

Apraxia, Appearances, and Beliefs: The Pyrrhonists' Way Out

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According to the objection of inactivity (apraxia), the skeptics cannot live their skepticism, since any attempt to apply it to everyday life would result in total inactivity, while any action they would perform qua skeptics would be a sign that they abandoned their skepticism. In this paper I discuss the ancient Pyrrhonists' response to the objection as is presented in the writings of Sextus Empiricus. Sextus argues that the Pyrrhonists are immune to the apraxia objection because it is based on the misunderstanding of their position, that is, on the wrong assumption that they live in accordance with philosophical logos. To live in accordance with philosophical logos includes two things. First, it includes the idea that one should apply one's philosophical tenets, concepts and recommendations to ordinary human life and use it as a practical guide. However, the only item that survives skeptical philosophy, appearance, is not used in this way: its role as criterion of action is different. Second, it includes the idea that ordinary human life can be, and should be, described in philosophical terms. However, the skeptics refuse to describe their actions in philosophical terms. More specifically, they refuse to describe their actions in terms of beliefs: from the Pyrrhonists' point of view, the question "Do you have beliefs?" is misplaced, since any answer to it, affirmative or negative, is as credible as any other, since it is about something non-evident.

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The objection of inactivity (*apraxia*) has been one of the most serious and the most famous objections to ancient skepticism. In a nutshell, the objection is that the skeptics cannot live their skepticism, since any attempt to apply it to everyday life would result in total inactivity, while any action they would perform *qua* skeptics would be a sign that they abandoned their skepticism. The objection is important not only because it looks like an elegant, simple and convincing refutation

of skepticism, but also because the skeptics' response to it can tell us much about how to understand their position.¹

Ancient Pyrrhonism, which was considered a particularly radical form of skepticism, was especially liable to this objection. The Pyrrhonists say that for any way in which something appears to one, or for any appearance, there is an opposing appearance, and that, due to the equipollence of the opposed appearances, they suspend judgment about whether things are such as they appear.² Such a position straightforwardly invited the *apraxia* objection. The Pyrrhonists' opponents objected that the skeptic is thus reduced to total inactivity, "staying fixed like some vegetable" (Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Ethicists* [M 11] 11.162), since suspending judgment precludes him from making any choice or avoidance.³

Sextus insists that the Pyrrhonists' position is immune to the *apraxia* objection, for two reasons. First, he says that the Pyrrhonists attend to appearances, which are their criteria of action. Second, he insists that the *apraxia* objection is misplaced because the Pyrrhonists are able to choose and avoid things in accordance with everyday life or "non-philosophical practice."⁴ In this paper I want to clear up some interpretative problems with such a response. In Section 1 I will discuss Sextus' most elaborate treatment of the *apraxia* objection (M 11.162–6). My aim is to show that Sextus' response to the objection in this passage leaves open two questions: first, how is it possible to call the Pyrrhonist life "non-philosophical" if it is governed by a philosophical recommendation that we should suspend beliefs?; and second, what exactly is included in attending to appearances? In Section 2 I will tackle the latter question. In my opinion, both attending and assenting to appearances should be understood negatively, as not being able to reject them. Correspondingly, appearances are the skeptics' criteria of action in a minimal sense, namely, because they are the only items that survive both the Pyrrhonists' theoretical inquiries—for, they are not the objects of theoretical inquiry—and their practical life—for, all appearances that a Pyrrhonist receive remain untouched, i.e. she does not select one of them as being more persuasive and reject the others. Section 3 will address the notorious question of whether the Pyrrhonists have beliefs. I will try to show why, from the Pyrrhonists' point of view, this question is misplaced. As a consequence, suspension of

¹ For an illuminating recent discussion, see Vogt (2010). See also Striker (1980).

² "Appearances" here are taken in a wide sense, including not only the objects of perception but the objects of thought as well. For such a use of "appearance," see Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* (PH) 2.10, *Against the Logicians* (M 7 and 8) 8.362; see also Frede (1973: 809–810); Burnyeat (1997: 39).

³ Translations from *Against the Ethicists* and *Against the Logicians* are by Bett (1997) and (2005) respectively, while translations from *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* (PH) are by Annas and Barnes (2000), occasionally with modifications.

⁴ For the first reason, see PH 1.23, 237; M 7.30; for the second, see M 11.165; PH 1.226, 231; 2.102, 246, 254.

beliefs does not enter into the explanation of skeptics' action. It only explains why they fare better than the dogmatists and why they are able to achieve tranquility.

Hopefully, these considerations will help us to make sense of Sextus' claim that those who make the *apraxia* objection "do not understand that the skeptic does not live in accordance with philosophical *logos*" (*M* 11.165). They wrongly assume that the Pyrrhonists use appearances as action-guiding principles, in a way in which the doctrinal philosophers use their criteria; and they do not see that the Pyrrhonists refuse to describe their actions in terms of beliefs. Hence, in a sense, Sextus responds to the *apraxia* objection by trying to show that the Pyrrhonists are in a position to refuse to engage with it.

1

Sextus' most elaborate discussion of the *apraxia* objection is found in *Against the Ethicists* (*M* 11.162–6):

Hence one also needs to look down on those who think that [the skeptic] is reduced to inactivity (*anenergēsia*) or to inconsistency (*apemphasis*)—to inactivity, because, since the whole of life is bound up with choices and avoidances, the person who neither chooses nor avoids anything in effect renounces life and stays fixed like some vegetable, and to inconsistency, because if he comes under the power of a tyrant and is compelled to do some unspeakable deed, either he will not endure what has been commanded, but will choose a voluntary death, or to avoid torture he will do what has been ordered, and thus no longer "Will be empty of avoidance and choice," to quote Timon, but will choose one thing and shrink from the other, which is characteristic of those who have apprehended with confidence that there is something to be avoided and to be chosen. In saying this, of course, they do not understand that the sceptic does not live in accordance with philosophical *logos* (for as far as this is concerned he is inactive), but that in accordance with non-philosophical practice (*kata tēn aphilosophon tērēsīn*) he is able to choose some things and avoid others. And if compelled by a tyrant to perform some forbidden act, he will choose one thing, perhaps, and avoid the other by the preconception which accords with his ancestral laws and customs; and in fact he will bear the harsh situation more easily compared with the dogmatist, because he does not, like the latter, have any further opinion over and above these conditions.

Sextus says that the Pyrrhonists do not live in accordance with philosophical *logos*. Philosophical *logos* includes dogmatic philosophical systems. More specifically, as is suggested by the words "further opinion" at the very end of the passage quoted, it includes the idea that action and passion involve holding beliefs about what is by nature good or bad.⁵ Since the Pyrrhonists insist that they have no beliefs about what is by nature good or bad,⁶ their opponents—doctrinal philosophers or

⁵ This is the source of the dogmatists' disturbance: see *PH* 3.236; *M* 11.158–61.

⁶ Sextus actually argues both that nothing is good or bad by nature (see *M* 11.68–95, 110, 118, 140; *PH* 3.178, 182) and that the Pyrrhonists suspend judgment about

dogmatists—conclude that they either do not choose or avoid anything (that they are inactive) or that, if they do, they abandon their skepticism (that they are inconsistent).⁷

An obvious response to such an objection is to reject the assumption that choosing and avoiding require beliefs about what is good or bad and to insist that the Pyrrhonists are able to choose and avoid things on different grounds. This is precisely what Sextus does in the passage: he says that the Pyrrhonists choose and avoid things in accordance with non-philosophical practice. Thus, if a Pyrrhonist under a tyrant's control refuses to commit some horrible act—say, to kill her parents—the account of what she has done does not include any consideration that has to do with a preferred or privileged status of some of her beliefs. She has just decided to save her parents because this is what her laws and customs tell her to do. In terms of the *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, she has decided to save her parents because doing so has appeared best to her. Her following laws and customs of her society is not based on any belief, but is, presumably, just a way of following appearances. This is why Sextus says that appearances are the skeptics' criteria of action (*PH* 1.22). There are two groups of problems with such a response.

(1) The Pyrrhonists suspend judgment about whether there is something that is by nature good or bad. Ordinary people, who are engaged in non-philosophical practice, do not suspend beliefs, and do not just follow appearances. Sextus is aware of the fact that ordinary people choose or avoid things because they believe that they are good or bad, and that non-philosophical practice is actually heavily permeated with dogmatic beliefs, especially political, moral and religious beliefs.⁸ Hence, “non-philosophical practice” can refer only to life as it is after the Pyrrhonist reform, that is, after the Pyrrhonists have eliminated all beliefs from it. But then the question arises not only as to how such a life is possible but also why it can be called non-philosophical. For, one might object that to lead a life without beliefs is to be governed by a philosophical *logos*, that is, by a philosophical theory which recommends suspension of belief. To be sure, Sextus does not view Pyrrhonism as a philosophical theory, but rather as a kind of ability (*PH* 1.8). However, even if we grant this, it is still not clear how can the exercise of skeptical ability be called “everyday practice.”

whether there is something good or bad by nature (see *PH* 3.182, 235). I need not enter into this complicated issue here. See Machuca (2011a).

⁷ There are, of course, some important differences between the inactivity charge (or, as Vogt (2010: 166) calls it, the plant charge) and inconsistency charge, but they need not be discussed here.

⁸ Thus he says that “both ordinary people and philosophers think ... that there is such a thing as good and bad ... yet are at war with one another as far as specifics are concerned” (*M* 11.44). Likewise, when introducing the first mode of Agrippa, he says that both ordinary people and philosophers are involved in disputes about the proposed problem (*PH* 1.165). See also Frede (1997: 22).

In other words, it seems that, even if the Pyrrhonists were able to show that life without beliefs is possible, they could not consistently maintain that they (a) live in accordance with common preconceptions of ordinary people; (b) suspend judgment about whether these preconceptions embody beliefs about what is good or bad by nature; and (c) nevertheless claim that they live in accordance with *non-philosophical* practice. Suppose, to take another example, that a Pyrrhonist lives in a society whose laws and customs forbid incestuous relationships. She will obey these laws and customs and will not engage in incestuous relationships, but she will suspend judgment about whether incest is something bad by nature, as she is aware of the opposing arguments, advanced by some members of the Stoic school, that incest is not objectively bad, but indifferent (see, for instance, *PH* 1.160, 3.205; *M* 11.192). However, her justification of the claim that she follows non-philosophical practice had better not include her suspension: for why would life which consists in obeying the laws and customs *and* suspending belief be considered non-philosophical, as opposed to life which consists in, say, obeying the laws and customs because of belief that they embody what is objectively good? The standards of what counts as non-philosophical practice cannot be ones that a non-philosophical community would not recognize as such, and it is hardly credible that in this regard the Pyrrhonists would fare differently from members of other philosophical schools. Hence, since they do have a position towards good and bad—suspension of judgment—which can be properly called philosophical (though not dogmatic), it seems that, if they hold (a) and (b), the Pyrrhonists cannot hold (c) as well.

(2) According to the skeptical stance presented in the *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, the skeptics just attend to appearances. The problem with this comes to light in the tyrant example, which serves to stress the inconsistency of the Pyrrhonists' position.⁹ To stress the inconsistency of the Pyrrhonists' position, the (unknown) author of the objection could have pointed to *any* action performed by a Pyrrhonist and argued that it contradicts the Pyrrhonists' proclaimed lack of beliefs. In the quoted passage, he points instead to a very harsh situation: a person is forced into a condition over which she has no power. She must either commit a horrible deed, say, kill her parents, or refuse to do so and face up to death. Her situation is thus doubly uncontrollable: she is involuntarily put into this condition, and whatever she does, she is forced to do. She does not even have a choice between doing *x* and doing something else instead: she must either do *x* or refrain from doing *x*. But regardless of what she does—and this is the crux of the objection—she must make a choice and thus prefer one option over another. Stated in this way, the example stresses the epistemic predicament in which a Pyrrhonist, by attending to appearances, finds herself. She is also involuntarily exposed to appearances, and her assent to appearance is also passive.

⁹ A similar example is found in Diogenes Laertius 9.108. See Bett (1997: 174–6).

However, her acting on appearance must involve a decision, since she does not have to act on that appearance. If it appears to the Pyrrhonist that it is hot, she cannot resist but must assent to this; but if she then moves to a colder spot, her action is preceded by a decision to act according to this appearance. Hence, assent to appearances is not sufficient for action, just as being involuntarily forced to commit a horrible deed or not is not sufficient for action. Thus, it seems that the tyrant example already presupposes the Pyrrhonist framework as is developed in the first book of the *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, and that the author of the example makes a further objection, namely, that to say that the Pyrrhonists just attend to appearances is not a satisfactory response to the *apraxia* objection because to assent to an appearance is not yet to act on it.¹⁰ Sextus' laconic response to this further objection suggests that he thinks that it is also based on the misunderstanding of the Pyrrhonist position, and that the Pyrrhonists' insistence on attending to appearances does provide a satisfactory response. It has been left unexplained, however, what is included in attending to appearances so that they can serve as the criteria of action.

Thus, to appreciate Sextus' response to the *apraxia* objection, one should answer two questions: first, how is it possible to call the Pyrrhonist life ordinary, non-philosophical life, given that it seems to be governed by a philosophical recommendation that we should suspend beliefs?¹¹ and second, how is it possible to live without beliefs, just by attending to appearances? These are big questions, especially the second, which is among the most debated topics in Pyrrhonian scholarship. I will attempt to show that both questions require a single answer. I will first, in Section 2, discuss Sextus' idea that appearances are the skeptics' criteria of action and then, in Section 3, address the notorious question of the skeptics' beliefs.

2

In the *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* Sextus addresses the *apraxia* objection in his discussion of the criterion of skepticism:

That we attend to appearances (*tois phainomenois prosechomen*) is clear from what we say about the criterion of sceptical persuasion. "Criterion" has two senses: there are criteria adopted to provide conviction about the reality or unreality of something (we shall talk about these criteria when we turn to attack them); and there are criteria of action, attending to which in everyday life (*kata ton bion*) we perform some actions and not others—and it is these criteria which are our present subject. We say, then, that the criterion of the sceptical persuasion is the appearance, implicitly meaning by this

¹⁰ In saying this, I do not want to suggest anything about the complicated problem of the chronology of Sextus' writings.

¹¹ Or that suspension of belief is a matter of psychological necessity; for a recent discussion on whether suspension is to be understood psychologically or normatively, see Lammenranta (2008).

the impression (*phantasia*); for it depends on passive and unwilling affections and is not the object of investigation. (Hence no-one, presumably, will raise a controversy over whether an existing thing appears this way or that; rather, they investigate whether it is such as it appears.) Thus, attending to appearances, we live in accordance with everyday practice (*kata tēn biōtikēn tērēsin*), without holding opinions (*adoxastōs*)—for we are not able to be utterly inactive (*anenergētoi*). This everyday practice seems to be fourfold, and to consist in guidance by nature, necessitation by feelings, handing down of laws and customs, and teaching of kinds of expertise. (PH 1.21–3)

At first glance, Sextus' point is clear: the Pyrrhonists are not inactive because they have criteria, appearances, on the basis of which they take or avoid some course of action. What is less clear, however, is in what sense exactly can appearances be called criteria. Sextus says that appearances are criteria of action, "attending to which in everyday life we perform some actions and not others."¹² As opposed to the elaborate distinction of various senses of the criterion of truth (PH 2.15–6; M 7.31–4), he is silent about what it means to say of something that it is criterion of action.¹³

The criteria of truth, which the Pyrrhonists repudiate, are supposed to discriminate between what is real and what is not real, or between what is true and what is false. Correspondingly, we can assume that the criteria of action should serve as guides in the Pyrrhonist's life by discriminating courses of action which she will take and those which she will avoid, that is, that they are judges in cases of conflicts. Such an account, however, is not satisfactory as it stands. We may grant that the Pyrrhonist will follow appearance when it is in conflict with some doctrinal belief. We may also grant that, faced with the conflict among appearances, she will not turn to a higher judge or authority to resolve it, but will adhere to appearances themselves. It is not clear, however, how she will decide which appearance she should follow.

Sextus' discussion might suggest that his account of the fourfold regime of everyday life is meant, among other things, to delineate a domain of appearances which are in accordance with non-philosophical practice or everyday life and which will guide the Pyrrhonists' actions.¹⁴ Sextus goes on:

¹² See also M 7.29; at 7.30 appearance is said to be the criterion of choice and avoidance.

¹³ His discussion of Arcesilaus' (M 7.158) and Carneades' (M 7.166–89) criteria of action is not of much help either. Brennan (2000: 67–9) argues that the four elements of everyday practice (PH 1.23–4, discussed below) are conceived by Sextus as criteria of action (Brunschwig 1994: 236 is more cautious), but the text does not support this. Sextus does suggest (M 7.33) that the first two groups of the criteria of truth ("every measure of apprehension," e.g. sight, hearing, and taste, and "every technical measure of apprehension," e.g. cubit, scales, ruler, and compass) are "the everyday" (*biōtika*) criteria, but they should not be confused with the criteria of action.

¹⁴ Thus, for instance, Vogt (2010: 174): "Not every passively experienced impression guides the sceptic's action. Rather, only those passively experienced impressions that go along with an ordinary way of leading one's life do so. Thus, appearances can do the work of a practical *criterion*."

By nature's guidance we are naturally capable of perceiving and thinking. By the necessitation of feelings, hunger conducts us to food and thirst to drink. By the handing down of customs and laws, we accept, from the everyday point of view, that piety is good and impiety bad. By teaching of kinds of expertise we are not inactive in those which we accept. (1.24)

So, on this interpretation, being affected by the object of perception or thought; being hungry or thirsty; following laws and customs (or, more generally, common preconceptions); following instructions in arts—these are all ways of how one can be appeared to in accordance with everyday life, and it is by attending to *these* appearances that the Pyrrhonist lives. Moreover, it may be argued that the above account of the fourfold regime stresses the passivity which characterizes the Pyrrhonist's attitude toward appearances: just as she involuntarily assents to appearances, so she is a passive subject of natural and societal forces.

There are two problems with this interpretation. First, such an interpretation leaves open the question what the Pyrrhonist will do in cases in which all relevant appearances belong to this supposedly acceptable, action-guiding domain of appearances. For, in such cases, no appearance is privileged so that it can serve as a judge. We may grant that, if it appears to the Pyrrhonist (a) that she is hungry and that there is a sandwich in front of her, and if it also appears to her (b) that a philosophical argument to the effect that three-dimensional bodies (or external world, for that matter) do not exist is sound, then she will certainly assent to (a), which belongs to the class of "everyday practice." But she may also be torn between conflicting appearances which both belong to this class: she may be hungry and passively attracted to the sandwich but also accustomed to involuntarily follow a law that forbids her to eat on this particular day.

Second, the only ingredient of the fourfold regime that can be straightforwardly understood on the model of what is going on in involuntary receiving appearances is the second on Sextus' list, necessitation of feelings. Sextus himself makes this clear in his discussion of the relationship between Pyrrhonism and the Methodical school in medicine (*PH* 1.237–41). One similarity between the two schools concerns the fact that the Methodics follow appearances in their practices. To explain the similarity, Sextus first reminds the reader that the Pyrrhonists follow the fourfold regime of everyday life (1.237), and then argues that "everything which the Methodics say in this vein can be brought under the necessitation of feelings, either natural or unnatural" (1.239). Thus, he clearly distinguishes the necessitation of feelings from other ingredients of the fourfold regime, thereby suggesting that a correspondence between what is going on in receiving appearances and holding on to the fourfold regime exists only as far as this ingredient is concerned. Furthermore, when speaking of the nature's guidance, he is not referring to the involuntariness by which the Pyrrhonists are affected by the objects of perception and thought, but to the plain fact that we are beings naturally endowed with the capacities for percep-

tion and thought. The same holds for handing down of customs and laws: the emphasis is only on the fact that the Pyrrhonists live in a particular human society, and not on the process by which they internalize its laws and customs. Finally, “by teaching of kinds of expertise we are not inactive in those which we accept” does not suggest that it is the special kind of training—which consists, perhaps, in automatically following the instructions or something like that—that enables the Pyrrhonist to be an expert in her profession. It rather suggests only that the Pyrrhonists are engaged in various kinds of expertise and that this is due to the instructions they receive just as anyone else.

Hence, appearances are not criteria because they are judges in cases of conflicts. In addition, the fourfold regime of everyday life is not meant to be a list of privileged kinds of appearances, that is, those which are action-guiding for a Pyrrhonist. It is rather a list of typical human characteristics and activities which a Pyrrhonist performs without beliefs, just by attending to appearances. To see in what other sense the appearances can be called criteria, we should consider in what sense the Pyrrhonists “attend to” (*prosechein*) to them.

In the preceding chapter (1.19–20), Sextus has offered several arguments against those who say that the Pyrrhonists reject appearances. The chapter on criteria quoted above, judging from its first sentence (“That we attend to appearances is clear from what we say about the criterion of skeptical persuasion”), seems to be a continuation of that discussion. Sextus suggests that a further reason to insist that the Pyrrhonists do not reject appearances is the fact that they are the Pyrrhonists’ criteria of action. Moreover, the only explanation of the Pyrrhonists’ attending to appearances and of their being criteria of action found in the chapter on criteria is in terms of the Pyrrhonists’ inability to reject them: in 1.22 Sextus just restates his reasons why the appearances cannot be rejected from the previous chapter (1.19). Hence, it seems that attending to appearances should be understood negatively, as not being able to reject them. Indeed, this is also the way in which *assenting* to appearances is understood by Sextus. Assenting to an appearance is not described in terms of forming a mental item (like belief) or in terms of acting according to appearance, but in terms of inability to reject it: if it appears to the Pyrrhonist that x is F , her assent to this seems to consist only in her inability to say “I think that it does not appear to me that x is F .”¹⁵ Thus in *PH* 1.13 (more fully discussed below, pp. 453–6) Sextus says: “The sceptic assents to the affections forced upon him in accordance with impression—for example, he would not say, when heated or chilled, ‘I think I am not heated (or: chilled).’”

In view of this, it may seem strange to say that appearance is the Pyrrhonist’s *criterion* of action. For, we would expect that criterion of

¹⁵ Hence, I do not agree with Vogt when she says: “in his positive description of what the sceptic does in forced assent, Sextus does not cite an utterance, or a kind of belief; he cites an action. The sceptic drinks, rather than saying ‘I am thirsty.’” (Vogt 2012: 657) But I agree with her overall conclusions.

action proposed by a philosophical school to be an item to which an adherent of the school can positively attend in her everyday life and which can serve as a guide in action. Obviously, if there is nothing more to attending to appearances than not rejecting them, then the Pyrrhonists' appearances cannot be such criteria. In what sense, then, can they be called criteria?

There is a difference between the Pyrrhonists' and the dogmatists' attitude toward appearances in action. The dogmatist, in a sense, also cannot reject the appearance: if it appears to him that he should save his parents, he cannot say "I think that it does not appear to me that I should save my parents." However, he lives according to a philosophical *logos*; thus, in order to make a choice between conflicting appearances, he will apply his own criterion of action and investigate, as Sextus would put it, "what is said" (*PH* 1.19) about each of the appearances, to see which one of them is action-guiding in accordance with the criterion. As a result, he will, in a sense, reject one of the appearances, in that he will act according to another; his philosophical *logos* will, as Sextus would put it, "snatch the appearance from under his very eyes" (1.20).

The situation of the Pyrrhonists is rather different. The Pyrrhonist philosophy consists of continuous inquiry (*PH* 1.1–3), that is, of making oppositions of appearances and thoughts which lead to suspension of belief. Hence, their philosophy cannot provide a guide or standard which they can apply in their practical affairs. Indeed, any attempt to directly implement Pyrrhonist philosophy in ordinary life would render them inactive.¹⁶ At the same time, they do not want to insulate their philosophy from ordinary life. Pyrrhonism cannot avoid being understood as a recommendation as to how to live, especially because it aims to show how to achieve a tranquil life.¹⁷ Hence, to engage in practical life *qua* Pyrrhonist philosophers, they can only hold to something that is not subject to their inquiries, and these are the appearances. For, in theoretical contexts, when discussing the so-called non-evident things, the Pyrrhonists do not investigate appearances, but what is said about appearances (*PH* 1.19). Hence, just as the dogmatists' criterion, whatever it is, remains free of dogmatic scrutiny, so the Pyrrhonists' appearances also remain free of skeptical scrutiny.

The appearances survive not only the Pyrrhonists' theoretical inquiries but their practical life as well. In practical contexts, all appearances the Pyrrhonist receives remain untouched, since she does not investigate what is said about them. Suppose it appears to the Pyr-

¹⁶ Sextus actually warns that Pyrrhonism may lead to inactivity: see *PH* 1.226: they follow ordinary life "in order not to be inactive"; see also *M* 7.30: the skeptics must have some criterion of choice and avoidance "so as not to be completely inactive and without any part in the affairs of life."

¹⁷ That the idea of insulation of skepticism from life cannot be found in ancient world is forcefully argued by Burnyeat (1997a), who insists that insulation is "a phenomenon of our time" (94). See also Bett (1993), who argues that things are more complicated. In Grgić (2011) I argue for a qualified version of insulation.

rhonist that her ancestral laws and customs require that she should save her parents and that it also appears to her that, because of the tyrant's cruelty, she cannot save them. She will assent to both of these conflicting appearances—for, she cannot reject either of them—but she will act on only one of them. The difference between the dogmatist and the Pyrrhonist concerns the fact that the reason why the Pyrrhonist has chosen, say, to save her parents has nothing to do with philosophical *logos*. Since the Pyrrhonist does not investigate what is said about appearances to see which one is true or more persuasive given some further epistemic or moral standards, she can just say that she has chosen to save her parents *because of her ancestral laws and customs*. The dogmatist cannot say just *that*; he will appeal, tacitly or explicitly, to some further criterion and hence live according to philosophical *logos*.

3

Another ingredient of Sextus' description of the Pyrrhonists' life is their living *adoxastōs*. To live *adoxastōs* is to live without *doxasta*; and *doxasta* are not just any beliefs, but heavily loaded doctrinal beliefs. In particular, they are beliefs based on judgments about something's being good or bad by nature (*M* 11.142).¹⁸ Now, the dogmatists would strongly object to the very idea of leading an ordinary life without holding *doxasta*. They would insist, for instance, that it is not possible to live happily without doctrinal beliefs about the universe, gods, or human nature. Moreover, they might object that, after the doctrinal beliefs have been removed as in a Pyrrhonist life, a kind of life that would result could not be called ordinary, since some of these beliefs, especially moral and political beliefs, are so deeply rooted that to abandon them is to abandon ordinary way of living and to live governed by certain philosophical assumptions.

These are serious objections to Pyrrhonism. The Pyrrhonists' life certainly differs from life of other people, since other people do not live without opinions. However, if the dogmatists were to base the *apraxia* objection on this characteristic of the skeptical life, the Pyrrhonists would have a ready answer. For, it is at this point that they could make a dialectical maneuver and say that, just as they may be required to account for the possibility of living *adoxastōs*, so the dogmatists may be required to account for the possibility of a life based on *doxasta*. Then they might say that since there is an undecidable dispute among philosophers about everything *doxastos*, the dogmatists are left without

¹⁸ See *M* 11.141–2: “Of things which are said to be good and bad ... some are introduced by opinion (*kata doxan*), some by necessity. By opinion are introduced whatever things people pursue or avoid in virtue of a judgment (*kata krisin*).” When Sextus says that the Pyrrhonists' goal is tranquility in matters of opinion (*en tois doxastois* or *en tois kata doxan*) and moderation of feelings in things forced upon us (*PH* 1.25, 26, 30), by “matters of opinion” he means primarily “things which according to opinion are good or bad”; see *M* 11.144, 147.

a foundation from which they could argue that living *adoxastōs* is impossible. In other words, they might insist that the dogmatists should first identify a set of beliefs necessary for life, and since they heavily disagree about that, their objection is baseless.

While Sextus does have resources for such a dialectical strategy, he does not use it in a straightforward manner. However, its weaker version is found in *Against the Ethicists* 114–8, where he argues that adopting the dogmatists' framework entails either inactivity or disturbance. For, suppose, with the dogmatists, that choosing *F* and acting on it include the belief that *F* is good by nature, and suppose, with the Pyrrhonists, that there is an undecidable dispute among philosophers about what is good by nature. Now, if the belief of every party of the dispute is true, then it is true to believe that *F* is good and also true to believe that *F* is not good, and this, if we accept the dogmatists' assumption, makes life impossible. On the other hand, if it is only the belief that *F* is by nature good that is true, then *apraxia* is avoided, but life based on this belief is full of disturbance, as Sextus regularly insists (*PH* 1.27–8; *M* 11.112–7). Hence, if, as a dialectical concession, the dogmatists' framework is adopted, the best policy is to suspend judgment about whether there is anything good by nature.

The doctrinal beliefs—beliefs based on certain theoretical assumptions—are not the only kind of beliefs. There are also common-sense or non-doctrinal beliefs, which do not seem to entail dispute. In addition, the terms “belief” and “to believe” may be used to refer to various sorts of things. In standard sense, to believe is to take something to be true. But there is also a looser sense, according to which to believe is just to be disposed to act in a certain way. *Prima facie* there seems to be no reason why these other kinds or senses of belief could not be ascribed to the Pyrrhonists. Consider, for instance, the following passage by Michael Frede:

If someone steps into the house, and we ask him if it is still raining outside, and he, without hesitation, answers that it is, we would regard this as an expression of his belief that it is still raining. ... There is no reason to suppose that the sceptic, if asked such a question, would not answer either yes or no; and there is no reason to suppose that the sceptic would mean anything different by his answer than anyone else. ... It is true that the sceptic does not believe that it is *really* still raining. His answer is not grounded in some insight into the true nature of things, an insight such that reason could not but give the answer it does. ... His answer, rather, tells us only what seems to him to be the case; if we ask *him*, that is how it strikes him. In this respect, his answer does not differ from that of the man on the street. (Frede 1997: 22)

If we characterize the Pyrrhonists' life as a life governed by common-sense, everyday, or non-doctrinal beliefs, along the lines of Frede's account, then Sextus' response to the *apraxia* objection amounts to saying that the dogmatists wrongly think that the skeptics do not hold common-sense beliefs, which are sufficient for action. On the other

hand, if we don't ascribe to them such beliefs, then the question recurs of how it is possible to live without them. Hence, we should address the notorious question of whether the Pyrrhonists have non-doctrinal beliefs.¹⁹

A key text to consider is in the *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* 1.13–5, where Sextus discusses the question “Does the skeptic dogmatize (*dogmatizein*)?” This passage may be taken to suggest—and it has been taken in this way by some scholars—that there is a sense of the term “*dogma*” in which it refers to non-doctrinal belief which can be ascribed to the Pyrrhonist, so that her mental life is, after all, describable in terms of certain kind of beliefs (see e.g. Frede 1997). Sextus says:

When we say that sceptic does not dogmatize, we do not take “*dogma*” in the sense in which some say, quite generally, that *dogma* is acquiescing (*to eudokein*) in something; for sceptic assents to the affections forced upon him in accordance with impression (*tois gar kata phantasian katēnankasmenoio pathesi sunkatatithetai*)—for example, he would not say, when heated or chilled, “I think I am not heated (or: chilled)”. Rather, we say that sceptic does not dogmatize in the sense in which some say that *dogma* is assent to some non-evident object of investigation in the sciences; for Pyrrhonist does not assent to anything non-evident. (1.13)

On the one hand, Sextus' main objective in the passage is negative: he wants to argue that the Pyrrhonists do not dogmatize. Since the Pyrrhonists make certain assertions about philosophical *dogmata* and, moreover, themselves propose certain formulas (e.g. “I determine nothing”) which may give the impression that they are forms of dogmatizing, it is important to him to make it clear that these practices do not count as signs of dogmatizing, and that in this respect, Pyrrhonism differs from other kinds of philosophy. In addition, which is perhaps a minor point, Sextus' discussion in the first book of the *Outlines* is very methodical and organized, with chapters proceeding in an orderly manner. At the end of the preceding chapter, he says that the Pyrrhonists' method of putting accounts in opposition has as its result the fact that they do not dogmatize (1.12), and a reasonable sequel of this is to ask what it exactly means to say that they do not dogmatize.

Yet, on the other hand, such an organization may suggest that Sextus has in mind a positive agenda as well. For, in the next two chapters he discusses whether the Pyrrhonists belong to a school (*haireisis*) (1.16–7), do they study natural science (*phusiologeia*) (18), and, as we have seen, what is the criterion of their skepticism (21–4). The Pyrrhonist position on these questions depends, among other things, on senses of the terms *haireisis*, *phusiologeia* and *kritēria*: in certain senses, they do belong to a school, study natural science and have a criterion, and in other senses not. Moreover, he says (1.16) that the Pyrrhonists' position on the question of whether they belong to a school is

¹⁹ The literature on this topic is vast (see Frede 1997; Burnyeat 1997; Barnes 1997; Brennan 2000; Fine 2000; Perin 2010; Vogt 2012). A recent survey is found in Morison (2014).

similar to their position on the question of whether they have *dogmata*, and likewise with the question of their studying natural science (1.18). This might suggest that Sextus' objective in 1.13–5 is not to deny that the Pyrrhonists are dogmatizing, but to establish that in one sense of the term “*dogma*” they do have *dogmata* and in another they do not.

Note, however, that the sense in which one might say that the Pyrrhonists dogmatize is not explained in positive terms. Unlike his accounts of the Pyrrhonist school, their pursuing natural science and having a criterion, Sextus does not say that, since *dogma*, in one sense of the term, is a certain kind of assent, and the Pyrrhonists do give such an assent, they therefore have *dogmata*. He also does not say, as one would expect if he really wanted to say something positive about Pyrrhonist *dogmata*, that, since to express the assent is to say “I think (believe) (It seems to me) that *p* (that I am affected in *p*-way),” the Pyrrhonists normally use such phrases and thus, in a sense, dogmatize. Rather, he says that they “would *not* say, when heated or chilled, ‘I think I am *not* heated (or: chilled)’” (see on this Barnes 1997: 75; Vogt 2012: 656). Thus there is an important difference between this and those other cases.

It is obvious, as Sextus stresses a little later (1.13), that the Pyrrhonists do not have beliefs about the so-called non-evident things, that is, roughly, things which can be known only by means of other things. Can they have beliefs about evident things, or those that can be known by means of themselves, like the fact that it is day or that I am writing? It seems that they cannot, for several reasons.

First, the distinction between evident and non-evident things is of dogmatic origin (cf. *PH* 2.97), and the Pyrrhonists need not be committed to it. But even if they make a concession to the dogmatists and accept the distinction, they can insist that they cannot have beliefs about evident things simply because the dogmatists make everything non-evident. This is because the dogmatists maintain that nothing is in fact known by means of itself, but always by means of other things, say, affections that it produces in us: “when fire has been brought to me and I have been warmed, I take the condition in me as a sign that the externally existing fire is warm” (*M* 7.365). Hence, since warmth of fire needs a sign to be known, it is a non-evident thing and Pyrrhonists cannot have a belief about it. Moreover, even if, as a further concession, the Pyrrhonist admits that there are some evident things, then, to have beliefs about them, she should have a criterion on the basis of which she would assent to some of them as true (see on this *PH* 2.95; *M* 7.25; see also Barnes 1997: 77–8). The Pyrrhonists, however, suspend judgment about whether there is a criterion of truth. Hence, they cannot have beliefs either about evident or about non-evident things, and since the distinction between evident and non-evident things is exhaustive, the Pyrrhonists cannot have beliefs about things. Furthermore, Sextus also says that if you hold a belief, then you posit (*tithetai*) the object of belief as real (*PH* 1.14). It is not quite clear what is the exact mean-

ing of “posit” here. However, it seems natural to suppose that positing something is preceded by assent. Since the Pyrrhonists do not assent either to non-evident or, as we have seen, to evident things (given the dogmatists’ criteria for being an evident thing), and the domain of what is real is exhausted by the evident and the non-evident, they do not posit anything as real, and hence, do not have beliefs. Finally, if—given the dogmatists’ criteria—to believe is to take something as true, then the Pyrrhonist, to believe something, must at least have some concept of what is true, or about the truth-bearer. Yet the Pyrrhonists insist that they cannot have such a concept, because of the unresolvable dissent that exists among the dogmatists (*PH* 2.80–94; *M* 8.1–140).

One might object that such line of reasoning can show only that it is the dogmatists, not the Pyrrhonists, who cannot have beliefs (see on this Brennan 2000: 67). For, if one assumes that having a belief includes a host of background ideas such as the classification of things in evident and non-evident, the need for a criterion of truth, resolved dispute over the truth-bearer, etc., then indeed one cannot have beliefs, including such ordinary beliefs that it is day or that I am writing. If one consistently follows these dogmatic requirements for having a belief, then neither the dogmatists nor, indeed, anyone else can have beliefs. Likewise, for instance, if one follows what the dogmatists say about human beings, it would follow that human being is inconceivable or even does not exist (*PH* 2.22–33). For, to have a concept of human being, there should be an agreement among the dogmatists about the definition of human being, and about the body and the soul, but there is no such agreement. This, of course, does not prevent the Pyrrhonists and ordinary people, who are not committed to philosophical conceptions of human being, body and soul to say of themselves and of others that they are human beings. Likewise, both the Pyrrhonists and ordinary people can have a belief that it is day or that I am writing because they are not committed to the dogmatists’ requirements for having a belief. It is the dogmatists who, by advancing contentious theories, abolish beliefs, human beings and other ordinary things.

These considerations may be taken to support the idea that, after all, there may be a sense in which the Pyrrhonists have beliefs. While their beliefs need not include the ingredients required by the dogmatists’ account, they must include *something*, and this cannot be subject to skeptical scrutiny. Indeed, this seems to be assent, for the Pyrrhonists, as Sextus says in the passage quoted, “assent to the affections forced upon them by appearances” (1.13). Hence, it seems that the Pyrrhonist’s belief includes only assent. As I have said, a comparison with the neighboring chapters from the beginning of the *Outlines* may suggest that Sextus’ objective is not only to identify the sense of the term “*dogma*” according to which it is not true to say that the Pyrrhonists dogmatize, but also to maintain that they do have *dogmata*. To have a *dogma* is to assent to something, and the Pyrrhonists assent to their affections; hence, they have beliefs about their affections, or about how

they are appeared to (see Fine 2000; Perin 2010: 59–85).

There are two groups of reasons that speak against such a conclusion. Some are specific and some are more general.

Note, to begin with specific reasons, that the Pyrrhonists may be seen as being caught in a trap. On the one hand, they unqualifiedly insist that they do not dogmatize: this is the conclusion of the previous chapter of the *Outlines* (1.12). On the other hand, as Sextus says, the most general sense of the term “*dogma*” is “assent” or “acquiescing” (1.13), and the Pyrrhonists, of course, cannot quarrel with this. Hence, if they unqualifiedly insist that they do not dogmatize, they seem obliged to admit that they do not assent to anything, which makes their position hopeless.

There are two ways in which the Pyrrhonists may evade the trap. They may admit that, by giving assent, they have *dogmata*. Sextus, however, does not say this; more importantly, he can easily avoid such conclusion, by admitting that the Pyrrhonists give assent (by not rejecting the appearances, as we have seen in Section 2) but suspend judgment about whether their assent should count as *dogma*. For, *dogma* is a non-evident thing, as there are several different definitions of it found near the beginning of the *Outlines* (“acquiescing” (1.13), “assent to some non-evident object of investigation in the sciences” (*ibid.*), “assent to something non-evident” (1.16)). Hence, an affirmative answer to the question “Do Pyrrhonists dogmatize?” will be given only by those dogmatists who think that *dogma* includes only assent. Sextus cannot deny that Pyrrhonists dogmatize, since the question of what should count as *dogma* is still open for him. For the same reason, he cannot give the affirmative answer either.

This leads to some more general reasons why we should be suspicious of the idea that the Pyrrhonist position can be described in terms of beliefs, regardless of how exactly we understand the notion of belief. As we have seen, this idea is supported by the fact that the Pyrrhonists are not obliged to accept the dogmatic requirements for believing something. These requirements make a cluster of closely connected notions: the notion of the distinction between evident and non-evident things, the notions of the criterion of truth, reality, truth-bearers, etc. There is no reason why we shouldn’t include in this cluster the notion of belief as well, which is also theoretical notion like other notions in the cluster. For, if we argue that the Pyrrhonist is not committed to the view that there is a criterion of truth to believe something, then there is absolutely no reason why we could not argue that she is not committed to the view that beliefs, of any kind, play a role in account of human life. From the Pyrrhonists’ point of view, the question of their dogmatizing is misplaced. It is the dogmatists who insist on answering the questions “Do Pyrrhonists dogmatize?” or “Do they believe that it is day?” because it is they who take it for granted that the notion of belief is indispensable in the explanation of human action. The Pyrrhonists

do not share that view. They may say that any answer to these questions, affirmative or negative, is as credible as any other, since it is about something non-evident.

4

Thus, Sextus' aim is to challenge the very idea that human life should be described in terms of beliefs. If a Pyrrhonist says that she lives without beliefs, or that she takes some course of action and avoid other without beliefs about what is good or bad by nature, we can take her to mean one of two things. On the one hand, she can be taken to mean that she has psychological resources other than beliefs to perform ordinary human actions. If this is what she has in mind, then she has a difficult task to show that it is indeed possible to live in this way and that such a life is not based on a philosophical *logos*. I do not think that this is what Sextus is doing. On the other hand, she can be taken to mean that she refuses to describe her actions in terms of beliefs because such a description is philosophical *logos*, and this, I believe, is all that Sextus intends. To say that a Pyrrhonist's choice to save her parents is in accordance with non-philosophical practice is just to say that there is a perfectly good explanation of her action which is not based on any of the dogmatic theories of human action. The explanation of her action includes only her decision to act in accordance with customs and laws, but *not* the fact that she suspend beliefs. Suspension of beliefs, as far as the Pyrrhonist's practical life is concerned, explains why she fares better than the dogmatists and why she is able to achieve tranquility.

Hence, the Pyrrhonists are immune to the *apraxia* objection because it is based on the misunderstanding of their position, that is, on the wrong assumption that they live in accordance with philosophical *logos*. To live in accordance with philosophical *logos* includes two things. First, it includes the idea that one should apply one's philosophical tenets, concepts and recommendations to ordinary human life and use them as a practical guide. However, the only item that survives skeptical philosophy, appearance, is not used in this way: as I have tried to show in Section 2, appearances are criteria of skeptical practice in that the skeptics do not reject any of them in their life. Second, it includes the idea that ordinary human life can be, and should be, described in philosophical terms. However, the skeptics refuse to describe their actions in philosophical terms. All that is needed to describe a Pyrrhonist's action is to point to a pattern of the fourfold regime of everyday life: when she is hungry, she eats, when she must decide whether to save her parents or not, she follows the laws and customs, etc.²⁰

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