

Sextus Empiricus and the Skeptic's Beliefs

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(ABSTRACT)

In his Outlines of Skepticism, Sextus Empiricus claims that the Pyrrhonian Skeptic can live without holding beliefs. According to the “Rustic” interpretation of this claim, Sextus holds that the Skeptic lives without beliefs of any kind. According to the “Urbane” interpretation, Sextus’ claim concerns only a restricted category of beliefs. I discuss each interpretation in the context of Sextus’ broader philosophical stance, and argue for an Urbane interpretation. On this view, Pyrrhonism represents a practicable stance towards the world.

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Chapter 1: Sextus Empiricus and Pyrrhonian Skepticism

The relative neglect of the second-century physician Sextus Empiricus by contemporary thinkers provides a striking example of the way scholarly trends can fail to reflect the significance of a philosopher's work. Although Sextus's ideas have influenced the course of Western philosophy to a degree matched only by those of his predecessors Plato and Aristotle, they have seldom been taught, at least until very recently, and are, for the most part, unknown except to a comparatively small circle of scholars whose work focuses on the historical development of ancient Greek, or modern, philosophy. Celebrated in late antiquity as canonical formulations of Pyrrhonian skepticism, Sextus Empiricus's philosophical writings were forgotten by around the fourth century and remained in obscurity until their rediscovery during the Renaissance. In 1562 the publication of a Latin translation of Sextus's Outlines of Skepticism provoked a frenzy of interest in the challenge Pyrrhonism poses to constructive philosophy and was an essential influence on the work of Montaigne, Gassendi and Descartes. Unknown to the majority of contemporary philosophers, it is this work that introduced modern philosophy to what would become its central concern: finding a satisfactory response to skeptical arguments against the possibility of knowledge, or even warranted belief.

What contemporary scholars know about Sextus and Pyrrhonism is derived almost solely from two surviving works, an introduction to Pyrrhonism, Outlines of Skepticism, and a dense four-volume treatise, Against the Mathematicians. Both works exhibit two primary features. First, they contain an immense catalogue of both (a) general arguments against any attempt to justify claims about the nature of the world and (b) specific arguments against the particular philosophical positions and methods of Sextus's contemporaries and predecessors. Second, scattered among these arguments are accounts of a unique way of living characterized by a state of "belieflessness" resulting from the discovery that one has no satisfactory grounds for accepting any claim as a description of how things really are. According to these accounts, the follower of Pyrrhonism, when

faced with a candidate claim for belief, will engage in Pyrrhonian investigation—a procedure which prevents the Skeptic¹ from accepting the claim as more or less warranted than one or more opposing claims. As a result the Skeptic ends his investigation by declaring the claim and its opposing claims “equipollent” (equally warranted or unwarranted), and “suspends judgment” over the issue in question, forming no beliefs about the nature of reality. According to Sextus, by suspending judgment, the Skeptic attains a state of “belieflessness,” which is attended by a psychic condition of “ataraxia,” or tranquility, longed for but unavailable to the non-Skeptic.

1.1 The Challenge of Pyrrhonism As a Way of Life

As described by Sextus, Pyrrhonism thus represents a powerful two-pronged attack on constructive philosophy. First, in suggesting that all arguments can be persuasively opposed by equally strong arguments, it undermines the possibility of arriving at reasonable beliefs through philosophical investigation. Second, in suggesting that its practitioners achieve a tranquility unavailable to those holding beliefs, it appropriates the very goal traditionally set by other ancient thinkers for their own philosophical systems. Both prongs of the Pyrrhonian attack are rendered more pressing by Sextus’s claim that Pyrrhonism represents a lifestyle that can be consistently and practically maintained. According to Sextus, though the Pyrrhonist lacks the beliefs thought to guide the behavior of non-skeptics, he can engage in much the same sort of activity as the non-skeptic by relying on a distinct type of psychological attitude—as Sextus puts it, by “assenting” to those *pathê* or “psychic events” forced upon him by *phantasiai*, i.e., “appearances.” Thus, according to Sextus, the follower of Pyrrhonism behaves in a manner that outwardly appears perfectly normal; it is primarily the inner dimension of his life that distinguishes him from the non-skeptic.

¹ I will use “Skeptic” (capital “S”) and “Pyrrhonist” interchangeably in this thesis. When quoting British authors, I will retain the British spelling “sceptic.”

1.2 The “Beliefless” Life and the Problem of Living

Because Sextus’s claim that the Skeptical way of life is livable strengthens the challenge Pyrrhonism poses to constructive philosophy, it has been frequently attacked by opponents of Pyrrhonism. The best known of Sextus’s modern critics, David Hume, complained in his An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding,

A Pyrrhonian cannot expect that his philosophy will have any influence on the mind: or if it had, that its influence would be beneficial to society. On the contrary, he must acknowledge, if he will acknowledge anything, that all human life must perish, were his principles to universally and steadily prevail. All discourses, all action would immediately cease; and men remain in total lethargy, till the necessities of nature, unsatisfied, put an end to their miserable existence.²

In this passage Hume levels two well-known and often-repeated objections against the skeptical lifestyle described by Sextus. First, in charging that without beliefs the Pyrrhonist will be unable to participate in intellectual discourse, Hume suggests that the very argumentative practice on which the Pyrrhonian lifestyle depends is inconsistent with the belieflessness Sextus describes as characteristic of that lifestyle. Second, and more generally, Hume charges that without the practical direction beliefs provide, the Pyrrhonist would be reduced to a state of paralysis and would remain unable to perform the simplest life-sustaining activities.

1.3 Two Interpretations of Pyrrhonism

While it is now generally acknowledged that Hume’s construal of Pyrrhonism is problematic because it misses entirely the distinction Sextus draws between living in

² Hume [1748], sec. XII, p. 128.

accordance with “beliefs” and following “appearances,”³ contemporary scholars disagree about both (a) how, precisely, this distinction should be understood and (b) whether, ultimately, it allows the Skeptic to avoid the kinds of problems Hume claims are inherent in the Pyrrhonist’s way of life. In assessing the feasibility of the Pyrrhonian lifestyle, interpreters as early as Galen have recognized two distinct interpretations of the distinction between the “beliefs” against which the skeptic argues and the skeptical attitudes which are supposed to make possible the Pyrrhonist’s “beliefless” life. According to “Rustic” interpretations of Sextus, the Skeptic attacks any and all beliefs and relies only on non-doxastic “appearances” to guide his behavior. In contrast, according to “Urbane” interpretations of Pyrrhonism, the skeptic attacks only a narrow range of scientific or theoretical beliefs and acts in accordance with a distinct category of “everyday” beliefs.⁴

Although for various reasons the “Rustic” view has been historically more widely accepted, contemporary scholars remain divided both over which interpretation accurately represents Sextus’s position, and over whether that position is philosophically tenable. Rustic interpreters have generally concluded that the Pyrrhonian lifestyle cannot be consistently maintained—a conclusion which contemporary Urbane interpreters fault for lack of charity among other reasons. Citing Sextus’s obvious awareness of this kind of objection to the Pyrrhonian lifestyle, contemporary advocates of an Urbane reading maintain that Rustic readings fail to take seriously those passages in which Sextus explains how the Pyrrhonist can live and argue despite his belieflessness. Contemporary advocates of a Rustic interpretation, however, point out that Urbane readings have difficulty drawing an acceptable distinction between those “beliefs” that the Skeptic refrains from holding and those that guide his everyday and philosophical activities.

³ For a discussion of Hume’s characterization of the Pyrrhonian project, see Popkin [1951], 386-387.

⁴ The terms “Rustic” and “Urbane” derive from Galen’s work on Skepticism and have been widely adopted by contemporary scholars.

1.4 Structure and Aim of This Thesis

In this thesis I present and evaluate two contemporary interpretations of Pyrrhonian Skepticism: the Rustic interpretation presented in Myles Burnyeat's "Can the Sceptic Live His Scepticism?", which has attained the status of being the orthodox contemporary view, and the Urbane interpretation presented by Michael Frede in his essay "The Sceptic's Beliefs." Setting aside the merits of Sextus's highly controversial suggestion that all claims about the world are equally warranted, I will focus on presenting an adequate understanding of Sextus's distinction between holding beliefs and following appearances, arguing that Frede's Urbane view is superior to Burnyeat's more popular, Rustic view. One problem with contemporary attempts to understand Sextus's distinction between holding beliefs and following appearances has been scholars' relatively narrow focus on the interpretation of a few notoriously ambiguous or obscure passages. I hope to move beyond the resulting deadlock by emphasizing the role the distinction is supposed to play in Sextus's larger Skeptical project.⁵

The structure of this thesis will be as follows. In Chapter 2 I present an introduction to Pyrrhonism in order to establish the philosophical context for Sextus's contrast between Beliefs and P-states.⁶ The chapter will end with a list of desiderata, emerging from this examination of Sextus's larger project, which an adequate interpretation of Beliefs and P-states will have to satisfy. In Chapter 3 I present Burnyeat's Rustic interpretation and show how it fails to satisfy those desiderata, focusing in particular on this reading's inability to allow for the possibility of a Pyrrhonian life. I end the chapter by arguing that the Rustic view can be accepted only in the absence of a viable alternative. In Chapter 4 I present Frede's Urbane interpretation and show that it is not only consistent with Sextus's explicit remarks on the distinction between P-states and Beliefs, but also accounts for the other features of Pyrrhonism,

⁵ For reasons of space and in order to avoid the controversy concerning the relationship between Sextus's two philosophical works, I will focus almost exclusively on his Outlines of Skepticism, which I will cite using the standard abbreviation "PH."

⁶ For ease of reference, throughout this thesis I will refer to those beliefs which the Skeptic does not hold as "Beliefs" (capital "B") and to those mental states on which the Skeptic relies as "P-states."

including the possibility of a Pyrrhonian life, that are presented in my list of desiderata at the end of Chapter 2. Thus, I will argue Frede's Urbane reading represents a superior alternative to Burnyeat's more widely accepted Rustic interpretation. My hope is that by resolving the interpretive disagreement between Rustic and Urbane interpreters of Sextus's work, I will show that Pyrrhonian Skepticism is not only a position one can adopt in the classroom, but a viable and practical attitude to the world. If my argument is successful, then Sextus should be given a place alongside Plato and Aristotle as an ancient thinker who still has much to contribute to contemporary philosophical debate and, perhaps, to contemporary life.

Chapter 2: Elements of Belieflessness

The task of this chapter is to set out the basic features of Pyrrhonism in order to locate the role that the distinction between Beliefs and P-states plays within the context of Sextus's larger philosophical project. By understanding Sextus's characterizations of the nature of Pyrrhonian Belieflessness, as well as the role P-states play in the life of a Pyrrhonist, we can establish a list of desiderata that a satisfactory interpretation of the distinction between Beliefs and P-states would have to satisfy.

This chapter is divided into six sections, each focusing on a particular aspect of Pyrrhonism. In Section 2.1 I present Sextus's definition of Pyrrhonism as a certain form of argumentative "ability," and discuss a number of key concepts introduced by that definition. In Section 2.2 I offer Sextus's contrasts between the Skeptic and the adherents to rival philosophical schools as well as between the Skeptic and the "ordinary person." In Section 2.3 I introduce the practical dimensions of Pyrrhonism, focusing on Sextus's explanation of how the Skeptic can conduct his life while maintaining a state of Belieflessness. In Section 2.4 I offer a taxonomy of the kinds of P-states required by the practical and theoretical activities in which the Skeptic engages. And in Sections 2.5 I examine Sextus's explicit remarks on the properties that distinguish P-states and Beliefs. The chapter will end with a list of the desiderata that an adequate interpretation of Pyrrhonian Belieflessness must satisfy.

2.1 The Definition of Pyrrhonism

In this section I present the essential features of Pyrrhonism as introduced by Sextus in the opening chapters of the Outlines. According to Sextus's definition:

T1: Scepticism is an ability (*dunamis*) to set out oppositions among things which appear and are thought of in any way at all, an ability by which, because of the equipollence (*isotheneia*) in the opposed objects and accounts, we come first to suspension of judgment

(*epochê*) and afterwards to tranquility (*ataraxia*).⁷

There are four important features of Pyrrhonism that emerge from this definition: (a) Pyrrhonism as an argumentative ability or *dunamis*, (b) the idea of equipollence, (c) the Skeptic's suspension of judgment, and (d) the relationship between Skeptical Belieflessness and tranquility. In this section I discuss each of these features before concluding with a brief presentation of Sextus's explanation of the origins of Pyrrhonism.

2.1.1 Pyrrhonism as a *Dunamis*

It is important to note, first of all, that in **T1** Sextus defines Skepticism as a *dunamis*, an ability, rather than in terms of a particular set of Beliefs.⁸ Since Sextus claims that the Pyrrhonist holds no Beliefs, he cannot define Pyrrhonism in terms of a set of doctrines or Beliefs which Pyrrhonists hold in common.⁹ According to **T1**, Skepticism is an ability to engage in a particular style of philosophical investigation that begins with the setting out of "oppositions" and ends with a "suspension of judgment." As we see from Sextus's writings as a whole, the Skeptic investigates the truth of claims by deploying two kinds of arguments: those directed against specific philosophical assertions and those which can be used against broad categories of assertions (i.e., the Pyrrhonian "modes"). Combining these two kinds of arguments, the Skeptic aims to demonstrate the lack of rational warrant for any claim or position that he investigates.¹⁰ In general, the Skeptic

⁷ PH I.8. All excerpts from Sextus's *Outlines* are taken from the translation by Annas and Barnes [1994].

⁸ Cf. PH I.3-4, 16-17.

⁹ Because throughout this thesis I describe Sextus as "making claims," "arguing for conclusions," and so on, the reader may prematurely conclude that Sextus's beliefless "position" is therefore self-refuting. However, as will be shown in Section 2.3.2.1, Sextus is aware of the potential for self-refutation (cf. PH I.14, 197, 206) and in response "claims" that all his assertions reflect "appearances," or P-states, rather than Beliefs (cf. PH I.4).

¹⁰ Although this thesis is not concerned with the ultimate success or failure of Pyrrhonian arguments purporting to show the equipollence of all claims about the world, I should note some of the more famous arguments in the Skeptic's extensive arsenal. Sextus's *Outlines* contains three major sets of general arguments or "modes" designed to undermine any thesis about the nature of reality: (a) the Ten Modes of Aenesidemus, (b) the Eight Modes of Aenesidemus, and (c) the Five Modes of Agrippa. The Ten modes of Aenesidemus establish various ways of setting up oppositions according to the various ways in which basic beliefs can be acquired (e.g., perception or tradition). The Eight Modes of Aenesidemus provide various arguments against claims involving attempts at causal explanation. The Five Modes of Agrippa allow the Skeptic to argue that neither claim in an opposing pair is more or less warranted than the other: first, by establishing that warranting statements must themselves be warranted, then by dismissing the

first identifies a position opposing the one under investigation and then argues that neither claim is more or less warranted than the other. This prevents the Skeptic from accepting either claim as a truth about the nature of things and eventually leads to the Belieflessness characteristic of the Pyrrhonian way of life.

2.1.2 Equipollence

According to **T1** Pyrrhonian investigations conclude with the discovery of equipollence in arguments for or against particular claims. This notion of equipollence represents an important difference between Pyrrhonism and modern forms of skepticism, which typically argue for the conclusion that certain knowledge is impossible but still allow claims to be more or less probable and hence more or less worthy candidates for belief. According to Sextus,

T2: By ‘equipollence’ we mean equality with regard to being convincing (*pistis*) or unconvincing: none of the conflicting accounts takes precedence over any other as being more convincing.¹¹

Thus, rather than establishing that a particular claim cannot be established with certainty while allowing it to have some measure of probability, the Pyrrhonian argumentative strategy involves repeatedly demonstrating that claims are no more (but no less) warranted or “convincing” than conflicting claims. But what is important to note is that the Skeptic does not conclude that a particular position is false, cannot be known to be true; rather, he merely attempts to argue that, at this point in his investigations at least, there are insufficient grounds for establishing the truth or even the greater plausibility of the position against its rivals.¹²

2.1.3 Suspension of Judgment

viability of both circular arguments and infinite sets of warranting statements. For more on the Skeptic’s arguments see Barnes [1990] and Hankinson [1995].

¹¹ PH I.10.

¹² Cf. PH I.14, 202-203.

Faced with equally convincing (i.e., equipollent) and conflicting views of a subject, the Skeptic cannot rationally believe one view rather than another and so adopts an indifferent attitude towards the truth of both views. In other words, as T1 describes, the Skeptic “suspends judgment” on the issue in question. However, as we will see in Section 2.3 below, in spite of his suspension of judgment, the Skeptic is still left with P-states that enable him to act *as if* he had Beliefs. Thus the “Belieflessness” resulting from the Skeptic’s suspension of judgment can be characterized as “indifference” only in so far as Beliefs are concerned. While the Skeptic holds no Beliefs about the subjects he investigates, he does have a distinctive category of intentional states towards those same subjects. Determining the precise nature of the Skeptic’s Belieflessness through an understanding of these P-states is the primary aim of this thesis as a whole.

2.1.4 Tranquility

Like all ancient Greek philosophical movements, Pyrrhonism was intended to directly impact the everyday lives of its practitioners. Because the attainment of *ataraxia* was the traditional goal of Sextus’s main philosophical rivals (i.e., the Stoics and the Epicureans), his claim that Pyrrhonism, rather than a life lived according to Beliefs, can lead to tranquility represents a key aspect of his challenge to constructive philosophy. Sextus explains the relationship between Pyrrhonian Belieflessness and the attainment of tranquility in the following passage.

T3: Those who hold the opinion that things are good or bad by nature are perpetually troubled. When they lack what they believe to be good, they take themselves to be persecuted by natural evils and they pursue what (so they think) is good. And when they have acquired these things, they experience more troubles; for they are elated beyond reason and measure, and in fear of change they do anything so as not to lose what they believe to be good. But those who make no determination about what is good and bad by nature neither avoid nor pursue anything with intensity; and hence they are tranquil.¹³

¹³ PH I.27-28; cf. PH III.235-238.

Here Sextus suggests that the non-skeptic's evaluative Beliefs cause psychological discomfort in two distinct ways.¹⁴ First, such Beliefs are immediately psychologically disruptive: when the non-skeptic lacks what he believes to be good, he feels himself the victim of misfortune; and when he has acquired what he believes to be good, he becomes “irrationally” (from the Skeptic's point of view) ecstatic. Second, evaluative Beliefs drive the non-skeptic to excessive and frantic pursuit either after what he believes to be good but does not possess or after security for what he believes to be good and has already attained. Since the Pyrrhonist lacks such troubling evaluative Beliefs, he remains unaffected by the psychological disturbances experienced by non-skeptics.

Sextus goes on, however, to issue a caveat concerning tranquility:

T4: We do not, however, take Sceptics to be undisturbed in every way—we say that they are disturbed by things which are forced upon them; for we agree that at times they shiver and are thirsty and have other feelings of this kind. But in these cases ordinary people (*idiotai*) are afflicted by two sets of circumstances: by the feelings themselves, and no less by believing that these circumstances are bad by nature. Sceptics, who shed the additional opinion that each of these things is bad in its nature, come off more moderately even in these cases.¹⁵

Here Sextus admits that Belieflessness cannot completely protect the Pyrrhonist from experiencing the discomfort of pain, cold, hunger, and so on. However, as Sextus points out, even when confronted with these kinds of discomfort, the Pyrrhonist suffers less than does an ordinary person. The ordinary person visited by physical discomfort compounds his suffering with the additional Belief that his condition is bad by nature. In contrast, the Skeptic, who has no such Beliefs, experiences only the physical discomfort, unaugmented by the additional psychological distress caused by such Beliefs. I should also note here that though in **T3** Sextus contrasts the Skeptic's tranquility with the condition of the man on the street, elsewhere Sextus draws the same contrast between the

¹⁴ For a more detailed discussion of these excerpts and related passages concerning tranquility from Against the Mathematicians, see McPherran [1991].

¹⁵ PH I.29-30.

Skeptic and the Dogmatic philosopher.¹⁶ Thus, taken together, **T3** and **T4** indicate that the Skeptic experiences a state of tranquility unavailable to any non-skeptic, whether philosopher or lay person.

2.1.5 *The Origins of Pyrrhonism*

Having set out the essential elements in Sextus's definition of Pyrrhonism, I now want to present Sextus's account of how the Pyrrhonist arrives at his ability to suspend judgment. In this way we can understand the motivation that leads to the Skeptic becoming a Skeptic in the first place. According to Sextus,

T5: [S]ceptics began to do philosophy in order to decide among appearances and to apprehend which are true and which false, so as to become tranquil; but they came upon equipollent dispute, and being unable to decide this they suspended judgment. And when they suspended judgment, tranquility in matters of opinion followed fortuitously.¹⁷

Here Sextus points out that the Sceptics did not originally set out to be Sceptics. Rather they began their investigations with the same goal in mind as students of the Dogmatic philosophical schools. By coming to distinguish those appearances that accurately reflect the true nature of reality, the Sceptics hoped to attain certainty about the good life for a human being and to avoid the disaster of basing their lives on what could be merely an erroneous understanding of how things really are.

In attempting to determine the true nature of reality, however, the Sceptics met with irresolvable disagreements and remained unconvinced by any particular world-view. By accident the Sceptics then discovered that by suspending judgment they achieved the tranquility they had originally sought. This in turn led to the development of Pyrrhonism as a practical way of life.¹⁸

¹⁶ PH III.237; cf. M 11.110-167.

¹⁷ PH I.26.

¹⁸ Cf. PH I.18 30, 205. Of course, according to Sextus, the Sceptics do not *Believe* that tranquility is desirable or that suspension of judgment leads to tranquility. Rather they have P-states which allow them to act *as if* they had those Beliefs.

2.2 The Skeptic, the Dogmatist, the Academic, and the Ordinary Person

At this point, we can sharpen our understanding of the essential features of Pyrrhonism by contrasting the Skeptic with various kinds of non-skeptic, both rival philosophers and ordinary people. In this section I present two key passages in which Sextus distinguishes the Skeptic from both the philosophical “Dogmatist” and the “Academic” Skeptic.¹⁹ In addition, I discuss the distinction between the Skeptic and the ordinary person—a topic that will be of particular relevance when we examine Urbane interpretations of Pyrrhonism in Chapter 3.

2.2.1 *The Skeptic and the Dogmatist*

Sextus opens the Outlines by distinguishing between three general positions or stances that can result from philosophical investigation:

T6: When people are investigating any subject, the likely result is either a discovery, or a denial of a discovery and a confession of inapprehensibility, or else a continuation of the investigation.... Those who are called Dogmatists in the proper sense of the word think that they have discovered the truth—for example, the schools of Aristotle and Epicures and the Stoics, and some others. The schools of Clitomachus and Carneades, and other Academics, have asserted that things cannot be apprehended. And the Sceptics are still investigating.²⁰

Although in this passage Sextus mentions the Dogmatist and the Academic separately, elsewhere he points out that the Academic’s declaration that “truth is inapprehensible” itself expresses a discovery of a negative sort, and that therefore the Academic is a form of negative Dogmatist.²¹ Thus the significance of **T6** lies in the distinction it draws

¹⁹ Ignoring the controversial issue of whether Sextus’s characterization of Academic philosophy is historically accurate, I rely on Sextus’s understanding of which philosophers and what positions are to be considered “Academic.” Sextus’s primary concern in **T6** below is to differentiate between Pyrrhonism and the philosophy of the “New Academy,” among whose members he includes Carneades and Clitomachus (PH I.220-235). Since my aim in this thesis is to achieve a precise understanding of the Skeptic’s P-states by distinguishing them from other intentional states, the historical question about the Academic Sceptics can be safely left aside. For more on the historical development of Pyrrhonism and its relationship with Academic Skepticism, see Hankinson [1995].

²⁰ PH I.1, 3.

²¹ PH I.226. In this thesis I follow a convention of using the term “Dogmatist” (capital “D”) as a technical term covering all philosophers who hold Beliefs.

between the Skeptic and various kinds of Dogmatist, i.e., philosophers who hold Beliefs, whether positive or negative. While Dogmatic investigations end in the Belief that a particular claim accurately reflects the true nature of reality (if only that it is unknowable), the Skeptic's investigations fail to yield such Beliefs, as we have seen in Section 2.1 above; it is in this sense then that the Skeptic is always "still investigating." The difference between the Dogmatist and the Skeptic then is not a distinction based on their adopting contrasting sets of Beliefs (e.g., about the possibility of knowledge); rather, the distinction depends on a contrast between a mental condition and a way of life determined by a set of Beliefs and a mental condition and way of life devoid of any Beliefs.

2.2.2 The Skeptic and the Academic

Although Sextus's classification of the Academic as a negative Dogmatist provides us with one means of distinguishing between the Skeptic and the Academic, I want to introduce here a second point of contrast that will be important later on for understanding the nature of the Skeptic's P-states. Because the language and arguments used by the Academics were frequently adapted to Pyrrhonian purposes, the two types of "skepticism" frequently have been, and still are, confused with one another. Thus Sextus takes particular pains throughout the Outlines to emphasize the differences between the two.

Sextus establishes this second point of contrast between the Academic and Pyrrhonist in the following passage:

T7: [W]e say that appearances are equal in convincingness or lack of convincingness (as far as the argument goes),²² while they [the members of the New Academy] say that some are plausible and others implausible.²³

As we will see in Section 2.5 below, the Skeptic's P-states are generated by appearances. Thus in **T7** Sextus points out that though the Skeptic holds P-states caused by

²² This important parenthetical phrase will be discussed in Section 2.5.4 below.

²³ PH I.227.

appearances, those P-states are distinct from Academic Beliefs. While both the Skeptic and the Academic rely on appearances to guide their actions, the Academic takes some appearances to be more likely than others to accurately represent the true nature of reality. Although the Academic, unlike the Dogmatist, does not conclude that appearances can yield certain knowledge of reality (in fact they explicitly deny this), they do have Beliefs in the further sense that they find some views of reality more “plausible” than others. In contrast, for the Skeptic, all appearances are equally “plausible.” Although the Skeptic acquires intentional P-states from the appearances he encounters, his investigations reveal those appearances to be equally convincing or unconvincing as representations of the way the world really is.

2.2.3 Formal Characterization of the Dogmatist, the Academic and the Skeptic

Given Sextus’s remarks discussed in 2.2.1 and 2.2.2 above, the distinction between the intellectual states of the Skeptic, the Dogmatist, and the Academic can be formalized as follows (where p stands for any indicative sentence representing a claim in need of philosophical investigation).

The Dogmatist

- (a) It appears to me that p .
- (b) I have conclusive grounds for thinking that p is true.
- (c) Therefore, I believe with rational certainty that p is true.

The Academic

- (a) It appears to me that p .
- (b) I have merely probable grounds for thinking p is true.
- (c) So I believe that p is merely likely to be true.

The Skeptic

- (a) It appears to me that p .
- (b) I have no more grounds for thinking that p than that not- p is true.
- (c) I neither believe that p nor that not- p is either true or likely to be true.

Here we see how each type of philosopher differs from the others. The Dogmatist, the Academic and the Skeptic all begin their investigations with an experience of some contestable appearance that p . The Dogmatist, as he thinks, uses his investigations to establish the truth of p , while the Academic, as he thinks, gains from his investigations only some non-conclusive support for the claim that p is true. Consequently, while the Dogmatist ends his investigations believing that p is true, the Academic believes only that p is more likely than its contradictory to be true. In contrast to both the Dogmatist and the Academic, the Skeptic's investigations produce no more grounds for believing that p than that not- p . Unable to grant even the greater likelihood that p rather than not- p is true, the Skeptic suspends judgment over both claims and ends his investigations without holding a Belief.

2.2.4 *The Skeptic and the Ordinary Person*

Before closing this section on the relationship between the Pyrrhonist and the non-Pyrrhonist, I want to briefly mention a final distinction that Sextus draws between the Skeptic and the *idiotês*, i.e., the ordinary person. Although Sextus does not offer any explicit definition of the term *idiotês*, it is reasonable to think he is referring to the non-philosopher, or the person who is only marginally reflective. Sextus's comments on the "ordinary person" are few and informal in nature; but since this distinction is sometimes considered to pose a particular problem for Urban interpretations of Pyrrhonism, I want to draw attention to it here.

The passage in which Sextus draws this distinction, **T3**, is one we've looked at in Section 2.1.4 above. There Sextus argues that although the Skeptic holds no evaluative Beliefs, he still experiences feelings of pain, cold, and so on. Sextus adds, however, that even when afflicted with these kinds of feelings, the Skeptic experiences less discomfort than would an ordinary person who in addition to experiencing the discomforting feelings, also Believes that such feelings are "bad by nature." Because the Skeptic does not hold evaluative Beliefs, he does not experience the additional discomfort caused by such

Beliefs. Thus the Skeptic can be distinguished from the ordinary person at least by his lack of the evaluative Beliefs an ordinary person holds, as well as by the greater tranquility that results from their absence.²⁴

2.3 How the Skeptic Lives and Argues

We can further clarify the role that P-states play in Sextus's general account of Pyrrhonism by turning to the practical challenge that the Skeptic faces in leading a life without holding Beliefs. In response to arguments raised against earlier formulations of skepticism, Sextus includes in his Outlines explanations of how the Skeptic can engage in both everyday and intellectual activities without compromising his Beliefless state.²⁵ As I noted briefly in the Introduction above, the claim that the Skeptic lives without Beliefs has raised two types of practical objections.

According to the first type of objection, performing even the simplest of life-sustaining activities is psychologically impossible without Beliefs. Critics argue, for example, that without Believing that one should avoid excessive cold, eat when hungry, and so on, the Pyrrhonist would be reduced to a state of life-terminating paralysis. Thus, according to this objection, in so far as the Skeptic manages to live and participate in normal everyday activities, his actions demonstrate that he does hold Beliefs.

The second type of objection involves the charge that without Beliefs the Skeptic could not engage in theoretical activities. We might mention three criticisms that fall into this category. First, critics contend that Sextus's own texts contain arguments and philosophical theses that can only reflect the Beliefs he holds. Second, critics argue that the Skeptic's ability to present arguments against Dogmatic claims requires that he understand, and hence have beliefs about, the language in which those claims are made. According to this objection, without Believing that particular words refer to particular

²⁴ Cf. M III.II.3-5. See also McPherran [1991] and Nussbaum [1991] for two interpretations of the relationship between the Skeptic's arguments and his experience of tranquility.

²⁵ These objections ultimately originated with both Plato's and Aristotle's responses to Protagorean relativism and Heraclitean metaphysics (see *Theaetetus* 181c-183b and *Metaphysics* IV.3-6). By Sextus's time they had become standard objections advanced by Dogmatists against various forms of skepticism.

existing objects, the Skeptic would be unable to investigate claims expressed by those words.²⁶ Finally, opponents of Pyrrhonism charge that the argumentative practice Sextus describes requires that the Skeptic Believe basic principles of logic and rational belief-formation. For instance, the Skeptic must Believe that the same statement cannot be both true and false, that certain rules of inference are valid and that the Skeptic should suspend judgment when faced with equipollent claims.

I turn now to a discussion of how the Pyrrhonist responds to these two kinds of objections.

2.3.1 The Pyrrhonian Practical Criterion

Sextus's response to the first family of objections is to present a "practical criterion" according to which the Skeptic can function in ordinary life without compromising his Beliefless state. According to Sextus,

T8: [A]ttending to what is apparent, we live in accordance with everyday observances, without holding opinions—for we are not to be utterly inactive. These everyday observances seem to be fourfold, and to consist in guidance by nature, necessitation by feelings, handing down of laws and customs, and teachings of kinds of expertise. By nature's guidance we are naturally capable of perceiving and thinking. By necessitation of feelings, hunger conducts us to food and thirst to drink. By the handing down of customs and laws, we accept, from an everyday point of view, that piety is good and impiety bad. By teachings of kinds of expertise we are not inactive in those which we accept.²⁷

In this passage Sextus argues that, in spite of holding no Beliefs, the Skeptic manages to engage in a normal range of activities by "attending to what is apparent," i.e., by following appearances. As we will see later in Section 2.5, appearances are what generate the Skeptic's P-states. Thus, according to Sextus, guided by these intentional P-states, the Skeptic can act without holding Beliefs.

²⁶ At PH II.2, Sextus turns this objection into a dilemma reminiscent of Meno's Paradox.

²⁷ PH I.23-24.

It is important to realize that for Sextus the appearances that generate P-states are not restricted to sensory appearances. According to **T8** the appearances that direct the Pyrrhonist's actions can be divided into four distinct categories. First, there are appearances generated by the Skeptic's natural capacities for sensory-perception and thought. Thus, it can appear for example that honey is sweet, or that particular claims contradict each other. Second, there are appearances caused by the Skeptic's natural desires and feelings; for example, it can appear that he should relieve his thirst and that pain should be avoided. Third, the Skeptic's societal conditioning can also generate appearances. Thus, for example, it can appear to the Skeptic that sacred places should be respected and that murder should be avoided. Finally, having been taught professional rules and practices, the Skeptic can fulfill his professional obligations by following the appearances generated by those teachings. Thus it can appear to the Skeptic that particular tools are appropriate to particular tasks or that tasks should be performed in a particular ways and in a particular order.²⁸ It is this wide range of P-states described in **T8** that, according to Sextus, allows the Skeptic to avoid life-threatening paralysis without holding Beliefs.

2.3.2 Objections to Beliefless Theoretical Activity

While the first family of objections to Belieflessness focus on everyday, practical activities, the second family focuses on theoretical activities. Although Sextus provides explicit responses to only the first two of the objections I mentioned above under this category, I want to consider all three of them in turn.

2.3.2.1 The First Objection: In order to pre-empt the familiar claim that the Skeptic's own assertions and writings constitute expressions of Beliefs, Sextus opens the Outlines by issuing a broad disclaimer:

T9: By way of preface let us say that on none of the matters to be discussed do we affirm that things certainly are just as we say they are:

²⁸ I should note here that in spite of his claim to hold no Beliefs, there is evidence that Sextus himself was a physician (see PH I.236-241).

rather, we report descriptively on each item according to how it appears to us at the time.²⁹

Here Sextus again implicitly relies on P-states to explain the nature of the Skeptic's philosophical utterances. According to **T9** the Skeptic's "theoretical" statements reflect only the appearances that generate his P-states and are therefore not the expressions of Beliefs that critics accuse him of holding. Thus, in spite of his critics' accusations, Sextus maintains that the Skeptic's philosophical assertions provide no evidence for his holding Beliefs.

2.3.2.2 The Second Objection: In response to the claim that without Beliefs, the Skeptic could not understand the claims he investigates, Sextus argues that:

T10: [A] Skeptic is not, I think, barred from having thoughts, if they arise from things which give him a passive impression and appear evidently to him and do not at all imply the reality (*huparchis*) of what is being thought of—for we can think, as they say, not only of real things but also of unreal things. Hence someone who suspends judgment maintains his sceptical condition while investigating and thinking; for it has been made clear that he assents to any impression given by way of a passive appearance insofar as it appears to him.³⁰

Sextus's point is that understanding the meaning of a claim does not imply granting the truth of the claim or even the reality of those objects the claim is about. The Skeptic's experience with language generates appearances that in turn cause a P-state that particular words have particular meanings. This allows the Skeptic to investigate claims without holding a Belief that a particular word corresponds to a particular object, that a particular claim reflects the way the world really is, or even that a particular word *really* has a particular meaning.

2.3.2.3 The Third Objection: Sextus does not explicitly respond to the objection that the Skeptic's engagement in philosophical argumentation entails the holding of specific Beliefs. However, since forms of this objection were familiar to both Sextus and

²⁹ PH I.4. Sextus repeats this disclaimer with variations throughout the *Outlines*; see, for examples, PH I.14, 24, 35, 208.

³⁰ PH II.10.

his Skeptical predecessors, it is worth presenting this objection here in order to facilitate the discussion of P-states in later chapters.³¹ Illustrating this objection requires first presenting the Pyrrhonian argumentative practice in terms of the following schema (where F and G stand for incompatible properties):

- (1) X appears to be F in circumstance A.
- (2) X appears to be G in circumstance B.
- (3) X cannot really be both F and G.
- (4) There are no more grounds for thinking that X is F rather than G.
- (5) So we must suspend judgment over whether or not X is really F rather than G.

According to the third objection, the Skeptic's investigations involve a movement through the stages represented above. Allegedly, however, the Skeptic's progression from (1) to (5) requires that he hold a number of Beliefs. For example, the Skeptic's reliance on premise (3) above seems to entail a Belief in the law of non-contradiction. Similarly, the Skeptic's use of arguments to reach the conclusion of equipollence in (4) seems to imply a Belief not only that (4) is true—but that the inference rules that govern the arguments supporting (4) provide grounds for Believing the conclusion in (4). Finally, the Skeptic's inference from (4) to (5) seems to indicate that he holds the normative Belief that unwarranted claims should not be Believed. Thus, critics who put forward this objection claim that in order to engage in the very practice that enables the Skeptic to achieve and maintain his Belieflessness, the Skeptic must hold Beliefs.

While Sextus does not explicitly respond to objections of this type in the Outlines, we would expect him both to be familiar with these sorts of counters and to be able to respond to them since they were routinely raised against earlier forms of Skepticism. Whether Sextus actually has the resources necessary to meet this kind of objection will be discussed in Chapters 3 and 4 of this thesis.

³¹ For a more in-depth discussion of this objection and one possible Pyrrhonian response, see Brennan [1994].

2.4 The Range of the Skeptic's P-states

Having established the essential features of Pyrrhonism and the role P-states play in guiding the Skeptic's actions, it will be convenient here to provide a taxonomy of the kinds of P-states to which Sextus's account of Pyrrhonian argumentation and action commits him. Based on the kinds of appearances indicated by Sextus's comments in **T8**, **T9**, and **T10**, we can divide the P-states generated by these appearances as follows.

- I.** Sensory P-states
- II.** Non-sensory P-states
 - A.** Evaluative P-states
 - B.** Intellectual P-states
 - 1.** First-order Intellectual P-states
 - 2.** Second- (and higher-) order Intellectual P-states

As we've seen from **T8**, the Skeptic can respond to both "sensory" and "non-sensory" appearances; thus we can establish as our two families of P-states: sensory P-states and non-sensory P-states. Sensory P-states (**I**) result from appearances immediately caused by the activation of organs of perception: for example, the appearance that a tower is round. Non-sensory P-states (**II**) are those that do not arise directly from organs of perception and can be divided into two genera: "evaluative" P-states (**II, A**), and "intellectual" P-states (**II, B**).

As we know, again from **T8**, the Skeptic acts in accordance with appearances such as the appearances that piety is good and that murder is bad. Thus the Skeptic needs to be able to have evaluative P-states. However, given Sextus's account of the practical criterion, evaluative P-states cannot be restricted to ethical or moral subjects, but must involve normative considerations including prudential "goods" of all kinds (e.g. that tranquility is good and that pain is bad). Faced with various possible courses of action, the Skeptic will rely on evaluative P-states to determine which he should adopt.

The second genus of non-sensory P-states, "Intellectual P-states," can be further sub-divided into two distinct species: first-order intellectual P-states (**II, B, 1**), and second- and higher-order intellectual P-states (**II, B, 2**). P-states of both types can be

distinguished from evaluative P-states by their lack of normative force. First-order intellectual P-states are generated by first-order non-sensory appearances: for example, the appearance that it will rain tonight. Similarly, the appearance that the law of non-contradiction is true, that certain inferences are valid, or that particular terms have particular meanings are all first-order non-sensory appearances.³² Second- and higher-order P-states are caused by second- and higher-order appearances. Thus, for example, it appears to the Skeptic that the arguments for and against the accuracy of a particular appearance as a representation of reality are equipollent. The appearance of equipollence is a second-order appearance, i.e., an appearance regarding the status of the appearance under investigation. The Skeptic acts in accordance with the second-order appearance because it generates a second-order intellectual P-state.

Thus, in order for Pyrrhonism to represent a viable lifestyle, the Skeptic will need to have P-states of each of the four kinds presented above. In addition, these P-states must neither be reducible to Beliefs nor otherwise entail the holding of Beliefs. Determining whether or not the kinds of P-states presented above are all available to the Skeptic under these conditions will dominate our attention in subsequent chapters.

2.5 Sextus's Characterizations of P-states and Beliefs

At this point I want to turn to those passages in which Sextus most explicitly characterizes the distinction between P-states and Beliefs. Because Sextus's explicit remarks are too vague to support a precise interpretation of this distinction by themselves, my aim in this section is merely to establish in general terms some key features of P-states and Beliefs as described by Sextus.³³

³² PH I.210, II.2-10, 102.

³³ Sextus explicit remarks on P-states and Beliefs are notoriously vague. Because identical passages have been translated and interpreted in widely divergent ways by a number of noted scholars (see Burnyeat [1997], Frede [1997], Hankinson [1995], Mates [1996], Nussbaum [1991]), I will not engage in a (cont.) close reading of these passages or the examples they contain. In addition, one scholar, Jonathan Barnes, has concluded that the passages can be legitimately interpreted to support both Rustic and Urbane interpretations (Barnes [1997]). A good illustration of the kind of difficulty encountered by interpreters of these passages is provided by Sextus's repeated and possibly inconsistent use of the term *phantasiai* ("appearances"). Although the term was used by the Stoics, the Peripatetics, the Academics, and the Epicureans in different ways, Sextus provides no explanation of how *he* is using the term. To make matters worse, in PH II.70-73 Sextus argues not only that the term does not express a coherent concept,

I will begin in Section 2.5.1 by simply listing the main passages relevant to the issue. In Section 2.5.2, I will discuss the relationship between P-states and Beliefs as revealed in **T11**, before presenting in Sections 2.5.3 and 2.5.4 the two pairs of contrasting features from which Sextus's derives his distinction between P-states and Beliefs. In Section 2.5.5, I offer a formal characterization of the distinction between P-states and Beliefs as presented in **T11-T16**.

2.5.1 Sextus's Remarks On the Distinction Between P-states and Beliefs

The following passages are those in which Sextus most explicitly describes the distinction between Beliefs and P-states. **T11-T12** presented below are those excerpts from the first book of Sextus's Outlines with which he introduces the distinction between P-states and Beliefs. **T13-T15** are sample passages from the later books of the Outlines in which Sextus is engaged in Pyrrhonian investigation of various subjects. **T16** is a passage we encountered in Section 2.2.2. I have boldfaced the key sentences and phrases that I will discuss in Section 2.5.4 below.

T11: When we say that the Sceptics do not hold beliefs, we do not take 'belief' in the sense in which some say, quite generally, that belief is acquiescing in something; for **Sceptics assent** (*sunkatatithetai*) **to the feelings** (*pathê*) **forced upon them by appearances** (*phantasiai*)— for example, they would not say, when heated or chilled, 'I think I am not heated (or: chilled)'. Rather, we say that **they do not hold beliefs in the sense in which some say that belief is assent to some unclear object of investigation in the sciences**; for Pyrrhonists do not assent to anything unclear.³⁴

T12: Those who say that the Sceptics reject what is apparent have not, I think, listened to what we say. As we said before, **we do not overturn anything which leads us, without our willing it** (*abouletes*), **to assent in accordance with a passive appearance—and these things are precisely what is apparent** (*ta phainomena*). When we investigate

but that even if it did the concept could not be apprehended. Thus, on the one hand, the term plays a critical role in Sextus's explanation of the distinction between P-states and Beliefs; on the other hand, he argues the term is, at least in some sense, meaningless.

³⁴ PH I.13.

whether existing things are such as they appear, we grant that they appear, and **what we investigate is not what is apparent but what is said about what is apparent itself....**³⁵

T13: ‘Standard’ has two senses: there are standards adopted to provide conviction about the reality or unreality of something...; and there are standards of action, attending to which in everyday life we perform some actions and not others.... We say, then, that **the [practical] standard of the Sceptical persuasion is what is apparent, implicitly meaning by this the appearances; for they depend on passive unwilled feelings and are not objects of investigation (*azêtêtos*).** (Hence no-one, presumably, will raise a controversy over whether an existing thing appears this way or that; rather **they investigate whether it is such as it appears).**³⁶

T14: It is enough, I think, to live by experience and without opinions, **in accordance with common observations and preconceptions (*prolēpseis*), and to suspend judgment about what is said with dogmatic superfluity and far beyond the needs of ordinary life.**³⁷

T15: Since the majority have asserted that god is a most active cause, let us first consider god, remarking by way of preface that, **following ordinary life without opinions, we say that there are gods and we are pious towards the gods and say that they are provident; it is against the rashness of the Dogmatists that we make the following [criticisms].**³⁸

T16: [W]e say that appearances are equal in convincingness or lack of convincingness (**as far as the argument goes** [*hôs epi tōi logōi*]), while they [the members of the New Academy] say that some are plausible and others implausible.³⁹

2.5.2 *The Relationship Between P-states and Beliefs*

Having presented Sextus’s main remarks on the distinction between P-states and

³⁵ PH I.19-20.

³⁶ PH I.21-22.

³⁷ PH II.246.

³⁸ PH III.3.

³⁹ PH I.227.

Beliefs, I want to begin my discussion of these remarks by discussing the relationship between P-states and Beliefs as revealed in **T11** above. In this passage, Sextus introduces the distinction between P-states and Beliefs by contrasting two uses of the word “belief” (*dogma*). Sextus points out in **T11** that in claiming that the Skeptic does not hold “beliefs” he is relying on a restricted meaning of the term. According to **T11**, if “belief” is broadly construed to mean any “acquiescing in something,” then the Skeptic can be said to hold “beliefs,” since he does not resist those *pathê* (“feelings” or, more generally, “states of the soul”) which are forced upon him by “appearances” (*phantasiai*). It is only when “belief” is more narrowly construed to mean an “assent to some unclear object of investigation in the sciences” that the Skeptic can be said to live without “beliefs.” Thus on the basis of **T11**, we can understand “belief” to designate the genus of which P-states and Beliefs are distinct species.

At this point, then, our task is to identify the defining features of each of these species of belief. Although, as we will see in Chapter 3 and 4 of this thesis, Sextus’s remarks allow for two widely divergent interpretations of the precise nature of the distinguishing characteristics between P-states and Beliefs, they do at least reveal in a general sense two pairs of contrasting features by which P-states and Beliefs can be identified. First, in **T11-T13** Sextus establishes that P-states and Beliefs involve contrasting attitudes: P-states involve a psychologically unavoidable attitude, while Beliefs involve an attitude that can be rejected. Second, in **T11-T16** Sextus establishes that P-states and Beliefs involve distinct kinds of content: P-states concern matters which are *not* subject to investigation, while Beliefs concern matters which *are* subject to investigation. I will discuss each pair of contrasting features in more detail below.⁴⁰

2.5.3 *P-states and Beliefs: Two Contrasting Attitudes*

In **T11-T13**, Sextus describes the Skeptic's P-states as involving an unavoidable, involuntarily acquired attitude. According to these passages a P-state involves an

“acquiescing” to feelings “forced” upon the Skeptic (T11), an inability to overturn something which leads one “without [his] willing it” to assent (T12), and an acceptance of “passive unwilled feelings” (T13). In contrast, in the same passages Sextus implies that Beliefs involve an attitude that can be avoided. Thus, he speaks of a refusal to assent to anything unclear (T11), a “rejection” or “overturning” of particular kinds of claims (T13), and the investigating of claims which, inevitably for the Skeptic, leads to a suspension of judgment (T14). Thus, although Sextus's comments fail to allow a precise understanding of the attitudes characterizing P-states and Beliefs, we can generally characterize the contrast between these attitudes as a contrast between an attitude that is held involuntarily (P-states) and an attitude that can be rejected (Beliefs).

2.5.4 *The Contents of P-states and Beliefs*

Sextus describes both the contents of P-states and the contents of Beliefs in T11-T16. For ease of reference I've used a table to illustrate the various descriptions that Sextus applies to these contents.

	The Content of P-states	The Content of Beliefs
T11	“feelings forced upon [one] by appearances”	“unclear objects of investigation in the sciences” “anything unclear”
T12	“anything which leads us...to assent in accordance with...an appearance” “what is apparent”	“whether existing things are such as they appear” “what is said about what is apparent itself”

⁴⁰ Throughout this thesis I rely on the standard contemporary understanding of a belief as consisting of (a) an attitude directed towards (b) a content.

T13	“what is apparent” “appearances...[which are] not objects of investigation”	“whether [an existing thing] is such as it appears”
T14	“common observations and preconceptions”	“what is said with dogmatic superfluity and far beyond the needs of ordinary life”
T15	the claim that “there are gods...and they are provident”	“the rashness of the Dogmatists”
T16	-----	“appearances...as far as the argument goes”

As the above table demonstrates, Sextus's varying descriptions of the contents of both P-states and Beliefs make it difficult to characterize precisely the contrast between them. For example, though Sextus's comments in **T11-T13** could be taken as implying that P-states concern subjective “appearances” (i.e., “how things seem to me”) in contrast with Beliefs which concern statements of fact (i.e., “how things are objectively”), Sextus's comments in **T14-T16** suggests this characterization is insufficient. In **T14** and **T15** Sextus's language implies P-states can have some “common” facts as their contents, while his comments in **T16** imply that Beliefs can have as their contents certain “appearances”—namely those supported by argument. What emerges from **T11-T16**, then, is a more general contrast between matters that cannot be investigated and those that can: P-states concern matters that cannot be investigated (for example, “whether an existing thing appears this way or that”) and claims made “in accordance with common observations and preconceptions.” Beliefs, on the other hand, concern matters that can be

investigated (for example, “whether [an existing thing] is such as it appears”) and claims made “with dogmatic superfluity and far beyond the needs of ordinary life.”

2.5.5 Formal Characterization of P-states and Beliefs

Based on the above discussion of **T11-T16**, we can characterize the distinguishing features of both P-states and Beliefs in general terms as follows.

P-states: a psychologically unavoidable attitude directed towards matters that are not subject to investigation.

Beliefs: a psychologically avoidable attitude directed towards matters that are subject to investigation.

While it remains the task of the interpretations we will consider in Chapters 3 and 4 to provide a more fine-grained understanding of these mental states, the general characterizations given above will serve to establish some rough parameters for an adequate interpretation of P-states and Beliefs.

2.6 Desiderata for Interpretations of Pyrrhonian Belieflessness

Having looked at the essential features of Pyrrhonism and examined Sextus’s explicit comments on the distinction between P-states and Beliefs, we can now summarize what an ideal interpretation of Pyrrhonian Belieflessness should accomplish. Although, of course, it may be impossible to offer an interpretation which renders all of Sextus’s assertions about the Pyrrhonian mental states true, there are compelling reasons for extending a high level of interpretative charity to Sextus. Dogmatic attacks on Skepticism were plentiful in antiquity and Sextus is presenting his version of Pyrrhonism after having considered those objections. This being the case, declaring Sextus’s Pyrrhonism psychologically unfeasible or philosophically inconsistent should be a last resort for any interpreter of Sextus’s work. If alternative interpretations avoiding these conclusions are available, they should be rigorously evaluated and, if equally compatible with Sextus’s writings, adopted.

Based on the features of Pyrrhonism presented above, the requirements of an adequate interpretation of Pyrrhonian Belieflessness are as follows:

- (1)** The interpretation should allow a contrast between the Skeptic's P-states and the Beliefs of three kinds of non-Skeptic: (a) the Dogmatist, (b) the Academic, and (c) the ordinary person (as discussed in Section 1.2).
- (2)** The interpretation should accord with Sextus's explicit characterizations of P-states and Beliefs (as outlined in Section 1.5). In particular, a P-state must involve a psychologically unavoidable attitude directed towards matters which are not subject to investigation, while a Belief must involve a psychologically avoidable attitude directed towards matters which are subject to investigation.
- (3)** The interpretation should allow for the full range of P-states necessary for guiding the Skeptic's practical and argumentative activities: (a) sensory P-states, (b) evaluative P-states, (c) first-order intellectual P-states, and (d) second-order intellectual P-states (as described in Section 1.4).
- (4)** The interpretation should be compatible with Sextus's claim that the Skeptic achieves a unique feeling of tranquility unavailable to the non-skeptic (as described in Section 1.1).

We can now turn to examine some interpretations of Pyrrhonian Belieflessness and evaluate how well they satisfy these four desiderata.

Chapter 3: The Rustic Interpretation of Pyrrhonism

In this chapter I address Burnyeat's Rustic interpretation of Sextus's distinction between P-states and Beliefs, which has become the standard contemporary interpretation of Pyrrhonism. The chapter is divided into two major sections. In the first, I present Burnyeat's understanding of Sextus's distinction between P-states and Beliefs. In the second, I evaluate Burnyeat's Rustic interpretation in light of the desiderata established in Section 2.6 above. Ultimately, I argue that Burnyeat's view fails to adequately satisfy the desiderata I've presented at the end of Chapter 2 and that, therefore, it is only acceptable in the event that no viable alternative view is available.

3.1 The Rustic Interpretation of P-states and Beliefs

The easiest way of presenting the Rustic interpretation of Pyrrhonian Belieflessness requires taking the appearances discussed in Chapter 2 to be expressible in the form of indicative statements.⁴¹ In this case, according to the Rustic interpretation, holding a Belief is equivalent to having an attitude that a particular indicative sentence is true, i.e., that an experienced appearance accurately represents an objective fact.⁴² In contrast, having a P-state is equivalent to acknowledging that one has an indicative statement in mind (i.e., that one is experiencing an appearance), without making a further commitment to the accuracy of the statement as a description of reality (i.e., without

⁴¹ In discussing both Burnyeat's interpretation in this chapter and Frede's view in Chapter 4, I have translated their positions into what I hope is clearer language. Although attempting as far as possible to accurately represent their respective positions, I have had to make interpretative choices which may ultimately fail to reflect their original intentions. In so far as I've departed from their actual views, I hope it is only in the way of improving them. In any case, when possible I've keyed my presentation of their views to quotations in their articles (see notes below).

⁴² "When the sceptic doubts that anything is true (PH II.88ff., MVIII.17 ff.), he has exclusively in view claims as to real existence. [I]n the controversy between the Sceptic and the dogmatist..., the issue is whether any proposition or class of propositions can be accepted as true of a real objective world...." "Assent is the genus: opinion or belief, is that species of it which concerns matters of real existence as contrasted with appearance" (Burnyeat [1997], 30-31).

deciding whether or not the appearance accurately represents reality).⁴³ Thus, the Rustic interpretation of the distinction between P-states and Beliefs can be expressed formally as follows (where *p* stands for an appearance expressed in the form of an indicative statement).

Belief: I accept that it is an objective fact that *p*.

P-state: It appears to me that *p* (i.e., I am experiencing an appearance that *p*), but I neither accept that it is an objective fact that *p* nor that it is an objective fact that *not-p*.

According to Burnyeat, the above construal of the distinction between Beliefs and P-states is the only way to make sense of the way the Skeptic's investigations undermine Beliefs, but leave P-states intact. Since, for Burnyeat, all Beliefs involve a commitment to the truth or falsity of a statement, the Skeptic fails to hold Beliefs because he discovers that opposing statements are equally worthy or unworthy of being accepted as true, and for that reason makes no commitment to the truth or falsity of a statement.⁴⁴ Thus, Burnyeat reasons, those P-states which remain intact after the Skeptic's suspension of judgment have as their content statements of a type not susceptible to evaluation in terms of truth and falsity.⁴⁵ According to Burnyeat, since the Greek philosophers understood truth and falsity as predicable only of statements purporting to describe the objective world, the only statements that can form the content of P-states are those describing how

⁴³ "The sceptic's assent is simply the acknowledging of what is happening to him.... The impression is just the way something appears to one, and assent to it is just acknowledging that this is indeed how the thing appears to one at the moment" (Burnyeat [1997], 43).

⁴⁴ "All belief [for the Skeptic] is unreasonable precisely because...all belief concerns real existence as opposed to appearance" (Burnyeat [1997], 32). "[T]he sceptic is left with the conflicting appearances and the conflicting opinions based upon them, unable to find any reason for preferring one to another and therefore bound to treat all as...equally worthy (or unworthy) of acceptance" (Burnyeat [1997], 29). "[E]pochê [i.e., suspension of judgment] is a state in which one refrains from affirming or denying that any [opinion] is true...." (Burnyeat [1997], 30).

⁴⁵ "[I]f *epochê* is suspending belief about real existence as contrasted with appearance, that will amount to suspending all belief, since belief is the accepting of something as true. There can be no question of belief about appearance, if statements recording how things appear cannot be described as true or false, only statements making claims as to how they really are" (Burnyeat [1997], 31). "[T]he claim is that [the skeptic's] report that this is how it appears to him cannot be challenged and he cannot be properly be required to give reason, evidence or proof for it" (Burnyeat [1997], 41).

the world appears subjectively to an individual.⁴⁶ Thus, the Skeptic, according to Burnyeat, has various subjective experiences of the world (i.e., is struck by how the world “appears”), but suspends judgment over whether or not those experiences or appearances accurately reflect objective reality.⁴⁷

3.2 The Rustic View and the Desiderata of an Adequate Interpretation

Having presented the Rustic understanding of Pyrrhonian Belieflessness, I now want to demonstrate the inadequacy of this view in light of the desiderata established in Section 2.6 above. In Section 3.2.1 I argue that the Rustic view is compatible with Sextus’s explicit though vague remarks concerning the distinction between P-states and Beliefs, though it does involve strained readings of several passages, for example, **T11** and **T14**. In Section 3.2.2 I present what Burnyeat identifies as a crucial and problematic implication of the Rustic view, namely that non-sensory P-states collapse into a kind of Belief. This implication, I argue, has four important consequences: (a) the Rustic view can make sense of only one of the four kinds of P-states outlined in Section 2.4; (b) the Rustic view cannot maintain the distinction between the Academic’s and Skeptic’s mental states as described in Section 2.2.2; (c) the Rustic view does not allow the Skeptic to respond to objections to Beliefless theoretical and practical activity; and (d) the Rustic view cannot make sense of Sextus’s claim that the Skeptic experiences a unique condition of tranquility.

3.2.1 The Rustic Interpretation and Sextus’s Characterization of Beliefs and P-states

⁴⁶ “[T]he issue is whether any proposition or class of propositions can be accepted as true of a real objective world. For ‘true’ in these discussions means ‘true’ of a real objective world’; the true, if there is such a thing, is what conforms with the real, an association traditional to the word *alêthês* since the earliest period of Greek philosophy...” (Burnyeat [1997], 30). “When Sextus says that a man’s impression is *azêtêtos*, not subject to enquiry (PH I.22), the claim is that his report that this is how it appears to him cannot be challenged and he cannot properly be required to give reason, evidence or proof for it. [I]t follows (cont.) that the sceptic who adheres strictly to appearance is withdrawing to the safety of a position not open to challenge or enquiry” (Burnyeat [1997], 40-41).

⁴⁷ “When a thing appears in a certain light to [the Skeptic], that no more inclines him to believe that it is as it appears than would the fact of its so appearing to someone else. It is merely one more impression or appearance to be noted” (Burnyeat [1997], 41).

One of the desiderata presented in Section 2.6 is that an interpretation of Pyrrhonism should accord with Sextus's explicit remarks on the distinction between P-states and Beliefs. In Section 2.5.5 I summarized these remarks as follows.

P-states (according to Sextus): a psychologically unavoidable attitude directed towards matters which are not subject to investigation.

Beliefs (according to Sextus): a psychologically avoidable attitude directed towards matters which are subject to investigation.

As we can see, Burnyeat's interpretation is roughly compatible with these summaries of Sextus's remarks. As we've seen in Section 3.1, on the Rustic interpretation P-states involve simply acknowledging that one is experiencing a particular appearance without committing to the truth or falsity of the appearance as an accurate representation of reality. According to this view, not only does the Skeptic involuntarily experience, for example, an appearance that a tower is round, that a wine is sweet, that certain actions are good or bad, but it cannot be legitimately disputed (i.e., "investigated") that the Skeptic is experiencing these appearances; the appearances are accessible only from a first-person perspective. What can be disputed is whether or not those appearances accurately represent reality—and, according to the Rustic view, this is precisely the issue over which the Skeptic suspends judgment. Because the Skeptics' investigations reveal no grounds for believing that a particular appearance accurately represents reality, the Rustic Skeptic only acknowledges how things seem to him, without committing to how they are in reality, i.e., he holds no Beliefs. Thus, on the Rustic view the Skeptic only acknowledges those appearances that he involuntarily experiences and which cannot be disputed, while suspending judgment over whether not those appearances accurately represent reality—an issue that is subject to investigation. So far then, the Rustic view is consistent with Sextus's explicit remarks on the distinction between P-states and Beliefs.

There are, however, two sources of tension between Burnyeat's view and Sextus's comments that I want briefly to indicate here. Although Sextus's language is too vague to allow too much emphasis to be placed on these tensions, as we will see later on they are

indicative of more serious problems with Burnyeat's Rustic interpretation. The first of these tensions derives from Sextus's use of the word *dogma* (belief) in **T11** to describe the Skeptic's P-states. As I emphasized in Section 2.5, Sextus in **T11** explicitly describes P-states and Beliefs as two species of the genus belief. On Burnyeat's interpretation of P-states, however, P-states can hardly be described as beliefs—since “belief” (*dogma*) implies a level of commitment to an appearance as a representation of reality rather than merely a neutral acknowledgment of that appearance.⁴⁸ Although this alone is insufficient grounds for questioning Burnyeat's Rustic view, it does suggest a too narrow interpretation of the Skeptic's P-states—a suggestion reinforced by a second source of tension.

As we saw in the table presented in Section 2.5.4, a number of Sextus's comments imply not only that Beliefs represent a particularly narrow category of beliefs, but that P-states include a number of, so to speak, “everyday” beliefs. There is then a second tension between, on the one hand, Burnyeat's broad interpretation of Beliefs and his narrow interpretation of P-states and, on the other hand, Sextus's comments in passages like **T14**.

T14: It is enough, I think, to live by experience...in accordance with common observations and preconceptions, and to suspend judgment about what is said with dogmatic superfluity and far beyond the needs of normal life.⁴⁹

On the Rustic interpretation, Sextus here is both (a) describing *any* commitment to the accuracy of an appearance as a representation of reality as “superfluous” and “far beyond the needs of ordinary life” and (b) implying that “common observations and preconceptions” involve no commitment to how things are. The implausibility of attributing these views to Sextus suggests both that Burnyeat's interpretation of P-states may be too restrictive and that his view of Beliefs may be too broad. Although, of course, this suggestion is insufficient to warrant by itself a rejection of the Rustic view, it

⁴⁸ Cf. Burnyeat's comments in footnote 25 above. For a detailed discussion of the word *dogma* (belief) and its connotations, see Barnes [1997], 74-77.

⁴⁹ PH II.246.

is worth pointing out that passages like T14—which imply either an expanded notion of P-states or a restricted interpretation of Beliefs (or both)—recur with some frequency throughout the *Outlines*.⁵⁰

3.2.2 Problems with the Rustic Interpretation

Having shown how the Rustic interpretation, while roughly compatible with Sextus's explicit remarks on the distinction between P-states and Beliefs, results in strained readings of particular passages, I want to turn to examining the difficulties suggested by our analysis of these passages in Section 3.2.1. According to Burnyeat, one implication of the Rustic view is that the Skeptic's non-sensory P-states are equivalent to a kind of Belief⁵¹—as I will argue, to Academic Beliefs. In the remaining sections of this chapter, I will argue that because of this implication, the Rustic view cannot satisfy any of the four remaining desiderata presented in Section 2.6 above. In Section 3.2.2.1 below I both discuss Burnyeat's claim that non-sensory P-states are equivalent to a kind of Belief and demonstrate that, on the Rustic view, non-sensory P-states are equivalent to Academic Beliefs. In the same section I also point out that the Rustic view's collapse of non-sensory P-states into Academic Beliefs entails that the Rustic interpretation (a) cannot provide the Skeptic with the four kinds of P-states described in Section 2.4, and (b) obviously cannot maintain the distinction between the states of the Skeptic and the Academic as described in Section 2.2.2. In Section 3.2.2.2 I argue that since Sextus relies on non-sensory P-states to explain how the Skeptic can respond to objections against both practical and theoretical Beliefless activity, the Rustic collapse of non-sensory P-states into Beliefs undermines Sextus's responses to these objections. Finally, in Section 3.2.2.3, I argue that since the condition of tranquility the Skeptic allegedly experiences is dependent on his lack of evaluative Beliefs, the Rustic view's inability to distinguish such

⁵⁰ Cf. PH I.20, 227; II.26, 104; III.3, 6, 13, 29, 65, 135, 167.

⁵¹ “[W]hen it comes to ‘All things appear relative’ (PH I.135)...or ‘Some things appear good, others evil’ (M XI.19), we can hardly take ‘appear’ (*phantasiai*) other than in its epistemic sense. That is, when the sceptic offers a report of the form ‘It appears to me now that *p*,’ at least sometimes he is chronicling the fact that he believes or finds himself inclined to believe that something is the case” (Burnyeat [1997], 47).

Beliefs from evaluative P-states makes Sextus's description of the source of the Skeptic's tranquility nonsensical.

3.2.2.1 *The Rustic Interpretation on Non-Sensory P-states:* The easiest way to illustrate the Rustic view's collapse of non-sensory P-states into Academic Beliefs is to contrast a sample sensory P-state with a sample non-sensory P-state. As presented in Section 3.1 above, on the Rustic interpretation a sensory P-state can be expressed as follows.

Sensory P-state: (a) It appears to me that the tower is square (i.e., I am experiencing an appearance of a square tower), but (b) I neither accept that it is an objective fact that the tower is square nor that it is an objective fact that the tower is not square.

According to Burnyeat, in cases like this the appearance of a square tower and the Skeptic's refusal to accept that appearance as a representation of objective reality are logically independent.⁵² Thus, according to the Rustic interpretation, in the example above the report in (a) expresses the Skeptic's inability to deny his current experience of a tower that appears square; his P-state involves simply acknowledging that he is experiencing such an appearance. However, because, for example, his experience of the tower changes (from far away the tower appears round, from nearby the tower appears square), the Skeptic cannot determine which if either of his experiences accurately reflects what shape the tower *really* is.⁵³ Thus, on the Rustic view, in the example above the report in (b) expresses the Skeptic's suspension of judgment over whether the tower is in fact round.

Burnyeat goes on to argue, however, that Sextus is wrong to think that the same kind of analysis can make sense of non-sensory P-states.⁵⁴ Burnyeat points out that in the case of a non-sensory P-state there is no phenomena (i.e., appearance), independent

⁵² “[In perceptual instances] assent and impression are logically independent” (Burnyeat [1997], 56-57).

⁵³ PH I.118.

⁵⁴ “The source of the objection...is that the sceptic wants to treat ‘It appears to me that *p* but I do not believe that *p*,’ where *p* is some philosophical proposition such as ‘Contrary claims have equal strength,’ on par with perceptual instances of that form such as ‘It appears (looks) to me that the stick in the water is bent but I do not believe it is’” (Burnyeat [1997], 56).

of an inclination to Believe, from which the Skeptic can distance himself. Thus the Skeptic's experience (i.e., what appears to him) is simply what the Skeptic Believes or is inclined to Believe. To illustrate Burnyeat's argument on this point, I will use the following example of a non-sensory evaluative P-state.

Non-sensory P-state: (a) It appears to me that pleasure is good (i.e., I am experiencing an appearance that pleasure is good), but (b) I neither accept that it is an objective fact that pleasure is good nor accept that it is objective fact that pleasure is not good.

In cases like this, Burnyeat points out, the appearance reported in (a) above is logically equivalent to the Skeptic's inclination to accept that appearance as a representation of objective reality. Put another way, it will not appear to the Skeptic that pleasure is good unless the Skeptic Believes or is inclined to Believe that pleasure is in fact good; the appearance is nothing other than the Skeptic's inclination to Believe that pleasure is good. As result, Burnyeat argues, statements like the example above express a contradiction: in this case, the report in (a) expresses the Skeptic's inclination to Believe that pleasure is in fact good, while the report in (b) flatly denies such an inclination.⁵⁵

Although Burnyeat does not explicitly mention Academic Beliefs, his analysis amounts to the claim that the Skeptic's non-sensory P-states are equivalent to Academic Beliefs. As Burnyeat points out, the phrase "it appears to me that" in sentences referring to non-sensory appearances indicates the speaker's caution or uncertainty, rather than a refusal to make *any* commitment to the truth or falsity of a description. Thus, replacing the equivalent phrases in the example above would yield the following:

Non-sensory P-state: I accept that it is *likely* that pleasure is good, though I have no *conclusive* reasons for accepting that pleasure is good (or, for that matter, that pleasure is not good).

Here we can see that on the Rustic interpretation, non-sensory P-states would have to be equivalent to Academic Beliefs as presented in Section 2.2.3.

⁵⁵ "He wants to say something of the form 'It appears to me that *p* but I do not believe that *p*' with a non-epistemic use of 'appears,' but it looks to be intelligible only if 'appears' is in fact epistemic, yielding a contradiction: 'I (am inclined to) believe that *p*, but I do not believe that *p*'" (Burnyeat [1997], 54-55).

Of course, it follows immediately from its collapse of non-sensory P-states into Academic Beliefs that the Rustic interpretation is unable to account for the following two desiderata established in Section 2.6 above: first, that the interpretation should allow a contrast between, on the one hand, the Skeptic's P-states and, on the other, the Beliefs of the Dogmatist, the ordinary person *and* the Academic; and second, that the interpretation should allow for the full range of P-states necessary for guiding the Skeptic's actions, *including* three kinds of non-sensory P-states. Since according to the Rustic view, the Skeptic's non-sensory P-states are equivalent to the Academic's Beliefs, it cannot maintain the critical distinction between Academic and Skeptic mental states as discussed in Section 2.2.2. Also, since on the Rustic view evaluative P-states and first- and higher-order intellectual P-states are likewise simply categories of Academic Belief, the view invalidates Sextus's claim (discussed in Section 2.4) that the Skeptic is guided in his practical and theoretical activities by mental states distinct from Belief. This last point has additional implications for the Skeptic's responses to various objections against the possibility of Beliefless activity, as we will now see.

3.2.2.2 The Rustic Skeptic and Four Objections against Beliefless Activity: At this point I want to turn to the fourth desideratum presented in Section 2.6, namely that an interpretation of Pyrrhonian Belieflessness should allow the Skeptic to meet two kinds of objections: (a) objections against Beliefless practical activity and (b) objections against Beliefless theoretical activity. As I will show, because Sextus's responses to these kinds of objections depend on non-sensory P-states, the Rustic interpretation's collapse of P-states into Academic Beliefs leaves these objections as fatal criticisms of Sextus's Pyrrhonism.

According to the first kind of objection (a), the Skeptic would be reduced to a state of life-threatening paralysis if he did not hold a variety of Beliefs.⁵⁶ As we've seen in Section 2.3.1, Sextus's response is that the Skeptic lives by performing the actions determined by his P-states. Of course, in order for this to represent a viable response, the

Skeptic must be able to rely on non-sensory P-states—including, most importantly, evaluative P-states—that are not equivalent to Beliefs. By having a non-Belief attitude that one course of action is superior to another, the Skeptic could avoid the paralysis described by critics of Pyrrhonism without compromising his state of Belieflessness. However, since on the Rustic interpretation non-sensory P-states are equivalent to Academic Beliefs, the Skeptic cannot adequately respond to this objection. Instead, in so far as he avoids paralysis, he must concede that his actions are guided by Academic Beliefs.

In Section 2.3.2.1-2.3.2.3, I presented three formulations of the second kind of objection mentioned above. According to the first version, Sextus's own philosophical writings can only be understood as expressions of his Beliefs.⁵⁷ Thus, according to this objection, Sextus's engagement in presenting his Pyrrhonian outlook and way of life is inconsistent with his claim to hold no Beliefs. As we've seen in Section 2.3.2.1, Sextus's response is that his writings express intellectual P-states rather than Beliefs; thus his writings purportedly provide no counter-evidence to his claim to live a Beliefless life. As we've seen, however, on the Rustic interpretation, the distinction between expressing P-states and expressing Academic Beliefs collapses when non-sensory P-states are concerned. Since the reports that constitute Sextus's philosophical writings are reports of non-sensory P-states, on the Rustic view Sextus's claim that his philosophical works do not express Beliefs is simply false.

According to the second objection against Beliefless theoretical activity, the Skeptic would be unable to understand Dogmatic claims without holding Beliefs. On this view, in order to respond to Dogmatic arguments, the Skeptic would have to Believe that particular words have particular meanings. As we've seen in Section 2.3.2.2, however, Sextus responds to this argument too by pointing out that the Skeptic relies on P-states, rather than on Beliefs, that particular words have particular meanings. Of course, a P-

⁵⁶ Burnyeat does not explicitly address the implications of the Rustic view for this objection.

⁵⁷ Again Burnyeat does not explicitly address the implications of the Rustic view for this objection or the one that follows.

state that a particular word has a particular meaning would be a non-sensory P-state; and on the Rustic interpretation non-sensory P-states are equivalent to Academic Beliefs. Thus according to the Rustic interpretation, Sextus should simply admit that in order to respond to Dogmatic arguments, the Skeptic would have to hold Beliefs.

The final objection to Beliefless philosophical activity involves the charge that the Skeptic's engagement in the Pyrrhonian investigative practice is inconsistent with his claim to lead a Beliefless life. Because of the frequency with which Sextus's contemporaries repeated charges of this kind, we would expect the Skeptic to be able to respond adequately, despite Sextus's failure to do so explicitly in the Outlines. In what follows, however, I present Burnyeat's version of this objection in order to demonstrate how the Rustic interpretation prevents the Skeptic from adequately responding to criticisms of this sort.⁵⁸

Summarizing Burnyeat's objection to the Rustic Skeptic's Beliefless participation in philosophical investigation requires presenting the schema of the Skeptic's investigative strategy first introduced in Section 2.3.2.3 (where F and G stand for incompatible properties).

- S1:** (1) X appears to be F in circumstance A.
(2) X appears to be G in circumstance B.
(3) X cannot really be both F and G.
(4) There are no more grounds for thinking that X is F rather than G.
(5) So we must suspend judgment over whether or not X really is F rather than G.

On the Rustic view, (1) and (2) from the schema above represent the Skeptic's reports of opposing appearances; (3) reports the Skeptic's experience of the non-sensory appearance that X cannot be both F and G; (4) reports the non-sensory appearance

⁵⁸ Burnyeat presents his objection to the Rustic Skeptic's engagement in philosophical activity as a criticism of Sextus's Pyrrhonian outlook and life. For Burnyeat, the Skeptic's inability to respond to this kind of objection represents a fatal flaw in Pyrrhonian practice. However, because the Skeptic's inability to counter objections of the sort raised by Burnyeat depends on the Rustic interpretation of the distinction between P-states and Beliefs, that inability can be alternately read as indicating a flaw in the Rustic interpretation of Pyrrhonism. As I will argue in Chapter 4, the fact that the Urbane view of P-states and Beliefs allows the Skeptic to adequately respond to objections of this type suggests that we attribute the difficulties Burnyeat raises to the Rustic interpretation rather than to Pyrrhonism itself.

produced by the Skeptic's investigations; and (5) reports the appearance that ends the Skeptic's investigation.

Burnyeat's objection to the Skeptic's participation in Pyrrhonian investigation hinges on premise (4) in the schema above. According to Burnyeat, the appearance in (4) is critical to the Skeptic's investigative procedure in that it motivates the Skeptic's suspension of judgment. In order for the Skeptic's investigative practice to be consistent with his claim to Belieflessness, the Skeptic must "accept" the appearance in (4) without *Believing* the appearance in (4). If the Skeptic fails to "accept" the appearance in (4) he has no motive for proceeding from the opposing appearances in (1) and (2) to the suspension of judgment in (5). On the other hand, however, as Burnyeat's points out, if the Skeptic Believes the appearance in (4) his engagement in Pyrrhonian investigative practice has forced him to compromise his Pyrrhonian Belieflessness.

As we've seen in Section 3.2.2.1, on the Rustic view non-sensory P-states cannot be distinguished from Academic Beliefs, and thus according to the Rustic interpretation the non-sensory appearance in (4) can only be understood as a Belief illicitly held by the investigating Skeptic; on the Rustic interpretation there is no way for the Skeptic to "accept" (4) without Believing (4). Burnyeat points out that the Skeptic's use of reasoned argument to reach (4) gives us particular grounds for attributing to the Skeptic the Belief that (4) is at least likely to be true. The Skeptic does not merely report the appearance that "there are no more grounds for thinking that X is F rather than G" while suspending judgment over whether or not that appearance is even likely to be true: instead, the Skeptic deploys a series of arguments designed to show that (4) is at least likely to be true, and then accepts (4) as a conclusion compelled by those arguments. As Burnyeat goes on to argue, "[A]ccepting [a] conclusion that *p* on the basis of certain arguments is hardly to be distinguished from coming to *believe* that *p* is true with that argument as one's reason."⁵⁹ Thus, according to Burnyeat, in following the procedure described in (S1)—in "accepting" that there are no more grounds for thinking that X is

⁵⁹ Burnyeat [1997], 54.

really F rather than G—the Rustic Skeptic must Believe that (4) is at least likely to be true, which would be inconsistent with his claim to lead a Beliefless life.⁶⁰

3.2.2.3 The Rustic Skeptic and Tranquility: Having shown how the Rustic distinction between P-states and Beliefs fails to allow the Skeptic to consistently maintain a state of Belieflessness while engaging in practical and theoretical activities, I want to turn briefly to the final desideratum established in Section 2.6. According to this desideratum, an interpretation of Pyrrhonian Belieflessness should account for Sextus’s claim that the Skeptic achieves a condition of tranquility unavailable to the Dogmatist, the Academic and the ordinary person. The Rustic interpretation, however, fails to make sense of this claim. According to Sextus, because the Skeptic lacks evaluative Beliefs, he neither experiences the immediate psychological discomfort produced by such Beliefs, nor is driven to frantic pursuit of what he Believes to be good, or of security for the good he has already attained. On the Rustic interpretation, however, as we’ve seen, the Skeptic’s evaluative P-states are equivalent to evaluative Academic Beliefs. Thus, according to Sextus’s explanation of the cause of psychological stress, the Rustic Skeptic will experience the same direct and indirect effects of holding evaluative Beliefs as would the non-Skeptic.⁶¹

3.2.3 Verdict on the Rustic Interpretation

At this point I think we have sufficient grounds for looking for an alternative to the Rustic interpretation of Pyrrhonian Belieflessness. Although the Rustic view does offer a possible (though strained) understanding of Sextus’s explicit characterization of

⁶⁰ “Remember that we know perfectly well *why* it appears to the sceptic that any dogmatic claim has a contrary equally worthy or unworthy of acceptance. It is the result of a set of arguments designed to show, compellingly, that this is in fact the case. Such arguments compel him to suspend judgment because they compel him to accept their conclusion—to accept, that is, that in each and every case dogmatic claims are indeed equally balanced and hence that one ought to suspend judgment. But accepting the conclusion that *p* on the basis of certain arguments is hardly to be distinguished from coming to *believe* that *p* is *true* with that argument as one’s reason” (Burnyeat [1997], 54). “The sceptic goes on seeking [continually, throughout his Skeptical life] not in the sense that he has an active programme of research but in the sense that he continues to regard it as an open question whether *p* or not-*p* is the case, at least for any first-level proposition concerning real existence” (Burnyeat [1997], 56).

the distinction between P-states and Beliefs, it fails to make sense of Sextus's descriptions of other features of the Pyrrhonist's Beliefless life. First, the Rustic understanding of the Skeptic's P-states can account for neither the distinction Sextus draws between the Pyrrhonist and the Academic nor the three kinds of non-sensory P-states which according to Sextus guide the Skeptic's actions. Second, as a consequence, the Rustic Skeptic is vulnerable to a number of objections to Beliefless activity; on the Rustic reading, Sextus's responses to these objections involve either philosophical confusion or an obstinate denial of the obvious. Finally, the Rustic view renders nonsensical Sextus's claim that the Skeptic experiences a tranquility unavailable to the non-skeptic. In short, of the four desiderata I presented in Section 2.6, the Rustic interpretation is tolerably consistent with only one.

Although advocates of the Rustic interpretation of Pyrrhonism will, of course, argue that the problems I've presented in this chapter are problems with Sextus's account of Pyrrhonism rather than with the Rustic interpretation, such arguments only amount to a defense of the Rustic view in the event that no more charitable interpretation is available. Thus my task in the next chapter will be to see whether that there is a viable alternative to the Rustic view that better satisfies the desiderata laid out in Chapter 2.

⁶¹ Cf. PH I.30, 226.

Chapter 4: The Urbane Interpretation of Pyrrhonism

In this chapter I examine Frede's Urbane interpretation of Sextus's distinction between P-states and Beliefs. The chapter is divided into two major sections. In the first (4.1), I present Frede's Urbane interpretation of P-states and Beliefs. In the second (4.2), I both evaluate that interpretation in light of the desiderata established in Section 2.6 and argue that, in contrast to the Rustic view discussed in Chapter 3, the Urbane interpretation is capable of adequately satisfy these desiderata.

4.1 Frede's Urbane Interpretation

As we've seen in Chapter 3, Burnyeat understands the distinction between P-states and Beliefs as a distinction between acknowledging that one is experiencing a particular appearance and accepting that appearance as an accurate representation of reality. According to Frede however, this Rustic interpretation fails to make sense of Sextus's claim that the Skeptic can live an ordinary life. In order to live an ordinary life, Frede argues, the Skeptic must be capable of distinguishing between appearances which are acceptable as bases for action and appearances which are primarily the product of the imagination (e.g. hallucinations, optical illusions, and so on). On the Rustic view, Frede points out, the Skeptic will be unable to draw precisely this kind of distinction: the Rustic Skeptic can acknowledge his own thoughts and feelings, but can form no opinions regarding the reliability of those thoughts and feelings as guides for action. Although this consequence of the Rustic view has generally been taken as grounds for rejecting Sextus's claim that Pyrrhonism constitutes a practicable way of life, Frede suggests that what is at fault is not Sextus's distinction between P-states and Beliefs, but the Rustic interpretation of that distinction. Rather than seeing Sextus as disavowing beliefs of all kinds, Frede distinguishes between "dogmatic" and "ordinary" beliefs and argues that the Skeptic disavows only the former. Thus, on Frede's Urbane interpretation the Skeptic's P-states

are equivalent to “ordinary” beliefs while Beliefs are equivalent to “dogmatic” beliefs.⁶²

Of course, Frede’s idea that P-states and Beliefs constitute two distinctive types of belief raises two important questions: (1) how can the two types of belief be distinguished? and (2) how can one type of belief (P-states) remain unaffected by the Skeptical arguments which undermine the other type (Beliefs)? In order to answer these questions, we will have to examine the three kinds of mental states recognized by Frede as well as his discussion of the historical circumstances within which Pyrrhonism emerged. In Section 4.1.1 I address the first question by introducing Frede's examples of three kinds of mental states and providing precise characterizations of both ordinary and dogmatic beliefs. Then, in Section 4.1.2, I examine Frede's discussion of the historical context for the development of Pyrrhonism in order (a) to explain further Frede's justification for interpreting Sextus's distinction as a distinction between ordinary and dogmatic beliefs, and (b) to address how Skeptical arguments can undermine dogmatic beliefs while leaving ordinary beliefs unaffected. In Section 4.1.3 I end the first half of the chapter with a brief summary of the Urbane interpretation.

4.1.1 Frede's Three Kinds of Mental States

Frede introduces his distinction between ordinary and dogmatic beliefs by providing examples of three distinct kinds of mental states in the following passage:

T17: Suppose, for example, that a particular wine seems quite sweet to me. Someone might explain, it only seems sweet, because I had eaten something sour just before tasting the wine. If I accept this explanation, I shall no longer think that the wine is sweet; at most, I shall think that the wine only seems sweet. Yet, someone might also try to provide a quite different explanation. He might say there is, in reality, no such thing as sweetness, no such thing as sweetness in wine; the wine, rather has certain chemical properties which, in normal circumstances

⁶² “Sextus Empiricus...emphasizes that the sceptical life is, and should be expected to be, a conventional one. It seems clear that the later sceptics [including Sextus] all sought a life which—on any ordinary criterion—would count as a satisfactory life. Their lives cannot readily be construed as lives without beliefs or even as attempts at lives without beliefs...” (Frede [1997], 4). “[I]t seems to me [that] the contrast between how things really are and how they appear nonepistemically is insufficient. If one does not think that something is so and so in the true nature of things, this does not yet mean it only seems as if the thing were so and so.... [I]f the sceptic suspends judgment on how things are in reality, this does not mean that he has only impressions, but no beliefs, about things” (Frede [1997], 13).

make it taste such that we call it sweet. It may even be that I am convinced by an explanation of this sort and come to view how things taste in an entirely new light. Nonetheless, such an explanation might seem rather puzzling, because it is not entirely clear how it is supposed to bear on my claim that the wine is quite sweet. Even if I accept this explanation, the wine will still seem sweet, and I shall still think that it is. Thus in a sense, it will still be true that it does not merely seem as if the wine is sweet, even if I believe that, in reality, there is no such thing as sweetness.⁶³

In this passage, Frede illustrates: first, a state of acknowledging an impression (which, as we've seen in Chapter 3, Burnyeat equates with the Skeptic's P-states); second, the state of holding an "ordinary belief" (which, as we will see, Frede equates with the Skeptic P-states); and third, the state of holding a "dogmatic belief" (which, as we will see, Frede equates with those Beliefs that the Skeptic disavows). Relying in part on his comments in other passages, we can understand Frede's view of these mental states as follows.⁶⁴

First, and in accordance with Burnyeat's position described in Section 3.1, for Frede the mental state of acknowledgment involves merely admitting that one is experiencing an appearance (expressible in the form of an indicative statement) without making any further commitment to that appearance as a representation of reality. For example, as Frede illustrates in **T17**, we can acknowledge that we are experiencing an appearance that "the wine is sweet" when drinking a glass of wine while simultaneously accepting that that appearance is primarily the result of our having previously eaten something sour. Under these circumstances, Frede points out, we do not believe that the appearance that the wine is sweet accurately represents how the wine *is*; rather we simply acknowledge that the wine *seems* sweet to us at a particular moment. Frede's example in **T17** also indicates that because our experiencing of any appearance is unaffected by arguments regarding the relationship of that appearance with reality, that the wine *seems* sweet to us will not be affected by Skeptical arguments (for example, by

⁶³ Frede [1997], 12-13.

⁶⁴ Because Frede frames his argument as a refutation of the Rustic view, he does not present his alternative Urbane interpretation with the degree of precision we might otherwise expect. As a result I've been forced to reconstruct Frede's view on the basis of comments scattered throughout his article. Although, where possible, I've keyed my interpretation to specific passages, elsewhere I've cited the several pages of discussion upon which particular aspects of my interpretation are based.

the explanation that “there is no such thing as sweetness”). Thus, the mental state of acknowledgment which Frede illustrates in **T17** corresponds neatly with the mental state which Burnyeat equates with the Skeptic’s P-states.

The second mental state introduced in **T17** is that of holding an “ordinary belief.”⁶⁵ Burnyeat, as we’ve seen in Chapter 2, does not distinguish this mental state from that of holding a dogmatic belief. As indicated by the example in **T17** above, for Frede, holding an ordinary belief involves accepting a particular appearance as an accurate representation of how things are under “normal circumstances.” Although Frede’s example does not make this point clear, because the contrast Frede intends is between “under normal circumstances” and “from an unmediated perspective,” we can characterize an ordinary belief indifferently as either (a) the acceptance of an appearance as a representation of reality mediated by memory, the sense organs, upbringing, and so on,⁶⁶ or (b) the acceptance of an appearance as a generally reliable guide to action.⁶⁷ Frede’s point is that though certain appearances can serve as reliable guides to action, their doing so does not require us to accept them as representations of unmediated reality, i.e., how things are independently of human experience. Thus, as Frede’s example in **T17** demonstrates, holding an ordinary belief that the wine is sweet involves thinking that the wine does not merely *seem* sweet, it *is* sweet—but only according to an everyday understanding of “is.”⁶⁸ As **T17** implies, one can hold this kind of ordinary belief regardless of whether or not one is simultaneously experiencing certain additional opposing appearances: for example, we could believe that a wine *is* sweet, even though for the moment the wine *seems* dry (as even a Riesling might taste dry after drinking a glass of Port). Similarly, as we will see more clearly in a moment, we could maintain our

⁶⁵ It is important to realize that by calling this kind of belief an “ordinary” belief, Frede does not mean to imply an equivalence between this kind of belief and the kind of belief held by the “ordinary” person. As we will see in section 4.2.4, the ordinary person might hold both “dogmatic” and “ordinary” beliefs.

⁶⁶ Cf. PH I. 35-177.

⁶⁷ Cf. PH I. 21-24; cf. Frede [1997], 9-10, 12-14. See also T19 and T20 in Section 3.1.2.

⁶⁸ Cf. “[T]he contrast between how things really are and how they appear nonepistemically is insufficient. If one does not think that something is so and so in the true nature of things, this does not yet mean it only seems as if the thing were so and so” (Frede [1997], 13).

ordinary belief that the wine *is* sweet, while holding a dogmatic belief that “in reality, there is no such thing as sweetness.”⁶⁹

The last kind of mental state illustrated by **T17** is that of holding a “dogmatic belief.” Again, Burnyeat fails to distinguish between dogmatic beliefs and the ordinary beliefs we’ve just discussed. As Frede indicates in **T17**, a dogmatic belief involves accepting a particular appearance as an accurate representation of how things are “in reality”—as contrasted with how things are “under normal circumstances.” Because, as I pointed out when discussing ordinary beliefs, Frede's contrast here should be understood as indicating a contrast between (a) a representation of unmediated reality and (b) a representation of reality as mediated by experience, we can understand a dogmatic belief as involving the acceptance of a particular appearance as an accurate representation of how things are when all the potentially distorting aspects of human experience are stripped away. Frede's example in **T17** illustrates how we can hold a dogmatic belief of this kind—i.e., the belief that there *really* is no such thing as sweetness and that, therefore, the wine *really* is not sweet—regardless of whether or not we hold the ordinary belief that the wine *is* sweet, and regardless of whether or not, at the moment, the wine *seems* sweet.

Based on this discussion of the mental states illustrated in **T17**, we can now answer the first question raised in Section 4.1: how can Frede’s two types of belief be distinguished? As we’ve seen, for Frede, ordinary beliefs involve the attitude that a particular appearance provides a reliable guide for action, i.e., it accurately describes an aspect of the world as it is experienced, while, in contrast, dogmatic beliefs involve the attitude that a particular appearance represents reality with the mediating effects of experience stripped away. Thus, we can characterize Frede's understanding of the distinction between ordinary and dogmatic beliefs for easy reference as follows (where *p* represents an appearance expressed in the form of an indicative statement):

⁶⁹ Cf. “We believe that objects around us are colored; in reality however, they only reflect light of certain wave-lengths that makes them appear colored” (Frede [1997], 10). “It can...happen that, even after we have

Ordinary belief: I accept that p represents how things are (i.e., I accept that p represents a reliable guide for action).

Dogmatic belief: I accept that p represents how things *really* are (i.e., I accept that p represents unmediated reality).

As I've explained in Section 4.1, Frede takes the distinction between ordinary and dogmatic beliefs to be equivalent to Sextus's distinction between P-states and Beliefs. To understand why, we need to turn to Frede's explanation of the historical context surrounding the development of Sextus's Pyrrhonism. Examining the relationship between the Skeptic and the Dogmatist will also provide an answer to the second question raised in Section 4.1: how can ordinary beliefs remain unaffected by the Skeptical arguments that undermine dogmatic beliefs?

4.1.2 The Historical Context for Pyrrhonism

Frede explains his equation of the distinction between ordinary and dogmatic beliefs with Sextus's distinction between P-states and Beliefs by referring to the historical context in which Sextus's Pyrrhonism developed. According to Frede,

T19: [A]ncient scepticism is essentially a reaction to dogmatism, to the attempt to get behind the phenomena, with the aid of reason, to true reality, and, thus, to dissolve the real or apparent contradictions among the phenomena, the contradictions in the world as it appears to us. However, it is characteristic of dogmatism that this attempt, to move beyond the phenomena, calls into question the status of the phenomena themselves. But in calling into question the status of the phenomena, they also call into question the status of our ordinary beliefs and claims, as these are beliefs and claims that reflect how things appear to us. Since, however, the dogmatists, generally speaking, do not deny that the phenomena have at least some objective status, it does not follow that if someone suspends judgment about how things really are, he only has impressions about how things are, and no beliefs.⁷⁰

been given an explanation of why something only appears a certain way and even after we've accepted this explanation, we still think the thing is as it appears to be" (Frede [1997], 12).

⁷⁰ Frede [1997], 13.

Although Frede's language in this passage renders his meaning somewhat obscure, his central point is that the problem facing the Dogmatists is not the Modern problem of solipsism, but the challenge of resolving contradictions between appearances ("phenomena"), which are already distinguished from mere hallucinations, by attaining an understanding of how things *really* are.⁷¹ Although in **T19** Frede misleadingly describes the status granted these appearances ("phenomena") by Dogmatists as "objective," his point is that the Dogmatists recognize the distinctions between (a) an appearance worthy only of acknowledgment (i.e., the wine *seems* sweet), (b) an appearance worthy of ordinary belief (i.e., the wine *is* sweet), and (c) an appearance worthy of dogmatic belief (i.e., the wine *really* is sweet). Thus, according to Frede, since the Sceptics were primarily reacting against the Dogmatists, and since the Dogmatists recognized this three-fold distinction, there are no grounds for adopting a Rustic view that recognizes only a two-fold distinction between subjective appearance and objective fact. Instead, Frede points out, understanding Sextus's distinction between P-states and Beliefs requires the more sophisticated three-fold distinction drawn by the Urbane interpretation—a distinction that mirrors that drawn by Sextus's dogmatic rivals.

In addition to explaining his grounds for equating Sextus's distinction between P-states and Beliefs with a distinction between ordinary and dogmatic beliefs, Frede's historical discussion also provides the beginnings of an answer to the second question raised in Section 4.1: how can ordinary beliefs remain unaffected by the Sceptical arguments that undermine dogmatic beliefs? According to Frede's comments in **T19**, for the Dogmatists, philosophical investigation provides, not a means of distinguishing between mere hallucinations and reality, but a means of confirming that one has attained an accurate view of reality unmediated by experience—a view which can elucidate contradictions in reality as experienced. It follows, then, that in arguing against the Dogmatists, the Sceptics are not concerned with demonstrating that there are no rational

⁷¹ Cf. "Plato, for example, ascribes a precarious intermediate status to the objects of belief or *doxa* in the *Republic*; they come between what really is, the objects of reason and knowledge, and what does not exist

means of distinguishing between hallucinations and reality; rather, their concern is with demonstrating that dogmatic arguments—and reason itself—fail to confirm that a particular appearance represents unmediated reality. Because dogmatic beliefs are beliefs about reality as unmediated by experience, they cannot be warranted solely by experience. Thus, by demonstrating that arguments fail to confirm that one has attained an accurate view of unmediated reality, the Skeptic undermines the possibility of holding dogmatic beliefs by demonstrating that one has no grounds for holding such Beliefs.⁷²

Of course, as Frede goes on to point out, arguing that one has no grounds for holding a dogmatic belief will not undermine an ordinary belief. Since ordinary beliefs are about reality as it is experienced, they can be confirmed by experience itself. Thus, as Frede explains,

T20: [T]here is a perfectly good sense in which someone who suspends judgment about how things really are can have beliefs about how things are. What is to stop the sceptic from having such beliefs? It is the dogmatists who talk endlessly about the need to go beyond phenomena, who insist on the need to rely on reason and reason alone. It is the dogmatists that believe that it is necessary for us to revise our beliefs, or at least all the important and central ones, in the light of reason. Whenever [the sceptic] follows reason seriously and fully, he can form no judgment, hence also no judgment that conflicts with his ordinary beliefs. Thus, he is not even faced with the choice, should he follow only reason (against his ordinary beliefs).⁷³

Here Frede points out that the Skeptic is not even faced with the challenge philosophical inquiry poses to the ordinary beliefs of the Dogmatists. Because the Dogmatists feel (mistakenly as far as the Skeptic is concerned) that their investigations provide them with

at all. He does not say that what we ordinarily call 'reality' is no better than hallucinations" (Frede [1997], 13).

⁷² It may be useful here to recall an essential premise underlying Burnyeat's Rustic interpretation: "It takes rather special circumstances to make intelligible the idea that a man could maintain a belief in the face of a clear realization that it is unfounded" (Burnyeat [1997], 27). The Urbane interpretation, accepts this premise, *when it is applied to dogmatic beliefs about reality as unmediated by experience*—beliefs for which experience provides no "foundation" or warrant. However, as we will see in a moment, on the Urbane view the same kind of "special circumstances" are unnecessary for the maintenance of an ordinary belief, since experience itself provides the "grounds" for holding beliefs about reality as experienced.

⁷³ Cf. (Frede [1997], 14-15); "And if we do propound arguments directly against what is apparent, it is not because we want to reject what is apparent that we set them out, but rather to display the rashness of the Dogmatists; for if reasoning is such a deceiver that it all but snatches even what is apparent from under our

a view of how things *really* are, *they* find themselves confronted with the necessity of revising their ordinary beliefs in light of the conclusions provided by their investigations. The Skeptic however, according to Frede, finds that his investigations fail to provide the circumstances necessary for Believing that a particular view accurately represents how things really are as unmediated by experience. Thus, in contrast to the Dogmatists, the Skeptic never finds his ordinary beliefs challenged by the results of his philosophical investigations. Although any dogmatic beliefs the Skeptic may have held will be undermined by his apparent inability to warrant a Belief about the nature of unmediated reality, his ordinary beliefs will continue to be held in accordance with his own experience with reality. In short, according to the Urbane interpretation, the Skeptic's arguments leave ordinary beliefs intact simply because they do not dispute them; instead, the Skeptic's arguments serve to undermine solely the possibility of holding Beliefs about the nature of unmediated reality.

4.1.3 Frede's Urbane Interpretation

With these answers to the two questions raised in Section 4.1, we are now in a position to summarize Frede's Urbane interpretation of P-states and Beliefs. Drawing on the definitions of ordinary and dogmatic beliefs established in Section 4.1.1, we can characterize Frede's understanding of P-states and Beliefs as follows (where *p* represents an appearance expressed as an indicative statement).

Ordinary belief: I believe that *p* represents how things are (i.e., I accept that *p* represents a reliable guide for action); however, I neither believe that *p* represents how things *really* are, nor that *p* does not represent how things *really* are.

Dogmatic belief: I believe that *p* represents how things *really* are (i.e., I accept that *p* represents reality unmediated by experience).

very eyes, surely we should keep watch on it in unclear matters, to avoid being led into rashness by following it" (PH I. 20).

In accordance with these Urbane characterizations, we can present Frede's Urbane interpretation as follows. The Skeptics begin their investigations motivated by a particular philosophical concern: they hope to discover how things *really* are through the systematic deployment of reason. However, in the course of their investigations, the Skeptics discover that reason fails to provide psychologically satisfying grounds for Believing any particular view of how things *really* are. As a result, the Skeptics can form no Beliefs about how things *really* are, i.e., they suspend judgment. The Skeptics' inability to hold Beliefs, however, does not prevent them from holding P-states. Because P-states only concern questions of reality as it is manifest in experience, the Skeptics' experiences, natural thought processes, upbringing, etc. are psychologically compelling in leading them to hold P-states. Thus, in contrast to the Dogmatist who insists that all beliefs should be rationally warrantable (and thus consistent with how things *really* are), the Skeptic discovers that, despite the failure of his investigations, by relying on P-states he can lead a practical, satisfying and Beliefless existence.⁷⁴

We are now in a position to evaluate Frede's Urbane interpretation in light of the desiderata established in Section 2.6.

4.2 The Urbane View and the Desiderata of an Adequate Interpretation

Having presented Frede's Urbane interpretation of the distinction between Beliefs and P-states, I want to demonstrate the attractiveness of this view in light of the desiderata articulated in Section 2.6. In Section 4.2.1 I argue not only that the Urbane view is consistent with Sextus's explicit remarks concerning the distinction between P-states and Beliefs, but that it avoids the Rustic interpretation's strained readings of particular passages (as discussed in Section 3.2.1). In Section 4.2.2 I argue that, in contrast to the Rustic view, the Urbane interpretation can make sense of the four kinds of P-states introduced in Section 2.4 and provide examples of each of these kinds of P-states. In Section 4.2.3 I show how the Urbane Skeptic, unlike the Rustic Skeptic, can

⁷⁴ Cf. PH I.12, 28-29.

respond to the four objections to Beliefless practical and theoretical activity introduced in Sections 2.3.2.1-2. In Section 4.2.4 I demonstrate how the Urbane Skeptic, unlike the Rustic Skeptic, can be distinguished from the Dogmatist, the Academic and the ordinary person. And finally in Section 4.2.5 I argue that, in contrast to the Rustic interpretation, the Urbane view is consistent with Sextus's comments concerning the Skeptic's condition of tranquility. The chapter ends with a brief summary of the advantages the Urbane interpretation has over the Rustic view.

4.2.1 The Urbane Interpretation and Sextus's Characterization P-states and Beliefs

In Section 3.2.1 we saw that, though the Rustic view is consistent with Sextus's remarks about the distinction between P-states and Beliefs (see Section 2.5.5), it presents strained readings of particular passages—for example, **T11** and **T14**. In this Section I will argue that the Urbane view is not only consistent with Sextus's remarks as summarized in Section 2.5.5, but it avoids the tensions that result from a Rustic reading of these passages.

As explained in Section 2.5.5, Sextus's remarks on the distinction between P-states and Beliefs can be summarized as follows.

P-states (according to Sextus): a psychologically unavoidable attitude directed towards matters which are not subject to investigation.

Beliefs (according to Sextus): a psychologically avoidable attitude directed towards matters which are subject to investigation.

Thus, to demonstrate that the Urbane interpretation is consistent with Sextus's remarks, I need to demonstrate both of the following: (1) that ordinary beliefs involve both (a) a psychologically unavoidable attitude and (b) an attitude directed towards matters which are not subject to investigation; and (2) that dogmatic beliefs involve both (a) a psychologically avoidable attitude and (b) an attitude directed towards matters which are subject to investigation.

(1a) and (2a) should be clear from our discussion of the distinction between ordinary and dogmatic beliefs in Section 4.1. While, as we've seen in Chapter 3, on the Rustic view the only unavoidable intentional attitude is one of acknowledging a subjective experience, the Urbane view recognizes that human beings are naturally compelled by their experiences to hold ordinary beliefs (i.e., beliefs about the world as they experience it). Thus, according to the Urbane view, ordinary beliefs are psychologically unavoidable in a manner compatible with (1a) above. In addition, on the Urbane interpretation a dogmatic belief can be undermined by the realization that one lacks grounds independent of experience for holding such a Belief, i.e., that one has no reason for thinking that one has attained a view of unmediated reality. In this way, then, the Urbane interpretation is also compatible with (2a) above.

Establishing the Urbane view's consistency with (1b) and (2b) is also a simple matter. As we've seen, on the Rustic view the Skeptic investigates whether any appearance accurately reflects how things are; on this interpretation the Skeptic draws no distinction between how things are as experienced and how things *really* are. On the Urbane view, however, the Skeptic (like the Dogmatist) investigates how things *really* are; he seeks grounds for holding dogmatic Beliefs, while discovering how things are in experience through experience. Thus, on the Urbane interpretation, the dogmatic beliefs disavowed by the Skeptic are precisely those Beliefs which can only be held if thought to be confirmed by grounds other than experience—in other words they concern matters which are subject to investigation in a manner compatible with (2b) above. Conversely, on the Urbane reading, the ordinary beliefs held by the Skeptic concern reality as mediated by human experience, which is something not subject to philosophical investigation, as is required by (2a) above.

Having shown how the Urbane interpretation of P-states and Beliefs can make sense of Sextus's comments concerning those states, I want to turn very briefly to those sample passages which, as we've seen, pose problems for the Rustic understanding of P-states and Beliefs. As I explained in Section 3.2.1, adopting the Rustic interpretation not

only requires ignoring Sextus’s description of P-states as beliefs (*dogma*) in **T11**, but also entails implausibly attributing to Sextus two problematic positions on the basis of **T14**: (a) any commitment to the accuracy of an appearance as a representation of reality is “superfluous” and “far beyond the needs of ordinary life,” and (b) “common observations and preconceptions” involve no commitments to how things are. In contrast to these Rustic readings, the Urbane interpretation can not only makes sense of Sextus’s claim in **T11**—that P-states can be considered a species of belief—but understands Sextus to be claiming in **T14** that: (a) ordinary beliefs are necessary for ordinary life, and (b) “common observations and preconceptions” involve commitments to how things are as encountered in experience.⁷⁵ In this way, then, the Urbane interpretation avoids the strained readings of these and related passages required by the Rustic view.⁷⁶

As I pointed out in Section 3.2.1, the tensions between the Rustic interpretation and passages like **T11** and **T14**, while providing insufficient grounds for rejecting Rustic view, suggest that Sextus may have had in mind both a narrower understanding of Beliefs and a broader understanding of P-states than is recognized by Burnyeat. As we’ve seen in Sections 3.2.2-3.2.3, this suggestion is reinforced by the Rustic view’s failure to adequately meet the desiderata established Section 2.6. Conversely, the Urbane interpretation’s ability to avoid the same kinds of tensions, by presenting both a more restricted understanding of Beliefs and a broader understanding of P-states, can be considered indicative of its ability to avoid the additional problems encountered by the Rustic view—as we will see in the sections that follow.

4.2.2 The Urbane Interpretation and the Skeptic’s Four Kinds of P-states

According to the third desideratum established in Section 2.6, an adequate interpretation of Pyrrhonian Belieflessness should account for four kinds of P-states: Sensory, Evaluative, First-order Intellectual, and Higher-order Intellectual. As we’ve seen in Section 3.2.2.1, according to the Rustic view the experience of a non-sensory

⁷⁵ Cf. Frede [1997], 10-11.

appearance cannot be distinguished from an inclination to believe that that appearance accurately represents reality. As a result, on the Rustic view the Skeptic cannot have a non-sensory P-state without holding a Belief that an appearance is at least likely to reflect the way things are, i.e., without holding an Academic Belief. Since on the Rustic interpretation the Skeptic claims to live without holding beliefs of any kind, the collapse of non-sensory P-states into Academic beliefs means that the Skeptic's reliance on non-sensory P-states is inconsistent with his disavowal of Beliefs.

In contrast to this Rustic reading, the Urbane interpretation views the Skeptic as holding ordinary beliefs while disavowing dogmatic beliefs. Thus, the Skeptic can be inclined to hold the ordinary belief that a non-sensory appearance accurately represents reality as experienced without contradicting his claim to live without holding dogmatic beliefs about unmediated reality. To illustrate the Urbane view's ability to render the holding of non-sensory P-states consistent with claims of Belieflessness, I will discuss an example of each of the four kinds of P-states.⁷⁷

(1) Sensory P-state: I believe that “the tower is square” accurately represents how things are (i.e., I believe that “the tower is square” represents a reliable guide for action); however, I neither believe that “the tower is square” accurately represents how things *really* are, nor that “the tower is square” fails to accurately represent how things *really* are.

(2) Evaluative P-state: I believe that “pleasure is good” accurately represents how things are (i.e., I believe that “pleasure is good” represents a reliable guide for action); however, I neither believe that “pleasure is good” accurately represents how things *really* are, nor that “pleasure is good” fails to accurately represent how things *really* are.

(3) First-order Intellectual P-state: I believe that “the law of non-contradiction is true” accurately represents how things are (i.e., I believe that “the law of non-contradictions” represents a reliable guide for action); however, I neither believe that “the law of non-contradiction is true” accurately represents how things *really* are, nor that “the law of non-contradiction is true” fails to accurately represent how things *really* are.

⁷⁶ Cf. PH I.20, 337; II 26, 104; III 3, 6, 13, 29, 65, 135, 167.

⁷⁷ Frede does not explicitly discuss the implications of his Urbane view for all four kinds of P-states.

(4) Second-order Intellectual P-state: I believe that “these two claims are equipollent” accurately represents how things are (i.e., I believe that “these two claims are equipollent” represents a reliable guide for action); however, I neither believe that “these two claims are equipollent” accurately represents how things *really* are, nor that “these two claims are equipollent” fails to accurately represent how things *really* are.

Point (1) from the list above illustrates the Urbane interpretation of a sensory P-state. In (1) the Skeptic not only acknowledges that he is experiencing the appearance of a square tower, but is compelled to hold the ordinary belief that the tower is square. Aware, however, that (a) the appearance of the tower can change according to his position relative to it (for example, as the Skeptic moves further away, the tower will appear round), and that (b) he has no grounds for inferring from his experience of a particular appearance under particular circumstances to a conclusion regarding what shape the tower has independently of human experience (i.e., what shape the tower *really* is), the Skeptic suspends judgment over whether or not the tower *really* is round.⁷⁸ Thus, though the Skeptic’s past experience with optical illusions, his natural inclination to form beliefs as the result of sense perceptions, and so on, compel him to hold a P-state about the tower’s shape, he is simultaneously aware that his experience, his natural inclinations, and so on, may be mediating his perception of the tower and that, therefore, he has no grounds for holding a Belief about the tower’s shape. Of course, without grounds for believing the tower *really* is a particular shape, the Skeptic cannot hold a Belief about the tower’s shape; instead, despite his ordinary belief, he is compelled to suspend judgment over whether or not the tower *really* is square (or round).⁷⁹

The second example in the list above illustrates the Urbane reading of an evaluative P-state. As we’ve seen in Section 3.2.2.1, according to the Rustic interpretation, having an evaluative P-state involves the contradictory conditions of (a) acknowledging that one is inclined to Believe, for example, that pleasure is good, while at the same time (b) denying an inclination to Believe that pleasure is good. The Urbane

⁷⁸ PH I.118.

⁷⁹ Cf. PH I.21, 31, 36, 163.

interpretation, however, avoids attributing this inconsistency to the Skeptic by allowing him to disavow dogmatic Beliefs while simultaneously holding ordinary beliefs. On the Urbane view, the Skeptic has investigated the conflicting ethical arguments of various dogmatic schools and discovered no grounds for thinking a particular ethical view represents anything other than a set of behavioral norms derived from a particular cultural background, set of personal preferences, natural biases, and so on. Thus, while the Skeptic's own upbringing, natural inclinations, and experiences might compel him to hold the ordinary belief that pleasure is desirable, to be sought after, etc., he is simultaneously compelled to suspend judgment over whether or not "pleasure is good" represents an ethical principle that is *really* true. Aware that his own experiences, upbringing and natural abilities may be distorting his perceptions, the Skeptic remains agnostic over whether or not his ordinary beliefs represent what *really* is good or bad.⁸⁰

Point (3) on the list above represents the Urbane reading of a first-order intellectual P-state. Again, on the Rustic view, the Skeptic's holding of this kind of P-state is inconsistent with his claim to hold no Beliefs: the Skeptic's experience of an appearance that "the law of non-contradiction is true" simply is his experience of Believing that it is at least likely that the law of non-contradiction is true. On the Urbane interpretation, however, the Skeptic can hold an ordinary belief that the law of non-contradictions is true while suspending judgment over whether or not the law of non-contradiction *really* is true. The Skeptic's experience (or native psychology) compels him to hold the ordinary belief that the law of non-contradiction serves as a general rule governing his (and perhaps the human) experience of reality. His holding an ordinary belief of this kind, however, is perfectly consistent with the Skeptic's claim that he suspends judgment over whether the law of contradiction represents a metaphysical principle governing reality independently of his capacity to experience it. The Skeptic is familiar with, for example, the Heraclitean position that the law of non-contradiction fails to accurately describe how things *really* are, but his investigations fail to provide him with

⁸⁰ Cf. PH I.145-163; III.235.

any grounds for accepting either the accuracy or inaccuracy of that position.⁸¹ Thus, in spite of holding an ordinary belief in the law of non-contradiction, the Urbane Skeptic does so without simultaneously holding a dogmatic belief.

The final example on the list above, (4), illustrates the Urbane interpretation of a second-order intellectual P-state resulting from the Skeptic's investigative practice. Again, on the Rustic interpretation such a P-state cannot be distinguished from an Academic Belief, and thus the Skeptic's reliance on such P-states is inconsistent with his claim to live and argue without holding Beliefs. Once again, however, on the Urbane interpretation the Skeptic can be compelled to hold an ordinary belief that two contradictory claims are equipollent, while simultaneously suspending judgment over whether or not they *really* are equipollent. On the Urbane reading, the repeated failure of the Skeptic's attempts to discover whether a particular claim—rather than an opposing claim—accurately represents unmediated reality generates a body of experience that (combined with his natural thought processes) compels him to hold the ordinary belief that the claims in question are equipollent, i.e., that he has reached an investigative impasse and has no grounds for preferring a particular view of how things really are over another.⁸² It is important to realize, however, that the same body of experience does not allow the Skeptic to hold the Dogmatic Belief that the two claims *really* are equipollent, i.e., that something in the objective nature of the claims in question produces his investigative impasse rather than his particular circumstances, psychological limitations, etc. When the Skeptic attempts to investigate the nature of philosophical claims—considered apart from the mediating influences of his own experiences, prejudices and circumstances—he is unable to reach any conclusion, and thus he is psychologically unable to believe such claims. In this way then the Urbane view allows the Skeptic to hold an ordinary belief about the equipollence of claims—a belief that allows him to suspend judgment and at least temporarily end his investigation—without holding a

⁸¹ Cf. PH I. 210.

dogmatic belief that would both contradict his disavowal of Beliefs and prevent him from revisiting his initial concerns about the nature of unmediated reality in future investigations.⁸³

In summary, the Urbane interpretation can make sense of the four kinds of P-states necessary for the Skeptic to live a normal life precisely because it equates P-states with ordinary beliefs about how things are as experienced and Beliefs with dogmatic beliefs about how things are unmediated by experience. Thus, while the Skeptic is compelled to hold ordinary beliefs that particular appearances accurately represent reality as he experiences it, he can suspend judgment over whether or not those same appearances accurately reflect how things are with all potentially mediating influences stripped away. The Skeptic's experience with investigation leads him to recognize both the variety of views about how things *really* are and his lack of psychologically adequate grounds for Believing any particular view. However, the Skeptic's experience and natural thought processes lead him to hold ordinary beliefs and to find that those beliefs allow him to lead a satisfying, and apparently enviable, existence.

4.2.3 The Urbane Skeptic and Four Objections to the Life Without Belief

At this point we're in a position to evaluate the Urbane interpretation's ability to allow the Skeptic to respond to objections against both Beliefless practical activity and Beliefless investigation. According to the fourth desideratum presented in Section 2.6, an adequate interpretation of P-states and Beliefs should allow the Skeptic to meet both kinds of objections. For clarity of presentation, I will first address the objection to Beliefless practical activity in Section 4.2.3.1, before discussing the objections against Beliefless theoretical activity in Section 4.2.3.2.

4.2.3.1 The Urbane Skeptic and Beliefless Practical Activity: As discussed in Section 2.3, according to the objection against Beliefless practical activity, the Beliefless Skeptic would lapse into an eventually fatal state of paralysis. But, so the objection goes,

⁸² Cf. PH I. 203, 208.

since the Skeptic is not paralyzed, he must hold Beliefs despite his claim to lead a Beliefless existence. As we've seen in Section 3.2.2.2, on the Rustic interpretation the Skeptic has no viable response to this objection. Because the Rustic view equates the non-sensory P-states necessary for the Skeptic's everyday actions with Academic Beliefs, the Skeptic faced with this objection can only admit that he does in fact hold some Beliefs.

On the Urbane interpretation however, the Skeptic can respond to this objection by pointing out that (a) his actions are guided by ordinary rather than dogmatic beliefs, and that (b) he only claims to live without holding dogmatic beliefs. As should be clear from the discussion in Section 4.2.2, on the Urbane reading the Skeptic avoids paralysis because he holds ordinary beliefs that particular things are desirable and that therefore he should favor particular courses of action over others. That the Skeptic holds these ordinary beliefs, however, does not entail that he holds the dogmatic belief that, for example, in the larger scheme of things he *really ought* to adopt one course of action rather than another. Because, according to the Urbane interpretation, the Skeptic is both familiar with a variety of conflicting views regarding what *really* is good or bad, and aware that he has no grounds for preferring one such view over any other, he suspends judgment over whether anything *really* is good or bad despite his inclination to adopt a particular course of action.⁸⁴ Thus, by rendering the Skeptic's failure to hold dogmatic beliefs consistent with his reliance on ordinary beliefs, the Urbane interpretation allows the Skeptic to engage in life-sustaining activities without compromising his Beliefless condition.

4.2.3.2 The Urbane Skeptic and Objections to Beliefless Theoretical Activity: According to the second family of objections to the Skeptic's Beliefless life, the Skeptic's engagement in philosophical activities requires him to hold at least some Beliefs despite his claims to the contrary.⁸⁵ According to the first of these objections, Sextus's own philosophical writings can only be understood as expressions of his Beliefs. According to

⁸³ Cf. PH I.33, 34, 163.

⁸⁴ Cf. PH I.21, II.14-17.

⁸⁵ Frede does not explicitly discuss the implications of his Urbane view for these three objections.

the second of these objections, the Skeptic's ability to understand Dogmatic claims requires that he Believe that particular words refer to particular existing objects. And finally, according to the last of these objections, the Skeptic's engagement in philosophical investigation provides evidence that he holds a variety of Beliefs. Although, as we've seen in Section 3.2.2.2, the Rustic view allows these objections to stand as fatal criticisms of Pyrrhonism, I will show that on the Urbane interpretation the Skeptic can adequately respond to each of these arguments.

According to the Urbane interpretation, Sextus responds to the first objection by pointing out that the Skeptic's philosophical utterances express ordinary rather than dogmatic beliefs.⁸⁶ Thus, as we've seen, on the Urbane view the Skeptic's report, for example, that "P and Q are equipollent" does not express a Belief that, considered from an omniscient or objective standpoint, the two views P and Q *really* are equally warranted or unwarranted. Instead, as we've seen in Section 4.2.2, it reports that given his background, native psychology, education, experience, and current circumstances, the Skeptic is unable to prefer P over Q or vice versa, i.e., that, as a result of his experience with philosophical investigation, he holds the ordinary belief that he is unable (at least for the moment) to find grounds for Believing either P and Q. The Skeptic recognizes that this ordinary belief is not supported even by probable grounds for a dogmatic belief that the two claims are objectively equally warranted. Nevertheless, that awareness neither challenges his ordinary belief that, as far as his current circumstances are concerned, he cannot prefer one claim over the other, nor affects his ability to express or report that belief. Thus, on the Urbane interpretation, the Skeptic can respond to the first objection to Beliefless philosophical activity by arguing that his philosophical writings express only ordinary beliefs in a manner consistent with his claim to live without holding dogmatic beliefs.

Similarly, according to the Urbane interpretation, Sextus can respond to the second objection by pointing out that the Skeptic can understand the Dogmatists' claims because he has ordinary beliefs regarding the meaning of those words the Dogmatists use.

⁸⁶ PH I.4, 15, 208.

On the Urbane view, the Skeptic acquires ordinary beliefs regarding the correspondence of particular words to particular meanings and is thus able to understand and respond to Dogmatic arguments and claims. In spite of holding these ordinary beliefs, however, on the Urbane view the Skeptic suspends judgment over both (a) whether the objects the Dogmatists' claims are about *really* exist and (b) whether particular words *really* correspond to particular meanings. First, as Frede's wine example in Section 4.1.1 illustrates, the Skeptic can understand the claim the wine is sweet without believing anything about the real nature of wine or of sweetness. Thus, the Skeptic can understand Dogmatic claims without holding a dogmatic belief that the objects the claims are about exist independently of human perception.⁸⁷ Second, while the Skeptic has an ordinary belief that particular words have particular meanings, he is aware that various Dogmatic schools use the same word in different ways and thus suspends judgment over whether a word *really* has a particular meaning. While Dogmatists might argue that a particular word has only a single correct meaning, the Skeptic has no beliefs about an objectively "correct" relationship between a word and its meaning; his inclination to use a word in a particular way provides no grounds for thinking he *really ought* to use that word in that way.⁸⁸ Thus, on the Urbane interpretation, the Skeptic can adequately respond to the objection that his ability to understand Dogmatic claims provides evidence that he holds Beliefs.

At this point I want to turn to the third and final objection to the Skeptic's engagement in Beliefless philosophical activity—the charge that the Skeptic's engagement in a specific argumentative practice entails his holding of Beliefs. As we've seen in Section 3.2.2.2, on the Rustic view the Skeptic is unable to consistently follow the Skeptical procedure described by Sextus because non-sensory P-states collapse into Academic Beliefs, i.e., the Skeptic's own arguments compel him to Believe that the claims he investigates are at least likely to be equipollent. Without Believing that the claims in question are (at least likely to be) equipollent, the Rustic Skeptic would have no

⁸⁷ Cf. PH II.10-11.

motive for ending his investigation by suspending judgment. As a result, the Rustic interpretation leaves the Skeptic confronted with a dilemma: on the one hand, the price of suspending judgment is the illicit holding of a Belief (namely, that the claims under consideration are equipollent); on the other hand, the price of remaining Beliefless is the absence of a motive for suspending judgment, i.e., for remaining Beliefless.

The Urbane interpretation, however, allows the Skeptic to avoid this dilemma by enabling him to have non-sensory P-states distinct from Beliefs. Thus, on the Urbane interpretation, the Skeptic can end his investigations by holding an ordinary belief that the claims he considers are equipollent without holding a dogmatic Belief that those same claims are *really* equipollent. The point is best illustrated by again presenting the schema of the Skeptic's investigative strategy (where F and G represent incompatible properties).

- S1:** (1) X appears to be F in circumstance A.
(2) X appears to be G in circumstance B.
(3) X cannot really be both F and G.
(4) There are no more grounds for thinking that X is F rather than G.
(5) So we must suspend judgment over whether or not X is F rather than G.

On the Urbane interpretation (1) from the schema above represents a candidate claim about the nature of unmediated reality. Point (2) represents an opposing claim selected by the Skeptic as a possibility that must be ruled out if (1) is to be Believed. Point (3) is entailed by the claim in (1) and thus represents the Skeptic's recognition that if (1) is to be Believed, (2) must be ruled out; (3), in other words, should be interpreted not as a Belief held by the Skeptic, but as part of the claim in (1) represented as a separate premise solely for the purposes of displaying the structure of the Skeptic's argumentative procedure. Points (4) and (5) represent non-sensory P-states (i.e., ordinary beliefs) generated by the Skeptic's investigative experience.

According to this understanding of S1, we can now understand the Urbane interpretation of the Skeptic's investigative practice as follows. The Skeptic begins his investigation motivated by a desire to determine whether a particular claim (1) accurately

⁸⁸ PH I.207, II. 4-12.

represents unmediated reality. Because accepting such a claim as true requires regarding any opposing claim **(2)** as false, the Skeptic finds himself faced with the problem of determining whether or not he should prefer a particular claim over an opposing claim. The Skeptic's own experience provides little assistance in resolving such oppositions because he only experiences reality as it is mediated by his own upbringing, natural faculties, physical circumstances, and so on, i.e., he can bring no personal experience with unmediated reality to bear on the problem. Thus, the Skeptic turns to the Dogmatists who claim that through the systematic deployment of reason one can attain access to how things *really* are. In case the Dogmatists are correct, the Skeptic adopts for the purposes of his investigation Dogmatic methods of determining the nature of unmediated reality. Doing so, however, turns out to provide little assistance: not only do various Dogmatic schools urge opposing descriptions of unmediated reality, but, as the Skeptic discovers, Dogmatic arguments in support of these descriptions are self-contradictory and/or inconsistent.⁸⁹ Thus, even when the Skeptic adopts, dialectically, the arguments and epistemological values of the Dogmatists, i.e., when he attempts to deploy reason in the manner they advocate, he remains confronted with his original problem of finding satisfactory grounds for preferring a particular claim (over an opposing claim).

At this point (as we've seen in Section 4.2.2) the failure of the Skeptic's attempts to discover whether a particular claim accurately represents unmediated reality generates a body of experience that, combined with his natural thought processes and so on, compels him to hold the ordinary belief (in **(4)**) that the claims in question are equipollent, i.e., that he has for all practical purposes reached an investigative impasse and is unable to prefer a particular view of how things really are over an opposing view. The Skeptic fails to hold a dogmatic belief that the claims under consideration are *really* equipollent—i.e., that something in the nature of the claims (rather than in his own particular circumstances and limitations) is causing his investigative impasse, since his attempts to investigate the

⁸⁹ PHI.164-167.

nature of such claims leads him to an identical investigative impasse.⁹⁰ However, the Skeptic's inability to be persuaded that a particular claim represents unmediated reality and his ordinary belief that he has reached an investigative impasse are sufficient to motivate him to suspend judgment. Thus, the Skeptic (at least temporarily) ends his investigation by suspending judgment while still regarding the question that provoked it as open. By allowing the Skeptic to offer this account of his engagement in Pyrrhonian investigation, the Urbane interpretation allows the Skeptic to respond adequately to the ancient and frequently repeated charge that his engagement in Pyrrhonian investigative practice requires him to compromise his Belieflessness.

4.2.4 The Urbane Skeptic, the Dogmatist, the Academic and the Ordinary Person

I want to turn now to the problem of distinguishing the mental states of the Urbane Skeptic from those of the Dogmatist, the Academic, and the Ordinary Person, as required by the first desideratum listed in Section 2.6. In Section 3.2.2.1, we saw that the Rustic view's collapse of non-sensory P-states into Academic Beliefs means that, according to the Rustic interpretation, some of the Skeptic's P-states cannot be distinguished from the Beliefs of the Academic. In this section I will argue that, in contrast, on the Urbane reading the Skeptic's mental states can be distinguished from all three kinds of non-Skeptic.

First, the Urbane reading maintains a distinction between the Dogmatist and the Skeptic as follows. As explained in Section 4.1.2, on the Urbane view the Dogmatist has dogmatic beliefs, i.e., views about objective reality ostensibly warranted by his rational investigations. However, as we've seen throughout this chapter, as far as the Skeptic can determine, there are no psychologically satisfying grounds for Believing any claim about unmediated reality. Although, on the Urbane reading, the Skeptic has P-states, i.e., ordinary beliefs about how things are as experienced, the Skeptic recognizes that those beliefs may not reflect how things are with the mediating influences of experience

⁹⁰ PH I.202-208.

stripped away. Thus, the Urbane Skeptic does not hold the Beliefs that characterize his Dogmatic rivals.⁹¹

Second, in contrast to the Rustic interpretation, the Urbane reading maintains a distinction between the mental states of the Skeptic and the Academic. As we've seen in Section 2.2.2, Sextus describes the Academic as (a) a negative Dogmatist, i.e., someone who Believes that one cannot obtain certain knowledge about unmediated reality and (b) someone who Believes certain appearances are more likely than others to accurately represent unmediated reality. However, as we've seen in Section 4.2.2, the Skeptic does not hold either of these Beliefs. First, he does not Believe that knowledge about unmediated reality is impossible to attain—he admits the possibility that, for example, future arguments might provide conclusive grounds for Believing a particular view of objective reality. Instead he holds the ordinary belief that as far as he can determine, he has been unable to discover psychologically satisfying grounds for adopting a particular view of unmediated reality.⁹² Second, the Skeptic does not Believe that particular appearances are more likely than others to represent how things *really* are. Instead he holds the ordinary belief that—at least as far as he can determine, bearing in mind his own limitations and circumstances—all views of how things *really* are are equally warranted or unwarranted.⁹³ Thus, despite attributing to the Skeptic ordinary beliefs about reality as experienced, the Urbane interpretation allows these P-states to be distinguished from the dogmatic beliefs that characterize the Academic.

The final distinction that the Urbane interpretation must maintain is that between the Urbane Skeptic and the ordinary person. This distinction is sometimes considered to pose a problem for the Urbane view. As we saw in Section 2.2.4, Sextus distinguishes between the Skeptic and the ordinary person by claiming that though the ordinary person holds “beliefs about what is good and bad by nature,” the Skeptic “sheds such additional

⁹¹ Cf. PH I.210, 213-215, 219.

⁹² Cf. PH I.33-34, 226.

⁹³ Cf. PH I.27.

beliefs.”⁹⁴ It might be argued, however, that according to the Urbane understanding of P-states, *both* the Skeptic and the ordinary person should hold only P-states—in which case it would seem there can be no difference between the beliefs of the Skeptic and the ordinary person. Thus, in order to maintain the distinction between the Skeptic and the ordinary person, the Urbane view must interpret Sextus’s remarks as indicating either that the ordinary, unreflective person’s ethical and moral beliefs are dogmatic beliefs after all, or that the Skeptic does not hold ethical and moral evaluative beliefs. As we will see, Frede (I think correctly) takes the first approach.

Frede explains the distinction between the Skeptic and the ordinary person in the following passage.

T21: [P]resumably the average person is quite dogmatic about some of his views, especially the moral or ethical ones. As far as scientific speculations are concerned, he may well be quite content to leave that to others, but when moral or political questions are at stake, he will tend to claim that he does have some deeper insight, even if his experience seems to tell against it, he has views about what is really good or bad (cf. PH I.27, 30) [...] In contrast to the man on the street, the sceptic is acutely aware of the fact that in all sorts of ways things might, in reality, be quite different from the way they appear to be. He takes the phenomena as they come, but he knows better than anyone else that nothing rules out the possibility that things could really be radically different.⁹⁵

Here Frede reasonably interprets Sextus’s claim that the ordinary person has beliefs about “what is good and bad by nature” as indicating that the ordinary person’s ethical and moral beliefs are in fact dogmatic beliefs—beliefs about what is *really* good, rather than what is good under limited and specific circumstances because of an individual’s upbringing, natural tendencies, etc. PH I.30, cited by Frede in the passage above (**T4** in Section 2.1.4), lends support to this interpretation. As we’ve seen, in **T4** Sextus claims that the Skeptic “sheds” the beliefs held by the ordinary person that things are good or bad “by nature,” i.e., that the Skeptic relinquishes his beliefs in moral and ethical principles “built into” the nature of unmediated reality. Since, on the Urbane

⁹⁴ PH I.30, 237.

⁹⁵ Frede [1997], 22.

interpretation the Skeptic's investigations undermine dogmatic beliefs, it makes sense to read T4 as indicating that the Skeptic does not hold dogmatic ethical and moral beliefs *in contrast to* the ordinary person. Thus, on the Urbane view, whatever the status of the ordinary person's commitments in other areas, he does not take his views about what is good and bad as reflecting merely traditional practices or practical guides to action. Instead, he adopts the dogmatic attitude that his ethical and moral views represent how things *really* are.

At this point then, the contrast between the Urbane Skeptic and the ordinary person should be clear. On the Urbane view the Skeptic's upbringing, education and experience compel him to hold ordinary beliefs about what kinds of behavior are appropriate to particular circumstances, what kinds of goals are worth pursuing, and so on. However, being both (a) familiar with a variety of conflicting ethical and moral positions and (b) aware that (as far as he can determine) those positions are equipollent, the Skeptic suspends judgment over whether or not any particular view accurately represents an objective moral truth.⁹⁶ In contrast, because the unreflective ordinary person fails to engage in Skeptical investigation, he continues to maintain his ethical and moral Beliefs (rashly, from the point of view of the Skeptic).

4.2.5 *The Urbane Skeptic and Tranquility*

Before ending my evaluation of the Urbane interpretation I want to turn briefly to the fourth desideratum established in Chapter 2, namely, that an interpretation of Pyrrhonism should be compatible with Sextus's claim that the Skeptic experiences a tranquility unavailable to the Academic, the Dogmatist and the ordinary person. Setting aside the psychological question of whether or not Sextus's understanding of the source of psychological unrest is correct,⁹⁷ I want to argue that it follows from the Urbane

⁹⁶ Cf. PH I.165, III.235-236.

⁹⁷ For a variety of views on this question, see Burnyeat [1997], 56-57, Frede [1997], 22-23, Nussbaum [1991], 545-555, McPherran [1991], 135-171, and Mates [1996], 61-63. Burnyeat argues that the Rustic Skeptic would end his investigations unsatisfied rather than tranquil. Frede argues that the Urbane Skeptic's Belieflessness produces tranquility. Nussbaum claims that the Rustic skeptic will achieve a

construal of the distinctions between the Skeptic and the three kinds of non-skeptic discussed in Section 2.2 that the Urbane view is capable of meeting this desideratum. From the Urbane reading of **T4**, presented in Section 4.2.4 above, we learned that, on the Urbane interpretation, Sextus attributes the lack of tranquility experienced by non-Skeptics to their holding of dogmatic ethical and moral beliefs. Thus, the Urbane interpretation's position that only the Skeptic lacks dogmatic beliefs of any kind is consistent with Sextus's claim that the Skeptic is in a unique position to experience a condition of tranquility unavailable to the Dogmatist, the Academic or the ordinary person.⁹⁸

4.2.6 Verdict on the Urbane Interpretation

At this point I think we have sufficient grounds for adopting the Urbane interpretation over the Rustic view. While, as we saw in Chapter 3, the Rustic interpretation is consistent, for the most part, with Sextus's explicit remarks on the distinction between P-states and Beliefs, it fails to account for any of the additional desiderata which emerge from the remainder of Sextus's Outlines. In contrast, while the Urbane interpretation can also make sense of Sextus's comments on the distinction between P-states and Beliefs, it also accounts for the other key features of Pyrrhonism as described by Sextus. First, in interpreting the Skeptic's P-states as ordinary beliefs, it allows the Skeptic to rely on the four kinds of P-states which Sextus describes as necessary for ordinary life. Second, it allows the Skeptic to respond to various kinds of objections with which practitioners of Skepticism would have been familiar at the time of

measure of tranquility but at great personal cost. McPherran argues that the Urbane Skeptic will live a happy life. And Mates sees no reason that the Rustic Skeptic should either suffer or benefit from his Pyrrhonian lifestyle.

⁹⁸ Cf. "What fundamentally distinguishes the sceptic from other people are not the beliefs he has but his attitude towards them. He no longer has the more or less naive and partially dogmatic attitude of the 'ordinary' man; his relation to his beliefs is permeated by the awareness that things are quite possibly different in reality, but this possibility no longer worries him. This distinguishes him from the dogmatist who is so worried by the question, how are things in reality, that he succumbs to the illusion that reason could guarantee the truth of his beliefs.... This dogmatic craving for the security of true belief as a necessary, perhaps even a sufficient, condition for the tranquility and healing of the soul strikes the sceptic as, at best, futile, perhaps even pathological and harmful" (Frede [1997], 23-24).

Sextus's writing. Third, it avoids collapsing the distinction between the Skeptic and the Academic—a distinction that Sextus takes particular pains to explain. In doing so, it also avoids equating the Skeptic with the Dogmatist and the ordinary person. Finally, the Urbane view is consistent with Sextus's explanation of how the Skeptic achieves a state of tranquility unavailable to the Dogmatist, the Academic and the ordinary person. In short, though the Urbane interpretation represents a deviation from the traditional Rustic view of the Pyrrhonist as radically undermining beliefs of any kind, there is sufficient evidence to support Frede's claim that the Pyrrhonian way of life requires only the disavowal of dogmatic beliefs.

Chapter 5: Conclusions

In this thesis I've developed Frede's Urbane interpretation of Sextus's Pyrrhonism and demonstrated how that interpretation is consistent with Sextus's comments in the Outlines. In doing so I hope to have discredited the traditional view of the Skeptic as stubbornly (and fatally) refusing to acknowledge the epistemological necessities of everyday life. What emerges from the Urbane interpretation as I've presented it, is an understanding of the Skeptic radically opposed to the portrait painted by Hume in the introduction. As I've shown, while the Skeptic does not yet abandon philosophical investigation aimed at the apprehension of "Truth," he is baffled by traditional methods of philosophical investigation and traditional accounts of Truth, while finding Truth unnecessary for his everyday purposes. Content with ordinary beliefs inextricably embedded in particular concrete contexts, the Urbane Skeptic acknowledges that the "reality" that guides his actions may be constructed, at least in part, by both the particular circumstances of his upbringing and his own psychological limitations and abilities.

Pyrrhonism, then, contrary to popular belief, represents a viable and coherent stance towards the world and the necessities of human existence—a stance which should be of continuing interest to contemporary philosophers and thinkers. Whether or not that stance should be more widely adopted depends on three questions. First, how strong are the Pyrrhonian arguments for the equipollence of claims about how things *really* are? Second, does a condition of tranquility supervene on an adoption of the Pyrrhonian way of life? Finally, is the tranquility described by Sextus a legitimate goal for human ambition? These questions will have to be taken up elsewhere—and, in the case of the last question at least, by a non-skeptic.

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