According to Sextus Empiricus, the Pyrrhonian skeptics “live in accordance with everyday practice (βιωτικῇ τήρησις)” (Outlines of Pyrrhonism [PH] I 23). They follow an ordinary life or ordinary experience (ἐμπειρία) by conforming to common preconceptions (προλήψεις) and appearances (φανόμενα), and this is how their life differs from the life of dogmatic philosophers, which is based on doctrinal beliefs (δόγματα). By insisting on the skeptics’ favorable attitude toward everyday life, Sextus wants to support his rejection of the charge that taking a skeptical position entails inactivity and complete detachment from the world: while it is true to say that the skeptics do not live according to philosophical theory, in respect of which they are indeed inactive, they are active as far as non-philosophical practice is concerned (AM XI 165). Nevertheless, his intention is not only defensive, but he also sees the skeptics as champions and supporters of ordinary life, which he takes to be superior to a doctrinal or philosophical life. Moreover, the skeptics are allies to everyday life in its struggle against the dogmatists who have risen up against its preconceptions (AM VIII 158): “Hence not only do we not conflict with everyday life, but we actually join the struggle on its side, assenting without holding beliefs (ἀδοξάστως) to what it has found convincing and taking a stand against the private fictions of the dogmatists” (PH II 102). The idea that the skeptics follow an ordinary way of living seems to include two things: first, that they are engaged in the activities

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1 Τήρησις is ‘observation’ (as in Annas & Barnes 2000; see Barnes 1997, 82 n. 89) or ‘regimen’ (as in Mates 1996). The word is common in writings of the Empirical doctors. I follow Bett (1997) in using ‘practice’ (see Adversus Mathematicos [AM] XI 165), but nothing in my argument depends on the exact meaning.

2 See PH I 23–24, 231, 237; II 102, 246, 254, 258; III 235; AM VIII 158.

3 All translations from PH are by Annas and Barnes (2000), occasionally with modifications.
that are characteristic of ordinary people, and, second, that they possess mental states that are characteristic of ordinary people or that are, at any rate, sufficient to explain the activities in which the skeptics engage.

Sextus’ insistence on the close alliance of skepticism and everyday life is in several respects deeply problematic. To begin with, it may sound odd to hear a skeptic saying that he advocates everyday life and that everyday life is superior to life that includes philosophical beliefs. We are accustomed to think of ordinary, non-philosophical life—or, as we would nowadays say, life based on common sense beliefs—as seriously challenged by skeptical arguments. Skeptics want to argue that our common sense claims that we know something, globally or locally, are not tenable, and that common sense beliefs cannot be rationally justified. In this respect, philosophical skepticism can be seen as the denial of common sense. Common sense can at best be excused from skeptical attack by shifting skeptical arguments to a level or a context above the everyday. Nonetheless, save for those who endorse a version of the so-called common sense philosophy, if subjected to skeptical scrutiny, common sense judgments cannot be immune to skeptical attack, let alone be considered skeptical allies. This, of course, does not apply to every form of philosophical skepticism. With moral skepticism, for example, things are probably rather more complicated. However, the traditional skepticism about knowledge or about the external world, inspired by Cartesian arguments, is an obvious adversary to common sense.4

To be sure, Pyrrhonian skepticism is a special form of skepticism, evidently different from traditional external world skepticism inspired by Cartesian arguments. It seems, however, that there are some reasons to think that a Pyrrhonist’s attitude toward common sense must be the same as the attitude of the traditional external world skeptic, and that the idea of the alliance between Pyrrhonism and everyday life is in many respects shaky. For one thing, Sextus’ urging that the Pyrrhonists are champions of everyday life seems to contradict their central recommendation, that we should suspend judgment about everything. For, obviously, on any plausible conception of ordinary life, pursuing an attitude of suspension of judgment because of the equal force of the opposed claims cannot be seen as part of such a life. The Pyrrhonists say that they live without beliefs, but this is certainly not the manner in which ordinary people

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4 On skepticism and common sense, see Lemos (2004), esp. 1–13; see also Bett (1993), esp. 364–366.