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# HARMONIZING PYRRHO AND AENESIDEMUS

## ON A PROBLEMATIC LINE OF ARISTOCLES AND ITS CONTEXT



### ARMONIZAR A PIRRÓN Y ENESIDEMO SOBRE UNA LÍNEA PROBLEMÁTICA DE ARISTOCLES Y SU CONTEXTO

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**RESUMEN**

En este artículo argumento en contra de una intervención textual, sugerida por Moraux y adoptada por Chiesara, a una línea del tratado de Aristocles sobre la filosofía pirrónica. Esta lectura conservadora me permite resaltar la importancia del contexto en el que se inserta la línea en disputa. Pienso que el pasaje es crucial para la crítica de Aristocles a los escépticos, pues implica un intento consciente, aunque implícito, por unificar dos corrientes distintas del pirronismo: la original, representada por la apropiación de Timón de las palabras de Pirrón, y la más cercana a Aristocles, representada por Enesidemo.

*Palabras clave:* Aristocles, Enesidemo, escepticismo, pirronismo.

**ABSTRACT**

In this paper, I argue against a textual intervention, suggested by Moraux and adopted by Chiesara, to a line of Aristocles' treatise on Pyrrhonian philosophy. This conservative reading allows me to highlight the importance of the context in which the disputed line is inserted. I think the passage is crucial to the skeptics' critique of Aristocles, as it implies a conscious but implicit attempt to unify two distinct currents of Pyrrhonism: the original, represented by Timon's appropriation of Pyrrhon's words, and the closest to Aristocles, represented by Enesidemus.

*Keywords:* Aenesidemus, Aristocles, Skepticism, Pyrrhonism.

In the second volume of his monumental work on Aristotelianism, Paul Moraux (160-161 n. 266) proposes a correction to a problematic line of Aristocles (*apud* Eusebius *Praep. Ev.* 14.18.8.5-6). According to all the manuscripts, Aristocles' Pyrrhonians<sup>1</sup> (the argument in which the problematic line appears is indeed set forth in opposition to them) says that *everything is unknown and conventional to everybody* (πάντα ἄγνωστα καὶ νομιστὰ πᾶσι). According to Moraux, the text says instead that *everything is unknown and indeterminate to everybody* (πάντα ἄγνωστα καὶ ἀόριστα πᾶσι). Maria Lorenza Chiesara, the latest editor of Aristocles' fragments (22 *ad loc.*), accepts Moraux's emendation and agrees explicitly with the arguments he puts forward in favor of it. The correction is justified first by an external reason: while there is no other Pyrrhonian testimony stating conventionality for everything, Sextus claims that everything is indefinite (*PH* 1.198-9). There are also two internal reasons for the intervention. The first one consists of questioning the relevance of the term νομιστὰ in this context. For Moraux, "the reference to the νόμῳ character of everything has no business being here (*hat hier nichts zu suchen*);" for Chiesara, instead, the correction is more consistent than the *lectio* of the manuscripts in this context. The second internal reason is a material one. The intervention would be justified, Moraux seems to argue, because the text, at this very point, is corrupted.<sup>2</sup>

In this paper, I want to support the text of the manuscripts. If my argument is sound, I will eventually be able to sustain that it not only makes sense but that it is also sufficiently consistent with the context. Moreover, I will also show that even if there is some degree of manipulation by Aristocles, he is inspired by typically Pyrrhonian claims. This conservative approach will allow me to highlight the importance of the context in which the problematic line appears. I think that the passage is crucial in Aristocles' criticism of the Sceptics because it supposes a conscious but implicit attempt to unify two different Pyrrhonian strands –the original one, represented by Timon's appropriation of Pyrrho's words, and the more recent one, represented by Aenesidemus.<sup>3</sup>

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- 1 In what follows, the terms "pyrrhonian" and "sceptic" as all their derivatives are synonymous.
  - 2 After the word ΠΑΣΙ or ΠΑΣΙΝ, codices I, O, and N add the nonsensical formula ΟΣ Δ'ΟΥΘΕΝ (or ΟΥΔΕΝ). The formula is absent from codex B. Mras and Des Places (307), Des Places (150) and Chiesara (22) adopt the truistic conjecture of Stephanus: πᾶσι, <γ>νωσ<τὸν> δ' οὐθὲν.
  - 3 Pyrrho, Timon, and Aenesidemus are the leading representatives of the Sceptic path for Aristocles (§29), and he organizes them in this chronological order. Pyrrho and Timon represent for him a unity, insofar as the latter is the disciple of the former who writes what his master only has orally formulated (§2). Aristocles poses an indeterminate

To obtain these results, I will first discuss the context of the problematic line. I will begin talking about the Pyrrhonian background against which Aristocles develops his argument. From this background, an implicit agenda will emerge that makes the two Pyrrhonian strands he is facing here compatible. I will then examine the argument Aristocles proposes against all his adversaries. Next, I will present my interpretation of the text of the manuscripts, showing that it is consistent with this argument. Finally, my conclusions will deal with Aristocles' attempt at harmonizing his adversaries' claims and the problematic line's role in it.

### The Pyrrhonian Background and Aristocles' implicit agenda

Let us begin with a translation of the passage. Arabic numbers [1], [2], [3], and [4] distinguish steps in Aristocles' argument. Roman numbers (i), (ii), (iii), and low case letters (a) and (b) mark claims he attributes to his Pyrrhonian adversaries.

[1] And those who affirm that (i) everything is obscure must do one of two things, be mute or state and say something. If they were silent, clearly there would be no arguing with such men; but if they make statements, in every way and absolutely they would either affirm that something was or that it was not, as they now say that (ii) everything is (a) unknown and (b) conventional/indeterminate to everybody [††]. [2] Therefore, either the man who grants this either expresses the thing and it can be understood when it is said, or it cannot. If he does not, there would be absolutely no arguing with such a man either. [3] But if he speaks meaningfully, he certainly says unlimited or limited things; and if he says unlimited things, in this case too there would be no arguing with him, for there is no access of the unlimited. But if the things expressed or one of them is limited, the man who says it defines something and judges it. [4] How then could (iii) all things be (a) unknown and (b) undecidable? (Translation based on Chiesara's version) [...].<sup>4</sup>

chronological distance between this founding couple and Aenesidemus. The latter's task was to revive something to which no one was paying attention anymore, and it was carried out on dates very close to those in which Aristocles wrote his treatise (literally, "yesterday or the day before"). Aristocles never deals explicitly with the doctrinal links and differences between these two moments of Pyrrhonism, but he provides clues that allow us to suppose that, for him, Aenesidemus did not simply repeat what Timon wrote (specific vocabularies and results, lists of works, etc.). I use original/recent, old/renewed, and old/new-age oppositions to distinguish Pyrrho and Timon from Aenesidemus, emphasizing the chronological distance Aristocles recognizes between these two factions. The harmonization that is for me the real *enjeu* of the passage involves first emphasizing the doctrinal distance between them and then determining the kind of manipulations Aristocles must perform to erase it.

4 Based on the following Greek text: "[1] ἀνάγκη δὲ τοὺς φάσκοντας, ὡς (i) ἄδηλα πάντα εἶη, δυοῖν θάτερον, ἢ σιωπᾶν ἢ ἀποφαίνεσθαι τι καὶ λέγειν. εἰ μὲν οὖν ἡσυχίαν ἄγοιεν,

Aristocles characterizes his adversaries by universal claims (i), (ii) and (iii). If we assume that the predicate “unknown” has the same meaning in (ii.a) and in (iii.a), on the one hand, and we split the conjunctions constituting (ii) and (iii), on the other hand, we obtain these four claims:

(i) Everything is obscure (the “Obscurity Claim,” henceforth, *O*).

(ii.a) = (iii.a) Everything is unknown (the “Agnostic Claim,” henceforth, *A*).

(ii.b) Everything is conventional/indeterminate to everybody (the “Contentious Claim,” henceforth, *C*).

(iii.b) Everything is undecidable (the “Undecidability Claim,” henceforth, *U*).

The logical implicit links between these claims can be established easily. *O* is introduced as a definitional feature of the Pyrrhonian stance. Since the conjunction of *A* and *C* is also presented as an example of what the Skeptics “say now,” it seems safe to assume that this conjunction is a gloss or explanation of *O*. Each claim composing the conjunction must be therefore, at least, a necessary condition of *O*. The same applies to *U*, because Aristocles sees no problem in juxtaposing it with *A*, just as, a few lines earlier, he had associated the latter with *C*. Given these logical

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δηλον ὅτι πρὸς γε τοὺς τοιοῦτους οὐδεις ἂν εἶη λόγος· εἰ δ' ἀποφαίνοντο, πάντη τε καὶ πάντως ἢ εἶναι τι φαίεν ἂν ἢ μὴ εἶναι, καθάπερ ἀμέλει νυκί φασιν ὡς εἶη (ii) πάντα (a) ἄγνωστα καὶ (b) νομιστὰ/ ἀόριστα πᾶσιν ††. [2] τοῦτο τοίνυν ὁ ἀξιῶν ἦτοι δηλοῖ τὸ πρᾶγμα καὶ ἔνεστιν αὐτὸ συνεῖναι λεγόμενον, ἢ οὐκ ἔνεστιν. ἀλλ' εἰ μὲν οὐ δηλοῖ, καθάπαξ οὐδεις οὐδ' οὕτως πρὸς τὸν τοιοῦτον ἂν εἶη λόγος. [3] εἰ δὲ σημαῖοι, πάντως ἢ ἄπειρα λέγοι ἂν ἢ πεπερασμένα· καὶ εἰ μὲν ἄπειρα, οὐδ' οὕτως ἂν εἶη λόγος πρὸς αὐτόν, ἀπίρου γὰρ γνώσις οὐκ ἔστι· πεπερασμένων δὲ ὄντων τῶν δηλουμένων ἢ ἐνὸς ὅτουοῦν, ὁ τοῦτο λέγων ὀρίζει τι καὶ κρίνει. [4] πῶς οὖν (a) ἄγνωστα καὶ (b) ἀνεπίκριτα πάντα εἶη ἂν.” I leave aside in this analysis the final section of §9 in which Aristocles presents his adversary denying the principle of non-contradiction (PNC) to escape the objection raised up to this point. As I understand them, these lines add nothing to our understanding of *Pyrrhonism* nor to our understanding of the image *Aristocles* has and wants to convey of it. They are, instead, an explicit acknowledgment that the Peripatetic is basing his argument on the refutation of PNC's deniers in *Metaphysics* IV (cf. *infra*). Much has been argued about whether Aristocles' testimony implies the Skeptics rejected the PNC (see Ferrari 1981, Reale 1981; against Stopper 1983). Warren (158) carefully distinguishes this issue from the problem of whether Aristocles assumed the Skeptics supported such a rejection. According to him, Aristocles does attribute such a claim to his opponents, but it is not true that they intended to deny the PNC. Even though I agree with Warren on the second point, I do not find his argument for the first one convincing. This is the only passage in the opusculum in which a Pyrrhonian is shown consciously and explicitly falling into a contradiction. For a serious revision on the Pyrrhonian attitude towards the PNC, see Machuca (2012).

links, it would be sufficient to reject either *A*, *C*, or *U* to refute *O*. That is what Aristocles is implicitly aiming at, as far as I understand.<sup>5</sup>

Let us now talk about the people behind these Pyrrhonian claims, leaving aside the litigious one, for obvious reasons. The author of *U* is easily identifiable since it uses a term that appears in Timon's programmatic summary of Pyrrho's thought transmitted by Aristocles (§§3-4). The term "ἀνεπίκριτα" (translated as "undecidable" here) is indeed part of the mysterious triad through which the master used to characterize all things, according to the pupil.<sup>6</sup> They are all, let us remember, "equally indistinct, unstable, and undecidable (ἐπ' ἴσης ἀδιάφορα καὶ ἀστάθμητα καὶ ἀνεπίκριτα)." Critics debate the meaning of these terms, and whether they were actually used by Pyrrho or by Timon alone.<sup>7</sup> I will not get into either of these two discussions here. It will suffice to point out that in this context *U* represents that "original" Pyrrhonism, embodied by Pyrrho and divulged by Timon.

Up to this point, all Aristocles' refutations explicitly attack the mysterious triad (cf. §§5-7). However, the term "ἄδηλα" does not appear either in this triad or in the development of the philosophical program arising from it. At the beginning of this passage *O* is thus a novelty. It will subsequently reappear several times (§§10, 11, 12, 21), always characterizing Aristocles' target and replacing the members of the triad in that role. Moreover, *O* is intimately linked to the other Pyrrhonian figure the Peripatetic is aware of, i.e., Aenesidemus. Thus, according to Aristocles, the general goal of his modes is to show that all things are obscure (§11). This is not a hidden goal, for it is what Aenesidemus asserts (§12), as does the opponent in our argument. We can thus assume

5 I am suggesting that the implicit argument has, in general terms, the structure of a *modus tollens*:  $O \rightarrow (A \vee C \vee U)$ ;  $\neg(A \vee C \vee U)$ ;  $\therefore \neg O$ . That is why I emphasize that *A*, *C*, and *U* function as necessary conditions of *O*. However, they are in fact necessary and sufficient conditions of it. The centrality I give to *O* is justified by the novelty it represents in the development of Aristocles' argumentation, as I will now show.

6 This term is also essential in Sextus' Pyrrhonism since he uses it to determine the type of disagreement on which the suspension of assent depends. Critics debate whether the term or the concept it involves was already present in Aenesidemus or not (against: Bett 209; in favor: Janáček 2008a 295, Polito *ad* B16). I do not want to take sides in this discussion. My point here is that Aristocles uses it as a marker identifying the Skepticism of Pyrrho and Timon. I am not interested in determining whether they actually used it or whether Aenesidemus took it up and in what sense. For this reason, I will not base my argument on the harmonization of these two Pyrrhonian strands on this possible borrowing. Later I will give some complementary determinations on how the Peripatetic understood it. On the Pyrrhonian undecidability see the excellent Svavarsson 2004.

7 The list is long, but for me, Stopper (1983), Brunschwig (1994a), Bett (2000), and Svavarsson (2004) are particularly illuminating.

that *O* and the vocabulary of obscurity in general are markers that allow him to distinguish this other Pyrrhonian strand.<sup>8</sup>

At the beginning of his treatise, Aristocles states that Pyrrho strongly supported the idea that we were not naturally constituted to know (§§1-2). However, the Peripatetic does not seem to be attributing this variant of *A* to the founding father *verbatim*.<sup>9</sup> In any case, neither this variant nor *A* itself is taken up again in Timon's programmatic summary. Instead, Aristocles seems to be drawing a conclusion that derives from any Skeptical proposal, obviously undesirable for him. If this is the case, we should not attribute *A* to any particular strand of Pyrrhonism because Aristocles holds that it belongs equally to all of them as an outcome. In refuting it, any Skeptical stance would be rejected.

If this assessment of the authorship of the claims is accepted, the picture of the Pyrrhonian background becomes very interesting. It is a mixed background that integrates two different tendencies of Pyrrhonism, each of which uses its own specific vocabulary.<sup>10</sup> For this reason alone, the passage represents a unique moment in the Peripatetic's text. Aristocles has to harmonize both tendencies to achieve this mixture, establishing logical links between the different claims. He never clears up these links, but it is possible to make them explicit. Up to this point, it is possible to say that, for Aristocles, both the original Pyrrhonism represented by *U* and the renewed one expressed in *O* imply *A* or some variant of it; and much more significantly, that the position of Aenesidemus implies that of Timon because *O* implies *U*.<sup>11</sup> Further on, once I have proposed a version of *C*, I will try to detail how it fits into this mixture, but before that I must deal with Aristocles' explicit argument aimed at refuting all Pyrrhonian adversaries.

## The Argument

Aristocles seeks to bring a hypothetical adversary to admit an exception refuting universal claims *O*, *A*, *C*, and *U*. The argument reaches

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- 8 Specialists have scarcely examined the question, but this proposal seems to have the support of Roberto Polito, the latest editor of Aenesidemus' fragments (*cf.* Polito *ad* B20). Chiesara suggests that Aristocles' use of the term ἀδηλος has an Aristotelian origin, but her argument is not quite convincing (114). My point, in any case, has nothing to do with the origin of the term but rather with its use in Aristocles' argumentation.
- 9 Chiesara also argues that the voice speaking in this introduction is that of Aristocles and not that of Timon (89), who will be the source of what follows.
- 10 That is why we can talk of a *conscious* attempt to harmonize these adversaries, even if there is no explicit argument supporting that: Aristocles is both using markers enabling him to distinguish the two Pyrrhonian strands and unifying them as a single opponent.
- 11 Alternatively, that *U* implies *O*, but as I explain in note 5, there are reasons supporting this emphasis.

the expected conclusion in section [4].<sup>12</sup> All the opponent has to do is to utter a linguistic item. Aristocles' task is to show her that this action implies accepting the fatal exception. Such an argumentative strategy is very reminiscent of a procedure used by Aristotle in Book IV of the *Metaphysics*: the much-discussed “demonstration by refutation,” set against the adversaries of the principle of non-contradiction (*Met.* 4.4.1006a11-28). Indeed, some formulas are inspired by or even copied from the Aristotelian text. It can thus be said that the Peripatetic uses this very passage of the *Metaphysics* or a paraphrase of it as a source.<sup>13</sup>

The structure of the argument is dilemmatic.<sup>14</sup> Aristocles proposes and links together three exclusive dichotomies. One of the horns of these dichotomies invariably leads to the automatic rebuttal of the opponent, more precisely to her exclusion as a dialectical opponent: she do not even deserve to be engaged in a discussion. The elements of the other horn, in contrast, give rise to a series of conditions of the act of verbalization, a series that leads to the conclusion.

The first condition (section [1]) is to *state something* (ἀποφαίνεσθαι τι). In *Metaphysics* IV, at least in the text established by recent editors, Aristotle argues that for his argument to run, it suffices that his opponent *says something*, anything but a proposition. The “demonstration by refutation” will be carried out using the word “ἄνθρωπος” as an example. Aristocles' initial demand, on the contrary, is to obtain the verbalization of a linguistic item with a propositional structure from his adversary: his opponent must say that “something is or is not (εἶναι τι ἢ μὴ εἶναι).”<sup>15</sup> Aristocles exemplifies his request evoking the conjunction of A and C. This does not imply that the opponent has to repeat any claim of her *credo*. At this point, the content does not seem critical. The requirement is formal: the argument starts if the opponent agrees to utter a set of articulated sounds with a specific structure.

12 Aristocles states this conclusion by means of a rhetorical question, as he usually does (§§5, 6, 12, 14, 17, 18, 20, 24, 25).

13 Cf. Chiesara (112-114) and Warren (151 n. 26). If Moraux (88-89) is right on Aristocles' chronology (AD 1st C.), it is possible to assert that this passage is one of the oldest extant references to *Metaphysics* IV.

14 Janáček (2008b 206) argues that Aristocles' use of the dilemmatic form involves “undoubtedly a parodic tendency,” for it is an argumentative form widely used by Aenesidemus. He may be right in general, but for this particular argument, it is also (and perhaps mainly) a reiteration of a procedure inaugurated by Aristotle in *Metaphysics* IV.

15 Interestingly, Alexander of Aphrodisias (*Met.* 273-274) reports a variant to *Met.* 4.1006a18 corresponding to what Aristocles demands here: the interlocutor would be required to state a proposition. However, the commentator remarks that this variant is difficult to understand.



The second condition (section [2]) is raised by two complementary formulas. If the opponent has successfully fulfilled the first requirement, she must “express the thing (δηλοῖ τὸ πρᾶγμα),” on the one hand, and it must be possible to “comprehend it when it is stated (ἔνεστιν αὐτὸ συνεῖναι λεγόμενον),” on the other hand. We have moved here from a phonological demand to a semantic one. The thing at stake in the two formulas is what we would call the content of the linguistic item that has just been uttered.<sup>16</sup> From here on, the argument will deal with that propositional content. Its properties will justify the exception denying the opponent’s universal claims.

The first formula does not seem to call for anything other than the existence of such content. When emitting a proposition, the opponent must be doing more than vibrating her tongue and moving her lips. She must mean something. The second formula sets forth a property of the content. If it is genuine, it must be attainable epistemically both by the one who enunciates it and by an occasional listener. That is the strength of “συνίημι,” the verb chosen to indicate the type of cognition at stake: the content must be comprehensible, understandable *in a common way*.

A property such as shared understandability does not structurally determine the content, as it must be defined in relation to the ones who can understand. This relative nature does not mean that it is trivial. It is a property that seems necessary, given the kind of thing at stake. An utterance whose content is not comprehensible is a noise, not a linguistic act. Moreover, by making his adversary admit it, Aristocles was already able to refute one of her universal claims. If the agnostic claim denies *all* epistemic access to things, the Peripatetic would have found an item that necessarily involves it. For reasons I will set forth in a moment, Aristocles is not interested in finishing his argument at this point. A last non-relative property of the content, directly linked to the relative one we have just discussed, remains to be specified.

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 16 Is Aristocles adopting a realist view on meanings here, or is his perspective a naive referentialism, according to which words and phrases refer to objects and states of affairs in the external world? The former seems more natural to me, but I lack sufficient elements to commit Aristocles to that theoretical perspective. In any case, he treats *that* which is signified by language as something pertinent to produce his counterexample. That very thing is what I shall call “propositional content” or “meaning” in what follows. In an earlier passage (§7), he also seems to take the signifiers themselves as a counterexample. There has also been much discussion about the meaning of “πράγματα” in this testimony and, here again, I think it is necessary to distinguish what Aristocles means by the term from what the Pyrrhonians might have meant by it. In his excellent article, Brunschwig (1994a) shows that there are also pertinent differences to be noted in this respect between Pyrrho and Timon.

To yield the last dichotomy (section [3]), Aristocles takes the distinction between unlimited and limited things from *Metaphysics* IV.<sup>17</sup> However, I am quite sure that it does not have the same value in both texts. In Aristotle, it separates two ways a name *could* be homonymous. There would be an uncontrollable homonymy, in which the name would signify an infinite number of things, and a manageable one, in which the name would signify a specific number of things. The distinction then determines the relationship between a unity (the signifier) and two kinds of multiplicities (its signifieds, either infinite or finite). Aristocles, on the contrary, uses the distinction without explicitly mentioning the problem of homonymy. It would not be worthwhile to assume that this problem is the implicit background of the passage because the Peripatetic is not examining the relationship between a signifier and its signifieds, and consequently, he cannot establish the two kinds of multiplicities of *Metaphysics* IV. Indeed, the quantitative meaning of the predicates “limited” and “unlimited” does not seem relevant.<sup>18</sup> They are not qualifying any multiplicity here, but rather the propositional content taken as a whole or one of its parts.<sup>19</sup> The other meaning of that pair of predicates, the qualitative one, better suits the passage. According to this qualitative meaning, something unlimited is something lacking unity and identity of its own. Conversely, something limited is a well-formed, identifiable, and unitarian object. Aristocles is thus raising the requirement that the entire content or any of its parts, which the adversary conveys when uttering a proposition, must be ontologically sound. He explains that there is no epistemic access to it if this is not so (ἀπείρου γὰρ γνῶσις οὐκ ἔστι). Without that access, it seems that the shared understandability demanded in the previous condition does not exist either.

Why does Aristocles take this ontological turn? After all, as we have seen, he could already have refuted his adversary by leading her to accept the need for some epistemic access to certain things. I think the answer is that he is attempting to refute a faction of Pyrrhonism with

17 The wording changes slightly from one text to the other: while Aristocles speaks of ἀπειρα and πεπερασμένα, Aristotle distinguishes between ἀπειρα and ὀρισμένα (*Met.* IV.1006a28-b13). I believe that the distinction between a qualitative and a quantitative sense I will introduce works for both pairs of terms. Perhaps the copy or paraphrase of *Met.* on which Aristocles relied had that variant (cf. note 15).

18 Pace Warren (154-155). His quantitative interpretation perhaps works for *Met.* IV but not for Aristocles.

19 This is my understanding of the following sentence of Aristocles: πεπερασμένων δὲ ὄντων τῶν δηλουμένων ἢ ἐνὸς ὅτου οὖν. The distinction between the whole and the parts of the propositional content appears abruptly in the development of the argument: nothing anticipates it, and it involves no further development.

the same ontological tendencies, i.e., the “original” one. Its presence at this point in the argument is undeniable. The conclusion, which stems directly from this section, includes the undecidability claim *U* which, as we have seen, is part of Timon’s triad. The predicate “ἀνεπίκριτα” clearly echoes the verb “κρίνει,” which, in the previous sentence, describes what happens when limited things are stated. The property denoted by this predicate is not *prima facie* ontological. Nothing is actually undecidable in itself, but it is necessarily so for someone. However, the other two properties of the mysterious triad, i.e., indistinctness and instability, do have this non-relative character, at least for Aristocles, for whom the “original” Pyrrhonism thus provides an ontological foundation that implies some epistemological consequences.<sup>20</sup> His argument proceeds in the same way at this point, and is therefore in line with these adversaries. Furthermore, he translates them using an inherited vocabulary that he trusts (even if he modifies its original meaning). I suggest indeed that by using the Aristotelian term “ἄπειρα,” Aristocles is capturing either one of the two implicit predicates of the mysterious triad or perhaps both at once. It seems reasonable to say that something ontologically ill-formed is also both indistinct and unstable.

Let us finish this section by concluding that Aristocles has led his adversary to grant that at least some kind of thing has necessarily the ontological conditions required for epistemic access. He has also led her to realize that this kind of thing “is there” or “appears” every time she makes a statement. At best, the opponent must recognize that she cannot both use propositional language and defend a claim such as *U*, or any other resulting from Timon’s triad. Moreover, a version of *A* depending on *U*, according to which there would be no epistemic access *at all* to the world, would be false. Presented this way, the imaginary opponent in the argument would be a Timonian Skeptic. However, the argument began by characterizing her not as an “original” Pyrrhonian but as a “renovator.” The opponent was someone who maintained, along with Aenesidemus, that everything is obscure. How are *O* and *U* linked? What is the role of claim *C* in this relation? Does it belong to the original strand of Pyrrhonism, or does it instead express an idea of Aenesidemus? To answer these questions, we must first solve the textual dispute from which we started, so let us now focus on claim *C*.

20 Here again, I follow Warren (145-148). Taking this position does not address the vexed question about the Pyrrhonian interpretation of the mysterious triad because it concerns only Aristocles’ understanding of it. I agree with Stopper (274), Declava (225), and Chiesara (95) that one must treat the pair ἀδιάφορα and ἀστάθμητα differently from the term ἀνεπίκριτα. The latter must necessarily refer to a subjective-relational property, at least in its Aristoclean use (otherwise, the echo with “κρίνει” would be unintelligible).

### A Conservative Reading of C

Perhaps the most persuasive argument of Moraux and Chiesara supporting their correction is based on the relevance of the text of the manuscripts. For the former, as mentioned above, the transmitted *lectio* makes no sense in this context. Less drastically, the latter maintains that the intervention improves the coherence of the passage. Nevertheless, both versions of the argument can be ruled out if one can find a relevant interpretation of the transmitted text. After all, it *should* have some authority of its own. I now want to propose a hypothesis that might restore its questioned authority. My hypothesis has two parts. The first one poses that Aristocles was using the predicate “conventional” to replace “relative.” This substitution is a metonymy that may be problematic, but it is based on certain uses of both predicates in Pyrrhonian sources. Moreover (and this is the second part of my hypothesis), it reflects Aristocles’ understanding of the notion of relativity and fits quite well with the aim of the argument in which it appears.

Let us start with the first part of the hypothesis. To make it plausible, I will first argue that Aristocles could have proposed such a substitution. Although no passage in the opusculum explicitly joins convention to relativity, two shared features of the Aristoclean use of both predicates make it possible to associate them. Firstly, he uses them in contexts directly connected to linguistic concerns. The suspected “conventional” (even if it would determine all things and not only linguistic items in C) appears in the framework of an argument establishing the conditions of meaningful language. Moreover, Aristocles’ presentation of Aenesidemus’ mode of relativity is that all things (all the same things that were also conventional in C) are *said* relatively (πρός τι λεγόμενα). Secondly, both predicates have a close link to another one that is fundamental for us, i.e., “obscure.” On the one hand, as we have seen, “conventional,” if accepted, would be a gloss or explanation of “obscure,” and, on the other hand, all of the Aenesidemus’ modes, including the one based on relativity, sought to show the obscurity of all things.

Such a substitution thus seems formally possible in Aristocles, but how justified would he be in making it? After all, C is not a claim of his own but one he attributes to his Skeptic opponents. At least one text in the existing Pyrrhonian corpus explicitly links the two predicates in the way my hypothesis requires. In *PH* 3, after presenting various assessments of life and death, Sextus argues that neither one “is such-and-such by nature (ἐστὶ φύσει τοῖον ἢ τοῖον), but <that> all <these things> are conventional, i.e., relative (νομιστὰ δὲ πάντα καὶ πρὸς τι)” (*PH* 3. 232). If we take this last phrase out of its context, we would practically have an occurrence of C, as transmitted in the manuscripts. Perhaps Aristocles employed this hermeneutically questionable

procedure. I cannot say whether or not this was the case. What is crucial is that in this quasi-occurrence of *C*, the predicate “conventional” is juxtaposed to or, better yet, explained by “relative” (if one takes, as I think one must, the “καί” joining both terms as exegetical). Now, Sextus recognizes a lot of relative things that are not conventional.<sup>21</sup> For example, he would agree that what appears to me as sweet is relative, but he never would concede that it is the result of a pact between the honey and me, or something I state as an autonomous legislator. Rather it is something I experience involuntarily. Therefore, if he is explaining one predicate by the other, it is because he assumes here (as indeed he must) that the set of conventional things is subsumed into the set of relative things. Substituting one predicate with the other would be a case of metonymy in which one would refer to the genus by mentioning one of its species.

It seems that the first part of my hypothesis is plausible, given that both Aristocles could have made the substitution and that it is also possible to trace Skeptical sources authorizing it (with a greater or lesser degree of *mauvaise foi*). Let us assume then that the text of the manuscripts where we find *C* is expressing claim *C\**, according to which *everything is relative*. Moraux and Chiesara could hardly object to the Skeptic origin of it since this is attested several times as a Pyrrhonian claim (cf. *PH* 1.135-140). Moreover, it also seems safe to assume outright that Aenesidemus is behind this, given the undisputed centrality of the notion of relativity in his version of Pyrrhonism. Nevertheless, the meaning of *C\** is controversial, as controversial as the Pyrrhonian use of relativity and the Skeptical mode based on it. I cannot settle all the questions this issue raises but can only propose a general outline to facilitate the understanding of what is at stake in Aristocles’ manipulation.

*C\** repeatedly appears in Sextus’ presentation of the eighth mode. It is not an ontological claim for him, as it might appear at first glance, but an epistemological one that establishes how things display themselves to us as possible objects of knowledge. This is precisely the meaning of his translation of *C\**: where it says “πάντα ἐστὶ πρὸς τι,” it is to be understood, according to him, “πρὸς τι πάντα φαίνεται” (§135). This “Pyrrhonianly correct” translation is ambiguous. On the one hand, if “πρὸς τι” is interpreted adverbially (“everything appears *relatively*”), the dependency between subject and object is emphasized: things will appear according to the one who grasps them, and only what she can

21 The distinction between the natural and the artificial (the conventional, the cultural) is used operationally in numerous Pyrrhonian sources. Sextus introduces it, for example, in *PH* 1.23, when he distinguishes the four aspects of the “observation of everyday life” a Skeptic follows. Aristocles transmit what is certainly an earlier version of this division in §20: “one must live by following nature and customs.” Something similar can be identified in *DL* 9.108. Regarding these last two passages, I refer to Correa (2015; 2019).

grasp will indeed appear to her. On the other hand, if “πρός τι” functions as an adjective (“everything appears *relative*”), the dependency of the possible object on other objects is emphasized: things will appear inextricably linked to other things, and it will be impossible for the subject to separate them. Sextus carefully distinguishes these two readings but suggests the same conclusion is to be inferred from both: we must suspend our assent on how things are either by nature or separately. Both subjective (adverbial) and objective (adjectival) codependencies will then inhibit our grasping of the very nature of things. Both codependencies are thus at stake in Sextus’ notion of relativity. Both give content to  $C^*$  in his use of it.

As previously mentioned, there is also a version of  $C^*$  in Aristocles: “all things are said relatively.” If one assumes that using language is part of our cognitive processes, it does not seem too bold to give this linguistic version of  $C^*$  the same epistemic import as the ontological version Sextus translates. The way we express things through language is indeed inseparable from the way they are given to us as possible objects of knowledge. Moreover, an ambiguity analogous to that of Sextus’ translation can also be detected here. Aristocles’ version can indeed be understood as asserting both subjective or adverbial codependence (“all things are said relatively *to us*”) and objective or adjective codependence (“things are said relatively *to other things*”).

According to Chiesara (123), both codependencies are at stake here.<sup>22</sup> Perhaps she is right, although no argument supports her view the way it should. The validity of her claim is not evident because not all ancient sources on Skeptic relativity state both codependencies or do not do so in the same way as Sextus.<sup>23</sup> It is not even certain that this linguistic wording of  $C^*$  corresponds to the original on which Aristocles relies, even if it may be a suitable formulation of a Pyrrhonian “doctrine.”

22 She claims that “the context in which this trope (sc. relativity) is placed by Aristocles suggests that the generic expression ‘relatively spoken’ [...] refers to both relativity of each thing to another [...], and relativity to that which judges [...]” All she does to prove her claim is to record ancient sources in which either one of these two types of relativities (codependencies in my jargon) or both appear.

23 Other sources on the relativity mode partially agree with Sextus’ presentation. Philo (*De ebrietate* 168-8) presents glosses of  $C^*$  that would only be based on adjectival codependence (“absolutely nothing in the world is thought in and of itself, but rather evaluated by juxtaposition with its opposite”). By contrast, Diogenes Laertius (9.87-88) offers a version of  $C^*$  that is restricted to adverbial codependence (“everything is relative to thought”). Although he clearly recognizes adjectival codependence, he does not explicitly formulate any generalization allowing him to attribute it to everything. The conclusion of the mode is also curiously partial: “therefore, things that are relative are unknowable in themselves.” Annas and Barnes argue that Diogenes would be “compressing his sceptical source with this formulation” (144).

Moreover, the first thing to determine is what Aristocles himself means by using it. That being said, if she were to admit the first part of my hypothesis, she would have at least one other passage showing that Aristocles (whatever his source may have proposed) recognized one of those two codependencies, i.e., the adverbial one, even if his understanding of it was far from Sextus' Pyrrhonian standards. To demonstrate this is to demonstrate the second part of my hypothesis.

Expressing the relativity of things by calling them "conventional" makes them all the result of a subject's activities. This metonymy captures the idea of adverbial codependency: things are whatever the subject can (or wants) them to be. However, it also goes beyond the scope the Skeptics intended to give to this codependency, for it implies taking a position on the ontological status of things: they are indeed creations of the subject; without it, they cannot even exist. With his metonymy, Aristocles would be performing both gestures simultaneously: expressing a typically Pyrrhonian idea, but in his own way, according to his understanding of it and responding to his own agenda.

I do not think one must necessarily see this course of action as an act of *mauvaise foi*. The original wording of *C\** (present in Sextus but most likely inherited from an earlier tradition) is ontological. If Aristocles did not have access to a translation into the "Pyrrhonian tongue" such as that proposed by Sextus, it is not surprising that he took it that way. Furthermore, it does not seem odd to introduce the notion of convention into an argument dealing with the nature of language (especially considering that the Pyrrhonians themselves linked it to the notion of relativity and, moreover, that it captures at least partially an intuition central to the Skeptical understanding of the latter). Finally, the metonymy works well in this context from an argumentative point of view. The wording of *C* in the manuscripts is as follows: "πάντα νομιστὰ πᾶσι" ("everything is conventional for all"). If "πάντα" and "πᾶσι" have a distributive meaning (as I think they must have), Aristocles would be declaring here that the Pyrrhonians believe that *each* human establishes what *each* thing is. In the argument, as we have seen, the pertinent things are meanings, things expressed by words and propositions. If one were to accept *that* kind of conventionalism Aristocles attributes to his adversaries, one would have to admit that every time a speaker utters a proposition, she is expressing something she is *ipso facto* establishing. The consequence of such a scenario would be fatal: nothing could guarantee that anyone else could understand *what* is being said because it is not something held in common. To put it as Aristocles did: one would certainly be "expressing the thing," but "it would not be possible to comprehend it."

If both parts of my hypothesis are admitted, it seems fair to say that Moraux was hasty in dismissing any relevant sense to the manuscripts' *lectio*. Furthermore, *pace* Chiesara, it does not seem necessary to introduce changes to the text to improve its coherence because the version transmitted is sufficiently coherent.

### Back to the Harmonization

I can now answer the questions raised in the second section. I will begin with the last two: what role does *C* (in its restored wording) play in the transition from the obscurity claim *O* to the undecidability claim *U*, and to which Skeptical strand should *C* be ascribed? By *C*, Aristocles expresses an idea that is typical of the renovating strand of Pyrrhonism, as we have seen. Although it is certainly not a fragment of some lost work of Aenesidemus, Aristocles might have justified its wording by appealing to intuitions and, perhaps, to linguistic uses of this renovator and his followers. Insofar as *C* represents this strand, it cannot by itself play any role in harmonizing this strand with the original one. Indeed, its links to *U* are not at all obvious. Both *C* and *U* raise or imply epistemological considerations, supported by ontological reasons. Nevertheless, these reasons are by no means equivalent. Stating that things are undecidable because they are ontologically ill-formed is not the same as calling them unknowable on the grounds that they would be the unreachable creation of an autonomous lawgiver. Thus, *C* does not clarify why the "recent" Pyrrhonism expressed in *O* implies the original version stated in *U*. Nevertheless, *C* must be linked to *O* because they both represent the same strand. In what way is this so? To answer this question and the one pending in the second section concerning the relations between *O* and *U*, it is necessary to specify the notion of obscurity that is at stake here.

The notion of obscurity has an epistemological nature in the Pyrrhonian sources, as in all other Hellenistic philosophies. It determines how things are presented as objects of knowledge. In general, an obscure thing is one to which epistemic access is difficult or impossible. In Sextus' Pyrrhonism, the notion basically involves epistemic impossibility, but in a very particular way. A Skeptic cannot maintain that certain things are *de iure* obscure, but only that she is in no factual condition to access them. Rather than distinguishing kinds of things, obscurity and its counterpart (clarity or evidence) separate different aspects of the same thing. They actually distinguish between what we *de facto* obtain from something through a given epistemic link, from what said link does not give us, i.e., what the thing is in itself. The former is what Sextus refers to as *to phainomenon*, while he constantly qualifies



as *obscure* the latter.<sup>24</sup> That very aspect of things is also what Dogmatics claim to apprehend with their theories and what the Pyrrhonist must cancel by suspending her assent. This epistemic situation, to which she aspires because of its alleged perks, supposes that she can neither affirm nor deny that the given (the phenomenon) *de facto* corresponds to the real (the obscure). Furthermore, she can neither affirm nor deny that such a correspondence is *de iure* the case or not. In qualifying things as obscure, she is only labeling them as *here and now epistemically indeterminate*, leaving open the possibility that they may eventually either be determined or ruled out as determinable.

If we accept that Sextus (whom I rely on for this characterization) inherited the notion of obscurity from Aenesidemus,<sup>25</sup> the meaning of *O* should be that things are *de facto* presented to us with said

24 See, e.g., *PH* 1.13.,14, 16, 197, 200. Diogenes Laertius also talks of obscure things on which the Pyrrhonian suspends his assent (9.103). In speaking of aspects of the same thing (and not of kinds of things), I am using a notion that is not explicit in Sextus but that is implied by statements such as the following one: “for example, it appears to us that honey sweetens (we concede this inasmuch as we are sweetened in a perceptual way), but whether (as far as the argument goes) it is actually sweet is something we investigate –and this is not what is apparent but something said about what is apparent” (*PH* 1.20, Barnes’ translation). This one, along with *PH* 1.13, is one of the most discussed Sextus’ passages (see Barney 1992; Frede 1997; Burnyeat 1997; Barnes 1997; Brunschwig 1994b; Vogt 2012). The wording implies that the Pyrrhonian admits that her appearance occurs in relation to the *very thing* about which the Dogmatist pretends to say what it actually is. That same thing (the honey) is thus considered under two different aspects. I am ready to assume this interpretation’s ontological and epistemological consequences, particularly that in Sextus, one cannot properly speak of skepticism of the external world (cf. Fine). The other distinction that Sextus never uses and which I use here is the *de facto/de iure* opposition. However, he does refer to the circumstantial and temporally restricted character of appearances (cf. *PH* 1.4, 25).

25 Sextus explicitly distances himself from Aenesidemus on several points, for example, in his interpretation of Heraclitus or Plato (cf. *PH* 1.210, 222). There are indeed authors who seek to mark these differences strongly (Woodruff 1988, Bett 2000). Others, on the other hand, while recognizing them, assume a fundamental conceptual and “doctrinal” continuity between these two Pyrrhonian figures (Castagnoli 2002; 2010). To make the hypothesis I put forward here credible, I should be able to identify in Aenesidemus the elements that allowed me to present the notion of obscurity in Sextus. If the testimony of Aristocles is reliable on this point, the notion itself was central to his thought. Aristocles himself seems to show that this notion was opposed to that of appearance or phenomena (§ 13). Other sources also testify to the existence of the latter notion in Aenesidemus’ thought (DL 9.104-106, cf. Polito *ad B5*; Correa 2021). Finally, it is also clear that in Aenesidemus’ proposal, the only epistemically acceptable things are those appearances, not the objects he qualifies as obscure. Finding discrepancies between both proposals will always be possible, and it is undoubtedly worthwhile to deepen the question. For what I need here, let the above suffice. I intend only to establish a Pyrrhonian point of view that can be contrasted with what Aristocles puts forward.

indeterminacy.<sup>26</sup> We can obtain from them only what our contingent and imperfect epistemic link can provide. Explained this way, the obscurity of things implies the recognition of their relativity, particularly their subjective or adverbial codependence as characterized earlier. Positing their relativity entails admitting in turn that, as we have seen, what they are by themselves is not necessarily given to us. *O* and *C\** (but not *C*) therefore imply each other. Nevertheless, I do not think the same is true for *C*.

First of all, *C* forces us to change the notion of subject we have used in the previous presentation. Instead of a generic “we” and some general human cognitive conditions, we have to speak of individual “legislators” and particular epistemic capacities. Secondly, *C* leads us to distinguish two irreconcilable epistemic situations. On the one hand, there is the relationship established by the “legislator” and her “creations.” It seems possible to think that there is complete epistemic access in this case. On the other hand, there is also the relationship that any other human subject seeks to establish with “creations” that are not her own. In this case, it would be necessary to assume a total impossibility of epistemic access –without a shared world, all possibilities of comprehension would come to an end. Therefore, thirdly, if we accept qualifying this last category of things (those instituted by subjects other than us) as obscure, we would have to realize that this attribute does not have the same meaning the Pyrrhonists gave to it. In this case, obscurity would correspond to total inaccessibility, both *de facto* and *de iure*, of things, and it could in no way be assimilated to the Pyrrhonian indeterminacy of things.

This seems to be how Aristocles understands obscurity and, therefore, what he presumes his new-wave opponents hold when they utter *C*. In fact, it is only in this way that *O* and *C* imply each other. Admittedly, this involves warping their notion of obscurity (that I am assuming Sextus took from Aenesidemus), but this fits quite well with Aristocles’ harmonizing agenda and argument. Let us recall that total inaccessibility of things was, in the argument, a direct consequence of

26 As I have said at the beginning, Moraux and Chiesara propose to change νομιστά for ἀόριστα in *C*, based on *PH* 1.198-199. Sextus defines the indeterminacy (ἀοριστία) of all things as “an intellectual feeling in virtue of which we neither deny nor posit anything investigated in dogmatic fashion, i.e., anything obscure” (Barnes’ translation, slightly modified). As far as I understand, this definition corresponds quite well to the indeterminacy I have just characterized. Moraux and Chiesara were not wrong linking indeterminacy and obscurity –and, as I hope it is clear, I never criticized them for that. However, an interpretative difficulty does not justify intervening the text, even if the proposed correction is doctrinally correct. Moreover, their correction completely erases the traces of a possible manipulation by Aristocles.

the position of the original Pyrrhonists. If one holds that things are unlimited (i.e., indistinct and/or unstable), no cognitive access (as I think *gnosis* should be understood) to them is possible. So, if one accepts the radical version of the concept of obscurity that Aristocles uses here, *O* and *U* also imply each other. In such a case, *C* and *U* would lead to the same outcome even if they are not equivalent. That being said, Aristocles had already announced that outcome at the beginning of his treatise and reiterated it in his argument by attributing the agnostic claim *A* to all his opponents.

Aristocles succeeds in harmonizing the positions of Pyrrho and Aenesidemus despite their differences (which are still visible in *O* and *U*) through *A* (which is his own) and *O* (which he takes and reinterprets from Aenesidemus). It would perhaps be more accurate to say that *A* is the Aristoclean translation of *O* because unknowability and obscurity seem to function as perfect synonyms in this case. By his explicit argument, Aristocles would have shown both Pyrrho and Aenesidemus that at least one kind of thing is necessarily cognizable, i.e., not obscure (either because it is ontologically well-formed or because it is held in common and therefore not relatively). They would have to admit this minimum cognizability if they intended to utter these or any other claims.

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