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LIFE WITHOUT BELIEF: A MADHYAMAKA DEFENSE OF THE LIVABILITY OF PYRRHONISM



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There is much debate about the viability of Pyrrhonian skepticism—viable in the most literal sense of the word: can it be lived? The charge that life without belief is impossible has been described as the most persistent objection to Pyrrhonian skepticism (Thorsrud 2009, p. 173). In this essay I demonstrate that Pyrrhonian skepticism *is* livable by employing its similarity to Madhyamaka Buddhism. This similarity has been well established by scholars such as Kuzminski (2008) and Neale (2014), but few philosophical lessons have been drawn from the parallels between the two traditions.¹ Neale hints at the potential of this comparison: if we regard Mādhyamikas as “honorary extra Pyrrhonists,” we are provided with a much larger “data set” of actual skeptics than the isolated figure of Sextus Empiricus (Neale 2014, p. 222). Indeed, Nussbaum suggests that Eastern traditions might provide empirical support for the attainability of the life that Sextus advocates (1994, p. 312). I will demonstrate that the theory and practice of Mādhyamikas in fact verifies the livability of Pyrrhonism.

This essay consists of four parts. First, I will introduce Pyrrhonian skepticism and Madhyamaka Buddhism. Second, I will demonstrate that Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka can be regarded as undertaking the same project. Third, I will establish that Madhyamaka provides theoretical support for Sextus’ defenses of the livability of Pyrrhonism. Finally, I will show that Madhyamaka also practically validates the livability of Pyrrhonism. Madhyamaka is a lived practice in Tibetan Buddhism. I will argue that, since Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka can be understood as undertaking the same project, living Tibetan Buddhists constitute empirical support for the livability of Pyrrhonism. I will use the testimony of these Tibetan Buddhists to refute objections to the desirability of a Pyrrhonian life.

I. Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka

I will focus on Pyrrhonian skepticism as it is described in the works of Sextus Empiricus (approx. second century C.E.).² It should be noted that Pyrrhonism is different from the way skepticism is often understood today. *Skeptikoi* means ‘those who investigate’, rather than ‘those who doubt’. Sextus describes skepticism as “an ability to set out oppositions among things which appear and are thought of in any way at all, an ability by which because of equipollence in the opposed objects and accounts, we come first to suspension of judgment (*epoché*) and afterwards to tranquility (*ataraxia*)” (*PH* 1:8). He characterizes Pyrrhonists by contrasting them with

Academic Skeptics, who dogmatically claim that the true nature of things is wholly unknowable, and with the Dogmatists, who claim to have discovered the true nature of things. Pyrrhonists continue to investigate, and finding no satisfying answers they are led to suspend belief, which induces the tranquility they set out to find in the first place. Nevertheless, the Pyrrhonist does accept appearances to which she involuntarily assents, and, attending to these appearances, she claims to live “in accordance with everyday observances” (*PH* 1 :23).

I will follow Vogt’s (2012) argument regarding which conception of belief to employ. Rather than picking and choosing among all senses of belief, a notion of belief should be used that Hellenistic epistemologists would recognize. Sextus’ main opponents, the Stoics and Epicureans, construe belief as a kind of judgment or acceptance. Vogt explains that this active assent is exactly what Sextus eschews (*ibid.*, p. 651). Instead the skeptic acts, speaks, and lives *adoxastôs*, without dogmatic assent, simply acquiescing in the observances of everyday life. This, at least according to Hellenistic understanding, constitutes a life without belief.

Madhyamaka, established by Nāgārjuna (approx. 200 C.E.), is one of the most influential schools of Buddhist philosophy. Mādhyamikas can be characterized by their adherence to the concept of emptiness (*śūnyatā*), which means that they take reality and objects to be empty of ‘inherent existence’ (*svabhāva*). Emptiness is best understood according to the notion of the two truths: the *conventional* truth and the *ultimate* truth. Mādhyamikas adopt this notion from the Abhidharma school. The conventional truth entails a commonsense understanding of the world; it is constituted by how the world ordinarily appears. The ultimate truth is what is left standing after rigorous philosophical analysis; it is constituted by how things are inherently. Madhyamaka is unique in its contention that nothing is left standing after such analysis (Cowherds 2016, p. 618). No inherently existing things are to be found.³ Hence, the ultimate truth is *emptiness*; nothing appears to exist ultimately. However, Mādhyamikas do not posit emptiness dogmatically. They hold that emptiness itself is empty, because like almost everything else, emptiness is dependently originated (*pratītyasamutpāda*), which is the notion that all phenomena arise in dependence on causes and conditions. Only individuals who realize the ultimate truth, *śūnyatā*, can relate to the conventional reality appropriately—as being merely conventional (Dreyfus 2002, p. 19).

II. Parallels between Pyrrhonian Skepticism and Madhyamaka Buddhism

In this section, I will demonstrate that Madhyamaka and Pyrrhonism have numerous significant parallels. This brief overview serves to raise awareness of the striking similarities between the two traditions, as well as to establish that they are similar enough to use Madhyamaka philosophy and practice to verify the livability of Pyrrhonism. I divide the Pyrrhonism-Madhyamaka parallels into six categories: investigation, attitude toward belief, method, suspension of judgment, tranquility, and attitude toward appearances.⁴ I will also consider several dissimilarities and demonstrate that these are not problematic for my argument.

Investigation

Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka both place a great deal of emphasis on investigation and analysis. Sextus identifies skepticism as an investigative project (*PH* 1:7), and Mādhyamikas highly value “thorough inspection,” a characteristic they consider unique to Buddhism (Neale 2014, p. 11). Both traditions find that their investigation only yields equipoise and emptiness: every position turns out to be disputable. Kensur Yeshey Tupden explains that one needs an investigative mindset to realize *śūnyatā*: “All established bases, all phenomena, are conventionally existent and are not ultimately existent. They are not found by an analytical investigative mind but are merely posited as existent by a non-analytical mind” (Klein 1994, p. 108). Both traditions hold that investigation does not lead to any conclusions. Sextus states, “The Sceptics are still investigating” (*PH* 1:1). Similarly, when the Madhyamaka Buddhist says an object is empty, it means that when trying to specify its true nature, she comes up with nothing (Garfield 1994, p. 231). Thus, neither tradition claims to reach any definite certainty, and neither investigation yields a positive or negative doctrine—the schools are devoted to undermining the dogmatic assertions of other traditions (McEvelley 1982, p. 4).

Attitude toward Belief

Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka both aim for the abandonment of beliefs. As explained before, I take this to mean that they avoid active and dogmatic assent. Sextus states, “It is from [investigation], we think, that we come to hold no beliefs” (*PH* 1:12). At the end of the *MMK*, the foundational treatise of Madhyamaka, Nāgārjuna concludes that the Buddha demonstrated the Dharma (teachings) in order for us to “abandon all beliefs” (*MMK* 27:30; trans. Neale).⁵ Indeed, already in the opening verse Nāgārjuna identifies the “auspicious cessation of hypostatization (*prapañca*)” as being of prime importance (*MMK*). Siderits and Katsura explain *prapañca* as the drawing of conceptual distinctions in a problematic way: the tendency to reify what are actually just useful ways of talking (2013, p. 198). Sextus also warns against this reifying tendency: “if you hold beliefs, then you posit as real the things you are said to hold beliefs about” (*PH* 1:14). Hence, both schools try to relinquish assent to epistemological, ontological, and theoretical commitments, that is, beliefs regarding how things are inherently.

Method

Madhyamaka and Pyrrhonism employ similar methods to induce suspension of judgment and realization of emptiness. Nāgārjuna’s *prasaṅga* strategy parallels Sextus’ argumentation style. *Prasaṅga* is the method of examining all possible alternative interpretations of the opponent’s proposition, showing the undesirability of the respective consequences and thus refuting it (Solomon 1978, p. 520). Nāgārjuna uses tetrallemmas to refute dogmatism regarding, for example, causation and *nirvana*.⁶ Sextus also extensively uses dilemmas, trilemmas, and tetrallemmas (to induce equipoise).⁷ The most famous of these is Agrippa’s Trilemma. Such *reductio ad absurdum* arguments allow the skeptic to criticize her opponents without assenting to a

theoretical position herself. This lack of theoretical commitment is underscored by the fact that Sextus and Nāgārjuna exclusively employ the theoretical material that their opponents themselves provide. Michael Williams points out that Sextus “argues for skeptical conclusions from the Dogmatists’ premises and by way of the sort of theoretical argument that they endorse” (1988, p. 577). Similarly, Candrakīrti, one of the most important Nāgārjuna commentators, is adamant that the Mādhyamika should only engage in philosophy using their opponent’s concepts in order to reduce them to absurdity (Tillemans 2016, p. 98).

The arguments of the two traditions often proceed in similar ways. Agrippa’s “Modes” in particular find striking parallels in Madhyamaka discussions (e.g., see VV 31–51). These Modes show that none of the ways in which propositions can be justified (i.e., by postulating foundational propositions, infinite regress, or circularity) are admissible. The final two Modes are those of Dispute and Relativity. Both schools argue, for instance, that any criterion of truth is unjustifiable if it leads to infinite regress. Sextus points out that a criterion that is not certified by a criterion itself can be dismissed because its opposite can be asserted as effectively. If the criterion were certified by another criterion, this would be the result of either a circular fallacy or infinite regress (PH 2:77–78). Nāgārjuna uses a similar argument as Sextus to show that any criterion is unjustifiable. Nāgārjuna asks how means of knowledge (*pramāṇa*) are established (VV 31–32). The first option is to say that the asserted *pramāṇa* is not itself established by a *pramāṇa*. This means that the opponent’s thesis that all objects of knowledge are established by a *pramāṇa* is abandoned. The other option is to claim that it is established by another *pramāṇa*, which would lead to an infinite regress: “[I]f there is a source (of knowledge) of each and every object of proof, then tell how . . . there is proof of these sources. If by other sources, there would be the proof of a source—that would be an ‘infinite regress’! In that case neither a beginning, middle, nor an end is proved” (VV 31–32; trans. Neale).⁸

Furthermore, there are numerous similarities between the Mode of Relativity and Madhyamaka arguments intended to reveal dependent origination (*pratītyasamutpāda*). For example, the fact that what is observed depends on the observer leads both Pyrrhonists and Mādhyamikas to conclude that how the object exists inherently and by nature cannot be found. This is the second of Aenesidemus’ Modes: “[I]f the same objects affect men differently . . . then it is likely that suspension of judgement will be introduced in this way too.” Sextus further clarifies that we are able to state how each object appears, “but are not able to assert what it is in nature” (PH 1:87). Similarly, Āryadeva explains, “Some desire [a certain object of observation], others are repelled by it, others confused by it: thus there is no object for desire to have. Apart from conceptualization, the existence of desire and so forth is not found” (CŚ 8:2–3).

Suspension of Judgment

The methods of both schools are intended to achieve a similar result: suspension of judgment about the nature of things. Kuzminski considers the Pyrrhonian suspension of judgment equivalent to the Madhyamaka realization of emptiness (2010, p. 55).

Both equipoise and emptiness deter the inquirer from positing anything beyond the conventional reality and the way things appear.

Crucially, Pyrrhonists and Mādhyamikas emphasize that this suspension of judgment does not constitute a negative doctrine. Just as Sextus disagrees with Dogmatists and Academic Sceptics, Mādhyamikas disagree with both eternalists (who claim things exist inherently) and nihilists (who claim that things do not exist at all). In fact, Madhyamaka is Sanskrit for 'Middle Way', which, philosophically, can be understood to refer to the path between eternalism and nihilism. Like Sextus, Nāgārjuna emphasizes that "he has no thesis to defend, and therefore [has] no stake in non-being" (RA 1:60; trans. Neale).

This stance is reflected in the way Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka deal with utterances. Their speech is 'non-assertive', meaning that the skeptic does not assert anything beyond the way things appear, even though she might seem to be making positive claims. Sextus stresses that when the skeptic says things such as "All things are unapprehended," she characterizes how things appear, not how they are by nature (PH 1:200). Nāgārjuna makes the same statement about the terminology regarding emptiness: "'It is empty' is not to be said, nor 'It is non-empty,' nor that it is both nor that it is neither; [empty] is said only for the sake of instruction" (MMK 22:11). Moreover, Nāgārjuna (in)famously denies presenting any theses (VV 29). This leads Gandolfo (2014) to suggest that Nāgārjuna's use of language is 'denegative': "Denegation is the type of speech act that does not assume a commitment to provide justifications for the content of the statement in any situation. It is the opposite of philosophical assertion in that it does not aspire to defend a proposition's content against any possible view" (p. 218). The way Gandolfo explains denegation relates directly to the way Pyrrhonists use speech. "To denegate, for example, that 'the table is brown' is to possibly say that 'the table is brown to me but not to you'" (ibid.); similarly, Sextus frequently emphasizes that his statements should be thought of as preceded by 'it appears to me that' (PH 1:198).

Both schools also suspend belief regarding their own analyses. They use the same analogy to explain this. Their teachings are represented by a medicine that needs to leave the body together with the disease (beliefs) it cures. Sextus asserts that all the claims he makes can be "destroyed by themselves, being cancelled along with what they are applied to, just as purgative drugs do not merely drain the humours from the body but drive themselves out too along with the humours" (PH 1:206). Candrakīrti asks, "Shall the sick man be freed of sickness if that medicine [emptiness], having evacuated all the diseases settled in his viscera, would not itself depart his viscera?" No, "the disease of that man would be more serious if that medicine, having evacuated all the disease, was settled in his viscera and would not depart" (PP 10:108; trans. Neale). Indeed: "Emptiness is taught by the conquerors as the expedient to get rid of all views. But those for whom emptiness is a view have been called incurable" (MMK 13:8).

Tranquility

Both traditions find that their method leads to untroubledness and tranquility. Indeed, "in realizing *śūnyatā*, the practitioner obtains tranquility of mind" (Nagao 1991,

p. 173), and “when [skeptics] suspended judgment, tranquility . . . followed fortuitously” (*PH* 1:25). Hence, the Pyrrhonian ideal of *ataraxia* corresponds to the Madhyamaka state of mental peace beyond unnecessary conceptualization (*prapañca*) (Mills 2016, p. 53). Underscoring this similarity, both schools observe that tranquility does not entail a freedom from all suffering. There is a difference between inevitable suffering, such as hunger and pain, and suffering that is caused by beliefs. Sextus explains that suspending judgment about inevitable suffering will bring more tranquility than holding beliefs about it, but suspension of judgment cannot remove the suffering itself (*PH* 3:236). According to Buddhism, pain is inevitable, but refraining from any judgment about it will prevent suffering. Like the skeptic, the Buddhist experiences “diminished affliction” because of her insight (Neale 2014, p. 174).

Attitude toward Appearances

The last parallel between Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka that I will discuss is their strikingly similar approach to appearances. Even though both schools advocate suspending all beliefs, they also emphasize that they assent to what is apparent and go along with the conventions of ordinary life. In response to the question whether the skeptic dogmatizes, Sextus makes a distinction between assent to appearances and assent to the non-evident. This crucial passage is worth quoting in its entirety:

When we say that Skeptics do not hold beliefs [do not dogmatize], we do not take ‘belief’ [*dogma*] in the sense which some say, quite generally, that belief is acquiescing in something; for Skeptics assent to the feelings forced upon them by appearances—for example, they would not say, when heated or chilled, ‘I think I am not heated (or: chilled)’. Rather, we say that they do not hold belief in the sense in which some say that belief is assent to some unclear object of investigation in the sciences; for Pyrrhonists do not assent to anything unclear. (*PH* 1:13)

Sextus adds that those who think skeptics reject what is apparent have not understood Pyrrhonism: “We do not overturn anything which leads us, without our willing it, to assent in accordance with a passive appearance—and these things are precisely what is apparent” (*PH* 1:19). He explains this using the example of honey: “It appears to us that honey sweetens . . . but whether it is actually sweet is something we investigate—and this is not what is apparent but something said about what is apparent” (*PH* 1:20). Baxter (2016) calls the assent to the appearances ‘passive acquiescence’, and the assent to the non-evident ‘active endorsement’.⁹

Crucially, the Pyrrhonian distinction between two kinds of assent corresponds to the Madhyamaka doctrine of the two truths. According to Madhyamaka, the ultimate truth (what is found by rigorous investigation) is *śūnyatā*. Nothing can withstand such analysis, and thus there are no ultimate truths. Inherent existence (*svabhāva*) and how things are by nature simply cannot be found. Mādhyamikas do, however, assent to the conventional truth, which parallels Sextus’ notion of appearances: “[the conventional truth] corresponds to appearances, so it must not be analysed” (*SDV* 21ab). Hence, Sextus’ involuntary assent to the appearances can be seen as assent to the conventional, and assent to the non-evident can be seen as assent to the ultimate.

Since no ultimately true things are to be found, the latter assent is misguided. It is a fundamental error to take the conventional truth to be inherently existent.

Śāntideva explains the Madhyamaka rejection of the ultimate, but not the conventional truth in very Pyrrhonian terms: “The manner in which something is seen, heard, and cognized [the appearances] is not refuted here but the conceptualization of its true existence [the non-evident], which is the cause of suffering is rejected here” (BCA 6:25; trans. Neale). Tupden also explains that the Madhyamaka refusal to assent to non-evident inherent existence does not entail a rejection of appearances:

When one searches to find whether there is . . . a phenomenon which corresponds to the conception of an inherently existent house, car, or person, [the] analytical consciousness . . . undermines or refutes the existence of such a truly existent phenomenon. It does not, however, undermine the *appearance* of such. . . . The conventional or imputedly existent house is what is left over once the inherently existent house is refuted. (Klein 1994, p. 49)

This is entirely in line with Sextus, who explains that “when we investigate whether existing things are such as they appear, we grant that they appear, and what we investigate is not what is apparent but what is said about what is apparent—and this is different from investigating what is apparent itself” (PH 1:19). Thus, both Pyrrhonists and Mādhyamikas assent to appearances, but reject dogmatic engagement with them.

Dissimilarities

It is not my goal to show that Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka are entirely the same, but to make clear that they are similar enough for my purposes. Indeed, there exist important differences between the traditions. I will consider three dissimilarities and argue that these are not problematic to my argument.

First, Sextus leaves room for the possibility that the skeptic’s investigation might lead to the discovery of certain facts about reality. The skeptic continues to investigate, but it is not ruled out that she might actually find something. This is not necessarily the case with Buddhism. Once one has realized emptiness, continued investigation will only lead to the discovery of more dependent origination. However, Mādhyamikas do not assent to the doctrine of dependent origination dogmatically: they accept it as a conventional truth, not an ultimate truth. In addition, Sextus’ allowance that investigation leads to some claim is hypothetical. During the time that the Pyrrhonist does not find anything, she will suspend judgment and be tranquil. This is the same mindset as the one that Mādhyamikas advocate, and one that critics of Pyrrhonism consider unlivable.

Second, Mādhyamikas emphasize the importance of relativity and dependent origination in arriving at a realization of emptiness. Pyrrhonists, on the other hand, stress the necessity of equipollence, the ability to establish the equal credibility of different positions. However, this does not mean that Pyrrhonists and Mādhyamikas aim for a different mindset. These approaches are not as discrepant as they may seem. Neale suggests that the argument that entities are empty because of dependent

origination and the suggestion that for every position an equally convincing opposing position can be found are two ways of expressing the same sentiment (2014, p. 31). Indeed, the opening verse of the *Bodhicittavivaraṇa*, a treatise attributed to Nāgārjuna, associates emptiness with the equality of all *dharmas*. Additionally, Sextus devotes almost half of the first book of the *PH* to discussing the relativity of all phenomena. Hence, the equal disputability of phenomena might be a different way to express their dependent origination. Even though Madhyamaka focuses more on the causal dependence of all things, the vast majority of Sextus' arguments still parallel those of Mādhyamikas (Neale 2014, pp. 95, 191). Therefore, the aim of both traditions remains the same; it is merely the emphasis on how to achieve this aim that appears to differ.

Furthermore, some scholars argue that Madhyamaka should be construed as a theoretical rather than a therapeutic philosophy. For this reason, Gandolfo claims that associating Madhyamaka with Pyrrhonism risks "not taking Nāgārjuna seriously" (2014, p. 20). These scholars argue that Mādhyamikas occasionally say things that do not look like conventional truths; take, for example, *MMK* 24:18: "Dependent origination we declare to be emptiness. It [emptiness] is a dependent concept; just that is the middle path" (Priest, Siderits, and Tillemans 2011, p. 149). According to a more therapeutic interpretation, such seemingly ultimate statements should be understood as skillful means (*upāya-kauśalya*). These are context-dependent techniques to help beings realize emptiness; when employed they should not be understood as theoretical claims, but as therapeutic tools.¹⁰ Tillemans calls the suggestion that Nāgārjuna expounds skillful means "uncharitable" (2015, p. 9). However, such a reading would take Nāgārjuna *more* seriously. It believes him capable of expertly constructing claims that seem to characterize what the world is really like, in order for us to stop clinging to the idea that there is a way the world is really like. In addition, a therapeutic interpretation would make better sense of Nāgārjuna's frequent disavowal of any dogmatic position (*MMK* 22:11, 27:30; *VV* 29). Such a reading is also in line with Siderits' (2003) suggestion that ultimate statements are ultimate to the extent that they generate the realization of emptiness. Even if Mādhyamikas assent to certain ultimate statements, this would have a minimal effect on their everyday life. Hence, although an important point of discussion, it has little impact on my argument.

In sum, there are many parallels between Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka. The similarities between their views on investigation, attitudes toward belief, methods, suspensions of judgment, notions of tranquility, and attitudes toward appearances support my claim that the two traditions are undertaking the same project. More importantly: it seems they would accept each other as undertaking the same project (Neale 2014, p. 45). Additionally, I have shown that their apparent dissimilarities do not affect my argument that both traditions aim for the same (arguably unlivable) life.

III. Madhyamaka Theory in Defense of Pyrrhonism

In this section, I will employ the theoretical similarities established above to defend the livability of Pyrrhonism. I will consider the objection that life without belief is

practically impossible (*apraxia*: impracticability) and the charge that it is logically impossible (*peritrope*: self-refutation). First, I will argue that the parallels between Sextus' two kinds of assent and the Madhyamaka doctrine of the two truths demonstrate that Sextus successfully responds to the *apraxia* challenge. These parallels provide a more comprehensive understanding of passive acquiescence in appearances, and they validate Sextus' claim that such acquiescence allows for action and ordinary life. Second, I will show that Nāgārjuna successfully responds to the very inconsistency charge leveled against Sextus. I will address the objections regarding the desirability of the Pyrrhonian life (the *eudaimonist* objection) in section 4.

The Apraxia Objection

In its most basic form the *apraxia* objection states that action requires some belief, or the holding of something to be true. Without this assent to certain truths, action would be impossible (Vogt 2010, p. 165). Ancient critics observed that skeptics went about their daily life as normal people: eating, drinking, and avoiding oncoming wagons. Surely, to act in this way requires having some beliefs about the world? Hume also raises the *apraxia* objection. He states that if Pyrrhonists were correct, "All discourse, all action would immediately cease; and men remain in a total lethargy" (1988, p. 104). In other words, a true Pyrrhonist would be rendered entirely inactive.

In response to this ancient objection, Sextus argues that the skeptic does not refute everything: she lives an active life by passively acquiescing in the appearances. Sextus ties the notion of appearances to the notion of 'ordinary life'. He explains:

Attending to what is apparent, we live in accordance with everyday observances, without holding opinions (*adoxastōs*)—for we are not able to be utterly inactive. These everyday observances seem to be fourfold, and to consist in guidance by nature, necessitation by feelings, handing down of laws and customs, and teaching of kinds of expertise. (PH 1:23–24)

Thus, the skeptic does not assent to anything unclear or inherently existent, which involves active endorsement, but via passive acquiescence she can live according to the appearances, and follow the customs of everyday life.

I argued in the previous section that Sextus' two kinds of assent correspond to the Madhyamaka two truths: Mādhyamikas reject assent to ultimate truths (the ultimate truth being *śūnyatā*), while accepting passive assent to the conventional truth, that is, the appearances. Hence, Madhyamaka supports the first part of Sextus' argument: it is possible to coherently suspend judgment about all dogmatic, ultimate claims, while assenting to the appearances and the conventional reality. Moreover, closer analysis of the conventional truth shows that it is very similar to a life lived *adoxastōs* (undogmatically; according to appearances), and that it supports Sextus' claim that such a life entails action.

The two Sanskrit terms used to signify the conventional truth are *vyavahāra* and *saṃvṛti*. *Vyavahāra* can be understood not only as "ordinary life; common practice," but also as "action; conduct" (Monier-Williams 2008). This validates Sextus' defense

of “everyday life” (*PH* 2 : 102) and the skeptic’s assent to the way ordinary people live (according to the fourfold observances). It also supports Vogt’s argument that assent to the appearances functions as a criterion for action (2012, p. 165). Additionally, Jñānagarbha explains that one of the ways the conventional truth can be characterized is by its allowance for ‘effective action’ (*arthakriyā*) (Jñānagarbha 1987, p. 137). This denotes the ability to perform a function that can serve some practical purpose for somebody (Dreyfus 1997, p. 66). Tupden further supports Sextus’ response to the *aproxia* objection by explaining that the conventional reality must be accepted in order to allow for actions: “Unless some objects are posited as valid—that is, conventionally existent, the thought apprehending the view of emptiness would undermine the thought apprehending activities and vice versa. Having understood that phenomena are without inherent existence, the Bodhisattva accepts the existence of giving, and so forth” (Klein 1994, p. 76). Thus, due to the similar nature of the two traditions, Madhyamaka not only supports Sextus’ assent to appearances, it also underscores that appearances allow for activity.

Note that the skeptic’s assent to everyday life is different from the way ordinary people assent to it. Here the second term for the conventional truth comes in. *Samvṛti* can simply mean conventional, but it can also mean *concealing* (Garfield 1995, p. 297). Mādhyamikas exploit this ‘delightful’ ambiguity by emphasizing that the conventional covers up its own emptiness by concealing its conventional character. This acknowledges that philosophers are not alone in holding beliefs about how things are by nature—regular people also perceive their views to have an objectivity that the skeptic finds unsustainable. Several scholars, such as Garfield (1990) and Eichorn (2014), construe Pyrrhonism in the same manner: non-philosophers also take appearances to represent how things are “by nature” (*PH* 1 : 27, 30; 3 : 235) or “in themselves” (Eichorn 2014, p. 130) (which would be an apt translation of *svabhāva*). Not having realized the emptiness of things, ordinary people will not be able to relate to the conventional reality appropriately—that is, as being merely conventional.

Thus, Madhyamaka makes clear that the conventional reality allows for action, which supports Sextus’ argument that assent to appearances constitutes a criterion for action. The way Pyrrhonists engage with everyday life is different from the way ordinary people do because Pyrrhonists realize that passive acquiescence in appearances is simply that: passive acquiescence in appearances. In Madhyamaka terms, having realized emptiness, they are able to relate to the conventional reality as being simply conventional.

The Inconsistency Objection

The inconsistency objection that I will discuss claims that either the skeptic has grounded justification for her arguments and recommendation that judgment should be suspended, or she does not. The former option would render Pyrrhonism inconsistent (because it presumes opinions can be established with certainty, which the skeptic contests); if we accept the latter option, it seems we can just ignore her (Thorsrud 2009, p. 4). Underscoring the similarity between Pyrrhonism and Madhya-

maka, the exact same charge has been leveled against Nāgārjuna (VV 1–4). Nāgārjuna’s Nyāya opponent argues that if all things are empty of inherent existence, Madhyamaka theses and arguments will be empty as well, which means they cannot effectively refute dogmatic positions and establish emptiness. Thus, the Mādhyamika must either accept that her theses are non-empty and have argumentative power (rendering her position inconsistent), or acknowledge that they are empty and thus unable to refute the view that things exist inherently (Nāgārjuna 2010, p. 66).

However, this dilemma only arises if one accepts the Dogmatists’ commitments. Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka would be vulnerable to this challenge if their intention was to establish how things are by nature. Instead, Pyrrhonists and Mādhyamikas embrace the groundlessness and emptiness of their arguments (Thorsrud 2009, p. 138; Nāgārjuna 2010, p. 11). They call into question the basic premise of the Dogmatists’ argument, the notion that things can be justified by the way things are inherently. Sextus and Nāgārjuna do not presume that their statements have such ultimate grounding; their language is ‘denegative’. They go along with the conventional and show that their opponents’ ‘justified’ claims fail on their own terms. When faced with the supposed dilemma, Nāgārjuna replies: “If I had any thesis, that fault would apply to me. But I do not have any thesis, so there is indeed no fault for me” (VV 29). Westerhoff explains that Nāgārjuna has no thesis according to his opponent’s semantics, which supposes that truth is grounded in an external reality (Nāgārjuna 2010, p. 69). Similarly, when Sextus claims “I have no apprehension” (PH 1 : 201), he shows that his opponents’ notion of apprehension is untenable, because it assumes the existence of external objects (PH 2 : 1–11). Instead of making positive or negative assertions, Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka rely on the dogmatic views of their opponents and show that these fail according to their own rational standards. Such refutations do not require the dogmatic commitments that would render Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka inconsistent. They are dialectical (Thorsrud 2009, p. 138).

In conclusion, Madhyamaka philosophy can be employed to defend Pyrrhonism against the *apraxia* and inconsistency objections. It demonstrates that living *adoxastōs* is possible: action is an important aspect of the conventional truth. It also shows that Pyrrhonian skepticism is wholly consistent: Madhyamaka underscores that Pyrrhonism only appears inconsistent according to the Dogmatists’ own commitments, which are shown to be untenable. Thus, Madhyamaka theory validates the claim that Pyrrhonism is in fact livable.

IV. Madhyamaka Practice in Defense of Pyrrhonism

In this section I will demonstrate that many Buddhists still live according to Madhyamaka, and thus engage in a project akin to Pyrrhonism. I will focus on Tibetan Buddhism, and the Ge-luk (*dGe-lugs*) order in particular. Tibet is the only country that has been governed by Madhyamaka philosophers (Newland 1992, p. 33), and Madhyamaka philosophy is considered the “culmination of Ge-luk education” (Dreyfus 2002, p. 133). Furthermore, Arnold (n.d.) explains that Tibetan Buddhism preserves a model for integrating Madhyamaka philosophy into a structured set of practices.

I will demonstrate that several important aspects of Tibetan Buddhist daily life, such as debate and meditation, can be understood as utterly Pyrrhonian. Their practices and testimonies thus constitute empirical evidence of the livability of Pyrrhonism. Kapstein (2013) also points to Tibetan Buddhism as a philosophical way of life. He explains that the lessons learned from Buddhist training are “to be realized at all times and under all circumstances” (p. 103). This means that although the practices discussed below are not exhaustive of the monks’ daily lives, what they learn from them should feed their thinking during everyday activities such as “falling asleep, passing in and out of doors, mounting the stairs, going to the toilet” (ibid.). I will also consider objections to my conclusion that Madhyamaka practitioners provide empirical verification of the livability of Pyrrhonian skepticism.

Debate

Dreyfus explains that ordinary philosophical methods are inadequate for coming to an understanding of emptiness, because it requires simultaneously undoing any characterization of emptiness used in the process (2002, p. 241). Therefore, Ge-luk monks employ an alternative method: debate. Debate in the Ge-luk tradition is an everyday, all-day-long affair. As Liberman points out, “Debate is not merely a supplementary means of philosophical study and investigation, it is the perpetual medium of the [monasteries’] activities” (2004, p. 53). These debates are intended to expose contradictions and avoid production of constructive syntheses, which means that “they are particularly fit to embody the radical Madhyamaka approach” (Dreyfus 2002, p. 243), or indeed the Pyrrhonian approach. Like Pyrrhonism, Ge-luk debate entails the refusal to make dogmatic claims. In addition, these debates illustrate that Madhyamaka can be understood as an ability, which is exactly how Sextus characterizes Pyrrhonism from the outset (*PH* 1 : 8). Moreover, central to these debates is the Pyrrhonian method of opposing accounts. The Dalai Lama asked Dreyfus one day, “Have you ever noticed that every opinion one can put forth in debate can always be undermined, however right it may be?” (2002, p. 243). An even more Pyrrhonian-inclined teacher emphasized, “The mark of a good debater is that he is able to establish that what is is not and that what is not is” (ibid., p. 244).

Ge-luk debate can be understood as being akin to Pyrrhonian inquiry. In the same way that the Pyrrhonist “investigates everything” (*PH* 1 : 7), the goal of the Tibetan dialectical system is to “continually place every philosophical position at risk” (Liberman 2004, p. 58). Sextus surmises that skeptical inquiry leads to the suspension of belief (*PH* 1 : 12); similarly, debate in the Ge-luk tradition “relentlessly pushes the investigation forward, preventing the mind from indulging in its tendency to seize on a final answer” (Dreyfus 2002, p. 244). The skeptic holds that “to every account an equal account is opposed” (*PH* 1 : 12); likewise, from the Ge-luk perspective, “any stance can and should be undermined” (Dreyfus 2002, p. 244). Tibetan debates do not aim to establish a point, as probative arguments do. Instead they center on bringing out the problematic consequences of their opponents’ statements. Hence, these arguments imply no direct commitment on the part of the arguer (ibid.). Furthermore, the fact that debates “require one to drop one’s outlook at a moment’s notice” (Liber-

man 2004, p. 60) makes them the perfect practice for suspending judgment. The goal of Ge-luk debate and Pyrrhonian inquiry is also analogous. Opposing accounts in Pyrrhonism is meant to lead to a state of mind in which the intellect does not reject or posit anything (*PH* 1 : 10). Similarly, in Ge-luk, “the questions raised by debate are worth thinking about not because they bring final clarity but because they oblige us to grow by relinquishing our tendency to cling to ideas” (Dreyfus 2002, pp. 287–288). Ge-luk debate is not an outdated static academic endeavor: “The current generation of young Tibetan scholars continues to be energized by the process of daily philosophical debating” (Lieberman 2004, p. 58). A young Tibetan scholar pointed out to Lieberman that debate is not actually limited to specific time slots: “Debating is like a river. It’s not just a class, it flows all of the time” (2004, p. 53).

Considering an example of a Ge-luk discussion could provide a unique illustration of Pyrrhonism in practice. The teacher in this example, Gen-la, aims to prevent his students’ minds from locking into any one stance (i.e., positing or rejecting anything), which pushes them into a new dimension of openness (i.e., leads to suspension of judgment) (Dreyfus 2002, p. 287). Gen-la starts by asking, ‘What is the buffalo?’ ‘Are the legs the buffalo?’ ‘Is the head the buffalo?’ ‘Are the horns the buffalo?’ The point of this exercise is to undo any attempt to pin down the concept by which the object could be identified. Sextus employs the same reasoning to achieve this when discussing wholes and parts (*PH* 3 : 98–101). Gen-la shoots down all positive answers, but insists that this does not mean that the buffalo does not exist. “The buffalo exists; otherwise, how could one be injured by its horns? Nobody has ever been injured by the horns of a rabbit!” (Dreyfus 2002, p. 287). At this point, Gen-la introduces the notion of conventional existence. The buffalo exists conventionally, but not ultimately. We can point to the buffalo and effectively use the concept of the buffalo, but we cannot go beyond this practice. In Pyrrhonian terms: if we were to do so, we would go beyond the appearance of the buffalo and become entrapped by our dogmatic beliefs.

Gen-la teaches Nāgārjuna’s texts by debating each stanza and asking questions such as “When an effect is produced, is it produced from an existing or from a non-existing cause?” (Dreyfus 2002, p. 288). Every response is rejected. Almost all of Gen-la’s arguments find equivalents in Sextus’ writing. For example, Gen-la explains, “an effect cannot be produced from causes existing at the time of its production, for causes and effects cannot coexist” (ibid.); Sextus states that a cause “neither pre-subsists its effect nor co-subsists with it” (*PH* 3 : 27). Gen-la and Sextus reject the remaining options of the tetralemma in the same way. How then is an effect produced? For Gen-la, no answer was allowed to stand. Even if a student would give the seemingly correct answer, namely that an effect is produced by causes only conventionally, Gen-la would continue the inquiry: “How then can we know that a phenomenon causes another one? Is any kind of inquiry into what is a cause impossible?” Sextus’ reasoning parallels Gen-la’s almost exactly. Like the student, Sextus comes to the conclusion that causes might not have inherent existence: “If a cause neither pre-subsists its effect nor co-subsists with it, and the effect does not come about before it, presumably it has no share in subsistence at all” (*PH* 3 : 27). Yet, like Gen-la, Sextus

does not take this conclusion to be final. He asks how, without cause and effect, “could the universe as a whole make its orderly progress?” (*PH* 3:17) He also wonders whether, even if things are not actually real, is it not because of “some cause that they appear to us to be such as they are not?” (*ibid.*). This way, Sextus, like Gen-la, prevents the mind from locking itself into any one stance. All of this is meant to lead to the same goal, which Gen-la describes as the realization of emptiness and Sextus as suspension of judgment.

Meditation

The Western tendency to see meditation as separate from analysis should be firmly resisted when studying Madhyamaka (Paul Williams 1989, p. 79). Most Ge-luk monks do not practice *śamatha* meditation (calming meditation, which entails focus on a single object). Instead, much of what they do can be seen as falling under *vipaśyanā* or *lhag mthong* (insight meditation), in which contemplation is key. This is also called, in suggestively Pyrrhonian terms, “meditation of investigation” (Dreyfus 2002, p. 170).

Although it seems likely that Pyrrhonists would be sympathetic to the tranquility-inducing nature of *śamatha*, it is Ge-luk *vipaśyanā* that appears strikingly conducive to the Pyrrhonian cause. The process of realizing emptiness is much facilitated by debate, but in order to internalize the inquiry started in debates, *vipaśyanā* is of great help (Dreyfus 2002, p. 170). This way, it can also be seen as a means to internalize Pyrrhonian analysis. After all, Sextus never qualifies what shape or form skeptical inquiry should take. Williams distinguishes several stages in Madhyamaka meditation. The meditator first tries to gain a clear idea of what is and what is not being refuted. She clarifies what intrinsic existence is, and how it differs from conventional existence. In Pyrrhonian terms, this could entail gaining a proper understanding of Sextus’ statement that “When we investigate whether existing things are such as they appear, we grant that they appear, and what we investigate is not what is apparent but what is said about what is apparent” (*PH* 1:19). Next, the meditator carefully surveys the arguments against intrinsic existence. When this leads to the conclusion that things lack inherent existence, the meditator places her mind on this absence alone, which entails an absence of conscious conception of subject and object. One can understand Sextus to be pointing at the same thing when he explains that grasping equipollence leads to a “standstill of the intellect, owing to which we neither reject nor posit anything” (*PH* 1:10). Paul Williams explains that the continued practice of such meditation leads to a firmer conviction that all things are empty, which then “forms the necessary background to all . . . religious activity” (1989, p. 80).

Cultural and Religious Practice

Many Tibetan Buddhist customs are to be understood in the context of realization of emptiness. Even though certain cultural and religious practices might appear unrelated or even antithetical to Pyrrhonism, closer inspection reveals that they closely align with the Pyrrhonian project. Indeed, Tupden emphasizes that “prostrations, making offerings . . . it should be remembered, are methods for understanding emp-

teness” (Klein 1994, p. 145). These practices are often intended to aid intellectual analysis and bring about wisdom (after all, one of the root problems of the human predicament is ignorance about emptiness). This means that they are aimed at achieving the same goal to which Pyrrhonists aspire: realization of emptiness, that is, the suspension of all judgment. For example, the worship of Mañjuśrī, the bodhisattva of wisdom, is thought to increase one’s intellectual abilities. That is why monks start their sessions of memorization with an invocation to Mañjuśrī (Dreyfus 2002, p. 85). Furthermore, the Heart Sūtra is recited in every Ge-luk monastery. This Sūtra encapsulates the teaching of emptiness. Reciting the Heart Sūtra therefore helps students to develop their comprehension of this philosophy (ibid., p. 248), and thus to come closer to realizing emptiness and suspending judgment.

Even practices that may appear wholly foreign to the Pyrrhonist, such as tantra, should be understood in the context of realizing emptiness. Indeed, “Ge-luk monks wishing to undertake tantric practice must first complete the many years of scholarly training in which the Madhyamaka forms the essential core” (Ray 2001, pp. 97–98). Note that even if certain practices may not revolve around realization of emptiness, they would not constitute a problem for associating the Ge-luk with the Pyrrhonist life. Realization of emptiness entails the understanding that such practices are merely conventional. In Pyrrhonian terms, adherence to (Tibetan) religious and cultural customs falls within assent to appearances. Sextus explains that the skeptic, in accordance with custom and laws, can assent to the idea of gods and is allowed to do “everything that tends to worship of and reverence towards them” (AP 1 : 49). Since both traditions allow for living in accordance with the tradition of laws and customs, cultural and religious differences between them could easily be accounted for.

In conclusion, I have demonstrated that Ge-luk monks live in accordance with Madhyamaka philosophy. The fact that these Tibetan Buddhists rigorously practice undermining dogmatic belief supports the claim that they are living without belief. This is underscored by the observation that Ge-luk monks exemplify the traits one would expect a Pyrrhonist to have. Debate undermines dogmatic opinions and the tendency to cling to beliefs; meditation is a potent means of internalizing skeptical analysis and gaining a better understanding of Madhyamaka and Pyrrhonist philosophy; and cultural customs constitute further means to realize emptiness (i.e., suspend all judgment). Therefore, the life of Tibetan Buddhists can be regarded as empirical verification that Pyrrhonism is a livable philosophical position.

Madhyamaka and Realizing a Life without Belief

I will consider two objections to my conclusion that the lifestyle of Ge-luk Buddhists demonstrates the livability of skepticism. Before addressing the *eudaimonist* objection, I address the charge that although I have established that Tibetan Buddhists *aim* for a life without belief, I have not demonstrated that their lifestyle actually *results* in a life without belief. In response to this objection, I would like to point out that there is a tremendous amount of testimony demonstrating that Tibetan Buddhists not only aim for, but truly achieve realization of emptiness. For instance, there are descriptions of how the realization works: “the realization of emptiness precedes the

actual experience of great bliss" (Dalai Lama 1994, p. 108); the explanations of how it works for different people: for some "emptiness can be realized easily" (Kelsang Gyatso 2013, p. 116); and the many accounts of people who reached emptiness: "while reading Buddhapalita's commentary, the meaning became totally clear and he gained a direct realization of emptiness" (Lamrimpa 2010, p. 26). Testimony such as "Geshe Rabten Rinpoche said that if we had any questions on emptiness, we should ask Gen Jampa Wangdu because he had fresh experience of emptiness" (Thubten Zopa et al. 2000, p. 136) demonstrates that realization of emptiness is a definite possibility.

Lama Zopa explains that, in addition to renowned Madhyamaka teachers, "many others" have realized emptiness (Thubten Zopa et al. 2000, p. 504), and the Dalai Lama states that a significant number of people who have realized emptiness are alive today (Mehrotra 2008, p. 134). Moreover, the Dalai Lama recounts an experience akin to the realization of emptiness from his mid-twenties, when he was reflecting on "unfindability and the fact that phenomena are dependent on conceptuality" (Dalai Lama 2003, p. 139). The impact of this experience lasted for a few weeks, during which things "appeared to inherently exist, but I knew they actually did not" (ibid., p. 140). He describes this as a level below complete and incontrovertible realization; but it convinced him that such realization was "a true possibility" (ibid.). Furthermore, he explains that "Nowadays, I always meditate on emptiness in the morning and bring that experience into the day's activities" (ibid.). Such testimony establishes that Madhyamaka activities can also translate into a life without belief outside these practices.

All of this suggests that objections against the livability of Pyrrhonism fail in the face of the empirical counter-evidence provided by Tibetan Buddhists. For instance, Ribeiro's (2002) claim that suspension of judgment is psychologically impossible is refuted by testimony like that of Lama Thubten Yeshe: "Oh, I realized emptiness ages ago, when I was debating on Madhyamaka in the courtyard at Sera Je" (Thubten Yeshe 1998, p. xiv).

Madhyamaka and the Eudaimonist Objection

Although I have now established that Tibetan Buddhism verifies the livability of Pyrrhonism, one might object that such a life can hardly be considered good or normal. Vogt calls this the *eudaimonist* objection, the charge that the skeptic cannot live a good life (2010, p. 166). I believe that Madhyamaka and Tibetan Buddhism not only can refute this objection, but also can show that a life without belief is desirable and profoundly ethical.

Burnyeat (2011, p. 232) and Annas and Barnes (1985, p. 168), suggest that the Pyrrhonian process of continually opposing claims seems more likely to lead to anxiety than to tranquility. Extrapolating from our data set of Tibetan Buddhists, we can see that this is not the case. Continuous debate, and realizing emptiness do not end in anxiety, but lead to a "tranquil and blissful state" (Phuntsho 2005, p. 56). The fact that Mādhyamikas following their philosophy reach tranquility, not anxiety, demonstrates that we must take seriously Sextus' claim that skepticism leads to *ataraxia*.

Furthermore, one might suggest that the life of a Buddhist monk, characterized by tranquil contemplation, can hardly be used as an example of a normal, active life. However, the Western perception of Buddhist monks living a passive life is rather inaccurate, especially in the case of Ge-luk monks. As we saw, the main component of the Ge-luk lifestyle is debate, and Ge-luk debates are extraordinarily lively. Geshe Lhundup Sopa underscores this liveliness when he points out that “Some people have no shyness, and are able to debate in a playful way, joking and laughing. That’s a very good way” (Lieberman 2004, p. 61).

Finally, one might argue that the Pyrrhonian life is not an ethical one. Those who attack Pyrrhonism on moral grounds often cite the Pyrrhonist’s response to the tyrant, who commands her to perform “some forbidden act” or be killed. Sextus replies that the skeptic will acquiesce in the appearances and follow her ancestral laws and customs (AE 165–166). Although this account might appear unconvincing, Madhyamaka can provide illumination and demonstrate that a skeptical life can be ethically desirable.

Sextus would observe that any principled ethical stance can ultimately be undermined; Garfield explains that according to Madhyamaka, “In the end, a conventional account of ethics . . . must be accepted, simply because that is the only ethical domain that makes any sense” (2015, p. 315). Finnigan and Tanaka elaborate: “the absence of ethical theorization does not constitute an abandonment of ethics. Rather, it reflects implicit recognition of the limitations of justification and suggests an expansion of the scope of ethics” (2011, p. 222). Indeed, understanding the conventional as conventional entails the realization of emptiness (and thus suspension of judgment). In Madhyamaka, this realization is intertwined with the teachings of dependent origination and *anātman*, the absence of an inherently existing self.¹¹ Experiencing the world without attachment to one’s self and without postulating dogmatic distinctions brings about a profoundly ethical attitude: universal compassion. As Śāntideva explains, there is no reason to prioritize one’s own pain and suffering over the pain of others (BCA). This leads Mādhyamikas to live compassionately. Moreover, the best method for helping others overcome such suffering is “to show that there is no basis for the belief that some objects are inherently undesirable or impure” (Hayes 2015). This is the same project that Sextus advocates. Hence, the fact that “Skeptics are philanthropic and wish to cure by argument, as far as they can, the conceit and rashness of Dogmatists” (PH 3:280), suggests that Pyrrhonists are engaged in a profoundly ethical project. In sum, Madhyamaka and Tibetan Buddhism refute the *eudaimonist* objection to Pyrrhonism by showing that a Pyrrhonian life can be tranquil, blissful, active, and ethical; they show that it can be a good life.

V. Conclusion

In this essay I have demonstrated that Madhyamaka Buddhism verifies the viability of Pyrrhonian skepticism, and thus that Pyrrhonism is a livable (and lived) philosophical position. This conclusion has several significant implications. First of all, by linking the debate about Pyrrhonism to a living tradition, there is now a lot more at stake

when arguing against the livability of Pyrrhonian skepticism. Moreover, the demonstration that there are people living a life without belief opens up a new realm of research opportunities. For instance, we can now direct any questions we have regarding Pyrrhonism to living Mādhyamikas. This means that we can supplement theoretical analyses of Pyrrhonism with examinations of how it works in real life. The profound similarity between the two traditions also suggests that scholars of Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka could gain much from closer cooperation. Furthermore, the present essay underscores the effects that practical uses of philosophy can have. Philosophical therapy can bring about a significant shift in our experience and understanding of the world. As Eichorn and Mills point out, the cultivation of a skeptical attitude would be a desirable development in our contemporary environment, which suffers from all kinds of dogmatism. Hence, the possibility of living a Pyrrhonian life should not merely be acknowledged—it deserves to be taken seriously.

Notes

Abbreviations are used in the Notes as follows:

- AE* Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Ethicists* (*Adversus Mathematicos* 11). See Sextus Empiricus 1997.
- AL* Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Logicians* (*Adversus Mathematicos* 7–8). See Bett 2005.
- AP* Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Physicists* (*Adversus Mathematicos* 9–10). See Sextus Empiricus 2012.
- BCA* Śāntideva, *Bodhicaryāvatāra*. See Śāntideva, Sharma, and Prajñākaramati 1990.
- CŚ* Āryadeva, *Catuhśataka*. See Āryadeva and Sonam Rinchen 2008.
- MMK* Nāgārjuna, *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*. See Siderits and Katsura 2013.
- PH* Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*. See Sextus Empiricus 2000 (*Outlines of Scepticism*)
- PP* Candrakīrti, *Prasannapadā*. See Candrakīrti 1979.
- RA* Nāgārjuna, *Ratnāvalī*. See Hopkins 2007.
- SDV* Jñānagarbha, *Satyadvayavibhāga*. See Jñānagarbha 1987.
- VV* Nāgārjuna, *Vigrahavyāvartanī*. See Nāgārjuna 2010.

1 – See also McEvilley 1982, Garfield 1990, Dreyfus and Garfield 2011, and Mills 2016.

2 – Whenever I refer to ‘skepticism’, I refer to the Pyrrhonian skepticism of Sextus Empiricus. All translations of *PH* are taken from Annas and Barnes 2000.

3 – Unlike the Abhidharma contention that the *dharmas*, individual elements that collectively constitute the empirical world, are inherently real, Madhyamaka suggests even the *dharmas* are empty.

- 4 – See Neale 2014 for further comparisons between the two traditions.
- 5 – Unless indicated otherwise, as here, all translations of the *MMK* are from Siderits and Katsura 2013.
- 6 – As I will demonstrate in section 4, Sextus uses the very same tetralemma regarding causation.
- 7 – See, e.g., *AP* 1:210–232, *AP* 1:258–264, *PH* 2:18–20, and *PH* 2:48.
- 8 – See Mills 2016, pp. 46–47, for the parallels between the other horns of Agrippa’s trilemma in Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka.
- 9 – Note that appearances are more than perceptual. In the same way that honey appears sweet, two arguments may appear equally convincing. As Vogt explains, appearances can be linguistic, conceptual, and cognitive, too (2012, p. 659).
- 10 – Compare with context-dependent arguments in Pyrrhonism, e.g., *PH* 1:20 and *PH* 3:280–281.
- 11 – See *AL* 1:263–282 and *PH* 2:22–28 for Sextus’ arguments that the ‘person’ cannot be identified.

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