Renata Ziemińska

The History of Skepticism

In Search of Consistency

Polish Contemporary Philosophy and Philosophical Humanities

Edited by Jan Hartman

Volume 10

This book reconstructs the history of skepticism ranging from ancient to contemporary times, from Pyrrho to Kripke. The main skeptical stances and the historical reconstruction of the concept of skepticism are connected with an analysis of their recurrent inconsistency. The author reveals that this inconsistency is not a logical contradiction but a pragmatic one. She shows that it is a contradiction between the content of the skeptical position and the implicit presumption of the act of its assertion. The thesis of global skepticism cannot be accepted as true without falling into the pragmatic inconsistency. The author explains, how skepticism was important for exposing the limits of human knowledge and inspired its development.

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Introduction

This book is an attempt to recreate the history of a current of thought that, for centuries, was called skepticism. It is also an attempt to present the current state of research on skepticism, focusing on the most recent interpretations of the works of ancient skeptics and contemporary positions in debates over skepticism. This book belongs to two disciplines of philosophy: the history of philosophy and epistemology. In pursuing both these lines, a historical reconstruction of the most important skeptical stances, ranging from ancient times to contemporary times, is connected with their assessment, particularly in terms of their consistency.

The skeptical stance is most easily expressed by the thesis "knowledge does not exist." This particular thesis of global skepticism played an extremely significant role within the history of philosophy, but is also the position most likely to be attacked for a lack of internal consistency. If knowledge does not exist, how can we know, or prove this fact? Skeptics, who were not willing to keep quiet and stood by their skeptical view, were forced to search for answers to this accusation. Ancients differentiated between theory and practice, that is, between theory and situations where one could be guided by probability (Carneades), and/or appearances (Sextus Empiricus). Modern thinkers pointed to other ways of learning about the world, ways outside of intellectual investigation, such as faith (William Ockham, Michel de Montaigne) or instinct (David Hume). That was their way of searching for a possibility to continue their skeptical discourse alongside everyday life and despite the conviction of knowledge's nonexistence. However, solutions turned out to be ineffective and accusations kept reappearing. When following the history of skepticism, one can observe that a lack of consistency seems to be its inseparable feature (Burnyeat, 1976: 65) and that a willingness to escape the aforementioned accusation was a driving force behind the creation of its later incarnations. Peter Unger, a twentieth-century skeptic, is not afraid of this lack of consistency (Unger, 1975: 6). In his opinion, this lack does not prove the falsity of skepticism. It merely reveals problems buried within human language and the thinking process.

Closer analysis of the inconsistency imbedded in skeptical stands shows that it is not simply a lack of logical consistency, or contradictions between different theses. It is rather a pragmatic inconsistency, the conflict between a proclaimed thesis and the assumptions hidden in its language formulation. This theory will be the primary outcome of this work. On the basis of the analysis of actual skeptical stands, particularly those of Sextus Empiricus and David Hume, as well the

use of tools taken from contemporary epistemology (particularly the language-game theory of Wittgenstein and speech act theory of Searle), it is clear that pragmatic inconsistency is the best way of conceptualizing inconsistencies embedded in skepticism.

The reconstruction of the history of skepticism, with small exceptions concerning Pyrrho of Elis, will be limited to the culture of the West and focused on philosophical skepticism (religious skepticism and other varieties will appear from time to time as well). Between the many different forms of philosophical skepticism, my attention will primarily be focused on global skepticism, since this is the form that is most exposed to accusations of a lack of consistency. Other important participants in the debate (e.g. Descartes), who either deepened the argumentation of skepticism, or formulated an antiskeptical strategy, will be the object of the reconstruction alongside well-known or declared skeptics.

The following chapters, except for the first one focused on defining with precision the meaning of the term skepticism, will be devoted to the consecutive stages and epochs in the history of skepticism: ancient, medieval, modern and contemporary. The main skeptical strands of every epoch will be presented and the most important ones will undergo more meticulous analysis, with particular focus on their consistency. Concerning antiquity, Sextus Empiricus will be presented as the main representative of skepticism, principally due to the survival of his works. The Middle Ages will be represented by William Ockham, as a typical, Christian skeptic-fideist. When talking about modernity, we will turn to David Hume as a representative of the most radical and influential variety of skepticism and finally, in the context of the contemporary world, Peter Unger will be presented as the most famous self-declared, contemporary skeptic, in addition to Kripke-Wittgenstein, due to their new form of meaning skepticism.

The book makes many references to Izydora Dąmbska (1904–1983) and Richard Popkin (1923–2005). Izydora Dąmbska wrote a lot about ancient and modern skepticism and made some assertions about medieval and contemporary skepticism. Her research was my starting point and guide in the reconstruction of the history of skepticism. Richard Popkin wrote *The History of Scepticism. From Savonarola to Bayle* (2003). The book covers the history of modern skepticism. I continue this work extending the reconstruction of skepticism from ancient times to contemporary times, from Pyrrho to Kripke and beyond.

Chapter I. The Notion and Types of Skepticism

Not simply skeptical stances, but the very term "skepticism" has undergone considerable evolution. Nevertheless, it would be hard to conduct the aforementioned reconstruction without using skepticism as understood in a contemporary manner. As already indicated, I will assume that the word *skepticism* stands for a thesis claiming that *knowledge does not exist*. I will treat this contemporary thesis as a model of skepticism in comparison with less typical theses or those positions that do not propose any thesis whatsoever.

1. Genealogy of the Term *Skepticism*

Skepticism was not always named this way and the representatives of such schools were not always called *skeptics*. Along with their critics, the skeptics of previous ages did not use the term *skeptikoi* (σκεπτικοί, skeptics) to name thinkers from the schools of skepticism, even though the Greek verb *skeptomai*, the noun *skepsis* and the adjective *skeptikos* already existed. The verb *skeptomai*, meaning "I look," "I research" can be spotted already in the works of Homer. Many writers, including Thucydides, Hippocrates, Sophocles, Plato (*Laches* 185b) and Aristotle (EN 1103b), use the verb regularly. The noun *skepsis*, meaning "a look," "research" can be found in the works of Plato (*Phaedo* 83a, *Theaetetus* 201a) and Aristotle (*Physics* 228, EN 1159b). All of this usage comes from the pre-skeptic period. However, in the times of Pyrrho and the academic skeptics, the situation was similar. Pyrrho's student, Timon of Phlius, uses the word *skeptosyne* in his poem *Silloi*, but it carries its common, vernacular meaning "research" (Bett 2010d: 5). The adjective *skeptikos* used at that time did not refer to the representatives of the skeptical school of thought, but meant "curious" or "inquiring." This is the case with an epicurean Philodemus (Rhet. 1.191) from the 1st century BC, Plutarch (*Moralia* 990A), and sometimes Philo of Alexandria from the 1st century A. D. (*De Ebrietate* 202). In the works by Philo of Alexandria, *skeptikos* is used for the first time, as far as we know, as the name for neo-Pyrrhonists (Congr. 52, see Bett 2003: 148). In the 2nd century, the adjectival noun *skeptikoi*, referring to the school of philosophical thought, appears in many different sources: the works by a sophist Lucian of Samosata (Vit. Auct. 27.40), a Roman writer Aulus Gellius (NA 11.5) and a little later in the writings of Sextus Empiricus (PH 1.3–1.21). In the 3rd century, in the works of Diogenes Laertius (DL 9.70), it is already a well-established, technical

term. Sextus will also use the noun *skepsis* as name for the branch of philosophy (PH 1.5, 1.7).

The word *skeptikoi*, or its Latin equivalent, are nowhere to be found in the oldest preserved, direct sources on the Greek skeptics, which are the works of Cicero from the 1st century BC. He did not write about "skeptics" but about "academics" who, for him, were the supporters of *epochē*, or the suspension of all judgement. Plutarch called academics "men, who suspend their judgement of everything" (*Adversus Colotem* 1121E=LS 68H1). *Epochē* was, for Cicero, a fundamental characteristic of academic skepticism. He mentioned Pyrrho as a moralist, famous for his indifference, but not a supporter of *epochē* (contrary to what Aristocles, Sextus Empiricus or Diogenes Laertius later wrote about him). The absence of the word *epochē* in the works of Pyrrho could be a possible excuse for Cicero (however, sources reveal the presence of a similar word – *aphasia* – which means "not making judgements"). Regardless of the right answer to this mystery, neither the writings of Pyrrho or Cicero use the term *skeptikoi* as a name for a philosophical school. We can presume that the term was coined in the neo-Pyrrhonian school of Aenesidemus and that it was Philo of Alexandria, who has conveyed the findings of Aenesidemus to us and provided the very first example of such usage.

At the beginning of the 2nd century, the word *skeptikoi* was clearly used to designate Pyrrho's followers, as well as academics. It might have played the role of a unifier for these two skeptical currents of thought. This was the goal of Phavorinus, a student of Plutarch (according to Philostratus, Lives of the Sophists 1.8.6). He was an admirer of Pyrrho and combined academic skepticism with neo-Pyrrhonism. Aulus Gellius, a citizen of Rome, was Phavorinus' student. Composed in Latin, his writings from the 2nd century include the Greek word *skeptikoi* as name of the school. In *Noctes Atticae*, Aulius Gellius questions the difference between the academics and Pyrrhonists (he refers to this question as an old problem, debated by many Greek authors) and, collectively, calls them *skeptikoi* (skeptics – those who look and examine, but do not find a solution). He mentions other names as well: *ephektikoi* (ephectics – those who suspend judgement) and *aporetikoi* (aphorectics – those who are helpless when confronted with a problem).[1] Sextus Empiricus and Diogenes Laertius will likewise write about this later on. Sextus will add a specific name to the three mentioned before – *Pyrrhonists* (PH 1.7) – and Diogenes (DL 9.70) will contribute with

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1 „Vetus autem quaestio et a multis scriptoribus Graecis tractata, an quid et quantum Pyrronios et Academicos philosophos intersit. Utrique enim σκεπτικοί, ἐφεκτικοί, ἀπορητικοί dicuntur, quoniam utrique nihil adfirmant nihilque comprehendi putant" Aulus Gellius NA 11.5, 2.

his *zetetikoi* (zetetics – those who search, but never find). The first and the last names are hard to distinguish, but we can assume that the first refers to a lack of understanding, despite analyzing and drawing conclusions, while the last one refers to the lack of an answer, despite searching and inquiring. These four names, with the exception of the one specific name (*Pyrrhonists*), grasp the important features of the skeptical attitude: a lack of results after search and examination, and a suspension of all judgement and observing problems without solution. All these names were used during the first centuries of our era (Floridi 2002: 104–5). The name *ephectics*, used by Clement of Alexandria (Strom. 8.8.15) and neo-Platonists from the 6th century (Ammonius, Simplicius, Olympiodoros; compare Floridi 2002: 20) had a decent range, but "Pyrrhonists" and "skeptics" ultimately dominated the others. One should add that during the Middle Ages, under the influence of St. Augustine and Cicero, "skeptics" were called "academics."

In the time of the neo-Pyrrhonian school's activity (Aenesidemus, Agrippa, Sextus Empiricus), under the patronage of Pyrrho, its representatives were called "Pyrrhonists" (compare Photius' *Bibliotheca*, 169b). However, the word "skeptic" was increasingly popular over time (Floridi 2002: 103). It seems that the main role in this process of establishing terminology was played by Sextus Empiricus, who wrote about skeptics and skepticism (PH 1.1–30) and whose works became the main source of information on skepticism for modern Europe. On the one hand, Sextus was not friendly toward academics (and especially towards Carneades), depriving them of the right to call themselves "skeptics" (instead calling them "negative dogmatics"). On the other hand, he assumed a certain distance when writing about Pyrrho, who was known as the originator of skepticism, but whose exact ideas were not that well known to Sextus (PH 1.7). Most likely written in accordance with the tradition of the neo-Pyrrhonian school, his *Outlines of Skepticism* (or *Pyrrhonism*) hardly ever names the representatives of that school "Pyrrhonists" (PH 1.7,11,13) and more often calls them "skeptics" (*skeptikoi*). Also, in the *Lives and Opinions* of Diogenes, it is a term used more often than "Pyrrhonists" (DL 9.11). Diogenes writes about the problems resulting from the usage of the term "Pyrrhonism" as caused by the lack of a doctrine in the teachings of Pyrrho (one can become a Pyrrhonist only through mimicking Pyrrho's style of life). At the beginning of *Outlines*, Sextus divides philosophers between dogmatics, who claim that they have found the truth (e.g. Aristotle), academics, who claim that the truth is impossible to attain (e.g. Carneades) and skeptics, who still search for the truth (PH 1.1–4). This famous division of philosophical stands, cited by Montaigne and repeated by his followers, confirms the key role of the term "skepticism" in the history of doubting philosophers. The broad definition of skepticism from

the beginning of Sextus' *Outlines* is defined more precisely later in the work with the introduction of the principle of the suspension of judgement.

The choice made by Sextus likewise became the choice of modern philosophy. In the 9th century, Photius also assumed that Pyrrhonists are some kind of skeptics (*Bibliotheca* 169b). In 1430, when Traversari's Latin translation of Diogenes's *Lives and Opinions* appeared and began to circulate, the Latin word *scepticus* entered the dictionary of modernity (Popkin 2003: 17, Hankinson 1995: 10, Floridi 2002: 14). In medieval Latin, the word *scepticus* did not exist. It was transliterated from the Greek *skeptikos* as a technical term, and so the literal translation – "researcher or explorer" – could be misleading. The Latin term *scepticus* appeared in the 2nd century in *Attic Nights* by Aulus Gellius and, similarly to the terms we find in the works of Cicero, it could have been a template for Renaissance translators. In 1562, the printed Latin translation of Sextus' *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* by Stephanus appeared. Only then did the word *scepticus* become truly popular in Latin Europe (Popkin 2003: 18, Hankinson 1995: 11, Floridi 2010: 281). The publication of Montaigne's *Essays* (1580) introduced the French term *sceptique* and further popularized the notion of skepticism.

Thanks to the title of Sextus Empiricus' work, *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, and a chapter devoted to Pyrrho in Diogenes Laertius's *Lives and Opinions*, the term *Pyrrhonism* did not disappear. It was moderately popular in the modern epoch and used by Montaigne in his *Essays* and by Hume in his *Treatise* and *An Enquiry.* At present, it operates in the background and is used by specialists researching different varieties of ancient skepticism (*Pyrrhonism* is a current of thought ascribed to Pyrrho, Aenesidemus, Agrippa, and Sextus Empiricus, while "academic skepticism" is connected to Arcesilaus, Carneades and other members of the *Academia*). The word "skepticism," in its different linguistic variations, became a term that denoted both academicism and Pyrrhonism, alongside other positions questioning the existence of human knowledge.

2. Evolution of the Idea of Skepticism

2.1. Ancient Skepticism: the Suspension of Judgements Aspiring to Be the Truth

We differentiate between two types of skepticism in ancient times: Pyrrhonism and academic skepticism. The first was radical, while the second was moderate. In both cases, the skeptical attitude involved *epochē* – the suspension of all judgement. *Epochē* is not a theoretical posture, but an attitude toward life that is recommended in order to avoid suffering and achieve happiness. It entailed life without making judgements of any kind or a life without any beliefs.

Sextus Empiricus passed on the radical version of skepticism. The arguments which he presents in his works suggest that there is no way to rationally prefer any given judgement, prior to its negation. Observational phenomena are dependent on circumstances and every attempt to justify any given thesis leads to an infinite regress or results in circular reasoning. For the same reason, it is impossible to establish a criterion of truth, or present a valid proof. Since no belief can be guaranteed as true, Pyrrhonists simply recommended a life without belief. Sextus states that such life is possible and explains that it consists of the passive acceptance of sensations and following customs and stereotypes imbedded in us by society.

Academic skepticism was decidedly more moderate. In this context, *epochē* is concerned with theory and not practice. There are no criteria for truth and all judgements are doubtful, but there still exists a need to be guided in one's everyday actions. Guidance through persuasive appearances seems sufficient. Carneades suspends all judgement, but in practice he approves of what is subjectively probable (*pithanon*). Academics, while attempting to solve the conflict between skepticism's assumptions and requirements of everyday life, discovered the so-called weak assent (an acceptance of what is not certain but probable or persuasive). Pyrrhonists, or at least Sextus and Aenesidemus, considered the approval of uncertain appearances to be a betrayal of skepticism.

This moderate version of skepticism was passed on to modernity by Cicero and St. Augustine and it was this version that has formed the modern understanding of skepticism as a lack of certainty. Even the discovery of Sextus' works during the Renaissance did not change that perception. His arguments against the reliability of our senses and the impossibility of rational justification have been labeled as arguments against established knowledge.

2.2. Medieval Skepticism: the Weakness of Human Judgements Contrasted with God's Omnipotence

Christian thinkers assumed that the skepticism of Pyrrho was a completely absurd position (the assent that nothing can be assented to) and not in accordance with the truth of revelation. None of the medieval thinkers declared themselves to be radical skeptics. From time to time, there were instances of acceptance displayed toward the moderate, academic skepticism, as understandably combined with the belief that faith is the only source of truth (John of Salisbury). Over time, a Christian version of skepticism emerged, concerning itself with God's omnipotence. This allowed for the possibility of the human mind to be tricked or cheated into false conviction. The confrontation of human cognitive abilities

with the idealized mind of God created a gap between objective truth and man's convictions, sometimes leading to cognitive pessimism. On the other hand, the Creator was a warrant for the very concrete possibility of knowing the world, which saved medieval philosophy from radical skepticism.

Medieval skepticism was focused on the weak cognitive abilities of man, assessed without God's help and in a situation where divine intervention took place in the form of misleading man. It doubted whether the human mind could reach knowledge on its own and without any assistance. Already in the Middle Ages, one can find the emergence of idea of probable knowledge in works of Nicholas of Autrecourt and Jean Buridan. The skeptic Nicholas of Autrecourt claimed that there is no certain knowledge, although he admitted that there is probable knowledge. His adversary, the antiskeptic Jean Buridan was of the opinion that there is still probable knowledge, even without certainty, and that this establishes the very existence of knowledge. For Nicholas, skepticism was constituted by a lack of certain knowledge and the lack of any knowledge for Buridan.

Medieval skeptics were also local skeptics (see later distinctions between types of skepticism) and fideists. William Ockham assumed that we lack certain knowledge based in reason about God (but we know the truth about God through faith). He thought that if there is no divine intervention, according to the natural order, we are equipped with knowledge about the world that is certain. Nicholas of Autrecourt broadened skepticism, claiming that we do not possess certain knowledge about the existence of observed objects or causal relations. Nevertheless, he accepted the certainty of *a priori* knowledge that can be reduced to the law of non-contradiction.

2.3. Modern Skepticism: Doubting the Value of Judgements Aspiring to be Knowledge

Ancient skepticism combined with Christian fideism was reborn in modernity. Excluding Montaigne, skepticism was no longer treated as practical wisdom. However, the theoretical importance of skepticism was duly noted. When discussing issues from the realm of skeptical thought, the idea of knowledge that required certainty was strongly emphasized (it should be noted that Francis Bacon was developing the idea of probable knowledge at the same time). Modern skepticism, in contrast with its ancient counterpart, did not pose any threat to common beliefs, which were excluded from the reach of skeptical doubt as belonging to a practical, rather than theoretical, order. In the theoretical order, certain knowledge was pursued and skepticism took the form of doubt in the value of judgements which aspired to be exactly that – certain knowledge.

In particular, Montaigne's skepticism is a thesis about the lack of certainty, which was stated with as much uncertainty as was the case in other formulations. "The philosophy of Pyrrhonists is to shake, wobble, doubt and seek not to strengthen your beliefs in nothing" (E 12). Rene Descartes, in his stage of methodical skepticism, wrote: "there is nothing of all those things I once thought true, of which it is not legitimate to doubt" (Med. 1. 21). David Hume, in one of the more desperate moments of his skepticism, simply stated that "all is uncertain" (THN, 1.4). Hence, what specifically marked modern skepticism was doubt and a lack of certainty. Instead of doubting already established judgements, the ancients preferred to restrain themselves from passing new judgements. They suspended their judgements due to the equipollence (*isostheneia*) between contradictory theses. Modern thinkers doubted and backed their stands with the Cartesian hypothesis and the possibility of logical fallacy. In his commentary to Sextus, Leibniz observes that two judgements are never ideally isosthenic and usually one of the sides dominates (Popkin 2003: 269).

Although modern skepticism turned out to be far more understanding of man's psychology than its ancient predecessor, it managed to break the natural bond between human cognitive abilities and nature. The idealism of Descartes and his hypothesis allowed for such radical doubt that it placed the very existence of the world in question.

Popkin rightly observed that during the Enlightenment, the main function of skepticism was in opposition to religion. Religious skeptics of the Renaissance were replaced by non-religious skeptics in the Englightenment (Popkin 1988: 145). In the times of Pierre Bayle, George Berkeley and David Hume, while not synonymous, skepticism very nearly implied atheism (Popkin 2003: 246). This transformed meaning remains alive, especially outside of philosophical discourse, as a common definition for the word "skepticism." In typical philosophical and especially epistemological debates over human knowledge, the understanding of skepticism remained religiously neutral, similarly to the usage of Descartes.

2.4. Contemporary Skepticism: Paradoxical Thesis on the Non-existence of Knowledge and Meaning

At present, modern doubt seems to have gone missing. The manifestation of its end might be signaled by the common belief in the non-existence of certain knowledge. In short, the contemporary understanding of knowledge and rationality has been weakened and no condition of certainty has since reemerged. By contrast, the idea of probable knowledge is now widespread and well established. As a result, the need to distinguish between fallibilism and skepticism

emerged. The stance of Charles S. Pierce and William James – the lack of certain knowledge (fallibilism) and the existence of some kind of knowledge (antiskepticism) – has generally been accepted. Arguments that were sufficient for Hume to take a skeptical stand (knowledge does not exist), are, after a weakening of the conditions for establishing what is knowledge, presently sufficient only for fallibilism (knowledge is uncertain). In other words, fallibilism is a belief that knowledge exists, although it is uncertain. Skepticism, by contrast, is a belief that knowledge does not exist at all. Between fallibilism and skepticism we can observe a change in our understanding of what knowledge actually is.

Within contemporary philosophy, skepticism – as a philosophical stance – which we are supposed to either accept or debate, is expressed in the form of an abstract thesis. After all, it is hard to debate statements about a "lack of judgement," or "attitude of doubt." And as it turns out, doubt expressed in the form of a thesis is itself paradoxical. The thesis claims that no knowledge exists, not even uncertain knowledge, and that somewhere there is a rational justification to be found. These thesis cannot be rationally held without creating a contradiction. It is therefore no surprise that they are rarely accepted, but often debated (similarly to relativism and determinism). They function within philosophy as a kind of paradox which one must tackle. Peter Unger declared himself to be a skeptic and defended his claim by saying that "no one ever knows anything about anything" and "no one ever has a justified or rational conviction about anything" (Unger 1975: 1). However, he later abandoned skepticism for the sake of contextualism and philosophical relativism. He admitted that if knowledge requires certainty, then skepticism in the form of thesis about the non-existence of knowledge is unavoidable. But if knowledge does not require certainty, then skepticism becomes groundless. Philosophical solutions of the problem of skepticism were, to his mind, relative to the meaning of the word "knowledge."

The contemporary model of skepticism uses the concept of strong knowledge when addressing the question of knowledge itself, thereby foregoing its own epoch that accepted the concept of weak knowledge. The weakening of the concept of knowledge resulted in the absorbing of common beliefs, which led to the return of their critique as a part of contemporary skepticism (people are not deprived of the right to have their own beliefs, as in ancient times, but the status of these beliefs as knowledge is questioned).

Subtle deliberations over the language and mind recently lead to the emergence of the skepticism of meaning (the meanings of our words do not exist, Kripke-Wittgenstein) and skepticism of the content of self-consciousness (we do not know the content of our own consciousness, according to Daniel Dennett).

This results in a further deepening of skepticism regarding the question of the possibility of knowledge. The contemporary skeptical hypothesis sketches the possibility that all our beliefs are false, the meanings of our words are unclear, and the entirety of self-consciousness is illusory. We are left turning back to everyday life, without understanding it and abandoning any theorizing of it. Today's skepticism is often a skepticism of the second order, pondering over the possibility of building a theory of knowledge.

In summary, ancient skepticism was a philosophy of not passing any judgements (*epochē*) on the outside world, and it was likewise an attempt to live without any convictions. Medieval skepticism was a recognition of the weaknesses of human cognition against the omnipotence of God. Modern skepticism is a philosophy of doubting human judgements which aspire to be knowledge. Contemporary skepticism is an abstract and paradoxical thesis about a lack of any knowledge or justification, and an unclearness of meaning resulting from the illusory character of the content of self-consciousness.

In the end, all these forms of skepticism are based on a lack of certainty, or fear that we do not posses knowledge that would fulfill the condition of being true (there is no warranty of truth). The fundamental divide resides between ancient and modern skepticism, which is between the ancient suspension of judgment and modern doubt about the value of judgements. Modern thinkers dismissed the suspension of judgments, arguing instead that beliefs can not be managed. They have recognized the *existence* of common beliefs and limited themselves to *assessing* their value. In other words, they have distinguished psychology (the description of mechanisms of acquiring and controlling beliefs) from epistemology (the assessment of the cognitive value of beliefs).

Working from ancient psychology, we might conclude that ancient arguments are those stemming from uncertainty. They point to the possibility that knowledge does not exist. The concept of knowledge has changed over time, but skeptics kept approaching it seriously, treating it as a manifestation of a willingness to reach objectivity and truth. A lack of certainty raised their suspicions as to whether we possess any knowledge at all. And so, the entire history of development of the global skepticism could be contained in our aforementioned thesis: "Knowledge does not exist."

3. Types of Skepticism and Related Terminology

When comparing popular and philosophical skepticism, Peter Klein states that the popular variety is about a doubting attitude for which we can eliminate reasons, while the philosophical strand does not allow for any answers. For example,

if we doubt whether a bird sitting on a branch is a sparrow, there is a way to alle-
viate the doubt by referring to pictures and descriptions of sparrows (shape, size,
color, and behavior). Common doubts are usually local and appear in the context
of knowledge we do not doubt. Klein is thinking in line with John Austin, who
states, in his *Other Minds*, that we answer typical questions (e.g. Is this a bum-
blebee or a goldfinch?) by providing justifications, and we can know in advance
what the possible answers might be (identification, description). The skeptic, on
the other hand, poses questions that we do not know how to answer (e.g. Is it a
real table?), because there is no readymade template of an answer (Austin 1990:
360–361). But if I do not know if that is a table (an object well known to you or
me), I do not know anything. Philosophical doubts are global and that is why
there is no practical solution at hand (Klein 2010: 2–3). If a skeptic doubts if we
can ever know anything, or even have a justified conviction – it is not enough to
be more vigilant and commit more time to the uncertain cause in order to resolve
pertaining doubts (Williams 1999: 37).

Aside from popular and philosophical skepticism, there are also varieties of
religious and political skepticism that can be observed. The religious skeptic is a
disbeliever, an atheist almost, unwilling to rely on revelation. Izydora Dąmbska
and Richard Popkin stated that "the most common usage of the term skeptic
is in relation to a religious disbeliever" (Popkin 2003: 246, compare Dąmbska
1948b: 79). The epistemological sense of skepticism that I am describing in this
book is secondary in our culture. The first and most immediate association with
the word "skeptic" is "man having an issue with religion." The political skeptic,
on the other hand, is a person who doubts the chances for successfully realizing
a political plan. For example, the euro-skeptic does not believe that the idea of
joining European nations into one political body will be advantageous to all of
members. These kinds of skepticism are, as with practical attitudes, based on
concrete rationale and close to popular skepticism, but they are also close to
philosophical skepticism in that they are concerned with truly difficult problems.

According to Izydora Dąmbska and Michael Williams, we are supposed to
distinguish between theoretical, practical and normative layers within philo-
sophical skepticism (Dąmbska 1948a: 80, Williams 2010: 291). It is a theoretical
thesis – the non-existence of knowledge – a practical attitude of doubting and
resignation from any pretense to knowledge, forsaking any convictions (in an-
cient terms, suspending judgement), and a norm calling to "refrain from judge-
ment!" The rational and practical strands of skepticism are based on theoretical
skepticism and are a realization of normative skepticism. The theoretical layer
dominates contemporary skepticism, but practical and normative layers domi-
nated its ancient predecessor.

When presenting historical positions, I will distinguish, according to the strength of assent, between radical and moderate skepticism. Radical skepticism in the ancient period was principally the philosophy of Sextus Empiricus, who refused even the weak assent and recommended life without any convictions. In modernity, radical skepticism was a thesis about the non-existence of knowledge, assuming the strong assent, which was merely a theoretical figure, debated widely but rejected by everyone. Moderate skepticism in antiquity is represented by the philosophy of Carneades, who allowed for the weak assent and limited the range for *epochē.* During modernity, it is the skepticism accepted by Hume in *An Enquiry*, in which the skeptical thesis is treated as equally uncertain as all other convictions. By implication, the critique of these convictions must be limited.

Philosophical skepticism in its consistent form should not be a thesis. That is why the ancients talked about the suspension of judgements and modern thinkers perceived doubting as an attitude rather than a thesis. In practice, these attitudes needed to be somehow described and justified. That is how skeptical arguments and the thesis with weakened assent were created. At present, we know that practical attitudes hide theoretical assumptions and that any attempts to escape assent are useless.

Skepticism as a thesis can also be divided into types according to the subject of skeptical critique. Ethical skepticism is a thesis claiming the non-existence of good and evil (Sinnot-Armstrong 2006). Skepticism concerned with religious beliefs will be a thesis about a lack of knowledge concerning the existence of God, his characteristics and/or goals (Schellenberg 2009). And finally, skepticism questioning the existence of the outside world (Greco 2008a) contradicts our knowledge of all external things, except appearances, while skepticism toward other minds will contradict the claim of the existence of knowledge or conscious experiences of others.

The most philosophically sublime and most regularly debated form of contemporary skepticism is a global skepticism concerned with knowledge. As we have previously stated, it is the thesis which reads: "knowledge does not exist." This particular form of skepticism is accused of incoherence, and it is this argument which is at the center of this book. The skepticism about knowledge can be divided into many different sub-categories. It can be concerned with the lack of knowledge or impossibility of knowledge – both local and global, and each of the four can be of the first or second order ("no one knows if s/he knows". The thesis "knowledge does not exist" is global first order skepticism about the lack of knowledge. The rational justification of beliefs is the subject of similar skepticism in all of these varieties.

The novelty of contemporary skepticism is the skepticism of meaning and mental content (the content of self-consciousness). "It is impossible for any word to have any meaning" (Kripke 2007: 93), in the sense of existence of facts of meaning, which would constitute those meanings. This is the thesis of the skepticism of meaning. There is also skepticism that has emerged within the philosophy of mind. "What Descartes has seen as the most important – the direct, introspective grasp of the elements of consciousness – turns out to be not entirely true. It is a by-product of the way in which brain fulfills its quest of approaching" (Dennett 1994: 237). It could be formulated in the form of a thesis: "Mental contents and contents of self-consciousness are an illusion."

The terms most closely related to skepticism are agnosticism and fallibilism. Agnosticism contradicted with the ancient skepticism understood as the lack of a thesis. It is a negative dogmatism in the form of thesis claiming inscrutability (for example: truth is inscrutable, the existence of God is inscrutable, the world is inscrutable). At the moment, when skepticism is interpreted as a thesis about the non-existence of knowledge, the difference between the two currents of thought may be blurred and might be limited to matters of aspect and degree. Agnosticism is perceived today as a synonym for skepticism, or its more radical version.

The rejection of certain knowledge is so common today that it no longer characterizes skeptics (almost every philosopher could end up being a skeptic). Skepticism is debated as a stance that could threaten all of knowledge, also in its popular variety. The very lack of certainty is not impressive. The difference between skepticism (saying that knowledge does not exist) and fallibilism (asserting that *certain* knowledge does not exist) is a topic of ongoing, lively debate.

Fallibilism has its pessimistic and optimistic side. The pessimistic one focuses on highlighting our inclination to commit mistakes and being mislead by our senses and mind. Sometimes we do not even realize we are being mislead and our scientific theories are incomplete and incorrect. At best, we posses knowledge that is fallible. On the optimistic side, this fallible knowledge is *some* knowledge after all. The fallibilist believes that it is true, although he admits that its falsity cannot be excluded (Harpner 2010: 339).

We ought to note that fallibilism is generally accepted, while skepticism lacks open or declared supporters. Hillary Putnam finds the skeptical hypothesis inconsistent, and yet he is a fallibilist (he holds no convictions that are guaranteed not to be revised in the future, Putnam 1994: 152). The difference between fallibilism and skepticism can seem purely emotional: skepticism being associated with cognitive desperation and fallibilism connected with cognitive hope (Hookway 2008: 312). Michael Williams formulated this difference nicely:

skepticism is a total doubt, while fallibilism is a potential total doubt, but not in everything at once. The difference is not logical, but pragmatic (concerned with the procedure of doubting as a form of action). Williams points to a number of skeptical assumptions that are hard to accept (an inadequate concept of knowledge, asymmetrical requirements for justification) and is ultimately opposed to skepticism. However, he accepts fallibilism: we have knowledge but we cannot logically exclude the possibility of its falsity (Williams 2001: 41).

In conclusion, today's skepticism (knowledge does not exist) is more than fallibilism (certain knowledge does not exist) – it is a negation of all knowledge, also the uncertain variant. Agnosticism (the world is inscrutable) has become a synonym of skepticism, or skepticism radicalized. Contemporary skepticism detached itself from fallibilism, but managed to attach itself to agnosticism.

It is worth mentioning the relation between skepticism and relativism. These two positions, in their most radical version, encounter the same problem with self-refutation, and the arguments supporting relativism are sometimes listed as arguments supporting skepticism (for example, the ten modes of Aenesidemus). However, these are separate positions. Unger (1984) rejected skepticism (knowledge does not exist) for the sake of relativism (an answer to the question of knowledge's existence depends on the concept of knowledge we adopt). In summary, skepticism assumes the objective concept of truth and a strong concept of knowledge requiring certainty. Relativism assumes the subjective concept of truth and knowledge. It is a thesis about our terminology and language, both skeptical and antiskeptical. Relativism is a thesis in meta-language and skepticism is usually a thesis formulated in first-order language (Amini, Caldwell 2011: 102). Common to both stances is the questioning of the value of human convictions.

The main focus of this book, then, is the problem of philosophical skepticism in its radical version according to which *knowledge does not exist*. This form of skepticism was of crucial importance in the history of philosophy and influenced both religious disputes and the development of modern science.

Chapter II. Ancient Skepticism

1. Elements of Skepticism in the Pre-Pyrrhonian Philosophy

Ancient skepticism as a philosophical movement[2] started by Pyrrho of Elis[3] (ca. 365–275 BC) had its background in earlier Greek thought which questioned the truth of human perceptions and convictions. Such a critical appraisal can be found in, among others, Xenophanes, Heraclitus, Protagoras, Gorgias, Democritus, Socrates or Plato (Krokiewicz 2002: 34–64; Lee 2010: 13–35). However, it was the sophists who, by virtue of their radical relativism, occupied the most important position among the precursors of skepticism.

Xenophanes questioned human knowledge mainly on the basis of his critique of polytheistic beliefs, but he also tended to generalize: "And as for what is clear, no man has seen it, nor will there be anyone / Who knows about the gods and what I say about all things; / For even if one should happen to say what has absolutely come to pass / Nonetheless one does not oneself know; but opinion has been constructed in all cases." (M 7.49 = DK 21 B 34). Xenophanes suspected that people could not know the truth – even if they knew it by accident, he believed, they would have no right to claim that they did (see also Lesher 1978: 1; Marcinkowska-Rosół 2004: 19).

Heraclitus observes that knowledge does not keep up with the universal changeability of all things, which is why all predicates are relative. According to Plato, Heraclitus says that "all things are in motion and nothing at rest" and that "you

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2   It is impossible to speak about a single school of skepticism in Antiquity. The ancient skeptical movement had undergone three distinct phases: (1) ethical skepticism of Pyrrho and Timon in the 4th–3rd centuries BC; (2) skeptical phase of the Plato's Academy headed by Arcesilaus and Carneades in the 3rd–1st centuries BC; (3) neo-Pyrrhonism of Aenesidemus, Agrippa, and Sextus Empiricus (the 1st century BC to the 3rd century CE). Pyrrho led his own school in Elis and his student, Timon, started a new school in Chalcedon and Athens (without continuation). The phase of academic skepticism belongs to the history of Plato's Academy. Scholars usually sharply distinguish between the academic and Pyrrhonian phases of skepticism. The center of neo-Pyrrhonism was probably Alexandria, which was the site of a school founded by Aenesidemus. However, it remains unknown whether Agrippa and Sextus Empiricus were members of this school. See Joachimowicz 1972: 269; Thorsrud 2009: 8; Vogt 2010b: 1.

3   Some scholars question the traditional view that Pyrrho was the founder of the skeptical movement, and even the fact that he was a skeptic (Bett 2003; Lee 2010; Sady 2010: 290). However, this view is not sufficiently justified (see Ziemińska 2011).

cannot step twice into the same stream." (*Cratylus* 402a)[4] According to Aristotle, in turn, he claimed that "all things in the world are in motion and always in motion, though we cannot apprehend the fact by sense-perception." (*Physics* 253b)[5] Cratylus, a Heraclitean and Plato's teacher, is supposed to go further and claim that "one should not say anything but only moved his finger, and criticized Heraclitus for saying that it is impossible to step twice into the same river; for he thought it was not possible to do so even once" (*Metaphysics* 1010a). Since everything changes, nothing can be known for certain or adequately described by predicating properties to it; the same thing can provoke opposite reactions and become a subject of contradictory predicates. For example, at the same time in the evening one may claim, with equal legitimacy, that it is a day and that a day had passed, just as the same middle-aged man can be described from one perspective as young, and from another perspective as old.

The sophists negated the objective quality of truth. Protagoras had begun his treatise *Truth or Refutations* by claiming that "man is the measure of all things – of things that are, that they are, and of things that are not, that they are not" (DK 80 B1, PR 146). This is how Plato interpreted this position: "what seems to people collectively is true" (*Theaetetus* 172b). Protagoras denied the existence of objective truth and described the subjective truth as a feature of any perception (relativism), therefore equating it with the false. Consequently, he claimed that two contradictory judgments might be equally true in relation to any object, and he defended the view that no judgment could be overthrown as false. He demonstrated how every assent could be met with an equal and opposite assent, and he refrained from judging. For example, "concerning Gods", he wrote, "I am not able to know to a certainty whether they exist or whether they do not" (DL 398).

According to Gorgias, since there is no difference between truth and falsehood, it follows that truth does not exist and everything is false. Gorgias defended three nihilistic theses: (1) nothing exists; (2) if anything exists, it cannot be known; (3) if anything can be known, it cannot be communicated in language. If Parmenides argued that being could not have a beginning or cease to be, Gorgias believed that eternal being could not exist in the first place: "if what-is is eternal, it is unlimited, but if it is unlimited, it is nowhere, and if it is nowhere, it is not" (DK 82 B3, PR 151). And since there is no being, there is no truth, and hence everything is false. Also Xeniades defended this statement (see Brunschwig 2002: 166).

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4   All quotations from Plato are taken from *Plato in Twelve Volume*s (trans. Harold N. Fowler, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1914–1930).

5   All quotations from Aristotle in this book are taken from J. Barnes (ed.), *The Complete Works of Aristotle. The Revised Oxford Translation* (Princeton, NJ., 1984).

Democritus emphasized the subjective nature of sensory data. As Aristotle summarized it, "many of the other animals receive impressions contrary to ours and […] even to the senses of each individual, things do not always seem the same" (*Metaphysics* 1009b). He provided the future skeptics with an example of honey that tasted bitter to the sick. "By convention, sweet; by convention, bitter; by convention, hot; by convention, cold; by convention, color; but in reality, atoms and void" (DK 68 B9, PR 123). Metrodorus of Chios, a Democritean, put forward a thesis that "no one knows anything, not even whether we do know anything or not" (DK 70 B1).

Also the famous words ascribed to Socrates – "I know that I know nothing" – have skeptical overtones. Socrates insisted that awareness of ignorance has a unique value because it leads to genuine wisdom. Cicero writes that Socrates employed irony, pretended his ignorance or consciously diminished his knowledge in order to lampoon his adversaries. Socrates' elenctic method, undermining his interlocutor's claims, could contribute to the growth of skeptical tendencies ("Socrates, I used to be told, before I began to meet you, that yours was just a case of being in doubt yourself and making others doubt also;" *Meno* 79e–80a). The Megarian school, which followed Socrates' and the Eleatic school's logic, constructed a series of paradoxes, which undermined a reliance on human reason, such as the paradox of liar that even Aristotle could not solve (*On Sophistical Refutations* 180B). Plato agreed with the Heraclitean view of empirical world and acknowledged that the concept of truth applies only to the world of ideas: "Well, the true part is smooth and divine and dwells aloft among the gods, but falsehood dwells below among common men;" *Cratylus* 408c). There is a small chance that human opinions about empirical world are true, since they are a mere shadow of objective truth. It is well illustrated by the metaphor of cave that can be read as a skeptical hypothesis according to which most of people do not perceive real objects, but merely their shadows (*Republic*, 514). Also *Theaetetus*, a dialogue concerning the definition of knowledge, has skeptical overtones – not only because it puts forward some of the later skeptical arguments (of sensory appearances, dreams, madness, or relativity of perception; *Theaetetus* 157e, 166e). Plato came close to the definition of knowledge ("knowledge is true judgment with a rational account", *Theaetetus* 201c; translation modified), but he left this matter unresolved, as it was unclear what "a rational account" meant in this case. It is hard to say whether we know anything, since we do not know what knowledge is. What Theaetetus receives is only a word of consolation: "you will have the wisdom not to think you know that which you do not know" (*Theaetetus* 210c). This and other dialogues, in which Plato masterly outlined his arguments for different

contradictory positions, leaving his reader without resolution, could make his followers believe that he was, in fact, a skeptic. Richard Bett claims that Pyrrho of Elis was himself familiar with Plato's dialogues where he found an inspiration for his conception of indeterminacy of things (Bett 2003: 139).

Skeptical themes are also to be found in Aristotle who acknowledged that not everything is provable, that human discourse is full of aporias and contradictory opinions, that the concept of knowledge is ambiguous, and, finally, that every perception is relative. As he claimed, "Our own doctrine is that not all knowledge is demonstrative: on the contrary, knowledge of the immediate premises is independent of demonstration." (*Posterior Analytics*, 72b). He also quoted an anonymous skeptical statement:

> Some hold that, owing to the necessity of knowing the primary premises, there is no scientific knowledge […] assuming that there is no way of knowing other than by demonstration, maintain that an infinite regress is involved, on the ground that if behind the prior stands no primary, we could not know the posterior through the prior (wherein they are right, for one cannot traverse an infinite series): if on the other hand – they say – the series terminates and there are primary premises, yet these are unknowable because incapable of demonstration, which according to them is the only form of knowledge. (*Posterior Analytics*, 72b)

In his critique of knowledge, Aristotle also referred to circular reasoning (*Prior Analytics* 57B, 59a) and to *petitio principii* in general (*Metaphysics* 1006a). Later on, however, he asserted the existence of knowledge, avoiding this earlier skeptical conclusion by adopting the assumption of the intuitive nature of cognition of the first premises (*Posterior Analytics*, 71b).

Aristotle was also absorbed by problems concerning the concept of knowledge:

> Before he was led on to recognition or before he actually drew a conclusion, we should perhaps say that in a manner he knew, in a manner not. If he did not, in an unqualified sense of the term, know the existence of this triangle, how could he know without qualification that its angles were equal to two right angles? No: clearly he knows not without qualification but only in the sense that he knows universally. If this distinction is not drawn, we are faced with the dilemma in the *Meno*: either a man will learn nothing or what he already knows (*Posterior Analytics* 71a).

Aristotle quoted various examples of the relativity of perception: that the same thing may be sweet to some and bitter to others, that animals have different perceptions than humans, and that the latter differ from one another (*Metaphysics* 1009B). It is nowhere else than in *Metaphysics*, where one may find the body of basic skeptical arguments: Aenesidemus's ten modes and Agrippa's five modes.

Mi-Kyoung Lee (2010: f13) is right to claim that skeptical arguments were already in the air in the presocratic philosophy, as well as in Plato and Aristotle. A potentially destructive power of these arguments was well-known, but most thinkers were focused on changing their premises rather than drawing skeptical conclusions. Also various antiskeptical arguments – addressed to those who could fall into skepticism – were already at work (for example, the objection concerning the impossibility to act, the self-refutation scheme; *Metaphysics* 1008B, 1012B). However, in the pre-skeptical period "virtually no one […] deliberately embraced the position that nothing can be known, or argued for suspension of judgement on all matters." (Lee 2010: 33)

In the 2nd century Sextus Empiricus was well aware of the existence of these precursors, but he also believed that the pre-Pyrrhonian thinkers were not consistent in their skepticism and that each of them held certain dogmatic theses: "Heraclitus makes dogmatic assertions on many unclear matters." (PH 1.210) Democritus, in turn, believed that atoms and void existed in reality (PH 1.214). In the spirit of the tradition of his school, Sextus claimed that "Pyrrho appears to have attached himself to Skepticism more systematically and conspicuously than anyone before him." (PH 1.7)

2. Pyrrho of Elis and Ethical Skepticism

Pyrrho of Elis (ca. 365–275 BC) was born in Elis in the Peloponnese. At the time of his birth, there was a living tradition of the socratic school founded by Phaedo and later moved to Eretria (the Elean or Erterian school). Pyrrho's first teacher was presumably Bryson of the Megarian school (Bett 2003: 1). The Megarian school, just as the Elean or Ertreian school, specialized in dialectics (following the Eleatics) and in eristic (following the sophists). "Pyrrho's first philosophical training was in the subtle complexities of dialectics and eristic." (Joachimowicz 1972: 33). At the same time, however, he was an enemy of both sophistics and dialectics, and he did not appreciate discussion. This is testified by the following statement of his student, Timon: "Now you, old man, Pyrrho, how could you find an escape from all the slavish doctrines and vain imaginations." (DL 9.65) In this respect, Pyrrho followed Socrates: he considered ethical questions to be most important, but he did not write anything and did not have much regard for sophistic arguments. Second Pyrrho's teacher (and friend) was Anaxarchos of Abdera, a Democritean philosopher. It was presumably by his influence that Pyrrho respected, read, and often quoted Democritus.

Together with Anaxarchos, Pyrrho took part in Alexander the Great's expedition to India in 327–325 BC. This was where he met with the Indian thinkers

called Gymnosophists who led highly ascetic life and were known for their indifference to pain and death. As Diogenes Laertius writes, one of those Indians reproached Anaxarchos for "never teaching any one else any good, but devoting all his time to playing court to princes in palaces." (DL 9.63) These words must have had impact on Pyrrho, who later "used to walk out into the fields and seek solitary places, very rarely appearing to his family at home." (DL 9.63) In his *Life of Alexander*, Plutarch tells the story of another Gymnosophist, Calanos, who decided that he lived too long and had let others burn himself alive in the presence of Alexander and his army. Pyrrho, after his return from the expedition, gained reputation of a man immune to physical pain, who was able to bear medical treatment without complaint (DL 9.67). He was committed to the idea of indifference (*apatheia*), which he believed to be the way of achieving peace (*ataraxia*) and happiness (*eudaimonia*).

The idea of indifference to fate was already propagated by the Cynics (Diogenes) and certain Megarians (Stilpon), but it was Pyrrho who reinforced its importance in Greek philosophy and in that sense inspired both the Stoics and the Epicureans. The concept of *apatheia* as a suppression of emotions was developed by Stoics, while the alleviation of suffering became one of the main epicurean themes. It is worth noting that Epicurus himself was interested in Pyrrho's philosophy and even attended the lectures of a Pyrrhonian called Nausiphanes (Krokiewicz 2002: 65).

As Adrian Kuzminski observes, the idea of *ataraxia* was not invoked in Greek philosophy before Pyrrho; in fact, the Epicureans, the Stoics borrowed this term form Pyrrho. This observation provides a strong argument for the influence of Indian thought on Pyrrhonism. Indian thought – especially Madhyamaka, an early form of Buddhism contemporary to Pyrrho – emphasized freedom from beliefs, anxiety, and emotions as the condition of the absence of suffering (*ahinsa*, *nirvana*). Against Richard Bett, Kuzminski champions the thesis according to which Pyrrho borrowed the idea of freedom from beliefs (that is, freedom of suspending from judgement) from Buddhist therapeutic practice (Kuzminski 2008: 47).

After returning to Greece, Pyrrho settled in his native Elis and lived with his sister who was a midwife. He led his own school of philosophy and gained great recognition among his townsmen. As Diogenes writes, he was appointed a priest and all philosophers were exempted from taxation (DL 9.64). Pausanias, a geographer from the 2nd century, wrote that he saw a statue of Pyrrho on the market-place of Elis (Bett 2010b: 2). These facts evidence that Pyrrho was highly estimated by his contemporaries.

The life of Pyrrho was written by Antigonus of Carystus (or Antigonus the Carystian), whose work, together with those of other intermediary authors, formed the basis for Diogenes Laertius's *Lives and Opinions*. Antigonus wrote about Timon's death, which allows one to assume that he lived later than Pyrrho. He did not know Pyrrho in person, but he merely collected various informations and anecdotes circulating about the philosopher of Elis. Diogenes Laertius is well-known for his disregard to the distinction between facts and legends, and hence his work is not always a reliable source of information about Pyrrho. It contains, for example, the voices of his opponents who tried to ridicule him: "he never shunned anything, and never guarded against anything; encountering everything, even wagons for instance, and precipices, and dogs, and everything of that sort; committing nothing whenever to his senses." (DL 9.62) It is somewhat hard to believe that Pyrrho behaved in this way and managed to live on into his nineties (Stopper 1983: 269). Already Aenesidemus questioned the reliability of these legends about Pyrrho: "he studied philosophy on the principle of suspending of his judgment on all points, without however, on any occasion acting in an imprudent manner, or doing anything without due consideration." (DL 9.62) Pyrrho's philosophical ideas were written down by his student, Timon of Phlius.

Timon (ca. 320–230 BC) was first a pupil of a Megarian philosopher, Stilpon. After returning to his native Phlius, he met Pyrrho who was on his way to Delphi. "His conversation with Pyrrho made such an impression on him that he left Phlius and moved with his wife to Elis. He lived there for a long time, probably until the death of his admired master." (Krokiewicz 2002: 71) Later Timon studied in Chalcedon and other towns, and finally, after acquiring wealth, he settled in Athens where he died in ca. 230 BC. He polemicized not only with the Epicureans, the Stoics but also with the an academic skeptic, Arcesilaus (DL 9.115). He popularized Pyrrho's thought and moved its center to Athens. After Timon's death his school probably ceased to function and the Platonic Academy became the center of skepticism.

Timon was a man of literary talent, erudition, and wit; he created poetry, drama, and prose. Only parts of his works have survived in transmission to our times. In a dialogue *Python*, he described his first encounter with Pyrrho. His satirical poem *Silloi*, in turn, depicts a conversation with Xenophanes, satirizing various quarreling philosophers who can be reconciled with each other only by Pyrrho. The dialogue describes Zeno of Citium as an "old Phoenician woman […] greedy for everything" (Ager and Faber 2013: 41), while Plato is accused of plagiarism of a Pythagorean book which he had purchased (Reale 1985: 328). These unjust opinions about other philosophers, as well as the creation of Pyrrho

as a superhuman Sage, shake the reliability of Timon's work. However, Timon presents himself as a recipient of Pyrrho's ideas and there is no concern that he might have placed his own beliefs in the mouth of Pyrrho, as Plato did with Socrates (Bett 2003: 10). Timon did not inscribe himself in the tradition as an author of new ideas, but precisely as a follower and popularizer of Pyrrho's thought. What is more, Timon kept direct touch with Pyrrho for many years, which makes his writings the most reliable source.

Timon had written down and put in order Pyrrho's ideas, confronting them with other philosophical positions. However, he was a very different person than his master. "He cared about money and fame, wrote intensely, and fiercely attacked other philosophers. A man of biting wit, he resorted to derision rather than argumentation. He competed in drinking with Lacydes in Athens and had never reached the moral stature of his master […] he also rejected the idea of indifference to physical pain as impossible to achieve for man." (Krokiewicz 2002: 97). Timon became an important figure because Pyrrho himself had never written anything (except the poem in honor of Alexander the Great). Moreover, Timon's account is important in that it allows one to distinguish Pyrrho's ideas from neo-Pyrrhonism of Sextus Empiricus which has often served to interpret them (beginning with Diogenes Laertius who ascribed to him all neo-Pyrrhonist theses).

The major testimony of Pyrrho's thought is a passage from Timon, which was transmitted by Aristocles, a peripatetic from Messene (Sicily) and the author of *On Philosophy*, and subsequently quoted by Eusebius of Caesarea in *Preparation for the Gospel*. It is, then, Eusebius's account form the 4th century, drawing on Aristocles's text, which was written around the turn of the eras and which cited Timon who, in turn, emphasized that Pyrrho left no writings behind him. Both Eusebius and Aristocles criticize Pyrrho's thought, but they are quite reliable commentators in that they cite a direct witness – Timon. According to Aristocles, Pyrrho, in general, insisted that "it is in our nature to know nothing." When it comes to particulars and technical terms, Aristocles quotes Timon. The position of Aristocles's contemporary neo-Pyrrhonist, Aenesidemus, is described as distinct and listed in the end.

> Before all things it is necessary to make a thorough examination of our own knowledge; for if it is in our nature to know nothing there is no further need to inquire about other things.
>
> Some then there were even of the ancients who spoke this language, and who have been opposed by Aristotle. Pyrrho indeed, of Elis, spoke strongly in this sense, but has not himself left anything in writing. But his disciple Timon says that the man who means

to be happy must look to these three things: [P1]⁶ first, what are the natural qualities of things; secondly, [P2] in what way we should be disposed towards them; and lastly, [P3] what advantage there will be to those who are so disposed.

The things themselves, he professes to show, are [A1a] equally indifferent (*adiaphora*), and unstable (*astathmeta*), and indeterminate (*anepikrita*), and therefore [A1b] neither our senses nor our opinions are either true or false. For this reason then [A2a] we must not trust them, but [A2b] be without opinions (*adoxastoi*), and without bias, and without wavering (*aklinesis*), [A2c] saying of every single thing that it no more is than is not, or both is and is not, or neither is nor is not.

[A3a] To those indeed who are thus disposed the result, Timon says, will be first speechlessness (*aphasia*), [A3b] and then imperturbability (*ataraxia*), but Aenesidemus says pleasure (*hedone*).

These are the chief points of their arguments… (PE 14.18.1-5, Eusebius 2002: 757–758).

Three problems and three answers are presented here, and the whole reasoning is governed by ethical considerations ("the man who means to be happy"). The first answer is the thesis of indifference, instability, and indeterminacy of things [1a], which is linked with the thesis of the inapplicability of the categories of truth and falsehood to sensory impressions or judgments [1b]. The second answer expresses the practical consequences of the first answer: distrust of sensory impressions and judgments [2a]; applying a specific mode of saying which signals a skeptical attitude: "saying of every single thing that it no more is than is not, or both is and is not, or neither is nor is not [2c]." The third answer assumes that the effect of this strategy would be formation of a speechless attitude (*aphasia*) [3a], which would further lead to *ataraxia* – undisturbed peace and quietness [3b]. This is the formula for achieving happiness.

In contemporary Anglo-Saxon philosophy, the debate concerning this subject is dominated by Richard Bett's position, who proposes the metaphysical interpretation of Pyrrho's thought in the monograph entitled *Pyrrho. Hist Antecedents and His Legacy*. Bett is right to observe that the first question posed by Pyrrho is surprising in the light of subsequent skeptical statements, as it is a metaphysical question concerning the nature of being. Bett insists that one should follow Eusebius/Aristocles's text closely, instead of interpreting Pyrrho along the lines

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6   The additions in the brackets are given by for the purposes of further discussion. "P" stands for "problem" and "A" stands for "answer".

of neo-Pyrrhonism, which has been a dominant practice leading to what he calls the "epistemological interpretation" (Bett 2003: v)[7].

According to Bett, in Eusebius/Aristocles's text Pyrrho claims, through the mouth of Timon, that things are indistinguishable (*adiaphora*) by nature, which means, as he goes on to claim, that they have no nature – neither stable (*astathmeta*) nor definite (*anepikritia*) – which would allow to distinguish them from one another. Bett describes these three properties together as the indeterminacy of things by nature, which he believes to be one of the main Pyrrho's theses (Bett 2003: 29). Such understood indeterminacy means that neither our perceptions nor our opinions teach us anything true about things. In Bett's eyes, it is a metaphysical and dogmatic thesis that would never be held by a skeptic such as Sextus who spoke, at most, of phenomena, not of the nature of things. According to Bett, Pyrrho is a dogmatist[8] speaking of the nature of things.

Svavar Svavarsson rejects the metaphysical interpretation proposed by Bett and believes that the three adjectives in Eusebius/Aristocles's text should be interpreted, not in metaphysical terms, but precisely in epistemological terms: it is from our perspective that things are equally indistinguishable (*adiaphora*), unstable (*astathemeta*), and indeterminate (*anepikrita*). It is not a thesis concerning the nature of things, but it is a thesis concerning our inability to distinguish between them, to decide what they are like (Svavarsson 2010: 42). Against Bett, Svavarsson shows that it is not nonsense to think that this inability to distinguish between things is the reason why our perceptions and opinions are untrue. To be sure, truthfulness itself is not dependent on the ability to distinguish, but the lack of this ability may be the reason why we cannot gain true perceptions or opinions (Svavarsson 2010: 45). In Sextus's understanding, such a thesis would be still dogmatic, but this kind of negative epistemological dogmatism has often befallen skeptics and it should not be the reason for Pyrrho's exclusion from the skeptical tradition. Pyrrho, as Svavarsson contends, "preserves as fundamental skeptical insight that one cannot decide how things are by nature" (Svavarsson 2010: 44).

An advantage of the metaphysical interpretation is its literal reading of Aristocles's text, a reading which runs afoul of later skeptics' theses. However, one should refrain from drawing too far-reaching conclusions from it. Kuzminski

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7   Adam Krokiewicz, in accordance with the previous tradition, interprets Pyrrho in epistemological terms, stating that what Pyrrho had in mind were things in the colloquial, and not the metaphysical, sense. Also Leon Joachimowicz adjusts Pyrrho's thought to neo-Pyrrhonism.

8   "In Sextus' own terms, Pyrrho would qualify as dogmatist rather than as skeptic." (Bett 2003: 4)

observes that the metaphysical formulation of the question [1] could be merely a reflection of the metaphysical approach held by a peripatetic Aristocles who was an intermediary (Kuzminski 2008: 39). Jacques Brunschwig writes that even if the formulation of the thesis [1a] was metaphysical, it would still carry antidogmatic overtones, since the statement of indistinguishability of things by nature makes it pointless to predicate the properties of things (Brunschwig 2006: 3). Let us add that Pyrrho was a pioneer of global skepticism, and it is a small wonder that he encountered problems with formulating his position. He was not prepared to defend his thesis against the charge of self-refutation (after all, he asserted that things are such that nothing can be asserted of them). Moreover, Pyrrho's thought is known to us merely through the intermediaries, which is one more reason to distance ourselves from the literal interpretation of their texts.

Bett himself, in his later text (see Bett 2010b: 7), abandons his earlier position and acknowledges that the choice between metaphysical and epistemological interpretation is irrelevant to the question whether Pyrrho was a skeptic. Here, Bett believes that regardless of which interpretation one assumes (whether metaphysical or epistemological), Aristocles's text is legitimized by the fact that Aenesidemus chose Pyrrho as the patron of the skeptical school in the 1st century BC.

There is also an ethical interpretation, which sees Pyrrho's statements merely as a set of ethical predicates (Decleva Caizzi 1981; Ausland 1989). This interpretation relies on Diogenes Laertius who gives only ethical examples ("…for he used to say that nothing was honourable or disgraceful, just or unjust" [DL 9.61]), as well as on Cicero who regards Pyrrho as a moralist (Ac. 2.130). In fact, Brunschwig's position, ascribing all epistemological insertions ([1b] and [2a]) to Timon (Brunschwig 1994: 211), is compatible with this ethical interpretation. Such interpretation is an attempt to discern and describe the main aspect of Pyrrho's position, but what speaks against it is the universal scope of Eusebius and Diogenes's accounts ("there was no such thing as downright truth" [DL 9.61]).

The answer [1b] suggests that truth and falsehood do not apply to human experience and beliefs. On the one hand, Pyrrho employs a radically objective concept of truth and falsehood but, on the other hand, against Aristotle he claims something more than just that human judgments are untrue. For he claims they are neither true nor false, a statement which is a negation of the principle of excluded middle. Adam Krokiewicz, Leo Groarke, and Giovanni Reale interpret this as a veiled repudiation of the concept of objective truth. Krokiewicz (2002) believes that Pyrrho shares here Protagoras' type of relativism, while Groarke (2006) points to antirealist trends in ancient thought. However, it is Buddhist logic invoked by Kuzminski (2008) that provides better explanatory context.

Giovanni Reale (inspired by Marcel Conche's book from 1973) even goes on to argue that Pyrrho's thought is driven by metaphysical nihilism, that is, by an utter negation of being (Reale 199a: 478). He believes that, in such worldview, Pyrrho might have followed the Megarians who, together with the Eleatics, regarded the world as a mere semblance or appearance, putting forward arguments against movement and multiplicity. Also Pyrrho's teacher Anaxarchos compared the world to a theater, dream or madness (M 7, 88).

What is important in such interpretation is to determine the extent of the world's apparentness. If the point were that nothing at all exists, then the thesis would simply refute itself. But Reale polemicizes with Conche and limits Pyrrho's negation of being solely to empirical being. He interprets Pyrrho as a religious mystic, who rejects Plato and Aristotle's metaphysics without negating the existence of an unknowable being given through a non-rational intuition. Krokiewicz's interpretation is weakened by Pyrrho's apparent aversion to sophists.

The answer to the question [2] is three-step. The thesis [2a] is an expression of doubt, the thesis [2b] is a prescription to suspend judgment, and the thesis [2c] determines the manner of speaking which corresponds to the Buddhist quadrilemma. If things are indistinguishable and human judgments can never be true, then it follows that one should rely neither on experience nor on opinions or one's own beliefs. What should one do then? At this point, Pyrrho's discourse shifts from critique to practical clues. The thesis [2b] is a formulation of the famous prescription to refrain from judgment. One should be "without opinions," *adoxastous*, which is one of skeptics' technical terms, whose usage by Aristocles proves his reliability as a commentator, given the fact that it is entirely absent from his own peripatetic vocabulary. The academic skeptics will later coin the term *epochē* to designate the suspension of judgment. This injunction of refraining from judgment provides a powerful counterargument to Bett's thesis, according to which Pyrrho was not a skeptic, since it is precisely the notion of suspension of judgment that constitutes the essence of ancient skepticism (Cp. Stopper 1983: 275; Svavarsson 2010: 49). It needs to be stressed here that, in general, the notion of *epochē* has always unified and distinguished the skeptical movement in Antiquity, both before the invention of the technical term *skeptikoi* and in relation to modern skepticism.

Apart from the suspension of judgment, Pyrrho pointed to the suspension of desire and ambition (refraining from taking any sides) and the suspension of all emotions. It is not hard to see that far from being one-dimensional, Pyrrho's prescription was applicable not merely to the intellect, but to the whole of conscious human existence, teaching how to guide and control one's own behavior. In this

respect, it closely resembled Buddhist therapeutic practices. In general, Pyrrho's solutions promoted the attitude of indifference in the intellectual, emotional, and volitional realms.

It is well-illustrated by Reale. If the world is a mere appearance disguising an unknowable being, whether divine or natural, then there seems to be only one proper response to this state of affairs, namely, indifference. If the world is an appearance, one should remain indifferent to it. This means that one should not rely on senses, accept judgments, feel emotions or be inclined toward anything. This is the attitude of a wise man who is well aware of the vanity of empirical world, but who nonetheless sees some value in himself which he struggles not to lose to this vanity. It makes no sense to ask how Pyrrho managed to save moral values in such a miserable world. For Pyrrho, peace and happiness are transcultural certainties that cannot be questioned, while philosophy is supposed only to provide recipes for achieving them.

The thesis [2c] advises one to say "of every single thing that it **no more** (*ou mallon*) **is than is not, or both is and is not, or neither is nor is not**." Krokiewicz (2002: 80) and Reale (1999a: 489) discern here a negation of the law of non-contradiction devised by Aristotle, of whom Pyrrho at least heard, given the fact that Callisthenes, Aristotle's nephew and pupil, took part in the expedition of Alexander the Great. Stopper (1983: 273) has a different opinion and doubts that Pyrrho knew Aristotle's esoteric writings. Regardless of these speculations, Pyrrho was familiar with the concept of objective truth through Plato, and knew a practical version of the principle of non-contradiction simply from common thinking. However, the principle of non-contradiction is not sufficient here, since besides its negation ("both is and is not") there is also the rest of the formula.

This formula becomes clear when we refer after Kuzminski (2008) to the Buddhist logic. In Madhyamaka Buddhism, already in Pyrrho's times (but it is probably also true with reference to a pre-Buddhist skeptic Sanjaya) a quadrilemma was developed which extended the range of logical possibilities beyond those known by Europeans through the classical logic. Apart from P and non-P, also other possibilities – of both P and non-P and of neither P nor non-P – were considered. In sum, there were four possibilities: 1) P, 2) non-P, 3) both P and non-P, 4) neither P nor non-P. As a Buddhist logician Nāgārjuna (1st–2nd century CE) wrote, "Everything is real and is not real, both real and not real, neither real nor not real. This is the Lord Buddha's teaching."

As Robert Hankinson (1995: 64) points out, the quadrilemma is mentioned in Aristotle's *Metaphysics*. Kuzminski adds that Aristotle might have had access to an appropriate manuscript by virtue of the rich tradition of Greek expeditions

to India. However, Aristotle does not seem to treat the quadrilemma seriously: "one who is in this condition will not be able either to speak or to say anything intelligible; for he says at the same time both 'yes' and 'no.' And if he makes no judgement but 'thinks' and 'does not think', indifferently, what difference will there be between him and a vegetable?" (*Metaphysics* 1008b, trans. W. D. Ross). Aristotle defends the law of non-contradiction and rejects the quadrilemma as an obstacle to rational discussion. He believes that one has to assert something in order for a discussion to be possible (*Metaphysics* 1006a).

The classical logic, based on the principle of non-contradiction, has dominated the European logic. This type of logic is useful for leading rational discussion in a precise language, but it does not account for ambiguous and unjustified statements. Pyrrho, who (as distinct from Aristotle) did not hope to gain knowledge of the world, invoked the Buddhist quadrilemma in order to express his pessimistic intuitions concerning human opinions about the world.

Indeed, the principle of non-contradiction is marginalized by the quadrilemma. This principle can be said to express the logic of objective being, while the quadrilemma expresses the logic of appearances. Within the latter, the principle of non-contradiction does not hold: in the world of appearances, the elements of contradiction – or, more precisely, opposition – can coexist in one entity and have a positive meaning.[9] Uttered contradictions are performative acts meant to liberate oneself from beliefs (Kuzminski 2008: 64). In Buddhist therapeutic practice, this purpose is served by antinomies.

Aristocles's text seems to have similar meaning. Things are indistinguishable, that is why we should refrain from judgment and say "it no more is than is not," or "both yes and no", in order to underscore that no statement we utter is adequate to our consciousness. The uttering of contradictory statements is meant to signal that words do not conform to thoughts and things. In the world of phenomena, contradiction is no longer a sin. Instead, it becomes an alert signal for an interlocutor or listener.

The thesis [3] promises that the following of this practice will shape the attitude of speechlessness (*aphasia*). *Aphasia* is not tantamount to an utter silence, since it is supposed to constitute a particular mode of thinking and speaking. Rather, it is a mode of speaking without asserting, a posture of constant doubt in

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9   In the European logic, certain intuitions of the quadrilemma are expressed through the logical square in which, besides contradiction, there are contrary and sub-contrary. Two contrary statements can be both false (All Xs are Ps, no X is P) and two subcontrary statements (Some Xs are Ps, some Xs are not Ps) can be both true. As a result, not every opposition is a contradiction.

one's own words. In the second phase of the process of shaping of this posture, when the world becomes completely indifferent, the state of *ataraxia*, that is, undisturbed peace and quietness, is produced.

Ataraxia was an ideal, to which the way was outlined by Pyrrho. It is well-known that he himself had trouble with achieving it. Martha Nussbaum points out that Pyrrho fell into anger when his sister was disrespected (Nussbaum 1994: 315; cf. DL 9.66). Others refer to the situation when he was frightened by a dog which was attacking him – and even ran away onto a tree (DL 9.66). There is also a less reliable anecdote in which Pyrrho refers to a non-conscious animal as an example of complete indifference: "when some people who were sailing with him were looking gloomy because of a storm, he kept a calm countenance, and comforted their minds, exhibiting himself on deck eating a pig, and saying that it became a wise man to preserve an untroubled spirit in that manner." (DL 9.68) This anecdote provides an important allegation against ancient skepticism: *ataraxia*, insofar as it is fully achieved, means a repudiation of human consciousness. Nausiphanes, Pyrrho's direct student, admired his way of life, but he rejected his theory: "he used to say that he should like to be endowed with the disposition of Pyrrho, without losing his own eloquence." (DL 9.64)

Pyrrho's skepticism, then, is not an autonomous philosophical position. It is merely a part of his ethics, a way of achieving ataraxia deemed as happiness. Thus, his position is rightly described as ethical skepticism.

It remains a mystery why Cicero, in his *Academic Books*, does not list Pyrrho among the skeptics. Some wish to use this fact as a premise to exclude Pyrrho from the skeptical tradition, dating its beginning from the academic skepticism. Cicero mentions Pyrrho ten times, but always in the ethical context, along with a rigorist moral philosopher Aristo of Chios. According to Cicero, Pyrrho used the term *apatheia*.

Cicero's texts, which are the oldest direct source on the ancient skepticism, seem to underpin the ethical interpretation of Pyrrho's thought. All the subsequent sources are possibly influenced by the neo-Pyrrhonist view. However, it is hard to dismiss these secondary sources, since they are numerous and seem impartial in presenting Pyrrho as the father of skepticism. Rather, one should assume that Cicero was not always well-informed. As a Roman, he had only a brief contact with Greek philosophy and the sources on which he drew might have been partisan (in the Academia Arcesilaus's skepticism was not linked to Pyrrho; cf. Ziemińska 2011).

One may agree with the thesis that Pyrrho's major interest was ethics – he searched for a prescription for a good, happy life. He was inspired by Indian

thought which seemed best for the hard times. The Greek notion of *eudaimonia* was now identified with the rejection of desires, emotions, and beliefs. In order to achieve this ethical purpose it is required to go through the epistemological phase: the mind had to be cleansed of all desires, emotions, and beliefs. The skeptical suspension of judgment is a part of the effort leading to the absence of suffering. Pyrrho was a Greek intellectual who, inspired by the wisdom of the East, presented a thoroughgoing critique of Greek philosophy and culture. He recognized the weaknesses not only of common opinions but also of philosophical positions immersed in endless arguments and uncertain, that is to say, having no guarantee of being true. He came to the conclusion that the best one could do was to suspend judgment on all questions, to become indifferent to all opinions, and, in consequence, to indulge in a peaceful life. Thus, the ethical reasons had led to the first skeptical declaration: it is necessary to suspend all judgments.

Aristotle who inquired into nature had never gone so far. He believed that uncertain theories are better than none. Pyrrho, on the contrary, did not believe that knowledge of the world was attainable for men. He chose another option: to him, the avoidance of falsehood was far more important that the search for truth. The function of the wise is to expose the falsehood of all beliefs without stating anything. There is no testimony to this, but Pyrrho must have been clever and persuasive in showing the weaknesses of all beliefs (perhaps, by driving them to contradiction, as his thesis [2c] suggests), since Timon was so determined in criticizing all thinkers and Arcesilaus discerned in Pyrrho's attitude a chance to defeat the Stoics in discussion.

It is probable that already Pyrrho had faced the problem of the coherence of global skepticism. It is testified by the anecdote about the renowned Greek painter Apelles of Kos. Apelles was a court painter of Alexander the Great, which is why the anecdote is said to have come directly from Pyrrho (PH 1.28–1.29). The painter could not paint a horse's foam and he was so upset that he flung at the picture a sponge and to his astonishment the mark of the sponge produced the effect of a foam on the horse's muzzle. For Pyrrho, this anecdote provided a response for the allegation that he did not want to judge about anything, but at the same time claimed to know how to find peace and happiness.[10] This was supposed to be an accidental experience of peace which happened to him and which

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10 Similarly, the example of Demophon, who "was cold in the sun, and warm in the shade" (DL 9.80–81), was also given by Pyrrho himself. Subsequently, it was used by the skeptics who designed the Ten Modes against the validity of sensory cognition. Demophon was a courtier and cook of Alexander the Great.

he wished to spread among others who wanted to imitate him. Apelles's case was considered as a model example of becoming a skeptic (Perin 2010b: 17).

Both Aristocles and Eusebius bring the accusation of incoherence against Timon. "Timon wrote a lot about his conversation with Pyrrho, but how could he know that this conversation actually happened? After all, they 'no more' met than did not and 'no more' spoke with each other than did not, since they both dismissed sensory impressions as merely subjective illusions (similar to dreams and tantamount to the hallucinations of a madman […])! What right did they have to accuse other thinkers of lack of intelligence (*agnoia*) and of inability to philosophize, without denying these intellectual abilities to themselves?!"[11] (Krokiewicz 2002: 76) Krokiewicz poses to important questions: how can we justify the skeptical position and how to reconcile it with everyday life? Both these questions contain the accusation of incoherence against Pyrrho and Timon. Every rational justification of Pyrrho's position (that is, of skepticism) is inconsistent with its meaning. All everyday actions, including the very conversation between the two thinkers, undermines the validity of Pyrrho's position (since **a thing no more is than is not**).

3. Academic Skepticism (Arcesilaus and Carneades)

Arcesilaus of Pitane (Aeolis) was a scholarch of the Platonic Academy and the founder of the so-called Second or Middle Academy, who initiated the academic skepticism. At that time, Timon, a follower of Pyrrho, resided in Athens. He met with Arcesilaus's disciple Lacides and accused Arcesilaus of repeating Pyrrho's beliefs without even mentioning his name.[12] As Sextus Empiricus observed, Arcesilaus "is not found making assertions about reality or unreality of anything […] he suspends judgment about everything." (PH 1.232) Arcesilaus, in turn, claimed to have merely developed Plato's thought. Also Cicero assumed this view and he wrote that in Plato's writings "nothing is affirmed, there are many arguments

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11 The same accusation was formulated by Aristotle in his discussion with an anonymous skeptic: "For why does a man walk to Megara and not stay at home, when he thinks he ought to be walking there? Why does he not walk early some morning into a well or over a precipice, if one happens to be in his way? Why do we observe him guarding against this, evidently because he does not think that falling in is alike good and not good?" (*Metaphysics*, 1008b).

12 Athenaeus, an erudite, rhetorician and grammarian from the turn of the second and third centuries, wrote in his *The Deipnosophists* (or *Sophists at Dinner*) that Timon and Lacides also competed in drinking (Krokiewicz 2002: 97).

on either side, everything is under investigation, and nothing is claimed to be certain." (Ac. 1.46)

However, given the Platonic theory of ideas, Timon's active presence in Athens, and the similarity between Pyrrho's and Arcesilaus's convictions, it is hard to concur with the opinion that Arcesilaus developed Plato's thought. Both Diogenes and Sextus repeated the common opinion about Arcesilaus: "Plato in front, Pyrrho behind, Diodorus in the middle." (PH 1.234). Officially, Arcesilaus was a scholarch of the Academy, but he used a dialectical method in the vein of a Megarian Diodorus Cronus and, in fact, propagated Pyrrho's beliefs. Numenius, in Eusebius's account, described "Arcesilaus as a Pyrrhonist in all but name." (Reale 1985: 333)

Giovanni Reale is right to observe that,

> In Socrates and Plato there are clearly aporetic treatises, positions of doubt, unexpected suspensions of judgment: but they are almost always ironically and maieutically aimed at the rediscovery of the truth or, for the most part, at mediating the preparation for this rediscovery. Doubt is always a means, never an end, in Socrates and Plato. (Reale 1985: 329)

Of course, Socrates and Plato were not self-declared skeptics, even if they often expressed doubts. Arcesilaus, on the contrary, declared himself as skeptic, probably under the influence of Pyrrho's thought and perhaps because this was a good strategy to adopt in polemicizing against the Stoics. However, Arcesilaus's skepticism had a different nature than Pyrrho's. He rejected Pyrrho's ethics (with *ataraxia* as its main purpose) and employed his epistemology, not to achieve happiness, but to debunk the Stoic views. Thus, skepticism became an epistemological position.

Now, let us discuss Cicero's favorable account of Arcesilaus's views (Arcesilaus himself did not trust his thoughts to writing):

> Arcesilaus used to deny that anything could be known, not even the residual claim Socrates had allowed himself, i.e., the knowledge that he didn't know anything. He thought that everything was hidden so deeply and that nothing could be discerned or understood. For these reasons, he thought that we shouldn't assert or affirm anything, or approve it with assent: we should always curb our rashness and restrain ourselves from any slip. But he considered it particularly rash to approve something false or unknown, because nothing was more shameful than for one's assent or approval to outrun knowledge or apprehension. His practice was consistent with this theory, so that by arguing against everyone's views he led most of them away from their own: when arguments of equal weight were found for the opposite sides of the same subject, it was easier to withhold assent from either side. (Ac. 1.45)

Arcesilaus's critique was directed against his older contemporary Zeno of Citium, a fellow philosopher and the founder of the Stoic school. Zeno was inspired

by Pyrrho's ethical ideas, recommending indifference as a way of achieving happiness. Apparently, however, he did not share Pyrrho's conception of the world and knowledge, since he proposed the criterion of truth as cataleptic sense perception/impression/representation (self-evident, certain, grasping the reality in the same way as a hand grasps things; Ac. 1.41), which is strikingly clear and "draws us into assent" (M. 7.257).[13] He believed that sense perception was a natural source of knowledge and that truth was sometimes accessible to men. Apparently, he did not want to accept Pyrrho's nihilism of which he presumably heard much.

Arcesilaus, in turn, was unwilling to accept the idea of cataleptic perception. In his eyes, this kind of perception could not provide a guarantee of truth and could be easily mistaken with a false representation, which might seem equally self-evident (such as dream, drunken or mad hallucination, etc.). To the Stoic answer that the cataleptic representation constituted the highest form of certainty, being far more self-evident than its non-cataleptic counterpart, Arcesilaus objected that the boundaries of certainty are necessarily vague. He also cited an argument called Sorites: what is the amount of grain that makes a heap, how many hairs may be lost before a man can fairly be called bald? (Krokiewicz 2002: 112).

Thus, "no true appearance is found to be such as could not be false" (M 7.154) This probably means that every impression regarded as true can turn out to be false. "[…] every true impression is such that one could also have a false impression just like it." (Ac. 2.40) Therefore, we cannot trust our perceptions, even the cataleptic ones and "the wise person suspends judgment about everything." (M 7.155) The suspension of judgment, or *epochē*, was recommended by the Stoics themselves with regard to the non-cataleptic, that is to say, non-evident perceptions. Arcesilaus invokes this term to assert that, insofar as one can never achieve certainty, *epochē* should be applied to all judgments (PH 1.232). The term *epochē* (ἐποχή) was coined in the heat of Arcesilaus's dispute with the Stoics (Reale 1985: 331). Subsequently, it has become the key term designating the skeptical position, which consisted, first and foremost, in suspending all judgments (total *epochē*).

An evident answer to this position of total suspension of judgment was the allegation of the impossibility of acting, which I have mentioned while discussing another adversary of the Stoics, namely Timon. Arcesilaus knew a response to this allegation:

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13 The term *cataleptic* derives from Greek *katalambanein* "to seize upon".

who suspends judgment about everything,[14] will regulate his choices and avoidances and generally his actions by the reasonable (*eulogon*), and by going forward in accordance with this criterion he will act rightly. For happiness comes about through insight, and insight lies in right actions, and the right action is that which, when done, has a reasonable justification. (M 7.158; translation modified)

Plutarch proposes a more skeptical account of Arcesilaus's views. The Stoics assumed a threefold structure of knowledge: stimulus, belief, response, in which belief was considered as a necessary condition of action. Arcesilaus rejects this condition and claims that the sole stimulus-response model is sufficient to account for human knowledge. Hence, after suspending judgment on all matters, that is to say, in the absence of beliefs about everything, action is still possible (Plutarch, *Against Colotes* 1122A–D). If Sextus maintained that Arcesilaus was a proponent of the conception of weak assent, then Plutarch attributed to him a conception of non-assent, of action without belief.

Apart from the issue of *apraxia*, the impossibility of action, the basic question is whether Arcesilaus expressed his own views (the thesis of *akatalēpsia*, that nothing can be known, and the thesis of *epochē*, that all judgments should be suspended), or merely polemicized with the Stoics (the dialectical interpretation). If he expressed any views, how could they be reconciled with the principle of *epochē* (the allegation of inconsistency)?

The simplest way of avoiding the allegation of inconsistency is the dialectical interpretation (Couissin 1929), according to which Arcesilaus's skepticism is not a philosophical doctrine but it is a method of refuting the views of others, leading to the suspension of judgment, and not to the expression of any statement. In this interpretation, Arcesilaus, strictly speaking, does not hold any views (including the skeptical ones). He not only does not acknowledge the Stoic criterion of truth but he also does not accept the thesis of the impossibility of knowledge and the thesis of the suspension of judgment about everything. Arcesilaus's activity would be a practical activity typical of a sophist who hypothetically acknowledges his adversary's principles and assumptions, but only in order to reduce them to contradiction (*argumentum ad hominem*). Most often Arcesilaus adopts the hypothetical assumptions of the Stoic philosophy (its conception of knowledge, beliefs, logical principles, and empirical data) and then draws skeptical conclusions from the Stoic views (the theses of the impossibility of knowledge and of *epochē*). This inconsistency would not concern Arcesilaus, because insofar as he

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14   Richard Bett proposes another translation of this passage: "not suspending judgment about everything, he will regulate his choices and avoidances and generally his actions by the reasonable (*eulogon*)."

does not accept any theses, they a fortiori cannot be inconsistent. It is rather the Stoic worldview that is said to lead to contradiction. Also the theory of rational action (*eulogon*) is not an expression of Arcesilaus's beliefs, but it is merely supposed to indicate an alternative to the Stoicism – a way of acting without holding any beliefs. Is this interpretation acceptable?

There have been several arguments made against it. As Harald Thorsrud (2010: 68) rightly observes, if Arcesilaus does not hold any views, then why does he reflect on the rightness of action, devising his theory of action without beliefs? After all, *epochē* is not a result of decision. The theory of *eulogon* as put forward by Sextus invokes the notions of reasonable justification and reasonable decision, which is why does not fit in the dialectical interpretation. In addition, if his views can be reduced to an analysis of the Stoic position, then why Arcesilaus replies to the allegation of the impossibility of action instead of being content with the fact that the Stoics are in trouble at this point? I believe that Arcesilaus begins with the skeptical assumptions, but only in order to refine them: he rejects the criterion of truth, the conditions of rational beliefs, and the theory of action. Or, more precisely, he adjust them to the requirements of skepticism, rather than simply interpreting them. Scholars highlight that the allegation of *apraxia* is important to Arcesilaus, that he seeks to show how to be a skeptic without being unable to act (Perin 2010b: 69). This attitude cannot be reconciled with that of a pure dialectician who is preoccupied merely with refuting the Stoic views. Besides, if Arcesilaus does not hold any views, it is hard to understand why, and in what sense, he recommends *epochē*.

Cicero, Sextus and Diogenes present Arcesilaus as a proponent of the thesis of the impossibility of knowledge and of the suspension of judgment. However, elsewhere Cicero attributes to him the following belief: "As for the wise person, Arcesilaus agrees with Zeno that his greatest strength is precisely to make sure that he is not tricked and see to it he is not deceived." (Ac. 2.77) Both Cicero and Sextus present his position as inconsistent. While Cicero writes as if he was not fully aware of this inconsistency, Sextus willfully presents Arcesilaus as a crypto-dogmatic who purports to be a skeptic. A contemporary scholar John Cooper (2004) also claims that Arcesilaus's position is inconsistent. Casey Perin has a different view and believes that, in this case, Arcesilaus simply accepts a belief which he should not accept; or, in other words, he accepts a belief which is groundless (Perin 2010a: 147).

Indeed, Arcesilaus does not accept the two contradictory theses, and this is not a mere logical (material) inconsistency. It seems that the inconsistency in question is of pragmatic nature (the act of asserting that knowledge does not

exist, silently assumes the existence of knowledge about this state of affairs and therefore contradicts its own content). The thesis itself is not inherently inconsistent, but the act of asserting it is misleading – it leads to a pragmatic contradiction. Similarly, one cannot accept the principle of *epochē* without denying it (since according to this principle nothing can be accepted). I shall elaborate on this problem in the section 5 devoted to Sextus's position.

If Arcesilaus does not assert the principle of *epochē*, then what is it that he does? What is left is either weak assent or acceptance without acknowledgement (as in the case of hypotheses). This second option is only locally applicable, since hypotheses are accepted on the basis of the rest of knowledge. That is why it would contradict the dialectical interpretation of Arcesilaus's whole position. The notion of weak assent seems to be the only plausible explanation from today's perspective, but, historically, it was still in a seed stage in Carneades. There is also a third option: one should not forget that Arcesilaus worked at the Academy and – as St. Augustin suggests – accepted the theory of ideas, which, in local skepticism, served as a backdrop for cognition of the material world. Let us examine how Carneades deals with this problem.

Carneades of Cirene (ca. 214–129 BC) was a scholarch of the Platonic Academy and the founder of the so-called New Academy who creatively continued Arcesilaus's line of skepticism. Carneades became famous as a deputy who delivered – in 155 BC in Rome, in the presence of eminent orators such as Cato the Elder – two speeches concerning justice. As Lactantius writes (Div. 5.14 = LS 68M), at the first day Carneades praised justice for its connection to wisdom, listing numerous arguments in its favor, and at the second day he refuted all these arguments, showing the connection of justice to folly. According to Lactantius, for Carneades this was a rhetorical display in providing arguments pro and contra. As Plutarch observes, this outraged Cato who convinced the Roman Senate to close the case immediately, so that Carneades would no longer demoralize educated (that is to say, Greek-speaking) Roman youth (Krokiewicz 2002: 157).

Carneade's views are known to us through the works of his disciple, Cleitomachos, and insofar as they were registered in Cicero and Sextus's texts. Cicero personally knew late Carneade's disciples, especially Philo of Larissa.

Carneades developed his skeptical position in opposition to Chrysippus, the scholarch of the Stoic school. He continued the critique of the Stoic criterion of truth qua cataleptic perception/representation. Carneades believed that, even in the best conditions for observation, we have absolutely no guarantee that we "only assent to true impressions that cannot be false." (Ac. 2.58) Developing Arcesilaus's critique, he pointed to the objects that are hard to distinguish (eggs,

twins, pillars), dreams and peculiar states of mind (illusions, ecstasy, madness). Therefore, Carneades concluded, it is impossible to find infallible and evident certainty (*perspicuitas*, *enargeia*) and, consequently, there is no such thing as infallible cataleptic perception to which the Stoics refer. "There are some false impressions", and "those impressions aren't apprehensible." (Ac. 2.83). "I recognize, after all, that my impressions misrepresent the oar and show several colours on the pigeon's neck, though there isn't more than one." (Ac. 2.79). The sun seems to be smaller than Earth, and a large ship seems very little when viewed from a distance (Ac. 2.82). This critique of sensory cognition is supplemented by Cicero with the arguments against the value of rational cognition as well as the liar paradox and some difficulties inherent in the law of excluded middle (Ac. 2.930–96). In effect, Sextus can write that, according to Carneades, "nothing is without qualification a criterion of truth – not reason, not sense-perception, not appearance, not anything else that there is; for all of these as a group deceive us." (M 7.159) According to Carneades, in this situation one should suspend all judgments (Greek *epochē* and Latin *adsensionis retentio*) and not "assent to anything at all." (Ac. 2.104) He believes that this is the only reasonable attitude to adopt toward the impossibility of distinguishing truth from falsehood, the only attitude adequate for the "wise person". The Stoics, in response to the principle of *epochē*, formulated the counter-argument of the impossibility of action (*apraxia*): life – at least good life, human, not animal – requires holding beliefs, and hence the total *epochē* would lead to the impossibility of action.

In response to this allegation, Carneades formulated his theory, according to which action is based on plausible (*pithanon*) impressions, and which has later been called the "theory of probability", after the Greek term *pithanon* was translated into Latin as *probabile* by Cicero, who[15] used the verb *probare* in the sense of "approving" or "accepting". In this case, *probabile* meant "that which invites approval or assent." (Frede 1998b: 142) Today, it is believed that a better translation of this word would be *credibile* (Krokiewicz 2002: 159; Wesoły 2007: 84). Leo Groarke explains that both Greek *pithanon* and Latin *probabile* had a subjective character.

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15 "Probabile aliquid esse et quasi veri simile" (Ac. 2.32). Cicero came up with an alternative translation of *pithanon* as *verisimile*, but the term was not adopted in medieval writings, and it was not until contemporary times that it provided the basis for the concept of verisimilitude, describing the degree to which the truth is approximated, or the so-called "truthlikeness". Karl Popper used the concept of verisimilitude in order to distinguish a particular type of scientific theory which is false as a whole, but which has a larger or lesser number of true consequences and in that sense approximates the truth. Of course, different theories approximate the truth in different degrees.

However, Cicero's notion of probability should not be mistaken with its contemporary meaning, which was deprived of this subjective quality, perhaps because of the development of the mathematical theory of probability (Groarke 1984: 285). In English translations of Cicero, the adjectives *persuasive* (Brittan 2006: xxvi), *plausible* or *convincing* are used instead of *probable*. There is, however, no error in treating Carneades's conception as a theory of subjective probability (Pacewicz 2007: 80).[16] In Sextus's account, Carneades argues that truth might be an objective question, while probability is always subjective.[17] Cicero adds that this is also how Cleitomachos interprets this Carneades's belief (Ac. 2.99).

> … since he [Carneades] too requires some criterion for the conduct of life and for the achievement of happiness, he is in effect compelled for his own part to take a stand on this, helping himself to the persuasive appearance and the one that is persuasive as well as not turned away and gone over in detail. (M 7.166)

An impression[18] is probable (in the specified sense) insofar as it is "apparently true" (M 7.169) and "in addition to appearing true, also has its appearance of being true to an extreme degree" (M 7.172). If it appears as false, it is described as improbable, unlikely to be true. But, at the same time, an apparently false impression can become apparently true, thereby receiving the status of probability ("many false [impressions] are persuasive"; Ac. 2.103). Furthermore, our impressions are interrelated with one another, which is why certain impressions can increase their probability if they appear as "irresistible", that is to say, if they are coherent with our previous impressions. "The Academic makes his judgment as to the truth by a cluster of appearances, and given that none of the appearances in the cluster turns him away as being false." (M7.179) Even more probable is an impression which is "carefully scrutinized" with respect to the psychical condition

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16 In contemporary times, at least three types of probability are invoked: objective (based on the frequency of occurrences of certain events), subjective (as the degree to which the subject is convinced of something), and the Bayesian probability (which is a synthesis of the two and is based on the knowledge of experts). Cicero wrote only about the notion of subjective probability.

17 "The appearance […] would have two states, one in relation to the thing that appears, the second in relation to the person having the appearance […] the thing that appears […] is either true of false […] As regards its state in relation to the person having the appearance […] it is called by the Academics *reflection* and *persuasiveness* and *persuasive appearance* […]" (M 7.168) [translator's note].

18 Because of the differences between the terminological choices made in the English translations of Sextus and Cicero, henceforth the term *appearance* will be used alternately with *impression* [translator's note].

of the subject, the distinction between dream and waking, the mind's abilities, the atmospheric conditions, the distance adopted by the subject (if it is not too long), the length of observation period (if it is not too short), etc. "Even more trustworthy than the appearance that is not turned away, and most perfect, is the one that produces judgment, which together with being not turned away is also gone over in detail." (M 7.181) Carneades describes the case of a man who saw a rolled-up rope in an unlit room, thinking it was a serpent. Even if such impression appears as evident, but the matter is so important that it requires further testing (one should check, for example, if the "serpent" is moving or even poke it with a stick in order to exclude the possibility that it is sleeping).

What ensues is a three-fold hierarchy of probability: (1) probability which consists only in the fact that something appears as true in an evident manner; (2) probability based on obviousness and coherence between different impressions; and (3) probability based on obviousness, coherence, and confirmation through scrutiny and further examination. "[…] on random matters we use just the persuasive appearance as criterion, on more important matters we use the one that is not turned away, and on matters that contribute to happiness the one that is explored all round." (M 7.184)

There is an ongoing discussion whether guiding one's actions with the principle of probability (*sequens probabilitatem, adprobari*; Ac. 2.104) requires one to hold beliefs, and whether Carneades's words concerning *epochē* and probability should be considered as his own view. Already Sextus accused Carneades of negative dogmatism, which could be seen in his assent to the thesis that truth is unknowable (PH 1.3, 1.226). Nonetheless, Cicero's *Academic Books* make this clear that Sextus's accusation was ungrounded. Carneades, at least in Cleitomachos's account, is explicit that a skeptic cannot accept the thesis that "nothing is apprehensible" (Ac. 2.28), because what such statement implies is either a contradiction or an unjustified exception. Cicero reported the discussion between two factions interpreting Carneade's conception in different terms. The first one was represented by Cleitomachos, the second by Philo of Larissa. This discussion is continued by contemporary scholars, some of whom take Cleitomachos's side (Bett 1990), while others argue in favor of Philo (Thorsrud 2009).

Cleitomachos distinguished between the subjective and objective aspects of perceptions. In the objective aspect, our perceptions provide no guarantee of being true, but in the subjective aspect, they are credible, inclining one to accept them and act on their basis. Cleitomachos also distinguished between the levels of theory and action. Assent (Greek *synkatathesis*, or Latin *adsentire* in Cicero) is the acceptance of something as true; while approval (Latin *adprobari*) is an action based on

information which is regarded as if it was true, but which is not accepted as true (Bett 1990: 14; Brittan 2006: 27). The Carneadesian concept of approval is problematic, since it was the seed of a new concept – that of weak assent. From the historical viewpoint, it is hard to determine whether this is a weak assent (non-certainty), or the absence of assent to any judgment (non-acknowledgement of truth). According to Cleitomachos, approval is not a type of belief (which implies acknowledgment of truth), but it is precisely a total absence of belief. It is not about a weaker assent or weaker belief, but it is about action without belief. But why should doubting be identified with a total absence of assent? Cleitomachos argues for total suspension of judgment, that is, *epochē*, on the level of theory, but he recommends that, in action, one guide oneself by what is reliable or credible. However, how can one, without having any beliefs, guide one's actions by what is credible? As the three-fold scale of probability suggests, the decision-making concerning taking up or giving up action consists in the balancing of reasons. It seems that this process engages one's will and requires one to have some initial data and assumptions. At least part of these should be approved as self-evident or treated as true. It is hard to imagine how this process is possible without at least weak assent. It is in accordance with this doubt that Philo develops his interpretation.

According to Philo, approval is a kind of acceptance of something as true, that is to say, a kind of belief, an opinion without certainty. Far from being merely an involuntary acceptance, the opinions might be rational. And a skeptic formulates and holds rational beliefs in the conditions of uncertainty. This version of Carneade's views is criticized by Sextus, who believed that a wise person has no right to make rational choices between appearances. However, Philo's version, through Sextus, was attributed to Carneades as a moderate skeptic and a probabilist. In practice, however, there is no significant difference between these two interpretations. They both negate the existence of knowledge and they both allow for opinions. What is different is only the status of opinion: in Philo, it is rational but uncertain, in Cleitomachos it is involuntary and irrational, because imposed by the necessity to act (hence, it can never be an indication of truth).

The reflection on the notion of approval is linked to the discussion between the proponents of the dialectical interpretation (Allen 1994) and those in favor of the non-dialectical interpretation (Throsrud 2009). The dialectical interpretation denies holding any beliefs to Carneades, attributing to him merely the deployment of skeptical method, which consists in undermining others' claims (Carneades's discussion with the Stoics or other thinkers). The non-dialectical interpretation attributes to Carneades beliefs with weak assent. The dialectical interpretation was to avoid inconsistency (Machuca: 2011: 262).

The weakness of the dialectical interpretation lies in the problem with the concept of approval and the theory of probability. If Carneades did not hold any beliefs, then why had he distinguished approval as a weaker type of acceptance? One may justify this difference by making a radical distinction between theory and practice (as proposed by Cleitomachos). However, from the perspective of contemporary theory of action, this distinction is highly questionable. In a situation in which Carneades himself was hesitant, and his disciples did not reach agreement regarding the interpretation of his thought, Carneades's approval would be best described, in contemporary terms, as weak assent, and his position as fallibilism (uncertainty and guiding oneself by subjective probability).

An additional problem is a local range of the dialectical interpretation. If Carneades's skepticism was merely a method, it would be important to notice that every method relies on certain theoretical assumptions. All questions have their assumptions stemming from the standards of knowledge, rules of inference, empirical data, etc. In other words, skepticism as a method should be appraised within a particular worldview. Augustin speculated that the academic skeptics were in fact Platonists, and their skepticism concerned only our knowledge of the empirical world. Skepticism can be also linked with other ontologies, such as Heraclitean or empirical (Aenesidemus, Sextus Empiricus). This dialectical skepticism is not theoretically self-reliant – it entails hidden assumptions, which is why it cannot be purely dialectical.

According to Philo's interpretation, Carneades's can be said to hold beliefs with weak assent. From this perspective, there is no inconsistency in his position, which, moreover, does not require the dialectical interpretation. Philo's interpretation can be described as non-dialectical and fallibilist. Perhaps, despite all subtle disputes in this regard, that is why Carneades's thought has been interpreted in Philo's way the modern period. (Thorsrud 2009: 83). I develop this kind of interpretation in Zieminska (2015).

However, it is worthy to quote Cicero (106–43 BC) listing the accusations put forward against the Academic skeptics by a later Academy's scholarch, Antiochus of Ascalon (ca. 125–68 BC), who turned the Academy back from its skeptical way, providing the most wide-ranging critique of skepticism in Antiquity.

1. The skeptical critique of sense cognition was inconsistent:

Their worst mistake […] is to take these two radically inconsistent premises to be consistent:

[1] there are some false impressions (and in accepting this they own that some are true); and then again,
[3] there is no difference at all between true and false impressions.

> But you assumed the first premise as if there were a difference—hence the former is undermined by the latter, and the latter by the former. (Ac. 2.44)

As Antiochus observes, the questioning of the cognitive value of perceptions implies that one has to rely on some information and make some distinctions. If a skeptic does not see any grounds to accept any perceptions, then there are no reasons for any critique either. Such a critique would be necessarily self-contradictory. Indeed, the accusation of inconsistency was widespread: the Academics, Cicero writes, "found themselves in the nasty position that there's always someone to ask them, no matter what they say, 'So that, at least, is something you apprehend?'" (Ac. 2.35)

2. The theory of probability (persuasiveness) was inconsistent:

> But, in that case, what do you mean by your 'persuasive impressions'? If you mean that you rely on what strikes you and seems persuasive at, in effect, first glance, what could be sillier than that? But if they say that they follow impressions that arise from some examination or detailed consideration, they still won't find any way out. First, because our trust in impressions that don't differ at all is removed from all of them equally. Second, because they allow that after the wise person has played his part thoroughly by subjecting everything to a meticulous examination, it's still possible for his impression to be truth-like and yet very far from being true. (Ac. 2.35–36)

Antiochus argues that the distinction between probable (persuasive) and improbable (unconvincing) beliefs requires having information that is considered as true. Hence, without the assumption of truth there would be no probability ("truthlikeness"). All beliefs would have to be considered as equally uncertain and there would be no basis for preferring some over others. To prefer some data over other data is to accept it as true (for example, by assuming self-evidence of rational and sense cognition), which is already a departure from the skeptical position. This allegation of inconsistency will be repeated by Aenesidemus and St. Augustine.

3. The skeptical critique of rational cognition was inconsistent (the skeptics, in their investigations, scrupulously distinguish between concepts and conduct reasonings):

> Hence, if an argument that has advanced by relying on apprehended premises has the result that nothing is apprehensible—how could we find anything more inconsistent than that? (Ac. 2.44)

Thus, although they despise reason, they nonetheless use it. Paradoxically enough, the skeptics make a theoretical argument against the possibility of theory.

4. Also the argument of impossibility of action was employed:

> For by doing away with assent, they have done away with every mental motion and practical action—something that not only can't be done rightly, but can't be done at all! (Ac. 2.62)

Skepticism immobilizes all actions and will (the accusation of *apraxia*).

5. Finally, there was an accusation concerning the impossibility of rational discussion:

> … there is no reason to argue with people who approve nothing. (Ac. 2.17)

Here, Aristotle's argument (mentioned earlier in this study) was repeated.

Cicero gave the following reply to this critique: "[what Antiochus said] would be right if we Academics did away with truth altogether. Yet we don't, since we discern as many true as false things. But our discerning is a kind of *approval:* we don't find any sign of apprehension." (Ac. 2.111) He defended Carneades's position as consistent, and (like Philo) attributed to him the doctrine of fallibilism: "just as he holds those as persuasive rather than apprehended principles, so with this one, that nothing is apprehensible." (Ac. 2.110) This was also Cicero's own view: "he stated emphatically that nothing can be apprehended by man." (CA 3.7) For Cicero, skepticism was wisdom without certainty (Schmitt 1972). What remains a puzzle, however, Cicero took Cleitomachos's side in the dispute between him and Philo of Larissa concerning right interpretation of Carneades's thought. (Ac. 2.78) Perhaps, he considered Cleitomachos's version as an ideal, albeit very difficult to achieve. In practice, at any rate, he followed Philo's line of thought. He regretted not being himself a skeptic as if he was not fully aware of general difficulties concerning total suspension of judgment.

Antiochus's critique is appropriate with regard to an extreme version skepticism as Cleitomachos interprets it – a view acknowledged also by Cicero. Defense against Antiochus's accusations rests on a withdrawal to a moderate skeptical position, fallibilism in the vein of Philo of Larissa, and keep the name "skepticism" for such a position. This kind of Ciceronian skepticism avoided the accusations of inconsistency and impossibility of action; it explained how a skeptic can live, philosophize, and have his own beliefs. Many philosophers of the modern period will accept this version of skepticism (e.g. John of Salisbury, Michel de Montaigne, Pierre Daniel Huet, Simon Foucher, David Hume). However, the Academic skepticism in the fallibilist interpretation weakens the principle of *epochē*, which is why it meets the accusation abandoning the idea of skepticism.

Antiochus has initiated the return of the Academy to the Platonic tradition and a positive doctrine of knowledge. Many scholars (for example, Giovanni Reale)

believe that Aenesidemus of Knossos was one of the academics who rejected these changes, abandoned the Academy, and renewed the Pyrrhonian skepticism. Cicero's defense proved to be futile, as the paths of the Academy and skepticism diverged more and more widely. After the experiences in the Academy, the successive phase of skepticism turned out to be more sophisticated and well prepared to reply to the accusations of inconsistency and impossibility of action.

4. Later Pyrrhonism (Aenesidemus and Agrippa)

In the 1st century of the old era a new sceptical school was founded in Alexandria by Aenesidemus of Knossos under the aegis of the return to original Pyrrho's thought. Aenesidemus lived in Antiochus and Cicero's times,[19] but Cicero did not mention him at all. This somewhat puzzling circumstance has led an Italian scholar Fernanda Decleva Caizzi to put forward a thesis that Aenesidemus was an outside critic of the Academia without ever being its student (Decleva Caizzi 1992: 185). Aenesidemus dedicates his work to Lucius Tubero, with whom he met in the town of Aegae in 61–58 BC, and who was related to Cicero's family (being a legate of Cicero's brother Quintus who served as a proconsul in Asia). According to Decleva Caizzi, if Aenesidemus was in the Academia, Cicero should have known about it. Aenesidemus gained information concerning the academics' views from Tuberon in the town where they had met (and where Timon of Philus used to live) or in Alexandria where Antiochus of Ascalon resided. This may also explain how Aenesidemus gained information on Pyrrho's life and views.

As already pointed out, Cicero considered Pyrrho as a rigorous moralist like Aristo of Chios, rather than a skeptic. Aenesidemus was mentioned by Aristocles as cited by Eusebius (*Preparation for the Gospel*, 14.18), and whence we know that Aenesidemus led a school in Alexandria. Diogenes Laertius (9.116) writes about Aenesidemus's place of birth. Main sources of information on Aenesidemus's views are: Photius,[20] Diogenes Laertius, Sextus Empiricus and Philo of Alexandria.

In the work *Pyrrhoneia* reported and discussed by Photius, Aenesidemus makes his assessment of the academic skepticism. First of all, he attacks Philo of Larissa for interpreting Carneades as a fallibilist while claiming (with a weak assent) that "nothing is apprehensible" (Ac. 2.28). Aenesidemus highlights that consistent skeptics, that is to say, proponents of Pyrrho "determine absolutely

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19 He dedicated his work to Lucius Tubero, a Cicero's relative. Cf. *Bibliotheca* 169b.
20 Photius was a ninth century erudite and a patriarch of Constantinople, the author of *Bibliotheca*.

nothing, not even this very claim that nothing is determined" (Wesoły 2007: 89), which is why he wrote "the Academics […] are doctrinaire about many things. They give firm determinations for many things, while expressing dissent about others." (*Bibliotheca* 169b; translation modified) "For if it is not known that this thing is good or bad, or that this is true but that false, and this existent but that non-existent, it must certainly be admitted that each of them is incognitive." (*Bibliotheca* 170a) In other words, if nothing is known, it is impossible to consistently state that everything is unknowable. This is an accusation of negative dogmatism and inconsistency, but also, and above all, of deviating from the path of consistent skepticism. Weak assent or guiding oneself with probability is a repudiation of the skeptical principle of suspension of judgment. What is more, Aenesidemos finds in the academics some decisive statements (for example, in ethical matters). As he argues, the academics are skeptics when they doubt about the knowability of truth, but they are not skeptics when they try do determine probability and improbability. He thereby calls into question the academic's way for avoiding the accusations of the impossibility of action and inconsistency of views.

The critique of the academics reveals Aenesidemus's radicalism, as he scrupulously lists stances which are inaccessible for a genuine skeptic.

> Thus the followers of Pyrrho, in determining nothing, remain absolutely above reproach, whereas the Academics, he says, incur a scrutiny similar to that faced by the other philosophers. Above all, the Pyrrhonists, by entertaining doubts about every thesis, maintain consistency and do not conflict with themselves, whereas Academics are unaware that they are conflicting with themselves. For to make unambiguous assertions and denials, at the same time as stating as a generalization that no things are cognitive, introduces an undeniable conflict: how is it possible to recognize that this is true, this false, yet still entertain perplexity and doubt, and not make a clear choice of the one and avoidance of the other? (*Bibliotheca* 170a)

These words reveal radicalism and provoke the basic question: what a consistent skeptic can say?

Drawing presumably on the academics' achievements, Aenesidemus put in order the arguments for skeptical doubts by developing the ten modes (some of which were related to Pyrrho's own experiences). The first mode concerns the differences in ways in which impressions are received by different species: "they […] differ in their senses, as for instance, hawks are very keen-sighted; dogs have a most acute scent." (DL 9.80) Aenesidemus says "that the same objects do not always produce the same impressions" and that it is impossible to resolve this discrepancy. Giving an account of Aenesidemus's views, Sextus seeks to show on various examples that animals are conscious beings, as they use their own speech and even conduct inferences (for example, a tracking dog). These remarks lead

him to conclude that "we are not able to prefer our own appearances to those produced in the irrational animals." (PH 1.78) Hence, what is left for us is *epochē*, the suspension of judgment.

The second mode is related to differences between human beings. "According to Demophon, the steward of Alexander used to feel warm in the shade, and to shiver in the sun […]. Again, one man is fond of medicine, another of farming, another of commerce; and the same pursuits are good for one man, and injurious to another." (DL 9. 81) Philo of Alexandria is even more categoric in his account:

> For not only do they form different opinions respecting the same things at different times, but different men also judge in different manners, some looking on things as pleasures, which others on the contrary regard as annoyances. For the things with which some persons are sometimes vexed, others delight in, and on the contrary the things, which some persons are eager to acquire and look upon as pleasant and suitable, those very same things others reject and drive to a distance as unsuitable and ill-omened. (*On Drunkenness*, 176; trans. Ch. D. Yonge)

Recognizing differences between our perceptions of the world already on the level of received stimuli, and pointing to the fact that the same person can often change his or her mind, Aenesidemus does not see any way to determine who is right, and therefore he suggests that one should suspend judgment about everything.

The third mode evinces even deeper differences in our perception of the world. These differences are related with particular senses: sight, taste, smell, and touch. For example, an apple seems to be smooth, fragrant, sweet, and yellowish, but those who are blind since birth do not perceive the color: "the apple may have more qualities than those apparent to us […] It is possible that we too, having only five senses, grasp from among the qualities of the apple only those we are capable of grasping, although other qualities can exist" (PH 1.94–1.95). An analysis of differences between data received by each sense makes Aenesidemus doubt whether things are as we perceive them: "It follows, therefore, that what is seen is just as likely to be something else in reality." (DL 9.81) And what we are left with is, once again, *epochē*, the suspension of judgment.

The fourth mode indicates that our knowledge and perception depend on various situations and changing conditions. Sextus gives an example already put forward in Democritus: "the same honey appears sweet to me, but bitter to people with jaundice." (PH 1.101) And he subsequently adds: "the same food seems most pleasant to people who are hungry but unpleasant to the sated. […] the same wine appears sour to people who have just eaten dates or figs, but it seems to be sweet to people who have consumed nuts or chickpeas. And the bathhouse vestibule warms people entering from outside but chills people leaving if they

spend any time there." (PH 1.109–1.110) Everyone is in certain state, which is why there are arguments impossible to resolve. Diogenes lists the following examples of situations influencing our impressions: health–sickness, sleep–waking, joy–grief, youth-old age, courage–fear, want–abundance, hatred–friendship, warmth–coldness, and so on. He underscores especially madness and sleep: "even madmen are not in a state contrary to nature. For, why are we to say of them more than of ourselves? For we too look at the sun as if it stood still. Theon, of Tithora, the Stoic, used to walk about in his sleep; and a slave of Pericles' used, when in the same state, to walk on the top of the house." (DL 9.28) The argument of madness and sleep will be repeated by Descartes formulating the dream hypothesis and questioning the existence of the world. Aenesidemus, in accordance with the specificity of ancient philosophy, employs this argument only in order to question our predicates on the properties of things.

The fifth mode (corresponding to Sextus's tenth) deals with rules of conduct, customs, laws, and religious beliefs, which are obviously dependent on time and place. "This mode embrace all that relates to vice, and to honesty; to the true, and to the false; to the good, and to the bad; to the Gods, and to the production, and destruction of all visible objects." (DL 9.83)

The sixth mode concerns different circumstances ("admixtures and combinations") that impact the reception of impressions. As Diogenes observes, "nothing is seen by us simply and by itself; but [everything is seen] in combination either with air, or with light, or with moisture, or with solidity, or heat, or motion, or evaporation of some other power. Accordingly, purple exhibits a different hue in the sun, and in a lamp." (DL 9.85) Thus, we speak about purple, but our access to it is always mediated by specific circumstances of perception. In his account of this Aenesidemus's mode, Sextus provides a detailed discussion of the mechanics of the sensual apparatus: "our eyes contain membranes and liquids inside them. […] our ears have winding passages and narrow channels […]. Further, since certain kinds of matter exist in our nostrils and in the regions of taste, it is together with these, not purely, that we grasp what we taste and smell." (PH 1.126–1.127)

The seventh mode (corresponding to Sextus's fifth) is related to distance which influences the way we see objects: "the sun, on account of its distance from us, appears small. The mountains, too, at a distance, appear airy masses and smooth, but when beheld close, they are rough." (DL 9.85) And, in Sextus, we read: "The same boat appears from a distance small and stationary, but close at hand large and in motion. […] The same oar appears bent in water but straight when out of it. […] Dove's necks appear different in colour depending on the different ways they turn them." (PH 1.118–1.120) There is no reason to privilege certain sights

over others, and the suspension of judgment seems to be the only option for us. These arguments must have been developed by the academics, since they were repeated also in Cicero.

The eight mode points to the dependence of qualities of things on their quantities. For example, "a moderate quantity of vine when taken invigorates, but an excessive quantity weakens." (DL 9.86) As Zeno of Elea observed, a single grain of millet when dropped does not make a sound, as distinct form a large quantity of grain. The skeptics provide an analogous example: "Grains of sand scattered apart from one another appear rough, but when combined in a heap affect our senses smoothly." (PH 1.130) A single grain makes us uncomfortable when in a shoe, while a large quantity of sand on a beach produces an effect of softness. The dependence of quality on quantity is also confirmed by the fact that "the accurate mixing of single poisons makes the compound beneficial." (PH 1.133; translation modified)

The ninth mode refers to the dependence of the intensity of a stimulus on the frequency of occurrences of phenomena; for example, "earthquakes excite no wonder among those nations with whom they are of frequent occurrence; nor does the sun because it is seen every day." (DL 9.87)

The tenth mode points to the relativity of terms such as *bigger*, *smaller*, *father*, *brother*, etc. "For instance, that which is on the right, is not on the right intrinsically and by nature, but it is looked upon as such in relation to something else; and if that other thing is transposed, then it will no longer be on the right." (DL 9.87) Philo of Alexandria adds that attributing properties to things depends on pairs of oppositions: "scarcely anything whatever of existing things, if you consider it in itself and by itself, is accurately understood; but by comparing it with its opposite […] for instance, we comprehend what is meant by little by placing it in juxtaposition with what is great; we understand what dry is by comparing it with wet, cold by comparing it with heat, light by comparing it with heavy." (*On Drunkenness*, 186; trans, Ch. D. Yonge) As Sextus concludes, everything is relative (including this very judgment) and therefore "we shall not be able to say what each existing object is like in its own nature and purely, but only what it appears to be like relative to something." (PH 1.140)

All these modes deal with relativity of our predicates and call into question the truthfulness of common beliefs. However, Aenesidemus is not content with a critique of common opinions based on sense perception. He seeks to show that it is utterly impossible to know the truth. For this purpose he calls into question the concept of truth and causality, drawing on the academics' achievements.

Sextus Empiricus somewhat vaguely recounts Aenesidemus's thesis that nothing true exists. What is true is not a sensory object, since "what is true is not known by sense-perception in general; for sense-perception is non-rational, and what is true is not known non-rationally." (M 8.43) Here, Aenesidemus sets against Epicurus who believed that only pure impressions – unmediated and unaltered by rational interpretations – are true. But, contrary to Plato, what is true is not a noetic object either, for the existence of such objects is debatable (M 8.40–8.47). Apparently, Aenesidemus's argumentation implies that the assumption of an existing vehicle of truth would require gaining certainty as to if and how it exists. As it turns out, doubts concerning the existence of true things become an argument for their non-existence. These somewhat complex difficulties suggest that, according to Aenesidemus, if we were to have access to the knowledge of truth, we would first have to acquire undebatable and evident knowledge of how the truth exists. Insofar as the nature and manner of existence of truth are debatable, it is hard to claim that man has any access to it.

Another concept essential for knowledge of the world is the concept of cause. In Sextus's account (PH 1.180–1.185), Aenesidemus lists eight arguments against causal explanations. Firstly, causal explanations concern that which is concealed or unclear (not known by way of immediate apprehension), and there is no commonly acknowledged interpretation of appearances. Secondly, people tend to explain appearances in a single way, even though there are many ways of explaining them. Thirdly, they imply a fixed order to causality, which does not fall under such order. Fourthly, having described the course of appearances, they claim to have discovered the course of concealed or unclear things, which can be utterly different. Fifthly, causes are given depending on an affiliation to a philosophical school, "just about all of them give explanations according to their own hypotheses about the elements." (PH 1.183) Sixthly, "they often adopt what is concordant with their own hypotheses about the elements, not according to any common and agreed approaches." (PH 1.183) Seventhly, causes are often incompatible with appearances and hypotheses. Finally, a causally explained phenomenon is often doubtful; in such cases, causes serve to explain a doubtful thing by an equally doubtful thing (cf. Annas, Barnes 1985: 181).

This list is not well-ordered. Rather, it refers to several different ways of showing an uncertainty of causal explanations. Aenesidemus's critique of causality will be later generalized by Sextus Empiricus, developed by William Ockham and Ockhamists, and finally will be given centrality in David Hume's skepticism.

Pyrrho's ethical ideas were quite alien to Aenesidemus. According to Photius, he also rejected the possibility to acquire knowledge on good and evil (or right

and wrong), virtues and the ethical purpose in general (*Bibliotheca* 170B). Both Aristocles and Diogenes confirm that Aenesidemus accepted the practical purpose of skepticism, which was *epochē* and *ataraxia*. The questioning of moral knowledge is not astonishing, given the fact that Aenesidemus wanted to be a consistent skeptic. But the lack of ethical purpose and values is much harder to accept. The question arises whether truth can be still considered as a value. What is evident here is a weakness of skepticism which proves to be non-independent.

I shall now return to Aenesidemus's understanding of skeptical position and his way of avoiding inconsistency. Diogenes mentions that Aenesidemus's disciples were often faced with the allegations of impossibility of action and inconsistency:

> the dogmatic philosophers attack the criterion derived from appearances, and say that the same objects present at times different appearances; so that a town presents at one time a square, and at another round appearance; and that consequently, if the Skeptic does not discriminate between different appearances, he does nothing at all. If, on the contrary, he determines in favour of either, then, say they, he no longer attaches equal value to all appearances. (DL 9.106)

However, the problem remains how to make decisions in the event of conflict between appearances? There are only two solutions: either to withdraw from taking any action, or to guide one's actions with that which seems more reliable. In fact, only the second option holds, and Adam Krokiewicz (1966: 26) is right to point out the similarity between "guiding oneself with appearances" in neo-Pyrrhonism and the academic probabilism.

Aenesidemus also sought for another way of supporting the skeptical claims. A great mystery in the history of philosophy has been the meaning of Aenesidemus's statement that "the Skeptical persuasion is a path to the philosophy of Heraclitus." (PH 1.210) Sextus found it outrageous, since, in his view, Heraclitus was a dogmatic who put forward statements about things: especially, "the idea that contraries actually do hold of the same things." (PH 1.210) Skeptics, in turn, can only say that "contraries appear to hold of the same thing." (PH 1.210) Aenesidemus, as the founder of neo-Pyrrhonism, was well-aware of this distinction – it was not a mere mistake. There have been many attempts to explain his thesis, of which the simplest referred to a copyist's mistake; but this statement is repeated not only in Sextus but also in Tertullian.

Krokiewicz points to a schism within the school as an explanation of why Sextus called Aenesidemus a dogmatic. The scholar claims Aenesidemus was not a dogmatic and considered Heraclitus's position as a phenomenon among others. He invoked Heraclitus in order to show that skepticism was not a futile position which did not discover anything and merely criticized others (Krokie-

wicz 1966: 191). Acknowledging Heraclitus's ontology, skepticism would have a positive philosophical significance, instead of being purely critical. However, Krokiewicz speculates that this was, in fact, an acknowledgment of the philosophical dependency of skepticism, and therefore other skeptics deemed it a tactical mistake: "they could not forgive him, the leading figure in the ancient skeptical current, for betraying, as it were, a philosophical dependency of skepticism to dogmatics." (Krokiewicz 1966: 194) As a result, the proponents of Aenesidemus were scornfully called "Heracliteans", and the aversion to Aenesidemus was widely exhibited. Sextus himself exemplified this attitude in his *Outlines of Skepticism*, when he listed the ten modes without even mentioning whom they came from, and when he reproved Aenesidemus for calling "the Skeptical persuasion" "a path to the philosophy of Heraclitus", and when he maliciously attributed to him a dogmatic thesis that time is body.

However, Victor Brochard and Leon Joachimowicz write of an apostasy. "After years of doubting he finally wanted to find out and clearly realize what were the principle and reasons of his doubting. Heraclitus's philosophy provided him with a ready answer: each thing is no more this than that (at most, it is both this and that), which is why nothing can be authoritatively stated about anything." (Joachimowicz 1972: 104) Similarly to the academic skeptics, he turned from skepticism to negative dogmatism.

Mikołaj Olszewski, drawing on Paul Natorp's thesis that there is no conflict between Aenesidemus's skepticism and heracliteism (Olszewski 1992: 289), demonstrates how Aenesidemus could move from skepticism to the Heraclitean ontology. An effect of skeptical considerations could have been "a magma of sense impressions" (Olszewski 1992: 293) which could not be further explained or refuted. Nor did they provide *ataraxia* promised by Pyrrho, and it could turn out that skepticism "failed to fulfill the great hopes laid in it as a philosophical system", for it was limited to a critique and "did not explain reality in positive terms." (Olszewski 1992: 295) The need to explain the world is more powerful than any methodological rigor. Heraclitus's ontology was a ready philosophical system which could absorb skepticism (Olszewski 1992: 293).

I shall add to this right interpretation that Heraclitus's ontology (changeability and fluidity of phenomena, relativity of predicates) provides skepticism with certain stability, explaining why it is impossible to know or responsibly state anything. For the source of man's cognitive trouble is reality itself which is flowing and variable, and seems inherently contradictory when seen through our simple concepts.

This Heraclitean aspect of Aenesidemus's skepticism confirms his trouble with being a consistent skeptic. Just as the academics found consolation in probabilism, so Aenesidemus supported his views with the Heraclitean ontology. However, this was a departure from consistent and independent skepticism.

Agrippa lived probably in the second half of the first century CE. Diogenes Laertios wrote about him and his school (DL 9.88, 106), and Sextus Empiricus listed his five modes, describing them as the modes of "more recent Skeptics." (PH 1.164) And although there are other ancient texts mentioning Agrippa (Barnes 1990: 8), his modes play a decisive role in Sextus's argumentation. Agrippa generalized, simplified and deepened Aenesidemus's modes. Instead of listing similar reasons for relativity of perceptions, he pointed out five important matters: the dispute between different opinions; an inevitable regression *ad infinitum* in justifying and conducting demonstrations; the relativity of sense perceptions; the groundlessness of assumptions; and circular reasoning (or "the reciprocal mode", "the mode of circularity" [cf. M 7.341, PH 1.164], "the reciprocal nature of proofs" [DL 9.88]).

The first mode refers to the disagreement between philosophical and common beliefs. There is no rational way of resolving the existing controversies.

The second mode introduced the concept of infinite regress: "it is impossible for a man ever, in his researches, to arrive at undeniable truth; since one truth is to be established by another truth; and so on, *ad infinitum*." (DL 9.88) As Sextus writes, "what is brought forward as a source of conviction for the matter proposed itself needs another such source, which itself needs another, and so *ad infinitum*, so that we have no point from which to begin to establish anything." (PH 1.166) This mode points to an impossibility of arriving at certainty in any justification process: every demonstration depends on various assumptions, and therefore in order to acquire certainty it is necessary to demonstrate validity of each assumption. These successive demonstrations, in turn, would require further demonstrations, and thus the demonstration process would go on to infinity. This argument should be considered as insightful and original in comparison to previous skeptical speculations. It is related to Aristotle (*Posterior Analytics*, 72B) whom Agrippa must have read and presumably employed to generalize the skeptical argumentation (cf. Barnes 1990: 121).

The third mode points to the relativity of perceptions and, in fact, corresponds to all Aenesidemus's modes.

The fourth mode is related to the second and points to the groundlessness of the assumptions which would seem to provide the way of avoiding an infinite regress (accepted either as requiring no demonstration or as first principles).

Adopting such assumptions is illegitimate, since their contraries can be equally adopted; hence, every unjustified assumption is empty. Here Agrippa does not accept Aristotle's solution which was to adopt the first principles without proof.

The fifth mode serves to demonstrate that circular reasoning is often employed in order to avoid regressing *ad infinitum* or adopting groundless assumptions: "the proof of the truth which we are looking for supposes, as a necessary preliminary, our belief in that truth." (DL 9.89; cf. *Posterior Analytics*, 72B) From the perspective of logical relations between different theses, going round in circle does not help arriving at certainty with regard to justification; and it should be underscored that skeptics are interested only in justifications characterized by certainty. If we consider some weaker types of justification, it is important to underscore that the reciprocal coherence may be regarded as a confirmation (as epistemological coherentists will claim), while the mode of circularity may increase understanding (as hermeneutic philosophers will argue). However, Agrippa is interested only in certainty.

The second, fourth and fifth modes constitute a logical whole and are concerned with discursive knowledge. They lay foundations for the devastating trilemma which will be employed by Sextus Empiricus. In seeking to justify a thesis, we are left with three options, none of which is acceptable: proceeding *ad infinitum*, adopting groundless assumptions or falling into circular reasoning. Sextus believes Agrippa's arguments to be most effective; they constitute the coping stone of his negative argumentations (for example, in the case of justifying the criterion of truth). It is only these modes that refute all possibility of rational cognition. Krokiewicz juxtaposes Aenesidemus with Agrippa and observes that while the former's arguments are of empirical nature, the latter's are purely logical (Krokiewicz 1966: 221). And while Aenesidemus called into question the value of knowledge, Agrippa demonstrated the impossibility of its justification.

As Jonathan Barnes observes, Agrippa's trilemma is still a problem for contemporary epistemologists who attempt to build a theory of justification (Barnes 1990: 9). No one hitherto has found an effective solution for this trilemma; at best, a dogmatic adoption of empirical and intuitive presuppositions or the circularity of human uncertain knowledge were acknowledged. Michael Williams (2010), who coined the name "Agrippa's trilemma", has discussed the theoretical presuppositions whose questioning allows one to undermine the trilemma. For Agrippa silently assumes that one may start doubting for no reason, and that in order to state anything one has to go through justification procedures. However, if one adopts contrary assumptions concerning putative justification and the need to provide reasons for every doubt, Agrippa's trilemma becomes a puzzle for those who

doubt, not those who state. To be sure, this shifting of the weight of proof does not undermine Agrippa's trilemma, but only calls into question its assumptions.

Criticizing the fallacy of *petitio prinicipi* in ancient skeptics, Andrzej Wiśniewski suggested to introduce a distinction between premises of argumentation and standards for accepting these premises as valid. These standards are silently assumed presuppositions and function on a different level than premises (Wiśniewski 1992: 186). Following Ludwig Wittgenstein, Adam Grobler (2001: 302) adds that calling for justification of silent assumptions is based on mistaking knowledge with the presuppositions that make it possible. If Agrippa was to justify his standards for acceptance of premises, he would himself fall into regression to infinity (Wiśniewski 1992: 188). Similarly to contemporary contextualists, Wiśniewski suggests that our standards for acceptance of premises should be tempered with common sense, which he believes to be the only way to stop the regression (Wiśniewski 1992: 183). However, it runs afoul of Agrippa's third mode which calls into question common, everyday experience.

Let us add that, if we held to all Agrippa's five modes, we would find out certain inconsistency. The trilemma is a specific kind of argumentation for the impossibility of efficient argumentation. In that sense, it undermines itself: it does not prove the impossibility of rational justification, but it drives a wedge of uncertainty into our knowledge.

5. Sextus Empiricus – Summa of Ancient Skepticism

Sextus Empiricus[21] was a Greek physician living probably in Rome or Alexandria in the second half of the second century or at the beginning of the third century CE (Nerczuk 2010: 8; Pellegrin 2010: 120), most likely in 160–210 (Vogt 2010b: 24). The sobriquet "Empiricus" indicates that Sextus was a member of the empirical school of medicine, which assembled many proponents of philosophical skepticism (Dąmbska 1970: vii). Sextus's preserved works have remained the major source of information concerning ancient skepticism: *Outlines of Skepticism/ Pyrrhonism* (*Pyrrhoniae Hypotyposes*) in three volumes (PH 1–3) and eleven volumes (M 1–11) of *Against the Professors/Mathematicians* (*Pros Mathematikous*, latin *Adversus Mathematicos*). This last work is divided into two collections. The first collection is *Against the Dogmatics* in five volumes (*Adversus Dogmaticos*, sometimes quoted separately as AD 1–5), encompassing: *Against the Logicians* (M7 and M8), *Against the Physicists* (M 9–10), *Against the Ethicists* (M 11). The

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21 He should not be mistaken with Sextus of Chaeronea, a nephew of Plutarch and teacher of Marcus Aurelius – a mistake made, for example, in Suda Lexicon.

second collection has the same title as the whole work (*Against the Professors*) and contains sixteen volumes and: *Against the Grammarians* (M 1), *Against the Rhetoricians* (M 2), *Against the Geometers* (M 3), *Against the Arithmeticians* (M 4), *Against the Astrologers* (M 5), *Against the Musicians* (M 6). *Outlines of Skepticism* is a brief presentation of the arguments put forward in *Against the Logicians*, *Against the Physicists*, *Against the Ethicists*, and the introduction to *Against the Professors*. The first book of *Outlines…* is the only work by this author which provides general discussion of skepticism as a philosophical position. Contrary to the numbering,[22] it is believed that the books M 1–6 were written later than M 7–11. *Outlines of Skepticism*, which refine the argumentation of M 7–11, were probably written in the period between these two collections. As Pierre Pellegrin observes, *Outlines of Skepticism* were written later,[23] as in this text the essence of M 7–11 arguments is aptly captured and the mistakes made in M 7–11 are corrected (Pellegrin 2010: 137).[24]

Sextus's texts present very detailed analyses and argumentations, which may seem boring and futile. Many readers tend to criticize him for "an excessively complex argumentation and manifold repetitions of the same refutation scheme." (Nerczuk 2010: 10) Adam Krokiewicz (1966: 293) considers Sextus an epigone and compiler, while Izydora Dąmbska describes him as a great erudite (a priceless source of information on ancient philosophy), and as earnest and insightful thinker (Dąmbska 1970: 8). In his works, Sextus most likely compiled different texts of previous skeptics (Aenesidemus, Agrippa, Menodotus, Cleitomachos); he did not mention any author who lived later than Aenesidemus.

Sextus employs Agrippa's trilemma and follows Aenesidemus who recommends guiding oneself with appearances; he also quotes their skeptical arguments. Yet, it is the criterion of truth and the question of validity of evidence that

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22 Since Victor Brochard (1923), it is believed that *Against the Professors* (M 1–6) is Sextus's last work. It is evidenced by internal references in the works (for example, in M 1.35 to M 9.195 and M 10.310) as well as by their content (having shaped his radical attack against basic philosophical disciplines in M 7–11, Sextus completes his work by addressing less important issues) and style (Karel Janacek [1972: 87] argues that in M 1–6 skepticism revolves in the direction of empiricism, and therefore the usage of terms such as *epochē* is significantly decreased). Cf. Spinelli 2010: 253.

23 Zbigniew Nerczuk (2010: 9), in turn, assumes that *Outlines of Skepticism* were followed by M 7–11 and M 1–6.

24 Richard Bett (2010a: 185) stresses that M 11 (*Against the Ethicists*) is earlier than *Outlines of Skepticism*, for it contains certain dogmatic theses (for example, the denial that anything is good or bad by nature).

constitute the focus of his thought. And, as Aenesidemus observed, it is precisely the lack of such criterion that testifies to the unreliability of senses and all immediate cognition. In turn, Sextus's considerations on the validity of evidence correspond to Agrippa's five modes concerning the impossibility of rational justification of statements.

5.1. The Concept and the Criterion of Truth

Sextus is not hostile toward the concept of truth, as he writes that "human being is by nature a truth-loving animal." (M 7.27) One may even contend that the concept serves to define the attitude of skeptics as those who continue to search for truth (PH 1.4) Skeptics do not prejudge the incognizability of truth, since they suspend judgment about everything and do not state anything at all (PH 1.193). According to Sexuts, the traditional skeptical expressions, like "everything is inapprehensible", should not be literally understood; they are merely commonplace phrases.

> […] when we say "everything is inapprehensible": we explain "everything" in the same way, and we supply "to me." Thus what is said is this: "All of the unclear matters investigated in dogmatic fashion which I have inspected appear to me inapprehensible." (PH 1.200)

However, his relation toward truth remains ambivalent. On the one hand, truth is the purpose of his pursuits, and it is in the name of truth that the critical arguments are formulated. Yet, on the other hand, the effect of this argument is the questioning of the knowability of truth. At the end of *Outlines…* Sextus does not write that he continues to search for truth, but he writes that his purpose is to cure "the conceit and rashness of the Dogmatists." (PH 3.280) It is a small wonder, then, that St. Augustine will later define skepticism as a thesis that "man is not able to find truth" (CA 2.23).

Sextus assumes that, in order to acquire knowledge of truth, one has to find the criterion of truth (in the case of immediate cognition) or present the proof or sign of truth (in the case of mediated cognition): "[…] plain things are thought to become known all by themselves through some criterion, while unclear things are thought to be tracked down through signs and demonstrations." (M 7.25)

Sextus refers to historical philosophical positions concerning the criterion of truth and divides them systematically into three groups (from the most general to the most particular): (1) the subjective criterion of "by whom" (a human being); (2) the instrumental criterion of "through which" (perception or intellect); (3) the objective criterion of "in virtue of which" (a single cognitive act of certain

type, "the impact of an appearance in virtue of which humans set themselves to make judgments" [PH 2.16]).

Against Protagoras, Sextus rejects the conception that human being, as a "measure of all things", is the criterion of truth (PH 216). Firstly, human being lacks a proper definition and, in that sense, remains unknown. Secondly, even if it would be possible to acquire knowledge and understanding about human being, it is still unknown whether human being is really the criterion of truth. Groundless assertions are of no value here, since what is needed is a demonstration – which, in turn, requires a guarantee of its validity:

> But if it is with a demonstration that he declares himself the criterion, surely it will be a sound one. But in order for us to learn that the demonstration that he is using to declare himself the criterion is sound, we ought to have a criterion – and a previously agreed one at that. (M 7.316)

It is not hard to see that what is applied here is Agrippa's trilemma. Demonstration needs a criterion – criterion needs a demonstration. And because we do not have one, we cannot have the other. This scheme of impossibility will be repeated like a mantra in Sextus's further argumentations. Thirdly, even if it would be possible to determine that human being is the criterion of truth, another problem arises: since people are different from each other, which one of them is to be considered the criterion of truth? Intelligent people are often demagogues, while opinions of a majority are prone to mistake. Again, all doubts should be dispelled by virtue of a demonstration whose validity can be assessed only against a criterion.

Let us proceed to the criterion of "through which". According to Sextus, senses cannot be the criterion of truth: "For they are by nature non-rational, and not being able to do more than be imprinted by the things that appear, they are useless for the discovery of what is true." (M 7.344) The sense apparatus can only "grasp only color and flavor and sound – whereas 'this is white' and 'this is sweet,' not being a color or a flavor, does not fall within the awareness of sense-perception." (M 7.345) Sextus assumes that truth is something that can be predicated of statements as sets of properties; uttering statements requires both intellect and memory.

However, intellect itself cannot be the criterion of truth. First of all, because the nature and existence of intellect are doubtful. If intellect was the criterion of truth, "it ought first to become familiar with itself", and "must also have focused […] on its own nature (such as the being from which it is, the place in which it belongs, and all the other things)." (M 7.348) Yet some philosophers say that it is inside the body or one of its parts, while others insist that it is outside the body. What is doubtful is also its relation to the senses: some consider it as one of the senses, "i.e. peeping out from certain apertures (sense-organs)", while others believe that it is distinct from

them (M 7.349–350). There are many incompatible conceptions of intellect and we have grounds for judging which one is correct (M 7.351). What is worse, intellect is enslaved by the senses and crucially dependent on them: "thought, being shut off inside, and being kept in the dark by the senses, will not be capable of grasping any of the external things. Nor, therefore, can we say that this by itself is the criterion [of truth]." (M 7.353)

Nor the senses and intellect together constitute the criterion of truth according to Sextus, as there are many points of incompatibility between them. For example, honey may be sweet to some and bitter to others. So, if intellect took into account all sense-data, it would come to contradictory conclusions, which is unacceptable. Thus, Democritus claimed that honey is neither bitter nor sweet, while Heraclitus believed that it is both sweet and bitter.

We shall now proceed discuss the third criterion of "in virtue of which", concerning appearance (perceptional judgment), which is an effect of a cooperation of the senses and intellect. One may already presume that the outcome would be negative, since neither the senses nor intellect were granted the status of the criterion of truth. Nonetheless, Sextus wishes to show his magnanimousness: "let us even concede the subsistence of the human being and of the senses and thought" (M 7.370) as the criterion of truth. Perhaps, his aim is to display versatility and systematicity of his argumentation. Making this concession, however, did not stop him from putting forward a skeptical argument: "if appearance is to be admitted as the criterion, either we must say that every appearance is true, as Protagoras said, or that every one is false, as Xeniades of Corinth said, or that some are true and some false, as the Stoics and Academics said, and also the Peripatetics." (M 7.388) The first option was already dismissed by Plato who polemicized against Protagoras, denouncing his thesis as self-refuting (Burnyeat 1976). If every appearance would be true then, Sextus argues, the statement that "even *not* every appearance's being true, since it takes the form of an appearance" (M 7.390) would count as equally true. Here, Sextus employs the concept of self-refutation (*peritropē*) or turning about in a more literal translation by Richard Bett. He is more experienced than Carneades, which is why – in order to avoid the accusation (already made by Antiochus) of predicating falsehood of some propositions without having the criterion of truth – he gives an example of two contradictory propositions which cannot both hold true, and one of which is necessarily false.

The same argument applies to the second option which is the statement that all appearances are false. "For if all appearances are false and nothing is true, 'Nothing is true' is true." (M 7.399) Thus, the thesis that everything is false is self-refuting. In order to claim that everything is false, one has to assume the truth of this thesis.

What is most interesting is the third option, namely – the statement that some appearances are true and others are false. What is missing here is the basis for distinction between them, and what returns is the critique of the cataleptic appearance, which is the criterion of truth proposed by Stoics. Sextus repeats Carneades's arguments: it is impossible to distinguish cataleptic appearances from their non-cataleptic counterparts, because they do not have any specific property. Differences between more or less reliable appearances are gradable, and it is hard to distinguish a more reliable non-cataleptic appearance form purely cataleptic one, as the sorites argument clearly demonstrates.

Sextus also criticizes Stoics for falling into circular reasoning:

> For when we are investigating what the cataleptic appearance is, they define it by saying "the one that is from a real thing and is stamped and impressed in accordance with just *that* real thing, and is of such a kind as could not come about from a thing that was not real." Then again, since everything that is taught by means of a definition is taught from things that are known, when we go on to ask what "the real thing" is, they turn around and say "a real thing is what activates a cataleptic appearance." (M 7.426; translation modified)

His conclusion is: "nothing is the criterion [of truth], given that 'by which', nor the 'through which', nor the 'in virtue of which' is firm in its knowledge." (M 7.439) This statement encapsulates all hitherto considerations. Sextus assumes that every proposition of the criterion of truth which is not certain (in other words, which does not guarantee truthfulness) has to be rejected altogether.

Sextus generalizes his reasoning in the following terms: if someone proposes a criterion of truth, it is either groundless or already based on a criterion. If it is groundless, it does not beget conviction; and if it is based on a criterion, it is simply self-contradictory, since what is searched for is precisely a criterion. "If there is a criterion, either it has been judged or it is unjudged, and we reach one of two conclusions – either infinite regress or that something is said, absurdly, to be its own criterion." (M 7.441) Sextus believes that a statement which predicates of itself is not reliable (M 7.445). Agrippa's trilemma makes it impossible to rationally justify any criterion of truth.

In *Outlines of Skepticism* Sextus explicitly claims that the existence of the criterion of truth is indeterminable:

> Again, in order for the dispute that has arisen about standards to be decided, we must possess an agreed standard through which we can judge it; and in order for us to posses an agreed standard, the dispute about standards must already have been decided. Thus the agreement falls into the reciprocal mode and the discovery of a standard is blocked – for we do not allow them to assume a standard by hypothesis, and if they want to judge the standard by a standard we throw them into an infinite regress. (PH 2.20)

This, however, does not close the case. Toward the end of his considerations, Sextus briefly acknowledges that he is far from accepting the view according to which the criterion of truth does not exist: "[…] we are not abolishing the criterion when we avail ourselves of the arguments against it, but we want to show that there being a criterion is not entirely reliable, since equal resources are mustered for the opposite case." (M 7.443) But he does not devote time to discuss these opposite reasons: "even if we do seem to join in doing away with the criterion […] we do not do this with assent, given the fact that the opposing arguments are also equally persuasive." (M 7.444) Similarly, as stated in *Outlines of Skepticism*:

> You must realize that it is not our intention to assert that standards of truth are unreal (that would be dogmatic); rather, since the Dogmatists seem plausibly to have established that there is a standard of truth, we have set up plausible-seeming arguments in opposition to them, affirming neither that they are true nor that they are more plausible that those on the contrary side. (PH 2.79)

Sextus, then, seems to have driven the dispute to *isostheneia*, that is, to the equipollence of opposite theses, which compels the suspension of judgment (*epochē*). It should be stressed, however, that the arguments in favor of a criterion of truth are brief and trite, as they quickly dissolve in his cannonade against the possibility of establishing such a criterion. There is no equipollence of opposite theses, but rather an all-out attack against any possibility of rational recognition of truth, that is to say, against the possibility of human knowledge. It is a small wonder that the reception of Sextus has been primarily focused on the thesis that knowledge does not exist.

Considering the question of the criterion, Sextus reveals his own concept of truth. If truthfulness was equated with probability, one would have to concede that "that the same thing is both real and not real, and that the same thing is simultaneously true and false. […] But it is impossible for the same thing both to be and not to be, or to be both true and false." (M 8.52) Thus, the probable (or persuasive) cannot be identified with what is true, "unless we are to say that what persuades many people is true […]. But this is silly. For when we are inquiring about truth, we should not look to the number of people who agree but to their conditions." (M 8.53) It is not hard to see that Sextus has an objectivist view of truth, and in that sense he follows Aristotle. Otherwise, what grounds would he have to impose the requirement of certainty? Of course, as the antirealist interpretation suggests (Groarke 2006: 16), it is precisely the lack of the criterion that calls into question the objectivist concept of truth but, at the same time, a repudiation of this concept undermines the very purpose of skepticism.

Analyzing the question of demonstration, Sextus confirms his objectivist understanding of truth:

> For every statement (*logos*) is judged to be true or false according to its reference to the subject-matter about which it has been produced. If it is found to be in agreement with the subject-matter about which it has been produced, it is thought to be true, and if in disagreement, false. (M 8.323)

> The skeptics very aptly compare those who are investigating unclear things with people shooting at some target in the dark. For just as it is likely that one of these people hits the target and another misses it, but who has hit it and who has missed it are unknown, so, as the truth is hidden away in pretty deep darkness, many arguments are launched at it, but which of them is in agreement with it and which in disagreement is not possible to know, since what is being investigated is removed from plain experience. (M 8.325)

To be sure, Sextus is not a convinced proponent of the objectivist concept of truth, since holding any belief stands in opposition to the complete suspension of judgment. But it can be noticed that, in practice, without consciously acknowledging any beliefs, he employs this common objectivist notion of truth. The same goes for the principle of non-contradiction, which is a part of this concept of truth. Of course, Sextus will not openly recognize this principle, neither in its ontological, nor psychological, nor logical version. But, in practice, it is applied as evident in his writings (McPherran[25] 1987: 313; Machuca 2012).

5.2. Signs and Demonstrations

Sextus's considerations on the criterion of truth concerned the possibility of knowing things that are clear (*prodela*, "the ones that impinge on the senses and thought all by themselves"; M 8.141). Clear things are all appearances or phenomena. Unclear things, in turn, are those which are concealed behind phenomena. Sextus's arguments against the criterion of truth showed that "it also becomes impossible to state confidently about apparent things that they are in their nature such as they appear." (M 8.142) One may already presume that skeptics would be unwilling to assert anything about these unclear things (*adela*). Sextus, however, in order to complete his argumentation, or perhaps out of respect for discursive knowledge, considers in detail the possibility of cognizing unclear things through signs and demonstrations.

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25 According to Mark McPherran, the principle of non-contradiction is not negated by the quadrilemma *ou mallon*; it is only the range of its application that becomes limited (McPherran 1987: 315).

Sings (*semeia*) are objects indicative of a thing which is unclear. Unclear things are further divided by Sextus into things unclear for ever, unclear by nature, and unclear for the moment. These two latter types require sings to become known. Here are examples: a soul is unclear by nature, and Athens, for the inhabitants of Rome, can be unclear for the moment.[26]

Sextus then proceeds to introduce the distinction between recollective and indicative signs. The former concern things which had been perceived to occur simultaneously (eg. fire and smoke) or one after another in the same place (eg. wound and scar). Smoke is a recollective sign of fire and a scar is a recollective sign of a wound. Recollective signs are said to enable us to learn about objects unclear for the moment. Things unclear by nature cannot be referred to by recollective signs (they could never be perceived, so a fortiori they could not be perceived as occurring simultaneously or in the same place). Such things are believed to manifest themselves through indicative signs. For example, the motions of the body are considered to be the signs indicative of the soul: "for we reason that a certain power, clothed by the body, endows it with such motions." (M 8.155) Sextus does not distinguish between conventional and natural signs, but he usually refers to natural signs, which is why Izydora Dąmbska, the Polish translator of his text, employs the term *mark* (*oznaka*).

Sextus's critique is focused on indicative signs. He does not criticize recollective signs, perhaps due to their practical utility, even though relying on memory creates a risk of error and does not lead to certainty. He opposes both dogmatic philosophers and rationalist physicians.

His main thought is, in general, that the relationship between a sign and the signified object is either clear (in this case the sign is unnecessary) or unclear (which means that there is no certainty). It is also uncertain whether signs exist at all. Here, Sextus's arguments are analogical to those against the criterion of truth (in fact, the criterion is a sign of truth). He is focused on an immanent critique of the Stoic theory of signs, which is denounced both for its erroneous definition of the sign and for the contradiction it produces with respect to the alleged nature of the sign (sensory/non-sensory). Having repudiated this theory, he can easily suspend judgment concerning knowledge acquired by means of signs.

His first argument against the sign refers to an existing disagreement about the nature of signs. For some, the sign is a sensory object; for others it is a non-sensory (noetic) object. Thus, as a disputable object, the sign requires another

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26   He writes that "the city of the Athenians" is unclear for him for the moment (PH 2.98). This suggests that he has been in Athens before.

sign that would explain it. However, one cannot refer to a demonstration, since "demonstration is a thing which is in dispute", it needs something else rendering it trustworthy, and "speaking generically, demonstration *is* a sign; for it is capable of revealing the conclusion" (M 8.180) "[…] each of them is waiting for the trust given to it by the other one, and so is just as untrustworthy as the other." (M 8.181) Every demonstration requires a sign of its trustworthiness and every sign requires the existence of the signified object. Therefore, it is impossible to demonstrate the existence of the sign.

The second argument is directed against the Stoic definition of the sign. Stoics argue that a sign is "a leading proposition in a sound conditional, capable of uncovering the finisher." (M 8.244) According to this insight, every sign corresponds to a sentence determining the relationship between the sign and the signified object. This, of course, cannot not fulfill Sextus's demands, as he searches for certainty. However, it should be acknowledged that he adopted and thoroughly analyzed the Stoic logic of sentences.

Sextus considers three different patterns of leader (antecedent) and finisher (consequent), whereby a conditional proposition is true, and he asserts that the truthfulness of a conditional proposition in which a sign is a finisher cannot suffice for determining the truthfulness of the sign. What is required is that the content of a leader reveals something about the finisher – a requirement which often poses difficulties. For example, a conditional "If it is day, it is light" may have a true leader and a true finisher but, for Sextus, its leader does not contain any information which would uncover anything about its finisher. For we perceive light, he argues, by virtue of its own evident character. By contrast, the function of uncovering manifests itself in conditional propositions such as "If this person has thrown up bronchial matter, he has a wound in his lungs" which, in turn, are usually uncertain. Therefore, as Sextus's claim goes, a leader either does not uncover an evident finisher or uncovers a non-evident finisher in an uncertain manner.

Let us quote an already discussed critique:

And if it is clear it will not be a thing signified, nor will it be *signified by* something, but will strike us all by itself. But if it is unclear, it will undoubtedly be unknown whether this thing is true or false, since when it is known which of these it is, it will become clear. The conditional that contains the sign and the thing signified, then, is necessarily undecided, since it finishes with something unclear. […] to make a judgment on it we must first of all know what it finishes with. If it finishes with something true, we will regard [the whole of] it as true […]; but if it finishes with something false, then conversely we will say that it is false […]. We should not, therefore, say that the sign is a proposition, nor a leader in a sound conditional. (M 8.267–8.268)

Sextus argues that because the signified is non-evident (uncertain), it is impossible to decide the truth value of a conditional determining the relationship between a sign and the signified, which is why the definition of the sign as a leader in a true conditional does not guarantee that one may acquire knowledge through signs.

It appears questionable whether the sign is a judgment at all. Such conviction is allegedly attested by the fact that signs are used by common people who have no idea about judgments: for example, helmsmen are able to anticipate a storm, and farmers can foresee a drought. In fact, even animals use signs: for example, a dog, when tracking an animal by its footprints, or a horse leaping forward at the sight of a raised whip. Here, Sextus seems to confuse the level of practice with that of theory. After all, using signs does not require one to understand any theory of signs, just as breathing does not require employing the concept of oxygen.

The Stoics introduced the distinction between the sign, its meaning, and the signified, whereby only the meaning (*lekton*; "the sayable" in Bett's translation) was incorporeal. However, if the sign was a leader in a true conditional, Sextus argues, the Stoics would fall into contradiction. The sign is supposed to be a sensory object but, insofar as it is also believed to be a judgment, that is to say, a kind of meaning, it is simultaneously non-sensory (Mates 1971: 25). But if someone claims that the sign is, above all, meaning, and that therefore there is no contradiction, Sextus has the following counterargument:

> Then again, how is it possible to demonstrate the reality of propositions? One will have to do this either through a sign or through a demonstration. But it is not possible to do this either through any sign or through a demonstration. For since these are themselves sayables [of impressions], they are under investigation like the other sayables and are so far from being able to establish something securely that, on the contrary, they themselves need something to establish them. (M 8.260–8.261)

Skeptical procedures are supposed to lead Sextus "to show that it is just as believable that there is no sign as that there is one, and conversely that the reality of a sign is just as unbelievable as the unreality of any sign. For in that way equilibrium and suspension of judgment is produced in our thinking." (M 8.159) In fact, Sextus if focused merely on uncertainty, as he intends to show that signs are not the source of certain knowledge. Today, it seems that such extensive argumentation was unnecessary, since the mere possibility of mistake already precludes certainty and, in the case of signs, a mistake is very likely to be made. Perhaps, Sextus addresses the question of signs because of the popularity of the Stoic semiotics and because of his own assumption that the whole knowledge is a set of signs (the criterion of truth is a sign of truth, demonstration is a kind of sign, whereby the premises reveal the conclusions).

Sextus concludes the topic of signs in a similar manner as he did in the case of truth, namely by briefly discussing some arguments of his adversaries. One cannot demonstrate that signs do not exist, he argues, because every demonstration is itself a kind of sign. Someone who demonstrates that signs do not exist, in fact signifies that signs do not exist, and thereby contradicts him or herself (M 8.282). "For if we were doing away with every sign, it would necessarily have to be the case either that the sounds uttered in our case against the sign signified nothing, or that if they did signify, it would be granted that there is some sign." (M 8.290) Therefore, Sextus claims neither that signs exist nor that they do not exist, but he suspends judgment, claiming that they exist no more than they do not.

The arguments against signs do not leave any hope that a demonstration can be valid. For, in order to achieve certainty that a demonstration is a demonstration, one needs to demonstrate this, and this second demonstration requires a demonstration of its validity – and thus to infinity. Besides, the absence of the criterion of truth makes it impossible to determine whether the premises of a demonstration are true, so the truth value of the conclusion is also hypothetical. Sextus writes that "the premises of the demonstration, whichever side they belong to, are untrustworthy and insecure. And for this reason demonstration is also not trustworthy." (M 8.356) Sextus wants to proceed methodically, that is to say, without overlooking the concept of demonstration, so important for the knowledge of truth. Since the Stoics have had great achievements concerning the logic of propositions, Sextus wishes to expose the weaknesses of their logic.

Demonstration, as a kind of argument, is a juxtaposition of premises and a conclusion. According to Sextus, the condition of validity of a demonstration is (besides the truthfulness of its premises) its conclusiveness (meaning that the conclusion follows from the premises) and ability to reveal an unclear conclusion on the basis of the premises. Demonstration is a kind of sign, that is to say, a way of uncovering unclear things (M 8.310). Inconclusiveness, in turn, manifests itself through lack of connection between premises and a conclusion, ignoring an important premise, employing a false pattern of inference or including a superfluous premise (PH 2.146). Determining a lack of each of these fallacies – which amounts to assessing whether a demonstration is correct and conclusive – remains a controversial and undecidable matter (since it would require a criterion, a sign, or another demonstration).

Sextus has criticized the Stoic axioms recognized by Chrysippus. He believed that it was possible to undermine the whole Stoic logic by calling these axioms into question: "if they are rejected, the whole of dialectic is overthrown"

(PH 2.156) In searching for inconclusiveness, he put emphasis on the arguments of superfluous premises and circular reasoning.

Let us list the patterns of inference: (1) If it is day, it is light; but it is day; therefore, it is light. (2) If it is day, it is light; but it is not light; therefore, it is not day. (3) It is not the case that it is day and it is night; but it is day; therefore, it is not night. (4) Either it is day or it is night; but it is day; therefore, it is not night (5) Either it is day or it is night; but it is not night; therefore, it is day. (PH 2.157–2.158) These patterns correspond to the laws discussed in medieval logic (cf. Kotarbiński 1985: 42):

1. $[(p \rightarrow q) \wedge p] \rightarrow q$ *modus ponendo ponens*
2. $[(p \rightarrow q) \wedge \sim q] \rightarrow \sim p$ *modus tollendo tollens*
3. $[\sim (p \wedge q) \wedge p] \rightarrow \sim q$ *modus ponendo tollens*
4. $[(p / q) \wedge p] \rightarrow \sim q$ *modus ponendo tollens*
5. $[(p \vee q) \wedge \sim q] \rightarrow p$ *modus tollendo ponens*[27]

Now, let us consider the first reasoning pattern called *modus ponendo ponens*: "If it is day, it is light; but it is day; therefore, it is light." (cf. M 8.440) Sextus believes that the premise "if it is day, it is light" is unnecessary, since "it is light" follows from "it is day" (M. 8.441–8.442). "This connection between the two phenomena – it is day, it is light – is either evident and undoubtable or non-evident and doubtable. If it is evident and undoubtable, it requires merely a simple and direct inference: 'It is day; therefore, it is light.' But if the connection is non-evident and doubtable, then the whole sequence [the conditional – R. Z.] is questionable, and hence it has no cognitive value." (Joachimowicz 1972: 170)

There is no way but to acknowledge that the connection between these two phenomena is evident to us. But this means that the first premise "is an superfluous load", as it presupposes the conclusion. Ben Mates (1961: 104) is right to point out that the superfluous premise cannot render the whole reasoning

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27 According to Tadeusz Kotarbiński (1985: 42), the fourth axiom contains the concept of Sheffer's disjunction (no more than one of two) and the fifth contains the concept of inclusive disjunction (at least one of two). Benson Mates believes that both these axioms should contain exclusive disjunction (exactly one of two). Exclusive disjunction was most used, and is the only type of disjunction which occurs in the five fundamental inference-schemas of Stoic propositional logic." (Mates 1961: 51) Mates, however, quotes different Stoics' propositions which contain the concept of inclusive disjunction and Sheffer's disjunction. It seems that this is not important for Sextu's argumentation, since all three concepts of alternative correspond to these axioms and do not diminish their tautological character.

inconclusive and that Sextus made an error here. This kind of reasoning is, at most, inelegant, but it is not inconclusive insofar as the conclusion follows from its other premises.

It seems that, for Sextus, the argument of superfluous premises seems to be a way to expose these patterns as circular. The conditional "If it is day, it is light" would not be accepted as a premise, if 'It is light' had not been earlier observed always to co-exist with 'It is day.' Thus one must first apprehend that when it is day it is necessarily also light, in order to construct the conditional 'If it is day, it is light', and by way of this conditional it is concluded that when it is day it is light." (PH 2.199) And, if it is so, there is a circularity between the demonstration and experience. Therefore, Sextus is right to assert that these axioms do not provide any new knowledge; instead, the conclusion is dogmatically presupposed in the premises. After all, it is hard to expect the demonstration to be something else. What Sextus wished to show, however, was that demonstrations could not be the source of certain knowledge for which he searched, because just like experience, they could give no guarantee regarding the possibility of recognizing the truth.

The accusation of circular reasoning is also put forward against Aristotle's categorical syllogisms. Let us take the following example: Socrates is human; everything human is an animal; Socrates is an animal. "Now this proposition – 'Everything human is an animal' – is confirmed inductively from the particulars; for from the fact that Socrates, being human, is also an animal, and similarly with Plato and Dio and each of the particulars it is thought possible to affirm that everything human is an animal" (PH 2.195) But then from the major premise that everything human is an animal, the conclusion is driven that Socrates is an animal, even though this conclusion is the condition of truthfulness of the inductive premise (it is a particular proposition which is a part of the inductive procedure to get this general premise; cf. PH 2.196).

Sextus is right to point out the limited role of syllogisms which do not reveal anything new about the world and are based on empirically observed correlations (everything is already determined in the premises). However, contrary to Sextus, it does not mean that demonstrations do not exist, but it means that their role is not so much to provide new knowledge as to settle relations between particular propositions. In his quest for certain knowledge on the world, Sextus could not be content with demonstration as a method of searching for truth. For every demonstration requires a criterion, just as every criterion has to be demonstrated. In short, we do not know "where to find conviction because of the circularity." (PH 2.203)

There are also other, less interesting but typically Sextan arguments against demonstrations, such as the dilemma between generic and specific demonstration. Sextus distinguishes demonstration as a genre from specific demonstrations, rejecting the former in order not to trouble himself with arguing against particular cases.

> That demonstration is something, then, is established either by a generic demonstration or by a specific one. But definitely not by a specific one; for no specific demonstration is yet in place given that generic demonstration is not yet agreed to. […] But not by a generic one either; for it is the one being investigated, […] it cannot be capable of establishing itself. (M 8.340–8.343)

Generic demonstration can have no particular premises and conclusions, which is why it cannot justify anything (including itself). If we claim otherwise, we fall into circular reasoning:

> For in order for generic demonstration to be confirmed, we need to have the specific one trustworthy, but in order for the specific one to be agreed to, we need to have the generic one firm, so that we can neither have the former before the latter nor the latter before the former. (M 8.342)

Moreover, Sextus writes that neither deduction nor induction can lead one to discover the truth. He describes induction as a procedure justifying "universals on the basis of particulars." (PH 2.204) Sextus does not address the method of induction in *Against the Logicians*, and in *Outlines of Skepticism* he provides only a brief discussion of it. Induction can be either complete or incomplete. Incomplete induction accounts only for some particular cases and remains uncertain, because it is "possible that some of the particulars omitted in the induction should be contrary to the universal." (PH 2.204) Complete induction seeks to take into account all cases, but it is "an impossible task, since the particulars are infinite and indeterminate." (PH 2.204)

Sextus also dismisses definition as a way to discover the truth. "The Dogmatics also take great pride in their technique of definition […]. […] we shall […] turn about all the vain effort which the Dogmatists have bestowed on [definitions]." (PH 2.205) Firstly, he claims that knowledge of things does not require definitions: "someone who is ignorant of the *definiendum* cannot define what is unknown to him, while someone who knows a thing and then defines it has not apprehended the *definiendum* from the definition but has first apprehended it and then put together the definition." (PH 2.207) Secondly, it is hard to determine the adequacy of definitions with respect to the *definienda* "because of the infinities of the particulars on the basis of which they ought to be decided." (PH 2.210) Therefore, definitions are not necessary for knowledge, and it is even impossible

to assess whether they are correct. Again, one may point out that Sextus underappreciates the ordering role of definitions which specify concepts and facilitate our orientation in the multiplicity of empirical data. From the perspective of his quest for certainty, definitions are indeed of no importance for acquiring knowledge.

Sextus's argumentation are usually convincing, but it should be stressed that they are also subject to his own critique of deductive arguments: everything is determined in their premises (including, for example, the conditions of correctness of demonstration). These conditions are unfulfillable, since one needs to be certain not only that the premises are true and the demonstration correct, but also that the conclusion is revealed by the premises. In adopting such a concept of demonstration, one necessarily comes to the conclusion that demonstrations do not exist.

I shall return to the topic of demonstrations at the end of the chapter discussing the self-refutation problem.

5.3. Physics, Ethics and the Specialized Sciences

The work *Against Physicists* and the third book of *Outlines of Skepticism* deal with the concepts of god/God, cause, place, time, number and others. Sextus applies to these concepts the model of self-refutation developed earlier (especially, Agrippa's five modes). His critique is focused on stressing the differences between ways of understanding of these concepts. According to Sextus, there is no way to arrive at any certain solution of these disagreements and the only proper stance, of course, is the suspension of judgment.

In the case of a god/God, Sextus begins with a presentation of differences in understanding of gods, but he assumes an approximate concept of god for the purposes of his argument: "god is a blessed and imperishable animal, perfect in happiness and free from all evil." (M 9.33) However, a problem arises when one seeks to specify the concepts of happiness of gods. The Stoics believe that, for a god, to be happy is to act according to virtue and spread its providence over all beings subject to it. The Epicureans propose a different view: to be happy is not to act, not to suffer and not to cause suffering to others (PH 3.5). Moreover, there is a problem of whether god/God is corporeal or incorporeal, similar or dissimilar to human beings, spatial or non-spatial, mundane or non-mundane, sensitive and changeable or imperishable (M 9.146–147). These and many other questions and doubts make it difficult, if impossible, to produce a unanimous concept of a god/God.

Sextus invokes Cardneades's six arguments against the Stoic concept of god (the same arguments are also quoted in Cicero's *De natura deorum*, 3.34–3.44). Following Carneades, Sextus presents several soritic arguments against polytheistic gods.

> If Zeus is a god, Poseidon as his brother will be a god. But if Poseidon is a god, Achelous too will be a god; and if Achelous, the Nile too; and if the Nile, every river; and if every river, streams too would be gods; and if streams, mountain runoffs. But streams are not [gods]; therefore neither is Zeus. (M 9.182–9.183)

Some of Sextus's arguments seem to be important also in the discussion of a monotheistic God. The radical conceptual divergence among other thinkers is supposed to confirm the cogency of skepticism. Many Sextus's arguments expose the concept of a single God as incoherent, for example:

(1) If there is something divine, it is either a body or incorporeal
(2) It is not incorporeal, since
(3) What is incorporeal is inanimate and insensitive
(4) Nor it is a body, since
(5) Every body is changeable and perishable, whereas
(6) The divine is imperishable, consequently
(7) The divine does not exist. (M 9.151)

Typically for himself, Sextus is far from claiming that this argument is conclusive. In fact, it is presented only in order to call into question common and philosophical notions about a god/God. Subsequently, Sextus suggests that human beings are unable to capture the concept of a god, because they "possess neither an agreed substance for him nor a form nor place in which he is." (PH 3.3)

If one would ignore these difficulties and assume that Sextus specifies the concept of gods/God, there is still no proof of their/His existence. Here, once again, Sestus presents the whole series of arguments against the existence of gods/God and several arguments in favor of it. Atheists, such as Euhemerus, Prodicus of Ceos, Theodorus the Atheist or Diagoras of Melos, put forward different arguments against the existence of a god. The Stoics, in turn, argue in favor of the existence of a god, pointing to the orderly motion of the universe and the gradual nature of perfection or justice. They even present an ontological argument that "gods are of such a nature as to exist." (M 9.134) Sextus dismisses all these arguments as inconclusive. He also debunks the arguments put forward by atheists – for example, by invoking the weak argument of piety. "If there are no gods, piety is not in existence; but piety does exist; so, too, do the gods." (M 9.123) Having analyzed different arguments concerning the existence of gods in *Against the Physicists*, Sextus suggests that we should suspend judgment about gods because of the equipollence of these arguments.

However, in his *Outlines of Skepticism*, which were written subsequently, he adds a detailed analysis of Epicurus's argument concerning the existence of evil. The concept of the divine employed in this argument is variously read by the

translators, who use either a small (Krokiewicz, Annas, Barnes) or a capital letter (Hankinson), but the logic of this argument clearly suggests a reference to the single, almighty God immune to all weaknesses (both causal and moral). Let us reconstruct Sextus's argument:

1. Anyone who says that there are gods says either that they provide for the things in the universe or that they do not.
2. If they provide, then either for all things or for some.
3. But if they provided for all things, there would be nothing bad and evil in the universe.
4. But everything is full of evil.
5. Therefore, the gods would not be said to provide for everything.
6. But if they provide for some things, why do they provide for these and not for those?
7. Either they both want to and can provide for all.
8. Or they want to but cannot.
9. Or they can but do not want to.
10. Or they neither want to nor can.
11. [7] is untrue because of [4].
12. If they want to but cannot [8], they are weak.
13. If they can but do not want to [9], they will be thought to be malign.
14. If they neither want to nor can [10], they are both malign and weak.
15. Anyone who says that gods are malign or weak [theses 11–13] is clearly impious.
16. Therefore, gods do not provide for the things in the universe [the Epicurean thesis].
17. But if they have providence for nothing and have no function and no effect [that is, there are no signs of their presence], we will not be able to say how it is apprehended that there are gods.
18. For this reason, it is inapprehensible whether there are gods. (cf. PH 3.9–3.12)

According to Sextus, those who claim that God exists are impious, as they make Him either weak or responsible for evil. Nor atheists are right in claiming that God does not exist (because their arguments are inconclusive). Sextus's position is the skeptical suspension of judgment: "the Skeptics have declared that, owing to the equipollence of the opposed arguments, the gods are existent no more than non-existent." (M 9.59)

However, the question arises whether a Skeptic should participate in any form of religious cult? One may expect that a skeptic who does not hold any beliefs regarding gods/God will not be actively religious. And yet Sextus seems to propose an opposite view: "we say that there are gods and we are pious towards the gods and say that they are provident." (PH 3.2) He also writes that, although skeptics do not hold beliefs, in practice they follow the custom of the community in which they live and consider piousness as good and impiousness as evil (PH 1.24). A skeptic "in conformity with his ancestral customs and laws […] declares that the gods exist and performs everything which contributes to their

worship and veneration, but, so far as regards philosophic investigation, declines to commit himself rashly" (M 9.49) It is a form of governing oneself with tradition and custom in the skeptical practice of life.

Sextus's recommendation of living without beliefs, especially in a wider perspective, that is, as a way of life, is hardly reliable. In fact, religiousness is here instrumentalized and reduced to hypocrisy. Sextus's thought is a precious source of ancient arguments concerning the divine, but he does not seem to be a serious theoretician of religion. His proposition of reconciling religion with skepticism strikes as artificial and is far from any serious analysis of the phenomenon of religiousness (as religiousness seems to consist precisely in holding beliefs). Modern skepticism, which will consist, not in a lack of beliefs but in uncertainty, will find a better way to be reconciled with religion (although Martin Luther will protest against linking faith with uncertainty).

Another important concept discussed by Sextus is the concept of cause. He described the crucial role of this concept in Greek philosophy. This discussion about it must have been already advanced, since the dogmatics formulated the charge of self-refutation against the skeptics.

> He who says that cause does not exist says so either without a cause or with some cause. And if he does so without any cause, he is untrustworthy […]. But if he says so with some cause, he is self-refuted, and in the act of saying that no cause exists he is affirming the existence of some cause. (M 9.204)

In short, every attempt to justify the thesis that cause does not exist requires one to provide a cause of this state of affairs, and hence to silently assume that everything has a cause. Otherwise, the statement would be groundless and unreliable. This is a very strong argument for every rationalist. Sextus, however, avoids acknowledging this conclusion and prefers to put forward such a "groundless statement". After all, he argues that rational justification of any thesis is impossible.

Subsequently, Sextus reverses this argument by means of Agrippa's trilemma. Someone who says that something is a cause of something else, either has a specific cause in mind or makes an unfounded statement. If he makes an unfounded statement, he is untrustworthy, and if he gives a specific cause, he "would have to provide a cause for there being causes, and another for that, and so *ad infinitum*. […] Therefore, it is impossible to assert firmly that anything is a cause of anything." (PH 3.24) There is also a possibility of circular reasoning: in order to capture a cause, one has to recognize its effect, and in order to capture the effect, one has to know its cause (PH 3.22).

Agains the Physicists contains specific temporal aporias concerning the question of cause and effect. According to Sextus, the cause and effect can be neither

simultaneous nor successive. If they were simultaneous, then the effect would already exist and would not need a cause of its existence. If the cause was earlier than the effect, it would not be possible for it to affect something subsequent to it, something that does not exist. And it would be all the more preposterous if the effect was earlier than the cause. Therefore, Sexusts argues that it is impossible to assert the existence of any cause (M 9.232–236).

Sextus, then, drives the discussion concerning the existence of causes to an equipollence of contradictory arguments. "The Skeptics assert that [cause] is no more existent than non-existent." (M 9.195) This critique ultimately results in calling into question the reliability of employing the concept of cause in cognizing the world. It is impossible to acquire certainty that something is a cause of something else, just as it is impossible to acquire knowledge by invoking the principle of causality. This type of skepticism will be thoroughly discussed in the middle ages (Nicholas of Autrecourt) and modern period (David Hume).

Against the Physicists provides many other skeptical arguments concerning place, time or number. Sextus is unable to find a fine theory of these primitive notions and fails to comprehend them. Place (space) is neither a body nor a void. It cannot be a body, because it stands in opposition to bodies which occupy it. Nor it is a void, since in giving room to bodies it is filled with them. Moreover, it is neither a form nor matter. For matter moves from one place to another and form is connected to matter, while place is not connected to any of them. And since place is neither a form nor matter, and neither a body nor void, it follows that its nature is unknown (M 9.29, 9.36).

Time is neither finite (it is a paradox to say that there was a time when there was no time) nor infinite (it is a paradox to say that the past and the future exist in the present; M 9.189–9.191). Similarly, it is neither destroyable (what it came from and to what is it transformed?) nor understroyable (yesterday no longer exists; M 9.204). It is unknown whether time exists, since it consists of that which does not yet exist (the future) and that which does not exist anymore (the past; M 9.192). It is neither indivisible (it is divided to the past, the present, and the future) nor divisible (as it is divided to that which not yet exists and that which no longer exists; M 9.194). To say that the present is merely a boundary between the non-existent past and the non-existent future is to annihilate time (M 9.198). Sextus suspects that time does not exist or, at any rate, that it can be neither comprehended nor known (cf. Dąmbska 1968: 247).

Also mathematical notions (such as number, point, line, and plane) do not escape Sextus's critique. Numbers are based on the notion of the one, of which it is unknown whether it is inside or outside of things. In *Against the Arithmeticians*,

Sextus tries to find a place for the one among the individual things. He encounters the paradox that the one can be applied to many different things (a stone or an animal, for instance, can be equally termed as "one"), which is why its own unity, or oneness, can be called into question. The one referring to many different things turns into its own negation, becoming "many" (M4.11–4.17). Therefore, according to Sextus, the one and all other numbers generated from it are not real (PH 3.158).

Euclid's geometry is called into question by the critique of the notions of point, line, and plane. Point is a sign which is without parts or dimensions (*semeion*), which is non-extensive and indivisible; line is a "point which has flowed", or length without breadth; and plane is length and breadth without depth. Solids are constructed from these primitive elements (M 9.376; M 10.278–282). However, Sextus asks, if a point does not occupy any plane, how can it divide a line? (M 3.103) If line describes a circle on a plane, how can it exist without breadth? (M 9.425) "[…] lenght without breadth cannot be conceived" (M 9.402) "[…] we have had no impression of any length without breadth." (M.3.44) How can the plane be a limit, if it is without depth? (M 9.434–9.435) If point is non-extensive, it is not a body and it is not real (M. 3.22) "[…] if no sign without parts or dimensions exists, neither will a line exist, and if the line does not exist, neither will length exist, and if length does not exist neither will body subsist." (M 9.376) Because of these doubts and paradoxes, Sextus argues, it is better to suspend judgment about mathematical objects.

Ethical questions are dealt with in *Against the Ethicists* and *Outlines of Skepticism* (book 3). Pyrrho considered such questions as most important, and Aenesidemus also devoted some attention to them. Ethics can be deemed as most important in skepticism insofar as its main purpose is *ataraxia*, peace and quietness of spirit. It was precisely avoiding disquiet and uneasiness that constituted the main motivation behind Pyrrho's suspension of judgment. For Sextus, however, it is much more important to avoid irresponsible assertions and false. He approaches ethical questions from an epistemological angle, examining whether one can legitimately hold beliefs concerning good and evil (right and wrong). He considers ethics simply as yet another area of ostensible knowledge which should be destroyed.

As usually, Sextus begins by describing the existing disagreements concerning both the concept of the good (like virtue in Stoics or pleasure in Epicurus) and the existence of the good. Health, for example, is the greatest good for some, while others consider it is a good, but not the greatest. For yet others it is not a good at all and those count it as a "preferred indifferent" or even as an "indifferent but not preferred" (M 11.48). Similarly, pleasure seems good to Epicurus, but indifferent to the Stoics and evil to the Cynics (M 11.74). If good and evil things

were the same by nature, they would have the same value for all people, like fire which burns everyone or snow which is always cold. If there is a difference of opinions regarding the good, a criterion of good and evil is required, which, however, can be provided neither by the senses nor by the intellect. "[…] therefore there does not exist anything good or evil by nature." (M 11.71)

Sextus's second argument is concerned with the misleading character of ostensible knowledge about good and evil. Those who assume the existence of good and evil are unhappy, because the pursuit of good and the avoiding of evil both lead to anxiety and disquiet: "when he has failed as yet to grasp the good he will be extremely perturbed, because of his desire to gain it, and when he has gained it he will never be at rest owing to the excess of his joy or on account of keeping watch over his acquisition." (M 11.116) In their pursuit to gain the good, people fall into greed and do a lot of evil things. Also the fear of the evil produces anxiety and concerns, which disturb peace. If we recognize that nothing is good or evil by nature, "we shall have a release from perturbation and there will await us a peaceful life" (M 11.185). There is no "science of goods and evils" (M 11.185), just as there is no art of life. The skeptical suspension of judgment about good and evil leads to *ataraxia*, a form of life which is free from anxiety. As Sextus writes, "to teach this is, in fact, the particular task of Skepticism; therefore, it belongs to it to secure a happy life." (M 11.140) This is an evident return to Pyrrho. Sextus seems to be dogmatic here, but he earlier stressed that, in this case, "is" should be considered as "appears to be" (M 11.18).

The most often discussed ethical problem in Sextus is the counterexample of a tyrant who would tell a skeptic to perform a malicious act. Is it possible for a skeptic to avoid making a choice and to remain in peace? After all, "either he will not submit to the order given him but will choose a voluntary death, or else to avoid torture he will do what is commanded, and thus he will […] choose the one and refuse the other, which is the action of those who confidently hold that something to be avoided and desirable exists." (M 11.164) Sextus replies that a skeptic does not govern his life with a philosophical theory, but rather relies on non-philosophical appearances and customs. "And when compelled by a tyrant to commit any forbidden act he will perchance choose the one course and avoid the other owing to the preconception due to his ancestral laws and customs; and as compared with the Dogmatics he will certainly endure hardship more easily because he has not, like the other, any additional beliefs beyond the actual suffering." (M 11.166) In other words, he will not hold any beliefs which might increase his suffering. The attitude of skepticism is a commitment practice without theory. However, one may ask whether in practice it is possible to avoid having

moral beliefs? Sextus replies that a skeptic makes his choices without beliefs, governed by his upbringing and customs or habits. But his answer, as many scholars point out, is not satisfactory (cf. Bett 2010a: 193; Striker 2010: 204; Vogt 2010a: 172). In fact, this is an example of incompatibility between Sextus's skepticism and the requirements posed by life and action. We shall return to this shortly.

The work *Against the Professors* (M 1–6) complements Sextus's summa of skepticism and is devoted to six of the seven liberal arts (grammar, rhetoric, geometry, arithmetics, astronomy, and music). In Sextus's times, these fields were called "cyclical sciences" and constituted the fundamental canon of education. Only logic is missing from this discussion, because Sextus devoted to it two separate volumes in *Against the Dogmatics* (M7 and M8).

Sextus seeks to show that also in these fields there is no certain knowledge, even if the grammarians, rhetors, geometers, astronomers, and musicians are convinced of importance of their knowledge, "propagating their futile considerations, subtle distinctions, and fanciful postulates." (Nerczuk 2007: 17) Sextus, to be sure, recognizes certain merits of these studies in their practical character (as opposed to pure theory). Grammar as the science of reading and writing, arithmetics as the practice of counting, and music as the art of playing instruments are all considered as beneficial. By contrast, their theoretical dimension – for example, inquiring into whether a statement is a corporeal sign or an incorporeal meaning (M 1.157–1.158) – becomes an object of typical refutation by means of Agrippa's trilemma (M 1.157). Grammar as a theory of linguistic correctness is dispensable, because the standards of speaking "good Greek" are established by "those who live ordinary lives and not [by] the Grammarians" (M. 1.191). Grammar as the art of interpretation is also unnecessary with respect to well-written, that is to say, clear texts (M 1.319–1.320).

As for the critique of arithmetics, Sextus repeats the arguments put forward against demonstrations: the uncertainty of assumptions and principles and the circularity of premises and conclusions (M 3.13–3.16). Additionally, he argues that the notions of number, point, and plane exceed imagination: for example, it is impossible to conceive "breadth without length" (M 3.44). Rejecting mathematical propositions, however, Sextus does not deny that the practical ability to count is beneficial.

Concerning the field of liberal arts, Sextus adopts a position which is in some respects similar, but in others quite dissimilar, to his position on philosophical disciplines. The similarity lies in his rejection of all theories in favor of practice. What is different is that, instead of suspending judgment, he is focused on overturning those theories. Perhaps, it is not so much that he ceases to be a skeptic – as Karel

Janacek suggests (1972: 87) – as that his skepticism evolves in the direction of negative dogmatism and empiricism.

5.4. The Defense of Consistency

After discussing the armory of skeptical means employed by Sextus, it is worth to answer the question about a status of these arguments and of the whole Sextan discourse. In his eyes, skepticism should be first defined as the quest for truth – in opposition both to the dogmatics who claim to have found the truth and to those who argue that it is inapprehensible (PH 1.1–4). Further, he offers a more detailed characteristic of skepticism: it is not a doctrine and does not involve any beliefs at all, since it promotes the suspension of judgment about everything. Skepticism emerges as a way of life (*agōgē*), an ability to argue in favor of opposite parties and to disprove all possible views, and, above all, as the position of *epochē*, the suspension of all judgment. Moreover, Sextus is evidently averse to all non-skeptical philosophers whom he calls the dogmatics.

According to Sextus, skeptical arguments and conclusions have only an instrumental value, as a cure for the disease of dogmatism. He considers these inferences as merely intellectual phenomena, as something probable or reliable (*pithanon*), without ever assenting to them. Sextan skepticism stands in evident opposition to the academics like Philo of Larissa who proposed the idea of assent without certainty. Its main principle is "no certainty – no belief". In contemporary terms, Sextus can be said to reject a gradation of beliefs and considers as legitimate only those beliefs which guarantee their own truth. In the light of Robert Hankinson's (1995) reading, Sextan skepticism is not a set of beliefs, but it is a set of habits or proclivities, an ability to disprove beliefs and argue in favor of opposite parties, and, finally, an attitude of suspending judgment. Even the principle of the suspension of judgment (*epochē*) is supposed to function without any contribution of will nor any belief in its merit.

The typical skeptical phrases, such as "We define nothing", should not be considered as statements or assertions; they are "mere admissions" (DL 9.104). We speak only about what appears to us, reporting our temporary sensations and personal feelings (PH 1.187–1.209). In fact, these expressions "can be destroyed by themselves, being cancelled along with what they are applied to, just as purgative drugs do not merely drain the humours from the body but drive themselves out too along with the humours." (PH 1.206) Pyrrho's phrase "'In no way more' says that it too, along with everything else, is no more so than not so, and hence it cancels itself along with everything else." (PH 1.14) However, insofar as the skeptics search for the truth, they maintain some relation to it. They just cannot

acquire certainty. By describing what there seems to be, they only assert what appears to them as true.

At the beginning of *Outlines of Skepticism*, Sextus writes that there is no sentence in the book that he, as the author, would consider as true. These sentences serve only to express that what appears to the author, the phenomena he perceives. This ostensible refusal of assent is based merely on uncertainty. However, he goes as far as to put forward the thesis that the skeptical position consists in a total and consistent suspension of judgment about everything and in a life without beliefs. If we take this declaration at its face value, the question arises not only of how to live without holding beliefs, but also of how to conduct philosophy consisting in discussing and defending a particular view. This is an old accusation of *apraxia*, the impossibility of living and acting. Both Epicureans (Colotes of Lampsacus) and Stoics made this accusation against the academic skeptics. It was also put forward against neo-Pyrrhonists by Aristocles (in Eusebius) and a prominent Greek physician, Galen, who fought against medical skepticism (Burnyeat 1982: 31; 1998: 27).

Sextus gives the following reply to the *apraxia* objection: to act in the skeptical manner is to passively receive stimuli and react to them, following that what appears. In Sextus's words, to live the life of a skeptic is to rely on "guidance by nature, necessitation by feelings [hunger conducts us to food and thirst to drink], handing down of laws and customs, and teaching of kinds of expertise." (PH 1.23–1.24) One may conceive of two aspects defining the skeptical criterion of action: follow that what appears to you and do not oppose customs (Joachimowicz 1972: 123). This description may seem to suggest that the skeptics advise one to lead an ordinary, everyday life, to follow one's natural instincts, to govern oneself with common sense and tradition, and to perform existing professions. However, Sextus insists that a skeptic does not share common opinions, and lives in an automatic, almost animal-like manner. If he performs any actions, it is not out of conviction, but out of coercion or habit: if he takes part in religious ceremonies, he does not adopt any beliefs, but merely follows tradition. Also the practice of physician is said to be possible without holding any beliefs. The skeptical philosophy should be a practice without theory (Williams 1988); similarly, the skeptical discourse lacks assent and merely report appearances, without involving the acceptance of anything as true. It is hard to resist the impression that Sextus mistakes uncertainty for non-assent.

Giovanni Reale argues that Sextus introduces a dualism between things and appearances and that this is his method for maintaining consistency of the skeptical position (Reale 1999b: 2015). Just as life should be led in accordance with appearances, so philosophy should be based on them. Arguments and dogmatic

theories are all just appearances. According to Reale, Sextus proposes "the new concept of the phenomenon understood as an *affection of a subject* in opposition to an *external object*, that is, in opposition to an object existing outside of the subject (beyond the phenomenon)." (Reale 1999b: 219) Discussing Aenesidemus's modes, Sextus interprets the suspension of judgment in terms of judgments about external objects. "I shall be able to say how each existing thing appears to me, but for these reasons I shall be forced to suspend judgment on how it is by nature." (PH 1.78) "We cannot say anything about the nature of external existing objects" (PH 1.128), "we must suspend judgment about the nature of objects." (PH 1.140) "No-one, presumably, will rise a controversy over whether an existing thing appears this way or that; rather, they investigate whether it is such as it appears." (PH 1.22)

However, a problem appears concerning with respect to the status of phenomenon (or appearance) and theoretical assumption that being is different than phenomenon. Reale acknowledges that the distinction between phenomenon and existing object posits the existence of objects beyond phenomena (that is to say, difference between appearing and being), while a skeptic has no grounds to accept such view (Reale 1999b: 219; cf. Stępień 1966: 92). Let us add that the distinction between being and phenomenon does not correspond well to the distinction between assent and non-assent. It merely limits the scope of assent to the field of subjectivity. Sextus, however, is interested in life without any assent.

Joachimowicz makes another allegation against governing oneself with appearances. Insofar as skeptics accept all phenomena, skepticism is a kind of commonsense dogmatism putting an end to all rational investigations. This, in turn, raises the problem of delusions and or mutually incompatible appearances: for example, an oar which appears bent when in water but straight when out of it. "In the face of these contradictory phenomena, the Dogmatics argue, a skeptic must decide on something and either recognize both phenomena as equivalent – but then he would be unable to act (similarly to Jean Buridan's ass) – or choose between them, thus undermining the whole skeptical position and the equipollence (*isostheneia*) of judgments. Showing preference to one phenomenon over others, he would recognize one of them as true and important, while rejecting the other. He would thereby disprove himself." (Joachimowicz 1972: 127) Therefore, different interpreters write that Sextus falls into self-refutation – and even Sextus himself seems to accept this critique. Is it possible, then, to defend consistency of his position?

5.5. Recent Consistency Interpretations

In contemporary writing on Sextus Empiricus one may also find different attempts to defend consistency of his skepticism. There are three interpretations

defending its consistency which seem most important. Michael Frede (1998b) proposed to attribute weak beliefs on things to skeptics of Sextus's type (such beliefs would not be accepted as true, but would no concern merely appearances). Robert Hankinson (1995), in turn, suggested skeptics of Sextus's type do not hold any beliefs, but their philosophy is a pure practice without beliefs (disposition and therapy). Finally, Alan Bailey (1990) observed that Sextan skepticism is not a thesis, but a process which develops in time and which involves a radical transformation of one's own theses and arguments (it is precisely overlooking this diachrony, that leads to the impression of inconsistency).

To support his interpretation, Frede quotes the passage of *Outlines…* devoted to non-dogmatic beliefs.

> When we say that skeptics do not hold beliefs, we do not take "belief" (*dogma*) in the sense in which some say, quite generally, that belief is acquiescing (*eudokein*) in something; for Skeptics assent to the feelings forced upon them by appearances – for example, they would not say when heated or chilled "I think I'm not heated (or chilled)". Rather, we say that they do not hold beliefs in the sense in which some say that belief is assent to some unclear object of investigation in the sciences; for Pyrrhonists do not assent to anything unclear (*adēlon*)." (PH 1.13)

As Frede observes, in spite of the simple interpretation that "a skeptic has no views or beliefs about anything […] suspending judgment on whatever issue" (Frede 1998a: 1), Sextus explicitly writes that skeptics hold certain beliefs. Frede adds that everyday human life requires holding beliefs and "the skeptic cannot avoid knowing many things." (Ibid.) In the quoted passage Sextus describes beliefs concerning impressions ("I'm heated", "I'm chilled") as examples of non-dogmatic beliefs. Frede will argue that Sextus maintains not only beliefs about appearances, but also certain beliefs about things.

Frede puts to question the simple distinction between appearances with directly accessible content and unaccessible external world. Analyzing the contrast between appearances and reality, he distinguishes between three types of beliefs: those about how things really are, those about how things are, and beliefs about appearances. Skeptics suspend beliefs of the first type, but they maintain both latter types. Things are not utterly unclear, Frede argues, and the suspension of judgment should be limited to the realm of philosophical and scientific beliefs about what there really is, or the nature of things (as the quoted passage suggests). But skeptics still hold beliefs about appearances and clear things. Does it mean that all common beliefs are accepted by skeptics? Frede contends that all common beliefs are based on appearances, which is why a common thing can be equated with an appearance (in fact, our common experience is restricted to the

sphere of appearances). Therefore, to reject beliefs about reality is not to reject appearances, but it is only to suspend beliefs about things:

> What fundamentally distinguishes the skeptic from other people are not the beliefs he has but his attitude toward them. He no longer has the more or less naive and partially dogmatic attitude of the "ordinary" man; his relation to his beliefs is permeated by the awareness that things are quite possibly different in reality. (Frede 1998a: 23)

As distinct from an ordinary man, the skeptic adopts distance to his own beliefs, but the content of these beliefs, Frede argues, remains unchanged.

Analyzing the concept of belief, Frede suggests to distinguish between weak and strong beliefs. The strong beliefs consist in "active acceptance of truth", while the weak ones are "merely passive." (Frede 1998b: 138) Frede believes that to accept that P is not always to accept that P is true (Frede 1998b: 135). Acceptance can consist in not rejecting an impression and acting on its basis. A skeptic reports his impressions without adopting any position on their truth value. Weak beliefs concern appearances and things which are clear. Strong beliefs are those about the nature of things. Such a broad scope of skeptical beliefs makes it possible for skeptics not only to live and act but also to philosophize in the form of weak beliefs. In that sense, skeptics accept the thesis that there is no criterion of truth nor legitimate demonstrations. Also the main skeptical thesis that one should suspend all strong beliefs, can have the status of a weak belief, thereby avoiding self-refutation. Thus, Sextus's skepticism becomes a consistent doctrine.

One may ask, however, if this interpretation is indeed adequate? Myles Burnyeat has opposed Frede's conception. He did not accept the idea that belief can be distinguished from accepting something as true. "Belief is the accepting of something as true." (Burnyeat 1998: 31), and "truth, in the skeptic's vocabulary, is closely tied to real existence as contrasted with appearance." (Burnyeat 1998: 31) Hence, it is impossible to hold beliefs without accepting them as true. According to Burnyeat, Sextus claims to accept appearances, but at the same time suspends all beliefs. Thus, the problem of incompatibility of skepticism and life or action returns. Appearances provide life with meaning, but their passive acceptance is insufficient for leading a typically human life. Without beliefs, he argues, life is also deprived of freedom, reason, emotions and values – it becomes passive and paralyzed (Burnyeat 1998: 46).

Burnyeat believes that it is only by virtue of inconsistency of Sextus's doctrine, that he can manage this problem. For, in spite of his declarations, he holds many strong beliefs, which he is simply unwilling to acknowledge. These beliefs include all Sextus's statements about skepticism, the conclusions of his arguments, or secondary claims on the equipollence of arguments (*isostheneia*). When a

skeptic shows that two primary beliefs (for example, that honey is sweet and that honey is bitter) are equally right, he also provides arguments in favor of a secondary belief that the reasons on both sides are equipollent. So even if he rejects primary beliefs, he still retains secondary ones. "In being shown, both on general grounds and by the accumulation of instances, that no claim about real existence is to be preferred to its denial, he has, again, been given reason to believe that generalisation true." (Burnyeat 1998: 54) Presenting his position, Sextus expresses many beliefs, thereby contradicting his own doctrine.

This polemic should be supplemented with the insight that Frede's interpretation does not conform to other Sextus's claims. Sextus criticizes Carneades and academics for their active acceptance of what is reliable and for their rational preference for appearances (PH 1.226). He also explicitly states his sole commitment to appearances: a skeptic, he writes, "report their own feelings […], affirming nothing about external objects." (PH 1.15; cf. Perin 2010a: 153)

Frede interprets Sextus in a consistent, reasonable and acceptable manner. His is the most favorable interpretation of Sextus, at least from the perspective of contemporary knowledge and concepts. Frede attributes fallibilism to Sextus and employs the concept of weak assent which can defend the consistency of his position. However, this interpretation is more accurate in the case of Carneades who can be said to have discovered the concept of weak assent. Sextus, in turn, wished to be a radical and consistent skeptic and, in cultivating this idea of skepticism, he opposed all types of beliefs, including weak and uncertain ones.

The second consistency interpretation assumes that Sextan skepticism excludes all beliefs. Hankinson (1995) seeks to demonstrate consistency of this position by describing it as a practice without theory. The skeptic governs himself with impressions and develops in himself a firm disposition to formulate mutually opposing arguments, suspend all judgments (PH 1.8), and employ arguments for the purposes of treatment against dogmatism (PH 3.280). This kind of philosophy does not contain any theses and acquires consistency by means of this causally developed disposition. Among the proponents of this interpretation are: Michael Williams (1988), Jonathan Barnes (1998), Alan Bailey (2002), Harald Thorsrud (2009),[28] Casey Perin (2010b) or Pierre Pellegrin (2010). Hankinson quotes Sextus's statement that skepticism is a way of life (*agōgē*).

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28 A similar interpretation is developed by Izydora Dąmbska and Jan Woleński. Dąmbska writes that skepticism is an attitude, not a thesis. "A formal logical argument of the inherently contradictory nature of the skeptical doctrine is futile insofar as the skeptical position is appropriately formulated" (Dąmbska 1950: 17–18). Woleński, in turn,

Replying to Frede, Hankinson writes that the acceptance of impressions described in PH 1.13 can be equated with a passive reception of stimuli[29] that consists in avoiding beliefs rather than holding them. Belief, he argues, is typically an active acceptance, not a passive affection. The rejection of all beliefs renders it impossible to make an accusation of their mutual inconsistency.

This is a radical and effective response, but it comes at the cost of deviating from common sense and undermining its own reliability. Of course, a skeptic can live without beliefs but can he philosophize? Following Barnes (1998: 59), Hankinson reconstructs the skeptical practice in the form of a following causal chain: examination – opposition – equipollence – suspension – *ataraxia*. This chain is described a causal chain independent of will, described from the perspective of external observer. Against Burnyeat, Hankinson writes that the concept of appearance should not be limited to sensory appearances, since also premises and conclusions are considered appearances by the skeptics (M 8.368). Appearances are impulses, and series of impulses produce habits and dispositions. The disposition is what brings regularity into reactions. Skeptical philosophy can be considered as this kind of disposition. In this causal interpretation, the principle of the suspension of judgment is not a secondary belief, but it is a state of mind causally produced by equipollent arguments and described in negative terms as a lack of judgment. Also the philosophical education of young skeptics consists in promoting the skeptical attitude, not a set of beliefs (Hankinson 1995: 351, n. 1). In that sense, Sextus's skepticism becomes a philosophy without beliefs, a pure practice.

In fact, it is important to recognize the similarity between Frede and Hankinson's interpretations which both extend the concept of appearance. Frede subsumes under this concept the presence of things in colloquial sense, Hankinson writes of intellectual appearances as distinct from those perceived by an external observer. Hankinson's skeptic accepts all common beliefs in a passive and instinctive manner, that is to say, according to his dispositions, without making any decisions, like a machine. Frede's skeptic, in turn, can hold beliefs, which depend on his will, but only insofar as he rejects truth and reality. He considers the whole world as unreal, but he uses his free will to govern his beliefs. Thus, the former lives without freedom, the latter without truth.

Insofar as Sextus and other skeptics do not hold any beliefs, one should pose the question about the status of Sextus's text. According to Hankinson, Sextus's

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describes Sextus's position as an attitude of refraining from asserting and does not recognize it as incoherent (1995: 179; cf. Nowicki 2007: 208).

29 "Not reacting contrary to the impression." (Hankinson 1995: 287)

statements are reports or avowals (*apangeliai*) of affections (*páthē*). Instead of involving an assent to belief, they express affections in the same way as a child expresses pain with a cry. One may trace in this interpretation some references to externalism and behaviorism. In fact, it inherits the difficulties of both these positions.

For the question arises whether the skeptical aversion to the dogmatics can be explained solely in causal terms? Perhaps, there are rational motivations behind this aversion. This question is linked to the problem of the role of skeptical arguments and to the question of whether skepticism is a rational philosophy.

Following Barnes, Hankison accepts the therapeutic interpretation of the skeptical arguments (PH 3.280). The skeptics do not hold any beliefs, nor accept any logical principles. Their only purpose is to cure the disease of dogmatism, and skeptical arguments are employed as tools of this verbal therapy. They accept neither the premises nor the conclusions of these arguments, which are used in a purely instrumental fashion, as means of effective therapy.

Such interpretation seems inadequate with respect to Sextus's texts. After all, they are full of subtle arguments which remain unreplied until today. In Hankison's interpretation, this treasure trove of ancient skepticism is discredited as a set of therapeutic means. The arguments are deprived of their power and importance, skepticism is turned into irrationalism, and the skeptics become an esoteric sect living in a passive, almost animal-like manner. However, it seems that insofar as we deny rationality to skepticism, it is no longer philosophically interesting. It might be better for skepticism to consider it as an inconsistent doctrine than to defend its consistency at such a high cost.

This opinion is confirmed by Bailey. The therapeutic interpretation is inadequate. If Sextus was interested only in therapy, he would rather employ persuasive arguments, based on rhetorical tricks and a manipulation of beliefs. These methods would surely bring more desired effects. But Sextus does not use such arguments – he neither frightens nor overawes the dogmatics, nor resorts to emotional arguments. His writing style is clear and simple, purely intellectual, employing strict argumentative patterns (Bailey 1990: 38; cf. Perin 2010b: 121). That is why his texts are of philosophical, and not merely therapeutic, significance.

The third consistency interpretation employs the concept of development and describes skepticism as a process, which encompasses at least two important stages: (1) the developing skeptic, who analyses skeptical arguments and shapes his skeptical attitude, (2) the mature skeptic. According to Bailey (1990), focusing on the maturation process radically alters the assessment of skeptical arguments. The mature skeptic does not hold any beliefs, accepts

only appearances, and considers arguments merely as therapeutic means of achieving *epochē* (Bailey 1990: 42). All features attributed to the skeptic by Hankinson, Bailey argues, define the mature skeptic (and the same goes for the causal-therapeutic interpretation). The developing skeptic, in turn, cannot treat skeptical arguments (for example, the five modes) instrumentally, because, in doing so, he would frustrate the whole process of rejecting common beliefs and suspending judgments, that is to say, the process of shaping the skeptical stance (Bailey 1990: 43). The developing skeptic still plays the dogmatic game: he considers skeptical arguments as convincing, based on good premises and logical principles. Sextus writes that the effect of presenting Aenesidemus and Agrippa's modes is the suspension of judgment (PH 1.35).

After going through the maturation process, the skeptic can go on to extend his critique onto the arguments which convinced him to skepticism, including their premises and logical principles on which they are based. These arguments were for him a ladder which he used to climb up to the level of skeptical thinking (skeptical arguments are the rungs of the ladder).

After reaching this level it is possible for a skeptic to conduct a self-critique, reflect on his way and finally recognize that skeptical arguments are also uncertain and no more plausible than the contrary arguments. The moment of rejecting his own arguments (symbolized by throwing away the ladder) seems to mark a breakthrough, a crisis whose final outcome is the transition from the developing stage to the mature stage of skepticism. In effect, the mature skeptic ceases to accept his own earlier arguments and no longer holds any beliefs or views. Nonetheless, he can still treat these arguments as therapeutic tools (Bailey 1990: 44), applied to other people who should go through the same process of skeptical development.

Bailey stresses that the same skeptical arguments can have different functions on different stages of skeptical development. They are persuasive for the developing skeptic (as he still remains a dogmatic and accepts their premises and principles), but for the mature skeptic they are only therapeutic tools (as he rejects all beliefs and logical principles). Bailey is a proponent of the therapeutic and dialectic interpretation of the mature skepticism.

The development interpretation is continued by Thorsrud (2009) who illustrates the development of skepticism on the example of the principle of *epochē* and the skeptical quest for truth. Thorsrud recognizes two incompatible theories of *epochē* in Sextus: normative and causal. According to the normative theory, the principle of *epochē* is a normative rule that, instead of relying on unfounded opinions, one should suspend all judgments. If a skeptic really searches for the truth, as Sextus declares, then he needs to establish principles of this quest. The

principle of *epochē* can be seen as one of such principles. However, the principle, thus construed, is not attributable to the mature skeptic. As Hankinson already showed, *epochē* is a causal state of mind, which happens to a skeptic and does not have normative character (Thorsrud 2009: 129). The causal interpretation fits well with the mature skeptical stance, but the developing skeptic, who goes through the process of rational persuasion to become convinced to skepticism (from the first-person perspective), can be described only in normative terms. In fact, this is a process through which every Sextus's reader goes when trying to figure out if the skeptics are right. Of course, one may describe the skeptical development process from the perspective of third person as a causal process of reinforcing the disposition to suspend judgment (Thorsrud 2009: 132). In this case, skepticism is no longer a rational philosophy. However, this aspect of skepticism should not be overlooked. In fact, it is hard to find a more advanced rationalism. The difference between these two interpretations is strictly related to the development process.

Thorsrud also shows how the purpose is shifted during this process. At the first stage, a skeptic aims to find the truth and the principle of *epochē* is subjected to it. However, the more he develops his dispositions to suspend judgment, the more judgments he suspends, and the more equipollent arguments he formulates – the lesser the hope for finding the truth. As Thorsrud observes, Sextus changes the rules and writes in one place that the basis for the suspension of judgment is not an actual formulation of a counterbalancing argument, but the very possibility of such formulation (PH 1.35). This possibility, he adds, is always open – if not now, then in the future. In light of this reasoning, there is no judgment that a skeptic can accept, so the quest for truth becomes pointless. A skeptic is unable "to sincerely expect that she will ever discover the truth." (Thorsrud 2009: 133).[30] Arguments against the criterion of truth also exclude the possibility of recognizing the truth, even if the skeptic does not assert this as a thesis. According to Thorsrud, the developing skeptic does not *yet* search for truth, while the mature skeptic, remaining at the top of the ladder, does not *already* search

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30   It is hard to agree with Casey Perin (Perin 2010b: 32) that a mature skeptic continues to search for truth, even if he does not exclude the possibility of knowing it. In my opinion this is true only about the developing skeptic. However, Perin is right to argue against interpreting the whole skepticism as antirationalism (Gisela Striker, John Cooper). He defends the thesis that the motivation behind the suspension of judgment is dictated by the requirements of reason. Interpreting skepticism as antirationalism, for instance, as a therapy, goes past the essence of skepticism (Perin 2010b: 114, 121).

for truth and does not govern himself with an normative rules of the quest for truth. His/her actions are driven by disposition and habit. "After developing the skeptical disposition, she no longer has any belief about what reason demands, or what she should do in virtue of being a rational agent." (Thorsrud 2009: 130)

This duality of Sextus's statements would be a sign of inconsistency insofar as skepticism was not considered as a process marked by a radical turn or breakthrough. The developing skeptic does hold beliefs, considers arguments as persuasive, searches for truth in a rational manner, and suspends judgments for rational reasons. The mature skeptic does not hold beliefs, treats arguments instrumentally, has no rules nor aims, and suspends judgment out of habit.

According to Bailey and Thorsrud, the inconsistency of the skeptical position is an effect of these changes in the maturation process. And insofar as skepticism is limited to its mature stage, it is possible to avoid the inconsistency, as showed by Hankinson. The lack of beliefs in the mature skeptic makes it impossible to accuse him or her of inconsistency. For such an accusation would be a category error: if one has no beliefs, they cannot be inconsistent (Thorsrud 2009: 14). In this aspect, the third interpretation comes down to the second. The rational dimension of skepticism is retained, but only as an element of the development. It seems, however, that the focus on the maturation process of the skeptic does not cancel the essential inconsistency of the skeptical position insofar as the whole process is interpreted as a rational endeavor. Skepticism limited solely to the mature stage becomes a form of irrationalism, and it is no longer possible to explain why Sextus's texts provide a collection of refined rational arguments. It is only the developing skepticism (from before the throwing away of the ladder), that can be subject to rational assessment.

The second interpretation – and, in fact, also the third one – avoids the allegation of inconsistency by abandoning the rationalism of skepticism. Therefore, these interpretations do not seem cogent, nor can they provide an adequate reply to the problem of inconsistency. Since the mature skepticism consist in a rejection of rationality, one may focus on the rational stage of developing skepticism in order to examine whether the maturation process of the skeptic was contaminated by inconsistency.

Sextus repeatedly acknowledges that the skeptical statements are self-refuting. The demonstration against demonstrations presented in the end of *Against the Logicians* is a glaring example of self-refutation; it can be said to be at the top of the skeptical ladder, perhaps as its last rung, since Sextus himself appears to argue in favor of self-refutation.

5.6. "Throwing away the Ladder" – Does Sextus Accept Self-Refutation?

Arguing against the existence of demonstrations, Sextus makes the allegations of lack of reliable assumptions (stemming from the absence of the criterion of truth), of circularity between premises and conclusions, of infinite regress in justifying the correctness of demonstration, and others. This series of arguments can be treated as the argument (AAD) against the existence of demonstrations (legitimate demonstrations).

The Stoics formulated a counterargument against AAD, which is important for the question of consistency of Sextus's position.

> Generally, the argument against demonstration either is a demonstration or is not a demonstration; and if it is not a demonstration it is untrustworthy, while if it is a demonstration, there is demonstration. (M 8.465)

A longer version of this argument is as follows:

> For the dogmatic philosophers think that the argument maintaining that there is no demonstration is turned about by itself, and determines demonstration by the very means by which it does away with it. Hence, setting themselves against the skeptics, they say: "The person who says that demonstration is nothing says that demonstration is nothing either with the use of a bare and undemonstrated assertion, or by demonstrating this with an argument. And if it is with the use of a bare assertion, none of those receiving the demonstration will believe him, since he is using a bare assertion […]. But if it is by demonstrating that there is no demonstration (their words), he has right away agreed that there is demonstration; for the argument that shows that there is no demonstration is a demonstration of there being demonstration." (M 8.463–8.464)

This is one of many examples of applying the argument of self-refutation against skepticism. Sextus replies to this arguments in four steps. The first step is an attempt to shift the burden of proof to the dogmatics; in the second step, Sextus typically refuses to accept the conclusion of his own argument by limiting his statements to the reporting of impressions;[31] the third step is an attempt to define the argument agains demonstrations as an exception. Mark McPherran (1987: 301) thinks that all these steps are futile, while Luca Castagnoli (2010: 285) believes that already the second step is effective (he assumes that, in order to avoid self-refutation, it is sufficient to refuse to accept one's own conclusion). In the fourth, and final, step of the defense against self-refutation, Sextus refers to the

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31 The skeptics consider their position on the non-existence of demonstrations as plausible. "For they will say that the argument against demonstration is merely persuasive, and that for the moment it persuades them and induces assent." (M 8.473)

metaphor of purgative herbs and of the ladder. McPherran believes that this final stage is, in fact, an acceptance of self-refutation, while Castagnoli considers it to be the final defense against the charge of self-refutation:

> … just as purgatives after driving the fluids out of bodies eliminate themselves as well, so too the argument against demonstration, after doing away with all demonstration, can cancel itself as well. And again, just as it is not impossible for the person who has climbed to a high place by a ladder to knock over the ladder with his foot after his climb, so it is not unlikely that the skeptic too, having got to the accomplishment of his task by a sort of step-ladder – the argument showing that there is not demonstration – should do away with this argument. (M 8.480–8.481)

This metaphor is supposed to show that the demonstration against demonstrations is a natural thing. It is questionable whether this metaphor is an expression of acceptance of self-refutation (Hankinson, McPherran), or its radical repudiation (Castagnoli, Pellegrin). The proponents of the first option argue that the mature skeptic can accept self-refutation with reference to all statements (including his own), because he has no reasons to treat self-refutation as an error. The proponents of the second option believe that self-refutation concerns only the dogmatic interpretation of the skeptical theses. Insofar as these theses do not induce assent, self-refutation is impossible.

The most recent defense against the charge of self-refutation and its acceptance is attempted by Castagnoli (2010). According to Castagnoli, AAD cannot be subject to self-refutation, because it is not treated by Sextus as a demonstration, and insofar as it is not a demonstration, its conclusion cannot be applied to it. Of course, if Sextus assented to its conclusion, it would be self-refuting. Sextus, however, does not accept any conclusions and suspends judgment on all matters; insofar, then, as there is no statement, there is no self-refutation either (Castagnoli 2010: 286). Self-refutation is a reversal of a thesis asserted earlier, so it requires an act of assertion which precedes it. If Sextus does not assert anything, his words cannot be subject to self-refutation.

Castagnoli highlights two Greek terms employed in Sextus's texts: *peritropē* i *perigraphē*. These two words are close in meaning: *peritropē* is the Greek term for self-refutation, while *perigraphē*, usually considered as its synonym, is not self-refutation, but rather self-cancellation or self-bracketing. Sextus uses *peritropē* when analyzing others' arguments of self-refutation, but when he writes of turning about his own words, he turns to *perigraphē* (Castagnoli 2010: 252–253). According to Castagnoli, to accept self-cancellation of AAD is not to accept the self-refutation of its conclusion. Instead, it is only to refuse to assent to this argument.

Even if Castagnoli is right to claim that *peritropē* i *perigraphē* are radically different in meaning, his "victory" is rather Pyrrhic (cf. Dąmbska 1939: 7), since this defense against self-refutation entails a devaluation of the argument itself. In other words, if it were to be valid (that is, if it were to demonstrate the weaknesses and uncertainty of inferential knowledge), its conclusion would have to be subject to self-refutation.

If we agree to Castagnoli's interpretation,[32] we may ask why Sextus presents all these arguments, without considering any of them as legitimate? This question cannot be answered solely by referring to the notions of dialectics and therapy. For even if these arguments are treated as therapeutic means, their philosophical role is not limited to this. If rational discussion is the opposite of therapy, it is worth to answer the question of the place held by the skeptic's arguments and theses within the philosophical context. The fundamental principle of all rational discussion is to be able to defend one's theses: its purpose is to search for the truth by means of a weighing of opposing reasons. A skeptic who suspends all judgments cannot become a legitimate participant in such a discussion: "he voluntarily abstains from taking a position" and "thwarts all reasonable discussion" (Dąmbska 1939: 5). He can act merely as a polemicist who reviews the convictions of others, without proposing anything by himself (and without even defending any methodological principles). The role of a polemicist undertaking an immanent critique of someone else's views is important, but it is parasitic.

Therefore, McPherran's interpretation, whereby the metaphor of the ladder is understood as a repudiation of rational discourse, seems more appropriate. McPherran (1987: 290–291) writes that Sextan skepticism tends to "accept – and even embrace – the charge of self-refutation." Indeed, Sextus writes that the skeptic's words are cancelled by themselves and that this is not a problem, but simply a consequence of the skeptical position. In that sense, the skeptical phrases bear resemblance to statements like "Everything is false" or "Nothing is true", which, according to Sextus, and to common opinion, are self-refuting. Sextus repeatedly compares words uttered by skeptics to purgatives which eliminate themselves along with the matters present in the body (PH 1.206, M 8.480; cf. PH 1.14–1.15).

It seems that the mature skeptic, who had thrown away the skeptical ladder and no longer holds any beliefs, does not have to develop a defensive reaction against self-refutation of his theses, which is why he can also accept the inconsistencies of

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32 Cf. Ziemińska 2012.

his position. Robert Fogelin and Hankinson seem to share this conviction.[33] One explain it by invoking the metaphor of the ladder. The developing skeptic climbs the rungs of the ladder by accepting consecutive skeptical arguments. But as soon as he realizes that some skeptical arguments, like AAD, are self-refuting, he has no other choice but to throw away the whole ladder, the whole set of skeptical arguments. This moment of crisis marks the final stage of the skeptical maturation process: it is only after rejecting his own arguments, that he can become a thorough and consistent skeptic who no longer holds any beliefs.

5.7. Pragmatic Inconsistency of Sextan Skepticism

If we would agree with Castagnoli that the mature skeptic avoids self-refutation by means of refusal of assent to all theses he utters, it is not hard to see that there is still a problem of pragmatic inconsistency (as the theses in question cannot be uttered without contradiction in ordinary contexts).

The concept of inconsistency is broader than that of self-refutation. An inconsistency in a philosophical position can stem from a mere incoherence between judgments (textual or logical inconsistency), or from an incompatibility between words and action (practical inconsistency). Pragmatic inconsistency is a type of practical inconsistency encompassing a specific set of actions, namely speech acts. For example, the statement "Everything is false" is pragmatically inconsistent, because the silent assumption of this assertive act (that what is says is true) stands in contradiction to its explicitly expressed content (that nothing is true). If someone would ask how the contradiction between beings so different as action and content is possible, we should answer that, in fact, it is a contradiction between two judgments (of which one is explicitly expressed and the other silently assumed). The practical and pragmatic inconsistency is characterized precisely by this contradiction between the explicit and implicit content of an act of speech.

Another instance of pragmatic inconsistency is the puzzle called "Moore's paradox" after George Edward Moore: "*p*, but I don't believe that *p*" (for example, "It's raining, but I don't believe that it is raining"). Such sentence cannot be literally asserted without falling into contradiction, insofar as its first clause silently assumes what its second clause negates (that I at least believe in P).[34] At the same

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33 "I will take this acceptance of self-refutation (*peritropē*) as a defining character of Pyrrhonian skepticism as I understand it." (Fogelin 1994: 4) "At all events they [sc. The Pyrrhonists] happily embraced self-refutation." (Hankinson 1995: 18) The inconsistency in Sextus' position is also recognized by Perin (2010b: 6).

34 See Unger 1975: 258; Vahid 2011: 411.

time, however, the whole sentence is logically consistent (its explicit content is not inherently contradictory).

Self-refutation is another type of pragmatic inconsistency. It can be described as a statement whose content is self-referential, that is to say, referring to the act of asserting it (usually an act of assent or preference). Also in this case the silently assumed content is in conflict with the explicit content. As Castagnoli importantly argued, self-refutation has a pragmatic nature. Against the earlier conceptions, he observed that self-refutation is not the same as falsification and it does not consist in an ordinary contradiction between two explicit statements (this type of relation is called incoherence). Self-refutation is an act of asserting a statement whose content stands in contradiction to this act). This is also the case when one asserts – that is to say, accepts as true – that nothing is true. Self-refutation is a moment in a discussion when the act of asserting that P stands in contradiction to the content of P (Castagnoli 2010: 173). This contradiction compels the person who performs the act to negate his own thesis or refrain from asserting it.[35] Thus, it reveals the conflict between the asserted (explicit) and assumed (implicit) content. The problem is that it is unknown which of them is true (cf Ziemińska 2013).

To be sure, Sextus announces that he does not consider anything as true or reliable (PH 2.79) and that he does not assert anything (PH 1.4). However, if one would take into account the content of his statements (and, especially, of his arguments for and against and the principle of the suspension of judgment about everything), then one could conclude that Sextan skepticism amounts to the following position (S): "No thesis is rationally preferable to its own negation." This thesis would easily fall into self-refutation, if it was explicitly stated by Sextus as his position. So either he does or does not rationally prefer the thesis that S. If he does, then he negates its content; if he does not, then he no longer asserts it, and thereby abandons his skeptical position. While an irrational preference for the skeptical position is not interesting, every rational articulation of this position is subject to self-refutation.

The statements "I do not hold any beliefs," "I do not assert anything", and all partial theses asserted by Sextus as conclusions of his rational arguments ("There is no criterion of truth," "Legitimate demonstrations do not exist") are self-refuting. The only defense against the charge of self-refutation is the refusal of assent.

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35 In the case of self-refutation, "the person who states that P ends up *admitting* that not-P in the act of, or as a consequence of, stating that P" (Castagnoli 2010: 173).

It is natural to pose the question about the purpose of such discourse without assent. At the beginning of the *Outlines of Skepticism* Sextus writes that his aim is to find truth (PH 1.4). However, toward the end of *Outlines* he defines his purpose as providing a cure for the disease of dogmatism, an arguments-based therapy (PH 2.380). The first purpose corresponds to the developing skeptic, and the second to the mature skeptic. But this therapeutic interpretation deprives skepticism of the status of serious philosophy. Instead of dismissing skepticism in this manner, it is better to give justice to the force of skeptical arguments and treat the mature skeptic's declarations simply as an attempt to avoid taking responsibility for his own words. It is worthy to focus on analyzing skeptical statements and the question of consistency of the arguments leading to the mature skepticism.

From the perspective of contemporary speech acts theory, one may observe that not all utterances are assertive. John Searle (1979) divides speech acts into several classes: assertive (ranging from weak conjectures to categorical claims), expressive (expressing affections and emotions, such as gratitude or grief), directive (asking the hearer to do something), commissive (committing the speaker to a future action, e.g. promises), and declarative (decreeing a new social fact, e.g. "I pronounce you husband and wife"). The assertives usually take the form of sentences in the indicative mood and are treated as expressions of the speaker's beliefs, with the assumption that the speaker takes responsibility for the truth of his or her statement (Searle 1979: 12–20; Witek 2010: 109). Sextus's declarations (expressing his intentions) can be described as the expressives, but their form (the linguistic convention employed by him) is assertive. Since Sextus refuses to take responsibility for the truth of his statements, the best locutionary category under which they can be classified is that of conjectures understood as weak assertives (such is Frede's interpretation). Even if Sextus declares his statements to be merely expressions of affections, it is still possible to take into account not only his intentions, but also the linguistic conventions he employs. In light of the conventional interpretation, Sextus's statements and arguments (which are uttered in the indicative mood) can be considered as assertives with weak assent.

Sextus attributes to his statements different degrees of locutionary power and different perlocutionary effects. It seems that he not only informs his readers about differences in beliefs and the absence of the criterion, waking them from their dogmatic dream, but also applies his therapy to them and uses various persuasive means in order to cure their dogmatism. One may argue that the intended perlocutionary effect of his arguments is to make the readers realize all weaknesses of their common and philosophical beliefs, call these beliefs into question, abandon them, and start a new life without beliefs, ultimately achieving

the state of *ataraxia*. Sextus's statements are meant to inform, but they also have a performative dimension. However, as Bailey rightly observed, it is not a brutal emotional persuasion, but rather a subtle exercise of rational influence. Describing Sextus's statements as merely expressive would diminish the rational force of his arguments.

We thereby face the following dilemma: either Sextus's words are expressive illocutions which are not philosophically interesting, or they are assertive illocutions, conjectures, but then some of them (for example, the thesis on the impossibility of providing a rational justification of any thesis) lead to inconsistency. Even if Sextus's position that "No thesis is rationally preferable to its own negation" (S) can be treated as a conjecture, it still involves the acceptance of something as true with weak assent, and hence a kind of rational preference. At the same time, the content of S excludes all possibility of rational preference. Therefore, one may contend that the act of assertion that S is contradictory to the content of S.

Additionally, invoking Wittgenstein's language games theory (PI, OC), one may argue that every assertion entails various unspoken statements or "hinge propositions" (Wittgenstein OC 341) which are dependent on some assumed context. Sextus presumes certain background assumptions concerning the description of the world, methodological principles, the notion of knowledge, the principle that there can be no knowledge without certainty, etc. These silent assumptions form the basis for the act of weak assent. Something must be rationally preferred to make it possible to assert that S. The silent assumptions of this act are in contradiction with the content of S.

So even if the statement "No thesis is rationally preferable to its own negation" should be treated as a conjecture, the act of asserting it is in contradiction with its content. The statement is self-refuting, and therefore pragmatically inconsistent. Even if Sextus did not assert anything, no one can assert his thesis without falling into pragmatic inconsistency.

What Sextus explicitly asserts ("I do not assert anything") is also pragmatically inconsistent with his attempt to persuade the readers to his point of view. The locutionary content of this statement is in contradiction with its conventional illocutionary power and its intended perlocutionary effect. Even if the skeptic does not follow the established conventions, developing his own context of the skeptical discourse, still (1) every language game requires unspoken assumptions, and (2) we have the right to assess this skeptical context from the perspective of other contexts (e.g. of a typical philosophical discussion).

Another question is that even if the charge of inconsistency fails to reach the mature skeptic, it cannot be avoided with respect to the maturation process insofar as it is rationally construed. For in order to climb the rungs of the skeptical ladder one has to accept arguments, their assumptions, inferential rules and conclusions.

Sextus presents Aenesidemus's ten modes as a rational way to the suspension of all judgments. However, if we are to treat these arguments as rational, we have to accept their conclusions, e.g. that a cognitive image depends on the circumstances of perception. At the same time, the act of accepting this thesis is incompatible with its content. When Agrippa's five modes are employed to justify the thesis that no thesis can be rationally justified, a pragmatic inconsistency between the content of this thesis and the act of accepting it is bound to emerge. Similarly, when the developing skeptic is persuaded by Sextus's argument that it is impossible to rationally justify any criterion of truth, the act of accepting this argument as rational is contradictory to its content. Therefore, the rational maturation of the skeptic involves pragmatic inconsistencies.

A real crisis comes when the developing skeptic is at the top of the ladder, making his argument against the possibility of making rational arguments. From this perspective, one may easily observe that skeptical arguments are also illegitimate and self-contradictory. However, as already noted, during the maturation process of the skeptic the whole series of arguments was employed. The throwing away of the ladder is a symbol of this crisis of the skeptical position – it is the moment when the skeptic ceases to respect his own beliefs. After throwing away the ladder, the mature skeptic achieves consistency, but only at the expense of loosing the rational grounds of his position.

So insofar as the mature skeptic is able to avoid inconsistency by refusing to assert anything, his position is deprived of its rational grounds (cf. Dąmbska 1939: 5). He can defend the rationality of his stance only at the expense of inconsistency. No one can reach the position of global skepticism in a rational and consistent manner. And no one can rationally justify this position. There is no other way for Sextan skepticism than to refuse to accept itself under the threat of inconsistency.

It seems that Sextus should be accused of inconsistency, rather than of irrationality. No one can deny that Sextus asserted that Carneades was a negative dogmatic. He asserted this categorically in spite of the common opinion, and his statement can be hardly described as a passive acceptance of an appearance. Sextus simply assumed that to assent to something was to accept it as certain and true. Without having the concept of weak assent, he considered the Carneadean approval as a betrayal of skepticism. He could not agree to the

Carneadean compromise, and inconsistency turned out to be the only way for him to conduct his life and philosophy.

From a contemporary perspective, one may wonder why Sextus was not simply a fallibilist. In fact, his arguments cannot prove anything more than the lack of certainty. However, Sextus considered it as undignified for a wise person to make uncertain statements. He silently presumed that a wise person cannot expose himself to error, but has to constantly reject all uncertain claims and patiently search for firm truth which would no longer be subject to doubts. It was precisely this radicalism and heroic commitment to truth, that led Sextus to inconsistency.

Conclusions for Ancient Skepticism

Ancient skepticism can be divided into two different currents: Pyrrhonian and academic, or three distinct stages: the school of Pyrrho of Elis, the skeptical phase of Plato's Academy (Arcesilaus and Carneades), and neo-Pyrrhonism of Aenesidemus, Agrippa and Sextus Empiricus. What is common to all these positions is the principle of the suspension of all judgments (*epochē*). Ancient skepticism had developed the critique of the whole previous philosophy (science) and all common opinions shared at the time. The skeptical arguments showed that no thesis is certain, and every argument can be opposed with an equipollent counterargument. The recognition of the equipollence of arguments led to *epochē* which became the symbol and essence of ancient skepticism, because it established the unity and specificity of the whole ancient skeptical movement, both before the term *skeptikoi* had been invented and in comparison to modern skepticism.

However, the principle of *epochē* has met two basic lines of criticism:

> According to the first line, the skeptics, in spite of their opposition to dogmatism, necessarily fall into it, since they maintain and believe in certain propositions, such as the principle of equipollence; according to the second line, the skeptical position leads to the renunciation of all action, and thus to a rejection of life. How can we require that someone should aim at some things, and avoid others, if he cannot have any opinion about these things? Insofar as the skeptic aims at some things, and avoids others, he stands in contradiction with his own doctrine. (Dąmbska 1993: 136).

The academic skeptics discovered a resolution to these difficulties in their theory of probability and the idea of weak assent. They presented their theses as only subjectively plausible. However, this resolution exposed them to the accusation of diverging from skepticism. For example, the status of Carneades's position has remained unclear. If it was a practice without beliefs, as Cleitomachos interpreted it, it follows that Carneades managed to retain his skepticism only at the

level of practice; yet, this radical division of theory and practice seems doubtful. If Carneades's position was a theory with weak assent, involving an acceptance of uncertain judgments, as Philo interpreted it, then it should be considered as fallibilism. Philo's interpretation seems to champion both the consistency and the plausibility of Carneades's view, but only at the expense of weakening (and for others even rejecting) his skepticism.

Neo-Pyrrhonists, in turn, rejected probabilism and the idea of weak assent, willfully embracing a life without beliefs. In denying that they assert anything, they stood in contradiction with the conditions and requirements of life, psychological laws, and their own assumptions. It was evident in the case of Sextus, whose skepticism was pragmatically inconsistent, as the content of his skeptical statements was in contradiction with the conditions of asserting them. In light of the above discussion, it seems that any radical or global version of skepticism is doomed to inconsistency (as it cannot be consistently claimed), while its more moderate version (fallibilism) can be no longer considered as resolute skepticism.

Chapter III. Christian Reception of Ancient Skepticism and Medieval Skepticism

1. The Early Christian Thinkers about Skepticism

The ancient Christian thinkers interpreted skepticism in many different ways. Scholars from Byzantine studied Greek texts, especially Pyrrhonian, while in Rome the main source of knowledge about skepticism was Cicero's account of academic skepticism, which, by virtue of its moderate form, gained some rare proponents among the Christians. Arnobius of Sicca (Adv. 2. 9–10) in the 3rd century and his disciple Lactantius[36] (Div. 3. 6) in the 4th century used Cicero's skeptical arguments in order to show the void of human knowledge in contrast with the divine light. However, academic skepticism in Cicero's account had been thoroughly criticized by St. Augustine (see section 2 below).

Radical Pyrrhonism was both criticized and rejected by Christian authors, even if its didactic merits were sometimes recognized. The reception of Pyrrhonian skepticism (Pyrrho, Aenesidemus, Sextus) was developed mostly in the East. Gregory of Nazianzus (ca. 330–390) described Pyrrho and Sextus as the progenitors of "the vile and malignant disease" of arguing on both sides of the same issue, a pestilence which infected churches across the Christian world (*Orationes* 21.12; Hankinson 1995: 6; Floridi 2002: 12). Also the emperor Julian the Apostate in his letter to Arsacius advises against reading the Pyrrhonians (*Letter to Arsacius, High-priest of Galatia*; cf. Floridi 2002: 13).

Clement of Alexandria (the second/third century), a Christian thinker whose generally favorable attitude toward Greek is well-known, refers to Pyrrho in *Stromata*, putting forward the charge of inconsistency against skepticism as the attitude of suspension of all judgments (*epochē*). The skeptical principle of *epochē*, "beginning with itself, it first invalidates itself. It either grants that something is true, that you are not to suspend judgment on all things; or it persists in saying that there is nothing true. And it is evident that first it will not be true." (Strom. 8.5.15.3–4) Similarly, since skeptical arguments cancel themselves even before providing reasons for accepting them, it follows they are futile. Clement cogently observes that skepticism is either inconsistent or ineffectual.

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36   In the Renaissance Lactantius was called the "Christian Cicero" (Erasmus 1974: 104).

A similar position is developed by Eusebius, the fourth century bishop of Caesarea, who, in his *Preparation to the Gospel*, discusses and criticizes Pyrrho's views, also mentioning Aenesidemus and Pyrrhonists. Eusebius's remarks are based on the work of Aristocles, a peripatetic from Messene (Sicily). He interprets skepticism as a thesis that "it is in our nature to know nothing" (Eus. PE 14.8.1) and shows the inconsistency of Pyrrhonian skepticism. Pyrrhonists invite people to reject all beliefs but, at the same time, they express their own beliefs and require others to believe what they believe; they claim to know nothing, and yet reject all beliefs as if they possessed knowledge on them (Eus. PE 14.18.7). Luca Castagnoli (2010: 346) articulates this Eusebius's charge in the contemporary terms of speech acts theory: what the skeptics openly claim ("we don't know anything") is pragmatically inconsistent with that what they assume ("the dogmatics are in error") and with their attempt to persuade hearers to accept their position. Aristocles and Eusebius rightly ask why the skeptics claim anything at all and why they claim what they claim, instead of claiming the opposite. There is no rational answer to this question, but there are other answers: therapeutic, dialectical, irrationalist, and so on. These, however, have usually deprived skepticism of the status of serious and attention-deserving philosophy.

Eusebius derides the skeptical metaphor of purgatives which was meant to explain the status of skeptical discourse. With the view according to which skeptical arguments cancel themselves along with dogmatic views, an inherent contradiction ensues: they are either valuable in debunking erroneous beliefs, or they are invaluable and cannot debunk any belief. Yet the skeptics consider their arguments as both invaluable and effective. According to Eusebius, a much wiser move would be to remain silent than to spread such nonsense (Eus. PE 14.18.21–2; Castagnoli 2010: 337–344). Skepticism as a philosophical position employing certain arguments in order to reject them could have seemed absurd, or at least worthy to ignore.

As Michael Frede writes, skepticism has been identified with the thesis that knowledge does not exist (Frede 1998b: 127). Skeptics' explicit statements of rejecting everything, including this very thesis, have been widely ignored. This negligence, Frede argues, was due to the suspicion that the skeptics were dishonest in making such reservation, whose only purpose was to avoid the allegation of inconsistency. Eusebius's harsh condemnation of skepticism, with terms such as "folly" or "nonsense", confirms this interpretation.

In the ninth century, this typically dismissive assessment of ancient skepticism was also repeated by Photius (Palusińska 2012: 85), who reported and discussed Aenesidemus's works in *Bibliotheca*. Aenesidemus's effort is described as

"emptiness and a lot of nonsense", while the only merit of his work is seen in that it provides argumentative exercises for those who are reasonable enough not to take it seriously (*Bibliotheca* 170b, 171a). According to Photius, Aenesidemus's skeptical arguments undermine basic principles and cannot help shaping one's opinion about the world. Their positive value is merely didactic – they are important as an exercise in debate.

Frede (1998b: 148) writes that St. Augustine, Eusebius, and Photius developed a dogmatic understanding of skepticism as the thesis that knowledge does not exist. However, it seems that they all merely repeated this typical interpretation of skeptical writings, which, despite their subtle reservations, have made such impression on readers: after all, their most important part were precisely the arguments against any possibility of acquiring knowledge. The Christian thinkers were not interested with the skeptical expressions of affects. They looked for a description of the cognitive situation of human beings, and what they found were strong arguments suggesting that knowledge is impossible.

Apart from this serious debate, there were also many minor references to Pyrrhonists and academics in encyclopaedists. For example, in the 5th century Joannes Stobaeus, a Byzantine compiler, remarked: "Pyrrho used to say that there is no difference (*meden diapherein*) between life and death. And someone asked him: 'So why don't you die?' He replied: 'Precisely because there is no difference.'" (*Florilegium* 4.117, 28; Krokiewicz 2002: 86) In the sixth century, Pyrrho and Sextus were favorably mentioned by Agathias (Hist. 2.29.7), who praised the skeptics for their critique of endless and futile debates about undecidable matters. At the end of the seventh century, Venerable Bede (673–735) was one of a few Western early Christian Greek-speaking thinkers who referred to Pyrrhonists, criticizing them for their exaggerated doubts about everything. Bede himself was a proponent of moderate questioning attitude (Floridi 2002: 17). Also Rabanus Maurus (the ninth century) provided some remarks on Pyrrhonists and academics, comparing the latter to heretics. He quoted Isidore of Seville who based on Lactantius drawing on Cicero (Floridi 2002: 18).

Among the Christian thinkers, the most important (in the sense of being most comprehensive, most influential to Western philosophy and, at the same time, thoroughly and typically Christian) position on skepticism was developed by St. Augustine (4th–5th century). Although his reading was limited to academic skepticism, it influenced the whole medieval thought and shaped our notion of skepticism as the thesis that knowledge does not exist.

2. St. Augustine and the Critique of Academic Skepticism

St. Augustine of Hippo (354–430) had a short skeptical episode in his biography, between rejecting Manichaeism and adopting Christian faith in 383–384 (Kijewska 2007: 52). The later bishop of Hippo Regius knew skepticism mostly through the works of Cicero (he never mentioned Pyrrhonists, but surely must have heard about them). As a Christian thinker, he felt necessary to reply to skeptical arguments.

The critique of skeptical arguments is developed in many Augustine's works, especially in a dialogue *Against the Academicians*, where he describes his skepticism in the following terms:

> Don't you know that up to now I perceive nothing to be certain? I'm prevented from searching for it by the arguments and debates of the Academicians? They somehow persuaded me of the plausibility […] that man cannot find the truth. Accordingly, I have become lazy and utterly inactive, not daring to search for what the most ingenious and learned men weren't permitted to find. Unless, therefore, I first become as convinced that the truth can be found as the Academicians are convinced that it cannot, I shall not dare to search for it. I don't have anything to defend. (CA 2,23)

Augustine seems to appreciate the seriousness of skeptical arguments, but he also indicates their negative impact: a resignation from searching for the truth, intellectual passivity, and lack of courage to investigate anything. He interprets skepticism as a simple thesis, without dwelling on the subtle question of weak assent. The thesis is that man can never find the truth, that is to say, acquire knowledge.

Augustine accepts the skeptical notion of knowledge as certainty: "knowledge consists not only in comprehending things, but in comprehending them in such a way that no one should be in error in regard to it nor be uncertain when hard pressed by any adversaries." (CA 1, 19) To know something, Augustine argues, is to comprehend it at least in the way in which one comprehends the result of a simple algebraic operation. However, he rejects both the skeptical claim that people are unable to gain this kind of knowledge (or, in other words, that a wise person should not accept any judgment) and the theory of probability which was meant to preclude adopting an utterly passive attitude in life.

Augustin observes that academics accepted certain definition of knowledge (devised by Zeno of Citium) and repudiated only the criterion of truth: only "that could be apprehended which presented itself in such a way that it could not appear as false." (CA 3, 21) To know, then, is to find absolute certainty, a guarantee of truth, a belief which in no way can be considered as false. Augustine agrees with this view, but insightfully remarks that the definition itself is already an

expression of certain knowledge (CA 3, 21). In other words, the skeptics assume that their concept of knowledge is true.

> The Academicians say that nothing can be known. On what ground do you hold this opinion […]? They say: "The definition of Zeno prompts us to formulate such an opinion." But why, I ask you? For if that definition is true, he who knows it knows something true; if it is false, it should not have influenced men of great strength of character. (CA 3, 18)

An Academic can object by referring to his theory of probability and reply that he accepts this definition not because he is certain of its accuracy, but because it appears plausible to him. Augustin responds that, "if you disprove it, you do not have a reason by which you are prevented from apprehending. I do not see that it can be refuted and I consider it absolutely true." (CA 3, 23) For Augustine, exclusive disjunctions appear to be a set of propositions that has nothing in common with falsehood, which is why there is no problem with recognizing them as true (CA 3, 23). Skeptics, however, have to assume some principles of rational thinking, such as the law of excluded middle, if they want to make their arguments. Moreover, Augustine discovers that the skeptical arguments do not apply to the existence of the world:

> Whence, he says, do you know that this world exists if the senses are untrustworthy? Your methods of reasoning have never been able to disprove the power of the senses in such a way as to convince us that nothing is seen […] And so I call this entire thing, whatever it is, which surrounds us and nourishes us, this object, I say, which appears before my eyes and which I perceive is made up of earth and sky, or what appears to be earth and sky, the world. (CA 3, 24)

The argument of madness or dream does not hold, since everything occurs in some world considered as more or less actual at a given moment. Regardless of the weaknesses inherent in our senses, something has to exist. Skeptics silently assumed this truth, although they did not count it as knowledge. However, Sextus Empiricus, of whom Augustine seems to have no knowledge, suggested that all opinions about the world are equally uncertain and should be suspended through *epochē*.

Another (third) antiskeptical element discovered by Augustine are mathematical and logical truths. It is true that, "if there are one and six worlds, it is evident to me, no matter in what condition I may be, that there are seven worlds […] For that three threes are nine and represent the square of intelligible numbers is necessary or would be true even though the human race were lying prostrate" (CA 3, 25) No argument against the senses, the dream hypothesis and the like, cannot undermine the certainty of mathematical truths. Similar argumentation will be later developed by Descartes in *Meditations*. Augustine applies this also to logical truths and simple *a priori* judgments: "if there is one sun, there are not

two; one and the same soul cannot die and still be immortal." (CA 3, 29) Nonetheless, it is important to point out that he ignored the liar paradox reported by Cicero (Ac. 2.91–2.98).

The fourth example of human knowledge, given by Augustine in order to disprove the skeptical claims, is self-knowledge. We cannot be mistaken with regard to our own affections – only a way in which we verbalize them may be incorrect.

> I do not see how the Academician can refute him who says: "I know that this appears white to me, I know that my hearing is delighted with this, I know that this has an agreeable odor, I know that this tastes sweet to me, I know that this feels cold to me. […] when a person tastes something, he can honestly swear that he knows it is sweet to his palate or the contrary, and that no trickery of the Greeks can dispossess him of that knowledge." (CA 3, 26)

The academics, after all, never made any charges against affections. However, as Augustine is right to observe, they forgot that affections are also a source of knowledge. Elsewhere, he famously appeals to his readers: "Return within yourself. In the inward man dwells truth." (VR 39, 72) He also replies to Cicero: "If only this were said to him when he stated that man cannot know anything: 'I know that this seems so to me,' he would have no grounds on which to refute it." (CA 3, 36) It follows that man is able gain some knowledge, a fact which skeptics tended to overlook.

The basis of the fourth type of knowledge is an awareness of one's existence. In *Soliloquies* (2.1), Augustine writes:

> *Reason*: You who wish to know yourself, do you know that you exist?
> *Augustine*: I do.
> *Reason*: How do you know it?
> *Augustine*: I do not know.
> *Reason*: Do you feel yourself to be unified or differentiated?
> *Augustine*: I do not know.
> *Reason*: Do you know that you move?
> *Augustine*: I do not know.
> *Reason*: Do you know that you think?
> *Augustine*: I do.

The City of God (11.26) provides a direct reply to skeptics:

> I am most certain that I am, and that I know and delight in this. In respect of these truths, I am not at all afraid of the arguments of the Academicians, who say, What if you are deceived? For if I am deceived, I am. For he who is not, cannot be deceived; and if I am deceived, by this same token I am. […] And, consequently, neither am I deceived in knowing that I know.

Therefore, I exist and I know that I exist. My existence stems from the fact of doubting (*Si fallor, sum*). For Augustine, the awareness of his own life provided the most powerful argument against skepticism. One may doubt everything except that one lives and thinks (cf. *On Free Choice of the Will* 2.3.7, *The Happy Life* 2.7).

A wise person, then, does not merely avoid uncertain judgments, but can be said to have some kind of knowledge. We can have certain knowledge of our own existence and being in the world, we know our affections, and we assume an understanding of knowledge and some principles of rational thinking (simple calculations, exclusive disjunctions, etc.). Augustine ridicules Carneades: "do you then intend to say that you do not know whether you are a man or an ant?" (CA 3,22). If you can call something into question, it means that you can know something. Augustine would later acknowledge that the academics did not claim that everything is unknowable, but they used this thesis as a weapon against the stoics (CA 3, 41).

Augustine is right to observe that any reflection aimed at assessing skeptical arguments already presumes the existence of the reflecting subject.[37] This is where skeptical questioning reaches its limit – in the undeniable existence of the questioning or truth-searching subject. In order to doubt, we have to know at least that we doubt, and we have to assume this knowledge as certain. Knowing one's doubting (and thus one's existence) is similar to knowing other conscious states (such as affections). The data of self-consciousness thereby gains the status of certain knowledge.

Augustine also rejects the Carneadesian theory of probability which was meant to provide a response to the charge of the impossibility of action. He alludes to the charge made by Antiouchus (whom he does not value, perhaps due to Cicero's influence): it is hard to know probability without knowing the truth.

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37 Myles Burnyeat (1982) believes that Augustine did not assigned a privileged status to the *cogito*, and it was only Descartes who introduced subjective thinking to Western philosophy: "Whatever hints Augustine may have furnished, it was Descartes who put subjective knowledge at the center of epistemology – and thereby made idealism a possible position for a modern philosopher to take." (Burnyeat 1982: 33) Burnyeat believes Augustine represented the same realism as all ancient thinkers. "What I have ascribed to antiquity is an unquestioned, unquestioning *assumption* of realism: something importantly different from an explicit philosophical thesis." (Burnyeat 1982: 33) In my opinion, Burnyeat is right that Descartes was the first to question the existence of the world. Indeed, this idea might have been developed together with the Christian doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* and God's omnipotence, but it was as late as in Descartes that it could find its full articulation. However, Augustine, as a Platonist, diminished the status of the material world and considered it as unreal, almost nonexistent.

> The very analogy proclaims aloud that your Academicians ought to be ridiculed, who say that they are striving in this life after what is like truth when they do not know what truth itself is. (CA 2, 19)

> If anyone should say that your brother is like your father, and he did not even know your father, would he not seen foolish in your estimation? (CA 2, 16)

> Indeed, nothing seems more absurd to me than for anyone to say he is striving after the likeness of truth, who does not know what truth is. (CA 2, 27)

Augustine's critique becomes even more harsh in *Retractions*, where he expresses regret for appreciating them by considering their thought so seriously. In spite of his unfavorable stance with regards to Antiochus, he acknowledges that assessing probability or likeness makes sense only insofar as one already has some information. If everything is equally questionable, there is no basis for distinguishing probable and improbable judgments, and no judgment can be justified by reasoning. It is only insofar as we know some initial truths that we can assess the plausibility of questionable judgments. But when we have no initial assumptions, we cannot reach any conclusions.

Trying to defend the academic doctrine as sensible, Augustine suspects that the academics knew and protected Plato's esoteric truth, applying skeptical arguments only to the knowledge of the world which they considered as merely probable (CA 3, 38). Such interpretation of the academic skepticism can be described as dialectic. It is unclear whether Augustine can be said to adopt this view, but he surely believes that the theory of probability without truth makes no sense whatsoever.

Augustine proceeds to disprove the theory of probability without truth by telling a story of two fellow travelers heading toward the same place. "One of them has determined not to believe anyone and the other is too credulous. They have arrived at a certain place where two roads meet." (CA 3, 34) The credulous man asked a shepherd about the road and followed his advice, which later turned out to be right. The skeptic laughed at the credulous man and decided to remain at the junction, waiting for a better informant. Finally, his inactivity made him choose to follow the advice of a refine and distinguished looking man who arrived there on a horse. However, this informant turned out to be a deceiver. In consequence, "he who erred by giving his assent so quickly […], was already relaxing in that place which he set out to reach", while the deceived skeptic "roamed around forests of various kinds and still did not find anyone who knew the place" (CA 3, 34) In fact, they both had equal chances to reach the place and took an equal risk. The latter relied on probability, but he ended up in a worse situation than his credulous companion who simply got lucky. The theory of probability, Augustine

concludes, can be useful only insofar as it assumes a knowledge of the truth; otherwise, there is no difference between relying on probability and being credulous.

This is the morale for all skeptics: we can be either inactive, or inconsistent. If we choose to rely on probability and appearances, we depart from consistent skepticism. Still, one may ask how is it possible to know appearances and probability? Both these forms can be considered as ways of getting by without certainty. But shouldn't we describe the reliance on probability and phenomena precisely in terms of adopting a credulous and uncritical attitude? We can avoid giving a positive answer to this question only insofar as we silently rely on some forms of knowledge, that is to say, insofar as we use some information which we accept without questioning.

Augustine also makes an important moral argument: if we adopt the view that all our beliefs are merely probable, it would be no longer possible to univocally determine a transgression or offense as morally wrong. Since everything is an appearance, and is therefore questionable, no one can be blamed for wrongdoing insofar as he or she relied only on probability (CA 3, 36). Embracing skepticism would cause a serious disorder in practical life.

In the end, Augustine shows the absurdity of the general attitude of skeptics ("in their actions they are striving after nothing except probability and they are earnestly seeking truth although it seems likely to them that it cannot be found. O strange spectacle!" [CA 3, 36]), and demonstrates the equipollence of the skeptical and antiskeptical arguments ("there is no difference between their view point and mine except that it seems probable to them that truth cannot be found, whereas to me it is probable that truth can be found." [CA 2, 23]). Having rejected the skeptical position and having found the five spheres of certain knowledge, he is imbued with hope for an authentic – and not merely feigned – search for the truth.

On the off-chance that his arguments might be insufficient, Augustine finds the ultimate support in the doctrine of divine illumination (CA 3, 42; Kijewska 2012a: 26). This theoretical dispute against skepticism has diminished the status of skeptical arguments for many centuries to come.

3. Medieval Skeptics before William Ockham (John of Salisbury, Henry of Ghent, Peter Aureoli)

Izydora Dąmbska (1958: 18) traces the skeptical motifs in the writings of medieval rationalists (like Peter Abelard) and mystics (like Hugh and Richard of Saint Victor). In *Sic et Non*, Abelard (1079–1142) juxtaposes 158 contradictory theses drawn from the Bible and texts by Christian writers. He presents arguments for and against, but he does not take any sides and suspends judgment

like Sextus Empiricus. Here are some examples of such questionable theses: God is not a substance and contra (9); nothing is accidental and contra (28); God is omnipotent and contra (32); God does not have free will and contra (34); God knows everything and contra (38); etc. As distinct from Sextus, Abelard hopes that reason is able to resolve these difficulties. "Through doubting we come to inquiry, and through inquiry we perceive truth." (cf. Chambliss: 3)

According to Kevin Guilfoy, Abelard did not arrive at global skepticism, but he had problems with explaining how it is possible to acquire abstract and universal knowledge about the world which consists of individual beings. In fact, he was pessimistic with regard to the possibility of gaining such knowledge by human beings (Guilfoy 2004: 216). He distinguished between opinion (*opinio*), knowledge (*scientia*), and intelligence (*intelligentia*). While intelligence is a total cognitive view attainable exclusively by God, opinion is a partial view, which is prone to error (Guilfoy 2004: 217). Knowledge is situated between opinion and intelligence (Majeran 2012a: 267): it concerns that which exists (the condition of truth), but because every existing thing is individual, universal knowledge about the world is impossible (Guilfoy 2004: 218). This conception of non-sensory natures or features does not provide us with knowledge, as the human mind is dependent on senses and unable to represent the incorporeal and the non-sensory. We have to imagine everything as if it was corporeal, and attribute sensory features to all objects, thereby necessarily distorting our view of non-sensory qualities. According to Abelard, we have no chance to gain knowledge – we have to be content with mere opinions (Guilfoy 2004: 219).

Dąmbska discovers skeptical tendencies in the activity of prominent mystical theologians, Hugh and Richard of the Augustinian Abbey of Saint Victor, where the oldest, incomplete Latin translation of Sextu's *Outlines of Skepticism* was found. Luciano Floridi (2002: 67) determined that the translation was made by Niccolo da Reggio in 1340. The Victorians employed skeptical arguments for the purposes of their critique of rational cognition. As Hugh wrote, (*Didascalicon*, I.2), "certainly the truth lies so deeply hidden that the mind […] can comprehend [it] only with difficulty" (Hugh of St. Victor: 48) and with the help of God's illuminative grace (Majeran 2012b: 326).

In the Middle Ages, skeptical arguments were known mostly through Cicero and St. Augustine. Medieval thinkers usually followed the latter in their rejection of skepticism. Exceptional with this regard was John of Salisbury (1115–1176), an English monk, Abelard's disciple and later the bishop of Chartres, who read Cicero and declared himself to be a proponent of academic skepticism in his *Metalogicon* (IV.31). This attempt at Christianization of skepticism will find its continuation in the Renaissance.

Elaborating his view, John lists three concepts of skepticism (or three types of the academics). The first type is a total and thoroughgoing skepticism based on the thesis that we do not know anything. John believes that the skeptic of this type is too careful and suspicious – his excessive effort to avoid error ends up leading to the self-refutation of his position. Therefore, John argues, he does not deserve to be called "philosopher". The second type of skepticism is based on the thesis that we can accept only what is necessarily true. According to John, this type can be reduced to the first one, since only God knows the limits of necessity and possibility. However, he accepts the third type of skepticism, which can be described as Ciceronian: moderate and probabilistic. It consists in suspension of judgment on questionable issues, but it allows for holding probable opinions and relying on probable knowledge (Grellard 2010: 141; Lagerlund 2010a: 10).

One should acknowledge that John's moderate form of skepticism deviated from the philosophical skepticism. Like Cicero's version, it moved away from the specific skeptical position of pessimism regarding knowledge. For the history of skepticism, however, it is important that there was a Christian thinker in the 12th century who openly declared himself to be a skeptic.

Also Henry of Ghent (ca. 1217–1293) was a zealous reader of Cicero[38] and Augustine. He discussed skepticism in the two opening questions of his theological work *Summa Quaestionum Ordinarium* (SQO). At the beginning, he posed the following skeptical question: "Is man able to know anything?", listing its two different versions related (respectively) to the natural cognitive faculties of man and the help of God. The problem of knowledge was analyzed in a typical medieval fashion: first, Henry asked if knowledge is possible at all, and then he addressed the question whether it is accessible solely through natural cognitive faculties or by virtue of the divine illumination. Henry's thesis is skeptical: man cannot acquire absolute knowledge by himself – in order to know anything he needs God's illumination (SQO a. 1, q. 2).

Henry provides a list of ancient skeptical arguments drawn from Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, as well as Cicero[39] and Augstine's writings. Following Aristotle, he also quotes the remarks of Heraclitus, Protagoras, Democritus or Plato. He

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38 In the Middle Ages, there were only several manuscripts of Cicero's *Academic Books*; they circulated in two versions and were only partially available (cf. Schmitt 1972). Augustine's writings were the basic source of information on Cicero.

39 Martin Pickave observes that Henry read only the first part of Cicero's *Lucullus*, as he was convinced that Cicero rejected the views championed by the academic skeptics. In the second part of *Lucullus* Cicero rejected the antiskeptical arguments – a fact of which Henry was not aware (Pickave 2010: 71, n.30). Henry was among a few medieval

describes seven erroneous skeptical theses, five of which, according to Henry, concern the principle of non-contradiction and the concept of truth, and were sufficiently refuted by Aristotle. He does not literally quote all the five theses (and it is not easy to reconstruct them based on the fourth book of *Metaphysics*), but three of them are discussed: everything is true; everything is false; everything is both true and false. The sixth erroneous view is the thesis from Plato's *Meno* (80d) that nothing can be learned (learning requires prior knowledge, but how can we have prior knowledge without previously learning it?). Aristotle had already refuted this thesis at the beginning of *Posterior Analytics* (first premises are assumed without proof). The seventh error is the academic position that it is impossible to know the truth. According to Henry, it was already sufficiently refuted by St. Augustine (SQO a. 1, q. 5; Pickave 2010: 69).

Henry devotes most of his attention to Heraclitus and Parmenides. This would prompt John Duns Scotus to accuse him of sharing their position according to which it is impossible to gain true knowledge about the word immersed in constant changes. Henry, however, repudiates the Heraclitean position as one of ancient mistakes and points to the abstraction of natures as a method of knowing changeable things. He also rejects academic skepticism as a thesis that the criterion of truth does not exist and suggest to use the coherence criterion of truth.

However, one should acknowledge that the charge made by Duns Scotus is not completely inaccurate. As an Augustinist, Henry assumes that the eternal truths exist only in the mind of God. This conviction opens up a space for Henry's skepticism: human intellect alone, without God's illumination, is unable to achieve "absolutely certain and irrefutable knowledge of truth" (*certa omnino et infallibilis notitia veritas*) or "the pure truth" (*sincera veritatis*), as Henry writes in *Summa Quaestionum Ordinarium* (a. 1, q. 2). His main argument refers to the status of human concepts (*exemplar*) as representations of the world. Certain knowledge is stable and free from error. But human concepts (*exemplar acquisitum*, *creatum*), as opposed to ideas in God's mind (*exemplar eternal*), are characterized by change. It becomes evident as soon as one juxtaposes mathematical and natural ideas. The latter are far less stable and certain than the former. Only the truth in God's mind is unchangeable and characterized by absolute certainty (SQO a. 1, q. 2). Human knowledge can be certain only through God's illumination, that is to say, insofar as it participates in God's mind.

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writers who knew Cicero's writings first-hand. His work contributed to the popularization of Cicero.

Particular features of the role of illumination in natural cognition have been an object of many controversies, already raised in Duns Scotus. Martin Pickave believes that illumination does not add any new content to human knowledge, does not substitute for natural cognitive faculties, but merely supports them. By virtue of the illumination we are able acquire absolutely certain and irrefutable knowledge of essences (Pickave 2010: 76–78). But God's illumination is not necessary in order to learn basic empirical truths, which can be even considered as certain (according to Henry, all knowledge requires certainty *non est scientia nisi sit certa* [SQO a. 2, q. 6]). Pickave observes that a two-fold understanding of certainty and truth is here applied. But he is right to assert that, in fact, Henry is not a skeptic and doest not seriously entertain the possibility that knowledge does not exist. Rather, he answers the question of how – not if – we acquire knowledge, and in that sense he shares the epistemological position which was widely adopted at the time. A lack of knowledge would run afoul of our natural desire for knowledge. What is natural, in turn, cannot be pointless as the work of the Creator (Pickave 2010: 90). Skepticism would be an irrational negation of faith and philosophy. The critique of skeptical claims at the beginning of Henry's theological work was more a methodological exercise than a serious discussion against skepticism.

Domick Perler is right to observe that Henry's theory is antiskeptical, but if it would reject God's illumination, it would have skeptical consequences because, in view of this theory, it is impossible to refute skepticism based on natural cognition (Perler 2006: 33). This kind of critique had been already formulated by Henry's disciple, John Duns Scotus, who claimed that Henry's arguments led to "the academics' view", or skepticism (*Ordinatio* I, dist. 3, pars 1., q. 4). Duns Sctous himself rejects this skepticism, defending natural and irrefutable cognition, both abstract (concerning self-evident principles and their consequences) and intuitive (concerning one's own actions: I exist, I'm alive, I'm aware, I see, etc.).[40]

According to many scholars, Petrus Aureoli (ca. 1280–1322), a Franciscan from the Paris University, has contributed to the development of skepticism, opening the path for William Ockham (Jung-Palczewska 200: 108). Aureoli was a conceptualist who, like Ockham, recognized only the existence of individual beings, considering the universals as intellectual constructs or, more precisely, fictions. The status of universals was explained by Aureoli in terms of a special kind of existence called *esse apparens*, apparent or phenomenal being. Every cognitive act, he believed, endows its object with this special status: our cognitive faculties create phenomenal beings which stand for the objects. Both concepts

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40   See Pickave 2010: 86, 90.

and affections are simple things recognized through this special ontological status, which is different form their reality outside of the mind. For Aureoli, Socrates and the concept of Socrates are the same (Friedman 2009: 18). This thesis on the identity of things and phenomena inspired controversies among Aureoli's medieval readers, and is still controversial for contemporary medievalists. Also Ockham, in his commentary to *Sentences* polemicized against Aureoli's theory of concepts as fictions, insisting that a particular concept is an act of knowing, a real entity, a state of mind. Aureoli, in turn, does not deny that concepts are real entities, but he claims that they have a special mode of being (*modus essendi*) which he calls *esse apparens*, *esse intentionale* or *esse obiectivium* (in the medieval sense of the term). In Aureoli, Friedman argues, every individual thing has two modes of being: real and intentional; the condition of the latter is being an object of cognition, that is to say, being in a relation to the cognizing subject. In light of this interpretation (Friedman 2009), there is no reason to attribute subjective idealism (Copleston 1960: 31) or phenomenalism (Palacz 1982: 38) to Aureoli.

The conception of *esse apparens* is supported by examples concerning sensory cognition which have strong skeptical overtones. They also reveal Aureoli's considerable erudition with regard to the ancient skeptical tradition. A famous passage from *Scriptum*, criticized also by Ockham, contains several descriptions of sensory illusions. To people sailing a boat down the river, trees on the shore appear as moving; when you twirl a stick very fast, you can see a colorful circle rotating in the air; when you press your finger against your eye while looking at a candle, you see two candles; after looking at the sun, you see back or colored spots; a straight stick appears bent when in water, and pigeon's necks appear different in color (*Scriptum* d. 3, q. 3, a. 1; Friedman 2009: 10).[41] Aureoli complements this list with dreams in which we see, hear or touch non-existent objects. All these instances of illusion confirm the existence of the phenomenal objects, which do not have their counterparts in reality. In order to understand the functioning of our cognitive faculties, Aureoli argues, it is important to examine illusions and perception errors, which reveal phenomenal being as a distinct mode of existence. In the case of veridical perception, but it is only because of their closer convergence with reality; in fact, they are called into existence in every act of perception. According to Aureoli, perception is an active process of creating

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41 Similar erudition in the field of ancient skeptical arguments against sensory cognition is displayed in the writings of John Scotus Eriugena (9th century) who lists (in *Periphyseon*, book 4.794) the following examples of natural sensory illusions: "the apparently broken oar, the reversed face in the mirror, the towers that seem to move to those sailing, the echo." (Eriugena 1995: 302)

of phenomenal beings. The same goes for intellectual cognition, which creates phenomenal beings (such as concepts) based on sensory data.

The conception of phenomenal beings disturbed Aureoli's readers;[42] yet, like many other medieval theorists of cognition, he can be also described as a reliabilist who assumes that our cognitive faculties were created by God, and therefore, in ordinary conditions, are able to acquire correct knowledge (Friedman 2009: 11). According to Aureoli, we also know logical truths, which is why he cannot be considered as a total skeptic (Bolyard 2009: 16).

Another argument in favor of the conception of *esse apparens* is Aureoli's analysis of the distinction between intuitive and abstractive cognition (introduced by John Duns Scotus). Perception is an exemplary instance of intuitive cognition, and reasoning is an exemplary instance of abstractive cognition (for example, the reasoning of an astronomer who, based on calculations alone, anticipates the sun's eclipse without leaving his room). Aureoli interprets this distinction in psychological terms. In intuitive cognition the subject directly experiences a thing as if it were present or existent. This kind of experience is possible even if the thing itself is not present or does not exist at all. In fact, this psychological condition can be accomplished even when, from the objective perspective, the perceived thing exists and is present (Bolyard 2009: 16). This interpretation of Duns Scotus's distinction suggests a possibility that the object of perception (an exemplary type of intuitive cognition) does not necessarily have to exist. Aureoli polemicized John Duns Scotus who assumed that intuitive cognition was possible only insofar as the object was present. Having analyzed the distinction as applied to sensory cognition, Aureoli comes to a pessimistic conclusion regarding the possibility of intuitive intellectual cognition, which can be enjoyed only by angels and saved souls. Human, embodied mind can have only abstract and faith-based knowledge about God. This was a pessimistic conclusion for the whole Christian metaphysics. For Aureoli, like for Henry of Ghent, the main reasons for skeptical conclusions stem from a comparison between the human mind and that of God. This position is typical for medieval and Christian skepticism in general. It will also find its continuation in modern skepticism.

According to Aureoli, we are also unable to acquire intuitive knowledge about individual things. We know them only by means of senses and discourse, we can apprehend their features, but not their existence (Friedman 2009: 15). This

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42 Izydora Dąmbska argues that Aureoli makes a skeptical argument here: "he juxtaposes a series of facts which undermine our reliance on external empirical data. To that end, he invokes the examples of dreams, illusions, afterimages and hallucinations, characterized by the same clarity as the ostensibly evident sensory perceptions" (Dąmbska 1958: 19)

thesis is only one step from Ockham's skeptical hypothesis that the all-powerful God can undermine the possibility of intuitive cognition. Ockham did not share Aureoli's radicalism and criticized it. He believed the perceptual illusions could pose no serious threat to knowledge and that it was an overstatement to characterize concepts as fictions. However, it was precisely Ockham who has become the symbol of medieval skepticism. Aureoli's arguments will be employed by Fransisco Sanches, a Renaissance skeptic and professor at Toulouse, where Aureoli (as a Franciscan) resided in 1314–1316.

4. William Ockham – Skepticism and Fideism

A new strand in medieval skepticism was initiated by William Ockham (ca. 1285–1374), who posed the problem of the possibility of cognition in face of the omnipotent God, who can either retain or destroy the object of cognition:

> Intuitive cognition of a non-existent thing is possible by the divine power […]. Every effect which God can produce by means of a secondary cause, He can produce directly on his own account. (Ockham 1990: 25)[43]

This thesis, taken literally, does not necessarily fall under skeptical interpretation, since, for Ockham, intuitive cognition is by definition true and certain (in the sense that it cannot be false). Intuitive cognition is possible when its object "exists and is sufficiently close." (Marenbon 1991: 185) In fact, this thesis should be understood as stating that God, creating intuitive cognition of non-existents, would have to make us believe that the object does not exist (elsewhere, in *Ordinatio* q. 1, Ockham discusses this possibility). However, the Ockhamists, like Robert Holkot, believed that the passage is about a false judgment that a non-existent object exists. Ockham himself acknowledges elsewhere that God can cause a reliable belief in us (Ockham does not call it knowledge!) about the existence of a non-existent object, and this belief would be indistinguishable from intuitive cognition (Bermúdez 2008: 70). As Theodore Kermit Scott argues, Ockham's thesis means that God can destroy the object of cognition, while retaining its appearance, a physiologic state of the observer (Scott 1969: 45).

In this context, the certitude of knowledge about the existence of external objects is put to question. From contemporary perspective, Ockham can be said to have initiated the Cartesian skeptical hypothesis as well as Hume's skepticism.

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43 In the Latin version: "Cognitio intuitiva potest esse per potentiam Dei de obiecto non existente […]. Omnem effectum, que Deus mediate causat cum causa secunda, potest immediate per se causare." (Cf. K. Michalski 1921: 10)

His insights, linking skepticism with the idea of omnipotent God, were utterly new against the backdrop of the ancient skeptical tradition.

Konstanty Michalski and Étienne Gilson describe Ockham as a skeptic with great impact, who undermined a reliance on medieval metaphysics (according to Gilson, he initiated its collapse). Philotheus Boehner, an editor of Ockham's works, writes that this reputation of (and charge against) Ockham is both "tragic and comic". He believes that Ockham was a zealous Franciscan and fideist, who had never posed the skeptical question of whether knowledge exists, but only asked how we acquire it (Gilson 1950: 61–91; Perler 2006: 7). Many scholars agree with Boehner. Richard Lee believes that skepticism was absent throughout the Middle Ages: the ancient therapeutic skepticism was already discredited by St. Augustine, while modern skepticism, based on the hypothesis of a split between subject and object, did not emerge before Descartes (Lee 2001: 7). Lee argues that, according to Ockham, the soul, as a cognitive faculty, stands in a causal relation to the world and has a natural capacity to cognize it. There is no "modern" split between them, as they belong to the same universe. That is why the problem of world non-existence is neglected, while knowledge of the world is treated as evident (Lee 2001: 9, 12–13, 19). In the same vein, Claude Panaccio i David Piché call Ockham a reliabilist (human cognitive processes are essentially trustworthy; human knowledge is possible on the basis of natural cognitive processes). They acknowledge, however, that Ockham's epistemological reliabilism is not in conflict with the hypothesis of a possible God's intervention (Panaccio, Piché 2010: 116).

Indeed, Ockham writes that, insofar as we speak of natural order, "intuitive cognition cannot be caused nor maintained if its object does not exist" (Ockham 1990: 31) With regard to natural order, then, Ockham is an ontological realist and epistemological reliabilist (Panaccio 2009: 229). However, the idea of the radical God's omnipotence complicates this Aristotelian picture. Against Lee's thesis, a possible split emerges between the subject and cognition, a split which will become the major source of modern skepticism. That is why Ockham can be said to be both an antiskeptic (with regard to natural order) and skeptic (insofar as the possibility of God's intervention is concerned). In a way, Ockham's conception is a reverse version of that of Henry of Ghent, who believes that certainty is guaranteed by God's help, but impossible without it.

Ockham assumes that human cognitive processes naturally tend to lead to true judgments about the existence of their objects, insofar, of course, as there is no divine intervention. The possibility that the object of intuitive cognition (which assumes an unmediated presence of its objects) may not exist, is examined only in theological, not epistemological context. It is examined in light of the assumption

that omnipotent God can do everything which is not self-contradictory (Panaccio, Piché 2010: 102), and that He established the principle of non-contradiction. For God has an intuitive and unmediated cognition of all existent and non-existent things (*Quodlibeta Septem* 4, 6). Ockham also discusses the possibility that profits, by virtue of God's intervention, can intuitively know things which had not yet happened (Panaccio, Piché 2010: 108). Of all these theological theories, it is only the theory of omnipotence that has skeptical consequences. It seems, however, that Ockham himself failed to appreciate its skeptical potential. As José Luis Bermúdez writes, the Cartesian malignant demon hypothesis loomed large here, but was never formulated (Bermúdez 2008: 69). It could not be formulated because of Ockham's assumption of the wisdom and goodness of God, who designed human cognitive processes (the omnipotence of God is limited only by his earlier decisions concerning the creation of the world and the laws of nature). It is this assumption that leads Pannacio and Piche to their interpretation of Ockham's epistemology as reliabilism. They argue that, in Ockham, cognitive processes are considered as essentially reliable or trustworthy (they usually lead to true beliefs, and illusions occur only in specific circumstances). The Creator governs their causal course and guarantees their validity, even if we do not know about it. In this theological context, skepticism regarding cognition of the external world is excluded. According to Ockham, people have the capacity of cognizing the world and acquiring knowledge (which he understands as a set of true beliefs justified by the reliability of the cognitive process) although the all-powerful God can always deceive us, if He wills (Panaccio, Piché 2010: 116). In fact, Ockham has precisely the same reasons for ignoring skepticism as Descartes will have for repudiating it: the wisdom and goodness of God.

Ockham was never a proponent of skepticism and even criticized Petrus Aureoli's views for their skeptical consequences. In spite of Michalski and Gilson's claims, Ockham's thesis that God can cause in us an idea, by which we judge a nonexistent thing to exist, failed to have any great impact in his times; its revolutionary potential was yet to be noticed (cf. Tachau 1988; Panaccio 2009: 230). In the late Middle Ages, it was treated mostly as an expression God's omnipotence, and in that sense it did not provoke any wonder. The possibility of supernatural intervention was examined in detail by many theologians, such as Peter Damian and St. Thomas Aquinas. According to Thomas, demons can influence the senses, angels can influence the intellect, and God himself can also influence the will. God, as an omnipotent being, can influence all cognitive capacities (Perler 2010: 177–178). Thomas does not recognize the skeptical consequences of this

thesis because the possibility of total deception is excluded by the assumption of God's goodness. Ockham and Ockhamists have a similar view.

The importance of Ockham's thesis was noticed only in the modern period when Descartes demonstrated its consequences. Ockham's considerations about God's omnipotence could not shake the natural world-view, but they undermined the trust to theology, especially in its rationalist version. In light of the theory of omnipotence, all particular determinations about God seemed implausible. Ockham was an insightful critic the then proofs of God's existence (both ontological, from the concept of God, and cosmological, from the existence of the world) and arguments for the soul's immortality. He considered these arguments as merely probable as they assumed doubtful principles, e.g. the Aristotelian principle that a series of causes cannot regress infinitely. Unable to acquire rational certainty, Ockham advocated fideism with regard to the issue of God's existence and properties. This combination of fideism and skepticism will become typical for later Christian skeptics.

Ockham held a nominalist position in the controversy about universals (only individual things exist, and only names are general). Nominalism itself did not imply total skepticism (Panaccio 2009: 228); it only questioned some metaphysical theses, such as the existence of human nature and other general natures existing outside of mind. Ockham's views, while being moderate and, at best, locally skeptical, have stimulated new tendencies (*via moderna*), becoming a serious threat to *via antiqua*. This, perhaps, was the reason why Ockham was summoned before the papal court in Avignon. The trial was not favorable to Ockham, who eventually escaped from Avignon, accompanied by his superior in the Franciscan order. They found shelter at the court of Louis the Bavarian, where Ockham started to produce his antipapist political writings, burning down all bridges behind him.

Ockham's skeptical fame among his contemporaries was not based on facts: it was political, rather than philosophical. Dying at the Bavarian court, he managed to avoid repressions, which nonetheless affected his continuers, especially those from the Paris University. In 1340, six scholars from the theological faculty were summoned to Avignon and charged for spreading erroneous doctrines. The philosophical faculty was identified as the source of error. It issued a decree banning the teaching of terministic or nominalist logic, which was a label for Ockham's ideas. Six years later the condemning sentence was pronounced against Nicholas of Autrecourt, the oldest of the defendants. Pope Clement VI, in his letter to the Paris University, expressed his regret that the school developed strange, Ockhamist ideas. A year later, the theological faculty, without an initiative from the papal court, decided to condemn another Ockham's proponent, John of Mirecourt (Michalski 1921: 19–26).

5. Ockham's Followers and Skepticism Based on Divine Omnipotence

Even if William Ockham had no intention of being a skeptic, and even if his hypothesis of God's intervention was simply a result of bringing the idea God's omnipotence under serious examination, his writings almost immediately provoked a rise of skeptical tendencies among both his Oxford fellow professors (like Adam of Wodeham,[44] Thomas Bradwardine,[45] Robert Holkot,[46] William Crathorn[47]) and his Paris readers (Nicholas of Autrecourt, John of Mirecourt, and others).

5.1. Nicholas of Autrecourt

Nicholas of Autrecourt (ca. 1300–1369) suffered an especially tragic fate, as he was condemned by the papal court of Avignon in 1346. The sentence violently ended his academic career: he was declared as unable to complete his mastery in theology and deprived of all academic degrees he had previously acquired. In 1347, Nicholas publicly renounced his views and burned his writings in the presence of the Paris University community. He was sentenced to banishment to Metz in Lorraine, where he served as a priest for twenty years until his death in ca. 1369.

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44 Adam Wodeham was more skeptical than Ockham and believed that, in the context of potentially deceptive God, there is no clear criterion which would allow us to distinguish between true and false perceptions (Michalski 1921: 11; Bolyard 2009: 16).

45 In his work *De causa Dei*, Thomas Bradwardine developed Ockham's idea of God's omnipotence, putting forward a thesis that "every act of human will is eternally determined." (Michalski 1921: 12).

46 Robert Holkot developed the thesis that whatever God makes by means of created things, He can also make directly; hence, we cannot gain certain knowledge about causal relations. Holkot also claimed that God is also the effective cause of human sin. This last thesis was condemned in John of Mirecourt's writings (Michalski 1921: 16–17; por. Perler 2010: 179).

47 William Crathorn lived in Ockham's times. In his commentary to the first book of *Sentences* (q. 1), he repeatedly invoked the idea of the omnipotence of God, who can deceive us, separate warmth from fire or maintain a sight of an object which ceased to exist. Crathorn gave the example of a swirling torch producing a circle of fire, as well as the examples of dreams and afterimages, which suggests his acquaintance with the works of Aureoli. Crathorn rejected skepticism in a similar manner as later Descrates: God's omnipotence does not reach logical truths nor the contents of consciousness. Following Augustine, he argued: if I doubt, I am; therefore, I am. Nor should we doubt in the existence of things, since God, in His goodness, cannot systematically deceive us (Bolyard 2009: 17).

Nicholas never openly declared himself to be a skeptic, and he even described skepticism as absurd. Especially his "First Letter to Bernard" (a Franciscan from Arezzo) reveals his antiskeptical position:

> you do not have certitude as to the existence of your own acts, still according to your position. Moreover, you will not have certitude about your own mind either and, thus, you do not know whether it exists. And, as it seems to me, from your position there follow things that are more absurd than follow from the position of the Academics. (Nicholas of Autrecourt 2007: 137)

However, the court considered his polemic against Bernard as "a cunning fiction concealing his actual beliefs" (Michalski 1921: 27), and declared him to be a dangerous skeptic. In fact, indirectly, through the conclusions of Bernard's assumptions, Nicholas asserted that Bernard was not certain whether the sensorial objects, and even his own intellect, exist (Pasnau 2003: 221).

In "Second Letter to Bernard", Nicholas formulated some views with visible skeptical consequences. Inspired by Ockham's thought, he assumed that only that which is reducible to the principle of non-contradiction is certain (all other things and beliefs allow for God's intervention). Therefore, he infers that the existence of things and the principle causality should be called into question. "From the fact that some thing is known to be, it cannot be inferred evidently, by evidentness reduced to the first principle, or to the certitude of the first principle, that there is some other thing." (Nicholas of Autrecourt 2007: 139) An inference "A exists; therefore, B exists" is certain only insofar as the negation of the consequent stands in contradiction with the antecedent (Nicholas of Autrecourt 2007: 139). However, when we infer about the existence of things or their interrelations, there is no such contradiction. As shown by both John Buridan's account and the records of the inquisition trial, Nicholas also argued that causes and effects cannot be cognized with certainty, since they are not the same (Zupko 1993: 199). Inductive conclusions are uncertain because every generalization is based merely on habit or convention (*habitus conjecturativus*; *Exigit ordo* 237, 39–43, cf. Grellard 2010: 136). It is a small wonder that Nicholas has been described as a medieval Hume (Rashdall 1906–1907; Grellard 2010: 119).

Nicholas wrote "Aristotle never possessed evident knowledge about any substance other than his own soul" (Nicholas of Autrecourt 2007: 141) – neither about the world nor about the First Cause. As he continued, "[…] it can happen, by some power, namely the divine, that no substance is there. Therefore in the natural light it is not evidently inferred from these appearances that a substance is there." (Nicholas of Autrecourt 2007: 141) Nicholas employed Ockham's argument in order to justify the incognizability of substance.

According to Nicholas, Aristotle's metaphysics is only probable, but it is hard to justify its probability: "nobody possesses probable knowledge of a consequent in virtue of an antecedent of which he is not absolutely certain whether the consequent has once obtained simultaneously with the antecedent." (Nicholas of Autrecourt 2007: 141) In fact, these remarks called into question proofs of God's existence and Aristotle's metaphysics, assigning to them a lower degree of certitude than in case of inductive theses about perceived phenomena.

John Buridan presented Nicholas' position as skepticism based on God's omnipotence (Zupko 1993: 195). Hans Thijssen (2000: 199–223) claims that Nicholas was an antiskeptic who defended probable knowledge.[48] Christopher Grellard (2010: 141), in turn, explains this divergence by pointing to differences in understanding of skepticism. In the Middle Ages, the established concept of skepticism was that of St. Augustine, who described it as the thesis that knowledge does not exist. This kind of skepticism was considered as absurd, which is why no one (except of John of Salisbury) called himself a skeptic. Also Nicholas shared this position, but he questioned the possibility of acquiring certain knowledge about objects of perception, causal relations and God – a view which could have been regarded as a moderate, but dangerous version of skepticism. According to Charles Bolyard (2009: 18), however, Nicholas represented the most radical version of medieval skepticism. This interpretation must have been confirmed when similar skeptical arguments were made by an 18th century skeptic David Hume.

Nicholas of Autrecourt was criticized by his contemporary John Buridan who, in his commentary to Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, discussed the skeptical arguments of illusion, dream, induction and causality against the backdrop of the possibility of the all-powerful and deceptive God. Buridan's theses were very similar to those put forward by Nicholas, but he came to different, antiskeptical conclusions. Buridan agreed with the view that only the principle of non-contradiction is unquestionable. However, he insisted that mathematical certitude cannot be expected with regard to all objects. The standards of certainty should be lowered for perceptive knowledge, induction and causality. Buridan distinguished between three types of knowledge: scientific (certain and evident, like the principle of non-contradiction and analytical judgments), inductive (with a lesser degree of certainty and evidentness, like knowledge of nature) and probable (based on dialectical arguments). Because of God's omnipotence, the second kind of knowledge is only *conditionally evident*. God may create in us an image of a non-existent

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48   In *Exigit ordo* (228, 29–32), Nicholas even replied to the skeptical modes against sense perception. Cf. Grellard 2010: 128.

stone, or even change the course of nature, but this kind of intervention would be extraordinary. In ordinary conditions, generalizations of sense experiences are certain and evident (Michalski 1921: 60) Buridan seeks to discover the conditions of reliable induction based on regular, repetitive experiences and an absence of contrary reasons. Buridan skillfully avoids an analysis of causality and merely highlights that its negation would undermine theodicy (Michalski 1921: 63).

5.2. John of Mirecourt

John of Mirecourt, a Cistercian from the Paris University was charged along with Nicholas of Autrecourt, but he was not condemned by the papal court in 1346. A year later an internal University commission condemned his theses, but he was not banished nor expelled from the University.

John was Nicholas's follower, drawing on Augustine and Ockham's ideas. He never cited the latter because of the interdiction issued by the Paris University in 1399. However, his assumptions were typical for the Parisian Ockhamist circle: beings should not be multiplied without necessity; God is the all-powerful creator of everything; God can cause in us an image of a non-existent object; we cannot be fully certain with regard to our convictions about causal relations.

Applying the principle of economy, John rejected the distinction between the soul and its acts, claiming that there are only substances without accidents. Both these theses were condemned. Beginning with Nicholas's assumption that only judgments based on the principle of non-contradiction are certain, John, like Buridan earlier, introduced a weaker concept of certainty, which he called natural evidentness (Nicholas denied any gradation of certainty). This natural evidentness is dependent on God's intervention, but it remains independent from natural causes. The first type of knowledge contains analytical judgments and deductive conclusions, as well as the consciousness of one's being and the contents of one's consciousness in general (Nicholas, in tun, assumed only his own being as certain). One can notice here the influence of St. Augustine, whom John so abundantly quoted. The second type of knowledge contains perceptive judgments about external objects and causal relations. It is prone to illusions and God's intervention. Judgments of this type are evident but not infallible (their negation does not lead to contradiction). The principle of causality is more doubtful because of the possibility of an infinite series of causes, which is why it is an object of only probable (*probabilis*) knowledge. This view had skeptical consequences in the field of theology, especially regarding the proofs of God's existence which were described as merely probable (Michalski 1921: 45).

John of Mirecourt was not committed to total skepticism and adopted less radical position than Nicholas. But he put in question the presuppositions of medieval metaphysics by underscoring the absolute omnipotence of God and rejecting the principle of causality. Perhaps, this was the reason why his position was also considered as a dangerous and thoroughgoing skepticism.

Peter of Ailly (1350–1425) was a proponent of John's views. He distinguished two types of knowledge: evident and probable. The principle of non-contradiction, analytical sentences, one's own existence and the contents of self-consciousness are considered as absolutely evident. In this case, even God's direct intervention cannot, according to Peter, cause error. Judgments about the external world are relatively evident (God can cause in us an image of something that does not exist). Probable knowledge is based on arguments with non-evident premises, such as theological theses (for example, proofs of God's existence). Their content may be true, but their justification is only probable (even if it is stronger than that of the opposite theses). Peter accused the opponents of Nicholas of Autrecourt of acting out of envy.[49] Michalski suggests that the condemnation of the teachings of John of Mirecourt "was provoked, not so much by their erroneous meaning, as by a willingness to tame the elevated spirit of their author and protect pious souls from corruption" (Michalski 1921: 67). Descartes never read the manuscripts of Nicholas's letters and John's commentaries but, as Michalski suggests, he may have known their views through a printed commentary by Peter of Ailly.

Dominik Perler argues that Peter of Ailly "acknowledges the possibility of divine intervention without thereby giving up every claim for knowledge." (Perler 2010: 186) Perler underscores the differences between the 14th century thinkers speculating about the possibility of God's intervention in the process of cognition and Descartes in terms of understanding of knowledge. The former did not search for certainty of knowledge, but examined different types of knowledge and evidentness. They did not consider the logical possibility of God's intervention in the process of cognition as a threat to the whole knowledge (Perler 2010: 190). They distinguished different levels of natural and supernatural processes. Regarding the natural level, they were Aristotelians who relied on senses and intellect. They allowed for supernatural intervention only with regard to singular, extraordinary cases. Their discussions of God's intervention were theological, rather than epistemological. They believed in the

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49 "Si vero obiciatur, quo inter articulos Parisiis condemnatos contra magistrum Nico- laum de Alticuria unus est iste […], respondeo, quod multa fuerunt con- demnata contra eum causa invidiae" (quoted in: Michalski 1921: 67).

natural capacity of cognizing the word, regardless of the possibility of God's intervention. Descartes, on the contrary, wished to call into question all assumptions and searched for a guarantee for the reliability of senses and intellect. This was the source of his radical questioning (Perler 2010: 190). According to Perler, medieval thinkers overlooked a theoretical potential of their scattered remarks concerning the absolute power of God.

The Ockhamist skepticism found its continuation in the 16th century. The mystical skepticism was developed earlier, in the 15th century, by Nicholas of Cusa (1401–1464), whose works *On Learned Ignorance* (1440) and *On Conjectures* (1441–1444) described the conception of knowledge as a conjecture or guess (*coniectura*). As he wrote in the earlier work,

> A finite intellect […] cannot by means of comparison reach the absolute truth of things. […] The relationship of our intellect to the truth is like that of a polygon to a circle; the resemblance to the circle grows with the multiplication of the angles of the polygon; but apart from its being reduced to the circle, no multiplication, even if it were infinite, of its angles will make the polygon equal to the circle. (Nicholas of Cusa 1954: 1, iii)

It is precisely the possibility of the infinite progress of knowledge, that undermines certainty. Only mathematical knowledge – which is extra-rational, intuitive and accessible by virtue of supernatural grace – can be considered as certain (Kijewska 2008: 8). Consequently, the exact truth cannot be discovered by the senses, but only by virtue of God's grace. This view can be said to anticipate the investigations of Renaissance fideist skeptics.

Conclusions for Medieval Skepticism

Christian skepticism has an additional and specific origin in the considerations of divine omnipotence which makes it possible to deceive the human mind. Confronting human cognitive powers with the idealized mind of God, Christian thinkers created a gap between objective truth and human beliefs, a gap which could lead to cognitive pessimism. At the same time, the perfect Creator was considered as a guarantor of the essential knowability of the world. This assumption protected medieval philosophy from falling into radical skepticism.

Medieval skepticism was not global, which is why it avoided the problem of inconsistency. The global version of skepticism, in turn, was univocally assessed as inconsistent, even by most radical medieval skeptics, like Nicholas of Autrecourt. John of Salisbury championed the Ciceronian skepticism, or fallibilism; Ockham remained a weak, local skeptic, whose position was strongly interrelated with a wider context of reliabilism and fideism; Nicholas of Autrecourt and John

of Mirecourt also allowed the existence of probable knowledge. These types of local and moderate skepticism did not lead to the problem of inconsistency.

St. Augustine and John of Mirecourt made important contributions to the polemics against skepticism, pointing to the special status of the contents of self-consciousness which resist ancient skeptical arguments. These contents will acquire fundamental importance in modern philosophy.

Chapter IV. Modern Skepticism

1. The Beginning of Modern Skepticism (Erasmus, Pico, Sanchez)

Renaissance discoveries of ancient texts constituted an important part of the history of skepticism and philosophy in general. In the Middle Ages, only the works of St. Augustine and passages from Cicero's *Academic Books* were known, and they naturally became the main source of modern academic skepticism. The emergence of a printed Latin edition of Sextus's *Outlines of Skepticism* had initiated a strong skeptical movement known as new or Christian Pyrrhonism.

The most influential Renaissance skeptics were: Erasmus of Rotterdam (1469–1536), Giovanni Francesco Pico della Mirandola (1469–1533), Francisco Sanchez (1551–1623), Michel de Montaigne (1533–1592) and his follower Pierre Charron (1541–1603). Izydora Dąmbska's (1958) studies on French skepticism reveal that skepticism in the Renaissance manner, inspired by Montaigne's thought, flourished as late as the 18th century in the works of François de La Mothe Le Vayer (1588–1672), Samuel Sorbière (1615–1670), Pierre Daniel Huet (1630–1721), Simon Foucher (1644–1696), and Pierre Bayle (1647–1706). Renaissance skepticism is analyzed in detail by Richard Popkin, who discusses many other, less known Renaissance skeptics (Popkin 2003: 28–35).

Desiderius Erasmus, like Nicholas of Cusa, underscored the limitations of intellect and ultimately found consolation in faith. Before the Latin translation of Sextus's *Outlines…* appeared, Erasmus, much like Peter Ramus and Omer Talon later on, championed academic skepticism in his *Praise of Folly* (Popkin 2003: 31):

> For they are quite beside the mark who think that the happiness of a man is to be found in things, as such; it resides in opinion. For such is the obscurity and variety of human affairs that nothing can be clearly known, as has been correctly said by my Academics, the least impudent of the philosophers. (Erasmus 2015: 63)

This declaration of skeptical sympathies is mixed with fideism (Domański 1990: 34), which grows out of a low assessment of human cognitive capacities: it "attributes wisdom to God alone, leaving folly as the portion of all men." (Erasmus 2015: 120)

Erasmus declares himself to be a skeptic also during his discussion with Martin Luther about the right interpretation of the Bible. In *De libero arbitrio* (1524), he contends that the issue of free will cannot be resolved with certainty and hence one should adopt a skeptical position regarding it. Free will is too difficult an issue

to be left to a subjective decision of readers of the Bible, and it is most reasonable to simply follow the Church tradition in this regard. The Bible, Erasmus argues, contains many difficult passages whose interpretation should be left to the institution of the Church. For an individual is much more prone to error than a long-lasting institution. Luther replies in his work *De servo arbitrio* (1525), claiming that a Christian cannot be a skeptic and that Erasmus, in adopting his skeptical position, is no longer a Christian. Religious beliefs are always a personal matter and it is only one's own, individual understanding of the Bible, that can provide a basis for genuinely Christian faith. The proponents of counter-reformation, in turn, considered Protestants as thinly disguised skeptics, deprived of true faith (Popkin 2003: 8–10). Both sides, then, invoked skeptical arguments in order to defend their positions – and both considered "skepticism" as an invective. Popkin believes that this Reformation discussion had popularized skepticism and contributed to the development of philosophical skepticism (Popkin 2003: 16). The disagreement about the criterion of faith had evolved into the disagreement about the criterion of truth, debunking the myth of certainty of any kind of knowledge (Dąmbska 1962: 270).

Erasmus mentioned the academic skeptics, but he followed mainly a 2nd century Greek sophist and skeptic Lucian of Samosat. He never quoted Sextus, but referred to Phavorinus, Aulus Gellius and Galen, translating into Latin the latter's work *De optimo docendi genere* in 1526. In this text, Galen provided both a report and critique of skeptical views. The translation was published in 1562 as an addition to the first Latin edition of Sextus's *Outlines of Skepticism* (Floridi 2002: 47).

Sextus' writings were not well-known before the publication of this translation. However, some earlier attempts to translate his *Outlines…* into Latin are reported along with the circulation of its quite numerous Greek manuscripts. The oldest preserved manuscripts were found in Paris, Venice and Madrid; according to Luciano Floridi, these were versions of the same translation made by Niccolo da Reggio in 1340. The earliest of them was found in the library of St. Victor Monastery in Paris (Floridi 2002: 67). There were also other reported attempts at translation of Sextus's works – for instance, one commissioned in Florence by Giralomo Savonarola (Popkin 2003: 21). The earliest, partly preserved translation of *Against the Logicians* was prepared by John Wolley (ca. 1530–1596), a secretary of Queen Elisabeth (the manuscript is stored in the Bodleain Library in Oxford [Schmitt 1988: 61]). The Greek manuscripts were probably brought from Byzantine libraries (Hankinson 1995: 10).

The earliest written reference to Sextus Empiricus by someone who read his works first-hand was a letter of Francesco Filelfo to his friend, Giovanni Aurispa, in 1441, found by Charles Schmitt (Popkin 2003: 19). Many years later, in 1495,

Gianfrancesco Pico (1469–1533) published *Adversus Astrologiam* (*Against the Astrologists*) by his uncle, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463–1494). Sextus was not mentioned in this work, but it contained his arguments; it was also read by young Nicholas Copernicus (Popkin 2003: 27). As distinct from his uncle, Gianfrancesco spoke of limitless misery and weakness of humanity, rather than its "honor and glory". Influenced by Savanarola, he had read Sextus as an introduction to Christian faith (Popkin 2003: 7).

In 1520, before the publication of Sextus's *Outlines of Skepticism*, Gianfrancesco Pico published his *Examen vanitatis doctrinae gentium et veritatis Christianae disciplinae* (*Examination of the Vanity of Pagan Doctrine, and of the Truth of Christian Teaching*), which was partly a translation, and partly a summary of Sextus's arguments. Pico had summarized *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* and *Against the Academicians*, adding a separate book with a critique of Aristotle. He employed the Sextan arguments in order to disprove all rational philosophy (especially pagan one), expose the nothingness of human knowledge (especially Aristotle's), and present the Christian teaching given through revelation as the only true and certain doctrine. The argument was quite simple: if everything is doubtful and man cannot gain any knowledge through rational means, it follows that he should reject philosophy as a source of knowledge and embrace the Christian revelation. Pico represented typical Christian Pyrrhonism, but he did not gain such popularity as Montaigne in the 16th century (Popkin 2003: 20–21). Pico's merit rests on his popularizing of Sextus's thought. As Dąmbska (1958: 20) observes, the difference between these two skeptics is that Pico, as distinct from Sextus, devalues human reason. He supplements the list of skeptical modes with some remarks concerning misery and imperfection of human mind. This, according to Dąmbska, was entirely absent from ancient skepticism.

In 1562, a first Latin translation of *Outlines of Skepticism*, supplemented with the chapter on skeptics from Diogenes's *Lives…* and one of Galen's texts, appeared in Geneva. It was translated by a Protestant, Henri Estienne, also known as Stephanus. A couple decades later, in 1569, a Latin translation of *Against the Professors* by a French Counter-reformer, Gentian Hervet, appeared together with *Outlines of Skepticism* in Paris and Antwerp. Both translators, in their introductions, expressed a hope that Sextus's arguments would exert a redeeming influence on religious disputes. Thus, Sextus Empiricus became an instrument of both a polemic against Calvinists and of their counterattack.[50] In both cases,

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50 An example of the skeptical discussion against Calvinism is provided by the famous tractate *De arte dubitandi* by Sebastian Castellio. Cf. Szczucki 1963: 147.

Sextus's readers were religiously engaged (Popkin 1988: 115). A first Greek-Latin edition of his works was published in 1621 in Geneva by the Chouet brothers.[51]

Francisco Sanchez (1552–1623), a Portuguese physician and philosopher, was a very important and influential skeptic who started publishing after the appearance of Latin translations of Sextus. However, his 1581 work titled *That Nothing is Known* (*Quod nihil scitur*) contains no mention of Sextus. He repeatedly invokes Cicero, Galen, Plutarch and Aristotle and employs arguments developed by medieval skeptics: Peter Aureoli (illusions in sense perception) and Nicholas of Autrecourt (the critique of causality). Sanchez signed his letter to Clavius "Carneades Philosophus" (Popkin 2003: 317, n. 160) and concluded all his works (including medical works) with the word *Quid* (*What*) and a question mark. It was supposed to be a symbol of his doubts, an expression of his skeptical position of "not asserting anything" and leaving freedom of choice to his readers (Dąmbska 1958: 21). Both Popkin and Dąmbska believe that Sanchez's writings were influenced by Sextus, while Dominik Perler argues against it, claiming that there is no trace of such influence. Instead, he highlights Sanchez's critique of Aristotle and his academic skepticism (Perler 2003: 211). In my opinion, some passages from *That Nothing is Known* indicate that Sanchez either knew Sextus first-hand or, at least, was familiar with the account of Sextus's philosophy presented in Diogenes's *Lives…* (Argippa's trilemma and the critique of sylogisms). After all, also Montaigne, who drew on many passages from Sextus, had never quoted his works.

Sanchez's *That Nothing is Known* is of academic – and not popular – character, and it is not an expression of antiintellectualism, as distinct from the works of Erasmus and Gianfrancesco Pico discussed above. It is a comprehensive and rigorous critique of Aristotle and the state of knowledge at Sanchez's time. Like Arcesilaus, he declared his skepticism by paraphrasing Socrates's dictum: "I do not know even this one thing, namely that I know nothing." (Sanchez 2007: 121)

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51 A critical edition of the Greek text, based on examination of numerous manuscripts and supplemented with a revised Latin translation, appeared in Leipzig in 1718 (and was authored by Johann Fabricius). In the 17th century, *Outlines of Skepticism* were translated into English, and in the 18th century also its French and German translations appeared. As Popkin writes, "there are indications that an English translation appeared around 1592 and that one or more French translations were being prepared in the early seventeenth century" (Popkin 2003a: 347). The Polish translation by Adam Krokiewicz was published in 1931.

Although his main thesis was that "nothing is known," he recognized it as inherently contradictory (or self-refuting) and felt he could not assent to it (Sanchez 2007: 122) For he doubted even this thesis and considered it merely as an expression of his own sentiments. As he concluded, "you will say, neither have I demonstrated that nothing is known. At least, I have expounded my opinion as clearly, accurately and truthfully as I could […]" (Sanchez 2007: 123). It is not hard to see that such statement comes close to Sextus's position (PH 1.4).

Apart from this declaration of skepticism, Sanchez's work provides not only several rational arguments for embracing skepticism but also a detailed analysis of the concepts of science and knowledge. Scientific knowledge, Sanchez argues, proceeds from a vocabulary and definitions. However, all definitions are merely nominal and label things with arbitrary names, or, more precisely, replace unclear words with other unclear words (the ultimate word to which everyone resorts, namely "being," is incomprehensible). An example of such definition is Aristotle's definition of science as a mental "disposition acquired through demonstration." (Popkin 2003: 39) According to Sanchez, particular scientific investigations are easier to comprehend than this kind of abstract formula. All demonstrations, considered as a method of Aristotle's science, are criticized as circular and unable to provide any new information.[52] Contrary to Aristotle, Sanchez believes that science cannot be the knowledge of causes either, for such knowledge is simply unattainable (after all, as argued by Wilhelm Ockham and Nicholas of Autrecourt, whom Sanchez never mentioned, the chain of causes is infinite). In short, science thus understood is a fiction.

Sanchez offers his own definition of science as a perfect knowledge of particular things. However, he immediately observes that people cannot gain certainty. Sense perception is not unmediated – it is prone to illusions and conditioned by circumstances, as Peter Aureoli showed. Hence, there is no perfect knowledge of things. Man can only acquire a limited and imperfect knowledge of things which are present in experience. That is why Sanchez offers his procedure of constructive experience processing, which he calls the method of knowing or the scientific method (patient, careful and precise examination, cautious judgment and accurate data assessment). "For my purpose is to establish, as far as I am able, a kind of scientific knowledge which is both sound and as easy as possible to attain; but *not* a science that is full of chimeras and fictions." (Sanchez 2007: 123) He announces

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52 Sanchez seems to know Agrippa's trilemma, most probably from Sextus's writings.

that he "will expound, as far as human frailty allows, the *method of knowing*." (Sanchez 2007: 123) Popkin describes Sanchez's skepticism as "constructive" and credits him for developing a new conception of empirical knowledge and for anticipating Descartes's concept of knowledge (the traces of the Renaissance fideism are not a constitutive part of his work).

Fortunat Strowski argues that Montaigne was familiar with Sanchez's works and that Montaigne's famous question, "What do I know?" (*Que sais-je?*), was a paraphrase of Sanchez's *Quid?* (Dąmbska 1958: 24). This opinion may seem implausible given the fact that Sanchez was born 18 years later than Montaigne, but if we take into account that Sanchez quickly embarked on his academic career, while Montaigne started writing in his forties, we can easily assume that they might have simultaneously developed their skeptical works and, being distant relatives (Montaigne's mother had Portuguese roots), even contact with each other. Their works appeared at almost the same time: Montaigne's *Essays* appeared in 1580 and Sanchez published *That Nothing is Known* a year later, in Lyon, with an introduction written in 1576 (probably this was the year when Montaigne became familiar with Sextus's works). They never quoted each other, but they can be said to have shared the same skeptical position, albeit formulated in different styles: whereas Sanchez, as a physician, was brief and precise in his writings, Montaigne was a humanist who seduced his readers with his beautiful if lengthy and chaotic style. Ultimately, it was the latter who gained fame, becoming an emblematic thinker of Renaissance skepticism. Today, however, Sanchez's work is much appreciated by scholars for its academic precision (Popkin 2003: 42).

What substantive conclusion can be drawn from Sanchez's investigations? Sanchez himself admits that skepticism is an inconsistent position, that it cannot be maintained without contradiction. However, one may treat it as an expression of intuition and a hypothesis that our knowledge is imperfect. Based on this uncertain hypothesis, one may start developing probable knowledge.

2. Montaigne's Skepticism

Michel de Montaigne's *Essays* (1580), a work, whose title alludes to Sextus's *Outlines…*, and which draws on St. Augustine's *Confessions* in its monologue form, "has become one of the most influential and popular books in France and whole educated Europe of the modern era." (Dąmbska 1958: 24) For example, only during the life of Blaise Pascal, it appeared in around 20 editions in France (Philips 2003: 24). Montaigne has become a point of reference in many discussions and an emblematic thinker of Renaissance skepticism. His skeptical position is best

expressed in his essay "An Apology for Raymond Sebond".[53] In Montaigne's skepticism, one may trace ancient, Christian and specifically renaissance themes.

2.1. Ancient Themes

The reader of *Essays* cannot doubt that Montaigne exhibits considerable erudition regarding ancient authors. His work contains numerous quotations from Cicero, Lucretius, Plutarch, Seneca, Vergil, Ovid or Horace, as well as from several Greek writers, like Herodotus, Euripides or Sophocles. Although there are no quotations from – or direct references to – Sextus Empiricus, Montaigne must have drawn on his works. Scholars have determined that Montaigne knew *Outlines of Skepticism* from the 1562 Latin translation by Henri Stephanus. Greek quotations found in Montaigne's library are probably taken from a Greek edition of Diogene's *Lives*, Greek passages left in Stephanus's translation of *Outlines…* and Lucian and Galen's writings (Floridi 2002: 47). After he had read the Latin edition of Sextus (ca. 1576), Montaigne went through a "skeptical crisis" and started to work on the "Apology" (Popkin 2003: 47, 318; Foglia 2004: 7). He did not use a Greek manuscript of *Outlines…* and the first printed Greek edition of Sextus's writings appeared after Montaigne's death. This may explain why he never quoted Sextus in his "Apology", even though it contains various quotations from many other authors whom he knew from their original texts.

"Apology" is full of paraphrased passages from the work of Sextus. For example, Montaigne delineates three distinct types of philosophers: (1) those who believe they have found Truth (the dogmatists); (2) those who claim that Truth

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53 Raymond Sebond (or Raymond of Sabunde) was a 15th-century Spanish theologian, a professor at the University of Toulouse and the author of *Natural Theology* (*Theologia Naturalis*), which Montaigne translated into French at his father's wish. Sebond was a proponent of the thesis that all truths of Christian faith can be justified by reason. He was criticized for trying to justify the truths of faith by means of human reasons, and his arguments were considered as weak and ineffective. Montaigne "defends" Sebond's position in a very intricate manner, in practice contradicting it. He assumes a fideist position that faith is the foundation of religion and that rational reasons can have only an auxiliary function. According to Montaigne, Sebond was right precisely in this secondary sense. Montaigne mobilizes his trenchant, skeptical critique of all rational arguments to justify the weakness of Sebond's position. In other words, for Montaigne, the discussion of Sebond's position is only a pretext to articulate his own skepticism and fideism (cf. Kowalewska 2011: 7; Popkin 2003: 47–48). Hartle argues that, in this case, Montaigne's discussion falls into contradiction, developing dialectically into an intermediary position (Hartle 2005: 201–202).

cannot be grasped (the academics); (3) those who "are still looking for Truth." (E 2, 12, 1338; cf. PH 1.3–1.4)[54] According to this distinction, skepticism is supposed to be a third way between simple dogmatism and negative dogmatism, that is to say, a position which avoids both positive and negative assertions or theses in favor of the suspension of judgment (*epochē*, *assensum sustinere*). In this passage, Montaigne somewhat uncritically repeats the words of Sextus who described the position of academic skeptics as inherently contradictory, denying them the name of skeptics. Montaigne attributed to them a thesis that truth is unknowable, ignoring Cicero's *Academic Books*, which he abundantly quotes and which describe Carneades's rejection of this thesis as leading either to contradiction or an unjustified exception (Ac. 2.28). Perhaps, he remembered this passage, but decided to agree with Sextus.

For in *Essays* one may find a polemic against probabilism, closely resembling an analogous polemic conducted by St. Augustine (CA 2, 16). Montaigne writes that, just as someone who had never seen Socrates cannot discover whether a picture of Socrates resembles who it purports to represent, so someone who does not know the truth cannot recognize probability: "how can they bring themselves to yield to verisimilitude if they cannot recognize verity?" (E 2, 12, 1502) Montaigne believes that Pyrrhonists, with their total suspension of judgment, are much more consistent. It seems, however, that the whole dispute is about the word "verisimilitude" or "probability." Montaigne argues that people should make careful judgments in spite of uncertainty. He is just unwilling to describe this position in terms of relying on probability. But it is not hard to see that Carneades and Cicero's probabilism consisted precisely in making careful judgments. While "Apology" is under the Sextan influence, the third part of *Essays* is eminently Ciceronian (Floridi 2002: 48).

If the skeptic neither affirms nor negates anything, but keeps thinking and searching, then it follows that he remains in a constant state of doubting. For Montaigne, skepticism is precisely an attitude of doubting:

> The professed aim of Pyrrhonians is to shake all convictions, to hold nothing as certain, to vouch for nothing. (E 2, 12: 1339)

> If you can picture an endless confession of ignorance, or a power of judgement which never, never inclines to one side or the other, then you can conceive what Pyrrhonism is. (E 2, 12, 1345)

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54 In all further quotations from Montaigne's *Essays* (E), the roman number stands for the Book, whereas the arabic numbers refer (respectively) to the chapter and the page of the English translation used in this volume.

Doubting and disquietness are specifically modern themes in a history of skepticism. Montaigne accepts *ataraxia* as the aim of skepticism (Laursen 1992: 103), but his skepticism is marked by anxiety, endless searching and constant shifts. Perhaps, *ataraxia* designates merely a distant attitude toward all circulating opinions. Montaigne's skepticism is not so much a lack as an instability of views.

In his essay "On Virtue" (E 2, 29, 1861), Montaigne quotes legends about Pyrrho and admires his life attitude. In "Apology", however, these legends are called into question: "They describe him as emotionless and virtually senseless, adopting a wild way of life, cut off from society, allowing himself to be bumped into by wagons, standing on the edge of precipices and refusing to conform to the law." (E 2, 12, 1346) According to Montaigne, the truth was different: Pyrrho was "a living, arguing, thinking man, enjoying natural pleasures and comforts of every sort"; it was just that "those false, imaginary and fantastic privileges usurped by Man, by which he claims to profess, arrange and establish the truth, were renounced and abandoned by Pyrrho" (E 2, 12, 1346).

> Pyrrhonists say that the sovereign good is *Ataraxia*, which consists in a total immobility of judgement; they consider that not to be a positive affirmation but simply an inner persuasion such as makes them avoid precipices and protect themselves from the chill of the evening; it presents them with this notion and makes them reject any other. (E 2, 12, 1545)

Montaigne quotes and develops the arguments against sense perception which were collected and discussed by Sextus. One my identify some of them with Aenesidemus's modes. For example, there are many remarks corresponding to Aenesidemus's first mode, comparing differences between humans and animals in their ways of receiving impressions (E 2, 12, 1593; cf. PH 1.78). Following Sextus, Montaigne gives the example of a dog which came at a crossroads, sniffed two of three paths which were there, made sure that neither of them bore any trace of what it was looking for, and took the third road without further investigations. According to Montaigne, this is an evidence that dog, like man, is able to make use of reason (E 2, 12, 1238; cf. PH 1.69). There are also remarks concerning differences between people themselves (the second mode), especially in terms of health, emotions or alternations between sleeping and waking (the fourth mode; cf. E 2, 12, 1519). Montaigne asks: "why should we therefore not doubt whether our thinking and acting are but another dream; our waking, some other species of sleep?" (E 2, 12, 1593). He adds his own observations concerning the influence of emotions on our ways of perceiving things: "When we are moved to anger, we do not hear things as they are [...]" (E 2, 12, 1590) but when we love someone "she appears more beautiful than she is." (E 2, 12, 1591) At the same time, the role

of thus distorted experience is essential, since it forms the basis of our whole knowledge: "The senses are the beginning and the end of human knowledge." (E 2, 12, 1569)

However, he agrees with the Epicureans that the senses provide us with the most reliable knowledge.

> For us there is absolutely nothing more absurd than to say that fire is not hot; that light does not illuminate; that iron has no weight or resistance. Those are notions conveyed to us by our senses. There is no belief or knowledge in man of comparable certainty […]. Our senses are privileged to be the ultimate frontiers of our perception: beyond them there is nothing which could serve to reveal the existence of the senses we lack (E 2, 12, 1571)

We can only juxtapose data received by different senses. He repeatedly underscores the importance of experience and self-governed observation. This seems to be an example of hesitation, which is typical for Montaigne and contained in his definition of skepticism.

After showing that it is unreasonable to reject sense data, Montaigne proceeds to his critique of reason as a potential source of error. The function of reason is to interpret sense data; it orders and structures our experiences according to its categories, and interprets them on the basis of its previously acquired knowledge. Reason is responsible for making judgments and drawing conclusions. In this respect, once again, Montaigne's assessment is ambivalent. He feels no hesitation to make depreciation charges against reason; for instance, describing it as the prey of passions (E 2, 12, 1377), or comparing it to wax, "a supple instrument which can be turned into any shape at all" (E 2, 12, 1440).[55] If we do not doubt in our reason, it is because "commonly received notions are assayed by nobody." ((E 2, 12, 1440) Categories and inference patterns are silently assumed by whole communities, but they are not immune to error, which becomes evident as soon as we compare different cultures with each other. Human knowledge is based on "preliminary assumptions," but "any human assumption, any rhetorical proposition, has just as much authority as any other, unless a difference can be established by reason." (E 2, 12, 1444). Our knowledge is suspended in the void because its foundations and consequences remain unknown. Montaigne invokes Agrippa's trilemma, which had been already discussed by Sextus: "no Reason can be established except by another Reason. We retreat into infinity." (E 2, 12, 1604, cf. PH 1.166). As a result, "we have no means of separating truth from falsehood"

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55 Montaigne makes an analogous comparison also elsewhere in this essay, when he writes that reason "is like a tool of malleable lead or wax: it can be stretched, bent or adapted to any size or to any bias; if you are clever, you can learn to mould it." (E 2, 12, 1510)

(E 2, 12, 1503), there is no single proposition which is not subject to debate or controversy among us and everyone (including philosophers) is doomed to "infinite confusion of opinions." (E 2, 12, 1504)

However, elsewhere Montaigne accepts the use of reason. In his essay "On Schoolmaster Learning" (E 1, 25, 468), he appreciates independent judgments of reason. As Zbigniew Gierczyński (1985: 38) is right to observe, "*Essays*, as a whole, are precisely an attempt at exercising this independent faculty of judgment." Marc Foglia (2004: 4,11) describes Montaigne's position as "a philosophy of free judgment." In fact, Montaigne develops his whole philosophy on the foundation of reason. Like every skeptic, he falls into the trap of criticizing reason by means of the reason itself. At one point, he confesses that he does not believe in a total incapacity of human reason. Reason is equally indispensable as sense perception when it comes to the quest for truth (E 2, 12, 1520). Montaigne criticizes both the senses and reason, but he does not consider them entirely unreliable.

An important point of Montaigne's skepticism is his hypothesis of ontological variability based on Heraclitus. Montaigne no longer asks, but asserts:

> …there is no permanent existence either in our being or in that of objects. We ourselves, our faculty of judgement and all mortal things are flowing and rolling ceaselessly: nothing certain can be established about one from the other, since both judged and judging are ever shifting and changing. (E 2, 12, 1606)

That is why reason, searching for something permanent, constantly fails to grasp its objects, while the senses mistake what appears to them for what exists. Izydora Dąmbska describes this statement as a divergence "from the line of consistent skepticism", but she adds that Montaigne's ontological thesis has brought "new arguments in favor of skepticism." (Dąmbska 1958: 31) The variability thesis goes beyond the skeptical method, but it provides skepticism with a solid ontological foundation. Here, Montaigne comes close to Aenesidemus who believed that "the Skeptical persuasion is a path to the philosophy of Heraclitus." (PH 1.210) The thesis of ontological variability is fine-tuned with the thesis of social variability pointing to a multiplicity of views and cultures and the infinite dispute between opinions.

Making an analogy to Montaigne's individual skeptical crisis, Richar Popkin describes "a Pyrrhonist crisis" of the whole Renaissance philosophy, which had discovered the oeuvre of Sextus (Popkin 2003 47, 79). Dominik Perler (2003: 213) rejects this hypothesis, both with respect to Montaigne and with respect to the Renaissance period in general. He underscores the absence of the typical Pyrrhonist method (isostheny, *epochē*, *ataraxia*) in Montaigne's thought, and points to the influence of Cicero, the use of the Ockhamist argument of God's omnipotence or

the opposition to Aristotle in the vein of Nicholas of Autrecourt: "Aristotle is the god of scholastic science." (E 2, 12, 1440) Other scholars (e.g. Kaźmierczak 2006: 68) believe that skepticism was a constant feature of Montaigne's thought, even before he had read Sextus and written "An Apology for Raymond Sebond". This is evidenced, for example, by his early essay "On the Uncertainty of Our Judgment" (E 1, 47, 805). However, if we understand the "Pyrrhonist crisis" in broad terms, that is, as a discovery of not only the arguments in favor of isostheny but also all skeptical arguments, then we can agree with Popkin. As Foglia (2004: 8) observes, Sextus might have generated a harsh, but short crisis in Montaigne, while Cicero remained his constant point of reference as a part of his general university education. Indeed, Montaigne repeatedly quotes Cicero, also in the crucial moments when expressing his own opinions. In that sense, Montaigne's skepticism is a synthesis of Pyrrhonism and academic skepticism, but it comes closer to Cicero who, as distinct from Sextus, never recommended passivity in the face of the world, but allowed for making free judgments in spite of uncertainty (Neto 1997: 201; cf. Ac. 2.8).

Following Cicero, Montaigne believes that most philosophers are skeptics concealed behind a guise of certainty, more often searching and doubting than making claims. As he writes, "I cannot really convince myself that Epicurus, Plato and Pythagoras genuinely wanted us to accept their Atoms, Ideas and Numbers as valid currency. They were too wise to base the articles of their belief on foundations so shaky and so challengeable." (E 2, 12, 1363) He suspects that philosophers "do not want to make an express avowal of the ignorance and weakness of human reason," as "they want to avoid frightening the children." (E 2, 12, 1457).

However, when it comes to arguing for the superiority of Christian doctrine, Montaigne criticizes Cicero for his vainglory in overestimating human capacities:

> Man is a wretched creature, subject to calamities; but just listen to him bragging: "There is no occupation", says Cicero, "so sweet as scholarship; scholarship is the means of making known to us, while still in this world, the infinity of matter, the immense grandeur of Nature, the heavens, the lands and the seas. […]"…Is this fellow describing the properties of almighty and everlasting God! (E 2, 12, 1303)

2.2. Christian Themes

Christian themes in Montaigne's work are related, above all, to his discussion of man's vanity. Christian teaching "shows us Man naked, empty, aware of his natural weakness, fit to accept outside help from on high: Man, stripped of all human learning and so all the more able to lodge the divine within him, annihilating his intellect to make room for faith." (E 2, 12: 1348–1349) The tradition

and experience of Christianity in Europe have cemented the conviction of the dependence of human reason on divine wisdom, providing yet another argument in favor of skepticism. It is precisely the context of Christianity that makes it easier for Montaigne to claim that "Man cannot be other than he is; he cannot have thoughts beyond his reach." (E 2, 12, 1388) It is an illusion to believe that "human reason is the Controller-General of everything within and without the vault of heaven." (E 2, 12, 1445) He seeks to support his skepticism by invoking Psalms, the Ecclesiastes, St. Paul and St. Augustine. Describing the vulnerability of man, he writes that the whole power of human mind can be "stunned and overthrown by the mere bite of a sick dog." (E 2, 12, 1469)

According to Montaigne, an important argument supporting skepticism comes from an analysis of various human notions of God. "Of all the ancient opinions of men touching religion, it seems to me that the most excusable and verisimilitudinous was the one which recognized God as some incomprehensible Power […]" (E 2, 12, 1366) In our efforts to imagine the divine, "we wish to make God subordinate to our human understanding with its vain and feeble probabilities; yet it is he who has made both us and all we know." (E 2, 12, 1397) Thus, people try to "to cut God down to their own size." (E 2, 12, 1409) His reflection on a much longer period in the history of religion than the ancient thought could encompass leads Montaigne to the conclusion that human imaginations about God have been largely prone to contradictions and naively anthropomorphic, which is why it is doubtful whether human reason is able to acquire knowledge of God with its own means.

However, in light the hypothesis of variability, only God can be said to exist, and thus the only certain knowledge can be precisely the knowledge of God. And yet this knowledge seems impossible to attain by men. "Nor may a man mount above himself or above humanity: for he can see only with his own eyes, grip only with his own grasp. He will rise if God proffers him – extraordinarily – His hand." (E 2, 12, 1613) That remains the only hope for man. Faith and revelation can compensate for the lack of knowledge.

Another argument in favor of skepticism is provided by the experience of Reformation. Religious disputes and their bloody outcomes have supported the reasonableness of the suspension of judgment. As Montaigne writes, "thus, by God's grace, without worry or a troubled conscience, I have kept myself whole, within the ancient beliefs of our religion, through all the sects and schisms that our century has produced." (E 2, 12, 1522) "Is it not better to remain in doubt, than to get entangled in the many errors produced by human fantasy? Is it not better to postpone one's adherence indefinitely than to intervene in factions, both quarreling

and seditious?" (E 2, 12, 1342) A skeptic can believe without reasons or follow the tradition (Hartle 2005: 186). The first option was suitable for the proponents of Reformation, the second for the proponents of Catholicism. Montaigne is committed to the second option, but the first one also accords well with his skepticism.

Certain scholars have interpreted Montaigne as a cryptoatheist (Popkin 2003: 320). Zbigniew Gierczyński interprets him as a writer who lacked courage to propagate naturalism and concealed himself behind a mask of fideism and commitment to Christianity. However, it is hard to agree with Gierczyński (1985: 22–23) that, in *Essays*, the vanity of man is "concealed with fideist declarations which give it an appearance of conformity to the Christian truth. The inscriptions from his library bear no trace of such an attempt to reconcile skepticism with faith." After all, Gierczyński himself observes that Montaigne was aware of the consequences of skepticism which opens up "an intellectual and moral void" in our minds (1985: 61). Montaigne's praise of Christian doctrine stems from understanding that neither skepticism nor naturalism is sufficient for man. In other words, Montaigne was a conservative (Foglia 2004: 7), not a revolutionary, as Gierczyński wished. To be sure, his daring thought may make an impression of being a critique of Christianity, but Montaigne's goal is rather a deeper appreciation of its value. He writes with complete seriousness, alluding to the original sin: "all other virtues are born of submission and obedience, just as all other sins are born of pride." (E 2, 12, 1301) According to Michael Conche, the contents of Montaigne's diaries evidence him as a truly faithful person (Conche 2007: 59). Again, it is Montaigne's skeptical hesitation, a living conviction which develops and transforms itself, that can best explain his attitude toward Christianity. David Hartle describes this process in terms of a dialectic:

> …from simple inarticulate belief he ascends through doubt to autonomous rationality and then descends through doubt to the truth of faith. Of course, he cannot simply return to or deliberately adopt the stance of unthinking belief as if he had never ascended from it. He ends up in a kind of middle position that transcends both simple credulity and learned presumption, and that, in philosophical terms, would be called "learned ignorance." (Hartle 2005: 203–204)

If all is doubt, one may expect the truths of faith to be doubtful in the first place. But one may also choose to rely on faith and established traditions in order to solve the problems of life. The first option leads to atheism and a critique of Christianity, the second to fideism and a defense of Christianity. In the Renaissance period, skepticism was used for both these purposes, which is why it was considered either as the best theology or concealed atheism. Popkin (2003b: 56) is right to point out that Montaigne was "mildly religious". Far from being an antiintellectualist fideist

like Erasmus, Montaigne was a religious writer who could hardly be criticized for being an atheist guised behind the mask of fideism. After all, he reached his skepticism by means of rational arguments and had never fallen into mysticism.

2.3. Renaissance Themes

The renaissance themes in Montaigne's skepticism are related especially to his naturalism and numerous references to scientific achievements found in his writings. Montaigne has deservedly become the emblematic thinker of his epoch and, despite his fascination in ancient times ("The writings of the Ancients […] tempt me and stir me almost at will" [E 2, 12, 1522–1523]) and respect for Christianity, he was fond of novelties. He quoted Petrarch, wrote not only about the Reformation but also about Copernicus and geographic discoveries, with a programmatic focus on experiences of common people.

The Renaissance provided Montaigne with new arguments in favor of skepticism. Europe had just gone through the Copernican revolution, which radically altered how people viewed the position of the world in relation to the universe. Geographic discoveries, in turn, altered the notions about the Earth's shape and size. Thus, the authority of both Aristotle's writings and the Bible, in which there was no mention of America, was called into question. Extensive and numerous travels provided new information about different cultures and religions, and the invention of print helped to propagate them. As Montaigne writes,

> A thousand years ago, if you had questioned the data of cosmography, you would have been accused of Pyrrhonizing – of doubting opinions accepted by everybody; it used to be heresy to allow the existence of the Antipodes! But now that in our century new discoveries have revealed, not the odd island or the odd individual country, but an infinite land-mass, almost equal in size to the part we already knew (E 2, 12, 1528)

These grand discoveries had badly shaken many traditional beliefs and roused doubts regarding the validity of others. Montaigne, however, does not seem to kneel uncritically before new scientific theories, considering them merely as a next step in the development of human knowledge. The work of Copernicus is regarded by Montaigne as yet another theory which can be called into question.

> A wise man can be mistaken; a hundred men can; indeed, according to us, the whole human race has gone wrong for centuries at a time over this or that: so how can we be sure that human nature ever stops getting things wrong, and that she is not wrong now, in our own period? (E 2, 12, 1539)

It should not be expected, Montaigne argues, that our present scientific theories are infallible and undoubtable. Since other epochs and civilizations could

be wrong, also our discoveries are prone to error. Montaigne believes that "all true scholars were skeptics. Even those who, like Plato, have been regarded as dogmatists. They considered all systems and theories, including their own, not as the true image of reality, but as fictions and hypotheses which delighted the mind with their beautiful constructions." (Dąmbska 1958: 27)

Medical knowledge is all the more doubtful, while law, morality and customs remain relative (cf. Montaigne's essay "On Habit" describing customs of American indigenous peoples). The only firm achievement in the centuries of the history of science has been the discovery of non-knowledge: "By long study we have confirmed and verified that ignorance does lie naturally within us." (E 2, 12, 1332) This was already a contribution of Socrates whose wisdom consisted precisely in that he was aware of his own ignorance. This situation, far from reinforcing certainty, overwhelms man who "stands out of place in the universe, weak and helpless in the face of the overwhelming magnitude of mysteries. We do not know the first principles of being and, what is worse, we do not know how to cognize them. […] the more we exert our minds, the more difficulties we discover." (Dąmbska 1958: 26) We are unable to tell anything certain about human nature. Conceptions of the soul are full of contradictions and errors. At the same time, self-knowledge, an attempt to understand oneself, is the key to all knowledge. In this situation, science cannot compete with revelation. Since we have no knowledge, we have to rely on faith. Thus, skepticism can be reconciled with moderate fideism. Human vanity and uncertainty of knowledge justifies a reliance on faith and revelation.

Gierczyński (1985: 38) considers naturalism as the core of Montaigne's philosophy. Naturalism is here understood as a conviction of the unity of nature, a sense of community with animals and nature in general, and the praise of simplicity and simple life. According to Montaigne, culture and civilization bring with themselves conventions, which are relative and disturb happiness. It is best for man to liberate from them and live as closely to nature as possible. Animals seem happier than human beings because they are closer to nature.

Montaigne's naturalism is related to his practical observations, which support his skeptical position. If death affects both scholars and ordinary men, erudition is not of much use or value. Montaigne even goes on to argue that the abundance of knowledge may lead to madness, physical degradation and moral decay. Knowledge can make us neither better nor happier: "I have seen in my time hundreds of craftsmen and ploughmen wiser and happier than University Rectors." (E 2, 12, 1299) Human knowledge, then, is not of great value. Besides, as Erasmus has already observed, it is not a necessary condition of happiness, as

the common people, who live closer to nature, seem happier than others. Thus, Montaigne's naturalism becomes a cure for skepticism. The grace of nature, like the grace of God, who sends revelation and faith, compensates for the lack of knowledge. Together with faith, the return to nature provides rescue for skeptics.

2.4. An Attempt to Avoid the Inconsistency Charge

Montaigne seeks to avoid the self-refutation of skepticism by replacing the statement: "I do not know" or "I doubt", with the question: "What do I know?" (*Que sais-je?*). According to Dąmbska, Montaigne thereby "avoids the charge that by putting forward a thesis – with a claim to certainty – that all is doubt, he contradicts himself." (Dąmbska 1958: 32). Having read Cicero and Sextus, Montaigne was well aware of the difficulties of the skeptical position:

> Pyrrhonist philosophers, I see, cannot express their general concepts in any known kind of speech; they would need a new language: ours is made up of affirmative propositions totally inimical to them – so much so that when they say "I doubt", you can jump down their throats and make them admit that they at least know one thing for certain, namely that they doubt. (E 2, 12, 1407)

In order to express the skeptical position, Montaigne suggests to replace such statements with an interrogative proposition: "What do I know?" This idea is original, as it had never been employed by ancient skeptics. However, in light of contemporary theories of language, and contrary to Dąmbska, Montaigne's position should be considered as futile. For every question is based on various presumptions, including the meaning of one's words and thoughts, self-knowledge and language competence. These, in turn, are not independent from a knowledge of the external world. Without assuming some kind of knowledge, it is impossible not only to assert but also to pose questions. In that sense, as soon as we ask, we become dogmatists. Silence seems to be the only option for a consistent skeptic.

What is more important, though, is that Montaigne is not content with merely asking questions. After all, his writings, including *Essays*, consist mostly of affirmative propositions. He describes "human nature, as well as the role and tasks of people in the world" (Dąmbska 1958: 32), "makes many statements (especially of ethical nature)", and "is not ready to rigorously abide by the skeptical rules as presented in the apology of Sebond." (Kaźmierczak 2006: 79) Dąmbska puts it "down to certain inconsistency in Montaigne, who had never intended to develop a complete philosophical system; rather, he merely shared his reflections on various topics he needed to address" (Dąmbska 1958: 32–33).

Hartle defends the consistency of Montaigne's position by interpreting it in dialectical terms. Montaigne begins by describing common opinions, then he

gives philosophical arguments, and finally, when it turns out that skepticism should follow the guidance of tradition and custom, he turns back to slightly transformed and more open common beliefs. The first and the second stage contain assertive ethical judgments, but they should be interpreted precisely in this dialectical manner (Hartle 2005: 194). Montaigne often uses phrases like "perhaps", "some say that", "it seems that", which mark his distance toward the statements he utters.

Many critics were right to point out Montaigne's inconsistency, lack of method and chaotic style. Nonetheless, this attitude can be also seen as a skeptical method. At times, Montaigne speaks "for", and other times "against"; he holds a belief, but he continues to search further. He seems to be another skeptic who accepts contradictions between his own statements resulting from their variability. These difficulties were not problematic for Montaigne, since he kept "trying out" rather than making judgments.

In "An Apology for Raymond Sebond", Montaigne uncritically quotes many legends found in Plutarch or Chrysippus, especially regarding animals. For example, he writes about an elephant which used to be fed with half the allotted rations, and when it once received the full ration, it set half of it aside, "to reveal the wrong done to it." (E 2, 12, 1246) Montaigne quotes many similar stories to support his belief in animals' rationality. The essay "On the Power of the Imagination" contains even more implausible stories cited from Plutarch, for example, about a cat which, using the force of its sight, made a bird fall down from a tree right into its paws (E 1, 21, 381). As Hartle writes, Montaigne uses these stories in order to present other cultures and open his readers to what seems incredible or improbable. His skepticism is based precisely on avoiding biases and essential openness (Hartle 2005: 190, 193). One should acknowledge that Montaigne underscores his distance from these stories, treating them just as popular opinions.

The literature on the subject is dominated by two interpretations of Montaigne's skepticism: one based on Sextus and the other based on Cicero. The first interpretations (total skepticism) is focused on the arguments presented at the end of the "Apology" which depict the vanity of man. Human reason is exposed as weak, and knowledge, as an expression of truth, is described as unattainable. The second interpretation (moderate skepticism) links Montaigne's skepticism to Cicero. Following Pascal and Pierre Villey, Foglia writes that Montaigne's contact with Sextus's writings caused merely a crisis, an intellectual desperation which passed quickly. He soon grew weary of these radical skeptical arguments, turned back to Cicero and redefined skepticism as a mere postulate that one should be careful in judging. According to Foglia, Montaigne, similarly to Cicero, "assimilates

opinions, according to what appears to him as true, without taking it to be absolutely true." (Foglia 2004: 8) He does not make assertive propositions, but, against Sextus, makes numerous judgments. A judgment is a decision made in the conditions of uncertainty (Laursen 1992: 101).

If we take into account *Essays* as a whole, we can describe Montaigne's skepticism as moderate and reduce it to a constant search for the truth, combined with the principle of careful judgment or fallibilism (man does not have any certain knowledge). As he declares in the opening of his essay "On Prayer", "the notions which I am propounding have no form and reach no conclusion […]. I am seeking the truth not laying it down." (E 1, 56, 890–891) However, in the "Apology" one may find several passages which support the interpretation of Montaigne as a total skeptic. This applies especially to the already quoted arguments regarding variability and the dream hypothesis: "why should we […] not doubt whether our thinking and acting are but another dream; our waking, some other species of sleep?", "we have no communication with Being." (E 2, 12, 1593, 1606) However, these passages seem to correspond only to moments of desperation which were passing quickly, allowing Montaigne to come back do his everyday life, in which, as David Hume will later observe, skeptical doubts loose much of their force.

Montaigne's skepticism amounts to a low appraisal of human opinions (regardless of whether one calls them uncertain knowledge, or utterly denies them the status of knowledge); or, more precisely, it is a strict questioning of these opinions accompanied by a sense of sorrow. It is a rejection of certainty, a call for adopting a moderate and careful attitude, and an encouragement for searching. It is a moderate skepticism in the vein of Cicero. It is a small wonder that this kind of skepticism was eclectic, containing elements of both Stoicism and Epicureism. It is a version of skepticism born within Christian culture, with which it shares the respect for faith, and in which one finds consolation after discovering the weakness of human knowledge. Thus, ancient arguments are merged with the Christian vision of the world.

2.5. Montaigne's Followers (Charron, de la Mothe le Vayer)

Montaigne had numerous readers and followers. Francis Bacon did not give in to the allure of skepticism, but Montaigne's position had clearly influenced both his famous theory of four idols disturbing cognitive processes and his method of scrupulous induction, set against them as a means of improving knowledge of probability (Popkin 2003a: 347).

Pierre Charron (1541–1603) was Montaigne's friend, who adopted his skeptical views. He presented these views in his *Treatise on Wisdom*, which differs from

Essays in having more systematic character, which was ridiculed by Pascal, who wrote that Charron's discussions "sadden and weary us." (Pascal 2013: 66) Indeed, Charron seeks to elaborate a systematic exposition of Montaigne's skepticism. He sets out by defining wisdom as "prudent integrity consisting in awareness of one's own nature, self-moderation and following appropriate rules of action" (Dąmbska 1958: 36) In the next step, he provides a descriptive analysis of human mind and nature. He concludes by formulating the rules of appropriate action.

In the descriptive part, Charron argues that we instinctively desire to learn the truth, but our cognitive methods turn out fallible. Both the senses and reason are untrustworthy, misleading and full of contradictions. Reason tends to question not only the evidence of the senses but also its own results. The senses are biologically conditioned and depend on external circumstances. There is no agreement between scholars and most of our beliefs are produced by habit (Dąmbska 1958: 37–38).

Such description of human nature drives Charron's commitment to the ancient principle of *epochē*, or the suspension of judgment. This principle applies to everything except the truths of revelation. Adopting this attitude, Charron argues, leads to peace and inner freedom (we dispense with emotions, desires or fears, avoid errors and fanaticism, and train ourselves in carefulness, tolerance and humbleness). This is how Charron complements the list of advantages of *epochē*, which has been initiated by ancient skeptics (Dąmbska 1958: 40). Popkin argues that Charron's systematic approach became a model for Descartes.

François de La Mothe Le Vayer (1588–1672) lived Descartes's times, but he was a skeptic in the vein of Montaigne. He popularized Sextus's views and discussed various skeptical arguments, including the principle of isostheny, which he described by "drawing an analogy of a weighing scales which balances contradictory judgments of equal force." (Dąmbska 1958: 43) His skepticism, like Montaigne's, contained an admixture of Stoic philosophy. He was right to point out the similarity between Stoicism and skepticism: the aim of both these attitudes was to gain inner balance and independence from the world. He repeated the view that skepticism is not an enemy, but an ally of faith: "shaping critical attitudes toward our own cognitive achievements, it could teach us humbleness and obedience to the supernatural authority." (Dąmbska 1958: 44) Nonetheless, he remained a moderate and optimistic skeptic: he fought against dogmatism and intolerance, but he highly valued scientific research and the quest for truth. He believed that by exposing weaknesses of human language (ambiguity and paradoxes), skepticism could not only protect us from error but also teach us carefulness and tolerance. He was

critical of himself, "placing in doubt his own beliefs" and "extending his questioning even to his own doubts." (Dąmbska 1958: 47)

In the Renaissance, skepticism assumed a double role. It was used both by the proponents of Reformation (in their critique of the Catholic Church) and by the proponents of Counter-Reformation (in their critique of the Protestant Churches). In both cases, doubt was considered the other side of faith (Leszczyński 2006: 128). Skepticism proved both beneficial and dangerous to religion: sometimes it underscored the importance of tradition (since everything is doubtful), and other times it defended the subjective judgment (against tradition which can be erroneous). During the Reformation, skeptical arguments were employed primarily in confessional disputes within Christianity. The Pyrrhonism typical for Renaissance will find its formulations in radical fideism of Pascal and Søren Kierkegaard. However, in the 17th and 18th centuries, the paths of skepticism and radical fideism will diverge, with the former becoming increasingly secular and antireligious.

Skepticism, which was the last word of Montaigne, will become a point of departure for Descartes.

3. Descartes' Hypotheses and the Radicalization of Skepticism

Izydora Dąmbska has examined the influence of French skepticism on René Descartes's *Meditations*. She came to the conclusion that it was equally significant as the impact of medieval philosophy, and noted that in both cases Descartes was unwilling to acknowledge his inspirations.

> One may ask why Descartes never mentions nor overtly discusses any French skeptic of the 16th and 17th centuries in *Meditations*. He seems to follow his usual habit – which has been often discussed – of not referring to his predecessors and taking into account only his direct critics. But actually, at the time, the skeptical argumentation, usually repeating or developing the ancients' line of thought, was often considered as a shared heritage of science, like elementary propositions of the Euclidean geometry (Dąmbska 1950: 20).

In Descartes's times, there was a strong skeptical movement in France (Med. Obj. 7, 548). For example, Marin Mersenne and Pierre Gassendi analyzed skeptical arguments and advocated moderate skepticism (Dąmbska 1962: 270; Popkin 2003: 112) in the vein of Cicero's probabilism (Dear 1984: 192). At the beginning of *Meditations*, Descartes decides to "withhold [his] assent from what is not fully certain and indubitable" (Med. I, 18), since "prudence dictates that we should never fully trust those who have deceived us even once." (Ibid.) In his response to the second objections, he writes:

> I had long ago seen several books on this subject composed by Academics and Sceptics, and therefore it was with some distaste that I found myself rehashing all this stuff, I could not dispense myself from devoting a whole *Meditation* to it (Med. Obj. 2, 130)

Scholars agree that Descartes was familiar with Montaigne's *Essays*. He might have also read Cicero's *Academic Books* and St. Augustine's *Against the Academicians* which belonged to the canon of education (Burnyeat 1982: 34; Groarke 1984: 297). Thus, in the Sixth Meditation ancient skeptical arguments are invoked:

> many experiences gradually undermined all the faith I had placed in the senses. For sometimes towers that from a distance had seemed round appeared from close up as square; and giant statues perched on the top of those towers did not look particularly large to one gazing up from below. (Med. VI, 76)

Subsequently, a modern argument from the illusion of pain is added:

> I had often heard from people whose arm or leg had been amputated, that they still occasionally seemed to feel pain in the part of the body they were missing; and therefore even in myself it did not seem to be wholly certain that one of my limbs was hurting, even though I was feeling pain in it. (Med. VI, 77)

Descartes had no affection for skepticism, as he sought passionately to resolve the problem of doubting once and for all. In addition, skepticism became for him a useful means to get rid of the Aristotelian tradition and clear the field for his inquiries. As distinct from Montaigne, he approached the problem of skepticism from the epistemological, not ethical perspective. Before attempting to reply to skeptical arguments, he contributed to their radicalization, and thus inscribed himself in the history of skepticism as one of its crucial authors. In the First Meditation, he devised two famous hypotheses, namely – the dream hypothesis and the evil or malignant demon hypothesis. For this reason, although Descartes was not a proponent of skepticism, we speak of the Cartesian skepticism or the First Meditation's skepticism.

3.1. The Dream Hypothesis and the Evil Demon Hypothesis

According to the author of *Meditations*, the weakness of the ancient arguments against sense perception is that illusions occur only in extraordinary circumstances, e.g. when objects are very small or placed at distance. It is also hard to negate the evidentness of clear perceptions, such as: "these hands themselves, and this whole body are mine" (Med. I, 19; this argument will be repeated in the 20th century by George Edward Moore). A real threat to sense cognition, Descartes argues, is posed by the example of the mad who see non-existent objects. This reflection on madness leads him to the dream hypothesis: "in my

dreams I have all the same experiences as these madmen do when they are awake – or sometimes even stranger ones." (Ibid.) He admits that things appearing in dreams are less vivid and clear, but he nonetheless argues: "When I think this over more carefully I see so clearly that waking can never be distinguished from sleep by any conclusive indications." (Med. I, 19) The dream hypothesis was also mentioned in *A Discourse on the Method*: "all the same thoughts which we have while awake can come to us while asleep." (DM 4, 32)

As pointed out by Hobbes, this hypothesis is not utterly new (Med. Obj. 3, 171). It was already discussed by Montaigne (E 2, 12, 1592). As Dąmbska (1975: 138) observes in her *Zagadnienie marzeń sennych w greckiej filozofii starożytnej* (*The Question of Dreams in Ancient Greek Philosophy*), already Heraclitus, followed by Plato in *Theaetetus* (190 B), Carneades (Ac. 2.47) and St. Augustin (CA 3,25), was concerned with the problem of indistinguishability of dreams and waking experiences. Also Peter Aureoli "invokes waking dreams, afterimages and hallucinations, which are equally clear and vivid as ostensibly evident sense perceptions." (Dąmbska 1950: 9) Leo Groarke (1984: 290) quotes a Muslim philosopher and theologian Al-Ghazali (1058–1111) who employed a similar argument from dreaming in order to justify skepticism and the reliance of faith.

Descartes most probably reconstructed this argument from writings of the modern skeptics. However, it is important to notice that he gives it a crucial function in the debate on the trustworthiness of the senses. For it turns out that one can ignore particular variants of perceptive illusions as soon as one recognizes that, in fact, all perceptions can be unreal as elements of a dream. The dream hypothesis is a generalization of all arguments against sense cognition: what is called into question are not only single perceptions and their contents but also the very existence of empirical world. Since no one ever granted such importance to the dream hypothesis (Burnyeat 1982: 35), it is a small wonder that Descartes has been usually considered as its author.

Another Descartes's contribution to the development of skepticism is his formulation of the evil demon hypothesis. It is absent from *A Discourse on the Method*, but its addition makes the Cartesian skepticism even more radical. Descartes observes that the dream hypothesis does not call into question the validity of rational cognition, e.g. mathematical knowledge. Sciences like arithmetics and geometry do not require their objects to exist in reality; in these disciplines, the imagined has the same value as the real, "for whether I am waking or sleeping, two plus three equals five, and a square has no more than four sides." (Med. I, 20) However, he notices also another possibility which is much more serious and related to both

sense and rational knowledge, namely – the possibility that God deceives us. If God is almighty and is able to do everything, how can we know

> …that he has not brought it about that there is no earth at all, no heavens, no extended things, no shape, no magnitude, no place – and yet that all these things appear to me to exist just as they do now? Or even […] that I too should be similarly deceived whenever I add two and three, or count the sides of a square, or make a judgement about something even simpler, if anything simpler can be imagined? (Med. I, 21)

However, Descartes later observes that this hypothesis needs to be slightly modified, since it is not suitable for God – understood as the source of truth and goodness – to act as a deceiver. Therefore, instead of God, one should speak of an evil demon. "I will therefore suppose that […] some evil spirit, supremely powerful and cunning, has devoted all his efforts to deceiving me." (Med. I, 22) In the Third Meditation he repeats:

> …whenever this preconceived opinion of God's supreme power occurs to me, I cannot help admitting, that, if indeed he wishes to, he can easily bring it about that I should be mistaken, even about matters that I think I intuit with the eye of the mind as evidently as possible. (Med. 3, 36)

Already in the First meditation, after formulating the hypothesis, Descartes confessed:

> To all these arguments, indeed, I have no answer, but at length I am forced to admit that there is nothing of all those things I once thought true, of which it is not legitimate to doubt – and not out of any thoughtlessness or irresponsibility, but for sound and well-weighed reasons. (Med I, 21)

Having discovered the *cogito*, Descartes no longer considered this hypothesis as strong, but even then he wrote:

> I must examine whether there is a God, and, if there is, whether he can be a deceiver; since, as long as I remain ignorant of this matter, I seem unable ever to be certain of any other at all. (Med. 3, 36)

The evil demon hypothesis had its origins in Cicero (Ac. 2.47), but – as José Luis Bermúdez (2008) wrote – it was only its formulation in the context of omnipotent God and modern science set against common experience, that made it a serious skeptical hypothesis. In the Middle Ages, the omnipotence of God had been discussed in depth, but it was usually considered as being limited by the principle of non-contradiction. Only radical voluntarists claimed that it was not confined by any laws, even logical and moral. During these debates, as I have already observed, the Cartesian hypotheses "loomed large", but they had never been formulated. To be sure, they were anticipated by Ockham's thesis that objects of perception might

not exist. But neither academics nor Ockhamists had never gone that far. A belief that God may sometimes deceive us is not sufficient to call into question the existence of the whole world (Bermúdez 2008: 67).

Descartes had not read the writings of Ockham and Nicholas of Autrecourt, but might have read about the voluntarists like Gregory of Rimini or Gabriel Biel (Groarke 1984: 299) quoted by Mersenne (Popkin 2003: 165). Dominik Perler examined their texts and came to the conclusion that Mersenne made a mistake, as both Gregory of Rimini and Gabriel Biel opposed the idea of deceptive God (Perler 2010: 183). However, he confirms that they discussed this question and thereby furnished an opportunity to learn about the position of radical voluntarism.

In *Meditations*, Descartes writes generally of "metaphysicians and theologians" (Med. Obj. 2, 143), and in his letter to Mersenne reveals his knowledge about voluntarists and advocates radical voluntarism. He writes that omnipotent God exceeds the laws of logic and mathematics, and even perpetual truths (Groarke 1984: 298). Perhaps, he also encountered the idea of omnipotent God in Montaigne who polemicized against the conception of Pliny the Elder. Richard Popkin adds that Descartes could have been inspired by the trial against the priest Urbain Grandier, who was accused in ca. 1630 of using black magic and demons to control others' behavior. Grandier was executed in 1634. The discussions following the trial were focused on the demons' victims and the trustworthiness of their statements before the court (Popkin 2003: 149). Regardless of Descartes's inspirations, this hypothesis has become a breakthrough in the history of skepticism.

3.2. Idealism and Making Skepticism Deeper

With the formulation of the evil demon hypothesis, Descartes creates a new form of modern skepticism, much different from its ancient predecessor. Firstly, ancient skepticism was of moral and practical nature (with peace and happiness as its main objectives), while modern skepticism was primarily theoretical (dealing with scientific propositions, not with commonly held opinions). Whereas Sextus denied his skepticism the status of a doctrine, Descartes analyzed skepticism as a theoretical hypothesis. Secondly, ancient Pyrrhonism was based on different psychological assumptions than its modern counterpart. The former underscored the isostheny of contrary arguments and the impossibility of making any rational decision (*epochē*). The proponents of modern skepticism assume that the rational subject holds beliefs, and even necessarily finds skeptical hypotheses untrustworthy, but at the same time has to acknowledge their validity. Thirdly, whereas ancient skeptics suggested that the hitherto examined phenomena are still unclear,

modern skepticism extended this view to encompass all perceptual and intellectual beliefs. Fourthly, ancient skepticism questioned the properties of things, while Descartes called into question their existence itself. For the ancient thinkers, the existence of a world was indubitable; Descartes, in turn, compared the world to a dream: "If I dream that I, for instance, walk in the forest, my mistake is not the belief that the forest is green but the belief that the forest exists when it does not." (Alquié 1956: 82) Jerzy Szymura (2005b: 248) is right to observe that ancient skepticism was skepticism about properties, universals (what something is?), and modern skepticism is about existence (does something exists?).

This was aptly shown by Myles Burnyeat (1982), who criticized George Berkley's thesis (*Siris* 311) according to which the idealist view was already present in Plato and Aristotle. It would seem even more accurate to attribute idealism to skeptics, had they not distinguished between being and appearance. Burnyeat quotes Galen who claimed that "according to the Pyrrhonists, we do not know whether there is a sun or a moon, an earth or a sea, or whether we are awake or even whether we are thinking or living." (Burnyeat 1982: 31) However, Galen asks whether the Pyrrhonists want us to stay in our beds when the sun rises and wonder whether it is a day or night time. According to Burnyeat, Galen refers to the old charge of impossibility of acting, not to a skepticism about the existence of the world. "Galen remains blind to the potential implications of the hypothetical position he is formulating." (Ibid.) The ancient skeptics did not consider beliefs about their sensations as knowledge and did not call into question that Pyrrho could walk around the world and fall into a ditch. Sextus did not regard his body as an external object, but as a part of a single nature. Also St. Augustine, criticizing skeptics, was far from seriously considering the idea of nonexistence of the world. He accepted knowledge on subjective experiences, but, as distinct from Descartes, he never granted them a privileged role (Burnyeat 1982: 33). Whereas both Cicero and St. Augustine wrote their skeptical works in the form of dialogue, Descartes uses a monologue form, which can be interpreted as a sign of theoretical isolation of the subject, breaking the natural bond with other subjects and the rest of the world. It was only Descartes who dared to question the world's existence. Berkley failed to recognize that his idealistic views depended precisely on the Cartesian breakthrough (Burnyeat 1982: 40). It is not surprising that contemporary skepticism about the existence of the world is often described as a Cartesian skepticism. Ancient thinkers would have never thought about the nonexistence of the world, as they considered matter as eternal and did not credit their gods with creative power.

Bermúdez (2008), in turn, explains differences between medieval skepticism and the radical Cartesian hypotheses. He argues that neither medieval skeptics questioned the existence of the world, since they assumed the Aristotelian view in which man and the world belong to the same nature (cf. Lee 2001: 9). According to Bermúdez, Christian revelation, underscoring the creation of the world, prevented them from questioning is existence. Descartes, in turn, despite his confession, never ceased to believe in the senses (their connection to the material word), as he discovered that secondary qualities were subjective, while primary qualities could be reduced to quantities. Natural sciences (with which Descartes was preoccupied) revealed a radical divergence between the scientific quantitative worldview and common appearances opposed to it. They revealed a possibility of general mistake inherent in common perception and worldview. Modern science, employing hypothetical theories, allowed for a general questioning of ordinary sense experience and provided a paradigm for formulating global skeptical hypotheses (Bermúdez 2008: 74). Neither ancient nor medieval skeptics were aware of this alternative. Descartes's doubting led him to his radical distinction between consciousness and the world: while the existence of the latter retained its status of certainty, the body came to be considered as belonging to the external world. The gap between the two substances – *res cogitans* and *res extensa* – has become a source of skeptical hypotheses (Williams 2010: 311).

3.3. Methodic Skepticism

There are reasons to ask whether Descrartes, in spite of his radical hypotheses, sincerely doubted the existence of the word, or merely applied a method of skeptical doubting.

First, Descartes employs typically skeptical concept of knowledge in the strong sense: "no knowledge that can be rendered doubtful should be called scientific." (Med. Obj. 2, 141) Second, he openly declares his skeptical doubts ("there is nothing of all those things I once thought true, of which it is not legitimate to doubt" [Med. Obj. I, 21]), but according to some critics his declaration is not sincere and only methodological.

> It became widespread to think, in accordance with Descartes's own suggestion, that the two first meditations are an original methodological trick and the concept of the Cartesian, or methodological skepticism was created. The method was to accept, in principle, normative skepticism, that is, using the basic directive of *epochē* toward all judgments about the reality, even those which impose themselves on us with all evidentness. The suspension should last until formulating axiom that can not be denied without contradiction. Only such an *a priori* and necessary axiom could provide a foundation for reconstructing an infallible philosophical system (Dąmbska 1950: 19).

However, as Dąmbska further observes, in the 17th century "an overcoming of skepticism was a necessary philosophical initiation for all those who wanted to avoid the label of dogmatists." (Ibid.) Therefore, it is hard to consider the Cartesian doubting as feigned. Władysław Augustyn claims that the Cartesian skepticism is not methodic, but epistemological. It is not a pretended skepticism, but a "negative position towards particular cognitive results." (Augustyn 1973: 21)

Descartes proposes a conception of skepticism as a rule of conduct. Since everything is doubtful and the evil demon might exercise its influence, Descartes decides to treat his beliefs as if they were "false and imaginary" (Med. I, 22):

> I will try […] eliminating everything in which there is the smallest element of doubt, *exactly as if I had found it to be false through and through*; and I shall pursue my way until I discover something certain; or, failing that, discover that it is certain only that nothing is certain. (Med. 2, 24; my emphasis)

Descartes, then, takes skeptical reasons seriously, but he does not exclude a possibility of discovering the truth. He applies what Alquié calls "hyperbolic doubting" (1956: 76), to protect himself against false. For he decides to treat the dubious as the false. He doubts excessively, more than it is necessary. This rigorous doubting corresponds to his ambitious goal as achieving certain knowledge. Replying to skeptical arguments, Descartes employs the strategy of searching for certainty, already applied, albeit in a different context, by St. Augustine. He can stop doubting only when he finds an example of certain truth. In light of the results that he reached, skepticism turned out to be just a transitional, or intermediary, stage of his thought. However, it seems that he was equally ready to accept skeptical conclusions.

Methodic skepticism, as Dąmbska rightly observes, is a kind of normative skepticism. Against both ancient thinkers and Montaigne, Descartes believes that skepticism is not a life wisdom but rather (and at most) a method of inquiry. In *Meditations*, "my concern at the moment is not with action but only with the attainment of knowledge" (Med. I, 22). In his replies to Second Objections, he reminds his readers that he "distinguished most scrupulously between the conduct of life and the contemplation of the truth." (Med. Obj. 2, 149) It is evident for him that skepticism cannot be a philosophy of life and action, which will be even more emphatically stressed by David Hume. Skepticism is of purely theoretical use, as a means to clear the field of inquiry and a method of achieving certain knowledge.

Skepticism provides a synthesis of the dream and evil demon hypotheses.

> I will think that the sky, the air, the earth, colours, figures, sounds, and all external things are no different from illusions of our dreams, and that they are traps he has laid for my

credulity; I will consider myself as having no hands, no eyes, no flesh, no blood, and no senses, but yet as falsely believing that I have all these. (Med. I, 23)

This passage clearly refers to dreams and the evil demon's activities. However, the domain of doubting becomes limited to sense cognition. As we read further,

> I will obstinately cling to these thoughts, and in this way, if indeed it is not in my power to discover any truth, yet certainly to the best of my ability and determination I will take care not to give my assent to anything false, or to allow this deceiver, however powerful and cunning he may be, to impose upon me in any way. (Med. I, 23)

Psychologically speaking, it is hard to totally doubt the value of one's own cognition, especially the natural light of reason, which is our means of inquiry. The Cartesian doubting is theoretical, as it is based on theoretical reasons (hypotheses). Therefore, Descartes seeks to overcome his psychological dispositions:

> I shall now close my eyes, I shall block up my ears, I shall divert all my senses, and I shall even delete all bodily images from my thought or, since this is virtually impossible to achieve, at least count them as empty and worthless. (M 3, 34)

Descartes's skepticism is sincere and, although it is informed by faith in a possibility of knowing the truth, it does not exclude skeptical conclusions. A reader of *Meditations* may sometimes get an impression that the author had already solved the problem and rejected skepticism, and now only intends to reconstruct the steps of his argument. In other words, it may seem that he doubts just for show. However, Descartes's doubting is too authentic, radical and novel to be dismissed as insincere – at least insofar as his original quest, laying foundations for the development of *Meditations*, is concerned.

3.4. An Attempt to Rebut Skeptical Hypotheses

Descartes's doubting could be stopped only by the discovery of his own existence. After all, doubting requires the existence of the doubting subject. "Certainly I did exist, if I convinced myself of something." (Med. 2, 25) He immediately replies to the evil demon hypothesis: "I also exist, if he is deceiving me […] he will never bring it about that I should be nothing as long as I think I am something." (M 2, 25) Having dismissed this hypothesis, he boldly says: "this proposition, 'I am, I exist', whenever it is uttered by me, or conceived in my mind, is necessarily true." (Med. 2, 25). Knowledge of one's own existence remains untouched by the evil demon hypothesis. The dream hypothesis is of lesser significance here, and it can be easily rejected by the same move:

> I exist – even if I am always asleep, and even if my creator is deceiving me to the best of his ability. (Med. 2, 29)[56]

In the next stage, Descartes gradually regains the knowledge which was previously subject to skeptical questioning. At the beginning of Third Meditation, before making the argument for God's existence, Descartes asserts the criterion of truth and rejects the power of evil demon in favor of clear and distinct cognition.

> I am certain that I am a thinking thing. But do I not therefore also know what is required in order for me to be certain of something? For in this first act of knowledge [*cognitione*] there is nothing other than a clear and distinct perception […] I seem already to be able to lay down, as a general rule, that everything I very clearly and distinctly perceive is true. (Med. 3, 35)

Thus, even before demonstrating the existence of the truthful God, Descartes supplies clear and distinct cognition with a guarantee of truth.

> Let whoever can, deceive me as much as he likes: still he can never bring it about that I am nothing, as long as I think I am something […] or that perhaps two plus three added together are more or less than five; or that other such things should be true in which I recognize an obvious contradiction. (Med. 3, 36)

Thus, in his Third Meditation, Descartes dismisses the evil demon hypothesis as inapplicable to clear and distinct, that is, evident, cognition. If he can discover his own existence without having God's guarantee, the same is applies to all equally evident judgments. In that sense, the criterion of truth as clarity and distinctness is not dependent on the assumption of God's truthfulness (Czerkawski 2002: 76). Whereas, in First Meditation, even clear and distinct cognition was believed to be threatened by the evil demon, in Third Meditation Descartes withdraws from this position. This interpretation finds its confirmation in Replies to Objections: God's guarantee is required only by memory-based cognition (involving, for instance, more complex reasonings) and sense cognition, which is not clear and distinct. The evil demon hypothesis is now considered a weak reason for doubting (Med. 3, 36).

> Whatever is shown to me by the natural light (for instance, that, from the fact that I am doubting, it follows that I exist, and suchlike) can in no way be doubtful, because there can be no other faculty that I could trust as much as this light (Med. 3, 38).

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56 Again, Descartes does not mention his antecedents. As already noticed by Arnauld (Obj. 4, 198), St. Augustine made a similar discovery of his own existence (Sol. 2, 1–1; DC 11, 26).

In this way, Descartes also finds what he believes to be an appropriate means to acquire knowledge about God. He refers to intuitive knowledge which is similar to knowledge of first principles: "From the bare fact that I exist, and that in me there is an idea of a supremely perfect being, that is God, it is proved beyond question that God also exists." (Med. 3, 51) One cannot think about "God without existence (that is, to think of the supremely perfect being without the supreme perfection)." (Med. V, 67). These and other arguments developed by Descartes may assume a form of demonstrations, but in fact they are different ways to put us on the right track to gain intuition of God's existence. Descartes came to the following theses: (1) that he exists; (2) that God exists and created him; (3) that God is not a liar; (4) that all clear and distinct intuitions are true (Chynoweth 2010: 168).

Another problem is the question of existence and knowability of the external world. After presenting his arguments for God's existence, Descartes ultimately rejects the evil demon hypothesis, whose applicability was earlier restricted to non-evident cognition.

> First of all, I recognize that it cannot happen that he should ever deceive me; for in all deceit and trickery some element of imperfection is to be found; and although to be able to deceive seems to be some indication of intelligence or power, nonetheless to *wish* to deceive is beyond doubt a proof of malice or feeble-mindedness, to which God cannot be liable. (Med. 4, 53; my emphasis)

God's truthfulness guarantees that we are not systematically deceived by our natural cognitive powers. Moreover, it guarantees the world's existence and its essential knowability. Both the existence of material things and our clear and distinct knowledge about them can be considered as certain (Med. VI, 80). The rest of our knowledge about the world lacks the status of certainty but it is credible by virtue of God's truthfulness. "Although I do not think that all that the senses seem to teach me is to be rashly accepted, I do not think that it should all be called in doubt." (Med. VI, 78) In light of this reply, the charge put forward by Hobbes and Bourdin – that there is still no criterion by which to distinguish between waking and dream – is no longer valid, since, in Sixth Meditation, Descartes already posits lesser standards of knowledge about the material world than those established in First Meditation (Chynoweth 2010: 153). Guarantees from the truthful God dismiss the dream hypothesis.

The basic charge against Descartes, formulated already by the authors of the Objections, concerns an unclear relation between clear and distinct knowledge and God's truthfulness guarantees (the suspicion of circular reasoning).

You say that you can be certain of nothing unless you know for certain that God exists. But when you concluded that you are a thinking thing, you had not proved God's existence: therefore your conclusion was not certain (Med. Obj. II, 125).

In Replies, Descartes denies that all knowledge depends on knowledge of God. "For the knowledge [*notitia*] of principles is not usually called 'scientific knowledge' by logicians. But when we realize we are thinking things, this is a first notion not derived from any syllogism. And, when someone says, *I am thinking, therefore I am, or exist*, he is not deducing existence from thought by means of a syllogism, but recognizes it as known directly [*per se notam*] by a simple intuition of the mind" (Med. Obj. 2, 140). He adds that there are things so plain and simple that "we can never think of them without believing them to be true: for instance, that while I am thinking, I exist; that what has once happened, cannot not have happened, and suchlike." (Med. Obj. 2, 145) Antoine Arnauld (Med. Obj. 4, 214) repeats the charge of circular reasoning. "The proposition 'all known clearly and distinctly is true' is based on God's truthfulness but the proposition asserting God's existence has its ground in the previous proposition; thus, the inference is characterized by a *circulus vitiosus*." (Świeżawski 2001: 18) Descartes briefly replies that we need to discriminate "between what we clearly perceive in actual fact and what we remember we once clearly perceived." (Med. Obj. 4, 246) God is required only in the second case. Both knowledge of one's own existence and knowledge about God are equated with knowledge of first principles. All these types of knowledge constitute the condition of knowability of other things. They are rather a sequence of intuitions than memory-based cognition.

The text of *Meditations* contains many ambiguities concerning the status of clear and distinct intuitions and this is the source of the so-called Cartesian circle problem. In First Meditation, Descartes calls into question the value of evident (clear and distinct) intuitions, referring to the evil demon hypothesis. He gives the example of mathematical propositions, like "two and three equals five." In Second Meditation, Descartes discovers the certainty of his own existence and, at the beginning of Third Meditation, before discovering God's existence, he asserts the criterion of truth as clarity and distinctness, or evidentness. He thereby manages to rehabilitate mathematical knowledge. The discovery of the *cogito* becomes a turning point, which limits the applicability of the evil demon hypothesis. This should be considered as a development, rather than a contradiction, of Descartes's thought.

However, the problem is that later, in Fifth Meditation, knowledge is described as dependent on the self-evident God:

> Once I have perceived that God exists, then because I grasped at the same time that everything else depends on him, and that he is no deceiver, and from this I deduced that everything I clearly and distinctly perceive is necessarily true. (Med. V, 70)

> I plainly see that certitude and truth of all knowledge [*scientiae*] depends on the knowledge [*cognitione*] of the true God alone: so much so, that before I had discovered his knowledge, I could have no perfect knowledge [*scire*] of anything else at all. (Med. V, 71)

It is hard to understand this passage as referring merely to knowledge about the external world. What seems problematic, however, is Descartes's earlier assumption that clarity and distinctness can guarantee truth even in a dream: "even if I were sleeping, if something is evident to my understanding, then it is altogether true." (Med. V, 71)

One way of defending *Meditations* against the charge of circular reasoning is to assume that both the *cogito* and knowledge of God are intuitive.

> The I and God directly (which is not to say, completely) reveal themselves as beings, even if they are not demonstrated by any reasoning or understanding. They are therefore the only truths which can do without a guarantee of God's truthfulness. In fact, Descartes often makes it clear that mathematical and logical truths require God's guarantee, but when it comes to asserting the *cogito* or God himself, he no longer holds to this requirement. On the contrary, the *cogito* is asserted precisely when God is assumed as a deceiver or against the evil demon (Alquié 1956: 118)

Indeed, rational, intuitive and evident cognition acquires such status by virtue of its similarity to the *cogito*. After all, the *cogito*, as distinct from mathematical knowledge, resisted the evil demon hypothesis. However, one should observe that, contrary to Alquié's interpretation, Descartes later considers mathematical knowledge as equally evident as the *cogito* (Med. 3, 36).

Analyzing the Cartesian foundations of knowledge, Władysław Augustyn concludes that the Cartesian evidentness is based precisely on "the impossibility to deny a particular proposition without nonsense." (Augustyn 1973: 24) It is this impossibility that constitutes the true criterion of evidentness and certainty. Descartes uses this criterion to defend his own existence and makes it applicable to mathematical knowledge. We must agree that only such a criterion could guarantee absolute certitude in the sense of infalsifiability. "Clarity and distinctness are therefore necessary conditions for asserting certainty of some knowledge, but they are not its sufficient conditions." (Augustyn 1973: 28) Augustyn is also right to remark that, already before the discovery of the *cogito*, the author of *Meditations*, in practice considered data of self-consciousness as infallible. He used them unknowingly to diminish the value of sense perception and to formulate his skeptical hypotheses (Augustyn 1973: 22). In the First Meditation,

they are not considered as knowledge, but in the Second Meditation this view is changed (Burnyeat 1982: 38).

Another charge faced by Descartes concerned weaknesses of his analogy between the *cogito* and other judgments recognized as clear and distinct. According to Gassendi, "the principle 'the true is what we know clearly and distinctly' is subjectivist." (Świeżawski 2001: 19) Indeed, knowledge one's own existence is self-verifying (if I ask whether exist, I must exist). Denying simple a *priori* judgments, like "triangle has three sides," leads to a similar contradiction. This, however, cannot be said about the proposition "I am a thinking substance" (in the sense of being different from physical substances). It may seem that what is certain is only the existence of the I as the condition of all representation, or the transcendental I, as Edmund Husserl will describe it in *Cartesian Meditations*. However, Descartes insists that certain is the existence of a thinking substance (the soul equipped not only with intellect but also with the faculty of imagination, will and affection). He is able to defend the criterion of truth as clarity and distinctness on the basis of his theory of "simple natures" and his distinction between the functions of intellect and will. The price is the limited applicability of such a criterion. "Whenever in passing judgement" – Descartes writes – "I so keep my will under control that it confines itself to items clearly and distinctly represented to it by the intellect, it certainly cannot come about that I should make a mistake." (Med. 4, 62) He acknowledges that "the necessities of action do not always allow us the opportunity for such a thorough examination." (Med. VI, 90)

Let us pass over Caterus and Gassendi's objections concerning the conclusiveness of his demonstration of God's existence. After all, Descartes considers knowledge about God as intuitive, equating it with knowledge about first principles. "One cannot think about anything without thinking about one's own thinking mind and one cannot think about one's limited mind without thinking about God." (Alquié 1956: 105) The more important problem is that even the truthful God could have "his own reason for deceiving us." (Nozick 1981: 201–202)

> You deny that God can deceive: but there are biblical texts to the contrary: he might deceive us for our own good, like a doctor with his patients or a father with his children. (Obj. 2, 126)

Descartes believes that every metaphysical illusion would negate the essential truthfulness of God, but he allows the existence of local illusions. However, we should agree with the criticism that if such rigorous criteria of knowledge were established at the outset of investigations in search of absolute truth, they should be also maintained later. Otherwise, the whole project is inconsistent. Descartes apparently loosens the requirements for evidentness, and that seems to be the

only reason why he avoids skeptical conclusions (he is unable to clearly and distinctly know the motivations of an infinite being).

Descartes's reply to skepticism did not put an end to the popularity of this position. Skeptics recognized the Cartesian philosophy as new dogmatism and declared him as their new adversary (Pierre Daniel Huet, Simon Foucher, Pierre Bayle). In the 17th century, skepticism was no longer antiAristotelian. Instead, it became antiCartesian (Dąmbska 1962: 270). At the same time, however, traditional philosophers saw Descartes's thought as a source of new and dangerous skepticism. As Popkin aptly writes, Descartes was a conqueror of skepticism, but he became a skeptic against himself, "a skeptique malgré lui." (Popkin 2003: 159) For Descartes, both these interpretations were deeply problematic and harmful. When in the Seventh Objections he was accused of excessive doubting and skepticism, he seems outraged by this accusation:

> …it seems to me impossible to imagine a greater and more unworthy calumny than this of our author's [Bourdin], when, throughout his whole dissertation, he hammers away constantly at the point—entirely his own invention—that I have fallen into the error that is the sole point of departure of the sceptical sect, namely excessive doubt. (Obj. Z 7, 550)

While Descartes's reply to skepticism has been questioned, his skeptical hypotheses are still considered as the paradigm of radical skepticism.

3.5. Skepticism between Descartes and Hume (Huet, Pascal, Bayle)

Pierre Daniel Huet (1630–1721) combines skepticism with fideism in the vein of Montaigne. In his *Philosophical Treatise Concerning the Weakness of Human Understanding* (*Traite philosophique de I'esprit humain*; 1723), he presented thirteen arguments in favor of the skeptical thesis that "human mind is unable to achieve complete and certain truth by means of rational cognition." (Dąmbska 1958: 53) The first argument refers to the Ecclesiastes and Christian writers "whose appraisal of cognitive capabilities of human mind was infused with profound pessimism." (Ibid.) The second argument refers to perceptual illusions, distortions of the cognitive vision caused by the circumstances of perception, the subjectivity of affection and changeability of our conceptual systems. As a result, we cannot be certain whether the ideas in our minds correspond to the external objects. The third argument concerns circularity between knowledge and definition of a thing: in order to define it (by giving its *genus proximum* and *differentia specifica*), one has to know it, but in order to know it, one has to define what one seeks to know. The fourth argument is Heraclitean: "Things can never be perfectly and certainly known by reason of their continual changes." (Huet 1725: 45) The fifth argument points to the problems of verbalization and

communication: "Do different people, using the same expressions, experience the same sensations?" (Dąmbska 1958: 55) The sixth argument underscores the infinite interconnectedness of things: "Things cannot be perfectly and certainly known, because their causes are infinite. […] Now it being impossible for Human Understanding to know all Things, or to know any one things without knowing them all, it follows that he can know nothing." (Huet 1725: 49) The seventh argument repeats Sextus's critique of the criterion of truth. Huet remarks that "These Matters hav[e] been amply and fully explain'd by the Philosopher *Sextus Empiricus*, a Man of a subtle and penetrating Wit, who has humbled the pride of the *Dogmatists* more than anyone else." (Huet 1725: 56) The eighth argument concerns Cartesianism, as it shows the weakness of the criterion of truth as evidentness: "Evidentness marks our thoughts in dreams and the thoughts of the drunk or the mad with equal force as it marks our waking, sober, and sane thoughts." (Dąmbska 1958: 55) Huet points out that people have different opinions about reality and even the same man often changes his mind on the same subject. Thus, we may acknowledge that he uses a psychological notion of evidentness. According to the ninth argument, Descartes failed to reply to skeptical doubting. Huet believes that insofar as Descartes assumed that "it is in our nature that we always make mistakes", it was impossible for him do dismiss skepticism.

Huet devoted to Descartes a separate polemical work *Censura philosophiae Cartesianae*, where he writes that the *cogito ergo sum* and the criterion of truth as clarity and distinctness cannot be defended against the Cartesian skeptical arguments (Dąmbska 1958: 56). *Cogito ergo sum*, as and inference, depends on one's memory, which is fallible (Popkin 2003: 280). According José Raimundo Maia Neto (1997), Huet, followed by Foucher, polemicizes against Descartes from the position of academic skepticism, employing Cicero's arguments which negate certainty and defend probable beliefs. Huet neatly combines this with Christianity, claiming that certainty is accessible only to God. According to Huet and Foucher, Descartes first accepts the skeptical method, and then he breaks its rules by granting the *cogito* the status of certainty, by claiming that thinking is the essence of the soul, and by proceeding from the soul to the existence of God (Neto 1997: 208).

In his next skeptical arguments, Huet goes back to the pre-Cartesian tradition. He observes that every attempt to justify capacities of human reason by means of this very reason involves a *petitio principii*; he also repeats ancient arguments against deduction, especially syllogisms (in order to accept the major premise one has to accept the conclusion); he underscores the divergence of opinions among philosophers; finally, he invokes the authority of grand thinkers like Pyrrho,

Arcesilaus, Carneades. Huet holds the latter in especially high esteem, following his idea of accepting "opinions which seem probable." (Dąmbska 1958: 57)

Huet defends skepticism against the charges of annihilating life and knowledge, self-refutation, and threatening morality and religion. He contends, first, that action does not require certainty, but it requires merely probability; second, that skepticism, as a perpetual search for truth, contributes to the development of knowledge; and third, that skepticism does not threaten faith and morality, and can even pave the way to them.

The charge of self-refutation is especially interesting. Defending consistency of skepticism, Huet asserts that skeptics "are content with saying that certain judgments seem more probable than others." (Dąmbska 1958: 59) Even the idea of truth, which they employ, "is equally uncertain and doubtful as all others." (Dąmbska 1958: 59) In that sense, Huet both repeated Carneades's strategy and anticipated contemporary fallibilism. However, this weakened version of skepticism is thereby deprived of its identity and justification. If everything is only probable, there is no ground for assessing probability and for rational preference of some opinions over others. Consequently, there is no ground for rational acceptance of skepticism against other positions. Facing a similar problem and recognizing skepticism's lack of autonomy, David Hume will combine skepticism with naturalism.

Blaise Pascal (1623–1662) is a moderate skeptic and a radical fideist. His knowledge of ancient skepticism is based primarily on Montaigne (Phillips 2003: 24). However, he criticizes Montaigne for his chaotic style and lack of method, obscene expressions, credulousness, ignorance and especially pagan conception of death (even if he also credits the author of *Essays* for showing the misery and vanity of man). As for Pierre Charron, who provided a systematic account of Montaigne's views, he contends that Charron's discussions "sadden and weary us." (Pascal 2013: 66/76)[57] Pascal himself both perfects the method, but at the same time follows Christian consequences of his skepticism, which is why he ultimately faces the charge of irrationalism.[58]

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57 In further quotations from *Thoughts* (Pascal 2013), the page number of the English translation is followed by the page number of Chevalier's edition.

58 Ryszard Kleszcz (2011: 159) defends Pascal against this charge, writing that the invocation of faith, and even the subjection of reason to faith, is not an abandonment of reason. According to this view, Pascal represents a partial rationalism, which removes some questions from under the sway of reason.

In Pascal, we can find many skeptical arguments, which are usually aimed to show the misery and nothingness of man. Man, as a part of the infinite universe, cannot encompass the totality within his knowledge.

> How impossible it is that a part should know the whole. […] the parts in this world are so related and linked to one another that I consider it impossible to know one without the other, and without the whole (Pascal 2013: 7/84)

> For after all what is man in nature? A nothing in regard to the infinite, a whole in regard to nothing, a mean between nothing and the whole; infinitely removed from understanding the extremes, the finality of things and their beginnings invincibly hidden from him in their impenetrable mysteries; equally incapable of seeing the nothing whence he came in the first instance, and the infinite in in which he is engulfed. (Pascal 2013: 4/84)

Next Pascal's arguments concern the senses, reason and imagination. The senses produce illusions, reason disturbs the senses by its arbitrary assumptions, and imagination produces images which inspire fear or desire. These and other affections disturb cognition.

> Man is a subject full of natural error, which is ineradicable without grace. Nothing shows him the truth: everything deceives him. These two principles of truth, reason and the senses, apart from the fact that they both are wanting in sincerity, reciprocally deceive each other. The senses deceive the judgment by false appearances; and this same trickery apply to reason; and they are subjected in return to the same trickery on the part of reason Passions trouble our senses and impart to them false impressions. (Pascal 2013: 36/92)

> Too much noise deafens us; too much light dazzles; extreme distance, or propinquity impedes sight; excessive length, or brevity in speech renders it obscure; too much truth appals. (Pascal 2013: 5/84)

Pascal's second point of reference is Descartes. He appreciates the dream and evil demon hypotheses, but does not accept the Cartesian reply.

> [We] hav[e] no certainty apart from faith, whether man was created by a good God, by an evil demon, or by chance […] Moreover no one has any certainty, apart from belief, whether he is awake, or asleep […]. Who knows whether the one half of our life in which we think we are awake is not another sleep? (Pascal 2013: 85/438)

What Descartes called the rational argument from God's truthfulness, is rede-scribed in Pascal as the argument from faith. Skepticism can be considered as a path to faith in that it makes us aware of our misery. It inspires reason to discern the questions which exceed it.

For beyond the order of reason, there is also the order of heart. "Skeptical arguments, Pascal argues, are not overcome insofar as rational cognition is concerned. But there are truths to whom we gain access through heart rather than

reason." (Dąmbska 1958: 66) Heart is a kind of intuition capable of grasping concepts and first principles which reason assumes but cannot demonstrate. By virtue of this intuition, which exceeds reason, we can also perform an act of faith: as distinct from mathematical truths, God is known through heart, not through reason. Intuition, together with the feeling of love and faith, supports and complements rational capacities. Reason, although limited, is important not only for science but also for faith (Pascal's wager).

Total Pyrrhonism is inconsistent, as it calls itself into question and has negative practical consequences. For, instead of doubting totally, one should "know when to doubt, when to feel certain, and when to submit." (Pascal 2013: 137/461) Similar approach to skepticism is found in Spinoza, who believes that a skeptic should not speak, doubt or speculate, for he does not know even his own thoughts (Popkin 2003: 248). Pascal recognizes in man a desire for truth which cannot be eradicated even by skepticism. Reason is sufficiently "reasonable to admit that it has never found anything stable." (Pascal 2013: 42/189) "We have an incapacity of proof, unsurmountable by all dogmatism. We have an idea of truth, invincible against all skepticism." (Pascal 2013: 98/273) Pascal interprets this idea as a proof of man's cognitive capacities. In his view, we are "incapable of certain knowledge and of absolute ignorance." (Pascal 2013: 6/438) Absolute ignorance is excluded by human nature, which makes people hold believes, while utterly certain knowledge is impossible in light of our critical reason.

In highlighting the truths of heart, Pascal paved the way to Hume's skepticism. According to Popkin, however, it was Pierre Bayle (1647–1706), a skeptic and Montaigne's follower, who was a more important and direct Hume's precursor. Hume himself mentioned him in his *Enquiry*, describing him as a contemporary skeptic (traveling to France, Hume took with himself eight volumes of Bayle's writings; Popkin 2003: 301). Both Dąmbska and Popkin consider Bayle as the most important skeptical writer in the period between Montaigne and Hume. Moderate skepticism was very popular at the time. Many famous Enlightenment thinkers were the proponents of skepticism: Voltaire, Étienne de Condillac, Nicolas de Condorcet, Denis Diderot, Jean le Rond d'Alambert or Jean-Jacques Rousseau, among others (cf. Olaso 1988: 47; Popkin 1988: 134).

Bayle's strategy was to criticize all philosophical, theological and scientific theories, including the new Cartesian dogmatism (Popkin 2003: 288). He argued against Descartes by employing Malebrache's argument: only faith can convince us of the existence of bodies. Following Foucher's critique (Neto 1997: 215; Popkin 2003: 276) and anticipating Berkeley's, he criticized not only the belief in the

objective existence of colors and smells but also the conception of the objective existence of extension and motion:

> …heat, cold, smell, colours, etc. are not in the objects of our senses, they are only some modifications of my soul; I know that bodies are not such as they appear to me. They were willing to except extension and motion, but they could not do it; for if the objects of our senses appear to us as coloured, hot, smelling, tho' they are not so, why should they not appear extended and figured, at rest, and in motion, though they had no such thing. Nay, the objects of my sense cannot be the cause of my sensations: I might therefore feel cold and heat, see colours, figures, extension, and motion, tho' there was not one body in the word. I have not therefore one good proof of the existence of bodies. (Bayle 1737: 654)

The only proof of the existence of things is that God does not deceive us (Ibid.) As Piotr Szałek is right to observe, Bayle lists all important arguments which Berkley will later employ to demonstrate the non-existence of matter (like Hume, Berkeley was also Bayle's reader). Bayle also repeats the medieval argument that, regardless of whether matter exists in itself, God can cause in us all possible perceptions. He therefore declares himself to be a fideist: "It is not without reason that we believe the system of the Sceptics, which is grounded upon an ingenuous acknowledgment of human ignorance, to be less contrary to our belief than any other, and the fittest to make one receive the supernatural light of faith." (Bayle 1737: 655) However, some scholars suspect that this was only a veil for his depreciation of faith and "disguised atheism" (Szałek 2008: 100) According to Popkin, Bayle represented a cold religiosity of an intellectual (Popkin 2003: 300).

Bayle, described by Popkin as a super-skeptic, was aware of the inconsistency and/or dubitability of this position. He gave the following description of Sextus's thought: "When a man is able to apprehend all the ways of suspending his judgment, which have been laid open by Sextus Empiricus, he may then perceive that that Logic is the greatest effort of subtilty that the mind of man is capable of; but he will see at the very same time that such a subtilty will afford him no satisfaction." (Bayle 1737: 655) He also added that "the reasons for doubting are doubtful themselves." (Bayle 1737: 656) Thus, skepticism could be viewed as either inconsistent or doubtful.

Bayle accepted the inconsistency of skepticism which, to be sure, could be erased by self-criticism, but only at the cost of dissolving skepticism's identity. This has often appeared to be a sad dilemma: one may either accept skepticism's inconsistency or abandon the skeptical position. David Hume will search for a way out of this dilemma.

4. Hume and Searching for Skepticism Consistency

David Hume has been considered as the most eminent modern skeptic. This is partly due to Immanuel Kant who wrote that Hume "gave himself up entirely to scepticism" (KPR B128) and was "perhaps the ablest and most ingenious of all sceptical philosophers, and his writings have, undoubtedly, exerted the most powerful influence." (KPR A764) A similar view was earlier expressed by Thomas Reid: Hume "with great acuteness reared a system of absolute scepticism, which leaves no rational ground to believe any one proposition, rather than its contrary." (Reid 2.12: 225) Indeed, Hume not only believes that skeptical arguments are invincible but also makes them deeper and supplements their list (adding the argument against knowledge about the I and the dilemma of judgments about facts and judgments about relations between ideas). He achieves mastery in developing ancient and medieval skeptical arguments against causality and induction, as well as moral skepticism (noticing invalid transitions from "is" to "should"). It was precisely the critique of causality that had awakened Kant from his "dogmatic slumber" (P 10). It has also become the most famous Hume's argument. However, Hume is far from simply accepting global skepticism. Even in his most radical *A Treatise of Human Nature*, he recognizes the inherent difficulties of this position (inconsistency and and incompatibility with the demands of life and action, and with psychological laws) and accepts skepticism only in a limited and uncertain form.

4.1. References to Ancient Tradition

Similarly to Sextus Empiricus, Hume believes that we are unable to find rational and certain basis for our judgments about the world. He probably never read Sextus's works (Popkin 1993: 137; Fosl 1998: 266; Grzeliński 2007: 143), but he knew his arguments through French philosophers: Michel de Montaigne, Pierre Daniel Huet, and especially Pierre Bayle, whom he mentioned by name in *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding* (EHU 12.1: 130). In *Treatise…* (1739), Hume neither mentions nor cites any skeptical thinker and describes skepticism in both generalized and radical way. Later, in *An Enquiry…* (1748), he mentions several skeptics by name and distinguishes between radical Pyrrhonian skepticism and moderate academic skepticism; thus, one may assume that, at the time, he has more deeply examined the ancient skeptical tradition (EHU 12), although he might have taken this distinction from Bayle's account (Olshewsky 1991: 278). It is only in *An Enquiry concerning the Principle of Morals*, where Hume makes two quotations Sextus's *Against the Physicists* and *Outlines of Skepticism*. However, it

was discovered (Fosl 1998: 267–268) that these quotations were probably borrowed from Malebranche, who quoted the same passages in the addition to the third edition of *De la recherche de la vérité* (1677). It was precisely this edition, that was found in Hume's library (Fosl 1998: 268). Moreover, Malebranche, in the discussed passage, referred to Cicero's *De natura decorum* and the same reference was also made by Hume (Fosl 1998: 268). According to Peter Fosl, Hume, following Malebranche, was also familiar with Sextus's Greek text, as *The Natural History of Religion* (1757) contains some other quotations from Sextus. In Hume's times, a Greek-Latin edition of Sextus's complete works edited by Johann Fabricius (Leipzig 1718) and an English translation of *Outlines…* included in Thomas Stanley's *History of Philosophy* (1687) were very popular. The form of Hume's quotations indicates that he used the earlier Chouet brothers edition (1621), which was also employed by Malebranche. Hume might have had access to this edition in his family house in Ninewells (Fosl 1998: 269, 272–273).

According to Thomas Olshewsky (1991: 278), Cicero, as a proponent of moderate skepticism, had much greater influence on Hume's skepticism than Sextus. At the end of *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding* champions moderate academic skepticism. Olshewsky believes that Hume's position consists in "Cicero's conclusions based on Malebranche's arguments." (Olshewsky 1991: 278) For Hume, Cicero was an exemplary skeptic and rhetorician. In *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, strongly inspired by Cicero's *On the Nature of the Gods*, Philo of Larisa (about whom Hume read in Cicero) becomes an exponent of the skeptical position. As José Raimundo Maia Neto observes, Hume might have followed a modern justification of academic skepticism provided by Simon Foucher (the critique of primary and secondary qualities and the exposition of the gap between sensations and things [Neto 1997: 218]).

Although Hume is familiar with the ancient skeptical tradition, he employs the modern concept of purely theoretical skepticism. He begins by rejecting two basic assumptions of ancient skepticism: (a) that skepticism is a life attitude, a practice, not a theory; (b) that it consists in the suspension of all judgments. Hume makes a precise distinction between theoretical skepticism and the practical attitude, between epistemology and psychology. The total suspension of judgment, or *epochē*, is described as psychologically impossible and destructive in that it may lead to a withdrawal from action, or even to death. As Hume himself writes,

> he [a Pyrrhonian] must acknowledge, if he will acknowledge any thing, 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. (EHU 12.2: 116).

This passage from *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding* is quoted by historians of skepticism as an example of the most blatant critique of Sextus Empiricus (Burnyeat 1998: 25). Similar view on ancient skepticism was earlier expressed by Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz in his commentary to Farbicius's edition of Sextus's works: there is no equipollence between judgments because one side always trumps the other; doubts do not lead to the *ataraxia*, but rather to disquietness; the practice of ancient skeptics contradicts their statements because action always provides reasons to prefer some appearances over others (Popkin 2003: 269).

Hume, as a prominent exponent of the modern concept of skepticism, believes that skepticism is a theoretical thesis which cannot be reconciled with practice (Floridi 2002: 51), unless it is understood only as a methodological principle applied in theoretical investigations. Either way, it is not given strong assent. The skeptical thesis is doubtful, local and momentary. In one of such moments, Hume writes: "I am ready to reject all belief and reasoning, and can look upon no opinion even as more probable or likely than another." (THN 1.4.7: 419) According to him, radical skeptics hold "that all is uncertain, and that our judgment is not in any thing possest of any measures of truth and falshood." (THN 1.4.1: 294) However, a skeptic can neither be certain of his/her skepticism nor hold his/her position on a permanent basis.

Hume's modern skepticism is also different from its contemporary counterpart. First of all because Hume employs the Cartesian strong concept of knowledge (the condition of certainty is infalsifiability) and a concept of strong rationality (Williams 2008: 83, 87). Judgments influenced by emotions or habit do not deserve the status of rational judgments, even if they conform to practice and are subjectively accepted. Only judgments based on undoubtable reasons can be described as rational. Assuming such concepts of knowledge and rationality, it is not hard to become a skeptic. In light of contemporary, weak concept of knowledge and rationality, Hume's arguments are treated as a basis of fallibilism, not skepticism.

For Hume, the concept of "probable knowledge", so natural for us today, is equally unacceptable as the concept of "false knowledge".[59] Hume was not a

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59 In this respect Hume is a Cartesianist. It is worth mentioning that the same conceptualizations of knowledge could be found in medieval critics of skepticism, e.g. in John Buridan's polemic against Nicholas of Autrecort who was described as a "medieval

fallibilist in the literal sense of the term, as he never claimed that knowledge does not exist. However, if we apply his arguments to contemporary, weaker concept of knowledge, he can be easily described as a fallibilist. In short, contemporary fallibilists employ similar arguments to Hume's, but in relation to different concept of knowledge.

One may also modify the concept of fallibilism and assume that it is a negative thesis concerning the lack of certain beliefs. In light of this interpretation, Hume's thought would also fall under the label of fallibilism. That is how Robert Fogelin puts it (2009a: 210, 225, 235), adding that Hume is not only a fallibilist but also a Pyrrhonist who denies rationality to all beliefs (such conviction is absent from contemporary fallibilism). Similarly, Hume did not believe that the concept of knowledge is changeable, depending on the context. However, his distinction between the skeptical and common ways of thinking can be said to have anticipated contemporary contextualism in the theory of knowledge.

4.2. Acceptance of the Cartesian Hypotheses

Hume is far from appreciating ancient skeptical arguments:

> I need not insist upon the more trite topics, employed by the sceptics in all ages, against the evidence of *sense*; such as […] the crooked appearance of an oar in water; the various aspects of objects, according to their different distances; the double images which arise from the pressing one eye; with many other appearances of a like nature. (EHU 12.1: 110)

What is more important, he believes, are Descartes's and Berkeley's arguments concerning the uncertainty of the world's existence. Even thought Berkeley vigorously rejected the label of a skeptic, Hume describes his analyses of perception as having skeptical consequences: "indeed most of the writings of that very ingenious author form the best lessons of scepticism, which are to be found either among the ancient or modern philosophers, Bayle not excepted." (EHU 12.1: 130)[60] Berkeley's

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Hume." It seems that skeptics of all epochs have tended to champion the strong concept of knowledge, while their adversaries and critics have usually invoked a weaker concept allowing for probable knowledge.

60 George Berkeley repeatedly highlights (for example, in his works' titles) that his aim is to oppose skepticism. He believe that Descartes's reply to skepticism is futile and, moreover, that his system is a dangerous source of skepticism. Bayle's position, in turn, is described as "disguised atheism" by Berkeley who searches for a better response to skeptical arguments. As distinct from atheists, whom he considers as the most dangerous faction of skeptics, he thinks that the immateriality of matter is a proof that God and the soul are the only existing beings. In order to defend the truths of faith,

arguments "admit of no answer and produce no conviction. Their only effect is to cause that momentary amazement and irresolution and confusion, which is the result of scepticism." (Ibid.) In this respect Hume has a different view than Locke, who believed that the dream hypothesis is not worth questioning, as it can be a result of the dream itself (Popkin 2003: 259), or Spinoza, who ignored the evil demon hypothesis as already dismissed by Descartes (Mason 1993: 563).

Hume agrees with Berkeley's skepticism concerning the existence of the external world:

> we always suppose an external universe, which depends not on our perception […] But this universal and primary opinion of all men is soon destroyed by the slightest philosophy, which teaches us, that nothing can ever be present to the mind but an image or perception, and that the senses are only the inlets, through which these images are conveyed, without being able to produce any immediate intercourse between the mind and the object. (EHU 12.1: 110)

These perceptive images could arise "either from the energy of the mind itself, or from the suggestion of some invisible and unknown spirit […]. It is acknowledged, that, in fact, many of these perceptions arise not from any thing external, as in dreams, madness, and other diseases." (EHU 12.1: 111–112) On this basis, as Descartes has already shown, it is impossible to "form any conclusion concerning the existence of [the object]." (THN 1.4.2: 337) This amounts to the thesis of the non-existence of the world – which, according to Hume, is one of these skeptical theses that are impossible to overcome by means of reason.

Like Berkeley, Hume does not accept Locke's strategy of rejecting secondary qualities and defending the existence of primary qualities. According to Hume (drawing in this respect on Berkeley's arguments), if sensory qualities, like hardness, softness, warmth, blackness, whiteness, are secondary and do not exist inside objects but are projected by minds, the same applies to primary qualities – extension and solidity (cf. EHU 12.1: 113). Therefore, "the only existences, of which we are certain, are perceptions […] immediately present to us by consciousness." (THN 1.4.2: 336) Beliefs about the world are only sensations caused by habits (Fogelin 2009a: 211). These beliefs, Hume argues, are neither based on reasoning nor justifiable by reason.

According to Hume, skeptical arguments have great force. He does not agree with the Cartesian reply nor does he see any other rational reply. "The Cartesian

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Berkeley is ready to sacrifice the existence of material things. However, setting aside the question of faith, Berkeley's arguments turn out to be serious skeptical arguments and this is precisely how Hume interprets them.

doubt, therefore, were it ever possible to be attained by any human creature (as it plainly is not) would be entirely incurable; and no reasoning could ever bring us to a state of assurance and conviction upon any subject." (EHU 12.1: 109) Hume, then, is convinced that the Cartesian doubting is infeasible, but he also believes that the Cartesian hypotheses are invincible.

He explicitly writes of the Cartesian attempt to dismiss the evil demon hypothesis:

> To have recourse to the veracity of the supreme Being, in order to prove the veracity of our senses, is surely making a very unexpected circuit. If his veracity were at all concerned in this matter, our senses would be entirely infallible; because it is not possible that he can ever deceive. Not to mention, that, if the external world be once called in question, we shall be at a loss to find arguments, by which we may prove the existence of that Being or any of his attributes. (EHU 12.1: 112)

According to Hume, it is hard to prove God's existence, but even if one would succeed and God's truthfulness would be considered as an antiskeptical argument, it is still hard to explain perception errors. The Cartesian strategy is rejected by Hume who believes that, even if Descartes and Berkley's skeptical arguments are cogent and invincible, their antiskeptical strategies remain equally ineffective and futile.

4.3. Broadening the Skeptical Arguments

If Hume's skepticism concerning the existence of the world is based on Descartes and Berkeley's arguments, his position concerning the existence of the I is an original broadening of skeptical arguments. Neither Descartes nor Berkeley questioned the existence of the soul and self-consciousness data. For Descartes, the existence of the I was the most certain thing. Hume, however, initiates the skeptical critique of self-consciousness by asking whether perceptions are based on the substantial I:

> For my part, when I enter most intimately into what I call myself, I always stumble on some particular perception or other, of heat or cold, light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure. I never can catch myself at any time without a perception, and never can observe any thing but the perception. When my perceptions are removed for any time, as by sound sleep; so long am I insensible of myself, and may truly be said not to exist. (THN 1.4.6: 395)

His argument is analogous to the argument against the existence of external things. Just as one cannot be certain about the existence of things, so one cannot be certain about the existence one's own I. In the next step, Hume provides a psychological explanation of the mechanism driving our common belief that the I exists. The source of the I is imagination: "we feign the continued existence of

the perceptions of our senses, to remove the interruption: and run into the notion of a soul, and self, and substance, to disguise the variation." (THN 1.4.6: 398) Thus, perceptions remain the only residue of the skeptical doubting. What needs to be explained, however, is why the certainty of perception cannot provide a counter-argument against skepticism. Hume apparently does not treat perception as knowledge of the world, but considers it in terms of passive sensations which do not have rational character (conceptual or judgmental) and therefore require interpretation. Hume's thought does not fall under Hegel's thesis that ancient skeptics placed phenomena beyond beliefs, assent and knowledge, while modern skeptics counted them as self-knowledge (Forster 1989: 15). Hume does not consider perceptions as knowledge.

The second original argument is the so-called Hume's fork. According to Hume, all judgments can be discriminated into judgments on relations between ideas and judgments on facts. Judgments of the first type are certain, but do not refer to the world and do not produce knowledge of truth. Judgments of the second type are related to the world, but at the cost of non-certainty. Insofar as the first group of judgments is concerned, Hume first describes them certain, but he subsequently withdraws from this position. "Though there never were a circle or triangle in nature, the truths, demonstrated by Euclid, would for ever retain their certainty and evidence." (EHU 4.1: 18). However, Hume argues, reason tends to fall into various paradoxes (EHU 12.2: 115) When mathematical propositions become beliefs of an individual, fallible man, they are prone to error and become merely probable (THN 1.4.1: 289). Thomas Reid (7.4) believes that attributing certainty to any rules is inconsistent, since all human judgments are fallible.[61] Indeed, Hume claims that accepting mathematical theses, as a psychological fact occurring in particular circumstances, is not guaranteed as true. Thus, according to Hume, mathematical beliefs are uncertain.

Following the skeptical and Cartesian tradition, Hume writes that facts, which constitute the second category of objects of human understanding, cannot be demonstrated: "the contrary of every matter of fact is still possible." (EHU 4.1: 18) As a result, the lack of certain knowledge about facts is equated with

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61 Reid also rejects Hume's thesis that probability, carefully examined, decreases to the point of vanishing. He is right to point out that successive stages of an inquiry into probability can not only weaken but also strengthen it, just as a witness can corroborate someone's testimony (Reid 7.4). He writes that Hume uses the concept of probability in a peculiar sense. Indeed, Hume excessively highlights the irrational character of probability, searching for its foundations in various irrational factors, such as emotions, imagination and habit. It seems that he construes probability in purely subjective terms.

ignorance, as knowledge requires certainty and truthfulness. Hume thinks it is impossible to make certain judgments about facts and, consequently, to gain any truth about the world. This dilemma of certain judgments about ideas and uncertain judgments about facts seems to be equally invincible as Agrippa's trilemma (infinite regress, circular reasoning, dogmatism).

The most famous Hume's skeptical arguments are not these two original arguments, but the causality argument, which he brilliantly develops, drawing on the skeptical tradition of Carneades, Aenesidemus, Al-Ghazali (the "Arabic Hume") and Nicholas of Autrecort (the "medieval Hume"). He became familiar with the traditional arguments against causality through Nicholas Malebranche, who used them to demonstrate God's omnipotence. As distinct from Malebranche, Hume considered these arguments as an expression of skepticism. In *A Treatise of Human Nature*, the problem of causality acquired a clear and radical form. The critique of causality, although not Hume's original idea, has exerted the most powerful influence of all his arguments, largely because of Kant's declaration that it had awakened his reason from its dogmatic "dream" or "slumber" (cf. KPRV B5; P 10). Hegel considered it as the most important Hume's argument (Hegel 1995: 372).

Hume presents a convincing psychological explanation of our reliance on the principle of causality: "nothing leads us to this inference but custom or a certain instinct of our nature; which it is indeed difficult to resist, but which, like other instincts, may be fallacious and deceitful." (EHU 12.2: 116) Our beliefs about facts, both external and internal, do not have a rational foundation, but they are based on habit and instinct. We unconsciously interpret every regular succession of phenomena as a cause-effect relationship and every regular similarity of perceptions as the identity of the thing which underlies these perceptions. Also our deed conviction of the existence of the I is a result of such instinctive interpretation of successive perceptions.

The critique of causality is related to Hume's skepticism concerning induction (THN 1.3.6). Every inductive inference assumes that nature is homogenous and that all future phenomena will be similar to those from the past. However, we cannot demonstrate this homogeneity of nature. There is no contradiction in supposing that nature can transform itself and that trees, for example, will blossom in December instead of summer. And those who seek to justify induction by inductive means fall into circular reasoning (Weintraub 2008: 131; Fogelin 2009a: 218). There is no rational justification of the principle of induction. We simply assume it, based on instinct and habit.

Hume's moral skepticism is equally famous. It amounts to saying that, as far as moral questions are concerned, it is emotions, not reason, that constitute the basis of our judgments:

> In every system of morality, which I have hitherto met with, I have always remarked, that the author proceeds for some time in the ordinary way of reasoning, and establishes the being of a God, or makes observations concerning human affairs; when of a sudden I am surprized to find, that instead of the usual copulations of propositions, is, and is not, I meet with no proposition that is not connected with an ought, or an ought not. This change is imperceptible; but is, however, of the last consequence. For as this ought, or ought not, expresses some new relation or affirmation, it is necessary that it should be observed and explained; and at the same time that a reason should be given, for what seems altogether inconceivable, how this new relation can be a deduction from others, which are entirely different from it. (THN 3.1.2: 715)

The lack of rational transition from "is" to "should" indicates that "morality is not an object of reason." (THN 3.1.1: 714) It is emotions that influence moral decisions. In this psychological explanation of moral beliefs reason is subjected to emotions.

Hume also develops skeptical conception of religion (concerning knowledge about the existence and properties of God). This form of skepticism was already at work in Sextus, but Hume adds his psychological and biological explanation of religion. Religious beliefs are not based on reason, they are irrational and cannot be considered as knowledge. They are produced by imagination and emotions. Paul Russell has recently proposed an atheistic interpretation of Hume, which seeks to avoid the inconsistency of the classical skeptical interpretation (how can a skeptic develop any conception of man?). According to Russell, Hume begins with extreme Pyrrhonian skepticism in order to undermine religious anthropology and ethics (for example, Samuel Clark's cosmological argument), and subsequently embraces the weaker academic skepticism in order to develop his naturalistic theory of man. This dynamic skepticism, Russell argues, served as a means of discrediting religious (and especially Christian) thinking (Russell 2008: 300). It seems, however, that Russell's interpretation is inconsistent. Insofar as Hume embraces moderate skepticism, he has no means to discredit religious beliefs, which can be equally probable as common beliefs. Hume was an agnostic, rather than an atheist, and his aim was not as much to criticize as to understand religious beliefs. His view is best expressed by Richard Popkin: "Nature does not allow us to be atheists, but does not force us to assent to the vagaries of popular superstition or refined theology." (Popkin 1951: 400)

Michael Williams even goes on to attribute to Hume conceptual skepticism, which is based on Berkeley's insight that abstract ideas do not exist (Williams

2008: 86). All these arguments make an impression (already described by Thomas Reid) that, for Hume, there is no field in which human knowledge would be attainable.

4.4. Instinct as a Rescue from Skepticism

Hume believes that there are no rational arguments against skepticism. The depth and force of the Pyrrhonian doubt is such that "any thing, but the strong power of natural instinct, could free us from it." (EHU 12.3: 118). In *A Treatise of Human Nature*, he referred to imagination instead of instinct:

> The great subverter of *Pyrrhonism* or the excessive principles of scepticism, is action, and employment, and the 159 occupations of common life. These principles may flourish and triumph in the schools; where it is, indeed, difficult, if not impossible, to refute them. But as soon as they leave the shade, and by the presence of the real objects, which actuate our passions and sentiments, are put in opposition to the more powerful principles of our nature, they vanish like smoke, and leave the most determined sceptic in the same condition as other mortals. (EHU 12.2: 116)

Thus, Hume accepts the classical charge that skepticism cannot be reconciled with life and action. He also underscores the weakness of skeptical arguments in the face of the force of instinct and requirements of life. Reason turns out to be the only mechanism of understanding and there is no point to hold on to it in the vein of skeptics. As he wrote in *A Treatise*,

> Most fortunately it happens, that since reason is incapable of dispelling these clouds, nature herself suffices to that purpose, and cures me of this philosophical melancholy and delirium, either by relaxing this bent of mind, or by some avocation, and lively impression of my senses, which obliterate all these chimeras. I dine, I play a game of backgammon […] and when after three or four hours' amusement, I would return to these speculations, they appear so cold, and strained, and ridiculous, that I cannot find in my heart to enter into them any farther. (THN 1.4.7: 419–420)

Hence, the only way to dismiss skeptical arguments are common-sense beliefs about the world. They are an effect of experience interpreted in light of habit and of the mysterious instinct. One cannot rationally justify these beliefs, but their universality and force suggest that they are produced by a part of the human mind. Skeptics, in turn, insists that one should accept only rational principles. In this respect, it is a particular kind of dogmatism.

Hume suspects that instinct, in principle, does not deceive us:

> As nature has taught us the use of our limbs, without giving us the knowledge of the muscles and nerves […]; so has she implanted in us an instinct, which carries forward the thought in a correspondent course to that which she has established among external

objects; though we are ignorant of those powers and forces, on which this regular course and succession of objects totally depends. (EHU 5.2: 40)

Here, Hume comes close to Blaise Pascal who wrote about the truths of heart. Instinct is an important supplement of reason, which is not the only cognitive faculty of man.

4.5. The Critique of Total Skepticism

In *A Treatise of Human Nature* skepticism is interpreted in radical and general terms, which is why Hume sometimes writes that he is not a skeptic. *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*, in turn, dwells on possible limits of doubting and the meaning of the word "skepticism." In this work Hume describes two ways of discriminating between types of skepticism: first, he distinguishes between methodic and resultant skepticism (the latter is understood as an effect of enquiries); second, he distinguishes between excessive and moderate skepticism (or Pyrrhonism and academic skepticism) (EHU 12.3: 116). He advocated moderate skepticism, both methodic and resultant.

Methodic skepticism was discovered by Descartes. "There is a species of scepticism, *antecedent* to all study and philosophy, which is much inculcated by Descartes and others, as a sovereign preservative against error and precipitate judgment." (EHU 12.1: 111) Hume, however, does not accept its radical Cartesian version: doubting all beliefs and cognitive faculties. This kind of doubting is unreal for man who cannot eliminate his instinctive beliefs. Besides, such radical doubting, as I have already observed, would be impossible to overcome; there would be no cognitive faculty with which to escape from the abyss of doubt. Hume recognizes the naiveness of Descartes's project of total doubting combined with the purpose to overcome it. In fact, Descartes did not exercise total doubts, as he set both self-consciousness and intellectual intuition beyond the pale of doubt. Nonetheless, Hume insists that total methodic doubting is neither possible nor beneficial because it is insurmountable.

That is why Hume suggests employing methodic skepticism in a moderate form, which entails awareness that one can doubt only locally and that it is impossible to overcome instinct (the local character of doubting will be underscored by Charles Sanders Peirce and contemporary fallibilists). This kind of methodic skepticism, as a preparative stage of enquiry and investigation, would involve impartiality of judgment, liberation from prejudice and rash opinion, governing oneself with clear and evident principles, as well as a careful examination of conclusions and an analysis of their consequences (cf. EHU 12.1: 110).

Thus, Hume advocates moderate and methodic skepticism, which, he argues, can be stable and beneficial (cf. EHU 12.3: 116).

The second distinction between types of skepticism is not related to the question of method, but it is a distinction between two different skeptical positions emerging as a result of philosophical investigations. Again, Hume points out that skepticism can be either excessive (total) or moderate. He accepts the second type and insists that there are no consistent skeptics in the strong sense: "no man ever met with any such absurd creature, or conversed with a man, who had no opinion or principle concerning any subject, either of action or speculation" (EHU 12.1: 110) As he writes of himself,

> Should it here be asked me, whether I sincerely assent to this argument, which I seem to take such pains to inculcate, and whether I be really one of those sceptics, who hold that all is uncertain, and that our judgment is not in any thing possest of any measures of truth and falshood; I should reply, that this question is entirely superfluous, and that neither I, nor any other person was ever sincerely and constantly of that opinion. (THN 1.4.1: 293–294)

Global skepticism is psychologically impossible:

> Nature, by an absolute and uncontroulable necessity has determined us to judge as well as to breathe and feel; nor can we any more forbear viewing certain objects in a stronger and fuller light, upon account of their customary connexion with a present impression, than we can hinder ourselves from thinking as long, as we are awake, or seeing the surrounding bodies, when we turn our eyes towards them in broad sunshine. Whoever has taken the pains to refute the cavils of this total scepticism, has really disputed without an antagonist, and endeavoured by arguments to establish a faculty, which nature has antecedently implanted in the mind, and rendered unavoidable. (THN 1.4.1: 294)

Total skepticism does not lead to any beneficial results.

Hume's critique can be described as practical and psychological. Additionally, Hume underscores the uncertainty (in epistemological terms) of the skeptical thesis and its self-refuting character (in logical terms). Total skepticism is doubtful and "still reason must remain restless, and unquiet, even with regard to that scepticism." (EHU 12.2: 115) Skepticism can easily become a negative version of dogmatism. Hume reiterates the dilemma already posed by Huet and Bayle: the total skeptic holds beliefs which are either uncertain or self-contradictory.

Hume is well aware of the pragmatic inconsistency inherent in radical skepticism, whose proponents assert something in spite of the principle of suspension of judgment, question reason which they employ, and act in a way which contradicts their words (EHU 12.1: 112). The radical skeptic has to deny his thesis in order to defend it.

It is therefore moderate, not total, skepticism, in the vein of the academics and Cicero, that is praised by Hume:

> The academics always talk of doubt and suspense of judgment, of danger in hasty determinations, of confining to very narrow bounds the enquiries of the understanding, and of renouncing all speculations which lie not within the limits of common life and practice. Nothing, therefore, can be more contrary than such a philosophy to the supine indolence of the mind, its rash arrogance, its lofty pretensions, and its superstitious credulity. Every passion is mortified by it, except the love of truth; and that passion never is, nor can be carried to too high a degree. It is surprising, there- fore, that this philosophy, which, in almost every instance, must be harmless and innocent, should be the subject of so much groundless reproach and obloquy. (EHU 5.1: 30–31)

Following the ancient academics, Hume reconciles his skepticism with the possibility of action, which should be governed by reasonable probability, or what is subjectively reliable and trustworthy. In theory, "a true sceptic will be diffident of his philosophical doubts, as well as of his philosophical conviction." (THN 1.4.7: 426) This type of skeptic also doubts his own doubts.

4.6. Searching for a Consistent Moderate Skepticism

According to Hume, the skeptical thesis of the non-existence of knowledge is inconsistent insofar as it is itself considered as knowledge. Nonetheless, the problem of skepticism cannot be dismissed by invoking the argument of self-refutation (THN 1.4.1: 302). In spite of its inconsistency, skepticism deserves attention and constitutes a real problem. One may search for a better form of skepticism, weaken one's assent to it and limit its scope. Moderate skepticism is not a simple acceptance of the thesis that certain knowledge does not exist. Rather, it is a weakened acceptance of this thesis, already described by Carneades and Huet. It is important to ask, however, how to cope with the problem o skepticism's identity?

When a skeptic weakens assent to his thesis, the thesis itself is also weakened, loosing much of its boldness. The weak assent increases the consistency of skepticism at the cost of decreasing its autonomy, for the skeptical thesis, like all other theses, lacks rational justification. In order to maintain its identity, skepticism becomes an attitude of doubt, undecidability and hesitation, rather than a philosophical thesis. This is precisely the position embraced by Hume. The process of doubting entails moments of acceptance, but they are temporary and unstable. In some sense, Hume's strategy is similar to Sextus's: he embraces an attitude instead of formulating a thesis and refuses to give strong assent to anything. However, Hume provides this attitude with stability by integrating it within a

wider system of human knowledge, in which emerges as a means of acquiring cognition. At the cost of stability, the Humean skepticism looses its autonomy.

Hume underscores that, in practical terms, a skeptic is unable to reject his own beliefs. By questioning reason, he would necessarily undermine his own position, which is created by reason. It is only because he weakened his arguments, that he did not utterly rejected himself. If he dismissed reason altogether, he would be unable to understand himself. In other words, it is only so long as he does not undermine reason that he can understand anything. Reason sets a trap for itself and just as it is unable to justify itself, so it cannot be utterly destroyed (THN 1.4.1: 299–302).

Instinct does not allow us to be total skeptics: we can doubt only briefly and locally. The skeptical position is equally doubtful as all other positions. Hume seems to be convinced that nature has equipped man with various means of coping in the world and reason should not be over-appreciated. He also believes that theoretical skeptical arguments in a moderate version do not pose any danger to life and common beliefs. They are isolated and related to a different context. Moderate skepticism in the form of "some drops of Pyrrhonism" can be beneficial as a cure for self-conceit (cf. EHU 12.3: 114). Hume sees the beneficial influence of moderate skepticism in the context of scientific investigations. An awareness of the weaknesses of cognitive faculties can help us choosing the object of investigations (Hume recommends observing the limits of experience and numbers [EHU 12.3: 119]) and teach us to avoid drawing hasty conclusions in favor of making careful and precise judgments. Ordinary people are not fond of undecidability and uncertainty. But a scholar, aware of the weaknesses of human reason, has to accept this state of affairs and operate within its limits.

The life and action of a skeptic require him to embrace moderate skepticism. A skeptic can act precisely insofar as he is inconsistent and sometimes betrays his convictions. Searching for a foundation of consistent skepticism, Hume recognizes its autonomy and limits it to the "moments of desperation", which occur on the basis of common thinking supported by instinct. Skepticism emerges as a method of critical thinking or a transitional stage of doubt. This limited skepticism can be consistent only as a phase in a dialectical process of acquiring knowledge.

4.7. Dialectics of Skepticism and Naturalism

Peter Strawson (1985) describes a tension between skepticism and naturalism in Hume, distinguishing two different levels of his thought: philosophical criticism, which cannot escape skepticism, and common-sense thinking, in which

skeptical arguments are replaced by inductive expectations and a natural inclination to believe in the existence of bodies (Strawson 1985: 12). On the level of everyday beliefs, there is no point to reply to skeptical arguments: they can only be ignored as powerless in the face of nature (Strawson 1985: 13).

Popkin believes that Hume found a proper proportion between skepticism and dogmatism (or doubt and belief) in order to provide skepticism with consistency (Popkin 1951: 403). Since our beliefs do not have any rational foundation, and the force of nature is insurmountable, we have to believe in what nature makes us believe. And nature makes us doubt only in matters which are distant from everyday life: "the true Pyrrhonist is both a dogmatist and a sceptic. […] He believes whatever nature leads him to believe, no more and no less." (Popkin 1951: 406) Popkin is right to observe that this attitude amounts to a blind subordination to nature (and thus a kind of dogmatism). In *A Treatise*, Hume writes that this kind of naturalism is the best expression of skepticism: "I may, nay I must yield to the current of nature, in submitting to my senses and understanding; and in this blind submission I shew most perfectly my sceptical disposition and principles." (THN 1.4.7: 420) Hume thereby reconciles skepticism with naturalism and dogmatism. In *Dialogues*, in turn, he writes that the only difference between a skeptic and a dogmatist is the former's commitment to stressing difficulties: "the skeptic from habit, caprice, or inclination, insists most on the difficulties; the dogmatist, for like reasons, on the necessity." (Hume 2012: 12, 94) According to Michael Williams and Rober Fogelin, Hume oscillates between common beliefs and skeptical desperation (Williams 2008: 103; Fogelin 2009b).

Hume's relation to skepticism should be presented as a process which occurs on at least two different levels: skeptical and common. On the one hand, he discovered serious skeptical arguments and never found a proper reply to them. He came to the conclusion that these arguments cannot be overcome by means of reason. On the other hand, however, he recognized the weakness of this thesis, which, in order to be seriously accepted, would have to contradict itself. In addition, the practical and psychological weakness of skepticism undermined its trustworthiness and exposed the skeptical position as equally doubtful as all common opinions. In this context, he could only decide that it is necessary to adopt a distant attitude toward skepticism and to return to common and scientific beliefs. That is why he moved to another level of investigations and it becomes clear how the skeptic can develop psychological, ethical and political thinking (assuming the existence of the world and causal relationships, employing the principe of induction and normative discourse, and so on). Thus, skepticism could be understood only in epistemological terms: as a methodic principle

of carefulness and criticism. When common beliefs fail him, he can return to his skeptical arguments and reiterate the process.

Claiming that knowledge does not exist, Hume falls into pragmatic contradiction. His only rescue is to withdraw all claims and, consequently, to abandon skepticism. However, so long as he is a skeptic, his position remains inconsistent. The whole dialectical process is an expression of hesitation between the dictate of reason and the dictate of instinct. Finally, only the lack of assent can immunize Hume from inconsistency.

As Popkin observed, Hume sees the continuation of his skepticism in a blind subordination to instinct. However, this is a version of skepticism which came to the point of departure, becoming a negation of itself as critical thinking. In this respect, Hume seems to repeat the strategy of Sextus Empiricus, who recommended that the mature skeptic should passively follow the guidance by appearances and customs.

In searching for a consistent form of skepticism, Hume (1) rejects radical skepticism and accepts its moderate version; (2) construes moderation as doubting in the skeptical thesis and limiting it to local questions and temporary attitudes; (3) confined the autonomy of reason and skepticism (underscores the supportive role of instinct and the dialectics between reason and common beliefs). Thus, skepticism is no longer an autonomous position and becomes an element of a wider cognitive process in which it plays a limited role. One may contend that Hume shows how, in spite of accepting the skeptical position, one may still live and conduct scientific investigations.

Thomas Reid and the members of the so-called "Scottish School of Common Sense" were the great critics of Hume. If Sextus's skepticism was criticized for its incompatibility with life and action, Hume's skepticism was criticized for its incompatibility with common sense, which was described as more trustworthy than all philosophical ideas and arguments. Even if Hume was uncertain of his skepticism, the Scottish School presented him as a radical skeptic. Kant will become familiar with Hume's ideas precisely through these thinkers and therefore will also consider him as a radical skeptic. However, Kant will not accept their common-sense rejection of skepticism and will devise his own, much more sophisticated response.

5. Kant's Transcendental Skepticism and its Continuations

5.1. Kant and the Skeptical Tradition

Descartes read Michel de Montaigne, Hume read Pierre Bayle, while Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) admitted that it was Hume who awakened him from his "dogmatic slumber" (P 10). And yet Michael Forster, in his book *Kant and Scepticism* (2008), tends to marginalize this inspiration. He argues that Kant was first influenced by the Pyrrhonian arguments, which led him to his project of reforming metaphysics, and then by Hume's insights, which constituted the main inspiration for his critical philosophy. Similarly to Patricia Kitcher (1999: 418), Forster believes that the Cartesian skepticism, questioning the world's existence, was not important for Kant. Forster discovered that Kant, in his minor work *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer* (1766), advocated the Pyrrhonian skepticism as a method of suspending judgments because of their equipollence (the antinomies of pure reason described in *Critique* are clearly influenced by this method). It was at that time that Kant had gone through a Pyrrhonian crisis and was awakened from the dogmatic slumber. And it was only later that he briefly fell into another snooze, which was interrupted by Hume (Forster 2008: 23).

Forster writes that Kant did not know English well enough to be able to read Hume's works without difficulty. Only *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* was available in German translation (1755). Kant discussed this work in his lectures, but admitted that it did not greatly impress him (Forster 2008: 105). It was only after the publication of a German translation of *An Essay on the Nature and Immutability of Truth* by James Beattie (a member of the Scottish School), that Kant was finally awakened. In this work, Beattie provided a clear account of Hume's critique of causality along the lines of Reid's thought (Forster 2008: 24, 107). This indirect contact with Hume may help explaining why Kant overlooked the subtleties of Hume's position, presenting it as a version of radical skepticism.

Forster's interpretation has been criticized. Andrew Chignell and Colin McLear believe that the statements found by Forster in letters and manuscripts do not undermine Hume's role. "On Forster's reading, then, it seems more apt to say that Hume (by way of Beattie) did not so much reawaken Kant as help him get back out of bed." (Chignell, McLear 2010: 232) It seems evident that Kant, before examining Hume's works, was familiar with typical skeptical arguments and antinomies. He also knew Bayle's works (Popkin, Neto 2007: 265). One can even find a reference to *ataraxia* in Kant, who wrote that it was only his system that could disarm metaphysical disputes.

As Forster was right to observe, the antinomies of reason resemble the ancient isostheny of opposite theses. Kant presents different pairs of such theses, for example, that "the world has a beginning in time, and is also limited in regard to space" and "the world has no beginning, and no limits in space, but is, in relation both to time and space, infinite." (KPR 50–51) Similar pairs of theses listed by Kant concern simplicity and complexity, freedom and determinism, the existence of necessary being and the world's contingency. The two first pairs of opposite judgments are appraised as false by Kant, while the next two pairs are viewed as true (one element of the opposition is true in the world of phenomena: determinism, contingency, and the other in the world of things in themselves: freedom, necessary being). Kant's antinomies resemble Carneades's contradictory lectures on justice, equipollence in Sextus Empiricus or Abelard's *Sic et Non*.

Another typically skeptical element is Kant's argument for the impossibility of providing any criterion of truth:

> If truth consists in the accordance of a cognition with its object, this object must be, ipso facto, distinguished from all others; for a cognition is false if it does not accord with the object to which it relates, although it contains something which may be affirmed of other objects. Now an universal criterion of truth would be that which is valid for all cognitions, without distinction of their objects. But it is evident that since, in the case of such a criterion, we make abstraction of all the content of a cognition (that is, of all relation to its object), and truth relates precisely to this content, it must be utterly absurd to ask for a mark of the truth of this content of cognition; […] a sufficient, and at the same time universal, test of truth cannot possibly be found. (KPR B83)

Kant formulates a new (as compared to Sextus) argument against the universal criterion of truth. He reveals a dilemma between formal and material (content-related) marks of truth. The criterion of truth cannot be content-related because, insofar as it is universal, it should be abstracted from all content. Nor it can be formal, since truth is always related with particular contents. The argument, similarly as in Sextus, seems to be irrefutable, although some thinkers have sought to dismantle it (cf. Stępień 1966: 96–97). Contradiction is the formal mark by which truth can be distinguished, but a lack of contradiction is not sufficient to determine the correspondence between a judgment and its object, since not all non-contradictory judgments are true.

These references to the Pyrrhonian tradition do not run afoul of Kant's explicit declaration that, immediately before the raise of his critical philosophy, Hume's arguments about causality had shaken him greatly. Kant is important in the history of skepticism, as a philosopher who tries to respond to Hume's skepticism and who finally reaches the position of the so-called transcendental, or agnostic, skepticism.

5.2. Futility of Skepticism and the Value of the Skeptical Method

In his *Lectures on Logic*, Kant briefly expresses his general position toward skepticism: skepticism is equally dangerous as dogmatism and "absolute" skepticism "contradicts itself". However, the skeptical method is beneficial. "There is no place for skepticism in mathematics and physics" (Kant 1992: 333), Kant argues, and reasons for skepticism are found only outside the sphere of mathematical and empirical cognition.

Both *Critique…* and *Prolegomena* provide a wider presentation of the skeptical position. Hume is interpreted as an exemplary radical skeptic based on his most radical statements (which were usually neutralized, but Kant ignores it). According to Kant, Hume "gave himself up entirely to scepticism" (KPR B128) "Hume", he continues, "is perhaps the ablest and most ingenious of all sceptical philosophers, and his writings have, undoubtedly, exerted the most powerful influence." (KPR A764)

However, Kant's assessment of skepticism as a philosophical position is definitely negative. Skepticism is described as an utterly hopeless attitude and "the euthanasia of pure reason." (KPR B434) As he argues, "we cannot stop at these doubts, much less regard the conviction of our ignorance […]. On the contrary, scepticism is merely a means of awakening reason from its dogmatic dreams and exciting it to a more careful investigation into its own powers and pretensions." (KPR A757) Kant seems to believe that skepticism is the death of philosophy, or rather its voluntary suicide. For what one can achieve in the philosophical field by proclaiming absolute ignorance? Those who, like Kant, are interested in exercising philosophy, cannot give themselves up to skepticism, which is a "contemptuous dislike of all inquiries" (KPR A757).

Skepticism cannot be an end, but it is useful as a means. "I freely admit that the remembrance of David Hume was the very thing that many years ago first interrupted my dogmatic slumber and gave a completely different direction to my researches in the field of speculative philosophy. I was very far from listening to him with respect to his conclusions, which arose solely because he did not completely set out his problem, but only touched on a part of it, which, without the whole being taken into account, can provide no enlightenment." (P10) However, just as dogmatism is a childish naiveness, so skepticism ends in a paralysis of doubt. Thus, Hume "deposited his ship on the beach (of skepticism) for safekeeping, where it could then lie and rot" (P 12) Kant's aim is to "dispose thoroughly of the Humean doubt." (P62)

Hume was right that "we in no way have insight through reason into the possibility of causality" (P62) but he was wrong in claiming that the principle of

causality is an effect of habit. This claim was erroneous because the principle in question has "universal validity". Hume believed synthetic *a priori* judgments to be impossible and this was precisely the point in which his position became uncertain: "the fate which always overtakes skepticism meets him too. That is to say, his own declarations are doubted." (KPR A768) Skepticism makes sense as an exercise in carefulness and sane critique of dogmatism, but it cannot be the aim of inquiries (KPR A769)

Kant distinguishes between skepticism and the skeptical method, which he believes to be beneficial. It is "really profitable to our speculative interests, not in the way of contributing any dogmatical addition, but as presenting to us another material support in our critical investigations." (KPR A486) Skepticism, as a proposition affirming that certain knowledge does not exist, becomes a dogma, while the skeptical method does not entail any affirmation nor negation. Skepticism is beneficial as a resting place for human reason, which can pause over and reflect therein – but it is not "a place to live as a constant residence." (KPR A761) It is not an end, but a means to an end. That is why Kant accepts the skeptical method.

Kant is in search for a third way between skepticism and dogmatism. He wishes to "safely to conduct reason between these two rocks, to assign her determinate limits, and yet leave open for her the entire sphere of her legitimate activity." (KPR B128) This third way is paved by criticism which, according to Kant, reveals the main assumption underlying the dispute between dogmatism and skepticism: that the object of our knowledge are things in themselves. According to Robert Stern, the advantage of criticism over skepticism is that the latter merely censors human reason, while the former exposes the limits of reason and explains why it (necessarily) fails in its attempt to reach certainty and why it relies on the principle of causality with respect to common experience. It thereby brings peace in the struggle between skepticism and dogmatism, a state that can be described as the *ataraxia* which ancient skeptics tried, but never succeeded, to achieve (Stern 2008: 278).

5.3. Transcendental Skepticism

In fact, one may contend that criticism is a form of skepticism. More precisely, it moves skepticism onto the transcendental level, while retrieving knowledge about objects as phenomena. One may also claim that this kind of skepticism amounts to local agnosticism (things in themselves are unknowable). For that is why Kant's thesis of transcendental epistemological idealism should be interpreted. "Objects are quite unknown to us in themselves, and what we call outward objects, are nothing else but mere representations of our sensibility"

(KPR A30). "All objects of a possible experience, are nothing but phenomena, that is, mere representations" (KPR A370) which "have no self-subsistent existence apart from human thought. This doctrine I call Transcendental Idealism." (KPR B519) Insofar as phenomena are posited as the objects of science, transcendental idealism assures the possibility of knowledge about phenomena and dismisses the threat of skepticism in this field, especially with regard to (scandalous, according to Kant) belief in the undemonstrability of the existence of the empirical world, which is now believed to consist of directly perceivable phenomena (that therefore do not require any proof). However, Kant still claims that things in themselves exist and are unknowable. That is why skepticism is ultimately not only a methodological device but also a constant element of Kant's method (cf. Landesman 2002: 11).

According to Kant, things in themselves are knowable neither *a priori* (through an analysis of concepts) nor *a posteriori*, as experience is related only to phenomena. "There are things given to us as objects of our senses existing outside us, yet we know nothing of them as they may be in themselves, but are acquainted only with their appearances, that is, with the representations that they produce in us because they affect our senses." (P 40) We know their existence only as the causes of these phenomena. Moreover, there is no accessible knowledge about the I as a thing in itself. "I am conscious of myself, not as I appear to myself, nor as I am in myself, but only that I am." Kant follows Hume in claiming that reason merely "holds out to us an uninterrupted continuation of the subject" (KPR A366) Transcendental apperception provides no content but merely a sense of existence:

> For in that which we call the soul, everything is in continual flux, and it has nothing abiding, except perhaps (if one insists) the I, which is simple only because this representation has no content, and hence no manifold, on account of which it seems to represent a simple object, or better put, it seems to designate one. (KPR A381)

Kant observes that inner experience assumes the concept of time. If time, together with the whole world, was doubtful, also the I would be called into question. The sense of our own existence does not provide us with any knowledge. "Even our inner experience, undoubted by Descartes, is possible only under the presupposition of outer experience." (KPR B275) Descartes assumed that inner experience is direct and autonomous. Therefore, he inferred from it about external things. Kant, in turn, claims that inner experience is possible only through outer experience (KPR B276–277). In other words, knowledge about phenomena is possible with respect to nature, but not with respect to the I.

According to Peter Strawson, Kant formulates a prototype of the transcendental argument against the Cartesian skepticism: the necessary condition of

self-consciousness and self-knowledge is knowledge about the external world (cf. Strawson 1985: 13). The lack of autonomy of self-consciousness makes it impossible for a skeptic to freely use the data of consciousness in order to formulate skeptical doubts and arguments. This confirms Michael Forster's thesis that the Cartesian skepticism concerning the existence of the external world was not treated seriously by Kant. For this kind of skepticism assumed a preference for self-consciousness over knowledge about the external world. Kant, however, had opposite preferences, which is why the main challenge to his system was posed by Hume's argument against causality.

Kant believes that the skeptical question whether knowledge exists is unnecessary, as mathematics and natural sciences constitute a form of knowledge. Mathematics is the boast of human reason (KPR A464) and has been certain since very long time (KPR B8). The examples of necessary judgments in natural sciences are: substance is continuous and persists; everything that happens has a cause (P 295). One should not ask whether such knowledge is possible (KPR B20). For, according to Kant, this kind of knowledge does not concern things in themselves but it concerns phenomena apprehended through apriorical forms and categories.

Skeptical arguments concern things in themselves but they do not deny the existence and objectual value of our knowledge about the world consisting of phenomena. Kant thereby retrieves not only common beliefs but also science, defining their objects as free from skeptical difficulties. Moreover, he defends the necessity of this kind of knowledge.

Whereas Carl Reinhold believed that Kant gave a definite response to skepticism, Gottlob Ernst Schutze claimed that he did not respond to the skeptical arguments concerning the existence of the world and hence fell into contradiction (Popkin, Neto 2007: 271).[62] Indeed, one may contend that the Kantian reply to skepticism is only partial and, moreover, that it is only a kind of "truce" between skeptical arguments and the fact of empirical knowledge. Just as Descartes was accused of skepticism, one may object that Kant not only does not provide a response to ancient and modern skepticism but, in fact, confirms this formation

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62 The first history of skepticism was written by a Kant's contemporary Carl Friedrich Stäudlin (*Geschichte und Geist der Skepticismus*, Leipzig 1794; earlier, in 1690, Simon Foucher published his *History of Academism*). Stäudlin's work contained a thesis that skepticism had both positive and negative consequences. Inspiring new discoveries, interrupting the dogmatic slumber, examining attitudes, and realizing human limits were listed among the former. The latter included destroying science and morality (especially among the youth), undermining religion, and causing doubts in the value of life.

of thought, excluding all possibility of knowledge about things in themselves. If he retrieves knowledge and truth, it is only insofar as they are understood in a weak sense (as related merely to phenomena). Kant overcomes skepticism by assimilating it (Landesman 2002: 7) or, more precisely, by changing the object of knowledge.

Kant does not avoid the typical inconsistency charge.[63] "How could we know that everything we have cognitive access to is true of the world only insofar as it appears to us unless we had *some* knowledge of the world as it is in itself, on the basis of which to give content to this contrast?" (Stern 2008: 269) The same charge was put forward against Sextus Empiricus who recommended to speak about phenomena instead of speaking about things. In Kant, the whole common experience and science seem to belong to the realm of phenomena.

In other words, how can we know that things in themselves are unknowable if they are unknowable? Kant escapes to the transcendental level in order to avoid the hopeless dispute with regard to empirical world, but the same problem returns on the level of things in themselves (whose existence he assumes as both the limit and the source of experience). This assumption results in an additional incoherence, which was already observed by Gottlob Ernst Schulze (Popkin, Neto 2007: 271): how can we know that things in themselves exist and are the cause of sensations if Kant considers them as unknowable and limits the principle of causality precisely to the sphere of sensations?

5.4. Hegel about Skepticism

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831) was one of those thinkers who regarded Kant's response to skepticism as both ineffective and inconsistent. However, as distinct from Schulze, Hegel categorically rejected skepticism. He believes that ancient skepticism was better and more consistent than its modern counterpart. Whereas ancient skeptics applied the method of isostheny, modern skeptics rejected it without proposing any alternative (Forster 1989: 11, 188). The former, Hegel argued, did not consider their own statements in terms of assent, beliefs, expressions of truth or descriptions of reality (Forster 1989: 15). This finds confirmation in their dispute with the Cyrenaics who regarded their own

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63 A Polish philosopher Marian Massonius recognizes another inconsequence in Kant, who "utterly contradicted his initial theses" and turned out to be "a dogmatist rejecting careful agnosticism in favor of metaphysics", as he wanted his philosophy to be considered as "doubtless and authoritative" (Szotek 2001: 67). Massonius described his own position as "new critical agnosticism."

experience as the criterion of truth. *Epochē* consists in a lack of beliefs, not in doubt in beliefs. According to Hegel, it was the complete lack of beliefs that kept ancient skepticism free from self-contradiction. This Hegel's thesis brings into mind one of contemporary interpretative lines concerning Sextus Empiricus, a line represented, for example, by Robert Hankinson (1995). However, this is a controversial issue and Hankinson's interpretation faces the problem of how to explain the status of skeptical discourse, the identity of skepticism, the value of skeptical arguments, and the possibility of acting without holding beliefs.

According to Hegel, modern skeptics who discovered self-knowledge and started to regard their own experience as true, were not consistent skeptics. Modern skepticism is a version of idealism which posits "certainty of self as all reality and truth." (Hegel 1995: 363) Hume was inconsistent when he wished their readers to believe him and therefore assumed that impressions and ideas are directly accessible to consciousness (Forster 1989: 28).

However, the author of *Phenomenology of Spirit* is not uncritical with regard to ancient skeptics. He repeats the old argument that the words of skeptics are contradicted by their actions (Forster 1989: 40). What is more important, he also cogently observes that their attempt to avoid contradiction and self-refutation is futile (Forster 1989: 40) – in this respect, they resemble a man who, instead of stating anything, limited himself to producing several cries. He avoids self refutation because he avoids making statements which can be refuted. However, the consequence of such self-limitation is his radical immersion in subjectivity. And the point is that no one cares about this kind of subjective discourse and it surely does not have a philosophical character (Forster 1989: 41). This Hegel's critical remark is very insightful and aptly exposes the weakness of Sextus's strategy of discourse without assent.

The main Hegelian charge against all skeptics (including Kant) is that they assume a specific dualism based on the difference between concepts and the world (Forster 1989: 34). According to Hegel, in turn, the notion of thing in itself as an object deprived of relation to consciousness is meaningless and self-contradictory (Hegel 2001: 44). He therefore rejects this dualistic conception and assumes that phenomena are the only existing beings and manifestations of the constitution of knowledge which, just like being, should be understood as a process. Hegel believes that a striving towards pure objectivity is not a culmination but a return to the beginning of the cognitive process. In Hegel's system, there is no purely objective knowledge which would be free from subjective additions. He believes that the proper reply to skepticism can be only a skeptical critique of skepticism itself. Skepticism is based on a fear of error, but this fear is

not free from various assumptions – for example, that being is on one side and knowledge on the other, even if it is also something real and true. Skepticism is cancelled as soon as skeptical doubts are directed against its assumptions. "Skepticism's lack of thought about itself must vanish." (Hegel 1998: 126)

Skepticism can be expressed neither without assent (the problems with identification) nor with weak assent (the infinite regress; Forster 1989: 23). Accepting it with strong assent, in turn, would lead to contradiction. According to Hegel, contradiction is natural for skepticism which is not the final word but a mere stage of thought.

In Hegel, like in Montaigne, skepticism is an experience of freedom of thought. In this experience, according to Hegel, thought annihilates being and highlights its autonomy (Hegel 1998: 123). It points to the dialectical movement between thought and being. Having annihilated being, skeptical consciousness experiences its own contingency, it "truly experiences itself as internally contradictory." (Hegel 1998: 126) Trying to avoid this contradiction, it moves onto a higher level where it renounces its freedom and once again subordinates itself to being.

The Hegelian reply to skepticism, similarly to its Kantian predecessor, turns out to be only partial. In fact, Hegel admits that empirical consciousness has no chance to achieve certain knowledge about truth. He shows that it is unattainable before achieving full development of consciousness, just as in Kant knowledge about things in themselves was ontologically impossible. In fact, this amounts to an acceptance of skepticism, or even agnosticism, and in that sense it leads to self-refutation. The latter, however, is not dangerous for Hegel, since skepticism is intertwined into the wider process of the historical development of Spirit. In that sense, Hegel both accepts and overcomes skepticism. The Hegelian dialectics provides a useful explanation of the self-refutation of the skeptical thesis.

Hegel makes many important remarks about the philosophical and historical role of skepticism, which is described as the *modus operandi* of reason and the driving force of thought (Popkin, Neto 2007: 281). He also owes a personal debt of gratitude to skepticism in which a prototype of his dialectical method, based on arguing on both sides of every question, was developed (Forster 1989: 32).

5.5. Nietzsche's Skepticism

Modern skepticism has gone through the evolution from Christian and fideist Pyrrhonism, through the Reformation disputes in which both sides used skeptical arguments, to religious skepticism. Søren Kierkegaard (1813–1855) was one of the last fideist skeptics. In *De omnibus dubitandum est* (*Everything Must Be Doubted*), he says that "the man who is sick to death cannot gain access to the

truth which is not sick to death" (Kierkegaard 1958: 140). Such truth is attainable only for God, while man can only continue to search for it and decide to take a leap into darkness. Ernest Renan (1823–1892) and Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900) also lived in the 19th century, but they represented the typical non-religious version skepticism. Renan became famous as a skeptic for his *Life of Jesus* (1863) where he criticized Christianity as the revealed truth. He argued that Jesus was a historical figure, a genius of emotions who enchanted people around him and created the best moral code (Drozdowicz 1987: 120; Skarga 2002: 80). Renan's skepticism was also related to science, as he assumed that truth is fluid and cannot be comprehended within any scheme, and hence man is always doomed to live in the world of antitheses (Skarga 2002: 92).[64]

Friedrich Nietzsche is the last thinker in the history of modern skepticism. As a classical philologist, he was very well acquainted with the ancient skeptical tradition. His doctoral thesis was devoted to the sources of Diogenes's *Lives*. Based on his considerable knowledge of Sextus Empricus and other available sources, Nietzsche scrupulously examined its Book 9 devoted to skeptics (Berry 2011: 27). He posed a rash hypothesis that Diogenes drew on weakly identified Theodosius.[65] He repeatedly expressed his admiration of ancient skeptics, describing them in *Ecce homo* as "the only respectable" philosophers (Nietzsche 2005: 90). Elsewhere, in *The Anti-Christ*, he wrote that "great spirits are sceptics. Zarathustra is a sceptic." (Nietzsche 2005: 54) He claims that all beliefs are limits imposed on freedom, that knowledge is a prejudice and that a skeptic is a free man who rejects all faith and certainty.

Nietzsche had in his library a complete edition of Montaigne's *Essays* and shared its skeptical naturalism. However, he believed that later modern skepticism became an intellectual illness which stimulated a new search for truth and a new faith, namely, the faith in certainty (Berry 2011: 32). Nietzsche ridicules the Kantian skepticism for its attempt to establish the proper object of reason in the unaccessible field of things in themselves and for its use of reason in order to determine *a priori* that reason is unable to acquire knowledge about them. Nietzsche describes this position as an ascetic and decadent philosophy.

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64 However, it is important to note that young Renan, in *The Future of Science* (1849), was a severe critic of skepticism (Drozdowicz 1987: 110).

65 Already as a philologist, Nietzsche had intense philosophical ambitions. He posed bold hypotheses and surely exceeded the boundaries of the philological discipline. Nietzsche, as Serafin observes, "modifies quotations, blurs traces, hides his sources and philological workshop, breaks the rules of the art." (Serafin 2010: 174)

He describes this kind of skepticism as only a sedative means for the weak and scared (Berry 2011: 12).

Nietzsche's skeptical theses were most expressly pronounced in his early text *On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense*. In this work, Nietzsche produces an atmosphere of skeptical desperation and jeers at human pretensions to knowledge. He describes human mind as miserable and superficial, contingent and temporary in the world's history, and an instrument of conceit and hypocrisy. He cogently elaborates on the role of human language in making judgments and compares the situation of man to that of other species. He claims that we reluctantly admit that "the insect or the bird perceives an entirely different world from the one that man does" (Nietzsche 1979: 87) and that "if we could only perceive things now as a bird, now as a worm, now as a plant" (Nietzsche 1979: 86), we would consider nature as a product of subjectivity. This argument resembles the first mode of Aenesidemus.

Using the arguments of language, Nietzsche denies to man the possibility of making even one certain judgment:

> What then is truth? A movable host of metaphors, metonymies, and; anthropomorphisms […] which, after long usage, seem to a people to be fixed, canonical, and binding. Truths are illusions which we have forgotten are illusions – they are metaphors that have become worn out and have been drained of sensuous force (Nietzsche 1979: 84).

Concepts are in fact the residue of metaphors stabilized by language and science:

> To begin with, a nerve stimulus is transferred into an image: first metaphor. The image, in turn, is imitated in a sound: second metaphor […]. when we speak of trees, colors, snow, and flowers; and yet we possess nothing but metaphors for things […]. In particular, let us further consider the formation of concepts. Every word instantly becomes a concept precisely insofar as it is not supposed to serve as a reminder of the unique and entirely individual original experience to which it owes its origin; but rather, a word becomes a concept insofar as it simultaneously has to fit countless more or less similar cases […]. Every concept arises from the equation of unequal things. (Nietzsche 1979: 82–83)

Although there are no two identical leafs, for example, the concept of leaf is formed through an arbitrary abstraction from these differences and mobilized to suggest the existence of a pre-form of leaf. Against this operation, Nietzsche returns to the Heraclitean vision of the world and claims that concepts are like "domes built upon an unstable foundation, and, as it were, on running water." (Nietzsche 1979: 86) Tautologies, in turn, are just empty husks with no content.

Interpreted literally, Nietzsche's position is a radical version of agnosticism with regard to truth. However, according to Jessica Berry, *On Truth and Lies…* should be read, not as a dogmatic claim that truth is unknowable or incomprehensible, but as a poetical warning against dogmatism and a demonstration

of merits of skepticism. In light of this reading, Nietzsche does not claim that all perceptions are erroneous – he simply does not claim that they are accurate (Berry 2011: 65–66). Therefore, as Berry's claim goes, he is not an agnostic whose statements are self-refuting, but he is a skeptic who does not hold any position. This interpretative line is confirmed by other Nietzsche's passages – for example, that convictions are dangerous "enemies of truth" (Nietzsche 2004: 179) – which suggest he not so much rejects the concept of objective truth as withdraws from asserting its presence in human experience. He does not develop any theory of knowledge nor ontology (Berry 2011: 3).

According to Berry, Nietzsche's skepticism is not contradictory to his naturalism, which considers man as an element of the natural world, and which is a tendency to treat philosophy as a continuation of natural sciences (Berry 2011: 74). Skepticism is a view that there is "no other, metaphysical world" (Nietzsche 2004: 23) As Berry argues, in Nietzsche skepticism is a cognitive practice without theory: in the face of the lack of certitude, it is focused on describing phenomena. Thus, this skepticism with regard to metaphysics leads Nietzsche to embrace naturalism. In other words, his naturalism is a consequence of his skepticism (Berry 2011: 95).

In fact, there are many resemblances between Sextus Empiricus and Nietzsche: the total critique of all existing theories, treating philosophy as a practice which consists in expressing one's own sensations, the return to nature in both everyday life and science, the acceptance of internal contradictions and self-refutation of one's own theses, as well as the typical atmosphere of skeptical pessimism. Nietzsche resembles an ancient skeptic who has nothing to offer himself but is able to point out various mistakes in the existing theories, to make a thorough critique, to interrupt cultural patterns and to inspire others to further insights. Besides, by virtue of his critique of Christianity, Nietzsche fits well within the contemporary model of the skeptic.

However, one should not overlook the fact that Nietzsche makes a sober appraisal of skepticism, which he believes to be a good means to shake off dogmatism and a source of freedom, but not the final word of philosophy. In fact, he claims that skepticism is even dangerous and detrimental to the development of life.

> As such, every great degree of caution in inferring, every skeptical disposition, is a great danger to life. No living being would be preserved had not the opposite disposition – to affirm rather than suspend judgement, to err and make things up rather than wait, to agree rather than deny, to pass judgement rather than be just – been seen as extraordinarily strong. (Nietzsche 2003: 112)

Nietzsche's assessment of skepticism is ambivalent: it can be equally useful as harmful and pathologic. Exaggerate skepticism is an expression of weak nerves and is dangerous for weak men. As Nietzsche argues, there were many who lost their track, drifting without a helm on the waters of skepticism. A skeptical philosopher is like a sailor on an open sea who left the land and – surrounded by endless waters – seeks to keep on the surface. This is a dangerous place where only the brave can survive.

Nietzsche also has his doubts regarding the consistency of skepticism. However, the inconsistency of skepticism does not diminish its beneficial quality as a stage in the development of knowledge. Following Hegel, Nietzsche seems to accept skepticism as an element of a wider process, a useful tool of development and bringing out "the hidden truth." In the endless ocean of Nietzsche's thought, it is hard to determine what does it mean to be a skeptic, let alone whether someone is a skeptic.

Conclusions for Modern Skepticism

Modern skepticism, as compared to its ancient predecessor, was developed in a very different context (that of the Christian religion). However, as distinct from medieval skepticism, it rediscovered the works of Sextus Empiricus which became an exemplary form of radical skepticism. Renaissance skepticism constituted a specific synthesis of ancient skeptical arguments and Christian ideas. In effect, this led to the skeptical fideism described as Christian Pyrrhonism. Based on this assimilation, and using the Christian idea of the omnipotent God, Descartes formulated two skeptical hypotheses (the dream hypothesis and the evil demon hypothesis) which not only attracted attention of later modern philosophers but also became the central point in contemporary discussions concerning skepticism. The evil demon hypothesis is an adequate expression of the uncertain status of all human knowledge.

Modern skepticism called into question human knowledge which was motivated by a striving toward absolute certainty. As we have already seen, David Hume, the most important modern skeptic, had ultimately capitulated before the Cartesian hypotheses. Nonetheless, Hume was right to observe that every attempt to accept the skeptical thesis, according to which truth is unknowable and there is no certain knowledge, exposes the inconsistency of skepticism. In other words, every total critique of reason by means of reason is pragmatically inconsistent: in developing skeptical arguments, reason weakens itself, but at the same time cannot complete the work of self-refutation. Hence, the only rescue is instinct which compels people to hold everyday convictions.

Hume believes that total and radical skepticism – as the thesis that knowledge does not exist – is both inconsistent and psychologically impossible. Moderate skepticism, in the sense of holding beliefs with weak assent, avoids the inconsistency, but at the cost of losing its justification and identity. If total skepticism cannot avoid self-refutation, moderate skepticism simply undermines itself. Hume has gained his fame as a skeptic because he vividly presented the skeptical arguments in *A Treatise of Human Nature*, but in *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* he chose to embrace moderate skepticism and tried to maintain it as an element of the dialectical process of cooperation between reason and common sense. This, however, amounted to a rejection of the autonomy of skepticism as a philosophical position.

The inconsistency of this radical form of skepticism was recognized not only by its critics but also by its proponents (except of Pierre Daniel Huet). Modern skeptics usually adopted a moderate position. They rejected the existence of knowledge because they assumed the concept of knowledge in a strong sense. However, if their arguments were juxtaposed with the contemporary concept of knowledge, their moderate skepticism would turn into fallibilism. Moderate skepticism was consistent by its limitation to certain knowledge: it was expressed by probable convictions supported by fideism or naturalism. This kind of skepticism was not an autonomous position, but an attitude or a method belonging to a wider system of knowledge.

Chapter V. Contemporary Skepticism

1. The Problem of Skepticism and the Change of the Concept of Knowledge at the Beginning of the 20th Century

Already the Ockhamists of the 14th century proposed the concept of probable knowledge, later it was propagated by Francis Bacon and used in scientific practice, but until the 20th century it remained on the margins of philosophical discussions concerning skepticism. In the modern period even David Hume was faithful to the Cartesian concept of knowledge based on certainty. At the beginning of the 20th century, strong tendencies toward repudiating this strong concept of knowledge emerged, and now this position is firmly established. In contemporary philosophy, skeptical arguments have not been overcome, but instead they have been deepened through its analysis of language and mind. It seems that philosophers learned to make do with these arguments and exercise philosophy in spite of their existence. Now, the concept of knowledge is no longer restricted by the condition of certainty. The lack of knowledge has been widely accepted and described as fallibilism, while the concept of skepticism has been limited to a rejection of all knowledge.

1.1. Pragmatism

Izydora Dąmbska writes that pragmatism is a "modern form of theoretical skepticism" (Dąmbska 1948b: 247), which does not entail the directive of suspension of judgment only because it assumes different axiology. Pragmatism, she argues, is wrongly described as a logical overcoming of skepticism (Dąmbska 1948: 88), as it avoids skepticism only verbally, that is, by transforming the concept of truth and knowledge (Dąmbska 1939: 8).

However, it is hard to reconcile this skeptical interpretation of pragmatist with the thesis that, for pragmatists, practical consequences become the criterion for cogency of philosophical positions. After all, for many centuries skepticism has been accused of being unreconcilable with life and action. It is worthy to quote Erik Olsson who denies that pragmatism is a version of skepticism: "Pragmatist responses to radical skepticism do not receive much attention in contemporary analytic epistemology" (Olsson 2005: 98). He believes these responses should be understood as an original antiskeptical strategy.

In his *Will to Believe*, William James (1842–1910) engages in a thoroughgoing critique of skepticism. Although the whole work is devoted to religious

beliefs, the arguments elaborated by James are also important in terms of global skepticism.

First, James rejects the possibility of gaining certain knowledge. The only exception is knowledge about the existence of consciousness:

> There is but one indefectibly certain truth, and that is the truth that pyrrhonistic scepticism itself leaves standing, – the truth that the present phenomenon of consciousness exists. That, however, is the bare starting-point of knowledge, the mere admission of a stuff to be philosophized about. (James 2010: 27)

This thesis was silently accepted by the classics of ancient skepticism. In some sense, it is meaningless as a bare sense of one's own existence, which – as we may put this today – cannot be verbalized without losing certainty. According to James, there is no objective certitude and evidence which are "very fine ideas to play with, but where on this moonlit and dream-visited planet are they found?" (James 2010: 27) James writes that mathematical propositions do not concern reality, logical principles are called into question and "no concrete test of what is really true has ever been agreed upon." (James 2010: 28) In effect, all beliefs are said to be uncertain and temporary. "To hold any of them – I absolutely do not care which – as if it never could be reinterpretable or corrigible, I believe to be a tremendously mistaken attitude." (James 2010: 27) In fact, as James argues, there are no infallible beliefs. These arguments closely resemble those made by Sextus Empiricus to support his claim that we should suspend judgment in all matters. They also come close to the hypotheses which led Descartes to question both the reality of the world and the value of mathematics. One may agree with Dąmbska that James is a skeptic with regard to certain knowledge. Today, however, this position is not called skepticism, but it is described as fallibilism. The term "fallibilism" was probably coined by Charles Sanders Peirce (CP 7.108). It was precisely within the pragmatist framework where the distinction between fallibilism and skepticism emerges. James does not describe himself as a "skeptic", but uses the word "empiricist" (as opposed to both "absolutist" and "skeptic"), which should be understood as a synonym for "fallibilist".

Second, *Will to Believe* already contains a formulation of the pragmatic theory of truth. James observed that when "we give up the doctrine of objective certitude, we do not thereby give up the quest or hope of truth itself. […] Our great difference from the scholastic lies in the way we face" (James 2010: 30), that is to say, in the method applied. Whenever a hypothesis is continually re-affirmed by "the total drift of thinking", whenever it is strong enough to seduce our will and proves useful to us, we can call it true.

According to Dąmbska, this shift in understanding of the concept of truth offers only a superficial escape from theoretical skepticism. Indeed, after transforming the concept, truth becomes accessible and can be measured by many different criteria. This means, however, that truth in a strong sense cannot be discovered and even does not exist. One may agree with Dąmbska that pragmatists accept what ancient and modern skeptics feared most – the deepening of theoretical skepticism which ultimately excludes the accessibility to objective truth.

Our faith in truth is nothing more or less than the fact that

> We want to believe that our experiments and studies and discussions must put us in a continually better and better position towards it; and on this line we agree to fight out our thinking lives […] But if a pyrrhonistic skeptic asks us *how we know* all this, can our logic find a reply? No! Certainly it cannot. (James 2010: 22)

Faith in truth is not a purely intellectual conviction. It is simply an emotion and will. This opinion is confirmed by the famous thesis of *Will to Believe*: "As a rule we disbelieve theories for which we have no use." (James 2010: 22) We do not have any logical reply to skeptical questions, but we do have faith in the existence of truth.

James objects to considering beliefs in purely intellectual terms:

> This very law which the logicians would impose upon us – if I may give the name of logicians to those who would rule out our willing nature here – is based on nothing but their own natural wish to exclude all elements for which they, in their professional quality of logicians, can find no use. (James 2010: 23)

This is a crucial point of James's argumentation, which, in this respect, is typically pragmatist and which Dąmbska overlooks. James is not interested in purely theoretical and intellectual interpretation of skepticism, because he believes knowledge to be a kind of action. More precisely, knowledge makes sense only insofar as it provides some rules of action. Therefore, James is interested in skepticism as a rule of action, a belief that knowledge does not exist. In that sense, he may seem close to the conviction that we have no right to hold beliefs. For it would be easy to assume that the lack of knowledge undermines all beliefs. Dąmbska does not adopt this viewpoint and maintains the distinction between theoretical and normative skepticism.

Third, in *Will to Believe* the existence of knowledge is expressly asserted in opposition to skepticism: James insists that "to know is one thing, and to know for certain *that* we know is another." (James 2010: 24–25) Thus, skepticism is opposed to both the absolutist and to the empirical faith in truth, and what is different between these two kinds of faith is their respective degree of dogmatism. The absolutists say

we not only can attain to knowing truth, but we can *know when* we have attained to knowing it; while the empiricists think that although we may attain it, we cannot infallibly know when. (James 2010: 24)

James, to be sure, rejects absolutism (the existence of certain knowledge), but he champions empiricism (empirical knowledge exists). Therefore, he can be described as a fallibilist.

In order to reject skepticism, James is even ready to describe his position as dogmatic. He writes that even the greatest empiricists tend to adopt dogmatic, or even absolutist attitudes in everyday life insofar as their behavior is governed by instinct. He also points out that dogmatism can be graduated and that even empiricism/fallibilism is a form of mild dogmatism as opposed to total skepticism.

James's main antiskeptical argument is not expressly used to defend the thesis that knowledge does not exist. A defense of knowledge can be found in Peirce who transforms the concept of knowledge, reduces it to a mere belief, questions the possibility of total doubt assumed by various thinkers, and imposes an obligation of providing reasons for doubting). James, in turn, attacks skepticism as an imperative to doubt. He is interested in skepticism as a rule of action: "we do not have any knowledge, so we should reject all our present beliefs."

Preparing his argument against skepticism, James makes very important distinctions, which are often cited by other authors – for example, Roderick Chisholm (1980: 40). One of these distinctions is between two imperatives that can determine the cognitive process: "*We must know the truth*; and *we must avoid error*." (James 2010: 30) He insists that these are two different epistemic imperatives which are variously preferred. According to James, achieving one of them would by easy. In order to know truth, it would suffice to accept all beliefs we encounter. In order to avoid error, it would suffice not to accept any of them. Although we may object whether it is possible to fulfill the first imperative by simply accepting all opinions, we should agree that the imperative of avoiding error is much easier to follow. However, the art of knowing consists in the ability to combine these imperatives. It is a distribution of emphasis, that determines the style of our thinking.

> We may regard the chase for truth as paramount, and the avoidance of error as secondary; or we may, on the other hand, treat the avoidance of error as more imperative, and let truth take its chance. (James 2010: 31)

These two imperatives express our cognitive aspirations which are located between two extremes. The goal is to acquire knowledge, but it can be accomplished in different ways.

It is this distinction that allows James to show the one-sidedness of skepticism and expose its non-evident axiological assumptions. Skepticism emerges as a view which exaggeratedly emphasizes the avoidance of falsehood, ignoring the second, complementary imperative. Credulousness is not the worst thing that can happen to us. What is even worse is when people totally reject the possibility of reaching the truth because they set excessively restrictive standards for knowledge. James expressly opposes skepticism as a too careful attitude which is constituted by the fear of falsehood. He prefers to be slightly careless rather than too nervous. His main argument is the following:

> Scepticism, then, is not avoidance of option; it is option of a certain particular kind of risk. *Better risk loss of truth than chance of error*, – that is your faith-vetoer's exact position. […] It is not intellect against all passions, then; it is only intellect with one passion laying down its law. (James 2010: 40)

It it not a rejection of the skeptical choice, but it is an exposure of its limitations. Skepticism is not an intellectual duty, as it results, not from neutrality (as skeptics tend to declare), but from preference. The skeptical *epochē* is also a decision, which means that is motivated by the fear of error and, just as every decision, can depart from the truth (James 2010: 24). To champion skepticism as an intellectual duty before having a proof of its validity is simply to assert that running from error is better than cherishing hope. Confronted with the lack of indubitable knowledge, man has two choices: either to hold doubtful beliefs (being motivated by other reasons) or reject them. It is not logically certain whether the second option is right. However, practical reasons seem to reject this option (Galewicz 1996: 14). James's merit is that he has shown these two options, providing an important antiskeptical argument (Galewicz 1996: 19, 32).

The rejection of normative skepticism is crucial for any possibility of action, which is why pragmatists cannot, in principle, accept this position. James discredits skepticism by invoking the laws of life and action. The power of these arguments overshadows all theoretical reasons for skepticism, which are no longer significant even as they remain unresolved.

First of all, James discredits skepticism by exposing its emotional foundation that runs afoul of its declared intellectualism. Pragmatists discovered that there are no purely intellectual positions. From the pragmatist viewpoint, the principle of *epochē* is a decision driven by emotions and based on insufficient evidence. In light of this observation, Pyrrhonist skepticism turns out to be an assessment, rather than a description. Włodzimierz Galewicz is right to point out that "the intellectualist prohibition of making judgments without having sufficient cognitive

reasons assumes a 'fearful' axiology of knowledge, one which privileges avoidance of error over knowing the truth" (Galewicz 1996: 16).

James admits that, in the case of some questions of more theoretical nature, we have a wider possibility of deferring decision and suspending judgement until we find appropriate proofs. However, there is no way to avoid making decision concerning practical questions like morality or religion. "Moral scepticism", James writes, "can be no more refuted or proved by logic than intellectual scepticism can." (James 2010: 36) In the process, the alleged intellectualism of skepticism is once again called into question: since the skeptical position is always adopted as a result of an emotional decision, we are entitled to make a similar decision to reject skepticism. In important life situations, when we are lacking rational arguments, we have a right to privilege practical, emotional or volitional aspects. Total suspension of judgment is disadvantageous, as it can ultimately prevent us from discovering truth and is absurd in the long run. There are judgments without sufficient theoretical reasons, but which are rational in practical terms.

Moral and religious beliefs are good examples to take when analyzing skeptical arguments, as they are exposed to the strongest type of skepticism, even though – or perhaps because – hypotheses regarding these questions are of the utmost urgency and cannot be simply suspended until sufficient evidence for them is found: "religion" – James writes – "is a *forced* option […]. We cannot escape the issue by remaining sceptical and waiting for more light." (James 2010: 39) Religious skepticism turns out to be dispensable because, in practice, we act as if we believed in the existence God; or, on the contrary, as if we rejected God's existence. Either way, we cannot avoid making the choice. What James writes about religious skepticism, bears importance for skepticism in general (Galewicz 1996; Mounce 1997).

It is doubtless that James has negative attitude toward skepticism as the thesis of the non-existence of knowledge. He agrees with the skeptical tradition that all beliefs are doubtful, but he is more willing to transform the concepts of truth and knowledge than to admit that knowledge does not exist or truth is unknowable. As he argues, our common, scientific and religious beliefs are our knowledge and truth. Skepticism, in turn, is an exaggerated intellectualism which underappreciates the role of emotions and overlooks the fact that knowledge is rooted in action. James shows that skepticism is not only based on unsound emotions, but also can be dangerous to action which is the most important measure of value of theories. In short, skepticism and pragmatism are opposed to each other. Action requires both optimism and hope. Skepticism is pessimistic and deprived of hope.

For centuries, skeptics have faced the problem of their doctrine's incompatibility with life and action. The pragmatist acceptance of fallibilism (everything

is doubtful) had to be combined with an antiskeptical theory of action. We are entitled to hold beliefs and to hope that they are true. We have to make do in the ocean of uncertainty: it is better to search for truth than to doubt. Pragmatism is a theory based on the practice of coping in the uncertain world.

A similar position was adopted by other pragmatists. Peirce was a fallibilist and antiskeptic who followed Hume in questioning the possibility of Cartesian total doubting (Gutowski 2004: 172), but also added something new – a requirement that doubts must be also justified with reasons (CP 5.265). He claimed that there is no absolutely certain knowledge (CP 7.108) and that every belief can be criticized, but he also insists that every critique has to based on reasons. In addition, he formulates a fallibilist concept of knowledge as a set of fixed beliefs (Olsson 2005: 108), which do not have to be true and certain. If James transformed the concept of truth, Peirce removed the requirement of truth from the concept of knowledge. His most accurate critical remarks against both ancient and modern skepticism (in both moderate and purely theoretical form) are based on the idea of inseparability of action and thought and the rejection of the distinction of practice and theory. To be convinced of something is to act according to it (CP 5.268). In light of Peirce's conception, not only Carneades but also Sextus Empiricus would have to admit that, insofar as they are engaged in everyday activities, they are not skeptics.

John Dewey provides a similar critique of skepticism, adding that we never abandon a belief unless we have a better one. Putnam is right to observe that the unique insight of American pragmatism was its combination of fallibilism and antiskepticism (Putnam 1994: 152).[66] A similar transformation of the concept of knowledge has been underway in both analytical and continental philosophy.

1.2. Analytical Philosophy

In his essay *A Proof of the External World*, George Edward Moore (1873–1958) quotes Kant that it remains a scandal to philosophy that we do not have a satisfactory proof of the world's existence. Kant believes that the proof could be provided only by his own system in which the external world is a necessary cause of sensations. According to Moore, one may deliver a different proof:

> I can prove now, for instance, that two human hands exist. How? By holding up my two hands, and saying, as I make a certain gesture with the right hand, "Here is one hand", and adding, as I make a certain gesture with the left, "and here is another". (Moore 2006: 165–166)

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66 "That one can be both fallibilistic and antiskeptical is perhaps the unique insight of American pragmatism." (Putnam 1994: 152)

Moore believes this proof to be justified because it satisfies all requirements of a proper proof: its premises are known and different than the conclusion, which is inferred from them. According to Moore, it would be absurd to say that I do not know, but only believe that I have two hands. If I do not know that I have to hands, Moore argues, it means that I do not know if I am standing up and speaking, and therefore it is uncertain whether I exist (Moore 2006: 166).

Moore believes that this argument is similar to a proof of the thesis that this page contains at least three misprints. It is enough to show each of them so that we no longer doubt their existence. Since we have no further doubts regarding the misprints, why should we doubt the existence of our own hands? We may only have a justified reservation, for example, that the hand is artificial, not human. But we can easily test this by "touching and pressing it" (Moore 2006: 169). Another reservation is the lack of proof that I am not sleeping. Moore admits that he is unable to disprove the Cartesian dream hypothesis, but he adds that he has conclusive reasons for asserting that he is not dreaming (Moore 2006: 169). According to Moore, there are cases in which we have knowledge that we cannot prove. In this and his earlier texts (for example, *A Defence of Common Sense*), Moore advocates the position of Thomas Reid and the Scottish School of Common Sense which emerged as a reaction to the Humean skepticism.

In *Four Forms of Skepticism* More polemicizes with Bertrand Russell who claims that skeptical arguments are irrefutable.[67] Russel adds a hypothesis that the world might have been created five minutes ago, while having all traces of the past, and claims that we do not know simple things, such as "This is a pencil." According to Moore, Russell assumes that (1) we do not and cannot have any immediate knowledge about the external world; (2) such knowledge cannot be deductively inferred from what we know; (3) it is based on inductive inferences; (4) therefore, it is not certain but merely probable. Moore is willing to agree with the first three assumptions, but he utterly rejects the fourth one. As he concludes, all these four assumptions are less certain than a simple belief like "This is a pencil." (Moore 1959: 226; Lemos 2008: 331).

In *Certainty*, Moore agrees with skeptics that if he does not know whether he is dreaming, he does not know whether he is standing up and speaking. He also admits that he really does not know whether he is dreaming or not. He formulates

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67 "Scepticism, while logically impeccable, is psychologically impossible, and there is an element of frivolous insincerity in any philosophy which pretends to accept it." (Russell 1967: 11)

two equally correct if opposite arguments: one skeptical and one antiskeptical. The first one (I) is:

1. If I do not know that I am not dreaming, it follows that I do not know that I am standing up.
2. I do not know that I am not dreaming.
3. Therefore, I do not know that I am standing up.

It is strange that Moore accepts the second premise. Perhaps, this is because the counterargument (II) appears:

1. If I do not know that I am not dreaming, it follows I that I do not know that I am standing up.
2. I know that I am standing up.
3. Therefore I know that I am not dreaming (Moore 1959: 247; Lemos 2008: 334).

The second argument is antiskeptical and shows how one can dismiss in a logically correct manner a skeptical hypothesis based on an assumption of one case of knowledge about the world ("I know that I am standing up"). According to Moore, both these arguments are correct (DeRose 1999b: 5). Their second premises are of crucial importance; yet, in this case, a skeptic is in the same position as an antiskeptic. Thomas Baldwin (2010: 16) believes that Moore lost his orientation here and deviated from his path of commonsense refutation of skepticism. Lemos (2008: 334), however, considers this to be a rejection of the skeptical argument by making a similarly correct antiskeptical argument. These two Moore's arguments will be later explained by contextualists (DeRose 1999a).

Duncan Pritchard encapsulates the essence of Moore's response to skepticism in the following way: we have true knowledge about everyday objects, which is why skeptical hypotheses are false (Pritchard 2002b: 283).

Moore has been often criticized (Stroud 1979: 279–284) for missing the problem of skepticism and anticipating his conclusion already in the premises which presuppose the validity of commonsense knowledge. The skeptical problem, however, is that subjective experience can remain unchanged even if physical things no longer exist. Laurence Bonjour claims that Moore's reply to skepticism is not only unable to silence skeptics but also restricts epistemological analyses of knowledge; it excludes in advance the possibility that skepticism may be correct (Lemos 2008: 345). Despite this critique, the Moorean position is very popular today: it is defended, for instance, by Timothy Williamson (2000), Ernst Sosa (1999, 2000), Charles Landesman (2002: 7), Duncan Pritchard (2002b), Noah Lemos (2008: 340).

In his book *On Certainty*, Ludwig Wittgenstein criticizes Moore's account, or, more precisely, makes a different argument against skepticism and explains the certainty of the proposition "I have two hands" in his own terms. He tries to find a third way between skepticism and common sense philosophy (Coliva 2010: 3). According to Wittgenstein, Moore does not have to say that he has two hands and demonstrates the world's existence, since these facts are evident for every competent user of language who sees Moore. These propositions are described as "hinge propositions", which serve as a theoretical framework for empirical beliefs.

Wittgenstein provides the following examples of hinge propositions: "If I make an experiment I do not doubt the existence of the apparatus before my eyes. […] If I do a calculation I believe, without any doubts, that the figures on the paper aren't switching of their own accord […]." (OC 337) "When I am trying to mate someone in chess, I cannot have doubts about the pieces perhaps changing places of themselves and my memory simultaneously playing tricks on me so that I don't notice." (OC 346) Both the questions we rise and our doubts

> depend on the fact that some propositions are exempt from doubt, are as it were like hinges on which those turn. (OC 341)

> What would it be like to doubt now whether I have two hands? Why can't I imagine it at all? What would I believe if I didn't believe that? So far I have no system at all within which this doubt might exist. (OC 247)

Hinge propositions serve a specific function in the structure of human knowledge. Wittgenstein compares this function to hinges which allow doors to move, but are themselves "removed from the traffic" (OC 210). It means that in "ordinary circumstances these propositions are not used, uttered or even thought" (Czesna 2009: 86) However, they constitute the assumed theoretical frame of everyday experience and thinking. That is why Wittgenstein also calls them certainties, which are not questioned and do not require justification. They are attributed with objective certainty which excludes error within a language game in which we are engaged.

Wittgenstein criticizes Moore for failing to distinguish the certainties from ordinary empirical statements which can be erroneous and require justification: "my having two hands is not less certain before I have looked at them than afterwards." (OC 245) It is impossible to doubt or justify this fact, Wittgenstein argues, as it is not knowledge but part of a framework for knowledge – of a system which allows knowledge to emerge. Wittgenstein has a peculiar epistemological conception according to which knowledge and certainty belong to different categories. Knowledge excludes certainty, it is based on doubts, and where there is certainty, there is no point to speak of knowledge. This peculiar

conception underscores that the system of our beliefs contains such beliefs which do not need to be justified.

Wittgenstein's certainties constitute his argument against skepticism. What is crucial is his concept of language game as a theoretical framework for acting, speaking and thinking (forms of life). Language game is a specific system of concepts and rules which order and structure our information about the world. Wittgenstein writes that "all testing, all confirmation and disconfirmation of a hypothesis takes place already within a system." (OC 105) Beliefs constitute a system which contains at least two basic sets of propositions: hinge propositions ("The earth has existed for many years past" [OC411]) and empirical propositions.

This holistic structure does not allow for total skepticism. Hinge propositions cannot be doubted, they are certainties in an actual language game. Every game has its certainties (linguistic, personal, local or universal) and can be transformed (together with the certainties). That is why Wittgenstein writes: "If you are not certain of any fact, you cannot be certain of the meaning of your words either." (OC 114) "If you tried to doubt everything you would not get as far as doubting anything. The game of doubting itself presupposes certainty." (OC 115) Doubting requires particular reasons (OC 458) and is informed by particular assumptions: "A person can doubt only if he has learnt certain things; as he can miscalculate only if he has learnt to calculate." (Wittgenstein 1975: 410) A total skeptic (if such existed) would be unable to rise questions or doubt. If someone asks about something, he already assumes something. If someone doubts about the existence of his/her hands, why not in that case about the meaning of these words, too? (OC 456) This position is set against the Cartesian skepticism, but it leads to meaning skepticism, which will be discussed later in this volume.

Peter Strawson draws an analogy between the theory of hinge propositions and Hume's moderate skepticism. In this view, Wittgenstein endorses and develops Hume's naturalistic thesis that our thinking necessarily rests on some beliefs which cannot be doubted and do not need justification. These beliefs provide a theoretical framework for thinking and define the rules of assent. We acquire these beliefs through the upbringing process and social practice. While Hume pointed to our beliefs about the existence of object and the reliability of inductive conclusions, Wittgenstein supplemented this list with individual certainties, assuming that the list itself is changeable in time. If we doubt such beliefs, it means that we do not understand their role in our system of beliefs (Strawson 1985: 19).

This dismissal of skepticism as absurd was already expressed in Wittgenstein's early *Tractatus Logico Philosophicus*:

> Scepticism is not irrefutable, but palpably senseless, if it would doubt where a question cannot be asked. For doubt can only exist where there is a question; a question only where there is an answer, and this only where something can be said. (TLP 6.51)

This statement can be also treated as a reply to Russell's previously quoted opinion (which he repeated after Hume) that skepticism is logically irrefutable (even if it is futile and cannot remove common beliefs).[68]

Elsewhere, Russell adds that "doubt is possible with regard to all our common knowledge" (Russell 1996a: 73), but not to all at once. We can purify common knowledge through an internal enquiry, not on the basis of some external criterion. Philosophy enjoys the "authority to condemn the facts of experience and the laws of science." (Russell 1996a: 74) Russel apparently construes this logical irrefutability of skepticism in terms of the impossibility to exclude potential mistakes. He equates skepticism with fallibilism. The futility of skepticism lies in that it is too weak to negate the whole experience of which it is a part. A skeptic does not have access to any privileged point of view – his critique can be undertaken only from within knowledge, which is always silently assumed.

Wittgenstein offers a more radical assessment of skepticism and even goes on to describe it as "senseless". He makes a fundamental charge against skepticism, a charge which seems to put an end to all discussions concerning the possibility of its refutation or justification. What I have in mind is Wittgenstein's thesis that skepticism is an inconsistent position. A consistent skeptic, Wittgenstein argues, should remain silent. His words are doomed to be self-contradictory. Even to rise questions or express doubts he has to use language which entails countless unacknowledged or unrealized assumptions. Therefore, one may contend that the act of saying something presupposes some knowledge about the world, which is why no one can consistently claim to know nothing.

My previous analysis of the pragmatic inconsistency of skepticism in Sextus Empiricus and Hume, draws on Wittgenstein's theory of language games and hinge propositions, as I believe it to be the best explication of the inconsistency which for centuries has haunted all skeptical minds. The skeptical discourse is itself determined by insurmountable conditions and hidden assumptions, which can be revealed through an analysis of skeptical questions and hypotheses. It is because of these hidden assumptions that total skepticism is always internally contradictory. The content of the skeptical thesis that knowledge does not exist

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68 Bertrand Russell is a proponent of moderate skepticism or what he calls "a middle position"; he recognizes the uncertainty of knowledge, but he agrees that, in practice, it is best to govern oneself with reasonable probability (Russell 1996: 2).

stands in contradiction with the act of uttering this thesis (or, more precisely, with silent assumptions of this act, such as knowledge about the meanings of the words one uses, knowledge about one's own thoughts and consequently knowledge about the world).

As Avrum Stroll (2009; cf. 1994) observes, "late" Wittgenstein dwells on the Cartesian dream hypothesis in spite of his earlier conclusion that radical skepticism is senseless. According to Stroll, Wittgenstein turned back to it because he believed it to be the most important skeptical hypotheses (OC 383, 676; Wittgenstein 1975: 396). However, Stroll believes that Wittgenstein's analysis of the dream hypothesis only confirms the thesis that skepticism is senseless. "Am I asleep?" makes sense only when someone finds out that he/she inherited a fortune from a distant relative. In that case, it is simply an expression of astonishment. But it makes no sense when someone is really asleep. For every statement, in order to make sense, must be uttered by a waking subject. Thus, the statement "I am asleep" refutes itself in very much the same way as in the case of the liar paradox. Either I am asleep and do not state anything, or I am asleep and my statement is false. When an unconscious person says "I'm unconscious", when a parrot says "I don't understand a word" or a gramophone: "I'm only a machine", their words do not make any sense even if they are true (Wittgenstein 1975: 396). If Moore believed that the dream hypothesis is consistent and requires a proof, Wittgenstein considers it to be inconsistent and dismisses it as senseless. If the skeptical position cannot be coherently maintained, there is nothing to refute. Moore's counterargument is simply unneeded. According to Stroll, Wittgenstein's position can be encapsulated as follows: "such forms of radical scepticism cannot even be coherently formulated, and […] any attempt to do so is palpable nonsense." (Stroll 2009: 690)

In spite of his explicit rejection of skepticism as an inconsistent position, there are reasons to consider Wittgenstein's own position as a specific kind of skepticism. What is of special importance here is his thesis (TLP 6.54) which draws heavily on the Sextan metaphor of throwing away the ladder (Witthegenstein might have borrowed it from Schopenhauer who repeatedly cited Sextus's *Against the Logicians*):

> My propositions serve as elucidations in the following way: anyone who understands me eventually recognizes them as nonsensical, when he has used them – as steps – to climb out through them, on them, over them (He must, so to speak, throw away the ladder after he has climbed up it. (TLP 6. 54)

There are two interpretations of this thesis. According to the standard interpretation, Wittgenstein, at the end of *Tractatus*, dismisses his earlier theses as erroneous. In this case, Wittgenstein's propositions resemble rungs of the Tractarian

ladder: he utters them only in order to be able to climb up and then rejects them (McManus 2004a: 139). According to the second interpretation, *Tractatus* does not present any philosophical doctrine, which is why there is nothing to reject. In light of both these interpretations, Wittgenstein, like Sextus, makes statements without assent.

Wittgenstein declares that his aim is to philosophize in a way which does not consist in putting forward theses, doctrines or theories, but which is precisely a practice without theory, a kind of therapy which cures from problems. Philosophical problems should utterly vanish, melt like a sugar cube dropped into water. "The object of philosophy is the logical clarification of thoughts. Philosophy is not a theory but an activity. […] The result of philosophy is not a number of 'philosophical propositions' but to make propositions clear." (TLP 4.112) Thus, philosophy is a discourse without assent, a practice without theory, a therapy which ultimately erases philosophical problems.

The analogies with Sextus are evident here. Wittgenstein's reply to skepticism can be seen as a therapy which allows one to see that the problem of skepticism is based on misunderstanding. Sextus also accepted the self-refutation of his own theses. And if, in spite of all that, he was a proponent of skepticism, it simply follows that he was inconsistent. Wittgenstein avoids making this mistake, but his rejection of theory brings him close to Sextus. He shows that his position is informed with skepticism even if he does not explicitly admit it.

We may also find other skeptical theses in *Tractatus*: "say nothing except what can be said, i.e. propositions of natural science" (TLP 6.53) "What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence." (TLP 7) "When the answer cannot be put into words, neither can the question be put into words." (TLP 6.5) These theses can be read as refutations of skepticism (a skeptic says what should pass over in silence), but they can also be read as expressions of skepticism (natural sciences and the practice of thinking are allowable, but all theories, and especially philosophy, are condemned to failure). But what we cannot speak about we can also show. Robert Fogelin is right to notice the tension between the "neo-Pyrrhonian" and "non-Pyrrhonian" positions: in his skepticism regarding philosophy, Wittgenstein is a follower of Pyrrho, but insofar as he prefers a kind of philosophical holism over skeptical refutations, he is indeed a non-Pyrrhonian (Fogelin 1994: 205).

Saul Kripke will find a new form of philosophical skepticism (i.e. meaning skepticism) in Wittgenstein's *Investigations*. I shall return to this later.

1.3. Phenomenology and Existentialism

Edmund Husserl (1859–1938) officially rejects skepticism, but just as his predecessors, Descartes and Kant, he also follows the trail of skeptical concepts (*epochē*, the questioning of the world's existence, etc.). On the one hand, Husserl, in his *Philosophy as Rigorous Science*, sets an ambitious aim to make one more attempt at defining philosophy as a science. He suggest we should overcome skepticism and historicism as expressions of lack of faith in the possibility of acquiring certain and utterly justified knowledge. He writes that skepticism cannot – and does not have to – be accepted: it does not have to be accepted because the hitherto failures of philosophy do not diminish the hope for achieving this aim in the future; and it cannot be accepted because this would contradict the ideal of man as a rational being (Galewicz 1983: 158). Against skeptics (but employing their own method of *epochē*), Husserl searches for a realm of irrefutable knowledge. He ultimately finds it in self-consciousness and *a priori* propositions.

On the other hand, however, Husserl is the 20th-century most famous proponent of *epochē*. In Husserl's terms, the operation of *epochē*, also called "phenomenological reduction", is a specific transformation of its ancient counterpart. It is a methodological means which involves an operation of "putting everything in brackets" and a suspension (or "disconnection") of common beliefs, especially the one concerning the world's existence. This belief is not a separate act, but it is a constituent of all our judgments about the world. *Epochē* is a withdrawal of this belief, but not so that it is negated, turned into a supposition or called into question. Husserl insists that his *epochē* is not based on the Cartesian doubt because it is not aimed to question the world's existence. The belief in the world's existence is not erased – it is merely suspended, "put in brackets". *Epochē* emerges as a form of consciousness which is combined with – or built over – the original simple consciousness. As a result of its presence, the subject does not use this belief, acts as if it never existed, even if it still pertains "in brackets". The phenomenological *epochē* is based on acceptance of the truth of a suspended thesis. It is only withdrawn from being held. Husserl is thereby able to adjust his *epochē* to the requirements of psychology: "I do not *deny* this 'world' as though I were a sophist; I do not *doubt that it is there* as though I were a skeptic; but I use the 'phenomenological' ἐποχή which *completely bars* me *from using any judgment* that *concerns spatio-temporal existence* (*Dasein*)" (Husserl 2012: 59) *Epochē* is applied not only to the common belief in the existence of the world but also to all scientific propositions which presuppose it. "Thus *all sciences which relate to this natural world*, though they stand never so firm to me, though they fill me with wondering admiration, though I am far from any thought of objecting to them

in the least degree, *I disconnect them all.*" (Husserl 2012: 59) All propositions of these science are "put in brackets": they are maintained but they no longer lay claim to legitimacy. Data of consciousness, which resemble phenomena described by ancient skeptics, become the object of *epochē*.

In his relation to skepticism, Husserl position comes close both to Kant who accepted the skeptical method and to Descartes who was a methodic skeptic. Similarly to Kant, Husserl rejects both dogmatism and skepticism as two different misconceptions of the functioning of consciousness. Skepticism is described as an exaggerated absolutization of the world. Following the Kantian solution, Husserl assumes that things in the world are constituted by the mind, that knowledge is a construction. However, he corrects Kant in that he rejects the concept of things in themselves and purifies the concept of mind, elevating it to the status of the transcendental I, which is not so much a part of the world as the condition of its existence. It removes all skeptical questions by changing the object of knowledge (the world is our construction). From the realist perspective, however, this amounts to a specific assimilation of skepticism.

Contemporary philosophers have often rejected skepticism by transforming, or, more precisely, weakening the concept of knowledge. In the 20th century, Husserl was the only influential thinker who tried to respond to skepticism, while maintaining the strong concept of knowledge. Nonetheless, his response proved ineffective because – like Kant's response – it was based on a hidden assimilation of skepticism. According to Abraham Dean Stone, Husserl intended to reject skepticism and at the same time was himself skeptical about the existence of the external world (Stone 2000: 3). For he accepted the assumption that the world's existence is doubtful and requires a proof.

Martin Heidegger (1889–1976) has weakened Husserl's concept of knowledge, thereby resolving the problem of skepticism. He is not interested in criticizing skepticism because, as he believes, it neither can nor has to be refuted:

> The usual refutation of skepticism, that denies either the being or the knowability of "truth", gets stuck halfway. What it shows by means of formal argumentation is simply the fact that when someone judges, truth has been presupposed. […] Moreover, one fails to recognize the fact that truth is already presupposed even when no one *judges* insofar as Dasein is at all.

> A skeptic can no more be refuted than the being of truth can be ever "proved". If the skeptic, who denies the truth, factically *is*, and has understood himself in this being, he has extinguished Dasein, and thus truth, in the despair of suicide. […] It has no more been demonstrated that there has ever "been" a real "skeptic" (although that is what has, at bottom, been believed in the refutations of skepticism. (SZ 229)

Firstly, according to Heidegger, it is impossible to be a consistent skeptic who does not assume any truth. The very existence of the subject presupposes truth. A consistent skeptic can reject truth only by "extinguishing" himself. No one ever demonstrated that there has ever been a real skeptic. Secondly, it is impossible to prove falsity of skepticism (as every proof is based on some assumed truth). It makes no sense to try to refute skepticism by means of formal argumentations, as they already presuppose the existence of skeptics. Thirdly, Heidegger disregards skepticism as a non-existent position based on a fundamental misconception of man's cognitive position. At the same time, however, both his discussion with Husserl and his project of hermeneutical philosophy suggest that he rejected the possibility of certain knowledge. We know truth but not with certainty. Truth is anthropological, concealed and partial. Heidegger is a fallibilist, not a skeptic.

Heidegger also dismisses as senseless skepticism regarding the external world's existence. For we are beings in the world. Knowledge is possible through different non-cognitive relations between the subject and things in the world. We do not need to infer the existence of the world from our consciousness data. Against Descartes, Heidegger claims that consciousness is never autonomous. Therefore, questions concerning the existence of the world are pointless:

> The question of whether there is a world at all and whether its being can be demonstrated, makes no sense at all if it is raised by Da-sein as being-in-the-world-and who else should ask it? […] world is essentially disclosed *with the being* of Da-sein; […] what is real, too, is discoverable only on the basis of a world already disclosed. And only on this basis can what is real still *remain concealed*. […]

> The entanglement of these questions and the confusion of what one would like to demonstrate with what is demonstrated and with what guides the demonstration, is shown in Kant's "Refutation of Idealism". Kant calls it "a scandal of philosophy and human reason in general" that there is still no cogent proof for "the existence of things outside us" which will do away with any skepticism. […]

> The "scandal of philosophy" does not consist in the fact that this proof is still lacking up to now, but *in the fact that such proofs are expected and attempted again and again*. (SZ 203–205)

The subject is not isolated from the world, but he is always in the world. The notion of being-in-the-world, as Heidegger has it, signifies an "unthematic" immersion in the world, or an intimate, non-cognitive relationship with the world which "occurs basis of a familiarity" (SZ 76) In light of these ontological assumptions, it is impossible to be both a subject and a skeptic. If someone declares himself to be a skeptic, it means that he is reluctant to reflect on his own thinking and falls into contradiction.

At the beginning of the 20th century philosophy, skepticism was evaluated as a position based either on a mistaken axiology (James) or on inconsistencies (Wittgenstein, Heidegger). However, the Cartesian hypotheses have found a new proponent and initiated a new discussion about the possibility of human knowledge.

2. Peter Unger and Contemporary Cartesian Skepticism

2.1. Knowledge as an Absolute Limit Term

Peter Unger (born 1942) is the most famous contemporary thinker who declares himself to be a skeptic. In *A Defense of Skepticism* (1971) he expresses his skepticism about knowledge, claiming that to know something is to know it for certain. This last claim leads him to conclude that people know nearly nothing. Along these lines, even own thesis is treated merely as a rational guess ("it may be reasonable for us to suppose the thesis to be true"; Unger 2003: 91). This early version of Unger's skepticism is moderate, as he believes that we know nearly nothing but we are able to hold rational beliefs.

In his later book (1975), Unger radicalizes his position and argues not only that we know nothing but also that we are unable to hold rational beliefs (Unger 1975: 1). His main argument in favor of skepticism is based on an observation that our language contains absolute limit terms, e.g. adjectives like "flat", "straight", "dry", "empty" or "full". When we add a modifier "absolutely" to these terms, it does not alter their meaning and is therefore redundant (Unger 2003: 98). These terms are not gradable, which is why it sounds peculiar to say that "this is flat and that is more flat." Nonetheless, there are also other terms, like "bumpy", which are gradable: there is no absolute "bumpiness" that would be approximated by individual instances of "bumpy" things.

According to Unger, the adjective "certain" is another absolute term. "It is certain that *p*" means, "It is not at all doubtful that *p*." (Unger 1975: 99) Just as there are no objects to which the term "flat" in an absolute sense can be applied, so it makes no sense to modify the term "certain" by adding "absolutely". It is better to suspend judgment than claim that something is absolutely certain (Unger 2003: 103). However, Unger, disagreeing with Chisholm and others, returns to the traditional view that knowledge requires certainty. The term "knowledge" thereby becomes a limit term.

Unger makes a linguistic argument: it is inconsistent to say that I know something but I'm not certain of it (Unger 2003: 105; Szymura 2005a: 154). He believes this argument to be analogical to Moore's paradox: "*p*, but I don't believe

that *p*." Just as to say that *p* is to silently assume that *p* is true, so to say "I know" is to silently assume that "I'm certain" (Unger 1975: 258).

Therefore, Unger writes, if I know in the proper sense of the word, then I know for sure. Since we are not certain about anything, there is nothing that we know. Knowledge, which is based on an absolute term ("certain"), becomes an absolute concept, too. This view, Unger argues, should provoke either acceptance or, at least, a suspension of the opposite judgment. The concept of certain knowledge leads to skepticism.

Unger invokes ancient Pyrrhonism and claims that his skepticism, as a recognition of ignorance, leads to the quietness of spirit and lack of emotional bond with objects. "For, if nobody ever really knows anything, then nobody will ever be angry, or happy, or surprised about anything." (Unger 1975: 186).

In his book *Ignorance* (1975) Unger deals with skepticism about knowledge ("No one ever knows anything about anything"), but he believes that it entails also skepticism about the possibility of rational justification ("No one is ever *justified* or at all *reasonable* in believing anything"). Being justified requires having reasons – if we do not know anything about anything, it follows that we cannot provide any justifying reasons (Unger 1974: 80). Being familiar with the skeptical tradition, Unger knows that the skeptical thesis concerning justification is self-refuting and immediately raises the question of why should we even take it seriously, let alone accept it. For the very acceptance of it is irrational on its own grounds.

Nonetheless, Unger writes that he is not afraid of this contradiction:

> Even if my arguments should terminate in genuine paradoxes, and in plain contradictions, that may be no fault of the arguments; indeed, it may make clear their whole point. For if there is something wrong with the language in which they receive substance and expression, this might be expected. Hence, in such a case, we may best regard the sceptical reasonings as indirect arguments against the suppositions embodied in our language, or against our common sense beliefs, which are given substance in its terms. (Unger 1975: 6)

Skepticism, then, appears to be inconsistent on the surface, but it is not mistaken (cf. Poczobut 2000: 371; Priest 2004: 29). Rather, it reveals deep problems inherent in our language and thinking. It is a good point of departure to change our common notions and beliefs.

Unger seems to adopt a dialectical interpretation of skepticism. The skeptical discourse is described in terms of argumentation *ad absurdum*. A skeptic does not state anything but merely shows a paradox inherent in the established concept of knowledge.

According to Unger, skepticism is unique in the depth of its arguments and in the impossibility of disproving them. In this respect, he agrees both with David Hume and Bertrand Russell. All attempts to refute skepticism, Unger argues, missed the point – even the greatest philosophers were unable to deal with these arguments. Unger poses a simple hypothesis that this is because these arguments are not mistaken but true.

The essence of the skeptical argument is their specific language in which words like "knowledge", "certainty", "rationality" are understood in the strong sense. The skeptic is interested, not in how we use the word "knowledge", but in what are necessary requirements for knowledge. The conditions in which these terms are used are very different from the conditions dictated by their meanings. We use them in a liberal manner, while skeptics seek to reminding us about their strong (and proper) sense.

Far from being content with contemporary philosophy of language, which he believes to make philosophy unnecessary, Unger argues that the development of knowledge requires a revision of common notions (instead of their uncritical analysis). If skeptics are right, it follows that common thinking, albeit useful, cannot remain unchanged. One may interpret this as a reply to Keith Lehrer suggestion that skepticism should be refuted by rejecting the philosophical concept of knowledge in favor of its common version which does not require certainty.

Apart from this argument of knowledge, Unger makes an argument against the existence of bodies and even goes on to defend the absurd thesis that "I do not exist". His argument takes the form of a decomposition sorites and are based on the heap paradox described by Eubulides, a Megarian: "Imagine a heap of sand. If you remove one grain, is it still a heap? Certainly. What if you remove all grains one by one? Is it still a heap? Well, it is not. But when exactly did it cease to be a heap?" Tables and chairs are composed of numerous atoms. If you remove one atom, it does not make any significant difference. But when you remove all atoms, it will no longer make sense to say that any of these things exists (Unger 2006b: 38). According to Unger, since we do not want to deny that a table is composed of a definite number of atoms and removing a single atom does not make it non-existent, we have to admit that tables do not exist at all (Unger 2006b: 39).

The decomposition sorites is also used as an argument against the existence of oneself. This time Unger uses a concept of the biological cell which is a basic element of the human living body. My body consists of a definite number of cells. Removing one or several cells does not make it non-existent. However, when all cells are removed, it no longer makes sense to say that the body still exists (Unger 2006b: 44). As distinct from a table, the human body is alive and conscious.

Unger describes a thought experiment in which the life and consciousness of the body are artificially maintained: natural cells are one by one replaced with synthetic ones. Even a brain in a vat (which will be discussed later) can have all its cells replaced with their synthetic counterparts. Unger shocks his readers by claiming that a person undergoing this experiment does not disappear because he never was there in the first place (Unger 2006b: 46). However, the philosopher later admits that this was only a provocation.

For Unger, these arguments undermine our common beliefs about things as well as natural languages (whose terms relate to things) and scientific theses (which presuppose the existence of things, animals and persons). Physical sciences examine elementary particles which are also doubtful. Even mathematics is called into question, since, if there are no people, no one can understand its propositions. In this respect, Unger resembles Sextus Empiricus who questioned all sciences in *Against the Professors*. And similarly to Sextus's *Against the Logicians*, Unger accepts the self-refutation of his own position: since there are no people, no one can consider the validity of the sorites arguments presented above. Unger does not consider this self-refutation as a failure of his skepticism, but he believes it to be a demonstration of the inconsistency of our language and thought (Unger 2006b: 51). All these theses were proposed only in order to make the argument *ad absurdum*.[69]

Unger shows the provisionality of our concepts and words and the continuity of nature which escapes the sharp boundaries we wish to impose. All things we distinguish for practical reasons are not isolated objects, as they are implicated in an exchange with everything that surrounds them. The number of atoms constituting them continues to change. That is not to say that things are not there. It only means that the objects delineated by our concepts do not exists because their boundaries are always blurred.

Unger's thesis concerning the non-existence of one's own body is a provocation which we cannot accept. The existence of one's own body is the most certain of all things. The content of the concept "my body" can be imprecise, but the very existence of one's body cannot be reasonably questioned. Nonetheless, Unger is right to say that certain knowledge of one's existence is not predicative nor verbal, while the rest of self-knowledge remains uncertain.

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69   In the process, Unger even suggests that the concepts of atom and cell are also doubtful.

2.2. Hypothesis of the Evil Scientist and Brain-in-a-Vat

Besides his drawing on ancient Pyrrhonism, Unger writes that his aim is to become a contemporary Descartes. In the vein of the evil demon hypothesis, which he calls the most important and classic skeptical hypothesis, he formulates its newer version based on contemporary knowledge and science fiction literature. In Unger's version, an evil scientist replaces the evil demon (Unger 1975: 7–8).

Let us take the example of any belief about the external world, e.g. that there are rocks. Now, imagine an evil scientist who can artificially induce experiences. He first drills holes painlessly in people's sculls, then implants his electrodes into the appropriate parts of their brains and sends electrical impulses into them. The electrodes are connected by wires to a laboratory console on which the scientist plays, pursuing his deceptive designs. The scientist is delighted that he was able to deceive someone (for example, yourself) that there are rocks.[70]

This hypothesis is part of the following skeptical argument: (1) If you know that there are rocks, then you know that there is no evil scientist manipulating your beliefs; (2) No one can know that there is no evil scientist tricking us into falsely believing there to be rocks; (3) Therefore, you never know that there are rocks. Generalizing this conclusion, we obtain the thesis of global skepticism: "nobody ever *knows* anything about the external world." (Unger 1975: 8)

Unger beliefs this argument to be very compelling. It is impossible to disprove it, for we are unable to dismiss the hypotheses on which it is based. And if we quickly forget our skeptical inclinations, Unger argues, it is only because we "fall back on comfortable, habitual thinking of 'common sense'" (Unger 1975: 9).

Unger's critics argued very much in the vein of George Edward Moore that the argument can be reversed and one may claim that the scientist (or demon) does

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70 Unger's full description goes as follows: "Evil scientist deceiving him into falsely believing that there are rocks. This scientist uses electrodes to induce experiences and thus carries out his deceptions, concerning the existence of rocks or anything else. He first drills holes painlessly in the variously coloured skulls, or shells, of his subjects and then im- plants his electrodes into the appropriate parts of their brains, or protoplasm, or systems. He sends patterns of electrical impulses into them through the electrodes, which are themselves connected by wires to a laboratory console on which he plays, punching various keys and buttons in accordance with his ideas of how the whole thing works and with his deceptive designs. The scientist's de- light is intense, and it is caused not so much by his exercising his scientific and intellectual gifts as by the thought that he is deceiving various subjects about all sorts of things. Part of that delight is caused, on this supposition, by his thought that he is deceiving a certain person, perhaps yourself, into falsely believing that there are rocks" (Unger 1975: 7).

not deceive us, since we know that there are rocks (Smith 1981: 271). If I know that there are rocks, I do not have to think about any demon (knowledge does not require us to consider such possibilities); moreover, the demon itself may induce true beliefs. According to Smith, Unger is unable to negate knowledge – what he negates is only knowledge about knowledge and about justification. Even if the demon really influences us, our believes still can be true and thus a form of knowledge (Smith 1981: 273).

A continuation of Unger's argument is the famous hypothesis of brain-in-a-vat. In 1981, Robert Nozick and Hilary Putnam published two independent books in which they discussed the problem of skepticism based on the example of this hypothesis. Nozick wrote that he was inspired by science fiction literature. Neither of them mentioned Unger, although his influence can be chronologically justified. Putnam offered the best formulation of this hypothesis:

> Imagine that a human being (you can imagine this to be yourself) has been subjected to an operation by an evil scientist. The person's brain (your brain) has been removed from the body and placed in a vat of nutrients which keeps the brain alive. The nerve endings have been connected to a super-scientific computer which causes the person whose brain it is to have the illusion that everything is perfectly normal. There seem to be people, objects, the sky, etc.; but really all the person (you) is experiencing is the result of electronic impulses travelling from the computer to the nerve endings. (Putnam 1981: 5–6, cf. 1999: 30)[71]

According to Unger, Putnam and others, the brain-in-a-vat hypothesis has a Cartesian structure. It is a contemporary version of the unresolved evil demon hypothesis (with a scientist replacing the demon). The hypothesis has been developed during further discussions. The main focus is placed on the brain in a vat representing the whole person. The vat with the brain is located on Alpha Centauri, where there are no earthly objects – this makes it easier to demonstrate that all beliefs held by the victims of the experiment are false. Even if the brain thinks "This is my hand", it is necessarily false, since the brain is disconnected from the body. The laboratory on Alpha Centauri is equipped with ultramodern computers able to perfectly imitate the stimuli which are naturally triggered through the body.

The brain disconnected from the rest of the body receives artificial stimuli together with ready-made beliefs (for example, concerning its own situation).

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71 Nozick's version goes as follows: "Could you not be floating in a tank while super-psychologists stimulate your brain electrochemically to produce exactly the same experiences as you now having, or even to produce the whole sequence of experiences you have had in your lifetime thus far?" (Nozick 1981: 167).

It can have both a false belief that it is eating breakfast in its house and a true belief that it is a brain in a vat. It all depends on the caprice of the evil scientist. Putnam unfolds his vision of the whole mankind functioning in such laboratory conditions.

Daniel Dennett presents the brain-in-a-vat hypothesis in the following way:

> Suppose evil scientists [in plural! – R. Z.] removed your brain from your body while you slept, and set it up in a life-support system in a vat. Suppose they then set out to trick you into believing that you were not just a brain in a vat, but still up and about, engaging in a normally embodied round of activities in the real world. (Dennett 1993: 3)

According to Dennett, this experiment is logically possible but today it is technologically unworkable. The brain in a vat would have to remain in a comma and scientists would be able to wake it up by sending aural or tactile impulses. Yet, it would be very hard to simulate the functioning of the disconnected body. Producing a sustained illusion of the reality would require countless amounts of information which even a supercomputer is unable to provide. "Making a *real* but counterfeit coin is child's play; making a simulated coin out of nothing but organized nerve stimulations is beyond human technology now and probably forever." (Dennett 1993: 3) Hallucinations of various sensations, afterimages, pain in a non-existent limb are all possible. In everyday lifer, hallucinations of an object, which subsists in time, which can be touched, walked around, looked at from different perspectives, and which casts a shadow, are rare. But such cases are described by clinical psychology. What we cannot artificially produce is performed by our brain as a result of its dysfunction. However, clinical reports reveal a singular passivity of hallucinators: they "usually just stand and marvel", fell no desire to touch, probe, challenge or enter any interaction with the apparitions. (Dennett 1993: 9).

Even though such perfect artificial stimulation is now only a theory, the brain-in-a-vat hypothesis has become the main reference point of contemporary discussions concerning skepticism. Especially skepticism concerning knowledge has been focused around this hypothesis. Before I will proceed to present the most important strategies employed against the Cartesian skepticism, I shall discuss several other contemporary proponents of skepticism.

2.3. Other Protagonists of Skepticism

Unger is not the only contemporary philosopher who can be described as a proponent of skepticism. In Anglo-Saxon philosophy, Barry Stroud has repeatedly insisted that skepticism should be taken seriously. He is a critic of Moore's antiskeptical arguments as well as all naturalist and externalist arguments. Hitherto,

he argues, there has been no satisfactory reply to skepticism. In fact, skepticism as a question concerning the possibility of any knowledge about the world is the basis of epistemology (Stroud 1979: 288). "We must somehow come to terms with the threat of philosophical scepticism if we are ever to get the kind of understanding we seek of the nature and possibility of human knowledge." (Stroud 1979: 277) Because of this voice of protest against the disregard of skepticism, Stroud has been often associated with the skeptical position, even if he never declared himself to be a skeptic.

Thomas Nagel recognizes a close relationship between skepticism and a striving toward objectivity. Skepticism seeks to pursue this aim, driven by a desire to achieve "the view from nowhere". In spite of this desire, Nagel argues, every human being are bound to perceive the world from his or her viewpoint (Nagel 1986: 70). "The search for objective knowledge, because of its commitment to a realistic picture, is inescapably subject to skepticism and cannot refute it but must proceed under its shadow." (Nagel 1986: 71) This ontological position makes us have "doubts […] that cannot be finally laid to rest" (Nagel 1986: 67) Nagel seems to argue that skeptical doubts and arguments are invincible. However, he believes that skeptics will not have the last word, since the very desire that drives skepticism is also a continuing source of dissatisfaction with the subjective picture leading to new efforts to acquire knowledge (Nagel 1986: 75).

In his *Pyrrhonian Reflections on Knowledge and Justification*, Robert Fogelin (1994: 9) describes his position as neo-Pyrrhonism. Similarly to Sextus Empiricus, he considers his own arguments as temporary and self-refuting, and interprets his skepticism in dialectical terms. After using them in his polemic against contemporary dogmatists, he will throw them away like a ladder which is no longer of any use. His analysis of contemporary theories of justification leads him to conclude that none of them provides a sufficient response to Agrippa's trilemma, even though they try to deal with the same subject of a possibility of rational justification. Since Agrippa's times, Fogelin argues, there has been no progress made in this regard. The trilemma can be still used to refute any proposition (Fogelin 1994: 116). According to Fogelin, radical hypotheses which can be refuted as senseless or inconsistent by means of transcendental arguments are not required in order to pose the problem of skepticism. It is enough to take into account the simple aim of eliminating the possibility error (Fogelin 1994: 94).

Recently, Bryan Frances (2005, 2006) declared himself to be a specific kind of skeptic. He listed several skeptical hypotheses based on the newest scientific developments. The popular brain-in-a-vat hypothesis, which I have discussed above, is described by Frances as academic and as posing no challenge to our common

beliefs. He refers to physics which calls into question the existence of colors and to neuroscience which questions the existence of beliefs or character traits and which locates the source of pain, not in body parts, but in the brain. For Frances, these are still valid hypotheses respected by many eminent experts. They are the source of contemporary skepticism which is able to undermine many common beliefs (Frances 2008: 230). According to critics, however, Frances's hypotheses based on the opinion of experts are unable to call into question common beliefs about colors, pain or character traits; they only can temporarily weaken force of these beliefs. Common psychology is still successful in explaining and anticipating human conduct (Adler 2011: 519). One may also add that common beliefs and scientific theses can be contradictory only in verbal terms, but they can be reconciled as different levels of description of the same phenomena. The practice of specifying common-sense notions by science has a long history, and because it is perceived as typical, we are rather unwilling to describe it as skepticism.

Skeptical declarations have been also made in continental philosophy. Odo Marquard, for example, declares himself to be a proponent of hermeneutical skepticism. He believes that "the core of hermeneutic is skepticism, and the important form of skepticism today is hermeneutics." (Marquard 1989: 18) Skepticism is not an absolute communicate – it is implicated in human life which is too short to gain self-understanding. Skepticism is a philosophy of finitude, a "farewell to a principle philosophy" (Marquard 1989: 17). Marquard follows Sextus Empiricus in claiming that skepticism has always signified a readiness to live according to established customs if there are no compelling reasons to deviate from them (Marquard 1989: 14). Skepticism's doubt is "a manifold sense of the *isosthenes diaphonia* (evenly balanced disagreement), the balance, not only of conflicting dogmas, but also of conflicting realities" (Marquard 1989: 17) Skepticism is a constructive practice of isostheny which makes it possible to think in spite of contradictions (Boroń 2011: 86). As Marquard writes, "contradictions ought, if necessary, be born, and their apparent solution resisted." (Marquard 1989: 6) The acceptance of contradictions is that additional element which makes Marquard position different from typical fallibilism.

Emil Cioran (1911–1995) shows the inconsistency of the Sextan skepticism which results in "absolute inaction – an extremity conceivable in theory, inaccessible in fact." (Cioran 1970: 83) Coran reject the conception of happiness as the absence of sensations. The Sextan skeptic is a "living dead man" (Cioran 1970: 85) who, paradoxically enough, reduces wisdom to conformism. Thus, skepticism is seen as the decadence of an epoch or civilization (Dąmbska 148a 85). Cioran shows how the ancient skeptic, driven to the extreme of subtlety and

committed to the absence of sensations, goes hand by hand with a barbarian (Cioran 1970: 82) According to Cioran, in skepticism reason splits and contradicts itself. However, "it is logically impossible to set ourselves above reason in order to acknowledge or contest its validity, for there is no proceeding superior to reason, no pronouncement which does not emanate from it." (Cioran 1970: 78–79) Similarly to Hume, Cioran accuses Sextus of misunderstanding human psychology and our implication in the world. At the same time, Cioran himself underscores the omnipresence of illusions and seems to champion a pessimistic and self-questioning form of skepticism. It is this radical pessimism that makes it impossible to describe his position simply as fallibilism.

Also the rejection of the idea of objectivity by Richard Rorty and other postmodern thinkers has a skeptical dimension (Rorty 1991: 21). Rorty describes himself as an ironist. One may interpret this declaration as an allusion to Ernst Renan who also called himself this way and considered irony as a means to overcome the inconsistency of skepticism. An ironist is someone who speaks without asserting. As we have already seen, this is a possible way of maintaining a skeptical position. Rorty writes that his "edifying" philosophy is parasitic on constructive theories (Rorty 2009: 377). This resembles the situation of skeptics who cannot make do without their opponent, as their position is not autonomous. Rorty, like most of analytical and continental philosophers, accepts fallibilism and rejects skepticism.

However, skeptical declarations and arguments still remain on the margins of contemporary philosophical literature on skepticism, as it is dominated by different and numerous attempts to reject this position.

3. The Discussion with the Cartesian Skepticism

Contemporary philosophy is swarmed by a variety of polemics against skepticism, especially its version based on the brain-in-a-vat hypothesis. These polemics can be systematized depending on which skeptical assumption they aim to call into question.

3.1. Knowledge Does Not Require Certainty (Fallibilism)

Keith Lehrer has proposed a simple way of rejecting skepticism: we should abandon the concept of knowledge requiring certainty. When skeptics say that knowledge does not exist, what they have in mind is certain knowledge (after all, the strongest form of skepticism emanates from hypotheses concerning the possibility of illusion). But when people, in everyday life, say that they know something,

they use a different concept of knowledge, one which does not lay claim to certainty. And as soon as we abandon our claims to certainty, the whole skeptical argumentation no longer concerns us; the possibility of error or the lack of truth guarantee is simply insignificant. Skeptics, in turn, do not claim anything more than that we cannot gain certainty (Lehrer 1974: 239).

One may claim that Lehrer almost entirely agrees with skeptics – the only difference is that he repudiates their concept of knowledge. He admits that skeptical arguments are semantically correct and logically consistent, that people are indeed prone to error and illusion, and that having certain knowledge requires the exclusion of the possibility of error. He agrees that our beliefs do not have a guarantee of truth and our knowledge lacks certainty. He even goes on to argue that there is no proof of the falsity of the skeptical position and that it comes closer to truth than many other epistemological positions. However, according to Lehrer, skeptics employ a concept of knowledge which is no longer of our interest. For they lay claim to certainty. If we abandon these claims, skeptical arguments will no longer concern us (Lehrer 1974: 239).

Willard Van Orman Quine writes that the problem of skepticism has not been resolved since David Hume. "The Humean predicament", he writes, "is also human predicament" (Quine 1969: 72) Quine is a fallibilist when he claims that no proposition is free from revision. If skepticism amounts to fallibilism, then Quine, like Hume, has no problem with this kind of skepticism. After having claimed that skeptical arguments are invincible, Hume never ceased to philosophize, but he turned to describe feelings, morality and politics. Philosophy and science are not certain, but this does not make them impossible. Quine, on the one hand, accepts skeptical arguments and, on the other, ignores them as insignificant to science (Landesman 2002: 187). This may explain why Barry Stroud and Michael Williams criticize Quine for not having an efficient reply to skepticism and even for being a skeptic. What should be underscored here, is a distinction between skepticism and fallibilism which sometimes functions as moderate skepticism. Typically for American pragmatism, Quine accepts fallibilism, but he does not accept skepticism which undermines the validity of science or common beliefs, negating all knowledge. Fallibilism is a reply to skepticism because it provides conceptual foundations for the existence of knowledge in spite of uncertainty. In contemporary philosophy, especially in neopragmatism, hermeneutics and postmodern thought, fallibilism is an obvious position to take.

The fallibilist reply to skepticism has been criticized by Alexander Harper who claims that refutable knowledge is a paradox because it combines the condition of truth with the idea of weak justification. A fulfillment of this condition,

in turn, is left to accident. If we do not know whether we are brains in vats, then we are unable to recognize true judgments. Fallibilism leads to a kind of second-order skepticism which assumes that we do not know whether we know anything (Harper 2010: 355). It seems, however, that Harper misses the point when he suggests that the Cartesian certainty is required for second-order knowledge. Fallibilism can be defended by claiming that its weaker conditions for first-order knowledge can be also applied to the second-order one.

3.2. Knowledge is Not Governed by Deductive Rules (Nozick)

An example of subtle discussions against philosophical skepticism is the position developed by Robert Nozick who explicitly addresses the brain-in-a-vat hypothesis and tries to deal with skepticism by disproving even simple and evident arguments regarding knowledge. It is another attempt to weaken the concept of knowledge – this time by rejecting the transmissibility principle for knowledge.

Nozick admits that we indeed do not know whether the brain-in-a-vat hypothesis described the actual state of affairs. "There is no way we can know it is happening for there is no way we could tell if it were happening." (Nozick 1981: 201) This compromise with skepticism seems to imply a whole deluge of ignorance. If I know that, insofar as I am sitting at my desk (in my house on Earth) I am not in a vat located in a laboratory on Alpha Centauri, and I know that I am sitting at my desk, then it follows that I know that I am not on Alpha Centauri. Being on Alpha Centauri implies not being on Earth and vice versa. And if I do not know that I am not on Alpha Centauri, then I do not know that I am here on Earth, that I am sitting at my desk and writing. Neither do I know all other trivial things of which I usually believe I know:

> For if we do not know we are not dreaming or being deceived by a demon or floating in a tank, then how can I know, for example, that I am sitting before a page writing with a pen, and how can you know that you are reading a page of a book? (Nozick 1981: 203)

However, Nozick believes that the relationship between skeptical hypotheses and our everyday knowledge is different than skeptics tend to present. One way to dismantle this relationship is to negate the principle of closure. The principle of closure (PC) is an epistemological version of *modus ponens*: if I know that $p{\rightarrow}q$, and I know that p, then I know that q (Nozick 1981: 204):

$$(PC)\ [K\,(p{\rightarrow}q)\,Kp] \rightarrow Kq$$

The principle of closure can be presented also through the inference pattern of *modus tollens*. Let us place "I am sitting and writing" for p and "I am not a brain in a vat" for q. If I know that, insofar as I am sitting and writing, I am not a brain

in a vat, and I do not know that I am not a brain in a vat, then it follows that I do not know that I am sitting and writing. Nozick does not agree with the conclusion (I do not know if I am sitting and writing) because he believes that having such knowledge (which is part of everyday knowledge) is a fact. This makes him question the principle of closure (PC). For a rejection of an inference pattern is sufficient to reject its conclusion. Nozick agrees with skeptics that we do not know if we are not brains in vats, but he does not agree that we can never know if we are sitting at a table or reading a book. Nozick believes that the principle of closure is a weak point of skepticism and it is sufficient to negate it in order to disprove skeptical arguments. When we accept logical laws of *modus ponens* and *modus tollens*, we do not have to accept their epistemic interpretation. Knowledge, Nozick believes, is in no sense closed under known logical implication (Nozick 1981: 206). The principle of deductive transmissibility of knowledge does not hold: one may know that *p* entails *q*, and that *p*, and still not know that *q*. According to Nozick, knowledge is governed by psychological rather than logical laws. And if so, then it follows that although a skeptic is right that we do not know whether skeptical hypotheses are true, he still cannot claim that we do not know all things implied by these hypotheses.

Many authors do not agree with the rejection of the principle of closure. Michael Williams (1992: 342) believes that the rejection of PC by Nozick is a result of confusion of the content of knowledge with knowledge understood as a whole cognitive situation. The obvious reason which makes it possible to negate principle of deductive transmissibility of *knowledg*e is that *belief* (which is part of knowledge) cannot be deductively transmitted. Let us assume that: (1) I know that I am sitting at my desk, and (2) I know that if I am sitting at my desk, I am not a brain in a vat. Does it follow from this that I know that I am not a brain in a vat? Well, it does not, since I may not even hold this belief at all, it may never cross my mind (Williams 1992: 322). However, these are not the reasons why Nozick negates the principle of closure because he considers only the content of beliefs, not the whole cognitive situation of the subject. Nozick writes that even if I clearly recognize the relationship between the content of (1) and the content of (2), I still do not know that I am a brain in a vat (Williams 1992: 323). This position seems to be too radical and it calls into question the rationality of human knowledge. The content of (1) and (2) entails that I know that I am not a brain in a vat. If this conclusion is rejected, it is not because the lack of inference between these *contents*, but it is because the lack of inference between cognitive *situations* (one may know (1) and (2) without making the conclusion). Williams believes that Nozick would be able to make his point by means of much less controversial

negation of the principle of knowledge transparence (according to which knowledge entails knowledge about knowledge).

3.3. Knowledge Does not Require Knowledge about Knowledge (Externalism)

The negation of the transparence principle (a principle according to which knowledge requires knowledge about knowledge) is another attempt to weaken the concept of knowledge, this time typical for externalism.[72] Externalists describe different forms of knowledge which are not accompanied by knowledge about knowledge. One of these forms is so-called tacit knowledge, typical for little children, animals, intelligent machines as well as many adults – it is a fixed knowledge whose reasons had been utterly forgotten. Externalism, then, extends the traditional concept of knowledge which is usually limited to realized or easily realizable knowledge. If knowledge can be influenced by external factors (unavailable through introspection), it does not have to be fully realized. As Timothy Williamson argues (1995: 563), knowledge can exist even without beliefs which correspond to it, that is to say, without secondary knowledge.

An example of epistemic externalism is Fred Dretske's informational theory of knowledge. As Dretske observes, information flow is possible even if channel conditions are not known. The existence of a channel of information requires a fixed system of conditions of information flow, but these conditions are not necessarily realized. For example, one may know (through his or her senses) that a given thing is in motion, without knowing that the senses function in a correct manner. The correct functioning of the senses is a channel condition which is required by perception but which does not have to be known (Dretske 1981: 123). A skeptic, in turn, is wrong to assume that no informational content can be carried by a signal unless an additional information about the channel employed in the transmission is carried by the same or another signal. As theory of information shows, channel conditions are usually tacitly assumed, but this does not interrupt the communicative process.

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72 In theory of knowledge and justification, epistemic externalism is a negation of epistemic internalism (a position which limits the set of factors providing justifications for beliefs to those which are available through introspection). Externalists argue that justifications of beliefs are bound to be influenced by factors which are unavailable through introspection (for example, the reliability of cognitive processes that produce a given belief).

Dretske also repudiates skepticism by means of the theory of relevant alternatives. To know that *p* is to be able to exclude relevant alternatives for *p*. Skeptical hypotheses are irrelevant in common thinking and knowledge does not require to exclude them. For they are just a matter of sheer possibility – if all of them were taken seriously, communication would be no longer possible.

Skepticism is a view which, in its typical form, is problematic only within internalism (which assumes that if I do not know that I know, then I do not know). This assumption is unacceptable for externalists who show that we can know without knowing that we know. If knowledge consists in having information, then the fact that we have information does not have to be (and often is not) realized. Therefore, we can know without knowing that we know.

Externalism, to be sure, does not proof that we have knowledge. But it rejects skeptical claim by showing that despite the absence of proof of the existence of knowledge, what we consider as knowledge can turn out to be knowledge (even in the field of reflective knowledge). Externalism does not undermine skepticism (it does not refute skeptical hypotheses), but it calls into question the skeptical argumentation, exposing its internalist assumptions (Greco 2000: 1).

When a skeptic says: "we may not know", and presents hypotheses illustrating this possibility, an externalist replies: "we may know", and presents the externalist theory of knowledge according to which one may know without knowing that one knows. Even if the skeptic's assessment is right with respect to second-order knowledge (knowledge about knowledge), he or she is not necessarily right with respect to first-order knowledge. For we can really know without knowing that we know and without knowing whether skeptical hypotheses describe the actual situation.

According to internalists, externalism not so much erases as ignores skeptical doubts. As Barry Stroud argues, the philosophical problem of skepticism is about understanding how we know what we know and demonstrating that skepticism is wrong. This, however, cannot be done, at least in Stroud's opinion, by any externalist theory. It seems that to accept extreme externalism is to deny rationality to human subjects, and therefore too high a price for a rejection of the problem of skepticism. Many contemporary authors, like Williams (2011), introduce a compromise externalist-internalist concept of justification.

3.4. Standards for Knowledge are Changeable (Contextualism)

In 1984, Peter Unger published his *Philosophical Relativity*, where he rejected skepticism in favor of contextualism and relativism. Influenced by his critic, David Lewis (1979), Unger admitted that ways of resolving the problem of

skepticism depend on how the term "knowledge" is construed. Lewis was right to observe – and to consider as paradox – that for Unger, as a skeptic, all common uses of the word "knowledge" are incorrect, which means that the word has no application (Unger 1999: 254). Unger agrees with this critique and admits that it is impossible to determine a single meaning for the word. If "knowledge" has many different meanings, then there are many different answers to the question whether we know anything. Unger describes his earlier semantic view as "invariantism" (Unger 1999: 249), and claims that an opposite view, "contextualism" (Unger 1999: 253), can be equally right. Invariantism posits a single concept of knowledge, while contextualism allows for many different concepts, or at least many different standards for knowledge. The essence of contextualism is the thesis that truth conditions for knowledge attributions are changeable depending on context.

The word "knowledge", in its common-sense usage, is not an absolute limit term. That is why, on contextualist grounds, common beliefs can count as knowledge despite the existence of skeptical arguments. By replacing invariantism (one strong concept of knowledge) with contextualism (many different standards for knowledge), Unger abandons his earlier skepticism.

Unger believes that contextualism better corresponds to common beliefs. Invariantism, in turn, is credited for determining simple and independent meanings of words. Whereas the invariantist account of the word "know" is appropriate for skepticism, the complex semantics of contextualism runs afoul of it (Unger 1999: 256–265). Unger does not think it is possible to decide which semantics is better, since both seem to accurately explain our cognitive practice.[73]

Skepticism formulates a high standard for knowledge which excludes all logical possibilities of error. In the language of the theory of relevant alternatives, one may contend that for a skeptic "all (logically possible) alternatives always *are* relevant" (Unger 1999: 266). In skeptical contexts, to know that *p* is to exclude all judgements that are logically incompatible with *p* (Unger 1999: 265). Unger admits that in common-sense contexts not all logical possibilities are relevant, e.g. the evil demon hypothesis is not relevant. That is why, on contextualist grounds, "both the earlier claim and the later denial can be true." (Unger 1999: 267)

The skeptic assumes that *S* knows that *p* if, and only if, *S*'s data deny any possibility of non-*p* (Lewis 1999: 223). As a contextualist, Lewis suggests to make

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73 "With apparently equal propriety, the two semantics approaches can variously explain, or account for, the relation between the useful noises and our tendencies towards consultant behaviour" (Unger 1999: 267).

exception for those possibilities which can be "properly ignored". Unger (in his skeptical period) wrote that a surface is flat only if it is not at all bumpy or irregular. Lewis adds his proviso: "Psst! – except for those bumps that we are properly ignoring. Else we will conclude, absurdly, that nothing is flat." (Lewis 1999: 225) What is now crucial is the question which possibilities can be properly ignored.

Lewis provides the whole list of such rules, but the most important is what he calls the Rule of Attention: we ignore these possibilities which are not taken into account in a given conversational context. If makes us aware of them, the context is changed and we can no longer ignore them. It has been asked, however, why should the mere fact that one poses the brain-in-a-vat hypothesis oblige us to take it into account in determining the status of our knowledge? Invoking this possibility does not seem to provide a sufficient basis for raising the standards for knowledge. Lewis importantly shows that these standards are alterable. They can be raised to Unger's level and lowered to Moore's (Lewis 1999: 234) The status of knowledge is dependent on how – and on which level – we use the word "know" (Szymura 2005a: 156).

The most important contextualist reply to skepticism is given by Keith DeRose. He accepts the contextualist rule that the word "knowledge" depends on context, just like the words "old", "high", "happy", "fat", "rich", etc. The context is a conversational backdrop which is composed of various tacit assumptions, intentions, suppositions and expectations. Semantic contextualism is a thesis according to which truth conditions for sentences ascribing knowledge are changeable depending on a conversational context. These sentences, however, are rather occasional than equivocal.

Contextualism is illustrated by many different examples. I shall quote the so-called "Airport Case" described by Stewart Cohen:

> Mary and John are at the L. A. airport contemplating taking a certain flight to New York. They want to know whether the flight has a layover in Chicago. They overhear someone ask a passenger Smith if he knows whether the flight stops in Chicago. Smith looks at the flight itinerary he got from the travel agent and responds, "Yes I know – it does stop in Chicago". It turns out that Mary and John have a very important business contact they have to make at the Chicago airport. Mary says, "How reliable is that itinerary? It could contain a misprint. They could have changed the schedule at the last minute. Smith does not know the plane stops in Chicago", John agrees with Mary, and they decide to check with the airline agent. (Cohen 2008: 418)

In this story, Smith claims he knows that the flight to New York has a layover in Chicago, and then it turns out to be true. Mary and John, in turn, are not sure whether Smith knows it. If we consider both these claims to be right, it is only because we apply two different standards of knowledge. Smith claims that he

knows this based on the flight itinerary, which he deems to be a sufficient source of knowledge. He is not personally interested in the matter nor he does not risk anything if the information is wrong. Mary and John are in a different situation, which is why they raise the standards for knowledge. They are concerned whether the itinerary contains a misprint, as they have some important things to do in Chicago. It is only after checking with the airline agent, that they finally gain conviction that Smith knew it and now they also know it. In fact, none of these people is certain, which is why a skeptic can easily claim that none of them has any knowledge in the discussed matter. Both these context are characterized by the same justification of knowledge. However, it is because of the different standards applied, that Smith believes to have knowledge, while John and Mary are not sure about it before checking with the airline agent. The Airport Case clearly shows that the standards for knowledge are changeable depending on context.

Instead of Lewis's Rule of Attention,[74] often criticized for being "oversensitive", DeRose introduces his Rule of Sensitivity: "When it's asserted that S knows (or doesn't know) that *p*, then, if necessary, enlarge the sphere of epistemically relevant worlds so that it at least includes the closest worlds in which *p* is false" (DeRose 1999: 206). The close worlds, to repeat after Nozick, are those which are probable to happen. In light of this rule, the relevance of given alternatives is decided, not by accidentally taking them into account, but through realizing what is probable in a given context. That is why the brain-in-a-vat hypothesis is not a relevant alternative in the common context in which it is improbable. The standards for common knowledge entail its rejection. For DeRose, the Rule of Sensitivity governs all changes in the standards for knowledge. A belief can be counted as knowledge if it is sensitive to a change of facts. However, the scope of relevant facts is limited to what is probable in a given contexts.

DeRose proceeds to formulate the paradox of skepticism in the form of three propositions which are equally reliable, but at the same time inconsistent:

1. I know that I have two hands.
2. I don't know that I'm not a brain in a vat (BIV).
3. If I don't know that I'm not a BIV, then I don't know that I have two hands.

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74 The process of ascribing knowledge is so unstable that, in any conversation, it is enough to invoke the skeptical hypothesis in order to affirm that we do not know anything (Feldman 1999: 100). "The paradox is that contextualists rejecting skepticism 'raise the standard' of knowledge to the skeptical level where we don't know if we are not brains in vats" (Szymura 2005a: 157).

Another way of presenting this conflict of intuitions is by invoking Moore's two arguments which employed the dream hypothesis. DeRose formulates two arguments based on the BIV hypothesis:

A skeptic presents his reasoning based on the scheme of *modus tollens*:

1. I don't know if I'm not a BIV.
2. If I know that I have hands, then I know I'm not a BIV.
3. I don't know if I have hands,

An antiskeptic, in turn, presents his *modus ponens*:

1. I know that I have hands.
2. If I know that I have hands, then I know that I'm not a BIV.
3. I know that I'm not a BIV.

These arguments are opposite, but they are nonetheless equally correct and based on plausible assumptions. DeRose provides a contextualist explanation of this paradox. The skeptic makes his argument only because, in the first premise, he raises the standards for knowledge to meet the requirements posed by the BIV hypothesis. His argument is reliable by virtue of the insensitivity of the conviction that the hypothesis is false. If the hypothesis were true, we would be still unable to recognize it. Therefore, "I don't know if I'm a BIV". This, however, does not determine whether I know that I have hands in different contexts. The skeptic is attached to his context and denies the proposition "I have two hands" through a simple inference. His assumptions and conclusion are the following:

1. If I have two hands, I'm not a BIV.
2. I know that if I have two hands, I'm not a BIV.
3. If I know that I have two hands, I know that I'm not a BIV.
4. If I don't know that I'm a BIV, then I don't know that I have two hands.

The transition from 2 to 3 is based on the principle of closure (PC) which was negated by Nozick: if S knows that $p{\rightarrow}q$, and S knows that p, then S knows that q.

DeRose believes that this is a simple intuitive principle which should not be repudiated. The principle, applied to dogmatic assumptions, can also serve to unfold the antiskeptical thesis. According to DeRose's formulation of the skeptical argument, knowledge is not an operator added to sentences, but it is included in their content. Hence, there are no grounds for disagreement about an epistemic interpretation of the logical rules. DeRose's skeptic uses a simple *modus tollens* inference.

Instead of rejecting the principle of closure, DeRose observes that although PC is applicable to all contexts, it is not transcontextual. A correct inference

based on PC should be restrained to a single context. In his argument, the skeptic applies PC in a transcontextual manner, he is blind to the contextual sensitivity of knowledge. Against Nozick, DeRose does not build a sensitivity requirement into the very concept of knowledge: "The notion of sensitivity, rather, finds its happier home in our contextualist account of how the standards for knowledge are raised." (DeRose 1999: 207) Even if the contextual sensitivity is closer to occasional than equivocal statements, it still makes the term "knowledge" gain different pragmatic meanings in different contexts.

If the skeptic, in the first premise, refers to knowledge as understood in common sense, while in the next premise he refers to knowledge in relation to a different context, then he commits an equivocation fallacy. Instead of rejecting the principle of closure, DeRose limits the second assumption. He denies that common knowledge requires a rejection of skeptical hypotheses.

We should admit that DeRose provides a good solution of the paradox of knowledge and corrects Nozick's reply. Whereas Nozick agreed to accept contradictory beliefs, DeRose eliminates the contradiction by pointing to the contextual sensitivity of our standards for knowledge. That is why we both know that we have hands (in common contexts) and we do not know it (if we are skeptics). There is no contradiction, but only a change of standards: contradictions can be determined only within a single context and under a single standard. The paradox of knowledge is possible only insofar as one forgets about the contextuality of knowledge.

DeRose protects common knowledge from the skeptical threat without making it necessary to accept the paradox of knowledge or to reject logical rules. This is a result of understanding of the contextuality of knowledge. DeRose thereby makes a large progress compared with Nozick. The Rule of Sensitivity also corrects the account of contextuality, making the standards for knowledge independent from extreme conversational contingency.

However, DeRose provides a solution of the paradox – not the problem – of skepticism. He does not formulate any charges against skepticism, except the one pointing to the misunderstanding of the contextuality of knowledge. He only defends our right to have weaker knowledge insofar as the standards are changed. This should be considered as a weak reply to skepticism, and even as its acceptance (in one of possible contexts). Nonetheless, it is important to acknowledge that contextualism has marginalized skepticism and disproved its claims to universal validity. Contextualism can be described as a specific systematization and legalization of the transformation of the concept of knowledge which has occurred in the 20th century. It makes it possible to reconcile skepticism with common sense and explain philosophical disputes about knowledge.

3.5. Justification Does Not Require the Procedure of Justification (Williams)

According to Michael Williams, the weakness of semantic contextualism is that it makes the epistemic status of a conviction dependent on accidental factors. Skepticism, Williams argues, requires a new analysis of its assumptions. In *Problems of Knowledge* (2001), he insists that the concept of justification is crucial for the problem of skepticism, since skeptics dismiss knowledge precisely as unjustified: "we cannot", they claim, "even get to the point of having justified beliefs." (Williams 2001: 59) Philosophical, that is to say, radical skepticism is a thesis that "we never have a slightest justification for believing one thing rather than another" (Williams 2001: 59) and that "nothing can ever be justified." (Williams 2001: 66)

The radicalism of these theses makes every polemic against skepticism a defense of rationality: "If skepticism cannot be refuted, the rational outlook undermines itself." (Williams 2001: 5) Skeptics suggest that there is no difference between knowledge and any given belief, and thus it is irrelevant what beliefs we hold. To accept or pass over skepticism is to reject the idea of human rationality.

William's reply to skepticism has evolved together with the development of his conception of justification. First (in 1977), he believed that in order to deal with skepticism it is sufficient to reject fundamentalism in theory of justification. In *Unnatural Doubts* (1992), as well as in his paper *Skepticism* (1999), he claimed that skepticism is a problem only within internalism and that it can be avoided by simply rejecting arbitrary limitations of the internalist theory of justification. In *Problems of Knowledge* (2001), Williams passes over the disputes between fundamentalism and coherentism and between internalism and externalism. He believes that skepticism stems from a demonstrative conception of irrefutable knowledge combined with a conception of justification which requires every belief to go through a procedure of justification. He distinguishes between two conceptions of knowledge: the classic demonstrative and the fallibilist, which are different precisely in terms of justification. The classic conception was first formulated by Plato who modeled it on mathematics. Originally, it was not applicable to empirical world, but later thinkers have started to treat it as a universal model to follow and have long searched for this kind of knowledge in the realm of human experience. It is a conception of irrefutable knowledge consisting of irrefutable basic beliefs and what can be inferred from them (Williams 2001: 39). In light of this conception, error is an accident which requires a special explanation. The fallibilist conception of knowledge, in turn, inscribes the possibility of error within the very idea of knowledge. Knowledge requires certain stability, which, however, is never guaranteed once and for all (Williams 2001: 55).

Skeptics employ the classic conception of irrefutable knowledge together with its related conception of justification that requires every belief to go through a procedure of justification. Williams calls it a requirement of "prior grounding". In accordance with the skeptical conception, a belief is justified insofar as it is based on proper foundations to which the subject has access and whose existence is proved. Of course, these requirements imposed on justification cannot be fulfilled by the human subject: the truth of every belief needs to be guaranteed through introspectively accessible data. Additionally, it is assumed that doubts can be freely posed, while the whole burden of proof is thrown on the subject who is obliged to present it on demand.

Williams suggests that the "prior justification" principle should be replaced by the "default and challenge" model of knowledge and justification. The difference between the two can be compared to a difference between two legal systems: in the first system, the defendant is treated as guilty until proved otherwise; in the second, the defendant is treated as innocent until proved otherwise (the burden of proof is thrown on the persecutor). In the second model, justification is default as long as no reasons can be offered against it.

The model of "default-and-challenge" poses the same requirements for negative statements as it does for affirmative ones. A skeptic is not free to ask: "How do you know?", and an affirming subject is not always required to carry out a procedure of justification of his or her beliefs. It is only when reasons for doubting are presented, that the skeptic's question becomes legitimate. Williams suggests that justification is default as long as no reasons can be offered in opposition. The subject's beliefs are implicitly accepted and justified even if no procedure was employed to justify them – the only condition is the absence of reasons for doubting. It is because the default justification of beliefs is allowed, that we no longer face the problem of circular reasoning and infinite regress. Default beliefs are rather makeshift and temporary: they can be called to question and their value is not independent from context. But in a particular context in which they are held, they provide a basis for thinking.

To justify a belief is to be convincing and able to dismiss charges against it. "For a competent adult, across a wide range of situations, justification is a default condition: such a person is deemed epistemically responsible and his beliefs adequately grounded unless there is reason to suspect otherwise. One can be justified without having *gone through* a process of justification" (Williams 1999: 189). Beliefs that do not require justification (or rather, those that are "defaultly justified") resemble Wittgenstein's hinge propositions. Their role is crucial for all thinking. For even questions already entail numerous presumptions. As Wittgenstein observed, "if

you tried to doubt everything you would not get as far as doubting anything. The game of doubting itself presupposes certainty." (OC 115) Williams quotes Wilfrid Sellars: empirical knowledge, like its sophisticated extension, science, is rational, not because it has a *foundation*, but because it is a self-correcting enterprise which can put *any* claim in jeopardy though not *all* at once." (Williams 2001: 179).[75] In light of fallibilism, anything can be called to question, but not in any situation (assumptions related to a given context can be formulated only in a different context). William's position is inspired by Wittgenstein. His main antiskeptical argument refers to the existence of hinge propositions which make it impossible to consistently express the thesis of global skepticism. That is why Williams reject the requirement of "prior grounding". For we implicitly assume various hinge propositions. Rationality cannot consist in providing proofs for everything; rather, it is a readiness to defend or modify one's views in the event of doubts or problems arising (Williams 1999: 54).

In the "default and challenge" model, the question of justification can appear only in particular contexts. Moreover, there are different standards of justification in different contexts. Insofar as common knowledge is concerned, the degree of scrupulousness with regard to justification depends on the subject's interests and the importance of an issue in question. A skeptic, however, continues to demand taking into consideration all logical possibilities and achieving the highest degree of scrupulousness, which is why the requirements he imposes on justification can be called into question. In light of fallibilism, the argument of the possibility of error – described by Jonathan Dancy (1985) as the most important skeptical argument – is not an argument at all. It does not undermine the existence of knowledge which by nature contains the possibility of error: "the possibility of error does not imply the impossibility of knowledge." (Williams 2001: 170) Williams believes that skepticism is a feature of individualist tradition. Nowadays, however, the prevalent conception of knowledge describes it as a socially acquired and transmitted achievement which can be hardly considered as certain (Williams 2001: 238). Certainty is inscribed in the ideal of demonstrative knowledge. This ideal, in turn, cannot be applied to empirical knowledge.

The previous remarks concerned skepticism in general (including ancient skepticism). Williams recognizes additional presuppositions in the Cartesian skepticism assuming that knowledge about internal sensations is free from doubts

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75 In the same vein, Richard Rorty writes that "We must insist that the fact that nothing is immune for criticism does not mean that we have a duty to justify everything." (Rorty 1991: 29) Rorty believes that the best way to deal with skepticism is by rejecting the idea of objectivity (Rorty 1998: 155).

and epistemologically priviledged, better than knowledge about the world. For Williams, this distinction between knowledge about the world and knowledge about experience entails so-called epistemological realism, which is considered as the major source of the Cartesian skepticism. Realism, as he construes it, is not so much a position in ontology (the real world exists), epistemology (the world is knowable) or theory of truth (truth is radically objective), as it is a thesis that objects of epistemological reflection exist in reality (Williams 2001: 171). Williams rejects the thesis and writes that "there is no such thing as knowledge of the external world." (1996: 12) However, it is not an expression of skepticism, but it is an expression of a specific type of deflationism with regard to knowledge (knowledge and beliefs do not have an internal nature). We have many shifting and contextual rights concerning knowledge, which, however, is not an object. And yet skeptics, as they wish to claim that knowledge is impossible, have to treat it as an object and the term "knowledge of the external world" as a natural kind. Also, giving priority to internal knowledge requires treating it as an integral object.

Epistemological realism is implied by the principle of "prior grounding", according to which conditions of justification are objective and independent from interests and situations: it is assumed that beliefs have an internal epistemological status. That is a theoretical source of the skeptical willingness to "take the context of philosophical reflection to be a uniquely privileged perspective that reveals the final, context-independent constraints on justification." (Williams 2001: 196)

According to Williams, "there is no room for either the skeptic's global doubts or the traditional epistemologist's global reassurances." (Williams 2001: 151) The most important Williams's achievement is precisely his discovery of the assumptions inherent in the skeptical argumentation. These include: the demonstrative conception of irrefutable knowledge; the concept of justification which guarantees objective truth on the basis of subjective data; the principle of "prior grounding" of justification; the priority of consciousness; the throwing of the burden of proof on those who assert (not those who call into question); and the right to unlimited doubting without providing any reasons. To be sure, not all of these assumptions should be rejected, but they are all arbitrary and therefore can be replaced with different theoretical constructions. Thus, the problem of skepticism becomes deconstructed and limited to a specific theoretical context.

Ultimately, then, Williams is a contextualist,[76] but he is not a typical contextualist. His division between contexts of knowledge does not rest on conversational differences, but on differences between tacit theoretical assumptions (or hinge propositions). These assumptions or propositions are transformed depending on the context, and Williams is often described as an inferential contextualist (Pritchard 2002a: 216). However, his position is not about some specific kind of inference, but about hinge propositions and what is justified on their basis. The difference between contexts is precisely the difference between hinge propositions.

According to Williams, contextualism had been already invented by Hume who "grasped something of great significance: the extreme context sensitivity of the skeptics' doubt." (Williams 1996: 19) Williams criticizes semantic contextualism for not being sufficiently contextualist: it assumes the existence of an invariant hierarchy of contexts. Semantic contextualists do not put forward any charges against skeptics and even consider the skeptical context as marked by the highest scrupulousness. Williams exposed theoretical assumptions of skepticism and presented their alternative in the form of his weaker concept of refutable knowledge and justification. Skeptical principles, he argues, do not have to be accepted not only in the context of common knowledge but also on the highest level of theoretical speculation. In theory, the skeptical context is not better than other contexts.[77]

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76 Williams describes the following situation: "Consider: you ask me whether I know when the next train leaves for the city and I tell you 'Yes, to o'clock; I just looked it up.' But then you point out that I am using last year's timetable. Since departure times are often revised, my evidence suddenly looks less than conclusive. Here, further inquiry is informationally triggered by your pointing out a fact that I had overlooked: my timetable was out of date. Now imagine, instead, that I have derived my information from the latest timetable, so that it seems clear that I really do know. However, you explain that you have an appointment that you absolutely cannot miss. Moreover, it does happen occasionally that repairs to the track require temporary timetable changes. Have I looked into whether any such changes have been announced for today? No. So do I really know that the next train leaves at two? Suddenly, things seem less clear. […] it seems that when the stakes are high enough, even very remote possibilities of error become worth taking seriously." (Williams 2001: 46–47) The conditions of knowledge are always dependent on a given situation and our interests related to it.

77 In Polish philosophy, a similar critique of the skeptical conception of justification was conducted by Andrzej Wiśniewski (1992) whom I have already cited in the chapter devoted to Agrippa. A skeptic pursues exorbitant standards for accepting premises as justified, but there are also other standards under which skeptical argumentation no longer works, and which make it possible to avoid infinite regress.

In fact, however, Williams is unable to reject the skeptical context; he can only choose another one. Skepticism (the thesis that "nothing can ever be justified") may seem to be self-refutable, but its inconsistency can be avoided insofar as it is dialectically interpreted. The skeptic can consequently suspend judgment and present arguments *ad absurdum* (we first assume something for the purposes of argumentation, and then we come to conclusion that the assumption is false). Thus, according to Williams, the skeptic can avoid the inconsistency of his position (Williams 2001: 67). However, it is important to add that this dialectical interpretation is possible at the cost of skepticism's autonomy. Once again, it turns out that thereby skepticism not only avoids inconsistency but also loses its identity and can be no longer considered as a particular philosophical position.

3.6. Inconsistency of Brain-in-a-Vat Hypothesis (Putnam)

Hilary Putnam is one of a few thinkers who seek to expose skeptical assumptions as not only doubtful and unattractive but also theoretically erroneous. The way to demonstrate this is by revealing skepticism's inconsistency and internal contradiction.

In this respect, Putnam is a continuator of the so-called transcendental argumentation against skepticism. The category of transcendental argument has been coined by Peter Strawson (1959) in relation to Kant's arguments, e.g. those against Descartes's idealism. A typical transcendental argument proceeds from psychological facts (like sensations, concepts or beliefs), posits a necessary relationship between them and the external world (which is their condition of possibility), and then infers the existence of the world and its elements from these facts (Stern 2000: 6). This kind of argument shows that things which skepticism calls into question constitute its condition of possibility (Stern 2008: 265).

Barry Stroud has observed that transcendental arguments lack the feature of necessity on which they are allegedly based (Stroud 1968; Stern 2011: 11). These arguments only support the best explanation on the basis of adopted assumptions (Vahid 2011: 398). Strawson admits that the weakness of these arguments is that they presuppose a necessary relationship between our concepts and the external world. He assumes that this presupposition is inseparably bound to our natural view of the world, but it is not a metaphysical necessity. However, this naturalistic interpretation is enough to claim that a skeptic would not be able to present his doubts by means of concepts if he had no knowledge about some objects belonging to the class which he calls into question (Strawson 1985: 9). That is why, according to Strawson, the task of philosophy is not to construct antiskeptical arguments, but it is to explain that skepticism is based on misunderstanding (1985: 19).

Putnam intentionally refers to Kant's pattern of transcendental argumentation and puts forward the argument of inconsistency against the brain-in-a-vat hypothesis. "We have investigated these preconditions [for thinking, representing, referring to, etc.] *not* by investigating these words and phrases [...] but by *reasoning a priori.*" (Putnam 1981: 16) In Putnam's eyes, a skeptical thesis based on the brain-in-a-vat hypothesis would involve a series of assumptions, e.g. internalism in theory of meaning (the subject decides what his/her words mean). However, if meaning internalism is replaced by externalism (meanings of words depends also on external factors, such as physical and social environment), then the brain-in-a-vat hypothesis becomes nonsensical or necessarily false.

Putnam believes that once we assume the externalist perspective, the hypothesis either no longer refers to anything or, if it does, then this very fact of having a reference proves it to be false. He claims that brains in vats can neither think nor say that they are brains in vats. For their words do not have the same reference as ours. If they say "we are brains in vats", their words refer to electrically stimulated illusions (they have their own "Vatish" language), and not to real brains and vats (to which, by definition, they are not causally related). At the same time, when we say "we are brains in vats", our words refer to brains and vats we know from our experience. So,

> if we say we are brains in a vat, then the sentence "We are brains in a vat" says something false (if it says anything). In short, when we are brains in a vat, then "We are brains in a vat" is false. So it is (necessarily) false. (Putnam 1981: 15)

If we can meaningfully describe the skeptical "brain-in-a-vat" hypothesis, using words which have a reference, then the hypothesis no longer holds. Putnam's argument can be presented as follows:

1. Brains in a vat can neither think nor say that they are brains in a vat.
2. Brains in a vat use their own specific language ("Vatish") which refers to electrical impulses producing their experience, not to real objects.
3. If I am not a brain in a vat and my words refer to real objects, then the sentence "I am not a brain in a vat" is true.
4. If I am a brain in a vat and I speak Vattish, the sentence "I am not a brain in a vat" means that I am not an imagined/unreal brain in a vat and is also true.

However, we should observe that although the sentence "I am not a brain in a vat" in necessarily true (in both ordinary and Vattish sense), I still do not know if I am not a brain in a vat. I cannot say that but it is still possible.

Williams is not satisfied with this argument: "why should I be comforted by the thought that, if I were a brain in a vat, I should not have mostly false beliefs

about the world as I now conceive it but mostly true beliefs about the vat environment" (Williams 1996: 314) If we assume that those who speak stand in a causal relationship with objects in the world, the problem of skepticism is already resolved. An additional problem is posed by interworld journeys. Is a person, who for many years had remained in causal relationships with real objects, and who was recently put into a vat, able to speak Vattish immediately or only after many years of having remained in new causal relationships?

Putnam believes that his antiskeptical argument is an a priori argument and that the brain-in-a-vat hypothesis is logically inconsistent. However, one should observe that Putnam's argumentation is based on an assumption taken from the externalist theory of meaning, which is not an a priori theory. Against this theory, Thomas Nagel writes that "I can use a term which fails to refer, provided I have a conception the conditions under which it would refer – as I say there are no ghosts." (Nagel 1986: 72) Even if externalism in meaning theory is wrong, Putnam was able to show there is a theory of meaning in light of which the skeptical hypothesis is inconsistent. If the meaning of our words depended on our life environment and if we were brains in a vat, we still would be unable to say this because our words would be causally bound to the world. This reasoning resembles Wittgenstein's thesis that skepticism is "palpably senseless, if it would doubt where a question cannot be asked." (TLP 6.51) It is a specific discreditation of global skepticism. All words uttered by a global skeptic are pragmatically inconsistent. However, skepticism is still not refuted. As Nagel writes, "What follows? Only that I can't express my skepticism by saying 'Perhaps I'm a brain in a vat' […]. If it doesn't qualify as skepticism, I don't know what does." (Nagel 1986: 73). The only consolation is the fact that skepticism still lacks a consistent justification. Therefore, and because we have other theories at our disposal, we do not have any intellectual obligation to accept skepticism. It is simply a matter of choice.

Other proponents of the transcendental argumentation defend its weaker version which is no longer focused on external facts but describes beliefs and concepts inseparably bound to skeptical doubts, and which points to an increase of coherence instead of necessity (Stern 2000: 10). Arguments of this kind do not demonstrate the truth of the belief about the existence of external things, but they show that it is hard to consistently negate this belief. Thus, they can only expose the pragmatic inconsistency of skepticism (Vahid 2011: 409).

Another form of antiskeptical transcendental argumentation was developed by Wittgenstein, who believed that skeptical doubts, like all other thoughts, require certainties (hinge propositions), even if they negate the existence of certainty. Insofar as they do so, he argued, they contradict their own assumptions.

A the same time, however, Wittgenstein also conceived a new version of skepticism, namely, meaning skepticism. We shall now describe this position.

4. Meaning Skepticism by Kripke-Wittgenstein

Meaning skepticism is another version of contemporary skepticism. It was first proclaimed in 1982 by Saul Kripke in his book *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*. Kripke has noticed this kind of skepticism in Wittgenstein's *Investigations*. Wittgenstein himself, as I have already wrote, considered the Cartesian skepticism's thesis as nonsensical and pointed to the existence of certainties in every language game, that is to say, in all discourse. In practice, he was a proponent of fallibilism and a kind of second-order skepticism (concerning the possibility of creating a theory of knowledge). When he rejected the possibility of private language and discussed the idea of linguistic rule in *Investigations*, he never used the word "skepticism", but he nonetheless did criticize the concept of meaning. I shall refer to this form of skepticism as Kripke-Wittgenstein skepticism in order to underscore Kripke's role in formulating it.

This form of philosophical skepticism had never appeared in the modern period. It is different from the Cartesian skepticism which has dominated contemporary epistemological discussions. In that sense, meaning skepticism seems to be a unique contribution of contemporary philosophy to the history of skepticism. It turns out that the linguistic turn in contemporary philosophy has also influenced the problem of skepticism.

4.1. Thought Experiment with *quus*

In order justify meaning skepticism, Kripke formulates his thought experiment with *quus*, a new skeptical hypothesis which, "ridiculous and fantastic thought it is", is not "logically impossible" (Kripke 1982: 9):

> Perhaps in the past I used "plus" and "+" to denote a function which I will call "quus" and symbolize by "⊕". It is defined by:
>
> $x \oplus y = x + y$, if $x, y < 57$
>
> $= 5$ otherwise.
>
> Who is to say this is not the function I previously meant by "+"? (Kripke 1982: 8–9)

It is a thought experiment in which the familiar mathematical concept of addition is replaced by a concept of "quaddition" which is different from the former only in the case of numbers greater than 57. If in the past, for example, at the beginning of elementary school, I used only small numbers, it is hard to say which

of these two operations I had in mind. For I was unable to distinguish between addition and quaddition. Now, when I am familiar with Kripke's experiment, I distinguish between the two operations, but I do not know how to decide which operation I performed at the beginning of elementary school. At the time, I never considered numbers greater than 57, while in the case of smaller numbers these operations are indistinguishable.

Suppose that I never added numbers greater than 57, and now someone wants me to add 57 and 68. In this situation, no fact from my past determines my interpretation of the rule of addition: I can answer either 125 (using plus) or 5 (using *quus*). In fact, using *quus* is in this case equally allowable as using plus. This is a paradox of semantic rules that do not precisely determine meanings of words.

According to Kripke,

> In the discussion below the challenge posed by the sceptic takes two forms. First, he questions whether there is any *fact* that I meant plus, not quus, that will answer his sceptical challenge. Second, he questions whether I have any reason to be so confident that now I should answer "125" rather than "5". The two forms of the challenge are related. I am confident that I should answer "125" because I am confident that this answer also accords with what I *meant*. (Kripke 1982: 11)

Here, Kripke distinguishes between epistemological and meaning skepticism and makes it clear that he is concerned with the latter.[78] I am not sure which mathematical operation I performed at the beginning of elementary school, when I calculated small numbers and was unable to distinguish between plus and *quus*. But Kripke says something more – a meaning of the word "plus", as I used it at that time, was not determined and therefore did not exist.[79] Hence, also the content of my thought about plus was undefined. The question of certainty is preceded by the question of existence or non-existence. If the meaning did not exist, it makes no sense to ask whether I am certain *what* was the meaning (Posłajko 2010: 179).

The concept of meaning and mental content is threatened, since

> no fact about my past history – nothing that was ever in my mind, or in my external behavior – establishes that I meant plus rather than quus. (Nor, of course, does any fact establish that I meant quus!) But if this is correct; there can of course be no fact about which function I meant, and if there can be no fact about which particular function I meant in the *past*, there can be none in the *present* either. (Kripke 1982: 13)

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78 "The sceptical challenge is not really an epistemological one." (Kripke 1982: 21)

79 It is important to note that, although the thesis of meaning skepticism is ontological, it is supported by epistemological arguments.

Kripke reviews and rejects one by one different conceptions of how meaning-facts are constituted. They stem neither from dispositions to use words nor from a history of language use, nor consciousness data: "nothing in my mental history of past behavior – not even what an omniscient God would know – could establish whether I meant plus or quus." (Kripke 1982: 13) Even a God, who knows all facts, cannot know this if no such fact ever existed. And if there was no fact constitutive of what I had in mind, Kripke continues, then the same applies to my *present* thoughts. There is no such fact, it is absent from both internal and external world. Elsewhere, Kripke quotes Wittgenstein's *Investigations*, and writes that "there is no 'superlative fact.'" (Kripke 1982: 65) This would provide a basis for a conflict between a non-factualist interpretation rejecting all meaning-facts, and a factualist interpretation positing the existence of weak facts.

"It seems that the entire idea of meaning vanishes into thin air." (Kripke 1982: 22) There are no meanings, even though there are linguistic practices and exemplary cases. We do not know what we mean, and even a content of our concepts and beliefs is undefined (the argument can be applied to both public language and an internal language of thought). Even God does not know this, as these abstract contents are not objectively determined. In this view, as already shown by Friedrich Nietzsche, it is impossible to establish whether our beliefs are true. In that sense, meaning skepticism makes it impossible to fulfill the requirement of truth (an undefined content can never correspond to reality). Moreover, it makes it pointless to search for certainty which have constituted the essence of the Cartesian skepticism. Skeptical hypotheses, as arguments, are not thereby disproved, since their only function was to indicate the possibility of falsehood, and they can still serve this function.

"There can be no such thing as meaning anything by any word" (Kripke 1982: 55) This is the main thesis of meaning skepticism.[80] To be sure, it is self-refutable and Kripke is well-aware of this fact: "Has not the incredible and self-defeating conclusion, that all language is meaningless, already been drawn?" (Kripke 1982: 71)

Kripke is not concerned with self-refutation and repeatedly refers to the procedure of throwing away the ladder. He considers both Wittgenstein's and his own presentation of skepticism as an argument of *reductio ad absurdum*. He accepts neither the assumptions nor the conclusion of the skeptical argument, but he shows that our standard concept of meaning leads to the paradox of skepticism. It is his lack of assent, that protects Kripke from the inconsistency charge.

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80 Kripke's hypothesis of *quus* is inspired by Nelson Goodman's *grue* (Kripke 1982: 20).

If the thesis of meaning skepticism was asserted, it would lead to a pragmatic contradiction. Kripke admits that the skeptical thesis is paradoxical and self-defeating, which is why it is also pragmatically inconsistent. Thus, meaning skepticism shares the fate of the Cartesian skepticism.

Many Kripke's critics have denied that Wittgenstein was a skeptic. Bernard Harrison even goes on to write that Wittgenstein was a sworn antiskeptic (Harrison 1991: 34). Richard McDonough believes that Kripke mistakenly attributed skepticism to Wittgenstein, who might have been a skeptic in *Tractatus*, but who rejected this position in *Investigations* (McDonough 1991: 76). These charges, however, are based on a misunderstanding. For Kripke makes it clear that Wittgenstein was never a proponent of meaning skepticism: "Wittgenstein never avows, and almost surely would not avow, the label 'sceptic', as Hume explicitly did." (Kripke 1982: 63) Nonetheless, Kripke argues, we must not forget that Wittgenstein poses this problem in *Investigations*, even if he immediately rejects it as paradoxical and explains why there is no reason for anxiety. In that sense, Wittgenstein can be described as a thinker who discovered the problem of meaning skepticism, although he had never accepted this position.

Kripke is right to underscore the originality of this form of skepticism:

> Wittgenstein has invented a new form of scepticism. Personally I am inclined to regard it as the most radical and original sceptical problem that philosophy has seen to date, one that only a highly unusual cast of mind could have produced. Of course he does not wish to leave us with his problem, but to solve it: the sceptical conclusion is insane and intolerable. It is his solution, I will argue, that contains the argument against "private language"; for allegedly, the solution will not admit such a language. But it is important to see that his achievement in posing this problem stands on its own, independently of the value of his own solution of it and the resultant argument against private language. (Kripke 1982: 60)

4.2. Practice as a Rescue from Skepticism

Happily, despite the absence of (ideal) meanings, there is still a linguistic practice in which people communicate with each other by means of undefined and approximated meanings. Meanings are constituted through a social discourse based on exemplary cases. The discussion of whether this solution is "ordinary" (John McDowell) or "skeptical" (Stanley Cavell), is a merely verbal conflict.

Before Kripke's book appeared, Wittgenstein's proposition was often described as "skepticism about rules" or "rule-skepticism" (Lewis 1988: 301). In *Investigations*, Wittgenstein gives an example of a pupil who learns the rules of producing sequences of natural numbers through the operation of addition. He asks how can we know how to apply these rules. We do not interpret some already established

rules (PI 198), nor do we use our intuition (PI 213) or instinct (Lewis 1988: 290). The answer is: "I have been trained to react to this sign in a particular way, and now I do so react to it […]. a person goes by a sign-post only in so far as there exists a regular use of sign-posts, a custom." (PI 198) It is all about being "master of a technique" (PI 199). Practice is precisely what we call "obeying a rule" (PI 202). This explicit answer provides an argument for proponents of the "ordinary" solution of the problem of skepticism. However, it is this problem that leads Wittgenstein to gain a deeper understanding of the functioning of language.

For the consequence of this reply is a thesis that one cannot privately obey a rule:

> It is not possible that there should have been only one occasion on which someone obeyed a rule. It is not possible that there should have been only one occasion on which a report was made, an order given or understood; and so on.—To obey a rule, to make a report, to give an order, to play a game of chess, are *customs* (uses, institutions).

> To understand a sentence means to understand a language. To understand a language means to be master of a technique. (PI 199)

> Following a rule is analogous to obeying an order. We are trained to do so; we react to an order in a particular way. (PI 206)

That is why it is impossible to create a private language. Suppose I keep a diary in which I register the recurrence of a certain sensation. I associate this sensation with the sign S and write this sing in the diary for every day on which I experience the sensation. (PI 258) I decide in my mind that the sign will refer to the sensation. Do I know what I had decided? There is no independent instance which would determine if I remember the rule correctly. If I wish to make my own decisions about the identity of the sensation, it is as if I tried to measure a ruler with itself or were to buy several copies of the same daily newspaper to assure myself that what it said was true (PI 265). Wittgenstein thereby shows that language is a social, not a private construct. All rules are coined in the course of social interaction and under social control.

Kripke underscores that Wittgenstein does not accept and seeks to disprove meaning skepticism. "Nevertheless our ordinary practice or belief is justified because – contrary appearances notwithstanding – it need not require the justification the sceptic has shown to be untenable." (Kripke 1982: 66) "We do not wish to doubt or deny that when people speak of themselves and others as meaning something by their words." (Kripke 1982: 69) Wittgenstein's reply to meaning skepticism turns out to consist in modifying the very concept of meaning.

In *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein writes that the meaning of a sentence depends on truth conditions. In *Investigations*, however, he introduces a new conception, according to which it depends on the conditions of assertability within a language game. The flexibility of this new approach is his way to avoid meaning skepticism. It is not threatened by the *quus* hypothesis pointing to the absence of meaning-facts. To be sure, there are no objective facts nor any truth conditions that would make it possible to verify statements about meaning of (one's own or someone else's) words. However, there are justified ways of ascribing meanings – the rules of this operation are worked out in practice by a language community. This justification theory of meaning is focused on members of a language community, not individual and isolated subjects. It is only within a language community, that one may meaningfully speak about a correct or incorrect following a rule. Without rules, in turn, there are no meanings and language. If a child has mastered the rule for addition, it means that he/she will react in the same way as his/her whole language community. It should be noted that Wittgenstein speaks about blind obedience to rules (Kripke 1982: 17). Wittgenstein's recourse to practice means that he rejects that it is possible to gain a theoretical understanding of understanding how these rules function. He thereby becomes an exponent of second-order skepticism about knowledge.

There has been a wide debate about whether the rules of meaning established by a community are factual or non-factual. The question is whether they constitute no meaning-facts (McGinn 1984; Wright 1984) or weak meaning-facts which are not limited to "superlative facts" (Byrne 1996). In light of non-factualism, the Kripke-Wittgenstein position is weak and incoherent (it is impossible to maintain this position and other Wittgenstein's theses, e.g. the impossibility of private language. Non-factualism has been often compared to emotivism in ethics. Indeed, emotivism can be regarded as a form of ethical non-factualism: ethical statements do not refer to facts and have no true conditions. The second theory, factualism, distinguishes between facts and superlative facts: there are no facts in the philosophical sense, but only facts in ordinary sense (Byrne 1996: 342). This position, however, is inconsistent with the skeptical thesis that there are no meaning-facts at all. The problem is how to define the concept of fact. Kripke himself, while formulating his position, did not explain what he meant by "meaning-fact". Should the requirements expressed by standard criteria of meaning attribution, established in practice by a language community and governing the proper use of language, be considered as facts or something non-factual? They contain both normative and conventional elements. They are never natural facts, but they can be social facts. Wittgenstein insists that meanings are constituted in practice and refused to treat

his reply to skepticism as a philosophical thesis. Perhaps this is why it exceeds all attempts to theorize it.

It is precisely by retaining ordinary meanings that Wittgenstein (in both factualist and non-factualist interpretations) is able to secure the consistency and reasonableness of his considerations, at least at the common level of practice. Harrison observes that a rejection of meanings in an ordinary sense would deprive of meaning the very words used by the skeptic to express his doubts (Harrison 1991: 64). Wittgenstein would find himself in a paradoxical situation had he not modify his concept of meaning: he would have to reject meaning skepticism in order to be able to formulate the very problem of meaning skepticism.

4.3. Meaning Skepticism about Other Minds

According to Kripke, skepticism about other minds is even more symptomatic of Wittgenstein's skeptical position. In Kripke's interpretation, it is also a form of meaning skepticism.

Traditional skepticism about other minds is based on doubts whether other minds like mine exist and whether they actually experience what I believe them to experience. It should be underscored that when the Cartesian skeptic asks about other minds, he asks whether and on what basis we know that other minds exist – do we have at least justified beliefs about it? However, he does not question the meanings of words we use to formulate this problem. The meaning skeptic questions only the meaning of words which describe others' mental states, e.g. pain. As Kripke writes, "it seems impossible to imagine the mental life of others on the model of our own. Is it, therefore, meaningless to ascribe sensations to others, at least in the sense in which we ascribe them to ourselves?" (Kripke 1982: 133) There is no good explanation of how it is possible to imagine others' thoughts and sensations. This results in a theoretical solipsism. However, when we take into account social origins of language (including the terms designating sensations), it becomes more clear how we can ascribe sensations to others. In spite of his behaviorist sympathies, Wittgenstein does not claim that an internal experience of pain and an ability to imagine this sensation do not play any role in ascribing sensations to others. Those who never experienced pain and cannot imagine it, are also unable to understand this vocabulary, even if they know the criteria of ascribing sensations (Kripke 1982: 138). However, it remains unclear what rules they follow in ascribing pain to others.[81]

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81 A similar conceptualization of skepticism about other minds can be found in James Conant (2004: 1), who distinguishes between Cartesian skepticism (concerning

In spite of the absence of a theoretical answer to this question, meaning skepticism about others' sensations finds a practical solution in Wittgenstein. "When people actually use expressions attributing sensations to others they do not really mean to make any assertion whose intelligibility is undermined by the sceptic (solipsist)." (Kripke 1982: 141–142) Children learn the meaning of the word "pain", when they get hurt and adults speak to them. "The first-person avowals would not make sense without the third-person use." (Kripke 1982: 134) There are no facts nor any truth conditions which would determine the meaning of mental predicates. The point is not that we represent others' sensations based on our own experience. For all meanings are defined through linguistic practice. "We are not to ask for truth conditions, but for the circumstances under which we attribute sensations to others and the role such attribution plays in our lives." (Kripke 1982: 139)

Andrea Kern (2004: 201) distinguishes two interpretations of Wittgenstein's antiskeptical therapy: a "dissolution" of skepticism and a reinterpretation of the skeptical paradox. The dissolution of skepticism (McDowell 1998) consists in exposing those skeptical assumptions which are doubtful and whose rejection makes the whole problem nonsensical (for example, the assumption that others' sensations are not given through experience but have to be inferred from their behavior). The reinterpretation of the skeptical paradox (Cavell 1979), supported by Kern herself, consists in accepting the problem of skepticism, combined with demonstrating that a skeptic cannot understand it without assuming common beliefs and practice. This means that he cannot question common practice, but he can only lament over the lack of its theoretical explanation. In both cases, the skeptical paradox is resolved. The first solution is "ordinary", while the other is a "skeptical solution".

For Andrea Kern, a skeptic is right that experience does not provide any epistemic basis for asserting the existence of pain. A man pretending to be in pain seems to fulfill the criteria of pain, and it is only after we apply these criteria that we can discover that the pain is feigned. The criteria of pain determine how to apply the concept of pain, not how to recognize pain in others. If our judgements about others' experience are to have any content, we need to have criteria for using psychological concepts. We learn these concept in practice, following their ordinary use. The concept of pain is related to the practice of responding to

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knowledge about other minds) and Kantian skepticism (about the possibility of experiencing the sensations of others).

someone else's pain. In this case, knowledge is an ability to react, rather than a set of reasons (Kern 2004: 210).

Skeptical doubts are caused by failing to recognize that the use of concepts is based on exemplary cases. In order to expose feigning – when, for example, a child is feigning stomach ache to avoid going to school – we can compare it with exemplary cases. However, a skeptic wants to say that all cases of identifying pain are the same, that there are no exemplary cases and that we always have doubts. He thereby ignores something that is not important for him – he forgets that everyday practice gives meaning to the concept of pain, which he also employs in order to formulate his doubts (Kern 2004: 213). If he rejects this practice, his words are no longer meaningful. Therefore, a skeptic forgets about his position. When he abandons the position of participant for the position of observer, he breaks his natural, close bond with the world and people. Because of this, their existence starts to seem alien and requiring justification. Philosophical reflection consists in withdrawal from everyday linguistic practice, while at the same time linguistic practice gives meaning to concepts which are used in philosophy (Kern 2004: 216).

Meaning skepticism about other minds is also self-refutable. If we do not know the meaning of the word "pain", which we attribute to ourselves and others (the same goes for other mental predicates), then we are unable to formulate the thesis of this skepticism. However, as soon as we refer to practice, it turns out that the problem does not exist, or if it does, it is not as dramatic as the skeptic tends to present it. To be sure, the skeptic is right that we do not know how we recognize pain in others and that we do not have any definition of pain. The word "pain" obtains its meaning in everyday life practice, even if we are unable to determine this meaning.

4.4. Skepticism about Self-Consciousness

This indeterminacy of meanings is accompanied by an indeterminacy of mental data expressed through these meanings.

> Nothing, especially the contents of our actual thoughts – and, respectively, of our propositions – can be reasonably asserted, as no such determined contents exist. This is because there are no rules which would constitute these contents in a finite form (that is, without calling for successive interpretations based on new rules). Thus, if a [Cartesian – R. Z.] skeptic, according to Izydora Dąmbska's conception, believes to have found solid foundations on which nothing more can be built, then Kripke-Wittgenstein's skeptic rejects even these foundations, intentionally exposing himself to contradiction in trying to answer the question whether his own views have any determined content. (Szymura 2009: 57)

As Jerzy Szymura observes, the idea of indeterminacy of both meanings of words and contents of thoughts constitutes a new form of contemporary skepticism. This skepticism deprives individual subjects of their ability to represent, ascribing it exclusively to their language community. On the one hand, meaning and content skepticisms are more radical than Cartesian skepticism but, on the other hand, they make it impossible to even formulate it (Posłajko 2010: 179). For a Cartesian skeptic, the socially constructed rules of language game are insignificant – they are excluded by his method, which consists in accepting only that which is certain. One may contend that the whole idea of searching for certainty is undermined in light of meaning skepticism. Even the meanings of mathematical propositions turn out to be socially constructed. Therefore, in the absence of ideal meanings, there is no chance for gaining certain knowledge. In that sense, meaning skepticism seems to mark the ultimate failure of Cartesian skepticism. However, it is hard to be content with this state of affairs, since it leads to the emergence of a more radical skeptical position.

Many contemporary philosophers of mind seem to suggest, or suspect, that self-consciousness data are pure illusion. If this suggestion was treated as an explicit thesis, this would be the most sinister version of contemporary skepticism. This kind of skepticism can be found in contemporary philosophy of mind: it is a "general skeptical suspicion that both our introspection and whole consciousness can be manifestations of something utterly different, that is to say, of brain processes or unconscious mental processes. And if it is so, then we see that not only introspective data but also consciousness as such should be considered as a specific form of illusion." (Judycki 2004: 92)

Paul and Patricia Churchland and Daniel Dennett can be considered as proponents of skepticism about self-consciousness. Paul Churchland argued that there is no such thing as beliefs (Paul Churchland 1981: 262). Patricia Churchland, in turn, added that our brain contains data which have a different form than beliefs: "the brain's basic mode of occurrent representation is the activation vector across a proprietary population of neurons." (Patricia Churchland 1994: 314) They believe that when we will gain precise knowledge about the structure and functioning of human brain, it will turn out that the phenomenal consciousness is only a subjective illusion and what objectively exists are only electric impulses in particular neurons. Daniel Dennett refers to hallucinations and dreams, and comes to a conclusion that "what Descartes thought was most certain – his immediate introspective grasp of the items of consciousness – turns out to be not even quite true, but rather a metaphorical by-product of the way our brains do their approximating

work." (Dennett 1994: 237) Introspection is not an insight but it is a theory (Dennett 1993: 67; Roy 2007: 13).

The experience of arguing against different forms of skepticism shows that every skeptic must have a point of departure; after all, it is impossible to call into question consciousness in general. Meaning skepticism avoids this problem by turning to the idea of social construction of meaning-rules. Skepticism about self-consciousness data has its basis in neurophysiological vocabulary and third-person research.

However, it is important to remember that neurophysiology is also a kind of knowledge acquired in a conscious manner and accessible only because we are conscious of our experiences and thoughts (Judycki 2004: 98–99). Similarly, every rejection of beliefs is possible through acts of assent which assume, if not knowledge, then at least the existence of beliefs. In other words, a skeptic about beliefs hold a belief that there are no beliefs. The act of holding a belief is therefore inconsistent with the content of this belief. Thus, also this form of skepticism falls into a pragmatic inconsistency. It is impossible to formulate this kind of skepticism as a thesis without falling into contradiction.

Garry Levvis seeks to reject the inconsistency charge by pointing to contextual differences between ordinary and neurophysiological languages and to the special status of existential propositions as hinge propositions. Existential propositions serve as grammar rules and their usage is only a reminder of these rules. They do not have any empirical content and cannot be assessed as true or false. When a skeptic about self-consciousness data holds a belief that there are no beliefs, the concept of belief assumes a double meaning. It is precisely this duplicity that makes it possible to erase the contradiction of this form of skepticism (Levvis 1992: 67). The first usage is a grammatical remark within the ordinary context, where it makes no sense to question the existence of beliefs, since they are useful in anticipating others' behavior. The second usage is a grammatical remark within the neurophysiological context in which it makes no sense to assume the existence of beliefs, since the vocabulary of neuronal impulses has a great explanatory force. These are two distinct language games in which the term "belief" obtains two different meanings. So the skeptic about mental contents is consistent within his game. The alleged inconsistency of his position is evident only in a different context. For Levvis, then, there is no contradiction.

As distinct from Levvis, I believe that the skeptical thesis about self-consciousness data shares the fate of all other versions of skepticism in being pragmatically inconsistent. When we try to say, within the ordinary context, that there are no beliefs, we immediately find ourselves in the same position as Sextus Empiricus

who wrote that there are no beliefs. Common language is different from neurophysiological language, but they both aspire to being true. Paul Churchland seeks to disprove common psychology and denies the existence of common beliefs from the position of neurophysiology. But when he tries to verbalize his skepticism, he uses common language and invokes common experience. The thesis that common beliefs do not exist can be true, since we are unable to falsify it. Yet, in ordinary contexts, it cannot be formulated without contradiction.

Skepticism about self-consciousness data is the most dangerous form of contemporary skepticism. It calls into question our whole experience, even if it stems precisely from this experience, as it is based on empirical research methods. This form of skepticism is important in that it indicated a possibility of error. However, it cannot be consistently accepted.

Meaning skepticism and skepticism about self-consciousness data are two different versions, public and private, of content skepticism, a novelty which contemporary philosophy has introduced to the history of skepticism. They can be also considered as forms of secondary skepticism. Either way, they both confirm the thesis that the skeptical position is pragmatically inconsistent.

Conclusions for Contemporary Skepticism

In contemporary philosophy there are, in general, two versions of skepticism: Cartesian skepticism (Peter Unger) and meaning skepticism (Kripke-Wittgenstein). The first version is based on traditional (albeit modified) skeptical hypotheses and a paradoxical thesis that knowledge does not exist. The second version is based on Kripke's hypothesis of *quus* and an equally paradoxical thesis that meanings of words (and consciousness data) do not exist.

Contemporary Cartesian skeptics (especially Unger) insist on conditions of certainty. The critique of this form of skepticism is based on the contemporary transformation of the concept of knowledge which is no longer subjected to the conditions of certainty and designates also probable beliefs. The discussions against skepticism have shown that the weakening of the concept of knowledge cancels the problem of skepticism. For if knowledge does not require certainty (the exclusion of all possibility of error), then it is evident that there are things we know. The same goes for the concept of justification. If not all justifications require going through a procedure of justification, then we can easily avoid Agrippa's trilemma. Contextualism is a specific recapitulation of this conceptual transformation in that it shows that the skeptical critique of common beliefs rests on a difference between standards of knowledge which are always dependent on context. Skepticism is thereby not so much refuted as marginalized.

It is because of this transformation of our concept of knowledge, that skepticism should be distinguished from fallibilism. I think all contemporary philosophers are fallibilists who claim that certain knowledge does not exist. Only those who deny the existence of all knowledge and all reasonable justification deserve to be called skeptics. Fallibilism provides a reply to primary skepticism, but it does not disprove second-order skepticism concerning knowledge about knowledge. It retains the truth condition for uncertain knowledge, but it is hard to determine whether it is satisfied. A more efficient reply to skepticism would require transforming the concept of truth (as William James did) or removing the condition of truth from the definition of knowledge (Grobler 2001: 291). In theory, the second option – retaining the concept of objective truth as a regulative idea and simultaneously rejecting the truth condition for knowledge – seems to be better. Knowledge is an established belief which needs to be neither certain nor true. In light of this conception, the expression "false knowledge" is no longer an oxymoron. A consequence of this change is a separation of knowledge from objectivity (a separation which the concept of truth rendered impossible). Skepticism no longer concerns knowledge, but only the knowability of truth. However, Thomas Nagel was right to point out that the danger of skepticism will be there so long as we will strive for objectivity.

Nowadays, the thesis of global skepticism – that *knowledge does not exist at all* – is usually considered as paradoxical and inconsistent. Peter Unger writes, however, that he is not afraid of inconsistency, as skepticism can be dialectically interpreted. Michael Williams has a similar view. Yet, it is important to note that, firstly, the dialectical interpretation leads to a withdrawal of acceptance of the skeptical hypothesis; and secondly, that there are reasons to consider the dialectical interpretation as insufficient to avoid inconsistecy insofar as skepticism is believed to have a global reach (like in Unger's version). The main reason against the dialectical interpretation is related to tacit assumptions of language games (basic data and rules) and causal connection between language and world (meanings depend on stimuli). Such theory of language makes it impossible to consistently formulate a hypothesis questioning the world's existence. Hilary Putnam has tried to demonstrate the inconsistency of the brain-in-a-vat hypothesis. To be sure, his attempt relied on an externalist conception of meaning, but nonetheless it should be considered an important alternative for the skeptical system of concepts. Like Putnam, I would contend that, since even posing the problem of skepticism and formulating skeptical hypotheses require tacit assumptions, skepticism in the dialectical interpretation becomes pragmatically inconsistent (the declared views are in conflict with the assumptions).

Meaning skepticism undermines our strive for certainty, but at the same time it leads us ever deeper into the desert of uncertainty. We have no clue how to verify our beliefs, but, what is more, we have problems with determining their meanings. Language is no longer a transparent tool which can be unproblematically used by skeptics. Thus, the meaning skeptic moves into deeper contradiction than the Cartesian skeptic (he cannot even formulate his thesis). However, it is not destructive for the idea of skepticism which has been always difficult to express with words. Nonetheless, skepticism serves a positive cognitive role, showing a split between our cognitive aspirations (the ideals of precision and truth) and the actual state of our beliefs.

Conclusion: Pragmatic Inconsistency of Skepticism

The historical survey of skepticism demonstrates that the internal problem of skepticism, constituting the main obstacle for its acceptance both in antiquity and in modern times, has been its inconsistency. Inconsistency is a kind of internal contradiction, but in the case of skepticism it does not consist in an explicit acceptance of two contradictory propositions, as skeptics often do not accept even their own theses (Sextus Empiricus) or seriously doubt their value (David Hume). The inconsistency of skepticism has a pragmatic character: it is not related and limited to the content of skeptical theses, but it concerns the relationship between these theses and tacit assumptions inherent in the act of speaking as such. Every attempt to formulate the skeptical thesis leads to the contradiction between its content (knowledge does not exist) and the act of its assertion, which necessarily presupposes that there is something we know.

Sextus Empiricus believed to have found a radical reply to this inconsistency charge by sternly proclaiming that he did not accept anything, including his own arguments. In this situation, there are no contents that can be logically inconsistent. However, it is evident that Sextus adopts a practical attitude, utters sentences, formulates arguments, draws conclusions and questions others' beliefs. Therefore, his position is interpreted in many ways: as fallibilism, as behaviorism or as a process which involves shifts in the attitude. Contemporary fallibilism, however, does not fully correspond to Sextus's radicalism that rejected all beliefs (including their weaker forms). The behaviorist interpretation, in turn, reduces Sextus's position to irrationalism. The development interpretation is most interesting, as it rests on a distinction between mature and developing forms of skepticism. This distinction provides an explanation of inconsistencies in the skeptical attitude. However, it does not change the fact that in the process of rational justification of his position, the skeptic repeatedly reaches pragmatically inconsistent conclusions, e.g. that no claim can be justified, that there is no criterion of truth nor legitimate evidence, etc. Hence the dilemma: either the Sextan skepticism is unjustified, or it is inconsistent. In both cases there are no reasons to accept this position. And even when we examine it from a contextualist perspective, we are still unable to remove its inconsistency. The skeptical context, like every language game, is governed by some specific, tacitly established rules, such as the concept of certain knowledge, the concept of justification (based on introspective data and at the same time assuring objective certainty), and the

unlimited right to doubt which requires no justification and throws the whole burden of proof on those who assert something. If Sextus claims that he holds no beliefs, then he is unaware of his own silent assumptions, and what he explicitly claims stands in contradiction with these very assumptions.

Let us designate as S the thesis suggested by Sextus's works: "No thesis is rationally preferable to its negation." Does the skeptic prefers S rather than non-S? If he does, then the content of S is in contradiction with the act of asserting S. And if he does not, then he is no longer a skeptic about the possibility of making a rational choice between beliefs. Sextus claims that he does not accept any thesis. However, those who accept S fall into self-refutation. For every act of assertion, even with weak assent, is an acceptance of truth. In that sense, the thesis expressing Sextus's position is pragmatically inconsistent. It can be formulated only without making an explicit assertion, e.g. ironically or insincerely, but such illocutive acts are of lesser significance in the search for truth pursued by Sextan skepticism.

Hume had a better understanding of the psychological dimension of human beliefs and their implication into a wider system of relations between people and the world. He accepted the skeptical thesis, but believed that it has to be moderate. Using the Cartesian concept of knowledge, he allowed the existence of uncertain beliefs and non-rational justifications. Moreover, he claimed that considered the thesis of global skepticism as inconsistent insofar as it was counted as knowledge. Therefore, he searched rescue in moderate skepticism as an uncertain and temporary thesis intertwined with an acceptance of common beliefs. This weakening of assent, however, could not provide a sufficient defense of skepticism. The weakened skeptical thesis becomes uncertain and unjustified. In fact, it would be no longer a skeptical thesis if it were not for our instinct and common beliefs which provide a foundation for skeptical doubts. Notwithstanding Antiochus's remarks, Sextus failed to understand that the thesis of skepticism was implicated in the context of common perception. Hume came to this conclusion, but he thereby limited the role of skepticism. The Humean skepticism was not an autonomous position – it became methodic skepticism or fallibilism (in contemporary terms).

Ludwig Wittgenstein considers the Cartesian skepticism as unutterable (the skeptic cannot consistently claim to be a skeptic). Skeptical doubts make sense only within a language game, which is why there is no language in which global skepticism can be consistently expressed. A consistent skeptic should remain silent: if he says something, he already contradicts himself. Not only propositions but also questions and doubts entail numerous assumptions. Everyone who says

something already presupposes some knowledge about the world, and therefore it is impossible to claim not to know anything.

The pragmatic inconsistency of the skeptical thesis, let us repeat, is that the explicit content of this thesis stands in contradiction with the very act of asserting it. This relation, of course, can be differently construed. Knowledge can be understood as either requiring certainty or not. Similarly, the assent to this thesis can be strong or weak. As it turns out, the only consistent version here is a presumption (weak assent) that certain knowledge does not exist. This version entails no contradiction, as it is based on a weak concept of knowledge which is not necessarily certain. However, it is no longer skepticism, but it is a thesis of fallibilism. Contemporary skepticism is a thesis that there is no such thing as knowledge (because knowledge requires certainty).

This kind of skepticism is inconsistent, at least insofar as it is considered as knowledge in the strong sense it aims to criticize. Let us designate as Q the proposition: "Knowledge does not exist". Does the skeptic know that Q? If he knows that Q, then the content of Q is in contradiction with the act of asserting it. If he does not know that Q, his skepticism is weak and does not offer any convincing arguments which would undermine beliefs held by others. The idea of weak assent can protect him from self-refutation, but it does not remove the dilemma: justification or inconsistency. If the skeptic merely presumes that knowledge does not exist, then his rational presumption is based on some reasons, arguments and concepts. Justifying his doubts, and even posing his question, the skeptic cannot, but refers to some kind of knowledge, even if he claims that knowledge does not exist. Every attempt to justify this thesis leads to the pragmatic inconsistency.

Skepticism about rational justification can be neither consistently justified nor even formulated. Let us designate as R the thesis that no thesis can be rationally justified. One may ask whether the skeptic has a rational justification for R. If he offers any justification, then the content of R is in contradiction with the act of asserting it. And if he does not, then he has no reasons to accept it. To assert R is to accept it as true, and hence to hold tacit assumptions that there are reasons which support it. Thus, the content of R is in contradiction with this tacit assumption.

None of the forms of skepticism discussed above has ever been falsified. In light of Luca Castagnoli's analyses, self-refutation cannot be equated with falsification. Even if skeptical theses are self-refutable, they can still be true. Nonetheless, every attempt to treat them as rational theses and to justify them leads to the pragmatic inconsistency. Rationality is based on rules and systemic assumptions,

even if they are only temporary. Therefore, those who try to reject the whole system fail to understand their own conditions. Wittgenstein's remarks about language games and our contemporary theories of speech acts (by John Austin and John Searle) have contributed to determining this kind of inconsistency which marks the skeptical position.

Such inconsistency is even more evident in case of meaning skepticism. If it were consistent, it could not be a position about meaning. Let us designate as T the thesis that there can be no such thing as meaning. Does the skeptic know what T means? If he does, then T has a meaning and a kind of meaning exists. If he does not, he is unable to determine what he says. Thus, global skepticism about knowledge, justification, meaning and beliefs cannot be rationally justified, or even accepted without falling into the pragmatic inconsistency.

Moderate skepticism of Carneades and Hume, as well as contemporary fallibilism, are both an effect of the search for consistency of global skepticism. However, it should be underscored that the cost of this solution was a rejection of any strong and autonomous skeptical thesis. Skepticism with strong assent cannot, in principle, find a consistent expression and remains a pragmatically inconsistent thesis. However, a majority of skeptical positions can be interpreted in a moderate way. The only problematic position is that of Sextus Empiricus, who defends skepticism, while withdrawing all assent from it. In spite of this problem, Michael Frede favorably interpreted his position as a kind of fallibilism. What is more important, only fallibilism can be justified by Sextus's arguments.

An important conceptualization, which is also a way to avoid the inconsistency of skepticism, has been offered by its dialectical interpretation. In light of this interpretation, skeptical arguments are arguments *ad hominem*, which use the premises held by the skeptic's opponent, while the skeptic himself neither accepts them as true nor recognizes any conclusions inferred from them. The skeptic does not claim anything, but remains a neutral observer of conflicts between beliefs (Lammenranta 2008: 11). That is why skeptics have often adopted their opponents' assumptions in order to bring them into contradiction. Methodic skepticism is a form of such skeptical activity. Many founders of great philosophical systems have tended to accept this form of skepticism. In Descartes, methodic skepticism consisted in doubting against our natural inclinations. However, it was only a method of reaching theoretical certainty. Immanuel Kant accepted the skeptical method as a protection from dogmatism. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel considered skepticism as a useful element in the dialectical process of the development of spirit. Edmund Husserl employed *epochē* to acquire certain knowledge. Each of these great thinkers used skepticism as a method

of thinking. Skepticism was a non-autonomous element within their theoretical systems. This role of skepticism is of singular importance, but it is not a role of an autonomous philosophical position which can be accepted as true. Thus, methodic skepticism has become a trivial element of critical thinking methods. "Nobody seeks to disprove it." (Dąmbska 1939: 3) Methodic skepticism and fallibilism have emerged in the skeptical tradition in order to be accepted as theoretical truisms. They are immune to the inconsistency charge, but they are no longer perceived as skepticism. Instead, they have become fixed elements of our system of knowledge.

Considering a historical role of skepticism, it is worth to quote Franz Brentano who believed that skepticism is a symptom of decline in every epoch. A phase of creativity and practical engagement is always followed by a phase of skepticism which calls into question the value of all current achievements. This second phase, in turn, is followed by irrationalism and mysticism, which emerge as a means to satisfy our cognitive aspirations (Dąmbska 1948a: 85). Brentano's view was shared by Władysław Tatarkiewicz, who believed that the heyday of philosophy lasted from its emergence to Aristotle and was followed by the Stoic and Epicurean practical philosophies, then by Pyrrhonism and academic skepticism, and finally by mystical Neo-Platonism. The heyday of medieval thought, in turn, lasted until the 13th century (reaching its culmination in Aquinas's system) and was followed by Scotist practical philosophy, skepticism of the Ockhamist movement, and mysticism of Eckhart and Nicholas of Cusa. Finally, the heyday of modern philosophy lasted from Francis Bacon to Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz and was followed by a practical turn of French Enlightenment, Hume's skepticism, and mysticism which manifested itself in German idealist systems of Kant and Hegel (Tatarkiewicz 1983: 162). A similar view is expressed by Étienne Gilson, who writes that skepticism signifies a loss of confidence in one's principles and that Willhelm Ockham, in paving the way to skepticism, already anticipated the decline of the medieval metaphysics. However, Izydora Dąmbska is right to observe that "all great philosophical systems have been accompanied skepticism", since "criticism and doubts are inseparably bound to scientific production." (Dąmbska 1948a: 85) It seems that in modern philosophy skepticism is no longer a symptom of decline: Decartes's skepticism is followed by Hume's and then Kant's skeptical position. It is also hard to agree that Kant and Hegel were irrationalists or mystics. The decline of modern period is expressed only by Friedrich Nietzsche. Therefore, one should accepts Dąmbska's middle-ground position that "skepticism has prevailed in both heydays and declines of the spiritual development of epochs." (Dąmbska 1948a: 85–86).

Regardless of how this controversy is resolved, skepticism plays an important role in the development of critical thinking. It flourishes especially in confrontation with great philosophical systems – when new conceptualizations of the world emerge and can be criticized for their weaknesses. "This readiness to a constant questioning of fixed beliefs has determined the evolution, expansiveness and effectiveness of Western culture." (Nerczuk 2010: 60) In the development process of knowledge skepticism is beneficial as a protection from error that leads, in effect, to new discoveries (Popkin 2003: 261). Denis Diderot was right to observe that "what has never been put in question has not been demonstrated […]. Scepticism is thus the first step towards truth." (Diderot 1916: 45) However, skepticism is beneficial only in proper doses. When it becomes a fixed perspective, it becomes dangerous in erasing all hopes of discovering truth (cf. Dąmbska 1948a: 84). Skepticism stems from our fear of falsehood, intermingled with our need for truth; that is why skeptical stances are usually ephemeral.

Skepticism is not an autonomous and philosophically constructive position. Sextus's attempt to turn it into a kind of life wisdom has made it inconsistent. Sextus, Hume and Wittgenstein relied on nature and practice in order to safeguard their skepticism. Sextus skeptical wisdom was based on the return to a passive performance of everyday tasks. Hume wrote about a blind subjection to instinct and beliefs dictated by it. This position is a rejection of the idea of rationality which has motivated the skeptical critique. Thus, the skeptical solutions have often come a full circle, returning to a common form of dogmatism. Nonetheless, the lesson of skepticism provides a deeper understanding of the situation of man (as an important element of the hermeneutic circle) and shapes the attitude of carefulness and precision. To be sure, the thesis of global skepticism – that knowledge does not exist – cannot be rationally accepted (because of its pragmatic inconsistency), but nonetheless it serves a beneficial role of stimulating intellectual ferment, a paradox which awakens us from the "dogmatic slumber" and encourages to rethink the foundations of knowledge.

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Abbreviations

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Chronology and Geography of Skepticism

I. Ancient skepticism (4th cent. BC to 3rd cent. CE)

Pyrrho of Elis (journey to India, Elis, ca. 360–270)
Timon of Philus (360–270 BC)
Arcesilaus of Pitane (Athens, ca. 315–240 BC)
Carneades of Cirene (Athens, ca. 214–129 BC)
Philo of Larissa (Athens, Rome, ca. 154–84 BC)
Cicero of Arpino (Rome, ca. 106–43 BC)
Aenesidemus of Knossos (Alexandria, 1st cent. CE)
Agrippa (Alexandria?, 1st cent. CE)
Sextus Empiricus (Rome?, Alexandria?, ca. 160–210 CE)

II. Early Christian and medieval skepticism (2nd to 14th cent.)

Clement of Alexandria[R] (ca. 150–215)
Lactantius (Nicomedia in the Byzantine Empire, ca. 250–325)
Eusebius of Caesarea in Palestine (ca. 264–340)
St. Augustine (Cartagine, Rome, 354–430)
Photios[R] (Constantinopole, 810–891)
John of Salisbury (Chartes, ca. 1115–1176)
Henry of Ghent (Paris, ca. 1217–1293)
Peter Aureoli (Paris, ca. 1280–1322)
Wilhelm Ockham (Oxford, ca. 1287–1347)
Nicholas of Autrecourt (Paris, Metz., ca. 1300–1369)
John of Mirecourt (Paris, ca. 1310–1350)
Nicholas of Cusa (Rome, 1400–1464)*

R – Authors important for the reception of skepticism, although usually its severe critics.

* – Only Lactantius and John of Salisbury declared themselves as skeptics, or, more precisely, as moderate, academic skeptics. Other thinkers listed above propagated views that can be interpreted as skeptical.

III. Modern skepticism (15th to 19th cent.)

Desiderius Erasmus (Paris, London, Torino, 1469–1536)
Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola (Florence, 1469–1536)

1562 – the first Latin translation of Sextus Empiricus' *Outlines of Skepticism*
Michel de Montaigne (Bordeaux, 1533–1592)
Francisco Sanchez (Braga, Toulouse, 1551–1623)
1580 – the first edition of Montaigne's *Essays*
Pierre Charron (Paris, 1541–1603)
René Descartes (France, Holland, 1596–1650)
Blaise Pascal (Paryż, 1623–1662)
Pierre Daniel Huet (Paris, 1630–1721)
Pierre Bayle (Tulouse, Geneva, Paris, Rotterdam, 1647–1706)
David Hume (Edinburgh, 1711–1776)
Immanuel Kant (Königsberg, 1724–804)
Ernst Renan (Paris, 1823–1892)
Friedrich Nietzsche (Basel, 1844–1900)

IV. Contemporary skepticism (20th cent.)

Ludwig Wittgenstein (Vienna, 1889–1951)
Emil Cioran (Paris, 1911–1995)
Richard Popkin (San Diego, California, USA, 1923–2005)
Hilary Putnam (Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA, 1926–2016)
Odo Marquard (Gissen, Germany, 1928–2015)
Richard Rorty (Stanford, California, USA, 1931–2007)
Robert Fogelin (Hanover, New Hampshire, USA, born 1932)
Thomas Nagel (New York, USA, born 1937)
Saul Kripke (New York, USA, born 1937)
Peter Unger (New York, USA, born 1942)
Keith DeRose (New Haven, Connecticut, USA, born 1962)
1960 – the first edition of Richard Popkin's *The History of Scepticism from Erasmus to Descartes* (Van Gorcum, Amsterdam)
1975 – the first edition of Peter Unger's *Ignorance. A Case for Skepticism* (Clarendon Press, Oxford)
1982 – the first edition of Saul Kripke's *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts)

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