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University of Alberta

**A Comparative Study of Scepticism:
Chuang Tzu and Sextus Empiricus**

by

Chicheng Zhou



**A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and
Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
Degree of Master of Arts**

Department of Philosophy

Edmonton, Alberta

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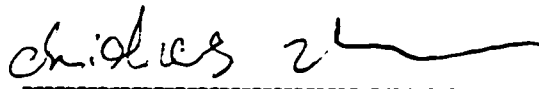
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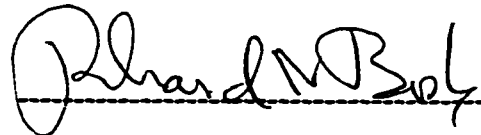


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Edmonton, Alberta
Canada T5K 0Y6

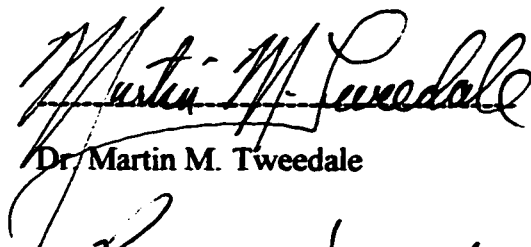
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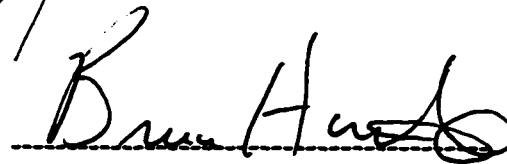
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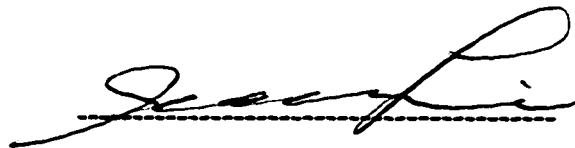
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Dr. Martin M. Tweedale



Dr. Bruce A. Hunter



Dr. Jenn-shann Lin

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To my wife Xuelian Xie

Abstract

In this thesis, I compare the scepticism of Chuang Tzu in Ancient China with that of Sextus Empiricus in ancient Greece. The two sceptics share many things: they are not pure or entire sceptics, and take their scepticism as a philosophy of life; holding naturalism, they alienate themselves from their scepticism; and using non-dogmatical language, they fall into self-negation. On the other hand, I state several contrasts between the two: Sextus's scepticism is based on the distinction between appearance and reality, while Chuang Tzu's leads to a peculiar monism according to which all distinctions disappear and various opposites go into one, Tao; Sextus is a conservative, abeying social norms, while Chuang Tzu is a rebel, intending to overthrow all of them; Sextus's scepticism plays an important role in Western philosophy, while Chuang Tzu's play a less important role in Chinese philosophy.

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List of Abbreviations:

- CT** Chuang Tzu, *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*, translated by Burton Watson.
New York: Columbia University Press, 1968.
- PH** Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of pyrrhonism*, translated by R.G. Bury. Cambridge,
Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1933.

Introduction

Scepticism, an old and still live philosophical doctrine, exists not only in Western philosophy, but also in Eastern philosophy. It is not overstated that wherever there is philosophy, there is scepticism. In this thesis I am going to compare skepticism in ancient Chinese philosophy with that in ancient Greek philosophy. I will focus my attention on the two philosophers, Chuang Tzu (b. 396 B.C.), a great Taoist, and Sextus Empiricus who lived in the last half of the second century and the first quarter of the third century A.D. Chuang Tzu is the most important sceptic in ancient China¹, while Sextus Empiricus, the last skeptic in ancient Greece, is our principal source for Greek scepticism, particularly in its Pyrrhonian form. The teachings of the two philosophers represent two typical kinds of scepticism in the world.

There has been much research done on Chuang Tzu and Sextus Empiricus respectively. But there is little on the comparative study of the two². I think that this

¹ Some scholars, such as Robert E. Allison and Wu Kuang-ming, deny that Chuang Tzu is a sceptic. In his work, *Chuang-Tzu for Spiritual Transformation* (1989), Allison makes a non-scepticism interpretation of Chuang Tzu (see chapter 5, 6, 7, 8, 9). I think that he misreads Chuang Tzu. Wu's argument in the question is similar to Allison's. See Wu Kuang-ming, *Chuang Tzu: World Philosophers at Play* (1982), p.7.

² So far as I know, there is only one paper on comparison between Chuang Tzu and Sextus. See Paul Kjellberg, "Scepticism, Truth, and the Good Life: a Comparison of Zhuangzi and Sextus Empiricus," *Philosophy East & West*, 44 (1994): 111-133. It is a good paper. Benefiting from it, I attempt to do the

comparative study is helpful for the interpretation of the two great philosophers at new levels. More importantly, the comparative study may help us to know the similarities and the differences between the two kinds of scepticism. Of course, the study of comparative philosophy is beneficial for us to comprehend all kinds of philosophy in different cultures.

work more comprehensively, fully, and deeply than Kjellberg. For more information about the comparative study of scepticism and Chinese scepticism, see Lisa Raphals, "Skeptical Strategies in the *Chuang Tzu* and *Theatetus*," *Philosophy East & West*, 44 (1994): 501-526; Russell B. Goodman, "Scepticism and Realism in the *Chuang Tzu*," *Philosophy East & West*, 35 (1985):231-238; Chad Hansen, "Linguistic Scepticism in the *Lao Tzu*," *Philosophy East & West*, 31 (1981):320-336; Chung-Ying Cheng, "Nature and Function of Skepticism in Chinese Philosophy," *Philosophy East & West* 27(1977): 137-154.

Chapter 1

Scepticism as a Philosophy of Life

In modern times, although there is ethical, religious, etc. skepticism, the key problems of scepticism are regarded as those of epistemology. In ancient times, however, skepticism is mainly regarded as a kind of philosophy of life. In ancient Greece, Pyrrhonism is shaped by an overriding practical and moral concern for human welfare. As a spokesman of Pyrrhonism, Sextus exemplifies this concern. As a physician, he promotes physical well-being; as a sceptic, he promotes psychological well-being. According to him, sceptics are philanthropists to cure us of the mental ill we inflict upon ourselves (and others) by virtue of our own dogmatism.³ Similar to Pyrrhonists, Chuang Tzu also focuses his attention on human well-being. The terms of "Perfect happiness," "Heavenly Happiness" are the keywords in his work, *The Chuang Tzu*. The majority of the work deals almost exclusively with ethical and evaluative questions of good and bad, right and wrong, and so on⁴. Therefore, the scepticism of the two philosophers represents their views of the philosophy of life. In the following, I will state the similarities between the two kinds of scepticism as the philosophy of life. First, both of them do not doubt happiness. They both seek happiness and take it as the final goal.

Second, they hold a similar answer to the question of what is happiness. For Sextus, happiness refers to quietude. The various dogmatic schools of Hellenic philosophy--the Stoic, the Epicurean, and the Academic-- are all looking for "peace of mind." Although

³ PH III 280-281.

⁴ Paul Kjellberg (1994), p.19.

Sextus attacks these schools, he actually agrees with their concept of “peace of mind.” As a sceptic, he does not doubt the existence of quietude and the value of it. Similar to Sextus, Chuang Tzu refers happiness to equanimity. For him, the happy man (“True Man,” “Perfect Man”) is one who keeps great equanimity in his mind, regardless of various outer situations. Chuang Tzu uses a rhetoric of exaggeration to describe the great equanimity of such a man: “The perfect man is godlike. Though the great swamps blaze, they cannot burn him; though the great rivers freeze, they cannot chill him; though swift lightning splits the hills and howling gales shake the sea, they cannot frighten him.”⁵

Third, they have a similar view on the root of unhappiness. According to Sextus, setting up and adhering to natural good or bad leads to unhappiness:

[T]he man who opines that anything is by nature good or bad is for ever being disquieted: when he is without the things which he deems good he believes himself to be tormented by things naturally bad and he pursues after the things which are, as he thinks, good; which when he has obtained he keeps falling into still more perturbations because of his irrational and immoderate elation, and in his dread of a change of fortune he uses every endeavour to avoid losing the things which he deems good⁶.

In Sextus’s light, anyone who holds natural and objective good or bad is involved in a feeling of deprivation when he does not have them and a terror of losing them when he does. Similar to that, Chuang Tzu says, “This is what the world honors: wealth, eminence, long life, a good name...People who can’t get those things fret a great deal.”⁷

⁵ CT, p.46.

⁶ PH I 27-28.

⁷ CT, P. 190.

For Sextus, natural good and bad increase our inner disturbance and hinder us from living a happy life. For Chuang Tzu, the concepts of objective values are shackles of human beings; to ask “which is good, which is bad” or “which is right, which is wrong” is the fundamental error in life.

Sextus and Chuang Tzu apply their denial of natural good and bad to the discussion of the problem of life and death, a crucial one in philosophy of life. Both of the sceptics deal with the problem in a similar way: life is not a naturally good, and death is not naturally bad. Sextus claims, “[D]eath should not be considered a thing naturally dreadful, just as life should not be considered a thing naturally good.”⁸ In order to get rid of people’s fear of death and anxiety about its coming, Chuang Tzu tells the story of Lady Li:

Lady Li was a daughter of the border guard of Ai. When she was first taken captive and brought to the state of Chin, she wept until her tears drenched the collar of her robe. But later, when she went to live in the palace of the ruler, shared his couch with him, and ate the delicious meats of his table, she wondered why she had ever wept. How do I know the dead do not wonder why they ever longed for life?⁹

In Chuang Tzu’s view, those who take death as natural bad is like the poor Lady Li; loving life and hating death is arbitrary. So the “True Man” knows nothing of loving life and know nothing of hating death; the “Perfect Man” remains calm in face of the coming of death.

⁸ PH III 232.

⁹ CT, P.47.

When Sextus and Chuang Tzu deny natural good and natural bad, they actually advocate an “inner detachment” in life. They want to liberate themselves (and us) from all bonds of the world, especially the bonds of “self” with concepts of natural good and natural bad. Because of such a detachment, the sceptic’s feelings will tend to be moderate and they will lack any emotional tension--they will not get upset in the same way in which so many non-sceptics do. Considering that Sextus is a conservative while Chuang Tzu is a rebel (I will detail this contrast in the third chapter), the former’s detachment is radical, whereas the latter’s is mild.

Fourth, for Sextus and Chuang Tzu, doubt is only a means to happiness (quietude, equanimity). In general, They do not take doubt as an end. Sextus’s procedure is “conflicting ideas of subjects--suspension of judgment--quietude,” While Chuang Tzu’s is “contradictory ideas of objects--how would I know which one is correct?--let them alone--equanimity.” In both procedures, doubt is not the end, but the means to quietude or equanimity. Viewed from this perspective, their scepticism is mild, not radical.¹⁰ For the two sceptics, doubt cannot omnipotent. They cannot doubt everything.¹¹

Of course, the two procedures are just similar, not identical. According to Sextus’s procedure, suspension of judgment is a state of mental rest owing to which we neither deny nor affirm anything. However, Chuang Tzu’s “let them alone” has somewhat of positive meanings: we do not dispute or interfere with all contradictory ideas; maybe all of them are feasible.

¹⁰ Many scholars criticize Sextus’s scepticism as radical scepticism. I think that although Sextus occasionally states radical sceptical views, his scepticism on the whole is mild.

¹¹ In the second chapter of the *Chuang Tzu*, the author seems to doubt everything. In fact, however, he cannot do so. If he could, he would not write the chapter.

Many interpreters often overstate the sceptics' means, and neglect their end. If we pay more attention to their end, we would know that there are many similarities between scepticism and other philosophical doctrines. But it is true that the two sceptics not always take doubt as a means. Rather, at times, they think of it as an end. When they do so, they actually forget or discard their end, quietude or equanimity. For example, at the beginning of *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, Sextus is careful not to regard doubt as the end, but latterly he sometimes implicitly takes doubt or suspension as the end, especially when he focuses overdue attention to doubt.

There are two crucial questions for scepticism as a philosophy of life: will doubt or suspension of judgment necessarily bring about happiness? Is doubt the only means to happiness? In replying to the first question, Sextus claims that sceptics by chance found that quietude follows their suspension. In this case, the sceptic is like the painter Apelles: "[W]hen he was painting a horse and wished to present in the painting the horse's foam, he was so unsuccessful that he give up the attempt and flung at the picture the sponge on which he used to wipe the paints off his brush, and the mark of the sponge produced the effect of a horse's foam."¹² But the fortuity in the discovery of the relationship between suspension of judgment and quietude does not mean that this relationship as such is fortuitous. Sextus's statement that quietude follows suspension is as "a shadow follows its substance"¹³ shows that he does not think that suspension of judgment only by chance brings about quietude (if he thought so, people who seek happiness would not be interested in his philosophy of life, just as patients would not see a doctor who says that

¹² PH I 29-30.

¹³ Ibid.

his prescriptions by chance cure diseases). Thus, I doubt the correctness of Arne Naess's statement, "The mature Sceptic will not, of course, claim that there is a necessary connection between epoche and ataraxia"¹⁴ However, if suspension of judgment certainly leads to quietude, the relationship between the two belongs to reality? Or it belongs to appearance? (In the two chapter I will state that the distinction between appearance and reality plays a key role in Sextus's scepticism) If it belongs to appearance, it is evident for everyone. Since it is so, why do non-sceptics not accept it? And why did not the sceptic easily (not by chance) find it? But if it belongs to reality, it is odd for Sextus to talk about it. For he does not think that man has the ability to know reality, as we will state latter.

Chuang Tzu does not explicitly answer the first question, whether doubt necessarily brings about happiness. But I think that he is inclined to say "yes"¹⁵ As to the second question, whether doubt is the only means to happiness, Sextus's answer is "yes," while Chuang Tzu's is "not." So far as I know, Sextus does not consider other means to happiness. Of course, this shows his dogmatically attitude. However, Chuang Tzu advocates another way to happiness. It is "following one's nature." Chuang Tzu accepts that different things have different nature. Saying of Chuang Tzu's philosophy, Fung Yu-lan states, "A free development of our natures may lead to relative happiness: absolute happiness is achieved through higher understanding of the nature of things...Following what is of nature, he [Chuang Tzu] maintains, is the source of all happiness"¹⁶ Chuang Tzu uses many parables to show this view. For example, the duck's legs are short, but to stretch them out worry him; the crane's long, but to cut them down would make him

¹⁴ Arne Naess, *Scepticism* (1986), p.5.

¹⁵ See chapter two and chapter eighteen of the *Chuang Tzu*.

¹⁶ Fung Yu-Lan, *A Short History of Chinese Philosophy* (1948), p. 105.

sad.¹⁷ Shortness of duck's legs and longness of crane's legs are their different natures. If the two animals have feeling of happiness and pain, their happiness is from following their different natures, while violating their different natures would certainly lead to their pain.

Is following one's nature, the means to happiness, inconsistent with doubt, another means to happiness? I think that the answer is "yes." When Chuang Tzu claims to follow nature, his doubt has gone. "Following nature" is an important idea of Chuang tzu's naturalism which is significant in his whole philosophy. In the fourth chapter, I will detail Chuang Tzu's naturalism.

Evidently, different people have different views on happiness. Many people would disagree with Sextus and Chuang Tzu who define happiness by "peace of mind." For instance, runners may think that running is happiness, while fighters fighting. They may define happiness by "excitement of mind." Even if we agree that happiness is peace of mind, we cannot dogmatically claim that doubt or suspension of judgment is the only means to happiness. We should consider the opposite voice: uncertainty in doubt makes mind disquieted; only certainty makes mind peaceful. In his famous Confessions, St. Augustine states that at about the age of thirty he has developed a completed scepticism. He doubts everything and gave up looking for any single truth. But he was profoundly unhappy. He lived in sin, and being torn between contrary impulses, had difficulty in acting coherently. For Augustine, unhappiness and scepticism thus went together. After telling Augustine's story, Arne Naess says, "[P]eople after a profound religious or political conversion, tend to be very inaccurate in their descriptions of their own life

¹⁷ CT, p. 100

before that happening.”¹⁸ Even if what Naess says is true, we cannot deny that ordinary people, rather than people who experience a profound religious or political conversion, have experience that unhappiness is related to doubt. Facing conflicting ideas on happiness, Sextus should not dogmatize one view that happiness is peace of mind; he should insist his typical attitude: suspension of judgment. And I think that it may be better to take Chuang Tzu’s way, “let them alone.” Indeed, all of the conflicting ideas on happiness may be all right

¹⁸ Arne Naess, *Scepticism* (1968), p. 67.

Chapter 2

Scepticism, Distinctions and Non-distinctions

Sextus's scepticism is based on the distinction between appearance and reality. This distinction is a commonplace in Greek philosophy. As early as in the pre-Socratic times, Greek philosophers begin to separate appearance from reality. According to them, the world has dual aspects, appearance or phenomenon which we can acquaint through our sense perception, and reality which can be known only by our intellect. Sextus accepts the distinction, and it plays an important role in his philosophy. Although he, like other Pyrrhonists, suspends judgment concerning reality, he accepts the theory of appearance-reality dichotomy. As Charlotte L. Stough states, "[A] metaphysical distinction between phenomenal and real dominates skepticism from its initial appearance in the fragments of Timon to its countless occurrence in the pages of Sextus Empiricus...The distinction was inherited by Sceptics from their philosophical predecessors, and it was accepted by them apparently without question"¹⁹ Sextus does not doubt appearance.²⁰ He accepts appearances and takes them as "criterion," the standard of action. Appearances conduct the sceptic's life. However, he doubts reality, the hidden essence of things. The sceptic does not make "any positive assertion regarding the external realities"²¹ For example, he does not doubt that honey seems sweet (he assents the appearance that honey is sweet), but he is not sure that honey is sweet in its nature or reality.

¹⁹ Charlott C. Stough, *Greek Scepticism: A Study in Epistemology* (1969), pp. 147-48.

²⁰ PHI 19.

²¹ PHI 15.

For Sextus, what is the difference between appearance and reality? His answer seems that appearance is evident while reality is non-evident. Generally speaking, the evident things are those which are perceived by our senses. However, Sextus's meaning of "evident" is much broader than that. In his light, sense-appearance is only one kind of things which are evident; there are many others evident. For instance, he even regards customs, morals, laws, and so on as evident. Thus, I think that Sextus's "appearance" is a blanket term: all sorts of things which the sceptic assents are appearance.

However, some commentators, such as Roderick M. Chisholm, and Charlotte Stough, interpret Sextus's appearance as related roughly to the empiricist notion of sense-impression. In his article, "Sextus Empiricus and Modern Empiricism,"²² Chisholm interprets Sextus's appearance from the standpoint of logical positivism, taking him as a forerunner to oppose metaphysical theories. Similar to Chisholm, Stough writes, "Sextus's philosophy is distinguished by its emphasis on experience as the most important factor in our knowledge. The 'empiricist axiom' that knowledge originates in sensory experience receives its most explicit statement in Sextus' writing."²³ In my opinion, this interpretation is too narrow. I agree with other interpreters, such as Arne Naess²⁴, Michael Frede²⁵, and Myles Burnyeat²⁶, who point out that Sextus uses the term of appearance quite loosely, and definitely in more than one strict sense, and very often

²² See *Philosophy of Science*, 8 (1947): 371-394.

²³ Charlott C. Stough (1969), p. 107.

²⁴ Arne Naess (1968), p.15-21.

²⁵ Michael Fred, "Review of C. Stough," *Journal of Philosophy*, 70 (1973): 15-21

²⁶ Myles Burnyeat, "Can the Sceptic Live his Scepticism?" in Myles Burnyeat, ed., *The Sceptical Tradition* (1983), p. 127.

not at all in any epistemic context of sense-impression. Anyway, it is misreading to regard Sextus's blanket term of appearance as a pure empiricist notion of sense-impression.

Why cannot appearance be doubted for Sextus? According to Leo Groarke's interpretation of him, "Appearances owe to be accepted and adhered to, not because we can establish true nature, but because we need a foundation for the conduct of practical affairs."²⁷ Considering that Sextus's philosophy is mainly philosophy of life, what Groarke says is quite right. More importantly, Sextus emphasizes the involuntary nature of appearances. For him, to accept appearances has nothing to do with the involvement of the free will. He claims, "[S]ince this [appearance] lies in feeling and involuntary affection, it is not open to question."²⁸ Therefore, it is under compulsion that we accept appearance.

As to reality, there have been debates on whether Sextus holds that it is unknowable. For example, Charlotte Stough claims that it is Sextus's view that "the real nature of the world is unknowable."²⁹ Contrary to that, Arne Naess states, "[I]t would be incorrect to picture him [Sextus] as feeling that reality is utterly unintelligible, incomprehensible, unreachable"³⁰ I think that the interpreters such as Naess follow Sextus's official saying, while others such as Stough are in accord with Sextus's unofficial ideas. Officially, Sextus opposes the Academic who overtly claims the impossibility of knowing truth. He calls them "negative dogmatists." Actually, however, he often unconsciously or consciously holds the views of the Academic.

²⁷ Leo Groarke, *Greek Scepticism: Anti-Realist Trends in Ancient Thought* (1990), p. 140.

²⁸ PHI I 22.

²⁹ Charlotte Stough (1969), p.116.

³⁰ Arne Naess (1968), p.56.

The distinction between appearances and realities plays a key role in Sextus's scepticism. It is a cornerstone for his philosophy. Without the cornerstone, the whole building of his philosophy would collapse. However, Myles Burnyeat maintains, "[T]he skeptic [Sextus] contrast between appearance and real existence is a purely formal one, entirely independent of subject matter. The skeptic does not divide the world into appearances and realities so that one could ask of this or that whether it belongs to the category of appearance or to the category of reality."³¹ What he says actually denies that the distinction between appearance and reality is applicable to Sextus. I do not think that there is any evidence for Burnyeat's argument. As stated in the first chapter, it is legal to ask Sextus the question, whether happiness (as well as other things) belongs to appearance or reality. To say that something is so and so in appearance, but that I doubt that it is so and so in reality is senseless, unless I divide the thing into appearance and reality.

In *The problem of philosophy*, Bertrand Russell referred the distinction between appearance and reality as "one of the distinctions that cause most trouble in philosophy." Although Sextus's distinction between appearance and reality leads him to doubt only reality, rather than appearance, thus again causing a mild scepticism, it brings about troubles for him. The statement of such a distinction is dogmatic, but Sextus opposes all kinds of dogmatic philosophy. Of course, there is inconsistency between the statement of distinction between appearance and reality and his scepticism. Anybody who holds the distinction takes it certain. However, according to Sextus's scepticism, anything certain can be doubted (although he accepts appearance, he does not admit that any kind of

³¹ Myle Burnyeat (1983), P. 128

appearance is certain). Therefore, the statement of the distinction between appearance and reality shows Sextus's certain mind, while the scepticism shows his uncertain mind.

Evidently, When Sextus holds the distinction between appearance and reality, he at least should presuppose three principles: (1) the existence of appearance, (1) the existence of reality, (3) the deference between appearance and reality. They all are metaphysical principles. Sextus who is regarded as the earliest subverter of metaphysics cannot help but admit metaphysical principles. He cannot doubt them. When we say that Sextus doubts reality, it does not mean that he doubts the existence of reality. Rather, it means that he doubts that the reality of something can be represented in the appearance of it, and that we can know the reality through the appearance. Surely, Sextus's doubt is based on something certain. If he doubts the three principles mentioned above, it is illegal for him to say, "Honey seems sweet, but I am not sure that honey is sweet in its reality." So far as Sextus does not doubt the existence of reality, but doubts that we can know reality through appearance, he is like Kant who makes distinction between the phenomenal world and the noumenal world, and confines our knowledge to the former, not like Hume who even doubt the existence of reality.

Furthermore, Sextus cannot doubt truth, even though he repeats to suspend judgment about the truth of something. At the beginning of *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, he takes sceptics as the searchers of truth.³² Officially, Sextus is different from the Academic who holds that truth cannot be apprehended. Even though unofficially sceptics, like the Academics, deny the apprehension of truth, they still presuppose the existence of truth. Again, it shows that skeptics have something certain.

³² PH I 3.

Contrary to Sextus, Chuang Tzu is indifferent to the distinction between appearance and reality. In ancient China, there is no tradition of such a distinction like that in ancient Greece. Unlike the Western philosophers who hold the concepts of absolute opposites between reality and appearance, mind and body, the internal and the external, etc., almost all classical Chinese philosophers think that so called “opposites” are not opposites, but relatives having complementarity. The following passage in Lao Tzu’s *Tao-te-ching* typically represents this view.

That the whole world knows the beautiful’s being deemed “beautiful” is sufficient for “ugly.” That the whole world knows the good’s being deemed “good” is sufficient for “evil.” Thus “having” and “lacking” produce each other. “Difficult” and “easy” complement each other. “long” and “short” offset each other; “high” and “low” incline each other; “note” and “sound” harmonize each other; “before” and “after” follow each other.³³

Most Chinese philosophers, including Chuang Tzu, are not concerned about the dichotomy of appearance and reality. Even if they talked about the dichotomy, they would not take appearance and reality as really opposing, but as complementary.

Ordinary people hold that all opposites, such as right and wrong, life and death, big and small, are irreconcilable. However, Chuang Tzu doubts that right is indeed right, wrong is indeed wrong, and so on. There are no accepted and impartial criterions to judge the issues. The following passage is famous in the *Chuang Tzu*:

³³ Lao Tzu, *Tao-te-ching*, Chapter 2.

Suppose you and I have had an argument. If you have beaten me instead of my beating you, then are you necessarily right and am I necessarily wrong? If I have beaten you instead of your beating me, then am I necessarily right and are you necessarily wrong? Is one of us right and the other wrong? Are both of us right or are both of us wrong? If you and I Don't know the answer, then other people are bound to be even more in the dark. Whom shall we get to decide what is right? Shall we get someone who agrees with you to decide? But if he already agrees with you, how can he decide fairly? Shall we get someone who agrees with me? But if he agrees with me, how can he decide? Shall we get someone who disagrees with us? But if he already disagrees with us, how can he decide? Shall we get someone who agrees with both of us? But if he already agrees with both of us, how can he decide? Obviously, then, neither you nor I nor anyone else can decide for each other.³⁴

Since there is no way to judge the debate, as well as other debates, Chuang Tzu advises us to "harmonize them all with the Heavenly Equality." "What do I mean by harmonizing them with the Heavenly Equality? Right is not right, so is not so."³⁵ Actually, Heavenly Equality is the state that right is identical with wrong, good is identical bad, and so on. Chuang Tzu puts Lao Tzu's idea that so called "opposites" are not opposites to its extremity, reaching that there is no difference between two opposable things. In the *Chuang Tzu*, there is the most important chapter, "Ch'i Wu lun," which has been translated into English as "Discussion on Making All Things Equal" by Burton Watson, or "On Seeing Things as Equal" by A.C. Graham.³⁶ From this chapter, we can see how Chuang Tzu's scepticism and relativism lead to a peculiar theory, Taoist monism. According to this theory, all different and conflicting things are united into One, Tao; all

³⁴ CT, p.48.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ A. C. Graham, "Chuang Tzu's Essay on Seeing Things as Equal," *History of Religions*, V. 9, N.2-3 (1969-1970), p.137.

things in the world are the same; all distinctions disappear³⁷. As Wing-tsit Chan says, for Chuang Tzu, Tao equalizes all things in the universe as one.³⁸ Of the complicated meanings of Chuang Tzu's Tao (or Way), I think, an important one is "no-distinctions," "no-opposites": "A state in which 'this' and 'that' no longer find their opposites is called the hinge of the Way... [W]hether you point to a little stalk or a great pillar, a leper or the beautiful Hsi-Shih, things ribald and shady or things grotesque and strange, the Way makes them all into one...Because right and wrong appeared, The Way was injured."³⁹ Facing the difficulty to judge the conflicting ideas on the same matter, Sextus suspends judgment, while Chuang Tzu equalizes them in Tao, oneness.

In the light of Chuang Tzu's Taoist monism, Tao is actually Chaos, the state of undifferentiation. Although he takes it as an objective state, it, in fact, is a subjective state in which he thinks that nothing any longer remains "itself," and that anything can be anything else. For Chuang Tzu, people's incompetence of knowing distinctions leads to Chaos, and in Chaos people are more ignorant. Thus, Chuang Tzu's monism is blended with his scepticism.

It is not easy to understand Chuang Tzu's monism. I think that people's incompetence for knowing distinctions is an important motivation of his peculiar

³⁷ Thank Dr. Bosley, my supervisor, who let me know that we should be careful in using Western terms such as monism and dualism to interpret Chinese philosophy. Surely, Western monism does not mean that all things in the world are the same, which Chuang Tzu holds. While western monism insists on Oneness of the world, it does not deny the distinctions of things. However, in Chuang Tzu's philosophy, Oneness excludes distinctions. In this thesis, when I use the term of monism, I only take its meaning of Oneness, neglecting its other meanings. In the sense of Oneness, Chuang Tzu's monism seems out-and-out. Unlike Western monists who holds that apparent multiplicity of substances is really manifestation of only a single substance in different states, Chuang Tzu claims that all things in the world are the same, and that Oneness is a state of non-distinctions. Although his Tao means Oneness, it greatly different from Parmenides's Being, Spinoza's God-or-Nature, and Leibnitz's Monad.

³⁸ Wing-Tsit, Article on Chuang Tzu, in Paul Edwards, ed., *The encyclopedia of Philosophy*, V. 2 (1967), p.110.

³⁹ CT, p.40-41.

monism. In his eyes, any distinctions of values and facts are arbitrary; you cannot set up non-arbitrary criteria to differentiate right from wrong, this from that, beauty from ugly, etc. Another motivation for Chuang Tzu's monism is that he hopes to use such a theory to reach a special peacefulness of mind. According to him, ordinary people who keep distinctions of things in their mind are disturbed by these distinctions; only transcending them, can you make your mind peaceful. For Chuang Tzu, "True Man," "Perfect Man" can do so. Because they transcend all distinctions, they can regard all things as the same. The realm of non-distinctions is the happiest realm. How to reach the realm? For Chuang Tzu, the most important thing is *Wang*, forgetting. So long as you forget the distinctions, you would transcend them.

Some interpreters hold that Chuang Tzu differentiates the world of distinctions from that of non-distinctions, the former being the phenomenal world, the latter being the noumenal world (Tao). I think that it is a misinterpretation of Chuang Tzu. He hates all distinctions, including the distinctions between reality and appearance. For him, Tao, unlike the noumenal world, is not hidden; rather, it is everywhere present. You can sense it in any place. Answering the question, "Where does Tao exist?" Chuang Tzu says, "There is no place it does not exist."⁴⁰

If we take Chuang Tzu's monism as a kind of absolutism, we can see that it, paradoxically, is from his relativism. For him, there are no absolute standards of big or small, important or unimportant; small things are as big as big things can be, and big things are as small as small things can be: "If we regard a thing as big because there is a certain bigness to it, then among all the ten thousand things there are none that are not

⁴⁰ CT, p.240.

big. If we regard a thing as small because there is a certain smallness to it, then among the ten thousand things there are none that are not small.”⁴¹ According to Chuang Tzu, a so called big mountain, compared with bigger things, is small, while a so called small autumn hair, compared with smaller things, is big. Surely, we can accept that the terms such as “big” and “small” are relative terms. But it does not mean that to make a comparison between a small thing and a big one is senseless, as Chuang Tzu holds it. We should note that in a given condition a big thing cannot be small, and a small thing cannot be big. For example, it is unchangeable that an autumn hair, compared with a mountain, is small. However, putting his philosophy of relativity into its extreme, Chuang Tzu reaches an absolutist conclusion: people cannot make a distinction between small things and big ones, or between bigness and smallness. Chuang Tzu’s steps from relativism to absolutism are (1) because the terms such as “big” and “small” are totally relative, to say that some things is small or big is arbitrary or senseless; (2) because of it, people have no reason to say that “small” is different from “big.” No doubt, the two steps are unsound. That you cannot change the simple fact that an autumn hair, compared with a mountain, is small, may falsifies the steps.

For Sextus, appearance can not be doubted. However, for Chuang Tzu, everything can be doubted. Suppose that Chuang Tzu encounters Sextus who says, “Honey seems sweet, but I do not know whether it is really sweet.” Chuang Tzu would asks, “How can you say so? When you say ‘sweet’ you presuppose ‘bitter.’ What are differences between ‘sweet’ and ‘bitter’ and those between ‘seem sweet’ and ‘really sweet?’ Why not think that the differences are arbitrary? When you say so, are you sure that you are not in

⁴¹ CT, p. 179.

dream?" According to Chuang Tzu, all experiences and the whole life may be a "Big Dream." Since everything can be doubted, can the statement, "everything can be doubted," be doubted? Chuang Tzu's answer to the question is "yes." So he has a paradoxical statement, "When I say you are dreaming, I am dreaming, too"⁴² Chuang Tzu tell us that he dreamt that he was a butterfly. But when he woke up he did know if he was Chuang Tzu who had dreamt he was a butterfly, or a butterfly dreaming he was Chuang Tzu.⁴³ As Toshihiko Izutsu interprets it, Chuang Chou himself and the "butterfly have become indistinguishable, each lost his or its essential self-identity."⁴⁴ Viewed from the Chaos, the distinction between Chuang Tzu and the butterfly cannot be apprehended.

Since Chuang Tzu does not hold the distinction between appearance and reality, he may avoid Sextus's paradoxical situation stated above. However, Chuang Tzu has other troubles stated in the following.

First, Chuang Tzu's monism greatly conflicts with common sense and reason. In the normal light, the view that right is identical to wrong, good is identical to bad, and so on is absolutely ridiculous. If there were the state of non-distinctions, you would not exist. For the fact that you exist means that you are different from other things. If there is no the difference between Chuang Tzu and the butterfly, Chuang Tzu cannot tell his "Butterfly Dream." Therefore, telling the story, he himself cannot help but add, "Between Chuang Chou and Butterfly there must be some distinction."⁴⁵ We cannot accept Chuang Tzu's statement of non-distinctions, unless we view it as a exaggeration, considering that he is a

⁴² CT, p.48.

⁴³ CT, p.49.

⁴⁴ Toshihiko Izutsu, *Sufism and Taoism* (1983), p.311.

⁴⁵ CT, p.49.

humorous thinker (Lee Yearley says that the *Chuang Tzu* employs a rhetoric of exaggeration, and that many parts of the book “function much as does some science fiction or fantasy literature today”⁴⁶). It is reasonable not to read the lyrical flight of a great writer, such as Chuang Tzu, as literally as one would an analytical philosopher. Probably, when Chuang Tzu states his Taoist monism, he is using a rhetoric of exaggeration to express most Chinese philosopher’s idea that so called “opposites” are not opposites, but relatives having complementarity.⁴⁷

Secondly, since Chuang Tzu’s monism denies any difference in all things, there is a question: is his monism different from the view that right is different from wrong, and good is different from bad, and so on? If Chuang Tzu’s answer is “yes,”—this means that he accepts the difference—he conflicts with his monism. But if his answer is “no,” he himself negates his monism. Chuang Tzu is conscious of the paradox.⁴⁸ However, I do not think that there is any way to resolve the paradox for Chuang Tzu.

Third, even if we accept Chuang Tzu’s skeptical statement that we have not the ability to find an impartial judge who can tell the right side from the wrong one in the dispute mentioned above, we may not accept his monism. For even if I am not sure

⁴⁶ Lee Yearley, “The Perfected Person in the Radical Chuang Tzu,” in Victor H. Mair, ed., *Experimental Essays on Chuang Tzu* (1983), p.137.

⁴⁷ Actually, Chuang Tzu does not always hold the view of non-distinctions. In many chapters of the *Chuang Tzu* he often states the complementary dualism, which accepts the distinction between one pole (such as right or beauty, etc.) and the other (such as wrong or ugly, etc.), but insists on the harmony of the two, taking them as complementary, not as opposed. For example, in chapter 14, he says, “I play it with the harmony of yin and yang.” (CT, p.15) Here, Chuang Tzu does not state that there is no distinction between yin and yang, but only means that yin can be in harmony with yang. Moreover, in chapter 5, he does not equate life to death, preservation to loss, etc., but lets people harmonize them (CT, p. 73-74). Thank Dr. Bosley who let me note Chuang Tzu’s complementary dualism which is inconsistent with his peculiar monism.

⁴⁸ Chuang Tzu says, “We have already become one, so how can I say anything? But I have just said that we are one, so how can I not be saying something? The one and what I said about it make two, and two and the original one make three.” (CT, p.43)

whether you are right and I am wrong or you are wrong and I am right, I may sure that your arguments are different form mine, and that right is different from wrong.

Chapter 3

Conservative and Rebel

In addition to the contrast between Sextus and Chuang Tzu mentioned in the last chapter, there is another one: Chuang Tzu is a rebel, intending to overthrow all social norms, while Sextus is a conservative, obeying customs, morals, laws, and so on as appearances. This chapter deals with this contrast.

Sextus's dualism is a key to understanding his conservatism. As stated above, his scepticism does not concern appearances. All of his doubt only aims at realities. Therefore, when Sextus says that sceptics follow social norms, he certainly takes them as appearances. As to whether they are good in reality, he suspends judgment. Viewed from this perspective, his conservative attitude toward social norms is different from the typical one according to which social norms are good in their reality.

In reply to the charge that sceptics are inactive and paralytic, Sextus states,

Adhering ... to appearances we live in accordance with the normal rules of life, undogmatically, seeing that we cannot remain wholly inactive. And it would seem that this regulation of life is fourfold, and that one part of it lies in the guidance of Nature, another in the constraint of the passions, another in the tradition of laws, and customs, another in the instruction of the arts. Nature's guidance is that by which we are naturally capable of sensation and thought; constraint of the passions is that whereby hunger drives us to food and thirst to drink; tradition of customs and laws, that whereby we regard piety in the conduct of life as good, but impiety as evil; instruction of the arts, that whereby we are not inactive in such

arts as we accept. But we make all these statements undogmatically.⁴⁹

There are many differences among the fourfold. For example, the second is the natural inclinations, while the third is the social norms. However, Sextus seems to think that to follow the social norms is like to follow the natural inclinations. He intends to regard the actions directed by customs and laws as involuntary actions. I think that sometimes it is true (e.g., some customs are so ingrained and dominant that everybody in a community accepts them unconditionally and unconsciously). In general, however, the actions directed by customs and laws, unlike the actions dependent on the natural inclinations, are conscious actions. The former are social phenomenon, while the latter are natural phenomenon. For all animals, hunger drives them to good. But not every animal follows customs, and, I think, no animal except the human being follows laws. Therefore, we can conclude that Sextus is involved in confusing social phenomenon with natural one.

At the same time it is worth noting that the Fourth conflicts with what Sextus says on other occasions. For example, at near the end of *Outlines of Pyhrrnoism*, he explicitly denies the existence of all things that relate to instruction and instruction itself: “[I]f neither the matter taught exists, nor the teacher and the learner, nor the method of learning, then neither learning exists nor teaching.”⁵⁰ Since it is so, it is odd for him to take the instruction of arts as a regulation of life.

On the other hand, we should not neglect Sextus’s statement, “We regard piety in the conduction of life as good, but impiety as evil.” Elsewhere, as we stated in the first

⁴⁹ PH I 23-24.

⁵⁰ PH III 269.

chapter, Sextus does not admit that natural good or evil exists. In order to be consistent with his denial of natural good and evil (or good and evil in reality), he should mean that piety seems good in appearance and impiety seems evil in appearance. Thus, although he does not think that customs and laws are natural good, he agrees that they seem good in appearance. This dual attitude toward social norms makes his conservative views on them uncertain and infirm.

In fact, the state of uncertainty is a universal mental state of Pyhrronists. Their suspension of judgment represents their strong sense of uncertainty. This sense determines that they cannot be thoroughgoing conservative. For a conservative is certain of what he sticks to. Surely, a typical conservative has no mind of universal uncertainty.

I think that to be a conservative is inconsistent with being a septic. As a sceptic, Sextus criticizes customs and laws (he does so when he claims that there is no natural good or evil social norms). But as conservative, he obeys them. When he details the relativity of customs and laws in the tenth Trope, he actually deeply doubts the reliability of them. David Glidden correctly states, "The Tenth of Trope...would seem to make it difficult for the skeptic to be uncritical of social customs which affect him."⁵¹ That different people have conflicting customs and laws surely shakes people's beliefs in them.⁵² Since Sextus has stabbed customs and laws, why does he still claim to follow them? Of course, he would reply: he only doubts the reality of customs and laws, without doubting the appearance of them. We have already stated the troubles of the dualism

⁵¹ David Glidden, "Sceptic Semiotics," *Phronesis* 28 (1983): 245.

⁵² I do not agree with Julia Annas who think that the relativity of morals dose not undermine our moral beliefs. See her article of "Doing without objective values: Ancient and Modern Strategies," in M. Schofield, and G. Striker, ed., *The Norms of Nature* (1985), p.11

between appearance and reality. Furthermore, in ordinary life, it is odd that when one doubts the natural good of social norms, he is still willing to follow them.

However, Sextus often says that he is consistent with ordinary life, and charges dogmatists with that they depart from ordinary life. Without doubt, Sextus's conservative attitude toward customs and laws often is consistent with ordinary life. But I do not think that his scepticism, as well as his dualism, is consistent with it. In ordinary life, people neither doubt that sweetness is a real property of honey, nor claim to follow customs and laws with denial of their naturally good or suspension of statement about their reality.

Although conservatism is inconsistent with scepticism, the coexistence of the two in sceptic's mind is a common sight in the history of Western philosophy. For example, early modern sceptics in sixteenth and seventeenth centuries deploy skepticism as a weapon in the Counter-Reformation. Like Sextus, they are conservative of customs, laws, and religion. Richard Popkin says, "[T]he sceptic of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries asserted, almost unanimously, that they were sincere believers in the Christian religion."⁵³ And he says, "[S]ince the Pyrrhonist accepted the laws and customs of his community, he would accept Catholicism...The marriage of the cross of Christ and the doubts of Pyrrho was a perfect combination to provide the ideology of the French Counter-Reformation"⁵⁴ And we can see that Hume, the greatest sceptic in the modern Western philosophy, also combines his scepticism with conservatism. Although Hume

⁵³ Richard Popkin, *The History of Scepticism from Erasmus to Spinoza* (1979), p. xviii.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, p.47.

holds a complete scepticism on all beliefs, he has a famous saying, "Custom is the great guide of human life." His emphasis on habit and tradition is very similar to Sextus's.⁵⁵

Unlike Sextus, a doctor who has a somewhat realistic mind, Chuang Tzu is a writer full of the qualities of romantic poets. To be discontent of ordinary life, he has a radical attitude toward the tradition of customs, morals, laws, and so on. He attacks the whole tradition.

No evidence shows that Sextus has any unconventional behavior. However, Chuang Tzu's behaviors often are surprisingly unconventional. For example, when his wife died, he refused to weep; rather, he pounded on a tub and sang! In reply to his friend's wonder on that, he explained that his wife's life comes from nature, and that after her death she returns to nature. Therefore, he thinks, there is no need to weep for her death.⁵⁶ In the *Chuang Tzu*, many of his unconventional stories like this are stated. Of course, Chuang Tzu's unconventional behaviors are based on his rebellious views on tradition.

As to Sextus's famous Fourfold, Chuang Tzu may agree with the First (the guidance of Nature), the Second (the constraint of the passions), and the Fourth (the instruction of arts), but he cannot agree with the Third (the tradition of customs and laws). While Sextus thinks that the Third is compatible with the others, Chuang Tzu holds that any traditional social norms suppress human nature, which is dealt with by Sextus when he states the First and the Second. As stated in the first Chapter, it is Chuang Tzu's view that different people have different natures. And he thinks that the social norms ignore the differences, forcing people to obey the unified criterion. According to him, the purpose

⁵⁵ Sheldon S. Wolin writes an excellent paper on Hume's conservatism: "Hume and Conservatism," in Donald W. Livingston and James T. King, ed., *Hume: A Re-evaluation* (1976), pp. 239-256.

⁵⁶ CT, pp. 91-92.

of all morals and laws is to establish uniformity and suppress differences. Therefore, all social norms conflict with the human nature. In order to follow human nature, it is necessary to throw off the fetters of social norms.

Social order is one of the most important topics for most of ancient Chinese philosophers. Confucians, Mohists, Legalists, and so on all have a preference for the topic. However, Chuang Tzu is totally different from them. He regards individual freedom as the matter of primary importance. As Burton Watson says, "The central theme of the *Chuang Tzu* may be summed up in a single words: freedom."⁵⁷ Furthermore, for Chuang Tzu, social order, like social norms, conflicts with freedom. In order to accomplish freedom, he also rebels against social order.

It is worthy to note that Chuang Tzu's freedom is greatly different from the Western one. Lin Tung-chi states, "Taoist [Chuang Tzu is a big Taoist] freedom is the freedom of a pre-social or an asocial being, while the libertarian freedom of the West is the freedom of a socially conscious man"⁵⁸ In general, Western liberalists does not oppose to live in a society, while Taoists like to live in mountains or forests, isolating themselves from society. Western liberalists prefer to employ laws to defend their freedom. However, Taoists flout all laws. Finally, Western liberalists have beliefs, for they are not skeptics. But in ancient China, those who seek freedom often oppose beliefs. For many of them are sceptics.

So far as I know, Sextus does not talk about Freedom. Both Chuang Tzu and Sextus advocate following human nature, but the former thinks that to follow one's own

⁵⁷ CT, p.3

⁵⁸ Lin Tung-chi, "The Chinese mind: Its Taoist Substratum," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 8 (1947): 260.

nature means to seek freedom, while the latter has no such an idea. As a physician, Sextus hopes to cure individual and social ill derived from dogmatism, without being conscious of the tension between following human nature and following social norms. As a thinker with some Existential qualities, Chuang Tzu worries about the tension.

Similar to Rousseau who holds that man's heart and action are basically good, until he is tainted or corrupted by civilization, Chuang Tzu criticizes the whole human civilization. According to Chuang Tzu, not only social norms, but also the whole human civilization suppresses human nature. For him, the actual effect of the civilization is like "putting a halter on the horse's head, piercing the ox's nose."⁵⁹ The wild horses and oxen have an original and perfect nature. But the tame ones have lost it. The process of taming them is just the process of damaging their nature. Similar to that, in the Nature State, human beings have a perfect nature which has been injured by human civilization. Vitaly A. Rubin rightly points out, "To the false, artificial civilization hobbled by thousands of conventions, Chuang Tzu counterposes the simple, pure, and true world of nature."⁶⁰

Although Chuang Tzu attacks social norms and the whole human civilization, he is not a revolutionary who advocates taking an action of violence. Rather he only chooses the way of living in seclusion to show his rebel attitude against society. Being a recluse, Chuang Tzu escapes from society, without taking the action to shatter society. For Chuang Tzu, to live in mountain, isolating from society, people have thrown off the fetters of social norms, and recover to their original nature. Of course, he thinks that the life of the recluse is peaceful and happy. In ancient China, the thinkers with skeptical

⁵⁹ CT, p.183.

⁶⁰ Vitaly A. Rubin, *Individual and State in Ancient China: Essays on Four Chinese Philosophers* (1976), p. 107.

tendency often are recluses. In addition to Chuang Tzu, Lao Tzu, the founder of Taoism, is also a recluse. It is worth to note that the Chinese recluses who have nothing to do with religious beliefs are different from the Western ones who often are religious believers. Furthermore, in the eyes of the Western people, the combination of sceptic and recluse may be a surprising thing. However, it is common for the Chinese people.

Although Chuang Tzu is from his spirit of doubt to attack social norms and the whole civilization, his rebellion against them eventually departs from his official scepticism. When he holds his official scepticism, he is a thoroughgoing doubter. For example, there is a famous dialogue in chapter two of the *Chuang Tzu*:

Nieh Ch'ueh asked Wang Ni, "Do you know what all things agree in calling right?"

"How would I know that?"

"Do you know that you don't know that?"

"How do I know that?"

"Then do nothing know nothing?"

"How do I know that?...What way do I have of knowing that if I know something

I don't really not know it? Or what way do I have of knowing that if I say I don't

know something I don't really in fact know it ? "61

Chuang Tzu's typical scepticism is fully expressed in the dialogue. He does not employ declarative sentences, such as "I do not know that," to convey his scepticism. Rather, he employs interrogative sentences, such as "How do I know that?" to do so. These sentences are filled in his work. Chuang Tzu often poses questions, but does not give

⁶¹ CT, p.45.

positive answer to them. Lee Yearley says, "[P]osing but not resolving of questions is at the heart of Chuang-Tzu's skepticism"⁶² Chuang Tzu's interrogative sentences, similar to Sextus's suspending judgment, may escape the charge that it is dogmatic. Evidently, Chuang Tzu's official scepticism shows his mind of uncertainty. However, in his rebellion against all social norms and the whole human civilization, he shows the opposite, a mind of certainty: social things are all bad, while Nature State is good. So the sprite of doubt has gone, and a new kind of dogmatism comes. It is similar to Sextus's falling into negative dogmatism.

It is very difficult for a sceptic to keep always a mind of uncertainty. When Chuang Tzu is a rebel and when Sextus is a conservative, they all alienate themselves from the mind. The former cannot always say, "How do I know that?" and the latter cannot always suspend judgment. In fact, the two sceptics, like common people, often change their mind, from certain to uncertain, and from uncertain to certain.

Among the Western philosophers, Nietzsche is one who combines scepticism (in a loose sense) with rebelling against tradition. Viewed from this perspective, he is similar to Chuang Tzu. However, Chuang Tzu, like Sextus, seeks a peaceful life, while Nietzsche seeks the life of "manly skeptic" which is pervaded with inner strife, shock, and storms.⁶³ Chuang Tzu is happy to be a recluse, but Nietzsche may think that a recluse is a weak character. Thus, although both Chuang Tzu and Nietzsche are rebels, they belong to different kinds of them.

⁶² Lee Yearly, "The Perfect Person in the Radical Chuang-Tzu," in Victor Mair (1983), p. 127.

⁶³ Adi Parush, "Nietzsche on the Skeptic's Life," *the Review of Metaphysics*, 29 (1976): 535.

To conclude this chapter, I think that the conservatives such as Sextus or the rebels such as Chuang Tzu are not compatible with the sceptics who holds a universal doubt. Without doubt, sceptics oppose all dogmatists. However, both conservatives and rebels are dogmatists.

Chapter 4

Scepticism and Naturalism

Many sceptics hold naturalism. There is enough evidence to show that the two skeptics, Chuang Tzu and Sextus, are naturalist. In this chapter, I will discuss their naturalism, and its relationship to their scepticism.

The term of “naturalism” seems to have been instituted by Pirre Bayle to designate the view of the world as devoid of all supernatural intervention, the view of the world as “disenchanted.” Surely, it is the traditional sense of this term. However, it is too general: if we follow this sense, we would conclude that most philosophers hold naturalism. Actually, philosophers use the term in various senses. In the following, I will use the term to mean the views of “following nature,” “to be conservative to nature,” “acting as what nature let us do,” “practicing naturally,” “taking natural ways,” “obeying the inescapable”, etc. For both Chuang Tzu and Sextus, naturalism is a guide to human actions. Following naturalism, Sextus hopes to live a common life, as common people do. However, following naturalism, Chuang Tzu wants to live a life of “True Man” who is different from common persons. Sextus’s naturalism is consistent with his conservatism, while Chuang Tzu’s is compatible with his rebellious spirit. Therefore, naturalism has different senses and plays different roles in the philosophies of the two sceptics.

In Sextus’s writings, the term of “nature” has two senses. First, it means “reality,” the opposite of “appearance.” For example, in the sentences, such as “We are unable to make

any absolute statement concerning the real nature of external objects,"⁶⁴ "As to its essential nature we shall suspend judgment,"⁶⁵ "These condition are evil by nature,"⁶⁶ the term of "nature" is equal to "reality". Second, it means the instincts or inherent tendencies directing conduct. This sense is expressed in one of Sextus's famous "Fourfold" of life-regulation, the "guidance of nature." He suspends judgment concerning the "nature" with the first sense. However, he accepts the "nature" with the second sense.

Nobody can suspend judgment about everything, and skeptics are no exception. Oliver A. Johnson writes correctly, "Though it is true that we should suspend our judgment on some issue...it does not follow that we should suspend our judgment on all matters."⁶⁷ Actually, Sextus does not suspend judgment on everything. When he says that he adheres to appearance, he cannot insist that he is suspending judgment. And when he takes nature's guide, he also cannot suspend judgment.

As a naturalist, Sextus emphasizes the importance of human instincts: hunger drives us to food and thirst to drink. And he seems to take natural sensation and thought as an instinct. He opposes the "instinctive self" to the "conscious self," promoting the former and belittling the latter. However, when he claims to obey instincts, he surely is conscious of the instincts. He cannot suspend judgment on what are the instincts. Instincts as such, when they are not talked about, is unconscious. However, when people have talked about them, they become conscious for the talkers. Unlike the typical modern sceptics who holds that any knowledge is impossible, Sextus does not deny the possibility to have

⁶⁴ PH I 134.

⁶⁵ PH I 59.

⁶⁶ PH I 30.

⁶⁷ Oliver A. Johnson, *Skepticism and Cognitivism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), p.105.

knowledge, although he challenges the possibility. When he accepts what are instincts, he seems not to deny that he has knowledge about the instincts.

Sextus, the dualist of appearance and reality, insists the dichotomy of theory and practice. Theoretically, he holds scepticism; practically, he holds naturalism. Through his scepticism, he differentiates himself from other philosophers, positive and negative dogmatists. However, his scepticism cannot be applied to practice. In practice, he cannot carry out the principle of suspending judgment. Rather, he takes naturalist principle to guide his action.

As stated in the first chapter, Sextus regards scepticism as a philosophy of life. He thinks that his skepticism is a practical philosophy. Paradoxically, however, this practical philosophy is not applicable to practice! For him, only naturalism (and conservatism stated in the last chapter) can be applicable to practice.

In order to escape inconsistency, Sextus may take human instincts as appearances. When he states, "We follow a line of reasoning which, in accordance with appearances, points a life comfortable to the customs of our country and its laws and instinctive feelings."⁶⁸ he thinks of customs, laws, and instinctive feelings as appearances. Compatible to his scepticism based on distinction between appearances and reality, Sextus may state that he accepts customs and laws as appearances, but suspends judgment concerning them as reality. This statement may make sense in that Sextus thinks that customs and laws seem good at their appearance, but he is not sure that they are good at their reality. However, such form of saying cannot be applicable to human instincts. He cannot say, "I accept human instincts as appearances, but suspend judgment about them

⁶⁸ PH I 17.

as reality.” This sentence violates the meaning of “instincts.” Evidently, it is absurd to say, “Hunger seems to drive me to food and thirst seems to drink, but I am not sure that they are really so.”

For Sextus, his naturalism is in accord with his conservatism. Both of them mitigate his skepticism. As a conservative, he follows customs, morals, laws, and son on; as a naturalist, he obeys instincts and other natural inescapable factors. In his light, natural rules are similar to social norms. They are all guides of human behaviuors. He thinks that he is not a subverter of human normal actions. He does not challenge ordinary life, but only challenges philosophical (or dogmatical) attempt to transcend the contingencies of ordinary life by seeking to discover the truth which lay beyond appearance.

Facing nature, Sextus’s skepticism cannot help but be mute. As a conservative, he may accept customs, morals as appearances, suspending judgment about their reality. However, as a naturalist, he cannot accept naturally inescapable factors as appearances, suspending judgment concerning their reality. He cannot doubt these factors. Nature forces the sceptic to alienate himself from his uncertain mind. Moreover, since everyone accepts the natural rules such as hunger drives us to food and thirst to drink, Sextus cannot use the Tropes to set things in opposition, thus reaching suspension of judgment (only if some persons believe the natural rules while others does not, Sextus can apply the Tropes to suspend judgment⁶⁹).

Of course, Sextus may say, “That I am hungry is evident, and that hunger drives me to food is also evident. I do not doubt the evident, but only doubt the non-evident.” But

⁶⁹ In the ten Tropes, the main argument for suspending judgment is that there are different sense feelings, views, etc. concerning the same matter. Of course, it is questionable that this argument is tenable.

what is the criterion by which we can differentiate the non-evident from the evident? Sextus cannot offer such a criterion. According to him, if you want to offer any criterion of anything, you would either be arbitrary or involve in infinite regresses (a criterion needs another criterion, and another criterion needs new another criterion...) If he cannot set up the criterion, how can he say, "I do not doubt the evident, but only doubt the non-evident?"

Many philosophers think that naturalism is inconsistent with scepticism. For example, talking about Hume, P.F.Strawson states that Hume's naturalism is the opposite of his scepticism: "One might speak of two Humes: Hume the sceptic and Hume the naturalist."⁷⁰ If it is true for Hume, is it also true for Sextus? I think that the answer is "yes." As stated above, when Sextus holds naturalism, he cannot help but have beliefs; and when he has beliefs, the tenet of his skepticism, suspension of judgment, has collapsed.

I think that Sextus's conflict between scepticism and naturalism foreshadows Hume's one. The latter is not new, but the continuity and development of the former. However, there is a difference between the two. Sextus himself maybe is not conscious of the conflict, so that the conflict is not presented fully in his philosophy. But Hume is conscious of the conflict, and he uses his naturalism refute his skepticism.

Naturalism plays a more important role in Chuang Tzu's philosophy. In the *Chuang Tzu*, only several chapters, such as chapter 2 and chapter 17, deal with scepticism, whereas most chapters of the book deal with naturalism. Some philosophers, especially

⁷⁰ P.F. Strawson, *Scepticism and Naturalism: Some varieties* , (1985). p.12.

those who are concerned for environmental ethics, may think that naturalism is the most important in Chuang Tzu's philosophy.

Like Sextus, Chuang Tzu advocates human instincts. Both of them want to use the "instinctive self" to suppress the "conscious self" or the "rational self." However, Chuang Tzu's concept of human instincts has a wider sense than that of Sextus. In the former's eyes, they include not only natural inclinations such as hunger drives us to good, but also other human natures. For example, he even thinks of seeking freedom as a human instinct.

Unlike Sextus who has a view of consistency between nature and society, and holds that following nature's guide is similar to following social norms, Chuang Tzu opposes nature to society. According to Chuang Tzu, following nature's guide is good, but following social norms, as stated in the last chapter, is evil, for they suppress human nature, and stop men from seeking freedom.

Although Chuang Tzu is a rebel to society, but he is a conservative to nature. His feeling of "following nature" is much stronger than Sextus's. While Sextus's naturalism mainly concerns human instincts, Chuang Tzu's concerns both human nature and nature of nature. Chuang Tzu's conservative attitude toward nature is the most important feature of his naturalism. This attitude may be expressed as the following.

First, humankind is insignificant while nature is significant. For Chuang Tzu, humankind is only a tiny part of nature which is infinite. Facing the infinite nature, man cannot help but feel humble. He opposes any kind of arrogance for human beings. In Chinese landscape paintings, there is a common thing: figures are too small to be seen

while trees, mountains, etc. are very large. It reflects Taoist, especially Chuang Tzu's, view of the relationship between man and nature.

Second, non-human beings and human beings have equal "natural rights." Human beings have no natural superiorities to non-human beings. Everything is seen as being "ontologically equal" and "axiologically equal." Non-human beings are regarded as having extrinsic values of theirs rather than having only extrinsic or instrumental values. For Chuang Tzu, impartial Tao embraces everything, and everything has Tao.

Both Chuang Tzu and Sextus oppose homocentrism. In the first Trope, Sextus details that animals may have sense impressions which are different from those of man. And he holds that we have no reason to think of ours as superior to other animal's. However, Chuang Tzu's anti-anthropocentrism is more thorough and radical than Sextus's. According to Chuang Tzu, human beings have no natural supriorities over all other non-human beings, including not only other animals, but also all life and non-life.

Third, men have an internal relation to nature. In the modern West after Descartes, people focus on the external relation of men to nature based on a qualitative separation and confrontation between the human and non-human worlds. For them, the non-human world is to be rationally studied, researched, and then scientifically manipulated and exploited for the maximum utility of serving man. However, according to Chuang Tzu's internalistic point of view of nature, man is the consummate of nature rather than the conqueror of nature; man is the participant of nature rather than a predator of nature. As a part of nature, man does not stand opposite nature in a hostile way. On the contrary, man should have profound concern and care for nature at large, as befitting his own nature.

For his own growth and well-being, man has to cultivate the internal link in him between himself and Mother Nature.⁷¹ Because of man's internal relation to nature, Chuang Tzu advocates that man should wholly become one with nature. He says, "the ten thousand things are one with me."⁷² In addition to Chuang Tzu, many other Chinese philosophers seek man's oneness with nature.

Last, and the most importantly, as a poetic philosopher, Chuang Tzu always keeps a aesthetical mood to nature. In his eyes, all natural things have aesthetical values. Lee Yearly rightly says, "Chuang-Tzu argues you ought to deal with everything the way you deal with esthetic objects. All life should be viewed as an esthetic panorama. We are not fulfilled through the interaction between human beings as most think. Rather we are fulfilled when we see all that we encounter as esthetic objects."⁷³ Chuang Tzu advocates "Heavenly Happiness" which is a kind of happiness caused by man's feeling beauty of natural objects. For him, the happiest thing is to stroll in untouched nature, seeing birds, flowers, trees, rocks, etc., feeling his oneness with the whole environment.

Facing beautiful nature, Chuang tzu's sceptical mind has totally gone. Read the following story.

Chuang Tzu and Hui Tzu were strolling along the dam of the Hao River when Chuang Tzu said, "See how minnows come out and dart around where they please! That's what fish really enjoy!"

Hui Tzu said, "You're not a fish--how do you know what fish enjoy?"

⁷¹ Chung-Ying Cheng, "On the Environmental Ethics of the Tao and the Ch'i," *Environmental Ethics*, 8 (1986): 354.

⁷² CT, p.43.

⁷³ Lee Yearly, "The perfected Person in the Radical Chuang-Tzu," in Victor H. Mair, ed., *Experimental Essays on Chuang-Tzu* (1983), p. 136.

Chuang Tzu said, "You're not I, so how do you know I don't know what fish enjoy?"

Hui Tzu said, "I am not you, so I certainly don't know what you know. On the other hand, you're certainly not a fish--so that still proves you don't know what fish enjoy!"

Chuang Tzu said, "Let's go back to your original question, please. You asked me *how*

I know what fish enjoy--so you already know I know it when you asked the question. I know it by standing here beside the Hao."⁷⁴

In this story, Chuang Tzu is not a skeptic, but the opposite of it. Suppose that that day is particular fine--the breeze is gentle, the sun is warm, and the air is fresh. In strolling, Chuang Tzu is in very happy mood, reaching the realm of "Heavenly Happiness." Under this circumstance, he cannot refrain from seeing the fish as enjoyable. If we follow analytical philosophy, we should refuse to accept anything that is neither well defined nor verifiable such as the fish's enjoyment. Furthermore, there is something wrong in Chuang Tzu's logic when he debates with his friend, Hui Tzu. He wrongly supposes that when Hui Tzu asks, "How do you know what fish enjoy?" Hui Tzu already knows that Chuang Tzu knows what fish enjoy. And Chuang Tzu actually answers the question, "Where do you know what fish enjoy?" rather than Hui Tzu's original question, "How do you know what fish enjoy?" (Of course, what Hui Tzu says also has problems. For example, he presupposes the controvertible thesis: we cannot know other minds.) However, Chuang Tzu's feeling of fish's enjoyment is a direct and intuitive experience which should not be analyzed by logic and reason. Chuang Tzu believes that this experience is natural and correct.

⁷⁴ CT, p.188-89.

As a naturalist, Chuang Tzu explicitly gives up his scepticism when he argues for his natural belief that he knows the fish's enjoyment. And he is happy to oppose scepticism. On the other hand, Sextus never explicitly say that he forsakes his scepticism, even if he sometimes actually does so. Although naturalism forces him to stop suspending judgment, Sextus is reluctant to give up his scepticism. Unlike Chuang Tzu, Sextus does not overtly oppose scepticism. We can conclude that while Chuang Tzu's scepticism is more radical than Sextus's, Chuang Tzu's alienating himself from scepticism is also more radical than Sextus's.

That a sceptic refutes his scepticism is not a seldom thing. As stated above, Hume also uses his naturalism refute his scepticism. It shows that there is no impassable chasm between the sceptic and the anti-sceptic. It is not a strange thing that a sceptic often changes his sceptical mind.

Chapter 5

Scepticism and Language

Compatibles to their anti-anthropocentrism, both of Chuang Tzu and Sextus disagree that only the humankind has the ability to speak. Rather, they think that it is highly possible that various animals can speak. Chuang Tzu wonders if there is any difference between human words and the peeps of baby birds.⁷⁵ In his work, there are many dialogues between animals (e.g., between a big bird and a small one, and between a man and a fish). If a literator, especially a writer of nursery tales, writes in the style of animal dialogues, we are not surprised at that. But few philosophers write in the style. Viewed from the style, we can see again Chuang Tzu's unconventional behavior.

Sextus compares the utterances of animals to the speech of foreigners: "[E]ven if we do not understand the utterance of the so-called irrational animals, still it is not improbable that they converse although we fail to understand them; for in fact when we listen to the talk of barbarians we do not understand it, and it seems to us a kind of uniform chatter."⁷⁶ Furthermore, Sextus claims, from the fact that dogs and other animals respond with different sounds in distinctly different circumstance, we can conclude that these animals exhibit, with their barks and cries, what the stoics call enunciated logos. Although Sextus repeatedly states that sceptic's action is conventional, his claim that animals can speak is unusual. Furthermore, most of his linguistic expressions are also unusual. As Charlotte Stough points out, "In fact the sceptic's manner of expression is

⁷⁵ CT, p.39.

⁷⁶ PH I 74.

often intentionally, even purposefully, unconventional. He [Sextus] is, at the very least, unmindful of the rules of ordinary discourse.”⁷⁷ In the following I will show how the sceptic’s linguistic expressions depart from conventional or ordinary ones.

First, there are many of Sextus’s terms which have much narrower meanings than what the same terms in the ordinary usage have. They include “dogma,” “to determine,” “all thing,” and so on. Look at the following table.

Terms	Ordinary Meanings	Sextus’s Particular Meanings
Dogma	Approval of a thing (it does not matter whether it is evident or non-evident)	“Assent to one of the non-evident objects of scientific inquiry” ⁷⁸
All things	Every things (including the evident and the non-evident)	“The no-evident matters investigated by the dogmatists” ⁷⁹
To determine	To state a thing	“to put forward something non-evident combined with assent” ⁸⁰

From the above table we can see that Sextus uses the terms whose meanings are different from the ordinary ones. When ordinary people say that they hold a dogma, they may hold one concerning the evident thing. But in Sextus’s eyes, “to hold a dogma” only means “to hold something concerning the non-evident things.” And when he claims, “All

⁷⁷ Charlotte Stough, “Sextus Empiricus On Non-Assertion,” *Phronesis*, 29 (1984): 138.

⁷⁸ PH I 13.

⁷⁹ PH I 198.

⁸⁰ PH I 197.

things are undetermined," the term of "all thing" only mean "no-evident things," without including the evident.

Second, contrary to the first, Sextus uses some terms whose meanings are much broader than those of the same terms in the ordinary usages. The most evident one of these terms is his "appearance." As stated in the second chapter, this is a blanket term, including meanings which are excluded by ordinary people when they use the term. According to them, "appearance" means the "the object of sense." But according to Sextus, it includes things appearing to thought. And he even takes his sceptic's philosophical utterance as appearance.

Third, compatible to his contrast between appearance and reality, Sextus differentiates dogmatical language from undogmatical language. According to him, there are two kinds of dogmatical philosophers: one kind, such as Aristotle, Epicurus, and Stoics, claims that they have discovered truth (reality); another kind, namely the Academic, asserts that truth cannot be apprehended. The first are positive dogmatists, while the second are negative dogmatists. The two kinds of philosophers are common in that they all use dogmatical language, assertion-language. That is to say, speaking in an assertive tone, they are certain of what they say. Contrary to them, Sextus claims, sceptics use undogmatical language, non-assertion-language: they are not certain of what they say. In other word, they think that their scepticism is applicable to their own statements. However, ordinary people do not think that there is a need for them to differentiate "dogmatical language" from "undogmatical language." Needless to say, they do not

prefer the latter to the former. Generally speaking, ordinary people are sure of what they say. Therefore, Sextus would think that they use “dogmatical language.”

Let us return to Chuang Tzu. He uses language more unconventionally than Sextus does. Chuang Tzu is a man who

expounded [his views] in odd and outlandish terms, in brash and bombastic language, in unbound and unbordered phrases, abandoning himself to the times without partisanship...He believed the world was drowned in turbidness and that it was impossible to address it in sober language.⁸¹

As a philosopher with poetic qualities, Chuang Tzu develops an unrestrained style which is rare to be seen in philosophical writings. And as a master of rhapsodic, sophisticated argument, parable, anecdote, and gnomic verse, he uses various unusual styles to express his views.

It is easy to find many contrasts between Chuang Tzu's styles and Sextus's. The former are poetic, while the latter are prosaic. Wit and intuition play an important role in Chuang Tzu's work, while reason and logic do so in Sextus's works. To say that Chuang Tzu is illogical and irrational is wrong. But it is true that in his work (and the most Chinese philosophical works), there are few strict logical arguments like those in Western philosophical works. Not strict logical arguments, but parables and allegories are Chuang Tzu's main expressions. Derk Bodde says, “Chinese philosophy, because of this special emphasis upon analogy, is rarely written in the form of logically developed essays, but

⁸¹ CT, p.373.

usually consists of a series of picturesque metaphors, parables, and anecdotes strung together to illustrate certain main ideas. Once more the result is to make Chinese philosophy poetic rather than logical.”⁸² On the other hand, we should note that even in Western Philosophy analogy sometimes is essential. Plato’s allegory of the cave, Descartes’s metaphor of the evil demon, and Sextus’s which we will state latter make a lasting impression on us. Chad Hansen rightly writes, “Skillful use of analogy is crucial to philosophical exposition, and there are no obvious reasons why sound arguments cannot be expressed poetically”⁸³

Similar to Sextus, Chuang Tzu advocates non-dogmatical language. He also is not certain of what he says, and even not sure whether what he said has really said something or not: “Now I have just said something. But I don’t know whether what I have said has really said something or whether it hasn’t said something”⁸⁴ It shows Chuang Tzu’s thoroughgoing sceptical attitude toward his own speech. This attitude is based on his view that speech has no constancy. Comparing words to wind and waves,⁸⁵ he thinks that words have no fixed meanings. If someone, like a Confucian or a Mohist, insists that speech has fixed meanings, he will be a dogmatist. Using dogmatical language, he would be bothered by his own words. Advocating undogmatical language, both Sextus and Chuang Tzu intend to liberate us from any fixation of words, including our own words.

Generally speaking, however, linguistic expression is a clumsy instrument to express the ideas of scepticism. As we know, a basic idea of scepticism is “suspension of

⁸² Derk Bodde, *China’s First Unifier* (1967), p.228.

⁸³ Chad Hansen, *Language and Logic in Ancient China* (1983), p.15.

⁸⁴ CT, p.43.

⁸⁵ CT, p.61.

judgment." Evidently, only "keep silence," rather than speaking or writing, is a better way to express the idea of "suspension of judgment." However, both Sextus and Chuang Tzu write their works. Does a sceptic who writes or speaks bring about self--negation? This is an interesting question for long time. Surely, the two sceptics are involved in the paradox: if they do not write or speak, what they think cannot be understood by others; but if they write or speak, it is hard for them to avoid the charge that they have violated the principle of suspension of judgment. It is possible that poets, when writing poems, may only express their private feelings, without making judgment. But it is hardly possible for philosophers who write philosophical works to do so. Actually, the works of the two sceptics are filled with various declarative sentences. This means that they make various judgments. Even if Sextus uses his typical expression, "something seems so and so," he cannot avoid making judgment (this expression shows his tentative judgment about some state of affairs).⁸⁶ For Chuang Tzu, even his odd saying, "When I say that you are dreaming, I am dreaming, too," also expresses his judgment.

In fact, the undogmatical language or non-assertion-language is the self-erasing language. Using such a language, the two sceptics fall into self-negation. As Avner Cohen says, "In general, the sceptic is trying to express something that cannot be said without causing an act of self-negation: to say it would amount to canceling it."⁸⁷ Both Chuang

⁸⁶ Some critics make non-judgmental interpretations of Sextus. See Julia Annas and Jonathan Barnes, *The modes of Scepticism* (1985), pp. 23-4; Jonathan Barnes, "The belief of a Pyhrronist," *Elenchos* 4 (1983):5-43; and M. F. Burnyeat, in three papers, "Can the Sceptic live his Scepticism?", in Myles Burnyeat, ed., *The Sceptical Tradition* (1983), pp. 117-48, "Idealism and Greek Philosophy: What Descartes Saw and Berkeley Missed," *Philosophical Review*, 91 (1982): 3-40, and "The Sceptic in His Place and Time," in Richard Rorty, J.B. Schneewind, and Quentin Skinner, ed., *Philosophy in History* (1984), pp. 225-54. I do think that non-judgmental interpretations are right.

⁸⁷ Avner Cohen, "Sextus Empiricus: Scepticism as a Therapy," *The Philosophical Forum*, 15 (1984):417.

Tzu and Sextus are conscious of their self-negation. Sextus says that his expression is just like aperient drugs which do not merely eliminate the humours from the body, but also expel themselves along with the humours: “[I]n regard to all the Sceptic expressions, we must grasp first the fact that we make no positive assertion respecting their absolute truth, since we say that they may possibly be confuted by themselves, seeing that they themselves are included in the things to which their doubt applies, just as aperient drugs do not merely eliminate the humours, but also expel themselves along with the humours.”⁸⁸ And Sextus also compares his work to a ladder one uses to climb to some vantage point, kicking it over when one has reached the goal.⁸⁹ Similar to Sextus, Chuang Tzu has another metaphor: “The fish trap exists because of the fish; once you’ve gotten the fish, you may forget the trap. The snare exists because of rabbit; once you’ve gotten the rabbit, you can forget the snare. Words exist because of meaning; once you’ve gotten the meaning, you can forget the words.”⁹⁰ For the two skeptics, words are only means to some ends; when you get the ends, the means are useless. Their words are like aperient drugs, ladder, fish trap, snare, and so on. You can abandon the sceptic’s words when you understand what he means. And the two sceptics would like to forsake their words when they think that they are understood by others. However, Can they be understood by others? I will return to the question latter.

In the common life, people often say, “I am not sure of what I said.” Nobody thinks that this sentence has any problem. But if a sceptic utters such a sentence, and if “what I said” is his scepticism, it would become “I am not sure of my scepticism” or “I doubt my

⁸⁸ PH I 206.

⁸⁹ *Against the Logicians* II 481.

⁹⁰ CT, p.302.

scepticism.” If we equate scepticism to doubt, it would become “I doubt my doubt.” This odd but admissible sentence makes doubter non-doubter. Here we can see again that the “rigid opposite” of sceptics and non-sceptics has disappeared. Sceptics hope to cure people’s stubbornness and self-conceit. But if they dogmatically hold their skepticism, they will involve another kind of stubbornness and self-conceit. I think that only when you aptly and appropriately keep sceptical and (or) dogmatical mind in different situations, can you get rid of stubbornness and self-conceit.

Using the above-mentioned metaphors, Chuang Tzu and Sextus show the ideas that language is unreliable: you should not keep a rigid and dogmatical attitude toward any language, including the language of yourself. Furthermore, Sextus even shows a more radical attitude toward language: learning a language is impossible. According to him, If language signifies something, it does so either by nature or by convention. Yet, language cannot consist of natural signs. For Greeks and non-Greek speakers cannot talk one another. But language acquisition cannot rely on conventional signs, either. Those who understand the conventions by which their words single out the appropriate things must already know the rules. That is to say, such people are already familiar with the language. For them, speaking it is just a matter of recollecting what they know. But for those who do not know the language yet and want to learn how its locutions work, they will not already know the rules. Nor will they be able to learn rules by demonstration, because the established convention governing the ways locutions are ordered in a particular language is not something plainly visible, something that could simply be seen, by ostension, say. Otherwise locutions would be natural signs anyone could use, Greek and barbarian alike.

And if students cannot learn a language by demonstration, they cannot be taught another way, since all forms of intellectual apprehension are already suspected as conceptual and private. Consequently, learning a language is impossible, because the rules cannot be taught.⁹¹ Here we can see his more radical attitude toward language than that stated in the above metaphors. Since he explicitly claims that learning a language is impossible, he makes a negative judgment about language. That is to say, he actually falls into negative dogmatism.⁹²

Chuang Tzu also shows his negative dogmatism when he states that words cannot express what people mean in their mind, and that the ultimate reality (Tao or Way) is unsayable: "Words have value; what is of value in word is meaning. Meaning has something it is pursuing, but the thing that it is pursuing cannot be put into words and handed down"⁹³ Following Lao Tzu's famous saying, "The Tao [The Way] that can be told of is not the eternal Tao,"⁹⁴ Chuang Tzu holds that Tao is ineffable: "The Great Way [Tao] is not named...If the Way is made clear, it is not the Way."⁹⁵ Considering that it often is difficult to tell negative dogmatism from scepticism, we may think of Chuang Tzu's negative dogmatism on language as linguistic scepticism. Influenced by Lao Tzu and Chuang Tzu, many classical Chinese philosophers hold linguistic scepticism in

⁹¹ PH III 266-9; cf. *Against the Ethicists* 241-243.

⁹² Sextus often criticizes the Academic as the negative dogmatist, as stated above. However, this charge may be applicable to Sextus himself on many occasions. Charlotte Stough rightly points out, "In fact it will be true for the most part that Pyrrhonian Sceptic assents to the same propositions as the Academic...His [Pyrrhonian Sceptic's] philosophical demeanor...will exactly match the behavior of the negative dogmatist." ("Sextus Empiricus on Non-Assertion," *Phronesis*, 29 (1984): 162).

⁹³ CT, p.152.

⁹⁴ Wing-Tsit Chan, *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy* (1963), p.139

⁹⁵ CT, p.44.

different degrees. Generally speaking, Chinese philosophers have a stronger feeling of non-reliability of language than Western philosophers.

The two sceptics fall into negative dogmatism by different ways. For Sextus, it is the paradox of language learning that leads him to fall into negative dogmatism. For Chuang Tzu, it is the incompetence of language in expressing meanings that makes him to do so. Although there have been various possible solutions to the paradox Sextus offered, it seems to me that no one is satisfied. While Sextus's paradox is theoretically interesting, Chuang Tzu's statement of incompetence of language has a practical function: it reminds people to be careful of the limitations of language.

Since the languages of the two sceptics are peculiar, can ordinary people understand what they say? Their speech is like the sounds of foreigners or of even animals? Although the two sceptics are not sure of what they say, they are confident that they would be understood by others. Actually, however, it is difficult, if not impossible, to understand them. They play the language-game which is totally different from the ordinary ones. However, I think, there is a way to access the two sceptics: not to take their words as very serious. Sextus's two metaphors mentioned above shows that the doctor is humorous. In comparison with Sextus, Chuang Tzu is much more humorous. The Butterfly Dream and the Story of Lady Li which we have stated are all humorous.⁹⁶ Anyone who read the *Chuang Tzu* easily feels the author's humour. Burton Watson states that Chuang Tzu

⁹⁶ In the *Chuang Tzu* there are many humorous discourses which have philosophical significance. Another example is the Story of Monkey Trainer: "When the monkey trainer was handing out acorns, he said, 'You get three in the morning and four at night.' This made all the monkeys furious. 'Well, then,' he said, 'You get four in the morning and three at night.' The monkeys were all delighted. There was no change in the reality behind the words, and yet the monkeys responded with joy and anger." (CT, p.41.) The story implies that philosophical debates (as well as all other debates) are meaningless. That is to say, the difference between the two opposites in any debate is the same as the difference between "three in the morning" and "four at night."

makes humour “the very core of his style”⁹⁷ For Chuang Tzu, it is impossible to use “sober language” (serious language) because of turbidness of the world. Of course, a humorous language is a non-serious language. The two sceptics prefer to use such a language. David Glidden says, “Sextus, like Derrida, certainly does not take his own writing seriously.”⁹⁸ So does Chuang Tzu. However, since philosophy is serious, the two philosophers cannot always use non-serious languages. Actually, they cannot avoid using serious languages. Thus, their blending non-serious languages with serious ones again makes it difficult to understand them.

Another way to understand Sextus and Chuang Tzu is taking their languages as evocative. The function of evocative language is not descriptive, but prescriptive. The prescription cannot be reached by literalism. If you do so, you will misunderstand it. Evocative language induces people to reach a new realm of thought. The two sceptics induce people to cast off rashness and self-conceit. If their inducement is successful, people would understand their languages even if they do not withstand strict logical analyses. Thinking of the two sceptics’s languages as evocative languages, as long as they actualize their prescriptive function people can understand it, even if they negate themselves. Not all self-negative statements are senseless. I think that the two philosopher’s languages, like many other philosophical paradoxes are not senseless. Even today their evocative function still exists.

Chad Hansen says, “Their [Chinese thinkers’s] concern in writing was to inspire and move the readers to action...They saw the function of language and theorizing as its

⁹⁷ CT, p.5.

⁹⁸ Sceptic Semiotics,” *Phronesis*, 29 (1983): 243.

impact on behavior.”⁹⁹ Chuang Tzu’s language is a good example for what Hansen says. He uses various styles to actualize his language’s role of guiding action. Taking his scepticism as a philosophy of life, Sextus, like Chuang Tzu, emphasizes language’s impact on human behavior. Viewed from this perspective, Sextus alienate himself from many Western philosophers who think that description is the real role of language. It is important to know that many descriptive sentences in Sextus’s works play a prescriptive role. His typical expression, “Something seems so and so, but I suspend judgment on that it is really so and so,” which is a descriptive sentence, aims at changing people’s dogmatical attitude, and letting them take undogmatical actions. We should understand the doctor’s real intention. If we keep in mind that the philosophy of Sextus and Chuang Tzu is a therapeutic philosophy, we maybe do not care much about their logical problems.

However, it is difficult to estimate their therapeutic effects. In stead of talking about this topic, I would like ask a question, do sceptics themselves need a therapy? Suppose that Sextus is asked a question, “Are you a man?” If his answer is “I seem a man, but I am not sure that I am really a man,” it is reasonable to think that he either makes a joke, or has mental disorder. If it is the latter, Sextus, the doctor and philosopher, who hope to cure the sickness of others, should be under treatment! If scepticism can be used to cure the sickness of dogmatists, I think that dogmatism can be used to cure that of sceptics.

⁹⁹ Chad Hansen, *Language and logic in ancient China* (1983), p. 26.

Chapter 6

Different Role in the Development of Philosophy

In the last chapter I want to talk about something about the role of Chuang Tzu's scepticism in the development of Chinese philosophy and that of Sextus's in the development of Western philosophy. I think that the former plays a less important role in Chinese philosophy while the latter plays a more important role in Western philosophy.

Sextus is the last sceptic in the ancient times. During the Middle Ages, Sextus's scepticism was practically unknown for more than one thousand years. As C.B. Schmitt points out, "Of the three major ancient writings on scepticism still extant--Sextus Empiricus's *Opera*, Diogenes Laertius's *Life of Pyrrho*, and Cicero's *Academica*--the first and the third were known to a very few in the West during the Middle Ages, while the second was apparently wholly unknown...The writing of Sextus Empiricus...exerted no visible influence during the Middle Ages."¹⁰⁰ However, during the Renaissance, Sextus's works were rediscovered. Since then, his scepticism has attracted more and more people's attention. By the end of the seventeenth century, he was regarded as the father of modern philosophy. For example, Pierre Bayle asserts that modern philosophy began with the reintroduction of Sextus.¹⁰¹ And many of recent interpreters, such as Julia Annas and

¹⁰⁰ C. B. Schmitt, "The Rediscovery of the Ancient Skepticism," in Myles Burnyeat, ed., *The Sceptical Tradition* (1983), p. 227.

¹⁰¹ See Richard H. Popkin, *The History of Scepticism from Erasmus to Spinoza* (1978), p.252.

Jonathan Barnes¹⁰², Richard H. Popkin¹⁰³, and C.B. Schmitt¹⁰⁴, emphasize the important role of Sextus's scepticism in the development of modern Western philosophy.

Since the Renaissance, almost all of the Western philosophers deal with scepticism, in the forms of either holding it, or defeating it, or both. It is interesting that the two great philosophers, Descartes and Kant, in the seventeenth and eighteenth century are involved in defeating scepticism and at the same time advocating it. According to Descartes's unlimited doubt, senses are apt to deceive us and are thus unreliable as a basis of truth; all that we know may be part of dream¹⁰⁵; it is possible that there is a demon who distorts our judgment. But in the process of trying to doubt everything, he claims to discover an indubitable truth: "I think, therefore, I am." Although Descartes applies the sceptical method more thoroughly than former skeptics had, he asserts that he is the first of all men to overthrow the doubts of the Sceptics. Satirically, however, after Descartes, scepticism has not been overthrown. Rather, it more and more flourishes. As Professor Richard N. Bosley correctly points out, of the two powerful currents of modern thought, one of them "moves in the direction of greater and greater skepticism"¹⁰⁶ As for Kant, his mature philosophical work is regarded as a reply to Hume's scepticism. He believes that

¹⁰² "It was the rediscovery of Sextus and of Greek scepticism which shaped the course of philosophy for the next three hundred years." (*The modes of Scepticism* (1985), p.5)

¹⁰³ "[A]s the only Greek Pyrrhonian sceptic whose works survived, he (Sextus) came to have a dramatic role in the formation of modern thought" (supra note 96 at p.19).

¹⁰⁴ "It now appears that the rediscovered skeptical texts of the antiquity played an important role in the development of modern philosophy. During the past fifty years various studies have progressively clarified the role of scepticism in the intellectual climate of the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth century. Although there is a certain amount of disagreement among scholars as to precisely what significance the skeptical movement had in the development of philosophy, theology, science, and literature during this period, most interpreters agree that the recovery and assimilation of the teachings of the ancient skeptical school was of the primary importance." (Supra note 95 at p. 225.)

¹⁰⁵ This view of Descartes is very similar to Chuang Tzu's we stated in the second chapter of this thesis.

¹⁰⁶ Richard N. Bosley, *On Knowing That One Knows* (1993), p.5.

he can provide foundations for our knowledge of the world. But the knowledge which he speaks of is only the knowledge about the phenomenal world. As to the noumenal world, Kant holds a complete scepticism. We can see that Kant actually continues Sextus's tradition of doubting reality, but not doubting appearance. Indeed, Sextus's sceptical dualism foreshadows Kant's philosophy.

Of course, the role of the scepticism in modern Western philosophy is not the same as the role of Sextus's scepticism in the field. In modern Western philosophy, various kinds of skepticism are different from its ancient counterpart. However, as many scholars note, of the three major ancient writings on scepticism mentioned above, Sextus's *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* is the most important and most detailed. The recovery of it is the key to the rise of modern skepticism and its latter development. Many of modern sceptical ideas have a root of Sextus' doctrine. For example, as Richard Popkin stated, even though Hume sharply criticizes Pyrrhonism, his scepticism is a more consistent and forceful statement of the original Pyrrhonian view.¹⁰⁷ Needless to say, many modern sceptics, such as Bayle, overtly claims to inherit Pyrrhonism. Therefore, in spite of the fact that the role of scepticism is not equal to that of Sextus's scepticism, the former may evidently show the latter.

Unlike Sextus, Chuang Tzu has a good luck that the influence of his teachings has not discontinued in China since his death. His writing has been studied generation after generation for more than two thousand years. Most of traditional Chinese intellectuals read the *Chuang Tzu*. There were innumerable annotated readings on his work in the long

¹⁰⁷ Richard Popkin, Article on Scepticism, in Paul Edwards, ed. (1967), *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, v. 7. p. 456

Chinese history. Unfortunately, however, Chuang Tzu's scepticism does not play an important role in the development of Chinese philosophy. Confucianism, the official and dominant philosophy in classical China (from about the second century to the nineteenth century), has nothing to do with scepticism. And within Taoism after Chuang Tzu, scepticism was not regarded as an important teaching. In the West, there have been great sceptics, such as Bayle and Hume, who inherit and develop Sextus' teachings. In China, however, there has been no great sceptic who follows Chuang Tzu. Taoists after Chuang Tzu neglect or belittle his scepticism. For example, Kuo Hsing (died in 312), a famous follower of Chuang Tzu, seems to overstate his naturalism and neglect his scepticism. In his work, *commentary on the Chuang Tzu*, Kuo Hsiang does not note Chuang Tzu's spirit of doubt expressed by interrogative sentences. Rather he uses declarative sentences to interpret Chuang Tzu's sceptical thought expressed in interrogative sentences. Thus, the mind of uncertainty has been totally changed into that of certainty.

The statement that Chuang Tzu's scepticism does not play an important role in the development of Chinese philosophy does not mean that it has not any influence on the field. An obvious instance is his linguistic scepticism which is inherited by many Chinese philosophers. It is a tradition for them to be careful of the limitations of language. They often remind others to pay great attention to the meanings which are not fully expressed by words. It is well known that Chinese linguistic scepticism reaches its peak in Zen (Ch'an) buddhistical philosophy. Giving up all linguistic expressions including speaking and writing, the Zen masters employ their gestures or bodily movements to answer their pupil's questions. Moreover, Chuang Tzu's scepticism has an impact on Chinese

behaviors. For example, there have been many Chinese rebels and recluses who are affected by Chuang Tzu's deep doubt of customs, morals, laws, social order, and the whole human civilization.

Why do the two kinds of scepticism of Sextus and Chuang Tzu play the different roles in the development of Western philosophy and that of Chinese philosophy respectively? It is difficult to answer the question fully. In the following I will try to answer the question in two ways. The first is to explain it by the factors within scepticism itself, while the second is to do so by those outside scepticism. Surely, my answer to this question is very tentative.

There are different qualities between the two kinds of scepticism. An important one, I think, is that Sextus's scepticism has greater elasticity than Chuang Tzu's. Sextus's elasticity is the result of his dualism and conservatism. By dualism, he only doubts reality, but not appearance. And by conservatism, he does not doubt customs, habits, laws and so on. Because of the elasticity, Sextus's scepticism has an adaptability and attraction to many people. Contrary to this, Chuang Tzu's scepticism is pretty rigid: it equalizes all things, rebels against all the tradition of custom, habits, laws, and the whole human civilization, and absolutely obey nature. The rigidity makes Chuang Tzu's scepticism attract fewer people. Furthermore, Chuang Tzu's rigidity shows that his scepticism takes an extreme form, which is difficult to be developed by the latter philosophers. On the other hand, Sextus's elasticity means that in his doctrine there is room for expansion of different views. In general, a rigid theory is more consistent than an elastic one. But an

elastic theory, if it is not too elastic to be apprehended, often has a greater prospect than a too rigid one.

However, I think that the factors outside scepticism are more important than those inside scepticism. Considering that the former is innumerable, I am confined to talk about the two of them: religion and science. The two are essential to the explanation of the different roles of the two kinds of scepticism.

Religion plays a much less important role in the Chinese history than it does in the Western history. Generally speaking, Chinese have not a strong religious feeling. Not any kind of religion has dominated the whole Chinese mental life.¹⁰⁸ Thus, there are few religious controversies in traditional China. However, religion is an important factor to influence the Western history. In the West, the writings of Sextus happened to be rediscovered when religious Reformation took place. With the development of religious controversies, scepticism thrives more and more. As stated in the third chapter, at the beginning, scepticism is used to defend Christian beliefs as stated in the third chapter. At that time, the problem of finding criterion of truth is central to the theological disputes. Was truth a matter for the Church to determine or could one return to the Bible, read the Scriptures, and judge for oneself? The humanist scholar Erasmus recommends the sceptical attitude of suspending judgment in his criticism of scholastic philosophy, but he defends Christian faith. Martin Luther furiously attacks Erasmus's view, maintaining that a true Christian cannot be sceptic. But a more typical defense of faith is offered by

¹⁰⁸ Confucianism is very powerful in traditional China. It seems to have somewhat religious effects for Chinese people, but its content basically is not religious. Some people think of Taoism as a school of religion. Actually, however, it on the whole is not. Moreover, Buddhism from India has been transformed into Chinese Buddhism in which religious content is not very strong.

Montaigne. He repeats that since sense experience and reason are deceptive and unable to comprehend reality, only through faith and revelation can real knowledge be gained. And he shows that the criterion employed to determine standards of judgment are themselves open to question and doubt, unless God gives us some indubitable first principles and makes our faculties reliable. Unaided by divine grace, all of man's achievements, even those of the most recent scientists, become dubious.

However, scepticism is not a good instrument to defend religious faith. If one holds scepticism thoroughly and universally, it is natural for him to raise the question, why does religious faith itself cannot be doubted? Therefore, in the religious controversies, scepticism is also used to argue against religious faith. This tendency has been more and more strong since the middle of the eighteenth century. As Popkin says, "[T]he term of 'scepticism' has been associated in the last two centuries with disbelief, especially disbelief of central doctrines of the Judeo-Christian tradition"¹⁰⁹ In either case that it is used to defend religious belief or that it is used to oppose the belief, scepticism more and more thrives with its usage in religious controversies. On the other hand, that there are few of such controversies in China may partly explain skepticism's non-thrivingness in the land.

Let us return to the second factor, science. It is the fact that modern science first emerged in the West, not in China. Joseph Needham's work, *Science and Civilization in China*, shows the great scientific achievements in ancient China, challenging the view that science is only the Western patent. It is true that China has its own tradition of science. However, it is also true that modern science did not start in the land. That

¹⁰⁹ Richard H. Popkin, *The History of Scepticism from Erasmus to Spinoza* (1979), p. xviii

modern science began in the West is significant. When we discuss the two kinds of scepticism's role in the West and China, we cannot neglect the fact. Without doubt, the birth of modern science is an important factor to make scepticism thrive in the West. As Paul Kurtz says, "The growth of modern science in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries played an especially powerful role in encouraging skepticism."¹¹⁰ Modern science brings about a new outlook of the world, questioning the revered truths of scholastic philosophy and theology. The shock of modern science gives a great impetus to scepticism¹¹¹. Furthermore, with the birth of modern science, scepticism in the West changes its focus: as stated in the first chapter, ancient scepticism was mainly regarded as a philosophy of life, while modern scepticism has been mainly taken as a theory of epistemology. Indeed, this change is due to the growth of modern science.

The birth of modern science in the West is a sudden thing. However, the development of Chinese science is very smooth and steady. Under this circumstance, the information which science provides in China does not shock people. Thus, China lacks an important impetus to scepticism like that in the West.

¹¹⁰ Paul Kurtz, *The New Scepticism* (1992), pp. 53-54.

¹¹¹ What I mean is not that science or scientists are sceptical, but that the birth of modern science has an influence upon thrivingness of scepticism. Shocked by modern science, many common people, other than scientists, do not know whether the old or the new is true. They do not know to accept which one. Modern science plays many roles, some of which conflict each other. On the one hand, it seems to move knowledge beyond indecision and doubt, on the other hand, it seems to encourage scepticism, especially in the early modern times. It is wrong to say that modern scientists are sceptics, but I think that it is true to say that the shock of modern science makes a contribution to thrivingness of early modern scepticism.

Conclusion

To conclude my thesis, I want to employ a pair of concepts in Chinese philosophy, yin and yang, to outline the relationship between scepticism and dogmatism, and that between the sceptical thoughts and the non-sceptical elements within the system of a sceptic.

The Chinese word, yang, originally means sunshine, or what pertains to sunshine and light; another word, yin, means the absence of sunshine, i.e., shadow or darkness. In latter development, yang and yin come to be regarded as two cosmic principles of forces, respectively representing masculinity, activity, heat, brightness, dryness, hardness, etc., for yang, and femininity, passivity, cold, darkness, wetness, softness, etc., for yin.¹¹² According to most Chinese classical philosophers, everything contains both yin and yang; nothing is entirely yin or yang; yin and yang coexist, interdepend each other; the unity of the two constitutes harmony; through the interaction of the two, all phenomena of the universe are produced. Therefore, the relationship between yin and yang is not opposable, but complementary.

I think that the concepts of yin and yang are helpful for us to consider the relationship between scepticism and dogmatism, and that between the sceptical thoughts and the non-sceptical ones in a system of a sceptic.

If we think of dogmatism as yang, and scepticism as yin, we can see that the two philosophical tendencies, though opposing each other, are a pair to be complementary. As

¹¹² Fung Yu-Lan, *A short History of Chinese Philosophy* (1948), p. 138

we stated above, scepticism is based on something certain provided by dogmatism. And it often implies negative dogmatism. It is the case in the scepticism of Chuang Tzu and Sextus. As nothing is entirely yin or yang, there is no pure scepticism or dogmatism. People often only see that the two reject each other, neglecting the forces that make them attract each other.

As the unity of yin and yang constitutes harmony of everything, the interaction between scepticism and dogmatism maybe produce a philosophical harmony. History of philosophy, eastern and Western, shows that the interaction is possible. Indeed, the interaction greatly benefits the progress of philosophy.

A system of every sceptic is not purely sceptical. Rather, it must contain something non-sceptical. If we take his scepticism as yang, his non-sceptical elements are yin¹¹³. In the system of Sextus, his dualism, conservatism and naturalism are non-sceptical, while in the system of Chuang Tzu, his monism, rebel spirit and naturalism are the same. Analysis of sceptic's yin and yang is helpful to see his predicaments and discern his useful ideas. Of course, it is difficulty to say that all his sceptical thoughts are wrong while all the non-sceptical ones are right. Sceptical thoughts, if appropriately held, are beneficial to get rid of self-conceit and keep an open mind. However, as long as you appropriately hold sceptical thoughts, you would be not a pure sceptic.

¹¹³ Since scepticism is sceptic's official and positive philosophy, while non-sceptical ideas are his unofficial and negative ones, it is reasonable to regard scepticism as yang, and his non-sceptical ideas as yin. Of course, the Chinese words, yin and yang, are flexible. If we take Chuang Tzu and Sextus as constructive thinkers, not as sceptics, we should say that their non-sceptical thoughts are yang, and that their sceptical thoughts are yin. In this case, the former are positive, while the latter are negative.

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