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EXPERT INTUITIONS AND SKEPTICISM IN SEXTUS EMPIRICUS?: AGAINST RICHARD BETT'S INTERPRETATION[1]

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Abstract: In this paper I argue against Richard Bett's interpretation (2020) of Sextus Empiricus' skepticism as an intuitive (natural) position. First (section I), I review the different meanings of the term "intuitive" in contemporary literature with the aim of establishing that the maneuver with which Bett tries to establish his objective is yet another episode of the so-called "defense of expert intuition". Second (section II), I reconstruct Bett's arguments in favor of the intuitiveness of skepticism in Sextus and then show (section III) the way in which his strategy is vulnerable to the objections that have been raised against the notion of "expert intuition". I conclude that the defense of expert intuition as applied to the case of skepticism in Sextus is unsuccessful and, at best, the skeptical attitude is not distinctive of Pyrrhonism, but instead concomitant with every rational enterprise.

Keywords: Sextean Skepticism; Expert Intuition; Intuitiveness of Skepticism; Epistemic Role of Intuitions.

1 Introduction

Within contemporary orthodox exegesis of skepticism, its putative intuitive (natural) character is taken for granted. Barry Stroud's influential work (1984) is mainly responsible for this. Although there is a dissenting group, led by Michael Williams (1991), regarding skeptical problems as inherent to our epistemic practices has been the *pièce de résistance* that elevated skepticism as the central problem of analytic epistemology.[2]

In his "Is Skepticism Natural?" Richard Bett (2020) grapples with this question from an ancient temple; particularly he seeks to answer this question from the perspective of Sextus Empiricus in order to find a plausible answer that could serve as a bridge of dialogue between ancient, modern, and contemporary skepticism. Things get complicated

[1] A previous version of this paper was presented at the *IX International Meeting on Skepticism* in Salvador de Bahía, Brazil, in April 2024. I am grateful to the audience for their comments and criticisms, particularly to Plínio Junqueira Smith for his insightful remarks regarding my interpretation of Sextus' global skepticism. I also thank CONAHCYT for funding this research. Finally, I explicitly reject any and all appropriations of "Classical culture" made by supremacist groups.

[2] Ayer (1956: 78) already considers refuting the skeptic central to the epistemological enterprise, and this idea has been endorsed more recently by BonJour (1985: 14-15), Frances (2005: 77-8), and Greco (2007), among many others.

because Bett finds two antagonistic answers in the Sextean *corpus*: one affirmative and another negative. In the remainder of his paper, Bett tries to accommodate both responses by explaining his motivations. Here, I will concentrate on Bett's affirmative response, the one that considers that skepticism must have been intuitive to Sextus, and I will try to show that such reading is problematic because it is yet another example of the so-called "defense of expert intuition" (*cf.* Williamson, 2007, 2009 and 2011; Ludwig, 2007 and Devitt, 2012), which ultimately undermines the initial appeal to the *intuitiveness* of a philosophical belief or thesis it usually has. First, however, I would like to briefly explore the various meanings that the term "intuitive" has taken on in contemporary literature, particularly the notion of "expert intuition," in order to frame Bett's use of it when he refers it to the work of Sextus Empiricus and to put my own critique in perspective.

2 Uses and Abuses of "Intuitive"

When we qualify something as "intuitive," we do not always do so univocally. Hence, one of the main problems with this term are the multiple misunderstandings it has generated. In the modern tradition, the term "intuitive" primarily referred to a first-order category related to knowledge—either seen as "necessary" in Descartes' philosophy or as "sensible" in Kant's views. In contrast, today it typically functions as a second-order meta-philosophical qualifier that reflects how a particular philosophical belief or argument appears in our minds, thereby influencing our presumption of truth. In what follows, I will present some popular definitions of "intuition" in contemporary philosophy. This will help demonstrate that when Bett discusses a certain "naturalness" toward skepticism attributed to Sextus, he is likely referring to something quite similar.

Plantinga (1993: 105) defines intuition as "finding yourself utterly convinced that the proposition in question is true… it is not only true but could not have been false." Bealer (1998: 207) defines it as "an intellectual seeming, a sui generis, irreducible… propositional attitude that occurs episodically." BonJour (1998: 106) affirms that "when I carefully and reflectively consider the proposition (or inference) in question, I am able simply to see or grasp or apprehend that the proposition is necessary, that it must be true in any possible world or situation…"[3] Against those heavy characterizations, others have proposed a deflationary approach in which intuitions are just "opinions" (Lewis, 1983: x), "our beliefs" (van Inwagen, 1997: 309), or "ordinary judgements seeming true" (Williamson, 2007: ch. 7), without any phenomenology at all.[4]

[3] Recently, feminist epistemology has challenged the characterization of a universal and idealized epistemic subject implied by those characterizations, arguing that it overlooks the situated nature of the epistemic agents involved in forming intuitions. Pohlhaus (2015: 4-5), following Anthony (2012: 241), refers to this issue as "essentialization." This term describes the cognitive tendency among members of specific groups (such as analytic philosophers, women, and non-white individuals) to assume they share a common, fundamental nature. This assumption can lead to generalizations that may not apply to all members of the group, resulting in cognitive dissonance—the judgments attributed to the members of the group to which you belong do not make sense to you at all. Schwartzman (2012: 311) adds that this problem becomes more pronounced when thought experiments are discussed among members of the same dominant group, particularly those who are White, male, Western, and upper-middle-class. The shared cultural background within this group can hinder their ability to recognize the biases inherent in those very thought experiments.

[4] Regarding the Gettier intuition, Williamson affirms: "For myself, I am aware of no intellectual seeming beyond my conscious inclination to believe the Gettier proposition." (2007: 217).

In discussing skepticism, Stroud (1984) introduced a new dimension to the intuitions by examining the origins of so-called intuitive beliefs:

> I think that when we *first* encounter the sceptical reasoning [...] we find it *immediately gripping*. It appeals to something deep in our *nature* and seems to raise a *real problem* about the human condition. (Stroud, 1984:39. Italics are mine).

Since then, this characterization has been installed as the orthodoxy in contemporary exegesis of the skeptical problematic, and it is just this background that Bett's (2020) discussion presupposes in his approach to the supposed intuitiveness of skepticism in Sextus. However, from these definitions it is possible to extract four senses of what has traditionally been understood under the label "intuitive" in the contemporary exegesis of skepticism:

1. Etiology: the origin of a belief

As Stroud himself illustrates, beliefs that originate in our everyday practices, as opposed to theoretical beliefs that only appear as a result of previously acquired doctrinal commitments, are sometimes referred to as "intuitive":

> I think the *source* of the philosophical problem of the external world lies somewhere within just such a conception of an objective world or in our desire, expressed in terms of that conception, to gain a certain kind of understanding of our relation to the world. But in trying to describe that conception I think I have relied on nothing but *platitudes we would all accept* – not about specific ways we all now believe the world to be, but just the general idea of what an objective world or an objective state of affairs would be. (Stroud, 1984: 82. Italics are mine).[5]

Thus, believing that objects fall to the ground, for example, is something we always notice, so it is natural to have such a belief, even without any Newtonian commitment. The same happens with the belief that fire burns or that water wets... among many other beliefs that constitute the so-called "common sense." Conversely, believing that moral virtues constitute a kind of unity is a belief that depends on prior theoretical commitments and that, therefore, not all people subscribe.

[5] In my (forthcoming), I argue that the motivation to analyze human knowledge from a completely objective perspective was influenced in Stroud (1984) by the ideas of Thompson Clarke (1972) and Bernard Williams (1978). Stroud subsequently developed this same idea in his other writings (1989 and 2011). I want to clarify that my critique of Bett does not depend on establishing whether such a completely objective conception of human knowledge was available to Sextus. Bett (2020: 317, fn. 13), following Burnyeat (1982), concludes that Sextus' inquiry aligns with the robust realism that was prominent in ancient philosophy.

2. Universal acceptability

The term "intuitive" is frequently used to describe beliefs that are universal and consensual, meaning they are shared by nearly *all* humans without exception. For instance, the belief that objects fall to the ground is one such belief that most people hold. Thus, the term "intuitive" refers to a belief that, given the right conditions, any individual is likely to adopt. Recent psychological research (Koriat 2008) indicates that the intensity of our intuitive feelings is directly related to the level of consensus among people: the more individuals who share the same intuition, the more strongly we perceive it. However, it is important to note that widespread agreement on an intuition does not necessarily mean that it is true. (*cf.* Nagel, 2012; I return to this discussion at the end of the text).

3. Spontaneous (non-doxastic) character.

Sometimes, "intuitive" qualifies the *unreflective* character with which certain beliefs appear in our mind. Their immediate, spontaneous appearance makes it clear that no other belief or inferential process is necessary for their acquisition. In a universe like ours, governed by gravity, the belief that objects fall to the ground is *immediate*. Every day, we are confronted with so many cases confirming that it would be impossible (not to say irrational) not to believe that objects are naturally attracted to the ground.

4. Epistemic: presumption of truth

Finally, another of the most common senses of the predicate "intuitive" has to do with its epistemic character. Suppose a belief is intuitive, natural, universal, and spontaneous. In that case, all this gives it, a priori, a presumption of truth in its favor: the belief that objects fall to the ground *must* be true since everyone believes it spontaneously and pre-theoretically. At least in most philosophical discussions (as is also the case in the discussion of skepticism), the intuitive character has tended to be associated with this epistemic reading that grants a presumption of truth to intuitive beliefs, as we saw in the case of Stroud's (1984: 82) treatment of skepticism.

As the attentive reader will have noticed by now, most of the time when the qualifier "intuitive" appears in philosophical discussions, it intends to follow this train of reasoning that passes through all these different meanings, which, although they may imply each other, do not necessarily do so. There are universal and spontaneous beliefs that are false, such as the belief that the color we see in objects is an intrinsic property of the objects themselves. The problem is that the indiscriminate use of all these meanings has bogged down the appeal to the intuitive character of certain philosophical theses, being particularly problematic the *epistemic* meaning in which it is claimed that the intuitiveness of a given belief grants it, *ipso facto*, a presumption of truth in its favor.[6]

[6] Two contemporary debates have placed intuitions in the focus of philosophical methodology. On the one hand, the debate between the defenders of thought experiments as currencies that generate new knowledge (Brown, 1994) and their detractors (Norton, 1994), and on the other hand, the critique of experimental philosophy to the traditional philosophical methodology. In both cases, the dispute revolved around the epistemology of intuitions. For a detailed analysis of these polemics, *see* Ornelas et al., 2018. Cappelen (2012), for his part, argues that intuitions play no special epistemic role, so we should eradicate them from philosophical methodology.

2.1 EXPERT INTUITIONS VS. POPULAR INTUITIONS

In traditional philosophy, the concept of intuitive character has often been associated with the idea of universality, which is seen as its most significant property since the other characteristics seem to rely on it. The reasoning is that if everyone shares the same intuition, it must originate naturally and spontaneously, independent of any other beliefs. This perspective makes it appealing to consider intuition as a form of true a priori knowledge. However, contemporary discussions have presented some limitations regarding this universal character. For instance, an intuitive belief can maintain its spontaneous and epistemic nature without resonating equally with *all* people; it may only appeal strongly to a select group of *experts* engaged in specific fields or practices. These are referred to as "expert intuitions." Examples of this particular type of intuition have multiplied rapidly and refer to spontaneous, unreflective, and presumed true beliefs that appear not among all humans but *only* among experts according to their expertise: the beliefs about flavor notes in New World wines among *sommeliers* (Goldstein et al., 2008), beliefs about the presence of cancerous nodules in ultrasound images by radiologists (Machery, 2011), the belief that a particular piece of pottery belongs to the Aztec culture by archaeologists (Brandom, 1994), among others. Note that such "intuitive" beliefs presuppose prior training (theoretical and practical), without which their appearance would be impossible. Nevertheless, such beliefs remain "intuitive" because they are *spontaneous appearances* that do not result from any conscious deliberative process: the expert *sommelier* is trained to detect notes of American oak in New World wines, but those same flavor notes appear spontaneously before her without the intervention of any other beliefs. Since not all humans have such expertise, the respective beliefs are not universal *tout court*, but their range of appearance involves only those experts who have undergone the corresponding training.

Although the expression "expert intuition" is something of an oxymoron, the truth is that it is a term that has become popular in contemporary literature, especially in light of criticisms coming from experimental philosophy (Knobe & Alexander, 1998; Machery, 2011, etc.) towards the role given to intuitions by traditional philosophical methodology. This criticism has sought to undermine the putative universality of intuitions. Specifically, experimental philosophers have challenged the putative reliability of philosophers' intuitions by documenting their sensitivity to non-epistemic factors, such as gender (Buckwalter & Stich, 2011), age (Colaço et al., 2014), and culture (Weinberg et al., 2001), among others.[7]

By appealing to expert intuitions, several authors have claimed to dodge the empirical evidence gathered by experimental philosophers, arguing that the intuitive character of philosophical beliefs is subsidiary to philosophical training and not something that is contrastable with laypeople's intuitions. The *locus classicus* of this type of defense has been Williamson:

[7] Such experimental results have been difficult to replicate. For gender and ethnicity, *see* Nagel et al. 2013; for the case of cultural differences in Gettier cases, *see* Kim & Yuan, 2014.

> Much of the evidence for cross-cultural variation in judgments on thought experiments concerns verdicts by people without philosophical training. Yet philosophy students have to learn how to apply general concepts to specific examples with careful attention to the relevant subtleties, just as law students have to learn how to analyze hypothetical cases. *Levels of disagreement over thought experiments seem to be significantly lower among fully trained philosophers than among novices.* That is another manifestation of the influence of past experience on epistemological judgments about thought experiments. (Williamson, 2007:191. Italics are mine.)[8]

Thus, according to this "defense of expert intuition" (to use Machery's expression), the intuitions of philosophers should be more conducive to truth (more reliable) than those of laypeople, given their expertise. This proves that disagreements between philosophers on specific issues involving intuitions (ethical, semantic, metaphysical, epistemic, etc.) are minimal compared to the significant differences between philosophers and laypeople.

It is worth noting that in the discussion of expert intuitions, the focus of attention has been shifted from the putative *universal* character of intuitions to their *spontaneous* character: for a belief to be intuitive, it is no longer indispensable that it be accessible to all human beings without exception, but that it appears in the mind in a *spontaneous*, unreflective way; it does not matter if even to reach such appearances prior training is needed.

In section III, I show that Bett finds this notion of "intuition" in Sextus' affirmative answer to the question of the "naturalness" of skepticism: Skepticism is intuitive (natural) for those who have undergone philosophical training. I point out that this interpretation is also vulnerable to the criticism that the "expert intuition" notion has recently received.

3 PROBLEMS WITH EXPERT INTUITIONS

Roughly speaking, the defense of expert intuition presupposes that philosophical training gives its practitioners a disposition to generate intuitions in a much more reliable way relative to laypeople. Although this idea has been criticized on several fronts, I present below two of the most popular criticisms that have cast doubt among defenders of expert intuition.

a. EXPERTISE AND RELIABILITY. These two concepts seem to imply each other: the more reliable a sniper is in hitting small targets at long distances, the higher the degree of reliability we grant him. However, Machery (2011) has shown that the sniper's ability to hit a target presupposes an *appropriate domain*: the same sniper can be very reliable at hitting one-meter diameter targets at a distance of 10 meters but very unreliable at shooting at 50 cm diameter targets at a distance of 20 meters. The idea here is that something similar happens with intuitions that allow us to elaborate judgments:

[8] Other defenses of expert intuition are found in Kauppinnen (2007) and Liao (2008), who, in tune with Williamson, argue that layperson's intuitions may well lack the benefits of systematic reflection that the judgments of professional philosophers very often exhibit.

when the domain is appropriate, for example, when we judge whether *X* has knowledge in an ordinary scenario in which truth and justification go hand in hand, expert epistemologists and laypeople agree in attributing knowledge to *X*. However, when a judgment is made outside the appropriate domain, such as in a Gettier case, even an expert epistemologist's judgement may be unreliable. This is because, in such scenarios, justification and truth can exist independently of each other. Similarly, an expert radiologist's judgment in identifying cancerous nodules may also be unreliable if the quality of the images produced by the scanner is poor. Philosophical expertise is *insufficient* for the truth of intuitions; experts may still be wrong due to factors beyond their control. Additionally, the fact that the difference between experts' intuitions is significantly reduced should not be read (*pace* Williamson, 2007) as evidence in favor of their reliability. Against this, Nagel (2012) shows that stability in intuitions cannot be seen as an indicator of their correctness: consensus does not imply the norm. Following the work in psychology of Koriat (2008), Nagel claims that the strength of an intuition corresponds with the consensus but not necessarily with its correctness (truth).

b. EXPERTISE AND EVERYDAY LIFE. Second, the very notion of "expert intuition" presupposes that the intuitions of experts are better (more reliable) than those of non-experts (less reliable), implying that the everyday judgments of ethical experts about what is right, for example, should be more reliable than those of ordinary people or of other philosophers who are not experts in ethics. Their expertise should correlate with everyday life. However, Eric Schwitzgebel (2009 & 2014) and Schwitzgebel & Rust (2010, 2014 & 2016) have accumulated a great deal of empirical evidence suggesting that ethicists behave no better than other philosophers: they do not return books to the library, they do not pick up their trash at colloquia, they do not declare themselves organ donors on their driver's licenses, they harass female students, etc. Indeed, this evidence is inconclusive in undermining the "expert intuition," however, I think it serves to cast doubt on the idea that philosophical expertise enhances the reliability of intuitions in general.

Nevertheless, let us analyze the two responses that Bett finds in the Sextean *corpus* regarding the "intuitive" character of skepticism and see whether Bett's strategy in his positive response appeals to something akin to expert intuition.

4 BETT'S DUAL INTERPRETATION OF THE INTUITIVE CHARACTER OF SEXTEAN SKEPTICISM

The first thing I want to emphasize about Bett's project exploring the "intuitiveness" of skepticism in Sextus is its bold character: without a concept equivalent to "intuitive" in ancient philosophy, the risk of anachronism lurks dangerously.[9] A problem that Bett successfully circumvents by showing that while such a concept is not part of the repertoire of ancient philosophers, the "attitudes" underlying philosophical positions are: a "natural" philosophical position amounts to "one that any normal person would unreflectively adopt, or one that any normal person who did reflect on it, unprompted by any particular

[9] Probably the closest term is "*noûs*" in the Aristotelian sense (*Anal.Po.* 2.19): a necessary and immediate rational knowledge exemplified by how we grasp the truth of first principles within his theory of demonstration. Despite the coincidences, the Aristotelian *noûs* do not seem to say anything about such truths' universality and/or naturalness.

theoretical or ideological agenda, would find themselves inclined to accept -one that, as we might put it - 'just feels right'." (Bett: 2020: 363). A characterization that closely resembles what, as we saw at the beginning of the previous section, is usually collected under the label "intuitive" in contemporary philosophy and where orthodoxy has modeled intuitions in perceptual terms: a causal model in which an object (a given situation, an argument, a thought experiment...) causes doxastic episodes (beliefs, proto-beliefs, inclinations to believe something...) that we presume to be true given the phenomenology with which it appears in our mind (unreflectively, spontaneously, persuasively and with a self-evident, necessary, obvious character.)

Armed with this characterization, Bett explores whether skepticism, as it appears in the Sextean *corpus*, is an intuitive ("natural") position or whether, instead, it is the result of specific commitments previously acquired with a given doctrine (Pyrrhonism). From my perspective, Bett's text is a successful example of the complicated crossover between ancient and contemporary epistemology. This maneuver allows us to rehabilitate ancient discussions in contemporary terms and highlights the commonalities and ruptures between the two types of skepticism. Few scholars today bite the bullet of working with a sometimes-contradictory *corpus*; most do not hesitate to twist the texts and introduce *ad hoc* hypotheses indiscriminately to safeguard the putative coherence of the Sextean *corpus*.

Having established the pertinence of the question about the intuitiveness of skepticism in Sextus, the next obstacle is that Bett finds two antagonistic answers in the Sextean *corpus*: one that affirms that skepticism is indeed a natural position and another that denies it. I will briefly comment on the latter to concentrate more calmly on the former, which is the subject of this paper.

4.1 Bett's Negative Response: against the Spontaneous Character of Skepticism

As with skepticism in our day, where belief is inevitable while the suspension of judgment is regarded as an elusive intellectual achievement, something similar has been the case in Antiquity. Bett (2020: 366) appeals to anecdotes from the life of Pyrrho (DL: 9.66) to show that, despite his skeptical creed, Pyrrho himself ran away from aggressive dogs and got angry with his sister, two extremely common and natural attitudes, both of which one would expect that a skeptic could avoid by putting his philosophical techniques into practice and thus achieve less suffering. This would show that the indifference concomitant to skepticism would be somewhat *unnatural* and difficult to reach via the development of specific behavioral habits. Thus, the skeptical attitude would result from specific theoretical commitments very difficult to practice, even on the part of its own exponents.

A first important difference between the ancient and contemporary conception, as mentioned above, is that in Antiquity, skepticism was seen (at least in the Pyrrhonian tradition) as a relief from the anxiety caused by the uncertainty intrinsic to our epistemic life. In contrast, nowadays, skepticism is considered "a terminal disease in which healthy mental processes run pathologically unchecked." (Williamson, 2005, p. 681). The skeptic is described as an intellectually terminal patient; hence, it is best to work on preventive strategies before he/she contracts the disease. However, Bett also warns that the Sextean *corpus* itself supports a negative answer to the question of the intuitiveness of skepticism: rather than a doctrine, skepticism is conceived by Sextus as a skill (*dunamis*) (*PH*: 1.8), a task that must be continually actualized (*via* the Modes) and deliberately so as not to fall

into the clutches of dogmatism. In this sense, skepticism would not be an intuitive position, not because it lacks universality, but because it is not spontaneous (unreflective), but rather the result of the prior adoption of a doctrine oriented to an exact end, the attainment of *ataraxia* (*PH*: 1.25).

But let us turn now to the positivist answer, which interests us most here. Let me clarify that if such an answer is plausible, it would count as an excellent point in common with the orthodox characterization of skepticism in contemporary philosophy introduced by Stroud (1984), according to which, as we have seen, skepticism is indeed intuitive.[10]

4.2 BETT'S POSITIVE ANSWER: TRADING "UNIVERSALITY" FOR THE "SPONTANEOUS" CHARACTER OF SKEPTICISM

Bett's first argument is that skepticism must have been intuitive to Sextus because he recommends living by it, or more precisely, he points to how a skeptic can guide his daily life in the absence of any theoretical commitment (*PH*: 1.21-24; 2.102; 3.151; 3.2; *M*: 8.156-8; 9.49). Here, Bett appeals to the compatibility within the Sextean *corpus* between skepticism and everyday life (*bíos koinós*). Bett reminds us that in Antiquity, skepticism was understood as a way of life (*bíos*) (*cf.* Hadot, 1981)[11] that conjured up the philosophical anxieties respective to dogmatism: a way of life free of theoretical-philosophical preoccupations. Sextus' bet on appearances (*phainomena*) as a criterion of action is well known, so I will not dwell on it; I would only like to emphasize that considering skepticism as intuitive does not cancel life itself, it is something that can improve it by detaching it from dogmatism and the suffering it entails. With a few exceptions (*cf.* Ornelas 2021 and forthcoming), the orthodox view of Sextean Pyrrhonism (*cf.* Bett, 2010, 2011 & 2019) appeals to these kinds of considerations to draw the difference between ancient and modern skepticism as follows: after Modernity, skepticism was only conceived as a theoretical working hypothesis, in Antiquity, on the other hand, skepticism was a moral position that aspired to be put into practice.

Bett's (2020: 367) second argument in favor of his positive answer falls on the famous passage *PH*: 1.12, where Sextus states how skepticism originates:

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

[10] In (forthcoming), I present reasons to rule out that skepticism about the external world, as understood by contemporary exegesis, can be intuitive. I do the same for the Sextean skepticism in my (2021), and in Ornelas & de Hoyos (2023b & 2025).

[11] In several places (2021, 2023b, and 2025), I have criticized Hadot's thesis, according to which the hallmark of ancient philosophy was its putative harmony between life and doctrine. Bett (2020) explicitly appeals to this conception to justify his initial interpretation of Sextean skepticism as a natural position. Although I have already said that my criticisms of Bett's interpretation are based instead on his defense of expert intuition, my criticisms of Hadot are also relevant because they indirectly weaken Bett's position.

Here, I would like to realize how Bett describes the inquiry that explores the distinction between truth and falsehood, which Sextus does not label as "natural" –or something similar. Bett argues that this passage provides evidence to establish the origins of skepticism, linking its intuitive nature to its background of expertise. He asserts that Sextus implies that skepticism is intuitive for a select group of "men of talent" (*megalopheús*), who find it compelling as a natural result of the philosophical inquiry, particularly after failing to find a compelling answer. These "men of talent", then, are naturally inclined towards skepticism. Bett believes that this passage is further supported by *PH*: 1.26:

> For Sceptics began to do philosophy in order to decide among appearances and to apprehend which are true and which false, so as to become tranquil; but they came upon equipollent dispute, and being unable to decide this they suspended judgement. And when they suspended judgement, tranquility in matters of opinion followed fortuitously. (Trans. Annas & Barnes.)

The argument that Bett draws from both passages can be synthesized as follows:

- The philosophers (*megalopheús*), confronted with anomalies (disagreements), *naturally* inquire into how to distinguish the false from the true.
- Their wager was that, by succeeding in distinguishing between the two domains, they would put an end to the disturbance adjacent to the disagreements, which would result in reaching a state of tranquility.
- The problem is that such an investigation only led to contradictory arguments, and since they were unable to choose between them, they suspended the judgment.
- Conclusion: By suspending judgment, tranquility randomly appeared.

Recall that the first passage (1.12) appears in the section entitled "The Principles of Scepticism," where it is stated that the ultimate end (*télos*) of skepticism is to reach *ataraxia*.

Sextus suggests that those "men of talent" dedicate themselves to investigating the truth when confronted with anomalies. However, I see no indication (*pace* Bett) that such investigations are *natural*, *spontaneous*, or *unreflective*, nor do they exhibit the characteristics typically associated with *intuitive knowledge*. In this context, philosophical research aims to achieve tranquility—an assumption that can be questioned—and involves the effort to distinguish between true and false ideas. This assertion seems trivial: all research is directed towards a specific goal and navigates through a web of opposing views, often with the hope that finding the correct answer will alleviate the anxiety caused by uncertainty. Nothing in those passages suggests that skepticism was intuitive or natural for Sextus.

In response to Bett's interpretation, I would like to emphasize that framing philosophical inquiry as a pursuit aimed at discovering truth is not characteristic of every philosophical tradition. Instead, it aligns with a specific Socratic spirit that is grounded in

a particular conception of philosophical endeavor (*cf. R.* 5.474b-480a; 6.484b; and 7.518b-c; *Banq.* 203d-204a; 210a-212a).[12] Additionally, although the idea of philosophy as a pursuit of truth was relatively widespread among ancient philosophers, there are notable exceptions. For instance, Democritus cancelled knowledge because "truth is an abyss" (DL. 9.72), and the Sophists openly rejected this veritistic project: Protagoras, a relativist, denied the existence of objective truth (Pl., *Tht.* 151e; S.E., *M.* 7.60; DL. 9.51), and his *antilogic* technique is designed to "make the weaker *logos* the stronger" (Arist., *Rhet.* 1402a-d 23-25) (*cf.* Fait, 2021). In his "Praise of Helen," Gorgias (DK 82B1) also appears to downplay truth as the ultimate goal of philosophical inquiry, instead prioritizing *persuasion* (*cf.* Pl., *Gorg.* 460a-c; 447d-448a.)

Furthermore, it is important to note that, unlike the contemporary perspective presented by Stroud (1984), where anyone engaging in epistemic practice is likely to develop skeptical doubts over time, Sextus seems to suggest that skepticism's apparent intuitiveness is confined to a specific group of experts—the philosophers. More specifically, this intuitiveness pertains to the type of investigation they conduct, which involves discerning the truth and falsity of the "anomalies of things" in order to determine what to assent to. However, I do not believe that Sextus's brand of skepticism should be viewed as natural for *all* philosophers. A clear example of this is the fact that their main rivals, the Stoics and Epicureans, also engaged in the Socratic investigation aimed at distinguishing truth from falsehood. However, rather than viewing skepticism as a *natural occurrence*, they regarded it as a theoretical construct that needed to be challenged due to its potential dangers. They believed that skepticism undermines life itself, as highlighted by the famous *apraxia* objection, as well as the moral character in general, which is established by the *immorality* objection.[13]

In conclusion, the idea that skepticism is a natural inclination only for "men of talent" appears to hold true, particularly when considering only the Pyrrhonian philosophers who subscribe to that belief. However, this perspective poses the issue that the concept of "intuitiveness" becomes overly narrow, suggesting that recognition of it is limited to a small group of experts. This ultimately undermines the essence and allure of Pyrrhonian skepticism.

5 Conclusion

The question of skepticism's intuitiveness within the Sextan *corpus* opens up many relevant avenues for inquiry, both for scholars and for those historically interested in comparing Pyrrhonian skepticism with contemporary skepticism. Bett's paper, which is under review here, significantly addresses these issues while also recognizing that the Sextan *corpus* is inconsistent on this particular matter.

I have attempted to demonstrate that Bett's positive answer to the question regarding the intuitiveness of skepticism indirectly supports what contemporary

[12] Compare this Socratic conception of philosophy with a Wittgensteinian one (*PI*: §119, 133), for which philosophy's goal is only to alleviate the bumps that language causes by constantly crashing into its own limits.

[13] See (forthcoming) for my reconstruction of the *apraxia* objection and Sextus' response, as well as Ornelas & Lozano-Vásquez (2023a), where we do the same for the immorality objection.

philosophy refers to as "the defense of expert intuition." According to this view, skepticism is intuitive primarily to a specific group of experts—the "men of talent" or philosophers. My criticisms of this perspective highlight classic objections to such a defense: First, intuitions have a specific domain of application, and outside of that domain, they tend to be unreliable, even if the intuitions come from experts. Secondly, ample empirical evidence suggests that experts do not necessarily make more effective judgments in everyday life related to their field of expertise. This raises concerns about the dominant epistemic role that the philosophical tradition has assigned to expert intuitions as a basis for determining the truth or falsity of philosophical claims.

I recognize that what I have discussed thus far is insufficient to entirely dismiss the idea of "expert intuition," nor was that my goal. My intention was merely to illustrate that philosophical expertise does not equate to having more reliable intuitions than those of non-philosophers. In recent research conducted by Livengood, Sytsma, Feltz, Scheines, and Machery (2010), the authors aimed to explore what they call "the philosophical temperament," which refers to the unique characteristics of reasoning that philosophers exhibit. Their findings suggest that a notable feature of the philosophical personality is a tendency to be skeptical about one's own intuitions:

> …philosophers are less likely to blindly accept their intuitions and more likely to submit those intuitions to scrutiny. Philosophers ponder; they question what spontaneously seems to be the case: they readily take a skeptical eye toward how things seem to them. Philosophical expertise is thus real and distinctive (more on this in Livengood et al. 2010). But, so far as we know, it does not consist in being more reliable at judging whether something is a cause, what a proper name refers to, what is permissible in specific situation, and so on. (Machery, 2011: 211-212.)

The latter gives grist to the mill of Bett's positive interpretation of the intuitiveness of skepticism in Sextus, who would be acknowledging that philosophers (and only philosophers) find the skeptical position natural. However, this is only an appearance that disappears as soon as we notice that the philosophical temperament reported by the aforementioned studies is reflected in the cautious and non-dogmatic *attitude* with which most philosophers regard their intuitions. In contrast, in the case of Bett, he is asking about the intuitiveness of skepticism *qua* substantive philosophical position.

The philosophical temperament consists of doubting one's intuitions and simple answers, an attitude that even dogmatic philosophers (the enemies of Sextus) exhibit.

If Bett's affirmative answer is a further example of the "defense of expert intuition" when applied to Sextus' skepticism, it is vulnerable to the criticisms that such a notion has raised. Therefore, there seems to be no way to establish that skepticism was intuitive for Sextus himself.

Being a philosopher does not necessarily mean being skeptical, despite how Bett interprets Sextus' perspective. Instead, it involves exercising caution and avoiding hasty judgments. This cautious temperament is not just a trait of philosophers; it is likely the appropriate mindset for anyone engaged in theoretical reflection.

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