What Does Pyrrhonism Have To Do With Pyrrho?

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The traditional picture of Pyrrhonian scepticism looks something like this. The sceptic assembles opposing arguments on as wide a range of topics as possible. On placing the arguments, on any given topic, in confrontation with one another, he discovers that they have the feature of isostheneia, "equal strength"; the arguments on one side, he finds, incline him towards acceptance no more and no less than those on the other side. This isostheneia also has a counterpart in the "unresolvable disagreement" (aneikritos diaphônia) that he takes to exist, on any topic you care to name, among philosophers - and perhaps among ordinary people as well. Faced with this unresolvable disagreement, and with his own perception of the "equal strength" of the arguments, the sceptic finds himself suspending judgement about the real nature of the objects under discussion. If this approach is applied sufficiently broadly - and the sceptic certainly professes to apply it across the board - the result is an entirely general suspension of judgement (epochê) about the real nature of things. This suspension of judgement does not prevent things' striking the sceptic in certain ways rather than their opposites; honey tastes to him sweet, for example, rather than bitter - at least, if he is not suffering some disease that affects his taste buds, or any other unusual physiological or psychological state. But though he will register the fact that honey tastes to him that way, and will allow this fact to shape his behavior, he will not take it as in any way indicative of honey's real nature; on that question the existence of equally powerful opposing arguments has driven him to withdraw from any position. Yet this global suspension of judgement about the nature of things itself has an important practical effect; it results in ataraxia, "freedom from worry" - the very goal that philosophers, whether sceptical or not, were generally presumed to be seeking. Most philosophers think that they can attain this tranquil state by discovering the truth about things. But the sceptic sees that it is precisely that ambition that produces turmoil, and that ataraxia is to be attained, on the contrary, by relinquishing any such pretensions.

This picture of Pyrrhonian scepticism is by no means simply false. It, or something close to it (for naturally enough, there is room for dispute about some of the details) is the outlook presented by Sextus Empiricus in his Outlines of Pyrrhonism. What is far more questionable is whether this picture can be said to represent Pyrrhonian scepticism as a whole. Besides Sextus, the most important figures in this history are Pyrrho himself, who lived some five hundred years earlier, and Aenesidemus, who, some two centuries before Sextus, saw in Pyrrho a model to follow and initiated the tradition of thought, based in some sense on Pyrrho's ideas, to which Sextus later belonged. Both Pyrrho and Aenesidemus are, for us, relatively shadowy figures; but in both cases, there is enough evidence for us to arrive at some fair conjectures about their philosophical outlooks. The question is whether these outlooks are essentially the same as the one expressed in Sextus' Outlines of Pyrrhonism.

The answer traditionally given has tended to be "yes"; the views of Pyrrho and Aenesidemus have been seen as incipient versions of that of Outlines of Pyrrhonism - not as fully worked out, perhaps, and not as sensitive to possible objections, but nonetheless
recognizable specimens of the same outlook. Recently, however, this reading has come under attack. A number of scholars, including myself, have argued for interpretations of Pyrrho's thought which make it look substantially different from that of Outlines of Pyrrhonism; and others have done the same, plausibly in my view, with Aenesidemus. If it is correct to see Pyrrho and Aenesidemus in some such new light, then instead of a single Pyrrhonist position, we are faced with three different positions. Moreover, I have argued elsewhere that the outlook of the reinterpreted Aenesidemus is to be found even in the work of Sextus himself. Sextus' Against the Ethicists, I hold, offers a position distinct from that of Outlines of Pyrrhonism, but essentially the same as that of Aenesidemus. If all this is so, then Outlines of Pyrrhonism represents not the Pyrrhonism which had been present in the tradition all along, but a particular, late phase in the history of Pyrrhonism - a history which encompasses at least three distinct views at different periods.

But the more one claims to detect differences among various Pyrrhonist views, the more an obvious problem presents itself. If Aenesidemus' view is distinct from Pyrrho's, why did he consider himself to be following in Pyrrho's footsteps? If Sextus' view (most of the time) differs from Aenesidemus', how can he regard himself as a member of the same tradition? And if Sextus in Against the Ethicists offers a view essentially the same as Aenesidemus', and in Outlines of Pyrrhonism a quite distinct view, how can he cheerfully refer to the holder of both of these views as "the sceptic"? To put it most generally, how could both Aenesidemus and Sextus see themselves as Pyrrhonists, if they differ both among themselves and from Pyrrho?

The problem is perhaps not as serious as it is sometimes made out to be, by those who want to retain a more unitary picture of Pyrrhonism. Aenesidemus is never recorded as claiming to promote precisely the views earlier held by Pyrrho. He is said to describe himself as "philosophizing in the manner of Pyrrho" (kata Purrôna philosophôn), and to refer to himself and his associates (whoever they may have been) as "the followers of Pyrrho" (hoi ... apo Purrônos); but this need indicate no more than a general similarity of approach. As for Sextus, his one comment on the philosophical common ground between himself and Pyrrho is notably cautious and notably vague; the sceptical movement is called Pyrrhonism, he tells us, "from the fact that Pyrrho appears to us to have approached scepticism in a more bodily fashion and more manifestly than those who preceded him". Then again, Sextus refers to Aenesidemus relatively infrequently, and rarely in any detail. Moreover, in a number of these places he appears to present him not as a sceptic, but as an interpreter, or possibly even an adherent, of dogmatic views; in such cases, not

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1 See, e.g., Charlotte Stough, Greek Skepticism (Berkeley/Los Angeles, 1969); and for a defense of the traditional picture of Pyrrho against rival accounts, M.R. Stopper, "Schizzi Pirroniani", Phronesis 28 (1983), 265-97.
6 Photius, Bibliotheca 169b26-7, 170a22-3.
7 PH 1.7.
surprisingly, there is no question of Sextus' claiming philosophical common ground with Aenesidemus.

But these observations do not make the problem disappear altogether. The use of Pyrrho as a figurehead by both Aenesidemus and Sextus implies that both saw some continuity in the tradition. If the views of all three thinkers were in fact distinct, we need to try to pin down what continuity there nevertheless was, or at least what continuity they might have thought that there was. In what follows, I shall sketch the views of Pyrrho and Aenesidemus, as I understand them, indicating the differences between them, and between each of them and the view expressed in *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*. I shall then try to indicate how the transition between one view and the next might nonetheless have naturally taken place.

I

Interpretation of the views of Pyrrho centers inevitably around a short excerpt from the *Peri Philosophias* of the Peripatetic Aristocles of Messene, preserved in quotation by Eusebius in his *Praeparatio Evangelica*; this purports to be a summary of an account of Pyrrho's views by Timon of Philus, his disciple and biographer, and it is the *only* surviving passage claiming to describe Pyrrho's most general philosophical attitudes. One might have hoped that this crucial evidence was not fourth-hand. However, there is no reason to doubt Eusebius' claim to be quoting Aristocles *verbatim*; and both the content of the passage itself and Aristocles' record in summarizing the views of philosophers of whom we have independent evidence encourage the conclusion that we have here an accurate reproduction of what Timon said. Given its central importance, the passage has not surprisingly received a great deal of attention; and there is nothing resembling a consensus as to how it should be read. I shall summarize as concisely as possible the interpretation for which I have argued in more detail elsewhere.

The passage presents Pyrrho as responding to three connected questions: 1) what are things like by nature? 2) what should our attitude be towards them? 3) what will the effect be on those who adopt this attitude? The answer to the third question shows at least one similarity with the position adopted in Sextus' *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*; the effect - or at any rate, one effect - of adopting the appropriate attitude towards things (an attitude itself generated by adopting the appropriate view concerning the nature of those things) is said to be *ataraxia*, "freedom from disturbance". We are told that another effect is *aphasia*, which is less clear; it might refer to something like the later sceptical posture of "non-assertion" (this is what *aphasia* means in most of its few occurrences in Sextus), or it might refer more literally to speechlessness. I myself prefer the latter alternative, but that is a minor point. Much more important is how we understand the answers to the first two questions.

10 XIV.17.10.
11 I have argued for this in "Aristocles on Timon on Pyrrho", sec.VI. It has recently been argued that Timon's account is not an accurate reproduction of what Pyrrho said; see Jacques Brunschwig, "Once again on Eusebius on Aristocles on Timon on Pyrrho", in Jacques Brunschwig, *Papers in Hellenistic Philosophy* (Cambridge, 1994), 190-211. I have argued against this view in "Hellenistic Essays Translated", *Apeiron* 29 (1996), 75-97, sec.III.
12 "Aristocles on Timon on Pyrrho".
13 *PH* 1.192, 193, 195, 2.211.
14 See "Aristocles on Timon on Pyrrho", sec.IV.
We are told that, in answer to the first question, Pyrrho held that things are "equally adiaphora and astathmēta and anepikrita"\(^{15}\). Taken by themselves, these three epithets seem capable of being read in two fundamentally different ways: either a) metaphysically - that is, as designating properties possessed by things in themselves, or b) epistemologically - that is, as describing the cognitive relations in which we stand towards things. Taken in the first way, the phrase may be translated "equally indifferent and unstable and indeterminate", and the point will be that it is the nature of things to lack any definite features; taken in the second way, it may be translated "equally undifferentiable and unfathomable and undeterminable"\(^{16}\), and the point will be that, whatever features may or may not belong to things, we are in no position to say what these features are. The second, epistemological reading sounds much more like what we are accustomed to think of as scepticism, and plainly brings Pyrrho into much closer contact with *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, than does the first; indeed, the first seems to qualify precisely as what *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* would call dogmatism - it constitutes a declaration about the nature of things. Nevertheless, it seems to me that the first, metaphysical reading must be the correct one.

The decisive reason for thinking so is the clause that follows the one we have just been inspecting. The translation of this clause is unproblematic: "for this reason neither our sensations nor our opinions are true or false [or, more literally perhaps, "tell the truth or lie"]\(^{17}\)." Given the metaphysical reading of the previous words, the inference here is easy; because things are inherently indefinite, our sensations and opinions, which present things as having certain definite features, are neither true nor false. They are not true, since reality is not the way they present it as being. But neither are they false, since that too would require that reality possess some definite features - features which are the *negations* of those that our sensations and opinions portray it as having. If reality is inherently indeterminate, things neither are nor are not the way they are represented in our sensations and opinions; hence these sensations and opinions are neither true nor false. If, on the other hand, we try the epistemological reading of the previous words, the inference becomes incomprehensible; we cannot determine the nature of things, and *for this reason* our sensations and opinions are neither true or false. If we cannot determine the nature of things, the obvious inference concerning our sensations and opinions would seem to be that we *cannot say* whether they are true or false; it is quite unclear how we could be entitled to infer that *they are neither* true nor false. At this juncture some have tried to save the epistemological reading by altering the text, changing *dia touto*, "for this reason" to *dia to", "because"\(^{17}\). The direction of the inference is now reversed; the point about sensations and opinions becomes a *reason for* the claim concerning the nature of things, not a consequence of that claim. But this does not help the epistemological reading. For the proposition that our sensations and opinions are neither true nor false does nothing to support the conclusion that we cannot determine the nature of things. In fact, the inference is still just as bizarre as before; to say that our sensations and opinions are neither true nor false presupposes that we *are* in a position to make at least some statements about the nature of things. Again, if the point was that we could not *tell* whether our sensations and opinions were true or false, the inference would be easy enough; but again, that is not what the text says.

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\(^{15}\) XIV.18.3.

\(^{16}\) With one exception ("undifferentiable" for "indifferent"), I here borrow the translation of Julia Annas and Jonathan Barnes, *The Modes of Scepticism* (Cambridge, 1985), p.11; Annas and Barnes support the epistemological reading.

\(^{17}\) The emendation was originally proposed, without explanation, by Eduard Zeller (*Die Philosophie der Griechen in ihrer geschichtlichen Entwicklung*, 4th edn., ed. Eduard Wellman, iii/1 (Leipzig, 1909), 501); it has recently received support from Stopper, "Schizzi Pirroniani", p.293, and Annas, *The Morality of Happiness*, p.203.
I conclude that Pyrrho's answer to the first question is that things are in themselves indeterminate; that our sensations and opinions are neither true nor false is a readily understandable inference from this. The text continues by saying, again understandably enough, that for this reason we should not trust our sensations or opinions, but should be without opinions\(^\text{18}\); and with this begins the answer to the second question, what our attitude towards things should be. This attitude receives its most precise formulation in another difficult series of words: the appropriate attitude is to be expressed by "saying about each single thing that it no more is than is not or both is and is not or neither is nor is not"\(^\text{19}\). Now, this complicated phrase has often been read as offering us three alternative, and somehow equivalent, ways of speaking about things: we should say, of any given thing, either 1) that it no more is than is not, or 2) that it both is and is not, or 3) that it neither is nor is not\(^\text{20}\). But it seems that this cannot be right. For if our sensations and opinions are neither true nor false, it cannot be appropriate for us to say about things that they both are and are not, or that they neither are nor are not, of some particular character\(^\text{21}\); for these assertions clearly would presuppose that certain sensations or opinions were true or false. If a certain object is both red and not-red, then the sensation or opinion that the object is red is true, not neither true nor false; if the object is neither red nor not-red, then that sensation or opinion is false, not neither true nor false.

A better way of reading the phrase, and a way which is just as consistent with the Greek, is to take it as offering us just one (compulsory) four-part way of speaking; we are to say, of any given thing, that it no more 1) is than it 2) is not or 3) both is and is not or 4) neither is nor is not. No one of these four possibilities, that is, obtains any more than any of the others. Now, if things are in their real nature indeterminate, this is perfectly correct; each of the four possibilities holds "no more" (and, for that matter, no less) than any of the others in the sense that none of them either holds or does not hold. In this way what we say "about each single thing" really does reflect the claim about the nature of things that was offered in answer to the first question.

Notice that I have assumed that \textit{ou mallon}, "no more", is used in the same normal, natural way as in ordinary Greek. To say "\textit{A ou mallon than B}" (where A and B are propositions) is simply to say that A holds, or is the case, to no greater extent than B. In \textit{Outlines of Pyrrhonism} Sextus proposes that by "\textit{A no more than B}" he will mean either "\textit{A rather than B?}" or "I do not know whether A or B"\(^\text{22}\); in other words, the term \textit{ou mallon} is used to express \textit{suspension of judgement} as between the alternatives A and B.

But, as Sextus indeed admits\(^\text{23}\), this is quite at odds with the natural usage of the term; and there is no reason to suppose that it is being used, in the present passage, in this peculiar redefined fashion. In any case, if I am right in opting for the metaphysical reading of the answer to the first question, suspension of judgement between the four possibilities mentioned here would be quite irrelevant to Pyrrho's purpose; the point is to fashion a form

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\(^\text{18}\) If our opinions were simply false, we could of course deal with this by switching to a contrary set of opinions; since they are neither true nor false - but purport to be true - we can avoid misconception only by refraining from opinions altogether.

\(^\text{19}\) XIV.18.3.

\(^\text{20}\) See, e.g., Long and Sedley, \textit{The Hellenistic Philosophers} vol.1, p.15; Caizzi, \textit{Pirrone}, p.104.

\(^\text{21}\) I here assume that among the possible uses of \textit{esti}, "is", covered by the phrase in question is the predicative use, with any arbitrary predicate to be supplied; in other words, that "is" stands (perhaps among other things) for "is...", where the gap may be filled with any predicate - or, as we would say nowadays, "is F" (for any F). This is a common use of \textit{esti} in philosophical Greek; for a brief justification of its applicability to the present context, see "Aristocles on Timon on Pyrrho", p.163.

\(^\text{22}\) PH 1.188-91.

\(^\text{23}\) PH 1.191.
of speech which reflects the intrinsic indeterminacy of things, not one which reflects epistemological caution on our part.

The nature of things, then, is indeterminate; our sensations and opinions are therefore not to be trusted; and we should speak about things in a way that is faithful to their inherently indeterminate nature. And if we do this, to return to the answer to the third question, we will achieve ataraxia, "freedom from worry". A great many questions might be raised about this account. But it is at least clear that Pyrrho's thought, on this account, is substantially different from the view offered in *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*; though connections between the two views are not non-existent, the earlier view would clearly not qualify as a form of scepticism by the standards of the later. Little of the other evidence relating to Pyrrho bears directly on the picture just laid out; most of it consists simply of illustrations of Pyrrho's extraordinary ataraxia. But there is one passage in Diogenes Laertius' life of Pyrrho which seems to fit nicely with the Aristocles passage, as I have explained it. Pyrrho, according to Diogenes, "said that nothing was either fine or ignoble, just or unjust; and that similarly in all cases nothing was so in reality, but that people do everything by convention or habit; for each thing is no more this than that". Here again, we appear to have an assertion of the indeterminacy of things, as well as the use of the term "no more" in a phrase expressing that indeterminacy. We also have some indication of how, given the indeterminacy of things, human life might have been thought possible; even though reality in itself has no action-guiding features - because it has no determinate features at all - there is also "convention and habit", which can serve as a basis for decisions about how to act. This last point is not echoed by anything in the Aristocles passage, but neither is it inconsistent with anything in that passage.

II

For the views of Aenesidemus, we are also heavily dependent on a single passage whose credibility is by no means immediately obvious. In this case the passage is from the *Bibliotheca*, or *Library*, of Photius, the ninth-century Patriarch of Constantinople. Photius writes two or three pages summarizing Aenesidemus' *Pyrrhonist Discourses* (*Purrôneioi Logoi*) - a work also referred to by Sextus - followed by some very brief and largely dismissive criticism; and this is by far the most extensive surviving passage devoted directly to the description of Aenesidemus' views. It might well be wondered whether a late, hostile and non-philosophical source such as this should be taken seriously. However, comparisons between the language of the Photius passage and language employed in numerous briefer allusions to Aenesidemus in Sextus and in Diogenes, as well as comparisons between this passage of Photius and his summaries of some other books, suggest that Photius is taking good care to keep his summary objective, and that frequently, at least, he is employing Aenesidemus' actual words. Besides, the view Photius ascribes to Aenesidemus is internally coherent, philosophically interesting, and clearly comparable to ideas that appear periodically in Sextus and in Diogenes - not always, admittedly, under the name of Aenesidemus, but often as characteristic of Pyrrhonism more generally. The view that emerges, however, is again noticeably distinct from that of the official program promoted by Sextus' *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*.

Aenesidemus is said to maintain that the Pyrrhonist "determines nothing" (not even that nothing is determined), and is "free from all dogma"; by contrast, the Academicians of his day - probably Philo of Larissa and Antiochus of Ascalon - are accused of being

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24 9.61.  
25 169b18-171a4. With the exception of Photius' critical remarks, this text occurs as passages 71C and 72L in Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*.  
26 On this, see Karel Janáček, "Zur Interpretation des Photius-Abschnittes über Aenesidemos", *Eirene* 14 (1976), 93-100.
"dogmatic"27. As a result of determining nothing, the Pyrrhonist is said to be happy, whereas dogmatic philosophers are said to be exercised by "ceaseless torments"28; the happiness in question is not specifically described as ataraxia, but the contrast with the dogmatist's situation at least suggests that this is how Aenesidemus conceives of the Pyrrhonist's more desirable state. So far, then, there is nothing to which the Sextus of *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* could object. But the stance of "freedom from dogma" is apparently compatible, in Aenesidemus' eyes, with a good deal that *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* would not countenance. The Pyrrhonist is said to assert that things are "no more of this kind than that, or sometimes of this kind and sometimes not, or for one person of this kind, for another not of this kind, and for someone else not even existent at all"29. By itself, of course, "no more of this kind than that" - or, in contemporary philosophical parlance, "no more F than not-F", where F stands for any arbitrary predicate - might be read as expressing suspension of judgement as between the alternatives F and not-F; as we noted earlier, this is how Sextus explains the term "no more" in *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*. But the other phrases - sometimes F and sometimes not-F, F for one person, not-F for another, and non-existent for a third - express not suspension of judgement, but certain types of relativity. Things are not invariably F, the point seems to be, but F in certain circumstances and not in others; this is not suspension of judgement about whether or not things are really F, but the confident assertion that things are F only in a relative or qualified sense. In order to make Aenesidemus consistent, it seems that the "no more" must also be read not as expressing suspension of judgement, but as qualifying the claim that things are F; things may be in a certain sense F, but to no greater extent than they are not-F - for each alternative, there are circumstances in which that alternative obtains, and circumstances in which it does not30. Aenesidemus is thus recommending three closely related ways of speaking; and notice that again, as in the case of Pyrrho, the term "no more" has its natural usage, rather than the special definition it receives in *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*. But the term is nonetheless employed to make a different point from the one we associated with Pyrrho; "no more F than not-F", for Aenesidemus, expresses not the indeterminacy of things, but the relativity of properties to circumstances. Aenesidemus accuses the Academicians of making assertions "unambiguously" (anamphibolos)31; this apparently refers to their failure to relativize or qualify their assertions in the way just discussed.

Yet the passage also represents Aenesidemus himself as making a number of negative assertions which would seem to be thoroughly "unambiguous". Aenesidemus is said to argue that signs - that is, observable phenomena affording reliable inferences to the unobservable features of things - "do not exist at all"32; he is described as "refusing to concede that anything is the cause of anything"33; and he is said to have argued that there is

27 170a11-12, 169b41, 169b39.
28 169b22-9.
29 170a1-3.
30 Another possibility is that the point is this: things are "no more" F than not-F in that, in their real nature, they are neither (the least bit) F nor (the least bit) not-F. As we shall see in a moment, this point is entirely complementary to the reading given in the main text; indeed, the two readings are really just opposite sides of the same coin. It is worth noting that Diogenes Laertius (9.75) mentions that "no more" may be used either positively or negatively - "A no more than B" is true if A and B either both obtain or both fail to obtain - and says that the sceptics use it negatively; this may be a case where Diogenes preserves an element of Aenesidemus' Pyrrhonism rather than the later variety represented in most of Sextus' writings.
31 169b40, 170a29.
32 170b12-14.
33 170b18-19.
simply no such thing as the telos, the ethical end. How is this consistent with his ban on assertions made "unambiguously"? And how is either this or the relative or qualified assertions that we have seen he admits consistent with his claim to "determine nothing" and to be "free from all dogma"?

The answer, I believe (and this idea is not original with me), has to do with a certain conception of what it is for something to be by nature, or in reality, a certain way. According to this conception, an object is by nature F only if it is F invariably - F for all people and in all situations. Thus an object which is F only sometimes, or for some people, is thereby not by nature F. This does not mean that one cannot refer to it as F on those certain occasions; it means that, when one is doing so, one is not ascribing to it any features which belongs to its nature. I have elsewhere referred to this as the Universality Requirement. The Universality Requirement certainly has precedents in Greek philosophy; Plato clearly subscribes to it - and I shall say a little more about this later - and at least for the concepts of good and bad, so do the Stoics. Now, there is no certain evidence that Aenesidemus accepted the Universality Requirement. But there is a passage of Sextus, reporting Aenesidemus' ideas, which at least seems to come very close to doing so; and if we assume that he did accept this Requirement, the questions just posed receive satisfactory answers. To restrict oneself to relative or qualified assertions is thereby precisely to refrain from any claims to the effect that things are by nature any particular way; it is only when one starts speaking "unambiguously", as the Academics allegedly do, that one's words have the force of attributing features to things by nature. Nor are the claims that there are no such things as signs, causes, or the ethical end claims to the effect that anything is of any particular character by nature. Aenesidemus is prepared to deny that anything is by nature a sign, a cause or an end; or at least, his conclusions about signs, causes and ends may very easily be read in this way. But this is not to assert that anything is by nature a non-sign, non-cause or non-end; for in order for those assertions to be true, by the Universality Requirement, things would have invariably to be not signs, nor causes or not ends - which Aenesidemus may again very easily deny. The denials that anything is a sign, a cause or an end, then, are not examples of "unambiguous" assertions. Finally, to "determine nothing" is to refrain from positing that any feature holds of anything "by nature"; both Aenesidemus' denials and his relativized assertions are consistent with this. And so, incidentally, is the Universality Requirement itself; an assertion about what it is for something to be F by nature is not itself an assertion to the effect that anything is F by nature.

The Photius passage also frequently reports that, according to Aenesidemus, certain things are beyond our grasp, beyond our knowledge or beyond our apprehension. This too seems to be distinct from the position of Outlines of Pyrrhonism, which specifically distinguishes Pyrrhonism from the assertion that things cannot be known (an assertion associated by Sextus, rightly or wrongly, with the Academics), holding that this is as much a violation of sceptical principles as the assertion that things can be known. But Aenesidemus' negative remarks about our knowledge can be readily understood in light of the preceding points. If it is only "unambiguous" specifications of the features of things that are of the right type to be specifications of the natures of those things, and if we are in no position to issue any such "unambiguous" specifications, then it is quite correct to say

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34 170b30-5.
35 See the works cited in n.3 above.
36 In my introduction and commentary on Sextus' Against the Ethicists.
37 See, e.g., Diogenes Laertius 7.103.
38 M 8.8.
39 170b7-8, 11-12, 16-17, 25-6.
40 PH 1.1-3.
that we are cut off from knowledge - that is, knowledge of the nature of things. It is true that Aenesidemus is also reported as saying that the Pyrrhonist, unlike the Academic, claims neither that everything is inapprehensible nor that everything is apprehensible\[^{41}\]. But this too should probably be read as a point about the nature of things - we are not in a position to assert that things are of such a nature as to be either apprehensible or inapprehensible; this is quite compatible with our in fact being cut off from apprehension of them, and with our being in a position to say so. Sextus reports a puzzling statement of Philo of Larissa, Aenesidemus' probable contemporary, that as far as the nature of things themselves is concerned, things are apprehensible (whereas as far as the Stoic criterion is concerned, they are inapprehensible)\[^{42}\]; Aenesidemus is no doubt responding to this by refusing to attribute either apprehensibility or inapprehensibility to things in their own nature.

The position attributed to Aenesidemus by Photius can also be detected - or at least, aspects of it can be detected - in a number of places in Sextus and in Diogenes. Both authors preserve versions of a set of Ten Modes, or standardized forms of sceptical argumentation, that are attributed to Aenesidemus\[^{43}\]. Now, Sextus' official presentation of the workings of these Modes, in Book I of *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, conforms to the pattern one would expect from that book; the Modes assemble sets of opposing appearances which, according to Sextus, strike one as having "equal strength", and so one is forced to suspend judgement as to the real nature of the objects of which these are the appearances. However, as commentators have noticed\[^{44}\], we not infrequently find, even in the Ten Modes as presented by Sextus himself, an emphasis on relativity, and on the contrast between how things are relatively speaking and how they are absolutely or by nature - the latter state being deemed inaccessible to us because our awareness is restricted to instances of the former\[^{45}\]. This seems at odds with appeals to an unresolvable conflict among appearances; but it seems thoroughly compatible with the kind of approach that we have seen from the Photius passage to be characteristic of Aenesidemus. Moreover, even when Sextus does introduce the notion of unresolvability, it is often, or even usually, in connection with considerations derived from another set of Five Modes, attributed to a certain Agrippa and belonging to a later phase of the Pyrrhonist tradition\[^{46}\]. The notion of unresolvable conflict, that is, tends to be associated with material that cannot originally have belonged in Aenesidemus' Ten Modes; this adds weight to the supposition that, as Aenesidemus himself presented them, they expressed a different outlook, one akin to that which occurs in the Photius passage. Finally, the Ten Modes as presented by Diogenes - who seems clearly to be drawing for his account of Pyrrhonism on sources other than Sextus\[^{47}\] - nowhere mention the notions of "equal strength" or unresolvability, but are, as far as I can see, wholly interpretable along the lines suggested by the Photius passage.

But the strongest evidence of a version of Pyrrhonism distinct from that of *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* occurs in Sextus' own *Against the Ethicists*, a book from one of his other two surviving works. Sextus does not tell us in *Against the Ethicists* that he is reproducing

\[^{41}\] 169b42-170a1.

\[^{42}\] *PH* 1.235.

\[^{43}\] *PH* 1.35-163, Diogenes Laertius 9.79-88; Sextus attributes them to Aenesidemus at *M* 7.345.


\[^{45}\] *PH* 1.132, 134, 140, 144, 163.

\[^{46}\] *PH* 1.60-1, 88-90, 114-17, 121-3. The Five Modes are attributed to Agrippa by Diogenes Laertius (9.88); Sextus (*PH* 1.164) says that they come from "the later sceptics", by contrast with "the older sceptics" (*PH* 1.36) who are responsible for the Ten Modes.

\[^{47}\] On this point, see Jonathan Barnes, "Diogenes Laertius IX 61-116: The Philosophy of Pyrrhonism", *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt* II 36.6, 4241-4301, esp. 4250-6, 4268-70.
the views of Aenesidemus; he expresses agreement with Aenesidemus on one specific point\textsuperscript{48}, but that is the only mention Aenesidemus receives. However, the view expressed in Against the Ethicists - or at least, in the first of its two major parts\textsuperscript{49} - is in all essentials the same as the one Photius attributes to Aenesidemus. Again, the term "equal strength" (\textit{isosthenia}) nowhere appears in Against the Ethicists\textsuperscript{50}. Sextus argues not that we should suspend judgement about what, if anything, is really good or bad, but that \textit{nothing} is really, or by nature, good or bad\textsuperscript{51}; and this definite negative conclusion is one to which he is committed in his own person, since he presents its acceptance as crucial to the attainment of the sceptic's goal of \textit{ataraxia}\textsuperscript{52}. He also presents the sceptic as referring to things as good or bad in the same relative or qualified manner discussed earlier\textsuperscript{53}. And his argument for this position includes an explicit mention of what I have called the Universality Requirement\textsuperscript{54}. Finally, as in the Photius passage, all this is assumed to be consistent with the refusal to "make determinations" (or, as Sextus also puts it, with the suspending of judgement)\textsuperscript{55}; again, the refusal to "make determinations" must here mean, and can unproblematically be taken as meaning, the refusal to issue any specifications of the way things are by nature - a refusal with which, given the Universality Requirement, the denial that anything is by nature good or bad and the accompanying assertion of relativities are quite consistent.

III

We have, then, three different outlooks instead of one; \textit{Outlines of Pyrrhonism} represents not Pyrrhonism as a whole, but the final phase of Pyrrhonism. But, as noted at the outset, this raises questions about the continuity among the three phases. Aenesidemus, the initiator of the second outlook, saw himself as in some sense following in the footsteps of Pyrrho, the holder of the first outlook; and the author of a work entitled \textit{Outlines of Pyrrhonism} must have seen himself as following in the footsteps of Aenesidemus, by whom the term "Pyrrhonist" seems to have been coined. How, then, are we to explain the transitions between these phases?

I shall begin with the transition between Pyrrho and Aenesidemus. The central difference between the two views is that Pyrrho advances the thesis that reality is indeterminate, whereas Aenesidemus refuses any attempt to specify the nature of reality. Both are prepared to assert, for a very wide range of predicates, that things are to no greater extent \textit{F} than not-\textit{F}; but in Pyrrho's case this is best interpreted as a way of stating the inherent indeterminacy of things, whereas in Aenesidemus' case it is best interpreted as saying that things may be either \textit{F} or not-\textit{F}, depending on the circumstances - but that in their \textit{real nature}, given the Universality Requirement, they are neither.

The link between the two may be better understood, I believe, if we ask why Pyrrho held that reality is indeterminate. The Aristocles passage does not tell us this (it

\textsuperscript{48} \textit{M} 11.42.
\textsuperscript{49} The final portion of the book (\textit{M} 11.168-257) is almost entirely distinct in subject-matter from the portion that precedes it. It is probable that these two main portions derive from different sources, and it is possible that they derive from different phases in the history of Pyrrhonism; on this, see my commentary on Against the Ethicists.
\textsuperscript{50} The term "unresolvable disagreement" (\textit{anepikritos diaphônia}) does appear (\textit{M} 11.229, 230), but only in the second major part; see the previous note.
\textsuperscript{51} \textit{M} 11.68-95.
\textsuperscript{52} \textit{M} 11.118, 130, 140.
\textsuperscript{53} \textit{M} 11.114, 118.
\textsuperscript{54} \textit{M} 11.69-71.
\textsuperscript{55} E.g., \textit{M} 11.111.
does not, after all, purport to be a complete account of Pyrrho's views, but to be giving only the "main points", *kephalaia*. But it is a fair conjecture that the main reason must have been observations concerning the many varied ways in which things strike people at different times, or different people at the same time; reality cannot have any determinate nature because there is no fixed way in which the world presents itself to us. Purely in the abstract, it is hard to imagine that such observations did not play some role in his arriving at this thesis. But more tellingly, perhaps, a number of philosophers before Pyrrho had already drawn metaphysical consequences from observations concerning variability; Heraclitus, Protagoras and Plato had all done so, and so perhaps had Democritus. The notion that variability creates difficulties for any straightforward, commonsense view of the world was certainly rife in the fifth and fourth centuries B.C.

One earlier text in particular seems to be relevant to our concerns. In a well-known passage of the *Theaetetus*, Plato has Socrates criticize what may be called a "thesis of total instability". The thesis is ascribed to some unidentified followers of Heraclitus; it also appears to be presented as what Protagoras, with his "man the Measure" doctrine, is ultimately committed to. In any case, according to this thesis, everything is constantly changing in every respect; and Socrates' objection is that if this is so, nothing can even be coherently described - language as a whole becomes impossible, except perhaps for a peculiar form of words, *oud'houtos* (translated "not at all thus" in the Burnyeat/Levett translation), that is apparently designed precisely to signal that there is no particular way things are. In the *Theaetetus*, this consequence is presented as a *reductio* of the thesis of total instability. But one can easily imagine others, such as Pyrrho, being attracted to the notion that things are radically unstable and accepting, on the basis of the types of considerations Socrates offers, that at least as regards the real nature of things, nothing definite can be said; indeed, Pyrrho's expression "no more is than is nor both is and is not or neither is nor is not", used to signal the utter indefiniteness of things, might well be seen as an improvement on the obscure form of words "not at all thus". In order for this position to be sustainable, there must also presumably be some way of using language that does not purport to describe the real nature of things - a point not envisaged in Socrates' criticism; but we have good reason to suppose that Pyrrho was aware of this point. Timon, Pyrrho's follower, is reported to have said "That honey is sweet I do not affirm, but I agree that it appears so", which suggests that right from the earliest form of Pyrrhonism, just as in its latest form, the application of language to appearances was conceived of as legitimate, separable from its application to the real nature of things, and usable as a basis for choice and action.

Nothing that I have said so far requires that Pyrrho actually knew the *Theaetetus*, or other works of Plato; I am simply suggesting that Pyrrho's thought may have run along lines similar to those of Socrates' criticism of the thesis of total instability, while drawing from this train of thought an entirely different moral. However, it is at least tempting to go further, and to speculate that aspects of his view, including the use of the term "no more" itself, may actually have been suggested to Pyrrho by Plato's writings. The term "no more" occurs several times in the passage criticizing the thesis of total instability. But it also occurs in other dialogues as part of Plato's own characterization of the sensible world.

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56 Eusebius, *Praep. evang.* XIV.18.5.
57 181a-183b.
58 179e.
59 183b-c.
60 183b4.
63 181e6, 182e3, 4, 10.
At the end of Republic Book V, for example, things in the sensible world are said to be "no more" large than small, light than heavy, etc.64 - because for any such pair of opposite predicates, there are circumstances in which each of the two applies; and this is taken to show that nothing really is either large or small, light or heavy, etc.. Republic Book V does not suggest a thesis of total instability concerning the sensible world - merely a thesis of lack of total stability with regard to any predicates, which, because of Plato's adherence to what I called Universality Requirement, disqualifies sensible things from really being any particular way. But passages in other dialogues suggest that Plato was at times attracted to more extreme theses concerning the instability of the sensible world65; and for this reason it has been suspected by some scholars that in the Theaetetus, Plato is indulging in some self-criticism. In any case, if Pyrrho did draw inspiration directly from Plato, it may have been from the Theaetetus, through a paradoxical acceptance of what Socrates presents as a reductio; but another possibility is that the inspiration was much more general - that Pyrrho found plausible something like Plato's view of the sensible world, as suggested in the Republic and related dialogues, but rejected Plato's hypothesis of separated Forms which give the sensible world a kind of vicarious stability or definiteness.

Much of the last couple of paragraphs has been highly speculative. But even if the suggestion of an influence from Plato on Pyrrho is overbold, the points just raised at least make clear that the intellectual climate in the period immediately preceding Pyrrho was highly congenial to someone being impressed with the variability or instability of things, and inferring from that variability or instability a radical thesis concerning the nature of reality. Now, if variability or instability was indeed the driving force behind Pyrrho's view that reality is indeterminate, and if this was made clear in the writings of Timon, to which Aenesidemus may be presumed to have had access, then it is not too hard to explain how Aenesidemus could have seen himself as following in Pyrrho's path, despite the differences noted earlier.

As we saw, variability - or as I put it, relativity to circumstances - was also central in Aenesidemus' outlook. But in Aenesidemus' day, it would have seemed thoroughly irresponsible to derive from this any positive characterization of the nature of reality, such as that it was indefinite. The Stoics and the Academicians had been engaged in a couple of centuries of debate on epistemological issues, in which the legitimacy of claiming to be able to specify how things really are, on the basis of how they strike one - and the dangers of trying to do so when they strike one in conflicting ways - was central throughout. Anyone familiar with the history of those debates - and the Photius passage shows that Aenesidemus was familiar with them, whether or not he was himself ever a member of the Academy66 - would naturally be very cautious about any pretensions to specify the real nature of things. Because of his acceptance of the Universality Requirement, Aenesidemus is prepared to make suitably relativized assertions; but these, precisely because they are relativized, do not count as assertions concerning the nature of things. Though doubts about our ability to say how things really are had certainly been broached by Pyrrho's time, they had nowhere near the centrality in philosophical discourse that they were to acquire in the Hellenistic period; given the different eras in which they lived, it is not surprising that the same kinds of observations about the variability in how things strike us might have led Pyrrho to a bold thesis to the effect that reality is inherently indeterminate, and Aenesidemus to a withdrawal from any attempts to "determine" - that is, to specify - the nature of things. But despite this important difference, Aenesidemus is still holding on, if I

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64 479b5-6.
65 E.g., Phaedo 78e, Cratylus 439e-440a.
am right, to much of the same outlook as Pyrrho. As a result of similar observations concerning variability, both refuse to trust our everyday impressions of things as revelatory of how those things really are; to express that refusal, both adopt forms of words including phrases of the type "no more F than not-F"; and both claim that as a result of that refusal, one can achieve a trouble-free existence, whereas philosophers who adopt other persuasions and procedures are perpetually troubled.

If one takes the final Pyrrhonist position - the one offered in Outlines of Pyrrhonism - as being what the term "scepticism" properly refers to, there is a clear sense in which Aenesidemus is closer to scepticism than Pyrrho is. But now, given the epistemological debates that occurred prior to Aenesidemus, the surprise, if anything, is that he is not closer still. For one thing, the Universality Requirement, as a criterion for something's being by nature a certain way, seems a surprisingly unsceptical item for Aenesidemus to accept. Although, as noted earlier, the Universality Requirement does not itself constitute a specification of how things are by nature - and refraining from such specifications is what Aenesidemus' policy of "determining nothing" may best be seen as consisting in - there is a clear sense in which the Universality Requirement would seem to qualify as a doctrine, or a philosophical commitment. Secondly - and perhaps because of the weight he attaches to the Universality Requirement - Aenesidemus seems surprisingly unsceptical about the various types of relative statements that he employs. Something is F in some circumstances, not-F in others - and by the Universality Requirement, this shows that the object is no serious candidate for being F by nature. However, that the object is F in the first set of circumstances, and not-F in the second, is something that Aenesidemus does not seem disposed to question. There is no suggestion that one or both of these states of affairs might be illusory; though relativity is supposed to create an obstacle to knowledge of the object's true nature, doubts about the relativities themselves apparently do not enter the picture. Indeed, if the Universality Requirement is to do its work, it seems that such doubts had better not enter the picture.

It is not easy to say why Aenesidemus should have been so unsceptical in these respects. It is, of course, quite possible that, despite his criticism of the Academics of his own day for being dogmatic, he himself was not immune from the generally less sceptical ethos of the early first century B.C, as compared with the heyday of the Academy under Arcesilaus and Carneades. It is also possible, as has been suggested by other scholars, that Aenesidemus was affected by a renewed interest in Plato on the part of the Academics of that period; perhaps he was impressed with Plato's use of the Universality Requirement, seeing it as a means to develop a new method of withdrawing from all "determinations" of the natures of things. We know from Sextus that Aenesidemus took a position on the question whether Plato was a sceptic; this suggests at least an interest in whether Plato's writings could be mined for his own sceptical purposes.

However, we cannot hope to advance beyond speculation in this area. What I do want to emphasize at this point is that if one abandons the Universality Requirement, the position adhered to by Aenesidemus becomes unsustainable - and the rather different position represented by Outlines of Pyrrhonism will naturally tend to take its place. As just noted, Aenesidemus' acceptance of the Universality Requirement seems in some ways peculiar; a successor of his who was struck by this peculiarity, and who refused to accept the Requirement, but who wanted to retain a policy of "determining nothing", might well find that one change altering his whole outlook. For suppose one no longer takes it that, in order for something to be by nature F, that thing must be F in all circumstances. Then the fact that the thing strikes us in some circumstances as F and in others as not-F no longer

67 Woodruff, "Aperotic Pyrrhonism", pp.165-6; see also Harold Tarrant, Scepticism or Platonism? The philosophy of the Fourth Academy (Cambridge, 1985).
68 PH 1.222. What position Aenesidemus took on this question is difficult to say; the text is corrupt at a crucial point.
has any tendency to suggest that the thing is by nature neither $F$ nor not-$F$; without the Universality Requirement in place, there is no particular reason to assume that either one of these ways it strikes one is not the way it really is. But nor, of course, is there any particular reason to assume that either one is the way the thing really is. If one assumes the Law of Non-Contradiction (and this continues to be assumed as securely by Sextus as by anyone), the object cannot be in reality both $F$ and not-$F$; and there is no reason to favor one possibility over the other - this point, at least, is common ground throughout the history of Pyrrhonism. Thus there will be no particular reason to be for or against either one of the possibilities $F$ or not-$F$; either one might in reality obtain, or it might not obtain. In other words, if one abandons the Universality Requirement, but retains an emphasis on the variability with which things strike one, one will tend to arrive at a position according to which each of the various possibilities, concerning how a thing really is, is of "equal strength".

By the same token, the posture of suspension of judgement now becomes a posture of refusing to commit oneself one way or the other as to whether some given object is in reality $F$. In the Aenesidemus-influenced Against the Ethicists Sextus argues, on the basis of ethical variabilities, that nothing is in reality good or bad. If one accepts the Universality Requirement, this is consistent with suspension of judgement, in the sense of refraining from specifications of how things are by nature. But if one does not accept that Requirement, then the claim that nothing is in reality good or bad would seem to constitute, precisely, a specification of how things are by nature; if "in reality $F$" is no longer assumed to entail "invariably $F$", there seems to be nothing to prevent the statement "nothing is in reality good or bad" from being taken to entail "everything is in reality other than good or bad". Given this, suspension of judgement can now only consist in a refusal to say whether or not any particular object is either good or bad by nature. This is the posture that is consistent with there now being two or more possibilities of "equal strength"; and this is the posture that Sextus actually does adopt in the ethical section of Outlines of Pyrrhonism\textsuperscript{69}.

Finally, the term "no more" has to assume a new function, if it is to continue in use. "No more $F$ than not-$F$" cannot be used, as it was by Aenesidemus, as a way of asserting the relativity of things' features to circumstances, and denying that these features hold of the things by nature; for this is not consistent with the new variety of suspension of judgement. Rather "no more $F$ than not-$F$" now has to be used, if at all, as a way of characterizing that new suspension of judgement - that is, as characterizing the "equal strength" enjoyed by the various possibilities. Hence, as Sextus says in Book I of Outlines of Pyrrhonism, although the term "no more" "exhibits the character of assent or denial"\textsuperscript{70} although it sounds as if it is to be used for asserting or denying things - he is going to use it in a way that is at odds with this natural usage.

The shift from Aenesidemus' position to that of Outlines of Pyrrhonism makes sense, then, if one makes the single supposition that the Universality Requirement came to seem problematic - a supposition that seems easy enough to grant, since as we saw, it is if anything a problem understanding why Aenesidemus would have been willing to accept it in the first place. My conclusion, then, is that both the transition between Pyrrho's position and Aenesidemus', and the transition between Aenesidemus' position and that of Outlines of Pyrrhonism, may be explained without too much difficulty - and hence that there is no fundamental obstacle to the view that Pyrrhonism is not one position, but three separate ones. It would surely be surprising if Pyrrhonism had stayed essentially unchanged over some five hundred years; that shifts, even important ones, took place over such a long period is only to be expected. (Nobody is surprised, for example, when this turns out be true of Platonism.) So long as the shifts can be made historically and

\textsuperscript{69} PH 3.182, 235.
\textsuperscript{70} PH 1.191.
philosophically comprehensible - and I hope that I have made at least some modest progress in that direction - there is no reason to resist the notion that Pyrrhonism encompassed several different views over its long and discontinuous lifespan.