

# Is Pyrrhonian Suspension Incompatible with Doubt?

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**Abstract:** The Pyrrhonian skeptic's stance, as described by Sextus Empiricus, is in good part defined by his suspending judgment or belief about all the matters he has so far investigated. Most interpreters of Pyrrhonism maintain that it is a mistake to understand this form of skepticism in terms of doubt because suspension as conceived of by the Pyrrhonist is markedly different from the state of doubt. In this article, I expound the reasons that have been offered in support of that prevailing view and assess their strength.

**Key words:** Pyrrhonism, suspension, doubt, *aporia*, Sextus Empiricus

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The Pyrrhonian skeptic's stance, as portrayed by Sextus Empiricus, is in good part defined by his suspending judgment or belief about all the matters he has so far investigated.<sup>1</sup> Most interpreters of Pyrrhonism maintain that it is a mistake to use the notion of doubt to describe this form of skepticism

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1. Sextus was a Pyrrhonist who lived sometime between the late second century and the early third century CE, and whose extant writings are our main source for ancient Pyrrhonism. Two complete works and an important part of a third by Sextus have survived: the three books of *Pyrrhonian Outlines*, the six books of *Against the Learned*, and the five extant books of *Against the Dogmatists*. To refer to *Pyrrhonian Outlines*, I will use the standard abbreviation *PH*, which are the initials of the transliterated Greek title, *Pyrrhōneioi Hypotyposis*. As for the other two works, they are better known by their Latinized titles of *Adversus Mathematicos* and *Adversus Dogmaticos*, respectively. In our manuscripts, *Adversus Dogmaticos* is attached to the end of *Adversus Mathematicos*. This has given rise to a deeply entrenched practice of using the title *Adversus Mathematicos* (*AM*) VII–XI to refer to the five extant books of *Adversus Dogmaticos*. Not only is this conventional designation incorrect, but it also creates confusion among non-specialists. For this reason, to refer to *Adversus Dogmaticos*, I will use the abbreviation *AD* I–V rather than *AM* VII–XI. References to any of the three works are by book number (in Roman numerals) and section number (in Arabic numerals).

because suspension as conceived of by the Pyrrhonist is incompatible with doubt. The aim of this article is to assess the correctness of that standard view. If we take Pyrrhonism to be a live philosophical option, then gaining an accurate understanding of Pyrrhonian suspension and its connection with doubt, or lack thereof, is of more than historical interest.

The article has the following structure. In Section 2, I offer an interpretation of Pyrrhonian suspension. In Section 3, I provide an analysis of the notion of doubt. In Section 4, I look at the reasons advanced by the scholars who defend the view that the Pyrrhonist is not a doubter. In Section 5, I assess the strength of each of those reasons. In Section 6, I answer the title question by relying on the analyses of the preceding sections.<sup>2</sup>

## 2. PYRRHONIAN SUSPENSION

What is suspension (ἐποχή) according to Sextus? There are at least four passages that should be considered in answering this question. At *PH I* 10, suspension is defined as a “standstill of the intellect owing to which we neither reject nor posit anything.” At *PH I* 196, we are told that the phrase “I suspend judgment” is used for “I am unable to say which of the things proposed I should find credible and which I should not find credible,” and that suspension “is so called from the fact that the intellect is suspended so as neither to accept nor to reject anything because of the equipollence of the matters investigated.” At *PH I* 7, Sextus remarks that the skeptical approach is called “suspensive’ because of the affection that comes about in the inquirer after the investigation.” And at *PH I* 192, when explaining the meaning of ‘non-assertion’ (ἀφασία)—which is another word with which Sextus refers to the state of suspension—he points out that “non-assertion is an affection of ours because of which we neither posit nor reject anything.”<sup>3</sup>

In light of these passages, the first thing to say about Pyrrhonian suspension is that it is a state of inability to form judgments or beliefs: when a person’s intellect is suspended because it has come to a standstill (στάσις), he is unable either to accept or to reject any judgment or belief about the matter under investigation—he could not form a judgment or a belief even if he wanted to.

Second, suspension is described as an affection, i.e., a πάθος. The Greek πάθος refers to that which happens to someone or something as a result of

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2. Two terminological remarks: the terms ‘Pyrrhonist’ and ‘skeptical’ will be employed interchangeably; and the word ‘dogmatist’ will be used in its ancient sense, namely, to refer to anyone who holds beliefs or makes assertions about non-evident matters, or about how things really are, mainly on the basis of what he takes to be objective evidence and sound arguments.

3. The translations of Sextus’s texts are mine, but I have consulted Bury 1933, Mates 1996, and Annas and Barnes 2000.

being affected by an agent in the broad sense of this term; it refers to the physical or psychological state or condition in which the affected person or thing is.<sup>4</sup> To the extent that it is an affection, suspension is a state in which the Pyrrhonist finds himself due to his own psychological constitution, by virtue of which he cannot avoid withholding his assent whenever conflicting arguments strike him as equipollent or equally credible. The Pyrrhonist is affected by those seemingly equipollent arguments in such a way that he ends up, as a matter of psychological fact, in a suspensive state of mind, which is, as noted above, a state of inability to form judgments or beliefs. Suspension is therefore something that imposes itself upon him, and so something he accepts passively, in much the same way in which he accepts such affections as the feelings of hunger and thirst, and those of coldness and heat (*PHI* 13, 19). Given that his suspending judgment about whether *p* does not depend on his decision not to take a stand on the question whether *p*, the Pyrrhonist does not suspend judgment about all the matters he has so far investigated because he takes it to be rationally required for him to do so when confronted with conflicting arguments that appear equipollent to him. In other words, he is not committed to the following requirement of rationality:

*Rationally Required Suspension*

It is rationally required to suspend judgment in the face of a disagreement that one is unable to resolve because of the apparent equipollence of the conflicting arguments.

Since suspension is the enforced psychological effect of being confronted with arguments that appear equipollent to one, the Pyrrhonist would describe his state of mind in the following way:

*Psychologically Constrained Suspension*

Up to now, I have found myself psychologically constrained to suspend judgment in the face of a disagreement whenever the conflicting arguments have appeared equipollent to me.

By my lights, then, the Pyrrhonist merely reports that, when exercising his natural capability of thinking (*PH* I 24) in his inquiries, he finds himself forced to suspend judgment about the truth of the claims and the soundness of the arguments under examination. His suspension is certainly the result of the use of reason, but his use of reason is neither doxastic nor normative because he does not believe (or disbelieve) that the requirements of rationality

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4. Even though in modern ordinary English 'affection' does not have the meaning of the Greek πάθος anymore, it has become in the specialist literature a technical term to translate πάθος. It also has the advantage of making clear the connection between πάθος and its cognate verb πάσχειν ('to be affected').

are true and, hence, does not claim that we should suspend judgment. In his road to Pyrrhonism, the prospective skeptic first suspends judgment about the matters under investigation because of his commitment to certain rational requirements, but once he turns into a full-blown skeptic and suspends judgment even about those requirements, his suspension is nothing but a psychological state forced on him. Both the fact that the full-blown skeptic finds himself having and using the capacity to think and the fact that his thinking operates in a certain way do not entail that he endorses the requirements of rationality. No doubt these requirements continue to exert some sort of psychological influence on the full-blown skeptic because of the way he is evolutionarily hardwired or because of the way he is conditioned by his past education and philosophical training, but this does not mean that he accepts them *in propria persona*. The skeptic does recognize that reason requires him to suspend judgment in certain circumstances, but he does so passively because he finds himself forced to do so; there is no voluntary and doxastic commitment to the demands of reason on his part. The skeptic is therefore doxastically detached from his suspension of judgment as a response that is triggered by his use of the faculty of reason.<sup>5</sup>

Third, the Pyrrhonist's suspension does not consist in his refraining from forming judgments or beliefs about issues he has not considered, but rather arises after the scrutiny of issues regarding which he has so far found no answers. It is thus a mental state in which the Pyrrhonist finds himself after having carried out an investigation about whether  $p$  that has so far turned out to be unsuccessful. Since he suspends judgment only about claims he has entertained in thought and carefully inspected, his suspension is not the mere absence or lack of belief about the claims in question. Suspension *per se* and not merely as conceived of by the Pyrrhonist seems to involve having examined the question about which judgment is suspended.<sup>6</sup>

5. In Machuca 2022, chaps. 5 and 10, I develop more fully this interpretation of the Pyrrhonist's use of reason and his stance on the requirements of rationality.

6. Bertrand Russell (1984, 143), for instance, claims that suspension "is a determinate attitude in regard to belief and disbelief, and represents the result of an attempt to decide between the two." Jane Friedman maintains that having considered a question is not necessary for suspending judgment on that question on the grounds that we cannot rule out the possibility of getting into a state of suspension by non-standard means: "if S has to have considered  $p$  in order to be in a state of suspended judgment about  $p$ , then he couldn't become agnostic about  $p$  by being hit over the head, or by having his brain operated on, and swamp-S could never emerge agnostic about  $p$ . I don't think that we should be so quick to rule these things out" (Friedman 2013b, 171). An obvious objection to Friedman's view is that it is based on a purely armchair consideration about an empirical matter; in other words, it is an unsubstantiated empirical conjecture. For what neurological or psychological studies even suggest that one could possibly attain the state of suspended judgment by being hit over the head or by having one's brain operated on?

Lastly, the investigation carried out by the Pyrrhonist consists in weighing up the conflicting arguments bearing on the matter under scrutiny, and he ends up suspending judgment because those arguments appear equipollent to him. Sextus defines equipollence or equal strength (ἰσοσθένεια) as “the equality with respect to credibility and lack of credibility (τὴν κατὰ πίστιν καὶ ἀπιστίαν ἰσότητα), so that none of the conflicting arguments takes precedence over any other as more credible” (*PH* I 10). When explaining the skeptical phrase “not more,” he remarks that equipollence is “the equality with respect to what appears persuasive (πιθανόν) to us” (*PH* I 190); when explaining “I suspend judgment,” he points out that this phrase indicates that “things appear to us equal in respect of credibility and lack of credibility” (*PH* I 196); and when explaining “To every argument an equal argument is opposed,” he observes that it is to be understood as meaning “To every argument investigated by me that establishes something dogmatically, there appears to me to be opposed another argument, which establishes something dogmatically, equal to it in respect of credibility and lack of credibility” (*PH* I 203). These passages make it clear that the opposing arguments that have been investigated by the skeptic strike him as being equally credible or persuasive as far as their epistemic credentials are concerned. Thus, Pyrrhonian suspension is not an inability to form judgments or beliefs about whether  $p$  that results from any event whatsoever. For the Pyrrhonist’s intellect has come to a standstill after having inspected the epistemic standing of the conflicting arguments bearing on the question whether  $p$  and having found them equipollent.<sup>7</sup> An interesting question concerns whether Sextus takes suspension to result exclusively from there being reasons in favor of both  $p$  and  $\neg p$  that appear equally persuasive or credible to the skeptic, or rather thinks that suspension may also result from the absence of (persuasive or credible) reasons in favor of either  $p$  or  $\neg p$ . To the best of my knowledge, Sextus always refers to suspension as resulting from the first kind of situation. But it seems to me that he would say that suspension may also result from the second kind of situation, namely, in circumstances concerning non-evident matters such as whether the number of stars or of hairs on one’s head is even or odd, or how many grains of sand there are in Libya (*PH* II 90–91, 97, III 177; *AD* I 243, 393, II 147, 317, V 59). I think that, in such cases, we can say either that one cannot adduce any reasons either for or against any of the possible answers, or that one can adduce reasons but that they are all equally unconvincing or

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7. Friedman (2013b, 175) claims that suspension can be achieved on the basis of non-epistemic reasons, as does Jan Wieland (2014) in connection with Pyrrhonism—for discussion of his position, see Machuca 2015. At this point, I know of no empirical evidence that suggests that it is possible for a subject to suspend judgment as a result of the consideration of reasons that are purely prudential or moral.

implausible. Is there equipollence in this second kind of situation? I think there is. For in some of the passages quoted above, equipollence and suspension are understood not only in terms of equal credibility, but also in terms of equal lack of credibility (*PH* I 10, 196, 203). Hence, it seems that, even if in the second kind of situation one cannot speak of the possible answers to the question whether  $p$  as striking one as equally credible or persuasive, one could speak of them as striking one as equally incredible or unpersuasive.<sup>8</sup>

Now, what kind of mental state is suspension? One popular view is that it is an attitude. In discussing ancient Pyrrhonism, Jonathan Barnes (1990, 14–15) talks of suspension as an attitude and thinks that the Pyrrhonist is part of a disagreement in attitude—i.e., a disagreement between someone who believes  $p$ , someone who disbelieves  $p$ , and the Pyrrhonist who suspends judgment about whether  $p$ . Michael Bergmann remarks that withholding  $p$  “is a propositional attitude distinct from mere failure to take up an attitude towards  $p$ . Like believing or disbelieving, it is taking an attitude towards a proposition” (Bergmann 2005, 421). Friedman (2013a; 2017) maintains that suspension is a question-directed or interrogative attitude, i.e., an attitude whose content is a question rather than a proposition. So, is Pyrrhonian suspension an attitude? Casey Perin (2018, 118–119) argues that Pyrrhonian suspension is a state of non-belief with regard to  $p$  in which one is incapable of believing either  $p$  or  $\neg p$ . If so, then suspension as conceived of by the Pyrrhonist cannot be considered an attitude inasmuch as it is possible, albeit irrational, for a subject to have inconsistent attitudes, namely, both to suspend judgment about whether  $p$  and to believe either  $p$  or  $\neg p$  (Perin 2018, 119–120). Probably most of us have met people who held inconsistent beliefs or have discovered that some of our own beliefs were inconsistent, but I cannot make an analogous remark about the psychological possibility of suspending judgment about whether  $p$  while simultaneously believing or disbelieving  $p$ . If disbelieving  $p$  is just believing  $\neg p$ , one may hypothesize that it is psychologically possible to simultaneously hold the same attitude of belief towards inconsistent propositions, but not to simultaneously hold the different attitudes of belief and suspension. At this point, I think there are no grounds to claim that Pyrrhonian suspension differs from what we commonly understand by suspension in not being an attitude one takes towards a proposition or a question.

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8. The distinction under consideration is similar to Francisco Suárez’s distinction between positive and negative doubt. While positive doubt (*dubium positivum*) occurs when plausible arguments are adduced in favor of both sides, negative doubt (*dubium negativum*) occurs when there are no arguments in favor of either side (see Suárez 1944, 833, 836; cf. 829). Thanks to Yuval Avnir for bringing Suárez’s text to my attention.

Suspension is customarily deemed to be one of the three doxastic attitudes, along with belief and disbelief. But is Pyrrhonian suspension a *doxastic* attitude? It is clearly not if ‘doxastic’ is used to express the view that the person who suspends judgment necessarily holds some sort of second-order belief. This is precisely the view adopted by those who endorse higher-order accounts of suspension: suspension involves, or is based on, a second-order belief about one’s own epistemic standing, e.g., the belief that one neither believes nor disbelieves  $p$ , or the belief that suspension is the attitude one should adopt when confronted with equally strong reasons for and against  $p$ , or the belief that it is the attitude that is justified or warranted given one’s evidence.<sup>9</sup> This account of suspension does not fit with the Pyrrhonist’s suspensive attitude because, first, he does not suspend judgment because he believes that he neither believes nor disbelieves  $p$ , but because he finds himself unable, as a matter of psychological fact, to hold any beliefs whatsoever about whether  $p$  due to the apparently equipollence of the arguments for and against  $p$ . Second, the Pyrrhonist is not merely a first-order agnostic, but a meta-agnostic: he suspends judgment about whether suspension is the attitude one is rationally required or epistemically justified to adopt in certain circumstances. Hence, if doxastic attitudes are those that express beliefs or presuppose them, then suspension as conceived of by the Pyrrhonist is not a doxastic attitude.

To conclude my analysis of Pyrrhonian suspension, I would like to briefly engage with a recent interpretation of Pyrrhonism proposed by Matthew McGrath (2021) in his discussion of different ways to be neutral on a question, two of which are suspension and agnosticism. According to McGrath, suspension is future-directed because its justification depends on future-comparative factors: when suspending judgment on a question, one is putting off judgment on it because one aims to judge it later or when certain conditions obtain—e.g., the evidence is better, one reasons better, one is unbiased, one does not become angry, or one feels like judging the matter. Hence, suspension is not a doxastic attitude and non-epistemic factors may matter to its justification. By contrast, agnosticism is a doxastic neutral attitude whose justification does not depend on future-comparative factors, but exclusively on epistemic factors. For instance, the fact that in the future better evidence on  $p$  will be available or the fact that one will be a better assessor of the evidence later are reasons to suspend judgment about whether  $p$ , but not reasons to be agnostic about whether  $p$ , which depends exclusively on

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9. Distinct versions of the higher-order account of suspension are endorsed by Russell (1999, 41), Crawford (2004, 226–227), Rosenkranz (2007, 58), Archer (2019, 79–82), Masny (2020, 5024), and Raleigh (2021).



whether one's current available evidence favors  $p$  or  $\neg p$ . By contrast, the fact that one will never be better placed to judge whether  $p$  is the case than one is now is a reason not to suspend judgment, but not a reason not to be agnostic in case the current available evidence favors neither  $p$  nor  $\neg p$ . At one point, McGrath remarks:

My accounts of suspension and refraining also fit well with the practice of the Pyrrhonian skeptics, who did not merely omit judgment but did so intentionally. Many of the modes of suspension Sextus Empiricus discusses are strategies for refraining from judgment in the face of some temptation to judge—constructing arguments for contrary sides on a question, recalling differences of opinion of experts, etc. Moreover, the Pyrrhonians approved of refraining from judgment because they were putting it off until epistemically acceptable conditions were met and while inquiring further in an effort to achieve these conditions. (McGrath 2021, 6)

Surprisingly, McGrath fails to realize that the Pyrrhonist is actually what McGrath calls an agnostic: the Pyrrhonist is agnostic about whether  $p$  because, at present, the opposing claims or arguments bearing on  $p$  strike him as epistemically equipollent. The modes of suspension are the main argumentative strategies that enable us to observe the apparent epistemic equipollence of conflicting appearances. The Pyrrhonist is of course open to the possibility that, in the future, his epistemic situation might improve so as to enable him to make a judgment about whether  $p$ —and his inquisitive temperament makes him engage in further inquiry that might enable him to reach that situation. But that openness is to be explained by a second-order agnosticism: he is agnostic both about whether there is a truth about the matters being investigated and, if any there is, about whether it can be found (see Machuca 2022, chap. 2).<sup>10</sup>

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10. We can distinguish between three types of agnostic: the Pyrrhonian, the optimistic, and the pessimistic. They all (seem to) suspend judgment about whether  $p$  because, at present, the reasons for and against  $p$  balance each other out, owing to their being either equally persuasive or equally unpersuasive. The Pyrrhonian agnostic suspends judgment also about whether the truth about  $p$  (if any there is) is knowable or about whether evidence will ever be available that might make it possible to decide whether  $p$ . The optimistic agnostic believes that the truth about  $p$  is knowable and that (it is more likely than not that) further evidence will be available that will make it possible to decide whether  $p$ . The pessimistic agnostic believes that the truth about  $p$  is unknowable and, hence, that no evidence will ever be available that might make it possible to decide whether  $p$ . He may think that we do have evidence on whether  $p$ , but that it is insufficient to decide the matter and that this epistemic situation will never improve; or he may think that there is no evidence on whether  $p$  and there will never be (cf. the “second-order agnosticism” described in Avnur 2020). Why does this second type of pessimistic agnostic suspend judgment? I think there are two possible replies, namely: (i) given that there is no evidence either for or against  $p$ , all possible answers to the question whether  $p$



### 3. THE NOTION OF DOUBT

In this section, I will examine the notion of doubt by partially drawing on the analyses offered by Thagard (2004), Howard-Snyder (2013), Lee (2018), and Moon (2018). I will combine some of the results of those analyses because my sole aim is to provide a terminological and conceptual framework in reference to which we may both understand the view that the Pyrrhonist is not a doubter and assess its correctness.

The best way to examine the notion of doubt is probably by focusing on the use of the noun ‘doubt,’ the adjectives ‘doubtful’ and ‘dubitable,’ and the verb ‘to doubt.’ With regard to the noun, one must distinguish between the count noun and the mass noun. When used as a count noun—as in “I have some doubts about whether  $p$ ,” “I do not have a doubt that  $\neg p$ ,” or “There are serious doubts about whether  $p$ ”—doubts about whether  $p$  are reasons not to believe  $p$ , i.e., either to disbelieve  $p$  or to suspend judgment about whether  $p$ . More precisely, a doubt about whether  $p$  is a defeater for  $p$ . What kind of defeater? Given that a doubt is a reason not to believe  $p$ , it may be either a rebutting or an undercutting defeater. A rebutting defeater for  $p$  is a reason to disbelieve  $p$ , while an undercutting defeater for  $p$  is a reason to call into question the connection between  $p$  and one’s evidence for  $p$ . In one case, one has a reason to believe that  $p$  is false or to believe the negation of  $p$ ; in the other, one has a reason to no longer believe  $p$  or to claim that one’s belief that  $p$  is epistemically unjustified. It might be thought that only doubts understood as undercutting defeaters are compatible with suspensive skepticism, but to determine what types of doubts are compatible with what types of skepticism, one must pay attention to the kind of use a skeptic makes of defeaters, whether rebutting or undercutting. I will briefly address this issue in Section 6.

The mass noun ‘doubt’ refers to a mental state that is (typically) based on defeaters and that seems to come in degrees. If one says “S has little doubt that  $p$ ,” one means that S has a high degree of confidence that  $p$ , although not the highest degree of confidence. If one says “S is in doubt about whether  $p$ ,” one seems to mean that S suspends judgment about whether  $p$  because one’s degree of confidence that  $p$  is (close to) 0.5. And if one says “S has much doubt that  $p$ ,” one means that one has a low degree of confidence that  $p$ , i.e.,

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are equally unpersuasive; and (ii) suspension about whether  $p$  is required by the second-order belief that the truth about  $p$  is unknowable: if it is impossible to know whether  $p$ , then one cannot but suspend judgment about whether  $p$  (cf. my remarks on Academic skepticism in Machuca 2022, chap. 2). Perhaps (i) and (ii) are connected: if the truth about whether  $p$  is unknowable, then all possible answers to the question whether  $p$  are equally unpersuasive, in which case one cannot but suspend judgment. Let me finally remark that, whereas both the Pyrrhonian and the optimistic agnostic may remain engaged in inquiry, doing so would be pointless for the pessimistic agnostic.

a high degree of confidence that  $\neg p$ . How then is the mental state of doubt to be defined? One possibility is to say that “S has some doubt that  $p$  if [and only if] S has a doxastic attitude toward  $p$  and does not have the highest degree of confidence that  $p$ ” (Moon 2018, 1833). Another possibility is to say that “S has some doubt that  $p$  if and only if S believes that it is possible that  $\neg p$ , and it’s not the case that S believes that the possibility that  $\neg p$  is insignificant” (Moon 2018, 1845). Both definitions explain the fact that doubt comes in degrees, but the second (favored by Moon) expresses the view that doubt requires something that is more reflective, namely, a belief about what is possible.

What about the adjectives ‘doubtful’ and ‘dubitable’? If one says “It is doubtful that  $p$ ,” it seems that one means that there are doubts about whether  $p$ , i.e., reasons not to believe that  $p$ , which may, once again, be either rebutting or undercutting defeaters. But if one says “S is doubtful about  $p$ ,” one is referring to doubt as a mental state. One can convey various degrees of doubt by adding adverbs: “S is slightly/somewhat/very doubtful about  $p$ .” As for ‘dubitable,’ if one says “ $P$  is dubitable,” it seems that one means that one has either a rebutting or an undercutting defeater for not believing  $p$ . This seems to be confirmed by the fact that, when referring to our allegedly privileged access to our current mental states, some philosophers claim that our statements about those states are indubitable, by which they mean that there are no grounds to call them into question.

As for the verb ‘to doubt,’ I think one can distinguish between “S doubts that  $p$ ” and “S doubts whether  $p$ .” The former indicates that S has a high degree of doubt that  $p$ , i.e., that S has a strong inclination to disbelieve  $p$ . By contrast, when one says “S doubts whether  $p$ ,” one means—at least to my ear—that S suspends judgment about whether  $p$ . This is clearer if one says “S doubts whether or not  $p$ .” Consider, for example, “I doubt that God exists” and “I doubt whether God exists”: while the former is something an atheist may say, the latter is something an agnostic may say. It should be noted, though, that one can vary the degree of doubt expressed by the verb by appending adverbs: e.g., “S slightly doubts that  $p$ ” and “S seriously doubts whether  $p$ .”

To conclude this brief analysis of the notion of doubt, note that doubt is sometimes understood as being a state that is unpleasant, irritating, frustrating, upsetting, disturbing, annoying, and the like. Why? Perhaps because having a degree of confidence in  $p$  that is not high or full creates a mental tension that is itself unpleasant, irritating, etc. If, as Russell (1984: 142) remarks, the term ‘doubt’ “suggests a vacillation, an alternate belief and disbelief,” one may hypothesize that it is such a vacillation that causes mental discomfort.

Or perhaps the reason is that the proposition that one doubts is one in which one would like to have the highest, or at least a high, degree of confidence because of the value one ascribes to certain states of affairs. Think of propositions such as “There exists a provident God,” “There is an afterlife,” or “My son is not a murderer.”

#### 4. THE STANDARD VIEW

As noted in Section 1, the prevailing view among scholars is that it is a mistake to understand Pyrrhonian skepticism in terms of doubt because suspension and doubt are markedly different mental states. To the best of my knowledge, five scholars have offered reasons for the standard view. In this section, I will lay out those reasons as clearly as I can.

Arne Naess seems to have been the first, in his book *Scepticism*, to voice reservations about depicting the skeptic as someone who is, by definition, in a state of doubt. There are six passages worth quoting to which I will assign the labels from P1 to P6 for ease of analysis. Naess remarks that, given that the skeptic is commonly portrayed as a doubter, “it is thought a valid objection to scepticism that one *cannot* persistently doubt all that the sceptic doubts. To be a sceptic, according to this view, is necessarily to be in a perpetual state of indecision; a moment’s confidence or certainty is enough to burst the fragile bubble, to disqualify one as a sceptic” (Naess 1968, 26, P1). He thinks, however, that there is no reason to regard the skeptic as someone “who should, ideally, hesitate before every step in order to question whether the assumptions on which it is based are valid. . . . At least it is not obvious that the sceptic must avoid trust and confidence, or that his behaviour must be characterized by doubt and indecision” (1968, 26, P2). In this connection, he further remarks that retaining “the image of a sceptic as a doubter rather than a truster . . . will not lead to misconceptions as long as one remembers that in the history of thought the greatest sceptics were also great champions of trust and confidence and of common sense *in action*, however brutal they were in criticizing ordinary thinking in its use of the notions of true or false, valid or invalid” (1968, 26–27, P3). According to Naess, not only is the skeptic not in a constant state of doubt, but also “the exercise of suspension of judgment as a mental act need not go so far as to completely color the sceptic’s private life. There is no need for him to consider judgments involving truth claims every day and come to the result that there is no decisive argument pro or con. Although there will certainly be occasions for suspension of judgment, there will be no constant need for it” (1968, 27, P4). Let me quote *in extenso* two other passages in which Naess explains his dissatisfaction with

characterizing Pyrrhonism in terms of doubt, for they might enable us to better understand his endorsement of the standard view:

Suspension of judgment is the basic trait of the sceptic when confronted with dogmatic assertions. The question of how much, how often, and in what sense doubt must, or is likely to, accompany or precede the suspension of judgment, is an open question. There is no reason at all to postulate a *state of doubting* as characteristic of the mind of one who suspends judgment. . . . Not that in the genesis of a sceptic, doubt and indecision play no part; indeed, the gifted people in Sextus's narrative were led to scepticism precisely by the disquieting doubt and indecision induced in them by the contradictions in things, and the *ataraxia* that Sextus describes is intended as a means of eliminating just that state of disquiet. (Naess 1968, 28, P5)

There are no grounds in Sextus's description for picturing the mature sceptic as a person who shows indeterminateness, irresoluteness, indecision, wavering, hesitation, suspense, perplexity, bewilderment, embarrassment, confusion, puzzlement, disbelief, incredulity, mistrust, diffidence, or suspicion, however fittingly these terms may describe his state of mind as he listens to dogmatists. But Sextus does list four names of the adherents of his philosophy: the 'sceptics,' the 'zetetics,' the 'doubters,' and the 'Pyrrhonists,' and it might seem that the first two, deriving from Greek terms for looking about in a searching manner, and particularly the third one alluding to doubt, suggest characteristics not at all conducive to a profound peace of mind. However, it is clear that Sextus introduces them simply in order to classify abstract philosophies according to how they stand in a particular discussion, namely on the true knowledge of reality. They need not designate personal traits. (Naess 1968, 53, P6)

In P1–P3, Naess does not actually provide a reason to reject the view that the skeptic is a doubter *tout court*, but rather to reject the view that he is a *permanent* and *across-the-board* doubter who, as such, can never trust anything or have confidence in anything. For, according to Naess, the skeptic does exhibit trust and confidence in the actions he performs in his daily life.<sup>11</sup> Surprisingly enough, in P4 Naess makes somewhat similar remarks about suspension: the skeptic is not constantly suspending judgment because he

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11. It is not clear to me whether Naess thinks that what the skeptic trusts or has confidence in is that which he does not doubt or suspend judgment about—as P2 and P4 seem to suggest—or whether he thinks that the skeptic insulates the trust and confidence he exhibits when acting from his criticism of “ordinary thinking in its use of the notions true or false, valid or invalid” (P3).

does not examine the arguments for and against every claim with which he is confronted in his daily life so as to assess their epistemic weight relative to each other. In this connection, note that, according to the beginning of P5, the skeptic's exercise of suspension is limited to those occasions in which he is confronted with the dogmatists' assertions. At the outset of P6, Naess seems to be saying the very same thing about two attitudes that characterize the state of doubt and for which he uses synonymous terms: irresoluteness/indecision/hesitation and perplexity/bewilderment/puzzlement. And in the middle of P6, he tells us that not only the labels 'skeptical' and 'zetetic' (i.e., investigative) but also the label 'doubter' describes the attitudes one adopts when faced with the philosophical discussion of our knowledge of reality, by which he seems to mean one's attitudes towards the views on that issue proposed by the dogmatists. Thus, we still do not have a reason to claim that the person who suspends judgment is not in a state of doubt, but only a reason to claim that the skeptic does not doubt, or suspend judgment about, everything all the time, but only when he engages with the dogmatists.

According to the second part of P5, the reason why the person who suspends judgment is not in a state of doubt is to be found in the fact that this is a state of indecision that, as such, causes distress or disquiet. The prospective skeptic was undecided and distressed at the beginning of his philosophical journey, but once he suspended judgment and attained undisturbedness, he left behind that state of doubt (cf. *PH* I 12, 26, 29). However, note, to begin with, that in the first part of P5 Naess does not deny that the full-fledged skeptic may be sometimes, to some extent, or in a certain sense in a state of doubt—inasmuch as this state may accompany his suspension—but only that doubt is what characterizes his state of mind. Moreover, in P6 he remarks that Sextus describes the skeptics as doubters. Naess is thinking of *PH* I 7, where Sextus says that the skeptical approach is called investigative, suspensive, aporetic, and Pyrrhonian—there is then a minor inaccuracy in Naess's description of the passage. Whether or not 'aporetic' may be accurately translated as 'dubitative' is irrelevant at this point, for what matters is that Naess takes Sextus to describe the skeptics as individuals who doubt. Note, second, that in P6 Naess maintains that not only the attitude described by the term 'doubter' but also the attitudes described by the terms 'skeptical' and 'zetetic' represent an obstacle to the attainment of the state of peace of mind or undisturbedness.

Naess is not precise and clear enough about his reasons for claiming that the skeptic is not, by definition, someone who doubts—or, at the very least, I have a hard time following his line of thought. If I had to identify those reasons, I would say that they are that (i) the person who is in a state of doubt is

in a state of indecision or irresolution not only at a theoretical level but also, and mainly, at a practical level, whereas the skeptic who suspends judgment does make decisions in his daily life and exhibits trust and confidence, and that (ii) the person who is in a state of doubt is in a state of distress or disquiet, whereas the skeptic's suspension has enabled him to attain a state of undisturbedness. Thus, Naess is concerned with doubt as a mental state and relates this mental state to mental discomfort.

On the basis of an analysis of certain texts by G. W. Leibniz and G. E. Moore, Ezequiel de Olaso (1975) claims that these philosophers understood doubt in two distinct ways: a state of irresolution and perplexity in the face of something one does not know, a state that causes disturbance (Leibniz); and a disposition towards self-criticism (Moore). I set aside whether de Olaso's interpretation of Leibniz and Moore is accurate, for my interest lies in his view on the connection between Pyrrhonian suspension and doubt. Like Naess, de Olaso remarks that doubt is the state in which the skeptic finds himself at the beginning of his philosophical journey, a state that is then abandoned when the skeptic suspends judgment:

The skeptic begins, to be sure, by doubting in the face of reasons that always seem insufficient to him; but precisely when he discovers that there is no criterion to discriminate between the opinions in conflict and that the withholding of his own judgment or assent is followed by tranquility, he abandons that spontaneous doubt, which is indeed distressing, for the suspension that soothes him. What is distinctive of the skeptic is not to doubt but to resolve doubt by means of suspension. . . . He gets rid of his doubts through suspension. (de Olaso 1975, 29–30)<sup>12</sup>

[S]ince doubting is typical of the person who believes he can make a judgment, . . . *the skeptic cannot doubt*. The man who is sometimes assailed by doubts with regard to one of his opinions or who is induced to cast doubt on it, has not yet ceased to be, for that reason, a dogmatist. It is necessary to know how he will resolve the doubt. He will be a Pyrrhonian skeptic only if he does so by means of suspension. (de Olaso 1975, 33)

De Olaso also claims that whereas the person who doubts has “*confidence that it is possible, in principle, to prefer one of two opposing opinions*,” the skeptic suspends judgment “because he has lost confidence that it is possible to prefer, on rational grounds, one party to the other” (de Olaso 1975, 35). But de Olaso actually thinks that there is skeptical kind of doubt. For he remarks

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12. The quotations from de Olaso (1975), and those from Corti (2010) below, are translations from Spanish and French, respectively.

that one normally doubts when faced with a dilemma, which is what happens to the skeptic in the first phase of his philosophical journey, when he “still believes that it is possible to prefer one of two or more parties and stumbles upon the current impossibility of doing so” (1975, 35). By contrast:

What is extraordinarily unique about skeptical doubting is that it arises . . . in the face of the claim to truth of *one* opinion, that is, in the face of *one* opinion advanced dogmatically. Never with regard to one’s own opinion, because the skeptic does not pass judgment and to that extent does not have to practice doubt as self-criticism, but with regard to the opinion of those who opine, of those who judge, of the dogmatists. What the skeptic does is ‘to cast doubt on’ that judgment by bringing in opposing judgments that reinstate the equipollence of reasons. This explains that the works [of Sextus] that advise not to judge do not contain perplexities or self-criticisms and are full of opposing judgments. (de Olaso 1975, 35)

Let us try to dissect de Olaso’s interpretation. First, when using the mass noun ‘doubt,’ he seems to have in mind a mental state that is a middle ground between belief and disbelief, since he remarks that the person who doubts is typically faced with a dilemma between whose horns she cannot choose. Second, he detects in the Pyrrhonist’s philosophical journey the two conceptions of doubt he thinks to have found in Leibniz and Moore: at the beginning of that journey, the prospective Pyrrhonist is in a state of irresolution and perplexity that causes him distress, and he is critical with regard to his own opinions. Third, once he becomes a full-blown Pyrrhonist, neither conception of doubt can be used to explain his stance. But there is a third conception of doubt that could be dubbed ‘dialectical’ because it is a type of doubt that is practiced in an agonistic context in which a dogmatist makes a judgment and the skeptic brings in an opposing judgment to reinstate equipollence. The opposing judgment the skeptic brings in when casting doubt on the dogmatist’s judgment can be viewed as either a rebutting or an undercutting defeater. Lastly, doubt that is not dialectical presupposes confidence that, in principle, one can make a judgment, i.e., that one can prefer one of the conflicting judgments to the other. It seems that suspension resolves doubt because the person who suspends judgment loses that confidence.<sup>13</sup> If so, then it seems that the distress caused by doubt is caused by the belief that it is in principle possible to discover the truth about the matter under

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13. It seems to me that, when de Olaso says that the skeptic has lost confidence that it is possible to decide between opposing judgments, he does not merely mean that the skeptic *does not believe* that doing so is possible—which is compatible with suspension—but that the skeptic *disbelieves* that it is possible.



investigation and by the fact that one does not yet know what that truth is. If the foregoing remarks are on the right lines, then for de Olaso (i) while doubt is distressing, suspension is followed by tranquility or undisturbedness, and (ii) while doubt presupposes the belief that it is in principle possible to prefer one of two opposing opinions, the Pyrrhonist has lost confidence that doing so is possible.

In taking issue with the “presumption that the characteristic attitude of a Pyrrhonian skeptic is one of doubt” (Mates 1996, 30), Benson Mates observes that, in his account of Pyrrhonism, Sextus never employs verbs that express that attitude—such as ἐνδοιάζειν and διατάζειν—and that to describe the Pyrrhonist’s attitude he uses the verbs ἀπορῆναι and ἀμηχανεῖν, which mean “to be at a loss.”<sup>14</sup> Mates remarks that being in *aporia* means “being at a loss, baffled, perplexed, puzzled, stumped, stymied” (Mates 1992, 128; 1996, 30). He explains the differences between being in a state of *aporia* and being in a state of doubt in the following way:

Thus when a philosopher declares, “Being and nothing are one and the same,” you may very well find yourself at a loss because you do not understand the sentence he has uttered, whereas in order to doubt that being and nothing are one and the same you have to grasp the sense and be unconvinced that it is true. Berkeley, who did not challenge his opponents’ definition of the word “matter,” was consequently in a position to doubt that matter exists, and even to believe that it does not. But the Pyrrhonist cannot very well be said to doubt that our beliefs about an external world are true, for . . . he finds no coherent concept corresponding to the word “soul,” or, by implication, any corresponding to “external world” (i.e., to “what exists independently of the soul”). (Mates 1996, 31; cf. Mates 1992, 128–129)

It is philosophical use . . . an *aporia* is a kind of conundrum in which there are plausible arguments for both sides of a philosophical issue, or it is the state of an intellect baffled by such a conundrum. Thus the extensions of the terms *aporia* and “doubt” may overlap, but they are not identical. “Doubt,” unlike *aporia*, implies understanding; but *aporia*, unlike “doubt,” involves the (futile) comparison of conflicting claims. (Mates 1996, 32)

Thus, Mates thinks that there are two differences between doubt and *aporia*. The main difference is that the former does, whereas the latter does not, imply understanding. The second difference is that, whereas the person who is in *aporia* weighs the conflicting claims about *p*, the person who is in a state

14. Sextus does use διατάζειν at *AD* III 99 and *AM* III 9, but in neither passage is he describing the Pyrrhonist’s attitude.

of doubt remains unconvinced of the truth of one of those claims without comparing it with a rival claim, which means that the doubter considers only one claim at a time.

Lorenzo Corti (2010) offers yet another reason why the Pyrrhonist's state of suspension is not the same as the state of doubt. Corti reads *PH* I 10 and 192, where Sextus says that the terms 'suspension' and 'non-assertion' are used to indicate that the skeptic does not posit or reject anything, in light of *PH* I 191, where Sextus says that the skeptic utters the expression 'not more' to indicate that he does not know which things he should assent to and which he should not. Given that the act of assent to a proposition is an act of judgment, Corti concludes that suspension is to be understood in the following way: "x suspends his judgment with regard to a proposition *P* iff x, after having considered the possibility that *P*, does not judge as true neither that *P* nor that not-*P*" (2010, 164). He observes that in this depiction of the skeptic there is no reference to the notion of doubt, which he describes as "a state of uncertainty or of lack of belief with regard to a certain set of propositions" (2010, 157, cf. 165). By contrast, the notion of doubt plays a key role in so-called Cartesian skepticism, in which it has the following sense: "x doubts that *P* iff x, after having reflected on the possibility that *P*, (i) does not believe that *P* and (ii) does not believe that not-*P*" (2010, 172). In Corti's view, the difference between the Pyrrhonist and the so-called Cartesian skeptic is that (i) whereas the former does not judge that *p* or  $\neg p$ , the latter does not believe that *p* or  $\neg p$ , and that (ii) belief is a state, whereas judgment is an act (2010, 172). Believing that *p* does not imply having judged that *p* inasmuch as one may be in a given state without having performed an act: in the present case, I may believe that *p* without having judged that *p* (2010, 173). For this reason, Corti contends that the only beliefs the Pyrrhonist lacks are those that are the product of a judgment (2010, 176–177).<sup>15</sup>

Finally, in his discussion of the skepticism of Michel de Montaigne, Gianni Paganini (2018) remarks that the French philosopher transformed Pyrrhonism into a philosophy of doubt. If I interpret Paganini correctly, such a transformation is problematic for three reasons. First, Montaigne took doubt to be "a state of restlessness and discomfort rather than of calm and moderation of emotions" (2018, 240). Second, while the modern skeptic's doubting is a mental exercise that consists in evaluating the truth of one's thoughts, the ancient Pyrrhonist's discursive practice consists in uttering conflicting claims that balance each other out, thereby reaching equipollence (2018, 240). Third, whereas doubt is "a fluctuating state of mind" of incertitude, hes-

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15. Corti is here relying on Barnes (2000, xxiv–xxv), who nonetheless remarks that it is hard to believe that "a Sextan sceptic may consistently maintain any number of beliefs."

itation, and wavering perplexity, suspension is a state of “balanced neutrality” (2018, 241). Although Paganini is not explicit about this, it seems that he takes the state of restlessness and discomfort to be caused by the hesitation and perplexity experienced by the doubter.

Thus, interpreters have proposed different reasons for claiming that the Pyrrhonist is not a doubter, namely: (a) whereas the doubter is in a state of indecision or irresolution, the suspender of judgment does make decisions in his daily life, exhibiting trust and confidence, and whereas the doubter is in a state of disquiet, the Pyrrhonist’s suspension has enabled him to attain a state of undisturbedness (Naess); (b) while the doubter is distressed because he believes that it is in principle possible to choose between the opposing judgments on  $p$  but is unable to make the choice, the Pyrrhonist is no longer distressed because he has lost confidence that it is possible to choose between the opposing judgments on  $p$  (de Olaso); (c) while the doubter understands the concepts he examines, the Pyrrhonist regards the concepts he examines as inconceivable, and while the doubter remains unconvinced of the truth of a given claim without contrasting it with a rival claim, the Pyrrhonist considers conflicting claims and find them equipollent (Mates); (d) while suspension consists in judging neither that  $p$  nor that  $\neg p$ , doubt consists in believing neither that  $p$  nor that  $\neg p$  (Corti); and (e) whereas doubt is a state of discomfort and hesitation, suspension is a state of balanced neutrality that makes it possible to attain a state of calm and moderation of emotions, and whereas doubting consists in assessing the epistemic credentials of one’s thoughts, suspension results from opposing seemingly equipollent claims to each other (Paganini).

## 5. IS THE STANDARD VIEW CORRECT?

Let us now assess the strength of the various reasons that have been offered in support of the standard view.

Both Naess and de Olaso implicitly or explicitly take the state of *aporia* to be a state of doubt, which they regard as a state of indecision/hesitation and perplexity/puzzlement. Thus described, I think they are right to regard the state of doubt as identical with, or sufficiently similar to, that of *aporia*.<sup>16</sup> For Sextus tells us that the skeptical approach is called “‘aporetic’ either because, with regard to everything, it is in *aporia* and investigates (ἀπορεῖν καὶ ζητεῖν), as some say, or because of its being at a loss (ἀμηχανεῖν) in relation to assent

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16. Liddell and Scott (1996) translate ἀπορία as ‘difficulty,’ ‘being at a loss,’ ‘embarrassment,’ ‘perplexity,’ or ‘puzzle,’ and ἀπορεῖν as ‘to be at a loss,’ ‘to be in doubt,’ or ‘to be puzzled.’ Similar translations are given by Bailly (1997) and Adrados (2002–2010), who also propose ‘doubt’ as a possible rendering of ἀπορία.

or denial” (PH I 7). The person who is in *aporia* is perplexed, puzzled, or baffled because he cannot decide whether he should assent to *p* or rather deny that *p*, and he engages in investigation to see if he can find a way to make that decision. An *aporia* literally means the lack of a way through something, such as a problem or a difficulty, which is the situation in which the person who is in doubt about whether *p* seems to be. Now, both Naess and de Olaso remark that the Pyrrhonist was in a state of doubt or *aporia* at the beginning of his philosophical journey, i.e., when he was not yet a full-fledged skeptic. Sextus indeed says that the prospective skeptic is in a state of *aporia* because he does not know how to resolve the conflicts of appearances (PH I 12, AM I 6). But note that, once he suspends judgment and becomes a full-fledged skeptic, he is still in that state inasmuch as he is still unable to resolve those conflicts—he is still undecided about whether *p*. Not only does Sextus tell us, at PH I 7, that the skeptical approach is called aporetic, but he also uses ‘aporetic’ as synonymous with ‘skeptical’ and ‘Pyrrhonian’ (PH I 221–222, 234) and often refers to the skeptics as ‘aporetics’ (AD II 76, 78, 80, 99, 160, 278, III 207, 303, IV 66, 68, 105, 246, 340, AM I 214). There is, however, a crucial difference between the prospective skeptic and the full-fledged skeptic. The latter is not merely in *aporia* inasmuch as, having carried out an inquiry into the disputed issues and having found no answers, he suspends judgment. Hence, the full-fledged skeptic both is in *aporia* and suspends judgment, whereas the prospective skeptic is only in *aporia* because he has not yet engaged in inquiry. Precisely because the prospective skeptic is not in a state of suspended judgment, he still believes that there is a truth about the matters under investigation, that it can be apprehended, and that knowing the truth is good or valuable. Hence, the difference between the prospective skeptic and the full-fledged skeptic does not have to do with the state of *aporia*, but with the holding of beliefs.<sup>17</sup> Thus far, then, I do not see any reason to claim that the full-fledged skeptic is not in a state of doubt, understanding doubt, of course, as the mental state of indecision and puzzlement described by such sentences as “S is in doubt about whether *p*” or “S doubts whether (or not) *p*.” For the doubt expressed by such sentences as “S has much doubt that *p*,” “S is very doubtful that *p*,” or “S doubts that *p*” is a high degree of doubt that amounts to a strong inclination to believe  $\neg p$ , which is clearly at variance with the state of equipollence.

If my interpretation of their views proposed in the preceding section is on the right lines, Naess and Paganini take the hesitation in which doubt

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17. It might be argued that another difference is that the prospective skeptic has not yet decided what attitude he is rationally required or epistemically justified to adopt in the face of disagreement. However, as I argued in Section 2 in connection with the higher-order account of suspension, the full-fledged skeptic does not believe (or disbelieve) that his suspension is rationally required or epistemically justified.

consists to be the source of the distress experienced by the prospective skeptic or the doubter, whereas de Olaso thinks that the distress is caused by the doubter's belief that it is possible to choose between the opposing opinions and his inability to do so. In reply, note, first, that the full-fledged skeptic who has attained undisturbedness is still in *aporia*, which means that he is still in some sort of tension between assent and denial. That said, it seems that such a tension is different from the vacillation between belief and disbelief mentioned by Russell (Section 3) and the fluctuating state of mind mentioned by Paganini (Section 4). For the intellect of the person who suspends judgment has come to a standstill, which means that suspension is a state of mind that is stable, although not necessarily permanent inasmuch as the skeptic does not rule out the possibility of coming to hold beliefs as a result of further inquiry.

Note, second, that although the full-fledged skeptic is in *aporia*, he does not hold the belief that it is possible to decide which opinion is to be chosen—just as he does not believe that it is impossible to do so. Moreover, I find no reason to claim that the person who doubts must hold that belief. Neither do I think that the Pyrrhonist would say that holding that belief causes distress or that doubt understood as vacillation or fluctuation is disturbing. So, the source of the prospective skeptic's distress or disturbance is not to be found in the state of doubt. What is that source, then? My own view on this matter, which I have defended elsewhere (Machuca 2019b), is that Sextus takes value beliefs to be the ultimate source of disturbance. The reason the prospective skeptic is disturbed by the conflicts of appearances is that he believes that the discovery of the truth is valuable and, hence, that his inability to resolve those conflicts hinders his acquisition of something that is valuable. This interpretation of what Sextus regards as the ultimate source of disturbance is in consonance with the second possible explanation, given at the end of Section 3, of why the state of doubt is sometimes deemed to be unpleasant, irritating, frustrating, upsetting, and the like. For the raising of doubts sometimes undermines one's beliefs about things one believes to be valuable: if I believe, e.g., that marital fidelity is valuable, then I will probably get deeply upset if someone provides me with a rebutting or an undercutting defeater for my belief that my wife is faithful that throws me into a state of doubt.

Naess's second reason for claiming that the skeptic is not a doubter is that, unlike the doubter, the skeptic is not in a state of indecision in his daily life and exhibits trust and confidence. It is true that the skeptic is not constantly undecided when it comes to the affairs of daily life, but neither is the doubter. Also, the reason the skeptic makes practical decisions is not that he believes to have found an epistemic criterion on the basis of which he de-

cides what to do and not to do. Rather, he chooses one course of action over another by following the various ways things appear to him at the moment (*PH* I 21–24). What appears (τὸ φαινόμενον) is merely a practical criterion, for the skeptic is still in *aporia* inasmuch as he is still unable to decide which course of action is the right one or the one that should be followed. For this reason, talk of trust and confidence is problematic in that these are primarily doxastic notions: if one trusts or has confidence that *p*, one believes or has a high degree of credence that *p*. It could be argued, though, that there is a form of trust and confidence that one can manifest in one's actions that is not doxastic, and that by relying without opinions on his appearances the Pyrrhonist performatively exhibits such trust and confidence. As a matter of psychological fact, the Pyrrhonist trusts his appearances as non-epistemic guides to action. However, I think that Naess (1968) takes trust and confidence to be doxastic, which seems confirmed by the fact that, in an essay from 1972, he remarks: "To believe strongly and consistently that such and such, to be confident and trust that such and such, seems somehow to be consistent, according to Pyrrhonism, with an attitude of *epoché* toward the truth of such and such" (Naess 2005, 131–132). I do not know what to make of this, for it strikes me as a deeply confused and confusing way to describe the Pyrrhonian stance.

What about de Olaso's idea that skeptical doubting is different from normal doubting in that it arises, not in the face of a dilemma or as a form of self-criticism, but in the face of an opinion advanced dogmatically that the skeptic seeks to counterbalance by bringing in an opposing opinion? Three remarks are in order here. First, the skeptic who produces such an opposition is faced with a dilemma because he does not know which, if either, of the opinions is to be preferred. Second, often enough, the two conflicting opinions between which the skeptic cannot decide are advanced by the dogmatists themselves. Third, I think the skeptic can engage in self-criticism for it is not unreasonable that he may either feel the pull of an old belief or be inclined to form a new belief after having inspected the arguments in favor of one side of a given question. If either event occurred, he would test the epistemic credentials of the belief in question by considering an opposing belief and the arguments in its favor—and he would suspend judgment if the opposed beliefs struck him as equipollent.<sup>18</sup> In sum, I do not see any grounds to distinguish skeptical doubting from normal doubting.

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18. If the skeptic can engage in self-criticism and suspend judgment as a result, there is no reason to claim, *pace* Naess, that he suspends judgment only when he engages with the dogmatists.

Unlike Naess and de Olaso, Mates maintains that *aporia* is different from doubt, and in two respects: doubt does, while *aporia* does not, imply understanding; and the doubter does not compare opposing claims. Let us consider this second difference first, which is also mentioned by Paganini. If the doubter is someone faced with a dilemma, as the etymology of ‘doubt’ indicates, then he does compare opposing claims and is undecided between the two. If the mental state of the doubter is one of hesitation and perplexity—as Paganini claims—then again he does consider opposing claims between which he cannot decide. We may therefore think, *pace* Paganini, that the modern skeptic who doubts engages in the mental exercise of evaluating the truth of his thoughts by opposing them to each other. If so, then there is no reason to suppose that the Pyrrhonist cannot engage in the same mental exercise—which may be regarded as a sort of self-criticism.

Let us now focus on the first alleged difference because it is, according to Mates, the main one. I think there are three reasons to reject it. The first is that it is hard to believe that Sextus does not understand any of the countless claims that he examines in his extant works and regarding which he finds himself in a state of *aporia*. If he does not understand any of those claims, it is unclear what he is doing when he expounds dogmatic positions or assesses the arguments for and against them. Sometimes Sextus does remark that certain things are, as far as what the dogmatists say, inconceivable (ἀνεπινόητος, ἀεννόητος): humans (*PH* II 22), appearances (*PH* II 70), the sign (*PH* II 104, 118, 123, *AD* III 378), proof (*PH* II 171, *AD* II 382, 390), god (*PH* III 5, *AD* III 47), cause (*PH* III 13), blending (*PH* III 57, 62), natural science (*PH* III 114), human happiness (*AD* III 47), and the line (*AD* III 390, *AM* III 37, 50). But this is not something he says about all, or even most, of the topics he explores. In addition, such a claim of inconceivability should be understood dialectically: faced with dogmatists who contend that their views on certain topics are easily understood or grasped, Sextus puts forward counterarguments to the effect that such views refer to things that cannot even be conceived of.

The second reason to reject Mates’s interpretation is that Sextus explicitly remarks that the Pyrrhonist can think, while being in *aporia*, about the things dogmatists talk about. At *PH* II 1–3, Sextus considers the objection that the Pyrrhonist is unable either to investigate or in general to think about those things about which the dogmatists hold beliefs: either he apprehends that about which dogmatists talk about or he does not; if he does, then he cannot be in *aporia* about something he says he apprehends; if he does not, then he does not even know how to talk about what he has not apprehended, and hence he is unable to investigate it. Sextus’s reply at *PH* II 4–10 consists



in distinguishing two senses of ‘to apprehend.’ Either it means to think of *simpliciter* (τὸ νοεῖν ἀπλῶς), without making any assertion about the reality of the things one is talking about, or it also includes such an assertion. Setting aside here the second possible meaning, if it is apprehension understood as thinking or conception *simpliciter* that must precede investigation, then this activity is not impossible for the skeptic. For he is not “excluded from thinking that both arises from things that passively strike him and arguments that appear evidently to him, and in no way implies the reality of the things that are thought—for we can think, as they say, not only of real things, but also of unreal ones” (*PH* II 10). Thus, *pace* Mates, the skeptic can think or conceive of, and hence investigate, the concepts contained in the claims made by his dogmatic opponents.

The third reason to reject Mates’s interpretation is that, if the skeptic suspends judgment about whether *p*, after inquiring into whether *p*, because he is in *aporia*, and if he is in *aporia* because of the equipollence of the conflicting arguments bearing on whether *p*, then the person who is in *aporia* understands the concepts employed in *p* and in the arguments for and against *p*. For if he did not, why would the conflicting arguments strike him as equal in terms of credibility and lack of credibility? As we saw in Section 2, at the very least most of the time, Sextus takes the person who suspends judgment to have an inclination to believe *p* and an inclination to believe  $\neg p$  that cancel each other out because the reasons in favor of *p* and those in favor of  $\neg p$  appear equally persuasive or credible to him. This would not be possible if the concepts employed struck him as inconceivable or incoherent. The same applies to those cases in which there seem to be no persuasive or credible reasons either for or against *p*. For in order to report that the possible answers to the question whether *p* strike one as equally unpersuasive or incredible, it seems that one must understand or grasp what one is talking about.

With regard to Corti’s claim that Sextus suspends judgment only about those beliefs that are based on judgments, several remarks are in order. First, Sextus is explicit that the state of mind of the skeptic is characterized by the absence of beliefs or opinions—although not *just* by that because, as argued in Section 2, Pyrrhonian suspension is not the mere lack of belief. He sometimes says that the skeptic does not hold beliefs (δόγματα) (e.g., *PH* I 12, 15, 212). He also denies that Plato is purely skeptical because the person who holds beliefs even about a single thing cannot be deemed a skeptic (*PH* I 223). As far as I can tell, in none of those passages is there any indication that the beliefs targeted are solely those based on judgments. In addition, at *AD* V 160, he refers to the skeptics as those who suspend judgment about all matters concerning opinion (οἱ περὶ πάντων ἐπέχων τῶν κατὰ δόξαν). He also

sometimes points out that the skeptic performs certain actions ἀδοξάστως, an adverb that literally means ‘without opinions’ or ‘non-doxastically’ (e.g., *PH* I 15, 23–24, 226, 231, 240; II 13, 102; III 2). Corti refers to Sextus’s use of this adverb in a note, where he merely remarks: “although the adverb ἀδοξάστως has often been translated as ‘without beliefs,’ this translation is not accurate. To live ἀδοξάστως means to live by eschewing δοξάζειν: that is to say, to live eschewing to form judgments and be inclined to do so” (Corti 2010, 164n9). Given that the literal meaning of ἀδοξάστως is the natural way of understanding it in the Sextan passages inasmuch as it makes perfect sense to say that the Pyrrhonist performs a given action without holding opinions, one needs more than a mere assertion to reject the standard translation of that adverb.

Second, contrary to what Corti (2010, 175) suggests, there is no textual evidence for the view that what disturbed the prospective Pyrrhonist was, not the beliefs he held, but the judgments he formed. In several passages, Sextus tells us that to believe that something is good or bad produces disturbance (*PH* I 27, III 237, 277; *AD* V 110–161). For when a person lacks that which he regards as good, he intensely desires to obtain it, and he thinks that he is persecuted by things naturally bad and restlessly tries to escape from them. He then pursues what he considers to be good, but he is troubled if he acquires it, not only because he is irrationally and immoderately elated, but also because he is afraid of losing it. For this reason, even when he is not directly disturbed by the presence of those things he deems to be bad, he continues to be troubled by the disturbance resulting from his constant guarding against them. There is no hint, in the passages in question, that Sextus has in mind only beliefs based on judgments, thereby leaving untouched value beliefs that are not so based. It seems that one’s desire to obtain, or not to lose, that which one believes to be good is independent of whether one has ever made the judgment “X is good or to be pursued.” Likewise, it seems that one’s desire to shun that which one believes to be bad is independent of whether one has ever made the judgment “Y is bad or to be avoided.”

Third, if Corti’s interpretation were correct, the inactivity (ἀπραξία) charge leveled against Pyrrhonism would not make much sense or could be easily dismissed. According to this objection, across-the-board suspension is incompatible either with action *tout court* or with certain kinds of action (see Machuca 2019a). If the proponents of the objection correctly understood the nature of the Pyrrhonist’s suspension as interpreted by Corti, what they were saying is that action *tout court* or certain kinds of action are impossible if one refrains from making conscious or explicit judgments, even if one holds beliefs that are not based on an act of judgment. I find it hard to believe that

the ancient proponents of the inactivity objection thought, for example, that a person is unable to avoid an approaching wagon, a menacing dog, or a precipice lying ahead unless he first forms judgments about the situations in question, even if that person holds the relevant beliefs. But if they did endorse such a view of action, the Pyrrhonists would not have replied to the inactivity objection by remarking that they act by following their appearances (*PHI* 21–24)—i.e., the various ways things appear to them—but rather by remarking that they have beliefs that are not the result of a previous act of assent and that those beliefs are enough to deal with the affairs of daily life.

Lastly, Corti remarks that the Pyrrhonist judges neither that  $p$  nor that not- $p$  after having considered whether  $p$ , and that the Cartesian skeptic neither believes nor disbelieves that  $p$  after having reflected on whether  $p$ . What is the difference between the Pyrrhonist and the Cartesian skeptic regarding the examination of the question whether  $p$ ? Why does such an examination result in absence of judgment in one case and absence of belief in the other? It seems that, when someone reflects on the question whether  $p$ , what he is trying to do is to consciously judge whether  $p$  is the case. If that is so, then there is no difference between the stances of the Pyrrhonist and the Cartesian skeptic as Corti portrays them.

## 6. CONCLUSION

So, is the Pyrrhonist's suspension incompatible with doubt? I think we can safely say that doubt *per se* is not at variance with the Pyrrhonian stance. To begin with, in the preceding section I tried to make the case that the reasons offered in support of the standard view are unconvincing. First, not only the prospective skeptic but also the full-fledged skeptic is in a state of *aporia*, which, inasmuch as it is a state of indecision and perplexity, is identical with, or at least considerably similar to, the state of doubt. Second, this state of *aporia* or doubt neither is a source of disturbance nor presupposes the belief that it is in principle possible to choose between opposing opinions. Third, it is not the case that the Pyrrhonist differs from the doubter in that he does not remain irresolute in his daily decisions and in that he exhibits trust or confidence. For both the Pyrrhonist and the doubter make practical decisions while being undecided about which course of action, if any, is correct. And having trust or confidence seems to be at odds with Sextus's constant remarks that the Pyrrhonist does not prefer any one claim or argument to others as being more credible or persuasive. Fourth, Pyrrhonian doubt is not a kind of doubt that is *sui generis* in that it does not arise when faced with a dilemma. For the Pyrrhonist who puts forward an argument to oppose it to another argument proposed by a dogmatist is undecided about which

argument, if either, is to be accepted. Hence, it is legitimate to say that he is faced with a dilemma. Fifth, and relatedly, there is no reason to maintain that the doubter, unlike the Pyrrhonist, does not compare opposing claims. Sixth, neither is there any reason to claim that the person who is in *aporia*, unlike the doubter, does not understand that about which he is in *aporia*. For Sextus makes it clear that the skeptic does understand, at least most of the time, what the dogmatists talk about. Lastly, there is no reason to affirm that Pyrrhonian suspension targets beliefs only insofar as they are based on judgments, thereby leaving untouched all other beliefs. For Sextus is explicit that the person who holds even a single belief about matters of objective fact is not a skeptic, and that skeptics live without opinions. Now, there is one respect in which doubt and Pyrrhonian suspension might differ: if the state of doubt is necessarily a state of vacillation or fluctuation, then it is, in this respect, different from the Pyrrhonist's suspension inasmuch as his intellect has come to a standstill, which means that suspension is a state of mind that is stable.

Next, if we consider the analysis of the notion of doubt offered in Section 3, it is plain that not all degrees of doubt are compatible with the Pyrrhonian stance. There is compatibility only when the degree of doubt is intermediate between belief and disbelief, as expressed in sentences such as "S is in doubt about whether  $p$ " and "S doubts whether (or not)  $p$ ." If one defines doubt by saying "S has some doubt that  $p$  if [and only if] S has a doxastic attitude toward  $p$  and does not have the highest degree of confidence that  $p$ ," this definition may be taken to be compatible with Pyrrhonian suspension—provided, of course, that the attitude in question is not doxastic in the sense that it presupposes a higher-order belief. But if one defines doubt by saying that "S has some doubt that  $p$  if and only if S believes that it is possible that  $\neg p$ , and it's not the case that S believes that the possibility that  $\neg p$  is insignificant," then doubt is at variance with Pyrrhonian suspension inasmuch as the Pyrrhonist refrains from holding such a belief.

What about doubts as defeaters? It should be clear that rebutting and undercutting defeaters can be used not only by those who purport to establish that  $p$  is false or unjustified, respectively. Though the Pyrrhonist does not intend to establish either conclusion, he does avail himself of both kinds of defeaters dialectically, i.e., to oppose those who offer reasons for the claim that  $p$  is true or justified, with the aim of assessing the epistemic strength of the reasons for and against  $p$  relative to each other. But do undercutting defeaters not constitute the basis of Pyrrhonism inasmuch as, by undermining the evidential support for a given belief, they lead one to suspend that belief? Note, first, that whereas that kind of suspension is based on the con-

clusion that the belief is not properly grounded, the Pyrrhonist also suspends judgment about whether or not it is properly grounded. He limits himself to observing that, according to the dogmatists' own standards, the belief seems to be unjustified. Second, if the interpretation of Pyrrhonian suspension laid out in Section 2 is correct, then whereas the person who bases his suspension on undercutting defeaters believes that it is the attitude he is rationally required to adopt, the Pyrrhonist experiences his suspension as the enforced psychological effect of being confronted with arguments that strike him as equipollent.<sup>19</sup>

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