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THE ROLE OF SKEPTICAL EVIDENCE IN THE FIRST AND SECOND MEDITATIONS

ARTICLE 2: CERTAINTY[1] (DRAFT: VERSION NOT YET REVISED BY THE AUTHOR)

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Abstract: The author argues that according to Sextus Empiricus, (a) the "sensible" nature of the phenomenon is a metaphorical notion, since it is indistinguishably extended both to sensibility and thinking; (b) the phenomenon manifests itself with irresistible force of impact, through a wide range of passive states of mind; (c) the impact of phenomena is always mediated by our ego, because all skeptic expressions are strongly correlated with the first person singular. The article shows that Descartes could not refute the "excess" of skeptical doubt and make an immanent critique of skepticism without borrowing the aforementioned statements of Sextus. Such borrowing (1) has created a common ground for discussion between Descartes and skeptics; (2) made it possible for the meditator to give persuasiveness to careful observation of his own internal experience. Descartes' search for certainty in the *Meditations* is entirely based on (a) evidence of "phenomena", "states of mind", "passions"; (b) refusal to agree with the "non-evident" proclaimed by Sextus Empiricus.

1 Introduction

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[1] As in the previous article, I will continue to refer to Sextus Empiricus' *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* in the Latin translation by Henri Etienne (Sextus 1569). For the justification of this decision, see (Khoma 2016: 7). Thus, the title *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* will be replaced in references by the abbreviation PH (from Πυῤῥώνειοι ὑποτυπώσεις = Pyrrhoniae Hypotyposeon). Usually, only the book (Roman numeral) and chapter (Arabic numeral) will be referenced. In some cases, such pagination, separated by semicolons, may be supplemented by the page number of the 1569 edition and the numbers of the corresponding lines (this edition contains a special numbering of the lines of each page, which makes it very easy to find small passages) - for example, PH I, 4; 417: 17-19 (*Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, book I, § 4; p. 417 of the 1569 edition: lines 17-19). The Greek text of the *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* is quoted from Descartes' contemporary bilingual (Greek-Latin) edition (Sextus 1621); this text was compared with the English bilingual (Greek-English) edition by R. Bury (Sextus 1976 (reprint of the 1933 edition)). - Descartes' works are quoted from the canonical edition by Adam and Tannery (Descartes1996) with the indication of volume, page, and line number. The experience of the influence of various editorial and publishing decisions, in particular, the introduction or non-introduction of paragraphs, on the meaningful understanding of the text is also taken into account (see: Carraud 2011).

In the previous article of this series, I emphasized the lack of thorough special studies of the influence of the Sextus Empiricus on Descartes' doctrine (Khoma 2016: 11). However, a substantial part of some works (though not the entire volume) is devoted to the above-mentioned studies. In addition to the paragraphs of the thorough commentary analyzed in that article (Kambouchner 2005), we should first of all mention the chapter (in fact, a very fundamental research article) by Michael Williams "The Cartesian Transformation of the Skeptical Tradition" from the collective monograph *The Cambridge Guide to Ancient Skepticism* (Williams 2010).[2] Williams's study is very revealing and prompts some methodological issues that are important to my subject.

2 When do disagreements become real?

According to Williams, the originality of Cartesian attitudes toward skepticism has traditionally been underestimated. Descartes, in his view, not only offers "some entirely new" skeptical arguments, but also embeds them in a form of skepticism that differs from Pyrrhonian skepticism "both in structure and intent" (Williams 2010: 289). Unlike Sextus, Descartes questions not only our ability to know the essence of things, but also their very existence, replacing the ancient "essential" skepticism with its "existential" variety, which can be expressed by the question "how do we know that the external world exists at all?" (Williams 2010: 288).

In the conclusion of his study, Williams argues that the main Cartesian originality lies in the transformation of the theme of perceptual errors inherent in ancient skepticism, which is carried out through a new argument of sleep.

> This argument points to the notion of perceptual experience, which is not conceptually connected with the indispensable existence of material things. This conception of experience makes it possible to construct a skeptical problem that is not found in Sextus or Cicero: a problem that concerns our knowledge not of nature alone, but of the existence of the external world (Williams 2010: 311-312).[3]

Since Williams recognizes Pyrrhonism as the deepest form of ancient skepticism, and naturally considers Sextus to be the most prominent Pyrrhonist,[4]

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[2] In this regard, one should also mention (Westphal 1987). It is also worth noting a recent publication, in particular, devoted to the influence of skepticism (albeit not specifically Sextus Empiricus) not only on Descartes, but also on his seventeenth-century followers (Adriaenssen 2017).

[3] Williams's argument, of course, is not the first to prove that the radical difference between Cartesian and ancient skepticism lies precisely in the plane of the consciously formulated problematic nature of the existence of the external world. If the ancient skeptics doubted whether the essence of things is cognizable, they did not formulate the problem of the possible non-existence of all things, of the world as a whole. However, the analysis of this very interesting discussion should be the subject of a special study

[4] I share Williams' thesis. There is no way Descartes could refute "all the skeptics" (AT VII, 550: 19-20) bypassing the most extensive body of ancient skepticism.
Of course, there can hardly be any doubt that Descartes was familiar, for example, with Cicero's *Academica*. Suffice it to recall Descartes' Latin terminology, which, quite naturally, was largely created by Cicero. Even at this level, it is problematic to prove the influence of Sextus on Descartes. At least the terminology of the Latin translation of the *Outlines of Skepticism* available to Descartes was purely Ciceronian (for example, it was Cicero who in his *Academica* proposed

the whole essay is actually set up by a description and interpretation of the nine most significant, in his opinion, differences between the doctrines contained in Sextus' *Outlines of Skepticism* and Descartes' First Meditation (Williams 2010: 289-90)

1) Pyrrhonism relies on suspension of judgment, which leads to *ataraxia*; in contrast, Cartesian skepticism introduces doubt as an uncomfortable state of uncertainty that one wants to get rid of;
2) for Sextus, skepticism as suspension of judgment is an "antidote to doubt", it is seen as a permanent state that ensures tranquility; instead, for Descartes, such an antidote is "certainty," so his skepticism appears as temporary, and therefore purely methodological;
3) Pyrrhonian suspension of judgment is philosophically neutral, since it applies to any philosophical (more broadly, to any theoretical) views; Cartesian doubt is selective, since it unevenly applies to certain metaphysical and epistemological views;
4) Pyrrhonian suspension is at least partially based on a critical examination of the theories of a number of specific sciences, while Descartes resorts only to general skeptical arguments;
5) the Pyrrhonian neutralizes all the "theoretical temptations" that have been present so far, and plans to consider future ones as they come, while Descartes immediately dispels all his possible falsehoods, both past and future; thus, the Pyrrhonist demonstrates openness to future challenges where Descartes' doubt is theoretically closed;
6) Pyrrhonism is "epistemologically monotonous" because it always uses the same arguments that lead to the same results; whereas Descartes

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the rarely used term *evidentia* (in addition to the commonly used *perspicacitas*) as a translation of the Greek ἐνάργεια (evident). Thus, Descartes' use of the terms *certitudo*, *comprehentio*, *evidentia*, *perspicacitas*, and many others can be explained not only by scholastic usage but also by the reading of Cicero, the author of the earliest surviving skeptical text. Although Cicero does not yet know the term "skeptics," speaking instead of the teachings of "academics," the term "skepticism" was in common use in Descartes' time, so this way, too, one cannot unequivocally prove the direct textual influence of the *Outlines of Skepticism*. Latin translations of Sextus as a possible source of Descartes' terminology and conceptual solutions seem to be, if not redundant, then at least no more than probable.

Moreover, the aforementioned treatise by Cicero is also very multifaceted in its content. Thus, Descartes focuses on refuting skepticism as a doctrine not of the unknowability of truth, but of the actual, here and now, uncertainty of all knowledge. This circumstance seems to play in favor of the Sextus Theses. However, the *Academica* also describes positions not only like Arcesilau's. For example, see (Luculus XVIII, 59): "I am not so much sure that there is something unknowable ... as that the wise man does not confine himself to mere opinion (*nihil opinari*), that is, he never agrees with either false or unknowable things."

However, in my opinion, Descartes' characterization of "skeptics" still necessarily points to the *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, because only it clearly and unambiguously reflects the intention of pure and critical inquiry without prior "hypotheses" about the unknowable. Skeptics are those who "seek" (*quaerunt*; see RH I, 1). In his response to the Seventh Objection, Descartes makes a very telling statement: "...a negation is appropriate only to someone who does not yet perceive something clearly and distinctly. As, for example, skeptics, who, because they remain skeptics, are inclined to never perceive anything clearly. For, of course, if they were to perceive something clearly, this would be enough for them to stop doubting and being skeptics" (AT VII, 476: 28-477: 1-4). Ultimately, it is precisely this "openness" of the skeptical attitude that makes possible, as I will show below, the path of philosophical meditation as a means of gaining primary certainty. I will try to prove that the success of the Cartesian project depends on a discussion not with Cicero's interlocutors or with the skeptics of the modern age, but with the systematic Pyrrhonian argumentation as presented by Sextus Empiricus.

skepticism implies a certain "progress", i.e., a qualitative deepening of doubt; therefore, the Pyrrhonian *epoche* can be called "flat" and Cartesian doubt "stratified";

7) Cartesian arguments are closer to those in Cicero's *Academica* than to Sextus' *Outlines of Skepticism*;
8) Sextus associates skepticism with situations of existing disagreement, i.e., with views that at least a certain number of people consider acceptable or even obvious; Descartes, on the other hand, puts forward too exotic arguments that no one recognizes in practice;
9) Sextus Empiricus never formulated the fundamental Cartesian problem concerning our knowledge of the external world.

Of course, all of these points have their grounds, but they look more like a set of systematically unrelated distinctions. All of them require not only clarification and contextualization, but also a correlation of the initial positions of both authors. In such overly general formulations, these theses are sometimes vulnerable to criticism. Moreover, we are not talking about theses yet, but about some primary, non-reflected information, a kind of textual "facts". Their comprehension is impossible without context: for example, we should take into account at least the target audience of the *Discourse on Method* and *Meditations*, to whom Descartes addressed these works, the peculiarities of the author's style, etc. Without delving into the issues that are not directly related to the subject of this article, let us consider at least thesis 4. If we retain the caveat "at least partially," then Descartes' argumentation is based on a "partial" critical examination of the theories of some sciences: after all, the Second Meditation undermines the obviousness of the traditional definition of man as "a living being endowed with reason" (AT VII, 25: 27-29). On the other hand, the first 12 paragraphs of the *Outlines of Skepticism*, the conceptual core of the work, are also not overloaded with refutations of "theories of specific sciences." Instead, Sextus's books "against the learned," which contain mostly refutations of theories, have no place in Descartes's plan. Sextus's work is much more "scholarly" than Descartes' *Meditations*, primarily in terms of style. If Descartes is closer to the *Academica*, it is primarily stylistically. Refuting scientific theories would not contribute to the achievement of the "one thing" that he intended in the *Meditations* – to prove that the arguments that lead us to the knowledge of our minds and God "are the most certain and obvious of those that can be known to the human mind" (AT V, 16: 4-9). Or consider point 6. Certainly, Cartesian doubt implies a certain hierarchy of levels, a certain scenario aimed at increasing the degree of doubt. But in Sextus, we can also observe the multileveled arguments, which have already been discussed in the previous article (Khoma 2016: 16-17). So, there is a plot in which Sextus' views do not look "epistemologically monotonous" either.

Thus, this example shows that the differences between the Cartesian and Sextan strategies of doubt are rather uninformative in themselves, and can only be explained within a convincing general theoretical model. The nature of Cartesian doubt (and, accordingly, the prospects for comparing it with certain types of skepticism) depends significantly on an understanding of both Descartes' general intention and the specific ways in which this intention was realized.

3 Additional arguments in the discussion of freedom and isosthenia

In seeking to interpret the Cartesian doctrine, it is very important, in my opinion, to follow the methodology summarized by Jean-Luc Marion (Marion 2007: 11-13). At this point, the principle of exhaustiveness is most appropriate, according to which the analysis should cover all the texts of the author under study, and none of

them should be unreasonably marginalized, exalted, or silenced. The Cartesian position should be clarified with the simultaneous consideration of all collodic (that collide one another?) texts. Otherwise, a situation similar to the one analyzed in the previous article of contrasting Sextus' *isostheneia* with Cartesian "freedom" may arise (Khoma 2016: 14–17).

As already noted in the previous article, Denis Kambouchner believes that the entire First Meditation is "permeated with the nerve fibers of the vocabulary of freedom" (Kambouchner 2005: 218). On this basis, he quite reasonably interprets Cartesian suspension of judgment as something fundamentally different from *isostheneia*: "refraining from assenting to anything that might give the slightest cause for doubt" is "the highest proof of freedom" and of the mind's direct relation to its own acts; these are the two features that contrast Cartesian doubt with the doubt of Sextus Empiricus (Kambouchner 2005: 217). Kambouchner emphasizes the forced and passive nature of Sextus' *isostheneia*,[5] rooted in a certain objective relation of things and reasoning that the mind or soul must inevitably adhere to. Such an *isostheneia*, "in Descartes' eyes," simultaneously appears "in principle undesirable, false in its essence, and, in the truest sense, impossible." This Cartesian criticism is summarized in the theses that emphasize the artificiality and falsity of *isostheneia* as a perfect balance of arguments (Kambouchner 2005: 221-222). Kambouchner interprets Cartesian suspension of judgment as the result of free decision, freedom, while Sextus' epistemology is a purely passive state of mind, caused by the objective equivalence of "things and judgments," that is, "a deterministic cognitive situation."

Undoubtedly, Descartes attaches essential importance to freedom when it comes to suspension of judgment (and in the activity of the mind in general). But how does he understand this freedom or, in the words of Sylvia Giocanti, the negative capacity of the will to "refuse the evident, to go against nature and thus protect its freedom, its independence, from any guardianship" (Giocanti 2013)?

After all, Kambouchner in the work cited above recognizes the obvious fact that, according to Descartes, "the will does not have ... full power of persuasion (self-persuasion)" (Kambouchner 2005: 233). The latter is possible only as a result of the will's "full consent and capacity to understand," so the will cannot prescribe (*décréter*) to itself to be convinced of something. Moreover, he rightly recognizes that although Descartes presented doubt "as primarily an act of free will, one should neither elevate this will to an absolute nor imagine that it can act alone" (Kambouchner 2005: 238). Without going into the nuances of Kambouchner's further presentation, which is aimed at achieving a different goal, it is worth trying to assess his initial distinction between Sextan *epoche* and the Cartesian suspension. If the factor of freedom "should not be absolutized," if the will does not prescribe whether we should believe or not, then is it still the case that we are talking about the essential role of a certain passive state, a "deterministic cognitive situation," even if it is different from *isostheneia*? And what is, after all, this Cartesian free will, which, on the one hand, "considered in itself formally and accurately," is no less than divine (AT VII, 57: 20-21), and on the other hand, is essentially dependent in its inclinations: not on the coercion of an "external force," but on "the great light

[5] According to Kambuschner, the Sextus epoch "is not a fully intellectual act; it is not something that comes (émane) from a force inherent in the mind or soul; it is a kind of suspended state of being (un être suspendu)5, characterized by an essentially passive mode, that is, a state in which the mind or soul finds itself as a result of the equal force (isosthenia) of the things or considerations that cause it, so that none of them prevails either in terms of conviction (pistis) or consent (synkatathesis)" (ibid. : 218).

present in the intellect" (AT VII, 59: 1-3)? Furthermore, to what extent is Sextus' *isostheneia* reduced to a "deterministic cognitive situation" and, in general, is Sextus' skepticism completely incompatible with freedom? Obviously, attempts to characterize Cartesian suspension in terms of "freedom" separated from irresistible intellectual inclinations will not lead to an acceptable result, since they will always focus on fragments instead of the whole.

We should start with issues concerning Sextus. First of all, the term "freedom" (ἐλευθερία) is not used in the *Outlines of Skepticism* at all! Nor does Sextus speak of the will as a separate capacity. Does this mean that he in no way takes into account what we are used to calling "freedom," "unfreedom," "will," etc.? Not at all, for Sextus often uses, for example, the noun "desire" and the verb "to want" (βούλομαι). The non-use of certain terms does not mean that the meanings that we are used to associating with these terms are not expressed. Terms are often interchangeable, so if we want to adequately interpret the text of the *Outlines of Skepticism*, we must analyze it more carefully and pay attention to other terms that can express the problem of "freedom" and "will."

First of all, we should consider the beginning of PH I, 4; 406: 18-20 (I quote the translation from Etienne's Latin translation with all its features preserved): "But the skeptical δύναμις, that is, power and ability (*vis et facultas*), is the one that opposes, and that in any way (*quodlibet modo*), φαινομένα, that is, what is perceived by the senses (*sub sensum cadunt*), to what is νοουμένα, that is, what is perceived by the mind and intellect (*mente et intellectu percipiuntur*)." The expression "in any way" (*quodlibet modo*; καθ΄ οἱονδ ἤποτε τρόπον) is particularly noteworthy here. First of all, he points to the pluralism of modes, since it is a matter of opposing sometimes a phenomenon to a phenomenon, sometimes the conceivable to the conceivable, and sometimes the phenomenon and the conceivable (PH I, 4; 406: 29-31). Thus, the choice of ways of contrasting "what is perceived by the senses" and "what is perceived by the mind and intellect" is very trustworthy, depending on the situation. In addition, as noted in a previous article (Khoma 2016: 16-17), *isostheneia* implies a rather wide range of meanings: the choice of a particular level of argumentation for balancing is determined by the degree of persistence of the opponent, not the strength of his arguments. Williams came to a very similar conclusion: "Pyrrhonian antitheses should be psychologically effective rather than epistemologically balancing. Equivalence (*isostheneia*) does not arise from judgment but from experience, and experience leads directly to suspension of judgment" (Williams 2010: 296).

According to PH I, 4, equivalence-isostheneia (*aequa potentia*; Ἰσοσθ ένεια) is connected with the struggle of opposing theses, it is the "equal" convincing or unconvincing credibility of them (*impetranda aut non impetranda fides*; π ίστιν καὶἀπιστ ίαν)" (PH I, 4; 407: 2-3). However, this "equality" is not identical to the process of "opposing a phenomenon to an imaginable one"; it is rather the final state of impossibility to recognize that one of the opposed positions is superior to the other "as more probable (*tanquam fide dignior*)" (3-4). Therefore, we should not understand Sextus's *isostheneia* as a "precise" balance, measured almost with a pharmacist's scale. It is about the impossibility of giving a decisive preference to one of the opposites. Moreover, the impossibility is always *ad hoc*, since a skeptic, without (even if only declaratively) dogmatic prejudices, cannot "predict" what the outcome of the next critique will be. Thus, the question of the procedural aspect of *isostheneia* arises: balancing involves a constant selection of arguments and counterarguments, i.e., it is, first, not an instantaneous task that requires some time, and second, a creative one, involving inventions, heuristic ideas, etc. In the end, Cartesian solutions regarding the choice of arguments underlying the scenario of

the First Meditation are structurally very similar to the Sextus pair "opposition - *isostheneia*": creative combination of arguments is combined with Cartesian unwillingness to recognize at least one of these arguments as finally convincing. So, technically, this situation is no different from *isostheneia*; "freely made decisions" to disagree are not as significant here as the state of lack of sufficient grounds to agree, which determines these decisions in the main.

It can be assumed that the opposition, that is, the selection of positions that are in a state of mutual struggle (*eas quem sibi invicem adversentur*), actually makes it impossible to trust any of these positions. The *epoche* of suspending judgment stems from this impossibility. Without entering into a rather unpredictable discussion of what is the source of this impossibility ("deterministic cognitive situation" or "power inherent in the mind or soul"),[6] we must state that Cartesian ability to make free decisions is also not free from significant limitations, which sometimes lead to the impossibility of not recognizing, and sometimes to the impossibility of recognizing. However, conclusions on this issue should be based on Descartes' own words, which are quite unambiguous.

First, Descartes considered the "only error" of skeptics, which is the essence of their doctrine, to be "excessive doubt" (AT VII, 549: 24-25),[7] they "exceed all the limits of doubt" (AT VII, 548: 24-25). If we do not go to such extremes,[8] then doubt is highly desirable and even necessary for the cognition of truth: at least the one who creates a new philosophy cannot risk basing it on only plausible positions that may nevertheless turn out to be false in the course of time. He cannot rely on anything less than *summam certitudinem*, the highest certainty (AT VII, 548: 17). Thus, the skeptics' position then becomes a useful test of the validity of knowledge. Indeed, what will the skeptic say to someone who relies on not quite so obvious theses? "On what grounds will he refute them? Unless he classifies them as hopeless or condemned. A brilliant move, to be sure. But where, in this case, will they classify

[6] The inability to show more confidence in any of the opposing theses, the preliminary selection of these theses, the desire to achieve tranquility, and scientific research driven only by this desire - all this, given the deeply "egoistic" nature of *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* (see Khoma 2016: 13), is largely the result of decisions, albeit made under considerable pressure from circumstances, cognitive obviousness/non-obviousness, etc. However, this issue deserves a separate study.

[7] This story was discussed in a previous article, see (Khoma 2016: 9).

[8] At first glance, it is strange to hear a condemnation of the "excesses" of doubt from a philosopher who begins his philosophy with doubts, in his own words, "hyperbolic", *hyperbolicae dubitationes* (AT VII, 89: 19), that is, doubts "about all things" (AT VII, 12: 1-2), doubts so abstract and far removed from everyday life that even their usefulness "does not appear at first glance" (AT VII, 12: 5). These doubts, given the argument of the "Evil Genius," are considered by some researchers to be even bolder than skeptical ones. After all, in the end, it is not the cognizability of the world that is questioned, but its very existence, and on a basis that is "very insignificant and, so to speak, metaphysical" (AT VII, 36: 24-25). Therefore, "redundancy" here should be understood, in my opinion, in a purely functional way, and not in terms of, so to speak, the "TNT equivalent": the skeptic cannot abandon his doubts, while Descartes considers them only a necessary stage in the discovery of undoubted truths. Always making a special reflection on what makes an object "suspicious," Descartes clearly states that he never imitated "skeptics who doubt for the sake of doubt and pretend to be always indecisive; for my whole intention, on the contrary, was to assure myself and to throw away the shaky ground and sand in order to find rock or (at least) clay" (AT VII, VI, 29: 1-3). Doubt, according to Descartes, is the fastest way to "firm knowledge of things" (AT VII, VII, 130: 17-18), and cannot be ignored in things that are "most certainly" (*certissime*) known by the human mind (AT VII, 351: 7). Therefore, it is not the power of its inherent subversive influence that makes it "excessive", but only the way it is used: instead of a temporary means of verification, skeptics perceive it as the only acceptable intellectual position.

him?" (AT VII, 549: 25-28). So, doubt without excess (even if it is on skeptical grounds) is a useful thing in Descartes' eyes.

Second, although the skeptics doubted even geometric proofs, Descartes argues that "they would never do such a thing if they had properly known God" (AT VII, 384: 9-12; see also AT, X, 512: 15-16). For it is enough for them to "perceive something (*aliquid*) clearly, as they will cease to doubt and to be skeptics (AT VII, 476: 28 - 477: 1-4). Skeptics will be satisfied only with a truly clear perception, free from all doubt, on grounds "more certain than those from which all appearances are taken (*apparentia omnia amplecturtur*)" (AT VII, 549: 18-20).

This outline of Descartes' position on skeptics should be supplemented by a Cartesian understanding of freedom. For Descartes, freedom is a compensator for the imperfection of human nature, which is prone to fall into a state of ignorance, misunderstanding, and lack of grounds for making firm judgments. God gives me the freedom to "agree or disagree with some (things) for which He has not placed a clear and distinct perception in my intellect (AT VII, 61:4-7). Some perceptions, on the other hand, are so clear that they preclude any doubt or alternative explanation. For example, Descartes can only perceive God as "truly existing," and "not because my thinking has done so, that is, not because it imposes any necessity on any thing; but, on the contrary, because the necessity of the thing itself, that is, the existence of God, determines me to think in this way: for I am not free (*neque enim mihi liberum est*; French author's translation: *il n'est pas en ma liberté*) to think of God without existence ..., though I am free to imagine a horse with wings or without wings" (AT VII, 67: 5-11). For Descartes, the ultimate evident operates with an irresistibility that cannot be denied without committing a conscious self-deception. Perceptions whose clarity is derived from "the intellect alone" and not from the senses or false prejudices (AT VII, 146: 8-10) are, according to Descartes, irresistible: there is no point in "pretending" that our clear perceptions are false to God or an angel, "for the obviousness of our perceptions will not allow us to listen to such fictions" (AT VII, 146: 11-13). After all, this concept has long been described by Cartesian scholars. For example, Henri Gouhier already considered Cartesian irresistible agreement with true obviousness to be a kind of coercion that makes it impossible to consider the object of this obviousness to be untrue (Gouhier 1999: 92).

The general conclusion from this discussion should be the recognition that Cartesian freedom is fully compatible with internal states of coercive force that "determine" us to think in a certain way, because, when we experience them, we suddenly lose the apparent "freedom" to think differently.[9] Thus, this property of

[9] It is worth emphasizing once again that the parallels between Cartesian "freedom" and Sextus' *isostheenia* concerned a very narrow aspect: the forced influence of obviousness, clear states of mind. Sextus interprets the lack of such influence as *isosthenia*, which does not allow one to lean toward one or the other opposite (due to the weakness, "non-obviousness" of their influence, compared to the influence of the phenomenon/natural light). It is important to realize that Sextus does not interpret *isostheneia* as a positive circumstance. Rather, he sees it as a necessary evil, the positive response to which is *epoche*, and the even more positive consequence of the latter is *ataraxia*. The latter can therefore be considered a goal and a good thing, since it is the only consolation in the state of hopeless *isosthenia* that characterizes the widespread struggle of poorly grounded dogmas. *Isostheneia* can be analogous to Descartes' "indifference," which he assessed openly negatively as the "lowest" (*infimus*) level of freedom due to lack of knowledge: "for if I always saw clearly what is true and what is good, I would never decide how I should judge or what I should choose; and thus I would be completely free, never being indifferent" (AT VII, 58: 5-13). Indifference contributes to arbitrariness in judgment, it means the absence of grounds that reliably persuade, allowing in situations of conflict of opposites "to affirm, deny, or even not to judge anything about this subject" (59: 12-14). The *isostheneia* of grounds

thinking significantly brings the initial positions of Descartes and Sextus Empiricus closer together. The distinct passivity of the will, which is under the influence of perfect "natural light" clearly correlates with Sextus the irresistible influence of a phenomenon that involuntarily (*invitos*) leads us to agree with him (PH I, 10; 408: 37). *Isostheneia* indicates the absence of such a powerful influence, a state in which expressions of consent are problematized. In the end, the sectarian "dogmatists" committed to their own doctrines are very much like Cartesian proponents of false evident derived not from intellect alone but from senses or prejudices. These conclusions allow us to finally understand why the *Meditations* as a project can only succeed if the skeptical position is represented by Sextus Empiricus.

4 Certainty, doubt and the project of philosophical meditation

At first, it should be noted that the aforementioned text by Williams only confirms the fact that modern researchers focus mainly on the differences between Cartesian and other versions of skepticism, in particular Sextus.[10] But, in my opinion, the Cartesian refutation of skepticism is not superficial and involves a significant involvement of skeptical provisions in the Cartesian concept itself. There are many grounds for proving this influence. My goal here is to reconstruct elements of Sextus Empiricus' doctrine that are embedded in the Cartesian concept of certitude, the cornerstone of all Cartesian metaphysics. This is the Sextus' version of the skeptical doctrine, despite Descartes' well-known orientation toward working with all kinds of skepticism.

The point is that Sextus Pyrrhonism cannot be reduced to doubt, *isostheneia*, epistemology, and *ataraxia* alone. After all, the works of Sextus Empiricus contain a very substantial set of positive theses that are not dogmatic, but claim to be obvious. In my analysis of the Sextus' doctrine, which I presented in my previous article, these theses were identified and described.[11] The importance of these

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can manifest itself in the somewhat paradoxical form of an easy transition from one ground to another: the very knowledge that it is only a supposition can "push (*impellendam*) my assent to the opposite (*in contrariam*)" (22-23). However, such uncertainty, in fact, makes it impossible to give a firm preference to anything, and this is an exact copy of the Sextan *isostheneia*.

[10] Theses such as the proof of the influence of Sharon's ἐποχή on the Cartesian cogito (Maia Neto 2003: 83 sqq.) And although the doctrines of Sextus and Descartes are generally distinguished, there are significant reasons to focus on the similarities that unite them. After all, scholarly criticism is based on arguments rather than authority, and the field of skepticism studies is no exception. Suffice it to recall the article by Dominic Perler, who questioned the now-classic ending of the "seventeenth-century Pyrrhonic crisis" once put forward by Richard Popkin (Perler 2004).

[11] Here we can limit ourselves to simply repeating them (see Khoma 2016). Khoma 2016: 11-14): 1) the phenomenon is "experienced" by us, it "involuntarily leads us to agree (with it)", its perception through the ability to imagine is our passive state, which skeptics "do not reject", i.e., with which they "agree"; 2) by searching for whether the object that presents itself is really what it presents itself, Pyrrhonists at least do not agree with what it presents itself; 3) the phenomenon is a kind of standard of skepticism that does not yield to searching and doubting; being in it as a passive state, it is impossible to doubt what the object of representation is; 4) both doubts about what is thought and conviction about a phenomenon are always essentially connected with the first person singular, with the "I" as the center of phenomenal experience; the skeptic does not affirm dogmas, but always says what "seems" to him at a given time; 5) the realm of "passive states" includes not only "senses" but also various states of direct self-awareness that are equated with senses ("instructions of nature," "impulses of passions," "dictates of laws and customs," requirements of "mastering the craft," etc.) To these points

features of Sextus' doctrine will become clear if we put ourselves in the shoes of Descartes, who seeks to develop a way to distinguish between the certain and the uncertain without error and, parallel to this, an effective anti-skeptic argument. But how can one refute skepticism if it destroys any simple dogmatic statement? The question is not even whether this destruction will be real and not illusory, but how to find at least some common ground with skeptics? That is, with opponents who do not take any clear position, who warn in advance that they speak according to what "seems to them now" (*quid nobis nunc videantur*; τὸνῦνφαιν όμενονήμῖν. - PH I, 1; 405: 31-32), refute others without positioning themselves. "They doubt for the sake of doubt," as Descartes put it.

The key point here is a feature of Sextus' doctrine as primary positive statements. True, these statements are not "dogmatic," that is, they do not give grounds for theoretical discussion, as they relate only to "phenomena" and internal attitudes. But this is the only material from which one can proceed firmly without running into skeptical counterarguments, the only thing that a Pyrrhonist will agree with, that is, the only chance for a common discussion space. The skeptic admits something about his inner reality, referring to some of its "states" caused by irresistible influences. Only here can a launching pad for an immanent critique of skepticism emerge. The fact that Descartes was interested in such a critique leaves no doubt: the question of "what I will say to skeptics who cross all the boundaries of doubt" was, as already mentioned, essential for him, as was the concern for borrowing means of skeptical criticism of unfounded dogmas.

The basis for this may be the thesis from the key paragraph of the *Outlines of Skepticism* (PH I, 7; 407: 32-33): *Nulli ... rei incertae et controversae* (τῶν ἀδήλων) *assentitur Pyrrhonius*. This is an almost literal formulation of the "negative" version of the Cartesian rule of determining truth: "whenever the truth[12] of a thing is not known, one should refrain from passing a judgment" (AT VII, 62: 1-2). It is true that Descartes' thesis is based on the correlation between the will and "what the intellect clearly and distinctly shows" (AT VII, 62: 12-15). However, this "pervasiveness of the nerve fibers of the will" does not eliminate the identity of both rules, Sextus' and Cartesian, in pragmatic terms.

Thus, recalling Descartes' previous remarks on skeptics, we can easily reconstruct his argumentative strategy: based on a generally sound methodology, skeptics do not have the means to perceive anything clearly. In this case, it is enough to (a) move to the level of what they indisputably recognize, that is, to the level of *apparentia*, to the level of non-theoretical experience, which we would now call "phenomenal;" (b) to show that skeptics are inattentive to the peculiarities of this level, to find phenomena that will be convincing not only internally but also intersubjectively; (c) to take advantage of their irresistible power to force skeptics to accept them; (d) to extract from these initial phenomena a number of obvious phenomenal consequences that skeptics will also be forced to accept; (e) to try to find a "phenomenon" that is also "conceivable"; (e) to move to a level of the "conceivable" that would consist only of "obviousnesses" no less powerful than the "phenomenal," that is, to find conceivable things that are as certain (*certae*,

should be added a sincere skeptical attitude toward "searching" (ζήτησις) and a strong disagreement with unfounded claims to truth.

[12] Sextus, of course, criticized "truth" as a dogmatic concept, but, according to Descartes, "whatever I perceive very clearly and very distinctly" (35: 14-15) is true. That is, we are not talking about a dogma derived "from the unobvious," but about, in fact, irresistible states of obviousness, that is, in Sextus' terminology, a phenomenon.

πρόδηλα) as the phenomenon and just the opposite of things that are uncertain (*incertae*, ἄδηλα), that is, the basis of clear and distinct cognition available to man.

The key to the success of this project should be the strength of the skeptical position, which is based only on the experience of perceiving phenomena and recognizing this experience, which is irrefutable for Pyrrhonism. After all, as Sextus declares on behalf of all Pyrrhonists, "what we passively experience (*iis ... a quibus patimur*; τοῖς ... κινο ῦσινἡμᾶςπαθητικῶς) and which forcibly brings us to agreement (*coacti ad assensum addicitur*; ἀναγκαστικῶς ἄγουσιν εἰς συγκατάθεσιν), we fast and thereby calm down (*cedimus et acquiescimus*; εἴκομεν)" (PH I, 20).

Thus, one who seeks to immanently refute skepticism and at the same time (in fact, this is the same task) to build a solid foundation of knowledge that is safe from any doubt, would inevitably have to work, at least at first, only with the phenomenon, without going to the theoretical level–until a way is found to move from a certain and obvious phenomenon to an equally conceivable one, if such a way exists at all. This task is hardly compatible with the traditional philosophical formulation of theses and their subsequent defense. Even the very traditional genre of treatise, the most common in philosophical discussions. Descartes was forced to look for not only new arguments, but also a new form of their presentation.

This form was "meditations," a genre of spiritual literature, exemplified by the works of Ignacio Loyola, St. Teresa of Avila, St. Juan de la Cruz, and others (see: Kambouchner 2005: 137-147). By giving the philosophical work the title "Meditations" for the first time in history, Descartes planned to take advantage of the features of spiritual meditation as a genre that were favorable to his idea: (1) close focus on individual inner experience; (2) the desire to purify this experience from false impurities, to expose and eliminate illusions and false thinking habits; (3) the development of new experience, new inner guidance, which occurs in the process of meditation itself. In this regard, Henri Gouhier emphasized the Cartesian distinction between agreement with the obvious and conviction of the obvious: due to the resistance of old prejudices, agreement is not always accompanied by conviction. That is why the knowledge of the truth presupposes the habit of believing the true, and the *Meditations* "is not just a careful reading", this work should be read often rather than for a long time (Gouhier1999: 93). Descartes seeks to transform the attitudes of his reader, to cultivate a certain culture of working with the obvious.[13] Without this culture, it is impossible to distinguish between the degrees of obviousness on which the whole Cartesian project is based: working at the level of experience, we can only take into account our sensitivity to the power of "natural light," not theoretical or factual theses themselves, which only have to be grounded. Thus, Pyrrhonian certainty (i.e., the indisputability of phenomena) and the rootedness of this certainty in the experience of our self is the only possible starting point of Cartesian meditation.

Descartes' strategy of achieving certainty is inextricably linked to the prohibition of leaving the circle of irresistible experience. Indeed, only the proof of God's existence in the third Meditation allows the meditator to go beyond

[13] Gouhier draws attention to an important thought of Descartes: "...in order to be always disposed to judge well, we need habit in addition to knowledge of truth. For since we cannot be continuously attentive to the same thing, no matter how clear and obvious the reasons that convinced us of a truth at first, false appearances may later dissuade us from trusting it, unless long and frequent meditation imprints it on our minds so much that it becomes a habit. ... Indeed, we lack knowledge of what we should do, not in a theoretical sense, but in a practical sense, that is, we lack the firm habit of believing in this truth" (AT IV, 295: 21-29 - 296: 1-8)

phenomenal experience for the first time; it is God who turns out to be the specific object of obvious inner experience that becomes the fundamental guarantee of the existence of something outside our minds. This circumstance is supported by several observations of contemporary Cartesian scholars. In 1986, Jean-Luc Marion noted an eloquent "lexical fact": "*substantia* never appears in the line of reasons before Meditatio III" (Marion 2014: 61). Vincent Caro has made an even more telling discovery, showing that before the Third Meditation Descartes speaks of the "I" not as "something" (*quid*), but as "someone" (*quis*). In addition, the first case when the self is called a "substance" (which is what the pronoun *quid* actually corresponds to) rather than a "thing" (*res*) appears only in the Third Meditation (AT VII, 44: 23). Carraud interprets these facts in the sense that before the Third Meditation, the Cartesian self is not defined as a "substance," so the *res cogatans* in the Second Meditation simply means a thing as something that thinks, is, at least temporarily, "desubstantialized" and, as ego *ille*, is in "search of identity" (Carraud 2010: 62).

Hence, it seems very reasonable to assert that in the First and Second Meditations, before the proof of God's existence, which first appears only in the Third Meditation, the Cartesian meditator uses only the clarity of inner experience, those irresistible "states of mind" that Sextus Empiricus also recognizes. It is these states of mind that allow us not only to disagree with uncritical prejudices, but also to recognize the ultimate clarity of the existence of the meditator's self, and subsequently the thinking nature of the latter. Without these Pyrrhonian presuppositions, without Sextus' willingness to accept the irresistible influence of a particular "phenomenon," "passion," or "state of mind" (*status mentis*), the immanent critique of skepticism made in the First and Second Meditations would be impossible.

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