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αἰρέτῶ, preferred, choiceworthy (oppd. But his reason is not hard to find. This opens up the possibility that the Skeptic can in fact have the belief that Myles Burnyeat says is necessary for the Skeptic to attain tranquility (see above, 3.3). αἰρέσις, choice, approval, preference. P. The best translation of this work bears the title Outlines of Scepticism (2000), but this is a replacement, not a translation, of the original title which offers a general account of scepticism in the first book and, in the remaining two books, a critical assessment of non-sceptic’s views in logic, physics and ethics, the standard areas of philosophy in the Hellenistic period; (ii) a work in six books criticizing the pretensions to theoretical knowledge by experts in various specialized fields such as rhetoric, mathematics and astrology, called Against the Professors (Adversus mathematicos in Latin, hence the standard abbreviation M); (iii) an incoherent work that originally covered the same ground as PH, but at much greater length; the surviving parts are Against the Logicians in two books, Against the Physicists in two books and Against the Ethicists in one book. This work outlines the extraordinary views of the Pythagoreans concerning the power of numbers, and then seeks to undermine them by arguing that Platonic notion of a monad or unit ‘the One’ is ‘inconceivable’ (I7), adding as an aside that ‘the notion of unity is far much better (21-22), and by attacking the principles of addition (23-33), to quote Aristotle’s Πρωτοῖν Ἐρωτῶν [suspension of judgment] supervenes—ἐνόησεν ἄποφρασις—directly towards the proposition that P. The Skeptic surely cannot endorse premiss (3). This is a dogma of Pyrrhonism’ (in Vol. The Modes divide into four groups, the Ten Modes, the Five Modes, the Two Modes, and the Eight Modes, 3.4.2 No, the Skeptic doesn’t have beliefs Frede’s proposal was rejected by Jonathan Barnes and Myles Burnyeat, who argued that Pyrrhonian Scepticism involves rejecting all beliefs. Now there are two possibilities, either this chain terminates in the same claim with which it started (P), or it doesn’t. 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surviving books were taken to be a continuation of the six-book work on specialized fields; as a result, the logical books are known by the abbreviation M 7–8, the physical part by M 9–10 and the ethical part by M 11. ἀκόλουθα, (logical) sequence, coherence, P. According to Burnyeat, what is going on when the Skeptic assents in accordance with the appearances is that he is merely ‘acknowledging that this is indeed how the thing appears to one at the moment’ (Burnyeat 1980, 43); but Skeptics and dogmatists dispute ‘whether any proposition or class of propositions can be accepted as true of a real objective world as distinct from mere appearance’ (30). ἀνεξέλεγκτος (oppd). Finally, it is worth noting another position that some scholars have taken: when Skeptics acknowledge that things appear thus-and-so to them, they quite simply do have beliefs, namely ‘beliefs about the ways things appear to him to be’ (Perin 2010b: 161, following Fine 2000: 104). The contents of PH II and III closely shadow those of M VII–XI. Please log in or subscribe to continue reading. PH III 280–81: Why do Skeptics sometimes deliberately propound arguments of feeble plausibility? Frede claims: “assenting to such impressions” cannot mean “assenting to the claim that one is affected in this way, that one has such impressions” (1979: 20), thereby flatly denying the interpretation of Barnes and Burnyeat. But the sceptic then argues, often at some length, that there is no intellectually satisfying criterion we can trust and use—this is the real backbone of the discussion. Why should the impressions garnered during the course of an investigation in the sciences be unclear? If the belief that p has been formed ‘on reasoned grounds’—“as a result of marshalling arguments or considerations in favour of p’ (Morison 2011: 266), or perhaps as a result of simply thinking that there are such grounds without having yet marshalled them—then this belief counts as a belief of the sort the Skeptic cannot have, and if the belief that p has been formed not on the basis of the marshalling of arguments, but just because that is how things strike the person who forms the belief, then this belief counts as a belief of the sort the Skeptic can have. For a Pyrrhonist such as Sextus, the answer is obvious: any impression that P which comes to him during his investigation will be counterbalanced by an impression that not-P (or some other conflicting impression). [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. Will being a Pyrrhonian Skeptic bring you tranquillity, as Sextus advertises? [See the supplementary document Revisiting the texts which appeared to support interpretations 3.4.2 and 3.4.3.] Thus, the weight of evidence seems to favour the Frede interpretation (although sometimes it can also seem as though the rational thing to do is to suspend judgment in the face of these equally strong competing interpretations). 257. E. (9) The question for Frede is how to understand what Sextus says in I 13 when he characterizes the first kind of belief (dogma) which he says the skeptics can have. For how will the intellect know whether the feelings of the senses are like the sense-objects, given that it does not itself come into contact with the external objects and that the senses make clear to it not the nature of these objects but their own feelings, as we deduced from the modes of suspension? Frede’s position allows the Skeptic to have ordinary beliefs such as ‘it is day outside’, ‘I am hungry’, ‘the library closes at 6.00 p.m.’, etc., whereas the interpreters under discussion allow to the Skeptic only beliefs such as ‘it seems to be daytime outside’, ‘I feel hungry’, ‘the library appears to close at 6.00 p.m.’, etc. Second, condemning this or that argument that a Dogmatist gives for a conclusion P, and suspending judgment accordingly on whether P, seems to fall foul of the strictures that Barnes himself places on what Sextan suspension of judgment consists in: after all, Sextus supposedly assembles arguments in favour of an affirmative answer, and arguments in favour of a negative answer. The second kind of belief referred to in I 13, the kind which the Skeptic cannot have, is a belief which Frede characterizes as one which ‘involve[s] an assumption or claim about one of the nonexistent objects of scientific inquiry’ (18). This is a standing puzzle for interpreters of Sextus (see section 3.7 below). So it is not difficult to put this in terms of impressions: Sextus is saying that the forbidden kind of dogma involves assenting to impressions which are not clear. Thus, there are exactly three possibilities for the form an argument propounded by a dogmatist might take: an infinite regress, a reciprocal or circular argument, or one which terminates in a hypothesis. L. Even though M VII–XI do not belong to the same work as M I–VI, it is customary amongst scholars to refer to all eleven books as M I–XI (Bett 2012: xi). The ‘feelings’ in question are the states (pathē) that the faculty of phantasia puts one in when it represents the world as being a certain way (so when my faculty of phantasia represents the world as being one in which P, I am thereby in the state of being appeared to that P). Barnes extends this analysis to the cases of reciprocity and hypothesis too, claiming that Sextus rejects reciprocal arguments as ‘bad arguments’ (1990a: 65; his emphasis) and hypothetical arguments as ‘valueless’ (99). Frede argues that what is meant is that the Skeptic accepts the judgment of phantasia; at least, he raises no objection against its verdict; if it says things are thus or thus, he does not challenge this. Additionally, Striker argues against Sextus that there is a psychologically crucial ingredient in tranquillity that is missing from the Pyrrhonist’s version, namely ‘the thought that one has or can easily get all the goods one might need’ (ibid). Sextus stresses in the ethical section of PH III that one should suspend judgment as to whether anything is good or bad by nature (e.g., PH III 235), and so it is no surprise that ‘M XI argues for the conclusion that nothing is by nature good or bad’ (Bett 1997: xiv)—so much one would expect by way of counterarguments to the Dogmatists’ positive arguments. However, a couple of times Sextus refers to his writings in ways which suggest that there are some treatises we no longer have (in addition to the part of M corresponding to PH I): M VII 202: ‘medical commentaries’ (ἰατρικὰ ὑπομνήματα); presumably the same as M I 61: ‘empiric commentaries’ (ἐμπειρικὰ ὑπομνήματα); M VI 55, ‘the commentaries on the soul’, and X 284 ‘in the writings on the soul’. (PH I 28) You search for tranquillity, and it will come, just not in the way you were expecting. President Obama neither believes that my mother’s name is ‘Judith’ nor believes that it isn’t, but he is not a skeptic about whether my mother’s name is ‘Judith’. (99–247), and an attack on the part of grammar which concerns poets and prose-writers (270–320), i.e., the part which deals with the interpretation of poetry, and which Sextus argues is useless because it makes no contribution to human flourishing. Texts such as I 13, I 22, and I 29–30 emphasize that the impressions are forced on us. However, in the opening sentences of PH Sextus seems to preclude the possibility that Pyrrhonian skeptics espouse such a global belief in the impossibility of discovery when he contrasts the Pyrrhonian Skeptics, who ‘are still investigating’, with other, dogmatic, skeptics, who ‘have already discovered’. The Ten Modes are devices for generating precisely such equal and opposing arguments, and not merely a pair of propositions (Morison 2011: 287–93). For example, it appears to us that honey sweetens (we concede (συγχωροῦμεν) this inasmuch as we are sweetened in a perceptual way). Skeptics have not yet found answers to those questions, because they are still investigating them, to κατεχόμενον), unoccupied (space), P. (With Sextus’ description of Pyrrhonian Skepticism, compare that in DL (Diogenes Laërtius) IX 61–116; for discussion of the differences, see the papers in Vogt 2015.) 2.1.2 Against the Mathematicians (Adversus Mathematicos) (This is usually referred to by the abbreviation M.) The work is in eleven books, referred to as M I, II, III, etc. For a table comparing M VII and VIII with PH II (and relevant passages in M I–VI), see Bett 2005: 193–5; for a similar table comparing M IX and X to PH III (and relevant passages in M I–VI), see Bett 2012: 161–64; for discussion of the comparisons between M XI to PH III (and relevant passages in M I–VI), see Bett 1997: 124, Ph. ii. That thought is missing because of course the Skeptic does not have any beliefs about what is good or bad, and indeed Sextus himself touts Pyrrhonism as having the advantage over other philosophies, and over the belief systems of ordinary people, that Pyrrhonists shed the additional opinion that each of these things [sc. PH III 265–73: Is there a way of learning? These two conceptions of the criterion, the Epicurean and the Stoic, were christened the ‘adelic’ and ‘prodelic’ conceptions by Brunschwig (1988: 230–233). There are two fundamental flaws. (1980: 56) In other words, in order to settle back into intellectual tranquillity, the Skeptic must have some belief along these lines: no enquiry will ever produce an answer. PH III 273–9: Does expertise in living benefit its possessor? 110, etc. Sextus elaborates further in PH I 25–30 that ‘the aim of the Skeptic is tranquillity in matters of opinion’ (I 26). (For a slightly different take on what Sextus is up to in PH I 12, see Cooper 2012, who interprets Sextus as telling us about his ‘original skeptic predecessors’ (283) or ‘proto-skeptics’ (285), who came upon the skeptical skill as a result of their reflections, ‘as something then for later worriers to avail themselves of’ (282 n.76). 57.) The loss of the part corresponding to PH I is greatly to be regretted, since much of the philosophical interest surrounding Pyrrhonian skepticism comes out of Sextus’ description of it in PH I (indeed, most of this entry concerns PH I). It is important to note that the beliefs such interpreters attribute to the Skeptics are nothing like the beliefs that Frede’s interpretation allows to the Skeptic. ἀδιάκροτος, indistinguishable, P. ἀκατάληπτον, be non-apprehensive, fail to grasp, P. In other words, in offering grounds for his claim P, he gives grounds, Q, and then for that he offers grounds, R, etc. This connects with investigation in the following way: when one investigates whether P, one assembles arguments or considerations in favour of P, and arguments or considerations against (i.e., arguments whose conclusions conflict with P). Against the Arithmeticians has a mere 34 sections. Thus, to assent to one of these impressions is to go beyond appearances; it is no longer a matter of responding, passively and without an act of the will, to the weight or pull of the appearances, but rather a matter of going beyond how things appear; in such cases, one’s assent is instead dictated by certain theoretical commitments one has (or, more broadly, by one’s accepting something as a reason for assenting to the non-apparent thing). However, Sextus also tells us that the Skeptic ‘takes ‘is’ in the sense of ‘appears to me’” (I 198; cf. The nature of Sextus’ Pyrrhonism (PH I) 3.1 What do Skeptics do, and where do they get their name? 76) In short, Barnes’ and Burnyeat’s appeal to the discussion of the criterion of truth is unconvincing as an attempt to show that for the Pyrrhonian Skeptic, ordinary beliefs are off limits. The belief that you should eat something right now, where this belief is formed immediately from the feeling you have of being hungry. And this he does by telling us which things the Skeptic assents to: he assents to the ‘feelings forced upon him by appearances’. (The terms ‘adelic’ and ‘prodelic’ derive from the Greek words adelon and prodelon, meaning ‘unclear’ and ‘clear’ respectively; thus, the ‘adelic’ conception of the criterion of truth is the one which emphasizes the role of the criterion in the discovery of unclear things, whereas the ‘prodelic’ conception is the one which emphasizes that those truths delivered by the criterion are clearly true.) Brunschwig shows in detail that Sextus conflates the two in his arguments against the criterion, although he acknowledges that this conflation does not deny the force of the objections that Sextus brings. First published Fri Jan 17, 2014; substantive revision Fri Jul 12, 2019 Sextus Empiricus was a Pyrrhonian Skeptic living probably in the second or third century CE, many of whose works survive, including the Outlines of Pyrrhonism, which is the best and fullest account we have of Pyrrhonian skepticism. For an example of this mode in operation, look at PH II 18: Of those who have discussed standards, some have asserted that there is one (e.g., the Stoics and certain others), some that there is not (among them, Xenaiades of Corinth and Xenophanes of Colophon who says: ‘but belief is found over all’); and we suspend judgment as to whether there is one or not. The first of those two modes of securing the conclusion that the Skeptic has no beliefs at all. Another pressing philosophical issue raised by M VII–IX is the alleged difference in the skepticism evident in M XI (‘Against the Ethicists’) as compared to PH. (Striker 2001: 119) Hence she is inclined to think ‘it is a matter of terminological choice whether we want to speak of belief here or not’ (ibid). One challenge for these interpreters who think Sextus is a rustic skeptic is to explain how the type of dogma that the skeptic does allow himself in I 13 won’t count as a belief. He assents to certain appearances, namely those that aren’t accompanied by equal and opposing appearances. (PH II 79; cf. in line with his [sc. His pronouncement is like saying ‘ouch!’: one does not express one’s belief that one is in pain in saying ‘ouch!’, but rather one simply expresses one’s pain (ibid). Sextus imagines someone arguing for the philosophical position that there is a ‘standard’ (more on that below) on the basis of the fact that the Stoics say there is one; the Skeptic would counter that one could equally well argue that there is no standard, since Xenaiades and Xenophanes say there isn’t one. 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. Janacek 1963 argues that M VII–XI form part of a larger work which was a lengthy elaboration of all the parts of PH; if this is right, then we have lost the book or books of that work which correspond to book I of the Outlines. Sextus attacks not astronomy (1), which is one thing the term ‘astrology’ referred to in classical times, but ‘the casting of nativities’ (Bury’s translation of the term γενεθλιαλογία in section 2) and horoscopes. PH III 252: Can expertise in living be taught? genit., Timon), untroubled by, heedless of, P. The work thus has a clear structure: presentation of arguments in favour of the existence of numbers (from the Pythagoreans), followed by presentation of arguments against the existence of numbers. the skeptic’s) ancestral customs and laws, he says (λέγων) that there are gods and does everything that tends to worship of and reverence towards them (M IX 49). Dogm. 3.4 Does the Skeptic have any beliefs? PH III 56–62; Blending PH III 63: Motion PH III 64–81; Local motion PH III 82–4; Increase and decrease PH III 85–96; Subtraction and addition PH III 97; Transposition PH III 98–101; Whole and part PH III 102–108; Natural change PH III 109–114; Generation and destruction PH III 115–18; Rest PH III 119–35; Place PH III 136–50; Time PH III 151–67; Number PH III 168; The ethical part of philosophy PH III 169–78; Good, bad and indifferent things PH III 179–238: Is anything by nature good, bad or indifferent? (19) Thus, [a]ny belief, whatever its content may be, can be a dogmatic belief; conversely, every belief can be an undogmatic one. (Note that this is not a linguistic point about the Stoics’ use of the word dogma, since they don’t use that word in these contexts, but rather a philosophical point about what assenting to an impression must amount to for the Stoics.) If this is right, then philosophical philology alone rules out the reading that Burnyeat and Barnes and Perin and Fine want. Imagine the apprentice carpenter who simply follows the example set by his teacher, without actually holding that the way his teacher does things is the correct one. 230: ‘doctrinal rule.’ P. By teaching of kinds of expertise we are not inactive in those expertises which we accept. Since the deliverances of the natural capacity of perception are criteria of truth according to the Epicureans, there is nothing one can do, short of putting one’s eyes out, to bring it about that one lacks this criterion of truth; merely suspending judgment on whether there is such a thing as a criterion of truth won’t do the job. Against the Musicians is in 68 sections. PH II 13: Where should the investigation of Dogmatism begin? As stated above, this last section is particularly puzzling, since Sextus, who was part of the Empiricist School of Medicine (hence his name), seems rather to align Pyrrhonian Skepticism with the Methodist School of Medicine, since the form of Empiricism associated with the Empirical school ‘makes affirmations about the inapprehensibility of unclear matters’ (PH I 236)—presumably the sorts of theory-laden affirmations which the Skeptic would not allow himself (see 3.6 above)—whereas the Methodists adhere more to the fourfold observations of everyday life that Sextus discussed in I 21–4 (see 3.4 above). III.) ἡ ἀγωγή, (doctrinal) procedure, method: ἡ οὐκ εὐτυχή ἀγ., ‘the Sceptic Way.’ P. 142: ἄθετος ἦθος (tv), unfitted for, L. (Striker 2004: 16) Another option would be to take the second objection seriously, and seek an interpretation according to which these three modes function like the other two members of the Five (and like the Ten Modes) as devices for generating equal and opposing arguments (an approach suggested by Morison 2011: 293–4, and worked out in detail in Morison 2018). (Frede 1983: 153) The issue is thoroughly uncontroversial in Stoic scholarship; see, for instance, Sandbach 1975: 88; The man may say ‘There appears to be an apple, and I assent; there is an apple’. (Striker 1990b: 151) The Epicureans and the Stoics had slightly different candidates for what the criteria of truth would be. (Sextus might be misunderstanding the Stoic position here; see Frede 1983.) At the end of Sextus’ discussion in PH II, he clearly signals, as one would expect, that he suspends judgment on whether there are criteria of truth: You must realize that it is not our intention to assert that standards of truth are unreal (that would be dogmatic); rather, since the Dogmatists seem plausibly to have established that there is a standard of truth, we have set up plausible-seeming arguments in opposition to them, affirming neither that they are true nor that they are more plausible than those on the contrary side, but concluding to suspension of judgement because of the apparently equal plausibility of these arguments and those produced by the Dogmatists. The question which concerns us is this: what does it mean to assent to this feeling, i.e., this impression or appearance? These are announced as being means by which the Skeptic comes to suspension of judgment (I 35). Contrast: the master-carpenter who has an account of why pieces of wood stick together better this way than any other way, and who believes on this basis that you should make the table this way accordingly. If this is the kind of belief that the Skeptic can have, then it can’t be a belief held as a matter of assembling reasons on either side, but must instead be a belief that he has on the basis of his multiple experiences of coming to suspension of judgment, rather than on the basis of having a philosophical argument to that effect (Frede 1984: 138–9). Sextus offers an answer in PH I 12. Intro. Thus, the Ten Modes are devices for generating an equal and opposing argument in response to a dogmatist’s attempt to show how things are based on how they are perceived in some situation or other. The question of how to interpret this little paragraph, and thus settle the question of whether the Skeptic has any beliefs, is the question that much contemporary scholarship concerning Sextus has focussed on (see for instance the papers collected in Burnyeat and Frede 1997; with Fine 2000; Barnes 2007; Perin 2010b), yet there does not seem to be a consensus. For this work, see Greaves 1986; Bett 2013. (1990a: 193) Perhaps, though, the tranquillity that Sextus promises is only supposed to be intellectual tranquillity, freedom from the trouble or anxiety that having an unanswered question in your life brings. The second case is a case of an argument which starts from unsupported propositions (first principles, or axioms, perhaps), which function as the ‘anchor’ for the proposition P we are trying to prove. And quite apart from the apparent unavailability of this particular belief to the Skeptic, there is also the general worry that the Skeptic has no beliefs whatsoever (thus precluding him from believing that no enquiry will ever produce an answer). Striker finds in Sextus’ imagery the message that ‘Skeptical tranquillity can only be reached if one does not try for it’ (1990a: 193).

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