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“Was Pyrrho a Pyrrhonian?”

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Abstract: This paper attempts a reconstruction of the views of Pyrrho of Elis. Many recent commentators, most notably Richard Bett, have made Pyrrho out to a metaphysical dogmatist who thinks the world is fundamentally indeterminate. Despite some criticisms of this view by Brennan and others, this metaphysical reading has continued to gain adherents. But there are serious textual and logical problems with these dogmatic interpretations. According to the evidence we have, a better view is that Pyrrho was an agnostic skeptic, i.e. one who refused to make assertions about the world outside of perceptual or intellectual appearances. But this does not mean that the traditional view of Pyrrho is correct either: the kind of skepticism Pyrrho endorsed is not Pyrrhonian, because it is grounded in the nature of our epistemic faculties rather than opposition between equally plausible theories, arguments, beliefs, or appearances. A secondary thesis of this paper is about methodology. Rather than focus on the most ambiguous and contentious passages in isolation, we should base our interpretation on the whole corpus, beginning with the easiest passages. Faulty interpretations of Pyrrho go wrong, I argue, partly by failing to follow this method.

Keywords: Pyrrho, Pyrrhonism, skepticism, *ou mallon*, perception

Introduction

Pyrrho of Elis is an enigmatic figure in the history of philosophy: he left no writing himself, but was extolled by his student Timon, and later taken as a role model by those who took his name as their intellectual banner, like Aenesidemus and Sextus Empiricus. The paucity of direct evidence for Pyrrho’s views allows for significant debate about the details. It used to be taken for granted that Pyrrho was an early skeptic whose views, while perhaps not identical to the latter Pyrrhonists, were at least close enough to provide the

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starting point for Pyrrhonism.¹ Richard Bett has forcefully argued against this view, suggesting instead that Pyrrho was a metaphysical dogmatist, who held that the world itself was indeterminate.² This argument was criticized by Tad Brennan, among others, on both linguistic and philosophical grounds.³ But this has not prevented the dogmatic reading of Pyrrho from gaining adherents.⁴ In this paper I ally myself with Brennan's efforts to defend a skeptical reading of Pyrrho from his dogmatic interpreters. But I part ways with the traditional reading in one important respect: I contend that the precise details of Pyrrho's skepticism show that he is not a Pyrrhonian skeptic, nor is he proto-Pyrrhonian in any interesting sense. Pyrrho's skepticism, I argue, is grounded in excluding perception and belief from consideration as sources of evidence, rather than in the balancing of opposing evidence that we find deployed in various ways by later Pyrrhonists like Aenesidemus or Sextus. That is, Pyrrho rejects the mode of inference that goes from 'x appears F' to 'x is F', rather than withholding judgment in the face of the pair of claims 'x appears F' and 'x appears not-F' or 'x appears F' and 'x appears G'.

Before delving into the details of our few extant Pyrrhonic fragments and testimonia, I want to say something about the methods used in reconstructing his views.⁵ The majority of our information about Pyrrho comes from Diogenes Laertius, with some scattered remarks from Sextus Empiricus, Cicero, and a few others. But most scholars have focused primarily on the "Aristocles passage", a summary of Pyrrho's views allegedly written by Timon and summarized by Aristocles, which survives thanks to quotation and discussion by Eusebius in the early fourth century CE.⁶ The passage reads as follows, divided for ease of reference, and using {} to mark areas of dispute.

[1] (A) His pupil Timon says that whoever wants to be happy must consider these three questions: first, how are things by nature (*hopoia pephuke ta pragmata*)? Secondly, what attitude should we adopt towards them? Thirdly, what will be the outcome for those who

1 See, among others, Annas and Barnes (1985, 10–14); Groarke (1990); Long (1974); Patrick (1929); Stough (1969); Stopper (1983).

2 See Bett (2000, 2002, 1994a). Since Bett's book largely supersedes the earlier paper, I will focus primarily on the book here. See also Bruntschwig (2007); Burnyeat (1980); Declava Caizzi (1981); Long and Sedley (1997); Hankinson (Routledge, 1995), Ch. 4.

3 Brennan (1998). Some objections are also raised in Lesses (2002) and Ziemińska (2011). Thorsrud (2009) canvasses both views, and argues that the epistemological reading is slightly "more plausible" (p.25).

4 Bailey (2002), Ch. 2; Lee (2010); Svavarsson (2002, 2004, 2010).

5 Throughout this paper I will use 'Pyrrhonic' to refer to the views of Pyrrho himself, and save 'Pyrrhonian' for the later skeptics like Sextus.

6 The other passage is [9], discussed below.

have this attitude? (B) According to Timon, Pyrrho declared that things are equally *adiaphora kai astathēmata kai anepikrita*. (C) For this reason (*dia touto*) {alternatively, on the grounds that (*dia to*)} neither our sensations nor our opinions (*mēte tas aisthēseis hēmōn mēte tas doxas*) tell the truth or lie (*alētheuein ē pseudesthai*) (D) For this reason, therefore, we must not trust (*mēde pisteuein*) them [our epistemic faculties], but we should be unopinionated, uncommitted and unwavering (*adoxastous kai aklineis kai akradantous*), (E) saying concerning each individual thing (*peri henos hekastou*) that it no more (*ou mallon*) is than is not {than/or} is both is and is not {than/or} it neither is nor is not. (F) The outcome for those who actually adopt this attitude, says Timon, will be first *aphasia* and then *ataraxia*; and Aenesidemus says pleasure. (Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evangelica* 14.18.4 [LS 1F, DC 53]).⁷

Scholars have tended to focus on this passage in isolation from other texts, with special attention to linguistic minutiae, despite the excerpt’s fourth-hand provenance. Though by no means the only example, Richard Bett’s influential work is an exemplar of this method, first dealing with the passage on its own and only then discussing its relation to other fragments, often rejecting as spurious or irrelevant those fragments which don’t comport with the interpretation so reached.⁸

I worry that this approach is liable to lead us astray from the best interpretation of Pyrrho’s views. While the Aristocles passage is undeniably the most philosophically rich of our extant texts, it is also (and for that very reason) the most ambiguous and controversial, and discussion of the passage in isolation has become mired in difficult to resolve disputes over, for example, which of two possible translations of a term is preferable.⁹ Focusing all of our efforts on this passage, with relatively little attention to the rest of our evidence, can only get us so far. The better course of action, I suggest, is to begin with those passages that are less vexing, and use them to illuminate the more difficult texts. This does not mean that the Aristocles passage should be discounted, but rather that we should try to be more holistic, reading each piece of the passage together with related fragments from the outset and using the less controversial fragments to help guide us on the more contentious passages. In other words, the Aristocles passage is central, but not exclusively important. Given that all of our evidence for Pyrrho’s thought is indirect (stemming from Timon through an unspecified number of intermediate sources), there are serious questions about whether we can reconstruct Pyrrho’s views at all. But if we try, I think we have to

⁷ All translations are based on Long & Sedley, with some modifications.

⁸ For discussion of this method, see Bett, (2000) 9–12, 14–18.

⁹ For a discussion of Aristocles and his text, see Bett, (1994) 175–80, and Chiesara (2001).

assume that (i) Timon faithfully reported the thoughts of his associate, and (ii) the evidence we have is more-or-less equally good; there are problems and complications with all of our sources, and I do not see any reason to, as a matter of principle, privilege some over the others. The alternative is to withhold judgment, and while that may be the more responsible approach, I will follow the many scholars of Pyrrho in adopting a more sanguine attitude toward our material. Again, the point is not that the Aristocles passage is not illuminating and important, but rather that we should not be content with downplaying or rejecting the most natural readings of more straightforward passages because they conflict with a reading of the Aristocles passage whose interpretation is, unavoidably, less certain.

The plan of the paper is as follows. I will begin with the last part of the Aristocles passage and work my way backwards. Section “Pyrrho on Thought, Speech, and Behavior” will address Pyrrho’s stance on behavior, especially intellectual behavior, arguing that Pyrrho was clear that the goal of his view was to be undogmatic. In Section “Pyrrho on *Ou Mallon*” I discuss the important qualifier *ou mallon*, which we are explicitly told is used in this context to express Pyrrhonic skepticism. In Section “Pyrrho on Appearance and Convention” I will discuss appearances and convention, and why Pyrrho’s views on the subject lead to his anti-dogmatism. In Section “Pyrrho on Things” I discuss Pyrrho’s position on things (*pragmata*), arguing that the dogmatic readings are both internally inconsistent and inconsistent with the texts surveyed so far. I then provide an alternative, non-dogmatic reading of the Aristocles passage: Pyrrho’s view is that we should be agnostic about matters beyond appearances (both perceptual and intellectual), because we cannot be justified in making inferences beyond these appearances. I conclude by showing how this view differs from the traditional epistemological reading.

Pyrrho on Thought, Speech, and Behavior

According to Eusebius on Aristocles on Timon on Pyrrho, Pyrrho’s view can be summarized as answers to the following questions:

[1A] His pupil Timon says that whoever wants to be happy must consider these three questions: first, how are things by nature (*hopoia pephuke ta pragmata*)? Secondly, what attitude should we adopt towards them? Thirdly, what will be the outcome for those who have this attitude?

The answer to this last question is as follows

[1F] The outcome for those who actually adopt this attitude, says Timon, will be first *aphasia*, and then *ataraxia*; and Aenesidemus says pleasure.

It will take us the rest of the paper to determine how exactly we get to the claim made in [1F]. However, getting clear on our destination ought to make the path to it easier to follow.

Before we begin interpreting [1F], we should note that there are other relevant passages which can help us see more comprehensively what Pyrrho’s view on the topic might have been.

[2] Pyrrho, on the other hand, held that a wise man is not even aware of [moral indifferents], which is called ‘impassivity’ (Cicero, *Academia* 2.130 [LS 2F, DC 69A])

[3] [Timon say of the Pyrrhonists] He will not decline nor will he choose. (Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Professors* 11.164 [LS 2J, DC 66])

[4] Timon quite splendidly said: ‘Desire is absolutely the first of all bad things’ (Athenaeus, *Deipnosophistai* 337a [LS 2I, DC 65])

[5] O, Pyrrho, how and whence did you discover escape from servitude to the opinions (*latreiēs doxōn*) and empty theorizing (*keneophrosunēs*) of the sophists? How did you unloose the shackles of every deception and persuasion? You did not trouble to investigate what winds prevails over Greece, from whence all things arise and into what they pass. (Diogenes Laertius, 9.65 [LS 3C, DC 60])

What is consistent throughout these passages is a commitment to being unopinionated and non-assertive. The key question is determining what exactly this amounts to. The term *aphasia* can be read in two ways: either as a state of being ‘non-assertive’ with respect to dogmatic claims (as Sextus uses it in *PH* I.192-93), or as ‘speechlessness’ as in the phrase ‘scared speechless’ (its more common usage, especially in non-philosophical texts). I am inclined to think that the former reading is preferable, because we have plenty of textual evidence that Pyrrho was consistently engaged in discussion (see, e. g. Diogenes’s reports at 9.61-67 [LS 1A-B, DC 1A6, 7, 9–10, 28]) and textual evidence best interpreted, as I will argue below, that Pyrrho did not assert dogmatic claims in roughly the way Sextus describes (see in particular [7]).¹⁰ There is no textual evidence directly supporting the alternative reading, that the first stage on the road to tranquility is shocked or surprised speechlessness. But this absence of direct evidence does not mean that no case can be made for this reading.¹¹ The difference in plausibility between two options is slight, and which reading is ultimately preferable will largely depend on the conclusion of our investigation more broadly, so I will

¹⁰ Cf. Stopper, (1983) 274, Decleva Caizzi, (1981) 230–32.

¹¹ See Bett, *Pyrrho*, 37–38.

not rely on my preferred reading in what follows.¹² While [2] and [4] could be taken to suggest that Pyrrho's views were ethical in scope (and perhaps [3] as well), the context of the claim is that we should be unopinionated and hence non-assertive in reaction to the question 'What is the nature of things?', which suggests that our lack of assertive opinions should extend beyond the realm of ethical predicates.¹³ We should read [5] in the same light; although this claim only mentions one specific area in which Pyrrho refrained from theorizing, the nature of the winds, it is hard to see how Pyrrho could avoid "every deception" if this were the only area in which he withheld judgment.¹⁴

But of course Pyrrho must have made some assertions, namely those reported in the fragments that constitute our evidence for his views. There is one domain in particular where Pyrrho seems comfortable having opinions: psychology and epistemology. Pyrrho appears to have no problem talking about beliefs and opinions themselves, as well as their epistemic status. Judging from [1C] (to be discussed in more detail in Section "Pyrrho on Appearance and Convention") Pyrrho is also confident talking about appearances, whether perceptual or doxastic. So we should not saddle Pyrrho with claims like 'One should say nothing at all' or 'One should have literally zero assertive opinions about anything'; such a claim is unattested and would be self-refuting.

What other restrictions, if any, are there on acceptable *doxa* for Pyrrho? Bett argues that the kind of opinions Pyrrho avoids are twofold: "the everyday opinions of ordinary people, and the theories of cosmologists", where the latter "attempt to render the ordinary world rationally explicable".¹⁵ I think Bett is largely right here, at least to the extent that either everyday opinions or cosmological theories attempt to go beyond appearances to explain the way the world really is. But there are some complications.¹⁶ For one, this is an awkwardly

12 One issue that is perhaps worth saying more about is whether 'first *aphasia*, then *ataraxia*' is a temporal sequence. One the 'speechless' reading it must be: we are first shocked into speechlessness, but we then progress to a different, better state. As Bett argues (see note above) there is precedent for this reading. But as he admits (38 n. 47), the text merely permits this reading, rather than requiring it. Conversely, this reading commits us to a somewhat controversial understanding of the relationship between *aphasia* and *ataraxia*, where the latter is a separate stage than transcends the former. The 'non-assertive' reason is compatible with this understanding, but does not require it. Hence the 'non-assertive' reading is the weaker, more neutral one, which is one point in its favor (though this point is not enough to settle the debate). I thank an anonymous referee for pressing me on this issue.

13 We will return to this topic in Section "Pyrrho on Appearance and Convention".

14 Pace Bett, (2000) 76–7.

15 Bett, (2000) 77 (cf. 24–25).

16 See also Brennan, (1998) 421 n. 4.

heterogeneous category: the opinions of ordinary people are often unreflective acceptance of appearances, while the theories of the cosmologists can be counter-intuitive rejections of appearances. For instance, ordinary people think that water and fire are different things, while the Presocratic cosmologists, in various ways, argue the opposite. Second, even at this early stage it is hard to see how Bett’s dogmatic reading of Pyrrho can respect this restriction. Bett’s position is that Pyrrho dogmatically asserts that reality is intrinsically indeterminate, based in part on the observation that appearances are highly variable.¹⁷ The indeterminacy thesis explains why appearances are variable: objects are not intrinsically determinate, and can therefore appear many different ways. Hence the indeterminacy thesis which Bett attributes to Pyrrho is just as cosmological and explanatory as the views of, say, Heraclitus, and therefore exactly the sort of view we should expect Pyrrho to avoid.¹⁸ Bett denies this, arguing “[Pyrrho’s view] is not itself a piece of cosmology; it is not a rational explanation of the workings of the cosmos, but a way of rejecting the possibility of any such explanation.”¹⁹ At some level, this may be true: Pyrrho doesn’t advance a full-fledged cosmology even on the dogmatic reading. But cosmology is only one branch of metaphysics, and there is no principled reason for thinking that this branch is off-limits while other comparable approaches are acceptable. In other words, it is hard to see how ‘appearances vary *because* the world itself is variant’ is so different from what we find attributed to Heraclitus or Cratylus.²⁰ So while we can agree with Bett that Pyrrho would have avoided grand explanatory theories, this just reinforces the importance of not attributing such a view to Pyrrho himself.

Are there any other restraints which we should put on Pyrrho’s willingness to make assertions? Based on the Aristocles text, it would appear not. Recall that [1A] asks how *ta pragmata* are by nature, and *ta pragmata* would appear to have a very broad scope.²¹ But we need to accommodate the point already made, that Pyrrho is comfortable discussing our epistemic faculties. The most natural way to make this accommodation is to take *pragmata* to refer to the objects on which our epistemic faculties can operate, i. e. that which our perceptions and beliefs

¹⁷ Bett, (2000) 114–123. We will discuss Bett’s view in much more detail in Section “Pyrrho on Things”.

¹⁸ Lee, (2010) 25–6 presents Pyrrho as a metaphysician on a par with his predecessors.

¹⁹ Bett, (2000) 25 n. 23.

²⁰ Brennan, (1998) 426 makes a similar point in a different context.

²¹ [IE], likewise, speaks *peri henos hekastou*. And as we’ll see below, [6] applies *ou mallon* to all things (*epi pantōn*), and [5] says that Pyrrho avoided every (*pasēs*) deception and persuasion. So we need not rely only on how to translate *ta pragmata* to make this point.

are about. But this runs counter to an argument offered by Brunschwig, who argues that *aisthēseis* and *doxai* are *pragmata* on the grounds that this makes sense of the otherwise unintelligible inference from [1B] to [1C] in the Aristocles passage.

It may be that this inference is unintelligible (though I will argue in Section “Pyrrho on Things” that it is not); for now, it is enough to note that Brunschwig’s proposal is no better. On Brunschwig’s reading, the passage “provides a trivial *Barbara*: All *pragmata* are indifferent (according to Pyrrho); all our sensations and beliefs are (special kinds of) *pragmata* [implicit premiss]; therefore, all our sensations and beliefs are indifferent.”²² Now, obviously *Barbara* is a valid argument. But it does not seem to be applicable to the present passage. For on this reading, sensations and beliefs are indifferent in a very specific way: they neither tell the truth nor lie. Other kinds of *pragmata* are not like this. On Brunschwig’s own view, *pragmata* are *ethically* indifferent, meaning that they are not choiceworthy.²³ But since our perceptions and beliefs aren’t objects of choice, and since our objects of choice don’t fail to tell the truth or lie in the relevant sense (e. g. an attractive object I shouldn’t steal doesn’t lie by presenting itself as attractive), each way of being indifferent here only applies to one category, not both. So, if we agree with Brunschwig about what exactly indifference amounts to, then the logical structure of the passage isn’t *Barbara*, but would rather be something like ‘All *As* are *Cs*. All *Bs* are *Ds*. So all *Bs* are *Cs*’, where *As* are *pragmata*, *Bs* are belief and perceptions, *Cs* are ethical indifferents, and *Ds* are neither-truth-tellers-nor-liars. This argument is not valid, and hence not a good argument to foist on Pyrrho. This undermines Brunschwig’s overall case that *aisthēseis* and *doxai* should be understood as *pragmata*, which makes room for the more natural reading that *pragmata* are external objects, and indeed the objects *aisthēseis* and *doxas* are about. There is more to be said on this topic, but it must wait for Section “Pyrrho on Things”.

Pyrrho on *Ou Mallon*

In our discussion so far we skipped from [1D] to [1F]. It is now time to address [1E], which reads:

[1E] saying concerning each individual thing (*peri henos hekastou*) that it no more (*ou mallon*) is than is not {than/or} is both is and is not {than/or} it neither is nor is not.

²² Brunschwig, (2007) 200.

²³ Brunschwig, (2007) 208.

The phrase *ou mallon* is also attributed to Pyrrho by Diogenes, who reports

[6] For [Pyrrho] said that nothing was either honorable or shameful, just or unjust; similarly in all cases he said that nothing is in truth, but that men do everything on the basis of convention and custom (*nomōi de kai ethei*); for each thing is no more (*ou mallon*) this than that. (Diogenes Laertius, 9.61 [LS 1A, DC 1A])²⁴

This is, in many ways, a vexing claim. The phrase *ou mallon* has a long history in Greek philosophy, and plays important roles in Plato and Democritus among others.²⁵ But these figures use the phrase in different ways, so we cannot use them to determine how Pyrrho might have meant it, especially since Pyrrho would apparently disagree with these figures in many other respects.²⁶ Fortunately, Timon gives us some guidance on how to interpret the phrase:

[7] So Timon says in the *Pytho*, the utterance [“no more this than that”] signifies determining nothing and refusing to assent. (Diogenes Laertius, 9.76[(LS 1G, DC 54)])²⁷

[7] matches what we have seen so far. The practical conclusion of Pyrrho’s view, as we saw in the last section, is to remain non-assertive and unopinionated. Using the phrase ‘*ou mallon*’ as an expression of non-assertion in one way to carry out this aim. So used, *ou mallon* expresses an epistemic state, rather than a logical qualifier pertaining to the instantiating of properties.

Many authors have resisted this straight-forward reading of the meaning of *ou mallon* and essentially ignored Timon’s clarification, arguing instead that Pyrrho’s use of *ou mallon* commits him to some kind of dogmatic assertion about objects and their properties; [6], for instance, has been interpreted as expressing the negatively dogmatic claim that things are, in their natures, neither *F* nor $\sim F$ (or perhaps neither *F* nor *G*, where *G* is the contrary of *F*, e. g. black vs. white). But since we are explicitly told by Timon what *ou mallon* signifies, it is strained

²⁴ There is another very similar quotation in Sextus Empiricus, which appears to be an incomplete version of the passage cited in Diogenes: “Nothing exists which is good or bad by nature, ‘but these things are decided on the part of men by convention’, as Timon says.” (*Against the Professors* 11.140, LS 11). Only the last half of the passage seems to be from Timon: Sextus apparently infers the first half from it.

²⁵ For details on the history of this phrase, see DeLacy (1958), and Woodruff (1988).

²⁶ Diogenes Laertius reports that Pyrrho frequently quoted Democritus with approval (9.67 cf. 9.40). But this does not mean that Pyrrho agreed with Democritus in any broad substantive way, any more than Pyrrho’s approval of Homer in the same passage entails that Pyrrho shares his epistemology with Homer.

²⁷ cf. Decleva Caizzi, (1981) 229–30.

to ignore this unequivocal piece of evidence, or to reinterpret it to mesh with other texts which, as we'll see below, are not naturally or necessarily read as dogmatic claims.²⁸

There is, however, one way of retaining a dogmatic reading of Pyrrho while also taking Timon's explanation of *ou mallon* at face value. [1E] is syntactically ambiguous, allowing both a wide-scope and a narrow-scope reading:²⁹

[WS] x is no more (a) F than (b) $\sim F$ than (c) (F and $\sim F$) than (d) $\sim(F$ nor $\sim F)$

[NS] x is (i) no more F than $\sim F$, or (ii) (F and $\sim F$), or (iii) $\sim(F$ nor $\sim F)$

These readings give widely divergent results.³⁰ With [NS], we have three apparently equally viable options: some things are no more F than $\sim F$, some are both, some are neither. This allows us to believe Timon when he tells us what *ou mallon* means, but also allows room for dogmatism in claiming that *ou mallon* is not exhaustive: we can say *ou mallon* about some things, but dogmatize about others. With [WS], on the other hand, all four options are on a par, and none of them are asserted. To say *ou mallon* about x is to refrain from making any for the four possible claims: one does not assert that x is F , nor that x is $\sim F$, nor that x is neither F nor $\sim F$, nor that x is not either F or $\sim F$.

28 Bett argues against taking [7] in the straight-forward way, but I find his argument puzzling. His argument is that we should not assume that [7] means the same thing as what Sextus means by '*ou mallon*', because (i) it is possible that they are different, and (ii) there are other uses of *ou mallon* in the context in which Diogenes introduces [7] ((2000) 31–2). We can grant that (i) and (ii) are true. But our interest here is not whether Timon agrees with Sextus. So ignore Sextus for the moment: what is the most natural reading of [7] on its own terms? I would think it is the face-value reading I've given. Other options are possible, but less likely. Moreover, in Diogenes (9.74–76), [7] is explicitly *contrasted* with the positive and negative readings which Bett takes to be alternative possibilities for *ou mallon*. Instead, Diogenes quotes Timon as an example of precisely the non-dogmatic, non-assertive attitude that the face-value reading would suggest. This is further evidence that we should not read [7] in the alternate way Bett proposes. Again, his reading is possible, but it has less support than its rival.

29 There are two other potential options, though there is perhaps less to recommend them. One, suggested in DeLacy, (1958) 64, is that x is (1) no more F than $\sim F$, or (2) no more F than (F and $\sim F$) or (3) no more F than $\sim(F$ or $\sim F)$. Another option, proposed but not endorsed by Svavarsson, is that x is either (A) no more F than $\sim F$ or (B) no more (F and $\sim F$) than $\sim(F$ nor $\sim F)$ ((2004) 277 n 49). Both these readings are syntactically less straightforward than either [WS] or [NS], so they are less natural readings. More importantly, I take them to be functionally equivalent to [WS], since they preserve a lack of assertion.

30 Appeals to Aristotle's discussion at *Metaphysics* 1008a30–5 are, I believe, unhelpful, because we cannot decide with sufficient certainty whether Aristotle would have been responding to Pyrrho or someone with similar views, or whether Pyrrho was responding to Aristotle, or whether the two views to be compared are only superficially similar.

I think [WS] better matches the face-value reading of [7], and this compatibility is already a mark in its favor. But beyond this I think [NS] has additional problems. For one, the syntax of [NS] is awkward: it requires us to read \bar{e} in two different ways in a very short space. The same thought could be expressed more naturally with an epexegetic *kai* or a *gar* between *ou mallon* and its alternatives. Furthermore, [6] seems to rule out [NS]: the *gar* in the *ou mallon* sentence shows that the *ou mallon* claim is meant to explain the claim that nothing is just or unjust, but on [NS] the claim that nothing is either F nor $\sim F$ is an alternative to the claim that it is no more F than $\sim F$. This point also undercuts the interpretation, accepted by Hankinson and Svavarsson among others, that (ii) and (iii) of [NS] are meant to provide different but equivalent interpretations of (i).³¹ If we took 'no more F than $\sim F$ ' to mean ' F and $\sim F$ to the same degree', then either (ii) or (iii) could be equivalent to (i). But they cannot both be equivalent to (i), because they are not equivalent to each other: (ii) positively attributes properties while (iii) does not. If [6] is evidence that (i) would be equivalent to (iii), then (ii) shouldn't be a viable alternative: Pyrrho does not make the claim in [6] (or anywhere else, for that matter) that any object positively is both F and $\sim F$, even if that means F and $\sim F$ only to a small degree. This makes [NS], at best, oddly phrased, if not actually inconsistent with [6].³² Alternatively, if we argue that Pyrrho only meant to commit himself to the disjunction of ((ii) or (iii)), while remaining uncommitted to either disjunct, then we are still left with a dogmatic reading, since Pyrrho would still be claiming that either (ii) or (iii) is true, though he isn't sure which.

Crucially, proponents of [NS] must interpret the predications in [1E] and [6] in a peculiar way. (ii) and (iii) can both be true, if read as follows: for any x and any F , x is at least a little bit F , but not exhaustively F , and hence is at least a little bit $\sim F$. So x is both F and $\sim F$, in that it is a little of both, and it is neither F nor $\sim F$, in that it is not exclusively one or the other.³³ This is meant to be a gloss on *ou mallon*: x is equally F and $\sim F$.³⁴ But notice that this interpretation only works precisely because the predications are not equal: the way that (ii) is true requires a weak sense of predication (x is at least a little bit F), and the sense that (iii) is true requires a strong sense of predication (x is exclusively F).³⁵

³¹ Hankinson, (1995) 63; Svavarsson, (2004) 278 *f.* See also Stopper, (1983) 273, though he accepts [WS].

³² If it is right that (ii) is superfluous, then this would be a count against [NS], not a consideration in favor, as Svavarsson argues ("Undecidable", 279).

³³ Svavarsson, (2004) 278.

³⁴ Svavarsson, (2004) 278.

³⁵ Cf. Hankinson, (1995) 63.

We could try to understand ‘equally’ in a different way than ‘ F and $\sim F$ in the same manner’, but I don’t think this will help. The most plausible option is ‘ F and $\sim F$ to the same degree’, but on this reading [NS] does not make (i) equivalent to (ii) or (iii). For x would be equally F and $\sim F$ only in those cases where x is either 0% F and $\sim F$, or 50% F and $\sim F$, or 100% F and $\sim F$. Of these options, only the 50/50 split is compatible with the [NS] reading of (ii) and (iii). Weak predication requires x to be at least a little bit F and a little bit $\sim F$, so 0/0 is ruled out for (ii). Likewise, strong predication would say x is 100% F and $\sim F$, and is incompatible with (iii). And if we’re right that F and $\sim F$ are exhaustive contraries, then 0/0 doesn’t work for strong predication, nor 100/100 for weak predication either. It could be that x is, say, 25% F , but then it would have to be 75% $\sim F$, and hence not F and $\sim F$ to the same degree.³⁶ This would satisfy (ii) and (iii), but not (i). So the only way to make [NS] work on this view is for each object to be 50% F and 50% $\sim F$. This would make (i), (ii), and (iii) equivalent, but at the expense of attributing to Pyrrho a very strange kind of dogmatism, where we end up knowing exactly how things are by nature and how they are related to their appearances, and we have to reinterpret each claim about a property, for instance in [6] or [8], as an assertion that x is 50% F and 50% $\sim F$. This is an otherwise uncorroborated position in Pyrrho’s fragments, and an odd view at that.

[WS], on the other hand, avoids these problems.³⁷ As mentioned above, [WS] expresses a non-assertive attitude toward four apparently exhaustive possibilities: Pyrrho will not assert that Fx , nor that $\sim Fx$, nor that x is both F and $\sim F$, nor that x is neither F nor $\sim F$. We take *ou mallon* here to express neutrality toward all the options under its scope, as Timon tells us in [7]. Bett puts this point well: neutrality between (a) and (b) is not sufficiently agnostic, because withholding assent from (a) and (b) still leaves on with further options, namely (c) and (d); but neutrality between all four options leaves one with nothing left to assert.³⁸ Hence [WS] is an expression of *aphasia*, just as [1D]-[1F] tell us.

There is one more feature of [WS] we should note before moving on. It is frequently held by proponents of the metaphysical reading that Pyrrho was

³⁶ That is, $\geq 1\%F$ and $\geq 1\%\sim F$ are not equally F , nor are $\leq 99\%F$ and $\leq 99\%\sim F$.

³⁷ Bett, (2000) 33–36; Stopper, (1983) 274.

³⁸ Bett, (2000) 35. I disagree with Bett’s claim, however, that ‘both F and $\sim F$ ’ does no work in [WS] (35 n. 41), mainly because we disagree about what exactly *ou mallon* means. Refusing to assent to (F and $\sim F$) is required to maintain complete agnosticism about how things are in themselves, *contra* the views of, e. g., Heraclitus or Plato’s depiction of Protagoras in the *Theaetetus*.

motivated by some version of a variability thesis about perception; that is, observing that things appear differently at different times or to different people, and positing an underlying indeterminacy in the world to explain these variations.³⁹ No extant fragment explicitly attributes this line of thought to Pyrrho. But more importantly, [WS] rules it out. This is because the variability thesis would have to make a claim about features of the world beyond our perception that explain how variable perceptions are possible: either conflicting appearances are both right, because x is both F and $\sim F$, or they're both wrong, because x is neither. These options corresponds to (c) and (d) in [WS]. But [WS] precludes asserting either (c) or (d), in which case we cannot appeal to either option to explain the variability of perception. So if [WS] is the right way to read [7], then this suggests Pyrrho would not have been motivated by the variability thesis after all.⁴⁰

We can now direct our attention to [6]. It may be tempting to read [6] as expressing two dogmatic claims: (i) for all x , x is in truth $\sim(F$ or $\sim F)$, and (ii) for any x and any F , if Fx then Fx by convention. These two options are the kinds of claims ruled out in Section “Pyrrho on Thought, Speech, and Behavior”, and they conflict with [WS] as well. So we should try to find a better way to read [6].⁴¹

Given the verbal parallels between [6] and [1E], I submit that we should interpret the former in light of the latter, taking [6] as an incomplete expression of idea in [1E]. Hence [6] means “I won't assent to x being F or $\sim F$ or (F and $\sim F$) or $\sim(F$ or $\sim F)$, despite the unjustified convention to make such assertions; nor will I assent to the specific assertions that, for example, theft is unjust”. We should note that the Pyrrhonic core of [6] is the final *ou mallon* clause, which is used to explain what it means, or perhaps why it is true, that “men do everything on the basis of convention and custom”. In other words, the claim *ou mallon*, which we are explicitly told should be read as “determining nothing and refusing to assent”, is primary, and Pyrrho appeals to it to explain in what sense things are neither just nor unjust, etc. Pyrrho's focus here is not on describing some indeterminate underlying metaphysical reality,

³⁹ See especially Bett, (2000) 114–121; Lee, (2010) 25–26; Svavarsson, (2004) 275–77; Svavarsson (2002) 282–85.

⁴⁰ Note that this is not an argument in favor of [WS], but merely an observation about its implications. I should also note a second issue with the variability thesis, brought to my attention by an anonymous referee. On the metaphysical reading, the world beyond our perception is indefinite. But the variability thesis posits one of two definite states of affairs: either that x is both F and $\sim F$ or that it is neither. So variability thesis fits ill with the metaphysical reading.

⁴¹ Cf. DeLacy, (1958) 64.

but to explain human behavior's dependence on convention. Taking the first half of [6] literally would be inconsistent with [4], Timon's claim that "Desire is absolutely the first of all bad things".⁴² For here something has a moral predicate, while the literal reading precludes things from having either positive or negative moral predicates. The alternative I recommend avoids an inconsistency by restricting the domain of [6] to human behaviors, which would include desire, and explaining all human behavior by appeal to convention *rather than* an underlying morally neutrality. In this case *ou mallon* would be used to indicate that convention itself is limited, and cannot go beyond itself to reach the true nature of things (if there is any such thing).⁴³ To see the relationship between *ou mallon* and convention more clearly, we must investigate the nature of convention itself in more detail.

Pyrrho on Appearance and Convention

But to speak about convention in Pyrrho, we must first speak about appearances. The relevant part of the Aristocles passage dealing with appearances is the following claim:

[1C] For this reason (*dia touto*) {on the grounds that (*dia to*)} neither our sensations nor our opinions (*mēte tas aisthēseis hēmōn mēte tas doxas*) tell the truth or lie (*alētheuein ē pseudesthai*)

We shall postpone until Section "Pyrrho on Things" discussing whether [1C] should begin with *dia touto* or *dia to*, and focus instead on the idea that epistemic faculties neither tell the truth or lie. We should note the subtle but important distinction between 'our faculties don't tell the truth or lie' versus 'our epistemic states are neither true nor false'; the verb is used here, to my ear favoring the former reading over the latter, in which case [1C] is not about the propositions our faculties generate, but rather about the faculties themselves. Moreover, the latter translation makes it difficult to avoid running afoul of the Laws of Excluded Middle and Non-Contradiction, which is a serious concern, as we'll see below. To say any more, we must see what else Pyrrho says about appearances and convention. We can begin by revisiting two claims we've already seen:

⁴² See Thorsrud, (2009) 26–28 for more on desire in Pyrrho.

⁴³ Thorsrud, (2009) 25 reads the fragment in the same way.

[1D] For this reason, therefore, we must not trust them (*mēde pisteuein autais dein*) [our epistemic faculties], but we should be unopinionated, uncommitted and unwavering (*adoxastous kai aklineis kai akradantous*).

[6] For [Pyrrho] said that nothing was either honorable or shameful, just or unjust; similarly in all cases he said that nothing is in truth but that men do everything on the basis of convention and custom (*nomōi de kai ethei*); for each thing is no more this than that.

To which we may add two more passages:

[8] (a) For this reason, Timon in his *Pytho* says that he has not diverged from what is customary (*tēn sunētheian*). (b) And in his *Likenesses* he says, “But the apparent utterly dominates (*partē sthenei*) wherever it goes’. (c) And in his work *On the Senses* he says, “That honey is sweet I do not posit (*ou tithēmi*); that it appears so I concede (*homologō*)’ (Diogenes Laertius 9.105 [LS 1H, DC 54])

[9] But with respect to their appearance we are in the habit (*ethos*) of calling each of them good or bad or indifferent, just as Timon too seems to indicate in his *Images*, when he says: ‘Come, I will speak a word of truth (*muthon alētheiēs*), as it appears to me to be (*kataphainetai einai*), having a correct yardstick (*orthon exōn kanona*): the nature of the divine and the good (*hē tou theiou te phusis kai tagaou*) always (*aiei*) consists in what makes a man’s life most equable.’ (Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Mathematicians* 11.19-20 [LS 2E, DC 62])

As a promissory note on the connection between appearance and convention, we may note that Diogenes connects the two in [8], as does Sextus in [9]. I should also note at the outset that by ‘appearances’ here, I mean both perceptual and intellectual seemings, congruent with [1C] above.

The most important passage for our purposes is [8], especially part (c). Here Timon makes two claims: we may concede to statements of the form ‘*x* appears *F*’, but not to statements of the form ‘*Fx*’. I submit that this passage is key to understanding Pyrrho’s overall view.⁴⁴ It tells us that we may not infer the properties of an object from the appearance of that object. This point is quite compatible with accepting appearances as they come; we simply do not automatically infer that our appearances veridically report the nature of the objects which these appearances are about (nor do we automatically infer that they fail to do so).⁴⁵ It is clear that Diogenes also understands [8c] in this way: he quotes Timon to explain the distinction between (i) whether or not a picture actually has raised surfaces and (ii) whether it appears to have them. In other words, saying ‘*x* looks *F*’ makes a different claim from ‘*Fx*’, and we should not mistake the former as an endorsement of the latter.

⁴⁴ On this point I am indebted to Long, (1974) 81–85. See also Lesses, (2002) p.260 n. 12.

⁴⁵ Cf. Long and Sedley, (1997) 18.

But why does Pyrrho think the inference from appearance to reality is invalid? We are told in [8b]: the apparent dominates wherever it goes. I take this to mean that we are unable to get past our appearances to epistemically access how the world really is. Appearances could be completely accurate, or completely inaccurate, or variable. We simply can't tell, because the only criterion we might have are the appearances themselves, and we can't use an appearance as the criterion for its own accuracy. Based on the fragments we have, Pyrrho takes appearances to have the form '*x* appears *F*' rather than 'it appears that *Fx*' or 'there is an *Fx* appearance'. 'Honey appears sweet', for instance, purports to say something about honey itself, rather than simply reporting that an appearance of a certain sort is occurring. And if appearances have this form, then they purport to represent something which they cannot actually represent, objects themselves. But we have no independent access to *x*, and therefore no way of knowing whether *Fx* is true other than the fact that *x* appears *F*. Hence we cannot justifiably infer the former from the latter.

The reading I've just given assumes that appearances make some sort of implicit commitment about what they represent. One might worry that this subjects the argument to an objection which Brennan raises to Bett's view.⁴⁶ Bett argues that appearances make an implicit metaphysical assumption, that it is determinately the case that objects have whatever property they might have.⁴⁷ But since, on this view, no object has determinate properties, and all appearances say that they do have such properties, no appearances can be true (they cannot be false, either, but for a different reason that need not concern us for the moment). Brennan objects that this assumption begs the question. We could equally well make an assumption that appearances represent a certain epistemological character instead, and there is no non-question-begging way to promote one assumption over the other. Brennan argues that we could make many such assumptions: for any appearance *p*, *p* represents reality as having some particular character *C*, but objects themselves lack *C*.

The view defended here is not threatened by Brennan's argument. All I have claimed is that Pyrrho objects to the inference from '*x* appears *F*' to '*Fx*', on the grounds that appearances purport to represent objects themselves but can only actually tell us about how those objects appear. This argument does not rely on specifying a single property or kind of property which all appearances attribute to their objects. The problem with appearances is that they can only tell us how objects appear; we cannot take for granted that appearance

⁴⁶ Brennan, (1998) 423–426.

⁴⁷ Bett, (2000) 23–24; Bett (1994a) 153.

tracks reality. This point is neutral with respect to whatever properties might be at issue, which I take this to be an advantage over both Bett’s and Brennan’s approach.

This finally puts us into a position to see why our epistemic faculties neither tell the truth nor lie. Our appearances purport to tell us something about objects themselves, independent of our epistemic access to those objects. But the only access we have to these objects is epistemic access: the apparent utterly dominates. And so we simply cannot tell whether our appearances accurately report their objects or not, because we lack a criterion for judging the accuracy of our appearances. Hence inferences from appearance to claims about object themselves are invalid; we cannot know if Fx is true or false based solely on x appearing F , even if it turns out that Fx is the case (an inference may be invalid even if its premises are true).

There is one more important point to address about the truth and falsity of appearances before moving on: whether *alētheuein ē pseudesthai* means ‘consistently tell the truth or lie’ or ‘tell the truth or lie, *simpliciter*’. I concede that both readings are linguistically viable. The former is a popular choice, but I am not sure it is preferable.⁴⁸ To say that our senses do not consistently tell the truth is to implicitly claim that our senses are correct at *some* times, though not all. But this is not what our sources tell us: [1D] says we must *never* trust our senses to report on the world itself.⁴⁹ And we would be unjustified in saying our faculties sometimes tell the truth unless we had some idea of when. But this would require us to have some sense of when the inference from ‘ x appears F ’ to ‘ Fx ’ is valid, and this is exactly what [8b] and [8c] seem to deny. Moreover, it is puzzling how [1D] would give rise to [1E] on this reading. Why should we say *ou mallon* about each individual thing when at least some of appearances are true? For instance, to the extent that ‘honey appears sweet’ ever successfully reports a truth about honey, then we would be licensed to say that honey is sweet, or at least more sweet than not-sweet; this is not the ‘unopinionated, uncommitted and unwavering’ attitude that [1E] recommends.

A further question about this reading is how often our epistemic faculties must succeed or fail in order to get the label ‘consistent’. There is something to be said for the idea that you wouldn’t trust someone who you catch in a lie, even

⁴⁸ See Brennan, (1998) 430–31. This position is also endorsed by Stopper, (1983) 292 n.53, and Brunschwig, (2007) 198.

⁴⁹ Hankinson, (1995) 62f, is certainly correct about the modal force of *mēde pisteuein autais dein*.

if most of what they say is true. But in order to catch someone in a lie, you would have to know what the truth was independently of their assertions, which, again, is exactly what [8] seems to deny. And even then, it seems like an overreaction to completely reject the claims of our epistemic faculties if they sometimes tell the truth. The better course would be to match our credence to the probability that our senses are correct (e. g., give a 0.10 credence to any appearance if appearances are correct 10 % of the time). This approach assumes we have an idea of what proportion of our faculties' judgements are truthful, but what grounds would we have for saying that our faculties tell the truth sometimes but not consistently, without at least a rough idea of this proportion? But of course none of our texts even hint at such a story. This suggests that it is better to interpret [1C]'s 'neither tell the truth or lie' in the stronger sense of 'never tell the truth and never lie'.⁵⁰

But what exactly does this mean? For instance, if 'honey appears sweet' does not tell the truth, then presumably 'honey is not sweet' does, and conversely 'honey appears sweet' would tell the truth if honey is actually sweet. One solution is to argue that Pyrrho rejected the Law of Non-Contradiction and/or the Law of Excluded Middle, but this seems untenable since [1E], at least when understood as expressing [WS], rules out rejecting these principles.⁵¹ Bett's solution is to stipulate that the truth or falsity of an appearance or opinion both require a determinate state of affairs; since there are no such states, no

50 It may also be worth noting some problems specifically with Brennan's argument for the 'consistently' reading. After giving some textual evidence supporting the 'consistently' reading, he argues that Pyrrho should be read as part of a schema: the Protagoreans say trust the senses, not reason; the Eleatics say trust reason, not the senses; the Aristotelians say trust both; and Pyrrho says trust neither. Aristotle certainly would not think that neither appearances nor reason always tell the truth. But in the other two cases things are not so clear. Protagoras was typically represented (e. g., in Plato's *Theaetetus*) as believing every appearance was true, not that appearances were only reliably true or true most of the time. Likewise, we might think that the Eleatics could argue that true reason, as opposed to mere *doxa*, always gets it right. The *simpliciter* reading, then, would be more natural in at least one, possibly two of the four options surveyed, in which case it is not at all clear why we should read Pyrrho in line with Aristotle rather than the other options. In addition, there is a more general worry about the neatness of Aristocles' schema here. Though Brennan makes a persuasive case that we should read our passage on Pyrrho in the light of the schema Aristocles is working with, Pyrrho is clearly being worked into a neat, independent schema, and there is always the worry that (i) the views represented will be over-simplified to fit the schema, and (ii) the schema represents Aristocles's way of framing the debate rather than Pyrrho's own (Lesses, (2002) p.258 describes the situation well). I do not want to go so far as to say that Aristocles is distorting Pyrrho here, but rather only that we have to be cautious, and so the schema cannot provide evidence of the strength that Brennan takes it to have.

51 Cf. Stopper, (1983) 272–4.

claims will be (determinately) true or (determinately) false.⁵² But this solution only works if we first concede that Pyrrho was a dogmatist. And in any case, there are other problems with this move. As Brennan notes, this view of falsehood is not the only possible view, and in any case not all of our appearances and opinions represent things as determinate.⁵³

To see a better approach to this problem, we should briefly step back and focus on how testimony works.⁵⁴ Let us begin by noting that [1C] uses the verbs *alētheuein* and *pseudesthai*, suggesting that what is being described are our epistemic faculties themselves, not their contents. The text tells us not that our appearances and opinions, as particular representational states, *are* true or false, but that our appearances and opinions, as representational faculties, *tell* the truth or *tell* lies. If so, we should not focus on whether assertions like ‘honey is sweet’ are true or false. Rather, we should ask what it would mean for our faculties to accurately or inaccurately report information. In standard cases of testimony, we don’t just utter information, but rather present it in a way that purports to be veridical. Or, perhaps more revealingly, when we lie we attempt to deceive someone by giving them information contrary to what we know to be true. Of course, full-fledged truth-telling or lying involves an agent with intentions and a theory of mind, and our epistemic faculties don’t have these features. But even so, our faculties do present information under a certain guise: our sense of taste, for instance, purports to describe the flavor of honey beyond the properties of the appearance itself. The issue here is not whether honey is, in fact, sweet or not; rather, the issue is what our epistemic faculties allegedly report versus what we can infer from these reports. Because appearances purport to describe the world itself, in order for them to tell the truth or lie they would need to have two components: (a) a first-order description (e. g. ‘honey tastes sweet’, and (b) a second-order recommendation to believe the first-order description, either because it is true (in the case of truth-telling), or in spite of its falseness (in the case of lying). But for us to trust (b) would require us to allow that our epistemic faculties have something like a direct access to the world, in order for them to connect the first-order and second-order components of their reports. And this is exactly what Pyrrho denies.

One virtue of this approach is that it helps solve a puzzle raised by Svavarsson: Why does Pyrrho add the redundant “nor lie” rather than simply

52 Bett, (2000) 23–4.

53 Brennan, (1998) 422.

54 The view I have in mind is close to that presented by Coadie (1992), 42, though some adjustments are necessary to allow the view to apply to epistemic faculties rather than agents.

saying that our faculties do not (or do not consistently) tell the truth?⁵⁵ If Pyrrho were concerned with the contents that our epistemic faculties report, the additional verb *pseudesthai* would be superfluous. But if Pyrrho is concerned with the second-order status of these reports, the addition makes more sense. Pyrrho needs to specify both in order to emphasize that what is at issue is not simply the truth of our opinions and perceptions, but rather the guise under which these opinions and perceptions are represented to us. Our faculties do not tell the truth because they cannot vouch for their contents as truth; they do not lie because they cannot present their contents in a way that inverts the reality they depict.

This way of understanding ‘tell the truth or lie’ is quite compatible with the contents of our appearances being true or false. It might be that ‘honey is sweet’ is true, but this does not mean that ‘honey appears sweet’ tells the truth, any more than someone who randomly guesses a correct answer tells the truth. The point is that there is a disconnect between the content of our epistemic judgments and the objects that these judgments are about. We cannot access the latter but through the former, and so we have no way of knowing whether the content of our judgements are accurate or not. They could very well be, even if we are not justified in so taking them. By restricting the claim ‘never tell the truth or lie’ to our faculties rather than their contents, Pyrrho can avoid taking a stand on both the truth-values of specific claims and on bigger philosophical questions about, say, Excluded Middle. I take this to be a strength of the proposed reading: it better matches Pyrrho’s style and commits him to less than rival interpretations do.

We can now turn to the role of convention and habit in Pyrrho. In introducing [8] above, Diogenes mentions [8b] and [8c] as explicating a distinction between the apparent and reality. But it is [8a] that immediately follows this distinction, suggesting that there is some important connection between appearances and what is customary. The idea seems to be that it is customary to accept appearances, for example, to concede that honey appears sweet. If [8b] is meant to expand on [8a], then we might also think that the customary is dominated by appearances. This is the same idea we see in [6]: Convention and custom lead us to make claims of the *Fx* form about objects independent of our epistemic access to them, but really we should say refuse to assent to any of the predications *Fx* or $\sim Fx$ or (*Fx* and $\sim Fx$) or $\sim(Fx$ or $\sim Fx$). Sextus Empiricus makes the same

55 Svavarsson, (2010) 43–45, (2004) 272–73. Svavarsson’s own solution to the problem is to posit the metaphysical claim that things are neither *F* or $\sim F$ in their nature, putting him on the side of the metaphysical dogmatist interpretation despite the ‘subjectivist’ label.

connection between appearances and convention in [9]. It is only a habit (*ethos*) that leads us to attribute particular properties to objects, a habit grounded in the dominating power of appearances.

[9], however, has been the subject of much dispute. There are several features here with a troublingly dogmatic air: a myth of truth (*muthon alētheiēs*), correct yardstick (*orthon kanona*), the nature (*phusis*) of the divine and good, which either exists forever or always has a certain property (*aiei* with a supplied *esti*). Several authors have found no way around these claims, and have concluded Pyrrho must have been a dogmatist after all.⁵⁶ Others have tried to rescue Pyrrho from inconsistency by interpreting the fragment to be about Pyrrho’s own nature.⁵⁷ Still others have argued that we should attribute the belief to Timon rather than Pyrrho on the grounds that it would conflict with the other fragments.⁵⁸ Still others have posited a lacuna that makes the text as it stands undecipherable.⁵⁹

Each of these proposals has its problems, and I think we can do better. A dogmatic interpretation conflicts with [1E], [1F] and [2]-[5]. It also, we should note, conflicts with the metaphysical dogmatism Bett and others ascribe to Pyrrho, since here Pyrrho is (i) speaking about the nature of the divine and good, and (ii) attributing determinate properties to it. Interpreting the fragment to be about Pyrrho himself presupposes that the text is an answer to another fragment, a presupposition for which we have no evidence.⁶⁰ Positing a lacuna is premised on the lack of a verb, but *esti* must often be supplied, and in any case some syntactic irregularity can be expected from a work in verse. And if we start down the path of distinguishing Pyrrho from Timon we begin to call all our evidence into question, a result we should postpone until our other options are exhausted.

Thankfully, there is an alternative interpretation of [9] which avoids these problems. Svarvarsson interprets *muthon* as ‘a fiction’, contrary to the correct yardstick of truth that Pyrrho claims to possess.⁶¹ On this reading Pyrrho would be contrasting a view he takes to be false (that there is a divine and good thing

⁵⁶ See in particular Svavarsson, (2002) 250–56.

⁵⁷ Burnyeat, Miles “Tranquility without a Stop: Timon, Frg. 68”, *The Classical Quarterly* 30:86–93, Long and Sedley, (1997) v.2, 11.

⁵⁸ Bett (1994b).

⁵⁹ Stopper, (1983) 271.

⁶⁰ The purported antecedent is LS 2D, DC 61, in which Timon asks “This, Pyrrho, my heart yearns to hear, how you, though a man, act with such ease and calm...”. See Burnyeat, (1980) 86–89, and Long & Sedley, (1997) 11. For the case against this view, see Bett, (1994b) 307–314.

⁶¹ Svarvarsson, (2010) 50–53. This reading is defended in more detail in (2002) 250–56.

with an eternal nature that causes an equitable life) with his own truth about the divine and good (e. g. that there is no such nature, or that it is not eternal, or that it doesn't lead to an equitable life). I think this view commits us to an unduly dogmatic reading of Pyrrho (since the reading implicitly contrasts a false dogmatic view with a preferred true dogmatic view), but Svarvarsson's insight that [9] refers to an opposing view, rather than Pyrrho's own, is attractive. There is a way to accommodate this insight without committing Pyrrho to dogmatism, as follows.

Pyrrho was reputed to be a skilled conversationalist.⁶² I suggest that we see [9] as an example of this skill, where Pyrrho adopts and undermines the terminology of his opponents. We should translate 'word of truth' (*muthos*), and 'correct yardstick' (*kanona*) in the standard way, but we should hear them with something like scare-quotes. This might just be a deflationary undercutting of Pyrrho's opponents views, which is common when one philosopher critiques another about something the first doesn't believe in (i. e. "What you call 'x' is really just y: there are no x's"). Or, following Timon's own rhetorical style, we could interpret these lines in a more sarcastic tone.⁶³ Either way, Pyrrho would be talking about truth and yardsticks and the like without endorsing them himself. We can envision the preceding context to be something like 'You dogmatists are always going on about the nature of the divine and good, positing this or that criterion to judge it.' The quote in [9] would be a critical response: 'Well, let me tell you a "word of truth", using my own "correct yardstick". This vaunted "nature of the divine and good" you talk about is never anything more than whatever makes life for man most equitable.'

The role of the '*hōs moi kataphainetai*' in the first line is not clear from context. It could modify *muthon aletheiēs* or *orthon echōn kanona*; I think word order makes the former more likely, but for our purposes there is no important difference in meaning between them. The phrase can be translated, as I have rendered it, "as it appears to me to be", or as a stronger, "as it manifestly is". The presence of the infinitive '*einai*' rather than a participle suggests the former, weaker reading. But on the reading I am defending here, it makes little difference. If we take it in the latter sense, we would interpret it in a deflationary way, as we did with the dogmatic-sounding terms above; hence the meaning, for our purposes, would be equivalent on either rendering. The *aiei* in line three should be read predicatively, not attributively; it does not mean 'the eternal nature of the divine and good is... ', but rather, 'the nature of the divine and good is always... ', where we understand 'always' as 'in every case' or, better, 'whenever

⁶² Diogenes Laertius 9.63 (LS 1B), and possibly Eusebius 14.18.17 (LS 2A).

⁶³ See the collection of polemical fragments in L&S 3A-K for a sense of Timon's caustic style.

you look’. Whenever we examine some dogmatist’s claim about the nature of the divine and good, all we ever see are things that humans already like or want. These dogmatists, we can imagine Pyrrho saying, profess to talk about some independent nature, but all they ever actually talk about are the same kinds of things which constitute human custom anyway. So interpreted, Pyrrho restricts his assertions to what is customary and apparent, rather than making a claim about a divine nature, and he argues that his dogmatic interlocutors fail to do any differently, despite their efforts to the contrary.

This interpretation has the advantages of retaining the kind of skepticism we would expect from Pyrrho: a hesitation to go beyond what is customary by dogmatizing. It therefore fits with the other texts we’ve examined so far better than Svarvarsson’s version. What makes this passage unique among our texts is that Pyrrho is responding to views he rejects rather than making positive claims of his own. Pyrrho is deploying a skeptical argument against dogmatism: even the dogmatists, we find, fail to say anything meaningful about what is *adēlon*, but only appeal to what is customary. The dogmatic language used in this fragment is not Pyrrho’s own, but the language of his interlocutors, used to undermine their position. There is a long tradition of this procedure, from Xenophanes and Heraclitus to Socrates to later Skeptics. So understood, [9] remains consonant with the other fragments of Pyrrho we have seen so far.

Pyrrho on Things

We may now finally address the line which has attracted the most attention in discussion of Pyrrho’s views. In [1a] Aristocles tells us that Pyrrho answers the question ‘How are things by nature?’ His answer is:

[1B] According to Timon, Pyrrho declared that things are equally *adiaphora kai astathēmata kai anepikrita*.

This claim is followed by

[1C] For this reason (*dia touto*) {alternatively, on the grounds that (*dia to*)} neither our sensations nor our opinions (*mēte ta aisthēseis hēmōn mēte tas doxas*) tell us truths or falsehoods (*alētheuein ē pseudesthai*).

There are important questions regarding [1B] and its relation to [1C]. The text as we have it presents [1B] as the basis for [1C]. But several scholars have argued

that this inference makes no sense, and have recommended emending [1C]’s *dia touto* to *dia to*, reversing the order of inference.⁶⁴ A closely related question is what proper meaning of the three adjectives in [1B] is. Each can be read in either a subjective sense (indiscernible, immeasurable, and inarbitrable) or an objective sense (indistinct, unstable, and indeterminate). The answers to these two questions are typically coupled. The *metaphysical* reading reads [1B] objectively and retains the transmitted text,⁶⁵ while the *epistemological* reading reads [1B] subjectively and emends [1C].⁶⁶

As I’ve already mentioned a few times in passing, I think there are some serious problems with the metaphysical reading. The most thorough defense of this view is given by Richard Bett, but this view has been subjected to thorough criticism by Tad Brennan, who argues that (a) Bett’s reading assumes a controversial suppressed premise, which is no more plausible than the equivalent premise the epistemological reading would need, (b) Bett’s reading doesn’t fit the epistemological context in which Aristocles presents the passage, and (c) the argument against emending the text, which the epistemological reading requires, is inconclusive.⁶⁷ Instead of rehashing Brennan’s objections, I will instead add one more, or at least extend Brennan’s objections a bit farther than he goes with them. None of Brennan’s criticisms show that the metaphysical reading is substantively flawed, but instead show only that the view’s rival isn’t yet vanquished. I think we can make a sharper critique than this. Bett argues that only the metaphysical reading can make sense of the logic of the Aristocles passage without emendation, while Brennan argues that the epistemological reading can make sense of the Aristocles passage with the emendation. I will argue that (i) the metaphysical reading fails to make sense of the logic of the Aristocles passage, and (ii) the epistemological reading can make sense of it, even without the emendation.

According to the metaphysical reading, the Aristocles passage makes the following argument

- (1) All *pragmata* are metaphysically indeterminate
- (2) Metaphysical indeterminacy entails that no sensations or opinions tell the truth or lie.

⁶⁴ The emendation was first suggested in Zeller (1909), 501.

⁶⁵ See n. 2 and n. 4. Note that Svavarsson calls his view subjectivist, on the grounds that it has epistemological relevance ((2004) 270–77). But the view nevertheless has dogmatic metaphysical commitments, and Svavarsson concludes that his view is “negatively dogmatic” (292). This comes out slightly more clearly in Svavarsson, (2010) 42–47.

⁶⁶ See n. 1 and n. 3.

⁶⁷ See Brennan, (1998) 420–26 for (a), 426–30 for (b), and 432–33 for (c).

- (3) (2) entails we should not trust our faculties, but should be unopinionated
- (4) Being unopinionated requires making only *ou mallon* claims about *pragmata*
- (5) Unopinionatedness leads to *aphasia* and *ataraxia*

Grant for the moment, against the epistemological reading, that this is the correct order of inference. The logic of this passage is specious nonetheless. (1) is supposed to entail directly (2), and entail (3), (4), and (5) transitively. But (1) is actually inconsistent with each of (2)-(5).

Let's begin with (2). Bett argues that all sensations and opinions neither tell the truth or lie. They are not true because there is not a determinate state of affairs to make the claim true. They are not false because there is not an opposing determinate state of affairs to make the claim false.⁶⁸ In other words, 'x seems F' is an instance of truth-telling just in case there is a determinate state of affairs such that Fx , and for 'x seems F' is a lie just in case there is a determinate state of affairs such that $\sim Fx$. On the metaphysical reading, there are no determinate states of affairs of any sort, and hence no instances of truth-telling or lying by our epistemic faculties.

The problem for this view is that there are certain kinds of seemings which will come out true or false even on the metaphysical reading. For instance, take the appearance 'the rose seems determinately scarlet'. This claim, on the metaphysical view, should be false. Why? Because on the metaphysical reading the negation of this claim is not 'There is a determinate state of affairs in which the rose is not scarlet', because there are no determinate states of affairs. Instead, it must be 'There is an indeterminate state of affairs in which the rose is not scarlet.' In other words, 'determinately' in 'the rose seems determinately scarlet' does not modify 'scarlet', but rather the whole sentence: it is equivalent to 'it seems that there is a determinate state of affairs such that Fx .' This seeming is wrong, because it misreports the quality of the state of affairs, not because it misreports the property or its instantiation.

The metaphysical reading could be adjusted in light of this problem to accept that an indeterminate state of affairs can be the truth-maker for the indeterminacy thesis. But if this is so, then an indeterminate state of affairs can also be used to be the truth-maker for other claims, like 'honey seems indeterminately sweet', or a false-maker for claims like 'the rose is determinately scarlet.' The same is also true for intellectual seemings of the everyday sort, such as 'appearances are deceiving' or 'objects aren't the way we think they are'.

⁶⁸ Bett, (2000) 23.

Hence the metaphysical reading entails that some appearances and opinions are true and others false, contra [1C].

The metaphysical reading is also inconsistent with the rest of the passage. [1D] tells us to be unopinionated, uncommitted, and unwavering, but the metaphysical reading prevents this. We will be opinionated and committed about the indeterminacy thesis and its consequences. We will likewise be opinionated about the falsity of many of our seemings, insofar as they present things as determinate when they aren't. This is just another way of reiterating the point that the metaphysical reading is dogmatic. The metaphysical reading conflicts with [1E] because we are not able to say *ou mallon* about each individual thing. Recall that the *ou mallon* formulation, read as [WS], prevents us from asserting any of the four exclusive options Fx , $\sim Fx$, $(Fx \text{ and } \sim Fx)$, $\sim(Fx \text{ or } \sim Fx)$, for any predicate F . But 'indeterminate' is itself a predicate.⁶⁹ This predicate can be truthfully applied to a wide range of objects. Hence the metaphysical reading requires us to say that *pragmata* are more indeterminate than determinate, rather than *ou mallon*. And finally, the metaphysical reading does not lead to *aphasia* (whether it could lead to *ataraxia* is unclear). There is a certain class of claims which the metaphysical reading will lead us to not make, namely determinate claims. And on the metaphysical reading there are many claims we can make: 'honey is indeterminate', 'man's nature is indeterminate' and 'oncoming carts are indeterminate' are all, on the metaphysical reading, true and assertable claims.

The metaphysical reading, then, makes a hash of the argument Aristocles reports, since its conclusion is inconsistent with several of its premises. But it could be that the inferences are no better on the epistemological reading, so we need to make a positive case for it in addition to the negative case against the metaphysical reading. In the course of this paper, we have already seen the components of this argument. All that is needed is to combine and connect them.

Let us start at the beginning. [1B] is meant to answer the question 'How are things by nature?', and strictly speaking Pyrrho does not answer that question. Rather, he rejects the possibility of answering it, by averring that

⁶⁹ A referee has suggested to me that this is an anachronistic way of thinking about this issue, "something that might occur to a contemporary analytic philosopher", and therefore not something that a proponent of the metaphysical reading needs to concede. I'm not sure this is so: there is a case to be made (though I can't make it here) that indeterminacy as a predicate is an idea we can trace back to Heraclitus at least. Instead, I'll simply note that Bett describes indeterminacy this way, describing *adiaphora* as "a property possessed by 'things' intrinsically – their lack of differentiating features" on his preferred reading ((2000) p. 19). So it is at least a way of thinking that both sides of the debate do in fact engage in, anachronistic or not, and therefore it is dialectically fair to use it.

the natures of objects are inaccessible to us. The adjectives *adiaphora kai astathēmata kai anepikrita* should be translated subjectively, as ‘indiscernible, immeasurable, and inarbitrable. Translating them objectively would make Pyrrho comment on the nature of objects beyond our epistemic access, something we cannot do. Why is this so? We are not told in the passage; instead, [1B] is introduced as a basic premise. But we can explain the premise nonetheless, based on [8], which tells us that we cannot infer ‘*Fx*’ from ‘*x* seems *F*’. We do not have direct access to objects; rather, we access them through the medium of our epistemic faculties. But we can only be certain that these faculties tell us how objects seem. We don’t know one way or another whether our faculties are accurate, because we have nothing to check the accuracy of these faculties against but the faculties themselves. Hence the objects remain, at least to us, indeterminable. But this is perfectly compatible with the world itself having determinate properties; Pyrrho takes no stance on this issue one way or the other.

There is another passage from Eusebius to which we can appeal to bolster this point. Eusebius remarks that Pyrrho thought that “nothing is *kataleptic*” (DC T26A, 25B, T46).⁷⁰ The terminology here is obviously anachronistic, since ‘*kataleptis*’ is a piece of Stoic technical terminology.⁷¹ What is important here is not what this is called, but what it is. The Stoics understood *kataleptic* impressions to be those which (i) strictly correspond to the way the world actually is, (ii) are distinguishable from incorrect or distorting impressions such that they are manifestly true, and (iii) constitute the criterion of truth (see LS 40B-K). According to Aristocles, Pyrrho thought there are no such things (whatever they are called). That is, we cannot use any of our epistemic faculties as the criterion of truth, because we cannot tell whether they generate true or false reports, because we cannot tell whether they report the world as it really is. This is not to say that our faculties necessarily distort, but only that they do not give us self-evidently, necessarily true reports of the world beyond our faculties. For Pyrrho to say nothing is *kataleptic* is just another way of saying that the apparent utterly dominates: we cannot get beyond our faculties to see whether they report accurately, even if it turns out that they do.

The fact that objects in themselves are indiscernible, immeasurable, and inarbitrable entails that our epistemic faculties neither tell the true nor lie. Why? Because, as we’ve seen, our faculties purport to report on the nature of those

⁷⁰ Long, (1974) 81–82.

⁷¹ This is presumably why Long & Sedley (1997) and Inwood & Gerson (1997) both omit the passage from their sections on Pyrrho.

objects; that is, ‘ x seems F ’ purports to tell us something about x , namely that Fx . But because these faculties are the medium through which we access these objects, there is no independent criterion to confirm that our faculties are correctly reporting the nature of objects, correctly reporting if objects are as they seem to be. And because our faculties only access the apparent qualities of objects, rather than their natures, they can only report how objects appear. Hence our faculties cannot tell us ‘Believe this appearance, because it accurately reports the nature of things’, nor ‘Believe this appearance, though it incorrectly reports the nature of things’. Just as someone may give us true information without telling us the truth, our faculties report on the apparent qualities of objects without “being sure” of the report’s veracity.

This reading allows us to infer [1C] from [1B] without emendation.⁷² Things are subjectively indiscernible, immeasurable, and inarbitrable, because we only access the world through our faculties, and these faculties cannot independently verify their reports. And therefore, they do not tell the truth or lie, because both truth-telling or lying requires this mind-independent access to the world in order give their first-order reports the second-order status of either ‘believe because true’ or ‘believe even though false’.

The inference from [1C] to [1D] on this interpretation is easy. Our epistemic faculties present appearances as if they report reality, despite being in no position to do so. They tell us ‘ x appears F ’, but prompt us to infer ‘ Fx ’. Hence they are untrustworthy. Rather than trust our faculties, and so infer claims about the nature of things from their appearances, we should resist these inferences, and thereby remain unopinionated, uncommitted and unwavering about these hidden natures. We can assent to appearances, as Timon tells us, but we should not go beyond them. And by refusing to assent to claims of the form Fx regarding the nature of objects, we suspend judgment, and express this suspension of judgment through the phrase ‘*ou mallon*’: we refuse to assert of any individual thing (in its nature) that it is more this than that than both this and that than neither. Hence [1E] follows from [1D].⁷³

It is worth noting how this interpretation differs from the standard epistemological reading defended by Brennan, Stopper, and others. First, we can extract a version of skepticism rather than dogmatism from the Aristocles

⁷² An epistemological reading coupled with an unemended text is defended in Long, (1974) 80–82 and Long (2006). The latter reads Pyrrho as denying the Law of Non-Contradiction (54), as does Stough, (1969) 17–20, but I reject this reading for the reasons stated above.

⁷³ How does suspension of judgment lead to *ataraxia*, i. e. how does [1F] follow from [1E]? That is a more difficult question, and one about which I am content to plead *tu quoque* here.

passage (situated in the context of the other fragments) without emending the text. Second, we interpret ‘neither tell the truth or lie’ as absolute claims, rather than as the weaker ‘sometimes one, sometimes the other, but never consistently either’. And third, a point which we have not yet raised: this reading of Pyrrho does not make him the kind of proto-Pyrrhonian forerunner to Aenesidemus or Sextus Empiricus. On the standard epistemological reading, Pyrrho notices that things sometimes appear one way, sometimes another, and infers from the inconsistency of these appearances that our faculties can’t be trusted. This approach follows the procedure, codified in the various collection of Modes, of opposing equally balanced considerations to prevent making a judgment. Whether this opposition is generating between arguments, as we see in Aenesidemus, or between theories, beliefs, or appearances, as we see in Sextus, is secondary: the unifying feature of Pyrrhonism is that withholding of judgment or *epochē* results from equipollence between opposing considerations. But we have no fragments where Pyrrho explicitly refers to opposing considerations. Instead, on the reading defended here Pyrrho precludes appearances from counting as evidence in the first place, rather than balancing evidence with counter-evidence. Appearances, perceptual or doxastic, do not count as evidence on this view because appearances don’t have the right status: we cannot use appearances to tell us about the world beyond, or independent of, those varying appearances. Hence Pyrrho would not count as a Pyrrhonian on this view.⁷⁴ The kind of skepticism we see here is much more akin to the kind that resurfaces in the early modern period, for instance when Descartes questions whether sense perception is the sort of thing that could justify beliefs about the external world.⁷⁵ It would take us too far afield to follow this line of thinking beyond Pyrrho himself, so I will stop with a negative conclusion: Pyrrho is indeed an epistemological skeptic rather than a metaphysical dogmatist, but he is not a Pyrrhonian skeptic.

74 If this is right, then why would Sextus praise his view’s namesake by saying that Pyrrho “set himself to skepticism more thoroughly and conspicuously than those before him” (*PH* I.7)? This is a larger question than I can answer here, since it would require an accounting of the history of skepticism from Pyrrho to Sextus. At minimum, however, I can note that Sextus’s praise of Pyrrho does not commit him to any claims about agreement in method, and his comment can be read as praise in a more general sense (by analogy, as educators we use the term ‘Socratic questioning’ or even ‘Socratic method’ as a term of honor, not as an explicit commitment to avowing ignorance, seeking only definitions, disallowing examples, and so on). And it should not go unnoticed that the dogmatist reading will have a more difficult time answering this question than I will, since I at least agree with Sextus that Pyrrho was a skeptic of a sort.

75 For just one discussion of this topic, see Fine (2000).

Conclusion

In this paper I have argued that the standard approaches to Pyrrho are unconvincing. A major source of these problems is methodological: by examining a single, very difficult fragment in isolation, we can be led to incorrect conclusions via appeals to plausibility and intuition about which of several acceptable grammatical or interpretive options is the best one. A better approach, I've maintained, is to try to look at the Pyrrhonic corpus more holistically. But this does not mean ignoring or downplaying the importance of the Aristocles passage, which is without doubt the most important passage of the extant fragments. Rather, we can group each line in the Aristocles passage with other fragments, using the latter as a foundation to help illuminate the former.

Substantively, I've defended a reading of Pyrrho which agrees with the traditional view that Pyrrho is a skeptic rather than a dogmatist, and joined in their critique of the metaphysical reading which has recently come into favor. But the precise kind of epistemological skepticism that I see in Pyrrho's fragments is not the traditional proto-Pyrrhonian skepticism of equipollence leading to *epochē*. Rather, Pyrrho's skepticism relies on the observation that our epistemic access to the world is limited, because it is necessarily and unavoidably mediated by our epistemic faculties, and these faculties cannot provide a mind-independent criterion for judging whether we should believe what these faculties report. Pyrrhonian skeptics may have adopted the results of Pyrrho's approach, not to mention his name as a label, but they did not adopt his methods. Does this view succeed at capturing the real Pyrrho? Appropriately enough, we cannot know the answer to this question. The best we can do is make our interpretation fit appearances (i. e. our textual evidence) as best we can. The view defended here, I submit, does this better than the alternatives.

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