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**Skepticism as a school since Sextus Empiricus: a contemporary debate**

It is true that since the rediscovery of the work of Sextus Empiricus in the Early Modern Era, the frequent objects of debate related to skepticism are arguments, doubts, assumptions and skeptical objections – and rarely the much-discussed "skepticism" takes the form of a skeptical philosophical system. Sextus Empiricus, the one of whom we have a few complete books, was a physician and philosopher who lived in the second half of the second century AD in Rome, Alexandria or Athens, and was an important skeptic philosopher. Today his work is our main source for the study of Pyrrhonian skepticism. It consists of the *Outlines of Phyrronism* (henceforth PH) and a series of other texts, best known by its Latin title *Adversus Mathematicos* (Against the Men of Science). The *Outlines* are a general introduction to Pyrrhonism, and the rest is a more detailed questioning of dogmatic philosophies in different fields of knowledge.

My opinion is that we find in Sextus a defensible and fully articulated skeptical philosophy, whose study could be shown useful to the contemporary philosophical debate. The objectives here are two: to present a specific interpretation of Sextus thus defending its strength as a philosophical position, and also to address what I consider to be a major critic to skepticism.

The exegetical and philosophical debate over the old skepticism of the Greeks is often of great impact to scholars. When met with a complete skeptical philosophy such as Sextus’, the contemporary philosopher is faced with the possibility of adhering to skepticism. This is reflected in the habit, common to many experts in the subject, to argue in favor or against Pyrrhonian skepticism, a habit that culminates in a growing number of scholarly and creative reconstructions of Pyrrhonism.

A very interesting debate has been going on for the last decades amongst some Brazilian philosophers on the coherence of skepticism, ancient or contemporary, as a school of thought, a discussion which was partially inspired by the work of Brazilian neo-Pyrrhonist philosopher Oswaldo Porchat (2006).

Prompted by an article by Roberto Bolzani (1996), this debate has a profound metaphilosophical character, since the strategy of Bolzani is not so much in the line of a refutation of skepticism, but constitutes a critic from the standpoint of metaphilosophical remarks (BOLZANI: 2006, p. 11). Making reference to the so-called “structural method” in the History of Philosophy, attributed to Victor Goldschmidt, a central figure in the French circles of History of Philosophy in the XX Century, Bolzani distinguishes between a “formal truth” and a “material truth”, when we are dealing with philosophical systems. For the proponents of the structural method, a philosophy is not merely, as one may think, a collection of opinions, but it is the very discourse that articulates those different claims, its “concrete movements” and its “rules” (BOLZANI: 2006, p. 13). In philosophical systems, the “material truth”, that is, the truth of its propositions, could even be considered subordinated to a “formal truth”, since the system, much beyond hypostatizing its opinions, hypostatizes itself. Those general characteristics of philosophical stances make the case for a very interesting critique against the skeptic way, since it also shares these characteristics, namely, those involved with affirming itself as a philosophical position while expressing no opinion whatsoever. The skeptic may not profess any dogma or any belief, but his philosophy would still retain some sort of formal truth. Bolzani writes: “Skepticism, with its therapeutic function and intention, presenting itself as the “healthy” philosophy, reveals its ‘exclusivist autonomy’”. Its universality of posture and intentions is found in its very origin, the search for the truth (…)” (BOLZANI: 2006, p. 27)

Thus is the metaphilosophical challenge for a skeptic school, rustic or urbane: the strongly metaphilosophical yet brilliant charge that Pyrrhonism, too, is a philosophical position subject to debate and in conflict with other philosophies, since it shares many characteristics with other philosophies and inevitably presents itself as a philosophical option. This sort of critique that avoids the arduous and often aporetic task of directly refuting the skeptic is sometimes overlooked, and may present some of the best sort of criticism that Skepticism has to confront. Of course there are many ways in which a pyrrhonist could respond to that charge, but my objective here was to simply present both this objection and what a rustic neo-phyrronism inspired in Sextus would be (a good example of a skeptic response to Bolzani’s critic is SMITH: 2006).

The proposal is to present and discuss this very interesting objection against skepticism as a school.

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