STROUD'S NEO-PYRRHONISM
AND THE HUMAN CONDITION

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Summary: This paper presents what seems to be at the heart of Stroud's conception of philosophy. According to Stroud, some of us feel an urge to understand ourselves and the world that leads to philosophy, but the latter's promises to satisfy that desire by a theory are not fulfilled, since the detached position required by the philosophical project is not or cannot be achieved by us, nor can we deliver any metaphysical verdict, whether positive or negative; though Stroud argues more forcefully against negative verdicts, he clearly does not endorse positive verdicts. I think that seeing both sides as equally not acceptable constitutes what ancient Pyrrhonists called equipollence (*isosthéneia*) and this is an updated form of the Pyrrhonian suspension of judgment (*epokhê*) about independent reality. Acknowledging the plights of the philosophical project, however, is only the starting point of philosophy. Despite that unavoidable metaphysical dissatisfaction, Stroud thinks that the philosophical desire may be satisfied in other ways: first, the very idea of the impossibility of such detachment brings with it a certain distinctive understanding of our situation in the world; second, the invulnerability of some beliefs, such as color beliefs, and the indispensability of certain beliefs, such as causal, inferential, and evaluative beliefs, bring both enlightenment and reassurance. Not delivering verdicts, and coming to see how we cannot deliver them, produces some kind of satisfaction, which is, in my view, a form of Pyrrhonian tranquility (*ataraxía*). Stroud seems to conceive the continuity of the philosophical enterprise as a search for that detached position, as if the initial desire could never die or even be altered. Just like the Pyrrhonist, Stroud thinks of philosophy as an on going activity: as a search after truth about an independent reality (*zétesis*). This paper argues that, once we are conscious of the plight of the philosophical project and of the inconsistency of the philosophical desire, we should go on philosophizing, not with any hope to attain truth, even if this is what we in fact are after, for we shall end only with

dissatisfaction; but with more modest goals in mind (like merely to describe our conceptual capacities and to understand our engaged situation, while sticking to our basic, ordinary beliefs and knowledge claims), for, if we aim at these goals, we can be satisfied. That is the more adequate neo-Pyrrhonian stance.

Key words: metaphysical urge; philosophical project; metaphysical dissatisfaction; connective analysis; invulnerability; indispensability.

1. Introduction.[1]

The questions I would like to raise in this paper are the following: how should we conceive the desire we feel towards philosophy? Can philosophy satisfy that desire? Should we go on pursuing philosophy if we acknowledge the impossibility of satisfying it? If we should, then on what basis? Is there an impact of these philosophical reflections on the philosopher and on the desire itself? I want to discuss these questions in the light of what Barry Stroud has to say about them, since he is arguably the best contemporary philosopher who meditated on such questions. Since anyone deeply concerned with skepticism cannot but become suspicious about philosophy itself and its project of knowing the nature of an independent reality, the likely result is to focus on the very activity of philosophizing and its meaning.

I offer an interpretation of Stroud's conception of philosophy. My primary purpose is not to discuss and criticize some specific points, as some have done, but only to see how all his views in different areas, especially in epistemology and metaphysics, are interconnected and how they evolved through time. One of my purposes is to show that Stroud's conception of philosophy is closer to ancient Pyrrhonism than it might seem and can be seen as a form of updated Pyrrhonism. I think that not only there is a historical basis for that claim, but also Stroud himself seems to imply this conclusion in his paper on contemporary Pyrrhonism.

The secondary aim of this paper is to make some suggestions that seem to me to improve Stroud's neo-Pyrrhonism. Perhaps Stroud would agree with some of the things I will suggest, like the impact of philosophy on the philosopher, but, as he didn't say them, it may be important to highlight those consequences. As to some

other things, like the impact of philosophical dissatisfaction on the very desire towards philosophy and the corresponding transformation of the form of our philosophical desire, he may well disagree, for his intellectual experience in the face of philosophical frustration seems to be somewhat different from mine. But, as I see it, it is not just a matter of having different intellectual experiences; it is also of what is the rational reaction to a deep suspicion of the traditional philosophical project. I hope that this paper at least furnishes him with the occasion to clarify some points of his conception of philosophy that could be explored further.

Let me summarize the main points. At first, we feel an unspecified or at least very hard to describe urge to understand the human condition, which leads some people to philosophy. We (philosophers) expect that philosophy will satisfy it, if we just find the correct or true theory about who we are and how we are related to the world. Accordingly, we start looking for answers to the philosophical questions about the human condition. We feel it under one specific form, hoping a satisfaction or at least thinking that it would be satisfied only if we could reach a completely disengaged position and discover the absolute truth about the independent world and be absolutely certain about our knowledge in general and know the objective values. However, if the urge takes that form, it seems inconsistent, for we would have to be both in an engaged and in a disengaged position. Moreover, even if we ignore this predicament and simply jump to disengaged conclusions, a metaphysical verdict or an epistemological theory won't put that urge to rest, since it would make things ever worse. These negative points seem to match perfectly a Pyrrhonian position.

Stroud, on the other hand, points out two further essential points in his position. First, since philosophy leaves everything as it is (in a qualified way, as we shall see), we hold our ordinary beliefs and knowledge claims. Stroud's notions of invulnerability and indispensability play an essential role in safeguarding our everyday beliefs from the philosophical attack, for they are immune in at least two senses: they cannot be consistently doubted, nor can we just put them aside. Second, not all philosophical satisfaction must come from a disengaged position. If one realizes which is the only kind of illumination that can be obtained in our engaged position, then one can satisfy her philosophical desires. The initial somewhat undefined urge, that was subsequently shaped by the traditional way of doing philosophy in an inconsistent form, may have now a new philosophical form and, in

this mature form, illumination of our human condition through connective analysis may satisfy it. These two further points, I submit, are also Pyrrhonian.

If this is correct, I think some further consequences that Stroud do not draw follow: even if our ordinary opinions are left untouched, the philosopher is not left as he was before he began to philosophize; and serious philosophy helps us to shape our desire into a modest form that can be satisfied. The desire for truth about the independent world may be both undying and intense, as Stroud says, but it need not necessarily assume its dogmatic form. One may preserve the philosophical desire in a modified, attenuated form. We can still go on trying to discover truths about the world, always "working from within" (in ordinary life and in the sciences); and we can also go on trying to understand philosophically our human situation (also "from within"), by discussing what dogmatic philosophers say and write, but always conscious of our engaged condition and without any expectation to reach a disengaged position. That is something very important and this can be achieved only by doing serious philosophy, when we step back to think about philosophy's plights, and conceive philosophy as an activity of describing our situation and beliefs.

2. The urge and its satisfaction.

According to Stroud, human beings feel a desire towards an understanding of themselves and their place in the world (EMD, p. 159; UHK, p. 124). This is a vague way to express an urge perhaps deeply rooted in our very nature. It is an essential idea in Stroud's view that we do not quite understand that urge or do not know exactly what may satisfy it (2008, p. 126). Our desire of an understanding of our human situation may be satisfied in many different ways, and religion or art could perhaps provide what one expects or hopes for. In that sense, the desire seems to be universal.

Another way of satisfying it is by doing philosophy. That is a "more reflective attitude" (EMD, p. 3) of dealing with that desire. If one is inclined towards philosophy and carries on a "critical assessment" (EMD, p. 3) of our ways of thinking and acting, then one may arrive at a satisfactory rational account of what he is looking for. Thus conceived, philosophy is, among other things, an effort to produce a rational understanding of ourselves and our place in the natural world as well as in the social world. Its value lies in the special kind of contribution it may offer to our understanding the human condition, thereby producing a satisfaction of the very urge that inclines us towards philosophy. Through an exercise of our reasoning

faculties, from a rational attitude, we should appease or placate our deeply rooted urge.

One could think that Stroud is following Kant in that human reason, by itself, has an internal structure such that it aspires to a rational understanding of our human condition. But I think Stroud has something more Humean in mind. According to Stroud, philosophers, when they try to satisfy their philosophical desire, engage in a tradition that lasts for more than two thousand years. On this first point, Hume says,

> I am sensible… that there are in England, in particular, many honest gentlemen, who being always employ'd in their domestic affairs, or amusing themselves in common recreations, have carry'd their thoughts very little beyond those objects, which are everyday expos'd to their senses" (T 1.4.7.14)

Not only this rational enterprise is restricted to those peculiar people who engage with that tradition, but above all there is no such thing as an internal development of reason (whatever that means). What we have to go on is only what history legated to us. Hume is also suspicious of such abstract schemes of thought:

> I wish we cou'd communicate to our founders of systems, a share of that earthy mixture, as an ingredient, which they commonly stand in much need of, and which wou'd serve to temper those fiery particles, of which they are compos'd." (T 1.4.7.14)

Stroud is not looking for a necessary, abstract development of human reason in general, but trying to understand what some human beings, called philosophers, are doing, when they engage in a historical practice of thinking in a specific way called philosophy.

There is an apparently straightforward way in which philosophers may rationally bring the desired satisfaction of that fundamental urge. Feeling that urge, they raise questions such as: are our beliefs about the world true? Do we know those things we think we know? Is the world really like the way it looks to us? Is there an independent reality? How is the world in itself? Is it really colored? Are there objective values? Are there logical and causal necessities? The philosopher starts to look for an answer to these philosophical questions. She will try to find the correct answer to her questions by reaching a verdict or elaborating a theory. When this

kind of questions guide the way we try to meet our original urge, one can say that the urge is transformed into a philosophical desire, for it has now a more distinctive form. That verdict or theory, built by philosophical reflection and argument, will put her philosophical desire to rest, if the verdict or theory is rationally acceptable.

I think this approach to philosophy is very similar to that approach developed by ancient skeptics, especially Pyrrhonists like Sextus Empiricus.[2] As Sextus points out, the causal principle of Pyrrhonism is precisely a hope of attaining tranquility, which should put an original disturbance to rest (PH 1.12). It must be admitted that, so far, this approach is not unique among Pyrrhonists, for it is common to all philosophers alike, for they all hope to put an end to this disturbance by finding out the truth about the world. After all, philosophy is a pursuit of truth (PH 1.1-4).

3. Dissatisfaction and distortion.

Unfortunately, things may not be as easy as they might seem at first sight. A glance at the history of philosophy shows how difficult it is to find a satisfactory answer to those questions. When we philosophize, instead of finding the true theory we hoped for, we may end up with empty hands. Instead of finding the truth, philosophy ends up in an awkward position. By engaging in that long philosophical tradition, one quickly realizes that perhaps too many solutions have been given. Instead of finding a solution, it seems that doing philosophy even make things more obscure. "Philosophy thrives on paradox, absurdity, dilemma, and difficulty. There are often what look like good arguments for surprising or outrageous conclusions." (2000, p. 1) One reason why history of philosophy shows less progress than what might have been expected is that perhaps philosophers are too eager to find an answer to a question they do not fully understand.[3]

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[2] Skepticism, in this paper, is to be distinguished from Pyrrhonism. While the former doubts about our knowledge of the external world, the latter questions philosophy itself. Another difference is the following: skepticism (as usually understood) relies on a peculiar, controversial conception of perception, whereas Pyrrhonism does not. In other words, skeptics assume that perception is subjective and falls short from direct contact with the world, but Pyrrhonists employ other kinds of arguments, such as the modes of Agrippa. What Stroud calls "skepticism" would be considered a negative dogmatism by ancient Pyrrhonists; in fact, Sextus uses such form of negative dogmatism in order to neutralize positive dogmatism, when he explores dialectically the Stoic and the Academic conception of perception; but, of course, Sextus never endorses such conception of perception (M 7.401-445). Moreover, it seems very important to contemporary Pyrrhonists to distance themselves from (Cartesian, modern, global) skeptics; see Fogelin (1994, 2003), Porchat (1991), Kornblith (2010). See note 7.

[3] Kornblith (2010) thinks that the lack of consensus in the history of philosophy leads to suspension of judgment. That is a very important Pyrrhonian idea (PH 1.26). Stroud, however, does not insist on disagreement as a major reason of concern; his main point is that, once we start philosophizing, we face

The desire to understand the human condition lies at the root of at least two philosophical projects:[4] the epistemological project and the metaphysical project.[5] Stroud dwells mainly on these two main areas and in both the result is that the philosophical project cannot be carried out. The epistemological project, according to Stroud, springs from the desire we have to understand our knowledge in a very special way. "We are interested in all our knowledge of the world taken all together, or in some domain characterized in general terms." (UHK, p. 4) That epistemological understanding is part of a philosophical understanding of the human condition and should improve it. However, according to Stroud, there is no such thing as an understanding of all our knowledge at once. "Understood correctly, the project cannot succeed." (PPP, p. 309) We cannot detach ourselves from all our beliefs and explain all our knowledge of the world at once.

The metaphysical project also fails. "In trying to raise the question, we cannot rid ourselves of a conception of the world as filled with coloured objects, so we can never achieve the kind of detachment from our beliefs that the metaphysical question seems to require." (QR, p. 193) This very same idea surfaces in EMD. The upshot of all his arguments concerning colour, causal dependence, necessity, and moral value, is that "we cannot carry out a certain intellectual project." (QR, p. 193) In metaphysics, what is at stake is a *verdict* on the connection between our beliefs and an independent reality. When someone is doing metaphysics, what she wants is to find out how the world really is; for instance, if objects are really colored. It is as if the urge we feel would not admit any other kind of outcome, except a metaphysical verdict concerning the color of objects.

> But being unable to arrive at an appropriate metaphysical verdict, or even to raise the metaphysical question in the right way, can be disappointing and frustrating. It leaves us without something we feel we want and should be able to get." (QR, p. 178; cf. QR, p. 209)

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paradoxes etc. Stroud focuses more on the content of the difficulties than on more formal features of the debate. But, then, Pyrrhonists also used more detailed arguments as well.

[4] In QR, Stroud refers to the metaphysical project as the philosophical project (QR, p. 3), as if that metaphysical project were to be identified with the philosophical project. In EMD, he calls it simply the metaphysical project (EMD, p. 3). It seems to me that EMD is more precise. So, I will talk about the philosophical project as a genus including both the metaphysical and the epistemological projects as specific kinds. I do not think that all philosophical projects necessarily involve a detached position; but, for Stroud, both the epistemological and the metaphysical project, as he describes them, do.

[5] Of course, Stroud also devoted himself to a number of other topics in philosophy of mind, philosophy of language, morals etc. However, I shall not dwell on them here.

The metaphysical project is doomed to failure just like the epistemological one.

Stroud says that, while in *The Significance of Philosophical Skepticism* he still thought that it could be possible to reach a detached position and from there see that knowledge is impossible, from *The Quest for Reality* onwards he refuses that possibility; and, he adds, there is no need to think that in both areas the results will be identical (EMD, p. xii). One could think that the contrast is between his epistemological reflections and his metaphysical reflections; it is not that Stroud's views changed, but that the differences depends on the nature of the subject. If that were the correct reading, we should expect that he would still go on saying that in epistemology detachment is possible (though not realized). But that is not the case, for he later came to deny that also in epistemological reflection detachment is impossible (2009, p. 568). In my view the contrast is that between the possibility of disengagement and its impossibility, irrespective of the philosophical topic under discussion. Even if there is this important difference in Stroud's development, one cannot but stress the unity of those two phases: in the first one, though it was still an open possibility that we could perhaps detach from our immersion in the world, the fact is that Stroud thought we never really get there; later, he went further and denied that there is a possibility for such a detachment in both metaphysics and epistemology.

However, from a Pyrrhonian point of view the new position seems weaker. After all, despite Stroud's arguments, it may still be possible to reach a disengaged position, for dogmatists also present powerful arguments on their behalf. Isn't Stroud going too far in trusting his own arguments that show that it is impossible to disengage? The first answer to this worry is that Stroud do not think he has definitely established that is is impossible to attain a disengaged position; for he sees his own arguments as merely "plausible" (QR, p. x) or "likely" (QR, p. 209); though they are "very good reasons" (QR, p. 209), still he cannot trust completely his own arguments. Is this enough to satisfy a Pyrrhonist? Maybe not. For one thing, Pyrrhonists rejected the probabilism held by the Academic skeptics; for Pyrrhonists, there is equipollence (*isosthéneia*) between arguments on both sides of a question (PH 1.8, 1.12 etc.). Taking his arguments as merely probable, not certain, brings Stroud closer to Academic skepticism, not to Pyrrhonism.

But one might wonder: why should Stroud endorse even a probable verdict concerning the question of a possible disengagement instead of sticking to a balanced position? An answer would be: if one thinks of this question as a

metaphysical one, then Stroud would say that he does not deliver a negative verdict, not even a probable one; he is not in the business of trying to prove "a bold antitheoretical thesis" (QR, p. x-xi), but only raising "the suspicion that perhaps the goal is not fully reachable" (QR, p. xii). Stroud comes back to this idea in his conclusions.

> I do not say it can be proved once and for all that such disappointment is inevitable in the quest for the reality of colours of things. Any convincing proof of such a verdict would give us finality and so a kind of metaphysical satisfaction after all, and so it could not be sound. (QR, p. 209)

This is perfectly compatible with Pyrrhonism.

Stroud adds a new, and to my mind, very important idea to his analysis of the shortcomings of traditional philosophy. How should one react when one feels this metaphysical dissatisfaction? "It is difficult to know what to do in the face of it." (EMD, p. 58) He points out a kind of smart way of obtaining the desired metaphysical satisfaction. If we are disappointed and frustrated, "this makes it tempting to try to get what we want in some other way." (QR, p. 178) Instead of trying to disengage progressively from our engaged position, one could simply jump to a disengaged position and deliver her verdicts. This is something one could really do in Stroud's view, for nothing forbids this move. The trouble is to move consistently from our engaged position into a disengaged one, but it is not impossible to deliver a verdict from a disengaged position.

However, if we yield to this temptation, somber problems arise. First, we do not follow our philosophical reason, since we would deliberately ignore some of the difficulties that philosophy presents us. We should arrive at a disengaged position working "from within". There is no other way of doing philosophy once we acknowledge that we must start where we are before doing philosophy. So, the only route to a disengaged position is to try to overcome our engaged position by progressively leaving it behind. "One way would be to dismiss or ignore all the difficulties I have drawn attention to in previous chapters and simply opt for a theory that would answer the metaphysical question." (QR, p. 178) In so far as this attitude deliberately ignores difficulties, it would not be rational; and in so far as one merely chooses one or another verdict, without meeting the Pyrrhonian challenge, it

is arbitrary. Being rational and arbitrary are two of the problems of this move. But there are other problems as well.

Suppose we could reach a detached position, such as is required by the metaphysical question, and, moreover, we could develop a metaphysical theory about, say, colour or causal dependence. Would our metaphysical desire be satisfied by a metaphysical theory illegitimately obtained? Would we be better off by taking this irrational route? Stroud's answer is: no, we wouldn't. "That would avoid the frustration of having no metaphysical position, but it would be no real solution. It would bring with it dissatisfactions and disappointments of its own." (QR, p. 178) There is no need to follow in detail all kinds of discomforts and all kinds of distortions that an arbitrary choice for one metaphysical theory would bring with it. Suffice to say that the obstacles to reach a satisfactory metaphysical theory "reappear in another form as difficulties in accommodating any such theory to what we already know or believe." (QR, p. 178) Stroud develops that theme in a number of insightful pages, showing that "we would not have a consistent, fully satisfying conception of the world" (QR, p. 180), that "it would yield no stable resolution of its own" (QR, p. 180), that "this would leave us in a position that is unsatisfactory or disappointing in a different way" (QR, p. 180), that "this is not a happy intellectual position" (QR, p. 181), that "acceptance of the metaphysical error theory is what would put us in this uncomfortable position" (QR, p. 181).

One may go on searching "the kind of reassurance we seek" or show that our beliefs are "no more than distinctive responses on our part" (EMD, p. 58) In either case, with a positive or a negative metaphysical verdict, this supposed satisfaction "leads to distortion of what we actually think", thereby "we will avoid frustration and metaphysical disappointment only at the cost of misunderstanding ourselves." (EMD, p. 58) Though philosophers may feel quite satisfied with their verdicts and theories,

> whatever satisfaction we achieve is gained only at the price of misunderstanding ourselves. And that provides no lasting satisfaction either, at least to those who can recognize the distortion as distortion. (2008, p. 127)

And, of course, one should recognyize them as such.

Philosophy rushes after an answer to its questions, not only drives us to an unavoidable metaphysical dissatisfaction when we try to deal rationally with our metaphysical desire, but it puts us in an even worse situation, when, proceeding irrationally, opts for some metaphysical verdict and develops a metaphysical theory, since it has all the dissatisfactions revealed by the second kind of philosophy, plus some dissatisfactions and discomforts of its own. "In that way it brings into question the very possibility of understanding ourselves that seems embodied in the idea of a philosophical theory." (2008, p. 128) Stroud's conclusion is quite clear: "We cannot accept both theories and find intellectual satisfaction." (QR, p. 189)

Our situation doesn't seem as promising as we thought at the beginning. In fact, it is even worse than what we may have thought after realizing that the philosophical desire cannot be fulfilled. We feel a metaphysical desire and we want to satisfy it. Philosophy promises to placate our urge. We think that it may be easy to satisfy it (cf. QR, p. 16): we just have to bring about an answer to the metaphysical question. However, this desire cannot be satisfied because there is no route to a detached position as is required by the metaphysical question. This leaves us with a feeling that we cannot achieve what we feel we should have. Alternatively, if we try to get what we want through an irrational, or at least an arbitrary, way, just by adopting some metaphysical theory, no matter which, we would feel more dissatisfied. One way or the other, dissatisfaction supervenes on the metaphysical desire.

In sum, throughout his career Stroud argued that both the epistemological and the metaphysical project demand a detached position, and (first) that we do not arrive at, and (later) cannot arrive at, that required, or desired, detached position. He also emphasized that the philosophical project always led to a dissatisfaction and, later, he came to point out that, even if we could reach a disengaged position, we would not be better off.[6]

Since pointing out that the traditional philosophical project cannot succeed is certainly one characteristic of Pyrrhonism, Stroud appears inclined to call himself a contemporary Pyrrhonist, just like Robert J. Fogelin. As, he himself says: "So, if that

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[6] I will not be concerned with the reasons for Stroud's position: they are too many, too complex, too far reaching. Obviously, to understand Stroud's position one would have to go into all these highly abstract, detailed, intricate, abstruse arguments. The trouble is that we may not get to the bottom of the "real source of the inevitable metaphysical dissatisfaction" (EMD, p. 146), which "lies in our unavoidable immersion in whatever conception of the world we seek metaphysical understanding of." (EMD, p. 145; cf. EMD, p. 156) Without a serious philosophical examination of Stroud's arguments, we may never grasp that real source.

is Pyrrhonism, maybe there is at least one contemporary Pyrrhonist after all. If so, then I think there are two of us, because that is the proposition Fogelin argues for and accepts in the second half of *Pyrrhonian Reflections on Knowledge and Justification"* (PPP, p. 309). How can we understand this at least partial agreement between Stroud and the Pyrrhonist?

A terminological point must be noted here: what Stroud calls metaphysics is similar to what Pyrrhonists call dogmatism. In Stroud's terminology, in metaphysics philosophers deliver a verdict (whether positive or negative) about independent reality from a disengaged position; this verdict can be about, say, logical necessity, causal relations, or moral values. Pyrrhonists say that judgments (whether positive or negative) about non-evident things (*ádela*), or things in themselves (*kath'auta*), are dogmatic. For ancient Pyrrhonists, logical necessity and inference was discussed in the logical part of philosophy; causal relations in the physical part; moral values in the ethical part. Stroud, however, calls all these three parts "metaphysics", as if metaphysics were one part of philosophy (another one would be "epistemology"). So, we have different ways of speaking, and different ways of conceiving philosophy. However, the basic idea of a transcendence and a transcendent judgment appears similar to both. When a philosopher delivers a verdict that goes beyond our engaged position, Stroud calls it "metaphysical" and Pyrrhonists "dogmatic". Thus, though the equivalence may not be perfect, it appears to me that, roughly speaking, they do match.

If that is correct, then the idea that we cannot deliver a metaphysical verdict is close to the Pyrrhonian *epokhé*. Not to deliver a verdict is not to affirm, nor to deny any proposition concerning the independent reality after careful consideration of the subject. That is precisely the Pyrrhonian notion of suspension of judgment: concerning independent reality or reality as it is in itself, the Pyrrhonist neither affirms, nor denies any proposition. One can see in Stroud's avoidance of any metaphysical verdict an updated form of Pyrrhonian suspension of judgment. I do not mean that Stroud is revising the notion of suspension of judgment; it is still the good old notion that one is unable to establish either side of a philosophical dispute. I only mean that he explored new ways of showing that we have not been able to settle our philosophical questions.

One possible objection is that Pyrrhonian suspension of judgment requires equipollence of two conflicting sides. It is true that the main principle of Pyrrhonism is opposition (PH 1.8, 1.12). But in many passages, Sextus does not require

opposition. Many of the Agrippan modes (PH 1.164-177), like regress and reciprocity, do not require opposition. Many arguments employed by Sextus depend solely on what a dogmatist say without any opposition, even if it is part of a structure of arguments that sets up an opposition; in these case, if we go by what dogmatists say, it does not follow what they claim. For instance, given the dogmatic definition of proof (PH 1.134-143), it follows that proof is non-existent (PH 1.144). This kind of argument is not based on a consideration on both sides of a question, but on only one. It is true that, in the end, Sextus opposes plausible arguments for proof's existence and plausible arguments for proof's inexistence, it remains that one important kind of argument is simply to use a dogmatist assumption against itself, without consideration of both sides of a question.

Since this point is not so obvious, perhaps the following remark is necessary. Though Fogelin (2011) rightly insisted on Stroud's Pyrrhonism, he pointed out an asymmetry in Stroud's position, and that would not be Pyrrhonian, for there would not be a balance between his critique of negative verdicts and his critique of positive verdicts. Fogelin's criticism appears to be correct at first sight, for Stroud focuses much more on negative dogmatism than on positive dogmatism. Nonetheless, two things must be said. On the one hand, despite this apparent asymmetry, Stroud is equally distanced from both forms of dogmatism of delivering a positive or negative verdict. As far as I can see, this is the heart of the matter.

On the other, one must understand why it seems that Stroud is harder on negative verdicts than on positive ones. The main reason is that philosophical dogmatism appears to begin as an attack on ordinary beliefs. Accordingly, Stroud takes this negative step as his first target. However, it may not be entirely true that philosophical dogmatism begins with this attack, for it may presuppose another kind of dogmatism. Stroud seems to suppose that positive dogmatism inflates, so to speak, ordinary opinions, so that it interprets ordinary beliefs as if they were metaphysical, i.e., as if they were verdicts in the technical philosophical sense. Thus, negative dogmatism would be a reaction to this initial positive dogmatism rooted in a wrong interpretation of what we ordinarily believe or claim to know (a mistake similar to Moore's mistake). Given this positive, dogmatic interpretation, the problems, paradoxes, puzzles, difficulties raised by negative dogmatism follows. By investigating these problems etc., Stroud also hopes to dispel that wrong interpretation of ordinary beliefs as if they were metaphysical verdicts.

If these remarks are correct, then there is no priority of negative dogmatism over positive dogmatism. Unfortunately, as far as I can see, Stroud didn't explored this dogmatic interpretation of ordinary life as this topic deserves. Unfortunately, as far as I can see, Stroud didn't explore this dogmatic interpretation of ordinary beliefs as this topic deserves. If he rejects a dogmatic interpretation of ordinary life, that would be yet another Pyrrhonian point in his position.

In the light of the foregoing discussion, we can endorse Stroud's claim that this *negative* result is a Pyrrhonian one. But, although this condemnation of the philosophical project is certainly a skeptical result, it is certainly "not enough to make one a Pyrrhonist" (PPP, p. 309). Let me point out two main ingredients of a Pyrrhonian outlook. The first is noticed by Stroud himself. According to him, once a Pyrrhonist turns away from the traditional philosophical project, she can have beliefs and know things just like any ordinary men (PPP, p. 309-310). It is an integral part of Pyrrhonism to live our ordinary life like everybody else. Even if the Pyrrhonist rejects the epistemological project, she is not forbidden to go on with ordinary knowledge practices. After all, only the philosophical project was rejected, not ordinary life. As Stroud says, quoting Wittgenstein's dictum, philosophy leaves everything as it is.

Moreover, the practice of philosophy should bring about some kind of satisfaction, even if not the satisfaction one hoped for when one initially engaged in doing philosophy. If the rejection of the traditional philosophical project brings about only dissatisfaction, then one cannot be properly characterized as a Pyrrhonist, for Pyrrhonism should produce an elimination of the initial disturbance that led one to philosophy (PH 1.25-30). So far, Stroud pointed out that the negative result leads to a dissatisfaction; he even affirms that this dissatisfaction is unavoidable or non eliminable. It seems that, if Stroud is a neo-Pyrrhonist, he is an unhappy one or, at least, an incomplete one, i.e., a neo-Pyrrhonist that has not reached tranquility (*ataraxía*).

In sum, neo-Pyrrhonism does not consist in a mere rejection of the traditional philosophical project, but, being a complex stance, moves on both to an acceptance, or even a defense, of ordinary knowledge claims and to enjoy some kind of philosophical satisfaction. I turn now to these two further points.

4. The diagnostic quest.

Before doing that, I must take notice of a further point which is also open to someone who rejects the traditional project. The above negative, skeptical result is something worth to reflect on. One should think more carefully about what philosophers have been doing and how and why they fall into these plights (QR, p. xi). Before trying to satisfy the desire by answering the questions it raises, one may concentrate on those very questions in order to know first what they demand from us (UHK, p. 5-6; UHK, p. 123-124).[7] The point is that the philosophical plight may be an important case to understand our human situation (2009, p. 569). A philosophical problem arises when one becomes aware that those general platitudes of human life seem impossible. Stroud wants to learn from these plights about the human condition. Though he does not look for a solution, as most philosophers do, he is also not interested in merely exposing our paradoxical situation (2001, p. 40-41). Skepticism, as a mere negative stance,[8] is a position no one seriously entertain; however, it may reveal to us something deep about our human condition; that is why we should take skepticism seriously (UHK, p. 1). On the contrary, it seems that philosophy begins precisely when one realizes that those projects fail and tries to understand the reasons why it fails. Stroud, then, moves on to the diagnostic question: why do these projects fail? "That in itself could prove deeply interesting and illuminating" (PPP, p. 309).

The important point Stroud is making is that a philosophical theory is not the only possibility that would count as a step forward in philosophy, for there are other ways to contribute to the philosophical understanding of our human situation (EMD, p. 160; 2008, p. 128). Part of what he means is that philosophy is an on going activity, and an indispensable part of that activity is to focus on the problems themselves and why we fall in this plight. Only by so doing will we be able to find out the correct philosophical position.

This careful way of doing philosophy, in which we first concentrate on the questions themselves, has another important feature. It focuses on the very desire that prompts those questions and may help us to understand what kind of desire it is. "I think reflection on this kind [of] reflection can be expected to reveal something interesting and deep about human beings, or human aspiration." (UHK, p.

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[7] As Bridges and Kolodny (2011, p. 3) say, "what is distinctive about Stroud's work, and the source of its particular richness and depth, is to appreciate the role played by his conviction that the philosophical project or quest is itself something we do not really understand."

[8] Since Stroud does view skepticism in this negative way, this is an indication that he doesn't take skepticism to be Pyrrhonism. See note 1.

124) Thus, not only does Stroud hope to understand our situation in the world better, but he also wants to understand the very urge that drives us towards philosophical questions. "Those metaphysical questions and aspirations are material for philosophy if anything is." (EMD, p. 160) To understand the desire for a metaphysical explanation of our human condition is a philosophical subject on its own, and a very important one.[9]

There are, of course, different ways of conceiving a diagnostic quest. Some contemporary understanding of the diagnostic quest assume that there's something *wrong* with what needs the diagnosed. For instance, Williams (1991) considers Stroud as a new Humean and argues that a proper way of dealing away with skepticism is precisely proposing a diagnostic answer.[10] Such assumption is clearly dogmatic, and I do not think that we find anything similar to a similar diagnostic quest in ancient Pyrrhonism. Now: what about the diagnostic quest in Stroud's sense? Could it be possible for a Pyrrhonist to endorse such a quest?

An ancient Pyrrhonist would probably look at the idea that we can diagnose the source of dogmatism as a further piece of dogmatism, for explaining why we raise such questions may be dangerously close to holding a dogmatic theory about us. If Stroud's view demands an explanation why we fall in the trap of dogmatism, then Sextus would arguably not endorse it at all. However, we do find in Sextus an incipient explanation of why most philosophers become dogmatists. Sextus Empiricus points out that dogmatists are rash and partial (e. g., PH 3.280). Though there is no full explanation of this point, it is certainly a suggestion of the motives that drive human being towards dogmatism. Moreover, Fogelin (1991, 2003) also seems to accept the idea of a diagnostic quest or, at least, not to see any problem with it. Anyway, pursuing this diagnostic quest, Stroud comes up with those two other ingredients of a neo-Pyrrhonian position: acceptance of ordinary knowledge claims and philosophical satisfaction.

5. Invulnerability: illumination and reassurance.

Through "connective analysis", i.e., an analysis of our conceptual capacities, Stroud thinks he is able to establish that some of our beliefs are invulnerable (UHK,

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[9] As Bridges and Kolodny (2011, p. 4) say, "for Stroud a satisfactory account of how philosophical questions about knowledge get confused with ordinary or scientific questions about knowledge will first have to explain what philosophical questions about knowledge are, and to do that, it will have to explain the point of these questions. It will have to explain why people ask them: what they hope to accomplish by asking them, what understanding or resolution they hope an answer to them might provide."

[10] For Stroud's discussion of Williams' criticism, see Stroud (UHK, p. 122-138).

p. 155-176). At a certain moment of his philosophical development (in the middle of the 90's), invulnerability becomes a key concept, and is responsible for a certain change in Stroud's attitude.

Stroud's idea is based on an analysis of the conditions of beliefs and belief-attribution. If we attribute beliefs to other people, as the skeptic must do if she is going to expose those beliefs as false or uncertain, then some conditions must hold. Stroud (UHK, p. 177-202) presents a new, weaker version of Davidson's considerations on the veridical nature of belief in order to avoid the skeptical threat. These conditions, or these beliefs, are held as invulnerable to the skeptical attack, even if they may not be true, as Davidson appears to argue. That reformulation of Davidson's position seems to have been decisive to the development of Stroud's own position.

It is still not a fully satisfactory position, because exploring connections among conceptual capacities will not establish the truth of any belief or knowledge. Invulnerability does not guarantee truth and Stroud candidly acknowledges that the philosophical questions are not answered by his explanations. "No such conclusion follows from the austere 'connective analysis' I am contemplating." (UHK, p. 174) One may still want to raise the question: "*do* we know the things we believe to be true about the world or not?" (UHK, p. 175) To those who still want to raise that question, "it will perhaps be found to be less than fully satisfying to have to admit that we still have not proved that we do know what we think we know." (UHK, p. 174) If our epistemological desire is to be satisfied only by a proof or demonstration of the truth of some of our beliefs, then it won't be satisfied at all.

Despite this admitted failure, Stroud calls our attention to the fact that exploring connections among conceptual capacities may bring rewarding results. He is optimistic and quite confident with the results achieved by his own line of a transcendental strategy. There is no need to follow the path of a strong version of a transcendental strategy and try to establish truths about the world, but "perhaps some forms of a broadly transcendental strategy can still be deployed with profit." (UHK, p. 213) Even if we do not discover any truth, connective analysis (in the sense of discovering necessary connection between conceptual capacities) at least offers us important two pay-offs.

First, it establishes the special status of some of our beliefs, and this is sufficiently rewarding for us to embark on the transcendental strategy. "Some things might still be shown to have a certain special position in our thought about the

world" (UHK, p. 213), i.e., it will reveal that some of our beliefs have "a certain distinctive status" (UHK, p. 214). That is a very important point for Stroud. Many of the advantages he sees in his position come from highlighting this special status of some of our beliefs. They may not be true, but even so they may be distinguished by a philosophical reflection. "Our beliefs as a whole might still enjoy the kind of invulnerability I have in mind." (UHK, p. 216) It is a kind of illumination in its own, even if it is not an illumination of how the world is really like.

Second, the explanations brought about by connective analysis provide a response to skepticism. Though skepticism is not shown to be false, for that is too much to be hoped for, the skeptical attack on ordinary beliefs is at least neutralized and the skeptical threat is dispelled. "It can still serve to block the potentially skeptical line of thinking right at the beginning." (UHK, p. 197) If some beliefs can withstand the skeptical attack, that would be an important achievement. Stroud's notion of invulnerability is a guarantee that philosophical reasoning will not put into question at some many of those beliefs (that pertain to a certain privileged class). This second pay-off is a kind of reassurance: we are safe from the skeptical assault.

These two pay-offs, illumination and reassurance, are connected by the fundamental notion of invulnerability. Not only does connective analysis shed some light on the special status of some beliefs, something to be hoped for in metaphysics, but also philosophical invulnerability of broad classes of beliefs concerns "just the kinds of beliefs that philosophical skepticism questions" (UHK, p. 217), something we would like to attain in epistemology.

As we saw earlier, sticking to ordinary beliefs is, for Stroud, an important criterion for being a consistent Pyrrhonist. This criterion has two different aspects. On the one hand, it implies that metaphysics (especially in its negative side) is an attack on ordinary beliefs and knowledge claims; on the other, that the strategy to defend ordinary beliefs and knowledge claims is to attack this metaphysical attack. Both aspects are present in Pyrrhonism as well. First, Sextus in many places suggests that it is the dogmatic attack on ordinary life that moves the philosophical quest: for instance, the dogmatic attack on the senses sets in motion the investigation about a dogmatic criterion of truth (M 7.89); attacks on the existence of movement (PH 3.65; M 10.45-49) and on the existence number (PH 3.151) are at the root of further dogmatic investigation. Next, one should remember that ancient Pyrrhonists said they in fact were on the side of ordinary folks against the attacks of dogmatic philosophy; they philosophized also on their behalf (PH 2.102; M 8.156-

158). The idea that dogmatism attacks ordinary life and that a consistent Pyrrhonian philosophy defends ordinary life from these (metaphysical or dogmatic) attacks is common to both Stroud and Sextus Empiricus.

One may object that Stroud develops a transcendental argument to make some ordinary beliefs invulnerable to philosophical attack; both the notion of invulnerability and the idea of a transcendental strategy do not seem Pyrrhonian. But perhaps one has to remember that Stroud's modest version of a transcendental argument is targeted against (Cartesian) skepticism, not Pyrrhonism.[11] Even if it does appear to be too theoretically loaded not to be open to a Pyrrhonian attack, it remains true that Stroud does not offer his transcendental arguments as theories in the philosophical sense. If so, why would a Pyrrhonian attack it? Pyrrhonism is concerned only with less modest, or more ambitious, theoretical thinking. In Kantian terms, Pyrrhonism (just like Stroud) has no problem with empirical realism, but only with transcendental idealism.

Moreover, Stroud is not saying that these beliefs are *per se* invulnerable and cannot be revised. For him, they can be revised and any belief is open to be questioned, just not by metaphysical reflections. Invulnerability only means metaphysical invulnerability, not an identification of an absolute privilege, as if they were invulnerable to all sorts of reasoning. As far as I can see, there is something analogous in Sextus. For Sextus, *phainómena* are not open to investigation as well (PH 1.19): being *azetetos* (PH 1.22), they also enjoy a kind of invulnerability. They impose themselves on us and cannot be refused; we must assent to them (PH 1.13). According to Sextus, philosophical arguments are very powerful, so powerful that they almost "snatch away the appearances from under our very eyes" (PH 1.20), but, in the end of the day, they can't, for *phainómena* impose themselves on us. Of course, we can question whether things really are as they appear to us and all our opinions are open to revision; still, for Sextus, one must avow the *phainómena*. And the *phainómena* are what we perceive and conceive in ordinary life (PH 1.21-24). In this sense, I submit that Stroud's notion of invulnerability is a contemporary way of exploring the strength of the *phainómena*.

According to Stroud, Robert J. Fogelin (1994), who proclaims to be a neo-Pyrrhonist, sometimes seems to backslide away from his Pyrrhonism when he doubts about his ordinary claims to knowledge (PPP, p. 311). Stroud sees himself as

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[11] For a discussion of Stroud's modest version of a transcendental argument, see Hookway (1999) and Stern (2000).

holding firm to ordinary beliefs and knowledge claims. If, as Stroud seems to imply, in order to be considered a complete Pyrrhonist, one must pass at least two tests (rejection of the traditional philosophical project and sticking to ordinary beliefs and knowledge claims), then Fogelin would be an inconsistent neo-Pyrrhonist, while he would be the only one of the two to fulfill both conditions. Thus, according to his own light, Stroud is the only consistent neo-Pyrrhonist.[12]

6. Indispensability: engagement and kinds of satisfaction.

At this point, a very important question concerning our desire to understand the human condition arises: "What kind of satisfaction do we seek?" (EMD, p. 88). Reflection on the philosophical aspiration implies reflection on what kind of satisfaction we expect to obtain. All along Stroud has talked about it as if there were only one kind of dissatisfaction that would fulfill our desire. We have seen that exploring connections between our conceptual capacities may bring illumination and reassurance, even if not the desired satisfaction. However, this illumination and this reassurance "can be found metaphysically unsatisfying." (EMD, p. 58) It may seem a mere acceptance of ordinary beliefs without any metaphysical understanding. "This is a very familiar form of philosophical disappointment or dissatisfaction." (EMD, p. 58) From this point of view, the only kind of metaphysical satisfaction is to know the truth about an independent reality.

But is this the only kind of satisfaction we can reach? Is it true that philosophy brings nothing but dissatisfaction? That is not Stroud's position. Besides metaphysical dissatisfaction, philosophy seems to bring about some satisfaction as well. Metaphysical dissatisfaction, though always looming large, seems to be superseded and in its place emerges a different kind of satisfaction, to be found, for instance, in reassurance and illumination provided by invulnerability. More specifically, one can be satisfied by an understanding of the human condition that is not provided by a metaphysical theory; and this understanding of the human condition is a sort of by-product of his philosophical efforts towards an understanding of the metaphysical question. No such understanding of the human condition was present in his thought before, and it is especially apparent in EMD. For Stroud, not all satisfaction of the desire must be a metaphysical verdict, theory, or doctrine. Maybe another kind of understanding our human condition will be

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[12] The Brazilian neo-Pyrrhonist, Oswaldo Porchat, would also fulfill the two conditions to be a consistent neo-Pyrrhonist, but Stroud does not know Porchat's works. See Porchat (1991).

enough to placate the metaphysical desire. This understanding may still be characterized as metaphysical, since it puts forward an understanding of ourselves and the world.

It seems to me that Stroud has two other kinds of metaphysical satisfaction in mind, none of which involves any metaphysical verdict, theory or doctrine. To see that point, we need to look again at those two pay-offs we found above: the special status of some beliefs and the reassurance against skeptical attack, both provided by the crucial notion of invulnerability.

First, the reassurance against skeptical attack turns into a reassurance against the subjectivist unmasking project of exposing some of our ordinary beliefs, like the belief that objects are colored. This metaphysical reassurance is conceived explicitly as a kind of satisfaction, for

> we can recognize the distinctive invulnerability beliefs of those kind enjoy. But if we go on to ask in a metaphysical spirit whether beliefs of those indispensable kinds do or do not capture the ways things really are in an independent world, what kind of *further satisfaction* can we expect?" (EMD, p. 143; my italics).

It seems that one is, or should be, content with that kind of satisfaction and there is no need to go on looking for a further metaphysical satisfaction. It is fair to say that recognizing the metaphysical invulnerability of some beliefs is itself a kind of satisfaction, and one that is within our reach.

Second, metaphysical satisfaction concerns also the special status of some of our beliefs. There is no doubt that invulnerability does play an important role in metaphysics as well. For instance, belief in colored objects is invulnerable and, therefore, it does not fall prey to the subjectivist strategy, as we just saw. In this sense, this belief may enjoy a privileged status. We cannot but believe that objects are colored, *if* we want to subject them to philosophical criticism, as does the subjectivist. Indispensability seems to play an even more important role in Stroud's philosophy than invulnerability.

The belief in colored objects, though invulnerable, is dispensable. According to Stroud, indispensable beliefs are invulnerable, but not all invulnerable beliefs are indispensable.

> So if colour beliefs are invulnerable in this way, it is not because they are indispensable, but because they form a system of beliefs that as far as we can tell is *sui generis*, or irreducible, and so cannot be acquired by construction from materials that lie outside the system. (UHK, p. 222)

Beliefs in colors are obviously not indispensable to our conceptual capacities, as the case of the blind may easily show. Blind people are as human as any human being can be (EMD, p. 149). Consequently, the connective analysis of color beliefs in QR does not reveal to us the human condition in general, since what one discovers through a metaphysical quest may be specific to that system.

In contrast to QR, the connective analysis of EMD focuses on conceptual capacities that lie at their heart of our ways of thinking and acting. In the case of necessity and causality (beliefs based on logical and causal inferences) and of moral beliefs, it reveals indispensable features of our human condition, that was not shown by a less basic conceptual capacity, like color beliefs (UHK, p. 223). Once we explore the central core of our conceptual capacities, we learn something about the human condition that perhaps cannot be learned when we are trying to understand what is not an indispensable conceptual capacity. To think causally, make inferences, and evaluate things and actions is metaphysically indispensable to our ways of thinking and acting. Thus, only an understanding of indispensable conceptual capacities such as these three enable us to obtain the understanding of our human condition that we were hoping for from the beginning.

Indispensability plays, therefore, a double role concerning satisfaction. On the one hand, it impedes us to reach the required detached position and, consequently, obtain the desired satisfaction. "The indispensability of those ways of thinking stand in the way of the detachment or disengagement that appears to be needed for genuine metaphysical illumination." (EMD, p. 19) If the metaphysical project requires disengagement from the totality of our beliefs and some of them are indispensable, the metaphysical project cannot get off the ground. In our general thinking about our beliefs, in the specific case of colors, and in the fundamental cases of causal dependence, necessity, and values, all attempts fail. We cannot even start our metaphysical question, because "the disengaged vantage point from which to ask that metaphysical-sounding question would still not have been reached." (QR, p. 218) Connective analysis, by showing the indispensability of some varieties of

beliefs, has a diagnostic of the reasons that impede the metaphysical project to take off.

On the other hand, connective analysis gives us another kind of satisfaction for our desire. Through a "proper understanding of these central and fundamental ways of thinking we could consistently achieve the satisfaction that this kind of metaphysical reflection aspires to." (EMD, p. 19) [13] Our desire to understand ourselves and the world we live in may be satisfied by another kind of metaphysical discovery. The metaphysical verdict is not the only outcome one can draw from his philosophical activity.

> One possible outcome of philosophical reflection could be the realization that in the search for a completely general understanding of ourselves in relation to the independent world *no* metaphysical satisfaction is possible one way or the other. (EMD, p. 160)

The envisaged possible outcome is precisely that we cannot come to a disengaged position in which we could give a verdict. We would be left in a state where we would deliver no verdicts at all. That is "a state we might achieve while acknowledging and understanding the source of the obstacles that preclude the kind of metaphysical understanding of those beliefs that we seek." (EMD, p. 160) This state, perhaps to our surprise, may bring with it some kind of unexpected satisfaction. "It would not give us what metaphysical reflection seemed to promise, but it might provide a certain reflective or second-level satisfaction of its own." (EMD, p. 160) It would not have fulfilled our desire with a metaphysical understanding, as we might have expected in the beginning, for, as we saw, at this level dissatisfaction is unavoidable, but it would somehow have brought about some kind of understanding of our situation in the world.

> If it could be shown that no metaphysical satisfaction is possible in the way we seek it, and we could understand why that is so, that itself could be a significant fact about the human condition. (EMD, p. 160)

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[13] I am in agreement with Bridges and Kolodny (2011, p. 11), when they say that "the philosophy that issues from the quest brings genuine self-understanding. By doing philosophy, we come to see how certain psychological and linguistic capacities presuppose other such capacities: how our ability to think or say one thing requires an ability to think or say something else. And so we come to see 'from the inside' – to use that treacherous phrase – how our conception of ourselves and of our relation to the world hangs together."

One might have thought, at the beginning, that our urge concerning understanding ourselves and the world could be satisfied only by a metaphysical verdict, theory or doctrine. But now we see this is not quite right. Not only a metaphysical theory may yield an even worse dissatisfaction or distortion, but also another kind of understanding our human condition may lead to what we wanted from the beginning. "The recognition of the inevitability of metaphysical dissatisfaction can itself reveal something important about the human condition or human aspiration." (2008, p. 128) Our urge may be appeased by another kind of understanding ourselves and the world: our desire may be pacified by an understanding of the human condition that realizes that no metaphysical verdict whatsoever is attainable by us. Diagnosis of the failure of the metaphysical project produces, as a by-product, an illumination of our human condition.[14]

We are now in position to answer at least partially an objection raised before, according to which we should not call Stroud a neo-Pyrrhonist: where a Pyrrhonist reaches tranquility (*ataraxía*) or moderation of the affections (*metriopátheia*), Stroud finds metaphysical dissatisfaction. Now, according to Stroud, some satisfaction does follow when we realize that we cannot deliver any metaphysical verdict. The question is: what exactly is the relation between Pyrrhonian ataraxía and Stroud's satisfaction? Sextus explains this mental state as of serenity or calmness (PH 1.10). In my view, Stroud doesn't think satisfaction only in these terms, for there is also an illumination. Besides, whereas tranquility follows suspension, it seems that satisfaction follows a description of our conceptual capacities. Though there are some important differences between them, both are typically a kind of pleasant intellectual state of the mind that results from refraining to deliver metaphysical verdicts. One has to bear in mind that satisfaction results also from conscience that we cannot attain a disengaged position, and this is very Pyrrhonian. Thus, one can say that satisfaction is different from, but analogous to tranquility.

If this is correct, then one can say that Stroud is a consistent neo-Pyrrhonist, for not only (i) does he reject the traditional project with all its dogmatic answers, while (ii) keeping many – if not most - of his ordinary beliefs, but also (iii) he attains

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[14] Kornblith (2013, p. 271) says that he is "at a loss to say what kind of intellectual progress Stroud believes we can make in philosophy, once he [Stroud] accepts, as I do here, the view that we are in no position to answer philosophical questions reliably." That is what I tried to explain here by distinguishing two kinds of philosophical satisfaction, and the related notions of invulnerability, indispensability, illumination and reassurance.

that satisfaction analogous to tranquility that accompanies the Pyrrhonist when she realizes that detachment is impossible and suspends her judgment (for she gives no verdict at all, whether positive or negative). Stroud, of course, does not care much about labels, so he may not really worry to call himself a neo-Pyrrhonist, but also, perhaps, may not bother to deny it, as long as the main philosophical points are correctly understood.

What I want to do in the next and last section is to review the interpretation so far and to propose some suggestions to Stroud's neo-Pyrrhonism, which seem to me to follow from what he says.

7. Seriousness: intensity and form of the undying desire.

As I see it, Stroud's view on the development of the philosophical desire has three main stages. First, before we philosophize, we aspire to understand the human condition in a highly general way. The desire, at this initial stage, may have no definite form. Perhaps, for someone who feels a desire to understand her position in the universe, religion or art could, at least in principle, satisfy it. However, one may move towards philosophy, if she feels a more rational impulse. She tends to think that only a theory of knowledge that explains our knowledge and makes it absolutely certain, or only a metaphysical theory that answers the metaphysical question is what would leave her satisfied.

Later, after having read the great philosophers of the past and those books and papers recently published, searching certainty in knowledge and absolute truth about an independent reality, the desire that this person feels may acquire a more definite form. By engaging in traditional philosophy, the desire of this person will be shaped in the same way that it was shaped throughout centuries of philosophical discussion. In my view, Stroud came to hold that, on this philosophical development, the urge takes an inconsistent form. As we saw, the philosophical form of the desire is the following: "It takes the form of a desire to get outside that knowledge and that condition, as it were, while somehow retaining all the resources needed to see them as they are." (UHK, p. 138) Of course, an inconsistent desire can never be satisfied, we cannot both detach completely from our beliefs and submit all of them to philosophical scrutiny. "The conclusion I think we are left with is that metaphysical reflection on beliefs of the three kinds we have considered is possible only if we also accept some beliefs of the kinds we wish to bring into question." (EMD, p. 156) One

cannot both accept and doubt the same beliefs at the same time.[15] The impossibility is built into the metaphysical quest. It is impossible "not because of ignorance, difficulty, or limited capacities –all of which are familiar enough- but because of the very nature of the task." (QR, p. xii) Epistemological or metaphysical dissatisfaction, then, is the necessary outcome for those who, feeling that strong desire, think of philosophy as a theory construction. This is the second stage of the desire, one that cannot be satisfied.

If one thinks that Stroud is right, she should come to know that she may want something impossible.

> While recognizing that urge we can nonetheless keep pointing out how and why the goal we seek has not yet and perhaps never can be reached. We can continue to draw attention to the distortions or misunderstandings or failed aspirations that seem endemic to the apparently reassuring answers to the completely general 'anthropological' questions that concern us. (2008, p. 128)

A philosopher should be conscious of the predicaments she falls in, but unfortunately most philosophers are not aware of the plights they are involved in. In fact, they rarely step back to think about philosophy itself and its plights, for they take for granted the meaning of the questions raised by them and just care to answer them with philosophical theories. The negative side of Stroud's Pyrrhonism is not a mere drawback, for it has the advantage of reminding us of this situation.

Being conscious of that impossibility has still other advantages. For one thing, it would be a kind of metaphysical result in its own right. It is a discovery of "a significant fact about the human condition" achieved by "serious philosophical investigation" (EMD, p. 160), not "by avoiding philosophical reflection." (EMD, p. 160). This is where the activity of doing philosophy helps us to answer correctly our philosophical questions.

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[15] Stroud does not seem to consider here the following possibility: one can doubt some beliefs while tentatively accepting others, and then expand the process by doubting, at another stage, the beliefs that had been tentatively accepted before. In connection to Quine's naturalized epistemology, however (SPS, p. 226), Stroud admits that there is no problem in using science in order to challenge science itself. Strawson (1959, p. 35, p. 106) accuses skepticism for being inconsistent. I think the same "logical point" could be made against Strawson, but Stroud does not move in that direction. On the other hand, Kripke (1982, p. 7-22) is very careful in distinguishing present and past meaning and use and mention of an expression in order to raise his skeptical paradox without being guilty of inconsistency. Stroud, however, seems to think that Kripke cannot use language meaningfully and doubt about meaning.

> An understanding of ourselves even without a metaphysical verdict one way or the other cannot be reached and found convincing without the careful, thorough intellectual effort that is called for in any serious philosophical investigation. (EMD, p. 160)

By thinking philosophically about what philosophers have been doing since at least Plato we can perhaps achieve in a different way what they have been trying to achieve in their own ways. "To reach and appreciate" the conclusion that we can never achieve "a certain kind of detached understanding of ourselves and the world" (EMD, p. 160), one must first try out if such a conclusion may be furnished by the metaphysical quest. One should not downplay this philosophical result, for it is, after all, what we have all along been pursuing, even if that is not exactly what we expected in the beginning. We wanted an explanation of our knowledge or a metaphysical verdict, whether positive or negative. We ended up with no theories or verdicts, but that in itself furnishes us with an understanding of our human condition searched by the philosophical tradition to which we belong.

Moreover, in order to appreciate this unexpected negative result about our human condition, one also obtains other kinds of illumination. Recognizing our philosophical failures "leads us closer to the actual thought and attitudes we want to understand" (2008, p. 128) Stroud, however, is not merely describing our ways of thinking. Were he merely describing them, there would be no illumination, at least not the desired one. Illumination comes through seeing necessary connections between our conceptual capacities, something a description does not establish. Descriptive metaphysics, so to speak, would leave us "without offering any satisfying positive explanation of what we feel we want to understand" (2008, p. 128). Connective analysis goes further and reveals to us unknown necessary links among our conceptual capacities. Therefore, not only are we pleased to understand the human condition by appreciating the inevitability of our epistemological and metaphysical dissatisfaction, but also we do understand better our necessary ways of thinking.

I insisted on the fact that, beyond an intrinsic dissatisfaction, philosophy has at least two kinds of pay-offs. Concerning knowledge, invulnerability not only shows the special status of some beliefs, but also protects them from skeptical attack. Both illumination and reassurance reappear in metaphysical issues, since, on the one hand,

connective analysis establishes necessary connections between certain conceptual capacities and, on the other, thanks to the indispensability of some fundamental beliefs, we unexpectedly can come to an understanding of our human condition. These pay-offs are clearly, at least to me, satisfactions brought about by doing philosophy. Stroud also talks about a reflective and second-order metaphysical satisfaction. Metaphysical disengaged dissatisfaction, so to speak, goes hand in hand with these other kinds of engaged satisfaction. That is why one should not give up doing philosophy, even if one may never satisfy the desire as one at first expected (2009, p. 569).

As I see it, "this back and forth movement of thought" (2008, p. 127) has an impact of the very urge that leads us to philosophy. This is the third, and perhaps final, stage of the urge I mentioned earlier. The impact of this "movement of thought" is not on our opinions, since, from this point of view, it leaves everything as before. In a Wittgensteinian style, Stroud says that philosophy seems to leave everything as before, since all my beliefs are still the same. For instance, "the everyday judgments about the colours of things with which we began are left completely untouched" (QR, p. 193). Speaking more generally, Stroud says that

> we are left, at best, just where we began. All our beliefs in all their variety – about causation, necessity, values, and everything else we believe in– represent our best collective effort so far to find out what is so and why the things we believe are true. Our being unable to reach a satisfactory verdict about the metaphysical status of the things we believe in casts no aspersions on those beliefs themselves or on their credentials. (EMD, p. 143)

We obtain some illumination or understanding of our human condition from it. It is clear that Stroud does not think that the impact, or the importance of philosophy, lies in changing our opinions or beliefs, but in illuminating them: we improve our understanding of them, without distorting them. These beliefs are invulnerable and indispensable.

Besides illumination of the opinions and beliefs we already have, there is a second gain from this philosophical practice. Let me quote in full a very important passage on our topic:

Not because philosophy as I think of it is idle and can have no effect on one's attitudes and one's relations to the world and to life. I mean only that philosophy as I understand it is different, and that it has its effects, if it does, in other ways. It is not a matter of arriving at conclusions that are applied to or used to guide or order one's life. Philosophy is thought, or reflection, that is done purely for the sake of understanding something, solely to find out what is so with respect to those aspects of the world that puzzle us. The activity is in a certain sense endless, even if it ends for each human being who engages in it. But that does not mean that it does not issue in anything, or that it has no effects. It is just that the effects, if they come, do not take the form of discoveries of conclusions or doctrines which serve to direct or guide one's life. (2001, p. 32)

As I see it, the importance of philosophy lies in its impact on our attitudes and on our relation to the world and life. Perhaps one could say that it is the *philosopher* himself who is affected by his philosophical practice, or that it is the *desire* felt by the philosopher that is affected. Knowing that the philosophical task is impossible "can bring home to us the irrepressible human effort to have something which at the same time we can come to see we cannot really have (at least in the form in which we most desire it)." (2008, p. 128) Now, what exactly does to "bring home" the philosophical desire mean?

Stroud keeps talking about an "apparently undying urge for the kind of 'outside' or 'elevated' position that gives the investigation its special philosophical character." (2008, p. 127) Moreover, it is a *strong* desire we all feel. "What is remarkable is the strength of the widespread feeling that things simply must be metaphysically one way or the other." (EMD, p. 159) That intensity of the urge is the driving force behind Stroud's relentless philosophical reflections. "The strength of that urge is a measure of the strength of a metaphysical desire I think we have to discover how we really stand to the independent world around us." (QR, p. 209) Stroud never changes his mind concerning both its undying character and its strength. My point is that, however undying and always strong, the desire may change its *form*. As we saw, in the beginning the desire had no specific form; after one has done a lot of philosophy and has immersed in the philosophical tradition, it acquires a specific philosophical form. Now, I submit, the strong, undying desire may change its first philosophical form into a new philosophical form.

On the traditional philosophical understanding, the desire assumed an inconsistent form which is impossible to satisfy. Now, in light of those other kinds of satisfaction, the desire may take a more reasonable form, one that can and is in fact satisfied by Stroud's way of doing philosophy. There would be, so to speak, *a qualitative change* in our desire, not a quantitative one; it would acquire a new form, a form that does not involve any incoherence. We may resist the temptation of a metaphysical theory or explanation of our condition, for now we realize that this is impossible for us. However, a different kind of understanding of our condition, one that does not depend on a metaphysical verdict, is open to us. The desire for a detached position from which we could assess all our beliefs is transformed into a desire of an understanding achieved from an engaged position, when we reflect philosophically "from within". Perhaps we may never really overcome the urge for a cosmic exile, but we may cope with it and its specific dissatisfaction by feeling other kinds of epistemic and metaphysical satisfaction.

That is why there is no need to avoid philosophy in an anti-theoretic or therapeutic spirit. One can be part of the philosophical tradition and still pursuit her own inquiries.

> The only seed of doubt I would be pleased to sow is the suspicion that perhaps the goal is not fully reachable, that the kind of understanding of ourselves and the world that is embodied in that quest is not really available to us. (QR, xii)

Stroud's final position is not a condemnation of the quest. Quite on the contrary, he is willing to go on in other metaphysical topics. "The most we will do, and continue to do, is keep trying." (QR, p. 209) For, then, we will keep reminding us of the impossibility of what we want to achieve at the same time that we obtain some satisfaction. After all, a consistent Pyrrhonist does not give up his philosophical investigations (PH 1.1-4, 1.7), for that would be dogmatic.

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