

HOW RELATIVIST ARE SCEPTICS?

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Abstract: *It is not uncommon to see epistemological discussions of cognitive states such as beliefs to treat scepticism and relativism as epistemic siblings. Yet, despite appearances, the relationship between the two does not seem to be a simple matter of entailment or implication. Thus, the aim of the article is to chart out the contours of epistemic scepticism and relativism against the backdrop of ancient sceptical stance of Pyrrhonism and the contemporary sceptical position of Peter Unger.*

Keywords: *Scepticism, Relativism, Pyrrhonism, Peter Unger.*

In his influential paper, ‘The Legacy of Skepticism’, Thompson Clarke puts forward an account of the nature of sceptical challenge against the greater context of our deep desire to philosophise and why the significance of scepticism cannot be summarily dismissed.¹ Although he slights certain attempts such as idealism and commonsense realism as inadequate for escaping the snares of scepticism, he attempts to identify the problematic assumptions that undergird the construction of sceptical arguments and to resist their appeal in a way that does not lead to either dogmatism or idealism. Clarke contends that the way to deal with scepticism is not to discredit it by proving the veracity of epistemic states in one way or another, but to evince that the conditions required for the very formulation of the sceptical question cannot be met. Thus, he does not set out to show that we do indeed have knowledge in reaction to the sceptical question whether we do but, rather, to use a process of analysing what the sceptic’s question itself presupposes in order to reveal that the question is in some way spurious or illicit: the philosophical claim to knowledge as well as its sceptical denial are ultimately ‘a spurious fiction’ that both should ‘be erased from the books.’ (Clarke 1972: 762)

Clarke’s analysis begins with the observation that the judgements and claims of knowledge that we make in ‘plain’ or ordinary life are ‘immune from sceptical assault’. (Clarke 1972: 754) But, immunity is a mutual matter: to philosophise, as Clarke puts it, is ‘to step outside the circle of the plain’ (Clarke 1972: 760) and, thus, scepticism is similarly insulated from our ordinary practices of affirming and disconfirming knowledge claims. Such a reciprocal insulation protects ordinary life from philosophy and philosophy from ordinary life and G.E. Moore! This is indicated by the fact that one’s occasional and legitimate assertion that one is not

¹ For the impact of Clarke’s thoughts on discussions of scepticism, see, for example, Burnyeat 1984: 226, Cavell 1979: xxi & *passim*, Nagel 1979: 19 & 27, Nagel 1986: 73, Stroud 1984: xiii & *passim*, Stroud 2000: xii & *passim*, and Williams 1991: 1 & *passim*.

dreaming fails to address the philosophical sceptic's question whether one knows one is not dreaming. It is in this light that the Moorean proof of the external world falls far short of its intended anti-sceptical target as no ordinary assertion could ever supply a satisfactory disproof of the sceptic's doubt. Yet, Clarke takes this as his cue that the *raison d'être* for the stalemate or mutual insulation between 'plain' and 'philosophical' knowledge-claims lies in the fact that language is being used in *two* different ways within the contexts of ordinary life and philosophy. Consequently, one needs to consider the conditions that are presupposed by, what Clarke calls, the philosopher's 'pure' use of our ordinary concepts: 'The peculiarly philosophical character of questions and propositions is their "purity". What *we* ask, or affirm, is what the words with their meanings do *per se*. Our commitments, implications, are dictated solely by language.' (Clarke 1972: 760) In contrast, the 'plain' language of ordinary man 'ignores certain kinds of remote possibilities' and what 'he asks and says is the product of meanings, bridled by nonsemantical practice ... he is saying, meaning, implying, committing himself to *less* than would his words *per se* ... In the eyes of the skeptic, plainness is restrictedness.' (Clarke 1972: 760)

Armed with this distinction between the 'plain' and 'pure' uses of language, Clarke then argues that the philosopher's or sceptic's 'pure' question depends upon the truth of certain assumptions about the use and application of concepts, where crucially, in his view, these assumptions are untenable. Specifically, the underlying conceptual supposition that Clarke finds implausible is the idea that whether an object falls under a concept is a completely objective matter: an 'objective' matter not up to us but 'an issue to be settled solely by the concepts and the item.' (Clarke 1972: 761) Clarke's counter-suggestion is that our grasp of a concept is essentially 'parasitic on, inextricably and dependently interwoven with' a grasp of conditions under which the concept is applicable, and it simply makes no sense to suppose that we might preserve our concepts and yet sever all connection with their actual application on particular occasions. (Clarke 1972: 761-2)¹ In other words, Clarke's response to the sceptic is not so much as attempting to prove that the objective world – as conceived by the sceptic – fits our subjective ways of thought, but merely to show that the kind of application of concepts that takes place within our ordinary practice of using language is somehow quintessential to their nature as concepts. Concepts cannot be cut free from this application and preserve a content that might be assessed for truth or falsity. The sceptic's question depends upon the idea that there could be such a thing as a language whose expressions possess a meaning independently of their actual application in judgements; that we can hold the sentences of this language up against reality like a measuring rod; and that there is a determinate result of this measuring process, even though no one can ever determine what it is: 'each concept is a self-sufficient unit or retains its independent identity within a conceptual scheme that in its entirety is the self-sufficient unit'. (Clarke 1972: 760) It is on the basis of this diagnosis about the sceptic's, as well as the philosopher's,

¹ It may not be amiss to note that Clarke's account of concepts and their usage looks like a full-fledged precursor of 'epistemic contextualism' that came into vogue a decade or so after his article on the legacy of scepticism.

underlying understanding of concepts and their application that Clarke deems the sceptical challenge unsustainable and thus indefensible.

Notwithstanding the success or failure of Clarke's endeavour to debunk scepticism, what is noteworthy, for the purpose of this paper, is his insistence on the enduring significance of scepticism and its legacy. Clarke claims that, by alerting us to the constitution and application of concepts and the structure of conceptual schemes through the *two* different uses of language, scepticism has been able to offer us 'a new, challenging problem': namely, highlighting the 'visible fact' that 'the objectivity attainable within the plain is only skin-deep, *relative*.' (Clarke 1972: 769 & 762) Clarke sees the more serious impact of scepticism in terms of showing the 'relative "non-objectivity"' of plain language and plain conceptualisation of the world through the use of plain sceptical 'possibilities.' (Clarke 1972: 769) Philosophically we wish to know not how things are *inside* the world, but how things are, *absolutely*. And, incidentally, 'the world itself is one of these things.' (Clarke 1972: 762) It is, therefore, this *relativism* of conceptualisation, understanding, and knowledge of the world that is heralded as the legacy of *scepticism*.

In the wake of this Clarkean construal of scepticism, it is not surprising to come across statements such as Roger White's remark that the essence of 'epistemic relativism' is constituted by 'scepticism about the universality of various epistemic norms.' (White 2007: 115) Similarly, in *Varieties of Relativism*, we find Rom Harré and Michael Krausz dividing relativism into 'two broad flavours – the sceptical and the permissive' where the former states that there cannot be any true belief and the latter asserts that there are many mutually incompatible true beliefs. (Harré and Krausz 1996: 3) In the same vein, in *Farewell to Reason*, Paul Feyerabend describes epistemic relativism as the doctrine that, 'For every statement, theory, point of view believed (to be true) with good reasons *there exist* arguments showing a conflicting alternative to be at least as good, or even better', which, according to him, was the mainstay of 'ancient sceptics to achieve mental and social peace'. (Feyerabend 1987: 76) In fact, Feyerabend goes so far as asserting that a rejection of his version of epistemic relativism 'would require detailed empirical/conceptual/historical analyses none of which are found in the customary objections to scepticism and relativism.' (Feyerabend 1987: 77) Thus, on such readings, there is a close kinship between scepticism and relativism, and, yet, the question that forms the core of this paper is whether scepticism and relativism do actually belong to the same epistemic pedigree. Part of the interest in this question lies in the issue of whether a rejection or acceptance of one of these epistemological positions would correspondingly commit one to the rejection or acceptance of the other.

Ancient Scepticism

From an historical perspective, doubts about man's ability to attain knowledge has an ancestry that is conventionally traced back at least to Xenophanes in the sixth century BC. (Sedley 1989) Similarly, objections to sensory knowledge were formulated by Parmenides in the first part of the fifth century BC and soon afterwards by his followers Zeno of Elea and Melissus, and,

with reservations, by the atomist Democritus. Yet, Pyrrho of Elis, living in the fourth and third centuries BC, is traditionally designated as the father of ancient scepticism as attested, for example, by Sextus Empiricus' *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*: 'Pyrrho appears to us to have applied himself to Scepticism more thoroughly and more conspicuously than his predecessors.' (Bury 1933: 5-7)¹ Like Socrates, Pyrrho himself did not write anything, but became the symbolic figurehead for a new way of doing philosophy. (Annas and Barnes 1994: ix-xv) He is reputed to have simply maintained that nothing can be known – without the subtlety of letting this thesis qualify itself – and, consistently, to have rejected all speculation about the world as it *really* is as a time-wasting source of anxiety.² The latter claim especially has a direct impact on one's understanding of the relationship between scepticism and relativism that is going to be discussed shortly.

The point of this genealogical detour on scepticism is to highlight, contrary to Feyerabend's historical reconstruction of ancient sceptics, a couple of crucial differences between scepticism and relativism. According to Sextus, the essence of Pyrrhonian or ancient scepticism is constituted by the 'ability to set out oppositions among things which appear and are thought of in any way at all, an ability by which, because of the equipollence in the opposed objects and accounts, we come first to suspension of judgement and afterwards to tranquillity.' (Annas and Barnes 1994: 4)³ In other words, the primary target of scepticism is to *suspend judgement* and thereby to *refrain* from assigning truth or falsity to our cognitive states altogether. Sextus' description delineates a path that the sceptic systematically treads in each case from an opposition or conflict of opinions to epistemic suspension and finally to psychological freedom from disturbance.

On this model of scepticism, the Pyrrhonian odyssey starts when the sceptic is investigating some question or field of enquiry and finds that opinions conflict as to where the truth lies. The hope of the search, at least in the early stages of the sceptic's quest for enlightenment, is that tranquillity would be achieved if only one can discover the rights and wrongs of the matter and give assent to truth and thus avoid falsity.⁴ The difficulty for the sceptic is that, in any matter, things appear

¹ However, for a different view on the significance of Pyrrho in Hellenistic scepticism, see Sedley 1983. David Sedley argues that as far as the theoretical side of scepticism is concerned, the alleged pioneering role of Pyrrho is 'an exaggeration', and his appellation of being the founding father of ancient Greek scepticism appears to be more of 'a political gesture' than a matter of historical accuracy. (Sedley 1983: 14 & 19)

² Academic scepticism is left out of the discussion on the ground that Pyrrhonian sceptics do not recognise them as proper sceptics since, as Sextus states, they still make "dogmatic" philosophical assertions. (*Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, Book I, Chapters I, VII, and XXXIII) Also, from an overall doctrinal position, as Charlotte Stough points out, Academic scepticism 'is not a continuation or elaboration of Pyrrho's views' and 'logically it is not a development of Pyrrhonism'. (Stough 1969: 6 & 34)

³ Gisela Striker argues that the first two stages of Pyrrhonian scepticism, *viz.* equipollence of opposite evidence and suspension of judgement, are 'logically independent of each other' and as such it is unwarranted to move from the thesis of unknowability to the recommendation of suspending judgement. (Striker 1989: 54) However, Charlotte Stough, among others, sees a more intimate epistemic and logical connection between recognition of equipollence of conflicting confirmations and the suspension of judgement. (Stough 1987)

⁴ *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, Book I, Chapter VI.

differently to different people according to one or another of a variety of circumstances. But, conflicting appearances cannot be equally true and thereby equally real. Therefore, the sceptic needs a criterion of truth to ascertain what to accept and what to reject. It is at this juncture that the Pyrrhonian sceptic argues that there is no intellectually satisfactory criterion we can trust and use, and, hence, the sceptic is left with the conflicting appearances and the conflicting opinions based upon them, unable to find any objective and impartial reason to privilege one belief or opinion over another. Consequently, if the sceptic can neither accept them all, because they are in conflict with one another, nor make a choice between them for lack of an objectively reliable standard or criterion, he *cannot* accept any.

Now, compare this sceptical suspension of judgement to, for example, Harré and Krausz's characterisation of relativism: 'all points of view are equally privileged, all descriptions are true and all assessments of value are equally valid.' (Harré and Krausz 1996: 3) Here, there are two important contrasts between ancient scepticism and relativism that need to be noted. First, as indicated in this definition of relativism, the relativist has no hesitation in ascribing truth to mutually incompatible statements or beliefs; for relativists, truth is a matter of epistemic egalitarianism. In contradistinction, at the end of his *sceptis* or enquiry, the Pyrrhonian enquirer feels obliged to withhold judgement about truth. For the sceptic, when it comes to truth, the only option is to suspend judgement completely. To put the epistemic dissimilarity between the two camps somewhat figuratively, where the sceptic finds matters on which one must suspend judgement, the relativist finds no matter at all.

This contrast between scepticism and relativism is further corroborated when one looks at Sextus' treatment of Protagoras' epistemological relativism in relation to Pyrrhonian scepticism. Commenting on Protagoras' celebrated claim that man is the measure of all things, Sextus remarks that although Protagoras introduces relativity through the dictum and 'for this reason he seems to have something in common with the Pyrrhoneans', he 'differs from them, and we shall perceive the difference when we have adequately explained the views of Protagoras.' (Bury 1933: p. 131)¹ Consequently, there has been a slue of contemporary commentators intent on separating Pyrrhonian scepticism from Protagorian relativism.² Paul Woodruff, for instance, writes: 'no form of relativism is sceptical in Sextus' eyes' as sceptics 'seek to induce in themselves an undecided attitude'. (Woodruff 1988: 140 & 153) Likewise, commenting on the second-century Latin antiquarian Aulus Gellius attempting to assimilate Pyrrhonian scepticism to relativism in his *Attic Nights*, Julia Annas and Jonathan Barnes try to show that even though the 'assimilation is easy to make', it 'is wholly mistaken.' (Annas and Barnes 1985: 97) Ultimately, in their respective philosophical ruminations, a sceptic is led to suspend judgement, whereas a relativist does not suspend judgement.³

¹ Briefly, the gist of Sextus' delineation of the difference is that since Protagoras' relativism still "dogmatizes" about the reasons for the appearances, he cannot be a Pyrrhonian.

² The only exception seems to be Kenneth Winkler who thinks that Sextus never explicitly 'denies the point of similarity' between Pyrrho's relativity and Protagoras' relativism. (Winkler 2004: 42).

³ In reconstructing Protagoras' epistemology from the extant, albeit scant, sources, Barnes says that although 'Protagoras was certainly a relativist ... he was not a sceptic in the philosophical sense'. (Barnes 1982: 551).

For the second significant difference between epistemic scepticism and relativism, as Myles Burnyeat poignantly points out, it should be clear that the ancient sceptic's argument is in a very fundamental manner dependent upon the concept of truth, and no stage of the sceptical sequence from opposition to suspension and then ultimately to tranquillity would make sense without a substantial understanding of that notion. (Burnyeat 1989) Basically, when the sceptic doubts that anything is true, the absence of truth is set out against the *real existence*. In other words, for the sceptic, statements that merely record how things *appear* are not in question; strictly speaking, they are not called true or false. Truth only applies to statements asserting that things are thus and so in reality. In the controversy between ancient sceptics and their opponents over whether any truth exists at all, as Burnyeat remarks, 'the issue is whether any proposition or class of propositions can be accepted as true of a real objective world as distinct from mere appearance.' (Burnyeat 1989: 25) It is indeed a fact of central importance that truth, in the sceptic's vocabulary, is closely tied to real existence as contrasted with appearance; whereas, for the relativist, truth is equally applicable to 'mere appearance'.

Thus, on the basis of these decisive disparities, it may not be amiss to say that it is rather simplistic, if not outright incorrect, to presume that there is a close connection between scepticism and relativism where one of them can be easily inferred from the other. Although there might be subtle connexions between sceptical and relativist arguments and positions, as Barnes observes, 'relativism itself is not a sort of scepticism, and the relativist is not the sceptic's ally.' (Barnes 1988/90: 5) Interestingly enough, it is not just in relation to ancient scepticism that we come across these divergences but also in the context of contemporary scepticism. Indeed, one can see the same type of concerns, claims and contrasts as Pyrrhonian scepticism, albeit expressed and formulated differently, in present-day epistemological works such as Peter Unger's.

Contemporary Scepticism

In a series of papers culminating with the publication of *Ignorance: A Case for Scepticism*, Unger came into prominence as one of the most radical sceptical epistemologists of his generation. He lays out the core of his sceptical project as 'the thesis that no one ever *knows* anything about anything', and, like his Pyrrhonian predecessors' aim to achieve tranquillity, he endeavours to show that a consequence of this type of pervasive ignorance is that we can have no realistic emotional ties to anything: 'if nobody ever really knows anything, then nobody will ever be angry, or happy, or surprised about anything.' (Unger 1975: 1 & 186)¹ What is, however, more germane and significant for the topic of this paper is Unger's subsequent shift from scepticism to relativism in his *Philosophical Relativity* and how he attempts to chart out the important differences between the two positions.

¹ Unger's characterisation of the impact of scepticism on the ordinary and practical aspects of daily life is somewhat antithetical to Annas and Barnes' claim that, unlike ancient scepticism, latter-day sceptical stances are 'insulated from the affairs of life and cut off from action.' (Annas and Barnes 1985: 8).

To set the scene for his defence of philosophical relativism, Unger states that there is ‘an extremely pervasive’ belief among philosophers according to which ‘the traditional problems of philosophy have definite objective answers: It is not a matter of arbitrary convention what answer one is to give to these problems.’ (Unger 1984: 3) Take, for example, the specific problem of knowledge. Unger, then, interestingly notes that, on one side, the majority, *viz.* anti-sceptics, as well as the few sceptics ‘alike believe in an objectively right answer’ (Unger 1984: 4), with the only difference being that, unlike the anti-sceptic, the sceptic believes that the right and objective answer is not epistemically accessible. Whereas, on the other side, we find relativists who believe that ‘there really is no objective answer, neither positive nor negative’. (Unger 1984: 4) In other words, relativism not only stands opposed to the commonsensical view that there is a ‘positive’ answer to the question of knowledge but also to the ‘negative’ answer of scepticism. That is, relativism and scepticism do *not* belong to the same epistemic lineage. This characterisation of scepticism actually tallies well with the earlier discussion of Pyrrhonian scepticism maintaining that truth is legitimately applicable to the real existence except that we do not possess reliable epistemic means to attain it. In contrast, on Unger’s reading, the essence of relativism is captured by its abdication of truth *in toto* and the abandonment of an objective reality totally.

The discord between scepticism and relativism, however, is not exhausted in terms of the respected parties’ variance over the notion of truth. There is in fact a second crucial dissimilarity *vis-à-vis* the semantics of natural languages that decisively divides the two camps. To develop his case for philosophical relativity, Unger remarks that a key aspect of a philosophical problem may always depend on the meaning of, or on the semantic conditions of, certain linguistic expressions in terms of which the problem is formulated. Although there may be aspects of a given philosophical problem that are not undecidable, the existence of only one undecidable semantic aspect would be enough to lead to philosophical relativity in the particular case of that problem. In such a situation, Unger writes, if ‘there is no objectively right answer as to how a certain expression should be interpreted’ and ‘no unique determinate meaning to be assigned’, then one is committed to *semantic relativism* and thereby to the position that there is no objectively right answer to any philosophical problem including the problem of knowledge. (Unger 1984: 5)

To motivate his semantic relativism, Unger suggests that in discussions of language there are only a few components that one needs to lay out in open: on the one hand, there are certain people making marks or sounds and, on the other, there are certain effects achieved on people as regards their conscious thoughts, their experiences, and, most importantly, their behaviour. Otherwise everything ‘linguistic, in between, is an explanatory posit.’ (Unger 1984: 6) By drawing on the presumed pervasive presence of vagueness in language that Unger calls the ‘quagmire of vagueness, so characteristic of our language’ (Unger 1984: 43), he notes that where such linguistic explanatory *posits* are stipulated, observable and concrete phenomena are already left behind in the sense that for a given group of speakers there is really no single semantics that is the unique, objectively real semantics of that group. Rather, one may formulate various explanations of the

people's production of effects on each other, where each formulation assigns a different semantics for the population under study.

Notwithstanding the propriety or otherwise of this linguistic analysis, what is pertinent to the discussion in hand is Unger's own observation that although relativism feeds on and relies upon semantic relativism, scepticism cannot comport comfortably with such a semantic thesis. For scepticism to be able to get off the ground, it has to reject the idea that 'there simply is no fact of the matter as to the (full) semantics of the relevant expressions' (Unger 1984: 10) and has to subscribe to the opposite position that Unger labels *semantic invariantism*.¹ To see this commitment on the part of the sceptic, consider the overall structure of the sceptical strategy where the sceptic sets out some propositions, each of which fairly obviously conflicts with what one claims to know to be true. Now, if there happens to be any linguistic ambiguity and vagueness whatsoever in the propositions that the sceptic attempts to pit against some corresponding commonsensical ones, then the anti-sceptic will have ample opportunity to dismiss the sceptical challenge. Thus, for the sceptical strategy to succeed, it will be only an anti-relativistic semantics that can give the sceptic, in Unger's words, 'the demanding conditions he wants for the key terms of his negative arguments.' (Unger 1984: 9) It is, therefore, not surprising to see Unger confirming that in the sceptical phase of his philosophical ruminations he had 'been an invariantist' (Unger 1984: 9), and his subsequent shift towards relativism had to be predicated upon semantic relativism.

To round off the discussion thus far, one may conclude that although there is a certain broad similarity between scepticism and relativism in that both hold that the truth-value situation of many things we say or express will be other than we ordinarily assume, there are significant dissimilarities between them. First, although sceptics are keen on undermining commonsensical claims to knowledge, they are averse to jettisoning the notion of truth and its application to the real existence; whereas, for relativists, the notion of truth is a matter of arbitrary convention. Second, for the sceptical challenge to get a foothold against commonsense, meaning and semantic conditions have to be fully determinate, where, in contrast, relativism views meaning and semantic conditions merely a matter of conventional stipulation.

Cause of Conflation

Hitherto the discussion has been moving in the direction that, despite superficial similarities between epistemic scepticism and relativism, the relationship between the two does not seem to be a matter of entailment or implication. In fact, Annas and Barnes unhesitatingly insist that 'relativism, far from being a form of scepticism, is actually incompatible with scepticism.' (Annas and Barnes 1985: 149) Somewhat less emphatically, Charles Landesman observes that sceptical arguments 'have been used to support philosophical views that, while not fully skeptical, lean in that direction; terms such as relativism,

¹ Unger's formulation of 'semantic invariantism' has an uncanny resemblance to Clarke's characterisation of 'linguistic purity'. (Clarke 1972: 760).

conventionalism, constructivism, anti-realism, pragmatism, and subjectivism are some current examples.’ (Landesman 2002: viii)¹ Therefore, the burden of this final brief section is to seek an explanation for this persistent proclivity to assimilate relativism and its ilk to scepticism.

One way of disentangling scepticism from relativism or cornering the cause of conflation of the two theses is to draw on Alfred Tarski’s distinction between *object-language* and *meta-language* in his classic article, ‘The Semantic Conception of Truth’. (Tarski 1944) In discussing the problem of defining truth against the backdrop of the paradoxical consequence of statements such as the liar antinomy, Tarski suggests that ‘we have to use two different languages’: the first is the language which is “talked about” and the second is the language in which we “talk about” the first language. (Tarski 1944: 349) In this dichotomy, statements involving the concept of truth are strictly speaking not uttered at the same level of language use and should be lassoed into the two different levels of object and meta utterances.

Applying this Tarskian schema to the domain of epistemic statements and replacing truth with cognitive concepts such as knowledge and belief, one may equally bifurcate epistemological utterances into object and meta propositions. On this model, sceptical claims are at the *object* level as they are on a par with the claims of knowledge that we make in our ordinary practices of life and conform to the same epistemic standards except for showing that the standards are not sufficient to yield any reliable claim of knowledge. In other words, sceptical statements are uttered at the same level of language use as ordinary statements of knowledge: namely, the language that is “talked about.” It is important for the sceptical challenge that the questions raised against our ordinary epistemic entitlements to be seen within the common standards of knowledge claims. In contrast, relativism is operating at the *meta* level as it tries to argue that, given both the positive and negative pronouncements of knowledge made by anti-sceptics and sceptics in the object language, one should conclude that ‘all points of view are equally privileged’. (Harré and Krausz 1996: 3) That is, the relativist is “talking about” the language in which both the anti-sceptic and the sceptic “talk about” their epistemic successes and failures respectively. It, therefore, seems as if it is this failure to distinguish between these two different levels of epistemic statements that is the cause of conflating scepticism and relativism, and it thereby sheds light on statements such as Michael Williams’ remark that ‘relativism is a reaction to scepticism that is difficult to distinguish from scepticism itself.’ (Williams 2001: 221) Introducing a Tarski-style epistemological hierarchy not only presents a clean conceptual chasm between scepticism and relativism but also provides a better historical appreciation of Pyrrhonian resistance to assimilate scepticism to Protagorean relativism.

¹ Interestingly, in a role reversal, Anthony Grayling claims that sometimes it is the sceptic that appears ‘in the guise of relativist’. (Grayling 1985: 76).

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