



PROJECT MUSE®

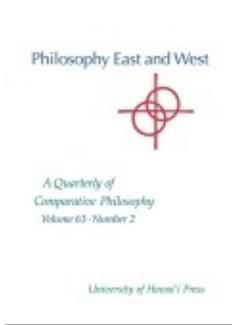
Pyrrhonism and the Mdhyamaka

Adrian Kuzminski

Philosophy East and West, Volume 57, Number 4, October 2007, pp. 482-511 (Article)

Published by University of Hawai'i Press

DOI: [10.1353/pew.2007.0052](https://doi.org/10.1353/pew.2007.0052)



Philosophy East and West

A Quarterly of
Comparative Philosophy
Volume 57 - Number 4

University of Hawai'i Press

➔ For additional information about this article

<http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/pew/summary/v057/57.4kuzminski.html>

PYRRHONISM AND THE MĀDHYAMAKA

Adrian Kuzminski

Department of Philosophy, Hartwick College

No one doubts that significant contact existed in ancient times between Indians and Greeks. Some kind of trade seems to have been carried on between the eastern Mediterranean basin and India from an early date, eventually taking advantage of monsoon winds carrying ships from the Red Sea across the Arabian Sea to the west coast of India.¹ The Persian empire by the sixth century B.C.E. included both northwestern India and the Ionian Greek city states of Asia Minor. Megasthenes, a Greek writer who lived at the court of King Candragupta in India as ambassador for Seleucus I around 300 B.C.E., recounted mythic tales of Dionysius and Hercules visiting India.² In 517 B.C.E., the Greek Scylax of Caryanda was sent by Darius I to explore the Indus River valley, and his now lost book, *Ges Periodos*, is the earliest known first-hand account of India by a Greek.³ The earliest Greek map to indicate India even approximately—by marking the Indus River—was drawn by Hecataeus of Miletus (ca. 560–490 B.C.E.).⁴ By the time of Eratosthenes' map of the world, drawn in Alexandria in the third century B.C.E., India appears in its familiar triangular shape, with the Indus and Ganges rivers and the Himalayan mountains accurately placed. The Indians knew the Greeks (and later, other peoples from the West) as the Yavanas or Yonas (probably a transliteration of "Ionians").⁵ The middle-length discourses of the Buddha include a revealing and plausible reference to the Yonas as a people distinguished by having only two classes, slaves and free men, though the authenticity of this text has been disputed.⁶

Strong evidence also exists of personal contact between ancient Greek and Indian thinkers, though the extent and depth of that contact is less clear. One of the best known instances is the intriguing case of Pyrrho of Elis, who traveled to India with a group of philosophers, including his older contemporary Anaxarchus, in the entourage of Alexander the Great in the fourth century B.C.E. Our source for this contact is Diogenes Laertius' life of Pyrrho in his *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*. Writing in the early third century C.E., but using older sources then still extant, including in this instance a certain otherwise unknown Ascanius of Abdera, Diogenes tells us:

Afterwards he [Pyrrho] joined Anaxarchus, whom he accompanied on his travels everywhere so that he even forgathered with the Indian Gymnosophists and with the Magi. This led him to adopt a most noble philosophy, to quote Ascanius of Abdera, taking the form of agnosticism and suspension of judgment. He denied that anything was honorable or dishonorable, just or unjust. And so, universally, he held that there is nothing really existent, but custom and convention govern human action for no single thing is in itself any more this than that.⁷

Diogenes reminds us that Pyrrho was commonly acknowledged as the founder of the ancient Greek skeptical school that bears his name.⁸ Although he wrote little

or nothing, his example appears to have inspired a powerful tradition carried on by men such as Timon of Phlius, Aenesidemus, Agrippa, and Sextus Empiricus. Pyrrhonian skepticism is marked by a scrupulous effort to distinguish the non-evident from the evident in human experience. Pyrrhonists were skilled in refuting claims about what is non-evident, claims they called dogmatic (from *dokein*, to think, in the sense of “to suppose”). They did not simply deny such claims; they called instead for something quite different: a suspension of judgment about them. Suspension of judgment in turn led, by their testimony, to liberation from the demands of the dogmatic claims and counterclaims in question. The subject, no longer constrained by the imperatives of such claims, is said to gain an astonishing release from suffering, a new kind of independence or tranquility (*ataraxia*). Pyrrhonists distinguished themselves from the other major ancient Greek skeptical school, the Academic skeptics (including Arcesilaus, Carneades, Philo, and Cicero). This school, which seemed to have arisen at least in part in reaction to early Pyrrhonism, dominated Plato’s Academy for various periods, but traced its origins back to Socrates, not Pyrrho. Academic skeptics seem to have adopted suspension of judgment with regard to dogmatic claims, but apparently not to the degree demanded by the Pyrrhonists. Details of these intra-skeptical disputes are mostly lacking, but it seems that the Pyrrhonists went further than the Academics in their search for liberation. They seem to have focused more consistently on suspension of judgment as a necessary condition for gaining liberation, even to the point of insisting upon suspending judgment about their own suspension of judgment.

The claim by Diogenes Laertius that Pyrrho was led to adopt his “most noble philosophy” after contacts with Indian sages, along with the emphasis in certain schools in India on suspending belief as a precondition of liberation (as we shall see below), suggests that a closer investigation into the Indian connection might be illuminating for Pyrrhonian philosophy, and for ancient South Asian thought and practice as well. The Buddha himself, like the Pyrrhonists but unlike the Academic skeptics, took a radically undogmatic stance with regard to metaphysical or speculative beliefs, famously neither affirming nor denying them, but suspending judgment about them and concentrating instead on practices aimed at easing suffering. What follows here is an attempt to explore a possible connection between ancient South Asian and Greek thought through an exercise in comparative philosophy, focusing on notably similar language found in a number of Mādhyamaka and Pyrrhonist texts.

First, some background. Pyrrho’s role as a potential link between Indian philosophy and Greek skepticism has been duly noted by most scholars, but they have generally downplayed its significance. Richard Bett, in his recent study *Pyrrho, His Antecedents, and His Legacy*, has argued at length that Pyrrho was not even a Pyrrhonist. Any connection through Pyrrho with South Asian thought, Bett says, was highly unlikely, mostly due to difficulties of translation, particularly “at a detailed doctrinal level.”⁹ While translation difficulties should not be minimized, neither should the possibility of adequate translation be dismissed, especially given the long history of contact between the Mediterranean and India; we just do not know enough to draw

conclusions on this point.¹⁰ And the Pyrrhonist insight, as I shall argue, is not a “doctrinal” matter at all, but a distinctive attitude that can be variously if indirectly communicated. Bett’s more important claim, that Pyrrho was no Pyrrhonist, would preclude any role for him as a transmitter of Indian ideas that might have been crucial for the later Pyrrhonian tradition. His case rests mainly on a reading of a short fragment from Aristocles of Messana, a second-century C.E. Peripatetic, quoted by the church father Eusebius in the fourth century. The quotation itself paraphrases a summary of Pyrrho’s views attributed to his disciple, Timon. The relevant passage is translated by Bett as follows:

It is necessary above all to consider our own knowledge; for if it is our nature to know nothing, there is no need to enquire any further into other things. There were some among the ancients, too, who made this statement, whom Aristotle has argued against. Pyrrho of Elis was also a powerful advocate of such a position. He himself had left nothing in writing; his pupil Timon, however, says that the person who is to be happy must look to these three points: first, what are things like by nature? Second, in what way ought we to be disposed towards them? and finally, what will be the result for those who are so disposed? He [Timon] says that he [Pyrrho] reveals that things are equally indifferent and unstable and indeterminate; for this reason neither our sensations nor our opinions tell the truth or lie. For this reason, then, we should not trust them, but should be without opinions and without inclinations and without wavering, saying about each single thing that it no more is than is not or both is and is not or neither is nor is not.¹¹

Bett, following the commentary on this passage by Long and Sedley,¹² notes that Aristocles attributes to Pyrrho the dogmatic view “that any given sensation, or any given opinion, is neither true nor false; and this is the crux of my argument. . . .”¹³ Bett concludes:

[H]e [Pyrrho] holds a metaphysical position—reality is inherently indeterminate; his prescription that we should avoid opinions is based precisely on his adherence to this metaphysical position, which . . . he may be understood to regard as itself *more* than mere opinion. He also tells us to employ a form of words reflecting the utter indefiniteness of things. And again, this is not a matter of our being told to refrain from any attempt to describe how things are—as the *epoche* of later Pyrrhonism would lead us to expect. Rather we are being told that we *should* describe how things are, namely by using this complicated formula reflecting utter indefiniteness. . . . Pyrrho’s recommended form of speech does involve a commitment concerning the real natures of things; it attributes no definite characteristics to things precisely because it expresses a commitment to the thesis that, in their real natures, things *have* no definite characteristics. (Bett’s emphasis)¹⁴

This is not the place to debate Bett’s lengthy and, by his own admission, sometimes “tortuous”¹⁵ arguments in favor of his thesis; they are based largely on his interpretation of the fragment from Aristocles, whose meaning and reliability remain subject to dispute. Aristocles, whose lost history of philosophy Eusebius quotes, was a Peripatetic philosopher, what Pyrrhonists would call a dogmatist, one clearly unaccepting of the Pyrrhonian attitude and, more important, not unlikely to misunderstand it even if trying to be accurate. Pyrrhonian skepticism seems to make little

or no sense to dogmatists; they can understand it, it seems, only as a negative version of belief, as nihilism. And indeed, Aristocles follows Aristotle and identifies skeptics as those who hold that “it is our nature to know nothing,” and that “neither our sensations nor our opinions tell the truth or lie.” Aristocles misses the key point that the Pyrrhonists did not claim to know nothing. They claimed direct knowledge at least of appearances, of our direct sensations and thoughts, and of reasonable inferences from these to other appearances equally direct, with whom they can be reliably if not absolutely correlated—as smoke can reliably if not absolutely be correlated with fire. This is all quite apart from whether or not any of these appearances might also be understood to “tell the truth or lie” about what does not appear. What Pyrrhonists questioned were not appearances as such, but various judgments and beliefs held *about* appearances. As Diogenes puts it in his life of Pyrrho, speaking as if he were himself a Pyrrhonist: “For we admit that we see, and we recognize that we think this or that, but how we see or how we think we know not.”¹⁶ Aristocles in this light seems a poor witness concerning Pyrrho and the Pyrrhonists, one whose own dogmatic mode of thought appears to prevent his understanding of the Pyrrhonists on their own terms. It is hard to see how invoking him can be used to discount the well informed and sympathetic testimony of Diogenes.

The point of Pyrrho’s advocating a “form of words reflecting the utter indefiniteness of things” is precisely that such a form of words is not descriptive, cannot be descriptive, since what is indeterminate cannot by definition be described. It is not all of reality that is indeterminate; it is only *how* it is that we see and *how* it is that we think, et cetera, that is (or rather, appears to be) indeterminate. Appearances really appear; it is just that we do not seem to have a clue how or why they do so. For Pyrrhonian skeptics there is no using words to describe some reality of indeterminateness; rather they use words to liberate themselves and others from trying to describe the indeterminate as if it were determinate, that is, some kind of specific object of knowledge. Asserting that such words must somehow anyway be descriptive and indicative of something, as Bett does, only begs the question, which is whether or not language can have nonassertive, nondescriptive, liberative uses. Like Aristocles, Bett imposes a dogmatic standard, that words must be descriptive of something, or make no sense. For Bett, and many others, nonfactual, nondescriptive, nonindicative language, to be meaningful, must somehow be factual, descriptive, and indicative. Indeterminateness must be something, or nothing.¹⁷

It seems to have been obvious to the tradition that followed Pyrrho and hailed him as their progenitor that the unusual form of speech apparently recommended by Pyrrho had indeed a peculiar and important use, as we shall see later, but not as an indicative assertion of fact. If Pyrrho’s real project was to “describe how things are,” as Bett and others claim, simple indicative language would have sufficed; there would have been no need for the “special form of words” Bett tries so hard to explain away, the “complex,” paradoxical, nonindicative language attributed to Pyrrho that lies at the very heart of his philosophy. This nonindicative language proceeds through caveat, a performative not an indicative mode. After checkmating their dogmatic opponents by posing contradictory arguments, Pyrrhonists warn all concerned

that they, as Diogenes puts it, “themselves laid down nothing definitely, not even the laying down of nothing.”¹⁸ There were a series of such well-known Pyrrhonian caveats, including some listed by Diogenes: “‘Not more (one thing than another),’ and ‘Every saying has its corresponding opposite.’”¹⁹ The effect of such a caveat, as Diogenes puts it, is “that after destroying others it turns round and destroys itself, like a purge which drives the substance out and then in its turn is itself eliminated and destroyed.”²⁰ This self-canceling move was to the Pyrrhonists their distinguishing feature, the mark of the mature or fully developed practice of suspension of judgment. The clear consensus of Diogenes and the sources he quotes seems to be that this was present and evident first of all in Pyrrho. The Pyrrhonist’s caveats are reminders to all that his or her counterarguments are neutralizing, not definitive, insofar as it seems to remain open to either side to advance further arguments. Rather than claim victory, then, or admit defeat, the skeptic suggests that the game be suspended. Such caveats were used by the Pyrrhonists to preserve suspension of judgment, making clear their skepticism about pursuing the “how” questions ranging beyond what can be directly experienced.

It is curious that Bett and others advance a philosophical view of Pyrrho that stands in direct contradiction not only to the whole later Pyrrhonian tradition (as he acknowledges), but also (as we shall see) to the South Asian schools that may have decisively influenced Pyrrho. It is curious because later Pyrrhonists were nothing if not alive to an extraordinary degree to the nuances of dogmatism and supposedly determinate beliefs, and it seems implausible that they, with access to important sources about Pyrrho unavailable to modern scholars, would have retrospectively chosen what, in Bett’s view, would have been a rather conventional dogmatic thinker as their progenitor. As Bett puts it: “Pyrrho’s philosophy, understood as I have proposed, will turn out to be by no means extraordinary for its time and place.”²¹ Why, then, would later Pyrrhonists have bothered with Pyrrho at all? There would have been nothing “Pyrrhonian” about him to justify their interest. What I wish to explore, by contrast, is what I suspect remains the more plausible and fruitful thesis, namely that Pyrrho was indeed the progenitor of the tradition that carried on in his name, and that a significant and perhaps determinative influence in the creation of that extraordinary tradition came from his contacts with Indian sages, just as Diogenes Laertius reports. This is not to say that Pyrrhonism sprang up fully engaged in all respects with Pyrrho, but it is to suggest that the core of mature Pyrrhonist practice—suspension of judgment about beliefs (including a suspension of judgment about beliefs about suspension of judgment), coupled with the consequent experience of *ataraxia*—seems likely to have originated with Pyrrho in the West, and very plausibly to have been derived by him from his Indian sources.

Let us turn to the “Indian connection.” Perhaps the most important discussion to date of Indian influences on Pyrrho is to be found in Everard Flintoff’s seminal 1980 article, “Pyrrho and India.”²² Flintoff makes a strong case for the importance of Indian influences on Pyrrho. As he puts it:

If we view the philosophy of Pyrrho not as a series of atomically separate positions some of which could have been taken from equally detached positions in earlier Greek philosophy, but as a rather idiosyncratic organic whole then there are some remarkable affinities with one or more of the schools which seem to have been in existence in India by the time that Pyrrho paid his visit there and that it is at least possible that Pyrrho derived the general shape of his philosophy from these.²³

In particular, Flintoff notes the similarity between Pyrrho's agnosticism and suspension of judgment and the Buddha's refusal to countenance beliefs about the nature of things, including his insistence that such beliefs were to be neither affirmed nor denied. In both Buddhism and Pyrrhonian skepticism, Flintoff points out, some kind of liberation from suffering is the goal, and it is achieved by resisting assent to any identification with extreme or dogmatic views or beliefs, whether affirmative or negative, that go beyond what is self-evident.²⁴ Such views overvalue or undervalue ordinary experience, or phenomena, and so either way lead to the anxiety and suffering that follow upon most such mismatches between speculation and experience. As a practical therapy and antidote to such views, both Buddhists and Pyrrhonists appear to advocate steering a middle course through life, taking experiences or phenomena at face value, and avoiding unsubstantiated beliefs or conclusions, neither affirming nor denying them. Neither is there some ultra-reality underlying phenomena, they suggest, nor are phenomena nothing at all; rather they seem to be a curious sort of semi-determinative, semi-indeterminative kind of experience.

Flintoff emphasizes "the antithetical approach towards all [things] metaphysical, indeed perhaps all assertion,"²⁵ which he finds to be shared to a unique degree by Pyrrhonists with Buddhist and—to some extent—other South Asian schools. It is what sets Pyrrhonists apart, he says, not so much as a technique of disputation (for other Greek schools, too, were disputatious), but as a technique used as a means to liberation (rather than victory over an opponent). This, Flintoff says, is "at the very heart of the matter."²⁶ Greek philosophers before Pyrrho used many dialectical techniques to counter the arguments of their opponents, but not, it seems, for the purpose of suspending beliefs. And while some earlier philosophers, especially Democritus and his followers, emphasized some form of personal tranquility as a goal, they very much remained dogmatic philosophers with strong views about non-evident reality (atoms and the void, etc.). Democritus' favorite term for this goal was *euthymia* (cheerfulness), and it seems likely that he understood it to result from holding the "correct" dogmatic views, such as his own. Indeed, any dogmatist would expect to derive personal satisfaction or well-being from his or her views, and Democritus seems to have emphasized this. But what no dogmatist could do, according to the Pyrrhonists, is achieve *ataraxia*. Although some scholars have tried to link Democritean *euthymia* with *ataraxia*, there seems to be no clear evidence that Democritus (or any philosopher before Pyrrho) used the term *ataraxia* in anything like the Pyrrhonist sense.²⁷

What was that sense? It is important to see that *ataraxia* is not simply cheerfulness or good spirits, or self-satisfaction, which indeed can accompany the adoption of various beliefs; it is rather a certain unusual and profound freedom from agitation

or anxiety, a special tranquility that follows only from having no beliefs at all. *Euthymia*, insofar as it is rooted in a “correct” view, in an attachment, is vulnerable to the refutation of that view, hence its instability; for Pyrrhonists it is a symptom of a problem, not a solution. But *ataraxia*, free of any link to a view or attachment, escapes this burden; it is a quite different response to the claims of beliefs, and it may be for this reason that *ataraxia* was introduced by the Pyrrhonists in place of *euthymia* and other similar terms, such as *eudaimonia*. *Ataraxia* is not the elation of finding the hidden “truth” underlying experience, nor the security offered by a belief in such a truth, but is instead a liberation from the urge to seek such “truths” or beliefs at all. Insofar as *ataraxia* follows only upon such a suspension of belief, and not upon the adoption of any belief, it could not have been experienced by dogmatists like the Epicureans, Stoics, Aristotelians, Platonists, Academic Sceptics, et cetera. *Ataraxia* is not achieved by replacing an apparently discredited belief with a supposedly better one, but only by suspending *all* beliefs. This sense of *ataraxia* seems to have been what Pyrrhonists thought distinguished them from dogmatists, including Epicureans and Stoics, who later adopted the term but continued to presume, as in the case of *euthymia*, that it could be realized in a dogmatic context.

On at least one point of technique, however, Flintoff seems to have overstated his case. He argues that the use of the quadrilemma by Greek skeptics, prominent in later writers such as Sextus Empiricus, was “without precedent in Greek philosophical or indeed any other thinking.”²⁸ He suggests it was derived from India, where it was common among Buddhists, Jains, and others, possibly including as well the early Indian skeptic Sañjaya. The quadrilemma expands logical space from simply p or $\sim p$ to include, as well, both p and $\sim p$, and neither p nor $\sim p$. In objection to Flintoff’s claim, R. J. Hankinson points out that “there is no need to suppose that it [the tetralemma, or quadrilemma] is of eastern provenance.”²⁹ He reminds us that Aristotle, writing before Alexander’s expedition to the east, refers to the quadrilemma in the *Metaphysics* (1028a). Hankinson translates Aristotle’s complaint about anyone who uses it as follows: “investigation with this person is pointless, since he says nothing. For he says neither yes nor no, but both yes and no, and then he denies these, saying neither yes nor no.”³⁰ Aristotle does not consider, however, that saying “neither yes nor no” may be the point for some.

That the quadrilemma can be found in both Greece and India before Pyrrho’s time would seem to preclude his role as its agent of transmission. As Flintoff reminds us, however, a number of early Greek philosophers are reported to have traveled widely in the east, including Thales, Solon, Lycurgus, Cleobulus, Pythagoras, Eudoxus, and Democritus (who hailed, like Ascanius, from Abdera, and, according to Philo of Athens, was the philosopher of whom Pyrrho was “most fond”³¹). Most of these figures went to Egypt and Persia (where they might have met Indians at court, in the markets, or at the temples), but Pythagoras and Democritus, at least, are said to have gone all the way to India before Pyrrho.³² Plutarch tells us of at least one report, by a certain Aristocrates, recording the voyages of Lycurgus “into Spain, Africa, and the Indies, and his conferences there with the Gymnosophists.”³³ Herodotus gives us our account of the voyage of Scylax to India,³⁴ and tells us that “the

number of Indians is greater than any other people I know of.”³⁵ These and likely other possibilities for contact and transmission of ideas seem to have existed very early on,³⁶ as we have noted, and it would seem hardly surprising that Aristotle, who had one of the earliest and largest private libraries,³⁷ might have been familiar with the quadrilemma from some early source he does not acknowledge. The question of its origin is put back, not resolved. This hardly affects Flintoff’s larger thesis of East-West contact, however, nor the key role, following Diogenes, that he ascribes to Pyrrho. What is perhaps more important about Flintoff’s claim is his emphasis on the use to which the quadrilemma and other antinomial techniques are put, namely, to bring about liberation, and his suggestion that it is these kinds of techniques with this kind of purpose that are shared by Pyrrhonists on the one hand and Buddhists and other South Asian traditions on the other. It is in this regard that Pyrrho remains the possible agent of transmission between them.

It is central to both Pyrrhonist and Buddhist as well as several other schools of Indian thought, notably Jains and forms of Vedānta, to formulate various antinomies in order to make them disappear, or cancel out one another, the aim and consequence of this process being to provide an opportunity for a certain tranquility to supervene. Suspension of judgment about non-evident things in the context of liberation is already evident in the Buddha’s striking refusal to speculate about such matters. “Now the harnessing of doubt to a goal of this sort,” Flintoff says, “seems to me to be without precedent in Greek thought.”³⁸ Before Pyrrho, Flintoff says, the point was to confuse one’s adversary, clearing the way for the promulgation of a competing view or belief: “In the pre-Socratics, the Sophists and the Dialogues of Plato, *aporia* is merely a means to an end. In Pyrrho, on the contrary, it is something like an end in itself—it is the only way by which to attain the new level of tranquil consciousness.”³⁹

The Socrates of the Platonic dialogues, one might object, may have had a sense of *aporia* as an end in itself, as a necessary therapy for dissolving dogmatic views, leading to a kind of tranquility that Socrates personally seems to have displayed. This may have been a claim later made about Socrates by Academic skeptics, beginning with Arcesilaus, as Harald Thorsrud suggests in his “Ancient Greek Scepticism.”⁴⁰ But, as far as I know, this is nowhere explicitly stated about Socrates by later Greek writers; rather it seems at best left as an implication to be drawn from his example. And Socrates famously claimed to know something, namely that he knew nothing, and so had a kind of conceit, or passion, a dogmatic belief. This, as we have suggested, is the mark of the Academic rather than the Pyrrhonian skeptic, with the latter claiming that it leads to anxiety rather than tranquility. Flintoff points out that we have to wait for Pyrrho’s use of the term *ataraxia* (freedom from passion; calmness, tranquility) to make this result explicit in Greek thought. He reminds us, moreover, that a complex vocabulary for states variously free of belief (*ahimsā*, *advaita*, *nirvāṇa*, *ānanda*, *samādhi*, *bodhi*, *chit*, *mokṣa*, *sat*) existed early on in India among virtually all the major schools.⁴¹

Flintoff also points out that there existed in India a developed and autonomous skeptical tradition associated with the obscure figure of Sañjaya Belatthiputta,

roughly a contemporary of the Buddha, which alone might have been able to inform Pyrrho's philosophy. We are told by Diogenes only that Pyrrho spoke with "gymnosophists" (literally, naked philosophers, perhaps *sādhus* or itinerant holy men of some sort) and "magi" (or magicians, or wise men, or sages). The latter might have been anyone, including Sañjayan skeptics. Our meager knowledge of Sañjayan skepticism comes mostly from a few obscure Jain and Buddhist texts written centuries later, particularly Silanka's commentary on the *Sūtrakṛtāṅga*, where, Flintoff points out, sixty-seven different types of Skeptic are distinguished.⁴² According to one scholar, Hiralal Jain, "Sañjaya Belatthiputta was the preacher of *Ajñāvāda* or Agnosticism. He says: if "you asked me, 'Is there another world?' and if I believed that there was, I should tell you so. But that is not what I say. I do not say that is so; nor do I say that it is not so."⁴³

In addition, Flintoff points out that in matters of practice, or everyday life, Pyrrho and his disciples introduced into Greece a phenomenon common in India but previously absent, rare, or marginal in Greece, namely that of wandering holy men, often possessed of special powers, indifferent to pain and suffering.⁴⁴ Pyrrho himself is said by Diogenes Laertius to have gone off wandering, and to have endured "septic salves and surgical and caustic remedies" for a wound without "so much as a frown."⁴⁵ We might add Diogenes' story in his life of Anaxarchus, Pyrrho's mentor and traveling companion to India: when later captured and condemned to death by his enemy Nicocreon, the tyrant of Cyprus, whom he had once insulted, Anaxarchus bit off his tongue and spat it at the tyrant, preempting his order that it be cut out prior to his execution.⁴⁶ Scholars have traditionally dismissed such tales as apocryphal flights of fancy, but they are a staple of Indian life, ancient and modern. It seems unlikely that Pyrrho and his philosophical companions introduced into Greece a philosophical "lifestyle" entirely without precedent there, given Diogenes the Cynic and other earlier Greek "eccentrics," but their Indian experiences could only have promoted further interest in what we might call "alternative" lifestyles.⁴⁷ We see this tradition of eccentric "wise men" continuing in the ancient classical West with popular figures such as Apollonius of Tyana (or even Jesus of Nazareth).

An interesting item of evidence not mentioned by Flintoff is found in the account of Indian philosophers given by Megasthenes as cited by Strabo in his *Geography*. Megasthenes, in speaking about certain Brahmins, is reported as having said

that they [the Brahmins, *Brachmanes*] converse more about death than anything else, for they believe that the life here is, as it were, that of a babe still in the womb, and that death, to those who have devoted themselves to philosophy, is birth into the true life, that is, the happy life; and that they therefore discipline themselves most of all to be ready for death; and that they believe that nothing that happens to mankind is good or bad, for otherwise some would not be grieved and others delighted by the same things, both having dream-like notions, and that the same persons cannot at one time grieve and then in turn change and be delighted by the same things.⁴⁸

Megasthenes was an Ionian, an older contemporary of Pyrrho's, who was sent on several embassies by Seleucus I between 302 and 291 B.C.E. to the court of the

Chandragupta, founder of the Maurya Empire in India.⁴⁹ He seems to have spent considerable time in India and wrote a general account of the country, used extensively by Strabo. His remarks, transmitted through Strabo, suggest that recognizing the relativism of good and bad, joy and sorrow, and being freed of them, may have been linked in India by some philosophers, at least, to some kind of suspension of notions or opinions and avoidance of authority. Opinions or notions (*hypolepsis*) are not said to be nothing, nor are they nonsensical, but are compared to dreams, generally believed to be compelling realities as long as they are being dreamt, if not afterwards. Megasthenes, it seems, can plausibly be read as describing a practice based on suspending claims made for various opinions touted as beliefs. It seems apparent that the aim, as with later Pyrrhonists, is not annihilation of the opponent through refutation of his or her beliefs, which presupposes the continued necessity of belief, but rather some kind of liberation from belief in what turns out to be mere opinion, insofar as it can be shown that opinion seems to entail contradiction (as in the suggested absurdity of believing that the same things can differently affect the same persons). The former approach suggests skepticism as a negative form of dogmatic assertion (“I know that you and I don’t know”), while the latter suggests skepticism as a positive therapeutic practice (“we can seek freedom from belief”). In this kind of therapeutic practice, the raw material—the opinions or the dreams, or, generally, the phenomena—remains; what is dissipated is one or more beliefs about that raw material.

Of course, this is not to suggest that the so-called Brahmins that Megasthenes describes freed themselves entirely from beliefs, only that they seem to have practiced a method that could be used to that end, and that could also have been observed and adopted by a visiting Greek like Pyrrho, who was in India not long before Megasthenes. Nor is it to suggest that South Asian argumentative techniques at this time were as formalized as those of the Greeks. For that evidence is weaker, compared to Greece, but argument and counterargument were clearly present, and that would have been sufficient to prompt the radical conclusion (drawn, it seems, by the Buddha, and perhaps by Indian skeptics and others) of suspension of judgment as a means to liberation, rather than as a means for pursuing a search for the “truth” about what is non-evident. It may have been that Pyrrho, seeing such a practice, might have recognized how the powerful argumentative arsenal developed by the Greeks could also be harnessed to liberation.

One practice on which Flintoff is silent, however, is meditation, also common to all the main Indian traditions, and so central to them that its apparent absence in the West in ancient times should seem surprising if we are to take Indian influences seriously. Pyrrho and his philosophical companions, with all their apparent curiosity, would likely not have failed to notice the unusual and striking activities associated with what we know were then existing varieties of Indian meditative practice. While extensive handbooks of meditative practices were developed in India and elsewhere in South Asia in ancient times (e.g., the *Visuddhimagga* and the *Vimuttimagga*),⁵⁰ the relative absence in the West of these particular types of practices is notable, until their introduction from the East in modern times. Of course, long before modern

times there existed in the West a variety of spiritual practices (prayer, chanting, isolation, mortification, etc.), especially among hermits, monastics, and mystics. But such practices rarely included, it seems, the particular combination of specific postures with specific techniques of concentration characteristic of South Asian meditative practices. Perhaps the closest approximation may be found in the practices of the Greek Orthodox Hesychasts, where “the body was to be held immovable for a long time, the chin pressed against the breast, the breath held, the eyes turned in, and so on.”⁵¹

On the other hand, the magicians and sages of the Hellenistic and Roman eras post-Pyrrho may well represent only the visible tip of a hidden iceberg of Eastern meditative practice that did get through, at least in part. We know that Plotinus, for one, practiced some kind of spiritual self-discipline that informed his indifference to suffering, enabled his fortitude, and produced in him ecstatic states perhaps comparable to those of Eastern practitioners. Porphyry, his student, tells us in his “Life” of Plotinus that Plotinus studied in Alexandria under Ammonius, through whom “he became eager to investigate the Persian methods and the system adopted among the Indians.”⁵²

In any event, Flintoff’s thesis—that the origins of Pyrrhonian skepticism likely lay in India—rests, as we have seen, on a number of “points of similarity” between early Indian thought, particularly but not only Buddhism, and what later became Pyrrhonian skepticism. The plausibility of this thesis depends on connecting the dots of otherwise apparently unrelated pieces of evidence. These points of similarity, as Flintoff realized, constitute a kind of evidence of possible direct influence strong enough on its own to be worthy of serious consideration. Insofar as the possible influence of Indian sages on Pyrrho remains an open question, a further comparison of Indian thought, particularly Buddhism, with Pyrrhonism remains relevant. In what follows I wish to expand further the points of similarity between Indian thought and Greek skepticism, to add and connect some dots in addition to those outlined by Flintoff. I am particularly concerned to draw out points of comparison between the Indian tradition of suspension of judgment for which we have the most evidence, namely Mādhyamaka Buddhism, and the most notable Greek tradition of the same kind, Pyrrhonism, with regard to their most important common features. Of course, doubts about Indian influences on Pyrrho have continued in spite of Flintoff’s arguments. One recent scholar, Thomas McEvilley, has noted the similarities between the Mādhyamaka and Pyrrhonism, but he questions the connection.

In his work *The Shape of Ancient Thought: Comparative Studies in Greek and Indian Philosophies*, McEvilley, as part of a comprehensive and detailed cultural comparison, compares a number of passages from Pyrrhonist and Mādhyamaka texts.⁵³ “It is hard,” he concludes, “to identify any significant difference between either the methods or the stated purposes of Pyrrhonist and Mādhyamaka dialectic. If the pacification of conceptual proliferation (Candrakīrti) and the suppression of belief in real entities or their absence (Nāgārjuna) constitute *nirvāṇa* for an Indian or a Chinese it is hard to say why they should not constitute *nirvāṇa* for a Greek as well.”⁵⁴ McEvilley’s work in this regard complements and supplements the textual

comparisons to be offered in the present article. He goes on, however, to discount the Indian influences on Pyrrho and Pyrrhonism:

There is a great temptation to say that Pyrrhon imported into Greece alien and pessimistic teachings from the East. . . . But in fact it seems certain, if one attends to the Greek tradition as a whole, that Pyrrhon must have imbibed the main attitudes of his philosophy from Greek teachers, before the visit to India. The position he came to teach was clearly in the Democritean lineage. . . .⁵⁵

McEvelley points out in detail that dialectical argumentation of various sorts was common in Greece as a method for criticizing beliefs, and that some kind of notion of tranquility as a goal of philosophy was developed there as well, especially by Democritus and his followers, including Pyrrho's mentor Anaxarchus. "It is clear, then," he concludes,

that the essentials of Pyrrhonism were already to be found among the followers of Socrates and Democritus in the late fifth and early fourth centuries B.C., well before Alexander's visit to India. If Pyrrhon encountered such doctrines in India, they must simply have reminded him of doctrines that had been common in Greece for a hundred and fifty years and which his own teachers had taught him.⁵⁶

But, as Flintoff emphasizes, it is the harnessing of the techniques of suspension of judgment to the goal of liberation that is the key to Pyrrhonism, and there is no evidence that that occurred in Greece before Pyrrho. It is not at all clear, for example, that Democritus' *euthymia* (cheerfulness) can be taken to mean tranquility in the sense of Pyrrho's *ataraxia*, not least because of Democritus' own explicit dogmatism, as noted earlier. There remains Diogenes' unambiguous testimony, which we have no reason to question, that Pyrrho was led to "adopt" his philosophy because of his contacts in India. McEvelley offers no evidence for downgrading Diogenes' testimony. His unsubstantiated counterclaim is that Diogenes "succumbed" to a "great temptation" by crediting Pyrrho with finding the origins of his philosophy in India.⁵⁷ No doubt Pyrrho brought to India a strong sense of dialectical argumentation and a strong sense that philosophy ought to result in some kind of personal transformation—something for which earlier Greek philosophers seem to have been searching, though not necessarily finding. And it seems a reasonable hypothesis that he may have concluded from his experiences with Indian sages, as Flintoff suggested, that argumentation could be used for the purpose of liberation from all beliefs into tranquility, and that he brought this novel synthesis of method and goal—already practiced in India by Buddhists, at least—back to Greece. McEvelley's characterization of Mādhyamaka-Pyrrhonist teaching as "pessimistic" and as a "doctrine" suggests a misunderstanding of these teachings. There is nothing either pessimistic or doctrinal about liberation from beliefs; as the Buddha taught, liberation is an extraordinary, positive release from suffering.

What is pessimistic, in the end, is attachment to dogma, to belief, to doctrine. Before Pyrrho, it seems any kind of liberation in Greece remained predicated on sorting out various wrong dogmas, not in hopes of gaining freedom from dogma as such, but rather in hopes of finding the right dogma or belief in place of all the wrong

ones. But insofar as any satisfaction obtained by a belief in what is non-evident remains vulnerable to counterposed doubts, as it seems to be, no such certainty can be any kind of liberation at all in the end, but must rather itself be a form of bondage and a cause of pain. Seeking liberation through one or another belief turns out to be self-defeating. Pyrrho, like the Buddha, taught the opposite: that liberation was possible only through suspending all dogma, all belief.

We shall now turn to see what this means. Diogenes' "Life of Pyrrho" and Sextus Empiricus' *Outlines of Scepticism* are among the principal sources for the skepticism they attribute to Pyrrho's inspiration, and Nāgārjuna's *Mūlamādhyamakakārikā* (*The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way*) and Candrakīrti's *Mādhyamakāvātāra* (*The Entry into the Middle Way*) are among the principal sources for the Mādhyamaka critique inspired by the Buddha. Although these texts were all written in the early centuries of the common era, hundreds of years after their acknowledged masters, Pyrrho and the Buddha, respectively, they have become central in many ways to their respective traditions. The practices they describe were almost certainly in existence centuries before, and it is clear that they incorporate much earlier material.⁵⁸ Comparing these texts (as I do below) will bring out important points of agreement in five key areas vis-à-vis Pyrrhonian skepticism and Buddhist Mādhyamaka. The five key areas are: method, belief, suspension of judgment, tranquility (*ataraxia*) or awakening (*nirvāṇa*), and appearances. I will take up each of these areas in turn.

Let us begin, then, with method, and with Sextus Empiricus, a second-century C.E. Greek physician and Pyrrhonist, and author of the principal and by far most extensive Pyrrhonist texts that have come down to us: "[W]hat we investigate," he says, "is not what is apparent but what is said about what is apparent."⁵⁹ What is called into question here is not language as such, but its use to try to speak about or somehow explain what is otherwise merely apparent. Sextus goes on to tell us, more expansively: "Skepticism is 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 the equipollence [*isotheneia*] in the opposed objects and accounts, we come first to suspension of judgment and afterwards to tranquillity."⁶⁰ Pyrrhonian skepticism is not a philosophy in any conventional sense; it is not a dogma, belief, or creed, or an attempt in any sense to establish or disestablish some kind of conceptual foundation for truth or knowledge; it is rather an "ability" (*dunamis*) to do something, a certain capacity to respond to events positively and therapeutically, a way to live. This therapeutic ability, Sextus tells us, depends upon opposing things that appear (*phenomenon*) and are thought of (*noomenon*), that is, which are objects (*pragmata*) and accounts (*logoi*) of these objects, resulting in suspension of judgment (*epochē*) and tranquility (*ataraxia*). Its purpose is to relieve or cure subjects of the suffering caused by the consequences of their beliefs in non-apparent things. And, Sextus makes plain, this is done through the peculiar techniques of questioning and suspension of judgment, after which follows tranquility. These profound and liberating consequences are said to transform dramatically the subject fortunate enough to realize them.

If we look at a classic text of Mādhyamaka Buddhism, such as *The Entry into the Middle Way* by the seventh-century C.E. Buddhist monk Candrakīrti—who claimed no more than to explain his master Nāgārjuna, the second-century C.E. founder of the Mādhyamaka, “like the dew which coaxes into bloom the buds of an evening lotus”⁶¹—we find language on method that Sextus could have written: “An opponent is refuted by perceiving that each and every response he offers is nothing but an unsubstantiated thesis.”⁶² A response deserving refutation, according to Candrakīrti, is any one that goes beyond the self-evidence of immediate sensations and thoughts: “Understanding based on apprehension by any of the six unimpaired faculties is true by the standard of everyday experience, while any remaining reified concepts are false according to this same criterion.”⁶³ Both Pyrrhonism and the Mādhyamaka, it seems, accept the immediate evidence of the senses and thoughts, and nothing else, at face value. They both resist going beyond immediate sensations and thoughts—or such that might be conditionally but plausibly inferred from them⁶⁴—to make any claims about the hidden nature of appearances, or of abstract or reified appearances, or of matters in any other way construed to be beyond or behind, above or below, appearances.

Let me clarify some key terms. I use the term “appearances” to include thoughts as well as sensations, mental as well as physical appearances, as do Pyrrhonism and the Mādhyamaka; each tradition, as we shall see, considers both to be self-evident insofar as they actually appear, that is, are present, not absent. The senses include the traditional five modes of sights, sounds, touches, tastes, and smells, while thoughts include what are commonly understood as the “mental objects” of imagination and memory, such as the thought of a unicorn or the recollection of one’s mother. Together, both traditions consider the physical senses plus thoughts to constitute six “senses,” as it were. For the Mādhyamaka any sensation or thought presents itself as an object (*viṣaya*). There is a certain ambiguity in Greek usage, where the word *phenomena* (to appear, to shine forth) is often used to indicate not only visual sensation alone, or sensations alone, but also to indicate thoughts in addition to sensations, where both are understood as appearances; it is this broader meaning, common to both schools, that is important to keep in mind. Both schools also agree that while sensations and thoughts are appearances, they can all too easily and mistakenly be taken as evidence of various hyper-realities. These hyper-realities (including their negations) are expressed as beliefs about mere appearances—as when we identify certain sensations as having magical or occult powers, or certain thoughts as representing pure concepts, categories, forms, or other abstracted or reified entities. In such cases, the beliefs in question are taken to refer to something other than or beyond what is apparently real.⁶⁵

The point, as Diogenes Laertius puts it, is that “The apparent is the skeptics’ criterion.”⁶⁶ It is what is “primitive” or “given” in our experience. And just as the liberation of tranquility or *ataraxia* is central for the Pyrrhonists, so does Candrakīrti proclaim a liberation into wisdom, which we know to be ultimately equivalent to the full awakening (*bodhi*) of a buddha, that is, *nirvāṇa*, or *samādhi*, the “tranquility” recognized under a variety of names in the Indian traditions. “Our arguments,” he

says, “are just like [a reflection] through which one becomes aware of the possibility of cleansing [spiritual ignorance from] the face of wisdom.”⁶⁷ In method, we find that Pyrrhonists and the Mādhyamaka both proceed to “set out oppositions” between the claims of their opponents about sensations and thoughts on the one hand, and the direct evidence of these sensations and thoughts on the other. They investigate or test these claims, and find them again and again to be unsubstantiated, or contradictory, or absurd, and insofar as they do so they set them aside, suspending judgment, with the surprising and satisfying result of a peaceful liberation. What C. W. Huntington, Jr., says about Candrakīrti and the Prāsaṅgika school of the Mādhyamaka applies equally to the Pyrrhonists:

According to the Prāsaṅgika [the school of Candrakīrti] one must be led toward a gradual realization of emptiness solely by means of a critique directed against his own prejudices and presuppositions about so-called empirical experience and the arguments either consciously or unconsciously posited to support these preconceived ideas. The Prāsaṅgika technique is accordingly a species of *reductio ad absurdum* whereby one moves step by step to become aware of the unforeseen consequences . . . , or better yet, the inherent contradictions . . . that give meaning and structure to every dimension of conventional affairs.⁶⁸

This method or technique is intended to break the bonds of belief, with belief by definition coming into play precisely where direct evidence ends. As indicated above by the passages from both traditions, it is a verbal method, one of dialectical confrontation. The interlocutor, driven into contradiction and absurdity, finds his or her belief broken, as it were, and is consequently liberated from attachment to it. A “self,” insofar as it can be understood to be created by identification with some belief, is dissolved through breaking the focus and structure of that belief. As the belief is broken down, the “self” it formerly sustained is dissolved. There are, of course, differences in emphasis and method between Pyrrhonism and the Mādhyamaka. The focus in the later Pyrrhonist texts, especially in Sextus Empiricus, is on formulaic canons of argument, especially the various modes (the Ten Modes, the Five Modes, etc.), originally developed by the first-century B.C.E. Pyrrhonist Aenesidemus. These are designed as a series of “talking points,” so to speak, to have at hand in disputations with dogmatists of various sorts. As far as I am aware, these do not appear in India in any systematized form, yet many of the individual arguments are similar, and at least one concrete example, the illusion of a coiled rope mistaken for a snake, is invoked both in Sextus and in the work of Śaṅkara, the *advaita* Vedāntist; a more common example, smoke and fire, is also invoked with regard to causation by both Sextus and Nāgārjuna.⁶⁹ The modes postdate Pyrrho, at any event, and hardly seem incompatible with Eastern verbal practices.

On the other hand, it would appear that South Asian meditative practices, apparently absent in the European West, are primarily nonverbal and solitary. To some, this might suggest a deeper difference. Meditation in South Asian countries achieved a kind of ritualized systematic specificity (detailed techniques of breathing and visu-

alization, postures of sitting, etc.), compelling evidence for which—as a sustained tradition—has not been found in the Greek and Latin West, as noted above. One sits silently in meditation, attending to the contents of one’s consciousness, neither embracing nor denying them, and so loosening the bonds of belief. But no fundamental incompatibility is apparent, nor need be posited, between verbal and meditative techniques. In nonverbal meditation, as in Pyrrhonian verbal disputation, one suspends commitment to beliefs about sensations and thoughts; as a result one is led to contemplate the absence of these beliefs and the support they provide for a traditional “self.” Whether some form of South Asian meditative practice played a role among ancient Pyrrhonists, we cannot say. There is no evidence for it, and its absence, especially from Sextus Empiricus, suggests it played little or no part in Pyrrhonian practice. The numerous points of contact between aspects of Greek and Indian culture and thought, however, imply at least its possible existence in the ancient West. Its centrality to the Mādhyamaka, by contrast, is beyond question, as attested by both Candrakīrti and Nāgārjuna. Candrakīrti writes: “The meditator sees the emptiness of “I” and “mine,” and he will be liberated.”⁷⁰ And Nāgārjuna flatly states: “Abandonment occurs through meditation.”⁷¹

No such statements are found in the Pyrrhonian texts. If I am correct, Pyrrhonism and the Mādhyamaka are in agreement on key points of verbal methods (putting any belief to the argumentative test, likely leading to a suspension of belief—not rejection—followed by some kind of awakening, enlightenment, or tranquility). And even if nonverbal methods such as meditation did not figure significantly, if at all, in Pyrrhonian practice, they do not seem incompatible with it.

Pyrrhonism and the Mādhyamaka, I argue, also share the same attitude toward beliefs. The problem with beliefs is evident in Sextus: “[I]f you hold beliefs, then you posit as real the things you are said to hold beliefs about.”⁷² Sextus also tells us: “For anyone who holds beliefs on even one subject, or in general prefers one appearance to another in point of convincingness or lack of convincingness, or makes assertions about any unclear matter, thereby has the distinctive character of a Dogmatist.”⁷³ To hold a belief, according to the Pyrrhonists, is to assert, dogmatically and likely (but not necessarily) wrongly, that some kind of reality lies beyond appearances, existing independently and unconditionally, and that this ultimate reality, among other things, explains what merely appears. Candrakīrti also resists beliefs in this sense: “The Buddhas did not teach that any entity whatsoever [ultimately] exists.”⁷⁴ And Nāgārjuna, writing roughly at the time of Sextus and Diogenes, tells us: “No Dharma was taught by the Buddha, at any time, in any place, to any person.”⁷⁵ Nāgārjuna’s point may be surprising, given common Buddhist talk of following “the Dharma” in the sense of the Buddha’s teaching (the Four Noble Truths, the Eightfold Path, etc.). But the Mādhyamaka, like Pyrrhonism, is distinguished precisely by its radical skepticism, by its refusal to countenance any sort of statement of belief, positive or negative, even to the point of calling into question the fundamental tenets of traditional Buddhism itself. What the Pyrrhonists call “dogmatism” (“dogma,” from *dokeo*, that which seems true), Buddhists, it would appear, call “attachment,” or “clinging” (*upādāna*) to a fixed “view” (*dṛṣṭi*); this means the positing of hidden, unclear, but

unconditional and determining entities, so-called “true” realities, which are said to govern our experience.

Beyond their fundamental agreement on method, and on the objects of their method, namely beliefs, Pyrrhonism and the Mādhyamaka are also uncannily similar with regard to a third key point: suspension of judgment. What Pyrrhonism calls “suspension of judgment” (*epochē*), the Mādhyamaka seem to understand as recognition of “emptiness” (*śūnyatā*), leading to “the silence of the sages.”⁷⁶ The latter can perhaps be correlated with Pyrrhonian *aphasia*, or nonassertion. Nonassertion, Sextus tells us, “covers both affirmation and negation,” adding that it is “the feeling that we have because of which we say that we neither posit or reject anything.”⁷⁷ Judgments are assertions about what is non-evident, and suspending them leaves us only with what is evident, now “empty” of any imputed judgmental content. Central to both traditions is their insistence that the dissolution of belief be not a simple denial, in which A turns into non-A, but a suspension of judgment, in which both A and non-A are equally suspended, leaving the subject in a noncommittal state.⁷⁸ It is just as possible, after all, to be dogmatic about something not being real as it is about its being real, an attitude Academic skeptics often if not always embraced. Furthermore, suspension of judgment leads to something quite different, something nondogmatic. As Candrakīrti puts it: “The absence of intrinsic being of [all] things is referred to by wise men as ‘emptiness,’ and this emptiness also is considered to be empty of any essence of emptiness.”⁷⁹

Nāgārjuna makes it clear that “emptiness” or suspension of judgment is not just another view of things: “[E]mptiness is the relinquishing of all views. For whomever emptiness is a view, that one will accomplish nothing.”⁸⁰ And: “‘Empty’ should not be asserted. ‘Nonempty’ should not be asserted. Neither both nor neither should be asserted. They are only used nominally.”⁸¹ And: “To say ‘it is’ is to grasp for permanence. To say ‘it is not’ is to adopt the view of nihilism. Therefore a wise person does not say ‘exists’ or ‘does not exist.’”⁸² And finally: “Everything is real and is not real, both real and not real, neither real nor not real. This is the Lord Buddha’s teaching.”⁸³

Compare these passages from Nāgārjuna with the following sequence from Sextus: “non-assertion is refraining from assertion in the general sense (which we say covers both affirmation and negation), so that non-assertion is the feeling we have because of which we say that we neither posit nor reject anything.”⁸⁴ And: “[W]e shall be able to say what the existing objects are like as observed by us, but as to what they are like in their nature we shall suspend judgment.”⁸⁵ And further: “In the case of all the skeptical phrases, you should understand that we do not affirm definitely that they are true. . . .”⁸⁶ Perhaps the most pithy expression of the point is made by Diogenes: “Thus in saying ‘we determine nothing,’ we are not determining even that.”⁸⁷ The convergence of attitudes here is remarkable. In suspension of judgment, dogmatists, that is, believers in what is non-evident, are not so much checkmated as stalemated. They can consistently be shown to be wrong, case by case, but that they might be right in some future case is not thereby ruled out. The Pyrrhonists and the Mādhyamaka claim not to establish “truth,” but only to clean away error, and this only in the interest of fostering tranquility or “inner peace,” a state free of

attachment or aversion. In contrast to the dogmatists, they settle for suspension of judgment, or emptiness. They claim no final victory over dogmatism, not least because of the very dogmatism of such a claim. This is reflected in a distinction in Buddhist logic between implicative and nonimplicative negation; in the former, the negation of A implies non-A; in the latter, adopted by the Mādhyamaka, the negation of A does not imply non-A.

The fruit of stalemate is tranquility, not another form of aggression. And with tranquility we come to the fourth important point of agreement between Pyrrhonism and the Mādhyamaka. For the Pyrrhonists, as for the Buddhists, tranquility seems originally to have been an unexpected discovery. Having opted for suspension of judgment rather than victory, it came as a surprise to find tranquility following behind, “like its shadow,”⁸⁸ as both Diogenes and Sextus tell us. Perhaps the Buddha, sitting under the *bodhi* tree, made this discovery after his final night of anxiety before his awakening, and perhaps Pyrrho, at some point, had a similar experience. Here is what the Greeks have to say about tranquility, beginning with Sextus: “those who make no determination about what is good and bad by nature neither avoid nor pursue anything with intensity; and hence they are tranquil.”⁸⁹ Then Diogenes: “No single thing is in itself any more this than that.”⁹⁰ Tranquility is the discovery, it seems, of the apparent indeterminacy of all things, and the precondition of a different kind of nondogmatic morality. Compare Candrakīrti: “The absence of anxiety [i.e., tranquility] is the distinguishing characteristic of morality.”⁹¹ It is belief—some determination of the nature or value of things—that generates doubt and vulnerability, and therefore anxiety, for belief is inherently unstable; it can be challenged, and lost. This does not preclude reasonable expectations about appearances, such as the expectation that the sun will rise tomorrow, but these are not dogmatic beliefs. And indeed, the sun might not rise tomorrow.

To insist on some belief, then, is to insist on some unstable and possibly false evaluation, leaving one vulnerable to anxiety and immorality, that is, to self-centered and even self-righteous behavior. But to eschew beliefs is to eschew actions based on beliefs. As Nāgārjuna puts it: “The root of cyclic existence is action. Therefore the wise one does not act.”⁹² Cyclic existence—the round of ordinary life—is determined in no small part by belief-generated action arising out of self-centered motives (so-called “karmic action”), so to suspend belief is to suspend such actions as would be generated by belief. In a somewhat cryptic formulation, Nāgārjuna writes: “There is not the slightest difference between cyclic existence and *nirvāṇa*.”⁹³ Insofar as “*nirvāṇa*” can be understood to overlap with what the Greeks called “tranquility,” it is not another view or another place, but rather a state in which cyclic existence is recognized for what it is, the play of appearances, what the Pyrrhonists understood as the ordinary experience of appearances undistorted by beliefs. In this play of appearances, action arises spontaneously as circumstances (not beliefs) dictate; only such spontaneous action can be considered moral, that is, free of self-centered motives.

Our review of method, beliefs, suspension of judgment, and tranquility, brings us finally to appearances, our last major point of comparison. We have already

noted strong similarities here between Pyrrhonism and the Mādhyamaka, principally that appearances are at once self-evident and “empty,” or without underlying “substance” or “nature,” and that there seem to be six senses or modes of appearance. Absent any beliefs, which either inflate or deflate and correspondingly distort the value of appearances, both traditions recognize that we respond to appearances spontaneously and at face value. “For we admit that we see,” Diogenes tells us, “and we recognize that we think this or that, but how we see or how we think we know not.”⁹⁴ Sensations and thoughts here are both considered phenomena, or appearances. He adds: “We see that a man moves, and that he perishes; how it happens we do not know. We merely object to accepting the unknown substance behind phenomena.”⁹⁵ The point seems to be that more than appearances is neither given nor required. Without the struggle to affirm or deny any “unknown substance behind phenomena,” those same phenomena are revealed for what they are, no more and no less: “[T]here is nothing really existent,” to quote Diogenes again, “but custom and convention govern human action; for no single thing is in itself any more this than that.”⁹⁶ “Thus, attending to what is apparent,” Sextus tells us, “we live in accordance with everyday observances, without holding opinions—for we are not able to be utterly inactive. These everyday observances seem to be four-fold, and to consist in guidance by nature, necessitation by feelings, handing down of laws and customs, and teaching of kind of expertise.”⁹⁷ These everyday appearances are simply the “empty” facts (*pragmata*) of life, to which we respond as they compel us, positively, negatively, or neutrally, no more and no less.

Pyrrhonism and the Mādhyamaka further seem to agree that appearances are mutually dependent on one another. What Pyrrhonism calls “relativism” may be central to what the Mādhyamaka and other Buddhists call “dependent origination.” Sextus puts it as follows: “since everything is relative, we shall suspend judgment as to what things are independently and in their nature.”⁹⁸ Things relative to one another, or mutually dependent, are not in any way independent, and therefore have no essence or ultimate, individual character or nature. “Whatever is dependently co-arisen,” Nāgārjuna says, “that is explained to be emptiness. That, being a dependent designation, is itself the middle way.”⁹⁹ Dependency seems to be the middle path between absolute being and absolute nothingness. Candrakīrti cites a classic example of dependent origination: “One does not consider a carriage to be different from its own parts, nor to be identical, nor to be in possession of them, nor is it ‘in’ the parts, nor are they ‘in’ it, nor is it the mere composite [of its parts], nor is it the shape.”¹⁰⁰ A carriage, or any other phenomenal object, or any appearance, that is, any sensation or thought, is at most for both Pyrrhonism and the Mādhyamaka a kind of “virtual” or “empty” object, no more than a bundle of perceptions, constituted both by its various parts, which make it a whole, and by the various wholes in which it finds itself a part.

Indeed, every whole is a part of some larger whole, and every part is a whole with parts of its own. What a phenomenal object is for anyone is no more or less than what that person’s experience may be of some of its parts, and some of the wholes of which it is a part. I see that a carriage has various parts (wheels, axles, a

frame, etc.) and also that it is found in various wholes, or contexts (moving on the road, sitting in the garage or repair shop, etc.). I can also examine pictures and diagrams of carriages, et cetera. I need to know only a few of these intersecting phenomenal parts and phenomenal wholes to have a working sense of a phenomenal carriage, the only kind it seems I can know. And although I can learn more about carriages, or anything else, and even become recognized as an expert, there remains nothing more, no essence, no Platonic Form, no defining concept, no theory of a carriage or anything else, beyond the level of appearances. To posit any such thing is to invite belief, attachment, aversion, anxiety, immorality. Appearances, it seems, are no more or less than the steadily unfolding kaleidoscope of phenomenal parts and wholes, all variously identical, similar, and different to one another.¹⁰¹ And to realize this, for both schools, is to suspend judgment about speculative, or “why” and “how,” questions, leaving room only for factual, or “which” or “that,” questions about phenomena, from which liberation flows. To sum up, for Pyrrhonism and the Mādhyamaka alike, dialectical interrogation (the Modes, the Tetralemma, and other techniques, including meditation) leads to a suspension of judgment about non-evident beliefs (claims, cults, magic, dogmas, miracles, theories, attachments, reifications, essences, forms, absolutes, etc.), resulting in a recognition of the “dependent origination,” or “emptiness” or “relativity” of the evident (the phenomena—that is, thoughts and sensations as we actually experience them, or reasonably expect to do so), leading to peace, tranquility, *nirvāṇa*, liberation, awakening.

Before concluding this comparison, it might be of interest to consider briefly another set of Buddhist texts, from the *Aṭṭhakavagga*, the fourth *sutta* of the *Sutta-Nipāta*. These are arguably among the oldest if not the oldest of extant Buddhist texts from the Pāli Canon. Here we find more material concerning suspension of judgment about beliefs or speculations or views, as a precondition of liberation.¹⁰² Consider these passages: “Some people speak . . . with the conviction that they are right. But the sage does not enter into any controversy that has arisen.”¹⁰³ And: “The sage has abandoned the notion of self or ego and is free from clinging. He does not depend even on knowledge; he does not take sides in the midst of controversy; he has no dogmatic views.”¹⁰⁴ The Buddha, we are told, points out that we find things to be pleasant or unpleasant because of the “action of contact, of mental impression.”¹⁰⁵ When asked where this contact comes from, he replies: “Contact exists because the compound of mind and matter exists. The habit of grasping is based on wanting things. If there were no wanting, there would be no possessiveness. Similarly, without the element of form, of matter, there would be no contact.”¹⁰⁶ The implication seems to be that the belief in form, or matter, that is, the abstraction of concepts thereof, is one if not the key fallacy leading to contact and attachment. What seems clear, in any case, is that suspension of views or beliefs is not only strongly recommended in the most basic Buddhist texts, but is somehow a necessary condition of liberation.

These scattered but persistent passages in which the sage is said to have “no dogmatic views” stand in apparent contradiction to other passages that seemingly

embrace “dogmatic views” such as *karma* and *saṃsāra*. But, as with the Pyrrhonist texts and those of Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti, these early Buddhist passages, too, may be read, I suggest, as performative assertions or caveats calling into question any dogmatic commitment to non-evident beliefs, which otherwise seem to be implied in terms such as *karma* and *saṃsāra*. Indeed, the hyper-reality implied by these notions is undermined by the transformation they necessarily undergo at the point of liberation; *karma* and *saṃsāra* and other similar notions as we understand them prior to liberation are, in the end, illusions to be dissipated. The point, finally, is *not* to believe in them.

In an extraordinary passage in the *Aṭṭhakavagga*, we get the following conclusion: “‘There is a state where form ceases to exist,’ said the Buddha. ‘It is a state without ordinary perception and without disordered perception and without no perception and without any annihilation of perception. It is perception, consciousness, that is the source of all the basic obstacles.’”¹⁰⁷ However this complex passage may be read, it seems to suggest that perception in the wake of liberation is neither “ordinary” nor “disordered,” but that some kind of perception clearly continues. It is “form” not “perception” that is annihilated; perception remains, yet it is no longer subject to the interpretations dictated by one or another belief, so presumably it can be appreciated for what it is, perhaps in the sense in which appearances can be appreciated for what they are by the Pyrrhonists once judgments about them have been suspended. But for the Buddhists, certain physical responses, such as sexual arousal, are widely presented as desires to be avoided, as if they were not perceptions but beliefs or judgments about perceptions, while by contrast we find no corresponding blanket avoidance of physical responses, including sexual arousal, among the Pyrrhonists; for the latter, sexual arousal appears to be not a judgment but an appearance, albeit subject, like all appearances, to distorting judgments. It is not clear whether or not this difference points to any fundamental incompatibility between Mādhyamaka Buddhism and Pyrrhonism; a deeper common resolution may be possible, but that is not a question that can be pursued here.

So far I have been mapping the common ground between Pyrrhonism and the Mādhyamaka, while acknowledging compatible differences in technique and emphasis, as well as a certain ambiguity—for example, with regard to sexuality—as to what constitutes a perception or appearance on the one hand and a judgment about perceptions or appearances on the other. It might still be wondered whether there are any clearly incompatible differences between the two traditions. Let me conclude by considering a recent study by David Burton on Nāgārjuna, *Emptiness Appraised*, which includes a rare comparative assessment of Nāgārjuna and the Greek skeptics. Burton sees serious incompatibilities separating the Greek skeptics from Nāgārjuna and the subsequent Mādhyamaka tradition. Burton defines Pyrrhonism as a realization of a conceptual construct that he calls “global skepticism:”¹⁰⁸ A global skeptic holds that “(a) {It is not known whether x or $\sim x$ } and (b) {it is not known whether or not it can be known whether x or $\sim x$ } [where x stands for any matter whatsoever]. Neither (a) nor (b) is a knowledge-claim.”¹⁰⁹ Nāgārjuna, it turns

out for Burton, fails to meet this standard, even though he claims that he has no views, positions, theses, et cetera. How does he fail? As Burton puts it:

When Nāgārjuna says that he does not have a view/position/thesis, this means that he does not have a view/position/thesis which asserts the *svabhāva* [substance] of entities. But Nāgārjuna does uphold the position that entities lack *svabhāva*. Unlike the skeptic, for whom there is no knowledge of phenomena in their real nature, Nāgārjuna contends that there can be knowledge of entities in their real nature. Emptiness is not a doctrine which denies that there is knowledge. Entities as they really are exist without *svabhāva*, and this is knowledge.¹¹⁰

Just as Bett concluded that Pyrrho was not a Pyrrhonist but in fact a dogmatic skeptic, so Burton concludes that Nāgārjuna, too, was a dogmatic skeptic. Burton's claim that Nāgārjuna holds that "there can be knowledge of entities in their real nature" does not square with Nāgārjuna's disclaimers about such assertions cited above, such as "emptiness is the relinquishing of all views." Both these scholars find it necessary to discount significant evidence to the contrary to sustain their points. For Pyrrhonist and Mādhyamaka texts both contain important passages, as we have seen, that clearly urge inquirers not only not to hold beliefs about things but also not to hold beliefs about beliefs about suspending judgment about beliefs. Such reflexive, self-contradictory statements are not asserted because they are self-contradictory, or absurd, or nonsensical, but because they present or picture, in their very absurdity, the self-defeating nature of the project of belief. They are presented in the way of examples, or demonstrations, in the manner of Zen Koans, perhaps, but not as literal statements about some reality or non-reality.

This is not an issue that can be settled by scholarly citations. The question is what attitude to adopt toward these citations, particularly those containing self-contradictory statements about our beliefs, about what we do or do not do about our beliefs. Those for whom contradictions are disqualifications, evidence of incompleteness, irrationality, confusion, inauthenticity, et cetera, will find in such passages little or no value, unless some unambiguous referent can be found or created for them. Absent such a referent, according to this view the presence of self-contradictory passages in these texts can only degrade our evaluation of them, leaving their otherwise interesting insights compromised by the presence of these incongruous, irrational, confusing, perplexing passages, which, to make sense, must have some independent referent, or the negation of one, if only we could understand it. But for those for whom contradictions have other, positive uses, as in Pyrrhonism and the Mādhyamaka, their presence can not only be explained but anticipated and welcomed.

It is Burton and Bett, by taking non-indicative statements literally, who reify emptiness, tranquility, et cetera, and expect the same of Pyrrho or Nāgārjuna. Given this approach, we might well expect some enterprising scholar to take on Sextus Empiricus himself, arguing away the paradoxical non-indicative passages to force Sextus onto the Procrustean bed of dogmatic skepticism, in effect eliminating Pyrrhonism itself. Burton does not challenge the Pyrrhonism of Sextus, or any other

figure in the tradition, including Pyrrho, but the arguments he uses against Nāgārjuna can just as easily be used against Sextus, or anyone else. And we have seen Bett invoke similar arguments, via Aristocles, against Pyrrho. Insofar as they admit only indicative literal readings as the standard of interpretation for any text, Burton and Bett and other dogmatists render non-indicative textual passages unreadable in advance, except insofar as they are forcefully treated as literal texts. These scholars end up destroying the texts in order to save them. Entranced by the stark fixed trees of Academic skepticism, they miss the flowing Pyrrhonian forest beyond. And, in a final paradoxical twist, with regard to the Indian-Greek connection, they imply that Pyrrhonism and the Mādhyamaka might after all share something in common, namely, a dogmatic skepticism from which they can no longer be distinguished.

But if Pyrrhonism and the Mādhyamaka were both examples of dogmatic skepticism, it is hard to see what motivation adherents of these schools would have had to make such nonsensical, paradoxical statements about their own procedures, which go far beyond anything necessary to express dogmatic skepticism. Since we can have beliefs about our suspensions of judgment about our beliefs, and since any beliefs are naturally suspect, these, too, they reasonably conclude, should be put to the test. This testing of beliefs, and the associated outcome of tranquility, is what separates these thinkers from dogmatists, including those who have come to own the label “skeptical”; it is a process that Pyrrhonism and the Mādhyamaka realized cannot be construed indicatively without self-contradiction. This also explains what all the fuss was about vis-à-vis their opponents. Far from seeing self-contradiction as a defining mark of incoherence and nonsense, or as some kind of mysterious referent, Pyrrhonism and the Mādhyamaka use contradictions of this sort as performative acts that, by their very absurdity, occasion a logic-defying liberation that cannot be characterized in any other way. The infinite regress of spiraling suspensions of belief into suspensions of suspensions of belief, and so on, may or may not be how things “really” are, may or may not be relevant, may or may not matter in any ultimate sense. Until and unless we are persuaded by some belief or other, insofar as we remain free of belief or attachment, we simply notice that “things” appear this way or that way, and we go about our phenomenal business, without having to worry about what it all “really” means. Both Pyrrhonism and the Mādhyamaka appear to share this skeptical middle path through experience, and to recommend it to us. Whatever differences might be proposed to stand between them would have to be weighed against their common, liberating suspension of judgment.

Notes

I am indebted to my Hartwick College colleague and friend, Prof. C. W. Huntington, Jr., for the impetus to write this article, for corrections and other comments, and for continued discussion of its themes, though I alone am responsible for the views and claims made herein, and for any remaining errors.

- 1 – Phoenician ships may have made the trade-wind run to and from India as early as the time of King Solomon, though the story of their doing so, found in the First Book of Kings, was recorded only in the sixth century B.C.E. See Rhys Carpenter, *Beyond the Pillars of Heracles: The Classical World Seen through the Eyes of Its Discoverers* (New York: Delacourt, 1966), pp. 215–219. A more conservative estimate of Mediterranean-Indian contacts can be found in the entry for “India” in the *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 2nd ed., ed. N.G.L. Hammond and H. H. Scullard (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), p. 544. Long-distance trade of some kind, though, was already a feature of Harappan culture: “The Indus Civilization, or alternatively the Mature Harappan (2500–1900 B.C.), is a time of cities, developed social classes, craft and career specialists, writing and long-distance trade with Mesopotamia, Central Asia, and even the countries at the mouth of the Red Sea” (Gregory L. Possehl, *The Indus Civilization: A Contemporary Perspective* [Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2002], p. 1). A recent, exhaustive survey of possible contacts between the Mediterranean and India in ancient times can be found in Thomas McEvilley, *The Shape of Ancient Thought: Comparative Studies in Greek and Indian Philosophies* (New York: Allworth Press, 2002), chap. 1, pp. 1–22, and throughout.
- 2 – Demetrios Th. Vassiliades, *The Greeks in India: A Survey in Philosophical Understanding* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 2000), p. 16.
- 3 – *Ibid.*, p. 22 et passim.
- 4 – Dirk L. Coupris, Robert Han, and Gerard Naddaf, *Anaximander in Context: New Studies in the Origins of Greek Philosophy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), pp. 54–55.
- 5 – Vassiliades, *The Greeks in India*, p. 29.
- 6 – *Ibid.*, pp. 29–30.
- 7 – Diogenes Laertius, “Pyrrho,” IX.61, in his *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, vol. 2., trans. R. D. Hicks (Cambridge, MA: Loeb Classical Library, Harvard University Press, 2000), p. 47.
- 8 – Aenesidemus (first century B.C.E.) is sometimes credited as the founder of the Pyrrhonist tradition as we know it, culminating in Sextus Empiricus in the second century B.C.E. His development of the modes certainly enhanced the tradition, but he himself claimed Pyrrho as the founder, using his name, and Diogenes Laertius, in his life of Timon (IX.115–116), gives an unbroken genealogy from Pyrrho and Timon through Aenesidemus and down to Sextus Empiricus and beyond, suggesting a continuous tradition.
- 9 – Richard Bett, *Pyrrho: His Antecedents and His Legacy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 178.

- 10 – But see McEvilley, *The Shape of Ancient Thought*, where he writes: “It seems, finally, that the [Persian] Empire was sufficiently polyglot that communication between Greeks and Indians in Susa or elsewhere would not have been a problem; the Greeks, as a people who produced interpreters, may be presumed to have known Persian, and the Indians, whose language was so close, to have picked it up easily. It is possible that the two groups communicated in Aramaic, but also possible that they spoke Persian to one another” (p. 13).
- 11 – Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 16.
- 12 – A. A. Long and D. N. Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, vol. 1, *Translations of the Principal Sources with Philosophical Commentary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. 16–18. Long and Sedley rely on the Aristocles passage, which they assert to be “remarkably uncontaminated by the centuries of intervening philosophy, and sufficiently different from later Pyrrhonism to be taken as the stance of Pyrrho and Timon themselves. On this construal Pyrrho’s skepticism was not simply the outcome of equally-balanced and undecidable disagreements between philosophers . . . , but the response to a metaphysical thesis, concerning the nature of things.”
- 13 – Bett, *Pyrrho*, p. 60.
- 14 – *Ibid.*, pp. 39–40.
- 15 – *Ibid.*, p. 82.
- 16 – Diogenes Laertius, “Pyrrho,” IX.103, p. 515.
- 17 – A dogmatic view of language as either indicative or nonsensical is widespread among commentators on Pyrrho and Pyrrhonism besides Bett. Such a view seems taken for granted by Long and Sedley in their commentary on Pyrrhonism (see note 12 above). See also James Warren, *Epicurus and Democritean Ethics: An Archaeology of Ataraxia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 86 ff. Warren, like Bett, asserts that “Pyrrho was not a Pyrrhonist,” and that it would be “foolhardy to claim that Pyrrho should be read as a Sextan skeptic.” Warren’s conclusions also seem to come from the presumption that language be either indicative or nonsensical; in any event, he seems to read Aristocles and Sextus accordingly, missing the point that Pyrrho and the Pyrrhonists might have had quite other purposes in mind.
- 18 – Diogenes Laertius, “Pyrrho,” IX.74, p. 487.
- 19 – *Ibid.*, IX.75, p. 489.
- 20 – *Ibid.*, pp. 489–490; see also Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Scepticism*, trans. Julia Annas and Jonathan Barnes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), book 1, sections xviii–xxvii, pp. 45–53; in a footnote on p. 94, Annas and Barnes note that “assertoric sentences can be used with non-assertoric force.”

- 21 – Bett, *Pyrrho*, p. 113.
- 22 – Everard Flintoff, “Pyrrho and India,” *Phronesis* 25 (2) (1980): 88 ff.
- 23 – *Ibid.*, p. 91.
- 24 – *Ibid.*, pp. 91–93.
- 25 – *Ibid.*, p. 91.
- 26 – *Ibid.*, p. 91.
- 27 – Cf. Warren, *Epicurus and Democritean Ethics*, passim; Warren argues that *euthymia* as used by Democritus foreshadows *ataraxia*, but he cites no instance of Democritus’ use of the latter term at all; he gives no indication that the Pyrrhonist sense of *ataraxia* as a release from *all* beliefs might make it something very different from its interpretation in dogmatic contexts, as in Epicureanism and Stoicism.
- 28 – Flintoff, “Pyrrho and India,” p. 93.
- 29 – R. J. Hankinson, *The Sceptics* (New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 64.
- 30 – *Ibid.*, p. 64.
- 31 – Quoted by Diogenes Laertius, “Pyrrho,” IX.67, p. 481.
- 32 – Flintoff, “Pyrrho and India,” p. 89.
- 33 – Plutarch, *The Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans*, trans. John Dryden, revised by Arthur Hugh Clough (New York: Modern Library, n.d.), p. 52.
- 34 – Herodotus, *The History*, trans. David Grene (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 4.44, p. 297.
- 35 – *Ibid.*, 3.94, p. 254.
- 36 – See Carpenter, *Beyond the Pillars of Heracles*, chap. 7, “Seaways to India,” pp. 215 ff. Carpenter traces contact by sea between Sumerian cities and Mohenjo-Daro back to the third millennium B.C.E.
- 37 – Lionel Casson, *Libraries in the Ancient World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), pp. 28–29.
- 38 – Flintoff, “Pyrrho and India,” p. 93.
- 39 – *Ibid.*, p. 94.
- 40 – Harald Thorsrud, “Ancient Greek Scepticism,” in *The Internet Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, www.utm.edu/research/iep/s/skepanci.htm (accessed 2003).
- 41 – Flintoff, “Pyrrho and India,” p. 96.
- 42 – *Ibid.*, p. 101.
- 43 – Hiralal Jain, *Jainism in Buddhist Literature*, <http://www.ibiblio.org/jainism/database/BOOK/jainbudh.doc> (accessed February 2004).

- 44 – Flintoff, “Pyrrho and India,” pp. 99–100.
- 45 – Diogenes Laertius, “Pyrrho,” IX.67, p. 479.
- 46 – Diogenes Laertius, “Anaxarchus,” in his *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, vol. 2, p. 473.
- 47 – See, for example, McEvelley, *The Shape of Ancient Thought*, pp. 225–236.
- 48 – Strabo, *Geography*, trans. Horace Leonard Jones (Cambridge, MA: Loeb Classical Library, Harvard University Press, 1966), XV.1.59, p. 101.
- 49 – See the entry “Megasthenes,” in *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, pp. 665–666.
- 50 – See Bhadantācariya Buddhaghosa, *The Path of Purification (Visuddhimagga)*, trans. Bhikkhu Nānamoli (Kandy, Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society, 1991), and Arahant Upatissa, *The Path of Freedom (Vimuttimagga)*, trans. N.R.M. Ehara, Soma Thera, and Kheminda Thera (Kandy, Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society, 1995).
- 51 – “Hesychast,” in the *Catholic Encyclopedia*, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07301a.htm> (accessed February 2004).
- 52 – Porphyry, “On the Life of Plotinus and the Arrangement of his Works,” in Plotinus, *The Enneads*, trans. Stephen MacKenna (London: Penguin Books, 1991), p. civ.
- 53 – See Thomas McEvelley, *The Shape of Ancient Thought*, pp. 450–490; McEvelley’s discussion is based on an earlier article, “Pyrrhonism and Mādhyamika,” *Philosophy East and West* 32 (1) (January 1982): 3–35.
- 54 – McEvelley, *The Shape of Ancient Thought*, p. 484.
- 55 – *Ibid.*, p. 492.
- 56 – *Ibid.*, p. 495.
- 57 – *Ibid.*, p. 492.
- 58 – With regard to the Pyrrhonists, Diogenes Laertius, as noted in the Introduction to the Loeb edition by Herbert S. Long (Diogenes Laertius, “Pyrrho,” p. xxi), “cites hundreds of sources,” and “most of these authors come from either the third and second centuries B.C. or the first century A.D.,” while according to the Introduction by Jonathan Barnes to the *Outlines of Scepticism*, “the texts which Sextus copied were written at a period when Stoicism was the dominant philosophy” (p. xvi), which is to say, three centuries or more before Sextus’ time. With regard to the Mādhyamaka, see “Proto-Mādhyamika in the Pāli Canon,” by Luis O. Gomez, *Philosophy East and West* 26 (2) (April 1976): 137–165, where Gomez traces key aspects of the Mādhyamaka tradition initiated by Nāgārjuna back to the earliest texts of the Pāli Canon, particularly the *Aṭṭakavagga* of the *Sutta-Nipāta*.

- 59 – Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Scepticism*, I.19, p. 8.
- 60 – Ibid., I.8, p. 4.
- 61 – Candrakīrti, *Mādhyamakāvātāra (The Entry into the Middle Way)*, trans. C. W. Huntington and Geshe Namgyal Wangchen with commentary, in *The Emptiness of Emptiness: An Introduction to Early Indian Madhyamika* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1989), Epilogue, 3, p. 196.
- 62 – Ibid., VI.68, p. 165.
- 63 – Ibid., VI.25, p. 160.
- 64 – As Sextus puts it: “we argue not against all signs, but only against indicative signs [of non-evident things], which seem to be a fiction of the Dogmatists. For recollective signs are found convincing by everyday life: seeing smoke, someone diagnoses fire; having observed a scar, he says that a wound was inflicted. Hence not only do we not conflict with everyday life, but we actually join the struggle on its side, assenting without opinion to what it has found convincing and taking a stand against the private fictions of the Dogmatists” (Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Scepticism*, II.102, p. 93). An example of the kind of indicative sign used by the dogmatists to go beyond appearances as noted by Sextus is the notion that “bodily movements are signs of the soul” (ibid., II.101, p. 93).
- 65 – On the various beliefs built upon sensations and thoughts, cf. Adrian Kuzminski, *The Soul* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1994), pp. 43–85.
- 66 – Diogenes Laertius, “Pyrrho,” IX.106, p. 517.
- 67 – Candrakīrti, *The Entry into the Middle Way*, VI.175, p. 179.
- 68 – Huntington, *The Emptiness of Emptiness*, pp. 24–25.
- 69 – Cf. Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Scepticism*, I.227, p. 60; Śāṅkara, *The Thousand Teachings (Upadeśa Sāhasrī)*, trans. A. J. Alston (London: Shanti Sadan, 1990), pp. 87, 165, 194, 268, 292, 329, 336; McEvelley notes that “Sextus and Nāgārjuna use the same exemplum, wood and fire” (McEvelley, *The Shape of Ancient Thought*, p. 462; see also p. 498).
- 70 – Candrakīrti, *The Entry into the Middle Way*, VI.165, p. 177.
- 71 – Nāgārjuna, *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā (The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way)*, trans. and commentary by Jay L. Garfield, in *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way: Nāgārjuna's Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), XVII.15, p. 45.
- 72 – Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Scepticism*, I.14, p. 6.
- 73 – Ibid., I.223, p. 58.
- 74 – Candrakīrti, *The Entry into the Middle Way*, VI.68, p. 165.
- 75 – Nāgārjuna, *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way*, XXV.24, p. 76.

- 76 – Candrakīrti in his *Prasanapadā Mūlamadhymakavṛtti* writes: “For those with deep insight the truth of the highest meaning is a state of silence” (quoted and translated by C. W. Huntington, Jr., “Was Candrakīrti a Prasāṅgika?” in *The Svātantrika-Prāsaṅgika Distinction: What Difference does a Difference Make?* ed. Georges B. J. Dreyfus and Sara L. McClintock [Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2003], p. 78).
- 77 – Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Scepticism*, I.20, p. 48.
- 78 – Cf. C. W. Huntington, Jr., *The Emptiness of Emptiness*, p. 58, and Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Scepticism*, I.10, p. 5; I.192, pp. 47–48.
- 79 – Candrakīrti, *The Entry into the Middle Way*, VI.185, p. 180.
- 80 – Nāgārjuna, *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way*, XIII.8, p. 36.
- 81 – *Ibid.*, XXII.11, p. 61.
- 82 – *Ibid.*, XV.10, p. 40.
- 83 – *Ibid.*, XVIII.8, p. 49.
- 84 – Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Scepticism*, I.192, pp. 47–48.
- 85 – *Ibid.*, I.59, p. 17.
- 86 – *Ibid.*, I.206, p. 52.
- 87 – Diogenes Laertius, “Pyrrho,” IX.105, p. 515.
- 88 – *Ibid.*, IX.107, p. 519; also Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, I.29, p. 21.
- 89 – Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Scepticism*, I.28, p. 10.
- 90 – Diogenes Laertius, “Pyrrho,” IX.61, p. 475.
- 91 – Candrakīrti, *The Entry into the Middle Way*, VI.205, p. 181.
- 92 – Nāgārjuna, *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way*, XXVI.10, p. 78.
- 93 – *Ibid.*, XXV.19, p. 75.
- 94 – Diogenes Laertius, “Pyrrho,” IX.104, p. 515.
- 95 – *Ibid.*, IX.104, p. 515.
- 96 – *Ibid.*, IX.61, p. 475.
- 97 – Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Scepticism*, I.23, p. 9.
- 98 – *Ibid.*, I.135, p. 35.
- 99 – Nāgārjuna, *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way*, XXIV.18, p. 69.
- 100 – Candrakīrti, *The Entry into the Middle Way*, VI.151, p. 176.
- 101 – See Kuzminski, *The Soul*, pp. 21–42.

- 102 – See Luis O. Gomez, “Proto-Mādhyamaka in the Pali Canon,” *Philosophy East and West* 26 (2) (April 1976): 137 ff.
- 103 – *The Sutta-Nipāta*, trans. H. Saddhatissa (London: Curzon Press, 1985), IV.3.1, p. 92.
- 104 – Ibid., IV.5.5, p. 95.
- 105 – Ibid., IV.11.9, p. 102.
- 106 – Ibid., IV.11.11, p. 102.
- 107 – Ibid., IV.11.13, p. 102.
- 108 – David Burton, *Emptiness Appraised: A Critical Study of Nāgārjuna’s Philosophy* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1999), p. 22.
- 109 – Ibid., p. 23.
- 110 – Ibid., pp. 36–37.