

Can Pyrrhonists Act Normally?

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Abstract

Pyrrhonism is the view that we should suspend all our beliefs in order to be rational and reach peace of mind. One of the main objections against this view is that it makes action impossible. One cannot suspend all beliefs and act normally at once. Yet, the question is: What is it about actions that they require beliefs? This issue has hardly been clarified in the literature. This is a bad situation, for if the objection fails and it turns out that the Pyrrhonists found a way to secure peace of mind, we better know the details. In the following I take up this systematic query, and show how the objection can be made precise. Despite Sextus Empiricus' ingenious appearance/reality distinction, which is to insure Pyrrhonism in this, I eventually argue that a life by appearances is quite unlike a normal life.

Keywords: Pyrrhonism, scepticism, action, belief, intention, appearance

[*Philosophical Explorations* 15: 277-89, 2012]

1. The unmotivated charge

Pyrrhonism, i.e. a main branch of ancient scepticism, can briefly be characterized as a four-fold view consisting of: investigation, equipollence, suspension, tranquillity. Investigation is its starting point: Pyrrhonists search for the truth. Their strategy is equipollence, i.e. to balance all pros and cons for a certain standpoint. The third step is suspension: Pyrrhonists do not take up any standpoint. Importantly, suspension of belief does not entail suspension of investigation. Pyrrhonists never stop investigating the pros and cons for a certain standpoint. Finally, suspension is to entail tranquillity (peace of mind, imperturbability).

* Thanks to: the participants of the Ghent work-in-progress seminar, Bert Leuridan, Katinka Quintelier and two referees of the journal. The author is a PhD fellow of the Research Foundation Flanders at Ghent University. Email: Jan.Wieland@UGent.be.

Every step between these elements has been debated in the literature. Are their connections causal, normative, or yet something else? For example, tranquillity might either be an accidental, causal effect of suspension (just like shadows are, to use Sextus' metaphor) or its direct, intended goal. By contrast, the connection between equipollence and suspension is presumably normative. Namely: if the pros and cons balance out (and Pyrrhonists have several argument strategies to this effect), then, if one is to be rational, one must suspend.

It is important to be aware of such qualifications. Yet for now this broad picture should suffice. Our special concern in the following will be the third aspect: suspension. Pyrrhonists do not suspend their beliefs on a selected number of topics, they suspend globally. That is, they are said to have no single belief at all (some qualifications aside that will be discussed in due course). Opponents of Pyrrhonism typically raise two sorts of complaints about this third aspect. First, they claim that it is impossible to have no beliefs. For example, it may be incoherent (as Pyrrhonists would at least have the belief that they should have no beliefs), or it may be unnatural (we would have beliefs by our very human nature). Second, they claim that even if it is *possible* to have no beliefs, it is not recommended as bad consequences would follow from global suspension. Specifically, global suspension would be incompatible with normal action. Pyrrhonism is to be unliveable, because you cannot have no beliefs and act normally.¹

In this paper I will focus on the second sort of objection, and set independent worries about the possibility of having no beliefs aside. Here is a classic formulation of the objection by Hume:

He [i.e. the Pyrrhonist] must acknowledge, if he will acknowledge anything, that all human life must perish, were his principles universally and steadily to prevail. All discourse, all action would immediately cease; and men remain in a total lethargy, till the necessities of nature, unsatisfied, put an end to their miserable existence. (*Enquiry*, ch. 12, §2)

In other words: anyone who globally suspends does not act at all, and indeed dies for the reasons indicated by Hume. A well-known anecdote by Diogenes Laërtius nicely supports this line of thought:

He [i.e. Pyrrho] led a life consistent with this doctrine, going out of his way for nothing, taking no precaution, but facing all risks as they came, whether carts, precipices, dogs or what not [...]; but he

¹ The phrase 'acting normally' derives from Mates (1996: 70).

was kept out of harm's way by his friends who [...] used to follow close after him. (*Lives*, Book 9, 62)

In other words: anyone who globally suspends dies unless she has friends who act in her place. The objection is clear: suspension is incompatible with action. The argument is pragmatic of sort: it concerns the practical consequences of a certain thesis. In this case, Pyrrhonism is to have bad practical consequences, and so should not guide our lives. Sometimes this is stated as a challenge rather than objection: the Apraxia Challenge. I will accept this term, but it is important to stress that 'apraxia' literally means inactivity while in this paper I will be concerned with both inactivity and non-normal or non-human activity (more about this distinction later).

The objection looks plausible. How can one ever act if one has no beliefs at all? However, the objection is wholly ineffective without further explanation. In particular the question is: *What is it about actions that they require beliefs?*

Hume does not motivate this. Moreover: apart from the recent Perin (2010), the topic has hardly been addressed in the literature either. This is a bad situation for at least two reasons. First, if the objection fails and it turns out that the Pyrrhonists found a way to reach peace of mind, we better know the details. Second, it partially sheds light on a query of independent interest, namely on the importance of having beliefs generally (i.e. what is the use of believing certain things rather than others at all?). So my approach in this paper will be systematic rather than historical: I want to know whether *we* can act without beliefs, and whether the Pyrrhonists have something interesting to say to us on this.²

To be sure: Hume's objection was far from new. Pyrrhonists were well aware of it, and spent a great deal to resist. Our most extensive source is Sextus Empiricus' *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* (PH, 2nd century CE). For my reading and the basic tenets of Pyrrhonism (which is usually taken as defined by PH), I will generally rely on Mates. The latter (1992: 210-1, 1996: 5-6) lists several points where Pyrrhonism differs from scepticism standardly conceived (i.e. in post-Cartesian fashion). For example, according to Sextus Pyrrhonism is a good thing, and not merely an imaginary opponent to be refuted. Also, its reality/appearance distinction, i.e. the key to Sextus' response to the Apraxia Challenge, is quite unlike other things that one might find in the history of philosophy under these labels.

In the following I proceed as follows. First, I provide a quick motivation of the Apraxia Challenge (Sect. 2). Next, I recap the crucial

² For similar approaches, cf. Mates (1996: vii), Lammenranta (2008: 10), Perin (2010: 102).

aspects of Sextus' response to the challenge (Sect. 3) plus his practical motivation for why we should want to suspend beliefs (Sect. 4). After that, I single out the most interesting version of the Apraxia Challenge (Sect. 5), consider Perin's account of why Pyrrhonists are not able to meet it (Sect. 6), and finally present my own account (Sect. 7). The latter, as we shall see, is an elaboration on the quick motivation to be presented next.

2. A quick motivation

So our question is: Why are beliefs needed for action? Let us invoke two cases for illustration:

Teacher Case. Your teacher is stuck in a slough. How to help if you have no beliefs?

Tyrant Case. A tyrant orders you to do very bad things. How to resist if you have no beliefs?

The Teacher Case derives from another anecdote about Pyrrho (see Diogenes Laërtius, *Lives*, Book 9, 62). The story goes that Pyrrho did not help his teacher Anaxarchus to get out of a slough. Moreover: whereas everyone blamed Pyrrho, Anaxarchus praised him for his imperturbability. The Tyrant Case is discussed by Sextus himself (M 11.162-6). Sextus' version is more like a dilemma (viz. with two unattractive horns): either one could resist, but then be punished and indeed be killed by the tyrant, or one could obey but then do the bad things the tyrant orders you to do. For my purposes it suffices to invoke the simple scenarios above.

Both are cases where it is a problem if you do not act. So the question is whether Pyrrhonists are able to act in these cases. It should be clear from the very start that Pyrrhonists should not be taken as to suspend all action. For in that case the objection is trivial: Pyrrhonists do not act because they suspend action. What they suspend is belief.

So here is a quick motivation for why Pyrrhonists cannot act. Consider the following two pieces of simple, practical reasoning:

- (P1) My teacher is in trouble.
- (P2) This requires me to help.
- (C) Hence: I should help my teacher.

- (P1) A tyrant orders me to do something bad.
- (P2) This requires me to resist.

(C) Hence: I should resist the tyrant.

In both cases, (C) is reached from (P1) and (P2) by the following practical principle (plus ordinary logic):

(*) If p and that p requires me to ϕ , then I should ϕ .³

Even if this principle is not to be among my beliefs, at least (P1) and (P2) are. If I do not have those beliefs (as Pyrrhonists do not have them), then I do not (consciously or unconsciously) infer things of the form 'I should ϕ '. Assuming that there are no other ways to obtain such intentions, or at any rate no ways which do not similarly involve beliefs, it follows that I never have intentions. The basic point: I have intentions only in a broader context of beliefs. Final step: If I never have such intentions, I do not act.

So this argument relies on the assumption that actions require intentions of the form 'I should ϕ '. Such statements are to mean the same as 'It is or would be good to ϕ ' or 'I prefer ϕ -ing to alternatives' (yet not as 'I will ϕ '). For the rest the argument is rather neutral. First, it is neutral on the nature of beliefs (such as (P1) and (P2) above). That is, beliefs may be a variety of mental representations, a variety of dispositions, or something else (for an overview, cf. Schwitzgebel 2010). To be sure: we shall invoke some features of beliefs in order to distinguish them from Pyrrhonian belief-substitutes (to be introduced soon). So in that sense beliefs cannot be anything whatever. But they can still be mental representations, dispositions, etc.

Second, the argument only assumes that actions are to be accompanied by intentions. It does not also assume that the latter play a justifying or explanatory role regarding the former. For example, it is not assumed that my intention to help my teacher justifies my helping, nor that it motivates and explains my helping. Rather, the primary role of the intention here is to distinguish my helping as one of my actions from my helping as a mere happening.

Before I go into further details of this reasoning, I will first look at Sextus' treatment of cases like this and his proposal to save Pyrrhonism from the Apraxia Objection. Importantly, Pyrrhonists do not only have the two usual options (resist or plead guilty), but there might be a third, middle option be available as well. Specifically, Pyrrhonists may:

³ Here and in upcoming principles of practical reasoning, 'p' is to be replaced with a full declarative sentence, and ' ϕ ' with a verb.

- Accept the objection and reject Pyrrhonism, viz. allow all sorts of beliefs.
- Hold onto Pyrrhonism, and show that the objection fails, viz. defend that you can act without beliefs.
- Hold onto Pyrrhonism, accept that the objection holds, and meet it by allowing a minimal set of beliefs or belief-substitutes.

As several authors have pointed out (Frede 1979, 1984, cf. Fine 2000, Perin 2010b), the third strategy to find belief-substitutes (viz. to distinguish between two kinds of beliefs, two kinds of assent, two kinds of propositional attitudes, etc.) in order to meet the Apraxia Challenge, was in fact among the main sceptical concerns. And indeed among Sextus'.

3. Sextus' account

According to Sextus, Pyrrhonists do act, yet unlike everyone else they act merely on the basis of appearances (PH 1.21-4). What does this mean? A common and natural take on the appearance/reality distinction is that reality comprises everything which is the case in the external, mind-independent world, whereas appearance comprises everything which is not the case in the external world but merely seems to be the case (and mistakenly so) to this or that mind. Put simply: appearance is fake, reality is not.

But this is not quite how Pyrrhonism conceives of the distinction. There are at least two important differences. First, reality comprises all non-evident matters, and appearance all evident matters. This is to be understood from a dialectical perspective. Reality is described by all statements that can be questioned, debated, disagreed with, investigated (i.e. all statements of which it is not evident that they are true). By contrast, appearance is described by all statements that cannot be questioned, debated, disagreed with, investigated (viz. all statements of which it is evident that they are true). Second, its appearance/reality distinction is to be formal or topic-neutral. This means that whatever happens to be debatable concerns reality. So indeed claims about the external world concern reality. But so do for example claims about what is good (ethical claims), claims about what is valid or correct reasoning (logical claims), and claims about the future (predictions). Likewise: whatever turns out to be non-debatable concerns appearance.⁴

One might wonder about this second category. Are there any non-debatable statements at all? Yet, Pyrrhonists have a simple procedure to

⁴ Cf. Burnyeat (1980: 39-40), Annas & Barnes (1985: 23), Mates (1996: 6). Main sources here are PH 1.69-70 and M 8.362.

obtain them. Namely, any debatable statement 'p' can be made non-debatable by supplementing it with 'It seems to me now that'. So Pyrrhonists distinguish between the following two forms that a statement can take:

- (i) p.
- (ii) It seems to me now that p.

In both cases 'p' is to be replaced with a declarative sentence which (in most cases) does not itself contain the phrase 'it seems to me now that'. Simple instances: My teacher is in trouble vs. It seems to me now that my teacher is in trouble. What holds for statements is to equally hold for beliefs (which can be seen as internal counterparts of the corresponding overt statements). That is, stating that p is a way of expressing one's belief that p. Such beliefs concern reality and are dogmatic because they are held in the face of their questionability. By contrast, the beliefs which correspond to the second class of statements concern appearances and are non-dogmatic as they are not held in the face of their questionability (as they are not questionable). Furthermore: the idea is that Pyrrhonists suspend globally in the sense that they have no (i)-type beliefs (while they do have (ii)-type beliefs).

Ingenious and original as this distinction is, it can be subjected to two, related lines of attack. First, it could be argued that no instance of (ii) can be non-debatable. Second, it could be argued that (ii)-type beliefs are ambiguous and might well be conflated with (i)-type beliefs. Let me take these in turn.

First, one might think that anything with propositional content is to be dealt with in the space of reasons and beliefs concerning appearances clearly have propositional content. There are at least two options: the propositional content of the belief that it seems to me now that p is either <It seems to me now that p> or <p>. In the latter case the difference between believing that p and believing that it seems to me now that p is to be taken as a difference in propositional attitude towards <p>. Either way, the Sellarsian worry is that these beliefs, as they have content, should be debatable in principle. This would be a problem for Pyrrhonism for sure. According to Sextus, Pyrrhonists live by appearances. But if there would be no non-debatable beliefs, then the domain of appearances would turn out empty and hence Pyrrhonists would live by nothing.

The second objection is equally pressing: if all (ii)-type beliefs can be taken as (i)-type beliefs, then there is not so much of a distinction after all. Specifically, the idea is that it is possible to read 'It seems to me now that p' epistemically, viz. as expressing a belief that is subject to investigation (Frede 1979: 10ff).

I think the latter is quite right. Nevertheless, this does not mean that there is not *also* a clear and distinct way in which ‘It seems to me now that p’ can be read non-epistemically. Moreover, this reading also shows that a certain class of beliefs with propositional content can indeed be non-debatable (hence responding to the first objection). These two readings differ in at least four important ways (see Diagram 1 for an overview).⁵

By the *epistemic* reading, beliefs of the form ‘It appears to S now that p’ (i) make a claim regarding whether p (e.g. that my teacher is in trouble), (ii) are voluntary, i.e. S is free to retract the belief, (iii) are open to investigation and can be disagreed with by holding ‘It appears to S* that it is not so that p’ (where S* may or may not be another subject), and (iv) can turn out false.

By the *non-epistemic* reading, in contrast, beliefs of the form ‘It appears to S now that p’ (i) do not make a claim regarding whether p, but only regarding S’s impressions with respect to whether p (e.g. ‘It seems to me now that my teacher is in trouble’ read in this way concerns me and my impressions, not the fact that my teacher is in trouble), (ii) are involuntary, i.e. S is not free to retract the content of what is believed, (iii) are not open to investigation and cannot be disagreed with by holding ‘It appears to S* that it is not so that p’, and (iv) cannot turn out false, ever (or better: the issue of truth and falsity just does not arise).

<i>Epistemic</i>	<i>Non-epistemic</i>
Concerns whether p	Concerns S
Voluntary	Involuntary
Investigation possible	Investigation impossible
Possibly false	Never false

Diagram 1: Epistemic vs. non-epistemic

The distinction can again best be taken as formal. Meaning: whatever belief turns out to concern S (rather than whether p), or to be involuntary (rather than voluntary), etc. is of the non-epistemic variety, or vice versa, no matter the subject matter.⁶ There may be further distinctions. For example, one

⁵ Cf. esp. PH 1.13-5, 19-22, 197-200, and the analyses by Burnyeat (1980: 36ff) and Mates (1992, 1996: 11-6).

⁶ As a consequence, counterexamples would be ineffective, i.e. one cannot introduce a claim which purports to be of the non-epistemic variety (say ‘It seems to

might suggest that the non-epistemic beliefs are privileged (i.e. S*, distinct from S, has no access to what appears to S now), whereas their epistemic counterparts are not (i.e. anyone distinct from S has access to what appears to S, namely whether p). Yet, Sextus never speaks in these terms, and I shall leave further qualifications aside.

At any rate, whenever the Pyrrhonist says 'It appears to me now that p', this is always to be understood non-epistemically. They are mere reports of what happens to her, i.e. of what impressions she has of that. Furthermore, having such impressions is not the only aspect of a Pyrrhonian life. Sextus lists three further aspects (PH 1.23-4). First, Pyrrhonists act on hunger, thirst, etc. in order to survive. Second, they follow the laws and customs of the country where they happen to live. They will even say that they believe in God if that is customary (although they merely say it, of course, and not believe it, cf. PH 3.2). Last, they learn a craft in order to make a living. It is said that Sextus himself was doctor. For these three aspects beliefs are not required (rather than the non-epistemic belief-substitutes of the form 'It seems to S now that p'), and so Pyrrhonists seem to be able to lead a rather ordinary life.

4. Tranquillity

If Sextus is right that Pyrrhonists manage to live an ordinary life, then how do they differ from everyone else? A first thing to note is that we cannot detect Pyrrhonists on the basis of their speech behaviour. As Sextus says, if he says or writes that p, he always means that it appears to him at that point that p and nothing more (PH 1.4). This is quite legitimate: whatever is said in a language needs not to reflect its propositional content (or the propositional attitude taken towards that content). So again: if Pyrrhonists eat, drink, work, respect the laws, other conventions, and now also speak like everyone else, then how to detect them?

Of course, the difference is that Pyrrhonists have no beliefs about reality, viz. about that which is non-evident, disputable and open to investigation.⁷ Yet now the question is why global suspension would be of any use if it does not work out in ordinary life. If Pyrrhonism is not unliveable, it seems irrelevant because if you can have no beliefs and act normally, then it does not matter whether you have beliefs or not.

me now that I do not exist'), but which turns out to be false or voluntary. For in that case the claim was just not of the non-epistemic variety.

⁷ As long as the evident/non-evident distinction is in place, it is a terminological choice whether to speak of beliefs if they concern appearances (cf. Striker 2001: 119).

The solution to this query (at least in part) must be sought in the final component of Pyrrhonism: tranquillity or peace of mind. Specifically, Pyrrhonists are to be free from all fears and worries that come with beliefs. What worries should we think of? Sextus provides two sets of suggestions (usually not distinguished as such). There are worries that come with beliefs, first, about what is *presently* good or bad, and, second, about what *would* or *should* be good or bad.⁸ Let us discuss these in turn. Here is Sextus about the first category:

For we agree that sometimes he is cold and thirsty and has various feelings like those. But even in such cases [...] the skeptic, by eliminating the additional belief that all these things are naturally bad, gets off more moderately. (PH 1.29-30, transl. Mates)

The first part we already know: Pyrrhonists can still be cold and thirsty. But so can anyone else. The difference is that Pyrrhonists have no beliefs about whether such things are bad (or good for that matter). And so they are not possibly affected by the worries that may come with them (viz. on top of the problems that come with the cold and thirst themselves). One of Sextus' examples is this: whereas many people suffer from beliefs about the gods and their torments if something bad happens to them, Pyrrhonists do not suffer likewise (PH 3.236, for further cases, cf. M 11.110-67).

This consequence of Pyrrhonism has been criticized. Specifically, the worry is that Pyrrhonists are too detached beings, too detached from what happens to them (cf. Annas & Barnes 1985: 167). It is important to be careful here. Of course, Pyrrhonists are detached from beliefs and so from beliefs about whether what happens to them is good or bad. But Pyrrhonists are not detached from all the rest, i.e. from everyday life and the things that happen to them themselves (they are not imperturbable in this sense). Still, Annas & Barnes are right that there is an important sense in which Pyrrhonists can be said to be too detached beings, and I will explain this at some length later on in the paper.

The second set of worries:

For the person who believes that something is by nature good or bad is constantly upset; when he does not possess the things that

⁸ Svavarsson (2011) identifies yet another option: Pyrrhonists are free from worries that arise from the conflicts that exist between beliefs. This kind of tranquillity seems unrelated to the others, yet Machuca (2011: 253) suggests the following link: Pyrrhonists are free from these worries because they do not believe that the conflicts between beliefs are bad and to be avoided.

seem to be good, he thinks he is being tormented by things that are by nature bad, and he chases after the things he supposes to be good. (PH 1.27-8, transl. Mates)

Moreover, Sextus goes on, if non-Pyrrhonists eventually obtain what is good (according to their beliefs), they fall prey to even further fears and worries. Namely: their situation might well change, and given that this would entail something which is believed to be bad, such a change is to be prevented by all means. For example, suppose I believe that I should get a nice job, that it is good to have a nice job. First I have to bother about strategies to get one. And if I finally have one, I have to bother about strategies to keep the nice job. If I have no such beliefs, I have no such worries.

Plausible as this may sound, Sextus' argument is restricted in at least two ways. First, it does not seem applicable to beliefs about what is good across the board. Take the teacher and tyrant cases. If I believe that I should help my teacher, or that I should resist the tyrant, I might well worry about how to do it, but not about how to prevent possible changes (assuming that the teacher and tyrant pose no structural problems). What is done is done. So, these temporary goods come with less worries than long term goods (as having a nice job).

Second, Sextus' argument only applies to beliefs about what is good or valuable, and not to beliefs about other matters. For example, it is not immediately clear what worries would come with beliefs like 'My teacher is in trouble' and 'A tyrant orders me to do something bad' which merely make a claim regarding what is the case.⁹

No matter these qualifications, the main idea seems to hold: Pyrrhonists differ from everyone else in that they do not have the worries that come with certain beliefs (i.e. the two sorts just discussed). It is in this sense that they are in a state of tranquillity.¹⁰ This is no doubt one of the main selling-points of Pyrrhonism.¹¹ Yet, a problem emerged along the way. In Sect. 2, I argued that we need intentions of the form 'I should ϕ ' in order to

⁹ Perhaps all such beliefs are still coupled with a belief about the good, viz. that it is good to believe what is true and bad to believe what is false, and so are coupled with related worries.

¹⁰ It has been objected that Pyrrhonists cannot be in such a state because having no beliefs entails worries on its own (cf. Burnyeat 1980: 55, Annas & Barnes 1985: 167-8, Mates 1996: 76-7). For whether for Pyrrhonists tranquillity also is to constitute happiness and the good life as a whole, cf. Striker (1990). For critical comments, cf. Annas & Barnes (1985: 170-1).

¹¹ Sextus provides another motivation on top of this, which is theoretical rather than practical (and not beyond controversy either). Namely: Pyrrhonists would be better inquirers (PH 1.1-3, 2.10-11).

act. As we have just seen, Pyrrhonists have no such intentions for principled reasons: they block tranquillity. If so, how do Pyrrhonists act?

5. Animal charge

As Vogt (2010: 166) makes clear, it is important to keep different versions of the Apraxia Challenge apart. Sometimes Pyrrhonists were compared with plants, sometimes with animals (i.e. they were accused of leading a non-rational or non-human life), and they were even accused of leading a bad life. For my purposes the following distinction is crucial:

- (a) Plant Charge: Pyrrhonists do nothing, rather than act.
- (b) Animal Charge: Pyrrhonists happen, rather than act.

As we have seen, Sextus tried to account for (a). He proved Hume's contention wrong and showed that Pyrrhonists are not committed to the inactive life of a plant. Moreover, he showed that Pyrrhonists behave like everyone else. They eat, drink, have a job, speak, and whatnot. But the question is: Did Sextus account for (b) as well? Did he demonstrate that Pyrrhonists are not committed to an animal life (i.e. understood as a life which merely happens)? The distinction between (a) and (b) can also be brought out as a distinction between two versions of the so-called problem of the practical criterion:¹²

- (a*) By what are Pyrrhonists able to perform a certain course of action, rather than another?
- (b*) By what are Pyrrhonists able to prefer or choose a certain course of action over another?

Sextus' answer to (a*) is this: Pyrrhonists do one thing rather than another depending on the laws and customs of the place where they happen to live. So, his own analysis of the Tyrant Case is that Pyrrhonists resist the tyrant depending on whether or not it is customary for that person to be brave and resist (M 11.162-6).

Whatever you might think of this answer, it does solve (a*). Yet, as we shall see next, (b*) remains unresolved within Pyrrhonism. And

¹² Sextus' own texts are ambiguous between (a*) and (b*), cf. PH 1.21-22 ("the criterion of action, by attention to which in the conduct of daily life we do some things and not others" vs. M 11.163-5 ("in accordance with non-philosophical practice he is able to choose some things and avoid others").

necessarily so. Furthermore, this is exactly what makes the life of a Pyrrhonist unlike a normal, human life. For if Pyrrhonists are not able to prefer one thing over another, then they happen rather than really act. Next I shall first consider Perin's explanation of this point, and then lay down my own account.

6. Perin's account

Taking his inspiration from Davidson (1963), Perin (2010: 101ff) invokes the so-called belief-desire (BD) model to distinguish actions from mere happenings. Let us capture this model by the following:

BD For any action x , S performs x only if, for an instance of ϕ , S desires to ϕ and S believes that performing x is a way to ϕ .

Perin provides the following simple example: S drinks a glass of water (rather than happens to drink) only if, for example, S desires to quench her thirst and she believes that drinking a glass of water is a way to do so. Any other desire and related belief will do as well. The assumed distinction between actions and mere happenings lies in the belief-factor. If S has no belief that drinking water will satisfy one of her desires, then S does not act (rather than happen).

This model may appear somewhat complicated, but it has in fact a simple motivation. To perform an action is more than just to move one's body, namely, it is to do something for a reason. Why does S drink a glass of water? In Perin's case, the reason is that S has a desire to quench her thirst plus a belief about how to satisfy that desire. Merely having a desire is not enough to turn an event into an action. Suppose S has a desire to quench her thirst, but really has no idea about how to satisfy that desire. Then even if she drinks water, it would be implausible to say that she did this for a reason. The desire and action would be only accidentally related.

Hence, beliefs are required. But of course Pyrrhonists have no beliefs (even though they can have desires such as thirst), and so by the belief-desire model they do not act.

The Pyrrhonian response is not hard to anticipate. As Perin rightly suggests (2010: 96-7), the appearances by which the Pyrrhonist lives can substitute for the beliefs from the BD model:

BD* For any action x , S performs x only if, for an instance of ϕ , S desires to ϕ and *it seems to S now* that performing x is a way to ϕ .

So Pyrrhonists act rather than happen whenever their actions are accompanied by the relevant appearances. If a Pyrrhonist drinks a glass of water but has no appearance that it satisfies one of her desires, then she does not act. She acts only if she also has the present appearance that it will quench her thirst (or something else).

Despite this fix, in the end Perin does not believe that Pyrrhonists are particularly normal beings (2010: 112-3). The problem is that they cannot be said to endorse their own behaviour, whatever they do. Even if it appears to S now that drinking water will quench her thirst, this will not make it the case that S endorses (or participates in) her action. She always stands at a distance from herself, and it is in this very sense that she is detached from herself.

As announced in Sect. 4, I think that this detachment is to be taken in a rather specific sense. For just as Pyrrhonists never endorse their own behaviour, they never reject it either (such that they are never detached from themselves in this other sense). Furthermore, the thought is that endorsing *or* rejecting one's own behaviour is what makes us particularly human (it is at least to be an essential component, whatever further components humanity might have). If Pyrrhonists are not able to do that, then they cannot engage in human behaviour.

Perin puts this even stronger in terms of a dilemma: Either appearances do not make it the case that S endorses her behaviour (as just explained), or appearances do this, but then they are just like the beliefs from the BD-model. For in the latter case, S has to acknowledge that there is a certain good or effective strategy to satisfy a desire in question, and such acknowledgements are open to investigation and disagreement, and as such unavailable to the Pyrrhonist.

7. My account

I think Perin's analysis is correct. Yet, I want to argue for it in a slightly different, and perhaps more direct way. The main point is that it is not just that Pyrrhonists have no beliefs about what ends their actions are to serve (i.e. no beliefs of the form 'Performing action x is a way to satisfy my desire to ϕ ') such that they cannot be said to endorse their own behaviour. Rather, they cannot be said to endorse their own behaviour directly because Pyrrhonists have no beliefs about whether their actions are good or preferable to any alternative actions (i.e. no beliefs of the form 'I should ϕ ' or 'It is or would be good to ϕ ').

The latter idea has been suggested at several places in the literature (cf. Burnyeat 1980: 45, Annas & Barnes 1985: 169, Annas 1993: 357, Vogt

2010: 177, Bett 2010: 191). My contribution in the following is making it precise in terms of the practical reasoning examples from Sect. 2, the epistemic/non-epistemic distinction from Sect. 3, and Sextus' practical motivation for suspension from Sect. 4.

Here is what the Teacher Case looks like in terms of appearances:

- (P1*) It seems to me now that my teacher is in trouble.
- (P2*) It seems to me now that my teacher's being in trouble requires me to help.
- (C*) Hence: It seems to me now that I should help my teacher.

Here, (C*) is reached from the appearance-reports (P1*) and (P2*) by the practical principle:

- (**) If it seems to me now that p and if it seems to me now that [that p requires me to ϕ], then it seems to me now that I should ϕ .

The problem is apparent: (C*) has no motivational or preferential power. If it seems to me now that I should help my teacher, or if it seems to me now that I should resist the tyrant, *then what?*

There are two relevant cases to be considered: either I did not act yet, or I am already acting (i.e. I am helping or not).¹³ In the first case the question is: Does (C*) tell me to help or not? It does not seem so because (C*) is to be read non-epistemically, and so does not concern the fact that it would be good to help, but it concerns me and my impressions. (C*) is only registering what happens to me now. Also, and perhaps more problematically, (C*) is not open to investigation, and cannot be disagreed with by holding (a second later perhaps) 'It seems to me now that I should not help my teacher'. If this is right, (C*) has no motivational power, i.e. no power to motivate me to help rather than to do other things. In the second case (viz. where I do help) the question is: Does (C*) tell me that my helping is a good thing or not? (Or in case I do not help: Does (C*) tell me that my not helping is a bad thing or not?) Again the answer seems negative, and for the same reason. If so, (C*) has no preferential power either.

Moreover, if (C*) does not motivate me nor make me prefer certain things rather than others, then (C*) is not what can make me endorse

¹³ This distinction corresponds to two sorts of intentions usually distinguished in the literature (cf. Wilson 2009: §2): intentions for the future ('I intend to help as soon as possible') vs. intentions with which someone acts ('I am reaching my hand with the intention to help my teacher').

(or reject) anything. If the latter is required for human action, then (C*) is not what can turn my helping (as a mere happening) into one of my actions.

This argument relies on the assumption that one cannot act (rather than merely move one's body) without being able to take some sort of evaluative stance towards what one does. In this respect, it is worth pointing out this criterion is not the only criterion that has been proposed in the literature to distinguish actions from mere happenings. Millgram (2009) classifies all criteria into four groups: the calculation account, the authorship account, the practise account and the evaluation account. The latter is the one I invoke in my argument, and the others say respectively the following: x is an action (vs. a mere happening) only if x has a stepwise internal structure (e.g. I reach out my hand with the aim of helping my teacher); x is authored or owned by an agent (e.g. I author my helping); and x figures in a broader social practice (e.g. my helping takes place in a non-egotistic social context). I do not think that these alternative accounts pose any problem for my argument. All I need is that the possibility of an evaluative stance is a necessary condition of actions, no matter what other necessary conditions they might have. Indeed, it is far from clear why those alternative conditions would be in conflict with the evaluation account.¹⁴

Even so, one might suggest the following fix:

- (P1*) It seems to me now that my teacher is in trouble.
- (P2*) It seems to me now that my teacher's being in trouble requires me to help.
- (C) Hence: I should help my teacher.

In this sort of case, (C) is reached from (P1*) and (P2*) by yet another practical principle (a mixture of the previous two):

- (***) If it seems to me now that p and if it seems to me now that [that p requires me to ϕ], then I should ϕ .

This time the problem is not that (C) is reached from beliefs which Pyrrhonists do not have (for (P1*) and (P2*) are no beliefs). The problem is neither that (C) has no motivational or preferential power (for it does). Rather, the problem is that (C) is just the sort of belief that the Pyrrhonist cannot infer or assent to. Namely: (C) can be investigated further, be disagreed with, and most importantly: it entails all the worries that preclude

¹⁴ For a defense of this account, cf. Buss (1999).

tranquillity (I am distressed as long as I do not accomplish what is motivated by (C) and fail to help my teacher, etc.).¹⁵

The Pyrrhonists' predicament can again be stated in terms of a dilemma: Either they admit beliefs (or anything with propositional content generally) with motivational or preferential power, but then they cannot obtain the tranquillity they are looking for, or they do not admit such beliefs, but then they cannot endorse or reject the things they do. Or again: Either Pyrrhonists reason by (***) but in that case it remains unexplained how they act as opposed to happen, or they reason by (****) in order to explain this, but in that case they stop being Pyrrhonists.

Actually, this may have been clear from the very start: Pyrrhonists do not only suspend belief on what is the case, but also on what is good or preferable. And if so, they have no intentions. Moreover: if intentions are needed to turn happenings into actions, then Pyrrhonists do not act. The last step added in this section is that appearance-intentions (viz. of the form 'It appears to S now that she should ϕ ') are no good substitute for intentions, i.e. they cannot distinguish actions from mere happenings.

8. Final trade-off

Hence in the final analysis, Pyrrhonists cannot act normally, just as some proponents of the Apraxia Objection predicted (but did not explain) and despite Sextus' ingenious appearance/reality distinction. Yet, and this has gone unnoticed by the proponents of the Apraxia Objection, the case is not closed. Namely: Pyrrhonists could agree on the fact that they happen rather than act and bite the bullet in this. For perhaps tranquillity is still preferable to human action. This seems right: in the end there is a trade-off between humanity and tranquillity. If you take one, you have to pay the other.

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¹⁵ By the same token, Pyrrhonists cannot base their theoretical (vs. practical) reasoning on principles like 'If it seems to me now that p and if it seems to me now that [if it seems to me now that p then q], then q'. For in that case they would obtain beliefs about reality from beliefs about appearances.

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