

BOUNDLESS SKEPTICISM AND THE FIVE MODES

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ABSTRACT: There is a difference between the tasks of interpreting Sextus Empiricus and contesting his arguments. Usually, one does the latter relying on some version of the former. Though this seems obvious, it is easy to make mistakes in this endeavor. From this point, I draw two basic recommendations which we should follow, lest we take Sextus to hold implausible positions regarding his Five Modes. However, these recommendations lead us to interpret Sextus' Pyrrhonism as a limited skepticism. In the final section, as I suggest a counter-example to this commitment, I reconsider the notion of infinite (*apeiron*) in the Five Modes to better explain interpretation and criticism of Sextus' arguments.

KEYWORDS: skepticism, Pyrrhonism, five modes, infinity, *apeiron*

There are two basic ways of approaching Sextus Empiricus' works. The first features the effort of interpreting Sextus and mining his work for insights. What takes precedence is offering a coherent picture of Sextus' writings. The second manner of approaching these works is to assume an interpretation of the writings and to either assess the cogency of Sextus' arguments, or to contest them. One, in short, engages with Sextus for the sake of making an anti-skeptical argument. Sometimes an interchange between these two approaches can take place. Here, I wish to explore this mixed program. My aim is to offer something relevant for both realms of investigation by discussing a possible interchange between interpreting and contesting Sextus' argumentation. Thus, in the first section, I discuss examples of these two manners of dealing with Sextus' skeptical arguments. I extract two basic outcomes from these discussions. They are both centered in the *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* and concerned with the issue of the scope of the suspension of belief. I assume them as basic orientations for any efforts on interpretation of these works. In the second section I reassess these orientations, dealing with what oddly seems to be their implication, i.e., that the arguments in the *Outlines* are constrained to the context where they emerged. In the last section I focus on the Five Modes of suspension and propose that, with them, we can better understand both the

suggested constraints and why it is so difficult to offer an objection to Sextus if we accept as plausible these rules of interpretation.

1.

I begin with an important excerpt of the debate regarding the scope of suspension. I wish to promote two outcomes whose implications I further consider. Let me, first, explain, how the debate emerges. A Pyrrhonian skeptic is drawn to investigation in response to the disquiet she feels when facing anomalous appearances and conflicts of opinion. However, as the investigation proceeds, our investigator finds it hard to eliminate the conflicting character of what appears, or to reach a decision on how things really are. She bases her investigation on all the means available in her context to achieve this decision. As none of them proves successful to eliminate the undecidability, she has as a result, not as a conclusion, the suspension of her judgment. But what does the suspension of judgment concern? If we take belief as an answer, we become curious about the scope of this suspension. Does it make sense to say that she suspends judgment about *all* her beliefs? For, if we take beliefs to exert an important role in most of our daily activities, we immediately tend to hold a suspicious regard on the claim that the suspension is about all beliefs.

This reasoning exemplifies how the scope of suspension becomes a problem when someone attempts to understand Pyrrhonian skepticism. To begin, there are two widely known interpretive positions of suspension. The first initially understands that suspension encompasses *all* beliefs, as long as we can make sense of how a skeptic can achieve a detachment from herself by regarding the beliefs which occur in her as not hers. The second is that it is inevitable for the skeptic to hold beliefs, thereby restricting the scope of suspension to philosophical or theoretical commitments.¹ These two positions are most famously represented by Myles Burnyeat and Michael Frede, respectively. They, however, do not exhaust the logical space.

More to the point, I'm addressing here the standpoint which Jonathan Barnes² proposes. In the problem of the scope, Barnes's view calls for a cautionary regard, brought by a detailed analysis of the aspects surrounding the views offered by Burnyeat and Frede above. As Barnes understands the matter, the problem of the

¹ Myles Burnyeat and Michael Frede, eds., *The Original Sceptics: a Controversy* (Indianapolis and Cambridge, Massachusetts: Hackett, 1998).

² Jonathan Barnes. "The Beliefs of a Pyrrhonist," in *The Original Sceptics: a Controversy*, ed. Myles Burnyeat and Michael Frede (Indianapolis and Cambridge, Massachusetts: Hackett, 1998), 58-91.

scope might be unreal.³ He views the scope of suspension as varying from skeptic to skeptic, depending on what is anomalous for one, or what is disturbance for the other. Details such as these would calibrate the extent to which one's judgment is suspended, and the presupposition of a general scope would be deemed implausible. This the first point on which I wish to expand. It is plausible to think that anomalies vary, along with the investigations which follow them and the suspensions obtained, delivering distinct scopes of commitments for skeptical reflection and, ultimately, suspension. The first outcome to be obtained here is that we should *deem the object of suspension as something subjectively determined, dependent on the case of each skeptic and the anomalies she might face, thereby prompting investigation*. I call this first outcome *subjective constraints of investigation* (from now on, SCI). Things may affect each one of us differently. We are, then, driven towards different anomalies and, by consequence, different investigations and suspensions. More specifically, what I am initially trying to say is that the proper comprehension of the object of suspension is dependent on the object of investigation and how it is determined. In the following sections I intend to show that this isn't solely applicable to the matter of suspension.

Meanwhile, it is fair to consider an initial reply to this view. According to it, regardless of the individual differences, there should be a way of distinguishing how suspension takes place, both in its scope and object. A proper analysis of belief and propositional attitude could afford us a general perspective on this. What this suggests is that we can comprehend the scope of suspension without resorting to any specificities about the skeptic and investigation. However, let me raise a few considerations in favor of Barnes' position, something that delivers a second outcome.

One consideration in favor of Barnes' position is that, at the height of their debate about the scope, both Burnyeat and Frede make important amendments in their views. One of the main motivations was the concern that it should be wrong to rely on an anachronistic background when interpreting Sextus' arguments. This was illustrated by Burnyeat's discussion of the insulation view wrongly applied, for example, by Gassendi to Sextus.⁴ Could we say that Sextus saw first-order judgments as insulated from the philosophizing about them? Most probably, this view would

³ Barnes, "The Beliefs of a Pyrrhonist", 89.

⁴ Myles Burnyeat, "The Sceptic in his Place and Time", in *The Original Sceptics: a Controversy*, ed. Myles Burnyeat and Michael Frede (Indianapolis and Cambridge, Massachusetts: Hackett, 1998), 92.

not make sense for someone like Sextus, as the distinction is inserted in a different philosophical context. A similar point was made by Frede,⁵ when he distinguishes between dogmatic and classical skepticism. We must be aware, he emphasizes, that classical skeptics like Sextus are not to be seen as holding any position. We are to properly comprehend two different forms of assertion supposedly taken by the skeptic in addressing the possibility of knowledge.

This excerpt of the debate concerning the scope of suspension provides us with a second consequence. But to obtain this result it is required to assume SCI above. For, as I understand the point shared by Burnyeat and Frede above, it lurks in the background of their respective revisions. This reflects, even if indirectly, the subjective constraints of investigation, though it does not imply the acceptance of Barnes' view.⁶ Thus, the outcome is the following: *any attempt of going beside the constraints of the context increases the risk of attributing to Sextus an anachronistic theoretical framework which is either foreign to his context, or something simply not considered by him.*

I call this second outcome the *context constraint* (from now on, CC), and I will assume it from now on, along with SCI. At the same time that they can bring us a clarifying view on the questions regarding suspension, they also suggest an interesting perspective on the skepticism described in *Outlines*. It appears that what prompts the skeptic towards the application of her *dunamis antithetike* comes from what theories are in conflict in the context where she is. More to the point, as Sextus himself acknowledges, the concern is with "the unclear things being investigated by the Sciences" (*PH* 1.13). Hence, if the object and scope of suspension is something subjectively determined, a lot will depend on the unclear things under investigation which feature in the skeptic's context. Again, it is a contentious matter if we should or should not embrace the subjective view of the scope and object of suspension, although it seems plausible to concede the subjective constraint of investigation. But, regardless of how the discussion unfolds in the first point, I think it is fair to say that we should, at least, initially acknowledge that we must be careful and avow SCI and CC in our interpretations of how far the suspension goes and its object. In the next section I begin to explore the consequences of assuming this position in the outset.

⁵ Michael Frede, "The Sceptic's Two Kinds of Assent and the Question of the Possibility of Knowledge", in *The Original Sceptics: a Controversy*, ed. Myles Burnyeat and Michael Frede (Indianapolis and Cambridge, Massachusetts: Hackett, 1998), 128.

⁶ I mention this because Burnyeat, for example, acknowledges his chapter as a response to Barnes' points. Cf. Myles Burnyeat, "The Sceptic in his Place and Time", no. 13, 97.

2.

I began the last section with a description of the skeptic in her efforts to address anomalies of appearances and wide disagreement. I understand that the many different difficulties she faces along the way could be seen as manifested in the diversity of the familiar skeptical modes. But some stage-setting is required for a due explanation of what I mean by the modes and what difficulties they represent. According to Sextus in *PH* 1.31, the application of the skill which defines the skeptic precedes the modes, that is, it could be seen as a general mode based on the ability to “oppose what appears to what appears, or what is thought of to what is thought of, or crosswise.” Moreover, this skill is manifested when the skeptic faces “some unclear object of investigation” (*PH* 1.13), something to which the skeptic soon demonstrates unsurmountable difficulties for justified assent. Obviously, there are different oppositions depending on the object of assent which is presented and the things to be opposed. To show how Sextus makes this clear, first, I wish to explore how the oppositions led to different modes in response to the constraints of the context and the investigation. Here, I show how CC and SCI above work in association with two of the Ten Modes of Aenesidemus. Later, I turn my attention to the Five Modes in order to explore a similar dynamics. My aim is to understand if the constraint of the context could represent a limitation for the modes, that is, if they would lose their force when considered in a different context from which they originally emerged. I explore this matter through purported counter-examples to CC. As none of them holds, CC and SCI yield the conclusion that the modes have a limited scope of application. But what I initially argue in this section is that this is not a limited skepticism, but, as most skepticisms are, a consideration of our limitations. I better explain the point in the final section.

Returning to CC, the proposal is to explore the context constraint in the formulation of the modes. My hypothesis is that, if we should not apply any foreign theory to Sextus’ views, we should see that Sextus consistently indexes suspension to subjects and their particular inquiries. For it is plausible to think that Sextus, and the reported creators of the modes, Agrippa and Aenesidemus, were not accessing some atemporal and decontextualized source when conceiving their formulation. The ability to oppose objects of perception or objects of thought, for example, could already be seen as a heritage from the sophists and their techniques of argumentation (see Protagoras fragment A1, and Gorgias fragment A1a). These skeptics particularized these strategies. In order to better explain my point, I turn to two passages. In the first, Sextus specifies that “what we investigate is not what is

apparent but what is said about what is apparent” (*PH* 1.19-20), and further he explains that in the case of arguments directed against what is apparent, the skeptic is using them as a way of countering the rashness of the Dogmatists. Further, in a second passage, Sextus clarifies that “when I say ‘Opposed to every account there is an equal account,’ I am implicitly saying this: ‘to every account I have scrutinized (...) there appears to me to be opposed another account (...)’” (*PH* 1.203). In association with CC, these passages afford the interpretation already mentioned above, i.e., the oppositions are set in accordance to what the skeptic scrutinizes or receives as an account. The important addition is the subjective perspective emphasized by the passage, for the opposition is raised “to every account *I* have scrutinized.” Such example reinforces the plausibility of SCI, since Sextus has explicitly restricted the modes to the investigations he has undertaken. Now, if the modes begin from these oppositions, it is plausible to expect them to be structured from the accounts with which the skeptic has had contact, that is, the particular theories. I proceed to show this in two of the Ten Modes of Aenesidemus.

At *PH* 1.46, while displaying the modes based on the difference among animals and the supposed conflict among our sense organs, Sextus comes with the following line: “it is surely far more reasonable, given that animals’ eyes contain mixtures of different humors, that they should also get different appearances from existing objects”. Thus, based on an investigation concerning what is apparently said in these fields, Sextus achieves a situation where to tell how an existing object really is becomes something undecidable. After all, according to theories in his context, different humors could prompt different perceptions of the object. How are we to decide which is the correct one?

However, observe that Sextus is forging the premisses of his argumentation from an outmoded theory about the physiology of living beings. Would this be enough for us to raise some doubts about it, or even to dismiss this as a skeptical consideration concerning our perception? This is what following CC and SCI would recommend. As these modes were composed assuming specific theories of physiology and perception, they should represent a skeptical threat only for those who take this theoretical framework to explain how we perceive the world. As these theories are not the basis for explaining sense perception today, the two modes no longer represent a skeptical threat and we would be entitled to dismiss them as such. Maybe, these can be considered, *pace* Sextus (*PH* 1.35), as the modes to be deemed unsound, if the outdated background truly compromises the scope of both.

Let me make this point in a different way, one which is relevant to what follows next. Imagine that we give ourselves the task of continuing this skeptical tradition nowadays and of updating effectively these two modes. To do this, in accordance with what Sextus presents in the *Outlines*, the first thing to be done is to conduct an investigation to the point of better manipulating the concepts in today's science. This is not the simple case where I have to spot disagreement among scientists on the matter of perception to attain undecidability and, as a consequence, suspension of judgement. The case is that I should investigate how cognitive science explains visual phenomena, for example, in order to demonstrate how color perception works and, then, reenact the mode similarly to what is presented above, if possible. At this point, then, someone would be able to properly structure an opposition between different episodes of cognitive perception from the standpoint of a certain theory.

This might yield the conclusion that the skeptic has to be an expert in a certain area of investigation in order to duly apply the *dunamis antithetike*. This sounds odd, at first, and in need of clarification. As I understand, only by considering the same problems in the context of the Five Modes can we comprehend what is at stake in this case. So far, I think it is plausible to conclude that, if we accept CC, these two modes don't hold as a means to identify undecidability on matters of perception. To put the matter differently, if CC guides us in interpreting these two modes, we may consider them as restrained for those who defended the four humors theory, and should not represent a concern today.

Thus, could we say that the Five Modes fall prey to the same problems which I addressed above, concerning two of the other ten modes? A first look on the matter may lead us to the conclusion that it does. I mentioned above that the raising of opposing arguments can be traced back to the well-known technique of the sophists. In the case of the Five Modes, something similar could be said.

Peter Klein,⁷ for example, holds that, in the Five Modes, Sextus has his reasoning guided by an Aristotelian view on how someone should bring forth a proof to decide something. Again, there should be no surprise here. Sextus himself, in the opening of *PH*, claims to be addressing Aristotle as someone among the dogmatists. And the demand for a "point from which to begin to establish something" (*PH*1.166) in the *ad infinitum* mode surely reminds us of Aristotle's formulation of his regress

⁷ Peter Klein, "Epistemic Justification and the Limits of Pyrrhonism", in *Pyrrhonism in Ancient, Modern, and Contemporary Philosophy*, ed. Diego E. Machuca (New York: Springer, 2011), 79-96.

argument in *Posterior Analytics* (72b5-18 and 72b25-28). Could these remarks allow us to say that this is the constraint on the Five Modes? Klein⁸ argues for the existence of this constraint, in tandem with what I just explored in the case of the two modes above. Only for someone who endorses important features of Aristotle's view on the matter could the Five Modes represent a problem. I explore this line of reasoning in connection with what I have already discussed so far.

I'm trying to relate this line of reasoning offered by Klein to the issues I have explored so far, concerned with CC and SCI. Thus, it is plausible to imagine Sextus scrutinizing the writings of Aristotle. More specifically, on one hand there are remarks such as "what is brought forward as a source of convictions for the matter proposed itself needs another such source, which itself needs another, and so *ad infinitum*" made by Sextus at *PH* 1.166. On the other hand, there is something like "we are led back *ad infinitum* on the ground that we shall not understand because of the prior items if there are no primitives" issued by Aristotle at *Posterior Analytics* 72b5. A similar connection can be drawn in the case of the reciprocal mode at *PH* 1.169, where an object investigated is advanced as a support for the object investigated. Aristotle equally condemns this reasoning when he says that "it is impossible for the same thing at the same time to be both prior and posterior to something" at 72b25. Obviously, both authors part ways when considering the point from which demonstration begins, supposedly responsible for helping us in avoiding regresses and circles. Aristotle offers a thorough theory to explain where the regress ends. But Sextus holds, at some point, this is something merely assumed and so not justified *per se* (*PH* 1.168).

I won't enter into the details of Aristotle's theory in order to evaluate if Sextus' argumentation holds against it. My point is that Klein reasonably draws from these connections interesting consequences which I relate to CC and SCI. The first one is that, in accordance with Aristotle, Sextus does not occupy himself with explaining or arguing why regresses and circles are bad.⁹ He takes it from Aristotle. Second, this is explained because Sextus structured these modes from within the Aristotelian background. He is arguing internal to the perspectives of those who hold that knowledge is possible. Finally, this explains why he dedicates more attention to show why there isn't the point of start or foundations which Aristotle claims to exist. Even though Sextus does not cite Aristotle's theory explicitly while displaying his arguments, the connection would be clear to any well-trained philosopher of the

⁸ Klein, "Epistemic Justification and the Limits of Pyrrhonism", 91.

⁹ Klein, "Epistemic Justification and the Limits of Pyrrhonism", 85.

period. From these connections, Klein derives the already mentioned conclusion: Sextus comes up with a puzzle for those who endorse the Aristotelian view of knowledge's structure. Now, I think it is explicit that the modes are placed in the context where Sextus elaborated his writings. CC, then, is vindicated, and we see reason for us to interpret Sextus in line with SCI, since the line of argument bears on the theories subjectively available to those who are seeking knowledge or investigating.

However, the issue which is most problematic in this example is the further step taken by Klein. He reasons that, as Sextus doesn't take in consideration theories which appeal to circular reasoning or infinity regresses, the modes above described could not represent a problem for those who espouse these two views. Put differently, Sextus' skepticism would be limited. The previous examples may also entitle one to say that this is the result we get from subscribing to CC and SCI. However, I understand that, once the so called limitation is properly understood, it becomes more of a triumph for Pyrrhonism than a problem for the program.

A proper comprehension of this limitation begins with an attempt to criticize Klein's line of argument, along with CC and SCI. To do this, I propose that we imagine a framework that would not be dialectically dependent on Aristotle's epistemology. This different theoretical arrangement would encompass different principles which, by their turn, would dislodge the platform from which the Five Modes once were raised. However, the problem is that, as we turn our attention to the basic constituents of any framework, Pyrrhonism no longer seems limited as Klein takes it to be.

I think it is not a controversial claim to say that a common characteristic to every framework is that they are composed by principles. These are the basic constituents which help shaping the theoretical arrangement. The point made by Klein, then, is that Sextus is drawing the Five Modes from a framework built through Aristotelian principles. The most crucial among them suggests that it doesn't matter how much longer you can go by executing inferences. If the starting point does not possess a special feature, you gain nothing by making more inductions. Thus, this strategy recommends the following: come up with principles which do not carry this view, and the Five Modes will no longer be a skeptical problem.

Nevertheless, we still begin from principles and, here, Sextus may pose a very simple question which can explain why the Five Modes are not constrained as the argumentation so far wants us to conclude. And the following point does not require that we resort to the specificities of an assumed framework. The reason is that

principles possess a very basic characteristic: they instruct us in how to proceed when doing something. And, as such, they must inform us of a very simple thing, that is, a place from where we start. With this, the basic question which Sextus would offer is the following: what makes this starting point a good one?

I must explain why I think this would be the appropriate question and what it means. I shall say that I'm not resorting now to a problem of the criterion, that is, I'm not saying that Sextus is questioning the principle itself (although it is defensible to state that the problem of the criterion reenacts the puzzle offered by the Five Modes¹⁰). But, let's follow what seems to be the skeptic's *modus operandi* and see if a change in the principle delivers another framework, one that does not allow the puzzle of the Five Modes to take off.

So, suppose we abandon the requirement of a privileged starting point and attribute to justifying inference a different status, one which can be sustained regardless of the beginning of the chain of inferences. Thus, it is the way the inferences are made which counts now, not from where they began. In better terms, what matters now is the performance of the person and not the place from which she started. The problem, though, is that the person following these instructions could always conceive of a better performance, one which excels the previous obtained, and so on. It will look as if the present performance was never good enough, rendering the utmost level of performance something indefinite. Thus, it appears that the mode *ad infinitum* has its grip also in this new framework.

A different way of posing the same problem is by imagining that the conditions under which the inferences are made could always be improved. The reasoning follows again. We lost the track of the best conditions under which the performance would be optimal. As a step further seems always possible, it becomes indefinite where to draw a line. Observe that a kind of limitation emerges now. It is related to a normative ambiance, where the puzzle is to properly establish where the optimal performance lies. It is also a concern with the ought-implies-can relation, that is, what if the optimal performance is to outstrip our cognitive abilities? Thus, contrary to what was previously stated, it is not that Pyrrhonism is limited. Rather, as most forms of skepticism, it reveals our limitations. I try to better explain this in the next section.

¹⁰. Cf. Andrew Cling, "Reasons, Regresses, and Tragedy: the Epistemic Regress Problem and the Problem of the Criterion", *American Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol 46, No. 4 (October 2009): 333-346.

3.

In the very beginning, I mentioned two basic approaches to the works of Sextus Empiricus. One may try to interpret his writings in an effort to discern a coherent view of the arguments he presents. Alternately, one may try to articulate an analysis of these arguments, but with the intent of showing where Sextus errs—so, for the sake of producing anti-skeptical results. The latter depends on the former; that is, in order to say that Sextus is wrong, one has to rely on an interpretation of the writings. In the previous section, I offered an example of how this interchange might work. The example was relevant for two reasons. First, because it follows closely the two outcomes observed in the first section. Second, because it drives us towards the center of the matter which I wish to fully explore now.

The main issue is to explain what is wrong with the claim that Pyrrhonian skepticism is limited. It is true that, by following CC and SCI, we reach the view that the Five Modes very much reenact the Aristotelian standards to accomplish a successful proof. However, as the counter-example above illustrated, it does not follow that these modes are innocuous for any theory formulated from a different background. A plausible explanation for this might be found in a passage where Sextus makes comments about the Five Modes.

Sextus pauses in *Outlines* to address the scope of the Five Modes, offering an explanation which could help us understand why Pyrrhonism is, in fact, not limited. Sextus notes “that every object of investigation can be referred to these modes” (*PH* 1.169). To explain how, from *PH* 1.170 until *PH* 1.177, Sextus argues for a pattern of interaction among the modes. First, the modes of dispute and relativity describe the terrain of controversy which tends to prompt investigation, regardless of the matter investigated, that is, be it an object of perception or an object of thought. For, as the controversy persists, the possibility of its resolution seems to dim, and the suspension of judgement becomes the inevitable result. At *PH* 1.171-174, we can observe the three formal modes (Agrippa’s Trilemma) arising as exploring what follows from the attempts to eliminate dispute and relativity regarding the matter investigated. For if I state that *p* is the correct view, I shall offer a proof in favor of it. If the proof solely reinstates the object investigated, I display a circular reasoning which offers no conclusion. And If I simply state *p* without proof, nothing gets in the way of someone else doing the same. I’m, then, back to the differences which nurture dispute and relativity. I may still opt for the continuity of investigation. However, as I manage to avoid the problems just mentioned, I drive myself towards an infinite

sequence of proofs. This means only that no conclusion is obtained, and suspension of judgement becomes the inevitable result.

So, it seems that Pyrrhonian skepticism is not limited, because the Five Modes encompass any object of investigation, regardless of the background. However, a puzzling detail emerges in a comparison between two excerpts, one just cited and another one discussed in the last section. At first, they seem to yield conflicting views. But a plausible interpretation can eliminate this first impression. First, recall the evidence in favor of CC and SCI. At *PH* 1.202, Sextus is concerned about the scope of ‘every’ in the “the chief constitutive principle of scepticism” presented at *PH* 1.12, that is, “that to every account an equal account is opposed.” As shown, the ‘every’ concerns particularly the accounts the skeptic has inspected. Similar points are made at *PH* 1.198 and 1.200. However, an equal constraint is not imposed on the ‘every’ which features at *PH* 1.169, i.e., the one just mentioned in the last paragraph. Someone may say that at *PH* 1.202 and 1.12, when Sextus is concerned with opposing accounts, he is indirectly approaching the mode from dispute. For, in this mode, he opposes conflicting views and, as explained in these passages, these would only be the views he had scrutinized. But notice that in this case he refers to every *view* concerning *an* object of investigation. While the ‘every’ I am focused on is related to *objects of investigation*. Thus, oddly, the scope of his affirmation would encompass objects of investigation emerged in his inquiry, in the inquiries before his and in those yet to come. In the end, it looks as if the Five Modes are an exception to CC and SCI.

However, to exempt them from these constraints won’t bring good results, especially in terms of trying to structure a coherent view of Sextus’ skepticism. First, this would put Sextus in a position to say that “regardless of the matter investigated, the result will always be the same: suspension of judgment.” Some could say that this is exactly what this skeptic is trying to tell us, thereby explaining why the Five Modes represent a skeptical challenge. But a second point must be made before such conclusion. Recall that at *PH* 1.1-3 Sextus qualifies the skeptic as the one who is still investigating. Now, if every object of investigation can be referred to the Five Modes, *it surely becomes difficult to explain why the skeptic would be still investigating as the result is already known*—that is, that the matter will not be resolved, and the skeptic must suspend judgment. But a few more passages may clarify why the inquiry persists.

First, we should remember that, at *PH* 1.12, Sextus explains what prompts the “men of talent” to investigation. It is “the anomaly in things” which troubles and

puzzles them. Deciding these matters (believing) would put these inquirers in a tranquil state of mind. Moreover, it is useful to remind ourselves that, following this passage, at *PH* 1.13, Sextus notes that appearances can force feelings upon the skeptics, constraining them to assent, that “the skeptic gives assent to the feelings which are the necessary results of sense impressions.” What I wish to highlight with these two passages is that, even if I’m aware that every object of investigation can be brought under the Five Modes, the skeptic and those who seek knowledge can’t help feeling troubled by anomalies in appearances here and there. Thus, anyone who has sense perception would inevitably put themselves back in the path of investigation to recover their formerly tranquil state of mind, even if they were aware that their efforts would lead them towards the puzzlement of the Five Modes.

This way of eliminating the inconsistency may raise problems for Sextus. For, as Katja Vogt¹¹ explains, this would allow one to say that the skeptic is not really engaged in finding or even pursuing the truth. Rather, Sextus would be concerned solely with the tranquility of the soul, and not with genuine investigation. However, as Vogt herself reminds us, a lot depends on how one conceives investigation. If investigation is an endeavor which aims at the discovering truths, the charge becomes plausible. But, if investigation is taken as an activity which responds, through its norms, to the *value of truth*, then the accusation doesn’t follow so straightforwardly. For now the skeptic may claim that she hasn’t found the truth, because all the means available weren’t appropriate to do so. Suspension of judgment follows out of a respect for the *value of truth*, not attainable in the present moment. In a few passages, Sextus gives us reasons to hold to this interpretation. At *PH* 2.11, for example, when also discussing the feasibility of the skeptic’s investigation, he indicates “the reason why any investigation is undertaken” is that the inquirers don’t know the real nature of the objects, and they haven’t found no answer to this question. Besides, at *PH* 1.25, Sextus explains that the tranquility of the soul purports to be found as soon as the skeptic is able to discern the truth or falsity of the appearances. Thus, suspension of judgment is only one of the paths towards a tranquil soul, followed solely under circumstances where the other options fall short of success. One is a skeptic precisely because one is a genuine inquirer, one who values truth and pursues it.

¹¹. Katja Maria Vogt, “The Aims of Skeptical Investigation”, in *Pyrrhonism in Ancient, Modern, and Contemporary Philosophy*, ed. Diego E. Machuca (New York: Springer, 2011), 33. This whole chapter offers more on the matter of investigation in Pyrrhonian skepticism than I can do at the present opportunity.

It seems, then, we have a plausible explanation for why the skeptic truly keeps investigating (as noted at *PH* 1.4), despite every object of investigation being captured in the Five Modes. It seems also that we achieved a good explanation of why Pyrrhonian skepticism is not limited in the way a purely dialectical interpretation would have it. But, still, this picture yields an incoherent view of the skeptic behavior, for we see someone who constantly begins a fight he knows he will lose, someone who takes on a task she can never complete. That is why I think now is the time to consider what exactly are the *limitations* Sextus addresses in his arguments. I think three basic points are helpful to understand this issue. First, it is wrong to say that Sextus is beginning a fight he knows he is going to lose. I'm afraid it is obvious now that he is simply entering an investigation. And, as with any investigation, he doesn't know where it is going to lead him. Otherwise, he wouldn't investigate, for he already knew the result.

Second, it is important to remember how Sextus broadly describes an object of investigation: "what we investigate is (...) what is said about what is apparent" (*PH* 1.19-20). I bring this quote once again in order to address an obvious similarity. Both the interpreter of Sextus and anyone disputing his arguments are also investigating what is said about something, be it apparent or not. Though it is an obvious point, it suffices to remind that the interpreter and the critic also have their objects of investigation under the scope of the Five Modes. A similar situation leads to a similar predicament. They might not be engaged in a lost battle, but the success of their investigation is heavily dependent on how they manage to deal with the modes of Agrippa. Because of that, suspension of judgment seems in the offing for them too.

Third and finally, it is also relevant to observe that, for example, maybe Klein sees the regress differently from Sextus. After all, these are two different inquirers who conducted investigations starting from different backgrounds, that is, the meaning of infinity in the mode *ad infinitum* might be differently seen by each investigator. It appears to me that Klein is more concerned with a flat-out infinity, a determined quantity, as it usually happens in the debate nowadays. However, Sextus seems to refer to something slightly but importantly distinct, once he uses the word *apeiron* which is more closely related to the boundlessness, the undetermined. It is hard to take this word as standing for the flat-out infinity expressed by Klein. It appears to be something more in the spirit of the skeptical posture defended by Sextus, whence he would not determine the existence of something ungraspable as an infinite length of proofs. Rather, he seems to indicate a non-conclusive situation,

associated with the boundlessness of his reasoning, from which would emerge aporia.

I concede it is not entirely clear the precise meaning of *apeiron* in this context. But I believe that what this reading of infinity suggests should not be confined to the *Outlines*. For it seems to deliver a common situation among the three investigations here analyzed: Sextus', the interpreter's and the disputant's. As Sextus argues at *PH* 1.85, the differences among our intellects are boundless as well. So, at each of these cases one comes from different backgrounds and one tends to see matters differently. An attempt to decide the correct one inevitably puts us in the route of boundlessness again, this time through the Five Modes. Thus, we are left with no starting point for our argument. And, even if we are free to start regardless of this, there does not seem to exist a conclusive and non-provisional point to interrupt our reasoning. Apparently, we are unable to escape the difficulties in which Sextus claimed to be. And there is nothing left to do but trying to understand how to deal with them, that is, keeping with the investigation.¹²

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