Curing Through Questioning?

A Cross-Cultural Analysis of Pyrrhonism, Madhyamaka, and their Potential as Philosophical Therapy

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Abstract

This thesis shows what we may learn about ancient Pyrrhonian scepticism, Indian Madhyamaka Buddhism, and their potential as philosophical therapy, by examining the two traditions in conjunction. It aims to accomplish three goals: present a robust comparison of Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka; demonstrate that significant insights may be gained from this juxtaposition; and show that these two traditions challenge current ways of doing philosophy.

The thesis starts by examining the preconditions of fruitful cross-cultural research; it is shown that ascribing too much or too little importance to context (radical relativism and universalism, respectively) is problematic. Previous comparisons of Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka have paid little attention to such methodological considerations, which has led to crucial shortcomings. This is unfortunate, because their remarkable parallels demand a representative, accessible overview. Having laid the necessary foundations, the thesis presents such an overview. A therapeutic framework is employed to systematically compare the two traditions, including their diagnoses of disturbance, their proposed cures, and their promised cured conditions. Such themes allow for systematically outlining their similarities and differences and to limit arbitrariness and bias.

Despite their striking similarities, very few attempts have been made to learn about Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka by studying them in conjunction. This thesis corrects this oversight by demonstrating that such cross-cultural research enables us to shed new light on

persistent ambiguities and allows us to bolster and defend both traditions. For example, it is demonstrated that Madhyamaka can shine a new light on one of the, if not *the* most vexed question regarding Pyrrhonism: what is the scope of suspension of judgment?

Finally, this thesis shows that Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka challenge the practice of philosophy itself. It is demonstrated that contemporary schools of thought akin to Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka may share their therapeutic potential. If so, then certain contemporary philosophies are able to alleviate distress and instil a sense of tranquillity. This means we must expand our understanding of what philosophy can do. After all, if contemporary philosophy can change our experience of the world for the better, it has a much greater potential than is currently believed—both in terms of audience and impact.

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Table of Contents

Abbreviations

Introduction **1**

1 Methodology **7**

1 Why Pyrrhonism & Madhyamaka (Again)? 8
2 The Purview of Cross-Cultural Philosophy 12
2.1 Minimal Context: Universalism 13
2.2 Maximal Context: Radical Relativism 19
2.3 The Middle Way Between Universalism and Radical Relativism 24
3 The Aim of Cross-Cultural Philosophy 25
3.1 Exegetical Projects 26
3.2 Exegetical/Constructive Projects 30
3.3 Constructive Projects 32

2 Contextualizing Pyrrhonism & Madhyamaka **36**

1 Contextual Relations 37
1.1 Buddhism, Abhidharma, Nyāya, Yogācāra 37
1.2 Hellenism, Stoicism, Epicureanism, Academic Scepticism 42
2 Intertextual Relations 45
2.1 Prasaṅgika & Svātantrika 45
2.2 *Against the Ethicists* & *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* 47

3 The Case for a Therapeutic Framework 49
3.1 Understanding Madhyamaka trough a Therapeutic Framework 51
3.2 Understanding Pyrrhonism through a Therapeutic Framework 52
3.2.1 The Role of Inquiry 54
3.2.2 The Role of Tranquillity 55

3 Comparing Pyrrhonism & Madhyamaka 60

1 Disturbance 61
2 Cause 63
2.1 Sources of Disturbance 63
2.2 What Does It Mean to Posit Reality? 68
2.3 Significant Discrepancies 72
3 Cure 74
3.1 Enquiry 75
3.2 Argumentative Form 76
3.2.1 Negation 77
3.2.2 Equipollence and *Catuṣkoṭi* 79
3.3 Arguments 82
3.3.1 The Five Modes of Agrippa 82
3.3.1.1 The Mode of Dispute 84
3.3.1.2 The Mode of Infinite Regress 84
3.3.1.3 The Mode of Relativity 85
3.3.1.4 The Mode of Hypothesis 88
3.3.1.5 The Mode of Reciprocity 89
3.3.2 The Four-Fold Madhyamaka Classification 90
3.3.2.1 Analysis of the Four Ways of Causal Production 90
3.3.2.2 Refutation of the Production from (Non-)Existent 91
3.3.2.3 Argument from Dependent Origination 92
3.3.2.4 Neither One nor Many Argument 94
3.3.3 Unclassified Arguments 94

3.4 Ethic & Religion 96
3.4.1 Compassion 96
3.4.2 Practical Advice 97
3.4.3 Buddhist Doctrines 98
4 Meta-Analysis 100
4.1 Precise Effect of the Cure 101
4.2 Acceptance of the Appearances 105
4.3 Qualifying & Self-Referring Statements 111
4.4 Significant Dissimilarities 116
5 Cured Condition 118
5.1 Tranquillity 118
5.2 Now What? 119
5.3 Qualities of the Realised Person 120
6 Recap & Contrast 122
6.1 Recap 122
6.2 Contrast with Existing Comparisons 124

4 Elucidating Pyrrhonism 127

1 Sceptical Activity as Spiritual Exercise 127
1.1 Enquiry 128
1.2 Setting out Oppositions 131
1.3 Uttering Sceptical Phrases 135
2 The Scope of Scepticism; or Why We Are All Dogmatists 135
2.1 The Foundations of the Debate 136
2.2 The Madhyamaka Case for a Universal Scope 138
2.3 Supporting Arguments for a Universal Scope 145
2.3.1 Context Supports a Universal Scope 145
2.3.2 Limited Scope as Insufficiently Therapeutic 146
2.3.3 Against *hoson epi tō logō* as Restrictive 146
2.3.4 Against Life as Insulated from Philosophy 148

2.3.5 Barnes' Underestimation of Disturbance 149
3 The Role of Relativity 150

5 Elucidating Madhyamaka 154

1 Identifying the Object of Negation 154
1.1 Defending Tsongkhapa 156
1.2 Criticizing Gorampa 159
1.3 Against Understanding Patsab as Pyrrhonian 162
2 (Non-)Pyrrhonian Aspects of Madhyamaka Hermeneutics 163
2.1 Wittgenstein & Madhyamaka Hermeneutics 163
2.2 Understanding Wittgenstein via Pyrrhonism 166
2.3 Understanding Madhyamaka (via Wittgenstein) via Pyrrhonism 168

6 Strengthening Pyrrhonism & Madhyamaka 172

1 Incoherence Objections 173
1.1 Anticipated Incoherence Objections 173
1.2 Burnyeat's Incoherence Objections 174
1.3 Perin's Incoherence Objections 179
2 Liveability Objections 180
2.1 Total Lethargy 180
2.1.1 A Theoretical Defence of Liveability 181
2.1.2 An Empirical Defence of Liveability 184
2.2 The *Homo Insipience* Charge 191
3 Desirability Objections 197
3.1 Epistemic Apathy 197
3.1.1 Draining the Slough 198
3.1.2 Global Deflationism 200
3.2 Ethical Apathy 208

7 Harnessing Findings **217**

1 Making Philosophy Therapeutic Again 218
1.1 Ludwig Wittgenstein 219
1.2 Richard Rorty 222
1.3 Jan Westerhoff 227
1.4 Examples of Contemporary Philosophy as Therapy 229
2 Harnessing Therapeutic Potential 230
2.1 The Middle Way between Irony and Liberalism 231
2.2 Reconsidering the Evidential Role of Intuition 236
2.3 Reconsidering the Role of Philosophy 237
3 A Day in the Life 240

Conclusion **244**

Bibliography **248**

Abbreviations

BCA	Śāntideva, *Bodhicaryāvatāra*
CŚ	Āryadeva, *Catuḥśataka*
M1	Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Grammarians*
M7	Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Logicians I*
M8	Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Logicians II*
M9	Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Physicists I*
M10	Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Physicists II*
M11	Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Ethicists*
MAv	Candrakīrti, *Madhyamakāvatāra*
MAvBh	Candrakīrti, *Madhyamakāvatāra-bhāṣya*
MMK	Nāgārjuna, *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*
PH	Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*
PP	Candrakīrti, *Prasannapadā*
RĀ	Nāgārjuna, *Ratnāvalī*
ŚS	Nāgārjuna, *Śūnyatāsaptati*
VP	Nāgārjuna, *Vaidalyaprakaraṇa*
VV	Nāgārjuna, *Vigrahavyāvartanī*
YṢ	Nāgārjuna, *Yuktiṣaṣṭikā*
YṢV	Candrakīrti, *Yuktiṣaṣṭikā-vṛtti*

Introduction

Pyrrhonian scepticism and Madhyamaka Buddhism offer a profound challenge to the way we understand and engage with the world. They submit everything to sustained questioning and inquiry. In doing so, they show that our understanding of the world does not have the grounding we ordinary take it to have. This may seem to induce a sense of vertigo. However, Pyrrhonists and Mādhyamikas observe that such questioning actually brings about a deep sense of tranquillity. When we stop engaging with the world as if it *really* is the way it appears to be and go along with how things seem to be, we cling less to objects, events, and to ourselves. This means we will be less distressed when we miss out on that new promotion, have our ideological beliefs challenged, or get turned down for that second date. Hence, it seems that the arguments from Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka have the potential to function as philosophical therapy. I want to explore these traditions in more detail, in order to better understand their impact, their potential, and the challenge they present to the contemporary practice of philosophy.

I aim to accomplish three things. First, I want to offer a robust comparison of Pyrrhonian scepticism and Madhyamaka Buddhism. Several comparisons have been made already, but all have crucial shortcomings. This is unfortunate, because the remarkable parallels between

the two traditions demand a representative, accessible overview. Second, despite their striking similarities, very few attempts have been made to learn about Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka by studying them in conjunction. I want to show that there are significant insights to be gained. Such cross-cultural research enables us to shed new light on persistent ambiguities, and it allows us to bolster and defend both traditions. Lastly, I want to show that Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka allow us to challenge (and enrich) the practice of philosophy itself. I will argue that contemporary schools of thought akin to Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka may share their therapeutic potential. If this potential carries over, then certain contemporary philosophies are able to alleviate distress and instil a sense of tranquillity. This means we must expand our understanding of what philosophy can do. After all, if contemporary philosophy can change our experience of the world for the better, it has a much greater potential than is currently believed—both in terms of audience and impact.

I will set about achieving these aims in seven chapters. To ensure that the entire project has a sound methodological basis, my first chapter will examine the preconditions for fruitful cross-cultural research. I will map out different methodological assumptions and argue against the extremes of universalism and radical relativism (ascribing too little and too much importance to context). I will explore what kinds of research can be done between these two ends of the spectrum. This allows me to clarify the assumptions underlying different parts of this thesis. In addition, by mapping out different methodological assumptions, this chapter serves as a systematic overview of the workings of cross-cultural philosophy.

In chapter 2, I will outline my understanding of Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka against their cultural and intellectual backdrops. This helps to avoid reading the traditions through a contemporary Western lens, as warned against in chapter 1. I will also explain my rationale for focussing on Sextus Empiricus on the Greek side, and Nāgārjuna, Candrakīrti, and

Śāntideva, on the Indian side. In addition, I will argue that a pre-defined framework should be used when comparing Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka, and that a therapeutic framework is most apt. Because my first chapter focusses on methodology, it takes a little while before Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka take centre stage. Hence, in order to avoid leaving you in the dark until chapter 2, I would like to briefly introduce them to you here.

Our most complete account of Pyrrhonian scepticism comes from Sextus Empiricus (ca. 200 C.E.). He describes scepticism as "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 equipollence in the opposed objects and accounts, we come first to suspension of judgment (*epochē*) and afterwards to tranquillity (*ataraxia*)" (*PH* 1.8).[1] Note that the Greek term *skeptikoi*, from which the English 'sceptics' derives, means 'those who investigate', rather than 'those who doubt'. Sextus characterizes Pyrrhonists by contrasting them with Academic Sceptics, who dogmatically claim that the true nature of things is wholly unknowable, and with the Dogmatists, who claim to have discovered the true nature of things. Pyrrhonists continue to investigate, and finding no satisfying answers, they are led to suspend belief, which induces the tranquillity they set out to find in the first place. Nevertheless, the Pyrrhonists do accept appearances to which they involuntarily assent, and attending to these appearances they live "in accordance with everyday observances" (*PH* 1.23).

Madhyamaka, initiated by Nāgārjuna (ca. 150 C.E.), is one of the most influential schools of Buddhist philosophy. Mādhyamikas can be characterized by their adherence to the concept of emptiness (*śūnyatā*) which means that they take reality and objects to be empty of 'intrinsic nature (*svabhāva*). Emptiness is a negative concept, best understood according to the notion of the two truths: the *conventional* truth and the *ultimate* truth. Mādhyamikas adopt this notion from the Abhidharma school. The conventional truth entails a common sense understanding of the world; it is constituted by how the world ordinarily appears. The

[1] All *PH* translations are from Annas & Barnes (2000), unless indicated otherwise.

ultimate truth is what is left standing after rigorous philosophical analysis; it is constituted by how things are intrinsically. Madhyamaka is unique in its contention that nothing is left standing after such analysis. No things with intrinsic nature are to be found. Hence, the ultimate truth is *emptiness*; nothing appears to exist ultimately. However, Mādhyamikas do not posit emptiness dogmatically. They hold that emptiness itself is empty, because like almost everything else, emptiness is dependently originated (*pratītyasamutpāda*), which is the notion that all phenomena arise in dependence on causes and conditions.[2] Only individuals who realize the ultimate truth, *śūnyatā,* can relate to the conventional reality appropriately – as being merely conventional.

Having laid the necessary foundations, I will realise my first aim in chapter 3: provide a robust comparison of Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka. I will employ a therapeutic framework to systematically compare the two traditions, including their diagnoses of disturbance, their proposed cures, and their promised conditions after the cure. These themes allow me to systematically outline their similarities and differences and to limit arbitrariness and bias. I will show that their parallels are remarkable, but also warn against imposing any sort of identity on the two traditions. I will harness these similarities and differences in the subsequent three chapters in order to achieve my second aim: demonstrate there are significant insights to be gained from studying Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka in conjunction.

Indeed, in chapter 4, I will demonstrate that Madhyamaka helps us to elucidate troublesome issues within Pyrrhonism. I will show that Madhyamaka practice helps us to conceive of sceptical activities as spiritual exercises, which are aimed at changing our experience of, and way of being in the world. In addition, I will argue that Madhyamaka is able to shine a new light on one of the, if not *the* most vexed question regarding Pyrrhonism: what is the scope of suspension of judgment? Does it encompass all beliefs? Or is it limited to dogmatic

[2] In the Pali canon, *nirvāṇa* is sometimes described as unoriginated (e.g. the *Udāna* 71); and some non-Madhyamaka schools hold that space (*ākāśa*) is not subject to change.

beliefs? With the help of Madhyamaka, I will show that this scope is universal, because everyone suffers from dogmatic beliefs.

In chapter 5, I reverse the analysis, and employ Pyrrhonism to shed light on issues within Madhyamaka. I will show that Sextus can help us better understand the nature of emptiness by offering insights into one of the most famous debates in Tibetan Buddhism: Tsongkhapa and Gorampa's disagreement about what exactly is negated in Madhyamaka analysis. In addition, I will argue that we can recognize 'Pyrrhonian' and 'non-Pyrrhonian' currents within contemporary Madhyamaka scholarship. The former merely problematises dogmatic theories, whilst the latter tries to find non-dogmatic replacements for them. Being able to distinguish the two tendencies helps to clarify where various interpreters disagree and untangle a variety of interpretations.

In chapter 6, I will harness the similarities and differences between the two traditions to bolster and defend their philosophical therapies. I will show that the charges of incoherence, unliveability, and undesirability are misguided or unpersuasive. My responses will draw on contemporary Buddhist practice, global deflationism, and moral phenomenology, amongst others.

Lastly, in chapter 7, I will utilize all previous findings to accomplish my final aim: show that Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka challenge popular ways of practicing philosophy. I will argue that there are several contemporary philosophies akin to Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka, that these contemporary arguments share their transformative potential, and that this potential is currently overlooked. I will show that awareness of this potential allows us to solve specific philosophical problems, such as the tension in Rorty's philosophy between questioning everything (irony) and sincere concern for other people (liberalism). I will also show that recognizing the therapeutic potential of philosophy raises significant problems: it suggests that intuitions can no longer be conceived of as static, which means that they cannot serve as neutral, objective evidence; this is problematic because philosophers have

used intuitions as evidence for centuries, and continue to do so. Finally, paying attention to the therapeutic effects of philosophical arguments suggests that contemporary philosophy may be able to change our way of being in the world for the better. I will offer a brief reflection on how this insight may be implemented in everyday life.

In sum, this project aims to shed new light on, and bolster support for two remarkable philosophical traditions. In addition, Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka reveal a unique opportunity to expand the scope of philosophy: they show that practicing philosophy can have a significant impact on our experience of the world. They offer a way to alleviate dogmatic afflictions and, perhaps, allow us a little more tranquillity.

Chapter 1

Methodology

With a project that spans multiple traditions and disciplines, it is important to be clear about aims, methods, and assumptions. There are many traps we can fall into if we do not tread carefully, like failing to provide standards for good comparative arguments, unduly fitting traditions into familiar categories, and uncritically reconstructing ancient texts. There are as many comparative methodologies as there are comparative projects, so before I can begin, I will need to make clear what methods I will be employing.

I will start by motivating the decision to examine Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka. I will then discuss the two spectra that demarcate most comparative projects, and lie at the root of most methodological debates:

1. How much context is required to do good cross-cultural philosophy? Answers to this question depend on one's affinity with relativism and objectivism.

2. To what extent does cross-cultural philosophy aim at *understanding* another philosophical tradition, *advancing* philosophy through cross-tradition engagement, or a combination of both?

When discussing the first spectrum, I will argue against going too far down the relativist or objectivist side. Instead, I suggest we engage with non-Western traditions dialectically. The second spectrum allows me to outline what kinds of research may be undertaken in this way. That enables me to pinpoint what positions different sections of this thesis occupy.

1: Why Pyrrhonism & Madhyamaka (Again)?

The striking parallels between Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka have garnered an increasing amount of attention during the last 50 years. According to Dreyfus and Garfield, "There is much to be said for reading Madhyamaka in the context of Western Pyrrhonean skepticism" (2011, 115); they remark on "the fruitfulness of this particular cross-cultural juxtaposition," and note that "this juxtaposition is not only a way to get a better understanding of Madhyamaka: It also sheds new light on the possibilities and tensions within Greek skepticism" (ibid.).

Indeed, the remarkable parallels have been long noted, with Conze claiming that, "The European system nearest to the Mādhyamikas is that of the Greek Skeptics" (1963, 15). Flintoff (1980) and McEvilley (1982) significantly expand upon the parallels that Conze identified, and Nussbaum suggests that Eastern traditions provide many empirical examples of the life that Sextus advocates (1994, 312). Kuzminski produced the first book-length survey, finding Madhyamaka, "the Eastern school most similar to Pyrrhonism" (2008, 35). Neale (2014) set out to correct the lack of systematicity in these efforts by going through each topic Sextus discusses and identifying parallels in Madhyamaka literature.

The well-documented parallels of Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka are all the more tantalizing because of the possibility that they derive from the same source: Pyrrho visited India. Diogenes Laertius (ca 225 CE) suggests that:

> [Pyrrho] joined Anaxarchus, whom he accompanied on his travels everywhere so that he even forgathered with the Indian *Gymnosophists* and with the *Magi*. This led him to adopt a most noble philosophy, to quote Ascanius of Abdera, taking the form of agnosticism and suspension of judgement. He denied that anything was honourable or dishonourable, just or unjust. And so, universally, he held that there is nothing really existent, but custom and convention govern human action (9.11).

Though Diogenes Laertius is not the most reliable historian, evidence from Sextus and Plutarch corroborates that Pyrrho went to India with Alexander (Bett 2000, 169). The important question is whether the parallels between Sextus and Nāgārjuna ultimately spring from this encounter. Unfortunately, this is virtually impossible to establish. First, Pyrrho must have actually learned from the Indian sages. Bett is sceptical of this possibility and questions whether the Greeks or the Indians possessed sufficient linguistic skills to transmit such a counter-intuitive philosophy (ibid, 178). There is evidence of bilingual communities and important individuals in India, however, suggesting that language need not have been an absolute hurdle (Neale 2014, 201). Furthermore, in order to trace Sextus' and Nāgārjuna's ideas to this encounter, the *gymnosophists* that Pyrrho met must have been early Buddhists. This is questionable too (Batchelor 2016). Finally, even if Pyrrho got his ideas from Indians, and even if they were from early Buddhists, the philosophy of Pyrrho and early Buddhism differs significantly from that of Sextus and Nāgārjuna, respectively. The latter are more anti-dogmatic and careful to eschew any commitment to the way things are, compared to the former (I will expound on this in section 2.2). These discrepancies are unsurprising given they lived many centuries later. Overall, this means that the data for a direct historical link between Sextus and Nāgārjuna is simply inconclusive.

Looking at these two traditions in conjunction *again* is important because, so far, few lessons have been drawn from their juxtaposition, beyond highlighting the parallels. Neale, Mills, and Garfield (and Dreyfus) have made promising starts, but they are insufficiently systematic and almost exclusively use Pyrrhonism to better understand Madhyamaka.

Even on the strictly comparative side, there is still work to be done. Whilst Neale's (2014) remarkable account is comprehensive and highly systematic, it is also decontextualized, paying little attention to how the content of the texts depends on their intellectual and cultural context. It also pays little attention to the diversity of Madhyamaka thought, citing any text that shows a parallel, occasionally even drawing parallels from Yogācāra sources (e.g., 2014, 12) to support his thesis that Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka would recognize each other as undertaking a similar project. He finds that between 60% and 75% of Sextus' claims and arguments are shared by Madhyamaka (ibid., 152-156; 191). This finding is less astounding given the vastness of Madhyamaka literature, which also contains *many* ideas not found in Pyrrhonism. Thus, the analogy he sets out is *formal* rather than *relational* (I will discuss later why this is problematic), and he spends little time considering significant dissimilarities. Finally, the conclusion that Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka would identify each other as undertaking the same project "on almost all criteria," should be qualified. The Pyrrhonist is not given the opportunity to consider what they think about rebirth, compassion, or a Buddha's supposed lack of any cognitive states. Furthermore, whilst ascribing a single position to Pyrrhonism is understandable (though not uncontroversial) given the almost exclusive focus on Sextus Empiricus, this does not work for Madhyamaka. Neale himself says of Mādhyamikas that there is little evidence they "ever considered themselves to be a single philosophical school," suggesting there may be "little beyond the name 'Madhyamaka' that unites them" (ibid., fn. 421). It is then odd to ascribe one position (i.e. that Pyrrhonism is identifiable as the same project as Madhyamaka) to such a heterogenous collection of thinkers. Thus, whilst Neale's thesis is a remarkable piece of

scholarship and an invaluable resource, there is still much work to be done, both comparatively as well as philosophically.

To compare the two traditions in their entirety is beyond the scope of this (and probably any) project. I will take Sextus Empiricus as the representative of Pyrrhonism, and Nāgārjuna, Candrakīrti, and Śāntideva as the representatives of Madhyamaka (for a defence of these choices, see chapter 2). Even within these restrictions, there are many topics that could serve as a focal point, such as epistemic justification, causality, and self-refutation. Instead, I will focus on the therapeutic dimension of these traditions (in which the above topics do play important roles). One of the virtues of comparative philosophy is that it forces us to reflect on the nature of philosophy itself. And it appears that better understanding the therapeutic (if not soteriological) history of philosophy could challenge contemporary assumptions the most. In other words, I hope this project will force us to rethink mainstream contemporary philosophy by showing the therapeutic potential of philosophical arguments.

A brief note on terminology: I will be using the term 'cross-cultural philosophy' throughout my thesis (though 'comparative' and 'intercultural' would have been apt too). I will use this term to refer to any kind of philosophizing where two or more culturally distinct traditions are being engaged. (I shall not hazard to qualify 'cultural distinctness' – I take it as uncontroversial that ancient Pyrrhonism, contemporary philosophy, and Madhyamaka Buddhist philosophy are culturally distinct). Note that this definition encompasses a lot of the work that has been traditionally done in the history of philosophy. Therefore, whenever I refer to 'non-Western' (or 'other') traditions, this encompasses distinct *historical* traditions too. And likewise, whenever I refer to 'Western' (or 'our') tradition, this should be understood as referring to *contemporary* Western thought.

2: The Purview of Cross-Cultural Philosophy

The most significant debate regarding cross-cultural methodology is how much context is necessary to do cross-cultural philosophy well.[3] By context, I mean all factors external to a text that may be required to understand its meaning, including historical, cultural, linguistic, conceptual, and intertextual factors. Determining the level of context required to do cross-cultural philosophy determines the boundaries within which cross-cultural projects can take place. This debate is set against the larger objectivism-relativism discussion: is there some permanent ahistorical matrix that can be used to understand philosophical notions such as rationality, knowledge, and reality; or must these concepts be understood as relative to a specific conceptual scheme, theoretical framework, or form of life (Bernstein 1983, 8)? If we can understand philosophical notions independent of context, this implies there is an independent, objective framework that we can appeal to. If maximum context is required to understand such notions, this implies that they can only be understood relative to the frameworks they are embedded in.

The debate regarding context (and the larger objectivism-relativism debate) is usually set-up as a dichotomy. Often, this is then dramatically revealed to be a false dichotomy: both positions are exposed as undesirable.[4] I think it is more helpful to consider the debate as a spectrum from the outset, and examine what set of assumptions are helpful or detrimental when doing cross-cultural philosophy. I will argue against going too far down either the objectivist or the relativist path. Doing so will end in 'universalism' and 'radical relativism' respectively, which are undesirable, in part because they share some problematic presuppositions. Instead, and in line with Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka, I will argue for a dialectical approach to the ideas and traditions under consideration. Thus, this section aims to establish the boundaries in which cross-cultural philosophy can successfully operate.

[3] See for example Ma & Brakel (2016), Chakrabarti & Weber (2016), and Connolly (2015).
[4] See for example Ma & Brakel (2016) and Bernstein (1983)

2.1: Minimal Context: Universalism

The further down the objectivist side of the spectrum we go, the less important context becomes. General frameworks, rather than historical and cultural ones, become the primary means of making sense of concepts and ideas. For instance, arguments that Buddhist ethics should be understood as consequentialist presume that 'consequentialism' is a category that can, to some extent, be effectively employed cross-culturally. At some point, this preference for generality morphs into universalism: the idea that we can understand ideas according to some universal, independent scheme that is, in theory, discernible independent of context. Such a scheme is then considered sufficient to discover the meaning of a text. This can be explicit, such as Robinson's conviction that Nāgārjuna is best understood once we formalize his arguments (1972), which suggests that formal logic constitutes a universal language in which meaning can be expressed; or it can be implicit, when non-Western traditions are uncritically explained according to Western categories, which implies that those categories are context transcended. Indeed, most often, universalism creeps in when we read another text without being aware we do so according to our own categories and concepts, which means that we think we are doing so from an independent, value-neutral standpoint.

Presuming such a universal framework is undesirable. It is unclear what could ground such a framework; it presumes that reason can free itself of bias and tradition; it invites unjust distortion of texts and prevents us from learning from them; and it relies on a fixed conception of meaning as well as on scheme/reality dualism.

A universal framework requires a firm foundation, even if we postulate it implicitly. The most likely candidate for such a foundation is something that humans share across all contexts: our biological makeup. As humans, our embodiedness and embeddedness in the world suggests that we will share certain concepts or responses that flow from our physical make-up and its response to external factors. However, the physical anatomy of humans is incredibly diverse – sex, sight, and sensations all exist on a spectrum. Further, the

commonalities established by biology are often minimal: even though some emotions, such as fear and empathy, have played an important role in evolution, how and when these feelings are experienced now is almost entirely a matter of culture. Indeed, the idea that we can generalize from the adaptive problems of our ancestors to our own general psychological make-up today is wrought with problems. For one thing, the more specific (and thus useful) supposed adaptive problems are postulated, the more speculative they become. Thus, the idea that our biology provides us with a universal framework to make sense of the world is problematic.

Furthermore, even if we could ground such a universal framework, employing it to make sense of other traditions requires the ability to purge our reason of any kind of bias. However, as Sellars and others have shown, we necessarily make sense of the world according to our learned categories. When processing information there is always a selection process going on regarding what is relevant and what is irrelevant for our current purposes. For instance, reading necessarily involves ascribing significance to certain passages, arguments, or implications. Summarizing would be impossible without this process. Moreover, to qualify something as significant we must already be in possession of principles which allow us to make those kinds of judgments. Not only that; we must have a scheme in place that identifies and categorizes the entities that we can ascribe significance to. It goes without saying that such schemes are not value neutral. How we understand a text is determined by what is salient to us, and what is salient to us is determined by our cultural and intellectual background. This goes for philosophers as much as for everyone else. Weber and Chakrabarti go as far as suggesting that: "The specialist of Plato cannot but come to completely Platonize the *Analects* or the *Arthaśāstra with* the disastrous but necessary consequence of presenting Confucius or Kautilya and as a deficient version of Plato" (2016, 9).

Tuck (1990) provides a striking history of our inability to separate ourselves from our conceptual backdrop. He shows how the shifting philosophical vogue in Europe determines how Nāgārjuna is interpreted. When Kant and idealism were the dominant intellectual forces, Western interpreters were concerned with parallels between the noumena/phenomena distinction and the theory of the two truths. When analytic philosophy was dominant, scholars turned to systematizing the logic in the *MMK*. Nowadays, later Wittgenstein is used as the main framework for understanding Nāgārjuna (see chapter 5:2.1). As Tuck emphasizes, trying to make sense of different ideas according to the conceptual tools available to us is inevitable – and not necessarily problematic. Having some sort of conceptual apparatus is necessary for even starting to begin to understand other traditions. And we can still consider new interpretations progress, by virtue of understanding why the previous interpretation was considered persuasive, and why it is not considered persuasive now. However, it does mean that the presumption of a universal framework according to which we can understand different traditions is unrealistic.

Moreover, though some level of conceptual imposition is inevitable, it becomes pernicious if we are not aware of it. And as Tuck points out, "There is no shortage of authors who seem to feel that their particular interpretive standpoint is absolute: that they are answering universal questions in serene, unconditioned objectivity" (1990, 97). If we fail to be reflective, such an approach leads to a detrimental imposition of our own framework. For instance, Schopenhauer uses the Indian and Christian saints to establish the ubiquity of 'negation of the will to life'. He writes, "The two have exactly the same strivings and inner lives, despite such fundamentally different dogmas, customs, and environments" (2010, 416). If we can learn anything from such arguments, it is Schopenhauer's agenda, rather than an understanding of Indian saints (as if that is a single category). This shackles our ability to learn from the text, because we fit it into categories that we presume or like to be universal. It means we overemphasize those notions that are similar to our own and underappreciate ideas and beliefs that are strange relative to our own. Universalism allows

one to remain comfortably within one's own categories. Thus, assuming universalism is more likely to lead to an interpretation of a text that strongly reflects our own categories, rather than to an opportunity to learn from our differences.

This becomes even more problematic when we take power relations into account: if there is a dominant philosophical worldview, it means that other philosophies will be understood according to their categories. Given the West's dominant position, there is currently an asymmetry where non-Western traditions are read and taught according to foreign frameworks. This is not because Western philosophical categories are simply more universal: *sensus divinitatis* or *eidetic reduction* make little sense outside a Western context, whereas Indian discussions of *pramāṇas* (epistemic instruments) are widely applicable. Believing Western categories to be universal, rather than historically contingent, supports this inequality. It invites us to see the ubiquity of Western categories as evidence of their superiority, rather than as part of historical processes. In this way universalism encourages epistemic injustice. Indeed, the inequality makes different traditions more likely to employ outside categories to understand themselves – a process called 'intellectual colonization' (Wiredu 1998).

Now, universalism in comparative philosophy is not only undesirable because it is difficult to ground, impossible to achieve, and conducive to epistemic injustice – it also relies on some controversial philosophical assumptions: a fixed account of meaning, and scheme/reality dualism. (Spoiler alert: radical relativism presumes these too).

Universalism presumes a fixed account of meaning: if we approach a text thinking we can articulate its meaning in terms of some universal language or categories (say formal logic), we presume that meaning is something determinate, waiting to be identified. It is to be confident that one has the tools to decide whether the renowned duck-rabbit is in fact a duck or a rabbit. This suggests meaning is out there, self-enclosed, waiting to be discovered independent of the interaction between the text and the interpreter. Such an approach to

meaning is problematic when we look at what is actually going on when we translate and interpret.

Quine (1960) devised a thought experiment that shows that two 'field linguists' observing the same verbal behaviour of speakers of a completely unfamiliar language may come back with very different translation manuals, both of which are equally supported by empirical evidence. This means that there is a level of indeterminacy in our translation; meaning is not something fixed that can be discerned objectively. As Quine puts it, "What the indeterminacy thesis is meant to bring out is that the radical translator is bound to impose about as much as he discovers" (1992, 49). Davidson (1999) expands this analysis from translation to interpretation. He notes that when translating from scratch, the other's beliefs and desires (in addition to their utterances) are also unknown. However, in order to discern what certain words mean, we must suppose they are related to the speaker's beliefs and desires. And the interpreter can only access these via the speaker's utterances. Hence, in order to interpret what the other is saying, we must presuppose that their beliefs, desires, and utterances hang together in a reasonable manner. This means that in ascribing meaning to a single utterance, the interpreter must rely on a general theory of how the speaker's over-all language hangs together. Davidson notes that multiple theories may present equally persuasive pictures of this over-all hanging together, akin to Quine's indeterminacy of meaning. For Quine this meant that there is 'no fact of the matter' when it comes to saying what speakers mean. Davidson does not think that there are no meanings because there are no determinate meanings. Instead, he replaces the picture of meaning as correspondence between the bits of meaning and verbal expressions with a picture where meaning is partly constituted by the set of true beliefs and desires that the interpreter attributes to the speaker. Other sets of attributions, other theories of meaning, may work equally well. There is no more of an objective basis for choosing one theory of meaning over another than there is for preferring the Fahrenheit to the Celsius scale for temperature. Thus, we cannot presume that meaning is something fixed, independent of the interpreter, waiting to be

discovered. Universalism fails to recognize that the interpreter plays an integral part in constituting meaning.

Furthermore, universalism relies on the scheme/reality distinction: it presumes that a language or framework is universal either by virtue of being shared by everyone, or by virtue of being independent of any particular scheme. We have already seen that it is impossible to neutralize the impact of our conceptual apparatus. Davidson (1974) further argues that it does not make sense to distinguish between reality on the one hand (the content) and schemes for conceptualizing reality on the other (the scheme). The scheme/reality distinction presumes that we can give meaning to whatever lies outside all conceptual schemes. However, this is problematic. If we take the scheme/reality distinction seriously, we must accept that what counts as a fact (or even existence) will be decided internally, only by the criteria available within the given conceptual scheme. Thus, we cannot coherently distinguish between scheme and reality from within a scheme. In addition, imposing an organising principle between the mind and the world introduces an intermediary that prevents us from holding directly unto the world. Consequently, "idealism, reductionist forms of empiricism, and skepticism loom" (Davidson 1989, 43).

Lastly, Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka themselves raise concerns regarding universalism. As we have seen, universalism implies that the meaning of things is fixed, independent of the observer, and that we are confident we can uncover it. However, Sextus is sceptical about the possibility of discovering what things are like independently and by nature. Indeed, he employs cultural diversity to try and free us of such notions (e.g., *PH* 1.145-163). Likewise, one of the extremes that Nāgārjuna's middle way avoids is *śāśvata dṛṣṭi*, usually translated as 'eternalism', the idea that things can exist absolutely and independently. Hence, universalism does not sit well with Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka either.

In conclusion, there are significant problems associated with underestimating the role of context in comparative philosophy. Believing that we can understand ideas independently of

the culture they are embedded in presupposes an untenable universal framework. Thus, our first demarcation excludes projects that are so far down the objectivist spectrum they fall into universalism.

2.2: Maximal Context: Radical Relativism

We saw that it is important to be aware of our own cultural context as well as of the context of the ideas we are investigating. If we move down the relativist side of the spectrum, these contextual concerns become increasingly important. Linguistic, historical, and cultural frameworks become the primary means to make sense of concepts and ideas. Take, for instance, the observation that Pyrrhonian suspension of judgement cannot be properly understood without the backdrop of Stoic epistemology. Gaber and Ayers go as far as to suggest that:

> Commentators in the analytic tradition in particular, writing very much out of their own philosophical interests and preconceptions, have often lost sight of the complex context in which philosophy was written. In doing so, they not only have distorted its achievements but also have often denied themselves the tools necessary for the interpretation of the very words and sentences they continue to expound (1998, 3-4).

At some point, this preference for particularity morphs into *radical relativism*: the idea that different traditions can only be understood from 'within' their specific frameworks. We can uncover the meaning of a text only if we 'go native', fully embedding ourselves in the relevant context. This means that we would not be able to understand ideas embedded within frameworks that differ radically from our own, nor would we be able to communicate effectively with people operating within such frameworks. Perhaps the most famous example is the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, which broadly suggests that linguistic categories

limit and determine cognitive and conceptual categories. In other words, language determines the way people understand and experience the world.

As sensible as this idea may seem after our rejection of universalism, it too is wrought with problems. Radical relativism renders comparative philosophy impossible; it assumes that cultures are discrete, static, coherent entities; and it assumes that meaning is fixed and that we can separate out the objective and subjective aspects of our understanding.

If we accept that ideas and arguments are wholly determined by their context, we could never enter into dialogue with thinkers whose context we do not share. As long as our conceptual apparatus is that of Western philosophers, rather than that of a 2nd century, North-Indian, Buddhist monastic, we will fail to understand Nāgārjuna. At best we engage in ignorant distortion, at worst we engage in intellectual imperialism. (In fact, the same would go for other Indian Madhyamaka thinkers, such as Candrakīrti, whose historical context is separated from Nāgārjuna's by 400 years.) Any consideration of what Nāgārjuna could teach us would necessarily involve imposition of foreign concepts, and therefore a misrepresentation of what he actually meant. However, requiring maximal context for understanding different traditions exoticizes and fossilizes them. Rather than imposing a foreign *universal* framework, we are now imposing a foreign *dichotomous* one. For instance, in the case of Madhyamaka, Stafford Betty argues that philosophers neglect the centrality of soteriology in the Madhyamaka system and so fail to appreciate the unapologetically 'mystical' nature of texts like the *MMK*. This implies that Eastern thought is inherently 'mystical' and Western thought inherently 'rational', and that this dichotomy is self-evident, which is clearly problematic. Such exoticizing is incongruent with how Tibetan and Indian philosophers showed respect for one another: "They commented upon and argued with one another" (Cowherds 2016, 620).

Furthermore, the notion that a tradition can only be made sense of from 'within' presumes that it makes sense to differentiate between an 'outside' and an 'inside' of a tradition. It

presumes that there is some kind of mechanism that fixes these boundaries and thereby their meanings. However, the notion of hermetically sealed traditions that developed in parallel is largely a historical fiction. As Edelglass and Garfield point out:

> Communication between Greek, Persian, and Indian philosophical communities was commonplace. Early European philosophy owes much to Islamic philosophy, as it does to Roman and Greek philosophy, traditions in turn influenced by Persia and India. East Asian philosophy is informed by Buddhism, Confucianism, and other views that spread along the Silk Road; and goods brought from China to the Middle East and Europe were surely accompanied by diverse ideas and cultural practices (2011, 4).

Feyerabend concurs and suggests that radical relativism, "flounders because one 'stage' or 'form of life' blurs into another. Most groups, societies, traditions not only interact, they are built for interaction" (1999, 127). Furthermore, the notion that ideas should be understood from within their cultural context suggests that their content is fixed and homogeneous. However, an integral part of cultures is challenging the norms and frameworks that govern discourse. Ideas and concepts are part of ongoing cultural transformations. Frameworks are not simply impressed on passive entities – enculturation is an interactive process, with people challenging and changing how they understand ideas. This also means that cultures are heterogeneous, which suggests that ideas are never part of simply one framework. Thus, the notion that ideas can only be made sense of from within a certain framework ignores that such frameworks overlap, change, are blurry, and are continually challenged.

Even if cultures could develop in complete isolation (and be internally coherent), we would still not be able to pinpoint the exact meaning of their ideas. Just as in the case of universalism, this presupposes that meanings are fixed. To quote Wang, it presumes that the text is "self-enclosed, its meaning is self-contained, and as such its propositional content is self-determinate, simply there to be discovered independent of the communication process

between the author and the interpreter" (2018, 566). However, we saw that this is not how meaning works: to be even able to begin interpreting, we must suppose the other tradition operates according to a set of true beliefs and desires that allow *us* to make sense of it. Understanding requires presuppositions. Radical relativism fails to recognize that, even with complete understanding of context, meaning cannot be constituted independent of an interpreter.

Furthermore, the suggestion that ideas can only be understood from within their conceptual framework implies that ideas in sufficiently different frameworks will simply be unintelligible to us. Davidson (1974) shows that this notion is incoherent. His famous argument from translation purports to show that we cannot interpret others as *both* operating within a conceptual scheme *and* as being massively different from ourselves. To be able to recognize others as operating within a conceptual scheme, we must be able to recognize them as using language. This means that we must know they are actually saying something (rather than just randomly grunting), which requires that we are able to ascertain some of their meanings (how else to distinguish them from random grunts). This in turn requires us to be able to translate some of their sounds into our language. To translate their utterances, we need to ascribe to them various beliefs, desires, and ways of connecting mental elements. Such ascription presupposes that there are commonalities in our way of being in the world. And this means that their conceptual scheme is not entirely different from our own. Hence, we can only conceive of completely different conceptual schemes if they are in fact not completely different. In other words, the notion of conceptual schemes entirely different from our own is simply inconceivable. This means that a key presumption of radical relativism, that some ideas can only be understood from within their own conceptual framework, is problematic. It implies that there may be frameworks that are completely different from our own, which is untenable. In order to recognize another tradition as a tradition, a text as a text, we must presuppose some commonalities. Thus, the idea that understanding can only happen purely from 'within' is unpersuasive.

Lastly, radical relativism would not be condoned by Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka. Their approaches are heavily context dependent. They do not set out new philosophical theories but respond to any such philosophical theory. Indeed, in the case of Madhyamaka, there is famously no master argument against *svabhāva.* This is because the formulation of their arguments depends on specific theories that postulate or imply *svabhāva*. Westerhoff (2014) suggests that this goes for Madhyamaka as a whole: how we interpret Madhyamaka should be relative to the ideas they are responding to. In fact, Ganeri (2014) argues that locking texts into their context would be incongruent with how the ancient Indians treated texts generally. Indeed, commentaries are their main medium for philosophy. They mediate between the text and a given readership, which allows those readers to engage philosophically with the text being commented upon. As Ganeri suggests, "it brings the past to the present" (2014, 102). Similarly, understandings of Pyrrhonism cannot be constrained relative to a single context. Sextus' method of opposition requires a case-by-case approach. As Williams suggests: "[Pyrrhonism's] generality consists in the sceptic's willingness to apply his method of opposition to whatever knowledge-claims anyone has thought fit to make" (1988, 559). Thus, for both Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka, their dialectical aims do not allow for restricting their projects to a single context.

In sum, I have demonstrated that attributing too little and too much importance to context is problematic. Doing so will lead to the extremes of universalism and radical relativism. They both assume that meaning is something fixed, waiting out there for us to discover it, and that we can coherently distinguish between scheme and reality. This is problematic because understanding is necessarily conceptualized – it is a pre-condition for even beginning to interpret. Cogent cross-cultural philosophy does not rely on these assumptions.

2.3: The Middle Way between Universalism and Radical Relativism

I have demonstrated what philosophical approaches are undesirable, but I have not yet outlined what approaches we should consider instead. If we want to avoid universalism and radical relativism, we should take the interaction between interpreter and what is interpreted seriously. Gadamer's hermeneutics exemplifies this approach: he defends a dialectical model of meaning. I will explain the foundations of this approach here, and then explain what kinds of research this allows for in the next section.

A dialectical approach accepts that interpreters must rely on their conceptual frameworks to generate meaning whilst taking care not to superimpose such frameworks arbitrarily or unjustly. As Wang puts it: "the meaning of a text can only be determined and contextualized through a dynamic interaction and transaction between the text and the reader's participation through the process of understanding. Understanding must be conceived as a part of the process" (2018, 572). The interpreter must be open-minded, listening, and participating with the other tradition so that it can 'speak' to them. This means that we must be open to revising our interpretation in light of insights derived from the encounter. As Beaney explains, "[this] helps us become aware of preconceptions we had in approaching the text that may need correcting" (Beaney 2019, 749). For instance, the soteriological dimension of Madhyamaka philosophy may initially strike one as undesirably religious; however, reflecting on this different way of doing philosophy may then highlight the absence of phenomenological considerations in analytic philosophy, or the continuing centrality of Christianity in philosophy curricula.

Gadamer explains the set of our preconceptions as a 'horizon': this highlights the perspectival nature of understanding as well as its limitedness. He emphasizes that our horizons are neither fixed nor discrete: "Just as the individual is never simply an individual because he is always in understanding with others, so too *the closed horizon that is supposed to enclose a culture is an abstraction*" (1975/2014, 315). Gadamer rejects the idea that

understanding involves stepping out of one's own horizon and into another. Rather, understanding is signified by the 'fusion of horizons'. This approach conceives of the relation of the self and other dialectically. It rejects the picture of the self and the other as ultimately distinct and fixed. Precisely by ceasing our tendency to reify conceptual frameworks our horizons can fuse with one another, and we can gain understanding.

This dialectical approach is also most consistent with Pyrrhonism and Buddhism. It does not suppose that meaning arises from fixed entities, from how things are by nature. Letting go of the idea that meaning is encapsulated in a specific context or available universally is a necessary precondition for interpretation. This is reminiscent of Nāgārjuna's observation that positing the intrinsic nature of things would mean that nothing could act in the world, because everything would be entirely independent (*MMK* 1.10). This approach is also in line with Pyrrhonism: both eschew the idea that we are discovering what things are by nature (universalism), or that such understanding is per definition impossible (radical relativism). In the next section I will examine how this dialectal approach may be implemented.

3: The Aim of Cross-Cultural Philosophy

This section has two purposes: first, to provide a basic overview of the kinds of cross-cultural research we can do when we avoid universalism and radical relativism and instead engage with non-Western traditions dialectically; second, to make clear what parts of this thesis engage with what kind of cross-cultural philosophy.[5]

It will be helpful to explain the different kinds of cross-cultural research according to the different *aims* of philosophy. This results in a range of possible projects that maps roughly unto the context-spectrum. Projects that pay more attention to context and situatedness

[5] Whilst this outline will represent most kinds of cross-cultural philosophy, it is not exhaustive. It does not discuss projects that *survey* a range of philosophical traditions, nor projects that *enact* the insights of one tradition in another.

tend to be informative. They help us make sense of a philosophical tradition, text, or thinker. In other words, they are *exegetical*. Projects that pay less attention to context, and more to general ideas, tend to aim for philosophical problem solving. Such projects employ Non-Western ideas to help Western philosophers think through their concerns, or they articulate these ideas in such a way that they can contribute to our discourse. In other words, they are *constructive*. These provisional labels (from Connolly 2015) are helpful, because they provide an entry-point for making sense of the possible range of comparative projects.

Like the objectivism-relativism debate, the exegesis-construction debate is often presented as a dichotomy.[6] I hope it will become clear that such dichotomous labels are overly reductive, not in the least because they are not mutually exclusive. Constructive cross-cultural philosophy still requires we grapple with the meaning of non-Western texts, in order to learn from them. And exegetical work does not simply extract meaning from a text: to be able to interpret, we must attribute some level of similarity; in other words, there is always a level of construction involved.

3.1: Exegetical Projects

One of the objectives of cross-cultural philosophy is to best understand the tradition or text under consideration. Exegesis always requires careful consideration of philology, history, culture, and related texts. I trust section 2 has demonstrated the importance of these traditional resources. My focus here will be on *analogical* reasoning, the process whereby we transpose information from one system to another; this is the mechanism that enables us to make observations about Pyrrhonism by drawing on Madhyamaka, and vice versa. I will argue that analogical reasoning can serve to clarify a text, reveal interpretative possibilities, and support specific interpretations.

[6] See, for example, Connolly (2015) and Beaney (2019).

Before outlining what doing cross-cultural philosophy exegetically can accomplish, I want to make clear what it *does not* accomplish. Namely, establishing authorial intent. I think it would be too presumptuous to believe that Sextus' work can reveal Nāgārjuna's psychological make-up (or vice versa).[7] Not only that, but the quest for authorial intent relies on some problematic assumptions. It implies that the author's psychological state somehow fixes the meaning of the text. The idea that we can uncover such a meaning not only presumes a problematic fixed account of meaning; it also presupposes that understanding intent amounts to understanding the text. However, the idea that all there is to know about a text is its author's intentions implies that people are able to completely understand themselves, their biases, and their place in history. This is questionable, because our intentions are informed by our ideology, economic system, and unconscious biases; and as participants in these systems, we are unable to step outside of them and fully understand how they impact us. Furthermore, attempting to discern authorial intent often is nothing more than making sense of a text. Frequently there is little extratextual evidence to inform us about the psychological make-up of an ancient author, in which case they offer little help with interpreting the text. This is definitely the case with Sextus and Nāgārjuna, which means that, "our only access to authorial intent is textual, and so as interpreters of a tradition, we should focus not on the psychology of unknown authors, but on the meanings of the words in front of us" (Garfield 2015, 325).

Now, let's focus on what doing comparative philosophy exegetically *can* offer: clarity, hypotheses, and evidence. For this, I will focus on analogical reasoning. Adapting Bartha (2019) and Wylie (1985), I will understand this as a cognitive process by which the perceived similarity between two systems is utilized to transpose information from the one to the other. We have already seen that *any* interpretation requires analogical reasoning: to

[7] If only because up to four Nāgārjuna's have been distinguished: Lindtner (1982, 2 n.12); Walser (2005, 69, 75-79); Eliade (1969, 415-416). Cf. see Yün-Hua (1970).

even begin understanding a different tradition, we must categorize it in the way that makes most sense to us.

Now, firstly, we can employ analogical reasoning to harness the information from one tradition to *clarify* ideas in another tradition. For instance, Westerhoff (2016) uses the western distinction between ontological and epistemological anti-foundationalism to clarify the target of Madhyamaka's various critiques of *svabhāva.* In restructuring Madhyamaka arguments, he draws on analogical Western categories to help us better understand what is going on.[8] I will use this approach to clarify contemporary Madhyamaka hermeneutics by identifying 'Pyrrhonian' and 'non-Pyrrhonian' tendencies in chapter 5.

Secondly, we can use analogical reasoning to generate hypotheses, which can then be further evaluated by textual and contextual evidence. For example, looking at the context of certain Madhyamaka arguments makes clear that they are best understood practically: repeated practice of these arguments changes our experience of the world. Given that there are similar arguments in Pyrrhonism, we can hypothesize they play a similar role. We can then look at the text and context to see if this holds up. In other words, looking at different traditions in conjunction can open up interpretative possibilities.[9] This is exactly what I will do in chapter 2:1.

Thirdly, I want to argue that cross-cultural philosophy, by virtue of analogical reasoning, can provide *evidence* for a certain way of understanding a text. In particular, I want to use characteristics of Madhyamaka to support specific interpretations of Pyrrhonism and vice versa. This requires drawing *analogical inferences*. I will follow Wylie in understanding these as "the selective transposition of information from source to subject on the basis of a comparison that, fully developed, specifies how the 'terms' compared are similar, different,

[8] Another example is Dreyfus and Garfield (2011) employing the difference between Pyrrhonian and Academic scepticism to clarify the notoriously vexed distinction between Prasaṅgika and Svātantrika Madhyamaka.
[9] Examples of this are Garfield & Priest (2003), and Slingerland (2004).

or of unknown likeness" (1985, 93). Now, such inferences are rarely (explicitly) employed in philosophical exegesis.[10] Though Wylie is a philosopher, her definition is part of a discussion regarding the role of analogy in archaeology, which relies on analogical reasoning to interpret remote traditions. Both philosophers and archaeologists deal with underdetermination: multiple interpretations can fit the available evidence. In the case of the philosopher, this evidence is textual, in the case of the archaeologists it is material. Examining how archaeologists employ analogical reasoning to mitigate underdetermination shows how we may do so in philosophy.

In "The Reaction Against Analogy," Wylie famously demonstrates that any attempt to do archaeology without analogy ultimately fails, or inadvertently continues to rely on analogical reasoning. Though she does not refer to Gadamer or Davidson, her characterisation of the mechanism by which analogical reasoning operates is very similar to their characterisation of interpretation. Wylie argues that inferences about the past are irreducibly analogical. Recognitions of significance are determined by our conceptual background: "Causal and functional relations in the source context [present day society] provide the baseline for making a reasoned and informed assessment of the relevance of known similarities to those inferred" (96). She identifies two kinds of analogies: *formal* and *relational*. Formal analogies are simplest and involve a point for point assessment of similarities or differences in the properties of source and subject. However, this means that an analogical inference can only be justified if it assumes "a comprehensive principle of uniformity affirming that the patterns of association observed among properties in familiar contexts hold for all contexts" (94). If this is not assumed, the similarities between source and subject may be entirely accidental and may not be indicative of further similarities. Hence, such formal analogies only work if we presume universalism, which we have seen is

[10] They *are* employed in philosophy of science and mathematics. Bartha (2010) articulates a method for analogical reasoning that meets our epistemological norms. This is largely the same as the account I set out below.

undesirable. Relational analogies rely on 'principles of connection' that structure the two traditions in question. This means that "analogs are compared for the relations that hold among the properties they share rather than for the simple presence or absence of these properties considered independently of one another" (95). These may be relations of proportionality, constant conjunction, function, or causal dependence. Relational analogies are strongest if shared causal mechanisms can be identified that determine the presence and interaction of characteristics of both traditions. Following these mechanisms, we can infer the existence of specific further similarities between them. In addition, cogent inferences also require weighing the similarities against the differences; and ensuring that the breath and specificity of the observed similarities outweighs that of the postulated further similarity.

If done well, conclusions from analogical inferences offer more information than the premises and initial data, i.e., they offer additional evidence. Thus, cogent analogical inferences provide *additional* exegetical support. They can strengthen the case for certain interpretations and weaken that of others. For example, I will argue in chapter 4 that we can draw analogical inferences from Madhyamaka philosophy to resolve the rustic/urbane debate in Pyrrhonism.

3.2: Exegetical/Constructive Projects

There are several kinds of research that occupy the centre of the aims-of-philosophy spectrum. Such projects are neither preoccupied with making sense of the text nor with employing the text to think through Western philosophical problems. Instead, they draw on aspects of both. The *clarifying* aim discussed in the previous section could also be suitably categorized here: attempting to clarify ideas in a text involves reconstructing them in language that the target audience finds perspicuous. In doing so, it may go far beyond the concepts and categories available in the original (con)text. Additional kinds of research I will

engage in aim to *defend* a given tradition; *problematise* a given tradition; and *reflect* on the nature of philosophy itself.

A common aim of cross-cultural philosophy is to *defend* a given tradition, which can be accomplished in several ways. By reasoning analogically, comparative philosophers can draw on one tradition to fill problematic gaps in another one. For instance, Sextus does not offer a substantial Pyrrhonian ethics; his account of the Pyrrhonist responding to demands of a tyrant by following laws and customs is derided as problematic conservatism (e.g. Naess 1968, 65). In chapter 6, I will argue that Madhyamaka provides a cogent articulation of ethics consistent with Pyrrhonism, without lapsing into conservatism.[11]

Another common aim of cross-cultural philosophy is to *problematise* non-Western traditions. If we subject these traditions to analyses that spring from different assumptions and that operate according to different patterns of reasoning, the weaknesses (as well as strengths) become more evident. For example, I will suggest that Madhyamaka highlights Sextus' negligence regarding epistemological processes within the life lived according to the appearances.[12] In chapter 7, I will also employ Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka to problematise Western philosophy (which is a more 'constructive' aim).

In addition, doing cross-cultural philosophy allows us to *reflect* on the very nature of philosophy. We have seen that cogent comparative philosophy must be open to acknowledging preconceptions when approaching different traditions and be ready to change these if need be. This is even more pertinent when we engage three different traditions. Trying to understand one tradition from the vantage point of the other will result in a different reading than doing so from our own vantage point. The differences can reveal

[11] Other examples include Siderits (2011) seeking to show that Mādhyamikas can allow for improvement in our epistemic practices, Priest (2010) using non-classical logic to alleviate apparent tensions surrounding Nāgārjuna's use of the *catuṣkoṭi*, Goodman's (2014) rearticulation of Buddhist ethics as consequentialist, and attempts to support Buddhist accounts of *anātman* using evidence from neuroscience, e.g., Flanagan (2011).

[12] Other examples include Burnyeat (1980) and Tillemans (2011).

our own presumptions about what is significant, cogent, or intelligible. Being aware of these will not only make for a more careful reading, but also for a better understanding of the framework within which present philosophy operates. As Frazier puts it: "It should not be a surprise that comparative reflection on multiple philosophies yields metaphilosophical insights into the *conceptual fabric* of philosophy itself" (46).[13]

3.3: Constructive Projects

In this final section, I want to examine projects that engage non-Western philosophies in order to address issues relevant to Western philosophers. Following Connolly (2015), I called projects occupying this end of the spectrum 'constructive'. This captures their aim of contributing to the edifice of Western philosophy. However, their actual methodology may be better described as 'reconstructive'. By reconstructing non-Western ideas and arguments in Western terms, these projects aim to *defend* or *problematise* Western philosophy. These all typically aim to progress contemporary Western thought.

We have already seen that comparative philosophers may reconstruct non-Western arguments in Western terms in order to clarify seemingly convoluted ideas. Reconstruction can also allow non-Western thinkers to participate in Western philosophical discourse. Their arguments are then often utilized to raise or resolve issues that occupy contemporary thinkers. For instance, Fogelin (1994) reconstructs Pyrrhonism in order to problematise epistemological notions of justification; and Siderits (2003) reconstructs Buddhist accounts of non-self (*anātman*) to defend Parfit's reductionistic account of personal identity. In doing so, they are less concerned with the original context, and more with construing the texts so that contemporary philosophers may benefit from them. An extreme example of this is Westerhoff (2020), who aims to defend key Madhyamaka claims and employs purely

[13] Examples include Burnyeat's (1984) 'insulation' thesis, and Hadot's (2004) discussion of philosophy as spiritual practices.

Western tools to achieve this.[14] The amount of reconstruction will differ per project – the more akin the Western and non-Western concerns are, the less reconstruction is required. I will be employing this methodology in chapter 6 in reconstructing Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka as global deflationism.

Now, the exact articulation of constructive methodologies tends to be controversial. They become problematic when they fail to appreciate that the questions they ask are relevant/significant/important by virtue of their intellectual backdrop. Inevitably, bringing non-Western ideas to bear on Western discussions shifts them away from their original context. However, if we do proper due diligence, if we understand the context we are lifting them out of and what meaning they had within it, we can at least be clear on what we are doing. The point is "that one must attend to certain meanings, understanding, usage and contexts in order to do so – if one is to come away with the meaning that can justifiably be ascribed to the concept" (Levine 227, 2016).

There is an additional complexity for comparative philosophers reconstructing Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka specifically. Both traditions refrain from committing to any philosophical views, because any such views can be questioned. Instead, they focus on exposing the absurdities and contradictions in the arguments of others. As Javanaud puts it, this makes it seem more likely they would approve of a programme of philosophical *de*-construction, rather than *re*-construction (2019, 38). The very practice of engaging with current philosophical problems means giving in to our fixation on discovering the way things are. Huntington goes as far as suggesting that:

> Our obsession with the rationalistic structure of epistemological and ontological propositions is symptomatic of a pathology that infects our entire form of life…

[14] Other examples include MacIntryre's (1981) reworking of Aristotelian ethics as virtue ethics, and Pritchard's (2015) reconstruction of Wittgenstein's *On Certainty* as hinge epistemology.

> critical discussion of epistemological and ontological problems will never provide any escape from the closed circle of this way of thinking and speaking (1992, 108).[15]

Thus, if Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka aim to cure us of our attachment to the way things are by abandoning all problematic conceptualization, then reconstructing their ideas according to Western concepts will necessarily be doing them an injustice. However, it is doubtful that efforts to articulate Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka in a (for us) more cogent fashion hinder their therapeutic ambitions. Even if they engage in a programme of philosophical self-destruction, this can only be accomplished by providing reasons and arguments. As Javanaud puts it, "Unexpectedly, then, reason is a vital tool for bringing people to the realization that reasoning involves conceptual imputation and is therefore both blinding and binding" (2019, 43). Furthermore, comparative philosophers can simply avoid reconstructing the traditions in such a way that would ascribe to them any sort of commitment to the nature of things. Depending on the soundness of the reasoning and its compatibility with soteriological goals, such a project could even provide new audiences with tools to further realization of emptiness and suspension of judgment.

In this chapter, I examined the methodological playing field of comparative philosophy. I argued for a dialectical approach, in which the context and preconceptions of both traditions are acknowledged and taken seriously. I then examined the range of potential projects according to philosophical aims. I showed that analogical reasoning can be used to clarify a text, reveal interpretative possibilities, and support specific interpretations. Projects that combine exegetical and constructive approaches allow us to defend or problematise a given tradition; and reflect on the nature of philosophy itself. Finally, reconstructing non-Western traditions allows comparative philosophers to defend or problematise Western philosophy. Doing cross-cultural philosophy well allows for increased awareness of the situatedness of

[15] This is inspired by the *Kāśyapaparivarta* (part of the *Ratnakūṭa Sūtra*), "Just as, Kāśyapa, from a pair of firesticks fire is born and, as soon as fire is born, it burns up that very couple of pieces of wood, exactly so, Kāśyapa, in dependence on analytical examination of reality the faculty of wisdom is born and, once it is born, it burns up exactly that very analytical examination of reality" (translated by Martini 2011, 147).

our own concepts, an expansion of existing categories, and an increased openness to new (old) voices. Thus, cross-cultural philosophy not only allows us to do philosophy *more*, it helps us do philosophy *better*.

Chapter 2

Contextualizing Pyrrhonism & Madhyamaka

In the previous chapter, I demonstrated the importance of understanding the context of the non-Western ideas we are engaging with. In the case of Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka this context awareness is extra important because the traditions are avowedly reactionary. Their arguments depend on, and are expressed in the language of, their opponents. Thus, if we want to understand these two traditions, we need to understand the environment they were operating in. Furthermore, to avoid pretence of universality (and its undesirable implications), I will be explicit about what framework I employ for understanding and comparing Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka. I will argue that a *therapeutic* framework is apt and cogent. By making my choice of framework explicit, the criteria for selecting similarities and differences become transparent. These criteria can then be called into question and even falsified. I hope this allows for a deeper and more robust discussion of the relation between the two traditions.

I start by examining the positions of Madhyamaka and Pyrrhonism within their intellectual climates i.e., their contextual relations. I will then examine the different currents that exist

within Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka i.e., their intertextual relations. This allows me to determine what thinkers to focus on, and to introduce some nuance. In the second half of this chapter, I will argue that Madhyamaka and Pyrrhonism are best understood according to a therapeutic framework and that this framework is structural, transparent, and useful for our purpose.

1: Contextual Relations

1.1: Buddhism, Abhidharma, Nyāya, Yogācāra

Madhyamaka is a school of Buddhist philosophy initiated by Nāgārjuna (ca. 150 C.E.). It was one of the two principal schools of Mahāyāna Buddhism in India and developed into the intellectual core of Tibetan Buddhism. Madhyamaka purports to uphold the core teachings of the Buddha. These are usually summarized as the Four Noble Truths:

1. There is suffering (*duḥkha*).

   Duḥkha not only covers ordinary physical and emotional pain, but also the existential suffering that arises out of our resistance to impermanence. Hence it is also often translated as 'unsatisfactoriness'.

2. There is origination of suffering.

   This is the simple claim that suffering arises because of certain causes and conditions. However, identifying the nature of these origins constitutes the core of the Buddha's realisation. He argued that ignorance (*avidyā*) concerning suffering, impermanence (*anitya*), and non-self (*anātman*) will lead to reifying psychophysical elements as 'I' and things as 'mine'. In other words, we experience the self as independent and enduring when the person is in fact a conceptual construction. This experience leads to attachment to objects and to oneself (in the form of desire and aversion), which

exacerbates ignorance of the true nature of things. And desire and aversion lead to suffering when the things we cling to inevitably perish or change.

3. There is the cessation of suffering.

   Suffering is not inevitable, however. Once we realise that everything is characterized by suffering, impermanence, and non-self, we can escape the cycle of suffering – not only in this life, but also with regards to all future rebirths. The key to realisation lies in a 'middle path' between two extremes: the view that persons are eternal, and the view that persons are completely removed from existence at death. Both share the presupposition that there is an 'I' that survives or is annihilated at death. The middle path avoids reifying personal identity and teaches that the self is nothing more than a causal series of psychophysical elements.

4. There is a path to the cessation of suffering.

   Realising that existence is characterized by suffering, impermanence, and non-self is not easily achieved, however. Our tendency to reify and cling to things and to ourselves is deeply entrenched in our psychology. Hence, the Buddha taught various forms of training to replace such habits with ones that are more conducive to realisation, such as meditation and right action. In order to bring about realisation most swiftly, the Buddha would adapt such teachings and arguments to match the spiritual advancement of his audience. Philosophical arguments are an important part of removing ignorance, but they should not become the end goal—this is illustrated vividly in the parable of the poisoned arrow, where the Buddha refuses to make any claims about the absolute nature of the universe and the self. Theorizing about such questions is like a man struck by a poisoned arrow focussing on the nature and origin of the arrow, rather than focussing on ways to remove it.

These teachings are in large part a response to the prevailing philosophical views in India. In particular, the Buddha's account of the self as a composite of ever-changing psychophysical

elements challenged the Upaniṣadic idea of an enduring, substantive self (*ātman*). Though the Buddha adopted the notions of *karma* (literally 'action' in Sanskrit) and rebirth, he insisted that *karma* was determined by the intent that brought about the action, rather than by the action alone. These and many other ideas are found across numerous discourses of the Buddha. The school devoted to classifying, analysing, and articulating philosophically the Buddha's teachings (as found in the Pali canon) is called Abhidharma, and it is one of Madhyamaka's main interlocutors.

Several different Abhidharma schools arose in the process of systematizing the Buddha's teachings, but they held a core set of presuppositions in common (Siderits & Katsura 2013, 4).

1. Statements may be true conventionally (*saṁvṛti-satya*) or ultimately (*paramārtha-satya*).[16]

   Conventionally true statements (and conventionally real entities) are those accepted as real by common sense; their acceptance reliably leads to successful practice. However, upon analysis their referents turn out to be conceptual constructs. For instance, we believe the self exists in addition to its constituent parts, because it is more convenient given our interests and cognitive limitations. Upon analysis, however, we will discover it is a conceptual construction, projected unto different, everchanging psychophysical parts.

   Ultimately true statements are those corresponding to the nature of reality, without involving any conceptual constructions. They reflect what the world is like, independent of our conceptual apparatus. The entities into which conceptual constructions are analysable (*dharmas*) are ultimate, as are statements regarding them. According to Abhidharma, this distinction between conventional and ultimate

[16] *Satya* can refer to both truth and reality, so like statement can be true conventionally or ultimately, entities can be real conventionally or ultimately.

statements allows the Buddha to talk about the self as if it really exists on some occasions (making conventional statements) and deny the existence of the self on others (making ultimate statements), depending on the needs of the audience.

2. Only *dharmas* are ultimately real.

   Dharmas are the remains of wholescale reductive analysis; they are the most fundamental elements of conscious experience. In other words, all experience consists of these momentary, atomistic psycho-physical events. Like almost everything in Buddhist philosophy, the *dharmas* are impermanent. They are subject to dependent origination (*pratītyasamutpāda*), which means they are subject to arising and cessation. Importantly, the *dharmas* have intrinsic nature (*svabhāva*). This means that their nature does not depend on anything else, which is why analysis cannot reduce them further into constituent parts. *Dharmas* are the only entities to have intrinsic nature (the nature of other entities will still depend on the characteristics of their parts).[17]

3. Cessation of suffering arises through realisation of the ultimate truth.

   In line with the Four Noble Truths, realising that the self and the world are mere conceptual constructions projected unto a causal manifold of *dharmas* will halt problematic reification and attachment. And with the cessation of attachment comes the cessation of suffering.

Madhyamaka subverts these Abhidharma doctrines. Nāgārjuna challenges the idea that *anything*, including the *dharmas*, is ultimately real. He shows that postulating intrinsic nature (*svabhāva*) i.e., ultimate entities, is problematic. Hence, all things are empty of intrinsic nature. This means that nothing, including statements of emptiness, could be

[17] One might observe a tension between *dharmas* being dependently originated whilst also existing intrinsically. This is exactly the tension that Madhyamaka exploits. However, some argue that in Abhidharma, *dharmas* should not be understood as substance having intrinsic nature e.g., Gethin (2004, 533). See Ronkin for a more detailed discussion of *dharmas* within Abhidharma.

ultimately true. Nāgārjuna did not originate the idea that all things are empty. This claim first appears in early Mahāyāna sūtras, collectively known as *Prajnāparamitā*.

Yogācāra, the second principal school of Mahayana Buddhism in India, also attempts to spell out the philosophical implications of emptiness. They do so in a very different vocabulary and are often subject to Madhyamaka criticism, particularly for their mind-only (*cittamātra*) and representation-only (*vijñaptimātra*) doctrines. These teach that postulating entities external to and independent of consciousness leads to suffering. The goal is to overcome the mistaken division of experience between a perceiving subject and perceived object. Roughly, Yogācāra and Madhyamaka disagree about whether emptiness is the absence of intrinsic natures, or the absence of duality between subject and object (Skilton 1994, 124). Though Yogācāra is derided by early Mādhyamikas as asserting the non-reality of the physical and the ultimate reality of the mental, later thinkers have attempted syntheses between the two.

Madhyamaka's interlocutors extend beyond Buddhism: many arguments are formulated against the background of Hindu philosophical dialectics; particularly the semantics of the Nyāya school. For Naiyāyikas, language must hook up with the world at some fundamental level via a denotation relation (Westerhoff 2009, 57). For our purposes this may best be described as a version of Fregean realism: "meaningful assertions are meaningful because they denote or express independently existent properties. A proposition is the pervasion of an individual entity or groups of entities by a real universal or sequence of universals" (Garfield 1996, 12).[18] Further, according to Nyāya, propositions are false when parts of reality are combined in an erroneous manner (and vice versa). This implies that for the combination of 'jar' and 'does not exist' to be meaningful, 'jar' (or its ultimate constituents) must have a real referent. As we will see, this picture of language does not sit well with the Madhyamaka suggestion that everything is empty (i.e., that nothing has *svabhāva*).

[18] Note that this not imply a belief in propositions; there are no such third-realm entities in Nyāya ontology.

1.2: Hellenism, Stoicism, Epicureanism, Academic Scepticism

Pyrrhonian scepticism is a Hellenistic philosophy, initiated by Pyrrho (ca. 300 B.C.) and accessible to us most fully through the writings of Sextus Empiricus (ca. 200 C.E.).[19] Most Hellenistic philosophical traditions, especially Stoicism, Epicureanism, and Pyrrhonism, conceived of philosophy as a way to tackle human suffering. Just as Buddhist philosophy, Hellenistic analyses and arguments are inextricably part of the pursuit to address the most painful problems of human life. Stoics, Epicureans, and Pyrrhonists accept the appropriateness of the analogy between philosophy and medicine. They agree that the human suffering motivates the philosopher, and that the goal is human flourishing (*eudaimonia*). Nussbaum suggests that all three schools would accept the Epicurean definition of philosophy, as accounted by Sextus: "Philosophy is an activity that secures the flourishing (*eudaimōn*) life by arguments and reasoning" (1994, 15; *M* 11.169).[20] As with Buddhism, the efficacy of Hellenistic arguments is deemed to depend on their ability to address the spiritual needs of a given audience. Hellenistic philosophers examine what parts of our understanding and experience are causing disturbance. By engaging people with appropriate critical procedures, they hope to alleviate people's distress.

The Stoics are the primary philosophical opponent of the Pyrrhonist; important Pyrrhonian notions are formulated against the backdrop of Stoic epistemology. Stoicism is a thoroughly naturalistic philosophy, which means that their ideas are closely informed by their understanding of the workings of the world and their understanding of our cognitive processes. This is reflected in their epistemology: the physical world is said to bring about changes in the (corporeal) soul. When we become aware of such change occurring, like when we notice a striking leaf on the path, this is called an impression or appearance

[19] Note that these dates are estimates and that Pyrrho did not found Pyrrhonism as a school: after Timon, his leading disciple, the philosophy ceased to have adherents. Pyrrho's ideas were revived in the first century B.C. by Aenesidemus, but it is unlikely this can be regarded as the founding of a school in any formal sense.

[20] All *M* 11 translations are from Bett (1997), unless indicated otherwise.

(*phantasia*). However, merely having an impression does not constitute belief. Only *assent* to the impression will form a belief. Though this process usually happens automatically and unconsciously, we also have the cognitive ability to *withhold assent*. Actions are based on our assent to impressions that generate a certain impulse, like the impression 'it would be good if I pick up the leaf'. However, not all impressions are true, and thus, not all assent is veridical. An impression that clearly and unmistakenly corresponds to reality is called a *kataleptic* impression (*phantasia katalēptikē*). Only assent to such an impression results in 'comprehension' or 'grasp' (*katalēpsis*). This is where the sceptic interjects and argues that it is never possible to have an impression that clearly and unmistakenly corresponds to reality. However, even if we grant that assent to *kataleptic* impressions is possible, this does not necessarily amount to knowledge. Knowledge (*epistēmē*), for the Stoics, only results from assent that cannot be overturned when confronted with opposing rational or emotional considerations. If my assent is to a non-*kataleptic* impression or if my assent is susceptible to change, I have merely formed an opinion or belief (*doxa*).[21] Clear, unchangeable assent to *kataleptic* impressions is reserved for Stoic sages, for only they have the proper discipline to always retain or withhold assent correctly.

As we will see, Sextus subverts this doctrine by recasting the distinction between involuntary and voluntary assent to the impressions (which he refers to as *phainomena*). For Sextus, assenting involuntarily to the impressions means simply going along with how things appear to be. It does not involve an active judgment. Assenting voluntarily to the impressions means positing what appears as really existent, which does involve judgment. Suspending judgment means ceasing to assent actively to the appearance of things and thus ceasing to posit things as really existent in one way or the other. This way, the sceptic is still

[21] There is contradictory evidence as to whether changeable assent to a *kataleptic* impression constitutes *doxa* too.

able to assent to things, in a weak sense of 'assent', without a commitment to what is really the case.

The Pyrrhonian sceptics share their epithet with another tradition attacking the Stoics: the Academic sceptics. They were the inheritors of Plato's Academy. Only Pyrrhonists called themselves investigators (*skeptikoi*), but from late antiquity onwards the Academics were thought to have had enough in common to warrant the label. Indeed, both schools of thought are centred on suspension of judgment. From the fifth head of the Academy onwards, Arcesilaus, the Academics advocated suspension of judgment, both via their own argumentative resources and via juxtaposing the competing arguments of others. It is unclear whether they meant to suspend their own judgments, or whether they meant for their opponents to suspend their judgments. Unusually, they have little to say about the therapeutic effect of their arguments. They do pay attention to how one could act after suspending judgment, however, and suggest following 'plausible' or 'persuasive' impressions. Sextus takes issue with later Academics (the followers of Carneades and Clitomachus), whom he describes as negative dogmatists. This means that they (dogmatically) assert that things are inapprehensible, rather than suspending judgment regarding them. Not only that, Carneades also offers an independent theory regarding what impressions are plausible. The Pyrrhonist, on the other hand, merely goes along with the appearances.

Lastly, we have the Epicureans, who pursued the absence of pain in body (*aponia*) and soul (*ataraxia*). Internalizing their physics (everything consists of atoms moving and combining in an infinite void) supports this endeavour. The most famous example is that death should not be feared because pain requires a living soul, which falls apart into atoms upon death. According to Epicurean epistemology, all sensory impressions are true; falsity arises next, from our judgment. Beliefs arising from impressions are true when they match and do not contradict ordinary experience; beliefs are false when they contradict and do not match

ordinary experience. Vogt suggests that for both Epicureans and Stoics, belief is a matter of active judgment or acceptance i.e., belief is actively accepting something as true (2012, 651; 661).

2: Intertextual Relations

2.1: Prasaṅgika & Svātantrika

Madhyamaka is a vast and multi-faceted school of thought that spans many centuries and cultures. Covering it in its entirety, from Nāgārjuna to the current Dalai Lama would be impossible. Hence, we need to narrow our scope significantly. Focussing on Nāgārjuna alone would be problematic, however. His work is in *sūtra* style, which means it is usually highly condensed, requiring a variety of details to be filled in.[22] This process happens within the commentarial tradition, which is not a unified body of work. Hence, it is important to be clear on what ideas to focus on. In order to stay close to Nāgārjuna's thought, my focus will be on Indian Madhyamaka. I will occasionally make recourse to Tibetan thinkers and debates because they have shaped our understanding of Madhyamaka significantly and because Madhyamaka remains the pinnacle of Tibetan philosophy.

In India, the most basic division between Madhyamaka schools of thought was between those who accepted external objects conventionally (like Bhāvaviveka and Candrakīrti) and those who argued for an interpretation of conventional reality similar to Yogācāra, in which external objects do not exist (like Kamalaśīla) (Dreyfus & McClintock 2003, 2). However, the most well-known division is that between Prasaṅgika and Svātantrika Madhyamaka. This is a Tibetan doxographical distinction applied retroactively in an attempt to make sense of competing interpretations of Indian Madhyamaka. According to the renowned Tibetan philosopher Tsongkhapa (1357–1419), Svātantrikas acknowledge that nothing withstands

[22] Except for the autocommentary on the *VV*.

ultimate analysis, but suggest that the intrinsic nature of things may be established conventionally; for Prasaṅgikas, intrinsic nature is just that which *is found* by ultimate analysis, and since nothing is found, it is misguided to postulate intrinsic nature in any way whatsoever. The former also advocates using independent inferences (*svatantrānumāna*) to establish emptiness; the latter regards this as too dogmatic and advocates a purely *reductio ad absurdum* (*prasaṅga*) approach, demonstrating the incoherent and self-refuting nature of views of others without committing to the opposite view.[23]

Both the Indian and the Tibetan distinctions share some resemblance to the distinction between Pyrrhonian and Academic Scepticism. Pyrrhonists, and thinkers like Candrakīrti, refuse to make ultimate claims about the nature of objects; Academics, and thinkers like Kamalaśīla, are happy to commit to their inapprehensibility and non-existence, respectively. Further, like Sextus emphasizes the opponent-relative nature of scepticism (the crux is responding to propositions with equally persuasive opposing propositions), Prasaṅgikas emphasize the opponent-relative nature of Madhyamaka (opponents should be refuted on their own terms, not independent ones). My aim here is not to establish any robust parallels, but simply to decide what thinkers to focus on. Given the clear affinity between Pyrrhonism and specific sides of the Indian and Tibetan distinctions, focussing on thinkers that accept external objects conventionally and are considered Prasaṅgikas would best match our focus on the Greek side. However, if such thinkers were little influential and little representative of Madhyamaka, this focus would present a very skewed picture. Fortunately, the two most renowned Indian Madhyamaka thinkers after Nāgārjuna, at least in Tibet and the West, are widely thought of as accepting objects conventionally and falling on the Prasaṅgika side of the Tibetan dichotomy: Candrakīrti and Śāntideva. Though Candrakīrti was little influential in India, he occupies a foundational position for Tibetan philosophy and contemporary

[23] Note that *reductio ad absurdum* is usually taken to license inferring the opposite, which is not the case for *prasaṅga*.

Madhyamaka scholarship. Hence, along with Nāgārjuna, I will focus on the works of these thinkers.[24]

Even though I used the Tibetan Prasaṅgika/Svātantrika distinction to justify focussing on Nāgārjuna, Candrakīrti, and Śāntideva, we should not understand this distinction as absolute—it was constructed retroactively by philosophers from a different time and place. As we will see in chapter 6, typical Prasaṅgika interpretations are not always desirable, for instance because they strip away more epistemic agency than is necessary. The grouping together of these three thinkers does mean that I will roughly follow Candrakīrti's interpretation of Nāgārjuna.[25]

2.2: *Against the Ethicists* & *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*

Matters are slightly less complicated on the Greek side, simply because there were fewer Pyrrhonian philosophers. Almost all of our information regarding Pyrrhonism comes from Pyrrho (ca. 300 B.C.), Aenesidemus (ca. 50 B.C.), and Sextus Empiricus (ca. 200 C.E.).[26] Of those three, almost all extant works are from the hand of Sextus; earlier accounts, regarding Pyrrho and Aenesidemus, consist of ambiguous second-hand testimony (and there is no evidence that Pyrrho wrote anything to begin with). Hence, I will restrict my focus to the works of Sextus Empiricus. However, Sextus should not be taken as representative of the entire Pyrrhonian tradition. Opinions differ on the extent of Sextus' divergence from his predecessors, but it is clear that Pyrrho was happy to claim that things are by nature indeterminate or, at least, indeterminable for us (the metaphysical and epistemological

[24] More specifically, I will focus on Nāgārjuna's Yukti corpus, Candrakīrti's *MAv(Bh)* and *PP*, and Śāntideva's *BCA*.
[25] Whether this interpretation is accurate is of course subject to debate. At the very least, Svātantrikas would take issue.
[26] These dates are estimates. See Polito (2004) for Aenesidemus and House (1980) for Sextus.

interpretation respectively), whereas Sextus does not make any claims about the nature of things and suspends judgment instead.[27]

However, even Sextus' own works are not entirely consistent. In general, the sceptic targets postulations of how things are by nature. Usually, the result of the sceptic's efforts is described as suspension of judgment, but sometimes it is described as the denial of things having a specific nature. In particular, in *Against the Ethicists* (*M* 11) Sextus argues that nothing is by nature good or bad. Such arguments also occur in *M* 7-10 (e.g. 'nothing either comes into existence of perishes' *M* 10.350), but Sextus tells us that these negative conclusions are to be juxtaposed with the positive conclusions of the dogmatists or the positive beliefs of ordinary people.[28] This is not the case in in *M* 11. Moreover, Sextus presents the conclusion that nothing is good or bad by nature, which *reason has proved* (*logou de parastesantos*), as one which the sceptic themself adopts. Endorsement of this claim is supposed to lead to *ataraxia*. This is quite unlike the suggestion that the sceptic should suspend judgment because of equipollence between opposing views on whether things are by nature good or bad.

However, as Bett (1997) suggests, this does not mean that Sextus is not suspending judgment. Asserting that nothing is good or bad by nature does not constitute assent to what is *really* the case. Sextus adopts his definition of goodness (what is good must be invariably good) from his opponents, and then notes that the good appears very variable in ordinary experience. He does not assert that things have some *other* (non-good) quality by nature, nor does he assert that things are *not-good* by nature (which would require lack of goodness to be invariable). By arguing that nothing is by nature good or bad, Sextus blocks attempts to specify the nature of things. He does not make an alternative proposal. Hence, Bett argues that this can still be considered suspension of judgement, albeit in a less rigorous form than

[27] For more on this debate, see Bett ("Pyrrho").
[28] All *M* 7-8 translations come from Bett (2005); all *M* 8-9 translations come from Bett (2012), unless indicated otherwise.

in the rest of Sextus' work. In *M* 11, Sextus allows for asserting that certain claims about the nature of things are wrong, rather than having to avoid any kind of assertion regarding their correctness. Bett suggests this discrepancy is due to Sextus' heavy reliance on earlier sources, and that arguments against anything being good or bad by nature can be traced back to Aenesidemus. This attitude appears present at times as well in *M* 7-8: in numerous places Sextus describes himself as "doing away with" certain kinds of objects posited by the dogmatists (e.g., *M* 7.299, 371; 8.1, 142, 157-158, 290, 338). In one place (*M* 1.26) he even uses the term "do away with" in the same context as "suspend judgment"; to "do away with" a set of objects posited by the dogmatists is, according to this passage, sufficient for putting us into a state of suspension of judgment about them.[29]

Whether *M* 11 truly represents an earlier form of Pyrrhonism or not is of little consequence to this thesis. What is important is that awareness of these different forms of Pyrrhonism allows for a more nuanced comparison with Madhyamaka. As we will see in the next chapter, both Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka target roughly the same thing (intrinsic nature) with strikingly similar arguments, but the *effect* of their arguments is open to different interpretations. These range from presupposing the reality of intrinsic nature whilst denying any specification of it, to refusing any conceptualization of intrinsic nature (including its existence or nonexistence), to denying intrinsic nature.

3: The Case for a Therapeutic Framework

Even after limiting my examination to specific thinkers, deciding what and what not to focus on is guided by specific interests. As we saw in the previous chapter, such interests may be clear criteria at best and unconscious biases at worst. In order to render my selection and categorisation criteria conspicuous and falsifiable, and to avoid the semblance of

[29] All *M* 1-6 translations come from Bett (2018), unless indicated otherwise.

universality, I will adopt a specific framework that guides the content and structure of my comparison of Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka in the next chapter. Failing to adopt a cogent framework may result in unbalanced analysis: for example, Neale (2014) strictly follows the structure of Sextus' work and thereby pushes Madhyamaka into the same mould; he pays little attention to aspects of Madhyamaka that do not fit this structure. Failing to adopt a cogent framework may also result in a biased analysis: Kuzminski (2008, 2021) aims to equate Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka, which leads him to underemphasize and underestimate significant differences. Selecting a framework forces us to take the interests of both Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka into account. It also makes it harder to focus on similarities (or differences) alone, because the pre-determined categories mean we cannot simply ignore topics that do not fit our aim, and because it would be obvious when we only discuss the similarities (or differences) within a certain category. Finally, a framework facilitates focus on relational similarities (or differences), which is important for establishing strong analogies, as we saw in the previous chapter. I will argue that a *therapeutic* framework is most useful when mapping the similarities and differences between Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka.

By a therapeutic framework, I mean a general, structured set of concepts associated with therapy. Therapy (from the Greek *therapeuein*, 'to attend to'; 'to take care of') may be thought of as a "systematic intervention aimed at remediating a particular disease, illness, or other difficulty," and is commonly used for anything thought to improve one's state of wellbeing (Molineux). Hence, I will consider a therapeutic framework to consist of the following key elements: (i) the observation of a disturbance; (ii) the identification of the source of the disturbance; (iii) recommendation of a cure; (iv) explanation of the nature and implementation of the cure; and (v) the effect of the cure. These elements generally hang together causally (and to some extent teleologically): if we are in pain, we are motivated to alleviate it; alleviation is brought about by a specific therapy that seeks to remove the source of the pain; this therapy is deemed successful if it in fact removes the pain. Thus, for a

therapeutic framework to be a cogent way of understanding a given tradition, these elements must be key and there must be no significant characteristics that are at odds with these elements.

3.1: Understanding Madhyamaka through a Therapeutic Framework

A therapeutic framework is undeniably suitable for understanding Madhyamaka. The Buddha is often described as a doctor offering a cure for the spiritual ills of the world. Indeed, one of his epithets is 'the Great Physician'. In the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka* Sūtra (the Lotus Sūtra), he is described as a benevolent doctor who aims to give his sons appropriate medicine. We saw that the Four Noble Truths are expressed as the identification of suffering, revealing its cause, and suggesting a cure. Buddhism employs a range of methods to remove the harmful and entrenched psychological habits that lead to suffering. These include chanting and recitation of Buddhist ideas so their impact on the mind may overcome that of detrimental entrenched tendencies; and insight meditation (*vipaśyanā*), which allows for analysing our ever-changing mental life and its afflictions. Such therapeutic techniques are tailored to the spiritual needs of the audience, such as different instructions for lay people and monastics (Bond 1993).

A therapeutic framework is not only apt for Buddhism in general, but also for Madhyamaka specifically. In fact, if we present Madhyamaka according to a non-therapeutic framework, we are actively distorting the tradition. Candrakīrti argues that the Buddha's arguments are intended to liberate:

> He did not for the love of quarrelling present
> The treatise's explorations, but to liberate.

> One can't be blamed if one's opponents' theories
>
> Are shattered when unravelling reality (*MAv* 6.118).[30]

Candrakīrti continues by cautioning against seeing the Buddha's teachings as primarily argumentative. This may lead to, "cherishing the rational approach of one's own side, and there wouldn't be any reversal of conceptual ideas" (*MAvBh* 6.118). This is problematic, because it entrenches us in conceptual reification, and "failing to reverse conceptual ideas results in bondage, not liberation" (ibid.).

Thus, Candrakīrti makes clear that discussing Buddhist arguments without appreciating their therapeutic intent undercuts the very aim of those arguments. Madhyamaka also follows the Four Noble Truths (*MMK* 26.7), and points to superimposition of *svabhāva* as the cause of suffering. Nāgārjuna identifies cessation of hypostatization (*prapañca*), the cognitive habit of reifying how things appear, as the purpose of the *MMK* (DV). Madhyamaka methods are frequently compared to medical therapies. For example, Nāgārjuna compares the displeasure of applying the Mahāyāna precepts to a physician's application of a bitter medicine, where supporting minor discomfort temporarily brings longer-term comfort (*RĀ* 376). He also suggests that teachings must be tailored to their audience (*RĀ* 394).[31]

Thus, understanding Madhyamaka through a therapeutic framework is thoroughly apt.

3.2: Understanding Pyrrhonism through a Therapeutic Framework

At first glance, a therapeutic framework appears thoroughly apt for Pyrrhonism too. We saw that Hellenistic philosophy generally has a clear therapeutic focus. This also seems to be the case for Pyrrhonism, as underscored by the sceptic's core aim (*telos*): "The causal principle

[30] All *MAv(Bh)* translations are from Liland (2019), unless indicated otherwise.
[31] All *RĀ* translations are from Hopkins (1998), unless indicated otherwise.

of scepticism we say is the hope of becoming tranquil" (*PH* 1.12). From the outset, scepticism is characterised as a means to change our psychology:

> 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 afterwards to tranquillity (*PH* 1.8).

Suspension of judgment and tranquillity are described in psychological terms: suspension of judgment is "a standstill of the intellect, owing to which we neither reject nor posit anything" (*PH* 1.10); and tranquillity is "freedom from disturbance or calmness of soul" (ibid.).

The disturbance (*tarachē*) that afflicts Dogmatists (and used to afflict the sceptic) is said to derive from holding beliefs about what is *really* the case (particularly regarding the good/bad) and from uncertainty as to what appearances to assent to (more on the sources of disturbance in the next chapter). Sextus also claims that the sceptic wants to cure dogmatic conceit and that they will adapt their arguments to do so most effectively:

> 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 – they employ weighty arguments, capable of vigorously rebutting the dogmatic affliction of conceit, against those who are distressed by a severe rashness (*PH* 3.280-1).

Such medical analogies are unsurprising, given that Sextus himself was a doctor. He famously compares sceptical expressions and arguments to purgative drugs: they should not be considered true assertions, but a means to purge flawed doxastic attitudes which will purge themselves in the process too (*PH* 1.206).

However, things become more complicated when we closely examine the role of inquiry (*zētētis*), tranquillity (*ataraxia*), and the sceptic's motivation for helping others (*philanthrōpia)*. Some argue that Pyrrhonian inquiry is mutually exclusive with therapeutic intent, and that tranquillity is not a core element of the Pyrrhonian project. If these arguments are cogent, it seems a therapeutic framework would be detrimental when trying to understand Pyrrhonism.

3.2.1: The Role of Inquiry

Inquiry sits at the heart of the Pyrrhonian project: "The sceptical way, then, is also called 'inquiring', from its activity in inquiring and examining (*zētētikē apo energeias tēs kata to zētein kai skeptesthai*); 'suspensive', from the affection that comes about in the sceptic after the inquiry; 'aporetic', either from raising puzzles over and inquiring into everything, as some say, or from having no means to either assent or deny" (*PH* 1.7).[32] Sextus explains that this inquiry is continuous, supposedly because every inquiry undertaken thus far has yielded equipollent propositions and thus resulted in suspension of judgment. However, if the ultimate goal (*telos*) is tranquillity, and if the sceptic successfully achieves this through suspension of judgement, why would they continue to inquire? Tranquillity and continued inquiry appear to be in tension; Striker even suggests that "contrary to Sextus's initial claim that the Sceptic goes on investigating, philosophical investigations seem to be precisely what the Sceptic's way of life is designed to avoid" (2001, 121). This tension is exacerbated when considering that if something *were* found via inquiry, *ataraxia* would be destroyed: Sextus suggests that holding things to be good or bad by nature leads to perpetual disturbance (*PH* 1.27). Hence, the question arises, should we consider *inquiry* or *tranquillity* as being of primary importance to the sceptic?[33]

[32] Following Annas and Barnes, with modifications from Castagnoli (2018).
[33] For the 'tranquillity' case see, e.g., Palmer (2000, 367–9), Striker (2001, 118), Bett (2010, 188–9), and Marchand (2010, 134–9); for the 'inquiry' case see, e.g., Perin (2010, ch. 1) and Machuca (2011, 251–3).

However, the sceptic's aims need not be mutually exclusive. We can alleviate the tension between continued inquiry (*zētētis*) and achieved suspension of judgment (*epochē*) by reconsidering what counts as inquiry for Sextus. Palmer surveys Sextus' usage of '*zētētis*' and shows that it is more often associated with 'examination' (*skepsis*) or 'questioning' than with 'search for something' (2000). Indeed, in the opening of the *PH*, Sextus carefully avoids suggesting that the Pyrrhonist continues to inquire *into the truth*, after achieving *epochē*. Thus, the continuing inquiry of the Pyrrhonist does not seem to be concerned with the discovery of truth. Castagnoli suggests that continuing *zētētis* may be "an inquiry into a certain matter which consists in further examination of all reasons pro and contra any possible judgement concerning it, or an inquiry into some matter which has not been (sufficiently) examined before" (222). The fact that Sextus closely links *aporia* (puzzlement) and *zētētis* (*PH* 1.7) suggests that Pyrrhonian inquiry into something is to puzzle over it. That means that the Pyrrhonist can inquire into the truth (in the same way they inquire into causes, gods, and the good), but continued inquiry is not aimed at discovering what is *really* the case. This does not mean that sceptical inquiry is truth-irresponsive. Not only is the existence of truth not denied, but the appearance of truth and falsity guides the sceptic's establishment of equipollence (more on this in chapter 6). Hence, the sceptic's continued inquiry can be understood as puzzling over topics, which leads to equipollent arguments, suspension of judgment and tranquillity. Seen in this way, it supports, rather than undermines, the appropriateness of a therapeutic framework.

3.2.2: The Role of Tranquillity

Furthermore, the centrality of tranquillity within Sextus' work has been called into question. If alleviating disturbance is an inconsequential part of the Pyrrhonian project, this would severely undercut the case for a therapeutic framework. Machuca (2006) argues that the role of tranquillity has been overestimated because the sceptic cannot believe in the

necessity or efficacy of their own therapy; and because tranquillity and philanthropy are contingent parts of the Pyrrhonian project.

Machuca starts by suggesting that the sceptic's caution prevents him from maintaining that "things are by nature such that *ataraxia* can only be reached by adopting suspension of judgment" (2006, 116). Whilst correct, this does not undermine the importance of *ataraxia* for the sceptic. Madhyamaka also refuses to make claims about the nature of things—even emptiness is only asserted didactically (*MMK* 22.11)—but cessation of suffering remains an integral part of the project. There is a conventional, not an ultimate, connection between superimposing *svabhāva* and suffering. The same goes for Sextus: the connection between dogmatic assent, *epochē*, and *ataraxia* need not be theoretical, but could be simply apparent. Relatedly, the fact that Sextus and Nāgārjuna show that any understanding of causality is problematic does not undermine the centrality of the connection (as Machuca suggests it does for Sextus); it merely undermines any dogmatic formulation of it. Machuca also (rightly) observes that Sextus does not believe that *ataraxia* is by nature good and *tarachē* by nature bad. Indeed, he clearly argues against anything being by nature good or bad (*M* 11). However, again, this does not undermine the centrality of these concepts. Nāgārjuna also argues against any postulation of how things are by nature, including the states of suffering (*saṃsāra*) and liberation (*nirvāṇa*) (*MMK* 16.10).[34] He even argues that we that we cannot ultimately distinguish between the two states (though we do so conventionally):

> There is no distinction whatever between *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*.
> There is no distinction whatever between *nirvāṇa* and *saṃsāra* (*MMK* 25.20).

Yet four stanzas later Nāgārjuna re-affirms his therapeutic aims, which shows that arguments against dogmatic understandings of therapeutic concepts do not undermine their centrality:

[34] All *MMK* translations are from Siderits & Katsura (2013), unless indicated otherwise.

> This halting of cognizing everything, the halting of hypostatizing, is blissful.
> No Dharma whatever was ever taught by the Buddha to anyone (*MMK* 25.24).

Thus, the fact that Sextus suspends judgment on causality and argues against things being good or bad by nature does not mean that therapy is not a central part of the Pyrrhonian project.

Machuca also employs Sextus' argument against the Epicurean conception of pain to show that the search for tranquillity is not a key part of Pyrrhonism. Sextus shows that, *contra* Epicureanism, pain is not always to be avoided, because we sometimes choose to suffer in the pursuit of things like knowledge and health. Machuca suggests, "He is therefore aware that some people choose at least some kind of disturbance, so he could not regard the search for *ataraxia* as something inevitably imposed upon us" (2006, 126). However, in that case, the sceptic could also not suppose that people are inclined to combat hunger and thirst, but they do: "by the necessitation of feelings, hunger conducts us to food and thirst to drink" (*PH* 1.24). Searching for alleviation of disturbance appears to be a very human tendency, and thus seems to be in line with the necessitation of feelings.

Further, Machuca argues that Sextus failure to mention *ataraxia* when discussing scepticism's nomenclature (*PH* 1.7) suggests it is not an intrinsic part of the tradition. However, this section merely pertains to the labelling of the tradition. Seeing as the sceptic's main interlocutors aim for *ataraxia* too, this is not something that sets the tradition apart, and may thus not be worth mentioning. Sextus also fails to label the tradition 'philosophical', but that does not prove the irrelevance of philosophy to Pyrrhonism. Moreover, Machuca acknowledges that Sextus does label scepticism 'Pyrrhonian' and, as Striker points out, Pyrrho's defining characteristic was his equanimity (2010, 196).

Machuca's argument that tranquillity is a merely contingent aspect of Pyrrhonism heavily relies on Sextus' statement that tranquillity is the aim of the sceptic *up to now* (*achri nun*) (*PH* 1.25, italics added). For Machuca, this proves that the sceptic is able to adopt a different

goal entirely, unrelated to cessation of disturbance, without meaningfully impacting their identification as a sceptic. Sextus employs the phrase *up to now* (*achri nun*) three times in the *PH*, and only once in reference to tranquillity. The second mention explains what the sceptic means when they say that everything is inapprehensible, namely: "I suppose that up to now I have not apprehended any of these things because of the equipollence of their opposites" (*PH* 1.200). If we follow Machuca's reasoning, this suggests that the sceptic may attain apprehension and abandon equipollence in the future, without meaningfully impacting their identification as a sceptic. However, this is unpersuasive, as it would drastically alter their entire philosophical outlook. This second mention also shows that Sextus' use of 'up to now' may simply be an expression of sceptical caution, so as not to associate scepticism and tranquillity dogmatically. Note that Madhyamaka also does not aim for tranquillity unreservedly. Just as Sextus' uses of 'up to now' prevent us from ascribing dogmatic inclinations to the sceptic, so Nāgārjuna warns against committing to the attainment of *nirvāṇa*:

> 'Being without appropriation [attachment], I shall be released; *nirvāṇa* will be mine.' For those who grasp things in this way, there is the great grasping of appropriation (*MMK* 16.9).

Hence, it is not strange that Nāgārjuna and Sextus qualify their commitment to tranquillity. If they did not, tranquillity itself may become the object of dogmatic attachment.

Further, Machuca points to Sextus' statement that Pyrrhonism is largely akin to the philosophy of Arcesilaus, who did not adopt *ataraxia* as his goal. However, Striker identifies this passage as an argument *in favour* of the centrality of *ataraxia*. If the philosophy of Arcesilaus was so similar, why did Aenesidemus choose Pyrrho as the figurehead, rather than Arcesilaus? She suggests that "the feature that sets Pyrrho apart from other philosophers seems to be his supreme detachment and equanimity" (2010, 198), which demonstrates the importance of tranquillity to the Pyrrhonists.

Lastly, Machuca suggests that the sceptic's desire to instil tranquillity in others is a merely contingent part of Pyrrhonism. He asks, "why would the Pyrrhonist who has reached the state of *ataraxia* want to induce it in others" (2016, 130)? I will provide a full answer to this question in chapter 6. For now, I would like to point out that in the case of the Madhyamaka, realisation of emptiness brings about a phenomenological shift that induces care for others. Even though the connection may be accidental, it is absolutely central. That implies the sceptic's philanthropy may be much more meaningfully connected to their philosophy than simply being an effect of following conventional customs, as Machuca suggests (ibid., 131).

In sum, understanding Pyrrhonism through a therapeutic framework is appropriate. Or rather, arguments have shown that up to now a therapeutic framework is appropriate (I am not claiming to have captured the essence of Pyrrhonism once and for all). This framework helps to structure the identification of disturbance, the role of inquiry and establishing equipollence, and the focus on tranquillity. I argued that the sceptic's continued inquiry supports, rather than undermines, the appropriateness of this framework, and that there are no good reasons to consider tranquillity nonessential for understanding the Pyrrhonian project. This means we now have an apt structure to guide our comparison of Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka. This structure not only governs the organisation of similarities and differences, it also shows how the different aspects of the traditions hang together.

Chapter 3

Comparing Pyrrhonism & Madhyamaka

In this chapter I will systematically compare Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka. This comparison will serve as the groundwork for arguments in upcoming chapters. In addition, by outlining the similarities and differences between Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka, I intend to provide a clear overview of the relation between the two traditions that may be harnessed for future research. I will employ the therapeutic framework defended in the previous chapter.

In section 1, I will examine the Madhyamaka and Pyrrhonian observation of disturbance. In section 2, I will compare the causes of suffering they identify. In section 3, I will look at their proposed cures. In section 4, I will take a step back to examine these cures from a wider perspective (i.e. their meta-analyses). In section 5, I will compare how Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka characterise the cured condition. In each of these sections, I will consider significant similarities and differences. As we will see in the upcoming chapters, we can learn the most from their differences, but this can only happen against a backdrop of

similarity. In the final section, I will contrast my analysis with existing comparisons of Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka.

1: Disturbance

Both Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka start with the observation of disturbance. The recognition of suffering (*duḥkha*) is the cornerstone of Buddhism. It is the first Noble Truth, and the last link in the twelvefold chain of dependent origination (*pratītyasamutpāda*), which illustrates the process of cyclic existence. Suffering retains this centrality in Madhyamaka. As Āryadeva, Nāgārjuna's leading disciple, states:

> Ordinary people are bent on pleasure;
> Those who have pleasure are hard to find.
> Thus it is as if transitory
> Beings are pursued by suffering (*CŚ* 29).[35]

Candrakīrti explains that *duḥkha* not only means ordinary suffering, which is perpetuated through rebirth, it also means "to each day be battered by the suffering of suffering and the suffering of change" (*MAvBh* 1.3). In other words, there is an additional psychological layer to our suffering.

Sextus also recognises multiple layers of suffering: "[O]rdinary people are afflicted by two sets of circumstances: by the feelings themselves, and no less by believing that these circumstances are bad by nature" (*PH* 1.30; see also *PH* 1.27). In addition, he identifies a disturbance (*tarachē*) amongst those who are unsure what to assent to:

[35] All *CŚ* translations are from Sonam (2008), unless indicated otherwise.

> Men of talent, troubled by the anomaly in things and puzzled as to which of them they should rather assent to, came to investigate what in things is true and what false, thinking that by deciding these issues they would become tranquil (*PH* 1.12).

And, as we saw in the previous chapter, tranquillity or un-disturbedness (*a-taraxia*), is the ultimate aim (*telos*) of the sceptical project.

Thus, the identification of disturbance, in the form of *duḥkha* and *tarachē*, plays a foundational role for Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka. Recognition of this malady sets their entire projects in motion. Both traditions also separate between different layers: ordinary physical and emotional suffering and additional psychological suffering. However, because Madhyamaka goes along with the doctrines of karma and rebirth, *duḥkha* has an additional cosmic layer:

> The bodhisattva [awakened being] sees through their own experience of suffering how the extremely intense oppressive physical pains of those suffering the relentless horrors in states of hell, as animals, in the world of Yama and so forth, are unbearable sufferings thousands of times greater than the pain they feel when cutting their own body (*MAvBh* 1.15).

Hence, in Madhyamaka, there is ordinary human suffering, additional psychological suffering, and the immense suffering that may befall one in non-human rebirths. Thus, the motivation to deal with suffering is much greater in Madhyamaka than it is within Pyrrhonism.

Note that the recognition of *duḥkha* is not what sets Madhyamaka apart from other Indian traditions, and the recognition of *tarachē* is not what sets Pyrrhonism apart from other Hellenistic traditions. What sets them apart is the *cause* (and subsequent treatment) that they identify.

2: Cause

In this section, I will examine the causes of disturbance that Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka identify. We will see they point to three parallel sources: first, they suggest that relating to the appearances as if they are *really* real (reification) is the root cause of disturbance; second, they illustrate this primarily according to the suffering that is generated by reifying the good/bad; and third, they point to confusion or puzzlement as a source of disturbance. I will also examine what happens during the process of reification, and what makes it problematic. For both, this can roughly be understood as the projection of independent, invariable existence unto the appearances. I will also examine several significant dissimilarities.

2.1: Sources of Disturbance

Sextus appears to identify three sources of *tarachē*. First, he states that tranquillity supervenes upon suspension of judgment about all matters (*PH* 1.31, 205; *M* 11.144). Hence, failing to suspend judgment entails disturbance. If you fail to suspend judgment you continue to assent to unclear (*adēlos*) things (*PH* 1.13). This means that problematic assent is indirectly identified as a source of disturbance. Indeed, ceasing such problematic assent by suspending judgment brings tranquillity (*PH* 1.8-10). Second, when Sextus explains *why* suspension of judgment produces tranquillity, he limits the discussion to beliefs about things being good or bad by nature and explains in detail how these lead to suffering (e.g., *PH* 1.30; *M* 11.112-124). In a nutshell, if we deem certain things really good by nature, we are desperate to obtain or retain them; if we deem them really bad by nature, we are desperate to avoid or get rid of them. Third, in his introductory characterization of Pyrrhonism, Sextus calls the prospective sceptic's puzzlement as to what to assent to

'troubling' (*PH* 1.12). Thus, Sextus identifies disturbance caused by: assent to unclear things; assent to things being good or bad by nature; and confusion about what to assent to.

We can consider assent to things being good/bad by nature as an instance of assent to unclear things. If tranquillity is only attained by suspending judgment 'about all matters', suspending judgment about things being good or bad by nature alone would be insufficient. In addition, in *PH* 1.25-30, Sextus switches freely between these two kinds of disturbance, as if there were no difference between them. The fact that Sextus singles out belief in things being good or bad by nature is significant though. Bett suggests that such belief, "disrupts tranquillity in an especially dramatic and obvious way" (1997, 132). Further, Machuca suggests that the prospective sceptic's disturbance, caused by confusion about what to assent to, is in fact a subset of disturbance caused by belief in things being good or bad by nature: the prospective sceptic considers confusion about what to assent to objectively bad, and veridical assent as inherently good (2019, 205). Thus, disturbance caused by confusion about what to assent to is caused by thinking things good/bad by nature, which is itself an instance of assent to something unclear. This suggests that assent to unclear things lies at the root of all disturbance. So what does assent to unclear things consist of exactly?

According to Sextus, assent to something unclear constitutes a belief (*dogma*), and "if you hold beliefs, then you posit as real the things you are said to hold beliefs about" (*PH* 1.14). Vogt suggests that, for Sextus, assent to something unclear is additive (*prosdoxazein*) (*PH* 1.25‑30): "*prosdoxazein* envisages belief as belief formation, as *actively* adding something to one's experience or mental state" (2012, 652). These observations suggest that, if you assent to something unclear, you posit its existence. I will refer to this as 'dogmatic assent'.[36] Sextus gives the example of honey: the sceptic accepts that honey appears sweet, but they

[36] There is debate about whether beliefs are problematic because of their content, or because of the way they are produced. For an accessible overview, see Brennan & Roberts (2018). I will not venture into this debate here. Note that my articulation leaves room for both interpretations: beliefs are problematic because they are formed by reason adding something; and beliefs are problematic because their content is reified.

do not assent to honey *really* being sweet, which is unclear. Hence, they accept the appearance of sweetness without positing its reality. Before discussing what 'real' means in this context, let us compare our observations thus far with Madhyamaka.

Madhyamaka also identifies three sources of suffering: first, projecting real existence unto the appearances (*prapañca*); second, the experience of attachment and aversion, induced by *prapañca*; and third, the experience of delusion, also induced by *prapañca*. (The latter two are usually categorized together). Just as Sextus identifies dogmatic assent as the root cause of *tarachē*, Mādhyamikas identify the process of projecting real existence unto appearances as the root cause of *duḥkha*. This process is called *prapañca*. In the opening of the *MMK*, Nāgārjuna identifies "the auspicious cessation of hypostatizing (*prapañca*)" as his aim. *Prapañca* may also be understood as 'reification' or 'superimposition': "taking what is actually just useful form of speech to refer to some real entity" (Siderits & Katsura, 15). Indeed, Candrakīrti explains that unenlightened people cling tenaciously to the belief in the existence or non-existence of entities, which leads to lamentation and sorrow, such as grief after a parent's death (*PP* 15.7).[37] He also suggests:

> Since all views and addictions originate from the cause of perceiving [intrinsic reality in] things, these things must be thoroughly understood [to be empty of intrinsic reality]. When one understands the actual nature of things, one eliminates such views through their non-perception. When such views are eliminated, addictions are eliminated (*YṢV* 47).[38]

Thus, *prapañca* may be considered analogous to dogmatic assent: both involve the reification of an appearance, and both lie at the root of suffering.

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[37] *PP* chapter 1 translations are from MacDonald (2014); citations follow her edition's enumeration (1.#). Unless noted otherwise, remaining *PP* translations are from Sprung (1979), ordinarily with changes; these citations follow the *MMK* stanza enumeration the passage is commenting upon and will note corresponding pages of de La Vallée Poussin's (1903) edition.

[38] All translations of *YṢ(V)* are from Loizzo (2007), unless indicated otherwise.

Moreover, as with Sextus, this suffering is primarily instantiated by reifying the good and the bad. Nāgārjuna explains:

> Through superimposition one develops the three distorted preconceptions toward pleasing, repulsive, and neutral objects, which respectively cause attachment [*raga*], hatred [*dveṣa*], and closed-mindedness [*moha*] (*ŚS* 59).[39]

Thus, *prapañca* gives rise to attachment/greed (*raga*), hatred/aversion (*dveṣa*), and delusion/confusion (*moha*), which are the three root afflictions (*kleśa*) that disturb the mind. All three correspond (to some extent) to the three manifestations of disturbance that Sextus identifies.

Attachment arises from believing something is good by nature. Sextus explains:

> By forever pursuing what is considered by him to be by nature good, and evading what is supposed bad, he will never be released from disturbance, but when he has not yet got hold of the good, he will be violently disturbed because of his desire to get it, and in addition, when he has got it, he will never be at peace, because of his excess of joy or because of his vigilance over what he has acquired (*M* 11.116).

Compare this with attachment as described in the *Maha-dukkhakkhandha Sutta*:

> If the clansman gains no wealth while thus working and striving and making effort, he sorrows, grieves, and laments, beats his breast, becomes distraught: 'My work is in vain, my efforts are fruitless! … If the clansman gains wealth while thus working and striving and making effort, he experiences pain and distress in protecting it: 'How will neither kings nor thieves make off with my property, nor fire burn it, nor water sweep it away, nor hateful heirs make off with it?' (Thanissaro).

[39] All translations of the *ŚS* are from Komito (1987), unless indicated otherwise.

Thus, when we hold things to be good or bad by nature, they will only bring us suffering. Sextus explicitly identifies wealth, glory, health, and pleasure (and their loss) as things we consider to be good (or bad) by nature (*M* 11.121-128). Candrakīrti also points to these:

> Cyclic beings drawn to these states
> Are driven by the eight concerns of beings:
> Gain and loss, fame and disrepute,
> Praise and blame, pleasure and pain.
>
> When success is gained attachment grows,
> While encountering loss upsets their minds;
> The rest may be similarly represented.
> These eight sicknesses cause constant harm (*MAvBh* 6.80).

Hence, suffering caused by attachment corresponds to disturbance caused by thinking things good by nature; and suffering caused by aversion corresponds to disturbance caused by thinking things bad by nature.

Furthermore, the remaining root affliction, confusion (*moha*), shares some affinity with disturbance caused by confusion about what to assent to. Candrakīrti identifies three aspects of this affliction: "the path of confusion arising from ignorance … the view of identity and … doubt (*vicikitsā*)" (*MAvBh* 11.36). The first two pertain to ignorance regarding the process of *prapañca*, and this ignorance sustains the process. Doubt (*vicikitsā*), however, is described as a two-pointedness of mind; it is characterized by wavering and manifests itself as indecision (Buswell & Lopez, "vicikitsā"). This seems to be very similar to the psychological state of the prospective sceptic: "troubled by the anomaly in things and puzzled as to which of them they should rather assent to" (*PH* 1.12).[40] However, in the case of the sceptic, this disturbance motivates action (i.e. inquiry), whereas in the case of the

[40] For an analysis of why this state of *aporia* (puzzlement) is initially disturbing, and later compatible with tranquillity, see Castagnoli (2018).

Buddhist, this affliction is said to hamper sustained thought and beneficial action. Hence, they do not constitute a direct parallel. Perhaps a better avenue may be to look at the disturbance plaguing the prospective Buddhist. Indeed, if we look at the most famous prospective Buddhist, Siddhārtha Gautama, we find a disturbance as to what path to follow in life. He felt dissatisfaction with both the indulgence of the homely life and the austerity of the ascetic life, which motivated him to find a Middle Way. However, the disturbance of the Buddha is more general than the primarily epistemological disturbance of the prospective sceptic.

To recap, we have seen that both Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka identify the reification of appearances (dogmatic assent and *prapañca* respectively) as the main cause of suffering. Both illustrate the connection between this reifying tendency and suffering via three main sets of examples: reifying the good, which leads to attachment; reifying the bad, which leads to aversion; and confusion about what to believe. However, we have not yet reached the heart of the matter, which requires further exploration of the process of *prapañca* and dogmatic assent. We saw that this process involves the positing of an appearance's reality. What is not yet clear, is what constitutes 'reality' in this context.

2.2: What Does It Mean to Posit Reality?

I will suggest that both Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka conceive of the positing of reality as the positing of *independent existence*, which is *findable under analysis*.

In the previous chapter, we saw that Mādhyamikas argue against the postulation of *svabhāva* (intrinsic nature). Ābhidharmikas suggest that the *dharmas* have *svabhāva*, but Nāgārjuna challenges any presumption of such intrinsic nature. This lack of *svabhāva* is expressed through the pivotal notion of emptiness (*śūnyatā*). *Prapañca* precisely is the imposition of *svabhāva*. In the case of Pyrrhonism, there is no single term for what is added

in dogmatic assent. The most frequently used phrase to express what is dissolved when suspending judgment is belief in what things are like by nature (*kata tēn phusin*) (e.g., *PH* 1.93; 1.123; 1.163; 1.167; 2.72). In order to get more clarity on what *svabhāva* and *kata tēn phusin* mean, let us look at the three senses of *svabhāva* that Candrakīrti distinguishes. Westerhoff terms these essence-*svabhāva*, substance-*svabhāva*, and absolute *svabhāva* (2009, 20).

Essence-*svabhāva* is that feature without which a thing would cease to be that thing. Candrakīrti does not consider this kind of *svabhāva* to be problematic, because it does not posit any kind of independent existence. It can be described conventionally without having to presuppose any ultimate entities. For instance, heat may be colloquially said to be the *svabhāva* of fire, but this is unproblematic because heat does clearly not exist independently (*PP* 15.2ab).[41] In fact, Candrakīrti suggests that essence-*svabhāva* "does not deserve to be called *svabhāva*" (ibid.).[42] He notes that essence-*svabhāva* is well known "to people, including cowherds and women" (ibid.).[43] When examining what is problematic for Sextus, we find a very similar analysis. He tells us that the sceptic accepts 'recollective' signs, which means they accept smoke as a sign for fire and a scar as indicating a wound. This relation seems to presume some kind of essence-*svabhāva*: without a wound, a scar would not be a scar, but a skin condition; without fire, smoke would not be smoke, but vapour or fog. Hence, these signs do not exist independently. Like Candrakīrti, Sextus tells us recollective signs are accepted because they "are found convincing by everyday life" (*PH* 2.102). It may be clear that recollective signs are not quite the same as expressions of essence-*svabhāva*.[44] Nevertheless, their acceptance demonstrates that Candrakīrti and Sextus do not associate

[41] De La Vallée Poussin (1903, 260).
[42] Translated by Westerhoff (2009, 30); de La Vallée Poussin (1903, 260).
[43] Translated by Westerhoff (2009, 30); de La Vallée Poussin (1903, 260).
[44] In fact, 'recollective signs' might be better understood as *hetu,* rather than *svabhāva.*

dependent, conventionally accepted entities with problematic reification (i.e. *prapañca* or dogmatic assent).[45]

Instead, Mādhyamikas target substance-*svabhāva*: that which exists independent of anything else, apart from conceptual construction. Candrakīrti explains: "This is the definition of it: *Svabhāva* is not artificially created and not dependent on anything else" (*PP* 15.2).[46] In addition to independence, *findability under analysis*, is considered a key characteristic of *svabhāva*. Indeed, Tillemans prefers to translate *svabhāva* as "analytically findable intrinsic nature" or "analytically findable identity" (2016, 24). The idea is that anything non-ultimate disappears under analysis, which means that what remains after analysis is ultimate, i.e. has *svabhāva*. However, for Madhyamaka, when we look for the ultimate constituents of some entity, every potential candidate turns out to depend on some further entities. No ultimate constituents are to be found. Hence, *svabhāva* is unfindable because no independent entity is found.[47]

The sceptic's target may be understood in similar terms. Just like for the Mādhyamika, ultimate existence is equated with having an intrinsic nature (*svabhāva*), Sextus equates what is the case really (*ontōs, tōi onti*) and in reality (*tais aletheiais*) with what is the case by nature (*phusei*). He appears to do so, not only in *M* 11 (e.g. 69-79; 89; 114), but also in the *PH* (1.226; 2.85-94). This equation is derived from Plato as well as the Stoics (at least as regards good and bad) (Bett 1997, xv). Further, Sextus implies that for something to be the case by nature, it must exist intrinsically, i.e., it must be the case independent of its relations to any particular person or event (*M* 11.69-71). Hence, Sextus suggests that what is good or bad for some people only is not good or bad by nature. Further, after outlining the (Aenesideman) mode of relativity, he states, "since everything is relative, we shall suspend

[45] The usage of 'essence' should not mislead us: in the scholarship on the Greek tradition the nature of things associated with dogmatic assent is typically identified with essences. However, as demonstrated, this is different from the 'essence' that Candrakīrti considers unproblematic.
[46] Translated by Westerhoff (2009, 25); de La Vallée Poussin (1903, 260).
[47] Note that some identify the Madhyamaka object of negation as conventional phenomena wholesale, rather than just their intrinsic nature. I will argue against this view in chapter 5.

judgement as to what things are independently (*apolutōs*) and in their nature" (*PH* 1.135). Fløistad suggests, "The absoluteness of the *apolyton* therefore basically consists in its fundamental unrelatedness" (2006, 195). Sextus also emphasises the sceptic avoids affirmations about external objects (*ektos upokeimenos*). *Upokeimenon* is an Aristotelian notion that indicates what persists through change, i.e. what exists independent of change (Peters 1967, 92). Indeed, Bett explains the understanding of 'existing by nature' as 'existing intrinsically' was widely accepted in ancient philosophy (1997, xiv). This renders what is *really* the case for the sceptic very similar to what is *ultimately* the case for the Madhyamaka. Both refer to intrinsic nature, independent of anything else. Note that Sextus' attitude with regards to intrinsic nature oscillates: in most of the *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, he suspends judgment about it; whereas in *Against the Ethicists* and in the Ten Modes of Aenesidemus, he appears to deny it altogether.[48] I will discuss this in more detail in section 4.1.

In addition, Madhyamaka's characterisation of *svabhāva* as *findable under analysis*, can be found in Pyrrhonism too (albeit indirectly). Sextus contrasts scepticism with Dogmatists who claim they have discovered what is the case, and the Academics, who claim that what is the case is inapprehensible. The sceptics continue to investigate precisely because they are unable to discover what is the case. This implies that the sceptic considers 'discoverability' to be a characteristic of what is the case. In practice, they simply fail to discover it and thus they suspend judgment. (Note that this is not replaced by a commitment to their non-existence).

Thus, for both Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka problematic reification (*prapañca* and dogmatic assent) adds a posit, namely intrinsic nature, which is characterised by independence and findability.

[48] One might object that Sextus' use of 'by nature' is a remnant of an earlier form of Pyrrhonism. However, it seems unlikely that this means he uses the term in a fundamentally different way, without indicating that he does so.

2.3: Significant Discrepancies

I mentioned that Candrakīrti identifies three kinds of *svabhāva*, one of which we have not yet discussed. In addition to essence-*svabhāva* and substance-*svabhāva*, Candrakīrti also identifies absolute *svabhāva*. This is the nature of things as it appears to enlightened beings, namely their emptiness. Westerhoff suggests this may be understood as a negative, corrective expression (2009, 222). To use a popular Madhyamaka example: some people suffer from vitreous floaters, which cause the appearance of hairs in the visual field. If we describe an empty pot as 'empty of hairs', this serves to correct the impression of the visually impaired person. 'Empty of hairs' (like 'empty of *svabhāva*') would not be ascribed to a pot independently of an attempt to rectify a mistake. Thus, when enlightened beings are said to experience *svabhāva*, this may simply be the absence of problematic reification.[49] Regardless, there is no such use of 'the nature of things' by Sextus.

Furthermore, for Madhyamaka *prapañca* is unambiguously ubiquitous. For example, Candrakīrti states:

> While ordinary men are trapped by theories,
> By not pursuing concepts yogis are set free.
> The wise have said that it is analysis which will
> Alleviate one of conceptual ideas (*MAv* 6.117).

However, things are more ambiguous in the case of the sceptic. Most famously, Frede restricts problematic beliefs to those that are formed via a particular kind of reasoning: "we have to withhold assent as far as this is a matter of reason or philosophical reason (*hoson epi tō philosophō logō*)" (1984, 260). This means that most ordinary, unreflective beliefs are unproblematic. I will argue against this view in the next chapter.

[49] See Westerhoff (2009) for further discussion of the issue. Certain interpretations do increase the discrepancy with Pyrrhonism.

In addition, one absolutely crucial key stone has thus far been absent in my explanation of Madhyamaka diagnosis: belief in the self (i.e. personal identity). For Mādhyamikas, this belief disrupts tranquillity in an especially dramatic (though not necessarily obvious) way. As Śāntideva states: "If one does not let go of self, one cannot let go of suffering, as one who does not let go of fire cannot let go of burning" (*BCA* 8.135). Emptiness can be understood as the extension of arguments against the intrinsic nature of the self to everything else. Indeed, Candrakīrti quotes from the *Samādhirāja Sūtra*, "Just as you have understood the concept of the self, so should you turn your mind to all things; all putative elements have the same nature as the self" (*PP* 4.8).[50] In other words, the Madhyamaka critique of *prapañca* springs from our ever-present tendency to reify the self. Their general critique of intrinsic nature flows from this fundamental sentiment.

This presents a striking contrast with Pyrrhonism. Sextus does argue against dogmatic conceptions of the body and soul (*PH* 2.22-33), but only in the context of criteria of truth. Hence, despite his observation that, "Humans—so far as what the Dogmatists say goes—seem to me to be not only inapprehensible but actually inconceivable" (*PH* 2.22), Sextus pays no attention to the role of personal identity. And even this inconceivability is an epistemological point, more akin to the discussion regarding *pramāṇas* rather than *ātman*. Pyrrhonism is presented as a way to avoid troubling dogmatic tendencies in general, whereas for Mādhyamikas such troubling tendencies flow from our attachment to the self. Indeed, this attachment may be understood as the catalyst that sets the entire Madhyamaka critique in motion. Mādhyamikas would consider the fact that Pyrrhonists did not challenge the reification of the self profound shortcoming, because they see this as the most profound and most problematic instance of *prapañca*.

Another important component in the Madhyamaka diagnosis of the origination and sustaining of suffering is *action*. The root afflictions of attachment, aversion, and confusion

[50] De La Vallée Poussin (1903, 127).

are said to give rise to unwholesome actions. These make achieving liberation more difficult, if only because they are said to lead to unfavourable rebirths (e.g., *MAvBh* 2.7). Contrary to this, wholesome actions such as giving, keeping precepts, and learning the dharma are said to facilitate liberation. This focus on action is much less pronounced in Pyrrhonism. The sceptic's philanthropy may motivate them to cure Dogmatists, and the sceptical phrases (*phonai*) may perhaps be considered to have some prescriptive force ('oppose to every argument an equal argument!'), but such actions are not imbued with cosmological implications.

In sum, Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka identify multiple sources of disturbance. For both, problematic reification, in the form of dogmatic assent and *prapañca*, is the root source. This consists of ascribing independent existence, findable under analysis, to the appearances. This tendency is instantiated primarily via reification of what appears to be good (such as wealth) and what appears to be bad (such as death). However, for Mādhyamikas *prapañca* and the disturbance this generates are considered an extension of our tendency to reify the self.

3: Cure

In this section, I will compare the Pyrrhonian and Madhyamaka cures for disturbances. These consists of techniques that lead to the cessation of *prapañca* and the cessation of dogmatic assent. I will start with the role of inquiry. I will then discuss the arguments propounded by Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka. I will compare their central argumentative forms and some of their most renowned arguments. This serves to provide a basic, but representative, overview. For a full overview of Sextan arguments and Madhyamaka parallels (not vice versa), see Neale (2014).

3.1: Inquiry

As we saw in the previous chapter, investigation and inquiry lie at the heart of the Pyrrhonian project. Sextus starts his characterisation of Pyrrhonism by contrasting it with the extremes of claiming the truth and denying the apprehensibility of the truth; instead, the sceptics are still investigating. This investigation leads to equipollence, which induces first suspension of judgment and then tranquillity.

We saw that Madhyamaka considers *svabhāva* to be findable under analysis. Hence, an important part of Madhyamaka is the searching for and failing to find *svabhāva.* Indeed, Candrakīrti outlines the benefits of searching for and failing to find ultimate truth, and the drawbacks of believing to have discovered it (*PP* 1.76). Williams foreword to the *BCA* summarizes the role of inquiry within Madhyamaka well:

> What is of enduring value and contemporary significance here is the critical enterprise itself, the employment of the analytic investigative mind in the spiritual path in a way which refuses to be taken in by new and often subtle forms of grasping attachment but sees relentless critical probing as a means of letting go, creating a more balanced perspective which will aid in the project of effectively helping others (Crosby & Skilton 1995, xxv).

Candrakīrti also illustrates this process via the search for the Self:

> After a searching investigation it is clear that there is no perceiving subject as self either before, after, or simultaneously with seeing and the other kinds of perceiving. What man of insight would in such case ontologize about the existence or non-existence of something whose very nature it is never to be perceived *(anupalabdha)*? (*PP* 9.12).[51]

[51] De La Vallée Poussin (1903, 200). See also e.g., *PP* 4.8, 23.25; and *YṢ* 42.

Hence, Candrakīrti shows that investigation helps the Mādhyamika avoid the extremes of positing existence or non-existence. These views are called eternalism (*śāśvatadṛṣṭi*) and nihilism (*ucchedadṛṣṭi*). In Madhyamaka, these refer to the ideas that things exist inherently and that things do not exist at all (not even at the conventional level).[52] 'Madhyamaka' means 'middle way', which refers to the middle way between these views. Thus, investigation ensures that Mādhyamikas do not view things as existent or non-existent.

Thus, both Madhyamaka and Pyrrhonism consider critical inquiry to be a central part of their project; and they characterize themselves in contrast with the extremes that investigation helps them avoid.

However, the results of their inquiring appear to diverge. Whereas the sceptic seemingly continues to be open to the possibility of discovering what things are like by nature (despite failing thus far), the Mādhyamika seems to rule out discovering *svabhāva* (e.g. *ŚS* 3). This relates to the exact relation between suspending judgment on the nature of things and denying *svabhāva*, which I will discuss in section 4.1. However, for now, note that Mādhyamikas do not actually cease inquiry when they fail to find *svabhāva*; they continue to investigate. As we will see in the next chapter, this has a clear therapeutic purpose. And, say Mādhyamikas are wrong, and things do exist ultimately, then their inquiry would still find it. They simply do not think that it will. Hence, the discrepancy between the openness of Pyrrhonian and Madhyamaka inquiry may not be as significant as appears at first.

3.2: Argumentative Form

I will start by discussing the formal aspects of arguments arising from inquiry. Westerhoff (2009) identifies *negation* and the *catuṣkoṭi* (tetralemma) as the key formal aspects needed

[52] In general, these two views refer to seeing the self as really existent or as annihilated at death (thereby denying the laws of karma).

to understand Madhyamaka arguments. On the Pyrrhonian side, *negation* (in the case of *M* 11) and *equipollence* (*isostheneia*) are the two argumentative forms that induce suspension of judgment. I will argue that both kinds of negation as well as the *catuṣkoṭi* and equipollence may be considered analogous.

3.2.1: Negation

As we have seen, Madhyamaka examines phenomena in search of *svabhāva*. This involves analysing all the possible ways in which these phenomena might be thought to exist with *svabhāva*. The Mādhyamika comes up empty: no way holds up under scrutiny. From this they conclude that the phenomenon does not exist with *svabhāva*. We saw in the previous chapter that this negation occurs against the background of Nyāya semantics. Naiyāyikas suggest that propositions are true (or false) when parts of reality are combined in a veridical manner (and vice versa). This means that for the combination of '*svabhāva*' and 'does not exist' to be meaningful, *svabhāva* must have a real referent. And this is exactly what the Mādhyamika calls into question. For the Naiyāyika, this means that emptiness (i.e. '*svabhāva* does not exist') cannot meaningfully be asserted. However, for the Mādhyamika, Nyāya semantics is itself problematic because it relies on the postulation of an objectively existent world (that language latches unto). Hence, they do not see the denial of *svabhāva* as creating the absence of something which is in fact there (which would undermine their own argument), but as *a corrective for a mistaken reification*. We already encountered this idea when discussing absolute *svabhāva*. As Candrakīrti explains:

> A healthy person does not perceive any of the hairs which appear to one afflicted by vitreous floaters. When he says 'these [hairs] are not,' he does not say that they are an existing entity the existence of which was denied because the object of negation is not real. In the same sense we say that 'all things are not,' in order to remove

> clinging to an error in those who see things in the wrong way like those afflicted by vitreous floaters (*PP* 15.11).[53]

In other words, the negation of *svabhāva* does not entail an alternative picture of reality. It simply removes a cognitive addition that is unfindable under analysis.

Negation plays a less central role in Pyrrhonism. Instead of denying intrinsic nature, the sceptic suspends judgment on it. However, sometimes Sextus does negate instances of intrinsic nature, rather than suspending judgement on them. He does so especially in *Against the Ethicists,* e.g., "There is nothing by nature good or bad" (*M* 11.71). This attitude pops up at other places too. For example, Sextus occasionally describes himself as 'doing away with' certain entities posited by the dogmatists (*M* 7.299, 371; 8.1, 142, 157-158). He even suggests that to 'do away with' a set of objects posited by the dogmatists is sufficient for inducing suspension of judgment about them (*M* 1.26). Bett (1997) accounts for this negative attitude in very similar terms as the Mādhyamika. By negating intrinsic nature, Pyrrhonists do not commit to a positive assertion about what things are really like. Instead, they block attempts to specify the nature of things; they do not make an alternative attempt at the same task. Thus, negation for the Madhyamaka and the Pyrrhonist should not be understood as a commitment to some alternative proposition, but as a corrective for a mistaken reification.

As this discussion shows, and as we will discuss in more detail in section 4.3, an important aspect of halting problematic reification (be that in the form of dogmatic assent or *prapañca*), is its *context dependency*. What arguments the Pyrrhonist and the (Prasaṅgika) Mādhyamika propound depends on the *prapañca* and dogmatic assent of their opponents. As Candrakīrti explains:

[53] Translated by Westerhoff (2009); de La Vallée Poussin (1903, 273-174).

> We do not employ an independent inference, because our inferences (*anumāna*) result in the negation of the opponent's thesis. To explain: The opponent (*para*) considers that the visual faculty sees. He is rebuffed by way of an inference acknowledged exclusively by him[self] (*tatprasiddhenaivānumānena*) (*PP* 1.56).

In other words, Candrakīrti argues that Mādhyamikas only rely on the presumptions of their opponents, in order to show that they are untenable; they do not employ independent inferences. (This is one of the key characteristics of Prasaṅgika Madhyamaka). Similarly, in the case of Pyrrhonism, what arguments are propounded depends on the claims made by the dogmatists:

> When I say 'Opposed to every account there is an equal account', I am implicitly saying this: 'To every account I have scrutinized which purports to establish something in dogmatic fashion, there appears to me to be opposed another account, purporting to establish something in dogmatic fashion, equal to it in convincingness or lack of convincingness' (*PH* 1.203).

Thus, Sextus utilizes existing dogmatic arguments; he does not set out any new novel philosophical theories. He merely employs concepts, terms, principles, and argument patterns recognised by the opponents.

In sum, Pyrrhonian and Mādhyamika arguments are corrective; they do not attempt to specify the nature of reality. They are used to halt problematic reification and depend on encountered theories and arguments postulating intrinsic nature. Thus, their arguments are non-implicative and context-dependent.

3.2.2: Equipollence & *Catuṣkoṭi*

We have now seen a few times that Sextus employs equipollence (*isostheneia*) to halt dogmatic assent. By 'equipollence' Sextus means, "equality with regard to being convincing or unconvincing: none of the conflicting accounts takes precedence over any other as being

more convincing" (*PH* 1.10). He specifies that these conflicting accounts may be broader than affirmation and negation (ibid.). Equipollence is absolutely key to the sceptical project. Indeed, Sextus defines scepticism as, "an ability to set out oppositions among things which appear and are thought of in any way at all" (*PH* 1.8).

Occasionally, Mādhyamikas also talk about the ability of balancing equal accounts. For example, Nāgārjuna explains:

> Sights, sounds, and so forth were said by the Subduer
> Not to be true and not to be false.
> If from one position its opposite arises,
> Both do not exist in fact (*RĀ* 103-5).

He also provides the flip-side to Sextus' observation that for every dogmatic account an opposing dogmatic account can be found:

> Great souls are beyond disputes,
> [For,] they assume no [fixated] position.
> For those who have no position,
> How can there be opposition? (*YṢ* 50)

Moreover, if we take a step back, and examine what Mādhyamikas actually *do* (rather than say), we find establishments of equipollence everywhere. This happens via the argumentative format of the *catuṣkoṭi* (tetralemma).

The *catuṣkoṭi* has a long and varied history within Buddhism; I will focus on its role within Madhyamaka. Generally, it comprises the enumeration of four alternatives: that some proposition holds, that it fails to hold, that it both holds and fails to hold, and that it neither holds nor fails to hold. In modern literature, this is usually expressed as:

1. A
2. $\neg A$

3. $A \wedge \neg A$
4. $\neg(A \vee \neg A)$

Nāgārjuna employs this format frequently and at important points in his arguments (e.g., *MMK* 22.11; 25; 27.25-28). When examining these different propositions, he finds fault with all of them: each leads to an absurd or undesirable consequence. For example, he observes that: "Some say that suffering is self-made, some that it is made by another, some that it is made by both, and some that it is without cause" (*MMK* 12.1). After showing that all alternatives are problematic, he concludes:

> Not only can suffering not be found under any of the four possibilities, external objects also cannot be found under any of the four possibilities (*MMK* 12.10).

Westerhoff suggests that this indicates Nāgārjuna takes the *catuṣkoṭi* to be a framework that can be widely employed to demonstrate the deficiency of concepts when referring to external entities (2009, 88-89). In other words, the ability to use the *catuṣkoṭi* is important when trying to halt *prapañca*.

Now, Sextus characterized scepticism as the ability to set out oppositions of equal persuasiveness *or unpersuasiveness* amongst phenomena and thoughts in any way at all (*PH* 1.203). The ability to use the *catuṣkoṭi* satisfies these criteria: it clearly involves setting out oppositions; and these oppositions are found to be equally persuasive, namely not at all. Indeed, Dreyfus explains that Madhyamaka inquiry initially arrives at, "the provisional conclusion that [the object of investigation] does not really exist. This conclusion does not mark, however, the end of the inquiry, for one should also realize that the subject does not not-exist either" (2011, 98). Moreover, Sextus' use of tetralemmas is quite ubiquitous. For example, he employs the precise alternatives of the *catuṣkoṭi* in his answer to the question 'is anything true by nature?': "things, which [dogmatists] say constitute the most general class of all, are either true, or false, or neither false nor true, or both false and true" (*PH*

2.86). He rejects all four alternatives. Hence, the most important argumentative forms of Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka (establishing *isostheneia* and *catuṣkoṭi*) may be considered analogous.

In sum, we find that at the most general level, Pyrrhonian and Madhyamaka arguments are very similar. They employ negation in similar ways (though the sceptic usually suspends judgment), namely as non-implicative and context-dependent; and their most famous argumentative forms seek to establish the equal (un)persuasiveness of opposing notions.

3.3: Arguments

Pyrrhonists and Mādhyamikas propound many, many arguments. Discussing them all is not feasible. Fortunately, Sextus and Tibetan Buddhists outline clear sets of Pyrrhonian and Madhyamaka arguments. I will discuss the arguments that are part of the most influential sets: the Five Modes of Agrippa and the 'Four Great Logical Arguments of the Middle Way'. I will end this section by briefly considering a few arguments that are representative of Pyrrhonian and Madhyamaka dialectics, but which are not part of these classifications.

3.3.1: The Five Modes of Agrippa

Sextus actually outlines multiple sets of arguments, but the Five Modes of Agrippa are considered most significant, and he employs these most often. They are:

1. Dispute with no resolution
2. Infinite Regress
3. Relativity
4. Hypothesis
5. Reciprocity

These induce suspension of judgment. The mode from dispute does so because "undecidable dissension about that matter proposed has come about both in ordinary life and among philosophers" (*PH* 1.165); the mode from infinite regress because "what is brought forward as a source of conviction for the matter proposed itself needs another such source, which itself needs another" (*PH* 1.166); the mode from relativity because "the existing object appears to be such-and-such relative to the subject judging and to the things observed together with it" (*PH* 1.167); the mode from hypothesis because "the Dogmatists, being thrown back *ad infinitum,* begin from something which they do not establish but claim to assume simply and without proof in virtue of a concession" (*PH* 1.168); and the mode from reciprocity because "what ought to be confirmatory of the object under investigation needs to be made convincing by the object under investigation; then, being unable to take either in order to establish the other" (*PH* 1.169).

This exact set of arguments is also employed by Nāgārjuna in order to problematise any means of justification. In Indian philosophy, means of justification are known as epistemic instruments (*pramāṇas*). *Pramāṇa* may also be translated as 'means of valid cognition' or 'valid knowledge'. The Nyāya school recognizes perception, inference, comparison, and testimony as *pramāṇas*. Nāgārjuna summarizes his discussion of epistemic instruments as follows:

> The epistemic instruments are not self-established [relativity], nor are they mutually established [reciprocity] or established by other epistemic instruments [infinite regress], nor are they established by the epistemic objects [reciprocity] or established without reason [hypothesis] (*VV* 51).

I will discuss the Five Modes in turn, and then examine how they hang together.

3.3.1.1: The Mode of Dispute

The Mode of Dispute is not as foregrounded in Madhyamaka as it is in Pyrrhonism, but if we consider the *catuṣkoṭi* a mechanism for setting up disputes, this mode is very prevalent. As we saw, Nāgārjuna notes "Some say that suffering is self-made, some that it is made by another, some that it is made by both, and some that it is without cause" (*MMK* 12.1). The *catuṣkoṭi* ensures dispute among the four alternatives. In the context of the Five Modes, the Mode of Dispute is often seen as generating a demand from the Dogmatists to justify their preference for one of the sides in the dispute. In the *VV*, Nāgārjuna's opponent suggests that objects are established by epistemic instruments. Nāgārjuna creates a dispute by suggesting that epistemic instruments may be established by non-epistemic instruments (which contradicts the suggestion that objects are established through epistemic instruments). Hence, he tells his opponent, "[Y]ou have to indicate how according to you the epistemic instruments are established in turn" (*VV* 31). Thus, the Mode of Dispute is prevalent in Madhyamaka, including in the justification-demanding role it plays amongst the Five Modes.

3.3.1.2: The Mode of Infinite Regress

The Mode of Infinite Regress is encountered very frequently in Madhyamaka. When examining how epistemic instruments (*pramāṇas*) are established, Nāgārjuna observes:

> If you thought that the epistemic objects are established by the epistemic instruments, and that the epistemic instruments are established by other epistemic instruments, the absurd consequence of an infinite regress follows (*VV* 32).

In the *MMK* alone, the observation that an idea or argument has infinite regress as a consequence can also be found in 1.4, 2.6, 5.3, 7.1, 7.3, 7.6, 7.19, 10.13, 12.7, and 21.13.

3.3.1.3: The Mode of Relativity

The Mode of Relativity is complicated, because it is unclear how it relates to the rest of Sextus' project.[54] Hence, I will discuss the two main interpretations. First, I will look at relativity as 'Aenesideman'; second, I will look at relativity as 'Agrippan'. As we will see, both can be understood as instances of dependent origination (*pratītyasamutpāda*).

I will call the first way of understanding the Mode of Relativity, 'Aenesideman relativity'. According to this interpretation, the Mode of Relativity refers back to the Ten Modes of Aenesidemus. These precede the Five Modes of Agrippa and discuss relativity in great detail.[55] Hence, according to the first understanding, the Mode of Relativity is simply a placeholder for this entire discussion. I will argue that the Mode of Relativity, understood as instantiating the Modes of Aenesidemus, corresponds to the Madhyamaka argument from Dependent Origination (*pratītyasamutpāda*). (This is the last of the fourfold set of Madhyamaka arguments.)

The Modes of Aenesidemus may be understood as aids to reveal the relativity of all things, e.g., the appearance of things (conceptually) depends on a given animal, human, sense, and circumstance (*PH* 1.136). Similarly, the argument from Dependent Origination demonstrates that all things are interdependent, which is incompatible with the view that they have an intrinsic nature (*svabhāva*). The renowned Tibetan philosopher Tsongkhapa distinguishes between three layers of Dependent Origination: *causal* dependence (when an object depends on causes and conditions); *mereological* dependence (when an object depends on its parts); and *conceptual* dependence (when an object is postulated to depend on a basis of designation, a designating mind, and a term used to designate the object) (1991, 578.3). Westerhoff adds that notional dependence (which captures the dependence of 'left' on

[54] See, for example, Barnes (1990), Sienkiewicz (2019), Brennan & Lee (2014), and Eichorn (2021).
[55] There is also debate about how the mode of relativity and the Ten Modes hang together, and how to make sense of the Ten Modes. For example, Morison (2011) suggests that the modes are starting points for constructing opposing arguments.

'right', 'north' on 'south', etc.) is an important part of conceptual dependence (2009, 96). We can understand the Ten Modes of Aenesidemus as exemplifications of conceptual dependence. For example, the second Aenesideman Mode shows that observations depend on the (human) observer. Similarly, Āryadeva notes:

> Some are attracted to it,
> Some have aversion to it,
> Some feel confused by it:
> Thus desire has no object.
> Apart from conceptuality,
> Desire and so forth are not found.
> Who with intelligence would hold [there are]
> Real things [imputed by] conceptuality? (*CŚ* 177-178)[56]

Indeed, Sextus concludes the second Aenesideman mode with, "suspension of judgement is necessarily introduced by way of the differences among humans" (*PH* 1.89). Furthermore, Sextus summarizes the eighth Aenesideman mode by noting that everything appears relative (*PH* 1.135). He explains that this has two senses: "first, relative to the subject judging (for the external existing object which is judged appears relative to the subject judging), and second, relative to the things observed together with it (as right is relative to left)" (ibid). In other words, objects are dependent on a designating mind and dependent notionally, which corresponds to the conceptual dependence of Dependent Origination. Hence, Aenesideman relativity corresponds to Dependent Origination. However, unlike Dependent Origination, Aenesideman relativity does not entail causal and mereological dependence.

Moving on, I will call the second way of understanding the Mode of Relativity, 'Agrippan relativity'. Critics of the 'Aenesideman relativity' interpretation question the match between

[56] Sonam (2008) with minor changes.

the Ten Modes of Aenesidemus and the other four Modes of Agrippa. The Ten Modes show that relativity and disagreement go hand in hand; however, disagreement is already represented in the Five Modes as the Mode of Dispute. Hence, critics suggest that, if the Mode of Relativity is to play any meaningful role amongst the Five Modes, it cannot be understood as Aenesideman. Brennan & Lee (2014) suggest that Diogenes Laertius' description of the Mode of Relativity may provide an alternative:

> The Mode of Relativity says that nothing is grasped by itself, but with something else; whence they are not known (9.89).

Brennan and Lee suggest that this phrasing is distinct from relativity as captured by the Ten Modes of Aenesidemus, because it is concerned with grounding, rather than with disagreement. Hence, they propose the Mode of Relativity asserts that "nothing can be grounded by itself; anything that is grounded must be grounded by something distinct from it" (254). In other words, justification is not reflexive; nothing can be self-justifying, self-explanatory, self-evident, etc., because this always happens relative to something else. They call this 'Agrippan Relativity'.

Now, Agrippan Relativity too is clearly represented in Nāgārjuna's discussion of epistemic instruments. After being confronted with arguments from infinite regress and hypothesis, Nāgārjuna's opponent suggests that epistemic instruments may ground themselves: "As fire illuminates itself as well as others, so the epistemic instruments prove themselves and others" (*VV* 33). The image of a fire illuminating itself wonderfully illustrates Brennan and Lee's suggestion. However, just as they note that nothing can be self-justifying because it is always relative to something, Nāgārjuna notes:

> If the epistemic instruments are self-established, the epistemic objects will be independent of the establishment of the epistemic instruments for you, for self-establishment is not dependent on anything else (*VV* 40).

> If for you the establishment of the epistemic instruments is independent of the objects to be known, then those will not be the epistemic instruments of anything (*VV* 41).

In other words, for something to be an epistemic instrument, it must be the epistemic instrument of something, i.e., it has to be relative to something. Hence, epistemic instruments are not intrinsically such instruments, because they always depend on factors extrinsic to the instruments. This means that epistemic instruments cannot ground themselves. Thus, even if we understand the Mode of Relativity as Agrippan, rather than Aenesideman, it finds clear parallels in Madhyamaka. Indeed, Nāgārjuna also appeals to irreflexivity in *MMK* 3.2, 7.1, 7.8, and 7.28. For Mādhyamikas, these are simply different instances of Dependent Origination. I will discuss Dependent Origination in more detail when examining the four-fold Madhyamaka set of arguments. In sum, whether we understand the Mode of Relativity as Agrippan or Aenesideman, parallels may be found in Madhyamaka.

3.3.1.4: The Mode of Hypothesis

The Mode of Hypothesis is also represented in Nāgārjuna's analysis of the establishment of epistemic instruments. After being confronted with infinite regress, the opponent suggests that "epistemic instruments are established without epistemic instruments" (*VV* 33). However, Nāgārjuna points to an inconsistency: if objects to be known are still established by epistemic instruments, but epistemic instruments themselves need no justification, why suppose that other objects do? He suggests, "You should state the special reason why some objects are established by epistemic instruments and some are not. As this is not specified, your supposition is not adequate" (ibid.). This is completely in line with Sextus' observation that:

> If hypothesizing something achieves anything towards making it convincing, why not hypothesize the object of investigation itself rather than something else through

> which he is supposed to establish the object about which he is arguing? If it is absurd to hypothesize the object under investigation, it will also be absurd to hypothesize what is superordinate to it (*PH* 1.174).

Thus, both the sceptic and the Mādhyamika employ the mode of hypothesis to block any attempt to arbitrarily end the chain of establishment. Both their opponents would consider it unacceptable to hypothesize the initial object, namely 'the object under investigation' and the 'epistemic object'.

3.3.1.5: The Mode of Reciprocity

Finally, the Mode of Reciprocity is well represented within Madhyamaka too. Again, Nāgārjuna employs this in his analysis of epistemic instruments:

> If for you the establishment of the epistemic objects is by the epistemic instruments and the establishment of the epistemic instruments by the epistemic objects, neither is established for you (*VV* 46)

> Because if these epistemic objects are established by precisely these epistemic instruments, and if these are to be established by the epistemic objects, how will they establish? (*VV* 47)

Other refutations of mutual reciprocal dependence can be found at *MMK* 7.6, 10.10, 11.5, and 20.7.

It may be clear that the Five Modes of Agrippa are fundamentally analogous to Nāgārjuna's discussion of epistemic instruments. Both discuss epistemic grounding, both start by creating a demand for justification via dispute, and both identify the four exact same directions their opponent may run. They are discussed in almost the same order too, with the Mode of Relativity and Mode of Hypothesis being swapped. In both cases, the line of argument only works if there is already some argumentative activity underway. Hence, they are inherently oppositional. Furthermore, both Nāgārjuna and Sextus employ the entire set

of arguments only once. Nāgārjuna uses it in his discussion of epistemic instruments, and Sextus in a discussion about causal explanation (*PH* 1.185-6). However, both employ the individual elements frequently.

3.3.2: The Four-Fold Madhyamaka Classification

Let us now turn to the most famous set of Madhyamaka arguments. This four-fold classification is outlined in the works of Bhāvaviveka and Atiśa (Tillemans 1984, fn. 16); and Mipham calls them 'the four great logical arguments of the Middle Way' (1984, 1):

1. Diamond Slivers (analysis of the four ways of causal production)
2. The refutation of the production from existent or non-existent
3. The argument from dependent origination
4. The neither one nor many argument

I will discuss these in turn.[57]

3.3.2.1: Analysis of the Four Ways of Causal Production

First, the 'diamond slivers' argument applies the *catuṣkoṭi* to causal relations. It analyses and problematises the different ways in which a thing could be causally produced: by itself; by something else; by both; and by nothing at all. For Sextus, this does not constitute a separate category of arguments, but he does analyse causal production. In particular, he problematises notions that effects *are* or *are not* produced by something else. In order to demonstrate that effects cannot be produced by a different cause, he suggests: "in order to conceive of a cause, we must already have recognized its effect, and in order to know its effect, as I have said, we must already know the cause, the reciprocal mode of puzzlement shows that both are inconceivable" (*PH* 3.22). And he problematises the idea that effects *are*

[57] Five on some accounts (Tillemans 1984, fn. 16), but this additional argument comes from later Mādhyamikas, and is not considered to be part of Prasaṅgika Madhyamaka. Hence, I will not discuss it here. Furthermore, it should be noted that this classification is a later Tibetan articulation. Indian thinkers would not classify arguments this rigidly, because it might give the impression they constitute a context-independent master argument for emptiness.

not produced by something else: "how could the universe as a whole make its orderly progress, or how could anything else happen if not in virtue of some cause" (*PH* 1.17)? He also notes that if there are no causes, "everything could come from everything – e.g. horses, say, will be born from flies" (*PH* 3.18). Candrakīrti employs the same argument, but in order to demonstrate that something cannot be causally produced by anything else:

> If something different could give rise to something else,
> Then utter darkness should emerge from tongues of flame.
> And anything could be produced from everything,
> Since in their difference all non-makers are the same. (*MAv* 6.14)

Hence, Sextus addresses two points of the *catuṣkoṭi* (things are produced by something else or by nothing at all), but he does not address the points that something may be causally produced by itself, or by both itself and something else. Nevertheless, it appears that the intentions of the arguments are strongly aligned.

3.3.2.2: Refutation of the Production from Existent or Non-existent

Second, 'the refutation of the production from existent or nonexistent' concerns the temporal relation between cause and effect. These can be successive, overlap, or be simultaneous. Madhyamaka critiques all options. Nāgārjuna argues that a cause cannot exist *after* the effect:

> If the effect existed [before the cause then what about] the cause which has this effect? [*Ex hypothesi* it does not exist yet.] If that [cause] does not exist, [however, the effect] would be similar [to something with] no cause (*ŚS* 6ab).[58]

He argues that a cause cannot exist *before* the effect:

[58] Translated by Westerhoff (2009).

> How could what is ceased and ended produce an arisen effect?
> How, on the other hand, could a cause that is connected with the effect, though enduring, produce the effect? (*MMK* 20.10)

And he argues that a cause cannot *co-exist* with the effect:

> If the effect were to become manifest simultaneously with the assemblage,
> it would follow that the producer and that which is produced are simultaneous (*MMK* 20.7).

As Buddhapālita points out, this makes it impossible to say which is the cause and which the effect. Sextus offers the exact same line of reasoning and puts this succinctly in a single paragraph. Hence, I will quote this in its entirety:

> A cause must either co-subsist with its effect or pre-subsist it or exist after its effect has come about. Now to say that a cause is brought into subsistence after the coming about of its effect is surely ridiculous. Nor can it pre-exist it; for it is said to be thought of relative to it, and they themselves say that relatives, insofar as they are relatives, co-exist and are thought of together with one another. Nor can it co-subsist with it; for if it is to effect it, and if what comes into being must come into being by the agency of something which already exists, then a cause must first become a cause and then in this way produce its effect. Thus, if a cause neither pre-subsists its effect nor co-subsists with it, and the effect does not come about before it, presumably it has no share in subsistence at all (*PH* 3.26-27).

Thus, 'the refutation of the production from existent or nonexistent' is employed by Sextus too.

3.3.2.3: Argument from Dependent Origination

Third, 'the argument from Dependent Origination' considers the compatibility of *svabhāva* with various dependence relations. Whenever we search an object for its intrinsic nature, it

falls apart into relations of dependence. Nothing is found that exists independent of anything else. We already discussed this line of reasoning in comparison with Sextus' arguments regarding relativity. We saw that the Ten Modes of Aenesidemus may be understood as demonstrating conceptual (but not causal and mereological) dependence. Conceptual dependence is also illustrated by Sextus' arguments against anything being by nature good or bad: what is considered good or bad differs for different people (e.g. *M* 11). Mereological and causal dependence do not find their equivalent in Pyrrhonism. This does not present a significant disanalogy, because mereological and causal dependence are simply tools for problematising *svabhāva*. Nāgārjuna himself undermines both causal relations (sections 3.3.2.1; 3.3.2.2) and mereological relations (section 3.3.2.4).

Regardless, dependence relations are ascribed a much greater importance in Madhyamaka than in Pyrrhonism. For one, the twelvefold chain of dependent origination is supposed to capture the entire mechanism of cyclic existence, from ignorance, to feelings, to attachment, and eventually to aging and death. Nāgārjuna devotes an entire chapter to this core Buddhist doctrine. This centrality is further illustrated by one of the pivotal claims in the *MMK*:

> Dependent origination we declare to be emptiness.
> It [emptiness] is a dependent concept; just that is the middle path (*MMK* 24.18).

However, the centrality of dependent origination does not mean it reflects the true nature of reality. Candrakīrti suggests the doctrine of dependent origination is only conventionally true (Siderits & Katsura, 308; *PP* 26), and Nāgārjuna problematises the Buddha's most famous expression of dependent origination (*YṢ* 23). Further, Nāgārjuna does not claim that emptiness is the same as dependent origination. He simply observes that if something is dependently originated, it does not exist independently.

Thus, even though dependent origination is a key part of Madhyamaka, it should not be understood as an ultimate description of the nature of things. The argument from Dependent Origination primarily serves to problematise postulations of *svabhāva*, rather

than to establish Buddhist doctrines. Regardless, this emphasis on dependence relations is less prominent in Pyrrhonism.

3.3.2.4: Neither One nor Many Argument

Fourth and finally, 'the neither one nor many argument' serves to undermine the idea that things are simple (without parts) or complex (with parts). Nāgārjuna suggests:

> Due to having many parts there is no unity,
> There is not anything without parts.
> Further, without one, there is not many.
> Also, without existence there is no nonexistence ($R\bar{A}$ 71).

Sextus also questions the existence of wholes and parts. He suggests that wholes cannot be different from its parts, because "if the parts are destroyed nothing is left behind" (*PH* 3.99), and if the whole is nothing different from its parts "then a whole will be merely a name and an empty noun, and it will have no subsistence of its own" (ibid). He similarly rejects the subsistence of parts: "if what are said to be parts are parts neither of the whole nor of themselves nor of one another, they are parts of nothing; and if they are parts of nothing they are not parts at all - for items relative to one another are destroyed together" (*PH* 3.100). Thus, 'the neither one nor many argument' is also found in Pyrrhonism.

In sum, the set classifications of Pyrrhonian and Madhyamaka arguments are profoundly analogous. We saw that the Five Modes of Agrippa (and the Ten Modes of Aenesidemus) find strikingly strong equivalents in Madhyamaka. And we saw that the arguments from the Madhyamaka classification find their equivalents in Pyrrhonism too. However, dependent origination plays a much larger and more central role in Madhyamaka than it does in Pyrrhonism.

3.3.3: Unclassified Arguments

There are many arguments that do not fall under Pyrrhonism's five-fold and Madhyamaka's four-fold classification. In this section, I will point to some significant examples, and note whether parallels are found. This will serve more as a reference guide, rather than as a full-scale comparison.

Westerhoff identifies two additional arguments articulated by Nāgārjuna: the property argument, and the argument from change. Nāgārjuna's property argument purports to problematise the different ways *svabhāvic* entities may relate to their essential properties (*MMK* 5.2-4). Sextus also seemingly problematises the relation between entities and their essential properties. Instead of presenting a dilemma between dependence and independence (as Nāgārjuna does), he suggests properties are either properties of an entity alone, or of other things too. He argues we cannot understand properties independent of the entities they belong to (*PH* 3.173-4). Whilst this raises some issues for relating entities and properties, it does not offer as comprehensive a critique as Madhyamaka does.

The argument from change examines the compatibility of *svabhāva* with change. Nāgārjuna suggests that, if things did have *svabhāva*, they could not change (MMK 13.3a, 4b-5). Sextus also argues that existence is incompatible with change (*PH* 3.104-5). This is part of his argument that change does not subsist. The argument from change is much more prominent in Madhyamaka than it is in Pyrrhonism though.[59]

We have already seen that reification of the self is a primary cause of suffering in Madhyamaka. Hence, arguments against reifying the self are a crucial part of the cure (e.g. *MAv* 6.150-65). However, the self plays no such central role in Pyrrhonism. As we saw, Sextus does argue against dogmatic conceptions of the body and soul (*PH* 2.22-33), but only

[59] Note that that the argument from change does not entail the ultimately reality of change. Nāgārjuna spends an entire chapter arguing against arising and dissolution (*MMK* 21).

in the context of criteria of truth. Hence, this crucial aspect of the Madhyamaka cure is suspiciously absent in Pyrrhonism.

Moving to the Greek side, Sextus starts the second book of the *Outlines* by considering the objection that the sceptic is unable to apprehend things. Sextus turns the tables on the opponent and argues that apprehension becomes impossible if the matter under discussion is posited as being real. Nāgārjuna also attempts to undermine reification of apprehension and investigation (*VP* 50). Westerhoff suggests we should understand this as problematising the understanding of hypothetical reasoning as pertaining to the ultimate (2007, com. on *VP* 50). Hence, both Sextus and Nāgārjuna problematise 'investigation' as understood by their opponents, because it involves problematic reification.

In *M* 11, Sextus argues that things are not good or bad absolutely and by nature, because what is good for some may be bad for others, and vice versa. As we have already seen, Āryadeva also argues that disagreement regarding something means we should not consider it to be ultimately real (*CŚ* 176-178). Nāgārjuna also problematises the ultimate reality of the good and the bad (*MMK* 23.6-12). Like Āryadeva, he suggests that these do not exist intrinsically, but unlike Āryadeva and Sextus he does not appeal to variability amongst people.

3.4: Ethics & Religion

Up to this point, we have primarily discussed *philosophical* aspects of Pyrrhonian and Madhyamaka cures. However, Madhyamaka is part of a religious tradition, which includes some important therapeutic aspects that are (largely) absent from Pyrrhonism. In particular, I will discuss compassion, practical advice, and Buddhist doctrines.

3.4.1: Compassion

Compassion is a crucial component of the Madhyamaka system and a pivotal force in alleviating suffering. Indeed, liberation in Madhyamaka is characterised by the cultivation of *bodhicitta* (usually translated as *the awakened mind*). This is a complex psychological phenomenon, which involves insight into the nature of reality (*śūnyatā*) *as well as* the development of universal compassion *(karuṇā)* (Garfield 2011b, 334). One who has cultivated *bodhicitta*, and thereby the aspiration to release all beings from suffering, is called a *bodhisattva. Bodhisattvas* remain in cyclic existence after liberation to help all sentient beings achieve liberation. They are considered more spiritually developed than beings that merely achieve liberation for their own sake (presumably due to a lack of compassion).

Hence, Candrakīrti considers compassion to be the very root of *bodhicitta*:

> Since love is like the seed for the abundant crop
> Of victorhood, is like the water for its growth,
> Like maturation for its yield to then endure,
> It's therefore that I praise compassion first of all (*MAv* 1.2).

The *Bodhisattva* attitude is expressed most famously by Śāntideva:

> As long as space abides and as long as the world abides, so long may I abide, destroying the sufferings of the world.
>
> Whatever suffering is in store for the world, may it all ripen in me. May the world find happiness through all the pure deeds of the Bodhisattvas (*BCA* 10.55-56).

This attitude appears entirely absent from Pyrrhonism. Granted, Sextus suggests "Sceptics are philanthropic and wish to cure by argument, as far as they can, the conceit and rashness of the Dogmatists" (*PH* 3.280), but this pales in comparison with Śāntideva's and Candrakīrti's paeans of compassion. Indeed, Śāntideva's response to a torture-inclined tyrant is to accept suffering if it reduces the suffering of others (*BCA* 8.106); Sextus'

response is to simply go along with ancestral laws and customs (*M* 11.166). It appears that liberation is possible without compassion, but this would be a lesser spiritual achievement (*MAvBh* 1.2).

3.4.2: Practical Advice

Furthermore, Nāgārjuna, Candrakīrti, and Śāntideva often offer practical advice that is meant to aid liberation. These can be general, such as recommendations of generosity, morality, patience, effort, and concentration (the Six Perfections), or very specific, such as Nāgārjuna's planning advice for a king:

> You should respectfully and extensively construct
> Images of Buddha, monuments, and temples
> And provide residences,
> Abundant riches, and so forth (*RĀ* 231).

Like bad actions were said to aid suffering, good actions are said to aid liberation. Such practical advice, and the recommendation of wholesome actions, is absent from Pyrrhonism. Sextus does suggest we 'keep the inquiry going' and 'follow traditional laws and customs', for instance, but they do not have the same ethical import.

3.4.3: Buddhist Doctrines

Madhyamaka is part of a much larger religious tradition. Hence, the path to alleviation from suffering is suffused with traditionally 'religious' notions. Let us look at *nirvāṇa* (liberation), *karma*, and reincarnation.[60]

Nirvāṇa is the state aimed at by the Buddha's teachings. It is understood as the liberation from cyclic existence, and it is often described in very colourful language. However,

[60] I will examine the figure of the Buddha and their attributes in section 6.2.

Madhyamaka argues that *nirvāṇa* should not be understood as an ultimate truth. Candrakīrti explains:

> Those who, not effectively understanding that *nirvāṇa* is the achievement of ending all reifying thought, falsely imagine *nirvāṇa* to be something which positively exists, or does not, or does both, or neither (*PP* 25.3).[61]

Hence, *nirvāṇa* does not function as a dogma in Madhyamaka. Nevertheless, *nirvāṇa* is a much richer and more significant notion in Madhyamaka than *ataraxia* is in Pyrrhonism.

Nāgārjuna spends much time arguing how *karma* may be compatible with emptiness. The laws of *karma* explain the relation between an action (*karman*) and their fruit for the agent. Nāgārjuna problematises this connection:

> If the action were something with intrinsic nature, then it would doubtless be eternal.
> And the action would be undone, for the eternal is not something that is done (*MMK* 17.22).

Hence, like *nirvāṇa*, *karma* does not exist ultimately, only conventionally. Action and result (across multiple lifetimes) are mere appearances:

> Defilements, actions, and bodies, agents, and fruits,
> are similar to the city of the *gandharvas*; they are like a mirage, a dream (*MMK* 18.33).

In addition, cyclic existence with its many realms features prominently in Madhyamaka too (e.g., *RĀ* 229). However, given that *nirvāṇa* and *karma* only exist conventionally, it would seem that reincarnation only exists conventionally too.

[61] De La Vallée Poussin (1903, 524).

Hence, the doctrinal elements of Buddhism are not at odds with Madhyamaka arguments. Nāgārjuna shows that they are all subservient to these arguments by demonstrating they could not exist intrinsically. However, conventionally, they are still taken to play a very significant role, and Mādhyamikas would likely regard them as real as other conventionally existing entities, like chariots. Indeed, they play an integral role in contemporary Madhyamaka traditions.

Madhyamaka religiosity does not constitute a significant disanalogy with Pyrrhonism. Sextus allows for following religious customs and holding religious beliefs, as long as these are not assented to dogmatically: "Following ordinary life without opinions, we say that there are gods and we are pious towards the gods and say that they are provident: it is against the rashness of the Dogmatists that we make the following points" (*PH* 3.2); and "[I]n line with his ancestral customs and laws, [the sceptic] says that there are gods and does everything that tends to worship of and reverence towards them" (*M* 9.49). Hence, it seems that both Mādhyamikas and Pyrrhonists can happily follow religious appearances. However, in the case of Madhyamaka, these religious appearances are considered an important part of the path to liberation.

To sum up our analysis of Pyrrhonian and Madhyamaka cures: both traditions consider critical inquiry to be an important part of their project; this inquiry often generates a set of equally persuasive propositions, and resulting negations are context-dependent and non-implicative; their arguments overlap to a significant extent, though Madhyamaka pays much more attention to dependence relations, the self, and compassion; the Madhyamaka cure also includes more traditionally religious practices and beliefs, though none of these should be thought of as ultimately existent.

4: Meta-Analysis

In this section, I want to step back from specific arguments, and consider the cures Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka recommend from a broader perspective. If the previous section explained the contents of a paracetamol, then this section examines the exact impact of paracetamol on the body, what it does not affect, the recommended dosage and manner of intake, and objections against its efficacy. In the context of Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka, that means examining the exact effect of their arguments, qualifying statements (regarding the acceptance of appearances, and self-referring statements), and their considerations of objections.

4.1: Precise Effect of the Cure

We have seen that Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka recommend very similar cures, but it is not yet clear what they think is the precise effect of this cure. We saw that, for both, suffering is caused by problematic reification (*prapañca* and dogmatic assent). We saw that this may be understood as the ascription of intrinsic nature to appearances. However, whereas Mādhyamikas appear to consider their cure to negate the notion of *svabhāva*, Pyrrhonists consider their cure to induce *epochē* about the nature of things. This suggests that the Madhyamaka cure functions by removing intrinsic nature, whilst the Pyrrhonian cure functions by removing the influence of intrinsic nature. In both cases the ascription of intrinsic nature is purged from their psychology, but the mechanisms by which this happens appear to diverge. It seems that Sextus presumes the *reality* of the intrinsic nature of things existing, and Madhyamaka presumes the *unreality* of the intrinsic nature of things. However, I will argue that such interpretations mistakenly characterize Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka as dogmatic philosophies.

As we saw in the previous chapter, Sextus' work includes a variety of attitudes regarding intrinsic nature. In *M* 11, and at various points throughout his other works, he describes the

result of sceptical inquiry as negative: thinking things are one way or the other by nature is shown to be unfeasible. Here, he argues against things having a specific intrinsic nature, without balancing this argument with an equally persuasive one to establish equipollence. In contrast, at the start of the *PH*, he characterizes scepticism as purely suspensive: the sceptic does not come down on either side of an argument; they suspend judgment. I will not attempt to reconcile these different approaches here, but I do want to challenge the suggestion that they share a commitment to existence of the real nature of things. Bett argues that even in *M* 11, Sextus does not object to the very notion of intrinsic nature, but only to attempts to specify it. He suggests that "To suspend judgment about the real nature of things is to assume that *there is* (or at least, there may be) a real nature to things, independent of our representations of them, but that we are not in a position to determine their real nature" (1994, 149). However, this seems to me entirely unpersuasive. When an agnostic suspends judgement on the existence of God, they do not merely note our inability to identify them as Indra, Kali, or Freia. Furthermore, the suggestion that the sceptic must be committed to the possibility of things having a real nature implies that they believe the universe is structured such that it must be possible for things to have a real nature. This appears to be an utterly unclear determination. Instead, when the sceptic suspends judgement, it seems more sensible to suggest that all beliefs regarding intrinsic nature cease. Indeed, if a dogmatist were to suggest that things can have an intrinsic nature, supposedly the sceptic would respond with the suggestion that things are incapable of having an intrinsic nature. If they refused to suspend judgment on the possibility of intrinsic nature, they would fall into dogmatism.

On the Madhyamaka side, the opposite is the case: realization of emptiness appears to entail the belief that *there is no* real nature of things. However, we have already seen that the negation of *svabhāva* should not be understood as implying that the nature of things is *non-svabhāva.* As Śāntideva explains:

> When there is no perception of something falsely projected as existent, there is no understanding of the non-existence of that entity. For it follows that, if an entity is not real, the negation of it is clearly not real.
>
> Therefore, in a dream, when a son dies, it is the projection 'he does not exist' that prevents the projection of his existence from arising, but that is also false (*BCA* 9.139-40).

This shows that realisation of emptiness can better be understood as the lack of beliefs regarding the real nature of things (including belief in its existence or non-existence). Indeed, Nāgārjuna emphasizes that emptiness should not be considered to be a positive doctrine:

> 'It is empty' is not to be said, nor 'It is non-empty,'
> nor that it is both, nor that it is neither; ['empty'] is said only for the sake of instruction (*MMK* 22.11).

Likewise, he argues that emptiness should be understood as a corrective, dialectic teaching:

> Emptiness is taught by the conquerors as the expedient to get rid of all [dogmatic] views. But those for whom emptiness is a [dogmatic] view have been called incurable (*MMK* 13.8).[62]

Hence, emptiness is not an independent doctrine. It only has meaning in juxtaposition with the dogmatic belief that it expels. In a way, it is an instance of equipollence: emptiness is supposed to be equally persuasive as the positing of *svabhāva*; if it is not, emptiness becomes reified instead. When discussing Pyrrhonism, I gave the example that, if a dogmatist suggests that things are capable of having an intrinsic nature, the sceptic would have to respond with the suggestion that things are incapable of having an intrinsic nature.

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[62] Siderits & Katsura translate *dṛṣṭi* as 'metaphysical view'. However, given that the standardized five types of wrong views (*pañcadṛṣṭi*) by and large relate to problematic reification and are not restricted to metaphysics, I will employ 'dogmatic' instead.

This seems to be exactly what is happening in the case of Madhyamaka. Abhidharma (and other Indian philosophical schools) presuppose that things have *svabhāva*, and thus the Mādhyamika challenges this presupposition. The presupposition of *svabhāva* is counteracted with the suggestion of emptiness. Though *svabhāva* is regarded as inherently contradictory, this equipollent move does not dogmatically commit the Madhyamaka to either side. Nāgārjuna explains that Madhyamaka arguments are as unreal as the problematic reification they address:

> If some man had a wrong conception of an artificial woman empty of substance, thinking "this is really a woman," he might develop desire for her because of that wrong notion. The Blessed One or one of his disciples could then create an artificial man, and by the power of the Blessed One or of his disciple the man's wrong grasping would be prevented. In exactly the same way, the grasping at substance, which is like the artificial woman, is prevented and negated by my empty speech, which is like the artificial man (*VV* 27).

Thus, the denial of *svabhāva* should not be understood dogmatically, but dialectically. This sentiment is further expressed via a range of self-referring statements, which I will discuss in section 4.3.

This brief discussion serves to show that Pyrrhonism is not committed to the reality of intrinsic existence and that Madhyamaka is not committed to the unreality of intrinsic existence. It may seem that the arguments in *M* 11 (showing the untenability of things being a specific way by nature) are most similar to Madhyamaka. Both explicitly negate instances of intrinsic nature. However, unlike *M* 11, Mādhyamikas make very clear that these negations are to be understood as purely corrective. They are supposed to establish a kind of psychological equipollence. Hence, it appears Madhyamaka is situated between the attitudes of *M* 11 and *PH.* Mādhyamikas argue fiercely against positing *svabhāva*, but this should be understood as balanced with our tenacious tendency to posit *svabhāva*. However,

the Madhyamaka insistence on the untenability of anything having intrinsic nature may be considered too dogmatic by the Pyrrhonist. Nevertheless, if we understand suspension of judgment and realisation of emptiness as the lack of beliefs regarding intrinsic nature, they are actually very similar. With both dialectic negation and pure suspension of judgment, our psychology is purged from the habit of reifying the appearances.

4.2: Acceptance of the Appearances

Up to now, we have mainly looked at what Pyrrhonian and Madhyamaka arguments expunge (reification of the appearances) and how they do so (via inquiry and dialectic arguments). However, both traditions spend a significant amount of time clarifying what their investigations *do not* eliminate, namely, the appearances. After outlining what these appearances entail, I will show that both traditions accept them involuntarily and uncritically, and that both contrast their alliance with the appearances with their opponents' approach.

Both Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka clearly distinguish between acceptable and unacceptable engagement with the appearances. We can either accept them involuntarily and uncritically, or we can reify them i.e., accept them as really existing. In Madhyamaka, this is the distinction between the conventional (*saṃvṛti*) and the ultimate (*paramārtha*). If we relate to the appearances as appearances, we realise they are merely conventional, but if we relate to the appearances as if they exist intrinsically, we mistakenly believe them to be ultimate. This is the process of *prapañca*. As Śāntideva explains:

> How something is seen, heard, or cognized is not what is contested here, but it is refuted here that conceptualization is real, as that is the cause of suffering (*BCA* 9.25).

Candrakīrti further explains the different aspects of '*saṃvṛti*', which designates the conventional truth: it is obscurational, dependently originated, and conventional (*PP* 24.8).[63] It is obscurational, because it conceals the way things actually are, namely empty; it is dependently originated, indicating that things exist in a web of causal, mereological, and conceptual dependence (and thus lack *svabhāva*); and it is conventional (also referred to as *vyavahāra*), which entails the various worldly practices. Henceforth, I will refer to *saṃvṛti/vyavahāra* as the appearances.

Sextus also makes clear that the sceptic goes along with the appearances, but objects to accepting appearances as if they are actually the case. He explains:

> 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. When we investigate whether existing things are such as they appear, we grant that they appear, and what we investigate is not what is apparent but what is said about what is apparent (*PH* 19-20).

According to the Stoics (as well as Epicureans), assent is acceptance as true (Vogt 2012, 661). Hence, assent involves a kind of judgement. Sextus' weak notion of assent eschews such judgment. Vogt suggests he is able to pull this off by exploiting the tension in Stoicism (and Epicureanism) between determinism and rationality. On the one hand, impressions exert a strong causal force on our mind; they "almost pull us by the hair toward assent" (ibid., 662). On the other hand, assent is supposed to be a deliberative judgement, in so far as we are able to not assent. This allows Sextus to say that, by simply following the impressions to assent, the Pyrrhonist avoids making any judgments. Just like Śāntideva suggest appearances may be perceptual and cognitive, Sextus employs 'appearance' in a

[63] De La Vallée Poussin (1903, 492).

wider sense, in line with Stoic impressions, in which both thoughts and sense perceptions can be appearances (e.g. *PH* 1.4).

For both the Pyrrhonist and the Mādhyamika the appearances cohere with the experiences, persuasions, and customs of everyday life. Sextus links the appearances to the notion of everyday observances (*biōtikē tērēsis*), which he describes as fourfold: guidance by nature, which allows us to think and feel; necessitation by feelings, which guides our responses to hunger, cold, etc.; laws and customs, which is what is customarily done; and teaching of kinds of expertise, like medicine (*PH* 1.23-24).[64] Ordinary usage of language forms another class of appearances for the sceptic (e.g. *M* 1.172, 193, 233). These characterisations are very similar to the conventional dimension of *saṃvṛti*, *vyavahāra*, which can also mean 'common sense' or 'general acceptance'. *Vyavahāra* designates, "the established social conventions, experiences, and practices of the quotidian world" (Buswell & Lopez, "vyavahāra"). The term is also used in the context of language, "to indicate those conventional words used by ordinary, unenlightened beings to designate reality as they (mis)understand it" (ibid.). Hence, both Sextus and the Mādhyamika consider the appearances to consist of common feelings, conventions, experiences, and linguistic practices.

Now that it is clear what the appearances entail, let us look at how Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka engage with them. In both traditions the appearances are accepted involuntarily. As we just saw, Sextus subverts Stoic doctrine by characterizing sceptical assent as involuntary (*aboulētōs*). For instance, the Pyrrhonist cannot help but taste honey as sweet. Candrakīrti also observes that things are simply taken for granted in the context of everyday experience. He notes:

[64] See Barnes (1982), Vogt (2010), and Eichorn (2014) for some discussions regarding the role of these observances in Sextus' philosophy.

> A chariot is found to be untenable when subjected to the scrutiny of the sevenfold analysis explained above, but you refuse to accept that there are alternative ways of allowing existent things to remain valid. How can such worldly conventions as the statement, 'Fetch the chariot!', then retain their validity for you? We are not affected by this problem, because:
>
> These seven points leave [the chariot] unjustified
> Both in reality, and in the world.
> But left unanalysed the world will still
> Identify [the chariot] based upon its parts. (*MAv* 6.158)

Candrakīrti suggests that, even if inquiry shows a chariot to be unfindable, its appearance will continue to persist in ordinary experience. Hence, the fact that acceptance of appearances is involuntary is compatible with the fact that they are unfindable under analysis. This also goes for the Pyrrhonist. Even though Sextus makes clear that sceptical assent to the appearances is involuntary, he acknowledges that they disappear when subjected to investigation:

> If we do propound arguments directly against what is apparent, it is not because we want to reject what is apparent that we set them out, but rather to display the rashness of the Dogmatists; for if reasoning is such a deceiver that it all but snatches even what is apparent from under our very eyes, surely we should keep watch on it in unclear matters, to avoid being led into rashness by following it? (*PH* 1.20).

However, the sceptic and the Madhyamaka do not tend to investigate the appearances. Both traditions exempt them from critical analysis (i.e. they are accepted uncritically). For Mādhyamikas, the appearances are simply characterized by their uncritical acceptance (and their disappearance when examined): "analysis (*vicāra*) does not take place in this manner in worldly practice, and worldly things (*laukikapadārtha*) exist from the nonanalytical point of view" (*PP* 1.104). For Sextus, the appearances are also exempt from critical analysis: "We

are not to investigate how what appears appears or how what is thought of is thought of, but are simply to take them for granted" (*PH* 1.9).

In addition, both conceive of the appearances as a necessary framework for action. For Mādhyamikas, the conventional is necessary to teach and attain liberation. Nāgārjuna explains,

> The ultimate truth is not taught independently of customary ways of talking and thinking [*vyavahāra*]. Not having acquired the ultimate truth, *nirvāṇa* is not attained (*MMK* 24.10; see also *CŚ* 194 and *MAvBh* 6.35).

Sextus ties the acceptance of appearances to the sceptic's general ability to act in the world: "Attending to what is apparent, we live in accordance with everyday observances, without holding opinions - for we are not able to be utterly inactive" (*PH* 1.23).

Furthermore, both traditions side with the appearances, against their opponents. Sextus notes,

> [N]ot only do we not conflict with everyday life, but we actually join the struggle on its side, assenting without opinion to what it has found convincing and taking a stand against the private fictions of the Dogmatists (*PH* 2.102).[65]

Candrakīrti also accepts what is found convincing by ordinary people. He explains:

> [A chariot] is something that has parts, composed of separate bits.
> A chariot is held to be a functional thing.
> For people it is real as what assimilates.
> Do not lay waste to what the world agrees upon! (*MAv* 6.159; see also *MAv* 6.166)

Like Candrakīrti notes the functional, pragmatic layer, Sextus elaborates that the sceptic accepts recollective signs, because "this is generally trusted by everyone in ordinary life to

[65] See also *PH* 2.246

be useful" (*M* 8.156). Both accuse their opponents of contradicting everyday life. Candrakīrti tells them:

> I, [in] situating [myself] exclusively on the worldly side [and in] invalidating, by way of other reasonings [of my own] the various reasonings (*upapattyantarāntara*) [you have] adduced for the sake of denying one aspect of the surface [level], obstruct like an elder in the world (*lokavṛddha*) [someone] straying from [proper] worldly conduct (*lokācāra*) only *you*, certainly not the surface [level] (*PP* 1.105).

And Sextus notes:

> We are refuting – by means of signs through an inquiry into nature! – the dogmatists who have risen up against the common preconception (*M* 8.158).

However, this alliance with everyday life does not mean that ordinary people are not in need of philosophical therapy. For Mādhyamikas, the fundamental and ubiquitous cognitive mistake is relating to conventions and appearances as if they exist ultimately (i.e. *prapañca*). Everyday concepts are not problematic, reifying everyday concepts is. Ordinary people do not do so consciously. Philosophers, on the other hand, explicitly articulate views that (presume that) things are intrinsically existent (Sopa 2017, 65). Hence, as Sopa puts it, they are afflicted with both innate and contrived grasping (ibid.). On the Pyrrhonian side, there is more disagreement about the extent of problematic beliefs. In the next chapter, I will argue that, according to the Pyrrhonian picture too, ordinary people are in need of philosophical therapy.

We have seen that Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka identify similar sources of suffering (problematic reification) and that they outline similar cures to address this. This discussion makes clear that their cures also leave similar things untouched: the appearances. These are conceived of as everyday conventions, practices, and experiences. Both the Pyrrhonist and the Mādhyamika accept these appearances involuntarily when they are not analysed. And that is basically always, because both also exempt the appearances from critical analysis. It

is the reification of the appearances that they consider problematic. Both Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka also side with the appearances against their opponents, who they accuse of conflicting with everyday life.

4.3: Qualifying & Self-Referring Statements

As we saw in the section on the precise effect of the cure, Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka are at pains to clarify they are undertaking a different project than their opponents are. Their statements and arguments should not be considered to be subject to the same semantics and commitments. Instead, they restrict their discourse to the level of the appearances, and their philosophy should be understood dialectically, in the context of claims made by their opponents. In order to illustrate this point, they make a range of qualifying and self-referring statements.

Sextus begins his main treatise my stating, "By way of preface let us say that on none of the matters to be discussed do we affirm that things certainly are just as we say they are: rather, we report descriptively on each item according to how it appears to us at the time" (*PH* 1.4). When discussing sceptical phrases, such as 'non-assertion', he also claims that:

> Non-assertion is refraining from assertion in the general sense (which we say covers both affirmation and negation), so that non-assertion is the feeling we have because of which we say that we neither posit nor reject anything (*PH* 1.192).

A similar sentiment seems to be expressed by Āryadeva when he notes:

> Against one who holds no thesis that [things]
> Exist, do not, or do and do not exist,
> Counterarguments cannot be raised
> No matter how long [one tries] (*CŚ* 400).

Indeed, both Pyrrhonists and Mādhyamikas emphasize that their statements and conclusions do not purport to state or demonstrate what is *really* the case. This is exemplified well in their response to the objection that their arguments are either ineffective or inconsistent.

Nāgārjuna's Nyāya opponent argues that if emptiness itself does not ultimately exist, it could not effectively refute other philosophical views (i.e. views that postulate *svabhāva*); however, if it does ultimately exist, then it shows that not everything is empty (*VV* 2). Thus, either emptiness is argumentatively ineffective, or it is inconsistent. Nāgārjuna responds by upholding the emptiness of everything, including the thesis of emptiness itself. He counters: "If I had any thesis, that fault would apply to me. But I do not have any thesis, so there is indeed no fault for me" (*VV* 29). Both historical and modern interpreters have argued that this statement should be understood as a disavowal of any theses *according to his opponent's semantics.*[66] Within the Nyāya framework, assertions are meaningful because they denote independently existent properties (Garfield 1996, 12). This suggests that Nāgārjuna wants to make clear that his theses (*pratijña*), particularly regarding emptiness, do not postulate an entity possessing intrinsic nature (Ruegg 2000, 129). Thus, emptiness should be understood conventionally, not ultimately. Candrakīrti explains that ascribing argumentative ineffectiveness to the Madhyamaka is simply misguided:

> To claim that it is an issue whether this critique makes contact with
> The criticised or not while criticising will only apply
> To those thinking in absolutes, but we do not endorse a stance,
> And therefore this unwanted consequence does not apply to us (*MAv* 6.173).

[66] See, for example Garfield (1996), Westerhoff (2009), and Tsongkhapa. This is by no means the only interpretation, and the question of whether the Mādhyamika can have any philosophical theses remains one of the most contentious debates in the tradition. For Indo-Tibetan views on this issue, see Ruegg (1983, 205-241). For an overview of modern interpretations see Napper (1989, 700-701 n208).

Sextus faces the exact same objection. His opponent suggests that his argument against demonstration is either not itself demonstrative but merely asserted, in which case it is argumentatively ineffective; or the argument is demonstrative, in which case demonstration is clearly real (*M* 8.463-4). Sextus responds by noting that the sceptic, "will say that the argument against demonstration is merely persuasive, and that for the moment it persuades them and induces assent" (*M* 8.473). Similar to the Madhyamaka, the sceptic makes clear that their argument does not purport to show what is really the case. This is illustrated well by Sextus' explanation of sceptical 'determination':

> Determining we deem to be not merely saying something but making an utterance about an unclear object and assenting to it. For in this sense Sceptics will perhaps be found to determine nothing - not even 'I determine nothing' itself. For this is not a dogmatic supposition (i.e. assent to something unclear) but a phrase which shows our feeling (*PH* 1.197).

Thus, just like with Nāgārjuna, Sextus' argument should be understood on the level of the appearances, not as indicative of what is *really* the case (i.e. ultimately). Even if the argument against demonstration is interpreted dogmatically, demonstrating that there is no demonstration and thereby refuting itself, this is not a problem for the sceptic. Sextus notes:

> For there are many things that put themselves in the same condition as they put other things. For example, just as fire after consuming the wood destroys itself as well, and just as purgatives after driving the fluids out of bodies eliminate themselves as well, so too the argument against demonstration, after doing away with all demonstration, can cancel itself as well. And again, just as it is not impossible for the person who has climbed to a high place by a ladder to knock over the ladder with his foot after his climb, so it is not unlikely that the sceptic too, having got to the accomplishment of his task by a sort of step-ladder – the argument

> showing that there is not demonstration – should do away with this argument (*M* 8.480-1).

Such self-referring statements highlight the dialectical nature of Pyrrhonian and Madhyamaka arguments. This is illustrated vividly by comparisons of characteristically Pyrrhonian and Madhyamaka statements to purgative drugs. Sextus explains:

> In the case of all the sceptical phrases, you should understand that we do not affirm definitely that they are true - after all, we say that they can be destroyed by themselves, being cancelled along with what they are applied to, just as purgative drugs do not merely drain the humours from the body but drive themselves out too along with the humours (*PH* 1.206).[67]

Candrakīrti cites the *Kāśyapaparivarta* in his commentary on *MMK* 13.8, where Nāgārjuna explains that emptiness is the means to remove all dogmatic views, as long as it does not become a dogmatic view itself:

> 'It is as if, Kāśyapa, there were a sick person, and a doctor were to give that person a medicine, and that medicine having gone to the stomach, having eliminated all the person's bad humors, was not itself expelled. What do you think, Kāśyapa, would that person then be free of disease?' 'No, lord, the illness of the person would be more intense if the medicine eliminated all the bad humors but was not expelled from the stomach' (*PP* 13.8).[68]

[67] See also *PH* 2.188, *M* 8.480. For a discussion of self-refuting/referring statements in Madhyamaka, see Garfield (1996).
[68] De La Vallée Poussin (1903, 248-249).

Thus, both Pyrrhonists and Mādhyamikas emphasize that their most characteristic statements (sceptical phrases and emptiness) should be taken as self-referential if they are understood dogmatically.[69]

In sum, Pyrrhonian and Madhyamaka texts are rife with qualifying statements that make clear their arguments are of a different kind than their opponents': they are dialectic, not dogmatic. And if their arguments are understood dogmatically, they will purge themselves along with other dogmatic commitments. Their qualifying statements are not entirely the same, however. Sextus emphasizes personal situatedness: he explains that the sceptic's statements should be understood as personal observations. For example, "[J]ust as someone who says, 'Go away' implicitly says 'You, go away', so someone who says 'Everything is undetermined' also signifies according to us 'relatively to me' or 'as it appears to me'" (*PH* 1.199). This appeal to personal situatedness is absent in Madhyamaka.

4.4: Significant Dissimilarities

I will look at the dissimilar objections the traditions face; the sense of urgency and drama present in Buddhism and virtually absent in Pyrrhonism; and the institutions in which these philosophies operate.

Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka both face much discussed objections that are virtually absent from the other tradition. In the case of Pyrrhonism this is the *apraxia* objection, which states that action requires some belief, or holding something to be true. This objection (and response) is entirely absent from Madhyamaka. Madhyamaka frequently faces the charge

[69] Sextus' fire analogy is also paralleled in Madhyamaka. Sextus compares his demonstration that there is no demonstration self-consuming fire (*M* 8.480-81). Atiśa uses the same analogy to illustrate that wisdom arising from reasoning (discerning *prajñā*) is not itself established: "the fire that arises from rubbing two sticks together will burn up the sticks and, when they no longer exist, the fire that consumed them will go out on its own. Similarly, when *prajñā* has proven that all phenomena—both specifically characterized and generally characterized—do not exist, that *prajñā* disappears and is luminosity, which has no essence at all" (Namgyal 2019, 107). Apple (2019) explains that "reasoning is a conventional process that dissolves itself when seeking to establish the existence of an object" (57).

that their philosophy entails nihilism. For example, Asaṅga states: "Because of the rejection of designation and reality [Mādhyamikas] are to be known as the most extreme kind of nihilist (*pradhāna nāstika*)" (Dutt 1966, 30–32).[70] These diverging objections may be explained by diverging contexts. Sextus is working against the backdrop of Stoic conceptions of assent. When employing assent in a novel way, this problematises activity according to the Stoic picture. Similarly, Nāgārjuna is working with the Abhidharma concept of ultimate reality. By refuting ultimate reality, the Mādhyamika appears to be arguing for nihilism according to the Abhidharma picture.

Furthermore, Madhyamaka texts convey a greater sense of urgency and drama than Pyrrhonian texts do. For instance, Nāgārjuna emphasizes the dangers involved in misunderstanding emptiness:

> This doctrine wrongly understood
> Causes the unwise to be ruined
> Because they sink into the uncleanliness
> Of nihilistic views (*RĀ* 119).

Or compare Śāntideva when lamenting the suffering that Madhyamaka is meant to cure:

> Oh misery! The extremely grievous condition of these beings who stay in the oceans of sufferings, who do not see their own wretched state though they stand in such extreme wretchedness! (*BCA* 9.163)

Such flair for the dramatic is largely absent from Pyrrhonism. Given the fact that Pyrrhonian and Madhyamaka philosophy is supposed to alleviate suffering *of someone*, the way this philosophy is expounded may greatly affect the impact that arguments have on them. Colourful language seems more likely to affect our psychology than dry arguments do.

[70] Translated by Westerhoff (2014).

In addition, philosophy (and especially therapeutic philosophy) is not practiced in some abstract realm of refined rationality. It is practiced within a society, and often within an institution. And it is very much unclear whether Pyrrhonists and Mādhyamikas shared a similar institutional context. In both cases, there is an extreme paucity of data. However, Boucher suggests that Buddhist institutions at the time of Nāgārjuna were, "characterized by a highly organized, sedentary monasticism with a complex administration governed by an equally complex legal system" (2008, 67). It is questionable whether all members of a given monastery belonged to the same philosophical school. This is quite unlike Hellenic philosophical schools. The Stoics likely never owned a piece of property, for instance (Mitsis 2003, 465). And with the possible exception of the Garden of the Epicureans, there is little evidence of Hellenistic schools having much institutional continuity. Mitsis (2003) suggests that Hellenistic institutions consisted of little more than a private place where members could meet and make use of the library of the head of the school. Evidence of even this minimal conception is absent in the case of Pyrrhonism.

5: Cured Condition

We have arrived at the final step of our therapeutic framework. We have seen that Madhyamaka and Sextus identify similar sources of suffering, use similar tools to mitigate this suffering, and qualify their cures in similar ways. We have also seen that Sextus' neglect of compassion, personal identity, action, and his lack of religious elements, constitute significant discrepancies between the two traditions. In this section, I will discuss the final phase of any therapy: the state of being *after* suffering. I will examine what cessation of problematic reification entails; what happens after such cessation; and what qualities Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka ascribe to someone in a cured condition.

5.1: Tranquillity

Both Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka consider problematic reification (dogmatic assent and *prapañca*) to lie at the root of suffering. Once this process is ceased, both note that tranquillity ensues. For Sextus, dogmatic assent is ceased via suspension of judgment. Indeed, when the sceptic, "suspended judgement, tranquillity followed as it were fortuitously, as a shadow follows a body" (*PH* 1.29). He describes suspension of judgment as, "a standstill of the intellect, owing to which we neither reject nor posit anything" (*PH* 1.10). Similarly, Śāntideva notes, "When neither entity nor non-entity remains before the mind, since there is no other mode of operation, grasping no objects, it becomes tranquil" (*BCA* 9.34). In both cases, the intellect is suspended, and nothing is affirmed or denied. Nāgārjuna confirms, "This halting of cognizing everything, the halting of hypostatizing, is blissful" (*MMK* 25.24a). Indeed, *nirvāṇa* may be glossed as the extinction of the root afflictions of attachment, aversion, and delusion, which gave rise to suffering in the first place.

However, whereas the sceptic did not expect tranquillity to follow suspension of judgment, there is no such surprise in Madhyamaka. The supposed fortuity of tranquillity following suspension of judgment may also be a qualifying move on Sextus' part, however, so as to not imply any dogmatic connection between suspension of judgment and tranquillity. Indeed, it seems that after the nth suspension of judgment, the following of tranquillity should not be so surprising anymore.

Furthermore, the extent of alleviation of suffering differs in Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka. For Sextus, the sceptic experiences tranquillity, "in matters of opinion and moderation of feeling in matters forced upon us" (*PH* 1.30). Indeed, he notes that, "at times [sceptics] shiver and are thirsty and have other feelings of this kind" (ibid.). Instead, because the sceptic has ceased dogmatic assent, they do not think these circumstances are good or bad by nature, which means they are less disturbing (ibid.). In Madhyamaka, whether people

who have fully realised emptiness experience pain is a matter of controversy. However, Nāgārjuna appears to imply that they do not (or very little):

> The physical sufferings of bad transmigrations
> Such as hunger and thirst arise from ill deeds;
> Bodhisattvas do not commit ill deeds,
> And due to meritorious deeds do not have physical suffering in other lives (*RĀ* 222).

Thus, both Pyrrhonists and Mādhyamikas note that cessation of problematic reification leads to tranquillity. For both, intellect is suspended, and nothing is affirmed or denied. However, Mādhyamikas more clearly acknowledge the connection between realisation of emptiness and cessation of suffering; and they purport that a wider range of suffering is alleviated than Sextus does.

5.2: Now What?

Pyrrhonists and Mādhyamikas have very different conceptions of what happens after suspension of judgment and realisation of emptiness. We have seen that the sceptic continues to investigate, supposedly (in part) to sustain their suspension of judgment and accompanying tranquillity. They also follow everyday observances. Not much more is said about the state of the accomplished sceptic. (Unless one gives credence to the colourful accounts of Pyrrho's life). For Mādhyamikas, the initial realisation of emptiness is but the first step on the way to full realisation. After realising emptiness, one may be called a *Bodhisattva*. However, there are many stages to the *Bodhisattva* path. Following the *Daśabhūmika Sūtra*, Candrakīrti explains that there are ten stages to this path, which come with "an increasing number of qualities, attainment of superior powers, advancement in the perfections such as generosity, and flourishing maturation" (*MAvBh* 1.4).

Thus, Pyrrhonists and Mādhyamikas identify similar sources of suffering and similar tools to cease this suffering, but they part ways once this cessation is actually attained. In fact, it is highly unlikely that Mādhyamikas would consider accomplished sceptics to be *Bodhisattvas*, due to their inattention to compassion. In Madhyamaka there is a whole discourse surrounding the various stages of the *Bodhisattva* path, and what qualities are associated with each stage.

5.3: Qualities of the Realised Person

Many of the qualities obtained by *Bodhisattvas* along the path would appear wholly speculative and dogmatic to the sceptic. Especially qualities attained at the eighth stage, which includes "mastery of life in terms of blessing their lifespan to last for inexpressible upon inexpressible aeons" (*MAvBh* 8.3). However, Candrakīrti also notes that these stages should not be considered to be ultimately real:

> The realized saint as well is like magic and a dream; the spiritual achievement of sainthood is like magic and a dream; the perfectly enlightened individual is like magic and a dream; perfect individual enlightenment itself is like magic and a dream. Even the ultimate Buddha is like magic and a dream as is ultimate Buddhahood like magic and a dream (*PP* 22.16).[71]

A more significant potential discrepancy is that the appearances may disappear entirely for the realised person. For example, Nāgārjuna claims:

> Here [in the face of a Superior's meditative equipoise]
> long and short, subtle and coarse,
> Virtue and non-virtue,

[71] De La Vallée Poussin (1903, 450).

> And here names and forms
>
> All are ceased.
>
> All those that earlier appeared to consciousness
>
> Because of not knowing that [reality]
>
> Will later cease for consciousness in that way
>
> Because of knowing that [reality] (*RĀ* 94-96).

However, Hopkins suggests that Nāgārjuna is referring to a particular state of meditation, and that 'all are ceased' refers simply to reified appearances. Garfield illustrates this via a mirage in the desert. A person who has realised emptiness will not rush to the mirage thinking there is water, nor will they stop perceiving the mirage altogether; they will simply experience the mirage as a mirage (2011a).[72] However, this is definitely not the case with Pyrrhonism. Sextus never suggests that the appearances take on the form of an illusion or reflection.

Furthermore, in both Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka scholarship, the continued activity of the cured person is connected to their past reifications. Dunne (1996) suggests that Candrakīrti locates the source of a Buddha's activity in the past. His previously acquired aspirations and concepts continue to motivate his actions: "a buddha's activity, such as teaching, is the unfolding of events whose actual origin lies in that buddha's previous conceptual aspirations as a bodhisattva, a being who is intent upon attaining Buddhahood" (ibid., 550). Similarly, Vogt suggests that the cured sceptic continues to employ the concepts and rationality they acquired prior to becoming a sceptic. As she suggests, "Whatever these abilities involve, it is not lost through conversion to scepticism" (2012, 652). Suspending all judgment does not wipe out all cognition – it leaves concepts and ideas that are simply not

[72] What a realised being experiences is subject to much debate. Candrakīrti seems to suggest that the appearances disappear entirely; see for example Dunne (1996).

longer reified. Thus, for both, the existing mental make-up helps the cured person to act and behave effectively in the world.

In sum, Madhyamaka spends a lot more time discussing the cured condition. They ascribe several stages to it, all with their own qualities. At the most realised level, there is even a debate about whether the person would experience anything. Nevertheless, fundamentally, both Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka note that cessation of problematic reification brings about tranquillity.

6: Recap & Contrast

In this section, I will briefly recap the above analysis. I will also contrast this analysis with existing comparisons and explain why it constitutes a significant improvement.

6.1: Recap

I started with the observation that both traditions identify a kind of suffering that transcends ordinary physical and emotional suffering. They point to multiple sources of this suffering. Problematic reification, in the form of dogmatic assent and *prapañca*, is considered the root source. This process is instantiated primarily via reification of what appears to be good (such as wealth) and what appears to be bad (such as death). Both traditions also identify confusion about what appearances to follow as a source of suffering. However, the Madhyamaka conception of problematic reification ascribes important roles to the self and to action, which are virtually absent in Pyrrhonism.

We saw that both traditions consider critical inquiry to be an important part of their project. This inquiry often generates a set of equally persuasive propositions. The negations (and suspensions of judgment) that follow are context-dependent and non-implicative. Their

arguments overlap for a significant extent too, with the Five Modes of Agrippa finding particularly striking parallels in Nāgārjuna's discussion of epistemic instruments. However, Madhyamaka arguments pay much more attention to dependence relations, the self, and compassion. The Madhyamaka cure also includes more traditionally religious practices and beliefs, though none of these should be thought of as ultimately existent.

The proposed cures of Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka not only include very similar arguments, they also leave very similar things untouched: the appearances. These are conceived of as everyday conventions, practices, and experiences. Both the Pyrrhonist and the Madhyamaka accept these appearances involuntarily when they are not analysed. And that is basically always, because both also exempt the appearances from critical analysis. They side with the appearances against their opponents, who they accuse of conflicting with everyday life. It is the reification of the appearances that they consider problematic.

Furthermore, Pyrrhonian and Madhyamaka texts are rife with qualifying statements that make clear their arguments are of a different kind than their opponents': they are dialectic, not dogmatic. If their arguments are understood dogmatically, they will purge themselves along with other dogmatic commitments. Their qualifying statements are not entirely the same, however. Sextus emphasizes personal situatedness: he explains that the sceptic's statements should be understood as personal observations.

However, due to different intellectual contexts, both traditions face (and respond to) different objections. In addition, there is a sense of urgency and drama present in Buddhism that is virtually absent in Pyrrhonism. The institutions in which these philosophies operate also seem to differ significantly. Further, Madhyamaka spends a lot more time discussing the cured condition. Nevertheless, fundamentally, both Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka note that cessation of problematic reification brings about tranquillity.

6.2: Contrast with Existing Comparisons

Neale (2014) presents the most comprehensive comparison of Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka thus far. He lists every argument and observation found in Sextus' works and investigates whether a parallel for them can be found in Madhyamaka. However, given the vast difference between the sheer amount of Madhyamaka works (spanning many centuries and many prolific thinkers) and the works of Sextus Empiricus (a single author), this method is problematic. If we compare an impressionist rendition of Michelangelo's *Creation of Adam* with all paintings in the Sistine Chapel, we will find parallels for virtually every aspect of the rendition. However, this does not imply that the rendition is analogous to all paintings in the Sistine Chapel. Neale looks at centuries of Madhyamaka literature, without explaining how it has changed, or how it differs in different areas. Furthermore, by examining every single aspect of Sextus' works, he can only superficially note its similarities with Madhyamaka texts. Amongst other things, this leads Neale to only mention in passing the analogy between the Five Modes of Agrippa and Nāgārjuna's treatment of epistemic instruments, even though these are central pillars for both traditions.

Kuzminski (2008) presents perhaps the most well-known comparison between Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka. He starts by defending a specific conception of Pyrrhonism, though his analysis lacks scholarly detail and engagement with existing literature. For example, he puts much emphasis on Sextus' distinction between the evident and nonevident, and employs this in his definition of 'belief', but he fails to pay attention to the rustic/urbane debate. He focusses on method, belief, suspension of judgment, tranquillity, and appearances. However, it is not clear why he focusses on these areas. He also includes the entire Pyrrhonian and Buddhist traditions. Moreover, he overemphasizes similarities and neglects differences. Indeed, in a new work (2021), he claims to demonstrate the "virtual identity" of the entire Pyrrhonian and Buddhist traditions. This is a sweeping suggestion, given that Madhyamaka texts burst with colourful language, religious notions, and peans of compassion and

selflessness. This means Kuzminski must discount much counterevidence in order to make his point, and he has to draw many strained parallels. For example, he suggests that the meditative experience of the eighth *dhyāna* (or *jhāna* in Pali, though Kuzminski misspells it as 'jnana'), which takes the sphere of neither perception nor nonperception as its object, is the same as the experience of suspension of judgment (25). However, *dhyāna* refers to the attainment of single-pointed concentration, in which the mind is entirely absorbed in a meditative object and withdrawn from external sensory input. Such meditative absorption is not part of Pyrrhonism. In fact, one of the hinderances to achieving this state is 'sceptical doubt' (*vicāra*), which is precisely what sets the Pyrrhonian project in motion. To give another example: Kuzminski equates Diogenes Laertius' suggestion that Pyrrho would periodically "withdraw from the world and live in solitude" with the Buddha's rich meditative teachings (49). Wittgenstein periodically withdrew from the world to live in solitude too, but few would suggest he was well-versed in meditative serenity.

Moreover, Kuzminski makes the same methodological error as Neale. He mainly focusses on accounts of Pyrrhonism and examines if they find parallels in Buddhist works (the accounts of dependent origination and *bodhi* being rightly excepted). This does not tell us the extent to which the two traditions are comparable. If I compare accounts of the Hindu Cārvāka school (usually referred to as 'the materialists') with Greek philosophy, I will undoubtedly find many parallels. However, this does not mean that Cārvāka and Greek philosophy are 'virtually identical', just like Pyrrhonian ideas found in Buddhism do not mean that they are virtually identical. Buddhist philosophy spans many centuries and many vigorous debates, but Kuzminski does not deem this heterodoxy to be relevant. Lastly, Kuzminski's account silently morphs from being exegetical to being constructive. He starts by examining texts on Pyrrhonism and see if they find Madhyamaka parallels and ends by explaining Pyrrhonian ideas in such a way that they will find Madhyamaka parallels. Both projects are defensible, but not if the aim is to demonstrate the virtual identity of both traditions. Indeed, once you suggest that, "If we combine the Pyrrhonian recognition of absence with the Buddhist

recognition of emptiness, we get a distillation in which both are fused, and their distracting accretions are vented away" (93), you cannot claim to engage in an unbiased comparison.

My analysis circumvents these issues by adopting a clear framework that fits both Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka. This has guided the selection of topics and ensured that both traditions are represented equally. My analysis also approaches Madhyamaka more selectively, so that I can distinguish between different understandings and present a more nuanced picture. Nevertheless, Kuzminski's work is provocative and intellectually stimulating; and Neale's comprehensive work is essential for anyone with an interest in the relation between Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka, and it is an excellent starting point for seeing what aspects of Sextus' work might be reflected in Buddhism.

Chapter 4

Elucidating Pyrrhonism

In this chapter, I will harness my previous analyses to improve our understanding of Pyrrhonism. I will show that Madhyamaka helps to open up interpretative possibilities and to provide support for specific interpretations. I aim to shed light on three issues: the nature of Pyrrhonian activity; the scope of Pyrrhonism; and the role of relativity. I will show that Madhyamaka reveals and substantiates specific ways of understanding these issues, and I will support these with additional arguments.

1: Sceptical Activity as Spiritual Exercise

Sextus outlines a few sceptical activities: setting out oppositions amongst appearances (*PH* 1.8); inquiring (*PH* 1.7); and uttering sceptical phrases, such as 'no more' (*PH* 1.187). He discusses at length the arguments and ideas that are the subject of these activities, but he tells us little about the nature and context of these activities. This has led to, for instance, the debate about whether these activities are aimed at truth or at phenomenological change (I

argued for the therapeutic role of inquiry in chapter two). If we want to better understand the nature of sceptical activity, it would be helpful to look at the nature of such activity in a similar tradition. That is, by examining the role of Madhyamaka activity, we can elucidate the role of Pyrrhonian activity.

The works of Śāntideva, Candrakīrti, and Nāgārjuna offer some insights about how their philosophical activity should be encapsulated into practice. However, aside from virtuous actions and calming meditation (*śamatha*), this information remains rather sparse. Fortunately, Madhyamaka is still a living tradition, predominantly amongst Tibetans, which means that we can examine what we can learn from later and current teachings. It may be clear that this is a move away from the affinity established in the previous chapter, which was limited to Indian Madhyamaka. Hence, my argument in this section is not that Madhyamaka shows how Sextus *should* be understood, but how he *may* be understood. In other words, as I explained in my methodology chapter, Madhyamaka allows us to generate exegetical hypotheses. In particular, I will show that Madhyamaka allows us to conceive of sceptical activity as spiritual exercise (following Hadot). I will substantiate this hypothesis with further arguments.

1.1: Inquiry

By investigating what inquiry looks like in Madhyamaka practice, we may gain new insights about its role within Pyrrhonism. As we saw in the previous chapter, *prapañca* is a cognitive habit, and one that, due to lifelong practice, is deeply ingrained in our psyche. According to the Mādhyamika, the only way to change this habit is by gradual and repeated cultivating of its opposite: realisation of emptiness. Mere understanding is insufficient. After all, there are plenty of philosophers who find the Five Modes of Agrippa persuasive, but I suspect few have found lasting tranquillity. Internalising these ideas so that they impact our experience of the world requires a great deal more effort. Indeed, to cultivate lasting realisation, one

needs to repeatedly practice investigative meditation (*vipaśyanā*).[73] Traditionally, investigative meditation is said to generate insight into 'the way things really are'. In the case of Madhyamaka, this means the realisation that there is no way things really are, i.e., realisation of emptiness. The desired result of such meditation is a direct, experiential understanding. However, in order for such an experience to be achieved, the mind must be fully focussed and undistracted. This state is cultivated via calming meditation (*śamatha*), which allows for heightened levels of concentration (*samādhi*). Śāntideva underscores the importance of investigative meditation:

> Without emptiness a mind is fettered and arises again, as in the meditative attainment of non-perception. Therefore one should meditate on emptiness (*BCA* 9.48).

However, Śāntideva tells us little about the technicalities of either calming meditation (*śamatha*) or investigative meditation (*vipaśyanā*). Brunnhölzl (2004) provides a more helpful explanation of investigative meditation in his exposition of Madhyamaka within the Tibetan Kagyü school.[74] First, we must focus on a particular object and then apply Madhyamaka reasoning (as outlined the previous chapter) to it. In doing so, we will not find the object to be anything whatsoever. As the *Verse Summary of the Perfection of Wisdom* says:

> When conditioned, unconditioned, virtuous, or nonvirtuous phenomena
> Are analysed by wisdom, not even a tiny particle is seen.
> This is commonly called the perfection of wisdom (Sopa 2017).

[73] This articulation of cultivating realisation of emptiness relies on a gradual conception of liberation. Whether liberation is gradual or instantaneous has been a matter of great dispute between different Mahāyāna traditions, allegedly coming to a head at the *bSam yas* debate between Kamalaśīla and Mo-he-yen. According to Indo-Tibetan traditions, Kamalaśīla's defence of a gradual process was victorious.
[74] Though some of his philosophical exposition is specific to the Kagyü (and Nyingma) sects, I deem his exposition of meditation to be more generalisable.

We should then rest in meditative equipoise in this very actuality of not finding anything. This process is to be applied to our entire range of mental events, so as to realise that neither external nor internal objects are to be found in any way. Brunnhölzl concludes, "In this way, the analysis is self-terminating, just as a fire springs to life when two sticks are rubbed together and then is extinguished once the sticks burn up. At this point, we just rest within this state without any grasping" (287).[75] Continued practice of such inquiry is necessary to properly cease our superimposition of *svabhāva*. Indeed, even at the 6th Bodhisattva stage, the Bodhisattva is not yet able to remain in meditative equipoise on signlessness indefinitely. Signlessness is the phenomenological state in which one does not reify or conceptualise the appearances.

Now, it may be clear that inquiry within Madhyamaka is a thoroughly therapeutic endeavour. It is intimately connected with the practice of investigative meditation, which, whilst operating along rational lines, aims at direct, experiential insight. This insight is said to remove afflictions (*kleśa*) e.g., attachment, aversion, and delusion.

It seems we can cogently extend this understanding to sceptical inquiry. We have seen that Madhyamaka reasoning is very similar to sceptical reasoning. Importantly, neither results in finding anything and both continue inquiring. Dwelling on this unfindability brings about a transformation of our experience of the world. Just like Madhyamaka analysis ends in a state in which the mind does not grasp anything, sceptical investigation ends in suspension of judgment, which Sextus describes as, "a standstill of the intellect, owing to which we neither reject nor posit anything" (*PH* 1.10). Thus, Madhyamaka suggests we understand sceptical inquiry as akin to investigative meditation.[76] In the Greek context, this may be expressed as

[75] See footnotes 15 and 59.

[76] One might object that Madhyamaka meditation is more fixed than sceptical investigation because it has a clear goal in mind. Ignoring the possibility that this is the case for Sextus too, Brunnhölzl explains that "Centrist [i.e. Madhyamaka] analytical meditation is meant to provide the ground for experimenting with our basic curiosity and openness to investigate ourselves and the world around us. … Furthermore, instead of trying to prove emptiness or identitylessness, we may as well take the opposite route, looking for reasons that things really exist and then checking out whether these reasons withstand analysis" (2004, 291).

understanding sceptical inquiry as a 'spiritual exercise'. This term was famously popularized by Pierre Hadot (2004), who argued that the role of philosophy as a way of life had been overlooked in interpretations of ancient philosophy. Spiritual exercises are aimed at generating and reactivating a constant way of living and perceiving, despite the distractions, temptations, and difficulties of life. Hadot discusses Pyrrhonism as an example of a philosophical way of life, but he fails to provide any examples of sceptical spiritual exercises (aside from a brief reference to sceptical phrases). However, Madhyamaka suggests we may understand inquiry as such a spiritual exercise: it is a constant practice, aimed at changing our experience of the world.

I defended a similar understanding of inquiry when suggesting that Pyrrhonism is best understood according to a therapeutic framework (chapter 2:3). Indeed, Sextus directly links inquiry and suspensive feeling (*pathos*) (*PH* 1.7), and links this to the experience of tranquillity (*ataraxia*) (*PH* 1.10). We also saw that 'inquiry' (*zētētis*) is more often associated with 'examination' (*skepsis*) than with the 'search for something', which suggests that it is more than a mere search for truth. Furthermore, Madhyamaka provides an answer to the question why Pyrrhonian inquiry is continuous. Problematic reification is a persistent and ingrained habit that is difficult to get rid of. As Śāntideva explains: "Without emptiness a mind is fettered and arises again" (*BCA* 9.48). Continuous inquiry is needed to uproot this tendency. Thus, Madhyamaka helps us see that sceptical inquiry may cogently be understood as a spiritual exercise.

1.2: Setting out Oppositions

The second clear practice that Sextus outlines is the "ability to set out oppositions among things which appear and are thought of in any way at all" (*PH* 1.8). We have seen that this is akin to the use of the *catuṣkoṭi* by thinkers like Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti. However, they offer little insight in how this may be instantiated in practice. Fortunately, the ability to

establish opposing accounts is key to Gelukpa (dGe lugs pa) debate; Gelukpa is the predominant Buddhist order in Tibet. Dreyfus suggests that "because debates proceed mostly by unearthing contradictions and allow minimal production of constructive syntheses, they are particularly fit to embody the radical Madhyamaka approach" (Dreyfus 2002, 243). In other words, debate prepares for the realisation of emptiness without falling into dogmatism. Indeed, the aim of debate is to make your opponent contradict themselves, i.e. to make them adopt an account that opposes their initial thesis.[77] Dreyfus points out that these debates can be taken to proceed "by explicitly identifying binary oppositions to undermine all alternatives" (ibid, 244). One teacher suggested that "The mark of a good debater is that he is able to establish that what is is not and that what is not is" (ibid.); and the Dalai Lama observed that, "every opinion one can put forth in debate can always be undermined, however right it may be" (ibid, 243). These debates are subject to strict rules and stringent logic, but as Tillemans points out, presenting them as mere logical systems "loses sight of the fundamental fact that debate is an activity, where the ontological question as to whether there is a counterexample or not is replaced by the practical activity of seeking and finding one" (1999, 120). As Dreyfus explains, debate "relentlessly pushes the investigation forward, preventing the mind from indulging in its tendency to seize on a final answer" (2002, 244). Hence, Perdue explains that debate is not an end in itself, but part of the path to spiritual wellness: "It is like the approach of a physician—to remove what does not belong and to strengthen what does" (ch. 19).[78]

Hence, like with inquiry, Madhyamaka allows us to conceive of setting out oppositions as a concrete activity. Gelukpa debate shows how this key Pyrrhonian practice may be

[77] See Samuels (2021) and Perdue (2014) for helpful discussions of this practice.

[78] However, note that there is not necessarily a direct historical connection between the form of Tibetan debates and the Madhyamaka agenda that they serve. As Dreyfus notes, "This is a complex question that can be answered only through further study of Cha-ba and his tradition" (2002, 245). Indeed, there are teachers that simply use debate to instil Buddhist doctrines. However, others do speak of "an exhilarating sense of openness that debate makes possible for them as they use it as a mode of inquiry in studying the tradition's great texts" (ibid. 268). Their motto is 'Do not underinvestigate and overdecide' (274).

encapsulated as a spiritual exercise. Such dialectical debate, aimed at loosening our mind's tendency to reify, helps to generate and reactivate a constant way of living and perceiving. This conception fits well with Sextus' exposition of Pyrrhonism. From the very outset he identifies scepticism as an ability, "an ability to set out oppositions among things which appear and are thought of in any way at all" (*PH* 1.8), which ultimately leads to *ataraxia*. He also explains that 'in any way at all' can also refer to 'ability', implying that the practice of setting out oppositions can take many different forms. This explicitly allows for a range of practices, such as dialectical debate. In fact, Arcesilaus seems to have engaged in a practice very similar to Gelukpa debate. Indeed, Hadot observes that, "Arcesilaus, for instance, who considered philosophical discourse to be purely critical, used to ask an auditor to propose a thesis; he then refuted it by asking questions which gradually brought the interlocutor to admit the contradictory of the thesis he had proposed" (105). This is precisely the method by which Gelukpa debate operates. And Sextus closely aligns Pyrrhonism with Arcesilaus: "indeed, his persuasion and ours are virtually the same. For he is not found making assertions about the reality or unreality of anything, nor does he prefer one thing to another in point of convincingness or lack of convincingness, but he suspends judgement about everything" (*PH* 1.232). Thus, Sextus closely associates Pyrrhonism with Arcesilaus, who engages in a practice akin to Tibetan dialectical debate. This suggests that the practice of setting out oppositions may cogently be understood as a spiritual exercise (rather than a merely theoretical endeavour).

1.3: Uttering Sceptical Phrases

Lastly, Sextus explains that the practice of scepticism involves uttering certain sceptical phrases, such as 'No More', 'Everything is undetermined', and 'Opposed to every account there is an equal account' (*PH* 1.187-209). The uttering of such phrases plays an important role in Buddhism too, particularly via recitation. For example, it is recommended that

beginners recite Madhyamaka reasoning before they meditate, in order to clearly bring the arguments to mind (Brunnhölzl, 290). Furthermore, the Heart Sutra, which encapsulates the teaching of emptiness, is recited daily by Buddhists all over the world (Dreyfus 2002, 248; Trainor 2004, 84), particularly the phrase "form is emptiness; emptiness is also form" (Kongtrül 2009, 171).[79] Such recitations help with transforming and retaining a transformed experience of the world.

It would be difficult to make sense of the recitation of sceptical phrases outside of a therapeutic context. Indeed, Sextus suggests that the phrases can be employed as exhortations, to prevent the sceptics "from being seduced by the Dogmatists into abandoning their investigation and thus through rashness missing the tranquillity apparent to them" (*PH* 1.205). This suggests that, in line with Buddhist recitation, sceptical recitation is aimed at retaining a certain experience. Hence, this supports Hadot's suggestion that, "Like the Epicureans and the Stoics … the Skeptics used short, striking sayings to renew their choice of life at each moment" (145).

Thus, I showed that Madhyamaka helps to conceive of Pyrrhonian activity as spiritual exercises, and that these articulations are corroborated by the text. This conception of Pyrrhonian activity also fits well with Sextus' general exposition of Pyrrhonism. The very reason sceptics start investigating is because they want to reach *ataraxia*: they search for a way to transform their experience of the world. In this way, they parallel their contemporaries: Hellenistic philosophy is intimately connected with everyday life (Hadot 2004; Nussbaum 1994). Thus, Madhyamaka reveals a more holistic way of understanding Pyrrhonian activity. In addition, it also helps us to understand how Pyrrhonian practices may be instantiated. Other Greek philosophies (even Aristotelianism, see Hall 2018) have

[79] Dreyfus points out that some Gelukpa monks use the daily recitation of the Heart Sutra to contemplate emptiness, but that its effectiveness primarily lies in its ritual power (2002, 249).

found avid practitioners in the 21st century; the above conception of sceptical activity may provide a more concrete starting point for Pyrrhonian practice too.[80]

2: The Scope of Scepticism; or Why We Are All Dogmatists

Probably the most vexed exegetical question concerning the ancient Greek Pyrrhonists is whether they disavow all, or only some, beliefs (Machuca 2013a). Indeed, determining the scope of suspension of judgment (*epochē*) is crucial to understanding the sceptical project. A universal scope suggests that the sceptic suspends judgment on all matters. This interpretation renders the tradition vulnerable to the crippling *apraxia* (inactivity) charge.[81] If sceptics fail to assent to the appearances, they are bound to be utterly inactive; yet if they are active, this implies that they do assent to some things (and thus are inconsistent). After all, who would suspend judgment on whether there is in fact a vengeful cow storming their way? To avoid these objections, attempts to transform the Pyrrhonian sceptic into a contemporary interlocutor have restricted the scope of scepticism in order to allow for some beliefs—in particular, beliefs regarding ordinary life. It is *philosophical* beliefs (or philosophically derived beliefs) that the sceptic calls into question (Hiley 1988; Frede 1987; Fogelin 1994). However, with the help of Madhyamaka, I will show that the scope of *epochē* is in fact universal, not because *all* beliefs are problematic, but because those beliefs that are problematic (involving problematic reification) are virtually ubiquitous.

I will start by outlining the foundations of the debate. The fact that it has been ongoing for nearly half a century (Barnes first articulated this issue in 1982) indicates additional data sources would be welcome. Hence, I will examine how this debate plays out in Madhyamaka,

[80] In fact, Chase (2021) argues that ancient scepticism is the Greco-Roman philosophy most equipped to tackle issues in the age of COVID-19; fake news in particular, because ancient scepticism combines renunciation of objective claims about reality with sophisticated proto-experimental scientific methodology.

[81] This comes in several versions, see Vogt (2010) for an overview.

and argue that their unambiguous avowal of the universal scope of *prapañca* constitutes analogical evidence for the universal scope of *epochē*. I will show that key passages for ascribing a limited scope to Pyrrhonism find parallels within Madhyamaka too; the fact that Madhyamaka clearly has a universal scope undercuts their evidential force. I will then support this analysis with additional arguments.

2.1: The Foundations of the Debate

The debate regarding the scope of scepticism centres on Sextus' reply to the question of whether the sceptic holds any *dogmata*, commonly translated as 'belief':

> When we say that Sceptics do not hold beliefs (*dogmata*), we do not take 'belief' (*dogma*) in the sense in which some say, quite generally, that belief is acquiescing (*eudokein*) in something; for Sceptics assent to the feelings forced upon them by appearances (*phantasiai*) – for example, they would not say, when heated or chilled, 'I think I am not heated (or: chilled)'. Rather, we say that they do not hold beliefs in the sense in which some say that belief is assent to some unclear (*adēla*) object of investigation in the sciences; for Pyrrhonists do not assent to anything unclear (*PH* 1.13).

Barnes (1982) first divided interpretations of *PH* 1.13 into two camps: 'rustic' and 'urbane'. Following Galen, he defines the rustic Pyrrhonists as, "[having] no beliefs whatsoever: he directs *epochē* towards every issue that may arise;" and the urbane Pyrrhonist as, "happy to believe most of the things that ordinary people assent to in the ordinary course of events: he directs *epochē* towards a specific target – roughly speaking, towards philosophical and scientific matters" (2).[82]

[82] As Striker points out, if we focus this debate on the notion of 'belief', it will largely depend on what meaning we ascribe to the term (2001, 119). Some, like Perin (2010) and Fine (2000), argue that one can

The scope of 'non-dogmatic' beliefs was first articulated by Frede. He argues that the sceptic suspends belief about how things *really* are but does have beliefs about how things are in an everyday sense (1998, 9). Frede suggests that when Sextus distinguishes between two kinds of belief, he means to suspend judgment on philosophico-scientific beliefs, namely those which are arrived at through reason, leaving the beliefs of ordinary people intact. This means the sceptic does not differ from the person on the street: "He, too, only reports his impressions and does not also think that things *really* are the way he takes them to be, the way they appear to him" (ibid, 22). Thus, sceptics can hold beliefs in an ordinary way, as long as they are not the result of philosophical reasoning. This view appears to be supported by the fact that Sextus explicitly aligns himself with everyday life: "Not only do we not conflict with everyday life, but we actually join the struggle on its side" (*PH* 2.102).

Thus, two key passages used to restrict the scope of scepticism are *PH* 1.13 and *PH* 2.102. In the former Sextus distinguishes between problematic and unproblematic assent, and in the latter Sextus sides with everyday life.

Burnyeat set the precedent for the 'rustic' view, namely that the sceptic has no beliefs. He accepts from *PH* 1.13 that the sceptics assent to claims regarding the appearances, but he does not think this assent amounts to belief. Burnyeat explains that the appearances are simply not within the purview of truth (and therefore not constitutive of belief) in the Hellenic context: "For 'true' in these discussions means 'true of a real objective world'; the true, if there is such a thing, is what conforms with the real, an association traditional to the word *alēthēs* since the earliest period of Greek philosophy" (1980, 210). Note that this argument alone does not contradict Frede's (1998) view. Both Burnyeat and Frede interpret the sceptic as not accepting anything as true. Their disagreement lies in the conception of

endorse a rustic interpretation, whilst still maintaining that the sceptic has some beliefs. Others, like Vogt (2012) and Burnyeat (1980) argue that, at least according to ancient standards, the sceptic has no beliefs.

the sceptical assent to the appearances, and whether this corresponds to everyday, non-philosophical assent.

2.2: The Madhyamaka Case for a Universal Scope

Now, evidence for both a limited and a universal scope can be found in the text. Hence, it will be helpful to access another source of evidence: Madhyamaka. I am not suggesting that the affinity established in the previous chapter means we can simply generalize from Madhyamaka to Pyrrhonism (or vice versa). As I explained in my methodology chapter, cogent analogical inferences require relational similarities, and ideally causal similarities. The therapeutic framework I used to analyse Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka captures such causal connections. Both identify problematic reification as the source of disturbance that their philosophies set out to alleviate; they tackle this reification in very similar ways (inquiry, equipollence, and dialectical argument); this halts the reification, but leaves the appearances alone, which are followed instead; both emphasize their arguments are not dogmatic; and they note that the halting of reification leads to tranquillity. Hence, Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka are similar causal systems. If a crucial component of one system, the scope, is unclear (does it apply to philosophers only, 0,00001% of all people, or does it apply to virtually everyone, 99,99% of all people?), then the status of this component in a very similar system may be used as evidence to increase clarity. In other words, because Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka share such similar causal structures, the scope of Madhyamaka may be used as evidence in the rustic/urbane debate. Just as all evidence in this debate, data from Madhyamaka is circumstantial, but it can increase confidence in one side or the other.

Fortunately, the Madhyamaka verdict is swift and decisive: virtually all beliefs are problematic,[83] because almost everyone engages in problematic reification (*prapañca*). It is this very tendency that keeps us trapped in cyclic existence. To cite Candrakīrti, Nāgārjuna, and Śāntideva in turn:

> As those of defective eyesight, because of their defect, persist in treating non-existing hairs and such things as if they were self-existent, so unenlightened people, their spiritual vision being afflicted with the defect of primal ignorance, persist in treating things which have no essential, self-existing nature as if they did (*PP* 15.2).[84]

> Ordinary beings (*pṛthagjana*), who hold at entities,
> Mistake existence and non-existence.
> Thus flawed, they are driven by addictions,
> And [hence] are deceived by their own minds (*YṢ* 24).[85]

> Ordinary people see existent things and also imagine them to be real, that is to say, not as an illusion. It is in this regard that there is disagreement between the ordinary person and the spiritually developed (*BCA* 9.5).

Hence, for Madhyamaka, the scope of *prapañca* is universal, and therefore the scope of their therapy is universal too. Given that *prapañca* is said to give rise to the same kinds of disturbance as dogmatic assent, that its halting leads to a state akin to *ataraxia*, and that this halting happens via very similar procedures as in Pyrrhonism, it would be striking if something as crucial as their scope would differ fundamentally. Indeed, imagine two doctors who, in a given population, notice similar symptoms, diagnose these in similar ways, prescribe similar medicines to treat it, and notice similar results. One doctor claims it is clear everyone suffers from this malady. The other doctor may be interpreted either as

[83] 'Belief' here is a translation of '*dṛṣṭi*', which is more commonly translated as 'view' or 'opinion'.
[84] De La Vallée Poussin (1903, 261).
[85] Loizzo (2007) with changes.

claiming that it affects virtually everyone, or as claiming that it affects virtually no one. Given the context, we would deem it more plausible that the second doctor also considers the affliction to be ubiquitous. Or, in any case, we should be inclined to distribute the medicine to everyone. If such an analogical inference is not regarded as substantial support, it at least firmly places the burden of proof on the defender of a limited scope.

One may object that, by identifying *reification* rather than *rational deliberation* as the core of dogmatism in my articulation of Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka, I have presupposed a rustic interpretation of Sextus' works, and therefore begged the question. However, I would like to draw apart two dimensions of the rustic/urbane dispute: first, there is disagreement about the *scope* of problematic beliefs; second, there is disagreement about the *criteria* of problematic belief (i.e. reification or rational deliberation). If viewing dogmatism as rational deliberation necessarily leads to a limited scope, and if viewing dogmatism as reification necessarily leads to a universal scope, then my argument would indeed be circular. However, this is not the case. For instance, Sextus notes that the sceptic does not hold beliefs understood as "assent to some unclear object of investigation in the sciences" (*PH* 1.14), but it is not obvious that *everyone* reifies such 'scientific' objects. In addition, some have interpreted Madhyamaka along more seemingly 'urbane' lines, whilst emphasizing its universal scope, which shows that the scope of problematic rational deliberation need not be restricted. For example, Huntington argues that the goal of Madhyamaka, "is to uproot altogether the very desire, or need, for rational certainty, and so to provide an anecdote to the intellectual and spiritual disease of clinging (2007, 122). And he suggests that disturbance arises from, "the compulsion to know something for certain, to command, demonstrate, prove or disprove something once and for all — including the validity of rational argumentation itself" (ibid., 129). However, he considers this clinging to rational certainty a ubiquitous problem, rather than one reserved for philosophers. This suggests that presuming reification does not necessitate a universal scope, and that rational deliberation does not necessitate a limited scope. It also raises the question how distinct

rational deliberation and reification in fact are – *prapañca* and *prosdoxazein* seem to have elements of both. Moreover, even we leave out the source of the disturbance out the equation altogether, the analogical inference still works, albeit less strongly. The similarities between the disturbances the two traditions identify (regardless of their source), their methods, their self-referring statements, their acceptance of the appearances, and the resulting tranquillity still hang together in very similar ways. Finally, this inference is supposed to put the defender of a limited scope on the back foot, not to provide conclusive evidence.

Indeed, after such an inference, the defender of a limited scope may point to *PH* 1.13 and argue that Sextus clearly allows for some kind of assent, and to *PH* 2.102, and argue that he considers everyday life philosophically innocuous. However, similar passages may be found in Madhyamaka, which suggests they need not be indicative of a limited scope at all.

In the previous chapter we saw that Madhyamaka too distinguishes between problematic and nonproblematic engagement with the appearances. This is the distinction between the conventional (*saṃvṛti*) and the ultimate (*paramārtha*). If we relate to the appearances as appearances, we realise they are merely conventional, but if we relate to the appearances as if they exist intrinsically, we mistakenly believe them to be ultimate. As Śāntideva explains:

> How something is seen, heard, or cognized is not what is contested here, but it is refuted here that conceptualization is real, as that is the cause of suffering (*BCA* 9.25).

Looking at Madhyamaka texts, one may get the impression that such reification primarily occurs in philosophical discourse. After all, Madhyamaka works are famous for their arguments showing the problematic philosophical consequences of *prapañca*. However, this is simply an intellectual articulation of a ubiquitous cognitive tendency. Ordinary people exhibit this tendency unwittingly. Philosophers, on the other hand, explicitly articulate views that (presume that) things are intrinsically existent (Sopa 2017, 65). Hence, as Sopa

puts it, they are afflicted with both innate and contrived grasping (ibid.). Most suffering is in fact caused by ordinary people relating to the conventional as if it were ultimate. As Candrakīrti explains:

> What is ultimate for ordinary beings is merely relative in the appearance-associated domain of noble ones, while the ultimate for the latter is its emptiness-nature. (*MAv* 6.28).

Thus, the fact that Madhyamaka criticizes philosophical reification and allows for going along with the appearances in no way restricts the scope of their therapy. This philosophical reification is simply an expression of a ubiquitous tendency. Indeed, Madhyamaka examples of the suffering that such reification produces, like aversion, greed, and preoccupation with the self, may be recognizable by everyone. Hence, the fact that sceptics "do not hold beliefs in the sense in which some say that belief is assent to some unclear (*adēla*) object of investigation in the sciences" (*PH* 1.13), does not imply that the scope of scepticism need be restricted to philosophical beliefs. It may be that everyone assents to unclear things, and that philosophers simply articulate this move.[86] Indeed, as with Madhyamaka, Pyrrhonian examples of belief-induced disturbance, like excessive greed and attachment, may be recognized by everyone.

In fact, Madhyamaka discourse allows us to suggest that *PH* 1.13 may not be concerned with limiting the scope of Pyrrhonism at all. Commentary on Nāgārjuna's elusive statement, "If I had any thesis [*pratijña*], that fault would apply to me. But I do not have any thesis, so there is indeed no fault for me" (*VV* 29), also distinguishes between two kinds of *pratijña*. One is *pratijña* as understood according to his opponent's semantics; and the other is *pratijña* as employed in everyday linguistic practice. Just as Sextus outlines two different understandings of *dogmata*, Candrakīrti uses *pratijña* in a philosophical, as well as a

[86] Bett (2020) and Vogt (2012) concur. Bett suggests that there are such persons as "dogmatic non-philosophers" (144); and Vogt suggests, "Dogmatizing is like swimming with the current. It is, in Sextus's characterization, the default mode of the mind" (139).

conventional sense. He can employ the latter "without automatically having to reject it as a thesis that posits some kind of self-existent entity" (Ruegg 2000, 130). The aim of such discussions of *pratijña* is not to stamp one usage with the Madhyamaka seal of approval, but to make clear that the Madhyamaka does not use *pratijña* dogmatically, according to their opponent's semantics.

Similarly, Sextus makes clear he eschews *dogmata* that posit "as real the things you are said to hold *dogmata* about" (*PH* 1.14); these constitute substantial philosophical theses. This suggests he is concerned with the clarifying that the sceptic does not engage in any dogmatism, rather than with outlining an acceptable set of beliefs. Indeed, there is disagreement about whether *dogma* actually denotes 'belief' in this context. Whilst it is common practice to translate *dogma* as 'belief', Barnes points out that it usually refers to weightier claims – and so too in Sextus (1982, 9). Indeed, Vogt argues that we should not consider Sextus' discussion of *dogma* in *PH* 1.13 as concerned with delineating acceptable *beliefs*, but as part of the attempt to avoid any semblance of presenting philosophical *theses.* Sextus generally deeps *doxa* and *dogma* apart, using them in different contexts: "*dogmatikōs* when he refers to philosophical claims, and *adoxastōs* when he describes the sceptic's life" (2012, 655). Rather than *PH* 1.13 being a passage where Sextus restricts the scope of scepticism, it may equally well be part of an effort to make clear the sceptic does not make theoretical claims.

Now, if Sextus' delineation of two kinds of *dogma* in *PH* 1.13 is no longer able to support the case for a limited scope, one may instead turn to Sextus' apparent alignment with everyday life.[87] Indeed, Sextus states that, "Not only do we not conflict with everyday life, but we actually join the struggle on its side, assenting without opinion (*adoxastōs*) to what it has found convincing and taking a stand against the private fictions of the Dogmatists" (*PH*

[87] See Grgic (2011) and Barnes (1982). Cf. Thorsrud (2011).

2.102). How could Sextus genuinely side with everyday conventions whilst also suspending all judgment regarding them?

However, as we have seen, Mādhyamikas too ally with ordinary conventions against their opponents, *whilst* maintaining a universal scope. Candrakīrti quotes the Buddha,

> The world (*loka*) argues with me. I don't argue with the world. What is agreed upon (*saṃmata*) in the world to exist, I too agree that it exists. What is agreed upon in the world to be non-existent, I too agree that it does not exist (*PP* 18.8).[88]

Candrakīrti suggests that the Madhyamaka is able to recognize the conventional as conventional, and that they counter any attempt of their opponent to deviate from the conventional (*PP* 1.105). The combination of Madhyamaka's universal scope and their alliance with the conventional can be explained by the nature of the conventional truth. As we have seen, the Sanskrit term, *saṃvṛti* can simply mean conventional, but also concealing (Garfield 1995, 297). The latter meaning is used to explain that the conventional truth covers up its own emptiness: it conceals its conventional character. This explains why ordinary people struggle to experience the conventional as merely conventional. It is like engaging with a hyper-realistic work of fiction: the Mādhyamika is happy sticking to the text and taking it seriously, but they would object to taking the narrative to be based on real events. In this way, the Mādhyamika can side with the text, with the ordinary life of the cowherders, whilst criticizing their reifying habits.

This suggests that Sextus may cogently follow ordinary life *adoxastōs* whilst criticizing ordinary beliefs. Indeed, Sextus suggests that, if a criterion of truth were found, the sceptics "will need to be convicted as rash and dismissive of common belief" (*M* 7.27). Now, the sceptic does assent "without opinion (*adoxastōs*) to what [everyday life] has found convincing" (*M* 2.102). This suggests that common beliefs involve opinions (*doxa*), which the

[88] Translated by Tillemans (2011); de La Vallée Poussin (1903, 370).

sceptic eschews. Hence, the sceptic sides with everyday life, but does not approve of everyday assent, which posits as real the thing assented to. Instead, by following everyday life *adoxastōs*, the sceptic is guided by nature, necessitation by feelings, handing down of laws and customs, and teaching of kinds of expertise (*PH* 1.24). Thus, the sceptic can genuinely side with ordinary, conventional life, whilst also recommending unrestricted suspension of judgment. Hence, Madhyamaka demonstrates that alliance with everyday life is insufficient grounds for limiting the scope of Pyrrhonism.

2.3: Supporting Arguments for a Universal Scope

I have shown that the structural and causal similarities between Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka allow us to use the universal scope of *prapañca* as evidence for the universal scope of *epochē*. It is universal, not because *all* beliefs are problematic, but because those beliefs that are problematic, involving problematic reification, are shared by everyone (except for by realised beings). In addition, I demonstrated that Madhyamaka undercuts two key arguments for limiting the scope of Pyrrhonism. In this section, I will substantiate this conclusion with additional arguments.

2.3.1: Context Supports a Universal Scope

If Sextus in fact limited the scope of Pyrrhonism to philosophical beliefs, then he would be unique in ancient Greece. The main interlocutors, Plato, Aristotle, the Stoics, and the Epicureans, did not think philosophers were uniquely afflicted; indeed, they were concerned with universal sentiments like anger, fear, piety, and happiness. The Epicureans aim for *ataraxia* too, and their therapy was very clearly not only for philosophers. If Sextus had proposed a radical shift away from such universal therapy, it seems likely he would have made this clear. After all, he takes great care to differentiate Pyrrhonism from other ancient philosophies (*PH* 1.210-41). For example, he notes that the aim of the Cyrenaics "is pleasure

and a smooth motion of the flesh, while we say that it is tranquillity" (*PH* 1.215). This is the only difference he notes regarding their aims, even though the Cyrenaics thought that pleasure was the aim for everyone, not just philosophers. If Sextus' scope was so much more restricted, it is difficult to imagine why he did not care to mention it here.

2.3.2: Limited Scope as Insufficiently Therapeutic

Limiting the scope of suspension of judgment would limit the therapeutic role of scepticism to alleviating philosophical confusion. This suggests psychological transformation is a minor concern to the sceptic: philosophical conundrums can be frustrating, but they are not a major source of suffering. However, this would disregard scepticism's avowedly transformative purpose. The very reason sceptics start investigating is because they want to reach tranquillity (*ataraxia*): they search for a way to transform their experience of the world. In the previous chapter, I argued that Pyrrhonism as a whole is best understood according to a therapeutic framework; and I argued that the sceptic's activities, such as continuous inquiry, may be understood as spiritual exercises. The need for such ongoing therapy implies that dogmatism is a cognitive habit that we must work hard to uproot. As fun as philosophizing can be, it seems like a stretch to suggest that people simply cannot help continuing to do so, unless they engage in continued dialectical therapy. Indeed, even a game of backgammon is sufficient to make one of the greatest thinkers forget all about philosophy. Hence, the centrality of therapy is incompatible with a purely theoretical scope.

2.3.3: Against *hoson epi tō logō* as Restrictive

Frede famously restricts problematic beliefs to those that are formed via a particular kind of reasoning: "we have to withhold assent as far as this is a matter of reason or philosophical reason (*hoson epi tō philosophō logō*)" (1984, 260). Indeed, he suggests that when Sextus distinguishes between two kinds of *dogmata*, he means to suspend judgment on beliefs that are arrived at through reason, leaving the beliefs of ordinary people intact. For instance, he claims that Sextus' allowance for conventionally accepted signs, e.g. smoke as a sign of fire

(*PH* 2.102), is an indication that only deliberatively formed beliefs are problematic. A view is dogmatic if we think that reason provides good grounds for believing it. Thus, on Frede's view, the sceptic can believe that honey is sweet, because it appears as such, as long as it is not established by reason as such.

However, there is little support for Frede's claim that *hoson epi tō logō* refers to a special dogmatic notion of reason, which determines the extent of suspension of judgment. Brunschwig points out that the statement can be interpreted in a variety of ways. He argues that *hoson epi* statements neither support 'rustic' nor 'urbane' interpretations, and suggests they are best understood as 'on that account', making clear that sceptical arguments are always opponent-relative and never generalisable (1994, 258). Similarly, Perin argues the standard translation, 'as far as the argument goes', makes clear that this restriction is open to revision (2010, 155). This means that it is not a dogmatic restriction, which is a point Sextus continually emphasizes. When Sextus writes that he suspends judgment 'as far as the argument goes' (*PH* 1.215), he suggests that a particular argument, which is open to revision, is the basis of suspension of judgment. As Perin points out, "That claim does not imply that there is, as Frede claims, some respect in which the Sceptic does not suspend judgement about whether honey is sweet" (2010, 156).

Furthermore, as we saw in the previous chapter when discussing essence-*svabhāva*, Madhyamaka too allows for conventionally accepted signs. Candrakīrti explains that saying heat is the *svabhāva* of fire is unproblematic, because heat clearly does not exist independently, and because this association is in line with everyday linguistic practice. Hence, Sextus' allowance of indicative signs, which "are found convincing by everyday life", does not imply that ordinary beliefs are innocuous. Sextus may simply be going along with linguistic convention, whilst criticizing reification of such conventions. Mādhyamikas would agree with Frede's suggestion that the sceptic, "only reports his impressions and does not also think that things *really* are the way he takes them to be, the way they appear to him"

(1987, 198), but they would argue that everyone, not just the philosopher, "succumbs to the illusion that reason could guarantee the truth of his beliefs" (ibid., 199). Indeed, who does not think there are good reasons to believe that there is a glass on the table, that the sun will rise tomorrow, or that we are not currently dreaming? Such beliefs may not be formed based on arguments, but we hold them as if supporting arguments could be found, which implies that we hold them dogmatically.

2.3.4: Against Life as Insulated from Philosophy

This brings us to a related point: urbane readings generally presuppose that ordinary people do not hold beliefs about how things really are, i.e. that the beliefs of non-philosophers are non-philosophical. This would imply that everyday beliefs are insulated from scepticism. Burnyeat famously attacks this assumption, which he dubs the 'insulation thesis'. He argues that limiting the scope of scepticism to philosophical claims would buy into the modern insulation between ordinary life and philosophy, which was not present in ancient times. He observes that before the Enlightenment, scepticism was considered to straightforwardly clash with common sense. It was taken seriously, precisely because it was seen as a genuine alternative to everyday views (1984, 227). Hence, the fact that Sextus focusses on philosophical arguments does not mean he is not attacking everyday beliefs too. Indeed, "Every statement making a truth-claim falls within the scope of scientific investigation because, even if the statement itself is not at a theoretical level, it will still use concepts which are the subject of theoretical speculation: concepts such as motion, time, place, body" (ibid, 244). Hence, our ordinary notions are imbued with philosophical content.

Another problem with presuming insulation is that Sextus uses philosophical argument to attack a whole host of ordinary beliefs, particularly beliefs regarding whether things are good or bad. Amongst such goods, Sextus lists desire for victory, wealth, and pleasure (*M* 11.120-124). Ordinary people accept these things as good – yet Sextus clearly includes these

topics in the scope of suspension of judgment. He also attacks some very mundane, non-ethical beliefs, such as 'It is day' (*M* 7.44).

2.3.5: Barnes' Underestimation of Disturbance

Lastly, Barnes argues that the scope of scepticism should be limited to those issues which induce mental disturbance (*tarachē*) in different individuals. He suggests that this means some people will never be in need of sceptical therapy, because they do not have *tarachē*-inducing encounters. He pictures *tarachē* as the disease, and *epochē* as the cure, the dosage of which will depend on the disease (1982, 91). I agree with the analysis, but I believe it necessitates a universal scope: *tarachē* is ubiquitous. After all, who has not suffered when they failed to obtain something they wanted or lost something they cherished? Who is able to stay undisturbed when we are constantly reminded we must be more productive, slimmer, richer, more adventurous?

Indeed, Buddhism's analysis of the human condition suggests that Barnes' underestimates the nature of our disturbance. As we have seen, *duḥkha* does not only entail ordinary pain, or disturbance in the face of mortality, but also suffering rooted in impermanence. This is the observation, similar to Sextus', that we always crave for things we consider good, and once we have them, we fear they will be taken away. We cling to goods like pleasure and victory, as well as to views, as permanent, but because they are fleeting and contingent, we are perpetually unsatisfied. Thus, Buddhism suggests *tarachē* is ubiquitous: we all cling to transient things because we take them to exist intrinsically, and when things inevitably change, we suffer because of our attachment to them. Barnes is correct in proposing that the scope of *epochē* depends on the scope of *tarachē*, but he underestimates the subtle nature of our disturbance. Buddhism shows that *epochē* must be broad, because *tarachē* is broad.

In sum, I have argued that the scope of scepticism is universal. Madhyamaka suggests that we are all dogmatists because we all engage in problematic reification. Thus, when Sextus' claims that the sceptic lives *adoxastōs*, we must take seriously that they suspend all

judgement. This cross-cultural conclusion also means that we must seriously reflect on our own beliefs. Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka urge us to recognize our dogmatic predicament. They present arguments that continue to frustrate contemporary philosophers, and they claim that proper engagement with these arguments can change our experience of the world. Failing to do so leads to continued reification of the appearances, which causes distress. Luckily, they also show that there is a way out of our predicament: if we philosophize well, we can cure our ignorance and relate to reality in a more tranquil, as well as more cogent fashion.

3: The Role of Relativity

Lastly, I want to examine the role of relativity in Pyrrhonism. In the previous chapter, I noted the tension between 'Aenesideman relativity' and 'Agrippan relativity'. When discussing the Five Modes of Agrippa, Sextus claims he has already outlined the Mode of Relativity, suggesting the Mode of Relativity is captured by the earlier account of the Ten Modes of Aenesidemus. Brennan & Lee (2014) suggest that the Ten Modes of Aenesidemus demonstrate relativity by highlighting disagreements between people, which shows things are relative to the thinking and perceiving subject. However, they note, disagreement is already represented in the Five Modes of Agrippa as the Mode of Dispute. Why would such an otherwise neat system contain an odd duplication? Moreover, the Mode of Relativity is listed after the Mode from Infinite Regress, distancing its association with Dispute, and breaking up the renowned trilemma of Regress, Hypothesis and Reciprocity. Instead, citing Diogenes, they suggest that the Mode of Relativity indicates that epistemic grounding must be relative to something else: nothing can be grasped through itself. They suggest this restores order and elegance to the Five Modes, and that it fits better with Sextus' own use of the Modes.

This suggestion is wholly supported by Madhyamaka. I demonstrated that Nāgārjuna's discussion of epistemic grounding (i.e. *pramāṇas*) is fundamentally analogous to the Five Modes of Agrippa. Nāgārjuna starts by generating a Dispute, which forces the opponent to demonstrate how epistemic instruments are established (*VV* 31). He then employs the Mode of Infinite Regress to block attempts to establish epistemic instruments via further epistemic instruments (*VV* 32). The opponent then reverts to Hypothesis, which Nāgārjuna dismisses as inadequate (*VV* 33). Now the Mode of Relativity enters the picture. Since epistemic instruments cannot be established by Hypothesis and require some justification, the opponent suggests that epistemic instruments may justify themselves. However, Nāgārjuna objects:

> If the epistemic instruments are self-established, the epistemic objects will be independent of the establishment of the epistemic instruments for you, for self-establishment is not dependent on anything else (*VV* 40).
>
> If for you the establishment of the epistemic instruments is independent of the objects to be known, then those will not be the epistemic instruments of anything (*VV* 41).

In other words, for something to be an epistemic instrument, it must be the epistemic instrument of something, i.e., it has to be relative to something. Finally, Nāgārjuna blocks attempts to establish epistemic instruments via epistemic objects: epistemic instruments are supposed to establish epistemic objects, so circularity would ensue (*VV* 46-47).

This picture is virtually identical to the one that Brennan and Lee propose (256-7). Only the Modes of Relativity and Hypothesis are swapped, which does not impact the flow or structure of the argument. Given these remarkable relational similarities, and the fact that this set of arguments plays a very similar role in Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka, Nāgārjuna's discussion of *pramāṇas* provides evidential support for Brennan and Lee's interpretation of the Mode of Relativity.

There is one problem, however. Brennan and Lee suggest that if their interpretation is correct, then Sextus himself must have misunderstood the role that Relativity plays among the Five Modes. After all, he suggests this Relativity is 'Aenesideman' rather than 'Agrippan'. Given that he is our main source of information about the Modes of Agrippa, this would be a significant price to pay. However, Madhyamaka may show the way to a solution here: Sextus' understanding of relativity is broader than Brennan and Lee presume.

Nāgārjuna argues against the reflexivity of epistemic justification by appealing to conceptual relativity. He suggests that epistemic justification can only be conceived of in relation to the thing that it justifies. Vision alone cannot establish itself as an epistemic instrument; only by verifying that it reliably establishes yellow flowers as yellow flowers (rather than red ones) can we make sense of it as an epistemic instrument. However, that means that we need something other than vision itself, the flowers, to establish it as an epistemic instrument, which means it cannot be purely self-established. For Mādhyamikas, this kind of relativity is part of the conceptual dimension of Dependent Origination (*pratītyasamutpāda*). I will argue that the Modes of Aenesidemus actually include such relativity.

Indeed, the Modes of Aenesidemus do not solely proceed by observing disagreements (which shows that things are relative to the subject judging), as Brennan & Lee suggest (251). Sextus outlines several more kinds of relativity. Relevant for our purposes, he argues:

> [S]ome existing things are clear, others unclear, as [Dogmatists] themselves say, and what is apparent is a signifier while what is unclear is signified by something apparent (for according to them 'the apparent is the way to see the unclear'). But signifier and signified are relative. Everything, therefore, is relative (*PH* 1.138).

He elaborates on this in his later discussion of signs: "If what is signified is apparent, it will not be a thing signified, having no need for the item which is meant to signify and reveal it. Hence, just as if right is rejected there is no left either, so if what is signified is rejected there cannot be any signs either" (*PH* 2.126). Thus, just like Nāgārjuna rejects that epistemic

instruments can be purely self-established because they are conceived of relative to what they establish, so Sextus suggests that signs and what is signified cannot be self-established, because they are conceived of relative to each other. Indeed, when discussing proofs, a subset of signs, he suggests, "since the [Dogmatists] say that proofs are relative to something, i.e. relative to their consequences, and relatives are thought of, as they themselves say, in relation to other things, then what is being proved must be something other than the proof" (*PH* 2.175). In other words, proofs cannot prove themselves (see also *M* 7.283-313). All of this shows that the relativity between the sign and signified, which Sextus outlines in the Modes of Aenesidemus, is the relativity used to reject reflexive epistemic justification. Indeed, it is exactly this kind of relativity that Nāgārjuna, as well as Sextus himself, use to counter the appeals to reflexivity by the Dogmatists. In order words, Aenesideman relativity encompasses Agrippan relativity.

This suggests that Sextus is not as at odds with Brennan & Lee's interpretation as they themselves suppose. They simply underestimate the different kinds of relativity that Sextus points to in his discussion of the Ten Modes of Aenesidemus. It may be that this connection was made clearer in Sextus' supposed full-fledged exposition of the content on *PH* 1 (preceding *M* 7-11), which is no longer extant. Thus, the above analysis suggests that, like the dependence of epistemic instruments on epistemic objects is an aspect of Dependent Origination, Agrippan relativity may be considered a subset of Aenesideman relativity. This allows for the more cogent articulation of the Modes of Agrippa that Brennan and Lee propose, without having to condemn Sextus as fundamentally misunderstanding the Mode of Relativity.

Chapter 5

Elucidating Madhyamaka

In this chapter, I will harness the testimony and conceptual distinctions provided by Pyrrhonism to illuminate issues within Madhyamaka. I will argue that Sextus helps us to better understand the nature of emptiness by shedding new light on the so-called object of negation. And I will argue that recognizing 'Pyrrhonian' and 'non-Pyrrhonian' currents within Madhyamaka hermeneutics helps to untangle and clarify various contemporary interpretations.

1 Identifying the Object of Negation

As we have seen, emptiness denotes a negation, but there is room for disagreement about what exactly constitutes the *object* of this negation. Garfield and Thakchöe (2011) suggest that focussing on the object of negation allows us to better understand the status of conventional truth and the relation between the two truths (87). Indeed, Tibetan Mādhyamikas devote much time to this topic. The key opponents in this debate are two of

Tibet's greatest Madhyamaka interpreters: Tsongkhapa (Tsong kha pa), the founder of the Gelukpa school, and Gorampa (Go rams pa), a major figure in the Sakya school. Although both are Prasaṅgika Mādhyamikas, Tsongkhapa argues that what is negated is the intrinsic nature ascribed to conventional phenomena, whereas Gorampa argues that conventional phenomena are the object of negation wholesale. In other words, they disagree about whether the object of negation is *intrinsic nature*, or *existence*.[89] If emptiness means that things do not exist full stop, then their apparent existence, captured by the conventional truth, must be a complete illusion. If emptiness means that things do not exist intrinsically, then the posited reality of appearances is problematic, rather than the appearances themselves. Textual support can be found for each view, but they have radically different implications.

I will argue that Pyrrhonism supports conceiving of the object of negation as intrinsic nature only. Basically, Tsongkhapa and Gorampa disagree about how to interpret Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti. This implies that meaning of the object of negation in early Madhyamaka is underdetermined: multiple understandings fit the bill. Hence, if there are insufficient text-internal resources to determine a cogent understanding of the object of negation, it is worthwhile to draw on resources outside the texts. For example, one might argue that a certain understanding is philosophically poor (even though it fits with the text). Another avenue, which I will employ here, is to reduce underdetermination by drawing on another tradition. By looking at how Pyrrhonism makes sense of the object of negation, we have additional tools to determine what understanding of the object of negation makes sense within anti-dogmatic projects like that of Sextus and Nāgārjuna. As before, I am not suggesting that we can simply generalize from one tradition to the other. In order to make a

[89] Note that both Tsongkhapa and Gormapa distinguish between a soteriological and epistemological object of negation (Garfield & Thakchöe 2011). For the purposes of this section, I will discuss these together.

sound analogical inference, the issue in question needs to be embedded in similar webs of causal connections (see chapter 1:3.1).

The issue here is the subject of inquiry. As Dreyfus notes, "it is the very subject of the inquiry that is negated in the Madhyamaka inquiry, not some other entity" (2011, 98). Now, we have seen in chapter 3 that inquiry plays a similar causal role in Madhyamaka as it does in Pyrrhonism: inquiry is intended to combat similar ailments; in both traditions, it searches for and fails to find what things are *really* like; it also brings about similar results (tranquillity); and leaves similar things untouched (the appearances). That does not mean that Pyrrhonism reveals the intentions of Candrakīrti or Nāgārjuna. However, it *does* increase the plausibility of understanding inquiry within Madhyamaka along the lines of inquiry within Pyrrhonism. In other words, Pyrrhonism helps to show that a particular interpretation is a persuasive, fruitful way of reading the text.

1.2 Defending Tsongkhapa

For Tsongkhapa, the object of negation is the existence of intrinsic nature, which is dissolved in the realisation of emptiness. In defence of this suggestion, he distinguishes between the *inability to withstand* inquiry and the *ability to be undermined by* inquiry.[90] Tsongkhapa suggests that conventional reality is not able to *withstand* inquiry, but that it is not actually *undermined* by it. The inability to withstand inquiry means that something is not found when looking for intrinsic nature. However, Tsongkhapa notes,

> [T]he fact that this line of reasoning does not find [things such as production] does not entail that it negates (*khegs pa*) them. Rather if they did exist [ultimately] this reasoning would establish them, and since it does not, they are negated [ultimately].

[90] This outline is based on the Special Insight (*lhag mthong*) sections of the *Extensive Exposition of the Stages of the Path* (*Lam rim chen mo)*. Translations are from Culter and Newland (2000-2004) with changes from Garfield & Thakchöe (2011).

> The production and cessation of such things as material objects are established by conventional consciousness. They do exist but rational consciousness does not establish them; it does not find them, so how could it negate them? (1993, 607).

In other words, inquiry does not actually have the power to negate the existence of objects. Since its purpose is to find intrinsic nature, if it fails in that purpose, the things inquired about do not exist ultimately (because, if they did, inquiry would find intrinsic nature).[91] Hence, the remit of inquiry is limited to ultimate truths, not conventional truths. This means that inquiry is unable to negate phenomena wholesale; it merely negates their intrinsic nature. Indeed, Tsongkhapa maintains that the object of negation cannot exist according to any corners of the *catuṣkoṭi* (existence, nonexistence, both, and neither), *and* he maintains that this is not a problem for conventional existence. The tetralemma only undermines the reified existence underlying each alternative (1993, 637-638). Hence, "by accepting the conventional existence of mere appearance, Tsongkhapa argues, the Mādhyamika eschews reification without eschewing commitment to conventional reality; reificationism is a conceptual error, and its elimination requires a correct understanding— not the elimination—of conventional truth" (Garfield & Thakchöe, 82).

Now, Pyrrhonism wholly supports Tsongkhapa's suggestion that the subject of inquiry, and thus the object of negation, is intrinsic nature. Because of structural and causal similarities between the role that inquiry plays in both traditions, the fact that Sextus exposition of Pyrrhonism corresponds to Tsongkhapa's interpretation, suggests that this is a plausible reading of the data.

Indeed, Sextus makes very clear that the appearances are not the subject of inquiry; their intrinsic nature is. He states, "When we investigate whether existing things are such as they appear, we grant that they appear, and what we investigate is not what is apparent but what is said about what is apparent - and this is different from investigating what is apparent

[91] See chapter 3:4.1 for why such negation is not as different from suspension of judgment as may appear.

itself" (*PH* 1.19). He gives the example of honey being sweet. The sceptic fully accepts the appearance of honey being sweet, but whether "it is actually sweet is something we investigate - and this is not what is apparent but something said about what is apparent" (*PH* 1.20).

This is also in line with, as Tillemans puts it, "the fundamental view of Tsong kha pa that statements in Madhyamaka arguments, in general, cannot be taken literally, but must be prefixed by a qualification which specifies exactly what it is that is being refuted (*dgag bya*)" (1999, 135). Tillemans notes that failure to do so would lead to a complete denial of conventional truth. This is of course paralleled by Sextus' qualification that his arguments merely report appearances (e.g. *PH* 1.4). Indeed, he explains:

> [W]hen a Sceptic says 'Everything is undetermined', he takes 'is' in the sense of 'appears to me'; by 'everything' he means not whatever exists but those unclear matters investigated by the Dogmatists which he has considered; and by 'undetermined' he means that they do not exceed what is opposed to - or, in general, conflicts with - them in convincingness or lack of convincingness (*PH* 1.198).

In other words, Sextus qualifies his argument to specify exactly what it is that is being problematised. When the sceptic makes critical statements about 'everything', this does not refer to existence simpliciter, but to the fictional posits articulated by the Dogmatists and accepted unreflectively by ordinary people, i.e., how things exist by nature.

Thus, Sextus targets how things exist by nature and safeguards the appearances from sceptical criticism. The former are the subject of inquiry, whereas the latter are emphatically excluded. This is underscored by the fact that Sextus specifies what exactly sceptical arguments target: not existence wholesale, but existence posited by the Dogmatists. This is exactly how Tsongkhapa suggests we understand Madhyamaka. As I mentioned, inquiry plays a similar role within Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka. Sextus shows that taking the object of negation to be intrinsic nature allows for inquiry that alleviates suffering without

falling into dogmatism. Given the unclarity regarding the object of negation in Nāgārjuna, the clarity within Pyrrhonism shows that taking the object of negation to be intrinsic nature is consistent with Madhyamaka, and that it is a valid and fruitful way to understand the tradition.

This argument increases the plausibility of Tsongkhapa's interpretation, but it does not undercut Gorampa's case. Let us turn to that now.

1.2 Criticizing Gorampa

According to Gorampa, appearances are conceptually produced. This means that, when conceptual reification (*prapañca*) ceases, the appearances cease also. To achieve this cessation, the "first priority should be the negation of the reality of appearances; thus the unreality of appearances is the principal thing to be established" (1969, 594-595).[92] He conceives of the object of negation dualistically: all conventional knowledge is constituted by an apprehending subject (via cognitions) and its apprehended object (conventional truths); both need to be negated, along with the illusory dichotomy they invite. I will discuss four of his arguments, as outlined by Garfield & Thakchöe (2011).

Unlike Tsongkhapa, Gorampa does think that the failure to find existence when investigated means that the phenomenon under investigation is entirely non-existent. This is because inquiry purports to be an analysis of real phenomena, rather than fictional entities; if the inquiry comes up empty, it means that something real, rather than something fictional, is negated. However, we may also inquire about the existence of money, and find that that it is simply a human conceptual fabrication. Yet, this does not mean that money is entirely non-existent.

[92] Translations by Garfield & Thakchöe (2011).

Further, Gorampa argues that Tsongkhapa's distinction between *mere appearance* and *really established appearance* is moot. Neither of them is real. And to allow for either provides a common object for debate (at least conventionally so). This is problematic, according to Gorampa, because if there is something that is accepted by different sides as an object for debate, that would undermine the Prasaṅgika claim of positionlessness (1969, 392c). However, Pyrrhonism provides a way out of this predicament. Just as Sextus specifies the object of negation, he also qualifies his claims with 'it appears to me that'. Thus, he makes clear that his acceptance of a certain argument or position is not like the acceptance of a Dogmatist, who would want to assert things absolutely. Thus, when Sextus allows for going along with the appearances, this is not an endorsement of things really existing as they appear, and hence does not constitute common ground with the Dogmatists. Relatedly, the sceptic does not assert that the appearances are not negated, they merely involuntarily acquiesce to them. Hence, Tsongkhapa may similarly respond that the Mādhyamika does not share a common object of debate with their opponent. Even if they both accept that the appearances are not negated whereas their reality is, the Mādhyamika acceptance does not rely on a realist semantics, whereas their opponent's acceptance does. (For if it did not, they may be as well called Mādhyamikas.)

In addition, Gorampa argues that accepting the conventional reality of conventional truth undermines soteriology. He notes: "If there is grasping to the reality of phenomena, i.e., the [five] aggregates, then similarly grasping to the reality of person will surely arise. … Thus the root of suffering is grasping to the reality of phenomena" (1969, 389b–c). However, the Pyrrhonists provide a clear rebuttal to this suggestion. They go along with the appearances, but they claim they are still able to alleviate disturbance. As Sextus notes, "tranquillity follows suspension of judgement about everything" (*PH* 1.31). In other words, going along with the appearances does not negate therapeutic efficacy. Thus, realising emptiness still aids liberation, even if it does not remove all appearances from one's psychology. This also

implies that awakening does not require the denial of the reality of the appearances, as Gorampa suggests (1969, 389c-d).

Finally, Gorampa suggests that realised beings will simply not experience the appearances, because all conventional realities are fabrications and realisation requires the cessation of all fabrication (1969, 446b; 447c). This implies that Pyrrhonists are not realised beings, which may be true, but that appears inconsistent with their clear avowals of *ataraxia*.

Furthermore, Gorampa's suggestion that the conventional truth is wholly erroneous presumes some kind of universalism. It implies an objective standpoint from which we can judge the entirety of all conventional truths. This may make sense within a Buddhist religious context, but, as we saw in chapter 1, it is difficult to defend philosophically. In fact, it gives rise to all sorts of undesirable philosophical consequences. If Gorampa suggests everything is entirely false, then, in everyday life, he must simply go along with the truth claims of others. This suggests that what is true for Gorampa is simply based on what is considered true by the common man; and there is little room for epistemological complexity. This issue culminates in the charge of epistemic apathy, which I will discuss in the next chapter.

In sum, by involving Pyrrhonism in the discussion regarding the object of negation, we can see that Tsongkhapa's case has cross-cultural precedent. Sextus makes abundantly clear that the object of inquiry is existence projected unto the appearances, not the appearances themselves. This shows that it makes sense to limit the object of negation to intrinsic nature in a tradition akin to Madhyamaka. Moreover, Pyrrhonism helps to undermine Gorampa's case for the object of negation being existence simpliciter.

1.3 Against Understanding Patsab as Pyrrhonian

Before moving on, I want to note that the arguments above problematise Dreyfus' (2011) association of Sextus with Patsab Nyimadrak (pa tshad myi ma grags), the translator and promoter of Candrakīrti's works in Tibet.

Patsab suggests that Madhyamaka does not aim at negating particular views, but at negating the very act of asserting or negating a thesis. Dreyfus connects this 'thesislessness' to Sextus' suspension of judgment. However, whereas Patsab eschews any theses, suspension of judgment actually allows for some kinds of *dogmata*. Pyrrhonists do not reject *dogma*, "in the sense in which some say, quite generally, that *dogma* is acquiescing in something" (*PH* 1.13), rather, "they do not hold *dogmata* in the sense in which some say that belief is assent to some unclear object of investigation in the sciences" (ibid.). This is not complete thesislessness. Relatedly, Dreyfus observes that, for Patsab, the unfindability of a particular phenomenon undermines the phenomenon itself (akin to Gorampa's position) (2011, 98). However, Sextus never means to undermine the phenomena themselves. As we saw above, he accepts the appearance of something as sweet, and investigates whether it is *really* sweet. In addition, Patsab states that he does not accept any epistemic instruments (*pramāṇas*) (2006, 49). However, Sextus in facts accepts recollective signs, for example as proof that there is fire when we see smoke (*PH* 2.102). He only rejects signs that "seem to be a fiction of the Dogmatists," not ones that are "found convincing by everyday life" (ibid.).[93] Moreover, he outlines a wide range of appearances that the Pyrrhonist can live in accordance with (*PH* 1.23-24). This is incongruous with Patsab's full scale rejection of reliable cognition. More on this in the next chapter.

Hence, I am not convinced that "Patsab can be described as a Pyrrhonian skeptic in that he completely rejects any position and any idea of reliable cognition" (Dreyfus 2011, 112). Such

[93] See Glidden (1983) for an argument that recollective signs are not in fact inferential, and that Sextus' use of them is purely dialectical.

a rejection would seem too dogmatic for the Pyrrhonist in any case, who merely suspends judgment. In fact, Dreyfus and Garfield subsequently use Sextus' appeal to the fourfold observances to articulate "an alternative to Patsab's reading of Prasaṅgika" (2011, 121)! Thus, Sextus 'thesislessness' is more nuanced than that of Patsab. It does not involve a complete rejection of *dogmata* or even of inferential reasoning; Pyrrhonian inquiry is restricted to intrinsic nature.

2 (Non-)Pyrrhonian Currents within Madhyamaka Hermeneutics

In this section, I will argue that recognizing 'Pyrrhonian' and 'non-Pyrrhonian' currents within Madhyamaka hermeneutics helps to untangle various competing interpretations of the tradition. This helps to bring to light what exactly the different interpreters are disagreeing about, which allows for a more precise and effective discussion to take place. Thus, this section focusses on how primary texts are read, rather than the primary texts themselves. First, I will outline the influence of Wittgenstein on contemporary Madhyamaka scholarship: many established interpretations of Nāgārjuna (indirectly) appeal to Wittgenstein, yet still disagree with one another. To understand what is going on here, we must understand different currents in Wittgenstein's thought. These currents have been called 'Pyrrhonian' and 'non-Pyrrhonian'.

2.1 Wittgenstein & Madhyamaka Hermeneutics

As Tuck (1990) aptly demonstrates, much contemporary Madhyamaka scholarship is influenced by (later) Wittgenstein. In fact, he suggests that the reason Nāgārjuna is one of the, if not *the* most written-about Indian philosopher today is because of his association with this Austrian thinker (77).

In the second half of the twentieth century, critics of logical empiricism began to rally Nāgārjuna for their cause. Wittgenstein and Nāgārjuna were portrayed as rebels against the realist authority of logical atomism and Nyāya. They proposed a new outlook that emphasised context and dependency, criticising metaphysical excess. For instance, Katz suggests,

> The parallel between the Buddhist notion of "convenient designation" and Wittgenstein's "everyday language" is clear. Both are saying that because a word may be used, we should not get carried away with philosophies about essences and the like (1981, 311).

Indeed, both were regarded as offering an escape from essentialist views of the world. The problem arises when we believe that the conventional or ordinary language gives us access to what is *really* the case. As Thurman suggests,

> The opponent [of Nāgārjuna], as the interlocutor in [Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*], is a philosophical absolutist , a substantivist, who is 'bewitched by language' into perceiving things to be absolutely true, 'really real' before him , and the Wittgensteinian and Mādhyamika nonegocentrist critical analyses intend to force him to look deeper into things and processes by examining his account of them to actually try to find the essence to correspond to the name , the 'metaphysical entity,' the 'simple,' the 'indivisible'. The absolutist's failure to find any such analysis-resistant essence is the first step on the road to liberation of his intelligence from the spell of language (1980, 326-7).

In particular, their positionlessness was remarked upon. Katz writes that "both Wittgenstein and Nagarjuna are explicit in stating that in their negations they are not negating anything real—which is consistent with our characterization of them as both being positionless" (1981, 318).

Wittgenstein remains a dominant force in Madhyamaka hermeneutics. For example, Garfield (1990) links Sextus, Nāgārjuna, and Wittgenstein in their denial that meaning is based on correspondence with a mind-independent world. Instead, Garfield suggests, they all argued that "our conventions and practices regarding the use of, talk about, and justification of knowledge claims regarding external objects get their point just from their role in our individual and collective lives" (289). Further, as I will explain in more detail in the next chapter, Siderits (2003) appeals to contextualism when trying to make sense of Madhyamaka semantic and epistemic practice. He bases his account on Williams' exposition of contextualism, which is in fact based on Wittgenstein's hinge commitments. Trying to make sense of entities outside of such contexts means going beyond the ordinary discourse in which they make sense, and will thus lead to issues. Hence, Siderits suggests "[c]hariots, houses, forests, trees, rivers, mountains, persons, atoms, quarks—all are real in the only way in which something could be real. Each has its own determinate nature by virtue of its functional role within some human practice" (2003, 202).

In addition, Tillemans (2016b) suggests that we can use Wittgenstein's account of action and forms of life to clarify why *vyavahāra* (the 'everyday life' sense of the conventional truth) is left unanalysed. (See chapter 3:4.2 for a discussion regarding the appearances and the conventional truth being exempt from critical analysis.) Wittgenstein argues against using philosophy to support or ground our common cognitive activities. We end up in trouble every time we try to provide a rational account of them. Instead, Wittgenstein argues, they are simply a natural fact of life, in no further need of analysis and justification, "as much part of our natural history as walking, eating, drinking, playing" (1953/2009, §25).[94] Tillemans suggests that we may use this to understand why *vyavahāra* is not investigated (it is 'fine unanalysed'). Just as Wittgenstein suggests that our everyday activities give our concepts meaning, but cannot themselves be rationally evaluated, so the

[94] See also 1953/2009 §217; ibid. §226; 1969 §359.

un-analysability of *vyavahāra* indicates it is the bedrock for investigation. As Tillemans suggests, "justificatory reasons stop there and can go no further in spite of the philosopher's constant temptation to uncover ever more interpretations and choices" (2016b, 131). Thus, the fact that the conventional is not critically investigated suggests that "there is no deeper account to explain entities, and indeed our lives, being what they are, whether in terms of intrinsic natures or in terms of strategic choices" (ibid., 131).

However, crucially, Tillemans appeals to Wittgenstein in order to *rebut* the accounts of Garfield and Siderits. He argues that they attempt to replace the theory that entities are grounded by *svabhāva* by the theory that entities are grounded by social conventions. Instead, he contends that, "The felt necessity to ground forms of life on something else … is the mistake" (ibid., 14). Tillemans argues that their attempt to ground entities in social conventions is not found in Madhyamaka texts, and that it actually shares a problematic presumption with realism: both take a universal perspective on our way of making sense of the world. To evaluate either we would have to remove ourselves from our scheme to observe it independently, as a whole, which is of course impossible. As Tillemans notes, "anti-realism is the flip-side of the same coin and presupposes the same impossible standpoint [as realism]" (ibid., 124).

However, we just saw that Garfield and Siderits directly and indirectly appeal to Wittgenstein too. How can we make sense of a discussion where both sides appeal to the same thinker?

2.2 Understanding Wittgenstein via Pyrrhonism

Fogelin (1994) identifies two currents in Wittgenstein's later thought that help us make sense of these diverging Wittgensteinian interpretations of Madhyamaka. On the one hand there is the rejection of all attempts to use philosophy to ground or vindicate our common

cognitive activities; on the other hand, there is the apparent embracing of holism or coherentism. As Fogelin notes, to the extent that the latter is true, "Wittgenstein is not a neo-Pyrrhonian rejecting all forms of philosophical justification but is, instead, a partisan of a particular version of justificationalism, one with its roots in German idealism" (ibid., 205). He calls these forces: neo-Pyrrhonian and non-Pyrrhonian, and reads Wittgenstein's later philosophy as a constant battle between these two currents. He describes the neo-Pyrrhonian features as "descriptive in content and philosophically deflationary in intent," and the non-Pyrrhonian features as "normative in content and philosophically constructive in intent" (ibid., 216). The former corresponds to Tillemans' interpretation of Madhyamaka, and the latter to the view Tillemans ascribes to Garfield and Siderits.

Note that Fogelin's use of 'Pyrrhonian' and 'non-Pyrrhonian' is not mere semantics. He associates Sextus and Wittgenstein frequently in his neo-Pyrrhonian attempt to problematise epistemological grounding. This affinity is not coincidental: Wittgenstein was deeply interested in Pyrrhonian scepticism, and he was influenced by Mauthner's attempts to develop a kind of neo-Pyrrhonism.[95]

Now, Fogelin criticizes the non-Pyrrhonian, inflationist aspects of Wittgenstein's thought, because they seem to replace theoretical foundationalism with a theoretical appeal to 'conventions' and 'action'. He notes that this reverses the priorities of the *Tractatus*: atomism over holism, privacy over publicity, thinking over doing; and it ascribes to them a similar privileged status. For example, Wittgenstein usually restricts himself to a modest contextualism where the meaning of a term is only understood by seeing it in use within its appropriate context; problems arise when you try to find a common essence that runs through all language usage. However, he sometimes appears to slide into holism: "Our knowledge forms an enormous system. And only within this system has a particular bit the

[95] See Sluga (2004) for the influence of Mauthner's reading of Pyrrhonism on Wittgenstein. In fact, Weiler (1958) suggests that Wittgenstein's use of the discarded ladder metaphor in the *Tractatus* was taken from Mauthner's work, and thus indirectly from Sextus.

value we give it" (1969, §410). This seems to presume the existence of a single overarching framework, which we have seen is problematic. In the same way, Tillemans criticizes Siderits and Garfield, because they seem to replace theories presupposing *svabhāva* with a theory that grounds things in social conventions. In fact, both employ the same analogy: "[A]nti-realism is the flip-side of the same coin and presupposes the same impossible standpoint" (Tillemans 2016b, 124); "What we learn from the neo-Pyrrhonian Wittgenstein, over against the non-Pyrrhonian Wittgenstein, is that the value of a coin is not increased by turning it over" (Fogelin, 220). Tillemans and Fogelin object to Siderits', Garfield's, and (occasionally) Wittgenstein's drive to replace the "earlier foundationalist theory with a nonfoundationalist theory" (ibid., 205). They suggest we must rest content with the disengagement of traditional philosophy and toss the coin away.

The distinction between neo-Pyrrhonian and non-Pyrrhonian currents provides a useful toolset for engaging with Madhyamaka hermeneutics. It pinpoints where different commentators disagree, and thus provides a straightforward point of contention. It also highlights the possible pitfalls when reading one philosophy with the help of another: we may just project too much in our enthusiasm.

2.3 Understanding Madhyamaka (via Wittgenstein) via Pyrrhonism

Indeed, Tillemans argues that the non-Pyrrhonian current is not actually found in the Madhyamaka texts. He acknowledges that Mādhyamikas argue that objects are not findable under analysis because they are posited on the basis of mere conventional designations, so that what is said about them can only be conventionally true. However, Tillemans notes, "it is another move to talk about the convenience and usefulness of certain designations and thus introduce pragmatic talk of strategies" (2016b, 123). Since things are described as empty and have intrinsic nature superimposed on them, it is tempting to characterize *prajñapti* as 'convenient designator' or a 'useful fiction.' Tillemans suggests Siderits is guilty

of this (e.g., 2007, 49) and he emphasizes that 'convenient' and 'useful' are modern additions that are not actually reflected by the Sanskrit.

Indeed, Garfield (1990) does at times mix his 'neo-Pyrrhonian' account of Madhyamaka, with non-Pyrrhonian aspects. For example, he puts much emphasis on the 'sceptical solutions', and the 'replacement of dogmatic impediments'. Sextus and Nāgārjuna never explicitly provide an alternative account of how 'truth' and 'knowledge' work. They simply emphasize that one must rest content with the conventional. Garfield's emphasis on social conventions and practices as sceptical solutions seems to indicate that he ascribes a certain foundationalist importance to them. In fact, by considering them a 'replacement', he seems to open himself up to Tillemans' criticism: flipping the coin to anti-realism. At times Garfield appears to indeed see social practices and action as a vindication, rather than as a description of language games. He suggests that Nāgārjuna, Wittgenstein, and Tsongkhapa "invert the order of explanation," by suggesting that meaning is constituted by the regularity of practices in a community (1990, 292). In support, he in fact quotes a passage that Fogelin warns to not interpret constructively: "it is our acting, which lies at the bottom [Grund] of the language-game" (1969, §204). However, such appeal to social conventions in order to ground meaning is not actually found in Nāgārjuna's work, and it seems even more unlikely that he would want to ascribe any theoretical importance to them.

On the other hand, Siderits admits: "I do have some worries though about the tone in which I here formulated the Madhyamaka brand of anti-realism. It is possible to overemphasize the role of human interests and cognitive limitations in laying out the conception of truth that is left once the idea of ultimate truth has been undermined. Such overemphasis is what leads to the common complaint that anti-realism is just another form of Hegelian-style idealism" (2016, 37). However, he also suggests that "in order for [epistemological contextualism] to work … these contexts must be seen as falling into a hierarchy, so that each is seen as an improvement on its predecessor" (2011, 179). This still presumes that there is some

context-independent criterium that all other contexts can be measured against, and that is exactly the non-Pyrrhonian tendency that is problematic in Wittgenstein's work; I will discuss this in more detail in the next chapter.

This battle between the Pyrrhonian and non-Pyrrhonian forces can be found within much contemporary Madhyamaka scholarship. For instance, Mills (2013) suggests that Nāgārjuna's philosophical activity consists of two 'phases': one where he criticizes the views of others and attempts to support a thesis of universal emptiness; and one where he demonstrates that emptiness undermines itself, and thus that any substantial philosophical view is misguided. Furthermore, Westerhoff suggests that the Mādhyamika might want to adopt an alternative theory of truth, such as dependence on assertibility conditions, coherence with other beliefs, or pragmatic success (2009, 220). However, there is no evidence for such alternative theories in Nāgārjuna's writings, which Westerhoff himself acknowledges (ibid., 183). In addition, Westerhoff suggests that Nāgārjuna's arguments against epistemic instruments existing with *svabhāva*—particularly the argument that we cannot make sense of the epistemic object without the epistemic instrument (they are mutually dependent)—outline an entirely different account of knowledge. He suggests that in addition to problematizing *svabhāva*, Nāgārjuna's arguments against epistemic instruments, "establish the necessary background epistemology needed for understanding how emptiness could in fact be known. It is this second aim which is particularly interesting, since it provides us with the outlines of a specific Madhyamaka theory of knowledge" (ibid. 181). These two suggested aims correspond to 'Pyrrhonian' and 'non-Pyrrhonian' currents. This implies we may want to reflect on our motivations for wanting to ascribe to Nāgārjuna a 'specific theory of knowledge'. Is Nāgārjuna really engaging in constructive epistemology, beyond a deflationist Wittgensteinian account of how 'knowledge' functions in conventional discourse?

Thus, awareness of Pyrrhonian and non-Pyrrhonian currents helps us to articulate the disagreement between various competing interpretations of Nāgārjuna more clearly. It also allows interpreters of Madhyamaka to recognize what different forces may influence their reading of Madhyamaka and reflect on their appropriateness. It helps to spell out in more detail what the presuppositions of each current are and how they may be problematic. In particular, it helps us see that it may be problematic to apply non-Pyrrhonian aspects of Wittgenstein to Madhyamaka. In this, it also highlights the dangers of reading one tradition with the help of another: we may inadvertently project more than we were intending, to the detriment of our understanding.

In sum, I have demonstrated that Pyrrhonism is able to illuminate our understanding of Madhyamaka in various ways. Sextus is able to shed a new light on the discussion of the object of negation, which is crucial for understanding emptiness. He problematises Gorampa's reasons for thinking that what is denied is existence simpliciter and provides cross-cultural validation for Tsongkhapa's reasonings for thinking that the object of negation is intrinsic nature. In addition, bringing Pyrrhonism into the modern Madhyamaka hermeneutical conversation reveals that some of our interpretive choices may not be as neutral as they may have seemed. The lasting influence of Wittgenstein on Madhyamaka scholarship means that some of the different currents within his thought have been projected unto Madhyamaka too. Recognizing these Pyrrhonian and non-Pyrrhonian currents allows us to be more reflective readers of Madhyamaka.

Chapter 6

Strengthening Pyrrhonism & Madhyamaka

In the previous chapters, I elucidated aspects of Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka, highlighting their therapeutic dimensions. However, whether the kind of therapy they advocate could and should be adopted is far from clear. Indeed, both Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka have been charged with *incoherence*; Pyrrhonism continues to be haunted by claims of *unliveability*; and even if *epochē* and *śūnyatā* can be realised, it is questionable whether this would be *desirable*. Without cogent replies to these objections, it is impossible to take the traditions seriously as philosophical therapy and, to the extent that therapy constitutes a core element of their philosophies, it is difficult to take them seriously in general. After all, if a medical treatment were subject to any of these objections, we should hesitate to adopt it. Hence, in this chapter I aim to strengthen the cases of Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka by responding to the above objections. I will start by examining the incoherence and unliveability objections, where I will defend interpretations of the texts that defuse the objections. In my response to the undesirability charge, I will articulate the ideas so that they are cogent by contemporary standards, moving away from strictly exegetical concerns.

1: Incoherence Objections

Arguably the most prominent line of attack against Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka is that of incoherence. This objection can take different forms. I will start by discussing the one that Sextus and Nāgārjuna anticipate, and then consider objections raised by Burnyeat and Perin.

1.1: Anticipated Incoherence Objections

On the face of it, Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka do appear incoherent: how could one argue against all positions without taking some position oneself? Both Nāgārjuna and Sextus anticipate this specific objection. Sextus suggests that the arguments of the Pyrrhonist do not constitute *dogma.* However, this leads to a dilemma: either the Pyrrhonist has grounded justification for their arguments and recommendation that judgment should be suspended, or they do not. The former option would render Pyrrhonism incoherent (because it presumes some opinions are more plausible than others, which the Pyrrhonist contests); if we accept the latter option, it seems we can just ignore them (*M* 8.479). Nāgārjuna anticipates the same objection. He considers the argument from his Nyāya opponent that, if all things are empty of intrinsic nature, Madhyamaka theses and arguments will be empty as well, which means they cannot effectively refute other positions and establish emptiness. Thus, the Mādhyamika must either accept that their theses are non-empty and have argumentative power (rendering their position incoherent), or acknowledge that they are empty and thus unable to refute the view that things exist intrinsically (*VV* 1-2).

As we have seen, both traditions offer the same response. They note that the dilemma only arises if they play according to their opponents' rules, and they refuse to do so. The traditions would be vulnerable if their intention were to establish how things are by nature. Instead, Pyrrhonists and Mādhyamikas embrace the groundlessness of their beliefs and emptiness of their theses. Thus, Nāgārjuna replies to the Nyāya objection: "If I had any

thesis, that fault would apply to me. But I do not have any thesis, so there is indeed no fault for me" (*VV* 29). As I mentioned before, both historical and modern interpreters have argued that this statement should be understood as a disavowal of any theses *according to his opponent's semantics.* Within the Nyāya framework, assertions are meaningful because they denote independently existent properties (Garfield 1996, 12). This suggests that Nāgārjuna wants to make clear that his theses (*pratijña*), particularly regarding emptiness, do not postulate an entity possessing intrinsic nature (Ruegg 2000, 129). Hence, they are not incoherent. Regarding the arguments being impotent, Nāgārjuna argues that they work "as if an artificial man hindered another artificial man engaged in some action … the artificial man who is hindered is empty, as is the one who hinders him" (*VV* 23). Arguments not having the grounding his opponent deems necessary is unproblematic because *nothing* has such grounding. Similarly, Sextus says regarding sceptical phrases, such as 'I determine nothing' that, "in uttering these phrases they say what is apparent to themselves and report their own feelings without holding opinions, affirming nothing about external objects" (*PH* 1.15). Thus, they do not involve positing anything dogmatically and are thus not incoherent. This does not render the arguments resulting in this state of mind impotent, because it still *appears* to the Pyrrhonist that their arguments equal the convincingness of the opposed account. Thus, both traditions can quite neatly counter this incoherence objection by embracing the groundlessness of their own arguments: they do not entail the semantic commitment that would render them incoherent.

1.2: Burnyeat's Incoherence Objections

However, Burnyeat (1980) famously presses the point. He argues that Sextus' appeal to the *merely apparent nature* of key sceptical notions like 'no more' (*ouden mallon*) and tranquillity (*ataraxia*) does not solve the problem. '*Ouden mallon'* expresses the observation that one proposition seems no more persuasive than the other. Burnyeat suggests that the

sceptic is persuaded by such arguments, which can only be made sense of in terms of reason, belief, and truth, "the very notions the Pyrrhonist is most anxious to avoid" (ibid., 50). The Pyrrhonist cannot be persuaded by merely apparent arguments because, "in the philosophical case, the impression, when all is said and done, simply is my assent to the conclusion of an argument, assent to it as true" (ibid., 53). However, this suggestion is insufficiently supported. It is not at all clear why an argument appearing cogent necessarily involves assenting to it as true, let alone dogmatically true. Indeed, as we have seen, Mādhyamikas allow for mere conventional truths. Even emptiness is only conventionally true. After all, 'truth' and 'reason' are part of quotidian discourse. Hence, the fact that arguments in everyday language cannot be understood apart from notions like reason and truth does not mean that the Pyrrhonist cannot engage them *as* everyday linguistic conventions (more on this in section 2.2.1).

Burnyeat also raises the objection that belief is necessarily involved, not only in argumentative contexts, but also in the cessation of mental disturbance. He suggests that, for the sceptic, "*ataraxia* is hardly to be attained if he is not in some sense satisfied -so far- that no answers are forthcoming, that contrary claims are indeed equal" (ibid., 52). And this, Burnyeat contends, can also not be made sense of without belief. However, again, it is not clear why only Dogmatic assent can safeguard tranquillity. It could simply appear to the Pyrrhonist that no answers are forthcoming, and like the mere appearance of a cute kitten, this is enough to provide comfort. Furthermore, Madhyamaka suggests that such satisfaction need not be made sense of in terms of rationality. In fact, 'rational satisfaction that no answers are forthcoming' would be insufficient for tranquillity. Buddhists make a clear distinction between 'understanding' and 'realisation'. Understanding the notions of emptiness and equipollence is relatively easy—the crux is to internalise it so that it is reflected in one's experience of the world. Thus, 'being satisfied that no answers are forthcoming' need not be made sense of in terms of reason and belief. It is not rational inference that generates tranquillity, but a change in experience.

Finally, Burnyeat notes that Sextus engages in "cheerful self-refutation" (ibid., ft. 52) to escape the charge that higher-level generalisations like *ouden mallon* involve reason, belief, and truth. He argues that this is problematic because self-refutation presupposes that the propositions do make a truth-claim. Indeed, it does appear that any appeal to self-refutation admits initial dogmatism, which would render scepticism incoherent after all. This is the standard view amongst interpreters (Machuca 2013a), which appears to be supported by passages such as:

> [J]ust as the phrase 'Everything is false' says that it too, along with everything else, is false (and similarly for 'Nothing is true'), so also 'In no way more' (*ouden mallon*) says that it too, along with everything else, is no more so than not so, and hence it cancels itself along with everything else. And we say the same of the other Sceptical phrases (*PH* 1.14).

Thus, if Sextus attempts to avoid incoherence by claiming that sceptical phrases refute themselves, he admits that such phrases do make truth claims, which renders scepticism incoherent after all.

However, Castagnoli (2000) argues that sceptical phrases (*phonai*) are *self-referring and 'self-bracketing'*, rather than *self-refuting*, and only when posited dogmatically. This would avoid having to ascribe some sort of initial dogmatism to the sceptic. As I will show, this interpretation is substantiated by Madhyamaka.[96] Positing *ouden mallon* as absolutely real, which Burnyeat accuses the Pyrrhonist of, means that, "it would refer to an external state of affairs, indicating that *isostheneia* [equipollence] is objective and deep-rooted in an *intrinsic* indeterminacy of the world or in an *intrinsic* weakness of human mind" (ibid., 282). Castagnoli argues that Sextus' articulation of *ouden mallon* neatly renders this impossible: *if*

[96] For a defence of using one tradition to 'substantiate' our understanding of another, see chapter 2:3.1. In a nutshell, like cogent analogical inferences provide archaeologists insight into inaccessible traditions, so we can use the characteristics on one philosophical tradition to increase the plausibility of certain interpretations of a very similar one—provided the inferred similarity is embedded in a similar relational (and ideally causal) nexus.

ouden mallon were posited as absolutely real it would be unclear (*adēlon*), and *then* it falls within its own scope. This means that absolute *ouden mallon* is no more persuasive than its opposite, which implies that the reasons for 'not absolute *ouden mallon*' are equally strong. Hence, believing absolute *ouden mallon* would be groundless. This means that *ouden mallon* has cancelled itself from the set of possible objects of belief, i.e. if it were true, one could not believe it.

Instead, Castagnoli employs the connotations of the Greek verb *perigraphesthai* to suggest that *ouden mallon* 'brackets' the dogmatic contents of sceptical phrases: "it says that those contents, being groundless, should no longer be believed to be true, and that they are now to be contemplated in a different light, i.e. with the Sceptical disposition of suspending one's judgement about the objective reality of what they represent" (ibid., 287). Thus, the sceptical phrases are *potentially* self-bracketing. As Castagnoli puts it, "*if taken as true dogmatic maxims* they are self-referring and say of themselves what they say of the other unclear things" (287). He argues that the purgative drug metaphor (*PH* 1.206) is best understood in this light (ibid., 291-292).

This argument is substantiated by the way Mādhyamikas explain their phrases. They too employ a purgative drug metaphor, quoted by Candrakīrti from the *Ratnakūṭa Sūtra* when discussing emptiness:

> 'It is as if, Kāśyapa, there were a sick person, and a doctor were to give that person a medicine, and that medicine having gone to the stomach, having eliminated all the person's bad humors, was not itself expelled. What do you think, Kāśyapa, would that person then be free of disease?' 'No, lord, the illness of the person would be more intense if the medicine eliminated all the bad humors but was not expelled from the stomach' (*PP* 13.8).[97]

[97] De La Vallée Poussin (1903, 248-249).

This appears to suggest that emptiness is self-refuting. It itself must be negated along with the things it negates. However, the context makes clear that this is only the case *if* emptiness is taken dogmatically. The above quotation is part of Candrakīrti's commentary on *MMK* 13.8:

> Emptiness is taught by the conquerors as the expedient to get rid of all [dogmatic] views. But those for whom emptiness is a [dogmatic] view have been called incurable.

It is clear that there is a wrong way to hold emptiness: viewing it as having an intrinsic nature. We can now understand the purgative drug analogy better: the sick person is beset with dogmatic views, and if emptiness expunges these but becomes a dogmatic view itself, then it too should be expunged. Buddhapālita says about those who do not make this error that, "They see that emptiness is also empty" (Siderits & Katsura, 146). Furthermore, Candrakīrti's discussion of the emptiness of emptiness states that this need only be appealed to *if* emptiness is understood as containing *svabhāva*:

> The emptiness of 'emptiness' is termed
> The *emptiness of emptiness [śūnyatāśunyatā]*.
> And this was taught to stop the mind
> That clings to emptiness as real. (*MAv* 6.186).[98]

This suggests that without a dogmatic understanding of emptiness, no employment of *śūnyatāśunyatā* is needed.[99] This wholly fits with Castagnoli's explanation of the purgative drug analogy: "The Sceptical *phonai* [phrases] are not self-bracketing *tout court*, but they are

[98] Liland (2019) with small changes.

[99] Like *ouden mallon*, the logical structure of emptiness is such that it does not allow for holding it as that which it negates. *Śūnyatā* tells us that things cannot exist intrinsically. Holding it ultimately would mean holding it as if it exists intrinsically. However, emptiness arguments show such intrinsic nature is unfindable, which means that there are no grounds for believing absolute *emptiness.* Hence, if *śūnyatā* had *svabhāva* it would be such that it would be impossible to believe it did.

such potentially, *only if* advanced (or interpreted) as *pantōs alētheis*; in this case (and only in this case) they do away with themselves" (2000, 291).

Thus, Madhyamaka not only makes it plausible that self-refuting traditions may be only so provisionally (i.e. if they are misunderstood), it also constitutes evidential support that this is the case in Pyrrhonism. After all, we saw in chapter 3 that both traditions employ qualifying statements in very similar ways, and that these play similar roles in their larger philosophies. This means that we can use Madhyamaka's clear avowal of the provisional self-refuting nature of emptiness to infer that sceptical phrases are only provisionally self-refuting too. Hence, there is a convincing way to understand Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka that does not involve self-refutation, and thus does not admit some sort of initial Dogmatism.

1.3: Perin's Incoherence Objection

The final incoherence objection I will discuss comes from Perin (2010). He presents Sextus with a dilemma regarding the representational content of the appearances. He suggests that, if the appearance represents a feature of the external world, it would make the appearance a dogmatic belief; if it does not represent a feature of the external world, "then an appearance cannot guide action in the way that a belief does" (99). So, either the Pyrrhonist cannot act, or he must be incoherent. However, it is not at all clear why representationalism is necessary for action. Virtual reality video games tell us nothing about the external world but require deliberative actions. Lucid dreamers act consciously, being well aware that nothing that appears to them represents a feature of the external world. Mādhyamikas claim to have expunged exactly such representationalism from their psychology, and yet are able to get up and debate. Indeed, Perin's off-handed suggestion that anti-representationalism is incompatible with action, does not at all engage with this diverse and influential school of thought. (And if this suggestion were true, it would refute the entire tradition, which is

doubtful.) Hence, Perin presents us with a false dichotomy, and the Pyrrhonist can safely embrace the anti-representationalist option. However, the objection that the Pyrrhonist expunges too much from their psychology is a prominent one, which I will discuss next.

2: Liveability Objections

The above discussion shows that Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka can be articulated coherently and cogently. However, this does not mean that they are *liveable*. Indeed, the charge that the life Sextus advocates is impossible has been described as the most persistent objection to Pyrrhonism (Thorsrud 2009, 173). Thus, in this section I will consider arguments relating to the life of the realised Mādhyamika and Pyrrhonist. I will start with the claim that Pyrrhonism is unliveable *tout court*, which is reflected is Madhyamaka's condemnation as nihilism. I will then consider more nuanced arguments, which make the case that, whilst Pyrrhonism or Madhyamaka will not end one's life, this life reduces one's psychology to little more than that of an animal.

2.1: Total Lethargy

The notion that complete suspension of judgment is lethal is articulated most famously by Hume:

> [The Pyrrhonian] must acknowledge, if he will acknowledge anything, that all human life must perish, were his principles universally and steadily to prevail. All discourse, all action would immediately cease; and men remain in a total lethargy, till the necessities of nature, unsatisfied, put an end to their miserable existence (1748/2007, 185).

Madhyamaka is not charged with such complete unliveability. However, they have been charged with nihilism: the notion that nothing whatsoever exists, or more frequently in Buddhist discourse, the notion that the laws of karma and rebirth do not exist.[100] In the Buddhist framework, if the latter 'principle' were to universally and steadily prevail, it would appear to lead to Hume's predicted untenable state of mind also. Indeed, Asaṅga argues:

> Because of the rejection of designation and reality [Mādhyamikas] are to be known as the most extreme kind of nihilist (*pradhāna nāstika*). Because he is a nihilist in this way, intelligent ones that follow pure conduct should not speak to him, and one should not dwell together with him. This one causes his own destruction, a worldly one who follows his view will also fall (Dutt 1966, 30–32).[101]

I demonstrated in chapter 4 that we cannot escape this problem by restricting Pyrrhonism (and Madhyamaka) to philosophical and scientific topics. A more plausible reply needs to be both undercutting and rebutting. Undercutting the objection will establish that Hume's and Asaṅga's conclusions are unsupported. However, this does not yet establish liveability, which is done by rebutting the objection. Thus, first I will demonstrate that charging Pyrrhonism with unliveability and Madhyamaka with nihilism rely on parallel flawed premises. Second, I will provide grounds to believe that Pyrrhonism (and early Madhyamaka) is in fact liveable, by pointing out that Tibetan Buddhism provides us with examples of practices and resulting experiences that can be considered akin to Pyrrhonian inquiry and *ataraxia*.

[100] There are several understandings of 'nihilism' at play in Madhyamaka texts – the one closest to unliveability is nihilism as the denial of efficacy.
[101] Translated by Westerhoff (2014).

2.1.1: A Theoretical Defence of Liveability

Unliveability critics in the case of Pyrrhonism and nihilism critics in the case of Madhyamaka, make the same two exegetical mistakes. First, they project a negative dogmatism onto Pyrrhonian and Madhyamaka ideas; second, they underestimate the significant set of appearances that remain after Pyrrhonian and Madhyamaka analysis. These parallel misunderstandings, and parallel replies provide a sense of mutual validation.

A core characteristic of Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka is their explicit middle way between two philosophical extremes. In the case of Pyrrhonism these are Dogmatism, which claims the nature of things is discoverable, and Academic Scepticism, which claims the nature of things is inapprehensible. In the case of Madhyamaka these are eternalism, which entails that things have *svabhāva*, and nihilism, which denies the existence of things altogether. Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka avoid the underlying assumption: things have an intrinsic nature that we can meaningfully talk about. The Academics and nihilists argue this nature is characterized by inapprehensibility and non-existence respectively. As Popkin (1951) and many others have argued, Hume confuses Pyrrhonism with this more dogmatic version: Sextus never dogmatically held that all questions are unanswerable. In fact, he frequently emphasizes that his proclamations and arguments should never be understood as referring to how things are by nature, e.g. in the very first section of *PH*:

> By way of preface let us say that on none of the matters to be discussed do we affirm that things certainly are just as we say they are: rather, we report descriptively on each item according to how it appears to us at the time (*PH* 1.4).

Similarly, Nāgārjuna explicitly rejects nihilistic interpretations of his philosophy, pointing out that emptiness does not reduce to non-existence (e.g., *MMK* 7.16). Candrakīrti makes it clear that he considers 'emptiness' precisely not to mean 'non-existence':

> [T]he meaning of the term 'non-existence' is not the meaning of the term 'emptiness'. Having superimposed the meaning of 'emptiness' on the meaning of the term 'non-existence' you criticize us. Therefore you do not know the meaning of the term 'emptiness' (*PP* 24.7).[102]

Furthermore, Hume and the nihilism critic ignore the entire realm of conventions and practices that Sextus and the Mādhyamika adopt into their philosophy. I demonstrated in chapter 3:4.1.2 that both traditions do not negate the appearances. Indeed, Prajñākaramati comments on *BCA* 9.26 that the negation of the world as it appears to us is not the aim of Madhyamaka:

> As it is seen, understood through perception, through the eye-consciousness etc, heard, from another person or scripture, known, ascertained from an inference possessing the triple characteristic of reasoning; having based ourselves wholly on the conventional, that is precisely not negated here, that is precisely not excluded. As it is understood from the perspective of the world, it is not analysed in its nature, it is accepted from worldly convention, but not ultimately (Vaidya 1988, 199, 17–20).[103]

Thus, objections of straightforward unliveability or nihilism rely on an unduly dogmatic interpretation and ignore the allowance for following the conventional reality and the appearances.

Having said that, things are a bit more nuanced: Sextus does admit to occasionally calling the appearances into question (*PH* 1.20); and it seems odd that centuries of renowned Buddhist and non-Buddhist thinkers have understood Madhyamaka as nihilistic if there were not some reasonable grounds to do so. However, in the instances where Sextus and Nāgārjuna appear more dogmatic and nihilistic, we can appeal to their explicit dialectical nature.

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[102] Translated by Westerhoff (2014); de La Vallée Poussin (1903, 491).
[103] Translated by Westerhoff (2014).

Indeed, Sextus states that the sceptic may propound arguments against what is apparent, but would only do so "to display the rashness of the Dogmatists" (ibid.). Similarly, Westerhoff (2014) articulates a version of nihilism that may be consistent with Madhyamaka, but argues that this should not be understood as the definitive picture of Madhyamaka. Instead, it should be understood as an 'opponent-relative' articulation, tailored to cure a specific view, namely that Madhyamaka has nothing to say about the conventional world.

Pointing out these two exegetical mistakes undercuts the unliveability/nihilism objections: it shows that such interpretations rely on flawed premises, and thus, that their conclusion does not follow. However, it does not yet positively establish that Hume and Asaṅga were wrong. After all, there are no tranquil Pyrrhonists around to prove them wrong.

2.1.2: An Empirical Defence of Liveability

It seems impossible to demonstrate that Sextus' instructions can alleviate *tarachē* and produce *ataraxia* by relying on nearly 2000-year-old texts alone. The most cogent method would be longitudinal double blind randomized research. In lieu of such (time- and resource-intensive) research, Madhyamaka provides us with a different method to demonstrate the liveability of Pyrrhonism. Nussbaum suggests that Eastern traditions provide many empirical examples of the life that Sextus advocates (1994, 312), and Neale claims that we can consider Mādhyamikas as "honorary extra Pyrrhonists," which allows us to tap into a much larger data set than Sextus' isolated example (2014, 220). Indeed, the profound similarities hitherto established suggest that, if we have evidence that life and realisation of emptiness go together, then complete suspension of judgment could be lived out too.

Thus, in this section I will argue that testimony of contemporary Mādhyamikas validates the liveability of Pyrrhonism (and early Madhyamaka). Note that our concern here is liveability simpliciter – more nuanced objections regarding the humanity of this life will be considered

in the next section. Before I examine testimonial accounts of contemporary Mādhyamikas, some issues need to be addressed. After all, I will be using a modern tradition as exemplification of ideas that predate them by nearly two millennia, in order make a point about a tradition on a different continent. Let's consider these points in turn.

First, we cannot assume that, say, Candrakīrti's experience of emptiness is essentially the same as a contemporary practitioner's. After all, Madhyamaka ideas are anything but static and homogenous, shaping traditions as distinct as Dzogchen and Zen. Whilst Tibetan Buddhist philosophy is built on the thinkers in question, their ideas may be interpreted in significantly different ways. We saw this in the previous chapter, with the diverging interpretations of Gorampa and Tsongkhapa. For instance, Gorampa offers a much more sudden, incontrovertible picture of realization of emptiness. However, even if the testimony discussed below refers to the experience outlined by Gorampa, this would not be problematic. After all, this experience appears more unintuitive and mystical than Tsongkhapa's. Hence, if that experience is survivable, it seems the less radical experience Tsongkhapa describes definitely is (and analogously, so is *epochē*). Nevertheless, we cannot assume that early and contemporary Mādhyamikas experience emptiness in the same way.

Indeed, even if Madhyamaka remained static for centuries, there are significant differences between the religious, material, communal, and environmental cultures of modern Asia and ancient Greece. As we have seen, the constitution of 'schools' differs greatly between Hellenistic Greece and Buddhist Tibet. Buddhism has much stronger institutions in the form of monasteries with art, rituals, and codes. This strong religious dimension is not necessarily problematic. Indeed, Tupden emphasises that "prostrations, making offerings … it should be remembered, are methods for understanding emptiness" (Klein 1994, 145). Even practices that may appear wholly foreign to the Pyrrhonist, such as tantra, should be understood in the context of realizing emptiness (Ray 2001, 97-98). And even if they would be wholly foreign, Sextus explains that the sceptic, in accordance with custom and laws, can assent to

the idea of gods and is allowed to do "everything that tends to worship of and reverence towards them" (*M* 9.49). Nevertheless, the fact that their philosophies, however similar, are set against different cultural backdrops means that experiences generated will be strongly culturally coloured.

Thus, given these provisions, the aim of this section is not to prove that contemporary Buddhist practitioners attain the mindset advocated by Indian Mādhyamikas, and analogously, by Pyrrhonists. Instead, the argument will be that they experience something akin to that experience; and if they can live with something akin to that experience, then Pyrrhonists could live with *epochē* too.

As briefly discussed in chapter 4, contemporary Tibetan Buddhism provides us with the most accessible example of lived Madhyamaka practice. Prasaṅgika Madhyamaka is considered the pinnacle of philosophical sophistication and of Buddhist thought in general. Indeed, Arnold suggests that the Tibetan tradition preserves, "a model for the integration of Madhyamaka philosophy into a structured set of transformative religious practices" ("Madhyamaka"). I demonstrated in chapter 4 that some of these practices may be understood as analogous to Pyrrhonian activities. Hence, I will only briefly recap them here in order to underscore that they aim at an experience akin to *epochē*.

Starting with debate, I suggested this Gelukpa practice can be understood as akin to the Pyrrhonist's ability "to set out oppositions among things which appear and are thought of in any way at all (*PH* 1.8). In debate "any stance can and should be undermined" (Dreyfus 2002, 244), and debaters "continually place every philosophical position at risk" (Liberman 2004, 58). The aim is to make your opponent contradict themselves, i.e. to make them adopt an account that opposes their initial thesis. Hence, these arguments imply no direct commitment on the part of the arguer. Opposing accounts in Pyrrhonism is meant to lead to a state of mind in which the intellect does not reject or posit anything (*PH* 1.10). Similarly, in Geluk, "the questions raised by debate are worth thinking about not because they bring final

clarity but because they oblige us to grow by relinquishing our tendency to cling to ideas" (Dreyfus 2002, 287-288).

Furthermore, as we have seen, *vipaśyanā* meditation on emptiness can be understood as akin to Pyrrhonian investigation. First, we must focus on a particular object and then apply Madhyamaka reasoning to it. As in sceptical investigation, we will not find the object to be anything whatsoever. We should then rest in meditative equipoise in this very actuality of not finding anything. This process is to be applied to our entire range of mental events, so as to realise that intrinsic nature is not to be found in any way. Brunnhölzl concludes, "In this way, the analysis is self-terminating, just as a fire springs to life when two sticks are rubbed together and then is extinguished once the sticks burn up. At this point, we just rest within this state without any grasping" (2004, 287). Similarly, Sextus states that sceptical investigation culminates in "a standstill of the intellect, owing to which we neither reject nor posit anything" (*PH* 1.10), and he says of his argument against demonstration, "fire after consuming the wood destroys itself as well" (*M* 8.480).

Lastly, we saw that sceptical phrases may play a similar role as Buddhist recitations. They serve to deepen and retain a certain state of mind, and help prevent the sceptics "from being seduced by the Dogmatists into abandoning their investigation and thus through rashness missing the tranquillity apparent to them" (*PH* 1.205).

The similarity between Tibetan and Pyrrhonian activity, and the fact that Tibetan Buddhists pay allegiance to texts that share significant parallels with Sextus' work, suggest that Tibetan Buddhist practices aim at a mindset similar (enough) to *epochē*. They purge the same thing from their psychology (problematic reification), and they leave similar things untouched (the appearances). Again, I am not suggesting that ancient Pyrrhonist, early Mādhyamikas, and contemporary Tibetan practitioners all have the same experience; I simply suggest that, if contemporary Mādhyamikas can 'survive' realisation of emptiness, then so can ancient Pyrrhonists.

Now, let us look at some testimonies of practitioners. It should be noted that direct, modern evidence of their experiences remains sparse: Buddhist practitioners are supremely reluctant to talk about their level of realisation. Indeed, humility with regards to spiritual attainment is seen as a virtue. The experience of tranquillity and compassion is clearly testified to in earlier sources. For example, Nāgārjuna observes, "This halting of cognizing everything, the halting of hypostatizing (*prapañca*), is blissful" (*MMK* 25.24ab); and Śāntideva states, "When neither entity nor non-entity remains before the mind, since there is no other mode of operation, grasping no objects, it becomes tranquil" (*BCA* 9.34). In addition, after much practice, reflection, and analysis, Tsongkhapa notes,

> These days, with greater familiarity [with insight into emptiness], even in the postmeditation periods, I would have the perception of this entire world of diversity as being empty yet, in an illusion-like manner, maintaining its specific forms. And the perception of things as not "sealed" or marked by awareness of their emptiness—as objective facts with intrinsic reality—rarely arises in me now (Khedrup, 136.)

The experience of emptiness filled Tsongkhapa with "an abiding sense of bliss, as well as profound feelings of gratitude and devotion for the Buddha, especially for his teaching of emptiness and dependent origination" (Jinpa, 169). In addition, he felt "abiding sense of peace and freedom derived from 'being at home,' as it were, with the nature of reality, with no urge at all to resist, reify, or grasp at what he perceived, nor any desire for something beyond it" (ibid., 184). In general, fully realised beings are said to reside in a "tranquil and blissful state" (Phuntsho 2005, 56). Indeed, *nirvāṇa* may be glossed as the extinction of the root afflictions of attachment, aversion, and delusion, which gave rise to suffering in the first place.

Regarding modern sources, we have some autobiographical accounts, as well as many more biographical accounts by peers and students. As for both, we cannot verify the

phenomenological state of these practitioners, but we can verify whether their behaviour matches what we would expect from a realised being.

Lama Thubten Yeshe (1935-1984) is recounted as proclaiming, "Oh, I realised emptiness ages ago, when I was debating on Madhyamaka in the courtyard at Sera Je" (Yeshe, Courtin & Cameron, xiv). Indeed, Lama Zopa Rinpoche states that Lama Yeshe claimed he realised emptiness when he was a young monk in Tibet (Zopa, 2000). Accounts of his life underscore this apparent realisation (though this is perhaps unsurprising given their hagiographical nature). Lama Zopa recounts:

> Lama was filled with great compassion, cherishing other sentient beings. You can understand Lama's great thought of loving kindness from the time he took to care for his students. Despite many doctors warning him of the seriousness of his heart condition, Lama was always extremely busy traveling, giving teachings, writing, reading texts, supervising the FPMT centers, and giving advice to students (ibid.).

Furthermore, the Dalai Lama recounts an experience akin to the realisation of emptiness from his mid-twenties, when he was reflecting on "unfindability and the fact that phenomena are dependent on conceptuality" (2002, 137). The impact of this experience lasted for a few weeks during which things "appeared to inherently exist, but I knew they actually did not" (ibid., 138). He describes this as a level below complete and incontrovertible realisation; but it convinced him that such realisation was "a true possibility" (ibid.).[104] Furthermore, he explains that "Nowadays, I always meditate on

[104] Madhyamaka realisation of emptiness is a gradual process. Hence, there will be periods of realisation, but continued practice is needed to render this incontrovertible. The process of the Pyrrhonist appears less gradual (though there may be the step of using arguments dogmatically, before they are overturned), but it seems *ataraxia* may not be incontrovertible either. After all, the sceptic continues to investigate, arguably in part to retain this tranquil state of mind; and Sextus warns that the sceptic may be "seduced by the Dogmatists into abandoning their investigation" (*PH* 1.205). This suggests that the Pyrrhonist may go through periods of complete suspending of judgment before it becomes incontrovertible.

emptiness in the morning and bring that experience into the day's activities" (ibid.). As to evidence of an 'enlightened' lifestyle, I imagine a Nobel peace prize will have to do.

Such personal testimonies are rare because, as Thubten Chodron points out, "You know when you start thinking, '*I'm* realizing emptiness,' that you haven't. When there's a big *I*, who's now the one who realized emptiness, you're still under the tyranny of I" (2005). Despite the lack of direct testimony, there are many people who are considered realised by their peers, and whose life seems to back this up. Let's look at the example of Tulku Urgyen Rinpoche (1920-1996).

He was considered realised by his peers: Thrangu Rinpoche explains, "He is unanimously accepted by everyone as a great Dzogchen yogi … he was someone who achieved the final realization of the Great Perfection" (Urgyen 2004, 29). Furthermore, it appears this level of awareness was reflected in his behaviour:

> There has been no one who, in actuality, was better able to carry out the intent of Shantideva's *Bodhicaryāvatāra* to the letter. Without any concern for personal hardship, he always aimed to do his utmost to benefit sentient beings. He was also extremely humble and self-effacing … He treated everyone, whether important or ordinary, with the same affection and attention, teaching everyone equally (ibid.).

Even Sam Harris (a rather hostile witness, given his notoriety as 'one of the four horsemen of atheism') testifies as to Urgyen's insight: "The genius of Tulku Urgyen was that he could point out the nature of mind with precision and matter-of-factness of teaching a person how to thread a needle and could get an ordinary meditator like me to recognize that consciousness is intrinsically free of self... I came to Tulku Urgyen yearning for the experience of self-transcendence, and in a few minutes he showed me I had no self to transcend" (135).

Many more biographical examples could be found, such as those of Ribur Rinpoche, Zong Rinpoche, Kalu Rinopche, Shugsep Jetsun Rinpoche, and Geshe Rabten.[105] Indeed, Zopa Rinpoche explains that, in addition to renowned Madhyamaka teachers, "many others" have realised emptiness (Zopa, Cameron & Ribush 2000, 504), and the Dalai Lama states that a significant number of people who have realised emptiness are alive today (Mehrotra 2008, 134).

The accounts of contemporary Tibetan practitioners serve to demonstrate that people can and do live with radically transformed psychologies. We have seen that these psychologies are indirectly related to the one advocated by Sextus. Hence, the fact that there are people alive who have realized emptiness implies that *epochē* is survivable too, and thus constitutes a rebuttal to complete unliveability objections.

In conclusion, we have seen that complete unliveability objections rely on flawed interpretations of Sextus and Nāgārjuna, and that contemporary accounts of realisation of emptiness validate the liveability of Pyrrhonism (and early Madhyamaka). Thus, the plausibility of a life centred on *epochē* and *śūnyatā,* combined with the unfoundedness of complete unliveability readings, shows that Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka are liveable.

2.2: The *Homo Insipiens* Charge

I established the basic survivability of realising *epochē* and *śūnyatā.* However, whether this life is normal, or even recognisably human, is another matter. According to a famous anecdote, Pyrrho needed friends to protect him from being run over by oncoming wagons (Diogenes Laertius, 9.62). A common objection against Pyrrhonism is that complete suspension of judgment removes that which makes human action *human* action.

[105] See Rabten's *Song of the Profound View* for a personal account of his meditations on emptiness.

Indeed, the *homo insipiens* charge refers to the idea that the sceptic's psychological engagement with the world is devoid of that which allows one to be a rational agent. Strangely, Barnes uses this image it as a *defence* of Sextus. He suggests that the objection that life without belief is impossible is without force: "Existence without belief is evidently possible… [I]f it is possible for the ant, why think that it is impossible for *homo insipiens*" (2000, xxv)? According to the Stoics, action without assent is not the action of a rational being, as the impressions directly generate the impulse for action (Cicero, 2.37–39). Sextus does explicitly allow for assenting to everyday life undogmatically (*adoxastōs*), but this may not satisfy Stoic criteria for action. Indeed, Spinelli suggests that, according to the Stoics, we may only we legitimately speak of coherent and justifiable *praxis* 'in accordance with philosophical theory' (*kata ton philosophon logon*) (111). In general, it is unclear to what extent there is room for rationality in the sceptical project. As Williams puts it, "Sextus is in danger of erasing epistemic distinctions that are essential to the conduct of everyday practical affairs" (2015, 101).

Note that *homo insipiens* objections are not raised against Madhyamaka. In fact, historically arguments have tended to go the other way: we saw that Gorampa claims that Tsongkhapa's conception of negation as intrinsic nature is too limited. According to such interpretations (e.g. Taktsang's), realisation of emptiness means ceasing all conceptual grasping, which may suggest that the actions of realised beings are entirely un-cognized and un-deliberated. However, I will argue that we can actually derive a blueprint for nondogmatic use of reason from early Madhyamaka texts.[106]

Questions regarding the sceptic's use of rationality are encapsulated by debate about whether the relation between equipollence (*isostheneia*) and suspension of judgment

[106] See Thakchoe and Wiltshire (2019) for an overview of these contrasting interpretations. Tsongkhapa in fact identifies six pairs of equipollent positions regarding cessation of conceptualization (*Queries*, 194–96). I will draw on his own reading of Indian Madhyamaka.

(*epochē*) is *rational* or *psychological*.[107] If equipollence rationally moves the sceptic towards suspension of judgment, following the Five and Ten Modes, this suggests that they assent to the equal persuasiveness of oppositions as being true. Such an endorsement of a philosophical conclusion seems incongruous with the rest of their project. Instead, Bett and "so many others", interpret equipollence psychologically: "one simply finds oneself equally inclined or disinclined toward either side (or every side) of the case, and given that situation, one finds oneself declining to assent to any of the alternatives" (230). This reading seems to remove any use of reason for the 'mature' sceptic. It paints a picture in line with Barnes' comparison of the Pyrrhonist to "a parrot or a tape recorder," both of which, "have no beliefs, and yet words tumble from their beaks or their loudspeakers … what poor Polly can do, sceptical Sextus can do; and Polly can transmit information, and do so reliably" (xxii). Contra Barnes, I will demonstrate that Madhyamaka provides a blueprint for an undogmatic use of rationality that may cogently be applied to Pyrrhonism, and I will support this suggestion with further arguments.

We saw in chapter 3 that Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka delineate similar sets of undogmatically accepted appearances. However, Mādhyamikas discuss this conventional reality (*samvrti*) in greater detail. Where Sextus is virtually silent on the use of reason, Mādhyamikas argue that reason may be employed undogmatically. That is, epistemic instruments (*pramāṇas*) are accepted within the conventional context.

Indeed, Candrakīrti explicitly allows for epistemic practice in line with the appearances. He argues that we can distinguish between conventionally reliable and conventionally unreliable epistemic practices. He terms these 'mundane conventions' (*lokasamvrti*) and 'not [even] mundane convention' (*alokasamvrti*) respectively. The latter are unreliable due to "sense organs being damaged by ophthalmia, cataracts, jaundice and the like" (*PP* 24.8).[108]

[107] See, for example, Thorsrud (2009, 128–30); Perin (2010, 35–8); and Sienkiewicz (2019, 43–5). Eichorn (2020) helpfully pulls the issue apart.
[108] Translated by Thakchöe (2011); de La Vallée Poussin (1903, 493).

We can make this distinction because it is part of everyday epistemic practice. Or, as Candrakīrti charmingly puts it, it is "well-known even to such uneducated individuals as cowherds, women and so forth" (*MAvBh* 6.26). For example, he says about mirages and delusions, "not even worldly folk will think that these are real" (*MAv* 6.26). Conversely, he explains that "the world regards non-deceptive consciousnesses as being epistemic instruments" (1996, 334).[109] In other words, epistemic instruments may be regarded as reliable if the world regards them as such. Thus, Mādhyamikas are able to distinguish between truth and falsehood, as long as both are understood as being purely conventional. They are able to reason according to commonly accepted criteria. Indeed, Candrakīrti is happy to go along with the Nyāya conception of epistemic instruments because it reflects ordinary conventions concerning rationality. He explains:

> The world's apprehension of objects is in this way established as being from the four-fold means of epistemic instruments [i.e., perception, inference, testimony, and analogy]. And those epistemic instruments and their objects are established in reliance on each other. Therefore, just let worldly things be, the way they are observed (*PP* 1.123).[110]

However, we must not overestimate the purview of these practices. Contrary to what ordinary people believe, they do not reveal what is actually the case. As Thakchöe puts it, "Conventional cognition correctly apprehends its principal object and therefore is nondeceptive—its only error is to grasp its principal object as metaphysically grounded, as if it possessed *svabhāva*" (2011, 48). Hence, epistemic instruments may not deceive us

[109] Commentary on *CŚ*, translated by Thakchöe (2011).

[110] Macdonald with small changes. In some editions the paragraph continues, "When the means of valid cognition exist, the objects cognized (*prameyārtha*) [exist]; when the objects cognized exist, the means of valid cognition [exist]. But there is absolutely not establishment by way of own-being (*svābhāvika*) of the means of valid cognition and what is cognized." However, MacDonald argues that these are later additions (fn. 543).

regarding the conventional nature of things, but they do deceive us regarding their ultimate nature. Conventional cognition is only authoritative in the domain of the conventional.[111]

Madhyamaka's acceptance of conventional epistemic instruments allows us to suggest that Pyrrhonism too is able to go along with 'folk epistemology'. In fact, because both traditions delineate the appearances in very similar ways (they consist of common feelings, conventions, experiences, and linguistic practices; they are accepted uncritically and involuntarily) and relate them to the rest of their projects in similar ways (they are allied with, rather than eliminated), Madhyamaka acceptance of conventional epistemic practice supports understanding Sextus as accepting a conventional use of reason. Indeed, Sextus outlines a fourfold set of everyday observances that the sceptic undogmatically lives in accordance with: "guidance by nature, necessitation by feelings, handing down of laws and customs, and teaching of kinds of expertise" (*PH* 1.23). Epistemic practices may feasibly be understood as part of customs or expertise. Indeed, Sextus appears to suggest he accepts ordinary epistemic practices, in the form of recollective signs:

> [W]e are not in conflict with the common preconceptions of humanity, nor are we throwing life into confusion, saying that nothing is a sign, as some people falsely accuse us of doing. For if we were doing away with every sign, perhaps we would be in conflict with life and with all humanity. But in fact we ourselves judge this way, assuming fire from smoke, a previous wound from a scar, death from previous trauma to the heart, and oil from a previous headband (*M* 8.157).

The sceptic is able to make use of everyday epistemic practices, as long as they are restricted to what is apparent. Sextus argues against unclear, indicative signs, which have

[111] Note that the extent to which the conventional is embraced in Madhyamaka is controversial. The early texts of Nāgārjuna, Candrakīrti, and Śāntideva suggest that the conventional reality itself is not the issue, but our engagement with it. As we have seen, this line of reasoning was further developed by Tsongkhapa, though vigorously disputed by Gorampa, who considered the conventional wholly erroneous. Indeed, at times it seems that even Candrakīrti suggests that a full Buddha, the very apex of Buddhist soteriology, will no longer experience the conventional (Dunne 1996).

been "invented by the dogmatic philosophers and rationalist doctors" (*M* 8.156). For example, Sextus does not consider the sweetness of honey a sign that it is sweet by nature (which would be indicative). Thus, epistemic practice is problematic if it pretends to reveal what is really the case.

Just like Candrakīrti claims that, "the sage had no quarrel with the world" (*MAv* 6.166), Stough suggests that Sextus, "has no quarrel with reason as it is employed in ordinary life. The sceptic, like anyone else, reasons in the conduct of his affairs. He merely denies that his thought consists of true propositions defining an art of right living" (1984, 147). Indeed, Sextus claims that someone who suspends judgment maintains his sceptical condition while investigating and thinking (*PH* 2.10). Spinelli even suggests that the sceptic may "develop 'theorems' derived from empirical generalizations, but can do so *if and only if* these are restricted within the appropriate sphere of recollective signs" (2012, 115).

Using these insights, we can now suggest that the rational vs. psychological readings of *epochē* present a false dichotomy. The sceptic initially feels rationally compelled to suspend judgment following the Five Modes. However, the mature sceptic realises that this compulsion is psychological. It is instilled by everyday epistemic practice, rather than by a commitment to the truth. And if the sceptic forgets for a moment that rationality does not discover essences, their reasoning will overthrow itself, because sceptical arguments will undermine any problematic reification. As Machuca suggests,

> His *epochē* is indeed the result of reason, but this use is not normative because he is not doxastically committed to the truth of what the Dogmatists describe as the canons or principles of rationality. To be more precise, in his road to Pyrrhonism the Skeptic-to-be first suspends judgment about a number of matters because his doxastic commitment to certain rational requirements, but once he turns into a full-blown Skeptic and his suspension encompasses even those requirements, this

> suspension is no more or less than a psychological state forced upon him (2013b, 218).

Indeed, Mādhyamikas emphasize that simply understanding emptiness rationally is insufficient. One must *realise* it. Such realisation can only come about if we become aware that rationality itself is empty.

Thus, Madhyamaka supports understanding Sextus' fourfold observances as including everyday epistemic practices. This means that the sceptic is not irrational. However, it also means that rationality must be understood as being purely conventional; it does not uncover what is really the case. Thus, according to dogmatic standards, the sceptic is not fully rational either. Hence, it may make most sense to describe the sceptic as a-rational: they operate according to established epistemic principles, but they do not commit to the reality of these principles. This means that they sceptic is not a *homo insipiens*; they simply go along with everyday epistemic conventions *as conventions*.

3: Desirability Objections

I established that Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka are liveable and that they do not reduce one's psychological state to that of an animal. However, that does not mean that this life is *desirable.* In this section, I will discuss objections that Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka lead to a less fulfilling or worthwhile life. I will first discuss the claim that Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka render one slavishly committed to established practices and opinions; I will then discuss the objection that they remove any commitment to virtue and induce a problematic detachment. These may be labelled epistemic and ethical apathy, respectively. A person with these states of mind would still be human, but their life would be a less desirable one, as would any society that is constituted by such humans.

3.1: Epistemic Apathy

We saw that Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka allow for a basic rationality. However, this use of reason appears to be yoked to established epistemic practices. By simply going along with conventional rationality, engagement with the world remains superficial. Indeed, Candrakīrti cites the *Ratnakūṭa Sūtra*:

> The world (*loka*) argues with me. I don't argue with the world. What is agreed upon (*saṃmata*) in the world to exist, I too agree that it exists. What is agreed upon in the world to be nonexistent, I too agree that it does not exist (*PP* 18.8).[112]

This appears to be a very conformist, static use of reason. Similarly, Spinelli suggests that the sceptic's use of reason, "will be empirical—linked, that is, to concrete situations and historically conditioned" (113). Now, this is not necessarily problematic. After all, all reason is historically conditioned, and it has proven itself adapt at reflecting upon and improving establish practices. However, as we have seen in the previous chapter, Gorampa and likeminded thinkers suggest that such use of reason is not available to the Madhyamaka. The conventional is wholly erroneous, and the use of epistemic instruments would sneak in commitment to *svabhāva* via the back door. Many thinkers link this complete erroneousness of the conventional with the fact that Mādhyamikas simply agree with the world (Tillemans 2011, 157). In other words, if the conventional truth is wholly false, then what counts as truth is simply determined by a show of hands. Tillemans suggests this leads to the inability to diverge from general consensus, the inability to achieve complex tasks like the moon landing, and the indifference towards improving epistemological practices.

I will suggest that the alternative account defended in the previous chapter (object of negation as limited to intrinsic nature) does not generate a blanket endorsement of the world's beliefs. I will then present a philosophical articulation of this view, which provides

[112] Translated by Tillemans (2011); de La Vallée Poussin (1903, 370).

Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka with the tools to engage with contemporary philosophy, whilst sticking to the conventional and the appearances.

3.1.1 Draining the Slough

The epistemic apathy objection is forwarded most famously by Kamalaśīla. He suggests that Prasaṅgikas unreflectively endorse what people already accept (*lokaprasiddha*), and that this precludes any use of epistemic instruments.[113] Tillemans (2011) argues that this attitude traps one in the 'dismal slough of pure conventionalism', without any motivation or means to improve upon established uses of reason. Indeed, for the 'typical' Prasaṅgika everything is entirely false. Hence, they try to avoid making any truth claims themselves, and simply go along with the truth claims of others. This suggests that what is true for them is simply based on what is considered true by the common man; and there is little room for epistemological complexity if these claims cannot be investigated. Tillemans argues that the basic rationality that Candrakīrti allows for is insufficient for deeper analysis of the world. Typical Tibetan interpreters of Candrakīrti argue the conventional is *wholly erroneous*, which opens the door to blurring "the distinction between on the one hand a metaphysical issue, something that might indeed best be left alone, and on the other hand a sophisticated scientific or technical issue" (ibid., 159). In other words, Tillemans supposes that consistency with common sense and basic epistemic practices are not able to generate complex ideas.

Now, this objection presumes that the Madhyamaka object of negation is conventional truth *tout court*, rather than intrinsic nature. I argued in the previous chapter that Candrakīrti and Nāgārjuna may cogently be understood as restricting the scope of negation to intrinsic nature. As we have seen in the previous section, this allows for use of epistemic instruments in the conventional domain, and a historically conditioned use of reason. This means the Pyrrhonist and the Madhyamaka will not fall into epistemic apathy. After all, epistemic

[113] *Sarvadharmaniḥsvabhāvasiddhi*, 312a 8–312b.

conventions do not suggest that truth is established by consensus, and they allow for divergence from the majority if it is (conventionally) justified. They also allow for complex tasks. Indeed, Sextus suggests that Methodist doctors practice their trade in a sceptical manner (*PH* 1.240).[114]

Hence, conventional use of reason allows the Pyrrhonist and the Mādhyamika to avoid epistemic apathy. However, given the Pyrrhonist's and Madhyamaka's reticence regarding rationality, it is unclear how we should conceive of notions like truth and knowledge as undogmatic. Global deflationism helps us spell this out in detail.

3.1.2 Global Deflationism

In reconstruing Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka as deflationist, I am not making strong exegetical claims. As Hankinson suggests, in order to strengthen the Pyrrhonian case, we may "attempt to elaborate a concept of truth that has nothing to do with any metaphysical realist claims" (250). However, this is not a project that Sextus himself undertakes: "The Sceptics are not concerned to establish a belief without foundations that is somehow none the less warranted; rather they simply describe a way of life" (ibid.). Hence, I am not suggesting that deflationism is what Sextus and Nāgārjuna had in mind; I *am* suggesting that it is a cogent, consistent extension of their ideas. After all, given the epistemic apathy objection, it is worthwhile to articulate a way in which Pyrrhonists and Madhyamaka's may be able to use terms like 'truth', 'existence', and 'knowledge', without any dogmatic commitments. This will help to make them more effective contemporary interlocuters.

The term 'deflationism' is used in many ways. I will follow Thomasson (2014) and use it to denote accounts that deny that a given concept (truth, reference, existence, knowledge) refers to a substantive property, the nature of which we can investigate and hope to

[114] The Methodist school of medicine arose in the first century AD and argued for relying on observation over theory. They disagreed, for instance, with the rationalists who argued that an individual had an essence that influenced the course of the disease.

discover (185). In other words, deflationary accounts problematise attempts to find and define the nature of certain concepts. Instead of postulating what makes all true sentences true, or all instances of knowledge knowledge, deflationists suggest that these concepts may be understood according to trivial conventions governing them. As Thomasson puts it, each account "thus gives a sort of no-theory attitude towards the concept in question, holding that we were wrong to think that we need a theory to uncover what truth, reference, or existence consists in" (ibid.).

One of its most popular forms is semantic deflationism. Tillemans, Siderits, and Priest (2011) suggest that the theory of the two truths may cogently be articulated as semantic deflationism. Semantic deflationism is most often presented in terms of the equivalence scheme: <*p*> is true if and only if *p*. Once we understand this scheme, we understand all there is to know about truth. As Williams puts it, "Philosophers who take a deflationary approach want no more from a theory of truth than a description of the logical behaviour of 'true' and some account of why it is useful to have such a device in our language" (1996, 111). This is contrary to theorists who argue that all true sentences correspond to facts; ideally cohere with other sentences; or lead to successful practice. For the semantic deflationist, there is simply no more to be said about the nature of truth, no deeper and more substantial theory to be uncovered. This is a useful way to understand truth in Madhyamaka: it neatly strips the conventional truth of any theoretical excess, and it fits well with the eschewal of dogmatic assertions and arguments. When the Madhyamaka suggests there is a pot on the ground, this does not require any semantic reification. Note that this understanding of truth occurs *after* the two truths have helped us realise that no ultimate truths are to be found. Hence, we are left with a simple sense of truth (i.e., conventional truth). Ordinary people maintain an inflated sense of truth, and all the afflictions that this brings. According to the deflationist picture, denials of the ultimate truth are no more than deflationary true either. As Tillemans suggests, "this might capture Tsongkhapa's idea that

everything, even emptiness and the denials of intrinsic nature, is only conventionally established" (2011, 164).

Thus, semantic deflationism allows us to conceive of truth without involving any reification. However, Pyrrhonists would be reluctant to commit to this (or any) position. Rather than claiming that truth has no discoverable nature, they would argue that this nature has thus far not been found. As noted before, "The sceptics are not concerned to establish a belief without foundations that is somehow none the less warranted; rather they simply describe a way of life" (Hankinson, 250). However, even though the Pyrrhonist will not be a committed semantic deflationist, they may cogently be construed as a provisional one. After all, following suspension of judgment, the sceptic employs 'truth' as a linguistic convention. They do not theorize about how it may be warranted, and simply follow the trivial conventions governing the concept. They also continually emphasize that their assertions should not be understood as relying on some dogmatic conception of truth; instead, they simply recount how things appear to them. This is exactly what a deflationist would do. And like a deflationist, the sceptic problematises any attempt to define the nature of truth. Hence, the Pyrrhonist's conception of truth may be understood as deflationist, albeit provisionally so. Note that this use of 'truth' is unlikely to occur in a philosophical, dialectical context: it denotes everyday usage of 'true'. In the dialectical context, Sextus often makes use of 'inflated' notions of truth, in order to problematise dogmatic assent.

However, semantic deflationism merely concerns truth. It is unfortunate that Tillemans, Siderits, and Priest did not extend their account to other theory-heavy concepts like existence and knowledge. After all, *saṁvṛtisatya* not only refers to truth, but to existence too, and it is not obvious that semantic deflationism entails existence deflationism. Moreover, Tillemans (2011) appeals to semantic deflationism to safeguard epistemic practices, but deflationism does not actually safeguards such practices against threats like Cartesian

scepticism.[115] Fortunately, knowledge deflationism and existence deflationism are able to help us reconstruct cogent Madhyamaka and Pyrrhonist positions.

Thomasson (2014a) suggests that, unlike semantic deflationism, existence deflationism has by and large gone unnoticed.[116] This is odd, because it problematises most debates in ontology: whether numbers, properties, mental states 'really' exist. Deflationary views of existence, "reject the idea that 'exists' or 'existing' names (or even attempts to name) a property or activity of objects *the substantive nature of which we can investigate*" (192). In other words, existence deflationists problematise attempts to ascertain the nature of 'existence'. There is no common property that all cases of existence share. Thomasson argues that semantic and existence deflationism go hand in hand, and that the former follows from the latter. She suggests that the equivalence schema for truth, plus some standard assumptions about formal logic, show that a given simple truth claim, like the pot is on the floor, implies that the pot and the floor exist (196-7).[117] In other words, existence claims may be derived from truth claims. This means that the suggestion that existence has no ascertainable nature is entailed by the argument that truth has no ascertainable nature. As Thomasson suggests, "since the deflationist about truth denies that there is any across-the-board condition for a proposition to be true, she is also led to deny that there is any across-the-board criterion for existence" (2014a, 196). This is perhaps not surprising, as

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[115] See Williams (1996). He argues that "not only do the epistemological questions that realism is thought to invite not depend on any particular account of the nature of truth, they do not even depend on the thought that truth *has* a 'nature'" (239).

[116] Carnap's discussion of internal and external questions may be an exception to this.

[117] (1) <n is P> is true
(2) <n is P> is true iff n is P
(3) n is P
(4) n is P iff ∃x ((n=x) & Px)
(5) ∃x ((n=x) & Px)
(6) ∃x ((n=x) & Px) →> ∃x (n=x)
(7) ∃x (n=x)
(8) ∃x (n=x) iff n exists
(9) n exists
(10) ∃x ((n=x) & Px) → ∃x(Px)
(11) ∃x(Px)
(12) ∃x(Px) iff Ps exist
(13) Ps exist

semantic deflationism undermines the representationalist picture of the relation between language and the world. Because everything there is to know about truth is captured by the equivalence scheme, there is no need to postulate state of affairs or facts that make claims true. Indeed, as Price puts it, "quietism about metaphysics needs to go hand in hand with quietism about semantics" (2011, 14).

This picture allows us to reconstruct Madhyamaka and Pyrrhonian notions of existence. It helps us see that the 'reality' and 'truth' aspects of *satya* are cogently connected. It also helps us make sense of the unfindability of *svabhāva*: the fact that entities disappear when subjected to ultimate analysis suggests that these entities have no nature that can be ascertained and theorized about. We must therefore rest content with trivial conventions concerning 'existence'; supposing there is more to it invites problematic reification. As Thomasson puts it, "The quietest approach may leave us uttering the same truths as the ordinary person does about what numbers, obligations, or beauties there are. But we do so without raising—or purporting to make any sense of— deep metaphysical questions about whether the relevant terms *really* refer" (2014, 203). In other words, the deflationist does not engage in problematic reification. We may also reconstruct the Pyrrhonist as an existence deflationist, though again, only provisionally so. They may use 'existence' in the same way the use 'place':

> [W]e say in an unsophisticated way that someone is in Alexandria and in the gymnasium and in the school; but our inquiry is not about place understood broadly, but about place understood in a limited way – whether it is, or is merely conceived, and if it is, what sort of nature it has: corporeal or incorporeal, and contained in a place or not (*M* 10.15).

The sceptic goes along with trivial conventions governing 'place', but they inquire about theoretical explanations about the concept. This may cogently be extended to 'existence'.[118] Thus, deflationism demonstrates how Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka can seriously engage with existence claims, without reifying them.

Finally, Madhyamaka and Pyrrhonism have occasionally been pictured as modern scepticism, attempting to undermine all knowledge claims.[119] For Pyrrhonism, this is unsurprising, given the strong etymological and genealogical links. However, more often than not, this association is an obstacle, rather than a support in understanding Pyrrhonism; and it is definitely so in the case of Madhyamaka. Instead, it is more helpful to reconstruct them as being deflationists about knowledge.

Williams suggests, "A deflationary account of 'know' may show how the word is embedded in a teachable and useful linguistic practice, without supposing that 'being known to be true' denotes a property that groups propositions into a theoretically significant kind" (1996, 113). Indeed, ascribing an ascertainable nature to knowledge seems problematic, given how context-sensitive knowledge claims are. For instance, after checking a public transport app, you might claim to know the bus times; however, in a different context, when it is made clear that the fate of the world depends on you being able to indicate accurately when the bus will arrive, you would be inclined to say that you do not actually know. Thus, "the epistemic status of a given proposition is liable to shift with situational, disciplinary and other contextually variable factors" (ibid., 119). This suggests that knowledge cannot be made sense of independent of these contextual factors. Hence, our epistemic position is not something that can be measured against the context-independent 'totality of knowledge'.

Instead, Williams describes epistemic evaluation as taking place relative to "methodological necessities" (ibid, 123). He adapts this notion from Wittgenstein's arational hinge

[118] Like the Sanskrit 'sat', the Greek verb 'esti' has connotations of both 'truth' and 'existence'. Note that 'to be' also has both connotations to in quotidian English!
[119] See, e.g., Matilal (1986), Siderits (1988), and Burton (1999).

commitments, outlined in *On Certainty*. These form the framework within which any epistemic evaluation occurs. For such evaluation to occur, we must hold certain things to 'stand fast'. So if I am researching the first Buddhist council, I will simply take the reality of the past for granted. Not because this cannot be called into question, but because, "We just *can't* investigate everything, and for that reason we are forced to rest content with assumption. If I want the door to turn the hinges must stay put" (1969, §341-3). So hinge propositions are the defining assumptions of a context of inquiry, not because they normatively characterize it, but because they deflationarily describe it and explain how it is individuated. With such a deflationary account of knowledge on the table, it is a further step to insist on a theory of knowledge as well, because this requires the additional move of taking knowledge to have a 'nature'.

This deflationist account of knowledge helps us reconstrue everyday knowledge claims of the mature sceptic. Williams suggests that, for the Pyrrhonist, in everyday life, "all sorts of things are simply taken for granted, without argument" (1998, 563). Just as hinge-propositions, these are not rational commitments, but they are simply taken for granted in the context of action. Inquiry into such propositions shows that they are not more persuasive than their opposite. In the context of running, I will take for granted that motion exists, but when subjected to inquiry, it appears unfindable. What propositions will be taken for granted by the Pyrrhonist, "is determined not by any theoretical considerations but by various contingencies, personal and social: his biological drives, emotional makeup, how and where he was brought up, whatever professional training he may have undergone" (ibid., 563). This goes for epistemic practices too. The Pyrrhonist understands that their participation in practices such as justifying and reasoning is simply the following of trivial conventions. Any attempt to step back from this context and provide a general account of knowledge invites sceptical inquiry. Thus, deflationism allows us to suggest that Pyrrhonists employ 'knowledge' in everyday contexts, and problematise attempts to provide theoretical accounts of knowledge transcending these contexts. This allows us to understand

Pyrrhonism as undermining theories of knowledge that go beyond everyday conventions governing the concept, rather than as undermining all knowledge claims.

Knowledge deflationism also helps to make sense of epistemic practice within Madhyamaka. In fact, Siderits (2003) adopts Williams' argument against knowledge as a theoretically significant kind: "[T]here can be no such thing as a means of knowledge per se, given that the justificatory role played by a means of knowledge derives in part from the context in which it occurs" (146). Indeed, we saw that Nāgārjuna undermines any attempt to ascribe a substantive nature to epistemic instruments by problematising the different ways these might be established (akin to the Five Modes). In addition, Siderits employs Nāgārjuna's 'refutation of the production from existent or nonexistent' to problematise the different temporal arrangements of an epistemic instrument and a cognition. This all serves to show that epistemic instruments do not exist intrinsically; they are epistemic instruments only by virtue of the role they play in an epistemic context. Attempts to go beyond different contexts are found to be incoherent. This means that Mādhyamikas can make use of 'knowledge' as it is used in different situations, whilst criticizing attempts to ascribe a substantive nature to it. It also highlights why there is no 'master argument' for emptiness. All epistemic evaluation is relative to a given context, so there can be no single context-independent argument that works in all cases.

A consequence of this view is that we cannot order epistemic contexts hierarchically. There is no context independent criterion that allows use to arrange epistemic notions. As Pritchard puts it, "contextualism just *is* the thesis that there is *no* such hierarchy of epistemic contexts … a context is individuated purely in terms of the epistemic structure it endorses" (2002, 235). It is then odd that Siderits attempts to safeguard epistemic progress for the Madhyamaka precisely by postulating a hierarchy of contexts: "Now, in order for this [epistemological contextualism] to work and not amount to an 'anything goes' relativism, these contexts must be seen as falling into a hierarchy, so that each is seen as an

improvement on its predecessor" (2011, 179). This move re-introduces a context-independent epistemic notion: a criterion of 'improvement'. This suggests that there are epistemic notions that may be understood as independent of anything else, i.e. as having *svabhāva*. Siderits suggests that this hierarchy consists of levels of reductive analysis, though without a final level at which *svabhāva* is found (ibid.).[120] However, it is not clear why such hierarchical reductionism is needed to safeguard epistemic progress. Thomasson (2014b), for example, argues that the picture of things in the world (or language) neatly falling into denumerable layers is highly implausible. She suggests that talk of hierarchical levels, "is just a coarse-grained, misleading, reified way of talking about relations among the rules of use for our terms" (294), and that we would be better of recognizing the complex interdependence of things. By taking seriously this interdependence, without neatly layering it, we can still make sense of molecules, gravity, and HIV, without thinking that these reflect neat levels of reality.

In sum, reconstructing Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka in a deflationist fashion allows us to flesh out their use of notions like 'truth', 'existence', and 'knowledge'. This shows that they can take these concepts seriously, without problematically reifying them. They simply follow trivial conventions governing these terms, and question any attempt to go beyond such conventions. One might object that for the Pyrrhonist and the Madhyamaka, these concepts are true only in some reduced, pretending sense. However, as we have seen before, such objections only hold *from the dogmatist's* perspective, which supposes that for something to be really true, it must have a discoverable nature. Deflationists question precisely this understanding of truth, existence, and knowledge. Thus, understanding these traditions in a deflationist manner allows us to see how exactly they escape the dismal slough of pure conventionalism.

[120] Note that this hierarchy is different from certain truths being more ultimate because they bring us closer to liberation of suffering, which is soteriological rather than epistemic.

3.2: Ethical Apathy

A common objection raised against Pyrrhonists is that their constant questioning, their complete suspension of judgment, and their focus on tranquillity make them ethically apathetic. Bett suggests that the Pyrrhonist would have an "ethically impoverished attitude" (2012, 4), and Nussbaum goes so far as to suggest that Pyrrhonism is, "morally and politically pernicious" (2000, 171). Indeed, it seems that cessation of reification may remove "the intensity of commitment to virtue that makes people risk their lives for justice, or endure hardship for those they love" (Nussbaum 1994, 314). After all, such commitments involve strong feelings, and it may seem that excessive feeling is exactly what Pyrrhonism is meant to avoid. Hence, Nussbaum suggests that Pyrrhonists, "cannot be relied on for the same committed behavior we can demand from a person who sees justice as possible and worthy of profound commitment and sacrifice" (2000, 192-193).

This picture clearly seems troublesome. In the best-case scenario, the Pyrrhonist lives in a just society and is brought up with ethical ideas, which means they will just happen to act ethically. In the worst-case scenario, the Pyrrhonist is raised in an evil society, which means that they will simply go along with everyday evil, maintaining the status quo. Given the fact that no society thus far has been entirely just, an uncritical acceptance of the status quo is undesirable.

This problem does not arise in this way for Madhyamaka. We saw that they emphasise the pivotal importance of compassion. However, this raises a different problem. Madhyamaka analysis problematises everything, leaving only the conventional truth intact, which means that Mādhyamikas too will go along with everyday conventions. Any normative ethics will be problematised. However, if that is the case, how can they be committed to compassion at the same time?

Before I show how Madhyamaka solves this issue and how that solution may be applied to Pyrrhonism too, I want to suggest that less dogmatism may in fact be conducive to more justice.

The often-quoted example to charge the Pyrrhonist with amorality is their response to a malicious tyrant. Sextus explains,

> If compelled by a tyrant to perform some forbidden act, [the sceptic] will choose one thing, perhaps, and avoid the other by the preconception which accords with his ancestral laws and customs (*M* 11.166).

Now, it seems reasonable to assume that this tyrant is a non-Pyrrhonist. After all, the act is forbidden, so a Pyrrhonist, going along with convention, would not indulge in such unconventional practices. This also implies that, had the tyrant been a Pyrrhonist, this horrible standoff would have never occurred. In general, it seems that a Pyrrhonist would be unlikely to engage in actions that are considered morally abhorrent by their peers, because this would involve going against established customs. That does not mean that history may not judge the Pyrrhonist and their peers harshly. However, it seems that dogmatists are capable of much greater evil than the Pyrrhonist. Indeed, from the Inquisition to the Third Reich, history is coloured red by those believing their morality to be absolutely true and just. And, in a society where different views are ever more entrenched, it seems we are suffering from too much dogmatism, rather than too little. The Pyrrhonist is unlikely to commit to their ethics to the extent that they would burn, gas, or lock up those that think differently. After all, they will have seriously considered these different views already, and observed they appeared equally convincing as their own. Indeed, Shklar goes so far as to suggest there is a natural alliance between scepticism and liberalism:

> Skepticism is inclined toward toleration, since in its doubts it cannot choose among the competing beliefs that swirl around it, so often in murderous rage. Whether the skeptic seeks personal tranquillity in retreat or tries to calm the warring factions

> around her, she must prefer a government that does nothing to increase the prevailing levels of fanaticism and dogmatism. To that extent there is a natural affinity between the liberal and the skeptic (1989/1998, 7).

Hence, it may be clear that the Pyrrhonist is unlikely to be unethical, and likely to make a society more just by the combatting of dogmatism. Having said that, it seems that they are unlikely to be revolutionaries. Just like the sceptic would be unlikely to burn others at the stake, they are unlikely to erect barricades, go on hunger strike, or topple statues.

This appears incongruous with Madhyamaka's commitment to compassion. Indeed, Śāntideva states that the Mādhyamika may go against established convention for the sake of compassion: "[O]ne should always be striving for others' wellbeing. Even what is proscribed is permitted for a compassionate person who sees it will be of benefit" (*BCA* 5.84). However, how can the Madhyamaka decide to prioritize compassion over convention, if not for some independent, normative ethics? Indeed, Buddhist scholars have questioned whether emptiness is consistent with ethical commitments, with Williams famously making the case that emptiness risks destroying the Bodhisattva path.

Discussions regarding the relation between compassion and emptiness centre on Śāntideva's *BCA. Prima facie*, he seems to suggest that a rational inference can be made from emptiness (of the self) to altruism:

> The continuum of consciousness, like a series, and the aggregation of constituents, like an army and such, are unreal. Since one who experiences suffering does not exist, to whom will that suffering belong?
>
> All sufferings are without an owner, because they are not different. They should be warded off simply because they are suffering. Why is any restriction made in this case?

> Why should suffering be prevented? Because everyone agrees. If it must be warded off, then all of it must be warded off; and if not, then this goes for oneself as it does for everyone else. (*BCA* 8.101-103)

Śāntideva appears to argue that, since the self is an unreal superimposition on a collection of psycho-physical aggregates, suffering cannot have an owner, and therefore all suffering should be prevented equally. This suggests that commitment to reducing suffering can rationally be inferred from the nature of reality, i.e. emptiness. However, Williams presents us with a dilemma. On the one hand, if the self does not exist ultimately, but still exists conventionally, a person might simply limit the reduction of suffering to that which is felt by the conventionally existent person. On the other hand, if persons are neither ultimately nor conventionally real, it becomes difficult to understand how to uphold compassionate practices, such as charity – our ability to think coherently about ourselves and others would be undermined. Thus, either Śāntideva is wrong, or emptiness destroys the Bodhisattva path.[121]

However, scholars such as Garfield (2011b), Westerhoff (2015), Finnegan (2017), and Harris (2015) argue that this dilemma only arises if we try to ascribe a philosophically substantial argument to Śāntideva. They maintain that Williams' argument fails to take seriously the emptiness of emptiness as well as the Buddhist distinction between *understanding* emptiness and its *realisation*, which is typically induced via meditation (Wallace 1999, 204). Indeed, "meditation is central to Śāntideva's account for it is through meditation that one embeds discursive knowledge into one's character" (Garfield 2015, 307). This observation is crucial because, unlike mere philosophical reflection, realisation of emptiness changes our experience of the world. Williams shows we run into problems when arguing that emptiness *rationally* entails compassion, but this issue is avoided once we see that emptiness *experientially* entails compassion. Westerhoff puts this as follows:

[121] See Williams (1989) for the full argument.

> The point is not to provide an argument for how one should act on the basis of how the world happens to be, but to argue that one state, that of the realisation of selflessness, is such that it subsumes under it another state, that in which selfish action is impossible. The former subsumes the latter because it entails a shift in the way we experience the world, a transformation of the way phenomena appear to us (2015, 214).

Garfield labels this conception of ethics *moral phenomenology*. He explains that "For Śāntideva, the culmination of ethical practice is a cognitively rich perceptual skill – a new way of experiencing oneself in the world, contingent on the realisation of emptiness" (2011b, 348). Once one sees oneself as nonsubstantial and existing only in interdependence, the suffering of others is experienced as one's own. This means that, once the understanding of emptiness is internalised, it "transforms one's very experience both of the external world and of oneself" (ibid. 353). Śāntideva's writings on selflessness, virtues, and interdependence help to internalise the idea that suffering is bad, regardless of who's it is. The experience of ourselves, others, and the world as interdependent, impermanent, and insubstantial induces, "a genuine commitment manifested in thought, speech and physical action to act for the welfare of all sentient beings" (ibid. 339). This also works vice versa, the more compassionate we are, the easier it becomes to let go of the intrinsic self.

This conception of ethics relies on emptiness, rather than just selflessness (*anātman*). If we understand Śāntideva as relying on *anātman* alone, he can be most straightforwardly read as making a statement of ultimate truth from the Abhidharma perspective: the self is an unreal superimposition on real psycho-physical aggregates. However, this means we would not only need to explain why a Mādhyamika would argue from an Ābhidharmika position, it also suggests Śāntideva makes the flawed argument that Williams accuses him of making. It would be more persuasive, and indeed charitable, to read Śāntideva as eschewing any such ultimate statements (Harris 2015, 97). This means that though emptiness of the self

remains a key concern, it cannot be understood apart from the idea that everything is interdependently originated and empty. Indeed, it seems that experiencing *everything* as interdependent and empty would generate a greater phenomenological shift than merely seeing the self as empty of intrinsic nature.

Thus, the foundation of the awakened life is "the ability to see all phenomena – including oneself, that to which one is intimately related, and other moral agents – as empty of intrinsic existence, as interdependent and as impermanent" (Garfield 2011b, 348). This means that emptiness and compassion are connected phenomenologically. Indeed, "The cultivation of even a basic understanding of emptiness increases compassion" (ibid. 353). As Śāntideva states:

> Without an understanding of emptiness, a mental state that has ceased will arise once again, just as when one engages in non-conceptual meditation. Therefore, one should meditate on emptiness (*BCA* 9.48; see also *BCA* 9.77).

None of this should be understood as a normative ethical theory. It is simply the observation that the realisation of emptiness transforms our experience of the world, inducing compassion for all beings whom we previously saw as wholly separate of ourselves due to our projection of intrinsic nature unto the world. Although any theoretical attempt to bring emptiness and compassion together is bound to collapse (as demonstrated by Williams), Madhyamaka shows that they can exist in mutual dependence due to their impact on our way of inhabiting and perceiving the world.

Thus, Madhyamaka provides a way of conceiving of compassion and emptiness as mutually supportive. We may apply this conception to Pyrrhonism too. This is not an exegetical, but a constructive exercise: Sextus never proposed such a connection, but it is consistent with his ideas, and solves the problem of ethical apathy. After all, Sextus does say that sceptics are "philanthropic", which motivates them to go out and combat dogmatism (*PH* 3.280). However, if Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka are so similar, why did Sextus not pick up on the

phenomenological connection between *epochē* and empathy? This may very well be due to Sextus' lack of attention to the reification of the self. This is absolutely key in Madhyamaka, and Buddhism in general. Given the centrality of *ātman* in Upaniṣadic philosophy, and Indian philosophy in general, it is unsurprising the doctrine of *anātman* plays a similar central role in Buddhism. As we have seen, the notion of the self having an intrinsic nature was much less prominent for Sextus. Indeed, his main interlocutors, the Stoics and Epicureans, were thorough going materialists. Epicurus suggests that a soul consist of a plurality of atoms, which scatter after the body dies. Hence, the reification of the self was not a key philosophical tendency that Sextus could inquire about.

Now, Madhyamaka analysis of the self is entirely consistent with Pyrrhonism: the self is inquired about, and failed to be found, and so we cease to reify the self, and go along with the appearance of it. This suggests that Pyrrhonists may consistently extent their inquiry to encompass the self and reap the phenomenological benefits: compassion. Just like suspension of judgment fortuitously leads to tranquillity, suspension of judgment about the self fortuitously leads to increased care and feeling of connection with other people. Indeed, it seems that this would impact the everyday observances that the sceptic follows, in particular nature's guidance, by which the sceptic is naturally capable of perceiving and thinking, and necessitation of feeling, by which hunger conducts the sceptic to food and thirst to drink. Once we cease to reify the self, our emotional state of being changes: we feel less concerned with our own lives, and more with those of others. The suffering of other people will feel more painful to us. Hence, we will think more about the concerns of others, and feel more compelled to alleviate their suffering. This may inspire the sceptic to act in ways that are contrary to the established laws and customs. In fact, it may be that the sceptic experiences some of this increased compassion already. After all, their philanthropy motivates them to cure dogmatism, and dogmatism is the main source of disturbance. This suggests that Sextus' writings are themselves an act of compassion, in the best way he knows how.

In sum, I have demonstrated that the ethical apathy objection falls flat. Not only is Pyrrhonism likely to lead to a more just, less dogmatic society, Madhyamaka shows that cessation of reification, particularly regarding the self, experientially increases compassion. This focus on the self may cogently be incorporated in Pyrrhonian inquiry. Hence, *epochē* may, fortuitously, increase our sensitivity to the needs of others. This shows that the Pyrrhonist and the Mādhyamika would have ethically enriched, rather than impoverished, attitudes.

In this chapter, I demonstrated that Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka are robust therapeutic philosophies. I showed that the incoherence and unliveability objections may be countered by cogent interpretations of the text, which are supported by the other tradition, and by drawing on the testimony of contemporary Madhyamaka practitioners. I argued that Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka may be understood as desirable, by reconstructing their ideas with the help of deflationism and moral phenomenology. All of this suggests that Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka are cogent, viable philosophies. This, combined with the fact that two traditions from different ends of the globe testify to the transformative potential of similar anti-dogmatic arguments, means we should take their potential seriously.

Chapter 7

Harnessing Findings

In this chapter I will employ the findings of the previous chapters to reflect on the practice of philosophy. I have argued that Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka may be construed as cogent, desirable therapeutic philosophies. As we will see, they can hold their own in the contemporary philosophical arena and several philosophies are aligned with their claims. However, whereas Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka are avowedly therapeutic, contemporary philosophy is virtually devoid of therapeutic considerations. In other words, there is little attention for the transformative effects that philosophical reasoning might have.[122] I will argue that insights from Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka show that this negligence of therapeutic considerations is problematic. If these traditions have transformative potential, then so may contemporary philosophies akin to them. I will show that this has significant implications for the way we consider specific philosophical problems, the role of intuitions,

[122] My discussion is restricted to 'analytic' philosophy. Continental philosophy seems to make better use of the therapeutic dimension of philosophical arguments. For example, Camus notes, "accepting the absurdity of everything around us is… a necessary experience" (1942/1991, 15-16).

and the role of philosophy itself. I will end with a reflection on what implementing these ideas in everyday life might look like.

1: Making Philosophy Therapeutic Again

In this section, I will show that some contemporary philosophies share the transformative potential of Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka. Hadot and Nussbaum have famously demonstrated that therapy was an integral part of classical philosophy. We cannot properly understand Sextus, Epicurus, and Seneca without understanding how their philosophies aim to change our way of being in the world. Indeed, Burnyeat famously demonstrates that the modern separation between philosophy and everyday life is simply a product of the history of philosophy. This in and of itself should give us pause about our current ways of doing philosophy. However, although Stoicism, Epicureanism, and Abhidharma offer fascinating arguments and insightful analyses of the human psyche, many of their positive doctrines struggle in the contemporary arena. Stoic epistemology, Epicurean atomism, and Abhidharma cosmology are not seen as serious options by contemporary philosophers. However, the psychological insights of these ancient philosophies are inextricably connected with such ideas. This means that, although these traditions show how ancient philosophy was therapeutic, they do not clearly show how philosophy might be so today. This is where Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka come in. Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka are able to hold their own in contemporary debates and their ideas are related to existing philosophies. I will discuss both in turn.

Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka offer little in the way of traditional, constructive philosophy. They primarily criticize others that theorize about the nature of reality. This means that their ideas are much more resilient, and better able to stand the changing winds of philosophy. In fact, Westerhoff (2014) suggests we justify our choice of interpretive

framework of Madhyamaka "relative to what theory the Madhyamaka arguments are primarily pitched against" (37). This suggests that there is an enormous flexibility in how we can conceive of their arguments, because they depend on the dogmatism of their opponents. This suggestion applies equally well to Pyrrhonism. For example, we have seen that both philosophies may be reconstrued as supporting deflationism, which is a significant force within the contemporary discourse. Moreover, both traditions are able to criticize contemporary dogmatic philosophies. For example, Fogelin shows that contemporary epistemologists would fare badly in an encounter with an ancient Pyrrhonist (1994); and Garfield critiques Fodor's suggestion that all scientific taxonomy is a-relational by drawing on Sextus and Nāgārjuna (1990). That is to say, the therapeutic arguments of Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka can operate successfully within contemporary philosophy. This shows that contemporary philosophy is not incompatible with therapeutic aims. On the contrary, the connection between Pyrrhonism, Madhyamaka, and certain contemporary philosophies suggests that they have untapped therapeutic potential.

I will highlight a few of such philosophies, namely Wittgenstein's, Rorty's, and Westerhoff's. These are not intended as robust comparisons, but as demonstrations that there is sufficient affinity for them to have therapeutic potential. I will also propose how their ideas may be captured by therapeutic practices.

1.1: Ludwig Wittgenstein

As we have seen in chapter 5, both Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka are often associated with later Wittgenstein.[123] Like Pyrrhonian practices help us to cease problematic reification without endorsing specific theses, Wittgenstein helps us to cease problematic philosophical theorizing without endorsing specific theses. It may be clear that this reading fits better with

[123] And, occasionally, the 'resolute' reading of early Wittgenstein (Smith 2021).

the limited scope reading of Pyrrhonism, where only philosophical beliefs are called into question. After all, Wittgenstein regards philosophy as the source of philosophical troubles. Nevertheless, both regard philosophy as a practice, rather than as a set of theses. In the same vein that Sextus emphasizes that he is not making dogmatic claims in his purging of dogmatism, Wittgenstein states, "All that philosophy can do is to destroy idols. And that means not creating a new one—say in the 'absence of an idol'" (1933/2005, §88). He shows that philosophical problems are illusory by examining the nature of everyday epistemic and semantic practices, which allows us to see how philosophers misunderstand and misrepresent what actually goes on in those practices. Thus, rather than proposing an opposing philosophical thesis, Wittgenstein 'cures' us of the misunderstanding that gave rise to the problem in the first place. It is in this sense that his work is considered 'therapeutic'.

We also saw that much contemporary Madhyamaka scholarship is undeniably influenced by Wittgenstein. Wittgenstein and Madhyamaka are associated for their problematizing of realism and foundationalism. Such ideas presume that language reflects what is *really* the case. Instead, Wittgenstein and Mādhyamikas argue that abstracting away from everyday linguistic contexts means that the meaning of words and concepts gets distorted. For Madhyamikas, *prapañca* means that everyone engages in such distortion. The hinge commitments and actions—*vyavahāra*, in the case of Madhyamaka—simply lie outside the realm of rational evaluation.

However, all this does not mean that simply going over Wittgenstein's arguments has a therapeutic effect. In fact, Pritchard suggests that it might induce a sense of disquiet. He compares the understanding of hinge commitments to a sense of vertigo:

> [J]ust as one can recognise, while high up, that one is perfectly safe and yet have a phobic reaction to heights nonetheless, so one can recognise, from a detached intellectual perspective, that there is nothing epistemically amiss with our hinge

> commitments being arational and yet feel a deep sense of epistemic insecurity regardless (2019, 101).

This is unsurprising, given that contemporary philosophy provides very few tools to reflect on the experiential effects that philosophical reasoning may have. Without a framework to contextualize an experience uprooting our basic understanding of the world, this experience is bound to feel uncanny. Dreyfus explains that this would happen to Mādhyamikas too, if they did not have the tools to frame their experience:

> By providing a narrative structure in which the insight into emptiness becomes meaningful, it ensures that the practitioner affected by the shake-up of categories involved in Madhyamaka does not fall into nihilism. … Jay Shay-rab Seng-ge was so frightened by Dzong-ka-ba's teaching of emptiness that he clutched his monastic shirt, as if to hold on to his nonexistent self, yet he did not feel as if he had lost all moral bearings in a meaningless universe. Because he lived in a Buddhist universe in which the insight into emptiness made sense, She-rab Seng-ge saw it as a way to reach closure and was able to assimilate its undermining of the most basic categories (2002, 243).

Thus, Mādhyamikas know that the cessation of reification may be intense, and they have the tools to make sense of this experience. In fact, Pritchard (2019) suggests that Pyrrhonism provides a context in which the experience produced by Wittgenstein's *On Certainty* makes sense. He argues that the sense of epistemic vertigo motivates the ongoing sceptical inquiry. Within this framework, the sense of vertigo plays a key role on the road to *ataraxia* and can therefore be recontextualized as a positive experience.

Indeed, we have seen that there are three key practices propounded by both Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka: continued investigation, establishing equipollence, and repeating phrases. It seems that Wittgensteinian inquiry into the (mis)usage of concepts and language fits the bill for continued investigation. It helps to pacify our tendency to cling to objects and

ideas as real, because we continually find that they depend on conventional usage, rather than rational foundations. It seems the establishing of equipollence (or usage of the *catuṣkoṭi*) does not find a ready equivalent. Perhaps Wittgenstein's discussion of hinge commitments, showing that our rational practices never have rational foundations, highlights that one practice is no more persuasive than any other (according to the foundationalist picture). Wittgenstein does provide plenty of pithy phrases that help to avoid problematic reification: "it is our acting, which lies at the bottom of the language–game" (1969 §204); "Philosophy is a battle against the bewitchment of our intelligence by means of language" (1953/2009 §1.109); "He must, so to speak, throw away the ladder after he has climbed up it" (1922 §6.54).

All of this is to show that Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka share a strong affinity with Wittgenstein's thought. This implies that, were Wittgenstein's therapeutic philosophy reconstrued as a set of exercises, it would have the potential to change our experience for the better. A significant discrepancy is that Wittgenstein restricts his therapy to philosophers. In contrast, Richard Rorty also has much affinity with Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka, and observes that everyone suffers from problematic reification.

1.2: Richard Rorty

In this section, I will outline the affinity between Richard Rorty and Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka. Unlike comparisons with Wittgenstein, this affinity has remained virtually unexplored. Hence, I will go into a bit more detail.

All three problematise the notion of independent, discoverable truth. As Rorty puts it, "what was needed, and what the idealists were unable to envisage, was a repudiation of the very idea of anything – mind or matter, self or world – having an intrinsic nature to be expressed or represented" (1989, 4). By rejecting the notion of an ultimate reality (or, suspending

judgment on it, in the case of Sextus), Rorty, Madhyamaka, and Pyrrhonism provide a middle way between philosophical extremes. Rorty explains that, "As long as we try to project from the relative and conditioned to the absolute and unconditioned, we shall keep the pendulum swinging between dogmatism and skepticism" (1998, 4). Similarly, Madhyamaka forges the middle path between nihilism and eternalism, and Pyrrhonism between Academic scepticism and dogmatism. By questioning the very idea of intrinsic nature, all three try to eschew problematic reification.

A key aspect of the approaches of Rorty and Madhyamaka (and to some extent Pyrrhonism) is relationality. By showing that everything exists in a web of relations, the notion of intrinsic nature becomes untenable. Rorty explains that in order to be able to let go of the notion of an ultimate reality we, "need to break down the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic – between the inner core of X and a peripheral area of X which is constituted by the fact that X stands in certain relations to other items which make up the universe" (1999, 50). For Mādhyamikas, dependent origination (*pratītyasamutpāda*) is intertwined with emptiness; and Sextus devotes much attention to Agrippan and Aenesideman relativity. This relationality is described in very similar terms. In case of Madhyamaka, "phenomena are dependently originated all the way down, and it is therefore impossible to specify precisely what it is upon which anything finally depends. Hence, there can be no set of 'ultimately existent' things" (Arnold 2008, 119). Correspondingly, Rorty states that, "Everything that can serve as the term of a relation can be dissolved into another set of relations, and so on forever. There are, so to speak, relations all the way down, all the way up, and all the way out in every direction: you never reach something which is not just one more nexus of relations" (1999, 53-54). Thus, Rorty's notion of 'panrelationism' parallels *pratītyasamutpāda*. Note that neither of these are definitive rational demonstrations; they are simply tools to problematise instances of intrinsic nature.

All three are at pains to explain that they do not provide an alternative theory of the nature of reality. Their point is that any such theory is bound to be incoherent. Rorty argues, "To say that there is no such thing as intrinsic nature is not to say that the intrinsic nature of reality has turned out to be extrinsic. It is to say that the term 'intrinsic nature' is one which it would pay us not to use, an expression which has caused more trouble than it has been worth" (1989, 8). He points out that, "Edifying philosophers have to decry the very notion of having a view, while avoiding having a view about having views" (1979, 371). We saw that this attitude is wholly shared by Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka. As Nāgārjuna puts it, "Emptiness is taught by the conquerors as the expedient to get rid of all [dogmatic] views. But those for whom emptiness is a [dogmatic] view have been called incurable" (*MMK* 13:8).

This struggle to reject theories about the nature of the world, without thereby positing an alternative picture is reflected in the way the three traditions deal with speech and arguments. Rorty explains that, "Pragmatists keep trying to find ways of making anti-philosophical points in non-philosophical language" (1982, xiv), where 'philosophical language' presumes to represent the true nature of things. Nāgārjuna demonstrates this struggle in his response to the *Nyāya* objection that, if his emptiness thesis is to have any argumentative power, it must exist substantially and thus contradict itself by admitting that not everything is empty. As we have seen, Nāgārjuna responds by denying he has any thesis (*VV* 29). Similarly, Sextus starts his thesis by emphasizing that the Pyrrhonist's statements are descriptive, not affirmative (*PH* 1.4).

Furthermore, unlike Wittgenstein, Rorty considers reificationism more than a flawed philosophical idea: it is reflected in our intuitions. Rorty wants to change our common-sense intuitions, precisely because they presume things having intrinsic nature. He acknowledges that such intuitions are "as deep and compelling as the essentialist says they are" (1982, xxxi). However, the pragmatist, "is urging that we do our best to *stop having* such intuitions"

(ibid. xxx). Thus, Rorty's philosophy is more readily amenable to the universal therapy that Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka recommend.

Moreover, Rorty and Madhyamaka share a strong aversion to cruelty and a utopian vision in which all suffering is eliminated. Rorty suggests that a liberal utopia is "achieved by the imaginative ability to see strange people as fellow sufferers. … It is created by increasing our sensitivity to the pain of others, unfamiliar sort of people" (1989, xvi). This sensitivity, and commitment to reducing suffering is reflected strongly in Madhyamaka, particularly by Śāntideva: "Whatever suffering is in store for the world, may it all ripen in me. May the world find happiness through all the pure deeds of the Bodhisattvas" (*BCA* 10.56). I will elaborate on their approach to ethics in the next section. For now, it serves to note that both perceive moral development as a transformation of our experience of the world, increasing our perceptiveness of suffering and our ability to respond to it. Thus, I take basic liberal sentiments to be akin to Madhyamaka compassion.

The initial steps in the neo-pragmatist, Pyrrhonian, and Madhyamaka projects are very similar: Rorty describes the 'ironist', the anti-dogmatic philosopher, as someone who faces up to the contingency of their ideas and beliefs, and thereby abandons the attempt to fight one's way past appearances to the real. This straightforward anti-dogmatism is the first of two types of 'irony' at play in Rorty's work (Curtis, 93). However, their ideas diverge after developing this anti-dogmatic insight. Whereas the Pyrrhonist and the Mādhyamika continue to inquire, and the latter also attempts to cultivate *bodhicitta*, Rorty strongly advocates poetic self-creation. Curtis explains that this second kind of ironist "feels impelled to challenge and transform her final vocabulary by perpetually seeking out and comparing it to, and reweaving it with, alternative final vocabularies" (95). However, Mādhyamikas and Pyrrhonists undertake no such redescription. Thus, most Mādhyamikas and Pyrrhonists will be more akin to the first kind of ironist, who is "generally satisfied with their current, often inherited, final vocabularies, or at least feel no compulsion to attempt to transform them by

actively seeking out new ones" (Curtis, 98), rather than to the more iconoclast ironist, focussed on poetic self-creation.[124]

Further, Siderits (2015) criticizes the connection between (his interpretation of) Madhyamaka and Rorty's irony. It seems that Siderits considers Rorty's deflationism a problematic flattening of truth. He attempts to avoid such flattening by incorporating epistemic and semantic contextualism in his exposition of Madhyamaka.[125] However, it seems Rorty would agree with this strategy. Ramberg notes,

> It is important to realize … that Rorty is not denying that there is any bona fide use of notions like truth, knowledge, or objectivity. Rather his point is that our ordinary uses of these notions always trade for their content and point on particular features of their varying contexts of application. His further point is that when we abstract away from these different contexts and practices, in search of general notions, we are left with pure abstract hypostatizations incapable of providing us with any guide to action at all ("Rorty").

Having said that, despite his disclaimers, Rorty is often understood as flipping the realist coin. I agree that, understood like this, his association with Madhyamaka may be unhelpful.

Thus, my suggestion here is simply that, if Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka have transformative potential, it seems plausible that Rorty's philosophy does to.

Ongoing inquiry for Rorty may be the continual questioning of our inherited vocabularies, in part by seeking out new ones. Rortian inquiry would likely be genealogical and historicist, continuously uncovering the historical contingency of our ideas rather than their intrinsic natures. Although Rorty does not talk about establishing equipollence as such, the ironist

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[124] Arguably, Mahayana Buddhists (particularly Nāgārjuna) redescribed the final vocabulary they inherited when responding to Abhidharma. The change in meaning of the ultimate and conventional truth is a good example of this.

[125] As indicated, Siderits adopts his notion of epistemic contextualism from Michael Williams (2003, 146), whose theory Rorty in fact celebrates (2000, 218).

attempts to continuously encounter new vocabularies, so that both lose their hold on us. Rorty explains: "[they] see the choice between vocabularies as made neither within a neutral and universal metavocabulary nor by an attempt to fight one's way past appearances to the real, but simply by playing the new off against the old" (1989, 73). For Rorty, literature provides the easiest access to such alternative vocabularies by getting us acquainted with strange people, families, and communities. This focus on contrasting our own vocabulary with that of others leads Williams to virtually equate irony and Pyrrhonism:

> The mark of a 'final' vocabulary item is the impossibility of defending its use in a 'noncircular way'; and the source of the ironist's doubts is acquaintance with other, competing final vocabularies. The affinity with Pyrrhonian scepticism in both its dialectical and theoretical-epistemological dimensions hardly needs spelling out: irony is scepticism by another name (2000, 210).

With regards to repeating phrases, Rorty recognizes the need for aphorisms, because these are effective as reactionary devises (1979, 369). Some of his own that may be used to this end include, "Freedom is the recognition of contingency" (1998, 326), and, understood as a counterbalance to the correspondence view of truth rather than an independent thesis: "[truth is] what our peers will, *ceteris paribus,* let us get away with saying" (1979, 176).

1.3: Jan Westerhoff

Bringing the discussion into the 21st century, I want to highlight a recent account in line with Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka.

Westerhoff (2020) attempts to spell out the idea that, "different parts of analytic philosophy (as well as in its larger orbit), including metaphysics, epistemology, the theory of personal identity, philosophy of science, philosophy of language, and cognitive science … could be joined up to form a systematic development and defence of key Madhyamaka claims"

(xxviii). Indeed, he methodically undercuts different arguments that appear to necessitate reification, such as the notion that the idea of an external world is necessary to distinguish between illusory and veridical perceptions, or for a satisfactory epistemology. By arguing that the very postulating of the external world is part of our representational interface, he collapses the distinction between the appearances and 'the real world', rendering 'the external world' an unnecessary presupposition. Westerhoff then turns this analysis inward and examines our postulation of an internal world. He shows that our different ways of conceiving of the self, such as unified spatially, functionally, or intentionally, are all problematic. Lastly, he questions the postulation of objects that stand at the end of a chain of existential dependence relations. There are plausible alternatives to foundationalism, and it is difficult to see how to make sense of objective foundations without a neutral theory that all other theories are based on, which is problematic in and of itself. However, Voron (2021) notes that, "Westerhoff's thesis is well-reasoned and intellectually, albeit not emotionally, persuasive. Caught up in the melodrama of our everyday lives, we probably cannot give up our deep-rooted intuition of a what-you-see-is-what-you-get world, but perhaps we can at least begin to question it." My aim here is to outline a way in which we *can* give up these deep-rooted intuitions. But it does require a different way of engaging with philosophy: one that conceives of it as gradually honing a skill, rather than instantaneously grasping an argument. And Westerhoff's work provides a way to render the therapeutic arguments of Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka persuasive according to the latest philosophical insights.

That is not to say that putting the technical work of Westerhoff into practice will be the best method for everyone. As Pyrrhonists and Mādhyamikas understood very well, different audiences require different treatments. For analytic philosophers, contemplating Westerhoff's arguments may work best; for the historically inclined, Rorty's approach may be best suited; and for others Gelukpa debate may have the greatest effect. My point here is simply that the affinity between Pyrrhonism, Madhyamaka, and contemporary philosophy

implies that the latter has untapped therapeutic potential. This point is substantiated by testimonies of philosophically induced experiences.

1.4: Examples of Contemporary Philosophy as Therapy

That philosophy can make us feel certain things is not controversial. Hume's sceptical ruminations famously plunged him into despair: "I am confounded with all these questions, and begin to fancy myself in the most deplorable condition imaginable, inviron'd with the deepest darkness, and utterly depriv'd of the use of every member and faculty" (1739/2000 §1.4.7.8). However, my focus here lies on a less fleeting change, which is not simply undone by a game of backgammon, as was the case for Hume.

Parfit (1984) wonderfully testifies to the salubrious effects of ceasing to reify the self. He observes:

> I find [the non-existence of the Self] liberating, and consoling. When I believed that my existence was a such a further fact, I seemed imprisoned in myself. My life seemed like a glass tunnel, through which I was moving faster every year, and at the end of which there was darkness. When I changed my view, the walls of my glass tunnel disappeared. I now live in the open air. There is still a difference between my life and the lives of other people. But the difference is less. Other people are closer. I am less concerned about the rest of my own life, and more concerned about the lives of others. When I believed the Non-Reductionist View, I also cared more about my inevitable death (281).

Thus, philosophical reasoning has brought about a lasting phenomenological change for Parfit. Moreover, he observes that 'practicing' his arguments consolidates their impact: "I can increase these effects by vividly imagining that I am about to undergo one of the

operations I have described" (282). This shows that hardcore analytic philosophy can completely change our experience of the world.

Another example comes from Burton (2008), who studies the neurological bases of 'certainty'. He finds that states of certainty "arise out of involuntary brain mechanisms that, like love or anger, function independently of reason" (2008, xi). And he testifies as to the experience that these arguments left him with:

> A personal note: The schema that I am about to present has given me an unintended new way of seeing common problems. It isn't that I think about each issue and how it relates to neurobiology. Rather, the very notion of how we know—and even how we ask questions—has shaped how I feel and respond to everything from the daily news to pillow talk with my wife to age-old philosophical questions. The sense of an inner quiet born of acknowledging my limitations has been extraordinary (xii).

Thus, contemporary research can have a significant phenomenological impact. Relevant to our case, undermining dogmatic understandings of the world (in the form of certainty and the self) can lead to an 'extraordinary inner quiet'. (This is to say nothing of the transformed psychologies of contemporary Madhyamaka practitioners).

Thus, the affinity between Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka and contemporary philosophies shows that we should pay more attention to the therapeutic dimension of philosophy. This is underscored by the fact that contemporary thinkers already testify to transformed, tranquil experiences of the world.

2: Harnessing Therapeutic Potential

In this section, I will show that the link between contemporary philosophy and therapy established above has significant implications for the practice of philosophy. First, I will show how it helps us to solve existing philosophical problems, using the tension between

irony and solidarity in Rorty's work as an example; second, I will reflect on what it means for the use of intuitions in philosophy; and last, I will examine how it reshapes our understanding of the philosophical project itself. All of this shows that therapeutic considerations ought to be taken seriously.

2.1: The Middle Way between Irony and Liberalism

In the previous chapter, I demonstrated that Madhyamaka is able to provide Pyrrhonism with a cogent account of ethics. We can apply this solution, together with the observation that contemporary philosophical ideas have transformative potential, to solve specific issues. In particular, I will make the case that Madhyamaka provides a way to remove the tension between Rorty's public liberalism and private irony, which continues to haunt his legacy (Haliburton 64). I will argue that proper realisation of the contingency of the self and the world transforms our moral intuitions, making one more averse to the suffering of others. This is not an attempt to ground ethics, but the observation that internalisation of Rorty's irony induces liberal sentiments.

Rorty articulates the private-public split as a conceptual tool to defend the liberal ironist, who epitomises the Romantic ideal of self-creation, as well as the Enlightenment ideal of liberalism. The former depends on letting go of our attachment to our final vocabulary by realising there is no ultimate reality grounding it; the latter entails a commitment to liberal values, particularly reducing suffering.[126] Rorty acknowledges the potentially corrosive effects of irony on liberal ideals, which would constantly be called into question and subjected to redescription. In order to have a functioning liberal society, we must therefore privatize our ironist scrutiny and self-creation. This way, we can privately be ironists, pursuing our own idiosyncratic identities, and we can publicly be liberals, committed to

[126] He follows Judith Shklar in identifying liberals by their belief that 'cruelty is the worst thing we do' and suggests that liberal ironists have the ungroundable hope that suffering will be diminished (1989, xv).

reducing suffering. As Rorty puts it, "The demands of self-creation and human solidarity are equally valid, yet forever incommensurable" (1989, xv).

However, many have objected to the notion of the liberal ironist. Writers such as Rogers argue that ironists are unable to sincerely commit to liberalism. Various scholars go even further, claiming that irony is straightforwardly inconsistent with liberalism. Foelber, for instance, observes that certain private identities that the ironist could create for herself conflict with liberal values to such an extent that they cannot be kept separate: "It seems impossible … to image how an ironist could be both a private Dahmerian torturer (rabid anti-Semite, racist) and a good liberal democrat" (34). Even some of Rorty's most sympathetic readers believe that the private-public divide creates an unsustainable tension (Bacon, 92–93; Voparil, 134).[127]

Thus, the task ahead of us is to provide a cogent account of the relationship between irony and liberalism. This includes explaining why the ironist's private re-descriptions do not threaten public commitment to reducing suffering, and why anti-dogmatists are less likely to be cruel. This needs to be accomplished without assenting to any traditional philosophical view.

Appreciating the therapeutic potential of contemporary philosophy provides us with the tools to do all this. In particular, Śāntideva helps us see how internalising anti-dogmatic arguments *experientially* entails liberalism. In the previous chapter, I demonstrated that Madhyamaka provides a non-dogmatic conception of ethics for Pyrrhonism; this solution may be applied here too. We saw that any rational connection between emptiness and compassion is bound to be problematic. Instead, *realising* emptiness, rather than merely *understanding* it, changes our experience of the world. This moral phenomenological approach suggests that "the culmination of ethical practice is a cognitively rich perceptual

[127] This is a problem for the anti-dogmatic (non-iconoclast) ironist too. As Rorty puts it, "there is no reason why a fascist could not be a pragmatist in the sense of agreeing pretty much with everything Dewey said about the nature of truth, knowledge, rationality, and morality" (1999, 23).

skill – a new way of experiencing oneself in the world, contingent on the realisation of emptiness" (Garfield 2011b, 348). Hence, emptiness and compassion are connected phenomenologically. This should not be understood as a normative ethical theory, but as the observation that realising emptiness transforms our experience of the world and our connection to others. Any theoretical attempt to bring emptiness and compassion together is bound to be problematic, but Madhyamaka shows that they can exist in mutual dependence due to their impact on our way of inhabiting and perceiving the world. In the previous section, I showed that liberal sentiments may be understood as akin to Madhyamaka compassion, and that both their arguments aim to cease problematic reification. This suggests that internalising Rorty's arguments has the power to induce liberal sentiments.

Armed with an understanding of the phenomenological connection between anti-dogmatism and commitment to reducing suffering, let us return to Rorty's philosophy. We now have the tools to reconcile private irony and public liberalism without infringing upon their autonomy by forcing them into a single theory. We have seen that the connection between emptiness and compassion arises once one has meditated on and internalised the arguments for anti-dogmatism and panrelationism. Thus, why does the first kind of irony (anti-dogmatism) not undermine liberal commitments? Because proper realisation of irony, particularly regarding the self, induces liberal sentiments. The more anti-dogmatic we are, the less we feel attached to ourselves and the more we feel connected with all other living beings. However, does this not restrict the second kind of irony (self-creation)? No, we are still absolutely free to choose any identity we like, but our induced compassion will significantly reduce the appeal of anti-liberal identities. A person who perceives the suffering of other people as her own is unlikely to create an identity that centres on hatred

or xenophobia.[128] Thus, moral phenomenology removes the tension between private self-creation and public commitment to liberal principles. Moreover, it demonstrates that irony is actually conducive to the quest for a liberal utopia. We can now conceive of irony and liberalism as two distinct ideals, which nevertheless happen to mutually support each other.

In fact, Rorty conceives of ethics in a manner that might well be labelled 'moral phenomenology'. Garfield explains that the Buddhist moral phenomenological transformation leads to experience "in which the welfare and suffering of others is that which is ascertained in perception, in which sentient beings are perceived intentionally as suffering, and in which the actions that are readied in the perceptual cycle are actions designed to alleviate suffering" (2015, 289). Similarly, Rorty states, "It is best to think of moral progress as a matter of increasing sensitivity, increasing responsiveness to the needs of a larger and larger variety of people and things" (1999, 81). Moreover, he cites the Bodhisattva ideal as the culmination of this progress:

> Moral development in the individual, and moral progress in the human species as a whole, is a matter of re-marking human selves so as to enlarge the variety of the relationships which constitute those selves. The ideal limit of this process of enlargement is the self-envisaged by Christian and Buddhist accounts of sainthood - an ideal self to whom the hunger and suffering of any human being (and even, perhaps, that of any other animal) is intensely painful" (ibid. 79).

If realisation of anti-dogmatism induces liberal sentiments, why did Rorty not pick up on this? First, Rorty swiftly moves from anti-dogmatism to self-creation, pausing little to consider the impact of anti-dogmatism alone. This might be because Rorty was not part of a

[128] Note that the Buddhist rejection of the self is not at odds with Rorty's focus on self-creation – it is purely the intrinsic nature of the self that is rejected. Brunning suggests that it may lead to a new form of self-attachment (2014, 252). However, in Tantra too, there is a strong focus on self-creation: one does away with one's ordinary ego and exchanges it for the ego of a deity. As Beyer puts it, "the practitioner acquires a divine ego, the total cessation of any merely human personality, accompanied by the actual re-creation of the world as a divine mansion for his dwelling" (79).

tradition that distinguished between understanding and realisation. Without a tool like meditation, it seems difficult to properly consider the effects of internalising irony.

Second, for Mādhyamikas, internalisation of anti-dogmatism regarding the self is the key stone for realising emptiness. The idea that the self has an intrinsic nature is one of the most difficult to repudiate, since it is most ingrained. Rorty, however, focusses more on reducing the perceived social distance between myself and others. The Madhyamaka emphasis on *eliminating* the self, by realising that it is does not have an intrinsic nature, is more intimately connected to anti-reificationism than Rorty's talk of *enlarging* the self. Thus, talk of eliminating the self might simply be a more effective metaphor. Indeed, in the experience of solidarity the notion of the self still plays a significant role: I include more people in *my* imagined community.

Thus, awareness of the transformative potential of philosophy can improve Rorty's talk of liberal irony in various ways. Madhyamaka shows how self-creation and reduction of suffering can be considered distinct goals without generating tension – quite the opposite, irony and liberalism are shown to exist in mutual dependence. In addition, Madhyamaka offers a more hopeful account of achieving a liberal utopia. Rorty's social hope is connected to irony only to the extent that it makes people less dogmatic, but this in and of itself does not constitute a commitment to reducing suffering, and there is no reason to suppose self-creation leads to liberalism.

Thus, I have demonstrated that awareness of the transformative potential of philosophy provides the means to remove the tension between irony and liberalism. This argument exemplifies that appreciation of the therapeutic dimension of philosophical arguments can solve current philosophical issues.

2.2: Reconsidering the Evidential Role of Intuition

The transformative potential of philosophy also has pressing implications for the tools philosophers use, particularly the use of intuitions as evidence. Following Climenhaga (2018), I understand an intuition as the seeming of something to be the case without this being the conscious result of an inference, a memory, a sensory experience, or someone's testimony.[129] As Sosa notes, philosophy has always relied on intuitions: "It did so already with paradoxes such as the liar or the sorites, and with hypothetical examples like the Ring of Gyges … [a]nd it does so today with trolley cars, split brains, Matrix scenarios, fake barns, and Twin Earth" (2006). However, there is a growing body of literature that critiques the evidential use of intuition on empirical grounds. I will argue that the transformative potential of philosophy substantiates this case.

The appeal to intuitions as evidence presumes that people's intuitions about philosophical questions are both static and ubiquitous. However, experimental philosophers have falsified the latter: intuitions about philosophical issues differ significantly depending on cultural background and educational level (Weinberg et al. 2001), gender (Stich & Buckwalter 2013), some personality traits (Feltz & Cokely 2009), and the order in which thought experiments are presented (Swain et al. 2008). One may object that visual experiences also differ, but unlike intuitions, we know that there are distorting factors, and what these are (e.g., mirages, hallucinations, etc.). In the case of intuitions, it is not clear that there is a universally shared experience that is being distorted. All this implies that intuitions are not objective sources that philosophers can use as evidence.

Now, experimental philosophy has focussed on undermining the ubiquity of philosophical intuitions. In addition, I want to problematise the presumed *permanence* of intuitions. After all, if we can change our intuitions, then it is not obvious how we could use them as evidence. The transformative potential of philosophical arguments precisely shows that our

[129] See Climenhaga (2018) for a discussion of recent literature about intuitions.

intuitions are fluid—our unreflective experience of the world may change. Indeed, the philosophical intuitions of children regarding free will changes as they grow older (Kushnir, Gopnik, et. al). And, as I have shown throughout my thesis, our experience of the world may also change as the result of repeated engagement with philosophy. This change not only impacts our ethical intuitions, as in the case of Śāntideva and Parfit, but also intuitions about the self, certainty, and the relation between language and the world. This problematises the use of intuitions when settling issues regarding morality, semantics, and personal identity. Descartes' 'cogito ergo sum' proof is based on the intuition that the self is a unified, persistent entity. However, Parfit and Buddhists show that this intuition can be changed by repeatedly engaging with counterarguments. Moore used his intuition that 'here is one hand' and 'here is another' as part of his proof of an external world. For Pyrrhonists, there is definitely the appearance of a hand, but they suspend judgment on whether there is actually, objectively a hand.

Thus, the transformative potential of philosophy shows that repeated effort to change our intuitions can actually change our intuitions. It is of course unclear whether this goes for all the intuitions that philosophers appeal to, but the diversity of intuitions does point in that direction. Hence, the malleability of intuitions implies that their use has little evidential force; they simply record a contingent state of mind at a specific point in time.

2.3: Reconsidering the Role of Philosophy

The transformative potential of philosophy not only helps to reconceptualise philosophical tools and problems, it also fundamentally challenges the way we engage with philosophical arguments. Contemporary analytical arguments are presented in ever more professionalised jargon, bearing no connection to the state of being of the author or to everyday life. This is of course not problematic per se – scientific papers are written in the same way. Philosophy, however, has historically had an intimate connection to our way of

being in the world. And attempts to sever this connection have been decried, especially by ancient philosophers. For example, an Epicurean saying suggests that philosophers unconcerned with life develop empty discourses (*DL* 7.39, 41), and, as Seneca put it, they turn love of wisdom (*philosophia*) into love of words (*philologia*) (2017, 7.1).[130] Similarly, Candrakīrti argues that Buddhist arguments should not be considered apart from their impact on one's way of being: "He did not for the love of quarrelling present the treatise's explorations, but to liberate" (*MAv* 6.118).

My argument purports to revive the connection between contemporary philosophy and everyday life. I have demonstrated that there are recent philosophers whose aims and arguments are aligned with Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka. Given the radical transformative potential of these therapeutic traditions, it is expected that this potential is carried over to similar traditions. Indeed, we have seen this in the cases of Parfit and Burton. This means that a significant dimension of (certain) contemporary arguments is entirely neglected.[131] It is as if scientists were to focus solely on the composition of antibiotics and their effect on bacteria in petri dishes, without realising the therapeutic effects they could have for humans. Thus, Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka force us to reflect on the role of philosophy and how we engage with philosophical arguments.

Most strikingly, we must consider the possibility that philosophical arguments have much greater power than contemporary thinkers believe. Good philosophical reasoning is not only able to change our mind, but our entire way of being in the world. Our examination of Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka suggests that encapsulating the irrealism of Westerhoff or the global deflationism of Thomasson as a set of practices may bring about an extraordinary sense of tranquillity. And, of course, there is the transformative potential that Madhyamaka has on contemporary practitioners and that Pyrrhonism may have if it were practiced today.

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[130] See also Epictetus (*Discourses* 3.21, 4-6).

[131] Of course, there are plenty of philosophical arguments that we can confidently say will not have therapeutic potential. However, there are plenty of topics that *are* promising, ranging from methodological scepticism to humean conceptions of laws, to ontic structural realism, to eliminativism.

Which contemporary philosophies have such impacts, and how these may be brought about is beyond the scope of this thesis, but I hope to have shown that it is a necessary path to explore. One way to transform this path from a lofty promise to a concrete route may be via experimental philosophy.

As Knobe indicates, experimental philosophy aims to bring together the kinds of questions traditionally associated with philosophy and the kinds of experimental methods traditionally associated with psychology and cognitive science. So far, this has been mainly used to explore philosophical intuitions, as discussed above. Exploring the psychological impact of philosophical arguments on our mental states may be a promising extension of this field. After all, philosophy has a long history of impacting our psychology and our way of being in the world. In this, Western thinkers would do well to take contemporary (practicing) Buddhist philosophers seriously. Robust results of such efforts would have profound metaphilosophical implications. If various arguments are demonstrated to have therapeutic benefits, and are considered cogent by contemporary philosophical standards, ignoring therapeutic considerations would not only be negligent but also wrongheaded. Such research would offer people more tools to take control of their state of being. This would be a radical way to expand the scope of philosophy—both in terms of audience and impact.

In sum, I have argued that the affinity between Pyrrhonism, Madhyamaka, and contemporary philosophy suggests that the latter shares the transformative potential of the former. This has significant implications for the way we engage with philosophy. It provides entirely new ways to solve philosophical problems, such as the tension between irony and liberalism; it undermines current ways of doing philosophy, such as using intuitions as evidence; and it implies that philosophical arguments have a much greater potential than contemporary thinkers realise. The latter may necessitate a radically new way of doing

philosophy, in which everyone can engage with philosophical debates, not only to become better thinkers, but to become better people.

3: A Day in the Life

Before I close, I would like to reflect on what the life alluded to in the previous section may look like. I will present a picture that is readily accessible to my (presumed) audience: Western readers. This is with the hope that they will then explore and engage with Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka on their own.

Imagine a recent philosophy graduate, Devi. During her studies she has encountered the ideas of Sextus, Nāgārjuna, Rorty, and Westerhoff, and would like to put them into practice. She hopes this may help to bring some tranquillity and perspective into her fast-paced life. The new year has just begun, so this is the perfect time to force some self-improvement. Devi has resolved to try and incorporate inquiry, establishing equipollence, and repeating phrases into her schedule.

On Monday, she wakes up and wants nothing more than to renounce her resolution. However, she has told some philosophy friends about her plans, and she is not willing to lose face in front of them. So, begrudgingly, she gets up and sits down. She starts with some breathing exercises to create a sense of focus. Then the hard work begins. Devi has divided her sessions into different topics she wants to inquire about. Today's topic is goodness. She has just purchased a new bike, and though it positively sails through the streets and presents a renewed sense of freedom, it has brought even more anxiety. At every corner she is worried a car might materialize and damage the bike that she purchased with her hard-earned cash. Also whenever she parks the bike, she experiences a burst of worry. Someone might just take it—it is a really nice bike! Enough. She returns to her breathing and begins her inquiry. Is there something that is really good? Is my bike good? She goes through the

Five Modes of Agrippa. First dispute, why would this new bike be good? She might as well have saved the money and walk places. So her defence begins. It is good, because it gets her places faster. And why is that a good reason? Because saving time is good. And why is that? Because then she can do other, more productive things. And why is that good? 'Capitalism?' Devi thinks. That chain of reasoning could go on forever. Is it good because it makes her feel good? However, in other cultures riding a bike might not be considered enjoyable at all. So she cannot just end her reasoning there. In this way, she goes through the other Modes and it helps her realise that having a bike is no more good than not having a bike: it is not inherently good. She will survive without it. For good measure, she applies to *catuṣkoṭi* as well. Is having a bike good? Is it not good? Is it both good and not good? Or is it neither good nor not good? She is able to problematise all four alternatives. Finally, she brings in the big guns and recounts Westerhoff's arguments against the external world. This helps to loosen her commitment to her bike a bit – it may just be an evolutionary, neurological hallucination. That of course does not mean that it is, but it helps to see that the reality she attributed to the bike was unfounded. The appearance of the bike balances out arguments against its existence. Hence, after her breakfast, she gets on her 'illusion-like' bike and cycles to work.

At work, she attaches the bike to a dodge looking rain pipe – the only securable spot. As she struggles with the lock, she sees people looking at her bike, and its significant price tag immediately springs to mind. She takes a deep breath. 'No more this than that'. Having a bike is not intrinsically more good than not having a bike. And, from Westerhoff, 'The Real World only exists as part of the virtual world'. She exhales, and a bit of the anxiety seems to be expelled too. She still much prefers her bike to not be stolen, but a theft does not seem as disastrous as it did before.

The first meeting of the day concerns a potential revision of guidelines for the amount of parking spaces per new terraced house. As a cycling enthusiast, Devi finds it strange that so

much public space is allocated to storing can-like containers. A colleague vehemently disagrees, and Devi starts to get defensive. How could they be so wrong? She is determined to win this argument. To her frustration, she realises that her colleague is not really engaging with her arguments. Devi catches herself in that thought. Because she is so sure she is right, she is not really engaging with his arguments either. Perhaps parking spaces are not inherently bad. 'No more this than that'. She starts listening to her colleague and decides to apply some Gelukpa techniques. 'As you say, parking spaces are needed for differently abled people, but wouldn't a broader pavement be more wheelchair accessible?' Pointing out the contradictions in her colleague's reasoning helps them to become less entrenched in their views too. Eventually, a compromise is reached. That evening Devi decides to take Rorty's advice and starts reading a book that employs a final vocabulary very different from her own, *Flowers in the Mirror*.

The next day, Devi's topic of inquiry is the self. She sits down. Getting out of bed was a little easier this time. She focuses on her breath for a few minutes, and goes through Candrakīrti's seven-fold argument against the Self. This is not a renewed picture of ultimate reality however. 'The ultimate truth is that there is not ultimate truth'.[132] She also engages with Rorty's expansion of the self, and Westerhoff's arguments against personal identity. For good measure, she goes through some of Parfit's thought experiments and balances them with arguments against the non-existence of the self. The arguments are radical for sure, and whilst focussing on them, she feels like the distinction between herself and everything else is blurring. She gets up and has some breakfast. Is she feeling a little bit lighter? Maybe. Time and perseverance will tell.

The transformative potential of Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka suggests that continued practice should help us to change our experience of the world. Sustained effort to internalise

[132] From Siderits (e.g., 2016, 24). The sense of the first 'ultimate truth' refers to insights that bring about liberation of suffering.

anti-dogmatic arguments has the promise of helping us to become more tranquil and compassionate. These are radical arguments, that completely go against how we ordinarily experience the world. Hence, it does seem that they could have a significant impact. And even if these exercises leave us just a little bit happier and more balanced, it seems worth the effort of trying.

Conclusion

About 1800 years ago, Sextus and Nāgārjuna proposed radically new ways of engaging with philosophy and with the world. Rather than making grand claims about what is *really* the case, Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka questioned any such claim. Instead of providing definitive answers, they continued to inquire. By tackling dogmatism, they were able to change their experience of the world for the better. I set out to explore the impact of both traditions and examine whether their therapeutic promise holds sway today. In doing so, I accomplished three things: first, I provided a robust comparison of Pyrrhonian scepticism and Madhyamaka Buddhism; second, I demonstrated that there are significant insights to be gained from studying the two traditions in conjunction; third, I showed that Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka present a profound challenge to the established ways of doing philosophy.

Comparisons of Madhyamaka and Pyrrhonism go back decades. However, by foregoing a specified framework, previous accounts have been marred by arbitrariness and cherry picking. In order to avoid these pitfalls, I began by wrestling with the methodological issues that make cross-cultural research so fascinating and frustrating. By conceiving of objectivist and relativist presumptions along a spectrum, I was able to pinpoint where each side of the spectrum becomes problematic; I demonstrated that understanding is necessarily

conceptualized. I then outlined what projects might be undertaken along the acceptable range of the spectrum. I believe this analysis provides a roadmap for anyone trying to do cross-cultural philosophy. I demonstrated that it is necessary to articulate Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka according to a clear framework. This helps to avoid any semblance of universalism, it allows for a balanced consideration of similarities and differences, and it renders selection criteria clear and falsifiable. I demonstrated that a therapeutic framework is most apt.

With this groundwork in place, I was able to offer a robust comparison of Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka, according to disturbance, cause, cure, meta-analysis, and cured condition: both traditions identify a layer of psychological suffering that exists on top of basic suffering. They suggest that this is caused by conceiving of the appearances as truly representing reality (reification). In order to alleviate this suffering, both traditions engage in inquiry, which results in a set of equally (un)persuasive ideas. Pyrrhonian and Madhyamaka arguments overlap to a significant extent too; the Five Modes of Agrippa find particularly striking parallels in Nāgārjuna's discussion of epistemic instruments. The proposed cures of Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka not only include very similar arguments, they also leave very similar things untouched: the appearances. These are conceived of as everyday conventions, practices, and experiences. Furthermore, Pyrrhonian and Madhyamaka texts are rife with qualifying statements that make clear that their arguments are of a different kind than their opponents': they are dialectical, not dogmatic. Crucially, both Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka note that cessation of problematic reification brings about tranquillity. I hope this comparison may serve as the basis for future discussion and disagreements.

My second aim was to demonstrate that examining Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka in conjunction offers significant insights. Indeed, Madhyamaka practice allows us to conceive of sceptical activities as spiritual exercises. Moreover, the unambiguous universality of Madhyamaka therapy sheds light on one of the most vexed questions regarding Pyrrhonism

by suggesting that the scope of suspension of judgment is universal. In addition, I demonstrated that Sextus substantiates Tsongkhapa's interpretation of the object of negation as being limited to intrinsic nature; and that recognizing Pyrrhonian and non-Pyrrhonian currents within Madhyamaka helps to untangle the interpretations of Tillemans, Garfield, Siderits, and Westerhoff, amongst others.

I also demonstrated that we can draw on Madhyamaka to defend and bolster Pyrrhonism, and vice versa. I showed that they support each other's defence against incoherence objections, and that appeal to contemporary Madhyamaka practitioners supports the liveability of Pyrrhonism. In doing so, I made the case that Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka are cogent and desirable philosophical therapies. This brings me to my final aim: show how Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka challenge established ways of doing philosophy.

In the final chapter, I demonstrated that the two traditions force us to reflect on the nature of philosophy. Their affinity with recent philosophers suggests that current arguments have therapeutic potential; I underscored this suggestion by showing that some contemporary philosophers already testify to this potential. This insight offers new ways of solving philosophical problems and problematises established philosophical practices. In addition, it forces us to rethink the role and impact that philosophy could have. Anti-dogmatic arguments do not only work on a philosophical level, but on a psychological level too. In fact, taking Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka seriously blurs the boundaries between the two. Their arguments not only problematise dogmatic philosophies like foundationalism, but they also appear to be conducive to achieving a peaceful state of mind; they sharpen one's critical thinking skills; and they increase tolerance and compassion. This seems like a worthwhile new avenue for experimental philosophy to explore. Thus, this thesis lays a path for contemporary philosophy to reconnect with its therapeutic roots. It is not at all intended as a domestication of Madhyamaka (or Pyrrhonian) philosophy. On the contrary, I hope it will

inspire contemporary philosophers to seek out these traditions, and let themselves be challenged by what Sextus and Nāgārjuna have to teach.

Philosophy can offer a much greater public service than critical thinking alone. The modern Stoicism movement has had a significant impact on our thinking about happiness; I hope my work can initiate a similar shift. Indeed, this research invites everyone to engage with philosophical debates, not only to become better thinkers, but to become better people. Wherever that path may lead, I believe it is one worth exploring.

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