It is impossible to exaggerate the importance of Richard Popkin in any reassessment of the role of skepticism in the configuration of modern philosophy. The fecundity of Popkin’s enterprise may be detected in the vast proliferation of questions that he has prompted. In fact, when re-established as a major philosophy, queries about skepticism may arise that are conventionally applied to philosophical traditions whose relevance has always been acknowledged as undisputed. A far from exhaustive listing might well include queries about the morality of skepticism, its anthropology, its attitude towards science, the possibilities of a skeptical aesthetics and, for the purposes of these reflections, its modes of perceiving politics and social life.

A variant of the main Popkinian hypothesis may be applied to political philosophy. If Skepticism has been a driving force behind modern philosophy—in terms of its own contributions and the variety of attempted refutations that it has prompted—something similar might well be said about the specific field of political philosophy. The history of modern political philosophy may also be considered in the light of the clashes that have taken place with various forms of skeptical argumentation, as well as the presence of skepticism in the formulation of positive arguments and not only in refutations.

Modern jusnaturalism during the seventeenth century was an attempt to refute and surmount skepticism through the association established between the tradition of natural law and rationalism. Just as in the broader philosophical field of politics and morality, for modern jusnaturalists—Thomas Hobbes more than all the others—this consisted of eradicating uncertainty and the assumption that there are no universal and axiomatic fundaments for sovereignty and civil philosophy. Both uncertainty and the assumption that there are no universals were
disseminated from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries onwards, as we have learned from Popkin’s discoveries, by the Pyrrhonean war machine.

Perceiving the political order as one of many components of the ordinary history of human beings, the Skeptics established a form of thinking about sovereignty as grounded on accidents, traditions, and beliefs. The foundations of sovereignty are located in the erratic modes of history and experience, thus not endowed with rational or metaphysical fundaments. This distinction—proposed by Fernando Gil in his book *La Conviction* (2000)—between foundation and fundament appears useful to me for distinguishing the specifically skeptical mode of philosophising.¹

There is thus a specific history of the presence of the skeptical tradition in terms of the configuration of the political field and its modes of cognition. Another fertile area for investigation would be to identify two elements within this specific history: that which contributes to the spirit of challenging dogmatisms—the war machine as well as *pars destruens*—and that which may be considered a specific vision of the public world, or in other terms, a specific political philosophy of skepticism. The work of John Christian Laursen—*The Politics of Skepticism*—today constitutes an undeniable benchmark offering guidelines for discussion of these elements.²

This paper moves away from the legitimate—and necessary—intention of indicating the possible contours of a skeptical political philosophy, instead striving to identify what I may call the philosophical form of skepticism in politics. I view this enterprise as complementing that of establishing a history of skepticism as a political and moral philosophy, rather than as refuting or outstripping other efforts along these lines. I think that this type of concern will require an investigation strategy that transposes any rigid distinction between the history of philosophy and an analytical perspective. In my view, analytical issues acquire an existential dimension only if associated with problems presented by the history of philosophy.

¹  This distinction was established by Fernando Gil in *La Conviction* (Paris: Flammarion, 2000).