

*The Oxford Handbook of Skepticism*, ed. J. Greco (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).

## THE PYRRHONIAN PROBLEMATIC

MARKUS LAMMENRANTA

Current discussion about skepticism focuses on Cartesian skepticism. There is an older and perhaps more fundamental skeptical problematic documented in the works of Sextus Empiricus. It is at least arguable that this is the problematic that Descartes himself and other early modern philosophers responded to. However, it is not at all clear what this problematic – the Pyrrhonian problematic – really is. I will give a rational reconstruction of it, considering three possible interpretations of the problematic, and argue that only the last one provides a serious skeptical challenge and explains the huge influence that the problematic had on early modern philosophy.<sup>1</sup>

In contemporary analytical epistemology, skeptical problems are taken to be theoretical in nature. They are composed of skeptical arguments for the impossibility of knowledge or justified belief. Rather than making us accept the conclusion, these arguments teach us something about knowledge or justified belief. They offer test cases for our theories of knowledge and justification. Because the conclusion is intuitively implausible, our theories must explain what goes wrong in the premises. Typically, the fault is seen to be in the epistemic premises. So our theory must explain why these are false, and thus how knowledge or justified belief is after all possible.<sup>2</sup>

In this tradition, the Pyrrhonian problem is identified with a skeptical argument purporting to show that it is impossible for finite beings, like us, to have any justified beliefs. This is the argument from the infinite regress of reasons. Various theories of justification try to explain what is wrong with this argument, and how finite beings can have justified beliefs.

There is another common way of understanding the Pyrrhonian problematic. As the scholars of Hellenistic philosophy emphasize, ancient skeptics used to argue both for and against a proposition. Because the arguments are of equal force, we are unable to decide whether the proposition is true or false. Here the problem is seen to be practical or psychological rather than theoretical. We are unable to decide between the alternatives, because they are equally plausible. It is the skeptics' ability to find such equipollent oppositions that leads them to suspend all belief.

There is a third interpretation not so fully defended in the literature as the other two. According to this interpretation, the problem is dialectical rather than theoretical or psychological. The problem is that we seem to be unable to resolve disagreements about the nature of reality without begging the question at issue. This problem does not presuppose any theoretical assumptions about knowledge or justification, but neither does it concern a purely psychological inability to decide between conflicting propositions. It just assumes that, in order to rationally resolve a disagreement, we should not beg the question.

When Sextus wrote his texts, ancient skepticism had already had a long history with a variety of different positions. That is why it may be hard to find a coherent description of a single skeptical problem there. Perhaps, there are several such problems, so it may not be difficult to find some

textual evidence for each of these interpretations. However, rather than Sextus's own stance, I am interested in the skeptical problems that an educated reader may find in his work and in evaluating their epistemological significance. This may help us to understand modern epistemology that ever since Descartes has tried to respond to the problems found there. But even more importantly, it may help us to see a serious skeptical problem for which we may still lack a satisfactory solution.

I will start by considering the first two interpretations, and argue that neither of them provides a serious skeptical challenge to our beliefs: neither has a tendency to induce suspension of belief that the arguments of the ancient skeptics were supposed to do. Then I will try to explicate the dialectical problem, which will prove to be a much harder problem. Only this will fully explain the skeptical crisis created by the rediscovery of Sextus's books during the Renaissance and the responses of early modern philosophers to it. I will try to show that not even contemporary analytical epistemologists have sufficient resources for resolving it.

## 1. The Regress Problem

The core of the Pyrrhonian problematic is often taken to be an argument for the impossibility of justified beliefs. This argument is found in the Five Modes of Agrippa, and it is called the regress argument. It is an argument for a very strong form of global skepticism that denies the possibility of any justified beliefs. Suspension of belief would then seem to be the appropriate attitude to every proposition: if we are not justified in believing anything, we should not believe anything.

It was once common to interpret the Pyrrhonian skeptic as himself advocating this argument, and basing her suspension of belief on its negative epistemic conclusion. This raised the accusation of self-refutation. If the conclusion of the argument is true, no one can be justified in believing anything, not even the premises of the argument itself, and thus they cannot be used to justify the conclusion. So no one can effectively argue for the conclusion that there cannot be justified beliefs. So why should anybody take the argument seriously?

Many recent scholars of Hellenistic philosophy<sup>3</sup> take this to be a misinterpretation of the dialectical strategy of ancient skeptics. The arguments of ancient skeptics are *ad hominem* arguments. They are directed at us, the dogmatists, and only use premises that we accept. The regress argument poses a problem for us, because we are inclined to accept the premises and take the argument to be valid, though we are not willing to accept the conclusion. As many contemporary epistemologists see it, a genuine skeptical problem is a kind of paradox: we are inclined to accept the premises and the denial of the conclusion, though they form an inconsistent set of propositions.<sup>4</sup>

On the other hand, Sextus says that the skeptics welcome the self-refuting nature of their arguments. Their arguments are like a ladder that we throw away once we have climbed up it, or like fire that after consuming the fuel destroys also itself.<sup>5</sup> However, as David Hume noticed, our beliefs tend to come back when we lose our reasons for giving them up. But then, the skeptic may point out, we also return to the arguments that make us to reject the beliefs once again. So the skeptical arguments create at least instability in our beliefs. This may be enough to make them a serious skeptical challenge to our beliefs.<sup>6</sup>

In order to pose a genuine paradox, the regress argument must have plausible premises. As Michael Williams points out, they should not be based on theoretical ideas that we are not bound to accept. They should be based on our ordinary intuitions about justification and knowledge.<sup>7</sup> Does the regress argument have such intuitively plausible premises? This is the standard formulation of the argument:

1. In order to be justified in believing something, one must believe it on the basis of good reasons.
2. Good reasons must themselves be justified beliefs.
3. Therefore, in order to be justified in believing something, one must believe it on the basis of an infinite number of good reasons.
4. No human being can have an infinite number of good reasons.
5. Therefore, it is humanly impossible to have justified beliefs.

Most epistemologists have not found all of the premises plausible. There are several ways of criticizing the argument. Indeed, epistemologists use the argument typically just to classify the possible theories of justification. These are distinguished by virtue of which premise or step in the argument they deny: Circular (linear) coherentists deny the step from 1 and 2 to 3, because they think that a circular chain of reasons can justify a belief. Wittgensteinian contextualists think that the chain of good reasons can terminate in beliefs that are not themselves justified, and thus deny premise 2. Foundationalists think that the chain terminates in basic beliefs that are justified but do not derive all their justification from other beliefs. They deny premise 1.

The skeptical conclusion is essentially based on the infinitist lemma (3) that only an infinite chain of reasons can justify a belief. All other theories except dogmatic infinitism deny this. Though Peter Klein, who has recently defended the position, argues that infinitism need not lead to skepticism, the skeptic has a strong position if infinitism is true. Indeed, Klein acknowledges that skepticism is a serious possibility for the infinitist.<sup>8</sup>

The regress argument thus provides a real paradox and a skeptical challenge only if infinitism is an intuitively plausible account of justification. Initially, it does not seem to be plausible. Why should we possess a concept of justification that is not applicable to any finite being? So the skeptic must do something to convince us of the truth of infinitism.

In his reconstruction of skeptical reasoning, Michael Williams appeals to our practice of giving and asking for reasons: Suppose I claim to know something. You can ask me how I know it. As a reply, I give my reasons for believing what I claim to know. But then you can ask how I know my reasons, and so on. Williams's skeptic admits that in real life this process of justification has an end. It ends when another person is satisfied with my reasons. In spite of this, Williams's skeptic insists that the regress goes on. Whether or not anybody really challenges my reasons, they can reasonably be challenged, and so I must go on giving reasons. The skeptic concludes that I do not know what I originally claimed unless I have first completed an infinite number of prior justifications, which is, of course, impossible.<sup>9</sup> But is this really the intuitive conclusion to draw from our practice of justifying knowledge claims?

Klein imagines a similar dialogue between Fred, the foundationalist, and Sally, the skeptic. Sally asks Fred his reasons for believing that *p*. Fred gives as his reason his belief that *q*. Then Sally asks his reasons for *q*, and the regress continues, until Fred gives a reason that he takes to be a

basic belief, which, according to foundationalism, is justified independently of reasons. Now Sally asks why Fred thinks that the basic belief is true. In order to avoid arbitrariness, Fred says that his basic belief has property P, and that all beliefs having P are likely to be true. But then Sally insists that the regress does not stop, and asks Fred for his reasons for the meta-beliefs that his belief has P and that beliefs having P are probably true. Klein concludes that nobody is completely justified in believing anything, because this would require going through an infinite number of reasons, but that people can still be provisionally justified in believing things, because such infinite chains are in a relevant sense available to them.<sup>10</sup>

Neither infinitist conclusion from our ordinary practices is intuitive. We see this more clearly if we think about the point of our practice of giving and asking for reasons. The point seems to be to evaluate each other as potential informants. When you claim to know something, I ask your reasons, because I want to decide whether I can trust you and learn from you. In this sort of case, I already have many beliefs about the world and your situation. I use these beliefs in evaluating your trustworthiness, and I do not expect you to justify them. So the regress may very well terminate in basic beliefs, because these are the kind of beliefs I take to be probably true in your circumstances. You need not justify them to me. This also explains why we sometimes attribute knowledge to small children and non-human animals, though they cannot justify their beliefs in any way.

If we imagine that the practice of giving and asking for reasons is conducted between the skeptic and us, the situation is different. The skeptic does not accept any beliefs as being justified or true. There is no way to convince her, because she does not accept any reasons that we could give. So there is no way out of the regress. But why should this show that it is impossible for us to have justified beliefs and knowledge? Our justificational practice does not aim at convincing the skeptic. It aims at convincing someone who already has many beliefs and is able to use these beliefs for evaluating the given reasons. The fact that we cannot justify our beliefs to the skeptic is of no epistemological importance.

So the skeptical strategy of arguing *ad hominem* from the infinite regress of reasons has no chance of succeeding. Our ordinary epistemic concepts and practices cannot be used to support it. It is thus hard to see how it could have created the skeptical crisis in early modern philosophy and played such an important role in shaping modern epistemology. Neither does it explain how the Pyrrhonian skeptics themselves became skeptics. Sextus does have a story about this, and this story seems to give us an independent skeptical problem.

## 2. The Practical Problem

Sextus starts his *Outlines of Scepticism* by distinguishing three kinds of outcomes that any inquiry may have: (1) it may result in discovery, (2) it may result in the denial of discovery and the confession that the truth cannot be discovered, (3) or the inquiry may just continue. According to Sextus, there are three kinds of philosophers corresponding to these outcomes: (1) the dogmatists think that they have discovered the truth; (2) the Academics think that the truth cannot be discovered, and (3) the skeptics continue inquiry.<sup>11</sup> If discovering the truth amounts to knowing the truth, we can say that the dogmatists think that they know the truth, the Academics deny the possibility of knowledge, and the skeptics suspend judgment both about their actually knowing anything and about the possibility of knowledge.

Here Sextus wants to distinguish real skepticism – Pyrrhonism – from Academic skepticism. The latter is itself one sort of dogmatism – negative dogmatism – because it defends the dogma that nothing can be known. Presumably this negative thesis is based on a positive epistemology: nothing can be known, because the conditions of knowledge put forth by this epistemology cannot be satisfied. So both dogmatists and Academics need an epistemology: the former need it for defending their knowledge claims, and the latter for defending their claim about the impossibility of knowledge.

Sextus ignores here the fact that the skeptics in Plato's Academy typically argue *ad hominem*: they use their opponent's, the Stoics', epistemology to argue against it. Yet, the message is clear. The Pyrrhonist neither needs nor possesses any epistemology. She suspends judgment both about the nature and possibility of knowledge. So her suspension of judgment is not based on any theory or epistemological thesis, such as infinitism. It is based rather on her inability to resolve disagreements among different dogmatists – including the disagreement about the possibility of knowledge.

This is how Sextus describes the way one becomes a skeptic:

- - Sceptics 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 judgment. And when they suspended judgment, tranquillity in matters of opinion followed fortuitously.<sup>12</sup>

According to Sextus, the skeptics were originally inquirers who were seeking truth, but who realized that there are disagreements about truth that they cannot resolve. They were therefore forced to suspend judgment. To their surprise, they achieved in this way the tranquility to which they originally aspired by trying to find the truth.

Sextus also describes skepticism as an ability:

- - 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 afterwards to tranquillity.<sup>13</sup>

So skepticism, as Sextus understands it, is not a thesis about the impossibility of knowledge or justified belief. It is an ability to find equipollent oppositions and the practice of using this ability to induce suspension of belief.

It is common to understand this account of skepticism in purely psychological terms. Thus from Julia Annas's and Jonathan Barnes's translation we get the following explanation of the relevant terms:

By equipollence we mean equality with regard to being convincing or unconvincing. Suspension of judgment is a standstill of the intellect, owing to which we neither reject nor posit anything. Tranquillity is freedom from disturbance or calmness of soul.<sup>14</sup>

This psychological interpretation is also defended in Michael Williams's article "Skepticism without Theory." He objects to the view that Pyrrhonian skepticism is based on any epistemological thesis. Pyrrhonian skepticism arises from practice. It depends on acquiring an ability, not proving or even assenting to a thesis. Skepticism is an ability to oppose any thesis or argument with a countervailing thesis or argument of equal force. Williams emphasizes that no epistemological commitments are buried in this notion of equal force, which is to be understood as equal convincingness or plausibility. There is no implication of equal evidential force.<sup>15</sup>

In spite of some textual support, this psychological interpretation makes the Pyrrhonian problem completely trivial. Of course, if there is a question with conflicting equally convincing answers, we suspend judgment about which answer is correct. For example, there seems to be no convincing reason to believe that there is an even number of stars rather than an odd number stars. What else could we do but suspend belief about the matter? But, in many cases, we do not find the answers equally convincing. We are inclined to find one of the answers more plausible than the others.

If the skeptic really finds such equally convincing oppositions everywhere, this requires that she attends only to arguments that are equally strong on both sides of the issue, and manages to forget arguments that do not balance in this way. But why should anybody try to do this? If we aim at truth, we should rather take all arguments on both sides of the issue into account, and these arguments do not typically balance. The only answer seems to be that the skeptic is convinced that she can attain tranquility only by suspending belief, and that suspension of belief requires her to do so. But such a skeptic hardly poses any problems for we who do not believe that this is the way to attain tranquility, and who are still interested in truth.

### 3. The Ten Modes

In order to induce global suspension of judgment, the Pyrrhonists have general modes – strategies or arguments – that can be used in any topic. However, these modes do not save the psychological interpretation. A closer look at these modes – especially the Ten Modes of Aenesidemus and the Five Modes of Agrippa – shows that they do not work if "equipollent dispute" is understood psychologically. I will argue that they finally reveal a genuine and serious skeptical problematic that cannot be so easily wiped out as the versions considered so far.

The Ten Modes of Aenesidemus share the following common structure:

- (1) x appears F relative to a;
- (2) x appears F\* relative to b;
- (3) x cannot be both F and F\* (F and F\* being incompatible properties);
- (4) we cannot decide whether x really is F or whether x really is F\*;
- (5) we must suspend judgment about the real nature of x.

Sextus spends most of the time giving examples of (1) and (2), thus establishing that things appear differently to different animals, to different people, in different sense organs, in different perceptual circumstances, and so on. Then, in very much the same way, he proceeds to show that we cannot decide between the conflicting appearances and concludes that we must suspend judgment.<sup>16</sup>

I have intentionally formulated the “conclusion” in an ambiguous way. Are we to understand the word “must” in a psychological and causal way, or are we to understand it as a normative must or should? Sextus’s text seems to be ambiguous on this point.

The psychological interpretation favors the former reading. It assumes that my considering the conflicting appearances and being unable to favor one over the others causes me to suspend judgment about the nature of reality. So the Ten Modes are not exactly arguments. They are rather general strategies that are supposed to help find conflicting appearances or equipollent disputes and to induce suspension of judgment causally.

If we look at the details, we see, however, that the Modes cannot work in this way. What is supposed to cause suspension of judgment, according to this view, is the fact that I find the alternatives that  $x$  is  $F$  and that  $x$  is  $F^*$  equally convincing. The problem is that the conflicting appearances that Sextus considers are not equally convincing in this way. The First Mode appeals to the fact that things appear differently to animals of different species. Of course, I am not aware of how things appear to cows or dogs, for example. So I cannot compare my appearances with their appearances and find both equally convincing. Surely I find my own appearances more convincing than those I am not even aware of. It is after all only those appearances that I am aware of that causally affect my beliefs.

Sextus is also quite aware that the dogmatists do not find the appearances of other animals and human beings as convincing as their own. He does not deny this psychological fact. His point is rather that when they prefer their own appearances to those of other animals and human beings, they make a mistake. There is something wrong with it:

For we shall not be able ourselves to decide between our own appearances and those of other animals, being ourselves a part of the dispute and for that reason more in need of someone to decide than ourselves able to judge.<sup>17</sup>

When the self-satisfied Dogmatists say that they themselves should be preferred to other humans in judging things, we know that their claim is absurd. For they are themselves a part of the dispute, and if it is by preferring themselves that they judge what is apparent, then by entrusting the judging to themselves they are taking for granted the matter being investigated before beginning the judging.<sup>18</sup>

Here, Sextus clearly thinks that the mistake of the dogmatists is a dialectical one. When dogmatists judge that their own appearances are true while those of other animals and other people are false, they simply assume what they are supposed to prove. They beg the question against their opponents’ conflicting judgments. So our inability to decide between conflicting appearances is not a psychological matter. It is an inability to do so without violating the rules of dialectic. It is an inability to resolve disagreements without begging the question at issue.

This shows that the conclusions in the Ten Modes are after all normative. We should suspend judgment, because we cannot decide between conflicting appearances without begging the question. The equipollence of oppositions is thus not a matter of equal convincingness. It is a matter of neither participant in the dispute having dialectically effective reasons for their own

positions. Neither can defend their views against the other without begging the question. Sextus suggests that we should suspend judgment in this sort of situation.

#### 4. The Modes of Agrippa

The considerations that Sextus relies on in supporting (4) are systematized in the Five Modes of Agrippa. We can see that the dialectical interpretation also fits very well with how they work. According to Sextus, every object of investigation can be brought under the following five modes:

According to the mode deriving from dispute, we find that undecidable dissension about the matter proposed has come about both in ordinary life and among philosophers. Because of this we are not able either to choose or to rule out anything, and we end up with suspension of judgement. In the mode deriving from infinite regress, we say that what is brought forward as a source of conviction for the matter proposed itself need another such source, which itself needs another, and so on *ad infinitum*, so that we have no point from which to begin to establish anything, and suspension of judgement follows. In the mode deriving from relativity, as we said above, 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 judgement on what it is like in its nature. We have the mode from hypothesis when 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. 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 judgement about both.<sup>19</sup>

Sextus describes here five modes that are supposed to induce suspension of judgment about any object of inquiry. We may call them the modes of (1) Disagreement, (2) Infinite Regress, (3) Relativity, (4) Hypothesis, and (5) Circularity. It is not clear how they are to be understood. Usually they are thought to work together: Modes (1) and (3), the modes of Disagreement and Relativity, challenge us to justify our beliefs by revealing that there are competing claims about the matter. The rest of the modes show then that the process of justification cannot be completed in a satisfactory way. All attempts to justify a belief lead either to an infinite regress, an arbitrary assumption or circularity. Often the challenging modes are seen to be unnecessary, because the skeptic is thought to assume implicitly that our concept of justification requires non-circular and non-arbitrary reasons. So the three modes of Infinite Regress, Hypothesis and Circularity – the so-called Agrippa's Trilemma – alone form the problem that can be identified with the regress argument against the possibility of justified beliefs.<sup>20</sup>

I argued that this interpretation of Agrippa's problem does not make it a serious skeptical challenge to our beliefs. It also misses the dialectical nature of the problem. According to the dialectical interpretation, it is the mode of disagreement that is the central one, and the others are subordinate to it. Its structure is very much the same as in the ten modes, and we may regard it as a generalization of them. Suppose we have a question to which there are just two possible answers  $p$  and  $\sim p$ . Then the mode of Disagreement works as follows:

- (1)  $S_1$  believes that  $p$ .
- (2)  $S_2$  believes that  $\sim p$ .

- (3) At most, one of them is right.
- (4) The disagreement between  $S_1$  and  $S_2$  is irresolvable.
- (5) We should suspend judgment about  $p$ .

So the mode of Disagreement alone is supposed to induce suspension of judgment. The other modes are used if the dogmatist wants to deny (4) that the disagreement is irresolvable. He is then asked how the disagreement is to be resolved. If he gives a reason  $r$  for his belief that  $p$ , it is pointed out that there is also an irresolvable disagreement about  $r$ . If he admits this, he also admits the irresolvability of the original disagreement. If he denies it, he is asked how the disagreement about  $r$  is resolved, and so on. By repeating the mode of Disagreement, the dogmatist is led into Agrippa's trilemma. Modes 2, 4 and 5 cannot resolve the disagreement: modes 4 and 5 are clearly question-begging, and nobody can complete an infinite chain of reason required by mode 2.<sup>21</sup>

The dogmatist may also try to appeal to a criterion of truth, but he is told that there is an irresolvable disagreement about it. If he tries to resolve this disagreement by appealing to a new criterion of truth, he is led into a regress. If he appeals to the same criterion again, he is in a circle. And, if he just assumes a criterion, the Mode of Hypothesis applies to him.<sup>22</sup>

Sextus clearly assumes that, in order to avoid skepticism, the dogmatist must be able to resolve all disagreements there are or could be about the object of inquiry and the reasons he appeals to. This requirement may seem too strong. We will see, however, that it arises from presuppositions that are quite plausible.

## 5. The Dialectical Problem

The Pyrrhonian problematic is after all composed of an argument. We saw that suspension of judgment cannot be based on equal convincingness of contradictory propositions. So it must be based on an argument for the normative conclusion that we should suspend judgment. Notice that this conclusion is not based on epistemic premises and the lemma that justified belief is impossible. It is based on our inability to resolve disagreements without begging the question and the normative principle that we should suspend judgment in such conditions. So the argument does not presuppose any epistemology, and it cannot therefore be opposed by rejecting that epistemology.

How plausible is the normative principle? In order to answer this question, we must keep in mind that the argument is meant to be an *ad hominem* argument, the target of which are inquirers seeking truth. As Sextus tells us, the skeptics were originally talented people who were seeking truth, and who were puzzled about the disagreements they found. Disagreement would hardly be a problem unless we were interested in truth. So we can assume that the target audience of the argument is truth-seekers. And it includes the skeptics themselves – at least before they became skeptics.

So how plausible is the requirement that inquirers should avoid begging the question under inquiry? It is very plausible, indeed. We can see this by considering two sorts of cases, in which disagreements arise. The principle says essentially that inquirers should treat them similarly, and this accords very well with our intuitions about the cases:

- (1) The enquirer is an impartial observer who is attending to a dispute between two persons. The dispute ends in a tie. Neither can convince the other, because their arguments beg the question. The enquirer does not have her own opinion about the matter under dispute. Neither has she independent grounds regarding either side. So she has no choice but to suspend judgment about the matter.
- (2) The situation is similar, except now the enquirer is herself one participant in the dispute. Being a participant, she has naturally her own beliefs about the matter. Otherwise, there would be no dispute. Once again, she realizes that the dispute ends in a tie. Neither position can be defended without begging the question. What should she do in this situation? It seems that she should give up her beliefs about the matter under dispute.

It is clear that the enquirer should suspend judgment in the first case: she has no ground for choosing one rather than the other of the opposed views. But why should the outcome be different in the second case? The only relevant difference is that the enquirer is in this case a participant in the dispute. If she were to prefer her own view in this case, she would seem to choose it simply because it is her own. But how could she then hope to find the truth? It is quite accidental which party in the dispute she happens to be.

The two cases are thus in all normatively relevant respects similar. It does not make a normative difference that the enquirer is herself a participant in the dispute. If she should suspend judgment in one case, she should do the same in the other. The implicit normative assumption is that it is wrong to beg the question. So one should not prefer one's own position simply on the ground that it is one's own.<sup>23</sup> One should look for impartial grounds for one's beliefs. This is at least what the skeptic's dialectical norm suggests, and it does have considerable intuitive force.

## 6. Appearance and Reality

The dialectical argument also relies on a general distinction between appearance and reality. In early modern philosophy, the distinction is typically made ontologically, between mental objects – ideas or sense-data – and physical objects in the external world. But this is not the distinction that is present in the ancient skeptical problematic. The ancient distinction does not concern just sensory appearances and external objects. It is a topic-neutral distinction that applies to any object of inquiry. About any topic we can ask what appears to be the case and what is in fact the case. For example, an argument may appear valid but not in fact be valid.<sup>24</sup>

I suggest that the distinction is to be understood as a distinction between how things are represented and how they are in themselves. In this way, we get the general distinction that covers both sensory experiences and beliefs. Both represent the world, and the world may differ from the way it is represented. What makes the modes of Aenesidemus and Agrippa such a serious problem is that they apply both to our sensory and doxastic appearances. We cannot decide which of our appearances are true by appealing to other appearances – be they sensory or doxastic – because the same problem of variability of appearances concerns these appearances.

Though the received view among analytical epistemologists is that skeptical problems depend on dubious epistemological presuppositions, it is also common to think that skepticism presupposes realism. This seems to be true of the Pyrrhonian problem, as it is understood here. The distinction

between appearance and reality is realistic. It presupposes two moderate forms of realism. As William Alston points out, we must distinguish between alethic realism and metaphysical realism. Alethic realism is a thesis about truth. It says that a belief or a perceptual content is true if and only if the world is the way it is represented by it. Metaphysical realism is the thesis that the world is mind-independent, i.e. independent of the way it is represented.<sup>25</sup>

In short, alethic realism says that appearances represent reality, and metaphysical realism says that reality is independent of its appearances. Both theses are mere platitudes, and were taken to be such during the greater part of the history of Western philosophy. But once we accept both theses, we have a problem: if our only access to reality is through its appearances and these vary in the way suggested, how can we ever decide which of the appearances are true and which false?

Of course, if we were allowed to beg the question in favor of some of them, the matter would be easy. But then anybody could defend the truth of any appearance in the same way. No, the task is to distinguish true appearances from false ones without begging the question, and this seems to be impossible.

If the dialectical interpretation is correct, we have three main options to avoid the skeptical conclusion. (1) We may try to produce non-question-begging reasons for our beliefs, and show how disagreements could thus be resolved. (2) We may reject the dialectical principle. (3) Or we may reject either of the realistic theses. We will see that none of these options should satisfy us. This makes the dialectical problem a more difficult and serious skeptical problem than those given by the other interpretations.

## 7. Cartesian Foundationalism

I have formulated the Pyrrhonian problematic without presupposing any epistemological theories – or at least any theories of knowledge or justified belief. This is not to say that such theories could not be offered as a response to the problematic. Quite the contrary, traditional theories of knowledge and justification seem to be motivated by the attempt to respond to it.

This is how the problematic is connected to knowledge and justification. We just take knowledge to be the state that truth-seeking inquirers want to attain. This is a natural and traditional use of the term. We want to discover the truth, i.e. to know the truth. When we now face the Pyrrhonian problematic, the natural intuition is that we cannot know until we can give non-question-begging justification for the truth of our belief. This seems to motivate, for example, Descartes, who writes in his *Rules for the Direction of the Mind*:

- - whenever two persons make opposite judgments about the same thing, it is certain that at least one of them is mistaken, and neither, it seems, has knowledge. For if the reasoning of one of them were certain and evident, he would be able to lay it before the other in such a way as eventually to convince his intellect as well.<sup>26</sup>

So we want to have knowledge, and we believe that we cannot have it if we do not have non-question-begging reasons for the truth of our beliefs. What kind of reasons are these? In the same work, Descartes says that intuition and deduction are the only sources of knowledge. In the later works, he speaks about clear and distinct perception.

What Descartes and other Cartesian foundationalists have in mind is some sort of direct intuitive awareness of certain facts or truths. It seems that without a faculty like this we cannot have the required reasons. We cannot resolve disagreements by appealing to further beliefs that are themselves under dispute. We must get outside of our beliefs directly to the facts that make them true. We can thus ensure the truth of some of our beliefs by direct awareness of their truth-makers. Other beliefs are then inferred from this foundation by deduction or induction. Also the conclusions of these inferential steps must be ensured to be true or highly probable by our intuitive grasp of the inferential relations.

It may seem that this sort of Cartesian foundationalism would be the only fully satisfactory response to the problematic. The required direct awareness of certain facts or truth-makers of our beliefs and necessary inferential relations between beliefs would provide an impartial standpoint from which to judge which beliefs are true without just begging the question. Furthermore, it was supposed that this direct awareness removes all doubt about the existence of those facts and guarantees the truth or probable truth of the beliefs based on it. So anybody who is aware of the relevant facts would have to follow the reasoning and become convinced of the conclusion. Disagreements could therefore be resolved by a careful use of our faculty of intuitive reason.

What directly accessible truths are there? In order to answer this question, Descartes uses the method of doubt. If we could find some completely indubitable propositions, these would be the ones that we can just see to be true. Others, like Berkeley and Russell, use also Sextus's strategy in the Ten Modes. Their conclusion from the variability of sensory appearances is not that we should suspend judgment. They conclude that in perception we are not aware of physical object at all but only of our own ideas or sense-data.<sup>27</sup>

The upshot of both strategies is that there are at most two subjects about which we can be directly aware: the present contents of our own mind and obvious necessary truths including truths about necessary inferential relations between propositions. This creates the notorious problem of our knowledge about the external world. The relation of our mind to the external world seems to be contingent rather than necessary. So there is no intuitively accessible inferential relation from the mind to the external world. Cartesian foundationalism leads to Cartesian skepticism.

There is a more fundamental worry, and Wilfrid Sellars presents it as a dilemma: either the kind of direct awareness in question is propositional in content, in which case it needs itself justification, or it is non-propositional, in which case it is unable to provide justification. In neither case can it be used to stop the regress of reasons in a non-question-begging way.<sup>28</sup> There are other worries, but together these two problems form a strong case against Cartesian foundationalism.<sup>29</sup>

I have presented Cartesian foundationalism as a possible response to the Pyrrhonian problematic. Post-Cartesian epistemological theories can be seen as reactions to the failure of the Cartesian program rather than as attempts to resolve the original Pyrrhonian problematic. Theories in the analytical tradition appeal typically to our ordinary epistemic concepts and practices, and argue that Cartesian epistemology has got them wrong. This reaction may help us to avoid Cartesian skepticism, but, I will argue, it does not give a satisfactory response to the original Pyrrhonian problematic.

## 8. Internalism

There are two ways of weakening the Cartesian requirements. The first of these keeps the requirements that the reasons or the factors that make our beliefs justified are something we can be directly aware of – by introspection or reflection. They are factors that we must be able to appeal to in justifying our beliefs. What this suggestion rejects is the requirement that justification is truth-conducive. This is after all not something we can be directly aware of. There is also an intuition that supports this weakening:

Imagine that you are deceived by a Cartesian demon that arranges things so that all your experiences, beliefs and other mental states are the same as they are now but the external world is completely different from what you believe. When you now form a perceptual belief based on sense experience and you have no reason to doubt the belief, the intuition is that your belief is justified. The facts that your belief is false and that your experience is not a reliable indication of truth do not affect your being justified in your belief. So external factors, such as truth and reliability, do not affect your being justified in your beliefs.<sup>30</sup>

Let us grant that there is such an internal sense of justification. Justification is a function of factors that are internal to the believing subject. External factors, like truth and reliability, do not affect justification. We may assume simply that these internally accessible factors are the subject's mental states. Internalism then makes justification the function of the subject's beliefs and experiences. Externalism takes justification to depend also on factors external to the mind.

What does internalism say about irresolvable disagreements? If we assume that both participants are reflective and careful in attending to their own internal evidence, it seems that they can both be justified in their beliefs, though at most one of them is right. For example, a theist may very well be internally justified in believing that God exists, while an atheist is equally internally justified in believing that God does not exist. Internal evidence does not help to resolve the disagreement.<sup>31</sup>

By allowing that both participants in an irresolvable disagreement are justified, the internalist may avoid begging the question under dispute. But if either participant concludes from her internal justification that she is not only justified but also right in her belief, she, of course, begs the question against the other participant. This seems arbitrary. Why should she be right and the other participant wrong, while they are both equally justified in their beliefs? It seems that a truth-seeker should instead suspend judgment about where the truth lies.

Perhaps it is more in the spirit of internalism to conclude that we should just settle for internal justification and suspend judgment about the truth of our beliefs. We believe that *p*, and believe that we are justified in believing that *p*, but we suspend belief about whether *p* is true. Some people think that this is not really logically possible, because to believe that *p* is to believe that *p* is true. But even if it were possible, we would end up in a rather awkward position. In believing that our beliefs are justified but suspending judgment about their truth, we must tolerate a considerable degree of incoherence among our beliefs. It would surely be more coherent to believe that our beliefs are not only justified but also true.

## 9. Externalism

The second way of weakening the Cartesian program retains the truth-conducivity of justification but rejects the awareness requirement. It is enough for justification that the sources of belief are reliable. The subject need not know or be aware of what those sources are and whether they are reliable. According to a typical form of externalism, reliabilism, justification is a function of the reliable causal origin of belief. So justification and knowledge do not require non-question-begging reasons. Indeed, they do not require reasons at all. They require that the belief be caused in a reliable way.

Reliabilism would be an easy answer to the first version of the Pyrrhonian problematic. The regress of reasons terminates in beliefs that have some other reliable source than reasoning. Of course, it is possible for finite beings to have such beliefs. So reliabilism easily explains how it is possible for us to have justified beliefs. But what is in question in the dialectical version is not merely the possibility of justified belief and knowledge. The problem is to decide who in fact knows or is justified in his or her beliefs. So even if we were to grant that reliabilism is the right answer to the possibility question, we do not yet have an answer to the actuality question.

Let us assume that we want to have knowledge and understand knowledge as a true belief that has a reliable source. According to Sextus, our situation is similar to that of the people in the following simile:

Let us imagine that some people are looking for gold in a dark room full of treasures. It will happen that each will grasp one of the things lying in the room and think that he has got hold of the gold. But none of them will be persuaded that he has hit upon the gold even if he *has* in fact hit upon it. In the same way, the crowd of philosophers has come into the world, as in a vast house, in search of truth. But it is reasonable that the man who grasps the truth should doubt whether he has been successful.<sup>32</sup>

Let us assume that those people in the dark room who have hit upon the gold have not done so accidentally. They happen to have some reliable way of detecting pieces of gold. They thus resemble inquirers or truth-seekers that have arrived at a true belief in a reliable way. So, according to Sextus, even people who have in fact hit upon the gold or come to know the truth – in the reliabilist sense – should doubt whether they have done so.

Why should inquirers doubt their knowledge? This is so, because none of them have any non-question-begging way of deciding which of them really knows and which of them do not. None of them is able to produce a non-question-begging argument for the truth of their own beliefs or the reliability of their own sources of beliefs. Because there are disagreements both about the truth of beliefs and the reliability of the sources of belief, they cannot argue from the truth of some particular beliefs to the reliability of their sources or the other way around without begging the question. There is no impartial way of saying who is right and who is wrong. So everybody is left in the dark about his or her really knowing anything.

Reliabilists typically point out that there is nothing in reliabilism that prevents one from attaining knowledge about reliability and thus knowing that one knows. If our sources of belief really are reliable, we can use these sources to attain knowledge about their own reliability. Though this is surely possible if reliabilism is true, it does not help with the present problem that concerns the

actuality of knowledge rather than its possibility. Arguing for the reliability of a source from premises based on the very same source begs the question at issue: because the premises are based on the source in question, we cannot be justified in accepting them, unless the source really is reliable. When we thus use the argument to justify the conclusion, we assume implicitly that the conclusion is true. This begs the question concerning the reliability of the source.<sup>33</sup>

A reliabilist might think that some questions simply need to be begged, and that the reliability of one's sources of belief is such a question. But if it were permissible to beg this question, then it would be very easy to defend almost any source of belief. Religious people could defend the reliability of religious experience arguing from premises based on religious experience. Crystal-ball gazers could defend the reliability of the crystal ball by arguing from premises based on the crystal ball. Indeed, any intelligent madman can offer his favorite source and defend its reliability in the same way.

If he is really aiming at truth, the reliabilist should not be willing to beg the question concerning reliability. He should suspend judgment about the scope of his knowledge and the reliability of his sources of belief. He, like anybody else, is in the dark and has no impartial grounds for preferring some particular set of sources to others.

## 10. Relativism and Anti-Realism

It seems that there is no satisfactory epistemological resolution of the Pyrrhonian problematic. Perhaps, we should rather focus on its realistic presuppositions. A radical Protagorean relativist avoids the problem by denying that there are genuine disagreements about reality. If I believe that  $p$  and you believe that  $\sim p$ , we are both right, because  $p$  is true for me and  $\sim p$  is true for you. There is no disagreement between us. Indeed, there can be no disagreements, because every belief or appearance is true. If truth is relative in this way, everybody can retain his or her beliefs without begging the question against others.

The traditional objection is that relativism is self-referentially incoherent: When the relativist says that relativism is true, she may mean that relativism is absolutely true or that relativism is relatively true. In the former case, she contradicts her own view that truth is relative. In the latter case, she acknowledges that relativism is true only for the relativist. It is not true for the absolutist. This is dialectically inefficient. She cannot argue the absolutist out of his view.

If we take relativism to be a response to the Pyrrhonian problem, the objection is misdirected. The problem is composed of an *ad hominem* argument against the absolutist. Because the absolutist accepts the premises of this argument, he cannot avoid the conclusion that he should suspend belief. If, in spite of this, he continues to hold on to his beliefs, it is his position that is incoherent. The relativist avoids the skeptical conclusion and the possible incoherence that it produces by denying the premise that there are genuine disagreements. There is no reason for her to suspend belief.

However, because it denies the possibility of error and disagreement, Protagorean relativism is extremely implausible. A more plausible form of alethic relativism – relativism about truth – relativizes truth to something other than singular persons, such as social groups or cultures. If truth is relative to something that can be shared by different persons, error and disagreement are

possible for them. And this shared background also provides the neutral basis for resolving their disagreements. When the background is not shared, there can be no genuine disagreements. So alethic relativism gives some hope for resolving the Pyrrhonian problematic.

Even the more sophisticated forms of alethic relativism are implausible, because our intuitions about truth are realist and absolutist. For example, it is an obvious necessary truth that a proposition that *p* is true if and only if *p*. It follows from this that one and the same proposition cannot be true for some people and false for others. So the truth-value of a proposition cannot vary in the way that alethic relativism suggests.<sup>34</sup>

Another form of relativism avoids this problem by relativizing content rather than truth. According to conceptual relativism, the contents of our beliefs and utterances are relative to conceptual schemes. So when one person utters the sentence “there are exactly three objects in the box” and another one utters the sentence “there are at least seven objects in the box”, there need be no genuine disagreement, because they use the word “object” in different ways. While the former uses it in the ordinary way, the latter uses it in a way that also counts mereological sums of objects as objects. However, as Hilary Putnam points out, we cannot explain this disagreement away simply by saying that the sentences have different meanings in the conceptual schemes that they belong to. Though this may be the case, they still appear to be incompatible ways of describing the same facts – what is in the box. Because there are no neutral grounds for choosing between them, we must explain how they can both be equally true descriptions of the facts. Putnam thinks we can do this only by assuming that the facts themselves are relative to the respective conceptual schemes.<sup>35</sup>

There are thus two sides in conceptual relativism: relativism about content and relativism about facts. Putnam thinks that they are tied together. A more realistically minded philosopher may grant that our descriptions are always perspectival or relative to conceptual schemes but deny that facts are in the same way relative. The above disagreement can be explained away by saying that the apparently conflicting sentences describe different objective facts. It is both absolutely true that there are three objects<sub>ord</sub> in the box and that there are seven objects<sub>mer</sub> in the box. This view leads, as Ernest Sosa notes, to the “explosion of reality.”<sup>36</sup> When different conceptual schemes cut up the world into different objects and kinds of objects, the realist takes all these objects to exist absolutely. Reality is for him much richer and more bizarre than we ordinarily think.

But not all apparently irresolvable disagreements are about the number of objects. They may also be about the nature or existence of one object. For example, there is the dispute over the question whether points are (1) basic abstract particulars, (2) sets of converging spheres, (3) composed of intersecting lines, or (4) logical constructions out of volumes. There is the metaphysical dispute over the question whether ordinary objects and persons are substances that are wholly present in different times or four-dimensional objects that are composed of temporal parts. And there is the disagreement between the naturalist and the theist about the existence of God. It is hard to explain these disagreements away by assuming that the participants are talking about different objectively existing facts. So if one wants to allow that all participants in these disputes are equally right, one must think that the facts that they are right about are relative to the respective conceptual schemes. The relativization must go all the way from content to reality itself.<sup>37</sup>

Depending on how content and conceptual schemes are understood, we get different forms of antirealism. If one takes conceptual schemes to be systems of beliefs, one might deny alethic

realism and define truth as (ideal) coherence with the relevant conceptual scheme. Then facts would literally be internal to conceptual schemes.<sup>38</sup> Or one might think that every proposition contains as part of its content an index, like ‘relative to contextual scheme  $C_i$ ’. Then assuming that one accepts alethic realism, one can conclude that the fact that makes a proposition true must itself contain a similar index. So content relativism together with alethic realism entails fact relativism. This option denies metaphysical realism alone.<sup>39</sup> In either way, one may try to explain how apparently incompatible beliefs can all be true, and how all genuine disagreements are resolvable in principle.

Donald Davidson argues against the possibility of alternative conceptual schemes.<sup>40</sup> If Davidson is right, we lose the relativist way of avoiding irresolvable disagreements. The lesson that Richard Rorty draws from Davidson is that we should reject the whole idea of mind or language as representing reality.<sup>41</sup> This may be the most radical attempt to dissolve our problem. If there are no representations, there is no problem of deciding between conflicting representations either. However, the costs are high. If this “view” is not self-refuting, it is at least in irreconcilable conflict with our common sense intuitions.

Though the Pyrrhonian problematic, as it is interpreted here, may explain the relativist and antirealist tendencies in philosophy, it is far from clear that they provide an acceptable resolution of it. Both alethic realism and metaphysical realism are parts of common sense that most philosophers are not willing to give up. Perhaps, we do not even understand the antirealist alternatives to them. Furthermore, the relativist strategy is counterintuitive in explaining away many disagreements that clearly appear to be genuine.

## 11. The Skeptical Moral

I have discussed three interpretations of the ancient Pyrrhonian problematic, and argued that only the last one – the dialectical interpretation – provides a serious skeptical challenge to our beliefs. There seems to be no satisfactory non-skeptical response to it. Should we thus accept the skeptical conclusion and stop believing anything? This is what the Pyrrhonists are traditionally thought to suggest. The traditional objection, made by David Hume, is that it is impossible to live without beliefs. On the one hand, action requires beliefs: without beliefs, we would be like vegetables that need someone else to take care of our needs. On the other hand, we cannot just give up our beliefs. This is psychologically impossible. Belief is simply not under our voluntary control.<sup>42</sup>

Hume seems to be right. We cannot live without beliefs. But this does not get us off the hook. Remember that the skeptic gives us an *ad hominem* argument. It is we who are committed to the conclusion, and it is our problem if we cannot follow its recommendation. Nevertheless, Sextus thinks that it is possible to be a skeptic. The skeptic lives by appearances, he says. So we still need to consider whether there could be a plausible skeptical resolution of the problematic.

The received view is that the Pyrrhonian skeptic really intends to live without beliefs by relying on appearances understood in some non-doxastic way. Whether there is such a sense of “appearance” and whether it helps to respond to Hume’s challenge is controversial.<sup>43</sup> We need not, however, go into this debate, because the dialectical interpretation of the problematic does not support this view of skepticism. It is rather the epistemological and psychological interpretations that do so, but these do not make it a serious challenge to our beliefs.

The moral of the first, theoretical, interpretation is clear. If there can be no justified beliefs, the suspension of belief should be global. But this demand only concerns the infinitist. If we are not infinitists, there is no moral for us. We can keep all our beliefs. The same is true of the skeptics who do not accept the infinitist dogma.

Also the psychological interpretation suggests that the skeptic lives without beliefs. If the reasons for and against a proposition are equally strong psychologically, then we are forced to suspend belief in it. The objection was that it is extremely difficult to maintain such a balance in most cases. Furthermore, the attempt to do so seems to be unmotivated. In any case, the scope of skepticism would in fact be very restricted under this interpretation. Surely at least our common sense beliefs are safe from doubt in this psychological sense.

According to the dialectical interpretation, the proper scope of Pyrrhonian skepticism is things we have disagreements about. Since we don't disagree about appearances, they fall outside the scope. So the skeptic may very well retain her beliefs about the world in so far as she does not take those beliefs to be true. This is something that is disputed, not the fact that she has beliefs or that things appear to her in some way.

So one possible skeptical moral deriving from the dialectical interpretation is that we should suspend judgment about the truth of our beliefs. The scope of suspension of judgment is restricted to the higher-level propositions about the truth of lower-level propositions. When the skeptic thus asserts something, she just expresses the proposition that she believes something. She does not suggest that the belief is true or that she knows anything. Because she does not want to beg any questions, her utterances can be understood as including an implicit indexical element: "It appears to me that..." and expressing what is her current belief about the matter. In this way, she avoids contradicting others that may have conflicting beliefs about the same matter.

There is tension or instability in this sort of skepticism. Because of the obvious necessary truth "p is true if and only if p", it may be hard to believe that p without also believing that p is true, provided that it is even logically possible. Some commentators suggest that, instead of restricting the scope of doubt, the skeptic distinguishes between two kinds of assent or propositional attitudes.<sup>44</sup> Let us call them belief and acceptance. Belief is a passive state caused in us by various causal processes and is not under our direct voluntary control. Acceptance is a voluntary act of judging something to be true, and it needs to be based on reasons. When the skeptic thus suspends judgment, she refrains from accepting anything as true. At the same time, she goes on forming beliefs involuntarily. Yet, this may not avoid all instability: The skeptic believes involuntarily that p and that p is true, but she also believes involuntarily that there are others who disagree with her and that she has no impartial reasons for accepting her own belief that p to be true. Why should these latter beliefs have no causal affect on the former beliefs?

So there seems to be no satisfactory response to the dialectical version of the Pyrrhonian problematic. Perhaps, this is just an initial appearance, and we can work out such a response. It is more probable, however, that philosophers will continue debating the matter without reaching a consensus.<sup>45</sup>

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> See Richard Popkin, *The History of Skepticism from Erasmus to Spinoza* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979); Charles Schmitt, "The Rediscovery of Ancient Skepticism in Modern Times," *The Skeptical Tradition*, ed. M. F. Burnyeat (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983).

<sup>2</sup> See for example John Greco, *Putting Skeptics in Their Place* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2000).

<sup>3</sup> See for example Michael Frede, "The Sceptic's Two Kinds of Assent and the Question of the Possibility of Knowledge," *The Original Sceptics: A Controversy*, ed. M. Burnyeat and M. Frede (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997), 127-131; Julia Annas and Jonathan Barnes, *The Modes of Scepticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 45.

<sup>4</sup> See for example Stewart Cohen, "How to Be a Fallibilist?" *Philosophical Perspectives*, 2 (1988), ed. J.E. Tomberlin (Atascadero: Ridgeview), 93-94.

<sup>5</sup> Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Logicians*, trans. R. G. Bury (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1935), 487-489 (M 8, 480-481).

<sup>6</sup> Michael Williams, *Problems of Knowledge* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 66.

<sup>7</sup> Michael Williams, "Skepticism," *The Blackwell Guide to Epistemology*, ed. J. Greco and E. Sosa (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), 35-36.

<sup>8</sup> Peter Klein, "Human Knowledge and the Infinite Regress of Reasons," *Philosophical Perspectives*, 13 (1999), ed. J.E. Tomberlin (Oxford: Blackwell).

<sup>9</sup> Williams, "Skepticism," 39.

<sup>10</sup> Peter Klein, "The Failures of Dogmatism and a New Pyrrhonism," *Acta Analytica*, 15 (2000), 14-17; "Human Knowledge and the Infinite Regress of Reasons," 312-316.

<sup>11</sup> Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Scepticism*, ed. J. Annas and J. Barnes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 3 (PH I, 1-4).

<sup>12</sup> *Outlines of Scepticism*, 10 (I, 26).

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 4 (I, 8).

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 5 (I, 10).

<sup>15</sup> Michael William, "Skepticism Without Theory," *Review of Metaphysics*, 41 (1988), 554-555.

<sup>16</sup> *Outlines of Scepticism*, 11-40 (PH I, 35-163). For commentary, see Julia Annas and Jonathan Barnes, *The Modes of Scepticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); R. J. Hankinson, *The Sceptics* (London: Routledge, 1995), ch. 9.

<sup>17</sup> *Outlines of Scepticism*, 17 (I, 59).

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 25 (I, 90).

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 40-41 (I, 165-169).

<sup>20</sup> This is the standard way of understanding the Modes of Agrippa among analytical epistemologists. See for example Robert Fogelin, *Pyrrhonian Reflections on Knowledge and Justification* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), Part II; Greco, *Putting Sceptics in Their Place*, Ch. 5; Ernest Sosa, "How to Resolve the Pyrrhonian Problematic?" *Philosophical Studies*, 85 (1997), 229-249; Williams, "Skepticism" and *Problems of Knowledge*, Ch. 5.

<sup>21</sup> One mystery of Agrippa's problem is the Mode of Relativity. It also appears as one of the Ten Modes, and Sextus says that it is the most general of them. One possibility is that it just spells out the conclusion of the mode of Disagreement: We can say how things appear to the participants in the dispute, but we cannot say how they are in themselves. The object of dispute is not how things appear. It is how they are in their real nature. The other interpretation is that Sextus confuses skepticism and relativism. Richard Bett argues that Aenesidemus was really a relativist. If Sextus took Aenesidemus to be a sceptic, the relativistic phrases may have been left in the text by mistake. See Bett, "What Does Pyrrhonism Have to Do with Pyrrho?" *Ancient Scepticism and the Sceptical Tradition*, ed. J. Sihvola (Helsinki: Acta Philosophica Fennica, 2000). In any case, relativism is a possible response to Agrippa's problem. It is to deny (3). See section 10.

<sup>22</sup> *Outlines of Scepticism*, 72 (II, 20).

<sup>23</sup> One might object that she need not prefer her position simply because it is her own. She may prefer it because of her reasons. But why should she prefer her own reasons to those of her opponent that are equally good dialectically? The only answer seems to be that they are her reasons.

<sup>24</sup> Myles Burnyeat, "Can the Sceptic Live His Skepticism?" *The Original Sceptics*, 37-41; Benson Mates, *The Sceptical Way* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 6.

<sup>25</sup> William Alston, *A Realistic Conception of Truth* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996).

<sup>26</sup> *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, Vol. 1, ed. J. Cottingham, R. Stoothoff and D. Murdoch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 11.

<sup>27</sup> Kenneth Winkler, "Berkeley, Pyrrhonism, and the Theaetetus," *Pyrrhonian Skepticism*, ed. W. Sinnott-Armstrong (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 48-54; Bertrand Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), Ch. 1.

<sup>28</sup> Wilfrid Sellars, "Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind," *Science, Perception and Reality* (London: Routledge, 1963), 128-129. For a more accessible formulation, see Laurence Bonjour, *The Structure of Empirical Knowledge* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), 69.

<sup>29</sup> There has been attempts to rehabilitate Cartesian foundationalism – especially by Laurence Bonjour and Richard Fumerton. See *Resurrecting Old-Fashioned Foundationalism*, ed. M. DePaul (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001).

<sup>30</sup> See Keith Lehrer and Stewart Cohen, “Justification, Truth, and Coherence,” *Synthese*, 55 (1983), 191-192; Richard Foley, “What’s Wrong with Reliabilism?” *The Monist*, 68 (1985), 192-193.

<sup>31</sup> Internalism does allow that the evidence that both the theist and atheist have about their opponent’s beliefs and reasons may undermine or defeat their own justification, in which case they are not justified in their beliefs. But assuming that both are sophisticated enough, they may also have as a part of their evidence a theory that explains why the other party is wrong and why its evidence is misleading. In this case, they both can sustain their justification for their beliefs.

<sup>32</sup> Sextus Empiricus: *Against the Logicians*, 27 (M vii, 52.). The translation is from Jonathan Barnes, *Toils of Scepticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 138-139.

<sup>33</sup> Alston calls arguments of this sort epistemically circular in *The Reliability of Sense Perception* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993). For a more detailed discussion about the reliabilist responses, see Markus Lammenranta, “Reliabilism, Circularity, and the Pyrrhonian Problematic”, *Journal of Philosophical Research*, 28 (2003), pp. 315-332.

<sup>34</sup> Alston, *A Realistic Conception of Truth*, 180.

<sup>35</sup> Hilary Putnam, *Realism with a Human Face* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), x, 96-104.

<sup>36</sup> Ernest Sosa “Putnam’s Pragmatic Realism,” *Journal of Philosophy*, 90 (1993).

<sup>37</sup> Nelson Goodman, *Ways of Worldmaking* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1978), 109-116; Putnam, *Realism with a Human Face*, 97; Alston, *A Realist Conception of Truth*, 171-173; Michael Lynch, “Pluralism, Metaphysical Realism, and Ultimate Reality,” *Realism and Antirealism*, ed. W. Alston (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002), 61-62, 69.

<sup>38</sup> Putnam seems to defend this view in *Reason, Truth and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

<sup>39</sup> Lynch, *Truth in Context* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1998) and “Pluralism, Metaphysical Realism, and Ultimate Reality.” Alston recommends this approach for Putnam in *A Realist Conception of Truth*, 180-181.

<sup>40</sup> Donald Davidson, “On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme,” *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984).

<sup>41</sup> Richard Rorty, *Objectivism, Relativism, and Truth* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1991); *Truth and Progress* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1998).

<sup>42</sup> David Hume, *Inquiries Concerning Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge, rev. P. H. Nidditch (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), 160.

<sup>43</sup> See Burnyeat, "Can the Sceptic Live His Scepticism?" and Bredo Johnsen, "On the Coherence of Pyrrhonian Skepticism," *The Philosophical Review*, 110 (2001), 521-561.

<sup>44</sup> Michael Frede, "The Sceptic's Two Kinds of Assent and the Question of the Possibility of Knowledge;" Gisela Striker, "Historical Reflections on Classical Pyrrhonism and Neo-Pyrrhonism," *Pyrrhonian Skepticism*, 17.

<sup>45</sup> I wish to thank Robert Audi, Mario De Caro, John Greco, Timo Kajamies, Sami Pihlström, Walter Sinnott-Armstrong, Emidio Spinelli and Leopold Stubenberg for their helpful comments on earlier versions of this paper as well as Ernest Sosa and Timothy Williamson for their very useful points made in personal conversation.