

HEGELIAN VS. KANTIAN INTERPRETATIONS OF PYRRHONISM:  
REVOLUTION OR REACTION?

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I. This paper concerns a surprisingly sharp disagreement about the nature of ancient Pyrrhonism which first emerges clearly in Kant and Hegel, but which continues in contemporary interpretations.<sup>1</sup> The paper begins by explaining the character of this disagreement, then attempts to adjudicate it in the light of the ancient texts.

In his Logic lectures, Kant interprets ancient Pyrrhonism as a position whose fundamental nature was not to attack all beliefs - in particular not everyday empirical, moral, mathematical, or logical beliefs - but instead just the reason-based beliefs concerning the supersensible espoused by metaphysical philosophers.<sup>2</sup> Accordingly, for Kant, the Pyrrhonian life by appearances was a life rich in beliefs (of the favored everyday sorts); it only excluded a certain type of beliefs, namely metaphysical beliefs founded on reason and concerned with the supersensible. For Kant, Pyrrhonism was thus fundamentally a reaction against the innovations of metaphysical philosophers.<sup>3</sup>

Hegel's interpretation of the fundamental nature of ancient Pyrrhonism is quite contrary to Kant's.<sup>4</sup> In his 1802 essay *The Relation of Skepticism to Philosophy* and his later *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* Hegel interprets ancient Pyrrhonism as a position whose fundamental nature was to attack *all* beliefs - in particular, not only

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<sup>1</sup>This is a short version of a longer paper which I hope to publish in the near future. It is perforce somewhat more dogmatic than the longer version.

<sup>2</sup>*Logik Blomberg*, pp. 213-14; *Logik Herder*, p. 4; *Logik Philippi*, p. 330. (Page numbers for all Kant's works refer to the relevant volume in the standard German edition of the Königl. Preussische Akademie der Wissenschaften.)

<sup>3</sup>See esp. *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, p. 271.

<sup>4</sup>Hegel seems not to have known Kant's interpretation directly. But he encountered its main lines indirectly in the work of the Kant-influenced self-styled skeptic "Aenesidemus" Schulze.

philosophical and scientific ones but also commonsense ones.<sup>5</sup> For Hegel, the ancient Pyrrhonists conceived their life by appearances to be a novel sort of life devoid of beliefs. Thus for Hegel, unlike Kant, ancient Pyrrhonism had the fundamental character, not of a reaction, but of a revolution.<sup>6</sup>

This deep interpretive disagreement persists (with only modest changes) in the modern scholarly literature on Pyrrhonism, particularly in the work of the two leading authorities on the subject, Michael Frede and Myles Burnyeat. On the one hand, like Kant, Frede interprets the Pyrrhonists as intellectual reactionaries who were reacting against a wave of philosophers and scientists who had themselves launched a revolutionary assault on traditional beliefs, presuming to inform people on the strength of reason and argument how the world really was, or was by nature, beyond the appearances which (they alleged) largely blinded traditional believers. On Frede's interpretation, the Pyrrhonists were not seeking to eradicate *all* beliefs, but only those beliefs which were distinctive of the philosophers and scientists (and others who imitated them by founding their beliefs on reason and argument). Far from the Pyrrhonists' life of appearances being an innovation introduced in order to sustain them after an eradication of all beliefs, it was a life made up mainly of traditional beliefs held in the same way as before the rude intrusion of the philosophers and scientists.<sup>7</sup>

On the other hand, like Hegel, Burnyeat instead interprets Pyrrhonism as a revolutionary movement which sought to eliminate *all* beliefs - those of the scientist or

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<sup>5</sup>Indeed, Hegel goes as far as to interpret Pyrrhonism as attacking a subject's beliefs in his own mental states, and in at least one place (an early critique of Bouterwek) he even implies that it attacks beliefs in the principles of formal logic. See my *Hegel and Skepticism* (Harvard, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989).

<sup>6</sup>Both Kant and Hegel distinguish between different phases of ancient Pyrrhonism in ways which complicate the basic contrast between their interpretations sketched here. I shall disregard these complications in the present paper.

<sup>7</sup>M. Frede, "Des Skeptikers Meinungen," in *Neue Hefte für Philosophie*, 15/16 (1979).

philosopher and those of the ordinary man alike - with a view to then undertaking the novelty of living by belief-free ("non-epistemic") appearances.<sup>8</sup>

In what follows I would like to explore this disagreement.<sup>9</sup>

II. As might be expected where a disagreement in interpretation has gone on for so long, and between interpreters of such outstanding quality, there is some fairly compelling prima facie textual evidence on both sides here. Let me begin by adumbrating some of the evidence which seems to me to speak most strongly in favor of the Hegel-Burnyeat reading (this is largely drawn from Burnyeat's "Can the Skeptic Live His Skepticism?").

(1) It seems clear that the Ten Tropes of Aenesidemus are aimed partly, and indeed primarily, at undermining the ordinary beliefs of the ordinary man.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, the Five Tropes of Agrippa seem quite indifferent as to the nature of the beliefs against which they are directed. Indeed, Sextus explicitly includes among their targets not only philosophers and scientists but also "ordinary life [*bios*]" (*Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, 1.165).<sup>11</sup> In short, both of the main sets of tropes seem committed to a revolutionary form of Pyrrhonism.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>M.F. Burnyeat, "Can the Skeptic Live His Skepticism?" in *The Skeptical Tradition*, ed. M.F. Burnyeat (University of California Press: Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1983).

<sup>9</sup>I will focus mainly on the leading spokesman of ancient Pyrrhonism, Sextus Empiricus. I will have less to say about the earlier Pyrrhonists. However, I agree with Burnyeat, *ibid.* that the evidence suggests substantial continuity between Pyrrho/Timon, Aenesidemus, and Sextus Empiricus rather than discontinuity, and I shall rely on this view in what follows to some extent.

<sup>10</sup>This is essentially the conclusion reached by the most thorough recent study of the Ten Tropes, J. Annas and J. Barnes, *The Modes of Scepticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); see esp. p. 124, cf. p. 112.

<sup>11</sup>Texts and translations for Sextus Empiricus are drawn from the Loeb editions translated by R.G. Bury, but with some modifications of the translations.

<sup>12</sup>Hegel already stresses this point in his *The Relation of Skepticism to Philosophy*.

(2) In the *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* and elsewhere Sextus attacks not only philosophical and scientific concepts but also such everyday concepts as causation,<sup>13</sup> motion, place,<sup>14</sup> time, and truth. Consider, for example, the following remark: "It is assumed by ordinary life [*bios*] and by some philosophers that motion exists, but by Parmenides, Melissus, and certain others that it does not exist; while the skeptics have declared that it is 'no more' existent than non-existent" (3.65; cf. 3.135-6, and *Against the Physicists*, 2.45-9).

(3) Similarly, in *Against the Physicists* Sextus gives as one of his reasons for suspending judgment concerning the gods "the divergency of the views of common life [*koinou biou*] about the gods," "for different people have different and discordant notions about them, so that neither are all of these notions to be trusted because of their inconsistency, nor some of them because of their equipollence" (1.191-2).

(4) Similarly, when Sextus in the *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* wants to illustrate the point that the Pyrrhonists avoid both positive and negative assertions, he chooses as his examples, not philosophical or scientific assertions, but instead the perfectly mundane propositions "It is day" and "It is not day" (1.192).

(5) Sextus's explanation of Pyrrhonism's advantage in relation to values - that by giving up any belief that things are good or bad by nature it minimizes mental disquietude [*tarachê*] - explicitly represents this as an advantage not only over philosophers or scientists but also over ordinary people [*idiôtai*] (*Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, 1.27-30).

(6) Early critics of Pyrrhonism, such as Aristocles, who were presumably in a good position to know, assume that they are dealing in Pyrrhonism with a philosophy which is

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<sup>13</sup>Pace J. Barnes, "Ancient Skepticism and Causation," in *The Skeptical Tradition*, pp. 157-8, Sextus's attack on causation seems to target not only philosophical or scientific conceptions of it, but also everyday ones.

<sup>14</sup>Sextus's attack on the concept of place is less clearly directed against the everyday concept than some of his other attacks mentioned here, but for a convincing reading of it in this manner see M.F. Burnyeat, "The Sceptic in His Place and Time" (in *The Original Sceptics: A Controversy*, ed. M.F. Burnyeat and M. Frede [Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997]).

intent on avoiding all beliefs.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, early critical testimony about Pyrrho himself strongly suggests that this was already the goal of the movement's figurehead.<sup>16</sup>

(7) Sextus not only characterizes the Pyrrhonists as rejecting *dogmata* - a term which, as Jonathan Barnes points out, often connotes philosophical or scientific principles.<sup>17</sup> He also characterizes them as living *adoxastôs*,<sup>18</sup> i.e. "without *doxai*" - a term for beliefs which is either neutral as between technical and everyday beliefs or actually suggestive of everyday beliefs rather than technical ones.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, at *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, 1.25-30, where he has just been using the term *adoxastôs* and continues to use its adjectival form, Sextus explicitly discusses *doxai* in connection with it, and says that the skeptics' rejection of *doxai* distinguishes them from ordinary people [*idiôtai*] (cf. 3.235-7). In addition, there is good evidence that Pyrrho himself already had this ambition of renouncing all *doxai* and living *adoxastôs*.<sup>20</sup>

(8) Pyrrhonism stands in close relation to Academic skepticism, but shows a persistent concern to distinguish itself by being more radical. Thus Aenesidemus, the real founder of Pyrrhonism as a school, left the Academy because he found it too dogmatic in his time,<sup>21</sup> and Sextus is constantly at pains in his works to distinguish Pyrrhonism as a more radical position than Academic skepticism as well. Yet Cicero tells us reliably that even the founder of Academic skepticism, Arcesilaus, spoke "against the opinions of all

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<sup>15</sup>See Burnyeat, "Can the Skeptic Live His Skepticism?" pp. 136-7.

<sup>16</sup>See esp. Aristocles' attribution to Pyrrho (on the authority of Aenesidemus) of the goal of a life without beliefs (A.A. Long and D.N. Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988], vol. 1, pp. 14-15) and the early stories about Pyrrho's helplessness relayed by Diogenes Laertius (which tend to support this conclusion even if, as is likely, they were intended as caricature).

<sup>17</sup>J. Barnes, "The Beliefs of a Pyrrhonist," in *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society*, 29 (1982), pp. 6-9.

<sup>18</sup>See e.g. *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, 1.15, 1.23-4, 1.226, 2.246, 2.254, 3.2, 3.151, 3.235.

<sup>19</sup>Cf. Barnes, "The Beliefs of a Pyrrhonist," p. 26.

<sup>20</sup>This is the clear implication of the testimony of Aristocles (see *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, vol. 2, p. 5).

<sup>21</sup>This complaint of Aenesidemus's against the Academy is reported by Photius in his *Library*.

men" (Cicero, *Academica*, 1.45).<sup>22</sup> Moreover, Sextus himself at least sometimes recognizes that Arcesilaus suspended judgment about everything (*Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, 1.232). So the question is this: Is it likely that the Pyrrhonists, who so prided themselves on being at least as radical as the Academic skeptics, would have fallen short of Arcesilaus in his aspiration to do away with all belief? Surely not.

(9) According to Sextus, all his own commitments are to be understood merely as expressions of how things currently appear to him.<sup>23</sup> In particular, this is how his own philosophical commitments are to be understood, specifically, the formulae in which he expresses equipollence and suspension of judgment (*Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, 1.14-15), and his theory that suspension of judgment leads to the end of quietude [*ataraxia*] (1.232-3); and appearances also constitute his solution to the problem of how in the absence of judgment the Pyrrhonist is to live a viable life, namely by following the guidance of appearances from four specified sources (1.23-4). But Sextus also explains that the Pyrrhonist's acceptance of his own current appearances is merely an acceptance that his *mental affections* are thus and so *in him*, not an acceptance that they correctly represent facts about the external world, and that this is why his acceptance of them is exempt from skeptical attack.<sup>24</sup> This implies that the acceptance of appearances which makes up the Pyrrhonist's whole position is free of belief ("non-epistemic"). For, as Hegel and Burnyeat argue, Sextus and his school do not think of mere reports of appearances as constituting *truths*, and consequently - since belief of its very nature concerns truth - do

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<sup>22</sup>Accordingly, Arcesilaus's contemporary critic Colotes objected that his suspension of judgment entailed inactivity (see Burnyeat, "Can the Skeptic Live His Skepticism?" p. 142), and Arcesilaus constructed a theory of the possibility of action without assent, evidently with the purpose of thwarting this sort of objection.

<sup>23</sup>*Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, 1.4; cf. 1.135, 1.198, 1.200; also *Against the Ethicists*, 18-20: whenever the Pyrrhonist says "is" he really means "appears."

<sup>24</sup>"In his enunciation of [the skeptical] formulae [the skeptic] states what appears to himself and announces his own affection [*pathos*] . . . without making any positive assertion regarding the external realities" (*Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, 1.15, cf. 1.197); "the criterion . . . of the skeptic school is, we say, the appearance, giving this name to what is virtually the presentation [*phantasian*]; for since this lies in feeling and involuntary affection, it is not open to question" (1.22).

not think of them as expressing *beliefs* either.<sup>25</sup> In short, the Pyrrhonist intends to live solely by appearances, and because these concern only his own state of mind, not external realities, they involve neither a commitment to truth nor belief.

Such evidence as this constitutes a fairly strong *prima facie* case in favor of the Hegel-Burnyeat reading of Pyrrhonism. But on the other hand, there is also some evidence which lends fairly strong *prima facie* support to the contrary Kant-Frede reading. The strongest of this seems to me the following (drawn from Frede's "Des Skeptikers Meinungen").<sup>26</sup>

(1) Sextus frequently uses various restrictive-looking qualifications, such as "*hoson epi tōi logōi* [to the extent that this is a question for reason?]" and "*physei / pros tēn physin / kata tēn physin* [in the nature of things]," to characterize the matters which he attacks and on which he suspends belief.<sup>27</sup>

(2) At *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, 1.13 Sextus distinguishes between two senses of the word *dogma* and adopts sharply different stances towards the two sorts of *dogma*. He says that in one sense *dogma* just means "acceptance [*eudokein*]" of something, but in another sense "assent to a non-evident object of scientific inquiry [*tēn tini pragmati tōn kata tas epistēmas zētoumenōn adēlōn sungkatathesin*]." And he says that, while the Pyrrhonist renounces *dogma* in the latter sense, he *adopts* it in the former sense.<sup>28</sup>

(3) Sextus often seems hostile to philosophers and scientists but by contrast sympathetic to ordinary life, or the ordinary man [*bios*]. For example, in *Against the*

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<sup>25</sup>See Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* and *The Relation of Skepticism to Philosophy*; Burnyeat, "Can the Skeptic Live His Skepticism?" pp. 121, 142-3. This is a complicated subject, however, concerning which I reserve detailed comments for the longer version of this paper.

<sup>26</sup>Frede also puts weight on what is in effect an argument from interpretive charity: since, in his view, it is clear that a life without any beliefs would be unlivable, because it would make action impossible (Hume's famous point against Pyrrhonism), we had *better* ascribe to the Pyrrhonists a position which allows them to hold some beliefs. I find this argument weaker, however, and will therefore set it aside here.

<sup>27</sup>Frede, "Des Skeptikers Meinungen," pp. 112-13, 117-18.

<sup>28</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 111-23.

*Logicians*, discussing the "commemorative" signs which he favors and "indicative" signs which he opposes, he writes as follows: "We propose to devote all our investigation and criticism not to the commemorative sign, *for this is generally believed by all ordinary folk to be useful*, but to the indicative, *for this has been devised by the dogmatic philosophers and by the logical physicians . . .* Hence we are not attacking the common preconceptions of mankind, nor are we turning ordinary life [*ton bion*] upside down by asserting that no sign exists, as some slanderously affirm of us. For if we were abolishing every sign we might, perhaps, have been attacking ordinary life [*tôî biôi*] and all mankind, but as it is, we ourselves are of the same mind and infer fire from smoke, and a previous wound from a scar" (2.156-8, emphasis added).<sup>29</sup>

III. Faced with this apparent conflict of evidence, one might be tempted to agree with Barnes, in his essay "Ancient Skepticism and Causation," that there simply *is no* consistent account of the scope of the Pyrrhonists' attack on beliefs to be found in Sextus's texts (and that this is due to the fact that Sextus was primarily a compiler of earlier material rather than a systematic thinker).<sup>30</sup> However, quite general principles of interpretation must surely make this a reading of last (or at least late) resort.

I would like, instead, to propose, at least in outline, a way of defending the Hegel-Burnyeat interpretation against the Kant-Frede interpretation's contrary evidence, as the correct interpretation of a Pyrrhonist position which is fundamentally consistent.

Reconsider, first, (Kant-)Frede evidence (1): Sextus's frequent use of such restrictive-looking qualifications as "*hoson epi tôî logôi* [to the extent that this is a question for reason?]" and "*physei / pros tên physin / kata tên physin* [in the nature of things]" to characterize the matters which he attacks and on which he suspends belief.

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<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 114.

<sup>30</sup>Barnes, "Ancient Skepticism and Causation," pp. 159-60.

Let me say something about each of these two qualifying tags in turn. The tag *hoson epi tōi logōi* is interpreted by Frede to mean "to the extent that this is a question for reason," and by other interpreters in different but similarly restrictive ways: "in its essence" (Bury), "as far as what the dogmatists say is concerned" (Janacek and Hossenfelder, who read the expression as elliptical for *hoson epi tōi logōi tōn dogmatikōn*, which also sometimes occurs). There are objections to each of these interpretations, however. Concerning Frede's interpretation, if the reference to "reason" involves the hypostatization of a mental faculty, then that would surely be a very peculiar thing for a Pyrrhonist to be doing in his own voice; and if it merely means reasoning (as contrasted with simply claiming), then we surely know that the Pyrrhonist would not wish to restrict his attacks to that (see, for example, the Ten Tropes, or the fourth of the Five Tropes against "assumptions [*hypotheseis*]"). Nor do the other two proposals ("in its essence" and "as far as what the dogmatists say is concerned") stand up to scrutiny, as Jacques Brunschwig has convincingly shown.<sup>31</sup> Reinforcing those negative points, and presenting a more plausible alternative: As Brunschwig points out, the first and indeed main occurrence of this tag, at *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, 1.20, takes place in connection with the famous example of the honey - "Honey appears to us to be sweet (and this we grant, for we receive perceptual impressions of sweetness [*glukazometha gar aisthêtikōs*]),<sup>32</sup> but whether it is also sweet *hoson epi tōi logōi* is for us open to doubt" – and suggests, or even requires, an alternative interpretation. For in the immediately preceding sentence Sextus had drawn a distinction between an appearance itself, which he said he does not call into question, and "the account given of that appearance [*ho legetai peri tou phainomenou*]" (1.19), to which *hoson epi tōi logōi* in the next sentence

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<sup>31</sup>J. Brunschwig, "La formule *hoson epi tōi logōi* chez Sextus Empiricus," in his *Études sur les philosophies Hellénistiques* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1995).

<sup>32</sup>I have modified Bury's translation here in order to do more justice to the unusual Cyrenaic idiom *glukazometha . . . aisthêtikōs*.

must presumably be alluding back anaphorically.<sup>33</sup> So the tag *hoson epi tōi logōi* presumably here means something like: "as far as it is a matter of an account," rather than a mere avowal of an appearance.<sup>34</sup> This reading also works well for the tag's other main occurrence in the *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, at 1.215. Thus Sextus's use of this tag turns out to be perfectly compatible with the Hegel-Burnyeat interpretation.

What about the other tag, "*physei / pros tēn physin / kata tēn physin* [in the nature of things]"? This tag first occurs in the *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* at 1.27-30, and the crucial thing to notice is that this occurrence makes it quite clear that the tag is supposed to characterize the way in which not only philosophers and scientists but also *ordinary people* [*idiôtai*] hold their beliefs. The tag implies a contrast with what is merely posited by human beings, in effect the traditional *physis/nomos* contrast, but modulated by Pyrrhonism into a contrast more specifically with what merely *appears* to human beings. Hence the tag connotes nothing more than the sort of commitment to reality or truth which is as much a part of everyday beliefs as of scientific or philosophical ones, in contrast with a mere acceptance of appearances. Sextus's restriction of his attack to what is "in the nature of things" is therefore once again entirely compatible with the Hegel-Burnyeat interpretation.

Reconsider, next, (Kant-)Frede evidence (2): Sextus's distinction between two senses of the term *dogma*, that of an acceptance of something and that of assent to a non-evident object of scientific inquiry, and his restriction of skeptical hostility to *dogma* in the latter sense.

Let us take the positive and the negative sides of this in turn. Positively, Sextus says that the skeptic is prepared to "accept [*eudokein*]" things. However, it seems clear from

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<sup>33</sup>Brunschwig, "La formule *hoson epi tōi logōi* chez Sextus Empiricus." In going this far with Brunschwig, I do not mean to endorse what he then says in addition (which seems to me oversubtle).

<sup>34</sup>It seems to me a virtue of this reading (over the restrictive readings) that it makes Sextus's position concerning the honey example in effect the same as Timon's reported position concerning the same example: Diogenes Laertius reports that "in his writings *On Sensations* [Timon] says: "That honey is sweet I do not affirm, but I agree that it appears so" (*The Hellenistic Philosophers*, vol. 1, p. 15).

what he immediately goes on to add in explanation of this acceptance - "for the skeptic gives assent to the affections which are the necessary results of presentations, and he would not, for example, say when feeling hot or cold 'I believe that I am not hot or cold'" (*Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, 1.13) - that the acceptance in question is precisely the sort of belief-free ("non-epistemic") acceptance of a presentation or appearance that the Hegel-Burnyeat reading would lead one to expect of the skeptic. In terms of Hegel-Burnyeat evidence (9), it is an acceptance by the skeptic that his mental affections are thus and so in him, but without any implication that they represent the external realities correctly, and hence it does not attain truth or constitute belief.<sup>35</sup>

Concerning next the negative side of Sextus's position, his rejection of *dogma* in the sense of "assent to a non-evident object of scientific inquiry," note the following points. First, Sextus's statement that the skeptic rejects this does not, at least strictly speaking, imply that this is *all* he rejects. Assuming that the points just made about what Sextus says the skeptic *accepts* were correct, the passage as a whole simply does not tell us what the skeptic's attitude to commonsense beliefs about everyday external realities is.<sup>36</sup> Second, this omission is entirely natural for the following reason. Sextus is discussing a term, *dogma*, for which there was already a certain set of meanings available in the language. In the commonest of these it connoted something like a weighty philosophical or scientific principle.<sup>37</sup> In another, less common meaning deriving from the word's transparent etymological connection with *dokein* (cf. Sextus's *eudokein*), it connoted something more like *seeming acceptable*, in a broad sense which might involve belief but need not. On the other hand, at least by Sextus's day, the word did *not* normally bear the

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<sup>35</sup>Frede argues against this surely natural reading at "Des Skeptikers Meinungen," pp. 124-6, but I find his argument unpersuasive. Note that on his contrary interpretation it would be surprising that Sextus chooses a mentalistic example in order to illustrate the sort of dogmatizing that he allows at all (since he also had virtually the whole field of everyday judgments about non-mental subject matters to choose from).

<sup>36</sup>Cf. Barnes, "The Beliefs of a Pyrrhonist," p. 10.

<sup>37</sup>See *ibid.*, pp. 6-7.

meaning "belief" simpliciter (which would rather have been *doxa*).<sup>38</sup> He was therefore only obliged to address the question of whether or not he allowed *dogma* in the former two senses, not in this third sense. For these two reasons, it seems to me implausible to read out of the negative side of Sextus's position in this passage an exemption of commonsense beliefs from skeptical attack.

In order to confirm this reading and to throw some further light on the situation, consider a strikingly similar-looking, but also significantly different, passage not discussed by Frede. At *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, 1.230 Sextus distinguishes between two senses of "believe [*peithesthai*]," one the sense of merely following without strong impulse or inclination, as a boy "believes" his tutor, the other the sense of assenting through deliberate choice from strong desire, and he says that while the skeptic does not "believe" in the latter sense, he does "believe" in the former sense: "The word 'believe' [*peithesthai*] has different meanings: it means not to resist but simply to follow [*hepesthai*] without any strong impulse or inclination, as a boy is said to believe his tutor [*tôi paidagôgôi*]; but sometimes it means to assent to a thing of deliberate choice and with a kind of sympathy due to strong desire . . . Since, therefore, Carneades and Clitomachus declare that a strong inclination accompanies their credence and the credibility of the object, while we say that our belief is a matter of simple yielding without any consent, here too there must be a difference between us and them."

There are three important points to notice here. First, as in Frede's passage, the appearance here that Sextus is endorsing a certain amount of belief turns out to be illusory on closer inspection (though for interestingly different reasons). The verb *peithesthai* can mean not only "to believe" but also "to trust / obey." It is probable that when Sextus endorses a certain sort of *peithesthai* he really means the latter rather than the former. For the picture here of the schoolboy following his tutor is almost certainly

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<sup>38</sup>Pace Burnyeat, "Can the Skeptic Live His Skepticism?" p. 122. For a correction of Burnyeat's contrary view, see Barnes, "The Beliefs of a Pyrrhonist," pp. 6 ff. Burnyeat in a later paper accepts the correction: "The Sceptic in His Place and Time," p. 97, n. 13.

meant to conjure up, not the acceptance of beliefs which might first occur to us from our own experience of modern teaching-contexts (e.g. believing a history teacher's information that the Battle of Hastings took place in 1066), but instead the sort of rote learning of letters, poetry, and music which formed the mainstay of Greek school education (in which connection note Sextus's choice of the verb "to follow," and of the Greek word for a tutor, *paidagôgos*, literally "boy-leader"). So the "belief" which the Pyrrhonist is here being said to indulge in is not really what we would call "belief" at all, but rather just a sort of faithful imitation of prescribed practices.<sup>39</sup> Second, in *this* passage, unlike the passage about *dogma*, it seems plausible to understand the sort of "belief [*peithesthai*]" which Sextus rejects - namely, "assent to a thing of deliberate choice and with a kind of sympathy due to strong desire" - as *including* belief in general. So this passage arguably answers, as the former passage did not, the question of what the Pyrrhonist's attitude to belief in general is, and it does so *in the spirit of the Hegel-Burnyeat reading*. Third, like the former passage's *failure* to answer that question, the fact that this passage *does* so is presumably dictated by the preexisting linguistic value of the word involved: unlike the word *dogma*, the word *peithesthai* did commonly bear the meaning *believe*, so that addressing the question of whether or not the Pyrrhonist *peithetai* in the sense of believing *is* appropriate in this case. This tends to confirm my explanation of why the former passage left that important question open.

Finally, reconsider (Kant-)Frede evidence (3): the fact that Sextus often seems hostile to philosophers and scientists but by contrast sympathetic to ordinary life or the ordinary man, and in particular the passage on signs from *Against the Logicians*.

The key to understanding passages such as this one in which Sextus seems to ally himself with the ordinary man against the philosophers and scientists is, I think, as follows. A Pyrrhonist may reject any given belief in *one* way or in *two* ways. He may

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<sup>39</sup>Cf. Sextus's description in *Against the Physicists* of the skeptic's behavior in regard to religion (1.49, especially as read in light of 1.191-2).

reject the *form* of the belief only, i.e. reject it as a belief, while, however, retaining allegiance to its propositional *content*, namely in the new form of an appearance. Or he may reject not only its form, its status as a belief, but also its propositional content, retaining no allegiance to this content even in the form of an appearance. For example, in the case of his own skeptical formulae the Pyrrhonist's rejection has the former character (see *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, 1.14-15), but in the case of a typical philosophical or scientific belief - say, one concerning the fundamental constitution of the universe or the underlying cause of certain medical symptoms - his rejection has the latter character. The considered Pyrrhonist position is that one should renounce the *form* of all beliefs, their status as beliefs, and in this respect the Pyrrhonist is as hostile to the beliefs of the ordinary man as to those of the philosopher or scientist. However, where the propositional *content* of beliefs is concerned, the Pyrrhonist is much more discriminating: here he is decidedly the ally of the ordinary man against the philosopher or scientist, generally accepting the propositional content of the ordinary man's beliefs, but rejecting that of the philosopher's or scientist's distinctive beliefs. This can be seen, for example, from the many passages in which Sextus equates the appearances which he accepts with what appears *to everyone alike*.<sup>40</sup> It can also be seen from his description at *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, 1.23-4 of the four sources of appearances which the skeptic uses to direct his life: the guidance of nature, the constraint of the passions, the tradition of laws and customs, and the instruction of the arts.<sup>41</sup> Hence Barnes is guilty of a non sequitur (or at least a misleading oversimplification) when he argues in "The Beliefs of a Pyrrhonist": "If we insist upon a rustic [i.e. Hegel-Burnyeat-style] construal of the *têrêsis* [i.e. the Pyrrhonian way of life], then we must dismiss Sextus's claim that his Pyrrhonist sides

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<sup>40</sup>See e.g. *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, 3.254; *Against the Ethicists*, 229, 240; *Against the Professors*, 1.36.

<sup>41</sup>Strictly speaking, the situation is a little more complicated. Pyrrhonism's allegiance with the ordinary man does include but also extends somewhat beyond acceptance of the propositional contents of the ordinary man's beliefs, since it incorporates in addition certain further propositional contents which are required or at least useful for the ordinary man's welfare and which conform to approved Pyrrhonian procedures. I shall defer fuller discussion of this qualification for the longer version of the paper.

with *bios*. Everyman has everyday beliefs; a rustic Pyrrhonist has no beliefs; it is merely disingenuous for a rustic to pretend that he is on the side of Everyman."<sup>42</sup>

Why does the Pyrrhonist favor the content of the ordinary man's beliefs over that of the philosopher's or scientist's distinctive beliefs (while rejecting them all qua beliefs)?

Sextus indicates two reasons. First, he implies that even when the ordinary man's beliefs have been discredited qua beliefs, their content somehow still forces itself on one as an appearance, unlike the content of philosophical and scientific beliefs.<sup>43</sup> Second, he implies that the content of the ordinary man's beliefs, unlike that of the philosopher's or scientist's distinctive beliefs, is required or useful for ordinary life [*bios*].<sup>44</sup>

It is, I suggest, this whole allegiance to the ordinary man and hostility to the philosopher or scientist with respect to the *content* of beliefs that is really at issue in the passage on signs from *Against the Logicians* which constitutes the core of (Kant-)Frede evidence (3). The Pyrrhonist accepts as an appearance the content of the ordinary man's beliefs in commemorative signs (e.g. the inference, based on past experience, that because there is smoke here, there must also be fire), but he does not accept even as an appearance the content of the philosopher's or scientist's beliefs in indicative signs (e.g. the inference that because sweat appears on the skin, there must be invisible pores in the skin). This does *not* mean, however, contrary to Frede's implication that it does, that the Pyrrhonist accepts the *form* of the ordinary man's beliefs, accepts them *as beliefs*. One can see that that is not Sextus's position from the discussion of signs in the *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* which corresponds to this discussion of them in *Against the Logicians*. For in the *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, Sextus, while repeating his claim that the skeptics reject only

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<sup>42</sup>Barnes, "The Beliefs of a Pyrrhonist," p. 17.

<sup>43</sup>For example, at *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, 1.193 he writes: "We yield to those things that move us affectively [*pathêtikôs*] and drive us compulsorily [*anangkastikôs*] to assent."

<sup>44</sup>Review in this specific light the passage on signs from *Against the Logicians* quoted earlier and under discussion here. For some further evidence that *usefulness* has this significance for the Pyrrhonist, see Barnes, "Ancient Skepticism and Causation," p. 156.

the indicative sign but retain the commemorative sign required for ordinary life, also makes explicit a qualification that their exemption of ordinary life from attack takes the form of "lend[ing] it our support by assenting *nonbelievingly* [*adoxastôs*] to what it relies on" (2.102, emphasis added).<sup>45</sup>

The question might perhaps still be asked, why, then, Sextus does not actually give equipollence arguments against our beliefs in commemorative signs in order to induce us to drop them as beliefs and merely accept them as appearances. The answer is probably that in his view he *has* given such arguments but in an indirect way, namely by making equipollence attacks on beliefs in the premises and conclusions of commemorative inferences (which beliefs are of course essential to beliefs in commemorative inferences themselves). For example, although he does not attack the belief in the commemorative inference "In the past scars have always been preceded by wounds; this is a scar; therefore this was preceded by a wound" directly, he *has* attacked it indirectly by attacking belief in its premises and conclusion in various ways. For instance, he has attacked the very concept of "time," and thereby the very notion that anything ever "precedes" another thing.<sup>46</sup>

In sum, it seems that the Hegel-Burnyeat reading of the Pyrrhonian texts can be defended both against the alternative Kant-Frede reading and against Barnes's suggestion that the texts are inconsistent (answering in part to both readings). At the level of straightforward exegesis, the Hegel-Burnyeat reading appears to win the day.

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<sup>45</sup>This passage refutes Barnes's assertion at "The Beliefs of a Pyrrhonist," p. 17: "Had Sextus wanted to indicate that the Pyrrhonists' use of recollective [i.e. commemorative] signs involves no beliefs he could have done so quite easily. He does not do so."

<sup>46</sup>Analogously, Sextus implies that his own skeptical formulae are susceptible to equipollence attack and to consequent suspension of belief if they are espoused as beliefs or assertions about realities (*Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, 1.14-15, cf. 1.191), but he does not actually *show how* they would be attacked in that case, instead presumably relying on his other attacks to do that job indirectly.

IV. However, I want to suggest, albeit more speculatively, that the situation is a good deal more complicated and interesting than this, that there remains something deeply right about the Kant-Frede interpretation of the Pyrrhonists as intellectual reactionaries.

Note, to begin with, that the Kant-Frede interpretation has at least *this* much truth to it: As we recently saw, the Pyrrhonists are very much intellectual reactionaries - siding with the traditional ordinary man against the innovating philosopher or scientist - with respect to the propositional *content* of their outlook.<sup>47</sup>

But that is not all. For there is, I think, also something deeply right in the Kant-Frede suggestion that the Pyrrhonists are intellectual reactionaries rather than revolutionaries with respect to the *form* of their outlook. How can that possibly be so, given that, with Hegel and Burnyeat, I have found the Pyrrhonists attacking all belief and opting instead for the novelty of living by belief-free appearances? It can be so, I suggest, because of two circumstances which go unnoticed by Frede, Burnyeat, and indeed the Pyrrhonists themselves: First, belief is not, as they all assume, a phenomenon and concept that is invariant across historical periods. Rather, the phenomenon and concept of belief, in the sense in which the Pyrrhonists were concerned to attack belief, was a comparative novelty in Greek culture at the time of the Pyrrhonists. Therefore, in attacking all belief the Pyrrhonists were reacting against a revolution. Second, the Pyrrhonists' pursuit of the novel course of living by belief-free appearances in order to achieve *ataraxia* was really a displaced attempt on their part to return to the type of "belief" which had preceded the novel type of "belief" which they were attacking - displaced largely due to their failure to understand the historical situation just described. Let me develop these two points in turn.

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<sup>47</sup>Frede misses the opportunity to make this point in favor of his general direction of interpretation because he is interested in the question of the *manner* in which beliefs are held - whether or not they are based on reason - rather than in the question of their *matter*. In his view, what the Pyrrhonists really object to is not the *content* of the philosopher's or scientist's distinctive beliefs, but their being *based on reason*, in a way that the content of the ordinary man's beliefs might be or come to be as well ("Des Skeptikers Meinungen," p. 123, cf. pp. 127-8). This identification of *basings beliefs on reason* as the real object of the Pyrrhonists' displeasure seems to me misleading (in a number of ways). However, I shall defer fuller discussion of this subject for the longer version of the paper.

The historically distinctive form of belief against which the Pyrrhonists were reacting is often called by them *dogma*, and its character can be identified by pursuing the use of this term in the Pyrrhonists and others. Here are three salient features of *dogma* which seem to me to deserve particular attention:

(1) *Dogmata* tend to be *fundamental or weighty principles* of some sort - typically, philosophical, scientific, or religious ones - rather than ordinary beliefs.<sup>48</sup>

(2) *Dogmata* are of their nature convictions held in the consciousness that there are *competing alternative principles* (i.e. contraries rather than merely negations) which might be adopted instead; they are affirmed *in conscious exclusion of competing alternatives*. This idea is already part of the term's meaning in one of its earliest recorded senses, in which it meant the *decree* or *resolution* of a political authority;<sup>49</sup> for a decree or resolution is of its nature something decided on in the light of alternatives. Plato's various uses of the term regularly include this idea as well.<sup>50</sup> This idea always seems close to the surface when the Pyrrhonists designate something as a *dogma* or someone as *dogmatikos*. For example, in what may be the earliest known use of the term *dogmatikos*, Aenesidemus reportedly called the Academics *dogmatikoi* because *they unequivocally affirmed certain things and denied others*: he "says that the Academics are dogmatic [*dogmatikoi*]: they posit some things without hesitation and deny others unambiguously."<sup>51</sup> And Sextus is full of statements like the following: "every *dogma* is disputed" (*Against the Logicians*, 2.329); "there exists amongst [the dogmatists] endless controversy" (*Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, 2.8); a certain position held by the skeptics is "not

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<sup>48</sup>As Barnes argues at "The Beliefs of a Pyrrhonist," pp. 6-9, this is true of the term's use, not only in Sextus, but also in Plato, Aristotle, Philo, Plutarch, Galen, and the Church Fathers.

<sup>49</sup>Concerning this early sense, see *ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>50</sup>For examples involving the political sense, see *Minos*, 314b; *Laws*, 644d, 926d. For non-political examples which seem to include the same idea, see *Republic*, 538c-d; *Theaetetus*, 158d.

<sup>51</sup>Photius, *Library*, 169b36-170a2 (in *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, vol. 2, p. 459).

a *dogma* of the skeptics but a fact which is experienced not by the skeptics alone but also by the rest of philosophers and by all mankind" (ibid., 1.210).

(3) *Dogma* involves *active volition* by the person who engages in it, rather than merely passive acceptance. This idea was again already part of the meaning of the term in its early occurrence in the sense of a political decree or resolution. More importantly, the idea that belief essentially involves active volition was central to the theory of belief (and presumably also reflected the practice of belief) espoused by the people who were for the Pyrrhonists the archetypal dogmatists, namely the Stoics, for whom belief consisted in an act of voluntary assent to a passive presentation.<sup>52</sup> And Sextus implies this feature of the sort of belief that he attacks in the passage concerning the word *peithesthai* quoted earlier, where he contrasts the sort of passive acceptance of claims in which the Pyrrhonist himself engages with belief in the sense of "assent to a thing of deliberate choice and with a kind of sympathy due to strong desire," which he rejects.<sup>53</sup>

(It seems plausible that such active volition in belief is inevitably involved in any belief in conscious exclusion of competing alternatives, and vice versa - i.e. that (2) entails (3), and vice versa.)

Now my hypothesis is that these three central features of *dogma* - a commitment to *fundamental principles* in *conscious exclusion of competing alternatives* through *active volition* - characterize a distinctive phenomenon and concept of belief which was relatively new at the time of the Pyrrhonists. In the archaic period (in Homer's day) the Greeks seem instead to have held their most fundamental convictions essentially *without consciousness of competing alternatives* and *through passive acceptance of them from communal tradition*. As Bruno Snell has put it, emphasizing the former of these two features, and explicitly noting its consequences for the phenomenon and concept of

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<sup>52</sup>See Frede, "Des Skeptikers Meinungen," p. 119; Burnyeat, "Can the Skeptic Live His Skepticism?" p. 146; and Barnes, "The Beliefs of a Pyrrhonist," p. 8.

<sup>53</sup>The same contrast is implied by the distinction between good *dogma* and bad *dogma* at *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, 1.13.

"belief": "When we consider the religion of Homer and the creed of the Olympian gods . . . we may well wonder whether this is a belief at all. Our notion of belief always allows for the possibility of disbelief . . . 'Faith,' the credo, requires as its opposite a false belief, a heresy . . . All this was foreign to the [archaic] Greeks; they looked upon their gods as so natural and self-evident that they could not even conceive of other nations acknowledging a different faith or other gods."<sup>54</sup> By the fifth century B.C. at latest this situation had changed to that presupposed by the Pyrrhonists, however. This is most obviously true of the philosophers and scientists from the period, whose very project was largely one of advancing fundamental principles in willful opposition to those held by common sense. But it is not true *only* of them. For by this time the combined impact of anthropological information about other cultures and the novel principles of philosophers and scientists had also put the ordinary man in a similar position of holding even his most fundamental convictions in willful exclusion of competing alternatives. For example, one can see from Aristophanes' *Clouds* that ordinary men holding traditional fundamental convictions in religion and ethics - in particular, Strepsiades at the end of the play, and the play's assumed audience - now maintained those convictions in conscious exclusion of contrary alternatives (in particular, the new-fangled ideas of the Sophists and the natural scientists) and through an active engagement of their wills.

This transformation of the very nature and concept of "belief" extended beyond fundamental convictions to encompass non-fundamental ones as well; reshaping the foundations automatically reshaped the superstructure too. Now every "belief" was either a fundamental one held by an act of volition in conscious exclusion of competing

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<sup>54</sup>B. Snell, *The Discovery of the Mind* (New York: Dover, 1982), p. 24. Snell is here concerned with religion, but his point arguably applies to other subject areas as well, such as ethical value, the mind, and physical nature.

alternatives or else a non-fundamental one held in an awareness that even the fundamental underpinnings on which it rested were held in that exclusive way.<sup>55</sup>

My suggestion, then, is that it was against this novel form of belief *specifically* that the Pyrrhonists were reacting. Without it Pyrrhonism would never have got off the ground. This is so for two reasons: First, and most obviously, in the absence of an awareness that their fundamental principles faced competition from alternatives people could not have raised skeptical equipollence difficulties concerning those principles; at best, their skepticism could only have concerned less fundamental beliefs, and so only been partial. But second, and less obviously, in the absence of an awareness that fundamental principles faced such competition even skepticism concerning less fundamental beliefs would in fact have been impossible to motivate effectively as well. This is because, although conflicts would certainly have arisen between less fundamental beliefs, thus providing at least a first promise of equipollence difficulties concerning them (Homer is full of such conflicts: Is Agamemnon a coward or not?, etc.), it is in the very nature of fundamental principles to afford ways of *deciding* such conflicts. Consequently, in the absence of a way of calling fundamental principles into question, less fundamental beliefs could not have been effectively called into question by the equipollence method either.<sup>56</sup>

Lacking the sort of historicist consciousness that has really only developed in the last few centuries, the ancient Pyrrhonists would not themselves have clearly recognized the historical specificity of this new type of belief against which they were reacting. Why, though, has it been overlooked by such historically sensitive modern authors as Burnyeat

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<sup>55</sup>Hence, for example, Sextus's practice of using *adoxastôs* as the normal antonym for *dogmatikôs*, and his implicit ascription at *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, 1.230 of *dogma*'s central features, in particular active volition and a choice between alternatives, to normal *peithesthai*, normal belief, as well.

<sup>56</sup>It is partly due to an inchoate recognition of this fact that Sextus commonly defines Pyrrhonist procedure as an attack, first and foremost, on *fundamental* principles - e.g. at *Against the Physicists*, 1.1-3; cf. *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, 2.84; *Against the Professors*, 1.40. In these passages his uppermost thought is that attacking fundamental principles is *sufficient* for calling other beliefs into question, but he is also evincing at least an inchoate recognition that it is *necessary* for doing so. Hence, for example, in his articulation of the Ten Tropes he repeatedly notices a danger that the conflicts among appearances to which he appeals there might be resolved by adducing more fundamental principles, and tries to forestall that danger by attacking the latter.

and Frede? The main reason, I suspect, is that since its inception it has endured, and survives today as our *own* form of belief. This makes its relative novelty and distinctiveness in the age of the Pyrrhonists easy to overlook, its immutability and universality easy to assume. (It also promises to make reflection on the Pyrrhonists' situation and their response to it highly relevant to our situation today.<sup>57</sup>)

The second suggestion I made earlier in support of the hypothesis that the Pyrrhonists are at some level intellectual reactionaries with respect even to the form of beliefs was that their ideal of a life by appearances achieving the end of *ataraxia* is really a displaced attempt to return to the type of belief which preceded the distinctive type of belief which they are attacking. It is really a displaced attempt to return to the archaic cognitive attitude of accepting fundamental principles without any consciousness of competing alternatives and in passive deference to communal tradition.

In favor of this reading, I would cite four prominent features of the Pyrrhonists' ideal of living by appearances and thereby achieving *ataraxia*:

(1) It is symptomatic of their yearning for a cognitive attitude free of consciousness of competing alternatives, and in conformity to tradition, that in their conception of their life by appearances they show great tenderness for matters on which *all men agree*.<sup>58</sup>

(2) More specifically, in their life by appearances they defer to *social tradition*.<sup>59</sup>

(3) They also constantly emphasize the *passivity* of their acceptance of appearances.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>57</sup>In the longer version of this paper I shall attempt to draw some morals for our modern situation from the historical account developed here.

<sup>58</sup>See e.g. *Against the Logicians*, 2.156-8; *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, 1.210-11, 2.246, 3.254; *Against the Ethicists*, 229, 240; *Against the Professors*, 1.36.

<sup>59</sup>Thus they identify "tradition of customs and laws" as a source of appearances to be followed (*Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, 1.23; cf. *Against the Physicists*, 1.49).

<sup>60</sup>See e.g. *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, 1.13, 1.19, 1.22, 1.193. Perhaps especially revealing, because of its implication of a social source of the passively received appearances, is the already-discussed passage from *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, 1.230 concerning "belief [*peithesthai*]" (cf. Sextus's striking choice of expression at 1.23 to describe even the skeptic's relation to appearances derived from nature: *hyphêgêsis physêôs*, the *guidance/instruction* of nature).

(4) Finally, as further suggestive of their desire to free themselves from the war of competing fundamental principles and the connected engagement of their wills, and to return instead to a passive acceptance of uncontested fundamental principles from tradition, consider also their official goal of achieving, through suspension of judgment and a life by appearances, the end of *ataraxia* - literally, freedom from "stirring up."<sup>61</sup>

Given the centrality of Homer to Greek education and culture, there would of course be no mystery as to how the Pyrrhonists might have encountered the cognitive attitude of the Homeric age, so as to be able to have this sort of obscure perception of it and yearning to return to it. But the following circumstances nonetheless significantly enhance the historical plausibility of my hypothesis here: It seems clear from the available evidence that the founders of Pyrrhonism, Pyrrho and Timon, were already committed to versions of the positions which I have just been interpreting as signs of a yearning for a Homeric outlook: in particular, that they already espoused a life by appearances, moreover one conforming to normal practice, and already aimed for *ataraxia*.<sup>62</sup> But it is also clear that Pyrrho and Timon were deeply steeped in a preoccupation with Homer. Thus, according to Sextus, "Pyrrho was constantly reading Homer."<sup>63</sup> Similarly, Timon's *Silloi* were a form of Homeric parody,<sup>64</sup> and his *Indalmoi* were based on an elaborate exploitation of a passage from Homer's *Odyssey*.<sup>65</sup>

It further enhances the plausibility of this hypothesis, I suggest, that (in contrast with Pyrrhonism's compelling negative side) the positive features of Pyrrhonism in question

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<sup>61</sup>There are also certain further features of the Pyrrhonists' positive ideal which seem to echo and yearn for the Homeric standpoint, though in ways less immediately concerned with its model of belief per se. For example, the Pyrrhonists in some sense accept both traditional commonsense views and such ancient disciplines as farming, seafaring, and medicine, but they reject the novel theories and disciplines distinctive of the Hellenistic age.

<sup>62</sup>See esp. the passages from Aristocles and Diogenes Laertius at *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, vol. 1, pp. 14-15.

<sup>63</sup>*Against the Professors*, 1.272, cf. 1.281; also Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, 9.67, 9.71, 9.73.

<sup>64</sup>See *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, vol. 1, p. 24.

<sup>65</sup>See Brunschwig, "Le titre des *Indalmoi* de Timon: d'Ulysse à Pyrrhon," in his *Études sur les philosophies Hellénistiques*.

here are among its most philosophically problematic. Prima facie at least, the Pyrrhonists' proposal to live by belief-free appearances is vulnerable to several serious objections, including the objection already raised in antiquity, revived by Hume, and recently exploited by Frede, that a life altogether without beliefs would make action impossible;<sup>66</sup> an objection due to Burnyeat that, while the notion of a belief-free appearance makes sense in perceptual cases, it makes no sense in non-perceptual ones, where, however, the Pyrrhonists equally rely on, and cannot avoid relying on, belief-free appearances in order to constitute their philosophical position and guide their lives;<sup>67</sup> and another ancient objection, recently revived by Gisela Striker, concerning the fact that even the four sources of appearances which the Pyrrhonists accept as guides for their lives will sometimes furnish them with *contradictory* appearances.<sup>68</sup> Also, the Pyrrhonists' tenderness for matters on which all men agree runs into philosophical problems. In particular, why could a Pyrrhonist not construct plausible arguments against conceptions never argued against before, and thereby discredit them (just as he often constructs new arguments in other cases)?<sup>69</sup> Moreover, as several commentators have recently noted, the Pyrrhonist's commitment to the thesis that *ataraxia* is the key to happiness, and *epochê* the key to both, seems, if not downright dogmatic, then at least highly controversial (in a way that ill befits the Pyrrhonist of all people), and indeed quite implausible.<sup>70</sup> So there

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<sup>66</sup>See Frede, "Des Skeptikers Meinungen," pp. 103 ff.

<sup>67</sup>Burnyeat, "Can the Skeptic Live His Skepticism?" pp. 137-41.

<sup>68</sup>For the ancient form of this objection, see Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, 9.107. For its recent revival, see G. Striker, "On the difference between the Pyrrhonists and the Academics," in her *Essays on Hellenistic Epistemology and Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 146-7.

<sup>69</sup>Accordingly, Sextus himself sometimes makes remarks which stand in deep tension with his tenderness for matters on which all men agree (see e.g. *Against the Logicians*, 1.329 and *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, 1.33-4).

<sup>70</sup>See D. Sedley, "The Motivation of Greek Skepticism," in *The Skeptical Tradition*; Annas and Barnes, *The Modes of Scepticism*, pp. 169-71; Striker, "On the Difference between the Pyrrhonists and the Academics," pp. 147-8. Sedley's charge of outright dogmatism can be defused by noting that Sextus evidently only means to commit himself to this thesis as an *appearance* (see *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, 1.232-3), but the problems of its controversialness and implausibility remain.

seems to be a need for some sort of explanation of why the Pyrrhonists were attracted to such *prima facie* problematic features of their position. The hypothesis which I have proposed helps to meet that need: what the Pyrrhonists *really* wanted in this whole area, an outlook like Homer's, they *knew* to be both possible and appealing, namely because of their intimate acquaintance with it from Homer's works. Hence their relative carelessness in developing its superficial philosophical proxy.<sup>71</sup>

In sum, I suggest that one can discern in the Pyrrhonists' description of the life by appearances and its end of *ataraxia* a sort of nostalgic picture of the outlook of the archaic age (an attitude of holding fundamental principles without awareness of competing alternatives in passive deference to communal tradition) as seen through a glass darkly. Unbeknown (or at least not clearly beknown) to the Pyrrhonists themselves, their yearning for a life by appearances and *ataraxia* was at bottom a yearning for something from the past. Beneath the conscious Pyrrhonian text of revolution lies a semi-conscious subtext of reactionary vision and desire.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>71</sup>In the longer version of this paper I shall pursue the question of the extent to which this situation shows that Pyrrhonism has resources for *answering* the *prima facie* objections adumbrated here.

<sup>72</sup>Warm thanks to Michael Frede, who, besides stimulating this paper through his written work, also taught me most of whatever I know about Pyrrhonism, and Vasso Kindi, who provided helpful comments on a draft of this paper.