

## Reply to my Commentators

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I am enormously grateful to the four distinguished colleagues who have contributed to this symposium on my volume of essays (referred to below as *HTBP*), and to the fifth whose contribution will appear in the next volume of *Sképsis*<sup>1</sup>. I have known all of them over many years, and have had fruitful debates with them, both in writing and in person, on many subjects. It is truly an honor to have had them give so much attention to the book and write up their reactions. As is the nature of philosophical debates, there has always been a measure of disagreement. But these are scholars from whom I am always confident of learning something, and their comments in this symposium are no exception. In several cases, I think our disagreements are actually somewhat less significant than they suggest.

Stéphane Marchand, Casey Perin and Katja Vogt all focus in large part on something I propose especially in the first two essays: that Sextus wants to draw attention to the fact that he is not a philosopher in the sense in which the dogmatists are philosophers. Each addresses other issues as well, but the amount of common ground in their remarks makes it convenient to respond to them together (section I). Ben Morison focuses on a different topic, and I respond to him separately (section II).

1. Vogt reads my suggestion that Sextus wants, at least to some extent, to distance himself from the label “philosopher” as a form of pessimism (even the “deepest” pessimism) about the enduring value of Sextus’ work. I certainly didn’t mean it in that spirit; to me, if Sextus doesn’t want to call himself a philosopher, that doesn’t make him the least bit less interesting – if anything, the opposite. More generally, I think I may have overstated the case for provocative effect. There is clearly a conception of philosophy on which Sextus is quite willing to say he is doing philosophy; and I think he would have welcomed Vogt’s comments about the diversity of what can count as philosophy (had he known about all the different models she enumerates), just as I do myself. I also agree with Marchand and Vogt that there is a lot in common between philosophy as Sextus conceives it and as others conceive it – the importance he gives to

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<sup>1</sup> I am also most grateful to Plínio Smith for organizing and publishing this collection of papers.

argument, the use he makes of various other philosophers' ideas, etc.; with Vogt that susceptibility to competing considerations is a central aspect of this common picture of philosophy; with Perin that this can be described as a concern with investigation (though I am somewhat at odds with him over what Sextus counts as investigation – more on this shortly)<sup>2</sup>; and with all of them that a great deal of what Sextus is doing is talking to dogmatic philosophers (and, as Perin rightly adds, dogmatic non-philosophers<sup>3</sup>)<sup>4</sup>.

The point on which I want to insist, and on which I think I differ at least from Perin and Vogt, is simply that Sextus takes the dogmatists' conception of philosophy, the one that he finds suspect, as the standard conception – and that this explains why he is sometimes willing to sound as if he is not a philosopher at all; he isn't, if by "philosophy" one means what people usually think of as philosophy<sup>5</sup>. Perin speaks as if it is "our scholastic age" that is responsible for this conception seeming natural to us. But philosophy has had a scholastic side to it for a long time; just look at Aristotle, not to mention the medieval scholastics themselves. And the terms *legomenê philosophia* and *kaloumenê philosophia*, "so-called philosophy", imply not just that Sextus does not want to be identified with this conception of philosophy, but that this is what is *generally* called philosophy. The same thing is suggested when he distinguishes between skepticism and "all the philosophical schools" (*pasais tais kata philosophian haireseis*, *PH* 1.185). This does not absolutely exclude the possibility of there being a kind of philosophy that is not involved with a school (which Sextus says skepticism is not, except, again, in a non-standard sense – *PH* 1.17); but the clear implication is that philosophy as usually understood is associated with adherence to a school (as usually understood). That Sextus' assumption about what philosophy is generally taken to consist in is quite reasonable for his time seems to be confirmed by a dismissive comment about Pyrrhonism by Aristocles, which I quoted in "Why Care Whether Skepticism is Different from Other Philosophies?": "I do not think it

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<sup>2</sup> The extent to which Sextus belongs within the general parameters of Greek philosophy is nicely brought out by the essays in the excellent collection Karamanolis and Politis 2018; in light of this volume, I would now probably phrase the issue a little differently from how it appears in *HTBP*.

<sup>3</sup> I am happy to accept Perin's fourth category of readers Sextus is addressing, in addition to the three I identified in "The Pyrrhonist's Dilemma" – namely, dogmatists, whether philosophical or not – as a friendly amendment; the actual people involved are not really distinct from those in my first and second categories, but the description he gives them is a helpful reframing.

<sup>4</sup> I am not sure that (as Vogt maintains) this disposes of my suggestion, in the essay on the self, that Sextus would have been just as happy with Prozac as with skepticism. Yes, as things were, Sextus found a certain form of dialogue with other philosophers the most effective route to tranquility. We really have no idea how he would have reacted if drugs such as Prozac had been available to him. But maybe she is right, and this was another case of provocative overstatement.

<sup>5</sup> My point in criticizing Annas and Barnes' translation "what they call philosophy", alluded to by Perin, was that it could be read as implying that there is something else Sextus himself calls philosophy; "so-called philosophy" has no such implication, and in some moods (though not all) I take Sextus to be encouraging the thought that he is not a philosopher.

should even be called a philosophy, since it does away with the starting-points of philosophizing” (in Eusebius, *Praep. evang.* 14.18.30). Aristocles does not need to offer any qualifications; the kind of philosophy that Sextus would call dogmatism is, for him, simply philosophy *tout court*. In carving out a distinct conception of philosophy, then, to the extent that he does, Sextus takes himself to be doing something unusual, and he is very probably right about this.

Perin offers a picture of the contrast between the two conceptions of philosophy that is somewhat different from the one I proposed in *HTBP*. Instead of the idea that Sextus alternates between rejecting the label “philosophy” for Pyrrhonism and hinting at a different understanding of philosophy on which he accepts the label, Perin takes Sextus to be rejecting the dogmatists’ conception and simply adopting (albeit in skeptical fashion) a partially distinct conception that he takes to be superior. On this distinct conception, philosophy is all about investigation. The dogmatists are not wholly divorced from this conception, in that in order to get to their conclusions, they have done a great deal of investigation. The problem is that, since they think they have discovered the truth, they have *stopped* investigating, and hence abandoned the lifeblood of true philosophy. Sextus, on the other hand, as he says in the first sentence of *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, is still investigating. But Perin adds a final twist when he says Sextus also has a second, distinct, conception of philosophy, which he calls the “therapeutic” conception, associated with the description of skepticism as an ability to produce suspension of judgment and thereby tranquility (*PH* 1.8).

I think both Perin’s and my views have shifted in the ten or so years since he published *The Demands of Reason* (Perin 2010) and I originally wrote “The Pyrrhonist’s Dilemma”, the first of the essays in *HTBP* that discuss Sextus’ references to philosophy. Perin always allowed that *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* included a “therapeutic” conception of the skeptic’s activity, at odds with the one centered around investigation. But he now apparently gives this a larger place than he used to, incorporating it into the very sentence (*PH* 1.8) that says what skepticism is; in his book (18-19) he took some care to argue that this passage was compatible with skepticism as investigation. For my part, I have become more accommodating to the idea that Sextus is indeed an investigator, and I now consider this neither disingenuous nor inconsistent with *PH* 1.8’s description of the skeptic’s “ability”<sup>6</sup>. (On this last point, then, we seem to have switched places.) Where we now differ is on the question of what investigation consists in; unlike Perin, I do not consider investigation, as Sextus conceives it, to be necessarily a search

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<sup>6</sup> My change of mind has been influenced by previous work of Katja Vogt, although I do not go as far as she does in considering investigation essentially truth-oriented; see Vogt 2012, ch.5.

for truth. Investigation involves weighing the merits of opposing views, being sensitive to possible objections to any proposal under consideration, willingness to consider alternatives, and other related exercises of rationality, all of which are on display (to varying degrees, no doubt) in the many books in which Sextus scrutinizes dogmatic views on various subjects. Investigation is not simply the fact of not having decided that one knows the truth or that this cannot be known (which, as I earlier objected, doesn't really deserve the label "inquiry" or "investigation" – *HTBP* 8). But nor is it inherently directed towards discovery of the truth – even though very often, of course, it is put to that use – and I do not believe (as I used to) that the opening sentences of *Outlines* need to be read as implying that it is<sup>7</sup>. But with this proviso concerning the notion of investigation, and recalling the previous point that the conception of philosophy that Sextus tars with the epithet "so-called" is the standard one, I find Perin's account of how Sextus approaches the question of what philosophy is or should be quite attractive; I am not sure I see anything to choose between it and the one I offered in *HTBP*.

My new picture of the nature (and legitimacy) of investigation in Sextus also allows me to answer one of Marchand's questions. At the end of "The Pyrrhonist's Dilemma" I flirted with the idea that, rather than projecting a notion of skeptical investigation that was simply in an unfortunate tension with his main conception of skepticism as an ability to generate suspension of judgment and thereby tranquility (as suggested in the main body of the essay), Sextus was deliberately offering two incompatible conceptions of skepticism itself and inviting us to suspend judgment on what skepticism is. Marchand observes that I hedge this idea with qualifications and leave it up in the air. But he nonetheless wonders, reasonably enough, how seriously I mean this – because if I do mean it, it seems to undermine a great deal of my own earlier work dedicated to interpreting apparent inconsistencies in Sextus as due to the presence within his work of different historical strata of Pyrrhonism (not to mention the work of everyone else who, in one way or another, strives to find in Sextus a coherent vision); if Sextus thinks it is acceptable to present incompatible versions of skepticism and invite us to suspend judgment about which to adopt, then the whole historical project was pointless. Well, he has a point here. And now that I no longer find Sextus' "investigation" inconsistent with his skeptical "ability", I no longer have the worry to which this momentarily seemed to me a possible solution. So I withdraw this "postmodern" reading, as Marchand calls it following my lead (*HTBP* 23). I should emphasize, however, that this is entirely consistent with my continuing to maintain that Sextus wants us to reflect, and perhaps suspend judgment about,

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<sup>7</sup> The best account I have seen of how to combine all these points is Castagnoli 2018.

two different conceptions of philosophy<sup>8</sup> – or, as I also suggest in the same essay, two different pictures of ordinary life and hence of its closeness to or distance from skepticism. Marchand seems to speak as if my entire picture of the skeptic’s manner of writing has the same radical and subversive import, but I don’t see this. The idea that the nature of skepticism itself was something Sextus might want to treat as fluid and open to equally plausible conflicting conceptions was confined to the last paragraph; nothing else in the essay was affected by it.

Another important theme addressed in both Marchand’s and Vogt’s comments concerns the “livability” of Pyrrhonian skepticism, and the extent to which something like it may be plausible today. Both of them find my view of this much too negative. To some extent, I think this is another case where my views have evolved<sup>9</sup>, and I am now not as far apart from them as they may think. Certainly some of the earlier essays emphasize a generally negative vision; I am thinking especially of “What Kind of Self Can a Greek Skeptic Have?”, “How Ethical Can an Ancient Skeptic Be?”, and “Can an Ancient Skeptic be *Eudaimôn* (or Happy)?”, where the answer in all three cases is roughly “nowhere near as much as we might like”. But two more recent essays, “Living as a Skeptic” and “Can We Be Ancient Skeptics?”, offer what I consider a somewhat more positive perspective. In neither case do I whole-heartedly embrace an updated Sextus-style attitude. But in both cases, I take myself, as regards its possibility, to be saying “it depends”; it depends on the issue, on the circumstances, and on matters of individual temperament. Suspension of judgment still seems a live option in some cases, but not in others; and suspension of judgment can be expected to yield tranquility in some cases, but not in others. If I still tended to give more attention to the negative side than the positive, I did not altogether neglect the positive side. Still more recently, while holding on to the same basic story, I give a further boost to the positive side in the introduction to a small new volume of excerpts from Sextus, currently under review for Princeton University Press’ Ancient Wisdom for Modern Readers series, called *How to Keep an Open Mind: A Guide to the Ancient Skeptical Outlook*. My willingness even to work on a volume of this kind, attempting to introduce the attractions of skepticism to a wider public, is perhaps an indication that my current attitudes on this issue are not so far from what Vogt and Marchand would advocate. I might add that I trace my evolving views on this question in part to having made several trips in the past decade or so to South America, where a broadly Pyrrhonian skepticism is

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<sup>8</sup> As I said, I am no longer entirely sure about that either, since I find Perin’s view on this topic (with a couple of qualifications) about as plausible as my own. But that has nothing to do with giving up on Sextus as a consistent thinker; it is simply a matter of my own uncertainty.

<sup>9</sup> As I acknowledge in the Preface to *HTBP*; see especially x, n.2. The specific issue there concerns what I call Sextus’ lack of robust commitment to values, but this is clearly connected with the more general question how far we can imagine ourselves adopting his outlook and lifestyle.

taken much more seriously as a live option than in the Anglophone world<sup>10</sup>, and especially to numerous conversations on the subject with Plínio Smith, the editor of this journal.

That's a rather broad-brush response on the "livability" question. I'll add just two more specific points. First, Marchand sees the closing sections of *Outlines* (*PH* 3.280-1), where Sextus tells us that the skeptic is philanthropic and wishes to cure the dogmatists of their rashness, as a central indicator of the kind of practical consequences he sees in the Pyrrhonist program. The goal is to reach a state where one is not too sure of oneself and, in particular, where one does not take oneself to have any theoretical justification for whatever views one may tentatively hold; it is not to shed one's humanity altogether, as Marchand reminds us that Pyrrho is said to have aspired to, and as he takes my reading of Sextus' attitude to approximate to much more closely than it should. I agree that this is an important aspect of Sextus' vision, and I am inclined to take the idea of the skeptic's "philanthropy" a little more seriously than I did in *HTBP*; one might compare the "gentleness" (*praotês*) he ascribes to the Pyrrhonist at the beginning of *Against Those in the Disciplines* (*M* 1.6). But I remain convinced that, despite his periodic claims to be "on the side of ordinary life", there is an important sense in which Sextus does *not* want to be like a normal human being; normal human beings have real commitments, evaluative and otherwise, and that is precisely what he wants to get away from, because of the anguish it entails.

Second, Vogt interestingly speculates about what might be included within the realm of the "appearances" that an updated Pyrrhonist might be able to "work with" in a non-theoretical way. In *Against the Disciplines*, he several times indicates that the skeptic is happy to employ in a practical fashion the forms of expertise embodied in these disciplines – reading and writing, forecasting the weather by looking at the sky, and playing musical instruments (*M* 1.49-56, 5.1-2, 6.1-3); what he is against is the theoretical underpinning these disciplines claim for themselves. Vogt suggests that, in the same spirit, a Pyrrhonist of today could engage with many forms of scientific knowledge: "Why [she says] should a skeptic today not 'work with' the periodic table, switch on the light, and so on ... and relate to chemistry, physics, and so on, in the way in which Sextus' skeptics relate to arithmetic and geometry?" I of course agree that the skeptic could switch on the light; and if one has a sufficiently instrumentalist view of the nature of science, some kind of involvement with the sciences would perhaps be possible<sup>11</sup>. Where I still find limitations to an updated Pyrrhonism is when

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<sup>10</sup> A good introduction to this topic in English is the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* article "Skepticism in Latin America", by Plínio Junqueira Smith and Otávio Bueno (Smith and Bueno 2016).

<sup>11</sup> It is interesting that one of the leading Latin American neo-Pyrrhonists, Oswaldo Porchat, also argued for a genuine place for science in a skeptical outlook; see Smith and Bueno 2016, section 4. (Almost all of Porchat's writings are

it comes to questions like “*why* does the light come on when I flip the switch?” Today we know the answer, and it has to do with the workings of electricity; suspension of judgment on that question – which in Sextus’ terms is a question about the underlying nature of things – would be a sign of simple ignorance, not of Pyrrhonist-style intellectual caution. But maybe that just shows my own resistance to an instrumentalist view of science, or, in other words, my unwillingness to step aside from the unthinking realism that, in the last two essays of *HTBP*, I ascribe to Sextus and to ancient Greek philosophy generally, while conceding that this is a contingent and non-essential feature of Pyrrhonism.

2. Ben Morison argues against my reading of Sextus’ *Against the Ethicists* (M 11) as offering a version of Pyrrhonism distinct from the one apparent in most of Sextus’ surviving writings. In this case I cannot pick and choose which points to respond to; only a point-by-point response will suffice. In my translation of and commentary on this book (Bett 1997), I argued that, rather than suspending judgment about whether anything is by nature good or bad, as one would expect from the account of skepticism in *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* (and from his treatment of the same topic in that work), Sextus argues for the definite conclusion that *nothing* is by nature good or bad. This question does not play a major role in *HTBP*. But I do draw on this interpretation in one of the essays, “The Sign in the Pyrrhonian Tradition”, and my broader developmental picture of Pyrrhonism, the case for which includes, as an important component, my interpretation of *Against the Ethicists*, receives some attention in a couple of the other essays. I also make reference to this interpretation in the introduction to my recent translation of Sextus’ *Against Those in the Disciplines* (M 1-6) (Bett 2018). Here, in response to Morison’s contrary view – which he had already expressed, though not been able to argue for in detail, in his *Stanford Encyclopedia* article on Sextus (Morison 2014/2019) – I say “I simply fail to see how the text can be read in this way” (13, n.24).

Well, I was asking for trouble in saying that, and I’m willing to back down; after reading Morison’s comments, I do see how the text can be read as he proposes. But I still don’t believe that this is the right way to read it.

The best place to start is maybe this. It cannot be assumed (as Morison does assume) that the phrase “no more” (*ou(den) mallon* or *mê(den) mallon*) means the same in *Against the Ethicists* as Sextus says it means in *Outlines*. The construal Sextus gives it in that work (*PH*

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available only in Portuguese, and I must admit to not having made the effort to get to know them. I was happy, however, to have had the chance to meet him in 2017 – as it turned out, only a few months before he died.) Also valuable on this topic is Bullock 2015.

1.188-91), where “P no more than Q” is a way of expressing suspension of judgment between the conflicting alternatives P and Q, is a highly unnatural one. The plain meaning of “P no more than Q” is that the state of affairs denoted by P obtains, or is the case, to no greater extent than the one denoted by Q – where the “extent” in question could be 100% (in which case it is equivalent to “both P and Q”)<sup>12</sup>, or 0% (in which case it is equivalent to “neither P nor Q”), or anything in between<sup>13</sup>. Indeed, Sextus admits this when, in explaining his peculiar usage of the phrase in *Outlines*, he says that it “displays the character of assent or denial” (*PH* 1.191); that is, it sounds as if, in saying “P no more than Q”, one is *asserting* that P holds to no greater extent than Q. That, of course, is not how he intends it in *Outlines*; but he is conceding that you might very naturally take it that way. I would go further. I do not believe the phrase would ever have been given the peculiar meaning that Sextus gives it in *Outlines* unless it had already been a catch-phrase in an earlier, and distinct, version of Pyrrhonism *in its normal meaning*; Sextus (or maybe one of his fairly close predecessors, of whom we know nothing) preserves it as a Pyrrhonist catch-phrase, but reconstrues it so as to fit with the later model of Pyrrhonism, the one that we see in *Outlines*. I talked about this in more detail in some of my earlier work<sup>14</sup>; but we need not worry about that here. For it is clear that in *Against the Ethicists* itself, “no more” is being employed in its normal and expected meaning, not in the meaning given it in *Outlines*.

The crucial occurrence of the phrase (*M* 11.118) is near the end of a passage where three possible views concerning things that are by nature good (or “to be chosen”) and bad (or “to be avoided”) are listed, and then Sextus tells us the consequences for the holders of each. The three possible views are: 1) that anything anyone finds desirable is thereby good by nature – and the same, *mutatis mutandis*, with “undesirable” and “bad”; 2) that some things are by nature good and others by nature bad; and 3) (which is the important one for our purposes, so I give the exact wording) “in relation to this person this thing is to be chosen or to be avoided, but in relation to the nature of things it is neither to be chosen nor to be avoided [*oute haireton estin oute pheukton*]” (*M* 11.114). The first view is both logically and pragmatically incoherent, given the fact of disagreement. The second does better on this score, but the life of someone who accepts it – namely, the dogmatist – is said to be full of disturbance (a theme that Sextus subsequently pursues in much more detail). It is the third view, now expressed as “a certain

<sup>12</sup> That is, assuming that the “no more” applies in both directions – that someone who says “P no more than Q” equally intends “Q no more than P”. This point is seldom made explicit, but I think it is common ground among interpreters of Pyrrhonism.

<sup>13</sup> Hence the range of uses to which the phrase was put by different Greek philosophers, as scholars have observed since at least DeLacy 1958.

<sup>14</sup> Especially Bett 2000; for references, see “no more” in the subject index.



thing is not more by nature to be chosen than to be avoided, nor more to be avoided than to be chosen" (*M* 11.118) that, as Morison and I agree, is the one Sextus recommends, since it is this one, and this alone, that, according to him, frees us from disturbance (and this too is pursued in much more detail later). Sextus therefore treats "no more by nature to be chosen nor to be avoided [or vice versa]" as equivalent to "neither to be chosen nor to be avoided". The "no more" locution, then, is not an expression of *suspension of judgment as to whether* anything is by nature to be chosen or to be avoided; it is an assertion that any arbitrary thing is by nature *neither to be chosen nor to be avoided*, which is readily rephrased as "nothing is by nature to be chosen or to be avoided". Picking up on this point, he closes his sketch of the outcome for the holder of the third view – that is, the Pyrrhonist – by saying that "Indeed, this [i.e., freedom from disturbance] will come to him from his thinking nothing good or bad by nature" (*M* 11.118). As Morison notes, I conceded in my commentary on this passage that "thinking nothing good or bad by nature" (*tou mêden phusei agathon ê kakon doxazein*) is ambiguous between "thinking that nothing is good or bad by nature" and "not thinking that anything is good or bad by nature". Morison alters my translation of this sentence to reflect his conviction that the second reading is the right one. But it seems clear to me from the context, just as it did a quarter-century ago, that the correct reading is the first.

Two other passages in *Against the Ethicists* are bones of contention between us, *M* 11.130 and *M* 11.140. In both places Sextus says that freedom from disturbance will be achieved by (to put it as neutrally as possible) having arguments for the conclusion that nothing is by nature good or bad drawn to one's attention. I have always read these passages as saying that freedom from disturbance comes from *accepting* this conclusion – in line with what Sextus said in the passage we have just examined. Morison reads them as saying that freedom from disturbance comes from being presented with arguments for this conclusion, which, when juxtaposed with the contrary view one already holds (and is the source of so much trouble), to the effect that there *are* things by nature good or bad, will lead one to suspend judgment on that question; tranquility, then, comes from suspending judgment as to whether anything is good or bad by nature, just as one would expect from the model presented in *Outlines*. He supports this reading by observing that the verbs Sextus uses in these passages, *paristêmi* and *hupodeiknumi*, which I translate by "establish" and "show" respectively, are frequently used in other books of his where it is quite clear that he is presenting arguments for one of a pair of opposing conclusions, between which we are then meant to suspend judgment. So why can't we understand Sextus as doing just the same thing in these passages of *Against the Ethicists*?

Morison is of course right about the regular occurrence of these verbs in these contexts elsewhere in Sextus, and I did not attend to this point when I did my original work on *Against the Ethicists*. This was my first Sextus translation, and at that stage I probably did not make enough of a habit of checking how Sextus used certain terms across his *oeuvre*. But I don't think this significantly changes the picture.

I think we are agreed that the translation of these terms is not the important point. Both in *Against the Ethicists* and elsewhere, I regularly translate *paristêmi* by “establish”, and Annas and Barnes do the same in their translation of *Outlines*<sup>15</sup>. In *M* 11.140 I translate *hupodeiknumi* by “show”, but elsewhere, following Annas and Barnes' lead, I frequently translate it by “indicate”. None of this really matters. The important point is that Sextus regularly uses these verbs in contexts where he does not intend that we come to accept the conclusions being argued for. On the other hand, I think we are also in agreement that both words certainly *can* be used in contexts where the author does wish the reader to accept the conclusions being argued for<sup>16</sup>. So the question is simply, is what is going on in these passages of *Against the Ethicists* the same as what is going on in other books where Sextus uses the same verbs<sup>17</sup>?

One striking contrast between *Against the Ethicists* and the rest of Sextus' surviving work is that it contains absolutely no mention of the juxtaposition of equally powerful opposing arguments. Whereas elsewhere Sextus will frequently say things along the lines of “Some people hold that there is X, others deny this, and others – namely, the skeptics – suspend judgment about it” (e.g., on criteria of truth, *PH* 2.18, on place, *PH* 3.119, and on motion, *M* 10.45-9), in *Against the Ethicists* the skeptic is consistently presented as someone who says certain things of a negative character – and nothing else. We have already seen an example of this, where the skeptic achieves tranquility as a result of thinking that nothing is good or bad by nature (*M* 11.114, 118). Another example comes earlier in the book, where Sextus has just finished describing a number of conflicting views about what things are good,

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<sup>15</sup> Borrowing from LSJ, Morison suggests “set before the mind, propose” as an alternative. But to judge from the numerous passages of Demosthenes cited in LSJ under that usage, the things “proposed” or “set before the mind” are not propositions, but topics for discussion or states of mind; several of these cases could just as well go under LSJ's next heading, “dispose”. When the item *paristêmi* is a proposition, as in the relevant passages of Sextus, the obvious meaning among those given in LSJ is “make good, prove, show”.

<sup>16</sup> The difference between “show” and “indicate” is not to the point here. “Indicate” is less forceful than “show”, and (like Annas and Barnes, I imagine) I find it often appropriate for this reason, given the diminution of emphasis implied by the prefix *hupo-*. But that does not make the word any less suitable for use in a context where the position in question is being endorsed (as Morison seems to suggest); if I indicate to you that P, I can perfectly well be intending to get you to share my belief that P.

<sup>17</sup> Morison also cites several other cases in *Against the Ethicists* itself where Sextus uses *paristêmi*. But these, of course, are just as much in question as the one that is our main focus.

and whether health, in particular, is a good – and if so, whether it is the highest good (*M* 11.42-67). He then says that “it will next be necessary to deal with the things that have been said by the skeptics on the matter at hand” (*M* 11.68). What follows is a series of arguments for the conclusion that nothing is by nature either good or bad (*M* 11.69-95). Of course, if Sextus had indicated that the skeptic is “saying” these things in order to balance them against the arguments of the dogmatists on the other side, so as to yield suspension of judgment on the subject, this would be easy to understand. But there is not a word to this effect; all we get are the negative arguments. The immediately preceding catalog of conflicting views on the good does not serve as a countervailing positive side; on the contrary, the whole point of including them is to serve as data in the arguments for nothing’s being by nature good or bad – especially the first one, which turns precisely on the existence of conflicting views (*M* 11.69-78, cf. 89). A further case comes at the beginning of the latter part of the book, where Sextus considers the Stoics’ claim to possess a *technê* of life, and if so, whether it could be taught to others. After an initial sketch of the Stoic view, Sextus says “Well, such promises snare the young with vain hopes, but they are just not true [*ouketi de eisin alêtheis*]” (*M* 11.171). Nothing in the subsequent discussion leads one to think that he means to qualify this verdict.

Let us return to the key passages at issue. In both cases, release from disturbance is presented as an immediate consequence of being presented with arguments to the effect that nothing is by nature good or bad. Morison will say, yes, but that’s because the dogmatist has already been indoctrinated in the case for the opposite conclusion; the combined effect of his prior opinions and these new arguments is that one suspends judgment on the question, and *that’s* why one achieves freedom from disturbance. But there is no hint of that in the text; all we hear is that being exposed to the negative arguments frees one from disturbance. Besides, these passages deal not only with the dogmatist’s experience, but also with the skeptic’s. In the first passage (*M* 11.130), indeed, the dogmatist is arguably not in the picture at all. What Sextus says is “But when reason has established that none of these things is by nature good or by nature bad, there will be a release from disturbance and a peaceful life will await *us* [*hêmas*]”. The natural way to read this is as a return to the contrast between the dogmatist and the skeptic that was employed in the first passage we examined (*M* 11.112-18); the dogmatist (who he has been talking about in the preceding sections) is full of trouble, whereas the skeptic is free from this. But, as I have just pointed out, the skeptic of *Against the Ethicists* shows no sign of having opposing arguments in mind; he simply argues for negative conclusions. So it looks as if (just as in *M* 11.114 and 118) the skeptic’s trouble-free state of mind comes from the acceptance of those conclusions.

The second passage (*M* 11.140) does speak of freeing the troubled dogmatist from his disturbance by exposing him to the negative arguments. But it also talks of the skeptic's own happiness, in an extra sentence that Morison does not mention. After saying that taking on board the arguments that there is nothing by nature good or bad will help the dogmatist, Sextus adds "But teaching this kind of thing [*to de ge didaskein toiouto*] is peculiar to skepticism; it is skepticism's achievement, therefore, to procure the happy life". Again, we have happiness being produced directly by means of what is here referred to as the skeptic's very own [*idion*] "teaching", namely that there is nothing by nature good or bad. And again, there is no suggestion that the skeptic of *Against the Ethicists* balances this conclusion with any other, opposing conclusion. But if the skeptic can get to tranquility by accepting the conclusion that nothing is by nature good or bad, there is no reason why the dogmatist cannot do so as well.

Morison will no doubt object that *didaskein*, "teach", is yet another word that Sextus uses in the context of introducing arguments that are intended to balance other, opposing arguments rather than to convince one of their conclusions. And he will be right; it is easy enough to find cases where Sextus says "as we will teach [*hôs didaxomen*]" or the like in embarking on his arguments<sup>18</sup>. But again, "teach" can also obviously be used in cases where the teacher does want the listener to accept the "teachings", and the word is also common in Sextus to refer to dogmatic views<sup>19</sup>. So again we have the question, which is it in this case? If one is antecedently convinced that Sextus must be proceeding in the same way as in *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, one can always say that "teaching this kind of thing is peculiar to skepticism" is shorthand for "The skeptic has the distinctive knack of lining up arguments for the conclusion that nothing is by nature good or bad with other arguments for the opposite conclusion, leading someone to withdraw assent from either side". Absent that antecedent assumption, it is much easier to read the text at what I will not hesitate to call face value, as saying that the skeptic gets to be happy because of having absorbed (that is, endorsed) skepticism's distinctive "teaching" – namely, that nothing is by nature good or bad.

So where does this leave us? I think Morison has succeeded in showing that my case for the distinctive character of *Against the Ethicists* is not as unequivocal as I originally thought. He is not the first to challenge my reading<sup>20</sup>, but his is the most penetrating case that I have seen for the (broadly traditional) view that *Against the Ethicists* conforms to Sextus' usual

<sup>18</sup> For some reason this is by far the most common in the first book of *Against the Physicists*: *M* 9.194, 209, 246, 259, 294, 297, 321, 330, 440. But see also *M* 7.314, 400, 8.199, 10.17, 48, 189.

<sup>19</sup> Here it seems to be the second book of *Against the Logicians* that has the most cases: *M* 8.62, 64, 85, 91, 187, 285-6, 428, 436, 468, 471, 473, 476. But see also, e.g., *M* 9.137, 294, 10.97, 156, 262.

<sup>20</sup> Another substantial challenge is Machuca 2011.

approach. Nonetheless, of the three texts we have focused on, the first (*M* 11.112-18) still seems to me clearly incompatible with his reading; while the second and third are much more easily read my way given the general tenor of *Against the Ethicists*, and have no reason to be read in the other way unless one assumes that this is the standard Sextan version of Pyrrhonism – which is precisely what is in question<sup>21</sup>.

Morison will no doubt regard my reply as itself question-begging, not to say perverse, especially given its refusal to see the skeptic (in *Against the Ethicists*) as someone in the business of opposing arguments. I have the feeling that our difference is in part methodological, and this actually relates to the one place in *HTBP* where I engage with Morison's views (on a different topic), in the essay on the Modes. He is more willing than I am to posit additional argumentative moves behind the scenes of the text in order to make that text come out consistent. In the case of the Modes, the consistency in question was the internal consistency of Sextus' presentation of the Ten Modes (*HTBP* 114, n.16); in this case, it is the consistency of the entire surviving corpus of Sextus' work. I can see the attractions of his approach, and who knows? Maybe I will come round in the end; or maybe I will come to see this itself as a meta-level issue on which suspension of judgment is in order. But I'm not there yet.

# Sképsis 20

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<sup>21</sup> I have said nothing about the fact that Sextus characterizes the skeptics as "those who make no determinations and suspend judgment" (*M* 11.111). Morison regards these as part of "the familiar conceptual scheme from the *Outlines*". Sure, the *terms* are the same as those we find in *Outlines*; but whether they are to be understood in the same way is another question. We have seen that "no more" needs to be understood differently in the two works, and it is not hard to see how "make no determinations" and "suspend judgment" can be understood in light of *Against the Ethicists*' different perspective; the terms themselves admit of various interpretations, and they are never given any explanation within *Against the Ethicists*. My proposal was to treat them as referring to a withdrawal from all attempts to specify the nature of things (which is consistent with denying that anything is by nature good or bad; see Bett 1997, 141-2).

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