

TRANQUILLITY WITHOUT A STOP: TIMON, FRAG. 68

THE PROBLEM

Timon, frag. 68 (Diels), is standardly printed as follows:

ἧ γὰρ ἐγὼν ἐρέω, ὥς μοι καταφαίνεται εἶναι,
μῦθον ἀληθείης ὀρθὸν ἔχων κανόνα,
ὥς ἡ τοῦ θεοῦ τε φύσις καὶ τὰγαθοῦ αἰεὶ,
ἐξ ὧν ισότατος γίνεται ἀνδρὶ βίος.

Translation at this stage would be premature, but three variants in line 3 deserve notice. (a) Bury (iii.394) writes ζῆ for ἧ. (b) Natorp (p. 292), followed by Brochard (p. 62 n. 4), suggested ἔχει for αἰεὶ (which would yield a meioric line). (c) Wachsmuth (p. 22) prints a colon instead of a comma after αἰεὶ.

It is not surprising that line 3 has attracted emendation. As it stands, it lacks a verb and αἰεὶ has to modify an understood existential ἔστι. The grammar of line 3 will concern us in due course, but it should be said at once that emending to ζῆ or ἔχει would not overcome the more serious problem of its content.

Frag. 68 is quoted by Sextus Empiricus, *M* xi.20 from Timon's poem *Ἰνδαλμοί* (*Images*), and it is agreed among commentators that it gives (probably the opening of) Pyrrho's reply to the question addressed to him in frag. 67:

τοῦτο μοι, ὦ Πύρρων, ἱμείρεται ἥτορ ἀκοῦσαι,
πῶς ποτ' ἀνὴρ ὅτ' ἄγεις ῥήστα μεθ' ἡσυχίης
αἰεὶ ἀφροντίστως καὶ ἀκινήτως καὶ κατὰ ταῦτα
μὴ προσέχων δύνους ἡδυλόγου σοφίης,
μῦθος δ' ἀνθρώποισι θεοῦ τρόπον ἡγεμονεύεις,
ὅς περὶ πᾶσαν ἐλὼν γαίαν ἀναστρέφεται
δεκνὺς εὐτόρνου σφαίρης πυρκαῦτορα κύκλον.¹

The problem is this. If Pyrrho is the speaker in frag. 68 (ἐγὼν ἐρέω, line 1), answering Timon's request in frag. 67 for the secret of his tranquillity, how can a sceptic allow himself a statement affirming (as it would appear) the eternal nature of the divine and the good? Even if with Natorp's ἔχει for αἰεὶ the idea of eternity drops out, would it not still be anathema to a sceptic to be talking thus positively of the φύσις of the divine and the good? To make matters worse, the statement in line 3 is heralded in line 2 as the content of a 'word of truth' or as validated by a 'correct yardstick (standard, rule)' or even (taking ἀληθείης with κανόνα instead of μῦθον) as derived from a 'correct standard of truth'. If the eternal nature of the divine and the good strikes one as the last thing a sceptic would proclaim, it seems equally impossible for him to assert for his account of it the validity of truth or a correct standard. Everything we know about Timon's critique of other philosophers in his *Σίλλοι* goes against the idea that he would approve a pronouncement about the eternal nature of the divine and the good.² Everything we know about the several works in which Timon

¹ Diels's text. The fragment was put together from partial quotations in D. L. ix.65, Sext. *M* i. 305, xi.1, by Wachsmuth and Diels, and independently by Mommsen.

Several textual issues arise in the compilation, but none of them need concern us here.

² On *Σίλλοι*, see now Long (2) – the

described Pyrrho and his philosophy goes against the idea that he would have Pyrrho make such dogmatic claims about truth and objective values. On the contrary, it is precisely by non-assertion (*ἀφασία*), by not affirming the truth (or falsity) of our perceptions and beliefs, by saying instead, about everything whatsoever, 'it no more is than is not thus and so', that the follower of Pyrrho is freed from emotional disturbance to enjoy peace and calm.³ The secret of Pyrrho's tranquillity, according to Timon, was nothing other than his scepticism. And this scepticism, again according to Timon, so far from asserting the eternal nature of the divine and the good, specifically refuses to countenance that anything is by nature good or bad: οὔτε ἀγαθὸν τι ἔστι φύσει οὔτε κακόν,

ἀλλὰ πρὸς ἀνθρώπων ταῦτα νόω κέκριται
κατὰ τὸν Τίμωνα.⁴

I have emphasized that frag. 68, as printed, is discordant within Timon's presentation of Pyrrho so that it may be clear that the problem does not arise from the imposition of some preconceived notion of what a sceptic can and cannot say. Certainly, as Hirzel warned (pp. 46 ff.), we should not look for Timon to parade all the various devices which later Pyrrhonists used to avoid the accusation that in the very statement of their scepticism they are dogmatizing (cf. e.g. D. L. ix.74–7, Sext. P. H. i.13–15). A measure of *naïveté* in the earliest formulations of Pyrrhonian scepticism is only to be expected. But frag. 68 as it stands is not a naïvely dogmatic assertion of scepticism. It is the assertion of a dogma. The positive content, the countenancing talk of the eternal nature of the divine and the good, is what is discordant, not merely the assertive mode in which it is expressed.

Some scholars – the majority – have been prepared on the evidence of frag. 68 to accept that early Pyrrhonism did contain elements of dogma, inconsistently with its professed scepticism.⁵ Others have hoped that the apparent inconsistency can be explained away, either by suggesting that the seemingly dogmatic certainty is practical rather than theoretical, or by taking the problematic lines 2–4 to be governed and qualified by ὥς μοι καταφαίνεται εἶναι.⁶ Something like this last was in Sextus' mind when he introduced the fragment by saying, *περὶ μὲν γὰρ τῆς πρὸς τὴν φύσιν ὑποστάσεως τῶν τε ἀγαθῶν καὶ κακῶν καὶ οὐδετέρων ἱκανοί πῶς εἰσιν ἡμῖν ἀγῶνες πρὸς τοὺς*

best general account of Timon's *oeuvre*.

³ See esp. frag. 2 = Aristocles *apud* Eusebius *Praep. evang.* xiv.18, 2–4. Aristocles' summing up of Timon's message is entirely consistent on the above-mentioned points with the surviving fragments: τὸ μηδὲν ὀρίξειν, ἀλλ' ἀπροσθετεῖν (frag. 80 = D. L. ix.76, giving Timon's interpretation of Οὐδὲν μᾶλλον); τὸ μέλι ὅτι ἐστὶ γλυκὺ οὐ τίθῃμι, τὸ δ' ὅτι φαίνεται ὁμολογῶ (frag. 74 = D. L. ix.105).

⁴ Frag. 70 = Sext. *M* xi.140. Hirzel (p. 56 n. 1, p. 61), followed by Wachsmuth (p. 24), Brochard (p. 62 n. 1), would read νόμῳ for νόω. Diels objected that what responds to φύσει is πρὸς ἀνθρώπων, while a κρίσις is effected νόω rather than νόμῳ. This is perhaps less than conclusive. It

would be more subtle, I think, to suggest that Timon used φύσει in a manner to lead his reader to expect νόμῳ but then surprised him with νόω, which points to the origin of νόμος. That the idea of νόμος is in the offing is confirmed by D. L. ix.51: οὐδὲν γὰρ ἔφασκεν οὔτε καλὸν οὔτ' αἰσχρὸν οὔτε δίκαιον οὔτ' ἄδικον· καὶ ὁμοίως ἐπὶ πάντων μηδὲν εἶναι τῇ ἀληθείᾳ, νόμῳ δὲ καὶ ἔθει πάντα τοὺς ἀθρώπους πράττειν· οὐ γὰρ μᾶλλον τόδε ἢ τόδε εἶναι ἕκαστον. Note the way οὐ μᾶλλον is taken to entail μηδὲν εἶναι τῇ ἀληθείᾳ.

⁵ So, in one version or another, Hirzel, Natorp, Goedeckemeyer, Robin, *dal Pra*.

⁶ For the first, see Brochard (pp. 62–5), for the second, Zeller (p. 506), Stough (p. 25).

δογματικούς· κατὰ δὲ τὸ φαινόμενον τούτων ἕκαστον ἔχομεν ἔθος ἀγαθὸν ἢ κακὸν ἢ ἀδιάφορον προσαγορεύειν, καθάπερ καὶ ὁ Τίμων ἐν τοῖς Ἰνδαλμοῖς [τοῖσι δῆμοις libri: corr. Fabricius] ἔοικε δηλοῦν, ὅταν φῇ· ἢ γὰρ ἐγὼν κτλ. But ἔοικε δηλοῦν betrays his embarrassment at the end, as Natorp (p. 292) saw. No matter how qualified the assertion of the eternal nature of the divine and the good, what is thus asserted remains a positive view about φύσις. It is not, as Sextus' blurb makes out,⁷ the standard later Pyrrhonist line that, the φύσις of good and evil being a matter of unresolvable dispute, one speaks only of what appears good and what appears evil and takes that as one's guide in practice. A qualified assertion of a dogma about φύσις is still not what one expects to hear when Pyrrho speaks.

THE SOLUTION

I want to suggest that the cause of the trouble is the editors' comma (or worse, Wachsmuth's colon) after αἰεί at the end of line 3. Remove the punctuation and a new perspective opens up. We must still understand ἔστι, but not the existential ἔστι which, when modified by αἰεί, produces the problematic notion of an eternally existing φύσις. All we need – and grammatically it is a much easier supplement – is the ἔστι of identity. The content of Pyrrho's message now reads as follows: 'The nature of the divine and the good <is> at any time [αἰεί] that from which [<ταῦτα> ἐξ ὧν] a man's life becomes most equable.'

The first benefit of the new construal is that 'the divine' and 'the good' no longer designate an independent and eternally existing φύσις. The words can be referred, as Diels saw they should be referred, to the character of Pyrrho himself.⁸ In line 2 of frag. 67 it is implied that there is something almost superhuman about his consistent tranquillity;⁹ in lines 5–7 he is likened to the sun-god, as the one and only guide and illumination for men. Secondly, with the backreference to frag. 67 secured, frag. 68 as a whole takes a relatively straightforward course.

To the question, 'How is it that you possess this godlike stature?' (frag. 67, 2), Pyrrho answers that he will tell the truth as it appears to him to be.¹⁰ What is truth? Nothing recherché, simply the truth about himself, which is what he has been asked about. He is enabled to tell this truth by having the right measure or yardstick (ὁρθὸν ἔχων κανόνα).¹¹ What yardstick, and for measuring what? He

⁷ Cp. also Stough, loc. cit.

⁸ Diels's comment was, 'θείου (cf. fr. 67, 5) et ἀγαθοῦ eadem natura versatur in aeterna ἀταραξία, unde vitae aequabilitas', but nothing in his version of the fragment justifies 'versatur in aeterna ἀταραξία'. The same goes for the translation of dal Pra (p. 64), 'come la natura del divino e del bene è sempre la stessa.'

⁹ Cf. also the saying ὡς χαλεπὸν εἶη ὁλοσχερῶς ἐκδύναϊ τὸν ἄνθρωπον, D. L. ix.66, Aristocles apud Eus. *Praep. evang.* xiv.18, 26, from Antigonos Carystus, which means, as Long (2) has shown, that it probably derives from something in Timon.

¹⁰ Take μῦθον ἀληθείης together as the direct object of ἐρέω, the whole pronounce-

ment being modified by ὡς μοι καταφαίνεται εἶναι – here I am indebted to Long (2). Stough (p. 25) also has it right. Translators who take ὡς μοι κτλ. first with ἐρέω, as e.g. Bury 'Verily I will relate each fact as to me it appeareth' (similarly Brochard, Robin, dal Pra), have then to subordinate μῦθον and ἀληθείης to κανόνα or vice versa as object to ἔχων: 'Standard exact of truth having in this my speech' (Bury), 'ayant une parole de vérité pour règle infaillible' (Brochard), etc. Which is dogmatism of monumental pretensions.

¹¹ Here too it is Stough who has the translation right: 'For I shall say, as it appears to me to be, A word of truth, since I possess the right standard.'

was asked about his godlike qualities, so the yardstick which enables him to tell the truth about himself is a yardstick for determining what is divine and good. The divine and the good is simply what at any time makes a man's life most equable. Again nothing complicated or *recherché*, no need to attend to the word-spinning of the learned (cf. frag. 67, 4). Just go for whatever will give you, day by day, a life of continuing and consistent (cf. frag. 67, 3) tranquillity.

Grammatically, the clause *ὥς κτλ.* in 3–4 is probably dependent on *μῦθον ἀληθείης* in the first instance, but by implication it connects with *κανόνα* as well. Thus, to translate —

I will speak, as it appears to me to be,
A word of truth, having a correct yardstick,
Namely, that the nature of the divine and the good is at any time
That from which life becomes most equable for a man.

Pyrrho says: the truth (about myself) is that the divine and the good (that in me which you ask about) is what at any time makes a man's life most equable — this is the rule by which I attain the good and likeness to god and by reference to which I can answer your enquiry. The word of truth about Pyrrho is generalizable as a rule which all can follow; the divine and the good are within the reach of any man (*ἀνδρί* in line 4 picks up *ἀνὴρ* frag. 67, 2).

This reading has the merit of simplicity, which by all accounts was a feature of Pyrrho's philosophizing. But how far does it remove the discordant dogmatism? One clear gain is that *μῦθον ἀληθείης* is no longer a portentous truth about an eternally existing *φύσις*. *ἐρέω . . . μῦθον ἀληθείης* just means 'I will tell you truly' the answer to your question about myself. And even this assertion is suitably qualified by *ὥς μοι καταφαίνεται εἶναι*. Secondly, with the existential claim eliminated, the *φύσις* of the divine and the good is not an entity or actuality but simply the nature revealed by a definition or rule — a common philosophical use of *φύσις* which need carry no ontological commitment. There remains, however, *ὀρθὸν ἔχων κανόνα*, which is not, I think, so easily defused.

No doubt this phrase also is subject to the qualification *ὥς μοι καταφαίνεται εἶναι*, but within that qualification, important as it is, lines 3–4 propound a positive rule of life. A positive rule of life is an improvement on the positive existential dogma which the traditional punctuation requires, but still, the lines define the good in a manner that later, sophisticated Pyrrhonists would avoid. The latter are careful to say that their *τέλος, ἀταραξία*, is something that just happens to come when one gives up seeking it as a positive good (Sext. *P. H.* i.25–9). Timon, by contrast, has Pyrrho identify the good in positive terms: it is the source or sources of tranquillity. A degree of dogmatism intrudes after all.

Yes, but this dogmatism is something we must in any case accept. It is the twin to the remarkable and similarly dogmatic frag. 71 (Athen. 337a):

πάντων μὲν πρώτιστα κακῶν ἐπιθυμία ἐστίν

If the good is what conduces to tranquillity, desire and other emotional sources of disturbance must be evil; and conversely. This answers the question, what the sources of tranquillity (the *ἐξ ὧν* of frag. 68, 4) would be: emotional indifference and the absence of desire in each successive situation of life. It is a point in favour of my construal of frag. 68 that it so neatly corresponds with frag. 71.¹²

¹² Hence it is reasonable to assign frag. 71 to 'Ινδαλμοί, with Wachsmuth (p. 24).

One could even suggest that it should be located in close association with frag. 68.

What we have to understand is the character of this dogmatism and whether it is truly discordant with Timon's account of Pyrrho; in particular, whether it is discordant with the claim that nothing is by nature good or bad.

Any moralist of the time would have taken the statement 'Nothing is by nature good or bad' as a claim about the *objects* of pursuit and avoidance, desire and aversion. The statement is (philosophical) Greek for: nothing is actually worth pursuing or avoiding – and it was no doubt of a sceptic who recognizes this that Timon said

*ἀφύγης καὶ ἀναίρετος ἔσται.*¹³

But frag. 71 is a claim about desire as such, and likewise frag. 68, 3–4, in effect, is a claim about the absence of desire and disturbing emotion. Frag. 71 attributes disvalue, frag. 68 value, not to the objects of mental attitudes but to mental attitudes themselves. Desire is bad, its absence good – how can this fail to be so if there is no value in the fulfilment of desire because there is nothing of value to fulfil it? Desire is just a nuisance, a source of disturbance, which it would be better to be rid of altogether rather than strain like the ordinary man to fulfil it. The ordinary man only makes the effort to satisfy his desires because he has concocted the idea that there are things which it is good to have and bad to be without: *ἀλλὰ πρὸς ἀνθρώπων ταῦτα νόω κέκριται*.

Here I pause for a paragraph's philosophical aside. For it might be objected to the Pyrrhonist view as just sketched that the things men seek could be held to acquire value from the very fact that they are desired and sought. Some philosophies of the subjectivist type maintain indeed that value is never more than the being desired or sought by human agents, while naive Utilitarianism locates the (objective) source of value in the satisfaction of men's desires as such. But the paradox of these theories is that they leave themselves no philosophical rationale for not accepting that it would be just as satisfactory and no less conducive to happiness to eliminate people's desires (whether by drugs, by hypnotic treatment, by ascetic training, or whatever) as to fulfil them in the normal way. What makes the difference, as we ordinarily conceive the matter, between fulfilling a desire and stopping it at source is the idea that the object of our desire has a value independent of its being desired. Remove that idea and desire is literally *κενόςπουδον* (D. L. ix.67),¹⁴ empty endeavour. On this the Pyrrhonist is right. A radical scepticism about values should entail that nothing is to be gained from the fulfilment of a desire which could not be gained, with less effort, by not having the desire in the first place. What is truly remarkable about Pyrrho and his followers is not so much their scepticism, however extreme, but the fact that, uniquely in the Western philosophical tradition, they both saw and accepted its consequences.

It is true that frags. 68 and 71 express this acceptance in a dogmatic way. Pyrrho denies value to the objects of desire only to attribute it to the absence of desire as such. But this is dogmatism at the higher level, comparable to the dogmatism of one who asserts that the objects of men's beliefs are no more this than that, and that the beliefs themselves are neither true nor false, and then goes

¹³ Frag. 72 = Sext. *M* xi. 164, from a context which supports the above interpretation.

¹⁴ Timon's fondness for *κενός* and compounds (cf. frags 11, 20, 21, 48) is noted by Long (2).

on to draw the evaluative conclusion that one ought not to entertain beliefs; belief is bad. Just this is what happens in frag. 2, where it is reported that Timon had Pyrrho answer the question *ὅποια πέφυκε τὰ πράγματα*; by saying *τὰ μὲν οὖν πράγματα . . . ἐπ' ἴσης ἀδιάφορα καὶ ἀστάθμητα καὶ ἀνεπίκριτα· διὰ τοῦτο μήτε τὰς αἰσθήσεις ἡμῶν μήτε τὰς δόξας ἀληθεύειν ἢ ψεύδεσθαι*, and then answer the question *τίνα χρή τρόπον ἡμᾶς πρὸς αὐτὰ διακείσθαι*; with the positive advice *διὰ τοῦτο οὖν μηδέ πιστεύειν αὐταῖς δεῖν, ἀλλ' ἀδοξάστους καὶ ἀκλιβεῖς καὶ ἀκραδάντους εἶναι*. In the context of frag. 2 the evaluation is in terms of what one should do to be happy, on the assumption (still found in later Pyrrhonism – Sext. *M* xi.140–1) that tranquillity is happiness. Belief, like desire, is bad, something one ought not to have, if one wants happiness, which is tranquillity. In frags. 67 and 68 the evaluation is directly related to the desire for tranquillity, expressed by Timon in frag. 67, 1. So one desire stands unconditioned and uncondemned, the desire for happiness or tranquillity; this could be thought of as a higher order desire common to all men for a satisfactory life free from pain and disturbance. It is in relation to this that first level desires for particular things are to be avoided (frag. 71) and the sole good is the indifference or absence of belief and desire from which tranquillity comes (frag. 2, frag. 68, 3–4).

In sum, the dogmatic strand in Timon's Pyrrhonism amounts to the following and no more: an endorsement of the universal desire for happiness and tranquillity (frags. 2, 67), the prescription of one single rule for achieving it (frags. 68, 71), plus the naively dogmatic assertion in frags. 2 and 70 of the radical scepticism which explains and justifies that rule. So much must be accepted on the historical evidence. But a claim to truth about an eternally existing *φύσις* of the divine and the good would be a dogma at the same level as and in direct conflict with the scepticism. As such it should be discarded with the comma in frag. 68, 3.

We have achieved a consistent reading of Timon, in this sense, that all the elements fit together without manifest conflict or incompatibility. (Whether the resulting whole is truly consistent from either a logical or a practical point of view is a deeper issue not to be entered into here; the question whether a radical scepticism can be coherently stated or practised was to be a main topic of debate in Hellenistic philosophy for 500 years to come, and later sceptics found it necessary to devise sophisticated ways of eliminating the least remnant of dogma.) An added bonus is that the position which has emerged – a naively dogmatic assertion of scepticism with a positive practical moral at the level of mental attitudes – tallies closely with Cicero's evidence on Pyrrho.

For Cicero, Pyrrho is the most negative of all moralists, more so even than the unorthodox Stoic Ariston, with whom Cicero regularly couples him (*Fin.* 4.43). Pyrrho, according to Cicero, held a conception of virtue which left nothing to be sought and desired at all (*ibid.*: *virtute constituta nihil omnino quod appetendum sit relinquat*). His chief and only good is *ἀπάθεια* (*Acad.* ii.130; for the term, cf. also Aristocles *ap. Eus. Praep. evang.* xiv.18, 26, D. L. ix.108), because everything is completely indifferent (*Fin.* iii.11). It may be an inaccuracy to call *ἀπάθεια* *virtus* or *honestum* (*Fin.* iii.12), but it would be understandable that Cicero should do so, given that it is the sole good that Pyrrho recognizes. The important thing is that what has come out of our re-punctuation of frag. 68 is precisely a statement that *ἀπάθεια* is the sole good. Since that statement has hitherto gone unnoticed, scholars have found Cicero's

account of Pyrrho difficult, on the face of it, to reconcile with that of Timon. Some have even tried to link the two accounts via the dogmatism we have now purged from frag. 68. 3.¹⁵ Others have seen where the reconciliation must lie, without being able to cite textual evidence in Timon himself;¹⁶ for surprisingly frag. 71 has not been mentioned in this connection. Removing the comma solves at a stroke the two major traditional problems in early Pyrrhonism.

POSTSCRIPT: IS IT GREEK?

I have left until last the question whether my proposed construal of frag. 68, 3–4 is possible Greek. I am prepared to claim that the reading shows itself to be possible Greek by the results to which it has led; there must be some cases which establish precedent rather than requiring it. Nor has anyone thought it necessary to cite a parallel for the traditional reading of line 3.

There would be no quarrel, I take it, if the proposed supplement was this: ἡ τοῦ θείου τε φύσις καὶ τὰγαθοῦ αἰεὶ <ἐστὶν ἐκ τούτων> ἐξ ὧν ἰσότητος κτλ.: the nature of the divine and the good derives always from that from which a man's life becomes most equable. This would imply that tranquillity itself was the one good, and much of what I have said will stand if this construal is preferred. Nevertheless, I think it gives a less informative answer to Timon's question in frag. 67 and destroys the correspondence with frag. 71: Timon applies 'good' and 'bad' to the sources of tranquillity and its opposite – that tranquillity itself is desired is the assumption of the whole enquiry. So I stick to the supplement <ἐστὶ τῶτα> ἐξ ὧν and would be grateful to hear from anyone who comes across a parallel (the standard reference books are not very helpful in matters of syntax). Meanwhile, sceptical readers can wrestle with a bit of Aristotle: οὐ γὰρ εἰ συμβαίνει ἀναρεῖσθαι τι, τοῦτο συμπέρασμα ἐστίν, ἐκεῖνα δὲ ἐξ ὧν (*An. Post.* 87^a 20–2). 'For it is not the case that if it happens that something is disproved, then this is a conclusion and those are what it depends on' (trans. Barnes). As the translation shows, the last phrase is to be read ἐκεῖνα δὲ <ἐστὶ τῶτα> ἐξ ὧν <τὸ συμπέρασμα ἐστίν>. Which was the syntax to be demonstrated.

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¹⁵ Brochard (p. 63).

¹⁶ Goedeckemeyer (p. 9–10), dal Pra (p. 36–7), Long (1) (pp. 76–8), whose tentative conclusion 'Cicero's evidence might be regarded as curiously defective

rather than totally anomalous' is now confirmed. In general, however, my assessment of the dogmatic strand in Timon is closest to that of Robin (p. 34).

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