

# OUTLINES OF PYRRHONISM

*Sextus Empiricus*

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© SEXTUS EMPIRICUS AND GREEK SCEPTICISM by  
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## The Fourth Trope

In order to attain to [Greek: epoche] by fixing the argument on each separate sense, or even by putting aside the senses altogether, we take up the fourth Trope of [Greek: epoche]. This is the one based upon circumstances, and by circumstances we mean conditions. This Trope comes under consideration, we may say, with regard to conditions that are according to nature, or contrary to nature; such as waking or sleeping, the age of life, moving or keeping still, hating or loving, need or satiety, drunkenness or sobriety, predispositions, being courageous or afraid, sorrowing or rejoicing. For example, things appear different as they are according to nature, or contrary to it; as for instance, the insane and those inspired by a god, think that they hear gods, while we do not; in like manner they often say that they perceive the odor of storax or frankincense, or the like, and many other things which we do not perceive. Water, also, that seems lukewarm to us, if poured over places that are inflamed, will feel hot, and a garment that appears orange-coloured to those that have blood-shot eyes, would not look so to me, and the same honey appears sweet to me, but bitter to those who have the jaundice. If one should say that those who are not in a natural state have unusual ideas of objects, because of the intermingling of certain humors, then one must also say, that it may be that objects which are really what they seem to be to those who are in an unnatural condition, appear different to those who are in health, for even those who are in health have humors that are mixed with each other. For to give to one kind of fluid a power to change objects, and not to another kind, is a fiction of the mind; for just as those who are in health are in a condition that is natural to those who are in health, and contrary to the na-

ture of those who are not in health, so also those who are not in health, are in a condition contrary to the nature of those in health, but natural to those not in health, and we must therefore believe that they also are in some respect in a natural condition. Furthermore, in sleep or in waking, the ideas are different, because we do not see things in the same way when we are awake as we do in sleep; neither do we see them in the same way in sleep as we do when awake, so that the existence or non-existence of these things is not absolute, but relative, that is in relation to a sleeping or waking condition. It is therefore probable that we see those things in sleep which in a waking condition do not exist, but they are not altogether non-existent, for they exist in sleep, just as those things which exist when we are awake, exist, although they do not exist in sleep. Furthermore, things present themselves differently according to the age of life, for the same air seems cold to the aged, but temperate to those in their prime, and the same color appears dim to those who are old, and bright to those in their prime, and likewise the same tone seems faint to the former, and audible to the latter. People in different ages are also differently disposed towards things to be chosen or avoided; children, for example, are very fond of balls and hoops, while those in their prime prefer other things, and the old still others, from which it follows that the ideas in regard to the same objects differ in different periods of life. Furthermore, things appear different in a condition of motion and rest, since that which we see at rest when we are still, seems to move when we are sailing by it. There are also differences which depend on liking or disliking, as some detest swine flesh exceedingly, but others eat it with pleasure. As Menander said—

O how his face appears

Since he became such a man! What a creature!  
Doing no injustice would make us also beautiful.

Many also that love ugly women consider them very beautiful. Furthermore, there are differences which depend on hunger or satiety, as the same food seems agreeable to those who are hungry, and disagreeable to those who are satisfied. There are also differences depending on drunkenness and sobriety, as that which we consider ugly when we are sober does not appear ugly to us when we are drunk. Again, there are differences depending on predispositions, as the same wine appears sourish to those who have previously eaten dates or dried figs, but agreeable to those who have taken nuts or chickpeas; the vestibule of the bath warms those who enter from without, but cools those who go out, if they rest in it. Furthermore, there are differences depending on being afraid or courageous, as the same thing seems fearful and terrible to the coward, but in no wise so to him who is brave. There are differences, also, depending on being sad or joyful, as the same things are unpleasant to the sad, but pleasant to the joyful. Since therefore the anomalies depending on conditions are so great, and since men are in different conditions at different times, it is perhaps easy to say how each object appears to each man, but not so of what kind it is, because the anomaly is not of a kind to be judged. For he who would pass judgment upon this is either in some one of the conditions mentioned above, or is in absolutely no condition whatever; but to say that he is in no condition at all, as, for example, that he is neither in health nor in illness, that he is neither moving nor quiet, that he is not of any age, and also that he is free from the other conditions, is wholly absurd. But if he judges the ideas while he is in

any condition whatever, he is a part of the contradiction, and, besides, he is no genuine critic of external objects, because he is confused by the condition in which he finds himself. Therefore neither can the one who is awake compare the ideas of those who are asleep with those who are awake, nor can he who is in health compare the ideas of the sick with those of the well; for we believe more in the things that are present, and affecting us at present, than in the things not present. In another way, the anomaly in such ideas is impossible to be judged, for whoever prefers one idea to another, and one condition to another, does this either without a criterion and a proof, or with a criterion and a proof; but he can do this neither without them, for he would then be untrustworthy, nor with them; for if he judges ideas, he judges them wholly by a criterion, and he will say that this criterion is either true or false. But if it is false, he will be untrustworthy; if, on the contrary, he says that it is true, he will say that the criterion is true either without proof or with proof. If without proof, he will be untrustworthy; if he says that it is true with proof, it is certainly necessary that the proof be true, or he will be untrustworthy. Now will he say that the proof which he has accepted for the accrediting of the criterion is true, having judged it, or without having judged it? If he says so without judging it, he will be untrustworthy; if he has judged it, it is evident that he will say that he has judged according to some criterion, and we must seek a proof for this criterion, and for that proof a criterion. For the proof always needs a criterion to establish it, and the criterion needs a proof that it may be shown to be true; and a proof can neither be sound without a pre-existing criterion that is true, nor a criterion true without a proof that is shown beforehand to be trustworthy. And so both the criterion and the proof are thrown into the *circulus in*

*probando*, by which it is found that they are both of them untrustworthy, for as each looks for proof from the other, each is as untrustworthy as the other. Since then one cannot prefer one idea to another, either without a proof and a criterion or with them, the ideas that differ according to different conditions cannot be judged, so that the suspension of judgment in regard to the nature of external objects follows through this Trope also.

### The Fifth Trope

The fifth Trope is that based upon position, distance, and place, for, according to each of these, the same things appear different, as for example, the same arcade seen from either end appears curtailed, but from the middle it looks symmetrical on every side; and the same ship appears small and motionless from afar, and large and in motion near by, and the same tower appears round from a distance, but square near by. So much for distance. Now in reference to place, we say that the light of the lamp appears dim in the sun, but bright in the dark; and the same rudder appears broken in the sea, but straight out of it; and the egg in the bird is soft, but in the air hard; and the lyngurion is a fluid in the lynx, but is hard in the air; and the coral is soft in the sea, but hard in the air; and a tone of voice appears different produced by a syrinx, and by a flute, and different simply in the air. Also in reference to position, the same picture leaned back appears smooth, and leaned forward a little seems to have hollows and protuberances, and the necks of doves appear different in color according to the difference in inclination. Since then all phenomena are seen in relation to place, distance, and position, each of which relation makes a great difference with the idea, as we have mentioned, we shall be obliged

by this Trope also to come to the suspension of judgment. For he who wishes to give preference to certain ones of these ideas will attempt the impossible. For if he simply makes the decision without proof he will be untrustworthy. If, however, he wishes to make use of a proof, should he say that the proof is false, he contradicts himself, but if he declares the proof to be true, proof of its proof will be demanded of him, and another proof for that, which proof also must be true, and so on to the *regressus in infinitum*. It is impossible, however, to present proofs *in infinitum*, so that one will not be able to prove that one idea is to be preferred to another. Since then one cannot either without proof or with proof judge the ideas in question, the suspension of judgment results, and how each thing appears according to this or that position, or this or that distance, or this or that place, we perhaps are able to say, but what it really is it is impossible to declare, for the reasons which we have mentioned.