

## **PORCHAT'S NEO-PYRRHONISM: AN INTRODUCTORY EXPOSITION.**

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Porchat's seminal paper, "On What Appears", lays the foundations and the main lines of his neo-Pyrrhonism. It was published in 1991, before Fogelin's well-known book (*Pyrrhonian Reflections on Knowledge and Justification*, 1994). It was a turning point in Oswaldo Porchat's philosophical thought. His neo-Pyrrhonism was further developed in a number of papers written since then. I hope to show not only that Porchat was a good historian of ancient Pyrrhonism, but also that he up-dated Pyrrhonism in a highly interesting way, proposing insightful solutions to some philosophical problems that are still with us today. One of the merits of Porchat's proposal is that his neo-Pyrrhonism allows us to see the Pyrrhonian stance as a global, coherent philosophical position, not subject to many often-repeated criticisms. Porchat's neo-Pyrrhonism is not confined to epistemological questions, but constitutes a broad, articulated philosophical perspective.

I will try to be as brief and clear as I can. But before presenting its basic ideas I would like to sketch out some of Porchat's previous thoughts and connect them to his sceptical worries. Though always interested in scepticism, he resisted in adopting a sceptical position, until at last he surrendered to it. Perhaps this will help to understand better how his neo-Pyrrhonism emerged and was shaped.

I. Some information about his background:

Formerly, Porchat's thought had two phases:

A) Structuralism (1961-1967) and the refusal of philosophy (1968-1969).

He graduated in classical languages (Greek and Latin), but later also in philosophy in France, where he studied under the supervision of Victor Goldschmidt. From 1961 to 1967, Porchat wrote his PhD on Aristotle's notion of science (and its relation to dialectics). He was a confessed "structuralist" not only in the history of philosophy (following the "structural method") but also in philosophy (the main thesis of philosophical structuralism is that philosophy is nothing but the study of the "structures" of philosophies).

However, soon after having finished his PhD, Porchat began to criticise *philosophical* structuralism, developing his own line of thought. Both Gueroult and Goldschmidt had their own philosophies attached to their method. Porchat's first idea was that, in the face of the conflict of philosophies, formulated in "structuralist" terms, one should give up philosophy as a whole. How did he come across the notion of "conflict of philosophies"? And why should one give up one's philosophical enterprise when confronted with such a conflict?

The notion of a conflict of philosophies was a direct result of the structuralist conception of philosophy: every philosophy, according to its own "internal logic", should polemise against other philosophies; therefore, to develop his own philosophy, a philosopher (whether a dogmatist or not) should criticise and reject his rivals. It is, so to speak, part of the essence of philosophy to dispute about whatever subject with its philosophical adversaries; a philosophy is elaborated through an argumentation directed against other philosophies. Porchat accepted this structuralist conception while writing his PhD, in the mid-60's.

In 1967, 1968, Porchat read Sextus Empiricus for the first time and gave some lectures on ancient Pyrrhonism. Reading Sextus only confirmed what he already knew through his reflections on philosophical structuralism. Accordingly, one should notice that the conflict of philosophies is not exactly the sceptical *diaphonía*, but it is similar to it. Porchat saw in the sceptical *diaphonía* a sort of predecessor of his own "structuralist" problem. (Protagoras and Gorgias, the sophists, seem to have a deeper influence on Porchat at this moment of his philosophical career.)

It is not the case to go through a detailed comparison here, but two things must be noted. First, as in the case of the sceptical *diaphonía*, the conflict of philosophies is undecidable. Both constitute an attack on the pretensions of philosophers, denouncing that absolute truth cannot be reached (or has not been reached). Second, differently from the mode of *diaphonía*, the undecidability of the conflict of philosophies does not lead to *epokhé*, or suspension of judgement, but to a rejection of all philosophies, including the sceptical philosophy. The conflict of philosophies includes all philosophies, not only dogmatic philosophies (as in the case of *diaphonía*). However, this rejection of scepticism was only *implicit*. Porchat did not take the trouble of pointing out to his readers that scepticism was also being rejected.

Now, this undecidability of the conflict of philosophies had an impact on the philosophical part of structuralism. Why should one adopt the structuralist philosophy in the face of the inevitable and insoluble conflict? This philosophy should be rejected along with all other philosophies. Moreover, the main structuralist thesis in philosophy should lead one to

abandon doing philosophy altogether: if philosophy is nothing but the study of structures of philosophies, why propose new “structures”? Why elaborate a new philosophical thought if, in the end of the day, all we have is a bundle of philosophies with no material truth, but only an internally coherent thought with a “formal truth”? Therefore, philosophical structuralism led to the idea that there is no point in proposing a new philosophy, or even in adhering to an old one. The structuralists themselves did not draw this natural, if not logical, consequence.

But Porchat did. In the face of an insoluble conflict of philosophy (not to be confounded, as already stated, with sceptical *diaphonía*), the best thing we can do is to give up the philosophical enterprise as a whole. If Porchat intended to justify philosophically his decision, he would be involved in a kind of contradiction. He makes no such move. From a non-philosophical point of view, he may be justified: it is a natural human reaction to give up an enterprise in which you have constantly failed and in which you think you can only fail. So, he took this decision without intending to justify it philosophically, without intending to downplay the value of philosophy, and without even intending that he would be followed, by similar decisions, by philosophers, as if he wanted to put an end to philosophy. It was merely his own personal decision.

Coherently, around 1969-1973, Porchat stopped doing philosophy, in the sense of trying to find the truth, and got interested in logic, in formal languages that have nothing to say about the world.

(Concerning the structural method in history of philosophy, however, Porchat never changed his mind. But this is another subject.)

#### B) Philosophy of the common view of the world (1975-1986).

A few years later, changing his mind, Porchat adopted what he called a “philosophy of the common view of the world”, under the influence of G. E. Moore and P. F. Strawson. Porchat developed the main lines of such a common view (he dislikes the phrase “common sense”, and points out carefully the distinction between *common sense* and the *common view* of the world) in two papers (1975, 1979). Porchat turned into a metaphysician, though not a speculative metaphysician. He believed in absolute truths about the common world (not about a postulated, transcendent world), those that we find in many beliefs of ordinary men. He “promoted” the truths of the common man into philosophical truths with a metaphysical status. His chief concern was to describe such a common view of the world, as well as to denounce the idealism of speculative philosophy. I will not dwell on this topic, since it would leave us far away from our purposes here.

By then, he rejected *explicitly* Pyrrhonism. Confessing he felt attracted by Pyrrhonism, he resisted the temptation. Some of the reasons for not becoming a sceptic were: it is not possible to live without beliefs, it is impossible to talk without affirming, it is strange to go on inquiring if there is no hope in finding truth, such a sceptical *zétesis* brings frustration, not *ataraxía*. Though he saw that sceptics intended to join our daily life, he thought that they did not come back from philosophy to common life: the very idea of a permanent investigation commits them to doing philosophy. Besides, by integrating the opinions of ordinary men into *diaphonía*, sceptics infested (or infused) ordinary life with philosophy; so, instead of living a life without philosophy, sceptics inserted philosophy in ordinary life. He, on the contrary, was able to return to ordinary life, leaving philosophy behind. These were his main reasons for not becoming a sceptic at that moment.

About ten years later, he still held on to this same basic philosophy of the common view of the world. His worries, however, changed. He was no longer in the business of presenting this common view of the world, but in defending it from external challenges. The main challenge, according to his mind in the 80's, came from scepticism. In two further papers (1985, 1986), he accuses scepticism of refusing the common knowledge of ordinary men. The essence of scepticism, he said, is to be an attack on common knowledge. His new strategy is not to put forward a common view of the world, but to protect it from scepticism. If one resists the sceptical attack, one may resist all philosophical attacks.

Following many philosophers, Porchat thought that sceptical doubts at bottom always concerned the external world. And such a doubt, to his mind, had a dogmatic presupposition. Accordingly, he tries to uncover this dogmatic assumption beneath (or behind) sceptical doubts. In order to raise his doubts, the sceptic must commit himself to a dogmatic assumption: the distinction between mind and body, he must conceive his thoughts and perceptions as mental items outside the common world. Therefore, scepticism would be just another form of dogmatism; and, as such, it would be part of the conflict of philosophies, it would integrate the conflict. Now, this assumption is clearly optional, not compulsory; there is no need in accepting this distinction between mind and body or in supposing that our thoughts and perceptions are mental items, representations in a non-physical mind. Porchat, resisting the attack of scepticism, by pointing out its dogmatic presupposition, would remain firm in the common world of ordinary men.

In sum: first, Porchat said it was impossible to live a sceptical life, that sceptics did not understand what is involved in common life, and that they did not really returned to it; then,

he accused sceptics of being inconsistent, since they based their sceptical doubts concerning the external world on (hidden) dogmatic presuppositions.

## II. Porchat's neo-Pyrrhonism (1991-...)

In the end of the 80's, Porchat came to change his mind again. He realised that those objections to Pyrrhonism were based on misunderstandings. Luiz Eva has played a leading role in this revision, together with Carlos Inada, since their challenge to Porchat's previous interpretation triggered a his new interpretation. Once correctly understood, Pyrrhonism would resist those two main kinds of objections (one against sceptical basic concepts, such as *zétesis*, *ataraxía*, *bíos*; one against alleged presuppositions). Porchat, therefore, set himself the task of elaborating a contemporary form of Pyrrhonism. "On what appears" is the first result of such an undertaking and is still his most important paper. As the title suggests, the basic concept of Pyrrhonism is "phenomenon". Porchat's neo-Pyrrhonism grows out of his new interpretation of Sextus' Pyrrhonism, in particular of his new interpretation of the notion of *phainómenon*. One cannot dissociate his philosophy from his interpretation of Sextus. Besides, there is an obvious reference to Quine's "On what there is". And, though Porchat prefers Quine to Wittgenstein, the latter is also an important reference, to whose work he often alludes.

Porchat distinguishes two parts in his neo-Pyrrhonism: a negative one, a positive one.

A) The negative part: *diaphonía* and *epokhé*.

Perhaps surprisingly, the negative part is very short in "On What Appears": items 1-2. In these items, Porchat exposes his conception of *diaphonía* and *epokhé*. However connected to previous thoughts, these two Pyrrhonian concepts allow Porchat to reelaborate his ideas. In his two previous phases, as we saw, Porchat used to talk about the "conflict of philosophies"; now, he talks of *diaphonía*. Though very similar and obviously related, still there may be some differences between them (as already pointed out): 1) their *scope*: the conflict of philosophies concerns all philosophies, not only dogmatism; *diaphonía* concerns only dogmatism. That explains why Porchat did not become a sceptic. Since scepticism was part of the conflict, scepticism was ruled out as any other form of philosophy; he had no choice but to abandon all forms of philosophy, scepticism included. 2) From this follows a second difference between them, concerning their *result*. As already stated, *diaphonía* is a conflict among dogmatisms; hence, scepticism is not involved in such a kind of conflict; therefore,

scepticism is still an option as a solution to *diaphonía*. Porchat now suspends his judgement in the face of *diaphonía*.

3) Another difference between the conflict of philosophies and *diaphonía* is that, whereas the dogmatism of the common men did not take part of the conflict of *philosophies* (because, as the name says, it includes only philosophies), it integrates in the *diaphonía*, because *diaphonía* integrates all kinds of dogmatism, whether philosophical or not. (In fact, this is a second difference in respect of the *scope* of the conflict or *diaphonía*).

4) The last difference is that the conflict of philosophies is generated by the “essence” of philosophy: all philosophies, in virtue of their “internal logic”, have to polemise against all other philosophies (scepticism is not an exception: the sceptical *philosophy*, in virtue of its internal logic, is obliged to a permanent investigation and to fight against all forms of dogmatism); in *diaphonía*, the disagreement emerges because of a strict logical relation of affirmation and negation (assertion and denial): the truth of one implies logically the falsity of the other.

What helps to explain all these four differences is that, whereas the conflict of philosophies was shaped by his philosophical structuralism, *diaphonía* is based on his new understanding of ancient scepticism.

Now, what is the scope of *epokhé*? Is (neo-)Pyrrhonism urbane or rustic? This question cannot be answered without a complete understanding of what the sceptics mean by “phenomenon”. So we have to turn to the positive side of neo-Pyrrhonism to answer it. Porchat's original contribution, by a deep, instigating interpretation of *phainómenon* may bring some light to this central question.

B) The positive phase:

As far as I can see, the positive part has two aspects (in a sense, both practical; in another, one more practical, another more theoretical): one concerns how the sceptic lives according to *epokhé* (items 3-10); another concerns a sceptical worldview (items 11-15). In both aspects, Porchat's neo-Pyrrhonism may contribute to our understanding of Pyrrhonism.

1) Items 3-10: *Phainómenon* and *bíos*.

Porchat develops his thoughts concerning the notion of phenomenon through two objections, both of which he (among other people) had raised before against scepticism: it is not possible to live a sceptical life; scepticism hides dogmatic assumptions, i.e., it is a form of mentalism. He now goes on to answer both objections. The first one is answered in items 3-6; the second in items 7-10. Together they constitute his general explanation of what a

phenomenon is. Since the issue is highly complex, I will indicate only what seems to me to be some basic ideas (according to my interpretation).

a) What we say about *phainómena* and expressing the *phainómena*.

There are a number of things that Porchat says concerning *phainómena*. Perhaps the most important one is to define it. But before trying to define it, it is interesting to say that Porchat, in a recent talk, made an important remark: *phainómenon* is a common word, well known and familiar to all Sextus' readers. Its meaning can be found in any good Ancient Greek dictionary. Moreover, it is a word used by Plato and Aristotle; it was used by the Stoics, as it was used by Greek physicians, both before and during Sextus' time. So, there was no need for Sextus to define it right away. He used it with its usual, common meaning.

However, later on, this did not prevent Sextus from giving a more precise meaning to *phainómenon*, to use it as a technical term. Let us turn now our attention to this technical meaning. First, I will remember how Porchat, following Sextus, defines *phainómenon*. Then, we will see some of its characteristics. Finally, its philosophical relevance.

Porchat is clear on how to define it: a *phainómenon* is the content of our experience; it is what is left untouched by *epokhé*. After one suspends his judgement, he still experiences the world in a highly similar way as before. He continues to see objects, people, and events around him, *as before*. A sceptic sees his computer in front of him, just as he used to see it before he turned into a sceptic. Now, the content of this experience, say, "this is a computer", was not altered by *epokhé*. Thus, according to this definition, a phenomenon is the undeniable content of our experience; in the example given, the content of what I see is that this thing in front of me is a computer or, to put it linguistically, "this is a computer".

He also says that *phainómena* are given to us, they are the given. This is somewhat misleading. As such, it seems that it is open to the same objections raised against the myth of the given. I do not know why Porchat used this old-fashioned terminology. There is, of course, a sense in which *phainómena* are not open to inquiry and must be accepted; we are passive in respect of what we see: there is no point in saying we do not see what we see, in denying what appears to us. Because *we are passive* in the face of the phenomenon, because *we do not choose* what we perceive, and because *we do not investigate* it, Porchat says that phenomenon is "given" to us. However, in another sense (as we shall shortly see it), *phainómena* are not given at all, but they depend on our language; one may even say that they contain linguistic elements that may help to "structure" them (though this way of speaking is

also misleading). Thus neo-Pyrrhonism seems sheltered from these objections against the myth of the given; it does not endorse the myth of the given.

*Phainómena* are always relative to someone. They may be individual (some things appear to *me*, or to one person) or common (some things appear to *us*, or to many people); but they always must appear to someone, since it makes no sense to talk of a pure appearance.

They may be sensible (e.g., a sense-perception) or intelligible (e.g., a law). According to Porchat, all *phainómena* are partly sensible, partly intelligible. The sense-perception of a desk, for instance, is mostly sensible, since I am seeing it, but also partly intelligible, since it does not reduce to what I am seeing. The desk is not a set of sense-perceptions; we do not conceive of a desk in such a reductionistic way; it is something more than what is sensed, and this something more involves how we *think* of it. Porchat goes as far as affirming that language permeates our common experience of the world, that language is a component or an element of the *phainómena*. Pyrrhonism obviously draw this tenet from the stoic notion of *lékta*. And Porchat, the neo-Pyrrhonist, is using Quine's doctrine on observational and theoretical sentences to develop this Pyrrhonian doctrine. That is a most important doctrine. I shall further elaborate on it.

Now, Sextus distinguishes between the *phainómenon* and what is said about the *phainómenon*. This distinction corresponds to the distinction between Pyrrhonism and dogmatism. If one says something about the phenomena, one becomes a dogmatism; if one is confined to phenomena, one remains a sceptic. Things, however, are not that easy. Sceptics speak like everybody else. We have to understand, and this is, to Porchat's mind (and to my mind also), perhaps the major problem in understanding Pyrrhonism, the difference between the sceptical *lógos* (language, discourse) and the dogmatic *lógos*.

Porchat includes, in the domain of the phenomena, the sceptical discourse, saying that it expresses the phenomena. Porchat also reminds us that Sextus only relates what appears to him. Now, one major trouble (both historically, and philosophically) is to understand the distinction between the dogmatic discourse (when we say something **about** the *phainómena*) and the sceptical discourse (when we do nothing but **express** or **relate** the *phainómena*). Where is the difference when a dogmatist say "honey is sweet" and when the sceptic say "honey is sweet"? Why in the mouth of a dogmatist "honey is sweet" is about a phenomenon, while in the mouth of a Pyrrhonist it only expresses the very same phenomenon? How do we explain this difference?

One may say that there is difference between a sceptical belief and a dogmatic belief. Porchat says so. But just to say they have different kinds of beliefs may not do, even if this is

correct. We still would have to explain the difference between these two kinds of belief and explain how they differ. We merely transfer one problem (to distinguish between two kinds of *lógos* to the distinction between two kinds of belief).

One may also feel inclined to say: the dogmatist is talking about the “real honey” or about the “nature” of the honey may seem unconvincing, though, again, this is not false. Porchat also says so. And this is, once again, not wrong. But we still would have to explain carefully why the neo-Pyrrhonist thinks there is a deep gap between both discourses. In what, exactly, “honey is *really* sweet” differs from “honey is sweet”? This is not clear to many people, and it deserves a better explanation. Both these answers are correct, but superficial. We need to go deeper into this issue.

Now, this is what I think Porchat is proposing to us. Let us first distinguish between *phainómena*, what appears (what is apparent, in Annas and Barnes translation) and, as Porchat says, its *phantasía* or its representation in us<sup>1</sup>. I will come back later to this distinction between *phainómenon* and *phantasía*. What matters now is that *phainómena* are things and events in the world that cause *phantasiai* in our *diánoia*. Now, if, on the one hand, a *phantasía* is the effect in our minds of a *phainómenon*, on the other, this *phantasía* is associated to a linguistic phrase. Then, with this representation in our minds *and* with this phrase, we can say that we experience the phenomenon. Language plays an important role in shaping our experience of the world. Thus, what appears to us depends on its very appearance on language. One strong, misleading formulation would be: language is a constitutive element of our experience of the world; since phenomena are the content of our experience, what appears to us (objects and events appear to us) is partly “constituted” by language (but this sounds too idealistic); a milder, more prudent formulation would run thus: *phantasía* is associated to language, so we experience the world through its connection to language; objects and events are out in the world, they are independent from our language, but, by being connected to language through the *phantasiai* they cause in us, the way we experience the world will partially depend on our language.

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<sup>1</sup> It is not easy to translate *phantasía*: it is a sense-perception or something we conceive, something that the object produces or causes in our mind and body. Annas and Barnes translate *phantasía* by “appearance”. Porchat, however, prefers “representation”, and sometimes uses “appearance” as synonym for “what appears”; recently, Porchat proposed “presentation” for *phantasia*.

Let us suppose I put some honey in my mouth. Now, honey appears to me, mostly sensibly, but also a bit intellectually. What appears to me is honey, an object in the world. And I have a representation of it, i.e., a sense-perception of it. What appears to me is associated to a sentence, for instance, "this is honey". And what I experience in my mouth is also associated to a sentence: "this taste is sweet". And I can use another sentence to say what is my experience of honey, i.e., "honey is sweet".

Obviously, associating phenomena and representations to language is something socially inculcated from our infancy on. There is a history behind how things come to appear to me. I came to perceive (since childhood) what I have put into my mouth in a certain way that depends on language. For instance, I came to recognize something as honey; I came to attribute properties, like being sweet, to some things, like honey. With time, and training, I learned to say "honey is sweet" in certain circumstances. It is built, as it were, into my perceptual capacity to perceive certain things with certain properties. Obviously, not everything in a *phainómenon* depends on language; many things depend on causal relations in the world and on my own body constitution; sense-perception representations are caused by what appears, as we just saw. If honey appears sweet to us, it is because we all have a similar constitution and similar causal relations take place. Anyway, what appears to me depends on our language.

If that explanation is correct, then we may say that, when the sceptic affirms that "honey is sweet", he has no intention of affirming anything concerning the nature of honey or something beyond the *phainómenon*. He is just expressing linguistically what is associated to the *phainómenon* through its *phantasia*. He came to experience things using language, and to associate certain sentences to certain situations. Thus, language helped him to shape his view of the world and how he experiences the world. Since the phenomenon is the content of his experience, there is a sense in which language permeates all our experience, being combined with the phenomena, and as if it were being an ingredient of the phenomonic domain. The sceptical discourse merely express the phenomena in this very sense of just putting in sentences those very sentences that helped us to experience the world in this way.

The dogmatist, however, does not merely express what appears to him. He goes further, instead, and he thinks he is postulating the real nature of honey. In this sense, he thinks he is revealing to us the inner truth of things, their true nature. So, he is talking about the real honey, well beyond its appearance. Though Porchat frequently talks about the "really" inserted in "honey is sweet" as the hallmark of dogmatism, it seems to me that what is at stake is not the proposition "honey is sweet" (or not). Dogmatism goes well beyond such an

innocent sentence, and implies something like: “honey is a substance” or “honey is composed of atoms and void”; “sweetness is an accidental property of honey” or “sweetness is an essential property of honey” or “honey does not have such properties as being sweet”. What “really” indicates, when a dogmatist says “honey is (really) sweet”, is not that we should attribute the value T (true) to “honey is sweet”, whereas the sceptic would be saying that we cannot attribute any truth value to it (after all, under usual circumstances, honey tastes the same to all of us that do not suffer jaundice...); but rather that, (in a simplified way) in the mouth of Aristotle, it means: “honey is a substance with the accidental property of being sweet”; to Democritus, it means: “honey is a composition of atoms and void with no sensible property”; to Descartes, it means: “it is an extended substance without the property of being sweet, since being sweet exists only in a thinking substance” to Leibniz, it means: “this honey is a monad with the essential property” etc. In sum, when a philosopher says “honey is sweet”, and the neo-Pyrrhonist comment that he means “honey is really sweet”, what is at stake is not the truth value of “honey is sweet” (this is indeed a very silly question!), but those sentences referring to substances, forms, substantial forms, accidental properties, essential properties etc. The “really” points to the postulation of such entities like substances, forms, properties etc., not to honey.

Let us go back to the sceptical discourse and to the way it merely expresses the phenomena. Now, this may take two forms in Pyrrhonism and neo-Pyrrhonism.

First, Sextus says that when the sceptic uses the verb “to be” we must understand him using (implicitly) “to appear”. So, when the sceptic says, “honey is sweet”, he means only “honey appears sweet”. If this is correct, the sceptic never affirms anything; and this seems pretty in line with suspension of judgement. There is no doubt that both Sextus and Porchat think like that or say something along these lines.

However, should we understand him suggesting that we must always substitute “to appear” for “to be” in the sceptical discourse? Does the sceptic mean “honey appears sweet” when he says “honey is sweet”? In a sense, this is correct; whenever someone suspects the sceptic is being dogmatic, he can paraphrase what he has said in such a non-committal way. But it seems rather doubtful to me (Plínio, and perhaps also to Porchat) that the sceptic is willing to do that as a systematic proposal (Porchat sometimes seems to think this can be applied to all cases). The sceptic, after all, speaks ordinary language as everybody does. And he would be open to this doubt: to learn the meaning of “to appear” presuppose the use of “to be”; it is, therefore, impossible to substitute one for the other. I think we have to make sense

of the fact that the sceptic, like a common man, says usually “honey is sweet”. He says “It is day” when it is day, says Sextus. This manoeuvre, to substitute systematically “to appear” for “to be”, may not explain fully what the sceptic intends. We must find a better explanation of the sceptical discourse.

Second, as Porchat says, it is “more precise” to interpret “honey is sweet” as “It appears to me (us) that honey is sweet”. It is more precise, I think, because it shows clearly that *phainómena* have a content that can be expressed by language. The content of our experience (i.e., the phenomenon) can be expressed by the proposition *p* to which it has been associated. We can always express the *phainómena* with this operator “It appears that...” and the *phainómena* are expressed by *p*. Now, if this is correct, the sceptic does not need to retract from an affirmation, as if he were merely expressing something subjective (his *Äusserung*, as Barnes suggested, using – abusing? – Wittgenstein ). His affirmation is an assertion concerning the object or event that appears, since *p* is indeed a proposition. However, the operator “It appears that...” connects the proposition *p* to what appears (an object, an event), not to something else, whatever that something else might be<sup>2</sup>.

If this is correct, then we can make a good sense of the difficult question: how can the sceptic affirm something without being committed to dogmatism? The sceptic says, like everybody else, “honey is sweet”. Now, this assertion may express the *phainómenon* (sceptical use of language: “honey appears sweet” or even better “it appears to me (us) that honey is sweet”) or it may postulate the real nature of honey (dogmatic use of language: “honey is really sweet”). The verb “to be” do not necessarily obliges us to this dogmatic commitment. The sceptic need not retract what he says and avoid this verb.

Many philosophers think, wrongly from the neo-Pyrrhonian perspective, that you cannot make assertions without being dogmatic, i.e., that using language necessarily makes you affirm things concerning the absolute reality of things or their intrinsic nature. According to them, if you affirm something, then you are committed to claim an absolute truth. Even sceptics fell on this trap. Montaigne for one. He did not see that language might be used to express only what is built into the *phainómena*. He said sceptics had difficulty with language, they could not assert anything; echoing one passage in Sextus, Montaigne said that their

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<sup>2</sup> Obviously, the neo-Pyrrhonist does not have to assert that *p* exhausts the content of the experience, nor that there is a non-conceptual content in it. Concerning this philosophical debate, I assume, the neo-Pyrrhonist suspends his judgement. However, this does not impede him to say that at least to a good extent he can express (relate) the content of his *phainómenon* by using *p*.

language should be understood as questions... But, as we saw, assertions may relate what we say to the *phainómena* they express; they are not less assertions if they are related to *phainómena* (than to alleged substances, atoms, forms etc.); what makes “honey is sweet” an assertion is not its connection to postulated realities or natures invented by dogmatists. And it is only this link to postulated realities that sceptics avoid, not the assertion of “honey is sweet”.

b) *Phainómenon* between *phantasia* and *bíos*: an obscure notion?

Let me now move to Porchat’s second point (though it was all over presupposed in the previous discussion). It is a well-known problem how we should interpret *phainómenon*. For instance, what is its relation to *phantasia*? Sextus is not very clear on this point. Since both words are connected, one may think that a *phainómenon* is after all a kind of *phantasia*. Porchat himself once thought so. If we should clarify the notion of *phainómenon* through its connection to *phantasia*, then we get a subjectivist interpretation of the *phainómenon*. After all, what appears appears to someone, and it makes no sense to talk of pure appearances. The sceptics themselves said that they were expressing their *páthe*. Now, *páthe* are certainly subjective states. And Sextus suggested that *phainómena* are virtually their *phantasiai* (representations). One cannot deny that the notion of *phainómenon* has a subjectivist flavour in it. Accordingly, Porchat accused ancient sceptics of accepting in germ what Descartes, Locke and the modern philosophers would develop more fully centuries later. There would be a continuity between ancient and modern scepticism, a kind of dogmatic, common commitment of both of them.

But, later, Porchat came to see that this interpretation is wrong. It is wrong for many reasons. First of all, Pyrrhonists had no theory concerning the nature of the *phainómena*; and they had plenty of arguments against dogmatic theories concerning *phantasia*. Therefore, it is a mistake to say that Pyrrhonists held that a *phainómenon* is (in its very nature) a *phantasia*. Moreover, Pyrrhonists did not suppose a mind divorced from the world; on the contrary, Porchat realised that Pyrrhonists conceived man a *zoon*, a living human being in this common world, someone of flesh and blood. Stoics and Epicurists were materialists; Sextus lived in a philosophical culture dominated by materialism; for all of them, the mind was a physical object. If Porchat is right, then it is not useful to try to clarify the notion of *phainómenon* using the (dogmatic) notion of *phantasia* (even in a non-dogmatic sense!). Obviously, what appears appears to someone, but we should distinguish between *what* appears and its *appearance*. We must find another way of clarifying the notion of *phainómenon*.

Here is where Porchat makes a new suggestion, it seems to me. The notion that hangs together with *phainómenon* is not *phantasía*, but *bíos*. Honey appears to us; a flower appears to us. Many *things* appear to us (events also appear to us). As we saw, they are not reducible to appearances. If I see a desk, the desk does not reduce to the sense perception. I conceive of the desk as something well beyond its *phantasíai* or representations (as Porchat says). It is an objective thing. But “things” must be conceived in its broad meaning: laws, customs, scientific theories may appear to us too. For *phainómena* may be sensible or intellectual, or both, of course. Porchat goes as far as to say that *life is what, after all, appears to us*; life in all its aspects. If we split *phainómenon* and *bíos* as two separate concepts we do not understand (neo-)Pyrrhonism. Both concepts are clarified by being connected to each other: on one hand, common life, if it is not understood as this life that appears to us, may be thought of dogmatically, as a reality dreamt of by dogmatists; on the other hand, phenomenon, if it is not connected to common life, may be thought of subjectively, as a kind of modern, Cartesian mentalism. Thus, both concepts connected together may illuminate one another, correcting both dogmatic interpretations (one that makes *bíos* an absolute reality; another that makes *phainómenon* a mental entity).

It is important to remember that one of Sextus' most important passages concerning the *phainómenon* is where he explains the sceptical criterion for action. What does he say in this passage? He says that *phainómena* are what allows him to live his life. And he goes on to indicate many aspects in which *phainómena* allow him a sceptical life. Thus, it should be clear that, in understanding what are *phainómena*, one should pay close attention to these four-fold criterion. Does not this mean that *phainómena* and *bíos* are interwoven concepts? And *bíos* involves: our instincts, our capacities, our bodies, customs, laws, our *téchnai*. All this are understood under the heading: *phainómenon*.

There is a sense in which *phainómena* are both objective and subjective: objective, in the sense that *things* appear to us, that common life or the ordinary world appear to us; subjective, in the sense that we are not talking about absolute reality, that we are talking about this reality that appear to us, since what appears must appear to someone. And the *phainómena* are not an absolute reality, nor mental entities. (Neo-)Pyrrhonists have always refused to give us any theory concerning the *phainómenon*.

2) The sceptical view of the world (items 11-15): *haíresis* and *zétesis*.

I would like to mention briefly another important contribution of Porchat's neo-Pyrrhonism to scepticism. To my mind, this is maybe the most important one, perhaps even more important than his conception of the sceptical discourse. He proposes that the Pyrrhonist

may have a “sceptical view of the world”. For Porchat, the neo-Pyrrhonist, a sceptic may have a *haíresis* in this important, positive sense of having a “sceptical view of the world”. The sceptic not only lives his life following the *phainómena*, but also he may organise his thoughts concerning them. In this sense, neo-Pyrrhonism is a *philosophical* enterprise (Porchat says it is still a practical one, but one may also characterise it as “theoretical”, obviously not in the Greek sense of *theoría*). The notion itself of a “sceptical view of the world” is not yet well elaborated in “On what appears”. One has to wait for his other papers to understand it better.

Now, what is a “sceptical view of the world”? As we saw, the neo-Pyrrhonist may express what appears to him. What appears to him is articulated or associated to sentences. Thus, just like he may say “honey is sweet” thereby expressing the sensible *phainómenon* he has, he may also say many things, in an articulated way, expressing his intellectual *phainómena*. So, a sceptical view of the world is an expression of highly general, complex intellectual *phainómena*. Obviously, this discourse is intimately related to his experience of the world, since it is an expression of it. It is, as Porchat says, his experience made into discourse.

A sceptical view of the world is something that is *achieved* by the sceptic. It is not something given to him or something obvious to him, as it were open, perspicuous to his thought. He must build it; in fact, he has been building it, since he started to philosophise. It emerges gradually from his philosophical reflections. Porchat once thought, in his second phase, before he became a neo-Pyrrhonist, that the philosopher should only make explicit what is implicitly thought by everyone, disclosing (or revealing) *the* “common view of the world”. This alleged “common view of the world” was already there, in everyone’s mind, awaiting to be described<sup>3</sup>. When Porchat becomes a neo-Pyrrhonist, he no longer thinks the philosopher’s view is this ready-made common view of the world (though, as we shall shortly see, *a* common view of the world will be an important part of the sceptical view – but not *the* common view of the world). The sceptic must construct his own view; this sceptical view of the world is the result of his philosophical reflections. That is why Porchat changes the meaning of the Pyrrhonian *zétesis*: originally, *zétesis* meant only the therapeutic, negative (so to speak) task; now it means chiefly the positive task of articulating an organised discourse in

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<sup>3</sup> Something like Strawson's descriptive metaphysics, in which he describes our conceptual scheme or framework.

which the sceptic will display what he thinks, thereby expressing his own intellectual *phainómena*.

As we know, *phainómena* may be personal or common. Accordingly, the sceptical view of the world has a personal aspect, as well as a common aspect. Let us see each aspect in turn.

It has a personal aspect. This means two things. First, it may vary from sceptic to sceptic; there is no need that all sceptics share precisely the same view of the world. In this sense, there is not *the* sceptical view of the world, but only sceptical views (plural) of the world. One can even imagine two sceptics discussing about their differing views. One sceptic thinks we should obey to law, another sceptic we should follow custom, where we notice a conflict between law and custom (something that happens too frequently in Brazil...). Second, a sceptical view of the world depends on the sceptic's experience and on his background (education, culture, epoch etc.). A sceptic born, say, in the II Century AD will include in his world view that the earth is flat and moves around the sun; a sceptic in the XX Century will have a different view of the earth's position in the universe. That is an important difference in their views of the world, despite both views being sceptical views.

It has a common aspect. This is the most important aspect for Porchat. Just like everybody else, a sceptical view of the world must share many things with the common view of the world. After all, he speaks the same language, he is educated in the same way as his fellows, he learns the same things, and he lives a very similar life in many important respects. It is natural that he shares a good deal of other people's views. Thus, a sceptical view of the world incorporates in it many things that are present in the common view of the world, though not as sacrosanct, but subject to revision (that is why we should speak, in the case of neo-Pyrrhonism, merely of *a* common view of the world, and not, as in the second phase, *the* common view of the world; common views of the world change across time, they may vary from one place to another, they are corrected and improved – sometimes, they may get worse...).

Now, in another sense, the common aspect may be distinguished from other aspects. Two stand out for a sceptical view of the world: the scientific aspect and the philosophical aspect. The sceptic, as an educated person who cares for our culture and knowledge, will also incorporate scientific results in his sceptical view of the world. As we saw, if our astronomy substitutes the view that the earth moves around the sun and it is not flat for the view that the earth is flat and does not move, then accordingly the sceptic will change his sceptical view. Whenever a scientific result contradicts a common opinion, the sceptic will be ready to think

about this contradiction and may change his sceptical view. Sextus was a physician, and he certainly held opinions due to his professional life, not always following common opinion, but, according to the criterion of action, following the instructions of art. The sceptic may have a position concerning science (*téchne*): whatever experience establishes, he may, and probably will, accept it; that is why Pyrrhonists accept causal relations when we find constant conjunctions, to borrow Hume's phrase. Porchat even thinks that this scientific aspect is the most important one, since the common man is not especially critical and makes no systematic and methodical investigation of the phenomenic world, whereas science is common sense corrected and methodised, bringing more solid results.

Something similar may be said about the philosophical aspect. The neo-Pyrrhonist acknowledges that there are a number of philosophical problems that may concern common life and can be dealt with phenomenically. These problems may have a sceptical solution, to borrow again from Hume. For instance, a sceptic is an "empiricist without dogmas" (now, borrowing from Quine). In philosophy of science, the neo-Pyrrhonist has a philosophical doctrine to assert: he is an empiricist. He also has a sceptical doctrine concerning truth: the neo-Pyrrhonist defends a version of the correspondence theory of truth (once separated from its – unfortunate – association with metaphysical realism). If we have, on one hand, the *phainómena* and, on the other, their discursive expression, it is not difficult to see how Porchat, the neo-Pyrrhonist, manages to defend a (sceptical) correspondentalist doctrine (*haíresis*) of truth, without any mysterious relationship between language and a postulated metaphysical world, nor with a comparison between things totally different (since the phenomenon *p* and its expression "p" have been associated). *Zétesis*, now a positive search for a sceptical view, ends with a *haíresis*, whenever the sceptic makes up his mind.

One last point of interest. Dogmas may always be hidden in our views, not least in a sceptical view. This is a consequence of the doctrine that there are no precise, well-defined frontiers between the domain of what appears and the domain of dogmas. So, the sceptic must always be on his guard, alert to the insidious, perfidious unknown presence of dogmas in the domain of phenomena. His therapy concerns not only other people's dogmatism, but also his own possible dogmatism. This is why the negative phase never ends, including for himself. If he wants to articulate his own sceptical view of the world, he must get rid of his own dogmas. Part of the task of erecting this sceptical view involves putting away dogmatic opinions, not only searching his own philosophical view or exploring empirically the phenomena.

In sum, the philosophical aspect of a sceptical view of the world has a negative phase, in which dogmas are hunted and, once caught, eliminated, and a positive phase, in which philosophical investigation helps to pave the way towards a doctrine that is a part of his sceptical view of the world.

Obviously, all these aspects (on one hand, personal and common; on the other, common, scientific, and philosophical) interact; one can see that they work together, in *a dynamic way*. Without the common aspect, there would be no scientific or philosophical aspect, nor a dynamics between them; but it is not sacrosanct. There is a sense in which the scientific aspect is the most important one, since its results are the best ones we have, since they are achieved through the best way our culture has developed to explore empirically the phenomonic world. But there is a sense in which also the philosophical aspect is crucial, since it is a philosophical reflection that tries to express the intellectual phenomena in an articulated way.