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WITTGENSTEIN AND PYRRHONISM: ON THE NATURE OF PHILOSOPHY

WITTGENSTEIN Y EL PIRRONISMO: SOBRE LA NATURALEZA DE LA FILOSOFÍA

PLÍNIO JUNQUEIRA SMITH
Doctor en filosofía
Profesor asociado
Universidade Federal de São Paulo
São Paulo/Brazil,
Investigador del CNPq
plinio.smith@unifesp.br
ORCID: 0000-0001-5239-3190

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Abstract: The aim of this paper is to assess Wittgenstein's later philosophy relation to skepticism. Despite the fact that he explicitly rejects it, it is argued that his conception of philosophy has strong affinities to ancient Pyrrhonism, and not to Humean skepticism, as some claim. Among other features, it is highlighted that both Wittgenstein and the ancient Pyrrhonist think of philosophy as a therapy requiring some specific abilities, whose goal is to bring about tranquility, leaving everyday life as it is without any dogmatic commitment. Lastly, it is suggested that Wittgenstein renewed this skeptical tradition inventing a new method, or methods, to achieve this goal.

Keywords: ability; method; Pyrrhonism; skepticism; therapy; Wittgenstein.

Resumen: El objetivo de este artículo es evaluar la relación entre la filosofía del segundo Wittgenstein y el escepticismo. Aunque Wittgenstein lo rechace explícitamente, se argumenta que su concepción de filosofía tiene fuertes afinidades con el pirronismo antiguo, y no con el escepticismo humeano, como sostienen algunos. Entre otros rasgos, se muestra que Wittgenstein y el pirrónico antiguo conciben la filosofía como una terapia basada en determinadas habilidades, cuyo fin es producir la tranquilidad, dejando la vida cotidiana como está, sin ningún compromiso dogmático. Finalmente, se sugiere que Wittgenstein renovó esa tradición escéptica al inventar un nuevo método, o métodos, para alcanzar ese fin.

Palabras Clave: escepticismo; habilidad; método; pirronismo; terapia; Wittgenstein.

INTRODUCTION[1]

The systematic comparison between Wittgenstein's philosophy and skepticism seems only to highlight their deep differences. It is well known that Wittgenstein himself explicitly rejected skepticism throughout his life. As early as the *Diaries* of 1914-1916 (01.May.1915), Wittgenstein raises an objection, which will reappear in the *Tractatus* (TLP 6.51) and according to which the skeptical doubt is senseless (*unsinnig*), for the skeptic intends to doubt about something that we cannot even say. And, in the end of his life, he condemns a universal skepticism, since a doubt makes sense only if one assumes previous certainties: "If you tried to doubt everything you would not get as far as doubting anything. The game of doubting itself presupposes certainty." (OC, 115) In these two objections, Wittgenstein insists on the idea that the skeptical doubt is devoid of sense[2].

The criticism targeted at the so-called "private language" could also be seen as a criticism of skepticism, for the solipsist stance, associated with a "private language", seems to be a consequence of the skeptical objections to a realist stance[3]. The skeptic argues in order to show that we can never know the internal states of another person. For instance, when I see something red, I don't know if another person has the perception of red, green or any other color. Even to say that I believe that another person perceives the same color as I do is wrong, for in order to speak of "belief" it is needed that this belief could be at least partially confirmed (or disconfirmed), and this is impossible in the case of other minds. And, finally, if the meaning of words consists in the reference to personal experiences and if two persons can never have the same experience, then communicability is lost, and I can never attribute to others internal states like those I have: the word "pain" can only refer to my pain, and not to the pain of someone else. Once one accepts these skeptical arguments, there is no other alternative but to hold solipsism and the possibility of a private language. But if Wittgenstein shows the absurdity of the supposition of a private language (PI, 243-315), he shows at the same time the absurdity of the skeptical stance, since this stance assumes, or presupposes, that possibility.

1 This paper was originally published in *Analytica*, 1993 (1): 153-86. It has been slightly modified and updated for this publication, especially in the last section. I would like to thank two anonymous referees; their comments helped me to improve some bits of my paper.

2 Strawson (1985) and Grayling (1985) base their criticism of skepticism on Wittgenstein, in particular on *On Certainty*.

3 Tugendhat (1979, p. 93-4) shows the role played by skeptical arguments in the internal dissolution of realism in the way to solipsism and, finally, to the abandonment of the language of "I". Hacker (1990, p. 25-6) says that the presuppositions of the metaphysical and linguistic theories of the philosophers lead inevitably to solipsism, where skepticism about other minds and communication are two necessary intermediary steps of this process.

Kripke (1982) and Fogelin (1987 chap. XI), on the other hand, argued that Wittgenstein's philosophy presents a new form of skepticism, a form with many similarities with Hume's skepticism.[4] According to them, Wittgenstein formulated a "skeptical doubt", to which he found a "skeptical solution", just as Hume did in sections IV and V of his *Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*. Their interpretation turns on Wittgenstein's considerations on following a rule (PI, 185-242), of which, according to Kripke, the private language argument is just an instance. Kripke states the argument in a Humean fashion: how can we know, in the future, based on what has been observed in the past, that we are really following the same rule? According to the "skeptical solution", the correct understanding of a rule is shown by a behavior that is in accord with the majority of the linguistic community. But Baker and Hacker (1984, esp. chap. 1) argued that the connection between the rule and the act in conformity with this rule is an "internal relation", i.e., understanding a rule is precisely knowing those acts in accord with it. The "community view" would be, on the contrary, an empirical way to associate the rule to acts in accord with it and, thus, there would be only an "external relation".[5] It is incorrect to attribute to Wittgenstein a Humean skepticism as Kripke and Fogelin did.[6]

In sum, nothing seems to suggest an affinity between Wittgenstein's philosophy and skepticism, and everything seems to point in the opposed direction. Wittgenstein's reflections on the meaning of the skeptical doubt (both in the *Tractatus* and in *On Certainty*), on the possibility of a private language, and on rule following rather lead him to reject skepticism instead of embracing it. Those who have denied any kinship between skepticism and Wittgenstein's thought are apparently right.

However, it must be remarked that the skepticism to which Wittgenstein and his commentators refer is skepticism in its modern form, inaugurated by Descartes in his First *Meditation*. Doubt and certainty, as a philosophical issue, especially as they are treated in *On Certainty*, clearly have their source in the Cartesian idea of a methodic, radical, and universal doubt, as well as in Berkeley's denial of a material world.[7] Not less modern is the issue of solipsism, in which the skeptical doubts lead us to a subject which has access only to its own modifications, like the Cartesian *cogito* or the Humean bundle of perceptions. Lastly, Fogelin's and Kripke's interpretation and Baker's and

4 There was a dispute between Kripke and Fogelin as to who held this interpretation first. It seems that they developed it independently (see Fogelin, 1987, p. 241-6, n. 10).

5 See also McGinn (1984).

6 Later, in the face of this and other criticisms, Fogelin (2009) changed his mind. On the other hand, one may claim, as one anonymous referee did, that there are more similarities between Kripkenstein and ancient Pyrrhonist than my comments suggest. This is an interesting, complex topic, and I cannot go into it here. See Smith (2003; 2022, chapter 7).

7 Kenny (2005) and Bouveresse (1987) point out that Descartes is Wittgenstein's target, but it seems to me that Berkeley is no less criticized.

Hacker's answer have in view only a Humean kind of skepticism. Thus, the issue of skepticism in Wittgenstein has been considered mostly in connection with modern philosophy.[8]

In order to endow the issue of the relationship between Wittgenstein's philosophy and skepticism with a precise meaning, two changes in its formulation are necessary. First, we have to put aside the reference to this form of skepticism which is nothing but a methodological step of the Cartesian dogmatism, as well as to the empirical and scientific form that Hume gives to skepticism, and turn our attention to ancient skepticism. Second, leave temporarily aside this discussion by topics and treat instead Wittgenstein's conception of philosophy and the most general significance he attributes to his own thinking; thereby we will be able to discuss on Wittgenstein's alleged skepticism with the necessary conceptual and historical rigor.[9]

My suggestion is that Wittgenstein's conception of philosophy has many affinities with the Pyrrhonian skeptical conception (M, p. 322).[10] To defend this interpretation, I will first present briefly some aspects of the Wittgensteinian conception of philosophy and, next, I will compare it to that presented by Sextus Empiricus. I do not intend to hold a new interpretation of the Wittgensteinian conception of philosophy, but only to order what we already know in view of a certain purpose: to show the skeptical style present in that conception.

1. WITTGENSTEIN'S CONCEPTION OF PHILOSOPHY

Wittgenstein opposes in a general way to his own conception of philosophy another one,[11] which I will call the traditional conception of philosophy. According to the traditional conception, philosophy should deal with phenomena to see through them ("*die Erscheinungen durchschauen*"; PI, 90) or with things to see through them ("*die Sache durchschauen*"; PI, 92) and, thus, to reach the essence of things. By "the essence of things", Wittgenstein refers to something hidden behind the very things that would be disclosed by a

8 I do not ignore that there as some studies that compare Wittgenstein to ancient skeptics, but among the main scholars on Wittgenstein's works none takes into account Greek skepticism. More recently, this perspective became more common. Since my original paper was published back in 1993, this shows that I was not obviously wrong.

9 Gómez Alonso (2022, p. 30-1) complains that the term "skepticism" is ambiguous, thereby making it difficult to compare Wittgentein's philosophy with skepticism. I hope to have avoided the ambiguities pointed out by him.

10 This interpretation, inaugurated by Fogelin (1981), is increasingly becoming widespread. See, for instance, Sluga (2004), Pritchard (2011; 2020) and Gómez Alonso (2022). Fogelin (1994, p. 205-222), however, moved beyond this Pyrrhonian reading of Wittgenstein; he came to interpret Wittgenstein as if there were two opposed voices: the skeptical and the dogmatic one. For the development of Fogelin's interpretations of Wittgenstein, see Smith (2019).

11 See Moore (1959), p. 322.

philosophical analysis. The idea that the essence is hidden ("*Das Wesen ist uns verborgen*") is a basic idea that Wittgenstein attributes to traditional philosophy. The task of the philosopher would be to discover the occult essence by means of an analysis of phenomena or things.

For Wittgenstein, on the contrary, philosophy is not concerned with phenomena or things, but with the "possibility" of phenomena, i.e., with the "*kinds of statement* that we make about phenomena." (PI, 90) Philosophers take our everyday assertions about phenomena as subject for their reflections. This is what Augustine did with the issue of time and that is why his considerations are grammatical: philosophy is completely concerned with our ways of making statements. As Wittgenstein says later to his internal interlocutor: "Your questions refer to words; so I have to talk about words." (PI, 120) Traditional philosophy, confounding the semantical domain with the domain of things, attributes to the latter what belongs to the former. "One predicates of the thing what lies in the mode of representation." (PI, 104) But the correct understanding of language keeps rigorously apart these two domains and the philosopher will take care only of language. "Philosophical investigations: conceptual investigations. The essential thing about metaphysics: it obliterates the distinction between factual (*sachlichen*) and conceptual investigations." (Z, 458) In other words, traditional philosophy mistakes logic and ontology, and Wittgenstein carefully keeps them apart.

Once the philosophical field is delimited (language or discourse, while science takes care of factual investigation), Wittgenstein opposes to *die Erscheinungen durchschauen* another phrase, that of *übersichtliche Darstellung* (PI, 92). This *übersichtliche Darstellung* is a description of the rules of our grammar that allows us to recognize that which we already know, but had difficulties in seeing. In contrast to the traditional view, Wittgenstein does not intend to go beyond things or phenomena in order to understand some hidden essence. The essence, for Wittgenstein, is already open to be seen in plain view and, by means of an arrangement of grammatical facts, becomes clear. The task is no longer to disclose "the real structure of the world", but only to describe conceptual connections. The essence, conceived by philosophers as an occult entity to be revealed by an analysis, is now interpreted by Wittgenstein as a mere grammatical rule of our language. If, for the traditional view, philosophy raised ontological-epistemological questions, for Wittgenstein they are all, at bottom, semantic ones.

Wittgenstein characterizes the propositions of traditional philosophy as scientific, as if philosophy were a super-science, for it builds theories, raises hypotheses, offers explanations of the world just like science. But, for Wittgenstein, in place of these theories, hypotheses and explanations, philosophy should only describe the workings of our language (PI, 109). No new theory is proposed and, were it the case of proposing one, there would never be

an issue about it, because everybody would agree with it (PI, 128). So, Wittgenstein does not hold any philosophical opinion and cannot even appeal to any opinion which is not shared by his interlocutor, since, in this case, they would not share the same language game that must be described. "On all questions we discuss I have no opinion; and if I had, and it disagreed with one of your opinions, I would at once give it up for the sake of the argument, because it would be of no importance for our discussion." (WL, p. 97) To hold an opinion is for Wittgenstein a way of being partial, as well as to have a creed, what is the opposite of what a philosopher should do: "Our task is to be just. That is, all we have to do is to point out and resolve the injustices of philosophy; we must not set up new parties – and creeds." (BT, 309e).

Linked to this refusal of formulating philosophical theses or theories emerges the idea that, in philosophy, there is no argumentative method in the sense of articulating premises and conclusions in order to establish the truth of the latter on the basis of the former. The aim of Wittgenstein's arguments is to dissolve the problems appealing only to linguistic facts acknowledged by his interlocutor. "In philosophy no inferences are drawn. 'But it must be like this!' is not a philosophical proposition. Philosophy only states what everybody concedes to it." (PI, 599)

It is important to note that this arrangement is not the product of an empirical science, of an investigation into new facts and that the empirical knowledge of grammar belongs to the grammarian. All that we want to know is given from the start, it is enough to remember what we already know about our language. "The problems are solved, not by coming up with new discoveries, but by assembling what we have long been familiar with." (PI, 109) If empirical science has also the aim of discovering new facts about the world, philosophy has no such aim.

One understands why, after Wittgenstein having said that philosophy is not concerned with phenomena and things, he can say that philosophy of logic refers to propositions and words in the everyday sense of these terms, i.e., "[w]e're talking about the spatial and temporal phenomenon of language, not about some non-spatial, atemporal non-entity." (PI, 108) Not positing occult entities like "essences", Wittgenstein refers only to what we refer in our "everyday thought," not only to real language, but also to everyday objects (PI, 106).

This positive goal, that of describing and understanding what is already before our eyes, but which we have difficulties in perceiving (PI, 89), acquires philosophical significance from a negative goal. The *übersichtliche Darstellung* does not aim to offer a new doctrine of the essence of things, according to which the essence would be apparent and not hidden behind things, but it aims at eliminating philosophical confusions. "And this inquiry sheds light on our problem by clearing misunderstandings away." (PI, 90)

In this sense, one must understand the claim that "[t]he work of the philosopher consists in marshalling recollections for a particular purpose." (PI, 127) This reunion of recollections is nothing but the explanation of the use of words in our everyday language. Later, Wittgenstein says that he wants "to establish an order in our knowledge of the use of language: an order for a particular purpose", namely, that of avoiding theoretical confusion which arise when "language is, as it were, idling, not when it is doing work," (PI, 132) when it is on holidays. On the one hand, it is undeniable that one of Wittgenstein's goal is to describe grammatical rules, but, on the other, the explanation of the reason why he wants to understand something points to a critical goal, to undo the misunderstandings philosophers have of the logic of everyday language. "For the clarity that we are aiming at is indeed *complete* clarity. But this simply means that the philosophical problems should completely disappear." (PI, 133) This passage, though it implies a certain equivalence between clarification and elimination of incomprehension, also points to a certain priority of the disappearance of philosophical problems with respect to the task of describing the grammar of our language.[12]

Confined to conceptual questions, philosophical investigations do not obtain a new, deeper knowledge of things, but will make us recognize that the alleged philosophical knowledge is but an inadequate use of language. Precisely because his considerations destroy "castles in the air" Wittgenstein judges that they are important (PI, 118). Immediately after, he admits that "[t]he results of philosophy are the discovery of some piece of plain nonsense and the bumps that the understanding has got by running up against the limits of language. They – these bumps – make us see the value of that discovery." (PI, 119; see BT, p. 305e) Conceptual description, in the place of the traditional philosophical explanation, "gets its light – that is to say, its purpose – from the philosophical problems." (PI, 109) Wittgenstein can now offer a definition of philosophy: "Philosophy is a struggle against the bewitchment of our understanding by the resources of our language." (PI, 109)

Once the nature of philosophy is so defined, it is natural to characterize it as therapeutic, as a philosophy whose goal is to cure the philosophers from the disease to which her intellect falls prey. "The philosopher treats a question; like an illness." (PI, 255) The metaphor of bumps caused by running up against the limits of language (PI, 119) is in accord with this characterization: the person who has these bumps must be treated. At first, Wittgenstein thought that there was only one therapeutic method (M, p. 322), but later he realized that there are many ways of carrying out the treatment: "There is not a single philosophical

12 Cf. Hacker (1972), p. 113-6. I disagree, therefore, with those who see therapy as a previous step of, and a preparation for, the positive step, as if the description of language were the main goal (e.g., Arregui (1984, p. 161-8) or even those who interpret the process of clarification as an independent goal.

method, though there are indeed methods, different therapied, as it were." (PI, 133)[13]

That the method is essential in doing philosophy turns philosophy into a "matter of skill" (M, p. 322). The idea of an ability comes in sharp contrast to the idea of depth, present in the traditional view. Reflections of this latter kind of philosophy has a general significance, namely, the discovery of an occult essence of phenomena or things and of the foundation of all sciences (PI, 89). Philosophical depth can be characterized as a (supposed) insight of the "ideal" hidden in reality (PI, 110). However, it is an illusion, for depth is but a grammatical joke (*Witz*), and the whole question is to know why we experience the feeling of depth in the face of philosophical problems (PI, 111). Which characteristics, in its turn, has the Wittgensteinian ability?

This skill, like many others, "is very difficult to acquire" (M, p. 322). According to Wittgenstein, it is not enough to attend to classes, but discussion is indispensable. Just like the physician, the Wittgensteinian philosopher must learn a *technique*, he must acquire the skill to cure; and just like the physician has to diagnose the cause of the illness and prescribe the adequate medicine, Wittgenstein must investigate the grammatical error that lies at the origin of a certain philosophical illusion, as well as he must have the ability to make the philosopher abandon her own particular way of speaking.[14] In the *Big Typescript*, Wittgenstein refers to an ability to do philosophy and, next, he treats the issue of teaching philosophy. Here, "[a] talent for philosophy consists in receptiveness: in the ability to receive a strong and lasting impression from a grammatical fact." (BT, p. 311e)[15] Not only the recollections of uses of our words cannot leave anything out, under the risk of permanently experiencing the feeling that something is wrong (M, p. 323), but it will also be necessary to order and reorder them until we eventually find a certain order that allows us to dispel the philosophical illusion (PI, 132). On the other hand, describing our language is not just a matter of recollections, and Wittgenstein allows himself to imagine possible uses, even apparently absurd ones, to illuminate certain "regions" of language, which could otherwise remain obscure. "Our method is not merely to enumerate actual usages of words, but rather deliberately to invent new ones, some of them because of their absurd appearance." (BB, p. 28; cf. PI, 122, 130) Wittgenstein requires another philosophical skill, that of learning to express

13 Hacker (1972, p. 139-44) describes some of these causes of the philosophical illnesses and, in (1990, p. 89-92), makes some comparisons with psychoanalytic theories, as already suggested in the *Big Typescript* (BT, p. 303e). See also Baker (2004, chapters 8-10).

14 It should be noted, however, that the sort of thinking required by the philosophical skill is "very different from what is required in science." (M, p. 322) I have already remarked that philosophy has a procedure very different from procedures in science: here, nothing is occult, no new fact is be found and no theory (or hypothesis) to be raised.

15 The text presents the following manuscript variation: "The ability to do philosophy consists in the ability to receive a strong and lasting impression from a grammatical fact."

precisely what the philosopher would like to say; if this does not happen, therapy is useless (BT, p. 303e; M, p. 304-5 and 322-3; OC, 37).

From what the philosopher suffers, after all? Of what kind are philosophical problems that cause intellectual bumps and that should be dissolved? Philosophical questions have their origin in an "intellectual discomfort" (M, p. 323), and philosophical problems are "troubles in our thought" (M, p. 257; cf. M, p. 318-9, 322-3), "they are deep disquietudes." (PI, 111; cf. PI, 112; PI, 125; BT, p. 306e-7e, 310e, 316e, 320e) In the *Blue Book*, rejecting the idea that an ideal language should be produced to improve everyday language, Wittgenstein attributes a new function to the construction of ideal languages. "Whenever we make up 'ideal languages' it is not in order to replace our ordinary language by them; but just to remove some trouble caused in someone's mind by thinking that he has got hold of the exact use of a common word." (BB, p. 28) A bit before, Wittgenstein had already referred to the philosophical question "What is…?" as "an utterance of unclarity, of mental discomfort." (BB, p. 26; cf. BB, p. 1, p. 59) This discomfort, Wittgenstein goes on, is comparable to the mental discomfort experienced by a child who keeps asking "Why?".

What causes this perturbation? Which philosophical form does this discomfort take? "A philosophical problem has the form: 'I don't know my way about.'." (PI, 123) This disorientation is a disorientation about language, about its grammatical rules: "Language is a labyrinth of paths. You approach from *one* side and know your way about; you approach the same place from another side and no longer know your way about." (PI, 203) Like a disease, this produces the feeling of discomfort. In those passages of the *Blue Book*, where Wittgenstein discusses Augustine's reflections on time, he refers to a contradiction between different uses of the word "measure" (BB, p. 26). In the *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein refers to a mathematical contradiction that "troubles us"; it is here, indeed, that is the origin of the philosophical problem taken in its generality: "The civic status of a contradiction, or its status in civic life – that is the philosophical problem." (PI, 125) How to interpret this passage?[16]

The *Blue Book* furnishes us with the first clues to think about the mechanism that leads us from contradiction to disturbance: the philosopher "sees a law in the way a word is used, and, trying to apply this law consistently, comes up against cases where it leads to paradoxical results." (BB, p. 27) The *Philosophical Investigations* describe this mechanism in a different way: "Here the fundamental fact is that we lay down rules, a technique, for playing a game, and that then, when we follow the rules, things don't turn out as we had assumed. So that we are, as it were, entangled in our own rules." (PI, 125) Different rules may work fine until a new, unusual situation makes that they get

16 Fann (1975, p. 72-3) quotes a long passage of Hertz about a contradiction that is very similar to Wittgenstein's texts about this issue.

into conflict with one another, bringing about a contradiction that may generate a philosophical problem. If, for instance, one handles a mathematical contradiction mathematically, then no philosophical disturbance will arise, for it is up to the mathematician to solve the conflict that arose from two mathematical rules. But if one attributes a philosophical status to the mathematical contradiction, then the philosophical problem will inevitably arise. Going beyond the conceptual domain into the objective one, the philosopher will look outside mathematics for the solution of an inherently mathematical problem, while he should look only for a conceptual description of the origin of that contradiction. "The entanglement in our rules is what we want to understand: that is, to survey." (PI, 125; cf. PI, 89)[17]

That is why, according to Wittgenstein, of the two ways of curing these disturbances, – either answering to the philosophical questions or showing that the particular question is not allowed (M, p. 323) – only the latter is satisfying. So long as the philosopher seeks epistemological or ontological solutions for semantic problems, his disturbances will not go away. The *Blue Book* illustrates this point:

> Very often the way the discussion of a puzzle runs is this way: First the question is asked 'What is time?' This question makes it appears that what we want is a definition. We mistakenly think that a definition is what will remove the trouble (as in certain states of indigestion we feel a kind of hunger which cannot be removed by eating). The question is then answered by a wrong definition, say: 'Time is the motion of celestial bodies'. The next step is to see that this definition is unsatisfactory. But this only means that we don't use the word 'time' synonymously with 'motion of the celestial bodies'. However in saying that the first definition is wrong, we are now tempted to think that we must replace it by a different one, the correct one.

But there is no correct definition of time and the solution for the problem must come from somewhere else. Wittgenstein compares this situation with this one: "It's like having a hair on one's tongue; one feels it, but can't get hold of it, and therefore can't get rid of it." (BT, p. 302e)

In a passage of the *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein says: "a main cause of philosophical diseases – a one-sided diet: one nourishes one's thinking with only one kind of example." (PI, 593) Thus, to avoid these diseases he prescribes a multilateral diet; hence the idea of multiplying language games, approaching the problem from different angles, without ever intending to offer a complete, systematic analysis (cf. PI, 130-1). We find similar ideas in the *Blue Book* (p. 28), where he recommended to counterbalance false analogies with

17 So, we see again that the positive part is subordinate to the negative one: description focus only on the manifest contradiction produced by the rules. See Fogelin (2003, chap. 1).

descriptions and inventions of word uses, for false analogies impose on us a single meaning to different uses of a certain word.[18]

Another of these methods is to substitute one form of expression for another, in order to make misunderstandings disappear. This method of substitution might be called "analysis," for it is often similar to a decomposition (PI, 90). But, contrary to the *Tractatus*, there is no correct perfect decomposed form of an expression, nor a complete logical analysis to reveal the determinate sense of an everyday sentence (PI, 91). The aim of the analysis that Wittgenstein intends to do is to avoid or to put aside misunderstandings; thereby, those language games invented by him with this purpose must be interpreted merely as objects of comparison that illuminate our language, not as revealing some occult, but present, meaning in all sentences correctly built (PI, 130). The analytic method receives a new sense in Wittgenstein's later thought.

In general, one can say that, by pointing out to the original contradiction of our rules and to different uses of words, Wittgenstein aims at dissolving philosophical problems. Thus, carrying out a linguistic therapy is making the ways of language known again to the philosopher, guide her in the grammatical rules and, thereby, eliminate the contradictions that bring about disquietude. Detecting the origin of the problem and the conflict of the rules on which misunderstandings lie, we will no longer raise the philosophical questions and, in this sense, we will stop philosophizing in the traditional manner.

It follows, from the abandonment of traditional philosophizing, the disappearance of those disturbances that afflict the philosopher. No longer confounded or seduced by language, she stops running against the limits of language. Wittgenstein puts this point in a well-known metaphor: "What is your aim in philosophy? – To show the fly the way out of the fly-bottle." (PI, 309) The *Notes for Lectures* confirm the idea that this metaphor refers to the philosopher's disturbance and show that getting out of the fly-bottle is to arrive at tranquility: "The solipsists flutters and flutters in the flyglass, strikes against the walls, flutters further. How can he be brought to rest?" (NL, p. 258) Other passages also refer to tranquility as the aim of philosophy:

> The real discovery is the one that enables me to break off philosophizing when I want to. – The one that gives philosophy peace (*zur Ruhe bringt*), so that it is no longer tormented by questions which bring *itself* in question. – Instead, a method is now demonstrated by examples, and the series of examples can be broken off. – Problems are solved (difficulties eliminated), not a *single* problem." (PI, 133; cf. BT, p. 316e)

18 Hottois (1976, p. 141-54) elaborates on the idea of an opposition between good and bad image: "language games" are good images and they fight false analogies, those that bring about philosophical problems.

> Disquiet in philosophy (*die Unruhe in der philosophie*) might be said to arise from looking at philosophy wrongly […] (We want to replace wild conjectures and explanations (*turbulenten Mutmassungen und Erklärungen*) by quiet weighing of linguistic facts (*ruhige Erwägung sprachlicher Tatsachen setzen*).) (Z, 447; cf. BT, p. 316e)[19]

It is undeniable, therefore, that tranquility is the final goal of therapy, that it plays a central role in Wittgenstein's conception of philosophy: we describe language for the sake of eliminating philosophical illusions; and we eliminate logical illusions for the sake of peace of mind[20], to free it from its mental discomfort or to remove the perturbation that troubles it and make it arrive at tranquility. Thus, intellectual tranquility is the last goal of Wittgenstein's philosophy and what explains the subordinate goals, which otherwise could seem arbitrary.[21]

This psychological aspect, so to speak, of therapy has its counterpart in a linguistic aspect. The first and most evident one is "to bring back words from their metaphysical to their everyday use." (PI, 116)[22] By helping the philosopher to escape from the metaphysical use of terms, "we are clearing up the ground on which they [house of cards] stood." (PI, 118) It is, indeed, a liberation, for we are as it were captives in a metaphysical language that constrains us and bothers us. Wittgenstein employs a metaphor to express the difficulty to make language work as usual: "The choice of our words is so important, because the point is to hit the physiognomy of the matter exactly; because only the thought that is precisely targeted can lead the right way. The railway carriage must be placed on the tracks exactly, so that it can keep on rolling as it is supposed to." (BT, p. 303e) This precision consists in the adequate choice of words to express what the philosopher would like to say, for he must recognize his own thoughts in the formulation proposed by the "therapist".

19 See the quotation of the *Big Typescript* in p. 13 above.

20 Using the word "mind" does not commit us to attribute any "mentalism" to Wittgenstein. The use of this word is authorized by the philosopher himself (for example, BB, p. 28 and M, p. 323, quoted above). On the other hand, Wittgenstein is not a behaviorist (see, for instance, Tugendhat (1979, p. 120ff.) and Hacker (1990,p. 224-53)).

21 Baker and Hacker (1980, "The nature of philosophy", p. 259-293) do not mention even once tranquility as a goal of Wittgensteinian therapy, let alone a final goal. Arregui (1984, p. 157ff.) says that tranquility is the final goal, but he seems not to distinguish it from the *Übersichtliche Darstellung*. However, given the frequent uses of *Zweck* (for instance, PI, 109, 127, 132), one can talk about clarity as a means to tranquility. For this reason, I agree with Hottois (1976, p. 164), when he claims that the final goal of the *Übersichtliche Darstellung* is to arrive at a peaceful state of mind.

22 Criticizing the idea of a private language, Wittgenstein claims that we should use words as they are normally used: "If we are using the word 'know' as it is normally used (and how else are we to use it?)." (PI, 246)

Even the mathematician, for instance, is tempted to make claims (non-mathematical ones) about the objectivity and the reality of mathematical facts; these claims do not constitute, properly speaking, a philosophy, but they are its subject-matter, i.e., they must be treated by philosophy (PI, 254). When we stumble in contradictions, we may try to clarify those grammatical rules that give rise to such contradictions, so that sciences can solve them in their own domain. Thus, scientific investigations will be free of philosophical confusions, of distortions that result from a philosophical perspective necessarily partial. Since philosophy is "*before* all new discoveries and inventions," (PI, 126; BT, p. 309e) one of its functions is to make sciences get rid of the false problems raised by philosophers and, sometimes, by the scientists themselves, when they move beyond their scientific work.

Going back to common usage of words does not mean a blind endorsement to the everyday people's views, nor a prejudgment against speculation. Wittgenstein, on the one hand, acknowledges the value of philosophical illusions: they are not mere mistakes, but they answer to basic misunderstandings that enables us to ponder about our language; philosophical problems are as significant as our own language (PI, 111). On the other hand, he has no intention to reject the modifications of our language, but, on the contrary, he thinks of it as deeply changeable (though its structure changes in an extremely low rhythm; cf., for example, PI, 18 and OC, 95-99). In his view, however, it is not up to the philosopher to promote the reform and the perfecting of our language: "Such a reform for practical purposes, an improvement in our terminology designed to prevent misunderstandings in practice, may well be possible. But these are not the cases we are dealing with." (PI, 132) One of the senses of the famous dictum that philosophy "leaves everything as it is" (PI, 124) is that everyday language is not to be altered by philosophy, but merely described when misunderstandings crop up.

Giving up grandiose theoretical and systematic constructions, philosophy becomes a *practice*, i. e., the activity or recollecting actual uses of words, or inventing possible ones, in order to realize a therapy.[23] We imagine other language games as objects of comparison to illuminate our own, actual language game (PI, 130). If language is like a city (PI, 18), the philosophical remarks made by Wittgenstein about it are like sketches of a landscape (PI, pref.), highlighting some of its aspects, or building walls around its limits so that the philosopher do not try to trespass them (BT, p. 312e). In the same vein that medicine is an activity, so is Wittgenstein's linguistic therapy: "Philosophy unravels the knots in our thinking; hence its result must be simple, but its activity as complicated as the knots it unravels." (PT, p. 311e) Precisely because philosophy is an activity Wittgenstein demands, as we saw above, a technical capacity of the philosopher.

23 The idea that philosophy is a practice was already present in the *Tractatus* (TLP 4.112).

A method to cure the disease that inflicts the dogmatist and metaphysicians is a way to conduct the investigation, a particular way to carry out this therapeutic activity.

According to Wittgenstein, of the aspects of the traditional manner of philosophizing, only a few remain valid: being general, being fundamental to everyday life and for sciences, and being independent from the results of science (cf. M, p. 323); and, in its place, we have only a new discipline that is no more than a heir of what he calls traditional philosophy (BB, p. 28).

But it is certain that philosophy does not end, once language will go on to suggest false analogies and some people will be prone to be seduced by them.[24] Thus, new problems will continue to arise and philosophers will come up with new philosophical theories, making new therapies necessary. As Wittgenstein says, we easily fall into dogmatism when doing philosophy (PI, 131). Besides, the dissolution of philosophical problems moves along "cross-strip", never along "unlimited strips" (Z, 447), i. e., therapy solves particular problems and eliminates some difficulties, but not a single problem (PI, 133). Thus, therapeutic philosophy requires an endless job: "But in that case we never get to the end of work! – Of course not, for it has no end." (Z, 447)[25]

2. AFFINITIES BETWEEN WITTGENSTEIN'S AND SEXTUS' CONCEPTIONS OF PHILOSOPHY

This conception of philosophy has nothing in common with the so-called Cartesian skepticism as it appears in Descartes' First Meditation, whose goal is to destroy all everyday (and scientific) beliefs to rebuild science from new and solid foundations and, at first sight, it is also far removed from Humean skepticism, which results from an empirical science whose goal is to discover the principles of the human mind.[26] For Wittgenstein, a universal doubt is not possible, nor is philosophy an empirical science discovering mental principles which explain mental facts. However, Sextus Empiricus' conception of

24 Grammatical problems, according to the *Big Typescript*, are deeply entrenched in our own grammar, connected to the most ancient habits of thought. Because we had, and still have, the tendency to think so, language involves an effort against our instinct, against a natural way of thinking (cf. PI, 109). This explains the remark that philosophy, since Plato, does not get tired of dealing with the same problems, for the basic structure of language is still essentially the same (BT, p. 311e-313e).

25 Hottois (1976, p. 165) claims that complete clarity brings about a definitive state of serenity, thereby reintroducing in Wittgenstein's philosophy a theoretical aspect, as well as a utopic ideal. But what appears as definitive to me is nothing but a tranquility with respect to a particular problem dissolved. Other philosophical problems threaten this tranquility which, from this point of view, is not definitive.

26 Smith (2011) defends the idea that Hume's empiricism leads to his skepticism. That is a Kantian idea (see Smith 2008, 477-484; 2013, p. 248-252).

philosophy seems to be very similar to the Wittgensteinian one we just saw. Since a comparison between them reveals many affinities, one may characterize Wittgenstein's conception of philosophy as a skeptical conception.[27]

First, Wittgenstein holds that the task of philosophy is eminently critical and negative. We saw that philosophy was characterized as a struggle against the bewitchment of our understanding (PI, 109), as destroying only houses of cards (PI, 118), i.e., dogmatic thoughts. Refusing to come up with arguments to back up conclusions, it does not formulate theses, but only fights, with the resources of language, those theses held by philosophers. This first idea is that philosophy should be transformed into a *therapy*.

Sextus Empiricus would certainly endorse this characterization of philosophy. Differently from dogmatists, who hold theses about the possibility knowing what is "real", Pyrrhonian investigations do not lead to any thesis; Academics also hold no theses, but since they claim that knowledge is impossible, they put an end to their investigations (PH 1.1-3). Thus, there are, according to Sextus, only three main kinds of philosophy: dogmatism, Academic philosophy, and scepticism (PH 1.4), where the specificity of the latter is that it holds no philosophical thesis at all, but still pursues philosophical investigations. The sceptic has no dogma, if by "dogma" we understand "assent to an unclear object of investigation in the sciences, for Pyrrhonists do not assent to anything unclear" (PH 1.13).[28]

If, in dogmatic philosophy, arguments sustained conclusions about a supposed "real world", in Pyrrhonism they have every different function. If we understand by "argument" a discourse that articulates premises and conclusion with the aim of establishing thesis about an unclear reality, then *there are no skeptical arguments at all*, but only dogmatic arguments that conflict with one another, mutually destroying themselves and bringing about suspension of judgment. Concerning arguments in this sense, what is proper to the Pyrrhonist is not in putting forward some particular argument, but in *the disposition or organization of the arguments*.[29] The Pyrrhonist merely ascertain the conflict of philosophical doctrines, but he goes on to argue that it appears impossible to find a criterion to solve it. Unable to deliver a verdict about the real existence of

27 I do not, of course, intend to exhaust this comparison. Many other topics, besides the conception of philosophy, should be dealt with. See, for instance, Marcondes (1996) for another comparison (in my view, a correct one) between Wittgenstein and Sextus.

28 Translation corrected. Annas and Barnes wrongly translate *dogma* by "belief". This is rather surprising for Barnes (1982) himself argued against Burnyeat that *dogma* is not "belief", as Burnyeart (1998*b*, p. 97, n. 13) came to acknowledge. See also Sedley (1983, p. 27, n. 57, and p. 28, n. 67). It is very important to realize that Pyrrhonism attack dogmas, not everyday beliefs (though everyday people may sometimes assent to what is called by Pyrrhonists as an unclear object). See Smith (2022, p. 289-297).

29 For a detailed account of this organization of arguments in order to produce suspension, see Smith (2022, chap. 8).

what is at issue, given the equipollence of both sides, he is led to suspend judgment (PH 1.8, 1.12, 1.26, 1.29).

Dogmatism is conceived as a kind of disease, which includes self-love (PH 1.90), conceit and rashness (PH 1.280), and must be treated by the Pyrrhonist. Sextus also employs a medical metaphor to explain the way with which the Pyrrhonist handles the dogmatist's attitude: for more sever diseases, the physician applies severe remedies, while for milder diseases he applies milder remedies; it all depends on the degree of sickness of the dogmatist (PH 1.280). Everything that is done positively, for Sextus, as much as for Wittgenstein, assumes philosophical relevance from this therapeutic intention. Indeed, the Pyrrhonist conceives his arguments as a purgative drug: both sides (pro and con) are to be eliminated, for mutually destroy one another. In the special case of the arguments against demonstration, while the skeptical argument expels the dogmatic argument, it expels also itself, for it proves that demonstrations do not exist (PH 2.188)[30]. In a similar vein, for Wittgenstein, philosophical description of language is to be distinguished from the grammarian's job precisely because it serves to eliminate philosophical confusion, not to back up a positive conclusion. One it has done its job, we no longer need it. (But it must be noted that the Pyrrhonian self-reference is lacking in Wittgenstein.) It is worth noting that Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus* (TLP 6.54) employs another metaphor employed by Sextus (M 8.481) to characterize the philosophical work as a necessary step to be abandoned later when it has done its job: after using the ladder to climb the wall, we throw it away.[31]

We have seen Wittgenstein's particular way of conceiving philosophical therapy; now, it remains to see how Sextus conceives it. A brief exposition of Pyrrhonian therapy already points out other similarities between both philosophers. At the origin of philosophizing there is a *perturbation* or *trouble*, and therapy is meant to eliminate it, leading the philosopher to complete *serenity* and *imperturbability* (*ataraxía*) concerning questions of opinion, via the equipollent opposition of arguments and suspension of judgment (PH 1.25). At first, the Pyrrhonist hoped that by finding truth his intellectual problems would be put to rest. Noting the anomaly in things and not knowing which alternative he should accept as true (and which as false) disturbed him (before he became a Pyrrhonist). The investigation of what is true and what is false in things seemed, at first sight, the only solution for his troubles and, therefore, the Pyrrhonist (before becoming a Pyrrhonist) devoted himself to this investigation (PH 1.12). But this investigation did not lead him to truth, but instead to suspension of judgment, because of the equipollent arguments on both sides of

30 The idea that skeptical arguments are like drugs which expel themselves have been emphasized by two neo-Pyrrhonists: Fogelin (1994, p. 4) and Porchat (2007, e.g., p. 334).

31 Wittgenstein learned this skeptical metaphor through the skeptical German philosopher Fritz Mauthner, who got it from Ernst Mach (Sluga 2004, p. 103).

a philosophical question. It happened, by chance and unexpectedly, that suspension of judgment was followed by the desired imperturbability with respect to avoidable things in matters of opinion (PH 1.28-29). Since suspension constantly led to imperturbability many times, the Pyrrhonist realized that *ataraxía* could be arrived at by other means than truth. On the other hand, he also noticed that having opinions and dogmas about what is non-evident increases the initial disturbance, so that, despite still searching after truth, he carefully avoids rash opinion, in order to arrive at tranquility via suspension of judgment.[32]

Concerning this point, some similarities between Wittgenstein and Sextus must be noted. Therapy, for both, aims at gaining again a lost state of tranquility in the face of a problem that troubles us. The cause of this perturbation is identified as a kind of contradiction and philosophy is perceived as the right way to solve the difficulty; moreover, of the two possible solutions –either to answer the philosophical question or to abandon it–, only the latter brings about the desired tranquility, while the first one merely deepens the initial trouble. Thus, philosophy, not by thinking one has found truth, but by not holding theses, i.e., by suspending judgment, becomes a means to arrive at intellectual tranquility.[33]

Besides, in both cases, one tries to avoid the partiality of dogmatic philosophy by calling attention to other aspects involved in a philosophical issue. Philosophy must be impartial. One arrives at impartiality, in the case of Wittgenstein, by *counterbalancing* false analogies with descriptions and inventions of uses of words or paying attention to the diversity of uses that a word has, without getting attached to only one and trying to impose it on others; in Sextus' case, by opposing negative arguments to the positive ones. The most conspicuous feature of Pyrrhonism is the opposition of arguments to arguments in such a way as to produce a state of the intellect in which one does not affirm, nor deny any thesis that posits the true reality of things (PH 1.8). The skeptical method tells the Pyrrhonist to match two opposed arguments so that they mutually destroy each other, for they are equally persuasive. The characterization of the dogmatist as a self-lover (*philautos*), i.e., someone who prefers his own dogmas and elects himself as the criterion of truth to solve the conflict among philosophical dogmas, corresponds to the criticism of his partiality in pondering arguments and dogmas involved in a philosophical issue.

32 In the first version of this paper, I thought that the Pyrrhonist gave up his search for truth, but I now think it is compatible to go on investigating the truth and to suspend judgment; see Smith (2022, chap. 6).

33 I now think that Sextus still investigates the truth as the *aim* of his philosophical investigation, while pursuing imperturbability as his *goal*. This does not downplay the fact that philosophy is concerned not only with truth, but also with tranquility, leading to the best human life available to us.

This skeptical therapy requires from the philosopher who practices it, both in the Wittgensteinian form and in the Sextan one, a certain *ability* or *skill*. I described briefly the technique required by those who intend to dissolve philosophical problems (perceiving grammatical facts, knowing how to order linguistic remarks, inventing possible uses and learning and expressing what the interlocutor wishes to say). Is there anything analogous in Sextus? The answer is in the very definition of skepticism and of the skeptical philosopher. Sextus defines skepticism as an ability (*dunamis*) of opposing arguments to arguments in such a way as to balance them in terms of convincingness (PH 1.8) and the skeptic is the person who possesses this skill (PH 1.11). While the dogmatist is the philosopher who has the ability to invent arguments in defense of a thesis about something unclear, arguments that appear stronger than the opposite ones, the skeptic is the philosopher who has the ability to organize all dogmatic arguments and even to come up with new ones, in such a way as they match each other, thereby producing suspension of judgment. The Ten Modes of Aenesidemus and the Five Modes of Agrippa can be seen as *techniques* of neutralizing dogmatism. Moreover, Sextus claims that skeptics are "men of talent" (PH 1.12), who were perturbed by contradiction in things and were able to arrive at imperturbability through suspension; therefore, becoming a skeptic requires some talent to acquire this technique.[34] Moreover, as we saw, Wittgenstein conceives this as a kind of "marshelling recollections" (PI, 127). Similarly, Sextus conceives philosophical arguments as remembrances of what can be said on each side of a question (PH 2.130, 3.20, 3.157, M 8.289, M 2.106, 6.52).

The idea that the skeptic possesses a particular ability is consistent with the idea that there are no skeptical arguments in the sense above defined, i.e., as conclusive about the unclear objects of investigation, for the Pyrrhonist does not propound an argument in order to persuade the dogmatist that he is wrong, but he displays a technique to arrive at tranquility, a way through which the dogmatist may rid himself of the troubles that inflict him. In so far as the conflict involves dogmas and arguments for both sides and with similar persuasive force, the Pyrrhonist may claim that his stance is the most rational and rigorous result at our disposal, if we are to judge (or suspend judgment) in a philosophical investigation.[35]

In Wittgenstein's conception, philosophy is not a theory, nor a contemplation of truth, but a *practice*, an activity of eliminating philosophical confusions and problems. Exactly the same can be said about Sextus: Pyrrhonism was also called "zetetic" because of its activity on investigating and examining (*apo energeias tês kata to zêtein kai skeptesthai*) (PH 1.7). Moreover, the idea that

34 For an analysis of who is the talented person, see Smith (2022), p. 24-29.

35 For an analysis of the skeptical rationality involved in this procedure, see Smith (2022), chap. 8.

Pyrrhonism is a practice is implicit in the definition of the skeptic as someone who possesses a certain skill or technical capacity. Pyrrhonism is not defined by a system of articulated dogmas or by a theory, or philosophical doctrine, but by a persistence in the activity of philosophical investigation (PH 1.1-4).

This therapeutic activity exhausts, not only for Wittgenstein, but also for Sextus, the investigative task of philosophy.[36] Though both acknowledge a scientific dimension and accept, each in his own way, a conception of science, this scientific activity is beyond the attributions of a philosopher *qua* philosopher. For both of them, science deals with phenomena (which include both facts and theories); philosophy deals with what we say about the phenomena, with concepts and language. Skeptical therapy is done exclusively with the means of language: "Skeptics are philanthropic and wish to cure by arguments (*iasthai logoi*), as far as they can, the conceit and rashness of the dogmatists." (PH 3.280) This aspect of Sextan philosophy becomes even clearer when one pays attention to the domain of suspension of judgment. Suspension cannot concern phenomena, for these phenomena impose themselves on us, forcing us to an involuntary assent (PH 1.13, 1.19). As Timon, Pyrrho's disciple said, "the phenomenon is powerful everywhere, wherever it comes" (M 7.30). Thus, suspension can apply only to what we say about the phenomena, positing what appears as "really existent" (PH 1.19-20). Likewise, Wittgenstein claims that language is the instrument to cure the disease of the intellect: "Philosophy is a struggle against the bewitchment of our understanding by the resources of our language." (PI, 109) The critical project is confined, without resource to science or the phenomena, to combat dogmatism by means of a philosophical discourse.

Concerning the latter point, it is possible to note another similarity between Wittgenstein and Sextus. For Wittgenstein, logical analysis does not reveal the occult sense of our language, as if sense needed to be disclosed by an analysis of our language; everyday language is perfectly fine as it is, even if there are (or precisely because there are) indeterminacies of sense. Sextus, in his turn, condemned the dogmatist attempt to find, by means of "analogy", a deeper grammar that could serve as the criterion to distinguish good and bad Greek (M 1.41-320). For Sextus, the criterion of correct and incorrect use of words does not depend on a special art that will discover a hidden meaning of a word, but it is just its everyday and non-technical use (M 1.152-153, 1.176ff.) Common use is the criterion of what belongs and what does not belong to the language of a given community. The sense of language is open to us.

36 One may say that, for Sextus, the investigative activity is not the whole skeptical philosophy, because living his everyday life is also part of Pyrrhonism. But I will put aside this further aspect of Pyrrhonism.

Another important Wittgensteinian idea that has clear echoes in Pyrrhonism is that we should speak as everybody does, i. e., that we should employ words with the meaning they usually have. According to Wittgenstein, the philosopher uses everyday expressions to erect upon them philosophical propositions (PI, 90), what is condemnable, but it is not condemnable to use them in their appropriate circumstances. And the use of everyday language does not entail the endorsement of any philosophical thesis, for it is before any dispute between realists and idealists (BB, p. 48). The Pyrrhonist, for his turn, acknowledges that he can say, when he feels cold or hot, that he is cold or hot (PH 1.13). He can express the phenomenon without being, thereby, positing its "real existence". All skeptical formulae used to communicate his suspension of judgment (PH 1.14-15, 1.187-209) merely express his phenomenon or personal experience,[37] and do not commit him to any form of dogmatism; he won't fight for words (PH 1.195). Just like Wittgenstein, to avoid misunderstanding one can explain what he means and substitute one form of expression for another. On the other hand, the Pyrrhonist does not endorse the dogmatic discourse that attributes or denies real existence to phenomena, i. e., that discourse which, criticizing our everyday language and inventing a technical and more adequate language, tries to establish dogmas about what is really existent or not. According to Sextus, dogmatism is a distortion of language (M 11.148). Both Wittgenstein and Sextus allow themselves to use everyday language without any dogmatic commitment and reject philosophical theses about what is unclear or about what is really existent. From this point of view, the similarity between them couldn't be greater.

It doesn't follow, for the Pyrrhonist, as much as for Wittgenstein, that everyday use in untouchable. Both conceive meaning as a human convention. Wittgenstein says, in the *Blue Book*, "let's not forget that a word hasn't got a meaning given to it, as it were, by a power independent of us, so that there could be a kind of scientific investigation into what the word *really* means. A word has the meaning someone has given to it." (BB, p. 28) Similarly, Sextus says that words have not a natural meaning (M 1.36-38, 1.142-154), but they signify by convention (PH 2.214, 3.267-268, M 8.193, M 11.241); one has to be taught and reminded which meaning they have in linguistic practices. Therefore, nothing forbids us to give new meanings to words, or even that we invent new words, and both philosophers think that language evolves through time and becomes more refined. Improvement, however, does not come from philosophical theory, but from experience. For Wittgenstein, practical purposes guide the reform of language, when one wishes to avoid misunderstandings in practice; this is not, tells us Wittgenstein, the case of philosophy (PI, 132). And

37 By saying that the Pyrrhonian language merely expresses his personal experience, I do not mean to associate it with a private language, for this would be tantamount to say something about the phenomenon, i. e., that it is a mental entity, something that really exists only in the mind, and that the mind has access only to its own experiences. This dogmatic doctrine in unacceptable for a Pyrrhonist. I will come back to this point in the last section.

Sextus, criticizing the dogmatists' incapacity to avoid confusions to distinguish ambiguities, says precisely the same thing:

> If an ambiguity is a phrase which signifies two or more things, and if phrases signify by convention, then those ambiguities which it is useful to resolve, i.e., those which involve some matter of experience, will be resolved by those who are trained in each expertise (since it is they who have experience of the conventional use – which they have created – of words and their significations). (PH 2.256)

This passage is very important, because it attributes to those who deal with practical and empirical questions the capacity and the responsibility to avoid ambiguities that words may have. And even in the common course of everyday life, when it is useful to draw a distinction to avoid an ambiguity, people do not hesitate in drawing it. "In this way, experience of what is useful in each case leads to the distinction." (PH 2.258) On the other hand, those ambiguities that dogmatists try to eliminate are not involved in our experience or in the practices of everyday life. Based on Sextus' considerations on ambiguities, we can say that the dogmatist tries in vain to solve ambiguities (even those not concerned with everyday life), while everyday people, experts and "even slaves" (PH 1.257) overcome them through experience.

Another similarity is the idea that the new task assigned to philosophy is endless. In Wittgenstein's case, both the workings of language and his method of treating philosophical questions led to the conception of an infinite task for philosophy. In Sextus' case, we also find the idea of a constant rebirth of philosophical problems and, as the search for truth didn't arrived at any definitive result, it remains an open possibility that we may eventually find it. After all, skepticism is precisely that main kind of philosophy that is defined by its continued investigation (PH 1.3, 1.7). Thus, each new proposed argument is a threat, so to speak, to the Pyrrhonian stance and it must be investigated, either for the sake of equipollence, or to acknowledge that truth was at last found. Anyway, both "condemn" themselves, by the internal logic of their philosophies, to a permanent critical task.

One basic idea pervades both Wittgenstein's and Sextus' thoughts: everyday life is much better without dogmatic philosophy. For Wittgenstein, as we saw, common sense is neither realist, nor idealist, this dispute being far beyond its realm (BB, p. 48). As he says: "Philosophy just puts everything before us, and neither explains nor deduces anything. – Since everything lies open to view, there is nothing to explain. For whatever is hidden is of no interest to us." (2009, 126) Thus, when we employ sentences of our everyday language we are not philosophically committed to any theory, but just living our everyday lives and using language as a useful tool for them. Dogmatism is like "a pair of glasses on our nose through which we see whatever we look at;" they are so close, that "it never occurs to us to take them off." (PI, 103) However, it is only when we take

the dogmatic lenses off that we may see things as they are (not as they "really" are). Sextus thinks that "it is enough […] to live by experience and without opinions (*adoxastôs*), in accordance with the common observations and preconceptions, and to suspend judgment about what is said with dogmatic superfluidity and far beyond the needs of ordinary life." (PH 2.246) Here is another important passage: "the skeptic's procedure is to refrain from making the case for things that are trusted, but, in their case, to be content with the common preconception as a sufficient basis." (M 7. 443) According to him, "the skeptic does not live in accordance with philosophical reasoning (for as far as this is concerned he is inactive), but that in accordance with non-philosophical practice he is able to choose some things and avoid others." (M 11.165) This practical criterion is further explained in PH 1.17 and 1.21-24. Rejecting dogmatism, the Pyrrhonist lives his everyday life, like any other person, without the opinions (*doxai*) everyday people may have. The Pyrrhonist does not attack everyday life, but thinks of himself even defending it, since he refutes those who attack everyday life (M 8.156-158). For both, we can make assertions according to everyday use of language, adopting the everyday view of the world, without turning this view into a philosophical dogma. And, as already said, it is possible to revise our view, when practice demands it, through experience.

This more general conception of philosophy is shared by Wittgenstein and the Pyrrhonists: a negative philosophy, therapeutic, whose goal is tranquility, which requires a certain special ability, dealing only with language, rejecting any knowledge of what is beyond phenomena, accepting everyday life without any dogmatic commitment and conceived as an endless task. So many important similarities seem to justify the characterization of Wittgenstein's conception of philosophy as Pyrrhonian.

3. IS WITTGENSTEIN A PYRRHONIST?

To the conclusion that Wittgenstein's conception of philosophy *is* Pyrrhonian, however, it is possible to raise some objections. It could be argued that, if the general conception does not distinguish one philosopher from the other, in its details we find many important differences. The way one arrives at tranquility in both schemes, for example, have almost nothing in common, for the arguments and the analyses are of a very different nature.

Naturally, in a therapy, the *diagnosis* plays a fundamental role, since it is based on it that the philosopher, like the physician, prescribes the remedy to be applied. Sextus identifies in self-love, conceit, and rashness the main causes that lead a philosopher to dogmatism. Here is the root of his evils: by not examining an issue from all angles, by not pondering all invoked arguments on a certain issue and by preferring his own view over other views, a person naturally incurs in a rash and arrogant dogmatism. Wittgenstein's diagnosis is very different: a

philosopher becomes a dogmatist, not because of certain personal psychological characteristics, but because of a dynamic internal to language. Language seduces him, it bewitches his mind; unable to resist this temptation, the philosopher experiences a sensation of the deep and begins to think about the "inner structure of the world," when in fact the cause of his thinking is a contradiction in the rules of language that leads him away from the everyday use of words. Hence, the importance attributed by Wittgenstein to philosophy, for the philosopher is not merely "hasty," or "conceited," but someone who experiences and betrays in his own theory basic contradictions of language. It is when language is not doing work, that we are tempted to fall into dogmatism (PI, 131).

From these different diagnoses, result different *therapies*. The Pyrrhonist's activity is to show to the dogmatist the equally persuasive force of other arguments for other philosophical theses, so that they mutually destroy themselves; there appears to be no neutral criterion to solve this disagreement. The Pyrrhonist has to come up with arguments equally plausible to those arguments held by the dogmatist. The activity of the Wittgensteinian philosopher is very different: what he must is to remind us of the common usage of words, a detailed description of how our everyday language works, inventing, if necessary, language games in order to illuminate its grammar; he has to be able to express what the dogmatist would like to say. Indeed, these methods constitute a great novelty in the Wittgensteinian way of philosophizing.

Now, these are powerful objections. It is true that, beyond those general affinities, everything else is very different. What shall we say? In my view, though these objections serve to deny that Wittgenstein *is* a Pyrrhonist, they are not strong enough to deny the affinities mentioned in the previous section. Perhaps one might say that he is a skeptic, though not exactly of the old Pyrrhonian kind. Almost two thousand years have passed. If so, these objections point out what could be considered as Wittgenstein's contribution to the history of skepticism, or his way of updating old fashioned Pyrrhonism. While preserving what is most basic to the skeptical stance, Wittgenstein was able to develop it in original ways. In other words, even if not, strictly speaking a Pyrrhonist, Wittgenstein can be seen as a skeptic who contributed to the development of skepticism along new lines. One aspect of this contribution is that Wittgenstein makes it even clearer the consciousness that dogmatism has its root in language. If the idea that dogmatism concerns *logos* was already present in Sextus, the idea that it is due to a malfunctioning in language (to contradictions in the rules of language) that emerge those problems raised by the philosophers is Wittgenstein's. The specific analysis of many processes involved in the workings of our language and how words end up by losing their sense may improve significantly in the comprehension and treatment of dogmatic illusions.

The idea of original contributions to the development of skepticism seems to be present in ancient skepticism. In so far as the Pyrrhonist is the person who has the ability to oppose arguments to arguments "in any way at all" (PH 1.8) in order to reach imperturbability by means of suspension, we can think that Wittgenstein offers *a new way* of doing it. Recall that Wittgenstein himself allows for different therapies (PI, 133). Just like Agrippa added Five Modes to the Ten Modes of Aenesidemus "not as rejecting the Ten Modes but in order to refute the rashness of the dogmatists in a more varied way by using both sets together" (PH 1.177), we may take Wittgensteinian therapy as another contribution to arrive at suspension and tranquility. Besides these ancient Modes and all other oppositions in each part of philosophy, the skeptic would have at his disposal a new and powerful way of investigating philosophically through which he could learn or acquire that necessary technical skill to suspend judgment: identifying false analogies that produce philosophical illusions and describing the workings of language in such a way as to show that philosophical theses make no sense or, if they do, it is just a manner of speaking that has no epistemic or ontological implications, as the dogmatist intends. Identifying the false analogies that are the source of a philosophical illusion, recognizing where the rules of our language get entangled, learn exactly what a dogmatist wants to say, describing correctly portions of our everyday language and inventing new language games, but useful for therapeutic purposes, are skills that require a refined discernment and that may have a huge dissuasive effect. In sum, Wittgenstein promotes a renewal of the Pyrrhonist tradition, in a highly original manner.

Objections apparently more powerful, however, might be raised. The difference in method only points put to a deeper and more decisive difference to our issue, namely, that the Pyrrhonist is still a traditional philosopher, while Wittgenstein was able to overcome traditional philosophy. This could be shown in two ways. First, Pyrrhonists share a presupposition with dogmatists: "that we possess knowledge of our own subjective experience, that we know with absolute certainty how things are with us, has been the common ground of agreement between sceptics and their opponents ever since philosophical debates about the extent and possibility of human knowledge began."[38] The modern contrast between what is in the mind and the external world has a counterpart in "the contrast implicit in skeptical practice between 'appearances' and 'the way things are'."[39] Many scholars on ancient skepticism endorse this view, seeing a continuity between Pyrrhonism and Cartesian skepticism.[40] The fact that Pyrrhonism takes the *phainomenon* as not open to investigation (*azêtêtos*) (PH 1.22) seems to confirm this point. The phenomenon imposes itself on us and we cannot deny that we are experiencing it. But, for Wittgenstein, the

38 Hacker (1990), p. 63.
39 Stroud (1984), p. vii.
40 See Porchat (1986), Fine (2000) and Gabriel (2009).

exclusion of doubt is rooted in grammar, and not in the nature of the phenomenon, of what is take as certain. In the case of mental states, in particular, nothing is considered as a doubt about them, for it makes no sense to say "that I know I'm in pain. What is it supposed to mean – except perhaps that I am in pain?" (PI, 246)[41] Thus, the Pyrrhonist remains tied to the traditional conception of philosophy, for he attributes the impossibility of doubting to an intrinsic property of the phenomenon, when, in fact, the senselessness of this doubts lies in our language.

Second, Wittgenstein's method, instead of opposing arguments to arguments, as if the dispute were meaningful, taking for granted the presupposition that it makes sense the dogmatic dispute about what is non-evident, identifies this presupposition and eradicates it:

> It seems to have been an almost instinctive maxim of his [Wittgenstein] that where philosophical debate has polarized between a pair of alternatives that seem exhaustive, the appropriate method to follow is not just to examine the conflicting arguments on each side and then opt for the seemingly stronger ones. Rather we should find out what was agreed by all participants in the centuries-old debate and reject it.[42]

The fact that the Pyrrhonist argues on both sides shows that, even if he does not endorse either of them, he still continues to philosophize as if each side makes perfect sense, taking the very dispute to be meaningful. He does not go deep enough to eradicate the very source of this dispute. Wittgenstein does precisely that.[43]

But is Pyrrhonism a traditional way of doing philosophy? The force of this objection lies in the attribution to Pyrrhonism of a presupposition shared with dogmatism: both the opposition of arguments and the acceptance of phenomena show that the Pyrrhonist still move in the philosophical traditional terrain, but it seems to go wrong in both cases.

First, the Pyrrhonist rejects the idea that the phenomenon is a subjective or mental state. It is true that the Pyrrhonists argues that, if one is to know the world around us based on its appearance (*phantasia*) to us, this appearance being a modification or alteration of the intellect, then it follows that we cannot know the world around us (PH 2.70-78; M 7.370-439). But what leads us to this negative conclusion is the dogmatic notion of *phantasia*, conceived of as an intermediary epistemic entity between the mind and the physical world outside the mind. Something similar could be said of the Cyrenaic notion of *pathos* (experience)

41 See Hacker (1990), p. 58-59.

42 Hacker (1990), p. 63.

43 This idea goes back to Kant (A 739-769/B 767-797). See Smith (2008, p. 467-476; 2013, p. 253-257).

(PH 1.215). But the Pyrrhonist has no theory whatsoever about the ontological or epistemic status of the *phainomenon* (and of *phantasia* or *pathos*).[44] He suspends judgment about them. Some dogmatists, however, do conceive them as subjective states, and Sextus merely extracts the negative conclusion that we can know nothing about the physical world from this dogmatic theory about *phantasia* (M 7.401-435); the Cyrenaics seem to have drawn this conclusion by themselves, given their conception of *pathos* (PH 1.215). For the Pyrrhonist, the phenomenon that honey appears sweet is not to be identified as a subjective or mental state, but it is *honey* (a physical object) that appears sweet.[45] In sum, the idea that one cannot doubt its own modifications, but only the outside world is not a skeptical idea; at best, this is a conclusion of the doctrine of appearances (*phantasiai*) held by dogmatists, not by the skeptics.

Next, the Pyrrhonist merely uses dogmatic arguments against other dogmatic arguments in a dialectical fashion, i.e., they are used merely for the sake of the argument, based on premises that dogmatists accept and forcing them to draw conclusions they do not accept. He does not take these arguments as his own, neither the premises, nor the conclusion. His job is to put plausible dogmatic arguments, both pro and con, side by side, so that they mutually destroy themselves, leading to suspension: "let us suppose both that the arguments produced by them are powerful and that those of the skeptics have remained impossible to oppose. What is left, given the circumstance of equal strength on either side, except to suspend judgment and make no determination about the matter under examination […], offering the safe comment that there no more is than there is not?" (M 8.298; cf. PH 2.133, 2.192) What is properly skeptical is *the way* both kinds of arguments are opposed, so as to balance them and bring about suspension. Moreover, the Pyrrhonist is happy to throw away even those arguments he employed to cure the dogmatists. "Arguments, like purgative drugs which evacuate themselves along with the matters present in the body, can actually cancel themselves along with the other arguments which are said to be probative." (PH 2.188; cf. M 8.480) Just like the Wittgensteinian philosopher has to understand what the dogmatist would like to say to cure him, the skeptic has to argue in the dogmatic fashion in order to cure the dogmatist.

One could insist on the objection and say that *using* dogmatic arguments is already conceding too much, for theses and arguments are senseless and, therefore, the method of opposition is also senseless; if so, the only method left for someone who wants to do philosophical therapy is to reject the presuppositions of the debate. However, this method of rejecting *the*

44 See Porchat (2007, p. 130-133). Burnyeat (1998*a*, p. 49) says that "to insist that Sextus' illustrative pathos must be either a subjective feeling or an objective happening is to impose a Cartesian choice which is foreign to his way of thinking."

45 For a distinction between the modern doubt concerning the *external* world and the Pyrrhonian aporia concerning the *physical* world, see Smith (2022, p. 275-284).

presupposition is not enough to distinguish Wittgenstein from some dogmatic philosophers who also tried to provoke a complete change in the philosophical scenario. Think, for instance, of Berkeley's criticism of materialism (*the* common presupposition of all philosophies) or Kant's "Copernican Revolution": up to now it has been assumed that all our cognition…" (B xvi). Why shouldn't one think that it is Wittgenstein the one who is just doing what other dogmatists have done?

Even more importantly, it could be said, in defense of the Pyrrhonist, that his skepticism also concerns the meaning of philosophical expressions. The Pyrrhonist argues that dogmatic terms are inconceivable. In fact, he acknowledges that to carry out a philosophical investigation, one must have an idea of what he is looking for (PH 2.1-11). But do philosophers have a precise idea of what they are searching? The Pyrrhonist often begins by point out that we do not have such an idea. "And when they [the dogmatists] wish to establish the concept, first they are in dispute and secondly what they say is actually unintelligible." (PH 2.22) For instance, humans are inconceivable (PH 2.23-28), so are the dogmatic concepts of sign (PH 2.104, 2.118), of gods (PH 3.3), of cause (PH 3.13). Then, granting that dogmatic terms are conceivable, the Pyrrhonist argues that these unclear objects of dogmatic investigation are inapprehensible. Thus, one may see two steps in the Pyrrhonian strategy: in the first one, the Pyrrhonist attacks the very conceivability of dogmatic terms; then, he moves forward to argue that, even if we could conceive the unclear objects of dogmatic investigation, it is impossible for us to apprehend them. If so, the Pyrrhonist, as much as Wittgenstein, claims that dogmatic language is senseless. Of course, both Wittgenstein and the skeptic must understand what the dogmatist wishes to say; otherwise, therapy would not get off the ground. In fact, Sextus goes on to argue that the trouble is not that dogmatic words are totally senseless; on the contrary, it has too many senses, for each dogmatist define it in a different way (M 8.331a-336a). And Wittgenstein has to grasp what the philosopher wishes to say, but cannot say it. Still, there is a difference between them. It seems that Wittgenstein is quite happy to remain only in the first step: it is enough to cure the dogmatist by calling attention to the senselessness of his words. Once this is shown, there is no need to move forward and argue that, even if dogmatic words had meaning, we could not know what is the object under philosophical investigation. Wittgenstein trusts too much in the first step. The Pyrrhonist is not so confident, and that is why he goes on to investigate whether the object investigates is apprehensible.

Finally, one might argue that the Pyrrhonist does not dissolve the philosophical question, while Wittgenstein does, and that is the true reason why the Pyrrhonist goes on arguing against dogmatism, saying that we do not know the unclear objects of philosophical investigation; skeptical continued investigation shows that the Pyrrhonist is trapped in the traditional conception of

philosophy: even if he does not hope to find truth, at least the Pyrrhonist must acknowledge that this is an open possibility. Wittgenstein, on the other hand, does not think so. Even if both think that philosophy is endless, they do it for different reasons; the Pyrrhonist, because he thinks he must go on investigating the dogmatic issues, for it remains possible to find truth, and Wittgenstein is not open to this possibility. This last form of the objection seems true to me. Sextus does not condemn once and for all the philosophical investigation of unclear objects.

However, this may turn out to be an advantage of the Pyrrhonian stance over the Wittgensteinian one, for from this point of view, Wittgenstein seems closer to the Academic philosophy as described by Sextus than to Pyrrhonism (PH 1.2-3). Despite the fact that Wittgenstein seems to be more radical against dogmatism, he may go too far, in trusting that he has shown that philosophical problems *are* meaningless; isn't this a bit of dogmatism? In short, isn't there a dogmatism in Wittgenstein's philosophy of language? Sextus' arguments are not based on any conception of meaning, such as "meaning is use". He bases his arguments on the fact that there is disagreement between dogmatists, not on a theory about language and meaning. If faced with the question whether the dogmatic philosophy has meaning or not, the Pyrrhonist would probably suspend judgment, while Wittgenstein affirms that it is meaningless. There is no way, from a skeptical point of view, to establish conclusively that philosophical problems are not legitimate.[46] On Wittgenstein's behalf, it could be said, not only that he has no theory of meaning, properly speaking, but also that it is also a fact of the history of philosophy, that dogmatists complain about everyday language, and that they invent a new vocabulary of their own, in order to show us what they claim to be the truth. So, both Wittgenstein and Sextus start from different facts of the history of philosophy to build a similar conception of philosophy.

Let me finish with the *Tractatus* and the senselessness of skepticism with which we began (TLP 6.51). In it, Wittgenstein says that "All philosophy is a 'critique of language'." (TLP 4.0031) He adds: "though not in Mauthner's sense". Well, Mauthner was a skeptic, and it seemed important to Wittgenstein to distance himself from such a conception of philosophy, even quoting him by name, which is very rare in Wittgenstein.[47] Russell, another skeptic, at least in some respects, was responsible for showing this. Even if, at the time of the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein's conception of philosophy was defined in contrast to two skeptical views, it remains true both that it was so defined as a result of a

46 See Porchat (2007), p. 226-228.
47 See Ferrando (2019), p. 50-57.

confrontation with skeptical positions and that his own conception of philosophy became more and more skeptical.[48]

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