



Inquiry, value, and some peculiarities of the Pyrrhonist's psychology

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Abstract

This paper offers a new psychological reading of the Pyrrhonian Skeptic and their way of life (the so-called Skeptic Way). The Pyrrhonist, I suggest, has three peculiar psychological hallmarks: (1) she is psychologically compelled to inquire after the truth, (2) she is persistently and repeatedly disturbed by anomaly in the facts, and (3) she is able to achieve tranquility (*ataraxia*) as a result of suspension of judgment (*epochē*). This new psychological interpretation has two payoffs. First, it helps us resolve the “inquiry problem”—how can the Pyrrhonist possibly engage in genuine inquiry into the truth, when it also seems to the Pyrrhonist that holding beliefs of any kind, but particularly evaluative beliefs, causes psychological disturbance? Second, it allows us to appreciate a new kind of value for Pyrrhonism, what I term *psychological value*. We can discern two distinct types of *ataraxia*, both a moderate type resulting from the simple, temporary cessation of inquiry and a more significant, enduring type achieved by failing to hold any evaluative beliefs. On the whole, the Pyrrhonist fares better than the non-Pyrrhonist by acquiring both forms of *ataraxia* more regularly.

Keywords Pyrrhonism · Skepticism · Inquiry · Psychology · Value · Ataraxia

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1 Introduction

This paper offers a new psychological reading of the Pyrrhonian Skeptic and their way of life (the so-called Skeptic Way), which aims to do two things.¹ The first is to provide a better understanding of who the Pyrrhonist is (i.e., what is her psychology?), what she does (i.e., how should we understand her suspension of judgment and its connection to certain positive psychological effects?), and why she does it (i.e., what value, if any, does the Skeptic Way have?). Thus, I aim to propose a new psychological lens and interpretive tool through which we can better understand the Pyrrhonist. The second is to ameliorate a tension regarding the Pyrrhonist's apparent jeopardized status as an inquirer, which contemporary philosophers have noted arises from three claims Sextus Empiricus makes about the character and practices of the Pyrrhonist: (1) the Pyrrhonist is zetetic, i.e., an inquirer after the truth; (2) the Pyrrhonist aims to achieve tranquility (*ataraxia*) and does so by a suspension of judgment (*epochē*); (3) it seems to the Pyrrhonist that holding beliefs of any kind, but particularly evaluative beliefs about what things are good or bad and should or should not be pursued (i.e., morally, prudentially, pragmatically, epistemically), causes psychological disturbance (*tarachē*).² Thus, my second aim is to solve a problem that scholars take the Pyrrhonist to be facing by appealing to this new interpretative resource, namely, what I argue are some notable hallmarks of the Pyrrhonist's atypical psychology.

In brief, I will suggest that the Pyrrhonist has three peculiar psychological hallmarks. The first hallmark is that she is, in a very strong sense, psychologically compelled to inquire after the truth. This isn't simply an incidental aspect of her philosophical practice, but one deeply rooted in her psychology, in that her practice of inquiring after the truth isn't reasons-responsive—she's unable to stop herself from continuously investigating the truth concerning some anomaly in the facts, even if it seems to her that her sought-after psychological tranquility can be achieved without any such inquiry. The second hallmark is that she is persistently and repeatedly dis-

¹ Eichorn (2020, pp. 188–197) overviews the debate between rational and psychological readings of Pyrrhonism, particularly concerning suspension of judgment (*epochē*) and equipollence (*isostheneia*); see also Thorsrud (2009, pp. 128–130). Those sympathetic to the psychological interpretation include Williams (1988), Morrison (1990), and Bett (2019). Those sympathetic to the rational interpretation include Striker (1996, pp. 95–96), Perin (2010), and Vogt (2012). My paper extends the debate to inquiry as well as *epochē* and *isostheneia*. There is a larger question of whether Pyrrhonism is psychologically possible at all. Although this question has been taken up by Burnyeat (1998), Frede (1998), Barnes (1998), and Ribeiro (2002), I suspect this to be an open empirical question, one that is unlikely to be settled solely by philosophical argumentation. In this paper, I take Sextus at his word and assume that Pyrrhonism is possible, at least for some people. The present paper may have some bearing on this larger debate but does not aim to argue for Pyrrhonism's psychological possibility directly. Instead, my focus is on the narrower question of how some people, for whom Pyrrhonism is psychologically possible, could still engage in genuine inquiry. I thus leave open the possibility that the universal suspension of the Pyrrhonist is not psychologically possible, which, if true, would render much of the philosophical literature on Pyrrhonism (including the present paper) argumentatively moot. However, barring definitive empirical proof to the contrary, I believe there is still philosophically fruitful work to be done by working under the assumption that Pyrrhonism is psychologically possible.

² On whether the Pyrrhonist can engage in genuine inquiry, see Sedley (1983), Burnyeat (1998), Palmer (2000), Striker (2001), Grgic (2006), Thorsrud (2009), Marchand (2010), Perin (2010), Vogt (2012), Machuca (2013), Bett (2019), and Smith (2022).

turbed by anomaly in the facts. I will argue that while this isn't the only source of psychological disturbance for the Pyrrhonist, it is one which distinguishes her from both philosophical dogmatists and everyday people. The third hallmark is that she is able to achieve tranquility as a result of suspension of judgment. Many people wouldn't find anything remotely comforting about being at such a complete loss concerning what to believe that it resulted in a kind of doxastic failure where they couldn't form any belief at all on the matter; however, for the Pyrrhonist, this same doxastic failure yields not psychological distress but relief.

This new psychological interpretation of Pyrrhonism, I believe, has two payoffs. First, it can resolve the supposed incompatibility between Pyrrhonism and genuine inquiry into the truth.³ Second, it can help us appreciate a new kind of value of the Sceptic Way and the Pyrrhonist herself, what I will term psychological value. More specifically, it can help us discern two distinct types of *ataraxia*, both a moderate type of *ataraxia* resulting from the simple, temporary cessation of inquiry and a more significant, enduring type of *ataraxia* achieved by failing to hold any evaluative beliefs.

Before proceeding, I would like, as Sextus does in the *PH*, to add a caveat at the outset. Although this paper makes specific proposals regarding various aspects of the Pyrrhonist's psychology, the larger thesis I remain most interested in and committed to advancing is that there is *something* peculiar about her psychology and that attending to this psychological peculiarity can shed philosophical light both on the problem of inquiry and on the value of the Sceptic Way. My hope for the paper is that it will offer others interested in the Pyrrhonists a new framework to use in considering their philosophy. As to the finite details of the hallmarks—I am much less committed, but rather, as Sextus says, “as regards none of the things that we are about to say do we firmly maintain that matters are absolutely as stated, but in each instance we are simply reporting, like a chronicler, what now appears to us to be the case” (*PH* 1.4).⁴

2 Pyrrhonists are strange

Pyrrhonists are very strange individuals. Perhaps as a result of emphasizing features of Pyrrhonism which pose particular philosophical threat (e.g., the problem of the criterion, Agrippa's trilemma, the skeptical Modes and their ramification for knowledge) or by focusing on the coherence of their philosophical outlook (e.g., whether they are able to engage in action at all—the so-called *apraxia* charge—or whether they really do live without belief [*adoxastōs*]), it often escapes notice just how peculiar Pyrrhonists are *as persons*. If we conceive of Pyrrhonism as we do the other ancient philosophical schools—as a philosophy that's meant to be lived and that's meant to be attractive as a way of addressing problems and living well—then someone for whom

³ This paper primarily discusses Sextus Empiricus' *Outlines of Pyrrhonism (PH)* and *Against the Ethicists (M 11)* for two reasons: (1) the majority of Sextus' direct description of what the Pyrrhonist is like and his criticism of those who hold evaluative beliefs are found here and (2) the scholars who have considered whether there's a tension between Pyrrhonism and genuine inquiry have suggested that the tension is owed to what Sextus asserts here.

⁴ Unless otherwise marked, translations of *PH* are from Mates (1996) and translations of *M* are from Bett (1997, 2012).

Pyrrhonism is suitable is psychologically peculiar along three dimensions: (1) the kind of psychological activity she compulsively engages in, (2) the kind of things that cause her psychological distress, and (3) the kind of psychological capacity she has for alleviating that distress. These, I submit, constitute three particular psychological hallmarks the Pyrrhonist has which distinguish her from other persons.

3 Hallmark 1: recurrent inquiry

In giving an account of the Pyrrhonist's psychology, it's helpful to begin where Sextus does in the *PH*, with a primary activity that characterizes the Pyrrhonist, namely, that she is an *inquirer* after the truth:

When people search for something, the likely outcome is that either they find it or, not finding it, they accept that it cannot be found, or they continue to search. So also in the case of what is sought in philosophy, I think, some people have claimed to have found the truth, others have asserted that it cannot be apprehended, and others are still searching. Those who think they have found it are the Dogmatists, properly so called—for example, the followers of Aristotle and Epicurus, the Stoics, and certain others. The followers of Cleitomachus and Carneades, as well as other Academics, have asserted that it cannot be apprehended. The Skeptics continue to search. (*PH* 1.1–3)

And again:

The Skeptic Way is called Zetetic [“questioning”] from its activity in questioning and inquiring, Ephectic [“suspensive”] from the *pathos* that arises concerning the subject of inquiry, Aporetic [“inclined to *aporiai*”] either, as some say, from its being puzzled and questioning about everything or from its being at a loss as to whether to assent or dissent. (*PH* 1.7)

Sextus characterizes inquiry not as a merely occasional activity, but as constitutive of the Skeptic Way. There are two important points to observe here. The first is that the Pyrrhonist's inquiry is *ongoing*. The Skeptic, notably, *continues* to search, and this is reflected in the Greek; the verbs for searching at *PH* 1.1–3 are both present tense (*zētousi*) and the inclusion of the adverb “still” (*eti*) indicates that we should understand them in a present progressive sense rather than as reflecting completed actions. There's no mention here that the Pyrrhonist *stops* searching at any point, even if they're also characterized as suspensive. While the Pyrrhonist might provisionally suspend, representing a temporary interruption in the inquiring process (for one cannot suspend and inquire at exactly the same time), Sextus' description unequivocally tells us that inquiring is a perpetually recurrent process for the Pyrrhonist. This is so important for Pyrrhonism that Sextus chooses recurrent inquiry as the main point of contrast between the Pyrrhonist and those belonging to the other philosophical schools. This is notable, for there are other features he could have chosen, e.g., that the Pyrrhonist lives entirely without belief (*adoxastōs*). The second is that Sextus

chooses to give primary placement to this feature of the Pyrrhonist. The Pyrrhonist *qua* inquirer is placed (a) at the opening of the whole work and (b) prior to other important characteristics, such as being suspensive and aporetic. I take this to be a conscious and significant decision on Sextus' part, for he just as easily could have begun the work with the Pyrrhonist's goal (*ataraxia* and *metriopatheia*, *PH* 1.25–26) or the Skeptic's characteristic ability (*dunamis*, *PH* 1.8–10), leaving this zetetic distinguishing feature for later (perhaps at the end of *PH* 1 where he addresses further distinctions between the Pyrrhonist and other philosophical schools). I take this to mean that, for Sextus, inquiring is a fundamental characteristic of the Pyrrhonist and the Skeptic Way.

Furthermore, it is crucial to attend to what the Skeptic is said to be searching for in these passages—the truth (*to alēthes*, *PH* 1.2). Some scholars such as Vogt (2012) have suggested that not all forms of inquiry necessarily have truth as their aim, and perhaps, like these, the Skeptic's inquiry is not aimed at the truth directly, and instead merely demonstrates a certain degree of regard for the truth. While there are good reasons to find this reading attractive (reasons I will address more in depth later), I think we must reject such a conception of the Pyrrhonist's inquiry, for Sextus' description of the Skeptic Way here at *PH* 1.1–3 is unambiguous—the Skeptic is a perpetual inquirer after the truth.

One might think the zetetic quality is meant only to apply to the Skeptic Way, not the Pyrrhonist herself. If so, then engaging in inquiry might be a characteristic only of a particular *practice* and not of the *individual*. However, we have evidence that Sextus doesn't restrict his characterization only to an activity, for at *PH* 1.11, he says, "The definition of the Pyrrhonian philosopher is implicitly contained in that of the Skeptic Way: he is a person who has the aforementioned disposition." Some might argue that because this passage follows directly after Sextus describes the Pyrrhonist's disposition to oppose phenomena and noumena at *PH* 1.8–10, and there is no explicit mention of inquiring here, we shouldn't take inquiring to be an essential characteristic of the Pyrrhonist herself. However, I see no reason to think that Sextus' characterization of the Pyrrhonist at *PH* 1.11 should *only* refer to opposing phenomena and noumena. This is because (a) Sextus has already informed us in *PH* 1.1–4 and *PH* 1.7 that the Skeptic Way is also partly constituted by the other psychological features of "inquiring" and "puzzlement" (*aporia*), and (b) once the Skeptic learns the practice of opposing phenomena and noumena, it becomes part and parcel of her inquiring. Consequently, when Sextus claims that the definition of the Pyrrhonian philosopher is implicitly contained in the Skeptic Way, it's reasonable to interpret Sextus as claiming that inquiring is constitutive of the Pyrrhonist herself.

There are, however, multiple ways we might understand what it means for inquiring to be constitutive of the Pyrrhonist. On one interpretation, inquiring is simply a *characteristic activity* of the Pyrrhonist. Activities can have many motivations. One might engage in inquiry to prove an opponent wrong or to satisfy the needs of one's profession (e.g., a detective, a scientist, a medical researcher), but in such cases the inquiring needn't be a feature of one's psychology. Such people might not be inquirers by nature, and their inquiring might not be a dispositional or constitutive feature of their psychology. Importantly, inquiry *qua* activity is a deliberate choice the individual makes and is something she can *refrain* from doing if she so chooses.

Alternatively, we can interpret inquiring as a *persistent psychological disposition* of the Pyrrhonist. On this interpretation, the Pyrrhonist inquires not because of some external motivation, but because she's compelled by internal features of her psychology. The Pyrrhonist's inquiry after the truth should be read as a kind of irresistible urge to search—it isn't something that she can set aside or stop doing, precisely because the cause of her inquiring isn't rational but psychological—she's psychologically *compelled* to inquire after the truth. To get a clearer picture of this kind of psychological compulsion, consider the case of someone whose psychology compels them to repeatedly check that the front door is locked. Such persons don't check the door because they think it rational to do so, but because they experience a deep psychological impulse to check. In cases such as these, the individual experiences a persistent urge to check the door that's prompted by a kind of psychological disturbance, which can only be alleviated by compulsively checking. Notably, when one has a psychological compulsion of this kind, the individual may even recognize that she has good reason not to engage in the activity. For example, she may believe that the door is locked; she may admit that her impulse is arational and stems from her neurodivergent psychology; she may even acknowledge that the compulsive checking is harmful or conflicts with her other aims; nevertheless, she still may feel compelled to check. Thus, inquiring *qua* psychological characteristic isn't a deliberate and rational choice made by the Pyrrhonist, but an arational, compulsive disposition to search for the truth. This isn't to say that the Pyrrhonist cannot have rational reasons for inquiring, only that her inquiring *needn't* have any such rational reasons. Even lacking good reason to inquire (and, as I will discuss later, even having good reason to *refrain* from inquiring), she will still inquire because she's compelled to do so by her psychology. In this way the Pyrrhonist's disposition to continue inquiring isn't reasons-responsive (see Fischer & Ravizza, 1998), for her inquiry isn't (entirely) sensitive to reasons for or against her engaging in inquiry. She doesn't, in a thick sense, *choose* to inquire. She inquires because it's in her nature and it's constitutive of her atypical psychology.⁵

4 Hallmark 2: anomaly as a source of disturbance

But why interpret the Pyrrhonist's inquiring as a persistent psychological disposition rather than a characteristic activity? I maintain that Sextus gives us good reason to adopt the former interpretation because of one of the attested sources of the Pyrrhonist's psychological disturbance:

⁵ I am not here claiming that the Pyrrhonist's atypical psychology is the same as that of the neurodivergent person who is obsessive-compulsive, if "neurodivergence" is to be narrowly construed as only designating individuals with observable markers in the brain that deviate from the norm. There is obviously no way of knowing if Pyrrhonists have such observable markers without subjecting them to a brain scan. Since "neurodivergence" is not a medical term, however, it can be construed more broadly, to encompass individuals who demonstrate certain behaviors, even in the absence of markers that would be observable on a scan. Nevertheless, since some construe neurodivergence in the narrower way, I have chosen "psychologically atypical," intending it to be a relatively general and neutral term that does not invoke any clinical diagnosis or neurobiological causal mechanism.

We say that the inchoative principle of the Skeptic Way is the hope of attaining *ataraxia*. Certain talented people [*megalophueis*], disturbed [*tarassomenoi*] by anomaly in “the facts” and at a loss [*aporountes*] as to which of these “facts” deserve assent, endeavored to discover what is true in them and what is false, expecting that by settling this they would achieve *ataraxia*. But the main principle of Skepticism is the practice of opposing to each statement an equal statement; it seems to us that doing this brings an end to dogmatizing. (*PH* 1.12, trans. Mates, 1996, adapted)

We are told here that for this particular group of individuals there are two sources of psychological disturbance. The first is the feeling of distress (*tarachē*) resulting from an apparent incongruity in some states of affairs—the anomaly in the facts. The second is the feeling of confusion (*aporia*) that ensues from the Pyrrhonist’s considering which propositions to assent to (which are true, and which are false). Put differently, the first kind of disturbance results from the Pyrrhonist noticing the incongruity in the states of affairs themselves, while the second kind of disturbance results from the Pyrrhonist considering what is said about the states of affairs.⁶ Machuca, however, has argued that it’s not the anomalies themselves that are the source of disturbance but rather the Pyrrhonist’s being unable to determine how to settle the unresolved conflicts in the appearances:

Judging by *PH* I.12, it seems that it is the very existence of an *anomalía* that was the cause of disturbance, since it is first said that the prospective sceptic was disturbed by the *anomalía* in things and it is then remarked that he was unable to determine which of the conflicting appearances exhibited by things he should assent to. However, at *PH* I.12 itself, and also at *PH* I.26 and 29, we are told that the prospective sceptic thought that he could become undisturbed by resolving the *anomalía*, or by deciding among the appearances, or by distinguishing what is true in things and what is false. This means that he took disturbance to be caused by existence of *unresolved* conflicts of appearances, that is, by the fact of being in a state of *aporia* as to how to settle them. Hence, it is not the existence of a conflict of appearances per se but the inability thus far to resolve it that brings about distress and anxiety. (2019a, pp. 197–198)

I think we have good reasons to question Machuca’s interpretation here. For one, Sextus clearly states that the Pyrrhonist is troubled by more than one thing, for he links the clauses with the conjunction “and” (*kai*) to mark a distinction between the disturbance at the anomaly in the facts *and* the confusion that ensues regarding which of the things said about the facts he should assent to. Sextus classifies the former as disturbance (*tarachē*) and the latter as confusion (*aporia*). While I agree with

⁶ Sextus himself makes this distinction: “And when we question whether the external object is such as it appears, we grant that it does appear, and we are not raising a question about the appearance but rather about what is said about the appearance; this is different than raising a question about the appearance itself. For example, the honey appears to us to be sweet. This we grant for we taste the sweetness. But whether the honey *is* sweet we question insofar as this has to do with the theory, for that theory is not the appearance, but something said about the appearance” (*PH* 1.10).

Machuca that the Pyrrhonist's *aporia* is a kind of disturbance, it's important to note that Sextus clearly regards the *aporia* as distinct from the *tarachē*, and it's *only* the anomaly in the facts that Sextus cites as disturbance. Thus, Machuca's claim that the disturbance Sextus attributes to the Pyrrhonist is *only* the *aporia* cannot be correct.

An additional reason for keeping these two concepts separate is that if we take the *aporia* to be the source of disturbance, it's unclear what prompts the Pyrrhonist to begin considering what is true or false in the appearances at all. As Machuca himself states, the Pyrrhonist thought she could become undisturbed by resolving the anomaly, but this means that the disturbance is *prior* to any confusion she feels in considering which of the conflicting things said about the anomaly are true or false. Machuca's interpretation would mean that the Pyrrhonist sees some anomaly in the facts and then, *just because*, begins the unsuccessful process of trying to resolve what is said about them, and it's the lack of success in this process that constitutes both the Pyrrhonist's confusion and her disturbance. But this cannot be correct, for it's precisely *because the Pyrrhonist is disturbed* that she's motivated to consider which appearances are true and which are false. Unfortunately, the propositions about those states of affairs are conflicting and, moreover, feel equipollent, such that she becomes confused as to which to assent to.

Some philosophers have noted that it's difficult to see why anyone would be greatly disturbed by the anomaly in the facts, especially anomaly of the kind Sextus often points to—e.g., whether the honey is sweet, that the tower looks round from one position and square from another, whether the wine is sour, that snow that appears white sometimes appears dark in color, or that the good fare ill and the bad fare well. Mates, for example, writes:

I have known few—very few—philosophers to whom the problem of “our knowledge of the external world” was seriously upsetting...But as to the common man, on such questions as whether it really is the case that the honey is sweet or that the wine is sour, it is hard to see why he would be particularly upset by the conflicting evidence, or if he were, how Pyrrhonism could offer any more help than perhaps the advice to stop worrying about that and be content with appearances. (1996, p. 63)

I concur with Mates here; even if the ordinary person were to perceive any incongruity in states of affairs, the psychological response is more likely to be either that (a) they ignore the incongruity altogether or (b) they end up affirming one of the conflicting propositions about the states of affairs as true. That the Pyrrhonist is both disturbed by these anomalies and subsequently feels confusion about what to assent to is psychologically atypical. But that this is atypical shouldn't be surprising to us, for Sextus tells us directly that this kind of disturbance is only applicable to those who already have a certain *nature*—the *megalophueis* (PH 1.12). The two components of the word, *megalo-* “great” and *phueis* “to be or to possess by nature,” suggest that the Pyrrhonist possesses by nature—that is, innately—some great capacity. Often the phrase is translated “men of talent,” which attempts to render into English the innateness of this Pyrrhonist feature (Annas & Barnes, 1994; Mates, 1996; Bett, 2012). The full phrase, *hoi gar megalophueis tōn anthrōpon* “the *megalophueis* of humankind,”

uses a partitive genitive in Greek, indicating that the *megalophueis* are a subset of humankind; that is, not everyone is *megalophueis*. Sextus uses *megalophueis* elsewhere only once, where the term is contrasted with ordinary people: “even if we have to leave aside the notions of ordinary people and trust the clever men of the most talent” (*M* 9.63). Being *megalophueis*, therefore, is a natural and innate trait that only certain atypical people possess. Additionally, there seems to be an intellectual dimension to being *megalophueis*, since it’s paired with *sunetos* “clever, wise” (*M* 9.63).⁷ Back in *PH* 1.12, it seems that the Pyrrhonists have a distinctive *type* of abnormal intellectual natural capacity—they are those who, being “upset by anomaly in ‘the facts’ and at a loss as to which of these ‘facts’ deserve assent, endeavored to discover what is true in them and what is false, expecting that by settling this they would achieve *ataraxia*.” We ought not, therefore, take the anomaly in the facts to be a source of mental disturbance for everyone, but only for those who have a certain innate and natural psychological disposition. I think Sextus’ description of the Pyrrhonist indicates one way that the Pyrrhonist is psychologically atypical as compared to other people. They are psychologically disturbed by things most people barely notice, and furthermore, they find themselves in a state of confusion about conflicting propositions which most people either simply disregard or between which they can easily decide.

Some philosophers have interpreted *PH* 1.12 as describing either (1) the Pyrrhonists of old—that is, the founding fathers of Pyrrhonism—or (2) a kind of proto-Pyrrhonist or the “Skeptic-to-be,” and claim that once one becomes a “full-blown Pyrrhonist” the anomaly in the facts no longer poses any disturbance.⁸ I take there to be two issues with such an interpretation. The first is that Sextus himself never draws any such distinction between the Skeptic-to-be and the full-blown Skeptic,

⁷ Smith (2022, pp. 25–27) speculates that the talents of the *megalophueis* might also include having a good memory (*M* 1.52), a desire to learn (*M* 1.42), a formal education (*M* 1.5), and moral traits of character (*M* 1.6).

⁸ Perin (2010, p. 14, p. 17), Machuca (2013, pp. 207–210), Machuca (2019a, p. 198), Bett (2019, p. 173), and Eichorn (2020, p. 201). A yet third approach, suggested by an anonymous reviewer, takes the *megalophueis* as referring to the dogmatists. One piece of evidence that might favor this view is that Sextus uses “but” (*de*) halfway through the passage, which could be taken to indicate a contrast between the Pyrrhonists and some other group. I find this interpretation unconvincing for two reasons. The first reason is that while the Greek cannot definitively provide a solution to this interpretative dispute, the placement of the particles *men* and *de* speaks in favor of contrasting the two types of *principles (archai)* that account for the Pyrrhonist’s activities. The second reason is that unless we are to take *megalophueis* sarcastically, it would be odd for Sextus to praise the dogmatists when he seems to take such delight in deriding them throughout his corpus. Veres (2020) has advanced a similar reading, arguing that the *megalophueis* refers to both the dogmatists and the Pyrrhonists—in order to make sense of Sextus’ claim at *PH* 3.280 about the Pyrrhonist’s philanthropy, the *megalophueis* must include dogmatists as well as Pyrrhonists “to advertise his position as an attractive way out of dogmatism” and “to secure common ground for the ongoing arbitration between Sceptics and dogmatists” (2020, p. 104). However, I argue in Sect. 7 for an alternative way of understanding the Pyrrhonist’s philanthropy that does not rely on interpreting *megalophueis* as referring to the dogmatist. Smith (2022, pp. 21–29) thinks that the *megalophueis* are talented proto-philosophers who might end up as Pyrrhonists, Academic Sceptics, or dogmatists. I am hesitant to accept such a reading, for Sextus is describing the principles (*archai*) of the *Skeptic Way*, a fact indicated both by the title of the section and that he seems to be attributing both principles to Pyrrhonism specifically (*tēs skeptikēs*, *PH* 1.12). Note that even if Veres’s or Smith’s reading is correct, this would only result in (1) the Pyrrhonists sharing one hallmark with other philosophers rather than lacking it, and (2) the Pyrrhonists still possessing two further hallmarks that distinguish them from other philosophers.

a point which Machuca (2013, p. 207) himself concedes. All Sextus informs us of at *PH* 1.12 is that the inceptive reasons for the inquiry of the *megalophueis* are that they're troubled by anomaly in the facts. I see no grounds for attributing to Sextus the additional claim that the *megalophueis* are only the Skeptics of old and that the moniker isn't also applicable to the present-day Skeptics.⁹ Moreover, even if we were to take Sextus to be drawing a distinction between the amazing *megalophueis* Pyrrhonists of old and the Skeptics nowadays who aren't *megalophueis*, this doesn't in any way imply that both groups can't share a common source of psychological disturbance. I am equally unconvinced that we should read into this passage any division between a Skeptic-to-be and a full-blown Skeptic. For if there were such a division, then employing such an interpretation would compel us to view Sextus as asserting that it's the Skeptic-to-be who is *megalophueis*, while the full-blown Skeptic isn't.¹⁰ Given that *megalophueis* seems to connote something admirable, it would be odd if Sextus were applying such an approbatory title to those who have *not* yet become full-blown Skeptics, and who, presumably, would then cease to be *megalophueis* once they reach full-blown Skeptic status.

The second reason for rejecting such an interpretation is that those who advocate for it must explain why, if it's only the Skeptic-to-be who's troubled by anomaly in the facts, the full-blown Skeptic no longer endures this kind of disturbance. As Machuca notes, "Now, what is striking is that the conflicts of appearances remain unresolved once the prospective sceptic becomes a full-blown sceptic—such a lack of resolution is precisely what makes him suspend his judgment—but nowhere does Sextus explain why the unresolved conflicts do not cause disturbance anymore" (2019a, p. 198). This interpretation, then, generates an unnecessary philosophical problem. Instead, I suggest that the reason Sextus provides no explanation for why the anomaly no longer causes a disturbance is precisely because the anomaly still *does* cause a recurrent disturbance for the Pyrrhonist. Sextus is quite clear about another source of psychological disturbance that the Pyrrhonist avoids—namely the holding of evaluative beliefs about what is good or bad. For example, he maintains that "the Skeptic, by eliminating the additional belief that all these things are naturally bad, gets off more moderately here as well" (*PH* 1.30, see also *PH* 3.235–238, *M* 11.110–118, 11.141–167). Nowhere does Sextus similarly indicate that the anomaly has ceased to be a source of disturbance for the Pyrrhonist. In the absence of explicit assertions to the contrary, I maintain that we should assume that the anomaly represents a recurrent source of psychological disturbance for the Pyrrhonist.

Thus, given that Sextus never distinguishes between a Skeptic-to-be who's troubled by anomaly and a full-blown Skeptic who's no longer disturbed by this same anomaly, I think we ought to understand the psychological disturbance caused by the anomaly as something which persists for *all* Pyrrhonists. This interpretation posits only *one* kind of Skeptic rather than two, and a defining feature of the Pyrrhonist is her having another type of persistent atypical psychology—she is recurrently disturbed by anomaly in the facts. The advantage of reading Sextus in the way I suggest

⁹ Mates (1996, p. 62) agrees: "The Skeptic, of course, is one of these 'talented people'."

¹⁰ Saying that a person did something in the past doesn't imply that they didn't also do that later on. Compare the classic Mitch Hedberg joke, "I used to do drugs. I still do, but I used to too."

here is twofold: (1) it's more in keeping with what Sextus says in the text, and thus we avoid attributing to Sextus a distinction he himself doesn't make between a Skeptic-to-be and a full-blown Skeptic, and (2) it doesn't give rise to the additional problem of explaining why the full-blown Skeptic is no longer disturbed although the anomaly persists. Given that being recurrently disturbed by anomaly in the facts is psychologically atypical, and that this kind of recurrent disturbance is applicable to all Pyrrhonists, I take "being disturbed by anomaly in the facts" to be another hallmark of the Pyrrhonist's psychology.

This second psychological hallmark can elucidate why the Pyrrhonist continuously inquires into the truth of everything. Because the Pyrrhonist is recurrently disturbed by anomaly in the facts, she's motivated to engage ongoingly in inquiry. The psychological disturbance she experiences *qua* anomaly will repeatedly arise for the Pyrrhonist given her atypical psychology, and in being disturbed she won't be able to refrain from inquiring. Thus, the first psychological hallmark of the Pyrrhonist psychology is explained by the second. Because these are features of the Pyrrhonist's psychology—her nature—this process of disturbance-then-inquiry will be both cyclical (it will occur again and again) and stable (it's a feature that won't and, in fact, *can't* be eliminated), for these are the very features which, in part, make her a Pyrrhonist.

5 Hallmark 3: the ability to derive *ataraxia* from *epochē*

There's one further way in which the Pyrrhonist's psychology diverges from the norm, and that is the capacity by which she is able to resolve the disturbance she feels. Sextus tells us that the Pyrrhonist has a certain *dunamis*, variously translated as "disposition", "power", or "ability":

The Skeptic Way is an ability (*dunamis*) to oppose phenomena and noumena to one another in any way whatever, with the result that, owing to the equipollence among the things and statements thus opposed, we are brought first to *epochē* and then to *ataraxia*. (*PH* 1.8–9)

While this ability is clearly one that defines the Pyrrhonist, there's some debate about how far this ability extends. For example, Machuca, in criticizing Perin's (2010) interpretation of the passage, argues that "the central aspect of this ability is the juxtaposing of conflicting appearances, which turn out to strike the person exercising the ability as equipollent" (2013, p. 211).¹¹ Similarly, Bett characterizes the Pyrrhonist's ability as being able "to engage in philosophical argument on multiple sides of a question. As I said, Sextus says that the Skeptic is marked by having the 'ability' to assemble opposing arguments and impressions on any given topic in such a way that they have for the reader or listener, the characteristic of 'equal strength' (*isostheneia*)" (2019, p. 174; see also 2019, p. 110). The reason, I think, for such a reading hinges on whether one takes the result clause as wholly independent of the first clause

¹¹ Machuca (2006, 2020) goes so far as to say that *ataraxia* isn't a defining feature of Pyrrhonism at all.

or as an integral part of one large noun clause describing the ability.¹² Put differently, the question is whether the Skeptic Way is solely the ability “to oppose phenomena and noumena to one another in any way whatever,” or whether the ability that is the Skeptic Way extends to include the clause “with the result that, owing to the equipollence among the things and statements thus opposed, we are brought first to *epochē* and then to *ataraxia*.” Nothing about the Greek syntax leads us to favor one over the other; semantically, the content of the result clause could easily be contained within the ability of the Skeptic.

One reason to think it extends beyond simply opposing the phenomena and noumena is that this ability is supposed to be one that is specific to the Pyrrhonist and the Skeptic Way, rather than one also possessed by non-Pyrrhonists, that is, both ordinary people and dogmatic philosophers. But if we interpret that ability, as some scholars have, as *only* the ability to oppose phenomena and noumena, this is hardly an ability which is idiosyncratic to the Pyrrhonist. Indeed, being able to consider, for example, how things appear differently between this person and that person, or this person and that animal, is a capacity that appears in other non-Pyrrhonist philosophers as far back as the Presocratics, and even by those who aren't philosophers at all such as the sophists and rhetoricians.¹³ Sextus himself saw the need to clarify that it *isn't* the ability to oppose phenomena and noumena that defines the Pyrrhonist, for he explicitly demarcates between the Pyrrhonist and the Heraclitean along these very lines: “But we reply to them that opposites' appearing to be the case about the same thing is not a dogma of the Sceptics but a matter occurring not only to the Sceptics but also to the other philosophers, and, indeed, to all mankind” (PH 1.210). Shortly thereafter, when delineating how the Pyrrhonist differs from the Protagorean, he notes that insofar as Protagorean relativism involves opposing what appears to each person, “he [Protagoras] too seems to have something in common with the Pyrrhoneans” (PH 1.216).

What *is* specific to the Pyrrhonists is that, unlike other people, they're able to achieve *ataraxia* as a result of being brought to *epochē*. For most ordinary people, this isn't so; many would find the state of confusion and suspension of judgment frustrating and demoralizing rather than productive of tranquility. Sextus himself gives us additional reason to include the achievement of *ataraxia* as a result of *epochē* within the scope of the Pyrrhonist's particular ability. Following the straightforward description of the ability, he unpacks its composite parts, namely, what he means by the terms “ability,” “to oppose phenomena and noumena,” “in any way whatever,” “opposed,” “equipollence,” “*epochē*,” and “*ataraxia*” (PH 1.9–10). If the Pyrrhonist's ability were *only* the ability to oppose phenomena and noumena, it seems odd that Sextus would further define both *epochē* and *ataraxia* as technical terms. I take this as evidence in favor of interpreting the Pyrrhonist's ability as encompassing the

¹² Nussbaum (1994, p. 286) has also noted these two different ways of reading the passage; see also Machuca (2020, p. 438).

¹³ For example, Heraclitus opposes how gold is perceived differently by human beings and asses and how burial practices are viewed differently between cultures; Protagoras and Gorgias argue for relativity on the grounds that different things appear differently to different people; and rhetoricians such as Antiphon with his *First Tetralogy* or the author of the *Dissoi Logoi* (*Opposing Arguments*) consider how the phenomena and noumena strike different jury-members in order to make multiple arguments about an issue.

capacity not just to oppose phenomena and noumena but also to achieve *ataraxia* from *epochē*.

That we should view this ability as a feature of the Pyrrhonist's atypical psychology seems clear from the fact that Sextus does not characterize the process by which the Pyrrhonist suspends nor the subsequent tranquility as arising from a deliberate and rational process but rather as something that passively happens *to her*. For Sextus states that the Pyrrhonist finds herself "held back" (*epechesthai*, *PH* 1.9–10) from assenting to any of the conflicting appearances under investigation, which then compels her to temporarily give up on trying to investigate. This giving up is necessitated not by any determination that she has *reasons* to suspend, but as a result of her *feelings* of being at a loss and puzzled (*aporia*) by the phenomenological fact that the conflicting appearances strike her as equally persuasive (*isostheneia*). There's textual support for this psychological reading in that almost every single reference to the arrival of *epochē* in the *PH* describes it as arising unintentionally. Fourteen of those references are described in terms of compulsion or necessity,¹⁴ eleven references make use of the passive voice,¹⁵ and sixteen references describe the Pyrrhonist as inadvertently "being led to," "being brought to," "ending up with," or "having recourse to" *epochē* (or alternately, that *epochē* "follows" or "is brought around" for the Pyrrhonist).¹⁶ Occasionally, all three techniques are used at once, e.g. "we shall be forced also by this Mode to have recourse to suspension of judgment" (*PH* 1.121). In a way, the Pyrrhonist's process represents a kind of doxastic *failure*: she cannot do what she set out to do, namely, discover the truth, and as a result she is forced to give up. This continuous doxastic failure is a product of her divergent Pyrrhonist psychology: she is disposed to investigate into the truth, but she is also disposed to become confused and suspend.¹⁷ But this feature of the Pyrrhonist's psychology isn't merely the fact that she repeatedly encounters this doxastic failure, but that the failure engenders in her feelings of *relief* and *tranquility* rather than distress and despondence. In this way, we can actually construe the Pyrrhonist's doxastic failure (*qua* inquiry into truth) as a kind of success (*qua* attainment of *ataraxia*).¹⁸ Thus, I maintain that the ability to achieve *ataraxia* as a result of *epochē* represents the third hallmark of the Pyrrhonist's psychology.

We can now see how all three hallmarks of the Pyrrhonist's atypical psychology fit together. Constantly inquiring into the truth of everything isn't something that people are typically compelled to do and represents one way in which the Pyrrhonist exhibits an atypical psychology. But what motivates this behavior? The fact that she is repeatedly disturbed by anomaly in the facts—*itself* a second kind of atypicality.

¹⁴ *PH* 1.61, 1.78, 1.89, 1.121, 1.128, 1.140, 1.163, 1.170, 1.175, 1.177, 2.95, 2.192, 3.6, 3.29. See also 3.65. Thorsrud (2008, p. 128) takes the statements about necessity as normative and that the Pyrrhonist "should" suspend; however, he neglects to consider the sort of psychological necessity I am describing here. Perin (2010, pp. 36–38) interprets the necessity as rational, not psychological.

¹⁵ *PH* 1.8, 1.35, 1.36, 1.78, 1.79, 1.89, 1.99, 1.117, 1.121, 1.123, 1.128. See also 3.65.

¹⁶ *PH* 1.8, 1.31, 1.35, 1.36, 1.79, 1.87, 1.88, 1.89, 1.99, 1.117, 1.121, 1.123, 1.134, 1.163, 1.165, 1.166.

¹⁷ This aligns with Sextus' unwillingness to commit to the idea that *epochē* will *always* occur; it just always has in the past because of the Pyrrhonist's character dispositions (*PH* 1.193).

¹⁸ Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for this point.

Finally, the Pyrrhonist's atypical psychology allows her to be able to achieve tranquility as a result of suspension (a type of doxastic failure) where non-Pyrrhonists in such a position would typically feel the opposite. The most significant aspect of these three psychological hallmarks is that they're constitutive and arational features of the Pyrrhonist. Although they're interconnected and mutually supportive, they're not something the Pyrrhonist exercises control over or can refrain from doing. Thus, the Pyrrhonist inquires because she *must*, because she is *unavoidably disturbed* by anomaly in the facts. This unavoidable disturbance, which for most people never arises at all, isn't insurmountable for the Pyrrhonist, because she possesses an atypical and innate ability to derive tranquility from suspending judgment.

6 Solving the inquiry problem

The three psychological hallmarks of the Pyrrhonist may serve as a useful interpretative resource in two ways. First, it can help us resolve the apparent incompatibility between the Pyrrhonist's claim to be an inquirer and Sextus' assertion that those who hold beliefs of any kind, but particularly evaluative beliefs, are perpetually disturbed and anxious:

The person who believes that something is by nature good or bad is constantly upset; when he does not possess the things that seem to be good, he thinks he is being tormented by things that are by nature bad, and he chases after the things he supposes to be good; then, when he gets these, he falls into still more torments because of irrational and immoderate exultation, and, fearing any change, he does absolutely everything in order not to lose the things that seem to him to be good. (*PH* 1.27)

Sextus repeats this same sentiment at *PH* 3.235–238 in describing how, for a person who undergoes surgery, the belief that something bad is happening to them is often worse than the surgery itself, which explains why onlookers will sometimes faint at the sight of surgery while the one actually having the surgery bears up better. Additionally, Sextus contrasts people who have evaluative beliefs with the Pyrrhonists who, “neither affirming nor denying anything casually but bringing everything under examination, teach that for those who suppose that there are good and bad by nature an unhappy life is in store, while for those who make no determinations and suspend judgment ‘Is the easiest human life’” (*M* 11.111; see also *M* 11.141–161).¹⁹

¹⁹ This could lead one to believe that it is in fact the dogmatists, rather than the Pyrrhonists, who have a peculiar psychology. For, despite the fact that their holding of beliefs only leads to a “state of extraordinary disquietude” (*PH* 3.237), they nevertheless continue to dogmatize. Sextus may well have agreed with this assessment, no doubt with some amusement. In response to Sextus, however, the dogmatists would likely reply that it's not holding beliefs *simpliciter* that precludes *ataraxia* but holding the *wrong* beliefs. Although the various dogmatic schools would disagree about what the right beliefs are, they would nevertheless agree (as would, I think, most people) that there is nothing psychologically peculiar in being committed to the idea that holding the right beliefs will result in *ataraxia*.

Perin (2010, p. 13) terms this argument “the value argument” and notes that it looks “very much like a piece of dogmatism.” If it seems to the Pyrrhonist that the only way to avoid disturbance is to suspend judgment about all matters, then how can the Pyrrhonist genuinely engage in inquiry? For if we take genuine inquiry to involve (a) inquiring into the truth of some matter and being open to the possibility of forming a true belief as the outcome of the inquiring process and (b) viewing the attainment of a true belief as (at least in some sense) a positive thing, the Pyrrhonist seems to fall short. This is because (1) if *ataraxia* through *epochē* is the Pyrrhonist’s goal, then this suggests that they aren’t truly inquiring into the truth, for their true objective is to suspend so as to achieve tranquility, and (2) if it seems to them that holding beliefs of *any kind*, whether true or not, only leads to disturbance, then the Pyrrhonist will take great pains to avoid forming any beliefs at all, regardless of whether they’re true or not, as holding any belief seems to be bad.²⁰ Furthermore, if the Pyrrhonist has discovered that *epochē* rather than truth is the means to acquiring *ataraxia*, what reason could she possibly have for continuing to investigate? Once she has found the means to achieve the sought-after *ataraxia*, why does she not dispense with the whole enterprise of investigating into the truth, now that she has an alternative means to her end?

Some conclude that once the Pyrrhonist realizes that *ataraxia* is achievable through *epochē*, they will no longer pursue the truth. For example, Striker (2001, pp. 117–118) claims, “when he finds himself unable to discover the truth, but nevertheless relieved of his worries, once he has given up the project, the Sceptic also loses interest in the investigation of the philosophical problems.” Similarly, Burnyeat (1998, p. 41) states, “to the extent that he has achieved *ataraxia* he is no longer concerned to enquire which is right.”²¹ Others maintain that, given the value argument, although the Pyrrhonist might be concerned with giving arguments pro and contra, the Pyrrhonist simply *can’t* be engaged in genuine inquiry.²² For example, Bett writes:

²⁰ One might argue that the Pyrrhonists were not averse to holding all kinds of beliefs, but merely holding *strong* beliefs (*diabebaiousthai*)—those beliefs that are maintained with certainty through time and against objections in a solid and settled way; on which see Mates (1996, p. 60). On such a reading, the Pyrrhonist might instead maintain a kind of weak belief which one might claim is compatible with both the process of genuine inquiry and the acquisition of *ataraxia*. Such a reading might seem to be supported by passages that contrast the philosophy of the Pyrrhonists with that of the Academic Sceptics and the other dogmatists (*PH* 1.229–230, 1.232–234; see also 1.13, 1.208–209). However, several points speak against this interpretation. First, at no point does Sextus attribute beliefs (*doxa*, *dogma*) to the Pyrrhonist or claim that the Pyrrhonist believes (*doxazein*, *dogmatizein*); rather, he claims that they live *adoxastōs*. The verb in *PH* 1.229–230, *peithesthai*, means “to be persuaded” (Mates, 1996, p. 122) or “to go along with” (Annas & Barnes, 1994, pp. 60–61). Second, the attitude that Sextus attributes to the Sceptic in these passages does not seem to merit the title of “belief.” The attitude in question does not come with any psychological feeling of certainty. Nor does it entail an assent to the truth, since the Sceptic who “goes along with” the way things appear does not thereby take the truth of the matter to be settled, as evidenced by the fact that they continue to engage in a process of genuine inquiry. It should also be noted that, from Sextus’ perspective, the attitude of belief must involve firmly maintaining that something is the case. Thanks to an anonymous referee for raising these issues.

²¹ See Sedley (1983, p. 21) and Palmer (2000, p. 369) for similar views.

²² For example, see Grgic (2006), Marchand (2010), and Bett (2019).

But if “inquiry” is taken, as it naturally might be, to suggest an active and serious search for the truth, then it is misleading as applied to a skeptic of Sextus’ variety; the skeptic is someone who is looking to maintain *ataraxia*, and who has found a way of doing it in which inquiry, in that sense, has no place. To be sure, Sextus does describe the skeptic as someone who starts out an inquirer—who aims to discover the truth and to attain *ataraxia* that way; but the shift from this attitude to skepticism itself is precisely the abandonment of inquiry in that sense. (2019, p. 175)

Various attempts have been made to resolve this apparent incompatibility. I will consider three popular solutions here, though this in no way implies that these are the only solutions available.²³ One method advanced by Vogt is to argue that inquiry does not require that one aim at the truth, but instead that one’s investigation only be “guided by epistemic norms that respond to the value of the truth” (2012, p. 119). On the other hand, Perin (2010, pp. 15–18) argues that the fact that the Pyrrhonist set out to pursue the truth as a means to *ataraxia* does not entail the claim that this is the *only* reason why she must pursue the truth. Though the Pyrrhonist recognizes that the sought-after *ataraxia* is achievable through *epochē*, she nevertheless maintains an independent interest in the discovery of the truth for its own sake. It’s this independent interest that motivates her to pursue the truth through inquiry. Perin, using the distinction between the proto-Skeptic and the full-blown Skeptic, argues that the proto-Skeptic believes that *ataraxia* can only be achieved through acquiring the truth whereas the full-blown Skeptic values the truth independently while recognizing that *ataraxia* is achievable through *epochē*. Reaching a different conclusion than Perin, Machuca argues that the “the Skeptic-to-be wants to know the truth about the matters he inquires into because he believes that knowledge of the truth is something good or valuable in itself, and so becomes distressed when failing to acquire that knowledge, i.e., that good” (2013, p. 209) and that as for the full-blown Skeptic, “the likely reason why he has remained engaged in philosophical investigation is that he has an inquisitive and open-minded character shaped by his upbringing, education, socio-cultural milieu, and philosophical training” (2013, p. 209). Thus, for Machuca, the Skeptic-to-be has an independent valuing of the truth, while the full-blown Skeptic does not “believe that knowing the truth is something valuable by nature”; rather, Machuca proposes a “deflationary reading” of the full-blown Skeptic’s reason for inquiring “according to which these are mere preferences with which he is left after suspending judgment and to which he has no strong commitment” (2013, pp. 209–210).

I believe there are some significant issues with these solutions, and I shall take each in turn. Vogt’s solution has initial appeal because it locates the alleged problem of the Pyrrhonist being incapable of inquiring with us rather than the Pyrrhonist—it is we scholars, with our narrow conception of genuine inquiry as requiring direct pursuit of the truth, who generate the incompatibility. Vogt’s view allows us to preserve the idea that the Pyrrhonist is engaged in inquiry, not by reevaluating what the

²³ For example, I leave aside the aspirationalist account of Ribeiro (2002) and the developmental model of Eichorn (2020), both of which explore aspects of how the Pyrrhonist progresses that could be used to address the inquiry problem.

Pyrrhonist is doing, but by reevaluating the practice of inquiry. The Pyrrhonist is certainly engaging in activity that in some sense reflects a valuing or interest in the truth, even if they aren't directly aimed at it, and this is really all that is required for genuine inquiry. Vogt's view, however, strikes me as unsatisfactory because it requires us to disregard Sextus' claim that he is in fact engaged in this narrower conception of inquiry. He straightforwardly claims at *PH* 1.1–3 that the Pyrrhonist is engaged (as are his philosophical opponents) in inquiry into the truth (*to alēthes*), and again at *PH* 1.12, he asserts that the Sceptic endeavored to discover what is true and what is false. Although Vogt might well be correct that genuine inquiry doesn't require that one be aimed at the truth, it's nevertheless the case that *Sextus* takes himself to be engaged in inquiry of this kind. I think it's crucial to take seriously Sextus' claim in this regard.

Perin's proposed solution has the advantage of more robustly preserving the Pyrrhonist's valuing of the truth, since he claims that even once they have determined that *ataraxia* can be attained without it, they still maintain an independent interest. However, I think Perin's solution raises several concerns. First, it generates an additional puzzle—namely, whence this independent interest? If the Pyrrhonist set out wanting to discover the truth only as a means of achieving *ataraxia*, why are they now interested in the truth for its own sake? Second, if it seems to the Pyrrhonist that having beliefs of any kind (and particularly evaluative beliefs) will cause her to feel the very disturbance from which she was trying to escape, what could her motivation be for wanting to pursue the truth at all? If the Pyrrhonist desires *ataraxia*, it's odd that she would thrust herself back into the independent pursuit of truth, when, if she actually achieves the end of this alethic pursuit (a true belief), she will only acquire something which seems to her to be harmful. Furthermore, to show how the Pyrrhonist comes to have this independent interest in the truth, Perin must posit the distinction between the Sceptic-to-be and the full-blown Sceptic, which, as I argued above, does not seem to have strong textual support.

Machuca's solution has some of the same problems as Perin's, for example, through the use of the distinction between the Sceptic-to-be and the full-blown Sceptic. However, he provides an explanation for the Pyrrhonist's independent interest in inquiring into the truth, suggesting that the Pyrrhonist's preference for inquiry is the result of his socio-cultural and educational circumstances. I am suspicious of the claim that we can attribute this preference to the socio-cultural milieu in which the Pyrrhonist is operating. For as Sextus says, the Pyrrhonist inquires into *everything*, and, as I argued earlier, this level of inquiry diverges from the norm in both degree and subject matter. In other words, I think it unlikely that the ancient society in which the Pyrrhonist lived (and no less so with our modern one) exhorted people, even tacitly, to inquire into absolutely anything and everything, and to do so repeatedly. Additionally, the same issue which arose for Perin's solution of independent interest for the truth arises for Machuca's preference for the truth. Why would the Pyrrhonist have a preference to pursue the truth, if it seems that, once she actually acquired it, this outcome would only lead to the very disturbance she is trying to avoid?

I believe the three psychological hallmarks presented above can yield a more satisfactory solution to the apparent incompatibility caused by the value argument. On my interpretation, the Pyrrhonist engages in inquiry into what is true because she is compelled to inquire by her psychology. Moreover, she will continually engage in

inquiry into what is true because her divergent psychology also makes her cyclically disturbed by anomaly in the facts, including anomaly pertaining to what is by nature good or bad. Because both her inquiry and her disturbance by the anomaly are arational (that is, they aren't reasons-responsive), regardless of whether she takes herself to have good reason to avoid inquiring into the truth—reasons such as (a) it seems to her that she can achieve *ataraxia* through *epochē* and so further inquiry is unnecessary to reach her goal, and (b) it seems to her that even if she were to acquire a true belief as the result of her inquiry this would only spell disturbance—she will nevertheless alethically inquire, because she cannot *refrain* from doing so.²⁴ The three psychological hallmarks provide us with what I think is a satisfactory account of (1) what motivates the Pyrrhonist to inquire, (2) how that inquiry can be genuine, and (3) why her inquiry is ongoing.

7 A new value of Pyrrhonism

In addition to solving the problem of inquiry, there's a second benefit of using the three psychological hallmarks as an interpretative tool, since they allow us to better understand and appreciate the value of the Sceptic Way and the Sceptic herself. The type of value I suggest here shouldn't be taken to be the *only* kind of value yielded by Pyrrhonism, but rather, from what I can tell, one that has not yet been suggested in the literature.²⁵ The value of the Sceptic Way I wish to suggest is quite narrow, and is in fact, *only* applicable to the Pyrrhonist. Let us suppose, for the sake of argument, as Sextus does, that holding beliefs about anything (and particularly evaluative beliefs) is a main source of disturbance for many people. Let us further suppose that there's some *moderate level of disturbance* one experiences when inquiring into the truth of some issue, simply by considering something that is yet unresolved; following Machuca we can refer to this as “unresolved conflict” (2019, p. 197). There may also be a corresponding *moderate degree of relief* that accompanies the resolution (or conclusion) of any inquiry; we might think of this as a kind of *moderate ataraxia*—this is simply the tranquility or relief that results from ceasing to inquire. If so, then one value of the Sceptic Way is simply that the Pyrrhonist has the psychology she does—a psychology which will (a) regularly allow her to resolve this conflict in such a way that she will achieve *moderate ataraxia* and (b) allow her to resolve the conflict without forming a belief. We can call this a *psychological value*. To illuminate the nature of this psychological value, consider one of the more mundane topics of inquiry that Sextus mentions—the question about whether the honey really is sweet. If we imagine two individuals, one a non-Pyrrhonist and one a Pyrrhonist, we can

²⁴ Her Pyrrhonism leaves open the possibility that if she were to acquire a true belief it might not yield disturbance, for it only *seems* to her that holding beliefs leads to disturbance. Additionally, though she may report that *ataraxia* seems to follow from *epochē*, this is only a report of what *seems* to be the case. Both are merely seemings for her—she asserts them *adoxastōs*.

²⁵ McPherran (1989, pp. 136–150), Mates (1996, p. 77) and Bett (2019, pp. 184–185) consider the value of Pyrrhonism as a whole. Machuca (2019b) investigates whether Pyrrhonism has practical or epistemic value. Nussbaum (2000, p. 171) has vehemently argued that Pyrrhonism has a kind of negative and harmful value, taking Pyrrhonism to be “morally and politically pernicious.”

see that when inquiring into the truth about the honey, one of three possible sets of outcomes is likely to occur:

- (1) Both the non-Pyrrhonist and the Pyrrhonist consider the various arguments pro and contra → both feel confusion → both suspend judgment and achieve moderate *ataraxia*.
- (2) Both the non-Pyrrhonist and the Pyrrhonist consider the various arguments pro and contra → both feel confusion → both suspend judgment, but the ordinary non-Skeptic feels frustrated and demoralized as a result and does not achieve moderate *ataraxia*, while the Pyrrhonist achieves moderate *ataraxia*.
- (3) Both the non-Pyrrhonist and the Pyrrhonist consider the various argument pro and contra → both feel confusion → the ordinary non-Skeptic arrives at a true belief and achieves moderate *ataraxia*, while the Pyrrhonist suspends and achieves moderate *ataraxia*.

From this, on any given occasion the Pyrrhonist will always be at least as well off as the non-Pyrrhonist, and over the course of a lifetime, the Pyrrhonist will always be better off than the non-Pyrrhonist. This is because in all three outcomes the Pyrrhonist is likely to end up with moderate *ataraxia*, while in at least some cases the non-Pyrrhonist will feel frustrated and demoralized as a result of feeling that she has no choice but to suspend judgment. Furthermore, in outcome (3) where it looks as if the non-Pyrrhonist might reap rewards equal to the Pyrrhonist in that she feels moderate *ataraxia* from arriving at a true belief, she will, in fact, be worse off, for her moderate *ataraxia* comes at the cost of holding a belief, something which, if Sextus is right, will only end up causing disturbance. Thus, even when the non-Pyrrhonist succeeds in achieving *ataraxia* through acquisition of a true belief, it's by this same token that she fares worse than the Pyrrhonist. Moreover, not only does the Pyrrhonist achieve more moderate *ataraxia*, but because she also avoids evaluative beliefs, she circumvents the much larger disturbance (such as the constant pursuit or avoidance of something, the feeling of being tormented by the Furies, irrational and immoderate exultation, on which see *PH* 1.25–30, *PH* 3.235–237, *M* 11.112–118, *M* 11.141–161) that such beliefs cause, and therefore achieves the more significant and enduring type of *ataraxia*. While the Pyrrhonist will encounter more low-level disturbance than the non-Pyrrhonist (for one of their psychological hallmarks is that they're disturbed by anomaly in the facts more than the average person), they will always, it seems, have a way of resolving that disturbance that yields moderate *ataraxia*, and they will never fall prey to the much greater disturbance caused by holding beliefs about what is good or bad by nature. In this way, the Pyrrhonist's psychology, which is an integral part of the Skeptic Way, offers a kind of value in that her life is semi-guaranteed to be, by and large, more tranquil than that of the non-Pyrrhonist.²⁶ The kind of value I am describing here is the value of being a certain sort of person with a certain way

²⁶ By "by and large," I mean that (1) it's still possible for the Pyrrhonist at some point to be persuaded by the evidence such that they arrive at a belief, though at that point I question whether she still counts as a Pyrrhonist, and (2) since the Pyrrhonist still experiences unavoidable *pathē* such as being cold or thirsty, it's possible that, overall, the Pyrrhonist's life could be worse than the non-Pyrrhonist's, provided that the Pyrrhonist experienced some sufficient number of negative unavoidable *pathē*.

of life—the Skeptic Way. We can see the value in a certain way of life, and indeed in having a certain psychology, even if that way of life and psychology aren't available to everyone and, very likely, only available to a limited set of *megalophueis* individuals.²⁷

That said, I think that Pyrrhonism might be of value for those who lack this atypical psychology. After all, Sextus himself claims that “because of his love of humanity (*philanthropos*) the Skeptic wishes to cure by argument, so far as he can, the conceit and precipitancy of the dogmatists” (*PH* 3.280), thus indicating that he takes Pyrrhonism to be of some value to those who are not like himself. I think, in light of what I have argued in this paper, that one potential reading of this passage is to view it as contending that although not everyone has the Pyrrhonist's atypical cognition which fortuitously results in a more tranquil life, nevertheless, by getting the dogmatist to recognize the benefits of the *adoxastōs* Skeptic Way, the Pyrrhonist can *improve* the life of the dogmatist by getting him to eliminate at least *some* of the evaluative beliefs which are productive of psychological disturbance. In other words, the dogmatist can attempt to do *deliberately* what the Pyrrhonist can do *naturally*. Such reasoning is neither strange nor unfamiliar, for it is often the case that those who have some particular natural capacity that brings about a desired outcome can serve as an aspirational model for those who lack that natural capacity (e.g., the chess prodigy and grandmaster Magnus Carlsen is studied by the average player; the musical genius Mozart by the amateur musician; and the physically anomalous Michael Phelps by the ordinary swimmer at the local pool). Such a reading is supported by the fact that Sextus qualifies the degree to which the Pyrrhonist may aid the dogmatist using the phrase “so far as he can” (*kata dunamin*) and the fact that the vehicle for improvement is the acceptance of the Pyrrhonist's *arguments*, the feature of their philosophy which (at least to some degree) can be appreciated and emulated, even without their atypical psychology. In this way the Skeptic Way can serve as a kind of model that can lead to a more valuable and tranquil life for a much wider audience.

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²⁷ It's tempting here to tentatively speculate that perhaps it's because the Pyrrhonist is defined by her psychology (unlike the Stoic, Epicurean, or Academic Skeptic) that there seem to have been fewer Pyrrhonists than there were members of the other Hellenistic schools.

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