

SEXTUS EMPIRICUS ON *ISOSTHENEIA* AND *EPOCHÊ*: A DEVELOPMENTAL MODEL

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Our problem with arguments in traditional epistemology is to get past their veneer of implausibility in order to get ourselves into a position to diagnose. We have to “intricate” ourselves before we extricate ourselves.

Thompson Clarke, *The Nature of Traditional Epistemology*

1 The Nature of *Isostheneia* and *Epochê*: A Two-Sided Debate?

In “The Modes in Sextus: Theory and Practice,” a paper written specially for his recent collection *How to Be a Pyrrhonist* (2019), Richard Bett focuses on Sextus Empiricus’s presentation and use of the Ten Modes of Aenesidemus and the Five Modes of Agrippa.¹ The Modes are “standardized forms of argument designed to induce suspension of judgment” (108).² Bett argues that both sets of modes are in tension with what I will refer to as ‘the Psychological Reading’ of Sextan *isostheneia* (equipollence) and *epochê* (suspension of judgment). In the contemporary secondary literature on Sextus, the Psychological Reading is presented as the standard interpretation in opposition to the revisionist ‘Rational Reading.’³ The difficulty of reconciling the Modes with the Psychological Reading is problematic for those who, like Bett, find the Rational Reading to be incompatible with Sextus’s undogmatic, non-doctrinal brand of skepticism.⁴

Bett describes the Psychological–Rational distinction this way:

How are we to understand Sextus’ statement that the opposing arguments and impressions assembled by the skeptic have *isostheneia*, “equal

¹ In Sextus’s *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* (PH), the Ten Modes are presented at PH 1.35–163 and the Five Modes at PH 1.164–77. In PH, Sextus ascribes the Ten Modes to “[t]he older skeptics” (PH 1.36) and the Five to “more recent skeptics” (PH 1.164). In *Against the Logicians* (M 7–8), he credits the Ten to Aenesidemus (M 7.345). Agrippa is mentioned as the source of the Five Modes only by Diogenes Laertius (*Lives*, 9.88; Vogt (ed.) 2015, 33).

² In what follows, all otherwise unattributed citations refer to pages in Bett 2019.

³ Two examples: Tad Brennan refers to Donald Morrison’s psychological reading of *epochê* as “representative of how suspension is understood on the traditional interpretation” (Brennan 1999, 55); it is “the standard view” (54). More recently, Stefan Sienkiewicz claims—using terminology borrowed from Casey Perin—that “[a] survey of the secondary literature shows that thinking of the necessity that governs the sceptic’s suspension of judgment in causal rather than rational terms, is the orthodox position” (Sienkiewicz 2019, 44 fn. 53).

⁴ Bett discusses or alludes to his preference for the Psychological Reading throughout Bett 2019. See: 4–5, 110, 152–3, 169, 221–2, 230ff.

strength?” One way to interpret it is that one judges the opposing positions to be of equal rational merit, and one suspends judgment because one draws the conclusion that one ought rationally to do so. Another is in purely psychological terms. Here it is not that one judges the opposing positions to be of equal rational merit, and one does not draw a conclusion to the effect that suspension of judgment is rationally required. Rather, one simply finds oneself equally inclined or disinclined toward either side (or every side) of the case, and given that situation, one finds oneself declining to assent to any of the alternatives. (230)

On the Rational Reading of *isostheneia*, the experience of ‘equal strength’ is “one of taking there to be equally good reasons on each side.” On the Psychological Reading, it is one of “feeling pulled with equal force toward or against each side” (230): the conflicting claims, arguments, or appearances strike the skeptic “as equally persuasive” (5); “they balance each other in terms of their tendency to convince” (227). As a result, skeptics simply find their judgment suspended (5); the skeptic “cannot muster any inclination to accept any one of [the conflicting claims, arguments, or appearances] in preference to the others; hence [she] has no choice but to withhold [her] acceptance from all of them” (152). *Epochê*, then, “must be understood as the inevitable psychological reaction to being faced with oppositions... of ‘equal strength’” (152). Though it lies at the heart of the Pyrrhonian philosophical therapy,⁵ rational argumentation is itself a casualty of the battle to achieve the skeptic’s goal of *ataraxia* (equanimity). Thus, as an enduring characteristic of mature Pyrrhonians, “suspension of judgment is not itself something that is argued for—it is something that happens to one” (222).

The unacceptability of the Rational Reading plays a significant, though largely unargued-for, role throughout Bett’s collection. In his paper on the Modes, it is what leads him to conclude that “the Ten Modes are... inconsistent with Sextus’ approach elsewhere: they are arguments for conclusions (‘we must suspend judgment about X’) of the sort that Sextus would not generally want to endorse” (114). Regarding the Five, he argues that, “though there are fewer obstacles to... a non-dogmatic (that is, genuinely skeptical) interpretation than there were in the case of the Ten,” the Five nevertheless “give the initial impression... of being a series of connected arguments for a definite conclusion” (121). The clear suggestion is that any “genuinely skeptical” interpretation of Sextus will endorse the Psychological Reading and reject the Rational Reading.

In what follows, I argue that the Psychological–Rational distinction is fundamentally misconceived, for there are in fact four possible (though only three actual) views to be taken regarding the nature of *isostheneia* and *epochê*. Bett is not alone in overlooking this important point. Indeed, as far as I’ve been able to discover, all commentators who discuss this issue characterize it as coming down to a choice between two possible readings.⁶ They do not all agree on how to characterize the options, but that there are two and only two is, I think, generally accepted. Realizing that the choice is not binary reveals, among other things, that Bett’s interpretation in fact deviates from the standard interpretation. This ought to come as a surprise to Bett, for he seems to think that he is endorsing the standard view, or at least a view that is generally accepted.⁷ After surveying examples of the

⁵ Here and in what follows, ‘Pyrrhonism’ and its cognates (as well as ‘skepticism’ and its cognates, unless qualified) should be understood as referring to Sextus’s position, particularly as it is presented in PH.

⁶ A few examples: Lamménranta 2008, 16; Thorsrud 2009, 128–30; Perin 2010, 35–8; Sienkiewicz 2019, 43–5.

⁷ “*Along with so many others*, I interpret ‘equal strength’ as a psychological rather than a logical or epistemic notion” (221; emphasis added). In fact, as we’ll see, very few commentators endorse a psychological

four possible (and three actual) interpretations (§2), I then argue that all and none of the three are correct—that is, while none is *wholly* right, all are *partly* right. I attempt to make good on this claim in §3 by sketching, “at appropriate length for an outline” (PH 3.279),⁸ a developmental model of Sextus’s Pyrrhonism. In conclusion (§4), I suggest that there are at least three distinct ‘voices’ or ‘viewpoints’ jostling each other in Sextus’s texts and that all are consistent with the aims and attitudes of the Mature Pyrrhonian, properly understood.

2 *Isostheneia* and *Epochê*: Four Possible Interpretations

The insight guiding my approach is simple. One can (and indeed, most commentators do) pull *isostheneia* and *epochê* apart: *isostheneia* can be interpreted as rational while *epochê* is interpreted as psychological, and vice versa. Assuming the mutual exclusivity and exhaustiveness of these two categories, the four possible readings are:

1. (Purely Rational) Both *isostheneia* and *epochê* are rational
2. (Standard) *Isostheneia* is rational, *epochê* is psychological
3. (Null) *Isostheneia* is psychological, *epochê* is rational
4. (Purely Psychological) Both *isostheneia* and *epochê* are psychological

As we’ll see, (1) and (4) are minority views. (2) is the standard interpretation, while (to the best of my knowledge) no one endorses (3).⁹

2.1 The Purely Rational Interpretation: Both *Isostheneia* and *Epochê* are Rational

This is the reading that Bett explicitly opposes. It has been at least qualifiedly endorsed by Markus Lammenranta, Casey Perin, and Katja Vogt. Interestingly, it was at one point also the view of Pyrrhonism offered by Gisela Striker, though she later argued in favor of the standard interpretation. In her “Sceptical Strategies,” Striker writes,

The question of the reasons for suspension of judgement is fairly easy to answer in the case of Pyrrhonism... Sextus makes it quite clear that the argument behind the sceptic's attitude is *isostheneia*, or the ‘equal force’ of contradictory propositions in the fields of both sense perception and theory. This argument is based on the famous ‘tropes’ as well as on the lengthy discussions of conflicting theories in Sextus’ own books *Adversus mathematicos*, which typically end with a statement to the effect that, there being no way to decide which one of the parties to the dispute is right, the sceptic will suspend judgement. Now this argument leads directly to

reading of *isostheneia*. I think Casey Perin is right when he claims that the rational reading of *isostheneia* is “the standard view” (Perin 2010, 36 fn. 7).

⁸ English translations of PH are based on Sextus Empiricus 2000, though often extensively revised by me. My source for the original Greek is the online edition prepared by Emidio Spinelli (Sextus Empiricus, n.d.).

⁹ In a sense, of course, there are a great many more possible views, even within the apparently binary conceptual space set up by the Psychological–Rational distinction, for we can distinguish between various types of psychological relation and various types of rational constraint.

epochê: if we have no reason whatever to prefer any proposition to its contradictory, clearly the most reasonable thing is to avoid a decision and keep clear of any positive belief. (Striker 1980, 95–6)

In this passage, Striker is taking it for granted that there are “reasons” for suspending judgment. She claims that *isostheneia* is based on “argument,” including the arguments codified in the Modes. These arguments establish (or purport to establish) that there is “no way to decide” between opposed and conflicting claims, arguments, or appearances. Thus, *isostheneia* is rational, not merely psychological; it is the conclusion of an argument. *Epochê* is also rational: if p and q (or x and y) are equipollent, then “the most reasonable thing to do” is to suspend judgment about p and q (or x and y).

It is important to bear in mind that one’s interpretation of the nature of *isostheneia*, *epochê*, and their relation needn’t be part of an account of Pyrrhonism that renders it consistent or coherent. One can hold that, as Sextus presents them, *isostheneia* and *epochê* are rational, but that this is incompatible with his own skepticism (because, e.g., commitment to rational principles is incompatible with universal suspension of judgment). Similarly with the Modes: one can find, as Bett does, that they are in tension with the undogmatic character of skepticism as Sextus describes it.¹⁰ For her part, Striker charges Sextus at different times with both sorts of inconsistency. The Ten Modes, she claims, are “arguments against the possibility of knowledge” (Striker 1983, 116), specifically knowledge regarding “the real nature of things” (Striker 1983, 117). This introduces into Sextus’s account an “apparent inconsistency,” for (a) the Modes appear to support not just undecidability, but relativity, and (b) “the relativity argument seems to belong to a tradition of negative dogmatism” (Striker 1983, 132–3).¹¹ The set of the Five Modes, meanwhile, “is not a method for reaching equipollence as advertised in the definition of Scepticism. It is in fact a piece of negative dogmatism” (Striker 2001, 120).¹² Again like Bett, she argues that the Psychological Reading of *epochê* must be Sextus’s official position, but that it is inconsistent with some of his arguments (specifically, in addition to the Modes, the ‘future philosopher’ argument at PH 1.33–4):

... like Agrippa’s Modes, [this argument] belies the claim that suspension of judgment comes to him “passively” and is a mere affection... Rather, he appears to rely on an inductive argument to show that even the most compelling philosophical theory might one day be overthrown, and to suspend judgment because he wants to avoid rash assent. Hence he seems for once to go against his passive affections and to follow reason. (Striker 2001, 128)

¹⁰ This point explains how Benjamin Morison can be correct that, according to “the orthodox interpretation” of the Modes (which he rejects), *epochê* is rational, not psychological, despite that the standard interpretation of *epochê* holds that it is psychological. See Morison 2011, 287–9.

¹¹ She does consider a way that Sextus could try to domesticate relativity, namely, by expressing it as a statement about appearances only (Striker 1983, 133); but she does not seem to find this strategy very promising—though others have, as we’ll see.

¹² Again, Striker does consider a way that Sextus might try to domesticate the negative dogmatism of the Modes, namely, by claiming that they are used only as *ad hominem* arguments against dogmatists (Striker 2001, 120). But again, she does not seem to find this strategy very promising: “to the extent that [Sextus] seems to think they [i.e., dogmatists] will have no escape [from the Five Modes], his practice threatens to undermine the claim that the Pyrrhonist will lead a life without dogmatic assent” (Striker 2001, 121)

It is unclear to me whether Striker's later endorsement of the standard interpretation of *isostheneia* and *epochê*¹³ reflects a genuine change in her view, as she may well have intended in the passage from Striker 1980 quoted above to state only how *isostheneia* and *epochê* work *in fact*, not how they would have to work for Sextus's skepticism to be consistent.

What distinguishes later proponents of (1) from Striker circa 1980 is that they *do* want to argue that the Rational Reading is consistent with Pyrrhonism. Markus Lammenranta, for example, has argued in a series of papers for a dialectical reading of Sextus, one that places great importance on the first Agrippan mode, the Mode from Disagreement. Regarding *isostheneia*, he writes that

[Sextus's] point is rather that when they [i.e., dogmatists] prefer their own appearances to those of other animals and human beings, they make a mistake... Here Sextus clearly thinks that the mistake of the dogmatists is a dialectical one. When dogmatists judge that their own appearances are true while those of other animals and other people are false, they simply assume what they are supposed to prove. They beg the question against their opponents' conflicting judgments. So our inability to decide between conflicting appearances is not a psychological matter but an inability to do so without violating the rules of dialectic. (Lammenranta 2008, 16)

Regarding *epochê*, he writes that "[w]e should suspend judgment because we cannot decide between conflicting appearances without begging the question... Neither [participant in the debate] can defend herself against the other without begging the question. Sextus suggests that we should suspend judgment in this sort of situation" (Lammenranta 2008, 16–7). Lammenranta's defense of the consistency of Sextus's appeal to the normative principle in question (namely, that "it is wrong to beg the question, so one should not prefer one's own position simply on the ground that it is one's own") consists in arguing for the "intuitive force" of that principle (Lammenranta 2008, 19–20). Alan Bailey makes a similar case regarding the three Agrippan modes that make up the Agrippan Trilemma:

...the three tropes that are supposed to establish that no claim is ever rationally preferable to its contradictory rely on principles of reasoning that are all extremely plausible. Almost no one would wish to maintain that unfinished regresses of justification, circular arguments, or mere assumption can provide a person with good reason to believe that some particular claim is true. Moreover... there are also persuasive grounds for conceding Sextus' unargued but far-reaching supposition that appeals to a claim's alleged self-evidence cannot provide us with a rational justification for assenting to that claim. It seems clear, therefore, that the individual components of Agrippa's tropes would strike most people as relatively uncontroversial constraints on the notion of rational justification. (Bailey 2002, 258)

¹³ Cf. Striker 2004, 16: "... the Pyrrhonist's suspension of judgment is not a stance adopted out of rational caution, on the grounds that none of the conflicting views seem to be sufficiently justified. Rather, suspension is an experience forced upon the Pyrrhonist by his inability to settle disputes in *any* field... The Pyrrhonist... does not conclude that he ought to suspend judgment but finds himself simply unable to make up his mind."

If Bailey is right that “most people” would agree that we ought to abide by the constraints embodied in the Agrippan Trilemma, then we might go further and argue that, insofar as he appeals *in propria persona* to these rational principles, Sextus is simply following “everyday observances” (cf. PH 1.23).¹⁴ This assumes, of course, not only that rational justification is an everyday, not an exclusively philosophical, phenomenon, but also that mature Pyrrhonians will feel free in the course of everyday life to make use of such everyday epistemic practices. I believe that both of these assumptions are correct. I will return to these issues in §3.

Casey Perin and Katja Vogt have also defended (1), though perhaps only in a qualified sense. The burden of Perin’s interpretation of Pyrrhonism is to make good his claim that Pyrrhonians remain truth-seekers throughout the various stages of their career, i.e., that their epistemic and practical attitudes remain at all stages responsive to or grounded on reason. Regarding *isostheneia*, he writes that “a conflict between two candidates for belief *p* and *q* is equipollent for the Sceptic if and only if it appears to him that there is no reason to believe either *p* or *q*” (Perin 2010, 36). Regarding *epochê*, he rejects what he calls “causal” readings of the relation between *isostheneia* and *epochê* in favor of “hypothetical” readings: “In the first instance this necessity [i.e., that one suspend judgment in the face of equipollence] is not causal but *hypothetical*: it is necessary for the Sceptic to suspend judgement if he is to satisfy, as he aims to do, the demands of reason” (Perin 2010, 38).

I say that Perin’s endorsement of (1) is qualified because he allows that the relation between *isostheneia* and *epochê* can be, and in some cases probably is, causal, but that it is never “*merely* causal” (Perin 2010, 50). The causal account is, as Sienkiewicz puts it, “highly under-described,” for what *accounts* for the causal connection? Following Perin, Sienkiewicz understands the causal account as turning on the idea that Pyrrhonians acquire “a [psychological] disposition... to suspend judgment when confronted by an evidentially undecided agreement” (Sienkiewicz 2019, 45). But, Perin argues, even if Pyrrhonians do acquire a disposition to suspend judgment such that the mere experience of equipollence causes them, in and of itself, to suspend judgment, “the hypothetical necessity I have described is the source of the Sceptic’s acquired disposition to suspend judgement and so of whatever causal necessity is attached to the Sceptic’s suspension of judgement” (Perin 2010, 51).¹⁵

Finally, Katja Vogt’s endorsement of (1) seems to involve the sort of ‘hypothetical’ considerations we saw in Perin. *Isostheneia*, she writes, is contingent upon “focus[ing] on the arguments” rather than on what seems to one to be the case: “It is only through the focus on argument, and immersion into argument, that the skeptic can arrive at this balanced state of mind” (Vogt 2012, 130–1). The same is true of *epochê*: “The skeptic investigates things ‘*hoson epi to logon*’ (PH 1.20). That

¹⁴ Cf. Williams 2001, 63: “On the question of its naturalness or intuitiveness, the Agrippan argument’s chief presupposition—that knowing differs from merely assuming or surmising and that this difference has something to do with an ability to back up or justify whatever can properly be said to be known—seems to be one of those lowest common denominator ideas that just about everyone (except perhaps extreme externalists) is ready to concede.” Of course, Williams ultimately diagnoses the Agrippan argument with presupposing what he calls the Prior Grounding conception of justification, which he finds to be deeply at odds with everyday epistemic practices (Williams 2001, 147–8). I am not convinced this is true with respect to *all* everyday epistemic practices. (For a compelling case against Williams, see Cíntora & Ornelas 2013.) Even if Williams is right (which, again, I doubt) that the Prior Grounding conception of justification is foreign to everyday life, it certainly is *not* foreign to traditional philosophizing; and as I argue in §3, below, a commitment to traditional philosophy plays an important role in the development of the Mature Pyrrhonian.

¹⁵ It isn’t clear to me that ‘causal’ readings *must* lean on an acquired disposition, for it is surely possible that the Pyrrhonian’s initial exposure to equipollence caused her to suspend judgment, in which case no story about an acquired disposition is needed—which is not to say that the ‘dispositional’ account does not make the causal reading more plausible.

is, in investigation, the skeptic looks at opposite positions *from the point of view of argument*. When she eventually suspends judgment on them, she does so with a view to the arguments she considered” (Vogt 2012, 131). Thus, both *isostheneia* and *epochê* are rational.

I say that Vogt’s endorsement of (1) is qualified because the rationality in question remains hypothetical. Vogt’s idea is reminiscent of Hume: in our ‘closets,’ immersed in pure philosophical argumentation, we will experience equipollence and suspend judgment, but (presumably) once we leave our closets and are no longer so immersed, we will fall back into ordinary epistemic attitudes. I take it that it is not immersion in just any sort of argument that has this effect, but immersion in a particular brand of argumentative practice: pure philosophizing. (I return to the idea of ‘pure philosophizing’ in §3, below.) It seems to me that, properly understood, this qualification answers Bett’s objection that “[i]t is not clear why involvement in argument makes ‘equal strength’ more likely; we must be dealing with topics where the arguments are not overwhelmingly on one side, and I see no reason to expect that all topics will fit this description” (Bett 2019, 232 fn. 11). What matters is not the *topic*, but the *style* or *kind* of argument.

2.2 The Standard Interpretation: *Isostheneia* is Rational, *Epochê* is Psychological

Let’s begin, as we so often must, with Myles Burnyeat. Despite some anomalies or ambiguities in his text, I think it is safe to count him as a proponent of the standard interpretation. He writes,

...we know perfectly well *why* it appears to the sceptic that any dogmatic claim has a contrary equally worthy or unworthy of acceptance. It is the result of a set of arguments designed to show, compellingly, that this is in fact the case. Such arguments can compel him to suspend judgement because they compel him to accept their conclusion—to accept, that is, that in each and every case dogmatic claims are indeed equally balanced and hence that one ought to suspend judgement. (Burnyeat 1980, 231)

Here, *isostheneia* is clearly rational: it is “the effect of argument” (Burnyeat 1980, 232; cf. 209). As a result of these arguments, the Pyrrhonian is *compelled* to suspend judgment. It would seem, however, that Burnyeat holds, *contra* the standard interpretation, that the nature of this compulsion is itself rational: the Pyrrhonian is led “to accept... that one ought to suspend judgement.”¹⁶ That this is not his considered view is made clear, I think, when he explains what it means to be “constrained by argument to suspend judgement and belief” (Burnyeat 1980, 224).

It would seem... that this *pathos* [expressed by the phrase ‘I determine nothing’], and assent to it, is forced upon the sceptic as the outcome of his arguments... Look through a sample of sceptic arguments and you will find that a great number of them end by saying that one is forced to

¹⁶ See also Burnyeat 1980, 232: “*Epochê* is not a blind, mechanical effect but, supposedly, the natural and intelligible outcome of following with our human capacity for thought along the paths marked out by the sceptical arguments.” I believe it is passages of this sort that lead Brennan to read Burnyeat as endorsing not (2) but (1): “... the sort of conclusion to *epochê* via arguments that Burnyeat had in mind” (Brennan 1999, 98).

suspend judgement, the word most commonly used being *anankazô*, the same word as describes our passive relationship to an impression of sense and the assent it engages. The sceptic assents only when his assent is constrained, and equally when he withholds assent, suspends judgement, this is because he finds himself constrained to do so. (Burnyeat 1980, 222)

The experience of equipollence plunges Pyrrhonians into a state of mind in which they just do not know what to think, as in the proverbial case of the person confronted with a debate over whether the number of stars in the sky is odd or even (Burnyeat 1980, 222–3). Yes, it is a *result* of argument, but it is not itself the *conclusion* of an argument—it's not that we *ought* to suspend judgment regarding the number of stars in the sky; it is that we cannot but suspend judgment.

The standard interpretation has also been endorsed by Donald Morrison (1990, 204),¹⁷ Julia Annas (1998, 196), Alan Bailey (2002, 120–1), Filip Grgic (2007, 142), Harald Thorsrud (2009, 128–34),¹⁸ Diego Machuca,¹⁹ and arguably Bett in the 1980s (1987, 51).

2.3 The Null Interpretation: *Isostheneia* is Psychological, *Epochê* is Rational

I am unfamiliar with any commentator who endorses (3).²⁰ It's not hard to see why. If one is committed to a rational principle at the stage of moving from equipollence to suspension, then presumably one will also have been convinced of that same principle earlier, at the stage of moving from opposed arguments to equipollent arguments

2.4 The Purely Psychological Interpretation: Both *Isostheneia* and *Epochê* are Psychological

The fourth and final possible interpretation is the mirror image of the account defended by Lammenranta, Perin, and Vogt. In understanding *isostheneia* as psychological, it differs, as Casey Perin has noted, from the standard interpretation (Perin 2010, 36 fn. 7). To the best of my knowledge, Michael Williams was the first to defend this unorthodox view. He writes,

... no epistemological commitments are buried in the notion of equal force, which is to be understood as equal persuasiveness or plausibility (for a

¹⁷ Morrison explains the psychological nature of *epochê* in terms of an acquired disposition—the view addressed by Perin. See also Morrison 1990, 208–11.

¹⁸ Thorsrud does not endorse the standard interpretation as explicitly as I would like. That he thinks *isostheneia* is rational is clear from his reference to “equal rational force” (2009, 128). Regarding *epochê*, he considers both the psychological (causal) interpretation and the rational (normative) interpretation, and it seems clear that he finds the former more acceptable.

¹⁹ See Machuca 2009 and 2011. Regarding *isostheneia*, Machuca writes that “[w]hat Sextus is saying is that, as far as the theoretical use of reason is concerned, all appearances appear equally persuasive or credible to the Sceptic, since their epistemic status seems to be the same” (2009, 117). As for *epochê*: it “is a state that supervenes on [the Pyrrhonist] as a result of his own psychological constitution by virtue of which he cannot avoid withholding his assent whenever conflicting epistemic appearances strike him as equipollent” (2011, 71).

²⁰ I consider a possible exception in §3.4, below; but I do not think it qualifies as an endorsement of (3) strictly speaking.

given person, in a given situation, etc.) and not as implying an objective scale of evidential strength. More than this, however, *epochê* is not mediated by the sceptic's *judging that* two theses are equally plausible, much less that they are equally well-supported or equally worthy of assent. Rather, the combination of contrariety and equal appeal makes it impossible to assent to either of them. Suitably opposed theses *neutralize* each other. This does not depend on the sceptic's making any judgments about them. (Williams 1988, 555)

If this passage leaves any doubt that Williams interprets *isostheneia* psychologically, he dispels it here:

The whole point of the method of opposition is that *isostheneia* is not "established" but felt. The method works, not by arguing that there are conflicts that can never be (rationally) resolved, but by *displaying* antitheses in which the conflicting opinions and arguments are felt to be equally plausible and so neutralize each other. Arguments for undecidability have nothing to do with *isostheneia*. (Williams 1988, 572)

In short: "To become a Pyrrhonian sceptic involves neither assenting to a thesis nor following a prescriptive rule but rather acquiring abilities and cultivating habits" (Williams 1988, 559–60).

Tad Brennan has endorsed a variant of this view. Regarding *isostheneia*, he writes that the Pyrrhonian's "mind... is not, in Burnyeat's phrase, 'paralyzed' by the presence of countervailing arguments; quite the opposite, it is simply unmoved by either side" (Brennan 1999, 96). *Epochê*, meanwhile, "is not in any sense a conclusion, not even in the sense of being the result of his examination of arguments" (Brennan 1999, 96). A peculiarity of Brennan's account is his claim that "the Sceptic doesn't come to, or arrive at, a suspension of belief, for the very simple reason that that is where he has always been, and indeed where he started" (Brennan 1999, 95). It seems to me that Brennan is here misreading the text, though in an illuminating way. I will return in §3 to the role of what I call 'antecedent *epochê*' in the Mature Pyrrhonian's development.

Bett follows Williams in endorsing (4).²¹ He writes that "[t]he [Pyrrhonian's] procedure seems... to consist in the assembling of opposing arguments, ideas or impressions, in such a way that both (or all) sides of the opposition are equally powerful and thereby together induce suspension of judgment." But, he goes on,

This does not require... that suspension of judgment is the rationally required reaction to the situation of "equal strength" among the oppositions; nor does the notion of "equal strength" itself have to be understood in terms of equal rational justification. "Equal strength" can very well be seen as a psychological notion—one simply... finds oneself experiencing each pole of the opposition as equally persuasive. Suspension of judgment, too, might simply be a result one finds oneself experiencing, rather than deciding upon as the *appropriate* reaction. (Bett 2011, 404)

This passage is similar to many in *How to Be a Pyrrhonist* in that it does not actually argue in favor of the purely psychological reading. I think we can all agree with

²¹ Cf. Bett 2019, 230 fn. 8.

Bett that (4) is a possible interpretation of Pyrrhonism. The question is whether it is the right one. Bett clearly thinks that it is, as we saw in §1. The closest he comes to defending the purely psychological interpretation is to claim that Sextus's Pyrrhonism officially forbids him from endorsing or adverting *in propria persona* to any rational standards. Thus, any trace of rationalism in Sextus would render his position inconsistent or self-defeating.

If [skepticism] was an argument for the conclusion that one ought to suspend judgment, that would invite the question "why?"; and it is hard to see how to answer except by appealing to norms of rationality—norms that Sextus, who claims to suspend judgment about at least all theoretical matters (PH 1.13), and who includes deduction, induction, and demonstration among the targets of his skeptical procedure (PH 2.134–204), would have no business signing on to. (110; cf. 230)

Here, Bett is assuming a particular interpretation of the nature of Pyrrhonian *epochê*. We might wonder whether Sextus's skeptical arguments leading to suspension of judgment regarding "deduction, induction, and demonstration" really do forbid him, on pain of inconsistency, from appealing *in propria persona* to reasons and arguments. I happen to think that they do not have this consequence, but for now I must leave aside this important issue.

According to what strikes me as Bett's most perspicuous argument in this area, saddling Sextus with rational commitments is incompatible with Sextus's skepticism because (a) "to suspend judgment about some topic is to cease to have definite beliefs about that topic" (222), and (b) to think that "suspension of judgment is the *rationally required* response" to the experience of equipollence "would itself amount to the holding of a definite view on the meta-level, about the nature of rational justification" (152). I am in complete agreement with Bett that "the topics on which the skeptic aims to produce suspension of judgment are quite unrestricted, and so would include second-order logical or epistemological topics" such as the topic of the nature of rational justification (152). I do *not* agree, however, that the fact that Pyrrhonian *epochê* extends to second-order epistemological claims and arguments entails that the Rational Readings of *isostheneia* and *epochê* are straightforwardly mistaken. At the same time, I agree with Bett that they *are* self-defeating (cf. 221). I also think that Sextus's position is consistent. To begin explaining how I can hold these views consistently and simultaneously, and (more generally) to make a start at trying to improve the sad state of interpretative affairs I have laid out in this section, I turn now to my Developmental Model.

3 Outlines of a Developmental Model of Pyrrhonism

Though my Developmental Model (DM) is not one of the four possible interpretations discussed in §2, I do not think of it as a fifth possible interpretation so much as an attempt to locate the positions staked out in §2 at different stages of the Pyrrhonian's development. Given my aim to present the DM "concisely and in outline" (PH 2.1), I will make little effort here to defend it on exegetical grounds. Doing so would require a paper in itself. For now, I want merely to sketch the model, my primary aim being to show that all the various interpretations discussed in §2 have a place in the scheme.

Many commentators note that, in the early chapters of PH, Sextus describes some sort of developmental story, one that begins prior to the proto-Pyrrhonian's initiation into philosophy and ends with the fully developed, or 'mature,' Pyrrhonian.²² It seems to me, however, that the significance of this for interpreting the various things Sextus says both in the opening of PH and in the rest of his work is woefully underappreciated. Unpacking Sextus's cryptic story of the Pyrrhonian's development helps to solve, or at least render less intractable, a host of fundamental interpretative disputes—or so it seems to me. Making a case for this claim will involve drawing upon conceptual resources that are not explicitly or indisputably present in Sextus's texts; but this should, I think, come as no surprise to anyone familiar with Sextus's maddening brevity on the subject of the Pyrrhonian's development.

3.1 Stage 0: The Everyday Dogmatist

The DM begins with the assumption that, in at least one of the senses Sextus has in mind, the sort of 'dogmatism' that he opposes is a *natural* state, not exclusively a state induced by or reliant upon philosophizing. In other words, there is a kind of everyday, prephilosophical dogmatism. Moreover, everyday dogmatism is not at all rare. On the contrary, it is widespread—a pandemic, one might say. Some commentators seem to deny this, claiming that prephilosophical everyday life is blissfully free of the sort of 'rash and conceited' epistemic attitudes that the Pyrrhonian therapy aims to treat. Robert Fogelin, for instance, writes that

The classical sceptic was not interested in the plain man's natural and unpretentious beliefs. As long as a person remained content with modestly reporting how things struck him, then the sceptic had nothing to say against him. The object of the sceptic's attack was the philosopher, in particular, the philosopher of a dogmatic cast who attempted to maintain that his opinions enjoyed a special status above those of others. (Fogelin 1981, 216–7; cf. Fogelin 1994, 3–9)

Anthony Rudd, who (like Fogelin) sees himself as adopting Michael Frede's interpretation of Pyrrhonism, holds that what he calls global metaphysical skepticism leaves everyday beliefs intact "provided we construe those beliefs in a modest, pragmatic fashion" (Rudd 2003, 13). Now, no doubt we could make out what sorts of belief qualify as "natural and unpretentious," and no doubt we would conclude that plain men (whoever they are) do hold such beliefs. But to make out the distinction between philosophers and plain men needed to underwrite the claim that Pyrrhonism targets only philosophers, it would have to be the case that *all* the beliefs of plain men are "natural and unpretentious" in this way. I find this possibility implausible in the extreme. Epistemic pretentiousness in one's beliefs and declarations is hardly a vice unique to philosophers. Encouraged by Perin (2020, 118–9), Bett has expressed agreement on this point: there are such persons as "dogmatic non-philosophers" (Bett 2020, 144). I think Vogt is expressing the same sort of sentiment when she writes that "[d]ogmatizing is like swimming with the current. It is, in Sextus's characterization, the default mode of the mind" (Vogt 2012, 139). Not only, then, are there dogmatic non-philosophers; dogmatism is (in

²² Cf. Bailey 2002, 264–6. My DM shares much with the interpretation Bailey offers in these pages. I do not, however, think that Bailey goes far enough, nor into sufficient detail.

at least the majority of cases) human beings' default attitude. We are, as Husserl saw, "born dogmatists" (Husserl 2014, 141); or as Montaigne would say, "Presumption is our natural and original malady" (Montaigne 1958, 330).

The DM assumes, moreover, that philosophical dogmatism is at least initially parasitic upon everyday dogmatism. As Jay Garfield puts it, discussing metaphysics,

arguably, the person on the street thinks of the physical as substantial, thinks of causation as a real force, thinks of personal identity as grounded in a soul, and so forth. But these views are probably in the typical case rather inchoate. Philosophical reificationism [i.e., dogmatism] can be seen as a careful conceptual refinement of this fallacy of everyday metaphysics. It is the job of the [Pyrrhonian or Buddhist] skeptic to cure both the ordinary and the sophisticated forms of the disease. (Garfield 1990, 262–3)

This seems right to me, and it suggests that there is something that deserves to be called 'the philosophy of everyday life.' Following Thompson Clarke, I locate the primary expression of this everyday philosophy in "the general propositions of Common Sense" (Clarke 1972, 754). In his unpublished dissertation, Clarke argues that the most fundamental commonsense beliefs—namely, that "[t]here are physical objects" and that "[w]e can know that there are because we can see them (and touch them)" (Clarke 1962, 235)—are themselves initially and for the most part philosophical, for they presuppose what we might call *commonsense realism*; but the philosophizing that produces them is "of the most natural, immediate, and compelling kind," so much so that the fundamental commonsense beliefs seem "in a certain respect... to be *a priori*" (Clarke 1962, 241). Indeed, the philosophizing that gives rise to the most fundamental commonsense beliefs is *so* natural, immediate, and compelling that "everyone succumbs to the conception [of empirical knowledge] implicit in the common-sense beliefs as soon as he begins thinking in general terms about empirical knowledge" (Clarke 1962, 243). In a word, the fundamental commonsense beliefs initially present themselves as *self-evident*. This is why denial of the fundamental commonsense beliefs is likely to strike us as *paradoxical* in the original sense of 'contrary to received (authoritative) opinion.'²³ In a certain attitude or frame of mind, we are likely to find that any denial of the fundamental commonsense beliefs is *absurd* and must therefore be mistaken (even if we cannot discern just where the mistake lies). Yet if Clarke is right, these beliefs are in fact philosophical—or, if you like, they are philosophy's prephilosophical roots. Thus, they are dogmas (or nascent dogmas) even in the stricter sense of "a philosophical principle or a scientific theory" (Barnes 1982, 73)—though, again, they are so natural, immediate, and compelling that we "succumb" to them sometimes without even realizing it.

To undergo the Pyrrhonian philosophical therapy, one must self-consciously commit oneself to philosophy (cf. PH 1.26). What does this amount to? In *How to*

²³ Cf. Bett 1987, 53: "What distinguishes a certain philosophical position as a form of *scepticism* is that it attacks, or undermines, some kind of deep-seated shared attitude towards the world or towards ourselves. For example, we normally take for granted that we *do* know at least some things about the world around us, that some moral positions *are*, in some objective sense, correct and others incorrect, or that we *do* in general choose our actions freely. None of these are propositions which we would normally *articulate*; they are much too basic to our ordinary attitudes even to occur to us most of the time. But it seems undeniable that we *proceed as if* these propositions are true. What is characteristic of scepticism, it would seem, is precisely that it denies propositions of this deep-seated kind."

Be a Pyrrhonist, Bett repeatedly draws a distinction between “a standard philosophical approach” (31)—i.e., “philosophy_D,” for ‘dogmatic’ (43)—and philosophy as Sextus practices it. He characterizes ‘standard’ philosophy as a project of inquiry aimed at discovering the truth (3–4), which differs from Sextus’s (perhaps intentionally) amorphous conception of philosophy, one that, whatever positive characteristics it may have, does *not* aim at discovering the truth. In my view, this dichotomy, while not without exegetical merit, overlooks a fundamental and pervasive contrast between two conceptions of philosophy, one of which (= Sextus’s) is best understood as a *reaction against* the other. I have in mind the distinction between what I call ‘traditional’ and ‘nontraditional’ philosophy. The basic form of this distinction is captured well by G.E.R. Lloyd, who finds in both Western and Chinese philosophy a “tension” between

two opposing views of the aims of philosophizing. On one [the ‘traditional’ view], the focus is on what reason reveals has to be the case, and if that yields counter-intuitive conclusions or ones that conflict with ordinary opinions, reason should nevertheless prevail. On the second [‘nontraditional’] view, the task of philosophy is rather to ‘save the phenomena’ in the sense of elucidating and clarifying what is normally believed, removing inconsistencies in those beliefs, and no doubt modifying some of them in the course of clarification. But on that view, if the conclusions are counter-intuitive, that suggests that the arguments should be reexamined, not that ordinary intuitions should be abandoned. (Lloyd 2009, 6)

Another way to look at it is that, for traditional philosophers, “one has to have some special reason [i.e., a philosophical justification] to make a claim” (Frede 1984, 206), even of the most ordinary sort, whereas for nontraditional philosophers, “there has to be *some*” “special reason to doubt” ordinary, commonplace claims (Austin 1970, 82; cf. 86–8). Traditional philosophy is (or purports to be) *pure* in the sense made familiar by Bernard Williams.²⁴ The various characteristics of pure philosophizing are explained by what I take to be its defining move: a methodological detachment from, or ‘bracketing’ of, the epistemic and practical authority of everyday life, accompanied by an exclusive commitment to pure, autonomous reason. To be sure, even much pure philosophizing is in the business of vindicating everyday life; but such a project is compelling only given an initial suspension or rejection of everyday life’s inherent authority.

I think that this insight lies behind Brennan’s idea that “[t]he Skeptic does not arrive at reasoned conclusions to *epokhê*; *epokhê* was there from the start” (Brennan 1999, 99). Adoption of a kind of antecedent *epochê*, as opposed to the ‘consequent’ *epochê* that Sextus has in mind,²⁵ is central to one’s initiation into traditional philosophy—and it is, I take it, traditional philosophy that Sextus has in mind when he speaks of “so-called philosophy” (as at PH 1.6). Whereas consequent *epochê* is, minimally, suspension of judgment regarding traditional philosophy, antecedent *epochê* is suspension of judgment regarding everyday life.

²⁴ Williams 1978. Williams’s conception of ‘pure enquiry’ may owe a debt, however indirect, to Thompson Clarke, whose characterization of philosophy in “The Legacy of Skepticism” turns on the notion of ‘purity.’

²⁵ Early in PH, Sextus tells us that the “skeptical way of life” can be called “suspensive’ (*ephecticê*), from the state of mind (*pathous*) that comes about in the inquirer after the investigation” (PH 1.7). “Comes about” translates *ginomenou*, a form of *gignomai*, which seems to me to have unmistakable connotations of *newness*, of the coming-to-be of something that was not there before, as in the case of birth.

One finds this sort of methodological use of suspension in Husserl's post-1907 work. For Husserl, antecedent *epochê* entails suspending judgment on “the general thesis of the natural attitude” (Husserl 2014, 52), which corresponds more or less to what I have referred to as ‘commonsense realism.’ We needn't “*give up the thesis... we alter nothing in our conviction*” (Husserl 2014, 54), for this initial *epochê* is intended only to clear the way for the discovery of a foundation for (or justification of) everyday life that is more rigorous and secure than mere self-evidence. Given a commitment to traditional philosophy, we are called upon to ‘give up’ the general thesis of the natural attitude only if a general negative dogmatism turns out to be the result of traditional-philosophical inquiry—which, Sextus thinks, is precisely what seems to be the case (cf. PH 1.20; 2.254–5). Traditional-philosophical inquiry does not, as the proto-Pyrrhonian had hoped, lead to the discovery of the truth, but to *isostheneia* and (consequent) *epochê* (PH 1.26).

3.2 Stage 1: The Traditional Philosopher

At Stage 1, then, proto-Pyrrhonians are traditional philosophers in the sense of being committed to traditional-philosophical epistemic standards—its canons of rationality. As such, they are “obliged to judge dogmatically” (PH 2.254). Faced with “equipollent dispute,” however, they find themselves “unable to judge” and so suspend their judgment (PH 1.26).

From the perspective of the Stage 1 proto-skeptic, both *isostheneia* and *epochê* are rational. The proto-Pyrrhonian is convinced *by the arguments* that *p* and *q* (or *x* and *y*) are equipollent and that, given equipollence, one ought to suspend judgment. The result is to transmute antecedent *epochê* (regarding everyday life) from a methodological gambit into an apparently inescapable philosophical conclusion. In its most general form, consequent *epochê* involves ‘giving up’ the ‘thesis’ of ‘the natural attitude’—it involves wholesale first-order *epochê*. First-order *epochê* is suspension at the epistemic level, i.e., at the level of claims about the world.

3.3 Stage 2: The Metaphilosopher

The shift from Stage 1 to Stage 2 occurs when proto-Pyrrhonians subject traditional philosophy's canons of rationality to the same sorts of skeptical challenges that they had previously, at Stage 1, brought to bear against epistemic claims. In other words, Stage 2 proto-Pyrrhonians move from the epistemic to the epistemological level.²⁶ This leads to the realization that Stage 1 *isostheneia* and *epochê* are not unqualifiedly rational; rather, they are hypothetical, contingent upon acceptance of traditional philosophy's canons of rationality. Only *if* you want to abide by those canons is it rationally required (*a*) that you find all claims, arguments, or appearances you have investigated to be equipollent,²⁷ and (*b*) that you suspend judgment when confronted with equipollent claims, arguments, or appearances.

²⁶ For a helpful discussion of the importance of such level-shifts to the logic of the Agrippan Trilemma, see Floridi 1996, Ch. 4. Floridi refers not to the Agrippan Trilemma, but, following Hans Albert, to Münchhausen's Trilemma (Floridi 1996, 116). He traces the history of the ‘metaepistemological’ problem back to Sextus, though, and there is no question that he has the Agrippan Modes in mind.

²⁷ This assumes, of course, the *success* of the skeptical arguments. It is important to bear in mind, however, that they need be judged successful only by traditional philosophy's own lights.

The result is *epochê* at the epistemological level, particularly regarding canons of rationality.²⁸ One consequence is that, by suspending the canons of rationality that underwrite first-order *epochê*, Stage 2 proto-Pyrrhonians thereby suspend judgment on Stage 1 suspension of judgment. That is, they suspend judgment at second-order on whether or not they should, given their situation, suspend judgment at the epistemic level. Stage 2 *epochê* frees them from Stage 1 *epochê*, i.e., from the *epochê* that is a philosophical conclusion and that enjoins us (in its most generalized form) to suspend judgment on all claims about the world.

The question now is: What becomes of Stage 2 proto-Pyrrhonians? Will they or will they not continue to believe that first-order *isostheneia* and *epochê* are, to borrow Barry Stroud's phrase (adapted from Thompson Clarke), 'conditionally correct'? In my view, they will or will not, depending on the context. In the 'theoretical' context of philosophizing, they will experience a kind of first-order *isostheneia* and *epochê*. In the 'practical' context of everyday life, however, they generally will not, for as Stroud puts it, "in the overwhelming majority of ordinary, humdrum cases, things are so obvious and uncontroversial as to leave us in no doubt or suspense at all" (Stroud 1983, 413). On this point, Sextus is in wholehearted agreement (cf. PH 2.245–6; 2.250–4).

3.4 Stage 3: The Mature Pyrrhonian

The distinction between philosophy and everyday life has played an important role in the DM from the start. Stage 1 is reached when the proto-Pyrrhonian adopts methodological *epochê* regarding everyday life and turns to pure or traditional philosophy for guidance. Here, the assumption is that the philosophical is more fundamental than the everyday and therefore takes precedence over it. On this view, the philosophical is the *rational ground* of the everyday. Consequently, the failure of the traditional-philosophical project would entail that everyday life is (rationally) *groundless*. At Stage 2, philosophy turns on itself, thereby calling into question the sort of first-order *epochê* (an *epochê* that may well amount to a kind of negative dogmatism) that seemed to the Stage 1 skeptic to be the inescapable outcome of philosophical inquiry. This leads the proto-Pyrrhonian to suspend judgment on the traditional-philosophical project itself, which entails suspending judgment on the traditional view of the relation between the philosophical and the everyday. Perhaps the everyday needs no philosophical grounding; indeed, perhaps the everyday is the ground of philosophy, not the other way around.²⁹

At Stage 3, Mature Pyrrhonians retain the Stage 2 skeptic's second-order *isostheneia* and *epochê*. This *epochê*, however, is no kind of negative dogmatism. Mature Pyrrhonians do not conclude, as do dogmatic nontraditional philosophers, that there is something fundamentally *flawed* with traditional philosophy—that it's doomed from the start, that it's a kind of intellectual neurosis, or that it amounts to a willful denial of our lived experience, let alone that it's incoherent or senseless. Thus, second-order *epochê* does not bar Mature Pyrrhonians from active, good-faith participation in the traditional-philosophical search for truth.³⁰ When they are

²⁸ Cf. Floridi 1996, 134–8.

²⁹ This is, I take it, the fundamental insight of nontraditional philosophies from Pyrrhonism to ordinary-language philosophy. For a sophisticated, though very dense and difficult, account of the priority of everyday (or 'plain') concepts over philosophical (or 'pure') concepts, see Clarke 1972.

³⁰ I cannot address in any detail the skeptics' goal of *ataraxia* and how having achieved it at Stage 3 might impact their motivation to continue to philosophize in a traditional manner. But I will say that it does not seem to me that their *ataraxia*, or their striving for it, prevents them from being traditional-philosophical 'truth-seekers.' It will almost certainly make any forays into traditional philosophy seem to them far less

philosophizing in the spirit of traditional philosophy, thereby adopting for the sake of argument traditional-philosophical canons of rationality, it will still seem to them that the ‘hypothetical’ interpretation of first-order *isostheneia* and *epochê* is correct, i.e., it will still seem to them that *if* they are to abide by traditional philosophy’s canons of rationality, then they are called upon to suspend judgment at first-order on account of undecided (and apparently undecidable) disputes. They do not themselves endorse the antecedent of the conditional, however—i.e., they do not actually endorse traditional philosophy’s canons of rationality—which means that rational–hypothetical first-order *epochê* will have no direct influence on their epistemic attitudes, at least as long as their second-order *epochê* remains in place.

When they are philosophizing, then, Mature Pyrrhonians will experience first-order *isostheneia* as psychological. When they are ‘immersed’ in the practice of philosophizing in a traditional manner (which entails accepting for the sake of argument traditional philosophy’s canons of rationality), they find that they simply can’t decide between any first-order *p* and *q* (or *x* and *y*). Hypothetical first-order *isostheneia* still seems right to them, but *their* experience of first-order equipollence will be psychological, for they do not themselves endorse any second-order philosophical judgments about evidentiary standards or what rationality requires. Thus, they simply have the experience of being pulled with equal force in opposing directions. Within the context of traditional philosophizing, the experience of first-order equipollence *causes* Mature Pyrrhonians to suspend judgment at first-order. Even at Stage 3, this seems to them to be the outcome of traditional philosophizing.

In the course of everyday life, however, Mature Pyrrhonians will have a different set of epistemic attitudes. What remains constant is their (psychological) second-order *epochê*, which amounts to suspending judgment on the traditional-philosophical project itself, including any account of the relation between philosophy and everyday life. I believe Sextus, along with many later philosophers influenced by the Pyrrhonian tradition (e.g., Montaigne, Hume, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Wittgenstein), find that, contrary to the traditional view of their relation, philosophizing seems to be grounded in everyday life. The supposed ‘foundations’ provided by philosophy are not “bedrock,” but, to borrow a helpful bit of terminology from Randall Collins, “the ever-receding apex of the abstraction–reflexivity sequence” (Collins 1998, 856), a sequence grounded in everyday life. Mature Pyrrhonians will not assert this claim dogmatically, however; it is just how it seems to them to be. Even in the course of everyday life, they retain second-order *epochê*, but not the psychological experience of first-order *isostheneia* and *epochê* that attends philosophizing, for it does not seem to them that traditional philosophy’s canons of rationality apply to most everyday epistemic practices. When they are immersed not in argument but in everyday activities, they will *not* ordinarily feel the psychological pull of first-order *isostheneia*. Thus, in most cases they will not find themselves compelled to adopt first-order *epochê*.

But even their second-order *epochê* will take on a somewhat different character when Mature Pyrrhonians are going about the business of everyday life, for in that

urgent than they will seem to those who think that success at getting at “the true reality of things” (M 7.27) is required in order to live a good life or, later in the Christian West, to secure the salvation of their souls. But (a) Mature Pyrrhonians do not conclude that the traditional-philosophical project is doomed, though that’s how it might seem to them, (b) in an important sense, discussed in the main body of the text below, their everyday epistemic attitudes remain influenced by the demands of traditional-philosophical rationality, which entails that it still has some degree of importance for them even in the course of everyday life, and (c) insofar as they continue to study traditional philosophy, even if only for skeptical-dialectical purposes, they will remain open to being convinced, even if (again) that outcome strikes them as highly unlikely. It seems to me that Hume provides us with an example of a Pyrrhonian who goes on philosophizing in a traditional manner while nonetheless retaining his skepticism about philosophy (cf. Hume 2007, 175–8).

context, traditional philosophizing seems not just questionable, but downright misguided. The reason for this is that its mode of questioning would hinder or even render unworkable our various everyday epistemic practices. Thus, Mature Pyrrhonians feel that they have achieved a principled rationale for, in Donald Davidson's words, "telling [the negative-dogmatic skeptic, i.e., the traditional philosopher] to get lost" (Davidson 1983/7, 154). It is this brand of second-order *epochê* that Jay Garfield has in mind, I think, when he writes,

To suspend belief in the sense Sextus has in mind is not to shrug one's shoulders in indecision regarding competing claims. To understand suspension this way is to see skepticism as a wholly negative position. I want to emphasize the essentially *constructive* character of skeptical argument... To suspend judgment in this sense is to refuse to assent to a position, while refusing to assert its negation, since either would commit one to a false or misleading metaphysical presupposition. To suspend judgment is hence to refuse to enter into a misguided discourse. For the skeptic... both members of any dogmatic pair, despite their apparent antagonism, share some common metaphysical thesis as a presupposition of their respective positions. And it is in the rejection of this position—and in the consequent suspension of judgment regarding the opposing dogmatic positions—that skepticism consists. (Garfield 1990, 8–9; cf. Frede 1984, 221–2)

Interestingly, it seems to me that this version of *isostheneia* and *epochê* might belong to the supposedly 'null' type (3) interpretation, according to which equipollence is psychological while suspension is rational. For Mature Pyrrhonians, second-order *isostheneia* is psychological; they just don't know what to say about the status of the traditional-philosophical project (beyond saying how it seems to them). But within the context of everyday life, psychological *isostheneia* makes second-order *epochê* seem like the most reasonable position to adopt. The sort of rationality in question, though, is everyday, not philosophical—it involves shifting, in the move from *isostheneia* to *epochê*, from philosophical to everyday rationality. Thus, it is not a case of (3) as originally conceived.

I said above that rational-hypothetical first-order *epochê* will have no direct influence on Mature Pyrrhonians' everyday epistemic attitudes, at least as long as their second-order *epochê* remains in place. It can and does, however, exert an *indirect* influence. This indirect influence is what, on my account, distinguishes Mature Pyrrhonians from everyday, prephilosophical dogmatists as well as from dogmatic philosophers. As I discussed in §3.1, the DM assumes that prephilosophical everyday life is shot through with nascent philosophical dogmas, including an everyday kind of commitment to canons of rationality such as those embodied in the Agrippan Trilemma.³¹ This entails that there is a degree of continuity between everyday and philosophical epistemic practices. Now, it will seem to Mature Pyrrhonians, as it does to traditional philosophers, that many everyday practices depend on taking a host of things for granted, things that have every appearance of being *questionable*—e.g., the general propositions of common sense Clarke identifies. Since Mature Pyrrhonians are not going to theorize about these matters (so as to conclude, e.g., that *only* such 'presuppositional' epistemic practices are genuinely conceivable), they will continue to think that it is perfectly legitimate to call everyday presuppositions into question. But that is just to say that

³¹ Here it is helpful to recall Bailey's and Lammenranta's claims that the rational constraints built into the Agrippan Modes (or some of the Modes, anyway) are uncontroversial. See §2.1, above.

they will think that it is perfectly legitimate, even if it is not always *appropriate*, to shift to a ‘pure,’ traditional-philosophical mode of inquiry.³² Thus, though Mature Pyrrhonians will in everyday life abide by “the appearances,” thereby following “everyday observances” (PH 1.22–3)—which include everyday epistemic practices—their second-order *epoché* will have the indirect effect of purifying their everyday epistemic attitudes of dogmatism. This amounts to saying that, even in the course of everyday life, Mature Pyrrhonians will accept that *anything* they believe, including their most fundamental beliefs, might be mistaken (cf. Frede 1979, 198–9). I take it that Hume is making this point when he writes that “[i]n all the incidents of life we ought still to preserve our scepticism” (Hume 2007, 176). What I’m imagining here differs from mere theoretical fallibilism in that it has, or is supposed to have, a concrete practical upshot: it is supposed to effect a fundamental change in Mature Pyrrhonians themselves, a change that might very well have far-reaching consequences in the areas of ethics and politics.

To see what this sort of fundamental change might look like, let’s turn to Nietzsche. What I call ‘dogmatism’ he calls ‘conviction’ (*Ueberzeugung*). “Conviction is the belief that we possess the absolute truth about some specific point of knowledge.” Convictions are not themselves “opinions” (*Meinungen*), but are rather “belief in opinions” (*Glaubens an die Meinungen*), specifically, the belief that our opinions are absolutely true: “Those countless human beings who sacrificed themselves for their convictions believed that they were doing it for the absolute truth.” Nietzsche claims that “someone with convictions is not a person of scientific thought; he stands before us at the age of theoretical innocence and is a child, however grown-up he may be in other respects.” And he argues that

if all those who thought so highly of their convictions, made all kinds of sacrifices to them, and spared neither honor, nor body, nor life in their service had devoted merely half of their strength to investigating by what right they adhered to this or that conviction or the way in which they had come to it: how peaceful human history would then appear! How much more knowledge there would be! We would have been spared all the cruel scenes resulting from the persecution of every sort of heretic, for two reasons: first, because the inquisitors would have inquired above all into themselves and would have gotten beyond the presumption that they were defending the absolute truth; and then, because the heretics themselves would not have given any further credence to propositions as badly grounded as the propositions of all religious sectarians and “true believers” are, once they had investigated them. (Nietzsche 1995, 296–7; *Human, All Too Human I*, §630)

Years later, having just referred back to his earlier writings, he says that “[c]onvictions are prisons.” That one has escaped the prison of convictions, Nietzsche writes, “*proves* itself through scepticism” (Nietzsche 2005, 54; *The Anti-Christ*, §54), by which he means Pyrrhonism.³³ It is this kind of attitude—this

³² Cf. Frede 1984, 212: “A skeptic might take the view that all one could sensibly do was to follow” everyday epistemic practices. “But if he would follow this practice it would be with the thought that what one said one knew could be radically otherwise, and that the whole practice of using the verb ‘to know’ the way we ordinarily do could be radically mistaken. For we cannot, e.g., rule out the possibility that we should subject ourselves to the rigorous standards and canons philosophers have been trying to impose, but which their own claims do not meet.”

³³ For present purposes, all I mean to imply by claiming that the skepticism Nietzsche refers to in *Anti-Christ*, §54 is Pyrrhonism is that this skepticism, like Pyrrhonism, is characterized by freedom from dogmatism (convictions)—including negative-dogmatic skepticism.

modest, undogmatic, ‘unopinionated’ attitude toward one’s own first-order beliefs (what Sextus refers to as living *adoxastôs*)—that I take to be the bearing that second-order *epochê* is supposed to have on our everyday epistemic attitudes.

4 Conclusion

According to the DM, there are at least three distinct ‘voices’ or ‘viewpoints’ present in Sextus’s text. First, there is the voice of the traditional philosopher. Sextus expresses this viewpoint when arguing *ad hominem*. From this viewpoint, *isostheneia* and *epochê* are rational (though Mature Pyrrhonians will consider them only contingently rational). Second, there is the voice of the Mature Pyrrhonian herself. When Sextus is philosophizing in the spirit of traditional philosophy, he finds that his *isostheneia* and *epochê* are psychological or causal. Finally, there is the voice of the Mature Pyrrhonian as an everyday human-being-in-the-world. When speaking in this voice, Sextus does *not* claim to experience equipollence regarding everyday matters; for the most part, he will suspend judgment at first-order (psychologically) only on matters that appear to him “misguided” in Garfield’s sense.

These voices are all consistent with the aims and attitudes of Mature Pyrrhonians. It is not the case that Mature Pyrrhonians suffer from what Michael Williams, discussing Hume, describes as “an irreconcilable clash between two outlooks or perspectives,” a clash that causes “an underlying uneasiness that [they] can never entirely ‘chase away’” (Williams 1991, 8). Mature Pyrrhonians can consistently hold these two very different attitudes toward traditional philosophy because (a) they accept the conditional correctness of first-order *isostheneia* and *epochê*, (b) they continue to see the attraction of traditional-philosophical epistemic standards, largely due to those standards’ continuity with everyday epistemic practices, and so (c) they are not inclined to revert to everyday dogmatism even as they follow everyday observances. The voice of the traditional philosopher remains with Mature Pyrrhonians: it is their intellectual conscience, reminding them that they do not have the sort of knowledge that philosophy promised or that naïve everyday life assumed itself to possess; that they see the world only from their own perspectives;³⁴ that they know of no purely rational means of privileging their own experiences over those of others; etc. All of this, I take it, is part and parcel of what it means to live *adoxastôs*.

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³⁴ Cf. Vogt 2012, 185–90.

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