


# ANCIENT GREEK SKEPTICISM AND HUME'S ACCOUNT OF PYRRHONISM

## *O CÉTICISMO GREGO ANTIGO E A INTERPRETAÇÃO DO PIRRONISMO EM HUME*

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### Abstract

This paper explores the intricate relationship between ancient Greek skepticism and David Hume's account of Pyrrhonism. Ancient Greek skepticism, specifically Pyrrhonism, emerged as a prominent philosophical school in the Hellenistic period and had a profound influence on subsequent Western philosophical thought. David Hume, as an Enlightenment philosopher, engaged with Pyrrhonian skepticism and developed his own unique perspective on skepticism. This paper begins by providing an overview of ancient Greek skepticism, tracing its roots back to its founder Pyrrho of Elis. It explores the core tenets of Pyrrhonism, such as a search for tranquility through suspension of judgment and belief (epochê) and argumentative opposition. The distinctive features of Pyrrhonian skepticism are analyzed in light of its historical and philosophical context. In conclu-

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sion, this paper aims to shed light on the intricate connection between ancient Greek skepticism, particularly Pyrrhonism, and David Hume's account of skepticism. It aims to highlight the profound influence of Pyrrhonian skepticism on Hume's philosophical thought, illuminating the enduring relevance and impact of these skeptical traditions on the history of Western philosophy.

**Keywords:** David Hume; Pyrrhonism; Skepticism; Hellenistic Philosophy; Early Modern Philosophy.

### Resumo

Este artigo explora a complexa relação entre o ceticismo grego antigo e a interpretação do pirronismo apresentada por David Hume. O ceticismo grego antigo, especificamente o pirronismo, surgiu como uma importante escola filosófica no período helenístico e exerceu profunda influência sobre o pensamento filosófico ocidental subsequente. David Hume, como filósofo do Iluminismo, dialogou com o ceticismo pirrônico e desenvolveu sua própria perspectiva singular acerca do ceticismo. O artigo inicia apresentando uma visão geral do ceticismo grego antigo, remontando às suas origens em Pirro de Élis, seu fundador. Em seguida, examina os princípios fundamentais do pirronismo, como a busca pela tranquilidade por meio da suspensão do juízo e da crença (epoché), bem como a prática da oposição argumentativa. As características distintivas do ceticismo pirrônico são analisadas à luz de seu contexto histórico e filosófico. Em conclusão, este trabalho procura esclarecer a intrincada conexão entre o ceticismo grego antigo, especialmente o pirronismo, e a concepção de ceticismo desenvolvida por David Hume. Busca-se destacar a profunda influência do ceticismo pirrônico no pensamento filosófico humeano, evidenciando a relevância duradoura e o impacto dessas tradições céticas na história da filosofia ocidental.

**Palavras-chave:** David Hume; Pirronismo; Ceticismo; Filosofia Helenística; Filosofia Moderna Inicial.

## Introduction

Skepticism is a domain in philosophy that preoccupied many philosophers for almost two thousand years and it has been among the most integral challenges in epistemology. While only a few philosophers defended skepticism, many others from various domains of philosophy such as externalism, contextualism, foundationalism, and coherentism have attacked skepticism with their theories. Each representative of these various domains of philosophy provided their own definitions of skepticism. Although the definitions they provided differ in detail and they generally distinguished between different kinds of skepticism, they still share the common assumption that skepticism should be defined as the impossibility of knowledge (Sinnott-Armstrong, 2004, p.3). According to Williams (Williams, 2017, p.35), there are two main kinds of skepticism namely practical skepticism and theoretical skepticism. A *practical skeptic* questions things and in regard to the insights (s)he received, (s)he suspends judgment. When (s)he is not comfortable with this state of mind, (s)he suffers from uncertainty and doubt. On the other hand, the definition provided above, in other words, the view that knowledge is impossible is called *theoretical skepticism*. These two types of skepticism constitute the backbone of philosophical skepticism.

## Rise of Skepticism in Ancient Greek Philosophy

Since this paper focuses on ancient skepticism and its reflections on modern philosophy, it is important to first study what skepticism meant for ancient Greek philosophy. It would not be wrong to claim that belief, suspension of judgment, criterion of truth, appearances, and investigation are the core concepts of ancient skepticism. According to Vogt (2018), modern skepticism and ancient skepticism are two different stories since modern skepticism has different important notions such as knowledge, certainty, and justified belief. The ancient skeptics started with inquiries about knowledge, but quickly turned to beliefs (Vogt 2018). There are other major differences between the ancient and modern skeptics. For example, it is widely accepted that while the ancient skeptics deny belief, the modern skeptics deny only knowledge. In addition, it could be argued that the scope of ancient skepticism is much less radical than that of moderns. As an example of this radicalness, unlike the modern skeptics, ancients did not question whether they have bodies or an external world. One possible reason for ancient skepticism to be less radical is that, for ancients, skepticism was a way of life involving practical concern. On the other

hand, modern skepticism is a strict methodological affair (Fine, 2000, pp. 195-196). That is the main reason why moderns had a more radical view in terms of skepticism.

Another classification of skepticism in the domain of ancients refers to two different skeptical traditions namely Academic skepticism and Pyrrhonian skepticism. Both skeptical traditions originated in the Hellenistic era and continued into modern times.

From the third century and on, Academic skepticism rose from within Plato's Academy under the influence of Arcesilaus when he was the leader of Plato's Academy from 272 – 243 BCE. Thus, the period for the Academic skepticism ranges from Arcesilaus (316-241 BCE), through Carneades (214-129 BCE) and his student Clitomachus (187-10 BCE), to Philo of Larissa (159-84 BCE) and Antiochus of Ascalon (130-69 BCE). These are the few representatives of the Academic skepticism tradition. Among these skeptics, Arcesilaus represents a radical form of epistemological skepticism that involves a universal suspension of judgment. Carneades expanded the boundaries of skepticism to include other domains such as theology and ethics. Clitomachus also defended a radical form of skepticism like Carneades. However, after Carneades, Academic skepticism started to soften (Machuca, 2018, p. 6). It could be argued that, after Arcesilaus took over the leadership of Plato's Academy, Academy has turned skeptical. Arcesilaus rediscovered Socrates the examiner. The starting point of Arcesilaus' skepticism is Socrates' commitment to inquiry and exploration of beliefs (Vogt, 2018). In other words, Arcesilaus returned to the Platonic and its Socratic refutational and aporetic roots. Arcesilaus has made a practice of destructive argumentation against the ethics and epistemology of Stoics. Thus, Academic skepticism was advanced in dialectical conflict with the Stoics. This conflict has remained through the 2<sup>nd</sup> century with Carneades who was the greatest refuter of them all. Identical to Arcesilaus, Carneades has claimed that Stoics' ideal of indubitable knowledge lays upon secure impressions was unattainable and he also implied that one could be satisfied with impressions that were tested as practical guides of life (Hankinson, 2014, p.92). There are few parts in Cicero's *Academica* that could be referred to support this claim. One of these parts is especially important since it provides the reason that leads Arcesilaus to introduce suspension of judgment in Plato's Academy:

It was entirely with Zeno, so we have been told, . . . that Arcesilaus set on foot his battle, not from obstinacy or desire for victory. . . but because of the obscurity of the facts [rerum obscuritate] that had led Socrates to a confession of ignorance, as also previously his predecessors Democritus, Anaxagoras, Empe-

docles, and almost all the old philosophers, who utterly denied all possibility of cognition or perception or knowledge, and maintained that the senses are limited, the mind feeble, the span of life short, and that truth (in Democritus's phrase) is sunk in an abyss. . . Accordingly, Arcesilaus said that there is nothing that can be known, not even that residuum of knowledge that Socrates had left himself - the truth of this very dictum; so hidden in obscurity did he believe that everything lies, nor is there anything that can be perceived or understood, and for these reasons, he said, no one must make any positive statement or affirmation or give the approval of his assent to any proposition, and a man must always restrain his rashness and hold it back from every slip, as it would be glaring rashness to give assent either to a falsehood or to something not certainly known, and nothing is more disgraceful than for assent and approval to outstrip knowledge and perception (Cicero, *Academica*, I.45)

In the passage, what we can find is the Arcesilaus' view about the obscurity of things and the weakness of human understanding parallel to the views of Socrates and Socrates' predecessors (Neto, 2014, p. 12). Academic skepticism survived from the middle ages to the Renaissance not only through Cicero's *Academica* but also through Lactantius's *Divinae Institutiones* and Augustine's *Contra Academicos*.

However, Academic skepticism started losing ground against Pyrrhonism after Sextus Empiricus' works were translated into Latin and published in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The term "*Pyrrhonism*" was thought to be introduced first approximately two hundred years after the death of Pyrrho of Elis, by Aenesidemus in the first century B.C. According to Striker (Striker, 2004, p. 15), Aenesidemus has broken his ties with the New or Skeptical Academy since he thought it had in effect abandoned skepticism. Aenesidemus thought that the Academy was pursuing a more modest version of Stoic dogmatism. It is important to note that Aenesidemus did not mention Arcesilaus - the earliest skeptic in Academy, whose philosophy is portrayed by Sextus as almost identical to his own Pyrrhonian approach. This similarity is shown in the passage by Sextus below:

Arcesilaus. . . certainly seems to me to have something in common with what the Pyrrhonists say – indeed, his persuasion and ours are virtually the same. . . And he says that the aim (*telos*) is suspension of belief, which, we said, is accompanied by tranquility" (1.232)

Eventually, Aenesidemus founded a new movement known as Pyrrhonism. This new movement has been described by Frede (Frede 1987, p. 218) as "not so

much a revival of Pyrrho's philosophy, but a revival of classical Academic skepticism under the name of Pyrrhonism, to distinguish it from the dogmatism which Aenesidemus and Sextus associated with the later skeptical Academy”.

It was obvious that Sextus has presented a more complete account of ancient skepticism than that of Cicero. Pyrrhonism was presented as a coherent form of skepticism and, on the other hand, Academic skepticism as a kind of negative dogmatism by Sextus (Neto, 1997, pp.199-200). Philosophical claims as written by Sextus, consist of seeking answers and there are some possible outcomes of this inquiry: First, one might think that he has found the answers – parallel to the claims of dogmatists or second, one might think that the answers are by nature undiscoverable as Sextus ascribes this to the Academic skeptics. According to Sextus, skepticism is:

[...] a capacity for finding oppositions, between appearances and judgments, in any way whatever, as a result of which we arrive firstly as suspension of judgment (*epochê*), and then afterwards at tranquility (*ataraxia*), on account of the equal strength (*isostheneia*) of the opposing objects and arguments (1.8)

According to Hankinson (Hankinson, 2014, p. 94), this claim has three key technical terms including *epochê*, *isostheneia*, and *ataraxia*. As mentioned above *epochê* means suspending the judgments that in return we neither deny nor confirm anything. *Epochê* could be considered as the result of *isostheneia* of considerations of on every question and this status in return leads to *ataraxia* – the serenity of the soul – which was the ultimate goal of most of the many later Greek philosophers especially of the Epicureans. Thus, according to Hankinson (Hankinson, 2014, p. 94), *ataraxia* was portrayed by Sextus as a causal consequence of *epochê*. Sextus says, “The causal origin of skepticism... was the hope for tranquility” (1.12). Furthermore, Sextus cites:

[...] having begun philosophizing in order to decide about the appearances and to grasp which of them were true and which false in order to attain *ataraxia*, they fell into disputes of equal strength [i.e. on each side], and being unable decide about them and so suspended judgment; but along with *epochê* there came along also, fortuitously, *ataraxia* in matters of opinions (1.26).

In addition to the idea given in the passage above, Sextus provides more insight into the origins of the skeptic by saying:

Men of noble nature (megalophueis), suffering anxiety (tarachê) because of the anomaly in things and puzzled (aporountes) as to which of them they should rather assent to, came to investigate both what in things is true and what false, that they might become tranquil (ataraktêsontes) by judging these things (1.12)

Sextus has also distinguished between the Academic skepticism and Pyrrhonism in his work *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*. Sextus says:

[...] although both the Academics and the [Pyrrhonian] Sceptics say that they believe some things, yet here too the difference between the two philosophies is quite plain. For the word "believe" has different meanings; it means not to resist but simply to follow without any strong impulse or inclination, as the boy is said to believe his tutor; but sometimes it means to assent to a thing of deliberate choice and with a kind of sympathy due to strong desire, as when the incontinent man believes him who approves of an extravagant mode of life. Since, therefore, Carneades and Cleitomachus declare that a strong inclination accompanies their credence... while we say that our belief is a matter of simply yielding without any consent, here too there must be difference between us and them. (I: 230)

Thus, it is clear that the widely accepted interpretation of Pyrrhonian skepticism is far more radical than the stance of Academic skeptics. Such a portrait of Pyrrhonism relies on the idea that as far as the knowledge concerned, the Pyrrhonist, can hardly assume that he knows anything; and as for the beliefs, the Pyrrhonist suspends the judgment on whatever issue is under consideration. In other words, the skeptic denies to assent to any assertion (Frede, 1987, p.179). On the other hand, it might be wrong to strictly claim that Pyrrhonists do not have beliefs. According to Sextus, Pyrrhonists have a sort of belief although these beliefs should not be understood as the beliefs of dogmatists and of other ordinary people. Passage from Sextus given below depicts the general announcement that ‘we [Pyrrhonists] attend to appearances’ then explains how this enables the Skeptic to lead a perfectly ordinary life:

We say, then, that the criterion of the skeptical way of life is appearance, implicitly meaning by this the impression, for it lies in passive and involuntary affection and is not an object of investigation. Hence no one, presumably, will raise a controversy over whether something appears this way or that;

rather, they investigate whether it is such as it appears. Thus, attending to appearances, we live in accordance with everyday observances, without holding opinions—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. By nature’s guidance we are naturally capable of perceiving and thinking. By the 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 crafts which we take up (Sinnott-Armstrong, 2004, p.17).

The passage clearly answers the question of why a skeptic is supposed to live a better life than other people. Skeptical suspension of judgment leads to ataraxia and being free from worry. Thus, seeking ataraxia is the starting point of skepticism.

Finally, if we question why and for whom Sextus wrote his arguments, Sextus never tells explicitly why or for whom he was writing. However, according to Bett (Bett, 2019, p. 9) there are three possible and mutually inclusive answers to this question. One answer is that Sextus was defending skepticism from the attacks of other philosophers showing that skepticism is not impossible to put into practice in real life. Another answer is that Sextus was writing not only to defend skepticism from other philosophers attacking it, but also to explain the character of skepticism to those previously unacquainted with it. Finally, one possible reason was that the writings of Sextus were partially directed to his fellow skeptics, providing them with a vast amount of material in their quest to maintain suspension of judgment and tranquility.

Sextus’ writings led to the revival of Pyrrhonism in Western Europe and this revival was obtained through the Latin translations of the works of Sextus. The first translation of the *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* by Henri Estienne was published in 1562 and it is followed by the translation of *Against the Mathematicians* in 1569 by Gantian Hervet. Skepticism found itself on fertile grounds and soon gained popularity among scholars (Parusniková, 2016, p. 49).

## David Hume and Pyrrhonism

Sextus’ writings affected many philosophers including David Hume. It could be argued that the ancient skepticism to an extent shaped the early modern phi-

losophy, including the philosophy of Hume. Hume seriously engages with skeptical doubts and skeptical argumentation and thus, Hume was deeply affected by the skeptical philosophy. According to Popkin, John Laird, in his *Hume's Philosophy of Human Nature*, states that Hume has remained a complete Pyrrhonian regarding all ultimate principles (Popkin, 1951, p. 385). Neto notes that, for Popkin, Hume's main contribution to the Pyrrhonian controversy was to show that;

- (i) The Pyrrhonian doctrine was the logical outcome of philosophical analysis,
- (ii) That the infeasibility of Pyrrhonism does not weaken its epistemological force but only its psychological plausibility, and
- (iii) That this implausibility obtains because nature impels the philosopher to believe (Neto, 1991, p. 41).

Furthermore, Hume admits that he was pursuing a skeptical philosophical inquiry in the abstract of the *Treatise*. Hume says:

By all that has been said [in the *Treatise*] the reader will easily perceive, that the philosophy contained in this book is very sceptical, and tends to give us a notion of the imperfections and narrow limits of human understanding (Hume, 1978, p. 657).

Yet in Section XII of the *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, as well as in some parts of the *Treatise*, Hume writes about the power of Pyrrhonian reasoning and credits the Pyrrhonists for providing us with a means to curbing our intellectual arrogance (Sachdev, 2019, p. 117). In the same section, Hume says:

And if any of the learned be inclined, from their natural temper, to haughtiness and obstinacy, a small tincture of Pyrrhonism might abate their pride, by showing them, that the few advantages, which they may have attained over their fellows, are but inconsiderable, if compared with the universal perplexity and confusion, which is inherent in human nature (Hume 1975: 141; SBN, 161–162).

It is important to note that, as claimed by Fosl, the references given by Hume about Pyrrhonism do not provide us with assurance that Hume had actually read Sextus by that time (Fosl, 1998, p.267). His understanding of Pyrrhonism may

have been generated through his reading of Academic skeptics such as Cicero, Diogenes Laertius, or any other early modern writers who have covered Pyrrhonism (Fosl, 1998, p.267). Hume was also influenced by the group of constructive skeptics with whom he shared the empiricist perspective. He was mostly influenced by the Pyrrhonian attitude they possess, specifically by their reception of the weakness of the reason that in return leads to modesty and caution in judgment. Hume recognized that the ancient Pyrrhonians required us not only to suspend our judgment as a result of skeptical attitude, but also to withhold our beliefs and to deny the epistemic value of appearances (Parusniková, 2016, p. 75). Hume considered Pyrrhonism as a series of arguments that lead to the development of a specific kind of attitude towards all intellectual and practical problems. In various parts of his essays, Hume implied that he believed that a certain part of Pyrrhonian doctrine was the logical outcome of philosophical inquiry. According to Hume, when the grounds of our judgments in regard to matters of fact, matters of value, or even matters of mathematics, we find that these judgments are neither rational nor certain (Popkin, 1951, p. 387). Hume says:

The intense view of these manifold contradictions and imperfections in human reason has so wrought upon me, and heated my brain, that I am ready to reject all belief and reasoning, and can look upon no opinion even as more probable or likely than another (Hume, 1978, pp. 268-269).

Furthermore, according to Hume, when we tackle these defects in our knowledge, a more fundamental difficulty arises:

This sceptical doubt, both with respect to reason and the senses, is a malady, which can never be radically cur'd, but must return upon us every moment, however we may chace it away, and sometimes may seem entirely free from it. 'Tis impossible upon any system to defend either our understanding or senses; and we but expose them farther when we endeavour to justify them in that manner (Hume, 1978, p. 218).

Thus, such a difficulty suggests that any rational grounding for our judgments seems impossible. Concerning this difficulty Popkin says:

A close examination of Hume's views will show that he agreed with the Pyrrhonian theory of the inability to find any rational and certain basis for our judgments to the extent that an epistemological analysis of the nature and

grounds of human knowledge would reveal that there are no rational or certain grounds for our judgments, and that we have no ultimate criterion for determining which of our conflicting judgments in certain fundamental areas of human knowledge are true, or to be preferred (Popkin, 1951, p. 387).

It is also important to note that, in the final section of *Enquiry*, Hume mentions about two major types of scepticism: *antecedent* and *consequent* with two subtypes of each namely as *the excessive* and *the moderate* (or mitigated). According to Hume, Descartes was a representative of excessive antecedent scepticism. For Hume, such a philosophy attempts at its inception to doubt everything. Hume considers excessive antecedent scepticism as unattainable and incurable. According to Hume, excessive consequent skepticism is Pyrrhonism and he says:

[...] when men are supposed to have discovered either the absolute fallaciousness of their mental faculties, or their unfitness to reach any fixed determination in all those curious subjects of speculation, about which they are commonly employed (EHU:12.5)

Thus, it is clear that Hume was differentiating between the total skeptics and Pyrrhonists. The former claim that “all is uncertain, and that our judgment is not in anything possess of any measures of truth or falsehood.” They think that they can “forbear viewing certain objects in a stronger and fuller light” even if experience has suggested that they always accompany another kind of objects (1978: 183, I.iv.1.7). On the other hand, Pyrrhonists do not pose such an extreme position. As given in his definition of skepticism, Sextus describes their motivation as primarily ethical. Pyrrhonists have learned that any attempt to formulate the doctrines would most likely to lead frustration. Therefore, they ended up with the idea that a life without doctrines is the best means to live a tranquil life (Ainslie, 2003, p.256). Thus, Hume’s total skeptics or excessive consequential skepticism stands opposed to what Hume calls moderate consequential skepticism. This moderate type of skepticism consists of two practical lessons derived from Pyrrhonism or extreme theoretical skepticism. First, the philosopher should possess “a degree of doubt, and caution, and modesty, which, in all kinds of scrutiny and decision, ought for ever to accompany a just reasoned” (Hume, 1975,p.162). Second, philosophers should limit their inquiries so they will “never be tempted to go beyond common life, so long as they consider the imperfection of those faculties which they employ, their narrow reach, and their inaccurate operations” (Hume, 1975, p.162).

Although it seems like Hume prefers the moderate type of skepticism, he indicates that the moderate type of skepticism is “the result of this Pyrrhonism, or excessive skepticism, when its undistinguished doubts are, in some measure, corrected by common sense and reflection” (Hume, 1975, p. 161). In other words, “Hume's moderate skepticism must presuppose the theoretical legitimacy of the contradictions that the excessive skeptic uncovers. The moderate skeptic, though, does not carry these problems over into common life” (Fieser, 1989, p. 95).

Supporting the claims above, in his work “*David Hume: His Pyrrhonism and His Critique of Pyrrhonism*”, Popkin indicates that Hume was not only a typical skeptic, but also he was a complete, proper, and a consistent Pyrrhonist (1951). Popkin’s view is that Hume has contributed to the history of skepticism by improving the Pyrrhonian tradition. It could also be argued that Hume approves the claim that Pyrrhonism was hard to defend due to its strong nature. However, Hume uses this claim not to refute Pyrrhonism, but to build a more consistent form of Pyrrhonism by indicating that we have no solid grounds for any beliefs, regardless of what we may be compelled to believe (Popkin, 1952, p.74). As Popkin puts it:

Hume maintained in far clearer and more significant fashion than Pyrrhonists or quasi-Pyrrhonists like Montaigne, LeVayer, Glanvill, Huet or Bayle, that we can never have grounds for beliefs, whether factual, moral, or demonstrable. By careful systematic analysis, Hume had tried to show that no belief of any of these kinds could be supported by adequate evidence that would demonstrate it (Popkin, 1952, p. 76).

Hume also answers to the criticism against Pyrrhonism that although Pyrrhonism is irrefutable, but nature makes us believers, and hence Pyrrhonism can be ignored by saying: “Philosophy would render us entirely Pyrrhonian were not Nature too strong for it” (Hume, 1978, p. 24). However, Stanley holds that the Pyrrhonism of Hume is logically irrefutable, but psychologically unsustainable for more than very short and intense periods (Stanley, 1935, p. 422). Still, much of Hume’s thinking is inevitably Pyrrhonian, defended as a solid weapon against dogmatism against which Hume directed his efforts (Stanley, 1935, p.422). It is also implied that Hume’s treatment of reason’s potential for self-subversion expresses a general epistemological theoretical skepticism that is completely unmitigated – or in other words Pyrrhonian (Garrett, 2004, p. 72).

On the other hand, it is important to note that there are passages that indicate Hume also holds a mitigated skeptical position (that also refers to Academic skepticism) and wrote against Pyrrhonism, especially on practical grounds. In *An*

*Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* Hume says:

[A] Pyrrhonian cannot expect, that his philosophy will have any constant 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 any thing, that all human life must perish, were his principles universally and steadily to prevail (EHU: 12.23)

In addition to the passage given above, Hume continues to compare Pyrrhonism unfavorably to mitigate or Academic skepticism in particular:

There is, indeed, a more mitigated scepticism or academical philosophy, which may be both durable and useful, and which may, in part, be the result of this Pyrrhonism, or excessive scepticism, when it is undistinguished doubts are, in some measure, corrected by common sense and reflection (EHU: 12.24)

Through the final section of the *Enquiry*, titled as the “*Of the Academical or Sceptical Philosophy*”, Hume differentiates between the skepticism that is “*antecedent to all study and philosophy*” and skepticism that is “*consequent to science and enquiry*” (EHU: 12.3-5). Radical form of skepticism that he attributes to Descartes recommends “a universal doubt, not only of all our former opinions and principles, but also of our very faculties”, whereby a more mitigate form of skepticism that calls for only practices of methodological caution intended to preserve a proper impartiality” and “wean the mind from prejudices”. Thus, Hume rejects this radical antecedent skepticism since he claims that it is unattainable by human beings and incurable if it were to be adopted (Garrett, 2020, p. 215). He, then embraces a more mitigate form of skepticism as “reasonable” and as invoking “the only methods, by which we can ever hope to reach truth, and attain a proper stability and certainty in our determinations” (EHU: 12.4). The paragraph below indicates Hume’s primary interest in examining consequent or mildest antecedent skepticism:

There is another species of scepticism, consequent to science and enquiry, when men are supposed to have discovered, either the absolute fallaciousness of their mental faculties, or their unfitness to reach any fixed determination in all those curious subjects of speculation, about which they are commonly employed. Even our very senses are brought into dispute, by a certain species of philosophers; and the maxims of common life are subjected to the same doubt as the most profound principles or conclusions of metaphysics and theology.

As these paradoxical tenets (if they may be called tenets) are to be met with in some philosophers, and the refutation of them in several, they naturally excite our curiosity, and make us enquire into the arguments, on which they may be founded. (EHU: 12.5)

Furthermore, it seems that Hume rejects at least two of the three main pillars of Pyrrhonian skepticism given in Sextus' definition of Pyrrhonism. In terms of adhering to the appearances of life, Sextus says:

Adhering, then, to appearances, we live in accordance with the normal rules of life, undogmatically, seeing that we cannot remain wholly inactive. (PH1: 17)

By making this claim, although suspending their judgment, Pyrrhonists thought themselves entitled to engage in all the normal activities of life. The paragraph by Sextus given above tends to respond to the challenge that a life without belief is unliveable. This objection is central to Hume's rejection of Pyrrhonism - without belief; there is no basis for action. Yet another aspect that Hume rejects in Pyrrhonism is the third notion which is central to the Pyrrhonian philosophy – namely as tranquility or ataraxia (Noonan, 2014, p.17). As mentioned earlier, ataraxia has a causal chain with epochê – the suspension of judgments. In other words, ataraxia is the result of epochê. This is a notion that Hume also rejects. According to Noonan (Noonan, 2014, p. 17) the perplexity obtained through opposing appearance to judgment Hume thinks, leads not to tranquility, but to a “sensible uneasiness” (Hume, 1978, p. 205) from which the mind “naturally seeks relief” in a rejection of one of the two opposing principles. In the absence of such a resolution, the consequence is not tranquility but “despair” (Hume, 1978, p. 264). Parallel to the discussions given above, Dimech also outlines Pyrrhonism as the adoption of radical epochê, which is motivated by isostheneia, and which purportedly leads to ataraxia (Dimech, 2021, p. 660). According to Dimech, Hume did not indeed flirt with the idea of radical suspension of belief in both the *Treatise* and *Enquiry* (Dimech, 2021, p. 660). It seems like reaching ataraxia is not possible. Hume says:

I may, nay I must yield to the current of nature, in submitting to my senses and understanding; and in this blind submission I shew most perfectly my sceptical disposition and principles. But does it follow, that I must strive against the

current of nature, which leads me to indolence and pleasure (Hume, 1978, p. 269)

The paragraph given above could be read as skepticism and epochê does not lead to ataraxia. But, unlike Hume's approach, Sextus' definition of skepticism includes the sequence of steps: conflict of opinions, undecidability, equal strength of the arguments, epochê, and then ataraxia. According to Michaud (Michaud, 1985, p. 39), if the main concern of Pyrrhonism is whether it is possible or not to live without belief, to suspend all judgment concerning what really exists, and simply follow appearances, it is clear that Hume's Pyrrhonism is quite peculiar.

## Conclusion

Hume's position towards Pyrrhonism is more complicated than that of any other modern philosopher. Although Popkin considered Hume as a proper and consistent Pyrrhonist, it seems like Hume should not be considered a pure Pyrrhonist since there are certain points in his philosophy that departs from that of Pyrrhonists. Thus, I would argue that although Hume holds a Pyrrhonian perspective in certain parts of his philosophy, he could also be considered as an Academic skeptic since he holds a more mitigate form of skepticism in general. Furthermore, as mentioned above Hume partially rejects two of the three main notions of Pyrrhonian skepticism namely adherence to the appearances of life and tranquility (ataraxia). It is possible that, as mentioned earlier, Hume's understanding of Pyrrhonism was modified by the philosophers (i.e. Cicero) he was more acquainted with. Fogelin suggests that "it is not Hume's empiricism but primarily his theory of belief that pushes his philosophy in the direction of extreme (or Pyrrhonian) skepticism" (Fogelin, 2008, p. 210). On the other hand, it is widely accepted that Hume was deeply influenced by Cicero and Cicero's skeptical stance. Cicero was a leading Academic skeptic and Hume accepts that Cicero has deeply influenced his moral philosophy. As claimed by Fosl, Hume's "*Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*" draws heavily upon the *Academica* - Cicero's text on Academic skepticism and one of the main conduits of skeptical thought to modernity (Fosl, 2011, p. 151). This is an important indicator that Hume should not be considered as a pure Pyrrhonist since part of his philosophy was deeply affected by the Academic skepticism.

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