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MORALITY WITHOUT COMPETENCE?

TWO INTERPRETATIONS OF THE IMMORALITY OBJECTION TO PYRRHONISM

¿MORALIDAD SIN COMPETENCIA?

DOS INTERPRETACIONES DE LA OBJECIÓN DE INMORALIDAD AL PIRRONISMO

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RESUMEN

Argumentamos en contra de dos intentos contemporáneos por rehabilitar el pirronismo debido a su incapacidad para resolver la clásica objeción de inmoralidad. Proponemos dos diferentes lecturas de la objeción: una débil, según la cual los pirrónicos son inmorales dado que sus actos mismos lo son —lo que constituye un cargo empírico—, y otra fuerte, donde la inmoralidad del pirrónico proviene del hecho de que, por diseño, no puede exhibir ningún tipo de competencia moral, lo que constituye un cargo conceptual. Concluyo que ambos intentos fracasan debido a que se atienen el sentido débil de la objeción, pero no el fuerte.

Palabras clave: moral, escepticismo antiguo, inmoralidad, acción.

ABSTRACT

We argue against two contemporary attempts to rehabilitate Pyrrhonism due to its inability to resolve the classic objection of immorality. We propose two different readings of the objection: a weak one according to which the Pyrrhonics are immoral since their very acts are immoral —which constitutes an empirical charge—, and a strong one, where the immorality of the Pyrrhonic comes from the fact that, by design, they cannot exhibit any kind of moral competence –constituting a conceptual charge. We conclude that both attempts fail because they only hold the weak sense of objection, but not the strong one.

Keywords: moral competence, Pyrrhonic skepticism, immorality objection, action.

Introduction

Moral deeds can intuitively be assessed from at least two different perspectives based on either their motivations or their consequences. According to the first group, Joachim's testing each week for Covid-19 and respecting social distancing speaks on behalf of his moral character: he looks like a responsible agent in pandemic times. However, according to the second group, Marina's performances also seem morally successful given that, unbeknownst to her, she has neither contracted nor, therefore, spread the Covid-19 virus despite her lack of interest regarding social distancing and medical precautions. For both groups, morality rests on some sort of success requirement (neither contracting nor spreading the virus). But for the first group, Joachim's moral success is considered a direct outcome of his moral competences, something he is morally entitled to. In the second approach, Marina's moral success rests –at least partially– on external (or lucky) factors of one kind or another, a reason why many people seem reluctant to morally entitle her to the same degree as Joachim. The first ethical stance depicted above is reminiscent of Aristotelian Virtue Ethics, for which moral rightness depends, necessarily, on moral character or moral competences, a condition designed to exclude luck from morality.[1] On the other hand, the second group fits well within *consequentialist* ethical theories, those in which morality depends exclusively on results (consequences) and not on the intrinsic nature of the performances.

In this paper, we reconsider the Immorality Objection (IO, hereafter) to Pyrrhonism –according to which Pyrrhonians' performances are immoral–, by presenting two versions of it, one weaker and another stronger. The weak version implies a consequentialist template from which IO is exclusively sanctioning the Pyrrhonians's performances, which could result from moral luck or any other external factors, where said factors are silent regarding the agent's moral personality. According to the stronger reading, IO is sanctioning some lack of internal factors such as the Pyrrhonians' moral traits or moral personality. To maintain that this last sense of IO puts a major challenge to the Pyrrhonian's ethical stance, we will argue that these kinds of intrinsic moral properties (possessing a moral character) are a necessary condition for moral human life as a whole. Given that Pyrrhonism is explicitly reluctant to

Jorge Ornelas thanks the CONACYT Postdoctoral Fellowship for funding this research. Both authors explicitly reject any and all appropriations of "Classical culture" made by supremacist groups.

1 Despite emphasizing moral character as a *sine qua non* condition for a virtuous life, Aristotle (NE 1099a31-33) recognized the influence of moral luck in such a project, the reason why he considered the possession of external goods, for example, were also necessary for happiness. See also: *Ph* 2.196b and EE 1246b37-1248b7.

them, it should then be able to bite the bullet of the immorality charge, which is an objection that cannot be solved even when appealing to contemporary maneuvers.

Unlike most of the ancient moral theories, which are used to imply imbricated metaphysical, epistemological, and even psychological theses, Pyrrhonism is a very minimalistic ethical stance: there is not even a single commitment to metaphysical or objective ethical values. Indeed, any adoption of a theoretical commitment is considered a part of our moral turmoil and is to be avoided. Pyrrhonism, from Timon to Sextus, recommends a life without any belief (*adoxastōs bioumen*) to achieve tranquility —a really good deal by any measure. Due to this minimalism,[2] some scholars (Machuca, 2019a, 2019b; and Laursen, 2019) have recently tried to restore Pyrrhonism as a possible ethical position even today. Most of the recent comprehensive reconstructions of Pyrrhonism try to convince us to adopt it as an ethical stance since it tends to handle our everyday moral quarrels successfully. In this paper we will argue against this interpretation of Pyrrhonism. So, even if we lead with the ancient sources of 10, our main motivation for reconstructing it is to position 10 within contemporary discussions.[3]

In the first section, we propose two distinct readings of 10. Specifically, we will argue that the stronger reading of 10 presents a deep, conceptual, and unsolvable challenge to Pyrrhonism, but also how this stronger version implies an Aristotelian ethical template. In section 2 we will show that internal moral requirements, such as moral competences, or the possession of a moral character, were the default ethical templates for ancient ethical reflection, the reason why the Pyrrhonian's dissociation constitutes a deficit instead of a sort of advantage. Finally, in section 3, we will discuss some of the contemporary answers to the charge posited by 10. In doing so, we will show that their

2 We are labeling here the Pyrrhonian ethical stance some sort of "minimalism," given those passages where Sextus openly accepts the existence of "private" (M 11.77-78) and intersubjective (*biotiké téresis*) (M 11.162-167 and PH 1.21-30) moral values guiding our everyday deeds. The true enemy, as Sextus clearly observes (M 11.68-78 and PH 3.179-182), will be moral realism, the thesis stating that there are objective moral values. In the contemporary discussions regarding the existence of objective moral values, instead, we have some anti-realist positions (Mackie, 1977 and Blackburn, 1993), which categorically deny the existence of objective moral values, a thesis not available to Sextus's skepticism, which only advocates suspension of judgement regarding their existence. Furthermore, Annas (23) has maintained that Sextus was seriously confused about "moral realism" and "moral absolutism", and apparently it is against the latter that Sextus offers his moral [minimalistic] relativism.

3 This has been a concern argued only by a handful of scholars, *cf.* Annas (1986), Nussbaum (1994; 2000), and more recently by Bett (2019.) Here, we are trying to provide more evidence on behalf of this concern.

failure is due to not considering this stronger reading of IO. We conclude that, independently of the Aristotelian theory of moral character, or indeed any appeal to some sort of moral realism, Pyrrhonism has a serious moral explanatory deficit regarding the relation between moral success and moral character, an important reason why Pyrrhonism should be avoided today.

The Immorality Objection

There is a great debate regarding the origin of the IO. Some scholars (i.e., Obdrzalek 2015) affirm that it could be contained in the *apraxia* objection while others suggest that it came afterward, presupposing the Aristotelian doxastic model of action, which is why they affirm that this objection arose in the bosom of the Peripatus (*cf.* Striker 1990; Corti 2009; Bett 2015; Correa 2019). According to the last interpretation, which we are going to subscribe to as well, it is worth noting that IO presupposes the Aristotelian *doxastic model of practical knowledge*, which tends to be the standard model of explaining action in ancient philosophy: every single human action implies a choice (or rejection), which in turn is based on beliefs.[4] In book 6 of *Nicomachean Ethics,* Aristotle asserted that in order to act the agent needs to deliberate which course of action to choose or to avoid, and that implies exercising the part of the reason that he calls *doxastikon* (1140b26 and 1144b), the part in charge of dealing with contingent things.[5] That is why *phronêsis* (but also *technê*) is a virtue of *doxastikon*, which does not involve reasoning through principles or dependence on essences, but is constituted by deliberative syllogisms (which do not need to be deductively valid) and whose conclusions are actions.[6]

As far as we know, the IO appeared for the first time in book 8 of *On philosophies* by the Peripatetic Aristocles of Messene (*ca.* AD second

4 *cf.* Corti (33). Inwood (4-5) attributes this Aristotelian doxastic model of action to Epicurus as well as Stoics, but it is also traceable to Plato (*Phil.* 11d) and even to Gorgias's *Encomium of Helen* (8).

5 *cf.* also, NE 6.4:1140a1-2 and 6.5:1140-5. The other part of reason, which is in charge of calculating (mathematics) and grasping universals (philosophy), is the *epistêmonikon* (1139a12). It is worth noting that throughout book 6 of *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle uses *logistikon* as a synonym for *doxastikon*. *cf.* Lorenz and Morison (2019) argue that Aristotelian doxastic knowledge is a subsidiary of empiricist epistemology, which originated in the medical empiricist tradition.

6 As Lorenz and Morison (n. 7) affirm, a paradigmatic example of this kind of syllogism is the Aristotelian "cloak syllogism" (*De Motu*, 7: 701a17-20.) Also see: NE 1147a28.

century), where he is reporting some of Timon's ideas (but also ideas from Pyrrho and Aenesidemus).[7]

Here is the main text containing the immorality objection:

> 18. One should consider also the following things: what sort of citizen, or judge, or counsellor, or friend, or simply human being would such a man [the Pyrrhonian] make or, on what atrocity would the man not venture who thought that nothing was really honourable or shameful, or just or unjust? for one could not even say that such men are afraid of the laws and their penalties; for how could they, who are free from emotions and troubles, as they say? (Aristocles of Messene, *Testimonia and Fragments*, 14.18.18, tr. Maria Lorenza Chiesara)

This objection has the form of a *reductio*: given the Pyrrhonian's reluctance to recognize objective ethical values, she is in the position to act immorally, which is unacceptable. In other words, the 10 states that, by design, Pyrrhonism lacks something central to moral practice. Specifically, within the *milieu* of ancient philosophy, that "lacking" has to do with moral character, as we are trying to settle here. But also beyond the context of ancient philosophy, this lacking can refer to moral competences in general, as we will argue at the end of this paper.

From our perspective, 10 can be read by two different means, one weaker and the other stronger, depending on what is rejected as morally wrong: on the one hand, if 10 rejects the Pyrrhonian's performances themselves, the immorality will come from their own deeds, leaving untouched her moral character untouched. It is worth realizing that from this reading the objection raises an *empirical* charge to Pyrrhonism: anyone in a psychological state of being uncommitted to objective moral values will commit immoral deeds. This sense implies a consequentialist interpretation of morality,[8] according to which it depends exclusively on the consequences of the agent's performances, leaving aside any "intention to act" for using a concept from the

7 But from this report, we only have notice through the *Preparatio Evangelica* by Eusebius of Cesarea (AD 243-330). From the many problems regarding Aristocles' report, three deserve mention: first, that, given his membership in the Peripatus, Aristocles' report is hostile to Pyrrhonism. Second, that despite being one of the only scarce sources on Pyrrhonism before Sextus's, it constituted a third-hand report in which the Pyrrhonian stance could be modified. And finally, many scholars (as in Donini 215; and Gottschalk 1164) have expressed some doubts about Aristocles' philosophical *acumen*; for the opposite opinion on this topic *see* Chiesara (xxiv) and Correa (n. 6).

8 Most of the scholars (*cf.* Correa, 2019: 75) agree that this *consequentialist* version of 10 is the original reading as proposed by Aristocles.

contemporary philosophy of action.[9] On the other hand, if IO's target is not the Pyrrhonian's deeds themselves, but their motivational grounds instead, the objection becomes stronger because it introduces a more serious *conceptual* challenge: by design, any performance without a moral commitment behind it is not praiseworthy and therefore immoral.

We reject the weak interpretation of IO for three reasons. The first one is the relatively easy way out with which Pyrrhonism is already equipped, namely, the appeal to the four-fold commitment –nature, necessitation by feelings, laws and customs, and expertise (PH 1.23-24, 3.235-8)–: following a shared religion, for example, the Pyrrhonian will be able to perform religious deeds, which will be qualified as moral by her fellow citizens and by herself. Our second reason is that the weak interpretation attributes an "imperturbable" moral character to the Pyrrhonian (Aristocles 14.18.26), which would be contradictory to the *adoxastos* way of life openly professed by Pyrrhonism.[10] Finally, given that this weak reading of the IO is an empirical one, the scant evidence we have regarding some Pyrrhonians' performances is indeed enough to reject it.

The stronger reading of IO is a more serious conceptual challenge instead, one which cannot be easily answered by, firstly, appealing to the four-fold commitment (even a bad guy is capable of performing good actions, and vice versa). Secondly, the objection will show that there is something central for moral action that Pyrrhonians lack, namely, inner moral motivational grounds. And finally, the strong sense of the objection is untouched by scant empirical evidence and, as we will argue in the final section, by the possible fictional or imaginative cases. Furthermore, according to the strong reading of the IO, if the everyday Pyrrhonian's performance is motivated exclusively by external educational conditioning, then her performances lack a moral dimension at all, because she will be acting just mechanically. In other words, the strong sense of the objection establishes that Pyrrhonism is attempting to counter self-ruling (*enkrateia*), and it is against the very possibility of having rational control over our own actions (*cf.* EE 1247a 4-14). Expelling deliberation from moral practice is then the real danger of the Pyrrhonian stance in the moral realm.

In a nutshell, according to the weaker interpretation of this objection (Aristocles 14.18.26; DL 9.108), the Pyrrhonian's immorality supervenes on her vicious performances, which emerge from her vicious "imperturbable" moral character, when referring to the no-fear stance regarding

9 *cf.* Anscombe's (1963: 11-15) epistemic account of intention, but also Davidson's collected essays (1980).

10 In the next section, we will argue that having a moral personality is only made possible by subscribing to a cluster of moral beliefs and having a systematic understanding of them, both requirements that are explicitly rejected by Sextus (PH: 3.239-249).

social and legal punishments. The stronger interpretation, by contrast, affirms that the Pyrrhonian's immorality has a deeper source: the lack of any moral character or moral competences at all.

Inner and Outer: Two Senses of Immorality

In this section, we present our own Aristotelian-inspired argument according to which having a moral life necessarily implies the possession of a moral character. To reach this outcome, we begin by dealing with the two main dimensions of Aristotelian theory of moral character, namely, its psychological and social aspects. Later, we demonstrate how both dimensions are absent in the Pyrrhonian stance, and that this absence is precisely what makes it unfeasible.

The Psychological Dimension of Moral Character

Most ancient ethics provided some sort of recipe for constructing a moral character, which they considered a necessary condition for happiness.[11] Once earned through education (i.e., the construction of habits), it is expected that this moral character remained cross-situationally consistent: becoming an ethical being meant acquiring the habit of doing the right thing. It was expected that the *phronimoi* (NE 3:1112b, 5:1140a-b and 1142a), or the virtuous (Plato *Phil*. 11b), but also the stoic wise man (Cic. *De fin*. III, 58; DL 7:107), acts in the same way (with regularity and reliability) when facing similar catastrophic scenarios, given their rational capacity for self-governing (appreciating the pros and cons of actions from a rational perspective).

However, it was Aristotle (NE 2.9) who offered a more comprehensive approach to moral virtue, constituted by three necessary and sufficient conditions: the possession/lack of material conditions, the moral character, and the actions performed. However, Aristotle is very cautious in recognizing that these factors are relative to the agent's particular situation: without enough money to buy some weapons, for example, the possibility of displaying a brave moral character in battle will be diminished. In the end, Aristotle is identifying moral character with a disposition of the soul, which in turn comes from customs (*ethical*), to know how to act in some critical situations:

> Excellence (of character), then, is a state concerned with choice, lying in a mean relative to us, this being determined by reason and in the way

11 The principal exception was the Cyrenaics, for whom ethics and epistemology were built on particular psychological entities called "undergoings" (*pathe*). Their occurrence was momentary, and this is why they identified the end (*télos*) of any ethical reflection as momentary pleasures (*cf.* M 7.191). As we will present in the next section, it is likely that this kind of "particularism" had a very high impact in Sextus's epistemological and ethical approaches.

> in which the man of practical wisdom (*phronimos*) would determine it. Now it is a mean between two vices, that which depends on excess and that which depends on defect. (NE 2.6, 1106b36-1107a3).

Here moral character implies a rational choice among excess and defect. Even if a Pyrrhonian could act in exactly the same way, her lack of moral beliefs blocks her reason to take part in her choice; only external educational constraints will determine her choices.

Aristotle is also very specific in saying (NE 2.2, 1144b-45a2) that moral virtue doesn't come from nature (like in the case of the excellent zither player) but must be practiced to form moral character. That, in turn, produces reliable outcomes the next time that justice or braveness is required. Moral character, therefore, has a reliable and non-volatile character, but this is precisely what the IO is claiming against the Pyrrhonians. Aristotelian moral character (NE 2.4, 1104b and 1105b) requires that the agent feel the motivation to act in a determined direction, reflecting her moral commitments, which in turn forms a system of beliefs that is reflective of –and accessible to– the agent.

How Pyrrhonians behave, however, even if they could be called virtuous from the perspective of the third person, has nothing to do with moral character as defined by Aristotle: there is no nascent character to blame or praise for their actions. Pyrrhonians can always restate that the certain existence of such a moral character as truth behind the appearances is what they are denying (we will be back to this point at the end of this paper), but for now, we want to draw attention to how anomalous the Pyrrhonian stance between ancient ethical theories was, canceling the very possibility of explaining moral performances rationally.[12]

The Social Dimension of Moral Character

The idea that ancient ethical reflections had an inalienable social orientation is commonplace: many ancient philosophers considered that personal well-being was just a small part of the well-being of the Polis and that even the excellent citizen could not be happy inside a corrupted Polis. Aristotle conceived happiness as part of something bigger than the common good of the Polis and healthy relationships among citizens (NE 9.9,1169b3-6).[13]

12 Burnyeat (132) and Bett (143-148) share the idea that this absence of moral values is actually the effect of a disastrous and deeper psychological cause: the absence of a robust conception of the self.

13 Salmieri (103) argues that even if Aristotle (NE 9.8,1168b) affirms that what is right for the agent is coextensional with what is the best for him, that is not enough for *ethical*

Hellenistic philosophers also gave a specific weight to the social dimension of moral character: Marcus Aurelius (*M. Ant.* 4.40) argued that human beings are just a microcosm that reflects cosmic order, and epicurean and stoic reflections on friendship are well known (i.e., *Sent. Vat.* 23, 28, 34, 39, 42, 66, 78). All this speaks in favor of the fact that, in the ancient world, ethical reflection had an inescapable social or communal standpoint. Against this common framework, some scholars have pointed out the anomalous character of Pyrrhonism, being a selfish (Nussbaum 194) or a *particularistic* ethical stance.[14] Pyrrhonian prescriptions such as suspending judgment have, by design, particular applications (facing a catastrophic scenario like death, death of a loved one, loss of material richness, etc.). In these cases, the Pyrrhonian could always suspend judgment regarding the truth behind the appearance of the moral misfortune of this particular fact. But it is also worth recalling here all the *protempore* clauses, such as "to the moment," "up to now," "given my experience," which Sextus uses to accompany most of his theoretical declarations. So, Pyrrhonism is not a theory (PH 1.13) and systematization is not one of its concerns. Instead, it is a collection of particular episodes of its principal representatives' experiences. This would also explain why Pyrrhonian discourse is, unlike most of the ancient ethical reflections, centered in the first-person perspective without any social implications.[15] Earlier, Sextus defined *eudaimonia* (M 11.141) in individualistic terms (as the person who lacks disturbance and has peace of mind), lacking all references to the Polis or even the other citizens.[16]

The lack of moral character carries harmful social and psychological consequences: faced with some similar counterfactual situations, nothing guarantees how the Pyrrhonian behaves, and even if she always behaves in the same way according to custom, nothing about

egoism, which also needs that "what makes the right actions right is that they are (or result in) what is best for the agent." *cf. Magna Moralia* 1212b22-23.

14 Bett (2019 198-200) has shown the similarities between the Cyrenaics and the Pyrrhonians regarding rejection of the systematic and long-term Socratic sense of happiness. Bett also suggests that the Cyrenaic definition of *télos* as a "particular pleasure" (*pathos*) could be an inspiration for the particularistic approach that Sextus employs in the *Outlines*, where *eudaimonia* was anathema. For more on the similarities and divergences between Cyrenaics and Pyrrhonians, see Bett (2018).

15 Only at the end of *Outlines* (PH 3.280-1) does Sextus posit that Pyrrhonians are *philanthropic*. Since this is the only passage in the whole work that makes room for a social implication of his tenets, many scholars have discarded it as an anomaly. Mates (1996 314) was one of the first calling attention to the incongruity of this passage. But also see Bett (2019 165-166).

16 From a Socratic perspective, this would be selfish because this conception would imply that the right of the right actions supervenes on what is best for the agent in her particular situation exclusively.

her performance will count as the expression of something deeper regarding her moral character. This is the most dangerous aspect of Pyrrhonism that 10 is pointing out: the psychological and social gap regarding rational motivations to act.

The 10 in the Contemporary Ethical Debate: Some Answers to the Intended Answers

At the beginning of this paper, we made explicit that our main motivation for discussing the 10 is to reject some contemporary efforts to rehabilitate Pyrrhonism today. We want to finish this work by assessing two of the main responses to the 10, but first we are going to review some presentations of this objection against which the defenders are arguing.

Martha Nussbaum (1994; 2000) has recovered the 10 and presented it as a knockout argument against Pyrrhonism in antiquity and the present day. In the same fashion as Aristocles, she appeals to the 10 to uncover the moral impoverishment that Pyrrhonism implies for our everyday lives, which is why, she concludes, we shouldn't embrace it.

Nussbaum (2000 171) affirms that the skeptical enterprise is, by its own nature, "morally and politically pernicious." Nussbaum's moral and political model is the Rawlsian theory of justice, in which the main assumption for the construction of a "reasonably just political society" is the possibility that human beings are fitted with "a moral nature," one which "can understand, act on, and be sufficiently moved by a reasonable political conception of right and justice to support a society guided by its ideals and principles." (Rawls xi-xii qtd. in Nussbaum 2000 172). It is evident that facing these standards, Pyrrhonism loses favor with the Rawlsian theory of justice because being a Pyrrhonian implies lacking a moral character. The real problem here, according to Nussbaum's reconstruction, is that Pyrrhonism gets rid of objective moral values, "something fundamental to humanity goes out with them, something that is integral to our ability to care for another and act on another's behalf." (2000 173).

The Pyrrhonian, given her lack of moral competences, would be immoral and politically dangerous precisely because she would be canceling the very possibility of building a political regime based on consensual reasons. Even if Nussbaum's presentation of the 10 claims its conceptual nature, she immediately passes on to discuss some of its negative empirical consequences in the moral and political realm, and we believe that this quick step explains why her critics focused only on its empirical consequences.

Without any moral character and its respective commitment to some moral values, Nussbaum says, political and moral choices will be

based only on the "play of forces": stronger or more organized factions will take political power with no rational deliberation in between.[17] Nussbaum concludes that the Pyrrhonian philosophical program is "selfish and solipsistic," the reason why it is not worthy of vindication in the present turbulent days (2000 194).

Machuca's Answers and Some Answers to Them

Facing Nussbaum's rehabilitation of the IO, Diego Machuca (2019a) has vehemently defended the Pyrrhonian stance, a defense that consists of two master movements. On the one hand, and against Nussbaum's charge of lacking any moral character, Machuca argues that Nussbaum begs the question against Pyrrhonism, precisely because detaching any commitment to objective moral values is, by design, the distinctive seal of Pyrrhonism. On the other hand, and against the IO properly speaking ("the Pyrrhonian is necessarily immoral"), Machuca strikes back with an approach to Pyrrhonian agency close enough to "Situationism":[18] Pyrrhonian's attitudes (being selfish or unselfish, solipsistic or other-regarding, politically conservative or subversive, etc.) "depends on circumstantial factors, such as his psychological makeup, his upbringing, his education, his life experience, and his socio-cultural context." (2019a 54). Rejecting Aristotelian moral character, which is supposed to be cross-situationally consistent, Machuca affirms that the Pyrrhonian's moral competences are a function of her particular situation, which is a reason why the Pyrrhonian could be conservative regarding women's reproductive rights (because she was raised in a very conservative family), but liberal regarding animal rights (because veganism was her sorority's creed in college). Note that from this reading, the Pyrrhonian's moral inconsistency is not attributable to her but to her particular situation, and so the IO misses its target.[19]

17 This is the way in which Rawls (1996) accounts for Nazism's accession to power in 1932.

18 Starting with some experiments in social psychology, the Situationist's core thesis denies the existence of a global and strong moral character (Harman 1998; Doris 2002). This is why they tend to explain behavioral variations by appealing to the agents' different and particular situations. However, as we saw above, Aristotle recognized the relevance of "external and contingent conditions" for moral character. Contemporary responses to the Situationist's challenge establish that, even if these psychological experiments shade legitimate doubts regarding moral character, they are not sufficient enough to deny its existence, but could instead lead us to improve them, just as knowing that alcohol diminishes one's competence to drive is a reliable signal for avoiding it. *cf.* Sosa 183-185.

19 Kamtekar (460) affirms that Situationist's conception of character traits is flawed; mainly because for Aristotle himself (EN 2), consistency regarding virtues should be evaluated from the agent's own perspective and not from an external one, as Situationist's

From our perspective, Machuca's answers miss the real challenge put out by the strong interpretation of the 10, namely the conceptual thesis according to which Pyrrhonism makes impossible any way of gaining a moral character at all.

It is true that in the first charge Nussbaum censures the Pyrrhonian lack of moral character, but replying that this is something that some Pyrrhonians such as Sextus explicitly did based on some ethical considerations (those commitments are the source of the turmoils) does not guarantee that Machuca is right.[20] The interesting point here is whether or not something like moral character is a necessary condition for human social life, and this is something that Machuca's answer does not conclusively reject. Some empirical evidence endorses the thesis saying that many particular deeds result from no rational reflection at all but from emotions, gut feelings, intuition, etc.[21] Fair enough, but the crux here is whether an entire human life could be modeled according to this non-deliberative stance. Starting from the considerations established above, living a whole social life carrying this moral deficit is something simply unrealistic: most instances of social life are based on shared moral values, which generate expectations in others that are essential to the proper functioning of social life. Regarding this particular point, Barnes invokes the "social life" of bees and ants to show that if they can practice a social life without any belief human beings should be able to do the same (23). However, Barnes' and Machuca's defenses confound purposive actions with intentional ones. Specifically, purposive actions are not enough to account for deeds such as deciding to participate in a Black Lives Matter demonstration or choosing the best school for one's children, both of which necessarily imply solving several social issues first via the opportunity to deliberate about them.

To summarize, our main argument against Machuca's answer is this: if someone is able to exhibit a social behavior close enough to the same extent as someone whose behavior results from rational deliberation,

critiques establish. Opposition between "virtue" and "situation" looks more like a misunderstanding produced by several misconceptions of this kind.

20 Especially now that we count empirical psychological data that shows, as a matter of fact, dogmatism (being provided with a closed system of beliefs) tends to relieve anxiety. *Cf.* Rockeach (1960); Kay,Whitson, Gaucher, and Galinsky (2009); Jost and Hunday (2002). For how this empirical evidence rejects Sextus's thesis according to which dogmatism is causally responsible for anxiety, see Attie-Picker (103-107).

21 Machuca himself (2013 226-228; 2019b 79-81) recognizes that these types of studies, in the best case, are only enough to establish that "there is a considerable number of judgments, decisions and actions" resulting from something different than rational deliberation. But that is very different from proving the Sextean thesis according to which Pyrrhonians can live *adoxastōs* for an entire life.

it could be impossible to account for her behavior without attributing some understanding regarding moral values to her, which in turn informs her moral character.[22] Performing a handful of particular deeds mechanically (guided only by some external constraints such as education, laws and customs, etc.) is not enough to take part in a complete and complex social life.

In short, Nussbaum's remark on the lack of moral character of the Pyrrhonians only begs the question regarding whether we consider this charge as an instance of the weak reading of the IO, as Machuca does. But, if we consider the stronger interpretation of the same objection proposed here, this appearance vanishes: Nussbaum is correctly censoring the Pyrrhonian moral deficit regarding moral character.

It is worth realizing that the morality/immorality of someone who has decided to live according to Pyrrhonism is an empirical question only settled with empirical evidence. Unfortunately, we only have a few items of information regarding the Pyrrhonian's everyday life: we only have some anecdotes depicting Pyrrho's behavior (DL 9:62-8), but even those are contradictory. By denying Nussbaum's stance, Machuca is implying that there are, in fact, some Pyrrhonians whose performances are not immoral, but in the absence of any empirical evidence in its favor, Machuca's rejection only counts as armchair speculation, which left untouched the IO.

In his concluding remarks, Machuca appeals to some empirical evidence (the cases of another scholar and himself) to show that someone can find Pyrrhonian's rejection of objective moral values attractive (2019a 63-64). In contrast, Attie-Picker (2020) conducted empirical research with over two hundred participants, aged between 18 to 72 years, from different ethnical groups, in which they were divided into three groups, each of them faced with vignettes of objectivity, relativity, and skepticism, respectively. Next, they were asked to answer questions such as "When two people disagree about a moral case, at least one of them must be wrong?"[23] The results, again, contravened Sextus's thesis: "It is worth noting, however, that most participants, regardless of condition,

22 This aprioristic argument against the Pyrrhonian particularistic model of action is inspired by Corti's arguments against the possibility of a Pyrrhonian participating in our complex linguistic practices without any corresponding epistemic state. Following Turing's Test argument (1950), Corti concludes "If some issuer exhibits a linguistic behavior so precise and so complex as does someone who has a proper master of determined language, it would be impossible to account for his behavior without attributing epistemic states to him" (184). Translation from French is ours.

23 As Attie-Picker states, this has been the standard question for testing moral objectivism (n. 15). *Cf.* Bebe, Qiaoan, Wysocki and Endra (2015); Goodwin and Darley (2008); Sarkissian, Park, Tien, Wright, and Knobe (2011).

expressed relativist intuitions. This appears to support the view that people are, if anything, meta-ethical pluralists" (Attie-Picker 116).

However, the real challenge remains from the stronger reading of 10, which is a conceptual objection: given his *adoxastos* way of life, all of the Pyrrhonian's performances will be immoral, even if he is acting based on some external factors such as "his psychological makeup, his upbringing, his education, his life experience, and his socio-cultural context."[24]

Moral character competences, then, are the condition that makes social life as complex a phenomenon possible, while the absence of them will condemn us to solipsism. A Pyrrhonian educated in a philanthropic society surely behaves in a philanthropic way too. The remaining problem would be that her philanthropic performance will not be motivated by rational deliberation but instead by a mechanical habit produced by external factors. That is the reason why, a priori, we know that any Pyrrhonian's deed will be immoral all along. Machuca's answer does not consider this stronger interpretation of 10 at all, and this myopia makes his supposed answer to Nussbaum's reconstruction of the 10 ineffective.

Literary Exemplars as "Evidence" for the Pyrrhonian's Moral Performance: Laursen's Answer to Nussbaum

In the same vein as Machuca's attempt, Laursen (2019) develops a clever strategy. Starting from Nussbaum's (1990) famous claim according to which "literature, and specifically fiction, can provide some of the best examples for bringing out the best lessons of moral philosophy" (Laursen 200), he extracts from literary works counterexamples to Nussbaum's charge of immorality against Pyrrhonism. Laursen's paper is directed, ultimately, to show that "philosophical skepticism does not necessarily imply either radicalism or conservatism, and that in any case, it may well be a good foundation for modern liberal politics" (2019).

Laursen presents, then, three characters in novels which supposedly instantiate the Pyrrhonian's *adoxastos* skeptical way of life. In the interest of space, I only focus here on the case of Kamal, one of the main characters of Naguib Mahfouz's *Sugar Street* (1993), the last volume of his *Cairo Trilogy*. Kamal is a skeptic who doubts everything, but at the same time, he has a very strong commitment to the Egyptian Wafd Party, originally a nationalist movement against British occupation. Laursen

24 Again, here we do not need to agree with moral realism to vindicate the strong sense of the objection: even a moral anti-realist, a quasi-realist, or a noncognitivist could recognize that independently of the metaphysical status of moral competences and values, acting presupposes some sharing points, no matter if they are objective entities, emotions, or just linguistic expressions.

appeals to Kamal's case to show that despite his professed skepticism, the character can recognize political justice and fight firmly against colonialism. Kamal is a fictional counterexample to Nussbaum's immorality charge: despite his skepticism, he is politically engaged with the attainment of justice, freedom, and political rights for all Egyptians: "Mahfouz spells it out: 'Was it possible for a skeptic to become a martyr? Perhaps patriotism, like love', he [Kamal] thought, 'is a force to which we surrender, whether or not we believe in it" (Laursen 210).

And also: "His heart believed firmly in the rights of the people, no matter how divided his intellect was on the subject'. Why? His answer was that 'my mother [Amina] trained me to love everyone'. That could lead to tolerance" (Laursen 211).

Not surprisingly, Kamal looks pretty much like a contemporary incarnation of the Pyrrhonian stereotype: his actions are not motivated by reasons but by another kind of force such as "love" or "education," and his behaviors are moral and politically praiseworthy. Thus, Laursen concludes that Kamal counts as a fictional Pyrrhonian performing political and moral deeds, but he also takes care of others' rights, revealing no selfishness in his skeptical stance.

However, we suspect that Laursen's approach to 10 exclusively considers its weak reading as well. Therefore, it is pointless to look for some counterexamples in contemporary literature; Sextus himself offered a solution proposing his four-fold commitment as a guide to action (PH 1.24-5). The real problem remains in the conceptual challenge embodied by the stronger interpretation of 10: despite Kamal's political and patriotic defense of his homeland, they wouldn't count as moral performances unless he believes firmly in the value of patriotism or freedom, for example, but if he does, he doesn't count as a skeptic anymore. Again, by "believing firmly" I am not making a plea for moral realism, but instead pondering something more modest and quotidian such as being capable to rationally justify the value of patriotism in order to see how this value is related to other guiding values such as friendship, love of country, pride regarding the athletic achievements by one's compatriots in international competitions, etc. In the examples presented above, Kamal is shown as someone who has a strong commitment to the value of patriotism. And even if this commitment does not arise from rational deliberation, the charge of inconsistency remains: possessing moral commitments, no matter how they were achieved, is tantamount to possessing a moral character (Kamal is a priori someone with open ears for any anti-colonialist initiative, for example), which is incompatible with Pyrrhonism.

At the end of the same last quote, Laursen suggests –and explicitly defends (209)– that skepticism is politically desirable because it produces

tolerance, one of the main values for liberal societies. Facing a political disagreement, the ideal skeptic would be unable to take sides given the impossibility to justify any of them conclusively, and even if he chose one side over the other, he would do it without the commitment to its truth but as a matter of custom or habit. However, Laursen maintains, this should have the positive consequence of triggering the skeptical's tolerance "of the other side" and becoming "more open to renegotiation, more flexible" (211). But here again, Laursen is making an empirical claim without any empirical evidence. Contemporary research in political psychology suggests that it is anxiety (and not the absence of it) that triggers "openmindedness and reflective deliberation" (MacKuen, Wolak, Keele, and Marcus 2010; Valentino, Hutchings, Banks, and Davies 2008), but also it is dogmatism (the exact opposite of skepticism), which "enables the individual to successfully cope with anxiety" (Attire-Picker 106). Even conceding Laursen's thesis, we need to question if this kind of tolerance is praiseworthy for contemporary democracies: what is the value of remaining open-minded to the opposite sides if, by design, the skeptic cannot truly agree with any of them without leaving behind his own skepticism? How could this sort of tolerance contribute to the goal of reaching some political consensus, as Nussbaum following Rawls claims, if any reason cannot be persuaded the skeptic? The flexibility of invertebrates is not very attractive in the political context, which demands agents with backbones and firm convictions, whether it is for following them or avoiding them.

Even when conceding that literary characters invoked by Laursen were legitimate Pyrrhonians, they are fruitless against the stronger interpretation of 10. No matter how they behave, there would be nothing praiseworthy about the Pyrrhonians.

Conclusions

At the beginning of this paper, we tried to show the relevance of the 10 for the comprehension of Pyrrhonism. Given its dependence on the Aristotelian doxastic model of action, the 10 raised a tough challenge to Pyrrhonism: the question about the place for moral competences in the Pyrrhonian stance. Afterward, we argued that moral character was not an optional issue in the context of ancient ethics but an essential element in any account of the phenomenon of morality. Exploring the Pyrrhonian's rejection of any moral competence in general, from our perspective, the particularistic approach under which Pyrrhonism operates in the philosophical market was evident: no systematic pretensions at all, a subject-centered ethical perspective, and an epistemology based on the Pyrrhonians' particular experiences,

leave us with a philosophical stance incapable of dealing with complex phenomena such as human morality. Finally, we dealt with two contemporary attempts to answer the immorality objection. We argued that the failure in both cases is due to considering 10 exclusively according to its weaker reading. Faced with the stronger objection, both attempts are insufficient for relieving Pyrrhonism of this problem, therefore leaving it with no allure in the present day.

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