

**DOUBT UNDOGMATIZED:
PYRRHONIAN SCEPTICISM, EPISTEMOLOGICAL
EXTERNALISM AND THE ‘METAEPISTEMOLOGICAL’
CHALLENGE**

DUNCAN PRITCHARD
University of Stirling

Abstract

It has become almost a conventional wisdom to argue that Cartesian scepticism poses a far more radical sceptical threat than its classical Pyrrhonian counterpart. Such a view fails to recognise, however, that there is a species of sceptical concern that can only plausibly be regarded as captured by the Pyrrhonian strategy. For whereas Cartesian scepticism is closely tied to the contentious doctrine of epistemological internalism, it is far from obvious that Pyrrhonian scepticism bears any such theoretical commitments. It is argued here that by viewing the Pyrrhonian style of sceptical argument in terms of this contemporary epistemological externalist/internalist distinction one can gain a new insight into some of the more problematic elements of this variety of classical thought and also get a handle on certain contemporary worries that have been raised regarding the anti-sceptical efficacy of externalist theories of knowledge.

1. Pyrrhonian versus Cartesian Treatments of Radical Scepticism

It is widely accepted that the sceptical challenge that Descartes poses in his *Meditations* far out-weighs that presented by the classical Pyrrhonian scholars, as represented by Sextus Empiricus in *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* and *Adversus Mathematicos*.¹ As Myles Burnyeat has expressed the point:

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What he [Descartes . . .] achieved was to bring about a permanent enlargement of our conception of the power and scope of skeptical doubt, with the result that Hume, for example, lists “Cartesian doubt” as a species of skepticism alongside, and more fundamental than, Pyrrhonism [. . .] This was indeed a transformation of the ancient materials, but in a sense quite opposite to that which Descartes intended.²

There is certainly a great deal of truth in this claim, and I shall begin by rehearsing the main reasons offered in its favour.

On one level, the Cartesian doubt is more compelling because of its *methodological* nature. Whereas its classical counterpart was motivated by, broadly speaking, *ethical* concerns,³ and therefore was used to inspire belief (or rather, non-belief) of a certain sort, Descartes conceived of his doubt as a hurdle that any adequate epistemological theory must clear. For example, in *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, in a section entitled ‘What is the End of Scepticism?’, Sextus Empiricus answers the question in hand by asserting that

[. . .] the Sceptic’s End is quietude in respect of matters of opinion and moderate feeling in respect of things unavoidable. (SE I 19)⁴

Later on he contrasts the “quietude” gained by living the sceptical life with the “disquietude” of those who do not suspend judgement:

For the man who opines that anything is by nature good or bad is for ever being disquieted; when he is without the things which he deems good he believes himself to be tormented by things naturally bad and he pursues after the things which are, he thinks, good; which when he has obtained he keeps falling into still more perturbations because of his irrational and immoderate elation, and in his dread of a change of fortune he uses every endeavour to avoid losing the things which he deems good. On the other hand, the man who determines nothing as to what is naturally good or bad neither shuns nor pursues anything eagerly; and, in consequence, he is unperturbed. (SE I 19)

Scepticism is thus a means via which one might learn to lead the 'good' life.

Contrast this conception of the sceptical project with that offered by Descartes, where the goal of his scepticism — his “general demolition of his opinions” — is to secure a “foundation” upon which he could establish belief in “the sciences that was stable and likely to last” (AT VII 18–9, CSM II 12).⁵ Here there is no suggestion that scepticism could be an end in itself.⁶ This move is important since it detaches the plausibility of the doubt from the plausibility of a particular stance adopted by a doubter, in that the sceptical challenge is no longer regarded as an argument that is advanced by an embodied sceptical opponent. This has important dialectical consequences. Whereas it would constitute an appropriate response to anyone who *argued* for his scepticism (and thus to Pyrrhonian scepticism, so conceived), to simply argue, as it were, *ad hominem*, against the coherence of the sceptic's position in proposing it (a common form of critique against classical scepticism⁷), the same line of attack would not (at least not in itself), seriously trouble Cartesian scepticism. After all, if one really is presented with an otherwise unobjectionable argument that leads to sceptical conclusions, is it really much of a retort to claim that no one could seriously advance an argument that led to such conclusions?⁸ Indeed, in understanding the sceptical challenge in this instrumental fashion, Descartes pays it the compliment of being, broadly speaking, a *paradox* — a series of claims which, when taken independently, are all entirely plausible but which, when set side-by-side, lead to a chain of reasoning that has absurd conclusions. And it would, of course, be no response to the proponent of a paradox to charge him with absurdity for proposing it since these are, putatively at least, intuitions which we *all* accept.⁹

A second reason that is often cited in support of the claim that Cartesian doubt is more radical than Pyrrhonian scepticism is the fact that it is directed at *all* of our beliefs all at once,

rather than at each of our beliefs in a piecemeal fashion. As Descartes famously wrote:

Suppose we had a basket full of apples and were worried that some of them were rotten. How would we proceed? Would we not begin by tipping the whole lot out and then pick up and put back only those we saw to be sound? (AT VII 481, CSM II 324)

This element of Cartesian scepticism follows naturally on from the first, in that if one regards one's scepticism as part of one's philosophical position, then it clearly would be incoherent to try to argue for one's complete ignorance on a principled basis. In contrast, if one regards scepticism as a paradox, then there need be no bar to elucidating that paradox in a manner that illustrates its utterly devastating consequences. As Michael Williams has expressed this conception of the relationship between Pyrrhonian and Cartesian radical scepticism:

It is a commonplace that ancient scepticism had a moral point, that scepticism was a way of life, life without the comfort of dogma or theoretical conviction; and it is not likely that philosophers intent on putting forward a way of living in the world would push their arguments to the point where the very existence of the world became a problem. Thus, it is sometimes said, the intentions of the ancient sceptics contrast sharply with those of Descartes who, for the first time, embeds his sceptical reflection in a project of starkly theoretical purity and, as a result, is able to follow them to a far more radical conclusion.¹⁰

Indeed, in contrast to Descartes' doubt in this respect, the standard form that Pyrrhonian scepticism takes does not have the appearance of a sceptical *argument* at all. Instead, the Pyrrhonian sceptic tends to offer dialectical *techniques* that enable one to create problems with any particular claim to know that one's opponent may make. The 'dogmatic' stance of claiming knowledge with complete conviction should, the Pyrrhoni-ans argued, be opposed by offering a countervailing argument

(*isosthenia*) which would engender a neutral attitude (*epoche*) and eventually lead to a tranquil and untroubled state of mind (*ataraxia*).

Consider, for instance, 'Agrippa's trilemma'.¹¹ The idea behind this trilemma is that any challenge to a claim to knowledge can only be responded to in one of three ways:

- I. Refuse to respond, (i.e., make an undefended assumption).
- II. Repeat a claim made earlier in the argument, (i.e., reason in a circle).
- III. Keep trying to think of something new to say, (i.e., embark on an infinite regress).

And given that there is no fourth option available, it follows that any attempt to justify one's claim to know will either be interminable (as with option III) or terminate in an unsatisfactory way (as with options I and II).

Another possible reason why Pyrrhonian scepticism is limited to this piecemeal doubt could be its focus on the *relativity* of experience. Although such relativity may be able to support doubt about particular beliefs (or at least provide reasons against those beliefs that out-weigh the reasons for), it seems insufficient to support the view that, in general, experiential knowledge is impossible. After all, it is consistent with the supposed sceptical import of such 'relativity' that one *does* derive knowledge from experience in a range of everyday 'normal' cases, it is just that each particular experience could be construed as being one of the 'abnormal' ones.

Descartes' doubt, in contrast, goes straight to the heart of what would constitute epistemic support for our experiential beliefs. Consider, for example, how Descartes' dreaming argument differs from that utilised by Sextus Empiricus. As Sextus Empiricus notes:

Sleeping and waking, too, give rise to different impressions, since we do not imagine when awake what we imagine in sleep,

nor in sleep what we imagine when awake; so that the existence of our impressions is not absolute but relative, being in relation to our sleeping or waking condition. (SE I 63)

Sextus' use of the dreaming argument, unlike that propounded by Descartes, merely adduces considerations concerning dreaming as a means of reinforcing the idea that experience is relative and therefore not necessarily a reliable guide to the nature of reality.¹² In Descartes' writings, in contrast, the argument has less to do with the relativity of experience than with the fact that we are unable to adduce a definitive criterion — a "sure sign" — that would indicate that we are awake and not dreaming. As Descartes puts the matter:

[...] I see plainly that there are never any sure signs by means of which being awake can be distinguished from being asleep. The result is that I begin to feel dazed, and this very feeling only reinforces the notion that I may be asleep. (AT VII 19, CSM II 13)

Since, Descartes argues, there are no features of our experience which allow us to definitively distinguish our waking experience from dreaming, it follows that we should suspend *all* of our sensory judgements, even when they are undertaken in "ideal" circumstances. The classical doubt concerning how experience can be 'relative' is thus replaced by a more subversive doubt suggesting that we lack grounds for believing that experience is *any* guide to the nature of reality at all, no matter what the quality of that experience is. It is important to recognise how radical a suggestion this is. If there are no such distinguishing features — and if such a distinguishing mark is a prerequisite for any belief based on sensory experience being accorded a sufficient epistemic sanction — then it would seem to follow that *no matter how 'reliable' our experience in other respects is*, it is still going to be of no use to us in forming epistemically sanctioned beliefs. Accordingly, whereas one could, conceivably at least, meet the classical arguments for the 'relativity' of experience

by fixating upon paradigm (if only hypothetical) cases of experience where there is knowledge and then working outwards to the more problematic cases, this would be no response to the Cartesian dreaming sceptic since on this view there are no such paradigm cases to which one could appeal. Again, then, we find Descartes apparently intensifying the disquieting force of epistemological scepticism.

Note that I have identified the break with the classical sceptical argument in this respect with reference to Descartes' use of the dreaming argument rather than, as is more usual, the 'malicious demon' argument.¹³ It is certainly natural to think that it is only with the latter argument that one gets the superlative sceptical threat that is held to be so distinctive of the Cartesian method. After all, as Descartes himself recognises, the dreaming hypothesis, as opposed to the malicious demon hypothesis, is perfectly consistent with the existence of many things, such as "eyes, head, hands and the body as a whole" (AT VII 19, CSM II 13).¹⁴ The latter argument is thus essential if one is to make the characteristic Cartesian move of being sceptical about even the *existence* of an external world. Nevertheless, although it is correct to say that it is only the malicious demon argument that attacks the *truth* of most of what is believed, *both* of these arguments attack the *epistemic status* of most of our beliefs (and not in a piecemeal fashion either, but *en masse*). For although dreaming does not preclude the truth of many of the propositions which we commonly believe (such as those propositions which concern objects in an external world), it does preclude our *knowledge* of those propositions. Accordingly, although the malicious demon argument is indeed a more radical sceptical hypothesis than the dreaming hypothesis,¹⁵ the dreaming hypothesis still marks a definitive break with the classical form of scepticism under consideration here.^{16,17}

We have canvassed two main differences between Cartesian and Pyrrhonian scepticism. First, that the former, but not

the latter, is methodologically (rather than ethically) conceived and thus, relatedly, is not regarded as *advanced* by any particular adversary. And, second, that the former is directed at all of one's beliefs all at once, as opposed to the latter which proceeds on a piecemeal basis and which, in a related fashion, consists of a series of *techniques* to induce doubt rather than arguments as such. As we shall see, these two axes of distinction are intertwined, but I think it best to keep them apart for now until we have examined them more closely since, as I shall explain below, the manner in which one regards them as inter-connected can vary depending upon one's wider epistemological prejudices.

There are, of course, other differences between Pyrrhonian and Cartesian scepticism. For example, Cartesian scepticism notoriously issues in the demand for complete certainty in our beliefs,¹⁸ as opposed to the Pyrrhonian request that we merely adduce grounds for our belief that out-weigh the grounds offered by the sceptic against our beliefs. Nevertheless, these differences should suffice for our purposes since it is on the basis of these distinctions that the conventional wisdom — found, to greater or lesser extents, in the recent work of such writers as, for example, Bernard Williams, Myles Burnyeat, and Christopher Hookway¹⁹ — has formed that Cartesian scepticism poses the more devastating critique than its classical counterpart.

2. Epistemological Internalism and Cartesian Scepticism

Despite these obvious ways in which the Cartesian variety of scepticism can seem to pose the greater threat, there is an important sense in which, as I shall now argue, it is Cartesian scepticism that poses the weaker challenge. The reason for this is that, unlike Pyrrhonian scepticism, Cartesian scepticism depends for its plausibility upon a prior commitment to the

doctrine of epistemological internalism. It thus follows that, at least on one level, it is Pyrrhonian scepticism that makes the most pressing demands on our epistemology since these demands will apply even if we abandon the doctrine of epistemological internalism.

Of course, I am not the first to argue that the plausibility of Cartesian scepticism depends upon epistemological internalism.²⁰ The distinctive thesis here is not this claim, but rather the two-fold contention that, (i) the plausibility of Pyrrhonian scepticism does not depend upon epistemological internalism, and (ii) that the modern sceptical debate can therefore learn from an engagement with this age-old adversary.

For the purposes of this paper, I shall characterise epistemological internalism as consisting, at least minimally, in the following thesis:

I_K : A necessary condition of an agent, a 's, knowledge of a proposition, ϕ , is that a has sufficient reflective access to the factors that make it such that a knows ϕ .

Although lacking in detail, this should certainly be an uncontroversial way of describing the core elements of the position.²¹ After all, it captures the distinctive internalist demand that reflective access to the relevant epistemic factors is essential to knowledge whilst evading the sort of Gettier-type concerns over the sufficiency of such an internalist component of knowledge. Moreover, if we follow convention in defining externalism as the denial of internalism (and thus, again at least minimally, as the rejection of this thesis), then we can allow for the possibility that an externalist account of knowledge could still incorporate core internalist insights. One could, for instance, disavow the claim that the kind of reflective access described in I_K is *necessary* for knowledge whilst still allowing such reflective access to play a pivotal role in one's epistemology.²²

In order to appreciate the relevance of this doctrine of epistemological internalism to the distinction between Cartesian

and Pyrrhonian conceptions of scepticism, we must first look again at how Descartes' motivates his scepticism. Take the dreaming argument, for example, the beginnings of which we saw above. The definitive criterion that Descartes is seeking is clearly characterised such that it is reflectively accessible to the agent — that the agent can himself reflectively determine that he is not the victim of the sceptical dreaming hypothesis. But since this “sure sign” can never be reflectively given in experience — because, *ex hypothesi*, the coherent dreams that Descartes is interested in are phenomenologically indistinguishable from waking experience — it follows that one could never know any of the everyday propositions which one believes the knowledge of which would be inconsistent with one's being the victim of such a coherent dream.

One could reconstruct Descartes' argument in this respect in the following fashion, where ‘dreaming*’ refers to those coherent dreams that are phenomenologically indistinguishable from waking experience:

(D1) If I do know that I am, for instance, sitting here now, then it must be false that I am dreaming*.

Hence:

(D2) In order to know that I am sitting here now, I must be able to know that I am not dreaming*.

But:

(D3) I cannot reflectively determine that I am not dreaming*.

Hence:

(D4) I cannot know that I am not dreaming*.

Hence:

(DC) I cannot know that I am sitting here now.

Even if one accepts the epistemic principle that drives the crucial move from (D1) to (D2) — the highly intuitive principle that (roughly) if one knows a proposition, then one must be able to know what is presupposed in that knowledge²³ — this is still only a plausible set of inferences on the assumption of epistemological internalism. The problematic move is from (D3) to (D4). Although, on an internalist account, it naturally follows from the fact that one is unable to reflectively determine that one is not dreaming* that one thereby cannot know that one is not dreaming*, this move is contentious on an externalist account. At the very least, the issue of knowledge possession will be a *further* question for the externalist, dependent upon the relevant cognitive mechanisms at work or the subjunctive relationships that the subject's beliefs bear to the truth-value of the target proposition in near-by possible worlds. The Cartesian sceptical argument thus presupposes epistemological internalism.^{24,25}

3. A Reconfiguration of Pyrrhonian Scepticism

With this Cartesian dependence on epistemological internalism in mind, it is worthwhile reconsidering the nature of the Pyrrhonian doubt. Why is it, for example, that the Pyrrhonians did not go for the same sort of “sure sign” arguments that Descartes did, especially since they had already considered the sceptical hypotheses themselves? And, (as we shall see) relatedly, why did they tend to focus on *claims* to know rather than the possession of knowledge itself? I think that one possible answer lies in a lack of commitment to the internalist paradigm.

Consider the Pyrrhonian focus upon *claims* to know. Right at the beginning of *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, Sextus Empiricus emphasises a crucial difference between, on the one hand, the Dogmatists — who “have *claimed* to have discovered the truth” (SE 3, *my italics*) — and the Academics — who “have *asserted* that it cannot be apprehended” (SE 3, *my italics*) — and, on

the other, the Sceptics who simply “go on inquiring” (SE 3). A contrast is thus established between those who claim knowledge or the lack of it, and the Pyrrhonian strategy of censuring each and every claim to know.

A natural thought to have is that any attack on an agent’s ability to claim to know a certain proposition is itself, albeit derivatively, an attack on the agent’s possession of knowledge. This thought depends, however, on the plausibility of the idea that, if one knows a proposition, then, *ceteris paribus*, one can properly claim to know that proposition. Such a principle is itself only convincing, however, given an internalist theory of knowledge. Clearly, on whatever epistemological view one endorses (whether internalist or externalist), what makes a claim to know legitimate is, (again, *ceteris paribus*), the subject’s possession of reflectively accessible grounds to support that assertion. As Wittgenstein expressed the matter:

One says “I know” when one is ready to give compelling grounds. “I know” relates to a possibility of demonstrating the truth.²⁶

Similar remarks are also to be found in the work of Austin:

When I say, ‘I know’, I give others my word: I *give* others my *authority for saying* that ‘S is P’. [...]

If you say you know something, the most immediate challenge takes the form of asking, ‘Are you in a position to know?’: that is, you must undertake to show not merely that you are sure of it, but that it is within your cognisance.²⁷

One could put the point by saying that a claim to know carries with it a certain conversational implicature to the effect that one is willing, and able, to *offer* adequate grounds (i.e., ‘internal’ grounds) to support that claim. If this implicature is false, however, (if one is unable to offer such grounds), then that claim to know, whilst it may be true, is improper.²⁸

Given that the internalist stresses the importance of reflectively accessible grounds to knowledge possession, it follows

that on the internalist account there will be a very tight connection between the ability to properly claim to know a certain proposition, and the possession of knowledge. In general, if one knows, then one can properly claim that knowledge, and if one can properly claim knowledge then (provided what is claimed is true), one knows.

In contrast, on the externalist picture this tight connection breaks down. Although the externalist will agree that a claim to know is only in order when one has sufficient reflectively accessible grounds to support that claim, he will demur from the converse direction of fit. For an externalist there will be cases in which one knows but one is unable to properly claim that knowledge because one lacks sufficient reflectively accessible grounds to support that claim.

Indeed, such is the point of the cases over which the internalist and the externalist disagree. Whereas externalists are content to allow, say, small children the capacity to know whilst lacking the reflective skills demanded by the internalist, they would agree that small children cannot properly claim such knowledge. For the externalist, then (and unlike the internalist), just as a lack of reflectively accessible grounds need not indicate that one does not know, so an inability to properly claim knowledge because one lacks reflectively accessible grounds need not indicate that one does not know either. One might possess a 'brute' externalist form of knowledge whilst being completely unable to properly claim that one has it.

This point is important because it highlights that it is only when viewed through the lens of an internalist epistemology that one would straightforwardly construe the Pyrrhonian attack on claims to know as thereby being attacks on knowledge *possession*. Viewed through the alternative lens of an externalist epistemology the challenge to a subject's claims to know can coexist with an acceptance that the subject may indeed know a great deal. This point has significant dialectical consequences. Since Cartesian scepticism presupposes internalism,

it will only defeat one's putative possession of knowledge (and thus one's putative ability to properly claim that knowledge), provided one accepts the internalist paradigm. In contrast, the Pyrrhonian censure of claims to know can be construed either as an indirect attack on knowledge possession (if one endorses the internalist paradigm), or as merely an attack on one's ability to properly claim knowledge (on the externalist account). In an important sense, then, Pyrrhonian scepticism can be understood as stronger than its Cartesian counterpart on the grounds that it can be interpreted as posing a sceptical challenge whatever type of epistemology, internalist or externalist, one endorses.

Furthermore, on the assumption that the Pyrrhonian sceptical position is not tied to an internalist epistemology, we now have a compelling explanation of several other interesting features of the Pyrrhonian stance. For one thing, we can further account for why it is that this variety of scepticism proceeds in a piecemeal fashion. The standard explanation of this facet of the classical doubt was that such a strategy enabled the Pyrrhonian sceptic to evade the charge that he is putting forward the very sort of general epistemological claims that his scepticism is supposed to undermine. One might add more flesh to this explanation by noting how a general form of doubt along the same lines as that proposed by Descartes would, in any case, commit the Pyrrhonian sceptic to internalist epistemological principles. Why seek a "sure sign" which would *reflectively* validate one's putative experiential knowledge if one does not endorse internalism?

By considering the Pyrrhonian challenge in the light of the internalist/externalist contrast we can also explain certain apparent anomalies in the Pyrrhonian position. It was often thought odd, if not straightforwardly self-refuting, that the Pyrrhonians claimed to endorse such an extravagant doubt whilst going about their lives in a normal (albeit "non-dogmatic") fashion. Isn't it impossible to "live" one's radical scepticism?²⁹

Relatedly, how can one understand radical scepticism as an *ethical* stance when it seems to preclude one from coherently engaging in any enterprise at all, ethical or otherwise?

There have been a number of proposals put forward to try to explain this apparent anomaly in the Pyrrhonian position. One popular thesis in this regard is to make some sort of distinction between the ‘theoretical’ or ‘philosophical’ beliefs that the Pyrrhonian sceptic must be sceptical about, and the ‘practical’ beliefs that can be left as they are. This proposal gains support from the fact that Pyrrhonian scepticism seems to primarily consist in, as Michael Williams has put it, “a distrust of theoretical commitments”.³⁰ Burnyeat has pursued a similar point, noting that

[...] ancient scepticism even at its most extreme did not seriously question that one can walk around in the world. It did not seriously question this, I have argued, because it was in fact entirely serious about carrying scepticism into the practical affairs of life.³¹

The ethical nature of the Pyrrhonian doubt is thus only possible because ‘practical’ concerns are exempted from the battery of sceptical argument.

By making a distinction of this sort between those theoretical beliefs that are open to censure and their quotidian counterparts which aren’t, one can thus explain why scepticism is ‘liveable’ in the way that the sceptic supposes.³² The problem with this line of thought is that it dramatically weakens the sceptical argument by restricting the range or propositions to which it is applicable. Moreover, surely the Pyrrhonian sceptical strategy of doubt could be applied to *any* genuine claim to know, even a non-theoretical one made in a ‘practical’ conversational context? Indeed, the application of Agrippa’s trilemma, outlined above, does not seem to be restricted in this way at all. *Prima facie*, it can put to work against any serious claim to know.

Michael Williams tries to evade this concern by distinguishing two different epistemological contexts — the context of “reflection” in which any claim can be legitimately called into question, and the context of “action” in which everyday beliefs are exempted from sceptical attack. He writes:

I think that the only way to resolve this apparent inconsistency [of advancing scepticism and assenting to propositions in everyday life] is to see the scope of sceptical assent as determined not just by style but also by context. What Sextus must mean is that, though anything can be questioned, some things ordinarily are not. In the context of reflection, where we want to determine what is true, or what can justifiably be believed, any opinion can be subjected to the method of opposition. But in the context of action, everyday life, all sorts of things are simply taken for granted, without argument.³³

It is difficult to see how this evades the difficulty, however, since the problem remains that one can be no less dogmatic in everyday life than one is in the context of theoretical speculation. Accordingly, if it is the ethical goal of attaining quietude that is at issue, with dogma its enemy, then the Pyrrhonian strategy of doubt must be applicable in whichever context a dogmatic claim is made, whether theoretical or practical.

Aware of this tension, other commentators have tried to rescue the radical nature of the classical doubt within an ethical framework by arguing that one should distinguish between two sorts of assent. Michael Frede, for example, has argued that the Pyrrhonians merely offered a ‘sceptical’ rather than a ‘dogmatic’ assent to the beliefs (about, primarily, appearances) that they lived their lives by.³⁴ Relatedly, the point has been made — by David Sedley, Jonathan Barnes, and (a later) Burnyeat *et al.* — that one needs to distinguish a more demanding sense of ‘dogma’ from that of ‘belief’.³⁵

Certainly, some distinction is needed if we are to rescue the internal coherence of the Pyrrhonian view. Sextus Empiricus

gestures towards such a distinction himself, of course, at a number of junctures. For example, he writes

[W]hen we say that the sceptic refrains from dogmatizing we do not use the term “dogma” as some do, in the broader sense of “approval of a thing” (for the Sceptic gives assent to the feelings which are the necessary results of sense-impressions, and he would not, for example, say when feeling hot or cold “I believe that I am not hot or cold”); but we say that “he does not dogmatize” using “dogma” in the sense, which some give it, of “assent to one of the non-evident objects of scientific inquiry” [...]. (SE I 13-4, cf. SE I 16)

The use of the term “dogma” here is remarkably close to a more contemporary reading in terms of “acceptance”, where the latter indicates a voluntary willingness to assent to the proposition in question.³⁶ What is interesting about this notion is that it is completely unlike belief in the sense that an agent’s acceptance of a proposition, *P*, neither entails, nor is entailed by, that agent’s belief that *P*.

On the one hand, an agent might involuntarily believe a proposition even though he would not be voluntarily willing to assent to it (and thereby accept it). This would, plausibly, be the case in scenarios in which an agent is convinced of a radical sceptical argument but continues to form (what we might call ‘Humean’) beliefs about his environment regardless. For example, in such a scenario (as the Pyrrhonians acknowledge), one would find oneself assenting (if only implicitly) to statements about one’s sense-impressions even though one did not accept those statements.

On the other, an agent may accept, and thereby be voluntarily willing to assent to, various propositions that he does not in fact believe.³⁷ Though the extent to which one can exercise control over one’s set of beliefs is moot, it is surely agreed by all that one cannot always change one’s beliefs merely as a matter of *fiat*. One might thus be convinced by an argument, and

therefore accept the conclusion of that argument, whilst still retaining one's belief in the negation of that conclusion.

The essential distinction between the two notions is thus one of *choice*. Although one can at least partially capture this distinction in terms of a 'practical'/theoretical' contrast— since theoretical beliefs tend to be the paradigmatic sort of beliefs that one chooses to assent to — the 'voluntary' axis makes a more fine-grained cut. After all, as noted above, even practical beliefs, if asserted with conviction, can be prone to the sort of techniques of doubt that one finds with Agrippa's trilemma.³⁸

What is significant about those cases in which one spontaneously 'assents' to a proposition in this way is that such assertions do not carry the same sort of weight of conversational implicature than is involved in a typical claim to know. For one thing, such spontaneous acts of assent are rarely, if ever, prefixed by an epistemic operator, and so do not carry the implicatures associated with such 'epistemic' claims that we saw above. Indeed, in an important sense, these non-dogmatic assertions tend to carry *no* conversational implicatures at all since the very fact that they are recognised as being spontaneous serves to 'cancel' such implicatures from the outset. For example, applying Agrippa's trilemma to such assertions would clearly be improper because the speaker is obviously not intending them to carry any sort of conversational burden. They are, if you like, more like reports than assertions.³⁹

What is also important about this distinction is that it leaves room for a notion of belief (however minimal) to play a role within the Pyrrhonian framework even once the sceptical argumentation has done its job. And where there is even such minimal belief there is the potential, at least on the externalist account, for knowledge. Moreover, where there is belief there is also the capacity for belief-guided action, thereby offering an explanation of how it could be that this form of classical scepticism was *advanced* as an ethical position that the proponents claimed to be trying to embody.

Accordingly, this distinction between dogma and belief merely serves to emphasise the fact that Pyrrhonian scepticism is entirely consistent with an externalist epistemology. It may well be that one is so related to the world such that one's beliefs do indeed mesh with reality in an appropriate fashion. In this nominal sense one would thus have a very 'brute' knowledge of the world borne of this limited causal engagement with an external reality. On this reading, then, the Pyrrhonian sceptics have no interest in attacking this type of 'knowledge', if, indeed, that is what it is. The focus of their attack is rather that form of knowledge that can be put to discursive use — knowledge that can be claimed, defended, used to convince. It is *this* form of knowledge — a more sophisticated cousin of its weaker externalist relative — which is under attack.

Provided one does not regard the Pyrrhonian sceptics as presupposing (even implicitly) epistemological internalism, one can thus see the exegetical difficulties surrounding the coherence of a sceptical ethical stance dissipate because such sceptics are not now committed to the widespread *absence* of knowledge, at least in this brute 'externalist' sense, only to the incoherence of any *claim* to possess it.⁴⁰ So although the Pyrrhonian sceptic is committed to undermining the dogmatic stance of claiming knowledge, he is not thereby committed to regarding himself as lacking knowledge, at least not the sort of knowledge that the externalist is content to allow to be deserving of the name.

In a very real sense, then, Pyrrhonian scepticism can, on this view at least, be regarded (in contrast to the *atheism* of Cartesian scepticism), as truly *agnostic* about knowledge possession, and what could be more non-dogmatic than that? It is important to note that the contention here is *not* that the Pyrrhonians were closet externalists, which would, in any case, be both superfluous to the core contention of this paper and highly implausible. Rather, the claim is that the Pyrrhonian sceptical strategy is *consistent* with both sides of the internal-

ism/externalism distinction (which is what you would expect from a non-dogmatic form of scepticism), and therefore cannot be undermined simply by rejecting an essential component of either epistemological camp. Accordingly, advancing epistemological externalism would not directly excuse you from serious consideration of a Pyrrhonian sceptical argument in the manner that it would a Cartesian sceptical argument. It is in *this* sense, then, that Pyrrhonian scepticism poses a more pressing sceptical challenge than its Cartesian counterpart.

4. Pyrrhonian Scepticism and the Contemporary 'Metaepistemological' Challenge

What makes Pyrrhonian scepticism particularly intriguing on this interpretation is that it seems to be able to encapsulate certain contemporary worries that have been expressed about the anti-sceptical efficacy of externalism. Sure, the objection might run, we may well (externalistically) know lots of things, but of what use is this sort of knowledge to us unless we can reflectively determine that we have it and therefore properly claim to possess it? This type of sceptical worry has been labelled by Richard Fumerton as 'Metaepistemological Scepticism', since it is directed at epistemological views (especially externalist epistemological views) which, at least by their own lights, are actually inconsistent with radical scepticism.⁴¹ For whilst it may well be true that externalism is inconsistent with the sceptical contention (on *a priori* grounds), that knowledge is, in the main, impossible, the issue remains as to whether one's endorsement of this externalist reorientation of one's concepts is itself warranted, or at least an intellectually satisfying manoeuvre to make in response to scepticism.

Part of the problem of expressing this concern, however, is to develop it in such a way that it does not simply beg the question against the externalist anti-sceptic. That is, we do not

simply want to dismiss externalist anti-sceptical accounts on the grounds that they are not *internalist* anti-sceptical theories of knowledge. Consider, for example, the following quotation from Fumerton:

[T]he main problem with externalist accounts, it seems to me, just is the fact that such accounts [...] develop concepts of knowledge that are *philosophically* irrelevant. [...] The philosopher doesn't just want true beliefs, or even reliably produced beliefs, or beliefs caused by the facts that makes them true. The philosopher wants to have the relevant features of the world directly before consciousness.⁴²

What is problematic about this quotation is the last phrase that the "philosopher wants to have the relevant features of the world directly before consciousness". After all, if this is simply the demand that an appropriate anti-sceptical philosophy should incorporate reflective access to the factors which make it such that agent knows, then it is simply a demand for internalism.

Similar concerns beset other attempts to formulate this met-epistemological worry. Consider the following remarks by Barry Stroud:

[...] suppose there are truths about the world and the human condition which link human perceptual states and cognitive mechanisms with further states of knowledge and reasonable belief, and which imply that human beings acquire their beliefs about the physical world through the operation of belief-forming mechanisms which are on the whole reliable in the sense of giving them mostly true beliefs. [...] If there are truths of this kind, although no one has discovered them yet, that fact alone obviously will do us no good as theorists who want to understand human knowledge in this philosophical way. At the very least we must believe some such truths; their merely being true would not be enough to give us any illumination or satisfaction. But our merely happening to believe them would not be enough either. We seek understanding of certain aspects of the human condition, so we seek more than just a

set of beliefs about it; we want to know or have good reasons for thinking that what we believe about it is true.⁴³

Again, one might object to this characterisation of the difficulty on the grounds that what Stroud is demanding when he speak of ‘understanding human knowledge philosophically’ is nothing less than some sort of reflective access to the fact that one does indeed have the knowledge that one takes oneself to have, and thus an internalist epistemology.⁴⁴

The advantage that the construal of Pyrrhonian scepticism offered here holds is that we can by-pass these concerns and nevertheless capture the metaepistemological worry implicit in these quotations. For what is accepted by both parties to the dispute is that the propriety of claims to know — and thus of any dogmatic form of assent — can be dependent upon reflectively accessible grounds. It thus follows that one could formulate the metaepistemological sceptical concern along Pyrrhonian lines in terms of an inability to (“dogmatically”) properly claim knowledge — regardless of whether or not that knowledge is actually possessed. Moreover, this demand does not beg the question against the externalist since this condition on the propriety of claims to know is one that, we might legitimately assume, the externalist would himself share. The issue would thus not be the standard first-order concern about knowledge possession (although, on the internalist account, it would translate into that), but rather whether or not one could properly claim one’s putative knowledge; whether one could adopt the “dogmatic” stance of assenting to/accepting propositions which one is under no compulsion to believe or assent to.

It is not hard to see how such a challenge would function. Consider the ‘regress’ element of Agrippa’s trilemma that demands that a new assertion must be made *ad infinitum* to support a claim to know. The externalist could respond to the epistemological regress principle that underlies this argument by

simply contending that there are no *a priori* reasons for thinking that such ultimate grounds do not exist and thus that the appearance of a regress is illusory. But that would be beside the point. For any claim to know must itself be supported, and if, as the trilemma suggests, each legitimate claim to know must always give way to another legitimate claim to know, then *this* regress will, *prima facie* at least, still stand. After all, whichever ‘foundation’ the externalist offered would itself be subject to the trilemma, and so a regress would loom even here. The externalist would thus have to meet a more specific sceptical challenge which was not directed at knowledge possession in the ‘brute’ sense, but merely at any *claim* to have knowledge; any form of dogmatic assent.

Even on an externalist account, then, although it may be that knowledge is rescued from the Cartesian sceptic and everyday conversational practices are left intact even by Pyrrhonian lights, what is really at issue in the sceptical debate — the ability to dogmatically claim knowledge; to understand knowledge ‘philosophically’ as Fumerton and Stroud might be tempted to put it — is still left moot whilst the Pyrrhonian sceptical challenge remains to be neutralised. It would thus appear that Pyrrhonian scepticism should be given a re-examination outside of the internalist paradigm in order to see whether it has anything important to tell us about the inadequacy of externalist responses to scepticism.⁴⁵ It may be that, on an externalist account, there is no *a priori* reason to believe that one lacks knowledge of most of what one believes. This would be of little use, however, if it still remained that there was an *a priori* reason to believe that one is unable to properly claim a substantive portion of that knowledge, and it could be that it is Pyrrhonian scepticism that is able to capture this latter type of ‘metaepistemological’ sceptical worry.⁴⁶

Keywords

Cartesian scepticism; epistemological externalism; metaepistemological scepticism; Pyrrhonian scepticism

Duncan Pritchard
 Department of Philosophy
 University of Stirling
 Stirling
 FK9 4LA
 Scotland, UK
 d.h.pritchard@stir.ac.uk

Notes

¹ Henceforth, when I refer to ‘classical’ scepticism, I shall have only the Pyrrhonian sceptical thought as represented by Sextus Empiricus in mind.

² ‘Introduction’ in M. Burnyeat (ed.) *The Skeptical Tradition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), p. 3.

³ For an illuminating discussion of the ethical goals of Pyrrhonian scepticism, see David Sedley’s paper ‘The Motivation of Greek Scepticism’, in M. Burnyeat (ed.) *The Skeptical Tradition*, *op. cit.*

⁴ See also SE 9 where Sextus Empiricus writes that “[T]he originating cause of Scepticism is, we say, the hope of attaining quietude.” All references to Sextus Empiricus given in the text are drawn from *Sextus Empiricus with an English Translation* (London: Heinemann, 1933–1949: 4 volumes), translated by R. G. Bury and cited as SE.

⁵ References to Descartes’ writings in the text are given in the standard manner to the Charles Adam and Paul Tannery edition of *Œuvres de Descartes* (Paris, Cerf., 1897–1913: 12 volumes), cited as AT, and to the translation by J. Cottingham, R. Stoothoff, D. Murdoch and A. Kenny in the *Philosophical Writings of Descartes* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1985–1991: 3 volumes). Volumes I and II are cited as CSM I and II and volume III as CSMK.

⁶ Bernard Williams offers a sophisticated account of how Descartes’ methodological conception of scepticism marks a definitive break with Pyrrhonian scepticism in ‘Descartes’s Use of Scepticism’ in M. Burnyeat (ed.) *The Skeptical Tradition*, *op. cit.* See also his *Descartes: The Project of Pure Enquiry* (Harmondsworth: Pelican, 1978), chapter 2.

⁷ We shall consider the effectiveness of such a strategy below.

⁸ Crispin Wright offers an interesting contemporary account of Cartesian scepticism that runs along these lines, arguing for what he calls the “adversary” constraint on anti-sceptical theories to the effect that, insofar as the sceptic is offering us a paradox, then one must not motivate one’s anti-scepticism by making any essential reference to the incoherence of the sceptic’s position. See his paper, ‘Scepticism and Dreaming: Imploding the Demon’ *Mind* 397 (1991), pp. 87–115. For a discussion of this proposal, see Duncan Pritchard, ‘Meta-Epistemological Constraints on Anti-Sceptical Theories’, forthcoming in *Facta Philosophica* 3 (2001).

⁹ Although this primarily epistemological characterisation of the Cartesian project in this respect is still dominant, there are those who maintain that one should also give due weight to the particular scientific and metaphysical concerns which engaged Descartes. For a subtle discussion of the exegetical options in this regard, see J. L. Bermúdez, ‘Scepticism and Science in Descartes’ *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 57 (1997), pp. 743–72.

¹⁰ *Unnatural Doubts: Epistemological Realism and the Basis of Scepticism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), p. 2.

¹¹ SE I 95–101. See also Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of the Philosophers* translated by R. D. Hicks (London: Heinemann, 1925), vol. 2, p. 501; and the translation offered by J. Annas & J. Barnes in *The Modes of Scepticism: Ancient Texts and Modern Interpretations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), appendix C. The trilemma is actually presented as part of a collection of five ‘modes’ that lead to a suspension of judgement. The role that the other two modes play — ‘discrepancy’ and ‘relativity’ — is, however, peripheral, and so I shall not discuss them here. For an excellent discussion of Agrippa’s trilemma, from which I borrow the essentials of the above characterisation, see Michael Williams, *Unnatural Doubts: Epistemological Realism and the Basis of Scepticism*, *op. cit.*, section 2.4.

¹² Indeed, some commentators, most notably Stephen Gaukroger, take this difference in approach to the use of sceptical hypotheses to indicate that the Pyrrhonians were not really proposing scepticism at all as such, but rather propounding a form of relativism. See his ‘The Ten Modes of Aenesidemus and the Myth of Ancient Scepticism’, *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 3.2 (1995), pp. 371–87.

¹³ For instance, in ‘Idealism and Greek Philosophy: What Descartes Saw and Berkeley Missed’, *Philosophical Review* 40 (1982), pp. 3–40,

Myles Burnyeat, whilst recognising the radical nature of the dreaming argument (p. 36), nevertheless maintains that it is the malicious deity argument that supports “a doubt more radical than the traditional sceptic had dared to suppose” (p. 37). As I note below, the reason for this is that Burnyeat believes that the distinctive Cartesian thesis in this regard consists in the doubt of even the existence of the external world.

¹⁴ Descartes makes the point via the analogy of a painter who, whilst creating even the most fictional of images, makes use of images of things which are real. Or, as he notes, “at least the colours used in the composition must be real” (AT VII 20, CSM II 13).

¹⁵ For one thing — as both Burnyeat, ‘Idealism and Greek Philosophy: What Descartes Saw and Berkeley Missed’, *op. cit.*, and M. Williams, *Unnatural Doubts: Epistemological Realism and the Basis of Scepticism*, *op. cit.*, pp. 110ff., make clear — it is this move that prompts Descartes to take the unusual step of ‘externalising’ his body.

¹⁶ And this is not just because it attacks the *certainty* we attach to those beliefs either, but rather due to the more general feature of knowledge that its possession seems to preclude the kind of deviant causal chains involved in dreaming. That said, it is certainly true that Descartes felt the need for the malicious demon argument. For a recent example of a paper which takes the opposing view in this respect — that it is the malicious demon argument that makes the definitive break with classical scepticism — see J. L. Bermúdez, ‘The Originality of Cartesian Scepticism: Did it have Ancient or Medieval Antecedents?’, forthcoming in *History of Philosophy Quarterly* (2000).

¹⁷ This is precisely the reason why radical sceptical arguments that revolve around dreaming hypotheses do not succumb to the standard treatment that deals in terms of the ‘Closure’ principle for knowledge. This principle states that if a subject knows a proposition, ϕ , and knows that this proposition entails a second proposition, μ , then that subject knows μ . The sceptic contraposes on this principle by arguing that since the agent does not know the denial of the favoured sceptical hypothesis (such as, for example, the malicious demon hypothesis, or the brain-in-a-vat hypothesis), and since the agent does know that the paradigm everyday proposition in question entails this denial, it follows that the subject does not know the paradigm everyday proposition. But since the paradigm everyday proposition will, most likely, be entirely consistent with the dreaming hypothesis, it follows that the dreaming sceptic will be unable to use Closure to

lever support for his doubt in this way. As I briefly discuss below, one has to view sceptical arguments based upon dreaming hypotheses as motivated via a different epistemic principle entirely.

¹⁸ As Descartes puts it:

Reason now leads me to think that I should hold back my assent from opinions which are not completely certain and indubitable just as carefully as I do from those that are patently false. So, for the purposes of rejecting all my opinions, it will be enough if I find in each of them at least some reason for doubt. (AT VII 18, CSM II 12).

For a seminal discussion of this aspect of the Cartesian project, see B. Williams, *Descartes: The Project of Pure Enquiry* *op. cit.*, chapter 2.

¹⁹ See B. Williams, 'Descartes's Use of Skepticism', *op. cit.*; Burnyeat, 'Idealism and Greek Philosophy: What Descartes Saw and Berkeley Missed', *op. cit.*; and Christopher Hookway, *Scepticism* (Oxford: Routledge, 1990).

²⁰ For an eloquent critique of Cartesian scepticism along externalist lines, see M. Williams, *Unnatural Doubts: Epistemological Realism and the Basis of Scepticism*, *op. cit.* In this and other works — such as 'Descartes and the Metaphysics of Doubt' in A. Rorty (ed.) *Essays on Descartes' Meditations* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), and 'Scepticism Without Theory' *Review of Metaphysics* 41 (1988), pp. 547–88 — Williams has been one writer who has explicitly emphasised the differences between classical and Cartesian forms of scepticism, arguing that the latter depends upon a greater commitment to what he regards as being the contentious theoretical (and 'acontextualist') doctrine of "epistemological realism". For a discussion of Williams' position in this respect, see Pritchard, 'Wittgenstein, "Hinge" Propositions and *On Certainty*' in Berit Brogaard & Barry Smith (eds.) *Rationality and Irrationality: Proceedings of the 23rd International Wittgenstein Symposium* (Kirchberg, Austria: Austrian L. Wittgenstein Society, 2000), pp. 84–90.

²¹ One finds equivalent characterisations in the main works by the chief exponents of the view in the literature, such as, for example, Roderick Chisholm's *Theory of Knowledge* (3rd edition) (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1989), chapter 1; and also by its chief detractors, such as Alvin Plantinga, *Warrant: The Current Debate* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), chapter 1. Indeed, in a recent survey article on contemporary epistemology, James Pryor has argued

that this conception of internalism constitutes the “core internalist position”. See Pryor, ‘Epistemology c. 1988–2000’ forthcoming in *The British Journal for the Philosophy of Science* 51 (2000).

²² For example, Robert Brandom has offered an account of knowledge which is clearly externalist but which also emphasises the importance of internal ‘virtues’. See Brandom, ‘Knowledge and the Social Articulation of the Space of Reasons’ *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 55 (1995), pp. 895–908, and ‘Insights and Blindspots of Reliabilism’ *The Monist* 81 (1988), pp. 371–92. He is not the only one. Even Alvin Goldman allows an internalist notion of justification to play a pivotal role in his epistemology. See, for example, Goldman, ‘Strong and Weak Justification’ *Philosophical Perspectives* 2 (1988), pp. 51–69.

²³ A very similar principle is referred to as “Descartes’ Principle” by Wright, ‘Scepticism and Dreaming: Imploding the Demon’, *op. cit.*, p. 91. For further discussion of this principle, especially in terms of how it differs from the ‘Closure’ principle (see footnote 17) that currently receives a great deal of discussion in the contemporary epistemological debate, see Barry Stroud, *The Significance of Philosophical Scepticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), chapter 1, and M. Williams, *Unnatural Doubts: Epistemological Realism and the Basis of Scepticism*, *op. cit.*, section 2.8.

²⁴ The same is true of the malicious demon argument. As with the dreaming argument, the problem here is that one is unable to reflectively determine that this hypothesis is false, and it is this that undermines the epistemic status of the agent’s everyday beliefs about the world. This argument only poses a direct challenge, however, provided one demands, with the internalist, that such reflective access to the conditions under which one putatively knows everyday propositions is necessary.

²⁵ For further (and more specific) discussion of how externalist treatments of knowledge can be used to block the Cartesian argument, see Ernest Sosa, ‘Philosophical Scepticism and Epistemic Circularity’ *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, (supplementary vol.) 68 (1994), pp. 263–90; and Christopher Hill, ‘Process Reliabilism and Cartesian Scepticism’ *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 56 (1996), pp. 567–81.

²⁶ *On Certainty*, (eds.) G. E. M. Anscombe & G. H. von Wright, (tr.) Denis Paul & G. E. M. Anscombe, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1969), §243.

²⁷ ‘Other Minds’, reprinted in his *Philosophical Papers*, (eds.) J. O.

Urmson & G. J. Warnock, pp. 44–84, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961), pp. 99–100.

²⁸ I take a conversational implicature to be any inference that one is entitled to draw upon hearing an assertion (but which need not be entailed by the assertion itself), provided one may legitimately make certain assumptions about the agent making the assertion — that he is, for example, honest, co-operative and (at least otherwise) rational. For the *locus classicus* for this account of conversational implicature, see H. P. Grice, ‘Logic and Conversation’, reprinted in his *Studies in the Way of Words* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989). Of course, as Grice himself pointed out, a conversational implicature can always be *cancelled* by the subject making an explicit disclaimer of some sort. In what follows I shall only be considering knowledge claims that are not cancelled in this way.

²⁹ For discussion of this point, see Arne Naess, *Scepticism* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1968), chapter 2; Burnyeat, ‘Can the Sceptic Live His Scepticism?’, *Doubt and Dogmatism: Studies in Hellenistic Epistemology*, (eds.) J. Barnes, M. Burnyeat & M. Schofield, chapter 3, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980); and Charlotte Stough, ‘Sextus Empiricus on Non-Assertion’, *Phronesis* 29 (1984), pp. 137–64.

³⁰ ‘Scepticism Without Theory’, *op. cit.*, p. 560.

³¹ ‘Idealism and Greek Philosophy: What Descartes Saw and Berkeley Missed’, *op. cit.*, p. 40. See also Burnyeat, ‘The Sceptic in his Place and Time’, *Philosophy in History: Essays on the Historiography of Philosophy*, (eds.) R. Rorty, J. B. Schneewind & Q. Skinner, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), chapter 10.

³² Of course, Burnyeat himself famously did not, at least at one point in his career, think that such scepticism is, ultimately, liveable because there are other sorts of beliefs that the sceptic must retain that are contrary to the sceptical stance. See ‘Can the Sceptic Live His Scepticism?’, *op. cit.*

³³ ‘Scepticism Without Theory’, *op. cit.*, p. 563.

³⁴ See ‘The Sceptic’s Two Kinds of Assent and the Question of the Possibility of Knowledge’, in *Philosophy in History: Essays on the Historiography of Philosophy*, (eds.) R. Rorty, J. B. Schneewind & Q. Skinner, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), chapter 11.

³⁵ See Sedley, ‘The Motivation of Greek Scepticism’, *op. cit.*; Barnes, ‘The Beliefs of a Pyrrhonist’, *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society* 208 (1982), pp. 1–29; and Burnyeat, ‘The Sceptic in his Place and Time’, *op. cit.* Burnyeat also offers a subtle discussion of the

manner in which belief and dogma are understood by the Pyrrhonian sceptics — such that, on at least one conception of belief, the Pyrrhonians can be viewed as retaining a significant class of their beliefs — in ‘Can the Sceptic Live his Scepticism?’, *op. cit.* See also M. Williams, ‘Scepticism Without Theory’, *op. cit.*

³⁶ See, for example, Keith Lehrer, *Theory of Knowledge* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1990).

³⁷ One finds a similar notion in the constructivist work of Bas van Fraassen where he argues for the *acceptance* of scientific theories (as empirically adequate) over *belief* in them (as true). See his *The Scientific Image* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980).

³⁸ Interestingly, despite his ultimate contextualist reading of the Pyrrhonian stance in this regard, Michael Williams does not recognise the import of the distinction that is being made here. This is especially surprising given that many of the observations that he makes directly support this conclusion. For example, he writes (‘Scepticism Without Theory’, *op. cit.*, pp. 561–2):

[...] the Pyrrhonian has a distinctive *style* of assent: spontaneous, involuntary submission to his unrationalised impulses. Assent is a *pathos*, something that comes over one. (It is tempting to see Sextus as ironically inverting the Stoic rule of overcoming the affections, *pathoi*, in order to live by reason, *logos*: Sextus neutralises reason in order to live by his affections). Ordinary life, as Sextus sees it, is much more a matter of impulse and habit than of judgement properly so-called.

³⁹ Wittgenstein expands upon this point at length in *On Certainty*, *op. cit.*

⁴⁰ It is important to distinguish this point from a similar contention made by some commentators to the effect that by distinguishing between the different notions of belief in play in the classical sceptical argument one can see that Pyrrhonian scepticism was not concerned with the possibility of knowledge at all. As Michael Frede in ‘The Sceptic’s Two Kinds of Assent and the Question of the Possibility of Knowledge’, *op. cit.*, p. 278, has put the point:

[...] because one has failed to understand the classical sceptic’s attitude towards belief, one has also failed to understand the peculiar nature and status of the arguments of classical scepticism, one has read them and keeps reading them as if

they represented the sceptical view of the problem of the possibility of knowledge.

Strictly speaking, Frede is right, of course, in the sense that distinguishing between the two different notions of belief does mark out Pyrrhonian scepticism as explicitly not making the claim that knowledge is impossible. A much stronger point is being made here, however, which is that if one regards the Pyrrhonian sceptic as agnostic about the internalist/externalist distinction, then one can regard his view as actually being consistent with the widespread possession of knowledge, at least of a sort.

⁴¹ See Fumerton, 'Metaepistemology and Skepticism' in M. D. Roth & G. Roth, *Doubting: Contemporary Perspectives on Skepticism* (Kluwer: Dordrecht, 1990), pp. 57–68; cf. Fumerton, *Metaepistemology and Skepticism* (Lanham, MA: Rowman and Littlefield, 1995).

⁴² 'Metaepistemology and Skepticism', *op. cit.*, p. 64. A related concern is raised by Edward Craig in 'Nozick and the Sceptic: The Thumbnail Version' *Analysis* 49 (1989), pp. 161–2, regarding the coherence of the sort of 'conditional' anti-sceptical account of knowledge offered by Robert Nozick in *Philosophical Explanations*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981). For discussion, see Anthony Brueckner, 'Unfair to Nozick' *Analysis* 51 (1991), pp. 61–4, and Pritchard, 'Understanding Scepticism' forthcoming in *Nordic Journal of Philosophy* 2 (2000).

⁴³ 'Scepticism, 'Externalism', and the Goal of Epistemology', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* (supplementary vol.) 68 (1994), pp. 290–307, p. 297; cf. Ernest Sosa, 'Philosophical Scepticism and Epistemic Circularity', *op. cit.*

⁴⁴ Note that the issue is not (at least not directly) one of second-order knowledge (as Stroud seems to suggest at the end of the quotation cited above), since the externalist can perfectly consistently allow that an agent may have second-order (or indeed, n^{th} -order) knowledge without thereby requiring that such knowledge must essentially involve reflective access in the manner that the internalist demands.

⁴⁵ Interestingly, in a recent article by a prominent commentator on Pyrrhonian scepticism — Robert Fogelin — one does find a cursory discussion of how one might apply a Pyrrhonian sceptical argument to an anti-sceptical strategy that ran along explicitly externalist lines. Notably, however, Fogelin fails to see that the advantage that the Pyrrhonian strategy holds in this respect is that it is primarily directed at knowledge *claims*, focussing instead upon the fact that the

Pyrrhonian sceptic could allow that many everyday propositions were *knowable* even though they were not *known*. See 'The Sceptic's Burden', *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 7 (1999), pp. 159–72; cf. Fogelin, *Pyrrhonian Reflections on Knowledge and Justification* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).

⁴⁶ Thanks to Patrick Greenough, Leslie Stevenson, Michael Williams and Crispin Wright for discussion on this, and related, topics, and to my colleague, José Bermúdez, from whose work in this area I have learned a great deal.