

## CONSTRUCTIVE-ENGAGEMENT DIALOGUE

### THE PRESUPPOSITIONS OF A SKEPTIC

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#### 1. GENERAL COMMENTS

In his stimulating book *Three Pillars of Skepticism in Classical India*, Ethan Mills constructs a tradition of philosophical skepticism in Indian philosophy that cuts across the now-standard classification of views as orthodox vs. heterodox and, among the orthodox, as belonging to one of 6 *darshanas*. Insofar as he groups the Buddhist Nagarjuna, the Charvakin Jayarashi, and the Advaitin Shri Harsha together as skeptics, Mills is following in the footsteps of Matilal's (1986, 28) grouping of these three figures as "skeptical dialecticians who argued that the very concept of knowledge was either paradoxical or circular". However, in arguing that these philosophers were skeptics *about philosophy* Mills hopes to show that they share a good deal more with skeptics in other traditions, like Sextus Empiricus in Greek philosophy and Zhuangzi in Chinese philosophy, than they do with contemporary *epistemological skepticism*, which he associates with Descartes and DeRose.

To begin, I'd like to get clear on the phenomenon, skepticism about philosophy or philosophical skepticism, which Mills distinguishes from epistemological skepticism. A chart will be useful here:

<i>Epistemological Skepticism</i>	<i>Skepticism about Philosophy</i>
(a) a <i>theoretical</i> position	(a*) a <i>way of life</i> [without beliefs], which results in some valued end-state,
(b) claims to state <i>truths about knowledge</i> [which ought to be believed]	(b*) aims at <i>suspending belief</i> <sub>1</sub> (also c*, d*) argues against dogmatic philosophers using the dogmatists' own views, and avoids adopting any views
c) on the basis of arguments that generate an active mental state of <i>doubt</i> ;	

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d) arguments have the form: in order for a subject to know some fact, some <i>further epistemic condition</i> must be met, but since that condition isn't met, the subject does not know the first fact	including (b*, d*) views about criteria for knowing
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Mills says that epistemological skepticism is (a) a theoretical position that (b) claims to state truths about knowledge [which presumably ought to be believed] (c) on the basis of arguments that generate an active mental state of doubt; (d) the arguments have the form: in order for a subject to know some fact (e.g. that there is a fire in front of him), some further epistemic condition must be met (e.g. he must know he's not dreaming), but since that condition isn't met (he doesn't know he's not dreaming), the subject does not have knowledge of the first fact (that there is a fire in front of him) (Mills 2018, xxiii-xxiv; my enumeration differs from Mills' in order to make referring to the points I focus on in my comments easier, but I think the substance is the same). By contrast, skepticism about philosophy aims at (b\*) suspending belief, and (or perhaps as a result) advocates (a\*) a skeptical way of life [without beliefs], which results in some valued end-state (e.g. freedom from disturbance in Sextus, nirvana in Nagarjuna, enjoyment in Jayarashi). Further, philosophical skeptics argue against dogmatic philosophers (b\*, c\*, d\*) using the dogmatists' own views, and scrupulously avoid adopting any views themselves, including (b\*, d\*) views about the criteria for knowing (xxiv-xxvii). In the introduction Mills says his conception of skepticism about philosophy aims at "a cultural expansion of the idea of skepticism...[and] a return to something much closer to the original, Hellenistic understanding" (xxv), and in the conclusion he speculates as to what features of thought make it the case that philosophical skepticism crops up in so many different times and places.

This is heady stuff. But in the dreary role of critic, I would like to urge some caution in the characterization of and contrast between these kinds of skepticism. First, the contrast between modern skepticism's focus on knowledge and Pyrrhonism's focus on belief (b, b\*) seems to me misleading. Sextus is working with his dogmatic (standard Stoic) interlocutors' conceptions of belief and knowledge: belief (*doxa*) is the result of an act of assent, and so is an occurrent judgment (which can become dispositional); among beliefs are special grasps (*katalêpseis*) that represent the object that caused them in such a way that they cannot be false; grasps correspond to and are the ancestors of Descartes' clear and distinct perceptions, which are pieces of propositional knowledge. The Stoics reserve the term 'knowledge' (*epistêmê*, *technê*) for a system of special grasps that have been made stable by their interconnections. It's only because what the Stoics *call* knowledge doesn't take individual propositions as its object that when Sextus gives particular arguments against particular views, he can only target what the Stoics call a belief or the special species of belief, grasp. But in ordinary language his target would be expressed as a bare assertion, e.g., 'The earth is the center of the cosmos' or a

knowledge-claim, ‘I know that the earth is the center of the cosmos.’ In this case, targeting belief rather than knowledge is a matter of nomenclature, not substance. Perhaps Mills has in mind that Sextus’ reason for targeting these dogmatic mental states is that they are a cause of disturbance rather than only that they may be false, but then the contrast between focusing on knowledge vs. belief isn’t itself an illuminating one.

Furthermore, does Sextus really target all beliefs for suspension? He says the Skeptic suspends belief about non-evident things, or, equivalently, does not form dogmatic beliefs, but *does* assent to the feelings which are the necessary results of sense-impressions (*Outlines of Pyrrhonism* 1.13-14), and “non-dogmatically” accepts “the guidance of nature, the constraint of the passions, the tradition of laws and customs, and the instruction of the arts”, “seeing that we cannot remain wholly inactive.” (23-24, translations of Sextus, here and below, are mine). When we flesh out the Skeptic way of life, Pyrrhonian skepticism may turn out to be a theoretical position after all (a), if it only suspends belief about the class of beliefs that are ‘about the non-evident’.

Second, because philosophy, even dogmatic philosophy, is critical, we need to have a way to distinguish critical from skeptical positions: Parmenides argues that the world delivered to us through sense-perception and opinion is impossible; Plato criticizes the senses as giving us an inaccurate account of what the world is like. But because these criticisms are the basis for their arguments about what reality must be like, it would not be right to call them skeptics *about philosophy* (nor should we say that they are methodological skeptics like Descartes because their criticism is restricted to one means of knowledge). Similarly, I need more argument than Mills provides that it is “articulation...of Upanishadic mystical skepticism” or a claim that “knowledge of the *atman* is not gained through philosophical conceptualization...” (8) when Yajnavalkya says to Maitreyi that [knowing?] the self “is like this. When a drum is being beaten, you cannot catch the external sounds; you catch them only by getting hold of the drum or the man beating the drum.” (*Bṛhadaranyaka Upaniṣad* 2.4.7, tr. Olivelle). Why skepticism or rejection of philosophical conceptualization rather than, for example, an argument by analogy that the self must be grasped indirectly? Clarity, and consistency with Mills’ initial characterization of skepticism, would recommend reserving the label ‘skepticism’ for global pessimism about our epistemic condition, and ‘skepticism about philosophy’ for a global pessimism about philosophical methods in particular, whatever those turn out to be.

Third, while I don’t doubt that similar philosophical questions, answers, and skeptical responses may be found in different traditions, it seems to me not at all straightforward to locate counterparts in particular texts. So for example, Mills finds Meno’s paradox of inquiry (“if one doesn’t know what virtue is, how will one recognize it when one finds it”, 10-11) in *Kena Upaniṣad* 2.2 on knowing *brahman*:

I do not think/that I know it well;  
But I know not/that I do not know.  
Who of us knows that,/he does know that;

But he knows not,/that he does not know (tr. Olivelle).

Although these dense verses can be interpreted in multiple ways, I cannot find in them anything about the problem of recognizing the answer to your question when you've got it. The *KeU* passage seems to me to say that even the one who is appropriately cautious not to overstate the extent of his knowledge ("I do not think that I know it well") doesn't *know* that he doesn't know (*no [na vedeti] veda cha*), or doesn't know *what* he doesn't know, or knows something and doesn't know something else of it. In the lines just before the quoted ones, the *KeU* considers a distinct problem also raised by Plato, that of double ignorance: when you are ignorant, you often don't even know that you don't know (Plato, *Apology* 21b-22e, *Laws* 863c). But if we want to pursue Meno's paradox as a consequence for inquiry of not knowing not only that we don't know *whether* we don't know what there is to know, but also that since we don't know something, we don't thereby know *what* it is that we don't know and can't inquire, then we should remember that Meno's paradox asks not only the question Mills picks up, of how, in the absence of knowledge, you can recognize the answer to your question when you have found it, but also the question he inexplicably leaves out, of how your inquiry can be directed in the absence of any knowledge (Plato, *Meno* 80d-e).<sup>1</sup>

But my comments will be very dreary indeed if they all take this form. So instead, I would now like to explore some issues around (b\*, c\*, and d\*), namely, the suspension of belief and argumentation solely on the basis of the dogmatists' own views, focusing on Mills' treatment of Nagarjuna, and introducing Sextus as a comparandum. For the time being, I'll accept Mills' overall interpretation of Nagarjuna as arguing against the views of other philosophers while not asserting any thesis himself, and as aiming by these arguments at the cessation of conceptualization and thereby attaining a liberatory end-state. Sextus also argues 'non-dogmatically' against the views of other philosophers, reports that as a result he is brought to suspend belief, whereupon a good end-state, freedom from disturbance, follows. I'll then compare and contrast (1) the two philosophers' practice of negative argument and (2) the epistemic attitudes of suspension of belief and cessation of conceptual proliferation.

According to Mills, early Buddhism had two strands: a practice of analysis leading to insight, and quietism. Quietism adumbrates (1) the Buddha's anti-speculative attitude, for example, when he refuses to answer metaphysical questions on the grounds that his teachings are for the sake of ending suffering, like a raft for crossing over, not retaining (14-15 on *Majhima Nikaya* 1.426-32, 130-42); (2) the Buddha's recommendation to eliminate conceptual proliferation (*papañca*) in order to rid oneself of attachment (16, on *MN* 1.110, cf. 17-18 for abandonment of views, which seems like the same thing and is also described in terms of cessation of

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<sup>1</sup> Carpenter and Ganeri 2010 describe the paradox as concerning 'the opacity of ignorance', and trace its treatment in a number of figures, including Shabara, Shankara and Sriharsha, with the last of these figures treating it as a problem of aiming at an unknown.

conceptualization); (3) the non-dogmatic conclusions of his negative arguments against the self, such as the argument showing that the self, which is permanent and exercises control, is not identical with the body, perception, consciousness, etc., the result of which is disillusionment with these, which eliminates lust (16-17, on *Samyukta Nikaya* 3.68). Mills makes the elegant proposal that Nagarjuna develops a two-phase philosophy integrating analysis-to-insight and quietism, the first phase giving anti-realist arguments for emptiness, and the second phase showing that the thesis of emptiness is self-undermining, for if there is nothing for views to be about, we should stop conceptualization. (Mills 2018, 35-41)

I have two worries about Mills' general interpretation. First, Mills considers the charge that it is logically inconsistent to make the claim that one is making no claim, and answers it, following Thorsrud's (2009) defense of Pyrrhonism, that insofar as skepticism is a practice or way of life, "the charge of inconsistency is a category mistake: 'Just as it is neither consistent nor inconsistent to ride a bicycle, the practice of skepticism, in so far as it is something the sceptic does, can be neither consistent nor inconsistent' " (Mills 2018, 36). But it's not because riding a bicycle is a *practice* that consistency and inconsistency are irrelevant to riding a bicycle; it's because the practice doesn't involve any actions that are evaluable for consistency or inconsistency. (Imagine if your student in Introduction to Philosophy said to you, 'Yes, I did say that there is no God, and that there is a God, but studying philosophy is my way of life, so it's a category mistake to accuse me of inconsistency!') Insofar as the practice of skepticism involves making claims (according to Mills in Nagarjuna's phase 1, and then in phase 2 about phase 1), and claims are evaluable for consistency or inconsistency, the skeptic is also evaluable for consistency or inconsistency. It's no good for the skeptic to say that she isn't making claims at all, since the force of her anti-dogmatic arguments depends on her making some claims, even if they are only conditional ones.

Second, Mills considers the objection that Nagarjuna couldn't be a Buddhist if he is a skeptic and answers by appeal (again) to Thorsrud on Sextus, that "for Pyrrhonians religion is a kind of behavior rather than a kind of belief" (Mills 2018, 41), and that Sextus says that "Pyrrhonians can engage in religious rituals and be pious toward the gods without having any religious beliefs". For the record, what Sextus actually reports is that Skeptics "*say undogmatically* that there are gods and revere gods and *say* that they exercise providence" (*Outlines* 3.3, my tr.). This is not a matter of ritual rather than belief, but (again) of nondogmatic belief or assertion (on which see more below). But further, suppose that it's true that in Greek religion piety is a matter of ritual rather than belief; why should the same hold in an intellectual tradition like Buddhism with its emphasis on right view and teaching? This is not to say that Nagarjuna can't be a Skeptic, but it is to say that if he is a Skeptic there's some tension between that and his Buddhism.

## 2. PRESUPPOSITIONLESS ARGUMENTS

I'll now turn to a couple of Nagarjuna's arguments in greater detail. In *Vigrahavyavartani* (*VV*) 30-51 Nagarjuna is replying to an objector who, after attacking (and here I'll just quote Mills) "the coherence of [the] concept of emptiness (*sunyata*)", argues, "if the means of knowledge (*pramanas*) are empty of essence, they cannot yield knowledge; thus Nagarjuna cannot give an epistemologically sound reason to believe that all things lack essences" (Mills 2018, 53). According to Mills, Nagarjuna's reply "denies that he is trying to apprehend anything through perception, inference, or any other means of knowledge, and thus the Nyaya objection is off base, since the opponent is accusing him of not being able to do something he was never trying to do in the first place" and then "launches into a critique of the means of knowledge", concluding with "a rejection of the five options for establishing the *pramanas*" (Mills 2018, 54).

Mills describes Nagarjuna's reply as a five-fold *prasanga* argument. In making a *prasanga* argument, one simply draws out consequences of the opponent's view that the opponent would find unwelcome, without committing oneself to either the view or the consequences. Readers of ancient Greek philosophy will recognize this as similar to one kind of elenctic argument Plato has Socrates make in his dialogues, e.g., if the interlocutor says, 'Justice is truth-telling and returning what you owe', the philosopher might reply, 'So on your account, it's just to return a weapon you've borrowed from a friend when he's gone mad?'. Although much of Mills' brief discussion is taken up with establishing the superiority of his own skeptical interpretation of *VV* over Westerhoff's 'contextualist' interpretation, according to which Nagarjuna is developing "an epistemology that incorporates empty epistemic instruments" (Westerhoff 2010, 55-56), I would like to focus on how the *prasanga* arguments themselves are supposed to work.<sup>2</sup>

To get a taste for these arguments, let's consider two:

- (1) Against the view that the *pramanas* need to be established by other *pramanas*, Nagarjuna argues: an infinite regress follows (*VV* 31-32).
- (2) Against the view that the *pramanas* are self-establishing, like fire, which is self-illuminating, Nagarjuna argues:
  - (a) since to illuminate is to light up something that was previously in the dark, fire does not illuminate itself (34); if fire were self-illuminating it would also be self-consuming [rather than fuel-consuming] (35); if fire illuminated itself then its opposite, darkness, would obscure itself (36); since to illuminate is to destroy darkness, there will have to be darkness in the fire for it to illuminate itself (37); the arising fire does not connect with darkness [because it excludes it] (38); if fire could drive out darkness

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<sup>2</sup> Because Mills is very quick with the *VV* arguments themselves, I provide my own detailed reconstruction below where needed.

without connecting with it, then fire here could drive out darkness everywhere (39)<sup>3</sup>

- (b) if the *pramanas* were self-establishing, they would not be means of knowing anything [but it's necessary, if something is to be a means of knowledge, that it actually result in an episode of knowing, *prama*] (40-41)

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In *VV* 51, Nagarjuna summarizes the conclusions of his *prasanga* arguments: The means of knowledge are not (1) self-established, nor (2) mutually established, nor (3) established by other means of knowledge, nor (4) established by the objects of knowledge, nor (5) established without reason.

Mills says that the conclusion of a *prasanga* argument is the denial of the view whose unwelcome consequences have been drawn out, which does not, however, imply any alternative view. Such a denial is an “illocutionary negation”, or “commitmentless denial” of the opponent’s thesis (Mills 2018, 52). He explains, using “the stock example”: whereas ‘This is a non-Brahmin’ (*paryudasa* negation) implies the existence of a person belonging to some other class, ‘It is not the case that this is a Brahmin’ (*prasajya* negation) doesn’t entail the existence of a person at all.

But illocutionary negation and commitmentless denial seem to me to be different analyses, with different implications. Matilal, the source of the illocutionary interpretation of *prasajya* negation, illustrates it with Sanjaya’s “I do not say that there is an afterlife”, where ‘I do not say’ negates an assertion (viz. there is an afterlife), but without committing Sanjaya to asserting that there is no afterlife. (Matilal 1986, 88-89). From someone’s saying ‘I do not say P’, it can’t be inferred what he *does* say about P.

‘I do not say this is a Brahmin’ would be illocutionary negation. But a sentence that begins ‘It is not the case that’ seems to be (qua illocution) an assertive, and the assertion ‘It is not the case that this is a Brahmin’ does seem to take on some commitments from the assertion that it negates, viz., that there exists some ‘this’, which is not a Brahmin. True, ‘this’ could refer to a statue, or a tree, or some vaguely designated region of space, but refer it must. In the literature on presuppositions, ‘this’ is a presupposition-trigger.<sup>4</sup>

Westerhoff (cited in Mills’ notes), who distinguishes the kinds of negations in terms of their different presuppositions, says that the distinction is originally grammatical. In *prasajya* negation it is the verb that is negated: *brahmana nasti*; in

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<sup>3</sup> I take it these arguments aren’t just about fire, but about self-illumination or self-certification, where the basic notion involves a change from one state to its contrary, from dark to light or ignorance to awareness. According to these arguments, the reflexive ‘self-’ is incompatible with that change of state. The arguments seem to have the same structure as Aristotle’s argument against self-motion in *Physics* 8.

<sup>4</sup> Beaver and Geurts 2014

*paryudasa* negation, it is the noun: *abrahmana asti*.<sup>5</sup> But unfortunately for philosophers, there is no natural language in which presupposition-preserving and presupposition-cancelling negations are realized by different lexical items. Indeed, the diagnosis of what is presupposed by a sentence is often made on the basis of whether it is projected when embedded in the negation of the sentence; for example, ‘The present king of France is bald’ is thought to presuppose that there is a present king of France, in part because it is also presupposed in, ‘The present king of France isn’t bald’ or ‘It isn’t the case that the present king of France is bald’. Now Westerhoff represents the *paryudasa* negation ‘The present king of France is not bald’ as  $\exists x (Kx \ \& \ -Bx)$ , and contrasts it with the *prasajya* negation ‘It is not the case that the present king of France is bald’ which he represents as  $-\exists x (Kx \ \& \ Bx)$ . The latter, but not the former, allows that there is no present king of France. But entailment and presupposition are not the same.<sup>6</sup> It’s possible that Nagarjuna and his opponent<sup>7</sup> are thinking of commitments as entailments rather than presuppositions, and this would be interesting. But if they are thinking of presuppositions, the question I want to raise is: how can Nagarjuna determine that none his negations will inherit any presuppositions from the sentences he negates?<sup>8</sup>

I can think of two ways: one is for him to say explicitly: ‘I cancel all presuppositions of my utterances’, but I’m not sure he could keep arguing after this, given how much we presuppose in communicating (the same goes for negating by saying ‘No!’ or ‘You’re wrong!’: the only way to continue arguing after this depends on presuppositions about what has been negated). A possibly more constructive, because more specific, alternative suggested by Sextus attempts to cancel the presupposition that his sentences make assertions about a mind-independent reality by explaining that they are really reports.<sup>9</sup> For to distinguish Skepticism from a superficially similar negative dogmatism, according to which the truth is inapprehensible (*Outlines* 1.3), Sextus says, “we do not positively affirm that the fact is exactly as we state it, but we simply record each fact, like a chronicler, as it appears

<sup>5</sup> Westerhoff 2007 thinks that the distinction between choice and exclusion negation, where choice negation assumes that the object falls under a property or its opposite, and exclusion doesn’t, is not quite the same distinction, because the *prasajya-paryudasa* distinction isn’t ever connected to categories, but allows that the choice-exclusion contrast might be one kind of *prasajya-paryudasa* distinction; perhaps the illocutionary-propositional distinction is another kind.

<sup>6</sup> As Beaver and Geurts 2014 point out, “It’s the knave that stole the tarts” presupposes a salient and identifiable knave and entails that the knave did something illegal. “It isn’t the knave that stole the tarts” still presupposes the salient and identifiable knave but does not entail that the knave did anything illegal.

<sup>7</sup> As Westerhoff 2007 explains (b), in Nyaya the negation, ‘X is not Y’ is analyzed as ‘X is not combined with Y’, where absence of Y is a property attributed to X. For such a negation to be sensical, there must be an X, and a Y (so that ‘X’ and ‘Y’ refer), and for the negation to be true, existing X and existing Y aren’t combined. This is on the assumption that terms either denote something existing or are nonsensical. The only way for a cognition to be false is for it to miscombine terms for existing things in a way they are not combined in reality.

<sup>8</sup> Galloway 1989 says that *prasajya* negation is more radical in Madhyamaka than the realists, not just predicate-negation or complement negation but term negation.

<sup>9</sup> Sextus’ move does seem to be illocutionary negation—noted by Matilal 1992, 7.



to us at the moment” (1.4). In other words, he is denying that the illocutionary force of his statements is affirmation or denial about how things really are apart from how they appear, and telling us that his statements are instead reports of how things appear to him, like the statement, ‘I’m cold’.

Sextus devotes several sections of *Outlines* (1.187-209) to how skeptical expressions should be understood:

‘No more this than that’ is said by the skeptic to mean ‘I know not which of these I ought to assent to’ (a report) or ‘why/for what reason this rather than that?’ (a question) (1.188-91);

‘Non-assertion’ is neither affirming nor denying anything about anything non-apparent (1.192-93);

‘I determine nothing’ means ‘I am now in such a state of mind as neither to affirm dogmatically nor to deny any of the matters now in question (1.197);

‘All things are non-apprehensible’ means ‘All the non-apparent matters of dogmatic inquiry which I have investigated appear to me non-apprehensible’ (1.200).

But does Sextus’ strategy for cancelling presuppositions by stipulating their illocutionary force work? Maintaining that one’s assertions are always reports of how things seem to one, never dogmatic pronouncements about how things are apart from how they seem to one, may seem to be as much of a cheat as stipulating that one’s negations don’t inherit any presuppositions from the statements they negate. Myles Burnyeat has argued that Sextus’ distinction between belief and appearance, or assertion and report, is in some cases merely verbal and that some of his so-called reports are really beliefs by another name.<sup>10</sup> I can sensibly suspend the belief that it’s cold today on the grounds that while I feel cold, it may not actually be cold (perhaps I have a fever). But can I suspend the belief that  $700+200=900$ , while reporting that it seems to me on the basis of addition that  $700+200=900$ ? What else is believing that  $700+200=900$  if not having it appear to one on the basis of addition that it is? But if what it is for me to believe that the statement p is true or to assent to p is that it appear to me that p on the basis of reasoning about p, then it looks like even though he says he is merely reporting, Sextus is actually stating a belief when he says, “To every dogmatic claim I have examined there appears to me to be opposed a rival dogmatic claim which is equally worthy and equally unworthy of belief” (*Outlines* 1.203).

In the above, I have tried to identify and evaluate the strategies by which Nagarjuna and Sextus might try to argue against dogmatists without having any views of their own. I turn now to the attitudes they recommend taking towards views.

### 3. PRESUPPOSITIONS OF SUSPENSION OF BELIEF VS. CESSATION OF CONCEPTUALIZATION

Sextus concludes his long discussion of the criterion, the analogue to the means of knowledge, “the criterion of truth has appeared to be unattainable” (*Outlines* 2. 95).

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<sup>10</sup> Burnyeat 1980.

But Sextus rejects ‘nothing is true’ as a self-refuting view. (91) Instead, the upshot of his arguments is that *he* is not (yet) in a position to form a judgment/belief about the criterion (whether it exists, what, if it exists, it is, etc.), and so must suspend belief about it. What kind of ‘must’ is this? If psychological, then the mechanism of belief formation is such that you’ll only assent to P if the evidence for P is stronger than the evidence for -P. Since the Skeptic’s ability consists in opposing evidence of equal strength on both sides of an issue, he can’t form a belief and must suspend. If ‘must’ is rational, i.e., if skepticism is a rational practice, he’ll decide to suspend judgment because the warrant for P and -P are equal. Indeed, Sextus characterizes the skeptic as one who continues investigating (*zêtousi* [1.4], *skepsesthai* [1.7]), which indicates that he is open to the possibility that there is a criterion of truth, and in general, about each thing he discusses, a mind-independent reality to be discovered.

The comparison with Sextus raises the question: Why is the effect of Nagarjuna’s *prasanga* arguments not to leave the philosopher in *aporia*, admitting that she doesn’t know *how* the means of knowledge are established, and as a result *whether* they can be established? In the circumstances, she might even wonder if she knows *what* a means of knowledge is. Still, wouldn’t this be a reason to try to find out? If she has no idea about how to find out, mightn’t she ask around, try out different accounts of means of knowledge (rather than examining just the different candidates of perception, inference, testimony)? Isn’t cessation of conceptualization a rash response to the arguments, insofar as the arguments don’t obviously identify conceptualization, rather than ignorance, as the problem? Or perhaps what’s rash is the prior conclusion that the means of knowledge are empty, or lack *svabhava*, which is what prompts the discussion of the *VV*. In either case, compared with suspension of belief, emptiness or cessation of conceptualization seems to me a dogmatic response, insofar as they put an end to inquiry and not only dogma. On the other hand, the fact that Sextus does not think to impugn our concepts despite having collected so many conflicting conceptions from the dogmatists, of e.g. cause, body, time, etc., raises interesting questions about a road not taken. Instead of concluding, ‘we cannot determine, concerning cause, whether it exists or does not exist’, it seems an oversight not to wonder: ‘how could anything answer to those specifications?’

In any event, the difference between suspension of belief and cessation of conceptualization suggests that Sextus is not among the philosophers who “use philosophical arguments to cure their readers of the desire to do philosophy” (62). Insofar as Sextus is offering a cure, it is for dogmatism, but dogmatism is attachment to a view, not the desire *to do philosophy*. One might, however, question whether Sextan investigation is really investigative, a genuine search for truth, or whether, contrary to his self-presentation, its search for evidence on either side of a question isn’t in fact *for the sake of* producing suspension.

Perhaps Nagarjuna’s ‘cease conceptualization’ is not supposed to follow, either psychologically or rationally, from *prasanga* arguments, in the way that suspension of belief is supposed to be a consequence of equipollent arguments; perhaps it is just supposed to be a practical recommendation, so that even if conceptualization hasn’t been established as the problem, cessation of conceptualization is a cure. In this

respect it would reflect the quietist strain of early Buddhism in which Mills finds its origin.

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