

**Doubt, Dogmatism, and the *Dunamis Antithetikē*:
Sextus Empiricus on Sceptical Inquiry**

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Thesis

Abstract

Sextus Empiricus' account of Pyrrhonian Scepticism has been judged harshly in the history of philosophy. Since the verdict of Hume 1748 (12.128), Pyrrhonism has often been thought to be neither a worthwhile way of inquiring, nor a worthwhile way of life. This verdict is, I think, mistaken. My goal in this thesis is therefore to show that Sextus' vision of Sceptical inquiry is more serious, sophisticated, and fruitful than it may seem, and thus can be the basis for a worthwhile life. I seek to show this in three stages.

In Section I, I discuss the interpretive problem of the scope of Scepticism, arguing for Barnes 1982's reading: the scope will vary for each individual Sceptic's exercise of her *dunamis antithetikē*. However, I raise a challenge for Barnes' therapeutic reading, on the basis of Sextus' insistence that the Sceptic is a *zētētikos* (PH I.7), and 'keeps inquiring' (PH I.1-3).

In Section II, I develop the concept of the *dunamis antithetikē* and assess its implications. First, I argue for a wide-scope interpretation of the *dunamis antithetikē*. Second, I examine the relationship of inquiry and therapy in Sextus, arguing that Sextus' inquiry pursues tranquillity insofar as this is achievable through methods which he judges rational: rationality is Sextus' epistemic *telos*, and Sextan *ataraxia* is reason-involving.

In Section III, I elaborate this into a vision of two stages in the Sceptic's life as an inquirer, in which she explores two candidates for meeting the specifications of rational inquiry. In the first stage, she pursues the ideal of 'critical rationality': the exercise of the Modes, which is constitutive of the *dunamis antithetikē*, reveals to the Sceptic the impossibility of achieving this ideal. In the second stage, she pursues the 'second-best' ideal of 'intuitive rationality': this 'post-Sceptical' inquiry is founded on forms of reasoning which Sextus judges to be basic and unassailable, and involves the rationally governed redirection of our impressions (*phantasiai*).

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§I. The Scope of Pyrrhonian Scepticism

§I.1. The Problem of the Scope of Scepticism

T1. *PH* I.13 – Λέγομεν δὲ μὴ δογματίζειν τὸν σκεπτικὸν οὐ κατ’ ἐκεῖνο τὸ σημαινόμενον τοῦ δόγματος καθ’ ὃ καὶ δόγμα εἶναι φασὶ τινες κοινότερον τὸ εὐδοκεῖν τινὶ πράγματι (τοῖς γὰρ κατὰ φαντασίαν κατηναγκασμένοις πάθεσι συγκατατίθεται ὁ σκεπτικός....) ἀλλὰ μὴ δογματίζειν λέγομεν καθ’ ὃ δόγμα εἶναι φασὶ τινες τὴν τινὶ πράγματι τῶν κατὰ τὰς ἐπιστήμας ζητουμένων ἀδήλων συγκατάθεσιν: οὐδενὶ γὰρ τῶν ἀδήλων συγκατατίθεται ὁ Πυρρώνειος.

When we say that Sceptics do not hold beliefs, we do not take ‘belief’ [δόγμα] in the sense in which some say, quite generally, that belief is acquiescing in something; for Sceptics assent to the feelings forced upon them by appearances....Rather, we say that they do not hold beliefs in the sense in which some say that belief is assent to some unclear object of investigation in the sciences; for the Pyrrhonists do not assent to anything unclear.¹

In this canonical formulation of the epistemic stance of the Pyrrhonist, Sextus declares (i) a disavowal of *dogma*², and (ii) a commitment to *pathē* (‘affections’) and *ta phainomena* (‘appearances’). Some incisive scholarship on ancient Scepticism has concentrated on the precise implications of this passage. In particular, Michael Frede³, Myles Burnyeat⁴, and

¹ This and all following translations are taken from Annas and Barnes 2000.

² Where *dogma* is understood as ‘assent to some unclear object of investigation in the sciences’ – I set aside here the semantic project of investigating the precise meanings of *doxa/doxazein* vs *dogma/dogmatizein* (cf Barnes 1982). It is, at any rate, plausibly an open question what turns out to be an *adēlon* – so the point would be that the Sceptic does not assent to whatever *turns out* to be unclear.

³ Frede 1979.

⁴ Burnyeat 1980.

Jonathan Barnes⁵ have staged a three-way debate about the nature and scope of the Sceptic's *epochē* ('suspension of judgement').

Frede maintains that the Sceptic has beliefs, in a qualified sense: (a) she has beliefs about how things are, but not how things *really* are, being unconvinced by the Dogmatist's insistence that reason can penetrate to the non-evident essence of things, and (b) she holds these beliefs non-dogmatically, in the sense that she does not think of them as underpinned by deeper insights, but sees them as possibly wrong and always revisable.

Extensive criticisms have been made of the Fredean reading. I find two counter-arguments to be especially compelling. Firstly, Frede's view projects a ternary distinction of *phainetai/esti/esti eilikrinōs* or *phusei* ('appears', 'is', 'is intrinsically/ 'by nature'), whereas we find that Sextus insists on a binary distinction: every instance of *esti*, he tells us, is to be construed *either* as *phainetai* ('appears'), *or* as *huparchei* ('exists' or 'is real') (*M* XI.18, cf *PH* I.135, 198). The binary is sustained in the other important passage where Sextus clarifies the scope of his investigation (*PH* I.20), distinguishing apparent sweetness and sweetness *hoson epi tōi logōi*⁶.

Secondly, the Fredean picture conflicts with many strong *prima facie* indications of 'rustic', i.e. radical Scepticism in Sextus. As Barnes⁷ highlights, it seems that insofar as Sextus attacks universal concepts (e.g. cause, proof, good etc.); insofar as the method of the Agrippan Modes can be extended in principle to any claim whatsoever (*PH* I.169); and insofar as the Sceptic promises to target both *phainomena* and *nooumena* (*PH* I.9), Sextus' Scepticism has wide-ranging implications. To construe Sextus' scepticism as only targeting the dogmatic attitude

⁵ Barnes 1982.

⁶ Whatever this means – cf Brunschwig 1994 for discussion.

⁷ Barnes 1982.

plays down this radical dimension in his thinking. On the basis of these two considerations, then, Frede's view appears flawed.

Burnyeat, in contrast, insists that the Sceptic is committed to a life without belief, inasmuch as the ancient concept of belief pertains to seeking truths 'of a real objective [external] world'. The Sceptic lives by the appearances in that she follows the impulses which do not depend on belief, and thus survive suspension of judgement, i.e. bodily drives, appetites, and natural inclinations, but not emotions and higher-level cognitions – this is Burnyeat's understanding of the *biōtikē tērēsis* ('everyday observances') by which the Sceptic's practical criterion is characterised (*PH* I.23-4).

Again, there are two major objections which we can raise. Most problematic is that Burnyeat's interpretation depends on what I take to be an overly mechanical, passive picture of the Sceptic's psychology – on his account of the Sceptic's conversion, it appears that the Sceptic has voluntarily become a kind of robot, suspending all those activities which require psychological agency. Of course, there are plenty of indications in the text that passivity and necessitation of some kind play an important role in the Sceptic's self-conception – indeed, R.J. Hankinson echoes Burnyeat's view in comparing the Sceptics to 'automata' or 'programmed responsive machines'⁸. Nevertheless, this seems to be an over-reading: there must be some room for genuine psychological agency, both in thought and in action, for the mature Sceptic as for the pre-conversion Sceptic.⁹ Otherwise, the mature Sceptic will be

⁸ Hankinson 1995 – in seeking to refute Burnyeat's reformulation of the self-refutation charge. McPherran 1989, p142, shares my dissatisfaction with the idea of the Sceptic as 'an inert or robotic spectator of life'.

⁹ That is to say, any individual who has successfully undergone Sceptical training – the relationship of proto-Sceptic and mature Sceptic will be clarified in sections II-III.

unable to continue to function as an inquirer and rational agent, as it seems evident that she would aspire to do¹⁰.

Further, although Burnyeat's interpretation makes good sense of one individual-focused prong of the fourfold *biōtikē tērēsis*, the *anankē pathōn* ('necessitation by feelings'), and perhaps the other, the *huphēgēsis phusikē* ('nature's guidance')¹¹, it is not clear how it explains the cultural prongs, the *didaskalia technōn* ('teaching of kinds of expertise') and the *paradosis ethōn kai nomōn* ('handing down of laws and customs') – how can a Sceptical society develop and be sustained by such automata? Indeed, passivity in acceptance of appearances at any given time need not imply diachronic passivity; it seems that there is room, in principle, for diachronic reflection on and attempts to modify appearances, which would go beyond Burnyeat's reading¹². These considerations together point against the overly mechanical picture.

Secondly, there is a consideration symmetrical with our critique of Frede: Burnyeat's reading conflicts with indications of urbanity in Sextus' scepticism. In particular, in the original characterisation of *PH* I.13, suspension of judgement is apparently targeted towards 'an unclear object of investigation in the sciences' – restricting the scope to *adēla* ('unclear objects') and specifically those investigated by *dogmatikoi*. In general, Sextus presents himself, as Barnes observes¹³, as a champion of ordinary life and common sense, a scourge of

¹⁰ Every Sceptic 'is still investigating', cf *PH* I.3.

¹¹ He explains it in terms of *hupomnēstika sēmeia* ('commemorative signs') – I think there is more to it than this, as I will discuss in section III.

¹² Burnyeat might say that such diachronic modification occurs only in the proto-Sceptic, not in the mature Sceptic, but I think that this is mistaken, for reasons given in the previous paragraph; cf section III.

¹³ Barnes 1982.

dogmatic scientists and philosophers ('learned charlatans')¹⁴ – surely such a figure would not completely relinquish ordinary beliefs?

In sum, we can make three points about the Burnyeat and Frede readings. Firstly, the text is straightforwardly inconsistent on the point of scope: Sextus equivocates between urbane and rustic attitudes and commitments. In light of this, the idea of achieving a conclusive interpretive victory for either side begins to seem misconceived; Sextus' 'equivocation' points not necessarily to confusion for him, but to a problem in our interpretive paradigm. Secondly, even though they appear to agree that Scepticism is primarily an 'attitude of mind' rather than a 'mental content'¹⁵, both seem to ignore an implication of Sextus' characterisation of the Sceptic attitude: it would be *unsceptical* for the aspiring Sceptic to pre-judge whether he will reach a radical or a more moderate Scepticism. Insofar as he is a genuine inquirer, his methods must not pre-determine this – otherwise the Sceptic will be convicted of methodological negative dogmatism¹⁶. Finally, both seem to think of the Sceptic story about *epochē* as exhausting the scope of the Sceptic's investigative activity. This is uncharitable: it may be the extent of the Sceptic's inquiry *qua* Sceptic, but there is no reason to think that the Sceptic is incapable or completely disinclined to investigate in *other* non-dogmatic ways¹⁷.

¹⁴ Brennan 1999, p71-2, reinforces this point with observations on the vocabulary of Sextus' critique of the dogmatist, including words like *periergos* ('meddler'), *apeirologia* ('endless argument'), *heurēsilogia* ('hunting out arguments'), fit for 'professional pedants' and 'speculative scientists'.

¹⁵ Burnyeat 1980, p40; cf Frede 1979, p23 'What fundamentally distinguishes the Sceptic from other people are not the beliefs he has but his attitude towards them.'

¹⁶ A charge which Sextus repudiates elsewhere – cf his meticulous deconstruction of the Academics (*PH* I.220-235) and Cyrenaics (*PH* I.215).

¹⁷ This speculation will be developed further in sections II and III.

§I.2. Developing a Fresh Solution

So we come to Barnes' very different reading. Barnes argues that the scope of *epochē* is a matter of a given individual's psychology, coming from what she happens to find *anōmalos* ('anomalous'), and thus a source of *tarachē* ('anxiety'). As such, he suggests that individuals with different psychological constitutions will undergo *epochē* to different degrees and with respect to different subject-matters. This radically reconfigures the debate which Frede and Burnyeat had set up, and invites us to reimagine the fabric of Sceptical philosophy. The crucial passage for Barnes' reading is the following:

T2. PH I.8 – Ἔστι δὲ ἡ σκεπτικὴ δύναμις ἀντιθετικὴ φαινομένων τε καὶ νοουμένων καθ' οἰονδήποτε τρόπον, ἀφ' ἧς ἐρχόμεθα διὰ τὴν ἐν τοῖς ἀντικειμένοις πράγμασι καὶ λόγοις ἰσοσθένειαν τὸ μὲν πρῶτον εἰς ἐποχὴν, τὸ δὲ μετὰ τοῦτ εἰς ἀταραξίαν.

Scepticism is an ability to set out oppositions among things which appear and are thought of in any way at all, an ability by which, because of the equipollence in the opposed objects and accounts, we come first to suspension of judgement and afterward to tranquillity.

This passage is very striking, and its peculiarity is rarely discussed in the secondary literature¹⁸. This seems to be a unique characterisation of a philosophy in terms of a *dunamis* ('ability'); Sextus further characterises the Pyrrhonist as someone in possession of this ability (I.11). The implication is that the Sceptical philosopher is such insofar as he possesses a psychological toolkit, *not* in virtue of any theoretical or even practical commitments. If we

¹⁸ Besides Barnes 1982, Hankinson 1995, Grgic 2006, and Morison 2011 are aware of its distinctiveness, but none probes deeply enough into it. Nussbaum 1991 engages with it, but her interpretation is uncharitable, as we will see in section II.

take this seriously, a further point would be that the Sceptic can choose when to exercise this set of skills, and when to ignore them¹⁹. In other words, the Sceptic appears to be a kind of epistemic opportunist, modifying her picture of the world with elaborate rationalisations so as to achieve a predetermined psychological *telos* – *not* an individual finding herself compelled to suspend judgement on all things, or even on a specific set of subject-matters.

The interpretation Barnes gives is compelling, and I think it is worth pursuing, because it moves us away from the difficult semantic project of interpreting *dogma* or *phainomena* in Sextus, and towards a wider view of the possible epistemological and ethical implications of Scepticism – the values and commitments which, despite his disavowal, we may feel that the Pyrrhonian sceptic must hold²⁰. The one dimension in which this strikes me as mistaken is that it treats Scepticism as an entirely, or at least primarily, therapeutic enterprise²¹. There is of course support for this approach in the text, and in the contextual datum of Sextus' status as an Empiricist doctor. However, it ignores the strong claims that Sextus makes in I.1-3 and I.7 to be a genuine inquirer, a philosopher who 'keeps investigating', a *zētētikos* and *aporētikos*. We must take these claims seriously, and therefore we require an interpretation of Sextus which is like Barnes', but which re-evaluates the relationship between the zetetic and therapeutic dimensions of the Sceptical project.²²

¹⁹ It might be objected that I am cruising towards over-reading a passage which Sextus urges us not to over-read: "We call it an ability not in any fancy sense, but simply in the sense of 'be able to'" – but I think the point of this qualification is merely to signal that Sextus is not committed to a metaphysics of powers; it does not preclude us attributing great importance to the *dunamis*.

²⁰ Even if he holds them in some weaker sense than the Dogmatist holds his – cf the insistence on value-*dogmata* as a source of *tarachē* in *PH* I.27-8 and *M* XI.

²¹ Cf Barnes 2007, p329, where he judges that, on the best reconstruction of Sextus, his philosophy amounts to a 'retirement from philosophy'.

²² Thus following in the footsteps especially of Perin 2010, Grgic 2006 and Grgic 2014.

§II. Psychology and Inquiry – Understanding the Sceptic’s

Autobiography

§II.1. Sceptical Psychology: the Sceptic’s Process

T3. *PH I.12* – Ἀρχὴν δὲ τῆς σκεπτικῆς αἰτιώδη μὲν φαμεν εἶναι τὴν ἐλπίδα τοῦ ἀταρακτῆσαι: οἱ γὰρ μεγαλοφυεῖς τῶν ἀνθρώπων ταρασσόμενοι διὰ τὴν ἐν τοῖς πράγμασιν ἀνωμαλίαν, καὶ ἀποροῦντες τίσιν αὐτῶν χρὴ μᾶλλον συγκατατίθεσθαι, ἦλθον ἐπὶ τὸ ζητεῖν τί τε ἀληθές ἐστιν ἐν τοῖς πράγμασι καὶ τί ψεῦδος, ὡς ἐκ τῆς ἐπικρίσεως τούτων ἀταρακτῆσοντες.

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

T4. *PH I.26* – ἀρξάμενος γὰρ φιλοσοφεῖν ὑπὲρ τοῦ τὰς φανασίας ἐπικρῖναι καὶ ὥστε ἀταρακτῆσαι, ἐνέπεσεν εἰς τὴν ἰσοσθενῆ διαφωνίαν, ἣν ἐπικρῖναι μὴ δυνάμενος ἐπέσχευεν: ἐπισχόντι δὲ αὐτῷ τυχικῶς παρηκολούθησεν ἡ ἐν τοῖς δοξαστοῖς ἀταραξία.

Sceptics began to do philosophy in order to decide among appearances and to decide which are true and which false, so as to become tranquil; but they came upon equipollent dispute, and being unable to decide this they suspended judgement. And when they suspended judgement, tranquillity in matters of opinion followed fortuitously.

Sextus gives several accounts of the Sceptic's autobiography, which evoke his first account of the *dunamis antithetikē* (PH I.8-11). Despite Sextus' punctilious exposition, it is unclear *exactly* how Sextus envisions this psychological process operating. There are three interconnected problems here:

- (1) Where and with what scope is the *dunamis antithetikē* exercised in the Sceptical psychological process?
- (2) How do we reconcile the apparent passivity of the Sceptic's life with the idea of exercising a *dunamis*? How passive or mechanical, really, is this psychological process?
- (3) How are we to understand the relationship between the pre- and post-conversion stages of the Sceptic's autobiography?

Let us go through these questions in turn.

§II.1.1. The Range of the *Dunamis Antithetikē*

We might think that the *dunamis antithetikē* merely refers to the ability to set up antitheses systematically, in the manner of 5th C BC Sophists, or 4th-3rd C BC Megarians or Dialecticians. After all, it is an intriguing fact that the *Dissoi Logoi* were long included as an appendix to the works of Sextus Empiricus²³. One consideration weighs strongly against this interpretation: Sextus seems to take the possession of this ability as a necessary and sufficient condition for being a Pyrrhonian Sceptic: 'a Pyrrhonian is someone who possesses this ability' (PH I.11). Yet Sextus does not consider all previous philosophers who have engaged in

²³ Cf Burnyeat 1998 for speculation on the connection.

sustained comparison of conflicting appearances or arguments in this fashion to be genuine Pyrrhonians – neither the Sophists, nor pre-Socratics like Democritus and Heraclitus, escape his indictment as dogmatists.²⁴ Indeed, it would be strange if he had. Why would a mere logical ability have the required psychological implications? An ingenious dialectician could easily be a rampant dogmatist – witness the example of Stoic logician-metaphysicians like Chrysippus.

We are therefore led to the conclusion that the *dunamis antithetikē* must be understood as having wide scope. When Sextus tells us that it is an ability ‘by which, because of the equipollence in the opposed objects and accounts, we come first to suspension of judgement and afterwards to tranquillity’, we must take the clause following ‘by which’ not as an accidental result of the *dunamis*, but as included within its exercise²⁵. The *dunamis antithetikē* is thus to be understood as a psychological ability which moves us from the logical procedure of assembling conflicting appearances through the psychological process of (a) recognising *isostheneia* (‘equipollence’), and (b) moving from *isostheneia* to *epochē*²⁶, and thence to *ataraxia*²⁷.

Is the exercise of this widely construed *dunamis* then identical to, or constitutive of, the Sceptic’s inquiry? Luca Castagnoli considers it possible that ‘the *zētēsis* of the mature

²⁴ This is evident from the array of philosophers targeted as ‘dogmatists’ in *M* VII-XI. Of course, Plato and Aristotle might just as naturally be included in the list – cf Castagnoli 2018.

²⁵ This corresponds loosely to the second of Nussbaum 1991’s two interpretative options (p528-9), according to which Scepticism means not (a) ‘just any old *antithetike dunamis*’, but (b) ‘a particular *antithetike dunamis*, namely, the one from which we come into suspension, equipoise, *ataraxia*.’ Nussbaum thinks that Sextus ‘wants and needs’ to claim (a), but ‘is forced continually’ towards (b). I maintain that Sextus in fact consistently holds (b) – Grgic 2006 argues for a similar view.

²⁶ I think it is plausible that the *dunamis antithetike* would also include the perception of *anōmalia* and *aporia* and consequent experience of *tarachē*, so as to pre-empt vulnerability to unexpected psychological disturbances. But this is a more speculative claim, and my argument works without it.

²⁷ As will be discussed below, the move from *epoche* to *ataraxia* is not within the control of the *dunamis*, but comes as an unexpected result (cf *tuchikōs*, I.26, I.29).

Pyrrhonist [is] nothing but the continuous exercise of [the *dunamis antithetikē*]²⁸. I reject this possibility: the exercise of the *dunamis antithetikē* is plausibly identical with her inquiry *qua* Sceptic, but, as I will explore in sections II-III, the mature Pyrrhonist has available to her a form of ‘post-Sceptical’ inquiry. The notion of a *dunamis* at play here might support this, on the basis that the Sceptic is defined only by *possession*, not exercise, of the *dunamis* (*PH* I.11) – i.e. she might not always, or even never, exercise it – and yet it is taken as equally definitive of the Sceptic that she is ‘still inquiring’ (*PH* I.3). This suggests that there ought to be a form of investigation available to the Sceptic which does not involve the *dunamis antithetikē*.

§II.1.2. Psychological Agency in the *Dunamis Antithetikē*

If the *dunamis antithetikē* is such an elaborate psychological capability, what does it mean for the Sceptic to exercise it, and how is it exercised at every stage of the Sceptical psychological process? The stages that I envision are as follows: (1) a decision to inquire -> (2) examination of conflicting appearances, inducing *aporia* -> (3) conflicting appearances are recognised as equipollent -> (4) equipollence motivates *epochē* (which produces *ataraxia*)²⁹. At each of these stages, there is a significant dimension of psychological agency: it is up to us to exercise the *dunamis antithetikē*.

What kinds of psychological agency are involved in (2)? Firstly, it is not clear that there is anything psychologically determined about our recognizing that we experience conflicting

²⁸ Castagnoli 2018, identifying this with *diaporein*, i.e. systematically raising all the *aporiai*.

²⁹ *Aporia*, both in the ‘objective’ sense of particular puzzles, and in the ‘subjective’ sense of psychological puzzlement, may play more of a role in the process, as *PH* I.7 and I.12 indicate – but I think its location within the process is only vaguely given, and may vary, in the fashion of Barnes 1982, from inquirer to inquirer.

appearances³⁰. The empirical data on cognitive dissonance testify to our capability for ignoring conflicting appearances which we experience. As such, there is a psychological activity of attentiveness that is required to recognise and heed experienced conflicts.

Secondly, even if we recognise conflicts, in what sense does this compel us into a state of realising the *anōmalia* therein, and thus experiencing subjective *aporia*? We have perfectly natural mechanisms for dispelling and ignoring the sense of *anōmalia* that might arise.

Consider how easily we suppress observed *déjà vu*, misidentification, and optical illusion on a daily basis; it requires a further psychological effort to embrace and engage with the sense of *anōmalia* that comes upon us – and a particularly strong effort, given the psychological discomfort that is involved³¹. We must grasp the nettle of our aporetic discomfort, and not ignore or casually explain away, for instance, the fact that we experience time as a linear unidirectional flow, but the best models of physics postulate a timeless universe³² – so that we can move onto the next stage of the inquiry.

A third dimension, to be discussed further in section III, is that Sextus implies that the exercise of the *dunamis antithetikē* may involve not an actual conflict of appearances in one's own experiences, but a recognition of the possibility of conflicting appearances in the experiences of others (cf especially the 1st and 2nd Modes of Aenesidemus), which necessitates the active exercise of our powers of imagination and inference.

³⁰ Elucidated by Sextus as *machomenoi logoi* ('conflicting arguments') about our *phainomena* and/or *nooumena* (*PH I.9*).

³¹ The notion of *aporia* as psychological turmoil has a long lineage in Greek philosophy – Castagnoli 2018 traces the notion back to a series of colourful metaphors in Plato.

³² In light of this, I would qualify Burnyeat 1984's observations about the 'insulation' between philosophy and ordinary life. Regardless of the presuppositions about insulation built into various philosophies, it seems that there are very ordinary psychological mechanisms which sustain this insulation – mechanisms which Pyrrhonism had to work hard to overcome.

Next, how do we reach (3)? It is important to note that it is *felt* apprehension of equipollence that is at issue in Sextus – we must fulfil the Sceptic definition of *isostheneia* as ‘equality with regard to being convincing or unconvincing’ (*PH* I.10)³³. Such *felt* apprehension of equipollence cannot come about spontaneously: there are very few situations where our *spontaneous* feelings are completely equipollent, at least where that feeling has some motivational force. We may view Buridan’s ass³⁴ as a *reductio ad absurdum* of the idea of spontaneously felt equipollence of this kind. We thus normally undergo a preliminary stage, reasoning to the conclusion that we have no principled reason for preferring appearance *x* to appearance *y*, and hence arriving at a second-order recognition that *x* and *y* are equipollent – this is, I take it, approximately what Sextus has in mind when he discusses undecidability, our recognition of difficult questions as *anepikrita*. Following this preliminary, we must then *develop* this rational conclusion into a felt apprehension. This does not come about passively, but requires a further effort – the phenomenon of indecisiveness, for instance, may express our ambivalence between felt preference and rationally recognised *isostheneia*. So here too there is a dual exercise of our psychological agency.

Finally, how is it that we achieve (4)? Does a strongly felt apprehension of equal strength in conflicting appearances directly bring about *epochē*? It evidently *is* a natural reaction simply to give up hope of reaching a satisfying conclusion, and abandon oneself to making an arbitrary decision. However, Sextus’ clarification of *epochē* as a *stasis dianoias* (*PH* I.10), best understood as a state of ‘mental rest’ (Bury) or ‘standstill of the intellect’ (Annas and

³³ *Pistoteron* – mistranslated by Bury as ‘more probable’. There are interesting questions to be raised here about Sextus’ conception of *to pithanon*, and its relation to the prior Aristotelian and Carneadean conceptions – cf section III.

³⁴ Originally devised as a satire of Jean Buridan’s moral determinism, the paradox envisions a donkey which is equally hungry and thirsty being placed precisely halfway between a stack of hay and a pail of water, or two identical piles of hay – the donkey is incapable of deciding which to choose.

Barnes)³⁵, indicates that Sextan ‘suspension of judgement’ is different to merely ‘giving up’. The phrase suggests that the concept of *epochē* includes a kind of mental calm and stillness which is by no means a necessary feature of ‘giving up’. When we give up on a question, second-order beliefs that there is a right answer we may have missed may persist, and we may remain subject to *tarachē* in light of such and similar mental side-effects. Therefore, I submit that to suspend judgement means not only to make a conscious and considered decision to set aside a question as, for the present time, irresolvable, but also simultaneously to quash an array of unwanted mental side-effects. Suspending judgement thus requires a mental effort and discipline on our part which merely ‘giving up’ does not.³⁶

In light of this analysis, we must ask: why is it that the Sceptic talks so often about the process as if it were a causal or necessitating one? Casey Perin gives a promising response: what is at issue is a kind of hypothetical necessity – if the Sceptic wants to be a rational inquirer, then she finds it necessary to engage in the *dunamis*.³⁷ This is, however, such a fundamental aspiration that the Sceptic will experience this necessity as something more than merely hypothetical³⁸. This idea of rationality as the Sceptic’s governing principle will be explored further in Sections II.2 and III.

³⁵ I reject Mates’ (1996) neutral rendering as simply ‘state of mind’: Sextus has alternative diction which he would use for such a neutral meaning.

³⁶ The links between Pyrrhonism and Buddhism come to mind here – cf Flintoff 1980.

³⁷ Perin 2010 p39. He applies it to the phase of *epochē* – I am suggesting that we should apply it to *every* stage of the *dunamis antithetikē*.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p51.

§II.1.3 The Development of the *Dunamis Antithetikē*

We now face the question invited by the Sponge of Apelles story: how does the *dunamis antithetikē* develop? How does the pre-conversion Sceptic or ‘proto-Sceptic’ develop into the ‘mature Sceptic’? The story is as follows:

T5. *PH* I.28-9 – Ὅπερ οὖν περί Ἀπελλοῦ τοῦ ζωγράφου λέγεται, τοῦτο ὑπῆρξε τῷ σκεπτικῷ. Φασὶ γὰρ ὅτι ἐκεῖνος, ἵππον γράφων καὶ τὸν ἀφρὸν τοῦ ἵππου μιμήσασθαι τῆς γραφῆς βουλευθεὶς οὕτως ἀπετύγχανεν ὡς ἀπειπεῖν καὶ τὴν σπογγίαν εἰς ἣν ἀπέμασσε τὰ ἀπὸ τοῦ γραφείου χρώματα προσρῖψαι τῆς εἰκόνι: τὴν δὲ προσασαμένην ἵππου ἀφροῦ ποιῆσαι μίμημα.

Καὶ οἱ σκεπτικοὶ οὖν ἤλπιζον μὲν τὴν ἀταραξίαν ἀναλήψεσθαι διὰ τοῦ τὴν ἀνωμαλίαν τῶν φαινομένων τε καὶ νοουμένων ἐπικρῖναι, μὴ δυναθέντες δὲ ποιῆσαι τοῦτο ἐπέσχον: ἐπισχοῦσι δὲ αὐτοῖς οἷον τυχικῶς ἢ ἀταραξία παρηκολούθησεν ὡς σκιά σώματι.

A story told of the painter Apelles applies to the Sceptics. They say that he was painting a horse and wanted to represent in his picture the lather on the horse's mouth; but he was so unsuccessful that he gave up, took the sponge on which he had been wiping off the colours from his brush, and flung it at the picture. And when it hit the picture, it produced a representation of the horse's lather.

Now the Sceptics were hoping to acquire tranquillity by deciding the anomalies in what appears and is thought of, and being unable to do this they suspended judgement. But when they suspended judgement, tranquillity followed as it were fortuitously, as a shadow follows a body.

We must stress two aspects of this analogy. Firstly, it seems clear that it is primarily intended to apply to the initial insight by which the proto-Sceptic begins his path towards mature Scepticism. We are not compelled to accept that every instance of Sceptical inquiry must be non-deliberate in this way; the *dunamis antithetikē* is exercised in full deliberative agency. Indeed, it is not even clear that *every* proto-Sceptic must have such a surprising experience. Pyrrhonism was probably loosely institutionalised, and it is reasonable to think that the protreptic efforts of mature Pyrrhonist teachers (cf *PH* III.280-1) prepared their proto-Sceptic acolytes for the connection between suspending judgement and feeling tranquil.

Indeed, given the complexity and psychological effort of the *dunamis antithetikē* as we have understood it, it seems clear that it would have required some kind of educational programme³⁹. Why, then, it may be asked, does Sextus speak of the Sceptics as *hoi megalophueis* ('men of talent'), as if the *dunamis antithetikē* were a natural gift restricted to a select few? My tentative answer is that this is just a fanciful rhetorical device, designed to give Pyrrhonism a good mythical back-story, gesturing towards its intellectual heroes like Pyrrho, Timon, and Aenesidemus.⁴⁰ In this light, there is no reason to think that Sextus would judge any ordinary individual to be incapable of developing the *dunamis antithetikē*.

Secondly, the purpose of the analogy is not to illustrate the nature of *epochē* itself. After all, Apelles' frustration is surely disanalogous to the calm way of inquiring Sextus envisions in a good Sceptic. It is rather to illustrate how it is that the move from *epochē* to *ataraxia* occurs *tuchikōs* ('fortuitously'). The analogy is an important way for Sextus to illustrate the plausibility of an unusual recipe for *ataraxia* in a Hellenistic context where *ataraxia* is more

³⁹ The details of the process by which the proto-Sceptic becomes the mature Sceptic will be more elaborately examined in section III.

⁴⁰ I am reassured to note that Mates 1996 (p227) is similarly perplexed by this.

or less universally accepted as an important *desideratum*⁴¹, and where most if not all of the pre-existing recipes are based on elaborate belief-systems.

The *dunamis antithetikē* is thus best understood as a set of psychological potentialities which we all possess, and are capable of learning to exercise intelligently. This raises a question: how can Sextus argue that we *should* use this toolkit, given his persistent insistence on merely stating how things appear to him? We have two options for responding. The first is to give the standard, etiolated answer of saying ‘it just seems good to him, and he has no further reasons to give’ – but it is unclear *why* it would appear good to the Sceptic, especially on the strict phenomenological interpretation of *phainomena*. The second, more convincing, option is to insist that Sextus is implicitly committed to some epistemic *telos*, which governs his operation of the *dunamis antithetikē*. To show this, we must now evaluate Sextus’ conception of inquiry.

⁴¹ Cf Striker 1990 for a nuanced account of how *ataraxia* is valued in the Hellenistic age; I discuss her account below.

§II.2. Sceptical Inquiry: Problems and Possible Solutions

T6. *PH* I.3 – Καὶ εὐρηκέναι μὲν δοκοῦσιν οἱ ἰδίως καλούμενοι δογματικοί, οἷον οἱ περὶ Ἀριστοτέλην καὶ Ἐπίκουρον καὶ τοὺς στωικοὺς καὶ ἄλλοι τινές, ὡς δὲ περὶ ἀκαταλήπτων ἀπεφήναντο οἱ περὶ Κλειτόμαχον καὶ Καρνεάδην καὶ ἄλλοι Ἀκαδημαῖκοι, ζητοῦσι δὲ οἱ σκεπτικοί.

Those who are called Dogmatists in the proper sense of the word think that they have discovered the truth – for example, the schools of Aristotle, Epicurus, and the Stoics, and some others. The schools of Clitomachus and Carneades, and other Academics, have asserted that things cannot be apprehended. And the Sceptics are still investigating.

T7. *PH* I.7 – ἡ σκεπτικὴ τοίνυν ἀγωγή καλεῖται μὲν καὶ ζητητικὴ ἀπὸ ἐνεργείας τῆς κατὰ τὸ ζητεῖν καὶ σκέπτεσθαι, καὶ ἐφεκτικὴ ἀπὸ τοῦ μετὰ τὴν ζήτησιν περὶ τὸν σκεπτόμενον γινομένου πάθους, καὶ ἀπορητικὴ ἥτοι ἀπὸ τοῦ περὶ παντὸς ἀπορεῖν καὶ ζητεῖν, ὡς ἔνιοι φασιν, ἢ ἀπὸ τοῦ ἀμηχανεῖν πρὸς συγκατάθεσιν ἢ ἄρνησιν, καὶ Πυρρώνειος ἀπὸ τοῦ φαίνεσθαι ἡμῖν τὸν Πύρρωνα σωματικώτερον καὶ ἐπιφανέστερον τῶν πρὸ αὐτοῦ προσελθῆναι τῇ σκέψει.

The Sceptical persuasion, then, is also called Investigative [Zētētikos], from its activity in investigating and inquiring; Suspensive [Ephēktikos], from the feeling that comes about in the inquirer after the investigation; Aporetic [Aporētikos], either (as some say) from the fact that it puzzles over and investigates everything, or else from its being at a loss whether to assert or deny; and Pyrrhonian, from the fact that Pyrrho appears to us to have attached himself to Scepticism more systematically and conspicuously than anyone before him.

We hypothesised in the previous section that exercise of the *dunamis antithetikē* is constitutive of the Sceptic's inquiry *qua* Sceptic – but what is Sextus' view of inquiry? The central problem here is that Sextus conceives of the Sceptic both as a committed inquirer, who is 'still investigating' (*PH* I.3), and defined as *zētētikos* (*PH* I.7 – 'investigative', cf *skeptikos*) no less than *ephektikos*, *aporētikos*, or *Purrōneios*⁴², and as a therapeutic doctor and/or patient. How can these two roles be compatible? Commitment to inquiry seems to entail commitment to some kind of 'truth-seeking' attitude – yet it would seem that (a) the Sceptic aggressively deconstructs the very concept of 'truth'⁴³ (e.g. Modes of Agrippa, attack on truth in *PH* II.80-94, *M* VIII.1-140); and (b) *ataraxia* matters more to the Sceptic than truth. This basic problem ramifies into others,⁴⁴ which must be resolved before we can move further into interpretive detail:

- (1) How can inquiry through the *dunamis antithetikē*, as discussed above, be both truth-seeking and therapeutic?
 - (a) In what sense and how is it therapeutic?
 - (b) Is it in fact truth-seeking – and if so, how?
 - (c) What is the relationship between the 'truth-seeking' and therapeutic conceptions?
- (2) Why should the Sceptic continue to inquire, after a sufficiently comprehensive application of the *dunamis antithetikē*? How can she continue to inquire?

⁴² Machuca 2006 makes an astute observation here that the Sceptic is not defined as '*ataraktikos*', seeming to imply that his supposed commitment to *ataraxia* is in fact less important than his commitments to *aporia*, inquiry, and suspension of judgement (where rational).

⁴³ And naturally enough, given that the very concept is so metaphysically laden in Greek thinking: Burnyeat 1982 'Idealism and Greek Philosophy' has compellingly argued that 'true' in Greek (usually) means 'true of a real objective [external] world'.

⁴⁴ Adapted from Castagnoli 2018.

§II.2.1. Therapy, Truth-seeking, and the *Dunamis Antithetikē*

§II.2.1.1. Therapy

First of all, how is it that *epochē* brings about *ataraxia*? This has been a persistent preoccupation of critics of Sextus: it is routinely argued, especially with regard to Sceptical ethics, that *epochē* must bring about ‘vertigo’ or anxiety⁴⁵, and that, for the purposes of tranquillity alone, a universal (moral) nihilism would seem to be a more conclusive therapy. I think that this misunderstands the nature of the therapy. The therapy involved in the *dunamis antithetikē* is best understood as a rational reconfiguration: as Castagnoli argues, it involves coming to see the *aporia* which we experience in the face of the *phainomena* as appearing not as a ‘subjective deficiency’ but ‘the ‘reasonable’ result of [our] *zētēsis*⁴⁶. In other words, the therapy comes in the form of a reflective endorsement⁴⁷ of our psychological enactment of the Sceptical process of inquiry. We reach *ataraxia* via recognising ourselves as, in some important, intuitively apprehended way, rational.

§II.2.1.2. Truth-Seeking

Is Sextus’ inquiry ‘truth-seeking’? There are two basic strategies for responding to this problem, given that Sextus has dismantled the basic Greek conception of truth. We may either seek to formulate an alternative notion of truth, besides the metaphysical-realist notion persistently attacked by Sextus, or argue that Sceptical inquiry pursues norms which differ from narrowly construed ‘truth’.

⁴⁵ Castagnoli 2017.

⁴⁶ Castagnoli 2018, p220.

⁴⁷ Korsgaard 1996.

How would we go about constructing an alternative notion of truth? One option would be to seek to find in the ancient Sceptics some notion of pragmatic, coherentist, or anti-realist truth, as Leo Groarke has sought to do⁴⁸. This project ultimately emerges as misguided and anachronistic, given that the evidence on the Greek concept of truth tends to support Burnyeat's view that 'true' in Greek means 'true of a real objective world'. A further option would be not to modify the concept, but to modify its locus – we might seek in Sextus a concept of 'truth in appearances' or 'truth in impressions', conceivably paralleled in Aristotelian claims about 'practical truth', or Protagorean truth. However, the notion of veridical *phantasiai* is strongly associated with the Stoic dogmatist, and Sextus will surely have been familiar with Carneades' arguments to the effect that true and false *phantasiai* will always be in principle indistinguishable.

So what if we thought about Sceptic inquiry as operating with different epistemic norms?

There are strong arguments to be made here. A compelling thought is that the Sceptic should be understood as not a truth-seeker, but a falsehood-avoider, thus following a norm symmetrical to the active goal of seeking truth. On this reading, the Sceptic is not epistemically ambitious, seeking the maximal set of true beliefs, but epistemically cautious, aiming to end up with the minimal set of false beliefs: these are two sides of the same zetetic coin. Katja Vogt has eloquently presented such an interpretation⁴⁹, attributing it to a borrowing from the Stoic norm of *aperiptosia* or 'avoiding precipitancy'⁵⁰. It is a powerful reading – but I find two problems with it. Firstly, it makes the Pyrrhonians look too much like

⁴⁸ Groarke 1990, arguing for an 'anti-realist' notion of truth in ancient Scepticism.

⁴⁹ Vogt 2012, chapter on 'The Aims of Sceptical Investigation'. Machuca 2006, p137, likewise thinks the Pyrrhonist is distinguished by his 'cautious, agnostic, and open-minded attitude'.

⁵⁰ Cf Diogenes Laertius VII.46-7.

the Stoics – this makes sense in the case of the Academics⁵¹, whose philosophy seems best understood as a dialectical riff on Stoicism⁵², but Sextus abhors the Stoic world-view⁵³.

Secondly, Sextus seems aware that eschewing falsehood is symmetrical with pursuing truth – this is reflected in some abstruse logical passages of Sextus’ work, he adverts to the notion that believing there is something false entails believing that there is something true⁵⁴. In light of this, falsehood-avoidance would involve the same kinds of *tarachē* as truth-seeking, namely from insisting that one of two *phainomena* must be true (/false), and that truth (/avoidance of falsehood) is the only worthwhile epistemic goal, as Filip Grgic argues.⁵⁵

An alternative view is presented by Grgic⁵⁶: he suggests that philosophy, for Sextus, is *not* equivalent to the search for truth. After all, as Grgic observes, ζῆτεῖν in Sextus has a much wider semantic range than ‘search for truth’⁵⁷. The proto-Sceptic may still be searching for the truth (cf *PH* I.12, I.26), but the mature Sceptic is engaged simply in ‘inquiry into certain things’ – an inquiry with an unspecified, open-ended epistemic goal. This is a very original interpretation, but I think it is unsatisfying – it leaves the Sceptic directionless and his inquiries haphazard at best.

A more promising alternative is that the Sceptic aspires to be rational. This is his epistemic norm, and it is not, *pace* Perin (2010) and others, reducible to truth-seeking components. After all, there is no clear reason why being rational should mean being committed to pursuing the truth, especially when understood in Burnyeat’s metaphysical-realist sense. Rationality may

⁵¹ Cf the famous remark about the epistemological debates of the 3rd-2nd Century BC – ‘Stoics fighting Stoics’.

⁵² Cf Couissin 1929.

⁵³ Though he might not abhor it so much were it understood in Vogt’s idiosyncratic way.

⁵⁴ E.g. esp *M* VII.399 – discussed in Castagnoli 2010.

⁵⁵ Grgic 2014.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ *Ibid.* p670 – to assess such general claims about *zētēsis* and truth in Greek philosophy or in Sextus would require much further scrutiny, in the spirit of Barnes 1982’s studies on *dogma*.

be cashed out in terms of other kinds of mind-world fit, like proportionality or understanding – it is in some sense an open concept⁵⁸. This norm may therefore fit with the Sceptic’s aspirations to inquiry without necessarily committing him to the kind of truth-seekingness which he repudiates.

§II.2.1.3. The Relation Between Therapy and Rationality

How do the therapeutic and zetetic goals relate, on this interpretation? My answer to this adapts the answer given by Casey Perin: for the Sceptic, rationality is both intrinsically and instrumentally valuable⁵⁹. In other words, the Sceptic pursues *ataraxia* insofar as it can be brought about by rational methods. This is in line with the thought that we developed in II.2.1.1, that *ataraxia* comes about via reflective self-endorsement, a long-term indication of some appropriate, rational fit between mind and world. We can present a further consideration which reinforces the thought that this makes sense as an implicit commitment within Sextus’ philosophy.

There is an important and widespread misconception about Hellenistic ethics: as Gisela Striker has argued, the Hellenistic philosophers (especially Stoics and Epicureans) do not value *ataraxia* as an end in itself, but rather as something of which a life should be *worthy*. As she puts it, such theories were intended to spell out “what sort of life one would have to live in order to have good reasons for feeling tranquil or contented; they were not recipes for reaching a certain state of mind.”⁶⁰ The Stoics think that we gain good reasons for *ataraxia* in

⁵⁸ I take it that we share with the Greeks this open concept, even if we the Greek conception(s) of reason were very different to ours (cf esp Frede 1991).

⁵⁹ Perin 2010, p16 – he speaks in terms of *truth* rather than rationality.

⁶⁰ Striker 1990, p183.

recognizing truths about the nature of the soul, the cosmos, and their interrelation, in honing our *eupatheiai* and minimising our *pathē*; the Epicureans think that good reasons consist in realising the truth of atomist physics, freeing ourselves from inappropriate fears and enabling appropriate kinds of material pleasure⁶¹. Understood thus, the notion of *ataraxia* is continuous with the classical notion of *eudaimonia*.

Striker thinks that the Pyrrhonians diverge from this pattern, valuing *ataraxia* merely as a state of mind, such that philosophers must give way to ‘psychiatrists and pharmacologists’.

Although there might be some *prima facie* reason for her view in the affinity between the Pyrrhonists and the Cyrenaics, I think that this affinity is to be understood only epistemologically, not ethically: I submit that the Pyrrhonists are placing themselves squarely in the mainstream Hellenistic tradition, aspiring to the ideal of a sagacious life which *earns* the psychological condition of *ataraxia* – it is simply that they have a different conception of the kind of life and inquiry which does⁶². After all, if Striker’s theory is correct, then this conception is presumably available to the Pyrrhonists as part of the *paradosis ethōn kai nomōn*⁶³ – especially to much later Sextan Pyrrhonists, as by the 2nd Century AD *ataraxia* had enjoyed a long institutional history. It seems unlikely that their conception of the *ataraxia* which they apparently pursue as a *telos* (*PH* I.26) would be somehow miraculously lifted from elsewhere.

⁶¹ Peripatetics would fit something like this schema in virtue of their Aristotelian heritage; Cyrenaics and Cynics would probably be an exception. The Sceptical Academy’s relation to it is unclear.

⁶² I find this more compelling than e.g. McPherran 1989, who supposes (p165) that the Sceptics are motivated independently by a natural love of truth and a natural love of *ataraxia*. A unified disposition towards rationally mediated *ataraxia* makes much better sense of Pyrrhonian inquiry.

⁶³ It might be objected that the *biōtikē tērēsis* is by definition ‘ordinary’, i.e. non-dogmatic, but I think that when it comes to the dimensions of traditional, institutionalised culture, this distinction must become permeable – institutionalised *dogmata* are part of what is socially available to the Pyrrhonist.

This understanding is corroborated by Sextus' statement of the Sceptic's *telos* (*PH* I.26): the Sceptic pursues *metriopatheia* ἐν τοῖς κατηναγκασμένοις ('in matters forced upon us') and *ataraxia* ἐν τοῖς κατὰ δόξαν ('in matters of opinion'). If *ataraxia* was really nothing more than a mental state of contentment, it would seem reasonable to think that we *could* pursue *ataraxia* even as regards 'matters forced upon us', given that this seems to include anything besides beliefs. It would be possible, for instance, to try to numb our bodily appetites and natural inclinations. After all, the Sceptics, as Empirical doctors, might well have been familiar with analgesic and soporific drugs⁶⁴. The very fact that they nevertheless draw such a distinction seems to reflect that *ataraxia* is something which can only be achieved where reason and rationality are concerned⁶⁵. For a Pyrrhonist, just as for most other Hellenistic philosophers, an inquiry targeting tranquillity *qua* mental state, rather than rationally achieving it as a kind of indirect by-product, would be defective.

§II.2.2. Ongoing Inquiry: The Life of the Practising Sceptic

The *dunamis antithetikē* is not inexhaustible. It may be so in principle, but in practice, we can imagine a time when a Sceptic has exercised her *dunamis antithetikē* as exhaustively as she is capable of doing, across all the spheres of inquiry with which she is familiar, and has reached stable equipollence and *epochē* across all these fields⁶⁶. What is she then to do – in what sense will she 'keep investigating'? To answer this question, I reiterate from II.1 that it seems

⁶⁴ E.g. perhaps opium, black henbane, or the psychedelic drugs possibly used in the Eleusinian mysteries.

⁶⁵ If it be objected that Sextus posits *metriopatheia* as the goal because, *qua* philosopher, the only tools available to him are arguments, not drugs, then I suggest that it amounts to the same thing – the Pyrrhonist is voluntarily circumscribing his inquiries within the rational limits of philosophy – and presumably finds this worth doing.

⁶⁶ This may seem a counter-intuitive scenario, but hopefully it will be conceded not to be impossible. Indeed, the exercise of the *dunamis* rehearsed in *PH* itself might be sufficiently comprehensive to meet the specifications of this scenario.

plausible to suppose that the *dunamis antithetikē* makes room for further inquiry of a profoundly different kind, the inquiry which the Sceptic undertakes not *qua* Sceptic.

We may speculatively characterise this different inquiry based on what the exercise of the *dunamis* rules out. It will differ both from Sceptical inquiry and from Dogmatic theorising, as these will both have been purged together through the exercise of the Modes⁶⁷. In light of this, in contrast to these methods, it will be (1) undertaken with a non-dogmatic, intellectually humble attitude; (2) carried out by non-systematic methods, and (3) targeted at changing our appearances and affections (*phantasiai/pathē*), not at changing our *doxai/dogmata*. However, the Sceptic will still retain his governing epistemic norm of rationality: post-Sceptical inquiry, no less than Sceptical inquiry, will aspire to be rational – how this is so we shall explain in the following section.

⁶⁷ This will be shown in Section III.

§III. Sceptical Epistemology

§III.1. Sketch of Sceptical Epistemology

Having extracted from Sextus' remarks in *PH I* a vision of the *dunamis antithetikē* and its role within Sceptical inquiry, we must develop a clear vision of the epistemology implicit therein.

In other words, we must answer the following question: what are the epistemological commitments, or what is the epistemological process, of the Sceptical rational agent? I shall here sketch an answer to this question, to be developed in sections III(b) and III(c). My answer is that we must see the Sceptic as proceeding through two epistemological stages⁶⁸.

The Sceptic's starting point is the most natural candidate for the concept of rationality, which I shall call 'critical rationality'. To be critically rational means to undertake the complete and systematic exercise of our powers of reasoning, so as to build for ourselves an explicit, fully intelligible, and non-arbitrary picture of the world – a full-formed *Weltanschauung*, which can answer all of the deepest questions about reality. The deployment of the Modes may be conceived as an effort to fulfil this undertaking, in the sense that it undertakes to generate and survey all possible *aporiai*, all of the difficult conflicting appearances, and to seek a resolution to them⁶⁹. However, what their systematic argument in fact brings about is a realisation of the impossibility of being critically rational in this way. This empowers us to adopt a new perspective on argument, and redirects our aspiration to rationality towards a second candidate, which is expressed in 'post-Sceptical' inquiry.

⁶⁸ I omit the 'pre-Sceptical' stage by which the proto-Sceptic is converted to pursuing his inquiries through the *dunamis antithetikē*. During the pre-Sceptical stage, the candidate for rationality is 'truth-seeking', as Grgic 2014 suggests – but the Sceptical conversion eliminates this conception.

⁶⁹ Castagnoli 2018 highlights the extent to which Sextan, Aristotelian, and Platonic methods are unified under this conception.

This second candidate I refer to as ‘intuitive rationality’ – which I take to be the minimum kernel of rationality gifted to us as part of the *huphēgēsis phusikē*⁷⁰. To live a life of ‘intuitive rationality’ means to accept the deliverances of our intuitions, especially of our most potent ones, and to engage in the methods of reasoning which are inextricable from our everyday lives. At the minimum, it means to restrict our scope in argument to the particular and piecemeal, engaging with this argument here and now, and how it strikes me, resisting the temptation to get away from particular considerations by invoking universal or systematic ones⁷¹. When the Sceptical agent engages most seriously in it, she recognises the need to identify with her conceptually laden states of seeing, but distance herself from the thoughts that she entertains as a result. Within this paradigm, she retains a higher-order sense of the hierarchy of her impressions, of what matters to her most.

The life of intuitive rationality is the life of the post-Sceptic, after she has completely exercised the *dunamis antithetikē*. Living it is taken by Sextus to include inductively following *hupomnestika semeia*,; thinking via analogies; imaginatively engaging with the perspectives of others; and, through all of this, engaging in a rationally governed redirection of my *phantasiai*, which is to say a redirection on the basis of the deliverances of the methods which my intuitive rationality cannot reject, and of the inbuilt *phantasiai* experienced as most important.

⁷⁰ There may be some warrant for the distinction in *PH* I.17, where Sextus identifies a *logos* which indicates ὡς ἔστιν ὀρθῶς ζῆν (‘how it is possible to live correctly’), and points us κατὰ τὸ φαινόμενον (‘in accordance with appearance’) to τὸ ζῆν πρὸς τὰ πάτρια ἔθη καὶ τοὺς νόμους καὶ τὰς ἀγωγὰς καὶ τὰ οἰκεῖα πάθη (‘a life in conformity with traditional customs and the law and persuasions and our own feelings’) – distinguishing, I presume, from the kind of *logos* which would be required to justify assent to *adela*.

⁷¹ Here I cite Brunschwig 1994’s interpretation of Sextus’ use of *hoson epi tōi logōi* in terms of a reluctance to generalise.

Sextus' writings clearly contaminate the two paradigms that I am envisioning. He makes extensive use of the methods of intuitive rationality within the framework of what we would expect to be critical rationality – and he uses the methods of intuitive rationality to subvert the efforts of critical rationality. The reason why I take this not to be a problem is this: the methods of intuitive rationality should be subsumed within critical rationality, compatible with them and explicable by them. The fact that they create all sorts of problems for critical rationality is thus a problem for critical rationality, not for them.

However, undergoing the Sceptical phase is a precondition for undergoing the post-Sceptical phase, in that this experience enables the Sceptic to adopt the appropriate attitude to her inquiries – which is to say an intellectually humble one. The Sceptic is best equipped to engage in a serious post-Sceptical inquiry when she has exhaustively operated the *dunamis antithetikē*, because the presupposition that critical rationality is beyond us yields a reflective endorsement of our inquiry by less straightforwardly 'rational' methods. The Sceptical phase legitimises the post-Sceptical phase; the post-Sceptical phase is a continuation of inquiry in the sense required by *PH* I.1-3⁷².

⁷² Insofar as, as I have argued, Sceptical inquiry is identical with inquiry carried out in pursuit of the epistemic goal of rationality.

§III.2 Critical Rationality in the Modes of Scepticism

§III.2.1 The Modes Require Psychological Effort

First things first, we must briefly demonstrate that the Modes meet our specification of the *dunamis antithetikē* – they are exercised with wide scope, and are psychologically strenuous in their operation. Two key points demonstrate this: (1) recognising and appreciating conflicting appearances requires imaginative engagement and empirical inference; (2) seeing those conflicting appearances as equipollent requires us to bring together a wide range of intuitive, empirical, and logical concerns.

In the Ten Modes of Aenesidemus, Sextus does not confine himself to conflicts directly available to him from experience, but rather makes extensive use of inferred, imagined, or merely possible conflicts of appearance. He makes empirical inferences from differences in reproduction, anatomy, physiology, and appetitive behaviour (Mode 1); differences in shape, *idiosynkrasiai*, and beliefs (Mode 2); from simple anatomical facts, such as membranes in the eye, or humours around *to hēgemonikon* (Mode 6), and from our own intuitive apprehensions of value or fittingness, plus what we infer to be those of others (Modes 9 and 10). Sextus thus requires not only extensive anatomical, physiological, and even anthropological knowledge in the aspiring Sceptic, so as to exercise these Modes in their fullest form⁷³, but also inferential acuity.

He likewise requires us to think analogically, guiding us with analogies between mirrors and organs of sight, between the sounds of *barbaroi* and irrational animals (Mode 1), between winding caves and our aural passages (Mode 6), and even, in one fell swoop, between blood,

⁷³ I take it that the amassing of empirical data here is not purely illustrative, but is in fact part of the Sceptic's training – he must acquire familiarity with such things so as to be a good Sceptic.

water, breath, and pressure (*PH* I.53). In addition to the mental effort of seeing such affinities, Sextus requires us to undergo imaginative labours such as entering the perspective of a ‘rational dog’ (*PH* I.62-72), imagining a world where water is rare and gold ubiquitous (*PH* I.143), and imagining how the world might be under- or over-determined by sense-perception, on the basis of an analogy with someone deaf and blind from birth (*PH* I.94-99). Inductive inference, analogical reasoning, and imagination are not abilities which we would naturally attribute to a Sceptical automaton – they require vigorous psychological effort, as we hoped to demonstrate.

Further to this, Sextus stresses that we should use the Modes in combination with each other (*PH* I.177, I.185) – which is to say, on any given question, we should have available both ordinary empirical and imaginative, deductive-philosophical, and inductive-scientific reasons for arguing against it. We may compare the numerous instances in the Ten Modes (e.g. in Modes 1, 4, 5) where Sextus brings to bear what appear to be strictly Agrippan concerns about proof. Sextus thus seeks to make available to us at any given moment the greatest range of considerations possible to move us towards seeing things as equipollent. Through his presentation actively to contemplate the apparent undecidability or relativity of a given claim⁷⁴, or to realise the apparent impossibility of situating it in a sound deductive system (~5 Modes of Agrippa), or to recognise the arbitrariness of our own means of scientific hypothesis (~8 Modes of Causation). The idea seems to be that we should be able to juggle these different concerns at every step. The more of these considerations which we can make available to

⁷⁴ Here I group together quite different ways of reading the Modes of Aenesidemus. I am not engaging with the extensive debate about the precise logical or psychological procedure which they represent – for detailed exploration of relevant issues cf esp Annas and Barnes 1985, Striker 1983, Barnes 1990, and Morison 2011.

ourselves, the better an exerciser of the *dunamis antithetikē* we in fact are, it would seem natural to conclude.

§III.2.2. The Modes Aspire to be Critically Rational

The Modes reveal the connection of the *dunamis antithetikē* to critical rationality, in that the Modes are themselves exercised systematically, and in that what they primarily target is the attempt to argue systematically.

It is often observed that the Modes of Sextus Empiricus unfold through an implicit dialectical progress, gradually progressing from ‘natural’ to ‘cultural’ appearances⁷⁵. We can imagine this in terms of a conversation where at each stage the Sceptic concedes to his interlocutor the assumption which has just been contested, for the sake of argument: i.e. ‘the human perspective is not superior to that of animals, but suppose it is: even then, your perspective is not superior to mine, but suppose it is...’ etc.

I think we can further understand the Agrippan and Causal Modes as answers to the following implicit thoughts: ‘suppose that you seek to substitute for the ordinary judgements scrutinised in the 10 Modes above some kind of rational deductive philosophical enterprise or system of axioms and arguments, purporting to give us a systematic picture of the world – even then, any *philosophical arguments* which you may wish to construct may be submitted to a systematic Agrippan deconstruction’; ‘suppose that instead you seek to substitute some kind of rational inductive scientific enterprise, purporting to give us a systematic picture of the world – even then, any *causal explanations* which you may wish to construct may be

⁷⁵ Long and Sedley 1987, p463.

submitted to a systematic Aenesidemean deconstruction.’ Sextus thus shows in turn how ordinary reasoning, deductive-philosophical axiomatic systems, and inductive-scientific hypotheses all fail to provide us with solid criteria. The ideal operation of the Modes appears to be through this sequential dialectical process.

Now, in light of the juggling of concerns at every stage which we observed in III.2.1, we can see that the Modes will be most dialectically effective when we are coming at them from the perspective of a system-builder. The more concerns with which a belief is entangled, the more vulnerable it naturally is to the exercise of the *dunamis antithetikē*. Conversely, the more prepared an inquirer is to tolerate some contradiction or arbitrariness, the freer they will be from the onslaught of the Modes. It is precisely the thinker who identifies fully with the deliverances of her critical rationality who will most completely feel the sense of *isostheneia* which the Modes seek to bring about, since it is this faculty in virtue of which we object to contradiction or arbitrariness in our understanding of the world. If we do not care about being critically rational, we can get by on our strength of feeling, desires, and non-rational mechanisms of thinking and making sense of the world.

This reflects an element of truth in the Frede-inspired reading of Sextus. Tad Brennan has expressed this very well: he urges that Sextus rejects the ‘habit of justification’ introduced by Dogmatists to “bring order into the chaos of ordinary belief”, because “outside of the sphere of philosophy, or dogmatism...people just believe things, for all sorts of reasons, good and bad, and sometimes for no reason at all.”⁷⁶ The point, though, is that he does not reject this

⁷⁶ Brennan 1999, pp62-3 – ignoring the reference to ‘beliefs’.

tout court, but rather because he himself has sought to achieve this order, and found the effort ultimately futile.

§III.2.3. The Modes Undermine Critical Rationality

To explain the operation of the Modes, we may present the following hypothetical narrative. The Sceptic, in deploying the Modes, identifies with her critical rationality, and really feels the force of arguments. Yet the very force of those arguments in turn reveals to her the impotence of critically rational, systematic argumentation – and thus the Sceptic becomes dissociated from her critical rationality. In other words, the Modes act as a drug of systematic, critically rational argument, which purge from the Sceptical agent her inclination towards systematic, critically rational argument – we may compare Sextus’ frequent use of the image of arguments as *kathartika* (‘purgative drugs’, *PH* I.206, II.188, *M* VIII.480⁷⁷), fire (*M* VIII.480), and his image of the ‘Sceptical ladder’, kicked down once it has been used to reach higher ground (*M* VIII.481).

This narrative may be challenged – it may be thought that the use of the Modes stacks the deck against a fair-minded inquiry. John Palmer especially has contrasted the Pyrrhonian to the probabilist or fallibilist Sceptic on this count, insisting that using the Modes precludes a genuine search for truth⁷⁸ – for my purposes, I will substitute critical rationality as the goal, instead of truth (in light of section II(b)). There are two main forms of this objection to the Modes, based on the thought either (a) that they are not really a critically rational tool,

⁷⁷ Cf also references to this image in Diogenes Laertius IX.76 and Aristocles ap. Eusebius *PE* 14.18.21-2.

⁷⁸ Palmer 2000, p359; cf Sedley 2015, p171 – ‘so presented as to shut off any chance of finding a privileged perspective from which such conflicts might be decisively arbitrated’; cf Striker 2001, p121, who sees the Modes, especially the Agrippan 5, as eliminating basic foundational truths, and thus as being a *refutatio ad absurdum* of themselves.

because they necessarily preclude the development of a coherent system of thought at any level, or (b) that the use of the Modes does not reflect an aspiration in the agent to be critically rational, but rather a kind of dogmatic pessimism. These accusations I shall label ‘operational anti-rationality’ and ‘subjective anti-rationality’. Both are, in my view, based on misunderstanding.

§III.2.3.1. Operational Anti-Rationality

Does the operation of the Modes rule out the possibility of a system satisfying to our critical rationality? No. Proponents of this charge usually dwell on Sextus’ claims about the universal applicability of the Modes – if they are universally applicable, they suggest, it follows that nothing can escape them. Following Casey Perin⁷⁹, I would note that the universal applicability of the Modes which Sextus envisions does *not* imply that they will always be successfully applied. Indeed, he himself raises a question about their soundness (*PH* I.35) – it seems simply that they are the most satisfying to his critical rationality of the tools for inquiry which he has hitherto encountered. This point applies to all three sets of Modes.

When we consider the 10 Modes, we can see that it will not always be possible to generate a conflicting appearance through inference or imagination. In some instances, there may be no physiological difference sufficient to motivate postulating a conflicting appearance – there might be some universal features of animal physiology (Mode 1), or some features of human neurobiology which simply do not vary from human to human (Mode 2). Further, it may in some instances be true that a conflicting appearance is not even conceivable – e.g. perhaps we

⁷⁹ Perin 2010, p28

could not imagine a conscious organism who does not experience the world somehow corporeally. This would already place limitations on the applicability of the Modes of Aenesidemus.

If we consider the 5 Modes, there is one very interesting point that tells against their powers: when Sextus speaks of the Mode of hypothesis, he envisions a distinction between merely hypothesising a premise, and *αὐτόθεν λαμβάνειν ὡς ἀληθές* ('establishing directly as true', *M* VIII.371, cf *PH* I.173, *M* III.9-10). It is not clear what this is supposed to mean, unless Sextus has in mind a notion of self-evident or 'basic' reasons, for which it is simply not *intelligible* to demand an additional reason⁸⁰. None of the sets of Modes will suffice completely to exclude this possibility: the 10 Modes may point towards the conclusion that no basic reason is 'universally accessible'⁸¹; the 5 Modes might show that no basic reason can be *formally* rationally defensible – but it would be definitive of a basic reason to be beyond such theorising.

Finally, as regards the 8 Modes, it is not evidently the case that a science overcoming all 8 problems could not be developed. Science builds consensus over time (Mode 1), and scientists might become more objective, consistent and meticulous (Modes 5-7). Modes 2, 4, and 8 are difficult to overcome – but it is not completely inconceivable that we might eventually have enough data to determine a theory; or that we might eventually have tools sufficient to appreciate 'non-apparent' events. After all, we might wonder what Sextus would have thought about a science operating with microscope, telescopes, and electromagnetic spectrography, making the 'non-evident' abundantly 'evident' to us.

⁸⁰ Perin 2010, p29.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p31.

§iii.2.3.2. Subjective Anti-Rationality

But is the Sceptic somehow an insincere inquirer in her use of the Modes, biased against the possibility of finding something satisfying to her critical rationality?

Here it is vital to reiterate that Sextus' method of inquiry is analogous to those of Plato and Aristotle, proceeding through the seeking of *aporiai* and the playing-off of conflicting appearances⁸². Are we to implicate them too as insincere inquirers? My suspicion, regarding this point, is that Sextus would envision that if a true inquirer, i.e. a Sceptic, carried out these Platonic or Aristotelian methods in full sincerity, aspiring to the same critically rational goal, she would reach the same conclusions about her critical rationality as she reaches through the exercise of the Sceptical Modes. In other words, it is precisely the sincerity and devotion of the Sceptic that yields the negative conclusion she reaches.

Beyond this, I would observe the following. Given that the use of the Modes is taken to be constitutive of the exercise of the *dunamis antithetikē*, the Sceptic will only operate the Modes precisely when she chooses to operate the *dunamis antithetikē*, and it is evident that this will not be all the time. She evidently does not rule out the possibility of trying other ways to be critically rational – but this is the one that strikes her as a good first try, and there is nothing culpably disingenuous about that.

⁸² Castagnoli 2018.

§III.2.4. The Modes Instil a New Perspective on Argument

T8. *PH* II.252 – ὥσπερ γὰρ εἰ ὁδὸς εἶη ἐπὶ τινα κρημνὸν φέρουσα, οὐκ ὠθοῦμεν αὐτοὺς εἰς τὸν κρημνὸν διὰ τὸ ὁδὸν τινα εἶναι φέρουσαν ἐπ’ αὐτόν, ἀλλ’ ἀφιστάμεθα τῆς ὁδοῦ διὰ τὸν κρημνὸν, οὕτω καὶ εἰ λόγος εἶη ἐπὶ τι ὁμολογουμένως ἄτοπον ἡμᾶς ἀπάγων, οὐχὶ τῷ ἀτόπῳ συγκαταθησόμεθα διὰ τὸν λόγον, ἀλλ’ ἀποστησόμεθα τοῦ λόγου διὰ τὴν ἀτοπίαν.

If a road is leading us to a precipice, we do not drive ourselves over the precipice because there is a road leading to it; rather, we leave the road because of the precipice: similarly, if there is an argument leading us to something agreed to be absurd, we do not assent to the absurdity because of the argument – rather, we abandon the argument because of the absurdity.

T9. *PH* III.280-1 – Ὁ σκεπτικὸς διὰ τὸ φιλόανθρωπος εἶναι τὴν τῶν δογματικῶν οἴησίν τε καὶ προπέτειαν κατὰ δύναμιν ἰᾶσθαι λόγῳ βούλεται. Καθάπερ οὖν οἱ τῶν σωματικῶν παθῶν ἰατροὶ διάφορα κατὰ μέγεθος ἔχουσι βοηθήματα, καὶ τοῖς μὲν σφοδρῶς πεπονθόσι τὰ σφοδρὰ τούτων προσάγουσι τοῖς δὲ κούφως τὰ κουφότερα, καὶ ὁ σκεπτικὸς οὕτως διαφοροῦς ἐρωταῖ [καὶ] κατὰ ἰσχὺν λόγους....

Sceptics are philanthropic and wish to cure by argument, as far as they can, the conceit and rashness of the Dogmatists. Just as doctors for bodily afflictions have remedies which differ in potency, and apply severe remedies to patients who are severely afflicted and milder remedies to those mildly afflicted, so Sceptics propound arguments which differ in strength.

In revealing to the Sceptic the impotence of critical rationality, the Modes enable the Sceptic to take up a new perspective towards argument, on the basis that she now has doubts grounded

in her intuitive rationality about its possibilities for satisfying critical rationality. It is in this light, I submit, that we must understand the flippant and dismissive remarks made by Sextus about argument.

Namely, in his discussion of the *sōritēs* paradox, Sextus insists that the Sceptic will not be carried along to absurdity by argument, but will abandon the argument as soon as he apprehends the absurdity; and, at the very end of *PH*, Sextus draws a controversial analogy according to which arguments are like drugs, to be tailored to the needs of any given philosophical patient.⁸³ These passages together reflect a conception of an argument as a means to some end, not as something intrinsically worthwhile, in stark contrast to the perspective of the Modes. In the first passage, we find evidence that the Sceptic takes his intuitions to be more authoritative than arguments themselves – such that he suspends judgement at every stage of the *sōritēs*. In the second, we find the Sceptic going further, and apparently instrumentalizing arguments as a means of therapy (cf the aforementioned ladder and *kathartika* images).

How can Sextus in good conscience adopt such a perspective? Well, after the operation of the Modes, it is perfectly natural for the Sceptic to have such a detached attitude to argumentation in general, given his past experience with argument. Sextus is speaking as a mature Sceptic who has practised the *dunamis antithetikē* extensively, and thus he can speak in such flippant terms about argument, because he has strong inductively based intuitions about it⁸⁴ - his change in attitude is earned through his Sceptical inquiries. Conversely, though, it would not be appropriate for a pre-conversion sceptic to be so flippant until going through the crucial

⁸³ Cf also the story of Herophilus and Diodorus Cronus at II.245, by which Sextus seems to signal his awareness of the ‘sophistical’ nature of many of his own arguments in *PH* and *M*.

⁸⁴ We will see why such inductive justification is valid below.

phase – and thus, while Sextus may instrumentalise argument in this fashion, we may presume that he would not expect pre-mature Sceptics to do so before undergoing their Sceptical training. Moreover, I submit, it must always be in principle available to the mature Sceptic to re-enter the critically rational perspective where he deems it necessary – or he would be guilty of *permanently* closing off an avenue of inquiry, which I think Sextus would find unconscionably dogmatic. I therefore suggest that Sextus’ Sceptic retains throughout the ability to take argument seriously – it is just not a perspective that he is still obliged to hold *all* the time.

The second passage implies that the Sceptic can recognise ‘strong’ and ‘weak’ arguments – it may be asked in what sense this is meant. Diego Machuca⁸⁵ suggests that we should distinguish two senses of *pithanon* in Sextus – an ‘epistemic’ and a ‘phenomenological’ one (echoing the terms of the debate about Sceptical *phantasia*); he takes *PH* I.226-231 (on Carneades) as a rejection only of the epistemic *pithanon*, for the Pyrrhonian’s purposes. What is epistemically *pithanon* persuades someone of something regarding truth or the nature of things, whereas what is merely phenomenologically *pithanon* includes intellectual appearances – where we cannot help but find arguments persuasive in a way precisely analogous to experiencing the *pathē* like hot or cold, hunger or thirst⁸⁶. As Machuca observes, Sextus himself explicitly draws an analogy between such a kind of *pithanon*, feeling joyful (*chairein*), and being in pain (*lupeisthai*) (*M* VIII.475-6).

In light of this distinction, there are two levels on which we may understand the notion of argumentative strength operating in III.280-1 – (1) 1st person vs 3rd person; (2) epistemic vs

⁸⁵ Machuca 2009.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.* p121.

phenomenological. I think that Sextus is blurring together two separate issues: (a) epistemic 3rd person persuasiveness – arguments are registered as strong or weak in virtue of past ‘clinical trials’, i.e. their track record on specific dogmatists⁸⁷ – and (b) phenomenological 1st person persuasiveness – the Sceptic may use arguments that appear to him weak on Dogmatists for whom he knows they will appear epistemically strong, etc. This is an important part of the *huphēgēsis phusikē*, as we shall see below.

⁸⁷ Machuca is right to reject Barnes and Hankinson’s cruder quantitative readings in terms of number of patients successfully persuaded or number of beliefs successfully targeted.

§III.3. Intuitive Rationality in the Post-Sceptical Phase – Sceptical Reasoning, Sceptical *Phantasiai*

§III.3.1. Sextus' Reasoning Includes a Basic Substratum of Intuitively Rational Methods

In our discussion of the Modes, we noted Sextus' use of various forms of reasoning whose status within his Sceptical philosophy is unclear – in particular, inductive reasoning, analogical thinking, and imagination. Sextus seems to find it unproblematic to make use of these forms of reasoning here, and they are never targeted in his attacks on dogmatic ways of reasoning in *PH* II and *M* VII-VIII. Why? We cannot take these as a dogmatic borrowing, because the Modes are supposed to stand as a Sceptical tool without Dogmatic presuppositions, and Sextus does not subsequently criticize these methods. As such, we must conclude that they represent a kind of reasoning which is acceptable to Sextus – in other words, they represent a kind of substratum of intuitively rational methods, which do not require the endorsement of our critical rationality.

The glaring exception to this, of course, is induction, which Sextus apparently demolishes in a single chapter (*PH* II.204), on the basis that induction from only some particulars will be incomplete, and induction from all particulars will be impossible, because particulars are 'infinite and indeterminate'. However, Sextus' whole way of thinking is strongly inductively coloured, and we have two further reasons to think that he is committed to some kind of induction: (i) he insists that it is acceptable to make inferences from *hupomnēstika semeia* ('commemorative signs') though not from *endeiktika semeia* ('indicative signs')⁸⁸; (ii) the basically inductive method of *epilogismos*, aka 'transition from the similar', was permissible

⁸⁸ I am unconvinced by Glidden 1983's arguments that Sextus' reliance on *hupomnēstika semeia* is merely a 'dialectical stratagem', to counter an objection about the Sceptic's language.

within the Empirical medicine which Sextus practised⁸⁹. In light of these considerations, I think we must follow Charlotte Stough, and hypothesise that the point here is to reject *truth* claims made on the basis of inductive inference, in particular those made within ‘the framework of a deductive system’, not to repudiate using the method of induction at all⁹⁰. Indeed, I think it is equally plausible to frame this in terms of the nature of the universal – in the dogmatic use of induction, the universal is strict, but in Sextus’ inductive methods, it is at most loose and provisional.

Just as Sextus’ use of loose inductive procedures finds a parallel in the Empiricists’ *epilogismos*, so, I would suggest, the role of imagination and analogy finds a parallel in the Empiricists’ use of *histōria* – the study of case histories and testimonies of other doctors. In fact, what I am calling intuitive rationality basically corresponds to what Frede, in his discussion of Empiricist medicine, wants to refer to as ‘ordinary patterns of cognitive behaviour’⁹¹. In light of this, I cite his remarks on how Pyrrhonian Scepticism may be compatible with Empiricism: “as a matter of fact, there seems to be a whole pattern of cognitive behaviour that people ordinarily follow and that we could study by merely observing what people do”⁹². Frede suggests here a definition of the philosopher as someone unwilling to follow such ordinary patterns of cognitive behaviour – this corresponds, in my analysis, to the Sceptic’s doomed attempt to satisfy his critical rationality⁹³.

⁸⁹ See Frede 1987a for a detailed discussion of how epistemological concerns in philosophy came to find their most sophisticated formulations among doctors.

⁹⁰ Stough 1969, p138-9.

⁹¹ Frede 1987b, pp253-6.

⁹² *Ibid.*, pp253-4.

⁹³ If we accept Frede’s intriguing and plausible, speculation that Sextus was out to reform Empirical medicine (*Ibid.*, pp251-2), to make it compatible with Pyrrhonian epistemology, then the project of this thesis takes on new significance: Sextus’ vision of the Sceptical inquiry would be undertaking a kind of rehabilitation of reason, in what I am calling its ‘intuitive’ form, to overcome the unsophisticated early Empiricist extreme scepticism about reason which Frede postulates (p248).

Sextus' conception of the intuitively rational methods which are available to all of us, especially this epistemological particularism, bears an interesting relation to the philosophy of science⁹⁴, and in particular to Albert Einstein's notion of epistemological opportunism. Einstein notes that the scientist is not permitted "to let himself be too much restricted in the construction of his conceptual world by adherence to an epistemological system. He therefore must appear to the systematic epistemologist as a type of unscrupulous opportunist", who can take up realist, idealist, positivist, or even Platonist perspectives wherever it suits him.⁹⁵ The Einsteinian scientist, just like the Pyrrhonian Sceptic, is led to abandon the strict dictates of critical rationality, and finds richer possibilities for it; Pyrrhonian Scepticism dialectically clears the way for the operation of science without the interference of systematic epistemology. It is not a long way from here to the more extreme version of this approach defended by Paul Feyerabend, of 'epistemological anarchism', proceeding by 'counter-induction'⁹⁶.

§III.3.2. Sextan Phantasia is the Raw Material of Intuitive Rationality

There is one further dimension to Sextus' conception of intuitive rationality: his cognitively rich notion of *phantasia*, as a non-propositional 'seeing-as'. This indicates a plausible *goal* for post-Sceptical inquiry – the rationally governed⁹⁷ redirection of our impressions of the world. To establish this, it will be necessary first to argue for this 'non-propositional' reading, then to

⁹⁴ In noting this connection I echo Brochard 1886, who tries to draw out a similar kind of connection with the science of his time, linking Sextus' concerns to those of positivists like J.S. Mill and Comte.

⁹⁵ In Schilpp 1949, pp665-688.

⁹⁶ Feyerabend 1975.

⁹⁷ By which I mean – governed by our intuitive reason, the deliverance of the *huphēgēsis phusikē*.

show that Sceptical *phantasiai* are complex, and modifiable, before considering the implications for Sextus' theory of the Sceptical agent.

§III.3.2.1. Seeing-as

T10. *PH* I.19 – τὰ γὰρ κατὰ φαντασίαν παθητικὴν ἀβουλήτως ἡμᾶς ἄγοντα εἰς συγκατάθεσιν οὐκ ἀνατρέπομεν, ὡς καὶ ἔμπροσθεν ἐλέγομεν: ταῦτα δὲ ἐστὶ τὰ φαινόμενα

As we said before, we do not overturn anything which leads us, without our willing it, to assent in accordance with a passive appearance – and these things are precisely what is apparent.

T11. *PH* I.22 – κριτήριον τοίνυν φαμὲν εἶναι τῆς σκεπτικῆς ἀγωγῆς τὸ φαινόμενον, δυνάμει τὴν φαντασίαν αὐτοῦ οὕτω καλοῦντες: ἐν πείσει γὰρ καὶ ἀβουλήτῳ πάθει κειμένη ἀζήτητός ἐστιν.

We say, then, that the standard of the Sceptical persuasion is what is apparent, implicitly meaning by this our phantasia; for [this] depends on passive and unwilled feelings, and is not an object of investigation.

The debate which we canvassed in section I about the scope of Scepticism hinges on a distinction between cognitive states of assent-less *phantasia* and *dogma*, which is to say assent to a *phantasia*. Now, I take it that there are four levels of mind-world engagement which we can find in Sextus, as in ancient Greek philosophy more generally: (1) basic phenomenological appearance, unconceptualized and uninterpreted ('mere seeming', cf Plato *Tht* 152-3); (2) 'seeing-as', i.e. a conceptualized but not propositionally formulated

appearance⁹⁸; (3) entertaining propositions about the world; (4) assenting to propositions about the world. Within this schema, I would argue that for Sextus, the mental state constituted by a *phantasia*, *phainomenon*, or *pathos* is primarily construed in terms of (1) and (2), and *not* in terms of (3). In rejecting *phantasia* as (3), I reject Rachel Barney's loosely corresponding reading of *phantasia* as a tentative or preliminary judgement (Barney 1992).

In *PH* I.19 and I.22, Sextus presents *phantasia* (a) as something unwilled and immediate (a *pathos*); (b) as *azētētos* ('not open to investigation'). This is strong evidence for understanding *phantasia* in terms of seeing-as, because entertaining propositions, or making preliminary or tentative judgements, seems both to be (a) will-involving, insofar as it comes about via the process of thought as a silent inner conversation (cf *Tht* 189e-190a), and (b) subject to investigation – we may, introspectively, explore our reasons for such preliminary judgements. Barney suggests that the involuntariness is to be understood in terms of being unable to shake a conviction (e.g. that glass is solid) – but this seems to me too weak. Likewise, I find her reading of *azētētos* as merely 'not investigated' a highly implausible reading – the point is surely that our *phantasiai* provide the experiential framework *within which* we can inquire⁹⁹.

My reading may seem counter-intuitive – after all, the Stoic understanding of *phantasia*, on which Sextus evidently sometimes draws (as e.g. II.70-2), clearly involves a 'propositional content' as part of the *phantasia*. However, the Sceptic may reasonably have his own notion of appearance, not necessarily isomorphic to the Stoic one. Furthermore, it seems to me possible, even within the Stoic framework, to detach the propositional content of a *phantasia*

⁹⁸ Illustrated by things like face recognition, or mental 3-d reconstruction of 2-d figures.

⁹⁹ Wittgenstein makes a similar point about the impossibility of doubting *phantasiai*/*pathe*/*phainomena* – in *On Certainty*, he dwells on how doubt gradually loses its sense, or even conceivability, as the subject-matter approaches 'the basic facts of our existence' (52, 56).

from our actual entertaining of it – a thoughtful Stoic would perhaps recognise the distinction between a phase of conceptualized seeing and a phase of entertaining thoughts about it. Further support will be found in III.3.2.4, in the promising implications which this reading has for Sextus’ theory of the Sceptical agent.

§III.3.2.2. Complex

Even though we have excluded (3), we have room for quite complex cognitive states. In particular, insofar as the Modes are taken to give us sets of *phainomena*¹⁰⁰, it is clear that the range of *phantasiai* is wide, encompassing not only ordinary perceptions, but also pleasure/pain, or appearance as choiceworthy/avoidance-worthy; judging someone attractive or ugly (I.108); emotional responses, e.g. of fear and confidence (I.111); judgements of value and impressiveness (I.142-3), shamefulness (I.148), and sacrilegiousness (I.149), and so on. *Phantasia* thus evidently includes, beyond ordinary perceptual impressions, intuitive value-apprehensions, and various modes of emotional responsiveness. It can also plausibly be taken to include ‘higher-order’ impressions – impressions of other impressions, e.g. as good or bad, or as pleasant or painful, and so on¹⁰¹: for instance, having the intuitive impression of an

¹⁰⁰ In the broad sense, cf I.31-4. I should clarify here that I am presupposing that the raw material of the Modes is indeed mental states: *phantasia* ~ *phainomenon* ~ *pathos* all refer primarily to mental states, in Sextus. On this I follow Stough 1969 (pp115-125).

¹⁰¹ There is an interesting possible textual support for this idea in Sextus’ mention of Xenias’ hypothetical appearance of all appearances as unconvincing (*PH* II.76) – which would, on my interpretation, mean an intuitive mistrust applied to all seeings-as. This might, however, be wrong, given that this occurs in the dialectical context of refuting the Stoic theory of *phantasia*.

instinctive revulsion at cannibalism as a good thing¹⁰². This might be understood as a kind of ‘thought’ – but it is different from the propositional kind discussed elsewhere.

§III.3.2.3. Modifiable

In accepting that the notion of *phantasia* contains this complexity, it is clear that at least some *phantasiai* are modifiable – that is to say, not simply different under different conditions, but actually modifiable in themselves. For instance, my moral intuitions about cannibalism, adultery, or public sexual intercourse may change, and so too may my impressions of the plausibility of myths and dogmatic suppositions.

Moreover, it is clear, from the fact that these *phantasiai* do not involve my explicitly entertaining thoughts, that their modification will not come about directly through the operation of my critical rationality – but through the operation of the intuitive rationality discussed above, or through non-rational methods which I find I can reflectively endorse. Genuinely to change the way that I see the world will require paradigm shifts which cannot be brought about within the limits of (strict) reason alone, even if my reason can motivate the effort to change them.

§III.3.2.4. Implications

In light of all of this, Sextus’ notion of passivity with respect to the appearances may be elaborated: his conception leaves room for the possibility that we are synchronically passive in

¹⁰² Cf McPherran 1989, p164: even the perfected Sceptic retains “not only brute *pathē* like hunger, but the more complex dispositions of moderate emotion and desire, moral sentiment, meaningful discourse, and finding some arguments more persuasive than others (but without being persuaded).”

relation to our appearances, but diachronically active, acting to modify and adjust our appearances in line with our intuitive rationality and our higher-order impressions. Here I would cite Julia Annas' suggestion¹⁰³ that what is natural for us is not merely passive acceptance of our appearances, but 'an active, critical use of them': the modification of our *phantasiai* can plausibly be seen as an activity deriving from the *huphēgēsis phusikē*, inasmuch as this can be taken to include our intuitive rationality and/or our higher-order impressions.

Adopting such an understanding resolves an otherwise quite difficult problem posed by Burnyeat. Burnyeat's worry¹⁰⁴ is that Sextus faces a problem insofar as he wants to treat cases of philosophical appearance as analogous to cases of perceptual illusion. Burnyeat judges this a problem on the basis that in the perceptual cases, assent and impression are logically independent, whereas in the argumentative case, they are not. Burnyeat's mention of 'philosophical appearance' is ambiguous between our type-(2) and type-(3) cases. There are, on the one hand, the cases where I experience something as good, right, appropriate, plausible etc – without any direct mediation by thought¹⁰⁵. There are, on the other hand, the cases where I entertain the propositional consequences of those appearances – where I think to myself, 'that seems good', or 'that appears to be a deep truth about the world'. Now, insofar as Sextus is talking in terms of type-(2) cases, then within the framework of my experience thereof, I 'assent' to them, in a sense¹⁰⁶, and that assent is 'logically' tied to the nature of my

¹⁰³ Annas 1993 p212.

¹⁰⁴ Burnyeat 1980.

¹⁰⁵ Cf esp McDowell 1979 for a developed account of related thoughts about ethics.

¹⁰⁶ Though, I take it, evidently not in the sense specified in *PH* I.13.

impression. However, when I move from that to a type-(3) cognitive state, the ‘logical’ connection is no longer present.

Sextus thus has a plausible way out of Burnyeat’s conundrum, which is to say the following: we are ultimately bound to identify with our type-(2) impressions. There is no way of completely extricating ourselves from them. However, it is quite natural not to identify with type-(3) cognitive states. I identify with my intuitions – they are ‘mine’ – but I very naturally question the explicit thoughts that they prompt. In fact, the whole framework in philosophical, and indeed ordinary, discourse of intuitions and preliminary impressions resembles the scenario Burnyeat imagines as an implausible one, of saying to oneself ‘it is thought within me that *p*, but *I* do not believe that *p*’ (p57). The human cognitive machinery is sufficiently complex that this is neither unnatural nor unintelligible, and Sextus’ account of it is sufficiently rich to appreciate this. On this basis, I reject Burnyeat’s argument that the Sceptic must be especially detached from himself. My suggestion is thus that such ‘seeings-as’, intuitive, emotional and otherwise cognitively complex forms of impression¹⁰⁷, are thought by Sextus to be part of the necessary cognitive equipment of any human being.¹⁰⁸

This idea of a rationally governed redirection of our ways of seeing the world invites parallels with the notions of post-Sceptical inquiry which we find in other Sceptical traditions. In particular, I think that we may compare it to Al-Ghazali’s ‘mystical seeing’, the Buddhist

¹⁰⁷ Including the aforementioned phenomenon of argumentative persuasiveness.

¹⁰⁸ An implication of this, which would be worth exploring further for the purposes of sceptical ethics, is that these *phantasiai* come under the goal of *metriopatheia*, rather than *ataraxia*. This might seem to cause a problem – in what sense, then, can a rationally governed redirection of them yield the reflective endorsement which we found to be constituted in *ataraxia*? I think the answer must be that what is taken to be a moderate (*metrios*) way to experience these *pathe* is likewise reason-governed, and thus the careful adjustment of *metriopatheia* has *ataraxia* as a consequence. This may seem to go against Sextus’ dichotomy in I.26 – but I hope it is still compatible with Sextus’ text.

meditative practices of Nagarjuna's tradition¹⁰⁹, and the philosophy of Zhuangzi¹¹⁰.

Zhuangzi's entire work is devoted to exploring the ways we can know the world when we abandon the rigid and arbitrary *shi-fei* (lit 'this-that' / 'right-wrong') classifications of the Confucians and Mohists. His eccentric array of allegories and parables about knowledge, in pursuit of *wu-zhi*, an elusive kind of knowledge that becomes paradoxical when we try to express it in ordinary language, especially in the *Qi Wu Lun*¹¹¹, strikes me as the most compelling version of a post-Sceptical inquiry such as Sextus might endorse, seeking to reconfigure our way of seeing the world.

¹⁰⁹ Cf esp Flintoff 1980 for extensive commentary on the affinity between Pyrrho and Indian philosophy

¹¹⁰ Perhaps also to Wittgenstein's philosophical explorations – cf esp Pritchard 2011 – but arguing for that parallel would require addressing more difficult interpretive questions, which I am not qualified to answer.

¹¹¹ E.g. esp the famous butterfly-dream, where it is recounted how Zhuang Zhou dreamed he was a butterfly, and then could no longer be certain that he was not a butterfly dreaming that he was a philosopher – or the 'pipes of heaven' passage, where an analogy between the 'pipes of heaven' (hollows, chasms, puddles, pits) and the 'pipes of the human' (nostrils, ears, eyes etc.) is used to motivate doubts about which part of the human body should be seen as 'ruler' (or, in terms of the Hellenistic controversy, *to hēgemonikon*).

§IV. Conclusion

In the history of Scepticism, it is usually the Academic Sceptics who are designated as *bona fide* epistemological pioneers, developing dialectical devices, norms of epistemic modesty (Arcesilaus), and probabilism (Carneades). However, even notwithstanding the misinterpretations this involves¹¹², I think this ignores the powerful and different contributions made by Sextus and the Pyrrhonian Sceptics. What I hope to have shown in this thesis is that there is a unique ideal of a Pyrrhonian sage, a Sceptical ‘rational agent’, just as much as a Stoic or Epicurean *sophos*, and that he is an epistemologically worthy figure, committed to an epistemically worthwhile enterprise, seeking and testing out candidates for a rational inquiry, and thus a rational life. The life of the committed Pyrrhonian Sceptic is indeed a radical reconfiguration of our way of life – but it is not an intellectual disaster or cognitive ‘doomsday bomb’¹¹³. Rather, it is a life which we can to a very great extent reflectively endorse.

By way of a brief postscript, I wish to point from this investigation towards a possible solution to two problems in Sceptical ethics – the problem of Sceptical culture – how can the Sceptic actively and sincerely participate in the development of *technai*, *ethē*, and *nomoi*, i.e. in the *didaskalia technōn* and the *paradosis ethōn kai nomōn* (*PH* I.23-4)? – and the problem of the Sceptic’s robust moral agency – how can the Sceptic resolve difficult moral dilemmas, such as when a tyrant seeks to compel him to do something abhorrent (*M* XI.166)? The solution is to be found, in both cases, in the paradigm of intuitive rationality which we have just discussed. It has the power to explain the possibility of cultural progress, adjustment, and adaptation,

¹¹² It seems unlikely that Arcesilaus and Carneades were anything more than dialectically committed to *to eulogon* and *to pithanon*: cf esp Couissin 1929 and Burnyeat (unpub.), ‘Carneades was no Probabilist’.

¹¹³ Colourful critiques of Scepticism quoted in Groarke 1990.

given the wide range of ordinary methods of reasoning it retains – and, indeed, the connection of Scepticism with medicine shows the natural affinity of this way of describing our cognitive apparatus with accounting for craft-knowledge. Likewise, it has the power to show how the Sceptic can be a robust moral agent, on the basis that so much of her affective equipment remains intact, subject to the norm of *metriopatheaia*, and she still identifies perforce to a great extent with it. But to show this more forcefully would require a further thesis.

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