

PYRRHONIAN SCEPTICISM AND THE SEARCH FOR TRUTH

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TWO passages at the outset of Sextus Empiricus' *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* raise fundamental issues about Pyrrhonian Scepticism as a way of life:

When people are investigating any subject, the likely result is either a discovery, or a denial of discovery and a confession of inapprehensibility, or else a continuation of the investigation [ἐπιμονὴν ζητήσεως]. This, no doubt, is why in the case of philosophical investigations, too, some have said that they have discovered the truth, some have asserted that it cannot be apprehended, and others are still investigating [οἱ δὲ ἔτι ζητοῦσιν]. Those who are called Dogmatists in the proper sense of the word think they have discovered the truth—for example, the schools of Aristotle and Epicurus and the Stoics, and some others. The schools of Clitomachus and Carneades, and other Academics, have asserted that things cannot be apprehended. And the Sceptics are investigating. [ζητοῦσι δὲ οἱ Σκεπτικοί]. (PH 1. 1–3)

The Sceptical way of life [ἡ σκεπτικὴ ἀγωγή], then, is also called 'investigative' [ζητητική], from its activity in investigating and enquiring [ἀπὸ ἐνεργείας τῆς κατὰ τὸ ζητεῖν καὶ σκέπτεσθαι]; 'suspensive' [ἐφεκτική], from the condition that comes about in the enquirer after the investigation [μετὰ τὴν ζήτησιν]; 'perplexed' [ἀπορητική], either (as some say) from the fact that it is perplexed about and investigates everything [ἀπὸ τοῦ περὶ παντὸς ἀπορεῖν καὶ ζητεῖν], or else from its being at a loss [ἀπὸ τοῦ ἀμυχανεῖν] whether to assent or deny. (PH 7. 1)¹

The Sceptical way of life is at least in part a life of philosophical investigation, and it differs in this respect from the way of life exemplified by the philosophical dogmatist. For investigation has no

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¹ I use, often modified, the translation in J. Annas and J. Barnes (trans.), *Sextus Empiricus: Outlines of Scepticism* [*Outlines*] (Cambridge, 2000).

place in the life of the dogmatist—either because she claims to have discovered the truth about the matters that concern her and so has no need to investigate them, or because she denies that it is possible to discover the truth about such matters and so in her view any investigation would be futile. The Pyrrhonist, by contrast, neither claims to have discovered the truth about the matters she investigates nor denies that it is possible to do so. That fact, according to Sextus, explains why investigation is an option for the Pyrrhonist but not for the dogmatist. But, as Sextus indicates elsewhere (*PH* 1. 12; 1. 25–9), it is the Pyrrhonist’s desire for tranquillity, and the fact that it appears to her that she can achieve tranquillity by discovering the truth, that explains why the Pyrrhonist exercises this option. The Pyrrhonist pursues the subordinate objective of truth as a means to her ultimate objective of tranquillity.

Some of his modern readers, as well as certain critics in antiquity, have argued that Sextus’ description of the Pyrrhonist as engaged in the search for truth is a sham.² For Sextus himself defines Pyrrhonian Scepticism as the ability to achieve tranquillity through suspension of judgement (*PH* 1. 8). But if the Pyrrhonist possesses this ability, and if she values truth only as a means to tranquillity, then she has no reason to engage in the search for truth. In addition, the Pyrrhonist deploys instances of certain argument-schemas—the so-called ‘Agrippan modes’—which collectively purport to show that no one can have any reason to assent to any candidate for belief. But the use of arguments with this negative dogmatic conclusion seems to be incompatible with the search for truth. For genuine engagement in the search for truth requires at least that one does not deny that it is possible to discover the truth, and discovering the truth about some matter requires having a reason to assent to one relevant candidate for belief rather than another.

These criticisms are important but, I shall argue, misplaced. I first survey a number of texts in which, according to some commentators, Sextus’ account of the Pyrrhonist or her arguments conflicts with his claim that the Pyrrhonist is engaged in the search for truth. My task here is largely negative: I attempt to show that these texts need not and should not be read in this way. But the completion of

² For Sextus’ unnamed critics in antiquity, see *PH* 2. 1; and for their modern counterparts, see especially J. Palmer, ‘Skeptical Investigation’, *Ancient Philosophy*, 20 (2000), 351–73, and G. Striker, ‘Scepticism as a Kind of Philosophy’ [‘Scepticism’], *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie*, 83 (2001), 113–29.

that negative task leaves unanswered the two important questions raised by these criticisms. So I next try to explain *why* according to Sextus the Pyrrhonist—that is, someone who can achieve tranquillity through suspension of judgement—engages in the search for truth and *how* her use of the Agrippan modes is compatible with her doing so.

I

Louis Loeb has written that although the Pyrrhonist initially sets out to acquire tranquillity by acquiring true beliefs, ‘the lower-order aim of truth is renounced as one that cannot be achieved and the higher-order objective of quietude is achieved in another way, by suspending belief’.³ But Loeb’s view here cannot be right, and this for at least two reasons. First, the Pyrrhonist has no grounds for claiming that the discovery of truth *cannot* be achieved. (Nor does Sextus anywhere in the *Outlines* report that the Pyrrhonist takes herself to have grounds for making this claim.) It is true that up to now the Pyrrhonist’s investigations have concluded in suspension of judgement, but *that* fact, as the Pyrrhonist herself recognizes, is no reason to deny that it is possible to discover the truth. Thus Sextus writes that, in contrast to the Academic, ‘It seems to the Sceptic that it may be possible even for some things to be apprehended’ (ὁ δὲ Σκεπτικὸς ἐνδέχεται καὶ καταληφθῆναι τινα προσδοκᾶ, *PH* 1. 226). Second, if, as Loeb claims, the Pyrrhonist does renounce truth as an objective that *cannot* be achieved, then Pyrrhonism collapses into a form of negative dogmatism. Yet Sextus takes great care to distinguish the Pyrrhonist from those negative dogmatists (according to Sextus, the Academics, the Cyrenaics, and the Empiricist school of medicine) who deny that the truth about the matters investigated by philosophers can be known (*PH* 1. 3; 1. 200; 1. 215; 1. 226; 1. 236).

Sextus does tell us, however, that suspension of judgement is an objective for *some* Pyrrhonists. At the conclusion of his discussion of the Pyrrhonist’s end or goal (τέλος), Sextus writes:

we say that the Sceptic’s end or goal [τέλος τοῦ Σκεπτικοῦ] is tranquillity in matters of belief and moderation in the conditions forced on her. Some

³ L. E. Loeb, ‘Sextus, Descartes, Hume, and Peirce: On Securing Settled Doxastic States’ [‘Sextus’], *Noûs*, 32 (1998), 205–30 at 214.

prominent Sceptics have added to these [ends or goals] suspension of judgement in investigations [προσέθηκαν τούτοις καὶ τὴν ἐν ταῖς ζητήσεσιν ἐποχὴν]. (PH 1. 30)

According to Diogenes Laertius (9. 107), these prominent Pyrrhonists include Timon and Aenesidemus, and Sextus suggests here that they pursued suspension of judgement as a means to achieving tranquillity. For these Pyrrhonists are said to have identified suspension of judgement as an end or goal *in addition to* tranquillity, and there is no indication in Sextus' text, and no reason to think, that suspension of judgement has some value for these Pyrrhonists independently of its relation to tranquillity. Moreover, Sextus alludes to these Pyrrhonists again in his discussion of the Sceptical phrase 'opposed to every account there is an equal account' (περὶ τοῦ παντὶ λόγῳ λόγον ἴσον ἀντικεῖσθαι). Sextus explains that those who follow the version of Pyrrhonism he is presenting in the *Outlines* utter this phrase to report that they are in the condition (πάθος) in which it appears to them that every dogmatic account they have examined up to now in support of a given candidate for belief is opposed by some equally credible dogmatic account in support of a conflicting candidate for belief (PH 1. 203). But, Sextus adds, some Pyrrhonists utter this phrase as an exhortation to their fellow Pyrrhonists to oppose to every dogmatic account they encounter a second, conflicting dogmatic account equal in credibility to the first:

They make this exhortation to the Sceptic to prevent him from being seduced by the dogmatists into abandoning his investigation and through rashness missing the tranquillity apparent to him, which (as we suggested before) they think follows on suspension of judgement about everything [ἡν νομίζουσι παρυσίστασθαι τῇ περὶ πάντων ἐποχῇ]. (PH 1. 205).⁴

The Pyrrhonists Sextus describes here pursue suspension of judgement as a means to tranquillity, and, though the text is not clear on this point, it is possible that they do so because they have the view that tranquillity can be achieved *only* by suspending judgement. The important point for our purposes, however, is that Sextus himself takes these Pyrrhonists to represent a version of Pyrrhonism different from the version he is presenting in the *Outlines*. That is

⁴ I follow Annas and Barnes, *Outlines*, in excising περὶ αὐτοῦ.

why in these passages he contrasts the practices of these Pyrrhonists with his own.⁵

Loeb also claims that 'A hallmark of Pyrrhonian skepticism is the claim that the suspension of belief is the *only* route to tranquility.'⁶ But in the texts Loeb cites in support of his claim—*PH* 1. 8; 1. 26; 1. 29; 1. 31—Sextus says that the Pyrrhonist first experiences suspension of judgement, then tranquillity (*PH* 1. 8), or that tranquillity 'followed fortuitously' (*τυχικῶς παρηκολούθησεν*) suspension of judgement (*PH* 1. 26; 1. 29), or that the Pyrrhonists claimed that tranquillity 'follows' (*ἀκολουθεῖν*) suspension of judgement (*PH* 1. 31). None of *those* claims is equivalent to the claim that tranquillity comes about *only* through suspension of judgement. None the less, it is true that in the *Outlines* Sextus presents suspension of judgement as the *only* possible route to tranquillity at least with respect to any question about the value, i.e. the goodness or badness, of something. At *PH* 1. 27–8 he argues that anyone who believes that certain things are good and other things bad will be perpetually anxious or distressed (*ταράσσεται διὰ παντός*).⁷ For if I lack something that I believe to be good, I will consider this state of affairs itself as something bad, and so be distressed by it. Yet if I succeed in acquiring something I believe to be good, I will fear the loss of this good and will be anxious about doing whatever I can to prevent myself from losing it. A person can avoid the anxiety and distress associated with the pursuit and retention of things she believes to be good (as well as with the avoidance of things she believes to be bad) only by suspending judgement about whether anything is good or bad. For if I do not believe about anything either that it is good or that it is bad, then I will not be distressed by the fact that I lack certain things and I will not fear the loss of anything I now possess. The argument purports to show, then, that tranquillity at least with respect to questions of value can be achieved *only* through suspension of judgement. Now most commentators have been unmoved by Sextus' argument here, and rightly so. For if I possess something that I not only believe to be a good but also be-

⁵ So, as we have seen, at *PH* 1. 30 what 'some prominent Sceptics' identify as the aims or goals of Pyrrhonism is contrasted with what 'we say' (*φάμεν*) they are, and at *PH* 1. 203–5 what 'some' (*τινες*) mean when they utter the Sceptical phrase 'opposed to every account there is an equal account' is contrasted with what 'I say' (*εἶπω*) when uttering that phrase.

⁶ Loeb, 'Sextus', 218 (emphasis added).

⁷ This argument recurs at *PH* 3. 237–8.

lieve to be a good which once acquired cannot be lost—the Stoics, for instance, believe that virtue is a good of this sort—then I will not fear the loss of this good and so I will not experience the distress that, according to Sextus, accompanies my possession of anything I believe to be good.⁸ Regardless of the merits of this argument, however, Sextus' use of it commits his Pyrrhonist to the view that at least with respect to matters of value tranquillity can be achieved only through suspension of judgement. For the argument turns on the claim that *any* belief that certain things are good and other things bad—even a true belief formed as a result of investigation on the basis of considerations that establish its truth—is a source of anxiety and distress.

The claim that the belief that certain things are good and others bad is a source of anxiety and distress sounds very much like a piece of dogmatism. It seems to me that the best we can say about the argument at *PH* 1. 27–8 is that while it requires that the Pyrrhonist pursue suspension of judgement rather than the discovery of truth with respect to matters of value, it does not give the Pyrrhonist a reason to do so with respect to other matters. It might seem awkward for the Pyrrhonist that in some or even most, but not all, instances she pursues tranquillity by way of pursuing the discovery of truth, and I think it is. I argue below that Sextus has a good reason to discard the argument at *PH* 1. 27–8

We can understand how an activity whose ultimate objective is tranquillity none the less counts as investigation provided that this ultimate objective is pursued by way of pursuing truth as a subordinate objective. But if truth ceases to be even a subordinate objective, then it is far from clear how that activity can count as investiga-

⁸ Of course we can restore some force to the argument at *PH* 1. 27–8 by taking one of its premisses to be suppressed, viz. that no good is such that once acquired it cannot be lost. On this reading the argument is directed against those who have been convinced on independent grounds of the truth of this suppressed premiss. However, the rehabilitated argument will still give the Pyrrhonist a reason to pursue—at least with regard to questions of value—suspension of judgement rather than the discovery of truth as a means to tranquillity *unless* the argument is strictly *ad hominem*. If it is directed only against those who have come to believe that no good is such that once acquired it cannot be lost, and if the Pyrrhonist does not hold this belief but suspends judgement about whether there is any good such that once acquired it cannot be lost, then the argument has no bearing on the objectives the Pyrrhonist herself pursues in her investigations. The problem is that Sextus does not present the argument at *PH* 1. 27–8 as strictly *ad hominem*. So at *PH* 1. 29–30 he writes of the Pyrrhonist as being less disturbed by things like cold and thirst because they do not believe that either of these things is bad by nature.

tion. That is why some commentators have argued that Sextus' Pyrrhonist not only replaces truth with suspension of judgement as her subordinate objective, but by doing so abandons the activity of investigation altogether:

The causal principle of Scepticism we say is the hope of becoming tranquil. Men of talent, troubled by the anomaly in things and puzzled as to which of them they should rather assent to, came to investigate what in things is true and what false, thinking that by deciding these issues they would become tranquil. (*PH* 1. 12)

For having begun to do philosophy [*ἀρξάμενος φιλοσοφεῖν*] in order to decide among appearances and apprehend which are true and which false, so as to become tranquil, the Sceptic came upon equipollent dispute, and being unable to decide it, he suspended judgement. And when he suspended judgement, tranquillity in matters of opinion followed fortuitously. (*PH* 1. 26)

Sextus describes here the experience in virtue of which someone who is *not* a Pyrrhonist *becomes* a Pyrrhonist. He presumably attributes this experience both to the very first or original Pyrrhonists and to anyone who subsequently adopts the Pyrrhonist's way of life. In discussing these passages Gisela Striker claims that 'when he finds himself unable to discover the truth, but nevertheless relieved of his worries once he has given up the project, the Sceptic also loses interest in the investigation of philosophical problems.'⁹ On Striker's view, then, abandoning the activity of investigation is

⁹ Striker, 'Scepticism', 117–18. A similar view can be found in R. Bett, *Pyrrho, his Antecedents, and his Legacy* (Oxford, 2000), 200–21; Palmer 'Skeptical Investigation', 369; and, perhaps, D. Morrison, 'The Ancient Sceptic's Way of Life', *Metaphilosophy*, 21.3 (1990), 204–22 at 218 (who writes that the Pyrrhonist's suspension of judgement is a matter of being 'in ignorance, but absolved from the responsibility of striving for knowledge by the thoroughgoing blockage of inquiry provided by sceptical training'). In commenting on *PH* 1. 7—where Sextus explains that the sceptical way of life is called 'suspensive' (*ἐφεκτική*) 'from the condition that comes about in the enquirer after the investigation' (*ἀπὸ τοῦ μετὰ τὴν ζήτησιν περὶ τὸν σκεπτόμενον γινόμενου πάθους*)—K. Janáček, *Sextus Empiricus' Sceptical Methods* (Prague, 1972), 29, writes that 'The main thing is the denial of *ἐπιμονὴν ζητήσεως*. The *ζήτησις* lapses and is replaced by the genuine sceptical *ἐποχή*.' Janáček's view here is endorsed by J. Brunschwig, 'The *ὅσον ἐπὶ τῷ λόγῳ* Formula in Sextus Empiricus', in id., *Papers in Hellenistic Philosophy*, trans. J. Lloyd (Cambridge, 1994), 244–58 at 244 n. 5. But it seems to me that B. Mates, *The Skeptic Way: Sextus Empiricus' Outlines of Pyrrhonism* (New York, 1996), 226, is right in claiming that *PH* 1. 2–3 (where the Sceptic is said to be still investigating) and *PH* 1. 7 'are consistent if the phrase *μετὰ τὴν ζήτησιν* in 7 means in effect "after some searching"; certainly some searching is required to bring the Skeptic into a state of *aporia* and from there to *epochē*, but there seems to be no reason why, just because he is withholding assent,

simply part of what it is to become a Pyrrhonist. For Striker appears to think that once the Pyrrhonist has suspended judgement about two conflicting candidates for belief p and q , and by doing so achieved tranquillity with respect to the conflict between p and q , the Pyrrhonist no longer has any reason to investigate whether p or q is the case.¹⁰ Referring to *PH* 1. 12, but apparently intending to refer to *PH* 1. 26 as well, Striker claims that 'here we are told that a Pyrrhonist philosopher is interested in finding the truth *only* as a way of reaching peace of mind'.¹¹ But we are told no such thing in either passage. Sextus tells us that the Pyrrhonist engaged in the search for the truth in order to achieve tranquillity, but that claim is neither equivalent to nor entails that the Pyrrhonist engaged in the search for the truth *only* to achieve tranquillity. Nothing Sextus says in either passage rules out the possibility that the Pyrrhonist engages in the search for truth *both* for its own sake *and* for the sake of tranquillity. *If* the Pyrrhonist has an interest in the truth that is independent of her pursuit of tranquillity, then even when she suspends judgement about whether p or q is the case and achieves tranquillity with regard to that conflict, she still has a reason to investigate the matter.

Striker and other commentators also appeal to the following (famous) passage in support of their claim that the Pyrrhonist achieves tranquillity by giving up the search for truth.¹²

A story told of the painter Apelles applies to the Sceptics. 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

he must close his mind to all further consideration of the matter in question.' Cf. M. Burnyeat, 'Can the Sceptic Live his Scepticism?' ['Can the Sceptic?'], in M. Burnyeat and M. Frede (eds.), *The Original Sceptics: A Controversy* (Indianapolis, 1997), 25–57 at 56.

¹⁰ For ease of exposition I shall write that the Pyrrhonist investigates or attempts to discover or suspends judgement about whether p or q is the case, where I use the phrase 'whether p or q is the case' in place of the more accurate but more cumbersome 'whether it is the case that p or the case that q '. In using the shorter and less accurate phrase I obviously do not mean that the Pyrrhonist investigates or attempts to discover or suspends judgement about whether the disjunction ' p or q ' is true.

¹¹ Striker, 'Scepticism', 117 (emphasis added).

¹² See G. Striker, 'Ataraxia: Happiness as Tranquillity', in ead., *Essays on Hellenistic Epistemology and Ethics* (Cambridge, 1996), 183–95 at 192; and 'Scepticism', 118, along with Bett, *Pyrrho*, 109.

horse's lather. Now the Sceptics, then, were hoping to acquire tranquillity 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, tranquillity followed as it were fortuitously, as a shadow follows a body. (*PH* 1. 28–9)

It is far from obvious just how we should formulate the moral of the Apelles story. Apelles has a certain objective (representing the lather on the horse's mouth), he is unable to achieve his objective in one way (painting with his brush the lather on the horse's mouth), and as a result he does something else by which he does *not* expect to achieve his objective (throwing the sponge on which he wiped his brush at the painting) but by which none the less he *does* achieve it. The Pyrrhonist, in turn, has a certain objective (tranquillity with respect to a conflict between two candidates for belief *p* and *q*), she is unable to achieve her objective in one way (by discovering whether *p* or *q* is the case), and as a result she does something else by which she does *not* expect to achieve her objective (suspending judgement about whether *p* or *q* is the case) but by which none the less she *does* achieve it. If, therefore, the Apelles story is supposed to reveal something about the relation between the Pyrrhonist's suspension of judgement and her tranquillity, it is that **the Pyrrhonist does not suspend judgement in order to achieve tranquillity (just as Apelles did not throw his sponge at the painting in order to produce a representation of the lather on the horse's mouth).**¹³

More importantly, I do not think that the Apelles story supports the claim that the Pyrrhonist achieves tranquillity by giving up the search for truth. Sextus does not say here that the Pyrrhonist gives up the search for truth, but only that being unable to determine whether *p* or *q* is the case, the Pyrrhonist suspends judgement about the matter. But in reporting that she is unable to determine whether *p* or *q* is the case, the Pyrrhonist is *not* making the negative dogmatic claim that the truth about this matter cannot be known. It is true that, according to Sextus, Apelles was so unsuccessful in painting the lather on the horse's mouth that he gave up his efforts to do so (*οὕτως ἀπετύγχανεν ὥς ἀπειπεῖν*), and it might appear that

¹³ In fact it may be that the moral of the Apelles story, whatever exactly it is, is supposed to apply only to the person described at *PH* 1. 26 as undergoing the experience in virtue of which she *becomes* a Pyrrhonist. That is, it may be that the Apelles story is not supposed to tell us anything about the relation between suspension of judgement and tranquillity **in the case of the converted** or practising Pyrrhonist.

we are supposed to conclude from this fact that the Pyrrhonist, too, is so unsuccessful in her search for truth that she gives up that search. But I think this appearance must be misleading. For the Pyrrhonist cannot give up the search for truth because she accepts the negative dogmatic thesis that the truth cannot be known (as Apelles might give up his efforts to paint the lather on the horse's mouth because he is convinced it cannot be done). If the Pyrrhonist suspends judgement about whether *p* or *q* is the case, she does so because it appears to her that the considerations she has identified as supporting the truth of *p* are equally balanced by the considerations she has identified as supporting the truth of *q*. If there is an analogue for the Pyrrhonist to Apelles giving up his efforts to paint the lather on the horse's mouth, it is this: in suspending judgement about whether *p* or *q* is the case, the Pyrrhonist gives up the search for the truth about this matter *as far as those considerations she has surveyed up to now go which bear on the question whether p or q is the case*. But that simply means that the Pyrrhonist's search for the truth in this case will now be a matter, at least in the first instance, of searching for additional considerations in support of the truth either of *p* or of *q*.

Two other texts in the *Outlines* have seemed to some commentators to be especially problematic for the view that the Pyrrhonist is engaged in the search for truth. At *PH* 1. 8 Sextus writes that Scepticism (*Σκέψις*) is 'an ability [*δύναμις*] 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 [*ἰσοσθένεια*] in the opposed propositions and accounts, we come first to suspension of judgement [*ἐποχή*] and afterwards to tranquillity [*ἀταραξία*]'.

The problem is that here Sextus appears to describe the ability which is constitutive of Pyrrhonism in such a way that the exercise of that ability eliminates any possibility that the Pyrrhonist's investigations will end in the discovery of truth rather than suspension of judgement.¹⁴ And the claim that it is not possible, given the Pyrrhonist's ability, for an investigation to end in the discovery of truth is just a version of the negative dogmatist's thesis that the truth about the matters investigated cannot be known. Since, however, Sextus explicitly claims that Pyrrhonism is not a form of negative dogmatism, we should try to read Sextus' description here of the ability which is constitutive of Pyrrhonism in such a

¹⁴ Palmer, 'Skeptical Investigation', 351–2.

way that the exercise of that ability does not commit the Pyrrhonist to negative dogmatism.

It is reasonable, therefore, to construe Sextus' remarks at *PH* 1. 8 along the following lines. Given any candidate for belief *p*, the Pyrrhonist is described as someone who is able to identify a conflicting candidate for belief *q* and to offer an argument which purports to show that there is no reason to assent to *p* rather than to *q*, or vice versa. On each occasion in the past when the Pyrrhonist has set up a conflict of this sort it has appeared to her, given the arguments she has marshalled, that she has no reason to assent to *p* rather than to *q*, and vice versa, and she has suspended judgement about whether *p* or *q* is the case. And it would be unsurprising, at the very least, if it also appears to the Pyrrhonist now that her future investigations, in which she exercises the same ability she has exercised in the past, will result in suspension of judgement. None the less, the Pyrrhonist does not give the form of assent characteristic of dogmatism to the proposition that all of her investigations will or must result in suspension of judgement.¹⁵ That is why the Pyrrhonist is not a negative dogmatist who believes that the truth cannot be known. Of course, the Pyrrhonist does not give the form of assent characteristic of dogmatism to the proposition that her future investigations can and will result in the discovery of truth. She suspends judgement as to whether this is so, but that suspension of judgement is perfectly compatible with her undertaking an investigation which has as one of its objectives the discovery of truth. For it is not a necessary condition of undertaking an investigation with this objective that one give any form of assent to the proposition that it is possible to discover the truth. All that is required is that one not deny, as the negative dogmatist does, that it is possible to do so.

PH 1. 33–4 is a second problematic text. There Sextus writes:

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 did not yet appear sound, but it was 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 does not yet appear

¹⁵ At *PH* 1. 13 (and see 1. 19–20) Sextus distinguishes two kinds of assent, and claims that only the kind of assent which is voluntary and directed towards propositions which specify non-evident states of affairs yields the dogmatism the Pyrrhonist claims to live without.

to us; so we should not yet assent to what is now thought to be a powerful argument.

The problem here is that Sextus' Pyrrhonist can deploy this argument—let us call it *the possibility argument*—whenever she is presented with an argument which appears sound to her and against which she cannot raise any other objection or counter-argument.¹⁶ And, crucially, *if* it appears to the Pyrrhonist that the possibility argument balances out any argument against which it is directed, then she will never be in a position in which an argument appears sound to her in a way that will lead her to assent to the conclusion of that argument. Given the availability of the possibility argument and given what the Pyrrhonist takes to be its force, *her investigation cannot end in anything but suspension of judgement*.¹⁷ Now it would be foolish to deny that Sextus' text can be read in this way, but I think another, deflationary reading is plausible as well. In presenting the possibility argument Sextus is indicating that he does not want to deny that it is possible that the argument will seem compelling to some Pyrrhonists. At the same time, however, Sextus can concede that it is possible that the possibility will *not* seem compelling to other Pyrrhonists. It is, after all, easy enough to imagine a Pyrrhonist who does *not* find this argument compelling. (Why should she?) The passage at *PH* 1. 33–4 does not require, as far as I can see, that according to Sextus the possibility argument will seem to *every* Pyrrhonist to be as compelling as any argument against which it is deployed. So for all Sextus has said in this passage, the mere availability of the possibility argument does not guarantee that in every case the Pyrrhonist's investigation will end in suspension of judgement.

II

To this point I have been arguing that none of the texts commonly cited in support of the view that the Pyrrhonist is not engaged in the search for truth needs to be read in this way. But these exegetical

¹⁶ Versions of the possibility argument are presented by Sextus at *PH* 1. 89; 1. 96; 1. 143; 2. 40; 3. 233–4.

¹⁷ Cf. Palmer, 'Skeptical Investigation', 356, and Striker, 'Scepticism', 127–8. The possibility argument has at least one champion in R. J. Hankinson, *The Sceptics* (London, 1995), 30.

arguments leave unanswered the question *why* the Pyrrhonist—that is, someone who is able to achieve tranquillity by suspending judgement—engages in the search for truth. There is a genuine puzzle here, and I think it arises in two ways.

Consider first the case in which the Pyrrhonist encounters and is distressed by a *new* conflict between candidates for belief. Given her past experience, it cannot but appear to the Pyrrhonist that her investigation of this new conflict will result in suspension of judgement. Moreover, it cannot but appear to her that by suspending judgement about this conflict she will alleviate the distress she is currently experiencing with respect to it. **The puzzle, then, is why the Pyrrhonist does not pursue suspension of judgement rather than the discovery of truth as her immediate objective.** The answer cannot be that if the Pyrrhonist were to do so, she would thereby commit herself to negative dogmatism. For the Pyrrhonist can pursue suspension of judgement as a means to achieving tranquillity without denying that it is possible to discover the truth. It will just appear to her, as a result of her past experience, that suspension of judgement is at least as effective a way to secure tranquillity as the discovery of truth. I argued earlier that the Pyrrhonist cannot pursue suspension of judgement rather than the discovery of truth as a means to tranquillity on the grounds that it is not possible to discover the truth. The point here is simply that the Pyrrhonist's pursuit of suspension of judgement need not be based in this way on negative dogmatism.

Consider next the case in which the Pyrrhonist has suspended judgement about whether *p* or *q* is the case and, as a result, is no longer distressed by the conflict between *p* and *q*. The Pyrrhonist has now lost her original motive for investigating this conflict—namely, in order to achieve tranquillity with respect to it. What reason, then, does the Pyrrhonist have to continue investigating whether *p* or *q* is the case? If she has no reason, how can the Pyrrhonist plausibly claim *still* to be doing so (*PH* 1. 2)? The quick answer to these questions is that the Pyrrhonist's suspension of judgement is, and is understood by her to be, **provisional**. That is why Sextus occasionally remarks that suspension of judgement obtains only as far as an argument or set of considerations go (*ὅσον ἐπὶ τῷ λόγῳ*) or 'up to now' (*μέχρι* or *ἄχρι νῦν*).¹⁸ It is also the reason why

¹⁸ As J. Barnes, *The Toils of Scepticism [Toils]* (Cambridge, 1990), 10, has noted, citing *PH* 1. 25; 1. 200; 1. 201; 3. 70.

when the Pyrrhonist utters one of the sceptical phrases catalogued at *PH* 1. 187–205, her utterance is governed at least implicitly by a temporal qualifier.¹⁹ The Pyrrhonist's suspension of judgement can be disturbed or unsettled by the introduction of a new consideration which bears on the matter about which she has suspended judgement. If this occurs, the Pyrrhonist once again finds herself distressed by a conflict between candidates for belief. This distress, or rather the desire to alleviate it, provides the Pyrrhonist with her reason to continue investigating the matter in question.

This quick answer, however, comes at the price of generating in a second way the same puzzle. Given her past experience, it cannot but appear to the Pyrrhonist that continued investigation of whether *p* or *q* is the case will result in suspension of judgement. Moreover, it cannot but appear to her that by suspending judgement about the conflict between *p* and *q* she will alleviate the distress she is once again experiencing with respect to it. Why, then, does the Pyrrhonist not pursue suspension of judgement rather than the discovery of truth as a means to restoring that tranquillity she has lost?

One possible solution to this puzzle is that **for the Pyrrhonist suspension of judgement is not something that can be achieved by pursuing it directly.**²⁰ (In this respect suspension of judgement would require the kind of indirectness familiar from a standard objection to utilitarianism. Just as you cannot maximize good consequences by trying to maximize good consequences, so you cannot come to suspend judgement about a matter by trying to suspend judgement about that matter.) Sextus, however, nowhere attributes this sort of view to the Pyrrhonist. According to him, the Pyrrhonist does *not* pursue suspension of judgement as her immediate objective—that fact is something which distinguishes Sextus' Pyrrhonist from earlier Pyrrhonists such as Timon and Aenesidemus. The question is *why* the Pyrrhonist does not do this, and there is simply no evidence in Sextus that it appears to the Pyrrhonist that suspension of judgement cannot be achieved by pursuing it directly. In addition, and given the Pyrrhonist's distinctive ability and her repertoire of arguments, it is very difficult to see why it would appear to the

¹⁹ See also *PH* 1. 193 (*νῦν*); 1. 197 (*οὕτω πέπονθα νῦν*); 1. 200 (*ἄχρι νῦν*); 1. 201 (*πρὸς τὸ παρόν*). Contrast Palmer, 'Skeptical Investigation', 372.

²⁰ This sort of view is suggested by some remarks in J. Annas, 'Scepticism, Old and New', in M. Frede and G. Striker (eds.), *Rationality in Greek Thought* (Oxford, 1996), 239–54 at 242 and n. 14.

Pyrrhonist that she cannot achieve suspension of judgement by pursuing it directly.²¹

We can offer a more promising solution to our puzzle by first noticing that the Pyrrhonist will pursue suspension of judgement rather than the discovery of truth as a means to tranquillity *only if* the Pyrrhonist is interested in the discovery of truth *merely* as a means to tranquillity. For suppose that the Pyrrhonist can achieve tranquillity either by discovering the truth or by suspending judgement, and that the Pyrrhonist is interested in the discovery of truth for its own sake and not merely as a means to tranquillity. In these circumstances the Pyrrhonist's interest in the discovery of truth for its own sake, and the lack of any such interest in suspension of judgement, will favour the choice of truth over suspension of judgement as a means to tranquillity. So the Pyrrhonist will pursue tranquillity by way of suspension of judgement only if she lacks an interest in the discovery of truth for its own sake and, consequently, has no reason to prefer the discovery of truth to suspension of judgement as a means to tranquillity. But—and this is the important point—this lack of interest in the discovery of truth for its own sake, and not merely as a means to tranquillity, undermines the motivation Sextus attributes to the Pyrrhonist for seeking tranquillity in the first place. For according to Sextus, the Pyrrhonist seeks tranquillity because she is distressed by conflicts between candidates for belief (*PH* 1. 12; 1. 26). Yet if the Pyrrhonist has no interest in the discovery of truth for its own sake, then there is no reason for her to be distressed by the fact that candidates for belief conflict and she does not know which member of a given set of conflicting candidates for belief is true. A lack of interest in truth for its own sake renders the Pyrrhonist immune to just the kind of distress which, according to Sextus, motivates the Pyrrhonist to seek tranquillity in the first place. In this way the coherence of Sextus' account of why the Pyrrhonist seeks tranquillity requires that the Pyrrhonist is interested in the discovery of truth for its own sake and not merely as a means to tranquillity. That interest, in turn, gives the Pyrrhonist a reason to pursue tranquillity by way of the discovery of truth rather than suspension of judgement.

²¹ In fact there are a few passages in *PH* 1 where Sextus presents a certain argument or argument-schema as being deployed *in order to* bring about suspension of judgement. See *PH* 1. 91 (ὡς αὖτε . . . ἐπὶ τὴν ἐποχὴν κατατρώμεν); 1. 100 (ὡς αὖτε . . . ἔχωμεν καταλήγειν εἰς τὴν ἐποχὴν).

This line of thought, incidentally, makes it clear why the argument at *PH* 1. 27–8 is so awkward for Sextus. The source of distress Sextus identifies there is not—as we might have expected given *PH* 1. 12 and 1. 26—a conflict between candidates for belief about the value of something and perplexity about which of these conflicting candidates one ought to endorse. It is, rather, any *belief* that something is good or bad. But in that case the discovery of truth—which involves the acquisition of beliefs about the matter being investigated—is incompatible with the achievement of tranquillity with respect to matters of value. So, on the one hand, Sextus' claim at *PH* 1. 12 and 1. 26 that the Pyrrhonist is distressed by conflicts between candidates for belief presupposes that the Pyrrhonist has an interest in truth for its own sake, and this interest provides the Pyrrhonist with a reason to make the discovery of truth her immediate objective. But, on the other hand, the argument at *PH* 1. 27–8 requires that at least with respect to matters of value the Pyrrhonist abandon her interest in truth for its own sake and make suspension of judgement her immediate objective.

Consider next a passage early in the second book of the *Outlines* where Sextus is responding to the charge that the Pyrrhonist cannot investigate (or even think about) those matters about which the dogmatist holds beliefs. At *PH* 2. 11 he writes:

Consider whether even now the dogmatists are not precluded from investigation. For those who agree that they do not know how objects are in their nature it is not inconsistent [*οὐ . . . ἀνακόλουθον*] to investigate them; but for those who think they know them accurately it is. For the latter [i.e. the dogmatists] the investigation is already at its end, as they suppose, but for the former, the reason why any investigation is undertaken—the thought that they have not made a discovery—is still present [*δι' ὃ πάντα συνίσταται ζήτησις ἀκμὴν ὑπάρχει, τὸ νομίζειν ὡς οὐχ εὐρηκάσιν*].

According to Sextus in this passage the Pyrrhonist, simply in virtue of withholding her assent both from *p* and from *q*, and hence being in a position in which it appears to her that she does not know whether *p* or *q* is the case, has a reason to search for the truth about *p* and *q*. For Sextus claims here that the reason *anyone*, the Pyrrhonist included, engages in an investigation of some matter is the fact that she thinks she has not discovered, i.e. does not know, the truth about that matter. And any investigation comes to an end when the investigator thinks, as the dogmatist does, that she

has discovered, i.e. now knows, the truth about the matter she is investigating. Now the fact that it appears to me that I do not know whether *p* or *q* is the case is *by itself* a reason for me to investigate the matter *only if*, first, I desire to know whether *p* or *q* is the case, and, second, I believe or at least do not deny that it is possible to discover whether *p* or *q* is the case. So in this passage Sextus is, at least by implication, attributing to the Pyrrhonist a desire to know the truth about any matter she investigates. This desire constitutes a reason for the Pyrrhonist to make the discovery of truth rather than suspension of judgement her immediate objective provided that the Pyrrhonist believes, or at least does not deny, that her ultimate objective, tranquillity, can be achieved by discovering the truth. I have already argued that the Pyrrhonist is not in a position to deny that it is possible to achieve tranquillity by discovering the truth. If this is right, then the Pyrrhonist will seek both the discovery of truth and tranquillity, but she will not seek the discovery of truth merely as a means to tranquillity.²²

So the passage at *PH* 2. 11 suggests the following solution to our puzzle. When the Pyrrhonist encounters a new conflict between candidates for belief or revisits an old one that is now troubling her again, she pursues the discovery of truth rather than suspension of judgement as her immediate objective because she values the discovery of truth independently of any contribution it makes to her achievement of tranquillity.²³ The discovery of truth, unlike

²² Palmer, 'Skeptical Investigation', 368–9, claims that the passage at *PH* 2. 11 can be read 'as a purely *ad hominem* point against the dogmatists who claim that the Skeptic is precluded from inquiring into their own theories: given that *they* conceive of the goal of inquiry as the discovery of truth, then a necessary condition of being able to conduct an inquiry of the type they pursue is the belief that one does not already know the truth, so their complaint against the Skeptic backfires since they suppose that they are already in possession of the truth'. But, first, Palmer does not explain why it is a point against the dogmatist who believes that *p* that she is not *still* investigating or cannot (without giving up her belief that *p*) investigate whether *p* is the case. It is, after all, the Pyrrhonist, not the dogmatist, who claims both that she is *still* investigating and that investigation is a constitutive feature of her way of life. Second, Palmer can read *PH* 2. 11 in the way he describes only by ignoring, as he does, the crucial portion of the text: Sextus explicitly says that those who agree that they do not know what the nature of a given object is—i.e. the Pyrrhonists—have *as their reason for engaging in any investigation* the fact that they think they have not discovered what the nature of that object is.

²³ The claim that the Pyrrhonist values the discovery of truth need not be equivalent to or entail that the Pyrrhonist gives the form of assent characteristic of dogmatism to the proposition that the discovery of truth is something good. According to the argument at *PH* 1. 27–8, as we have seen, doing so would be a source

suspension of judgement, is not merely a means to an end. There is no problem for the Pyrrhonist in pursuing the discovery of truth as an end in itself while also pursuing tranquillity as the ultimate end of the sceptical way of life. In presenting the sceptical way of life as having an ultimate end, Sextus simply employs without endorsing standard dogmatic definitions of the ultimate end (*PH* 1. 25). Tranquillity alone satisfies those definitions. For tranquillity alone is that for the sake of which everything else, the discovery of truth included, is pursued while it itself is not pursued for the sake of anything else.

I now want to turn to a second puzzle about whether and how the Pyrrhonist's use of certain arguments is compatible with the search for truth. At *PH* 1. 164–9 Sextus introduces a set of five modes or argument-forms—the so-called Agrippan modes—which lead, either individually or in combination with one another, to suspension of judgement.²⁴ The Agrippan modes purport to show that a candidate for belief is subject to undecided disagreement (the mode from disagreement) or that the attempt to establish the truth of a candidate for belief relies on mere assertion (the mode from hypothesis) or involves reasoning in a circle (the reciprocal mode) or generates an infinite regress (the mode from infinite regress). Some commentators have claimed that the Agrippan modes are designed to establish the conclusion that for any candidate for belief *p* (where *p* specifies a non-evident state of affairs), there is not *and cannot be* any reason to assent to *p*. But this conclusion is equivalent to the negative dogmatic thesis that for any proposition *p* which specifies a non-evident state of affairs it is not possible to discover whether *p* is the case or not. The puzzle, then, is how, in searching for the truth about some matter, the Pyrrhonist can use arguments which have as their conclusion, and are taken by the Pyrrhonist to have as their conclusion, that the truth about that matter cannot be discovered. Moreover, as commentators regularly observe, Sextus writes that

of distress or anxiety for the Pyrrhonist. But it might none the less merely appear to the Pyrrhonist that the discovery of truth is something good, and for that reason she might pursue it.

²⁴ Sextus reports that these modes of suspension of judgement were devised by 'the more recent Sceptics' (οἱ νεώτεροι Σκεπτικοί) in contrast to 'the older Sceptics' (οἱ ἀρχαιότεροι Σκεπτικοί) who are said at *PH* 1. 36 to have handed down the ten modes of suspension of judgement and who include, as Sextus indicates elsewhere (*M.* 7. 345), Aenesidemus. Diogenes Laertius (9. 88) attributes the five modes to Agrippa.

'it is possible to refer every object of investigation to these modes' (*πᾶν τὸ ζητούμενον εἰς τούτους ἀνάγειν τοὺς τρόπους ἐνδεχεται*, *PH* 1. 169). If the Agrippan modes have universal application, then the Pyrrhonist appears to have arguments which can be used in every investigation she conducts to show that the truth about the matter investigated cannot be discovered. How can someone who has arguments of this kind at her disposal be engaged in the search for truth?²⁵

There is a solution to this puzzle, and it is a solution which seems to me to be available to the Pyrrhonist, but I want to be clear that Sextus nowhere explicitly formulates it. So I am concerned here less with exegesis and more with those possibilities that fall within the logical space of Sextus' Pyrrhonism. The solution I have in mind turns on two points. First, someone who, like the Pyrrhonist, takes the Agrippan modes to have universal application is not for that reason alone committed to a general negative dogmatism. For the claim that the Agrippan modes can be applied to any matter the Pyrrhonist investigates is not equivalent to the claim that the Agrippan modes can be successfully applied in every case. The Agrippan modes together constitute a formal, and therefore topic-neutral, argumentative strategy. But while its topic-neutrality guarantees that the Agrippan strategy has universal application, that topic-neutrality cannot by itself guarantee that every application of the Agrippan strategy will be successful. So the fact that the Pyrrhonist uses an argumentative strategy with universal application commits the Pyrrhonist to a general negative dogmatism only if the Pyrrhonist also believes that every application of the Agrippan strategy will be successful.

The second point, then, is that the Pyrrhonist has no reason to believe that every application of the Agrippan strategy will be successful. Here is one version of the Agrippan strategy.²⁶ Take any candidate for belief *p*. Either the truth of *p* is merely asserted or it

²⁵ For versions of this objection to the Pyrrhonist's use of the Agrippan modes, see Palmer, 'Skeptical Investigation', 356–9, and Striker, 'Scepticism', 120.

²⁶ This version of the Agrippan strategy is developed by Barnes, *Toils*, 119, but it is based on Sextus' own description at *PH* 1. 178–9 of a strategy that employs three (not, as Sextus curiously says, two) of the Agrippan modes: the mode from disagreement, the reciprocal mode, and the mode from infinite regress. Barnes produces his strategy by simply replacing the mode from disagreement with the hypothetical mode. If the Pyrrhonist's use of this strategy or one of its variants need not commit her to negative dogmatism, then her use of the Agrippan modes individually need not do so.

is established on the basis of some reason R_1 . If the truth of p is merely asserted, the hypothetical mode applies. According to that mode the mere assertion of p is no more or less credible than the mere assertion of not- p . If the truth of p is established on the basis of some reason R_1 , then R_1 is either the same as p or different from p . If R_1 is the same as p , the reciprocal mode applies. The attempt to establish the truth of p on the basis of R_1 involves reasoning in a (very small) circle. If R_1 is different from p , then either the truth of R_1 is merely asserted or it is established on the basis of a reason R_2 . If R_1 is merely asserted, the hypothetical mode applies. If the truth of R_1 is established on the basis of R_2 , then either R_2 is the same as or different from R_1 . If R_2 is the same as R_1 (or p), the reciprocal mode applies. If R_2 is different from R_1 , then either the truth of R_2 is merely asserted or it is established on the basis of a reason R_3 ; and so on. The effort to establish the truth of p on the basis of a reason generates an infinite sequence of reasons, and the mode from infinite regress applies. According to this mode, an infinite sequence of reasons cannot establish the truth of p .²⁷

The crux of the Agrippan strategy is the demand, given any reason R_1 offered as establishing the truth of p , for a second reason R_2 which establishes the truth of R_1 , and the dismissal as mere assertion of any reason whose truth is not established by another reason. The question is why the Pyrrhonist would believe that for any reason which is offered as establishing either directly or indirectly the truth of a candidate for belief, it will be reasonable or even intelligible to demand an additional reason which establishes the truth of that first reason. If R_1 is a reason whose truth is self-evident, then appealing to R_1 as support for the truth of p without also offering a second reason R_2 which establishes the truth of R_1 is *not* an instance of merely asserting R_1 . For the charge of mere assertion, and so the hypothetical mode, can be successfully applied only to a reason whose truth is not self-evident and must be established by some additional reason. And if R_1 is different from p —as it must be if its truth is self-evident—then the reciprocal mode cannot be successfully applied to the appeal to R_1 in support of the truth of p . And, finally, if the presentation of R_1 in support of the truth of p is not an instance of mere assertion and does not involve circular reasoning, then there is no need for an

²⁷ See Barnes, *Toils*, 44–8, on why this is so or why the Pyrrhonist takes this to be so.

additional reason *Rz* and the mode from infinite regress does not apply.

Call a truth that is self-evident and can be used to establish the truth of some proposition which specifies a non-evident state of affairs a *basic reason*.²⁸ The Pyrrhonist has a reason to believe that every application of the Agrippan strategy will be successful *only if she believes that there are not and cannot be basic reasons*. In this way her use of the Agrippan strategy commits her to a general negative dogmatism *only if* she is also and independently committed to *a form of negative dogmatism about basic reasons*. But, I claim, the Pyrrhonist has no reason to believe that there are not and cannot be basic reasons, and she will suspend judgement on the matter.²⁹ In doing so she must also suspend judgement as to

²⁸ Barnes, *Toils*, 122–37, sketches an ‘externalist’ account of basic beliefs or items of knowledge to which the dogmatist can appeal in response to the Agrippan strategy, and he attributes this account to e.g. Galen and certain Stoics. My point here, in contrast, is simply that the Pyrrhonist has no reason to deny the possibility of what I am calling basic reasons (though she need not have any reason to accept their possibility). If the Pyrrhonist does not deny the possibility of basic reasons, then her use of the Agrippan strategy does not commit her to a general negative dogmatism.

²⁹ David Sedley has suggested to me that the Ten Aenesidemian Modes provide the Pyrrhonist with a reason for denying the possibility of basic reasons. I take it that something like the following is the thought. A basic reason is a self-evident truth. For any proposed basic reason *p*, the Pyrrhonist can appeal to one or more of the Ten Modes to establish that it appears to some creature under some condition that not-*p*. But in that case the truth of *p* is not self-evident and *p* is not a basic reason. In this way the Ten Modes can be used to show that the truth of any proposed basic reason is in fact something non-evident, i.e. something that needs to be established by argument. But in fact the Ten Modes do not show this at all. For the claim that the truth of *p* is self-evident is not equivalent to, and does not entail, the claim that the truth of *p* is evident to every creature under any condition. The claim is only that it is possible to know that *p* where one’s knowledge that *p* is not derived from some other item of knowledge. Sedley has also suggested to me that if the notion of being apprehended or known by means of itself (τὸ καταλαμβάνεσθαι ἐξ ἑαυτοῦ) is equivalent to the notion of being self-evident, then at *PH.* 1. 178 Sextus assumes that the fact that it appears to one person that *p* and to another person that not-*p* is sufficient to show that *p* cannot be known by means of itself and, therefore, is not self-evident. But it seems to me that in this passage neither Sextus nor those whose argument he is reporting make this assumption. Sextus explains that ‘the more recent Sceptics’ who devised the Agrippan modes also argued that the fact that nothing is known by means of itself, and therefore that nothing is self-evident, follows from the fact that there is an ‘undecided’ (ἀνεπίκριτος) dispute among natural scientists (φυσικοί) over all objects of perception and of thought. According to this argument, then, the fact that a given proposition *p* is not known by means of itself and therefore is not self-evident does not follow, as Sedley suggests it does, from the fact that it appears to one creature that *p* and to another creature (or to the same creature in different circumstances) that not-*p*. The conclusion that *p* is not self-evident, according to this argument, follows only from the fact that the dispute

whether every application of the Agrippan strategy will be successful. That suspension, in turn, allows the Pyrrhonist to use the Agrippan strategy without thereby committing herself to a general negative dogmatism.

III

I have argued here that, according to Sextus, the Pyrrhonist is and takes herself to be engaged in the search for truth, and this is so in part because the Pyrrhonist values the discovery of truth not merely as a means to tranquillity but also as an end in itself. I have also claimed that the Pyrrhonist's use of certain arguments, including the Agrippan modes, **does not by itself commit her to negative dogmatism and so is compatible with the search for truth.**

The conclusion that Sextus' Pyrrhonist is and takes herself to be engaged in the search for truth has at least two important consequences for our understanding of Pyrrhonian scepticism. First, if the Pyrrhonist takes herself to be engaged in the search for truth, then she will also take herself to be committed to certain basic norms of rationality which she (or anyone else) takes to govern the search for truth. So she will take herself to be committed to, for instance, the principle that if you have no reason to assent to one candidate for belief *p* rather than another conflicting candidate for belief *q*, you ought to suspend judgement about whether *p* or *q* is the case. A commitment to this principle can serve as the basis for a novel explanation of the sense in which, by Sextus' own report, if the Pyrrhonist has no reason to believe *p* rather than *q*, and vice versa, the Pyrrhonist not only suspends judgement about whether *p* or *q* is the case, but it is *necessary* for her to do so.³⁰ Virtually all commentators think that the necessity which governs the Pyrrhonist's suspension of judgement is causal.³¹ But if the Pyrrhonist is

over whether *p* is the case is 'undecided', i.e. from the fact that there is no reason to assent to *p* rather than to its negation, and vice versa. And that is so, the argument continues, because any consideration that could serve as a reason to assent to *p* rather than to its negation, or vice versa, would itself be an object of perception or an object of thought and, for that reason, subject to the dispute it is supposed to resolve.

³⁰ *PH* I. 61; I. 78; I. 89; I. 121; I. 128; I. 129; I. 140; I. 163; I. 170.

³¹ For versions of the view that the necessity with which the Pyrrhonist suspends judgement is causal, see Burnyeat, 'Can the Sceptic?', 39; M. Williams, 'Scepticism without Theory', *Review of Metaphysics*, 41 (1988), 547–88 at 572; J. Barnes,

engaged in the search for truth, then it is possible to see that necessity as hypothetical: suspension of judgement is necessary if the Pyrrhonist's epistemic conduct is to conform to the norms which she takes to govern the search for truth.³²

Second, if Sextus' Pyrrhonist is engaged in the search for truth and committed to certain basic norms of rationality which she takes to govern that search, then the Pyrrhonist does not exemplify the anti-rationalism which some commentators have attributed to her and which is characteristic of, for instance, the early Empiricist school of medicine in antiquity.³³ It is true that reason, in its capacity to construct and assess arguments, leads the Pyrrhonist to suspend judgement and to sustain her suspension of judgement. But it is also reason in this same guise which prevents the Pyrrhonist from becoming one more negative dogmatist. For rational reflection reveals to the Pyrrhonist that neither her past experience of searching for the truth but failing to discover it nor those arguments which led her to suspend judgement about the matters she investigated rule out the possibility of discovering the truth in the future. Of course, the Pyrrhonist does challenge the sometimes extravagant claims made on behalf of reason by dogmatic philosophers. But by subjecting those claims to rational scrutiny that in most cases they cannot withstand, the Pyrrhonist, more than her dogmatic counterpart, emerges as an advocate of reason.

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³² I want to be clear that I am claiming here only that the conclusions of this paper make it *possible*—in the sense that they provide a reason—to see the necessity which governs the Pyrrhonist's suspension of judgement as hypothetical rather than causal. I do not here have the space to provide arguments for the claim that we *ought* to see the necessity in question in this way.

³³ For the charge of anti-rationalism against Sextus' Pyrrhonist, see especially Striker, 'Scepticism', 121–8. For the anti-rationalism of the early Empiricist school of medicine, see M. Frede, 'The Ancient Empiricists', in id., *Essays in Ancient Philosophy* (Minneapolis, 1987), 243–60 at 248–9.

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