Pyrrhonism and Cartesianism: external world and aliens

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List of Abbreviations

PH: Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*

M: Sextus Empiricus, *Adversus Mathematicos*

HR: Rene Descartes, *Philosophical Works*
Introduction

Skeptical attitudes have been present in philosophical thought since ancient times. Pyrrho of Elis (c. 360 – c. 272 BC) is considered to be the founder of what is today known as ancient Greek skepticism. One of two ancient skeptical movements (whose members actually called themselves skeptics, unlike the members of the other one), got its name after him – Pyrrhonism. Still, except the name, Pyrrhonists do not have much in common with Pyrrho, who they would rather consider as a radical skeptic who pushed skepticism to unnecessary limits. The other skeptical school is Academic skepticism, which was developed in one of the phases of Plato’s Academy. Since their agenda was to prove that nothing could be known, Academics were also considered by Pyrrhonists not to be the real skeptics, but rather anti-dogmatists.

In this thesis, I will argue about some of the points of Pyrrhonian thought, for which the main source is Sextus Empiricus’ *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*\(^1\), and which is reinforced into Western philosophy by Montaigne. I will focus my attention on the segment of contemporary debates which concerns the scope of Pyrrhonian skepticism as less wide than one of the Cartesian skepticism. My aim is to claim that regardless of the fact that scope of Pyrrhonian skepticism can or cannot be expanded to cover all which falls into the scope of Cartesianism, it still does have serious power in terms of epistemology.

In what follows, I will firstly discuss the differences in motivations of Pyrrhonian and Cartesian skeptical points. Afterwards, I will provide an analysis of reasons why Pyrrhonian skepticism has not expanded its scope, as well as whether that expansion is possible even in principle. At the end, I will indicate some characteristics of Pyrrhonism and Cartesianism which are reflecting one important difference between them, in the relevant, epistemological sense.
1. Methodological and practical skepticism: theory and a way of life

Whether they are formed in order to surpass skeptical demands, or revised in accordance with skeptical challenges, the fact is that the great number of epistemological theories are shaped with respect to various forms of skepticism. Generally speaking, one could say that the whole epistemology is framed by debates of those who defend and those who oppose skepticism.

Nowadays, the role of what is known as ‘modern skepticism’ is highly theoretical. Namely, many consider skeptical insights as a pushing force directed toward philosophers in order to make them improve or recheck the validity of their theories. Of course, it is up to a theory whether it is going to take skeptical notifications as a hard task for overbidding, or just something that is worthless and easy to dismiss, so in a way has a function of a straw man. One way or another, it is highly unlikely for a respectable epistemological theory to completely ignore skepticism.

Furthermore, skepticism can be used for attaining a positive epistemological theory. The well known example of such an enterprise is Descartes’ ‘methodological’ skepticism. Namely, Descartes starts his project of methodical doubt in order to find an infallible basis for knowledge. His idea is to get rid of all the preconceived opinions, so he could gain ones which are genuinely certain and indubitable. In order to eliminate these opinions which only appear to be certain, it is required to ‘demolish everything completely and start again right from the foundations’². Descartes’ idea is to use the fact that our beliefs are organized in a

² Descartes, R.1996. *Meditations on First Philosophy*, p. 17
way as to be interrelated and interdependent, and that there are beliefs which underlie all other beliefs. His mission is to find a way to raise doubts about these basic beliefs, which means that all the beliefs based on them are to be doubted as well. If, however, it turns out that among these basic beliefs there are some beliefs which are impossible to be doubted, one is provided with firm and reliable foundations on which the building of knowledge can be built.

Thus, even though his method is skeptical, it is hard to say that Descartes himself should be considered a philosopher of a skeptical orientation. It is true that he uses skeptical equipment to achieve his goal, but it is also true that his goal is completely anti-skeptical. Because of that, Curley describes Descartes as the one who is going ‘against the skeptics’, since he is ‘turning the skeptic’s own weapons against him and showing that some propositions are immune to any reasonable doubt’.\(^3\)

Obviously, it is not impossible to use some benefits of skepticism but not to be completely devoted to it. In addition to this, it is a common place for contemporary skepticism to be specialized.\(^4\) These local, thematically specified skepticisms are framed in accordance with different types of knowledge that they question or deny, so there are religious, mathematical, ethical, cognitive skeptics, and so on. What actually is not very common is the existence of fully dedicated skeptics, who doubt all different types of knowledge, without exemptions.

Pyrrhonists, or ancient skeptics, are supposed to be these devoted skeptics, since they do not hesitate to doubt any kind of knowledge. Namely, any kind of theoretical stance falls into the scope of their skepticism. In this respect, Pyrrhonism is supposed to be an example of the global application of skepticism. Still, there are some things that seem to be exempted

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\(^3\) Curley, E. M. 1978. *Descartes Against the Skeptics*, p. ix

\(^4\) Hankinson, R. J. 1995. *The Sceptics*, p. 17
from Pyrrhonians’ attention, and it is these that I will discuss later on, in chapter 2. In line
with this, Cartesianism is usually appreciated as the most radical skeptical project, or the
‘universal’ one, since Cartesian doubt includes in its scope what Pyrrhonism fails to question.

However, these two skeptical approaches, Pyrrhonism and Cartesianism, do have in
common a very large range of matters to which they apply their skepticisms. Still, they
definitely do differ in a manner in which they build their positions, as well as in aims that
they hope to achieve by it. The first big difference between these two traditions is a way in
which they approach everyday life. While Pyrrhonism is pretty much occupied with affairs of
ordinary life, Cartesianism, as a true representative of the modern skepticism, does not have
too much interest in adjusting its own position in accordance with a life out of theory. In fact,
it is uncommon for skeptics of today in general to include their theoretizings in their real,
non-theoretical lives. Or, in Burnyeat’s words:

nowdays, if a philosopher finds he cannot answer the philosophical question ‘What’s
time?’ or ‘Is time real?’, he applies for a research grant to work on the problem during
next year’s sabbatical. He does not suppose that the arrival of the next year is actually
in doubt. Alternatively, he may agree that any puzzlement about the nature of time, or
any argument for doubting the reality of time, is in fact a puzzlement about, or an
argument for doubting, the truth of the proposition that next year’s sabbatical will
come, but contend that this is of course a strictly theoretical or philosophical worry,
not a worry that needs to be reckoned with in the ordinary business of life. Either way
he insulates his ordinary first order judgments from the effects of his philosophizing.\(^5\)

Unlike this, obviously purely theoretical skeptical approach, the ‘historical’, ancient skeptics
are known as ‘genuine’ ones exactly because they used their stances as guidance of life.
Namely, in order to live peacefully (that is, in Pyrrhonists’ terms to gain ‘tranquility of mind’
or ataraxia, which is the main goal of Pyrrhonian skepticism), one is supposed to reject all
the data that are shown to be non-evident. The information which are considered by

Pyrrhonists as non-evident, or *dogma*, are about to claim what is the ‘real’ nature of things, in the contrast with the appearances of these things. In this sense, there are two types of beliefs.

In Sextus words:

> When we say that the skeptic does not have beliefs we are not using “belief” in the more general sense in which some say that belief is acquiescing in something. For the Skeptic assents to the conditions forced on him in accordance with an appearance. For example, the skeptic when warmed or cooled would not say ”I think I am not warm (or cool).” Rather, we say that the Skeptic does not have beliefs in the sense in which some say that belief is assent to some non-evident matter investigated by the sciences. For the Skeptic does not assent to anything non-evident.\(^6\)

The way in which Pyrrhonists carrying out their interest into these dogmatists claims is through a ‘distinctive ability’ that they are supposed to possess. According to Sextus:

> skepticism is an ability to set out oppositions among things which appear and are thought of in any way at all, an ability by which, because of the equipollence in the opposed objects and accounts, we come first to suspension of judgment and afterwards to tranquility.\(^7\)

Namely, Pyrrhonists think that for every non–phenomenal claim, if they are devoted enough in undergoing inquires, they will be able to find equally (un)persuasive reasons for and against it. Once these reasons are explicated, the conflict between them becomes obvious. Furthermore, it becomes impossible to decide which of these conflicting reasons is true. That is the point when one should realize that all of the reasons offered are equally worthy of being accepted. This in Pyrrhonists’ terms means that they are equally balanced, i.e. that they are in *isosthenia*. More thoroughly expressed by Sextus:

> when we say that to every argument (*logos*) an equal argument is opposed, by ‘every’ we mean every one examined by us, and we use the word ‘*logos*’ not without qualification, but as something which establishes something dogmatically (i.e.

\(^6\) PH 1 13
\(^7\) PH 1 8
concerning the non-evident), and establishing it not necessarily by means of premises and a conclusion, but howsoever it might. We say ‘equal’ with respect to conviction or the lack of it; we mean ‘oppose’ in its general sense of ‘conflict’; and we implicitly supply ‘as it seems to me’. So, whenever I say ‘to every argument an equal argument is opposed’ I mean in effect ‘it seems to me that to every argument examined by me which attempts to establish something dogmatically there is opposed to it another argument which attempts to establish something dogmatically, and which is equal to the first in respect of conviction and the lack of it’; thus the utterance of the sentence is not dogmatic but is rather an avowal (apangelia) of a human affection (pathos), which is what appears to the person affected.⁸

In order to be sure that they have critically approached all the options in the inquiry, Pyrrhonists developed a whole set of ‘tropes’ or ways of arguing, which I will roughly present in the third chapter. If all the evidence and arguments provided for and against some position seem to be balanced, and mutually cancel each other, Pyrrhonists will suspend their judgment on the matter of inquiry. This is to say that the equipollence of arguments drags Pyrrhonists to the state of epohe. Unlike Cartesian skeptics, Pyrrhonists do not doubt some position, as well as neither affirm nor deny it, but only suspend their judgment on it.

The result of the epohe should be the freedom from all the mental disturbances. Namely, once the Pyrrhonist suspends his judgment on a certain matter, he will end up in the state of ataraxia, and he will not worry about whether a position is true or false. In the same way that epohe follows isosthenia, ataraxia follows epohe. This means that after acquiring isostheneia, firstly epohe, and then ataraxia follows, and that both of these happen completely unexpectedly. If the character of these relations is to be described, than it should be said that these are not logically, but causally connected.⁹ An illustration of this is provided by Sextus:

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⁸ PH 1 202-3
⁹ Hanckinson, The skeptics, p. 27
the Skeptic is in the same case as that which is alleged of Apelles the painter. For they say that while he was painting a horse and wished to represent the horse’s foam, he fell so far short of his aim that he gave up and flung at the picture the sponge on which he wiped the colors from his brush; and its impact produced the impression of the horse’s foam.\textsuperscript{10}

Thus, it is not that Pyrrhonists expect or know in advance that \textit{ataraxia} will happen. They cannot know whether \textit{epohe} will take place as the result of their inquires. But, if they cannot know whether the tranquility will be gained or not, how come Pyrrhonists are so dedicated in pursuing their inquires? The answer is that they are motivated to examine dogmatist claims because they are looking for the truth – if a claim is not confronted with its alternatives and compared by the strength of the arguments and evidence which are supporting these alternatives, it may happen that truth will not be gained.

Simply, uncertain beliefs are about to endanger very much wanted perfectly peaceful Pyrrhonian resort. Since according to Pyrrhonists, the efforts of going beyond appearances of things in order to gain their hidden nature are the ones which usually bring disturbances and anxiety in the everyday life, their main concern is to question the achievements of these efforts and, if they turn out to be ungrounded, dismiss them. This is why Pyrrhonists are oriented towards questioning stances or disputes of dogmatist philosophers. If it turned out that some of dogmatists’ claims are true, Pyrrhonists will adopt them, but if, on the contrary, these cannot be proved, then Pyrrhonists will put them aside. So, Pyrrhonists’ interest in ideas of dogmatists is of a highly practical character.

This practical orientation of Pyrrhonism is clearly opposed to Cartesianism’s theoretical one. Different aims of these two skeptical traditions entail differences in their structures. For instance, in Pyrrhonism there is no need for raising ‘outrageous hypothesis’\textsuperscript{11},

\textsuperscript{10} PH 1 28
\textsuperscript{11} The expression that Williams uses in Williams, M. 2010. “Descartes transformation of the skeptical tradition”, p. 290
which are in a way a trade mark of Cartesian skepticism. In order to achieve its goal, Pyrrhonism is pretty much settled with inquiring and engaging in actually existing disagreements and challenges, which have already been raised by dogmatists. Cartesianism, on the other hand, as the theoretical stance, is not strictly attached to real life concerns, so it is open for all kinds of possible scenarios. Descartes himself says:

My statement that the entire testimony of the senses must be considered to be uncertain, nay, even false, is quite serious and so necessary for the comprehension of my meditations, that he who will not or cannot admit that, is unfit to urge any objection to them that merits a reply. But, we must note the distinction emphasized by me in various passages, between the practical activities of our life and an inquiry into truth; for, when it is a case of regulating our life, it would assuredly be stupid not to trust the senses, and those skeptics were quite ridiculous who so neglected human affairs that they had to be preserved by their friends from tumbling down precipices. It was for this reason that somewhere I announced that no one in his sound mind seriously doubted about such matters [HR I 142-3]; but when we raise an inquiry into what is the surest knowledge which the human mind can obtain, it is clearly unreasonable to refuse to treat them as doubtful, nay even to reject them as false, so as to allow us to become aware that certain other things, which cannot be thus rejected, are for this reason more certain, and in actual truth better known by us.

Obviously, the Cartesian doubt is intended to be completely theoretical. Unlike it, Pyrrhonism is oriented towards the common life affairs, and, whatever Descartes may think about it, Pyrrhonists are in this sense able to question many important things and to do that pretty sanely.

12 This is the point where it can be seen that Descartes was not really introduced with the Pyrrhonian thought in its finest points. We will see later that Pyrrhonists do have a way out of living a strange life which is in the literature ascribed to a Pyrrho.

13 HR II 206
2. Hypothetical doubt, practical concerns and the existence of the external world

In his ‘project of pure enquiry’\(^\text{14}\), Descartes introduces us to the three levels of doubt, which is supposed to be progressive. This means that Descartes gradually reinforces the range of doubt on every new level. For this reason, it becomes more radical on each level than it was on the previous one, and accordingly endangers a greater portion of our preconceived knowledge.

At the very beginning of his *Meditations*\(^\text{15}\), Descartes notes that all of our beliefs about the external world are based on the assumption that the information we gain by our senses is reliable, i.e. that our senses are reliable in discovering the truth. However, it is not difficult to see that we are often misguided by our senses. Descartes uses this fact to introduce the ‘Argument from Illusion’, the first step of his methodological doubt, where he notices that our senses are deceitful, so that it happens for example that we perceive a stick dipped into the water as broken, while it is in fact whole. But illusions such as this one are not hard to dismiss – one can, in this case, use his hand and his tactile sense to feel that the stick is actually whole, and dismiss what he saw as a simple visual illusion. Thus, situations in which we have illusive sensory experiences are problematic just in cases in which the object of perception is in some way ‘masked’ so that we misperceive it. It is possible, however, to remove this ‘mask’ by the use of some other senses, so although one of our senses may be deluding us, one could say that other senses successfully fix up such delusions.

This first step of the Cartesian skeptical enterprise is not that different from the cases Pyrrhonism takes into consideration. But, Descartes then expands the scope of his doubt,

\(^{14}\) Williams, B. 2005. *Descartes: The Project of Pure Enquiry*

\(^{15}\) Decartes, R. 1996. *Meditations on First Philosophy*
introducing his famous ‘Dream Argument’ which represents a modern radicalization of doubt, and his first ‘outrageous’ hypothesis. This argument starts with the insight that in dreams we are often deceived by our senses, even about the things that we normally take to be completely obvious. Since it is possible that we consider some objects of dream experience as real i.e. belonging to the waking experience, and, furthermore, since there is no intrinsic difference between these waking and dreaming experiences, it could be that we are dreaming all the time, or at least, at any time. So, every perceptual impression, including those about our own body, could be just a dream illusion. As Descartes writes:

how often has it happened to me that in the night I dreamt that I found myself in this particular place, that I was dressed and seated near the fire, whilst in reality I was lying undressed in bed. At this moment it does indeed seem to me that it is with eyes awake that I am looking at this paper; that this head which I move is not asleep… What happens in sleep does not appear so clear or so distinct as all this. But in thinking over this I remind myself that on many occasions I have in sleep been deceived by similar illusions, and in dwelling carefully on this reflection I see so manifestly that there are no certain indications by which we may clearly distinguish wakefulness from sleep that I am lost in astonishment.16

Namely, it can seem to one that he is sitting next to the fireplace in more than one way. One can be awake, and perceive the situation described, or one can be at sleep, only dreaming it. Thus, in order for one to be justified in believing that what he experiences is what is actually the case, one needs to be able to show that his experiences are not there due to dreaming i.e. that the dreaming scenario is not actualized. But according to Descartes it is impossible to do this based on experience, because the experiences one has when awake are not intrinsically or qualitatively distinct from those he has when dreaming, or at least sometimes they are not distinct, and nothing guarantees that the actual case does not fall into the scope of ‘sometimes’ here. Then, since one is unable to dismiss the scenario in which he is only

16 Descartes, R. 2008. Meditations on First Philosophy. p. 22
dreaming, he cannot be justified in believing that he is not deluded in believing that he is sitting in his armchair next to his fireplace. In all other cases in which one deals with the external worlds and gains information by senses, the same point applies. In other words, there seems to be no guarantee that we perceive veridically.

Still, whether we are sleeping or not, truths concerning the existence of the external world as well as arithmetical and geometrical truths remain the same. Descartes, in order to stay in line with the main idea of his project, has to try to endanger these beliefs. This is why on the third level he introduces a ‘hyperbolical’ doubt, well-known as the ‘Evil Genius Doubt’. According to this scenario, which represents the second Cartesian ‘outrageous hypothesis’, there could be a powerful deceiving deity that arranges things in the world in such a way that we are never in the position to distinguish between true and false. Our reasoning faculties would always deliver us false impressions, since all perceptions of the world we make are false. This means that our experience would be exactly the same as it is in the case in which there is no external world at all.

If one devotedly goes through all of these presented levels of doubt, as it is recommended by Descartes, he will end up doubting the very existence of the external world. This is why Cartesianism is considered as existential skepticism. Unlike it, Pyrrhonism is usually described as essential skepticism, since it is questioning if things really are as they appear to be. But, it seems that Pyrrhonists are not concerned whether things, whose appearances are questioned, actually exists or not. For instance, Sextus says:

but nothing is of a nature to be perceived by itself, but rather everything is so via affection, which is distinct from the object which makes it apparent. When I am sweetened by the application of honey, I conjecture that the externally existing honey is sweet; and when I am warmed by proximity to fire, I infer from my own condition
that the externally existing fire is warming; and the same account applies for the other perceptible objects.17

Also:

When we doubt whether the underlying object is such as it appears, we grant that it does so appear, while we doubt not about appearances (phainomenon) but about what is said about appearance… For instance, honey appears to us to be sweet. We allow this, since we are perceptually sweetened. But we doubt if it is sweet as regards its definition (logos); this is not the appearance, but something said about the appearance.18

It seems that Pyrrhonists do not find it problematic if externally existing, underlying objects, such as honey or fire, really exist or not. In that sense, Pyrrhonism matches Cartesian skeptical enterprise only in its first step. Thus, the big difference between Pyrrhonists and Cartesians is that the former stays on this level, or more precisely, Pyrrhonists’ approach stays ‘monotonous’ while Cartesians continue in deepening their doubt and making it ‘stratified’. Namely, Pyrrhonism does investigate and find delusive the real nature of objects of senses 20 (since they appear differently to different observers or even to the same ones in different situations …), but that is where resemblance stops, and Pyrrhonists do not go any deeper in posing scenarios, such as dreaming or evil demon ones.

Even when they do discuss dreaming contents, they do not mention them in the way Cartesians do. Sextus, thus, writes:

Different appearances come about depending on sleeping or waking. When we are awake we view things differently from the way we do when we are asleep, and when asleep differently from the way we do when awake; so the existence or non-existence

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17 M 7 365
18 PH 1 19-20
19 Williams uses these expressions (monotonous, stratified) in Williams, M. 2010. “Descartes transformation of the skeptical tradition”. p. 290
20 Beside the objects of senses, Pyrrhonians also apply the same pattern when discuss objects of reason – one very complex argument, for instance, can appear valid to us, but because of its complexity we cannot be sure if we have missed some flaws in it, so we still do not have belief about its validity, but rather suspend judgment on it.
of the objects becomes not absolute but relative – relative to being asleep or awake. It is likely, then, that when asleep we will see things which are unreal in waking life, not unreal once and for all. For they exist in sleep, just as the contents of waking life exists when even though they do not exist in sleep.²¹

Sextus writes of dreaming in order to add one more example of situations in which things may look differently to us. Dreaming and waking actually go together with other pairs, such as being young or old, ill or healthy, and all of these are intended to show that our experience of things is relative to situations in which it is gained. There is no inferring here, like in Cartesianism, that things of one of the worlds – dreaming or waking, do not exist. For Sextus, the thing is that these worlds do exist, but they exist in different ways. In order to find out which of these he should believe in, a Pyrrhonist has to find out which world is the right one.

Additionally, as Williams notices²², Sextus does not consider the option that dreaming and waking contents are indiscernible. For Pyrrhonists, dreaming differs from being awake, and it differs significantly, so there is no problem for deducing in which of the two states a person is. Dreaming actually does not involve any kind of mental confusion, which is presented in Cartesianism. Pyrrhonists, even in dreaming, think that they stay cognitively lucid, and that their way to find out the truth is to pick out which of the worlds is offering them with the right appearances.

²¹ PH 1 104
2.1. An explanation for Pyrrhonists not questioning the existence of the external world

From our contemporary point of view, it may seem odd that Pyrrhonists did not make the step towards questioning the very existence of the objects, when they had already discussed contents of dreams. Even more so because Pyrrhonists do not seem to be hesitant of questioning anything at all, so it is quite unexpected that they have respect for the existence of things. The thing is that this idea of doubting the existence of the external world is not something natural or implicit for human or philosophical thought. Rather, it is, as Williams puts it, ‘an invention, not a discovery’\(^{23}\) of a Cartesianism. Namely, the external world skepticism is not something which emerges once when we put our attention and reflect on what we already know about our environment. It is the result of well organized, attentively guided and precisely aimed theoretical approach of Descartes, which is a huge historical novelty.

If we agree with Williams on this matter, there is still a question of what prevented Pyrrhonists to be the first ones, before Cartesians, to extend the scope of their skepticism on the existence of the external world. Burnyeat gives an answer to this question, one which has become a common place in discussions about Pyrrhonism. Burnyeat claims that Pyrrhonists could not develop the existential skepticism since they, as the rest of Hellenistic philosophical world, had a ‘practical concern’\(^ {24}\). Of course, this concern reflects in devotion to gain happiness, or in Pyrrhonist terms, to end up in *ataraxia*. According to Burnyeat, Pyrrhonists would not go against their solution for a problem of acting in the world full of uncertainties. This is the point that I will discuss more a bit later in this chapter.


For now, I will agree with Burnyeat that practical aims of Pyrrhonists are a proper explanation to be proposed in order to explain why they restricted themselves only to essential skepticism. But additionally, I want to make it explicit that this explanation actually serves to show why it did not cross the minds of Pyrrhonists to extend their skepticism, and not that they were not able to do that, or, in other words, that their skepticism does not sustain external world skepticism, at least in principle.

Namely, Pyrrhonists fight against *dogma* – non-evident beliefs, but what is more, they fight against dogmas that have already been shaped. They engage themselves in disagreements that are actual, on questions already raised by someone. This is because Pyrrhonians want to be sure that they dismiss beliefs that might be untrue, and in that way prevent to be bothered and disturbed by them. They are not the ones to raise some new potentially true beliefs and then question them, but it is rather enough for these skeptics to deal with already existent ones and in that way assure tranquility for themselves. In one word, Pyrrhonism is defensive in its character, unlike Cartesianism, whose theoretical concerns make it offensive, and lead it toward posing ‘outrageous hypothesis’ of dreaming and evil demon.\(^{25}\)

Another important reason for not raising the question about the existence of the external world, besides their practical concerns, is the historical context that Pyrrhonians are part of. Namely, people of Hellenistic time knew about the division of cognitive subject and what was external to it, but they could not know a division which is characteristic for modern times, the one of mind and body. Or, in Burnyeat’s words:

For we find a parallel unclarity or ambiguity in Sextus’ talk of external things. If we ask what these external things whose nature is in doubt are external to, it appears that no sharp line is drawn such as is presupposed in the modern formulation of the

\(^{25}\) Williams’ expressions are: reactive and pre-emptive, in Williams , M. 2010. “Descartes transformation of the skeptical tradition”. p. 298
problem of the existence of the external world. In the modern formulation “external” means external to the mind, but in Sextus it means simply external to oneself, the cognitive subject, i.e., a man (cf. adv. Math. VII 167) – and the question is, “What does that come to?” Sextus can contrast the external thing with the bodily humors which affect one’s perception of it (PH I 102) or the medium through which it is perceived (ib. 124-27), so it seems plain that the line is not drawn in Cartesian fashion between the mind and everything else outside it, including the skeptic’s own body.26

The explanation why Pyrrhonian skepticism does not introduce a division of body and mind is because it is not framed in the same way as Cartesianism. Namely, Cartesian skepticism is a kind of ‘faculty-skepticism’, which means that the world, as well as our cognitive faculties, is created by someone – i.e. God, deceiving deity, mad scientist, or by nature or chance. Thus, if God is assumed as a creator it is clear that Pyrrhonism cannot conceive the theological assumptions of Cartesianism. This is so because the Hellenistic approach considers theology to be a part of physics – ‘an account of god is part of an account of the natural world’. Since all parts of the universe exist as interconnected with each other, and it could not exist if it is not in this way, it becomes obvious why the gap between mind and the rest of the world is not possible.

Thus, it may be that Pyrrhonists do not recognize the possibility of the division of body and mind, because they do not share the theological framework of Cartesian skepticism.

But also, even if it is not God that operates as a creator, but nature or coincidence, then it is as well decided through the process of the creation if the world and our faculties will be in accordance or not, or more precisely, if our faculties will be fallible or not. And, since we can ask whether our faculties are created to be erroneous or not, there is an open space for a gap between mind and the world. However, in Pyrrhonism our bodies and faculties are natural, ‘organic and functional’ parts of the natural world. Thus, there should be no room left for the

option that our facilities are created as fallible in the way that Cartesianism suggests them to be, so, accordingly, it is not surprising that the idea of mind-body gap does not appear at all.

2.2. An analysis of whether Pyrrhonists could expand the scope of their skepticism to include the external world

Obviously, the historical context of Pyrrhonian skeptics, as well as their practical concerns created a good atmosphere for not questioning the external world’s existence. Pyrrhonists simply were not challenged to question the very existence of things, but only their essence. My question is: what would happen if someone was there to ask them about it? Or, more precisely, would Pyrrhonists have a problem in gaining ataraxia if they expanded the scope of their skepticism on the external world?

Burnyeat says that, in their answer to the famous inactivity objection, Pyrrhonists are underwriting that they are not touched by Cartesian ideas. Namely, this objection, well known as the apraxia challenge, accuses Pyrrhonists that they are condemned to live a life without any activities, since they choose to live a life without beliefs. But, Pyrrhonists explain that their normal activity is possible because they act in accordance with appearances in some of ways presented in the fourfold scheme. Namely:

attending to the appearances, we live in accordance with the ordinary ways of life, without holding opinions – for we are not able to be utterly inactive. These ordinary ways of life seem to be fourfold, and to consist in guidance by nature, necessitation by affections, the handing down of laws and customs, and instruction in expertises. By nature’s guidance we are naturally capable of perceiving and thinking. By the necessitation of affections, hunger conducts us to food and thirst to drink. By the handing down of customs and laws, we regard piety as good and impiety as bad in a

practical, everyday kind of way. Through instructions in expertises we are not inactive in those kinds of expertise which we adopt.  

According to Burnyeat, here we can see a Pyrrhonist as an example of a man who is not at all concerned if he has “a body to act with and a world to act in”  

But, it does not seem to me that it would make any important difference for Pyrrhonists even if someone would try to make them concerned about the existence of body and world. Namely, if it was somehow possible for them to be in contact with Descartes, and if he asked them how they can be sure that they are not dreaming and that they have a body, they would answer that actually, they cannot. The same would go for the problem of deceiving evil demon and the existence of the whole world. Descartes would even save time for Pyrrhonists. Since the situations of dreaming and being deceived by evil demon are already composed in such a way as to offer equally balanced arguments for and against believing the existence of body and the world, Pyrrhonists would in their manner easily withhold the assent on these questions.

Still, whether they have a body or not, and whether the world exists or not, the same answer proposed for apraxia challenge serves as the explanation of how Pyrrhonists can act in these new circumstances. Every Pyrrhonist would still get up in the morning, have breakfast, do his best not to be bitten by dogs, run over by carts, not to fall down into precipices, and so on. And this is because he would still have appearances of the external world things, including his own body, and he would act in accordance to these.

Hence, it does not seem that withholding their assent on the existence of their body and the rest of the external world would in any respect spoil Pyrrhonists’ practical concern of gaining and living tranquility. This goes in line with the idea that they could in principle suspend their judgment on the existence of the external objects and the world itself.

28 PH 1 23 - 24
But, there is one point in Burnyeat’s interpretation of Pyrrhonian thought which implies that they could not enlarge the scope of their skepticism, not even in principle. Namely, when explaining Pyrrhonian concept of truth, Burnyeat says that it is closely connected to the real existence:

First, and this is something Sextus is entirely explicit about, the skeptic’s doubting and suspending judgment extends only to statements which make claims about how things are in themselves. Variants on this formulation include: how things are in their own nature, how things are in reality, what the external things are like, and (most simply) what is true. All these are what the skeptic suspends judgment about. He refrains from statements which make a truth claim about what is the case in a common objective world, external to ourselves and comprising things with a nature of their own. “Truth” in these contexts means truth as to real existence, something’s being true of an independent reality. It is in this sense that skeptic will not assent to anything as true.30

As well as:

And it is a fact of central importance that truth, in the skeptic’s vocabulary, is closely tied to real existence as contrasted with appearances. When skeptic doubts that anything is true (PH II 88 ff., M VIII 17 ff.), he has exclusively in view claims as to real existence. Statements which merely record how things appear are not in question - they are not called true or false - only statements which say that things are thus and so in reality. In the controversy between the skeptic and the dogmatists over whether any truth exists at all the issue is whether any proposition or class of propositions can be accepted as ‘true of a real objective world’; the true, if there is such a thing, is what conforms with the real, an association traditional to the word alethes since the earliest period of Greek philosophy (cf. M XI 221).31

So, according to Burnyeat, Pyrrhonists hold that a belief can be neither true nor false if it is not tied to a real objective world. This is what I find to imply that Pyrrhonists could not extend the scope of their skepticism not even in principle, because if they were to question

the existence of the external world they would not be able to identify any belief as true (or false). However, gaining the truth is very important point of Pyrrhonian enterprise, since the true beliefs are the hopeful offspring of it, and I do not see that there is any reason to think that they would be inclined to abandon the possibility of acquiring them.

Namely, Pyrrhonist skepticism is ‘open-ended’ in its character, unlike the Cartesian version, which in terms of questioning the certainty of beliefs is ‘theoretically closed’.\textsuperscript{32} This means that Cartesians, once they find out they cannot be certain about something, e.g. the existence of their bodies or the external objects in general, conclude that this uncertainty exists once and for all. Since it seems to them that they will never become certain about these, Cartesians move forward to try to find something that they can be certain of. On the contrary, Pyrrhonists’ strategy is that, once they recognize they cannot be sure whether something is true or not, they suspend their judgment on it, but continue seeking to find out if that is actually true or not. For instance, having an appearance of honey’s sweetness does not imply that honey really is sweet, since its appearance is relative for different observers, in different circumstances, etc, but that does not prevent a true Pyrrhonist to keep investigating, and at some point hopefully reach the true belief about real nature of honey. Thus, for Pyrrhonists there is always an open possibility to reach certainty if the real nature of honey is to be sweet, or about anything else, whatsoever.

It may seem strange though, that Pyrrhonists keep inquiring even though they have already gain their chief goal of \textit{ataraxia}. This is so because it looks as they are actually spoiling their so much wanted tranquility by troubling themselves with this ongoing investigation. But in fact, their seeking for the truth is simply wondering, without any disturbances.\textsuperscript{33} Pyrrhonists just allow for the possibility that they may acquire true beliefs,

\textsuperscript{32}Williams , M. 2010. “Descartes transformation of the skeptical tradition”. p. 290
\textsuperscript{33}Hankinson, R. J. 1995. \textit{The Sceptics}. p. 270
unlike dogmatist who are certain that these beliefs can be gained. And this certainty is exactly what is causing the discomfort. As Sextus writes:

the man who opines that anything is by nature good or bad is forever being disturbed (\textit{tarassetai}); and when he does not have these things which he takes to be naturally fine, he thinks that he is tormented by things naturally bad, and he pursues the things he imagines to be good, than, having obtained them, he keeps falling into further disturbances because of his unreasonable and immoderate elation, and, fearing a reversal of fortune, he does everything in order not to lose the things, which seem good to him. On the other hand, the man who makes no determination regarding things naturally good or bad, neither avoids nor pursues anything vigorously – and for this reason is untroubled.\textsuperscript{34}

Since Pyrrhonists do not share commitments of dogmatists, gaining \textit{epohe} for them does not necessarily mean an abruption of inquiring. \textit{Epohe}, thus, goes along with inquiry, but even though it is an unforeseen result of it, it is not at the same time a conclusion of it.

Thus, Pyrrhonists leave open the possibility that at some moment any belief may be shown to be true or false. If Burnyeat is right, this gaining of certain beliefs is obtainable only once one reaches the accordance with reality. That is why for Pyrrhonists it should not be possible, even in principle, to question the existence of the external things, since that would close a possibility for gaining the truth.

At this point, I would like to focus attention on one part of Sextus’ writings, which Hanckinson qualifies as ‘perhaps the nearest Sextus ever gets to doubting the existence of external objects’\textsuperscript{35}, and then to show that in light of it, Burnyeat is not right when claiming that ‘truth, in the skeptic’s vocabulary, is closely tied to real existence’. The significant quote is the following:

\textsuperscript{34} PH 1 27-28
\textsuperscript{35} Hankinson, R. J. 1995. \textit{The Sceptics}, p. 271
since then what is grasped by way of something else [i.e. nonimmediately] is by common consent non-evident, and since everything which is grasped is so by way of our affections which are distinct from them [i.e. the things grasped], all externals are non-evident and are for this reason unknown to us.\textsuperscript{36}

Obviously, Sextus explicitly claimed that external things are non-evident. And all non-evident things are, according to Pyrrhonists, liable to investigation (unlike appearances which are the only things to be exempted from it).\textsuperscript{37} Also, as we have seen, this investigation does not have to stop once the epohe is gained, which means that external objects belong to a group of things for which it is possible that true beliefs will be acquired at some point of time.

But, if Burnyeat is right in his interpretation, then this investigation makes no sense. Namely, if truth is related to the external objects, than once we question the very existence of something, we cannot expect to end up with a true or false belief about it. So, Burnyeat’s cannot be right in interpreting Pyrrhonism on this matter. And that is, in my opinion, for purely historical reasons, or precisely, the text written in M 7 366.

Since one implication of Burnyeats’s claim is that in Pyrrhonism the external world cannot be doubted, not even in principle, now when we see that his claim is problematic, there is still an open possibility for Pyrrhonism to be equal in scope with Cartesianism on this matter. However, the truth is, as Hanckinson emphasizes it, that point from M 7 366 is not very common for Sextus writings, and that it is actually a solitary example of it. Hanckinson’s explanation, which I agree with, is that this is the case because Pyrrhonists do not really doubt the existence of objects ‘as such’.\textsuperscript{38}

\textsuperscript{36} M 7 366 \\
\textsuperscript{37} PH I 13 \\
\textsuperscript{38} Hankinson, R. J. 1995. The Sceptics, p. 272
Namely, when Pyrrhonists are asked about the sweetness of honey, they will suspend their judgment if it is really the nature of honey to be sweet or not. Also, it is true that if they were asked about the real existence of that honey, Pyrrhonists would not have a choice but to answer that they cannot know about it and they would withhold their assent as well. This seems to imply that Pyrrhonism is compatible with existential skepticism.

But, as Hankinson says, suspending judgment on whether something ‘really’ exists or not, does not necessarily mean that Pyrrhonists doubt the existence of the objects in general, or even of some particular external object. Pyrrhonists actually doubt the existence of ‘that something’ to which particular properties are ascribed. Their doubt is, in fact, directed toward any statement that has some theoretical content. Since in principal any statement can be said to have such a content, statements about the real existence of things do not present any exemption.39

3. Pyrrhonism, Cartesianism and some epistemologically interesting questions

The previous chapter is concluded by what seems to be a plausible explanation for why Pyrrhonism is supposed to be comprehended as a truly essential, rather than existential skepticism. It means that Cartesian is wider than Pyrrhonist skepticism, at least in this respect. In what follows, I am going to explicate which aspects of human thought each of these skepticisms is endangering. In respect to this I will suggest that Pyrrhonism, even if it is narrower in its scope than Cartesianism, is on some matters more effective than it.

39 Hankinson, R. J. 1995. The Sceptics. p. 272
First of all, it is important to explicate how big is the role of the concept of isosthenia for the whole Pyrrhonist enterprise. Namely, the very foundation for reaching, firstly the state of epohe and than ataraxia, lies in isosthenia, which, as has been said, presents realization that the arguments for and against some belief are arranged in such a way to be of equal strength. In order to acquire isosthenia, Pyrrhonists use their modes or ways of arguing, specially constructed for these purposes.

One set of these ways is known as Ten Modes of Aenesidemus. The first seven of them show that perceptual experience is of a relative character, while ninth and tenth deal with questions of value. The eighth of them, Relativity Mode, is special in two ways. Firstly, it is repeated as one of Agrippan Modes, which will be roughly presented later. And secondly, it presents a summary of seven Modes which precede it, but also goes beyond them since it argues for relativity of all things. In short, this Mode indicates that since all perceptions are relative to something, one is not to deliberate the real nature of things but only how they appear. There are many examples which are supposed to show that in the light of the conflicting appearances the same thing is grasped differently. These are classified in the first seven Modes in order to illustrate that objects appear relatively e.g. to the ones who perceive it, circumstances or mixtures in which they appear, position, distances or places from which they appear, and so on.

Thanks to ‘Ten Modes’, one realizes that he is not supposed to be confident about the perceptual sources of belief. The question remains if reasoning is to provide him with the beliefs that are certain. Pyrrhonists have developed the ways of arguing to answer to this as well. Strategies supposed to lead to withholding the assent on the results of reasoning are presented in the Five Modes of Agrippa, and they are certainly the masterpiece of Pyrrhonist

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41 And opinions, when it comes to the purposes of Agrippan Modes.
Each of these Modes leads one to suspend judgment on matters in question. All five combined provide an ‘all-embracing skeptical strategy’, leaving no room for the adequate basis for believing.

Depending on the way one employs them in the skeptical milieu, the Agrippan Modes could be divided in two groups: material and formal Modes. Material Modes are the modes from Dispute and Relativity, and their role is to call attention to the fact that we are required to resolve the disagreement we have reached (whatever the topic is). This way, they provide material for the formal modes – Infinite regress, Hypothesis and Circularity, which show that the disagreement is in fact indeterminable, as there is no satisfying way of arguing in favor of either side.

The one of material Modes, Mode from Dispute, says that no matter the subject of a debate (from everyday life or a philosophical one), one finds it impossible to make a definite choice between the positions regarding the disputed question. The inability to choose one position over another is to be understood as a report on the current status of the debate in question. Due to their basic principles, Pyrrhonists would not claim that it is impossible to solve the dispute at all, but just that, things being as they are, one is to suspend the judgment as the matter is currently unresolved.

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42 Here presented in accordance with Barnes, J. 1990. *The Toils of Scepticism*.
43 Hankinson, R. J. 1995. *The Sceptics*, p. 163
44 Fogelin calls these *challenging* and *dialectical* Modes, in Fogelin, R. 1994. *Phyronian Reflections on Knowledge and Justification*, p. 116
45 This Agrippan mode should be interpreted not as to claim that it is impossible to take one side in the dispute, but that it is unjustified to make any positive claims in the context of such disputes. Therefore, this Mode is not based on mere possibility, but rather on rationality. Still, the question remains, even if we accept that every possible matter is subject to dispute, why would one need to think of that dispute as something that is unsolved? That is, why would one have to suspend his judgment on the matter in question? The response comes from Sextus who says that any matter of dispute is unclear so we need a criteria or a proof to make it clear and evident, and thus solve the dispute. But the problem is that every effort to find such criteria turns out to be a subject of the dispute itself. Therefore, it turns out that in order to resolve some dispute one needs to move to a meta-level, but on that level too we end up reaching a dispute about the adequateness of the criteria we used, and since this dispute is itself unsolved, it follows that, together with it, the initial dispute is not solved and that one should suspend his judgment on it.
The remaining of Material modes is the one from Relativity, which is already described above as the eighth of Aenesidemus’s Modes. Here it has a function of establishing the facts needed for a dispute. It presents the cause for dispute, whereas the dispute is a sign of relativity. Since other three Modes are based on the existence of dispute, the mode from Relativity is the one which sets off all the others.

Once the dispute is explicated, three other Modes get on the stage. So, the Mode from Dispute, together with the one from relativity serves as the background for understanding the role of the three remaining Modes. These three modes have the task to show whether dispute can be resolved by reasoning.

Firstly, the Mode from Infinite regress indicates that if one is to assert something, he is to present adequate reasons in favor of it, but then he must give reasons in favor of those reasons, and so on, *ad infinitum*. That something is based on reasons means that it is founded on a firm point, but in an infinite sequence all the points are elusive, being based on other ones. Believing that reasons related in this manner can offer an adequate justification resembles believing that there could be a building lacking its foundation. And this is why one cannot find a justification for his belief in it.

That is why a person could, instead of giving an infinite number of reasons in favor of a certain position, or establishing one of them as self-evident, end up offering the reasons that are derived from the positions concerned. This is when the Mode from Circularity intervenes. Namely, in such a case, being unable to assume one of the reasons as the starting point, the person should suspend judgment on both.\(^{46}\)

Also, in order to avoid giving reasons for the ones already given, one may give a reason that is not supported by further reasons. This situation is a job for the Mode from

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\(^{46}\) The lack of starting point is not to be taken literally, since every point of the circle can be thought of as the starting one. The problem is that no reason is of higher priority than any other, as they are all eventually based on each other i.e. equally (un)justified.
Hypothesis. Namely, Agrippa says that because there is no evidence in favor of that kind of a reason, accepting it would lead us to Dogmatism. If one does not offer any reasons for an opinion, it is hard to see why he would be any less justified to assume the exactly opposite opinion. No reasons are offered to support either of them, so they are equally (un)justified. If he was to choose one of the options instead of the other, his choice would be based upon no evidence or reasoning.

And this is how both Agrippan and Aenesidemus Modes, are in the long run based in isostheneia, since all conflicting reasons for a belief are supposed to be equally worthy of acceptance. Of course, one might still ask, when confronted with the Mode from Hypothesis, or the outcomes of any of Aenesiedmus Modes, how it is possible that he really cannot recognize one of the options as a better one. Or, in other words, how it comes that all proposed options for and against one belief are of equal strength.

The thing is that, when Pyrrhonists say that arguments given for some belief are equally balanced so they will suspend their judgment on it, that does not mean that there is some certain criteria for ratifying this equality. Rather, these proposed arguments are, strictly speaking, weightless. The only reason for suspending judgment lies in persuasiveness of that if offered opposed arguments are equally balanced or not. Thus, recognizing arguments as equally balanced is intended to serve as a ‘psychological motivation’ for suspending of judgment.

The expected persuasiveness of isostheneia goes in line with the therapeutic character of Pyrrhonism. Namely, the Pyrrhonist approach resembles the doctor’s procedure of detecting illness, making a diagnosis and then prescribing a proper medicine. The strength of a medicine is dependent on that how tough the illness is. In Pyrrhonian terms, the choice of

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47 Here is more adequately to put that Sextus say this, since the only one who ascribes these Modes to Agrippa is Diogen Laertius, thus the very existence of Agrippa is not certain.
48 Hankinson, R. J. 1995. The Sceptics., p.260
49 PH 3 280-1
the arguments intended to accomplish isostheneia is relative to individuals. And the job of a Pyrrhonist skeptic is to modify arguments in a way which best suits someone. As Sextus says:

The skeptic’s procedure is to refrain from making the case for things that are trusted, but, in their case, to be content with the common preconception as a sufficient basis – but to make the case for the things that seem not to be trustworthy, and to bring each of them into equal strength with the trust surrounding things deemed worthy of acceptance.50

Sometimes it may be that for different individuals who have the same belief, different arguments have to be proposed in order to persuade them to suspend judgment. It means that even some very lousy arguments may be used if the person is easily persuaded. If they are effective enough to lead a particular person to end up in epohe, it means that these arguments serve well for the purposes, regardless their ‘actual’ strength.

Of course, this does not exclude the possibility that for some persons any choice of arguments will not do the job. It is not something to trouble Pyrrhonists. As Sextus says:

to give an outline account [of the Skeptic way] stating in advance that with respect to none of the things that we will recount do we strongly maintain that they are just as we say; rather, according to our impression at the moment, we report like a chronicler on each one.51

After all, Pyrrhonist procedures are not something they recommend to others. In the first place they used these for themselves, so it may be said that Pyrrhonism is actually auto-therapeutic. Pyrrhonists are interested in gaining a good life, and they would be satisfied to accomplish it for themselves. If someone else reaches happiness on behalf of their methods, that is fine, but not necessary for the Pyrrhonism to succeed in their intentions.

Also, it may be that someone does not find the Pyrrhonist concept of happiness as desirable at all. As Burnyeat says, it is not hard to imagine that someone would find ‘the state of bafflement rather than belief’ as something which actually provides him with severe anxiety rather than tranquility.52 Or, it can be that the Pyrrhonist life may look to someone as

50 M 7 443
51 PH 1.4 (this is Williams’ translation in Williams , M. 2010. “Descartes transformation of the skeptical tradition”, p. 294)
unbearable, and this time not in the sense of anxiety but rather boredom. Namely, as Socrates says, emotions are dependent on beliefs. In line with this, Pyrrhonist life is, in a way, designed to be without any sorts of risks. And we can easily imagine a gambler who would not find a satisfaction in gaining ataraxia, if that is preventing him to enjoy all the passion he can find in risking. Again, whatever the effect on others may be, as long as their method provides them with tranquility, Pyrrhonists have gained their goal, and beliefs of others are not to spoil it.

Obviously, it may be discussed whether the Pyrrhonist arguments are of the adequate strength, persuasiveness or even if they lead to a preferable goal. But, once when isosteneia is recognized and appreciated, there is no way back. First epohe, and after it ataraxia follows. And, what is of a big importance, after reaching these states there is no space left at all for believing the matter in question. Not in the sense that belief cannot be acquired during the continual inquiry which is compatible with ataraxia, as I discussed it before. But rather, at the very moment, or during the period of ataraxia’s presence, there is no belief as well as no disturbances which are connected with having a belief.

This is not how the things go in Cartesian skepticism. Namely, Cartesian arguments are intended to endanger the basis of human knowledge. These arguments exploit the character of knowledge as deductively closed. Cartesian skepticism actually relies on the Deductive Closure principle for the knowledge, which says that if someone knows $p$, and $p$ is like that to entail $q$, than that person knows $q$ as well. This means that if I know that I have a body, and because the existence of my body implies that I am not dreaming, then I know that I am not dreaming. The same point applies to my knowledge of the existence of the external world, which goes with my knowing that evil demon is not deceiving me, since the existence of the world implies that I am not deceived.

53 Burnyeat, M. F. 1998. “Can the skeptic live his skepticism?”, p. 45
54 Hankinson, R. J. 1995. The Sceptics., p.275
But, both dreaming and evil demon scenarios are constructed in the way which makes it impossible to say for sure whether they are actually realized or not. One cannot know whether he is awake or not, since dreaming and waking states are indiscernible, as well as, for the same reason, one cannot know whether he is being deceived by evil demon or not. If one does not know whether he is dreaming or the evil demon is playing with his mind, then he does not know that he has a body or that the external world exists.

Interestingly, even when presented with Cartesians scenarios, one may still believe that he has a body or that the external world exists. He would have to admit that he does not know these things, but it does not prevent him from believing them. As we have seen, Pyrrhonism does not leave one with that option of believing the thing which is questioned and upon which *isostheneia* is agreed. These differences are recognizable in the ways in which Cartesian and Pyrrhonian skeptic would approach many scientific and philosophical questions.

For instance, we can imagine Teodora who is in love with ‘The X-files’ series and incidentally lives in a town near to the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forest in Arizona. Since she has heard the Travis Walton’s story, she has got obsessed by the possibility of becoming a victim of alien abduction. Teodora’s psychiatrist is by chance a promoter of a strange alternative treatment in which patients are confronted with the skeptical programs. After realizing that it might be that she was dreaming or being deceived by an evil demon and because of that thinks that she saw an UFO, Teodora still could not be sure that this is the case. She would have to admit that she does not know if she saw UFO or not, but since there is still a possibility that she did, she would not let herself stop worrying for her own safety. On the contrary, if psychiatrist would be persistent enough in listing the reasons for and against actual presence of aliens, it may be that they would lead Teodora to consider some of
these as equally balanced. If that happens, it would leave no place for her to believe that aliens threatening her, so she could stop being terrified.

The same goes for someone interested in the life after death, such as shaman from the biggest Roma community on Balkan – Shutka, FYR Macedonia. He is, like his other fellow citizens who are champions in possessing the best clothes, best Turkish music tapes, best looking wife, himself the champion in exorcism of evil spirits, who also believes that our souls after death get twisted in trees crowns. In order to prevent his soul to be born in Shutka again, this shaman dedicatedly cuts leaves on every tree in his village. If in Shutka there was some champion in philosophy, he could present shaman with skepticism. Again, only Pyrrhonist approach would possibly save Shutka’s trees from devastation, since it would leave shaman without any belief about destiny of his soul whatsoever.

In line with this is the Pyrrhonists attitude towards religion. Namely, in the mentioned fourfold scheme, respecting the pieties falls under ‘the handing down of laws and customs’. Pyrrhonists are thus able to act as others of their contemporaries when worshiping Olympic gods – they can, together with all the others, enjoy the Dionysius feasts, immolate oxes to Zeus, etc. But what distinguishes Pyrrhonists from their fellow citizens is their suspension of judgment on whether these gods actually exists or not. On the contrary, Cartesian doubt seems to be compatible with having a belief about God’s existence. If it were to Descartes, as we know, Cartesian arguments actually open a space for determining indubitable, clear and distinct ideas, among which is the idea of God, that in fact serves as the criteria for other clear and distinct ideas. However, sharing Descartes’ intuitions or not, the truth is that even though a person is deceived by an evil demon he still can believe in God’s existence, although he cannot have a certain knowledge about it.

The reason for illustrated differences lies in the different concerns of the two skepticisms that are discussed in the beginning of this paper. Again, Cartesian doubt is a
methodological one. In order to get certain knowledge it is important to clear it of all suspicious, unreliable parts. This does not exclude the possibility of having beliefs about some suspicious matters, which, as we have seen, Pyrrhonism does not allow. This is because Pyrrhonism is not troubled with pure theoretical concerns as Cartesianism, but with vivid, practical ones. In order to acquire life worth of living in accordance to Pyrrhonist standards, one is not to have beliefs either about the existence of aliens (or strumphs for that matter), or about important epistemological questions such as the existence of God or soul. However, one of the consequences of different motivations of these two skeptical approaches is that Pyrrhonism is stronger than Cartesianism in the relevant epistemological sense, since it attacks the very possibility of belief, unlike Cartesianism which stays content only with problematizing the concept of knowledge. While Pyrrhonian skepticism operates on the level of beliefs, Cartesianism stays on the knowledge level.
Conclusion

In the end, it seems that Pyrrhonian skepticism has a particular strength and that it was not dug out from the dust of the centuries without a good reason. If not as an effective therapeutic method for gaining the happy life, then Pyrrhonian skepticism, armed with its Modes, can still serve at least as a very powerful weapon for testing the plausibility of the already accepted opinions and theories.

We have seen how much Cartesianism and Pyrrhonism differ in their intended goals. The theoretical orientation of Cartesian skepticism pushed it towards suspecting, firstly the reliability of our perception, and then the existence of particular objects as well as the whole external world. On the contrary, practical concerns and historical circumstances in which they lived, as well as the defensive character of their skepticism, prevented Pyrrhonists from drawing the same conclusions from the same data as Cartesians do.

This is why we should accept Pyrrhonism as purely essential. But that is not to be accepted as the implication which can be drawn from the Burnyaet’s interpretation of Pyrrhonian thought, since it does not go in line with Sextus’ writings.

Even though it does not expand its scope to the level which makes it universal, as in the case of Cartesianism, Pyrrhonism is to be respected as one remarkable enterprise, since that it is not just that the things that are members of its scope cannot be known, but what is more, they even cannot be believed in. And this is what very well goes in line with a remark of editors of The Original Skeptics, who characterize the skepticism which is discussed in the modern philosophy as ‘a pale and impoverished version of the ancient original’.55

55 Burnyeat, M and Frede, M (eds.). The Original Skeptics: A Controversy, p. ix
References


