

The Pyrrhonian way of Life

Thor Amadeus van den Berg

Preface

If this piece piques your interest then let it do so. If it does not seem to suit your taste then let it be. I do not wish to convince any reader. I write down what comes to my mind. Whatever it is Pyrrhonism was supposed to be in ancient Greece is unclear to me. My writings are entirely dedicated to the impact philosophy and life's other experiences has had on my attitude towards living, but more specifically Pyrrhonism is what I feel to be most characteristic of my own thoughts and their tranquillity. Therefore I wish to enquire into what Sextus Empiricus has said, who wrote about Pyrrhonism in the general sense in his outlines, since Pyrrho himself has left us no writings.

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Introduction

The following work is an effort in building a stance towards life with the aid of philosophy. This is my personal endeavour to explain what I feel to be a fruitful stance towards modern daily struggles with the insights I have gained through philosophy. The thoughts that are described in the work are inspired by both the life of normal citizenship in the Netherlands, discussions with friends, of who some were occupied with their own academic field, and a thorough reading of a variety of philosophical works. This philosophy for life came into existence for two reasons. The first is an aversion towards the careless belief in science. The second is an optimistic view of life in general, which is ironically at the same time one of uncertainty and not deprived of hope. I have also put all of my efforts in writing a work that is easy to comprehend, and as a result readable for everyone who is driven by mere interest. This is as such also a personal reaction to overly complex work that the philosopher tends to present. I do not wish to confuse anyone but rather give a simple account that can be discussed without the disadvantage of being interpreted in a variety of ways that can lead meaningful discussion astray.

Why a focus on daily life, or even more specifically, its struggles? I believe that Philosophy in its essence is first a way of guiding life and only second a love for knowledge. Love for knowledge lies at the essence of doing philosophy, but why people engage in philosophy has not been given sufficient attention. We start with life and its hurdles and to that we find philosophy. To those who reached out to philosophy there was an initial instinct that made it attractive compared to other meaningful activities, or at least a way to spend time. Love for knowledge, one could argue, presupposes the will to inquire. To explore meaning, knowledge or doubt seems to lie in the heart of philosophy. How one explores depends on the philosophical doctrine favoured as beginning. However questions about daily life appear even before any question that arises out of a specific doctrine. I have the wish to explore these questions rather than the intricate questions that come forth by specific doctrines of philosophy. This also requires me to explain why my position seems fruitful compared to the more commonly visited forms of philosophy, as the inspiration for my position seems in no way popular.

In this paper I will explain why I think that the heart of philosophy is best expressed by Pyrrhonism. This position can be understood as taking no position at all. The doubt that brings one into the domain of philosophy will not disappear, in contrast it will only increase. Indeed the doubt will not be neglected but will instead remain as drive to inquire. I will revise traditional Pyrrhonism and build my own position of Ordinary Pyrrhonism. This is in response to the ambiguities concerning the possibility of holding some common sense beliefs by the Pyrrhonist as describes by Sextus Empiricus. I do not wish to claim to present the correct interpretation of his work, which seems a waste of precious effort, because of the clear disagreement found in secondary literature. I find it more fruitful to present my own stance as a response to the ambiguities that Sextus left us. Annas describes

how Sextus's work is a representation of different forms of sceptic thinking that are represented in the same work.¹ I would not be surprised if I grasped one of the work's expressions, namely the form of scepticism she calls the urbane interpretation.² This means allowing the existence of some beliefs in Pyrrhonism. Although I will in the end advocate a personal stance that is renewed and thus different from traditional Pyrrhonism, it is at the same time a reliving of the ancient school of philosophy of Pyrrhonian Scepticism. I will refer to Pyrrhonian scepticism as Pyrrhonism in this work. There is just one reason for this clarifying suggestion, and that is the misunderstanding of the school. This misunderstanding exists by confusing Pyrrhonism with Academic Scepticism. The distinction between the two needs to be clear. This is the first step of explaining Pyrrhonism.

It must be announced that I do not wish to abandon all discoveries that exist through our 'modern god' of science. This seems to be in stark contrast to traditional Pyrrhonism. Sextus does not want to make firm statement about nature through science.³ Richard Bett says that we know too much of natural science in our modern times to abandon some of its conclusions.⁴ I tend to agree with Bett on this point. It is undeniable that in modern times science has brought forth innovations, concepts and its own set of miracles and should be appreciated for these possibilities. This will also lead me to add some facts⁵ of science into common sense, which I allow in Ordinary Pyrrhonism. Acceptance of common sense in Pyrrhonism is something I allow. Sextus supports the acceptance of undisputed ordinary belief in the *Outlines* in various sections of his writing.⁶

Nonetheless the unwavering trust of the people in science is a neglect of uncertainty that should not be protected. People should be inspired to think rather than to believe. Just as the Christian god had its acts instigated as what was to be deemed as true, so too does science mandate its followers to believe 'facts'.⁷ Facts that the rational human being would see as uncertain. I am most concerned by the results of belief in these claims. To provide an image of my worries concerning the authority of science as the judge of truth we can look at a 'fact' that science propounds as true at this very moment.⁸

'Corona virus is more deadly than typical flu' is a message that has appeared in media⁹, which claims the support of science. There is however contrasting information regarding the matter simply because of uncertainty. No chances for exciting Corona reports are overlooked as society's eye is

¹ Annas, xv.

² Annas, xxiii.

³ PH 1.18; I use Annas translation of the *Outlines*. She speaks of the scepticist where I speak of the Pyrrhonist. I use Pyrrhonist not to confuse the Pyrrhonist sceptic with the Academic sceptic.

⁴ Bett, 2019, How to be a Pyrrhonist, 183-184.

⁵ I separate myself from the normal definition of fact, which is a thing that is known or proven to be true. Facts by my definition should not be regarded as absolute truths. It is rather what has been accepted into the common sense understanding of reality.

⁶ PH 1.13, 1.22, 1.226, 2.8.

⁷ I mean facts here in a different sense than previously. Just because scientific methods have been used in providing proof for a finding does not mean that it instantly deserves the label of fact. A finding can only achieve the state of fact in my current expression when it has been adopted by common sense.

⁸ The time of writing at this moment is the 4th of April 2020.

⁹ See <https://www.livescience.com/new-coronavirus-compare-with-flu.html>, 06/04/2020. This is a typical example of a 'Fact'.

currently focused on nothing else, and thus the media gains benefit by highlighting it. But that is the less interesting part of the story. The problem is not such claims on themselves but the reaction of the people who are unable to assess the matter rationally and instead put all their trust in the authority of science. As uncertainty is not explored, but shoved away, acute panic rises. The worries are prevalent and politics is almost solely engaged in decreasing panic among the people. Panic that would not exist if people would put trust in their own thinking instead of science.

Beliefs can drive people into insanity. Uncertainty however should inspire to explore the matter instead of taking a presupposed position. If this is taken as the first stance towards doubt one will eventually gain peace of mind or what Pyrrhonism called tranquillity. Then yes, disaster can still hit and sweep, but no struggles in the upholding of belief are entertained by the Pyrrhonist. Only initial worry can hurt, because all worries clinging to belief are foreign for the non-believer. This is what I advocate in this thesis, and also where I give credit to Pyrrhonism.

Pyrrhonism advocates a suspension of judgement. It is the philosophy that encourages inquiry. It always seems to end in a suspension of belief because of equally convincing or non-convincing positions on any appearance.¹⁰ It is characterized by careful thinking, doubting belief and being receptive towards the world. Taking belief as true should be avoided, but interestingly the Pyrrhonist still acts.¹¹ How the Pyrrhonist can still act without affirming any belief as true or untrue is intriguing. The Pyrrhonist can act in accordance with the standards of action.¹² One of these standards is law and custom. The interventions of the government concerning the previous Corona example can be seen as the exercise of this law, and thus cause the Pyrrhonist to act accordingly, without the belief that these interventions are the most adequate. The choice to conform to political decisions can be done rationally through the common sense that being part of this community benefits me. I should comply to not only see my participation as harmonious to the whole of my community, but also to not end in prison.

The feelings that appear to me when I suspend my judgement on uncertain beliefs, or non-common beliefs, resonate with the tranquillity that Sextus described. I felt neither fear nor anger that could have come with believing the claim that corona is deadlier than flue as true or false. The confusion one might expect with a middle position of uncertainty also did not strike me with its gaze. In the end a Pyrrhonian stance towards life gives us two things that are not easily attained with any other method. The first is the drive to explore the matter in great detail. A Pyrrhonist would not take any belief for granted without enquiry into the matters that surround such a belief. The second is the tranquillity that comes with the suspension of judgement. A Pyrrhonian can feel an initial emotion as it appears but does not hold onto beliefs that could trap him within a cage of dogmatic belief.

¹⁰ PH 1.8.

¹¹ PH 1.23.

¹² PH 1.23.

Dogmatism for Sextus is any form of philosophy that holds beliefs and sometimes even a system of beliefs. Most importantly dogmatism holds belief that is disputed, and as such not accepted as common sense belief.¹³ One can easily understand that the moment that a belief holds, it results in secondary beliefs that also hold. Therefore any belief can lead to a system of beliefs. In this way Dogmatism steers its inquiry in a certain direction, and limits its exploration. Pyrrhonists though, do not hold on to any dogmatic belief and can let themselves be guided by mere curiosity or any other drive towards exploration, rather than a beginning assumption that explains all of reality. Dogmatists claim that they have found truth.¹⁴

Sextus suggests that Dogmatists may have barred themselves from investigation, while for Pyrrhonists the reason for investigation, namely the question, is still very present.¹⁵ Cohen describes the Pyrrhonist in a similar way. The Pyrrhonist still philosophizes but in a different manner than the dogmatist. That is without hoping to reach some ultimate truth. The Pyrrhonist instead becomes a sceptical free-thinker, who enjoys throwing pro and con arguments, whilst taking them all as appearances.¹⁶ This does not mean that Sextus dogmatically claims that the Pyrrhonist gives up his search for truth, since he does not assume the impossibility of truth.¹⁷

Scientists would defend themselves from being called dogmatists by saying that their science allows for facts to be negated. Science gives the option to test a given fact and if it proves to be false, adjust belief with the newly found evidence. This form of science has grown in popularity since the introduction of the Falsificationism of Popper. He views the best science to be the science that presents itself as open to falsification and sees progress as falsifications of these falsifiable conclusions.¹⁸ But, when one proves something to be false they still create a belief of certainty, which is the certainty that this specific fact is false. While in this process the only logical solution should be that we cannot believe 'facts' to be either true or false, as they do not give us any definite answer that can be grounded. This is because the falsification on itself can be false. Science as such cannot seem to give definite truths as of yet.

The Pyrrhonism I present accepts ordinary belief without claiming it to be true. I present a philosophy that is an alternative to ungrounded belief in science and dogmatism. I will show that my Ordinary Pyrrhonism can function as a combined philosophical and psychological stance that can help humans in their daily struggles and their quest to an open minded form of philosophy enveloped in the uncertainty of life.

¹³ PH 2.8.

¹⁴ PH 1.3

¹⁵ PH 2.11, 2.11.

¹⁶ Cohen, 1984, 420-421.

¹⁷ PH 1.226

¹⁸ Chalmers, 1999, 60.

In the upcoming chapters I will go through the necessary steps to explain how my revised form of Pyrrhonism is an appealing position in modernity. In chapter 1 I will give a general overview of Pyrrhonism and modernity. It is needed to give a description of modernity to understand the applicability of both traditional and Ordinary Pyrrhonism. Also, I need to give a general overview of the traditional form of Pyrrhonism to elucidate where my own stance differs in later chapters. I will stay true to the more general understanding of Sextus's work in the first three chapters to avoid pushing readers to attribute Ordinary Pyrrhonism to Sextus. In chapter 2 I will explain suspension of judgement in Pyrrhonism. This is a unique feature compared to other forms of philosophy and it is of utmost importance to explore this act in detail to understand how it makes the position of the Pyrrhonist such an attractive one. The process of suspending judgement and its consequence of tranquillity in the mind will be exposed. I will show with the use of an example how suspension of belief works and how it ends in tranquillity.

In chapter 3 I will discuss how Pyrrhonism is related to life in general. It is important to know when the way of the Pyrrhonist appears during daily life and how it is beneficial in these times to be a Pyrrhonist. This chapter will mainly consist of three different examples I use to give a sense of the psychological effects of suspending judgement. This chapter is mainly used to show how the Pyrrhonian act is beneficial in daily modern life. I think this is done best by examples that are relatable for the common individual.¹⁹ This will make the stance more comprehensible than solely a systematic viewing of suspending judgement. I will give an overview in chapter 4 of what appearance is for the Pyrrhonist. It is important to know that the Pyrrhonist does think there is a world of certainty, and this is the world of appearances. Next to simple appearances Sextus Empiricus gave four standards of action. The standards are used for the Pyrrhonist to be able to live with the appearances and act accordingly. This chapter will begin the separation from traditional Pyrrhonism and introduce my Ordinary Pyrrhonism. I will discuss the ambiguities in tradition Pyrrhonism, and how this explains choices in my own position.

Afterwards I will explain in chapter 5 how David Hume's scepticism is related to Ordinary Pyrrhonism and can help in understanding the position. Although Hume differs in many aspects from the Pyrrhonist, he can give aid in understanding the liveability of adopting the Pyrrhonist position. Hume was convinced of being sceptical and its effect on the happy life. He discussed habits in his work, which can explain not only the adopting of standards of action but also their development through history. The adopting of standards of action is important in this specific work. It is something that Sextus has not given sufficient attention to in his *Outlines*. In my eyes it is the one thing that can give clarity about how the Pyrrhonist can live an active life. Hume's work will support my account of

¹⁹ With common I mean the average human being. I try to create an archetype that will encompass individuality in the most general sense, but of course it will be difficult to have the individual expressed in a general example. Nonetheless I feel that any individual can find common grounds with the common individual that I will present.

Ordinary Pyrrhonism and give further insight in the standards of action. In chapter 6 Dogmatism is explored. I will present dogmatist philosophy and discuss its appeal and danger. This will be used to eventually argue Ordinary Pyrrhonism to be the more fruitful expression of philosophy. Finally we will finish with the closing chapter encompassing all of our explorations into a satisfactory conclusion.

1. Modernity and Pyrrhonism

1.1 Modernity

Antiquity can be seen as the birthplace of early scientific development. In a world where Zeus made thunder and the moon and sun were believed to be gods the Greeks originated science.²⁰ Their scientific speculations were extraordinary. Aristarchus's speculations of the heliocentric system, Anaximander's notion that men originated from animals of a different species, and Democritus's theory of atoms.²¹ The Greeks also pushed the primacy of rational thought, thereby laying the ground for modernity and its seeming control over nature.²² It would not be considered insane to claim that the Greeks grasped the ideal of science as well as scientists do today. Although the Greeks were already invested in science it seems that time was necessary to create the inventions and methods that we have today. In our modern time we have the possibility to soar through the air and communicate with someone on the other side of the world in a matter of seconds. If I had to point to anything that is clearly different from ancient times it would be the industrialized and globalized way of living that people have grown accustomed to.

Kofi Ackah emphasizes this in his comparison between antiquity and modern times. While he stresses that modernity has a lot of good things to offer, it also causes certain unintended side effects.²³ There has been an increasing scientific attitude to nature. Western science is focused on strict accumulation of facts, and derives its value from these facts. In antiquity people saw themselves as part of nature, while in modernity humanity sees itself more as separated from nature.²⁴ Modernity's separation treats nature as an object, set apart from value, which the human subject can manipulate to satisfy human needs and wants.²⁵ Ackah argues that science can be seen as causing a deepening of our empirical understanding of nature, but this does not mean that we understand its actual deeper meaning.²⁶ In that sense we have no higher claim to reality than humanity in antiquity. Our increasing power over nature and our economic system created a variety in goods far beyond our needs,

²⁰ Livingstone, 1935, 178.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ackah, 2014, 1-2.

²⁴ O.c., 2.

²⁵ O.c., 2-3.

²⁶ Ackah, 2014, 3.

establishing a consumer driven society that pursues higher standards of living.²⁷ This can create problems for nature in the form of increased pollution and oversaturation of the earth, which Ackah establishes as a side effect of modern society.²⁸ It can be argued that human consciousness has developed as a reaction to these side effects. This would imply that humanity evolved in its understanding of responsibility to nature, and human's power to preserve it. But Ackah argues that this understanding was already present in old Greece. There was investment in groves, sacredness of certain rivers and other vital sections of the ecology that were protected.²⁹

With the automatization by machinery, work has made a general shift from tasks of manual labour to tasks that require mental agility.³⁰ Together with the abundance of unhealthy foods, that has its appeal through irresistible tastes and smells that tend to break down the restraints of appetite, humans in westernized countries have degraded in overall physical health.³¹ Family bonds can be seen as less strong in general. The industrialized world asks people to move to far away locations for work, thus creating a more individualized community, which can deprive human beings of any sense of belonging.³² Ackah gives us an image of modern society that has problems in its comparison to antiquity. The scientific view of nature has given rise to economic growth and industrialization that creates a society more detached from nature, facing problems by its increasing wants and needs that negatively impact not only individual health but also the health of nature. Additionally there is a detachment from the family in an increasingly individualistic culture.

Philosophy did not stand still in its development, and it seems similar in its development as the previously sketched picture. Habermas gives a general overview of the development in philosophical discourse over time. This is what I will use in describing the development of philosophy in a brief manner, as an exploration of all philosophical work seems to be an unrewarding and even impossible task. Modernity³³ has created a plethora of philosophical work that was not yet present in antiquity. There has been an increased focus on subjective rationality in Descartes that was further developed by Kant, and this still plays an important role in modern philosophical discussion.³⁴ Kant limited rationality and its access to the external world.³⁵ This can be linked to the earlier point that human reasoning has received increased attention, but it seems to detach itself from the external world as a result. Kant introduces the noumenal world as unknowable:

²⁷ Ackah, 3.

²⁸ O.c., 14.

²⁹ O.c., 14.

³⁰ O.c., 8.

³¹ O.c., 17.

³² O.c., 14.

³³ There is the ongoing debate of what modernity is, and if we should not consider our current epoch as post-modernity. I want to make clear that it is not my goal here to decide on this matter. I have no interest in how we should term our current age. I have decided to name the year of writing this work modernity. Modernity in this specific work will therefore be defined as the year of 2020.

³⁴ Habermas, 1987, viii.

³⁵ O.c., 302.

“Our understanding attains in this way a sort of negative extension. That is to say, it is not limited by, but rather limits, sensibility, by giving the name of noumena to things, not considered as phenomena, but as things in themselves. But it at the same time prescribes limits to itself, for it confesses itself unable to cognize these by means of the categories, and hence is compelled to cogitate them merely as an unknown something.”³⁶

Kant describes that the external world does not lend its true essence to our senses. They are things in themselves, which we do not have access to with our limited rationality. This inspired others to study the limits of rationality instead of the external world. This turn to the subject, its freedom and its power of rationality created a whole line of philosophy that is known as German Idealism. In this tradition Hegel focused on the importance of history in reaction to Kant’s focus on the subject,³⁷ and this focus on history was gaining popularity afterwards. Humanity was now viewed in its historical development, which does not have the need to explain the external world beyond humanity’s senses.

Nietzsche then tried to show the end of philosophy in the death of God and the destruction of the primacy of reason in the world.³⁸ Habermas describes how this invited critique concerning the power of rationality and the importance of the subject. Habermas reacted with his own view of communicative action as what should define modern philosophy.³⁹ He upholds the historical view that Hegel propounded but does away with the primacy of rationality and the subject that Hegel propounded.⁴⁰ Habermas criticizes that a subject can find truth on its own, but needs others to find truth. He denounces the power of individual knowing, which seems to have been a prevalent conviction from Descartes all the way to Hegel.

This is a limited accumulation of philosophers that can be seen as characterizing the change within philosophical discussion through time. If anything philosophy can be seen in early development as drifting away from viewing the world through absolute ontological truths towards an increasing focus on subjectivity and freedom, and now as critical of this shift. There was also a need to account for God or gods in both daily life and philosophy. There is no longer such need, and it is now no longer necessary to account for these absolute notions. There seems to be a more historical, mechanical and subjective understanding in today’s philosophy which can be seen as a reflection of current modern daily life as opposed to ancient Greece.

Next to that there has been increased globalization and cultures have been mixed, and so have traditions. There are traditions that are solely practiced in certain parts of the world, but there also seems to be an urge to replicate traditions individuals become fond of. For example Buddhism and its practice in the western world. Or the rising popularity of Asian cuisine in Europe. Other practices are

³⁶ Kant, 1855, 159.

³⁷ Habermas, 1987, 303.

³⁸ O.c., 301.

³⁹ O.c., X.

⁴⁰ O.c., 301; This of course depends on the reading of Hegel. The importance here is the shift from a focus from the subject to the interconnectivity between subjects.

no longer mandatory and are now even considered unique. It was custom in some part of the Netherlands to pray before dinner or visit church on Sundays, but these are no longer common practices.

Modern philosophy is characterized by its different disciplines and schools of thought. In western philosophy this has been so since antiquity. The ancient Greeks already had schools that lived by their respective doctrines. Nowadays when starting a study in philosophy, the courses commonly start with assumptions typical to specific schools of thought, and works forward from these grounds. This is very similar to the course one takes in modern life in general. One works with basic principles educated in primary schools, takes these grounds to high school, and is afterwards ready to specialize in higher education or specific labour. What is noticeable about these steps is that society grants a certain baseline to work with, and individuals are consequently left with choices between these different dimensions that we built a basic understanding upon.

Choices or freedom to choose are not only well-developed topics within Philosophy but are essential to life overall. To make the ‘correct’ choices individuals will have to strongly believe that their choice provides meaning to their life. Other options would be to choose randomly, by instinct, based on the suggestions of others or not make a choice at all. I wish to argue that this process is fundamental to the struggles we find in daily life. Ackah shows reason to regard these choices as more characteristic of modernity than of antiquity. Specifically in education there is a shift from more general education to subject specialisation.⁴¹ Individuals become so specialized that it becomes hard to ground a choice on the firm belief that it is the right choice. If one believes that one has made the wrong choice it would not be strange for negative feelings to flourish. Conversely if one is in constant doubt about what is the correct choice a feeling of despair could develop. On the flipside one could strongly believe one made the right choice in life and feel content or happy as a result. In an era of choice we might want guidance or a standard of living, so that we do not live in despair or unhappiness. This is where I will advocate a position known as Pyrrhonism, and ultimately Ordinary Pyrrhonism.

1.2 Pyrrhonism

Pyrrhonism is not a commonly visited form of philosophy. During all my study of Philosophy I only came across it once, but it did stick with me through all other forms of activity and thought from that moment on. Pyrrhonism can be summarized as not a doctrine at all, but something arising even before the epistemological question.⁴² It is a way of living rather than a base of assumptions concerning truth and knowledge, which is why it can be invigorating for anyone who is searching for a way to deal with

⁴¹ Ackah, 2014, 7.

⁴² What is knowledge? Beliefs are needed to give an account of knowledge, and this does not seem to work the other way around. Therefore one could say that an account of belief comes before that of knowledge.

daily life. In contrast to modern philosophy Hellenistic philosophy seems engaged in finding the key to happiness or living well. Julia Annas⁴³ likewise shows her opinion in the goal of Hellenistic philosophies in general:

*“Scepticism is offered as a recipe for happiness. After all, scepticism is an ancient philosophy; and ancient philosophies were, in general, offered as recipes for happiness”*⁴⁴

Tranquillity is described by Sextus as being free of the troubled mind, at least in matters of opinion.⁴⁵ It is unclear if tranquillity can lead to happiness. Richard Bett argues that the Pyrrhonist cannot claim that their scepticism leads to *eudaimonia*,⁴⁶ which he describes as a happy life in general.⁴⁷ This is because that would imply that the Pyrrhonist claims that his philosophy results in happiness, and would thus affirm Pyrrhonism as leading to *eudaimonia*. But the Pyrrhonist can still express that it appears to him that he is *eudaimon*, and that this appears to be the result of an untroubled mind that is achieved by his suspension of judgement.

Instead of relying on beliefs Pyrrhonism goes by the world of appearances.⁴⁸ Pyrrhonists take life as it appears to them rather than forming beliefs about these appearances. Pyrrhonism cannot cause the formation of beliefs, because it shows that the truthfulness of belief is unclear. Essential in understanding Pyrrhonism is that it does not claim the impossibility of truth. This is in contrast to Academic Scepticism, which claims the impossibility of truth and knowledge.⁴⁹ Many of the criticisms of Scepticism attack the Academic form rather than the Pyrrhonist form, even when they announce refuting Pyrrhonism with their argumentation.

Bett argues against the result of tranquillity by suspending judgement.⁵⁰ He describes that not holding beliefs would not lead to a peaceful state of mind because there would no longer be any secure values to cling to and humanity would lose meaning in their lives.⁵¹ If anything, he argues, this would be more disturbing than comforting. He elaborates that ceasing to believe that anything has any real value would not result in tranquillity, but in despair born of a sense of meaninglessness.⁵² This critique would work if the Pyrrhonist would hold on to the belief that there is no meaning in life.⁵³ The Pyrrhonist however does not accept this assumption because this is also a belief, and we have concluded that the Pyrrhonist does not hold beliefs. Therefore Bett’s critique is directed to the Academic Sceptic and not to the Pyrrhonist. Although Pyrrhonism does not appear to allow the

⁴³ I will be using the translation of Annas & Barnes of the outlines of Pyrrhonian scepticism by Sextus Empiricus as the main work in my investigation on what Pyrrhonism is.

⁴⁴ Annas, xxx.

⁴⁵ PH, 1.25.

⁴⁶ Bett, 2012, 15

⁴⁷ O.c., 12

⁴⁸ PH 1.9.

⁴⁹ Kuzminski, 2008, 10.

⁵⁰ Both tranquillity and suspension of judgement are explored in chapter 2.

⁵¹ Bett, 2019, 180.

⁵² O.c., 181.

⁵³ Or the belief that life should have meaning.

affirmation of beliefs, it does urge us to keep looking, to keep searching and to keep thinking. In a society where beliefs are professed to be essential in making choices and living truthfully to oneself it becomes hard to see how a doctrine that does not hold any belief can give us any benefit. In spite of this I am invested in showing the appeal of the Pyrrhonist attitude.

2. Suspending Judgement, Tranquillity and its practical application.

2.1 Suspension of judgement and tranquillity

To suspend one's judgement means the coming to a standstill of the intellect, and this leads to tranquillity.⁵⁴ This seems to imply that the Pyrrhonist decides that there is no further investigation needed to reach the conclusion that all accounts are equally convincing or unconvincing. The intellect is put to rest by the suspension of judgement, and then some kind of peaceful state arises. The chief constituent of being a Pyrrhonist is the claim that to every account an equal account is opposed, and it is from this that they cannot hold any belief.⁵⁵

The process itself consists of a few steps described by Sextus Empiricus. In the enquiry of something that is uncertain⁵⁶ a Pyrrhonist uses his Pyrrhonian ability to set out oppositions among things that appear.⁵⁷ It shows the equipollence in the opposed objects and accounts. Equipollence means that all the accounts reach a state of being equally convincing and unconvincing in their comparison, and that none of the accounts have more right to constitute a belief than the other.⁵⁸ It is important to note that this is not only an affirmation or a negation of a specific belief. It is rather conflicting accounts that are both investigated in sufficient detail.⁵⁹ Sextus does not seem to give us much clarity on how to decide that things are equally convincing. It seems that it cannot be decided logically that different opinions are equally convincing in the end. This is because argumentation for a position is dependent on certain presuppositions, and they carry this same problem. Therefore it seems that the decision that positions are equally convincing must come forth from a certain kind of instinct or ability.

The problem is that it is unclear when someone correctly uses his Pyrrhonian ability, and if it differs for individuals when they might reach equipollence. It seems that the investigation continues until this state of equipollence is reached, and this can take an immense amount of exploration, which seems to differ for individuals in when they reach it. There is no objective measure of when to decide that equipollence is reached. If there is no objective standard and it differs per person when

⁵⁴ PH 1.10.

⁵⁵ PH 1.12.

⁵⁶ The things that are uncertain are all the things that do not show themselves in appearances. They can be easily recognized, especially in philosophy, by all the dispute that surrounds them.

⁵⁷ PH 1.8.

⁵⁸ PH 1.8.

⁵⁹ PH 1.10.

equipollence is reached with different tools it presents us with the problem of relativism. As Bett mentions things are good or bad for an individual only in a relative sense.⁶⁰ But this does not mean that when a person thinks something is good for him it is automatically good for him. It is a necessary but not a sufficient condition.⁶¹ There seems to be no guide when to accept something is convincing, and it therefore depends solely on personal preference.

But Bett mentions an important distinction between relativism and Pyrrhonism. The difference between relativism and Pyrrhonism is that Pyrrhonism does not deny the possibility of the real nature of things. Relativism dispenses with the idea that there can be an independent reality outside of our perception.⁶² So even though it can differ per person in how one reaches equipollence, it does not assume anything about how things are in truth, and the correct path to equipollence. Sextus cannot conclude that there is no possibility of an objective standard, because that would be a very dogmatic thing to do. I will have to account for relativity in my presentation of Ordinary Pyrrhonism, since now it seems purely subjective when someone reaches equipollence. There seems to be a sort of relativity in play, but it should not lead to the conclusion that things are purely relative, because this is on itself a definitive conclusion.

The intuition that there is some acceptance of relativity is supported by Sextus in his comparison with the Protagorean school. He mentions that the relativity of the Protagorean persuasion is something they and the Pyrrhonist have in common.⁶³ Sextus also introduces relativity in the ten modes. These modes are used to create counterarguments against beliefs.⁶⁴ The eighth mode is the one deriving from relativity.⁶⁵ Both uses of relativity can be interpreted as merely the use of relativity for the purpose of suspending judgement, but it is enough to at least suspect a relation between relativity and Pyrrhonism. However, from this we can still deduce that the Pyrrhonist simply keeps on investigating until equipollence is reached, which can be reached in different ways by different individuals. This is not an affirmation that reality is explained by relativism.

Reaching equipollence leads first to the suspension of judgement, and afterwards to tranquillity.⁶⁶ In first light not affirming any belief may feel like nihilism. That nothing has any meaning at all. This is where Pyrrhonism is misunderstood as Academic scepticism. It is the nihilism of the Academics in their formulation of the negation of belief that nothing can be known at all which is made explicit here.⁶⁷ However suspending belief rather than affirming or denying belief is not nihilism. It is a return to the thing we have in common: our experience of the direct appearance of the

⁶⁰ Bett, 1994, 134.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² O.c., 149.

⁶³ PH 1.216

⁶⁴ PH 1.36

⁶⁵ PH 1.135

⁶⁶ Kuzminski, 2008, 18.

⁶⁷ Kuzminski, 2008, 14.

world.⁶⁸ This is before we decide to reconstruct the direct world into beliefs. Pyrrhonism has the world hold its meaning in its essence, where it is not deconstructed into what seems logical by an overcomplex system of beliefs.

2.2 The process of suspension

When one thinks Pyrrhonism leads to a passive mind, since it has no drive for being active, this is simply not true. Sextus makes clear that suspending judgement is not suspending thought. We continue to think just as we continue to have sensations, but all of these end in the suspension of judgement.⁶⁹ The curious inquiring mind that philosophers are so fond of is not lost in Pyrrhonism. It is Academic Scepticism that caused the labelling of scepticism as the impossibility of inquiry, and that has sadly remained its principal meaning ever since,⁷⁰ but Pyrrhonism approves the act of inquiry. The original meaning of the word ‘sceptic’ is actually inquirer or someone who examines.⁷¹ Pyrrhonism does not do away with the curious enquiring mind, because it is what Pyrrhonism advocates, and it is its starting position. I will now present the process of the suspension of judgement in full clarity with the use of an example to improve our understanding of the Pyrrhonian act. I will illustrate an example that is for the philosopher reason to not adopt the Pyrrhonist stance, by showing a belief that he will surely not want to abandon in fear of the consequences.

Let us take a look at the belief that Philosophy has a meaningful existence in modern day society. The belief itself gives Philosophy a certain positive quality that we do not wish to discard, for what would it mean if we deem this belief to be untrue? Let us look at reasons to assent to this belief. Philosophy can be seen as the groundwork for science. Philosophy is known for its analytical character and understanding of principles, and science would not exist without it. Philosophy challenges the mind, and causes people to truly use their intellectual capacities to create understanding in important questions, such as what is a human? Is there a goal in life? What is knowledge? Perhaps all questions that seem to be in the interest of many people and, as a result, are important to thoroughly analyse in the benefit of these people. There has been philosophy since ancient times, as such it must be essential to humans in some way, and if we let go of this movement we may lose an essential part of the education of humankind as a whole. Ethics is practiced extensively within philosophy. If we wish to be good humans, practicing philosophy seems to be an effective way to become good. Lastly analytical skills are trained which makes a philosopher an excellent thinker who can contribute in many different areas of the working life.

⁶⁸ O.c., 4.

⁶⁹ PH 2.10.

⁷⁰ Kuzminski, 2018, 10.

⁷¹ O.c., 3; although if someone googles the definition today it will show that the sceptic is the one who denies the possibility of knowledge, which Sextus does not do.

This is an overall convincing picture of why philosophy has a meaningful existence in modern day society. But we wouldn't be true Pyrrhonists if we would not try to make a complete inquiry of the matter. So on the other side we might say: Philosophy is too hypothetical and speculative. It cannot be proven that it contributes to daily science or life. All sciences work within their own paradigms and do not seem to need philosophy to create new methods of research that have shown significant results for science. The only people that can actually benefit from philosophy are philosophers themselves, since their texts are too cryptic for the average Joe. And even if they would devote an immense amount of time in translating a text, they would end up with a common sense message such as 'history is important to understand human being as a whole in its development'.⁷² Such information could have been learned in 5 minutes. Instead Joe spent a month struggling to decipher what was said after every third comma in every second sentence. Philosophy may challenge the mind, but other disciplines can do this just as much, such as advanced math, artificial intelligence or biomechanics. Can any philosophy be taken serious if their theories are always susceptible for critique? In the end all philosophy is just an assembly of convictions that people want to convince others of.

Above I have given both an account in favour and against the belief that philosophy has a meaningful existence in modern society. It has to be noted that this is merely me spouting arguments that appear to me as they are, and the briefness does not do justice to the possibility of strong argumentation in favour of any of the given positions. Overall the account given above may still seem unconvincing from one of the two sides for the reader, which is probably the side that they would not take as their own. For these readers, if they wish to put their Pyrrhonian ability⁷³ to the test, it is their own challenge to give arguments for both positions until they reach equipollence. The argumentation I have personally given may not appear sufficient or logically coherent for some, but sometimes a weak argument is enough for the Pyrrhonist, since it only needs to cure dogmatic rashness.⁷⁴

A counterargument to equipollence is that one side of the argument is much more convincing than the other and that we could not possibly accept that they are in the end equally convincing. This is a counterargument that Bett uses. In our modern day world there are just some beliefs that are so likely that they cannot possibly attain an equally convincing opposing account.⁷⁵ But Bett seems to forget one of the ways Pyrrhonists deal with this case, which is perhaps my favourite counterargument that the Pyrrhonist uses. A counterargument may not be available in our current time, but it can present itself in the future, and therefore we need to suspend our judgement.⁷⁶ This may seem silly and a weak argument, but Bett actually strengthens the argument by saying that in the ancient time of the

⁷² An oversimplification of an interpretation from the *Phenomenology of Spirit* by Hegel.

⁷³ This means how capable anyone is in seeing the opposition as equally convincing or unconvincing. By Sextus's own argument in PH 2.40 it cannot be said that anyone is the complete Pyrrhonist. This is because there may be someone in the future who can be described as a better Pyrrhonist than those who came before him. This leads to the question when is anyone considered a Pyrrhonist? A question I will try to answer in chapter 5.

⁷⁴ PH 3.281.

⁷⁵ Bett, 2019, 183.

⁷⁶ PH 1.34.

Pyrrhonist school it may have been more plausible to always find an equally opposed account compared to modern times. He presents the availability of certain arguments as being dependent on time, and as a result makes this last counterargument of the Pyrrhonist more convincing.

It is unclear when the Pyrrhonist is done enquiring and suspends judgement. I would say that the Pyrrhonist is never truly done with enquiring, but suspends judgement automatically when everything seems balanced once again. If anything the Pyrrhonist seems to go through this specific process constantly, giving a balanced account on certain beliefs that causes them to suspend their judgement on the matter. All the different arguments, in addition to the original claim, are by themselves beliefs, and this also shows how a Pyrrhonist may enquire in many matters, by examining all these separate beliefs. For example the argument that philosophy challenges the mind from my example can be investigated by itself. It can be deduced that the Pyrrhonist is as a result constantly investigating, until the suspension of judgement becomes a sort of second nature. Or rather, as we spoke of earlier, a return to an original nature.

This could present itself as a counterargument against the claim that tranquillity is reached by suspending judgement, as the Pyrrhonist never seems to stop inquiring. But if done continuously through life it would not be strange to think that even this whole process becomes a habit for the Pyrrhonist.⁷⁷ It may even cause him to eventually have beliefs always appear in a state of equipollence, which would cause the Pyrrhonist to not even leave his state of tranquillity. But this is all merely speculative, and both accounts seem equally plausible, and therefore I will suspend my judgement. The suspension of judgement is important for modern daily life in that it creates the ability to always see things in perspective, staying true to the world of appearances instead of clinging to beliefs that are uncertain.

3. The life related aspects of Pyrrhonism

3.1 The life of the Pyrrhonist

A large part of living as a Pyrrhonist raises the question of how anyone who does not hold belief lives at all? Sextus describes how a Pyrrhonist lives by following law, custom, guidance by nature and necessitation of feeling.⁷⁸ The Pyrrhonist is not a passive individual that has made it his sole task to suspend beliefs during the day. He also lives his life, and goes through its hurdles. The part that differentiates the Pyrrhonist from the dogmatist is found in the areas of life that involve belief. This is a difficult step to take in our exploration of life related belief in general. For belief seems to have the

⁷⁷ Which would be an indication of someone who has truly endorsed the Pyrrhonian way of life in my eyes, and transform someone who aspires to be a Pyrrhonist to gain the character of a Pyrrhonist in addition to his aspiration.

⁷⁸ PH 1.23.

ability to arise during all activities of life. It is here that we see that Pyrrhonism could be a stance that involves all of daily life. This does not mean that belief, as Sextus intends its meaning, arises all the time as well.

Burnyeat claims that what Sextus meant with belief is simply seeing anything as true.⁷⁹ This is exactly what Burnyeat thinks Sextus advocates against, and something I agree with. But Burnyeat makes a move against those that would uphold that Sextus allows for some beliefs. In expecting the counterargument that there are certain beliefs that Sextus allows, Burnyeat makes a distinction between an ambitious type of belief and a more ordinary form of belief.⁸⁰ He describes the ambitious type as the one Sextus eschews, and the one that is characteristic of the dogmatist. This same distinction is also made by Vogt. Sextus speaks of the difference between *dogma* and *doxa*.⁸¹ Although these can at times be used almost interchangeably, *dogma* mostly refers to somewhat weightier claims.⁸² *Doxa* can be seen as non-dogmatic and could be seen as acceptable. Burnyeat then continues in showing that this is not what Sextus intended and that he truly wishes to suspend all belief.⁸³ I however tend to disagree in one aspect. I propose that we should allow the acceptance of something as non-dogmatic belief, but not affirm it as true. Sextus mentions in passage 1.13 of the *Outlines* that the Pyrrhonist does not mean belief in the general way, and he has written several other passages that suggest the acceptance of common sense belief.⁸⁴ I believe that accepted common beliefs are found in what Sextus describes as the standards of action.⁸⁵

Action necessitated by feeling is one of the standards of action for Sextus. But not all of these standards are as commonly seen between communities as feelings. For example custom and laws are different for different communities. In modern times some communities prohibit gay marriage, while others do not. These differences in laws and customs in communities cause difference in actions between individuals. But it seems that these laws and customs are consequently open for change, and such change is made by the agreement within a community. Agreement that can certainly be regarded as agreement of common beliefs. I agree with Burnyeat that affirmation of belief as true is what Sextus eschews, but I believe Burnyeat's step of not allowing beliefs in general is incorrect. Sextus seems to allow belief that is without controversy, which is not the same as saying anything about the truth of this belief. In 1.22 of the *Outlines* where Sextus introduces the standards of action, he makes a distinction between two interpretations of standards. The first is the one he does not allow, which is a standard that is surrounded by controversy and is thus uncertain. But the second form he defines by something that no one (presumably) will raise controversy over. Sextus adds these standards without

⁷⁹ Burnyeat, 2012, 230.

⁸⁰ OC, 225.

⁸¹ *Doxa* meaning common belief or popular opinion.

⁸² Vogt, 2012, 655

⁸³ Burnyeat, 2012, 228.

⁸⁴ PH 1.22, 1.226, 2.8, 2.102.

⁸⁵ PH 1.21.

controversy to the world of appearances. This shows that Sextus allows for certain beliefs, but of the ordinary kind.

Ordinary belief is accepted by the community, or maybe even by a long life individually.⁸⁶ Vogt also argues along these lines. In order to explain Pyrrhonist activity, Sextus must allow for some kind of acceptance of belief, something that allows the appearance to be effective as a guide and motivator for action.⁸⁷ Vogt continues by showing that this is exactly what the commemorative sign is for a Pyrrhonist.⁸⁸ In my translation it is the distinction between indicative and recollective signs.⁸⁹ The recollective sign is equal to the commemorative sign. ‘Seeing smoke can lead us to believe there is fire’ is the example for Sextus, but this assenting to what is convincing is different from assenting to dogmatic assumptions. Assuming there to be fire can put one into action, for example to flee or extinguish the fire. Recollective signs can be seen as a form of common sense belief, and it gives standards of action that are part of the world of appearances the Pyrrhonist act on.

The forming and agreeing upon standards seems more apparent for custom, laws and expertise than it is for nature’s guidance and necessitation by feelings. Sextus clearly mentions that from an everyday point of view we accept that piety is good and impiety is bad.⁹⁰ This is a matter of accepting the customs and norms within a society. This does not imply that Sextus thinks that these are deemed to be true norms fitted to reality, but I think that if a Pyrrhonist wishes to live in action he needs to accept these beliefs nonetheless. This interpretation has consequences for the understanding of Pyrrhonism as a modern doctrine and how we should understand standards of action. I continue this investigation further in my redefining of the standards of action in chapter 4.

3.2 The Sam examples

Beliefs that raise controversy are present every day. Indeed if these beliefs can be present in all of life it seems impossible to attain a full account of every situation where being a Pyrrhonist can have an effect. To get more insight in how it is to live as a Pyrrhonist and its appeal we can investigate examples. But as there are so many different situations it serves clarity to limit our use of examples to those that can give most information on how a Pyrrhonist deals with daily life. The variability in a life is immense and varies per individual. It would therefore be wise to limit our exploration first. It is too arduous a task to present examples that account for every individual on the earth, also I deem myself incapable of sympathizing with the deep hurt that have struck some individuals, as I have not yet been

⁸⁶ I will argue that in the end the standards are decided upon by the community. But yes there are individual differences that can provide individual standards.

⁸⁷ Vogt, 2012, 660.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ PH 2.102.

⁹⁰ PH 1.23.

part of the many horrors of human life other than the loss of a loved one. I propose my fictional character of Sam. She is what I deem to be representative of the average western adult.⁹¹

In summing up the domains of the average westerner's life it would not be weird to talk of social life, work life and free life as the three main activities for Sam. The individual is either engaged in his work, meeting up with loved ones or spending his free time through activities of preference. These are obvious domains in which any western individual spends his time, therefore the examples should serve a wide audience, and at least one of the examples should make the Pyrrhonist stance clear. It is easy to pick a negative belief around any of the three domains to put Pyrrhonism in a positive light, therefore it is more challenging to take a positive belief within the domains and see how Pyrrhonism would still rise as an attractive alternative. It is important to keep in mind that Pyrrhonism means not holding any belief and the opposite would be to hold a belief. Let us start with work life.

Sam holds the belief that as a banker she has one of the more refined jobs. If asked she will answer without any hesitation that she is extremely happy with her occupation and enjoys her time working. She is content with her earnings and believes it to be adequate to her financial demands. There are no other jobs Sam rather fulfils than her current job.

In this example it would be absurd to say that Sam's belief causes her suffering in any way or harms her state of mind. If anything it seems to bring joy to her life, since every time she thinks of her job it gives her a positive feeling. The belief that she holds a good job seems to bring her happiness and fortune. Then how could this belief limit her capacity for happiness?

Now the bank goes bankrupt. The bank is no longer able to offer Sam the job and she gets fired. Sam is left with the belief that the work that she no longer has is the job she wants and needs. This belief is no longer coherent with her circumstances and she therefore despairs. None of the other available workplaces are as good as the one she initially embraced. She loved the staff, the desks and everything surrounding it, but she can only indulge in the memories. She endures despair for two weeks, then finds a new job as a librarian, but holds on to her initial belief and as a result no longer enjoys her current work. Her previous job was what she wanted and still wants three years later as she fulfils her duties as the librarian, but with constant pain in her heart.

Sam clings to belief instead of suspending judgement. Let us see how a Pyrrhonist would have gone through the similar scenario. He would not hold the belief that work as a banker is the best work that is available. This however is not a prerequisite to enjoy work as a banker. A Pyrrhonist can still experience pleasures that are derived initially from pleasurable work. Any time something is finished it can be an instigator of pleasurable feelings, there are just no beliefs that prolong such feelings. A Pyrrhonist would return to its state of tranquillity, which if anything can be seen as a desired state for a

⁹¹ Western meaning someone who lives in a well-faring country within either Western Europe or North America.

Pyrrhonist.⁹² So both the Pyrrhonist and Sam are in a desired mental state. The conviction that the work is good does not carry any additional benefits in acquiring a desired mental state. The problem for Sam comes into existence when she gets fired. The belief that the work is good is now an impediment to her mental health. Pyrrhonists are not undisturbed in every way. They can be disturbed by things forced upon them,⁹³ but Sam is also disturbed by the belief that the nature of the happening is bad. While the Pyrrhonist can get upset over the initial losing of work he will not fall into despair, because he holds no belief that causes him to. The Pyrrhonist achieves the same state in his new work of librarian, for he does not hold the belief that this work is inferior. In the end the desired mental state is experienced in both cases but only Sam experiences lingering despair. Let us now change our perspective towards social life.

Sam has the belief that she can provide great mental support for her friends. Anytime they suffer from negative thoughts Sam knows how to deal with those, and gladly helps her friends in need. They expressed multiple times that they appreciate her efforts to help them and there is no one else they rather have talked to in their time of worry. Sam's belief that she holds an empathic posture, and the quality of a kind listener is strengthened by these expressions of gratitude from her friends. But one day Sam overhears her friends, where they describe Sam as annoying and intrusive into their personal matters. Sam is shocked as they initially expressed to be happy with her supportive actions. On a later time one of these friends again expresses his gratitude towards Sam's empathic behaviour. Not only does her friend now lie, but Sam's conviction of her empathic strength conflicts with the remarks on her intrusive behaviour. Not knowing which to hold as true Sam becomes unsure how to act in front of her friends. Her beliefs make their contact awkward and she holds on to these thoughts for a year until she finds the courage to speak up. Her friends surprisingly responded that everyone has some annoying aspects, and it wasn't as big of a deal for them as it may have seemed to Sam. Relieved Sam could finally let go of the fear of not being liked by her best friends.

In this example Sam acts in a certain way because of her beliefs, and also clings to these beliefs even though they seem uncertain. The key component of this example is that she did not explore the matter fully, but instantly held beliefs as a response. Sam held on to a small sample of beliefs which she did not further investigate. She held on to them as likely truths without deciding which one was more convincing, and this caused conflict and a troubled mind. The Pyrrhonist would have investigated further until equipollence was reached and thus suspension of judgement. This shows the benefit of the Pyrrhonist way of searching for a full account of matters. Let's now explore an example that represents spending time in a life of freedom.

⁹² Kuzminski, 2008, 11.

⁹³ PH 1.29.

Sam always had an urge to spend her time productively. She's been playing the piano for over four years, and has made it a habit to play at least half an hour every day. She wishes to play an hour every day but she is unsuccessful in her aspiration. After a heavy day of work she rather skims through Facebook and watches Netflix the rest of the night. Every time she does these, by her considered as, unproductive activities she feels guilt and shame. She believes to be successful in the rest of her life activities and ponders; why can't she do this? She finds herself troubled by feelings of failure, while falling back into old habits, but with an additional sense of guilt.

Sam has a certain belief of what is to be termed productive. She also carries an additional belief that she should be more productive, since she would not have termed these other activities as 'failures' if she did not carry this belief. It isn't that the Pyrrhonist would act differently or be more successful in adopting productive behaviour. I do not wish to claim that the Pyrrhonist would succeed in making the half hour a full hour. But, the Pyrrhonist would spend these so termed unproductive forms of activities in tranquillity rather than in guilt or with a feeling of failure. There is no reason to be convinced that it is unproductive or a failure of acting. The Pyrrhonist perspective here is most clearly depicted as a remedy to negative thinking that is caused by the holding of beliefs. Although Sextus Empiricus calls his Pyrrhonist counterarguments purgative drugs,⁹⁴ he presents these as purgative drugs for dogmatic stances. It can also be understood as clearing one's mind in daily life from the pressures of dogmatic belief. To be productive continuously can be seen as a dogmatic stance in modern times. It has been shown that norms that one sees as true can cause a sense of helplessness through serial failing to adopt to them.⁹⁵ This is similar to the repetitive failure I depicted in the third Sam example. Purging the belief of helplessness by counterarguments, and acquiring tranquillity by suspending judgement is the Pyrrhonist remedy.

These examples showed a few key components in favour of the Pyrrhonist attitude towards life. The first argument showed that having a positively inclined belief does not lead to a more superior form of a state of mind, as a state of tranquillity is the desired end for a Pyrrhonist. Tranquillity can therefore be regarded as just as much of an desired mental state as the happiness that comes in accordance with one's belief. While the initial positive belief can be an impediment as well, the state of tranquillity does not seem to be reliant on a particular situation, and is therefore a more robust state. Secondly, the Pyrrhonist investigates conflicting accounts extensively and builds arguments for both positions leading to a suspension of judgement. This is done instead of holding on to any of two opposing beliefs, and remaining confused over which one is more convincing because of insufficient inquiry. Not knowing which side is correct, as both seem probable, and therefore staying in a state of confusion is not resolved by Sam, but it automatically leads to the suspension of judgement for the Pyrrhonist. This shows that the Pyrrhonist in contrast to Sam has the ability to see

⁹⁴ PH 1.206, 3.280.

⁹⁵ Piko, 2002, 278.

the equipollence.⁹⁶ Thirdly, we have seen the curative aspects of Pyrrhonism. It can cure the troubled mind of dogmatic beliefs. Sextus made clear that those who hold beliefs are perpetually troubled.⁹⁷ In contrast to Sam, the Pyrrhonist makes no determination about what is good or bad, and does not endlessly pursue either, and is therefore tranquil.⁹⁸

The Sam examples have shown the contrast between a life grasped by belief and that of the Pyrrhonist. I hope to have shown that Pyrrhonism is appealing, at least for the human that is troubled by their beliefs, through my set of examples of the average individual in modern western society. Bett sees the content psychological state that Pyrrhonism advocates as the indication of an impoverished life.⁹⁹ I disagree. While it may not present ultimate happiness, the Pyrrhonist is stable and liberated from daily troubles, and it may well be more appealing than a state of euphoria with the occasional hysteria. The life of a Pyrrhonist in modern life is in conclusion one in tranquillity and free of a troubled mind.

There is additional reason to suspect that Pyrrhonism might have a positive influence on the troubled mind. There is currently a form of psychological therapy that is well applied throughout western society. Cognitive behavioural therapy is accepted as an effective tool in dealing with negative thoughts that impact one's life and mental state. It is actually similar to the Pyrrhonian endeavour. It educates people in learning certain positive beliefs in contrast to their existing negative belief.¹⁰⁰ Although the intervention is focused on adopting positive beliefs as true it cannot be denied that clients are still aware of their previous negative beliefs. The reason why many individuals fall back into their depression can be the result of regarding the negative beliefs as more true than the positive. It is unclear what would happen with the same population if they were encouraged to see not only their negative beliefs as ungrounded but also their positive beliefs. Because why would the positive beliefs have any more claim to truth than their negative beliefs? And it could be argued that the success of this therapy is solely based on acquiring the wisdom that the negative beliefs causing hopelessness and anxiety are not representative of the truth.

4. Appearance and action in modern daily life

4.1 The world of appearances

Appearances are those things that initially appear. They are not complex in their definition for they are just that which comes to us, either by the senses or in thought. Primacy of the appearances is what

⁹⁶ Kuzminski, 2008, 5.

⁹⁷ PH 1.27.

⁹⁸ PH 1.28.

⁹⁹ Bett, 2012, 21.

¹⁰⁰ Hughes, 2014, 106.

makes Pyrrhonists different from the dogmatists. The appearances constitute their own reality,¹⁰¹ namely a reality consisting of appearance, which can be understood as the only true reality for a Pyrrhonist. The opposite seems true in dogmatist forms of philosophy. Dogmatists give primacy to specific aspects that decide how humans and nature should be understood,¹⁰² but the primacy of these aspects cannot be taken as certain for Sextus.¹⁰³ Throughout the history of philosophy, reason has been presented as that highest principle. Reason's primacy is doubted by Sextus in his discussion of intellect. He mentions intellect as even more unclear than the soul.¹⁰⁴ Nonetheless reason is continuously used as that which explains human understanding and the external world.¹⁰⁵ German Idealism fixates on the supremacy of reason. Hegel even saw reason as a sort of substance that makes up all of reality,¹⁰⁶ thus making the empirical world one of rational substance. Rationality as the primary way to understanding humans is refuted by the Pyrrhonist. This is done in two ways. First by showing that subjects differ in the appearances they receive, and this shows how a general account of humanity in terms of its reason is a faulty effort.¹⁰⁷ Secondly by showing how the lowliest of animals (a dog) can have claim on just as much rational behaviour when compared to humans.¹⁰⁸ This means to show that going beyond the appearances in making a claim of primacy is uncertain, thus we should suspend our judgement on these matters.

There is an accessible example of an appearance in the *Outlines* of Sextus Empiricus that makes the difference between appearance and the uncertain clear. When a Pyrrhonist eats honey and it appears to be sweet, he does not go against that appearance.¹⁰⁹ The question if it is sweet is a different matter, because then you enter the realm of belief, truth and knowledge. A Pyrrhonist would never claim that it did not appear sweet to him when he ate it.¹¹⁰ A Pyrrhonist assents to the appearance and the feeling that it causes in him. It is also important that the feeling accompanying an appearance is an appearance on its own.¹¹¹ It cannot be assumed that the sensible appearance causes the appearance of a feeling. Sextus is sceptical of the existence of causes in general.¹¹² The joy of sweetness is as such a different appearance than the sweetness itself.

Assenting to appearance, but not to the uncertainty of its essence also involves the other senses. If it appears that the sun is out, this appearance is not refuted but is accepted for what it is. This does not mean that I should assume that the sun is actually there. I can only assume that it appears to be there for me. That I smell freshly baked bread does not give certainty that someone is baking bread,

¹⁰¹ Kuzminski, 2008, 75.

¹⁰² This is different for every school of course, but Sextus argues against a few of them. Examples being Democritus and his primacy of the atoms (PH 2.24) and Epicurus his pointing to decide who is human (PH 2.25). But he does not limit his critique to these two.

¹⁰³ PH 2.34.

¹⁰⁴ PH 2.32.

¹⁰⁵ O'Connor & Mohr, 2006, 5.

¹⁰⁶ Hegel, 2006, 329.

¹⁰⁷ PH 1.36.

¹⁰⁸ PH 1.76.

¹⁰⁹ PH 1.20.

¹¹⁰ PH 1.20.

¹¹¹ Kuzminski, 2018, 74.

¹¹² PH 3.29.

but the appearance is there and is not refuted. Although these examples may not be of any interest for the Pyrrhonist they do provide us with a clear distinction between the world of appearances and the world of uncertainty.¹¹³ Furthermore appearances are not limited to the senses. There are also appearances in thought,¹¹⁴ and thoughts can take on the form of a conviction. So it is not true that conviction cannot appear in the mind of a Pyrrhonist. A conviction can appear, but a Pyrrhonist does not hold on to this conviction. Even speaking out such beliefs is merely an uttering of the Pyrrhonist and this does not mean he endorses the belief, but only that the belief appears to him, and his urge to express it.¹¹⁵

This work is engaged in building a stance applicable in modernity, and is focused on the modern world of appearances and its effect on action. The question is how the primacy of appearances in viewing the world affects our modern daily life. In this question we investigate two aspects of going by the world of appearances as our standard. First the effect on our mind when we take the appearances for what they are and second the effect it has on our actions. The second part is important because Sextus describes appearance as the cause for action.¹¹⁶ He gives us four standards of action.¹¹⁷ These are nature's guidance, necessitation by feelings, customs/laws and teaching of kinds of expertise. These were all apparent for the traditional Pyrrhonist,¹¹⁸ but they might be less apparent in modern daily life. It would be wise to investigate these four in the light of modern daily life. Now that we have a basic understanding on what appearances are for the Pyrrhonist we can look how the Pyrrhonist deals with them.

4.2 The effect of the appearances on the mind

Appearances are not to be investigated, but instead should be taken for granted.¹¹⁹ If the Pyrrhonist does investigate the appearances, it is only to react against the rashness of dogmatism.¹²⁰ Appearances have primacy to everything else, for all other things are uncertain. So there is something that Pyrrhonists take as irrefutable, and that is the appearance. Not everyone receives the same appearances, and this by itself can explain individual differences.¹²¹ With this remark it cannot be assumed that humanity shares anything in the world of appearances, and since appearances are the only irrefutable things for the Pyrrhonist there seems no ground to make any universal statements

¹¹³ Common sense belief is accepted by my form of Ordinary Pyrrhonism. So questions such as: Is the sun really there? are not interesting for the Ordinary Pyrrhonist and may not have been interesting for the traditional Pyrrhonist either.

¹¹⁴ PH 2.10.

¹¹⁵ PH 1.15.

¹¹⁶ PH 1.21.

¹¹⁷ PH 1.23.

¹¹⁸ PH 1.23.

¹¹⁹ PH 1.9.

¹²⁰ PH 1.20.

¹²¹ PH 1.15. At the same time Sextus introduced standards of action. And these do seem to indicate a common ground between individuals in the world of appearance. This ambiguity has been discussed before and the notion of relativity plays an important role. I will clarify this in chapter 4.

about humanity. Every uttered thought or phrase, even these about the appearances, are just how it appears to me personally. The appearances do not have to be explained, rather they can serve as the principles of explanation.¹²²

So appearances seem to be the thing that we can be certain of in all of our explanations. This also means that if we try to form anything further in conception than the initial appearances we end in doubt. It is just a bundle of appearances, and the links we build are uncertain. Sextus describes how we should just go along with appearances, just like how a boy follows his chaperon, where one finds oneself neither embracing nor rejecting the experience, but yielding without adherence.¹²³ Sextus seems to ask of us to trust appearance but without rejection or affirmation, and this adds some flavour to not clinging to beliefs. Appearances do not need to be shown as true for Sextus. There is a simplicity in just going by appearances, and this also gives it its charm. An example might illuminate the charm of going by appearances.

Thinking about a polar bear allows an appearance to instantly appear to your mind, but defining the polar bear is tough. The complete explanation does not simply appear. You need different forms of appearances to construct the definition of a polar bear. It is white, big, a carnivore and survives in cold climates. But the entirety of a polar bear comes in one single appearance, and even if you do try to define it you are engaging in appearances. The separate appearances may not even do the polar bear justice. Is it truly big? Compared to what? It seems as if the definition of the polar bear is less capable to do justice to the animal than your appearance of the polar bear. A counterargument would be that if one studies the polar bear exhaustively one would have a better understanding of the polar bear. There seems to be truth in the possibility of gaining better familiarity with a being, but not all polar bears may be the same. Conceptualization of the polar bear would mean corrupting the pure appearance. Kuzminski writes:

*“The more our beliefs are winnowed out from our appearances, the more our appearances stand forth just as they are, freed of the distortions imposed by our beliefs about them”.*¹²⁴

There are both equally convincing and unconvincing arguments for why one would have a better appearance of a polar bear. What is to be deemed better? Either exhaustively study the polar bear or taking its appearance for what it is, I do not know, therefore I will suspend judgement.

I think there is always something in appearance that becomes clouded by defining and conceptualizing.¹²⁵ This leads me to introduce a concept that is close to our hearts and, as I boldly

¹²² Kuzminski, 2008, 72.

¹²³ PH 1.230.

¹²⁴ Kuzminski, 2008, 141.

¹²⁵ It is interesting that babies and children do not have a well-built conception of things, and they have only the appearances in a sense. When does belief come into existence? What instigates it, and what are its effects? But then again all of the possible answers to these question seem grounded in belief. This has not stopped science, yet.

assume, familiar to all of us. This is the conception of the I. Through Pyrrhonism, identity cannot be understood in any other way than merely as a compilation of appearances.¹²⁶ All stable traits that one describes oneself with are none other than how it appears to that individual.¹²⁷ Identity is how you appear to yourself and others. This is a construct of different appearances, and claiming one overarching identity is uncertain.¹²⁸ In conclusion appearances are the only things that are certain, both in understanding the external world and the internal world of subject identity.

4.3 The standards of action

This was an inquiry into how the appearances affect the mind. I now wish to turn to the second part, that is how a Pyrrhonist acts according to the appearances. It is quite convincing that a well-built set of beliefs can be the cause of behaviour for an individual in daily life. The conviction that one wants to be wealthy can give an explanation why that individual is working overtime every day. But how to interpret the action of the Pyrrhonist? It is not that the Pyrrhonist stays utterly inactive.¹²⁹ Sextus provides us with four standards of action. He does however not give us much detail or examples on how these put the Pyrrhonist into action, nor does he give an account of the exhaustiveness of the list of four. I will explain all four and describe their relevance in modern life.

Nature's guidance can be interpreted as our natural capacities, specifically perceiving and thinking.¹³⁰ It seems that all senses can be counted within this category, as necessitation by feelings is seen differently in its emotional force. I have described earlier that the appearance of a sense and a feeling are different appearances that are able to occur together. A human is naturally inclined to think, sense and perceive. Being a thinking sensational being is automatic, and the senses create appearances to act upon.¹³¹ Nature's guidance fits the mechanical view that we have in modernity. Humans in modern time are seen as animals that are regulated by their brain and act within the bounds of natural law. Evolutionary theories also support nature's guidance, which explains human behaviour linked to survival and adaptation. In the scientific worldview humans are less seen as dependent on divine entities and best explained by looking at nature.

Necessitation by feelings concern the actions that come forth with specific emotions. I think that even the most rational person will acknowledge that they sometimes act directly in response to emotion. If one is disgusted, the act of expressing this facially seems almost necessary. It is difficult to

¹²⁶ Kuzminski, 2008, 87, 92.

¹²⁷ The moment you introduce character traits into the description of yourself you may already be going beyond the appearances. Suppose you describe yourself as a jolly person, and then you find someone else who also appears jolly. Does this mean that you are exactly the same as the other in that aspect? I think not.

¹²⁸ Pyrrhonism was aware of its need to address individuality, as it appears that there are individual differences in perception. I will try to add additional insight on the matter in my Ordinary Pyrrhonism.

¹²⁹ PH 1.23.

¹³⁰ PH 1.24.

¹³¹ Recently I have entertained the thought that rationality can also be seen as a sense. This falls outside the scope of the current work. Thus I will leave it at that: An entertaining thought.

express emotions in conception. When someone feels angry the underlying causes of the reaction can be explained in concepts, but the actual emotion does not seem to lend itself to clear conceptualizing. Reasoning can give explanations, such as an unjust act towards an individual who gets angry as a reaction, but it would still be the emotion of being angry that necessitated the punching of a hole in the wall and not the injustice inflicted upon the puncher. It feels adequate to explain a large portion of human behaviour as necessitated by feelings. A Pyrrhonist moderates these feelings to a certain extent, as Sextus advocates,¹³² but it seems impossible to extinguish necessitation by feeling completely. This should not even be the goal, since many actions that come forth through emotion can have positive effects as well. Hugging loved ones after long separation gives the receiver of the hugging nothing but warmth and a long lingering smile. The choice of Pyrrhonism to adopt an emotionally related standard of action seems logical, and is still relevant in our modern age.

Teaching of kinds of expertise is for Sextus a cultivation of practical skills and crafts that we have accepted, and keep us active.¹³³ Expertise is translated from the Greek term *technē*. This is a form of practical knowledge in craftsmanship or skill, which has been imbedded into the body by extensive practice. An example of a skill is medical expertise. Doctors see certain symptoms and give a remedy that heals. Methodic doctors choose a certain medicine based on what they have accepted as that which works when someone is ill with certain symptoms.¹³⁴ Sextus describes that within the school of Medical Empiricism healing is not done with certain beliefs the doctor has regarding the disease, but through the ability to respond correctly to symptoms with a suitable treatment.¹³⁵ Sextus describes the method of Medical Empiricism to at least be the same as that of Pyrrhonism.¹³⁶ These medical practitioners simply removed that which is unnatural, just like a dog is inclined to remove a thorn that got stuck in its paw.¹³⁷ Next to medical expertise many learned skills can count as expertise. Such as playing the guitar, the art of the blacksmith or running really fast.

Custom and laws are simply cultural in my opinion. In some countries specific actions are banned, for example gay marriage. It seems that the Pyrrhonist simply accepts laws and customs within their culture. This is more nuanced in modern times. There has been globalisation and it is no longer straightforward what the appropriate customs are. One can only assume that the Pyrrhonist would simply adopt any law or custom that is specifically designed for the culture they currently inhabit. The difficulty here is that there is a great number of informal laws. It is unclear in Sextus what the extent of assenting to laws and customs is. It seems to be mainly the common sense form of going by custom and law. I think one would do best to follow this common sense line of thinking. Laws like ‘do not kill’ are common sense and should therefore be followed. ‘Take off your shoes’ when entering

¹³² PH 1.30.

¹³³ PH 1.24.

¹³⁴ PH 1.238.

¹³⁵ PH 1.240.

¹³⁶ PH 1.236.

¹³⁷ PH 1.238

the shower is not a law but it is custom, and one would be in a strange mood to do otherwise. ‘Aim for the top’ is more of a personal guideline and is uncertain. This indicates that there are some questionable laws and customs, but these are within the realm of uncertainty. It would be weird for the Pyrrhonist to doubt the most common sense customs. Sextus even states that we adhere to the common sense preconceptions and common observation.¹³⁸

Another concept of modernity that has grown in its common acceptance would be science. While it is generally accepted that science can bring forth facts,¹³⁹ it can also be argued that it is currently custom to use science to find truths and facts. Facts can be convincing just because they are announced in the name of science. This view on science renders it nothing more than the most commonly agreed method for providing certainty. This seems especially the case for ‘ordinary folk’.¹⁴⁰ I am talking of the unwavering trust of the people in science, which is apparent to me in modern society. While it would have been more appropriate in antiquity to ask the gods for guidance, in modernity science is the first to offer itself as general guide for truth.

Science is a commonly accepted notion for facts and it should have a claim to fall within the standards of action as custom. This is where I separate myself from the ambiguity in Sextus’s *Outlines* with my Ordinary Pyrrhonism. An example is that the sun is in the middle of our solar system. This appearance was made possible by astronomical methods, and is in our time taken for granted. These facts are well within the domain of appearance. The distinction between what is appearance and what is uncertain can be vague in these cases. But I claim it is decided by common sense, and custom gives good explanation why we have adopted a heliocentric model. If one looks through a telescope and peers at the heavens with great methodological strategy for a certain amount of time it appears that the sun is in the middle of it all. I am not belittling the scientific methods that were present in ancient Greece. The heliocentric model of the universe was proposed by Aristarchus of Samos around 310 – c. 230 BC, but it was not until Copernicus reintroduced the model and Galileo’s use of the telescope that these speculations were accepted. This is what I wish to make clear here. There is a shift of custom of what is accepted in the different communities through times. This shift is not instant but accumulates over time. Astronomical science did not just come into existence as we know it. It is the community that decides what is accepted as appearance and what is uncertain. It is undeniable that the modern world has accepted some views that were not common in Ancient Greece. There has been an increasing shift from the divine and mythical to the rigorous form of science that is adopted today.

¹³⁸ PH 2.246

¹³⁹ Even in the traditional understanding of facts.

¹⁴⁰ In the general sense I mean everyone who is not a Pyrrhonist, but I specifically mean the uneducated.

4.4 Ordinary Pyrrhonism

The question is whether we find Sextus's four standards sufficient. I wish to argue that it needs to be clear how the standards of action come to be. What decides if anything is to be considered a standard of action? This is the moment to resolve ambiguities in Sextus's description of Pyrrhonism, and introduce Ordinary Pyrrhonism. I argue that it is culturally and historically dependent what should be adopted as standards of action. This requires an acceptance of a certain kind of belief, namely the ordinary kind. I return to my earlier discussion of the relation between Pyrrhonism and relativity (p. 14). The standards of action should be viewed in a relative manner. Hales claims that Pyrrhonism harmonizes with a form of perspectival relativism.¹⁴¹ Ordinary beliefs are accepted in a perspectival sense that is characteristic for a specific community. An epoch¹⁴² is represented by the expression of the standards of action in its relativist position towards the whole of history. This is clear for customs and laws, but it can also be argued that it involves the other standards.

If standards can change through time they should not be viewed as mere raw appearance. Surely laws are human creations to help society function. If these laws are regarded as human creations they are grounded in beliefs of how humans should live together. Frede also argues that philosophy is an ongoing enterprise with its own standards of what is acceptable. He expresses an instinct that supports that the standards may change over time under the pressure of the larger context, for example science.¹⁴³ What I am suggesting here in understanding the standards of action is similar to a view that is announced by Habermas. A view he calls communicative reason, which is dependent on agreement between individuals rather than an ontological understanding of the world.¹⁴⁴ Habermas sees this as a way out of the subject-oriented view on philosophy.¹⁴⁵ Although Habermas accepts the historical approach from Hegel, he does not classify subjects as most important but communicative action instead, and as such philosophy based on the community. I sincerely think this is the approach that is most suitable in deciding on the standards of action. It is an overall agreement in how the world appears to us as humans. Reality is understood as appearances that we share, and how it appears to us in common.

This does not mean that we must believe the standards to be true. This is how Pyrrhonism can have ordinary beliefs without propounding any belief to be true, and at the same time not deny the possibility of truth about either humans or the external world. Bett seems to agree on this point, and claims that it is the permitted relative rather than the appearance that can provide the key to living well, where things may strike us as being good without claiming them being good in reality.¹⁴⁶ Bett explains that Sextus can still make relative claims if they do not declare truth. A problem with my

¹⁴¹ Hales, 2008, 252-253.

¹⁴² Epoch: A particular period of time in history.

¹⁴³ Frede, 1988, 671.

¹⁴⁴ Habermas, 1987, 301.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Bett, 1994, 151.

current view is that I do allow the existence of ordinary belief, namely in the form of the agreed upon standards of action. Sextus's remains mysterious on the matter, but it seems possible that he did intend a distinction between ordinary belief and dogmatic belief. I disagree with Burnyeat.¹⁴⁷ I do not think the Pyrrhonist eschews all belief, but only the dogmatic kind. And it is exactly in the standards of action that Sextus allows this kind of ordinary belief.¹⁴⁸ Frede also finds section 1.22 in the *Outlines* convincing evidence to indicate that the Pyrrhonist does hold ordinary beliefs.¹⁴⁹ Ordinary belief is defined as follows: uncontroversial belief that is implemented in the standards of action. Ordinary Pyrrhonism is a stance that adheres to modernity in its connection to history, the communicative decided standards of action and its inclusion of science.

Frede further supports this interpretation.¹⁵⁰ He argues that the Pyrrhonists even if they suspended judgements on all matters would still have many beliefs, quite enough to lead a worthwhile life.¹⁵¹ He argues that the Pyrrhonist *tries* to live a life without holding on to beliefs rather than that he *succeeds* at it always.¹⁵² This accompanies our earlier observation that Sextus argued that there may be someone wiser in the future and this supports the conclusion that there may be a better Pyrrhonist in the future. This in turn can support the creation of a clear form of Pyrrhonism. Ordinary Pyrrhonism should be seen as a striving towards having no beliefs rather than having no belief. Pyrrho is seen as the one who is most characteristic to the Pyrrhonist doctrine,¹⁵³ but my thoughts imply that even Pyrrho may not have been worthy of the label of the complete Pyrrhonist.

5. David Hume and the introduction of habit

5.1 The common man

David Hume does not call himself a Pyrrhonist. On the contrary, he refutes the Pyrrhonian stance. He claims that if humankind would accept Pyrrhonism they would slowly wither away in their inability to act.¹⁵⁴ David Hume has a strong opinion that Pyrrhonism as the most extreme form of scepticism would lead to nothing, as scepticism for him is the opposite of acting. It can work in the lecture room, but never in common life.¹⁵⁵ As we know by now this is a false assumption for Pyrrhonism, since Pyrrhonism acts upon appearance and through its standards of action. Hume also unjustly

¹⁴⁷ Burnyeat, 2012, 227.

¹⁴⁸ PH 1.237.

¹⁴⁹ Frede, 1987, 186.

¹⁵⁰ O.c., 180

¹⁵¹ O.c., 181.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ PH 1.7.

¹⁵⁴ Hume, 1999, 82.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

misinterprets Pyrrhonists in his criticism of how they do not trust the senses,¹⁵⁶ since the Pyrrhonists do not distrust their senses but take them for what they are.¹⁵⁷

Then how can Hume be an advocate of Pyrrhonism? I wish to explain that although Hume criticizes Pyrrhonism he actually presents a stance similar to Ordinary Pyrrhonism, but with additional explanation of how standards of action come to be stable, and that is with his account of habit. Hume definitely sees the benefits of a Pyrrhonist stance, but he asks to accept it in a small dosage, where there is also room left to adopt a bit of dogmatism.¹⁵⁸ Hume introduces the impressions. These cause a lively perception of the world we hear, feel, see, love, hate or will.¹⁵⁹ They are different from the ideas, which are fainter perceptions we gain by reflection on our impressions. This is similar to the distinction between appearances and the uncertain in Pyrrhonism. He also sees the danger of overly complex dogmatism. This can be expressed by his following quote.

“Indulge your passion for knowledge, says nature, but seek knowledge of things that are human and directly relevant to action and society. As for abstruse thought and profound researches, nature also says, I prohibit them, and if you engage in them I will severely punish you by the brooding melancholy they bring, by the endless uncertainty in which they involve you, and by the cold reception your announced discoveries will meet with when you publish them. Be a philosopher, nature continues, but amidst all your philosophy be still a man.”¹⁶⁰

Hume can truly be seen as an advocate for the common man. He expresses the danger in traveling through the uncertain paths of dogmatic philosophy and urges us to steer our inquiries back to the initial world of impressions. In addition Hume advocates the Pyrrhonist ideal of building equal stances in viewing one’s convictions. He does this by speaking in favour of dogmatism, solely to do both positions justice.¹⁶¹ He wants people to challenge their opinions and destroy ungrounded confidence,¹⁶² which can in return be favourable in creating a fuller and more satisfactory account on the matter.

Richard Popkin describes Hume as the complete Pyrrhonist, as the man who builds a more balanced account of Pyrrhonism that makes it more liveable by being partly dogmatic and partly sceptic.¹⁶³ I agree with Popkin in that Hume is a balanced sceptic rather than a complete sceptic, since he dogmatically uses habit as the explanation of everything. But I disagree in calling Hume the complete Pyrrhonist for the exact same reason. While Hume very much indulges in comparing both

¹⁵⁶ O.c., 77.

¹⁵⁷ Kuzminski, 2008, 80.

¹⁵⁸ Hume, 1999, 83.

¹⁵⁹ O.c., 8.

¹⁶⁰ O.c., 4.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² O.c., 12.

¹⁶³ Popkin, 1951, 407.

sides of the argument and deems appearances important, he also holds strong, and if I may say uncertain,¹⁶⁴ opinions which is not very Pyrrhonian to do. Hume creates arguments for both sides but does this to give credit to dogmatism rather than to achieve equipollence and the suspension of judgement. I would not call Hume a Pyrrhonist in the end, but I do think that he has a Pyrrhonian attitude to some extent. His balanced account is similar to my form of Ordinary Pyrrhonism. Hume himself makes the distinction between ordinary belief and dogmatist belief.

“the sentiment of belief is nothing but a conception that is more intense and steady than conceptions that are mere fictions of the imagination, and this manner of conception arises from a customary conjunction of the object with something present to the memory or senses.”¹⁶⁵

5.1 Habit

The difference in dogmatist belief, or fictions of the imagination, and ordinary belief is that in ordinary belief it has become custom to conjoin the impressions that make up that ordinary belief. The important notion for Hume in explaining behaviour is habit. It is not justified by reason but it is an inclination caused by behaving, or thinking these things often in the past.¹⁶⁶ Habit is also his explanation for ascribing causality to the things in the world. It is not reasoning that links things together, but it is the reoccurrence of different impressions following each other, which links them eventually in our minds.¹⁶⁷ This same line of thinking is also found in his understanding of personal identity. If we try to think of a stable I, we are left to conclude that this I is nothing else than an accumulation of appearances in memory,¹⁶⁸ and there is no continuous I that oversees this process. For Hume individuals are different bundles of experiences.

Although it seems irrefutable that there are personal differences between individuals, I do not wish to accept Hume’s conviction that experience is the only thing causing these differences. It has been an incredible large discussion between the rationalists and the empiricists. What is the cause for knowledge? Experience or rationality? Pyrrhonism does not want to deny or affirm one or the other, and I will thus suspend judgement regarding this controversy.

Hume is one of the few people who ascribe primacy to feelings rather than to rationality, which makes his philosophy so interesting. Giving primacy to feelings is where Hume differs from my

¹⁶⁴ His strong empirical attitude makes it impossible for ideas to develop independently of the impressions.

¹⁶⁵ Hume, 1999, 24.

¹⁶⁶ O.c., 20.

¹⁶⁷ O.c., 22.

¹⁶⁸ Hume, 2008, 1.4.6.3

own stance, since I ascribe primacy to neither rationality nor feelings.¹⁶⁹ Hume sketches the philosopher engaged in the ordinary as someone who inquires up to a point until he realizes his error. At this moment he goes no further but renews his appeal to common sense, and secures himself from any dangerous illusions.¹⁷⁰ This can be associated with the journey towards Pyrrhonism. Sextus describes that Pyrrhonists began to do philosophy to decide what is true and what is false, but they came upon equipollent dispute, and being unable to decide this they suspended judgement.¹⁷¹ Hume advocates a philosophy that steers between obscure dogmatist philosophy and ignorance. A philosophy that stays true to the world of the ordinary and creates ideas that compel not just the academic but ordinary folk as well. He describes the good philosopher as:

“The best kind of character is supposed to lie between those extremes: retaining an equal ability and taste for books, company, and business; preserving in conversation that discernment and delicacy that arise from literary pursuits, and in business preserving the honesty and accuracy that are the natural result of a sound philosophy. In order to spread and develop such an accomplished kind of character, nothing can be more useful than writings in the easy style and manner, which stay close to life, require no deep thought or solitary pondering to be understood, and send the reader back among mankind full of noble sentiments and wise precepts, applicable to every demand of human life. By means of such writings, virtue becomes amiable, the pursuit of knowledge agreeable, company instructive, and solitude entertaining.”¹⁷²

5.3 Hume and Ordinary Pyrrhonism

Hume presents further inspiration for Ordinary Pyrrhonism. The ambiguities stated in my interpretation and a revision of Pyrrhonism are heralded by Hume. First the Pyrrhonist does allow ordinary belief. It is dogmatic belief that the Pyrrhonist inspects, sees as uncertain and suspends judgement on. Staying true to common sense and destroying dogmatist belief causes tranquillity, and avoids the brooding melancholy caused by holding obscure dogmatist belief.¹⁷³ Second Hume provides explanation of how ordinary belief comes into existence, but more importantly remains as a standard. Ordinary or common sense belief comes into existence through habit. The allowance of slavery has been abandoned by the acceptance of certain laws against slavery. Existing laws can be

¹⁶⁹ It seems obvious that Hume wished to give primacy to feelings instead of rationality. In his age of enlightenment rationality gained ruling authority over humanity and philosophy. His choice of giving primacy to feelings may have just been his reaction to the leading dogma.

¹⁷⁰ Hume, 1999, 3.

¹⁷¹ PH 1.26.

¹⁷² O.c., 3.

¹⁷³ Hume, 4.

regarded as something that has become a habit of our community.¹⁷⁴ Habits as such can be understood as those things that have stayed as standards because of their reoccurring nature and their prevalence among humankind through the course of human history. All the standards of action can be seen as the customs that have developed in the community, and these are the habits the community has acquired. I agree with Hume that common sense and thus the standards of action are built through habit both individually and for the community as a whole, which can be regarded as their respective history.

Third the use of frequency or probability in choosing what to accept as ordinary beliefs or dogmatic beliefs. The standards of action are taken for granted because the Pyrrhonist does not want to be utterly inactive. This does not mean the Pyrrhonist believes these standards to adhere to reality. Matters of fact in Hume are accepted by common sense for their convincing aspects, but he remains cautious of their truth. His famous example is that the sun will rise tomorrow. The sun rising tomorrow is only convincing because we have seen the sun doing this in the past. But if we had not acquired this belief through habit the opposite statement of the sun will not rise tomorrow would be just as intelligible a proposition.¹⁷⁵ Sextus adds strength to the acceptance of such common sense belief in his description of the different signs. Recollective signs are exactly those that represent common sense and ordinary life.

“For recollective signs are found convincing by everyday life: seeing smoke, someone diagnoses fire; having observed a scar, he says that a wound was inflicted. Hence not only do we not conflict with everyday life, but we actually join the struggle on its side, assenting without opinion to what it has found convincing and taking a stand against the private fictions of the dogmatists.”¹⁷⁶

It is no extreme move to say that Hume and Sextus agree on the acceptance of common sense belief and the suspension of judgement of dogmatist belief. The controversy remains that we have not yet found any ordinary belief that gives us certain grasp of reality, or else philosophers would surely agree on it,¹⁷⁷ but matter of fact is that philosophers still argue. We accept ordinary beliefs as the best available explanation. As Hume explains, it is probability that separates dogmatic belief from ordinary belief. Ordinary belief is characterized by its regularity. Fire has always burned and water has always suffocated a man.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁴ PH 1.24. Even necessitation by feelings can be seen as what we regard as a common sense understanding of it. Hunger conducts us to food and thirst to drink is surely common sense. It is something the community has decided to accept as an ordinary belief.

¹⁷⁵ Hume, 1999, 12.

¹⁷⁶ PH 2.102.

¹⁷⁷ A bold assumption, based on my conviction that humanity would agree upon the truth if it would present itself to us.

¹⁷⁸ Hume, 1999, 28.

To conclude, I have shown that there are three ways in which Hume can be seen to support my proposal of Ordinary Pyrrhonism. The allowance of ordinary belief, the building of the standards of action through habit and the difference between ordinary belief and dogmatic belief in terms of their probability. I do not accept Hume's view that all ordinary beliefs are constituted solely by experience, since other philosophers still argue for the supremacy of reason. I think Pyrrhonism should accept neither the empiricist nor the rationalist position on this matter.

6. The appeal and (trap)suppression of Dogmatism: A comparison of attitudes

6.1 The essence of Dogmatism

Science,¹⁷⁹ Academic Scepticism¹⁸⁰ and any other doctrine that tends not to suspend judgement have one thing in common for the Pyrrhonist. They are all part of the same attitude of dogmatism.

Dogmatism can be seen as a complete opposite of Pyrrhonism. It is everywhere where one engages in love for wisdom without sufficient investigation of what should be the primary principle to further inquire from. This should result in an exhaustive quest for that principle, which would lead into equally convincing positions, and would then lead into the suspension of judgement. Dogmatism is found where one chooses one of the principles as primary in light of available principles. This causes further investigation to occur only based on this initial principle. Therefore the dogmatist will only explore areas that are coherent with this initial principle. The exploration is limited in that way, but for a dogmatist it is the leading truth.

It is not that dogmatism is unconvincing in any way, for dogmatists are plentiful. Certainly dogmatism provides clarity where the dogmatist must locate his search, but Sextus would agree with me when I say that it is an extended form of sophistry. If all exploration follows this initial assumption then all the following findings bear at least the same uncertainty as this initial assumption. Although the system seems convincing, when one returns to the root of inquiry it must be concluded that this first step is uncertain. Nonetheless the entire system appears convincing to the dogmatist, and he holds on to this initial assumption as a truth. This also shows the modern expression of dogmatism, namely one's inability to refute their own stance. Although philosophers try to criticize their own position and build counterarguments, they rarely attack their initial assumptions.

Why is dogmatism this prevalent? Years of study are being invested in the analytical reviewing of dogmatic stances. These are either focused on dismantling the dogmatist arguments or

¹⁷⁹ Kuzminski, 2008, 82.

¹⁸⁰ PH 1.222.

expanding further on their presuppositions and filling the holes of ambiguity with additional arguments. What makes dogmatism appealing? If anything dogmatism seems like a true intellectual endeavour. It is a digging well beyond the practical. It is an exploration of the theoretical in its purest sense. The further we inquire into a specific form of dogmatism, the further we drift away from normal daily activity and ascend into the pure theoretical world that philosophy can offer. When we focus on uncertainty it opens up a world of speculation. But it is not mere speculation that drives us into this world. Dancing in the theoretical domain is done by strong argumentation and logical continuation of an original instinct that started the inquiry at the beginning. This one grounding assumption can lead the investigation through the theoretical domain. When one has long strived to uphold the initial assumptions and continued their investigation by analytical argumentation, nothing becomes more satisfying than when everything fits together in a single moment. Then the dogmatist has succeeded in explaining the world from his assumptions, and has not only made it logically correct, but also made it convincing to the educated ear.

Some dogmatists try to convince the ‘common folk’ with understandable argumentation, while other philosophers try to convince the ‘elite’, namely philosophers themselves. It has appeared to me that fellow philosophers enjoy the purely theoretical, and I must admit to be guilty of the same pleasure. One indulges in pure theoretical discussion, and loses sight of the original world of appearances. There is something admirable in using the strength of the intellect that man has gained by putting himself through hardships filled with tough, long and confusing education. Philosophers analyse confusing claims of the madmen who decided to write works of ten thousands of words on just one particular subject.¹⁸¹ We put our rational thinking through excruciating challenges on a daily basis. The only way to reward these efforts is with the activity that caused all these difficulties in the mind. If we receive anything by enduring all the different theories, it is the ability to construct them ourselves. This is the pleasure that dogmatism can bring. It is just like Pyrrhonism and its work of equipollence, namely an ability, but one to construct a coherent whole around assumptions that can only be embodied by its true form in the theoretical domain. I agree with Hume’s description of the advantageous side of dogmatism.

“If these reasonings concerning human nature seem abstract and hard to understand, what of it? This isn’t evidence of their falsehood. On the contrary, it seems impossible that what has hitherto escaped so many wise and profound philosophers can be very obvious and easy to discover.”¹⁸²

Dogmatic philosophy is the form that ventures into the abstract to further inquire into human understanding and all of reality. It tries to find truth, and even if we deem it unsuccessful thus far does not mean it should stop its endeavour.

¹⁸¹ And yes, Sextus Empiricus is no exception.

¹⁸² Hume, 1999, 8.

6.2 Pyrrhonism as a solution

It cannot be denied that dogmatism has a certain charm. It can fuel the lust for intellectual aspirations. But, holding on to dogmatic beliefs presents its own danger. The trap of dogmatism is that the coherent system build around the uncertain assumptions makes them more convincing, but the system itself gains its certainty from these uncertain assumptions. This in turn does not allow any ideas that stand in contrast to these assumptions. The dogmatist may want to hold on to their assumptions, and then there is the danger of stubborn upholding of beliefs, causing blindness for a full account. This is when the trap has been set, and exploration becomes limited. It is the moment that the dogmatist convinced himself to not inquire beyond his own system.

We seem to have come to a difficult decision. Should we either suspend judgements, and never endorse any possibly false conviction as a result? Or, do we wish to uphold our intellectual activity in its glory and envelop ourselves in dogmatist assumptions? I propose we choose neither of those positions. Instead we can have both by accepting Ordinary Pyrrhonism. There is no reason why Pyrrhonism does not allow someone to engage in his intellectual urges. There is no reason for the Pyrrhonist to not build or work with or investigate a coherent system that depends on an uncertain assumption. My endeavour lies quite surprisingly in harmonizing both, and this is what Ordinary Pyrrhonism allows. The difference between the Pyrrhonist and the dogmatist concerning the intellectual pursuit is that the Pyrrhonist never claims truth when it is uncertain. The Pyrrhonist will instead view dogmatism as mere fiction,¹⁸³ but as a fiction in its highest intellectual expression. A fiction created through the accomplishments of the intellect's prowess.

7. Conclusion

I described what Pyrrhonism is and introduced my Ordinary Pyrrhonism, and showed how it is an appealing stance in modern daily life, and for philosophy. First I have provided an introductory chapter to describe Pyrrhonism, and how the Pyrrhonian stance can influence daily life. I briefly described the progression towards modernity from antiquity and the development of philosophy alongside it. In the second chapter I explained the ability of Pyrrhonism. This was done by introducing the steps of equipollence, suspension of belief and its consequence of tranquillity. This was meant to give insight into the Pyrrhonist attitude in general. I have illustrated its process in modern daily life by an example to provide clarity. In the third chapter I have given, mostly by examples involving Sam, an explanation of how Pyrrhonism has an effect in daily life by its non-holding of belief. It was shown

¹⁸³ This of course is when it remains in the area of uncertainty. If it some day is no longer open for dispute but falls within the world of appearances, there is no reason for the Pyrrhonist to then still see it as fiction. But dogmatism has yet to show its face in the world of appearances, and if it does it is no longer dogmatism.

that the Pyrrhonist attitude of not holding beliefs benefits us more than the holding of belief. This finding came through three separate conclusions. First tranquillity can be seen at least as attractive as a positive conviction driven state of mind, but without any of the negative consequences that come with the latter. Second the investigative nature of the Pyrrhonist causing suspension of judgement was seen as more preferable than prevailing confusion caused by not knowing which account to hold on to. Third the curative aspects of Pyrrhonism, as it can cure the troubled mind of dogmatic belief. The three examples have shown that the Pyrrhonist attitude has an effect in a variety of situations and can have a positive psychological effect on wellbeing.

In the fourth chapter I have discussed the world of appearances in greater detail and introduced the standards of action. These were nature's guidance, custom and law, necessitation by feeling and teaching of kinds of expertise. I mentioned that it is ambiguous how the standards come into existence, and I have given an account that adheres to modern society, where I introduced my Ordinary Pyrrhonism. I have related the standards of action to history, Habermas's idea of communicative action and the acceptance of science in modernity. In the fifth chapter I have introduced Hume's thoughts on scepticism and have argued how these can help in understanding the existence and stability of the standards of action. Hume helped in three ways: By showing the importance of ordinary beliefs, by introducing habit as creator of the standards of action and by explaining the difference in accepting ordinary belief and claiming them to be true.

In the sixth chapter I have talked about dogmatism. This was a comparison between the dogmatic stance and the Pyrrhonist stance to show why Pyrrhonism is an appealing stance to adopt. I have shown that in contrast to dogmatism Ordinary Pyrrhonism allows the existence of the other, be it merely as a fictional creation of the intellect. Dogmatism in my eyes needs to be appreciated as what it is; an act of the intellect in its endeavour to express itself to the fullest of its capability. It is an activity that satisfies human beings' urge to engage their intellectual faculty, and it should therefore stay. The only aspect of dogmatism that brings harm to our state of being is its inclination to propound itself as being true, and as a result gain followers who truly believe these doctrines to be true and limit themselves both in their thinking and in the quality of their state of mind.

In sum, this work has given reasons for viewing Pyrrhonism as an appealing stance in two different domains. First the psychological domain. I have shown through examples that the Pyrrhonian ability to suspend judgement can aid in acquiring a positive state of mind that can help anyone who is otherwise troubled and may find himself in a state of hopelessness. As a result this work presents Pyrrhonism as a doctrine that is very much worth investigating in its use for therapeutic ends. Second the philosophical domain. Pyrrhonism is a form of scepticism that does not create the problems that Academic scepticism present. The fear of nihilism is misplaced, and Pyrrhonism instead gives the option to keep exploring, but without the limitations that dogmatism holds. It has both the advantage

of an open mind towards all different positions and supports the urge for inquiry that many academics wish to hold on to. Pyrrhonism allows the existence for the search of truth but does not confine the inquirer in a system that blinds him from inspiration. I have presented Ordinary Pyrrhonism as my own stance and have shown how it adheres to traditional Pyrrhonism but solves some of the ambiguities and controversies that have been signalled in the secondary literature.

Pyrrhonism favours the philosophers that enjoy the act of philosophizing but do not want to tie themselves to a specific doctrine. It is truly an embrace of the common life, for the philosopher has no more claim than any man to possess truth, and does not have the urge to bind all of humanity by his own convictions.

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