I. Apelles and the Problem of Sceptical Inquiry:

Near the beginning of Outlines of Pyrrhonism I, Sextus Empiricus tells an odd little story:

"The sceptic, in fact, had the same experience which is said to have befallen the painter Apelles. For they say that he was painting a horse and, wanting to represent the horse's foam in the painting, he was so unsuccessful that he gave up the attempt and flung at the picture the sponge on which he used to wipe the paints off his brush. And the mark of the sponge produced the effect of a horse's foam. So too the Sceptics were in hopes of gaining tranquility, by means of a judgement regarding anomalies in appearances and in ideas, but being unable to do so they suspended judgement. And as they suspended judgement, as if by chance [hoion tuchikós], tranquility followed, as a shadow does a body." (PH I.28-9)¹

Sextus is here explaining the end [telos] of scepticism, which he has said to be tranquility (PH I.25). He has already offered a much more abstract story about the sceptic's progress (I will follow Sextus in using 'sceptic' as shorthand for 'Pyrrhonian sceptic'):

"We say that up to now [akhri nun]² the end of the sceptic is tranquility in matters of opinion and moderation of feeling in respect of what is unavoidable. For the Sceptic,

¹ Translations are a mix of my own, Bury, and Bett or Annas and Barnes as available.
² For achri nun cf. PH III.70, PH I.200, M VII.320, VIII.257, 427. These other uses, restricting the scope of various claims to Sextus' investigations so far, seem appropriate enough, but in the case of the telos the phrasing is bizarre, almost comic: the telos of a
having set out to philosophize in order to pass judgement on his impressions [phantasias], and grasp which are true and which false, so as to be tranquil, fell into contradictions of equally powerful disagreements; and being unable to reach a verdict, he suspended judgement. And when he did so there followed by chance [tuchikos] a tranquility in matters of opinion." (I.25-6)

The brief depiction of the sceptic which follows the Apelles story, included in the quotation above (PH I.29), is clearly a recap of this. So we have here a small-scale piece of ring-composition, with the story of Apelles, in the middle, offered to help us interpret the more abstract narrative of the model sceptic. The whole serves to answer the question of what the telos of skepticism consists in, and thus completes a tiny narrative arc which began with the question of the sceptic’s archê:

“The starting-point [archê] of Scepticism we say is the hope of becoming tranquil. Smart and energetic people [megalophueis]3, troubled by the anomaly in things and puzzled as to which of them they should rather assent to, came to investigate [zetein] what in things is true [alēthes] and what false, thinking that by deciding these issues they would become tranquil.” (PH I.12)4

philosophical system is a fixed theoretical principle, not an observation or a biographical fact that might only hold 'up until now'. That is presumably the point: Sextus is cleverly undermining what would otherwise count as a dogmatic commitment par excellence.

3 Lit., 'great-natured'; I adopt Cooper's vivid overtranslation (2012, 282ff.). Here again we have a nice example of Sextus' underappreciated literary cunning (or perhaps that of his source). Sextus cannot make general causal claims about the effects of sceptical inquiry without implicitly committing to a psychological theory; he cannot urge scepticism on us without implying an ethical theory. What he can do is tell little stories; and those stories can suggest that for a certain kind of person, with whom the reader may choose to identify, scepticism might turn out to be just the thing....

4 When Sextus turns to investigate the professions in M I-VI, he tells the same story of disappointment as in PH I, though without reference to the framing dyad tarachê-ataraxia: "in respect of the fields of learning [ta mathemata] they experienced the same thing as they did in philosophy as a whole. For just as they came to philosophy with a yearning to find the truth [tuchein tês alêtheias], but when faced with the equipollent conflict and discord of things suspended judgement -- so too in the case of the learned professions they set out to grasp them, searching here too to learn the truth [mathein
Sextus adds here that tranquility is indeed achieved by the sceptic’s investigations – not by the discovery of the truth, but by its failure to reach any such positive result.  

This raises the question of what the two stories have in common. Where is the resemblance between Apelles and the sceptic supposed to lie? Sextus never quite tells us explicitly, and it is easier to see where they come apart. Sceptical inquiry, *zêtēsis*, is an ongoing practice, indeed a way of life. Once he has discovered that suspension of judgement (*epochê*) produces tranquility (*ataraxia*), the sceptic goes on to replicate the experience on every topic of philosophical debate. Apelles' gesture, by contrast, is presented as a unique event, and we're left to wonder what if anything he does about it afterwards. If Apelles was as clever as the other ancient stories about him suggest, he should have been thrilled with his discovery: we can imagine an extended, *prōtos heurētēs* version of the story in which he and others go on to incorporate sponge-throwing into painting on a regular basis -- as Francis Bacon in fact did (though for aleatory rather than pictorial purposes). This isn't as fanciful as it might sound: the idea that important discoveries can be made by chance, then incorporated into expert practice, is an important feature of ancient medical Empiricism, the medical counterpart to Pyrrhonian scepticism. But it isn't part of the story as Sextus tells it.

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5 I agree with Perin (2010, 24-6) that the Sceptic's origin story makes no sense unless we attribute to him an ongoing if inchoate aspiration to the truth. But I take that to be just a natural part of *bios*, lurking in the background along with his aversion to *tarachê* and his natural capacity for thought -- not something Sextus means to thematize as a distinct end.  
6 Cf. Perin (2010, 17-18), though I think he gives up too soon on making sense of the story.  
7 See Pliny, *Nat Hist.* XXXV.36.41-78 for other tales of Apelles' talent and ingenuity. The sponge story is absent, though a tall tale is told of his extraordinary skill at painting horses (73). Pliny also reports that upon seeing a painting on which his friend and rival Protogenes had lavished enormous effort, Apelles said that Protogenes surpassed him in all things but one: he knew when to stop (41).  
8 On most accounts, though Sextus himself is ambivalent at *PH* I.236-41.
That the narrative in *PH* I.25-6 and the recap are telling the same story is signalled by a striking repetition. The Sceptic's tranquility is described as following by chance [*tuchikós*] (I.26) both in the first instance and then, more fully, in the recap: "as if by chance [*hoion tuchikós*]... as a shadow does a body" (I.29). The image of the shadow is also found, without reference to chance, in Diogenes Laertius, who attributes it to Timon and Aenesidemus: "The end to be realized they hold to be suspension of judgement, which brings with it tranquility like its shadow: so Timon and Aenesidemus declare" (IX.107, trans. Hicks revised). In that passage the *present* tense is used: the sceptic's ongoing investigations produce tranquility as a reliable byproduct. Sextus is instead offering an *origin story*, about how the sceptic (the first sceptic? every sceptic? some paradigmatic sceptic?) first discovers this correlation.

It's not hard to see why the term 'chance' applies to the story of Apelles: in our only other source for the story, in fact, it is part of an encomium to the goddess *Tuchê* (Dio Chrys. *Or.* 63). But this is just where the shadow image seems wrong: shadows do *not* follow bodies 'by chance' but by physical necessity -- Sextus perhaps admits as much by using the fudge-phrase, ‘as if’. And neither the word 'chance' *nor* the shadow metaphor really seems right for the sceptic's case: the relation between *epochê* and tranquility must be something more than a random one-off, if it is to motivate the sceptic's continued inquiry, but Sextus can hardly mean to affirm it as a law of nature either.

There is a much worse problem: Apelles succeeds *by giving up*. He literally throws in the sponge. This phrase, like the equivalent 'throwing in the towel', comes from nineteenth-century boxing: the trainer of the boxer who is losing throws a towel or sponge into the ring to signal defeat, and end the match. What Apelles does is even more decisive -- he expresses his acceptance of defeat with a violent gesture, by which he intends to mar the picture forever. It is only because he fails in this too that his painting becomes a success.

For Sextus, however, the Pyrrhonian sceptic is above all someone who has *not* given up. The beginning of the *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* makes this very clear. 'For those who inquire...' are its very first words:
"For those who inquire into [zêtousi] any subject, it seems reasonable to suppose that they either discover [heurèsis] what they are looking for, or they renounce discovery and agree that the matter cannot be known, or they go on inquiring. This is presumably why, in the case of the matters investigated in philosophy, some have claimed to have discovered [to heurekeinai] the truth [to alêthes], others have declared that it cannot be grasped, and others again are still inquiring [zêtoisin]. And those who believe they have discovered it are particularly known as 'dogmatists', e.g. the followers of Aristotle and Epicurus and the Stoics and others; while the followers of Cleitomachus and Carneades, and the other Academics have declared it to be unknowable; and the sceptics go on inquiring [zêtoisi]. Hence it seems reasonable to hold that the main types of philosophy are three: the Dogmatic, Academic, and the Sceptic." (PH I.1-4)

The sceptic is, uniquely, defined by his philosophical practice, and not by the results he has reached. And that practice is ongoing: for the sceptic alone, inquiry belongs to the present tense rather than the past or perfect. From the sceptic's point of view, then, it is the Academic who has given up.9 (So the genus 'philosopher' must include all who have inquired into philosophy.) For the Academic concludes that the task of inquiry is impossible, insofar as the truth cannot be known. It is precisely the contrasting decision to continue his relentless zêtësis, search or inquiry, by which the Pyrrhonian claims to be defined, so much so that Pyrrhonians, Sextus tells us, are also known as zetetics (PH I.7).10 Moreover, it defines a large part of his activity: the language of zêtësis saturates both his description of sceptical practice in PH I and his performance of it in PH II-III and M VII-XI.11 He also tells us explicitly that the sceptics are still inquiring in the all-

9 Cf. Aulus Gellius Noct. Att. X.v. The Academic will of course reject this depiction as unfair; for the Academic side of the story, see Striker 2001 and Palmer 2000. Barnes 2007 points out that Sextus' tripartition is in any case an oversimplification (322-5).
10 Cf. DL: the sceptics are called 'zetetics' from their searching [zetein] on every occasion for the truth, 'sceptics' from their investigating [skeptesthai] and never discovering [heuriskein], and 'ephetics' from the experience [pathos] which follows their search (IX.70).
11 Of Sextus' works, the whole of PH II-III and M VII-XI are clearly labelled zêtëseis: for PH II-III, see PH II.1; for M VII-XI, see M VII.2 and 24-5 (also M VIII.481 for M IX-X,
important case of the criterion of truth ('up until now', to mechri nun zêteisthai, PH II.53); so, since a criterion is what would be needed to conclude any other inquiry with success, no inquiry once opened can be regarded by the sceptic as closed (cf. e.g. PHIII.70).

Now modern interpreters are often dismissive of this depiction of the sceptic as the only true practitioner of inquiry, central though it is to Sextus’ self-presentation. In fact it is probably fair to say that the dominant line of contemporary interpretation of the sceptic entails that it is false -- that is, the Pyrrhonist is not someone who continues to genuinely search for the truth. Denial of the possibility of skeptical investigation is an important part of the influential reading of the sceptic as a radically self-alienated irrationalist, different versions of which have been offered by Myles Burnyeat, Gisela Striker and Jonathan Barnes. Other less hostile readings still take the sceptic's other commitments and argumentative practices to preclude investigation in any normal sense.

and M XI.257 and perhaps M XI.2 for M XI). Particular large-scale discussions flagged as zêtēseis include those on truth (M VIII.50), proof (M VIII.300), and generation and destruction (M X.310). (It is clear that a zêtēsis may have more specific zêtēseis as parts.) PH I explains sceptical inquiry rather than being an instance of it; the case of M I-VI is interestingly ambiguous. There are references to the work at hand as zêtēsis in M I-VI (M I.41, 57, 71, 99, 119, 194; II.1, 51; III.6, etc.), but they are fleeting and muted compared to PH II-III and M VII-XI. Here the dominant language in programmatic contexts -- placed in the foreground right at the start of M I.1, as zêtēsis is in PH I.1 -- is that of 'speeches-against' or 'rebuttals' [antirrēseis, M I.1, I.8, I.91, II.9, III.1, III.108, IV.10, IV.34, V.3, V.43, VI.3-5, VI.38, etc.]. How a zêtēsis may be part of, or a means to, an antirrēsis is a question for another day.

It is interesting that these arguments for dismissiveness are all apparently confined to modern scholarship, or at any rate Sextus himself does not feel compelled to answer them. He does discuss at length a dogmatic objection that the sceptic cannot inquire (or perhaps we should distinguish several challenges to that effect), but this seems to be essentially a rather unconvincing ad hominem application of Meno's paradox (PH II.1-11, cf. M VIII.337-6a; for discussion see Grgic 2008, Fine 2014 Chapters 10 and 11, and Vogt 2012 Chapter 6).

Thus, "real Sextan sceptics do not investigate" (Barnes 2007, 327); "Contrary to Sextus' initial claim that the Sceptic goes on investigating, philosophical investigations seem to be precisely what the Sceptic's way of life is designed to avoid" (Striker 2001, 121); and the sceptic "goes on seeking not in the sense that he has an active programme of research..." (Burnyeat 1983, 56) -- so that Sextus' corpus is presumably the record of something else. Dismissiveness about sceptical inquiry is a crucial part of the depiction of the sceptic as a polemic-obsessed extremist, leading a 'hollow shell' of an existence thanks to his 'paralysis of reason by itself' (Burnyeat 1983, 46, cf. 28, 40-45, 57). I count
I will refer to interpretations which reject the sceptic's claim to inquire in any normal sense -- which take the sceptic, like Apelles, to have essentially given up -- as dismissive. And though Apelles is rarely discussed in detail, I suspect that the story, understood as a story about the rewards of giving up, has been a powerful influence on the dismissive reading, counterbalancing the explicit commitment to inquiry which pervades the early chapters of *PH*. The other grounds for the dismissive reading are not usually articulated very precisely, but we can distinguish the following:  

(1) **psychological plausibility**: How could the sceptic seriously hope, on the occasion of any new investigation, that -- for the first time ever! -- the arguments he considers on both sides of the question might not be equal, so that he might actually reach a positive result? Without such a hope, can he really count as engaged in sincere inquiry?

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these as instances of the 'bad faith' reading of Sextus -- though their Sextus is so psychologically peculiar that we might want to speak instead of mental illness. In fairness, I should also note that these readings tend to take as central questions about sceptical belief and assent, so that what they say about inquiry to some extent falls out of broader considerations I cannot engage with here. For defenses of both sceptical inquiry and sceptical belief, engaging with some of these concerns, see Barney 1992 and Brennan 1999.

14 Cf. Palmer 2000, Machuca 2013, Grgic 2012, Marchand 2010/11, etc. (cf. Palmer n. 3 for references to earlier works). On the other side, defenders of the sceptic's claim to inquire include Brennan 1999 (88-102), Perin 2010 (Ch. 1), and Cooper 2012 (Ch. 5). Vogt's version of sceptical inquiry is deflated inasmuch as it does not aim directly at the truth, but her reading is much closer in spirit to the defenders than the dismissers (2012, Ch. 5).

15 Though see e.g. Striker 2001, 119.

16 For readings mobilizing a number of these concerns see e.g. Marchand (2010/11), Machuca (2013, 205), and Bett (2010, 188-89 with my annotations): "There remains the question whether Sextus' positing of tranquility as the *telos* is consistent with his self-description as an inquirer, a *skeptikos*.... Several scholars have concluded that his claim to be an inquirer is disingenuous [bad faith], or that 'inquiry' has to be understood in a special way [deflation].... Someone as single-minded as Sextus is at constructing oppositions among arguments with a view to tranquility is just not believable when he claims to be still seeking the truth [ruthlessness]; for the two activities cannot be pursued simultaneously or in the same frame of mind [displacement, plausibility]."
(2) **displacement:** The sceptic's overriding goal is tranquility; so how can he really be aiming at successful inquiry as well? Worse, once he finds out that tranquility is actually produced by *epochê,* the latter must replace discovery of the truth as his proximate, instrumental aim. The two are incompatible, for discovery and suspension exclude each other: if suspension is the hoped-for result of inquiry, then discovery of the truth is not. So genuine inquiry is barred to him.

(3) **completion:** once the sceptic has achieved tranquility, why should he go on inquiring *at all?*\(^\text{17}\) (Whether *displacement* or *completion* seems applicable depends on whether we take the attainment of tranquility to be a 'once-and-for-all' business, so as to need no renewal by further attainments of *epochê:* see section II.)

(4) **ruthlessness:** Sextus' actual argumentative practices seems to confirm *displacement* (and exacerbate *plausibility*) by exhibiting a determination to reach *epochê* at all costs. Here we can distinguish two different angles:

(4a) **dodginess:** some of Sextus' comments about the sceptic’s practices have a fishy aroma. The sceptic, he says, is not above using admittedly 'lightweight' arguments (whatever exactly that means) when it suits the context, a practice Sextus defends as therapeutic for his opponent (*PH III.280*). He will also resort to insisting that some unknown line of argument, not yet apparent, may well be discovered some day in the future, to counter reasoning which might otherwise seem irresistible at present (*PH I.33-4*).\(^\text{18}\) If this is supposed to suffice, it seems that *any* pretext for proclaiming *epochê* will do.\(^\text{19}\)

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\(^{17}\) Cf. Grgic (2012, 657) and Barnes 2007 (328-9): "Sextan scepticism is not a philosophy: it is a retirement from philosophy".

\(^{18}\) Hankinson (1995, 30), Striker (2001, 127), and Perin (2010, 20) argue that this is not so bad as it sounds.

\(^{19}\) I will be passing over the important question of exactly how *epochê* occurs, and how it can be -- as it must be -- at once an involuntary, passive psychological reaction and a rational response to the evidence. The same question arises in the case of the sceptic's assent to (non-sensible) appearances. (Burnyeat gives what seems to me essentially the right answer on both counts (1983, 43-5), without seeming to see that it answers many of
(4b) **over-effectiveness:** the *central* argumentative practices of the sceptic, and in particular the Five Modes, are collectively *too effective* across the board to permit him genuine inquiry. For it is impossible to imagine a dogmatic position against which they fail, and so it is impossible to imagine that the sceptic applies them in a spirit of openmindedness. (This can be seen as support for *plausibility*, or for a stronger claim that it is *impossible* for a sceptic armed with these methods to count as inquiring.)

All these objections rely on certain assumptions or intuitions, usually left rather inchoate, about what real inquiry consists in: I will have much more to say about that in section II. Otherwise they are very different. Some appeal to our intuitive sense of what it would be like to try living as a sceptic, others to Sextus' actual practices of argument, others to the intentional logic of the sceptical project. They also lead to very different conclusions: that Sextus *does not in fact* aim to practise inquiry; that he *cannot* engage in inquiry; or that the sceptic he describes has *no reason* or motivation to practice inquiry. In this paper I will be largely setting aside the first of these claims, and with it the objection from dodginess. It seems to me much less interesting than the others if true (Sextus would hardly be the first philosopher or the last to fail to live up to appropriate norms of argument), and at the same time extremely difficult to assess. For our own intuitions about what a seriously intended argument ought to look like are irrelevant here. We are dealing with a philosopher who has no particular views about truth, no criterion, and no belief in demonstration. By exactly what non-partisan standard, then, can his refutative strategies be judged excessively ruthless, fallacious, non-truth-oriented? What *should* Sextus accept as adequacy or legitimacy in an argument? Since I have no answer to this,

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his criticisms of Sextus.) However we should be careful, I think, not to construe *epochê* as itself an assent to anything at all.

20 Cf. Palmer (2000, 355-9, 365)

21 The same problem arises in assessing the arguments of the ancient sophists -- and not by coincidence. Most methods of sceptical argument are essentially sophistic, and Sextus has a great deal in common with Protagoras in particular. And in both cases, interpreters have been too hasty to assume that an anti-theoretical project must also be irrationalist. I hope to explore this connection elsewhere.
my interest in what follows will be with the other worries, and the kinds of dismissive reading they support.

These readings come in two flavours. Some opt for a flat denial of sceptical inquiry, and with it an accusation of bad faith: Sextus is just being disingenuous when he claims -- trolling the long-dead Academics, perhaps -- that the sceptic alone continues to inquire. It is on this reading above all that the Apelles story seems extremely telling, as a slipping of the mask -- a hint that there is a "décalage entre la 'théorie' et la pratique sceptique" (Marchand 2010/11, 129). So read, the story fits perfectly well: in truth the sceptic has attained his end in just the way Apelles did, by giving up.

The less uncharitable option is to understand the sceptic's inquiry in some deflationary way. Here in turn two main strategies are available. First, we might take the sceptic's 'inquiry' as entirely dialectical and other-directed. For according to Sextus, the sceptic also claims to be a philanthropist, who argues for the benefit of his interlocutor (PH III.230). So understood, the sceptic's 'inquiry' is really just an ad hominem practice of therapeutic refutation. Alternatively, we might try to understand the sceptic's practice as serving his own interests -- but interests other than the discovery of the truth. Perhaps the sceptic is motivated simply by "idle curiosity", as Hankinson says, his inquiry "a gentle sort of pottering about comparing and contrasting things".

My aim in the rest of this paper will be to sketch a positive picture of how sceptical inquiry works, from which we will be able to see that the dismissive reading is both strained and unnecessary. I will try to show that we can take Sextus' claims to inquire at face value, once we have a clear sense of what inquiry is, and how and why the sceptic does it. Moreover, the sceptic is not nearly so psychologically exotic or philosophically

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24 By way of preview: I deal with plausibility and overeffectiveness in section II (which also offers a preliminary caution about displacement); and displacement and completion in section III (along with some incidental reasons to doubt dodginess). However, I take the widespread appeal of the dismissive reading to rest at least as much on an inchoate
anomalous as the dismissive reading makes him out. On the contrary, as a relentless, knowledge-disavowing inquirer he is very close to the great philosophical ancestor who was surely the first Pyrrhonians' model: Socrates.

II. What Inquiry Is:

To assess the dismissive reading, we need to begin by looking more carefully at what inquiry is. I cannot discuss Sextus' conception of inquiry [zêtēsis] in full here -- and of course, as with anything else, the sceptic cannot have his own theory or proprietary definition of it. We must look instead to standard usage and traditional Greek ideas about zêtēsis, which is potentially a massive task; but I believe a few basic points will suffice. The first is that in ancient Greek thought zêtēsis is what I will call a formal practice. By a formal practice I mean one which has a rule-governed structure organized around a constitutive end, which may then be embedded as proximate or instrumental in some larger intentional structure. Tennis is a formal practice: the constitutive end of playing tennis is to win at tennis, and this can only be done by obeying the rules of tennis. Those rules dictate that one wins through actions such as serving aces and returning volleys, not by scoring on a penalty kick or hitting a home run. The important point here is that formal practices have a certain normative autonomy: they maintain their own internal means-ends structure and standards of practice even when the practice itself is only adopted in the interest of a further, external goal. I may well play tennis for the sake of exercise and ultimately for my health. But while I am on the court my actions must be dictated by the constitutive end of tennis, and not directly by those more ultimate concerns. If I start to randomly jump and hop about, or run laps around the court in order to maximize the health benefits, I no longer count as 'playing tennis for the sake of my health'; for I no longer count as playing tennis at all.25

sence, stemming both from his descriptions and his argumentative practices, that Sextus' sceptic is somehow paradoxical and psychologically bizarre. And it is the paper as a whole which attempts to disarm that.

25 As this already suggests, there are ways in which commitment to an external goal sometimes may interfere with a formal practice. It might lead me to opt out of the
This is enough to show that we need to be very careful in framing and considering displacement. It would be absurd to complain that if my 'real' end is health, I cannot genuinely aim to win at tennis, or to assume that the one tends naturally to displace or undermine the other. If there is a real problem here, it must have to do with the possible displacement of the constitutive end of inquiry by epochê -- not by tranquility, which remains unproblematically fixed as a distinct external goal motivating the practice as such. And the objection will need to be framed in much more precise terms, ones which respect the logic of formal practices. (I will return to this at the end of section III.)

So how does zêtêsis, understood as a formal practice, work? One thing is clear and consistent in the Greek tradition, including Sextus' own usage: the constitutive end of zêtêsis is heurêsis, discovery. The association of the two is pervasively embedded in Sextus’ writing, as we have already seen in the programmatic passages of PH I. And in this he is just conforming to the most central features of standard usage. The dyad inquiry-discovery goes back at least as far as Xenophanes B18, the famous "searching [zetountes] in time, they discover [exeuriskousin] better", and Archytas fr. 3:

"For it is necessary that one become a knower (of the things one did not previously know) either by learning [mathonta] from another or discovering [exeuronta] for oneself. Learning is from another and belongs to the other, while discovering is through oneself and belongs to oneself. Without inquiring [zatounta], discovering is rare and hard to get at [aporos], but with inquiry it is easy and straightforward -- but for one who doesn't know how to inquire, it is impossible."

practice altogether; or I might behave in a way which subverts or undermines it; or I might simply perform it badly, 'going through the motions', so that in the limit case we might want to say that I pretend to ϕ instead of actually doing so. These permutations raise some interesting questions about actions and ends, but I hope to show that we need not solve them here: in the sceptic’s case there are no incentives to subversion or malpractice, any more than there are to giving up.
Nothing much changes later on: for the Stoics, according to Cicero, "Inquiry [quaestio] is an impulse aiming at apprehension [adpetitio cognitionis], ending in discovery [inventio]. But no one discovers what is false, nor can something that remains unclear [incerta] be a discovery -- rather it is when something that had been veiled [involuta] (so to speak) has been revealed [aperta] that it is called discovery" (Academica II.26, Brittain trans. rev.).

As this shows, though ‘discovery’ tends to be conceived as the discovery of some object (ti pragma, as at PH I.1; to zêtoumenon passim), this is easily translated into terms of truth and falsity: heurêsis is the discovery of the truth, or a set of truths, about some question. This has been apparent all along, of course, in Sextus' usage: in the programmatic passages I have cited, 'truth' is explicitly specified three times as the object of zêtësis and the content of heurêsis (cf. also M VII.24) 26 It is important to bear in mind that ‘truth’ here, as often in Greek philosophical texts (including the Cicero above), must be taken in a somewhat loaded sense, as regarding the underlying realities or natures of things -- as a matter of how things really are, under the veil. 27 It is because the sceptic's reports of how things appear to him do not purport to tell us what is true in this sense that they cannot be made the subject of inquiry. 28 Thus Sextus specifies that it is truth about non-evident matters which is the end of inquiry:

"For it is when something is true or false, and we don't know which of them is true and which false, that we have a case of the non-evident, and the one who says, 'It is non-

26 Put more precisely, it would seem that inquiry seeks knowledge of some set of truths -- nb the epitasthai at M VII.393. For one thing, it seems possible to inquire into the truth of a proposition you already believe, examining whether it is really rationally supported all things considered; but not one you already know. In any case a certain level of epistemic ambition is built into the concept of zêtësis, so that heurêsis represents a significant cognitive achievement: it is not just a matter of coming to have a belief on some question rather than lacking one.


28 In other words, the sceptic's appearance-reports are not claims about how things really are: they are not even claims about how the sceptic's own experiences really are. So while the content of any sceptical report may be open to investigation, subjecting it to investigation qua sceptical report is impossible -- the very act of investigation involves recasting its status. This is all I take to be involved in the claim that appearance-reports are immune to investigation [azêtëtos] (PH I.22). It does not imply that the sceptic's assent to his appearances cannot be based on reasons. (Contrast Cooper (2012, 291-4, Burnyeat 1983, 40-46, cf. 28, 57.)
evident to me whether the stars are even or odd' is in effect saying that he does not know \(\text{episthasthai}\) whether it is true or whether it is false that the stars are even or that they are odd.... But if everything were evident, there would be no inquiring \(\text{to zétein}\) or wondering about anything; for someone inquires and wonders about something which is non-evident to him, not about the evident" (\(M\) VII.393).

Since all the dogmatists' claims about the natures of things are non-evident in this way, all the sceptic's inquiries are inquiries into non-evident things (cf. the casual collocation \(\text{tôn zétoumenôn adélôn},\) \(PH\)I.201), and into the truth so understood. After the opening chapters of \(PH\), Sextus does not thematize 'truth' as the object of the sceptic's inquiry as much as we might expect. 29 But it is easy enough to see why not: to do so would be to immediately invite the question, and just what do you mean by the truth? And, as always, this is not something the sceptic can have a theory about, though he enjoys refuting the dogmatists’ accounts (\(M\) VIII.1-140). Nonetheless, it seems to me clear that he follows common conceptions in this central respect: Sextus understands inquiry as an attempt to discover the truth on some non-evident question. 30

29 Palmer 2000 argues that this creates an opening for a deflationary reading: the early chapters of \(PH\) I refer only to the inquiries of the 'proto-sceptic', and the mature sceptic's \(\text{zétēsis}\) is no longer an inquiry into the truth. It is only inquiry in a different sense, represented by different Greek constructions, into various topics -- in effect, a critique of the views of others about those topics. Palmer's survey of Sextan constructions involving \(\text{zétēsis}\) is fascinating and instructive (366-8), but does not seem to me show that he envisages a truth-independent kind of \(\text{zétēsis}\). For instance, consider the \(\text{pros}^{+}\)-accusative construction, in effect 'inquire against', used in relation to the dogmatists (\(\text{zétēsis pros tous grammatikous} M\) I.41, \(\text{pros tous dogmatikous} M\) VII.25, \(\text{pros tous phusikous} M\) VIII.481, etc.). It seems to me most natural to understand 'inquire against x' as 'inquire whether x's claims about some object of inquiry y are true (and count as knowledge on the part of x)', by subjecting them to an attempt at refutation (see section III). And this is indeed very often Sextus' -- perfectly reasonable -- strategy for inquiring into the truth about y. I am not really sure what else it could mean to 'examine the various views' (367) of the dogmatists: Palmer leaves the objects and aims of non-truth-oriented inquiry rather underspecified, and it is only so long as we do so, I think, that it looks like a genuine alternative. (Hankinson makes only a bit more of an effort to describe what a deflated, 'mild' sceptical inquiry would be like: namely, 'pottering about' (1995, 300).) Philosophically, there are enormous difficulties with the very idea of non-truth-oriented inquiry.

30 This is what Katja Vogt terms 'the Discovery Premise': "investigation is only genuine investigation if it aims at the discovery of truths" (2012, 119). Vogt takes this to lead directly to the 'Tranquility Charge': since sceptical inquiry aims instead at tranquility, it cannot be the real thing. (A misnomer, as I suggest above: it is displacement by \(\text{epochê}\)
The next question, then, is under what conditions inquiry is possible. We can get some idea of the conditions on inquiry from the most influential text for ancient Greek thinking about *zêtēsis* and *heurēsis*, Plato's *Meno*. [Long, unoriginal discussion of the *Meno* here omitted]\(^{31}\) I take it that the discussion of Meno's paradox gives us roughly the following conditions on inquiry:

1. The inquirer must have some sort of *method*: one which (a) deploys relevant antecedent information (so that the inquirer is not looking for what he 'does not know at all'), (b) tells him 'where to look', and (c) enables him to 'recognise' the object of inquiry (=the right answer to his question) when he meets it.
2. The inquirer must not know so much as to count as knowing the object of his inquiry already, or believe that he does.
3. The inquirer must not know that his inquiry cannot succeed, or believe that he does.

To sum up the story so far: *zêtēsis* is a formal practice; its constitutive end is discovery; and it must be pursued by some determinate intellectual method. That constitutive end imposes two other conditions, namely that the inquirer has not already discovered what he is searching for, and that he does not know or believe that success (that is, discovery as a result of this inquiry, using this method) is impossible. This is meant to be very general, and open to many instantiations: *zêtēsis* is not proprietary to philosophy, so these methods might include not only Socratic dialectic and Aristotelian science but the geometer's method of analysis, the doctor's methods of observation and case studies, and so on.

So to determine whether sceptical inquiry is possible we simply need to ask whether the conditions for engaging in zêtēsis are, or can be, met in the sceptic's case. Two things should immediately be clear: first, the rather blurry psychological notions of hope, sincerity, openmindedness, and the like which were at work in motivating the dismissive reading are not really to the point. The requirements for engaging in inquiry are strictly cognitive, not a matter of the right esprit. And second, now that these conditions have been put in suitably precise terms, it seems clear that the sceptic does meet them. The sceptic obviously meets condition (2): that is, he does not already know or believe that he knows the truth about the questions he investigates. In fact, Sextus argues reasonably enough that it is the dogmatist who is precluded from investigation, invoking condition (2):

"But consider whether, as things are, it is not actually the Dogmatists who are precluded from inquiry [zêtēseōs]. For it is not those who agree that they are ignorant of how objects are in their nature who are inconsistent in still inquiring about them, but those who think they know them accurately. For the inquiry is already at its conclusion for the latter, as they suppose, whereas for the former, the reason why any inquiry is undertaken -- that is, the idea that they have not found [heurêkasín] the answer -- is fully present" (PH II.11).

And as for (3), Sextus certainly does not know or believe that success in his inquiry is impossible. On reflection, it should be obvious that the sceptic cannot think this. He has, after all, investigated induction, and found it to be as unreliable and inconclusive, as dubious in its claims, as every other method of argument (PH II.204; note that it rates only a paragraph, though one might think that Sextus' lengthy critique of the 'indicative sign' counts as a critique of what we would call induction as well). So he is the last

32 I am taking it that 'arguments of equal strength' are a null result rather than a form of successful 'discovery'. Again, discovery is understood to be discovery of the truth regarding the (non-evident) natures of things -- the answer to some ti esti question, or to a philosophical puzzle of the form 'P or ~P?'. The sceptic’s finding is always that there are arguments sufficient to make a determination between P and ~P impossible, and this goes a fortiori for choosing between the schools’ various candidate answers to ti esti questions.
person to infer anything about the future from his experiences so far. And in discussing 'the sceptical phrases', Sextus repeatedly points out that any global-looking generalizations on his part are to be translated into claims restricted to his own findings so far.

This disposes of at least two of the worries motivating the dismissive reading. First, that the sceptic's Modes might strike us as too effective ever to fail is neither here nor there. The Modes are just schemata for arguments, to be applied in successive dialectical contexts (I will say more about this in III), and the sceptic is the last person to certify a priori their infallibility. Second, and in regard to psychological plausibility, whether he thinks heurêsis is a likely result of his efforts is another question -- and an irrelevant one. For a spirit of optimism is not one of the preconditions for engaging in a formal practice. Nothing in the logic of agency and intention precludes my playing tennis with Roger Federer.

The irrelevance of the sceptic's hopes and dreams points to a general feature of Sextus' account which seems to me worth emphasising. His account of the sceptic is not intended as a full psychological portrait of any particular sceptic, still less of every possible one. How could it be? Rather, PH I is a job description. Like the Critique of Practical Reason, it gives the blueprint for a certain kind of rationality, while remaining deliberately neutral on any number of empirical psychological questions. For all Sextus says, sceptics may come in all shapes and sizes, emotionally and psychologically speaking. One might be naive and optimistic about someday hitting upon an unrefutable account of the natures of things, accepting skepticism only as a pis aller; another might be disdainful of dogmatic hopes to the point of contempt. Some sceptics might have a missionary debunking zeal, others might continue to inquire only as minimally necessary for the upkeep of their tranquility. For that matter, perhaps the perfect sceptic, the unwavering instantiation of all his specifications, has never existed at all: how would Sextus know?

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33 Cf. Machuca 2013, 222.
34 Cf. Ribeiro for Sextus' version of scepticism as 'aspirational'.
III. The Sceptic’s Method of Inquiry

So far I have discussed zêtēsis only at a rather high level of abstraction. But as per condition (1), zêtēsis must be instantiated by some determinate intellectual method appropriate to the object sought. The sceptic's methods are complex, sophisticated, and, I would say, still ill-understood, even though they are explained in PH I and exhibited throughout Sextus' work. I cannot give even a general account of them here, but will just bring out two points relevant to his claim to inquire.

The first is that the sceptic's investigation is inherently dialectical and piecemeal.35 His scepticism is defined by an ability: like the sophist Protagoras (who I take to be the great unacknowledged influence on sceptical thought),36 he is able to produce opposed arguments on any question (PH I.8-10, 31-35; cf. DL IX.51). The sceptic applies this skill as he inquires into anything and everything, from the principles of grammar, to the scientific pretensions of astrologers, to the foundations of epistemology, to whether motion exists, to the nature of the good. And he does so with no nisus towards simplification or selectivity in his own argumentation. One could imagine a kind of sceptic who, satisfied with his case against the criterion, and preening himself on the Five Modes, would call it a day and find another line of work. But Sextus is manifestly not that kind of sceptic. Such global lines of argument are used to help with his specific inquiries, not to obviate them. (So the overeffectiveness charge also seems to me to

35 It is no objection to this that the sceptic is said to gain tranquility by suspending judgement 'about everything' [peri pantôn] (PH I.31, 205, M XI.144) (contra Grigic 2012, 662, 664). In explaining the sceptical phônai, Sextus repeatedly insists that when the sceptic refers to panta, 'everything', this is to be understood merely in piecemeal and provisional terms, as 'everything which I have investigated' so far (PH I.198, 200, 202-3). (It is hard to see how it could be otherwise without attributing to the sceptic a comprehensive theory of What There Is.) In discussing Arcesilaus (PH I.232-3) Sextus refers intriguingly to tas kata meros epochas, suggesting that the sceptic can distinguish between general and local suspensions. But it is unclear whether we are to contrast this with suspending peri pantôn, and the distinction is not put to work elsewhere.

36 I mean here the Protagoras of DL IX.50-56, inventor of argument on both sides of the question -- not the construct of Plato's Theaetetus, whom Sextus rightly sets aside as a dogmatist at PH I.216-9. Alas Sextus himself seems to know nothing of the former.
misunderstand how the sceptic deploys his modes of argument.) In his investigations, the Sextan sceptic uses whatever strategies are available to him at the time and appropriate to the topic, recognising that new considerations might later necessitate a new round of argument. No investigation is ever closed for good: when he suspends judgement, his report to that effect is only ever first-personal and provisional, a record of 'how things appear' to him in light of the investigation so far (PH I.33, 200-1). 37

So scepticism evolves over time, and involves subjecting a revolving cast of propositions to the dialectical spotlight; and different propositions will be treated differently in the context of different inquiries. Here it is relevant that any method of investigation requires the deployment of antecedent 'knowledge' in the search (condition (1(a)). This means only that the inquirer must deploy some antecedent information for the purposes of any inquiry -- there is no such thing as inquiring into what one does not know at all -- and attempt to leverage it in his investigations. In relation to Sextus, let us just say that every inquiry into the truth of P must take as given for present purposes a certain set of propositions Q, R, S -- that is, that it must bracket off any inquiry into the reasons for accepting those propositions, and likewise for suspending judgement about them. 38 For to say 'I suspend judgement as to whether P or ~P' is to say inter alia that neither P nor ~P has any epistemic force for me -- that neither can contribute as a persuasive consideration in argument for, as grounds for belief or disbelief in, any other proposition.

37 Thus Barnes is doubly wrong in saying that the sceptic's twin designations of 'investigative' and 'suspensive' "are badly matched. For whereas the name 'investigative' recalls the observation that the sceptic's researches are never over, the suspension of judgement which explains the name 'suspensive' comes about 'after the investigation', and 'after the investigation' does not mean 'after a certain amount of investigating has been done' but 'after the investigation is over' " ('Sextan Scepticism', 327). No investigation is ever over in the way required for Barnes' contrast here, as Sextus repeatedly tells us; and anyway investigation-suspension is a local cycle to be repeated indefinitely, not a once-and-for-all matter. It is as if one were to puzzle over how the same person could be both a tennis player and a tennis champion.

38 I will try to remain neutral here as to what sceptical 'taking as given' involves. The obvious questions here are: (1) does the sceptic in the course of and for the purposes of the inquiry assent to the propositions which he takes as given? (2) does that assent count as constitutive of belief? and (3) if the answers to (1) and (2) are no, how do these propositions contribute to the sceptic's own achievement of epoché on the subject of his inquiry? These questions have of course been the subject of endless scholarly diaphônia.
(If I have no reason to believe that P is true, P cannot serve in turn as my reason for
believing or disbelieving that Q.) For any proposition to be subjected to investigation
through the sceptical method of argument pro and con, some other propositions must be
taken as given for the purposes of constructing those arguments -- that is, they must for
the time being not be subjected to inquiry or doubt themselves, or made the object of
suspension. 39 An obvious instance of this is the way in which Sextus will begin major
investigations by establishing what is in a general way meant by the term in question (e.g.,
the 'good' in M XI). This is not a proposition about the way things really are, and Q, R,
and S need not fall into that category; it still counts as an epistemic 'given' in the relevant,
very weak sense that it would be needed as a premise in a fully explicit formulation of
Sextus' subsequent arguments. Or think for instance of the most famous weapons in the
sceptical armory, the ten modes of Aenesidemus. 40 The first mode is based on the way
that the same things appear differently to different animals (PH I.40-78), and Sextus
supports this principle with an overwhelming, almost fantastical amount of empirical
elaboration.41 For instance:

39 This is often taken as a point in favour of the other-directed reading: the sceptic need
only ever 'assert' the empirical claims in the sense of proposing that the dogmatist should
accept them given his own epistemic standards, without in any way doing so himself. The
difficulty with this is that the sceptic himself models the epochê which he invites the
dogmatist to share on any given occasion: the other-directed reading leaves it mysterious
how he himself achieves it.
40 On the Ten Modes, see Morison 2011. Morison rightly brings out that the Modes are a
machine for generating opposed arguments, in the manner of Aristotelian (or, I would say,
Protagorean) topoi. But I am unconvinced that the sceptic's work is done once opposed
arguments have been juxtaposed (289), or that it is impermissible for him to say
something along the lines of 'you have no good reason for...' (290). However, I intend to
remain neutral here vis a vis the 'orthodox interpretation' and Morison's alternative: the
presentation above is just chosen for convenience.
41 In a fuller treatment this would also be the place to discuss the chatty, discursive,
eminently sensible Sextus of M I-VI, who argues against various forms of pseudoscience
on the basis of what for the most part look like perfectly ordinary epistemic commitments.
What the Sextus of M I-VI has in common with the Sextus of PH I is an ongoing
commitment to refutative investigation, and anti-dogmatism loosely speaking; and a
readiness to suspend judgement on any question -- including whether there can be such a
thing as a techné at all -- whenever it is framed as a dogmatic thesis about the non-
“When we press one of our eyes from the side, the forms and shapes and sizes of the objects we see appear elongated and narrow. It is likely, then, that those animals (such as goats, cats and the like) which have slanting and elongated pupils, should view existing objects differently and not in the same way as animals with round pupils suppose them to be.” (PH I.62)

The whole account of the Mode is festooned with 'likely' empirical details like this; their upshot is that we have no rational, non-partisan basis for trusting our own perceptions as reliable, faced with the (presumably) conflicting perceptions of other animals.

But now consider how the Modes -- which are not exactly arguments themselves, but templates or tropes of argument, a premium sceptical brand of dialectical *topoi* -- are to be deployed. The sceptic is confronted with some dogmatic claim -- say a claim to perceptual knowledge put forward by a Stoic, who claims to have a kataleptic impression to the effect that some object is square, and on that basis to know that the object *is* square. The sceptic offers a counterargument, giving grounds for *epochê*. To deploy the first mode, he will say something like: 'But a goat would say that this object is oblong, not square… [insert elaborate sub-argument for this claim given above, from the shape of a goat’s pupils]; and you have no valid, unbiased reason for considering your own perceptions more reliable than the goat’s; therefore you have no basis for making this claim to knowledge based on your own perception’. For all this to work, the sceptic must provisionally assert as true the whole array of allegedly empirical propositions that Sextus exhibits in discussing the first mode. If we ask how the sceptic can *know* any of these things about goats' eyes, the answer, of course, is that he doesn't: he just takes them as given, provisionally and without prejudice, for the purposes of the argument at hand. 42 Tomorrow he will be happy to subject these claims to just the same sort of undermining investigation for which they are currently being deployed as evidence. After all, the claim that goats’ pupils are oval is itself *exactly the sort of empirical claim about shape that the

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42 Everything here is intended to be compatible with (but independent of) the account of sceptical cognition given in Barney (1992).
first mode is used to attack. Such claims may be taken as given for the purposes of present argument; but their credentials will be instantly revoked as soon as the searchlight turns to them.

So the fact that we cannot subject all our commitments to radical doubt at once, or motivate doubt about some of them without relying on others, suits the Pyrrhonian sceptic perfectly well. He is happy to allow that any proposition which he takes as given in one of his arguments can in turn be made the object of zêteσis, and, ultimately, suspension of judgement. This provisional, dialectical character is one of the things signalled in the characteristic sceptical operator 'it appears to me', tacitly appended to every assertion.

For present purposes, the important point is what this tells us about the character of the sceptic's tranquility. If the sceptic's inquiry is local, piecemeal and provisional, so is the

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43 This is perhaps one reason the modes are so massively overengineered, with many different grounds and lines of reasoning provided under each heading. This allows the sceptic to pick and choose on any given occasion: he will never have to use ‘goats’ pupils are oval’ in order to show that we have no reason to believe that goats’ pupils are oval.

44 The most shocking example of this dialectical mobility is probably M XI.76. Sextus is excluding the possibility that the correct account of the good might be gained through enargeia, 'plain evidence' (Bett). He says, "But there is no way it could be through plain experience. For it is in the nature of everything which strikes us through plain experience to be grasped in a common and harmonious way by those who have their apprehensions [antilêpseis] unimpaired, as can be observed in the case of nearly all appearances [phainomena]. But the same thing is not called good concordantly by everyone...". Granted, Sextus' terminology here does not refer directly and unambiguously to sense experience, so that this is not exactly a claim that sense experience is rarely subject to disagreement. But enargeia is a term traditionally associated with sense-perception (see Bett's note (f), (2000) 99), and the "as can be observed in the case of nearly all appearances [phainomena]" (hôs paron idein epi pantôn schedon tôn phainomenôn) indicates that we are meant to see a reference here to some very familiar situation -- he is not just stipulating what the concept of enargeia means. This could hardly be anything else than the -- alleged -- consensus of observers with 'unimpaired' perceptions. So much for the Ten Modes, then! But on Sextus' considered, post-zetetic view, we have no experience of anything as enargê at all: as Brunschwig says, "the class of enargê is empty, de facto if not de jure" (240). It is just that for the purposes of the present argument, the (comparatively) undisputed character of sense experience can be taken as given.
suspension of judgement it evokes; and so too is the tranquility which ensues. Sextus is in fact clear that *epochê* is indexed to both a time and a topic: his very first reference to it is as "a *pathos* which arises concerning the thing investigated after inquiry" (*PH* I.7). (The term *pathos* would be a very odd choice for a permanent or generalized condition.) Moreover, he explains, in saying 'I suspend judgement', "we state what appears to us concerning them [the matters in question] at the time they come to our attention" (*PH* I.196, my emphasis).45 The only plausible candidates for a question large-scale enough that *epochê* about it might have some sort of permanent, globalized effect would be the nature of the good and, perhaps, of the criterion. But Sextus does not actually specify either of these as the object of the proto-sceptic's inquiry: on the contrary, he only refers lightly and vaguely to a puzzlement about the 'anomaly in things' as the proto-sceptic's starting-point (*PH* I.12). *Anômalia* seems to take many forms, including everyday perceptual disagreements; there is no reason to suppose it ever goes away.46 It is natural for us to imagine the proto-sceptic having his epiphany after striving and failing to find a defensible theory on the Big Questions: but Sextus does not say this. Instead, his sceptic is *any* philosopher who has come to realise that the cycle *tarachê*-inquiry-*epochê*-ataraxia* can be replicated indefinitely.

If this is on the right track, then worries about completion are misguided. For *ataraxia* is *not* a 'once and for all' business, supervening as a generalized permanent state on the failure of One Big Inquiry. Rather, the sceptic's *ataraxia*, like the more familiar sorts of tranquility we associate with meditation and other spiritual exercises, has to be rewon and sustained by mindful practice every day.

My second point about the sceptic’s methods is that, though his strategies of argument are rich and diverse, they are all essentially critical and refutative. Think again of the Modes: these are templates for arguments *against* any claim to perceptual knowledge (in an extremely broad sense of 'perceptual'). When the sceptic considers more complex

45 Cf. "for the time being" (*PH* I.201), and, of non-assertion: "making clear that we are *now... experiencing* [peponthamen] this in the case of *these* objects of investigation" (*PH* I.193).

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questions, such as whether astrology passes muster as a science, the answer is always no; and when he investigates dogmatic accounts of the good, say, or the criterion, every one turns out to be unacceptable. The sceptic is a kind of Official Opposition to the ruling Dogmatic Party in philosophy: his method and mission, at the highest level of generality, is simply the ongoing refutation of knowledge claims.\textsuperscript{47} Whenever the dogmatist claims that P, the sceptic is there with an argument \textit{contra}, one of sufficient strength to make suspension of judgement rationally warranted. (This is why, as the modes bring out (and as Sextus elsewhere explicitly warns, e.g. \textit{M} VII.443), the sceptic is often concerned only to provide one side of the argument, arrayed against a standard type of dogmatic claim (and whatever might ground it) on the other side.) This oppositional character dovetails with the piecemeal nature of the sceptic's methods. It is not the sceptic's job to refute every knowledge claim all at once and forever, but only to investigate the dogmatists' claims as he encounters them.

The sceptic's methods are thus unified by being different kinds of strategies of refutation. Of course we usually think of 'refutation' as attempting to show that the target proposition is to be rejected as false, and Sextus typically does not aspire to that. Instead, the canonical sceptical result is equal strength \textit{[isostheneia]} on the part of the two sides of the argument, and in its train a withholding or suspension of judgement \textit{[epochê]}. But the only significance of this distinction is to prevent us from falsely inferring from his rejection of P that the sceptic is committed to endorsement of \textit{~P}. Rather, the sceptic's suspension is a state in which \textit{neither} P nor \textit{~P} seems adequately grounded: suspension is privileged by the sceptic over talk of refutation or rejection only because it is, so to speak, the \textit{maximally} negative, null result which an inquiry can have. In terms of Stoic epistemology, on which Sextus is of course heavily parasitic, the sceptic's aim is always to block assent to any impression -- and that in such a way as to avoid entailing assent to a contradictory one. Thus as Sextus says, to suspend judgement is the same thing as withholding assent (\textit{M} VII.157). The product of a \textit{complete} sceptical \textit{zêtēsis} is thus an evenhanded, doublesided refutation of both P and \textit{~P} -- a close descendant, though I cannot argue the case here, of sophistic and specifically Protagorean \textit{antilogikê}. (I will

\textsuperscript{47} I take it that this is the great inheritance of the Pyrrhonian from the Academic skeptic.
continue to use 'refute P' in this sense of 'rationally warrant the withholding of assent to P'.

Sceptical argument is thus what we may call a *negative method*, in relation to the formal practice of inquiry. That is, it is only when the method fails that the formal practice attains its end. But of course we need to be careful to avoid misunderstandings here: it is not that the end is attained when the method ‘fails’ in the sense of being poorly executed or giving no result at all. Rather, the method has the form: *Attempt with maximal ruthlessness to refute both P and ~P*; so it 'succeeds' whenever that result is reached and ‘fails’ whenever it is not, i.e. whenever, *mirabile dictu*, some dogmatic claim turns out to withstand the sceptic’s bid to refute it.

We're now in a position to see more clearly how the sceptic pursues genuine inquiry. On the picture I have sketched, to understand the sceptic's project we need to carefully distinguish three levels of intention and agency, each with its own success conditions. In the middle is the formal practice of inquiry with its constitutive end: discovery of the truth. The sceptic succeeds in this practice whenever he discovers the truth about the natures of things (i.e., as it turns out, never). Formally subordinated to this practice is the method by which the sceptic pursues it: the piecemeal doublesided refutation of dogmatic knowledge claims. Standing above and beyond the practice is the sceptic’s external project of finding tranquility, for the sake of which he undertakes the practice in the first place. None of these levels has any tendency to displace the others; none implies that the others can only be in bad faith. There is a superficial paradox involved in any negative method, in that it is when the method 'fails' that the practice succeeds. But this paradox is easily disarmed: in fact negative methods are very familiar, particularly in the case of epistemically oriented practices. Think of the Popperian scientist who tries to identify the true theory through attempts to falsify her preferred candidate, or the philosopher who searches for a counterexample to her theory, or the government economist who only certifies a bank as healthy if it passes the most severe stress test she can devise.
Once the tripartite structure of negative method, formal practice and external goal is articulated with due care, I take it that displacement disappears as a worry about the logical possibility or coherence of the sceptic's enterprise. But there is a more telling version of the problem lurking in the vicinity. Strictly speaking, epochê is neither a rival end to discovery nor the aimed-at result of the sceptic's method, but a by-product of that result. (The result of the method strictly speaking is just the doublesided refutation.) The mature sceptic is thus someone who has discovered an anomalous causal byway within the structure of his project: success in his method (i.e. failure in his practice) has a side-effect which turns out to lead directly to his goal.

It is important to be clear about what does and does not follow from this. Again, there is no displacement: this causal byway does not give the sceptic any reason for dropping his practice of inquiry. After all, it's precisely as the method of that practice that the sceptic's refutations have worked their magic; and he has no reason to suppose that the method would be more effective if detached from the practice, even if such a thing should be possible.48 To the dismissive interpreter who charges bad faith, Sextus can point out that the inquiry which led him to tranquility in the first place was, uncontroversially, real inquiry; why would it be in his interest to trade it for a fake? (Displacement tends to gain plausibility from confusion with completion, even though the two actually exclude each other: once we fully accept that the sceptic's attainment of epochê is a local, cyclical, piecemeal business, there is no obvious reason for the mature sceptic to change the route by which he gets there.)49

48 I am not at all sure that it is possible: refutation seems to me implicitly truth-oriented in such a way that as a method it just is a method of inquiry (cf. Burnyeat 1983). Of course, we can postulate a kind of argument which aims only at the appearance of refutation, achieved in some non-truth-oriented way. But, again, why should we attribute such a thing to the sceptic? Deflationary readings of sceptical inquiry are only attractive if we take the real thing to be barred to him; I hope to have shown that it is not.

49 Thus Cooper (2012) rightly insists that the sceptic's continuing investigation must not be a merely 'formalistic': "they must not keep on investigating just as a charade engaged in so as to keep, or pretend to keep, an open mind... the reason they keep investigating is a quite positive one. It is because they remain positively committed to follow reason as the true authority (that seems to them the thing to do), if only it can (seem to) prove itself to be capable of giving authoritative instructions for what to believe and how to live."
Still, the discovery of the causal byway does open up a new possibility for the sceptic; and here we can locate, at last, the rather small grain of truth in the displacement worry. This is that the sceptic's discovery of the causal byway might be thought to make the practice of inquiry otiose. It is as a method that his refutative activity has led to tranquility; but why does it have to be a method of anything?

As a parallel, think of a value investor schooled in the ways of Graham-Dodd analysis and forensic accounting. Her overarching external goal is to get rich off the stock market; her formal practice is value investing, the constitutive end of which is to select stocks in promising undervalued companies. Applying her methods of careful, detailed scrutiny of financial statements, she finds that every publicly traded US corporation she examines is in fact overpriced, so that her end is never attained. But she also finds she can use this depressing information to become a successful short seller -- thereby getting rich off the stock market.

It is here at last, I think, that 'psychology' does finally become important for understanding the sceptic. For we can imagine two such investors diagnosing their situation in very different ways. One might continue to consider herself a value investor, still looking for underpriced companies and prepared at any moment to invest in any she finds.\(^50\) The other might continue to act in exactly the same way while no longer thinking of herself as anything but a short-seller. So long as the critical methods of the two are identical, the distinction seems to boil down to a matter of self-conception. The residual question, then, is whether the availability of a new, alternative self-conception is in and of itself a problem for the sceptic, and grounds for the dismissive reading. And clearly it is not. For Sextus clearly, explicitly, and consistently chooses the first, unchanged self-conception on behalf of his sceptic -- not only in his pervasive avowal of inquiry, but in

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\(^{50}\) Cf. Cooper's 'hopeful' sceptics (2012, 302).
distancing himself from Timon and Aenesidemus, who do adopt epochê as their end. 51
And nothing we have seen bars him from doing so.

IV. Socrates and the Sceptic:

To help make vivid that there is nothing incoherent about pursuing inquiry with perpetual failure in view, it may help to turn to a more familiar case. The sceptic's disclaimer of the knowledge which would preclude inquiry should help us to see that there is something deeply Socratic about sceptical inquiry. 52 In fact there is a more general ur-condition for sceptical inquiry: quite generally, the sceptic does not think that he knows what he does not know. (That he does not believe that he knows his inquiry to be impossible and that he does not believe he already knows its object are both instantiations of this.) This point is very marked in Photius' introduction to his summary of the Pyrrhonian Discourses, a book by the first Pyrrhonist, Aenesidemus:

"... neither the Pyrrhonists nor the others know the truth in things; but the philosophers of other persuasions, as well as being ignorant in general, and wearing themselves out uselessly and expending themselves in ceaseless torments, are also ignorant of the very fact that they have cognition of none of the things of which they think that they have gained cognition. But he who philosophizes after the fashion of Pyrrho is happy not only in general but also, and especially, in the wisdom of knowing that he has firm cognition of nothing." (Bibliotheca 169b818ff. =Long and Sedley 71C)

This disavowal of knowledge, and with it the avowal of a certain important self-knowledge, is of course strongly reminiscent of Socrates' self-depictions in the Apology.

52 On the general resemblance, see Bett (2005), Vogt (2012), and Fine: "both argue that the fact that others have false pretensions to knowledge is an impediment to their incentive, or ability, to inquire; and both take themselves to be free of such false pretensions, and so in a better position to inquire than others are" (2014, 365) Cf. also M. Frede (1984, 129-30). To be clear, I am here discussing a shared pattern of inquiry, not making any assertion about how close Socrates himself comes to being a sceptic.
In response to the oracle, Socrates emphasises this awareness of his lack of knowledge: "I was conscious of knowing practically nothing" (22c9-d1), as he says. And like the sceptic, Socrates considers himself better off for it (22e).

Socrates’ disavowal of knowledge is the necessary complement to his practice of investigation. And the centrality of zêtësis to the sceptic’s identity gives him a second deep kinship with Socrates, for whom it is likewise a defining practice, indeed a credo and a way of life. I now want to suggest that the sceptic’s inquiry is even more Socratic than it at first appears, and that the parallel can help us to make sense of the sceptic's commitment to inquiry – as well as the story of Apelles.

Consider the story of Socrates and the Delphic oracle, told by Plato in the Apology. Socrates has been informed of Chaerophon’s question to the oracle, 'Who is wisest?', and of its answer that there is no one wiser than Socrates himself.

"When I heard of this reply I asked myself: 'Whatever does the god mean? What is his riddle? I am very conscious that I am not wise at all; what then does he mean by saying that I am the wisest? For surely he does not lie; it is not lawful for him to do so.' For a long time I was at a loss as to his meaning; then I very reluctantly turned to some such investigation as this: I went to one of those reputed wise, thinking that there, if anywhere, I could refute the oracles and say to it: 'This man is wiser than I, but you said I was.' Then, when I examined this man... my experience was something like this: I thought that he appeared wise to many people and especially to himself, but he was not. I then tried to show him that he thought himself wise, but that he was not.... So I withdrew and thought to myself: 'I am wiser than this man; it is likely that neither of us knows anything worthwhile, but he thinks he knows something when he does not, whereas when I do not know, neither do I think I know; so I am likely to be wiser than he to this small extent, that I do not think I know what I do not know'."

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Eventually the penny drops, and Socrates arrives at a new understanding of what the oracle must have meant:

"What is probable, gentlemen, is that in fact the god is wise and that his oracular response meant that human wisdom is worth little or nothing, and that when he says this man, Socrates, he is using my name as an example, as if he said: 'This man among you, mortals, is wisest who, like Socrates, understands that his wisdom is worthless'. So even now I continue this investigation as the god bade me -- and I go around seeking out anyone, citizen or stranger, whom I think wise. Then if I do not think he is, I come to the assistance of the god and show him that he is not wise.” (23a-b, trans. Grube-Reeve)

Socrates' starting point is with a disturbing puzzle, an *aporia* (21b7): what the oracle says seems clearly wrong, but as a divine utterance it *must* be right. To solve the puzzle Socrates undertakes a mission of inquiry. He puts the oracle to the test by attempting to find a wise man. As with the sceptic, his method is a kind of critical stress-testing through attempted refutation. If we take his inquiry into the oracle as a kind of formal practice, the parallel to the sceptic is very close indeed, for the method stands in a negative relation to the end of the practice. That is, what Socrates undertakes is to refute the oracle by attempting to refute the putative wise men he encounters: it is only if he fails in the latter that he will succeed in the former. As it turns out, no candidate is able to pass: his *zêtēsis* is a failure, with no positive result. The key turning-point in the narrative comes with the moment of reversal when this failure is recognised and accepted. He has failed to discover a wise man -- but wait, that means that he *is* the wise man, just as the god had said. He now *sees how* the god could have been right all along. Not only that, he is able to see *why* the god spoke as he did -- namely, to provoke him to just the mission of examination he has been carrying out. So in this deeper respect, his mission has been a success after all, as a kind of divine service.

This new understanding vindicates Socrates' practice of *zêtēsis* and gives it new meaning. It is a crucial feature of the story that Socrates continues his mission: as he explicitly says above, “even now I continue this investigation”. He continues to put to the test any
claimants to wisdom he encounters: he never gives up. Of course, as with the sceptic, Socrates' claim to inquiry has often (though not as often) provoked a hostile, dismissive response. Critics ancient and modern, including some in the Platonic dialogues themselves, have denied that his inquiry is the real thing, accusing him of glorying in refutation for its own sake and as an exercise in the will to power. Or, more charitably (but once again like the sceptic), Socrates' inquiries are sometimes diagnosed as strictly other-directed. His point in interrogating Euthyphro, for instance, is simply to reveal to Euthyphro the depth of his own ignorance, thus prompting him to human wisdom and humility. That this philanthropic exercise never actually seems to work is perhaps a bit of a problem for this reading; but as with the sceptic, it is supposed to explain why Socrates would go on inquiring, or pseudo-inquiring, even after he himself has nothing to gain from it.

The other-directed reading is implausible in that, like the sceptic, Socrates is clearly also committed to self-examination and inquiry on his own behalf (Apology 38a, Crito passim); and there is no clear dividing line where the one project begins and the other ends. Nor is there any conflict between accepting that his project has a therapeutic dimension, and holding that it is still genuine inquiry: indeed Socrates might well insist that it can only have the former by being the latter. Nor does the negative character of Socrates’ method undermine its claim to be genuine inquiry. The attempt to refute a claim is, after all, an excellent strategy for discovering precisely what it means, and assessing it for truth. We can see this from the way Socrates speaks of his initial inquiry as an attempt to 'refute' the oracle (21c1): there is never any question that the god might be wrong, but there is no better way to clarify what his puzzling utterance might mean.

The sceptic's inquiry is squarely Socratic in its form, end and results. He could sum up his findings by saying, as Socrates does, that none of the claimants to wisdom he has examined know what they purport to; and that, as a result, he has so far failed to discover the truth about the natures of things. Like Socrates, he has come to recognise and accept this failure; and like Socrates, he has at that point come to a surprising realization. In fact in a general way it is the same realization, namely that here failure turns out to be success.
This *pathos* of reversal brings with it a new understanding of his project, one which like Socrates’ gives it a new *raison d’etre* -- including a philanthropic mission to others.\(^5^4\)

V. Conclusions: Sextus, Socrates, and Apelles:

All these stories are versions -- in the case of Apelles, a comic, miniaturized version -- of the mythic hero's quest. The pattern goes back to Gilgamesh: troubled in spirit, the great King of Uruk sets out on a search for immortality, but repeatedly fails. He acknowledges that failure by returning home, and writing the story of his quest -- thereby gaining immortality after all.\(^5^5\) Failure is converted to success by a heroic act of acceptance and acknowledgement, in which the object of the quest is discovered after all. Socrates fails to find a wise man; in accepting this failure he also comes to recognise that he *is* the wise man, and so finds him. In doing so he also recognises that wisdom is something different -- something smaller and more modest -- than he might have hoped. The sceptic accepts his failure to find any theory which can withstand his investigative attack. At that point, 'as a shadow follows a body', he finds in this acceptance the relaxation from anxiety that he had earlier assumed would require discovery and dogmatic commitment. Neither his end (tranquility), nor the means to it (inquiry) is given up; but his understanding of how the one is fitted to the other gets reversed. For he sees it is not successful inquiry, terminating in discovery, which provides tranquility, but the kind which fails. And that is

\(^5^4\) Given the powerful family resemblance, we have to wonder why Socrates is not more of a philosophical hero for the Pyrrhonians. It seems relevant that the *Academic* sceptics went in so strenuously for the appropriation of famous predecessors, Socrates among them: Sextus’ indifference to Socrates marks a decision not to play at that game. The only person the Pyrrhonian *does* claim affiliation with is Pyrrho, who wrote nothing, taught nobody, and about whom Sextus claims no real information. To present Pyrrho as your great ancestor and school-founder is to treat philosophical genealogy as a joke, and I take it that's the point. Genealogy is the first step towards constructing arguments from authority, and true sceptics can have no use for any such thing: this is yet another respect in which they really *are* Socratic.

\(^5^5\) Not the kind he wanted, of course: as Woody Allen said, "I don't want to achieve immortality through my work; I want to achieve it through not dying". But then the object of investigation is always underspecified; and discovery is often surprising, and a bit disappointing.
not a reason to give it up, or to substitute a fake; it's a new and better reason to practise the real thing.

Apelles is another story of successful failure. What makes him seem anomalous is the dramatic moment in which he throws the sponge: this is indeed a moment of giving up which has no counterpart in Sextus or Socrates. But for all its drama, this is not the step of the story that matters. (After all, imagine a version of the story in which he throws the sponge but never looks, and his assistant tosses the canvas in the garbage -- that would not illustrate any interesting point about scepticism, or anything else.) What makes Apelles importantly like the sceptic is rather the pathos of reversal that follows: the moment in which he looks back and recognises his inadvertent success. The point of his moment of 'giving up' is to set the stage for this reversal. It also serves to hint at a thought which Sextus has no acceptable way of claiming explicitly: that it is only through such a causal byway that tranquility can be attained. Apelles' giving up is significant because it establishes that he -- the cleverest painter of all time -- first tried everything to attain his goal directly; and none of those methods worked.

Sextus' mention of 'chance' and his image of the shadow are designed to reinforce this suggestion. For the shadow is an image of necessary causal indirection. You cannot act on a shadow directly: you can only move or change it, or create it in the first instance, by moving the body it follows. So too, Sextus hereby suggests, with tranquility: it can only be reached by working on something else. The route from inquiry to tranquility, for all its reliability, is still 'by chance' [tuchikōs] in the same (surprisingly echt-Aristotelian) respect: the result the sceptic wanted is produced by his going after something else. As far as the sceptic knows, this is the only way tranquility is to be attained: by adopting the end of inquiry as your own, and learning to fail at it over and over again.

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56 Cf. Physics II.4-5.
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