

CHAPTER 1

Pyrrho's Thought

BEYOND HUMANITY

A brief passage that derives ultimately from the lost dialogue *Pythō* ‘Python’¹ by Timon of Phlius is accepted to be the single most important testimony for the thought of his teacher, Pyrrho.² Because it is preserved in a chapter of a history of philosophy by Aristocles of Mesene (quoted verbatim in the *Preparation for the Gospel* by Eusebius), it is generally known as “the Aristocles passage”. The text begins with Timon’s short introduction, in which he says, “Whoever wants to be happy must consider these three [questions]: first, how are *pragmata* ‘(ethical) matters, affairs, topics’ by nature? Secondly, what attitude should we adopt towards them? Thirdly, what will be the outcome for those who have this attitude?”³ Then Timon quotes⁴ Pyrrho’s own revelation of the three negative characteristics of all *pragmata* ‘matters, affairs, questions, topics’. The ethical meaning of the word *pragmata* is absolutely clear because other testimonies⁵ show that it meant for Pyrrho exclusively ethical ‘matters, affairs, topics’. Accordingly, the

¹ Based on remarks by Aristocles in his history of philosophy preserved by Eusebius; see Appendix A.

² See Appendix A for the Greek text, detailed point-by-point analysis, and full references.

³ This is my slight revision of the translation by Long and Sedley (1987: 1:14–15). For their original and my commentary, see Appendix A.

⁴ As normal in ancient Greek, this is done in *oratio obliqua* ‘indirect discourse’, so it is not necessarily exact, but unlike the English equivalent, *oratio obliqua* in Greek is explicitly marked grammatically as a quotation, even if indirect. Poetry, by contrast, is virtually always quoted verbatim. For further examples and discussion, see Chapter Two.

⁵ Especially Narrative 5, “Pyrrho and the Dog”, below in this chapter.

word will be so translated below, or given in Greek as *pragmata* (singular *pragma*).⁶

Following these prefatory remarks, Timon says, “Pyrrho himself declares that”⁷

As for *pragmata* ‘matters, questions, topics’,⁸ they are all *adiaphora* ‘undifferentiated by a logical differentia’ and *astathmēta* ‘unstable, unbalanced, not measurable’ and *anepikrita* ‘unjudged, unfixed, undecidable’. Therefore, neither our sense-perceptions nor our ‘views, theories, beliefs’ (*doxai*) tell us the truth or lie [about *pragmata*]; so we certainly should not rely on them [to do it]. Rather, we should be *adoxastous* ‘without views’, *aklineis* ‘uninclined [toward this side or that]’, and *akradantous* ‘unwavering [in our refusal to choose]’, saying about every single one that it no more is than⁹ it is not or it both is and is not or it neither is nor is not.¹⁰

To paraphrase, Pyrrho says that ethical matters or questions are not logically differentiated, they are unstable (or ‘unassessed and unassessable by any measure’), and they are unjudged, not fixed (or, undecidable). Therefore, our inductive and deductive reasoning cannot tell us whether any ethical question is True or False, so we should not count

⁶ *LSJ*'s primary definitions of the word *pragma* are: ‘deed, act, thing, advantage, concern, affair, matter, matter in hand, question [i.e., subject, topic], fact, circumstances, state-affairs, fortunes, business (“esp[ecially] lawbusiness”), trouble, annoyance’. In the long entry in *LSJ* there is not a single glossed example of *pragma* (singular) ~ *pragmata* (plural) in the meaning of a physical object, such as a stone, a tree, a dog, etc. The sense “thing, concrete reality” listed in the *LSJ* entry does *not* in fact refer to “concrete physical things” at all, as one should expect, but only to abstract “subjects” or “objects”. As I note in Appendix A, the English in *LSJ* is sometimes peculiar, probably because it was first published in the mid-nineteenth century. I also checked all linked source citations and read them; none use the word in a physical or metaphysical sense.

⁷ There is no reflection of the word *pephyke* ‘by nature, really’ in Pyrrho’s statement, despite most scholars’ interpretations. It has been used to further the “metaphysical” interpretation of Pyrrho’s statement, e.g., by Bett (2000). The word occurs only in Timon’s introductory remarks, which Aristocles explicitly says are by Timon. In my 2011 article reprinted in Appendix A, I unthinkingly followed the usual interpretation. I would like to thank an anonymous reviewer of the manuscript for catching me on this. My translation here corrects this error.

⁸ Literally, “Matters (*pragmata*) are equally . . .”, i.e., “All matters are . . .”.

⁹ Literally “(it) no more is or (it) is not”, making the symmetry complete. On the tetralemma, see below and the extended discussion in Appendix A.

¹⁰ Eusebius, ed. K. Mras (1983: xiv 18:1–5); Chiesara (2001: 20–21); see Appendix A for the Greek text and commentary.

on them to tell us. Instead, we should have no views on ethical matters, we should not incline toward any choice with respect to ethical questions, and we should not waver in our avoidance of attempts to decide such matters, reciting the tetralemma formula—“It no more is than it is not or it both is and is not or it neither is nor is not”—in response to every single one of such ethical questions.

The Aristocles passage is crucially important, highly condensed, and not easy to understand, as attested to by the fact that its basic meaning has been disputed by scholars of Classical philosophy for the past century. It thus requires additional explanation.

To begin with, as the subject of Pyrrho’s entire declaration, the meaning of *pragmata* is crucially important, so it needs a little further clarification.

The Greek word *pragma* (singular) ~ *pragmata* (plural) is largely abstract. In other words, it means ‘something, things’, but in the abstract logical sense of ‘an object of our cogitation or disputation’,¹¹ so translating *pragmata* as ‘things’—in the same general abstract logical sense—is not wrong, but *things* in English are by default largely physical or metaphysical objects. As a result, scholars have let themselves be misled by that default meaning into misinterpreting Pyrrho’s entire message. When helpful below, *pragmata* will be translated as “ethical things, matters (etc.)”.

Moreover, it must be emphasized that Pyrrho sees *pragmata* as *disputed* matters.¹² If people agreed on *pragmata* or did not argue about them, they would not be characterizable as Pyrrho says. They would already be decided and no problem. Arguments about opposing or disputed “matters, topics” are ubiquitous in Greek philosophy, as for example in Plutarch, “They quarrel about whether the matter (*pragma*) is good or evil or white or not white.”¹³

¹¹ I.e., in the sense of Tugendhat: “What is meant by ‘objects’ in philosophy has its basis in . . . what we mean by the word ‘something’. . . . There is a class of linguistic expressions which are used to stand for an object; and here we can only say: to stand for something. These are the expressions which can function as the sentence-subject in so-called singular predicative statements and which in logic have also been called *singular terms* . . .” (Tugendhat 1982: 21–23), quoted in Laycock (2010).

¹² Cf. the usage of Aristotle in *Nicomachean Ethics* 1094b, where it occurs in the singular and means ‘subject, topic (under discussion)’; v. *LSJ*, s.v. *pragma*.

¹³ Plutarch *Adversus Colotem* (Stephanus 1109D7, from *TLG*): διαμάχονται περὶ τοῦ χρηστοῦν ἢ πονηροῦν ἢ λευκὸν ἢ μὴ λευκὸν εἶναι τὸ πρᾶγμα.

Based evidently on the general scholarly unclarity about *pragmata*,¹⁴ some have argued that the Aristocles passage represents a “dogmatic” metaphysical position, on account of which they conclude that Pyrrho could not be the founder of Pyrrhonism. This idea has been much criticized,¹⁵ mainly because the ancient testimonies overwhelmingly say that the concern of Pyrrho is purely with ethics, and many modern scholars agree.¹⁶ The very first significant word in his declaration is *adiaphora*, a logical term, which is followed by inference after inference. Pyrrho’s way of skewering ethical issues is to use logic. How would using metaphysics for ethical problems make sense?¹⁷ Pyrrho never, in this or any other testimony, talks about physical or metaphysical issues (though he is said to have criticized other philosophers who did talk about them), and in two testimonies—the Aristocles passage and the narrative about the dog¹⁸—he explicitly mentions *pragmata* and makes it very clear that he uses the word to refer to conflicting *ethical* “matters, affairs”. In short, for Pyrrho, *pragmata* are always and only *ethical* ‘topics, questions, matters, affairs’ which people dispute or try to interpret with antilogies—opposed choices such as Good : Bad, or True : False.

Pyrrho’s declaration may now be examined section by section.

THE THREE CHARACTERISTICS

Pyrrho famously declares that all ethical “matters, questions” have three characteristics which, oddly, are all *negative*, so his statement is actually a declaration of what matters are *not*. That is, the positive equivalent of each negative term is what Pyrrho negates, so we must

¹⁴ Scholars have given and discussed at length examples referring to hard physical objects, including “a tomato”, “the earth”, and “rocks” (Bett 2000: 23, 117–120), “the sun” and “an icy lake” (Thorsrud 2009: 21), etc.

¹⁵ See the survey of previous studies in Appendix A. An anonymous reviewer of the manuscript of this book, like Bett, understands *pragmata* to mean physical or metaphysical “things”. The reviewer notes, also like Bett, that scholars “who favor the ‘metaphysical’ reading of Pyrrho’s thought . . . have had a hard time making their case to scholars of Greek philosophy”.

¹⁶ The anonymous reviewer who favors the metaphysical interpretation (see the previous note) agrees with this too.

¹⁷ Cf. Stopper (1983) on the putative “zany inference” in the Aristocles passage.

¹⁸ See below in this chapter.

base our understanding of the terms on their positive forms, which (unlike the negative ones) are all well attested in Classical Greek. His declaration is presented as the foundation of his teaching, and modern scholars' intensive analysis of the entire passage and the other ancient testimonies has confirmed that it is indeed the core of his thought:¹⁹ it is inseparable from his practical indirect path, via *apatheia* 'passionlessness', to *ataraxia* 'undisturbedness, calm'. Because of its conciseness, the text requires interpretation based on the remaining part of the Aristocles passage, other material in Aristocles' chapter on Pyrrhonism, and other testimonies, including in particular those containing statements attributed directly to Pyrrho himself.

1. *Adiaphora* 'Without a Self-Identity'

The first term, *adiaphora*, is the negative of *diaphora* 'differentiated by a logical differentia' and literally means 'undifferentiated by a logical differentia',²⁰ that is, 'without a logical self-identity': *pragmata* 'matters, affairs' do not come supplied with their own self-identifying differentiae or other categorizing criteria. For example, someone's expression of anger is not automatically identified for us by a "thought balloon" spelling out its genus (or superordinate category) "an emotion" and further differentiating it as a "bad" emotion, thus distinguishing it from "good" emotions (among other choices). In several testimonies Pyrrho denies that *pragmata* are in fact differentiated from their contrasting opposites, for example "the just" versus "the unjust", or "the truth" versus "a lie". People dispute *pragmata* as to whether they are good or bad, just or unjust, and so on, but any specific *pragma*, in order to be a subject of philosophical discussion at all, must necessarily be discrete

¹⁹ See Bett (2000: 14–18) and Appendix A.

²⁰ A differentia is a kind of categorization that distinguishes a genus from a species, as explained by Aristotle (*Metaphysics* Δ 6 (1016a) 24–27, from Ross and Smith 1908): λέγεται δ' ἔν καὶ ὧν τὸ γένος ἔν διαφέρων ταῖς ἀντικειμέναις διαφοραῖς—καὶ ταῦτα λέγεται πάντα ἔν ὅτι τὸ γένος ἔν τὸ ὑποκείμενον ταῖς διαφοραῖς (οἷον ἵππος ἄνθρωπος κύων ἔν τι ὅτι πάντα ζῶα), translated by Apostle (1966:80) as "Also those things are called 'one' whose genus is one, although they differ by opposing differentiae; and all these are said to be one in view of the fact that the genus underlying the differentiae is one. For example, a horse and a man and a dog are one in this sense: they are all animals" (Apostle 1966: 80). I.e., "horse", "man", and "dog" all belong to the *genus* "animal", but are all distinct *species* that "differ by opposing differentiae".

and differentiated from other *pragmata* by a logical differentia. Because *pragmata* themselves do not actually have differentiae (as Timon says, “by nature”), *we ourselves* necessarily supply the differentiae. But that makes the entire process strictly circular and therefore logically invalid.²¹

A direct consequence of the teaching of *adiaphora* ‘without a logical differentia, no self-identity’ is the explicit denial of the validity of opposed categories, or “antilogies”.

2. *Astathmēta* ‘Unstable, Unbalanced, Not Measurable’

The second term, *astathmēta*, is an adjective from the stem *sta-* ‘stand’ with the negative prefix *a-*, literally meaning ‘not standing’. The word is based on the noun *stathmos* ‘standing place, stable; a balance-beam, measuring scale’. For example, Aristophanes, in *The Frogs*, has Aeschylus say, “what I’d like to do is take him to *the scales* (*stathmos*); That’s the only real test of our poetry; the weight of our utterances will be the decisive proof.”²² So *astathmēta* means ‘non-standing-place; no *stathmos* (a balance-beam, scale)’, thus, ‘unstable, unbalanced’.²³ Since *pragmata* are unbalanced and unstable, they pull this way and that, and are unsettling. They make us feel uneasy and susceptible to passions and disturbedness.

²¹ This is a fundamental epistemological problem. In Antiquity it was generalized and became known as the Problem of the Criterion. It was taken up again in the Enlightenment, most famously by Hume; see Chapter Four.

²² Aristophanes, *The Frogs* 1365: ἐπὶ τὸν σταθμὸν γὰρ αὐτὸν ἀγαγεῖν βούλομαι, / ὅπερ ἐξελέγξει τὴν ποιήσιν ὧν μόνον / τὸ γὰρ βάρος νῶ βασιανεῖ τῶν ῥημάτων. Text and translation from Henderson (2002), emphasis added. Aeschylus and Euripides then go over to the large measuring scales, and each speaks a line into his measuring pan. Dionysus, the judge, says (of the measuring scale pans), “Look, this one’s going much lower!” Aeschylus wins a second attempt too, and Dionysus says, “His (side of the scale) went down farther again, because he put in Death, the heaviest blow.” (Henderson 2002: 210–215). Henderson (2002: 209n130) comments, “This weighing scene is probably modeled on the scene in Aeschylus’ *Weighing of Souls* where Zeus weighs the souls of Achilles and Memnon as they fight.” See Griffith (2013) for an extremely illuminating and important discussion of this passage and of judging in general in ancient Greek culture.

²³ *LSJ* online, s.v. *stathmos*. Cf. Bett (2000: 19) “*astathmēta*—derived from *stathmos*, ‘balance’—could mean ‘unstable’ or ‘unbalanced’ . . . [or] ‘not subject to being placed on a balance’, and hence ‘unmeasurable’.” The interpretation ‘not measurable’ would follow if *pragmata* are ‘not balanced’ or ‘unbalanced’.

3. Anepikrita ‘Unjudged, Undecided, Unfixed’

The third term, *anepikrita*, is a negative made from *epikrisis* ‘determination, judgement’,²⁴ from the well-attested derived verb *epikrinō* ‘to decide, determine; judge; select, pick out, choose’—as in Aristotle’s usage “with what part of itself (the soul) judges that which distinguishes sweet from warm”²⁵—which is based in turn on the verb *krinō* ‘to separate, distinguish; choose; decide disputes or contests; judge; prefer’; *krinō* is the source also of the important word *kriterion* ‘criterion, means for judging or trying, standard’.²⁶ *Anepikrita* thus means ‘unjudged, undecided, unchosen, unfixed’,²⁷ so *pragmata* are not permanently decided or fixed.

THE THREE CHARACTERISTICS— THE BUDDHA

Pyrrho’s tripartite statement is completely unprecedented and unparalleled in Greek thought. Yet it is not merely similar to Buddhism, it corresponds closely to a famous statement of the Buddha preserved in canonical texts.²⁸ The statement is known as the *Trilakṣaṇa*, the ‘Three

²⁴ Cf. Bett (2000: 19). One of its few occurrences is in D.L. ix, 92, where it means ‘judgement’ or ‘decision’. However, its positive verbal form is very well attested in Classical period Greek. See the following note.

²⁵ Aristotle, *De Anima* 431a20 (text from *TLG*): τίνι δ’ ἐπικρίνει τί διαφέρει γλυκὺ καὶ θερμόν. Cf. *LSJ* online, s.v. *epikrinō*.

²⁶ *LSJ* online, s.v. *krinō*. Cf. Griffith’s (2013) illuminating discussion of judging between contestants in ancient Greek culture.

²⁷ Cf. Bett (2000), who regularly refers to this characteristic as a lack of “fixity”, though he interprets it metaphysically.

²⁸ The canonical Nikāya texts of the Pali Canon are traditionally thought to reflect Early Buddhism—meaning, in theory, the state of the teachings close to the time of the Buddha. However, the actual dates of the Nikāya texts are unstated, and in general traditional studies do not reveal when they were composed, pace Wynne (2005) and many others. Their acknowledged doctrinal similarity both to early translations of Buddhist texts into Chinese and to the recently discovered Gāndhārī texts does not affirm the picture of Buddhism presented in them as being close to the time of the Buddha because these Chinese and Gāndhārī texts both date to the late Kushan period. Their similarity to the “early” Pali canonical texts tells us only that all three sets of texts date to the same period, thus confirming that traditional “early” Buddhist canonical literature reflects Normative Buddhism (q.v. below), a product of the same Saka-Kushan period. Because the Nikāya texts are also far from homogeneous in their representations of the teachings

Characteristics' of all *dharma*s 'ethical distinctions, factors, constituents, etc.' Greek *pragmata* '(ethical) things' corresponds closely to Indic *dharma* ~ *dhamma* '(ethical) things' and seems to be Pyrrho's equivalent of it.²⁹

The Buddha says, "All *dharma*s are *anitya* 'impermanent'. . . . All *dharma*s are *duḥkha* 'unsatisfactory, imperfect, unstable'. . . . All *dharma*s are *anātman* 'without an innate self-identity'."³⁰

1. *Anitya* 'Impermanent, Variable, Unfixed'

The first term, *anitya* (Pali *anicca*) is the negative form of *nitya* 'eternal, invariant, fixed (etc.)' and means 'impermanent, variable, unfixed'.³¹

2. *Duḥkha* 'Uneasy; Unsatisfactory; Unsteady'

The meaning of the second term, *duḥkha* (Pali *dukkha*), is contested by scholars and actually has no universally accepted basic meaning or etymology. The standard Sanskrit dictionary and recent scholars' interpretations of *duḥkha* include 'unsatisfactory, imperfect', and 'uneasy, uncomfortable, unpleasant',³² and so on, but the term is perhaps the most misunderstood—and definitely the most mistranslated—in Buddhism.³³ However, at the very beginning of his definition, Monier-Williams says, "(according to grammarians properly written *dush-kha*

of the Buddha, scholars have determined that some elements are earlier or later, while study of the inner logic of the Buddha's own teachings (to the extent that it is agreed what they were) also allows inclusion or exclusion of various elements.

²⁹ I am indebted to Georgios Halkias (p.c., 2012) for this observation; I am of course responsible for any misunderstanding. Cf. the discussion of *dharma* in Appendix C.

³⁰ *Anguttara-nikāya* III, 134. Mitchell (2008: 34) translates it: "all [the world's] constituents are [1] transitory [S. *anitya*, P. *anicca* 'impermanent'] . . . all its constituents are [2] unsatisfactory [S. *duḥkha*, P. *dukkha*] . . . all its constituents are [3] lacking a permanent self [S. *anātman*, P. *anattā* 'containing no permanent inner substance or self']." His "constituents" translates Sanskrit *dharmā*, Pali *dhammā*.

³¹ Monier-Williams (1988: 547), online edition, s.v. *anitya* and *nitya*.

³² Monier-Williams (1988), online edition, s.v. *duḥkha*.

³³ Hamilton (2000: 12) says, "Until recent years, *dukkha* was usually translated as 'suffering', with 'pain' or 'ill' being common alternatives; now 'unsatisfactory' is more usually used." Despite Gethin's (1998: 187) reasonable definition of *duḥkha* as "unsatisfactory and imperfect", he still regularly mistranslates it as "suffering" in much of his book. Note that Hamilton (2000), which is based on the Pali Nikāya texts, rightly treats the *Trilakṣaṇa* as a key element of Early Buddhism. Nevertheless, her book presents a solidly traditional Normative Buddhism, not Pre-Normative Buddhism or actual historical Early Buddhism.

and said to be from *dus* and *kha* [cf. *su-khá*] . . .).³⁴ The opposite of *duḥkha* is widely thought to be *sukha* ‘running swiftly or easily (only applied to cars or chariots)’—a usage that occurs in the Rig Veda.³⁵ The usual meaning of *sukha* is now simply ‘good’, so its apparent opposite, *duḥkha*, should mean ‘bad’, but such an idea is explicitly refuted by the third characteristic, *anātman*, as well as by complete agreement in attested Early Buddhism that antilogies such as “good” versus “bad” are misconceived. Accordingly, although the sense of *duḥkha* in Normative Buddhism is traditionally given as ‘suffering’, that and similar interpretations are highly unlikely for Early Buddhism. Significantly, Monier-Williams himself doubts the usual explanation of *duḥkha* and presents an alternative one immediately after it, namely: *duḥ-stha* “‘standing badly,’ unsteady, disquieted (lit. and fig.); uneasy,” and so on.³⁶ This form is also attested, and makes much better sense as the opposite of the Rig Veda sense of *sukha*, which Monier-Williams gives in full as “(said to be fr. 5. *su* + 3. *kha* , and to mean originally ‘having a good axle-hole’; possibly a Prakrit form of *su-stha*³⁷ q.v.; cf. *duḥkha*) running swiftly or easily (only applied to cars or chariots, superl[ative] *sukhā-tama*), easy”. It would seem that there were two forms of each word; Prakrit and Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit chose the *-kha* forms instead of the *-stha* forms, which survived nevertheless in a much smaller way. The most important point here is that *duḥ* + *stha* literally means ‘dis-/bad- + stand-’, that is, ‘badly standing, unsteady’ and is therefore virtually identical to the literal meaning of Greek *astathmēta*, from *a-* + *sta-* ‘not- + stand’,³⁸ both evidently meaning ‘unstable’. This strongly suggests that Pyrrho’s middle term is in origin a simple calque.

3. Anātman ‘No (Innate) Self (-Identity)’

The third term, *anātman* (Pali *anattā*), means ‘no (innate) self (-identity)’. As with the other characteristics, it is applied to all dharmas, including

³⁴ Monier-Williams (1988: 483).

³⁵ Monier-Williams (1988), online edition, s.v. *sukha*. Cf. below. The other meanings are later.

³⁶ Monier-Williams (1988: 483); Böhtlingk (1928), Cologne online edition.

³⁷ Monier-Williams (1988: 1239) defines *sustha* as ‘well situated, faring well, healthy, comfortable, prosperous, happy’.

³⁸ The root of the verb in both languages (as in English) is a cognate inheritance from Proto-Indo-European *stā- ‘to stand; place or thing that is standing’ (Watkins 2000: 84).

humans, so it of course includes the idea of the human “self-identity”, and much discussion in Buddhist texts and the scholarly literature on them focuses on that idea.³⁹ Nevertheless, Buddha explicitly says that “all dharmas are *anātman*.” As Hamilton rightly points out, “In a great many, one might almost say most, secondary sources on Buddhism” *anātman* “has regularly been singled out as being the heart or core of what Buddhism is all about.”⁴⁰ Like all major Early Buddhist teachings, this one is presented negatively. It rejects the idea of inherent absolutes such as good and bad, true and false, and so on. The rejection is explicit also in Buddhist-influenced Early Taoist texts as well as in early Normative Buddhist texts such as the *Pratyutpanna Samādhi Sūtra*, first translated into Chinese between AD 178 and 189 by the Kushan monk Lokakṣema, and the *Sukhāvativyūha Sūtra* (translated in the early third century AD), both of which belong to the Pure Land school of Buddhism, traditionally classed as a branch of Mahayana.

The “three characteristics” are said to apply to “all dharmas”, that is, everything, and are central in Buddhism.⁴¹ But for Buddha, as for Pyrrho, their reference is exclusively to ethical or moral matters, including emotions and other conflicts. Like Pyrrho, the Buddha did not even mention metaphysics. He is presented in early Normative Buddhist texts as considering metaphysics to be distracting sophism, and refuses

³⁹ Hamilton (2000) is one of the many extreme examples of this, but her book does contain some unique insights on *anātman*.

⁴⁰ Hamilton (2000: 19); cf. Gethin (1998), who devotes thirty pages to the topic “No Self”.

⁴¹ Hamilton (2000) stresses the centrality of the concepts in the *Trilakṣaṇa*, but also emphasizes the “Four Noble Truths” and the “Eightfold Path”. It is significant that neither of the latter two lists mentions *anitya* ‘impermanent’ and *anātman* ‘lacking an inherent self-identity’, and the Four Noble Truths are fixated on *duḥkha* alone. It is pointed out by Bareau (1963: 178–181; cited in Bronkhorst 1986: 101–104), from contrastive study of Vinaya accounts of the Buddha’s first sermon with the accounts in the early sutras, that the Four Noble Truths are not even mentioned in the sutras. Moreover, it has since been shown definitively by Schopen (2004: 94) that the Vinaya versions we now have are actually dated or datable only to the fifth century AD. Because the *Trilakṣaṇa* seems to be attested in Pyrrho’s Greek version, it is datable to 330–325 BC, and is therefore three centuries earlier than the otherwise earliest known Buddhist texts—the Gāndhāri manuscripts—and nearly a millennium earlier than the attested Vinaya. In any case, the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path are clearly developments of late, standardized Normative Buddhism, which spread far and wide and absorbed or replaced earlier forms of Buddhism in the Saka-Kushan period.

to teach it,⁴² but that story has patently been concocted to explain why a topic of concern in later times was not discussed by the Buddha.

Pyrrho's version of the *Trilakṣaṇa* is so close to the Indian Buddhist one that it is virtually a translation of it: both the Buddha and Pyrrho make a declaration in which they list three logical characteristics of all discrete "(ethical) things, affairs, questions", but they give them exclusively negatively, that is, "All matters are *non-x*, *non-y*, and *non-z*." The peculiar way in which the characteristics are presented is thus the same, the main difference being the order of the first and third characteristics.⁴³ This passage about the three characteristics is thus the absolutely earliest known bit of Buddhist doctrinal *text*. It is firmly dated three centuries earlier than the Gāndhārī texts.⁴⁴

Now, the *Trilakṣaṇa* is not just any piece of Buddhist teaching. It is at the center of Buddhist *practice*, which is agreed to be the heart and soul of living Buddhism of any kind. Speaking of "insight meditation", evidently the oldest, but certainly the single most important of the different kinds and stages of Buddhist meditation, Gethin (1998) says,

With the essential work of calming the mind completed, with the attainment of the fourth *dhyāna*, the meditator can focus fully on the development of insight. . . .⁴⁵ Insight meditation aims at understanding [that

⁴² *Majjhima-nikāya* I, 428. Discussed by Gethin (1998: 66–67).

⁴³ In view of the three centuries separating Pyrrho's version of the *Trilakṣaṇa* from the Gāndhārī texts (and probably still more centuries for the Pali texts), the probability must be considered that the meaning of the word *duḥkha* (Pali *dukkha*) had changed so much in that long interval that its Early Buddhist meaning has been lost in Indic. In that case, Pyrrho's version may preserve something closer to the Buddha's own intentions. As for the reversal of the first and third characteristics in Pyrrho's version, it could similarly represent the earlier tradition, or it could perhaps have been deliberate, due to Pyrrho's own stress on *adiaphora*, as discussed below.

⁴⁴ The statement of the *Trilakṣaṇa* is attested in the earliest known Buddhist manuscripts, the Gāndhārī texts that are currently under intensive study, including one dated to the first century AD, or possibly even the previous century. See Baums (2009: 251, 302, 406): "*aṇica · dukha · aṇatva*", which he translates traditionally as "impermanent, painful and without self". It is currently thought that the Gāndhārī texts date to approximately the same time as the traditional date of the compilation of the Pali Canon, but that the latter has been much altered in the following centuries.

⁴⁵ Here Gethin (1998: 187) adds "and the wisdom that understands the four truths." This is no doubt relevant for practitioners of later, Normative Buddhism, but as noted above it has been demonstrated that the Four (Noble) Truths cannot be reconstructed to Pre-Normative Buddhism.

“things”) . . . are impermanent and unstable (*anitya/anicca*), that they are unsatisfactory and imperfect (*duḥkha/dukkha*), and that they are not self (*anātman/anattā*). The philosophical nuances of these three terms may be expressed differently in the theoretical writings of various Buddhist schools, but in one way or another the higher stages of the Buddhist path focus on the direct understanding and seeing of these aspects of the world.⁴⁶

This characterization is supported by the *Mahāsaccaka Sutta*, in which the Buddha describes his final enlightenment, ending with his achievement of the four *dhyānas*.⁴⁷ In the last and highest of these, the fourth, he says, “As a result of abandoning bliss, and abandoning pain, as a result of the earlier disappearance of cheerfulness and dejection, I reached the Fourth Dhyāna, which is free from pain and bliss, the complete purity of equanimity and attentiveness, and resided [there].”⁴⁸ What the Buddha is abandoning here is the *distinction between the opposite qualities* or antilogies that are mentioned. This is Pyrrho’s *adiaphora* state of being ‘undifferentiated, without (an intrinsic) self-identity’, which is identical to the Buddha’s state of being *anātman* ‘without (an intrinsic) self-identity’. It is equated with nirvana (*nirvāṇa* or *nirodha*) ‘extinguishing (of the burning of the passions)’, and the peace that results from it. In the terms of the *Mahāsaccaka Sutta*, ‘being free from both pain and bliss’⁴⁹ means the state of *apatheia* ‘passionlessness’, while “complete equanimity” is exactly the same thing as *ataraxia*. As Timon says, the result of following Pyrrho’s program is first *apatheia* ‘passionlessness’,⁵⁰ and then *ataraxia* ‘undisturbedness, equanimity’—nirvana.

⁴⁶ Gethin (1998: 187). However, it must be emphasized that the Buddha did *not* teach about metaphysics (or for that matter physics, etc.), as noted above.

⁴⁷ Sanskrit *dhyāna*, Pali *jhāna*, has been borrowed into Chinese as *Ch’an* 禪, and into Japanese via Chinese, as *Zen* 禪.

⁴⁸ *Mahāsaccaka Sutta*, MN I, 247, translated by Bronkhorst (1986: 17), who adds that the text’s “description of the Buddhist Four Dhyānas . . . is standard, and recurs numerous times in the Buddhist canon.”

⁴⁹ Bronkhorst’s “bliss” is his translation of Skt. *sukha*, and “pain” is his translation of Skt. *duḥkha*. These are common late Normative Buddhist interpretations of the meanings of the words, as discussed above.

⁵⁰ See the passage quoted below in this chapter; *apatheia* is my textual emendation for *aphasia*, as shown in detail in Appendix A, q.v.

WE KNOW NEITHER THE ABSOLUTE TRUTH NOR THE LIE

Pyrrho next points out that the logical problem he has noted has specific implications for truth values of anything, and accordingly, for our epistemology: “Therefore, neither our sense perceptions nor our *doxai* ‘views, theories’ tell us the (ultimate) truth or lie to us (about *pragmata* ‘matters’). So we certainly should not rely on them (to do it).” Because *differentiae* and other criteria are provided by human minds,⁵¹ and ethical “matters, affairs, topics” are by nature unstable and unfixed, both our inductive knowledge (based on perceptions) and our deductive knowledge (views, theories, or arguments, even if based on purely internal logical calculation) must be circular, and therefore logically invalid and fatally defective in general.⁵² They are thus useless for determining any ultimate, absolute truth, or its converse, untruth—the lie—about *pragmata* ‘matters’; so we certainly should not expect our intrinsically flawed and imperfect sense perceptions and mental abilities to do that.⁵³

Pyrrho’s rejection of the antilogy of *the Truth* versus *the Lie* hearkens back to the fundamental antilogy, repeated over and over in the early Avesta and the early Old Persian inscriptions, between *Asha* or *Arta* ‘the Truth’, supported by Heavenly God, Ahura Mazda ‘Lord Wisdom’, versus *Druj* ‘the Lie’.⁵⁴

Pyrrho’s point here is that humans want to know the ultimate, absolute Truth, but *the ultimate* or *the absolute* is a perfectionist metaphysical or ontological category created by humans and superimposed on everything. The same people declare our task to be to learn the

⁵¹ Of course other animals—even the simplest ones—do the same thing.

⁵² See the discussion of the Problem of Induction in Chapter Four.

⁵³ Pyrrho’s explicit mention of the converse of telling the truth indicates not only that he was well aware of the Law of Non-Contradiction, but that he was aware of the deeper implications of his negative “declaration” about things, q.v. Chapter Four.

⁵⁴ In the Gāthās, although Zoroaster vehemently rejects the *daevas* or *daivas*, the old polytheistic gods, they are equated with *druj* only indirectly, via condemnation of the priests who worship the *daevas*. Their worship was evidently too prevalent to be stamped out, and the most important of the old gods were reintroduced under the later Achaemenids.

absolute, perfect truth, and to understand it, as if it really existed.⁵⁵ Yet such categories cannot exist without humans, as pointed out in the Buddha's teaching of *anātman*—dharmas do not have inherent self-identities—and in Pyrrho's version of it, *adiaphora*.

In several famous Normative Buddhist sutra narratives the Buddha is presented as steadfastly refusing to discuss metaphysics and other forms of speculative philosophy, declaring that they are nonsense, and harmful, because they lead one astray from one's path to passionlessness and nirvana.⁵⁶

The attitude of the Buddha in these texts is very clear:

Buddhism regards itself as presenting a system of training in conduct, meditation, and understanding that constitutes a path leading to the cessation of suffering.⁵⁷ Everything is to be subordinated to this goal. And in this connection Buddha's teachings suggest that preoccupation with certain beliefs and ideas about the ultimate nature of the world [i.e., metaphysics] and our destiny in fact hinders our progress along this path rather than helping it. If we insist on working out exactly what to believe about the world and human destiny before beginning to follow the path of practice we will never even set out.⁵⁸

There has been much empty scholastic debate on why the Buddha did not answer the metaphysical and other questions posed by the novice monk Māluṅkyāputta in the sutra about him, including even whether or not Buddha knew the answers.⁵⁹ It must first be stressed that this entire problem is purely a Normative Buddhist one, and cannot be projected back to the time of the Buddha. However, from the perspective of that late form of Buddhism, the reason he did not answer is remarkably clear in the sutra itself: from the Buddhist point of view, the questions are irrelevant, but also, as the *Trilakṣaṇa* makes abundantly clear, they are “unanswerable because they assume. . . *absolute categories* and concepts—the world, the soul, the self, the Tathāgatha—that the Buddha and the Buddhist tradition does not accept or at least criticizes and

⁵⁵ This is the goal of most of the major ancient Greek philosophical schools.

⁵⁶ The most famous example is in the *Cūḷa-Māluṅkyā Sutta*; see Gethin (1998: 66).

⁵⁷ Gethin's usual translation of *duḥkha*.

⁵⁸ Gethin (1998: 65–66).

⁵⁹ See Gethin (1998: 67–68) for a summary.

understands in particular ways. That is, from the Buddhist perspective these questions are ill-formed and misconceived. To answer ‘yes’ or ‘no’ to any one of them is to be drawn into accepting the validity of the question and the terms in which it is couched.”⁶⁰ The Buddha’s great insight, as stated in the *Trilakṣaṇa*, is that absolute, perfect categories and concepts⁶¹ conceived by humans are among the obstacles to achieving passionlessness and nirvana; it is necessary to get rid of them in order to progress.⁶² The questions of Māluṅkyāputta reveal that some Buddhists did not understand the Buddha’s main overt teachings, let alone the covert ones.

WHAT WE SHOULD BE WITHOUT

Based on the above considerations, Pyrrho advises, “So we should be *adoxastous* ‘without views, theories’ [about *pragmata* ‘matters’], and *aklineis* ‘uninclined’ [toward or against *pragmata*], and *akradantous* ‘unwavering’ [in our attitude about *pragmata*], saying about every single one⁶³ that it no more is than it is not, or it both is and is not, or it neither is nor is not.”

1. We Should Have *No Views*

Pyrrho says that we should have “no views, theories” because they force us to be inclined in one direction or another with respect to *pragmata*. They thus constitute an obstacle to our attainment of passionlessness or unperturbedness—though Pyrrho does not say this himself, no doubt because stating an explicit goal would violate the principles he has just outlined. Instead, he must have taught his students to understand that the goal can be attained only indirectly, because Timon does supply this information at the end of his account, as quoted by Aristocles.

⁶⁰ Gethin (1998: 68), emphasis added.

⁶¹ See Chapter Four.

⁶² As Gethin (1998: 68) puts it, “such views (*dr̥ṣṭi/diṭṭhi*) about the ultimate nature of the world are, from the Buddhist perspective, the expression of a mental grasping which is but one manifestation of that insatiable ‘thirst’ or ‘craving’ which Buddhist thought regards as the condition for the arising of suffering”.

⁶³ The phrase “every single one (of them)” here refers again to *pragmata*, explicitly echoing the beginning statement that *pragmata* are “equally”—i.e., “all”—undifferentiated, etc.

Pyrrho's explicit enjoinder that we should have "no views" corresponds exactly to the Buddhist attitude attested in some of the earliest texts in the Pali Canon. In the *Aṭṭhakavagga*,⁶⁴ several texts say unambiguously that we should have "no views". The teaching of "right views" and "the highest knowledge" are rejected as "the false science of those who are still attached to views. Moreover their attachment is not deemed to be merely the attachment to wrong views, but to views in general. Also, there is no question here of teaching the superior *dharma*, rather the point is that the true follower of the path would not prefer any *dharma*; he would make no claims to the possession of a higher *dharma*."⁶⁵ Wise men are those who "fancy not, they prefer not, and not a single *dharma* do they adopt."⁶⁶ Gómez points out further, "This idea is in fact well known to us through the traditional doctrine of the Middle Path—avoiding the two extremes. Thus, not to rely on views is in a certain way a form of nondualism."⁶⁷ This connection is explicit in Pyrrho's next point.

2. We Should Be *Uninclined to Either Side*

Second, Pyrrho says we should be "uninclined". One of the parallel testimonies, a poem by Timon in praise of Pyrrho, says he was "not weighed down *on this side and that* by passions (*patheōn*), theories

⁶⁴ The fifth book of the Sutta Nipāta subsection of the Khuddaka Nikāya section of the Pali Canon.

⁶⁵ Gómez (1976: 139–140). I have silently changed his past tense verbs to present tense and spelled out *Aṭṭhakavagga* here and below. Gómez (1976: 156) also notes, "Some key passages from the *Aṭṭhakavagga* could be called 'proto-Mādhyamika' passages in the sense that they anticipate some of the axial concepts of the Mādhyamika. . . . [However], the theoretical framework of the Mādhyamika is totally absent from the *Aṭṭhakavagga*. The twofold truth, emptiness, causation, and dependent origination, the indeterminables, the tetralemma, the equivalence of *samsāra* and *nirvāṇa*, are conspicuous by their absence." Note that by "the tetralemma" Gómez means the developed form of it used conspicuously and even profligately in Madhyamika works. However, it is very definitely odd that Madhyamika should have *revived* a dialectical fashion of the fourth to third centuries BC (see Appendix A). Something thus seems to be wrong with the periodization here. D'Amato (2009) compares the early texts discussed by Gómez to the fully developed Madhyamika system.

⁶⁶ *Aṭṭhakavagga* 803 (Gómez 1976: 140). His comment on this being "a form of nondualism" is precisely correct. It is one aspect of the Buddha's rejection of Early Zoroastrianism, which is permeated with an early kind of dualism focused on antilogies, opposed ethical categorizations.

⁶⁷ Gómez (1976: 141).

(*doxēs*), and pointless legislation”. This clarifies that we should maintain our balance in the middle, *neither for nor against* passions, *doxai* ‘views, theories’, and vain attempts to “fix” things (i.e., to make them established, permanent).⁶⁸ With the exception that they are not in the same order, these three points correspond to the three injunctions of Pyrrho presently under consideration, which also apparently correspond to the “three characteristics” of all *pragmata* in the first line of Pyrrho’s declaration, namely *adiaphora* (there are no logically differentiated *pragmata*) : *adoxastous* (be without views or theories—which require differentiae—about *pragmata*); *astathmēta* (there are no balanced *pragmata*) : *aklineis* (do not be unbalanced by inclining toward this one or that one) ; *anepikrita* (there are no fixed *pragmata*) : *akradantous* (unwaveringly avoid trying to fix or “choose” them by fiat). The ancient testimonies say that Pyrrho did not “choose.” He maintained a balance between extremes, without views, and thus achieved *ataraxia* ‘undisturbedness, calm’.

One of the insights of Buddhism that appears to go back to the Buddha himself is that we should not have attachments (*upādāna*) or cravings (*trṣṇā*, *tanhā*) with regard to material things, human relations, views, and so on, in order to avoid disturbance. In normal daily life “we become attached to things that are unreliable, unstable, changing, and impermanent.” Though we try to find something “that is permanent and stable, which we can hold on to and thereby find lasting happiness, we must always fail.” The Buddha’s solution is, “Let go of everything.” The goal of the Buddhist path is thus the cessation of craving, equated with the cessation of *duḥkha*.⁶⁹

One who “does not grasp at anything in the world . . . craves no longer, and through not craving he effects complete *nirvāṇa*”.⁷⁰ Although this is expressed in Normative Buddhist language understood by modern Normative Buddhist exegesis, the point is the same as in Pyrrhonism: maintaining one’s balance by not clinging or being weighed down by passions, which pull us, in one direction or another, away from the balanced condition of having no views, no passions, no choices, and so on. Buddhist mendicants are explicitly enjoined not to refuse whatever

⁶⁸ See Appendix A for references and discussion of Timon’s poem.

⁶⁹ Gethin (1998: 74); here as elsewhere, he translates *duḥkha* as “suffering”.

⁷⁰ *Dīgha Nikāya* II, 68, translation by Gethin (1998: 146).

food is given them when begging, nor to refuse a robe given to them, but to eat and wear whatever they may have without complaint—that is, they should not be choosy or picky. It is precisely the attitude and behavior of Pyrrho described in several narratives about him,⁷¹ and it is precisely the attitude of the Buddha: according to the traditional account in the *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra*, he died after eating spoiled food given him by a pious donor.

This “not choosing” is thus one of the core teachings of Early Buddhism and Early Pyrrhonism both. It is expressed in exactly the same words. The *Paramattaka Sutta* in the Suttanipāta, in stressing that holding particular views is a form of clinging, says, “One who *isn't inclined toward either side*—becoming or not-[becoming], here or beyond—who has no entrenchment when considering what's grasped among doctrines, hasn't the least preconceived perception with regard to what's seen, heard, or sensed.”⁷² These points thus occur in exactly the same *systemic* relationship in both Buddhism and Pyrrhonism.

3. We Should Be *Unwavering*

Pyrrho finally enjoins us to be “unwavering” in our disposition about *pragmata* ‘(ethical) things, matters, affairs’, reciting the tetralemma formula in response to “every single one” of them so as to deny that they have any validity whatsoever. “For Pyrrho declared no matter to be good or bad or just or unjust, and likewise with regard to all matters, that not one of them is (good or bad or just or unjust) in truth, but that people manage all matters (*prattein*)⁷³ by law and custom, because each one is no more this than it is that.”⁷⁴

⁷¹ See below in this chapter.

⁷² *Paramattaka Sutta*, Suttanipāta 4.5, trans. Thanissaro Bhikku (1994–2012) <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/kn/snp/snp.4.05.than.html>, emphasis and clarification added. The sutra also emphasizes the importance of having no views: “Abandoning what he had embraced, abandoning self, not clinging, he doesn't make himself dependent even in connection with knowledge; doesn't follow a faction among those who are split; doesn't fall back on any view whatsoever.”

⁷³ The construction in Greek uses not the noun *pragmata* but its corresponding verb *prattein* ‘to achieve, bring something to an end’, from *prak-*; it is a verbal form of *pragma* and *praxis* that means something like ‘to “do” *pragmata*’, i.e., ‘to manage matters’.

⁷⁴ D.L. IX, 61: οὐδὲν γὰρ ἔφρασκεν οὔτε καλὸν οὔτ' αἰσχρὸν οὔτε δίκαιον οὔτ' ἄδικον: καὶ ὁμοίως ἐπὶ πάντων μηδὲν εἶναι τῆ ἀληθείᾳ. Text by Hicks (1925: 474), but correcting the erroneous printed form ἀληθείᾳ in his text from the text of Declève Caizzi (1981: 29).

The denial that *dharmas*, or “(ethical) things”, exist “in Truth” is yet another pervasive teaching of Buddhism.⁷⁵ What both Pyrrho and the Buddha deny is the idea of anything existing in some ultimate, absolute sense *beyond* that of our perceptions and thoughts, as opposed to phenomenal appearance.⁷⁶

Both Pyrrho and Buddha stress that the Way is not easy; one must struggle against our natural human inclinations to waver back and forth between this passion and that. We are not perfect beings living in a perfect world, so we sometimes err. We must stick to the path, despite occasional setbacks and other difficulties, as pointed out by Pyrrho in his response to criticism related below in Narrative 5.

Pyrrho tells us that when we are confronted by a conflict, we should recite the tetralemma, a four-part formula that negates all possible determinations. Doing this “unwaveringly” in every instance eliminates the obstructions of *pragmata* one by one.

Although it has been argued that Pyrrho’s use of the tetralemma reveals that his thought derives from Buddhism, this has been shown to be an untenable view because the tetralemma already occurs in earlier Greek philosophical texts. Plato (428–347 BC) quotes a tetralemma in the *Republic* spoken by Glaucon and responded to by “Socrates”, and Aristotle too quotes a tetralemma in his discussion of those who deny the Law of Non-Contradiction.⁷⁷ It also occurs in the *Chuangtzu* (composed mostly of material put together in the fourth to third centuries BC). In Normative Buddhist texts, the tetralemma is earliest attested in works ascribed to the Madhyamika philosopher Nāgārjuna (traditionally dated to the second century AD), but the tetralemma also occurs in sutras from the Pali Canon traditionally thought to reflect Early Buddhism. Moreover, as noted above, basic Madhyamika philosophy itself is found in some of the early Pali sutras.

⁷⁵ The apparent partial exception to this teaching taken by the Sarvāstivāda school (‘those who say all [dharmas] exist’), an important subset of Normative Buddhism in Late Antiquity (q.v. Willemsen, Dessein, and Cox 1998), was the cause of much creative disputation, q.v. Beckwith (2012c).

⁷⁶ See Chapter Four.

⁷⁷ See Bett’s (2000: 123–131, 135–137) excellent discussion of their usage of the tetralemma, bearing in mind his view of Pyrrho as a dogmatic metaphysician; see Appendix A for discussion and citations.

PASSIONLESSNESS, AND THEN UNDISTURBEDNESS—PYRRHO AND BUDDHA

The Aristocles account ends with the quotation of Timon's conclusion: "Timon says that, for those who maintain this attitude, what is left is first *apatheia* 'passionlessness, absence of suffering', and then *ataraxia* 'undisturbedness, calm, peace'". This translation is based on a hitherto overlooked passage, later in Aristocles' chapter on Pyrrhonism, which *explicitly* paraphrases the long problematic—in fact, bewildering—received text's conclusion. In the received text the first of the two results is given as *aphasia* 'unspeakingness', rather than *apatheia*, which is what the other ancient testimonies lead us to expect. In short, the resulting textual correction totally vacates the extensive scholarly literature about what Pyrrho meant by *aphasia* because the word was never in Aristocles' text, which had *apatheia*.⁷⁸

The passage as a whole is remarkable because once again it corresponds exactly to the Buddhist tradition. The last two of the Classical stages of realization in Buddhist "mindfulness" yoga (breath meditation)⁷⁹ are *apranahita* (Pali *appanahita*) 'passionless' and *nirodha* 'extinguishing; nirvana',⁸⁰ which correspond precisely to what, according to Timon, are the two things "one is left with" after following Pyrrho's "attitude" or path: "first *apatheia* 'passionlessness' and then *ataraxia* 'undisturbedness, peace'."⁸¹ The earliest form of Buddhist meditation,⁸² which ends with the Fourth Dhyāna and nirvana, as discussed above, explicitly states that having abandoned antilogies such as good and bad, one is free from them, that is, passionless, and

⁷⁸ For detailed discussion of the textual error in the received text of Aristocles in Eusebius, and its emendation, see Beckwith (2011b)—now Appendix A.

⁷⁹ In the Central Asian Buddhist yoga textbook (Schlingloff 2006), they are stages or steps 15 and 16 of the first phase, Development for the Present, in chapter 2, Mindfulness of Breathing. See the next note.

⁸⁰ See Schlingloff (2006) on the Central Asian manuscript in Sanskrit; he compares it to the standard lists in Sanskrit and Pali; see also Bretfeld (2003). The literal meaning of both *nirodha* and *nirvana* is 'the extinguishing (of the burning of passion)'.

⁸¹ See Note 78 and attendant text.

⁸² It seems to go back to Buddha himself. Bronkhorst (1986) shows that it is the earliest identifiable form of meditation in Buddhist literature.

one dwells in “indifference” and “mindfulness”.⁸³ The first of these is of course *apatheia* “passionlessness”, and the second is *ataraxia* “undisturbedness, calm”. In Buddhism, nirvana is regularly stated to be inexpressible. Like all the rest of the basic teachings of Buddhism and Pyrrhonism, it is expressed only negatively in both.⁸⁴

In sum, Pyrrho points out that because *pragmata* (‘ethical’) things, matters, questions’ are inherently undifferentiated by logically valid criteria, there is no valid difference between good and bad, just and unjust, and so on. Therefore, neither sense perceptions nor *doxai* ‘views, theories’ can either tell the truth or lie, as a consequence of which neither the absolute Truth nor an absolute Lie can “really” exist, nor is it possible to determine “in truth” whether any *pragmata* exist. Therefore, we should not expect our senses or our *doxai* ‘views, theories’ to be able to tell the “real truth” or a “real lie” about anything. Instead, we should have “no views” about *pragmata*, we should be uninclined toward any extreme with respect to *pragmata*, and we should be unwavering in our attitude about them, reciting about every single *pragma* the tetralemma formula, “It no more is than it is not, or it both is and is not, or it neither is nor is not”. This formula invalidates all dogmatic arguments.⁸⁵ What is left after maintaining this “attitude” or path, says Timon, is first *apatheia*⁸⁶ ‘passionlessness’, and then *ataraxia* ‘undisturbedness, peace’. According to Diogenes Laertius, Timon says suspending judgement “brings with it *ataraxia* ‘undisturbedness, calm’, like its shadow”.⁸⁷ Although suspending judgement is a feature specifically of Late Pyrrhonism, essentially the same thing is already advocated by Pyrrho himself in the Aristocles passage, and by Timon in his *Pythō*, where he puts it as “determining nothing and withholding assent”.⁸⁸

Pyrrho’s *ataraxia* “undisturbedness” is perfectly paralleled by the early sutras’ accounts of Buddha’s enlightenment when he reached the Fourth Dhyāna. His enlightenment was equated with nirvana. It has been shown conclusively that in the earliest sutras Buddha is shown

⁸³ Bronkhorst (1986: 16–17, 82–83).

⁸⁴ See also the discussion of Narrative 4, below.

⁸⁵ Bett (2000: 30); he discusses this and other interpretations at length (29ff.).

⁸⁶ See Appendix A for the long overlooked textual problem and its solution.

⁸⁷ Diogenes Laertius IX, 107.

⁸⁸ Diogenes Laertius IX, 76. See the discussion in Appendix A.

as having attained nirvana in this lifetime, and did not lose it during the decades before his death.⁸⁹ Hundreds of years later, in Normative Buddhism, the early picture of Buddha's enlightenment as nirvana had become increasingly modified, to the point that many came to consider it impossible to attain nirvana in one lifetime. Nevertheless, this must not mislead us into thinking that such was the view of the Buddha's followers in his lifetime, or soon after his death.⁹⁰ It is logically necessary for the Buddha to have achieved nirvana and for his followers to have believed that they could do the same thing if they imitated him, in order for such later ideas to have developed in reaction to it. If the Buddha had not achieved his remarkable, heroic breakthrough, there would have been no Buddhism.⁹¹

The teachings in the Aristocles passage are paralleled and amplified by other ancient testimonies. Together, the corpus of material on Pyrrho's thought, though certainly quite limited, presents a very clear, consistent, unambiguous picture of it. Moreover, the main teachings of both Early (Pre-Normative) Buddhism and Early Pyrrhonism are the same. Both have the same *telos* or 'goal', which is expressed negatively and is explicitly said to be attained as an indirect result of following the path, and both express specific details of the teachings in precisely the same way, in several cases in the same words.

PYRRHO'S DECLARATION AND EARLY BUDDHISM

Pyrrho's negative statement that all *pragmata* 'discrete matters, objects of cogitation', are Not-x and Not-y and Not-z corresponds to the Buddha's negative statement about all *dharmā* 'discrete matters, objects

⁸⁹ This is shown already by Barea (1963: 72–77; cited in Bronkhorst 1986: 93).

⁹⁰ Bronkhorst (1986: 93–95 et seq.), q.v. for analysis and citations.

⁹¹ Cf. Bronkhorst (2011: 10–11): “[T]he buddhist texts state repeatedly that the Buddha taught something new, something that had not theretofore been known in the world. . . . [The texts indicate that] the original teaching of the Buddha was in various respects radically different from other teachings that were current in its time and region. The buddhist texts themselves insist that the Buddha had discovered something new, and that he therefore taught something new. Scholars have not always believed this, but their scepticism was not justified.”

of cogitation, dharmas'. Both of them include the statement that individual *pragmata* ~ dharmas have no inherent self-identity. Logically, then, we cannot say for certain if anything is "true" or "false", and so forth, so we should have "no views" (such as that a given *pragma* is true or false), and we should "not incline" toward any choice. If we are "unwavering" in this "attitude", we will be passionless, and then calm.

No other Greek system proposes such a program as a coherent system, and no one has ever suggested that there is one. It is equally the core of the Early Buddhist system. Pyrrhonism and Buddhism alone propose it, and they match down to details.

PYRRHO'S PRACTICE

Some of the most striking bits of information about Pyrrho make almost no sense in the Greek tradition, and have been treated with some puzzlement by scholars, but they make very good sense as attestations of Buddhist practice, and are completely consistent with Pyrrho's—and the Buddha's—teachings.

The most literally solid statement of all is the remark by Pausanias (fl. ca. AD 150–175) in his *Description of Greece* that the city of Elis erected a statue in Pyrrho's honor. "On the side of the roofed colonnade facing the marketplace stands a statue of Pyrrho, son of Pistostrates, a sage⁹² who would not give firm assent to any proposition."⁹³ Pausanias's book is a travelogue or guidebook rather than a history, but he has been shown to be a faithful and extremely accurate observer. He saw the statue himself, as well as Pyrrho's tomb nearby in his home village, Petra.⁹⁴

⁹² The text has σοφιστοῦ. Greek σοφιστής is usually rendered into English as 'sophist', even though it often does not have the negative meaning of the *English* word *sophist*. Considering what Pausanias says here about Pyrrho it is impossible to imagine that he could have intended the meaning 'sophist'. I have translated it as 'sage', one of the alternative translations frequently used for instances when the Greek word is applied to people we might properly call 'philosophers'.

⁹³ Pausanias VI, 24.5: κατὰ δὲ τῆς στοᾶς τὸ ἐς τὴν ἀγορὰν ἔστηκε Πύρρωνος τοῦ Πιστοκράτους εἰκὼν, σοφιστοῦ τε ἀνδρὸς καὶ ἐς βέβαιον ὁμολογίαν ἐπὶ οὐδενὶ λόγῳ καταστάντος. Text from Perseus online version of Spiro (1903); cf. Jones (1917: 3:148–151).

⁹⁴ Pausanias VI, 24.5: ἔστι δὲ καὶ μνημα τῷ Πύρρωνι οὐ πόρρω τοῦ Ἡλείων ἄστεως: Πέτρα μὲν τῷ χωρίῳ τὸ ὄνομα. "Not far from the town of the Eleans, at a place called Petra, there is also a tomb of Pyrrho."

This accords very well with a report, on the authority of Nausiphanes, who had personally studied with Pyrrho: “So revered was he by his home town that they appointed him high priest, and because of him they voted to make all philosophers exempt from taxation.”⁹⁵ The veracity of this testimony has been doubted, and perhaps for a typical Greek philosopher such consideration is difficult to imagine. But for Pyrrho, who in his own lifetime was viewed by nearly everyone—even those who did not agree with him—as a kind of holy man,⁹⁶ much like the Buddha, it is easy to understand. The agreement of this strand of thought in the testimonies adds further support to the report of Nausiphanes. It should not be surprising then to learn that it also accords very well with the historical treatment of Buddhist teachers.

It is well established from the earliest accounts of Normative Buddhism that monks, nuns, and their monasteries were not taxed in ancient India.⁹⁷ The ancient Greek accounts of Early Buddhism do not mention whether or not the Śramaṇas were taxed, but since they are explicitly described as living extremely frugally, it is difficult to imagine how they could have been taxed. The Forest-dwelling Śramaṇas, in particular, essentially owned nothing and had no property—in fact, they did not participate in economic activity of any kind, as noted in Chapter Two—while the Town-dwelling Śramaṇas, the Physicians, begged for their food and stayed with people who would put them up in their houses, so it would have been next to impossible to collect any taxes from them.⁹⁸ Not only does Megasthenes present this as the normal state

⁹⁵ D.L. IX, 64: οὕτω δ' αὐτὸν ὑπὸ τῆς πατρίδος τιμηθῆναι ὥστε καὶ ἀρχιερέα καταστῆσαι αὐτὸν καὶ δι' ἐκεῖνον πᾶσι τοῖς φιλοσόφοις ἀτέλειαν ψηφίσασθαι.

⁹⁶ The testimonies contain repeated reference to such opinions by many well-known contemporaries of Pyrrho who knew him personally, including some who are said to have remarked that they did not agree with Pyrrho's philosophy.

⁹⁷ The tax-free status of religious foundations was one of the main reasons for their proliferation. On the tax-free status of Buddhist *vihāras*, see Beckwith (2012c: 41–42) and references. On the de facto continued ownership of *vihāras* by donors in India, see Schopen (2004: 219–259); cf. the continued ownership by the Barmakids of the famous Nawbahār (Nava Vihāra) of Balkh and the lands that were donated to support it, surviving Islamization and several wars (Van Bladel 2010).

⁹⁸ The Brāhmanas, by contrast, had extensive possessions, including land, so one would imagine that they were taxed even during their ascetic stage, which according to Megasthenes was thirty-seven years long. The period is given as forty years in the accounts of Calanus, but he was not a Brahmanist at all, based on Megasthenes' description of the beliefs and practices of his sect; cf. the Epilogue. The insistence of modern scholars

of affairs, the *gymnosophistai* ‘naked wise-men’ (or “Gymnosophists”) of ancient Greek tradition—who were *neither Śramaṇas nor Brāhmanas*—are described in all accounts as having lived extremely frugally, and they openly encouraged the Greeks to join them and live the same way so as to learn their philosophy and practices. Did Pyrrho actually live as a Śramaṇa for a while when he was in India? We do not know. But the account of Megasthenes tells us that the “philosophers” or “holy men” of ancient Gandhāra were undoubtedly not taxed; they were left alone to practice and teach.⁹⁹

In view of the high esteem, and even veneration, accorded him by his contemporaries, it is not difficult to imagine the elderly Pyrrho—a companion of Alexander, as well as an esteemed teacher—being honored by his fellow citizens in the way described, perhaps after suggestions and encouragement from Timon and others who had heard Pyrrho’s stories about his experiences in India.

From Eratosthenes, reported by Diogenes Laertius, it is well established that Pyrrho also remained celibate.¹⁰⁰ Diogenes Laertius, quoting from Antigonos of Carystus’s book about Pyrrho, says, “He would withdraw from society and live as a hermit,¹⁰¹ rarely making an appearance before his family.”¹⁰² Later in the same section of quotations Diogenes says, “Often . . . he would leave his home and, telling no one, would go roaming about with whomsoever he chanced to meet.”¹⁰³ That is,

that Megasthenes’ description does not accord with what “we know” about ancient Brahmanism is based not on ancient Brahmanism (of which we have absolutely no record for at least half a millennium after Megasthenes’ time, and typically much longer), but on the imaginations of medieval to modern writers.

⁹⁹ Plutarch makes this explicit, insofar as he quotes Alexander himself as having said that the naked wise men of India did not even have a wallet, unlike Diogenes the Cynic, whom Alexander had met in Corinth and had been impressed by. Plutarch’s account, however, seems to have been influenced by Megasthenes’ account of the Forest-dwellers. The actual “philosophers” met by the Greeks when Alexander was there depended on other people for many things, as the accounts make clear. See further in Chapter Three.

¹⁰⁰ D.L. IX, 66: “He lived in fraternal piety with his sister, a midwife” (translation by Jones 1933: 3:479).

¹⁰¹ Greek ἐρημάζειν; derived from ἐρημος ‘desolate, desert, solitary, lonely’, the source of the English loanwords “eremitic”, “hermit”, etc.

¹⁰² D.L. IX, 63: ἐκπατεῖν τ’ αὐτὸν καὶ ἐρημάζειν, σπανίως ποτ’ ἐπιφαινόμενον τοῖς οἴκοι. Text and translation by Jones (1933: 3:477); cf. Narrative 1 below.

¹⁰³ Translation by Jones (1933: 3:477). The quotations are of course in *oratio obliqua*.

he *wandered*. Both of these reports accord perfectly with the itinerant wandering, hermetic life of the Buddha, according to the traditional accounts, as well as with that of a Buddhist *śramaṇa*, particularly the Forest *Śramaṇa* type attested in the *Indica* of Pyrrho's contemporary Megasthenes.¹⁰⁴

THE NARRATIVES ABOUT PYRRHO

The Greek version of the Trilakṣaṇa text and its parallels,¹⁰⁵ some statements directly connected to them, and a number of verbatim quotes of Timon's poems praising Pyrrho are the most important testimonies about Pyrrho's *teachings*. By contrast, the most important testimonies on his *practices* are narrative vignettes about his life. These "anecdotes" typically describe him in the context of events involving other actors and spectators, and conclude with a moral, or judgemental comment.

No previous attempt seems to have been made to organize these narratives¹⁰⁶ and analyze their purpose.¹⁰⁷ They are moralistic or didactic stories. Regardless of their subject matter, the narratives are concerned to show whether Pyrrho behaved in accordance with his teachings or in violation of them. This is significant in the Greek context because "philosophers" were expected to follow their teachings in daily life.¹⁰⁸ Most strikingly, all of them show Pyrrho as an imperfect being living in an imperfect world. In this respect they contrast sharply with the panegyric verses of Timon that praise Pyrrho as a perfected being beyond ordinary men. Accordingly, the narratives cannot be attributed to Timon.

¹⁰⁴ See Chapter Two.

¹⁰⁵ Discussed above; for a detailed study of this material, see Appendix A.

¹⁰⁶ This is a rather Aristotelian enterprise, fully un-Pyrrhonian, so I doubt Pyrrho would approve of it as such, but I hope that the clarification of his teachings that results from it would have met with his approval.

¹⁰⁷ When they are discussed by scholars, they have usually been given ad hoc explanations, rather than ones that fit the points of the vignettes into the picture of Pyrrho's thought and practice known from other sources. Clayman (2009: 44–46) argues that the "essentially Skeptical portrait" of Pyrrho in the narratives "was a deliberate creation of Timon who embodies the principles of Skeptic practice in Pyrrho." However, there is no evidence for this claim. Bett (2000) notes the practical impossibility of distinguishing Pyrrho from Timon in the sources; cf. Appendix A.

¹⁰⁸ Cf. Clayman (2009: 35) on this Greek tradition.

As reports apparently written in most cases by non-Pyrrhonists who were contemporaries of Pyrrho, the narratives are important for understanding what Greeks in general thought of Pyrrho's teachings and practice, and how Early Pyrrhonism contrasted with what might be called "normal traditional Greek thought and behavior".

The narratives begin with Pyrrho's experiences as a member of Alexander's court for over ten years, five years of which were spent in Central Asia and India. According to all accounts, Pyrrho had an experience there that permanently changed him.

1. *Pyrrho in India*

The first narrative about Pyrrho survives in two pieces found as quotations or paraphrases in different works, though each piece assumes or refers to the other. The main versions are in Diogenes Laertius, Sextus Empiricus, and Plutarch.¹⁰⁹ The story relates that while in India, "Pyrrho heard an Indian reproach [his teacher] Anaxarchus, telling him that he would never be able to teach others what is good while he himself danced attendance on kings in their courts. Since Pyrrho himself had written a poem in praise of Alexander, for which he had been rewarded with ten thousand gold pieces,¹¹⁰ he withdrew from the world and lived in solitude, rarely showing himself to his relatives."¹¹¹ This narrative seems to go back ultimately to a personal account by Pyrrho himself or someone very close to him. Its moral is simple and clear, but the effects of the Indian's remark on Pyrrho are stunning. As

¹⁰⁹ Bett (2000: 1n4).

¹¹⁰ Sextus Empiricus, *Adversus Mathematicos* ("Against the Learned" = *M*), I, 282, ed. and trans. Bury (1933: 4:162–163): λέγεται γὰρ αὐτὸν καὶ ποιῆσιν εἰς τὸν Μακεδὸνα Ἀλέξανδρον γράψαντα μυρίοις χρυσοῖς τετιμηθῆναι "for Pyrrho himself, it is said, wrote a poem for Alexander of Macedon and was rewarded with thousands of [or 'ten thousand'] gold pieces." Plutarch has: Πύρρωνι δὲ τῷ Ἡλείῳ πρῶτον ἐντυχόντι μυρίους χρυσοῦς ἔδωκε "To Pyrrho of Elis he (Alexander) gave ten thousand gold pieces when he first met him". Plutarch, *Moralia* 331 E ("On the Fortune of Alexander"), ed. and trans. Babbitt (1927: 4:411). The significant difference in Plutarch's version is his omission of the reason for Alexander's gift, as noted by Bett (2000: 1n4).

¹¹¹ The first and third sentences are in chronologically reversed order in D.L. IX, 63, the first being intended to explain the third, which reads in Hicks's (1925: 2:477) translation, "He would withdraw from the world and live in solitude, rarely showing himself to his relatives."

a result, Pyrrho not only ceased writing poetry, he adopted a “philosophy” that was unprecedented and bewildering (for a Greek). In particular, though, he “withdrew from the world”, and “lived in solitude”, and “rarely showed himself to his relatives”.

These three things are stereotyped expressions for what a person beginning Early Buddhist practice did, especially one following the way of the Forest-dwelling *śramaṇas*. Buddhist texts regularly refer explicitly to *śramaṇas* as those who have “left their families (or homes)” and have “withdrawn from the world”.¹¹² The early *śramaṇas* who are thought to have best preserved the original practices of the Buddha before he achieved enlightenment are those who “lived in solitude” in the forest and practiced greater austerities than the other *śramaṇas*. Megasthenes, a contemporary of Pyrrho who gives an eyewitness account of the Indian “philosophers”, tells us explicitly about these Forest-dwelling *śramaṇas* and their austerities, thereby confirming the antiquity of the Indian tradition in this case. Pyrrho himself is said to have behaved as a hermetic ascetic.

2. *Pyrrho's Continuing Issue with Wealth*

The first narrative tells us that Pyrrho took the Indian's admonishment to heart specifically because of his own acceptance of a fortune in gold from Alexander. In the next story, from Athenaeus, Pyrrho says to a host who has just lavishly entertained him, “I'm not going to visit you in the future, if you entertain me that way, so that I don't feel bad when I see you wasting your money unnecessarily, and so that you don't run short of funds and suffer. Because it's better to favor one another with our company than with a large number of dishes, most of which the servants consume.”¹¹³ The other quotations in that section of Athenaeus are mostly dated to Pyrrho's time, or slightly earlier or later, so it is quite possible that Pyrrho actually said something like this, but even if he did not, his statement is specifically Pyrrhonian and is certainly the kind of thing he would have said to a friend. Pyrrho does not want either of

¹¹² In Normative Buddhism, these expressions are specifically equivalent to saying “became a monk”. Cf. Gethin (1998: 85, 87) on “becoming a Buddhist monk . . . : ‘going forth’ (Sanskrit *pravrajyā* ~ Pali *pabbajjā*) . . . from the household life into homelessness”.

¹¹³ Athenaeus x, 419, d-e, translation by Olson (2008: 4:469).

them to feel distressed because of the banquet or, to put it in more Pyrrhonian terms, to become “disturbed” or “unbalanced” by excesses.

The narrative about the Indian’s reproach and the narrative about the banquet could simply be written off as traditional morality—either generic or, as Bett suggests, that of a specific Greek school, the Cynics.¹¹⁴ But the point of the first text is that Pyrrho reacted to the Indian’s remarks because he felt bad about having accepted a lavish reward from Alexander. The second says explicitly that he wanted to avoid being distressed by receiving the “gift” of a luxurious banquet. In both cases his remarks are strictly about the effects of excess on the *individual*. He says nothing at all about waste or unfairness themselves, both of which have to do with *social* morality.

This focus on the individual is a specific characteristic of Early Buddhism, which encourages people to “leave the family” to pursue individual enlightenment, just as Pyrrho himself did. Both narratives are in full accord with the Early Buddhist reason for not accepting wealth, or anything luxurious: to avoid extremes and attachments to things, with their attendant emotional disturbances.

3. *Pyrrho’s Humility*

A narrative in Diogenes Laertius, taken from Eratosthenes, presents Pyrrho performing humble, everyday tasks without either complaint or excessive enjoyment: “He lived in fraternal piety with his sister, a midwife, . . . now and then even taking things for sale to market, poultry perchance or pigs, and he would dust the things in the house, quite indifferent as to what he did. They say he showed his indifference by

¹¹⁴ Bett (2000: 64); he summarizes the account, saying, “Pyrrho goes to a sumptuous dinner with a friend, and says that he will not see him again if he is received in this fashion, because what is important is good company rather than a display of unnecessary luxury.” He then remarks, “Here, as in some of the other anecdotes, Pyrrho’s behaviour is reminiscent of that of the Cynics . . .”. This misses the point or moral of the story (see the discussion above), which is given explicitly in Athenaeus, who has taken the passage from the second century BC writer Hegesander (Bett 2000: 64). Certainly Pyrrho’s thought is sometimes reminiscent of Antisthenes (ca. 445–ca. 365 BC), a student of Socrates who focused on ethics and is considered to be a forerunner of the Cynics, but Antisthenes also promoted monotheism, among other interesting and non-Pyrrhonian things. It is even more difficult to find much in common between Pyrrho and Diogenes the Cynic (ca. 404–323 BC), the practical founder and model of the school.

washing a porker.”¹¹⁵ This account twice uses the term *adiaphora* or a derivative; Hicks translates them as “indifferent” and “indifference”, and the text itself apparently suggests that meaning—in other words, that Pyrrho did not care one way or the other what he did. However, this is certainly an error, perhaps going back as far as Pyrrho’s own day, when the original anecdotes may have been recorded, because in the Aristocles passage, quoted and discussed at length above, Pyrrho uses the word *adiaphora* as it was used by Aristotle, meaning “undifferentiated by a logical differentia”. Pyrrho does not refer to himself, Timon, or any other person, as *adiaphora* or the like. He uses the term explicitly in reference to *pragmata* “matters, affairs”—which almost exclusively meant for Pyrrho, as for Buddha, conflicting ethical or emotional matters, with attendant antilogies such as good versus bad, true versus false, and so on. Moreover, neither Pyrrho nor the Buddha ever hints at a metaphysics, or even an epistemology. To the contrary, Pyrrho says explicitly that we should have “no views” or theories, and the Early Buddhist tradition says precisely the same thing.¹¹⁶ The concept embodied in *adiaphora*, in the sense used by Pyrrho, is one of the characteristic and most important elements of his teachings. The comments *about* Pyrrho’s behavior in this narrative are therefore technically inaccurate, and the narrative as we have it is perhaps not datable to Pyrrho’s own time (though misunderstanding knows no chronological bounds). Nevertheless, the points made by the story are close to those of Early Pyrrhonism. In the story Pyrrho shows graphically, in a way anyone can understand, that conventional theories about what is *truly* or *ultimately* or *absolutely* good or bad are logically unfounded and therefore invalid. He also teaches those around him about humility, simplicity, and morality, virtues that seem to have been expressed by the Buddha, and by Buddhist teachers ever since.

¹¹⁵ Diogenes Laertius IX, 66. This narrative is strongly reminiscent of the story about the Early Taoist master Liehtzu in *Chuangtzu* 7.5: “He went back home, and for three years did not leave his house. He did the cooking for his wife; he fed the pigs as though he were feeding people. *He did not prefer one thing over another*, from fine carving he reverted to the plain material. He took his place like a clod of earth. Amidst confusion, he was secure.” Translation by Brooks and Brooks (2015: 195–196), emphasis added. See Chapter Three on the influence of Early Buddhism on Warring States Chinese thought.

¹¹⁶ See the discussion above in this chapter.

4. *The Seaworthy Pig*

The association of Pyrrho with animals recurs in the fourth narrative. This version of it is from Plutarch:¹¹⁷ “[When Pyrrho] was on a voyage, and in peril during a storm, he pointed to a little pig contentedly feeding upon some barley which had been spilled near by, and said to his companions¹¹⁸ that such passionlessness (*apatheia*) must be cultivated through reason and philosophy by anyone wishing not to be thoroughly disturbed by the things that happen to him.”¹¹⁹ Once again, Pyrrho is shown in humble circumstances and uses them to teach the cultivation of passionlessness “through reason and philosophy” in order to attain, indirectly, *ataraxia* ‘undisturbedness’—which he explicitly refers to in the text via a negative plus the word *tarattesthai* ‘to be disturbed’, a positive verbal form of the same word, that is, *ataraxia*.

5. *Pyrrho and the Dog*

The next narrative is also set in everyday conditions that any audience could understand. It relates how Pyrrho responded upon being attacked. “When a dog rushed at him and terrified him, he answered his critic that it was not easy entirely to strip oneself of one’s human nature, but one should strive with all one’s might against *pragmata* ‘(conflicting ethical) matters, events’, by deeds if possible, and if not, then through reason.”¹²⁰ The quotation of Pyrrho’s statement in this

¹¹⁷ Plutarch, *Moralia* 82 F (“Progress in Virtue”), ed. and trans. Babbitt (1927: 1:441), online version from Perseus, <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text:2008.01.0153:section=11&highlight=pyrrho>. The other version is in D.L. IX, 68, taken from Posidonius.

¹¹⁸ Babbitt’s (1927: 441) translation from this point on reads, “a similar indifference must be acquired from reason and philosophy by the man who does not wish to be disturbed by anything that may befall him.”

¹¹⁹ This is my translation of *καὶ πρὸς τοὺς ἐταίρους εἶπεῖν ὅτι τοιαύτην ἀπάθειαν παρσκευαστέον ἐκ λόγου καὶ φιλοσοφίας τὸν ὑπὸ τῶν προστυγχανόντων ταραττέσθαι μὴ βουλόμενον*, text from Babbitt (1927: 1:440).

¹²⁰ D.L. IX, 66. I have revised the translation of Hicks, which reads, “When a cur rushed at him and terrified him, he answered his critic that it was not easy entirely to strip oneself of human weakness; but one should strive with all one’s might against facts, by deeds if possible, and if not, in word.” The phrase “through reason” (or perhaps “through logic”) here translates the last word in the Greek passage, *λόγω*, in the translation of Hicks, “in word”. Cf. Bett (2000: 66).

narrative agrees very closely with the content of his statement quoted in the Aristocles account.¹²¹ The dog narrative is vivid, and Pyrrho's words are characteristically idiosyncratic. The story thus seems to go back ultimately to an actual event involving Pyrrho himself. It is particularly helpful for understanding the Aristocles account of his teaching about the three characteristics of *pragmata*—which word means for Pyrrho conflicting ethical or emotional things.

Significantly, this narrative shows that Pyrrho behaved completely according to normal human reactions. Aristocles' version even has him climb a tree to get away from the dog.¹²²

Pyrrho also says one should struggle to free oneself of one's human nature. It is impossible to achieve undisturbedness if one is continually disturbed, but it is not *easy* to achieve undisturbedness, nirvana. One must struggle against one's own *human nature*, using deeds (that is, the physical body), and if that does not work, reason (that is, the mind). This corresponds exactly to the Buddhist use of yoga (or "meditation"), a method of physical training of the body as well as the mind to overcome human nature. Timon and other ancient Pyrrhonists say that it worked for Pyrrho and those who followed his path, and it apparently did for the Buddha before him. Pyrrho's teaching in this narrative is identical in all essentials to the Buddha's teaching, the way of the *śramaṇas*. Pyrrho tells us straight out that to be disturbed is ordinary human nature. It is thus in effect heroic—superhuman—to achieve undisturbedness. And that is exactly how Timon praises Pyrrho in his poems, as many Buddhist writers too have praised the Buddha down through the ages.

SOME THOUGHTS ON THE NARRATIVES

It should by now be clear that none of the narratives about Pyrrho are versions of the well-known, traditional, and *late* Normative Buddhist narratives about the Buddha.¹²³ All of Pyrrho's take place in his

¹²¹ See Appendix A and above in this chapter.

¹²² Bett (2000: 68n16).

¹²³ As Bareau, Schopen, and other scholars have begun showing, the traditional stories, including even much of the canon, cannot be dated to anywhere near the time of the Buddha himself. Even the epithet "Buddha" does not appear in the Greek sources

lifetime; they are about Pyrrho himself, who was a Greek “philosopher” by training, and despite his Indian experience, still a Greek; and all but one of them take place in Greece and are clearly Greek in color and detail.¹²⁴ⁱⁱⁱ The narratives present Pyrrho as an ordinary man, somewhat ascetic and hermetic, who understood much about the human condition and what one needed to do to overcome it. He does not attempt to hide his lapses, but instead uses them as a way to explain about imperfection and to teach others a practical way to *ataraxia* ‘undisturbedness, peace’.

Although the narratives are not versions of the later Indian stories of Normative Buddhism, the didactic elements of the narratives provide important clarification of Pyrrho’s teachings and practices, which are in their intention thoroughly Early Buddhist in nature. Together with the contemporary account of ‘India’ by Megasthenes, the texts relating to Pyrrho provide us with valuable information about late fourth century BC Buddhism, and show that it corresponds well to traditional accounts of what it was like in the Buddha’s lifetime. One thing clear from Pyrrho’s teachings, from the account of Megasthenes, and from the portrayal of Gautama in Early Taoism is that Buddhism had not yet become fixated on the person of the Buddha as a kind of divinity. As recent research by Gregory Schopen has shown, Buddhism had also not yet developed other devotional and organizational elements that did eventually appear.¹²⁵

The conclusion to be drawn from the evidence about Pyrrho’s thought and practice is that he adopted a form of Early Buddhism during his years in Bactria and Gandhāra, including its philosophical-religious and pragmatic elements, but he stripped it of its alien garb and

until Clement of Alexandria (mid-second to early third century AD), though it does appear on a Kushan coin of Kanishka I (r. first half of the second century AD), where it is written in Bactrian spelling ΒοΔΔο ‘Buddha’ <http://www.bpmurphy.com/cotw/week2.htm>, and *bodhi* ‘awakening’ is attested in the early third-century AD Major Inscriptions of king Devānāmpriya Priyadarśi, q.v. Chapter Two and Appendix C. Megasthenes, Pyrrho’s contemporary, refers to Buddhists as Sarmanes, the *Sramanas* of the Mauryan inscription fragments in Greek. The word *Śramaṇa* was the unambiguous term for ‘Buddhists’, and was still used exclusively in that sense in the Middle Ages, as shown in Chapter Two.

¹²⁴ The poetic fragments of his disciple, Timon, praise Pyrrho, but they are not narratives; they are basically panegyrics. The most outstanding example of them is a poem in which Timon compares Pyrrho to the Sun God. See Endnote iii.

¹²⁵ In particular, the works collected in Schopen (1997, 2004, 2005).

reconstituted it as a new 'Greek Buddhism' for the Hellenistic world, which he presented in his own words to Timon and his other students.

THE PROBLEMATIC NARRATIVES

Perhaps not surprisingly, the most popular and widely quoted narrative about Pyrrho is utterly spurious—it occurs already in Aristotle and has been shown to have been wrongly applied to Pyrrho.¹²⁶ It is placed prominently by Diogenes Laertius at the very beginning of his long, detailed account of Pyrrhonism, and perhaps for this reason it has given far too many scholars the wrong impression about Pyrrho and his thought. So as not to perpetuate the tradition, it and a textually corrupt narrative have been deliberately placed at the end of this chapter rather than at the beginning.

1. The Topos of the Madcap Fool Philosopher Applied to Pyrrho

Diogenes Laertius gives a succinct summary of Pyrrho's teachings at the beginning of his chapter on him.¹²⁷ Referring to Pyrrho's experiences in India, he says, "he even forgathered with the Indian Gymnosophists and with the Magi," and he says, "This led him to adopt a most noble philosophy, to quote Ascanius of Abdera. . . . He denied that anything was honourable or dishonourable, just or unjust. And so, universally, he held that . . . custom and convention govern human actions; for no single thing is in itself any more this than that."¹²⁸

Immediately following this summary of his teachings, Diogenes gives his first narrative about Pyrrho: "He led a life consistent with this doctrine, going out of his way for nothing, taking no precautions, but

¹²⁶ See Bett (2000: 67–69). The story was used as a criticism of Pyrrho already in Antiquity.

¹²⁷ His account of Pyrrho's thought is unfortunately contaminated in part with features of Late Pyrrhonism and simple errors (some of which are discussed below), though on the whole it is rather accurate. However, some scholars have unwittingly thought that the entire long chapter is supposed to be about Pyrrho himself and his thought, whereas the bulk of it is about the Late Pyrrhonism of Diogenes' own times and shortly before him.

¹²⁸ D.L. IX, 61, translation of Hicks, from Perseus online.

facing all risks as they came, whether carts, precipices, dogs or what not, and, generally, leaving nothing to the arbitrament of the senses; but he was kept out of harm's way by his friends who, as Antigonus of Caristus tells us, used to follow close after him."¹²⁹ Diogenes himself then remarks that this passage is contradicted by a sober comment of Aenesidemus, a later Sceptic who adopted much of Pyrrho's thought, saying that Pyrrho "did not lack foresight in his everyday acts." Diogenes concludes—significantly, in view of the life-threatening nature of the philosopher's supposed behavior in the anecdote of Antigonus—that Pyrrho "lived to be nearly ninety."¹³⁰ Yet despite Diogenes' correctives, the image of a batty eccentric has been painted from the outset upon the unwary reader's mind.

While other testimonies—including those in Diogenes Laertius—do portray an unusual person, they do not show us a foolish or crazy one. His actions all make a philosophical point. Moreover, this particular narrative reveals its source. The main point, along with the example of walking over a cliff, is found in Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, in the discussion of what would happen to someone who denied the Law of Non-Contradiction.¹³¹ It has thus been applied to Pyrrho despite the fact that he is not known to have denied the Law of Non-Contradiction, and hardly could have done so, since that would have meant he held a *doxa* 'view, theory, dogmatic belief', among other violations of his teachings. The statement of Diogenes Laertius in his introduction has often been interpreted to mean that Pyrrho denied anything exists, suggesting that the behavior ascribed to him by Antigonus followed his beliefs, but Pyrrho

¹²⁹ D.L. IX, 62, translation of Hicks, from Perseus online.

¹³⁰ D.L. IX, 11.62.

¹³¹ Many scholars report this story as if it had some basis in fact. Clayman (2009: 35) says that in it "Pyrrho is making himself a living example of the Skeptic view that appearances are not to be trusted", but later in the same work she rightly notes and discusses the Aristotelian parallel, as pointed out and briefly discussed by Bett (2000: 68, 88). There are also points of textual similarity, most notably the expression ἐὰν τύχη 'if he comes to it' in Aristotle (*Metaphysics* IV, iv, 40 [1008b], ed. and trans. Tredennick 1933: 1:178) and εἰ τύχοι 'as [= if] they came' in Antigonus as quoted in D.L. IX, 11.62; they are used the same way in both texts. Clayman (2009: 43–44) says, "This story comes not from Pyrrho's own life, but was invented by someone familiar with Aristotle's *Metaphysics*. . . . He is obviously not describing Pyrrho himself, who was a much younger contemporary". Unfortunately, she then suggests, "but it may also have been Timon who meant to capture the charming simplicity of Pyrrho's disposition."

does not and could not deny that anything exists—it makes absolutely no sense on the basis of what we know about his philosophy and religious practices—and Diogenes does not actually make such a claim.¹³² Pyrrho is quoted by Timon as saying not to have any *doxai* “views, theories”, and Timon and others praise him repeatedly for his success in not having any. More could be said, but all of the evidence tells us that this particular narrative is spurious and must be eliminated from the corpus of authentic information about Pyrrho and his teachings.

Having done that, one might then ask if we can determine to which philosophical or religious tradition the topos of the devil-may-care philosopher who denies the Law of Non-Contradiction could belong.¹³³ Although we do not of course have any information about the people who proposed such a view (assuming that Aristotle got it right),¹³⁴ it would seem at least arguable that they correspond to the school of Indian philosophy most familiar to the Greeks, namely the sect of men exemplified by Calanus, an Indian philosopher from Taxila who joined Alexander’s court there, left India with him, and after spending a year in the West committed suicide at Pasargadae by burning himself to

¹³² See above and Appendix A for a correct translation of Diogenes’ parallel to the Aristocles passage. Bett’s (2000: 51) argument that in a sense Pyrrho “does away with all existing things” depends on accepting Bett’s thesis that Pyrrho’s thought is founded on dogmatic metaphysical ideas; see Appendix A.

¹³³ Bett discusses at length the identity of the unnamed opponents of Aristotle who denied the Law of Non-Contradiction (Bett 2000: 123–131). He rightly concludes that their position “is not, in fact, particularly close” to Pyrrho’s, and “whoever are the people who Aristotle is attacking [in *Metaphysics* IV], there is no serious basis for the belief that they were associates of Pyrrho, or that they and Pyrrho were of like mind” (Bett 2000: 131).

¹³⁴ An anonymous reviewer of the manuscript of this book states, “The idea that Aristotle is addressing Indian ideas in his discussion of the Law of Non-Contradiction in *Metaphysics* gamma is completely unsupported, and very unlikely. Aristotle names a great many Greek thinkers as his opponents in these chapters; and, while we can hardly doubt that he also has in mind other thinkers whom we can no longer identify, there is no reason to think that they are not Greek. Pyrrho and others may have been open to influence from other cultures, but Aristotle was a determinedly chauvinist Greek.” However, as he rightly notes, Aristotle does not give the slightest hint who these people were, and there is no reason to think he could not have heard the idea from one of the many Greeks who knew, or knew about, Calanus. Without insisting that the idea must have an Indian source, I think it is better to present the data and an argument for the identification than to ignore this particular motif.

death on a funeral pyre in 323 BC.¹³⁵ The Indians made interesting comments to the Greeks about why his sect did this.¹³⁶ “Megasthenes says that suicide is not a dogma among the philosophers, and that those who commit suicide are judged guilty of the impetuosity of youth; that those who are tough by nature throw themselves against a blow or over a cliff;¹³⁷ whereas others, who shrink from suffering, plunge into deep waters;¹³⁸ and others, who are much suffering, hang themselves; and others, who have a fiery temperament, fling themselves into fire; and that such was Calanus, a man who was without self-control and a slave to the table of Alexander; and that therefore Calanus is censured.”¹³⁹ The accounts of this particular sect of Indians do not say much more than this, but there is an exception, also in Megasthenes. As discussed in Chapter Two, some Indians denied that there was any difference between good and bad—according to Aristotle’s misinterpretation, they therefore denied the Law of Non-Contradiction. They also believed that death was “birth”—that is, necessarily, *rebirth*—into the “true life”, which is the “happy life”, so they devoted themselves to preparing for death. This is what the sect of Calanus is said to have believed.¹⁴⁰ The identity of his sect within the Indian philosophical tradition is not certain, probably because all written evidence of such traditions in Indic languages is very late, and scanty until even later, while not surprisingly, the sect seems to have died out very early. However, its teachings are similar *in part* to those of the early Pure Land sect of Buddhism which is first attested when texts introduced from the Kushan Empire to China in the mid-second century AD were translated into Chinese.¹⁴¹

¹³⁵ Calanus reached Persia with Alexander the year before his suicide, so Aristotle outlived him by about a year. Since we know from Arrian that Calanus had a good number of disciples among the Greeks, it is reasonable to assume that they learned something on Indian beliefs and practices from him.

¹³⁶ Strabo xv, 1, 68 (text from Radt 2005: 4:220).

¹³⁷ The Greek here reads: τούς μὲν σκληρούς τῇ φύσει φερομένους ἐπὶ πλιγὴν ἢ κρημνόν, translated by Jones (1930: 7:118–119), “some who are by nature hardy rush to meet a blow or over precipices”.

¹³⁸ I.e., they drown themselves.

¹³⁹ The text continues, contrasting Calanus with another Indian, Mandanis, who criticizes Calanus severely. However, Mandanis does not seem to have belonged to the same sect, though the sources suggest they shared some values, at least.

¹⁴⁰ Strabo xv, 1, 59, 64, 68.

¹⁴¹ It has been much noted that some Pure Land followers committed suicide by self-immolation (Keown 1996: 9n2; Kleine 2006: 167n1). Most examples that have been

This is the same sect that worshipped the Buddha Amitābha essentially as a sun god, a belief that might be responsible for Timon's similar treatment of Pyrrho in some of his poems, as noted above. Moreover, one of their key teachings mentioned by Megasthenes is that there is no real difference between good and bad, a key teaching of Early Buddhism in general that is also attested in Early Taoism,¹⁴² as well as in Pyrrhonism.

Nevertheless, with respect to the opponents of Aristotle who denied the Law of Non-Contradiction, and the madcap behavior described in the *Metaphysics* (and based on it, in Antigonus's putative account of Pyrrho), there is again no reason to connect such people to the Pre-Pure Land practitioners in the early Greek accounts. The key point is that in Aristotle and Antigonus, the individuals in question—because of their philosophical position—*do not care* what happens to them. However, that is simply not true of the Pre-Pure Land practitioners¹⁴³ in Megasthenes, nor even of Calanus. Both cared very much, and spent their entire lives preparing for death, which they considered rebirth into a true, happy life. Pyrrho's teachings and practices are all directed specifically toward freedom from passion, and eventually undisturbedness, but that is hardly “uncaring”. Moreover, there is not a single suggestion in any authentic testimony that shows Pyrrho being “uncaring” in this sense. His practice of being “uninclined” about “matters, affairs” in order to be calm and undisturbed is ample proof that he cared, and is further supported by the fact that, like Buddha, he went to the trouble to teach others the secret of how to achieve the same passionlessness and internal peace.

2. *The Corrupt Account of Pyrrho and His Sister's Offering*

Another problematic narrative is the story, also deriving from Antigonus, about Pyrrho losing his temper at someone who broke a promise to help Philista, his sister, in connection with a temple sacrifice. As

cited, however, are medieval, so it is not at all certain that this was a feature of early Pure Land Buddhism; a chronologically sensitive study would seem to be needed; cf. Chapter Two.

¹⁴² See Chapter Three.

¹⁴³ For discussion of theories about the possible non-Indic origins of Pure Land, see Halkias (2012).

in the narrative about the dog, he is said to violate his own advice or principles, though the main point seems to be, again, that he was not perfect, he had to work to control his human nature, and he cared—in this case, about his sister. As with the authentic and textually unproblematic narratives in general, this one also has a concluding statement by Pyrrho explaining the event in the context of his philosophy.

However, although the narrative does seem to have been originally as authentic as the others,¹⁴⁴ something happened to the text very early in Antiquity, so that the two surviving versions give significantly different concluding statements, one of which (the longer version in Aristotle) seems to support Pyrrho and the other (the shorter version in Diogenes Laertius) to criticize him. Although Brunschwig has argued cogently in favor of the former,¹⁴⁵ in fact the texts of both accounts are problematic and unclear, as concluded by Bett.¹⁴⁶ They must therefore be set aside until or unless someone is able to solve this problem.

¹⁴⁴ I.e., excluding the fake “careless Pyrrho” story in Antigonus, which evidently derives from the same source drawn on by Aristotle (or more likely by an Aristotelian of his school) for the argument in his *Metaphysics* discussed above in this chapter.

¹⁴⁵ Brunschwig (1992).

¹⁴⁶ See Bett (2000: 66n9).