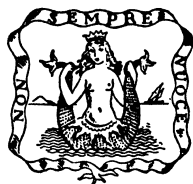


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GABRIELE GIANNANTONI



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DIEGO E. MACHUCA

PYRRHONISM, INQUIRY, AND RATIONALITY

Abstract

In this paper, I critically engage with Casey Perin's interpretation of Sextan Pyrrhonism in his recent book, *The Demands of Reason: An Essay on Pyrrhonian Scepticism*. From an approach that is both exegetical and systematic, I explore a number of issues concerning the Pyrrhonist's inquiry into truth, his alleged commitment to the canons of rationality, and his response to the *apraxia* objection.

Keywords

Pyrrhonism, Sextus Empiricus, inquiry, rationality, *apraxia*

1. *Introduction*

Given the high degree of development and sophistication reached by scholarship on ancient skepticism over the past three decades, it comes as no surprise that new articles, collections, monographs, and translations continue to be published in this area. The interest excited by ancient skepticism is mainly due to both the intriguing outlooks adopted by the Academic and the Pyrrhonian skeptics and to the serious challenges posed by their argumentative armory. Casey Perin's recent monograph, *The Demands of Reason: An Essay on Pyrrhonian Scepticism* (New York 2010), is a significant contribution to the philosophical understanding of the Pyrrhonism of Sextus Empiricus, the only ancient Pyrrhonist of whom substantive writings survive. Clearly written and tightly argued, the book requires careful, attentive reading to fully appreciate the sometimes complex line of argument¹.

¹ I should note from the beginning that my approach in this book discussion

Besides an Introduction and a Conclusion, the book consists of four chapters that, albeit connected, could well be read as separate essays². They deal with the Pyrrhonist's search for truth (Chapter 1), his stance on rationality (Chapter 2), the scope of ἐποχή (Chapter 3), and the ἀπραξία objection and the appearances as criterion of action (Chapter 4)³. Although the question of the Pyrrhonist's commitment to the requirements or principles of rationality is addressed specifically in Chapter 2, it constitutes, as the main title of the book already indicates, the core of Perin's interpretation of Sextan Pyrrhonism. As expected in a book by an Anglophone scholar, there is almost no reference to works in languages other than English. And even if one confines oneself to the Anglophone literature, when the reader is referred to studies dealing with topics not addressed in the book – e.g., medical Empiricism and Aenesideman skepticism – most pertinent studies are ignored.

In the Introduction, Perin remarks that his study is highly selective in that it is confined to the four aforementioned aspects of Sextus's Pyrrhonism as it is expounded in the Πυρρώνειοι Ὑποτυπώσεις (PH), particularly in its first book⁴. We are informed that there will be no extended discussion of either the Ten Modes of Aenesidemus or the Five Modes of Agrippa, and no discussion of the Eight Modes against causal explanations or the relationship between Pyrrhonism and the Empirical school of medicine. Even though a book's author may in general be

is not only exegetical but also systematic: I am interested in understanding Pyrrhonism as a philosophical outlook and will sometimes go beyond what is explicitly said in Sextus's texts. In this respect, my approach is in line with Perin's.

² Curiously enough, in Chapter 2 (p. 35) Perin introduces the Agrippan modes as though he had not discussed them in Chapter 1 (pp. 27-31).

³ Chapter 1 is a revised version of *Pyrrhonian Scepticism and the Search for Truth*, «Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy», xxx (2006) pp. 337-60. A shorter and less elaborate version of Chapter 3 is found in the second part of *Scepticism and Belief*, in R. BETT (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Ancient Scepticism*, Cambridge 2010, pp. 145-68.

⁴ Following the standard practice, I will use "Skeptic" and "Skepticism" with a capital "S" as synonyms of "Pyrrhonist" and "Pyrrhonism"; and I will be specifically referring to Sextan Pyrrhonism. I will also employ "Dogmatist" with a capital "D" to refer to anyone who makes assertions about how things are on the basis of what he considers to be objective evidence and sound arguments.

entitled or required to circumscribe the range of issues he addresses, in the present case some of the issues (partially) left aside are closely related to what is the main topic of the book and its short length would have allowed for a (fuller) treatment of them⁵. Perin's decision is regrettable particularly in the case of the Agrippan modes and medical Empiricism.

The Pyrrhonist's use of the Five Modes raises the question whether he is committed to the standards of epistemic justification underlying them. In Chapter 1, Perin briefly analyzes whether the Pyrrhonist is committed to the general negative Dogmatism to which those modes seem to lead and correctly concludes, in line with most scholars, that he is not. However, he does not examine the Pyrrhonist's use of the Agrippan modes in relation to the conception of epistemic justification on which they rest, which is clearly relevant to the topic of Chapter 2. In addition, a further question is whether, despite his not being doxastically committed to the Agrippan modes, the Pyrrhonist is nonetheless *psychologically* influenced by them, given that he is a thinking being who was raised in a given cultural context and was immersed in a specific philosophical milieu, which may explain why he continues to be in the psychological state of ἐποχή⁶.

As for medical Empiricism, this school bore a close connection, both philosophical and historical, with Pyrrhonism. Like other Pyrrhonists, Sextus was an Empirical doctor, although he explicitly distinguishes the two outlooks (*PH* I 236, *Adversus Dogmaticos* [AD] II 327-8). Some of our evidence about the medical Empiricists indicates that they made what might be considered a non-theoretical use of reason, which raises the question whether exploring their outlook might not help us better understand the Pyrrhonist's own use of reason⁷. In addition, exploring the way the Empirical Pyrrhonists practiced medicine

⁵ The book is 130 pages long, or 121 without the Bibliography and the General Index.

⁶ I discuss this issue in: *Pyrrhonism and the Law of Non-Contradiction*, in D. MACHUCA (ed.), *Pyrrhonism in Ancient, Modern, and Contemporary Philosophy*, Dordrecht 2011, pp. 51-77, at p. 73; *Agrippan Pyrrhonism and the Challenge of Disagreement*, «Journal of Philosophical Research» (forthcoming), Section 3.

⁷ On this topic, see e.g. the discussion and the bibliographic references in E. SPINELLI, *Beyond the Theoretikos Bios: Philosophy and Praxis in Sextus Empiricus*, in

might shed some light on their criterion of action and their response to the ἀπραξία objection. It should be noted that also relevant to the Pyrrhonist's use of reason and his reply to that objection is the connection between Pyrrhonism and medical Methodism, which is in fact the topic to which Sextus devotes most of the chapter of *PH* that examines whether medical Empiricism is the same as Pyrrhonism (*PH* I 236-41).

Let me finally note that Perin does not discuss the question whether Sextus's remarks about the self-applying or self-canceling character of the Skeptical phrases and the arguments against proof (*PH* I 14-5, 206, II 188; *AD* II 480) mean that he accepts self-refutation or whether such remarks are merely part of a dialectical maneuver. Perin briefly examines some of those remarks in the concluding chapter in connection with his analysis of the Pyrrhonist's therapeutic practice (pp. 119-21) and does not even mention the literature on the subject⁸. What is interesting about some of Sextus's remarks is that they make one wonder (or, at least, they make me wonder) whether Pyrrhonian investigation reveals that, whenever we carry the application of the logical and epistemological principles dictated by reason to the limit, we find ourselves in a situation of total *aporia* in which such principles end up undermining themselves.

In sum, discussion of the topics just mentioned would have been valuable, particularly in relation to whether the Pyrrhonist makes a normative or a merely pragmatic use of reason and hence whether he is committed to certain rational requirements.

2. *Skeptical inquiry*

In the famous opening paragraphs of *PH*, Sextus distinguishes between three "kinds of philosophy": the Dogmatic, whose practi-

T. BÉNATOUÏL-M. BONAZZI (eds.), *Theoria, Praxis and the Contemplative Life after Plato and Aristotle*, Leiden-Boston 2012, pp. 101-17, at pp. 114-6.

⁸ See especially M. MCPHERRAN, *Skeptical Homeopathy and Self-refutation*, «Phronesis», XXXII (1987) pp. 290-328, and L. CASTAGNOLI, *Self-bracketing Pyrrhonism*, «Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy», XVIII (2000) pp. 263-328.

tioner claims to have discovered the truth; the Academic, whose practitioner maintains that the truth cannot be apprehended; and the Skeptical, whose practitioner keeps on investigating (*PH* I 1-4). This characterization of the Skeptic as an inquirer is also found in other passages, such as *PH* I 7 and II 11; in fact, as we all well know, “inquirer” is literally the meaning of the Greek σκεπτικός. The question of the object and the possibility of the Pyrrhonist’s investigation has lately received a lot of renewed attention among scholars, who have focused on the (apparent) incompatibility between his engagement in the search for, or the inquiry into, truth and several other aspects of his outlook: his global ἐποχή; his quest for, and attainment of, tranquility or undisturbedness (ἀταραξία); his use of the Agrippan modes; his (alleged) anti-rationalism; or his use of what I call “the argument from possible disagreement”⁹. The incompatibility is deemed to be so manifest and stark that most of those who have examined the question maintain that the discovery of truth either is not or cannot consistently be the object of the Pyrrhonist’s investigation¹⁰.

Perin devotes Chapter 1 to this thorny issue. He correctly argues that the logic of *PH* I 1-3 makes it clear that the object of Pyrrhonian inquiry is the truth in the matters under investigation. With respect to the several cases of incompatibility just referred to, Perin mentions, and focuses on, two of them, namely, those concerning the Skeptic’s aim of ἀταραξία and his use of the Five Modes¹¹. I will here focus on

⁹ I examine these issues and argue that there is no incompatibility in: *Ancient Scepticism: Pyrrhonism*, «Philosophy Compass», vi (2011) pp. 246-58, at pp. 251-3; *The Pyrrhonian Argument from Possible Disagreement*, «Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie», xciii (2011) pp. 148-61; *Agrippan Pyrrhonism*, cit., Section 3.

¹⁰ See, e.g., J. BARNES, *Sextan Pyrrhonism*, in D. SCOTT (ed.), *Maieusis: Essays on Ancient Philosophy in Honour of Myles Burnyeat*, Oxford 2007, pp. 322-34; F. GRGÍĆ, *Sextus Empiricus on the Goal of Scepticism*, «Ancient Philosophy», xxvi (2006) pp. 141-60; D. HILEY, *The Deep Challenge of Pyrrhonian Scepticism*, «Journal of the History of Philosophy», xxiv (1987) pp. 185-213; S. MARCHAND, *Le sceptique cherche-t-il vraiment la vérité?*, «Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale», lxxv (2010) pp. 125-41; J. PALMER, *Skeptical Investigation*, «Ancient Philosophy», xx (2000) pp. 351-75; G. STRIKER, *Scepticism as a Kind of Philosophy*, «Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie», lxxxiii (2001) pp. 113-29.

¹¹ Perin also briefly examines whether the argument from possible disagree-

the first case, both because it is the one to which Perin devotes most of Chapter 1 and because I agree on the whole with his analysis of the second case.

The alleged incompatibility between the search for truth and the aim of *ἀταραξία* consists in that, given that the Skeptic engaged in the search for truth with the hope of attaining *ἀταραξία*, but ended up attaining it by suspending judgment, there seems to be no reason for him to persist in that search: discovering the truth is not a necessary means to *ἀταραξία*. In addition, if Skepticism is the ability to achieve *ἀταραξία* through *ἐποχή* (*PH* I 8), then to be a Skeptic consists in part in pursuing *ἀταραξία* by means of *ἐποχή* only. Perin opposes those who maintain that the Pyrrhonist takes *ἀταραξία* to be attained only through *ἐποχή* and hence replaces the discovery of truth with *ἐποχή* as the means to achieving that state of mind, with the result that he loses any interest in the search for truth. Perin correctly argues that Sextus's claim, at *PH* I 12 and 26, that the Pyrrhonist engaged in the search for truth in order to attain *ἀταραξία* neither amounts to nor entails the claim that the Pyrrhonist did so *only* to attain that state of mind. Hence, Sextus does not exclude the possibility that the Pyrrhonist «engages in the search for truth *both* for its own sake *and* for the sake of tranquillity» (p. 15). If the Pyrrhonist did not have an interest in the discovery of truth for its own sake, then he would lack the motive for seeking *ἀταραξία*. For Sextus tells us at *PH* I 12 and 26 that the Pyrrhonist seeks *ἀταραξία* because he is distressed by the unresolved conflict of appearances and hence by his not knowing whether *p* or not-*p* is the case. This means that the Pyrrhonist has an interest in knowing, and hence a desire to know, whether *p* or not-*p* is the case. The fact that such a desire is unsatisfied is a source of distress for him and it is this distress that motivates his desire for

ment is compatible with the Skeptic's engagement in the search for truth (pp. 19-20). But not only does he not mention this issue when explaining, in the Introduction and at the beginning of Chapter 1, the problems to be discussed in this chapter, but he deals with it in the course of his analysis of the connection between the search for truth and the search for *ἀταραξία*, as though they were not different issues.

ἀταραξία. Thus, the Pyrrhonist's interest in knowing the truth cannot be an interest in this knowledge as a means to ἀταραξία, i.e., cannot presuppose the desire for ἀταραξία, since that interest is ultimately the source of this desire. Also, given that the Skeptic has an interest in the discovery of truth for its own sake but lacks any such intrinsic interest in ἐποχή, he has a reason for preferring the former to the latter as a means to ἀταραξία. Although I agree with Perin's view that the Pyrrhonist can consistently keep searching for truth because he has an interest in the discovery of truth for its own sake, I have several points of disagreement with him.

The first point concerns Perin's failure to distinguish the different stages of the Skeptic's philosophical journey. With regard to the option of continuing the investigation (*PH* I 1-3), he claims that, «as Sextus indicates elsewhere (*PH* 1.12, 1.25-9), it is the Sceptic's desire for tranquillity, together with the fact that it appears to him that he can achieve tranquillity by discovering the truth, that explains why the Sceptic exercises this option» (p. 8). This claim is no doubt inexact because, whereas at *PH* I 1-3 there is no mention of ἀταραξία and Sextus is talking about the *full-blown* Skeptic, at *PH* I 12 and 25-9, where the search for ἀταραξία is discussed, he is talking about how the *Skeptic-to-be* sought to attain that state of mind. Thus, Perin seems to be conflating the beginning of the Skeptic's philosophical journey, a stage at which he was still a Dogmatist, and the present stage of that journey, at which he is already an out-and-out Skeptic¹². This is why I find problematic Perin's claim that «the Sceptic pursues the discovery of truth rather than suspension of judgement as a means to tranquillity»

¹² Perin himself at certain points distinguishes between the person who *becomes* a Skeptic and the person who *is already* a Skeptic (pp. 14, 17). Emidio Spinelli has pointed out to me that nowhere does Sextus distinguish between the Skeptic-to-be and the full-blown Skeptic. This distinction is, however, in perfect accord with Sextus's account of why the Skeptic began to do philosophy and how he ended up suspending judgment. Let me also note that the reason why I say that the Skeptic-to-be is a Dogmatist is that, although he is in a state of *aporia* regarding which appearances are true and which are false, he still believes that, e.g., there is a truth about the matters under investigation, that it can be apprehended, and that knowing the truth is objectively good or valuable.

(p. 23). For, to the best of my knowledge, nowhere does Sextus say that the *full-blown* Skeptic seeks to attain *ἀταραξία* by discovering the truth. We must bear in mind that up to now the Skeptic has achieved *ἀταραξία* *only* when he suspended judgment about everything, so that it non-doxastically appears to him that he will remain undisturbed if he continues to suspend judgment¹³. Of course, he does not rule out the possibility that this will change in the future – since *qua* Skeptic he does not rule out any possibility – but from this we cannot infer that he prefers the discovery of truth to suspension of judgment as a means to *ἀταραξία*. So why does he continue to be engaged in philosophical investigation? I agree with Perin that the Skeptic is interested in philosophical investigation independently of his desire for *ἀταραξία*, but I differ from him in my interpretation of that interest, as I will explain in a moment.

My second disagreement with Perin concerns his interpretation of a Sextan argument he calls “the value argument” (p. 13), according to which those who hold the opinion that anything is good or bad by nature are perpetually disturbed (*PH* I 27-8, III 237-8). Thus, whereas at *PH* I 12 and 26 we are told that what produces distress is the fact that one does not know whether something is, e.g., good or bad, at *PH* I 27-8 and III 237-8 we are told that what produces distress is having the belief that something is good or bad. In Perin’s view, Sextus should discard this argument because it is incompatible with the search for truth. For in those cases in which a person is disturbed by his holding beliefs about anything being good or bad by nature, *ἀταραξία* can be achieved only through *ἐποχή* insofar as any belief of that sort produces distress, even if it is «a true belief formed as a result of investigation on the basis of considerations that establish its truth» (p. 13). In such cases, discovering the truth about the value of something, and thus forming the belief that it is good or bad, is not a means, but an obstacle to tranquility (p. 25). I think it is possible to show that the unsolvable problem Perin detects here is merely apparent. As we saw, Perin maintains that

¹³ At this point it is perhaps worth emphasizing that Perin does not ascribe (and neither do I) to the Skeptic the belief that there is a causal connection between the discovery of truth or suspension of judgment and *ἀταραξία*.

the Pyrrhonist seeks ἀταραξία because he is disturbed and he is disturbed because he is interested in discovering the truth for its own sake. But I think there is still a further reason that shows the connection between the two apparently distinct sources of disturbance, a reason that can be seen provided one keeps in mind the difference between the Skeptic-to-be and the full-blown Skeptic. My suggestion is that the Skeptic-to-be wants to know the truth about the matters he inquires into because he believes that knowledge of the truth is something good or valuable in itself, and so becomes distressed when failing to acquire that knowledge, i.e., that good. This is in perfect agreement with the value argument, so that, if my suggestion is correct, there is actually a single source of disturbance regarding matters of opinion. Hence, I cannot agree with Perin when he says that, «when [the Sceptic] has suspended judgement about the matter but is once again distressed by the fact that he does not know whether *p*, he pursues the discovery of truth rather than suspension of judgement as the means to tranquillity» (p. 26). For if he were distressed by that fact, this would mean that he is once again holding the belief that knowing the truth is valuable, and given his past experience, it would non-doxastically appear to him that it is more convenient to try to achieve ἀταραξία by getting rid of that disturbing belief rather than by discovering the truth. If so, why is the full-blown Skeptic engaged in philosophical inquiry? I submit that, since he lacks any belief about something being objectively good or valuable, the likely reason why he has remained engaged in philosophical investigation is that he has an inquisitive and open-minded character shaped by his upbringing, education, socio-cultural milieu, and philosophical training. Just as the full-blown Skeptic's desire for ἀταραξία differs from that of the Skeptic-to-be in that the latter does, while the former does not, believe that that state of mind is something valuable by nature, so too does the full-blown Skeptic's interest in philosophical investigation differ from that of the Skeptic-to-be in that the latter does, while the former does not, believe that knowing the truth is something valuable by nature. I propose a deflationary reading of both the full-blown Skeptic's search for ἀταραξία and his engagement in philosophical investigation according to which these are mere preferences with which he is left after suspending judg-

ment and to which he has no strong commitment¹⁴. Given that Perin thinks that the value argument «is very much like a piece of dogmatism» (p. 13), let me finally make the unoriginal suggestion that, when Sextus expounds the value argument in *PH* – as well as in *AD* v – he is either arguing dialectically or merely describing his own non-doxastic appearances.

Two other points of disagreement concern Perin's claim that, at *PH* I 8, Sextus defines Skepticism «as the ability to achieve tranquility

¹⁴ Baron Reed has pointed out to me that I assume that a person's personality will remain largely unchanged after becoming a full-blown Skeptic: if he was committed to looking for reasons and assessing arguments before, he will continue to do so afterward. However, since people are temperamentally different, we cannot rule out the possibility that he might become disappointed about philosophical investigation and turn radically against it by embracing some form of dogmatism (in the modern sense of this term). The same point applies to the Skeptic's interest in *ἀταραξία*. In addition, if the point is correct, one wonders whether Sextus's writings are of any philosophical interest insofar as he is merely reporting what has happened to him and others like him. In response to these two objections, I would first like to say that my deflationary and psychological reading of Pyrrhonism is actually consonant with the spirit of Reed's first objection. Sextus never asserts that what has happened to him and others will definitely happen to anyone else. Secondly, I am here interpreting the stance of the kind of Skeptic described in the Sextan writings, namely, someone who suspends judgment across the board, is engaged in philosophical investigation, and is interested in *ἀταραξία*. Now, on my interpretation of Pyrrhonism, there is a key difference between those three aspects. For while a person could still be considered a Skeptic even if he stopped being interested in *ἀταραξία* or engaged in philosophical inquiry and debate, he could not be considered a Skeptic if he did not suspend judgment and embraced some form of dogmatism. As for the philosophical interest of Sextus's writings, even though the absence of Dogmatic claims may prompt many to reject those writings out of hand, nothing necessarily precludes one from finding them philosophically challenging and intriguing. For it is one thing how Sextus intends what he says to be taken and quite another how his readers react to what he says. For instance, someone may believe that some of the arguments that Sextus expounds but to which he does not assent are sound and have significant philosophical implications. Furthermore, even if one rejects his *sui generis* radical stance, one may still find it philosophically stimulating in that it makes one ponder more carefully problems concerning justification, inquiry, disagreement, and action. Finally, it might well occur that some will identify with Sextus's account of his own experience or will be deeply influenced by it.

through suspension of judgment» (pp. 8-9), and hence that achieving *ἀταραξία* through *ἐποχή* is constitutive of Skepticism. First of all, the actual definition says:

[A]n ability to set out oppositions among things that appear and things that are thought in any way whatsoever, an ability from which we come, through the equipollence in the opposed things and arguments, first to *ἐποχή* and after that to *ἀταραξία*.

To begin with, Perin's paraphrase is incomplete and misleading, since the central aspect of this ability is the juxtaposing of conflicting perceptual and intellectual appearances, which turn out to strike the person exercising the ability as being equipollent (cfr. Perin himself on p. 33). From this ability one gets first to *ἐποχή* and then to *ἀταραξία*. Secondly, Perin takes *ἀταραξία* to be essential to Pyrrhonism, which is unsurprising, this being the view of the majority of scholars. I think this view is incorrect, but since I have discussed this issue at length elsewhere¹⁵, I will be brief here. There are at least three passages (*PH* I 25, 232, and *AD* I 6) that show to a greater or lesser degree that *ἀταραξία* in matters of opinion is an aim that the Skeptic has pursued up to now and that it might stop being so in the future, and that one may still be a Skeptic even though one stops searching for *ἀταραξία* or fails to attain it. As noted above, the desire for *ἀταραξία* is merely a preference the Skeptic happens to have due most probably to the influence of his cultural and philosophical milieu. If anything defines Sextan Pyrrhonism, it is the Skeptic's *ἐποχή* reached by the exercise of the *δύναμις ἀντιθετική* as well as his living by appearances.

A further point of disagreement has to do with Perin's interpretation of *PH* I 30 and 204-5. In the former passage, after telling us that the Skeptical *τέλος* is *ἀταραξία* in matters of opinion and *μετριοπάθεια* in matters forced upon us, Sextus remarks that «some prominent Skeptics have added to these [goals] suspension of judgment in the investigations». On the basis of *DL* IX 107, most interpreters, Perin included,

¹⁵ See my *The Pyrrhonist's ἀταραξία and φιλανθρωπία*, «Ancient Philosophy», xxvi (2006) pp. 111-39.

plausibly claim that those Skeptics are Timon and Aenesidemus. Now, Perin maintains, quite surprisingly, that at *PH* I 30 Sextus suggests that the Skeptics in question

pursue suspension of judgement as a means to achieving tranquillity. For these Sceptics are said to have identified suspension of judgement as an end or goal *in addition to* tranquillity, and there is no indication in Sextus' text, and no reason to think, that suspension of judgement has some value for these Sceptics independently of its relation to tranquillity (p. 11, cfr. p. 23).

I find Perin's inference unsound and his reading forced. For at *PH* I 30 there is no obvious indication either way, i.e., that the Skeptics in question search for *ἐποχή* for its own sake or that they value it as a means to *ἀταραξία*; we are only told that they have three goals. However, one could ask why, if they do not value *ἐποχή* for its own sake, they conceive of it as a goal along with *ἀταραξία* and *μετριοπάθεια*. Perhaps *ἐποχή* is merely an *intermediate* aim that is the means to the *ultimate* aim of *ἀταραξία*, but once again the text does not license us to draw such a conclusion. Neither does one find support for Perin's reading at *DL* ix 107 – although he neither claims one does nor examines the passage – since the text says: «The goal, the Skeptics say it is suspension of judgment, which undisturbedness follows (*ἐπακολουθεῖ*) like a shadow». Nothing in this text allows us to draw the conclusion that *ἐποχή* is regarded as an aim only insofar as it makes it possible to achieve *ἀταραξία*.

Perin offers as a further reason for his inference the alleged fact that Sextus alludes to the Skeptics in question in his explanation of the phrase «To every argument an equal argument is opposed» (pp. 11, 12 n. 5). Sextus says that *some* utter the phrase as an exhortation to the Skeptic to oppose to every argument a conflicting and equally credible argument,

lest he be somehow deceived by the Dogmatist into giving up the investigation and, by being rash, miss the undisturbedness apparent to [the Skeptics], which (as we suggested before) they think supervenes together with (*παρυφίστασθαι*) suspension of judgment about everything (*PH* I 205).

One immediately wonders on what grounds Perin can claim so straightforwardly that Sextus is here talking about the Skeptics to

whom he alludes at *PH* I 30. Perin offers the quoted passage in support of his view that the Skeptics mentioned at *PH* I 30 conceive of ἐποχή as a means to ἀταραξία, but the only connection he finds between the two passages is that the Skeptics referred to at *PH* I 205 do conceive of ἐποχή that way. Perin is therefore simply begging the question. One might perhaps find another reason in a note (n. 5 on pp. 11-2) in which he tells us that it seems to him that at *PH* I 205 Sextus is referring back to *PH* I 30 rather than to *PH* I 29, and for two reasons. The first is that the verb παρρησιάζεσθαι, used at *PH* I 205, is not used at *PH* I 29 or anywhere else in *PH*. The second reason is that, if we understand that verb with the sense of “supervene on”, which suggests dependence, then someone who considers ἀταραξία to depend on ἐποχή will take the latter, rather than the search for truth, as his aim. Now, first, at *PH* I 29 (as well as at I 26) Sextus employs παρακολουθεῖν (cfr. ἀκολουθεῖν at I 31), but I do not see any crucial difference between this verb (which means “to follow closely”) and παρρησιάζεσθαι. Secondly, as already noted, *PH* I 30 does not talk about the connection between ἐποχή and ἀταραξία, as do both *PH* I 29 and 205. Thirdly, at *DL* IX 107 the verb employed is ἐπακολουθεῖν, not παρρησιάζεσθαι, and we find the image of the shadow following the body, which is also found at *PH* I 29. Finally, nothing of what is said at *PH* I 205 is incompatible with Sextus’s own account of Pyrrhonism, even though he himself does not use the phrase in question as an exhortation. The purpose of Perin’s somehow tangential analysis of *PH* I 30 and 205 is to show that Sextus distinguishes himself from Skeptics who take ἐποχή, and not the search for truth, as their goal because they seem to view it as the only means to ἀταραξία. I do not think that these two passages help Perin support his interpretation of the nature of Pyrrhonian inquiry and, in trying to show that they do, he ends up reading too much into them. But neither do I think that he needs them to make his case.

A final point of disagreement has to do with Perin’s discussion of the argument from possible disagreement, which he calls “the possibility argument” (p. 20)¹⁶. Sextus makes use of this argument in order to

¹⁶ Perin quotes the version of the argument expounded at *PH* I 33-4 (p. 19), and points out that other versions are presented at *PH* I 89, 96, 142, II 40, and III

set out an opposition and induce ἐποχή whenever he is confronted with an argument on a given topic to which at present he cannot oppose a countervailing argument on the same topic. Perin observes that, although it would be foolish to deny that one can take the use of the argument as intended to show that the Sceptic's investigation cannot end in anything but ἐποχή, another reading is possible:

In presenting the possibility argument Sextus is indicating that he does not want to deny the possibility that some Sceptics (or, for that matter, some non-Sceptics) will find the argument persuasive. At the same time, however, Sextus can concede that it is possible that some Sceptics will *not* find the possibility argument persuasive. The passage at PH 1.33–4 does not require, as far as I can see, that according to Sextus *every* Sceptic will find the possibility argument as persuasive as any argument against which it is deployed (p. 20).

Besides the fact that Sextus does not indicate anything of the sort in the passage in question, Perin's solution is convoluted, and unnecessarily so, for there is in fact a much simpler one. The argument from possible disagreement appears to Sextus himself to be as credible or epistemically persuasive as the argument to which it is opposed. He does not, however, rule out either the possibility that, at some point in the future, he might come to the conclusion that the argument from possible disagreement is unsound, or the possibility that, at some point in the future, the argument from possible disagreement might not appear to him to be as credible as the argument to which it will be opposed. The use of the argument from possible disagreement would pose an insoluble problem for Sextus only if he were committed to its soundness, which he is clearly not.

233-4 (p. 20 n. 20). It must be observed that PH 1 96 does not expound an argument based upon the possibility of *disagreement*, as all the other passages do. The inclusion of that passage in the list is probably to be explained by the fact that Perin calls the argument "possibility argument" and so has a more general argument in mind. I think, however, that the argument from possible disagreement and the one presented at PH 1 96 are markedly different and should therefore not be deemed to be versions of the same general argument. I examine in detail the argument from possible disagreement in *The Pyrrhonian Argument from Possible Disagreement*, cit.

3. *The scope of ἐποχή*

I will deal first with Chapter 3, and then with Chapter 2, because this will provide the necessary framework for part of my discussion of the latter chapter. Besides, the line of argument of Chapter 3 does not depend on anything expounded in the previous chapter.

Chapter 3 addresses the thorniest exegetical question concerning Sextan Pyrrhonism, namely, the scope of ἐποχή. In his exploration of this question, Perin focuses the analysis on the much discussed *PH* I 13. This passage introduces a distinction between two senses of the term δόγμα, one of which is rejected, while the other accepted, by the Skeptic. After offering a detailed critical discussion of Michael Frede's interpretation¹⁷, Perin argues that the two senses of δόγμα correspond to two kinds of belief, which he calls "dogmatic" and "non-dogmatic", the former encompassing beliefs about how things *are* and the latter beliefs about how they *appear* to be – where the notion of appearance is non-doxastic. Thus, he contends that the only beliefs about which the Skeptic does not suspend judgment are those about how things merely appear to him to be. Although this interpretation is not novel – as Perin himself recognizes (p. 62 n. 8)¹⁸ – his analysis is certainly penetrating and subtle. Since I agree on the whole with his interpretation of the scope of the Pyrrhonist's ἐποχή¹⁹, I move on to critically discuss the remaining two chapters and the Conclusion.

¹⁷ Perin focuses primarily on M. FREDE, *The Sceptic's Beliefs*, in M. BURNYEAT-M. FREDE (eds.), *The Original Sceptics: A Controversy*, Indianapolis 1997, pp. 1-24.

¹⁸ See especially G. FINE, *Sceptical Dogmata: Outlines of Pyrrhonism I 13*, «*Méthexis*», XIII (2000) pp. 81-103. Cfr. A. BAILEY, *Sextus Empiricus and Pyrrhonian Scepticism*, Oxford 2002, chs. 9 and 11.

¹⁹ I do not agree with Perin's interpretation of the phrase ὅσον ἐπὶ τῷ λόγῳ (pp. 71-2) and I think he should have addressed the difficult issues raised by the Skeptic's acceptance of recollective signs because this is key to the question of the scope of Skepticism (pp. 72-3, p. 83 n. 44).

4. *Rationality*

In Chapter 2, Perin argues that the kind of necessity Sextus has in mind when saying that the Pyrrhonist is compelled to suspend judgment in the face of a disagreement he cannot resolve is primarily rational insofar as it is mainly the result of the aim of satisfying certain requirements of rationality. He further argues that the reason for having the aim of satisfying those requirements is that such an aim is part of what it is to be engaged in the search for truth, for given that the Pyrrhonist aims to discover the truth, he also aims to satisfy the rational requirements that govern the search for truth. A person can be regarded as aiming to discover the truth provided he aims to form the belief that p if and only if there is a reason, in the form of evidence of the truth of p , to believe p (p. 55)²⁰. Perin calls the rational necessity in question “hypothetical”: the Pyrrhonist must suspend judgment *if* he is to satisfy, as he aims to do, the demands of reason, i.e., certain basic rational requirements (pp. 4, 32, 38). Perin thus opposes what he takes to be the consensus among interpreters, who claim that the necessity in question is only or merely causal: its appearing to the Pyrrhonist that he has no reason to believe either p or its negation causes him to suspend judgment; he is thus passive with respect to a state of mind that is forced on him.

Perin correctly claims that the Skeptic’s Dogmatic rival is committed to the following rational requirement:

(SJ) Rationality requires one to suspend judgement about whether p if one believes there is no reason to believe either p or its negation (p. 40).

But in the case of the Skeptic, given that he has no beliefs (or at least no beliefs about how things are) and hence no beliefs about the reasons for a given belief, the rational requirement he aims to satisfy is, according to Perin, the following:

²⁰ As Baron Reed has pointed out to me, this biconditional is incorrect when read left to right. For one might aim to form the belief that p even when there is no reason to believe p , and although in doing so one might be frustrated in one’s aim, one could still be regarded as aiming to discover the truth.

(SJ*) Rationality requires one to suspend judgement about whether p if it appears to one that there is no reason to believe either p or its negation (p. 43).

Thus formulated, this requirement is nevertheless problematic for the same reason why Perin claims that (SJ) is not the requirement the Skeptic aims to satisfy. For (SJ*) itself can be interpreted as a belief the Skeptic holds, and if so, then, despite the view defended in Chapter 2, the Skeptic does have at least one belief that is not about his own appearances. For he believes that, when one is confronted with contrary claims about a given issue that appear to one to be equipollent, one is rationally required to suspend judgment on that issue. If, however, Perin does not think that the Skeptic holds such a belief, he should have formulated the requirement that, in his view, the Skeptic aims to satisfy thus:

(SJ**) It appears to me that rationality requires one to suspend judgment about whether p if it appears to one that there is no reason to believe either p or its negation.

Adopting this formulation would pose a problem for Perin's interpretation insofar as it does not seem to have any normative force – which may in fact be the reason why he does not use (SJ**). For the Skeptic is just describing the way he is appeared to, not making an assertion about what any rational being ought to do in certain circumstances. This is precisely the manner in which Sextus tells us that the Skeptical $\phi\omega\nu\alpha\acute{\iota}$ – such as “I suspend judgment” and “All things are inapprehensible” – are to be understood (*PH* I 187-208). They express the various ways the Skeptic has so far been affected, or appeared to, in his investigation of the Dogmatists' claims and arguments. They do not purport to state what is objectively the case because they are not ontological or epistemological assertions. This is why I submit that the Skeptic merely reports that, when exercising his natural capability of thinking in his philosophical inquiries, he finds himself forced to suspend his judgment about the truth of the claims and the soundness of the arguments under examination. His $\epsilon\pi\omicron\chi\eta$ is indeed the result of a use of reason, but this use is not normative because he is not doxastically committed to the truth of what the Dogmatists describe as the

canons or principles of rationality. To be more precise, in his road to Pyrrhonism the Skeptic-to-be first suspends judgment about a number of matters because of his doxastic commitment to certain rational requirements, but once he turns into a full-blown Skeptic and his suspension encompasses even those very requirements, this suspension is no more or less than a psychological state forced on him. As I noted in Section 1 in relation to the Agrippan modes, the past commitment to those rational requirements probably continues to exert some sort of psychological influence on the full-blown Skeptic, which would explain why he finds himself forced to suspend judgment whenever he is unable to give his assent to any one of the parties to a given dispute²¹. If so, this only shows that the full-blown Skeptic's suspension has its origin in that past commitment, *not* that he *now* adheres to certain rational requirements he aims to satisfy.

One should bear in mind that the mere facts that the full-blown Skeptic finds himself having and using the capacity to think and that his thinking operates a certain way do not entail that he aims to satisfy the demands of reason as something to which he expresses doxastic commitment. This is not to say that he is an *anti-rationalist* – since he does not reject so-called rational requirements but only suspends judgment about them – but rather that he is an *a-rationalist*²². Hence, when applied to Sextan Pyrrhonism, the distinction between rationalism and anti-rationalism is not, as Perin clearly presupposes (pp. 114-8), exhaustive. In my view, then, the Skeptic's use of reason is inescapable – insofar as he experiences himself as a thinking being – and pragmatic – insofar as it makes it possible for him to communicate with others. So I agree with Perin (pp. 57 n. 40, 114) that the Skeptic does not renounce reason as a guide to life, but only if this is not interpreted as a normative guide, but only as an unavoidable and pragmatic one. The Skeptic does recognize that reason requires him to suspend judgment in certain circumstances (p. 116), but he does so passively because he finds

²¹ Compare this idea with Perin's remarks, on p. 51, to the effect that hypothetical necessity and causal necessity may be compatible.

²² See my *Pyrrhonism and the Law of Non-Contradiction*, cit., p. 75.

himself forced to do so; there is no voluntary and doxastic commitment or adherence to the demands of reason on his part.

Perin also offers textual evidence in support of his interpretation: at *PH* II 96 and III 36, Sextus employs the expression ἐπέχειν προσήκει, which Perin renders as “it is right to suspend judgment”. In the former passage, the expression is used before Sextus reviews arguments against the existence of signs and proofs in order to counter those in favor of their existence. Given that at the end of both the discussion of signs (*PH* II 133) and that of proofs (*PH* II 192) Sextus remarks that one must suspend judgment and say that signs and proofs no more exist than do not exist, Perin concludes that “it is right to suspend judgment” is used as equivalent to “it is necessary to suspend judgment”. For its part, in the second passage, Sextus says that it is right to suspend judgment about the material principles because we are unable to assent either to all the positions in conflict or to any of them, given that we are unable to prefer one of them over the others either with or without proof. Perin concludes that, in saying in both passages that it is right to suspend judgment, Sextus means that it is rational to do so. I honestly do not know how much weight we should give to the use of the term προσήκει (which may also be rendered as “it is convenient” or “it is proper”). Even if we interpret it in the sense Perin claims, it is first not clear whether in the passages in question Sextus is not merely arguing dialectically, with the aim of showing to the Dogmatists that, by their own standards, it seems proper for them to withhold assent. And if we think that he is also describing the Skeptic’s own situation, this does not necessarily mean that he is committed to certain rational requirements, as I try to make clear in what follows.

What about Perin’s claim that the Pyrrhonist’s commitment to certain basic rational principles is required by his engagement in the search for truth? I submit that in his philosophical investigations the Pyrrhonist makes an uncommitted use of whatever tools he has at his disposal, including the logical principles, inference rules, and standards of justification endorsed by his Dogmatic rivals. He can do so because he does not reject them, but only suspends judgment about their truth or validity and hence does not exclude the possibility that those principles, rules, and standards might turn out to be correct and allow him to

discover that there are definite answers to the questions he inquires into. Of course, neither does he exclude the opposite possibility. If either possibility became actual, his investigation would come to an end, but in the meantime he continues to critically employ all the logical and epistemological tools he is aware of and is willing to employ any new ones he might encounter. We can imagine the Skeptic saying to himself: «Most Dogmatists claim that by using these various tools they have discovered the truth about the matters I inquire into, while others claim that by using them they have come to realize that the truth about those matters cannot be apprehended; so I will try them in my investigation and see where they lead me». Up till now, the results of his investigation have been (i) the observation of widespread and entrenched disagreements that he has been unable to resolve using the Dogmatists' own logical and epistemological tools, (ii) the realization that by pursuing the application of the standards set by these tools to the limit one ends up calling into question their very truth and validity, and finally (iii) the experience of suspension as a state or condition forced on him.

Let me end the present discussion by considering the final chapter of *PH*, which Perin examines in the Conclusion. At *PH* III 280-1, Sextus tells us that, motivated by a philanthropic concern, the Pyrrhonist wishes to cure, by means of arguments, the differing degrees of conceit and rashness that afflict the Dogmatists. This is why he uses both arguments that appear weak and arguments that appear strong in their persuasiveness. The former are those which are capable of curing those who are mildly affected, and the latter those which are capable of curing those who are highly affected, by such conceit and rashness. Perin claims that this therapeutic practice has little to do with the central features of the Pyrrhonism described in *PH*, being incompatible particularly with the Pyrrhonist's search for truth. For the Pyrrhonist who is a therapist is not concerned with the epistemic but with the pragmatic value of an argument, since he is not concerned with whether it «establishes the truth of its conclusion and, by doing so, resolves a conflict between candidates for belief» (p. 121). Perin also seems to think that, at *PH* III 280-1, Sextus is saying that the Pyrrhonist makes use of arguments that are logically weak whenever these are sufficient to induce suspension of judgment in his Dogmatic patients (p. 118). He

claims, in addition, that he finds «little of philosophical interest or value in the therapeutic strand of Scepticism» (p. 118 n. 7). I think Perin dismisses the passage in question too hastily.

I have elsewhere argued that the Pyrrhonist's philanthropic argumentative therapy should not be deemed to be essential to his outlook²³, which in no way means that such a therapy is at odds or in tension with other aspects of Skepticism. It is true that the end of *PH* is the only place in Sextus's extant corpus that explicitly lays out his therapeutic use of arguments²⁴. But not only does this not entail by itself that such an argumentative practice is incompatible with his Skepticism, but one should also bear in mind that his explanation of that practice fits perfectly well with his characteristic dialectical style of argumentation. In addition, and leaving aside the philanthropic and therapeutic elements, the closing paragraphs of *PH* are of philosophical interest because they tell us something crucial about the Pyrrhonist's conception of argumentation: his use of arguments does not imply a commitment to their soundness. It is because he makes an uncommitted use of arguments that he can, if he wants to, employ them therapeutically. I do not think that this shows that the Pyrrhonist adopts a form of anti-rationalism, but rather that he is an a-rationalist, which means, as I said above, that he neither embraces nor rejects the requirements of rationality. But in either case, the final chapter of *PH* poses a serious problem for Perin's interpretation and it is regrettable that he does not offer a fuller analysis of it. It should also be noted that nothing said in that chapter indicates that the strength and weakness of arguments refer to their validity or soundness. An argument is considered as weak or strong depending on whether it is able to persuade someone who is mildly or severely affected by conceit and rashness²⁵.

²³ *The Pyrrhonist's ἀταξία and φιλανθρωπία*, cit., pp. 134-6.

²⁴ Emidio Spinelli has called my attention to the passages in which Sextus compares the Skeptical phrases (*PH* I 206) and the arguments against proof (*PH* II 188, *AD* II 480) to purgative drugs that evacuate themselves together with the fluids they drive out of bodies. In my view, however, the purgative simile has nothing to do with the argumentative therapy laid out at *PH* III 280-1.

²⁵ I explore this issue in detail in *Argumentative Persuasiveness in Ancient Pyrrhonism*, «Méthexis», xxii (2009) pp. 101-26, at pp. 102-12.

What about Perin's claim that the argumentative practice described in the closing paragraphs of *PH* is incompatible with the Pyrrhonist's search for truth? I have already observed that, in my view, someone can be a Pyrrhonist even if he does not engage in a philanthropically motivated therapeutic practice, just as he can be a Pyrrhonist no matter whether he is kind or cruel, easygoing or strict, funny or serious. In case he does undertake such a practice, there is no reason for thinking that his own philosophical investigation is affected by it. In his inquiries, the Pyrrhonist is concerned with the epistemic credentials of the arguments advanced by the Dogmatists with whom he engages. But if he happens to care about other people's well-being and if it appears to him that having certain attitudes or dispositions brings about suffering, he may decide to make a pragmatic, therapeutic use of arguments with those who have such attitudes or dispositions. Just think of a common and partly similar case: sometimes people who are interested in the truth, and hence in discovering and constructing sound arguments no matter where these may lead them, are reluctant to expose others to those arguments for merely pragmatic reasons. For example, a person may be unwilling to share the conclusions of what he regards as sound arguments with a child, a depressed friend, or an unstable patient for fear that becoming aware of the truths expressed in those conclusions may have a negative effect on them.

5. *Rational vs. irrational action*

Chapter 4 critically examines Sextus's response to what is probably the most serious charge leveled against Pyrrhonism since antiquity, namely, the so-called ἀπραξία objection, according to which action is incompatible with universal ἐποχή. Given the interpretation defended in Chapter 3, Perin understands the objection as the claim that action is incompatible with suspension of judgment about all Dogmatic beliefs. Hence, the Pyrrhonist cannot act because he lacks beliefs about how things really are rather than appear to him to be. Perin maintains that Sextus is right in replying to the ἀπραξία objection by arguing, not that action only requires the kind of beliefs the Pyrrhonist has, but that

action does not require beliefs of any kind. For the reason behind the objection is that, when an agent performs an action, he is attempting to satisfy a desire, which cannot be done unless he has a belief about how to satisfy it, which in turn requires having beliefs about how things are, namely, «how the world is now, how the world must change in order for the desire to be satisfied, and how this change is to be made» (p. 92). Thus, beliefs about how things are guide an agent in action, a guidance that cannot be provided by a belief about how things appear to one to be because this belief is not about how to satisfy a given desire. For, in having such a belief, one only believes that one is in a certain psychological state or condition (a πάθος) in which it appears to one that one can satisfy some desire by performing a given action. It is therefore such a psychological state or condition, and not the belief that one is in it, that guides the Pyrrhonist in action. This interpretation is indeed correct since, at *PH* I 21-2, Sextus points out that the φαινόμενον, φαντασία, or πάθος (terms he here employs as equivalent) is the Pyrrhonist's criterion of action, which explains why he performs some actions rather than others. Now, Perin maintains that Sextus's reply to the ἀπραξία objection is incomplete since he does not explain how appearance is different from belief. For if appearance can guide action, then it has the same action-guiding feature belief has and is hence similar to belief in this key respect. Perin does not in the end take a position on this issue, but limits himself to observing that Sextus can adequately respond to the ἀπραξία objection only if he can provide an account of such a difference. I do not think this is necessarily a shortcoming in Perin's analysis of Sextus's reply, since we know full well how hard it is to come to a definite conclusion about knotty philosophical problems and it is sometimes meritorious enough to identify and highlight a problem of this sort.

In any case, Perin does take a firmer stance in relation to another version of the ἀπραξία objection. He argues that, even if we concede that Sextus can successfully reply to the charge that the Pyrrhonist is reduced to complete inactivity, he still faces the charge that the Pyrrhonist's activities do not amount to actions, where action is contrasted with non-rational or animal behavior consisting in mere activity or bodily movement. This version of the ἀπραξία objection was leveled

against the Academic skeptics by the Stoics on the basis of the latter's theory of action, according to which action requires that the agent assent to a *φαντασία* and thus form a belief. This charge does not seem to have been leveled against the Pyrrhonists and in fact Sextus does not consider it. But it may perfectly well be leveled against them, and so Perin is right in taking it into account, given that his interest in Pyrrhonism is not merely exegetical but also systematic. And this is precisely why he examines whether Sextus has the resources to respond to the version of the *ἀπραξία* objection in question if one adopts what is now the standard account of action, according to which an action is an activity the agent engages in for a reason, which means that the activity has a cause that rationalizes it. More precisely, the activity is motivated and caused by the combination of a belief and a desire: one engages in an activity because one believes it will satisfy, or promote the satisfaction of, a desire one has. Perin calls this account the "belief-desire model of action" (p. 101). In his view, Sextus can respond to this line of thought by arguing that an appearance can play the same role that, on that model of action, a belief plays in causing and rationalizing an activity. For the Pyrrhonist can claim that it appears to him that performing a given action will satisfy a desire he has, which means, not that he believes so, but only that he treats it as true that performing the action will satisfy the desire. Perin thinks that this move is problematic insofar as treating something as true cannot, in conjunction with a desire, motivate action. Still, he does not exclude the possibility that a desire together with the relevant appearance can rationalize the Pyrrhonist's behavior and remarks that the belief-desire model of action is not the only or most plausible account of action.

A more serious worry expressed by Perin is that, since the Pyrrhonist does not endorse any desire he has in the sense that he does not believe that anything he desires is good and hence worth desiring, he does not believe there is any justifying reason for him to desire what he does and hence to behave as he does. This means that the Pyrrhonist stands at a distance from his own behavior and hence fails to endorse it or participate in it in the way that is required by what is deemed to be the distinctively human form of agency. According to Perin,

Scepticism, as Sextus describes it, is supposed to remove from one's life those distinctively human obstacles to tranquillity. The problem – and this, it seems to me, is the fundamental problem with Scepticism – is that it can do so only by removing from one's life some of its distinctively, and most important, human features. Scepticism purports to make us more tranquil by making us less human. The question is how much less human Scepticism makes us and whether, as Sextus presents the matter, a tranquil life can be a recognizably human one at all (p. 113).

Let me first note that Perin's concern would be more serious if he did not take the Pyrrhonist to be committed to certain requirements of rationality. I assume he would say that, in this respect at least, the Pyrrhonist is recognizably human. On my interpretation of Pyrrhonism defended in Section 4, reason plays a key role in the Pyrrhonist's behavior. As Sextus tells us, one of the parts of the Pyrrhonist's four-fold criterion of action is the "guidance of nature", which is that by virtue of which he is naturally capable of perceiving and thinking (*PH* I 24, cfr. *DL* IX 103). However, if someone maintained (as I suspect Perin would) that what is characteristically human is the use of reason that implies, or consists in, a commitment to certain rational requirements, then on my interpretation the Pyrrhonist does deprive us of a distinctively human feature. Although I do not have a definite opinion about this question, it is not evident to me that that is the manner in which people use reason always or most of the time in ordinary life, as I argue in what follows.

The worry expressed in the quoted passage is part of a family of worries commonly voiced by those scholars who find the Pyrrhonian outlook threatening or disturbing in one or more respects: it results in a detachment from oneself or from one's reasons to act, promotes an animal or infra-human behavior, or undermines social order and cooperation by precluding commitment to any moral principle and by allowing morally outrageous actions. The first thing to note about such criticisms of Pyrrhonism is that it is not entirely clear whether they intend to make a normative or a descriptive claim. That is to say, it is not entirely clear whether the problem the critics see in Pyrrhonism is that it does not exclude a kind of behavior that does not correspond to the way humans *ought to* make decisions and act or to the way humans *do in fact* make decisions and act. Or perhaps they intend to make both

points. Although I think there is a normative component in their criticisms, their main point seems to be that adopting the Pyrrhonian outlook would entail losing something that is a key part of what we are as rational and moral beings. The problem I find in such criticisms is that they seem to rest upon a common but highly idealized, and hence descriptively inaccurate, picture of moral judgment and human agency. People usually believe that their actions are typically based on judgments that are the result of a process of reflection and hence that there are epistemically justifying reasons for their decisions and actions. This, however, does not seem to be what typically occurs. It might suffice to consider our own everyday attitudes and actions. How often, in very similar situations, do we behave in a way that at times is impartial, sincere, empathetic, or altruistic, but that at other times is biased, hypocritical, insensitive, or selfish? One day we help a beggar, but another day we pass by him with indifference; one day we grade the exam of a student whom we do not like much with impartiality, but another day our grading is biased; one day we recognize ourselves to have acted on bad faith, but another day we deny it shamelessly. Of course, we usually attempt to provide epistemic reasons to justify the change, but sometimes we realize either that we are unable to do so or that we are rationalizing rather than offering a genuine justification. These ordinary cases with which we are all familiar can be taken to indicate that our judgments, decisions, and actions are determined, in part at least, by our frame of mind or emotional state and that the idea that human behavior is essentially or typically the result of a process of reflection is nothing but a fiction. But if such cases are regarded as insufficient evidence, there are still several recent studies in psychology that appear to provide stronger evidence. I will here give two examples.

Particularly in recent years, a number of moral psychologists have called into question the rationalist view according to which moral judgment is caused by a process of conscious reasoning or reflection, claiming instead that it is primarily and directly caused by moral intuitions and emotions. For instance, according to the social intuitionist model defended by Jonathan Haidt, moral judgment is in general the result of intuitions – i.e., quick, automatic, effortless, and affectively laden evaluations – and moral action co-varies more with moral emotion than

with moral reasoning. In his view, moral reasoning is usually nothing but an *ex post facto* process in which one seeks for arguments that will justify an already-made judgment with the aim of influencing the intuitions and actions of others²⁶. This kind of non-normative view finds support in several studies. For instance, in two experiments conducted by Haidt and Thalis Wheatley²⁷, highly hypnotizable individuals were given the post-hypnotic suggestion to experience «a brief pang of disgust [...] a sickening in your stomach» (p. 780) whenever they read one of two arbitrary words (“often” and “take”). In the first of the experiments, participants were then asked to read a set of vignettes (some containing the words in question, others not) describing moral transgressions and to morally rate the transgressions. The results of the experiment showed that the participants rated the transgressions as more morally wrong when the words in question were used than when they were not. One of the changes introduced in the second experiment was that a new story containing no moral transgression was added. In this case, the results showed that, when the new story included one of the two arbitrary words, some participants made a negative moral judgment about the act described in the story. These participants were puzzled by their negative evaluation, or desperately searched for some kind of justification unrelated to the story, or claimed that, despite not knowing why, the act was just wrong. The authors conclude that their findings indicate that gut feelings influence moral judgment: participants interpreted their feelings of disgust as information about the wrongness of the acts they were reading about.

The second example I would like to mention is a study in which Alexander Todorov and his colleagues²⁸ showed that inferences of competence of political candidates based only on their facial appearance made it possible to predict better than chance the results of U.S.

²⁶ See J. HAIDT, *The Emotional Dog and Its Rational Tail: A Social Intuitionist Approach to Moral Judgment*, «Psychological Review», CVIII (2001) pp. 814-34.

²⁷ T. WHEATLEY-J. HAIDT, *Hypnotic Disgust Makes Moral Judgments More Severe*, «Psychological Science», XVI (2005) pp. 780-4.

²⁸ A. TODOROV-A. MANDISODZA-A. GOREN-C. HALL, *Inferences of Competence from Faces Predict Election Outcomes*, «Science», CCCVIII (2005) pp. 1623-6.

congressional elections in 2000, 2002, and 2004. Such inferences were made by undergraduate and graduate students at Princeton University on the basis of a one-second exposure to pairs of head-shot photographs of candidates about whom they had no prior knowledge. The authors point out that the findings of the studies suggest that rapid and unreflective trait inferences from facial appearance can contribute to voting decisions, which are usually taken to be based mainly on rational and careful considerations, such as the candidate's position on issues the voter considers important. They also argue that such inferences can influence subsequent deliberate judgments about the candidates and that correction of initial impressions by the acquisition of additional information may be insufficient.

In referring to these two studies, I do not intend to argue that conscious reasoning or reflection plays no role in our judgments, decisions, and actions. Rather, my aim is to call attention to the fact that a considerable number of our judgments, decisions, and actions – a number greater than we might be willing to recognize – seem to be the result of the influence of intuitions, feelings, or emotions, and that the reasons we offer to epistemically justify them are mere rationalizations. Sometimes we seem to be only onlookers on the judgments and decisions we make and the actions we perform. Hence, the rationalist theory of action does not appear to be descriptively correct in a large number of cases; and if it is normatively correct, then most people's actions, and not only the Pyrrhonist's, seem to fall short of the way one should act.

In book discussions, one typically focuses on the points of disagreement and makes strong criticisms for the sole reason that this is what allows one to further the inquiry into thorny issues. Perin's book has made me rethink a great deal about the nature and the viability of Sextan Pyrrhonism as well as the intricate philosophical questions it raises. This is why I cannot but highly recommend it²⁹.

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²⁹ I would like to thank Baron Reed and Emidio Spinelli for their critical comments on a previous version of this paper.