

IN OBSERVANCE OF THE EVERYDAY:  
THE CONCEPT OF ASSENT IN PYRRHONIAN SKEPTICISM

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IN OBSERVANCE OF THE EVERYDAY:  
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This dissertation focuses on the philosophy of Sextus Empiricus (c. late 2<sup>nd</sup> Century CE), a skeptic who provides the most complete account of Pyrrhonian skepticism that survives from antiquity. In particular, this dissertation examines Sextus' account of skeptical assent, the attitude that structures and informs the life of the skeptic. Accordingly, this dissertation has two aims: first, to elaborate and defend a novel method of interpreting Sextus' claims and concepts, one based on their significance in ordinary life and language; and, second, to apply this method to Sextus' claims about the nature of skeptical assent in order to generate a novel account thereof.

In the first chapter, the most widely-held and influential interpretations of skeptical assent are elaborated and taxonomized. It is argued that all these interpretations neglect to pay sufficient attention to the self-reflexivity of Sextus' skepticism, in consequence of which Sextus' own claims about skeptical assent must be understood as expressing skeptical assent. It is argued, moreover, that this neglect of self-reflexivity cannot be remedied without abandoning these interpretations.

In the second chapter, Sextus' claims about ordinary life (including language) are examined and it is argued that Sextus regards skepticism as a distinctive expression of ordinary life. However, ordinary life may be understood in two different ways and the failure to distinguish them has resulted in a misconception of Sextus' outlook. The two different conceptions are therefore elaborated and it is argued that Sextus' understanding of ordinary life accords with only one of them. Finally, responses are provided to some important objections to the close connection between

skepticism and ordinary life.

In the third and final chapter, Sextus' conception of ordinary life is deployed to produce a novel understanding of skeptical assent. The focus here is Sextus' account of assent in *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* 1.13. Each of the key concepts in that account are explained in light of chapter two's results. Additionally, the roots of a concept central to skeptical assent are located in Aristotle's methodological reflections. Finally, the novel account of skeptical assent is distinguished from two other closely related accounts.

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Clifford Masood Roberts was born in Carshalton, United Kingdom on January 30<sup>th</sup>, 1979 and emigrated with his family to Canada in 1981. Upon completion of secondary education in Calgary, Alberta, he attended the University of Toronto, eventually graduating with a BA (Hon.) in Philosophy in 2002. After several years working in the private sector, he enrolled in the graduate program in Philosophy at Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario. He graduated with an MA in Philosophy from Queen's in 2007, having completed a thesis on Socrates' concept of *technê*, and entered the graduate program at Cornell University's Sage School of Philosophy. He defended his dissertation on Sextus Empiricus' Pyrrhonian skepticism on December 18<sup>th</sup>, 2015.

*For Mom*

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## Introduction

### A Synopsis of the Argument

Any understanding of the content and character of ancient Pyrrhonian skepticism must, at some point, address the issue of assent (*synkatathesis*). Assent is what the Pyrrhonian skeptic suspends, after the application of equally strong arguments *pro* and *contra* a claim, and it is this suspension of assent (*epochê*) that secures the final aim of skepticism: freedom from disturbance (*ataraxia*). Since an understanding of suspension of assent presupposes an understanding of assent, we cannot make sense of the former without making sense of the latter.

The centrality of assent to the skeptical outlook is only made more apparent by the fact that Pyrrhonian skeptics seem to distinguish between two different kinds of assent and to suspend only one of these (call this kind of assent “dogmatic”); the other kind of assent is what structures and characterizes the skeptical life and thus makes possible such a life (call this kind “skeptical”). The following dissertation elaborates and defends a novel interpretation of the Pyrrhonian concepts of skeptical and dogmatic assent as they are elaborated by Sextus Empiricus; in so doing, it aims to provide a new understanding of the content and character of Pyrrhonian skepticism.

Part of the aim of this dissertation is to overcome the scholarly stagnation that has afflicted interpretation of Pyrrhonian skepticism since the re-birth of scholarly interest in the second half of the twentieth century. While it is true that there has been a wealth of research into the structure, sources and nature of skeptical argument and thought, the range of scholarly interpretations of the Pyrrhonian concept of assent have remained virtually the same since they were staked out almost 50 years ago. The central claim of my first chapter is that the majority and most influential of these interpretations rest on a framework that assumes a conception of assent as a discursive psychological state or cognitive condition involving taking some claim to be true or to be the case (so that assent is a propositional attitude). I argue that this propositional attitude conception of assent cannot be

rendered consistent with other aspects of skeptical reflection. On the assumption that the skeptic is consistent, the propositional attitude conception of assent must be rejected. The abandonment of this conception allows for a quite different conception skeptical assent.

Another aim of this dissertation is to highlight aspects of Sextus' thought that, though noticed, have not been as central to discussion as I think they should be. These aspects are Sextus' focus on ordinary life and language, as separate from philosophical reflection and theory, and his insistence that his claims, *in propria persona*, be understood in terms of ordinary, everyday language. By examining this dimension of Sextus' thought, it becomes possible not only to give a new account of skeptical assent quite different from the familiar propositional attitude accounts, but to mine important parts of Sextus' work that have not been studied. Study of these neglected parts of Sextus' corpus makes available a more complete picture of his Pyrrhonism.

As previously remarked, the ambitions of chapter one are largely critical and negative. I begin by discussing and analyzing the two most influential and common sorts of interpretations of skeptical assent with a view to understanding both the basic framework they share and how they differ from each other. This shared framework I label the "Standard Account" and the interpretations based upon this framework I call the "Standard Interpretations."

In the second part of the chapter I then adduce a specific difficulty facing the two kinds of Standard Interpretation, namely, the fact that in his discussion in *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* (PH 1.4) Sextus makes plain that the very concepts and claims in terms of which the skeptical outlook is described are themselves to be understood in terms of a distinction between skeptical and dogmatic assent. Thus, Sextus' descriptions of skeptical assent are themselves instances or expressions of such assent: Sextus is describing, as it were, features of his very act of describing. The self-reflexivity of Sextus' discussion entails that skeptical assent applies not only to existential claims, i.e., claims about whether or not such and such a thing exists, but also to what I call "conceptual" claims, i.e., claims

about the content and nature of our concepts (captured, for instance, in a scientific or philosophical definition). Of particular interest are those conceptual claims about the nature of skeptical assent which are given by the Standard Interpretations.

Finally, I argue in the last part of chapter one that on neither of the Standard Interpretations of skeptical assent can such assent coherently be understood as self-reflexive and conceptual, so that either skeptical assent is not self-reflexive, which goes against what Sextus says, or it is self-reflexive, which means the Standard Interpretations need to be jettisoned.

At the end of chapter one, I suggest that part of the error in the Standard Interpretations might result from a failure to consider that Sextus might wish his words to be taken in certain philosophically non-standard ways. In chapter two, I make good on this suggestion by examining Sextus' claim that the skeptical outlook is, in important ways, closely connected to and reflects ordinary or everyday life (what Sextus calls *bios*), in particular, one facet of such a life, namely, ordinary or everyday language and usage. This is a topic largely neglected in the literature, despite the fact that it seems central (i) to figuring out how Sextus means his claims to be taken and, therefore, (ii) to properly understanding those claims. Such ordinary or everyday language may be understood in either of two ways (a "dogmatic" and an "undogmatic" way), but I argue that only the undogmatic way captures what makes ordinary language allied to the skeptical outlook.

I take as an example of the incorrect way of understanding ordinary language one scholar's interpretation of Sextus' remarks and arguments about *place (topos)*. I argue against this scholar's interpretation by noting that he fails to recognize that skeptical arguments (designed to generate suspension of assent) apply to conceptual truths, e.g., definitions, as much as existential ones. As part of this argument, I give a more thorough-going account of that distinction between truths and provide evidence of Sextus' commitment to suspension of assent about both. The result of the argument against this interpretation is a negative understanding of what ordinary language is *not*.

In the penultimate part of chapter two, I draw on the negative understanding of ordinary language in order to sketch a positive one that is faithful to Sextus' own conception of ordinary language as vague, imprecise and loose. A positive understanding is hampered by certain aspects of Sextus' conception, namely, the fact that his skepticism involves suspension of assent to definitional claims that might effectively explain what he means by what he says. Nevertheless, there is enough indirect positive indication of the nature of ordinary language allowing us to understand the nature of such a language, in particular, how to interpret the claims made in ordinary and everyday situations. I sketch these "indirect positive indications" and argue that they serve as important constraints on any interpretation of Sextus' words.

The final part of chapter two is devoted to two objections to my contention that Pyrrhonism and ordinary life and language are seen by Sextus as closely connected. I elaborate these objections in contrast to a third objection that I think is misplaced. I conclude that for one of the two objections there is a good response and that, while there is no persuasive response to the second, this is not a problem unique to my account, but results from a genuine tension in Sextus' thought.

The larger aim of the third and final chapter is application of the lessons from chapter two to interpretation Sextus' conception of assent and suspension of assent. The chapter begins, however, with a discussion of Aristotle's picture of the relationship between philosophical theory and the data (what he calls the "*phainomena*") that such a theory explains and justifies. My understanding of Aristotle's view is meant to be uncontroversial and non-committal, but I argue that Aristotle's concept of *phainomena* is in important ways a precursor to Sextus' own concept. Sextus describes the skeptic as "following the *phainomena*" and skeptical assent as directed towards the *phainomena*, so that this concept is quite important to understanding such assent. Unfortunately, as in the case of ordinary language, *phainomena* can be understood in either of two ways, only one of which, I argue, captures Sextus' own concept.

The lion's share of chapter three is devoted to interpreting a single passage in the *Outline of Pyrrhonism* (PH 1.13) and it does so by applying *both* the important features of ordinary language (discussed in chapter two) and the lessons from the investigation of skeptical *phainomena* (earlier in chapter three) to generate a new understanding of skeptical assent. I focus on the three different expressions (“*to endokein*,” “*kata phantasiai*”, and “*pathē*”) used by Sextus to explain skeptical assent. In order to make sense of these expressions, I focus on ordinary, everyday uses of them in Hellenistic literature. I conclude by arguing that skeptical assent is best understood as a “going along with” (*to endokein*) what is obvious or apparent in everyday life (*phainomena, phantasiai*) and that skeptical assent bears a special relation to action and behavior.

# Chapter One

## Skepticism Turned In On Itself: A Critique of the Standard Interpretations

### 0. Introduction

The renaissance of scholarly interest in ancient skepticism over the past half-century has benefited students and scholars by greatly enlarging our knowledge of the structure and details of the various strains and schools of skepticism. While the Pyrrhonian skepticism articulated and defended by Sextus Empiricus has certainly been among the beneficiaries of this enrichment, the interpretive positions on the basic structure and character of the Pyrrhonian outlook were presented quite early and have remained largely unchanged ever since. In consequence, our knowledge of the details of skepticism has improved but our philosophical understanding of the outlook as a whole has, I think, stalled. This scholarly stasis becomes particularly evident when one focuses on interpretations of the skeptic's concept of assent, for it is precisely the skeptic's particular variety of assent, and her particular understanding of that variety, that fundamentally distinguish Pyrrhonian skepticism from other philosophical views. My aim in this chapter, therefore, is to re-examine the basis and coherence of the standard interpretations of skeptical assent and to argue that they rest on a misapprehension of the scope or nature of skepticism. To this end, the chapter is divided into four parts. First, I provide an introductory characterization of Pyrrhonian skepticism at a level of abstraction sufficient to show the common framework of the standard interpretations. In part two I provide a taxonomy and characterization of the interpretations that illuminates both the logical and conceptual structure of each as well as their mutual relations. In part three I discuss a peculiar feature of Sextus' writing, namely, its "self-reflexivity." The effect of self-reflexivity is to expand the scope of skepticism to include the very concepts and terms used to articulate the Pyrrhonian outlook. Finally, I turn towards critique in part four and argue that none of the standard

interpretations can be coherently reconciled with the skeptic's self-reflexivity. The upshot of this argument is the need for a new approach to interpreting skepticism, one that is more sensitive to how the skeptic intends his words to be taken.

## 1. Two Elements of Pyrrhonian Skepticism: *Sunkatathesis & Epochê*

### a. The Structure of Skepticism

Among the various controversies attending interpretation of Sextus' Pyrrhonian skepticism, one has seemed particularly important for distinguishing the basic character of the skeptical outlook: the dispute over the proper interpretation of the phenomena of "assent" (*sunkatathesis*) and "suspension of assent" (*epochê*), as these are practiced and understood by Sextus (or, more generally, the Pyrrhonian<sup>1</sup>). The two phenomena are quite closely related, a point which is brought out in translation, for *epochê* is precisely the "suspension" or "withholding" of *sunkatathesis*. Commitment to *epochê* is so often taken to distinguish the Pyrrhonian philosophy, that Sextus registers "those who suspend assent" (*hoi ephektikoi*) as among the names for the Pyrrhonian skeptics (*PH* 1.7). Since, however, the Stoics also advocate *epochê*, at least with regard to a certain class of impressions (non-cataleptic *phantasiai*), and the skeptics appear to disagree with (or anyways suspend assent on) the Stoic view, we need to distinguish a "skeptical" *epochê*.<sup>2</sup> Of equal importance is the fact that Pyrrhonian skeptics also assent, specifically to what they call "what is apparent" (*phainomena*), which

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<sup>1</sup> Sextus appears to identify as a Pyrrhonian, not least saliently in his use of the first person plural forms when elaborating the skeptical position (*PH* 1.6, 9, 14-15, etc.). Perhaps the most powerful evidence, however, is Sextus' insistence in *PH* that his remarks should be understood as reflecting "how things appear" (*PH* 1.4) which is precisely a distinguishing feature of skeptical discourse (*PH* 1.15, 19-20). (I discuss the latter feature of skeptical discourse at length in part 3 below.) Moreover, he takes the polemical view that Academic skeptics are not *genuine* skeptics, but combine negative dogmatism (*PH* 1.1-4, 226) with a mitigated form of positive dogmatism (*PH* 1.226-7). As a result of all of this, throughout this dissertation I will switch between talk of *Sextus'* and the *skeptic's* or *Pyrrhonian's* understanding or interpretation, taking the former to be an instance of the latter. (For a fairer assessment of Academic skepticism, see Striker (1980) and Brittain (2006) for meticulous discussion of the various strands of argument in Cicero's *Academia*. For an explanation of how such a dogmatic misreading arose, see the classic diagnosis in Couissin (1929).)

<sup>2</sup> For Stoic views on suspension of assent, see, for instance, Plutarch *St. rep.* 1056E-F, *SVF* 2.131, and Cicero *Acad.* 1.40-1 and 2.77-8.

provide the standard (*kritêrion*) by means of which they live their lives (*PH* 1.21-2). Again, as in the case of the Stoics, “skeptical” *sunkatathesis* is usually supposed to be different from the Stoic variety, though precisely *how* it differs depends on one’s interpretation.<sup>3</sup>

The structure of the Pyrrhonian outlook may be understood, therefore, as a combination of two separate elements or strands: (a) the skeptic’s commitment to some form of *sunkatathesis* (skeptical *sunkatathesis*) and (b) her commitment to some form of *epochê* (skeptical *epochê*). I use the expression “some form” advisedly, since the bone of contention between interpreters is precisely the nature of the skeptical *sunkatathesis* and *epochê*, in particular, how they differ from other forms (most saliently, those of the Stoics), indeed, even whether the *sunkatathesis* suspended in skeptical *epochê* is identical in kind to skeptical *sunkatathesis*. One of the benefits of articulating the structure of the skeptical outlook in terms of these two elements is that not only does it both capture something essential to the logical structure of the outlook and abstract from ancillary disputes and concerns, but it provides a helpful taxonomy of scholarly interpretations of skeptical assent. In a sense, this taxonomic benefit is unsurprising, since the distinction between skeptical *sunkatathesis* and *epochê* is logically fundamental to the entire skeptical outlook, and so must figure in any plausible interpretation of skepticism. In the next section (§(b)), I will supply this picture of the structure of the Pyrrhonian outlook with a little more detail, but only so much as suffices to capture what all prevailing interpretations of Pyrrhonian skepticism share. This shared picture, composed of what I will call the “Standard Accounts” of skeptical *sunkatathesis* and *epochê*, is the framework within which scholarly disagreement is carried out. By providing this framework, I hope to allow for much greater precision in understanding the divergences between rival interpretation discussed in part two.

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<sup>3</sup> The Stoic account of assent is discussed in more detail in the next section (§(b)).

## b. The Standard Account of *Sunkatathesis*

The Standard Accounts of *sunkatathesis* and *epoché* arise naturally (indeed, seemingly inevitably) from reflection on those early passages of the *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* that offer clarification of the meaning of central skeptical terms. The crucial passages are principally the first 24 sections, which provide a self-conscious articulation of the use and meaning of skeptical terms, among them “*sunkatathesis*” and “*epoché*”. I will begin with a discussion of the Standard Account of *sunkatathesis* because it is both less controversial and conceptually more basic than the account of *epoché*, since one can scarcely understand *suspension* of assent without first understanding assent itself.

Sextus’ clearest and most direct statement of skeptical *sunkatathesis* occurs when he addresses the question about whether or not the skeptic “dogmatizes” (*dogmatizein*, PH 1.12):

We say the skeptic does not dogmatize not according to that meaning of “dogma” [*kat’ ekeinon to sêmainomenon tou dogmatos*] whereby some say that the acquiescing [*to eudokein*] to some matter is even [*kat’*] dogma (for the skeptic assents [*sunkatatithetai*] to the affections forced upon her in accordance with appearance [*tois...kata phantasian katênankasmenois pathesi*], as for example [*hoion*] she would not say “I seem not to be heated or chilled” [*dokô mê thermainesthai ê psuchesthai*] when heated or chilled [*thermainomenos ê psuchomenos*]... (PH 1.13)<sup>4</sup>

It is the parenthetic clause that has proven so crucial for understanding the nature of skeptical *sunkatathesis*, for interpreters take Sextus to be explaining there the sense in which the skeptic “dogmatizes” or “commits to a dogma”, namely, the sense in which she assents (*sunkatatithetai*) in the relevant way. Two of the three key terms here – *phantasia* and *sunkatatithetai* (the other is *pathos*) – are usually interpreted so that they come to have a significance very similar to that in the Stoic theory of mind, though no interpreters explicitly note this. Moreover, the relation between *sunkatathesis* and *phantasia* and their combined generation of beliefs and actions is wholly Stoic in form. Presumably, the appearance of Stoic pedigree is to be taken to result from the adoption of Stoic theoretical language as a sort of philosophical *lingua franca* during the Hellenistic period: even

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<sup>4</sup> All translations from Sextus’ *PH* are my own, unless otherwise noted, though I have benefited from consultation of the translations of both Bury (1933) and Annas & Barnes (2000).

thinkers manifestly hostile to the Stoics might nevertheless adopt their terms with the meanings they give them.

On the Stoic account, assent (*sunkatathesis*) is the positive cognitive attitude of holding some claim to be true<sup>5</sup> and so is a psychological state directed towards a claim or proposition (an *axiōma*) that something is the case. It is thus natural to construe Stoic assent as, quite simply, belief.<sup>6</sup> Stoic sources sometimes misleadingly characterize the object of assent as a *phantasia*, but this is usually taken as an elliptical characterization of the object of assent as an *axiōma* providing the representational content of a *phantasia*.<sup>7</sup> A *phantasia* is a psychological unit, which in a rational subject represents the world as being a certain way (hence the frequent translation of the term as either “impression” or “presentation”). This representation can be given precise discursive form in an incorporeal *axiōma*, which is the proper object of assent. Stoic assent is, therefore, a variety of propositional attitude, specifically, the attitude of holding something to be true.<sup>8</sup>

The customary reading of 1.13, which generates the Standard Account of skeptical *sunkatathesis*, takes the Stoic provenance of the terms seriously, at least so far as concerns the idea that assent is a propositional attitude directed towards a *phantasia/axiōma*. Thus, all interpreters agree to this much: whatever kind of propositional attitude is denoted in 1.13, it is a positive attitude involving some kind of commitment to a claim. To be sure, the interpretation of assent as *some kind* of positive attitude even when it agrees with the Stoic account is not solely dependent on its Stoic provenance. After all, Sextus often describes the skeptic as “conceding” (*sunchōroumen*, 1.20) and “granting” (*didomen*, 1.19) that things “appear” (*phainetai*) a certain way. Indeed, in 1.13 implies

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<sup>5</sup> This is a little cavalier with the details: assent is a mental act that results in holding some claim to be true; nevertheless, even in Stoic sources, there is a tendency to equivocate between assent as a standing psychological condition (or attitude) and assent as a mental act. Something of the same act/result ambiguity attends the English term “belief”, making it a fitting translation of *sunkatathesis*.

<sup>6</sup> Sedley (1983) pg. 11; Brennan (2000) pp. 58-60.

<sup>7</sup> Sextus was aware of this fluidity of usage, see *M* 7.154.

<sup>8</sup> The (hopefully) uncontroversial account of the Stoic theory of mind in this paragraph is explained with admirably clarity in Brennan (2000) pp. 50-65. Other helpful discussions are found in Inwood (1985) pp. 42ff and Long (1971).

(though it does not assert) that the skeptic, when heated, would say “I seem to be heated” rather than deny such an appearance.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, the role of skeptical *sunkeatathesis* in explaining action (1.21-24) appears to make plain that it must be some kind of *positive* psychological state. Similarly, the same passages strongly suggest that skeptical assent is propositional, for in granting and conceding things, as well as making certain claims, the skeptic appears to be expressing the kind of assent whose content is captured by propositional claims. It is thus concluded that the assent so expressed must be cognitive and propositional.

Some care is required, however, in explaining this view of skeptical *sunkeatathesis* as a positive psychological state or attitude directed towards the representational content of an appearance (the *axiōma* corresponding to a *phantasia*), since Sextus does not, in fact, designate the object of assent as either *phantasia* or *axiōma* (or some *axiōma*-like entity), but rather a *pathos* (or *pathê*) “forced upon [the skeptic] *in accordance with* appearance.” I have translated “*pathos*” non-committally as “affection” and it corresponds to that which affects a subject or, perhaps better still, the “fact/condition of a subject being affected.” Gail Fine describes this sense of *pathos* well: “To have a *pathos* is to be affected in some way. When, for example, the sun warms a stone, the stone is affected and so it has a *pathos*.”<sup>10</sup> The standard approach to handling the fact that skeptical *sunkeatathesis* is directed towards *pathos* not *phantasia*, is to insist on a close connection between the latter two. In a sense, this connection is to be expected: surely, if something appears to one to be a certain way, then it follows that one is being affected in a certain way (namely, being affected such that something appears to one) and *vice versa*.

Though interpreters agree that there is some kind of connection between *phantasia* and *pathos*, the precise understanding of this connection varies between them. Thus, for instance, Fine describes *phantasia* as a species of the genus *pathos*, so that any *phantasia* is, *ipso facto*, a *pathos*, though

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<sup>9</sup> These facts of Sextus’ usage provide part of the justification for Fine’s interpretation of skeptical assent, see Fine (2000) pp. 91.

<sup>10</sup> Fine (2000) pg. 90.

the converse is not the case; this is how in assenting to a *pathos* the skeptic can simultaneously assent to a *phantasia*.<sup>11</sup> By contrast, Ben Morison interprets *phantasia* to designate a faculty the exercise of which produces specific representational states which are precisely the *pathê* to which the skeptic assents.<sup>12</sup> The disagreement between Fine and Morison on this topic is largely terminological: what Fine calls *phantasia* and describes as a species of *pathos*, Morison calls a *pathos* and describes as a deliverance of the *faculty* of *phantasia*. It is agreed by both interpreters (indeed, by most interpreters<sup>13</sup>) that assent is a positive propositional attitude directed towards the content of a representational state (which state, whether one calls it *phantasia* or the product of *phantasia*, is, nevertheless, a *pathos*).

While the previous disagreement between Morison and Fine may be terminological, another disagreement pertaining to *phantasia* and its content is rather more substantive. Morison and Fine are fitting representatives of opposing camps on the question of the nature of the propositions (the content of the skeptic's *pathê*) to which the skeptic assents. In particular, Fine thinks that these propositions or claims pertain *only* to the subjective states of the skeptic, while Morison allows for the propositions to be objective as well.<sup>14</sup> This dispute over the content of skeptical assent needs to be kept in mind when capturing what all interpreters accept in the Standard Account of skeptical *sunkatathesis*.

A second substantive dispute among interpreters also needs to be monitored and considered when formulating the Standard Account. In this second dispute as well, Morison and Fine are excellent exemplars of the opposing positions. While the previous dispute concerned the nature of the *content* of skeptical assent, this other dispute concerns the nature of the propositional attitude figuring in skeptical assent; it is a dispute about the nature of the *assent* in skeptical assent. Morison contends that what distinguishes skeptical assent are the sources that generate or underwrite it: the

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 90-91.

<sup>12</sup> Morison (2014) §§3.4.1 and 3.4.4.

<sup>13</sup> Evidence for this claim will be provided in part two.

<sup>14</sup> See Fine (2000) pp. 96-100 and Morison (2014) §3.4 and (2011) pp. 265-6.

basis of such an attitude. If that basis is, in some important sense, ‘philosophical’ (e.g., a philosophical argument, theory or consideration), then the assent is not skeptical, but dogmatic. By contrast, Fine does not regard the basis of skeptical assent as important so long as the content of it is subjective in the relevant sense. It may be that a philosophical argument, theory or consideration underwrites a given skeptical assent, but if the content is subjective, it is a skeptical assent and its basis immaterial.<sup>15</sup>

Before I offer a precise characterization of the standard account of skeptical assent, I would like to reiterate the importance of assent to action. Certainly, assent is taken by interpreters to in some sense explain linguistic activity. Thus, e.g., the skeptic’s remark “I seem to be heated” is taken to express the positive cognitive attitude towards the claim that she seems to be heated (itself the content of an appearance to that effect), but Sextus seems to have much more systematic ideas about the width of scope of assent in skeptical action.

Thus, attending to what is apparent [*tois phainomenois*], we live undogmatically [*adoxastós*] in accordance with the observance of everyday life [*kata tēn biōtikēn tērēsin*] – for we are not able to be wholly inactive. This observance of everyday life seems to be fourfold and to consist in guidance by nature, necessitation by feelings, transmission of laws and customs, and instruction in the arts... (*PH* 1.23)

Earlier (1.19) Sextus described *ta phainomena* as *phantasiai*, i.e., the object of skeptical assent, and this has strongly suggested that the above fourfold division is to be understood as unified by skeptical assent. In consequence, we are to understand skeptical assent as effecting or generating (as well as structuring) action in each of the four parts. In other words, it is the skeptic’s assent to nature’s guidance, the necessitation of feelings, etc., that moves her to act in accordance with them. Indeed, Sextus’ insistence (1.21-22) that the standard or rule of action for the skeptic is *ta phainomena* (hence, *phantasiai*) itself implies the crucial role of assent in action.

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, for the views of Morison and Fine.

In light of the previous reflections, we can now offer the following characterization of the Standard Account of skeptical *sunkatathesis*.

**The Standard Account of Skeptical *Sunkatathesis*:** Skeptical assent is a kind ( $A_{Snk}$ ) of positive propositional attitude of taking a certain kind of claim ( $C_{Snk}$ ) to be the case (whether or not this means ‘taking to be true’<sup>16</sup>), where  $C_{Snk}$  is the content of a *phantasia* (or *phainomenon*), which is passively received (and hence, a *pathos*). Such an attitude serves to explain the actions of the skeptic such that the practical standard or guide of skeptical action is what is apparent (*phainomenon*).

In this section, I have noted two *loci* of disagreement between rival interpreters, the first, pertaining to the kind of propositional attitude that is at issue in skeptical *sunkatathesis*, and, the second pertaining to the nature of the content or proposition to which the skeptic assents. In order to allow for substitution into the above schema of a precise characterization of both the kind of attitude and the kind claim in question, I have only formally specified the kind of attitude and claim, respectively, by means of the constants  $A_{Snk}$  and  $C_{Snk}$ . The use of these schematic constants is designed, as everything in this section, to capture the shared form of diverse and rival interpretations of skeptical *sunkatathesis*; as a result, it will be much easier to capture the precise character of the dispute or disagreement between interpreters.

### c. The Standard Account of *Epoché*

It is much easier, in light of the Standard Account of assent, to provide an account of skeptical *epoché*, at least an account sufficient to capture what the various rival interpretations have in common. Even more so than in the case of *sunkatathesis*, interpreters seem to rely on the role that *epoché* plays in Stoic philosophy; this is welcome as Sextus is less forthcoming in his description of *epoché*. The clearest and most explicit characterization *epoché* is given at *PH* 1.10.

“*Epoché*” is a standstill of the intellect [*stasis dianoias*], on account of which [*di’én*] we neither reject [*airomen*] nor posit [*tithemen*] anything.

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<sup>16</sup> This *caveat* is important, since at least one interpreter (Myles Burnyeat) denies that skeptical assent is meant to be characterized as holding a claim to be true (rather than holding the claim to be the case in a sense precluding truth). See Burnyeat (1980) pp. 23-27.

Jonathan Barnes' comment on this passage is apposite: "It is not wholly clear what Sextus means by [*airomen*] and [*tithemen*]." <sup>17</sup> He concludes that they are each forms of assent, one affirmative and the other negative. Interpreters, in general, agree with Barnes' reading of the terms. Support for this reading can be found by reflecting on the fact that if we understand the intellect (*dianoia*) as either the *locus* of discursive reflection or the phenomenon of that reflection itself (an interpretation certainly buttressed by the philosophical tradition <sup>18</sup>), then it is natural to construe "reject" and "maintain" as signifying propositional stances or attitudes taken with respect to some claim *p*. On such a reading, *dianoia* is arrested or brought to a standstill (*stasis*) precisely because neither *p* nor its denial is taken to be the case; the operation of *dianoia* is thus suspended. On this interpretation, more precisely, to "reject" *p* is to maintain that *p* is not the case and to "maintain" *p* is to take or hold *p* to be true. This interpretation of skeptical *epochē* coheres well with what Sextus says elsewhere in *PH*. Thus, for instance, when Sextus explains the senses of "reject" and "maintain" later at *PH* 1.192, he makes crucial use of overt speech acts of assertion (specifically, "it is day" and "it is not day"). If we construe acts of assertion as expressions of assent to the truth of some claim, then Sextus is naturally interpreted as conceiving of *epochē* as a refusal to assert or deny in the relevant sense. Clearer evidence is found in Sextus' insistence, in his analytic-genetic story of the emergence of the skeptic (*PH* 1.26-27): the skeptic suspends judgment only once he finds himself unable to "grasp which [of his *phantasiai*] are true and which are false." <sup>19</sup> Finally, *epochē* arises as the result of equally persuasive arguments for a claim and for the negation of that claim (arguments formalized in the skeptical Modes) <sup>20</sup>; these arguments are, more precisely, arguments for the *truth* of the given claim or for the

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<sup>17</sup> Annas and Barnes (2000) pg. xxiv.

<sup>18</sup> See, for instance, Plato *Soph.* 263e3-5, Aristotle *de An.* 433a2 & *Met.* 1025b25, and Chrysippus, quoted in Galen *PHP* 2.515-20.

<sup>19</sup> The story is repeated in Sextus' account of the causal (*aitiôdê*), as opposed to the constitutive (*sustaseôis*), principle of Pyrrhonism at *PH* 1.12.

<sup>20</sup> For evidence of this interpretation of the Modes, see *ibid.*, *PH* 1.26-27, and *PH* 1.31-35.

*truth* of the negation of the claim, so that acceptance of one or the other argument implies acceptance of the truth of the conclusion of the argument.

The interpretation of skeptical *epochê* as neither taking a claim nor its negation to be true coheres exactly with how the Stoics understand *epochê*. As noted in the previous section, the Stoics conceive assent as the holding some claim  $p$  to be true, so that when this is suspended one neither assents to  $p$  nor assents to *not*  $p$ . It was also noted in that section that interpreters disagree about the nature of two separate elements involved in skeptical assent: the content of such assent and the nature of the assent itself (specifically, whether the source generating the assent distinguishes the assent as skeptical); room is made for both loci of disagreement in the Standard Account of skeptical assent. Moreover, since skepticism must be understood as combining a variety of *sunkatathesis* with a variety of *epochê*, it is perhaps unsurprising that the Standard Account of skeptical *epochê* also allows for two such points of disagreement. Indeed, though it is never explicitly stated, it is a natural assumption that the only way the skeptical outlook can be rendered coherent is by ensuring that either the kind or content of the assent suspended (the target of skeptical *epochê*) is different from the kind or content of skeptical assent.

In light of these reflections, we can give the following characterization of the Standard Account of *epochê*, which is agreed upon by all the interpretations discussed in part two.

**The Standard Account of Skeptical *Epochê*:** Skeptical *epochê* is the condition of not giving “dogmatic” assent to a claim or its negation, where dogmatic assent is a kind ( $A_{Epo}$ ) of positive propositional attitude of taking a kind ( $C_{Epo}$ ) of claim or its negation to be true.

As in the case of the Standard Account of *sunkatathesis*, I have used schematic letters to designate the kinds of attitude and claim that are suspended in skeptical *epochê*; the designations of ‘ $A_{Epo}$ ’ and ‘ $C_{Epo}$ ’ depend for their specification on the interpretation of skeptical *epochê* one adopts.

The Standard Account of skeptical *epochê* labels the target of skeptical *epochê* “dogmatic *sunkatathesis*,” in other words, that variety of *sunkatathesis* practiced and advocated by the dogmatic

schools of philosophy. The precise interpretation of skeptical *epochê* does not alter the fact, agreed upon by all interpreters, that skeptical *epochê* is precisely suspension of the kind of assent practiced, advocated and explained in dogmatic philosophy. This should not be surprising, in light of Sextus' insistence that skeptical *epochê* concerns matters "investigated by the sciences" (*kata tas epistêmas zêtoumenôn*, PH 1.13) and the fact that such sciences are constituents of the teachings of the dogmatic schools.

#### d. The Relation of *Sunkatathesis* & *Epochê*

I have so far discussed skeptical *sunkatathesis* and *epochê* separately, without referring to their mutual relations, but this should not imply that decisions about the proper interpretation of the constants ( $A_{Snk}$ ,  $C_{Snk}$ ) figuring in description of the Standard Account of *sunkatathesis* are *independent* of decisions about the proper interpretation of the constants ( $A_{Epo}$ ,  $C_{Epo}$ ) figuring in the description of the Standard Account of *epochê*; I have already suggested that and why the interpretation of the one must also take into account the other, so that interpretations of both Accounts come together as a package. The skeptic advocates or practices *both* assent and suspension of assent, so that a careless interpreter who attends only to one or the other might discover that she cannot make them cohere with each other, a perilous result indeed for the plausibility of both the interpretation and the skeptical outlook itself. In order to see the options available to someone wishing to avoid incoherence, it helps to combine the two Standard Accounts discussed previously as follows.

**Standard Accounts of Skeptical *Sunkatathesis* & *Epochê*:** Skeptical *sunkatathesis* is the positive attitude  $A_{Snk}$  towards claims of kind  $C_{Snk}$ ; while skeptical *epochê* is the condition of not giving dogmatic *sunkatathesis*, where this is the attitude  $A_{Epo}$  to claims of kind  $C_{Epo}$  or their negations.

This combination of the two Standard Accounts shows that there are several ways for an interpretation to ensure the coherence of skeptical *sunkatathesis* and *epochê*, but I want to focus on the two that have been adopted by most interpreters, both because they are the most plausible routes to

coherence (in light of the textual sources) and because they are the topic of the next section. These interpretations can be represented schematically in terms of the relevant constants.

$$(a) C_{Snk} = C_{Epo} \text{ and } A_{Snk} \neq A_{Epo}$$

$$(b) C_{Snk} \neq C_{Epo} \text{ and } A_{Snk} = A_{Epo}$$

Interpretations adopting expedient (a) distinguish the nature of the propositional attitude figuring in skeptical *sunkeatathesis* from that figuring in skeptical *epoché*. Such interpretations construe the kind of claim to which the skeptic assents to be the same as the kind of claim with respect to which she suspends assent; as a result, the skeptic may assent to the very same claim with respect to which she suspends assent. Since, on this interpretation, the skeptic would be taking two distinct sorts of attitude to the same claim, there is no incoherence: the skeptic would not be suspending the kind of assent that she is giving to the relevant claim. In the next section, I will refer to (a)-interpretations as “Dual-Assent Interpretations.” In contrast, interpretations that adopt (b), distinguish between the kind of claim to which assent is given and the kind of claim with respect to which the skeptic suspends assent. In other words, the class of claims to which the skeptic assents and the class of claims with respect to which the skeptic suspends assent are *disjoint*: no claim figuring in the one, figures in the other. Such interpretations accept that the attitude in assent is the same as the attitude targeted in suspension of assent, but since the two attitudes always (and necessarily) target distinct kinds of claim, there is no danger of the same claim being the target of both assent and suspension of assent. In the next section, (b)-interpretations are discussed under the label “Dual-Content Interpretations.”

The goal of this section has been to lay the groundwork for a precise understanding of the logical structure of the competing interpretations discussed in the next section. The excessively formal character of the discussion will be (thankfully) remedied in the next section, but it has a point: the Standard Accounts shows how widespread and deep the agreement is between competing

interpretations on the basic structure of skeptical *sunkatathesis* and *epoché*. It is precisely the content of this agreement that will form one of the targets of my discussion in this chapter.

## 2. Two Kinds of Standard Interpretation

### a. The Textual Basis: *PH*1.13

In the previous section, I gave what was largely a formal account of the two prevailing interpretations of skeptical *sunkatathesis* and *epoché*. Quite apart from its lack of content, the account failed to show how and why those two different sorts of interpretations arise from a reading of Sextus' work. In this section, I will correct this deficit: first giving an introductory sketch of the textual basis for each interpretation and, second (in §§(b)-(c)), providing a detailed account of the two kinds of interpretation. Since both sorts of interpretation are instances of the Standard Accounts of *sunkatathesis* & *epoché*, I will collectively label them "Standard Interpretations," not intending by this label to obscure the fact that, though generically similar, they are specifically different.

The central passage for any interpretation of the distinctively skeptical variety of *sunkatathesis* and *epoché* is undoubtedly *PH* 1.13, part of which was discussed in §1(b) above. This passage has been the target of much scholarly reflection and this seems justified not only because it appears to hold the key to reconciling *sunkatathesis* and *epoché*, but also because it promises to deepen and make more precise our understanding of the nature, force and scope of each element. The precise interpretation of the passage is, however, a matter of considerable controversy. I think part of the reason for the controversy is a fundamental ambiguity or duality in the passage that supports two distinct interpretations. In 1.13, Sextus responds to the anti-skeptical charge that the skeptic is guilty of "dogmatizing", that is, practicing dogmatic assent and so assenting in a manner that is inconsistent with her commitment to skeptical *epoché*.

[1] We say the skeptic does not dogmatize not according to that meaning of “dogma” [*kat’ ekeinon to sêmainomenon tou dogmatos*] whereby some say that the acquiescing [*to eudokein*] in some matter is even [*kat’*] dogma (for the skeptic assents [*sunkatatithetai*] to the affections forced upon her in accordance with appearance [*tois...kata phantasia katênankasmenois pathesi*], as for example [*hoion*] she would not say “I seem not to be heated or chilled” [*dokô mê thermainesthai ê psuchesthai*] when heated or chilled [*thermainomenos ê psuchomenos*]);<sup>21</sup>

[2] but, rather, we say that the skeptic does not dogmatize [in the sense of “dogma”] according to which some say that dogma is the assent [*tên sunkatathesin*] to some unclear matter of investigation in the sciences [*tôn kata tas epistêmas zêtoumenôn adêlôn*]. For the Pyrrhonian assents [*sunkatatithetai*] to nothing unclear [*oudenî... tôn adêlôn*]. (1.13)<sup>22</sup>

In this passage Sextus seems to draw a distinction between two meanings (*sêmainomenon*) of “dogma” such that according to one meaning (“the acquiescing in some matter”) the skeptic does *not* suspend assent, but according to the other (“to assent to some unclear matter of investigation in the sciences”), she does suspend assent. At first blush, the distinction appears to rest on a distinction between *what* the skeptic assents to. It is natural, therefore, to interpret Sextus as insisting on a distinction in the kind of content or claim and so to suppose that a Dual-Content Interpretation of *sunkatathesis* and *epochê* is appropriate. The skeptic suspends assent with regard to certain claims or content pertaining to “unclear matters investigated by the sciences”, but assents to those involving “the affections forced upon her in accordance with appearance.” The latter claims seem like<sup>23</sup> the sorts of things that Sextus goes on (*PH* 1.19-24) to describe as *ta phainomena* and as the standard or rule according to which the skeptic structures her actions. Even though Sextus mentions “appearance” (*phantasia*) rather than “what is apparent” (*to phainomenon*) in 1.13, which might suggest he means to refer to distinct items, he goes on to dispell<sup>24</sup> the latter suggestion, noting that:

<sup>21</sup> There is something of a puzzle about this sentence, for it is ambiguous between “I do not have the appearance of being...” and “I have the appearance of not being...” It is not obvious, however, that any significant matter of interpretation hangs on this ambiguity.

<sup>22</sup> I have divided the single Greek sentence (!) into two separate paragraphs for ease of exegesis and comprehension.

<sup>23</sup> As noted before (see §1(b) above), this is an oversimplification. Sextus explains assent as to *pathê* not to *phainomena* or *phantasia*; yet I 22 seems to strongly suggest that the connection between *phantasia* and *pathê* is such that the distinction between them can, in general, be overlooked without harming our subsequent discussion. See Frede (1979) pg. 196; Fine pp. 90-1.

<sup>24</sup> ‘..dispell...’ The identification of *phantasia* and *phainomena* is an oversimplification, for Sextus earlier (I 19) described *to phainomenon* as what leads to assent in accordance with *phantasia*. If we substitute co-referring or synonymous terms (*phantasia* for *to phainomenon*), then we get: *phantasia* is what leads to assent in accordance with *phantasia*, which is at least odd.

The standard of the skeptical way of life is what is apparent [*to phainomenon*], implicitly meaning by this the appearance [*tên phantasia*]. (1.22)<sup>25</sup>

According to Sextus, then, appearances (*phantasiai*) and what is apparent (*ta phainomena*) amount to more or less the same thing. In light of this, the opposition between [1] and [2] in 1.13 becomes clearer: Sextus is distinguishing between claims about “what is apparent” (*to phainomenon*, *phantasia*) and claims about “what is unclear or unapparent” (*to adêlon*). Indeed, Sextus’ reflections in the *Outlines* are shot through with such a distinction, though Sextus’ fondness for terminological variation means that it is not always put the same way: sometimes “what is apparent” is merely *prodêlon* (better translated as “something clear”), other times *phantasia* or *phainomenon*; similarly sometimes “what is inapparent” is merely *aphanes* (“something unclear”), other times *adêlon*. Nor are these the only ways in which Sextus signals the distinction he has in mind in his work, for he complicates matters further by distinguishing *to phainomenon* from what he variously calls: “what underlies” (*to hypokeimenon*), “what is external” (*to ekton*), and “what underlies externally” (*to ekton hypokeimenon*). Despite the terminological profusion, Sextus certainly appears to be drawing a distinction between the sorts of things targeted by assent and this strongly suggests the Dual-Content Interpretation discussed earlier, a distinction we might refer to as the *phainomenon/hypokeimenon* distinction.

The distinction between [1] and [2] in terms of the contents of assent and suspension of assent is not, however, the only distinction at work in 1.13, as is apparent when we examine the distinction between the two senses of “dogma.” It is important, in particular, to focus on the term *koinoteron* (“more generally”). The first sense of dogma (*to endokein*, assent to affections) is broader or

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Presumably, then, the remark at 1.22 is meant to restrict *phainomenon* to *phantasia* in later uses of each term throughout *PH*; while, in earlier passages, *phainomenon* has a wider or more general sense (perhaps including *phantasia*, but not restricted to it).

<sup>25</sup> Bury (1933) includes “*autô*” in the latter clause of this passage (hence, *dunamei tên phantasia autou houtô kalounetes*) apparently following Fabricius (on the basis of the Savilianus manuscript). Mutschmann shows incontrovertibly that such a reliance on Fabricius is mistaken and, indeed, that all other manuscripts, including some earlier than Savilianus, exclude the word. For discussion of the manuscripts, see Mutschmann (1909).

more general than the second one (assent to unclear objects). In other words, every assent to unclear objects (second sense of dogma) can *also* be described as “acquiescing in something” (*to eudokein tini pragmati*); but the converse is not the case. Sextus, in other words, is characterizing a generic or abstract kind of assent and distinguishing it from a more specific kind of assent. In the more generic or broader sense of assent, the skeptic *does* assent (“for the skeptic assents only to those affections forced upon her in accordance with appearance”); but in the more specific sense of assent, she does not. What this suggests, furthermore, is that we should not distinguish the two senses of dogma by distinguishing between the contents of assent, since if the *only* difference between skeptical and dogmatic assent resides in the content of assent, then it is not at all clear (i) why skeptical assent is a “more general” or “abstract” kind of assent or (ii) how it is possible to view every case describable in terms of dogmatic assent as describable in terms of skeptical assent. Yet (i) and (ii) seem to be clearly implied by the language of 1.13, so that the passage is more plausibly read as distinguishing between two different conceptions or kinds of assents: roughly speaking, a skeptical assent and a dogmatic one. In other words, what we have in 1.13 is case of Sextus espousing a distinction best captured by Dual-Assent Interpretations. Indeed, further evidence for the claim that it is assents that are at issue, not the contents thereof, might be found in Sextus use of adverbial modifiers such as the contrasting “undogmatically” (*adoxastôs*, 1.15, 24) and “dogmatically” (*dogmatikôs*, 2.193, 197) to describe skeptical assertions and assents: if it is *how* the skeptic assents or asserts, rather than *what* he asserts or assents to, then the appropriate interpretive approach is a Dual-Content one. Similarly, Sextus takes care to distinguish the kind of speech act the skeptic engages in – described as “announcing” (*apangellei*, 1.15; *apangellomen*, 4) – from the kind of speech act the dogmatist engages in – “strongly maintaining” (*diabebaioumetha*, 1.4; *diabebauoumenos*, 1.15).

In this section, I have only sketched the textual basis of the two kinds of Standard Interpretation, without going into any real detail about the character of each interpretation. Still less

have I discussed the problems or prospects of each of these interpretations. In the next two sections (§§(b)–(c)), I will offer a more precise and detailed description of each line of interpretation. My intention is not, or not merely, to explain those interpretations, but to bring out the essential elements of each that will loom so large in my critical remarks in §4 of this paper.

### **b. The Standard Interpretations I: Dual-Content Interpretations**

A number of scholars<sup>26</sup> have argued for some version of the Dual-Content Interpretation and despite their variety and number, they all share some basic views about the nature of key skeptical concepts. An effective and illuminating way into this shared interpretation is to begin with some examples of a distinctive kind claim about how things appear.

It appears (to me) that the oar is bent, but (I know) it is not.

It appears (to me) that the proof is valid, but (I know) it is not.

It appears (to me) that Stoicism is coherent, but (I know) it is not.

It appears (to me) that Jonathan Barnes is an 18<sup>th</sup> C man-of-letters, but (I know) he is not.

In each of these claims, the first clause – which states something about my appearances or how things appear to me – is consistent with the second clause, despite the fact that the second clause negates a claim embedded in the first (specifically, embedded in an “appears that”-clause). This fact is made much clearer when we substitute a constant for the relevant claim:

It appears (to me) that  $p$ , but (I know that) *not*  $p$ .

In claims of this form, the embedded claim about appearance is not falsified by the fact that what appears is not the case; indeed, even if I *know* that what appears is not the case, I am still not inconsistent in claiming that it nevertheless appears to me be the case. An appearance that

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<sup>26</sup> See, for instance, Stough (1969) pp. 107-125; Burnyeat (1980); Annas & Barnes (1985) pp. 23-4; Fine (2000); Thorsrud (2009) pp. 173-200; Perin (2010a, b); and Mates (1996) pp. 4-85.

something is the case is not, then, falsified by or inconsistent with a fact that the relevant something is *not* the case (even if that fact is available to the subject whose appearance it is).

One way of explaining the distinctive status of “appearance claims” of the sort figuring in the above claims is by suggesting that those claims do not report a fact about the world independent of the subject whose appearance it is, but rather a fact about that subject’s conscious apprehension: a fact *that* and *how* something is represented to the subject in her consciousness. The fact that the relevant *subject* is recording a fact about her own consciousness is what makes such appearance claims and the facts they record *subjective*. In contrast to subjective claims, objective claims pertain to the world and are *objective* in the sense of consciousness-independent: whether or not an objective fact obtains does not depend on the consciousness of a subject.

A simple formulation of the master thought of Dual-Content Interpretations is to say that they, one and all, regard the claims to which the skeptic assents as subjective in the previous sense. The subjective appearance claims of the form *it appears that such-and-such* are taken by Dual-Content Interpretations to capture the content of those representational psychological states (*pathê*) of the skeptic that Sextus labels “*phantasiai*.” On such an interpretation, the skeptic *really does* assent to a subjective psychological state (*pathos*), specifically, the state of *being appeared to in such-and-such a way*. Such subjective psychological states are, however, to be distinguished from objective psychological states, whose content is expressed by objective claims. The distinction between subjective and objective psychological states allows us to fill in the schematic Standard Accounts of skeptical *sunkatathesis* & *epochê* in the following way.

**Dual-Content Interpretations** : Skeptical *sunkatathesis* is the positive attitude of taking a subjective appearance claim (giving the content of a subjective psychological state of being appeared to) to be the case (whether or not this means taking it to be true); while skeptical *epochê* is the condition of taking neither an objective claim nor its negation to be true.

Such interpretations treat the *phainomenon/hypokeimenon* distinction as a distinction between the subjective content of certain of our psychological states (captured by corresponding subjective appearance claims) and the objective content of our psychological states (captured by objective or non-subjective claims); this distinction in turn captures a distinction between subjective psychological states and objective ones. On such an interpretation, the clarity (*prodélon, enarges*) of *phantasiai* and their attendant content is, in fact, the clarity resulting from availability to the subject's consciousness: in claiming that it subjectively appears to me that *p*, I am making a claim about how *p* is represented to me in my consciousness, quite apart from whether or not *p* obtains independently of my consciousness. Thus, when Sextus insists that (1.22) “no one disputes” (*oudeis...amphisbêtei*) how an object appears, that appearance is “not open to enquiry” (*azêtetos*) and that (1.20) the skeptic “accepts” (*sunchôroumen*) how things appear, he is best understood as making modal claims, specifically, that no one *can* dispute or enquire into how things appear (since both require the possibility that one might be mistaken about the object of enquiry) and that the skeptic (like everyone else) *must* accept how things appear (for she cannot reject how things appear to her).<sup>27</sup>

If the Dual-Content Interpretation is correct, then the skeptic is in a very secure epistemological position indeed. In fact, she is in the same position as Descartes in the Second Meditation, when, despite having doubted the existence of the objective world and even mathematical truths, he can nevertheless conclude that

although perhaps, as I supposed before, absolutely nothing that I imagined is true, still the very power of imagining really does exist, and *constitutes a part of my thought*. Finally, it is this same “I” who senses or who is cognizant of bodily things as if through the senses. For example, I now see a light, I hear a noise, I feel heat. These things are false, since I am asleep. Yet I certainly do *seem* to see, hear, and feel warmth. *This cannot be false.*

(Meditation Two, §29, *italics mine*)<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> All of these modal facts capture the sense in which a subject's knowledge of her own subjective states is “immune to error”; the discussion of Descartes below brings out this immunity even more clearly.

<sup>28</sup> See Descartes (2006).

What “cannot be false” is the subjective fact that Descartes *appears* to see, hear and feel warmth; in our terms, the subjective content of his states. In describing these various subjective facts as “part of his thought”, Descartes means to characterize them as elements of his consciousness; it is the occurrence of these thoughts – these appearances – that cannot be false so long as they remain in his consciousness. We need not attribute to Dual-Content interpreters an egregious anachronism by recruiting Sextus to Descartes’ cause; instead, we might insist that, if they are correct in their interpretation of Sextus, then Descartes’ epistemological insight stretches further back than is usually reckoned: rather than call Sextus “Cartesian”, one might call Descartes “Sextan”.<sup>29</sup> More importantly, the contrast between the Cartesian philosophy and the Sextan lies rather in the fact that the Sextan skeptic remains in the realm of subjective appearance, while the Cartesian attempts to re-erect the world (the objective realm) on the basis of it. Subsequent history has proven Sextus the more philosophically astute.

As a final thought on the Dual-Content Interpretation, I would like to return to the fact that in the passage I called the “textual basis” of the Interpretation (1.13), there seems to be strong evidence that Sextus has in mind a distinction between assents or attitudes rather than between the content of assents or attitudes. In the Dual-Content Interpretation, by contrast, the *kind* of assent that is suspended and the *kind* of assent that is given is the same, which seems to tell against this interpretation. In fact, however, according to the Dual-Content Interpretation, what is *fundamental* to the distinction in 1.13 is a distinction between subjective and objective content and states. By “fundamental”, the Dual-Content interpreter only means logically or explanatorily basic, so that the subjective/objective distinction is the primary distinction *in terms of which* the distinction between kinds of assent is to be articulated. Indeed, this seems quite natural: one way of reading 1.13 is to

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<sup>29</sup> Perhaps even further back still. For an illuminating and nuanced discussion of the thought that Descartes may not have originated discussion of subjective certainty in epistemology, see Fine (2000, 2003).

suppose that the distinction between the two kinds of assent is a result of the distinction between two kinds of objects of assent. In other words, according to the Dual-Content Interpretation, we individuate assent-kinds by reference to object-kinds; not the other way around. Thus, the Dual-Content Interpretation can allow for a distinction between kinds of assent that supervenes on a distinction between kinds of content.<sup>30</sup>

### c. The Standard Interpretations II: Dual-Assent Interpretations

As in the case of Dual-Content Interpretations, a number<sup>31</sup> of contemporary scholars have adopted Dual-Assent Interpretations, though the *locus classicus* is undoubtedly Michael Frede's work. Frede offers a helpfully succinct formulation of the view in "The Skeptic's Beliefs":

[I]t is not the content of theoretical views (though, as we shall see, content is not entirely irrelevant) that makes them dogmatic views; it is, rather, the attitude of the dogmatist who believes his rationalist science actually answers questions, actually gives him good reasons for believing his theoretical doctrines.<sup>32</sup>

In light of the explanation of the previous discussion, it is fairly easy to re-state Frede's remarks in terms of the Dual-Assent Interpretations, once again by filling in the schematic letters in the Standard Account of *sunkatathesis* & *epoché*:

**Dual-Assent Interpretations:** Skeptical *sunkatathesis* is the positive attitude of taking claims to be true but not on the basis of philosophical argument, consideration and/or reasoning; while skeptical *epoché* is the condition of not giving dogmatic *sunkatathesis*, where dogmatic *sunkatathesis* is the taking of claims or their negations to be true on the basis of philosophical argument, consideration, and/or reasoning.

On these interpretations the *phainomenon/hupokeimenon* is conceived as a distinction between two distinct kinds of assent: *dogmatic assent*, which is determined and produced by philosophical argument,

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<sup>30</sup> The central thought of this paragraph really only ameliorates the worry that 1.13 looks like it's espousing a distinction between kinds of assent rather than between contents of assent, it does not dispatch this worry. It is not at all obvious, for instance, that this paragraph is an adequate response to the issues raised in (i) and (ii) on pp. 17-18 (§(a)) above.

<sup>31</sup> Michael Frede (1979, 1984), Rachel Barney (1992), Tad Brennan (1994, 1999), Benjamin Morison (2011), Gisela Striker (2001, 2004), and John Cooper (2012) pp. 291-304. One might also include Hankinson (2001) (see pp. 246-277), but his interpretation of Sextus on assent seems obscure and confused. For a diagnosis of those confusions and obscurities, see Fine (1996), in particular, pp. 283-290.

<sup>32</sup> Frede (1979) pg. 195, *cf.* pg. 199.

considerations and reasoning, and *skeptical assent*, which is not so determined. Dual-Assent Interpretations take seriously the idea that the contrast Sextus wishes to draw is between, roughly, assents that are the result of the methods of inquiry in the sciences and philosophy and those that are not. Thus, when the skeptic assents to “affections, in accordance with how they appear”, she is constrained by ordinary facts about the world, e.g., that it is day or that this water is cold, facts, in other words, that strike the skeptic without the intervention of a distinctive sort of philosophical reflection or theorizing.

One important result of this interpretation is that the appearance statements the skeptic (implicitly) makes are not to be understood *solely* on the model of subjective appearance claims. The skeptic, of course, may sometimes make such an appearance claim, but the content of her skeptical assent is not *limited* to such sorts of claims. Indeed, ordinary claims about how things are in the world are available as the content of her assents. In other words, the Dual-Assent Interpretation takes the logically/explanatorily basic distinction to be between *kinds* of assent, i.e., between the sort of cognitive stance one takes towards claims, rather than between the kinds of content of those assents. As a result, the distinction between *phainomena* and *hupokeimena* is understood by reference to kinds of assent: *phainomena* are those things towards which skeptical assent is directed, while *hupokeimena* are those things towards which scientific-philosophical (dogmatic) assent is directed.

In the previous discussion, we noted that Sextus insists that (1.22) no one disputes the *phainomena*, that they are “not open to enquiry” (*azêtetos*) and that (1.20) the skeptic “accepts” (*sunchôroumen*) *phainomena*. All of these claims can be redescribed or reinterpreted in the Dual-Assent framework. Thus, in saying that *phainomena* are not open to enquiry (*azêteta*<sup>33</sup>) or are not disputed,

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<sup>33</sup> It is worth noting that the Greek adjective *azêtetos* can mean *either* “not enquired into” or “not capable of being enquired into”; this ambiguity is part of what allows both kinds of interpretation to accommodate the evidence. Though it’s also worth noticing that when Sextus insist that no-one “disputes” appearances and that the skeptics “accepts” them (1.20, 22), he does not use any syntactic devices to clearly signal he is making a modal claim (most obviously “*an*” together with an optative form of the relevant verbs).

Sextus is *not* making a modal claim: it is not the case on this Dual-Assent view that *phainomena cannot* be enquired into; after all, they can be the object of dogmatic assent. Rather, the point is that when they figure as the objects of skeptical assent, they are not, as a matter of fact, enquired into; that is the nature of that kind of assent: it *is* not the result of enquiry.

In certain respects, the Dual-Assent view does a *better* job of explaining Sextus' remarks, for instance, with regard to his distinction between *ta phainomena* and *ta hupokeimena*. Sometimes when making this distinction (1.20), Sextus will distinguish between *ta phainomena* and "what is said about *ta phainomena*" (*peri tou phainomenou legomenon*). At the very least, this claim seems odd if we suppose the distinction in question to be between how things are (objectively) and how they appear (subjectively). In the case of the Dual-Assent view, however, the distinction makes perfect sense: "what is said about the *phainomena*" is precisely a theoretical account or explanation of it, so that, in line with etymology, *legomenon* = *logos* in this context. Moreover, the Dual-Assent Interpretation explains why Sextus is so preoccupied with attacking various philosophical schools and scientific programs and theories: precisely, because the skepticism he advocates is conceived in part negatively, as avoiding what such intellectual activities endorse, advocate, and practice.

A significant difficulty in understanding and evaluating the Dual-Assent view, however, is the vagueness of some of its claims or concepts. In particular, one might wonder what counts as a specifically *philosophical* argument, consideration or reflection. Could one, for instance, believe something on the basis of *non-philosophical* argument, consideration or reflection? One way to approach this question, and to deepen our understanding of the Dual-Assent Interpretations, is to reflect on the fourfold division in the skeptic's "observance of everyday life" (see §1(b) above) and how it is understood on this interpretation. Recall that the fourfold division is supposed to help explain the sense in which *ta phainomena* constitute the standard or measure (*kritêrion*) of skeptical conduct, so that the division is somehow a division of *phainomena*. Ben Morison gives the clearest

statement of how the fourfold division divides *phainomena* and regulates the skeptical life. I quote here his explanation of three of the elements of the division: guidance by perception and thought (1(a) & (b)), transmission of custom or acculturation (2), and the instruction of crafts (3).

1. (a) The belief that it is day outside, *where this belief is formed immediately from the perceptual appearance to you that it is day outside*. ... [C]ontrast someone who believes that it is day outside because they run through an argument such as this in their heads: my senses are reliable; it appears right now to my senses that it is day outside; therefore it must be day.  
(b) The belief that  $1+1=2$ , *where this belief is formed as a result of it just striking your intellect that  $1+1=2$* . Contrast: believing that  $1+1=2$  as a result of running through the proof in *Principia Mathematica*.
2. The belief that the Stoic God exists, *where this belief is formed simply from acculturation*; ‘imagine someone who has been raised by the Stoics and who thus has the Stoic concept of God’ (Frede 1979: 23). Contrast: a philosopher who believes that the Stoic God exists, formed as a result of running through and accepting the proofs the Stoics give of the existence of this sort of God.
3. The belief that you should make the table in this way, *where this belief is formed from your craft-experience*. Imagine the apprentice carpenter who simply follows the example set by his teacher, without actually holding that the way his teacher does things is the correct one. ... Contrast: the master-carpenter who has an account of why pieces of wood stick together better this way than any other way, and who believes on this basis that you should make the table this way accordingly.<sup>34</sup>

The division among *phainomena* amounts to a division among the *sources* or *causes* of the skeptic’s beliefs. In each case, a contrast is helpfully drawn by Morison between believing something immediately as result of perception, thought, acculturation or craft-experience and believing it, as it were, mediately as result of “running through” an argument, proof, or some considerations or reflections bearing on the truth of the content of the belief. The contrast is *not* between believing something for a reason and not so believing, since in each case the skeptic may believe something for a reason (e.g., *because* she can see it is day, *because* she was brought up that way, *because* of her craft-experience); rather it is between believing something via argument, considerations, or reflection rather than, in a certain sense, immediately.

The distinction between sources of belief can be partly captured in terms of the contemporary contrast between *justifying* and *explanatory* reasons. Though we can talk of the skeptic

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<sup>34</sup> Morison (2014) §3.4.1

doing things for reasons, it is misleading to describe these reasons as thereby serving the skeptic as justifications for her belief (and so as *justifying* reasons); in Tad Brennan's words "the skeptic does not claim that because a certain belief is traditional, it is thereby justified."<sup>35</sup> Instead, the point is that the relevant belief is *explained* by some element of the fourfold way – and the skeptic herself may advert to it as her reason for action – but it is not thereby justified. Such a distinction only partly captures the one Dual-Assent Interpretations rely on; in such interpretations justifying reasons are paradigmatically arguments or, at least, considerations, reflections or theoretical accounts whose constituent claims can be put in the form of arguments. Thus, the contrast integral to the Dual-Assent Interpretation is between two kinds of sources of belief: on the one hand, justifying reasons, articulated in the form of reasoning or argument, for the truth of whatever is believed (which the skeptic's disavow), and, on the other hand, explanatory reasons, which are immediate and not the result of arguments. The skeptic eschews the first in daily life, but is permitted a genuine standard or measure in the form of the second.

The distinction at the heart of the Dual-Assent Interpretation between the two kinds of assent is closely related to another, namely, between the cognitive activity in ordinary life and the cognitive activity in a philosophical life. The central idea, well brought out by Morison's examples, is that in ordinary or everyday life we believe certain things and these beliefs generate our actions, but the grounds of our belief are more or less immediate, in particular, they are not grounds made available by philosophical argument or theorizing. Indeed, one criterion of skeptical belief is whether or not we can see it arising in the activities of ordinary (non-philosophical) life as opposed to the extraordinary(?) reflective life of the philosopher. The immediacy of skeptical belief, or its grounds, is a product of the fact that in ordinary life action is called for, regardless of whether or not we have a philosophical theory or argument to support the action.

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<sup>35</sup> Brennan (2000) pg. 11.

#### **d. Varieties of Dual-Assent Interpretation**

In the previous section, I provided a general picture of what I call “Dual-Assent Interpretations.”

The name for these interpretations is liable to mislead if one neglects to note that all such interpretations I considered presuppose the Standard Account of *sunkatathesis* and *epoché* (§1 above). Central to the Standard Account is a conception of assent as a cognitive stance adopted with respect to a claim, which claim will inform and shape action and behavior (including verbal behavior). To put this same point slightly differently, the Standard Account characterizes assent as a propositional attitude and so as a psychological state directed towards a proposition, i.e., a claim that something or other is the case (where this need not be assimilated to “is true”).

I said that the name “Dual-Assent Interpretations” is liable to mislead and this is because presupposition of the Standard Account is not necessary to a Dual-Assent Interpretation. Indeed, the interpretation that I will defend in chapter three (§2) can be called a Dual-Assent Interpretation, despite the fact that it involves rejection of the Standard Account. Any interpretation that does not locate the source of the difference between skeptical and dogmatic assent in the content of the assent, i.e., in *what* is assented to, but rather in the attitude adopted, can count as a Dual-Assent Interpretation. What is essential to Dual-Assent Interpretations is a difference in attitude or stance towards something, not a difference in that towards which the attitude or stance is adopted. Perhaps, therefore, it is more accurate to label the interpretations I discussed in the previous section, which rely on the Standard Account, “Dual-Assent *Propositional Attitude* Interpretations.” Such a label would have the benefit of specifying the interpretations as a subset of a family or class of interpretations, all of which are Dual-Assent Interpretations.

I focus my critical arguments in this chapter on Dual-Assent Propositional Attitude Interpretations because it seems to me that the most influential and widespread Dual-Assent Interpretations hitherto offered *do* presuppose the Standard Account and so are best seen as

conceiving of assent in terms of propositional attitudes. By contrast, the interpretation I will defend in my final chapter, while still a Dual-Assent Interpretation, does not presuppose the Standard Account and so does not characterize assent in terms of propositional attitudes. In what follows, rather than adopting the cumbersome “Dual-Assent Propositional Attitude Interpretation,” I will refer simply to “Dual-Assent Interpretations” and such references should always be taken as abbreviated references to those views presupposing the Standard Account, unless I explicitly mention otherwise.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that just as Dual-Assent Interpretations might be distinguished by whether they fall in the subset of such interpretations that presuppose the Standard Account and propositional attitudes, so too some Dual-Content Interpretations might also be so distinguished. It is an interesting question whether such a subset is not coextensive (and so a *proper* subset) of the Dual-Content Interpretations, but, suffice it to say, all of the Dual-Content Interpretations I consider in this dissertation presuppose the Standard Account and propositional attitudes.

### **3. The Status of Sextus’ Account of Skepticism: Self-Reflexivity in *PH***

#### **a. Speech-Acts & Interpretive Guidance**

Quite early in *PH*, immediately after he has distinguished three philosophical positions (dogmatic, Academic, skeptic) by locating them in a logical space structured by their respective stances towards philosophical inquiry and its end, Sextus offers the following clarification about the intended force of all his subsequent remarks:

Presently, we will speak in outline [*bupotupōtikōs*] about the skeptical way of life [*peri tēs skeptikēs agōgēs*] and preface [*proeipontes*] this: that none of the things about which we will speak [*peri oudenōs tōn lechthēsomōn*] do we positively affirm [*diabebaioumetha*] that it holds thus in all ways just as we say [*bōs houtōs echontos pantōs kathaper legomen*], but rather concerning each thing we report like a historian [*apangellomen istorikōs*] according to how it now appears to us [*kata to nun phainomenon hēmin*]. (*PH* 1.4)

Later on in *PH*, Sextus will remind us of the intended force of his claims, but this passage is the earliest statement (as a form of “preface” : *proeipontes*) and only here does he insist that *all* the subsequent statements in *PH* – rather than a circumscribed set of them individuated in one way or another<sup>36</sup> – are to be understood as having a certain specific force. It is important not to neglect the wide scope Sextus claim in 1.4: “*none* [*oudenos*] of the things about which we *will* speak [*lechthésomón*], do we positively affirm...” Certainly, Sextus’ remarks are of great importance to readers and interpreters of *PH*<sup>37</sup>, for by insisting that he intends all his subsequent remarks to have one rather than another force he constrains how readers and interpreters are to take those remarks. In other words, the range of interpretations of Sextus’ remarks is constrained by the fact that they must reflect their intended force – as “reports about how things appear” – and only such a range can be regarded as accurately interpreting Sextus’ remarks and, beyond these, his skeptical outlook as a whole. Unfortunately, the exact nature of this constraint (and so the tolerable range of interpretations) is not only unclear from this passage but a major source of interpretive controversy.

We can sidestep the controversy and clarify the passage by noting that the distinction Sextus is relying on – between, on the one hand, “positively affirming that things hold just as they are said to” and, on the other, “reporting how things appear” – is closely connected to another distinction that has pride of place in most interpretations of Pyrrhonian skepticism, namely, the distinction between skeptical *sunkatathesis* to *phainomena* and skeptical *epoché* to *hypokeimena*. Articulating and explaining this *sunkatathesis/epoché* distinction, of course, lies at the heart of Standard Interpretations of Sextus’ skepticism and determines their division into Dual-Content and Dual-Assent views.

Certainly, Sextus is here insisting that the reader must interpret his subsequent remarks as reflecting

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<sup>36</sup> In 1.15, for instance, the interpretive counsel is explicitly limited to the skeptical *phónai* as in 1.187-209 (which constitutes a continuous and systematic discussion of *phónai*). But *phónai* are not the only class of objects circumscribed by the constraint in 1.4; see, for example, 1.24, where the scope appears limited to the discussion of chapter x, and 1.35, where the constraint is applied to the skeptical modes.

<sup>37</sup> A point emphasized by both Johnsen (2001) pg. 522, *n.* 2, and Mates (1996) pp. vii-viii & 6.

or expressing assent to *phainomena* rather than assent to *hupokeimena*, despite referring to the latter by “*echonta*” rather than by more familiar locutions (*hupokeimena*, *huparchonta*, *ta ekτος*). Since the distinction between *phainomena* and *hupokeimena* must be captured in one way or another by *any* interpretation of Sextus’ skepticism and so, *ipso facto*, by the Standard Interpretations, it should be quite uncontroversial that 1.4, like 1.13 and other passages, reflects the relevant distinction, however articulated.

I said the distinction in 1.4 is “closely connected” to the earlier and more familiar one, but it is not *identical*. The distinction in 1.4 is made in terms of overt speech or communicative acts, rather than in terms of the underlying psychological phenomenon of assents.<sup>38</sup> The latter can, of course, be expressed by overt communicative acts, but they need not be. In 1.4, Sextus distinguishes the communicative act of “positively affirming” (*diabebaiōō*) from that of “reporting” (*apangelō*) and insists that subsequent remarks in *PH* are to be understood in terms of the latter communicative act. The distinction is not always made in these terms: sometimes Sextus refers to the speech act of “reporting” as “asserting undogmatically” (*phēmi adoxastōs*, 1.24), sometimes simply as “saying in accordance with how things appear” (*kata to phainomenon legō*, 1.191); similarly, with regard to “positively affirming”, he sometimes refers to “dogmatizing” (*dogmatizōō*, 1.15), sometimes to “speaking dogmatically” (*legō dogmatikōs*, 1.193). Regardless of the terminology, however, what “closely connects” the discussion of 1.4, and the distinctions therein, with the division between assents is precisely the fact that both kinds of speech act can be used to express assents. As Sextus implies<sup>39</sup>, by uttering (*propherō*, *legō*) certain sentences (*phōnai*<sup>40</sup>), one can affirm or report something,

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<sup>38</sup> The theory of speech acts put forward seems plausibly attributable to Sextus in light of his familiarity with Stoic logic and his remarks in *PH* (in particular, 1.187-209 suggest familiarity with the distinctions and concepts relevant to speech acts); the Stoics themselves had a fairly sophisticated understanding of communicative acts not at all strange as bedfellow to contemporary speech act theory. See Bobzien (1999) for an excellent discussion of the Stoic account and Diogenes’ discussion of the Stoic theory of dialectic: DL 7.55 *ff.*

<sup>39</sup> 1.191, 200, 206, etc.

specifically, one can affirm or report that which one assents to. Indeed, it is precisely the content of such assent that gives content or meaning to the relevant sentence, thus determining what is reported or affirmed by means of the sentence. In this sense, then, the communicative act of reporting or affirming (and, parasitically, the sentence uttered) *expresses* assent. Not all syntactically distinct sentences are characteristically used to express assent in this sense, indeed, interrogative sentences and imperative sentences, *inter alia*, do not so express assent; rather, the characteristic syntactic entity at issue here is the declarative sentence (*bê dêlousa thesin ê arsin phônê*, 1.192).

The fact that both reporting and affirming can be understood as expressions<sup>41</sup> of assent in the previous sense – indeed the fact that both are speech acts involving declarative sentences – should not obscure their difference. Certainly, both speech acts express an underlying psychological state describable as “assent” and both acts can express their respective states by means of declarative sentences; but the underlying state and so the speech act in each case is importantly different. Of course, what this difference is depends on the specific theory – either Dual-Content or Dual-Assent – that one adopts. For a Dual-Content interpreter, the speech acts are distinguished by virtue of the fact that one speech act expresses assent to *phainomena* while the other expresses assent to *hupokeimena*, and because this is a distinction in the content of the assent, it follows that the meaning of the declarative sentence figuring in the one speech act is distinct from that figuring in the other. By contrast, Dual-Assent interpreters will conceive the distinction in speech acts as reflecting a difference in the form of assent (the species of the genus “assent”), so that although both sentences in reports and sentences in affirmations *mean* the same thing, the speech acts in which they figure are not the same. One might describe this as a pragmatic difference between the acts: one (“affirming”)

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<sup>40</sup> In this use, ‘*phônai?*’ refers to utterances syntactically construed, *not* to the distinctive ‘skeptical *phônai*’ of 1.187-209 and 14-15.

<sup>41</sup> My understanding of the ‘expression’ relation has greatly benefited from the discussion in Schroeder (2008).

carries the implicature<sup>42</sup> that it is the result of philosophical reflection, argument and theory-building, while the other does not. If this analysis is correct, then one of the purposes of 1.4 is to prevent a misinterpretation that might result from the ambiguity of syntactically declarative sentences used in *PH*. The ambiguity results from the fact that a given declarative sentence *p* can be understood in terms of either the speech act of “reporting” or the speech act of “affirming.” Depending on how one understands the distinction between the two acts, one will understand the ambiguity as translating to a semantic one (as in Dual-Content interpretations) or a pragmatic one (as in Dual-Assent interpretations).

In order to more precisely articulate the logical structure of the claim made in 1.4, but also to avoid prejudging the proper interpretation of the distinction between “reporting” and “affirming,” we can re-write the central claim in 1.4 in light of the previous reflections.

**Skeptical Principle of Interpretation:** Every declarative utterance by the skeptic in *PH* is to be understood:

- (i) as figuring in that speech act (called “reporting”) that expresses skeptical *sunkatathesis* to some claim (which gives the content/meaning of the utterance);
- (ii) but not as figuring in that speech act (called “affirming”) that expresses dogmatic *sunkatathesis* to some claim (which gives content/meaning the utterance).

Earlier, I claimed that 1.4 quantifies over all subsequent remarks in *PH*, but this is not quite correct, as is made plain in the above Principle. Questions, commands, and the like are not subject to the interpretive principle; rather, this constraint applies only to declarative sentences, since they alone can be understood as expressing assent in the relevant sense. The fact that the principle quantifies over utterances rather than claims follows naturally from the fact that Sextus intends it to provide guidance on how to interpret the rest of *PH*, in particular, to avoid the error of mistaking the speech acts involved in *PH*, and so mistaking the claims *made* by means of these utterances. This is an important aspect of the Principle, for it encodes a metalinguistic claim connecting sentences to

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<sup>42</sup> Here, I follow contemporary linguistic usage, deriving from Grice (1975), for what is suggested by a speech act but neither said in it nor (logically) implied/entailed by it.

assents via the relation of “expressing”. Of course, how this metalinguistic claim is understood depends on how we interpret the relevant notions of skeptical and dogmatic assent, which calls forth the debate between Dual-Content and Dual-Assent interpretations, but that should not prevent us from seeing the Principle as going some way toward clarifying both the claim made in 1.4 and, in so doing, making precise the debate between the two interpretations.

The Skeptical Principle gives the semantic structure of 1.4 as it would be understood by both kinds of Standard Interpretations and it does so by clarifying 1.4 in terms of the basic framework (discussed in §1) shared by both interpretations. My use of “would” here is quite intentional and self-conscious: few<sup>43</sup> Standard Interpreters have, in fact, spent much time understanding the implications of 1.4 for their interpretations. Regardless, the Principle captures the claim made in 1.4 in terms of categories, distinctions, and concepts that these interpretations rely on and, insofar as those are concerned, the Principle reflects how Standard Interpreters would naturally read 1.4.

Though only resolution of the controversy between Dual-Content and Dual-Assent interpretations will fully disambiguate the Skeptical Principle and 1.4, the connection between the sentences of *PH* and assent to *phainomena* allows us to see what motivates Sextus’ interpretive guidance in 1.4. Both strands of Standard Interpretation recognize that the skeptic has a quite specific understanding of the kind of assent which he forswears or suspends and an equally specific understanding of the form of assent he engages in. The distinction is fundamental to skepticism for it is supposed to distinguish the skeptical form of life from both Academic and dogmatic forms, both of which are taken to involve dogmatic assent. In light of this, it is easier now to see why Sextus insists on the Principle: if the claims made in *PH* are themselves interpreted as expressions of

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<sup>43</sup> Two exceptions to this claim are: Mates (1996) and Johnsen (2001). Johnsen, in particular, makes ingenious use of this claim to immunize Dual-Content Interpretations from inconsistency, see pp. 531-540. I do not think, however, that Johnsen’s insights can effectively defend the Dual-Content Interpretations from my own objections (which, it should be said, Johnsen never considers). Mates (1996) emphasizes 1.4 and his continual attention to it shapes his interpretation of Sextus’ position, see pp. vii-viii, 6, 9-17.

dogmatic assent, which is precisely what follows from interpreting them as “positive affirmations” rather than “reports”, then the very speech acts by means of which Sextus articulates the skeptical outlook would refute that outlook, for those acts would presuppose that the skeptic is expressing a dogmatic assent in articulating the skeptical outlook and so would place the skeptic in the dogmatist’s camp. Thus, the very act of describing the skeptical outlook would refute that outlook: we would have here a case of the “shameful dialectical sin”<sup>44</sup> of self-refutation.<sup>45</sup> It is no surprise, then, that Sextus insists on his remarks in *PH* being interpreted in a specific way. Indeed, the distinction between interpreting Sextus as “reporting” and interpreting him as ‘affirming’ simply recapitulates the distinction between skeptical assent to *phainomena* and dogmatic assent to *hypokeimena*.

If the purpose of the constraint in the Principle is to make plain that the skeptic’s utterances are intended as elements in speech acts of reporting, which are not speech acts expressing dogmatic assent (since such assent would be inconsistent with the skeptic’s practice of suspension), then it makes little sense to insist – as the Principle might seem to – that the interpretive constraint applies only to the utterances in *PH*. After all, to the extent that any of the skeptic’s utterances must or should be understood in terms of speech acts of affirmation, skepticism will be self-refuting. As a result, in my subsequent remarks, I will sometimes refer to the skeptic’s utterances *simpliciter* rather than the utterances in *PH*, assuming that the constraint in the Principle is meant to apply more widely than it allows.

A final wrinkle in the application of the Principle needs to be mentioned, since ignorance of it will confuse and deform interpretation of Sextus’ remarks. At *PH* 1.5-6, Sextus distinguishes

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<sup>44</sup> In the words of Castagnoli’s (2010) pg. 251. My discussion presupposes that Sextus wants to avoid self-refutation, but it *has* been argued that he embraces it, for instance, by McPherran (1987). The interpretation of those passages (*PH* 1.14-15, 206, 2.288; *M* 7.480), which seem to provide the best evidence for Sextus countenancing self-refutation, has been powerfully disputed and, to my mind, refuted by Castagnoli (2000), see pp. 263-293 & 295-320.

<sup>45</sup> More precisely, we would have an instance case of ‘pragmatic’ self-refutation, see Mackie (1964) pp. 193-4. For a detailed discussion of the history of self-refutation arguments from the *Dissoi Logoi* to Pyrrhonism, see Castagnoli (2010).

between two parts of the skeptical “account” (*logos*) : the “general” (*katholou*) and the “particular” (*eidikos*). In the general account,

We set out the distinctive character [*ton charaktéra*] of skepticism, saying what the concept [*ennoia*] of it is, what are its principles and what its arguments, what is its standard [*kritérion*] and what its aim [*telos*], what are the modes of suspension of assent, how we employ [*paralambanomen*] skeptical assertions [*tas skeptikas apophaseis*] and what distinguishes skepticism from neighboring philosophies.

By contrast, the particular account is “the one in which we argue against each of the parts of what they[= dogmatists] call philosophy [*tés kaloumenês philosophias*].” The general account is where Sextus articulates the outlook and ambitions of skepticism – including, for instance, the content of its concepts – and the particular is where actual skeptical *argument*, in particular, the Modes, are deployed against various specific claims of the dogmatists (and Academic skeptics). What makes the distinction so important is the fact that the concepts, claims, inferences and accounts figuring in the particular account do *not* belong to skepticism, but to the various philosophical outlooks being criticized. This is, in a way, obvious, for the skeptic always ends by *suspending* assent to the relevant claims, concepts, inferences and accounts, and this implies that she does not adhere to them *outside* of the particular account. In effect, or so I would argue, the arguments figuring in the particular account are similar to *reductiones ad absurdum*, since the skeptic adheres to the concepts, claims, inferences, and accounts of her opponent, only to conclude by suspending assent. Such adherence is thus only provisional and guided by the commitments and criteria of the skeptic’s opponent. By contrast, in the general account the skeptic speaks, as it were, for herself: her remarks are to be interpreted as uttered *in propria persona*, rather than “dialectically” with a view to suspension of assent.

Failure to recognize the previous distinction would result in a tendency to interpret skepticism as rather more doctrinally similar to the dogmatic schools than one might otherwise suppose. (Such a tendency is most obviously manifest in interpretations of Academic skepticism as sharing in Stoic concepts and so as reacting to Stoicism by advocating a species of “negative

dogmatism”<sup>46</sup> by means of the Stoic’s own arguments and concepts.) In the context of interpreting Sextus’ remarks, such a tendency will, in effect, treat his use of a term or expression in the context of dialectical argument the same way that it treats his use of the same term outside that context, when used *in propria persona*. Sextus implicitly warns against such a mistaken ascription, when arguing (at *PH* 1.1-12) against the charge that the skeptic either grasps the claims, concepts and objects she argues against or does not; if she does, then she does not suspend assent to them, whereas if she does not, she cannot argue against them; either way, she cannot argue against the dogmatic claims, concepts and objects. Sextus responds to this argument by noting (i) the same argument can be deployed against the dogmatist with regard to any claim or concept they argue against; (ii) it is possible to think about or reflect upon a view without “grasping”<sup>47</sup> it – i.e., assenting to its truth – for otherwise the dogmatist is faced with (i), and (most importantly) (iii) that the skeptic “is not barred from having thoughts, if they arise from things that give him a passive impression and appear evidently to him” since “it has been made clear that he assents to any impression given by way of a passive appearance just as it appears to him” (*PH* 2.10). The latter point (i.e., (iii)) refers directly back to *PH* 1.13’s discussion of skeptical assent and makes plain that we must understand the skeptic’s *thinking about something* (*a fortiori*, arguing against something) in terms of skeptical assent. In order for (iii) to make full sense, it is necessary to understand the *assent* in question, I think, as directed at the *thought*. Thus, the skeptic’s *thinking* about, e.g., dogmatic concepts is, in effect, the skeptic *assenting* to the claim or fact that s/he is *thinking* about dogmatic concepts; notice, that this does *not* entail that the skeptic is assenting to such dogmatic concepts (and so to their reality, in some sense of that term), but only that she is assenting to her *thinking* of them. Of course, the latter fact still leaves the

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<sup>46</sup> The *locus classicus* of this insight into the mistaken interpretation of Academic skepticism is Couissin (1929); see also Striker (1980). Sextus is guilty of perpetuating the traditional interpretation of Academic skepticism (he may be the originator of it in its modern form) most clearly at *PH* 1.1-4.

<sup>47</sup> The (apparently) Stoic opponents use the technical term “grasping” or “apprehending” (*katalēpsis* and cognates).

question of *how* we are to understand this “thinking,” but this resolves into the question of how to understand *PH* 1.13’s account of assent.

### **b. The Skeptical Principle of Interpretation & Self-Reflexivity**

The central claim made in the Skeptical Principle is that Sextus’ utterance of declarative sentences is to be understood in terms of speech acts that express skeptical assent. The content or meaning of the declarative sentence so uttered is precisely the content of the skeptical assent.<sup>48</sup> It is important to distinguish the claim that such speech acts *express* skeptical assent from the claim that they are, more generally, *about* such assent in the sense of referring to or making claims about assent. To say that a speech act expresses an assent is, partly, to say that it shares the same content as an assent; but to say that a speech act involves reference to assent is to say that the content of the assent expressed by the speech act (and so the speech act itself) involves reference to or contains a claim about assent.<sup>49</sup> The same point can be made much more simply and less revealingly by noting that there is a difference between an assent whose content pertains to (either refers to or contains a claim about) assent and one that does not; what makes for confusion is that both assents can be expressed by means of speech acts of reporting, though, of course, each act will have different content.

The fact that a speech act expressive of an assent is not *ipso facto* a speech act expressive of an assent about assent does not make it impossible for speech acts or assents to involve claims about assent; in fact, certain passages of *PH* do just that. The passages I have in mind here are those that loomed so large in parts one and two of this chapter: *PH* 1. 13-14, 17, and 19-24. These passages capture Sextus’ systematic reflections on the topic of skeptical assent and suspension of

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<sup>48</sup> This understanding of the meaning of declarative sentences follows closely the Stoic one: see Long (1982) pp. 50-1.

<sup>49</sup> Schroeder (2008) stresses this distinction at pp. 91-2, but it is much older than Schroeder’s work and has its roots in Frege’s (1879, I.1-4) careful distinction, in the *Begriffsschrift*, between the *content* of a judgment and the *assertion* of that content, which distinction is reflected in Frege’s symbolism.

assent, which is why they have figured so significantly in scholarly discussion. The distinction between assent put forth in these passages is made most carefully in 1.13, when Sextus claims:

- (1) [S]keptics assent to the affections forced upon them in accordance with appearance [*phantasian* = *phainomenon*, 1.19]...
- (2) But...the skeptic does not dogmatize [in the sense of “dogma”] according to which... dogma is the assent to some unclear object of investigation in the sciences...

In (1) and (2) Sextus makes some claims about the nature of skeptical assent and suspension. Clearly the passage consists of declarative sentences and so falls within the scope of the Skeptical Principle, which means it must be understood in terms of the speech act of “reporting”. More importantly, when understood as a component of a certain determinate sort of speech act of reporting, (1) and (2) are self-reflexive: they refer to or make a claim about the very sort of assent which they express. To put this point more diagrammatically and, perhaps, more clearly: in saying that (1) and (2) are reports by Sextus, we say that

Sextus assents (to the claim) that (1) [S]keptics assent to the affections forced upon them in accordance with appearance [*phantasian* = *phainomenon*, 1.19]... (2) but...the skeptic does not dogmatize [in the sense of “dogma”] according to which dogma is the assent to some unclear object of investigation in the sciences...

By assenting to (1) and (2), Sextus assents to a claim about his own assent : he assents, in effect, to a description or characterization of the nature of his own assent. (1) and (2) apply, in other words, to the very assent which they express and, in this sense, the speech acts (1) and (2) are self-reflexive. The fact that Sextus himself is a skeptic – indeed, identifies himself as such – and the fact that this status involves application of the Skeptical Principle to his remarks, allows us to re-write the above claim as follows:

**Skeptical Self-Reflexivity:** Sextus gives skeptical assent (to the claim) that (i) he assents to the affections forced upon him in accordance with appearance, but (ii) he does not assent to any unclear object of investigation in the sciences.

Skeptical Self-Reflexivity expresses not only the skeptic’s *awareness* of the relevant sorts of assent, but also the fact that such awareness takes shape in a specific conception of the relevant sorts of assent,

namely, the conception of his own assents as to “the affections forced upon him in accordance with appearance” and of the assents he avoids as to “any unclear object of investigation in the sciences.” Such awareness entails that these phrases or expressions, when applied to the skeptic’s assents, cannot be understood as merely extensional – such that, e.g., coextensive expressions could be substituted without any harm to the truth of the claim – but must be understood intensionally, as picking out how the skeptic herself picks-out and describes the relevant item.

I think the prevailing interpretations of Sextus’ thought have largely<sup>50</sup> failed to notice this distinctive sort of skeptical self-reflexivity, but I have not yet backed up that claim with any evidence. In fact, my argument for this claim will proceed indirectly. I shall argue in the next two sections that in order to reflect Skeptical Self-Reflexivity, the prevailing interpretations must make a series of moves that will render their interpretations incoherent or, more accurately, that will render Sextus’ skepticism, as interpreted by them, incoherent. On the assumption that any successful interpretation must at least be coherent, this will show that even if they wished to accommodate the self-reflexivity, they could not.

#### **4. Do the Standard Interpretations Rest on a Mistake?**

In the next two sections, my argument will proceed in symmetrical ways. First, I will explain how the relevant Standard Interpretation (Dual-Content, followed by Dual-Assent) understands the Skeptical Principle of Interpretation, which will in turn involve a re-interpretation of Skeptical Self-Reflexivity. Next, I will explain why the resulting version of Self-Reflexivity, properly understood, makes the skeptic’s position incoherent in precisely the way he hoped to avoid by means of the characterization of his utterances as reports rather than affirmations.

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<sup>50</sup> One important exception is Mates (1996), who discusses (pp. 9-11) what he calls the “self-referential aspect of Pyrrhonism.”

### a. The Incoherence of Standard Interpretations I: Dual-Content Interpretations

The essence of Dual-Content Interpretations is a distinction between skeptical assent and suspension solely in terms of content or the claim assented to. The content of the former is a subjective appearance claim, while the content of the latter is an objective factual claim. For the Dual-Content theorist, then, the Skeptical Principle of Interpretation must be understood as follows:

#### **Skeptical Principle of Interpretation (Dual-Content):**

Any declarative utterance '*p*' of the skeptic made *in propria persona* in *PH* is to be understood:

- (i) as figuring in that speech act (called "reporting") that expresses assent to the subjective claim that it appears to the skeptic that *p*;
- (ii) but not as figuring in that speech act (called "affirming") that expresses assent to the objective factual claim that *p*.

For Dual-Content views, the distinction between (i) and (ii) is a distinction between claims about how things (subjectively) appear and claims about how things (objectively) are. The same declarative sentence can express both – i.e., it is semantically ambiguous – and the same kind of assent is involved in both; the difference lies in the content of the assent. This, in turn, entails the following version of Skeptical Self-Reflexivity

**Skeptical Self-Reflexivity (Dual-Content):** For every claim *p* made *in propria persona*, Sextus assents to the subjective-appearance claim (i) that he assents to subjective-appearance claims (*It appears that p*), but (ii) that he does not assent objective-factual claims (*p*).

The concept of appearance, in terms of which Sextus conceives of his assent, is important here, for it is what allows for the coherence or consistency of (i) and (ii). If, for instance, the concept of appearance in question was understood as "doxastic"<sup>51</sup> – in the sense that if *it appears (to me) that p*, then *I believe that p* – then it is not clear that it would be possible for Sextus to assent to the one without assenting to the other. As a result, if Sextus assents *that it appears (to him) that p*, then he effectively assents *that p*, and this would spell the end for the distinction between the two kinds of assent. It is to no avail, in response to this point, to contend that Sextus might not see the relevant

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<sup>51</sup> I borrow this term from Fine (2000) pg. 83.

implication, for this would amount to denying Skeptical Self-Reflexivity and the evidence of *PH* 1.4. We must, therefore, take Sextus to conceive of “appearance” as non-doxastic, that is, as allowing for the consistency of the claim that *it appears (to him) that p* with the falsity (and truth) of *p*. This might seem to suggest that Sextus is to be understood as assenting to the following claim:

(a) It is consistent that (i) *it subjectively appears (to someone) that p* despite the fact that (ii) *not-p*.

Of course, such an understanding of Sextus would entail that he *does* in fact, contrary to his skeptical scruples, assent to a claim that is *not* a subjective appearance-claim, namely, (a) itself (call these claims “objective-factual”). If this were the case, then Sextus could not be seen as practicing a coherent form of skepticism, since it would depend on assent to precisely the sort of claim to which he forswears assent. Since Sextus is a skeptic and only assents to *appearances*, we are obliged to understand him as assenting to the subjective-appearance counterpart of (a):

(a\*) *It subjectively appears to someone* [i.e., “me” = Sextus] *that it is consistent that (i) it subjectively appears (to someone) that p* despite the fact that (ii) *not-p*.

In line with his skeptic outlook, Sextus will assent to (a\*) but suspend or withhold assent to its objective-factual counterpart (a), at least thus do the Dual-Content Interpretations understand him. The question, then, is whether such an understanding of Sextus’ skepticism is, in fact, coherent. The central difficulty with this line of interpretation can, I think, be made plain by considering another claim, the negation of (a), to which the skeptic also suspends assent:

(b) It is *not* consistent that (i) *it subjectively appears (to someone) that p* despite the fact that (ii) *not-p*.

If (b) were true, then (a\*) would not be consistent with the falsity of its objective-factual counterpart (a), and the central claim articulating the distinction between subjective-appearance claims and their objective-factual counterparts would therefore not be true. This fact would not merely make it the case that (a\*) does not correspond to “how things are”, but, much more worryingly, that the concept of “appearance” that figures in (a\*) is not, in fact, the concept of subjective-appearance, where that

concept is understood as articulated in a subjective-appearance claim. This follows from the fact that such a claim is distinguished on the Dual-Content Interpretation by being, *inter alia*, consistent with its objective-factual counterpart *and* the negation of that counterpart. Since (b) asserts that (a\*) is not consistent with the falsity of its objective-factual counterpart, it follows that the truth of (b) makes it the case that (a\*) is *not* a subjective-appearance claim.

It is certainly true that it is *not* the case that Sextus assents or must assent to (b), since part of what is involved in claiming that he suspends assent to (a) is precisely that he suspends assent to *not* (a) (= (b)) as well; *epoché* is, after all, defined as neither affirming nor denying a given claims: (b) is precisely the denial of (a), so the skeptic cannot be understood as assenting to it. One might therefore conclude, on the Dual-Content interpreters behalf, that since Sextus suspends assent with regard to (b) *and* its negation (a), there is no inconsistency between (i) Sextus assent to (a\*) and (ii) the claim that (a\*) is a subjective-appearance claim. Moreover, since the Skeptical Principle of Interpretation only requires (i) and (ii), there is no problem for that view.

However, the Dual-Content interpreters' insistence that Sextus does not assent to (a) or (b) does not ensure the coherence of that interpretation. This becomes clearer when we note two facts. First, while it is certainly true that Sextus in suspending assent to (b) takes no stance on its truth or falsity, this does not change the fact that *if* (b) were true, then Sextus could not be understood as employing the concept of a subjective-appearance in (a\*). For if (b) were true, then it would follow that (a\*) is *not*, in fact, a subjective-appearance claim at all. Sextus might still *think* or *even* believe that it was a subjective-appearance claim, but he would simply be mistaken. Thus, if (b) were true, then (a\*) would not be a subjective-appearance claim. Second, the *very* fact that the truth of (b) entails that (a\*) is not a subjective-appearance claim, in turn entails that (a\*) is not a subjective-appearance claim. For such a claim is partly distinguished by the fact that it is consistent with the falsity of its objective-factual counterpart. To say that (a\*) is a subjective-appearance claim is, in part to say that it

is not made false by the falsity of (a) (i.e., the truth of (b)), since the latter is not the case (as the first point showed), neither is the former. The natural conclusion is, then, that (a\*) cannot be a subjective-appearance claim, despite the Dual-Content Interpretation.

The previous conclusion needs, in fact, to be qualified; (a\*) cannot be a subjective appearance claim *unless* it is the case that (i) it is not *possible* for (b) to be true or it is the case that (ii) the truth of (b) does not entail the falsity of regarding (a\*) as a subjective-appearance claim. If the line of argument I have been pursuing seems hopelessly confused to some, I think this is because (i) is taken to be an obvious truth, indeed, a truth necessitated by the Dual-Content Interpretation. After all, for such interpretations, a “subjective appearance claim” is *identified* or *distinguished* as the sort of claim that is consistent with the falsity of its objective-factual counterpart. To put this slightly different, the concept of a subjective appearance claim is, in part, given content by the consistency of such a claim with the negation of its objective-factual counterpart. Consequently, when in (a\*) it is stated that something “subjectively appears” that *just means* that the following ‘that’-clause picks out a claim which, when negated, is consistent with (a\*). It, therefore, makes no sense at all to assert, as does (b), that (a\*)’s status as a subjective-appearance claim might be inconsistent with the truth of (b). In fact, (b) itself is a logical or semantic contradiction, for it asserts that, on the one hand, it *subjectively appears* that *p* and, on the other, that *p*’s falsity is inconsistent with that subjective appearance; but if it *subjectively appears* that *p*, then, *ipso facto*, *p*’s falsity is *consistent* with that subjective appearance. Consequently, (b) is itself inconsistent and necessarily false. In other words, it is a necessary truth, following from the definition of “subjective-appearance claim”, that if (a\*) is the case and the use of “subjectively appears” in it is correct, then (b) is false. Thus, the following is true:

(c) It is impossible for (b) to be true or, alternatively, that it is necessary for (b) to be true.

The truth of (c) is required for it to be the case that (a\*) is a subjective-appearance claim and that is all. Thus, Sextus can still assent to (a\*) and, in so doing, assent to a subjective-appearance claim. The

Skeptical Principle of Interpretation and the Dual-Content Interpretation that gives it specific content only appear to require this, so (again) there is no inconsistency.

The problem for Dual-Content Interpretations arises when we combine the Skeptical Principle with Skeptical Self-Reflexivity. The latter together with the former requires that Sextus assents to a specific conception of his own assents *as* assents to subjective-appearance claims. However, if Sextus does indeed conceive of (a\*) as making a subjective-appearance claim then that means he understands it as implying (c), since (according to the Dual-Content Interpretations) (c) plays a role in articulating the content of the concept of “subjective-appearance,” or, to put the matter slightly differently, (c) is entailed by the definition of “subjective-appearance.” If Sextus, therefore, conceives of (a\*) *as* a subjective-appearance claim, then it cannot but follow that he assents to (c). Such a conclusion would, however, spell the end of the Dual-Content Interpretation. For if Sextus’ conception of (a\*) as a subjective-appearance claim entails that he assents to (c), then we cannot suppose that he assents *only* to subjective-appearance claims, for (c) is not such a claim. (In fact, (c) is just a version of (a).)

Moreover, if Sextus suspends assent with regard to (c), then it is not clear how he can avoid the preceding arguments, for he cannot then deny (i) that it is *possible* for (a\*) and (b) to be true together (since it may be the case, *for all he knows*, that (b)) and, therefore, (ii) that (a\*) is not, in fact, a subjective-appearance claim. Notice this also follows even if we add to the fact that Sextus suspends assent to (a) and (b), the fact that he assents to the subjective-appearance version of (c), i.e., that it *appears* to be impossible that (b). The latter claim – as a subjective appearance claim – is consistent with the truth of the negation of (c) (i.e., with the truth of (b)), so Sextus still has to allow that it is *possible* for (c) to be false, i.e., for (a\*) and (b) to be true together: precisely the possibility that makes (a\*) *not* a subjective-appearance claim. The result seems to be that Sextus cannot understand his own assents as assents to subjective-appearance claims *unless* he assents to an objective-factual claim

(namely, about the consistency of subjective-appearance claims and their objective-factual counterparts), but were he to so assent, then he could no longer honor his commitment to only assenting to subjective-appearance claims. (This has the strange implication that *non-skeptics* can understand the skeptic's assents as subjective-appearance claims, since they are not precluded from assenting to (a) and (c); but the skeptic *herself* cannot so understand them!)

The lines of argument I have been pursuing reveal not so much a problem for the skeptic as for the Dual-Content Interpretations, since they are impaled on a dilemma: either (i) such interpretations must allow that the aforementioned consistency claims ((a) and (c)) are *not* subjective-appearance claims *and* that the skeptic conception of such claims implies his assent to them, in contradiction to the skeptic's doctrine of assenting only to *phainomena*; or (ii) such interpretations must accept that the skeptic does not conceive of the contrast between *phainomena* and *onta* as between subjective-appearance claims and their objective-factual counterparts. Since the latter conception is essential to the Dual-Content Interpretations, (ii) cannot be coherently accepted by such interpretations. Regardless, therefore, of whether the proponents of Dual-Content Interpretations find themselves on lemma (i) or lemma (ii), they cannot succeed in the task they have set themselves.

The arguments I have been pressing all rest on a specific claim about the scope of skeptical argument and *epoché*. There is a natural distinction in skeptical argument between (i) those arguments that result in conclusions about the existence or non-existence of objects or about the possession by objects of certain properties (call these "objectual" arguments) and (ii) those arguments that result in conclusions about the *intelligibility* or *thinkability* (*anepinoêtos*, *asustos*) of certain concepts. In deploying my arguments against the Dual-Content Interpretation, I have been assuming that the skeptical distinction between appearance and reality is applied even to concepts and conceptual truths. After all, (a) and (c) are determinative of the very concept of a subjective-appearance claim – we might say

that they play a part in *defining* what it is to be such a claim – and so arguments against (a) and (c) are naturally to be understood as examples of (ii). I have, therefore, taken it for granted that skeptical argument is not restricted to (i) but includes (ii) as well. I will argue for this claim in the next chapter (§2). Suffice it to say, for now, that not only is the deployment of such arguments as in (ii) against the skeptical conception of *phantasia* a natural extension of those arguments, but Sextus provides evidence of *actual* arguments against such conceptions. Thus, at *PH I 70ff.* Sextus argues against the “conceivability” or “thinkability” of *phantasiai*, or the Stoic conception thereof. Such arguments block a potential means of rescuing the Dual-Content Interpretations, namely, by insisting that the status of conceptual truths (such as, e.g., (c)) is such that they are immune to skeptical argument. Sextus *does* argue against “definitions”, where these are understood as articulating the content of the concept defined, and in so doing shows that he does not regard such claims as immune to criticism. I would like to suggest that it is, in part, the failure to notice that such arguments form part of the skeptic way that, together with the failure to recognize the importance of skeptical self-reflexivity, accounts for the confusions and incoherence of the Dual-Content Interpretations adduced above.

#### **b. The Incoherence of Standard Interpretations II: Dual-Assent Interpretations**

Dual-Assent Interpretations do not characterize the distinction between reporting and affirming in terms of a difference in the semantic content of each act (and, *ipso facto*, in terms of a difference in the content of assent expressed by each act). Rather, both acts and assents have the same content; what distinguishes them is the fact that affirmation expresses a form of assent (call it “dogmatic” = assents) produced and conditioned by philosophical argument, considerations and reasoning; whereas reporting expresses a distinct form of assent (call it “skeptical” = assents) not so produced or conditioned. Thus, Dual-Assent Interpretations fill the schematic ‘Skeptical Principle of Interpretation’ as follows.

**Skeptical Principle of Interpretation (Dual-Assent):** Any declarative utterance ‘*p*’ made *in propria persona* by the skeptic in *PH* is to be understood:

- (i) as figuring in that speech act (called ‘reporting’) that expresses assent<sub>s</sub> to *p*;
- (ii) but not as figuring in that speech act (called ‘affirming’) that expresses assent<sub>D</sub> to *p*.

When this is applied to the schematic Skeptical Self-Reflexivity, the result is

**Skeptical Self-Reflexivity (Dual-Assent):** For every claim *p* made *in propria persona*, Sextus assent<sub>s</sub> that (i) he assent<sub>s</sub> that *p*, but (ii) does not assent<sub>D</sub> that *p*.

Self-Reflexivity makes plain that the character and the content of the distinction between dogmatic and skeptical assent is itself something to which Sextus gives skeptical assent, which is precisely what is required if expression of the distinction is not itself to refute Sextus’ commitment to skeptical assent.

I want to examine how plausible is the claim of Self-Reflexivity that Sextus gives *skeptical* assent to (i) and (ii). In §2(c) we described dogmatic assent as the taking of a claim to be true “on the basis of philosophical argument, consideration and/or reasoning.” The quoted description is admittedly vague – what distinguishes a philosophical from a non-philosophical argument? what counts as a valid philosophical consideration? etc. – but we made it a little more precise by contrasting it with skeptical assent, which figures importantly in everyday life, and the basis of which is immediate and falls into one of the categories of the fourfold division, i.e., not the result of philosophical reasoning or argument. Examining the claim of Self-Reflexivity along these dimensions will, I think, make things clearer.

The first thing to note when addressing the claim of Self-Reflexivity is that, although Morison’s examples in §2(c) involved assent<sub>D</sub> being given on the basis of a subject “running through an argument”, we need not suppose that every instance of assent<sub>D</sub> is the result of such “running through.” Indeed, assent<sub>D</sub> may be given if a subject, though she does not “run through” the argument for the claim assented to, nevertheless recalls that she has, at some point, done so; in fact, even weaker conditions may apply: she may assent out of habit, but that habit was initially instilled

by a “running through” of an argument. What is at issue, then, is whether the skeptic’s assent to the claim is *at any point* the result of philosophical argument or consideration. Moreover, the term “consideration” here is important: some claims will be controlled and informed by philosophical ambitions, theories or claims, and such claims are, therefore, to be understood as expressing dogmatic assent rather than skeptical assent.

The idea of “running through” an argument needs also to be further modified or explained, since one might suppose the phenomenon picked-out is of proceeding through a series of premises to a conclusion. If the idea of “running through” *is* restricted in this way, it is a non-starter, for Sextus is quite explicit that he views “arguments” (*logoi*) as encompassing a much wider range of phenomena. At *PH* 1.202, for instance, he remarks that he means by “argument” (*logos*) those things “which purport to establish [things unclear] in any way [*hopósoun*] and not necessarily by means of premises and conclusions [*ek lémmatôn kai epiphoras*].” Moreover, quite often, Sextus will, in presenting equally-opposed “arguments”, contrast what we might more aptly label *theories* or *accounts*. Indeed, the same word for “argument” (*logos*) in Sextus might also be rendered by “account”; the latter translation results far less misleading and confused translations when applied to uses of “*logos*” and its cognates than does the former. It is precisely to broaden the notion of “argument” that I included reference to philosophical ambitions, theories and claims in the previous paragraph. What unites all these different elements of philosophical method and inquiry is, I think, precisely their various roles in the project of providing a rational, systematic, clear and precise account or explanation of some phenomenon. To the extent, therefore, that one’s assents are guided or informed by such a project, they are guided or informed by dogmatic accounts and so are species of “dogmatic assent.”

An illuminating entry into my argument against the Dual-Assent Interpretation begins with some remarks by the originator of this interpretation, Michael Frede, in a justly influential article (“The Skeptic’s Beliefs”):

[O]n this interpretation, the skeptical position turns out to be inconsistent. For it is generally assumed that ordinary, everyday life is simply not possible without any beliefs or views; and so it is generally assumed that the skeptic does refute himself, when he insists on total suspension of judgment while, at the same time, constantly relying on all sorts of judgments in his actual life.<sup>52</sup>

The interpretation in question is precisely the traditional view of Sextus as arguing against *all* belief, regardless of its cause or content. It is true that Frede is here restating an ancient objection (the so-called “argument from *apraxia*”<sup>53</sup>) to skepticism, but his own view will turn out to preserve a place for beliefs, even if only a restricted class or kind, in the skeptical outlook so that it is natural to read this passage as giving some reason to question the traditional interpretation. Indeed, Frede makes this plain when he asserts that we ought to try to explain why the skeptics felt the argument to be something of an *ignoratio elenchi*.<sup>54</sup>

As Frede recounts it, the *apraxia* objection hinges on the thought that “ordinary, everyday life is simply not possible without any beliefs or views.” At first blush, this might seem a surprising claim: when I wake up in the morning, have a shower and brush my teeth, do all these actions involve or presuppose beliefs? This seems, at best, false and, at worst, nonsensical. After all, I may be barely awake and do those things purely out of habit (“without thinking,” we sometimes say) – does it still follow that sundry beliefs are involved in or presupposed by my actions? One might have thought that very little if any cognitive activity at all was involved in my actions, so that talk of belief or thought or anything cognitive seems quite misplaced. Moreover, if these genuine *actions* do not

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<sup>52</sup> Frede (1979) pg. 180 (*italics mine*).

<sup>53</sup> Sextus discusses this argument at *M* 11.162*ff.* and may have it in mind at *PH* 1.23. Other discussions of the argument are found at: *Plu. Col.* 1122A-F & *Cic. Acad.* 2.31, 99; its first recorded occurrence appears to be in Aristotle’s arguments against denials of the law of the excluded middle: *Met.* Γ 4 1008b10-19.

<sup>54</sup> Frede (1979) pg. 180.

involve or require beliefs or thoughts, then why suppose “life is simply not possible” without such things?

The previous puzzle stems, I think, from the fact that Frede’s claim that action presupposes belief is ambiguous: it might be urging (i) that the rational structure of ordinary, everyday life is not characterizable without reference to beliefs, or it might mean that (ii) in *living* ordinary, everyday life, we have constant recourse to references to belief. The first claim concerns the possibility of providing a certain characterization or description *of* the structure of life; the second concerns what is involved in *living* such a life. There is a natural reason to assent to (i), at least in the case of rational *human* life, and this because articulating and capturing the rational texture of such a life – the way in which one acts for reasons or on account of reasons – can seem quite impossible without reference to beliefs. Assent to (i) can, in turn, lead to assent to (ii), for though we may not *use* the word “belief” or “view” (or similar terms) in ordinary, everyday life, nevertheless, we implicitly reference an individual’s beliefs when describing her as “intending this” or “wanting that” or even when describing an intentional or voluntary action.

I want to ask about the basis for the previous line of thought that we “implicitly” make reference to beliefs or views in ordinary, everyday life. Certainly, I think, it would misdescribe ordinary, everyday life and the phenomenology of our linguistic practice to insist that we *use* the words “belief,” “think”, or the like as often as might be suggested by (i). After all, quite often one goes days, weeks or even longer in ordinary life without any *use* of those words. Moreover, even if we did use the words frequently, it would scarcely follow that such use alone underwrites assent to (i), for the word “belief” might simply be used in a very different way than is required or presupposed by (i). In fact, (i) seems, in a certain way, to *prescribe* the use of “belief” etc., namely as part of the project of giving a systematic, clear, and precise characterization of the rational structure

of human life and action. What is here found is the conception of “folk psychology” as a theory<sup>55</sup>: a theory of the rational structure in life and action. In this sense, then, to the extent that such an explanatory project dominates and conditions our understanding of the various terms, the use of “belief” in (i) is *technical* and *philosophical*. Moreover, it is easy then to see why such explanatory ambitions would yield an account like the following:

**The Standard Account of Skeptical *Sunkatathesis*:** Skeptical assent is a kind ( $A_{Snk}$ ) of cognitive condition or propositional attitude of taking a certain kind of claim ( $C_{Snk}$ ) to be the case (whether or not this means ‘taking to be *true*’), where  $C_{Snk}$  is the content of a *phantasia* (or *phainomenon*), which is passively received (and hence, a *pathos*). Such a cognitive condition serves to explain the actions of the skeptic so that, in this sense, the practical criterion of the skeptic is what is apparent (*phainomenon*).

The above account gives a *definition* of assent: a precise, clear, and systematic account of what assent is. Moreover, it does so by attempting to reflect those ordinary uses of the word and the syntax of such uses (which involve, e.g., objects of assent and “*that*-clauses”) and also to extend those uses to other situations. The idea is that reference to assent, as conceived in the Standard Account, will help explain and articulate the rational character of human life. The account endeavours to explain and give a specific account of the rational texture of our lives.

The elements of this Account are important to the Dual-Assent Interpretation, in particular, the concept of a “claim” or “proposition” and the distinction between different kinds of “assent” to such claims is perhaps the most central element of the interpretation. The picture of different kinds of assent to a proposition is what allows the Dual-Assent Interpretation to maintain that the skeptic can simultaneously assent and suspend assent to the *same* proposition. The upshot is that skepticism

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<sup>55</sup> The *locus classicus* for the *contemporary* understanding of folk psychology as a theory is Sellars, W. “Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind,” (1956) especially, §§xiv-xv; but its roots lie much deeper. Plato’s attempt, e.g., in the *Republic* to understand the structure of the soul in terms of behavioral and affective results as well as Aristotle’s analysis of virtue and action in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, both fall within the scope of a history of reflection guided by the desire to step from ordinary observations about human behavior to a theoretical explanation thereof in terms of the machinery of ordinary psychological concepts: desire, belief, etc.

is more a matter of the attitude than a matter of the object in question (there is some truth to this, but it will require considerable care in unpacking, for which see the next chapter).

Of course, the cost of such explanation will be to deform and supplement ordinary usage, since in many cases uses of the word “belief” or “assent” that we consider similar or even identical will turn out to be different by virtue of failing to conform to the Standard Account and on many occasions where it would be unnatural to use the term “belief”, it will turn out that we can nevertheless do so. Alternatively, such uses that fail to conform will need to be reinterpreted so that they *do* conform. Indeed, it is precisely such tactics that allow the move from (i) above to (ii) and the determination that various actions, whether linguistic or otherwise, make *implicit* reference to beliefs – *implicit* because though the word may not be used, the concept is required to articulate and explain the action.

The fact that in ordinary, everyday life – even when explaining human behavior – we do not make explicit reference to beliefs (as opposed to “wants”, “thoughts”, “facts” etc.) is important here because the Dual-Assent Interpretations conceive of the skeptic as privileging our ordinary, everyday linguistic and non-linguistic activities at the expense of dogmatic theorizing and reflection. If such interpretations *mistake* the facts of ordinary life, as I have been suggesting they do, then they risk falling prey in their account of assents to precisely those problems which they think beset assents. *That* the Standard Account does mistake the facts of ordinary, everyday life seems to me indisputable: whether or not one is explaining someone’s actions or remarks, whether or not one is mentioning someone’s beliefs, in ordinary, everyday life one’s usage of such terms as “belief” etc. is certainly not *consciously* controlled by an underlying account like the Standard Account; moreover, it seems also plain that when one learns to use the word “belief” and psychological vocabulary more generally, one does not learn it by means of the Standard Account (which then might figure unconsciously or implicitly in one’s deployment of the terms). This fact seems even more obvious in

the case of Morison's account of the fourfold way (see §2(c)): it depends upon analyzing various different sorts of behavior and activity, familiar in ordinary life, in terms of a specific account of (i) the role of belief or assent in that life and (ii) the nature of belief or assent itself (as being directed to content furnished by the receptive capacity that generates *phantasiai*). It seems quite false or confused to claim that *in* ordinary, everyday life people so understand their own behavior and explicitly so interpret it. Indeed, even the thought that people *implicitly* commit to such a picture of their activity, which might be made explicit upon questioning, seems out of place. To insist it is relevant is simply to misdescribe the phenomenology of linguistic usage and practical activity in ordinary, everyday life. In such a life, the desire to offer that sort of complete, systematic and precise explanation of individual behavior is never an abiding concern; that is a concern only when one turns to theoretical explanation, where one's activity is conditioned and controlled by criteria of theoretical and explanatory adequacy (consistency, precision, completeness, etc.).

Nor does it solve the problem of being unfaithful to life to insist that the repeated application of skeptical arguments (Modes) generates, through experience, as it were, the Standard Account in the individual.<sup>56</sup> For while it makes good sense to suppose the experience of repeated exercise of the skeptical capacity for opposition will generate some kind of change in outlook, it is less plausible to suppose that such a change is conceived by the individual who undergoes it as a change in one's attitude towards propositions (as opposed to, e.g., simply a change in attitude or interest or even activity), still less that the result of the changed outlook is a conception of two different kinds of assent sharing only a propositional object. This seems to require that someone persuaded by skeptical argument to suspend assent and so abandon some claim, will conceive of herself as (i) nevertheless assenting to a claim (just not on the basis of argument) and as (ii) agreeing with the dogmatist *that* some claim might be true, but denying the basis for its truth.

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<sup>56</sup> This objection was urged by Charles Brittain in conversation.

As a final pass at making my argument so far clearer, it helps to reflect upon some of the examples of the fourfold way that Morison discusses. Consider, for instance, the following example:

(a) The belief that it is day outside, *where this belief is formed immediately from the perceptual appearance to you that it is day outside*. ... [C]ontrast someone who believes that it is day outside because they run through an argument such as this in their heads: my senses are reliable; it appears right now to my senses that it is day outside; therefore it must be day.

Morison mentions the belief *that it is day outside* formed from *the perceptual appearance that it is day outside*. I take it this meant to describe certain facts of behavior, e.g., the fact that you wake up and go to school or work or that you remark to your child or spouse: “Wake up, it’s daytime. Time to get up.” I take it, moreover, that it is a mistake to assume that Morison (or any other proponent of Dual-Content Interpretations) would view it as essential to the belief-formation that one have conscious awareness of an occurrent thought about it being day outside: after all, in the quotidian course of everyday life, few if any pause to reflect upon or even notice that. Moreover, even when one “notices” that it is day outside, one scarcely need be seen as, at the same time, having an occurrent token of the thought that it is day outside; still less, does one suppose that one has a receptive faculty in one’s mind the activation of which generates *phantasiai* – themselves *pathê* of one’s mind – and that, as a result, one acts. The point, in other words, is that the belief and the attendant concepts are meant to explain and rational articulate your linguistic and other behavior. These psychological concepts are, therefore, *technical* or *philosophical* at least insofar as they are not meant to *merely* reflect ordinary use of the relevant words expressing the concepts. Thus, the perception that it is day outside is not mediated by anything, yet still manifests possession of a belief, at least in discursively rational creatures, like human beings, since the ascription of such a belief serves to explain behavior. What all of this shows, I think, is that the ascription of belief is not a *part* of living one’s life, but a way of articulating the rational structure in that life: a *theory* that explains the structure of ordinary, everyday life.

The previous example does, I hope, make clearer the point I have been attempting to articulate, namely, that the Standard Account is a piece of explanatory theorizing that endeavors to capture the structure of skeptical life in terms of certain technical concepts – *phantasia*, *pathos*, and even *sunkatathesis* – and so if one’s activities are to be understood by appeal to it, then one’s activities are to be understood by appeal to a dogmatic account. Insofar as appeals to such accounts determine one’s behavior, verbal or otherwise, then that behavior is to be understood as “dogmatic.” To be sure, however, the fact that the Standard Account *is* a bit of theorizing and the fact that ordinary life and its phenomenology do not require or make explicit reference to the cognitive conditions or psychological states *as* conceived by the Standard Account (or even its cousin, the theory of Folk Psychology) does not show (i) that such an Account *cannot* be applied nor even (ii) that such an account might not be a *true* and *accurate* picture the character of human rational action and speech. To suppose this would be to suppose that the (dogmatic) concepts in terms of which such action is to be understood must somehow *themselves* be an explicit part of such a life as, for instance, in the consciousness, thoughts or plans of subjects living such a life. But the latter is *not* a requirement on theoretical explanations of our use and understanding of psychological vocabulary and concepts, any more than the facts of our conscious awareness of our brain functions (e.g., chemical levels, synaptic firing, neuronal connections) constrains the vocabulary and claims of neuroscience. Indeed, the upshot of the previous line of thought is precisely that ordinary life does not *involve* – explicitly, as it were – such theoretical explanation. Instead, all that is required is a sort of extensional adequacy: the Standard Account (or any related account) should capture the structure of such a life clearly and precisely without it being necessary that the subjects of such lives act and speak *with understanding and reference to* that account. The proprietary concepts in terms of which the Standard Account is articulated are not concepts we need suppose belong to the subjects whose actions and behavior the theory describes. It is perfectly consistent, therefore, for the Skeptical

Principle of Interpretation to apply to Sextus (or any other skeptic's) verbal behavior even *if* they are not in possession of the relevant concepts or account.

This constraint of only extensional adequacy will not, however, work in the case of interpreting Sextus' skepticism, however, for it runs afoul of Skeptical Self-Reflexivity. According to Self-Reflexivity (together with the Skeptical Principle), Sextus (or the skeptic) must not only assents to certain claims (understood as *phantasiai*), but must assents to his assentings to those claims. The skeptic must conceive of his own assents as assents, i.e., as assents governed and informed by the Standard Account. If that account is, as I have argued, controlled and informed by philosophical concerns, then by having his own assents governed and controlled by it, Sextus will, in fact, be indulging in assent<sub>D</sub>. The Standard Account will be the dogmatic theory that characterizes his own assents and with regard to which he understands his own assents. Indeed, the very fact that *PH* 1.13 is interpreted *as* an account of skeptical assent, upon which Sextus will rely in his ascriptions of assents to himself and others, shows that the Standard Account – that interprets *PH* 1.13 – cannot be regarded as a merely extensional characterization of skeptical assent. To do justice to Skeptical Self-Reflexivity, the Standard Account must be regarded as conditioning and informing the skeptic's understanding of her own assents, indeed, as describing those assents in precisely the same terms that she herself understands them. To accommodate this, mere extensional adequacy will not do.

Careful attention to the ordinary use of such terms as *phantasia*, *sunkatathesis*, and *phainomena* will, I think, show how distant such uses are from the use required of them in the Standard Account, or so I will argue in chapter three (§§3–5). If the line of argument I have been pursuing is correct, then the Dual-Assent Interpretations of Sextus, at least those canvassed here, cannot but be regarded as offering an incoherent picture of his skepticism, for Skeptical Self-Reflexivity in combination with the Principle of Skeptical Interpretation will entail that the very form of assent

that Sextus must be understood as forswearing (assent) is precisely the form of assent in terms of which he understand his own assent.

There is, it seems, good evidence to suppose that Sextus would accept the argument that the Standard Account itself is manifestation of dogmatic impulse, reflection and thought. There are, in fact, marked similarities between the Standard Account and Stoic psychology. Like the Standard Account, the Stoic account conceives of assent as directed towards a specific kind of *pathos* of the soul, *phantasia*, whose content is given by a proposition (for the Stoic, an *axiōma*). Such assent, again as in the Standard Account, informs and structure human rational action. It is revealing, therefore, that Sextus argues against different elements in the Stoic account of psychology that bear striking resemblance to the Standard Account. At *PH* 2.70-78, Sextus argues successively that *phantasiai* are unintelligible or unthinkable (*anepinoētos*); that even if they were not, they would be inapprehensible (*akatalēptos*); that even if they were apprehensible, they would be useless for apprehending objects; and (lastly) that even if they were useful for this, they could not serve as a standard of judging (*krinesthai*). Sextus' arguments against *axiōma* are even more revealing, since the notion of a "claim" in the Standard Account is to be understood on the model of a proposition: something true or false but reducible neither to an utterance nor to a fact. This precise conception of proposition Sextus attacks at *M* 7.73ff. (*cf.* *PH* 2.104ff.).

In adducing these various examples of Sextus arguing against a position that often seems quite similar to the picture given in the Standard Account, I do not meant to suggest that the sole basis for supposing Sextus would accept the previous arguments for the incoherence of the Dual-Assent Interpretations is the fact that he argues against such a position elsewhere. Certainly, proponents of that interpretation would allow that the same claim or sets of claims might figure as the object of dogmatic as well as skeptical assent. My point, rather, is that such arguments (i) give some evidence of how far removed the Standard Account is from the lived reality of everyday or

ordinary life and (ii) give some evidence that Sextus would so conceive of the Standard Account. If a psychological theory of assent quite similar to the Standard Account forms the target of skeptical argument, then it is natural to see it as failing somehow to adhere solely to the *phainomena*. Consequently, the Standard Account seems also to fail to adhere to the *phainomena* in the relevant sense.

We are accustomed to confronting quite outlandish theories as targets in Sextus (often Stoic ones, to be sure), but not all of these theories need have this quality; in the case of some, their removal from ordinary, everyday life is less manifest, but nevertheless as certain. The Stoic account of assent is not, one might suppose, the most controversial element of the Stoic philosophy and this fact no doubt explains how the concept of assent to *phantasia* was taken up in the subsequent tradition; other philosophical accounts, whether Epicurean, Peripatetic, or whatever, possess similar accounts of cognitive conditions. This latter fact might bely the ‘philosophical’ or ‘dogmatic’ character of them. By providing evidence of Sextus’ hostility to even some rather uncontroversial bits of Stoic doctrine, one uncovers evidence of Sextus’ own conception of what is ‘non-philosophical.’ This conception I will discuss more in the next chapter, but for now, it suffices to notice that the Standard Account seems unable to capture it.

A final point on the topic of Dual-Assent Interpretations: it might be contended that talk of propositional attitudes, while not capturing ordinary usage and life, but instead providing a theoretical account of rationality in human life, should nevertheless not be seen as robust and implying determinate or problematic ontological commitments.<sup>57</sup> Instead, we might view propositional attitude talk as merely a *façon de parler*, everywhere replaceable by ordinary locutions.

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<sup>57</sup> I owe thanks to both Gail Fine and Charles Brittain for making me aware of this objection. Though I doubt my response to it will satisfy either of them, at the very least it provides some evidence of an attempt (even if unpersuasive) to respond to it.

To this argument, I would reply that while this approach might work for some accounts of the propositional attitudes, it is difficult to see how it could apply to Dual-Assent Interpretations. It is essential to these interpretations that the difference between the skeptic and dogmatist is a matter of different attitudes towards certain claims. More precisely, on such views, the claim to which the dogmatist assents may be the same as that towards which the skeptic assents; the difference is merely that the skeptic allows that her beliefs might be false and is not bothered by this possibility, while the dogmatist does not allow this and is perturbed by the possibility of being mistaken.<sup>58</sup> Thus, the difference between the dogmatist and skeptic necessarily involves claims because it involves notions like truth or falsity. To divest the Dual-Assent Interpretations of such notions is to do away with those interpretations altogether. Some kind of robust commitment to claims and attitudes towards the truth or falsity of claims is, therefore, integral to Dual-Assent Interpretations.

It is true that, in ordinary life and language, we talk of claims and truth or falsity, but I have already pointed out that Dual-Assent Interpretations do not capture that sort of talk, so they cannot merely rely on the existence of such talk to vindicate their view. From the fact that *sometimes* and *in certain contexts*, we talk of truth, falsity, claims, beliefs, thoughts and kindred things, it does not follow that all our actions and our talk of them involve such things or mention of them. Only on the basis of an account or theory of belief as providing the rational structure of ordinary life do the Dual-Assent Interpretations make sense, but precisely because of this, they are not *part* of ordinary life and language.

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<sup>58</sup> For some evidence of this, see, e.g., Frede (1979) pg. 199: "What *fundamentally* distinguishes the skeptic from other people are not the beliefs he has but his attitude toward them. ...his relation to his beliefs is permeated by the awareness that *things are quite possibly different in reality*, but this possibility no longer worries him. This distinguishes him from the dogmatist who is so worried by the question, how things are in reality, that he succumbs to the illusion that reason could guarantee the *truth* of his beliefs, could give him knowledge which would be secure because of his awareness that things could not, in reality, be different from the way reason says they are." (Italics mine.)

## 5. Conclusion: Abandoning the Standard Approach

I have been arguing that the central fault, leading to incoherence, of the Standard Interpretations is the fact that they characterized the distinction and nature of skeptical *sunkatathesis* and *epoché*, *without* accommodating the fact that, in describing his view of the skeptical outlook (and, consequently, *sunkatathesis* and *epoché*), Sextus was, in fact, expressing skeptical *sunkatathesis*. However, the attempt to correct this fault and accommodate the self-reflexive character of portions of Sextus' discussion in *PH* – the fact that he was *describing* the very outlook he was *expressing* – results in incoherent positions. It is natural to wonder, therefore, whether there is something wrong with the whole approach of the Standard Interpretations. Central to this approach is a method of reading Sextus text that takes it for granted that he means *precisely* what he says, i.e., that his discussions are to be understood literally. Indeed, we might even call this a central presumption of *philosophical* interpretations quite generally. After all, philosophical treatises attempt to articulate a position or set of claims as clearly, precisely, and literally as possible; unlike, for instance, literary works such as plays or poem in which figurative language figures so prominently. This shared interpretive or exegetical assumption of the Standard Interpretations is most evident in their mutual advocacy of the Standard Account of Skeptical Assent. Both kinds of Standard Interpretation converge in their basic conception of the form of *sunkatathesis* and *epoché* and precisely because they both suppose that Sextus means his discussion of *sunkatathesis* and *epoché* to provide a clear, literal, and precise characterization or description of these two phenomena.

What if, however, the literalist-cum-philosophical approach to Sextus' skeptical words mistakes the force with which Sextus offers them? Notice this would be the case if it had turned out that Sextus was expressing subjective appearances in making claims; in doing so, he would only be saying how things appeared to himself *without* any expectation or thought that those appearances

should obtain for other people. This, of course, would have the effect of making *PH* little more than a highly-articulate and sophisticated expression of feeling rather than a description of a specific philosophical position or outlook. Moreover, this would also have the effect of making a literal interpretation of his words misplaced. If Sextus were insisting only that it subjectively appeared to him that things were thus-and-so, then it would be a mistake to suppose he was claiming *that* things were thus-and-so at all; to so interpret his words, would be to mistake their force.

I do not want to urge that we treat *PH* as a species of poetry or imaginative literature, but I do want to suggest that we will have difficulty understanding Sextus unless we first examine how he intends his words to be taken and, in the next chapter, I will focus on those forms of linguistic usage that make plain his larger designs. For now, it suffices to say, that we cannot presume that Sextus' utterance can be understood in much the same way as other philosophical utterances nor, indeed, that the *PH* is to be read the same way as other philosophical treatises. In insisting that the *PH* is an example of the speech act of *reporting*, rather than *strongly affirming*, Sextus seems to be warding us off the philosophical approach altogether. It remains to the next chapter to explain what he imagines in its stead.

## Chapter Two

### “The Gift of a Common Tongue”<sup>59</sup>: The Skeptic’s Linguistic Practice

#### 0. Introduction

In various sections of his *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, Sextus suggests that there is something distinctive about the linguistic means employed in expressing the skeptical philosophy and outlook, namely, the “looseness,” “imprecision,” and “simplicity” of its terms and claims. In a way this peculiarity is unsurprising: Sextus conceives of skepticism as quite different, in important ways, both from neighboring views (*PH* 1.209-241) and from dogmatic philosophy (*PH* 1.1-4) – indeed, as I shall eventually argue, from philosophy itself – so that we should scarcely be shocked by the thought that the linguistic means employed to express that outlook are also philosophically unique. Sextus regards the same looseness and imprecision as distinctive also of ordinary or everyday language (*bios*); such a language – understood in the right way – registers and expresses the essential insights and outlook of skepticism. Nevertheless, commentators have by and large neglected discussion of the connection between ordinary life and language and skepticism<sup>60</sup>, and this for a variety of reasons, not least, the desultory character of Sextus’ comments on *bios*. The aim of this chapter is to remedy this neglect; its animating thought is that a clearer understanding of the skeptic’s conception of ordinary language will provide a clearer understanding of the skeptical outlook. I proceed to this end in three parts. In part one, I introduce the concept of ordinary life and language as it figures in Sextus’ work and discuss those features salient for the skeptical outlook. I consider two different ways of understanding ordinary language in part two, one dogmatic, the other undogmatic, and discuss the

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<sup>59</sup> This phrase I borrow from Churchill (1943), though my use of it (as the reader will see) is rather different: “The gift of a common tongue is a priceless inheritance and it may well some day become the foundation of a common citizenship.”

<sup>60</sup> Two exceptions to this general neglect are Barnes (1982) §5 and Grgić (2011); for discussion of the latter, see §3(a) below.

former at length by focusing on an example of dogmatic interpretation in the literature. The aim of this part is to give a negative characterization of how the skeptic understands ordinary language by means of a consideration of how the skeptic does *not* understand ordinary language. In part three, by contrast, I move to a positive account of ordinary language by elaborating an undogmatic understanding of it. My hope is that the insights gained in this part will make possible a new approach to understanding Sextus' remarks *in propria persona*, which can be deployed in chapter three to understand the skeptic's concept of assent. Finally, in part four, I consider some objections to the contention that ordinary language and life is central to Sextus' skepticism and discuss some possible responses to these objections.

## 1. Linguistic *Bios*

### a. A New Basis for Interpreting Skepticism

Sextus varies the precise characterization of the linguistic means that he takes to be distinctive of skepticism: sometimes describing them in semantic terms, sometimes in terms of the relevant speech act involved, and often in terms of both. On the semantic side, when the skeptic uses the formula (*phônê*) "not more" (*ou mallon*), it is with an implicit restriction of scope, so that the expression is elliptical either for "not *this* more than *that*", where the demonstratives specify certain claims (PH 1.188), or for "no more *reason* for *this* than *reason* for *that*" (PH 1.189-190, *cf.* 196). Alternatively, the skeptic might use the formula "all things are undetermined" to mean "all things *I have examined appear to me* to be undetermined" (PH 1.198-199, *cf.* 200). However, skeptical usage is also distinguished by the kind of speech act involved: a kind of speech act that gives expression to the skeptic's assent to *phainomena*. Thus, Sextus insists that the skeptic practices "non-assertion" (*aphasia*) in her utterances: neither affirming nor denying a given claim, but rather merely exhibiting (*dêlountes*) "how things

strike her” (*PH* 1.192-193), where such exhibiting is not to be understood on the model of assertion. The latter thought is given variously expressed in Sextus’ work: sometimes he describes the skeptic briefly as “speaking undogmatically” (*phamen adoxastós*, *PH* 1.24), other times as “reporting his own impressions undogmatically” (*to pathos apangelei to heatou adoxastós*, *PH* 1.15), still other times as “reporting on each thing as it appears to us at the time” (*kata to nun phainomenon hēmin apangellomen peri hekastou*, *PH* 1.4).

The variability in Sextus’ description of the skeptic’s linguistic practice has not troubled interpreters, since there is a natural way to understand both the semantic and the pragmatic characterizations of the skeptic’s linguistic activity as forming, in some sense, a unity. The key is found in the opening sections of *PH*, specifically, in Sextus’ description of the form of assent that the skeptic practices: “for the skeptic assents to those affections constrained by appearances” (1.13). The Standard Interpretations understand the latter claim as asserting that the skeptic assents to specific sorts of affections (*pathē*), namely, appearances (*phantasiai*). Since how things appear to the skeptic (or to anyone) can vary from moment to moment and depends in crucial ways on what a person is cognitively or perceptually confronted with, the above semantic characterization of the skeptic’s utterances in terms of a restricted scope and relativization to object and place is fitting; on the other hand, because the skeptic describes only her appearances – not how things, in some sense, *are* independently of those appearances<sup>61</sup> – it is natural or fitting to see her utterances as falling in some class of non-assertoric speech acts. In this way, then, skeptical assent is more basic in the order of explanation – and so presupposed in a characterization of the rational basis for the distinctive semantics of skeptical expressions and for the distinctive speech acts conveying them. It is natural therefore that focus in interpretation has largely been on the phenomenon of skeptical assent rather

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<sup>61</sup> The qualifier “in some sense” is important here: all the Standard Interpretations take it that there is a sense in which the skeptic suspends assent to matters external to appearance; they differ in how they understand appearance.

than on the distinctive features of skeptical linguistic practice; unfortunate too in light of the fact that the principal sources on skeptical assent seem riven by a fundamental ambiguity (an ambiguity partly responsible for generating the Dual-Content and Dual-Assent Interpretations).<sup>62</sup>

Since I have explained in chapter one why I think the Standard Interpretations provide a mistaken characterization of such “skeptical” assent, it should be no surprise that I regard the related understanding of skeptical linguistic practice as equally mistaken. Indeed, it is precisely a desire to motivate this claim that will focus my discussion in this chapter. In this first part, I will discuss one strand in skeptical linguistic practice that has been little discussed and seems revealing both of the nature of that practice and of the nature of the phenomenon of skeptical assent meant to inform it: the skeptic’s reliance on and privileging of “the linguistic practice of ordinary life” (= *ho bios*, *hê tou biou sunêtheia*, *hê sunêtheia*). This strand seems conceptually distinct from skeptical assent in a way in which those other aspects of skeptical linguistic practice are not. By this I mean that while the previous semantic and pragmatic features of linguistic practice seem naturally allied to the conception of skeptical assent articulated in the Standard Interpretations, *ho bios* and the relevant features thereof upon which I would like to focus are not quite so “naturally allied.” Using the concept of *ho bios* as the basis for interpretation, moreover, will make possible an interpretation of skeptical linguistic practice that avoids taking skeptical assent as conceptually and explanatorily basic; the latter strategy, after all, dubiously relies on certain assumptions about how the skeptic’s words and claims are to be taken and the intentions with which they are delivered. Thus, articulation of the details of this neglected aspect of skeptical linguistic practice might afford the possibility of shedding new light on skeptical assent by means of an understanding of how the skeptic’s words, expressions and speech acts are to be understood and received. The central thought is that a clearer sense of how to interpret Sextus’ words will give us a better grasp on what is being asserted in those passages

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<sup>62</sup> I argue this in chapter one §§2(a)-(c).

on assent. This promise of hermeneutic clarity might permit clarity too in understanding Sextus' intentions and the skeptical outlook as a whole.

### **b. The General Concept of *Ho Bios***

The expression “*ho bios*” and cognates are an important, if not always obvious, feature of skeptical discourse. Part of what can obscure the importance of *bios* is precisely the temptation to treat it as meaning nothing more than “life.” In fact, the earliest appearance of an expression related to “*ho bios*” in *PH* (at 1.23) makes plain that *bios* cannot simply mean that: “adhering to what is apparent [*tois phainomenois*], we[= skeptics] live undogmatically in accordance with the observance of life [*kata tēn biōtikēn tērēsīn adoxastōs*].” This statement connects the skeptic’s life lived “in accordance with appearance” with a life lived “in observance of life,” but such a connection might seem redundantly expressed if one takes “*biōtikēn*” to be nothing more than an adjectival modification of the verb “*bioō*”. To be sure, *any* life – one might suppose – is a life lived in observance of life: by the very fact that one *lives*, one observes *life*. In fact, as I’ve translated the passage, a crucial aspect of the meaning of the expression is left out, a lacuna that is well-remedied by Jonathan Barnes’ remarks on *bios*.

Sextus employs the word in a somewhat different way: *bios* contrasts with *philosophia*, *biōtikos* with *dogmatikos*. The contrast is roughly that between the layman and the professional, between real life and theory. *Bios* means something like “ordinary life”, “everyday life.” Thus, *hoi apo tou biou* (*M* 11.49) are ordinary men, non-professionals; *ta biōtika kritēria* are the standards used in everyday judgments, as opposed to the technical or “logical” standards invented by the philosophers (*PH* 2.15, *M* 7.33); *Bios* itself is often used to mean “Everyman” (e.g., *M* 1.232; 8.129).<sup>63</sup>

The expression *ho bios* can sometimes pick out a way of life, sometimes an ideal entity (“ordinary man”), but both these uses are oriented by the concept of what is familiar, ordinary or everyday: the man who lives a familiar, ordinary or everyday life is *bios* and so too is such a life. Perhaps more

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<sup>63</sup> Barnes (1982) pp. 79-80. In what follows, it will become clear that I am much indebted to Barnes’ paper, in particular for drawing my attention to both the concept of linguistic *bios* and its attendant obscurities (which partly result from how the concept figures in Sextus’ work: sometimes in skeptical argument against dogmatists, sometimes in explanations of the skeptic’s own outlook).

accurately or, at least, in a manner more illuminating, the orienting concept is that of familiar, ordinary and everyday *life*: the Everyman is, after all, distinguished by the sort of life he lives, but it is at the very least awkward or conceptually curious to insist that ordinary life is distinguished by the Everyman; only the former seems to reflect the explanatory order of the concepts. Thus, the characterization of a life lived “in accordance with appearance” is paired with the characterization of a life lived “in accordance with *ordinary* life” in the skeptical outlook: the two characterizations picking out a single phenomenon – the skeptical life – in two different ways.

There is a natural opposition between the philosophical life, understood as a life shaped or informed by philosophical-cum-scientific reflection or theory and the practices thereof – a life the full explanation of which is available only in terms of the technical standards and concepts and distinctive claims of philosophy or science – and ordinary or everyday life, which is structured by those elements, familiar to everyone, which Sextus describes at *PH* 1.23-24: “guidance by nature [e.g., sense-perception & thought], ... necessitation by feelings [e.g., hunger & thirst], ... transmission of customs and laws, ... and instruction in the arts.” The opposition between these two sorts of life rests on the fact that our use of concepts, our language and our thought does not depend upon consciousness (whether occurrent or otherwise) of a theoretical framework which controls the application of them. (If it *did* rest on such a theoretical framework, there would be no philosophical or scientific work to do; the content of science and philosophy would be immediately available *in* life.) It is far less obvious that a life lived “in accordance with appearance” should also be a life lived “in accordance with the observance of ordinary life.” Indeed, this very identification provides further evidence that the Standard Interpretations have gone quite wrong in how they understand Sextus’ skepticism, for while their accounts provide a plausible understanding of “appearances” and what a life lived in accordance with them would amount to, they are less

successful in making clear why such a life should also be regarded as an ordinary one or, at the very least, should conform to an ordinary life.

**c. A Specific Concept of *Ho Bios*:  
Ordinary, Everyday Language**

The expression “*ho bios*” is sometimes restricted in denotation to one aspect of the more general phenomenon of ordinary life.<sup>64</sup> In the previous section, we saw that this restriction may be to the agent or subject of such a life, but the central focus of this chapter is a different sort of restriction: the use of *ho bios* to pick-out a specific sort of linguistic activity, namely, *ordinary* or *everyday* language, the language typical or distinctive of ordinary or everyday life. In *Adversus Grammaticos* (M 1) 232, Sextus distinguishes this “usage” as follows:

...some usages [*sunêtheiôn*] are scientific [*kata tas epistêmas*] and others are ordinary and everyday [*kata ton bion*]. For example [*kai gar*], certain terms are accepted in philosophy, and especially in medicine and also in music and geometry, but there is also simple usage in ordinary life belonging to laymen [*biôtikê tis aphelês sunêtheia tôn idiôtôn*], which differs among cities and peoples.<sup>65</sup>

As in the case of ordinary *life*, the contrast here is between the technical and philosophically informed terms and expressions of philosophers and scientists and the familiar ordinary terms and expressions of laypeople. This distinction can be further explained by noting that in scientific and philosophical discourse the terms and expressions are controlled by *ta dogmatika kritêria* of scientific and philosophical reflection or theory, whether implicitly in light of the doctrinal commitments (e.g., to the existence and character of certain states, substances, etc.) or explicitly by means of an organon (such as Aristotle’s); while ordinary usage is controlled only by *ta biôtika kritêria* or, perhaps, more simply by *biôtikê têrêsis*.

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<sup>64</sup> Barnes notes this as well, *ibid.*, pg. 80.

<sup>65</sup> Translations from M 1 are my own, but I have benefited from both Bury (1933) and the more recent Blank (1998).

Sextus' usage here is not indigenous to him, but inherited from those grammarians towards whom he is so unsympathetic in *Adversus Grammaticos* (M 1). Apollonius Dyscolus, a grammarian and contemporary of Sextus, not to mention a prominent party to the debates discussed in M 1, sometimes distinguishes between two forms of evidence for his grammatical theories: those derived from classical writings, e.g., of Homer and the Athenian tragedians, and those derived "from ordinary life" (*ek tou biou*), where this is clearly intended to pick-out the linguistic phenomena of ordinary life.<sup>66</sup> It is true that in many cases Apollonius is concerned centrally with *syntactic* as opposed to semantic questions, and this may seem to place his usage and insights in a different light from Sextus", but (i) it is not always easy to distinguish his purely syntactic insights from the more semantic ones, e.g., even Apollonius' theoretical reflections on the syncategorematic particles involve discussion of semantic features of them<sup>67</sup>; (ii) we have considerable evidence that Sextus does not conceive of grammarians as concerned exclusively with syntactic matters (see the discussion below), so that Apollonius' methodology should be regarded as, to some extent, indifferent to the syntax/semantics distinction and so the methodological approach with respect to syntax should be generalizable to semantics; and (iii) even without such evidence as in (ii), it is quite clear that Sextus himself understands ordinary language as distinguished, in part, by semantic features (again, see below).

Apollonius' methodology or theoretical practice is instructive for the interpretation of Sextus: the expressions of *ho bios* constitute not only part of the basis for the construction of his theoretical account of grammatical particles and terms, but serve as touchstones for the accuracy and plausibility of that account. This dual function of data – as basis for theory construction, as basis for theory testing – is, of course, familiar in modern characterizations of the role of data in scientific

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<sup>66</sup> Apollonius Dyscolus, *conj.* 245.21, 246.10.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

practice, but what is more interesting for current purposes is the light it sheds on the connection between “appearances” (or the life lived in accordance with appearance) and “ordinary life” (or, again, the life lived in accordance with observation of it).

One possible understanding of appearances – especially when denoted by the expression *phainomena* – is as elements or objects forming the basis for theory construction in philosophical and scientific pursuits. It plays something like this role in Aristotle’s methodological reflections<sup>68</sup> (at least, some of the time), and some of what Sextus says about *phainomena* seems best understood precisely in such terms (*PH* 1.16, 19-20). This tightens and even explains the connection between the two sorts of specifications of the skeptical life, the one in terms of appearances, the other in terms of *bios*. Some care is needed here, however, for to so understand *phainomena* in its role in theoretical reflection is not thereby to countenance or, indeed, partake of such reflection or even to insist that the fact of theoretical reflection is *essential* to any understanding of *phainomena* in such terms. The thought, instead, would be that picking out *phainomena* is an effective even if dispensable way of understanding what *phainomena* are and what role they play in skeptical reflection and the skeptical outlook: how, that is, the skeptic conceives of *phainomena*.<sup>69</sup>

It is a familiar and frequent feature of Sextus’ arguments against various philosophical claims that he pauses at some point to delimit what we can rather vaguely call the “scope” of his arguments. Thus, for instance, prior to his discussion of God in *PH* 3, he suggests the following.

[L]et us first consider God [*peri theou skopēsōmen*], premising first that in undogmatically following life [*tōi... biōi katakolouthountes adoxastōs*] we say [*phamen*] that there are gods and we are pious towards the gods and say [*phamen*] that they are provident: it is against the haste [*propeteian*] of the dogmatists that we make the following points. (*PH* 3.2 *cf.* *M* 9.49)

Or again, when discussing arguments about and conceptions of number, Sextus notes that:

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<sup>68</sup> The role of *phainomena* in Aristotle’s methodological reflection is addressed in greater depth in chapter three §1.

<sup>69</sup> This important thought I pick-up again and discuss in more detail in §2(d) below.

So far as ordinary usage goes [*epi tēi sunētheiāi*], we speak undogmatically [*adoxastós...phamen*] of numbering a thing and we take it [*akouomen*] that there is such a thing as a number. But the over-elaboration [*periērgia*] of the dogmatists has provoked an argument against number too [*kai...kekineke logon*]. (PH 3.151)

One can multiply the examples of such delimitation further, but I think these suffice to show that *bios* – at least on a certain conception thereof – is preserved from the skeptical arguments that terminate in suspension of assent. Thus, though the skeptic suspends judgment about a variety of things, *bios* is not among them. Consequently, it is natural to conclude that Sextus conceives of *bios* informing the skeptical philosophy, so that the distinctively skeptical life is indeed, as 1.23 emphasizes, lived both “in observation of *bios*” and “according to appearance.”

The previous quotations actually establish *more* than merely that *bios* is preserved from dialectical attack and so suspension of judgment. For in both passages Sextus insists that what the skeptic *says* and what she *speaks* is shaped by *bios* as well; in preserving *bios* from dialectical critique, the language *ek tou biou* is also preserved, and so we can suppose that such language is conceived as bearing a special relation to the expression of the skeptical outlook, as being distinctively reflective of the skeptical philosophy. Indeed, we need not merely *suppose* this, for Sextus makes more explicit claims to this effect elsewhere in his work. What has obscured this fact is, I think, that his remarks are rather unsystematic and depend on a series of conceptual connections that are not obvious and certainly not signposted by Sextus.

In his discussion of those expressions and claims (*phónai*) particularly reflective of the skeptical outlook and philosophy (expressions like “not more” [*ou mallon*], “all things are undetermined” [*panta estin aorista*], etc.), Sextus notes that:

We say too that we do not declare these things precisely [*ou kuriós delountes*], but without distinctions [*adiaphorós*] and, if you like [*kai ei boulontai*], loosely [*katachrēstikós*] – for it is unbecoming for a skeptic to fight over phrases, especially as it works to our advantage that even these phrases are said to signify nothing purely [*katholon*] but only relatively, i.e., relatively to the skeptics. (PH 1.207)

The significance of the thought expressed in this passage is easy to miss, if one fails to note (i) that “loose” (*katachrēstikos*) and “indifferent” (*adiaphoros*) linguistic usage is distinctive of ordinary language or (ii) that ordinary language bears a distinctive relation to the skeptical outlook and philosophy. The above passage (1.207) will, of course, testify to (ii), provided we can show that (i) is also well-supported in Sextus; that it is, passages such as the following in *M* 8.129 make quite plain:

For we must allow ordinary speech [*tōi biōi*] to make use of inexact terms [*katachrēstikōis onomas*], as it does not seek after what is true with regard to nature [*to pros tēn phusin alēthes*] but rather what is true with regard to opinion [*to pros tēn doxan*]. Thus we speak of digging a well and weaving a cloak and building a house, but not with precision [*keurios*]; for if there is a well, it is not being dug, but has been dug; and if there is a cloak, it is not being woven but it has been woven. So that in ordinary life [*tōi biōi*] and common conversation [*tēi koinēi sunētheai*] inexactness [*katachrēsis*] is in place, but when we are inquiring into facts of nature [*ta pros tēn phusin...pragmata*], then we must adhere to accuracy [*tēs akribeias*].

A contrast is here drawn between the usage proper to those disciplines “seeking after what is true in nature” – the scientific and philosophical disciplines – and the usage of ordinary life, which is directed only towards truth in human practice and discourse (and what precisely this amounts to will be an important concern in subsequent sections). The Greek expression denoting the latter is revealing – *to pros tēn doxan alēthes* – since “*doxa*” is the nominal form of the verb “*dokēō*”, one of whose meanings is “to appear/seem”. The Greek suggests that the truth in question pertains to matters of appearance: to what properly belongs in the class of *ta phainomena*.

The precision of technical and proprietary concepts and terms of the scientific and philosophical disciplines is determined by their ambition of capturing the objective constitution and structure of the world (or “nature” = *phusis*); the looseness and inexactness of ordinary usage is the result of its pragmatic orientation and its role in our everyday lives. Indeed, even when scientific disciplines make use of terms that have an ordinary usage, their use of them is not the same, for it is controlled by a picture of their subject and an ambition – namely for a true picture of the world – that demands precision. It is no surprise, then, that when discussing the concept of place, Sextus

takes pains to distinguish between a “loose” use of the term “place” (*topos*) and a strict use of it in order to emphasize that the skeptical arguments he deploys will be directed only to the latter (*M* 10.15, cf. 10.95 & *PH* 3.119): the skeptic’s life and outlook will involve use of the term “place” in the loose and inexact sense distinctive of ordinary language.

The connection between the previous two features of linguistic practice – looseness (*adiaphoros*) and inexactness (*katachrēsis*, *katachrēstikos*) – and what is called “ordinary” or “everyday” language or “common” usage (*koinē sunētheia*, *ho bios*) articulates Sextus’ conception of ordinary language, but a further specification or, anyways, a specification in terms of further concepts or properties is available. Thus, for instance, Sextus sometimes describes the linguistic practice of ordinary life as “untechnical” (*atechnōs*; *M* 1.30-4, 153, 179-80), other times merely as “simple” (*aphelōs*, *PH* 1.17, *M* 1.153, 162; *haplōs*, *PH* 1.9, 10); the former term captures the sense in which ordinary usage is not controlled or informed by a *technē*, here understood not as the sort of practical craft the skeptic will practice, but as a theoretical art, e.g., the art of grammar or rhetoric (*M* 1.256-257), while the latter emphasizes that there is no elaborate theoretical apparatus – no “overwrought” or “needlessly complex” (*periergos*, *periergia*; *PH* 1.9, *M* 2.59) structure of doctrine or commitment – controlling or underwriting the usage, but simply the “practical” (*pragmatikōs*, *M* 1.7, 5.106, etc.) exigencies and urgencies of everyday life.

#### **d. Sextus’ Own Usage**

In the previous sections, I have focused largely on explaining the content of the skeptic’s concept of ordinary language, but here I would like to discuss some evidence of Sextus’ own preference for ordinary language, especially when making claims *in propria persona* about the nature of the skeptical outlook. Absent the skeptic’s more general commitment to *ho bios*, whether linguistic or otherwise, the evidence I would like to consider might not be seen as significant or revealing. Thus, the

previous discussion of *ho bios* allows us to see the following evidence as of a piece with the skeptic's more general commitment to *ho bios*.

When making claims *in propria persona* rather than in the context of skeptical argument or in the description of dogmatic doctrines, Sextus shows a marked tendency to avoid the technical terms of philosophers and scientists. I mean, in particular, those terms or expressions that have an obvious philosophico-scientific use that might tend to inform our interpretation of them, especially, when they are met with in what is, ostensibly, a work of philosophy (i.e., Sextus' work). Stéphane Marchand notes<sup>70</sup>, for instance, that "Sextus generally avoids the classical vocabulary of *phasis* or *apophasis*," opting instead to use *prophēresthai* or *apangellein* and their cognates, especially when describing the skeptic's utterances (*PH* 1.4, 14-15, 188, 191, 197, 203, etc.). The latter terms reflect a sort of theoretical reticence in the face of building too much into the description of the skeptic's utterance: *prophēresthai*, as Marchand also notes<sup>71</sup>, can be applied to animal sounds as much as human ones. *Apangellein* connotes "mere" description or "report": when someone reports on something or someone else's remarks (or even their own), there is the strong suggestion that interpretation and analysis is avoided.

Much like the use of *prophēresthai* and *apangellein*, Sextus' use of *phōnai* to denote those phrases and words distinctive of the skeptical outlook is (in Arne Naess' words<sup>72</sup>) "a highly non-committal word." When describing someone as asserting or affirming something in the classical philosophical vocabulary (*apophasis*, *phasis*) we attribute to that person a discursive or conceptual ability distinctive of human beings and this, in turn, suggests a specific understanding of the way in which the linguistic acts express thoughts (as well as those thoughts themselves). Thus, when Sextus describes (*PH* 1.192) the "non-assertion" (*aphasia*), to which the skeptic is committed, it is in terms of the

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<sup>70</sup> Marchand (2011) pp. 119-20.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, pg. 120.

<sup>72</sup> Naess (1969) pg. 7.

classical vocabulary (*apophrasis*, *kataphrasis*, etc.) which suggests the interest is in denying that the skeptic engages in what the dogmatist would describe as assertion. This thought is further supported by the definition of non-assertion as involving neither the “positing” (*titthenai*) nor the “rejecting” (*anairein*) of anything, for these terms, at least in this precise use, seem to function more or less technically in philosophical contexts (cf. *PH* 1.10; for evidence of the usage outside Sextus, see Plato *Rep.* 5 (333c)). By contrast, Sextus denotes those phrases and words that give distinctive voice to the skeptic’s outlook by “*phonaí*”.

In some circumstances, however, it may be difficult to avoid using a word that has a distinctive philosophico-scientific meaning. This may be because while such a word has a current use in ordinary language, it has also a specific technical use in philosophical or scientific contexts. Indeed, quite often, the technical use constitutes a sort of hardening or precisification of the non-technical one. With regard to such terms, Sextus takes care to point towards the ordinary use, rather than the technical one. An illuminating example of this strategy is provided in his discussion of “What skepticism is” (*PH* 1.4). This discussion occurs early in *PH* 1 (8ff.) and provides a clear and careful description of the skepticism. First, Sextus describes skepticism as

an ability [*dunamis*] which opposes [*antithetikē*] what appears to what is thought in any way whatsoever because of which [*aph’ hēs*], owing to the equal [*isostheian*] force of the matters and accounts [thus] opposed [*antikeimenois*], we come [*erchometha*] first to a state of suspension [*epochē*] and, after that, to a state of freedom from disturbance [*ataraxia*]. (*PH* 1.8)

More interesting for our purposes, however, are his metalinguistic or conceptual reflections on this description:

Now we call it a “*dunamis*” not in any elaborate sense [*ou kata to periergon*] but simply [*haplōs*] in the sense of “to be able” [*kata to dunasthai*]. (*PH* 1.9)

Sextus’ worry here is that “*dunamis*” might be understood in a more “elaborate” sense than he intends. One thinks immediately of the concept as it figures in Aristotle’s reflections in *Metaphysics*

IX (Theta) in connection with his hylomorphism; indeed, the sophistication and intricacy of the concept as it there appears would be quite beyond anything Sextus intends.

Even, however, if we do not ascend the dizzying heights of Aristotelian (or Peripatetic) metaphysics, there remains a tendency, at least among those philosophically or scientifically inclined, to articulate the concept in precise and clear theoretical terms. Sextus seems anxious to avoid this by drawing a distinction between what is complicated or overwrought (*periērgon*) and what is simple (*haplōs*). As discussed in the previous section, the latter terms clearly signals that the use he has in mind is that of ordinary or everyday language. What is, however, a little puzzling about his remark is why the expression “*to dunasthai*” should be taken as immune to the sort of complex or sophisticated articulation to which “*dunamis*” is vulnerable. The worry seems to be that we might understand *dunamis* as something other than merely a sort of linguistic variant of the description of someone or something as “able” to do something. The idea would be that the only difference between saying someone or something “possesses a *dunamis*” and someone or something “is able” to do something is linguistic. While the noun “*dunamis*” might be mistakenly taken, e.g., to refer to a specific entity or object – i.e., a “power” or “ability” – and so risk inviting a philosophical account of the metaphysics of such things, the verbal form seems less vulnerable to such a mistake, not least because we do not talk about someone or something “being able” unless we supplement an account even if only implicitly of what they are able to do. Notice, furthermore, that there does seem to be an implicit appeal to our ordinary or everyday use of words: this does seem to be the use meant to singled out by “*to dunasthai*”. Indeed, the evidence in Sextus’ corpus of the connection between simple and ordinary uses of the expressions seems to put this appeal beyond all doubt.

It is worth emphasizing, or perhaps *re*-emphasizing, the great care Sextus takes in those passages that might reasonably regarded as expressing the skeptical outlook, as it were, *in propria persona*. Unlike in the context of skeptical argument or the exegesis of dogmatic claims, Sextus

cannot simply rely on the meaning of the terms imparted by the relevant dogmatic school or tradition. I think this and the previous sections show what it is that he relies upon: the understanding and knowledge with which everyone is equipped and which is involved in our quotidian traffic with words and expressions in ordinary life.

## **2. A Dogmatic Conception of Ordinary Language: Burnyeat on Sextus on Place (*Topos*)**

### **a. Dogmatic vs. Undogmatic Understanding**

In the previous section, I contrasted terms used primarily as technical terms with terms that have technical uses but equally prominent uses in ordinary life. I noted that the latter terms pose a particular problem for Sextus, since their appearance in a work of *philosophy* inclines a reader to interpret them philosophically and technically. In fact, no term or expression is really entirely immune to such a tendency because every term allows philosophico-scientific analysis or definition and so conversion into a “technical” term; this is really just another way of saying that the scope of philosophic-scientific inquiry is unlimited. This point focused on terms can be generalized to any object of reflection and inquiry, and so any object at all, with the result that the same *thing* can be understood within or without philosophical reflection and theory.

In the previous section, I also attempted to articulate Sextus’ conception of ordinary language and to show that it bears a special and distinctive relation to the skeptical outlook, since there is some evidence that it is not targeted by skeptical argument and thus *epoché*. But ordinary language is an object of philosophical reflection, which should make it unsurprising that there *are* passages in Sextus which suggest that ordinary language and usage is sometimes targeted by skeptical argument and *epoché*. To make matters worse, some of those passages were, in fact, included in my discussion of the nature of *ho bios* (§1(b)-(c)). Moreover, even if there were no explicit evidence of

such targeting, it would remain unclear why skeptical argument *could* not be deployed against ordinary language; after all, nothing so far said about the notion or nature of ordinary language seems to make such a contingency impossible. To suppose otherwise bespeaks a naivety about the scope and potential objects of philosophical reflection and argument.

Ignoring the fact that ordinary language itself can figure in skeptical argument and so as an object of *epoché* makes any interpretation of Sextus work problematic. To illustrate this latter point, I would like to briefly focus on one example: existential claims made in ordinary language. We can begin to see the problem by reflecting upon Sextus' description of the first of the Agrippan Modes, the "Mode derived from dispute" (*ho apo tês diaphônias tropos*):

According to the mode derived from dispute, we find that an undecidable situation [*anepikriton stasin*] has arisen both in ordinary life [*para...tôi biôi*] and among philosophers [*para tois philosophois*]. Because of this we are not able to choose or rule out anything, and we end up with suspension of assent. (*PH* 1.165)

A possible application of this Mode is found in the first book of *Against the Physicists*, wherein Sextus discusses the arguments for the existence and non-existence of the Gods:

Such [i.e., the previous arguments] are the sorts of arguments by the dogmatic philosophers for the existence and non-existence of the gods. Because of them [*eph' hois*] the skeptics' suspension of assent is arrived at, especially when they are also supplemented by the inconsistency among views in everyday life about the gods [*tês apo tou koinou biou peri theôn anomalias*]. (*M* 9.191-2)<sup>73</sup>

The thought expressed here is that the skeptic's *epoché* is warranted by the inconsistent views available in everyday life about the gods. The "inconsistent views" Sextus mention, no doubt, create precisely the "undecidable situation" that warrants *epoché* according to the first of the Agrippan Modes. Moreover, the "views in everyday life" suggest the varying views of ordinary people about the gods. Certainly, this passage strongly suggests that "ordinary life" is not immune to skeptical criticism or *epoché*, yet Sextus nevertheless asserts, in the same work:

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<sup>73</sup> All translations from *M* 9-10 are my own, though I have benefitted from consulting both Bury (1933) and Bett (2012).

For perhaps the skeptic will be found safer than those practicing a different philosophy [*para tous hōs heterōs philosophountas*], since, according to the familial traditions and the laws, he says [*legōn*] that the gods exist and does all pertaining to the worship and veneration of them [*pan to eis tēn toutōn thrēskeian kai euseibeian sunteinon poiōn*], but so far as philosophical inquiry goes [*hoson epi tēi philosophōi zētēseō*], he will not be hasty. (M 9.49)

In light of the two previous passages, one might wonder: how can the skeptic consistently do such things? After all, he has decided to suspend assent about the existence of the gods, yet nevertheless asserts that they exist and worships and venerates them. Moreover, it does not seem possible to contend that ordinary life is somehow insulated from the relevant *epochē*, for if it were so insulated, it would be false or anyways mistaken to claim that there *is* a conflict either between ordinary life and philosophical reflection or *within* ordinary life itself, the very conflict upon which the Mode from disagreement relies.<sup>74</sup> To insist that there *is* such a conflict is to suppose not only that the claim made in ordinary life is the same as the claim argued in philosophical reflection, but that the considerations that render the one false or without rational basis do the same for the other. In light of Sextus' recommendation of *ho bios*, the commitment to *epochē* seems inconsistent, for *ho bios* involves making the very claims or assertions with regard to which the skeptic adopts *epochē*; moreover, claims with regard to which *ho bios* invites the very standards of evaluation (with regard to truth, justification, etc.) according to which the skeptic suspends assent.<sup>75</sup>

The previous inconsistency centers on what we might call *existential* claims, i.e., claims about the existence or non-existence of something. In my discussion, I focused on the question of the existence of god(s), but, of course, the inconsistency can be generalized to cover nearly any existence claim or, at least, any existence claim that appears to figure in *ho bios*. Perhaps some philosophical

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<sup>74</sup> "Relies" or "posits"? Hopefully, by the end of this chapter it will be seen why, at least from the standpoint of ordinary life, the latter seems more apt.

<sup>75</sup> My "solution" to the apparent inconsistency in Sextus' works is hardly new: it is merely an interpretation of the distinction between the character of claims inside dialectical contexts and outside of them. For a recent development of this distinction, see Castagnoli (2000). While I disagree with Castagnoli's understanding of the appearance/reality distinction in Pyrrhonism, I think his concept of Pyrrhonist "self-bracketing" (pp. 286-291) can be re-deployed in the service of my own account, though I do not undertake to do so in this dissertation.

concepts are not expressed in ordinary language, but claims regarding time, place, motion, cause, etc. – in other words, many of the existential claims that figure in skeptical arguments (see, e.g., the arguments in *PH* 3) – figure implicitly and explicitly in ordinary life and language, so that the inconsistency of *epochê* and *ho bios* is not a circumscribed matter but afflicts much of ordinary language, at least, when such language is deployed to make claims or assertions.

The key to resolving the previous inconsistency is the suggestion that when Sextus insists on an inconsistency in ordinary life and language (as at *M* 9.191-2 above) he is speaking as one pursuing the aims of dogmatic philosophical reflection – the aims of theoretical truth or “what is true with regard to nature” (*to pros tēn phusin alēthes*), discussed in §1(c) above – but when discussing how the skeptic acts (as at *M* 9.49), he is *not* speaking thus. The upshot of adopting this suggestion is the distinction between a claim made in a “dogmatic” context or dogmatically, from one made undogmatically: in the former the whole set of philosophical standards pertaining to argument, evidence and truth (what I’ve called *ta logika kritēria*) are in play, while in the latter only *ta biôtika kritēria* are. The inconsistency adduced earlier is thus one example of the sort of inconsistency generated by ignoring the difference between dogmatic and undogmatic understanding.

To be fair, it is not always entirely obvious *which* standards Sextus has mind, but oftentimes he is quite explicit about which standards are to be invoked. Thus, for instance, he will sometimes signal that he is interested in a dogmatic understanding or argument by forms of the phrase *boson epi tēi philosophōi zētēsei* – “so far as philosophical inquiry goes.” Sextus uses other locutions of this same form (*boson epi* + dative), most frequently, *boson epi tōi logōi*: “so far as the account goes” (*PH* 1.20, 215, etc.). The natural assumption is to view these phrases as signalling the application of a specific sort of standard of evaluation of the relevant claim, what we earlier referred to as *ta dogmatika kritēria*, and that it is the application of these standards that marks a dogmatic understanding. The thought would then be that if we are adjudicating a claim’s legitimacy on the basis of philosophical standards,

then we must suspend assent to such a claim, which is understood dogmatically; if, however, on the basis of the standards of ordinary life (*ta biôtika kritéria*), then the claim is *undogmatic* and perfectly legitimate. Such a thought might be given further plausibility by Sextus' frequent description of actions – whether linguistic or otherwise – as undertaken *adoxastôs* (“undogmatically”); only actions undertaken “dogmatically” are vulnerable to skeptical critique and *epochê* because only such actions invite the relevant standards.

Even when Sextus does not use such locutions in his discussion, context can often serve to disambiguate the nature of the usage. Indeed, in chapter one, I have already referred to Sextus' own (*PH* 1.5-6) distinction between the dialectical contexts of general (*katholon*) and particular (*eidikos*) accounts of skepticism, noting that only the former sets out the “distinctive character” (*ton charaktêra*) of skepticism and its methods, aims, and concepts. The latter constitutes the skeptical arguments against the various dogmatic claims and theories. Since the terminus of the latter activity is suspension of assent, it should be unsurprising that the use of concepts, terms and claims in the context of such argument should be understood dogmatically, whereas, in the latter, we must understand these undogmatically. It is important, therefore, to attend to the dialectical context and purpose of Sextus' remarks in order to avoid ascribing to him positions and views that he is only entertaining, as it were, dialectically or for the sake of argument.

From what has been said so far, however, the distinction between dogmatic and undogmatic may seem only slightly more than nominal. It remains to see what the relevant “standards” are and what distinguishes dogmatic from undogmatic use and understanding. In the remaining sections of this part, I would like to investigate these questions by focusing on Myles Burnyeat's discussion of Sextus' arguments about place (*topos*). Not only will this provide a fitting example of what I think a dogmatic understanding of ordinary language looks like, but it will focus the discussion on a term and concept – *topos* – that has a familiar ordinary use. The larger aim of this discussion is to provide

a *negative* characterization of the skeptic’s concept of ordinary language by focusing on what such a language is *not*.

## **b. A Sketch of Burnyeat’s Account**

In “The Sceptic in His Place and Time,”<sup>76</sup> Myles Burnyeat takes aim at a concept he thinks has loomed large in Dual-Assent Interpretations, namely, the concept of *insulation*. Burnyeat focuses his argument by examining Sextus’ discussion of place (*topos*) at *Against the Physicists* 2 (*M* 10) 37-168 and *PH* 3.119-135, contending that a correct understanding of these passages and argument will refute the claim that Sextus invokes some concept of insulation. Burnyeat offers the following characterization of insulation:

Nowadays, if someone claims that Aenesidemus lived and worked in the first century BC and Sextus Empiricus around 200 AD, we see a big difference between doubting this claim on empirical grounds concerning the historical evidence – it really is frightfully meager – and doubting the claim on the basis of a philosophical argument to show that the past is unreal. I do not think Sextus has anything like our sense of this difference.<sup>77</sup>

Burnyeat insists that the difference presupposes a notion of “insulation”, whereby certain claims (in this case, historical ones) responsive to certain kinds of evidence and evaluation are *insulated* from philosophical claims, despite the fact that the latter appear to pertain to the former; after all, a denial of the existence of the past certainly ostensibly seems to entail a denial of facts about the quality of certain historical evidence. The truth or falsity of the former seems to logically bear on the truth or falsity of the latter, but this is precisely what insulation denies.

At *PH* 3.119, Sextus begins his discussion by prefacing that:

Place, then, is used in two senses, strictly [*kurios*] and loosely [*katachrēstikōs*] – loosely of place taken broadly [*en platei*] as in “my city”, strictly of the exact [*pros akribēian*] containing [place] [*ho...katechōn*], by which we are exactly enclosed [*periechometha*]. We are inquiring [*zētoumen*], therefore [*oun*], concerning the exact [concept of space].

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<sup>76</sup> Burnyeat (1987).

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, pg. 242.

At *M* 10.15, a passage parallel to *PH* 3.119, Sextus is even clearer about the reason for the focus of his inquiry on place “taken strictly”:

For it is agreed that we say [*legomen*] simply [*aphelós*] that someone is in Alexandria or in the gymnasium or in the school; but the investigation [*hê skepsis*] does not concern [“place” understood] broadly [*kata platos*], but “place” [understood] in a circumscribed way [*tou kata perigraphên topou*], as to whether this exists or is merely contrived [*epinoeitai monon*]...

The first person plural, so often used by Sextus to refer to himself and his “school” (Pyrrhonism), of the verb *legô* is significant here, for it appears to make plain what the previous passage leaves implicit: that place understood broadly is not the object of the skeptical critique nor, then, of skeptical *epochê*. Burnyeat notes<sup>78</sup> that the term *aphelós* seems best glossed as “without distinctions” (*v. PH* 1.17, *cf. M* 6.1-2), which allies the use of this term in the second passage with the use of *katachrêstikôs* in the first passage, both of which specify that the broad concept of place distinctive of ordinary language. The fact that Sextus insists that place broadly conceived is not the subject of investigation entails, therefore, that place as it figures in ordinary or everyday language, i.e., in “simple” usage, is not the subject of argument. It is natural, therefore, to interpret the passage as evidence that Sextus regards place broadly conceived to be *insulated* from the considerations and arguments brought to bear on “circumscribed” place; to put the same point differently, the ordinary or everyday conception of place is not vulnerable to the sorts of arguments and considerations attending the concept of place as circumscribed.<sup>79</sup> So interpreted, the above passage *seems* (at least, at first pass) to provide a paradigmatic case of the sort of insulation Burnyeat wishes to reject, a fact that Burnyeat himself acknowledges.<sup>80</sup>

However, Burnyeat argues against the conclusion that the passage *is* to be understood thus.

His argument can be boiled down to a single point, namely, that the distinction drawn between

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<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, pg. 235.

<sup>79</sup> I question this reading of the passage in §(d) below.

<sup>80</sup> Burnyeat (1987) pp. 233-4.

broad and circumscribed conceptions derives from the distinction between “an improper and a proper use of the term [*topos*].”<sup>81</sup> Burnyeat notes quite rightly that the latter distinction – between using expressions *aphelôs* or *katachêrstikôs* and using them *kuriôs* – is not indigenous to Sextus, but derives from the work of ancient grammarians. For the grammarians, the distinction captures the fact that there exists, on the one hand, “sloppy usage,” which is “nonsense” and “a misuse of language,”<sup>82</sup> and correct or *genuine* usage. Correct usage alone clearly and precisely expresses the relevant concept (in this case, *place*) while sloppy usage does so only in a confused, inconsistent, and unclear manner.

Consequently, on the assumption that the broad conception of place derives from incorrect usage while the circumscribed or narrow conception derives alone from correct usage, it follows that in the proper acceptation of the term, “place” means that by which we are exactly enclosed. Narrow place is not a technical construct of natural philosophy but what “place” actually means.<sup>83</sup>

In referring to a “technical construct of natural philosophy,” Burnyeat means to reject precisely the view that takes Sextus to distinguish between a philosophico-scientific concept of space – a technical concept underwritten by a theory of place – and a non-technical variety. From Burnyeat’s understanding of Sextus’ distinction, it follows that what looks like a case of “privileging” or “insulating” certain uses of *topos* in *M* 10.15 and *PH* 2.119 needs to be understood quite differently. Sextus is not there suggesting that he wishes to immunize a certain class of uses from critique and, therefore, allow them equal legitimacy in expressing the concept of *topos*; rather, because such uses are, at best, sloppy, misleading, and improper and, at worst, degenerate, nonsensical, and incoherent, he will not argue against the concept confusedly or incoherently expressed by those uses. By characterizing place as broadly conceived as what is expressed by or reflected in improper usage, one

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<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 234ff.

<sup>82</sup> For these descriptions see *ibid.*, pp. 234, 242.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, pg. 234.

effectively asserts that such uses express or reflect only a confused and improper *concept* of *place*; indeed, on the assumption that a minimal principle for individuating concepts is that they be coherent, such confused uses would not really express the concept at all or, at best, a degenerate version of the concept of *place*. Moreover, if one does reject such sloppy uses, it does not entail that there is *not* a non-empty concept of *topos*, for it is a prerequisite of arguing for or against *topos*, that one have a clear and precise concept or understanding of *topos*, for without it, it is not at all clear what it is that one is arguing about. The precise or proper use of the expression “*topos*”, which directly expresses the concept of *topos*, is presupposed by the sloppy or confused usage which Sextus insists he is not discussing. Burnyeat notes that both those parties arguing against the reality of *topos* (e.g., Diodorus Cronus) and those arguing for it (e.g., the Peripatetics) accept this understanding of proper uses of the expression and the relation to improper uses.

The distinction between proper and improper uses is, therefore, a distinction between the clear, precise and coherent expression of the concept of *topos* (alternatively, the clear, precise and coherent *understanding* of *topos*) and a confused, vague, and incoherent expression or understanding. On Burnyeat’s interpretation, the skeptic can afford to ignore the proper or genuine uses and can adhere to the improper ones precisely because he assents only to subjective-appearances. Since the subjective appearance that *p* does *not*, on Burnyeat’s assumption, involve a truth claim that *p*, the fact that the ‘skeptic’s usage is incoherent, confused and improper makes no difference, for these are properties relevant only to the evaluation of truth claims. Thus the skeptic’s adherence to *ta biôtika kritêria*, rather than *ta logika kritêria*, is unproblematic, despite the fact that the former is insensitive to truth and reality, for the skeptic herself is so insensitive. Moreover, since Burnyeat is arguing that this is how the skeptic herself understands her position and practice, it follows that the skeptic must be committed to the foregoing analysis of *topos* and the language thereof.

I have so far argued that at the heart of Burnyeat's account is a view of Sextus as committed to the claim that the *proper* meaning of "the place of *x*" is (something like) "the volume exactly enclosing *x*." A great deal hinges on this notion of propriety. After all, the skeptic might retort that just because "place" means this in certain contexts, it does not follow (i) that it means this in all contexts and so (ii) that any use that fails to reflect this meaning is, *ipso facto*, degenerate and improper. Burnyeat, however, would reject these claims, for the following reasons.

My claim has been that both Sextus and Aristotle conceived the debate not as a discussion of a special theoretician's notion of place, but as a discussion of place. They agree that the word "place" is correctly analysed as requiring a unique place for each thing. It is not just a contextual synonym of "city" or "gymnasium" but has its own proper meaning, its own job in the language: assigning to each thing its proper place in the world. Alternatively, and giving the point a more polemical thrust, if the word "place" has any real work to do in our language and lives, it *presupposes* the possibility of defining for each thing, a unique place.<sup>84</sup>

What Burnyeat means by "presupposes" is explained in the following.

You are asked to fetch a slab and are told that it is in Alexandria. This just says that it is somewhere in Alexandria without indicating exactly where. Locating the slab vaguely in Alexandria presupposes that it can be located precisely at a particular place which is enclosed within the larger whole of Alexandria. The same applies if you are told "It's in the temple" or "In the inner shrine." You can still ask, "Where in the shrine is it?" So we reach the thought that there is exactly one place which is the slab's place and nothing else's place, and, as Aristotle saw, inevitably this will be narrow place...<sup>85</sup>

Burnyeat's claim is that "narrow" place – i.e., place defined as what exactly encloses a thing – is the logical or conceptual basis (note his phrase "correctly analysed" in the first passage) of all other uses of the term that share a similar "spatial" sense. Insofar as one intends to express a concept of *place*, one's usage needs to be controlled and structured by this analysis of place; if it is not so controlled, then either one is not expressing a concept of place at all or one is expressing it in a confused, incoherent, and misleading way. The definition of place as what exactly encloses a thing, therefore, captures the content of the concept of place; only such uses that reflect that concept, can be taken

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<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, pg. 236, italics mine.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, pg. 238.

to be *about* place. There is, therefore, a connection between *what place is* (i.e., the definition of place) and a “proper” understanding of it: namely, the content of the proper understanding *is* what place is; to put the same point another way: the proper analysis of place yields the content of the *concept* of place. According to Burnyeat, it is Sextus’ recognition of this latter fact, that obliges him, in arguing against place *simpliciter*, to presuppose the understanding of place as what exactly encloses a thing, since without such an understanding he could not be viewed as arguing against *place* at all.

### **c. Conceptual Skepticism & Burnyeat’s Problematic Assumption**

Burnyeat’s contention that Sextus accepts a roughly Aristotelian definition of place suggests a restriction on the scope of skeptical *epoché*. The restriction I have in mind is best understood in terms of a division between two sorts of skeptical critique: “existential-objectual” critique and “conceptual” critique. Many of the paradigmatic arguments in Sextus’ work are what we might call “objectual” or “existential” arguments: they pertain to the existence or “reality” (*huparxis*) of a specific sort of object or property. This reflects the skeptic’s adherence to *phainomena*, “what appear”, rather than *hupokeimena*, “what underlie or subsist” (*PH* 1.19-20). In consequence of these arguments, the skeptic suspends assent with regard to the existence of the relevant object or property. Thus in response to the claim (*PH* 2.2-3) that the skeptic cannot inquire into dogmatic objects without “apprehending” them, Sextus notes (10-11) that such objects are available to him in thought as a result of those passive impressions according with manifest appearances, but their existence – which is presupposed by apprehension – is not thereby posited. The skeptic is perfectly well allowed to argue against the latter, for if he were not, the dogmatists own criticism of other positions would also be impossible (*PH* 2.11). The existential-objectual arguments recur throughout Sextus works and chapter headings alone suffice to mark them: “Does a standard of truth exist

[*huparxei*?]” (PH 2.4) “Is [*esti*] there anything true by nature [*phusei*?]” (9) “Does an indicative sign [*semeion endeiktikon*] exist [*esti*?]” (12). The argument about the existence or non-existence of the gods (M 9.49, 191-2) discussed in §(a) is another example of one of these existential-objectual arguments; so too, most importantly for our purposes, are the arguments pertaining to the existence of place, which Burnyeat discusses.

Existential-objectual arguments all take as their topic whether or not something exists or whether or not there exists something with certain properties. Another way of putting this same point is to say the arguments take as their topic whether or not certain concepts are empty or not. Thus, the question of the existence of a standard of truth asks whether the concept of a standard of truth is empty or is not; *mutatis mutandis*, for the other existence questions. Similarly, in asking whether a standard of truth is apprehensible, we can be understood as asking whether the concept of an apprehensible standard of truth is empty or not. Indeed, Sextus seems to recognize the possibility of formulating existential-objectual arguments in terms of concepts by virtue of the fact that in many of his existential-objectual arguments he begins with a clear definition of the thing the existence of which is being disputed. Existential-objectual arguments presuppose a clear definition of the item in question, a definition that yields the content of the corresponding concept. The definition of “indicative sign” states what such a sign is, so that to have a concept of an indicative sign is precisely to understand what such a sign is. Without a clearly intelligible concept of a given object, there can be no question as to whether the object in question exists or does not (for there is no “object in question”!). It follows from this line of thought that suspension of assent with regard to the existence/non-existence of an object does not entail suspension of assent with regard to the *concept* of the object. The two kinds of suspension of assent are, to this extent, logically independent. Consequently, it is perfectly possible for the skeptic to suspend assent to the existence/non-

existence of an object, *but* to assent to the concept of the relevant object or to the definition that gives the content of that concept.

The second form of argument Sextus deploys, which I have called “conceptual”<sup>86</sup>, is directed towards the intelligibility of the *concept* of a given object or item. The central question in this form of argument is on the unthinkability (*anepinoêtos*) or incoherence (*asustatos*) of the concept of the relevant item. In his discussion of epistemological or logical “standards” in *PH* 2, Sextus will sometimes begin a discussion of a given standard by arguing that it is *anepinoêtos* (*PH* 2.22ff., 70ff.), moving on to the question of the existence of the relevant object. Such arguments have a distinctive dialectical structure worth mentioning: first, the argument is made that  $x$  is inconceivable; second, the argument is made even if it is conceivable, it is “non-apprehensible” (*akatalêptos*); third, even if it is apprehensible, it cannot function as a standard. Sextus’ method in these arguments is to adduce the incoherence or unthinkability of the relevant concept by articulating both how that concept is understood and how that understanding coheres with other commitments, sometimes theoretical, sometimes more familiar.

A fitting example of such conceptual arguments or critiques is in the discussion of the concept of human being (*anthrôpos*):

And when they [=dogmatists] wish to establish the concept [*parstanai...tên ennoian*] of it [= human], first they are in dispute, next even [*eita kai*] what they say is unintelligible [*asuneta*].

[23] Democritus says that human being is that which all of us know. But as far as this goes [*boson epi toutôî*], we shall not be acquainted with the human being [*ton anthrôpon*], since we also know a dog, and for that reason the dog [*ho kuôn*] will also be a human being. And there are some humans [*tinâs anthrôpous*] we do not know – wherefore they will not be humans. Or rather, as far as this concept goes [*boson epi têi ennoiai tautêi*], no-one will be human; for if Democritus says that the human must be

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<sup>86</sup> The earliest discussion of conceptual skepticism as a distinctive kind of skepticism and in terms similar to my own is Fogelin (1985) pg. 6. However, Fogelin’s discussion focuses on David Hume’s “skepticism” and the skepticism contrasting to conceptual is not ‘existential-objectual’ but epistemological and centers on the justification of beliefs. For scholars who have recognized some form of conceptual skepticism in Sextus’ work, see Mates (1996) pp. 22-30 and Fine (2014) pp. 336-339. The existence of conceptual skepticism in Sextus has been denied by Hankinson (1995), see *n.* 90 below.

known by everyone, and no human is known by all humans, then no one will be a human according to him.<sup>87</sup>

...

[25] Epicurus says that a human is this sort of shape animated by a soul [*meta empsuchias*]. So, according to him, since the human is shown by pointing, anyone who is not pointed to is not a human; and if someone is pointing to a woman, the male will not be human...

(PH 2.22-25)<sup>88</sup>

Each of these arguments – one against Democritus, the other against Epicurus – centers on a definition of “human”, which is taken to “establish the concept.” Moreover, because Sextus reads such definitions as articulating the content of the concept corresponding to the definiendum, the falsity or incoherence of the definition entails the falsity or incoherence of the relevant concept. The arguments as laid out require supplementation for their incoherence to be manifest: they are enthymematic. It is assumed, for instance, that dogs are not humans and that someone is human (so that no-one is human will be inconsistent with this). It is an interesting question what the status is of these missing premises: are they taken by Sextus to be theoretical claims particular to Democritus? This seems unlikely; rather, the enthymematic premises are claims made on the basis of *phainomena*: it is *apparent* that dogs are not human and that there *are* humans. (Similar remarks apply to Sextus’ remarks on Epicurus’s definition.)

In order for Sextus’ argument to genuinely function as an argument against the intelligibility of the concept of man, we must suppose that the criterion for intelligibility of a definition of a

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<sup>87</sup> What is Sextus up to in this argument? It seems that he’s offering a sophisticated argument (perhaps, an *ignoratio elenchi*) against Democritus’ claim that all human beings possess the concept of a human being, presumably by virtue of self-awareness (specifically, their awareness of themselves *as* human beings). The argument he deploys seems to rest on obscuring the distinction between (i) knowing the concept of a human being (or the property of being a human being) and (ii) knowing an individual or individuals with this property (or who fall under this concept). Sextus manages to pull this off thanks to the fact that “human being” and “dog” are sortal concepts, so that we can talk about *a* human being or *the* human being (and denote an individual who falls under the sortal) and also talk about human being or (again) the human being and denote the sortal or the property. The most plausible reading of Democritus’ claim is that the property of being a human or the concept of human being is known by all human beings (note the 1<sup>st</sup> person plural: *ismen* = *we* know), presumably because instantiated by all such knowers; this clearly does not entail either that every individual human being is known to us or that there is one human being who we all know. (Cf. M 7.265-6 = DK 55B165)

<sup>88</sup> Another equally sophisticated and uncharitable argument. Clearly, from the fact that this form is (contingently) identified by pointing, it does not follow that the pointing is part of the definition: the pointing is a contingent fact about the form, not an essential one. (Cf. M 7.267-8)

concept is that it not make obvious truths false (or inconsistent). In other words, the Democritean definition fails because: (i) it makes a claim like *no one knows all men* inconsistent when “men” is replaced by “what all men know”, and so necessarily false; (ii) it makes a claim like dogs are not humans *false* in certain circumstances (e.g., when one knows a dog); and (iii) it makes the claims that there are some humans we do not know false on the model of (i). To be sure, both sets of arguments are unfair and sophistical, often blatantly so, but the underlying thought is important and interesting. It is, one might think, a necessary condition on any account of a definition of a concept, where that definitions functions as giving the *content* of the concept, that the definition entail that obvious truths (or really any truths) remain true under the relevant interpretation; to abandon this condition is, one might think, to abandon the philosophical task of giving the content of concepts. In his discussion of definitions, Sextus quite explicitly credits this basic view to dogmatists:

...they say that unsound definitions [*mochthêrous borous*] are those including [*periexontas*] something which does not belong [*tôn mê prosontôn*] to the *definienda* [*tois boristois*], whether wholly or in part. That is why, when someone says that a human is an immortal rational animal or a literate mortal rational animal – in the one case, no humans being immortal, in the other some not being literate – they say that the definition is unsound. (*PH* 2.209)

The claim that the skeptic will suspend assent with regard to the definition of a concept is well-supported by other passages in Sextus, in particular, his discussion in *PH* 2.205-212 of definitions (*boroi*). There Sextus notes that dogmatists “always present definitions as indispensable either for apprehension or for teaching.” It is natural to presume he has Stoic theory<sup>89</sup> in mind here, which is likely, but we should not presume a preoccupation or interest in definition is merely a parochial or adventitious concern of the Stoics; the interest and importance of definitions stretches all the way back to Plato and is given powerful form in Aristotle’s rational reconstruction of the structure of scientific knowledge in *Posterior Analytics* – at the foundation of which structure lies, *inter*

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<sup>89</sup> See, e.g., Diogenes Laertius’ discussion of Stoic philosophy in his chapter (8.42) on the founder of Stoicism Zeno of Citium.

*alia*, definitions of scientific concepts. Indeed, the desire for clarity and precision about the content of certain concepts has always been a central to the descriptive and theoretical enterprise of philosophy and science. Sextus, by contrast, argues that definitions are useless both for apprehension and for learning, but also for understanding in everyday life; in so arguing, he places himself in direct opposition to an essential strand of philosophico-scientific reflection.

A slightly different approach to what I have labelled “conceptual” skeptical arguments is provided by Sextus’ discussion of “conceptions of gods” (*tôn theôn ennoiai*) in *Against the Physicists* 1 (M 9). Having proceeded through a series of conceptions afforded by philosophers – similar to the series of definitions in *PH* 2 – Sextus concludes:

Such, then, are the sorts of things said by the dogmatic philosophers about the concept of the gods [*peri tês tôn theôn ennoias*]; but we do not suppose that they need refutation [*antirrêseôs*]; for the variety of assertions [*to...polutropon apophaseôs*] stamps them with ignorance of the truth; for while there can be many modes of conceiving god [*ton theou noêseôs*], the one of them which is true is not apprehended. (M 9.29)

It is natural to assume that the “true” concept would be the one that denotes God or gods, so that suspension of assent about the existence of a true concept of God is simply suspension of assent about the existence of God. Yet, Sextus’ remarks seem to allow a case where God *exists*, but we have an incorrect concept of him or it. Consequently, I think the point of the passage is to insist that *whether or not* God exists, we cannot even make the first step of determining whether we have the right concept, thus whether or not God exists, we cannot determine this, for we cannot determine whether we have the “right” concept. What might this mean? I think there is good reason to suppose Sextus’ is making the same point as earlier: we do not know how to articulate the concept of God – we cannot produce the correct definition – so we are obliged to suspend judgment. We would, thereby, be suspending assent with regard to the content of our concept of god. That this is Sextus’ point seems well supported by the eventual conclusion of (part of) his discussion:

...someone will perhaps say that, before this, the lawgivers and leaders of each tribe invented this conception [*tên noêsîn*], and on this account different peoples conceived [*hupelabon*] the existence of different gods. But this is silly: for, on the contrary [*palin*], all men have a common preconception [*koinên prolêpsin*] about god, according to which it is a blessed and imperishable animal, perfect in happiness and not receptive of anything bad, and it is thoroughly unreasonable [*teleôs...alogon*] that all men grasp [*epiballein*] the same characteristics by chance and were not moved thus by nature [*phusikôs houtôs ekkineisthai*]. (M 9.33)

We have here an excellent example of two “opposed” (*antikeimenoî*, PH 1.8, cf. 31) lines of argument. One argument contends that different peoples conceived different gods due to the activity of their different leaders and lawgivers; the other that everyone has a common preconception of god, so that it could not be derived from a variety of sources. In response to this, the skeptic suspends assent not merely with regard to the *true* concept of god or the gods, but even with regard to whether there is *one* or there are *many* such concepts. Part of the interest of these two arguments lies in the nature of the various claims; the first argument seems to depend on the apparent fact that people worship and believe in different gods – there is no such homogeneity – this seems a matter of *phainomena*. By contrast, the argument for a common preconception, clearly derived from Epicurean doctrine about god, even down to the language of *prolêpsis*, seems to rest in part on *phainomena* (Epicurus, after all, contends that knowledge of *gods* is evident – *Ep. Men.* 123) but in part on a specific theoretical account of the *phainomena* in terms of Epicurean philosophy of mind and epistemology. This gives us something of a key to coming to grips with the issue of conceptual skepticism: the division between an apparent or undogmatic use of concepts and a dogmatic one; it is Sextus’ dogmatic articulation of the ordinary concept of God – his explanation of it in terms of preconceptions and the source of preconceptions in experience – which partly generates the puzzle.

The previous examples of what I have called “conceptual arguments” center on definitions of the relevant items. It should by now be clear that Burnyeat’s contention that Sextus accepts the Aristotelian definition of place amounts to the claim that, at least with regard to place, Sextus’

skepticism is only existential-objectual (i.e., results from such arguments) and not conceptual. In light of the large amount of evidence that I have cited and discussed, it seems implausible to suppose that the scope of Sextus' skepticism is limited or restricted in the way implied by Burnyeat's account.<sup>90</sup> While it is true that Sextus may not explicitly argue against the *definition* of place, his work has given his reader more than enough resources to embark on those arguments for herself. In the next section, I will give further evidence for why a careful reading of the very passages on *topos* require us to conclude that even the definition of place falls within the ambit of skeptical critique.

#### **d. Burnyeat's Misreading of *M*10.15 & *PH* 3.119**

In the previous section, I argued that Burnyeat's account of Sextus' views on *topos* cannot be right, for he mistakes the scope of skeptical arguments and assumes they apply only to existential-objectual claims and not conceptual ones such as, for instance, claims about the proper meaning of *topos*. Burnyeat assumes that Sextus accepts the dogmatic definition of place, but wider evidence makes plain that such definitions are frequently the target of skeptical critique. In this section, I would like to provide a more precise characterization of Burnyeat's misreading of *M* 10.15 and *PH* 3.119 and discuss further errors in Burnyeat's interpretation of those passage.

There is a strong temptation to read Sextus' opening remarks at *M* 10.15 to the effect that Sextus' skeptical inquiry does not pertain to *topos* broadly conceived as reflecting Sextus' own commitment (as a skeptic) to *topos* broadly conceived (and then to use this interpretation as the basis for understanding the corresponding passage at *PH* 3.119). Such a reading encourages one to regard the concept of *topos* as broad as reflecting the skeptic's own conception of *topos* in ordinary, everyday life. Once this assumption is in place, it then becomes a matter of debate whether, as Burnyeat

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<sup>90</sup> *Pace* Hankinson (1995) pp. 121, 253 & 331 (*n.* 2), who contends that Sextus' skepticism is not conceptual. Hankinson seems to me to err like Burnyeat in failing to attend to the wider dialectical context of Sextus' argument. For a helpful and incisive discussion of some problems with Hankinson's claim, see Fine (2014) pp. 336-338.

contends, Sextus' (again, as a skeptic) accepts the further characterization of *topos* broadly conceived as logically and semantically improper. My previous discussion of Burnyeat's error might seem to justify a response of the following form: the skeptic does indeed accept *topos* broadly conceived, but suspends assent with regard to the question of whether so conceived it is logically and semantically improper. Both Burnyeat's interpretation and my imagined one rest on viewing Sextus as indeed accepting *topos* conceived as broad.

In fact, however, I think the previous assumption about the force of Sextus' opening remarks is mistaken: *M* 10.15 does not assert or imply that Sextus accepts *topos* broadly conceived (and so neither does *PH* 3.119). The mistake is understandable when we examine the remarks Burnyeat focuses on.

[1] Now it is agreed [*homologon*] that we say [*legomen*] simply [*aphelôs*] that someone is in Alexandria or in the gymnasium or in the school; [2] but our [*hêmin*] investigation [*hê skepsis*] does not concern ["place" understood] broadly [*peri tou kata platos*], but "place" [understood] in a circumscribed way [*tou kata perigraphên topou*], as to whether this exists or is merely contrived [*epinoeitai monon*]... (*M* 10.15)

Two features of Sextus' claim here might incline an interpreter to follow Burnyeat's interpretation:

(i) Sextus says that the skeptic's investigation does not concern place understood broadly, and (ii) the transition from clause [1] to clause [2] (via "but" = *alla*) suggests that place understood broadly applies to what Sextus agrees everyone "says simply" in clause [1]; if the latter is true, then it is natural to assume that Sextus himself conceives such uses as evincing a broad conception.

To begin to see that such an interpretation of the passage is mistaken, it helps to consider Sextus' remarks in a later section (*M* 10.95) when re-introducing the distinction between the two conceptions of place.

There have been those who have distinguished an ambiguity [*êsan de hoi kai amphibolian diestellonto*]. For "being contained in a place", they say [*phasin*], signifies two things [*duo sêmainein*]: one is in a place understood broadly [*kata platos*], as when we say that someone is in Alexandria, and the other is in the place understood exactly [*kat' akribëian*], as my place would be said to be the air that encloses the surface of my body, and the wine-jar is called the place of what is contained in it.

Here Sextus quite clearly ascribes the claims that (i) there is an ambiguity in *topos* and (ii) that “place” can be understood in two ways to unnamed dogmatists. (In the discussion of *topos* in *PH*, Sextus repeats the ascription of (ii) to unnamed dogmatists (*PH* 3.75).) It is precisely (i) and (ii) that underwrite the dogmatic response to Diodorus Cronus’ argument that motion is impossible (*M* 10.85-90, *PH* 3.71) and to which Sextus responds, presumably on Diodorus’ behalf, by insisting that place conceived narrowly is presupposed by (*proégetai*) place conceived broadly (*M* 10.108-110, *PH* 3.75). Moreover, and more importantly for our purposes, the fact that Sextus credits certain unnamed dogmatists with the distinction between the two concepts of *topos* strongly suggests that the very distinction is itself a piece of dogmatic theorizing and a matter for dogmatic argument: in other words, the very distinction between broad and narrow conceptions is itself something to which the skeptic will suspend assent.

In fact, we do not even need to search much farther than the neighboring sections of *M* 10.15 to see that it is unlikely that Sextus intends the division between narrow and broad to reflect the conception of an ordinary, everyday speaker. For the textual context of Sextus’ remarks makes clear that *M* 10.15 is being used by Sextus, on behalf of Diodorus Cronus, as part of an argument against the existence of place. It is proponents of Diodorus Cronus’ argument who insist that the (e.g., Aristotelian) arguments for place all center on place narrowly conceived rather than place broadly conceived. Consequently, it is natural to assume it is Diodorus Cronus (and other dogmatists) who hold that our ordinary simple claims, e.g., that “someone is in Alexandria or in the gym”, must be interpreted as expressions of a broad rather than a narrow concept of place.

One of Burnyeat’s errors consists in assimilating the sense of the expression “simply” (*aphelôs*) in clause [1] of *M* 10.15 to something like “with a broad understanding of place.” The source of this error is easy to see, for while it is true that clause [1] of *M* 10.15 asserts that the only thing agreed upon by *both* parties to the dispute about the existence of place is what we *say simply*

(i.e., in ordinary, everyday life and language), clause [2] strongly implies that it is also universally agreed that the proper characterization of such simple usage is as reflecting expression of and commitment to a concept of *topos* as broad. Sextus hides the fact that the move from talk of ordinary, everyday locutions concerning place (clause [1]) to the characterization of those locutions as assertions about place understood broadly (clause [2]) is actually already a dogmatic view involving analysis of ordinary locutions about place.

It remains, therefore, to consider the second feature of *M* 10.15 that motivates Burnyeat's reading, namely, the claim in the second clause that "our investigation does not concern place understood broadly." This claim could be read as suggesting that the skeptic does not, in general, investigate place understood broadly and one might infer (as does Burnyeat) that the reason for this is that the skeptic finds such an understanding unproblematic for her skepticism. Such a reading, however, ignores the context of the discussion, for it is precisely on behalf of Diodorus Cronus that Sextus refers to "our investigation": it is Diodorus and those arguing against the existence of place who ignore place conceived broadly. Moreover, the reason Diodorus *et al.* ignore place conceived broadly is precisely because (as is argued at *M* 10.108-10 and *PH* 3.75) they view place conceived narrowly as logically presupposed (*proégetai*) by place conceived broadly; it is, in other words, a dogmatic commitment that underwrites their restriction of argument to place conceived broadly. Consequently, it is rather Diodorus and his ilk who understand their privileging of ordinary, everyday locutions *as* the privileging of expressions of place broadly conceived.

I argued in the previous section that insofar as Burnyeat ascribes to Sextus an Aristotelian analysis or definition of the concept of place, he neglects to recognize Sextus' general tendency to argue against dogmatic definitions. In this section, I have continued my argument against Burnyeat by faulting him for supposing that Sextus accepts that ordinary, everyday spatial language implies commitment to place broadly conceived. To be sure, my two lines of argument are closely related,

for it is precisely the Aristotelian analysis of place that gives content to the distinction between place understood narrowly and broadly (for more on this, see the next section); but my discussion in this section makes more explicit a central problem with Burnyeat's approach, namely, his ignoring of dialectical context and his tendency to construe *anything* Sextus writes as expressing a certain kind of commitment on his part.

Consider, for instance, Burnyeat's contention that if Sextus uses the term *katachrēstikōs* to describe that broad use of the term, then "this can only be because he does not question the dogmatist's analysis of the language of 'place'"<sup>91</sup>; I take it he intends a similar sort of point to underwrite ascribing to Sextus a conception of ordinary spatial language as expressing a broad concept of place. I think Burnyeat's claim can seem plausible only if we ignore the distinction between two very different claims:

- (i) Sextus accepts the dogmatist's analysis of "place" such that he uses *katachrēstikōs*, *kata platos*, etc., in light of it.
- (ii) Sextus accepts that the dogmatist analysis of "place" is such that *the dogmatist* uses *katachrēstikōs*, *kata platos*, etc., in light of it.

Only (i) implies (in fact, asserts) that Sextus accepts the dogmatist's analysis; (ii) does not. That (ii) rather than (i) is the correct interpretation of Sextus' use of the relevant terms seems indisputable: the whole point of skeptical argument is to show how certain dogmatic claims are no more persuasive or plausible than certain other incompatible dogmatic claims, so that one's only recourse is to *epochē*; in order to argue thus, one will have to use the relevant terms as the dogmatist does, unless one wishes to be guilty of misinterpretation or equivocation. Moreover, such misinterpretation or equivocation would be self-defeating, since the goal of skepticism is to cure the dogmatist of her dogmatism (*PH* 3.280-1) and to free her from the psychic disturbance inseparable from dogmatism (*PH* 1.25-30). As a result, it is possible and likely that Sextus will, as it were,

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<sup>91</sup> Burnyeat (1987) pg. 238.

provisionally use the terms dogmatically only to eventually dispense with them when he suspends assent to the claims that give such use content and explanation. The fact that Sextus uses a term dogmatically no more shows his commitment to the term (or its attendant claims) than a proof by *reductio* of the existence of irrational number entails a commitment to the non-existence of such numbers.<sup>92</sup>

### **e. The Character of Dogmatic Accounts & the Audience for Skepticism**

In the previous two sections, I argued that Burnyeat errs in attributing to Sextus commitment to a dogmatic analysis or definition of the concept of place (of an Aristotelian variety) and a conception of ordinary, everyday language as involving commitment to a concept of place as broad.

It is natural to conclude, therefore, that skeptical argument and *epoché* pertains to the entire Aristotelian framework that gives rise to and makes intelligible the distinction between place conceived as circumscribed and place conceived as broad. This, in turn, strongly implies that the Aristotelian account of place is itself a species of dogmatism and invites the question of what *precisely* makes it dogmatic. In this section, I would like to further investigate the nature of the Aristotelian account with a view to isolating those abstract features of it that distinguish it as dogmatic; realization of this endeavour will provide us with a clearer understanding of how ordinary language is *not* conceived by the skeptic, which will in turn equip us with the resources for a positive account in part three.

The Aristotelian account of place, at least as explained by Burnyeat, is driven by the desire to give a correct analysis of the concept of place, an analysis that will yield a definition of place, i.e., an

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<sup>92</sup> This paragraph attacks the fallacious inference from “the skeptic says *p*” to “the skeptic believes *p*” that has dogged skepticism since its founding. The Academic skeptics, in particular, have suffered at the hands of this fallacy; see Couissin (1929) for the classic diagnosis and see Brittain (2006) and Striker (1980) for interpretations that do not fall prey to the inference. One of the arguments of this dissertation is that the previous inference still casts a long shadow over Sextus’ Pyrrhonian Skepticism.

account of *what place is*, which articulates the content of the concept. The result of such an analysis permits a division of usage into broad and narrow as well as the corresponding division into proper and improper based on whether or not such usage expresses and adheres to the concept. Thus, for instance, the claim that “I am in Alexandria” or “Someone is in the gymnasium” must be understood as expressing a *broad* concept of place. Since neither of these statements is meant to assert that the person occupies the whole of Alexandria or the Gymnasium, they cannot be understood as expressing the concept of place as what exactly contains or encloses something; moreover, since the latter is what place actually is, it follows that broad uses or broad concepts are always improper, misleading and confused. If place is the volume occupied by something, then it is either false to say the previous things – because one is literally asserting that the subject occupies the whole gymnasium or Alexandria – or deeply misleading, since what is intended is the claim that the subject occupies a *part* of the place in question. Consequently, the concepts of broad, narrow, loose and imprecise are made intelligible only by virtue of the relevant definition of place and the assumption that the use of “in” invokes the concept of place (and so is elliptical for something like “in the place of”), so that without such a definition and interpretation of “in”, there can be no question of loose or imprecise.

The denial that a use of “loose” or “imprecise” in the sense considered is intelligible apart from a definition is *not* the same as denying that it is intelligible apart from the definition to say that, e.g., Alexandria is a larger “place” than the gymnasium, i.e., has a greater extension. This is important because it suggests that Sextus would, indeed, accept that Alexandria is a bigger place than, e.g., the area exactly enclosing me. Even in ordinary, everyday language it will be correct when comparing, for instance, two responses to the question: “In what place is Khufu entombed?” to say that the reply “In Egypt” indicates a broader area than, e.g., “In a pyramid on the Giza plateau in the outskirts of Cairo.” This assertion does not entail that the first response is “loose” or “imprecise”,

still less “misleading” and “improper”; in fact, it may be perfectly correct as an answer in a given situation. Similarly, I might say in response to a question that I am in Alexandria; this need not be improper, misleading or false. In ordinary life and language, the assertion that I am in Alexandria can be used in a way that is perfectly intelligible and such that there is no question of its impropriety or even looseness of such usage, but this, of course, is because in ordinary contexts and in ordinary language no question of a “correct analysis” of place arises, except in the harmless sense that someone may not know what the word “place” means (or what “in” means). The definition or correct analysis of place arises from the attempt to provide an account (a *logos*) of what place is, an attempt that operates on ordinary usage by interpreting what such usage asserts and implies. This point is made quite clearly by Burnyeat, when he notes that when constructing his definition, Aristotle

[l]ike Sextus’ dogmatist, ...mixes considerations drawn from natural philosophy with arguments *based on what is said in the common speech of ordinary life*.<sup>93</sup>

Common speech is not the only reservoir of material for such arguments, for, as Burnyeat himself notes, our “ordinary locating activities”<sup>94</sup> are also viewed as the basis for argument; indeed, it is partly by virtue of making those activities intelligible and legitimating them by giving an account of how they involve and depend upon a concept of place, that the definition is regarded as successful. However, because my interest is in ordinary *language* (rather than *life*), I will ignore this department of evidence.

The concept of looseness or impropriety of some bit of linguistic usage implies the invocation of standards of evaluation as well as principles of interpretation (what Sextus collectively calls *ta kritéria*); the point I have been attempting to articulate is that those standards and principles that are proper to the activity of giving a theoretical account of some concept (*ta logika kritéria*) are

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<sup>93</sup> Burnyeat (1987) pg. 239 (italics mine).

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, pg. 239.

quite different from any standards invoked in ordinary life (*ta biôtika kritêria*). It is true that we might, in ordinary life, describe someone as speaking “loosely” or “imprecisely”, but such usage does not depend for its intelligibility on a proper analysis of place, but variously on the peculiarities of context, the information available to the conversants, and the intention behind such speech (e.g., to inform, to warn, etc.). In other words, the uses of the expressions “loosely” or “imprecisely” in ordinary language are not tracked by the use of those expressions in the context of a theoretical account or framework. Indeed, the very fact that *argument, inference, and interpretation* is required to determine the correct definition of place and so too to determine which uses of the expression are proper and which improper makes quite plain that ordinary language – or mere common usage – is inadequate to answer the question of what place is, at least, in the relevant sense. The impossibility of reading a definition of place immediately off ordinary usage makes argument, interpretation, inference and all the other components of theoretical reflection and activity necessary; it also opens the door to controversy, since the questions are not settled by the mere fact of ordinary or common usage.

In suspending assent with regard to the entire framework constituting the Aristotelian account of place, Sextus suspends assent to the deliverances of a certain activity: the theoretical activity of providing an account of the concepts or the content thereof expressed in ordinary language. As a result, the skeptic no longer appeals to such a framework or, more importantly, to such theoretical activity in making sense of his own linguistic activity *in propria persona*. Another way of putting this same point is to say that the skeptic does not accept a dogmatic understanding of ordinary language – an understanding controlled by a theoretical account of the concepts expressed in such a language – but abandons reference to those characteristics of such an understanding – e.g., its dependence on argument, inference and interpretation of ordinary usage.

The idea that ordinary language and its standards do not clearly reflect the logical structure of the concepts expressed in such language is as close to a truism as one might get in philosophy. Indeed, if such language *did* clearly reflect such structure, then there would be little if any room for philosophical dispute, argument, inference and interpretation. Questions about the definition of place, cause, property, etc., would not arise because ordinary language would make them directly available and manifest. While Sextus suspends assent with regard to the question of whether or not place exists and whether or not the Aristotelian analysis of place is correct, I think he nevertheless accepts that *from the perspective of philosophy and science, i.e., dogmatism, ordinary language is* “loose” and “imprecise.” For those who think that philosophy has “discovered the truth” (whether this is the discovery of the truth or the discovery that there is *no* truth), ordinary language is loose and imprecise since it does not immediately disclose this truth, which is why philosophical and scientific argument are required to uncover it. On this point, consider the remarks at *M* 8.129:

For we must allow ordinary speech [*tôi biôî*] to make use of inexact terms [*katachrêstikôis onomasi*], as it does not investigate [*zêtounti*] what is true with regard to nature [*to pros tèn phusin alêthes*] but rather what is true with regard to opinion [*to pros tèn doxan*]. Thus we speak of digging a well and weaving a cloak and building a house, but not with precision [*kurios*]; for if there is a well, it is not being dug, but has been dug; and if there is a cloak, it is not being woven but it has been woven. So that in ordinary life [*tôi biôî*] and common conversation [*têi koinêi sunêtheai*] inexactness [*katachrêsis*] is in place, but when we are inquiring [*zêtômen*] into facts of nature [*ta pros tèn phusin...pragmata*], then we must adhere to accuracy [*tês akribeias*].

A contrast is here drawn between two sorts of aims of investigation (*zêtêsis, zêtêô*): on the one hand, those concerned with what is “true by nature” and, on the other, those concerned with what is “true by opinion.” I have already noted that semantic connection between the word here translated as “opinion” (*doxa*) and the verb meaning “to appear or seem” (*dokêô*) and think it follows from this fact that the contrast is meant to be between what is true by nature with what is true by *appearance*. The passage occurs in the course of an argument about the proper semantic interpretation of the logical connective “conjunction” (*sumpeplegmenon*) where an interlocutor attacks a given interpretation

as inadequate to ordinary usage; a defender offers the above response. The fact that this passage occurs in a argument strongly suggest that both parties – the defender of the interpretation of conjunction and the critic – share the ambition of uncovering what is “true by nature.” Indeed, it is precisely by virtue of this commitment that they characterize ordinary language as loose or inexact, i.e., loose or inexact compared to a language that reflects the true structure of the relevant concepts (a language controlled by the very sort of definitions discussed in the previous section) and the true nature of the relevant items.

For the skeptic, however, who is “still inquiring” and so suspends assent with regard to the “correct” interpretation of conjunction, there is as yet no answer to the question of whether ordinary language is loose and imprecise, for she is not yet able to adopt the perspective of philosophy and science that would make intelligible such a claim: so far as she knows, it may turn out that the methods of scientific and philosophical inquiry deliver no results, either negative or positive, indeed, such methods may turn out themselves to be confused and incoherent. In other words, while Sextus or the skeptic takes the philosopher at her word when she asserts that philosophy and science show the imprecision and looseness of ordinary language and so accepts that the philosophers thus conceive of ordinary language, Sextus or the skeptic does not assent to the claim that ordinary language *is* loose and imprecise, since there is as yet no philosophical framework she accepts with regard to which she could make that claim.

So far, I have argued both that such terms as *aphelos*, *katachrēstikos*, etc., can be understood undogmatically, as they are in ordinary, everyday contexts, and dogmatically, as they are in philosophical contexts. Moreover, I have noted that Sextus accepts that such terms are taken *by the dogmatist* as rendered intelligible and precise by virtue of their role in an underlying theory or account that distinguishes proper from improper uses of expressions. Both of these points allow us to understand a rather surprising fact, namely, that Sextus sometimes uses those expressions with their

“dogmatic” sense *even when speaking in propria persona* (see, e.g., *PH I* 207). Why does he do so? I think two reasons need to be adduced to explain this usage: (i) the fact (already discussed) that to the dogmatist ordinary, everyday language, because not controlled by a philosophico-scientific theory, is loose and imprecise; and (ii) the nature of the audience for skepticism. For it helps to remember that Sextus’ work is, after all, a work of philosophy and its primary audience are philosophers and scientists, that is, dogmatists. As a result, the dogmatic impulses of his audience can be assumed.

Indeed, this fact is obvious from Sextus’ own analytic-genetic story about the origin of skepticism:

For the skeptic began to do philosophy in order to decide among appearances [*tas phantasias*] and to apprehend which are true and which false, so as to become tranquil; but he came upon equipollent dispute, and being unable to decide this he suspended assent. And by means of his suspending assent [*epischonti... autô*], tranquility in matters of opinion [*tois doxastois ataraxia*] followed as if by chance [*parêkolouthsen tuchikôs*]. (*PH* 1.26)

The impulse to philosophy is the impulse to find out the truth in matters of appearance and it is because the audience for skepticism shares this impulse and perspective that Sextus invokes concepts that would have little significance to those without that perspective. This method is of a piece with the skeptic’s approach more generally: using philosophical concepts and arguments are used to undo and halt philosophical reflection.

### 3. An Undogmatic Conception of Ordinary Language<sup>95</sup>

#### a. Doing Without Existential Commitments

That Sextus' skepticism involves *epoché* about both existential-objectual claims and conceptual ones only serves to characterize Sextus' undogmatic conception of ordinary language *negatively* by what it does *not* involve, but it is helpful and illuminating to consider how such a stance is compatible with the fact that ordinary language appears to make such claims. An unhelpful answer would be to say that since skeptical *epoché* pertains to conceptual matters, among which are definitions of objects, and since existential-objectual claims can only be argued if the object in question is clearly defined, the existential-objectual claims lapse when the conceptual ones do. This response is unhelpful not only because it is abstract, but because it converts the worry about the consistency of existential-objectual *epoché* into a worry about the consistency of conceptual *epoché*. Instead, in what follows, I would like to address the issue of the consistency of existential-objectual directly by contrasting my treatment of this issue with another.

My focus will be on *PH* 2.229-255, a section concerning that part of logic focused on the resolution or dissolution of sophisms, specifically, Sextus' discussion of Diodorus Cronus' arguments that motion is impossible (so that there is no such thing as motion). Commenting on a potential response to this "sophistical" argument, Filip Grgić remarks:

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<sup>95</sup> In this part, and indeed in all my reflections on ordinary, everyday usage, I have been primarily influenced by Wittgenstein's methodology and remarks in *Philosophical Investigations* (1953). In particular, I have found the application of Wittgenstein's ideas and the explanation of his methods by Stanley Cavell (in *The Claim of Reason* (1979), esp., pp. 191-246) and J. L. Austin (in "Other Minds" (1946)) particularly illuminating so far as the issue of what ordinary, everyday language involves, implies and presupposes. Since, my application of the ideas and methods of these several thinkers cannot be understood as a mere adoption of their arguments or claims, I must make do with this rather vague citation. I am not the first to find echoes of Pyrrhonism in Wittgenstein's work. Barnes (1982) pp. 65-67, for instance, suggests Wittgenstein's notion of "avowal" might serve to capture how the skeptic understands his utterances. While I am sympathetic to Barnes idea of using Wittgenstein's work, I think his application of "avowal" is still far too theory-laden and misconceives the force of Wittgenstein's discussion of the term. Wittgenstein's discussion of avowals begins with the remark: "Here is one possibility..." (§244) and I think this strongly suggests that his intention is not to offer a *theory* of linguistic reference via avowals, but to show that the desire for a philosophical account of reference is misplaced and unnecessary.

...one can oppose to Diodorus' sophism an evident fact, like the fact that Diogenes is now walking or that ordinary people set out on journeys by land or by sea, etc. This does not mean, however, that in the latter, where the sophism is refuted by the use of everyday judgments, its resolution becomes useful, or that the status of everyday judgments that are adduced in its refutation is different from the status of judgments that appear as premises in Diodorus' sophism. Both are pieces of philosophical reasoning which [have] as [their] outcome the suspension of judgment about whether motion exists. The only *legitimate* and *undisputable* use of common sense judgments is outside philosophy, in matters of everyday life. In its normal, practical use, they are *irrefutable* by philosophical argument...<sup>96</sup>

In this passage, Grgić distinguishes between Diodorus' argument and "evident facts" about motion, where the latter is a direct reference to *enargeia*. Thus, we have the same contrast here as we had in the earlier passage between *enargeia* about place and arguments about it. If we follow the same course as the previous argument, then we must conclude that Sextus suspends assent to *enargeia* as much as to Diodorus' arguments. In response to this argument, Grgić insists (i) that the skeptic's common sense judgment (which presumably captures the *enargeia*) has a different status from the judgment that would be opposed to Diodorus' claim that motion does not (and cannot) exist. At the same time, he also wishes to insist (ii) that the sophism is "refuted" by the common sense judgment, since the common sense judgments are "irrefutable." Moreover, he claims (iii) that the "legitimacy" and "indisputability" of common sense judgments outside of philosophy arises from the fact that they are "irrefutable" by philosophical argument.

Grgić's analysis is puzzling not least because he seems to want to have his cake and eat it. On the one hand, he contends that the common sense judgment is *different* from the judgment opposing Diodorus' argument, but, on the other, he wishes to insist that the common sense judgment nevertheless *refutes* Diodorus' conclusions (or, at least, is *not* refuted by them). After all, at the very least, regardless of its justificatory status, the common sense judgment must be *inconsistent* with Diodorus' conclusion *if* it is the *same* judgment in both contexts; but if the skeptic's claim has a genuinely different status, then it seems false to say that it refutes the sophism or bears any real

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<sup>96</sup> Grgić (2011) pp. 84-5. (Italics are my own.)

logical relation to it (or, for that matter, is the *same* judgment). On the other hand, if the common sense judgment does *refute* and is inconsistent with Diodorus' conclusions, then it can only do so by making Diodorus' conclusions false and this seems to make the logical bearing of common sense judgment on Diodorus' claim indistinguishable from the bearing of the philosophical judgment on that claim. What is further puzzling is that (ii) and (iii) appear to entail or, at least, suggest that the common-sense judgment is somehow more *certain* than the rival philosophical judgment: if this is not so, then in what sense do we have a *refutation* here at all (as opposed to a mere inconsistency)? In what sense, moreover, is the common-sense judgment *irrefutable* if it is not more certain than the rival philosophical judgment or Diodorus' argument? It does no good to insist that common sense judgments are only "irrefutable" *outside of philosophy*, if one nevertheless, thinks they are *irrefutable*. Grgić's error seems to be that he both wants and does not want the common-sense judgment to have the sort of epistemological certainty that would be convincing in philosophical contexts.

The reference to "evident fact" (*enargeia*) serving to refute the dogmatist's content is precisely a philosophical move; the evidentness of the common-sense judgment is precisely what makes it suitable to refute Diodorus' claim about motion. In this context, Sextus is arguing precisely like G. E. Moore, as Grgić describes<sup>97</sup> him: using common-sense judgments ("I am now standing" or "This is a hand") in a non-common sense way. Grgić's confusion on this issue is understandable. Indeed, I have already mentioned Sextus' tendency to affirm something in a non-dialectical context that nevertheless figures in a dialectical context leading to a puzzle about whether or not the thing affirmed is actually held by the skeptic or not. The solution to this puzzle lies in recognizing that something said in a dialectical context will only appear to say the same thing in the context of ordinary life: thus, a person who utters "the boat is moving" as a boat disembarks may *appear* to say the same thing as one who utters "the boat is moving" as part of a philosophical argument for the

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<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 83-4.

reality of motion, and this may seem to suggest that the standards of evaluation for the truth of the one utterance are the same as the other. In fact, however, the context here is all and it determines the standards by which the relevant utterance is evaluated. What matters is whether the utterance is made in the context of a *logos* or dialectical argument or whether it is made in ordinary life in response to the practical urgencies thereof. In the one case, we will have a dogmatic claim, in the other a non-dogmatic one. Moreover, this is clear in those contexts, for if I tell my friend “the boat is moving” to alert him to take care and at the same time a friend remarks “there is no such things as motion”, I may laugh or ignore my friend’s remark, but either way, it will seem *irrelevant* to the case at hand. The point is not that I will view the certainty of the boat moving as more *certain* than the other claim, but simply that, in the practical situation, its only bearing is as a joke or a distraction. Does this mean the utterance “there is no such thing as motion” is *not* inconsistent with my remark about the boat moving? Does it mean it *is* inconsistent? Answers to neither question seem to enter in ordinary life (except as a joke or distraction): they simply have no application; however, from the vantage of philosophical reflection the answers to both questions are important, for they determine whether or not our ordinary judgments have a rational basis.

The point about certain questions or claims not “entering into” ordinary life or “having no application” is important here, for it indicates the existence of standards of evaluation quite separate from those involved in philosophical argument. Thus, for instance, consider the case in ordinary life where I say “There’s a sloop in the marina” in response to someone’s question as to whether the marina is empty. Certainly, such a claim looks like an existential-objectual claim: after all, it asserts that something exists, does it not? It is useful to ask how one might respond if someone said “So, you’re implying that something exists?” Again, it is tempting to view this as a joke and, in an important way, as irrelevant to the issue at hand; again, the question and its answer do not really have a point in the context and so it is difficult to see what is meant by asking it. Indeed, such a

question might simply be an invitation to restate the initial claim: “I couldn’t hear you, you said that there’s something there?”, but if this were the case, then it would not be an existential-objectual question in the relevant sense, for the answer to it would not depend on, e.g., *ta logika kritéria* and their status, but merely looking. Moreover, even if one were to accept that such a claim *is* existential-objectual, that will scarcely vindicate those abstract general claims distinctive of philosophical reflection, e.g., that motion, place, cause, number, etc., exist. Indeed, it is rather difficult to see in what ordinary circumstance or context, one would be inclined to say that motion or cause or place exist.

Of course, it is true that philosophers would claim that any reference to motion, cause, etc., implies an ontological or existential commitment to motion, cause, etc., just as my reference to the sloop implies a commitment to the existence of a certain kind of object (namely, a sloop) whether or not I am aware of such commitment. On such a view, the claim is *not* that in ordinary life one would recognize such reference in those terms. Rather, the point is that a theoretical account of such a claim will make plain that it is in virtue of certain logical properties of the claim that it *is* or *implies* an existential-objectual claim; the theory in question explains the utterance or claim in terms of its making certain existential commitments. This latter point is important for it is a matter of dispute and philosophical controversy *how to determine* the existential or ontological commitments of ordinary language utterances<sup>98</sup>, so that the very question of whether or not such a claim *is* making an existential claim (or implying one) and even *what* objects or items are being claimed to exist; the existential commitments of ordinary language are no more transparently available in usage than are the definitions articulating the content of the concepts expressed by such usage. That Sextus has in mind something like the latter thought is, I think, made clear by his remarks on “loose” usage at *M* 8.129:

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<sup>98</sup> For a contemporary voicing of this fact, see Azzouni (1998).

Thus we speak of digging a well and weaving a cloak and building a house, but not with precision [*kurios*]; for if there is a well, it is not being dug, but has been dug; and if there is a cloak, it is not being woven but it has been woven.

In ordinary usage, none of the three claims would be problematic or “loose” or “imprecise”: we know what is meant and there is no confusion, illogicality, or obscurity; but from the point of view of philosophical theorizing, in particular trying to determine the existential commitments of them, they seem to suggest that the well being dug has already been dug (otherwise, it would not be a well) and that the cloak being woven has already been woven (otherwise, there would be no cloak). It is not to the point that such a reading of the phrases is crude or philosophically unimaginative, for while this is certainly true, it does not impugn the fact that the existential commitments of the ordinary language remarks cannot be read off those remarks immediately.

The line of thought I have been pursuing could be put differently by considering the following question: if, then, Sextus is not asserting *in propria persona* that the claims of ordinary language refute Diodorus’ arguments to the contrary, since the claims are made in indifference to the arguments, how are we to understand the apparent fact that in ordinary language we refer to place or motion? I think we need to ask whether ordinary language does refer to places or motion in a way which would make it inconsistent with Diodorus’ claims: do the *phainomena* (the claims of ordinary language), in fact, constitute *enargeia*? Again, recall the previous boat example. In ordinary life, the issue of whether or not motion or place exists just *does not arise*; the denial of motion in Diodorus’ sense seems to have no application in ordinary life, which is not the same as saying that such a life is inconsistent with it. It is precisely the fact that there is no such application that allows the skeptic to suspend assent with regard to the question of whether or not ordinary language and life implies the existence of motion or place. The reason that such existence questions have no application is that the standard governing them – philosophical standards pertaining to argument, inference, interpretation and explanation (*ta logika kritêria*) – are not applied in the context of the exigencies and

demands of ordinary life. What Sextus calls variously *ta biôtika kritêria*, *phainomena*, and *bios* do not entail or involve answers to those questions. It is, in turn, this latter fact that makes it possible for dispute about whether or not ordinary language encodes claims about existence.

Understanding Sextus' claims about his own linguistic practice in this way casts a new light on the significance of certain passages in his work. Thus, consider Sextus' remarks in the midst of a passage ridiculing the sophisticated arguments of the dogmatist (and the dogmatist's attitude towards them).

Indeed, a certain philosopher, when the argument against motion was propounded to him, said nothing and walked about. And ordinary men set out on journeys by land and sea, and construct ships and houses, and produce children, *without paying any attention* to the arguments against motion and coming into being [*tôn kata tês kinêseôs kai geneseôs amelountes logôn*]. A witty anecdote is told about Herophilus the doctor. He was a contemporary of Diodorus, who vulgarized dialectic and used to run through sophisticated arguments on many topics including motion. Now one day Diodorus had dislocated his shoulder and went to Herophilus to be treated. Herophilus wittily said to him: "Your shoulder was dislocated either in a place it was or in a place it wasn't. But neither in which it was or wasn't. Therefore it is not dislocated." So the sophist begged him to *leave such arguments alone* [*lîparein ean... tous toioutous logous*] and to apply the medical treatment suitable to his case. (PH 2.244-5)

These two sets of remarks seem to figure in Sextus' discussion as part of the basis for refuting Diodorus and other "sophists," i.e., as part of a philosophical argument, but from the point of view of the subjects of the discussion, they need not be so interpreted. Ordinary people who "ignore" sophisticated arguments, simply live their lives without reference to such arguments; Diodorus requests that Herophilus do the same: "leave alone" such arguments. In neither case, need we suppose that what underlies these remarks or actions is some justification that puts them on more solid footing (à la Moore) than Diodorus' conclusions.

Of course, there may be a *reason* for Diodorus' request – namely, he is in pain – but the role of such a reason in his life (or in ordinary life) is very different from the role of kindred claims about pain in philosophical argument (for one thing, we do not expect from Diodorus a definition of pain to mediate his assessment of pain: as though without a clear sense that he knows what pain is or has

a definition thereof, Herophilus would not treat him, for he could not be sure he was not malingering.) Like the ordinary man, the skeptic simply ignores the arguments in question; unlike the ordinary man, he is familiar with them, but suspends assent, which is why he cannot but ignore them. Such arguments and such justifications have no role in ordinary life – which is not the same as saying they *could* not or *should* not have such a role. In living our life, we make no reference to a *logos* of that life or our living of it: we simply *live* it.

### **b. The Problem of Conceptual Skepticism**

In the previous section I discussed existential-objectual skepticism in light of an undogmatic understanding of ordinary language. It remains, therefore, to discuss conceptual skepticism in light of such an understanding. However, before doing so, I would like to emphasize the difficulties associated with the task and with honoring conceptual skepticism generally.

Conceptual skepticism is a dizzying stance and makes difficult one of the principal ambitions of philosophical exegesis: the reconstruction and characterization of the content of a philosopher's concepts and claims. Part of the reason that the skeptic's preference for ordinary language is so difficult to elaborate stems from the assumption that the distinctive or puzzling or peculiar features of such language are, at most, superficial and disappear when we discuss the thoughts they express. The temptation is, I think, to suppose that while the skeptic may use words in unconventional and even puzzling ways, it is, nevertheless, possible to reconstruct the relevant thought expressed by his remarks in such a way that the peculiarities of her usage simply disappear. The thought would be that a certain kind of "semantic ascent"<sup>99</sup> might allow us to talk about what the skeptic means in clear, precise and careful terms while acknowledging that the surface features of skeptical usage are unusual. After all, there is an important difference between the *content* or *meaning* of some remark and

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<sup>99</sup> Quine (1960) pp. 249ff.

that remark itself, and while the remarks of the skeptic might seem loose or vague or non-technical, it is nevertheless possible to reconstruct the content or thoughts of the skeptic quite precisely and clearly. Whatever the worrying implications of Pyrrhonian skepticism, among them is not the risk of expounding or advocating a position that cannot be described in clear, precise and specific terms. Such semantic-ascent would allow various interpretations to characterize the content of the skeptic's concepts and claims, especially, when those are used *undogmatically*, and so would make available a clear and precise understanding of the skeptic's outlook. On such an understanding the problem posed by the oddity of the skeptic's usage – its looseness and imprecision – is no different from that posed by the usage of any philosopher: rarely can the meaning of terms or expressions in philosophical contexts be simply read off those utterances or claims. This latter fact entails only that the struggle to articulate, explain and understand the terms and expressions of a philosopher will not be straightforward, *not* that such a struggle is fruitless or mistakes the character of those terms or expressions.

That such a semantic-ascent to precise characterization of the concepts, claims and thoughts of Sextus is possible in the case of the skeptical outlook seems to me an unspoken but quite deep assumption of the Standard Interpretations. Indeed, an important element of my argument in chapter one (§§4(a)-(b)) that such interpretations could not accommodate the self-reflexive awareness implicit in the skeptical outlook was precisely that a certain kind of semantic-ascent was ruled out. This was because a purely extensional characterization of the concepts in play in skepticism could not capture how the skeptic herself understood those concepts, something required by skeptical self-reflexivity. Yet without such an extensional characterization the Standard Interpretations could not hope to offer a consistent or coherent picture of the skeptical outlook. In what follows I would like to further examine the reasons for and the implications of this critical stance towards semantic-ascent.

I have argued that Sextus suspends assent both with regard to the *existence* and *non-existence* of certain objects as well as with regard to the *intelligibility* of the *concepts* of certain objects. The former kind of suspension of assent is roughly Cartesian in character (Descartes' skeptical arguments seem largely objectual-existential in character<sup>100</sup>) and it generates a form of skepticism that allows interpreters precisely articulate the content of the skeptic's concepts. Thus, while Descartes may doubt whether objects exist, he has little doubt about *what an object is* or *what a property is* or what *existence* is. Consequently, it is possible to explain Descartes' skeptical outlook in terms of the uncertainty of whether such concepts have empty or non-empty extensions. The implication of the possibility that I am dreaming does not entail the possibility that I do not know what I am thinking about or cannot give content to my concepts, but only that I cannot be sure that what I *think* corresponds to anything *independent* of my thought (hence, in the world).

While the skeptical arguments of Descartes' First Meditation are often reckoned quite "radical," they seem less worrisome and "radical" than conceptual skepticism. After all, if we have reason to doubt the content of our own concepts, we have reason to doubt that even our own mental experience – the thoughts we think, the concepts we have – is transparently available to us. In the case of interpreting Sextus' skepticism and, in particular, in the case of determining how to interpret Sextus' terms and claims, such skepticism is doubly problematic, for the natural way to express and explain these terms and claims is precisely by means of definitional statements or, at any rate, definitional statements *understood* as articulating the content of the relevant concepts or claims. Such a kind of definitional statement is precisely what is provided in Standard Interpretations, for they rest on the possibility of giving a precise, systematic and clear account of the content of the

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<sup>100</sup> I say "largely" because one might take issue with characterizing Descartes' doubt about mathematical truths in the First Meditation as existential-objectual or, at the very least, *not* conceptual, see Descartes (2000) pp. 11-12 (20-21).

skeptic's concepts (i.e., *phantasia*, *sunkatathesis*, etc.). If Sextus were merely a Cartesian skeptic, then we would have little difficulty making sense of his own views, but his Pyrrhonism cuts much deeper.

The idea that semantic-ascent might resolve the problems of Sextus' usage depends on thinking that Sextus' skepticism is exclusively existential-objectual, like Descartes'. If this were the case, then we could allow that Sextus' own suspension of assent does not apply to definitional statements that might precisely articulate the content of his concepts and the significance of his claims. It might still be difficult to understand these concepts and claims – it is not always straightforward, e.g., making sense of Descartes – but the strategy itself would not misrepresent the view. By contrast, jettisoning the latter strategy, which relies on the thought that Sextus' skepticism does not infect his own conceptual awareness and understanding, leaves us in the tricky position of having to understand even the skeptic's conceptual life in dogmatic vs. undogmatic terms.

As in the previous section, where there was a worry that Sextus' commendation of ordinary language – and of its special connection to the skeptical philosophy – as anomalous and loose was inconsistent with his deployment of skeptical arguments *about* such anomalousness and looseness (thereby entailing that the skeptic suspended assent to this feature of ordinary language), conceptual skepticism also renders inconsistent or, at least, dubious Sextus' claims about the concept-involving character of ordinary life. Indeed, Sextus insists that:

It is enough [*arkei*], I think, to live [*bioun*] practically [*empeirōs*] and undogmatically [*adoxastōs*] in accordance with the common observances and preconceptions [*kata tas koinas tērēseis te kai prolēpsis*], and to suspend assent about what is said based upon [*ekē*] dogmatic superfluity [*dogmatikēs periergias*] and far removed from the needs of ordinary life [*malista exō tēs biōtikēs chreias*]. (PH 2.246)

The thought expressed in this passage is echoed elsewhere in Sextus (e.g., *M* 11.44) and it seems clearly to conflict with Sextus' habit of suspending assent about the truth of concepts and even about whether or not there *is* a single concept or multiple. But the conflict is only a matter of appearance and depends on reading such passages as this *dogmatically*. This involves more than

merely viewing the passages as expressive of *ta phainomena*, for *even if* we suppose that the previous arguments involve *phainomena* (I suggested that the multiplicity of concepts of gods might be a *phainomenon*) – to which the skeptic gives assent – this does not exclude them from *epoché*. As Sextus makes quite plain, the opposition between two lines of argument or reflection results in suspension of assent about *both* lines of argument and their respective conclusions; so the fact that *phainomena* appear among the premises or reflections makes them just as vulnerable to *epoché*. Thus, even *phainomena* can and must be understood dogmatically and undogmatically.

The division between dogmatic and undogmatic (assents, claims, actions, etc.) has been recognized as crucial to the skeptical outlook. Part of what this section has endeavoured to show is that such a distinction does not apply merely to existence-claims and objects considered as non-mental items, but even to our concepts and thoughts. There is a way of understanding concepts *dogmatically* and *undogmatically*, and this distinction is essential to the skeptic outlook. It is failure to appreciate the latter fact that lead the Standard Interpretations astray. Moreover, the existence of conceptual skepticism puts paid to the assumption that semantic-ascend can be problematically used in understanding Sextus' skepticism: the looseness, indeterminacy, and vagueness of skeptical usage cannot be purged so easily.

### **c. Doing Without Conceptual Truths**

The thought that an undogmatic understanding of ordinary language – an “ordinary” understanding of ordinary language – would make no room for existential commitments or existential-objectual claims is surprising, but much less problematic than the thought that such an understanding will need to do without conceptual truths as well. By “conceptual truths” here I mean largely those definitional claims that articulate the content of a concept by providing a characterization of the nature of the object satisfying the concept. The difficulty of abandoning such truths is that they

seem to forestall precisely the sort of philosophical activity involved in articulating a philosopher (or scientist's outlook). Indeed, the debates over the character of the skeptical "concept" of *phantasia* seem intelligible only in light of such definitions (even if only provisional). To see this, one need only consider a claim like the following:

(\*) A *sunkatathesis* is a propositional attitude of a subject that involves the subject taking some claim to be the case.

This is, roughly, the shared view of the Standard Interpretations captured in the form of a definition of *sunkatathesis*. Since (\*) is a definition, it is vulnerable to the same objections as other definitions, and the skeptic will have to suspend assent to it. Consequently, whatever else (\*) does, it cannot be viewed as capturing the content of the skeptic's conception of *sunkatathesis*. How might a skeptic argue against (\*)? Several possibilities are suggested, all of which are designed to show that the definition cannot aid in apprehension of *sunkatathesis* or in learning about it or even in offering illumination. One obvious route to this conclusion is by noting that the terms on the right-hand-side of the definition need also to be defined and that such a procedure will result in either an infinite regress, circular argument, or unjustified assertion. Moreover, if a definition is genuinely necessary for apprehension, or learning, or whatever, then the demand cannot be refused.

The form of definition exemplified in (\*) presupposes that the content of the relevant concept can be characterized in a way that makes the term *sunkatathesis* dispensable. The latter is possible because the characterization of the concept articulates the nature of what the concept is a concept of. In ordinary life, it is true, we might try to explain the meaning of *sunkatathesis* with a dictionary definition or by means of synonymous terms or by means of pointing out examples, but such an explanation does not work by articulating the content of the concept, but rather by showing how the word is used in ordinary life. (After all, a dictionary just codifies such usage.) This is why pointing out examples of *sunkatathesis* may be just as or even more effective than citing a definition

or synonym. What counts as understanding the word *just is* the ability to use it in ordinary life and language: nothing more and nothing less. This is why it falsifies the phenomenology of language use (in ordinary life) to suppose that in using the term *sunkatathesis* what a person “has in mind,” whether consciously or not, is the relevant definition; even if such a person learned the word by means of a definition, it scarcely follows that their understanding of the word is to be articulated in terms of a definition that they themselves do not use in applying the term. How, then, are we to establish a method of interpreting precisely what Sextus means by what he says without proceeding by means of such definitions or by means of constructing them? This is, in fact, another way of asking the question of how to positively characterize the skeptic’s linguistic practice, in particular, how to understand the content of the skeptic’s utterances.<sup>101</sup>

To begin to reply to these questions, it helps to consider some of Sextus’ remarks on definition:

It would surely be ridiculous to say that definitions are useful for apprehension or for teaching or, generally, for illumination [*saphêneian*], when they involve us in such obscurity. For example – if we may indulge in a little ridicule [*bina ti kai paixômen*] – suppose someone wanted to ask you if you had met a human on horseback leading a dog, and were to pose the question like this: “O mortal rational animal receptive of thought and knowledge, have you met a broad-nailed animal capable of laughter and receptive of political knowledge, resting his buttocks on a neighing mortal animal, leading a barking quadruped animal?” wouldn’t he be mocked [*katagelastos*] for casting such a familiar matter [*gnôrimou pragmatos*] into obscurity because of his definitions? (*PH* 2.211)

These thoughts form part of a general argument against the possibility and usefulness of definitions and like the similar discussion of the possibility and usefulness of grammar, they are intended to motivate a suspension of assent about the possibility and usefulness of definitions. It would be wrong, therefore, to take them outside of this dialectical context. However, Sextus is pointing to a phenomenon of ordinary life, namely, the ridiculousness or absurdity of the application of definitions in certain situations. By itself, this does not, of course, establish that a definition is false

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<sup>101</sup> In my discussion in this paragraph and the remainder of this section, I have benefited particularly from Wittgenstein’s (1953) remarks on family resemblances and rule following, see §§143-230 and 67-108.

or useless, nor does it require it, but it does mark a feature of definitions that makes philosophical or scientific definitions – as a matter of fact – not a familiar aspect of ordinary discourse or usage.

Notice, moreover, that even if someone had learned the meaning of man by a definition like “mortal rational animal receptive of thought and knowledge”, it would not follow that in using the term he necessarily *meant* that, in the sense, that such a use was “what he had in mind” whether consciously or unconsciously. To see this, one need only notice that it is perfectly consistent to suppose (i) that someone learned the meaning of human/person by means of the definition yet (ii) no longer remembers the definition, but still uses the term correctly.

The use of humor is important: part of what informs our usage and determines it is our sense of what’s ridiculous or idiotic, since this tends to trace what is inappropriate or not implied or relevant in the given practical situation. That we find certain usage ridiculous or comical – and in a certain specific way – indicates its general failure to figure in practical life; of course, such usage may be intentional – designed to provoke a laugh – but even then the funniness still depends the fact of the usage not being suitable in everyday life. “Oh god,” we might say, “*no* one would *ever* say that!” The humorousness of some bit of usage, while often an effective mark of its failure to conform to ordinary usage, is not a perfect criterion, since there are other sources of humor apart from linguistic perversity. Moreover, humor is a tricky thing: it depends in certain respects on our sensibility or reaction – and this “respect” often defies acute let alone general analysis thereby making it difficult to articulate. Nevertheless, the fact of humor – the fact that Sextus often takes it as an effective means to disarm the dogmatist – reveals the importance of attention to ordinary or everyday language and usage in understanding the claims the skeptic makes, at least, when those claims are not embedded in dialectical contexts (and used to attack or defend dogmatic claims).

By figuring out how an expression or claim might be used in ordinary or everyday life, we can get a better sense of how Sextus intended the expression or claim to be taken. In doing this,

however, we need to be careful to avoid merely indulging in the sort of definition with regard to which the skeptics suspend assent; thus we need to be careful to avoid ignoring usage because we take it to be improper or non-specific. Recall, for instance, the response to a question like “Where am I? What place am I in?” Depending on the circumstance, one might say “In Alexandria” or “In my city”, which Aristotle considers improper and broad; the proper use of an expression would specify my proper place exactly. But all of the previous uses are, in different circumstances, appropriate: moreover, the preposition does not appear to be doing semantically different work in each case. To insist that those uses are improper and not conceptually or semantically clear would be to indulge in dogmatism. The concept of place, whatever it is, is as manifest in the reply “In Alexandria” as in the reply “in the place enclosing my body.” Indeed, were we to explain the concept of “place” to someone who, e.g., does not speak English (or Greek) it would be precisely by such locutions and gestures and the like. These uses of the expression “in”, therefore, are as appropriate to articulating the concept as any; if we feel that such uses do not make the concept adequately precise or clear, then so much the worse for the presumption that the concept is so or must be so. That ordinary usage is, from the point of view of a certain *logos* of the semantics of ordinary language, vague or unclear is not something we can deny even if it makes the interpretation of Sextus more difficult. I alluded to what we might *do* or *say* in ordinary life to explain an expression or disambiguate it, and this should be kept in mind when articulating the content of Sextus’ claims. Sometimes it will be enough to mention an object, experience or fact; sometimes it will not.

In the interpretation of philosophers, there is, as mentioned, a tendency to presume that the concepts used can be given a precise, systematic and clear elaboration; in the case of Sextus, such a presumption would fly in the face of his own remarks. The vagueness, imprecision and looseness of ordinary usage must always be kept in mind. These features entail that it will not, in general, be possible to read off the metaphysical or ontological commitments or even the precise semantics of

expressions from Sextus' remarks, except when he is adapting the arguments or claims of others. One way to honor this is to ensure one avoids privileging one kind of use of an expression over another; this does not mean one should suppose that all tokenings of a given expression (or claim) need to be treated equally – the use of “bank” to mean (roughly) the place where your money is, and the use of it to describe the side of a body of water will need to be differentiated. Another way to ensure that the looseness is honored is to emphasize the context in which the expression is used and what should be salient or significant in such a context as well as the ends or interests that are relevant: altogether what are sometimes called the “pragmatic” features of the situation, though even here there is the risk of building too much *logos* into one's description.

Attention to the particular practical context of the skeptic's utterance, in particular, to those features that are available and those that are not, will often allow more clarity in understanding the skeptic's claims. That Sextus thinks this is important seems fairly clear based upon his remarks emphasizing that the skeptic's utterances must be understood as relative to time and place (*PH* 1.4, etc.) and, more generally, relative to the skeptic (*PH* 1.207); and his insistence that the skeptic's usage is not to be understood in “absolutely” (*eilikrinôs*, *ibid.*). Moreover, this attention suggests that some care is needed in distinguishing between the pragmatic components of skeptical language (the speech acts) and the semantic component (what the skeptic means by his utterance), since quite often the two will be quite closely related: what the skeptic means will be determined by when, where and how he says it and *vice versa*. By attending to the pragmatic features of an utterance in ordinary life, we necessarily attend to what is available to any speaker – regardless of philosophical sophistication – but also what is “obvious” or “clear” to a speaker: that which is manifest and so naturally might be relevant to understanding the claim or utterance.

Part of attending to context might also be attending to what a speaker is *trying to do* by making a claim, i.e., what the point is of her saying what she says. Of course, such a point might be

expressed in different ways and the content of it might be given various different precisifications, but this may be irrelevant to the point being conveyed. Thus, e.g., when telling my friend that there is a sloop in the marina my *point* was to inform him that the marina is largely empty. To be sure, such a point might be conveyed by alternative claims: “There’s only one boat there,” or even “Yeah, it’s basically empty” (which would not raise eyebrows even if there were a sloop there), and I think it’s a mistake to assume that it was essential to my claim that the boat was a sloop or that a boat exists or, still less, *what a boat is*. Attention to the point of a claim or remark allows us to see the role it plays in ordinary life and language, which prevents us from attributing to the speaker implications or inferences or meanings that she or he would not recognize as such *in ordinary life*.

Finally, and perhaps most helpfully, as attention to all *uses* of a given expression or kind of expression (not selecting proper from improper uses) is necessary, so too is it necessary to focus on what would be meant by some utterance, if it were uttered by a non-philosopher or an ordinary person, e.g., a laymen. The thought here has, in a sense, already been communicated by emphasizing the importance of ordinary or everyday life, but by asking whether a laymen could mean what we take an expression to mean, we effectively limit or even wholly avoid the tendency to indulge in too sophisticated a *logos* of the concept conveyed by the skeptic’s remarks.

The humorousness or ridiculousness of inappropriate usage as well as the looseness and imprecision of ordinary usage *and* the sensitivity of such usage to the pragmatic details of everyday life together constitute as much as we can fairly and precisely single out as relevant to interpreting Sextus’ positive remarks. It is no surprise, then, that it will be a tricky business interpreting Sextus’ language precisely – specifically when he is making positive claims outside of dialectical argument – for there will be no algorithm or set of rules, nor any pre-existing framework, that will allow us to make the interpretation precise. As in the discussion of other aspects of the skeptical life, the only authority is the authority of *bios*: and that is available only in a case by case way, dependent on

specific features of the context and specific pragmatic purposes and interests, and involving the reactions and reflections of the language user as they arise in everyday life.

#### 4. Pyrrhonism & Ordinary Life (*Bios*) in Tension

##### a. *Bios*, Dogmatic & Undogmatic

In the foregoing, I have argued for a close connection between the Pyrrhonism of Sextus and ordinary life and language. By my lights, ordinary life and language give unique expression to Pyrrhonism by virtue of the fact that the Pyrrhonist's own remarks (*in propria persona*) and actions are understood “undogmatically” only when understood in terms of the usage of ordinary language and life. Moreover, I have contrasted the undogmatic understanding of Pyrrhonist claims and actions with a “dogmatic” understanding that depends on philosophical theory and interprets Pyrrhonist claims and actions by reference to the technical concepts and categories of such theory. In this part, however, I consider two potential objections to my argument, one focusing on the supposed ethical advantages of the Pyrrhonist life (as compared to ordinary life) and another on the claim that Pyrrhonism is a “philosophy” (*philosophia*), which distinguishes it from ordinary life. Before discussing each of these objections, however, I would like to revisit<sup>102</sup> a class of objections to my depiction of Pyrrhonism as championing ordinary life and language. By elaborating this class of objections and showing how the objections misfire, it will be possible to bring into relief the distinctive features of the quite different objections discussed in the next two sections.

The preoccupation of the first half of *Against the Physicists* 1 (*M* 9) is god and the gods. At *M* 9.50-51, Sextus begins his discussion by noting that:

The majority of dogmatists and the common conception of ordinary life [*hê koinê tou biou prolêpsis*] say<sup>103</sup> that he [=God] exists; the ones labeled “atheists” say he does not exist. . .

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<sup>102</sup> I discussed this class of objections earlier in this chapter (§2(a))

<sup>103</sup> “Say” (*phasi*) does not explicitly occur in this sentence (which lacks an explicit finite verb), but it is plain that the finite verb of the previous sentence (namely, *phasi*) is implicit in this one. Thus, I follow Bett's (2012) translation of this

The natural reading of this remark, which appears to put dogmatists and *bios* on the same footing, is that both dogmatists and ordinary life, by virtue of its “common conception,” assent to the claim that God exists. Sextus repeatedly appeals to what this common conception asserts or implies throughout his discussion in *M* 9. For instance, at *M* 9.138, he remarks:

...people’s common conception [*tês koinês tôn anthrôpôn ennoias*] comes to the aid of this argument [i.e., that God is an animal], since ordinary life [*ho bios*] and the poets and the majority of the best philosophers testify [*marturei*] to God’s being an animal.

Moreover, at the end of his discussion of god and the gods, Sextus concludes as follows.

And following them[= the dogmatists’ opposed arguments] the skeptics’ suspension of assent is arrived at – and especially when we add to them the lack of uniformity about gods in ordinary life [*tês apo tou koinou biou peri theôn anomalias*]. For [gar] different people [*alloi*] have different and discordant suppositions [*allas kaia sumphônous hupolêpseis*] about them, so that neither are all these to be trusted because of the conflict, nor are some of them because of their equal strength. (*M* 9.191-192)

This final quote appears to offer strong evidence that Pyrrhonism and *bios* part ways: after all, this passage contends that the skeptic suspends assent, but that ordinary life (and ordinary people) have conflicting beliefs or suppositions about the gods. On the one hand, we have the Pyrrhonist who suspends assent on the issue of the existence of God (or the gods) and, on the other, we have ordinary life and people who assent. The close connection between skepticism and *bios* seems here to be severed.

However, there is room for doubt about how effective the above passages are as evidence for a division between Pyrrhonism and *bios*. Notice, for instance, that in *M* 9.138 the uniformity of the common conception in ordinary life underwrites the claim that God is an animal, while a few sections later (*M* 9. 191-192) it is precisely the *lack* of a uniform conception in ordinary life that militates against trusting its suppositions. This suggests that Sextus’ claims about *bios* in *M* 9 are determined more by their dialectical context – specifically, by the conclusions they are meant to

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passage, which includes the implicit verb “to say,” rather than Bury’s (1933), which does not include the verb (but provides a periphrastic construction using the word “view” instead).

support – rather than by what Sextus himself, *in propria persona* as a skeptic, thinks about *bios*. Indeed, this is plain from the fact that these various different claims about *bios* are part of larger dogmatic arguments. To assume that Sextus is here revealing something about his own conception of *bios* seems to depend on ignoring the dialectical context.

The previous suggestion that ordinary life is receiving a dogmatic interpretation or characterization is supported by Sextus’ own remarks at the beginning of his discussion of the gods.

At *M* 9.49, Sextus issues the following caveat:

[I]n conformity with his ancestral laws customs and laws [*kata ...ta patria ethê kai tous nomous*], ...[the skeptic] says [*legôn*] that there are gods and does [*poión*] everything that tends to worship of and reverence towards them... (*M* 9.49)

Conformity with ancestral laws and customs is part of the Pyrrhonist’s “fourfold way,” which articulates her criterion for pursuing and avoiding things (*PH* 1.21-24). More importantly, the fourfold way is described by Sextus as capturing how the skeptic “lives undogmatically, in observance of ordinary, everyday life” (*PH* 1.23). Thus, at the very beginning of his discussion in *M* 9, Sextus insists on the close connection between Pyrrhonism and ordinary life, which connection he proceeds to sever in his subsequent arguments. The conflict between Sextus’ opening remarks and his later arguments strongly suggests that a distinction must be drawn between claims about *bios* within the dialectical context of the arguments about the existence of the gods and those claims made without the argument, as in Sextus’ prefatory remarks. Indeed, it is even plausible to suppose that Sextus prefaces the arguments with a caveat about the skeptic’s activity in order to alert the reader to the necessity of treating the various claims made in the subsequent arguments differently from those claims made by the skeptic *in propria persona*. As I have argued in the foregoing, what is required to interpret this apparent conflict is a distinction between “dogmatic” and “undogmatic” understandings of ordinary life, where this is a distinction, in part, between understanding the claims as figuring in arguments and subject to the logical standards (*ta logika kritêria*) pertaining to argument,

evidence and truth, and understanding the claims as subject to the standards of ordinary, everyday life (*ta biôtika kritêria*).

The claims made on behalf of *bios* in dialectical contexts are dogmatic interpretations of certain stretches of *bios*. Here it helps to notice Sextus' language in *M* 9.49: he talks about what the skeptic *says* and *does*, i.e., her actions or behavior, both verbal and non-verbal. In ordinary life, people *say* that God exists or that they think he does and they *worship* and *pray*, but the move from those facts to the claim that they assent to something with regard to which the skeptic suspends assent is a dogmatic interpretation of what they do. After all, it is not enough, for the dogmatist's purposes, to say that both ordinary people and dogmatist's *say* and *do* the same things, since it is perfectly possible for that to be true and for it to be false that both parties assent that God exist. The move from what people say and do to the claim that, in so acting, they assent to a certain claim, to which the dogmatic philosophers also assent is an inference or dialectical move. In order to use the actions, whether verbal or not, as the basis for concluding that ordinary life and dogmatists share belief in or assent to a certain claim requires, *inter alia*, that they both *mean* or *intend* the same things by what they say and do, and that what they say or do has the *same significance* for both parties. All of this, however, seems to require argument or an account of what people mean/intend by their actions: why these people are, in fact, evidence of assent to the existence of God, as opposed to evidence of something else (e.g., mass hypnotism, hysteria, habitual social behavior, etc.). If someone goes to church only to socialize, or writes a book entitled "my belief in God" as a literary experiment, or prays/worships only because someone they care for or admire someone who does so, then it would be unwarranted to infer that they assent to the claim that God exists – the question may well never have arisen for them because it is immaterial and irrelevant to their interests and purposes.

Without some distinction between *ta logika kritêria* and *ta biôtika kritêria* and between dogmatic and undogmatic understanding of a topic, it is difficult to make sense of passages like the

following, from the second book of *Against the Physicists*, which provides powerful evidence for the close connection between Pyrrhonism and *bios*.

Some people say [*phasi*] that there is motion, some that there is not, and some that there no more is than is not. That there is, says ordinary life [*bios*], adhering to appearances [*tois phainomenois prosechôn*], and most of the physicists, such as Pythagoras and Empedocles and Anaxagoras and Democratic and Epicurus... (M 10.45)

By applying the same sort argument for a divergence between Pyrrhonism and *bios* previously used with regard to M 9, we might conclude that this passage offers evidence that ordinary life, unlike skepticism, is wedded to assenting to the existence of motion. As in the case of M 9, Sextus here concludes (M 10.168) that the result of the various of arguments is suspension of assent, so that, once more, it looks as though we have evidence of Pyrrhonism and *bios* parting ways. But if we do so interpret this remark, then it becomes very difficult to make sense of Sextus' remark, apparently *in propria persona*, at PH 1.23 to the effect that the skeptic follows appearances and ordinary life. Indeed, even Sextus' word choice and word ordering in the two passages is the same: "*tois phainomenois ...prosechontes*" (PH 1.23) and "*tois phainomeois...echôn*" (M 10.45). Consequently, we would have to conclude that unlike *bios* (which follows appearances) the skeptic suspends assent, which directly contradicts Sextus remarks at PH 1.23. Thus, regardless of one's favored interpretation of skeptical appearances and assent, understanding M 10.45 and 168 (and, by parity of reasoning, M 9.49, 138, 191-192) requires *some* distinction between undogmatic and dogmatic readings of a given topic in order to avoid the conclusion that Sextus' is being obviously inconsistent.

Attention to dialectical context and to the different standards in play suffices, I think, to disarm any objection to the close connection between Pyrrhonism and *bios* based on passages that use the word "*bios*."<sup>104</sup> If we recognize (i) a distinction between dogmatic and undogmatic

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<sup>104</sup> After an exhaustive examination of Sextus' use of "*bios*" and cognates, I have been unable to locate a case which cannot be handled by means of some distinction between dogmatic and undogmatic understanding. This, of course, does not entail that there *are* no such cases: a suitably ingenious or assiduous interpreter might uncover one.

understanding and remember that (ii) dialectical contexts are, *ipso facto*, contexts in which dogmatic understanding is operative, then it is possible to make sense of those remarks (involving use of the word “*bios*”) that appear to sever the connection between Pyrrhonism and *bios*.

## **b. *Bios* & the Ethical Advantage of Pyrrhonism**

In the previous section, I emphasized that, so far as I have been able to establish, there is no critical mention of “*bios*” in Sextus’ work that cannot be adequately handled by means of distinguishing the dialectical context and the dogmatic force of the claims made about it. This, of course, only means that all of the contexts in which the word “*bios*” figures and in which Sextus appears to imply a conflict or, at least, a strong separation between *bios* and Pyrrhonism involve a dogmatic understanding of *bios*. However, what about those discussions in which, while the word “*bios*” is not used, a divergence between *bios* & Pyrrhonism is strongly implied? In this section and the next, I would like to discuss two such kinds of cases, one pertaining to the end (*telos*) of skepticism and the other to the view of Pyrrhonism as a *philosophia*.

The first class of cases center on the ethical advantages of Pyrrhonism. Sextus tells us that the end (*telos*) of skepticism is “freedom from disturbance” (*ataraxia*). The sort of disturbance Sextus has in mind is described clearly at *PH* 1.27.

For the one who holds the opinion [*doxazōn*] that things are good or bad by nature [*tēi phusei*] is perpetually troubled [*tarassetai*]. When he lacks what he believes [*dokounta*] to be good, he takes himself to be persecuted by things bad by nature and pursues what (so he thinks [*ōs oietai*]) is good. And when he acquires these things, he experiences more troubles [*pleiosi tarachais peripiptei*]; for he is elated beyond reason and measure, and in fear of change he does anything so as not to lose what he believes [*doukounta*] to be good.

The source of individual disturbance is the belief, opinion, or thought that certain things are good or bad by nature. Such a thought explains why an individual is “elated beyond reason and measure” when she acquires what she supposes is good by nature and is equally upset or depressed when she

is without what she supposes is good by nature. Moreover, the thought also explains how, even when someone has acquired something she thinks is good by nature, she remains troubled by the possibility of losing it. Thus, Sextus goes on to conclude that:

We do not, however, take the skeptic to be undisturbed in every way [*aochlēton pantēz*] – we say that they are disturbed [*ochlēisthai*] by things which are forced upon them [*tōn katēnangkasmenōn*]; for we agree that at times they shiver and are thirsty and have other feelings of this kind. But in these cases ordinary people [*hoi...idiōtai*] are afflicted by two sets of circumstances [*peristasesin*]: by the feelings themselves [*tōn pathōn autōn*], and no less by believing [*dokein*] that these circumstances [*peristaseis*] are bad by nature [*phusez*]. The skeptic, who sheds the opinion [*to prosdoxazein*] that each of these things is bad in its nature [*pros tēn phusin*], comes off more moderately [*metriōteron*] even in these cases. (*PH* 1.30)

In this passage Sextus contrasts the skeptic with “ordinary people,” noting that the skeptic does not opine (*prosdoxazein*) and so is more moderate than ordinary people, who do opine. While this passage does not mention *ho bios*, it does talk about “*hoi idiōtai*” and the force of the passage is that the *idiōtai* are to be contrasted with the skeptic. A natural translation, therefore, of the word is either “ordinary people” or “laymen,” where the implication is that such people *lack* precisely the understanding or outlook of the skeptic. Such a translation almost immediately causes problems for my contention that Pyrrhonism is wedded to ordinary, everyday life (*bios*): after all, if Pyrrhonism is so wedded, then why is it that ordinary people suffer from precisely the malady that the skeptics aim to cure? Indeed, if skepticism were truly of a piece with *bios*, would it not also suffer from that malady? Yet, skepticism promises freedom from the particular disturbance afflicting *hoi idiōtai*. How can a skepticism wedded to ordinary, everyday life offer people a remedy from the afflictions of ordinary, everyday life? We seem to have here a point at which Pyrrhonism and *bios* must part ways. Moreover, this line of criticism cannot be dealt with, as the previous one was, by invoking a distinction between dogmatic and undogmatic understanding, since the context of *PH* 1.27-30 seems clearly non-dialectical: Sextus is describing, *in propria persona*, the skeptical outlook. Consequently,

without the possibility of invoking the dogmatic/undogmatic distinction, it looks as though we have evidence that the Pyrrhonist is not so faithful to *bios* as I have argued.

In a sense, this line of objection should be unsurprising, especially if we turn to empirical facts. After all, non-philosophers and ordinary people – indeed, conspicuously, people who have never read or otherwise encountered philosophy – certainly do dogmatize and engage in precisely the sort of activity of which the skeptic wishes to cure them.<sup>105</sup> It is presumably this disposition or tendency in ordinary people that leads them to philosophy and, eventually, to skepticism (*PH* 1.12, 26). But is this objection fatal to my claim that skepticism bears a distinctive and close connection to ordinary life and language? Of this I am not so sure. To see why, I would like to discuss two different features of Sextus' discussion: (i) the use of “*idiôta?*” (or, rather, the *absence* of *ho bios*) and (ii) the distinction between ordinary *life* and ordinary *people*.

The temptation to translate “*idiôta?*” as “ordinary people” is natural, especially when we think of the “ordinariness” of such people in contrast to the “extraordinariness” of those possessing knowledge, whether practical or theoretical. I am an “*idiôtês?*” with respect to carpentry, though less so with respect to philosophy. In other words, one translation of “*idiôta?*” is simply laymen or non-experts. When so used, there will be an implicit or explicit restriction to some area or field of expertise or knowledge. In *PH* 1.30 Sextus is speaking about those unfamiliar with Pyrrhonism (and philosophy), so it is natural for him to refer to such people as “*idiôtai.*” It, therefore, need not be supposed that Sextus use of “*idiôta?*” is meant to imply a close connection to *bios*, when it is understood as ordinary life. While it may seem natural to translate “*idiôta?*” by “ordinary people,” it

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<sup>105</sup> On this point, see Keynes (1936) pp. 383-384: “Practical men, who believe themselves to be quite exempt from any intellectual influence, are usually the slaves of some defunct economist. Madmen in authority, who hear voices in the air, are distilling their frenzy from some academic scribbler of a few years back. I am sure that the power of vested interests is vastly exaggerated compared with the gradual encroachment of ideas. Not, indeed, immediately, but after a certain interval; for in the field of economic and political philosophy there are not many who are influenced by new theories after they are twenty-five or thirty years of age, so that the ideas which civil servants and politicians and even agitators apply to current events are not likely to be the newest. But, soon or late, it is ideas, not vested interests, which are dangerous for good or evil.”

could just as well be translated as “laymen” or “non-skeptics/philosophers.”<sup>106</sup> Translating “*idiôtai*” thus would make the connection to ordinary life (*bios*) less obvious.

Of course, while the previous translations might make the connection between “*idiôtai*” and *bios* less direct, one might nevertheless think that by advocating on behalf of ordinary *life*, Sextus is advocating on behalf of ordinary *people* and that to be a layman *just is* to be an ordinary person. In §1(b) above I noted that *bios* as ordinary *life* might be conceptually prior to *bios* as ordinary person/people in the sense that a person is or is not an ordinary person by virtue of the kind of life they live. However, even if one does not accept this, one can allow that *bios* can refer to a certain kind of life (and language) rather than a certain kind of person. Indeed, some translators (e.g., Richard Bett (2012)) seem to prefer to translate almost all uses of *bios* by “ordinary life” unless there is a pressing reason not to do so. Barnes, by contrast, as noted above, seems to allow that *bios* might refer to a life, language, or person. Thus, there is room to distinguish between “ordinary people” and “ordinary life” and it is plausible to suppose that when he uses *bios* in the sense of “ordinary,” Sextus means to restrict it to a kind of life.<sup>107</sup> If this is the case, then the distinction between *bios* and *idiôtai* is important, since, while it is possible for *idiôtai* to *not* live an ordinary life, it is impossible for ordinary life (*bios*) not to be ordinary life. The reason such a distinction is important is because it makes room for Sextus to allow that, while Pyrrhonism is closely allied to ordinary life and language, nevertheless, there may be people who, though *idiôtai* and so not philosophers but laymen, are nevertheless inclined to dogmatism. Indeed, such people would be departing from *bios* when they dogmatized, but, at the same time, they would not, strictly speaking, be *philosophers*, and so would still qualify as *idiôtai*. The change effected by Pyrrhonism would be to cure them of their inchoate

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<sup>106</sup> In order for this line of thought to be genuinely credible (as opposed to *prima facie* plausible), one would need to canvas all uses of “*idiôtés*” and show that they could all be so understood. Apart from a quick and cursory consultation of all uses of the term in Sextus, I have not endeavoured to thoroughly and carefully examine all such uses. Such an examination would proceed beyond the scope of this chapter and dissertation.

<sup>107</sup> Again, this would require considerably more argument and discussion: see the previous note.

dogmatic impulses. Consequently, Sextus' thought certainly has sufficient resources to coherently meet the objection to the connection between Pyrrhonism and *bios*.<sup>108</sup>

To summarize: in Sextus, “*bios*” may sometimes refer to “ordinary people” and sometimes to “ordinary life.” While ordinary people can succumb to dogmatism, ordinary life cannot. When Sextus discusses the ethical advantages of Pyrrhonism for “ordinary people” (*idiôtai*) he does not mean to refer to ordinary life, but rather to non-philosophers, who may or may not live an ordinary life. In passages like *PH* 1.30, Sextus supposes that such non-philosophers are dogmatists or possess dogmatic traits or impulses, so that they are troubled and do not live an ordinary life. As a result, application of skeptical arguments to these laymen will, potentially, divest them of their dogmatism or their dogmatic traits and impulses, and produce in them the *ataraxia* distinctive of ordinary life. The ethical advantage of *ataraxia*, therefore, is only an advantage over *dogmatic* life and impulses, not over ordinary life, which we can suppose is already free from dogmatic disturbance.

### c. *Bios* & the “Philosophy” of Pyrrhonism

Earlier in this chapter, I argued that *bios*, when understood to refer to ordinary life, should be seen as opposed to the methods and results of philosophy. I contrasted the logical standards (*ta logika kritêria*) distinctive of philosophical reflection and theorizing to the ordinary standards (*ta biôtika kritêria*) involved in ordinary life. Moreover, I argued that Pyrrhonism is allied with ordinary life and standards, rather than philosophical ones, since the skeptical life can be distinguished as an ordinary life employing such ordinary standards. Such claims, however, might seem problematic when we consider that Sextus, usually *in propria persona*, often labels Pyrrhonism a “philosophy.” Thus, for example, at the very beginning of *PH*, when describing the “main difference between philosophies [*philosophiôn*],” Sextus contends that:

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<sup>108</sup> Whether or not Sextus makes use of these resources is a separate question: see the previous two notes.

It seems reasonable to hold that the main types of philosophy [*philosophiai*] are three: the dogmatic, the academic, and the skeptical. (*PH* 1.4)

Later still in *PH* 1 (209-241), when Sextus is discussing the difference between Pyrrhonism and “neighboring philosophies [*tôn parakeimenôn...philosophiôn*],” he refers to Pyrrhonism as a *philosophia* more than once (*PH* 1.229, 236). In light of this evidence, there can be little doubt that Sextus refers to Pyrrhonism as a *philosophia* in contexts that are not obviously dialectical. Consequently, it is not possible, as it was in §(a) above, to explain away the characterization of Pyrrhonism as a philosophy as reflecting only a dogmatic understanding and not an undogmatic one. Thus, we seem to have an important objection to my contention that Pyrrhonism and *bios* are of a piece: *bios* and *philosophia* are opposed, but Pyrrhonism is a *philosophia*, so it cannot be a *bios* as well.

To respond to this objection, it may help to distinguish (as I did in the case of *bios*) different meanings of “*philosophia*.” Notice, for instance, that in the distinction between the “main types of philosophy,” Pyrrhonism appears in rather a strange light. After all, academic and dogmatic philosophies might be regarded as doctrinal and possessing content in the sense of claim(s) to which they give assent. In the case of dogmatic philosophy, this is obvious and is what distinguishes them from each other; in the case of academic philosophy, it is less obvious, but Sextus seems to think they have at least one doctrine: “that the truth cannot be grasped” (*PH* 1.2). By contrast, skeptics do not have any such doctrines, but only “keep inquiring” (*eti zētousi*, *PH* 1.2). Skepticism, therefore, looks more like an *activity* than a body of views. Indeed, Sextus seems to insist on the distinctiveness of this feature of skepticism when he characterizes (*PH* 1.8-10) the *ti esti* of skepticism as a “capacity [*dunamis*]” to produce oppositions among claims, in virtue of which the skeptic suspends assent and, eventually, achieves *ataraxia*. Frequently, Sextus refers to skepticism as a “way of life” (*agôgê* – *PH* 1.7, 210, 212) rather than a philosophy.

However, while skepticism does put greater store in methods and activity than other philosophical outlooks, this does not seem to disqualify it from being a philosophy in Sextus' sense. Thus, when confronted with the question of whether or not skepticism is a "school of philosophy [*hairesis*]," Sextus offers the following non-committal response.

[I]f you count as a school of philosophy a way of life [*agōgē*] which, in accordance with appearances [*kata to phainomenon*], follows an account [*ἰνὶ λόγῳ*], which account suggests [*ὑποδείκνυοντος*] how it is possible to seem [*δοκεῖν*] to live correctly [*orthōs*] (taking "correctly" not only in accordance with virtue, but also in a looser sense [*aphelesteron*]) and tends [*διαιτῶντος*] to enable one to suspend assent, then we say that skepticism is a school. (*PH* 1.17)

In this passage, Sextus is clearly wary of providing a theory or a more philosophical or robust "account" of the sort one might find in other philosophical works. Indeed, sensitive to this reticence and wariness of Sextus, Gisela Striker suggests that rather than "account," she would prefer to translate "*logos*" by "story," thereby suggesting that Sextus is offering more of a personal narrative about what *has* happened (and might again) to skeptics, rather than a theory about what will or should happen.<sup>109</sup> Nevertheless, it does look as though the skeptic's possess something like a "theory" or "account," though, of course, it is manifestly *not* a true, explanatory account about the the structure and constitution of reality (including, human life), but rather an account that "enables one to suspend assent" and to achieve *ataraxia*. Sextus seems to have in mind here the Modes, such that it is (in part) by virtue of the Modes that skepticism possesses a *logos*, which, in turn, makes it a *hairesis*.

If one identifies philosophical outlooks on the basis of their doctrinal content and their view (however, provisional) of the structure and constitution of reality, then skepticism is not a philosophical outlook. While skepticism does make use of an armory of argument-forms (the Modes) and methods that are manifestly philosophical, the result of skepticism's deployment of them is distinctive: not *truth*, but suspension of assent and *ataraxia*. It is plausible to conclude,

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<sup>109</sup> Striker (2001) pg. 117 (*cf.* pg. 122).

therefore, that because it shares methods and modes of activity (namely, arguments, as systematized in the Modes) with other philosophies, Sextus counts skepticism as a philosophy as well. It is by virtue of methodology, then, that skepticism is a philosophy.

Does this methodological conception of skepticism as philosophy make it inconsistent with *bios*? It does seem to. To see this, recall my contention that the skeptical standard of “appearances” is nothing more than *ta biôtika kritêria*, i.e., the implicit standards of ordinary life. The hostility to belief and the contention that the disturbance skepticism cures is due to philosophical reflection suggests that Pyrrhonism and ordinary life are closely connected. Indeed, one might even contend that by delivering us of our dogmatic claims, impulses and outlooks, skepticism *returns* us to the standards of ordinary life. However, even if this is true, the route by means of which it returns us to ordinary life is not obviously a method or route *of* ordinary life. The arguments, methods of inference and reflection, and techniques that the skeptic deploys (captured in the Modes) are resolutely philosophical, even if their results are not. For my claim about the connection between Pyrrhonism and *bios* to be correct, such methods would need to be those of ordinary life, yet it is difficult to see how they could be, and Sextus himself seems sometimes to imply that they are not.

It may seem, therefore, that my interpretation of Pyrrhonism and *bios* is mistaken. But this is not the only response to the tension in question. It may be, for instance, that there is a genuine tension in Pyrrhonism to which Sextus gives voice, namely, a tension between championing the methods of ordinary life and making use of philosophical methods to cure dogmatism. I think there is strong evidence of the genuineness of this tension in Sextus’ response to the *apraxia* argument at *M* 11.

[T]he skeptic does not conduct his life according to a philosophical account (for so far this goes he is inactive), but according to non-philosophical observance he is able to pursue some things and flee other things.

*kata men ton philosophon logon ou bioi ho skeptikos (anaenergêtos gar estin boson epi toutôî), kata de tèn aphilosophon têrêsîn dunatai ta men hairesthai ta de pheugein. (M 11.165)*

This passage makes quite plain that Sextus conceives the skeptic as acting *not* in accordance with a philosophical account, but rather in accordance with non-philosophical observance. If this is true, then it makes the skeptic's methods of argument (the Modes) *non-philosophical*, even though these methods seem to be the only thing that skepticism shares with other philosophies. The above passage strongly suggests that Pyrrhonism or skepticism is *not* a philosophy, which contradicts Sextus' earlier claims that it is.

In addition, the non-philosophical "observance" mentioned in *M* 11.165 certainly seems to belong to ordinary life, for at *PH* 1.23-24 Sextus describes the same observance as "*biôtikê*".<sup>110</sup> *M* 11.165 makes explicit the tension between skepticism and *bios*: somehow the methods of skepticism, which seem to make it a philosophy for Sextus, must be those of ordinary life, which Sextus contends is *opposed* to philosophy. If, therefore, this tension *is* a genuine feature of Sextus' thought, then it is no objection to my own interpretation that it cannot reconcile *philosophia*, *bios* and skepticism, for this must be a problem for *any* interpretation of Sextus' skepticism.

## 5. Conclusion

In this chapter I have attempted to articulate Sextus' conception of the skeptic's linguistic practice and have argued that the distinctive character of this practice goes a long way towards explaining how the skeptic can consistently both suspend assent and nevertheless live a normal or ordinary life. The conclusions of this chapter may seem quite unsatisfying: the skeptic's account seems little more than an insistence that the skeptic simply lives an ordinary or everyday life without endeavouring to provide a rational, systematic and precise account of that life or its elements. Yet it is precisely such

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<sup>110</sup> The two formulations (at *M* 11.165 and *PH* 1.23-24) are even *formally* similar. Both characterize the skeptic as living (*bioû*) *kata...têrêsîn*.

an account that the skeptic conceives as making unclear or obscure the familiar *phainomena* of everyday life. To follow appearances alone, without the mediation of an explanatory *logos*, is nothing more than to do what people do in ordinary, everyday life. There is no deeper account of the structure of such a life beyond the utterances and actions composing it; this is what “following appearances”, after all, amounts to. In the final section of this chapter, I attempted, with some difficulty, to determine and articulate some heuristics for interpreting Sextus’ remarks. Of course, the proof will be in the pudding when, in the next chapter, I apply such insights to interpretation of the crucial earlier sections of *PH I* (1-33). For now, it suffices to note that the difficulty of discovering such hermeneutic guidance and the frustration of trying to articulate it is not mine alone. Galen, a contemporary of Sextus, voices his frustration with the linguistic constraints of “Methodist” physicians in *De Methodo Medendi* (IV.4.268K). His target is important, since Sextus himself insists that skepticism is better allied with Methodism than with empiricism in medicine (*PH I* 236-241). Galen is attacking the 1<sup>st</sup> century Roman physician and noted Methodist, Thessalus of Tralles for inconsistent usage.

But, in those matters where [Thessalus] urges us to abandon what is not apparent [*tón adélón*] and to keep in mind only the commonalities which are manifestly apparent [*tais enargós phainomenais koinotêsín*], he should not still be using dogmatic [*dogmatikóis*] words. “But don’t interpret his talk dogmatically [*dogmatikós akoue legontos autou*],” they say, “but simply [*aphelós*]!” For some of his followers are in the habit of taking [his talk] thus, leading us back to yet another word: “simplicity” [*tên apheleian*] – but what *it* signifies I, at any rate, haven’t the faintest. For if indeed [it is to be understood] as they themselves interpret it, i.e., by exchanging it for a sillier one: “life-ish-ly” [*to biôtikós*] – and if again in interpreting this [word] they say it also means to him “likewise as to the mass of men”, then “simply” would, I guess, be identical to “not articulately or precisely, but rather non-technically and without any scientific understanding.”<sup>111</sup>

It is striking how close Galen’s picture of the Methodists’ views on language conform to that of Sextus hitherto described. All of the key terms are here; as is the insistent refusal to resort to theoretical accounts of the content of various claims. Certainly, Galen is unsympathetic and critical,

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<sup>111</sup> To the extent that this translation captures Galen’s Greek, Tad Brennan alone deserves credit. While I have indeed translated the passage, the success was largely with the help of Tad’s glosses. Any infelicity, incompetence, or awkwardness is mine alone; Tad deserves credit for amending the original translation, which was nothing short of a procession of perversities.

but there can be little doubt that he is struggling with a strand of thought common to both the Methodists and skeptics and that his articulation of that thought is not at all unfair. The question of whether or not this amounts to a refutation of that strand of thought or a mitigation of its plausibility seems to me a matter of controversy that cuts to the heart of the philosophical enterprise.

# Chapter Three

## On the Very Idea of (a Standard Account of) Skeptical Assent

### 0. Introduction: An Alternative to the Standard Account

As I have urged throughout this dissertation, the concept of assent is fundamental to any understanding of the Pyrrhonian skeptic's outlook and activity. Not only is it a species of assent that is suspended in skeptical *epoché*, but it is a distinct species of assent that governs the skeptical life and in terms of which the skeptic's adherence to the standard (*kritérion*) of appearances (*phainomena* = *phantasiai*) is to be understood. The account of skeptical assent currently prevailing among scholars, which I have labelled "the Standard Account," seems to me mistaken both in its details and in its general drift. While the focus of chapter one was a critique of the Standard Account, in this chapter I again take issue with the Account, but only as a foil to the alternative I will sketch. The aim in chapter one was wholly critical; the aim in this chapter is constructive: by offering a competing interpretation of skeptical assent that resolves both the philosophical and the specifically textual issues, I hope to put that interpretation on a sound footing. In motivating and developing this novel interpretation, I will rely upon the insights of chapter two into the nature of skeptical discourse and linguistic practice. My central thought is that attention to Sextus' own conception of his linguistic activity will provide an improved basis for interpreting his remarks on assent in *PH* 1.13 and related sections. The development of my own account of skeptical assent in this chapter proceeds on two fronts. My focus in part one is on the concept of appearance (*phainomenon*), which constitutes the skeptic's practical standard for living her life. I begin with a discussion of Aristotle's conception of *phainomena* and its role in theoretical reflection and explanation. I then move on to a discussion of

Sextus' skeptical conception of *phainomena*. The animating thought of this part one is that something like Aristotle's conception of the nature and role of *phainomena* in reflection is picked-up and re-interpreted by Sextus. Moreover, since Aristotle's account is more clearly developed than Sextus', it is hoped that the connection between the two will shed light on Sextus' sometimes obscure conception of *phainomena*. In part two, I switch my focus to discussion of *PH* 1.13 and those related passages in which Sextus articulated his conception of assent. This part constitutes a more or less extended reading of *PH* 1.13, with some mention of related sections. I begin in the first two sections of this part with a careful discussion of the meaning of the expressions “*to endokein*” and “*kata phantasia*”, which play such an important role in *PH* 1.13. The understanding of these expression is then brought together in a complete account of Sextus' concept of skeptical assent in the final section.

## **1. Aristotelian vs. Skeptical *Phainomena***

### **a. Aristotle on *Phainomena***

While it is certainly clear enough that the skeptical life is characterizable as a life lived in adherence with what appears (*ta phainomena*) – indeed, Sextus asserts precisely this at *PH* 1.21 – it is a matter of considerable controversy just what precisely Sextus means by *ta phainomena* and this despite the fact that by “what appears” Sextus means, more or less, the appearance (*hê phantasia*) (*PH* 1.22). In chapter one §§(a)-(c), I noted that the controversy is at least in part occasioned by ambiguities in Sextus' expression of the distinction between the two kinds of assent (or two meanings of “*dogma*”) at *PH* 1.13. The result of this ambiguity is something of a dialectical stalemate between competing interpretations of the passage that focus exclusively on Sextus' text and corpus. Consequently, while it will eventually be necessary to reconsider that passage itself in light of the reflections in this chapter and chapter two, I will here approach the concept of *phainomenon* from the perspective of the

wider philosophical tradition, focusing especially on Aristotle and hoping that a fresh perspective on the concept will prove illuminating. The central thought is that one aspect of the role of *phainomena* in Aristotle's reflections on the methodology of philosophico-scientific inquiry is picked up and re-interpreted in Sextus' own concept of *phainomena*.

A fitting entry into Aristotle's "methodological" concept of *phainomena* are his remarks in *Nicomachean Ethics* 7.1:

As in other matters, one must set down [*titbentas*] what appears [*ta phainomena*] and, having first gone through the puzzles [*diaporésantas*], next prove [*deiknunai*] thus and above all every reputable opinion about these affections [*ta endoxa peri tauta ta pathē*]; if not [every], then the majority and most authoritative. When the difficulties are resolved [*luētai*] and the reputable opinions have been left behind, they will have been sufficiently proved [*dedeigmenon*]. (1145b2-7)<sup>112</sup>

Though these reflections on the so-called "endoxic method" arise in Aristotle's discussion of ethics, they are not restricted either to this field or to the practical sciences more generally, as Aristotle himself indicates (*hōsper epi tōn allōn*). Indeed, scholars have rather exhaustively demonstrated that the method here described – a method summarized by Barnes as "setting down, puzzling through, proving"<sup>113</sup> – is extensively employed in the biological and physical works as well.<sup>114</sup> How precisely the methodology applies to the *Physics*, which seems largely a philosophical work concerned with establishing principles rather than collecting data, has been a matter of some controversy, which I will discuss in more detail below. Nevertheless, *that* the methodology is understood by Aristotle as applying so widely suggests that it plays an important role in any sort of philosophico-scientific inquiry, however unclear Aristotle's conception of *how* it applies.

One source of the puzzle about the wide application of the endoxic method arises from what is taken to be a disharmony between the concepts of *phainomena* and *endoxa*, a disharmony only exacerbated by Aristotle's later use of the expression "*ta legomena*" (1145b20) to denote what he here

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<sup>112</sup> This translation is mine, though I have benefited from Ross (1941a). I follow Barnes (1980) pp. 499-500 in translating *endoxa* as "reputable opinions."

<sup>113</sup> Barnes (1980) pg. 490.

<sup>114</sup> The *locus classicus* for discussion of this point is Owen (1961).

calls *ta endoxa*. As Jonathan Barnes has capably shown<sup>115</sup>, the expression “*ta endoxa*” is best translated as “reputable opinions.” This translation highlights (i) the source or status of the opinions and (ii) the fact that they *are* opinions, i.e., claims that something or other is the case or is true, a point emphasized by Aristotle’s use of the expression “things said” (*ta legomena*) to denote *ta endoxa*. When discussing *endoxa* in *Topics* I (100b21-3), Aristotle makes plain that he views them not only as claims that something or other is the case, but as claims whose reputability derives from their being held by everyone or the majority or the wise. Depending, therefore, on whether the opinion is held by everyone or the majority, or by the wise, the term may be translated variously as “common opinions” or “philosophical opinions.” These “common opinions” form an important class of items so far as my argument goes; moreover, they generate much of the puzzlement surrounding the relationship between *ta phainomena* and *ta endoxa*, so it is worth pausing to consider the role and importance of them. In this regard, we can do little better than attend to the remarks of G. E. L. Owen in his seminal paper which originated much of the modern puzzlement and drew attention to the disharmony between *phainomena* and *endoxa*. Thus, in discussing Aristotle’s reflections on incontinence in the *Ethics*, Owen notes that:

In the discussion of incontinence, on the other hand, where the *phainomena* are things that men are inclined or accustomed to say on the subject, the *aporiai* that Aristotle sets out are not unexplained or recalcitrant data of observation but logical or philosophical puzzles generated, as such puzzles have been at all times, by exploiting some of the things commonly said.<sup>116</sup>

Owen’s comment brings out the apparent tension between understanding *phainomena* as observed facts or data of observation and *phainomena* as *ta endoxa*. While in one sense, *phainomena* pick out observed or evident facts, *endoxa* pick out opinions or belief derived from reflection on the conceptual structure revealed by linguistic usage. One way of putting the apparent tension would be to say that while there is good *prima facie* reason to think that an observed or evident fact is *true*, i.e.,

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<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 498-500.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, pg. 87

that it is a *genuine* fact – namely, the fact that it is secured by perception – it is not obvious that there is the same good ground for supposing that *endoxa* are true: common opinions or reflections of ordinary people do not seem privileged in any way, still less justified by anything like perception.

It is only slightly misleading, therefore, to say that while non-endoxic *phainomena* pick out (apparent) *facts*, *endoxa* pick out *opinions* or *beliefs*. In light of the different conceptions of *phainomena* and *endoxa*, there does appear to be a poor fit between them, for that something is an *endoxon* implies only its source as a belief of someone or other, but that something is a non-endoxic *phainomenon* entails that it true and that it captures a way in which the world is.

The gap or divergence between the two concepts would not be of any significance, but for the fact that Aristotle does seem to think there is a close connection between them. This connection becomes even clearer when we note that in the earlier passage from the *Ethics* (1145b2-7), *tauta ta pathê* (1145b5), which provide the content of *ta endoxa*, are most naturally identified with *ta phainomena* (1145b3). There is a conceptual connection between the two items: a *phainomenon* is a mode of being affected by something so that it “appears” to one and a *pathos* is precisely an affection. Indeed, this connection is more than mooted by the demonstrative “*tauta*” which can only plausibly be taken to refer back anaphorically to “*ta phainomena*.” Consequently, the reputable opinions *just are*, on Aristotle’s model, the things that appear, i.e., the evident or observed facts, though even if they were only a subset thereof, we would still have a puzzle.

In fact, however, as Jonathan Barnes has noted<sup>117</sup>, the puzzle of the disunity of *endoxa* and *phainomena* is not so dire as Owen suggests. To begin to see this, we need only look at the definition of *endoxa* given at the beginning of the *Topics*:

...reputable [opinions] are the things that seem to be so [*ta dokounta*] to everyone or the majority or the wise, that is, to all or the majority or the most well-known and reputable [*gnôrimois kai endoxois*]. (100b21-3)<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Barnes (1980) pp. 490-1.

Here *endoxa* are identified with “things that seem to be the case”. Indeed, the verb “*dokeō*”, from which the participle “*dokounta*” derives, can be used to mean precisely the same thing as the verb “*phainomai*” from which the participle “*phainomena*” derives. In both cases (*dokounta*, *phainomena*), we have a term that means “things that seem to be the case.”<sup>119</sup> Notice, furthermore, that such seeming need not be purely perceptual, such that what seems to be the case must be available to sensory perception; rather, the seeming in question can take all sorts of non-perceptual facts as objects: it might *seem* that a proof is invalid or that a thought is contradictory or that life is a grim business, where none of these things are specifically perceptual facts. The *endoxa* turn out simply to *be* the *phainomena*: we are given two slightly different ways of picking out the same class of items. Moreover, the rational basis for *endoxa* is the same as the rational basis for *phainomena*: namely, the fact that they appear (whether perceptually or not) to be the case.<sup>120</sup>

One may still, however, worry that non-endoxic or perceptual *phainomena* seem to have *better* grounds than non-perceptual *endoxa*, simply because the one arises through perception while the other does not. However, this is problematic only on the assumption of a specific role for *phainomena* in Aristotle’s method of inquiry. Indeed, there is reason to suppose that Aristotle’s grouping together of both sorts of *phainomena* is guided less by attention to what has a good rational basis and more by that which provides the *starting point* of theoretical reflection and explanatory inquiry, namely, what we (or subsets of us) *take* to be true.<sup>121</sup> Notice, for instance, that the perceptual basis of

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<sup>118</sup> The translation is my own, though I have benefitted from consulting Pickard-Cambridge (1941).

<sup>119</sup> Barnes (1980) makes precisely this point (at pg. 490). Though Barnes never quite makes all the claims I make in this paragraph, it is nevertheless true (I think) that (i) his thoughts cohere with my own claims and (ii) he deserves credit for making plain the solution to Owen’s puzzle. In fact my debts to Barnes’ paper as well as Owen’s go far beyond these points and will perhaps be more apparent to others than to myself.

<sup>120</sup> For a more nuanced view, one that involves a developmental story about Aristotle’s method, see Irwin (1988). At pp. 30-2, Irwin argues that *endoxa* are, in fact, a proper subset of appearances, which diverges from the claim I make here. Since I will eventually conclude that only a subset of appearances are important for my purposes, I do not think this divergence harms my overall argument.

<sup>121</sup> Martha Nussbaum deserves credit for this insight about the role of *phainomena* in Aristotle’s method in chapter eight of “The Fragility of Goodness” (1986). Nussbaum’s interpretation has been roundly rejected, and rightly so, by various

*phainomena* does not immunize them from rejection in the process of puzzling through and if they were to have plausibility *due* to having a perceptual basis, this failure of immunity would seem a little puzzling. More importantly, focus on the evidentiary basis of *phainomena* risks obscuring an important function of them in inquiry, for not all of the assumptions with which we begin inquiry are supposed to have a determinate justification or basis (although, they are certainly *taken* to be true) or are supposed to survive such inquiry: in many cases these *archai* are assumed to be true without any clear sense of *why* they are so assumed. Moreover, the whole *point* of “puzzling through” is to figure out *if* they have a sound basis.

Of course, there are limits to the basis provided by being successfully retained after the puzzles have been dealt with. In his taxonomy of the sort of puzzles that might arise from the *phainomena*, Barnes lists: inconsistency of groups of *phainomena*, internal contradiction, vagueness, ambiguity, and inadequate or obscure expression – “in short [*ta phainomena*] may suffer from all the vices that infect human beliefs.”<sup>122</sup> None of these puzzles seem, however, to arise from questions about the “external” justification or basis of the *phainomena*, external that is to the *phainomena* themselves, but rather from questions about the coherence of *phainomena* both with each other and internally. The endoxic method describes a move from *phainomena* to proof of them, and while this suggests that such *phainomena* do not *already* have a wholly sound basis, it also suggests that Aristotle’s interest is largely in arranging the *phainomena* in a systematic or perhaps even explanatory way. To think of this system in terms of propositions, one might suppose that the final form of a science or philosophy will consist in an elaborate edifice of appearance-claims, the legitimacy of which edifice resides in the fact that the *phainomena* are rendered in it precisely, clearly, and

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scholars for imputing rather more than is plausibly implicit in this conception of *phainomena*’s role. Certainly, her claim that Aristotle is committed to a version of Putnam’s “internal realism” seems *periergon*, but her central thought seems to me right, namely, that Aristotle sees theoretical reflection as beginning from what *we take* to be the case. For criticisms of Nussbaum, see Cooper (1988) and Wians (1992). A helpful contrast to Nussbaum, more sophisticated in its treatment of Aristotle’s evolving methodology, is Irwin (1988), see pp. 187-188 and pg. 550, *n.* 19.

<sup>122</sup> Barnes (1980) pg. 492.

consistently. In light of such a picture, there will seem good ground to retain propositions capturing observed or evident facts, but less ground for retaining *endoxa*. Aristotle's approach, therefore, seems in one sense quite unscientific and irrational: why save *endoxa* at all?

To suppose Aristotle's conception of science is captured by the previous picture of an edifice of *phainomena* seems misleading, and not merely because it does little to accommodate the fact that some *phainomena* will need to be jettisoned (as I have mentioned). Consider Aristotle's remark in *Metaphysics* VII iii on the two senses of "familiar" or "known":

For it is proper to advance to that which is more familiar [*gnôrimôteron*]. For learning proceeds for all in this way – through that which is less familiar by nature [*día tón êtton gnôrimôn phusei*] to that which is more familiar [*eis ta gnôrima mallon*]; and just as in conduct our task is to start from what is good for each and make what is without qualification good good for each, so it is our task to start from what is more familiar to oneself [*ek tón autôi gnôrimôteron*] and to make what is familiar by nature [*ta têi phusei gnôrima*] familiar to oneself [*autôi gnôrima*]. Now what is familiar and primary for particular sets of people is often familiar to a very small extent [*mikron*], and has little or nothing of reality [*outhen echei tou ontos*]. But yet one must start from those things which are barely known [*ek tón phaulôs...gnôstôn*] but known to oneself [*autôi...gnôstôn*], and try to know [*gnônai*] what is knowable without qualification [*ta holôs gnôsta*], passing, as has been said, by way of those very things which one does know. (1029b3-12)<sup>123</sup>

The same process of learning is discussed in the *Posterior Analytics* (1.2.71b33-72a6) in the context of the development of scientific understanding. In that passage what is "more familiar to us" is restricted to what is available to perception; but the above passage from the *Metaphysics* clearly removes this restriction. The division between what is familiar or known to us and what is known either without qualification or by nature suggests that what is at issue are two sorts of "knowing", but in fact what is familiar to us is often "barely known" and "has little or nothing of reality," and I take it Aristotle's thought is that whatever else might be true of such items, they are not *genuine* or *real* objects of knowledge, where this means they do not have a truly sound basis or justification. This thought is brought out by the translation of "*gnôrimôteron*" as "familiar." What is familiar to us can be understood as what is to hand or available or what we take for granted or assume, but it is

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<sup>123</sup> This translation is largely adapted from Ross (1941b) with a few modifications of diction.

not thereby something known, still less something known *by nature* or *without qualification*. Indeed, such a category of items may, in fact, be quite empty (hence “have little or nothing of reality”).

If we wish to combine the methodological reflections of the *Ethics*, *Analytiks* and *Metaphysics*, one natural approach, argued by William Wians<sup>124</sup>, is simply to identify *phainomena* with what is “more familiar to us.” Such an identification would allow us to bring together the methodology of the scientific and philosophical works by noting that they both begin with *phainomena* or “what is familiar to us” and proceed to *ta onta* or “what is knowable by nature” or “without qualification.” In the *Analytiks* (see, e.g., 88a5-15) and elsewhere (see, e.g., *EN* 1.1095b2-13), Aristotle distinguishes between, on the one hand, facts (or “the that” : *ta hoti*) and, on the other, explanations (the why/cause : *to aition*) thereof. While the former may be included among *phainomena*, the latter will be less likely to be included; moreover, it is the latter which are better known than the former and more certain. I think, however, it will be a step too far to identify the *phainomena* also with what Aristotle calls *ta hoti*, as opposed to “the why” or “explanation” (*to aition*), in the *Analytiks* and elsewhere. This is because, as the endoxic method makes quite plain, we will not move to explaining the facts until we have rendered the set of them consistent, and this depends upon solving the various puzzles attending *ta phainomena*. Indeed, this suggests that the “facts” in question are precisely what result from the endoxic method; moreover, it is these resulting facts of which the sciences and philosophy endeavor to give an explanatory account.

If we identify *ta phainomena* with what is familiar to us, then Aristotle’s conception of their status becomes much clearer. In fact, *ta phainomena* are not genuinely known or genuine objects of knowledge *prior* to the development of a coherent and systematic scientific picture relating to them and this despite their perceptual basis. Certainly, they can become such objects of knowledge once a

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<sup>124</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp. 141-146. As in the case of the papers of Owen and Barnes, my debt to Wians’ discussion is deeper than my exiguous citation suggests.

theoretical explanation or account of them is finally available, though of course such an account may result in the rejection of the claim that the relevant *phainomena* “have reality.” Regardless, it seems fair to say that for Aristotle *ta phainomena* do not admit of distinctions on the basis of whether they are more or less justified, but only the basis of *whose phainomena* they are; all *phainomena* are to be equally disputable when examined from the point of view of philosophico-scientific methodology. They are, we might say, all “bracketed” with regard to the truth. What, then, is their role? The simple answer is that they constitute a sort of *archê* or “beginning”, specifically, the beginning of inquiry. The methodological picture Aristotle gives is of a move from what is familiar to us to what is genuinely known, but not familiar to us, and this corresponds to a move from *ta phainomena* to *ta onta*, where the latter serve to a certain extent as explanations for the former. It is by virtue of this role in the methodology of explanatory inquiry that we individuate *phainomena*. But this notion of “explanatory inquiry” includes *both* the endoxic method and the search for causes discussed in the *Analytics* and elsewhere: the former supplies the facts upon which the latter operates; and both are components of the single enterprise of explanatory inquiry.

One strand in this single enterprise of explanatory inquiry is of particular significance in the argument of this chapter: the strand involving those *phainomena* that are often described as “common” or “ordinary” opinions or conceptions. Owen tends<sup>125</sup> towards treating such as derived largely from an articulation of the conceptual structure implicit in linguistic usage, but this is too restrictive, for the things we do and the things we accept also figure in the class of *phainomena*. Indeed, Barnes specifies<sup>126</sup> 4 different sorts of ordinary opinions: (i) those explicitly held or avowed; (ii) those “evidently entailed by, or close corollaries of” (i); (iii) those “ascribed to us on the basis of our actions”; and (iv) those “latent in language”: both those expressed by language and those

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<sup>125</sup> Owen (1961) pg. 187188.

<sup>126</sup> *Op. cit.*, pg. 501.

revealed by linguistic usage. Consider in this light, for instance, the account of “place” (*topos*) in *Physics* IV, specifically, with regard to the discussion of the “various ways that something is said to be in something else” (*posaxôs allo en allôï legetai*). Aristotle canvasses a number of different but quite ordinary or everyday uses of “in” (*en*) and proceeds to explain how these various uses are to be understood – some ambiguous and thereby problematic, others in conflict with each other – and the resulting theory or account of place will attempt to honor or explain these various uses or, at the very least, explain why they are misleading. This is clearly an example of Barnes’ category (iv) of ordinary opinions and the example of the *Physics* helps us to see the source of these beliefs: the way in which we talk; it is but a small step from this to what we do (category (iii)).

It is clear that *ta phainomena* are conceived by Aristotle as occupying the role of basis and beginning for theoretical reflection that I have outlined. Apposite is the Neurathian picture<sup>127</sup> of our knowledge of the world as a ship afloat allowing us to fix this or that piece “without ever being able to dismantle it in dry dock”<sup>128</sup>, so that we must rely on another piece of the ship to stand on. Certainly, Aristotle’s explanatory account will end by *justifying* or *explaining* even *ta phainomena* on the basis of claims known to be true and much more certain than them; thus, those bits of the edifice of knowledge upon which we stand in giving an account will be explained by means of an account of perception or cognition. What is interesting, however, is *where* that explanation or account arises and begins: in the material of ordinary life. Aristotle’s sensitivity to the method of inquiry delivers an account of our “sense-making” practices that locates their beginnings in ordinary life.

It is sometimes contended that Aristotle’s endoxic method – which is sometimes erroneously assimilated to Aristotle’s method *simpliciter* – involves vindication of common sense and

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<sup>127</sup> John McDowell is my source for the thought that such a picture might be applicable to Aristotle’s methodological reflections. He argues this point, with much more apprehensiveness than I show, in McDowell (1998) pp. 36-7. For a contrasting developmental picture of Aristotle’s methodology, one that attempts to show how *phainomena* can serve as *archai*, see Irwin (1988).

<sup>128</sup> Neurath (1932) pg. 92.

that this explains the contrast between Aristotle’s philosophical outlook and the fanciful flights of Plato or Parmenides or whomever.<sup>129</sup> In fact, however, Aristotle’s method does not prejudge results in favor of “common sense” (whatever precisely *that* is). The two-tier picture – first from *ta phainomena* to *ta endoxa*, by the endoxic method; then from *ta endoxa* to the explanatory theory – is much more widely applicable; even Parmenides and Plato are forced in their inquiries to rely upon *phainomena* – things which are familiar or to hand or ordinary – in order to conduct their inquiry and to persuasively argue for their position, for they begin in the same place all of us do: in the world of *ta phainomena*, and they must rely on the transitions in thought, the assumption of meaning and interpretation, and judgments about what is and what is not ‘intelligible’ and ‘possible’ which belong to that world.

### **b. Skeptical *Phainomena***

The Aristotelian concept of *phainomena* is, I have argued, primarily a concept of those beliefs or opinions that form the basis for theoretical explanatory accounts which are not, contrary to one tradition of interpretation, solely directed at explaining or justifying those beliefs. In this sense, *ta phainomena* are the “things that appear” to everyone or the majority, or to the wise. It is by their *role* in theoretical reflection – as forming the basis of and informing such reflection – that they are primarily identified. In this section, I would like to suggest that this concept of *phainomena* is picked up and re-interpreted by Sextus. Sextus does indeed use the expression “*phainomena*” and cognates, but in more than one sense. Sometimes *ta phainomena* are restricted to perceptual appearances (*PH* 1.9, 31ff, 121, etc.) – they are often so restricted in the discussion of the Ten Modes of Aenesidemus – but the expression is also used to delimit a wider class of things than mere perceptual appearances (*PH* 2.88ff, *M* 8.17ff, etc.). Thus, when discussing “whether anything true exists” (*ei esti ti alêthes*, *M*

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<sup>129</sup> Barnes (1980) pp. 502-11 discusses this interpretation and rejects it with some qualifications.

8.2-140, *PH* 2.85-96), Sextus considers the question of whether or not such a thing might be “apparent” or not, where the term is “*phainomenon*”; clearly, whatever else something “true” might be, it is not restricted to, nor taken to be restricted to, matters perceptual. Yet all of these uses occur in the context of skeptical argument, a context in which *prima facie* the skeptic is not speaking *in propria persona*, but rather using the arguments, commitments, and assumptions of various philosophers in order to achieve suspension of assent. Consequently, we should be wary of attributing to Sextus or skepticism a specific understanding of *phainomena* on the basis of *these* passages.

Perhaps the most striking evidence of Sextus’ Aristotelian conception of *ta phainomena* is given early in *PH* (1.16). It is also a passage where we have good reason to treat Sextus as speaking *in propria persona*, for he is there describing the skeptical outlook in a context external to dialectical argument.

If you say that a school [*tis hairesin*] involves adherence to a number of beliefs [*prosklisis dogmasi pollois*] which cohere [*akolouthian*] both with one another and with what is apparent [*phainomena*], and if you say that belief is assent to something unclear, then we shall say that we are not a school [*me echein hairesin*].

It is perhaps possible, though not plausible, to interpret *phainomena* here as referring specifically to perceptual *phainomena*. The plausibility of such a position is impaired by the fact that in the previous section (*PH* I 15), Sextus has referred to *phainomenon* and there it is clear that what is meant is a much wider class of elements than perceptual *phainomena*; for in *PH* 1.15 the potential *phainomena* include claims about the persuasiveness of arguments. Moreover, the above passage is part of a chapter wherein Sextus contrasts one concept of *hairesis* (quoted above) with another (at *PH* 1.17), but both involve a notion of *phainomena* or *phainomenon*. The second concept clearly refers to the wider class of elements (since it is provides the concept of *hairesis* that the skeptics do constitute). It would be quite misleading for Sextus to use the same term in the same chapter to mean two

different things *without* noting the difference. It *is* true that many of the uses of the term which relate to the wider class of items involve the singular with definite article (e.g., *to phainomenon*), but (i) this is not always the case (*cf.* *PH* 1.19-20) and (ii) “*to phainomenon*” is often used in conjunction with a preposition (e.g., *kata*), which suggests the singular form of the term may be determined rather by its role as prepositional object than by the concept it expresses.

The concept of *hairesin* discussed in the above passage seems designed to be maximally general so that it might capture as wide a range of different philosophical schools as possible (presumably, all those characterized as dogmatic at *PH* 1.1-4). To restrict the notion of *phainomena* to perceptual kinds would be problematic in light of this ambition because it would almost immediately rule out prominent schools like Stoicism – a clear target – for whom *phainomena* are not restricted to perceptual matters. Moreover, Sextus’ familiarity with the Stoics makes it deeply implausible (if not impossible) to suppose he did not recognize the scope of *phainomena* in Stoicism. Indeed, the discussion of Stoic *phantasiai* at *PH* 2.76 focuses on a *phantasia* the content of which is given by the claim that every *phantasia* is un-credible (*apistous*) and this is surely not a perceptual *phantasia*; yet the content of *phantasia* are nothing if not “what is apparent” (*phainomenon*) for the subject.<sup>130</sup> If the concept of *phainomena* is so understood, then the above passage provides a noteworthy example of a conception of the methodology and structure of scientific and philosophical inquiry as guided and informed by *phainomena*; a conception quite similar to the Aristotelian. In fact, it is “Aristotelian” only insofar as Aristotle most clearly and carefully articulated the conception, but in fact it reflects the form of methodology and theory of scientific and philosophical inquiry quite generally: indeed, so general is this form that it sometimes goes unnoticed.

If the Aristotelian concept is what Sextus has in mind, then this allows us to shed new light on other passages involving the concept, such as the following:

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<sup>130</sup> See, for instance, Plutarch *St. Rep.* 1057b.

When we investigate whether the underlying thing [*to hypokeimenon*] is such as it appears [*hupoion phainetai*], we grant that it appears [*to...hotei phainetai didomen*], and what we inquire into is not the *phainomenon* but what is said [*legetai*] about the *phainomenon* – and this is different from investigating the *phainomenon* itself. For example, it appears to us that honey sweetens (we concede this inasmuch as we are sweetened in a perceptual way); but whether as far the argument goes it is actually sweet is something we investigate – and this not the *phainomenon*, but something said [*legomenon*] about the *phainomenon*. (PH 1.19-20)

The expression “*logos*” is cognate with the verbal “*legomai*” and Sextus often uses the former expression in the sense of “account” or “theory”. It is natural therefore to suppose that in distinguishing between *to phainomenon* and what is “said” about it, he is distinguishing between *to phainomenon* and the theory deployed to explain and understand it. This fits well with the Aristotelian concept of *phainomena* which is distinguished as the basis of theoretical reflection and as what such reflection explains and understands (or what such inquiry *aims* at explaining and understanding, though it may end by discarding the *phainomena*). On this view, the above passage is individuating *to phainomenon* as what is given to scientific-cum-philosophical reflection as the basis for interpretation and understanding; in this sense, a *phainomenon* is a datum of a theory.

In the previous section, I noted that the Aristotelian *phainomena* are conceived as *beliefs* or *opinions* and are individuated on the basis of who holds the opinions or beliefs. Thus, for instance, some opinions or conceptions will be common to all, while others will be common only to the wise. What makes them *phainomena* is the fact that (i) they are taken as true by some class of people and, most importantly, (ii) they form the basis or material for – as well as the object of – the activity of theoretical inquiry and explanation. A sub-class of *phainomena* are those things taken to be true *by everyone* (or *by most people*), and those are particularly relevant to Sextus and his concept of *bios* or ordinary/everyday life. There is, however, an important ambiguity in this concept of *phainomena*: it may be understood from the perspective of theoretical inquiry or reflection – often as somehow unclear or obscure or otherwise degenerate – or it may be *not* so understood.

To understand what I mean by a “theoretical understanding” of *phainomena*, it helps to recall Barnes’ fourfold division of “common opinions.” With the exception of the first class of beliefs, all of the others are the result of inference and interpretation. Thus, the second class of beliefs is derived explicitly from inferring what follows from or is presupposed by the first class of beliefs, which are alone explicitly avowed. But determining what follows or is presupposed itself depends on understanding the beliefs in a certain specific way and ridding them of obscurity and inconsistency (all part of the “proof” in the endoxic method); it also depends upon certain canons of inference, e.g., what is a legitimate inference and what not. Similarly, the beliefs derived from our doings and sayings also depend upon interpreting those doings and sayings in a certain way – e.g., as having a certain point or structure, or making a certain claim – and in light of certain canons of explanation: clarity, precision, consistency, etc. After all, the theory of “folk psychology” (upon which the latter interpretation rests) *is* a theory and depends for its explanatory power on certain minimal criteria of a theory. In the end, even the first class of beliefs depends on interpretation, specifically, of what we say or what our acts mean.

What I have been calling “interpretation in the light of an explanatory theory” is quite different from how the various doings and sayings are understood in ordinary life, where the ambition is not to interpret them in the relevant way. Earlier, I gave the example of the concept of place and noted that Aristotle’s *phainomena* are not collected from ordinary people’s utterances, *simpliciter*, but from what those utterances are taken to say, that is, the thoughts they are taken by Aristotle to express. Consequently, there is already some interpretation or reflection that has gone into understanding them. By contrast, if we take the utterances simply as they are, it is obvious that they support multiple different interpretations and understandings, being – as it were – agnostic between them. We need, therefore, to distinguish between *phainomena* understood as the object of

scientific-cum-philosophical theoretical and explanatory understanding (the scientific conception of *phainomena*) and *phainomena* not so understood (the ordinary conception of *phainomena*).

That Sextus understands *some* distinction between *phainomena*, specifically, between how *phainomena* are understood, is suggested by a variety of passages and locutions. It is noteworthy, for instance, that twice (*PH* 1.19 & 22) Sextus notes that the sense of “*phainomenon*” he has in mind is “*phantasia*” (frequently translated as “impression” or “presentation”). Jonathan Barnes notes<sup>131</sup> that *phainomenon* can mean either the *thing* that appears or the *appearance* or *appearing* itself (*to phantaston*), whereas *phantasia* picks out only *to phantaston*. This seems correct, but scarcely resolves the issue of how precisely Sextus intends the distinction to be understood. Moreover, in distinguishing between the two concepts of *hairesis*, he takes care to distinguish between a view in which *phainomena* are used to support (and are supported by) other beliefs and so can be understood as, in some sense, propositional, and a view in which the skeptic’s activity is conducted “according to *phainomena*” (*kata to phainomenon*). This seems related to the distinction between assent *to* the unclear objects investigated by the sciences and assent *in accordance with* appearance discussed at *PH* 1.13.

Further insight into how Sextus understands the distinction between the two kinds of *phainomena* can be derived from the second part of Sextus’ discussion of the frequent charge that the skeptics “reject what is apparent” (*anairousi ta phainomena*). The first part of his response distinguishes between appearances and things said about them, which we’ve already discussed. The second part, however, states:

And if we do propound arguments [*erôtomen logous*] directly against *phainomena*, it is not because we want to reject [*anairein*] *phainomena* that we set them out, but rather to display the rashness of the dogmatists [*epideiknentes tén tón dogmatikón propeteian*]; for if reasoning [*ho logos*] is such a deceiver that it all but snatches even *phainomena* from under our very eyes, surely we should keep watch over it in unclear matters, lest we be rash [*propeteuesthai*] in following [*katakoloutountas*] it? (*PH* 1.20).

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<sup>131</sup> Barnes (1983) pg. 194, *fn.* 45.

There is a strong temptation to read this passage as urging that while the skeptic *appears* to adopt *epochê* with regard to *phainomena*, in fact, she is not doing so, but only trying to display the risks of dogmatic reflection and argument. This suggests, furthermore, that there is only one sense of *phainomena* in play, since if there were two (skeptical and dogmatic), Sextus would not need to concede *epochê* with regard to *phainomena, simpliciter*, but only concede *epochê* with regard to dogmatic *phainomena*. Unless there is only one sort of *phainomena* in question, the insistence that the skeptic does not “reject” seems quite otiose. Thus, the passage might be interpreted as repudiating the view that there are two different concepts of *phainomena*.

The previous conclusion is, however, based on a misreading of the passage. To avoid this misreading, one must attend to Sextus’ exact words. Sextus here concedes that the skeptic argues against *phainomena*, but notes that this is not because she *rejects* them. The verb here translated as “reject”, namely, “*anairin*”, occurs several passages earlier at 1.10, where Sextus defines the skeptic’s *epochê* as “a standstill of thought, due to which we neither reject [*anairomen*] nor posit [*tithemen*] anything.” Consequently, it is important not to assimilate *epochê* to “rejection”, since avoidance of the latter is part of what is entailed by the former. In light of this fact, together with knowledge of the skeptic’s commitment to *epochê*, it is, in a sense, no surprise that the skeptic does not *reject* the *phainomena*, for the skeptic does not, strictly speaking, reject *anything*. In fact, the skeptic endeavors to avoid rejecting *and* positing. In light of this, Sextus cannot be conceding that by arguing against *ta phainomena*, the skeptic is *not* suspending judgment on *ta phainomena*; rather Sextus is only reaffirming the fact that the skeptical *epochê* is not a species of negative dogmatism. In other words, nothing in this passage implies that Sextus is *denying* that the skeptic suspends assent with regard to *ta phainomena*.

Of course, the reading I have proposed may make the thread of the argument a little obscure, since if Sextus is allowing that the skeptic will suspend assent with regard to *ta phainomena*,

why does he insist that the goal of such argument is to “display the rashness” of the dogmatists’ arguments rather than simply to suspend judgment? I would like to suggest that “displaying the rashness” of the dogmatists’ arguments, and of such reasoning generally, is precisely another way of characterizing what the skeptical arguments *do*. The very fact that such arguments are available, that even in matters that in ordinary circumstances do not even *invite* controversy, let alone manifest it, shows the dogmatic character of the assertions made in them. A great deal here depends on what Sextus means by dogmatic “rashness.” Certainly, there is a tendency to rashness in philosophical and scientific inquiry: a tendency, that is, to conclude that one’s theory or inquiry has proven more than it has, in fact, proven. Such a tendency results in the conclusion that something we took for granted or thought we knew in our ordinary lives or something that seemed obvious and not worth comment in those lives turns out to be false or mistaken.<sup>132</sup> Indeed, in many ways, Sextus’ work consists in an attempt to show that our ordinary lives are not at all affected by such reflections, i.e., that, as a matter of fact, we do not depend on those conclusions and doctrines that we supposed we did. Another way of putting this point, with specific reference to *ta phainomena*, is to say that the dogmatic conception of *ta phainomena* makes *ta phainomena* a matter of dispute or controversy, while the skeptical conception does not, for the skeptical conception of *phainomena* is just a conception of the *sayings* and *doings* that form part of the fabric of ordinary, everyday life.

This reading of the above passage is rendered even more plausible when we note that Sextus does, as he implies he does, argue against the *phainomena*. Indeed, as I have mentioned in previous chapters, Sextus frequently embarks on a line of argument the justification or basis of which is “in” *phainomena*. This conception of *phainomena* – as providing the basis for certain conclusions or as otherwise providing *prima facie* evidence for a position – is, I have suggested, a *dogmatic* conception. It

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<sup>132</sup> A contemporary example: the popular literature by neuroscientists and others contending that contemporary neuroscience has proven that “free will” does not exist.

depends upon a certain precise understanding of *phainomena* as the claims, beliefs or opinions that are derived from our verbal and non-verbal behavior in ordinary life. The very act of interpreting the sayings, doings, and facts of ordinary life according to systematic explanatory theory changes the object of interpretation. Thus, for instance, in ordinary life our sayings and doings are not structured by any deeper account or theory, but only by what *seems* or *appears* appropriate or relevant on a given occasion at a given time – those seemings or appearances that together constitute what Sextus calls the standards of ordinary life (*ta biôtika kritéria*). For the dogmatist, however, whose interest is a systematic and explanatory theory of our sayings and doings, such an account is *no account at all*, for it does not characterize those sayings and doings according to what Sextus calls *dogmatic* standards (*ta dogmatika kritéria*).

As is plain from the foregoing remarks, part of the evidence for the dual conception of *phainomena* arises from Sextus' own tendency to distinguish between things evaluated or understood according to one set of standards or criteria and things evaluated or understood according to another set. The most obvious instance of such a distinction is reflected in Sextus' use of the locution “*boson epi to* [+ dative]”. The most thorough investigation of this phrase has been undertaken by Jacques Brunschwig and one may worry that his findings do not quite square with my own interpretation.

Brunschwig's discussion is structured by the following “ambiguity” in the locution:

In truth, the ambiguity is twofold: both syntactic and semantic. Syntactically, the restriction conveyed by [*boson epi to*] could bear either upon the *verb* expressing doubt, thereby imposing a restriction upon the *modality* of that doubt, or upon the *proposition* which constitutes the object of the doubt, thereby imposing a restriction upon the *contents* of that doubt. The former construction - let us call it 'adverbial' - has led to semantic interpretations of the following type: the Sceptic doubts [*boson epi to*] that honey is sweet; he doubts this, but only (for example) at a theoretical level; it does not prevent him from assuming it in his practical conduct. The second construction - let us call it 'objectal' - has led to significantly different interpretations: the Sceptic doubts that the honey is sweet [*boson epi to*]; he doubts it but only (for example) to the extent that one might claim that it is sweet by nature and in

its essence; and this does not prevent him from accepting the proposition insofar as it could be understood in a different sense from that.<sup>133</sup>

I think that this passage displays precisely the sort of issue that Sextus would treat as within the scope of skeptical *epoché*, for the passage presupposes a connection between syntax and semantics that is itself a matter of philosophical controversy and so is itself a matter of philosophical argument. The idea that a restriction on the verb should translate to a restriction on the attitude expressed by that verb and that a restriction on the “*that*-clause” should translate to a restriction on the content of the relevant attitude seems to me highly suspect and quite disputable; more importantly, it presupposes that the connection between syntax and semantics is not a matter of argument, which I have pointed out seems to be false.

It is important, however, not to conflate the previous objection with another: namely, that there is no ordinary, everyday understanding of Brunschwig’s distinction. Certainly, there *might* be contexts in everyday life in which we would want to distinguish between what is doubted and the doubt itself and, certainly, we can distinguish between the verb and the object of the *that*-clause in everyday life, but neither of these facts translates to the semantic distinction Brunschwig mentions. *This* distinction arises only in the context of a specific ambition: the attempt to provide an account of the syntactic difference *in terms* of an account of the semantic difference. The idea that all sentences involving a verb meaning “to doubt” are capable of being understood as expressions of an underlying attitude with a propositional structure is, itself, a matter of philosophical argument and so a reflection of the dogmatic orientation.

Brunschwig’s mistake is understandable, for it arises from the natural philosophical ambition of interpreting Sextus in a clear and precise way, where such clarity and precision reflects a philosophical interest in articulating Sextus’ remarks. The problem is, I have suggested, that skeptical

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<sup>133</sup> Brunschwig (1990) pg. 245.

suspension of assent, entailing as it does suspension of assent to the sort of conceptual claims and technical precision which Brunschwig must traffic in to achieve his ends, entails that any reading of Sextus which interprets his words in the same manner as one might interpret Aristotle's or Chrysippus' will risk misrepresenting his position.

## 2. Skeptical Assent: Interpreting *PH* 1.13

### a. *PH* 1.13 & the Standard Account

In the previous section I sketched my own account of Sextus' conception of *phainomena* and this account will indeed eventually play a role in my interpretation of Sextus' account of skeptical assent in this part of the chapter. However, my central aim in this part is to provide a close reading of *PH* 1.13 (with some mention of related sections) in order to articulate my own interpretation of Sextus' concept of skeptical assent. Moreover, since this interpretation is developed by using the Standard Account as a foil, it will help to recall both Sextus' remarks on assent in *PH* 1.13 and the Standard Accounts of assent and suspension of assent, which interprets those remarks.

[1] We say the skeptic does not dogmatize not according to that meaning of "dogma" [*kat' ekeinon to semainomenon tou dogmatos*] whereby some say that the acquiescing in some matter [*to eudokein tini pragmati*] is even [*kat'*] dogma (for the skeptic assents [*sunkatatithetai*] to the affections forced upon her in accordance with appearance [*tois...kata phantasiai katēnankasmenois pathes*]), as for example [*hoion*] she would not say "I seem not to be heated or chilled" [*dokō mē thermainesthai ē psuchesthai*] when heated or chilled [*thermainomenos ē psuchomenos*]);

[2] but, rather, we say that the skeptic does not dogmatize [in the sense of "dogma"] according to which some say that dogma is the assent [*tēn sunkatathesin*] to some unclear matter of investigation in the sciences [*tōn kata tas epistēmas zētoumenōn adelōn*]. For the Pyrrhonian assents [*sunkatatithetai*] to nothing unclear [*oudenī... tōn adelōn*]. (1.13)

Scholars are largely in agreement about the basic interpretation of these remarks, though to be sure there is dispute about the understanding of certain key terms.<sup>134</sup> The basic interpretation of these remarks is captured in the Standard Accounts of skeptical assent (*sunkatathesis*) and suspension of assent (*epochē*).

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<sup>134</sup> For this dispute, see chapter one §2.

**The Standard Account of Skeptical *Sunkatathesis*:** Skeptical assent is a kind of positive propositional attitude of taking a certain kind of claim to be the case (whether or not this means taking to be *true*), where the claim is the content of a *phantasia* (or *phainomenon*), which is passively received (and hence, a *pathos*). Such an attitude serves to explain the actions of the skeptic such that the practical standard or guide of skeptical action is what is apparent (*phainomenon*).

**The Standard Account of Skeptical *Epochê*:** Skeptical *epochê* is the condition of not giving “dogmatic” assent to a claim or its negation, where dogmatic assent is a kind of positive propositional attitude of taking a kind of claim or its negation to be true.

While my discussion in the following sections presumes familiarity both with the Standard Accounts and with *PH* 1.13, it offers, I hope, sufficient detail for readers with even a cursory familiarity to navigate the arguments and reflections.

### **b. The Meaning of “*To Eudokein*”**

As the opening of *PH* 1.13 makes plain, the goal of the passage (indeed, of the chapter, which that passage begins) is to explain the force of Sextus’ remark at the end of the previous section (and chapter) that the skeptics “seem to end [the process of skeptical argument] by no longer dogmatizing” [*katalégein dokoumen eis to mê dogmatizein*]. To do so, Sextus draws a distinction between two different meanings or senses (*to sêmainomenon*) of the word “*dogma*” and, presumably, its cognates: a “broader” or “more general” (*koinoteron*) sense, according to which “*dogma*” is “*to eudokein tini pragmatî*”, and what is presumably a “narrower” or “more specific” one, according to which *dogma* is “assent to the unclear objects of scientific inquiry.” The use of “*koinoteron*” suggests that Sextus is distinguishing between two different species of the genus *to eudokein*. If this is right, then the most natural candidates for these species are, on the one hand, “assent to the affections forced upon [one] in accordance with appearance” and, on the other, “assent to the unclear objects of scientific enquiry.” There is a natural temptation to begin with the concept of assent, since it seems more clearly understood than *to eudokein*, but this seems a mistake, since Sextus’ strongly implies that the central notion for understanding the two species is *to eudokein*.

Unfortunately, the previous account of the two senses of “*dogma*” does not go very far towards allowing us to understand what Sextus *means* by “*to eudokein*.” To begin to answer this question, we should keep in mind the conclusions of the previous chapter, namely, that however we understand the term, we must take Sextus’ use of it to be distinguished by such concepts as *katachrēstikos* and *aphelos* which, in the previous chapter, we noted are taken to have distinctive application in the case of ordinary or everyday language. We should, therefore, see Sextus’ use of the term as attempting to reflect its use in ordinary or everyday life and language. The thought would be that Sextus is relying upon an ordinary or everyday use of the term, which, like all such uses, will be viewed as loose or imprecise from a dogmatic perspective, and that so far as that use goes, the term will apply to the skeptic’s practice and outlook. Should one still doubt that Sextus intends an ordinary use of the term, the curious provenance of “*to eudokein*”, illuminated by Michael Frede, may be persuasive:

“Eudokein” to judge from its frequent occurrence in papyri, is quite a common word, especially, in legal contexts. It also occurs frequently in Hellenistic literature, e.g., in Polybius. On the other hand, it hardly appears at all in philosophical texts; as a *philosophical* term, it occurs nowhere else. Thus, it has no philosophical or technical meaning, no philosophical associations and is connected with no special philosophical claims; *presumably it is exactly this fact that leads Sextus to choose the word.*<sup>135</sup>

Frede here gives another reason for why we ought not to simply assume whatever sense “*to eudokein*” can be given by our prior (philosophical) understanding of assent; since the most natural source for the latter is the Stoics and Sextus has clearly taken pains to avoid making assent the central concept in the definition in order to preserve it from philosophical or dogmatic interpretation. Gail Fine makes a similar point when she notes that the word “lacks a clear philosophical sense.”<sup>136</sup> In light of the importance of ordinary usage to expression of the skeptical outlook, Sextus’ use here of a word

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<sup>135</sup> Frede (1979) pg. 193; italics mine.

<sup>136</sup> Fine (2000) pg. 93.

that has little to no prior application (let alone proprietary or technical application) in philosophical or scientific contexts seems unlikely to be mere coincidence.

The question of how to understand “*to endokein*” is tricky, in part, I should argue, *because* of its looseness or simplicity. Based on a survey of uses of the term, particularly, in papyri and the work of the Hellenistic historian Polybius, Frede follows the LSJ in translating “*to endokein*” as “consenting” noting that “the principle that one consents if one does not object is at work here.”<sup>137</sup> Barnes comes to a similar conclusion based upon a survey of uses of the term in Polybius and various lexica. He concludes that Sextus has in mind “a minimal notion of contentment – a Pyrrhonist *acquiesces* in his *pathé*, he does not speak out against them or deny them.”<sup>138</sup> Certainly, both Barnes and Frede are, in part, motivated by what Sextus says in *PH* I 13 about “assent to affections”, so that their judgment on the meaning of the term is not *solely* determined by the available meanings. In a similar way, Fine, who insists that the appropriate understanding characterizes “*to endokein*” as taking to be true, can only justify such insistence by supposing that the term “*dogma*” must have as its minimal sense: “something taken to be true.” Thus, Sextus, by defining a sense of “*dogma*”, must be relying on an understanding of it as something taken to be true.<sup>139</sup> Even Fine, however, allows that the word may *sometimes* be understood in the sense “acquiesce”, which does not involve “taking to be true.” Moreover, her approach via an understanding of *dogma* is precisely backwards: Sextus is explaining the sense of “*dogma*” in question by means of “*to endokein*” and this suggests, at least, that the latter should do the work of explaining the former. Indeed, Sextus does not even claim that *he* would call *ta endokein* a *dogma* (*PH* 1.13), rather it is “some” (*tines*) who are inclined to call even (*kai*) “the acquiescing” to be *dogma*. Surely, then, we must understand “*dogma*” as something consented to or acquiesced in, rather than

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<sup>137</sup> Frede (1979) pg. 194.

<sup>138</sup> Barnes (1982) pg. 75.

<sup>139</sup> Fine (2000) pg. 93.

something taken to be true. Moreover, it is not at all clear why our understanding of “*dogma*” should not be similarly loose and ordinary as our understanding of “*to endokein*”, so that the interpretive puzzle remains. Indeed, it is the latter point that I want to examine: the idea that, however we understand “*to endokein*”, our understanding must be oriented by attention to the ordinary or everyday, hence loose and simple, uses of the expression. The absence of a clear, exact philosophical sense is what allows the expression to adequately and effectively reflect the skeptical outlook. There is good reason, therefore, to approach an understanding of skeptical assent through an understanding of the meaning of the word, not least because Sextus takes the word to explain what he means by the word “*dogma*” and the sense in which the skeptic *dogmatizes*. Clearly, he thinks the familiar sense of the word will give readers a clearer sense of what the skeptic is up to.

The *Suida* does give as a synonym for ‘*endokein*’, the word “assent” (*sunkatathesis*) and this might also tempt interpreters into simply dispensing with analysis and investigation of the sense and use of “*endokein*” itself in favor of a clearer and more rigorous philosophical understanding of *sunkatathesis*. Indeed, such an approach might be supported by the fact that in [1] Sextus explains why the skeptic’s activity must be understood in terms of “*to endokein*” by noting that “the skeptic assents [*sunkatatithetai*] to *pathé*.” But I think this is mistaken for two reasons. First, it is a mistake to take the use of “*sunkatatithetai*” in the explanation as the basis for applying “*to endokein*” to skeptical practice, since it is clear from what Sextus says that it is “*to endokein*” that captures the sense of “assent” at issue, not *vice versa*. To proceed in one’s analysis through the use of “assent” in the explanation (again) risks simply ignoring the distinctive character and sense of “*to endokein*.” The importance to the skeptical outlook of the words used and the fact that “assent” is used to express both an ordinary and a technical concept makes reliance on it to understand *endokein* at best fraught. Second, even if we suppose that analysis of “assent” might be more illuminating as a route into understanding of skeptical assent, we are left with the difficulty of how to take the relevant

expression: is it to be loosely or strictly understood? In fact, I have been arguing that the former is most relevant here and, if so, then the problems attending an understanding of “*to eudokein*” afflict “*sunkatathesis*” as well, since the question of what the loose or everyday understanding of “*sunkatathesis*” is, is no more or less tractable than the question of what the understanding of “*to eudokein*” is. Indeed, there is evidence that on the loose understanding of the word “*sunkatathesis*” means more or less the same as “*to eudokein*”.<sup>140</sup>

Both Barnes and Frede feel pressure from Sextus’ use of “*to eudokein*” to give a deflationary account of the kind of assent picked out by it. As noted, Barnes takes the expression to pick out a “minimal notion of contentment” and implies that the notion is “thin.” Frede, as also noted, concludes that Sextus subscribes to the principle that whereof one does not object, thereof does one assent. Both interpreters labor to capture the sense that the term is used without much specificity or precision, in particular, without implying a specific conception of the nature of the acquiescence or contentment; their attempts, while valiant, still seem burdened by commitments which not only does Sextus not share, but which he intends to render dubious by skeptical argument. In fact, any interpreter who conceives of skeptical assent – the assent at issue in *PH* I 13 – along the lines laid out by the Standard Account, however deflationary their intentions, seems to misrepresent Sextus’ thoughts on the matter and so to misrepresent the “positive” aspect of his skeptical outlook. To show this, it helps to focus on ordinary or everyday uses of the expression “*to eudokein*”.

The following uses of the expression and its cognates derive from historical works; these are apposite sources, as they capture ordinary or everyday uses of the word.

- (i) Having taken over the command, and having by means of some of his connections made his way into the city, [Hieron] got his political opponents into his hands; but conducted the government with such mildness, and in so lofty a spirit, that the Syracusans, though by no means usually acquiescing in the election of officers by the soldiers [*oudamós eudokoumenous epi*

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<sup>140</sup> Polybius certainly (i) treats the two terms as synonymous when (ii) they are used to capture the “minimal” notion. See Polybius 21.30.8.

*tais tón stratiótón archairesiais*], did on this occasion unanimously approve [*eudokéσαι*] of Hiero as their general [*stratêgon hautôn huparxein Hierona*]. (Polybius 1.8.4)<sup>141</sup>

- (ii) [The Achaean League] found many of the Peloponnesians ready enough to adopt it[= the League] of their own accord: many were brought to share in it by persuasion and argument: some, though acting under compulsion at first, were quickly brought to acquiesce in it [*eudokein autêi*]. (*Ibid.* 2.38.7)
- (iii) It was still easier...for one possessing intelligence to perceive that the Aetolians and Cleomenes, having gained the upper hand of the [adversaries], would not be content [*eudokéσousin*] nor yet abide in their circumstances. (*Ibid.* 2.49.2)
- (iv) And when Tatiüs acquiesced [*eudokountos de tou Tatiou*; = in regard to an exchange of reward for allowing Tatiüs entry into a fortress], she received his sworn pledge for faithful performance of [the exchange]. (Dionysius Halicarnassensis *Ant. Rom.* 2.38.5)<sup>142</sup>

To be sure, the contexts discussed in these examples are, in one sense, not everyday, dealing as they do with military conflicts. Nevertheless, the *use* of the term in each case *is* quite ordinary or everyday and certainly not technical nor dependent on a philosophical or scientific account to give it content. A more urgent issue with regard to understanding the passages is whether or not they can all be understood as involving the same concept of *eudokein*. Some of Fine's remarks suggest that she might regard (i) – (iv) as evincing a use of picks-out a decision, which might be regarded as a quite different use from one meant to pick out a cognitive state or condition such as a propositional attitude. From the point of view of ordinary usage, however, the concept of *eudokein* seems (as always, loosely speaking) the same in (i) – (iv). Indeed, consultation of a dictionary could easily provide all four as examples of the same sense of the word (as indeed it does). Moreover, any one of the examples would provide one with adequate understanding such that one could understand and use the word in the other examples.

If, however, one relies on something other than the intuitive or ordinary judgment of sameness of meaning in distinguishing the uses of the relevant expression, then perhaps some or

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<sup>141</sup> All English translations from Polybius are adapted from the translations of W. R. Paton (1922) and Evelyn S. Shuckburgh (1889).

<sup>142</sup> This is a modified version of Ernest Cary's translation (1937).

even all of them will seem inadequate. Fine<sup>143</sup> may be suggesting just this when she notes that we can ignore all uses of the expression that do not reflect “taking something to be true” and focus on those uses that do. This approach, however, is precisely the sort that I think is inimical to Sextus’ outlook, for it privileges a certain use of the expression without relying on our ordinary intuitive use of such expressions as ‘mean the same’ and even the authority of a dictionary (which is a helpful codification of ordinary usage). In order to show the inadequacy of the Standard Account in making sense of *eudokein*, I shall focus in what follows on some ordinary uses of the expression, attending always to the insights of the previous chapter.

The Standard Account specifies that the object of skeptical assent is some claim or proposition in the intuitive sense of “something taken to be the case or to be true.” Yet of (i) – (iv), only (i) remotely suggests that what is being “consented” to is a proposition: namely the proposition that Hieron is their commander. By contrast, in the remaining uses, the object of acquiescence or consent is much more varied. Indeed, more generally, ordinary use allows acquiescence to sayings, doings, and states of affairs, whether proposed or not. Certainly, if we take syntax to reflect the logical form of the attitude putatively denoted by the expression, then we have little basis for supposing that *eudokein* is solely directed towards claims or propositions. Moreover, if we take, e.g., (iii) to be the only proper or precise expression of *eudokein*, then we do so on the basis of commitments that do not reflect what we do in ordinary or everyday life; for in the latter context, it is the syntactic form that indicates the object of *eudokein*. To put the point slightly differently, the question, in ordinary life, of what the “object” of *eudokein* is, when it has meaning, must be a way of asking what fills the syntactic position of object of the verb, even (as in (iv)) when that object is only implied, that is, what we ordinarily would *say* is the object of *eudokein*.

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<sup>143</sup> *Op. cit.*, pg. 93.

The previous line of thought may seem hopelessly crude; after all, those committed to the Standard Account need not insist that the logical structure or form of the underlying attitude picked-out by *endokein* can be, as it were, directly read off the syntactic structure or even directly culled from what we *say*. More sophistication is demanded, for we know full well that words can be ambiguous and syntax misleading. What is required, instead, is semantic ascent: a move from attention to syntax to attention to the content of the claims made by means of that syntax; in other words, a move from a purely formal feature of sayings to the content of such sayings. There are, to be sure, various different sorts of accounts of what such content amounts to, but one prominent view is that whatever else the content of a claim *is*, it determines the truth-conditions of the relevant claim: those conditions, in virtue of which the claim is true. Surely, then, proponents of the Standard Account will argue, the question is whether or not the Standard Account adequately captures the content of the claims made in (i) – (iv), whether, that is, it adequately interprets the truth-conditions of those claims. Does the Standard Account succeed in this task?

This is a complex question: read one way, it asks whether or not the Standard Account adequately characterizes the truth-conditions of the relevant claims; read another way, it asks whether or not the skeptic herself understands the truth-conditions of the relevant claims in terms of the characterization of the Standard Account. If one answers affirmatively to the latter question, then one is claiming that the skeptic's conception of *endokein* is the conception given by the Standard Account. In light of the importance of ordinary or everyday life for the skeptic, moreover, it follows that such an affirmative answer entails that ordinary or everyday uses of the expression are understood *when so used* in terms of the Standard Account; yet this seems clearly to falsify what one might call the phenomenology of linguistic usage in ordinary life.<sup>144</sup> To see this, one need only note

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<sup>144</sup> I will appeal to the “phenomenology of linguistic usage” throughout the following discussion. I derive this notion largely from Wittgenstein (1953), for he seems to me especially sensitive to what facts are and are not available to

what it is that makes such uses of the relevant expressions correct or appropriate in ordinary circumstances. Thus, for instance, in (i) and (iv) it may be that what is required is an overt act of agreement (a yay or nay or vote, etc.), though it does seem in (iv) that Tattius could agree to the arrangement simply by not objecting to it. Regardless, however, in neither of these two cases need we suppose that anything is implied beyond the overt act: the description in (i) and (iv) would not be *falsified* if, in fact, Tattius did not believe that he should make the agreement or even if he did not intend to, nor if someone gave overt agreement to Hieron's command, but in fact did so insincerely. (In this respect, overt agreements are, in effect, performative utterances: the agreement is effected by the act of utterance or agreement.<sup>145</sup>) Indeed, the internal cognitive state of the various individuals seems quite immaterial to the determination of their assent in the relevant sense.

With regard to the other instances of *endokein* it seems fairly clear that the acquiescence in question is often little more than a *failure* to overtly gainsay or disagree or reject some course of action or some state of affairs. Thus, the first use of *endokein* in (i) suggests only that the Syracusans usually *object* to the elections in question and that, in the relevant case, they did *not* so object (though it scarcely follows that they were of one mind about the matter or even that they all agreed with the election); similarly, while (ii) implies only that they stopped resisting membership (not that they agreed that they should be members), and (iii) is made true only by virtue of the fact that the Aetolians and Cleomenes would *not* stop their territorial expansion or invasion. It is interesting that, for instance, in describing someone as acquiescing to or in something in the relevant sense, we need not suppose the person is necessarily aware of what they're acquiescing to in any specific or precise sense. Thus, for instance, it would be true that the Aetolians acquiesced (in their circumstances) just in case they *no longer* pursued territorial expansion, but we need not suppose either collectively or

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consciousness in our ordinary traffic with words. See, e.g., pg. 33e (*fn.*), §§60, 70, 79, 179, 184. My repeated appeals to what we say and do in ordinary life are also wholly inspired Wittgenstein's methodology. For examples of this methodology, see the previous citations as well as the discussion of learning a rule (and following it) at §§143-238

<sup>145</sup> For the notion of "performative utterances," see Austin (1956).

individually they conceived of themselves as acquiescing; similarly, acquiescing in the command of someone does not require one to assent to that command or even to think about it, it simply requires one to *not* reject or rebel against or otherwise countermand that command. Moreover, as noted by Barnes<sup>146</sup>, this reading of “*to endokein*” gets strong support from Sextus’ own example in *PH* I 13: he insists there that the skeptic would *not* say she is hot, when she is not, since this would signal her *not* assenting. This strongly suggests that *assent* is to be understood as *not* gainsaying or denying and so as “going along with”, in this case, her feelings.

All of this shows that “*to endokein*” is a thin and rather minimal notion: it does not imply any conception of the form and nature of the relevant sort of ‘assent’. Indeed, I think the verb itself is probably best translated, at least in its uses by Sextus, as “going along with.” This does not imply any particular cognitive state or attitude nor does it imply any determinate object with which one might go along. One can go along with a thought, an act, a remark, an agreement, a proposal, etc. All it suggests is that one’s action or activity is somehow in conformity with or the result of something else. This latter suggestion is, I think, all Sextus means to suggest by the expression “*to endokein*.” Moreover, it helps to explain the balking tone of Sextus’ remark in *PH* 1.13 [1], for he says that *some* people (not obviously skeptics) say that *to endokein* is *even* (*kai*) *dogma*; in other words: this minimal phenomenon of acquiescing is even *dogma* according to these people.

In claiming that the concept of “*to endokein*” does not pick-out specifically cognitive attitudes, still less propositional ones, I am not claiming that either (i) it *could* not or (ii) it does not *on some philosophical or scientific accounts of the psychology of action*. Certainly for the Stoics, for example, my discussion would appear a monstrous *ignoratio elenchi* in light of their account of the psychology of rational action. For the Stoic it is simply false that the “doings” mentioned earlier are not generated by assents to certain claims (the *axiomata* corresponding to *impulsive phantasiai*), so that, in one sense,

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<sup>146</sup> Barnes (1982) pg. 75.

the doing in question *just is* assent to the relevant sort *axiōma*.<sup>147</sup> At the same time, it seems the Stoics would allow that in ordinary usage one does not *intend* or *imply* that the item denoted is a psychological state, still less the specific mental act of assent to *phantasia*. Sextus, as a skeptic, however, is not relying on any such account, implicit or explicit, of mental acts or rational doings, but is reflecting ordinary usage and its phenomenology. It is consistent with such a stance both that (i) *endokein* could be understood as a cognitive condition or propositional attitude and (ii) that on some philosophico-scientific accounts, it *is* so understood. Since Sextus suspends judgment on (i) as well as on any theory or account falling under (ii), his recourse is to ordinary linguistic usage and the phenomenology underwriting it alone.

While it has been fairly widely noted that Sextus' concept of *endokein* is a thin notion or one with minimal content, why Sextus requires such a thin notion to communicate his concept of skeptical assent, is rarely if ever asked. This is surprising, for, if I am right, the thinness or minimalness of the concept reveals something important not only about Sextus' intentions, but about the skeptical outlook he is communicating. I have already argued that the skeptic will live an ordinary life in conformity with the standards of such a life; but such a life is structured and organized in certain ways. It is what one might call the "intelligible structure" of such a life that Sextus is attempting to capture *without* offering a theory or account of the character of that structure, *without*, that is, presupposing a specific account or theory of what governs or inform the structure of such a life. To put the same point differently, the goal is to capture the *phainomena* without *interpreting* or *explaining* it. To this end, *endokein* works admirably, for it captures otherwise quite disconnected activities and actions: e.g., the pursuit of food or drink *as a result of* hunger or thirst; the specific decisions in medical treatment *as a result of* one's medical training; the sudden reaction of dodging *as a result of* perceiving a ball heading to one's head, etc. In each of these cases, we can describe the

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<sup>147</sup> For the Stoic view, see Brennan (2000) pp. 82-114 and Inwood (1985) pp. 42-103.

actions minimally as, e.g., going along with one's feelings of hunger or thirst, one's medical training, and one's perceptions, *without* implying a specific account of how such *going along* is effected. This latter fact preserves a place for the phenomenology: for a well-trained physician or surgeon may well regard himself – especially in urgent situations – as not *thinking* at all, but only reacting to the situation as a result of his training. Certainly someone who dodges a ball is aware of the ball, but that may be all he or she is aware of: the action is not mediated by anything, but immediately follows upon the perception. Such a picture of these actions is, of course, *consistent* with very many different theoretical and explanatory accounts of the way in which the perception generates the action or the training inculcates modes of behavior, but it does not presuppose any such theory and, in so doing, attempts only to reflect the *phainomena*: the fact, we might say, that we do *this* as a result of *that*. Moreover, the very fact that in ordinary or everyday life we do not *need* an account or theory to mediate between what explains the act and the act itself, nor an account or theory that explains what exactly the act *is*, shows that ordinary life does not involve – at least so far as phenomenology goes – such theories and accounts. This, of course, is not the same as saying that ordinary does not involve explanations or accounts; rather it is to say that, in ordinary life, such explanations and accounts are *part* of that life rather than controlling, structuring and organizing it.

### **c. The Meaning of “*Kata Phantasia*”**

In the previous section, I endeavoured to present an account of “*to eudokein*” as meaning “going along with,” where there is great variety in what one might go along with: facts, situations, events, objects, subjective states (e.g., feelings). In order to determine what one goes along with, it is necessary to examine the specific situation in ordinary, everyday life in which such going along with is manifested. *To eudokein*, however, constitutes only one part of Sextus' account of skeptical assent in *PH* 1.13, for Sextus goes on to explain the reason for the skeptic's *to eudokein* by saying that the

skeptic assents to “the affections [*tois pathesi*] forced upon him by appearance [*kata phantasia*].” The use and meaning of both “*pathos*” (and cognates) and “*kata phantasia*” are integral to this account and, in this section, I would like to focus on the latter phrase, postponing until the next section discussion of the former.

When Sextus claims that the skeptic assents to the affections (*pathê*) forced upon him “by appearance” (*kata phantasia*), it is very natural to suppose, as the Standard Account does, that he means to closely connect *phantasia* and *pathê*, so that a *phantasia* is a kind of *pathos*. On this view, well articulated by Gail Fine,

to have a *pathos* is to be affected in some way. ... *Phantasiai* are a kind of *pathos*: to have a *phantasia* is to be appeared to in some way.<sup>148</sup>

Fine’s view implies that, while all *phantasiai* are *pathê*, not all *pathê* are *phantasiai*. This characterization of *phantasia*, while plausible, is not wholly free of difficulties. First, Sextus writes that the *pathê* are *katênankasmena*, i.e., “forced” or “necessitated.” One might wonder *what* forces or necessitates the *pathê*, if the *phantasia* cannot (since, on this view, the *phantasiai* constitute a species of *pathê*); whereas, if one interprets *kata phantasia* as complementing the participle *katênankasmenos*, then it is clear what necessitates the *pathê*: the *phantasia*. Second, Sextus never actually claims that the skeptic assents to *phantasiai*; he claims, rather, that the skeptic assents to *pathê*. Yet it seems that if the two are related as species to genus, then we would expect Sextus to talk about assent to *phantasiai* at least on occasion.

Regardless, a defender of the species/genus view might point to Sextus’ various formulations of the point made at *PH* 1.13 to bolster the connection between *phantasiai* and *pathê*. Thus, for instance, at *PH* 1.19, responding to the charge that the skeptics “abolish appearances [*anairousi ta phainomena*],” Sextus says that:

We do not overthrow those things which, in accordance with passive affection [*kata phantasia pathêtikên*] and unwillingly, lead us to assent, as we said before.

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<sup>148</sup> Fine (2000) pg. 90.

Certainly, here we have powerful evidence that *phantasiai* are a species of *pathos*, since Sextus describes the *phantasia* as *pathêtikên*, i.e., passive or, even more revealingly, *pathos*-like; though, once more, he does not actually refer to assent to *phantasia*, but to such things that, in accordance with *phantasia*, lead to assent. More persuasive still for the species/genus view is Sextus' insistence that that *phantasia* "resides in passive and unwilled affections [*en peisei gar kai aboulêtôi pathei keimenê*]" (PH 1.22) and that this is why it is "not investigated" (*azêtetos*). Certainly, if *phantasiai* are a species of the genus *pathê*, then the former "reside in" the latter, since *phantasiai* just are a *kind* of *pathê*.

I mentioned earlier that if the species-genus view is correct, then Sextus' picture begins to look surprisingly Stoic, and this in at least two ways. First, the species/genus picture that emerges closely resembles the Stoic picture of the relation between *phantasiai* and *pathos* that Sextus attacks at PH 2.70-79 (cf. M 7.343-387). In those passages, Sextus discusses and criticizes the view that *phantasiai* are *pathê* of the soul (specifically, of *to hégemonikon*). Certainly, this is not conclusive evidence that Sextus' view of the relation between *phantasiai* and *pathê* is *not* the Stoic one, but if Sextus suspends assent on the question of whether *phantasiai* are *pathê*, then it is natural to conclude that the species/genus model of their relation is not accepted by Sextus. If we take seriously Sextus' objections to the Stoic view, he must have a different kind of connection between *pathos* and *phantasia* in mind.

Second, if *phantasiai* are a kind of *pathos* and the skeptic assents to *pathê*, then the skeptic, in assenting to *pathê*, assents to *phantasiai*. Yet, not once in Sextus' corpus does he describe the skeptic as assenting to appearance (whether *phantasia* or *phainomena*). This is all the more puzzling in light of the fact that in PH 1.13 [2] and elsewhere Sextus does in fact refer to "assent to those matters that are unclear [*tên tini pragmati tôn...adélôn sunkatathesin*]", though only to indicate that the skeptic does not assent in that sense.

Interpreters have recognized that Sextus' description of skeptical assent in *PH* 1.13, 19, and 22 fails to fit properly the Stoic model. Fine, for instance, notes that Sextus' "language doesn't correspond exactly with that used by either the Stoics or the Academics when they speak of assent."<sup>149</sup> In particular, she has in mind the fact that Sextus takes *dogmatizēin* to characterize skeptical assent such that a skeptic *can* be understood as possessing *dogma* in the general sense considered there. Neither the Academics nor the Stoics, however, speak thus, instead preferring to speak alternately of "opinion" (*doxa*) or "apprehension" (*katalēpsis*) as the result of assent. Indeed, the difficulty is magnified, as Jonathan Barnes notes, since Sextus' use of "*dogma*" doesn't appear to conform to any use available in the ancient literature (whether classical or post-classical).<sup>150</sup> Barnes concludes that the usage must simply be an *ad hoc* dialectical concession to the skeptic's opponents in response to their claim that the skeptic assents to her *pathei*. Finally, Michael Frede notes that Sextus "takes pains to avoid" talking about assent as to *phantasiai* (or "impressions", in Frede's translation) and he takes this to be informed by a desire to avoid speaking as the dogmatist does and importing the assumptions, distinctions and theoretical commitments such talk would imply.

One way of reconciling the apparently Stoic character of the species/genus view with Sextus' non-Stoic usage would be to contend that, strictly speaking, Sextus does *not* think the Stoics regard assent as to *phantasia*, but rather as to the discursive representational content of *phantasia*, namely, what the Stoics call "*axioma*." In other words, what looks like a divergence between the Stoic and skeptical usage is no such thing. Certainly, Sextus is aware of the infelicity, on the Stoic model, of describing assent as to *phantasiai*, since it is more properly to be understood to be to the *axioma*, which is the content of the relevant *phantasia*. He makes precisely this point when arguing against the existence (*anuparxia, anuparktos*) of Stoic "apprehension" or "grasping" (*katalēpsis*); part of that

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<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, pg. 89, *fn.* 29.

<sup>150</sup> Barnes (1982) pg. 75, *fn.* 68.

argument turns on the claim that “assent is not relative to appearance [*pros phantasia*], but to thought [*pros logon*], for assents are of propositions [*tôn axiōmatōn*]” (M 7.154). Moreover, Sextus employs various grammatical means to articulate the *Stoic* idea of assent as directed towards an objects: sometimes the object of assent will be put in the dative (PH 2.4; M 7.152-155, 188, 417-419), sometimes in the genitive case and mediated by the copula (M 7.154); on still other occasions Sextus will express the idea by the use of the preposition “*pros*” (M 7.154).

Despite the variety of his usage and his awareness of the impropriety of describing assent as “to appearance”, Sextus nevertheless repeatedly refers to the Stoic definition of *katalēpsis* as “assent to a cataleptic phantasia [*katalēpsin kai katalēptikē phantasiai sunkatathesin*]” (PH 3.241; M 7.153, 154), allowing, perhaps, that though strictly speaking improper, this is nevertheless an elliptical way of explaining the doctrine. Consequently, Sextus’ recognition of the impropriety of talking about assent as “to appearance” scarcely establishes that in PH 1.13 he means to imply that the object of assent is an appearance.

There are, therefore, strong reasons to question the species/genus view of the relation between *phantasia* and *pathē*. To assay a different approach to the issue, it helps to consider how the phrase “*kata phantasia*” is used by both Sextus and other roughly coeval writers. The expression is not used very often in Sextus or in other authors. Sextus’ use resolves, at least when we bracket its use in articulating the concept of skeptical assent, into something like “on the basis of appearance” or, alternatively, “according to appearance.” Frequently, the phrase is used to specify the basis of a judgment (PH 1.76, 2.73, 75, 228; M 7.390, 400):

If, therefore, the intellect judges [*krinei*] according to this [*kata tautēn=phantasia*], then it judges badly [*phaulōs*] and not according to reality [*ou kata to hypokeimenon*]. (PH 2.73)

In such contexts, the *phantasia* is what provides the *basis* for a judgment. This is most naturally understood from the perceptual case: what I perceive to be the case (e.g., that the oar is bent) is the

basis for my judgment that it *is* the case. It is in this sense that my judgment conforms to or accords with my perceptual *phantasia*. Even in those cases where Sextus uses the phrase, but the concept of judgment is not in play (either explicitly or implicitly), “*kata phantasian*” still seems to mean conformity or accordance with *phantasia*. Thus, Sextus says (*PH* 1.62) “we compare [*sunkrinomen*] the so-called irrational animals to humans according to [their] appearance [*kata phantasian*].” In this case, the comparison depends upon differences in how things appear to each group (humans, irrational animals). *PH* 1.62 highlights the fact that the appearances in question are always restricted to some group or person: some creature to whom the things are appearing and to whom the appearances belong.

While this survey of Sextus’ uses of *kata phantasian* is illuminating, applications of the results of it are complicated by two features. First, most of the occurrences of the phrase are in dialectical contexts as components of skeptical argument and often in these contexts *phantasia* has a technical-philosophical use. This use is typically Stoic, so that a division between judgment (directed towards *axiomata*) and *phantasia* is implied such that the *axioma* uniquely characterizes the content of the *phantasia*. This is what makes it so easy to judge something on the basis of appearance. Second, while there seems little problem understanding how judgments might accord with *phantasiai*, it is less obvious what it would mean to say that affections accord with *phantasiai*. To be sure, if we go by the species/genus analysis, *phantasiai* just are (a kind of) *pathê*, but this presupposes an understanding of *kata phantasian*, which is precisely what we are now investigating.

The first of the previous two “complications” is perhaps not difficult to overcome: even if Sextus uses the phrase in dialectical contexts, it does not follow that its meaning changes entirely when outside of those contexts, e.g., in ordinary life: “*kata phantasian*” could still have the sense of “according to appearance,” though, of course, there would be no need to understand *phantasiai* on the Stoic model. However, the second complication is less easily resolved because it seems to imply

both (i) a certain sort of relation between *phantasiai* and *pathê* and (ii) a distinction between the two that is more than merely species/genus (and so, in this sense, merely conceptual). A judgment made on the basis of an appearance is intelligible because we can construe the appearance as representational, so that what is represented can also be judged to be the case. A judgment is also distinct from the appearance in the sense that one can have an appearance *without* making a judgment. Indeed, while an appearance might be readily understood as “unwilled” or “necessitated” (*aboulêtôs, katênanakasmênôs*), a judgment is usually voluntary. By contrast, a *pathos* or affection seems as necessitated as an appearance (which is, in part, what motivates interpreting their relation on the model of species/genus) and it is not so clear how the affection might be generated by the appearance.

In discussing *to eudokein* and other terms used by Sextus *in propria persona*, I have suggested that there is good reason to focus on non-philosophical uses, since, as I argued in the previous chapter, Sextus seems to wish that his words, outside of skeptical arguments, be understood according to their ordinary uses. It might help, therefore, to do the same with the phrase “*kata phantasian*.” The phrase does not occur frequently in classical and Hellenistic works, still less frequently in non-technical or non-philosophical contexts. Two uses of the phrase that are both ordinary and helpful are the following.

- (i) For you [=beautiful Midianite women] have only to be seen, and by this first appearance [*kata tèn prôtên phantasian*], you will win [=the war with the Hebrews] without bloodshed or rather without effort. (Philo, *De Virt.* 38)<sup>151</sup>
- (ii) When he [=Scipio Aemilianus] advanced and presented himself, he immediately struck them [=the troops] with amazement by this first appearance [*kata tèn prôtên phantasian*]. For most of them still supposed him to be in feeble health... (Polybius 11.27.7-8)

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<sup>151</sup> This is a modified version of the translation in Colson (1939).

Neither of these uses is philosophical or technical and, though both arise in discussions of conflict in historical or quasi-historical narratives, it is plain that the words are being used in their ordinary, everyday sense.

There are a few noteworthy features of these two uses of “*kata phantasian*” for my purposes. Both uses indicate a relation between a *phantasia* and something else. The use of “*kata*” here has a quasi-causal force: it is the appearance of both the Midianite women and Scipio that *cause* the end of the war and the amazement of the troops, respectively. Of course, “cause” here is being used quite loosely and non-technically, but this is as it should be if the use is meant to reflect ordinary, everyday language. We could just as well translate the passages by saying that the amazement and the winning of the war “followed upon” or “were a consequence of” the relevant appearances. Moreover, Sextus’ own use of “*kata phantasian*” to mean “in accord with appearance” is not irrelevant here, since both uses suggest that the reactions – the end of the war, the amazement of the troops – *accord* with the appearances. There is a perfectly ordinary sense in which the relevant reactions accord with the appearances: in each case, the character of the appearance is what explains the reaction it causes. It is because Scipio appears hearty, when they thought him feeble, that the troops are amazed; it is because of the beauty of the Midianite women that the Hebrews would give up fighting. In other words, the reactions are appropriate to (and so accord with) the appearances. Such an understanding of “*kata*” in these two ordinary, everyday cases allows us, therefore, to interpret the sense of “*kata*” as “according to” or “in accord with,” while still retaining the causal force.

If we apply the previous “quasi-causal” interpretation of “*kata phantasian*” to PH 1.13, then Sextus would have to be understood as saying that the *pathê* are caused by the *phantasiai*. The skeptic, therefore, assents to those *pathê* caused by and according with the appearances. This would allow us to make sense of the participle “*katênankasmenos*”: the *pathê* are forced or necessitated by the appearances. Thus, in the two historical examples, as the reactions of the troops and the Hebrews

are necessitated by the appearances of Scipio and the Midianite women, so too *pathê* are necessitated by the *phantasiai*. Not all interpreters disagree with this reading of “*kata phantasian*” + “*katênankasmenos*.” Annas & Barnes (2000) seem to share my judgment that the relation is quasi-causal, for they translate the relevant passage as follows: “...Sceptics assent to the feelings *forced* upon them *by appearances*” (italics mine). To be sure, the translation of “*pathê*” by “feelings” is controversial and must be discussed further below,<sup>152</sup> but if the foregoing considerations are persuasive, then “forced...by appearances” seems to translate Sextus’ Greek correctly.

I have not yet responded to all the various problems confronting my interpretation of “*kata*,” but I would like to postpone my response to these to the next section, in which I discuss “*pathê*,” because I think that without a clearer understanding of *pathê*, we cannot fully explain the use of “*kata phantasian*” in relation to “*pathê*.” I would like now to turn to the question of what precisely Sextus means by the word which I have translated as “appearance.” Once more, I think it best to proceed by looking at some non-philosophical and non-technical uses of the word, culled from ordinary language.

- (iii) In these circumstances, the elephants [*ta thêria*] were of the greatest service to him [= Alexander]; for the enemy never dared to approach that part of the column in which these animals were, being terrified of the strangeness of their appearance [*to paradoxon tês tôn zôion phantasias*]. (Polybius 3.53.8-9)
- (iv) ...he [= Scipio Aemilianus] again occupied the hill situated above the town and spared no expense in fortifying it and digging a moat around it, giving [*poiôn*] to enemies [*bupenantois*] the appearance [*tên phantasian*] as if doing this for the purpose of the siege [*bôs touto prattôn tês poliorkias heneka*], but in truth [*têi alêtheiai*] desiring to secure himself from possible danger on the day of the enterprise. (*Ibid.* 14.2.3-4)

Both of these are examples involve what we might call “perceptual” appearances: i.e., the look of things or their appearance to sight. We need not suppose, however, that *phantasia* are only such appearances. Notice, moreover, that in (iii) the appearance is clearly not propositional: what terrifies

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<sup>152</sup> See §(d).

the soldiers is not something or other being the case, but rather the *look* of the elephants: their “strangeness.” Of course, we could insist that what scares them is something being the case, namely, it being the case that the elephants appear strange, but this seems artificial and clearly does not reflect the ordinary usage of the term. By contrast, (iv) involves a use of “appearance” that is of something or other being the case: it appears that Scipio intends to besiege the town, when in fact, he does not so intend. Thus, while appearances can sometimes be propositional, sometimes they are not: it sometimes appears that something is the case, but it is also the case that sometimes something appears. From this, one might conclude that *phantasai* may be of facts, states of affairs or objects, hence *phantasiai* themselves may be propositional or not. It may appear to me *that* something is the case or *something* might appear to me. In ordinary language, neither case is given primacy over the other.<sup>153</sup>

What does talk of appearance in (i) - (iv) amounts to? What makes it fitting to describe the circumstances in (i) - (iv) in terms of *phantasiai*? Why do Philo and Polybius elect to describe the cases in terms of appearance? To answer these questions, it helps to notice a few things about the uses of “*phantasia*” in each case. While the soldiers and Scipio’s enemies might be able to give reasons or explanations things appearing to them thus, it is not *via* those reasons or explanations that the elephants appear strange or Scipio’s action appear to be siege-preparations. It is often natural to explain this sense of “appearance” by talking about how things “strike” someone or the “impression” they make: the elephants strike the soldiers as strange and Scipio’s activity strikes his enemies as siege-preparation. This usage is not alien to Greek either and Sextus frequently talks about the impression things make on people and animals or how these things strike them (*hupopiptō*: *PH* 1.94, 97, 99, 124, 196, 211, etc.) in ways that suggest this talk is interchangeable with talk about

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<sup>153</sup> This provides some explanation of why I think the issue over the proper formulate of the skeptic’s appearance claims is not central to articulating skeptical assent. For this issue, see Fine (2000) pg. 91, *n.* 36.

*phantasiai*. It seems to me that what both of these (*phantasia*, *hupoipiptó*) uses emphasise is the fact that to the individual to whom things appear, the appearances are not the rational result of reasons, arguments, or inferences.<sup>154</sup> This fact becomes obvious when we contemplate one of the soldiers saying: “I concluded, on the basis of reasoned argument, that the elephant’s appearance is strange to me.” What this remark implies is that, in fact, the elephant did *not* appear *to him* strange at all, but rather the soldier determined either that the elephant *is* strange or that it *should* appear strange to him. After all, it is rather difficult to make sense of a claim, for instance, that he was not aware that the elephant appeared to him strange *until* he examined an argument for the claim that it did, in fact, appear strange to him. In the latter case, we might say that the fact that argument was required shows that the elephant did not appear thus to him. To put this point another way, while it may be *possible* to explain *why* the elephant appeared strange to a soldier, it seems odd to say that an explanation (or reasons or arguments, etc.) is required merely for the elephant *to* appear to him thus: if the soldier needs an explanation or argument, *ipso facto*, the elephant does not appear to him strange. Thus, we need not (and should not) contend that reasons, arguments or inferences for the elephants’ appearance to the soldiers might not be given – *ex post facto*, as it were – but only that from the soldiers’ point of view, the relevant appearance arose not as a result of arguments, inferences or reasons. To the soldiers, the elephants just *appeared* strange; for the enemies of Scipio, his actions just appeared as siege-preparation. The appearances in question just *befell* them or *happened* to them; they were not the result of inferences, arguments or reasons. From these considerations, I think it follows that we need to understand appearances as (i) relative to the people to whom the things appear (hence, *PH* 1.4, 15, 20, etc.) and (ii) as not the result of conscious reasons, arguments, or theoretical reflection.

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<sup>154</sup> See Irwin (1988) pg. 30: “To call something an appearance is to contrast it, in a particular context at least, with the conclusion of an argument; what appears to us is what we take to be the case immediately and without reflexion.” Irwin is referring specifically to *phainomena*, but I think the point still stands.

There is a natural connection between the previous sense of “appears” and the idea of something being obvious or apparent to someone. Indeed, we might say that the previous sense of “appearance” is precisely “something obvious or apparent,” which is why Sextus so frequently insists that the skeptic favors apparent things (*enarges, délon, prodélon*: PH 2.97, 99; M 8.141, 144). To the soldiers and Scipio’s enemies the things that appeared are obvious to them, in the sense that they did not require an explanation or theory to articulate how what appeared to them appeared to them. Indeed, one sense of “obvious” is simply “not needing to be explained” and this can also be offered as the sense of “apparent.” In light of this connection, it is easier to see how the discussion in §1(b) above pertains to the current one. In that section, I argued that *phainomena* are understood by Sextus (and skeptics) to be whatever is obvious in ordinary life, i.e., whatever manifests itself in ordinary life, without the need for arguments, reasons or theoretical explanations. As Frede has noted,<sup>155</sup> Sextus does quite explicitly characterize “that which is not questioned in ordinary life” as *phainomena* (PH 1.19-20, 22; 2.244). To me, however, the most powerful evidence that *phainomena* (and so *phantasia*) is connected with *bios* is provided by the following passages.

- (a) Adhering [*prosechontes*], therefore, to appearances [*tois phainomenois*] we live undogmatically [*adoxastôs bioumen*] in accordance with the observation of ordinary life [*kata tén biôtikên têrêsîn*]. (PH 1.23)
- (b) That it [= motion] exists is said by ordinary life [*ho bios*], which adheres to appearances [*tois phainomenois prosexôn*]... (M 10.45)
- (c) [T]he skeptic does not live [*ou bioi*] in accordance with the philosophical account [*kata ton philosophon logon*] (for so far as this goes [*hoson epi toutôî*], he is inactive [*anenergêtos*]), but in accordance with non-philosophical observance [*kata tén aphilosophon têrêsîn*] he is able [*dunatai*] to pursue some things [*ta men hairesthai*] and flee other things [*ta de pheugein*].  
(M 11.165)

The similarity between (a) and (b), both with regard to word choice and syntax, indicates that, for Sextus, in adhering to *phainomena*, the skeptic also adheres to ordinary life, for both the skeptic and

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<sup>155</sup> Frede (1973) pg. 809.

ordinary life adhere to the same thing (*phainomena*). Moreover, (c) makes explicit that the observance of ordinary life *just is* non-philosophical observance. Finally, when we recall that by “*phainomenon*” Sextus “implicitly means *phantasia*” (*PH* 1.22), it becomes possible to see (a) – (c) as claims about *phantasiai*. Taken together, these passages provide strong evidence that Sextus (and the skeptics generally) view *phainomena* and *phantasia* as things manifest in ordinary life and ordinary life as opposed to philosophical reflection.

What, then, *are phantasiai*? To answer this fully, it will be necessary to discuss *pathos* and its relation to *phantasia*. From the foregoing, however, we can say that *phantasiai* are whatever is obvious or manifest to someone in ordinary life; this may be an event, fact, property, object, indeed whatever it is that is manifest or obvious in everyday life. While *what* exactly *phantasiai* are may be variable, it is essential to them that they are manifest to an individual in ordinary, everyday life without the mediation of arguments, reasons, inferences or philosophical theory. In this sense, then, *phantasiai* contrast with those things that Sextus calls “unapparent” or “non-evident” (*adêlon*).

#### **d. The Meaning of “*Pathos*”**

The discussion of “*kata phantasian*” was, in a certain sense, inconclusive and I made it quite plain that this was because a fuller and more thorough discussion would have to wait until we investigate the meaning of “*pathos*,” which investigation is the province of this section.

How does Sextus use the term “*pathos*” in his writings? There seem to be three different uses of the expression in Sextus. Often, he intends the term simply to mean “feeling,” so that *pathê* are just feelings like hunger, thirst, pleasure, pain, and so on (*PH* 1.24, 29-30; 3.184, 235; *M* 7.320; 11.83, 158). Barnes & Annas elect to translate “*pathê*” always by “feelings”<sup>156</sup>, and though this has some plausibility, it obscures the fact that Sextus also uses the term in two more general ways.

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<sup>156</sup> Annas & Barnes (2000) pp. 226 & 230 (the glossary).

On one of these general uses “*pathê*” corresponds best to “affection” or even “being affected.” These *pathê* seem to include perceptions and thoughts *as well as* feelings (PH 1.13, 19-20); indeed, it sometimes seems that these *pathê* include whatever can befall or happen to an individual, whether mentally or physically. Perceptions and thoughts are not obviously feelings, so that by supposing *pathê* are only such things, one will either be unable to understand or make sense of the crucial passages that elaborate and explain skeptical assent (PH 1.13, 19-20, 22) or one will attempt to force upon them an interpretation restricted to such feelings.

“*Pathos*” (pl. *pathê*) is a nominalization of the verb “*pasxô*” which, as the LSJ notes, signifies “to have something happen to one” frequently in opposition to “to do something.” So understood, the noun form might simply denote something that has *happened* to one. In this sense, it resonates with the adverb “unwilling” (*aboulêtôs*) and its cognates, which figure in later descriptions of skeptical assent at PH 1.19 and 22. Both sets of expressions suggest the passivity of the skeptic in the face of something. Moreover, the use of “*katanankasmenois*” in PH 1.13 can be understood, I think, as conveying something like the same compulsion that is conveyed by “*aboulêtôs*” and cognates. In light of the earlier interpretation of “*to eudokein*” as “going along with”, this understanding of *pathos* seems fitting, for the skeptic will go along with (read: not object to) what happens or occurs to her. This sort of assent is “unwilling” or “compelled” in the sense that by not gainsaying or countermanding it, the skeptic does not exercise choice with regard to it.

Finally, the second of the two general uses of “*pathos*” by Sextus corresponds to “conditions” or “states” of a thing. In this sense, a *pathos* is a matter of how things stand or obtain in an individual, again, whether physically or mentally (PH 1.1, 190, 192). Thus, for instance, Sextus refers to “the condition of the skeptic after his search,” (PH 1.7) from which the adjective “suspensive” arises. This use of *pathos* is as general as the previous one, though it differs from it in not obviously

implying something happened to or befell the subject of the *pathos*. The LSJ also notes that *pathos* can simply mean a state or a condition and so concurs with Sextus' use.

We have, therefore, three candidates for translations of “*pathos*” on the basis of Sextus' usage and the LSJ. It is natural to suppose that the general uses are what Sextus has in mind, since at least one of those uses contains, as it were, the specific use of “*pathos*” to mean “feeling.” This still leaves us with two different meanings: which should we choose? The puzzle of the meaning of *pathos* can be resolved, I think, if we try to combine the distinct meanings. On the one hand, Sextus wants to refer to any condition or state of an individual; on the other, to something befalling or happening to an individual (as, e.g., a feeling). One possibility, therefore, is simply that *pathos* refers to a state or condition of an individual, which is the result of something befalling or happening to that individual: e.g., the skeptic's “suspensive” *pathos* (PH 1.7), which comes about as a result of skeptical argument (specifically, the Modes). The Modes produce or cause suspension of assent in the skeptic (PH 1.31), so that he is in a state or condition produced by the Modes. Thus, for Sextus, we may talk about *pathos* both as a condition of the skeptic and as something that happens to her. In this sense, therefore, the *pathos* is the coming to be of a certain condition (whether mental or physical) in the skeptic.

In order to clarify this line of thought and make it more plausible, we need to return to the question of the meaning of “*kata phantasia*” in PH 1.13. Recall that, at 1.13, Sextus justifies the claim that the skeptic dogmatizes in the sense of “goes along with” (*to endokein*), by saying:

[F]or the skeptic assents [*sunkatatithestai*] to the affections forced upon her in accord with appearance [*tois...kata phantasia katēnankasmenois pathesi*], as for example [*boion*] she would not say “I seem not to be heated or chilled” [*dokō mē thermainesthai ē psuchesthai*] when heated or chilled [*thermainomenos ē psuchomenos*]).

I think this passage is best read as claiming the following: the skeptic is put in a certain condition (*pathos*), whether mental or physical, as a result of or in consequence of (hence, “*kata*”) what appears

to her (*phantasia*). In the example Sextus gives, what appears to the skeptic is *being* heated/chilled and this produces in the skeptic the *feeling* of being heated/ chilled. Thus, the *phantasia* is being heated/chilled and the *pathos* is the feeling of being heated/chilled.

The example of being chilled/heated is helpful because it shows the nature of the connection between *phantasia* and *pathos*. The feeling of being heated (the *pathos*) is caused by being heated (the *phantasia*), but the *pathos* also accords with or conforms to the *phantasia*. Should I feel hot or cold, despite being neither, then my *pathê* would be *para phantasian* rather than *kata phantasian*: I would be in a state *not* caused by the relevant *phantasia*. This account allows us to honor the ordinary, everyday sense of “*kata phantasian*” and the ordinary, everyday sense of “*pathê*.” For, on this view, the *pathê* register the effects of the *phantasia*. Thus, to use the previous examples, the amazement of the troops before a healthy Scipio and the terror of the troops before the elephants are both cases of *pathê katênanakasmèna kata phantasian*: the *phantasiai* are the appearance of Scipio and the elephants and the *pathê* are the conditions or states of amazement and terror. In each case, what appears produces or causes certain conditions in those to whom they appear and those conditions conform to or are in accord with what appears. Moreover, the relevant *pathê* are “unwilled” or “forced” because the individual whose *pathê* they are does not *choose* or *will* the *pathê*.

To further elaborate this view of the *pathos-phantasia* relation, two further points should be made. First, the account is, in a certain sense, “formal”: it states a certain sort of quasi-causal between *phantasiai* and *pathê*, without specifying either the nature of the causal connection or the precise character of the elements involved. (Both of these things are matters for philosophical reflection, not matters of *phainomena*.) The *phantasiai* can be any of a number of things: all sorts of things might appear in all sorts of different way. Similarly, *pathê* can describe any state or condition, whether mental or physical, of the subject to whom the relevant things appear. The crucial facts are (i) that the *phantasiai* are what is obvious or manifest in ordinary, everyday life; (ii) that the *pathê* are

those conditions (mental, physical) that conform to or follow from those *phantasiai*; and (iii) that the *pathê* are not willed or chosen by those in whom they arise.

Second, one major objection to my division between *pathê* and *phantasiai* is that Sextus sometimes suggests that they are identical. Recall that at *PH* 1.19, Sextus refers to *kata phantasian pathêtikên* and, more damningly still, he says later (22) that *phantasia* “resides in feeling and involuntary affection.” On my view, however, neither of these claims are problematic, though they need to be taken with care. First, 1.19 must be read as a rather loose way of talking about *both* the *phantasia* and its attendant *pathos*: it is these *together* that lead the skeptic to assent. Second, 1.22 is correct in saying that the *phantasia* “resides [*keimenê*]” in feeling and involuntary affection (i.e., the *pathos*), because it is the *pathos* (or the feeling and involuntary affection) that registers or conforms to the *phantasia*: the *pathos* is the effect of the *phantasia* and so, in this sense, the *phantasia* “resides” in the *pathos*.

### e. The Practical Orientation of Skeptical Assent

I have so far focused on explaining the various expressions (“*to eudokein*,” “*kata phantasian*,” and “*pathos*”) figuring in Sextus’ articulation of the notion of assent, but I have not yet knit these expression together into a coherent picture of skeptical assent, which is the intention of this section.

In my previous discussion, I left out a crucial aspect of Sextus’ account of assent, namely, its focus on *action* (*to prassein*). In chapter xi of *PH* 1 (21-4), Sextus discusses the skeptical criterion (*ton kritêrion hê skeptikê*). He makes it clear that *that which appears* (*to phainomenon*) is the criterion of skepticism – meaning by this, of course, *the appearance* (*hê phantasia*) itself – but *to phainomenon* is only a criterion of action, not of conviction.

“Criterion” is said in two ways [*legetai dichôs*]: there is the criterion adopted with regard to conviction in the reality or unreality of something [*to te eis pistin uparxeôs ê anuparxias lambanomenon*]...; and there is the standard of action, according to which in everyday life we do some things and not others [*to te tou prassein, hōi prosexontes kata ton bion ta men prassomen ta d’ ou*]. (*PH* 1.21)

It is not entirely clear what the difference is between the two standards – one of action, the other of belief – for proponents of the roughly Stoic Standard Account. After all, for the Stoics, e.g., the standard will be a certain kind of *phantasia* together with a certain kind of *assent* to that *phantasia*, and this is usually understood as identifying a certain kind of belief, at least, in the sense of being a thinking or grasping *that* something or the other is true (or is the case). Moreover, for the Stoics, the *same* psychological picture applies to the case of action: in acting one assents (or the assent “results” in action) to a certain *phantasia*. To be sure, this *phantasiai* is distinguished by being related to action in some way, but assent to it is no less a belief in the relevant sense, despite this restriction. A natural reply, on behalf of the Stoics, would be to say that while it is *sufficient* to assent to an impulsive *phantasia* for action; it is not sufficient merely to assent to a *phantasia* for *knowledge*, since the latter requires a certain kind of assent and a certain kind of *phantasia*. But this reply assumes that the *standard* for action does not itself depend on knowledge, since without such knowledge one will act mistakenly. The point, I think, is that for the Stoics, the standard appears to be some sort of cognitive state, regardless of whether one is looking at action or at belief, and this seems just as true for the Standard Account.

However, if Sextus is to be understood as targeting, *inter alia*, the Stoics, it is rather surprising that he accepts this framework and supposes that whatever the difference *is* between the standards of action and of belief, it is *merely* a difference within the field of beliefs or cognitive states. In fact, I think this conception of the two different standards depends for its plausibility on a prior conception of skeptical assent as a cognitive or propositional attitude directed towards a claim that something is true (or the case). Once we jettison the latter conception, it is possible to articulate a much clearer difference between the two standards.

The Standard Account reads *pathos* as having a certain content (itself further specified by *kata phantasia*), so that the example Sextus gives of the skeptic *not* going along with, i.e., *denying*, that she is being chilled or heated, only expresses an underlying assent to the *pathos* that may or may not be expressed verbally. I have already explained in the previous section why I do not think that a *pathos/phantasia* is propositional or factual, but this is not the aspect of the Standard Account that I want to reject here. Rather, I wish to question the idea that “assent” (in the sense of *to eudokein*) is best seen as an underlying event or condition that is given expression in action or speech. Certainly, Sextus claims that the skeptic assents to *pathos*. If we suppose, as I have argued we should, that such a notion of assent is to be understood as “going along with,” which is the sense of *to eudokein*, then I think it is a mistake to suppose that in going along with a *pathos*, the skeptic adopts an attitude that may or may not be given expression in verbal or other behavior.

In contrast to the Standard Account, I want to insist that the “going along with the *pathos*” *just is* the verbal or other behavior produced. Thus, in the example at *PH* 1.13, the skeptic does *not* go along with the *pathos*, because such “going along with” would not result in the skeptic’s denial of being heated or chilled. It is, of course, true that one might *not* verbally express one’s feelings, but that is not the same as denying them. This is why the notion of *eudokein* is so important: one’s feelings generate all sorts of sayings and doings, and by this I only mean that a wide range of sayings and doings are natural or do not require explanation over and above the occurrence of those feelings. Thus, “going along with them” might involve doing and saying all sorts of different things or even none of them.

I have been focusing on Sextus’ example of feeling being heated/chilled and expressing it, but this should not imply that all the skeptic’s doings and sayings are expressions of feelings of that sort, or even that all the skeptic’s doings and sayings must be understood by reference to some

particular and determinate underlying subjective state of the skeptic. With regard to this point, it is important to keep in mind Sextus' account of the fourfold "observation of ordinary life":

Thus, adhering to what is apparent [*tois phainomenois...prosexontes*], we live undogmatically in accordance with the observation of everyday life [*kata tēn biōtikēn tērēsin adoxastōs bioumen*] – for we are not able to be utterly inactive [*anenergētoi*]. These everyday observances [*hē biōtikē tērēsis*] seem to be fourfold, and to consist in guidance by nature [*en huphégēsei phuseōs*], compulsion by feelings [*en anagkēi pathōn*], transmission of laws and customs [*en paradosei nomōn te kai ethōn*], and the teaching of handicrafts [*en didaskaliai technōn*]. By nature's guidance, we are naturally capable of perceiving and thinking; by the necessitation of feelings, hunger conducts us to food and thirst to drink [*bodēgei dipsos epi poma*]; by the transmission of customs and laws, we accept [*paralambanomen*], from an everyday point of view [*biōtikōs*], that piety is good and impiety bad; and by the teaching of handicrafts we are not inactive in those which we take up. (*PH I 23-4*)

Each of the examples can be understood in terms of my interpretation of going along with *pathē* produced by *phantasiai*. The skeptic's state or condition (*pathos*) is produced or caused by what appears to her obvious or not requiring explanation in ordinary, everyday life, and her verbal or other behavior is the product, in turn, of that condition and conforms to it, which means that it too is something obvious or not requiring explanation in everyday life (since the behavior conforms to a condition which conforms to how things appear). In going along with her *pathē*, the skeptic simply does not gainsay the sorts of behavior that issue from those *pathē*. This going along with is a sort of assent and it is "unwilling" or "compelled" (*PH I.13, 19, 22*) in the sense that by not gainsaying or countermanding it, the skeptic does not exercise choice with regard to it.

When the skeptic feels hungry or thirsty, she is led to seek food or drink; when she is raised in a certain tradition of religion and laws, she acts in accordance with them (without necessarily being conscious of it); when she thinks someone is trying to harm her, she avoids them. In each case, the skeptic's *pathē* produce a certain kind of behavior, in particular, the sort of behavior that conforms to the *phantasiai* that produced the *pathē*. In each case, moreover, the connection between the *pathos* and the behavior is determined by *phantasia*: when the skeptic feels hungry/thirsty, she is led to food or drink, because such behavior conforms to what is apparent and, therefore, requires no further explanation. It is just an apparent fact that feeling hungry produces food-directed

behavior; just as it an apparent fact that being raised in a tradition of religion and laws causes a person to behave and conduct themselves in conformity with them. Neither of these things require explanation.<sup>157</sup>

I have so far explained the sense in which the skeptic *does* assent, which amounts basically to the fact that she does not gainsay what, in everyday life, results (i.e., verbal or other behavior) from whatever condition (*pathos*) she is put in by how things appear to her (*phantasia*). How does this form of assent differ from what Sextus calls assent to “the unclear things investigated by the sciences [*tini pragmati tón kata tas episémas zētoumenón adélón*]” (PH 1.13)? To answer this, we need to recall that things are “unclear” by virtue of being matters of specifically philosophical arguments, reflections and/or reasoning. For something to be unclear in this way is for it *not* to be a matter obvious or evident in everyday, ordinary life; rather, it requires philosophical investigation. In going along with (*endokeô*) such matters, an individual is, *ipso facto*, not conforming to what is obvious or natural in everyday life, but rather conforming to a philosophical theory that explains and characterizes what is obvious and natural in everyday life. I take it that, since the scope of such theorizing is unlimited, so too are the things (*tina pragmata*) to which the individual assents. In going along thus, an individual’s attitude to what is obvious or manifest in ordinary life is fundamentally altered: every aspect of that life, be it feelings, thoughts, actions or behavior (verbal or otherwise), acquires a different significance. All these aspects are no longer merely accepted or followed naturally, rather they are reinterpreted and explained by means of theoretical reflection and in accordance with logical standards (*ta logika kritéria*).

To be sure, there are grades of “dogmatist,” so that few will understand their whole life in such terms. Moreover, one need not be a “card-carrying” Stoic or Epicurean to share a basic attitude

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<sup>157</sup> My discussion in this passage may seem quite similar to Barnes’ (1980) discussion of avowals. While I am certain of the similarity, I am less certain that what I describe here conforms to Barnes’ notion of “avowal.” Indeed, I think the notion of an avowal is precisely a theoretical concept alien to ordinary life. See my remarks at *n.* 95.

or approach with them. Rather, what all these individuals share, I think, is what Sextus calls (*M* 8.129) an orientation towards understanding and knowing what is, in reality, true (*pros tēn phusin alēthes*), rather than towards following what merely appears (*pros tēn doxan*). The dogmatic person, above all, seeks to know the truth and in pursuit of that aim demands explanations and justifications. This orientation to the truth and explanation shapes their outlook and their understanding of their lives and the world; but it also makes them live what is a life *para tēn biōtikēn tērēsin*.

It is tempting at this point, in frustration, to insist that Sextus is confused: for in ordinary life we often ask for explanations or accounts for things, which Sextus seems to be denying. This, however, is to ignore the nature of the explanations or accounts that figure in scientific and philosophical inquiry, and those that figure in ordinary life. The former are governed by *ta logika kritēria* and so must face the skeptical arguments Sextus employs, for those arguments follow from and are based upon the *kritēria*. The ambition for a certain sort of understanding embodied in philosophico-scientific inquiry requires the *kritēria*, but the ambition of merely living one's life does not. This, I think, is how Sextus' distinction between the standard of belief and the standard of action is meant to be understood; the latter is simply what it is obvious to *do* in one's life, the former is more complex and demanding. In light of this distinction, I think such passages as the following have a much more natural reading:

For 'to be persuaded' [*peithesthai*] is used in different senses. It means not resisting [*mē antiteinein*] but simply following [*haplōs hepesthai*] without strong inclination or adherence (as a boy is said to go along with his chaperone); and it sometimes means to assent [*sunkatatithesthai*] to something by choice and, as it were, sympathy (as a dissolute man goes along with someone who urges extravagant living). (*PH* 1.230)

The contrast Sextus draws here is between following as a result of a belief and not so following. The young boy is a suitable symbol of the skeptic, for he merely *acts* as is appropriate for him to (given the appearance of orders from an adult), without believing anything about the chaperone or his authority (perhaps, even, by training). Attention to the phenomenology of each individual is

illuminating: the dissolute man no doubt *believes* and *thinks* what the exhorter says is true or compelling, but the young boy need *think* or *believe* nothing at all: he merely acts. This reading of the passage, moreover, suggests that the distinction between the two sorts of assent in *PH* 1.13, is precisely a distinction between what we ordinarily do in everyday life and the interpretation and explanation of what we ordinarily do by means of an account. In the first case, the boy just reacts to the directions of the chaperone (his action follows immediately from it, without the exercise of choice), whereas in the second case, the dissolute man's "going along with" is mediated by the *logos* of extravagant living as virtuous or conducive to happiness, an account to which he assents.

### 3. The Views of Others

#### a. Michael Frede, "The Skeptic's Beliefs" (1979)

There are many similarities between the view I put forth in this dissertation and those put forward by Michael Frede (1979), but I think the two views are, nevertheless, different in an important way. In this section, I would like to explain what those differences are and, hopefully, to further explain my own interpretation.

Frede's basic picture of the difference between the skeptic and dogmatist is well-captured in the following two passages.

- (i) Any belief, whatever its content may be, can be a dogmatic belief; conversely every belief can be an undogmatic one. Thus, it is not the content of theoretical views (though, as we shall see, content is not entirely irrelevant) that makes them dogmatic views; it is, rather, the attitude of the dogmatist who believes his rationalist science actually answers questions, actually gives him good reasons for believing his theoretical doctrines. (pg. 195)
- (ii) What fundamentally distinguishes the skeptic from other people are not the beliefs he has but his attitude toward them. He no longer has the more or less naive and partially dogmatic attitude of the "ordinary" man; his relation to his beliefs is permeated by the awareness that things are quite possibly different in reality, but this possibility no longer worries him. This distinguishes him from the dogmatist who is so worried by the question, how are things in reality, that he succumbs to the illusion that reason could guarantee the truth of his beliefs... (pg. 199)

For Frede, the fundamental difference in attitudes of the skeptic and dogmatist resides in their different attitudes towards the truth of their beliefs. The dogmatist thinks he has found a way to guarantee the truth of his beliefs, while the skeptic allows that his beliefs may be false, but is not worried. In chapter one (§2(c)), I grouped Frede's interpretation together with the other Dual-Assent Interpretations that rely on the Standard Account, a group of interpretations I said would be best described as a "Dual-Assent Propositional Attitude Interpretations." I take all of these latter views to interpret skeptical assent in terms of the propositional attitude of taking some claim to be true. Frede's interpretation, it seems to me, is precisely such a view.

It might be objected that Frede himself contends (pg. 197) that

the conditions for employing these verbs [= "believe," "think," or "suppose"] are so weak that the skeptic's beliefs will satisfy them without difficulty.

Presumably, his thought is that even a non-cognitive disposition – a matter, say, of habitual behavior – could count as manifesting belief, so that his use of beliefs is not dogmatic and his talk of propositional attitudes is ultimately dispensable. Frede's claim about the weak conditions, even if true, will not help his view, for it is fundamental to his view that *both* the skeptic and the dogmatist take a certain stance on the *truth* of their beliefs: the one allows that his beliefs may be false, the other is certain his are true. It is difficult to see how a conception of belief that permits such a distinction could be dispensed with in favor of a dispositional or other non-cognitive account.

Moreover, the question of whether or not such a dispositional view of belief – or indeed, a view of belief that makes propositional attitude talk dispensable – is possible seems to me precisely a *philosophical* question. Indeed, Frede's remark assumes that "believe," "think" and "suppose" all work the same way in ordinary language and that one can group them together as synonyms. Even if they are, more or less, synonymous, it does not seem obvious or a matter of ordinary language that they can all be used sufficiently similar ways to be regarded as referring to the same thing. Again, it seems

Frede is presupposing a certain explanation of those words, one that I took great pains to criticize in chapter one (§4(b)), and one that is dogmatic and philosophical. This is precisely the reason I took Frede's interpretation to be self-refuting: it aims to characterize the distinction between skeptical and dogmatic assent as one between ordinary, everyday life and philosophical theory, but it does so by characterizing that very distinction in terms of a dogmatic or philosophical conception of beliefs.

While my view is a Dual-Assent Interpretation – since it distinguishes between two different ways one might “go along with” things: a philosophical and an ordinary, everyday one – it is *not* a Dual-Assent Propositional Attitude Interpretation. On my view, it is simply not possible to characterize the difference between skeptical and dogmatic assent by means of the difference between the skeptic's and the dogmatist's relations to the truth of certain claims or beliefs. The difference between them goes much deeper and concerns their attitude towards reality and their own lives. It is the methods (arguments, reasons, theories) and standards (truth, coherence, explanatoriness) by means of which the dogmatist understands her life that distinguish her from the skeptic, who simply follows the implicit standards of ordinary, everyday life.

Even *my* distinction between ordinary life and philosophy is *itself* a distinction made in ordinary, everyday life. For, in that life, we distinguish between what is natural, obvious or unexceptional from that which is strange, unnatural or obscure. In that life, too, we have a distinction between practical, ordinary, everyday life and a contemplative, philosophical one; it is precisely this distinction that I aim to capture. Moreover, it is because this distinction is an ordinary one that my interpretation can survive self-refutation, or so I argue.

A final point: in explaining the skeptical/dogmatic difference in terms of different attitudes to something or other being the case, Frede cannot allow that the difference between the two, in a sense, *precedes* questions of truth and belief because it involves how the different parties approach life and what their attitude to it is. After all, to approach life solely or primarily with a view to

understanding or knowing is different from approaching life with a view merely to taking pleasure in it, even if philosophers have long contended that understanding and knowing is pleasurable.

### **b. Gisela Striker, “Skepticism as a Kind of Philosophy” (2001)**

Unlike Frede’s interpretation, Gisela Striker’s does not conform to the Dual-Assent Account nor indeed to the Standard Account. My focus will be on the interpretation she provides in “Skepticism as a Kind of Philosophy,” though she has elaborated a similar one elsewhere.<sup>158</sup>

An illuminating entry into Striker’s interpretation is provided by her answer to the question of whether or not Pyrrhonism should count as a kind of philosophy.

Is it also a kind of philosophy? Yes and no, I think. If by philosophy we mean a search for truth, successful or otherwise, the Sceptical way of life can hardly qualify. Contrary to Sextus’ initial claim that the Sceptic goes on investigating, philosophical investigations seem to be precisely what the Sceptic’s way of life is designed to avoid. The impressive apparatus of the Sceptical modes is supposed to be used for one purpose only, namely, to rid us of the foolish attachment to settling questions by reason and argument. (pg. 121)

In light of this view, it is, perhaps, no surprise that Striker views Pyrrhonism as a “vehement anti-rationalism” (pg. 122), for it avoids any attempt to reason or argue. One might wonder, in light of this opposition to reason and rationalism, whether the skeptic can be understood as believing anything. To this, Striker offers a characteristically nuanced response:

I will not go into the vexed question whether the Pyrrhonists’ “appearances” are to count as some kind of beliefs or not. It seems to me that the debate about this question has suffered to some extent from a failure to distinguish between different senses of “belief”. It may be taken in the strong sense of “judgment”, meaning assent to a proposition justified by appropriate reasons one is prepared to produce in order to defend the truth of one’s assertion; but it can also be used in a much weaker, dispositional sense, according to which it is sufficient for the ascription of a belief to an agent if she acts or behaves in a certain way. If I avoid an approaching car, for example, I thereby show that I believe that there is a dangerous heavy object coming towards me that might kill me if I do not get out of the way. I could no doubt offer reasons, both for the belief and for the action, but I probably did not think of them. In fact my dog might have reacted in exactly the same way, though it cannot offer reasons to justify its ‘belief’. I would say that the Pyrrhonist conception of “following appearances” is on the model of this kind of behaviour, and it is a matter of terminological choice whether we want to speak of belief here or not. Appearances and natural urges arise passively and

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<sup>158</sup> Striker (2004), it seems to me, largely conforms to the earlier paper, though certain aspects receive greater emphasis (e.g., the skeptic’s “anti-rationalism”) and she distinguish ancient Pyrrhonism from contemporary Neo-Pyrrhonism with great sensitivity and care.

involuntarily (*PH* 1.22) and hence are not based on judgments as to what is or is not the case, ought or ought not to be done; but they are sufficient to keep the Sceptic going, as it were.

I have quoted this passage at length because I think it provides the key to Striker's conception of the skeptical life and her answer to the question of skeptical belief. To the latter, she answers that the skeptic has beliefs only in the sense that, e.g., a dog might be supposed to have beliefs: she acts and behaves in certain ways. The skeptic does not, however, have beliefs in the sense of claims that she thinks are true and that she is willing to defend on the basis of valid and true reasons. Moreover, in a revealing footnote (pp. 119-120, *n.* 7), Striker contends that the skeptic does not reason, but merely thinks in some minimal sense. Hence, Striker concludes that the skeptic "follows appearances" only in the sense of acting and behaving in certain ways and maybe having some minimal thought. It is a life that Striker, unsurprisingly, calls "not...very appealing."

Striker is a sensitive reader of Sextus, but she seems to me to miss the force of his references to, e.g., *logos*, when it means theoretical or philosophical account, rather than merely reason or argument. Moreover, her account does little justice to either (i) Sextus' emphasis on ordinary life, which permeates even language and thought, and (ii) his insistence that ordinary life is not philosophical. I agree with Striker that Sextus' account of assent certainly *looks* dispositional, but I have argued that that is because Sextus is trying to avoid a certain sort of philosophical-dogmatic account of human action and behavior; he is attempting to remain true to the phenomenology of everyday life.

Striker's deeper error, it seems to me, resides in her conviction that there is continuity between the forms of argument, reasoning and reflection distinctive of philosophy, and those distinctive of ordinary life; in other words, she has no doubt that *ta biôtika kritéria* are, at best, simply *ta logika kritéria* and, at worst, crude approximations to them. This is especially apparent in her division between a strong notion of belief (reason-based assent to truth) and a weak form

(dispositional action/behavior): she does not contemplate the possibility that this might be a continuum or, indeed, that the division itself may be understood in two different ways, depending on whether you are engaging in philosophical theory or not.

Unlike Stiker, I do not think the skeptic is prevented from reasoning or even arguing; my claim is simply that in engaging in those things he follows the implicit standards and categories of ordinary life. Moreover, such reasoning and argument is constrained and determined by practical concerns involved in life, so that issues involving reasoning (e.g., in distributing shares of something or finding the quickest route somewhere) are perfectly consistent with a skeptic life. What Sextus objects to are forms of reasoning and argument that are not so constrained, that do not figure in such a life. For Sextus, certain forms of reasoning or argument may well be among the skeptic's *phantasia* and, so, his *pathê* and his actions may be shaped by them. After all, the skeptic has no theory of reasoning or argument, but uses the words as we do in ordinary life. For him, there is a distinction between reasoning practically about something, which is involved in ordinary, everyday life, and philosophical reasoning, which is not so involved. Moreover, this is a distinction reflected in ordinary life and language. It is Striker's failure to recognize the appearance of the latter distinction in Sextus' thought that distinguishes her interpretation from mine.

#### **4. Conclusion**

In this final chapter, I have attempted a new and distinctive account of skeptical assent, one that attempts to dispense with the reliance on propositional attitudes that characterizes many accounts of skeptical assent. Central to this project is a distinction between the "going along with" (*to eudokein*) what is apparent or obvious in ordinary, everyday life (*ta phainomena, hai phantasiai*), which is distinctive of skeptical assent, and the going along with what is unclear or obscure (*adêla*), which depends on philosophical methods of reasoning, argument and theorizing, and is distinctive of

dogmatic assent. Skeptical assent is guided by the practical demands of ordinary, everyday life and its attendant standards (*ta biôtika kritêria*); dogmatic assent by the demands of a philosophical understanding of the truth and its standards (*ta logika kritêria*).

In the first part of the chapter, I attempt to show the roots of Sextus' conception of *phainomena* (and so *phantasiai*) in Aristotle's view of *phainomena* as the basis for theory construction and philosophical reflection and argument. Sextus appropriates this notion, which seems absent from Stoic reflections on methodology, and changes it in certain significant ways, but ultimately retains the view of *phainomena* as the *archai* of our philosophical activity. Though I did not discuss this point, we have no evidence that Sextus was familiar or even acquainted with Aristotle's methodological remarks; my suspicion is, rather, that Aristotle's ideas permeated the intellectual climate of the Hellenistic world and so made their way into various philosophical outlooks without being recognized as Aristotle's ideas. Perhaps a more plausible view is that Aristotle congealed in his methodological remarks a view of philosophical methodology so closely tied with philosophy that each subsequent generation that has endeavoured to philosophize eventually discovers it for itself. Regardless, however, of the historical connection, Aristotle's account seems helpful as a way of making sense of Sextus' concept of *phainomena*.

In the second part of the chapter, I embark on a close reading and discussion of several key terms (*pathos*, *kata phantasiai*, and *to endokein*) that are essential to making sense of Sextus' picture of assent. I attempt to make use of the insights into ordinary language and usage that Sextus invokes when guiding the reader to an understanding of skeptical claims and thoughts, insights developed and discussed in chapter two. I conclude by interpreting Sextus' concept of *pathê* as the (physical or mental) conditions arising in an individual as a result of appearances (*phantasiai*), where the latter are understood to be anything that might appear to the skeptic and is not restricted to facts or claims. The skeptic goes along with (*endokeô*) the relevant conditions in the sense that he does not gainsay

their production of verbal or other behavior. Moreover, because the conditions result from and are appropriate to how things appear in everyday, ordinary life, so too the behavior produced by those conditions conform to how things appear in everyday, ordinary life.

Finally, I conclude the chapter by discussing the views of two scholars – Gisela Striker and Michael Frede – that might naturally be seen as quite similar to my own. I argue that these appearances are misleading and that both authors, while sharing some points of agreement with me, nevertheless have a quite different picture of Sextus' Pyrrhonism. My hope is that the differences between my interpretation and theirs will be apparent. Moreover, I hope too that the interpretation of skeptical assent offered here shows more clearly the centrality and importance of ordinary, everyday life for Sextus and Pyrrhonism. Sextus' Pyrrhonism seems to me to be one of the few philosophical outlooks that does not flinch from recognizing the complexity and indeed (philosophical) obscurity of ordinary, everyday life.

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