

TEXTS - The Pyrrhonians

T1. PHI 12

The causal principle/origin (ἀρχή) of scepticism we say is the hope of becoming tranquil. Men of talent (μεγαλοφουεῖς), troubled (ταρασσόμενοι) by the anomaly in things and puzzled ἀποροῦντες as to which of them they should rather assent to, came to investigate what in things is true and what false, thinking that by deciding these issues they would become tranquil.

The chief constitutive principle/origin (ἀρχή) of scepticism is the claim that to every account an equal account is opposed (παντὶ λόγῳ λόγον ἴσον ἀντικεῖσθαι); for it is from this, we think, that we come not dogmatize (μὴ δογματίζειν).

T2. PHI 5-6

[5] The Sceptical philosophy contains both a general and a specific account (Τῆς σκεπτικῆς οὖν φιλοσοφίας ὁ μὲν λέγεται καθόλου λόγος ὁ δὲ εἰδικός) In the general account we set out (ἐκτιθέμεθα) the distinctive character of Scepticism, saying what the concept of it is, what are its principles and what its arguments, what it is its standard and what its aim, what are the modes of suspension of judgment, how we understand the sceptical assertions, and what distinguishes Scepticism from neighbouring philosophies. [6] The specific account is the one we argue against (ἀντιλέγομεν) each of the parts of what they call philosophy (πρὸς ἕκαστον μέρος τῆς καλουμένης φιλοσοφίας).

T3. The ten modes of suspension of judgment. PHI 35-163

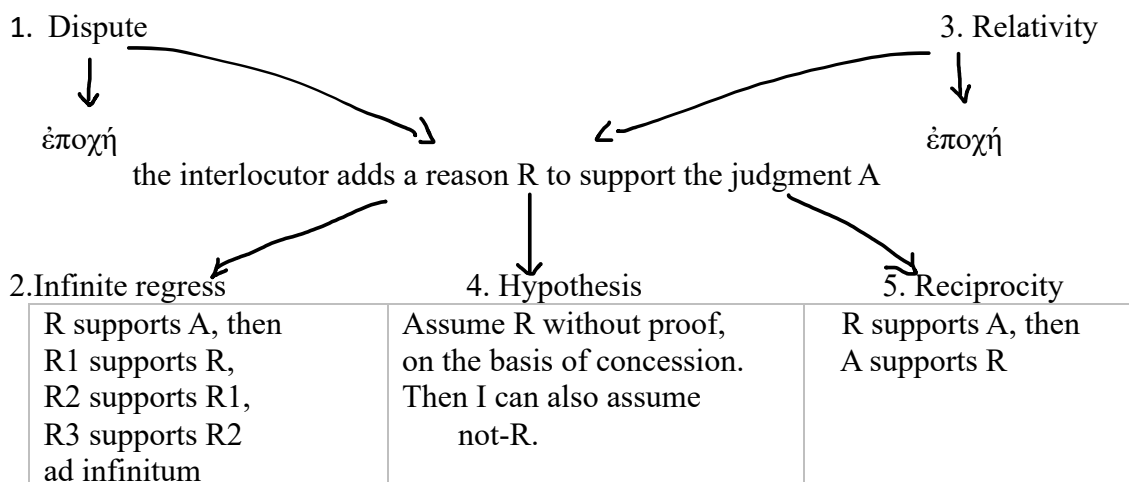
1. The mode depending on the variations among animals. Animals, depending on the differences among them, do not receive the same appearances from the same thing. (40–78). Example: ‘...people with jaundice say that what appears white to us is yellow, and people with a blood-suffusion in the eye say that such things are blood-red. Since, then, the eyes of some animals are yellow, of others blood-shot or white or some other colour, it is likely, I think, that their grasp of colours is different’ (44)
2. The mode depending on the differences among humans (79–90). Example: ‘There was, so they say, an old woman in Attica who consumed four ounces of hemlock without harm. Lysis actually took half an ounce of opium without distress’ (81).
3. The mode depending on the differing constitutions of the sense-organs (91–99). Examples: ‘Honey appears pleasant to the tongue (for some people) but unpleasant to the eyes’ (92). ‘Each of the objects of perception which appears to us seems to impress us in a variety of ways – for example, an apple is smooth, fragrant, sweet, and yellow. It is unclear, then, whether in reality it has these qualities alone, or has only one quality but appears different depending on the different constitution of the sense-organs, or actually has more qualities than those which are apparent, some of them not making an impression on us’ (94).
4. The mode depending on circumstances or conditions (100–117). Examples: ‘The same air seems cold to old men but mild to the young’ (105). ‘Many men who have ugly girl-friends think them most beautiful’ (107).
5. The mode depending on positions and intervals and places (118–23). Examples: ‘The same tower appears from a distance round, but from close at hand square’ (118). ‘The same oar appears bent in water but straight when out of it’ (119).
6. The mode depending on admixtures (124–28). Example: ‘A body surrounded by water is light, surrounded by air heavy’ (125).

7. The mode depending on the quantities and preparations of existing things (129–34). Example: ‘Grains of sand scattered apart from one another appear rough, but when combined in a heap affect our senses smoothly’(130).
8. The mode deriving from relativity (135–40). ‘...everything is relative... implicitly saying “Everything appears relative”... first: relative to the subject judging... and second: relative to the things observed together with it (as right is relative to left).
9. The mode depending on frequent or rare encounters (141–44). Example: the sun and the comet.
10. The mode depending on persuasions and customs and laws and belief in myths and dogmatic suppositions (145–62). Examples: ‘in Persia homosexual acts are customary, while in Rome they are forbidden by law’ (152). ‘with us it is the custom to ask for good things from the gods, while Epicurus says that the divinity pays no attention to us’ (155).

T4. The five modes - ‘The Pyrrhonian net’. *PHI* 164-177

[164] The more recent Sceptics offer the following five modes of suspension of judgment: first, the mode deriving from dispute; second, the mode throwing one back *ad infinitum*; third, the mode deriving from relativity; fourth, the hypothetical mode; fifth, the reciprocal mode.

[165] According to the mode deriving from **dispute**, we find that undecidable dissension about the matter proposed has come about both in ordinary life and among philosophers. Because of this we are not able either to choose or to rule out anything, and we end up with suspension of judgment. [166] In the mode deriving from **infinite regress**, we say that what is brought forward as a source of conviction for the matter proposed, itself needs another such source, which itself needs another, and so *ad infinitum*, so that we have no point from which to begin to establish anything, and suspension of judgment follows. [167] In the mode deriving from **relativity** as we said above, the existing object appears to be such-and-such relative to the subject judging and to the things observed together with it, but we suspend judgment on what it is like in its nature. [168] We have the mode from **hypothesis** when the Dogmatists, being thrown back *ad infinitum*, begin from something which they do not establish but claim to assume simply and without proof in virtue of a concession. [169] The **reciprocal** mode occurs when what ought to be confirmatory of the object under investigation needs to be made convincing by the object under investigation; then, being unable to take either in order to establish the other, we suspend judgment about both.



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[169]...every object of investigation can be referred to these modes.

[177] Such are the Five Modes which have been handled down by the more recent Sceptics. They put them forward not as rejecting the Ten Modes but in order to refute the rashness of the Dogmatists in a more varied way by using both sets together.

T5. *M VII (Against the Logicians I) 27.* The preamble

The investigation of the criterion is universally contentious, not only because the human being is by nature a truth-loving animal, but also because it [i.e., this investigation] pronounces judgement upon the highest-level schools of philosophy regarding the most important matters. For either the dogmatists' big solemn boast will need to be completely done away with, if no standard (κανών) is found for the true reality of things, or, on the contrary, the skeptics will need to be refuted as rash and as making an insolent attack upon common belief, if something comes to light which is capable of leading our way to the apprehension of the truth. For it will be too bad if we expend extreme effort in searching for the external criteria (τὰ ἐκτὸς κριτήρια), such as rulers (κανόνας) and compasses, weights and balances, while we leave aside the one that is in us (τὸ ἐν ἡμῖν), and that is thought to be able to test those very externals (καὶ τούτων αὐτῶν δοκιμαστικὸν εἶναι δοκοῦν).

Two interrelated common beliefs about the criterion of truth:

(1) *the criterion in us (τὸ ἐν ἡμῖν) is there to be found.*

(2) *it is believed (δοκοῦν) to be δοκιμαστικόν, to be able to test the external criteria (τὰ ἐκτός), and to have an authoritative priority over them.*

An analogy between the criterion of truth and measuring instruments brought about the idea that the criterion of truth is a criterion in us, while the measuring instruments are criteria external to us. The use of the term shifted to the measuring instruments and 'criterion' became a general term which could refer to both the measuring instruments and the philosophers' criterion. The extension of the usage of the term 'criterion' to name the measuring instruments, brought to the philosophical concept of criterion the appearance and the familiarity of a concept we are naturally led to acquire and trust (a common preconception, κοινή πρόληψις M 7.443). At the same time the evident reference of these 'external criteria' to tangible credible instruments 'breathed referential life' into the concept.

T6. *M VII (Against the Logicians I) 29-37.* Next chapter: on the different senses of the criterion

(29) To begin with, then, the criterion (for we should start with this) is spoken of in two ways: in one way it is that to which we attend when we do some things and not others, while in another way it is that to which we attend when we say that some things are real and others are not real, and that these things are true and those things are false. The first of these we have laid out earlier in "On the skeptical method". (30) For inevitably the person who does philosophy in an aporetic way (ἀπορητικῶς)— so as not to be completely inactive and without any part in the affairs of life (μὴ εἰς τὸ παντελὲς ἀνεργητὸν ὄντα καὶ ἐν ταῖς κατὰ

τὸν βίον πράξεσιν ἄπρακτον)– must have some criterion of choice as well as avoidance, namely what appears (τὸ φαινόμενον) as Timon has also attested in saying

But what appears is powerful everywhere, wherever it comes.

[31] The other one (I mean the one to do with reality, about which we are currently inquiring) seems to be spoken of in three ways, commonly and specially and most specially.

[32] Commonly (κοινῶς), it is every measure of apprehension, and in this sense even the natural criteria, such as sight, hearing, and taste, have claim to the appellation. Specially (ιδίως), it is every technical measure of apprehension – as one would call a cubit and a pair of scales and a ruler and a compass criteria, in so far as they are technical, but not by any means sight and hearing and in general the remaining common sense-organs, which are constituted naturally. [33] Most specially (ἰδιαίτατα) it is every measure of apprehension of an unclear object, in terms of which the everyday ones are no longer called criteria; it is only the logical ones that are so called – namely, those that the dogmatists bring in for the discovery of the truth (καθ' ὃ τὰ μὲν βιωτικὰ οὐκέτι λέγεται κριτήρια, μόνα δὲ τὰ λογικὰ καὶ ἅπερ οἱ δογματικοὶ τῶν φιλοσόφων παρεισάγουσι πρὸς τὴν τῆς ἀληθείας εὔρεσιν).

First distinction:

criterion of what is true and what is false – criterion of action, in the affairs of life.

'The apparent' (τὸ φαινόμενον) is the Pyrrhonian criterion of action.

Second distinction:

three ways that the criterion of true and false is spoken of,

commonly, specially and most specially (κοινῶς τε καὶ ἰδίως καὶ ἰδιαίτατα).

One condition: *The philosophers' logical criteria, which are on the top of a 'hierarchy', has the authority to deny to the everyday criteria the appellation 'criterion' (καθ' ὃ τὰ μὲν βιωτικὰ οὐκέτι λέγεται κριτήρια). Whatever we may rely on to make truth claims in ordinary life, but also any criterion of action philosophers like the Pyrrhonians themselves may resort to are 'everyday criteria'. The philosopher's logical criteria have the authority to disqualify all of them from being criteria.*

T7. M VII (Against the Logicians I) 34

[...] since the criterion is spoken of in many ways, the task before us is again to inquire primarily (προηγουμένως) into the logical one that the philosophers talk so much about, but consequentially (κατ' ἐπακολούθημα) into each of the everyday ones as well.

Sextus' inquiry concerns primarily the philosophers' logical criteria but has at the same time certain consequences for the everyday criteria.

T8. M VII (Against the Logicians I) 35-7

[35] It is, however, possible to subdivide this logical one, too, saying that one is a criterion in the manner of “by which,” one in the manner of “through which,” and one in the manner of “impact and state”: “By which” – namely, a human being; “through which” – namely, sense-perception; the third one – namely, the impact of the appearance. [36] Compare the testing of heavy and light objects, in which there are three criteria, the weigher,

the pair of scales, and the position of the scales, and of these the weigher is the criterion “by which,” the scales are the criterion “through which,” and the position of the scales is the criterion as “state.” Or again, for the determination of straight and crooked objects there is a need for the craftsman and the ruler and the application of this. In just the same way, in philosophy, too, we need the three aforementioned criteria for distinguishing true and false things, [37] and the human being, “by whom” the judgment occurs, is like the weigher or carpenter; sense-perception and thought, “through which” the judgment occurs, are like the scales and ruler; and the impact of the appearance, in virtue of which the human being undertakes to judge, is like the state of the aforementioned tools.

Third distinction: framed according to the conditions necessary for a judgment based on measuring instruments:

“by which” - “through which” - “impact and state” or “in virtue of which”:
The weigher - the pair of scales - the position of the scales.

Sextus organizes his critical arguments in three sections according to these three criteria, i.e., M 7.263-342: the criterion ‘by whom’, 343-369: ‘through which’ and 370-439: ‘in virtue of which’; and he comes to the following conclusion.

T9. M VII (Against the Logicians I) 439

[...]nothing is the criterion, given that neither the “by which”, nor the “through which”, nor the “in virtue of which” is firm in its knowledge.

T10. M VII (Against the Logicians I) 443

[...] the skeptic’s procedure is to refrain from making the case for things that are trusted, but, in their case, to be content with the common preconception as a sufficient basis – but to make the case for the things that seem not to be trustworthy, and to bring each of them into equal strength with the trust surrounding the things deemed worthy of acceptance. In the present case too, then, we are not abolishing the criterion when we avail ourselves of the arguments against it, but we want to show that there being a criterion is not entirely reliable (οὐ πάντως πιστόν ἔστι τὸ εἶναι κριτήριον), since equal resources are mustered for the opposite case.

T11. The Pyrrhonian practical criterion. PH I 21-23:

[21] That we attend to what is apparent is clear from what we say about the standard of the Sceptical persuasion. ‘Standard’ has two senses: there are standards adopted to provide conviction about the reality or unreality of something (we shall talk about these standards when we turn to attack them); and there are standards of action, attending to which in everyday life we perform some actions and not others – and it is these standards which are our present subject.

[22] We say then that the standard of the Sceptical persuasion is what is apparent (κριτήριον τοίνυν φαμὲν εἶναι τῆς σκεπτικῆς ἀγωγῆς τὸ φαινόμενον), implicitly meaning by this the appearances (τὴν φαντασίαν); for they depend on passive and unwilled feelings and are not objects of investigation (ἐν πείσει γὰρ καὶ ἀβουλήτῳ πάθει κειμένα ἀζήτητός ἐστιν). (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.)

[23] Thus, attending to what is apparent, we live in accordance with everyday observances, without holding opinions (τοῖς φαινομένοις οὖν προσέχοντες κατὰ τὴν βιωτικὴν τήρησιν

ἀδοξάστως βιοῦμεν) – for we are not able 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 teaching of kinds of expertise (καὶ τὸ μὲν τι ἔχειν ἐν ὑφηγήσει φύσεως, τὸ δὲ ἐν ἀνάγκῃ παθῶν, τὸ δὲ ἐν παραδόσει νόμων τε καὶ ἔθων, τὸ δὲ ἐν διδασκαλίᾳ τεχνῶν). [24] 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 teaching of kinds of expertise, we are not inactive in those which we accept. And we say all this without holding opinions (ἀδοξάστως).

The Pyrrhonians can follow their practical criterion, i.e., the 'apparent' (τὸ φαινόμενον: M 7.30 and PH 2.21-2), according to which they can make all the truth claims we customarily make. They can still say: 'It is true, I have seen it with my own eyes' or 'It is straight, I have tested it with the straight edge'. However, they 'insert' these truth claims as well as their whole life in the ambiguity of the 'apparent' (φαινόμενον).

The ambiguity of φαινόμενον:

1. Φαίνομαι+infinitive=something gives a certain impression, but it isn't so, for example the oar in the water looks broken, but it isn't.

2. Φαίνομαι+participle=something is manifest, evident and clear.

The Pyrrhonians get a magic image, like the Wittgenstein duck-rabbit image (Philosophical Investigations 194).

