

ON WHAT APPEARS.

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1. The experience of daily life always presents us with anomalies, incongruities, contradictions. And, when we try to explain them, explanations that seem reasonable at first sight turn out to be unsatisfactory upon more accurate examination. The nature of things and events doesn't seem easily intelligible to us. Opinions and perspectives of men are hardly reconcilable or even inconsistent with one another. Emerging consensuses prove provisional and precarious. Those who feel the need to think with a more critical mind or who strive for better understanding are bewildered by this diversity.

Perhaps most men live well enough with this spectacle of the mundane anomaly. A few, however, are incapable of such a thing and this experience greatly disturbs them. Some of these become philosophers and seek in philosophy to end this disturbance and to find tranquillity of mind. The tranquillity of mind they hope to find, for example, through the possession of truth. Philosophy promises to explain the world to them, to account for our everyday experience, to dissipate contradictions, to dispel the clouds of incomprehension by revealing the being that the appearance conceals. Or, if that is not possible, by solving the mysteries of knowledge and delineating its nature and precise limits; or at least clarifying the nature and function of our human language, in which we speak about the world and formulate the philosophical problems. Philosophy distinguishes and proposes to teach us how to distinguish between truth and falsity, knowledge and belief, being and appearance, subject and object, representation and represented, besides many other distinctions.

Philosophy, however, does not give us what it has promised and what we have sought in it. Quite the contrary, what it offers us is an extraordinary diversity of positions, and perspectives, totally incompatible with each other, and never reconcilable¹. The discordance (*diaphonía*), which divides common men, we find again among philosophers, but now made infinitely more powerful and sophisticated by sagacious discourse. Philosophers do not agree on anything, not even upon the object, nature, or method of the enterprise of philosophising itself.

For those who seriously proposed to carry out philosophical investigation and are not content to make of philosophy a mere ingenious and pleasant verbal game, the experience of *diaphonía* is at first extremely frustrating, because it appears to us as lasting and unresolvable. However, could it be otherwise, when all the philosophers tranquilly recognise that there is not a single point of doctrine on which they universally agree? The incessant polemics among doctrines, the permanent rejection of rival positions, the reciprocal excommunication are repeated with monotony throughout the history of philosophy. Impressive argumentative structures excogitate themselves to sustain, with good logic, incompatible theses. Does a theory seduce us and appear persuasive? A little serene investigation soon leads us to discover arguments that contradict it with no less persuasion.

The controversial character of the theses in dispute appears to us as an unequivocal sign of its non-evidence. On the other hand, how would they solve such controversies in the total absence of criteria and accepted methods for deciding them? Criteria and methods are no more deserving of consensus among philosophers and are equally objects of universal disagreement. Of course there have been numerous philosophers who thematised this situation, diagnosing the “crisis” of philosophy in their epochs and trying to put an end to it. To this end they have established new philosophical systems or, at least, new ways of philosophising. Still, those systems and those ways soon found themselves submerged in the endless ocean of philosophical discrepancies. If we are to deal seriously with philosophies, there is no escaping from the experience of its insoluble *diaphonía*.

Moreover, a little reflection suffices to indicate that if we maintain the traditional perspective and make a philosophical decision – either by adhering to one of the historical

¹ I have dealt with this theme in early works, for example, in “The conflict of Philosophies” (cf. Porchat Pereira 1993, p. 5-21), and also in “Philosophy and the common worldview” (cf., *Ibid.*, p. 46-95). The reader who has read them will realise that, however, advancing a little in the following pages, that the same ideas take me to very different paths.

philosophies, or by inventing our own philosophy – we inexorably condemn ourselves to be nothing but new and dissonant members of a choir without *symphonía*. The majority of philosophers will refuse our arguments, criticise our presuppositions and methods, and reject our results. Will we invoke in favour of our theses the power of evidence? Many philosophers have invoked it in favour of theirs, but others did not give them credit. In addition, there are as many theories of evidence as heads that have reflected upon the subject. Philosophy has long since dethroned evidence. Furthermore, let us not forget Montaigne: “The impression of certainty is certain evidence of madness and extreme uncertainty” (cf. Montaigne 1962, p. 522).

The human being seems, however, an eternal lover of truth. He never finds it to be sure, but he does not tire of pursuing it. The dogmatic spirit (in the sceptical sense of the term) exerts over him an extraordinary fascination. Various causes – and some of them certainly profound, lost in the underworld of consciousness or the unfathomable abyss of race’s unknown evolution – are responsible for this immoderate attachment to truth, whether purportedly possessed or searched for with inextinguishable hope. For this reason, perhaps, relatively few are those who, having once considered the sceptical trope of *diaphonía*, consent to spend their time meditating on it. Because if we agree to spend our time meditating upon it, if we keep alive the demands of a critical rationality that prohibits us from falling into dogmatic precipitation and temerarious assent to a momentarily seductive doctrine, then no philosophical decision is possible for us; we do not see how to assign truth to any doctrine. In this critical inability to choose truths, we retain our assent; we find ourselves in *epokhé*.

We remain in *epokhé* with regard to every philosophical subject upon which we reflect. Because about all of them, having diagnosed the irrecusable *diaphonía* that involves them, having always detected the possibility of building reasonably well-structured arguments in favour of each conflicting side, we are never able to critically decide ourselves for this or that direction. This repeated experience of the necessary suspension of judgement, this always renewed impossibility of any decision gradually leads us to lose the ancient craving for a fugitive truth. And perhaps it will happen, if the experience renews [repeats] itself enough times, that we reach, as a casual consequence of *epokhé*, that tranquillity we have formerly sought in the impossible possession of truth. It may happen because we no longer get anxious about a truth that does not seem fit to seek anymore. It is also important to highlight that this new sceptical posture does not derive from any philosophical decision. We neither establish nor demonstrate anything, our philosophical investigation does not have a positive result to

offer. Our *epokhé* is just the state in which we find ourselves when an exhausting investigation, undertaken with rigour and a critical mind, leaves us precisely in no condition to choose or decide. For this reason, instead of saying that we practise an *epokhé*, it is more adequate to say we remain in *epokhé*, or we are in *epokhé*.

2. We have suspended judgement about every philosophical assertion we consider. And, of course, our expectation can only be that we will be analogously led to *epokhé* with regard to any philosophical assertion we come to consider. Nevertheless, what kind of assertion philosophy has not done, or could not do? What kind of assertion concerning the truth of things could be immune to *epokhé*? Some are inclined to maintain that the sceptical suspension of judgement cannot be extended to the everyday truths of common men, the most basic ones that, above all, guide their daily lives. One would say that, having once abandoned our speculative concerns, we could find a safe refuge in a more tranquil truth, possessed and known by ordinary men. A truth that doesn't need any philosophical justification or foundation because it is directly extracted from human immersion in the world. In this way safe and reliable, even irrecusable, knowledge would be at our disposal, if we were capable of finding again within ourselves the common men we are, who now lie hidden under the extravagant clothes of the philosopher seeking philosophical truth. One could perhaps be even more daring and propose a refounding of philosophy, through a philosophical promotion of the common view of the world, drawn from that wilful immersion in the common life of men².

What we have here is actually a clever stratagem to try to save *in extremis* the domain of reality, truth, and knowledge – in sum, the domain of dogmatic philosophy – in the face of the battering of sceptical questioning. A stratagem that nonetheless cannot conceal the philosophical decision that inspires it. A decision that resembles any other philosophical decision even if the paths by which it was arrived at were less trivial. It is a philosophical posture that, by its nature and project, cannot elude the mode of *diaphonía*, since it must necessarily integrate itself in the perennial conflict of philosophies, its explicit pretension to the contrary notwithstanding.

The “common truths” have frequently been the object of philosophical reflexion. Depending on doctrinal preferences philosophers have emphasised or minimised the

² That was the position I have adopted in “Philosophy and the common view of the world”.

undeniable variation in time and space, from community to community, from culture to culture, from epoch to epoch of these common truths. Or their customary conflict with scientific doctrines, which usually prevailed, obtaining acceptance, and that once vulgarised were diffused on common sense, promoting gradual overcoming of the collective ancient beliefs. Considering and thematising such “common truths”, philosophies most often intended to denounce and demystify them, but sometimes to endorse and promote them philosophically. Interpreted by the philosophies in this or that way, rejected or accepted, justified or considered immune to any need of justification, these “truths” have long since been integrated into philosophical disputes and included in the *diaphonía* of philosophies.

It is indeed a very strange procedure, then, to try to take them collectively as an evident expression of human knowledge of reality and truth about the world, allegedly sheltering them from philosophical polemics and judging it possible to promote them philosophically. At the same time this spares them the need for any justification (even if the philosophical undertaking of giving foundations should, at the end of the day, be condemned to failure and frustration). Rarely does one stop to consider that words like “knowledge”, “reality”, “truth”, in their trivial and common use, are too vague and obscure to bear the philosophical weight one wants to place on them. Nor is it properly remembered that no assertion can ever acquire any cognitive dimension simply because it is accepted and repeated by society as a whole; philosophy and science have taught us to criticise collective myths.

The common man, when he makes himself dogmatic – as he does in many areas – frequently shows an exaggerated attachment to his own point of view, intending his assertions to be absolute and indisputable truths. He scarcely relativizes them; he rarely refrains from seeing positions that differ from his own as errors or falsehoods. He is like that individually, and collectively not less. Such dogmatism does not differ, in this respect, from philosophical dogmatism, except that the former lacks the sophistication of the latter. It is at times a coarse and stubborn dogmatism, less inclined to justify itself. Its acceptance of the “common truths” shares in the obstinate desire for the absolute, nor is it sustained by the argumentative structure of philosophic discourse.

For this reason, it seems rather a symptom of philosophical despair to want to shield these truths from the critical questioning of philosophy, to assign them preferentially the virtue of truthfulness, to confer upon them an aspect of knowledge, and an unknown deep kinship to reality. It is as if, in the vain attempt of erecting a dike against the danger of scepticism, which sweeps away all dogmatisms, one should resort to an exceptional and

confessedly unjustifiable form of dogmatism, in the pious hope of brandishing against scepticism a supreme and decisive weapon.

However, this stratagem shows itself to be powerless before the sceptical challenge. The same procedures that corrode the dogmas of the philosophers also throw into doubt the dogmatic assertions of the common man. Analogous arguments are applied to them with identical results. And our *epokhé*, thus, equally affects any apophantic discourse (in the etymological sense of the term), be it philosophical or non-philosophical, sophisticated or trivial, accompanied or unaccompanied by an alleged justification, in short every discourse that attempts to “make us see” the truth. It touches every human belief that, formulated in a judgment, is proposed as real knowledge of any aspect of the world.

3. What, then, remains for us after *epokhé*? Do we not accept or approve anything anymore? If we do not assert anything as true, if we renounce all pretence to knowledge, if we no longer believe anything, if we denounce all apophantic judgments as dogmas that a critical and rigorous thought cannot endorse, what will be our situation? Is living still possible? How can we act without believing? The Stoics tirelessly repeated this objection to Pyrrhonism, and Hume took it up with vivacity in a passage that became deservedly famous. The generalised *epokhé* seemed to inexorably condemn us to inaction and death. The sincere practice of the sceptical philosophy, if possible, would guide us to a quick and unhappy conclusion of our “miserable existence” (cf. Hume 1983, p. 160), putting a very sad end to our philosophical journey.

Foolishness and absurdity! But the philosophical ignorance of Greek scepticism is – or must be – huge, because objections like these trivially repeat themselves even up to our own day. However, since Hellenistic times, the Pyrrhonian philosophy was aware of these objections and had answered them.

Let us imagine a young student of philosophy, deeply imbued with the old philosophical craving for reaching a decision that, one day, would allow him—once the nature and goal of the philosophical enterprise has been defined for him—to arrive at a firm and unequivocal position in favour of a certain set of philosophical *dogmata*. Yet for now, he has not realized his hope, and although he has already confronted different systems and schools of philosophy, he still does not feel able to make a choice. He has been tempted by different solutions, but careful examination of the doctrines that criticise and refuse them have left him cautious and averse to rash decisions. He recognizes that he is still unable to maintain a thesis or make philosophical assertions.

Nonetheless, let us also suppose our young philosopher has already advanced sufficiently in his studies and reflexions to have become aware that, with regard to the worldview of common sense, which like everyone else, he certainly shares a good part of, he can no longer share the dogmatic, not very critical attitude of the ordinary man, which for a long time was also his own. He has learned to problematise the ultimate truth of the sentences that like everyone he daily utters. He cannot bestow on them an effective cognitive dimension, and he questions in the final analysis their relationship to the real, whatever this might mean. He is still unable to offer any philosophical interpretation of his everyday experience. Seeking such interpretation, he follows philosophical paths. However, while he walks them, he lives the life of everyman.

Very well, it is in no other situation that our Pyrrhonian philosopher finds himself, who constantly suspended his judgement through a critical reflexion upon the doctrines. Except, of course, in what concerns his expectations. Even now our young philosopher sees, so to speak, truth on the horizon. He longs to find it, even as he acknowledges that he does not yet know precisely what it is. While the more experienced philosopher, whose mind has been conditioned by the repeated experience of *epokhé*, has other perspectives, which truth does not inhabit. Concerning, however, the current definitions and decisions, options and dogmas, they are both in exactly the same condition: both are in *epokhé*.

Would one say, then, because our young philosopher has not yet philosophically come to a decision and because he no longer assumes the dogmatising posture of common men, that he is unable to act and live, that he condemns himself to inaction and death, at least if he is sincere and consistent with himself? This would be a manifestly unreasonable evaluation of his situation, and nobody would say as much. This already makes plain to us that there is something very wrong with the objection against the Pyrrhonian *epokhé*; only a total ignorance of the nature of the sceptical attitude may explain it. Still, the question is important and deserves a closer look.

4. What has changed for us after we have repeatedly suspended our judgements? In a certain sense, it would be correct to say that nothing has changed. I see myself sitting in front of my desk, putting my reflexions on paper. My dog, José Ricardo, is lying at my feet. I hear the distant noise of cars on the highway. Several ideas come to my mind, and suddenly I remember that I have to call a friend and ask him for the information I desire. I could go on describing my current “sensible” and “intelligible” experience, and it certainly seems to me

that it is quite similar and analogous to innumerable other recent or former experiences, when I still had a dogmatic conception of the world. I continue to see, to feel, and, in a certain sense, also to think as before. In other words, the *epokhé* has in no way affected - but then how could it have affected? - the immediate contents, so to speak, of my everyday experience. This experience and these contents are had by me, and I cannot refuse them. Everyone has such experiences, which they neither refuse nor can refuse them; they all acknowledge and accept them.

What we cannot refuse, what offers itself irrecusably to our sensibility and understanding – if we allow ourselves to use an illustrious philosophical term – is called by us sceptics, phenomenon (*tò phainómenon*, what appears). What appears to us imposes itself on us with necessity, we can do nothing but assent to it, it is absolutely unquestionable in its appearance. That things appear to us as they do, this does not depend on our deliberation or our choice. This is not owing to a decision of our will. What appears to us is not, *as such*, an object of investigation, precisely because it cannot be doubted. It makes no sense to argue against the appearance of what appears, such argumentation would be ineffective and absurd.

What appears, i.e., this phenomonic residue of *epokhé*, this phenomonic content of our daily experience is, so to speak and in a certain sense, the *given*; it is given to us. What appears appears to us, appears to someone. If one prefers to put it in a dogmatic vein, we should say that the phenomenon constitutes itself as essentially relative, it is relative to the person to whom it appears. We do not even understand how one could speak of a pure appearance.

Philosophers have discussed whether phenomena are sensible (*aisthetá*) or intelligible (*noetá, nooúmena*), or both. As to the nature of phenomena, we suspend judgement. Likewise, we suspend judgment concerning the ultimate nature of the distinction between sensibility and understanding, which does not prevent us from, having once learned the philosophical vocabulary, using it in a looser way without any doctrinal commitment. We shall say, then, that a good part of phenomena offer themselves to us as sensible, imposing themselves on our sensibility, while a good part of them, perhaps the majority, appear to our understanding, offering themselves to us as intelligible. But we say these things without dogmatising. For us, it is above all a didactical distinction, to which some dogmatic speculation intended to provide an adequate foundation and a rigid and safe conceptualisation. [This sentence is incomplete]

I see a desk in front of me, and I touch it. I have the experience of its colour, its form, its solidity. These are phenomena I will not hesitate to call sensible. But it also seems that I

have before me an object that is not reducible to what I sensibly perceive of it. It appears to me, for example, that it has parts and properties that my senses are not perceiving, that it remains in existence while no one is observing it, etc. This is also a phenomenon of this desk as it appears to me; here I must certainly speak of an intelligible phenomenon. As it is also an intelligible phenomenon to me that there are deserts in distant regions of the planet, that my life will after some time come to an end, or that it is appropriate to distinguish between the sensible and the intelligible, although without rigidity. Such examples are easy and trivial, and could be multiplied to infinity.

Actually, we are sensitive to the fact that discourse seems to permeate all our experience of things and to mix, to a greater or lesser degree, with every phenomenon. Perhaps we could say more, we could say it represents a constitutive ingredient of the whole phenomenal field, so to speak. Hence, we will not object to those who say every observation is impregnated with “theory”. To acknowledge this is not to dogmatise about the phenomena (at least, it is possible to do so without dogmatising), but even here we are only relating what appears to us. It is indeed appropriate to insist that recognition of this intelligible dimension of phenomena must not be confused with the attribution of any epistemological or ontological privilege to thought or *lógos*.

Much of what appears to us appears as an object of a common experience to us and to many others, if not to a large part of other human beings in the world of our phenomenal experience. That is, it also appears to them (that this is so, then, is to us an intelligible phenomenon). Though these are very numerous, to be sure, there are phenomena that offer themselves to us as objects of an experience that is exclusively ours. Those others, we call “common phenomena”.

What appears to us, appears here and now. Yet, much of what appears to us here and now appears to us here and now as something that already existed, independently of having been observed or thought by someone; or again as something which will continue to exist in the future, independently of us, and maybe outliving us; or perhaps as both. What here and now appears to us has not always appeared to us and may have never appeared to us before. Moreover, much of what once appeared to us no longer appears. Most certainly what appears to us today – in the sensible sphere evidently, but also in the intelligible sphere – will no longer appear to us tomorrow. And just as much of what appears to us does not appear to others, so much of what appears to others does not appear to us—it has neither appeared to us before nor will appear to us later. So it appears to us.

Classical philosophy distinguished, as we know, between being and appearance, by metaphysically transposing the trivial distinction between deceptive appearances of things and their correct and ordinary manifestation. It privileged being as necessary and stable, rejecting appearance as unstable and contingent. Sometimes it understood the appearance as a being's manifestation, even if superficial; but, most frequently, it considered it as a deceiving appearance that dissimulates and hides being. Appearance becomes then a form of minimal being or simply non-being. And philosophy, making itself metaphysics, set itself the task of discovering and revealing being behind or beyond appearance. Showing by which paths one can and must cross the barrier raised by "appearances", to reach a true knowledge of being. The traditional links of philosophical kinship between being, knowledge and truth were thus established. Pyrrhonism suspended, certainly, the judgement on metaphysical doctrines and put being in brackets, questioning the philosophes' discourse. In contrast, it honoured metaphysics in its own way, by preserving the old vocabulary of appearance, and calling phenomenon the content of our experience, which out of spontaneous necessity removes itself from the scope of *epokhé*. We sceptics acknowledge ourselves to be immersed in phenomenicity.

5. Sticking thoroughly to phenomena, it is important for us to distinguish clearly between the phenomenon and "what is said about the phenomenon" (cf. Sextus Empiricus, PH 1, 19-20), i.e., the (philosophical) interpretation one makes of phenomena or of the discourse that expresses it. We say, for example, that honey is sweet, or that this event was simultaneous with another, or that ingratitude is a serious defect. Thus, we report how things appear to us, we describe the phenomena, trivially using common language. We understand "is" as "appears", or, more precisely, it is as if we said: "It appears to us that honey is sweet", "It appears to us that this event was simultaneous with that other". Not that we have such formulations in mind in the common circumstances of daily life; we are simply apt to reformulate our discourse, if one tries to make a metaphysical interpretation of it, so that there is no risk of such interpretation.

By saying, for example, that honey is sweet, we do not commit ourselves concerning the real nature of honey or sweetness, about the possible substantial reality of honey, about whether sweetness is or is not a real property inherent in it, nor about the nature of the relationship between subject and predicate; neither are we presupposing any of this, since we suspend our judgement on all these questions. Because none of these is the phenomenon, but "what is said about it". We suspend our judgement as to whether honey is sweet *hóson epi tò*

lógo (cf., PH 1.20; also PH 1.215; PH 2.95; PH 3.29, 3.65 etc.), i.e., while this sentence (“honey is sweet”) is subject of philosophical reason, that is, while it is the object of dogmatic interpretation or commentary. Having clarified this point, we allow ourselves to use the current language of men, using it to express what appears to us.

We say, then, that our discourse is not “thetic”, as the dogmatic discourse is. Because dogmatic discourse “posits” what it says as real (cf. PH 1.14). It assumes itself as true expression of real knowledge; it intends to transcend itself and to transcend *empeiría*. It proposes itself, so to speak, as a vehicle of this transcendence. It wants to make us see “how things really are”, beyond “mere” appearance. But, to us, who question the apophantic pretension of discourse, who were led to *epokhé* by such questioning, this discourse is a mere expression of our experience; it states its contents, it says what appears. The words, forms and procedures of expression, which we were conditioned to use to manifest our experience and life, by our society and culture, constitute our language. The latter is always loose and precarious, even if we try our best to improve it. Therefore, we do not postulate any mysterious relationship of correspondence between words and things. Neither do we understand that language has the power to establish anything, nor do we recognise any thickness that it would be philosophy’s duty to penetrate. A certainly effective instrument of our insertion in the phenomenic world, our language, as the philosopher said, is part of our form of life.

6. Let us imagine some philosophers joyfully assembled, drinking draught beer, around a table in a bar (perhaps a Bergsonian, a Hegelian, a Kantian, a Berkeleyian, an Aristotelian and, as a counterbalance, a sceptic). Let us also suppose they are not talking about philosophy. Their major philosophical differences obviously do not prevent them from understanding one another or the waiter concerning countless things, or even perhaps from agreeing on several issues (such as the temperature or the economic crisis), or from identically describing objects and similar events, as ordinary men in the “marketplace”³ do. They and everybody tranquilly recognise as obvious that experiences of daily life are the object of consensual descriptions from philosophers who, nonetheless, are divided by serious differences of doctrine. Because it is about the “common phenomena” which irrecusably

³ I borrow Quine’s expression (cf. Quine 1960, p. 272).

impose themselves on everyone and which philosophy never dreamed of rejecting (no idealist philosopher ever denied that Wittgenstein wore shorts under his trousers⁴).

But if all those philosophers relate the phenomena either in the same way or in a very similar way, they disagree greatly in what they have to say about the phenomena (except the sceptic, who has nothing to say). Their different doctrines offer distinct and incompatible interpretations of this common experience which they consensually describe; those doctrines interpret the phenomena in different ways. Perhaps it would not be difficult to imagine how each one of those dogmatic philosophers would analyse, from the point of view of his particular philosophy, some banal statement on his current experience (“this beer came warm”, for example). Each of them would certainly reject the interpretations of all the others and would insist that his own philosophical interpretation of the common phenomenon under discussion is the only one capable of integrally coping with it. Their doctrinal disagreement is total, as much as their “pre-philosophical” agreement concerning the phenomenon and how to describe it is, let us suppose, complete.

To remember such obvious trivialities has its importance here. By the way, in philosophy, it is very important to remember something everyone knows. What we want to emphasise here is that the sceptic philosopher, who suspends his judgement about all those interpretations of the phenomenon, by confessing he has no criteria with which to decide the controversy, he moves within that non-philosophical common terrain, in which occurs the consensual description of the experienced⁵ common situation. He acknowledges himself incapable of transcending the modest perspective of the marketplace. It does not matter to him that each dogmatic philosopher proclaims solidarity between the consensual experience and the interpretation made by his particular doctrine. The fact that each of the others rejects this interpretation and that the same occurs with each proposed interpretation, this insuperable *diaphonía* that, here as in every similar case, leads to the sceptic *epokhé*, implies, in the sceptic’s eyes, something like a philosophical neutralisation of that common terrain, preserving and guaranteeing its pre-philosophical status. We Pyrrhonists delightfully recognise ourselves to be confined to this common terrain.

⁴ This is what Wittgenstein said, according to Wisdom, when he listened to Moore’s proof of the external world (cf. Wisdom 1942, p. 231). I admit I owe to Bento Prado my initial interest for Wittgenstein’s pants. (cf. Prado Jr. 1981, p. 69)

⁵ - Porchat makes a note concerning a neologism he finds useful in portuguese. Instead of using "experimentada", Porchat invents "experienciada". [N.R. - Plinio]

But philosophical doctrines will continue to dispute endlessly about this and about the common discourse that deals with it. They will ask themselves about the real meaning and import of this discourse; they will discuss its immediate or possibly profound veracity, its possible correspondence with the reality of things, its possible referentiality. They will discuss the possible cognitive dimension of the common experience consensually described and its relationship with the “real world”. They will attribute or deny reality to the phenomenon. They will equate, or not, phenomenon and representation (they will possibly equate phenomenon and thought). They will consider, sometimes, the phenomenon as the result of an interaction between subject and object. They will debate the subjective or objective, or mixed status of the phenomenon. They will say the phenomenon is reliable or unreliable. They will make the phenomenon either the road or, quite the contrary, the veil and occultation, transposable or non-transposable barrier, which separates us from being, provisionally or permanently. In a thousand ways they will comment, explain and interpret the phenomenon. From these multiple possible interpretations will rise different ontologies and theories of knowledge.

We Pyrrhonists, however, because we are in *epokhé* about all these things, *do not attribute any epistemological or ontological status to the phenomenon*. We do not have to offer any philosophical theory of it. We repeat only that we acknowledge it in its simple appearance and relate this experience of ours. We always regard with due suspicion the philosophical *lógos*, which is so deceiving that, at times, it nearly snatches the phenomenon from under our eyes (cf. Sextus Empiricus PH 1.20).

7. It is certainly correct to say that we represent to ourselves what appears to us. Ancient Pyrrhonism had already described the phenomenon as what imposes itself on us with necessity “in accordance with a passive appearance” (cf. PH 1.13, 1.19, 1.193 etc.). The Stoic theory of knowledge privileged the notion of representation (*phantasia*), modification or alteration of our soul that may perhaps copy the real object in a specular way [in the manner of a perceiver?] and present it to us in an adequate and faithful manner. The philosophers of the New Academy proclaimed the inevitability of *epokhé* with regard to this purported knowledge of reality by means of our representations and questioned the alleged representativeness of these latter. This did not prevent these philosophers, it seems, from

focusing on them; Carneades, in particular, gives the impression of having made the representations into our only unquestionable data⁶.

The Academicians did not concern themselves with the phenomenon, leaving this task to the subsequent development of Pyrrhonist philosophy, restored by Aenesidemus against the Academy. It was in this period that the old notion of phenomenon was redeveloped and the problematic of representation analysed from a new angle. It is worth mentioning here that Pyrrhonism seems to have hesitated with regard to this issue and, even, to have been inclined to identify representation and phenomenon. The passages from Sextus Empiricus on this question are not clear and their interpretation is very problematic and for this reason controversial.

Limited to living our phenomenic experience and contenting ourselves with reporting it, we recognise, of course, that what appears to us and necessarily moves us towards assent is intimately associated with certain “representations”. We do not hesitate to say that we represent to ourselves what appears to us, nor does it seem to us that we should – could we, in any case? – avoid this way of expressing ourselves. Why, by the way, would we consider doing such a thing? Why should we reject, at the end of the day, the use of a terminology already incorporated in the everyday language of men of a certain culture, already fairly widespread, in spite of its philosophical origins? We speak, as everyone does, about how we represent things to ourselves, about the objects and their representation in us, especially because this way of expression seems well-suited to our experience.

We are also not insensitive to the fact that a theory of knowledge built upon the notion of representation seductively invites us to confuse phenomenon and representation. Because it seems a strong temptation to say that, by suspending our judgement about the nature and reality of things, we end up strictly confined to our representations, the only thing that is left to us and which constitutes what is immediately given to us, the only residue of our *epokhé*. We would have access to nothing but the universe of our own representations. One step further and we would be pointing out that what appears to us and irrecusably offers itself, what we call "phenomena", are always our representations. The so-called phenomenic world would be nothing but the set of our representations.

⁶ This interpretation seems suggested by Sextus (cf. M 7.166ff.). However, one should remember that the reconstitution of the philosophy of Carneades is a very complex and polemical issue.

On the other hand, we are always eager to recall that at each moment we are merely reporting our experience, and that, when speaking of the phenomenon, it is our *páthos* that we are reporting (cf. PH 1.15, 1.197, 1.203 etc.). This form of expression, by the way, led some of the ancients to assimilate Pyrrhonism with the Cyrenaic school, since the latter maintained that we could only apprehend our *páthe*, i.e., our affections and experiences (cf. PH 1.215).

The situation, then, seems ripe – as it has been since the time of Hellenistic Philosophy and with the background of the Stoic theory of representation – for Pyrrhonism to convert itself into something like a Philosophy of Mind, as we say today, for which it would suffice to interpret phenomena as representations, as affections, and purely “mental” experiences. Besides, some texts by Sextus Empiricus, read from the modern mentalist perspective, seem to strongly suggest the implicit presence of a philosophy of mind in his conception of Pyrrhonism. To make it explicit, however, it lacked the conceptual resources and the language that post-Cartesian philosophy, especially in the wake of Locke, came to develop.

Thus, Pyrrhonian scepticism could apparently characterize itself as a philosophy of subjectivity, and it is precisely this interpretation that, at least since Hegel, that many have offered. It is certain that the Pyrrhonists suspend judgment concerning the conception, nature and reality of the soul, as well as the nature and reality of body and matter. They suspend judgment concerning the so-called faculties of the soul, the reality of the so-called intellect, and its alleged power to know itself (cf. PH 2.57-8; M 7.348-50). I say that things appear to *me* and that *I* suspend judgment concerning their reality, but also concerning the substantial reality of a thinking subject to which those pronouns would supposedly refer. I do not attribute to them any reality to which they might refer. Having questioned thethetic character of the self-reflexivity of consciousness, Pyrrhonism does not leave room for the emergence of *Cogito*.

Modern scepticism, Humean scepticism in particular, also rejected the *Cogito*, by joining a mentalist philosophy that identified the self with a mind conceived as a bundle or collection of our representations (cf. Hume 1992, p. 207, 252, 634). So by identifying phenomenon and representation, saying that phenomenon is a *páthos* of ours and privileging the subjective dimension of our experience, Pyrrhonism would have been led towards Hume’s mentalist scepticism. The Scottish philosopher would have brought to fruition, thanks to the conceptual resources furnished by Locke’s empiricism, under the impact of Cartesianism, the latent potentialities in the old Pyrrhonism. At the core of scepticism there would always have

resided, however partially concealed and covered up, a mentalist subjectivism of the Humean type waiting to be made explicit.

8. However, Greek Pyrrhonism didn't take that step or follow this path. Nor could it have done so, on pain of inconsistency, given that such a position would necessarily represent a kind of preference, even if involuntary and merely implicit, for a certain philosophical commitment. This is obviously intolerable for the philosophers of *epokhé*⁷, who would have been committing themselves to a very particular philosophical interpretation of phenomenon. Pyrrhonism would be unable to conceal its status as an involuntary and ashamed member of the diaphonic choir of dogmatic doctrines. Modern scepticism, however, adopted this mentalist position, equating phenomenicity with the “interior” world.

While in no way despising the current use of the vocabulary of representation and even recognising its convenience for expressing our phenomenic experience, we Pyrrhonists question all philosophical theories of representation (Sextus thoroughly questioned the Stoic and Academic theories). Just as we suspended judgment concerning dogmatic ontologies, the nature and reality of the objects, the real existence or nonexistence of the sensible and the intelligible, so we have suspended judgment concerning the various theories of knowledge and doctrines of the soul forged by dogmatism. We suspend judgement, for example, concerning the philosophical notion of representation and its intelligibility, the real nature of representation, its alleged representativeness, its possible relation to the real, but *no less* concerning its possible identification with what appears to us. It is not as if we are not aware of the so to speak philosophical potentiality of phenomenon—the “natural” emergence of a theory of representation which bids us not to distinguish what appears from the representation of what appears. In such a case, we would virtually be calling phenomenon its own representation⁸. However, we do not have any reason to assent to such identification. On the contrary, with regard to our daily experience, if on the one hand we appear to ourselves representing what appears to us, on the other, much of what appears to us appears also as distinct and independent of our “mind”, as external to it and being merely represented in it.

⁷ I have interpreted Pyrrhonism as a mentalist philosophy and attributed to it this implicit choice in “Scepticism and Exterior Word” (cf. Porchat Pereira 1993, p. 121-66). But the objections from two of my students in an undergraduate course taught at the Department of Philosophy, Universidade de São Paulo, on Greek scepticism, Carlos Alberto Inada and Luiz Antônio Alves Eva, formulated on academic papers which they have presented me, although I have rejected them at first, they have ended up encouraging me to a radical reformulation of my reading of Pyrrhonism, which culminated in the interpretation I propose now.

⁸ Cf. PH 1, 22: *tò phainómenon, dynámei tèn phantasían autou hoúto kalountes* (Literally: “the phenomenon, virtually to the representation of it thus calling”) The interpretation of this proposition is extremely controversial.

Certainly, we say that we are merely reporting our *páthos* when we express the phenomenon, insisting that we are only announcing our affections and experiences. But we also want to make clear that we intentionally leave ambiguous the character of this experience, since we do not confer any philosophical status upon the phenomenon. Carefully refraining from any dogmatic assertion, we certainly do not postulate any real objective dimension to our phenomonic experience. Much less do we confer upon it any subjective reality. Nor do we philosophically privilege its subjective character, since we suspend judgement concerning all of these things.

It is likewise certain that we emphasise the relative character of the phenomenon, always bearing in mind that what appears appears to someone. Furthermore, with regard to phenomonic experience, it is to *my* phenomonic experience that I am restricted. It is always *my* phenomenon that I express—that is, what appears *to me*. The phenomonic field presents itself as centred on me. That is how it structures itself, that is its “logic”, and that is the grammar of the discourse that expresses it. Things appear to me, I appear to myself, and I appear to myself as the one to whom these things appear. I am a phenomenon to myself, and it is a phenomenon to me that it is to me that things appear.

Dogmatic philosophy invoked this “logic”, which is certainly irrecusable by us, of the phenomonic discourse and experience with the purpose of postulating, beyond (or beneath) the phenomonic self, another self. This other self is rightfully [*de juri*] prior to phenomonicity and allegedly presupposed by it—something like a transcendental self, purportedly required as ultimate explanation to account for the phenomonic experience. We are familiar with how philosophers have tirelessly debated this topic, and we have the actual experience of the undecidability of its unavoidable *diaphonía*. Knowing also how the “logic” of the situations and the grammar of the discourse that describes them are steeped in tradition and culture, we learned long ago to distrust doctrines that would draw ontological or epistemological consequences from them. For this reason, we do not see how we could offer a philosophical interpretation of the “structure” of the appearance, and we acknowledge our inability to apprehend the real nature of the relationships in question, to catch a glimpse of the requisite non-phenomonic subjectivity. We necessarily extend our *epokhé* with regard to it as well. As with any other topic, and for all the reasons we have laid out, we do not see how a philosophical interpretation of the phenomenon could compel our acceptance. Certainly, it is not correct to construe our scepticism as a philosophy of subjectivity.

9. Acknowledging what appears to *me*, describing *my páthos*, at the same time that I suspend my judgement concerning every philosophical theory of the subject, I have no grounds for refusing that it is a *human páthos* that I describe (cf. PH 1.203). Because I appear to myself as a living (*zōon*) human amidst other human beings, who coinhabit, all of us, the same physical world that surrounds us and of which we share the experience, living in it our common life [This sentence is incomplete]. This man that I am, I appear to myself as this body and these sensations, emotions, passions, feelings, representations and thoughts that accompany it. My self feels and thinks, but it also has flesh and blood. It is a living body like other living bodies in the world, with feelings and thoughts just like those of other men. It lives in continuous interaction with them, immersed in the objects and events of the world.

I appear to myself as a very small item in this large world to which I belong. Objects and events, in their vast majority, appear to me as fundamentally external to me, i.e., external to *my body* and my psychic life, as do others who are not me and are fundamentally independent from me, totally prescinding from [transcending?] me. The world that appears to me does not appear to me as in need of me. On the contrary, it appears to me that it would almost unaffected by my disappearance or annihilation. A very important part of what imposes itself on my experience irrecusably imposes itself on me as a non-self, distinct from me, coexisting with me now, but having preceded me in the past and most likely outliving me in the future.

What appears to me does not privilege me. For I appear to me only as an item amidst others in the phenomenic world. It appears to me, through this human prism, that the fact that my vision of the phenomenic field is centred in myself is nothing but a natural and necessary consequence of the emergence of consciousness in living beings. If I can never go beyond what appears to me, this limitation that manifests itself in the same experience of appearing to me, it manifests itself as exclusively mine, without affecting in any way the majority of things that appear to me. Here one can comprehend why the Pyrrhonist sceptic has never been tempted by solipsism.

If we allow ourselves to talk about subject and object, adopting a common vocabulary now current in philosophical language, it is only to highlight that phenomenic bipolarity between man, who appears to himself and to whom things appear, and all other “things”. However, men and “things” are items of the phenomenic world; they have, as such, the same status. Our *epokhé* equally applies to any apophantic discourse that seeks to “reveal” them to us. The subject is always, for us, the human subject, the “flesh and blood” man. Pyrrhonism “humanises” the subject, it “naturalises” him. If we talk about ideas, arguments, criteria,

theories, controversies, we never forget that they are ideas had by men, arguments that men employ, criteria that men propose, theories that men formulate, controversies with which philosopher-men amuse themselves. Philosophies appear to us as human things. Discursive productions engendered by human brains, with which man frequently tries to transcend the boundaries of his own humanity. It is always from the perspective of the human animal that we, Pyrrhonists, deal with things belonging to the mind, because it is in this way that the mental life appears to us. But we obviously do not have any intention to establish the nature and essence of the human being, about whom we confess to be ignorant, even as to whether he has an essence and nature. We do not have any philosophical anthropology to offer, since, we equally suspend our judgement about men.

10. Having no criteria to decide concerning the reality and truth of things, in a state of *epokhé* with regard to theories and doctrines, we cannot rely upon them to regulate our actions in daily life. Compelled to recognise the phenomenon and to confine ourselves to it, it is obviously by means of it that we orient our practical conduct in our day-to-day lives, taking it as a criterion for action (cf. PH 1.21ff.). According to what appears to us, we take decisions, we choose certain things, we avoid others. We act and live in common life, interacting with our fellows and conversing with them. We employ common language, using it without dogmatising (*adoxástos*), i.e., without expressing beliefs or holding opinions purportedly true or in accord with reality. If perchance we should utter a sentence that sounds to some like a dogmatic assertion, we are always willing to reformulate our language, to clarify our position, and to correct the mistake.

To explain its observance of common life didactically and with no intention of proposing an exhaustive and rigid scheme, ancient Pyrrhonism highlighted four aspects that characterise our quotidian practice according to the phenomenon. First, we follow, so to speak, nature's guidance, spontaneously using our senses and intellect. We also yield—we could hardly do otherwise—to the necessity of our affections and instincts. In general, we conform to the tradition of institutions and customs, since we are placed in a particular sociocultural context. Finally, we adopt the teachings of the arts (*tékhnai*) developed by our civilisation and incorporated into daily life in our society. Obviously, our use of ordinary language is adapted to all these dimensions of daily life in which we are immersed and indicates to us the depth of our immersion in it.

But is this not to recognise that we have many beliefs and that we regulate our daily life by them? The answer to this question depends on what one understands by “belief”. If by

“belief” one understands the disposition to take a proposition as a truly adequate characterisation of reality, as a legitimate candidate, requiring only foundation and justification, to the function of expressing real knowledge – such is the dogmatic and frequent meaning of term – then we sceptics certainly do not hold beliefs. However, if the expression is taken in a looser and weaker sense and by “belief” one understands merely compelled agreement to what appears to us, to what irrecusably imposes itself on us – which is nothing but our acknowledgment of the phenomenon –, if one chooses to call this a belief, we will not argue over a word, and we will willingly say that we have beliefs. Yes, we sceptics believe in phenomena. I believe there is a desk in front of me, I believe there is a closed door a few meters away from me, which I shall open when I leave this office. I believe I will certainly risk to hurt me much, if not to die, if I try to leave through the window beside me, because my office is on the second floor of the house. I also believe that the country is immersed in a huge economic and social crisis, etc. Trivial beliefs of mine, beliefs just like those any man might have. I have them calmly, i.e., I follow what appears to me.

Such beliefs, understood as a mere acknowledgment of the phenomenon, are obviously also held, in their life as a common man, by a Berkeleyian, regardless of his “immaterialism”, or a Kantian, despite his doctrine of the external world and representation. To intend to invoke these beliefs and their irrecusable necessity as an argument against Berkeley's or Kant's philosophy would, of course, be ridiculous and bizarre—a demonstration of amazing philosophical naiveté. However, it is no less unreasonable and bizarre offer such arguments against Pyrrhonism, to object that its *epokhé* should imply the abolition of all beliefs, and the fact that the sceptic continues to have them and shows that he has them in his daily life (for how could it be otherwise?) demonstrates an unsolvable contradiction between the practice of the sceptic and “his doctrine”. Absurd, though time-honoured non-sense, predicated on a striking ignorance of the sceptical attitude and its “phenomenology”! The objector fails to understand that those beliefs do not fall under the scope of *epokhé* to the same extent that the phenomenon does not fall under the scope of *epokhé*... But the objection has been fastidiously repeated against the sceptics since the time of the Stoics and, thanks to Hume, is renewed even in our own day.

To the extent that we allow ourselves to say that we have beliefs in the manner indicated, to this same extent and in this same manner we do not deny having *certainities* in our practical and daily life. We have no reason not to welcome into our language the usual vocabulary of certainty. It suffices for us as in other cases to take care not to impose a dogmatic interpretation on our linguistic practices, nor to extract epistemological or

ontological presuppositions from our linguistic uses. The irrecusability of experience, which frequently makes us say we are certain of something, has at times been used to attribute an epistemological status to our certainty, and an ontological status to its object. But to be certain of something is just part of the game of daily life in which we are immersed.

The imposition of the phenomenon occurs no less in the moral sphere, where certain values are necessarily absorbed by us as a result of sociocultural conditioning, as is the case with every man. Frequently, such values have been incorporated so deeply in our personality and in such a way that they constitute, so to speak, our second nature. We will not commit an act that is recognised as evil and shameful, precisely because it appears to us as evil and shameful. And if we are willing to do everything possible to save a child in danger, it is simply because it irresistibly appears to us that we must do so. If a tyrant commands us to perform a vile act under the threat of torture or death, then submitted to the impact of opposite forces, the preservation and survival instinct on one side, and our moral requirements and values, on the other, perhaps we will choose – let us hope we will be able to do so – to act according to our upbringing and education, in accordance with the laws and customs by which we were raised (cf. Sextus M 11.166). Our *epokhé* concerns only theories, doctrines and dogmatisms. There is a miserable philosophical fallacy according to which absolute values and ultimate justifications are indispensable to moral actions. However, life and history have very often disproved this, and revealed to us that the bearers of moral dogmas do not always offer the best examples of morality...

Against Pyrrhonian *epokhé*, whose nature he was not able to apprehend, Hume has proposed a mitigated scepticism (cf. Hume 1983, p. 129-30), which he affirms to result from the moderation of Pyrrhonism by means of the irresistible force of nature. The latter obliges us to make judgements and to hold beliefs, regardless of the rational analysis that shows the absence of justification and reasons for them, and which taken by itself would lead us to suspend them. The term “nature” is certainly ambiguous and vague as even Hume acknowledges.⁹ In any case, Hume reminds us that we have irresistible beliefs, beliefs that could be called instinctive and natural, which do not depend on deliberation or choice. Such

⁹ About the word “natural”, see Hume: “The word natural is commonly taken in so many senses and is of so loose a signification, that...” (Hume 1983, p. 258). Compare with Philo’s words, in Hume’s *Dialogues*: “and, perhaps, even that vague, undetermined word nature to which the vulgar refer anything...” (cf. Hume 1948, p. 49). In PH 1.98, Sextus Empiricus reminds the undecidable *diaphonia* of the dogmatic philosophers about nature’s reality.

beliefs are independent of justification or rational foundation, which are nonexistent. It is worth adding that one of those irresistible beliefs is the belief in the independent existence of bodies (cf. Hume 1992, p. 187ff).

Now, as we have seen, Pyrrhonism says precisely the same thing by describing our necessary agreement with phenomena. Hume failed to realise not only that there is no incompatibility between such “naturalism” and Pyrrhonian *epokhé*, but also that the former is the necessary complement of the latter. In fact, it is as if in Pyrrhonism the suspension of judgement and naturalism were the two sides of the same coin. Pyrrhonism is a kind of “naturalism”. Nevertheless Hume’s ignorance of Pyrrhonism has been transmitted to his modern and contemporary descendants. Even today, we see philosophers seeking an answer in “naturalism” – the only answer, according to them – that is able to circumvent the philosophical consequences of the allegedly nefarious sceptical *epokhé*.

All the observations we have just made concerning the phenomenon as a criterion for action in everyday practice make it very clear that the Pyrrhonist completely adheres to common life, living it in its entirety like common men. Experiencing its pleasures and joys, its trials and tribulations, he has no reason to strive for apathy as an ideal. He “is not made of rock or a primeval oak, but he is from the race of men”¹⁰. He is a common man who acts and behaves like an ordinary man, but a common man who was able to break free from myths and dogmas, who no longer bends under the weight of Truth. The theme of ordinary life is indeed central to Pyrrhonian philosophy, and, if one does not take this into account, the notion of phenomenon itself becomes obscure. Pyrrhonism entirely restores life, which the dogmatic philosophy often forgets. For what appear to us, in the end, is life’s domain itself.

11. It is also manifest to us that it is entirely appropriate to talk about a sceptical view of the world, which will however differ, in many respects, from one sceptic to another. The worldview of a sceptic, as the worldview of any man, obviously conforms to his past experience and cultural background. It is built from his experience of phenomena, with which it is closely associated. It is this experience made into discourse. If we pay attention to its most obvious structural elements and its general aspects, we will quickly realise that it has a great deal in common with the worldviews of other men. We will say that it appears to us as

¹⁰ Odysseus’s verse (XIX, 163) modified by Sextus, cf. M 11.161.

having at its core something like a common view of the world, peculiar to the historical and social constellation in which the sceptic exists.

The sceptical view of the world was progressively consolidated over an extended philosophical itinerary, gradually emerging from a path that slowly and critically weaved through doctrines and problems of philosophy. By refraining from doctrinal assertions, and avoiding any cognitive dimension, it refuses to set itself up as a metaphysics. It would likewise be more prudent not to characterise it as descriptive “metaphysics”, if one fears the obvious impertinent connotations of such terminology. Neither should it be called a “theory of the world”, for an analogous reason: the term “theory” habitually carries connotations that appear suspicious to Pyrrhonic eyes. It certainly does not result from theoretical choices: it is not a construction of speculative reason and lacks systematicity. As a “spontaneously” constituted phenomenology (in the etymological sense of the term), it is naturally articulated around a certain structure that interconnects its propositions—something like a “basic conceptual framework”, which defines the frame of the basic, mutually dependent “certainties”.

In the description of his experience of the world, especially when philosophical issues are under discussion, the sceptic would rather avoid the vocabulary of truth, reality and knowledge, for he does not forget how these words are impregnated with philosophical meanings which an ancient tradition has given them. Were this not so, these words would be innocent in themselves, and, in daily practice, the sceptic will not refrain from using them according to the common meaning. For in their vulgar usage “truth”, “reality” and “knowledge” primarily refer to the internal framework of the phenomonic world and have no ontological or epistemological weight. With regard to their alleged presuppositions, the sceptic obviously questions them and suspends his judgement. Thus, for example, if it had appeared to him that there was before him a person whose presence in that place and time someone had later called into doubt, the Pyrrhonist can tranquilly say that this person was “really” there at that moment, that he “knew” it because he was also there and saw that person, that it is “true” the person was there, that the doubt aroused has no “grounds” etc. To prohibit us from the current language because one fears impertinent philosophical interpretations would be an overreaction, not very natural and rather pedantic. However, if we were questioned about such use of language, we would have to explain that we assent to these assertions according to the customary practice of language, without ever thinking of venturing

beyond the phenomenon. We merely describe our life and experience and abstain from any interpretation that seeks to transcend them.

It is within the phenomenic world that we distinguish between “real” and imaginary and fictional, “true” and “false”, dream and waking experience (the Cartesian dream argument is foreign to the Pyrrhonian problematic), “knowledge” and ignorance or conjecture. We make such distinctions as does any men, and it is worth remembering that the common man seems unaware of what is at stake in the philosophical problematic that one wants to graft onto his daily usage of language. Though this may not be the case with a more sophisticated and educated person, who can sometimes superimpose a dogmatic interpretation on many of his linguistic uses. For this reason one might hesitate to attribute to the common view of the world and its language an implicit and “natural” tendency to a certain metaphysical stance, for example, to a realist metaphysics. It would rather be pertinent to investigate the cultural genesis of its grammar.

Our experience of the world appears to us, in fundamental respects, as an experience of our deep insertion in the society that has borne and educated us. Hence, our worldview is also an expression and reflexion of the same society and historical constellation to which we belong, beyond the idiosyncratic traces of our personal experiences. And, whether as expression of the individual experience or as a reflexion of collective experience, our phenomenic worldview presents itself to us as subject to permanent evolution. What is trivial concerning the sensible phenomena is no different concerning intelligible phenomena.

An historic and classic example may be appropriate here. It used to appear to men that the Sun daily made its way across the sky above our heads, moving from east to west, while the earth remained stationary. Today, and for a long time now, however, it appears to us that mankind was wrong and that the movement we thought we saw was merely apparent, that it is our planet that is moving around the Sun. Other things are intelligible phenomena to us; the phenomenic framework has been radically altered. This "essential" contingency appears to us as one of the most conspicuous characteristics of our phenomenic experience, and the basic framework of our worldview does not appear to us as immune to evolution.

Our explanation of the Pyrrhonian view of the world seems to us more than enough to show how foreign to Pyrrhonism is the modern problematic of the existence of the exterior “world”. This problematic, as is well known, emerges from the sceptical itinerary of Descartes’ *First Meditation* and is intimately related to the mentalist developments of British empiricism, from Locke to Hume. Having this philosophical context as background, the modern sceptic privileges the subject, the mind, the “interior world”, and wonders whether a

world external to our mind does or does not exist. As Rorty has pointed out, the question of how I can know that something mental represents something not mental becomes, so to speak, the “professional” question of scepticism (cf. Rorty 1980, p. 46). Modern scepticism doubts the existence of the “exterior” world, problematising our capacity of transcending the universe of our representations.

However, to attribute such doubt about the existence of the “exterior” world to Pyrrhonism is irremediably anachronistic¹¹ and even inconsistent with the peculiar perspective of Pyrrhonian philosophy. There is no way of confuse this modern sceptical doubt with our *epokhé* with regard to the alleged metaphysical or epistemological dimension of our acknowledgement of the phenomonic world. As we have seen, our questioning of dogmatic discourse applies *equally* to the nature and so-called reality of subject and object, mind and body, faculties of the soul and properties of matter. On the one hand, we recognise the sensible and intelligible data that imposes itself on our experience; on the other hand, we problematise all discourses that go beyond the phenomena in an attempt to interpret our experience. If, as human beings, we do not forego anything from the so-called worlds of mind and matter, we entirely abstain from apophantic judgements about one and the other. If one wishes to call this doubt, then one should say that we doubt the body and the soul, the mind and matter, the reality of the “exterior” world as much as the reality of the “interior” one. However, it should be granted us that it is preferable to avoid such misleading language.

12. Let us consider, once more, the dogmatic perspective. The dogmatist utters a discourse that seeks to say how things “really” are, transcending the experience of phenomenon. He sees himself as the possessor of knowledge and as capable of stating the truth, in the strong sense of the term, that he attempts to elucidate. From the sceptical perspective, however, at the same moment that the dogmatist exposes his *dógmata*, he is also simply stating what appears to him, what is a phenomenon¹² to him. Certainly, the dogmatist will acknowledge that he is reporting what appears to him, since it could not be otherwise. However, he will add that what appears to him actually *is such* and will maintain this either on the basis of purported immediate evidence or by appealing to a chain of reasons, which

¹¹ Having interpreted the scepticism as a mentalist philosophy, I have committed such anachronism is “Scepticism and Exterior World”.

¹² Cf. Sextus, M 7.336: “In addition, the person who says that he himself is the criterion of truth says what appears to himself, and nothing more. Therefore, since each of the other philosophers also says what appears to himself and is opposite to the point just put forward...”.

starting from purported immediate evidence would supposedly justify a conclusion that is not immediately evident in itself. The phenomenicity of the dogma is, then, intimately associated with this purported evidence or with the demonstrability of that discursive construction.

This becomes patent and explicit in the very refusal of the truth of a dogma by rival dogmatists that see in this dogma a mere expression of a subjective belief, based on false evidence or insufficient and non-demonstrative reasons. The sceptic takes note of this habitual diagnosis, which the dogmatist utters concerning the *dógmata* of others, but extends universally it to all dogmas. Always questioning the alleged evidence and suspending judgement concerning the purported demonstrability of the arguments, he is not capable of assenting to a dogma, which does not appear to him, just as it does not appear to the rival dogmatists. In each dogma, he sees nothing but what is phenomenon to the dogmatist who maintains it. Moreover, if a dialogue takes place between the dogmatist and the sceptic, if the sceptic is able to undermine the basis on which the former has built his belief, if the dogmatist begins to doubt the “evidence” on which it rests, or if he discovers difficulties in the arguments that led him to his conclusion, then his dogma loses support and credibility. It ceases to appear to him as it once did. In this case the same thing happens to him that happens to anyone when a belief one used to think of as true is abandoned: he recognises that it was nothing but an “appearance”—his particular phenomenon, in fact covered in unsuspected precariousness. This precariousness does not cover what is phenomenon to the sceptic, even if recognisably contingent and subject to dissipation in a possible process of evolution, unpredictable in advance. For what appears to the sceptic irresistibly imposes itself on him, regardless of his *epokhé* with regard to all *dógmata*. It does not depend on arguments and reasons, and prescind from “intuitions”, which one can always call into doubt.

Nonetheless, it seems to follow from these considerations that it is not fitting to attempt to draw too clear of a boundary between the domain of the dogma and the domain of the (intelligible) phenomenon. It is certainly a more than convenient and adequate distinction for describing our experience, but a Pyrrhonist would never say – a Pyrrhonist could never say – that it is founded in the nature things. Assent to a dogma necessarily bears a phenomenic element, and no division of the phenomenic world can ever hope to be immune to the surreptitious presence of hidden dogmatic elements and, imbedded in the common language, possible vestiges of ancient myths inextricably incorporated into the common sense of a given culture. The two regions extend over a no-man’s-land, where the contours dissipate, become unclear and poorly delineated. So it appears to us.

The domain of the dogma is where the *lógos* has sovereignty. The sceptic knows better than anyone the power of *lógos* and the immense fascination it exerts over men. He charges himself with the precise duty of denouncing and defusing its traps and ruses. Thus, a considerable part of the sceptical philosophical enterprise is to engage in criticism of dogmatical reason, demolishing the idols and fictions continuously forged by dogmatic discourse. Through this prism, Pyrrhonian philosophy conceives itself as therapeutic and the disease it fights is dogmatism. As Sextus said, “Sceptics are philanthropic and wish to cure by argument, as far as they can, the conceit and rashness of the Dogmatists” (cf. PH 3, 280). Pyrrhonism is, basically, a critique of language and its myths. It fights to break the spell that binds men to a language on vacation...

13. Some may be tempted to invoke modern and contemporary science and its accomplishments to reject the Pyrrhonian stance. When science and the technology that results from it, as is recognised, unquestionably impregnate our life and common practice, when vulgarised scientific theories progressively seep into common sense, with which they are mixed and from which they can scarcely be dissociated, when the common image of the world becomes more and more influenced by innumerable elements borrowed from scientific theories, it would seem appropriate to ask how one can one maintain the *epokhé* with regard to scientific theories. The impact of science on daily life was certainly not so visible in Hellenistic time, but in our own time it is absolutely incontestable. Does this not constitute a formidable objection against the Pyrrhonian *epokhé*?

Of course not. On the contrary, Pyrrhonism seems to us completely compatible with modern and contemporary scientific practice. For what the Pyrrhonists problematised was the old classic *epistème*, science understood as safe and adequate knowledge of the reality of things-in-themselves. In other words, they questioned the metaphysical dimension that science attributed to itself, a dimension to which a certain philosophical theory of knowledge allegedly justified the access. The sceptical *epokhé* extended, then, to the purported truths of this science and called into question the purported reality of scientific objects, the real and absolute cognition [knowability?] of the entire enterprise.

However, Pyrrhonists are not insensible to similarities and differences, nor to the regularity that even careless observation detects in the world. They pay attention to the fact that the very human invention of language rests on the experience of regularities that guide the course of “nature” as well as to the fact that the common man appeals to these regularities to formulate his daily hypotheses and predictions when dealing with phenomena. When such

procedures of ordinary life are methodised and systematised, when the constant conjunctions between phenomena become the object of careful consideration and deliberate observation, when the use of hypotheses built on past experience becomes a habitual tool of prediction, we are then in the field of *tékhnē*, which humanity developed to subjugate the world of experience for its benefit.¹³

Built on the phenomenon and not concerned to transcend it, seeking only to deal with the phenomonic world in an adequate way, by exploring and mastering it insofar as humanly possible, for man's benefit, the *tékhnai* certainly constitute one of the most conspicuous traces of civilised life. To observe its teachings, to use them, and – if this is our personal vocation – to develop and amplify them, is an important part of the Pyrrhonian observance of life in accordance with the phenomenon (cf. PH 1, 23-4). Ancient Pyrrhonism did not dare call *tékhnē* "science" probably because the term *epistéme* had already taken on connotations that classical and Stoic philosophies had indissociably attached to it. *Tékhnē*, as the Pyrrhonist saw it, unlike *epistéme*, could be entirely fitted within the phenomonic sphere, easily dispensing with philosophical interpretation.

The complex and multiform landscape of modern and contemporary philosophy of science no longer privileges the old notion of *epistéme*. Scientific practice, since the beginnings of modern empirical, has progressively broken free from these epistemological and metaphysical ties. Following Hume, the empiricist philosophy of science has insisted on the primacy of observation and experimental methods of scientific theories, on the continuity between scientific procedures and those of ordinary man, as well as on the need to clearly distinguish between science and metaphysics. Above all, it has insisted on the advantage of liberating scientific practice from any hindrance of a philosophical nature, seeking to define its parameters through their own experimental development.

It is very easy to see how this entire stance, at least in its most fundamental respects, is essentially Pyrrhonian in nature. Or, at least, it can calmly associate itself with the Pyrrhonian conception of "science". It is as if we have watched the gradual triumph of the old *tékhnē* over

¹³ One can verify, for example, the following passages from Sextus: M 7.270 (on the use of signs and formulation of predictions by illiterate men); M 8.288 (on human capacity to "hold" the constant conjunctions between phenomena); M 8.152-3 (on how men spontaneously use their observation of constant conjunctions of phenomena to make predictions); M 1.51 (on the origin of *tékhnai*); M 8.291 (on the deliberate observation, in *tékhnai*, of phenomonic regularities); M 5.1-2 (on making predictions in *tékhnai* from the observation of phenomena); M 5.103-4 (on the connection between reliable predictions, causal attributions and constant conjunctions between phenomena); PH 1.237 (on the search for usefulness in the Methodical empirical medicine according to the practice of the sceptics), M.50-1 (on the utility for life as the purpose of *tékhnai*) etc.

the venerable *epistème*. Of course, the much richer and more complex nature of modern science demands a more sophisticated reformulation of Pyrrhonian concepts in this area. We could even say that this is one of the most urgent tasks for a neo-Pyrrhonism today.

Nor does it seem to us that Pyrrhonism should adopt, in the face of contemporary science, a conventionalist, operationalist or even pragmatic (in the more precise and technical sense of the term) perspective. This is because it does not appear to us, for example, that the mere acceptance of the possibility that the so-called theoretical terms of a given scientific theory may correspond to “entities” and that its theoretical propositions may have a “descriptive” component is enough to confer a metaphysical dimension on those “entities” and the “described” world. Still less does it seem to us that we Pyrrhonists must object to an interpretation of the hypothetical-deductive method as a method of [confronting with experience ?], through a test of its empirical consequences, a discourse that “describes” how the world *could* be. Thus, to say that *p* has *q* as an empirical consequence *could* mean that it appears to us that, if *p* were the case, then *q* should be manifest to our observation under appropriate circumstances. As we emphasised above, the intelligibility of the phenomenon extends far beyond the narrow boundaries of mere sensibility. Nor is there any reason to equate phenomenicity and observation in the strict sense. Even so-called “scientific realism” can perhaps legitimately be shorn of any association with metaphysical doctrines, particularly with metaphysical realism. If such dissociation succeeds, “scientific realism” becomes totally acceptable to a Berkeleyian or a Kantian, for instance, because it does not prejudge the epistemological or ontological interpretation of scientific theories. For this reason and to the same extent, it is entirely reconcilable with the sceptical *epokhé*.

The aforementioned objection, which attempted to exploit against Pyrrhonism the irrecusability of the results of scientific theories and their pervasiveness in common life, certainly does not have any solidity. The Pyrrhonist is, on the contrary, an apologist of empirical science as a human tool for systematic exploration of the endless richness of the world of phenomena. The spectacular advances of technological progress connected to scientific practice can serve the welfare of man. On the other hand, the “acceptance” of scientific theories is not forbidden him, precisely because “accepting a scientific theory” can have many meanings, some of which, as different philosophers of science have often pointed out, do not involve any compromise with philosophical dogmatisms. Finally, the sceptic has no reason to deny the historical fact that vulgarised scientific theories (as well as philosophical and religious doctrines) sometimes get embedded in common sense in such a

way that we begin to have – spontaneously – a worldview moulded by them. When this occurs in such a way that one loses the “historical” consciousness of the constitution of our view of the world and it [to what does ‘it refer here?'] imposes itself in an unquestionable way, then we are simply in front of that intelligible phenomenicity that we all, Pyrrhonists and non-Pyrrhonists, can do nothing but acknowledge and assent to it.

I believe it is correct to say that, in a certain way, modern science has grown progressively sceptic. As for us, we Pyrrhonists, freed from the fascination of linguistic constructions and philosophical speculation, about which we suspend judgement, valuing only the phenomenon to which alone we adhere, we must necessarily point to this empirical and *sceptical* science as the only path that is manifestly open to us to develop the positive investigation and rational exploration of the world. This investigation and exploration must certainly take us, as they have taken us in the past, to reformulations of our worldview. Pyrrhonism points to a phenomenic world opened to unlimited possibilities of investigation. Nevertheless, the paths of the appearances are cannot be known in advance.

14. A few additional considerations are in order. Because it recognises, for reasons we have seen, that the task of investigating the world is primordially up to science, Pyrrhonism envisions a happy alliance between science and philosophy, without falling into Positivist naïveté. And adopting, as is appropriate, a phenomenological attitude, the Pyrrhonist does not move through the paths of a systematic phenomenology, which seems to him to exceed the limits of the feasible. Descriptions of phenomena are always confessedly precarious and their nature is always "punctual". Pyrrhonism also enters the domain of philosophy of language and accords language a central place in its problematic, insofar as its permanent diatribe against dogmatism necessarily privileges analysis and critical reflexion on the dogmatic usage of discourse. It values common language, though without sacralising it and necessarily considers as precarious and loose the correspondence between words and the phenomena they express, which can always able to be expressed in different words. Pyrrhonian philosophy also entirely values human experience and common life. It is viscerally humanist and restores life's spontaneity to philosophy.

While never running into epistemological negativism, Pyrrhonism never becomes a theory. It insists on defining itself only as a philosophical practice, of an eminently therapeutic value. Trusting in dialogue and argumentation as its instruments, and making of them its tools, it intends to contribute to the welfare and spiritual progress of men. It is also proper to say that, by the very nature of its method and procedure, Pyrrhonism constitutes an

effective antidote to every form of irrationalism. By rejecting dogmatism, it shapes another, different picture of rationality.

This Pyrrhonian attitude is thoroughly up to date, completely adequate to the intellectual necessities of our time. Our epoch is tired of truths, dogmatism, and speculations. The contemporary intellectual strongly tends to scepticism. If they do not admit it, it is only because of the perverse connotations that a generalised ignorance about Pyrrhonism, including that of many philosophers, has associated with the term. It is for this reason that remembering Pyrrhonism is necessary.

15. I have tried, in the preceding pages to outline my philosophical position. Even had I not quoted Sextus Empiricus so often, any reader of his work will have easily discovered how deeply it has influenced me. Often, I followed Sextus' texts closely; other times, I've developed lines of thought he had merely sketched. In a way, this conduct strikes me as the most faithful to the spirit of Pyrrhonism. With regard to certain themes, I have considered what solutions within an "updated" Pyrrhonism could be found to questions that ancient philosophy did not formulate, nor could have formulated, at least in the form modernity has given them. Even in those cases, I have nonetheless intended to achieve results that are compatible with the original Pyrrhonian attitude. I need not add that I have dealt with Pyrrhonian philosophy according to my own reading and interpretation, which often diverges – sometimes considerably – from the way it is read and interpreted by scholars and philosophers.

If not in style, at least in intention, this text is highly programmatic, pointing out directions that, from a sceptical perspective, have not yet been explored or even suspected. It seems to me that it would be good if someone should try to advance further along these paths.

In any case, I warn you, reader, of something that you may have already seen for yourself, namely that this entire sceptical or Pyrrhonian – or neo-Pyrrhonian discourse, if you prefer – has relatively little originality. That is because I never sought for it to be otherwise. On the contrary, without intending that things really are as I say, I am content, like a simple chronicler, to report what appears to me, acknowledging as was said by Pyrrho's disciple, Timon, that "the phenomenon has power, wherever it comes" (cf. M 7.30).

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