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APPEARANCES AND ASSENT: SCEPTICAL BELIEF RECONSIDERED¹

Does Sextus Empiricus' scepticism make room for some kind of belief? Though this is a long-standing issue, the question remains intriguing.² An interpretation of the relevant texts involves central epistemological questions, most importantly, the question of what beliefs actually are. And yet, as I shall argue, the discussions between the sceptics and their critics have been misconstrued. The sceptic faces several objections. The common element among Sextus' replies is not that he allows for some kind of belief in the sceptic's life. His most important responses in addressing the problems raised by his opponents are given in terms of *assent to appearances*, not in terms of kinds of belief.

In a recent paper, Gisela Striker observes that those who initiated contemporary scholarly interest in ancient scepticism took, in their early publications, a perspective that insufficiently distinguished between Academic and Pyrrhonian scepticism.³ Richard Bett offers a line of argument that similarly encourages greater attention to the differences between Academic and Pyrrhonian scepticism. As he reconstructs the evidence, the early Pyrrhonists aim to explain what the world must be like for there to be conflicting appearances. While Sextus distances himself from this metaphysical enterprise, he inherits from his predecessors a central concern with appearances (*phainomena*). He also inherits a set of expressions – for example, *ou mallon*, 'no-more-this-than-that' – originally meant to reflect a metaphysics of indeterminacy.⁴

¹ I greatly benefitted from Avery Archer's comments on an earlier draft, extensive feedback on several versions by Jens Haas, and careful notes on the final version by Nandi Theunissen. The anonymous referee of *Classical Quarterly* provided insightful comments. Many thanks to all of them.

² The papers by M. Frede, J. Barnes and M.F. Burnyeat that initiated discussion of these issues are collected in Burnyeat and Frede (edd.), *The Original Sceptics: A Controversy* (Indianapolis, 1997). I refer to the following papers by the years in which they were originally published: M. Frede, 'Des Skeptikers Meinungen', *Neue Hefte für Philosophie* 15/16 (1979), 102–29; M. Burnyeat, 'Can the sceptic live his scepticism?', in M. Schofield, M. Burnyeat, and J. Barnes (edd.), *Doubt and Dogmatism: Essays in Hellenistic Epistemology* (Oxford, 1980), 117–48; J. Barnes, 'The beliefs of a Pyrrhonist', *PCPhS* 28 (1982), 1–29; M. Burnyeat, 'The sceptic in his place and time', in R. Rorty, J.B. Schneewind and Q. Skinner (edd.), *Philosophy in History* (Cambridge, 1984), 225–54; M. Frede, 'The sceptic's two kinds of assent and the question of the possibility of knowledge', *ibid.* 255–78.

³ Those interpreters include Striker, Frede, Burnyeat, Barnes and others. Cf. 'Academics versus Pyrrhonists, reconsidered', in R. Bett (ed.), *Cambridge Companion to Ancient Scepticism* (Cambridge, 2010), 195–207. Pyrrhonism involves two notions that are absent in Academic scepticism: tranquillity and appearances. Striker argues that the most important difference between Pyrrhonian and Academic scepticism might lie in the Pyrrhonian conception of tranquillity. As I argue in this paper, the Pyrrhonian focus on the sceptic's relationship to appearances is equally important.

⁴ On Pyrrho, cf. R. Bett, *Pyrrho, his Antecedents, and his Legacy* (Oxford, 2000), 14–39 and 84–93; cf. Diog. Laert. 9.106. On Aenesidemus, cf. R. Bett (ed. and tr. with commentary), *Sextus Empiricus: Against the Ethicists (Adversus Mathematicos XI)* (Oxford, 1997), xiv–xxiii.

When Academic and Pyrrhonian scepticism are studied in conjunction, belief may indeed appear to be *the* central notion of ancient scepticism.⁵ While this is probably true for Academic scepticism, it is misleadingly one-sided with respect to Pyrrhonian scepticism. Sextus takes himself to face several interrelated questions: whether the sceptic has any beliefs, whether the sceptic dogmatizes, whether the sceptic rejects appearances and whether the sceptic can lead an active life. Corresponding to these questions, I refer to four anti-sceptical arguments: the Belief Charge, the Dogma Charge, the Appearances Charge and the Apraxia Charge.⁶ The Belief Charge and the Apraxia Charge are raised against Pyrrhonian and Academic scepticism, while the Dogma Charge and the Appearances Charge are specifically targeted at Pyrrhonian scepticism. Heightened attention to these differences, I suggest, provides good reason to reconsider the question of sceptical belief. I begin with discussion of the relevant notion of belief (§ 1), and the famous paragraph *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* 1.13, which in my view is concerned with the Dogma Charge, not the Belief Charge (§ 2).⁷ I then turn to Sextus' notion of appearances (§ 3), and argue that sceptical assent figures in action, not in belief formation (§ 4).

1. HELLENISTIC NOTIONS OF BELIEF

Michael Frede argues in two influential papers that a distinction between two kinds of belief is at the heart of Sextus' Pyrrhonism.⁸ The sceptic's beliefs, as he describes them, are thoughts that linger in the sceptic's mind. While the sceptic does not endorse her thoughts as true, she still finds herself left with these thoughts. For example, careful consideration leads her, again and again, to the thought that things are inapprehensible. The sceptic does not add the further thought that this is how things really are. Thus she does not have a belief in the sense in which dogmatic philosophers (as the sceptic calls those who put forward theories) understand the notion of belief. She has, according to Frede, a weaker version of it.⁹

Whether or not one agrees with Frede's view as an interpretation of Sextus' scepticism, it is inherently attractive in so far as it captures an intuitive distinction. Frede draws attention to the difference between finding oneself with a thought,

Cf. P. Woodruff, 'The Pyrrhonian modes', in Bett (n. 3), 208–31; for a different view, see S.H. Svavarsson, 'Pyrrho and early Pyrrhonism', *ibid.* 36–57.

⁵ Cf. Cicero's characterization of the different versions of Academic scepticism in his *Academica*.

⁶ Each of these arguments can take several forms (cf. K.M. Vogt, 'Scepticism and action', in Bett [n. 3], 165–180). However, for present purposes it is sufficient to see belief, dogmatizing, adherence to appearances and action as four domains in which the sceptic faces the challenge to explain her attitudes, so that they are consistent with scepticism.

⁷ R. Barney, 'Impressions and appearances', *Phronesis* 37/3 (1992), 283–313 is an important exception to a general trend, initiated by Frede (1979), of focussing on *PH* 1.13. Burnyeat (1980) also does not focus on *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* 1.13, though Burnyeat (1984) does. From this point on, Sextus Empiricus' writings, the *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* and *Against the Theoreticians*, will be referenced as *PH* and *M*.

⁸ (1979) and (1984).

⁹ I am here summarizing Frede's later position. Frede's papers from 1979 and 1984 each have their own focus. In 1979, Frede looks at cognitive attitudes that figure in action but do not involve truth claims. In 1984, Frede is interested in the way in which such pronouncements as 'nothing is known' might be thoughts the sceptic finds herself with.

and thinking that, in actual fact, this is how things are. I take it that, whatever interpretation of scepticism (as I shall henceforth call Sextus' scepticism) one offers, it ought to accommodate this distinction. Surely, Sextus does not suggest that the sceptic's mind is blank, or that the sceptic does not have thoughts. Frede's arguments also seem to me to supply another premise, to be adopted even if one disagrees with his reading. As Frede observes, Sextus takes himself to be able to account for the sceptic's life. He thinks he can show how a sceptic can be active, and we should take this seriously.¹⁰

Largely in response to Frede's proposals, interpreters have asked what kind of belief would be compatible with sceptical philosophy. Striker observes, in my view rightly, that this kind of discussion can be fatiguing: it is no surprise that interpreters disagree – they stipulate different notions of belief.¹¹ If we pick and choose among all conceptions of belief we can think of, then surely, there are notions of belief according to which the sceptic has beliefs, and there are other notions according to which she does not.¹² As I see it, it is not up to us which notion of belief we should invoke in this particular context. Interpreters (and Sextus) must employ a notion of belief that the Hellenistic epistemologists would recognize.

Scholars have long noted that sceptical philosophy is dialectical.¹³ I shall adopt a weak version of this claim. As I see it, Pyrrhonian scepticism develops within a set of philosophical exchanges between sceptical and non-sceptical philosophers. That is to say that key aspects of Sextus' scepticism are shaped by repeated attempts on the part of the sceptics to respond to anti-sceptical objections. The complex history of Pyrrhonism affords Sextus some liberty. He has several points of reference and can invoke premisses from a range of interlocutors, and yet he must employ central notions in ways that speak to those who formulate the anti-sceptical arguments. Accordingly, the Stoics and Epicureans are particularly important points of reference for the notion of belief.¹⁴

¹⁰ Frede (1979).

¹¹ G. Striker, 'Scepticism as a kind of philosophy', *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 83 (2001), 113–29, at 119.

¹² If one dismissed the question of 'what goes on in the sceptic's mind' or, in today's terminology, the general outlook of representationalism, turning, say, to dispositionalism and the question of whether someone's behaviour is best explained by ascribing beliefs to her, one would probably end up ascribing beliefs to the sceptic. But that is not a relevant option within Hellenistic debates about belief.

¹³ This view was first formulated by P. Couissin, in an interpretation of Academic scepticism: 'The Stoicism of the New Academy', in M.F. Burnyeat (ed.), *The Sceptical Tradition* (Berkeley, 1983), 31–63; translation of 'Le stoïcisme de la nouvelle Académie', *Revue d'histoire de la philosophie* 3 (1929), 241–76. Scholars have since formulated many versions of the thesis that sceptical philosophy is dialectical.

¹⁴ It is widely accepted that the Stoics are important interlocutors. Some scholars also recognize, in my view rightly, the Epicureans as relevant points of reference. When Epicureans explain the details of their epistemology, they talk with sceptical arguments and examples in mind. M. Schofield suggests that there is an exchange of arguments between Epicurean epistemology and a type of scepticism that is associated with Aenesidemus; see his 'Aenesidemus: Pyrrhonist and "Heraclitean"', in A.-M. Ioppolo and D.N. Sedley (edd.), *Pyrrhonists, Patricians, Platonizers. Hellenistic Philosophy in the Period 155–86 BC. Tenth Symposium Hellenisticum* (Naples, 2007), 269–338. While I cannot argue for this view here, I think that Pyrrhonian engagement with Epicurean epistemology is underrated, and runs through several strands of Pyrrhonism.

For the Stoics, it is a hallmark of human rationality that reason passes judgement on impressions, rejecting some and accepting others.¹⁵ For example, in sense perception the leading part of the soul passes judgement on the reports of the senses.¹⁶ These judgements are assents or rejections, and those which do not qualify as knowledge are beliefs.¹⁷ The impressions that are accepted or rejected are true or false, cognitive or non-cognitive, convincing or non-convincing, and so on. In the cases of both belief and knowledge, the cognizer takes something to be the case; she accepts an impression as true.

According to Epicurean epistemology, all sense impressions are true; falsity enters the picture immediately thereafter.¹⁸ We make judgements based on our sense impressions: '[...] we judge some things correctly, but others incorrectly, either by adding and appending something to our impressions or by subtracting something from them, and in general falsifying arational sensation' (*M* 7.210). That is, our judgement is the source of falsity. True beliefs are those that are attested (and that means, attested by what is evident), and those that are uncontested by self-evidence. False beliefs are those that are contested and those that are unattested by self-evidence.¹⁹ That is, in so far as the sceptics are talking to Epicureans, the relevant notion of belief is that of true or false judgements. Both Stoic and Epicurean philosophy thus construe belief as a kind of judgement or acceptance.²⁰ This is a complicated and deep feature of Hellenistic epistemology. It matters in at least three ways for how we approach Sextus' discussions of belief.

First, consider the way in which Sextus addresses the Belief Charge – the challenge to the effect that, if the sceptic disavows all belief, she ascribes an impossible mental condition to herself, or her self-description is inaccurate, because in fact she does have beliefs. Sextus does not devote any one chapter to this set of issues; his response to it is reflected in many passages throughout the *Outlines*. Importantly, Sextus focusses on belief formation or judgement. When Sextus describes sceptical utterances, he argues that the sceptic does not affirm anything (*PH* 1.4). She makes no assertions or negations (*kataphasis* and *apophasis*). This corresponds to mental states of not accepting (*tithenai*) or rejecting (*anairerein*) anything (*PH* 1.192). Sextus' focus, then, is on affirming or accepting, which is to say, on judgement. The sceptic's end (*telos*), Sextus says, is tranquillity in matters of belief (*kata doxan*; *tois doxastois*) and moderate affection in matters that are forced upon us. In this latter domain, the sceptic is better off than the non-sceptic because she

¹⁵ Origen, *On principles* 3.1.2–3 = *SVF* 2.988, part = A.A. Long, and D.N. Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers* (Cambridge, 1987) [= LS] 53A.

¹⁶ Calcidius 220 = *SVF* 2.879, part = LS 53G.

¹⁷ The Stoics define *doxa* as weak and false assent (Sext. Emp. *M* 7.151–2 = LS 41C; cf. Stobaeus 2.111.18–112.8 = LS 41G = *SVF* 3.548, part; cf. Stobaeus 2.73.16–74.3 = LS 41H = *SVF* 3.112, part). Importantly, this definition does not name an alternative, according to which some beliefs are weak assents and others are false assents. All belief is weak assent. Cf. C. Meinwald, 'Ignorance and opinion in Stoic epistemology', *Phronesis* 50 (2005), 215–31.

¹⁸ I shall not attempt to comment here on the notoriously difficult claim that all sense perceptions are true (cf. *M* 7.210, 8.9). Epicurus' own formulations of this idea are somewhat less straightforward (cf. *Ep. Hdt.* 50–2).

¹⁹ *M* 7.211 = LS 18A.

²⁰ This is, for example, in contrast to a view according to which looking at my laptop under good viewing conditions *causes* me to believe that this is my laptop. For a different notion of acceptance, cf. G. Fine, 'Descartes and ancient skepticism: reheated cabbage?', *PhR* 109 (2000), 195–234, at 216.

does not *add* beliefs (*prosdoxazein*) to what she experiences (*PH* 1.25–30).²¹ Again, *prosdoxazein* envisages belief as belief formation, as *actively* adding something to one's experience or mental state. The qualification *adoxastôs*, used in several important contexts – the sceptic speaks *adoxastôs* (*PH* 1.24; cf. 1.15), lives *adoxastôs* and adheres to ordinary life *adoxastôs* (*PH* 1.23, 226–7) – thus seems to refer to the idea that the sceptic does not *form* beliefs. I shall translate *adoxastôs* as 'non-doxastically', and I shall take 'non-doxastically' to refer to precisely this idea: something is done non-doxastically if it does not involve belief formation or judgement.

There might be an even more ambitious way to disavow belief. If Sextus' focus was not on belief formation, he might be read as claiming that no dormant or non-occurrent beliefs figure in the sceptic's mind. This, however, is not how Sextus describes the sceptic. The sceptic is a rational human being: she perceives the world conceptually and thinks conceptual thoughts. And these are abilities she acquired prior to turning into a sceptic. Whatever these abilities involve, it is not lost through conversion to scepticism. Furthermore, beliefs that the sceptic formed prior to turning into a sceptic shape the configuration of her mind. It is impossible for the sceptic to reverse all such aspects of her 'rational constitution', and it is not a goal of the sceptic to do so. Sextus does not address these issues when he describes the sceptic's life as lived *adoxastôs*.²² His claim is not that, by becoming a sceptic, the sceptic adopts the goal of wiping out all beliefs that she formed in the past. If one did not consider the dialectical context, one might accordingly say that, therefore, the sceptic 'has beliefs'. As I argued, this is not the perspective we should take. In the terms of a debate that views beliefs as judgements or acceptances, the sceptic 'does not have beliefs' in the sense that, *as* a sceptic, she does not *form* beliefs.

Second, the idea that beliefs crucially involve judgements leads to the question of whether Sextus dialectically engages with theories according to which belief is voluntary. I do not think that there is a clear answer to this question, posed in these terms. The issue of voluntarism about belief arises in the framework of later philosophical theories.²³ However, a variant of the relevant claim is true: both Stoics and Epicureans think that it is *up to us* to form a particular belief.²⁴ It is central to Stoic philosophy that assent is in our power. Acceptance or rejection is not caused by the convincingness or unconvincingness of the impression (nor by the fact that the impression is cognitive or non-cognitive). It is up to us to accept and reject impressions. This does not mean that we would be able to adopt

²¹ The relevant verb – *prosdoxazein* – figures importantly in Epicurus' epistemology. Epicurus writes that falsehood and error always lie in that which is added by belief (*prosdoxazein*) (*Ep. Hdt.* 50–2).

²² Arguably, Sextus invokes the process of concept acquisition when he explains how the sceptic is able to think. Cf. J. Brunschwig, 'Sextus Empiricus on the *kritêrion*: the Sceptic as conceptual legatee', in id., *Papers in Hellenistic Philosophy*, tr. J. Lloyd (Cambridge, 1994), 230–43; and K.M. Vogt, 'Skeptische Suche und das Verstehen von Begriffen', in C. Rapp and T. Wagner (edd.), *Wissen und Bildung in der antiken Philosophie* (Stuttgart, 2006), 325–39.

²³ Cicero says that, according to Zeno, the mind's assent is located 'in us' and is voluntary (*Acad.* 1.40). However, Cicero's Latin terminology might already go beyond the Greek expressions used by Zeno and his immediate successors.

²⁴ For a different view, see G. Fine, 'Sceptical *dogmata*: *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* I 13', *Methexis* 12 (2000), 81–105, at 99.

beliefs 'at will.' Rather, it means that, in belief formation, we are able to adhere to epistemic norms – even though this may be a difficult task.²⁵

Third, we should ask how Sextus' interlocutors conceive of the relationship between declarative thoughts on the one hand and beliefs on the other. Recall the famous passage in Plato's *Theaetetus*, where Socrates compares the inner speech of examining an issue (*skopê*) with belief formation (*doxazein*) (189e6–190a6). While one is thinking, one is having a conversation with oneself, asking questions and responding, saying 'yes' and 'no.' Only when one arrives at a determinate claim, no longer going back and forth about the matter, do we speak of belief (*doxa*). Frede's interpretation of scepticism suggests that there is something in between: having considered a matter carefully, one finds oneself left with a thought, where this thought is already a kind of belief; since one does not think that the thought is true, one does not hold a belief in the strong sense of the dogmatists.²⁶ The passage in the *Theaetetus* is a useful point of reference – it is likely that the Hellenistic epistemologists engage with it.

The Stoic version of Socrates' distinction is the following: all rational impressions are thoughts. Assents are acceptances of these thoughts as true. For example, to have the impression that there is a monster under my bed is to think the thought that there is a monster under my bed.²⁷ Suppose I think this thought because I had a bad dream, and I know full well that I have to shake it off, because there is of course no monster under my bed. In this case, I think the thought 'there is a monster under my bed', but I do not believe that there is a monster under my bed. The Epicurean analysis is similar, at least in the respects that matter for the present purpose.²⁸ If I find myself with the thought that there is a monster under my bed, it is my job as a student of physics to remind myself of the fact that there are no monsters, thus keeping myself from forming the judgement that there is a monster under my bed. Thus both major Hellenistic epistemologies adopt something like Plato's twofold distinction. They do not envisage Frede's threefold distinction.

They can, however, account for Frede's phenomenon. Frede's proposal is appealing precisely because it seems right that, sometimes, we find ourselves left with a thought even though we do not endorse it. From the point of view of Stoic and Epicurean epistemology, some thoughts might linger in one's mind because, as physiological processes, they cannot be instantaneously annihilated through rejection or suspension of judgement; they have inertia and momentum.²⁹ Other

²⁵ This is an important point, especially since contemporary discussions of doxastic voluntarism often assume that belief is 'voluntary' in the relevant sense if one can form a belief 'at will' (for example, because one is offered a million dollars). This idea would appear absurd to the Stoics and Epicureans. That judgement is 'up to us' means that we are able to adhere to epistemic norms such as, for example, that one should think carefully about the available information, try not to make mistakes in the logic of one's reasoning, attend closely to the evidence, and so on.

²⁶ 'To be left with the impression or thought that p [...] does not involve the further thought that p is true' (1984, 206).

²⁷ I owe the monster example to Steve Ma, who formulated it in a context unrelated to Hellenistic epistemology.

²⁸ Dream images are caused by processes at the atomic level. Cf. Epicurus, *Ep. Hdt.* 50–2. However, it does not matter to my example whether the thought is caused by a dream or in some other way.

²⁹ This is explained in the context of the theory of emotions. Emotions are judgements, but they are not wiped out immediately when the judgement is revised. Cf. Galen, *On Hippocrates'*

thoughts linger in one's mind because one keeps arriving at them, say, because one investigates and keeps arriving at the thought that things are inapprehensible. That is, both sensory and non-sensory thoughts ('there is a monster', 'things are inapprehensible') can have a prolonged presence in one's mind, even though they were not accepted as true.

Through its focus on acceptance, Hellenistic epistemology might miss out on ideas that we find interesting. For example, we might insist that one can believe things in different modes and degrees – being more or less committed to, convinced of and confident in the truth of what we believe.³⁰ We also take attitudes to our beliefs. We are more or less attached to our beliefs, have strong feelings tied to some of them, or believe something and at the same time do not really care whether it is true. The Stoics and Epicureans propose a uniform notion of belief. Though they can admit that particular instances of belief can have particular features, their focus is on whether one makes a judgement, thereby accepting something as true, or not. To us, this may seem misguided. We might be inclined to think of the sceptic's beliefs as lying at one end of a spectrum, the end where the believer is least committed – where she merely entertains a belief, without buying into it. So we might be inclined to think of the sceptic as finding herself with the view that 'nothing is known.'³¹ While this proposal, which may capture part of the spirit of Frede's interpretation, is appealing, it could not be defended in conversation with Stoics and Epicureans.

2. *PH* 1.13–15: DOES THE SCEPTIC DOGMATIZE?

In response to Frede's views, even scholars who disagree with the details of his analysis have embraced Frede's starting point: a certain passage in Sextus, namely *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* 1.13, must be scrutinized, because here Sextus seems to offer a distinction between a kind of belief the sceptic has, and another kind of belief that the sceptic does not have.³² In taking this view, they pay too little attention to the title of *PH* 1.13: "Does the sceptic dogmatize?" As I see it, Sextus primarily addresses the Dogma Charge, not the Belief Charge.³³ Here is *PH* 1.13, in conjunction with the adjacent paragraphs:

Does the sceptic dogmatize (*dogmatizein*)?

When we say that the sceptic does not have *dogmata* we are not using 'dogma' in the more general sense in which some say that *dogma* is acquiescing in something. For the sceptic assents to the conditions forced on her in accordance with an appearance. For

and Plato's doctrines 4.2.10–18 = *SVF* 3.462, part = LS 65J.

³⁰ It is important to Sextus that the thoughts which figure – unendorsed – in the sceptic's life do not have different degrees of credibility. In his account of suspension of judgement, Sextus speaks about several positions being equal as far as credibility (*pistis*) and lack thereof (*apistia*) are concerned, so that none of several views is more credible (*pistoteron*) than another (*PH* 1.10).

³¹ This is Frede's example in (1984).

³² There are two main ways of drawing the relevant distinction. Kinds of belief could be differentiated depending on the subject matter, or by the kind of attitude that is involved.

³³ Burnyeat (1984, in id. and Frede [1997], 51) notes that we should be careful in how we draw on *PH* 1.13.

example, the sceptic when warmed or cooled would not say ‘I think I am not heated (or cooled)’. Rather, we say that the sceptic does not have *dogmata* in the sense in which some say that *dogma* is assent to some non-evident matter investigated by the sciences. For the sceptic does not assent to anything non-evident.

Not even in uttering the sceptical phrases about unclear matters – for example, ‘In no way more’, or ‘I determine nothing’, or one of the other phrases which we shall later discuss – do they dogmatize (*dogmatizein*). For if you dogmatize, then you posit as real the things that you are said to dogmatize about; but sceptics posit these phrases not as necessarily being real. For they suppose that, just as the phrase ‘Everything is false’ says that it too, along with everything else, is false (and similarly for ‘Nothing is true’), so also ‘In no way more’ says that it too, along with everything else, is no more so than not so, and hence cancels itself along with everything else. And we say the same of the other sceptical phrases. Thus, if people who dogmatize posit as real the things they dogmatize about, while sceptics utter their own phrases in such a way that they are implicitly cancelled by themselves, then they cannot be said to dogmatize in uttering them. But the main point is this: in uttering these phrases they say what appears to themselves and report their own feelings without any belief (*adoxastôs*), affirming nothing about external objects. (PH 1.13–15, tr. Annas–Barnes, with changes)³⁴

In §13, Sextus does not speak about beliefs (*doxai*), but about *dogmata*. Scholars have examined uses of *dogma* in Hellenistic and earlier writings.³⁵ *Dogma* and *doxa* can at times be used almost interchangeably. In Hellenistic texts, however, *dogma* mostly refers to somewhat weightier claims, and it is plausible that Sextus uses *dogma* in this sense. The question of whether the sceptic dogmatizes leads Sextus to discuss whether central pieces of sceptical philosophy – the sceptical formulae – are doctrinal teachings. This assessment fits well with the way in which Sextus, quite generally, keeps *doxa* and *dogma* apart, using these words and their cognates in different contexts: *dogmatikôs* when he refers to philosophical claims, and *adoxastôs* when he describes the sceptic’s life.

The chapter as a whole is concerned with a problem that arises specifically for Pyrrhonian (not Academic) scepticism, the problem I have called the Dogma Charge. The Pyrrhonians are associated with a set of formulae: ‘no more’, ‘non-assertion’ (*aphasia*), ‘maybe’, ‘I suspend’, ‘I determine nothing’, ‘all things are indeterminate’, ‘all things are inapprehensible’, ‘I do not apprehend’ and ‘to every argument an equal argument is opposed.’³⁶ It is dogmatic and potentially self-refuting to put these expressions forward as theses.³⁷ Aside from the modes, Sextus’ discussions of these formulae take up the largest part of PH 1: §§ 187–209. They have a long history, going back to formulations like ‘nothing is known.’ In part this means that the formulae are a kind of baggage that Pyrrhonism comes with. They capture much of the core of Pyrrhonism, albeit in an almost historical fashion: these are ideas that earlier Pyrrhonists formulated, aiming to express ideas that were much closer to a metaphysical doctrine than Sextus could allow.

I submit that, when Sextus asks whether the sceptic has any *dogmata*, he is addressing the problem that the formulae look like teachings, and accordingly the

³⁴ All citations in this paper are rendered in Annas and Barnes’s translation, with changes; see J. Annas and J. Barnes, *Sextus Empiricus. Outlines of Scepticism* (Cambridge, 2000).

³⁵ Barnes (1982); D. Sedley, ‘The motivation of Greek skepticism’, in Burnyeat (n. 13), 9–29.

³⁶ Cf. L. Castagnoli, *Ancient Self-Refutation* (Cambridge, 2010) on the issue of self-refutation.

³⁷ The same goes for the parallel passage in Diog. Laert. 9.102–4, which addresses the question of whether the sceptics are dogmatizing in their claims that ‘they determine nothing’, that ‘every argument has an opposite argument’, and so on.

Dogma Charge. That is to say, he is not, or not primarily, addressing the question that interpreters since Frede (1979) generally take him to be discussing – whether the sceptic has any beliefs. In so far as the various anti-sceptical objections are interrelated, the Belief Charge is never far from Sextus' mind. Nevertheless, Sextus considers the problem that Pyrrhonism might appear to have its own teachings as a charge that merits particular attention. Frede thinks that one cannot come away from reading *PH* 1.13 without concluding that the sceptic has quite a few beliefs.³⁸ That does not seem right. One cannot come away from reading *PH* 1.13 *in context* without concluding that Sextus is concerned with the issue that Pyrrhonism might appear to make theoretical claims. The next chapter in Sextus' *Outlines* pursues this line of thought. Sextus explains the sense in which scepticism is a philosophy – a kind of *logos* (*PH* 1.16–17). Scepticism is a kind of 'school', albeit one without a body of teachings. With this context in mind, turn now to the contested § 13. I shall consider the text sentence by sentence.

When we say that the sceptic does not have *dogmata* we are not using 'dogma' in the more general sense in which some say that *dogma* is acquiescing in something.

Sextus says that there is a general sense of 'dogma' – a kind of acquiescing – that figures in the sceptic's life. As I see it, this is how the formulae (and other thoughts central to the sceptic's philosophy) can linger in the sceptic's mind, without her having accepted them as true. The formulae are, as it were, stock thoughts of the sceptic. They have a more or less continuous presence in the sceptic's mind. When something strikes one regularly and repeatedly in a certain way, one would have to engage in rather extreme measures to purge oneself of the respective thought – otherwise, it will continue to be present in one's mind. The sceptic allows the thought to stay (she 'acquiesces' in it), rather than actively purging herself of it.³⁹ This kind of 'giving in' is quite different from acceptance. It is the path of least resistance: the sceptic would have to be more active in order to get rid of these thoughts than she is active in letting them linger in her mind. To acquiesce is to give a kind of assent – one that Sextus, somewhat unexpectedly, explains with respect to bodily affections, rather than with respect to philosophical thoughts.

For the sceptic assents to the conditions forced on her in accordance with an appearance. For example, the sceptic when warmed or cooled would not say 'I think I am not heated (or cooled)'.

According to *PH* 1.23–4, *pathê* that are forced on the sceptic are affections like hunger and thirst. These affections have a certain kind of necessity and they compel the sceptic to assent, thus leading her to food and drink. Presumably heat and cold are like this. When freezing, we cover up; when we feel too warm, we open the window. The double negation in Sextus' example means that, in effect, we do not get an example.⁴⁰ Sextus reports what the sceptic would not say: she would *not* say that she is *not* warm if she was warmed. What would she say? We cannot

³⁸ Frede (1979, in Burnyeat and Frede [1997], 19) writes: '[w]hichever way we choose to interpret the text, there will be a large number of beliefs about things which are not dogmatic beliefs'.

³⁹ In (1984), Frede explores the verb *eudokein*, 'to acquiesce'. *Eudokein* has no particular philosophical ancestry and no determinate uses in philosophy.

⁴⁰ Cf. Barnes (1982), 75.

conclude that, if warmed, the sceptic would say 'I am warmed.' When Sextus turns to forced assent in *PH* 1.23–4, he says that 'thirst leads the sceptic to drink'. That is, in his positive description of what the sceptic does in forced assent, Sextus does not cite an utterance, or a kind of belief; he cites an *action*. The sceptic drinks, rather than saying 'I am thirsty'. Analogously, we might assume that she puts on a coat when cold, rather than saying 'I am cold'. This is an important point, to which I return below. In so far as the sceptic assents, her assent does not figure in belief formation; it figures in action. After his brief point about affections, Sextus returns to what I take to be his main concern: some aspects of Pyrrhonism might look as if they were theoretical claims.

Rather, we say that the sceptic does not have *dogmata* in the sense in which some say that *dogma* is assent to some non-evident matter investigated by the sciences. For the sceptic does not assent to anything non-evident.

As others have observed, this argument is rather unsatisfactory.⁴¹ By appealing to a distinction between the evident and the non-evident, Sextus invokes premisses of some of his interlocutors (say, the Epicureans). However, Sextus does not employ these premisses throughout the *Outlines*. Ultimately, any claim about how things are, even a statement like 'the honey is sweet', is a claim that the sceptic does not make (*PH* 1.19). The closing remark of § 13 is of limited value for the interpretation of Sextus' philosophy. It appears to be a move that can be employed only in a restricted dialectical context.

§ 13 is an overly dense paragraph. Once Sextus unpacks his arguments, he keeps separate several spheres of sceptical action on the one hand and the sceptical formulae on the other. Each needs to be accounted for in its own way. I take it that § 13 serves two important functions. First, it is part of a larger argument, extending into § 15, on the danger that Pyrrhonism might appear to have teachings. Second, it acknowledges that, in addressing any issue touching on whether the sceptic assents, the sceptic will have to be aware of a particularly pressing anti-sceptical argument, the Apraxia Charge – the charge that, without accepting impressions as true, the sceptic cannot *act*. Sextus briefly invokes one aspect of the Apraxia Charge: the sceptic will soon be dead if she does not respond to such affections as hunger, thirst, freezing or getting warm. His considered reply to the Apraxia Charge goes significantly beyond the suggestions of § 13 (see § 4 below).

PH 1.13–15 ends with what Sextus sees as his best account of the formulae:

And, most important of all, in his utterance of these formulae he says what appears to himself and announces his own affection without any belief being involved (*adoxastōs*), without making any assertion about the way the external things are.

The formulae involve legacy issues: there is a long history of formulations and reformulations. Sextus is aware of a wide range of things that could be said, and he has many things to say (cf. *PH* 1.187–209). His simplest reply, and the one that is most economical in referencing only ideas that are key elements of his own version of Pyrrhonism, is this: something appears to the sceptic, and this appearance can be reported in speech. I think that we should consider this as Sextus' final word on the way in which the sceptic thinks her sceptical thoughts. Notably,

⁴¹ Cf. Barnes' (1982) and Burnyeat's (1980 and 1984) arguments on this point.

this description does not involve a conception of belief. Rather, Sextus uses the adverb *adoxastôs* ('non-doxastically', or 'without involving belief formation') in describing this mode of thought.

3. THE APPEARANCES CHARGE

It is time to turn to the positive side of Sextus' account of the sceptic's life, and that is, to Sextus' construal of the sceptic's relationship to appearances. In *PH* 1.19–20, Sextus discusses the Appearances Charge.

Do the sceptics reject appearances?

Those who say that the sceptics reject appearances have not, I think, listened to what we say. As we said before, we do not overturn that which leads us, as a passively experienced impression (*kata phantasian pathêtikên*) without our willing to assent (*aboulêtôs*); but these are the appearances (*phainomena*). When we investigate whether existing things are such as they appear, we grant that they appear, and we do not investigate what appears, but what is said about what appears. And that is different from investigating the appearance itself. For example, it appears to us that honey sweetens (that we concede, in so far as we are sweetened in a perceptual way). But we investigate whether, as far as arguments are concerned, it is sweet. And this is not the appearance, but what is said about the appearance.⁴² (*PH* 1.19–20)⁴³

The clause 'as we said before' in § 19 appears to refer back to § 13. The question, however, is what precisely Sextus invokes. If we think that § 13 discusses the Belief Charge, and if we do not consider the Appearances Charge as an objection that merits attention in its own right, then *PH* 1.19–20 appears to be a continuation of Sextus' reply to the Belief Charge. The premisses of this reading, however, are questionable. § 13 is part of a discussion of the Dogma Charge, and *PH* 1.19–20 addresses the Appearances Charge. What then does § 19 refer back to? As I see it, Sextus invokes the idea that impressions can be forceful, and compel the sceptic to assent. That is, he neither invokes the Belief Charge, nor the Dogma Charge, but a more general question that connects several anti-sceptical arguments: whether the sceptic *assents* in any way.

In *PH* 1.19–20, Sextus addresses the issue of sceptical assent in terms of assent to appearances and thus in the terms of the charge that the sceptic rejects appearances. In the paragraphs that immediately follow, Sextus continues to address the Appearances Charge, giving it great prominence in his account of scepticism. That the sceptic adheres to appearances is clear, he says, from what sceptics say about their criterion (*PH* 1.21). Appearances are the sceptic's practical criterion (1.21–3). That is, Sextus treats the objection that the sceptic rejects appearances as a charge

⁴² Cf. *PH* 1.22: the sceptic investigates whether things are really as they appear; *that* they appear, the sceptic grants.

⁴³ I am drawing on Annas and Barnes' translation, albeit less so than in the other passages I cite. Annas and Barnes translate *phainomenon* as 'what is apparent' and *phantasia* as 'appearance.' While there are some disadvantages to my own rendering (*phainomenon* as 'appearance' and *phantasia* as 'impression'), I think it is, on the whole, closer to the way in which Sextus uses the terms. The expression I am translating as 'as far as arguments are concerned' is controversial; I argue for this translation in 'The aims of skeptical investigation', in D. Machuca (ed.), *Pyrrhonism in Ancient, Modern, and Contemporary Philosophy* (Dordrecht, 2011), 33–50.

that merits independent attention. It is here – in his response to the Appearances Charge – that Sextus explains how the sceptic can lead an active life.

Sextus inherits the notion of appearances from early Pyrrhonism. However, he associates appearances with impressions (*phantasiai*), thereby using one of the core terms of Stoic philosophy. Stoic technical vocabulary does not include a notion of appearances, and accordingly the Stoics do not tie their conception of *phantasia* to the notion of appearances. Sextus is not committed to a (dialectical) notion of *phantasia* that is Stoic through and through. Other philosophers have employed the term *phantasia* and Sextus can stipulate a broader notion; and yet the Stoics are particularly important interlocutors. In giving the notion of *phantasia* an important role, it is a promising strategy for Sextus to invoke some specifically Stoic assumptions about *phantasiai*. This makes for a complex dialectical set-up. In some contexts, Sextus uses a notion of appearances that refers only to perceptual appearances (e.g. *PH* 1.9).⁴⁴ For the most part, Sextus uses a wider notion of appearances, according to which both thoughts and sense perceptions can be appearances (e.g. *PH* 1.4). This is one of the respects in which Sextus' notion of appearances is like the Stoic notion of impressions: impressions are sensory or non-sensory.⁴⁵ Arguably, Sextus exploits the Stoic conception of rational impressions (the impressions of adult human beings) in further ways. Appearances, as he uses the term, are linguistic and conceptual; they are thoughts; they are the object of acceptance, rejection or suspension of judgement.

When interpreters consider the Belief Charge and the Appearances Charge as if they were virtually one objection, they often ask whether appearances have a judgement component.⁴⁶ Presumably, if 'X appears A to me' involves some kind of judgement, then it is a kind of belief.⁴⁷ This approach neglects the way in which Sextus likens appearances to Stoic impressions. Sextus invokes the closeness of *phainomena* and *phantasia* at crucial points in his argument: when he explains the sceptic's relationship to appearances (*PH* 1.19–20), and when he describes sceptical adherence to appearances as a practical criterion (*PH* 1.21–4). In 1.19, he says that the sceptics do not overturn what leads them, as a passively experienced impression (*kata phantasian pathêtikên*) without their willing (*aboulêtôs*), to assent; and these (what leads the sceptic in this way to assent) are the appearances (*phainomena*). In 1.22, he says that the sceptic's practical criterion are appearances, and that the sceptics refer by this term implicitly (*dunamei*) to the impression (*phantasia*): 'for

⁴⁴ Cf. *PH* 1.8–9 and 1.31–3. Arguably, some of the contrasts envisaged in Sextus' commentary on the Ten Modes are contrasts between sense perceptions and thoughts. Note that sense perceptions are here understood as one kind of *phantasia*, and as not involving assent.

⁴⁵ There are also earlier points of reference. In particular, one might consider Plato's *Theaetetus*. Early on in the discussion with Protagoras, appearances are associated with perception; later, the notion is extended to include theoretical appearances (e.g. it appears to Protagoras that 'man is the measure'). Cf. 152b9–c2 and 170a3–4.

⁴⁶ Scholars use different vocabularies to discuss these matters. Sometimes a purely phenomenal use of 'to appear' is distinguished from an epistemic use. I suggest we stick to the dialectical context of Sextus' arguments: in this context, the relevant distinction is between thoughts (rational impressions) on the one hand and acceptances on the other.

⁴⁷ Cf. Barney (n. 7). Barney's premise is that, given that Sextus does not want to put forward any specific account of appearances, his notion of appearances is close to the ordinary sense of 'appearances.' By exploring everyday uses, as well as some relevant discussions in Plato, Aristotle, Epicurus and the Stoics, Barney argues that there is no purely phenomenological sense. Accordingly, she ends up arguing for a judgemental interpretation of sceptical appearances (that is, the view that the sceptic's relationship to appearances involves beliefs).

this [*phantasia*] depends on unwilling affection and is not subject to investigation'. Importantly, Stoic impressions come *before* assent (they are the object of assent, rejection and suspension of judgement). They are *passive* in the sense of not involving any act of acceptance, or other active response on the part of the cognizer. In likening appearances to impressions, Sextus specifically appeals to these aspects of the Stoic conception of *phantasia*. Sextus' appearances, accordingly, should be thought of as passive in the sense that they do not involve any kind of judgement.

4. APPEARANCES AND ASSENT

Appearances are the sceptic's *practical* criterion; they are *not* her criterion in matters of assessing what is and what is not the case (*PH* 1.21–4). That is, appearances play a role in action that they do not play in thought and, importantly, a role that they do not play in investigation. For example, if honey appears sweet to the sceptic outside of the context of action, this appearance does not offer epistemic guidance. The sceptic does not consider it likely that the honey is sweet; she is not inclined to believe that it is sweet. Rather, the sceptic will apply her sceptical modes of investigation. She will remind herself that things appear differently to different cognizers (under different conditions, and so on), thus leading herself to suspension of judgement on whether honey really is sweet. In a practical context, say, when looking for some food for breakfast, the appearance plays a criterial role: when tasting honey from different jars, the sceptic allows herself to be guided by appearances. She eats the honey that tastes sweet.

As we saw, the dogmatic theories of thought are such that persistent thoughts can be accounted for without any role given to assent. But Sextus' Hellenistic interlocutors would not grant that a mere thought can do as much as move us to action.⁴⁸ It can incline us toward an action, or move us toward performing it; but assent needs to be given if an action is to be conducted. The sceptic lives an active life, being active in spheres that we might call Survival (drinking when thirsty), Custom (going along with the customs of her community) and Skill (doing things she was trained to do) (*PH* 1.21–4).⁴⁹ In order to explain sceptical activity, Sextus needs to allow for some kind of qualified acceptance – some act of the mind that allows the appearance to be effective as a guide for and motivator of the action.

Sextus characterizes sceptical assent in three ways, all of which play a role in sceptical action: forced assent, which figures in actions like drinking when thirsty (*PH* 1.13, 23–4, 193); assent given involuntarily (*aboulêtôs*), which is illustrated through the example of honey tasting sweet (*PH* 1.19–20); and, albeit not in *PH* 1, assent given non-doxastically (*adoxastôs*), which is mentioned in the context of the sceptic's reliance on commemorative signs (e.g. fire and smoke, wound and medication), which serve to guide action (*PH* 2.102).

⁴⁸ Plutarch's report of Stoic–Academic and Epicurean–Academic discussions about *apraxia* shows that the Stoics and Epicureans agree on this point, even though they disagree on the details of how agency should be analysed (Col. 1122a = LS 69A).

⁴⁹ I am here skipping the first of four domains of sceptical activity: thought and perception, abilities which Sextus says the sceptic has through the guidance of nature. For this point, Sextus can rely on dogmatic theories about the acquisition of reason, which takes place without rational assent; cf. Vogt (n. 22). For the present purposes, I shall assume that this domain of activity is unproblematic.

Does Sextus, in speaking of forced, involuntary and non-doxastic assent, use three names for the same thing? My proposal is that he does not: forced assents are a sub-class of involuntary and non-doxastic assents. They figure in a specific domain of action, namely Survival. Sextus' example is drinking when thirsty and eating when hungry (see also *PH* 1.238). Based on *PH* 1.13, immediate responses to feeling cold or warm might be added as another example.⁵⁰ Such appearances are particularly compelling and they are particularly strong physiological movements of the mind. They force the sceptic to assent. That is, if the cognizer does not counteract their force, they directly generate action. Presumably, there are activities like covering up when freezing for which this is plausible.

The sphere of Survival, however, is quite limited. When cold, we usually consider what to wear: a ski suit when skiing in the mountains, or a coat in the city. When thirsty, we usually consider when and what to drink, and at times also how to prepare the drink. That is, even activities that respond to thirst or feeling cold involve custom and skill. Accordingly, Sextus must admit a kind of assent into the sceptic's life that is not necessitated but is yet sufficiently passive in order to differ from assent or judgement as the dogmatists envisage it. Involuntary and non-doxastic assent play this role.

Note that Sextus is in an almost impossible dialectical situation. The notions of necessitated assent, involuntary assent and non-doxastic assent are contradictions in terms from the point of view of his Hellenistic opponents. They are contradictions in terms for two reasons. First, for the Stoics and Epicureans assent simply *is* acceptance as true, and thus doxastic in the sense of 'involving belief formation'; accordingly, the notion of non-doxastic assent makes no sense. Second, assent is up to us, and thus the notion of forced or involuntary assent is incoherent. How can Sextus possibly try to put forward such conceptions, if the aim is to succeed in his arguments against the dogmatists? As I see it, Sextus aims to make plausible a notion of assent that does not involve belief formation via the notions of forced and involuntary assent (and that is, the kinds of sceptical assent he mentions in *PH* 1; 'non-doxastic assent' is not mentioned in *PH* 1). Sextus can plausibly try to make this argument because the Stoics and Epicureans are notoriously torn about the relevant issues. Philosophers from both schools aim to reconcile a deterministic natural philosophy and responsibility for good and bad action: on the one hand they explore how everything is *caused*, and on the other hand they argue that every action is generated by a *rational* act of the mind, judgement.⁵¹ A version of this problem arises for belief formation. Our minds undergo causal processes; cognitive acts are nevertheless 'up to us'. The Hellenistic philosophers thus aim to formulate a compelling position on what today would be called the question of doxastic voluntarism. In the terms of Hellenistic epistemology, the difficulty lies in explaining how we are able to adhere to epistemic norms, even though we are 'moved' by impressions. In which sense is it in our power to accept or reject impressions? If Sextus can argue that sceptical assent is passive, he in effect also argues that, according to the premisses of his interlocutors, it is non-doxastic. Judgement is thought of as inherently active, and judgement is constitutive of belief. Sextus' strategy is thus to defend the notion of passive (forced, involuntary)

⁵⁰ If we take the notion of necessitation seriously, these actions look almost like reflex actions.

⁵¹ My arguments here do not depend on any particular interpretation of Stoic or Epicurean thought on these issues. Cf. T. O'Keefe, *Epicurus on Freedom* (Cambridge, 2005), and S. Bobzien, *Determinism and Freedom in Stoic Philosophy* (New York and Oxford, 1998).

assent, thereby admitting a kind of assent into the sceptic's mental life that does not involve judgement or belief formation.

The Stoics think that assent is up to us, a tenet that is central to their account of virtue and knowledge: it is up to us to become virtuous and knowledgeable.⁵² And yet the Stoics also describe the powers that impressions have over our minds. For example, they think that cognitive impressions almost pull us by the hair toward assent.⁵³ Impressions are more or less convincing, which means that they generate a more or less smooth movement of the mind, toward assent.⁵⁴ If we are not careful in controlling our assent, we have given it before we even know it. We need the virtue of non-precipitancy to avoid this.⁵⁵ Assent is up to us, but this is a *normative* idea, not simply a fact. We are able to adhere to epistemic norms. These norms are not easy to follow. If we are not cautious, our mind gives assent without our having considered the matter.

The Epicureans are in a similar predicament. Like the world of the Stoics, their world is explained by natural science. For the Epicureans, atomic events are caused by other atomic events. Praise and blame need to be left intact, and thus responsibility is located in our judgements: our actions are based on judgements. But atoms and compounds of atoms, flying in and out of our souls, affect us in myriad ways, setting physiological processes in motion.⁵⁶ While all sense perception is true, and error is introduced by judgement, it is by no means easy to steer clear of error. We are prone to judge. The mind is such that it likes to add and subtract things – we remember something, and already we have added an element from the past to a current perception; we love something, and already we have changed the mode of a perception. Judgement is in our power, but this is a normative idea. Where we do not train this power so that we achieve the relevant kind of restraint, judgement runs away with us.

Sextus presents sceptical assent against the backdrop of these conceptions. Actively granted acceptance is in our power, if we work hard at it. If we allow ourselves to go along with things, acceptance really is something else. Sextus treads a subtle balance between activity and passivity. Forced assent is entirely passive. Involuntary assent involves a degree of activity, namely, not setting anything against a movement in the mind. The appearance sets the sceptic's mind in motion, and the sceptic allows herself to be guided or persuaded by it.⁵⁷ Sextus' argument depends on exploiting two intuitions that, for the dogmatists, must be explained in sophisticated ways in order to not be in conflict with each other: that judgements are active, and that the mind is moved by impressions. Sextus invokes these two assumptions in order to say: our mind is pushed and pulled by appearances, and we let this happen, so that we end up passively accepting things; this passivity means that we do not make judgements. The dogmatists of course balk at this. From their perspective, one either accepts an appearance and thus makes a judgement,

⁵² Cf. Cic. *Fat.* 39–42 = *SVF* 2.974 = LS 62C.

⁵³ Cf. B. Inwood, *Ethics and Human Action in Early Stoicism* (Oxford, 1985), 76.

⁵⁴ *M* 7.242.

⁵⁵ The Stoics warn against the ways in which things are convincing (*pragmateiôn pithanotêtas*), which can lead astray the person who is not wise (Diog. Laert. 7.89).

⁵⁶ Epicurus, *On nature* 34.26–30.

⁵⁷ This is where Sextus' metaphor of the pupil being guided by a teacher comes in (*PH* 1.229–30). The pupil follows the teacher. He is not dragged by his hair. Still, he does not make his own decisions.

or one does not. However, their own theories aim to account for intuitions which might seem to be in tension. Whether they succeed in resolving these tensions is not immediately relevant for the sceptic. The sceptic has no interest in a charitable interpretation of a theory as a whole; she can invoke particular premisses, taken out of context. Doing so, Sextus is able to exploit one of the most delicate areas in the theories of his interlocutors – an area where, if one does not get things precisely right, the question of whether acceptance is active or passive looks sufficiently muddled for the sceptic to have a promising point of departure.

CONCLUSION

I have argued that Sextus dialectically employs premisses of Stoic and Epicurean philosophy which allow him to conceive of passive assent to practically relevant appearances: assent that leads to activity, but does not involve and is not identical with belief formation. Sextus repudiates the Appearances Charge as a misunderstanding of scepticism. The sceptic is far from rejecting appearances; she lets herself be guided by appearances. Appearances are a *practical* criterion. They are allowed to exert their guiding force only in action. Notably, appearances are not ‘epistemic guides.’ The sceptic is not inclined to believe what appears to her; on the contrary, she investigates it. Appearances are ‘practical guides.’ Accordingly, the sceptic’s assent to them is genuinely non-doxastic – it figures in action, not in belief.⁵⁸

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⁵⁸ Versions of K. M. Vogt (2006) and (2011) have meanwhile appeared in K. M. Vogt, *Belief and Truth: A Sceptic Reading of Plato* (Oxford and New York 2012).