretation of the Problematic (which he calls "the Agrippan argument"), I will argue that the same argumentative strategy can be generalized in a way that threatens *all* declarative interpretations of the Problematic. Williams' strategy is subtle and indirect. His stated aim is to *diagnose* the challenge posed by the Agrippan argument rather than to *answer* it head on. "It may be that the challenge of Pyrrhonian skepticism, once accepted, is unanswerable," he writes. "The question, however, is whether that challenge may be reasonably declined. I think that a proper diagnosis shows that it can be" (122). Williams implements his strategy in two phases: First, he argues that the Agrippan argument tacitly relies on specific epistemological assumptions in order to secure its conclusion. Second, he argues that an alternative model of epistemic justification that dispenses with these assumptions is available. As a whole, the strategy promises a means of escape from the Skeptic's net. If it is successful, Dogmatists will find a new option available to them: Give up their current, vulnerable model of epistemic justification, and adopt

Williams' new model instead.

The central claim of the first phase is “that the Prior Grounding or Cliffordian conception of justification must be presupposed by the Agrippan argument, *if it is to amount to an argument for radical and general skepticism*” (129–130). The Prior Grounding conception holds that personal justification depends on proper grounding and that believing on less than adequate grounds (i.e., evidence) is always epistemically irresponsible and, hence, unjustified. Moreover, the conception pairs with this a highly *internalist* account of grounding, holding that grounds can only be beliefs (or similarly personal cognitive states) and that in order for a belief to be properly grounded, it must be held in virtue of grounds that are immediately cognitively accessible to the believer (129). Thus, Williams concludes:

While the Skeptic's conclusion concerns entitlement and responsibility, his argument establishes at most that there are limits to our capacity to *give reasons or cite evidence*. To get from this lemma to his desired conclusion, the skeptic must make a crucial assumption, either on his own part or on behalf of the philosopher who takes the idea of epistemic justification seriously. This assumption, generally tacit, is that no belief is responsibly held (and the responsibility at issue here is epistemic responsibility) unless it rests on adequate and citable evidence. (130–131) (130–131)

Williams' key insight is the recognition that the Agrippan argument poses a problem for Dogmatists only in so far as it issues a relentless stream of demands for citable evidence. If all such demands are legitimate and create binding obligations on Dogmatists to respond, failure or refusal to answer constitutes a kind of epistemic negligence. If, on the other hand, Dogmatists can devise a means of opting out of this stream of demands in a way that can be defended as rational, they may be able to escape from the jaws of the Agrippan argument.

In the second phase of his strategy, Williams presents what he calls the “Default and Challenge” model of justification as an alternative to the Prior Grounding

conception (132–133). The difference between these two conceptions is analogous to the difference between a legal system in which the accused is considered guilty unless proven innocent (Prior Grounding) and one in which the accused is considered innocent unless proven guilty (Default and Challenge). On the Prior Grounding model, “a belief is not responsibly held unless the believer can establish its credentials according to rather rigorous standards” (132). By contrast, on the Default and Challenge model, epistemic entitlement accrues to the believer by default in the absence of any appropriate challenge.

This distinction explains why it is possible, on the Prior Grounding conception, for the Skeptic to issue what Williams calls “brute challenges”—challenges prompted merely by a claim to possess knowledge or justified belief. Such brute challenges are inappropriate on the Default and Challenge conception and hence create no obligation on the believer to provide evidence. This is because, on the Default and Challenge conception, “there is no universal default entitlement to enter a challenge: depending on the circumstances, challenges (as much as claims) may need to be explained or justified” (133). Williams defends the Default and Challenge model in part by appealing to its accord with ordinary practice. “If I think you might be making a mistake, that you have not shown proper epistemic responsibility, or that your epistemic procedure may have been flawed, I ought to be able to say how and why,” he writes. “Groundless, free-floating suspicion is not ordinarily considered a basis for a reasonable challenge.” In addition to its accord with ordinary practice, Williams claims that the Default and Challenge model reveals problems in the Skeptic’s procedure:

If I suggest that you might be making a mistake, you can reasonably ask me what I have in mind. If I say that I have nothing particular in mind—just that your belief might be false—then at best I am articulating a generalized fallibilism. What I have not yet done is to

give grounds for doubt. Accordingly, I have not taken a step toward skepticism, let alone a form of skepticism that is either radical or general. Nor is it clear how such a step could be taken. (133)

At this point, one might object that Williams is selling the Agrippan argument short. After all, the function of the disputational mode is to point out that *every* claim is subject to dispute. Therefore, if one makes a claim, it will be a disputed claim, and making a disputed claim naturally requires providing some kind of support for it. Similar objections can be made, *mutatis mutandis*, by appeal to the relative (and, in at least some cases, the hypothetical) mode. But this, Williams says, is precisely what the Default and Challenge conception denies.

Is the mere fact that some other people do not (or might not) share some view of mine always sufficient to place a severe justificatory burden on me? It is hard to see why it should be. But the skeptic will say: it is sufficient *whenever I lay claim to knowledge*, thereby representing my opinions as properly grounded. In his own eyes, the skeptic does not *impose* the burden of justification on me. Rather, by laying claim to knowledge, I *assume* it. In a way, he is right: in laying claim to knowledge I do assume some kind of justificatory burden. But the question is, What kind exactly? If the skeptic is presupposing that the justificatory burden implicit in any claim to knowledge involves an unrestricted obligation to give reasons, even in the absence of concrete challenges, he is relying on the Prior Grounding Requirement. (134)

From the perspective of the Default and Challenge model, the Skeptic's mistake lies in assuming that the obligation created by making a knowledge claim is an obligation to provide citable evidence in support of that claim. Rather, in the Default and Challenge model, the obligation "may amount to nothing more than a Defense Commitment: i.e., an obligation to respond to reasonable challenges, if any should arise." Moreover, "in the absence of such challenges, and in the context of epistemically responsible behavior, an 'externalist' grounding may be sufficient for a belief's amounting to knowledge" (133).

By showing that the Agrippan argument tacitly relies on the Prior Grounding conception, and by introducing the Default and Challenge conception as a viable alternative for Dogmatists, Williams has paved the way for a Dogmatic escape route. If Williams' argument is successful, the Agrippan argument never gets off the ground, since the Skeptic may no longer appropriately issue brute challenges against all claims. While this does not eliminate all forms of Skeptical doubt (Williams admits that, even on the Default and Challenge conception, "given the right stage setting, any belief can be challenged"), it does mean that "there will be no question of challenging our beliefs all at once, hence no question of general skepticism" (134).

Before turning to consider the implications of Williams' argument for the Problematic, it is worth taking a moment to reflect on the considerable cost it entails. Even if Williams' strategy is successful, it requires conceding vast swaths of Dogmatic epistemology to the Skeptic—in particular, every epistemological view that depends on the Prior Grounding conception. While Williams himself may think this no great loss, many other epistemologists would disagree. Moreover, Williams' solution provides no aid or comfort to those Dogmatists who may be unwilling to go along with his new epistemological framework. Even those willing to flee the Prior Grounding conception may not be prepared to join the exodus to the Default and Challenge conception. Far from the Dogmatic ideal of stopping the Problematic in its tracks while leaving the edifice of constructive epistemology untouched, Williams has succeeded in evading the Problematic only by razing that edifice and starting anew. He has achieved, at most, a Pyrrhic victory against Pyrrhonism.

2.5 Reconceiving the Problematic Procedurally

Thanks to Williams, we are now in a position to understand how, precisely, Fogelin's interpretation of the Pyrrhonian Problematic goes wrong. Fogelin, in attempting to defend the Problematic, makes the mistake of interpreting it as a declarative argument. Williams' strategy, in turn, works by exploiting this fact. Notice, however, that Williams' strategy does *not* attempt to repudiate the aspect of Fogelin's interpretation on which the Problematic results in a *particular conclusion* (viz., that epistemic justification is impossible). On the contrary, Williams *upholds* this aspect of Fogelin's interpretation.

We are treating Agrippan skepticism as radical: as precluding the possibility of justified belief. What kind of justification is at issue here?

According to the skeptic, any attempt to justify a belief must open a vicious regress, end with a brute assumption, or go in a circle. He concludes that no one is ever justified in believing one thing rather than another. Skeptical argument, he claims, leads him to suspend judgment. (130)

To interpret the Problematic as having such a conclusion is to interpret it as a type of nonfallacious *argumentum ad hominem* (understood as a species of *argumentum ex concessis*), i.e., an argument the premises of which are furnished solely by the interlocutor's commitments.¹⁹ This is because, as we discussed in Section 2.1, Skeptics themselves accept neither the premises nor the conclusions of the arguments they advance. As Fogelin explains:

It is important to see that the Pyrrhonists themselves are not engaged in the Cliffordian project, for the Pyrrhonist does not hold that it is

¹⁹ *Argumenta ad hominem* are typically conceived as fallacious, but this is only because they typically involve personal attacks that are *irrelevant* to the matter in dispute. The Problematic, on the interpretation presently under consideration, is *nonfallacious* since it attacks the interlocutor's beliefs about epistemic justification, which are always relevant to the question of whether the interlocutor is justified in holding any particular belief.

epistemically irresponsible to believe things on insufficient evidence. As always, the Pyrrhonist simply takes the standards of the dogmatist at face value and holds the dogmatist to them. The Pyrrhonist invokes the Five Modes and similar devices for dialectical purposes. (115–116)

But if such an argument is to have any direct persuasive force in a dispute, at least one of the parties involved must accept its premises, which—in a dispute between a Skeptic and a Dogmatist—leaves only the Dogmatist.²⁰

Reliance upon the commitments of an interlocutor is an inherent trait—and weakness—of every *argumentum ad hominem*. It is a weakness in so far as it restricts the scope of the argument's application to those potential interlocutors who hold the necessary commitments. The principal lesson we should draw from Williams is that the Problematic, on a declarative interpretation, shows not that there are no justifiable beliefs *simpliciter*, but only that there are no justifiable beliefs according to the conditions for justification hitherto advocated by Dogmatists. It will always be open to Dogmatists to revise these conditions and, in so doing, to escape the argument's conclusion. This is, in fact, precisely what Williams has done.

But Williams' strategy is not the only game in town. *Justificatory externalism*, broadly understood, may be viewed as a strategy for denying the particular condition that a belief can be justified only by some personal cognitive state, such as another belief. This is a condition that must hold if the Problematic is to secure its purported conclusion by showing that all justificatory paths are blocked by the modes from hypothesis, reciprocity, and regress. If one's belief can be justified without one thereby appreciating the basis of that justification *qua* justifier, as externalists hold, then a demonstration of the impossibility of inter-belief justification does not amount to a demonstration of the impossibility of justification *per se*.

²⁰ Note, however, that nothing prevents a dispute from containing more than two participants (or, for that matter, *fewer* than two, as I explain below).

However, even externalism, broadly understood, constitutes but a single way of denying the Problematic's premises. In general, there is no reason to suppose that hitherto implicit, unopposed premises of the Skeptic's argument cannot be similarly unearthed and denied. As long as the Problematic relies upon commitments that Dogmatists may choose to give up—which is to say, as long as it is declarative—its conclusion will be avoidable in this wholly general way.

We have expanded our horizons, but not wide enough. For even the general aim of avoiding the Problematic's conclusion is only one possible tactic. Ameliorating beliefs can also be affirmed. Even if a declarative interpretation of the Problematic were to show conclusively, on the basis of the Dogmatists' own beliefs, that no belief is epistemically justified, those Dogmatists could, in full acceptance of this conclusion and without renouncing any antecedent commitments, adopt the additional view that some beliefs are *also* justified in some other respect. This is effectively the strategy of various forms of *epistemic contextualism*, according to which the same belief, held by the same subject for the same reasons, may be justified or unjustified depending upon either the context in which the subject holds the attitude or the context in which justificatory attributions are made to the subject.²¹ Contextualists need not deny any aspect of the Pyrrhonian Problematic, interpreted declaratively, in order to maintain the view that there are justified beliefs; they need only insist on contextualizing every instantiation of it.

It would not be difficult to devise a more comprehensive version of the Problematic—one with a conclusion that contextualism could not avert. But nor would it be difficult to generate increasingly comprehensive ameliorating beliefs.

²¹ Contextualism that focuses on the former condition is known as *substantive* contextualism, while the focus on the latter is characteristic of *semantic* contextualism. See Williams (1991, 2001) for the former; and Cohen (1999), DeRose (1992, 1995), and Heller (1999) for the latter. Note, also, that contextualism may itself be externalist; the comparison is not meant to imply a distinction.

Consider the extreme case of amelioration: the belief that all contradictions are true (and hence that everything is true). This “global dialetheism” (or, what is logically equivalent, trivialism)²² would be immune to the consequences of any Skeptical conclusion. On the other hand, it would also *entail* every Skeptical conclusion. But while global dialetheists will accept even Skeptical conclusions *in word*, just as they do every other prescription, they cannot, even in principle, accept them *in deed*, since this would entail simultaneously holding all beliefs and holding no beliefs (i.e., suspending judgment on everything). The fact that they may refrain from acceptance while remaining coherent creates a unique problem for declarative interpretations of the Problematic: global dialetheists can accept the Skeptic’s conclusion without thereby being rationally compelled to become Skeptics.²³ There need not actually exist any real-life global dialetheists for this problem to be germane: as long as global dialetheism is an epistemologically possible position, it will always be open to Dogmatists to adopt further ameliorating beliefs in order to avoid the substantive force of Skeptical conclusions.

Our epistemological horizons are now quite broad, but let us expand them one last time. We have hitherto considered strategies of forestalling the Problematic that fall into two categories: those that involve relinquishing epistemic commitments and those that involve affirming them. Strategies in both categories are designed to preserve, in one way or another, the Dogmatic conception of justified belief. A final means of resistance lies in altering this conception itself.

Theories of rational belief and knowledge are almost invariably constructed

²² On this and a number of interesting parallels between dialetheism and skepticism, see Priest (2000).

²³ To point out that global dialetheism is a logically inconsistent position is insufficient to dismiss it, for global dialetheists accept that their position is logically inconsistent and contend that logical inconsistency is not necessarily irrational. Since the permissibility of logical inconsistency is precisely what is at issue in the disagreement over the legitimacy of global dialetheism, merely pointing it out does not decide the dispute. Again see Priest (2000).

around some notion of epistemic justification. Naturally, then, philosophers have interpreted the Pyrrhonian Problematic as a declarative argument attacking epistemic justification. But why ought we to suppose that this aspect of the enterprise of constructive epistemology is limited to the development of theories of justification? Even if a declarative interpretation of the Problematic were to show conclusively that justification, on any construal, is impossible, it would still be open to Dogmatists to adopt the revisionary stance that epistemic justification is not, after all, necessary to achieve their epistemic aims. For it is not the possibility of *knowledge* or even *justified* belief that epistemology truly strives to establish, they may decide, but rather *rational* belief, which need not itself depend upon the concept of epistemic justification. In general, if the universe of epistemological *desiderata* beyond justification is sufficiently robust to sustain the enterprise of constructive epistemology, as it appears to be, then revisionary maneuvers of this kind will always be available to Dogmatists when confronted with any formulation of the Problematic as a declarative argument. It is up to Dogmatists to define the success conditions of their own epistemological project, and as long as these success conditions can continue to be redefined, no static Skeptical argument will ever be able to prove conclusively that this project has failed.

It might still be maintained, however, that the Agrippan *argumentum ad hominem* strikes deeper than any revisionary maneuver can avoid. The problem, according to this line of argument, is not just that the theoretical framework Dogmatists happen to employ has turned out to be faulty, but that their fundamental concept of rational belief is inherently inconsistent or unrealizable. On this view, what the Pyrrhonian Problematic condemns is not any particular *theory* of the well-foundedness of rational belief, but rational belief *itself*. It is always open to Dogmatists to revise their favored *conception* of rational belief, but it is not clear that

they can renounce the *concept* of rational belief entirely, since this concept may be essential to *any* constructive epistemological endeavor.

If the Pyrrhonian Problematic targets the concept of rational belief itself, then it is unlikely that its conclusion can be avoided by revisionary maneuvers. But how can an argument be used to deny a concept (the abstract reference of a predicate), rather than merely a conception of that concept (a set of necessary and sufficient conditions)? In order to deny a concept, it is necessary to articulate the concept being denied. But any particular articulation of a concept of this sort *just is* a conception of it. By all appearances, the closest one can come to denying a concept is to denying some conception of it. The only hope for declarative Skeptical argumentation is that there exists a conception that captures some or all of the essential features of the concept (if there are any). In other words, the conclusion of the Skeptical argument must be the denial of a sufficiently *general* conception. If the conception is not general enough, revisionary maneuvers might still be possible, i.e., it might still be possible for Dogmatists to exchange the conception denied with an alternative conception while retaining the same concept. On the other hand, the more general a given conception is, the less likely it becomes that any argument for its denial will be forthcoming. However, there is little reason to think that Dogmatic epistemologists' beliefs are capable of furnishing the premises of an argument to the effect that every possible conception of rational belief fails. *Eo ipso*, there is little reason to think that the same beliefs will afford an argument for the denial of a conception of sufficient generality to merit abandonment of the concept itself.

The limitations we have been discussing are inherent to the Pyrrhonian Problematic *qua* declarative argument, yet there is an intuitive sense in which they miss the point of it. Each limitation is revealed by a dialectical move that the Dogmatist can make in response to the Skeptic's argument, but the Problematic, as Sextus

presents it, is supposed to be perfectly general in its applicability. It should, in principle, be capable of responding to the Dogmatic maneuvers executed against it. For every dialectical move the Dogmatist makes, we should expect a Skeptical countermove. Yet the Problematic, as a declarative argument, is static. It admits of no such countermoves. By interpreting the Problematic as a declarative argument, we glimpse only a shadow of what it can be. We interact with an artificially bounded simulacrum, neatly delimited by the methodological presuppositions of contemporary Dogmatic philosophy—a static argument to serve as a foil in a dynamic sphere of epistemological debate.

I propose an alternative: a *procedural* interpretation, according to which the Pyrrhonian Problematic is *a systematic method composed of a set of instructions for making and responding to claims*. On this interpretation, as I will explain, the Problematic advances no conclusions and makes no presuppositions, so it is not subject to the inherent limitations of declarative arguments. In light of this, I submit that there are three principal reasons to favor the procedural interpretation: first, it allows us to explain the intuitive force of the Problematic, which is lost on the declarative interpretation; second, the principle of charity requires us to ascribe to the Skeptic the strongest available interpretation of her central argument; and third, if philosophers wish the Problematic to serve as a litmus test for Dogmatic epistemological theories, the test should be taken in its most challenging form, so as to be maximally effective in separating the wheat from the chaff.²⁴

This distinction allows us to explain why so many have been tempted to inter-

²⁴ Note that interpreting the Problematic procedurally does not amount to the same thing as “using the modes dialectically,” e.g., in a nonfallacious *ad hominem* manner, as Fogelin and others hold (see Lammenranta 2008; Williams 2015). Nor does a procedural interpretation merely entail that a Skeptic employing the Problematic will be engaging in an exchange of giving and asking for reasons with her interlocutor. After all, even declarative arguments can be “used dialectically” in both of these senses, but that does not liberate them, when considered in themselves, from the inherent limitations discussed above.

pret the Pyrrhonian Problematic in a declarative way. *Prima facie*, the Problematic appears to be a declarative argument just like almost every other philosophical argument.²⁵ The natural assumption, then, is that it must be an argument that seeks to establish some conclusion about its subject matter—in this case, about epistemic justification, or some such related notion. This idea seems all the more natural if we begin referring to the Problematic as the Agrippan *argument*, as Williams does. However, once the alternative of a procedural interpretation is on the table, it is no longer obvious that the Problematic should be interpreted in this way, and in fact, I have argued (and will continue to argue below), it ought not to be, since doing so renders it unnecessarily weak.²⁶ On a procedural interpretation, it turns out, the Pyrrhonian Problematic is not an *argument* in itself, but a set of instructions for *making* an argument.

While a procedural interpretation of the Problematic may be *philosophically* superior, there is still the further question of whether it can be supported *textually*. As we saw in Section 2.3, Sextus' presentation and discussion of the Problematic fails to reveal any clear attitude on his part regarding its precise nature. While a procedural interpretation is certainly not *inconsistent* with what Sextus says about the Problematic, the fact of the matter is that Sextus does not say enough to allow us to attribute to him a precisely *procedural* interpretation of the Problematic. Realistically, it is unlikely that Sextus or any of his contemporaries conceived of anything quite like the declarative/procedural distinction, and this is not terribly surprising. After all, many of the considerations that motivate the distinction are due to developments in Dogmatic epistemology that have occurred only recently

²⁵ Exceptions might include certain Wittgensteinian arguments, which perhaps ought also to be classified as non-declarative.

²⁶ The continuation of this argument must be postponed until Section 3.4, since it depends on the intervening introduction, presentation, and explanation of the Pyrrhonian Procedure in Sections 3.1, 3.2, and 3.3, respectively.

on a historical scale.

Nonetheless, we can look to what Sextus *does* have to say about clear examples of declarative argumentation. In *PH* Book II 134–203 (chapters xii–xiv), Sextus covers proofs and deductions. Here, he discusses in great detail the logical structure of arguments composed of propositions, citing along the way examples, such as:

If it is day, it is light.
But it is day.
Therefore, it is light.

Throughout this discussion, Sextus shows himself to be fluent in the Dogmatists' logical apparatus and its use in generating alleged proofs, which he seeks to undermine at every turn. It would be the height, not only of self-contradiction, but of self-*refutation*, then, to set out his own Skeptical system in the form of such a proof. And, indeed, we have seen that he does not do so. In fact, he does not even attempt to set out the Problematic as a set of propositions with any sort of logical relationship to one another. Rather, as we saw in Section 2.3, he explains the Problematic primarily in terms of how the Skeptic *uses* the modes. Given Sextus' evident familiarity with propositional arguments, this is no doubt intentional.

Thus, it is nearly certain that Sextus did *not* conceive of the Problematic declaratively. Moreover, while he might not have consciously conceived of the Problematic procedurally (having not had in mind the declarative/procedural distinction as we have set it out here), it is quite plausible that he would have endorsed the procedural interpretation had he been made aware of it. These considerations, I contend, provide ample reason to endorse the procedural interpretation on both philosophical *and* textual grounds.

Finally, let me point out that the procedural interpretation also has the advantage of according with our general understanding of unmitigated skepticism. If

anything follows from apparent arguments advanced by unmitigated skeptics, it does so only in virtue of Dogmatists *inferring* that it does. Unmitigated skeptics themselves are epistemically indifferent to their own utterances. But if this is correct, then any expression of the Pyrrhonian Problematic is itself just another such utterance, and any conclusion that seems to follow from it must be purely a matter of Dogmatic construal.

Furthermore, if any purported *conclusion* of the Problematic must be Dogmatic, then any *interpretation* of the Problematic must be Dogmatic for the same reason. In a dispute between a Skeptic and a Dogmatist, an argument advanced by the Skeptic qualifies as *ad hominem* only if the Dogmatist holds the requisite beliefs, as we have previously observed. But in order for a Skeptic to *intend* for this argument to operate *ad hominem*, the Skeptic must *believe* that the Dogmatist does, in fact, hold the requisite beliefs. Since no Skeptic can hold such a belief, it follows that no Skeptic can *intentionally* advance an argument *ad hominem*.²⁷

This is a surprising result, and it may seem to run contrary to what we have previously learned about Skepticism. But in fact, all it shows is that the only way to render Skeptical behavior consistent is by interpreting it procedurally. Since all declarative arguments advanced by Skeptics must operate *ad hominem* and all *ad hominem* arguments are, by nature, declarative, it follows that Skeptics *cannot* advance declarative arguments *qua* declarative. If Skeptics themselves do not (and,

²⁷ Why must the Skeptic *believe* that her Dogmatic interlocutor holds the requisite beliefs to furnish the premises of her argument? Why is it not sufficient that it merely *appears* to the Skeptic that her Dogmatic interlocutor holds the requisite beliefs? This depends, of course, on our understanding of what it means for the Skeptic to *intend* for her argument to operate using the Dogmatist's beliefs, but it seems to me that this sort of intention *does* require belief (rather than mere appearance). After all, if it merely *appears* to the Skeptic that her Dogmatic interlocutor holds the requisite beliefs, then she is, in effect, casting her argument out into the dialectical field and subsequently suspending judgment as to whether it actually operates *ad hominem*. At most, this is consistent with *hoping* that the argument actually operates *ad hominem*, but hoping for a particular outcome is not the same as intending it.

indeed, cannot) view the Pyrrhonian Problematic declaratively, much less intentionally advance it in that form, then *we* ought not to view it that way either, especially if doing so renders it vulnerable to all the weaknesses of declarative argumentation we have just encountered. On the other hand, *any* particular way of interpreting the Problematic might be said to run contrary to unmitigated skepticism, given that unmitigated skeptics themselves would not have any beliefs about the Problematic at all. Ultimately, then, we must view the Problematic as a description of what Skeptics *do*, i.e., as a procedure that they undogmatically employ.

Material from Chapter 2 has been included in the following paper, which has been submitted for publication: Wong, Andrew David. "Procedural Pyrrhonism". The dissertation author was the sole author of this material.

3 A Procedure for Unmitigated Skepticism

3.1 The Interpretive Groundwork

Having identified inherent limitations of the standard declarative interpretation of the Pyrrhonian Problematic, and having proposed the alternative of a *procedural* interpretation not subject to these limitations, I now turn to the task of presenting an account of the procedural interpretation. If the full force of the Problematic is to be evaluated according to this account, however, a vague sketch will not do. Rather, what is required is a *precise* and *formal* account. To my knowledge, this has not been attempted. There have, however, been more general analyses of the Problematic at varying levels of detail. The most instructive of these analyses, in my view, is Barnes' (1990) *The Toils of Scepticism*. In what follows, I build on the groundwork Barnes has laid. Thus, it is important to explain at the outset what Barnes has already accomplished, why further work is required, and what remains to be done.

In the fifth and final chapter of *The Toils of Scepticism* (1990), Barnes develops what he calls "the Pyrrhonian net," a system of argument that he describes as "a net in which the sceptical gladiators thought they could entangle their Dogmatic

opponents” (113). He develops this system in multiple stages.

First, he begins by considering the Five Modes of Agrippa as a single system, which he attributes to Sextus.¹ This is what we have been calling the Pyrrhonian Problematic. Barnes refers to it as the System of Five Modes. Barnes does not have much to say about the System of Five Modes, being quick to point out that “it is easy enough to construct a modified version of the system” (114) that includes only four of the Five Modes, the omitted one being the relative mode. He refers to this modified version as the System of Four Modes and explains how it works:

Take any problem ?*Q*. Suppose that there are (at least) two incompatible solutions to it, *P* and *P**. Now, by the διαφονία [i.e., disagreement] mode we shall be aware that there is disagreement over ?*Q*, some opting for *P* and others for *P**. Hence if we are to answer the problem ?*Q* we must decide or resolve the διαφονία. Suppose we think that *P* is in fact the correct answer to ?*Q*. Can we warrant or justify this thought?

At the outset we seem to have two possible procedures: we might simply *affirm P* without more ado; or we might offer some reason in support of *P*. If we follow the first procedure and simply affirm *P*, then the sceptic will adduce the hypothetical mode—to our bare assertion *P* he will oppose the bare assertion of *P**, and we shall be stymied. Hence we must follow the second procedure. Let us then advance reason *R*₁ in support of *P*. Now, by διαφονία *R*₁ will be contested, and we must somehow decide in its favour. We cannot—by the hypothetical mode—merely assert it. Therefore we must produce some reason in favour of *R*₁. Let that be *R*₂. Well, either *R*₂ is identical with *P* or it is a new idea. If it is identical with *P*, then we are brought to scepticism by the reciprocal mode. (For we are supporting *P* by *R*₁ and *R*₁ by *P*.) If *R*₂ is new, then it will be subject to dispute. We cannot resolve the dispute merely by asserting *R*₂ (the hypothetical mode forbids this easy option). Hence we move on to *R*₃. If *R*₃ is not a new idea (if it is identical with *P* or with *R*₁, then the reciprocal mode is brought up. If it is new, then the hypothetical mode obliges us to produce a further reason, *R*₄. And in this way, by repeated application of διαφονία, hypothesis and reciprocity, we are led into an infinite regression, *R*₄ being supported by *R*₅, *R*₅ by

¹ I also attributed this system to Sextus in Section 2.2.

R_6 ; and so on without end. But this endless path is forbidden by the mode of regression. (114–115)

Barnes points out that there is something odd about the System of Four Modes in the sense that the mode from disagreement “seems to perform a different function from the other three” (116). In fact, Barnes argues, the mode from disagreement is not a necessary component of the system. “Rather, it should be thought of as a psychologically useful aid to the sceptic” (116). The function of disagreement is, in effect, to remind the Skeptic that there is room for doubt about any given matter by pointing out that people disagree (or could disagree) about that matter. Given that the mode from disagreement is not strictly necessary, Barnes says, we might think to dispense with it, leaving us with a system of three modes.

In fact, Barnes argues, Sextus presents us with a system of three modes. In particular, Barnes thinks that when Sextus presents the Two Modes at *PH* I 178–179, he is in fact presenting a (misnamed) system of three of the five Agrippan modes: disagreement, reciprocity, and regress (see Appendix B). However, this set of three modes includes the mode from disagreement, which Barnes has argued is not a necessary component of the system, but merely a psychologically useful aid. By contrast, Barnes thinks that the hypothetical mode “is a mode of the first importance to the Pyrrhonists” (119) for reasons that he presents in his fourth chapter (which is devoted to the hypothetical mode). Thus, Barnes proposes what he calls the System of Three Modes, which is isomorphic to Sextus’ Two Modes but with the hypothetical mode substituted for the mode from disagreement.²

The System of Three modes (composed, to be clear, of the modes from hypothesis, reciprocity, and regress) constitutes the final stage of the development of Barnes’ “Pyrrhonian net” and, he thinks, “conveys what is epistemologically

² See Appendix B. The structural isomorphism between Barnes’ interpretation of the Two Modes and his System of Three Modes is readily apparent when one compares Fig. B.1 and Fig. 3.1.

most important and most challenging about this aspect of ancient Pyrrhonism”

(119). The System of Three Modes (see Fig. 3.1) works as follows:

Suppose you are considering the claim that P . Then either (1) the claim is merely asserted, or else (2) it is supported. If (1), then the hypothetical mode applies. If (2), then P rests on some reason or set of reasons, R_1 . Either (2a) R_1 is an ‘old’ item, i.e. (in this case) it is the same as P , or else (2b) it is a new item. If (2a), then the reciprocal mode applies. If (2b), then either (2bi) R_1 is merely asserted or (2bii) R_1 is supported. If (2bi), then the hypothetical mode applies. And so on...until the regressive mode is invoked. (119)

Having explained Barnes’ vision of “the Pyrrhonian net,” I now turn to a critical examination of its most developed form: his System of Three Modes (which I shall henceforth simply refer to as his “system”). Barnes’ innovation in developing his system is indubitably laudable. In particular, I think he has argued convincingly that the Pyrrhonian Problematic can effectively be reduced to the hypothetical, reciprocal, and regressive modes without any loss of force. (Thus, in referring to the Pyrrhonian Problematic henceforth, I mean to include interpretations, such as Barnes’, which exclude some of the Five Modes.) Nonetheless, I contend that Barnes’ system is flawed in certain subtle but critical respects. A careful analysis of these flaws will reveal the requirements an improved system must satisfy. In showing how such an improved system can be implemented, I consider myself to be building on the foundation Barnes has laid.

I will begin by making two general remarks about Barnes’ System of Three Modes. The first is that this system is not clearly declarative *or* procedural. This is unsurprising, since it is unlikely that Barnes had in mind anything specifically like the declarative/procedural distinction, as I have defined it, when presenting his system. Thus, it is probably most accurate to say that Barnes’ system is simply ambiguous or underspecified with respect to the declarative/procedural distinction. However, for reasons that I advanced in the previous section, it is crucial that

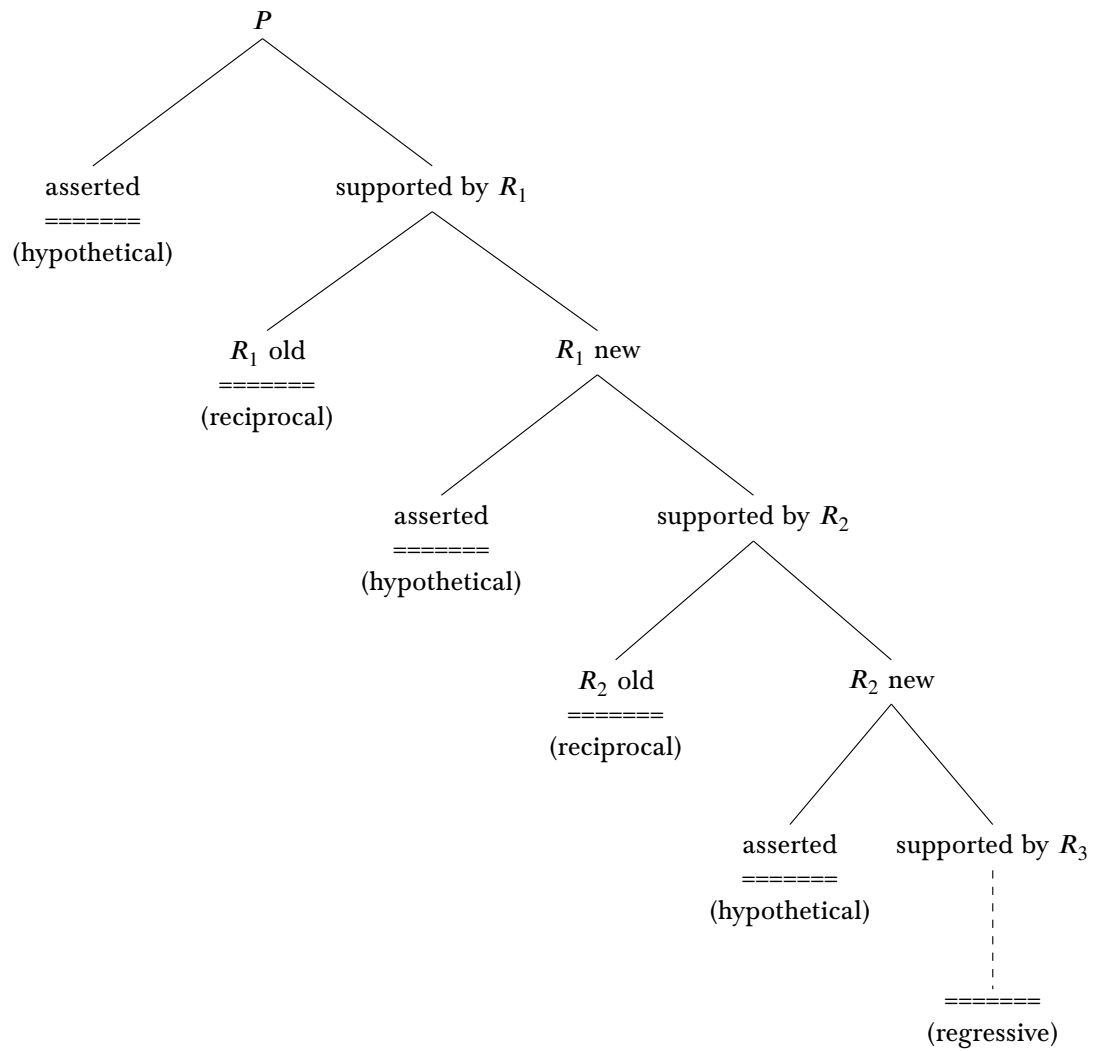


Figure 3.1: A reproduction of Barnes' (1990d) diagram of his "System of Three Modes" (120).

any interpretation of the Problematic be clear about whether it is declarative or procedural in nature, since this carries serious implications for the force of the Problematic. In particular, I argued, interpreting the Problematic as a declarative argument renders it unnecessarily weak in ways that a procedural interpretation avoids. Thus, one aspect of my project to improve on Barnes' system will be to show how it can be recast in an explicitly procedural way.

The second general remark I wish to make regards the way Barnes presents his system. Recall that Barnes initially describes his "Pyrrhonian net" as "a net in which the sceptical gladiators thought they could entangle their Dogmatic opponents" (113). As I shall argue below, I believe Barnes, like many others, is mistaken in portraying the Skeptic as thinking that they can "entangle" their Dogmatic opponents. More precisely, I think it is a mistake to present the Pyrrhonian Problematic as something that aims to compel Dogmatists to suspend judgment. Rather, I shall argue that the Problematic, properly understood, is a procedure the primary function of which is to induce and sustain suspension of judgment *in the one who implements that procedure*, and that only if certain conditions are met is the Skeptic's interlocutor affected in the same way (and even then, only as a byproduct of the procedure's primary function).³

I turn now from general remarks to specific criticisms. The first of these is the fact that Barnes' system assumes a single sequence of items (R_1, R_2, R_3, \dots) given in support of a claim. This is overly simplistic in so far as it fails to account for a large class of claims that are routinely made in ordinary dialectical situations—claims that exhibit multiple, branching support relations. Suppose, for example, that a claim P is made and that R_1 is given in support of P . Further suppose that

³ For the sake of coherence, however, I will in some cases continue to speak of Barnes' system as targeting Dogmatists in so far as doing so is necessary to discuss his system as he has presented it.

R_1 is “old.” According to Barnes’ system, since R_1 is “old,” the reciprocal mode compels us to suspend judgment. However, suppose our Dogmatic interlocutor objects that R_1 is not the only reason that supports P . In fact, P is supported not only by R_1 but also by X_1 , Y_1 , and Z_1 , all of which are “new” and distinct, with their own respective patterns of support. In this case, Barnes’ system has too hastily concluded that we must suspend judgment due to the fact that *one* of the several items given in support of P turned out to be “old” without attempting to evaluate the other three items given in support of P .

Now, one might be tempted to object that Barnes does, in fact, take this consideration into account when he writes that R_1 is “some reason *or set of reasons*.” Since R_1 can be a *set* of reasons, the objection goes, we should consider all of the reasons present in R_1 , X_1 , Y_1 , and Z_1 to be members of the set R_1 . However, this “solution” actually makes matters even worse. How are we to evaluate a *set* of reasons, according to Barnes’ system, if some members of the set are “old” while others are “new”? And what if some members of the set are merely asserted, while others start us down the path of an infinite regress? Barnes’ system treats each supporting item, R_n , as a single entity. If this entity is a set of reasons, then his system classifies that set of reasons, in its entirety, as “asserted,” “supported,” “old,” or “new.” What does the system do if such a classification would be false? It must either proceed to falsely classify a set of reasons or to refrain from classifying the set at all. If it falsely classifies a set of reasons, then Dogmatists would be right to reject the system as posing no threat to them. For what the system would be doing would be tantamount to saying, for example, “You have provided some reasons that are supported and some that are merely asserted. However, since the entire set of reasons you have provided is merely asserted, you must suspend judgment.” This is simply to *talk past* one’s interlocutor and is not a basis for

rational skepticism. Alternatively, if the system refrains from classifying a set at all (in order to avoid falsely classifying it), then the system simply does nothing. It cannot proceed if it simply refrains from classifying R_1 , for example, as either “asserted” or “supported.” Once again, then, Dogmatists would be right to reject the system as posing no threat to them.

Thus, Barnes’ system, in its apparent attempt to accommodate cases in which claims are supported by multiple reasons, has fatally compromised its own ability to function. Moreover, this appears to be a flaw that cannot be corrected without fundamentally changing the system. If we simply remove the “set” clause, we are left with a system that is vulnerable to the original problem explained above (i.e., that the system cannot accommodate cases in which claims are supported by multiple reasons). One solution to this problem would be to take Barnes’ system (without the “set” clause) and embed it in a *metasystem* that creates branching, parallel instantiations of Barnes’ system whenever multiple reasons are given in support of a claim. In other words, the metasystem would create an instantiation of Barnes’ system that evaluates R_1 in the way already illustrated above. However, rather than concluding on the basis of the result of this single instantiation that we must suspend judgment due to the reciprocal mode, the metasystem would also create three additional instantiations of Barnes’ system that are otherwise identical to the first, except that X_1 , Y_1 , and Z_1 would each take the place of R_1 in their respective instantiations.

However, there remains a deeper sense in which Barnes’ system is overly simplistic. The fundamental problem is that the binary nature of Barnes’ classification of supporting reasons into either “old” or “new” cannot account for the potential complexity of circular patterns of support. This problem arises because the concepts of “old” and “new” reasons in Barnes’ system are implicitly doing

the work of the reciprocal mode. In Barnes' system, an "old" reason is supposed to be a claim that is a member in a circular sequence of support relations. The assumption underlying this aspect of Barnes' system is that an "old" reason, by virtue of being "old," can be supported (directly or indirectly) *only* by some other claim that it (directly or indirectly) supports. Given this assumption, it follows that "old" claims are universally subject to the reciprocal mode.

The problem is that this assumption turns out to be false in cases in which a claim is supported *simultaneously* by a circular chain of claims *and* by another claim that stands outside the circle. Suppose, for example, that our interlocutor gives a circular sequence of supporting claims. *P* is given in support of *Q*, which is given in support of *R*, which is given in support of the initial claim, *P*. Barnes' system will evaluate this as follows:

Is *P* supported?

Yes, by *R*.

Is *R* old or new?

New.

Is *R* supported?

Yes, by *Q*.

Is *Q* old or new?

New.

Is *Q* supported?

Yes, by *P*.

Is *P* old or new?

Old.

I invoke the reciprocal mode, and you must suspend judgment.

Suppose, however, that our interlocutor replies that *Q* is *also* supported by *X*, which is not a member of this circle. In this case, it is unreasonable to invoke the reciprocal mode as a basis for suspending judgment, as Barnes' system has done, since this completely ignores *X* as an item given in support for *Q*. Yet this is precisely what Barnes' system is committed to doing. What this shows is that Barnes' classification of reasons as either "old" or "new" fails to capture some of the more complex forms

that circularity can take. In this example, a circular chain of claims was “externally grounded” by another claim that was not itself a member of the circle.⁴ Barnes’ system failed to detect this because it assumes a naïve version of circularity in which an “old” claim is always a member of a circle, and every source of support for every member in a circle must come from within that circle.

By recognizing these inherent flaws in Barnes’ system, we position ourselves to develop a new system that preserves the former’s strengths while correcting for its shortcomings. But our task in developing this new system is not merely to avoid such mistakes. Rather, as I said above, if the true force of a procedural interpretation of the Problematic is to be evaluable, what is required is a *precise* and *formal* account of that interpretation. Barnes’ account is more rigorous than many other attempts to make the Pyrrhonian Problematic explicit, but there is still significant room for improvement in this regard, as I hope to demonstrate. Barnes has gotten us part of the way there. I shall now attempt to pick up where he has left off.

3.2 The Procedural Account

I will refer to my account of a procedural interpretation of the Pyrrhonian Problematic as “the Pyrrhonian Procedure,” or “the Procedure” for short. The Procedure is, strictly speaking, a *set of instructions* that Skeptics follow. In its simplest form, it states:

For any claim, φ :

I. Request support for φ .

⁴ I will revisit this in the discussion of “pure” and “mixed” circularity below.

- II. If some support, ψ , is provided, return to step I, substituting ψ for φ .
- III. Otherwise, make an incompatible claim and (continue to) suspend judgment.

While this simple set of steps embodies the full force of the Pyrrhonian Problematic, understood procedurally, it is rather *opaque* in the sense that it leaves mysterious how and why the Procedure works (if it “works” at all). For example, one might wonder how the foregoing set of steps is any different from a trivial “procedure” that states: “Whenever anyone makes a claim, cover your ears and sing.” Both have the effect of sustaining Skepticism by preventing the Skeptic from acquiring any new beliefs. The difference, I suggest, is that the Skeptic who implements the Procedure is engaging *rationally* in a dialectical situation with her interlocutor, while the person who simply covers his ears and sings in response to a claim is not.

However, it is important to understand that the Skeptic does not take *herself* to be acting rationally (or, for that matter, irrationally). She suspends judgment about that along with everything else. Rather, my contention is that the Skeptic is acting rationally by *our* lights. In order to argue for this contention, I must show that the Procedure conforms to our standards of rationality. Since these standards are themselves controversial, I will base the account on a *minimal* set of assumptions in the hope that this minimal set is sufficiently unobjectionable to be shared by most, if not all, readers. In particular, I will assume a standard logico-mathematical apparatus common to contemporary analytic philosophy.

The nature of these assumptions should not be misunderstood. Basing my presentation of the Procedure on these assumptions does not, *ipso facto*, entail that the Skeptic holds these assumptions as beliefs, that the Procedure itself necessarily relies on them, or that any part of the logico-mathematical apparatus is immune

to the Procedure. Rather, the use of such assumptions is a matter of practicality. We must have some shared conceptual framework in order to communicate with one another, and it is far more efficient to convey an idea in terms that we can all readily understand, even if that idea in some way seeks to undermine our common framework. The best way to convey Procedural Pyrrhonism in a way that is philosophically interesting and useful is to present it in Dogmatic terms, but doing so does not transform it into a dogma. With this caveat in mind, let us proceed to the constructive account of the Procedure.

Formally, the Procedure is an iterative process that takes any individual claim as its input.⁵ A *claim* is defined as a proposition that is asserted.⁶ In defining the word “claim” in this way, I seek not to introduce a novel technical term but rather to restate the common sense of the word as it is used in both ordinary and philosophical dialectical situations. That is, I intend to use (and I therefore intend for the Procedure to use) the word “claim” in a perfectly plain and familiar sense. Note, however, that claims are not necessarily *utterances*. To “assert” a proposition here means to put forward or present the candidate proposition as true, where this presentation may or may not take the form of an utterance.⁷ I follow Frege in noting that the propositional content of a claim or assertion may also be presented *non-assertorically*, e.g., as a supposition, hypothesis, or wish. Such

⁵ The requirement that the input be an *individual* claim does not limit the Procedure’s applicability in any important sense. One can still effectively apply the Procedure to any arbitrarily large set of claims, *S*, either by performing the Procedure on each member of *S* separately or by conjoining all the members of *S* and performing the Procedure on the resultant conjunction.

⁶ Alternatively, we may define a claim as any *candidate for belief* that is asserted or presented as true. I remain neutral on whether the class of propositions is coextensive with the class of candidates for belief.

⁷ There are two senses of the word “candidate”: possibility and nominee. Merely pointing out that something is a *possibility* for belief does not, by itself, prompt any evaluation of that possibility, much less any consequent belief or suspension of judgment. By contrast, *nominating* something for belief is a way of *putting it forward* or *presenting* it for belief, which is just to present it as true, which is precisely to make a claim. Thus, propositions (or candidates for beliefs) are not *themselves* claims but *become* claims if they are asserted (or presented as true).

presentations are not claims, since they are not presentations of propositions *as true*. Hence, the Procedure does not apply to them.⁸ In particular, a claim may take the form of a thought, and one may make a claim to oneself (i.e., in one's own mind). Indeed, the phenomenon of arguing, deliberating, and conversing with oneself in this fashion is a common one, especially for philosophers.⁹ In considering the Procedure, we must therefore keep in mind that some dialectical situations are *intrapersonal*. Partially or wholly internal dialectics no less constitute dialectical situations than the interpersonal, observable variety that exist externally (to a person or a mind, however defined). Thus, the Procedure applies just as much when we deliberate with ourselves as when we deliberate with others.

Although my definition of the word “claim” strives to be ordinary, it necessarily uses the word “proposition” in the latter’s philosophical sense. Nonetheless, it is my impression that most philosophers would find my definition of a claim in terms of a proposition unremarkable. Likewise, I expect that most philosophers would be amenable to the notion that for any proposition, a claim can be made that has that proposition as its expressible content. If all of this is acceptable, then it follows that the Procedure can effectively be applied to any proposition. Nonethe-

⁸ Note, however, that there exist actual *claims* of the form, “I suppose/hypothesize/wish that...” In these cases, what is being claimed is that I am performing some action or instantiating some mental state. The Procedure applies to these claims just as it does to all others. In addition, there are cases in which one makes an assertion in order to *advise* or *inform* rather than to *persuade* (see Turri 2012). In such cases, a proposition is nonetheless being presented as true; hence, a claim is being made to which the Procedure applies. One might worry that the application of the Procedure to such a claim would reflect a misunderstanding of the nature of this kind of assertion, since in such cases the failure to persuade one’s interlocutor (as evidenced by the successful application of the Procedure) does not constitute an epistemic failure on the part of the claimant. But this is not a problem, since (as I will explain below) the function of the Procedure is not to judge the epistemic success or failure of the claims on which it operates. Likewise, the Sceptic who implements the Procedure does not thereby render any epistemic judgment about her interlocutor (at least, not from her own point of view). Applying the Procedure to a claim in no way assumes (or implies) that the claim was intended to persuade (or, for that matter, that the claim was made for any other purpose).

⁹ Perhaps this activity is even constitutive of thought itself, as Plato suggests in the *Theaetetus* and the *Sophist*.

less, the Procedure takes not propositions, but claims, as its inputs. This is because the Procedure operates in *dialectical situations*, as described in Section 1.4.2. I will explain the importance of this after we have come to a thorough understanding of the Procedure.

Now, claims can be *supported* by other claims. If someone claims that it is day, and we ask her why we should accept this, she may reply that the sun is shining. In this dialectical situation, the claim “It is day” is supported by the claim “The sun is shining.” However, in everyday speech, we sometimes reserve the word “support” in this sense for cases in which one claim *successfully* supports another, where successfully supporting a claim means something like *constituting a good reason* to accept the supported claim. The Procedure does not carry this restriction. In fact, the Procedure places no restrictions on the support relation except that a claim *purport* to support another claim. If one claim *purports* to support another claim—if it is *given* in support of another claim—then that is sufficient for the Procedure to treat it as a supporting claim. This is an important point, for it implies that the Skeptic is not required to make any judgments regarding the adequacy of purportedly supporting claims. The Skeptic employing the Procedure may simply allow the claimant to define support relations between claims however she likes.

The formal definition of the Procedure uses Cx to mean “ x is a claim” and Sxy to mean “ x supports y .”¹⁰ As an additional means of formally expressing the support relations that hold between claims, the Procedure *indexes* claims according

¹⁰ Note that the fact that S is a two-place (as opposed to an n -ary) relation suffices to capture the nature of support relations that hold between claims in actual dialectical situations. Although S takes as its arguments exactly two claims, an arbitrary number of claims can be conjoined to form a conjunction that is itself a single claim. Hence, S is effectively capable of taking as its arguments *sets* of claims in so far as one can always form a conjunction out of all the members of any given set of claims.

to the following rule, here given as the zeroth step of the Procedure:

$$(0) \forall n, m \in \mathbb{Z} (\forall \varphi_n \psi_m (C\varphi_n \wedge C\psi_m \Rightarrow (S\psi_m \varphi_n \Leftrightarrow n = m + 1))).^{11}$$

Index values are integer subscripts that represent the support relations that hold between claims. Step (0) states that one claim supports another claim if and only if the two claims possess index values such that the supported claim's index value is equal to the supporting claim's index value plus one. Particular index values are not inherently meaningful. In other words, the fact that one claim supports another is represented equally well by the representation of the supporting claim by p_0 and the supported claim by p_1 as by the representation of the supporting claim by p_{47} and the supported claim by p_{48} . Consequently, the Procedure can accommodate any countably infinite sequence of support relations that holds between claims.

Note that a single claim may possess more than one index value. Fig. 3.2 illustrates an example of this phenomenon, in which we begin with a claim with an arbitrarily chosen index value of 1, e.g.,

p_1 : "It is day."

An additional claim offered in support of p_1 would have an index value of 0, e.g.,

p_0 : "The sun is shining."

If, however, the claim "It is day" were again made in support of p_0 , then "It is day" would additionally possess the index value -1 :

p_{-1} : "It is day."

We must recognize the distinction between the nature of a sequence (or "chain") of support relations (e.g., that it is circular), on the one hand, and those support

¹¹ $\mathbb{Z} = \{\dots, -2, -1, 0, 1, 2, \dots\}$ (i.e., the set of all integers).

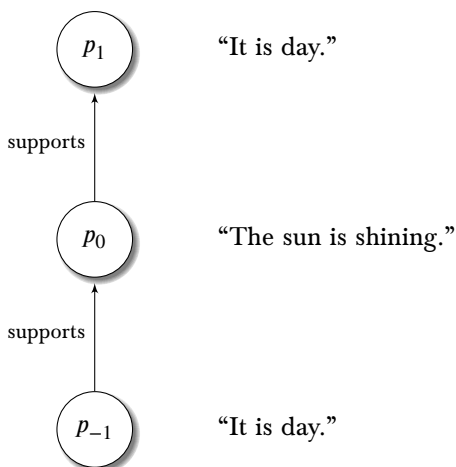


Figure 3.2: A single claim can have more than one index value if it appears multiple times in the sequence of support.

relations themselves, on the other hand. The Procedure takes the latter, but not the former, for granted. Hence, the Skeptic implementing the Procedure will respond (in a manner to be specified below) to the fact that the same claim (“It is day”) is invoked in support of the claim that supports it. However, she will not—in virtue of implementing the Procedure—dispute the support relation itself. This is akin to the difference between saying, “No, this claim does not properly support that claim” (disputing the support relation itself) and saying, “Look, these claims circularly support one another” (pointing out the nature of a sequence of support relations). The former statement expresses a judgment about what counts as suitable support for a claim. As I stated above, the Procedure entails no such judgments.

Not only are claims made in support of other claims, but often claims give and receive support to and from multiple claims. For example, when we ask our claimant why we should accept her claim that it is day, she may reply not only that the sun is shining, but also that the songbirds are chirping, that there is a crowd in the amphitheater, that the moonflowers are not in bloom, and so forth. As a matter of convention, when discussing multiple supporting or supported claims relative to

a single claim, we shall distinguish among the supporting or supported claims by choosing different Latin sentence letters to represent them (p, q, r , etc.) while continuing to obey the indexing rule, step (0), in assigning index value subscripts to them in order to represent the fact that they all stand in a certain network of support relations relative to the given single claim in question. In Fig. 3.3, which illustrates this, the single claim in question is represented by p_0 , at the center of the diagram.

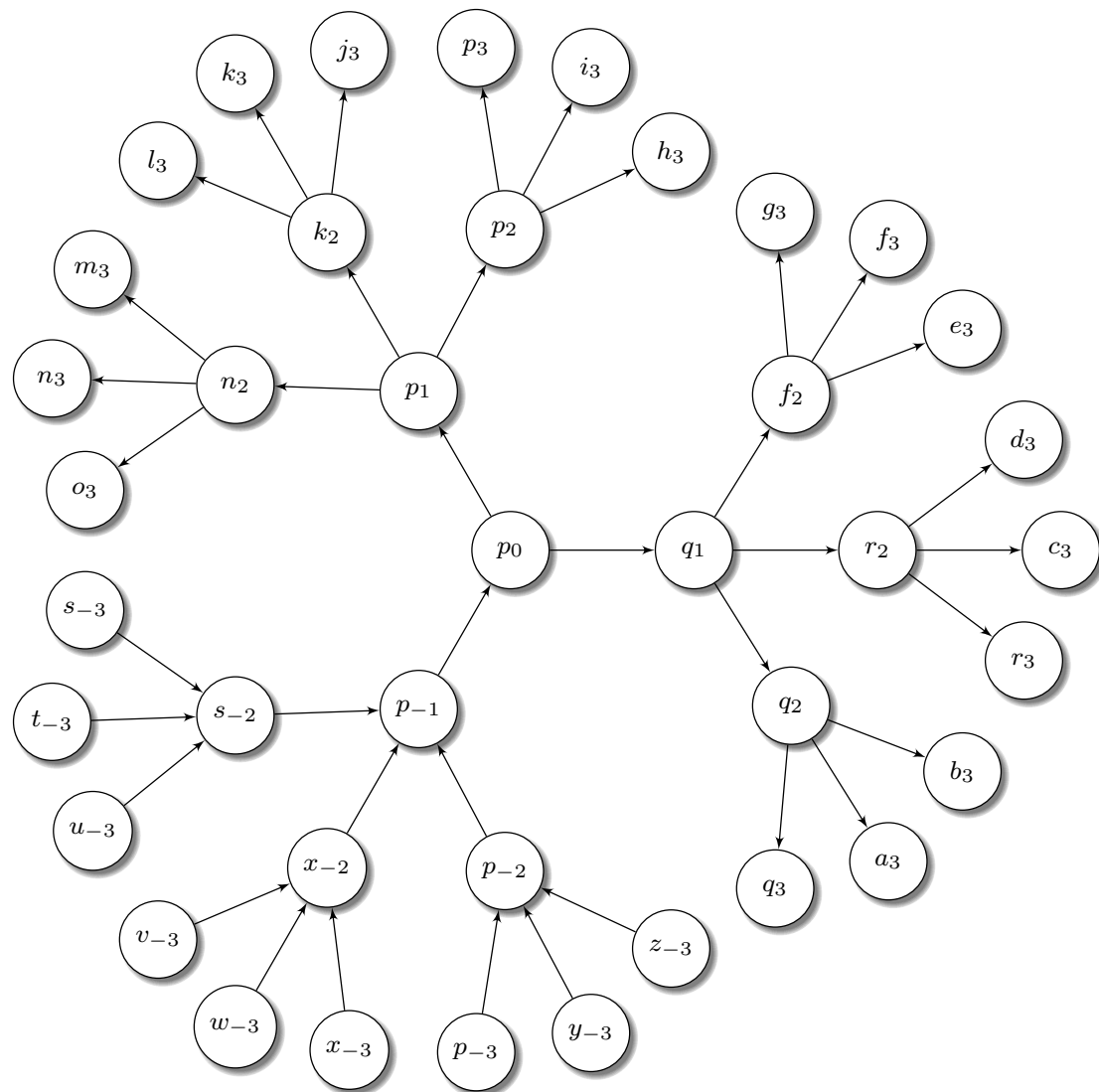


Figure 3.3: A network of multiple, branching support relations.

With the inclusion of (0), the Procedure is defined by the following sequence of steps:

- (1) Take any claim, p_i , where $i \in \mathbb{Z}$.
- (2) If $\forall \varphi (C\varphi \rightarrow \neg S\varphi p_i)$, then make a claim incompatible (unsupported) with p_i .
- (3) If $\exists \varphi (C\varphi \wedge S\varphi p_i)$, then for all φ : (supported)
 - (3.1) If $\exists n \in \mathbb{N} (\varphi = p_{i+n})$,¹² then for all φ : (circularity)
 - (3.1.1) If $\forall \psi (C\psi \wedge S\psi \varphi \rightarrow \exists m \in \mathbb{N} (\psi = p_{i+n+m}))$, (pure circularity) then for all ψ and φ , accept any of $\psi, \varphi, p_i, \dots, p_{i+n}, \dots, p_{i+n+m}$ only after accepting all the others.
 - (3.1.2) If $\exists \psi (C\psi \wedge S\psi \varphi \wedge \forall m \in \mathbb{N} (\psi \neq p_{i+n+m}))$, (mixed circularity) then for all ψ , take each claim and repeat from step (1).
 - (3.2) If $\forall n \in \mathbb{N} (\varphi \neq p_{i+n})$, then for all φ , take each (noncircularity) claim and repeat from step (1).

The first step of the Procedure instructs us to “take any claim.” To “take” a claim, in this sense, means simply to focus our attention on that claim for the purpose of following this sequence of steps. The claim taken is analogous to the input of a mathematical function. Of course, the Procedure is not a mathematical function, and its input is not a mathematical value. Rather, its input is a claim, and the Procedure is a kind of “dialectical function” (or, as I am calling it, a dialectical

¹² $\mathbb{N} = \{0, 1, 2, \dots\}$ (i.e., the set of all natural numbers including zero).

procedure), which is just to say that the operations performed by the Procedure involve dialectic activities, viz., making, accepting, and responding to claims.

The claim taken is represented by p_i , where $i \in \mathbb{Z}$. This means that our claim is represented by the variable p , and this variable is indexed in accordance with the rule given in step (0). The subscript i represents the index value of p . (Recall that the index value represents the support relations that hold between claims.) To say that i is a member of \mathbb{Z} is to say that i is an integer. (In accordance with the indexing rule, all index values are integers.) The actual value of i does not affect the operation of the Procedure. Consequently, the Procedure can accommodate any countably infinite sequence of support relations holding between claims. If there is no basis for the indexing rule to assign a particular value to p_i (e.g., because p_i is an initial claim), then we may simply assume that $i = 0$. (Alternatively, a random integer may be assigned to i .)

The second step states: If every claim fails to support p_i (i.e., if p_i is not supported by any claim), then make a claim incompatible with p_i . An example of such a claim is, of course, $\neg p_i$. For simplicity, let us assume that this is the claim that the Skeptic is to make. Notice that this step does not instruct the Skeptic to provide any support for $\neg p_i$. She is simply to make the claim $\neg p_i$ without offering any reasons to her interlocutor to accept it. While this might seem inadvisable for someone involved in a dispute over whether it is the case that p_i , it is perfectly fitting in this case, for the lack of support for $\neg p_i$ is exactly equal to the lack of support for p_i . Since p_i is, *ex hypothesi*, not supported by any claim, it has precisely as much support as $\neg p_i$, namely none (Fig. 3.4).¹³ Hence, p_i and $\neg p_i$ are equipollent

¹³ Besides, it is likely that $\neg p_i$ has already been Dogmatically propounded. As Cicero remarked in *Div.* 2.119, “Somehow or other no statement is too absurd for some philosophers to make” (Falconer 1923, 58). Cf. Descartes in the *Discourse on Method*, Part Two: “One cannot imagine anything so strange or so little believable that it had not been said by one of the philosophers” (Cress 1998, 9).

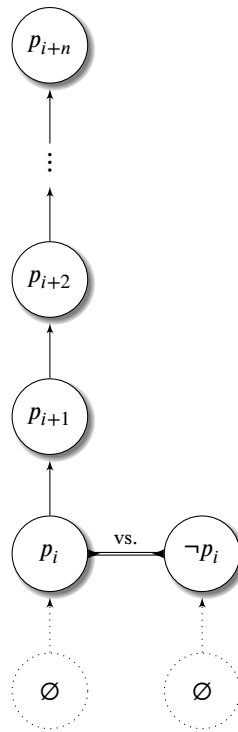


Figure 3.4: If the sequence of support terminates in an unsupported claim, the Skeptic makes an incompatible unsupported claim.

(equally strong). Hence, the Skeptic shall suspend judgment about both of them. (This step corresponds to the hypothetical mode.)

Having dealt with claims that are unsupported, we proceed to the third and final step, which deals with claims that are supported by other claims. The third step is complex and consists of multiple substeps. Let us take each component in turn. Step (3) states: If there exists some claim, φ , that supports p_i (i.e., if p_i is supported at all), then for each such φ , proceed to substep (3.1) or (3.2).

Substep (3.1) states: If every claim, φ , that supports p_i is identical to some claim that has an index value that is either equal to (in the case of $n = 0$)¹⁴ or greater than (in the case of $n > 0$) i , then for each such φ proceed to substep (3.1.1) or (3.1.2). Note that an index value greater than i means that p_i directly or

¹⁴ Since n is a natural number, the value of $i + n$ cannot be less than the value of i .

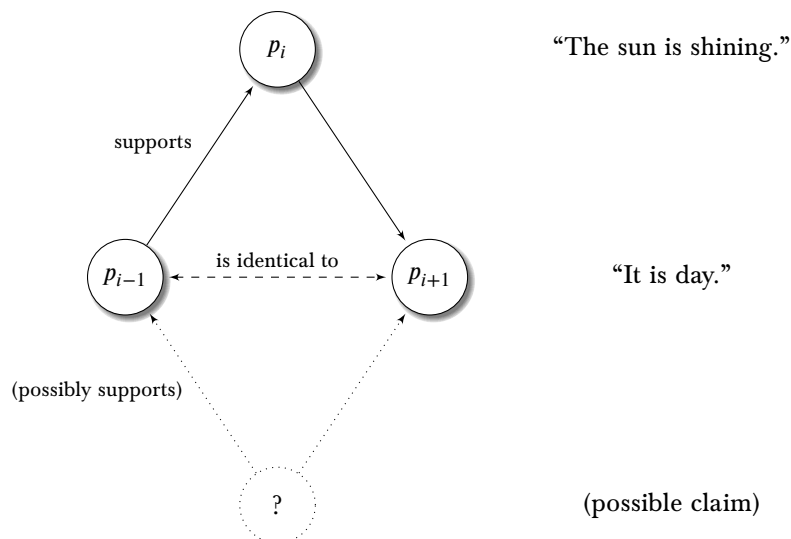


Figure 3.5: Basic circularity. Every claim in the circle supports and is supported by another claim in the circle.

indirectly supports each such φ . Since this is true of *every* such φ , it follows that every claim that supports p_i is itself directly or indirectly supported by p_i , which is just to say that the sequence of support relations is circular (see Fig. 3.5).

Substep (3.2) states: If every claim, φ , that supports p_i is not identical to any claim that has an index value equal to or greater than i (which is to say that no such φ is supported directly or indirectly by p_i), then take each claim represented by φ and repeat the Procedure from step (1). The antecedent describes the case of *noncircular* support, since satisfaction of the antecedent entails that no claim that supports p_i is in any way supported by p_i .

Only substeps (3.1.1) and (3.1.2) remain. In order to see why these two substeps exist, notice that, in the antecedent of substep (3.1), the fact that every φ both supports and is (directly or indirectly) supported by p_i does not entail that any such φ is supported *only* (or ultimately, in the case of indirect support) by p_i . In other words, to say that a sequence of support relations is circular is not to say

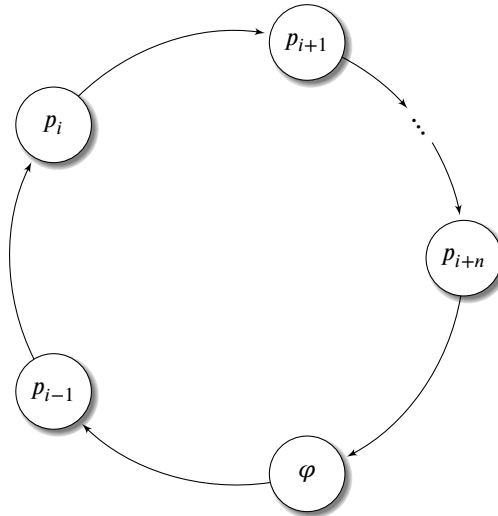


Figure 3.6: Pure circularity. No claim in the circle receives support from any claim outside the circle.

that it is *purely* circular. In fact, the circularity of the sequence may be either “pure” or “mixed.”

Pure circularity is the case in which every such φ is supported only by claims that (are identical to claims that) have an index value equal to or greater than that of φ itself (or, more precisely, than that of the claim to which φ is itself identical). In other words, every claim, ψ , that supports such a φ is itself supported (directly or indirectly) by that φ . Since the same holds of p_i with respect to each such φ , the sequence of support is said to be *purely* circular: No claim in the circle is supported by a claim that stands outside the circle (Fig. 3.6).

Mixed circularity is the case in which there exists some claim, ψ , that is not identical to any claim with an index value equal to or greater than that of φ . In other words, there exists some claim that supports φ but that stands outside the circle (Fig. 3.7). Hence, φ is supported by a *mixture* of claims, some of which are part of the circle, and some of which are not. This state of mixed circularity is one in which the circle, as a whole, is *grounded* by some external element (in a sense to

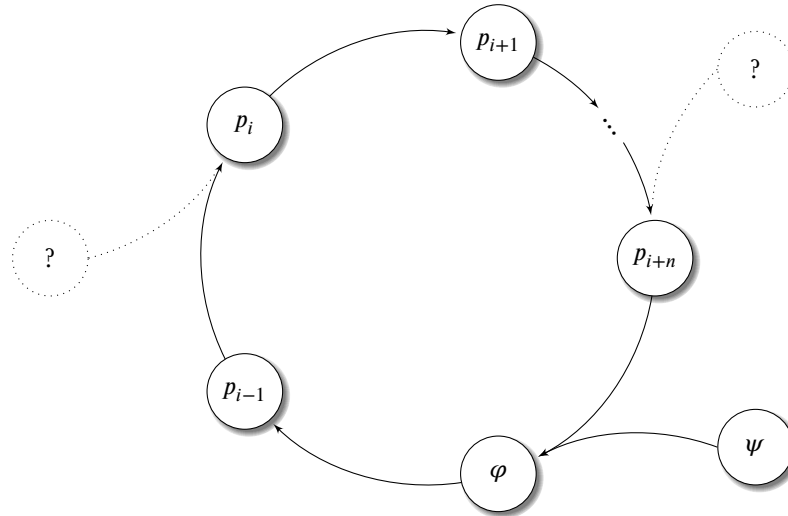


Figure 3.7: Mixed circularity. At least one claim in the circle receives support from some claim outside the circle.

be discussed below).

Thus, substep (3.1.1), which captures the case of pure circularity, states: If every such φ is supported only by claims that (are identical to claims that) have an index value equal to or greater than that of φ itself (or, more precisely, than that of the claim to which φ is itself identical), then accept any of the supporting or supported claims only after accepting all the others. Notice that in a purely circular sequence of support relations, every claim in the circle is supported by some other claim in the circle, and no claim in the circle is supported by any claim outside of the circle. In order to accept any given claim in the circle, a neutral individual (i.e., one who does not antecedently accept any member of the circle, such as a Skeptic) must first accept the claim(s) in the circle that support that claim, which in turn requires accepting the claim(s) in the circle that support *that* claim, and so on until we have circled back to the original claim in question. Hence, the only way for a neutral individual to accept any claim in a pure circle is to first accept all the other claims in the circle. But in order to accept any of *those* claims, she must

first accept all the *other* claims in the circle, including the original one. Since this is impossible, the Skeptic can never accept any claim in a purely circular sequence of claims.

Finally, substep (3.1.2), which captures the state of mixed circularity, states: If there exists some claim, ψ , that is not identical to any claim with an index value equal to or greater than that of φ , then take each claim represented by φ and repeat the Procedure from step (1). I stated above that the case of mixed circularity is one in which the circle, as a whole, is in some sense “grounded” by an external element. By contrast to cases of pure circularity, in which the acceptance of any claim in a circle requires the prior acceptance of all other claims in that circle, cases of mixed circularity allow for the (eventual) acceptance of all the claims in a circle after one has accepted any “external grounding claim,” i.e., any claim that supports a claim in the circle but that is not itself a member of the circle (e.g., ψ in Fig. 3.7). Note, however, that merely to refer to such claims as “grounding claims” is not to imply that they *successfully* ground any circular sequence of support relations. Whether such a grounding claim is sufficient to make any given circle, as a whole, acceptable depends upon the outcome of the application of the Procedure to that grounding claim itself.

This completes our discussion of each of the individual steps in the Procedure. Though the Skeptic would never assert this, we may observe that exactly three outcomes are possible:

1. The Procedure arrives at an unsupported claim. The Skeptic makes an incompatible claim and continues to suspend judgment.
2. The Procedure arrives at a circular sequence of claims. The Skeptic cannot accept any claim in the circle without first accepting the others, so she

continues to suspend judgment.

3. The Procedure repeats. As long as the Procedure continues repeating, the Skeptic is never in a position to accept any claim and thus continues to suspend judgment.

The Procedure may be repeated any finite number of times before either of the first two outcomes obtains. If neither of the first two outcomes ever obtains, then this means that the Procedure simply continues without end, which constitutes the third outcome.¹⁵ For example, the Procedure may begin with a claim that is a member of a mixed circle. This mixed circle may be supported by another claim, which is itself supported by a long chain of claims, which themselves branch off into yet further chains of supported and unsupported claims, some of which are themselves members of pure and mixed circles, and so on. In this way, the Procedure is capable of accommodating the often complicated networks of supporting and supported claims that mirror Dogmatic theories and systems of belief. On the assumption that a “theory” denotes a set of propositions, our earlier definition of the word “claim” entails that there can indeed be a “mirroring” (more precisely, an *isomorphism*) between a theory and a set of claims, where each claim has as its content a corresponding proposition in the theory.

Likewise, on the assumption that a “belief” is a mental state that takes a proposition as its content (remaining neutral, as far as we properly may, on all the other widely disputed aspects of what, precisely, constitutes a belief),¹⁶ a claim can

¹⁵ This is not to say that the Skeptic actually implements a Procedure with an infinite number of steps, *per impossibile*. Rather, it is to say that the Skeptic continues to implement the Procedure’s finite number of repeating steps and never arrives at a final step for as long as she continues to implement it.

¹⁶ There is one matter of dispute about “beliefs” on which the nature of the current discussion makes it impossible to remain neutral. This is the matter of whether “beliefs” exist at all. Although the Procedure, strictly speaking, can be presented in such a way that it does remain neutral about

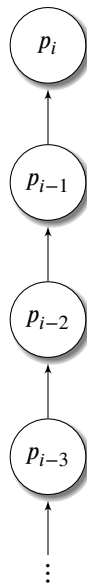


Figure 3.8: Infinite regress.

be made that corresponds in content to any belief. Each time a chain branches, a new instantiation of the Procedure is born. I mentioned this above, when I pointed out that claims may support and be supported by multiple claims (Fig. 3.3). Thus, the Procedure is able to accommodate even the most complicated systems of claims.

A note about the third outcome is in order. We are now in a position to understand the variety of conditions under which the Procedure might repeat *ad infinitum*.¹⁷ The most obvious case is the one in which there exists a discrete sequence of claims that is itself infinite. This is the classic case of an infinite regress (Fig. 3.8), which corresponds to the regressive mode.

Typically, philosophers who discuss infinite regression and infinitism (about which more later) consider only this simple case. However, as we have seen, the sit-

this matter, it impossible to *explain* the Procedure in any illuminative way without taking for granted some shared conceptual framework between myself and the reader, and one in which there exist things called “beliefs” appears to be suitable given that most people seem to believe that there are beliefs. (Whether the Skeptic need make any such assumption—and, if so, the nature of such an assumption—will be discussed later.)

¹⁷ See n. 15.

uation may be significantly more complex. There may be a large number of branching claims, and branches off those branches, and pure and mixed circles throughout. Many branches might terminate in ultimately unsupported claims. Nonetheless, if any *instance* of the Procedure exhibits the third outcome—i.e., it continues without end—then there will exist a sequence of claims that can be *traced* through the vast total network of claims and that, if reconstructively mapped on its own, would appear as in Fig. 3.8. The significance of this is that the *total* sequence of the Dogmatist’s claims need not resemble Fig. 3.8 for an infinite regress to obtain.

Lastly, as a final aid to understanding, the Procedure in its entirety is represented as a flowchart in Fig. 3.9.

3.3 The Effects of the Procedure

The Skeptic implements the Procedure through a set of dialectical actions, but what effect, if any, are these actions supposed to have on the *participants* in this dialectical situation? The Skeptic’s own case is fairly straightforward. Since every sequence of steps in the Procedure leads either to suspension of judgment or to reiteration of the Procedure, the Skeptic who consistently deploys the Procedure will never come to form a belief but instead continue to suspend judgment. She will, in other words, continue being a Skeptic.

The Dogmatist’s case is more complicated. It is on this point that the divergence of the Procedure from the declarative version of the Problematic is most prone to misunderstanding. Consider, for example, the common charge that the Skeptic imposes particularly high epistemic standards on the Dogmatist. Frede (1998b) writes:

[The Sceptics] thought that their opponents had committed themselves to a certain view as to what counts as knowledge, good reason,

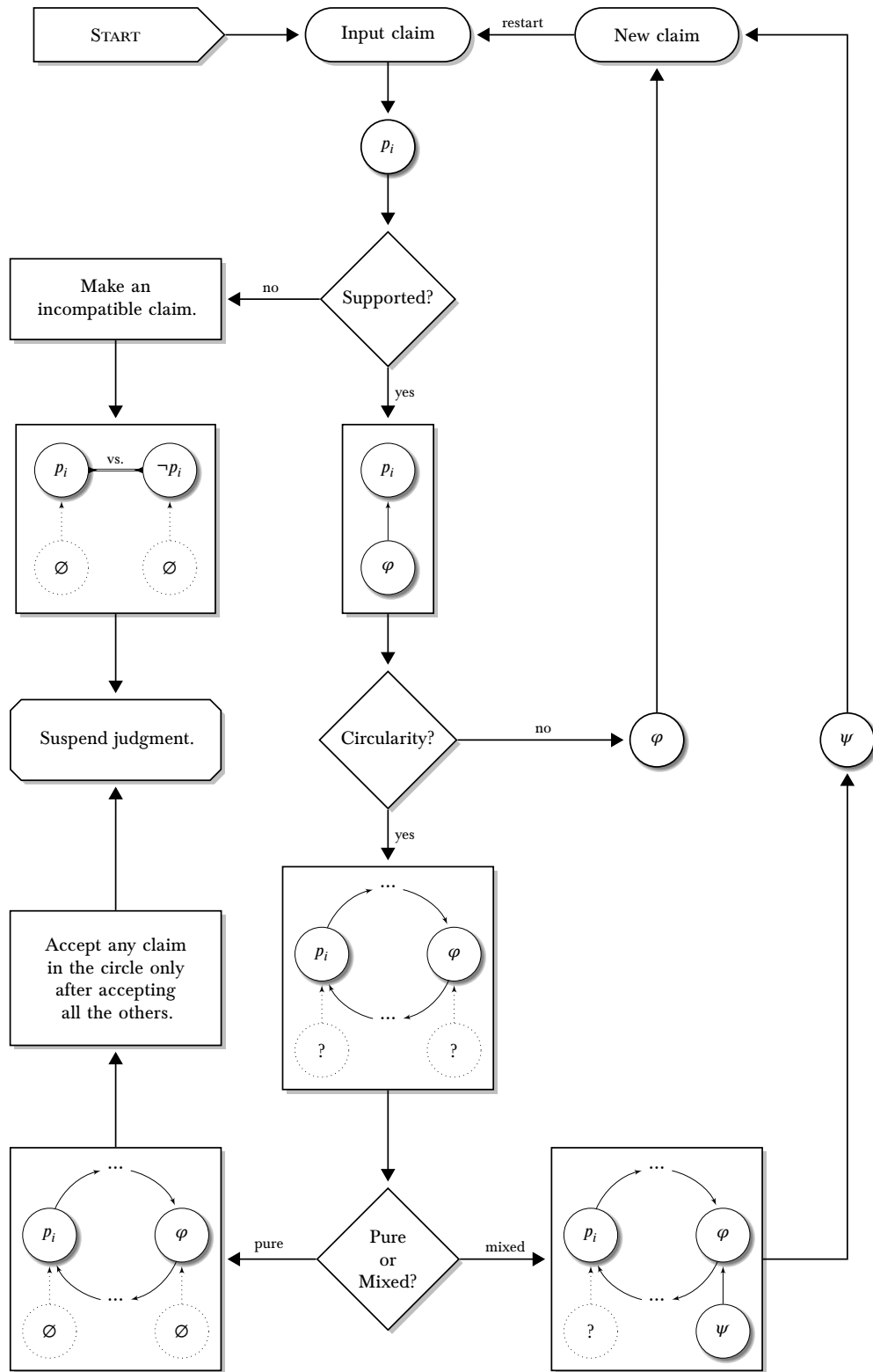


Figure 3.9: The Procedure represented as a flowchart.

sufficient reason, justification, and that their opponents had developed something called ‘logic’ to formulate canons and standards for argument and justification, canons whose strict application would guarantee the truth of the conclusions arrived at in this way. . . . [The Skeptic] is aware of the fact, e.g., that ordinarily we do not operate by these standards and that it is because his opponents want more than we ordinarily have that they try to subject themselves to these stricter canons; they want ‘real’ knowledge, certain knowledge. (130)

This notion that the Skeptic’s arguments rely on such standards is so widespread, in fact, that Williams (2015) refers to it simply as “the Standard Model” in the course of arguing against it.

In the Standard Model . . . [t]he skeptic assumes some standard or condition that must be met if a belief is to amount to genuine knowledge, or method that is to be followed for knowledge to be gained. . . . Starting from some putative criterion, the skeptic argues that there is an insuperable obstacle to our meeting the standard we set or deriving knowledge from the method proposed. . . . Focusing on the Agrippan Problem and under the influence of the Standard Model, we will be inclined to identify the criterion with the claims that knowledge is distinguished from mere opinion by being adequately grounded. The trilemma is then the obstacle to assuring ourselves that we meet this standard. (88)

It is not difficult to see why such charges are leveled against the declarative version of the Problematic. On the declarative interpretation, the Problematic is often thought to deny knowledge or justified belief not only to the Skeptic, but to the Dogmatist, as well. In this sense, the Problematic is conceived as a Skeptical weapon wielded with destructive intent against Dogmatic commitments. On a dialectical interpretation, however, the situation is quite the opposite. As far as Dogmatic commitments are concerned, the Procedure is, in a word, *laissez-faire*. The manner in which a Dogmatist reacts to the Procedure depends on his antecedent commitments. Different Dogmatists, possessing different antecedent commitments, will react to the Procedure in different ways.

One possibility is that the Dogmatist arrives with antecedent commitments that make him particularly susceptible to the Procedure. For example, a Dogmatist who comes to the table with a Cliffordian conception of justification might very well react to the Procedure by concluding that epistemic justification is impossible. In this scenario, however, it is the Dogmatist—not the Skeptic—who brings his high epistemic standards with him into the dialectical situation. The Skeptic herself has no such standards. At most, we (*qua* external observers) might characterize her dialectical behavior in implementing the Procedure as exhibiting a single, exceedingly low, standard: not accepting claims arbitrarily.

Recall that the Procedure, as we have defined it, entails that the Skeptic (1) does not make an arbitrary choice between two incompatible claims with equal support, (2) does not accept a claim in a circle of claims that she does not already accept (since, as we have seen, this is impossible for her actually to do), and (3) does not accept an infinite series of claims (since, again, this is impossible for her actually to do). Since the latter two of these are impossible for the Skeptic to do, it would be inaccurate to portray them as epistemic standards. A standard is a norm or requirement that it is possible to fail to satisfy. Hence, there is only one standard that the Skeptic's behavior might be said to exhibit: not accepting claims arbitrarily. Compared to the demanding standards of the Problematic on the declarative interpretation, this is an astonishingly low bar.

A Dogmatist who understands this must confront the uncomfortable realization that, if he were in the Skeptic's position, he would not be able to accept even his *own* claims. That is, if the Dogmatist did not *antecedently* hold many of the beliefs he in fact holds, then he would have no reason to accept any of the claims he is now making to the Skeptic. A Dogmatist who understands this is in a position to recognize that the only way he could have come to hold any beliefs in the first place

was by accepting at least one claim arbitrarily. In a sense, then, all Dogmatists are simply failed Sceptics who could not manage to abide even by the exceedingly low standard of nonarbitrary belief. To be fair, however, the likely explanation in almost all such cases is that Dogmatists acquired their initial set of beliefs when they were young, before they had fully developed their ability to reason. Here Cicero's observation in *Academica* 2.8 regarding non-Academic philosophers is apposite:

Other philosophers, after all, labour under two constraints. First, they are chained to one spot by bonds formed before they were able to judge what was best. Second, they make their judgments about subjects they don't know at the weakest point in their lives under pressure from a friend or captivated by a single speech from someone they heard for the first time; and they hang on to the philosophical system they happened to adopt as their salvation from the storm that drove them into it. (Brittain 2006, 6)

3.4 The Significance of the Procedure

I have argued that interpreting the Pyrrhonian Problematic procedurally, rather than declaratively, allows us to recognize its intuitive force. We are now in a position to explain this intuitive force. The power of the Procedure lies primarily its ability to *operate at every metalevel of discourse*.

In any dialectical situation, it is possible to introduce a new claim *about* one or more of the claims that have already been made. To do this is to make a *metalevel* claim about an *object level* claim, or, as it is sometimes put, to "shift the discussion to a metalevel." Metalevels and object levels are always relative. If I make a claim, p , and you make a metalevel claim, q , about p , then I might respond by making a new metalevel claim, r , about q . In this scenario, r occupies a metalevel relative to q , which in turn occupies a metalevel relative to p . Meanwhile, p occupies an object level relative to q , which in turn occupies an object level relative to r .

Epistemology, like many areas of philosophy, is a metalevel enterprise. Epistemological theorizing relies on our ability to occupy a metalevel relative to certain object level epistemic states, such as beliefs. However, there is something peculiar about epistemological arguments concerning epistemic states like beliefs, for it is *in virtue of our beliefs themselves* that we either believe or disbelieve the contents of such arguments. Such metalevel arguments *target* object level epistemic states even while a subset of those object level states are *about* the very metalevel arguments that target them. When we gaze into the epistemological abyss, it gazes back into us.

The high degree of metalevel abstraction inherent in epistemological theorizing can make it difficult to appreciate the second-order implications of epistemological theories on those theories themselves. This is a hazard with which Skeptics are intimately familiar, as they have long been accused of self-refutation by those who misunderstand them as holding the *belief* that one ought to suspend judgment on everything (and hence to give up all beliefs, including this one). But if recognizing the second-order implications of epistemological arguments is often difficult, then perhaps it should come as no surprise that the higher-order implications of *metaepistemological* arguments are even more easily overlooked. For just as one can advance arguments about basic epistemic states, such as beliefs, so too can one advance arguments *about* arguments about basic epistemic states. And this is precisely what happens when a Dogmatist attempts to refute the Problematic: he advances a *metaepistemological* argument.

Here is the key point: Metaepistemological arguments advanced against the Problematic are, like all declarative arguments, composed of claims. To advance such an argument thus requires advancing each component claim in the argument. As we have seen, however, the Problematic applies procedurally to *every* claim

that is advanced. *A fortiori*, it applies to the very component claims that jointly constitute any declarative argument advanced against the Problematic itself.

Consider, for example, Williams' argument against the Problematic, which we examined extensively in Section 2.4. The ingenuity of Williams' dialectical strategy, as we can now appreciate, rests on its ability to operate at a metalevel relative to the Problematic. Recall that Williams' explicit aim is to *diagnose*, rather than *answer*, the challenge posed by the Problematic. The Problematic, he claims, tacitly relies on certain internalist assumptions, to which he proposes alternatives. The strategy, in effect, is to trade one set of assumptions for another. This is achieved by circumscribing the scope of the Problematic in a way that allows for the identification of an area of logical space lying outside its reach, then to stage an organized retreat to the safe location. But this maneuver is made possible only by first shifting the discussion to a metalevel. For it is only by gaining an overview of the whole dialectical terrain that Williams can chart the territory within which the Problematic, as he understands it, exercises its rule. And it is only from the vantage point of this metalevel that he can see which unclaimed regions yet lie beyond its borders, out of harm's way.

As I pointed out in Section 2.5, there is no reason, in principle, that Dogmatists cannot continue to redeploy this strategy indefinitely, so long as the Problematic is interpreted declaratively (and hence as vulnerable to such a maneuver). Should the Skeptic (as the Dogmatist imagines her) explicitly extend the scope of the Problematic in response to an argument like Williams', there is nothing to prevent the Dogmatist from shifting to a yet higher metalevel of discourse and redeploying the same strategy, again circumscribing the (now extended) scope of the Problematic, but continuing to interpret it declaratively and proceeding to retreat to a new area of logical space lying beyond its scope. As the Skeptical threat (as

conceived by Dogmatists) has mutated and its maw grown ever wider, the Dogmatist's epistemological framework has historically shifted (e.g., from internalism to externalism and contextualism). The evolution of Dogmatic epistemology might thus be viewed as the result of millennia of selective pressures from perceived Skeptical threats. Moreover, there is no reason, in principle, that this evolution cannot continue indefinitely into the future. Just as it is a fundamental error in cosmological reasoning to assume that the limit of the observable universe defines the limit of the universe itself, so too is it a fundamental error in epistemological reasoning to assume that the metaepistemological frameworks of which we are presently capable of conceiving exhaust the entirety of logical space (which, like physical space, may well be infinite).

Nonetheless, the specter of Skepticism is largely a figment of Dogmatic imagination. The reality is far subtler—and far more pervasive. Dogmatists have mistaken the Problematic for a declarative argument, when it is in fact a procedure. Consequently, they have misperceived the force of the Problematic as lying in its conclusion. Since the conclusion of any declarative argument is necessarily limited in scope, they have, quite naturally, assumed the scope of the Problematic to be limited, and they have devised strategies that exploit this limitation. We can now recognize the futility of these strategies. The Procedure, not being a declarative argument, has no conclusion. Hence, its force lies not in its conclusion, but in its scope, which is unlimited. This is to say that the force of the Procedure lies in its *generality*—its applicability to any claim whatsoever.

The specter of Skepticism has largely been a figment of Dogmatic imagination. The reality, we now see, is far subtler—but far more pervasive. Dogmatists have mistaken the Problematic for an argument, when it is in fact a procedure. Consequently, they have misperceived the force of the Problematic as lying in its

conclusion. Since the conclusion of any argument is necessarily limited in scope, they have, quite naturally, assumed the scope of the Problematic to be limited, and they have devised strategies that exploit this limitation. We can now recognize the futility of these strategies. The Procedure, not being an argument, has no conclusion. Hence, its force lies not in its conclusion, but in its scope, which is unlimited. This is to say that the force of the Procedure lies in its *generality*—its applicability to any claim whatsoever.

The key to understanding the Procedure's force, then, is understanding the implications of this generality. The Procedure applies to every claim. Since meta-level claims are no less claims than object level claims, the Procedure applies even to those claims that occupy a metalevel relative to the Procedure itself. Thus, the Procedure, consistently applied, will operate on any and all metalevel claims about it, which necessarily include any argument advanced against it in so far as the advancement of any such argument entails the advancement of its component claims in some dialectical situation. Moreover, the generality with which this holds for familiar metaepistemological frameworks like internalism, externalism, and contextualism strongly suggests that the same will hold of any novel metaepistemological framework developed in the future. It appears to be part of the very nature of Dogmatic epistemology that any innovation, no matter how radical a departure from prior dogma, will nonetheless require in its advancement the making of claims in some dialectical situation. If this is the case, then all such innovations will inexorably be subject to the Procedure.

In following the methodology of contemporary analytic philosophy, Dogmatists attempt to put the Problematic in a box and to analyze it from the outside, safe from interference by the Problematic itself. The unrestricted scope of the Procedure makes this impossible. Any claim the Dogmatist wishes to make, no matter how

many metalevels above the level of discourse the Procedure is presently thought to occupy, will be subject to its relentless implementation. This is what it means to say that the Procedure operates at every metalevel of discourse. There is no box from which it cannot escape.

Material from Chapter 3 has been included in the following paper, which has been submitted for publication: Wong, Andrew David. "Procedural Pyrrhonism". The dissertation author was the sole author of this material.

4 Pyrrhonian Moral Skepticism

4.1 A Skeptical Commitment?

I have argued that the Pyrrhonian Problematic should be interpreted procedurally rather than declaratively, and I have presented an account of such an interpretation: the Pyrrhonian Procedure. Moreover, I have argued that the Procedure is unmitigated in scope. It remains to be seen, however, whether this unmitigated scope is consistent with Pyrrhonism as it is presented in the Sextan corpus. In this chapter, I aim to argue for that consistency in one of the most important areas in which it is contested: Pyrrhonian Moral Skepticism.

Many have argued that what Sextus writes about Pyrrhonian Moral Skepticism in *Adversus Mathematicos* attributes certain Dogmatic ethical commitments to the Skeptic (Annas and Barnes 1985; Bett 1994, 1997, 2003; Striker 1996a,b). If this is true, then it poses a significant threat both to an unmitigated interpretation of Pyrrhonism and, as we will presently see, to the widely shared view that *PH* and *M* are mutually consistent (Annas 1993, 1998; Hankinson 1994; Laursen 2004; McPherran 1989; Nussbaum 1994; Spinelli 1995; Svavarsson 2004).

In *PH* III 168–238 and *M* XI 1–167, Sextus addresses the principal question of Pyrrhonian Moral Skepticism: Is anything by nature good, bad, or indifferent?¹

¹ Interestingly, Sextus is not uniform in his inclusion of “the indifferent” in this matter. This is

The problem is that Sextus appears to make conflicting statements with respect to this question in different texts. In *PH*, Sextus addresses our question in Book III, and he clearly states that the Skeptic exercises suspension of judgment with respect to this question. Having set out the various answers given by Dogmatic schools to the above question, he writes:

It is impossible to be convinced either by all the positions set out above (because of conflict) or by any one of them. For anyone who says that we should find this position convincing but not that one has opposing him the arguments of those who take different views and becomes part of the dispute. And so he will himself need to be judged along with the rest rather than being a judge of others. Since, then, there is no agreed standard of proof (because of the undecidable dispute about them), he will end up in suspension of judgement and hence be able to make no affirmation as to what is by nature good. (182)

Furthermore, at the end of the portion of Book III that deals with our question, he concludes:

The Skeptics, then, seeing such anomaly in objects, suspend judgement as to whether anything is by nature good or bad, or generally to be done, here too refraining from dogmatic rashness; and they follow the observance of everyday life without holding opinions. They therefore remain without feeling in matters of opinion and with moderation of feeling in matters forced upon them. (235)

Hence, in *PH*, Sextus is clear that the Skeptic suspends judgment about the question of whether anything is by nature good or bad, and he understands this suspension of judgment to entail that the Skeptic is able to make no affirmation as to what is by nature good (nor, presumably, as to what is by nature bad or indifferent).

By contrast, it is rather unclear what Sextus' position is in *M XI*. At times, he seems to endorse the same suspension of judgment he advocates in *PH III* ² At

perhaps for the sake of brevity. In what follows, I will follow his example. The reader should thus understand the phrase "by nature good or bad" to mean "by nature good, bad, or indifferent," and *mutatis mutandis* for all variations on this phrase. See Bett (1997, 119–120).

² In using the terms "endorse" and "advocate" here, I speak loosely. I intend for such language to be neutral with respect to Dogmatic commitment.

other times, he appears openly to state that the Skeptic *accepts* the view that nothing is by nature good or bad and even goes as far as to say that this commitment is *necessary* in order for the Skeptic to attain tranquility (*PH* I 25-30). At *M* XI 111, Sextus writes:

The Sceptics, on the other hand, neither affirming nor denying anything casually but bringing everything under examination, teach that for those who suppose that there are good and bad by nature an unhappy life is in store, while for those who make no determinations and suspend judgement “Is the easiest human life”[*sic*].

Here, Sextus appears to be advocating precisely the same attitude as he does in *PH* III: suspension of judgment with respect to the question of whether anything is by nature good or bad. Furthermore, at the start of part B of *M* XI, Sextus begins by stating, “We have shown well enough that it is possible for people who adopt suspension of judgement about everything to live acceptably” (168).³ By contrast, at *M* XI 118, Sextus writes:

But if someone should say that a certain thing is not more by nature to be chosen than to be avoided, nor more to be avoided than to be chosen, every event being in a certain state in relation to something and, in accordance with differing states of affairs and circumstances, turning out as at one time to be chosen and at another time to be avoided, he will live happily and without disturbance, being neither uplifted at good as good [*sic*] nor dejected at bad, nobly accepting what happens by necessity, but freed from the trouble associated with the opinion that something bad or good is present. Indeed, this will come to him from his thinking nothing by nature good or bad. Therefore it is not possible to live happily if one conceives certain things to be good or bad.

Here, Sextus seems to attribute the same practical benefits that he attributed to suspension of judgment in both *PH* III and *M* XI 111 to the *belief* that nothing is

³ Within *M* XI, Bett distinguishes between part A (1-167) and part B (168-256). Part A is the portion that deals with the question of whether anything is by nature good or bad, while part B deals mainly with the question of whether there is a “skill relating to life.”

by nature good or bad. At line 130, he reiterates this, stating: “But when reason has established that none of these things is by nature good or by nature bad, there will be a release from disturbance and a peaceful life will await us.” Thus, Sextus appears to be claiming that *assenting* to the proposition that nothing is by nature good or bad is (at least one, if not the only) path to tranquility.

Astonishingly, Sextus goes on to assert that the view that nothing is by nature good or bad is a uniquely Skeptical one. He writes:

It will only be possible to avoid [being troubled], then, if we show to the person who is disturbed on account of his avoidance of the bad or his pursuit of the good, that there is not anything either by nature good or bad, “But these things are judged by the mind on the part of humans,” to quote Timon. But such a teaching is certainly peculiar to Skepticism; it is Skepticism’s achievement, therefore, to procure the happy life. (*M* XI 140)

Sextus here links the belief that nothing is by nature good or bad to “the happy life” (τὸ εὐδαίμονα βίον) rather than directly to tranquility (ἀταραξία), but it is plain from what he says earlier (e.g., *M* XI 118) that he either refers to these interchangeably or means to include both. Moreover, he goes even further in explicitly crediting the view that nothing is by nature good or bad solely to Skepticism.

These textual differences raise two questions: (1) Is Pyrrhonian Moral Skepticism consistent? (2) If so, what is its scope? (The second question may be clarified by the following two more precise questions: (2a) On which ethical matters does the Skeptic suspend judgment? (2b) What ethical commitments, if any, does the Skeptic hold?)

I will begin with an overview of the logical space that the general problem of the consistency of Pyrrhonian Moral Skepticism occupies. I will then proceed to consider Bett’s argument in detail. While I find the problems plaguing Bett’s proposed solution to the apparent inconsistencies in Sextus’ texts to be numerous

and insurmountable, I contend that a novel solution is available.

4.2 The Legacy of Aenesidemus

Are *PH* and *M* consistent with respect to the question of whether the Pyrrhonian Skeptic is committed to the view that nothing is by nature good or bad? The views on this question can be divided into two broad, mutually exhaustive classes: those views on which *PH* and *M* are consistent, on the one hand, and those views on which *PH* and *M* are inconsistent, on the other hand. Within each of these broad classes, we may distinguish multiple subclasses (see figure 4.1). Let us first

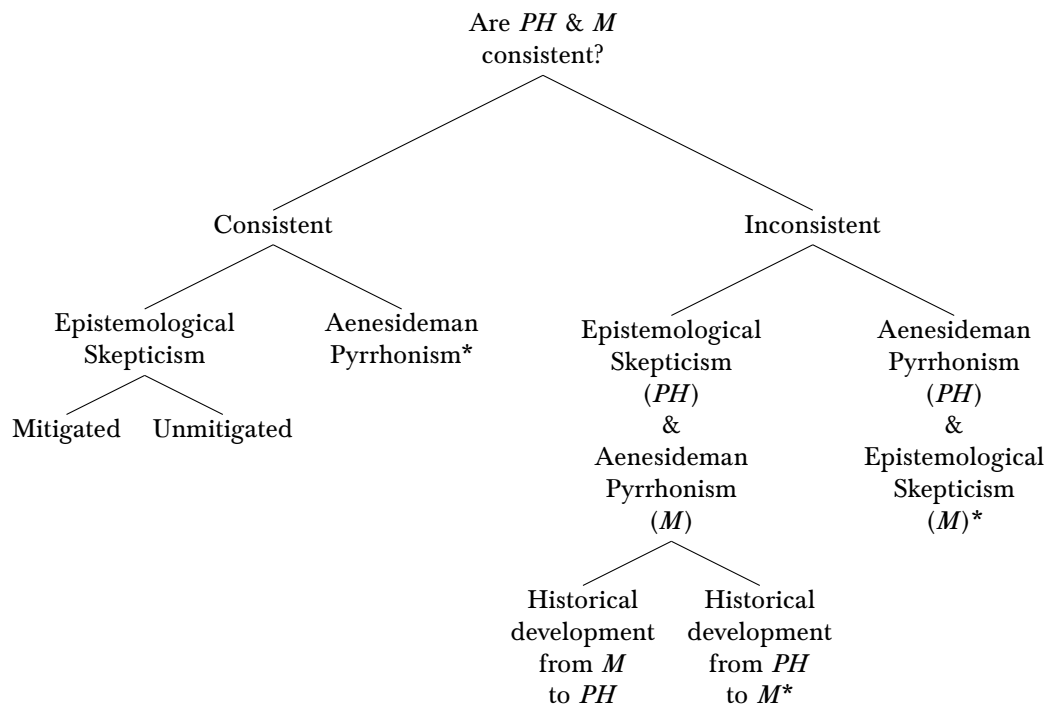


Figure 4.1: A map of the logical space. Asterisks indicate hitherto unendorsed positions.

consider the class of views on which *PH* and *M* are consistent. Within this class, there is at least one subclass of views that is well-represented in the literature. This is the subclass of views on which *PH* and *M* are consistent with each other in that

both represent what I shall label Epistemological Skepticism [ES] with regard to ethics. This is the position in which the Skeptic holds relatively few or no beliefs with regard to ethical matters. While there is considerable controversy over the extent to which the Skeptic is and can be free of belief, we may stipulate that a minimum condition of qualifying for membership in the subclass of [ES] with regard to ethics is that any interpretation must characterize Sceptics as holding no belief about whether anything is by nature good or bad. This minimum condition might plausibly be generalized to the condition that Sceptics hold no *theoretical* ethical beliefs, where theoretical beliefs, in general, are to be contrasted with *practical* beliefs. This distinction is significant, since some philosophers object that practical beliefs are necessary in order to live, psychologically necessary, or otherwise indispensable.⁴ In addition, one might take statements such as those at *PH* I 19-20 as endorsing beliefs in appearances (*φαντασία*), which one might suppose at least partially constitute practical beliefs (see Sections 1.4.3 and 2.2).

Thus, we may further divide the subclass of [ES] into our familiar subclasses of mitigated and unmitigated [ES]. Mitigated [ES], both with regard to ethics and generally, is characterized by the view that Sceptics do hold some beliefs, but that their doxastic position is significantly different from that of Dogmatists in that they fail to hold beliefs of a theoretical nature, i.e., beliefs about that which is non-apparent. Unmitigated [ES], by contrast, is characterized by the view that the Skeptic holds no beliefs whatsoever. Such a view is therefore inconsistent with the view that some beliefs are indispensable, whether because they are necessary for action (and hence to live) or because they are psychologically necessary.

⁴ The objection regarding belief being necessary for action (hence, life) is often referred to as the Apraxia Objection. It was leveled by the Sceptics' opponents in antiquity and was famously revived by Hume in *The Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, XII, 128. More recently, Frede (1998a) and Burnyeat (1998a) have initiated a broader discussion over the compatibility of life with the Skeptic's lack of belief.

While the subclass of [ES] is, by far, the most well-represented subclass of views under the broad class of views on which *PH* and *M* are consistent, there is another subclass of logically possible views that is relevant to the present discussion. This is the subclass of views on which *PH* and *M* are consistent with each other in that both represent Aenesideman Pyrrhonism [AP] with regard to ethics.⁵ This is the position according to which both *PH* and *M* endorse the claim that there exists nothing that is by nature good or bad. Since this subclass contains those views that entail that the Skeptic holds a belief about whether anything is by nature good or bad, and hence, more broadly, that the Skeptic holds a belief about theoretical, non-apparent matters, it is distinct from the subclass of [ES].

The subclass of [AP] has, to my knowledge, hitherto gone undefended. I suspect the reason for this to be that philosophers have taken Sextus' ostensible rejection of doxastic commitment in *PH* to leave little to motivate the ascription of [AP] to *PH*, and that this has been true even of those philosophers, such as Bett, who find much evidence to motivate the ascription of [AP] to *M*, as we shall see. If, however, the case for ascribing [AP] to *M* is as strong as philosophers such as Bett claim it to be, then one might wonder why there is such a widespread proclivity to reconcile the apparent conflict between the alleged [ES] of *PH*, on the one hand, and the alleged [AP] of *M*, on the other hand, by attributing [ES] both to *PH* and to *M*, while there exists no such proclivity to proceed in the converse manner, by attributing [AP] both to *PH* and to *M*. One hopes that our examination of this matter might yield a plausible explanation of this curious fact.

Let us now turn to consideration of the broad class of views on which *PH* and *M* are inconsistent. As I intimated above, there is one subclass of views under this

⁵ I refer to it as "Aenesideman Pyrrhonism," since this view is most closely associated with Aenesidemus, a Pyrrhonian who preceded Sextus, and whom Bett believes to be the inspiration for the Pyrrhonism of *M* XI.

class that has received significant attention in the literature. This is the subclass of views according to which *PH* represents [ES], while *M* represents [AP]. The primary champion of this class of view has been Richard Bett. Bett has argued that there is a historical development of Pyrrhonian Skepticism from *M* to *PH*, with the [AP] of *M* representing a distinct, earlier development of what eventually became the more sophisticated [ES] of *PH*.

There is another logically possible subclass of views under the subclass according to which *PH* represents [ES], while *M* represents [AP]. This is the subclass of views according to which there is a historical development of Pyrrhonian Skepticism from *PH* to *M* (i.e., the converse of Bett's position). This view has, hitherto, gone undefended. One might suspect that the same—or a similar—proclivity in favor of [ES] as that indicated above may, in this case, suggest a presumption in favor of the [ES] of *PH* as the more developed, or more sophisticated, position relative to the [AP] of *M*. As above, however, one might wonder why this is so, and whether it ought to be. Of course, we may find that there is sufficient non-philosophical evidence—perhaps textual evidence—to establish the historical order of the two works. But, barring such evidence, it would seem to be equally possible that [AP] developed from [ES] as that [ES] developed from [AP]. At the very least, one might wish to argue against the presumption (to the extent that such a presumption exists), that [ES] is more sophisticated, philosophically, than [AP], regardless of the order of their historical development.

Finally, there is another subclass of logically possible views that falls under the broad class of views on which *PH* and *M* are inconsistent, though it is hardly worth mentioning. This is the subclass of views on which *PH* represents [AP], while *M* represents [ES]. Unsurprisingly, this view has, hitherto, gone undefended, and will almost certainly remain so, for the weight of evidence appears to be firmly

against any such view. Nonetheless, it is interesting to note that such a view may, in fact, be plausible to the extent that any argument is successful (or equally successful) in attributing [ES] both to *PH* and to *M*, and to the extent that any argument is successful (or equally successful) in attributing [AP] both to *PH* and to *M*. For then, it may be possible (depending on the natures of these arguments) to combine the (possibly circumscribed) argument in favor of attributing [AP] to *PH* with the (possibly circumscribed) argument in favor of attributing [ES] to *M*. In itself, this would be an odd thing to do. However, the existence of this strategy might suggest a potential *reductio ad absurdum* against at least some attempts to argue for consistency between *PH* and *M* that can be shown to be successful to the same degree, given the available evidence.

4.3 Sextus' Historical Development

Bett's claim is that, in *M* XI, Sextus argues for the conclusion that nothing is by nature good or bad. This is, *prima facie*, a negative Dogmatic claim, which is to say that it commits the claimant to a belief that something is not the case. A positive Dogmatic claim, by contrast, would simply be a claim that something is the case (Perin 2010, 2–3). In a sense, this distinction is an artificial one, since all claims (whether positive or negative) that commit their claimants to beliefs of any kind are equally Dogmatic. However, the distinction between positive and negative Dogmatic claims is a useful device for clarifying the precise view for which Bett argues.

In addition to the positive/negative distinction with respect to claims, the aforementioned practical/theoretical distinction is particularly significant to the present debate. If the claim, "Nothing is by nature good or bad" is taken to be a

theoretical claim, then even those who read *PH* as endorsing a kind of mitigated [ES] will find Bett's interpretation of *M XI* to be inconsistent with *PH*. Conversely, if the claim at issue is taken to be a practical one, then Bett's interpretation presents yet another potential divide between the champions of mitigated versus unmitigated readings of Sextus *qua* Epistemological Skeptic.

But is the claim that nothing is by nature good or bad a theoretical or a practical claim? One might think that questions about whether things are good or bad (in a general sense) are deeply practical ones. While this might be true of ordinary claims that concern goodness and badness and that are of crucial importance in the conduct of everyday life, such as "He is a good man," or "This law is bad," we must attend to the distinct structure of the claim at issue. The claim is that *nothing* is by nature good or bad. The claims concerning goodness and badness that concern us in daily life are claims about whether a *given thing* is good or bad. It is these claims that allow us to pursue beneficial things and avoid dangerous ones, while managing complex systems of material organization and social cooperation. However, the claim at issue is a claim about *everything*. Moreover, the claim at issue is about whether everything is *by nature* good or bad. The claims about goodness and badness that concern us in our daily lives are about whether something is good or bad *in the present circumstances, for some purpose, for a particular individual*, and so forth. In other words, what we care about in daily life are the *relative* goodness and badness of things according to whether they fit various particular human aims and purposes. The claim at issue is very different. It concerns whether anything is good or bad *in relation to everyone*. As Sextus writes:

Well now, if there is anything by nature good, and there is anything by nature bad, this thing ought to be common to all and to be good or bad for everyone. For just as fire, being by nature warming, warms everyone and does not warm some but chill others, and in the same

way as snow, which chills, does not chill some people but warm others, but chills everyone equally, so that which is by nature good ought to be good for everyone, and not good for some but not good for others. . . . So that if there is anything by nature good, this is good in relation to everyone, and if there is anything by nature bad, this is bad in relation to everyone. But nothing is good or bad in a way which is common to all, as we will establish; therefore there is nothing by nature good or bad. (*M* XI 69-71)

It is important to note that even a claim of the form, “*x* is by nature good/bad,” where *x* is a discrete object, is implicated in this issue, even though it was not implicated in the former issue.

These differences between the claim at issue and the claims of everyday life speak strongly in favor of the view that the claim at issue is a theoretical one. To those who believe that Pyrrhonian Sceptics remain uncommitted to theoretical beliefs, it is significant and surprising, then, that Sextus should appear to endorse the claim that nothing is by nature good or bad, given that Sceptics are ostensibly, according to Sextus in both *PH* and *M*, not committed to any beliefs about theoretical matters, as we saw above. If Sextus does indeed characterize Sceptics as suspending judgment on all theoretical matters (and, indeed, on all matters *tout court*), one would expect that Sextus should instead consistently endorse the position, in *M* XI, that the Sceptic suspends judgment on whether anything is by nature good or bad.

However, Sextus flouts this expectation and goes on to claim something even more surprising, viz., that the acceptance of the negative Dogmatic claim that nothing is, by nature, good or bad is crucially important to the Sceptic’s attainment of tranquility (*M* XI 118, 130, 140). This appears to reveal an even deeper chasm between *PH* and *M* XI than what might have been previously thought to exist, since, in *PH*, tranquility is said to follow from suspension of judgment rather than from the acceptance of any claim (I 25–30). To accept the Dogmatic claim that *p*

(as opposed to $\neg p$) is entirely incompatible with suspending judgment on whether p or $\neg p$. Thus, if Bett's interpretation of the texts is correct, Sextus directly and openly contradicts himself between *M XI* and *PH*. Bett's proposed explanation for this is, ultimately, that there was a historical progression from the Aenesidemian (Dogmatic) Pyrrhonism of *M* to the more developed Sextan (Skeptical) Pyrrhonism of *PH* (Bett 1997, xxxi–xxxiii).

Yet, as Bett (1997) points out, and as we have seen, Sextus claims repeatedly in *M XI* that the Skeptic “suspends judgment about everything” (ἐποχή περὶ πάντων) (144, 160, 168). Bett writes:

Unless Sextus is very confused indeed, it follows that the notion of suspension of judgment is also to be understood in *M XI* in a different, weaker sense than that in which it occurs in *PH*. And such a sense is not too difficult to discern. The sceptic of *M XI* suspends judgement in the sense that he neither issues nor commits himself to any assertions claiming to specify the nature of things. The denial that anything is by nature good or bad does not violate suspension of judgement in this sense (to deny that X is by nature good is not to assert that X is by nature *other than* good). (xviii)

Bett is correct that some explanation must be given, lest we be forced to conclude that Sextus is deeply confused. However, his proposed explanation is problematic for four important reasons.

Firstly, Bett argues that this “different, weaker” sense of suspension of judgment is also one according to which the Skeptic stands apart from all Dogmatists but does so by suspending judgment only about the various positive accounts of what is, by nature, good or bad. Under this interpretation, when Sextus claims that Skeptics suspend judgment about everything, the universe of discourse denoted by “everything” is restricted to the universe of positive (Dogmatic) views.⁶

⁶ I place the adjective “Dogmatic” in parentheses here in order to clarify that these views are Dogmatic, but it is unclear whether any positive view could, in the present dispute, fail to be Dogmatic. A “positive Skeptical view” is (again, in the present dispute) unfathomable. However,

However, this restriction is, by itself, insufficient to set the Skeptic apart from all Dogmatists, since there are possible Dogmatic views according to which nothing is by nature good or bad. Since such views are possible, it follows that the Skeptic is not distinct, in principle, from all Dogmatists. For this reason, Bett takes Sextus' skepticism in *M XI* to be further restricted in that it distinguishes the Skeptic only from actual, contemporaneous Dogmatists. This requires that there were no actual Dogmatic ethical situationalists⁷ claiming that nothing is by nature good or bad (or that Sextus did not recognize them as such). Bett (1997, xiv) seems to think that this assumption is warranted since he states that "any constructive ethical theorist in antiquity would have been committed [to the claim] that certain things are good by nature and certain other things are bad by nature."⁸

These further restrictions might be seen as excessively weakening Sextus' position in *M XI*. Indeed, such a reaction would seem to be well-justified, given the frailty of any philosophical position that relies so heavily on the contingent composition of one's contemporaneous interlocutors. After all, the heavily restricted interpretation of Sextus' view in *M XI* would be largely identical to some Dogmatic views in contemporary metaethical discourse. Moreover, there have been actual moral skeptics since Sextus' time.

Nonetheless, Bett's restrictions are not wholly unwarranted, for several reasons. It is well-known that Pyrrhonian Skepticism is a highly dialectical philosophical position. By this, I mean that Pyrrhonian Skeptics frequently tailor their

in the broader dispute over the extent of the Skeptic's doxastic commitments, as we are by now well aware, some argue that Skeptics do hold some positive views. I henceforth omit the adjective "Dogmatic" from this phrase for the sake of brevity, though it should be understood that the caveats outlined here continue to apply.

⁷ I owe this descriptive term to Machuca (2011).

⁸ The key here is whether Bett's use of the term "constructive" makes a distinction between Skeptics, on the one hand, and "constructive" philosophers, on the other, or whether the term makes a distinction between different kinds of Dogmatic philosopher.

arguments to the particular philosophers or schools whom they wish to oppose with those respective arguments (see Section 2.1). Perhaps the Skeptic's apparent Dogmatism is simply an instance of this phenomenon. (But if it is, then doesn't this leave open the possibility that the Skeptic is not committed to the view that nothing is by nature good or bad—that it is simply another means of meeting their opponents' claims, all of whom happen to be committed to a view that something or other is by nature good or bad? We will return to this question below.)

In addition, Sextus repeatedly states that the Skeptics employ a multitude of arguments of varying strengths in response to Dogmatic arguments of varying strengths—some of which are admittedly feeble (*PH* III 280-281). Thus, it may well be that the claim that nothing is by nature good or bad is an admittedly feeble claim meant to oppose what (at least some) Skeptics take to be a common feeble Dogmatic assumption. In conjunction with this, the Skeptics have a toolbox of catch-all modes and arguments designed to work in highly generalized and abstract circumstances. The most prominent examples are the Five Modes of Agrippa, which are best appreciated when taken to form a single, general system capable of handling any possible claim (see Sections 2.2–3.4). Another, perhaps infamous, example is the “arguments yet to be” argument.

When someone propounds to us an argument we cannot refute, we say to him: “Before the founder of the school to which you adhere was born, the argument of the school, which is no doubt sound, was not yet apparent, although it was really there in nature. In the same way, it is possible that the argument opposing the one you have just propounded is really there in nature but is not yet apparent to us; so we should not yet assent to what is now thought to be a powerful argument.” (*PH* I 33–34)

There are several variations of this argument, some of which are quite amusing. At *PH* II 40, for example, Sextus argues that since there are infinite degrees of possible cleverness, we should refrain from assenting even to the judgment of someone who

is, at any given moment, the cleverest person ever to have lived, since it is always possible that an even cleverer person will be born in the future. Hence, we should wait for the latter's judgment. (Of course, we will end up waiting a rather long time, since once she is born, we will say that there may yet be an *even cleverer* person who will be born after *her*, and so on *ad infinitum*.)⁹

The second major problem with Bett's proposal is that there is simply no coherent sense of "suspension of judgment" that entails refraining from specifying the nature of things but not refraining from denying that things bear a certain property by nature, for denying that things bear a certain property by nature is itself a way of specifying their nature. One might suppose that to suspend judgment, in Bett's sense, about whether anything is by nature good or bad ought to entail that I suspend judgment about all claims that positively specify the natures of things with respect to being good or bad. It would follow from this that I suspend judgment about, e.g., the proposition that virtue is by nature good. Since Bett's form of suspension of judgment is designed to be compatible with the belief that nothing is by nature good or bad, suppose that I do, in fact, also hold this latter belief. It follows from this latter belief that I believe, e.g., that it is not the case that virtue is by nature good or bad. However, if I believe that it is not the case that virtue is by nature good or bad, then I believe that the proposition that virtue is by nature good is false. But this is incompatible with my suspending judgment about the proposition that virtue is by nature good. If I believe that this proposition is false, then, far from suspending judgment about it, I have a precise and articulable doxastic attitude toward it (indeed, a Dogmatic one). Whatever we might like to call this attitude, it clearly cannot be a form of suspension of judgment.

⁹ In another variation, Sextus argues that even if we cannot find dispute about a matter among our own people, "we should say that possibly there is dispute about these matters too among nations unknown to us" (*PH* III 233).

Bett is correct in saying that to deny that x is by nature good is not to assert that x is by nature other than good, but this is beside the point. The point is that to deny that x is by nature good is to assert that x is not by nature good, and this latter assertion is plainly one that specifies the nature of x to a certain extent. If it were not, then it would remain an open question, on the assumption of the truth of this assertion, whether x is by nature good, just as there remain open questions whether, for any F , x is by nature F .

In case it is still in doubt that negated assertions about the natures of things specify the natures of things, consider an indefinitely long disjunctive assertion, where each disjunct is a negated assertion that states that, for a unique F , x is not by nature F . If this disjunctive assertion rules out every property in the relevant universe of discourse except one, it will be maximally specifying. Indeed, it will be equivalent, in the extent to which it specifies the nature of x , to, as Bett put it, an “assertion claiming to specify the nature” of x . Hence, Bett’s attempt to formulate an alternative, weaker sense of suspension of judgment relies on an ultimately illusory distinction between positive and negative specifications of the natures of things.

Even if we ignore this serious shortcoming of Bett’s view, there is a third important reason that his alternative sense of suspension of judgment is problematic. As Bett acknowledges, in *M* VII–X, Sextus repeatedly indicates that suspension of judgment consists in refraining from holding any belief about whether the object under discussion exists (*M* VII 380; VIII 118–119, 258, 298, 363, 380, 428, 477; IX 191, 194; X 6, 69, 168).¹⁰ Bett (1997, xxx) offers two possible explanations for this. The first is that “Sextus was working with sources from different periods in the logical and physical parts of his treatise, on the one hand, and in the ethi-

¹⁰ See also Bett (1997, xxix–xxx) and Machuca (2011, 158).

cal part, on the other,” and that the sources closer to [AP] were those used in the composition of *M XI*, while the sources used in the composition of *M VII-X* had already developed beyond [AP].

However, Bett (1997, xxx) seems dissatisfied with this explanation, pointing out that it “attributes to Sextus a depressingly low level of autonomy over, or comprehension of, what he was doing in this work [i.e., *M VII–XI*].” He instead prefers the following explanation: Sextus, in *M XI*, is committed to what Bett calls the Recognition Requirement, which states that “nothing can really be good or bad unless it is recognized as good or bad by the person or persons for whom it is good or bad” (xii–xxx). Furthermore, *M XI* is committed¹¹ to what Bett calls the Universality Requirement, which is the view that nothing is “really, or by nature, a certain way unless it is that way universally, or without qualification” (xiv–xxxi).¹² From these two commitments, it follows that if a given type of thing is not universally recognized as good or bad, then “that type of thing cannot be by nature good or bad.” It in turn follows from this that if nothing is universally recognized as good or bad, as Bett takes Sextus to believe, then nothing is by nature good or bad. Since it is not necessary to have access to some true underlying reality—but merely to people’s opinions—in order to reach this conclusion, Bett argues, it is not a conclusion about which the Skeptic must suspend judgment.

Bett (1997) acknowledges that the foregoing argument will not work if the Skeptic suspends judgment about the Recognition Requirement itself. While he states that it is not necessarily the case that the Skeptic of *M XI* suspends judgment about the Recognition Requirement, he states that it is most likely the case that the Skeptic of *PH* does suspend judgment about the Recognition Requirement (xxxi).

¹¹ Curiously, Bett states that this is peculiar neither to good and bad, nor to Sextus (xxx).

¹² Machuca (2011, 148–176) refers to the Universality Requirement as principle Π.

This difference may thus serve as an explanation for the alleged difference in the character of Pyrrhonism between *PH* and *M XI*.

Unlike the situation in ethics, Bett (1997) tentatively suggests, the subject matters of logic and physics are such that one cannot make a definite judgment as to the existence of any given thing without “commit[ting] oneself to assertions about the ‘non-evident’ properties of things.” This is why Sextus makes no mention of the Recognition Requirement in *M VII-X*, and this is why, unlike the situation in ethics, Skeptics must suspend judgment about all assertions made in the areas of logic and physics (xxx).

However, there are serious difficulties with Bett’s further explanation here. As Machuca (2011) finds, there is no indication that the various Greek forms Sextus uses for “suspension of judgment” (ἐποχή, ἐπέχειν, ἐπέχω), “indeterminacy” (ἀοριστα, ἀοριστεῖν), “affirmation” (τιθέναι), or “denial” (αἶρειν, ἀναρπεῖν) are used differently between *M XI PH I*. Their usage and meaning is consistent across both texts. Machuca concludes that “in both [*M*] XI and *PH I* Sextus says that the Skeptic suspends judgment and refrains from making determinations, which means to refrain from accepting or abolishing anything” (159). If suspension of judgment in both *M XI* and *PH I* entails refraining from accepting or abolishing anything, then there appear to be inconsistencies not only between *M XI* and *PH*, but also within *M XI* itself. For it is within *M XI* that the Skeptic is said to accept that nothing is by nature good or bad, contrary to suspension of judgment.

The fourth and final reason that Bett’s proposal is problematic is that, as Machuca (2011, 161–163) argues, it is simply implausible that Sextus would employ key technical terms in two completely different senses within the same work without giving any indication to his readers that he is doing so. Indeed, it is ironic that, in seeking to avoid the conclusion that Sextus exhibits “a depressingly low level

of autonomy over, or comprehension of, what he was doing in [*M* VII-XI],” Bett actually ends up attributing to Sextus precisely this.

One might hypothesize that Sextus did, indeed, explain to his readers that he was employing two different senses of suspension of judgment in the lost portion of Sextus’ work that preceded *M* VII-XI. However, this hypothesis is problematic for two reasons. The first is that it is simply methodologically improper to invoke a lost text in this manner. The second reason is that, given that the lost portion of the work must have been concerned with Pyrrhonism in general, it must have been consistent both with *M* VII-X and *M* XI (Machuca 2011, 161–163). However, at *M* XI 144, Sextus writes:

Hence, such being the difference in the objects, we have already established the fact that the only person who conducts himself without disturbance in the matter of the things which according to opinion are good and bad is he who suspends judgment about everything—both earlier, when we discussed the Skeptical end, and at present, when we showed that it is not possible to be happy while supposing that anything is by nature good or bad.

“Earlier” here is referring to the lost portion of the work, and Sextus is here indicating that, in the lost portion of the work, it was stated that the end (τέλος) of Pyrrhonism, viz., tranquility (ἀταραξία), is attained only via suspension of judgment about everything (ἐποχή περὶ πάντων). Thus, if Sextus were indeed operating with two distinct senses of ἐποχή, it would have to be the case that, in the lost portion of the work, he delineated two distinct paths to ἀταραξία—one corresponding to each of the distinct forms of ἐποχή. As Machuca puts it, “In the logical and physical parts of philosophy, ἀταραξία is attained by adopting a kind of ἐποχή which, insofar as it is universal, is incompatible with all types of assertions, whereas in the ethical part ἀταραξία is attained by adopting a kind of ἐποχή which, although being universal, is compatible with both negative and relativized assertions” (162).

Furthermore, Machuca (2011, 162) points out, *M* VII 345 indicates that, in the lost portion of the work, Sextus describes the Ten Modes of Aenesidemus, which are intended to induce ἐποχή. To accept Bett's proposal would again require the assumption that, in the lost portion of the work, Sextus delineates a special kind of ἐποχή that is induced by the ethical mode (*PH* I 145), where this form of ἐποχή is distinct from the forms of ἐποχή induced by the other nine modes. It is highly unlikely that Sextus employed such vastly different conceptions of ἐποχή and ἀταραξία, given that we have no indication whatsoever that Sextus understands there to be different senses of these words.

I find the four major problems with Bett's proposal argued for here to be insurmountable. The correct explanation for the apparent inconsistencies between *PH* III and *M* XI—and within *M* XI itself—cannot be wholly accounted for by a story of historical development from one distinct form of Pyrrhonism to another.

4.4 The Argument for Consistency

Bett sees as the only explanation for Sextus' repeated claim in *M* XI that the Skeptic suspends judgment about everything the notion that a weaker sense of suspension of judgment is being employed in *M* XI than in *PH*. Even Machuca (2011, 162–163) is prepared to accept that “[*M*] XI contains elements of a negative dogmatism which are in conflict with a thoroughgoing suspension of judgment and which may be deemed ‘relics’ of an earlier form of skepticism.” By contrast, I contend that Sextus is, in fact, employing the same sense of ἐποχή throughout both *PH* and *M*. The key to accounting for the apparent inconsistencies between and within these works is to come to a full understanding of precisely how ἐποχή operates.

As we know, one of the Skeptic's primary methods for inducing *ἐποχή* is by producing equipollence (*ἰσοσθένεια*) by setting up arguments of equal strength both pro and contra any given object of inquiry.¹³ Typically, the arguments on both sides are unwittingly furnished by rival Dogmatic schools. However, when the Skeptic has the need or the desire (either because no suitable Dogmatic views have been proffered, or simply for the sake of adding variety to the arguments employed), the Skeptic constructs her own argument to be used in generating *ἰσοσθένεια*. Of course, the Skeptic does not assent to her own argument simply because she constructed it. Indeed, such arguments will often be nonfallaciously *ad hominem* in nature, relying on assumptions that Dogmatists openly accept.¹⁴

My suggestion, therefore, is that Sextus, in an attempt to induce *ἐποχή*, was in fact using Aenesidemus' Dogmatic view—that nothing is by nature good or bad—in order to generate *ἰσοσθένεια*. It was necessary for him to do this precisely because no Dogmatic contemporary of his defended the view that nothing is by nature good or bad. Since all Dogmatists of the time were committed to something or other being good or bad by nature, the Sceptics were left to their own devices in constructing arguments for this position, that they might use them in opposing all Dogmatic views to the effect that something is by nature good or bad.¹⁵

¹³ See Section 1.4. Note that I am here speaking loosely. The Skeptic's ability is the ability to set up oppositions among things, and it is these oppositions that may or may not be equipollent. Moreover, suspension of judgment follows involuntarily from equipollence. Since it would be cumbersome to repeat this entire account at each step, I will be referring to it in a more approximate manner, with the hope that the reader bears the details in mind.

¹⁴ As I argued in Chapters 2–3, while many of the arguments Sceptics employ are nonfallaciously *ad hominem*, not all of them should be understood in this way, the most notable exception being the Five Modes of Agrippa.

¹⁵ In saying that it was “necessary” for Sextus to do this, I do not mean to imply that it was the only possible dialectical means of responding to Dogmatic claims on this subject. As I explained in Section 1.2, there is disagreement over whether *PH* or *M* was written first. If *M* was written first, then it is possible that Sextus thought it necessary to use Aenesidemus' Dogmatic view in this manner because he was not yet aware of the more general modes that would be developed by Agrippa and the later Sceptics. However, even if Sextus *was* aware of more general methods of responding to the Dogmatic view that something or other is by nature good or bad, he may

This explains why Sextus states that “it will only be possible to avoid [being troubled], then, if we show to the person who is disturbed on account of his avoidance of the bad or his pursuit of the good, that there is not anything either by nature good or bad” (*M* XI 140). We must show this to the disturbed person in order to show that the matter is equipollent—that to every Dogmatic view that holds *something* to be by nature good or bad there is opposed this contrary view, that *nothing* is by nature good or bad. Likewise, this explains why Sextus, in the same passage, refers to the view that nothing is by nature good or bad as a “teaching peculiar to Skepticism.” It is “peculiar to Skepticism” in the sense that the Skeptics had to generate it, since none of their Dogmatic interlocutors had done so. Finally, this also explains why Sextus repeatedly links ἀταραξία to the proposition that nothing is by nature good or bad. It is because this proposition *does* result in ἀταραξία, but not by believing it. Rather, this proposition results in ἀταραξία indirectly, by allowing the Skeptic to suspend judgment about whether anything is by nature good or bad, thanks to the ἰσοσθένεια generated by the opposition of this proposition to the collective commitment of the Dogmatists.

Recall that, at *M* XI 118, Sextus writes that “if someone should *say* that a certain thing is not more by nature to be chosen than to be avoided, nor more to be avoided than to be chosen . . . he will live happily and without disturbance” (emphasis mine). Merely to *say* this is not to assent to it. On the other hand, to say it is a necessary part of the dialectical processes of using it as (part of) an argument in generating ἰσοσθένεια. Recall further that Sextus continues, in this same passage, writing that one will be

freed from the trouble associated with the opinion that something
bad or good is present. Indeed, this will come to him *from his thinking*

have simply wanted to introduce further variety into the Skeptical arsenal in the form of a *specific* equipollent view.

nothing good or bad by nature. Therefore it is not possible to live happily if one conceives certain things to be good or bad. [emphasis mine]

While the participle “thinking” might still seem to suggest assent, there is no reason to suppose this is so. “This will come to him from his thinking nothing good or bad by nature” is equally likely to mean (a) “This will come to him as a result of his holding the belief that nothing is good or bad by nature” as (b) “This will come to him as a result of his not holding the belief that anything is good or bad by nature.” This is because both possibilities succeed in preventing us from holding the opinion, in any given situation, that something is present that is good or bad by nature. If, following (a), I hold the belief that nothing is good or bad by nature, then I will not hold the opinion, in any situation, that something is present that is good or bad by nature, since I believe that no such thing exists. If, following (b), I lack all beliefs to the effect that anything is good or bad by nature, then I will again not hold the opinion, in any situation, that something is present that is good or bad by nature, since I do not hold a belief in any such thing’s existence.

Moreover, Sextus’ conclusion is actually that ἀταραξία is closed to those who conceive certain things to be good or bad. In other words: if one conceives certain things to be good or bad, then one will not attain ἀταραξία. This does not imply that holding the belief that nothing is by nature good or bad is the only way to attain ἀταραξία. The other obvious possibility is suspending judgment about whether anything is by nature good or bad. If anything, then, this passage is neutral evidence with respect to my proposal.

That Sextus is simply affirming, in *M XI*, through his repeated statements that the Skeptic suspends judgment about everything, that he is employing the same sense of suspension of judgment that he employs elsewhere, would be apposite given the probable recognition on Sextus’ part that potential ambiguity exists in *M XI*. If

the intention behind his affirmation of unmitigated suspension of judgment was to forestall potential misunderstandings that might result from his seeming endorsement of a negative Dogmatic claim, it is indeed ironic that this very affirmation has instead created the confusion it was intended to prevent. In any case, it is plausible that Sextus foresaw the confusion that might ensue from his apparent endorsement of a negative Dogmatic position (among other arguments advanced in *M* XI) and sought to remind his readers that the Skeptic's suspension of judgment is, indeed, universal. We should, in general, require considerable motivation, and the exhaustion of plausible alternatives, if asked to reinterpret such universal statements as being considerably restricted, as Bett's interpretation requires.

Part of appreciating the potential for unity between *PH* and *M* involves taking seriously Sextus' trademark self-referential warnings against interpreting the Skeptic's words to indicate that she actually holds any beliefs that might ostensibly be implicated by her utterances.

Not even in uttering the Skeptical phrases about unclear matters—for example, “In no way more,” or “I determine nothing,” or one of the other phrases which we shall later discuss—do they [i.e., Skeptics] hold beliefs. For if you hold beliefs, then you posit as real the things you are said to hold beliefs about; but Skeptics posit these phrases not as necessarily being real. For they suppose that, just as the phrase “Everything is false” says that it too, along with everything else, is false (and similarly for “Nothing is true”), so also “In no way more” says that it too, along with everything else, is no more so than not so, and hence it cancels itself along with everything else. And we say the same of the other Skeptical phrases. Thus, if people who hold beliefs posit as real the things they hold beliefs about, while Skeptics utter their own phrases in such a way that they are implicitly cancelled by themselves, then they cannot be said to hold beliefs in uttering them. (*PH* I 14–15)

The Skeptical phrases represent a target upon which Dogmatists are perennially tempted to pounce. Upon hearing the Skeptic utter a phrase like, “I determine

nothing,” the Dogmatist’s first instinct is often to proclaim, “A-*ha!* So you *do* believe something, namely that you determine nothing!” (Slightly more attentive Dogmatists delight further in the observation that this belief is self-refuting.) But as Sextus here makes clear, these phrases, properly understood, do not provide a suitable target. For the Skeptic, in uttering them, is not “positing” them “as real” as one does with ordinary predications. Instead, the Skeptic applies them also to themselves, as if saying, “I determine nothing—not even this (viz., that I determine nothing),” or “Nothing is true, including this very statement.” Sextus likens the mechanisms by which these phrases operate to those of self-purging drugs.¹⁶

In the case of all the Skeptical phrases, you should understand that we do not affirm definitely that they are true—after all, we say that they can be destroyed by themselves, being cancelled along with what they are applied to, just as purgative drugs do not merely drain the humours from the body but drive themselves out too along with the humours. We say too that we do not use the phrases strictly, making clear the objects to which they are applied, but indifferently and, if you like, in a loose sense—for it is unbecoming for a Skeptic to fight over phrases, especially as it works to our advantage that not even these phrases are said to signify anything purely but only relatively, i.e. relatively to the Skeptics. Besides, you must remember that we do not use these phrases about all objects universally, but about what is unclear and investigated in dogmatic fashion, and that we say what is apparent to us and do not make firm assertions about the nature of externally existing things. (*PH* I 206–8)

Here Sextus makes it abundantly clear that one cannot directly infer a Skeptic’s commitments from her speech acts, since the use of Skeptical “phrases” is not only occasionally, but typically, either self-purging or non-Dogmatically loose. In other words, when the Skeptic appears to be making a Dogmatic assertion, she is actually either just speaking loosely (in the ordinary sense of employing a locution that merely approximates the semantic content the speaker wishes to express) or

¹⁶ Cf. *M* VIII 480; *DL* IX 76; Aristocles, apud Eusebius, *PE* XIV xviii 21 as cited in Annas and Barnes (2000, n. 211).

she means her Dogmatic phrase to apply also to itself such that it cancels the doxastic implicature of the utterance.

A classic example of this latter phenomenon is the phrase “Nothing is determined” (*PH* I 198-9). For this phrase to “apply to itself” means that the phrase “Nothing is determined” entails that it is not determined whether anything is determined. If nothing is determined—including whether anything is determined—then one cannot state with any degree of certainty whether anything is determined (not even that nothing is determined). In applying to itself, the phrase thus asserts nothing. The act of uttering it does, however, effectively serve to communicate the Skeptic’s lack of belief about the determination of things, and it is therefore successful as an aid to conveying an understanding of Skepticism to the listener.

But is the phrase, “Nothing is by nature good or bad” one of the “Skeptical phrases” of which Sextus wrote? While it is not explicitly mentioned by name, Sextus makes it plain that he has not provided an exhaustive list in *PH* I, and a comparison of this phrase with the ones he does mention reveals direct and striking similarities in all the most important respects. Among the phrases he discusses in *PH* I, “Everything is undetermined” (198–199), “Everything is inapprehensible” (200), and “Opposed to every account there is an equal account” (202–205) are most similar to the phrase we are considering. Each of these phrases is, *prima facie*, a Dogmatic claim about the way things are in some fundamental respect, just as is the phrase “Nothing is by nature good or bad.” Yet, Sextus explicitly treats these phrases as non-Dogmatic Skeptical tools for expressing the indeterminacy, inapprehensibility, and equipollence of things, respectively. It is plausible, then, that he means to do the same with the phrase, “Nothing is by nature good or bad.”

In what might a Skeptical explanation of this phrase consist? If we were to ask him, Sextus might tell us that this phrase, like the others, is in some sense

relativized to the Skeptic, such that it is actually about the Skeptic and what appears to her to be the case. For a Skeptic to say, “Nothing is by nature good or bad” could simply be a means for a Skeptic to deny that she holds the belief that anything is by nature good or bad, or that nothing appears to her to be by nature good or bad. This is consistent with the less mitigated (as I see it, *unmitigated*) form of Skepticism Sextus presents in *PH* I and is directly analogous to the manner in which he treats the other Skeptical phrases. Moreover, this interpretation preserves the desirable effects of refraining from holding any beliefs about things being good or bad (most prominently, the attainment of ἀταραξία) that Sextus promotes in both *PH* and *M* XI (see Section 1.4.5).

A final, but significant, benefit of my proposal is that it uncompromisingly attributes to Sextus a high degree of competence and sophistication in his authorship of both *PH* and *M*. As I argued above, Bett’s interpretation threatens to deny Sextus’ competence in more ways than one. Any reasonable principle of charity would have us prefer an alternative explanation on which we may avoid doing this.

Much of the foregoing evidence speaks to the unique character of Pyrrhonian Skepticism in general. If Skepticism is a philosophical position defined primarily by the manner in which Sceptics employ phrases and conduct their assent to claims, as I have argued, then it is distinct from most philosophical positions in that it is primarily characterized by the dialectical activity of its adherents rather than any shared set of doxastic commitments. Given this unique character, it is crucially important to our understanding of Skepticism in general that we explore every plausible avenue of interpretation in the cases of particular apparent commitments, and even more so in cases of apparent inconsistency and self-contradiction.

A The Ten Modes of Aenesidemus

Aenesidemus most likely flourished in the early or mid first century BCE (Polito 2014). He was one of the principal Skeptics to arise after Pyrrho but before Sextus, and some contemporary scholars have even suggested that he was the single greatest contributor to Skepticism throughout this period. Thus, Polito (2014, 1) writes, “It is only with Aenesidemus, in the first century BC, that a Pyrrhonist tradition came to life.”

Aenesidemus presented his Ten Modes in one of his major works, the *Outline Introduction to the Philosophy of Pyrrho* (Polito 2014, 3). Although this, along with all of Aenesidemus’ other works, is now lost, we possess three accounts of the Ten Modes from three distinct sources. The first and most comprehensive account is Sextus’ presentation of the Ten Modes at *PH* I 35–163. While Sextus attributes the Ten Modes only to “the older skeptics” in this passage, he refers to them explicitly as “the Ten Modes of Aenesidemus” at *M* VII 345. Secondly, Diogenes Laertius presents the Ten Modes and attributes them to Aenesidemus at IX 78–88, in the course of his biography of Pyrrho. Lastly (and most peculiarly), the Jewish philosopher Philo of Alexandria left a partial account of the Ten Modes at the end of his essay “On Drunkenness,” which was part of his immense commentary on the

books of the Pentateuch (Annas and Barnes 1985, 26–27).

Sextus presents the Ten Modes as follows:

1. The mode depending on the variations among animals.
2. The mode depending on the differences among humans.
3. The mode depending on the differing constitutions of the sense-organs.
4. The mode depending on circumstances.
5. The mode depending on positions and intervals and places.
6. The mode depending on admixtures.
7. The mode depending on the quantities and preparations of existing things.
8. The mode deriving from relativity.
9. The mode depending on frequent or rare encounters.
10. The mode depending on persuasions and customs and laws and beliefs in myths and Dogmatic suppositions.

Diogenes Laertius presents the same Ten Modes but in a different order than the above. This does not present a problem, however, since Sextus notes that his own ordering is used only “for the sake of argument.”

While the ordering of the Ten Modes is of no particular significance, Sextus *does* claim that the Ten Modes have a particular *structure*. In addition to the ten already listed, Sextus introduces three “superordinate” modes (I 38–39), which serve as a way of sorting the Ten Modes into groups:

- The mode deriving from the subject judging. (Superordinate to 1–4.)

- The mode deriving from the object judged. (Superordinate to 7 and 10.)
- The mode combined from both the subject judging and the object judged. (Superordinate to 5, 6, 8, and 9.)

Finally, Sextus states that these latter three modes are *in turn* subordinate to a single mode: the mode from relativity. This complete structure is illustrated in Fig. A.1. At first glance, this organizational structure appears intriguing and seems to hint

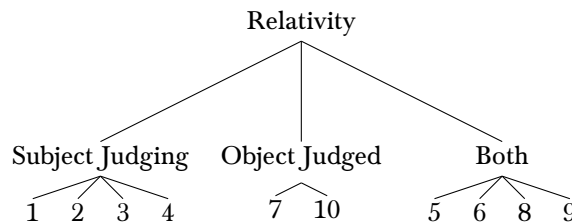


Figure A.1: The structure of the Ten Modes of Aenesidemus.

at some deeper truth regarding the Ten Modes. On closer inspection, however, it turns out to be both artificial and largely arbitrary, serving no substantive purpose in Sextus' presentation of the Ten Modes and in some cases even obscuring it, as in the case of the mode from relativity, which appears inexplicably as both superordinate and subordinate (*qua* mode 8) to the mode combined from both the subject judging and the object judged (see Annas and Barnes 1985, 25–26).

B The Two Modes

Sextus' presentation of the Two Modes is complex, and their interpretation is controversial. Therefore, let us first review the entirety of Sextus' own discussion of the Two Modes prior to attempting to analyze it:

They also offer two other modes of suspension of judgment. Since everything apprehended is thought to be apprehended either by means of itself or by means of something else, they are thought to introduce puzzlement about everything by suggesting that nothing is apprehended either by means of itself or by means of something else.

That nothing is apprehended by means of itself is, they say, clear from the dispute which has occurred among natural scientists over, I suppose, all objects of perception and of thought—a dispute which is undecidable, since we cannot use either an object of perception or an object of thought as a standard because anything we may take has been disputed and so is unconvincing.

And for the following reason they do not concede either that anything can be apprehended by means of something else. If that by means of which something is apprehended will itself always need to be apprehended by means of something else, they throw you into the reciprocal or the infinite mode; and if you should want to assume that that by means of which another thing is apprehended is itself apprehended by means of itself, then this is countered by the fact that, for the above reasons, nothing is apprehended by means of itself.

We are at a loss as to how what is in conflict could be apprehended either from itself or from something else, since the standard of truth or of apprehension is not apparent, while signs—quite apart from proof—are overthrown, as we shall learn in what follows.

(*PH* I 178–179)

First, a remark on attribution. Sextus begins by noting, “*They* also offer (Παραδιδόασι δὲ καὶ) two other modes...” (emphasis added). Here he is almost certainly referring to “the more recent Skeptics” credited at *PH* I 164 & 177 with offering the Five Modes. These Skeptics are “more recent” relative to “the older Skeptics” credited at *PH* I 36 with offering the Ten Modes (see Appendix A). Therefore, “the older Skeptics” probably included Aenesidemus, while “the more recent Skeptics” probably included Agrippa (see Section 2.2). However, it is a matter of controversy whether Agrippa himself, as opposed to another Skeptic coming after Agrippa but before Sextus, was the “more recent” Skeptical author of the Two Modes (see Barnes 1990, 116-117).

Now, it is not immediately obvious from the above passage what, precisely, the Two Modes are. The following two pairs of options are apparent candidates:

- A1. Everything apprehended is thought to be apprehended either by means of itself or by means of something else.
- A2. Nothing is apprehended by means of itself or by means of something else.
- B1. Nothing is apprehended by means of itself.
- B2. Nothing is apprehended by means of something else.

The difficulty encountered by pair A lies in the fact that A1 does not take the form of a typical Skeptical mode. In particular, it seems to describe a conventional Dogmatic *assumption*, whereas Skeptical modes typically describe some means of *undermining* such assumptions. All other Skeptical modes we have encountered are the sorts of things which can be *deployed* by the Skeptic to such an end. A1 fails to fit this pattern.

Hence, the more promising route lies in bifurcating A2 in order to obtain pair B. Here, we find two modes clearly suited to the function of undermining potential Dogmatic assumptions. Nonetheless, the dispensation of A1 leaves unidentified the Dogmatic assumption(s) which pair B is to target. In order for pair B to fulfill its proper role as the Two Modes, the Skeptic thus requires an assumption of her own, namely A1.

But this is an “assumption” on behalf of the Skeptic only nominally, for Sextus is here clearly conditioning the operation of the Two Modes on an appearance-level observation about Dogmatic behavior: “Everything apprehended *is thought* [by Dogmatists] to be apprehended either by means of itself or by means of something else.” In other words, since it appears to Sceptics that Dogmatists believe (or assume) that everything apprehended is apprehended either by means of itself or by means of something else,¹ it appears to follow that every alleged Dogmatic apprehension can be undermined by showing that it cannot in fact be apprehended either by means of itself or by means of something else, and this is precisely what the Scylla and Charybdis of the Two Modes, as made explicit by pair B, accomplishes.

Barnes (1990) argues that this system of “two modes” in fact constitutes a misnamed attempt to reduce the Five Modes of Agrippa to a system of *three* modes—disputational, regressive, and reciprocal²—without sacrificing the power of the Five Modes (116–119). Barnes presents his interpretation of this system of three modes as a diagram (reproduced here as Fig. B.1), which he explains as follows:

¹ Sextus is not clear about whether *all* or only *some* Dogmatists appear to him to be guilty of this. But this need not pose a problem to the Two Modes, since Sextus need not claim that the Two Modes apply to *all* Dogmatists, as opposed merely to those Dogmatists who harbor the vulnerable assumption (which is likely to be a rather high proportion, in any case).

² Barnes refers to these three modes as “διαφρονία,” “regression,” and “reciprocity,” respectively.

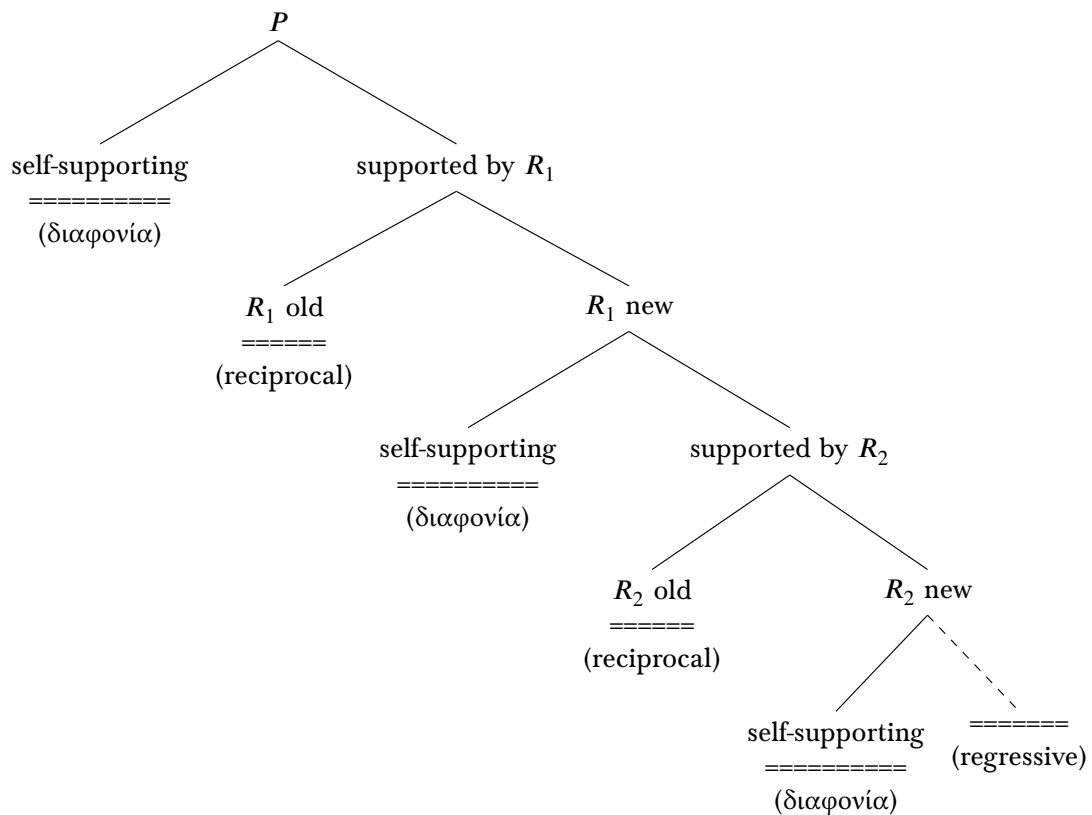


Figure B.1: A reproduction of Barnes' (1990d) diagram of the "System of Two Modes" (118).

Start with the Dogmatist's claim—with *any* claim—at the top of the diagram. The possible paths which the Dogmatist may take are marked by the downward diagonal lines. When an item appears in the diagram for the first time, it is called 'new'; otherwise it is old. When a diagonal is blocked by horizontal bars (=====), the meaning is that, so far as this line of argument goes, the Dogmatist must suspend judgement. Since all possible paths in the diagram are eventually blocked by horizontal bars, the Dogmatist must suspend judgement in all cases (see [Fig. B.1]). (117–118)

I discuss the significance of Barnes' interpretation of the Two Modes to his broader project (and to my own) in Section 3.1.

C The Eight Aetiological Modes

Immediately following his discussion of the Two Modes (see Appendix B), Sextus presents “eight modes in accordance with which [Aenesidemus] thinks he can refute and assert to be unsound every dogmatic causal explanation” (180). The enumeration of these eight modes occupies *PH* I 181–184, as follows:

1. The mode in accordance with which causal explanations, which are all concerned with what is unclear, have no agreed confirmation from what is apparent.
2. Some people often give an explanation in only one way, although there is a rich abundance enabling them to explain the object of investigation in a variety of ways.
3. They assign causes which reveal no order to things which take place in an ordered way.
4. When they have grasped how apparent things take place, they deem that they have apprehended how non-apparent things take place.
5. Just about all of them give explanations according to their own hypotheses about the elements, not according to any common and agreed approaches.

6. They often adopt what is concordant with their own hypotheses but reject what runs counter to them, even when this has equal plausibility.
7. They often assign causes which conflict not only with what is apparent but also with their own hypotheses.
8. Often when what seems to be apparent is just as puzzling as what is being investigated, they rest their exposition about what is puzzling upon what is just as puzzling.

Given that the Five Modes of Agrippa (and, on certain assumptions, the Two Modes) are sufficient to handle every possible claim (see Sections 2.2–3.4), why introduce the Eight Aetiological Modes at all? Sextus explains that Skeptics do so because Dogmatists “pride themselves on [their particular causal explanations] especially” (180). This lends support to the idea that the Eight Aetiological Modes are superfluous in the sense that they are not strictly required by Skeptics to set out any of the equipollent oppositions necessary to induce suspension of judgment in themselves.

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