Polish Studies on the History of Skepticism, 20 November 2026

Workshop online 10.50 -14.30

10.50 Prof. dr hab. Tadeusz Szubka, Director of the Institute of Philosophy and Cognitive Science, University of Szczecin (opening)

11.00-11.30 Prof. dr hab. Zbigniew Nerczuk, Translating Sextus Empiricus: Reflections on the Outlines of Pyrrhonism

Break 15 minutes

11.45-12.15 Prof. dr hab. Dariusz Kubok, Primary Philosophical Zeteticism and Two Interpretations of Skepticism: Effecticism and Zeteticism in Sextus Empiricus

12.15-12.45 Dr Dawid Rogacz, Knots that cannot be untied. The Place of Skepticism in Wang Chong's Epistemology

Break 15 minutes

13.00-13.30 Prof. Wu Sanxi, John Searle's Transcendental Argument and its Limits

13.30-14.00 Prof. dr hab. Renata Ziemińska, Pyrrho of Elis and the Buddhist quadrilemma

14.00 Closing the workshop or time for general discussion on skepticism

ABSTRACTS

1. Prof. dr hab. Zbigniew Nerczuk, Nicolaus Copernicus University, Toruń, Poland

Translating Sextus Empiricus: Reflections on the Outlines of Pyrrhonism

Abstract

The paper presents a new Polish translation of Sextus Empiricus' Outlines of Pyrrhonism (2019). It recalls the treatise's impact on Renaissance and modern philosophy and on the 20th-century revival of scepticism, and sets the translation against Adam Krokiewicz's controversial 1931 version. Unlike it, the new translation aims at clarity and terminological consistency. The main difficulty lies in Sextus' terminology: he often relies on paraphrased, reinterpreted sources,

so terms such as ousia, hypostasis or dynamis are not used consistently, and his scepticism blends several traditions. The paper also argues that the Outlines postdate Against the Dogmatists, that the chapter division is not Sextus' own and obscures the work's original structure, and that Sextus' view of the history of philosophy, far from the 19th-century Hegelian model, offers a unique perspective on Greek thought. [Sekstus Empiryk, *Zarysy Pyrrońskie,* przełożył, wstępem i przypisami opatrzył Zbigniew Nerczuk, Wydawnictwo Naukowe UMK 2019, s. 407.]

Bio. Zbigniew Nerczuk is a classical philologist and historian of ancient philosophy at the Institute of Philosophy, Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń, Poland. His research focuses on Greek philosophy, particularly Plato, the sophistic movement, and scepticism. He has written two monographs: *Sztuka a prawda. Problem sztuki w dyskusji między Gorgiaszem a Platonem* (Art and Truth: The Problem of Art in the Debate between Gorgias and Plato) and *Miarą jest każdy z nas. Projekt zwolenników zmienności rzeczy w platońskim "Teajtecie" na tle myśli sofistycznej* (Each of Us Is the Measure: The Project of the Advocates of Flux in Plato's Theaetetus against the Background of Sophistic Thought). He has translated into Polish Sextus Empiricus' *Outlines of Pyrrhonism, Against the Professors, Against the Physicists, and Against the Ethicists*, as well as works by Thomas Aquinas, Pico della Mirandola, and Hans-Georg Gadamer. Combining close linguistic reading with structural analysis, his work reconstructs the historical and literary contexts of philosophical debates and explores how their argumentative form and conceptual vocabulary shape their meaning. E-mail: zibbi@umk.pl

2. Prof. dr hab. Dariusz Kubok, Primary Philosophical Zeteticism and Two Interpretations of Skepticism: Effecticism and Zeteticism in Sextus Empiricus

Abstract

In the opening sections of Sextus Empiricus' Outlines of Pyrrhonism (I, 1–4), Sextus presents a division of philosophy into dogmatic, Academic, and skeptical, proceeding from the act of inquiry shared by all philosophers. This preliminary condition, referred to in this paper as primary philosophical zeteticism (PPZ), is often overlooked in the literature. Yet it is precisely this condition that determines that the three positions distinguished by Sextus differ solely in their relation to seeking and finding, and in the reason for bringing the search to an end: the dogmatist and the Academic terminate their inquiries (respectively, because they claim to have

found a resolution or because they regard it as unattainable), whereas the skeptic continues to inquire.

In PH, I, 7, however, Sextus also characterises skepticism as “zetetic” and “ephectic” The former designation points to the continuation of inquiry, whereas the latter refers to withholding assent following inquiry. In this paper, I propose treating these designations as two competing interpretations of skepticism (along with two different conceptions of aporeticism), rather than as two aspects of one and the same process of inquiry. Zeteticism (Z) would thus denote the active continuation of inquiry without presupposing whether its goal will or will not be attained, whereas ephecticism (E) would denote the suspension of judgment as the outcome of the inquiry undertaken.

This distinction makes it possible to preserve the difference between PFZ and Z and to grasp the fundamental tension in Sextus’ characterisation of skepticism: between remaining engaged in inquiry and bringing inquiry to an end. The paper also considers the extent to which the later skeptical tradition privileged the ephectic interpretation, subordinating persistent inquiry to the anticipated suspension of judgment. It is important to bear in mind that Z, representing a form of skepticism marked by a continuing epistemic hope, emphasises the activist character of inquiry and the unceasing persistence in the search for resolution. Although it constituted an original, dynamic dimension of Greek critical thought, the zetetic interpretation became considerably obscured in the subsequent development of the philosophical tradition. It was overshadowed by various positions based on ephecticism (E), epechism, and even agnosticism.

Bio. Dariusz Kubok is a Full Professor of Philosophy and Director of the Institute of Philosophy at the University of Silesia in Katowice, Poland. He leads the University’s Research Group on Critical Thinking and serves as Editor-in-Chief of Folia Philosophica. He is a co-author of the textbook Podstawy filozofii dla uczniów i studentów (Foundations of Philosophy for School and University Students). His research interests include the history of Greek philosophy, ontology, epistemology, the concept of criticality, and the history of ideas. He is the author, co-author, and editor of numerous publications, including Prawda i mniemania. Studium filozofii Parmenidesa z Elei (2004) and Krytycyzm, sceptycyzm i zetetycyzm we wczesnej filozofii greckiej (2021). He also edited Thinking Critically: What Does It Mean? The Tradition of Philosophical Criticism and Its Forms in the European History of Ideas (De Gruyter, 2017). He is a co-author of Atmospheric Health, Nature and Well-being: Towards a Philosophy of the Garden (Routledge, 2025). E-mail: dariusz.kubok@us.edu.pl

3. Dr Dawid Rogacz, Knots that cannot be untied. The Place of Skepticism in Wang Chong's Epistemology

Abstract

Wang Chong (27-97) is one of the most independent philosophers and cultural contestators of ancient China. His Balance of Arguments (Lun heng) has traditionally been characterized as a skeptical work, a view recently challenged by several contemporary scholars (such as A. McLeod and E.S. Klein), who reject this categorization entirely. The problem with existing interpretations is that they tend to assume that since Wang Chong was not a total and/or radical skeptic, his epistemology contains no skeptical elements whatsoever.

This presentation challenges such interpretations by defining the role of methodical doubt in Wang Chong's theory of knowledge. Based on a careful reading of a wide array of passages, it will be shown that Wang systematically confronted opposite testimonies (chuan), which led him to the conclusions that the doubts (yi) regarding their truth or falsity (shi fei) cannot be settled (ding), or, in his own poetic words, that "there are knots that cannot be untied." The statements (yan) that ignore that are either empty/devoid of (xu) any reality (shi), that is absurd/meaningless, or produce (zao) exaggerations (zeng) derived from the limited knowledge about the world that we nonetheless possess.

Bio. Dawid Rogacz is Assistant Professor and Deputy Dean for Research and International Collaboration at Adam Mickiewicz University, Faculty of Philosophy; Vice-President of the European Association for Chinese Philosophy; and a member of the Polish Young Scholars Academy. He is the author of „Chinese Philosophy of History" (Bloomsbury, 2020), the co-editor of a three-volume set, „Chinese Philosophy and Its Thinkers" (Bloomsbury, 2024), and the author of numerous papers on Chinese and comparative philosophy. Currently translating Wang Chong's Lunheng into Polish. E-mail: dawid.rogacz@amu.edu.pl

4. Prof. Wu Sanxi, John Searle's Transcendental Argument and its Limits

Abstract

In his study of transcendental argument, Robert Stern groups John Searle with thinkers like P. F. Strawson and Hilary Putnam, noting that each has proposed their own approach to transcendental argument. This is because Searle explicitly puts forward a transcendental

argument for realism in his work. Realism—and the ideas associated with it—is a significant topic in modern philosophy, and one that Searle has consistently explored throughout his own philosophical project. However, Searle's account of realism is not entirely clear and contains several ambiguities. In this paper, I aim to provide further clarification of the realism found in Searle's thought. I will first demonstrate that, for Searle, realism comprises three dimensions: (1) metaphysical realism, which encompasses both an independence thesis and an existence thesis—with various recurring remarks by Searle suggesting that this form of metaphysical realism is, in fact, scientific realism; (2) external realism—a specific term Searle uses to denote the claim that there exists a mode of being independent of humans (i.e., independent of our conceptual schemes, representations, language, etc.); and (3) direct realism, a position within the philosophy of perception. This paper focuses primarily on metaphysical realism and external realism, while direct realism will be addressed in a separate study. My presentation centers on external realism. The argument Searle offers for external realism is a transcendental one. I will argue that this transcendental argument faces two major difficulties: first, there are problems with the argument itself, in particular, it is unable to deal with social constructivism; and second, even if the argument were sound, it would only establish realism as a structural condition for our experience or other practical activities—it would fail to prove the actual independence and existence of the world itself. There remains what Barry Stroud famously termed a vast "gap" between the structural conditions that make experience possible and the state of the world itself.

Bio. Wu Sanxi, Associate Professor at Hebei Normal University, China and Visiting Researcher at the University of Szczecin. I also serve as a part-time researcher at the Institute of Western Cultural Philosophy at Tianjin Foreign Studies University, council member of Hebei Philosophical Society, and member of the Pacific Division of American Philosophical Association (APA. My primary research areas are epistemology, (anti-) realism, and philosophy of mind; I also have an interest in early modern philosophy and the philosophy of religion. I am the author of *Ancient Greek Scepticism: A Historical and Philosophical Introduction* (simplified Chinese version, 2024). Recently, I have been focusing my research on issues concerning scepticism. E-mail: wuxizhispring@163.com

5. Prof. dr hab. Renata Ziemińska, Pyrrho of Elis and the Buddhist quadrilemma

Abstract

The paper examines Eusebius' passage on Pyrrho of Ellis, especially the part including quadrilemma: "no more is than is not, or both is and is not, or neither is nor is not" (PE 14.18.1-5; LS, 1F). Neither metaphysical nor epistemological reading of the whole passage is consistent with skeptical attitude (Bett 2003, Svavarsson 2010), and the quadrilemma seems opposite to the law of non-contradiction (Krokiewicz 2002; Aristotle Met. 1008b). Adrian Kuzminski (2008) shows that quadrilemma is popular in Buddhist therapeutic practice (Nāgārjuna; Balcerowicz 2019) and that it was in the time of Pyrrho's life (his travel to India; possible followers of pre-Buddhist skeptic Sanjaya). The quadrilemma expresses the position without opinions (adoxastous) leading to promised peace of mind (ataraxia). In Buddhism this kind of quadrilemma is one of antinomian techniques leading to liberation from beliefs (Kuzminski 2008). I claim that connecting Pyrrho with Buddhist tradition makes his skeptical attitude more understandable. In European terms it would be a kind of dialectical or therapeutic skepticism as acting rather than asserting. And even if skeptical speaking leads to pragmatic inconsistency, this paradox reveals something: the weakness of human concepts/words and difficulty applying the value of truth to beliefs involving them.

Bio. Renata Ziemińska is Professor of Philosophy at the University of Szczecin, Poland. The main area of her research expertise is the history of philosophical skepticism in western culture and some epistemological issues, especially post-truth, the concept of gender/sex, and epistemic injustice. In the historical part she focuses on the evolution of the idea of skepticism and the problem of its inconsistency. In the book "The History of Skepticism. In Search of Inconsistency" (Peter Lang 2017) she reconstructs the history of skepticism ranging from ancient to contemporary times. The historical reconstruction of the main skeptical stances relates to an analysis of their recurrent inconsistency. She claims that this inconsistency is not a logical contradiction but a pragmatic one: it is a contradiction between the content of the skeptical thesis and the implicit presumption of the act of its assertion. The thesis of global skepticism cannot be accepted as true without falling into pragmatic inconsistency. In the paper "Argumentative strategies of Pyrrhonian and Academic skeptics" (The Routledge handbook of Hellenistic philosophy 2020) she focuses on arguments for the suspension of all judgments and the defensive arguments against the inconsistency charge. E-mail: renata.zieminska@usz.edu.pl