

REPLY TO MY COMMENTATORS

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It is humbling to be the object of so much attention, and I am indeed grateful to receive it. I wish to thank Plínio Junqueira Smith for first suggesting the idea of a book symposium on my book, and I sincerely appreciate his efforts in arranging for the respondents and bringing the idea to fruition. I am also thankful to each of the individual respondents for their thoughtful critical reflections on *Sextus, Montaigne, Hume: Pyrrhonizers* (hereafter cited as SMHP). Their responses have certainly given me much food for thought, as well as a valuable opportunity to further clarify my views, and I hope my replies (below) indicate how much I value the opportunity to constructively engage with their feedback.

1 Groundwork: Skepticism, Academic and Pyrrhonian

While the principal concern of SMHP is Pyrrhonian skepticism (SMHP 2), Academic skepticism nonetheless intrudes into my account at several different points, in large part because both Montaigne and Hume discuss Academic skepticism, and they both do so in ways that have inclined some readers to see their own views as Academic, *rather than* Pyrrhonian. Therefore, in order to make my responses—in Sections 2-4 (below)—to the several commentators as clear as possible, I think it will be worth pausing to explain how I understand (some of) the relations between these two forms of ancient Greek skepticism.

To a first approximation, Pyrrhonian and Academic skepticism can each be split into two variants, resulting in four distinct types of skepticism. Pyrrhonian skepticism can be understood as either rustic or urbane, and Academic skepticism can be understood as either mitigated or radical. I read Sextus, our chief source for the Pyrrhonian tradition, as a rustic Pyrrhonist, one who abjures belief überhaupt, rather than as an urbane skeptic who only suspends judgment (i) concerning some subset of all beliefs or (ii) in one sense of “belief.” In either case—(i) or (ii)—the urbane skeptic retains some beliefs about what is the case. I read Cicero, our chief source for Academic skepticism, as a radical Academic skeptic, one who normatively approves of suspending judgment überhaupt (though he admits to falling short of carrying out global *epoché*), rather than as a mitigated Academic skeptic who allows that, although apprehension is not possible, the Academic inquirer will still hold many beliefs about what is most plausible/probable.¹

Now with these four variants on the table—rustic Pyrrhonism, urbane Pyrrhonism, radical Academic skepticism, mitigated Academic skepticism—I would suggest that there are two ways in which Pyrrhonian and Academic skepticism can be seen to come quite close to each other, without producing a

¹ “Most plausible/probable”: This is Carneades’s *to pithanon*, which Cicero later renders into Latin using both *probabile* and *veri simile*. There is on-going scholarly dispute about how best to understand these terms, but here I take no position regarding those disputes.

perfect identity in either case. First, when the Academic skepticism at issue is *radical* Academic skepticism, that view comes dangerously close to rustic Pyrrhonism, as both advocate a global *epochē* and neither attributes any positive epistemic status to any beliefs which the skeptic (whether rustic Pyrrhonian or radical Academic) may find psychologically irresistible and continue to hold. Sextus himself—in the section of *PH*, Book 1 where he is at great pains to distinguish Pyrrhonism from all neighboring philosophies—admits as much (*PH* 1.232). Of course, Sextus speaks as if the rustic Pyrrhonist or the radical Academic can succeed in practicing global *epochē*. I do not find that to be at all plausible, and it's the interpretive puzzle I address, and try to resolve, in Chapter 3 with my aspirationalist account of rustic Sextan Pyrrhonism. Indeed, Chapter 3 is the first place in *SMHP* that Cicero receives any sustained attention, and he does so because I believe Cicero is himself an aspirational radical (Academic) skeptic in a way that parallels the aspirational rustic Pyrrhonism of Sextus.²

Now in *SMHP* I define a *Pyrrhonizer* as a radical skeptic who practices “the *skeptical ability* to problematize and cast doubt upon all open-to-dispute matters brought under scrutiny during inquiry” (*SMHP* 2). I add that “what makes Pyrrhonizers radical skeptics, in my view, is not that they have succeeded in the (perhaps psychologically impossible) attempt to *suspend judgment on all matters of investigation*, but rather that, qua radical skeptics, they relentlessly, ruthlessly inquire and, *crucially*, they make no claim, concerning any beliefs they *may* hold, that those beliefs enjoy any positive epistemic status” (*SMHP* 3). Of course, a radical Academic skeptic could easily fit that description, and I am amenable to the claim that Cicero—on my own radical-Academic understanding of him—could be called a Pyrrhonizer.³ Rustic Pyrrhonists and radical Academics can hold very similar views for broadly similar reasons.

The second way in which Pyrrhonian and Academic skepticism might approach each other involves urbane Pyrrhonism and mitigated Academic skepticism, both of which attribute some beliefs about what is the case to the skeptic. Frede's urbane reading of Sextus, in essence, makes Sextan Pyrrhonism something much closer to mitigated Academic skepticism. One possible difference concerns whether Frede's urbane Pyrrhonist follows the mitigated Academic skeptic in attributing some sort of *positive epistemic status* to his beliefs. I won't go into that question here, though it's not hard to see how such an attribution of positive epistemic status might be worked into an urbane, Frede-style Pyrrhonism.

What is highly relevant for the discussions soon to come is that neither Montaigne nor Hume ever considers the conceptual possibility of *radical* Academic skepticism. Nor, I think, does either show any evidence of having considered an *urbane* form of Pyrrhonism. And that means that the two skeptical alternatives for Montaigne are rustic Pyrrhonism (derived from Sextus) and mitigated Academic skepticism (derived from Cicero). And I argue (see *SMHP* 71-74) that Montaigne *rejects* mitigated Academic skepticism. Similarly, Hume faces the same two alternatives, and I argue (see *SMHP* 98n.5, 112, and Section 4, below) that a genuinely “skeptical” reading of Hume cannot see him as (merely) a mitigated Academic skeptic.

² In *SMHP* I merely offer a sketch of my reading of Cicero's skepticism: see *SMHP* 63-65. I have defended my view that Cicero is an aspirationalist radical Academic skeptic more fulsomely in Ribeiro Forthcoming.

³ At the serious risk of being tedious, let me repeat: I am saying that Cicero could be called a Pyrrhonizer *assuming that my reading of him as a radical Academic skeptic is correct*: for a defense of that reading, see again Ribeiro Forthcoming. (Obviously, if Cicero is instead understood—as he is by some scholars—as a *mitigated* Academic skeptic, then he would *not* be a Pyrrhonizer.)

2 Pyrrhonism, Rustic and Urbane: Reply to Bolzani

I turn now to the first of three critical commentaries, and I will begin my reply to Professor Bolzani by further elaborating a contrast which was introduced in the previous section, viz. the rustic/urbane distinction.⁴ It was Jonathan Barnes (following Galen) who first introduced the terms “rustic” and “urbane” into contemporary scholarship as a means of describing the interpretations of Sextus produced by Burnyeat and Frede respectively.⁵ If Burnyeat’s rustic skeptic is the skeptic who proposes to abjure belief *altogether*, then what exactly is the contrasting stance of Frede’s urbane skeptic?⁶ Here, Frede himself seems to have two entirely distinguishable ideas. One of Frede’s ideas is that rather than abjuring *all* beliefs (as the rustic skeptic proposes to do), the urbane skeptic instead gives up only a particular subset of his beliefs, a subset that is characterized by having certain specific *content*: The urbane skeptic abjures all *theoretical beliefs* (“the theorems of philosophers and scientists”), as opposed to “ordinary, everyday beliefs,” which the urbane skeptic retains.⁷ Frede’s second idea is that the urbane skeptic distinguishes two different types of belief-*attitudes* (“two kinds of assent,” as Frede puts it): The urbane skeptic then abjures all belief in one sense (viz., belief *qua* “positive act of assent”) but simultaneously *retains* many beliefs in a different sense (viz., belief *qua* “passive acquiescence”).⁸

Professor Bolzani does not suggest that Frede’s urbane reading of Sextus is superior to the rustic reading of Burnyeat, so that is not the point in contention here.⁹ Instead, Professor Bolzani simply wonders whether an urbane understanding of Sextan Pyrrhonism might not be a better fit for my project. After all, by reading Sextus rustically, I am then forced to see Montaigne and Hume as *transgressing* against the complete belief-abjuration proposed the rustic skeptic (see, e.g., SMHP 20). If I, instead, treat Sextan Pyrrhonism as urbane—viz., as allowing that the skeptic *will retain many beliefs*—then this would at least lessen, and perhaps eliminate, one aspect of apparent discontinuity between Sextus, Montaigne, and Hume. United together as urbane skeptics, all three could then be read as continuing to believe many things. This, I believe, is Professor Bolzani’s suggestion, and it is an interesting one. But for a number of reasons, which I outline below, it is not one that I find to be ultimately appealing.

First, let me start off by simply affirming that I sincerely do find the basic thrust of Burnyeat’s rustic reading to be the most plausible take on the Sextan texts themselves. Inspired by that radically-skeptical understanding of Sextan Pyrrhonism, the challenge I undertook in SMHP was to develop readings of Sextus, Montaigne, and Hume as radical Pyrrhonizing skeptics, while taking close account of all the obstacles (philosophical, textual, etc.) that such readings must face. And

⁴ In what follows, I will cite Bolzani’s commentary (“Sextus Empiricus in Brian Ribeiro’s *Sextus, Montaigne, Hume: Pyrrhonizers?*”) as “SE in BR” followed by page number(s).

⁵ Barnes, “The Beliefs of a Pyrrhonist” [originally 1982], reprinted in Burnyeat & Frede 1997: 58-91; see 60-61.

⁶ For Bolzani’s discussion of this, see “SE in BR” 63-65.

⁷ This idea is most prominent in Frede, “The Sceptic’s Beliefs” [originally 1979], reprinted in Burnyeat & Frede 1997: 1-24, with the quoted phrases on 18 and 5, respectively. See esp. 8-9, 18-19, and 23. Barnes, e.g., citing Frede’s “The Sceptic’s Beliefs,” reads Frede as holding that the urbane skeptic targets beliefs about “philosophical and scientific matters” while remaining “happy to believe most of the things that ordinary people assent to in the ordinary course of events” (1997, 61-62).

⁸ This idea is most prominent in Frede, “The Sceptic’s Two Kinds of Assent and the Question of the Possibility of Knowledge” [originally 1984], reprinted in Burnyeat & Frede 1997: 127-151, with the quoted phrases on 135 and 134, respectively. See esp. 128, 133-136. In SMHP (see 20n.4, 51-52) I simply set aside Frede’s reading of Sextus and focused on attempting to develop a philosophically-tenable version of Burnyeat’s reading; I won’t take up the project of Frede-criticism here either, though those interested in such should consult Perin 2010, Chapter 3, which is excellent.

⁹ See “SE in BR” 69n.21.

while it was not my intention to establish that my own radically skeptical readings of these figures are simply *dictated* by the available texts or are opposed only by alternative readings which I can *demonstrate to be mistaken*, I nonetheless find my own readings quite persuasive.¹⁰ So let me interpret Professor Bolzani's suggestion in this conditionalized form: *If* Sextus were best understood urbanely, then wouldn't readings of Montaigne and Hume as fellow urbane Pyrrhonists fall naturally into place?

So, *can* Montaigne and/or Hume be best understood as urbane Pyrrhonizers? The first point I would make in reply to that question is that I do not believe that either Montaigne or Hume ever considered the conceptual possibility of (what we now call) urbane Pyrrhonism. Instead, they each seem to understand Sextan Pyrrhonism in a rustic manner. Thus, to the extent that one wishes to explore continuities between Sextus, on the one hand, and Montaigne and Hume, on the other, it seems one must start from a rustic Sextus, for that is the only Sextus known to Montaigne and Hume. And yet someone might object as follows: even if neither Montaigne nor Hume ever considered *Sextus* to be an urbane Pyrrhonist, perhaps they might have discovered such urbane Pyrrhonism on their own. In other words, whatever they might each have thought about *Sextus*, perhaps their *own* individual views could be properly characterized as urbane versions of Pyrrhonism. So let us set Sextus aside entirely and simply consider whether the skepticism in Montaigne or in Hume can be best understood as urbane Pyrrhonism.

The view I defend in SMHP sees Montaigne and Hume as *lapsed rustics*, i.e. theoretical rustics who fail to practically achieve beliefless rusticity.¹¹ What urbane skeptics and lapsed rustics have in common is that *neither group* abjures belief completely. Urbane skeptics find some beliefs to be exempt from skeptical inquiry; lapsed rustics find some beliefs to be psychologically ineliminable. So, given that Montaigne and Hume do each retain many beliefs, what best explains that fact, their urbanity or their lapsed rusticity?

Before I tackle that question, I would be remiss not to point out that on my reading of Sextus, he himself must be understood as a lapsed rustic! Since I don't think it is possible for a human inquirer to achieve global *epochē* through philosophical practice, I don't think Sextus did so. Nor for that matter did Cicero, who is—on my reading of him—a lapsed radical Academic skeptic. Recall that the whole point of my aspirationalist reading of Sextus is to address the psychological impossibility of global *epochē*. Therefore, according to my way of thinking, Cicero, Sextus, Montaigne, and Hume are *all* lapsed radical skeptics. For those who are radical skeptics, there is just no alternative, given the doubt-resistant elements of human life (as I argue in Chapter 3 of SMHP).¹²

Returning now to the question I proposed about Montaigne and Hume, given that Montaigne and Hume *do* each retain many beliefs, what best explains that fact, their urbanity or their lapsed rusticity? Professor Bolzani thinks that my description of that-which-resists-doubt (at SMHP 23-25) suggests that the beliefs retained (in spite of Pyrrhonizing doubt) may “[cease] to be subject to this [skeptical] investigation,” and this (he thinks) “is . . . more easily compatible with the urbane interpretation (“SE in BR” 66). Such beliefs “will possibly no longer be the objects of skeptical investigation” (“SE in BR” 67). It seems that Professor Bolzani believes that urbane skeptics are those who *cease to inquire about the beliefs which they retain* (“SE in BR” 66-68). And he understands me as holding the view

¹⁰ On my authorial aims, see SMHP 7-8.

¹¹ Cf. the phrase ‘lapsed Catholic.’

¹² Professor Bolzani seems to believe that, for me, the rustic reading implies the achievability of global *epochē*. See “SE in BR” 65 and 67. But for me all rustics are lapsed rustics.

that (those I see as) lapsed rustics cease to investigate the beliefs they cannot shake off:

It is true that Ribeiro did not propose that the skeptic does not investigate basic notions of life, but he does argue that, at some point in his trajectory, basic beliefs such as these—I suppose they include, for example, the reality of movement, time and place—solidify and cease to be investigated. (“SE in BR” 68)

This is not, in fact, my view, and Professor Bolzani does not cite any specific passages from SMHP here. On my view, should they cease to inquire, they would cease to be *skeptikoi* (‘inquirers’)! For me, that-which-resists-doubt thereby acquires no positive epistemic status, nor does it become exempt from skeptical inquiry. Skeptical inquiry is endless and without boundaries.¹³

But *must* the urbane skeptic lose his interest in inquiry? Suppose Montaigne and Hume do continue to inquire. Might they not still be seen as urbane skeptics? Professor Bolzani very diplomatically concludes his commentary by suggesting that they might start out as rustics and end up urbane, which sounds intriguing (“SE in BR” 70). Might we be looking at some new form of skepticism?¹⁴ Alas, I think this apparent mixture of elements simply describes the state of lapsed rustics: on the one hand, nothing seems to withstand Pyrrhonizing scrutiny and so global *epochē* beckons us; yet on the other not everything gets dissolved in the acid-bath of Pyrrhonizing doubt.

Recall that Frede presents two ideas which could ground urbane skepticism: (i) the urbane skeptic abjures some beliefs due to their content and/or (ii) the urbane skeptic abjures one belief-attitude while also retaining a second and distinct belief-attitude. Surely, there is no hint at all of (ii)—the idea of “two kinds of assent”—in Montaigne or in Hume, so (ii) cannot form the basis for reading Montaigne or Hume as urbane skeptics. Might there then be some evidence of (i)? Might Montaigne or Hume have rejected philosophical and scientific beliefs while holding fast to ordinary, everyday beliefs? It seems true that ordinary, everyday beliefs may be especially resistant to Pyrrhonizing doubt, and it is also true that both Montaigne and Hume register their continued commitment to many such ordinary, everyday beliefs? Is this good evidence that their skepticism was urbane?

I do not think it is. For one thing, Montaigne seems not to assign this contrast (theoretical beliefs/everyday beliefs) any stable or consistent weight. Moreover, for Montaigne, even some of our most humble, *everyday beliefs* still seem to be appropriate subjects for inquiry, nor does Montaigne appear to abjure all *theoretical beliefs*. As I argue in Chapter 2 of SMHP, he seems to retain some vestiges at least of his Catholic faith in God. In Hume, perhaps, such a contrast (theoretical beliefs/everyday beliefs) plays a more visible role. But if Hume were relying on such a contrast to define his skepticism, then one would expect to find him treating everyday beliefs as simply exempt from his Pyrrhonizing doubts.¹⁵ After all, that is the view of the urbane skeptic. But for Hume (at least from 1748 onward) it seems

¹³ Here, I am agreeing with Professor Bolzani’s own view (“SE in BR” 68-69).

¹⁴ “The possibility of elaborating an acceptable and coherent portrait of a Pyrrhonist that brings together rustic and urbane aspects at the same time maybe shows us an instigating conclusion” (“SE in BR” 70).

¹⁵ For discussion of Hume’s proposed subject-matter restrictions in EHU 12, see SMHP 119-122. While EHU 12.25 (SBN 162) declares “all distant and high enquiries” to be *verboten*, it does *not* exempt topics of “common life” from critical inquiry. On the contrary, EHU 12.25 argues that our inquiries should be *focused exclusively* on “common life, and . . . such subjects as fall under daily practice and experience.”

that, while they do manage to *survive* Pyrrhonizing doubt, everyday beliefs are not portrayed as *immune* from, or *exempt* from, such doubts. These beliefs do *stand fast* for Hume, but not because they are on the safe side of a contrast (related to belief-content) which renders them immune to skeptical inquiry. Rather, they stand fast simply and merely because they are *psychologically impervious* to Pyrrhonizing doubt. As Hume himself (in)famously puts the point, “Philosophy would render us entirely *Pyrrhonian*, were not nature too strong for it.”¹⁶ This, to me, clearly smacks of lapsed rusticity, not complacent urbanity. And with this answer I draw my first reply to a close.

3 Montaigne as a Pyrrhonizer: Reply to Raga

I turn now to considering Professor Raga’s critical response to my account of Montaigne’s skepticism, which he finds to be unpersuasive.¹⁷ I do not aim to change his mind, but I will attempt to respond to some of his particular objections and to correct some distortions of my account which he has—innocently, I am sure—introduced.

Certainly it is true that my account of Montaigne’s skepticism owes a heavy debt to Popkin’s seminal work, as I acknowledge throughout SMHP. I believe Popkin’s reading of Montaigne’s “Apology” establishes the important role that Montaigne’s encounter with Sextus played in forming the views which Montaigne formulates in that long essay. Indeed, in SMHP I argue that it is clear that in the “Apology,” Montaigne writes as an advocate of Pyrrhonian, rather than Academic, skepticism, and Professor Raga seems to concede that this is true (“Specters” 74, 79). However, I have also taken care to critically evaluate the role which Cicero plays for Montaigne in that same essay.¹⁸ Moreover, while Popkin’s account does focus centrally on the “Apology” and on Montaigne’s skeptical fideism therein, I have also tried—particularly in Chapter 4 of SMHP—to cast a wider net by relating Montaigne’s Pyrrhonizing in the “Apology” to his Pyrrhonizing in the *Essays* as a whole. And I have also, in a similar broadening move, tried to show how we might understand Montaigne’s judgments on *non-religious* matters. In other words, in interpreting Montaigne as a Pyrrhonizer, one must consider his “Apology” and his skeptical fideism—just as Popkin does—but one must *also* consider the *Essays* as a whole as well as Montaigne’s tendency to express judgments on matters non-religious. Despite Professor Raga’s complaints about the “strategic” selectivity of my own reading (see, e.g., “Specters” 72, 75, 78), this is just what I do in SMHP.

But in doing so, have I thereby attempted to show that Montaigne was a “pure Pyrrhonist” (“Specters” 71) as Professor Raga puts it? Definitely not! In fact, as I took pains to stress in the Introduction to SMHP, I am proposing the thesis that Sextus, Montaigne, and Hume can all be plausibly read as *Pyrrhonizers*. But to argue that Montaigne was a *Pyrrhonizer* is not, *ipso facto*, the same as arguing that he was a “pure Pyrrhonist.”¹⁹ For example, the necessity of achieving global *epochē* and,

¹⁶ Abstract of *A Treatise of Human Nature*, paragraph 27; SBN 657. Or as Hume puts the same point in the First *Enquiry*, “Nature is always too strong for principle” (EHU 12.23; SBN 160).

¹⁷ In what follows, I will cite Professor Raga’s commentary (“Specters of Pyrrho: Montaigne’s *Essays* as Pretext”) as “Specters” followed by page number(s).

¹⁸ See SMHP 70-74.

¹⁹ Professor Raga creates additional confusion by placing the phrases “pure Pyrrhonist”/“pure Pyrrhonism” in quotation marks, as if he were quoting from SMHP. Those phrases never appear in SMHP. He repeats the same straw-man characterization of my view three times (“Specters” 71, 74, 78). In addition, he asserts that I “unhesitatingly” describe Sextus, Montaigne, and Hume as Pyrrhonists (“Specters” 71), but, again, this is not correct. These misrepresentations refuse to allow any nuance to my view, despite my explicit definition of the *Pyrrhonizer* (see SMHP 2-3) and my inclusion of the term “Pyrrhonizers” in the title of the book.

afterward, *ataraxia* (cf. “Specters” 72, 78) are not essential elements of *Pyrrhonizing* as I define it. More generally, I will state here, for the record, that I don't associate Pyrrhonism—at any stage of its existence—with actual, psychologically-complete *epochē*. As I said in Section 2 (above), even in the case of Sextus, I think we must read *epochē* as an ideal to be aspired to, not as an accomplishment achieved in actual psychological fact. (I present this reading in Chapter 3.) So completed *epochē* in no way defines the notion of *Pyrrhonizing* which I articulate in the book, and neither does the attainment of *ataraxia*.

From my perspective, I see Sextan Pyrrhonism as one attempt to embrace and indulge a skeptical *impulse* and a skeptical *ability*, an impulse and an ability which together suffice to generate doubt sufficient to undermine the (alleged) rational credentials of *any* non-evident view subjected to scrutiny. In some cases, despite this undermining of all rational warrant, some beliefs may yet persist; and in those cases, the *Pyrrhonizer* refuses to concede that such psychological irresistibility in any way indicates *positive epistemic status*. This distinguishes the stance of the Pyrrhonizer from any Academic view which allows that our views (while not achieving the certainty of Stoic *katalepsis*) can nonetheless be regarded as probable or verisimilitudinous, as the mitigated Academics taught (SMHP 3).

However, some *other* Academic skeptics—namely *radical* Academic skeptics—may have, like the Pyrrhonizers, felt a skeptical impulse and exercised a skeptical ability which together sufficed to generate doubt sufficient to undermine the (alleged) rational credentials of any non-evident view subjected to scrutiny. And, again like Sextus, they may have thought or felt that, given this state of affairs, it would be rational to suspend judgment, though like Sextus (as I read him in Chapter 3) they may also have discovered that complete *epochē* is only a rational ideal, not something fully psychological realized (exactly as Cicero reports, *Acad.* 2.66). Thus, in some cases, some beliefs may persist (as Cicero reports, *ibid.*); yet even in those cases, the radical Academic skeptic (Cicero) refuses to concede that such psychological irresistibility in any way indicates positive epistemic status. This is what distinguishes the view of the radical Academic from the view of the mitigated Academic.

Related to this, Professor Raga (“Specters” 73) is distressed to find that I seem to have kidnapped Cicero and taken him aboard the good ship *Pyrrhonizer*.²⁰ This, he says, is “one of [my] most questionable interpretive moves” (“Specters” 73). But as I have explained here (and back in Section 1), I see no reason not to classify Cicero as a *Pyrrhonizer* (even if he cannot be called a *Pyrrhonist*). I did not apply that label to Cicero in SMHP, but Cicero was not a central concern of SMHP. I won't elaborate my view of Cicero any further here either.²¹

So, on my view, we have Pyrrhonists and radical Academics on the one side, sharing the points of similarity I have highlighted above, with each of those groups contrasting with the mitigated Academic skeptics. It seems to me that the differences between the two former groups may be less important than the similarities, as even Sextus—who, we must remember, is motivated to distinguish his Pyrrhonism from all other views—himself concedes (PH 1.232).

²⁰ In this connection, Professor Raga says (“Specters” 73) that I fail to explain how I distinguish radical from mitigated Academic skepticism (or how I relate them both to Pyrrhonism). But I do offer an explanation of these matters in SMHP: see, e.g., SMHP 2-3 and 71-73. I have further discussed the relations between them in Section 1 here. (And for further discussion of radical *versus* mitigated Academic skepticism as it relates to Cicero, see Ribeiro Forthcoming.)

²¹ I presented a reading of Cicero as a radical Academic skeptic in Ribeiro 2019. Ribeiro Forthcoming offers a more fulsome attempt to defend my understanding of the nature of Cicero's skepticism and argues that Cicero was an aspirationalist radical skeptic.

Thus, I see Sextus, Montaigne and Hume as thinkers who have that skeptical impulse and exercise that skeptical ability, the impulse and the ability which I think the Pyrrhonians and radical Academics both share. Yet, as I argue in SMHP, neither Montaigne nor Hume should be associated with *mitigated* Academic skepticism, which they both equated with Academic skepticism *simpliciter*. In order, therefore, to emphasize their specific forms of continuity with the Pyrrhonists, while acknowledging (1) my own non-standard understanding of Pyrrhonism (one which divorces it from the achievement of *epoché*) and (2) a conceptual connection to radical Academic skepticism that was not appreciated by either Montaigne or Hume, I dubbed those who had that skeptical impulse and exercised that skeptical ability—an impulse and an ability which together suffice to generate doubt sufficient to undermine the (alleged) rational credentials of any non-evident view subjected to scrutiny, such that in any case in which some belief(s) may persist, the skeptical inquirer refuses to concede that such psychological irresistibility in any way indicates positive epistemic status—*Pyrrhonizers*, rather than Pyrrhonists, thereby acknowledging (1) and (2) while still highlighting the important connections and continuities which I see.

Let us, now, turn our attention more directly to Montaigne's skepticism. In taking up the twin challenges of looking beyond the "Apology" to the *Essays* as a whole and also considering Montaigne's numerous *non-religious* judgments, I appeal to Montaigne's project of self-exploration and to the unusual nature of his text (SMHP 74-82). Regarding those specific points, Professor Raga again finds my account unpersuasive ("Specters" 75-76). Perhaps here it will be useful to separate the two issues. First, (1) is Montaigne engaged with self-investigative inwardness in the *Essays*? In other words, does Montaigne want us "to see the entirety of the *Essays* as an autobiographical examination of, and expression of, his own ideas" (SMHP 77)? Second, (2) can Montaigne's actual approach to writing the *Essays* itself be understood as a form of—indeed as the very *activity* of—Pyrrhonizing? In SMHP I defend affirmative answers to both (1) and (2). (See SMHP 78-82.) After describing my commitment to (1) and (2), Professor Raga rejects my account of (1) in two paragraphs, though none of his discussion there cites or engages with SMHP (see "Specters" 75-76), leaving me a little unsure how I might respond to him. I take much of what I argue in SMHP 78-80 to represent a broad scholarly consensus, and I cite a number of completely representative passages there to support that view. Professor Raga objects, in particular, to the idea that in the *Essays* Montaigne offers the reader a "picture of the self" (i.e., a picture of his own self). But I find that objection very hard to understand. In Montaigne's own 1580 "Note to the Reader" (retained in all subsequent editions) he tells us quite explicitly that "*it is my own self that I am painting*" (my emphasis).

After briefly sketching his own preferred understanding of Montaigne's self-portrait, one involving several dimensions (moral, intellectual, physical, and social), Professor Raga next rejects my account of (2) by noting that Montaigne's approach to the writing process clearly differs from Sextus's approach to writing ("Specters" 76). Of course, *I completely agree*. But my intention in SMHP was to highlight Montaigne's originality on this point! After highlighting some points of rhetorical commonality in the skeptical texts of Sextus, Montaigne, and Hume (SMHP 76-78), I next point out how the text of the *Essays* can be seen as highly original and perhaps singularly unique among skeptical texts:

Thus, Montaigne's way of handling the problem of how to be a skeptic and also write a book is to write a book about *himself*; a book of attempted self-exploration and self-examination—one of the first of its

kind in the Western tradition. If you are looking for a book about *things*, look elsewhere, he says. Even his opinions are being offered, not primarily as his *opinions*, but as *his* opinions. (SMHP 79)

If my reading is correct, then Montaigne may have found a way to *exercise the skeptical ability* through the *very process* of writing, revisiting, revising, and extending his ever-enlarging text. In other words, the *Essays* are (for us, now) the artifactual records of (what was for Montaigne, in the 16th century) *present-moment Pyrrhonizing*.

Given that very little I say about Montaigne seems plausible to Professor Raga, I can only suppose that my responses here will do little to change his mind. But I hope I have at least been able to clarify some of my own views and remove some obstacles that might prevent readers from achieving a clear understanding of my claims.

4 What Qualifies as a “Skeptical” Reading of Hume? Reply to Sanfélix and Ordóñez

Finally, I turn my attention to the joint commentary of Professors Sanfélix and Ordóñez.²² I will begin my replies to them by returning to the question of Academic skepticism in Hume’s philosophy, to which Professors Sanfélix and Ordóñez devote considerable attention.

As I argue in SMHP, if the skeptical and naturalistic readings of Hume are meant to represent genuine alternatives, then the “skeptical” reading must be understood as referring to some form of *radical* skepticism, either a rustic Pyrrhonism or radical Academic skepticism. The reason this must be so is quite simple, viz. *mitigated* Academic skepticism (which allows the skeptic to hold many plausible/probable opinions) combines very easily with the naturalistic elements in Hume’s philosophy. Such a reading is, therefore, best regarded as a *naturalist* reading of Hume, *not* a skeptical reading. (See SMHP 98n.5, 112.) Professors Sanfélix and Ordóñez suggest this point themselves by wondering in what sense the Academic reading of Hume still counts as a *genuinely skeptical* reading. (See “Pyrrhonic Hume?” 85-86, 91.) I would answer simply, it does not count as such, at least not in the terms of the contemporary scholarly debate concerning whether Hume was a “skeptic” or a “naturalist.” Consider that any remotely plausible “naturalist” reading of Hume will have to include *some role* for the numerous skeptical elements in Hume’s philosophy. But if the skeptical elements are understood in such a way that they combine amicably with an overall naturalist reading, this is just what is required in any remotely plausible naturalist reading. Thus, a “skeptical” reading must understand the skeptical elements in Hume’s philosophy in such a way as to generate *tensions* with the naturalistic elements. Therefore, as I’ve said, the skeptical reading must refer to some form of radical skepticism. But radical *Academic* skepticism is not even on Hume’s radar as a conceptual possibility. Thus, the skeptical reading of Hume must refer to a *Pyrrhonizing Hume*.

Note well that I do not mean to suggest that a Pyrrhonizing reading of Hume can be shown, by appeal to the Humean corpus, to be *superior* to the mitigated-Academic-cum-naturalist reading. To make that sort of argument, I would need to think that the skeptic/naturalist debate in Hume studies can be settled in some satisfactory manner. In contrast to that sort of argument, I have now finally and

²² I will cite their commentary (“Pyrrhonic Hume?”) by that title followed by page number(s).

utterly foresworn the possibility of successful Hume interpretation. To make a case for this interpretive pessimism is one of the chief tasks of Chapter 6 of SMHP.²³ There may well be a mitigated-Academic-cum-naturalist Hume within (what I call) the great Humean tapestry²⁴, but in the terms of the current scholarly debate, that counts as a naturalist reading, and I am instead selectively focusing on the skeptical (= Pyrrhonizing) reading of Hume:

Skeptical-Hume *is* less than (all of) Hume, but Skeptical-Hume is not incomplete in any other way and does not in any way represent less than a full philosophical position. (SMHP 110)

As I argue in SMHP, I think that such selective attention to various “Humes”—including, of course, Naturalist-Hume (see, e.g., SMHP 112)—is our only option, given the apparent impossibility of successfully unvexing Hume’s conflicted corpus.

That is my view concerning the skeptic/naturalist debate in Hume studies. But Professors Sanfélix and Ordóñez also give some attention (see “Pyrrhonic Hume?” 82-84) to my claim, developed in the first half of Chapter 5 of SMHP, that Hume might have—at some times, in some moods—been a “tepid deist” (a term I borrow approvingly from Popkin). In response to their discussion of this topic, I want to clarify what my claim about Hume’s possible “tepid deism” amounts to.

First, let me make clear that I do not think Hume might have been a *Christian* of any sort. While I do compare Hume’s views to those espoused by skeptical fideists (and Christian Pyrrhonists, one specific group of skeptical fideists), I did not intend to “place Hume in the tradition of the Christian Pyrrhonists” (“Pyrrhonic Hume?” 82).²⁵ My only contention is that “Hume might have held some kind of *deistic* belief” (SMHP 86, emphasis in original). As I argue in SMHP, and as Professors Sanfélix and Ordóñez also point out (e.g., “Pyrrhonic Hume?” 83), there can be no question of attributing any sort of *evidentially-based* deistic belief to Hume. On the other hand, given textual evidence from the *Dialogues*, as well as some of Hume’s personal letters, it is possible to imagine that Hume might have been a fideistic deist (see SMHP 84-89):

²³ See esp. Chapter 6, section 3, which is titled “There is No Satisfying Way to Interpret (All of) Hume.”

²⁴ Professors Sanfélix and Ordóñez suggest that my proposed metaphor of the great Humean *tapestry* should perhaps be replaced with the metaphor of a great Humean *collage* (“Pyrrhonic Hume?” 85, 87). But if we—very optimistically!—suppose that Hume scholars might find the general approach which I propose attractive, I think the metaphorical details are much less urgent. Nonetheless, for my part, I don’t see that a metaphorical collage captures my interpretive approach any better than a metaphorical tapestry: Both will involve numerous distinct elements coming together to form a whole of some sort, and disassembling either would allow us to turn our attention from the whole toward the individual elements (or sets of elements). Any metaphor will eventually strain under our analytical gaze, but, again, if my general approach is found to be defensible, the particular metaphor that we select to symbolically represent that approach seems to be of decidedly secondary importance.

²⁵ Though perhaps I should have been clearer about this in SMHP than I was. In Chapter 7, e.g., I do say this: “Admittedly the evidence for this modesty-based reading is somewhat scattered in the *Enquiry* and the *Dialogues*, but as I will try to show, seeing intellectual modesty as the stable and valuable fruit of skepticism would place Hume firmly in an already existing tradition, viz. that of the Christian Pyrrhonists like Montaigne and Bayle. These Christian Pyrrhonists aimed to *humiliate* human powers—in the literal sense of that verb—so as to prepare us for *faith*. But there is no reason why one couldn’t agree with the Christian Pyrrhonists’ account of what skepticism *does to us* (that it humbles us and abates our intellectual arrogance) without wishing to build any faith upon the back of that intellectually humbling experience” (SMHP 129-130). In this passage, the connection I am making between Hume and the Christian Pyrrhonists only concerns “seeing intellectual modesty as the stable and valuable fruit of skepticism,” not accepting Christian faith as a result of that.

I think we can imagine a version of Hume, where some belief in an Ultimate Reality was at some times, for him, one he could not entirely dispense with, even though he might view any such belief as rationally indefensible. This would be a *Montaignian Hume*. (SMHP 88)

Professors Sanfélix and Ordóñez also suggest—correctly, I believe—that someone who sees deistic belief as *rationally indefensible* (as Hume did) could only retain a deistic belief due to “his own nature,” rather than due to the available evidence (“Pyrrhonic Hume?” 83). They sometimes phrase this same point in terms of having a “religious character” or “religious longing” (see “Pyrrhonic Hume?” 83-84), though I don’t particularly care for that terminology, since it sounds a bit too rich for describing *tepid deism*. What we must bear in mind is that Hume lived in a place and at a time when virtually all of his contemporaries, not to mention nearly all of his philosophical predecessors, expressed some form of belief in divinity. It is possible that Hume managed to cast off the shackles of such belief, but it is also possible that he failed to do so, or that he was *at some times* or *in some moods* subject to such belief. In SMHP I survey the available textual and biographical evidence in support of such a possibility, and my only conclusion is that Hume *might* have “oscillated between doubt and deism” (SMHP 88).

5 Concluding Remarks

I am very grateful to Professors Bolzani, Raga, Sanfélix, and Ordóñez for their critical evaluations of SMHP. Naturally, I have not been able to respond to all of the points which they have raised; instead, I have responded in a somewhat more selective fashion, seeking to use their critiques—along with my replies—as a means of further clarifying the key theses I defended in SMHP and exploring some of the complex interrelations between importantly different forms of skepticism. If I have been successful, then I hope I have at least made my own views clearer and more explicit.

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