Practical Skepticism: Sextus Empiricus and Zhuangzi

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Introduction

This thesis inquires into the way in which skepticism is able to inform a practical life. In the first chapter, I examine the theoretical aspect of Pyrrhonian skepticism. I explore the goal and methods of the Pyrrhonist in order to see how this leads to a skeptical epistemology. In the second chapter, I examine the way in which the Pyrrhonist’s skepticism informs her practical and day-to-day life. In the third chapter, I examine the theoretical aspect of Zhuangzi’s Daoism, looking at major notions in his position that lead him to a skeptical outlook. In the fourth chapter, I examine how this skeptical outlooks leads to a Daoist way of living. Finally, in the fifth chapter, I compare and evaluate the two skeptical philosophies. I note that while both philosophies are similar in many respects, they lead to very different manner of living. Ultimately I conclude that the difference lies in the fact that the Pyrrhonist is actively engaged in disputation and argumentation, while Zhuangzi disavows the search for truth entirely. I argue that this difference leads to the Pyrrhonist having a very traditional life, and the Daoist having a very spontaneous lifestyle, and that in the end, the Daoist lifestyle is preferable to the Pyrrhonist.
Chapter 1

Pyrrhonian Skepticism in Theory

1.1 Introduction

Before I begin my examination of the Greek skeptics, I would like to take a brief look at the philosophical culture found in the ancient world, which in turn, helped produce Pyrrhonian skepticism. Philosophy, in the ancient world, had as a goal the attainment of wisdom. For us, knowledge and wisdom are often conflated, so that when we think of one who has many true and justified beliefs, we think of someone with a lot of knowledge, and by extension, someone who is wise. For the ancient Greeks, on the other hand, wisdom was most often seen as living the good life, in some way or another. Many of the ancient schools—Platonism, Parapateticism, Stoicism, and Epicureanism—thought that the best way to achieve this good life was through metaphysical and ethical knowledge of the world and the self, yet the goal always remained wisdom and the good life. The reason that it is necessary to make note of this, is that in contemporary philosophy skeptics keep their offices in the utmost regions of the ivory tower, such that even recondite metaphysicians and other esoteric philosophers accuse the skeptic of being too
impractical and unconnected to life. Ancient Pyrrhonian skepticism was not like this. As we will see later in the chapter, the Pyrrhonian skeptic has something like the good life as a goal, but the means traditionally chosen to achieve this end—knowledge—were abandoned in favor of something else.

Pyrrhonian skepticism (hereafter, simply skepticism) was first practiced by Pyrrho of Elis. Pyrrho was born in 360 BCE and died in 270 BCE. According to the tradition, Pyrrho accompanied Alexander the Great to India, where he met with and studied under the ascetics and gymnosophists of the East.¹ These men were most likely Hindu or Buddhist, and when Pyrrho came back from the Indian expedition, he lived his life in solitude and without wealth. Although Pyrrho did not found a school or publish any documents outlining his beliefs, he began to expound a rudimentary form of skepticism that would later be transformed into a tradition and a way of life that was actively engaged in during many centuries of the ancient world. Although Pyrrho did not write anything, and we have lost the works of nearly all his followers, we do have the Outlines of Skepticism, which was written by Sextus Empiricus in the late second century ACE, or so many scholars believe.² Because Sextus is writing several centuries after Pyrrho, he has the benefit of coming at the end of a long tradition, meaning that he has read and learned from many of the best skeptics who all looked to Pyrrho as their intellectual ancestor. Because of this, we will take Sextus’ account as the authoritative account of Pyrrhonian skepticism.

¹ Sextus, Outlines of Scepticism, xvii. ² Ibid., xi-xii.
1.2 Definition of ‘Skeptic’

It will now behoove us to define skepticism as well as the other philosophical schools using the skeptics own words. According to the skeptic there are three types of philosophers, which correspond to the three different logical positions held in regard to a proposition—assent, denial, and neither assent nor denial. A dogmatist is anyone who assents to a proposition or set of propositions describing things as they are. As Sextus puts it, “Those who are called dogmatists in the proper sense of the word think that they have discovered the truth.” These propositions or truths may be logical, physical, ethical, or metaphysical. In the ancient world, this included Platonists, Aristotelians, Stoics, Epicureans, Cynics, Parmenideans, Heraclitians, and many others. Amongst modern and contemporary philosophers, nearly every one can be counted a dogmatist, except perhaps for some of the post-modernists, like Derrida or Rorty, although even this is questionable. An Academic is one who assertorically denies that knowledge is possible. The name Academic is derived from the middle phase of Plato’s Academy, when it was taken over by a man named Arcesilaus, who claimed to return to Plato’s true roots in Socrates and the Socratic dialectic, which never arrived at an answer but continuously moved the conversation forward with new objections. Since the ancient world, there have only been a very few who

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3 Ibid., 1.
4 Although cynics do not seem to be particularly dogmatic or attached to any particular interpretation of the world, they do make certain claims regarding what is natural, and regarding what sort of life will lead to happiness and contentment.
qualify as Academics, and most of them have referred to themselves as skeptics. Finally, the skeptic is one who neither asserts nor denies particular propositions regarding the true nature of things. Unlike the dogmatists and academics, who have decided on some matter at hand, “[the skeptics] are still investigating.” Among philosophers since the ancient world, very few have been skeptics in the sense that I have defined.

Although we have stated the criterion given by Sextus to identify a skeptic among dogmatists and academics, we still need a proper definition for the skeptic. According to Sextus, “Skepticism is an ability to set out oppositions among things which appear and are thought of in any way at all, an ability by which, because of the equipollence in the opposed objects and accounts, we come first to suspension of judgment and afterwards to tranquility.” In this definition we find several key terms whose elucidation will help us fully understand the skeptic, his goal, and method. The terms we will examine are as follows: ‘ability’, ‘oppositions’, ‘appear’, ‘equipollence’, ‘suspension of judgment’, and ‘tranquility’. In the section immediately following we will explore the terms ‘ability’, ‘suspension of judgment’, and ‘tranquility’ in order to gain an understanding of the skeptic’s aim and overall purpose. The remainder of the chapter will look at the terms ‘opposition’, ‘equipollence’, and ‘appear’ in order to fully understand the methodology and technique of the skeptic.

It is essential to note that skepticism is an ability and not a set of beliefs.

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5 Ibid., 1.
6 Ibid., 4.
Unlike many of the other ancient or modern philosophical schools, a member did not have a set of standard beliefs that included him among other members. If questioned, a skeptic would not tell you what the good is, whether there was an afterlife, or whether some specific physical theory was true. But that does not mean that every non-philosophical and non-thoughtful person was a skeptic, for the skeptic knew all of the philosophical arguments on both sides of the issue and it was this breadth of information, as well as the ability to employ it, that made one a skeptic. In order to clarify this point even further, Sextus has this to say: “We call it an ability not in any fancy sense, but simply In the sense of ‘to be able to’… A Pyrrhonian [skeptic] is someone who possesses this ability.”

1.3 Goal of the Skeptic

The terms ‘suspension of judgment’ and ‘tranquility’ define the ultimate goal and purpose of skepticism. According to Sextus, “Suspension of judgment is a standstill of the intellect, owing to which we neither reject nor posit anything. Tranquility is freedom from disturbance or calmness of soul.” While both of these states are a calming or quieting, the difference between the two can be said to lie in the difference between what is calmed in us. Suspension of judgment is a calming of the rational intellect, or if one prefers a different way of speaking, the faculty in us

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7 Ibid., 4-5.
8 Ibid., 5.
which discerns truth from untruth. Tranquility, on the other hand is a calming of our
gen-eral being, including our rational faculties, but additionally, our emotions and
excess desires. According to Sextus, “The causal principle of skepticism… is the
hope of becoming tranquil,”⁹ and again that “the aim of the skeptic is tranquility in
matters of opinion and moderation of feeling in matters forced upon us.”¹⁰ Suspension of judgment and tranquility, however, are not separate ends that are
achieved independently of one another. Rather, suspension of judgment leads to
tranquility. As Sextus tells us, “Skeptics began to do philosophy in order to decide
among appearances and to apprehend which are true and which false, so as to become
tranquil; but they came upon equipollent dispute, and being unable to decide this they
suspended judgment. And when they suspended judgment, tranquility in matters of
opinion followed fortuitously.”¹¹

Before moving on to the section dealing with methodology, I would like to
raise two points, the first dealing with the way skeptics came to be skeptics, and the
second dealing with an objection often raised against skepticism by someone recently
introduced to it. Skepticism is not so much an ideology propagated and expanded by
its followers, but a conclusion come to by different thinkers each on their own terms.
It is true that Pyrrho was credited with attaching himself to skepticism first, and in
this sense he is its founder, but again, it is not something that he taught because he
thought that others needed to hear the truth. As I mentioned earlier, tranquility and

⁹ Ibid., 5.
¹⁰ Ibid., 10.
¹¹ Ibid., 10.
freedom from disturbance was a goal sought after by nearly all philosophical people in the Hellenistic times. The search for tranquility was part of the culture. The skeptic achieved this by pursuing suspension of judgment. In many cases the skeptic first went to the Platonists, and then perhaps the Stoics and finally to the Aristotelians finding virtue in some of their teaching but never being fully convinced of any one system. The tranquility of the dogmatists is arrived at by understanding the true nature of the world and acting accordingly. But, when the skeptics found this supposed nature either incomprehensible or the explanations unfitting, they gave up this method of reaching tranquility with a sort of thoughtful resignation. It was in this moment, however, that the tranquility long sought after was found.

Thus we come to the second point. Many people upon hearing about skepticism respond that the skeptics are being dishonest, for they do in fact have beliefs—beliefs about tranquility, how to achieve tranquility and the inherent goodness of tranquility. To this we may respond that the skeptics do not refrain from speaking or acting or having desires. Rather, while the dogmatists are giving us objective accounts of real objects in the real world, the skeptic is giving us an account of subjective feelings, desires, and motivations, in relation to things that appear to her to be so. The skeptic, like many others, has a natural desire for tranquility and after she gave up assenting and dissenting from certain propositions, she achieved her goal and made a method of it. The skeptic does not claim that this is the only way to achieve tranquility, nor does she state that tranquility is a good in itself that others ought to pursue. The skeptic gives a subjective account of what works for him or her,
and if you have similar goals, then you may benefit from trying it. In this regard, Sextus often uses what he calls the skeptical phrases. Some examples of these phrases are things like “in no way more”, “possibly”, and “it seems to me”. These phrases are appended to arguments and propositions uttered by Skeptics to indicate that what is being said are not being dogmatically affirmed. Even these phrases are cancelled out by other skeptical phrases so that the skeptic never truly affirms anything in a dogmatic fashion. To illustrate this point, Sextus, himself a medical doctor, gives a poignant medical analogy: “In the case of all skeptical phrases, you should understand that we do not affirm definitely that they are true—after all, we say that they can be destroyed by themselves, being cancelled along with what they apply to, just as purgative drugs do not merely drain the humors from the body but drive themselves out too along with the humors.”\textsuperscript{12}

1.4 Methodology of the Skeptic

The next term we need to examine is ‘opposition’. While this word is simple and straightforward, a sufficient amount of importance cannot be placed on the concept when it comes to the strategy taken by skeptics in debate. When confronted by a dogmatist who is touting his own beliefs, the skeptic will oppose the dogmatist’s own arguments with different beliefs that call into question the certainty of his

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., 52.
opponent’s beliefs. The ways of opposing arguments went through various stages of systemization, and by Sextus’ time we have what are called “the ten modes,” “the five modes,” and the “two modes,” and the “eight causal modes.”

In general, the modes, or tropes as they are also called in the literature, are a “systematic framework within which [the skeptic] can arrange his various particular arguments.” To help us understand how these modes work it is important to remember that, according to Sextus, the skeptic sets out “oppositions among things which appear and are thought of in any way at all.” According to Julia Annas and Jonathan Barnes, “There is an opposition of appearances when something appears so-and-so and also such-and-such, ‘so-and-so’ and ‘such-and-such’ picking out opposite or incompatible properties.” Thus, from just this brief introduction to the modes we can see the heart of the strategy. By noticing that a thing seems x and –x, we have no reason to infer anything whatsoever about the reality of the thing in question. With no good reason to jump from appearance to reality, we are left in the world of appearance and suspend judgment on any metaphysical or supra-apparent world.

Because this is not a thesis on skeptical epistemology, I will not examine every mode in detail. I will, however, look at some of the modes I think most clearly illustrate the methods of the skeptic, for the skeptics had sophisticated reasons for the things they believed—or rather they had reasons for withholding their assent and not having beliefs. The skeptics did not take things on faith, but, rather, were strict

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13 Annas and Barnes, *The Modes of Scepticism*, 22.
15 Annas and Barnes, *The Modes*, 22.
philosophers who demanded good reasons before they believed something. By looking at some of the modes we can see an outline of the arguments that caused them to assert their skeptical stance. We will first look at a selection from the ten modes, which explicitly allow one to take different sorts of appearances and claim and contrast them with opposing claims. We will then look at the five modes which are more powerful and theoretical in nature.

1.5 Modes of Argumentation

The names of the ten modes we will examine are as follows: (1) variation among animals; (2) differences among humans; (4) circumstance; (6) mixtures; (7) quantity; (10) custom and habit.\(^\text{16}\)

(1) The first mode, variation among animals, pits the appearances of two different species together, arguing that they are, in all likelihood, different.\(^\text{17}\) Sextus gives two different arguments that lead to the conclusion that different animals likely have different perceptions. Sextus argues that (a) animals have different methods of reproduction,\(^\text{18}\) (b) animals have different biological constitutions,\(^\text{19}\) and (c) animals have different appetites.\(^\text{20}\) From these three premises he concludes that (d) animals

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\(^{16}\) These names are not explicitly given by Sextus but are easily formed from the content of the explanation of each mode. Thus, the names I have used were produced by me, but in many cases are similar or identical to the names produced by other scholars such as in Annas and Barnes, *The modes.*

\(^{17}\) Ibid., 13-22.


\(^{19}\) Ibid., 13.

\(^{20}\) Ibid., 16-17.
have different perceptions. While Annas and Barnes admit that “[the first premise] seems to us [moderns] not to have the slightest force,” the second and third premises are ones accepted by most who have the scientific world view. Take, for example, a dog. According to scientists, dogs do not see colors. This supposition is backed up by physiological and neurological evidence. Additionally, regarding premise (c), dogs are sexually attracted to other dogs, and find the scent and taste of fecal matter pleasing. Both of these claims stand in opposition to humans, who do see in color, are not sexually attracted to dogs, and do not enjoying eating feces. Based on this evidence we may counter those philosophers and ordinary people who make inferences from their ordinary perceptions to the way things truly are in themselves (colored or arousing). Thus we get the following opposition:

“For species H, objects are C” contra “For Species D, objects are -C”

Because we can prefer neither one over the other from which to make our inference from appearance to reality, we are left suspending judgment on the real nature of objects in relation to property C.

2) The second mode, variation among humans, follows on the first insofar as a natural response to the first mode is something along the lines of, “well, yes, animals see the world differently, but they are animals and we are humans,” which is to say that humans have some sort of epistemological trump card or distinguished point of

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21 Both of these claims are true for the vast majority of humans, although some are in fact colorblind, and there are some humans pleased by bestiality and the eating of excrement.
view. This mode is fairly simple in that it states that different humans have different physical compositions as well as psychological capacities, in addition to different desires. Thus, while some people enjoy intellectual puzzles, others enjoy exercising. One man may find Shakespeare the consummate poet, while another prefers Goethe. Perhaps most importantly for our concerns, one man may find a hero in Socrates, another in Alcibiades, and yet a third in Achilles. Ethicists, from Plato to the present day, have given reasons for choosing one over the other, but in doing so they evoke much speculative reasoning and often end by dabbling in abstruse metaphysics. As often is the case when dealing with values, one is often inclined to beg the question in favor of something he sees as good. Thus we get the following opposition:

“For individual x, life A seems desirable”

contra

“For individual y, life –A seems desirable”

Because there is no seemingly obvious or apparent way to decide which is actually desirable, we suspend judgment on the matter.23

(4) The fourth mode deals with the way things appear depending on individual dispositions or states.24 For example, spinach (or any commonly disliked food) may taste foul when we are not hungry, but delicious when we haven’t eaten in a day. Water may feel hot when he have a fever, but luke-warm when we are healthy.

22 Ibid., 22-25.
23 Or, if one is not a skeptic, she continue to give reasons in support of her position. These reasons are not immune from other modes, though.
24 Ibid., 27-31.
Achilles’ strength and passion may seem admirable in our youth, but as we grow old we may prefer the calm and serenity of the Buddha. Being drunk or in love we may find a woman beautiful, whom we previously thought hideous. While some modes may see more obviously correct or accurate than others, Sextus points out that to decide this you must be in some state or no state. Since you are not in no state, you are in some state, and thus not unbiased. To our scientific modern minds this may seem like no objection at all, for while qualia are subjective, we have broken through the veil of ignorance to discover the atomic structure of reality, upon which all reality supervenes. Yet as I just pointed out, all people are in some such condition. This means that there is no independent viewpoint free of bias or the circumstance of a particular condition. This is the case even with people doing science.\textsuperscript{25} Thus, we get:

\begin{align*}
\text{“To individual x in state } S, \text{ y appears } F'' & \quad \text{contra} \\
\text{“To individual x in state } S^*, \text{ y appears } F^*''
\end{align*}

While certain states or circumstances may seem more natural or preferable, this is not granted, and needs further argumentation to prove.

(6) The sixth mode, mixture, states that anything we know is known through something else.\textsuperscript{26} For example, color is seen in the light or in the dark, smell in a

\textsuperscript{25} While it is not intention to develop this argument at length here, it is noteworthy that Thomas Kuhn raises a very similar point in \textit{The Structure of Scientific Revolutions}. When the community is transitioning between two scientific frameworks there is no standard for doing normal science, and people then appeal to extra-scientific criteria for determining the truth of a theory. These extra-scientific criteria may range from the practical to the political or cultural, all of which are influenced by the particular circumstances peoples and cultures find themselves in.

\textsuperscript{26} \textit{Ibid.}, 32-33.
room full of gases, and so on. This is true even of our mathematical accounts of the world. By these accounts, the world is known through numbers and the intellect. In addition, sensible things are known through the particular mixture of the mixtures that make up our senses (membranes in the eye, fluids in the ear…) and intellectual things are known through the combination of the object and our intellect (faculties or brain states, or whatever you like to call them). Because this is the case, we can never know what an object is like outside of the particular mixture that we are perceiving the object through. Thus, we get:

“To individual y, x appears F in mixture M”

Because we can never compensate to say what the thing is like independently of some mixture, we are barred from claiming what an object is truly like.

(7) The seventh mode, quantity, deals with the different impression the same thing gives off in different quantities. For example, one grain of sand feels rough but a handful feels soft. Two shots of whiskey make us courageous, while ten make us foolish and nauseous. Because of this discrepancy, we cannot know what a thing is actually like outside of a particular numeric determination. Thus, we get:

“x appears A in quantity Y”

contra

“x appears B in quantity Z”

\[^27\] Ibid., 34-35.
Because we cannot prefer one over the other we are lead to a suspension of judgment.

10) The tenth mode, custom and habit, deals with the difference found among people regarding custom, law, tradition, and myth. Sextus draws on many different sources to show how people differ widely on topics that deal with lifestyle and ethics. Where one person values pleasure, another values nobility, and another values self-sufficiency, and each of these people can call upon numerous laws, traditions, and religions to support their views.

In general we may state that these ten modes are not very persuasive to us modern people. This is, I believe, because we live in a thoroughly scientific culture where we view appearances as something illusory. We, the scientists claim, have gotten past appearances to the underlying atomic structure of reality and it couldn’t possibly make a difference whether honey tastes sweet when we are healthy, but bitter when we are sick. In both cases, honey has the same molecular makeup that we can use to explain the appearance. While this may or may not be the case, we can note that the modes were much more persuasive in ancient Greece, where the true nature of things was not discovered in a laboratory but inferred from something’s appearance. At any rate, these modes still often work in the realm of ethics, where we are, as of yet, unable to put a virtuous and vicious soul side by side under the microscope. The “five modes,” which I now turn to, on the other hand, comprise a philosophical powerhouse that is not mollified by contemporary science. These

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28 Ibid., 37-40.
arguments are still of interest to epistemologists and many other philosophers.

The first of the five modes is the mode from disagreement. According to this mode “undecidable dissension” arises, has arisen, or could possibly arise regarding all sorts of important matters and most others as well. “Because of this we are not able either to choose or to rule out anything, and we end up with suspension of judgment.” Think about this as a dilemma, as Sextus often does in his writings: Given any controversy, we may ask whether the matter is decided or undecided. If it is decided, we may ask how it is decided, or by what criteria the matter was settled. If the matter is undecided, we may infer either that the criteria by which to settle the issue is unknown, or there is disagreement abut what criteria could settle the issue. If it is decided, and a criterion is given that settles the matter satisfactorily for everyone, then it is more than likely that we were not talking about a controversy, but rather about some commonplace observation. If, on the other hand, the issue is undecided, it is clear that it would be irrational to assert an answer without knowing what type of answer would satisfy the problem. Or, if the issue is between two different criteria, then we have the same exact problem removed to the meta-level. This type of reasoning involves what Sextus in other places calls the problem of the criterion, which is not properly one of the five modes, but often functions in conjunction with them.

29 Ibid., 41.
30 Ibid., 41.
31 Ibid., 41.
The second of the five modes deals with infinite regressions.\textsuperscript{32} Most commonly, this mode is used when a dogmatist gives either a proof or a criterion for determining truth. For example, when a proof is given, the skeptic will ask that the premises of that proof are then proven and so on, an infinite number of times. When a criterion of proof is given, the skeptic will ask what second order standard of truth allowed us to determine the first one. If the standard of proof confirms itself, the skeptic will then ask why this is not begging the questions.

The third of the five modes is called relativity, and its content is quite unclear, so I will not address it here.

The fourth of the five modes is the hypothetical mode.\textsuperscript{33} The hypothetical mode occurs when a dogmatist starts from a hypothesis that is not proven but rather assumed by consensus. This happens all the time in many different disciplines, particularly in math and philosophy. If what is assumed is able to be proven, then let the dogmatist prove it, and if it is not, then why let them assume it, or so the argument from the skeptic goes.

The fifth of the five modes is the reciprocal mode.\textsuperscript{34} As Sextus puts it, “The reciprocal mode occurs when what ought to be confirmatory of the object under investigation needs to be made convincing by the object under investigation.” In other words, when I try to use A to prove B, but A is only believed provided B, then neither assertion is well supported and the skeptic maintains that we should suspend

\textsuperscript{32} Ibid., 41.
\textsuperscript{33} Ibid., 41.
\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., 41.
judgment on both.

As I said earlier, the different modes are used to create an opposition between two arguments. When a philosopher from one of the schools would make a claim about the way things really are, one or more of the modes would then be introduced to create said opposition. The goal of these oppositions is not just opposition, but to create oppositions that are equipollent, as Sextus says. The result should be a suspension of belief. In the very last section of the *Outlines*, Sextus gives a clear analogy:

Skeptics are philanthropic and wish to cure by argument as far as they can, the conceit and rashness of the dogmatists. Just as doctors for bodily afflictions have remedies which differ in potency, and apply severe remedies to patients who are severely afflicted and milder remedies to those mildly afflicted, so skeptics propound arguments which differ in strength… This is why those with a skeptical impulse do not hesitate sometimes to propound arguments which are sometimes weighty in their plausibility, and sometimes apparently rather weak. They do this deliberately, since often a weaker argument is sufficient for them to achieve their purpose.\(^{35}\)

The purpose Sextus has in mind here is the purpose of putting forth equipollent arguments, which in turn causes suspension of belief, upon which tranquility follows.

1.6 *Appearances*

Next, the term ‘appearance’ must be discussed. After grasping the modes just discussed, one might think that the Pyrrhonists rejected everything, leaving them in a

\[^{35}\textit{Ibid.}, 216.\]
chaotic state of non-belief about anything whatsoever. While a state of non-belief certainly is the goal of Pyrrhonism, there are other affectations that strike us as human beings other than beliefs. These other affectations were called appearances by the pyrrhonists. As Sextus says, “Those who say that the skeptics reject what is apparent have not, I think, listened to what we say. As we said before, we do not overturn anything which leads us, without our willing it, to assent in accordance with a passive appearance—and these things are precisely what is apparent.”36 In an earlier passage Sextus explicitly states that “Pyrrhonists do not assent to anything unclear.”37 For some examples we may look at the following statements:

(A) I am cold.
(B) The earth is round.
(C) Beethoven is the greatest composer.
(D) Scientific realism seems to be the best theory we have to describe the world.

(A) is a report of the speaker’s subjective feelings. (A) makes no metaphysical or existential claim regarding any particular set of entities, nor does it make any inferences or claims. It merely asserts what is presently being felt by the speaker. On the chance that the speaker says this when he has a fever and is in fact in bed from having such a high body temperature, the claim can be translated as “I feel cold,” which is true, despite the body temperature. Again, on the off chance that the speaker is lying, then he is just that—a liar. We cannot, from this lie, infer that he is a hypocritical skeptic.

36 Ibid., 8.
37 Ibid., 6.
(B) is slightly trickier than (A). Until humans left the atmosphere and observed that the earth was round, this conclusion rested on a mathematical argument based on the position and height of shadows at different parts of earth’s surface, and it seems to not have qualified as an appearance, but a theoretical observation. For those of us alive in the space-age, we have the testimony and pictures of the earth at such a distance that we can see its roundness. Yet, I think that Sextus would here apply some of the ten modes and argue that we have no good epistemological justification for preferring one appearance (that from the astronaut’s point of view) over another (the view from my window, where the earth looks flat). Sextus would want to insist that we claim “the earth looks round from space, but flat from earth.” I do not think this conclusion so odd as it first seems. A normal person on hearing this claim would say, “fine, but even odd philosophers like you think that the earth is really round, don’t you?” The real point of contention then becomes what is meant by the word ‘really.’ If the speaker means what is the earth like aside from your appearance of it, I don’t think this question is answerable without subscribing to some sort of metaphysical position. If the question simply means what is the earth really like when you are far enough away to see all of it, then of course the answer is that it looks round. I can find no other meaning in this question, and if there is one, it is up to the anti-skeptic to elucidate it.

(C) makes a judgment value, which again, can be interpreted in different ways. If I asked the speaker why he felt this way, and he responded with a list of compositional criteria, bestowing merit to certain compositions, clearly this would not
be permitted by the skeptic. If he responded by saying that Beethoven was the best composer because he enjoyed listening to Beethoven more than any other composer, this would merely be a report of subjective feelings, and would count as an appearance to which the skeptic would assent.

(D) might seem plausible because the word ‘seems’ is thrown in there, but again, it depends on what is actually being stated. If by ‘best’ theory the speaker is stating that the theory is truer than others, it will not be accepted by the skeptic. If a pragmatic notion of usefulness is being employed, I see no reason why this is not a subjective report. For it does in fact seem to me that modern science allows us to build better couches, guns, and medicines than other theories, and this statement does not appear to rest on any theoretical supposition.

As Adam Kuzminski points out, appearances are not something that have to be explained away. The Pyrrhonist, unlike most other philosophers, takes appearances at face value and has no problem asserting that x appears F, even if others vehemently disagree.\(^{38}\) As a short summary, we may say that a statement qualifies as a statement about appearance if and only if it is a report about a subjective state and the subjective state does not postulate any reality behind the appearances. More will be said about appearances in the next chapter.

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Lastly, I need to say something about inferences, which are sometimes seen as legitimate by the skeptic. Instead of speaking about inferences directly, Sextus speaks of signs, and what can be known from them. He distinguished between two types of signs, the recollective and the indicative. Recollective signs are signs such that when having seen A and B conjoined in the past, we now see A and it causes us to recall its conjunction with B, and thus to predict B. Indicative signs are signs such that from A’s nature, qualities, or properties, we conclude B, which is unseen or is not customarily associated with A. The example he gives are that of fire and smoke (recollective) and bodily motion and soul (indicative). Regarding the two types of signs, Sextus has this to say:

There being two different sorts of signs, as we have said, we argue not against all signs but only against indicative signs, which seem to be a fiction of the dogmatist. For recollective signs are found convincing by everyday life: seeing smoke someone diagnoses fire; having observed a scar, he says that a wound was inflicted. Hence, not only do we not conflict with everyday life, but we actually join the struggle on its side, assenting without opinion to what it has found convincing and taking a stand against the private fictions of the dogmatists.39

Thus, we see that Sextus has a mixed feeling on inferences. While recollective signs are taken at face value, Sextus uses the phrase, “assenting without opinion” meaning that while we take the fire and smoke to be conjoined in most scenarios, we do not

39 Sextus, Outlines, 93.
need to have the further belief that fire causes smoke, or that fire is a necessary condition for smoke.

1.8 Conclusion

In closing this chapter, let me summarize what we have thus far said of the Pyrrhonian skeptic. The skeptic’s ultimate goal is a suspension of judgment on matters that are not apparent, which then leads to tranquility. When confronted with evidence for one side of a debate the skeptic employs his different modes, creating an equipollent opposition among the different arguments. Having no way to decide between the equipollent alternatives, the skeptic suspends judgment on the matter and achieves mental tranquility. While it has become clear how the skeptic handles arguments and oppositions of thought, we have not said much about how the skeptic lives his day to day life. We have noted that the skeptic accepts appearances at face value and is willing to accept the conjunction between appearances. In the next Chapter I will discuss how the skeptic makes lifestyle choices and how he goes about living at all.
Chapter 2: Pyrrhonian Skepticism in Practice

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter I am concerned primarily with how the Pyrrhonian skeptic lives his life on a day to day basis. How does he make choices or resolve dilemmas? Whom does she choose to marry or spend her time with? What lifestyle can be chosen in the broadest sense of the word “lifestyle”? Perhaps most importantly, how is any choice or action possible for one who makes no judgments? I begin by looking at what is called the apraxia charge, attempting to formulate an adequate response to the charge. In trying to answer the apraxia charge, I will have to take a detour to look at some of the scholarly literature on skepticism and determine what the exact scope of Sextus’ skepticism is. Only by doing so, can we determine what beliefs and appearances are for the skeptic and whether these notions are consistently used in Pyrrhonian skepticism. I conclude the chapter with a short, rough portrait of the Pyrrhonian skeptic as he lived and acted.

2.2 Apraxia Charge

The apraxia charge is a very intuitive counter-argument brought against the
skeptics. In general, especially if we have not studied epistemology, we tend to think that we eat bread because we believe it to be healthy and filling, we marry a spouse because we believe it will cause us happiness and fulfillment, and we use certain methods—say, in a chess game—because we believe those methods will allow us to best achieve our goals, in this case capturing the opponent’s king and win the game. But the skeptic is defined by the resolution to not hold beliefs. Herein lies the intuitive problem. In its broadest sense, the apraxia charge is as follows: If the skeptic suspends judgment, then action is impossible.40

The ancient dogmatic schools of philosophy found skepticism as counter-intuitive as most people today. Every person believes that he is a human being and everyone knows where his car keys are, where his car keys are not, or that he doesn’t own car keys. Thus, if I believe that I am a human, I believe something, and if I know where my car keys are, I know something—or so the anti-skeptical argument goes. From the ancient sources that have survived, this seems to have been the most broad and common objection to the skeptics by the ancient philosophers. Additionally, this charge was refined in many ways, and the argument appeared in slightly different forms. Katja Maria Vogt lists seven different versions of the argument. Historically, David Hume also brought this charge against the skeptics.41 I will briefly go over the different versions of the argument before examining Sextus’

41 Hume, An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding, 140: “[The skeptic] 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.”
response to them.

First, is the self-destruction charge. Without beliefs or convictions, one would not move when he saw a car speeding at them, because he would doubt that the car was really there. Living a life like this would cause the skeptic to die a quick, seemingly absurd death because of a lack of beliefs. Second, is the eudaemonist charge. This objection claims that a sceptical life is not and cannot be a good life. Presumably, an ancient skeptic became involved in philosophy, at least in part, because she wanted to live a good and noble life, a life that could only be attained through an alignment with the truth. Third, is the plant charge. If the skeptic has no beliefs, then he will become as a plant, never moving or getting up from bed because of his doubt. Any action will take an assent on the part of the one taking an action, but if there is no assent, then there can be no action. Fourth, is the inconsistency charge. It goes hand in hand with the plant charge. The plant charge says that without assent, there can be no action, while the inconsistency charge says that since the skeptics do act and perform daily feats, they must in fact be assenting all the time. Together, these two charges form a logical dilemma.\(^\text{42}\) Fifth, is the paralysis charge. This objection asserts that without a practical criterion the skeptic can never choose between sleeping longer and getting out of bed. Since no choice can be made, the skeptic will, presumably, die lying in bed without ever moving. Sixth, is the animal charge. This charge is a weaker version of the plant charge. It asserts that without rational deliberation, the skeptic will, at best, live the life of an animal, doing nothing.

\(^{42}\) Either the skeptic assents to action, or he does not. If he assents, then he contradicts himself, if he does not, he is reduced to a plant-like life.
but eating, sleeping, defecating, and fornicating. Seventh, is the search charge. This objection claims that without using advanced types of reasoning skills, the skeptic could not participate in logical discussion, let alone employ advanced logical techniques such as the different modes. The fact that the skeptic engages with other philosophers indicates that the skeptic has beliefs about, and assents to, many different propositions.

In order to formulate a coherent response to these objections, we must do two things. First, we must clarify and demarcate exactly what is meant by ‘appearance,’ ‘belief’ ‘assent’, and ‘judgment’. Secondly, we will examine the fourfold scheme that Sextus gives under the rubric of appearances so that we may see what exactly is allowed according the Sextus. I will also take this opportunity to emphasize that while this thesis is not dealing strictly with epistemology, it is requisite that we make the skeptical view coherent, (1) because if it is not a coherent view, there can be no practical skepticism, because in reality there were no coherent skeptics, and (2) because by honing our understanding of key terms, we will gain a more secure insight into what the skeptics actually thought and thus how their philosophy translates into a practical life.

2.3 Skepticism’s Proper Scope

Before I explicate what is meant by the key words ‘appearance,’ ‘belief,’ ‘assent,’ and ‘judgment,’ I need to take a look at exactly what the scope of the
Pyrrhonist’s skepticism is so that it is clear what counts as a belief or a judgment. Within the literature there is some debate over the scope of the skeptic’s skepticism and the scope of acceptable things to which the skeptic may assent. Roughly, there are two camps drawn out. These factions are drawn divided according to their interpretation of the scope of the skeptic’s skepticism. To use the phrases of Galen, some interpreters see in Sextus rustic Pyrrhonism—people who disavow all belief entirely—while others see urbane Pyrrhonism—people who disavow only those higher rationalizations produced by philosophers, scientists, and professors. Three of the most prominent scholars in Phyrronian skepticism—Michael Frede, Myles Burnyeat, and Jonathan Barnes—have each taken different positions on the matter. Frede argues that the skeptics are urbane and internally consistent, Burnyeat argues that the skeptics are rustic but unable to live their skepticism because of a certain belief that he thinks all skeptics have whether they want it or not, and Barnes argues that the question is misguided because each skeptic has a different scope for his skepticism according to how troubled he is by certain phenomena and particular aspects of life. Barnes’ position has a lot of intuitive appeal given what the goals of the skeptic are as described by Sextus Empiricus. There is no clear reason why all the skeptic’s would have the same scope for their skepticism, nor does it fit my experience that all people find the same controversies troubling nor do they find inconsistency in the same ideas and phenomena. Yet for my present purposes I am

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41 Barnes, “The Beliefs of a Pyrrhonist,” 61.
44 Barnes, “The Beliefs of a Pyrrhonist,” 90.
interested in the truly rustic skeptic who has no beliefs at all. Even if there were no skeptic’s who pushed their philosophy this far, it will behoove us to make a case for this skeptic *par excellence*, and to see how a skeptic with no beliefs would act in the world. Keeping this in mind, I will be working with Burnyeat’s interpretation, and will show that even the extreme rustic skeptic can live his skepticism consistently.

2.4 Appearance and Belief

Now that we have identified exactly what type of skeptic we are dealing with, let us now turn to the problem of assent appearances, beliefs, and judgments. According to Burnyeat, “it is a fact of central importance that truth, in the skeptic’s vocabulary, is closely tied to real existence as contrasted with appearance.” The skeptics take their epistemology from the stoics, who argued that objects caused an impression in a person’s senses. These impressions further caused an appearance within the consciousness of the person. Appearances are not just sense-phenomena. They may also be feelings (*pathos*) such as anger or joy. Beliefs, were propositions formulated about these appearances. There is not one class of appearances and one class of realities, rather, we may ask of anything whatsoever does it appear that way or is that way in reality. Finally, a judgment is a claim about a belief or appearance that says the belief or the appearance in question accurately represents the real world or a real object. Lastly, to assent to a belief or appearance is to accept it at face value.

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47 Burnyeat, “Can the Sceptic Live his Scepticism?” 30.
It is not to accept an appearance or belief as representing reality, but rather, to accept an appearance for what it is and not reject it. There is not one class of appearances and one class of realities, rather, we may ask of anything whatsoever does it appear that way or is that way in reality. In short, as I stated in the last chapter, an appearance is a subjective report of how something seems to a particular subject. There can be no debate about it (unless one is a pathological liar) for the matter at hand is immediately available to the subject who is reporting it. In this sense, we may assent to an appearance or to a belief. There are cases which may appear problematic—a case where one is unsure about an appearance or belief. For example, it is unclear to me whether Wayne Gretzky or Bobby Orr is the better hockey player. Yet it is not my appearance or belief that is unclear. It appears to me that the matter at hand is unclear. While this seems to be a semantic quibble, it is not, for appearances are always clear and we are led to them without resistance or will, even if it clearly appears that two objects are nearly equal in some respect.48

2.5 The Epistemic Reading of ‘Appear’

The real problem for Burnyeat is that “appear” is often given an epistemic reading. ‘It appears to me that metaphysical realism is correct’ is really just a tricky way of me stating that ‘I believe metaphysical realism to be true’. But does the

48 The differences between ‘appearance,’ ‘belief,’ and ‘judgment’ are explained in Frede, “The Sceptic’s Beliefs.”
skeptic use ‘appear’ in this way, or is this a misguided objection? Burnyeat thinks that the skeptic must use ‘appear’ in its epistemic sense at least once, and if he is right, the skeptical project is undermined. According to Burnyeat this sense of ‘appear’ is tied up with the notion of equipollence and the suspension of judgment.

Take the following example as a non-problematic case: “Tea appears to me to be delicious.” When I state this, I mean it as a report of my subjective affectations. Tea delights my palate, and I enjoy drinking it. Now consider this problematic example: I have considered the arguments both for and against the existence of abstract entities, and I find them equipollent. Can this statement be taken as a report of subjective affectations? Burnyeat says that it cannot, because we cannot make sense of the statement that it appears to me that x, but I do not believe x, in a case where x is a proposition to be judged according to truth. What could it mean for an argument to seem true, but yet not to believe it? According to Burnyeat, the problematic example must properly read, ‘I believe that the arguments for and against the existence of abstract entities are equally strong, but I do not believe that they are.’ Because this type of statement is crucial to the skeptic’s project, Burnyeat concludes that the skeptic cannot truly live his skepticism.49

2.6 An Alternative Interpretation

I would like to offer a different interpretation that keeps the skeptic honest and

49 Burnyeat, “Can the Skeptic Live his Scepticism?” 54-57.
fully able to live a practical life. First, I would ask the reader to recall the problem of the criterion that I briefly discussed in the first chapter. The problem of the criterion states that for any argument to be resolved, we must be able to state the criterion that, if met, would, in theory, resolve the issue one way or another. In almost all cases, these criteria are not agreed upon by both sides—each side postulating it’s own criteria and claiming that it’s solution thus solves the problem at hand by meeting said criteria.\(^{50}\) If this were not the case, then solving any particular problem or argument would be a matter of reaching a pre-defined goal that is explicitly known to both parties, yet this is not how argumentation works in general. Based on this argument, the skeptic will not commit to how any particular problem is to be solved. I believe this has a direct bearing on the skeptic’s conception of equipollence. The skeptic does not have a logical criterion in mind when evaluating two sets of arguments, and because this criterion is lacking, it seems reasonable to me that the two sets of arguments really do strike the skeptic affectively as being more or less equal. This is not true in every case, for someone may show the skeptic Gödel’s incompleteness theorem, and the skeptic would not find it to be equipollent that somebody else’s father once told them Gödel was a liar. We may summarize this issue like this: In the absence of a well-defined criterion that would solve an argument, we must rely on our intuitive sense of the approximate force an argument may carry. While this intuitive

\(^{50}\) For a practical example, think of a union arguing with corporate headquarters. The union thinks that the argument will be settled for good (the criteria) once they get benefits, time-off, sick days, and the corporate people make less money, while corporate thinks that the argument will be resolved once and for all once the union is disbanded. If either of these were to happen, the other side would not agree that the argument had ended and the other side had won. They would think that they had been cheated and that the other side had merely the appearance of settling the argument. This is because the real issue upon which they disagree is the criterion.
sense is extremely vague, it is sharp enough to let us know when an argument is completely lacking in force.

2.7 Sextus’ Four Guidelines

If this approach is feasible, I think that we have satisfactorily answered Burnyeat’s objection. Yet before we can return to solving the apraxia charge, we need to look at this intuitive force that allows us to evaluate things without having beliefs or making judgments about them. Where does this power come from, and how does it give us the ability to evaluate situations and arguments? Sextus’ answer to this problem is what he calls the four-fold schema of appearances. I am going to present these four guidelines, and then go back to answering the multi-faceted apraxia charge that I raised earlier.

According to Sextus:

Thus, attending to what is apparent, we live in accordance with everyday observances, without holding opinions—for we are not able to be utterly inactive. These everyday observances seem to be fourfold, and to consist in guidance by nature, necessitation by feelings, handing down of laws and customs, and teaching of kinds of expertise.51

Sextus does not explicate these four schemata at length, but we can get enough of a sense of them to understand what he is saying. The first guideline is guidance by nature. The two examples that Sextus give under this category are thinking and

51 Sextus, Outlines, 9.
perceiving. Because human beings are naturally endowed with thought and the five senses, Sextus says that the skeptic can live by these faculties. We may do so, first of all, because it would be impossible to live without them, but more importantly, because living by them does not require any dogmatic belief or theorizing, rather it just requires that we don’t fight against our intrinsic nature that thinks and perceives almost automatically. We cannot help but use our senses and have thoughts flow through our head.

The second guideline is necessitation by feeling. The examples given by Sextus are hunger leading us to food and thirst to water. We may add to these examples many other commonplace activities, as well. For example, pursuing a relationship with someone we have romantic feelings for, or playing a game when we are feeling bored or curious. Many of the activities we fill our days with are these types of activities, which are not based upon judgment or truth, but simply upon our emotions and feelings leading us to a type of activity that fulfills a rather commonplace desire.

The third guideline is the handing down of laws and customs. According to Sextus, the skeptics accept, “from an everyday point of view, that piety is good and impiety bad.” I take this to mean that the skeptic adheres to the customs of his land not because he has reasoned about the issue and come to the conclusion that his land is correct on the matter, but because there is no good reason, according to the skeptic,
to believe one way or the other. The skeptic probably does not believe in a flesh and blood Zeus, but he also does not believe in his non-existence. In the absence of belief leading him one way or the other, it seems likely that he would accept the customs of his land because that would be the prudent thing to do. It would make no sense for him to do otherwise, and the necessitating of his feelings would draw him (1) to not becoming an outcast in the community (for most human being desires friendship and companionship), and (2) to not stir up trouble like Socrates did, when clearly this would have effects contrary to the desires of the skeptic.

The fourth guideline is the teaching and practicing of forms of expertise. By this Sextus means trades and arts that not only fill up one’s time, but also make one useful to society, which is certainly a custom in most lands. A completely radical skeptic may doubt that a hammer is a better tool for a particular job rather than a screw driver, or that a particular herb is a better remedy for an illness than drinking three bottles of wine, yet this doubt should be no stronger than any other. Additionally, Sextus says that while many philosophers claim that they can make inductions from the seen to the unseen using certain signs, indicative signs and inferences are accepted as ordinary and useful. Just as the skeptic or the common person will assume there is fire when smoke is seen, so will a skeptic accept that some particular tool will accomplish a specified task that it has done many times in the past. In a sense, any of the arts or trades practiced by a skeptic can be seen as a tradition of indicative signs that have been collected and systematized not by dogmatic philosophizing or theorizing, but by repeated observation, trial, and error.
If we think about the case presented earlier—Gödel’s incompleteness theorem contrasted with the claim that somebody’s father said Gödel was a liar—we can see that this is a case that can be solved by the fourth guideline. Gödel is making a mathematical claim about a conceptual thought system that is arrived at through particular tools and techniques particular to mathematicians. He is not claiming that the world is some way or that it appears some way, but merely that if you accept the postulates and premises of logic and mathematics, a certain conclusion follows. Furthermore, somebody’s father is probably not a mathematician and so has no good reason to weigh in on the issue of Gödel’s particular trade, in this case, mathematics and logic. As a short summary, which we will return to in the final chapter, we may say that the four schemata presented by Sextus are a sort of non-rational and habitual way of dealing with an infinite number of decisions, such that one does not have to formulate judgments in order to make choices.

2.8 Solutions to the Apraxia Charges

Let us now return to the different versions of the apraxia charge and see what rebuttal can be given. First, is the self-destruction charge. To this, the skeptic would say that if a car were speeding at her in the street, she would move, not out of some dogmatic belief that pain or death is bad, but because, first, there is no reason to doubt our senses on a regular basis. The skeptic would indeed assent to the impression that a car is really heading towards her. Second, the skeptic would move simply as a
reaction, just as if you quickly raise your hand towards someone’s face he will flinch or deflect the blow with his hand. In both cases the skeptic would simply be following a gut reaction and assenting to the necessitation of feeling (second guideline).

The second charge is the eudaemonist charge. As was stated in the first chapter, the skeptic’s goal is to suspend judgment on all matters. Because tranquility is attained through this skeptical methodology, then this is all that the skeptic wants out of his philosophy. In the absence of a good argument for naming some other end as the true good, the fulfilled desire may be called a good life. It should also be remembered that in the first chapter it was pointed out that nearly all the philosophical schools of this time were seeking tranquility and peace of mind, and so the skeptic’s search for suspension of judgment, upon which tranquility follows, can be seen as one of custom and habit (third guideline). The third and fourth charges form the dilemma of either being inconsistent, or living a plant-like life. The skeptic would claim this is a false dilemma, for a human being is not like a plant and has the natural capacity of thought and locomotion (first guideline). It does not take belief for the skeptic to partake in these natural capacities any more than it takes some special power above and beyond being a plant for the plant to move towards sunlight. Insofar as the skeptic is able to partake in these activities without belief, he is not being inconsistent and the dilemma is unfounded. The fifth charge is the paralysis charge. To this the skeptic claims that the necessitation of feeling and obedience to custom and law is more than enough of a criterion for making individual choices, all
the while still claiming that she does not have to actually endorse the criterion as the correct or true one (second and third guidelines). Sixth is the animal charge, and like the plant charge the skeptic will say that insofar as a human has more advanced natural capacities than an animal, his life will be more complex and varied (first and fourth guidelines). Additionally, the skeptic would wonder if the philosophers truly have a better life than some animals. Animals never kill themselves out of woe nor do they have their cities sacked by enemies. They live day to day in seeming peace following their natural urges and biding their time through instinct. It seems quite a large assumption that this is not a life worth living or pursuing. Lastly, is the search charge. To this, the skeptic would claim that humans born in society are taught through custom to speak language and with this ability comes the ability to reason and deliberate (first guideline). Just as a Stoic must not accept the Platonist’s position to debate him, the skeptic need not accept any other philosopher’s beliefs in order to argue or debate with her (fourth guideline).

This is a fairly cursory response to the different forms of the apraxia charge, but it is clear that none of the arguments given are knock-down arguments that completely undermine skepticism. Keeping that in mind, I will now give a short summary of what the skeptic’s life may have looked like, in general.
2.9 An Outline of the Pyrrhonist’s lifestyle

If we accept Sextus’ fourfold schema, it would seem that a skeptic would be a very normal looking person. The skeptic would have a job, speak and reason in the normal colloquial sense, and even obey the laws, customs, and religion of the land she lived in. Seemingly every problem that could arise could be decided according to the guidelines listed by Sextus. To demonstrate this, let us look at the three situations posed at the beginning of the chapter to see how a skeptic would make a choice. It is commonly accepted that we eat bread because we believe that it is healthy and this action will stave off our hunger. But is this really true? Do we actually reason this way and come to a belief before we eat bread? I think we usually do not. In fact, I think that in most cases we do not reason about it at all, we merely eat it because we are hungry. If we actually reasoned in this way, it seems we would come to a skeptical (in the contemporary epistemological sense of the word) conclusion much more often. We can never be sure that the food we are about to eat has not been poisoned, and if we cannot know that, then we cannot know that the bread will be healthy for us. Yet this reasoning never even occurs to us. We all know that we have eaten bread before and that it has never made us sick. Thus, it seems that we usually act out of habit or common inference and not reasoned belief.

The second situation I proposed is that of marrying someone because I believe that the marriage will make me happy. In this case, as the last one, I think we can look to Sextus’ fourfold guidance. If someone makes me happy currently when I
spend time with her, I may project that onto the future as a good guess, just as we do when we eat bread or when we see smoke and diagnose a fire. I may of course be wrong. It is also interesting to consider the question of whether married people can ever achieve tranquility. When one is married, one takes on the responsibility and worries of another for one’s whole life. Thus, it may be that an honest skeptic would decline to ever get married, although it does not seem contradictory that the skeptic may become married.

The third situation I described is one in which a person makes a move in a game because he believes that this move will win the game (the game may be chess or wrestling or whatever.) In this case, I would argue that the mental state in question is not properly a belief. As Myles Burnyeat pointed out, a judgment has to do with things as they really are and not as appearances, but a game is just an appearance that we all accept and agree to abide by for a short time.55 If, after winning, a chess game, someone asked me whether I had really put his king in checkmate, I would not know how to answer. The trivial answer would be that yes, we had both just seen it happen, but if the questioner wanted to know whether there was any truth to it behind that, I would have to say no for my opponent does not really have a king or a queen or knights or bishops.56 Insofar as we agreed to play the game, we had accepted a

55 Perhaps it is not an appearance at all, but rather something other than a truth claim or an appearance. A game is something like a conceptual scheme whose rules we agree to abide by for a short time. We do not really think the world is this way while we partake, nor do we think that the world appears that way. A game is more like a fiction that we partake in—one in which we make no truth or appearance claims.

56 In the off chance that that I were playing chess against a Medieval King, the answer would be no, for I did not really capture the king or kill any knights. I only did so according to the fictional game that we played, which is a type of appearance.
certain number of rules that are not real rules as some claim the laws of physics are. After accepting these rules I can make certain evaluations without properly having beliefs. An analogous example would be claiming that in Aristotelian logic some argument would be valid, but in first order predicate logic, the same argument would be invalid. I may properly say this without believing that either one truly depicts the world. Further, I think that I may say this without having any real beliefs (in Buryeat’s sense) about the world. I am merely talking about a conceptual construct or system that does not necessarily track anything true in the world. In both cases, the skeptic is creating a hypothetical statement where the antecedent is some set of rules that the skeptic does not claim is a true representation of the real world. This situation may also be viewed under the fourth guideline of arts and expertise. When we play a game or do follow some set of rules to work within a conceptual scheme we are merely following rules. It does not seem clear to me that to abide by these rules for a short time is the same as endorsing the conceptual scheme as a true description of reality.

2.10 Conclusion

In general, the skeptic lives a very normal and traditional lifestyle. I end this chapter, however, by commenting that in one very crucial respect the skeptic is not like an ordinary person. The skeptic has an internal life that is at once both more vivid and also less engaged than the ordinary person. It is more vivid in the sense that
the skeptic would have a keener intellect than the average person. She would have investigated many more things and would be more familiar with many more ways of life, customs, idea, and historical situations than someone who had worked a desk job form the time of eighteen. The skeptic would be less engaged in the sense that he would not put stock in many of his actions. He may follow the laws and do what is considered good without ever believing it himself. Burnyeat calls this phenomenon a detachment from oneself and finds it to be very problematic and something we ought to avoid. I return to this theme somewhat in the next two chapters as I discuss the Daoists and the idea of *wu-wei*.

\footnote{Burnyeat, “Can the Skeptic Live His Skepticism?”}, 57.
Chapter 3: Daoist Skepticism in Theory

3.1 Introduction

In the previous chapters I examined Sextus Empiricus and Pyrrhonian Skepticism in order to see how Pyrrhonian skepticism translated into practical life. As a contrast, I will now examine the philosopher, Zhuangzi. In this chapter I will introduce the concepts of yinyang and wu-wei. After explicating these notions and examining the ways they appear in the Zhuangzi, I will then explore the ways in which these two concepts inform and constitute Zhuangzi’s skeptical outlook. It is important to keep in mind that I am not examining Daoism as a whole nor am I giving an exhaustive account of the philosophy found in the Zhuangzi. Having noted this, I will occasionally make reference to Daoist sources and texts other than the Zhuangzi when a conceptual point is made especially clear in these other sources. I must also comment on the structure of this and the following chapter. Zhuangzi is a radically anti-systematic thinker, and this aspect of his teaching comes out in his stories and tales but also in the structure of his writing. Unlike Sextus, who wrote a book neatly divided into sections and sub-sections with a clear flow and structure, Zhuangzi told

58 When I say ‘Daoist’ in this thesis, I will be referring to Zhuangzi or to someone following the text of Zhuangzi, and not to any of the other types of religious people or philosophers who have called themselves Daoists throughout history.
stories and made his points in a very non-systematic way, with no clear relationship linking two stories found in succession. Thus, my explication of Zhuangzi will be somewhat less rigid than my exposition of Sextus, although no less rigorous.

Much like with the Pyrrhonists, it will be easier understand the subject at hand if a bit intellectual history is first discussed. Zhuangzi was a Daoist, and it will behoove us to examine how Daoism was a reaction to Confucianism in order to understand Zhuangzi, who is usually regarded as one of the major figures of early Daoism. According to Frederick W. Mote, “Throughout most of Chinese history, Confucianism has been the proper, openly espoused, official, and in the limited sense that the word has application in China, the orthodox system of thought.”\footnote{Mote, Intellectual Foundations of China, 67.} One of the main reasons that this was the case is because the main concerns of the Confucians were the welfare of the state, including politics, ethics, traditions, rites, and all that was appropriate or inappropriate. In general, Daoists were less interested in the ideals of the peaceful state that the Confucian sought after. In one sense, where the Confucian wanted to perfect culture and civilization, the Daoists wanted to forget culture and civilization and return to a more natural way of behaving.

I now introduce some of the basic concepts used by Zhuangzi. Many of the stories and tales used to show or argue for his skepticism revolve around these concepts, and it will be easier to understand why Zhuangzi argues for what he does after these basic concepts have been understood. The two concepts I introduce are \textit{yinyang} and \textit{wu-wei}.  

\footnote{Mote, Intellectual Foundations of China, 67.}
3.2 Yinyang

I will first discuss the notion of yinyang. Technically, what is at issue here is the logical framework that underlies this notion (yinyang). That is, implicit within the yinyang outlook there is a particular view of logical opposition—one that is different from the Aristotelian tradition we are accustomed to in the West. For Aristotle, and by consequence for most of us, systemization and categorization are attempts to gain “knowledge of the natures or essences of things, knowledge which will be expressed in the form of adequate definitions by genus and differentia which says what it is to be a thing of a given kind.” 60 When we create categories or concepts we almost always utilize this scheme, just as biology and the other natural sciences do. For example, if a child wants to know what the world ‘color’ means you would show her something red, and something blue, and something yellow. You would then explain that all of those are species, or kinds, of the genus ‘color,’ although typically we do not introduce children to such technical vocabulary. According to Aristotle, anything at all could be defined according to a genus and its differentia—in other words, a characteristic that made the object in question different from everything else included in the same genus. According to this view, opposition is viewed in terms of contraries:

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60 Tiles and Yuan, “Geometrical Space,” 5.
The opposition of contraries is an opposition against a background of something they have in common (they share the same presuppositions about the kind of thing to which they can apply.) In other words, contraries are such that they are characteristics which could belong to the same kind of thing. An animal can be sick or healthy but a rock cannot.\[^{61}\]

I offer Aristotle’s traditional method of definition and logical structure as a constructive backdrop against which to understand the Daoist conception of opposition. The Daoist, and the Chinese in general, view oppositions, not as contraries, but as relations.\[^{62}\] Tiles and Yuan cite an ancient Chinese astronomical text by Chen Zi, in which the goal of systematization and categorization is explained: “It is the ability to distinguish categories in order to unite categories which is the substance of how the worthy one’s scholarly patrimony is pure, and how he applies himself to the practice of understanding.”\[^{63}\] Where Aristotle sees contraries, the Daoist sees two interrelated and interconnected polarities that cannot be defined or understood independently of one another. In contrast to the example of color I gave earlier, imagine the example of a master and a slave. A master and a slave are something of opposites but not necessarily because they share a genus. Slaves and masters seem to be opposites, yet they also mutually define one another. One is a master if one is a slave owner, and one is a slave if one is owned by a master. The

\[^{61}\] Ibid., 6.
\[^{62}\] While The Chinese philosophers have a tendency to reduce all opposition to this mode of complementary relationship, not all things must be viewed this way. Just as Aristotle recognized that complementary relationships existed, yet preferred using the contraries to understand opposites, the Daoist can prefer the complementary way of seeing opposites while still acknowledging that some opposites are contraries, like black and white.
\[^{63}\] Ibid., 12.
same relationship holds between familial terms, such as father and son. There is no way to define these terms independently of one another, nor can either half of the pair’s status be reduced to something totally independent from the other. It is this sort of interdependent relationship that holds between two things that the \textit{yinyang} pattern of thought is approaching. Further, things themselves become more fluid and dynamic at their core. If a slave is freed, he takes on a new identity, and since the world is seen in terms of these complementary relationships for the Daoist, new situations cause any entity’s fundamental “nature” or “essence” to change. Thus, unlike for Aristotle, a thing’s identity is not static, but fluid and dynamic.

Thus, when things are considered as opposites, it is not because they are as different as possible within a common genus but rather because the things considered opposites are interdependent and related as complementary polarities that define each other. The \textit{yinyang} perspective is able to define opposites in this way “by pointing out that the relationally opposed terms cannot wholly exclude one another… On the one hand two things are against each other, and on the other hand they are harmonious; it requires that opposed pairs be united harmoniously by each holding its counterpart within itself.”\textsuperscript{64} Like Aristotle’s logical scheme, “The \textit{Yin/Yang} distinction is… a distinction of the “rubrics” by which everything that is or happens can be classified.”\textsuperscript{65} Further, according to Hans-Georg Moeller, \textit{Yin} and \textit{Yang}, “are not forces or substances, but rather complementary aspects or \textit{moments} that constitute

\textsuperscript{64} Ibid., 15.
\textsuperscript{65} Moeller, \textit{Philosophy of the Doadejing}, 34.
any orderly, efficient, and ‘creative’ processes.” With this quote, Moeller is pointing out two things. First, he is acknowledging that *yin* and *yang* are not metaphysical substances or entities like Platonic Forms. Second, when he says that they are aspects or moments, he means that any object trying to be understood has a *yin* aspect and a *yang* aspect. This follows from the fundamental idea that the *yinyang* perspective views things as complementary polarities and not individual substances. In order to illustrate this way of thinking, let us look at two examples from the first chapter of the *Zhuangzi*, as well as a story from the text *Huainanzi*.

### 3.3 Yinyang in the Fish-Bird Story

The opening scene of the *Zhuangzi* tells a story of a legendary fish-bird. This story is packed with many meanings and interpretations, but it is not at all controversial that this story sets the intellectual mood of the *Zhuangzi* by making great use of the *yinyang* way of seeing things. According to the translation of Burton Watson, it goes like this:

> In the northern darkness there is a fish and his name is K’un. The K’un is so huge I don’t know how many thousand li he measures. He changes and becomes a bird whose name is P’eng. The back of the P’eng measures I don’t know how many li across and, when he rises up and flies off, his wings are like clouds all over the sky. When the sea begins to move, this bird sets off for the southern darkness, which is the lake of Heaven.

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66 Ibid., 35.
In this short tale, we see many instantiations of the yinyang point of view—a point of view that sees opposites as complementary, which are intricately tied together. The story begins in the “northern darkness”. For the ancient Chinese, the northern darkness was a place of cold, winter, and water. A place with no order, shrouded in confusion and chaos. But, the story tells us, in this disorderly land of darkness and coldness is a living being, a giant fish. This is our first indication that Zhuangzi is operating within a logical space defined by relational oppositions—the yinyang perspective—and not by contrary oppositions. The northern darkness is a place unsuited for life. It is watery and cold and devoid of order. Yet life is the antithesis to these characteristics. A living being is one that generates its own heat and is not chaotic, for all biological systems regulate themselves and maintain a strict demarcation between themselves and their environment.

Next we are told that this fish’s name is K’un, which means fish roe. This is a second example of the yinyang perspective. We are introduced to a huge fish, miles and miles long, that is given the name of one of the tiniest aquatic animals—the fish egg. Next, the fish turns into a bird. By any common-sense account, birds and fish are opposed. One cannot breathe air, the other lives exclusively in the open air. One lives down in the depths covered by the deep darkness of water, one soars through the clouds in the vast expanse of the sky. The next example arises when we look at the bird’s name which means something like “social” or “friend”. This is yet another opposition because the story has only described a single living being so far, and

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68 Wu, Butterfly as Companion, 69.
69 Wu, Butterfly as Companion, 70.
despite its vastness, one cannot be social while being alone.\textsuperscript{70}

Furthermore, we are told that the bird is headed south. In Chinese culture the south, in contrast to the north, is associated with clarity and sunniness.\textsuperscript{71} It is the antithesis to the north. The last thing to be pointed out about this story is the number of dynamic shifts that occur. The story starts in the north and ends in the south, the fish starts below the world and the bird ends up miles above the world. To fully understand the purpose and the meaning of this story would require a complete and lengthy examination of chapter one of the \textit{Zhuangzi}, which is not my intention. Yet it is clear that throughout this entire story we see the \textit{yinyang} outlook in which opposites relate to one another not as contraries, but as dynamic and complementary aspects of one another.

\textbf{3.4 \textit{Yinyang in the Useless Tree Story}}

Let us now look at a second story, which also articulates and demonstrates the \textit{yinyang} outlook:

Hui Tzu said to Chuang Tzu [Zhuangzi], “I have a big tree called a \textit{shu}. Its trunk is too gnarled and bumpy to apply a measuring line to, its branches too bent and twisty to match up to a compass or square. You could stand it by the road and no carpenter would look at it twice. Your words, too, are big and useless, and so everyone alike spurns them!”

Chuang Tzu said, “Maybe you have never seen a wildcat or a weasel. It crouches down and hides, waiting for something to come along. It leaps and races east and

\textsuperscript{70} Wu, \textit{Butterfly as Companion}, 71.
\textsuperscript{71} Wu, \textit{Butterfly as Companion}, 70-72.
west, not hesitating to go high or low—until it falls into the trap and dies in the net. Then again there’s the yak, big as a cloud covering the sky. It certainly knows how to be big, though it doesn’t know how to catch rats. Now you have this big tree and you’re distressed because its useless. Why don’t you plant it in Not-Even-Anything Village, or the field of Broad-and-Boundless, relax and do nothing by its side, or lie down for a free and easy sleep under it? Axes will never shorten its life, nothing can ever harm it. If there’s no use for it, how can it come to grief or pain?

This story demonstrates the yinyang framework by demonstrating the complementary relationship between opposites. Hui Tzu criticizes Zhuangzi for telling useless stories and speaking useless words. Zhuangzi replies by telling of the very crafty and clever (supposedly good traits) wildcats and rodents who chase rats until they are caught in a trap and die (supposedly bad result). He compares this to the yak who is lazy, slow, and lumbering (supposedly bad traits), but who lives his life in peace grazing in the fields (supposedly good result). From an Aristotelian point of view, we see in this story two problematic scenarios: One in which good traits lead to bad results, and another where bad traits lead to good results. The Aristotelian solution to this problem would be identify the traits that we misidentified as bad or good and fix our notions accordingly. Or perhaps the solution would be to claim that bad traits and good results are not truly contraries, because they fall under different genera—good traits being a type of moral classification, and bad traits being a type of practical outcome.

But Zhuangzi does not use this framework. Zhuangzi is stressing the interrelatedness of complementary terms. The good is intertwined with the bad, and

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the bad with the good. Similarly, the tree who is straight, tall, and beautiful is the first one cut down by the carpenter, while the gnarled one stays unscathed. The yinyang outlook sees how the useful leads to trouble and pain, while the useless leads a happy free life. Because the story starts out as a criticism of Zhuangzi’s philosophy as useless, the implication is that the very useful philosophies of Confucius or the logician/sophist Hui Tzu lead to the troubles that people seek to avoid—disappointment, failure, discontentment, and unhappiness. Part of the problem with the outlook that Zhuangzi is criticizing is that it sees good and bad as contraries. People strive for the good and avoid the bad but this is simply not possible. The two concepts are fundamentally related to one another in a way that disables one from accepting half of the polarity while rejecting the other.

3.5 Yinyang in the Old Man at the Fort Story

The third story I examine that demonstrates the yinyang perspective is the story of the old man from the text Huainanzi:

There was an old man at a frontier in the north who understood Daoism. One day he lost his horse, which wandered into the land of the Hu tribesman. His neighbors came to condole with him, and the man said “How do you know this is bad luck?” After a few months, the horse returned with some fine horses of the Hu breed, and the people congratulated him. The old man said, “How do you know this is good luck?” He then became very prosperous with so many horses. The son one day broke his leg riding, and all the people came to condole with him again. The old man said, “How do you know this is bad luck?” One day the Hu tribesmen invaded
the frontier fort. All the young men fought with arrows to defend it, and nine tenths of them were killed. Because his son was a cripple, both father and son escaped unharmed. Therefore, good luck changes into bad, and bad luck changes into good. It cannot be known where their alterings end.\footnote{Moeller, \textit{Philosophy of the \textit{Daodejing}}, 99.} 

The moral of this story is straightforward. Because the old man understood and adopted the \textit{yinyang} outlook, he understood that seemingly opposing situations flow into one another, and that this process of change cannot be stopped once the good has been reached: “[The old man’s] emotional indifference or equanimity, however, does not mean that he was unable to differentiate between having a horse and not having one, but he did not know which was essentially better.”\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, 100.} The use of the word ‘essentially’ here is important, because according to the \textit{yinyang} view, essentially neither one was better. On the \textit{yinyang} perspective, good and bad luck are separate, yet intimately connected. To assume that any situation is essentially good \textit{or} bad (but not both) is to misunderstand the nature the dynamic interplay between good and bad.

\textbf{3.6 Wu-wei}

The next concept I will explain is \textit{wu-wei}. Instead of offering up my own definition, concerning this the notion of wu-wei I defer to Edward Slingerland, a
leading authority on the issue:

“Wu-wei” literally means “in the absence of/without doing exertion,” and is often translated as “doing nothing” or “non-action”... It refers not to what is or is not being done but to the phenomenological state of the doer...It describes a state of personal harmony in which actions flow freely and instantly from one’s spontaneous inclinations.75

The question that now must be addressed is how yinyang and wu-wei relate to one another. On my view, yinyang and wu-wei are intricately connected concepts. According to the yinyang point of view, no event, object, or state of affairs is essentially determined in itself. A thing is essentially defined by its relationship to other things, such that they are essentially codependent. This is true even of the human self. Wu-wei is the “phenomenological state of the doer,” as Slingerland puts it, or one could say that it is the psychological state of being one is in, when one views one’s self through the yinyang perspective. By viewing one’s self as an entity without an independent essence76—a thing that is in a dynamic relationship with every situation and object one encounters—one fosters an attitude of spontaneity.77

As Roger T. Ames and David L. Hall put it, actions committed in the mindset

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76 Generally speaking, when one has an Aristotelian view, one sees entities as individuals that have an essence, which can be captured through the genus/species system of categorization. If one has accurately categorized something, any particular situation will not affect the essence of the thing because it is permanent and stable.
77 The next chapter will explain how wu-wei creates a spontaneous or free outlook on life.
of *wu-wei* “are the result of deferential responses to the item or event in accordance with which, or in relation to which, one is acting. These actions are…“spontaneous”…and as such are nonassertive actions.” It is in this way that the *yinyang* outlook is the foundation of *wu-wei*.

### 3.7 Wu-wei in the Archer Story

To clarify the concept of *wu-wei* I will look at two stories. The first is the story of the archer:

When you’re betting for tiles in an archery contest, you shoot with skill. When you're betting for fancy belt buckles, you worry about your aim. And when you’re betting for real gold you're a nervous wreck. You're skill is the same in all three cases—but because one prize means more to you than another, you let outside considerations weigh on your mind. He who looks too hard at the outside gets clumsy on the inside.

The point of this story is that the archer’s lack of a *yinyang* mindset disallows him from acting with *wu-wei*, or spontaneity. When there is no prize at stake the archer responds to each moment according to his natural feelings and dispositions, which his body has become accustomed to through the act of practicing archery. This changes, however, when there is a valuable prize at stake. When gold is at stake, the archer becomes a “nervous wreck,” because he views money and prestige as good, while he views not winning a prize or prestige as bad. Because in one situation he is not

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78 Ames and Hall, *Daodejing “Making this Life Significant”, A Philosophical Translation*, 39.
worried about the prize (and therefore not worried about valuations like good/bad), he is able to keep calm and act according to his spontaneous dispositions, while in the other situation he is preoccupied with the prize (and the hope of money and prestige) and this distracts him from completing his task. As the passage says, “the skill is the same in all three cases.” What is different is the mental state of the archer. On the one hand, when he is not distracted by the idea of winning money and prestige, he acts with wu-wei. On the other hand, when the archer is in a judgmental mindset (without yinyang), he labels money and success in the contest as good, and failure as bad, and this goal of success and victory in the contest prevents the archer from acting with his full ability. When Zhuangzi says that “he who looks too hard on the outside gets clumsy on the inside,” he means that focusing on goals created by the values such as success, victory, and fame will cause us to stop acting with spontaneity and ultimately cause us to fail in our pursuits.

3.8 Wu-wei in the Cook Ting Story

The next story I will look at is the famous story of Cook Ting:

Cook Ting laid down his knife and [said], “What I care about is the Way [Dao], which goes beyond skill. When I first began cutting up oxen, all I could see was the ox itself. After three years I no longer saw the whole ox. And now—now I go at it by spirit and don’t look with my eyes. Perception and understanding have come to a stop and spirit moves where it wants. I go along with the natural makeup, strike in the big hollows, guide the knife through the big openings, and follow things as they
are. So I never touch the smallest ligament or tendon, much less a main joint.\textsuperscript{79}

This story is a metaphor of someone who knows how to move from a judgmental mindset to acting with \textit{wu-wei}. Originally, Cook Ting only saw the whole ox. What his means is that when Cook Ting started butchering, he only saw an objectified entity that he could use to satisfy his own goals—becoming a good butcher, selling meat, and making money. Much like the archer from the last story, who couldn’t shoot his best when there was a prize at stake, Cook Ting wasn’t the best butcher when he was focused on his goal and could only see the objectified ox. This is contrasted with Cook Ting now, who doesn’t see the whole oxen, and doesn’t use “perception and understanding” but goes at it by “spirit”. Slingerland has this to say about the passage:

Unlike instinctual or merely habitual forms of actions, then, \textit{wu-wei} calls for some degree of awareness on the part of the agent, and allows for a considerable amount of flexibility of responses. Although it does not involve abstract reflection or calculation, it is not to be viewed as “mindless” behavior.

What Zhuangzi means by ‘perception and understanding’, then, is not the observation of your surroundings, but calculated and deliberative effort towards the attainment of a goal, which is what Cook Ting did when he viewed the objectified ox as a means for satisfying his goals. Further, when Zhuangzi says that cook Ting goes at it by ‘spirit’ he is referring directly to the \textit{wu-wei} mindset, wherein one acts by natural and spontaneous feeling, paying attention to the particular situation at hand, which

\textsuperscript{79}Chuang Tzu, \textit{Basic Writings}, 46-47.
allowed Cook Ting to “never touch the smallest ligament or tendon.” At the very end of the story, Lord Wen-Hui, who was listening to Cook Ting talk about his skill, exclaims, “Excellent!...I have heard the words of Cook Ting and learned how to care for life.” By this, Zhuangzi is making the point that the story is not a story for butchers in training, but a story that explains the attitude one must have to get along in life (wu-wei) according to the Daoist.

3.9 *Yinyang, Wu-wei, and Skepticism*

By accepting the *yinyang* outlook and fostering *wu-wei*, Zhuangzi achieves a skeptical outlook on life. The *yinyang* outlook says that at the essential level, nothing is determinate, independent or static. All things, insofar as they are specific types of things, are reciprocally determined by their surroundings, their environment, and their context in a dynamic manner. This means that certain traits may be considered good in one situation, but bad in another, and that there is no fixed or independent standard to the matter that lies outside of those individual situations. The same type of reasoning applies to all dualities that we use in making value judgments—good/bad, right/wrong, useful/useless, moral/immoral, happiness/unhappiness, and so on. As John Trowbridge puts it:

Zhuangzi suggests that the sage does not favor one side of a distinction over the other. Rather, he accepts them both together as correlatives. Because of this, it is inconclusive as to whether there is really a fixed distinction. Therefore, in

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80 Ibid., 47.
illuminating the alternatives…the sage occupies a neutral ground, where no single point of view is dominant and from where he can adaptively respond to the situation according to the changing circumstances (yin shi). This nonpreference for either side of any given distinction is consistent with aporetic skepticism.  

Like the Pyrrhonist, however, this does not leave the Daoist motionless or without any natural desires. Rather, the skepticism that is fostered is a skepticism of human judgment and valuation.

3.10 Skepticism in the Passage on Happiness

Next I will look at a passage from the 18th chapter of the Zhuangzi, which demonstrates Zhuangzi’s skepticism very clearly:

This is what the world honors: wealth, eminence, long life, a good name. This is what the world finds happiness in: a life of ease, rich food, fine clothes, beautiful sights, sweet sounds. This is what it looks down on: poverty, meanness, early death, a bad name. This is what it finds bitter: a life that knows no rest, a mouth that gets no rich food, no fine clothes for the body, no beautiful sights for the eye, no sweet sounds for the ear... What ordinary people do and what they find happiness in - I don't know whether such happiness is in the end really happiness or not. I look at what ordinary people find happiness in, what they all make a mad dash for, racing around as though they couldn't stop - they all say they're happy with it. I'm not happy with it and I'm not unhappy with it. In the end is there really happiness or isn't there?

I take inaction [wu-wei] to be true happiness, but ordinary people think it is a bitter thing. I say: perfect happiness knows no happiness, perfect praise knows no praise.

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82 Inaction is a common translation of wu-wei, but it is not a very apt translation.
The world can’t decide what is right and what is wrong. And yet inaction can decide this. Perfect happiness, keeping alive - only inaction gets you close to this!  

The world lives according to a judgmental mindset that sees good and bad as contraries, where the good (wealth, fame, nice things) is to be pursued, and the bad (poverty, infamy, bitter things) is to be avoided. Zhuangzi, however, questions whether this is really happiness at all. It is important to note that Zhuangzi is not saying we should value the opposite of what the world values—wealth and a good name. Rather, Zhuangzi takes wu-wei to be happiness, which doesn’t say that one particular set of qualities is good or bad, but remains indifferent towards both. According to Moeller:

The indifference or equanimity in the face of good luck and bad luck [or happiness and bitterness] acknowledges the equal validity of two necessary events or stages. They equally contribute to a cycle of change, and it would be terribly one-sided to attach one’s feelings to one stage at the expense of the other.

Zhuangzi states that the perfect happiness knows no happiness (in the world’s sense of the word ‘happiness’), and as Moeller points out, the sage’s happiness is indifferent to the world’s happiness. The sage does not pursue the things the world considers good, but she is also not burdened by the things the world considers bad, precisely because she has abandoned the judgmental mindset in favor of the yinyang

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83 Ibid., 111-112.
84 Moeller, *Philosophy of the Daodejing*, 100.
perspective, which allows her to foster *wu-wei*.

### 3.11 Conclusion

In this chapter I have explained the fundamental concepts of *yinyang*—a non-judgmental outlook in which opposites are not viewed as contraries, but as dynamic polarities that reciprocally complement each other—and *wu-wei*—a psychological state that is fostered and attained when one views the world and the self from the *yinyang* perspective, which allows one to act spontaneously in any situation one finds oneself in. Further, I have shown how these two concepts are found throughout the stories and passages of the *Zhuangzi*, and how *yinyang* and *wu-wei* lead to a skeptical and spontaneous attitude towards life. I now move to the next chapter to examine how Zhuangzi’s skepticism informs a practical life.
Chapter 4: Daoist Skepticism in Practice

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter I examine the ways in which yinyang and wu-wei inform Daoist skepticism, which in turn motivates a practical life. In order to do this, I examine three different characteristics, broadly speaking, that give insight into the skeptical Daoist lifestyle. The first is the Daoist similarity to animals. The second is the idea of “free and easy wandering.” Third are the notions of freedom and spontaneity.

4.2 Animal

I will begin by looking at the idea of the animal. The animal is important for Zhuangzi for two reasons. First, many of his tales and stories involve animals, but secondly, and more importantly, animals are offered up as a type of ideal to live by in the Zhuangzi. At the beginning of the last chapter, I made the claim that Zhuangzi and the other Daoists stand in contention to Confucius, because Confucius’ goal is to create a perfect or near-perfect society, whereas Zhuangzi wants us to return to a more natural state of living. On this point, Zhuangzi is easily misunderstood.
Zhuangzi does not advocate becoming a hermit, abandoning society as a whole. In one story, Zhuangzi tells his friend Hui Tzu that fish are happiest when they are free to swim and dart around. Conversely, they are not happy when confined in small tanks or dirty ponds. I think that Zhuangzi would also agree that birds are happiest when they can roam freely in the open sky and sit upon the perch they so choose, and that birds are not happy when trapped in small cages. I would like to make the same analogy when relating Zhuangzi to Confucius. Confucius, according to the Daoist, wants to create the perfect cage or pond in which the human animal can live—organized society. This cage is not necessarily one of bars of glass, but one of value judgments, traditions, and customs. Zhuangzi thinks that for the human to be happy and foster *wu-wei*, society must not be perfected but rather people must be allowed to live a more spontaneous lifestyle.

In the opening of the third chapter, Zhuangzi spells out this sentiment nicely:

> Your life has a limit but knowledge has none. If you use what is limited to pursue what has no limit, you will be in danger. If you understand this and still strive for knowledge, you will be in danger for certain! If you do good, stay away from fame. If you do evil, stay away from punishments.⁸⁵

Not only does Zhuangzi give us skeptical advice—that it is foolish and dangerous to pursue knowledge in this life—but he tells us that whether you do good or bad, avoid the merits and demerits handed out by society. When animals act, they do so without thoughts or rational motivations. They act because it is their instinct and their natural

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tendency to do so. This is the type of lifestyle that Zhuangzi is pointing us towards. He does not want us to literally become animals or to become mountain hermits, but to act according to our natural dispositions. Some men naturally desire to become generals, or storeowners, or cooks, or any other occupation that one can imagine. This is a natural disposition for humans, but when society gets involved, praising one job or one lifestyle over another based on the collective value judgments of people, things go awry, and people start pursuing praise and honor. Instead of acting naturally and with honest desire, men act for social recognition with the hopes that this will make them happy.

Let us take a closer look at what the animal can teach us about the Daoist lifestyle. In an article entitled, “Chuang Tzu’s Becoming-Animal,” Irving Goh makes the case that Zhuangzi’s use of animals in his stories, myths, and tales gives an indication about how to live, and that the key lies in what Goh calls becoming-animal or thinking the animal. By following or thinking the animal, Goh means that “one does not and must not seek to reach toward anything; one is not seeking an organized totality of concepts, propositions, or arguments at the end of this following.”86 This sentiment was explained in the passage quoted above from the Zhuangzi: It is foolish to pursue knowledge. To seek towards anything as a final end, is to abandon wu-wei and the yinyang view in which the self is an indeterminate and dynamic entity that does not have pre-determined goals or an ultimate telos. Specifically, when society teaches one to pursue fame and virtue, it leads one to abandon wu-wei in favor of a

86 Goh, “Chuang Tzu’s Becoming-Animal”, p.111
lifestyle where the self is evaluated according to how successfully fame and virtue are procured.

To illustrate this point, Goh looks at the story of the butterfly dream and the opening story of the giant fish that becomes a bird. In the Butterfly dream, Zhuangzi dreamt, and in the dream he fluttered around as a butterfly. This dynamic state where things dynamically change situations and identity is called the “transformation of things,” and it perfectly represents the wu-wei mindset, where there is no true essence of a thing, but rather an entity’s identity dynamically changes based on the context. In the butterfly dream, we see a butterfly and Zhuangzi become so entangled that Zhuangzi no longer knows which he is. While Zhuangzi calls this the transformation of things, Goh equates it with what he calls becoming-animal. In this story, Zhuangzi does not wake up and give a logical argument for why he is the “real” Zhuangzi or why the dream was less real than being awake. He accepts changes as they confront him, without looking for a systematic account of how to understand these changes or stop them.

Similarly, in the opening story, we see an animal turn from a bird to a fish with no goals, thoughts, objectives, or value judgments. The animal turns from a fish into a bird, going from the water to the sky, from north to south, without any purpose or concept-driven intention. This is in contrast to the politician, activist, and bureaucrat, the “man who has wisdom enough to fill one office effectively, good conduct to impress one community, virtue enough to please one ruler, or talent

\textsuperscript{87} Chuang-Tzu, Basic Writings, 45.
enough to be called into service in one state.”\textsuperscript{88} According to Goh, the way to solve this problem is through \textit{wu-wei}, wherein “one does not and must not seek to reach toward anything,”\textsuperscript{89} but rather, acts in a dynamic and fluid manner. By fostering \textit{wu-wei}, one abandons the political approach taken by the activist and the politician and acts as the animal does—one abandons the narrow goals of attaining certain virtues and mastering certain skill that make you useful in one area, but leave you helpless in others. By properly employing the \textit{yinyang} point of view, one realizes that the self is a dynamic entity, and that one must have a fluid sense of self in order to respond adequately to each individual situation one encounters.

Because Goh posits that the way of the animal is one that has attained \textit{wu-wei}, I will now point out one more aspect of \textit{wu-wei}, which, until now, has been only implicit. When one acts with \textit{wu-wei}, there is no need for moralistic or societal approval or applause. There is no need for the belief or knowledge that one is acting correctly or virtuously because the spontaneity of one’s desires and actions justify themselves. Because \textit{wu-wei} is fostered by viewing the self through the lens of \textit{yinyang}, the self is viewed, in a sense, as empty, particularly, it is viewed as empty of any essential qualities that transcend particular situations. This emptiness is not just promoted by Zhuangzi, but is demarcated as the true mark of a sage: “The Perfect man has no self; the Holy Man has no merit; the Sage has no fame.”\textsuperscript{90} And again, Zhuangzi says:

\footnotesize
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{88} \textit{Ibid.}, 25.
\item \textsuperscript{89} Goh, “Chuang-Tzu’s Becoming-Animal”, 111.
\item \textsuperscript{90} \textit{Chuang Tzu, Basic Writings}, 26.
\end{itemize}
The True Man of ancient times knew nothing of loving life, knew nothing of hating death. He emerged without delight; he went back in without a fuss. He came briskly, he went briskly, and that was all. He didn't forget where he began; he didn't try to find out where he would end. He received something and took pleasure in it; he forgot about it and handed it back again. This is what I call not using the mind to repel the Way, not using man to help out Heaven. This is what I call the True Man.91

The human to be admired—the true man, the holy man, the perfect man, or the sage—does not have fixed plans or intentions. Life is lived as it is found, and it is not to be helped along, fixed, or mastered through knowledge. Just like the animal, the sage lives freely and without speculation.92

4.3 Free and Easy Wandering

Next, I turn to the idea of “free and easy wandering, which is the first chapter title of the Zhuangzi. As Kuang-Ming Wu puts it, free and easy wandering is without a doubt about movement. This involves movement from, “the big and the small, the far and the near, the common and the uncommon, the useful and the useless, [confusion and clarity].”93 Yet this moving and traveling is not strained or stressful, but rather “exudes peace and roaming at ease.”94 Yet how are we to understand this roaming and wandering? Zhuangzi does not literally advocate becoming a wandering vagrant or mendicant, although many Daoists have in fact done this. Rather,

91 Ibid., 74
92 Goh, p. 120.
93 Wu, Butterfly as companion, 84.
94 Ibid., 84.
Zhuangzi is telling us first and foremost about what state of mind, and what emotional state we ought to be in. This follows naturally from what has been repeatedly said about *wu-wei*. When one views the self as a dynamic being with no permanent or determinate essence, the good or wise person is the one who can adapt to different situations, seeing any particular state of affairs from more than just one limited point of view. After the *Zhuangzi’s* initial opening story of the fish/bird, which I examined in chapter three, we are given a short story about a dove and a cicada—tiny animals—who are mocking the huge animal:

The cicada and the little dove laugh at this[the travels of the fish/bird], saying, "When we make an effort and fly up, we can get as far as the elm or the sapanwood tree, but sometimes we don't make it and just fall down on the ground. Now how is anyone going to go ninety thousand li to the south!" If you go off to the green woods nearby, you can take along food for three meals and come back with your stomach as full as ever. If you are going a hundred li, you must grind your grain the night before; and if you are going a thousand li, you must start getting the provisions together three months in advance. What do these two creatures understand? Little understanding cannot come up to great understanding;\(^5\)

Here we see the little animals mocking the big. Initially, one thinks of a prosaic, practical, Confucian mocking the eccentric and poetic Daoist. But, like all of the other value judgments that characters in the stories of the *Zhuangzi* seem to espouse, these values are too narrow and short-sighted. According to the initial reading of this passage, Zhuangzi is merely turning valuations on their head, and flipping them—the useless becomes useful and the uncommon becomes common. But this falls into the

same problem of valuing one set of qualities over another, except that in this scenario, the values one has chosen to accept are chosen only because everyone else has rejected them. As Wu states, “On second thought, however, the laughs of the small are justified after all… The big Bird had to wait for the wind, the tide, and the sky; he had to collect food for a six months’ journey. The small birds need none of that.”

When Wu says that the big Bird has to wait for the wind, the tide, and the sky, he is referencing a paragraph that comes between the two stories we just looked at:

> If water is not piled up deep enough, it won't have the strength to bear up a big boat. Pour a cup of water into a hollow in the floor and bits of trash will sail on it like boats. But set the cup there and it will stick fast, for the water is too shallow and the boat too large. If wind is not piled up deep enough, it won't have the strength to bear up great wings. Therefore when the P'eng rises ninety thousand li, he must have the wind under him like that. Only then can he mount on the back of the wind, shoulder the blue sky, and nothing can hinder or block him. Only then can he set his eyes to the south.

While it is true that the small view of the dove and the cicada seems overly-practical and short-sighted, it is not the case that we can merely abandon that view and ascend to the “truly correct” view of the big Bird, P’eng, for the huge animal also has dependencies and limitations. To think that there is one correct viewpoint that we must attain, is the problem that Zhuangzi is addressing in the first place. To be “truly big,” as Wu puts it, is to wander back and forth between these different viewpoints, recognizing both as equally useful and valid in particular contexts—just as the

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96 Wu, *Butterfly as Companion*, 87-88.
yin\textit{y}ang perspective tells us.

To put this point in more human terms, we may remember the point made earlier in this chapter about the politician and the bureaucrat, who are very good at one small and specific set of skills. Zhuangzi is not telling us to label these people as bad and instead call the mystic or the hermit good. Instead, Zhuangzi is telling us to realize that both of these people have their place in the world, but that both are of limited value. In a city, the politician might be very well needed, and in the woods, the hermit might be better prepared than anyone. But to be truly “good” or “wise” is to make oneself so dynamic and fluid as to not be limited by the valuing of one of these occupations or skill sets over another.

4.4 Spontaneity and Freedom

The last idea I will discuss is spontaneity and freedom. In the fourth chapter of the \textit{Zhuangzi}, entitled “In the World of Men”, we are presented with the story of Tzu-Kao, the duke of She, who asks Confucius for advice on how to best lead a bureaucratic mission he is embarking on, which he is not very confident about. It is important to note that Zhuangzi is parodying Confucius in this section by turning him into a Daoist, and making Confucius give advice that is not in line with traditional Confucian thought. At one point, Confucius says the following: “if you do not succeed, you are bound to suffer from the judgment of men. If you do succeed, you are bound to suffer from the \textit{yin} and the \textit{yang}. To suffer no harm whether you
succeed or not—only the man who has virtue can do that.” Tzu-Kao is not in the proper mindset when he approaches Confucius. He is asking for advice on how to succeed, because he views success as good for his career and everything else as bad for his career. Confucius responds with a hypothetical: if you view your career in this way, two things could happen. Either you will fail, and people will call you a lousy politician, or you will succeed. But, if you succeed, good fortune will not last forever, for the world is such a place that the good and the bad flow into one another over time, and you cannot achieve one without also getting the other. This is precisely what Confucius means by the “yin and yang.” But, says Confucius, to come to no harm, you must become “virtuous,” in the sense that one must abandon the view that good/bad and virtuous/unvirtuous are contraries, such that we can pursue one independently of the other. As we have already seen, the perfect or virtuous man has no self. To truly avoid harm, one must give up the notion that one can become a good person.

So far this sounds no different that what has already been stated in this chapter, but Zhuangzi ends the section by making Confucius say something enlightening on the idea of freedom: “Just go along with things and let your mind move freely. Resign yourself to what cannot be avoided and nourish what is within you—this is best. What more do you have to do to fulfill your mission?” This passage is illuminating because it reinforces what we have already said about the Daoist lifestyle, but also introduces the notion of freedom. Confucius says that to

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99 Chuang-Tzu, Basic Writings, 55.
100 Ibid., 57-58.
fulfill your mission (here Zhuangzi intends for us to think of our “mission” of living life, which is not some pre-determined goal, but merely to get through life without too much harm) two things are needed. First, to accept things as they are and to let you mind move freely, and secondly, to nourish what is within you, that is, to act spontaneously on your natural impulses. In practice, these two dictates are very similar.

To explain this idea further, let us look at another passage. In chapter five of the *Zhuangzi* we are given a passage in which Zhuangzi’s friend asks him whether a man can really live without “the impulses of man.” He wants to know whether a human will really live a fully human life if he has fostered *wu-wei*, and created the emptiness of the self that I mentioned earlier. Zhuangzi responds by saying that what he means by the impulses of man is the “judgmental attitude” that views some things as good and some as bad. The emptiness that comes from *wu-wei* does not mean that the human has no feelings or inclinations. So how does this relate to freedom and spontaneity? When Zhuangzi says to nourish what is within you, he is referring to our natural dispositions and inclinations. Unlike value judgments, these are not to be discarded, but followed and acted upon. Thus, if one is able to give up value judgments and follow one’s natural inclinations, one is left with a spontaneity of choice and a free or open-ended way of seeing the world. This is seen very clearly in a story that we have looked at, where Zhuangzi sees a tree that the carpenter has

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102 page 55 of this thesis.
passed by and judged as too crooked to be useful. Because Zhuangzi gave up this sort of value judgment; he does not see view the tree as useless. Further, because he is following his own natural dispositions and inclinations, he sees the tree as the perfect place to lie in the shade and take a nap. Thus, by seeing his own self from the yinyang perspective, he is able to foster wu-wei and get rid of value judgments. But since his natural desires and inclinations are still there, he takes on a new, spontaneous, and free view of life, where he sees objects in the world from a different point of view, that others—those who are stuck in a judgmental mind-set—are not able to do.

4.5 Conclusion

In summary we can say that the life Zhuangzi proposes is one that admires the natural state of animals, that produces an attitude where one can wander between ideas without worry or care, and that produces a freedom—a life that is fully human, including thought, feelings, emotion, and spontaneity, but that is not dominated by a judgmental mind-set. “The book is meant to offer a realistic lesson in the uselessness of trying to figure out life. Thinking and talking have a place: Zhuangzi does a lot of both of them. The challenge is to harmonize thinking and talking with the other, incomprehensible aspects [of] life.” The harmony that this quote speaks of is referring to the harmony between rationality and the irrational parts of life, but

104 Chuang-Tzu, Basic Writings, 29-30.
105 Ivanhoe and Van Norden, Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy, 208.
Zhuangzi wants us to find harmony between every opposition life. This is achieved through the *yinyang* perspective and *wu-wei*. Through this perspective one is given a freedom of perspective so that the goal of life is not to understand or “succeed” but simply to behave as you naturally are and enjoy life while it lasts. When one has this perspective, contrary elements like fortune and misfortune are viewed equally and with calm. The freedom that this view of life affords allows one to freely and easily wander through life, without worrying about status, success, or achieving some particular set of traits that are considered good, while avoiding those that are bad.

I now proceed to my final chapter, where I will examine the similarities and differences found between these two skeptical philosophies and weigh in on the causes of the differences, as well as whether one lifestyle is more properly suited for someone who is inclined towards philosophical skepticism.
Chapter 5: Comparison and Evaluation

5.1 Introduction

In the preceding chapters I have laid out the basic concepts of both Pyrrhonian skepticism and Zhuangzi’s skepticism, and how these basic concepts lead to a skeptical outlook that guided a practical life. In this final chapter I look at both the similarities and differences between these two types of skepticism, specifically, looking at how differences in theory lead to differences in every day life. Finally, I will make an evaluation concerning the practical application of the two sceptical philosophies.

5.2 Similarities

I begin with the similarities between the two philosophies. The first similarity is that found between the methodologies\textsuperscript{106} of the Pyrrhonist and the Daoist. Where the Daoist uses the yinyang outlook in conjunction with wu-wei to motivate and constitute a skeptical outlook, the Pyrrhonist uses opposition of arguments,

\textsuperscript{106} By ‘methodology’ I do not mean philosophical technique or literary style, but refer to the series of psychological states experienced by the skeptic as she practices skepticism.
equipollence of arguments, and tranquility of mind to motivate and constitute a
skeptical outlook. I argue that these two methodologies form a very similar process,
which amounts to the two skepticisms being very similar. For the Pyrrhonist there is
an ordered method that ends in tranquility. One begins by hearing some argument or
theory. Upon hearing this argument, the Pyrrhonist will see if the argument stands up
to the different modes of argumentation used by the skeptic that we examined in the
first chapter. Seemingly, no argument ever does stand up to this rigorous gauntlet of
skeptical tropes, so the argument is not justified. But, the opposite claim is also never
able to defeat the skeptical arguments, so both the argument and its negation are taken
as not justified, and thus not believed by the skeptic. This is where opposition comes
in. Because any statement (or theory) and its opposite have the same level of
argumentative force, the arguments are said to be in opposition. Because the skeptic
has no reason to believe one over the other, she suspends judgment on the matter. In
this situation, she has no choice but to suspend judgment. Sextus then tell us that
after the Pyrrhonist suspends judgment, the skeptic finds tranquility.\textsuperscript{107} While most
philosophers seek tranquility by discerning the true nature of the universe or
acquiring knowledge somehow, the skeptic finds it by setting her mind to rest about
some issue in which no superior argument can be found on either side of the debate.

Interestingly, we find something similar at work in Zhuangzi’s skepticism.
When the Daoist adopts the \textit{yinyang} perspective, she realizes that opposites are
mutually interdependent. When the Pyrrhonist views an argument and its negation as

\textsuperscript{107} Sextus, \textit{Outlines}, 11.
equipollent, it is because both arguments have been viewed in light of the set of skeptical arguments that the Pyrrhonist uses. The Daoist does not have stock arguments like the Pyrrhonist, but rather, when the assertion ‘x is good’ is evaluated by Daoist, she will also see that the claim ‘x is bad’ is equally true, because good and bad reciprocally determine each other. Thus, the Daoist also ends up with two statements that are equipollent, although this conclusion is arrived at through a different view of opposition from the one held by the Pyrrhonist.108 Further, when the Daoist applies the yinyang perspective to the self, she cultivates wu-wei which allows her to see that a self is not an independent entity with permanent and substantial properties. By viewing the self in this way, the Daoist stops striving for “goods” and “virtues” that can be accumulated in the self because the self is not the type of thing that can be made “good” or “virtuous,” precisely because it is a dynamic entity that changes based on its relationship to other things and situations. For clarity, it should be made clear that what I mean by ‘good’ here is good qualities that are contrary to bad qualities. In a sense, Zhuangzi argues that wu-wei is good, but Zhuangzi thinks wu-wei is good because it avoids the judgmental mindset. Thus, the Daoist arrives at a tranquil mindset just as the Pyrrhonist does. The Pyrrhonist arrives there by suspension of judgment, and the Daoist achieves tranquility by realizing that one cannot strive for just the good or just virtue.109 Because of this realization, the Daoist skeptic stops worrying about these things, just as the Pyrrhonist does.

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108 This point is discussed further in the next paragraph.
109 By ‘good’ and ‘virtue’ here I mean those sets of qualities that are seen as contraries to the bad, and that lead one to success.
It is also interesting to note that the Pyrrhonist is using Aristotle’s logical framework, which views opposites as contraries. All of the ten modes take one appearance and pit it against a contrary appearance (an appearance of the same type but so different that both cannot be true about the object in question) independent of some particular point of view. The Daoist, who uses the *yinyang* framework, also arrives at a skeptical outcome, but not by pitting contraries against each other. In spite of not having a logical framework that views opposites as contraries, the Daoist uses the notion of relational opposition to argue that because any entity or state of affairs is dependent on context and not essentially defined in terms of a genus and differentia, the nature of an entity or state of affairs can never be pinned down. Thus, nothing permanent or stable can be asserted of the entity or state of affairs, which leads to a skeptical conclusion concerning valuations or judgments about the entity or state of affairs in question.

Not only are the methodologies of the Daoist and the Pyrrhonist similar, but there is also a similarity between the notions of nature (Daoist) and appearance (Pyrrhonist). For Sextus, an appearance is a self-reporting of something that cannot be denied. It is essentially an affectation. The Chinese did not think in terms of inner and outer as the Western tradition has, but nature for Zhuangzi is something that operates on its own, with regularities, and does not need any sort of justification from humans or metaphysical realities. It is merely observed doing what it does. According to Hans-Georg
Moeller, “The Daoist concept of nature is a concept of perfect immanence.”

Nature is transparent and we observe its regularities. Just as Sextus is happy to make the connection between smoke and fire, so the Daoist is happy to make the connection between the four seasons, even though it is possible that, in either case, one could be wrong. Nature, then, is the phenomenal world acting with regularity, and for Zhuangzi it is something that we can observe and learn from without making value judgments or hypotheses.

Within both systems, appearance and nature play a similar conceptual role. If someone is skeptical, she will not be making knowledge claims or basing her actions on justified true belief. Rather, both systems need a conceptual category of things that can be used as an impetus for action and decision. This is precisely the role that is filled by both of these concepts. When asked why a Pyrrhonist would eat when hungry, the Pyrrhonist could reply by saying that in the past, the appearance of hunger was sated by eating, and so the Pyrrhonist will continue to eat when hungry. Similarly, the Daoist may be asked why she eats and drinks. If the Daoist is skeptical of value judgments and the systems of thought produced by culture and society, why follow any of the common sense that is practiced in society? The Daoist would respond that nature shows us that all living things eat and drink. It is a part of nature that is seen over and over again. It is precisely this sense of

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110 Moeller, Daoism Explained, 108. ‘Immanence’ here is not being used in a way that connects it with transcendence, but rather something that shows itself fully. We do no have to get “behind” nature to discover its truth.
action justification that make appearance and nature similar. Both give some basis upon which to interact with the world, and both appearance and nature are taken non-dogmatically.

One last similarity that needs to be pointed out is the reliance upon the non-rational as a way of making choices. In the last paragraph I spoke of appearance and nature as being the basis for making decisions. The philosopher often makes a decision after a period of rational deliberation in which the best course of action is grasped. The skeptic, however, does not do this. The skeptic resorts to appearance or nature but often to other considerations. For a point of reference, I will compare Sextus’ four guidelines with Zhuangzi. The four tenets that the Pyrrhonian skeptic are able to fall back on are (1) guidance by nature, (2) necessitation by feelings, (3) handing down of laws and customs, and (4) the teaching of expertise.\footnote{Sextus, \textit{Outlines}, 9.} Based on what I have already said about Zhuangzi, it is clear that the he advocates guidance by nature. Although, Sextus is here using the word ‘nature’ in a vague and unspecified way, the four guidelines Sextus presents are varieties of appearance that the skeptic can fall back on. The types of appearances that Sextus specifies as guidance by nature are things like drinking when thirsty or avoiding pain as a natural reaction. The Daoist would accept this without hesitation. The same could be said of necessitation by feeling. Hans-Georg Moeller gives the example of a child falling into a
well, and asks whether the Daoist would help him. The typical ethicist would explain to you why it would be good or moral to help the child, while it would be bad or immoral to neglect the child. The Daoist, like the Pyrrhonist takes a different approach: “The Daoist sage…would rescue the child, but I would still maintain that this would not be done for “moral” reasons—and the sage would do it indifferently.”112 According to Moeller, it would be a natural impulse to save the child, and that even dogs act this way when their offspring are in danger. Similarly, the Daoist, like the Pyrrhonist, would not go on to label this action as just, heroic, or moral—the Daoist would follow his feelings but he would do so indifferently, not labeling the action as praiseworthy.

As for the handing down of laws and customs, the Daoist would not accept this, but this will be addressed in the next section that compares the differences of the two skeptical philosophies. The fourth guideline, the teaching of expertise, is accepted by Zhuangzi. The best evidence for this is the characters found in the tales. His stories are full of people exemplifying the Daoist way if life—people who have professions like cooks, thieves, kings, or rulers. Additionally, I think that the Daoist would collapse this fourth guideline into the first or second: people are by nature not sloths. We do not naturally sleep all day or sit around. We naturally incline towards skills and professions, even if for no reason than other than killing time. The

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essential element of these four guidelines is that they are not the product of rational deliberation. They are non-rational, because they offer a means for making choices and living an active life that are not dependent on knowledge, that is, justified true belief.

Before I move on to the differences between the Pyrrhonist’s and Zhuangzi’s skepticism, I will summarize the similarities. Both philosophies offer a very similar methodology in which one arrives at an opposition of two statements or theories. Both skeptical methodologies also lead to a state where the skeptic feels at ease and tranquil with the skeptical position arrived at. Additionally, both schools offer a way of making choices that are non-dogmatic by introducing nature and appearance, respectively. Further, they seem to agree that people must resort to non-rational standards for making choices and living an active life. Although these similarities are crucial, there are also important differences between the two skeptical philosophies, which I now turn my attention to.

5.3 Differences

Although the Daoist would agree with three of the four guidelines proposed by Sextus, the Daoist would not want to accept the handing down of laws and customs for two important reasons. The first is that laws and traditions are fixed standards that embody old and habitual value judgments. Laws and customs are
designed to promote the good and stop the bad, which is not what the Daoist (or anyone who accepts the yinyang perspective) wants to do. A life in complete accordance with the traditional rites and traditions of society was the lifestyle championed by the Confucian, not Zhuangzi or the Daoists. One of the problems that Zhuangzi detected in his society and contemporaries was the fact that they deferred to traditional morality, preferring “this” over “that” and reading false distinction into nature, and according to the Zhuangzi, “the sage does not proceed in such a way.”

The second reason Zhuangzi would not accept the handing down of laws and customs is that laws, customs, and rites have a tendency to become determinate and static. They provide a list of dos and don’ts that are to be followed in every situation. Again, the Daoist will not accept this, because if one accepts the yinyang perspective and fosters wu-wei, one will see that any action or way of behaving will take on a different value based on the particular circumstance in which it is performed. To make this clearer, we may say that no action or object can be viewed independently of its surroundings, because from the yinyang perspective, a thing’s surroundings determine its essence through that contextual relationship. Because fixed laws must take actions and entities out of their context and make valuations about them, it is impossible for the laws to ever fully capture what is appropriate in a given situation.

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113 “[Confucius] believed that there was still a hope for humanity, because the traditional Zhou [500 years before Confucius and Zhuangzi] ritual forms and classics…could serve as a sort of blueprint for rebuilding the lost Golden age.” From Ivanhoe and Van Norden, Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy, 2.

114 Chuang Tzu, Basic Writings, 35.
For this reason, the Daoist skeptic would find it unacceptable to use laws, rites, and customs as a method of determining how to act in any situation.

The second difference between the two skeptical philosophies is that the Pyrrhonist is still involved in debate and philosophical inquiry,\textsuperscript{115} while the Daoist is not. This difference is the most important between the two philosophies and one that helps us understand why even though they have similar methodologies, the practitioners lead very different lives. One passage that I have already quoted from the \textit{Zhuangzi} demonstrates this: “Your life has limit but knowledge has none. If you use what is limited to pursue what has no limit, you will be in danger.”\textsuperscript{116} Sextus on the other hand has this to say when discussing different names that have been applied to the Pyrrhonist: “The skeptical persuasion, then, is also called investigative, from its activity in investigating and inquiring.”\textsuperscript{117} The point here is that the skeptic is still involved in disputation and debate. Sextus describes the way tranquility comes to the skeptic by telling the story of a painter who, having failed to emulate foam from a horse’s mouth gave up, threw the sponge at the canvas, and perfectly emulated the foam. The skeptic’s tranquility is seen, like the foam, as an accidental byproduct—in this case the byproduct of suspension of judgment. Because tranquility follows from suspension of judgment, and suspension of judgment follows from investigating equipollent arguments on both sides of any debate, the skeptic is still engaged in the debate. Zhuangzi, on the other hand, doesn’t think knowledge is even useful: “the

\textsuperscript{115} By ‘truth’ I do not mean simple observation or indexical claims, but justified true belief that allows one to explain the world by a determinate theory or hypothesis.

\textsuperscript{116} \textit{Ibid.}, 47.

\textsuperscript{117} Sextus, \textit{Outlines}, 4.
sage hatches no schemes, so what use has he for knowledge?”

This difference comes out in the methodologies of each philosophy. Although both have a similar function within the philosophies and both lead to tranquility, the Pyrrhonist’s method is laden with rationality. The heart of the Pyrrhonist’s method is to use the different modes of argumentation that allow one to reach opposition of arguments and eventually suspension of judgment. Argumentation and rationality are the key for the Pyrrhonian skeptic. For Zhuangzi, rationality is not a method, but something that must be overcome in order to live a fulfilling life in which one enjoys being alive. This is evident in the book that Zhuangzi wrote, which is not a logical treatise, but a book of tales, allegories, and myths.

Before I give an evaluation of the two skeptical philosophies, I will first look at one more paragraph from the Zhuangzi which I think gives a good summary of his view on reason and rationality:

The fish trap exists because of the fish; once you’ve gotten the fish, you can forget the trap. The rabbit snare exists because of the rabbit; once you’ve gotten the rabbit, you can forget the snare. Words exist because of meaning; once you’ve gotten the meaning, you can forget the words. Where can I find a man who has forgotten words so I can have a word with him?

The typical analysis of this story says that once we have understood the Zhuangzi, we can stop reading it, and just follow what it says. This is a fairly simplistic and

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118 Chuang Tzu, Basic Writings, 71. ‘Knowledge’ here means justified true belief that allows one to hypothesize about or explain the world.
119 I discuss the notion of enjoyment more on pages 79-80 of this thesis.
120 Moeller, Daoism Explained, 55.
naïve reading, however, that doesn’t take into account the other parts of the *Zhuangzi* that speak of meanings. According to Moeller, “Practically every time that the notion of *yi* [meaning] appears in the sense of “meaning of words” it has a *negative connotation* attached to it.”\(^{121}\) Additionally, the phrase being translated as ‘gotten the meaning” is a pun that can be translated as ‘gotten one’s desires fulfilled’. Since the Daoist sage is not after knowledge, or hatching schemes, then the sage’s desire is actually to be *rid of ideas and theories and deep meanings*. Thus, the Daoist “gets the meaning” only by getting rid of meanings and ideas completely.

5.4 Evaluation

Although there are many ways to evaluate a philosophy, this thesis is concerned with skepticism and practical life, so in my evaluation I will focus on the possibility of someone in contemporary society living the lifestyle indicated by either Pyrrhonism or Daoism. Ultimately, I will argue that Daoism offers a more appealing and open-ended lifestyle.

First, I will examine the Pyrrhonist. The Pyrrhonist’s lifestyle makes him the quintessential conservative.\(^{122}\) The third guideline (the one rejected by Zhuangzi) says that the Pyrrhonist should live by the customs, traditions, and laws of the land. At first, this does not seem too stringent or conservative, because, for the most part,

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\(^{121}\) *Ibid.*, 57.

\(^{122}\) The word ‘conservative’ in this chapter has no overtly political connotations attached to it. When the Pyrrhonist is described as politically conservative this means that she always lands in support of the status quo.
we all live in accordance with these things. The problem with the Pyrrhonist position is that it does not leave room for much leeway. On every political issue, seemingly, the Pyrrhonist would side with the status quo. As this is true of politics, it would also be true of religion, art, and every sphere of culture. The reason for this is that activism and social change are almost always derived from some sort of argument about the current state of affairs being bad, wrong, immoral, or unsatisfactory. The pyrrhonist, however, will not take the arguments at face value, like some others might. He will run these arguments through the different modes, and (more than likely) conclude that there is an equally strong argument for keeping things the way they are. Not knowing what to do then, the Pyrrhonist resorts to Sextus’ four guidelines and ends up supporting the status quo, by appealing to the third guideline. This line of reasoning applies to any sort of societal change whatsoever, such that Pyrrhonists would be as conservative as it is possible to be, since they would never be willing to endorse or support change that came from deliberation or was in contrast to societal tradition and law.

Unfortunately, I think that a contemporary Pyrrhonist has even deeper problems than a type of lifestyle that would be undesirably conservative. Because of our melting-pot conception of culture, America is filled with a plurality of diverse traditions and cultures. For example, would a Pyrrhonist be a Christian in today’s society? My family has been Lutheran since the 1600s, and in this sense I am part of a tradition. But I am also an American, where no religion is required or mandated, and I am living in the 21\textsuperscript{st} century, where the current trend is for young people to stop
going to church. What would one do in this situation? I do not think that there is a clear answer in this situation.

Here is another problem that comes up when trying to decipher the third guideline in today’s society: In America, it has historically been considered a duty to vote. A good citizen ought to vote because democracy thrives on an informed and active populace. If a Pyrrhonist tried to take this traditional duty seriously, how could she ever decide for whom to vote? When it comes time to decide there would be no law or tradition to appeal to, and seemingly she would either have to 1) deliberate about who is the better candidate or 2) choose based on something other than merit, or 3) not vote at all. Since she can’t deliberate and arrive at a conclusion because of her skepticism (1), she must either vote without a reason (2), or not vote (3). In any of these situations, she would not be fulfilling the tradition of voting because on the one hand she doesn’t vote, and on the other hand she wouldn’t be making a decision based on relevant information about who would be the better candidate— in other words, she wouldn’t be acting as an informed member of the populace, which is intricately connected with the duty of voting.

The two examples I examined were just that— examples. I think that in a democratic society with a plurality of traditions present, finding the correct traditions and customs is not only difficult but will in principle cause conflicts and contradictions. Additionally, I will add that while there are ways to get round these

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123 According to David Kinnaman, there is a 43% drop-off rate among young people in church attendance between teenagers and young adults. Kinnaman, You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church and Rethinking Faith.
problems by asserting that one tradition is stronger or more relevant than some other, it seems that these are merely ad hoc solutions.

I now turn to the Daoist skeptic. In contrast to the Pyrrhonist, the Daoist skeptic is not socially conservative. As I have noted, Zhuangzi rejects the third guideline of deferring to laws and customs on a number of different grounds. At this point, I will comment on the problem that the Pyrrhonist faces while voting. Unlike the Pyrrhonist, the Daoist will not feel compelled to vote. First, because the Daoist does not take custom seriously, he will not feel compelled to follow the social norms in which she becomes informed and votes. Second, the Daoist will not vote because voting is essentially making a value judgment about who is a better leader—something the Daoist strives to avoid. Because of this the reluctance to follow custom and tradition the Daoist skeptic will not be limited in the same ways that the Pyrrhonist is. The best examples of this are spontaneity and freedom, which were discussed in the last chapter. A good example of this mindset is found in a story I have already examined in which Zhuangzi is being criticized as useless. Zhuangzi compares his philosophy to the large, but ugly and gnarled tree that the carpenter passes over because nothing can be made of it. Zhuangzi suggests that instead of calling the tree useless because we can’t turn it into furniture, we instead lie down beside it and enjoy its shade. This element of enjoyment is essential to understanding the Daoist lifestyle and how it differs from the Pyrrhonist’s. By seeing the world in non-judgmental terms Zhuangzi enables us to see it in a myriad of different ways that are divorced from, and contrary to, the traditional interpretations of our particular
culture. It is important to note that by ‘enjoyment’ I don’t mean hedonistic pleasure or an obsessive attitude of “being in a good mood.” Rather I am referring to a broad and holistic notion of appreciating the experience of being alive, and having an absence of existential distress or worry. None of this is to say that the Pyrrhonist does not enjoy life. The point is that the spontaneous and free view the Daoist has on life is not found in Pyrrhonian skepticism, but follows from the Daoist notion of spontaneity.

This freedom and spontaneity, however, is not something accidental or tangential to Zhuangzi’s philosophy. Zhuangzi’s view of rationality leads directly to this result. By jettisoning the search for truth, and not engaging in argumentation the Daoist skeptic opens up a new horizon of possibilities in which to interpret the world. As I said earlier in the chapter, the fact that the Pyrrhonist is still engaged in dispute and the Daoist is not is a crucial difference between the two varieties of skepticism. The Pyrrhonist is limited in her outlook. It is not a self-justifying fact of the world that we ought to engage in debate or disputation. Because of this, it seems a Pyrrhonian skeptic could put into question the very goal of engaging in disputation. Yet, Sextus never hints at anything like this. For this reason I think that the Daoist lifestyle makes more sense and is a more enjoyable one.
5.5 Conclusion

To conclude this thesis I will summarize what I have done. In the first two chapters I examined the nature, goal, methodologies, and lifestyle of the Pyrrhonian skeptic, pointing out the importance of concepts like opposition, equipollence, suspension of judgment, and tranquility. I showed the lifestyle of the Pyrrhonian skeptic looks very normal—the skeptic would have a job, speak like everyone else, and follow all of the traditions and customs of the land she was in. On the inside however, the Pyrrhonist would have a very interesting mental life; a life where everything was being examined by the rigorous modes of skepticism. In chapters three and four I examined the Daoist skeptic’s view of the world, methodology, and lifestyle, pointing out the important notions of *yinyang* and *wu-wei*. The Daoist skeptic would *not* look like the average person precisely because of his views on rationality and his non-deference to tradition and custom. Instead the Daoist skeptic would lead a life of spontaneity. In this final chapter, I have compared the two skeptical philosophies, showing that a very similar methodology is at work in both philosophies. The main difference between the two is that the Pyrrhonist is still actively engaged with disputation and debate, while the Daoist is not preoccupied with such endeavors. This difference of methodology leads to a crucial difference in lifestyle. Ultimately, I conclude that the Daoist version of skepticism is not only more practical for one to practice in our democratic and pluralistic society, but also more thoroughly skeptical because it does not take engagement with intellectual
disputation and debate as a necessary aspect of life.
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