“Here’s Looking at You,” Rick: *Casablanca* and Pyrrhonian Skepticism

by

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Abstract

The Ancient Green philosopher Sextus Empiricus provides us, in the *Outlines of Skepticism*, with arguably the most complete surviving account of Pyrrhonian Skepticism. He conceived of Skepticism as a way to live your life peacefully, free from the worries that are caused by oppositions in the world around us. For every claim, there is an equally plausible opposition, and this creates stress for the dogmatist. The Skeptic, on the other hand, by recognizing that there are oppositions and thus practicing suspension of judgement along with investigation, is able to be tranquil in the face of oppositions. To better be able to understand Skepticism, it is useful to see a practical application. Therefore, I will argue that Rick Blaine, from 1942’s *Casablanca*, matures into a Skeptic during the course of the film. Although the film is a work of fiction, there is enough character development to argue that the earliest version of Rick chronologically is not a Skeptic. As the film progresses, we can see his development and at the end of the film he is able to face making the decision to send his love, Ilsa, away without experiencing turmoil. I will also argue that the film has Skeptical qualities of its own which mean that it should be read as more than a wartime propaganda piece. Both of these arguments will be shown by completing a close reading of the film’s script, written by Julius and Philip Epstein and Howard Koch, as documented in *Casablanca: Script and Legend* by Howard Koch as well as my viewings of the film. The reading has been organized into the four phases that Rick experiences in his relationship with Skepticism.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Ancient Pyrrhonian Skeptics, such as Sextus Empiricus (estimated 160-210 CE), describe themselves as those who investigate the truth of matters while suspending judgement, in order to achieve freedom from concerns about uncertainty (Greek: *ataraxia*, typically translated as tranquility). Within the history of ancient skepticism, three movements are typically identified. The earliest of these include the unofficial skeptics: those simply with skeptical tendencies and ideas but no official recognition by themselves or others as ‘skeptical philosophers’, including 6th-4th century BCE Greek philosophers Xenophanes, Socrates, Democritus, Plato. Pyrrho of Elis (360-270 BCE) was also an early skeptic, and many of his ideas became the foundation for later skeptics: hence Pyrrhonian Skepticism.

The second wave of skepticism originated at Plato’s Academy with, in particular, two of the headmasters of the school: Arcesilaus (316/5-241/0 BCE) and Carneades (214/3-129/8 BCE). This wave of skepticism never gained a lot of traction, although skepticism remained as part of the teachings at the Academy for some time after.

The third wave of ancient skepticism is the Pyrrhonian form. One self-identified skeptic who claimed Pyrrhonian inspiration, Aenesidemus (1st century BCE), broke away from the Academy as he believed that the Academy had settled on a weak form of skepticism that no longer required investigation as a key principle. Unfortunately none of Aenesidemus’s texts have survived and references to him are limited.
We then come to Sextus, the primary representative for Pyrrhonian Skepticism.¹ His account of Skepticism was meant to counteract all forms of dogmatism, including the Stoics, an influential school of thought originating with the Ancient Greek Zeno of Citium in the 4th century BCE and associated with various figures through to the Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius (121-180 CE). The Stoics were particularly influential on the Academic skeptics and in part this is thought to have motivated Aenesidemus’ break with the Academy. Sextus also considers arguments made by pre-Socratic dogmatists in his works about Skepticism. In “The Life of Sextus Empiricus”, D. K. House tells that Sextus takes care throughout his writings to make it clear that he is able to provide a Skeptical view of things, as “one would expect an ancient Skeptic to make a special effort to be [as well] versed in as wide a range of conventions as possible in order to be able to show that what is taken to be a law of nature is merely an arbitrary contrivance” (233). Sextus was thought to be a medical doctor, although little else is known about his life. Typically he is placed sometime around the second century CE, though there is much disagreement on any specific timeline for his life. House concludes that there is enough evidence only to be able to place Sextus sometime between 100 CE and the first part of the 3rd century (231).

In addition to not knowing when specifically Sextus lived, we know little else about him. In all of the writings that we do have, there are no indications as to where he was born or where he spent most of his life. The knowledge that Sextus has about different areas around the world “does not stand out in a way that would justify identifying [any one place] as his home land” (231). As Sextus came after the Academic skeptics, some historians have considered whether he or any other Pyrrhonian skeptics had a fixed location or school

¹ Henceforth, Pyrrhonian Skepticism will be shortened to Skepticism with a capital S.
where there was training of new pupils. House argues that this line of reasoning implies that
the Pyrrhonian Skeptics were much more organized and formal than we have evidence to
believe (232). Ultimately, “the evidence on Sextus’ life is sufficient to provide a basis for
endless conjecture… Namely, it is necessary to suspend judgement on Sextus’ life in
almost every detail” (238).

In Sextus’ writings we can see Pyrrhonian Skepticism fully formed. Sextus
conceives of Skepticism as a philosophy, something which offers a way of life and not
merely an academic exercise (Annas and Barnes 17). However, to better be able to
understand Skepticism, it is useful to see an example of how it might play out in a life—
even a fictional one. For this reason, I propose to examine the character Rick Blaine
(played by Humphrey Bogart) from the 1942 ‘Best Picture’ Academy Award winning film
*Casablanca*, directed by Michael Curtiz. Although the film is a work of fiction, Rick
presents as an interesting character that has many facets to his personality which are shown
to us throughout the film. The character development that he experiences throughout his
life, as represented in the film, functions as an illustration of what Skepticism would look
like as it develops through lived experiences and reflection. I will argue that, throughout the
course of the film, Rick develops into a Pyrrhonian Skeptic. Moreover, I will argue that the
film has Skeptical qualities of its own which mean that it should be read as more than
simply a propaganda piece. This will be shown by completing a close reading of the film’s
script, written by Julius and Philip Epstein and Howard Koch, as documented in
*Casablanca: Script and Legend* by Howard Koch as well as viewings of the film. The
reading has been organized into the four phases of Rick’s relationship with Skepticism as a
way of life.
First, I will examine Rick’s character from the flashback scene. Although this scene takes place in the middle of the film, from the chronological perspective of Rick’s life it is the earliest example of his character. During this scene, when Rick is with Ilsa in Paris, he is inquisitive towards her and about her, but not Skeptical. I will argue that, although asking questions of her, it is clear that he knows what kind of answers he is looking for—he has therefore not suspended judgement. The skills that he has in the questioning shown during these scenes will aid him in becoming a Skeptic, in so far as investigation and questioning the truth of dogmatic claims is essential to Skepticism, but that at this time he does not approach the investigation with an open mind.

The second phase that we see Rick in is how he acts at the beginning of the film. This is prior to Victor and Ilsa’s arrival in Casablanca. Rick is a shrewd business man who has little concern for others and is mostly removed from human interaction: ironic because he is the owner of a social establishment. Rick is observed and named by others as cynical, but does not seem to accept that about himself. Instead, he lives an unengaged life without investigation or tranquility, emotionally withdrawn from others.

The third phase that Rick experiences takes place in Casablanca, but shortly after Ilsa arrives. Immediately upon her arrival, Rick goes through a short phase of anger and other extreme emotions. The feelings he has about her and her betrayal and abandonment of him come flooding back and he does not deal with them well. To compensate for these feelings, once he has had a night to cool off, he begins to ask questions. He attempts to understand why she acted this way and refrains from passing judgement without understanding. This is the first major step that paves the way for his evolution into a Skeptic.
Finally, the end scenes of the movie are essential to my reading of Rick’s character as a Skeptic. It is in the final scenes of the film where we find the most convincing evidence of Rick’s Skeptical commitment. Rick is a Skeptic who has realized that he cannot escape action and must decide on what to do—whether to send Ilsa and Victor away or let one or both of them stay. His actions here are consistent with his past customs and traditions, as there were cited examples throughout the film of him working on the side of the underdog. He also has demonstrated the custom of loving Ilsa, and it is customary to protect those that you love. Rick recognizes that Ilsa is Victor’s inspiration and must go with him to help the war cause. For all of these reasons, he is willing to make the decision to help them escape Casablanca.

One of the major criticisms that Skepticism has faced throughout the years is that a truly Skeptical life, where judgement on all matters is suspended, may very well be tranquil but it would also be a life of inaction, for a Skeptic who completely suspends judgement will not ever be able to act. Sextus responds to these claims, and I will address these further in relation to Rick’s character and development as a Skeptic. Throughout this paper, I will show that his decisions and actions at the end of the film to actively send Ilsa with Victor, to take a life and risk his own, and to walk into the fog with Louis are not inconsistent with the Skepticism that he has developed. As mentioned, it is Rick’s custom and tradition to act in particular manners and Sextus demonstrates that Skeptics are able to act in spite of criticisms to the contrary.

I will conclude with a look at the historical footprint that the film, as a whole, has left for us. Originally envisioned not as a major Warner release and instead as a “B” movie (Koch 9), Casablanca went through three intended directors before it became Michael
Curtiz’s project. It fell into the category at the time of a wartime propaganda piece, meant to encourage Americans to buy into joining World War II, but also as a romantic and insightful film, in part due to Howard Koch’s interest in “characterizations and the political intrigues with their relevance to the world struggle around fascism” offset by Michael Curtiz’s leaning towards “the romantic elements of the story” (19). “Casablanca was how we thought we were, all right, a pure explication of the mood in which we entered World War II and a greater distance than Mars even from the way we eventually came out of it, seduced by power, corrupted by affluence” (5). Throughout the years since its release, Casablanca has endured as a beloved and noteworthy film. Many of the other wartime pieces that were churned out by Hollywood studios have been forgotten. The argument can be made that Casablanca continues to appeal to audiences because of the film’s Skeptical tones.

Before we begin looking at Rick’s character more closely, I must provide a brief explanation of Pyrrhonian Skepticism. Specific concepts and examples will be discussed in greater details as they apply to individual accounts of Rick’s character, but there are relevant concepts which deserve at least a brief explanation prior to my reading of the film.
Chapter 2: Skeptical Concepts and Practices

According to Sextus in the *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, “Skepticism is an ability to set out oppositions among things which appear and are thought of in any way at all, an ability by which because of the equipollence in the opposed objects and accounts, we come first to suspension of judgement and afterwards to tranquility” (1.8). What this means is that the Skeptic is able to recognize conflicting accounts of information. With this recognition, he understands that some things, even though they may seem convincing, may not be convincing after all. None of the conflicting accounts should be considered more or less worthwhile than their opposition. This leads to suspension of judgement: the “standstill of the intellect” (1.10) where the Skeptic does not assent to any particular idea. Tranquility, or ataraxia, is the calmness of the soul that is attained when judgement is suspended.

What this definition does not include is any reference to whether the standstill of the intellect implies an end to investigation. However, in his *Outlines*, Sextus clearly sets out that there are three types of people: those that say they have discovered the truth, those that say that the truth cannot be discovered, and those who pursue investigation (1.3). Dogmatists such as Aristotle (384-322 BCE) and the Stoics believe they have discovered the truth. Academics, such as Clitomachus (187/6-110/09 BCE), assert that truths cannot be known. Ancient Skeptics fall into the third category: investigators.

Sextus’ account in the *Outlines* provides us with the most comprehensive view of Skepticism, including what Skeptical investigation means, why suspension of judgement (*epoche*) is important, and what the telos of Skepticism is—to obtain ataraxia. He also provides context for non-assertion, when to use ‘maybe’, what saying “I determine
nothing” means, and more. However, it should be noted that Sextus emphasizes at the beginning of the Outlines that he can assert throughout the record no more than what appears to him at the moment to be the case, as is the Skeptic’s way.

The Pyrrhonians believed that Skepticism could be made up of two principles. First, one must admit that one cannot know anything to be true or false. Evidence may always come along which would refute something we believe to be true, and as such, we should suspend our beliefs and judgements. Second, in order for the person to remain active, investigation must be involved. Sextus was clear that the Skeptic must be an active investigator. Investigation and suspension work hand in hand to aid the Skeptic in achieving his or her goal: to become tranquil (1.4).

Sextus says that our investigation of things should lead us to a life where we are able to set out oppositions between accounts in how things are thought of or appear to be (1.4). What this means is that we are able to recognize the strengths of an argument but also that there may be an argument which is equally as convincing that is in disagreement with the first. Neither of these opposing accounts will be more or less convincing than the other, leading to equipollence. From this, we determine that we must suspend our judgement, electing not to “reject nor posit” anything (1.4). We are then able to achieve tranquility: freedom from being troubled by the equipollence, along with calmness of the soul.

Essentially, the Pyrrhonian Skeptic will attend to only that which is apparent and which comes from ongoing observations of what is around them, without holding opinions and judgements (1.23-4). Things that are apparent to us are divided into four categories: guidance by nature, necessitation by feeling, acceptance of tradition (laws and customs), and teaching by ‘experts’:
By nature’s guidance, we are naturally capable of perceiving and thinking. By the necessitation of feelings, hunger conducts us to food and thirst to drink. By the handing down of customs and laws, we accept, from an everyday point of view, that piety is good and impiety bad. By teaching of kinds of expertise we are not inactive in those which we accept. (1.23-4)

Skeptics, therefore, are not undisturbed in every way (1.29) For example, Skeptics would be disturbed by coldness and begin to shiver. In these cases, though, dogmatists are subject both to the feeling of coldness and the resulting shivering along with the belief that this feeling is bad. Skeptics shed the additional opinion that this feeling is bad in its nature and so is less troubled (1.30). Ultimately, these things which are apparent lead the Skeptic to be able to live a life without inaction but also without fixed opinions.

One thing that is perhaps not as self-evident as it should be is that the Skeptic is not able simply to decide to suspend judgement and have this be the case. Perin argues that “if the Skeptic could suspend judgement in this way [by simply deciding to], he would not need to seek or devise, as he does, arguments for and against the truth of the candidate for belief that is under consideration” (22). What this means is that if the Skeptic decided, out of the blue, to suspend judgement on all matters, he would have no further reason to continue investigation—which we know to be an equally essential part of Skepticism. Instead, suspension comes about because the Skeptic cannot determine what to do with the equipollence, and so elects to continue with investigation without determining which side of an opposition is better or worse.

The Ten Modes of Suspension of Judgement that Sextus provides in the *Outlines* are given to facilitate the production of oppositions and hence to begin our suspension of
judgement. The Modes, which in their whole are not essential to the basic understanding of Skepticism, make it easier for the Skeptic to arrange the various arguments that he comes across (Annas and Barnes 22).

A final note on the translation of *epoche* to ‘suspension of judgement’ from Benson Mates:

…the Skeptic’s *aporia*, as a state of mind, is consistent with his *epoche*; consequently, although for the most part [we] follow tradition in translating the latter term as ‘suspension of judgement,’ [we] perhaps should [use] the more accurate phrase ‘withholding of assent’. For one can withhold assent from an assertion without granting that it makes sense, whereas ‘suspension of judgement’ suggests […] that one knows what the issue is but has not yet made up one’s mind as to which of the opposing views is correct. (32)

Throughout the literature, the term *epoche* as used by Sextus and other skeptics is almost exclusively translated as suspension of judgement. Although I will continue to use suspension of judgement as the translation for *epoche*, Mates brings forth an interesting point given Sextus’ considerations of non-assertion in *Outlines* 1.192-3 and other close chapters. Sextus says,

Hence it is clear that we do not use ‘non-assertion’ to mean that objects are in their nature such as to move us necessarily to non-assertion, but rather to make it clear that now, when we utter it, we feel in this way with regard to these matters under investigation. (1.193)

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2 The typical definition of *aporia* as the feeling of being at a loss or perplexed by something and therefore inclined to doubt or raise objections is consistent with the translation of *epoche* as suspension of judgement.
Skeptics neither agree to nor reject anything which is stated in a dogmatic fashion about things that are unclear, although Sextus recognizes that there are things which “passively move us” (1.193) and lead us necessarily to assent.
Chapter 3: Reading Rick: Pre-Skeptic

We begin the detailed examination of Rick’s character with the earliest point of his life that is represented in the film: the dialogue and actions between Ilsa and himself when they originally meet in Paris. The flashback scene (which takes place in the middle of the film, after Ilsa’s arrival) begins with Rick asking Ilsa a series of questions. She deflectively answers that they agreed to live in the present and not to ask each other questions about the past:

Rick: Who are you really? And what were you before? What did you do and what did you think? Huh?
Ilsa: We said “no questions.” (Koch 110-1)

Their subsequent dialogue in Paris echoes the first dialogue:

Rick: I was wondering.
Ilsa: Yes?
Rick: Why I’m so lucky. Why I should find you waiting for me to come along.
Ilsa: Why there is no other man in my life?
Rick: Uh huh.
Ilsa: That’s easy. There was. He’s dead.
Rick: I’m sorry for asking. I forgot we said “no questions.”
Ilsa: Well, only one answer can take care of all our questions. (112-3)

Notice that in both of these cases, Rick is the only one asking questions. He wants to know, to be able to form a plan for his life, to understand Ilsa more, whichever the case may be.
He actively is inquiring and is open to receiving information. Certainly though, he is expecting to receive particular answers as any hopeful romantic would be. In this sense, he has not suspended judgement. Though he might be receptive to any answer, as he has asked the questions, he is asking questions for the purpose of finding out more about his new love and bringing them closer together. His questions do not have the suspension of judgement that is necessary for it to be recognized as Skeptical investigation.

Investigation is central to Skepticism. Even the Greek adjective *skeptikos* derives from a verb meaning ‘to inquire’ or ‘to consider’. Skeptics are thus portrayed as “perpetual students or researchers” (Annas and Barnes 1); those who continuously investigate in order to seek out the truth of a matter without previously making any judgements.

This Skeptical way of life differs from dogmatic philosophers, for whom investigation plays no significant role in determining or sustaining their beliefs. Dogmatic philosophers typically claim to have discovered the truth already, and so do not need to investigate them any further, or they deny that it is possible to discover the truth about the matter and so investigation is useless (Perin 7). The Skeptics are able to continue to pursue investigation because they are without fixed opinions.

Sextus says that the Skeptics were led to equipollence through the practice of traditional philosophy. Troubled by the different sides that could be presented for and against a claim, they were unable to determine what they should assent to and thus began their investigation into which things are true and which are false. Instead of being able to determine, however, which things are true, instead they discovered that for every claim there exists an equally convincing opposing claim, or at least the possibility for such a
claim. This led the Skeptics to suspension of judgement, with the desire to continue searching and understanding the claims, looking for truth.

House reports that the Skeptics are able to detail what their experiences are, but that they regard these as simply an announcement of what they are perceiving—how things appear to them. They must then go on investigating because they have been unable to apprehend adequately the object of their investigation while simultaneously suspending their judgement as to whether it will be apprehensible or not (237). In this sense, House argues, the Skeptic and the Empiric share a common experience: “the inability to apprehend non-evident things”, and yet each comes to a different conclusion (237).

Had Ilسا and Rick not agreed, “no questions”, there is the potential that he could have been more of an investigator as he would not feel hushed or restrained by this agreement. That being said, his romantic bias rules out counting him as a Skeptic at this time. He is looking for certain answers and may be inquisitive by nature, but it is really not to sort out the truth or falseness. He is uncomfortable with the uncertainty of not knowing things and so continues to ask. Ilسا, on the other hand, is more uncomfortable with committing to anything and so continues to insist on the “no questions” rule.

Soon after this discussion, the Germans begin marching into Paris. Ilسا remarks, “with the whole world crumbling, we pick now to fall in love” (Koch 118). This is a simple and honest statement, one which does not require any further investigation, and yet Rick’s reply is first a nod of agreement, and then more questioning: “where were you, say, ten years ago?” (118). No questions: they are supposed to be living in the moment, and yet Rick cannot find any kind of tranquility with this. He continues to ask questions.
The final series of questions between Rick and Ilsa in Paris involve his marriage proposal. Rick is attempting to create some certainty in their relationship, in order to help him deal with his feelings about her.

Rick: Say, why don’t we get married in Marseilles?

Ilsa: That’s too far ahead to plan.

Rick: Yes, I guess it is a little too far ahead. Well, let’s see. What about the engineer? Why can’t he marry us on the train?

Ilsa: Oh darling! (*begins to cry*)

Rick: Well, why not? The captain on a ship can. It doesn’t seem fair that…

(120)

Ilsa’s sobbing response is because she is unable to answer a question like this—she is stuck, unable to affirm any of the feelings or experiences and unable to act. Perhaps this is out of fear, and her fear is overwhelming. It may also be as a result of the fact that she has recently discovered that her husband is not dead, as she thought, and she has yet to decide—or is incapable of deciding at this moment—what her next course of action is.

She is also afraid to hope for anything certain. This reminds her of her loss, of her husband and of her lost belief in lasting happiness. She cannot commit to something lasting because she is unable to believe that things last. Though Rick’s proposal itself is not really intended as part of an investigation, instead of being rejected by Ilsa’s reply, Rick continue to question her. He ponders whether the train conductor would have the same jurisdiction as a ship’s captain. His questioning is meant to encourage her to have hope. This style stands in contrast to his moving and definitive speech at the end of the film, when action must be taken.
This exchange between Rick and Ilsa shows the difference between layers of inquiry. Rick’s real question is wondering why they are unable to make their own happiness, as opposed to the literal and practical question of who has the jurisdiction to perform a marriage ceremony. Rick’s question is rhetorical and should be viewed as more of an argument against Ilsa’s expression of uncertainty about the future. Rick disagrees with her decision to live only in the present and wants to push her to consider more.

Much of what we know of Socrates’ work is his skeptical questioning and searching. For example, Socrates argued that the unexamined life is not worth living. We are bound to lead our lives based on what we believe, and so we have to examine what our beliefs are as well as reject those that are false. If you are unable to do this, you could lead a bad life. For Socrates, this questioning of beliefs begins with moral skepticism, but it extends from questions of value to a wide range of other examinations.

In the Pyrrhonian period of Skepticism, Arcesilaus stated that neither our perceptions nor our beliefs could be true or false (Bett 14). Because of this, we should not trust them and therefore should be without opinion or inclination. The result of this is first speechlessness, as those new to Skepticism have to come to an acceptance of how this will influence their lives. Then freedom is the result: freedom from worry (ataraxia) and ultimately—according to Aenesidemus—pleasure (16). Sextus says that Skeptics act in accordance with certain appearances in order to be able to live normal lives. Nature gives us the ability to perceive and to think, along with the necessary afflictions to compel us such as thirst and hunger. Then, Skeptics follow traditions and customs, and they are able to do technical things by being trained in the specific skills. Skeptics are able to free themselves from the tumult that they believe goes hand in hand with having beliefs. While
they still have experiences, for example: experiencing thirst, they do not add the further belief that being thirsty is bad or painful.

Keeping this inquisitive—but not yet Skeptical—Rick in mind, we then return to their present time in Casablanca. At the beginning of the movie, we are introduced to Rick as the owner and proprietor of the Café Americain.

In the opening scenes of the film, we get the first glimpse of Rick’s character through a discussion with one of Rick’s employees, Carl, and patrons of the bar. The patrons ask if Rick might be willing to join them for a drink. In response, Carl declares that “[Rick] never drinks with customers” (Koch 40). A woman in the party responds, insulted, by asking “what makes saloon-keepers so snobbish?” (40) and is clearly disappointed with this response from Carl. The male patron hints to Carl, “perhaps if you told him I ran the second largest baking house in Amsterdam” (40). Carl’s response is, “the second largest? That wouldn’t impress Rick” (40). From this, it can be read that Rick is not interested in the general socialising that happens in saloons, including his own. He has no desire to be involved with the guests of his establishment and is not easily impressed by others. We get an air of detachment from this, although his detachment is from everything except for business. His attachment to his business is unemotional; for example, he takes risks with money and his business by running an illegal gambling hall in the back of the café. By removing himself from situations involving others, Rick can remain untempted to return to his previous approach to life where he did investigate. He is not tempted to inquiry because he believes he will be disappointed again, as he was when he left Paris without Ilse.

The first detailed interaction that we see Rick have in the café is during the conversation with Senor Ugarte. Ugarte is attempting convince Rick to help him by hiding
stolen letters of transit to exit the country. At Rick’s dismissal of him, Ugarte asks, “you despise me, don’t you?” (46). Rick replies, “if I gave you any thought I probably would” (46). This particular customer is not the only patron Rick resists giving thought to. Continually, he turns a blind eye to selling of passport visas and the gambling going on in his café. Sextus says that “the causal principle of Skepticism we say is the hope of becoming tranquil” (1.12). This distancing and abstinence from complicated situations that Rick practices is his attempt at achieving tranquility. Unfortunately, he is attempting to get to tranquility without any investigation. Having some kind of emotional investment serves to motivate investigation; Rick, however, is emotionally void. During his previous experience of being an investigator he believed in the possibility of happy endings. This was not a success for him, so he withholds from investigation in hopes of finding tranquility, but is unable to achieve it without investigation.

During their time in Paris, Rick was hurt by Ilsa. This made him self-centered and lonely. In turn, this made him appear to others, and perhaps to himself, as cynical. For example, this petty criminal Ugarte says to Rick “you are a very cynical person, Rick, if you’ll forgive me for saying so” (Koch 43). Curtly, Rick responds that he will forgive him for this. Much later in the film, Captain Renault says to Rick, “because, my dear Ricky, I suspect that under that cynical shell you’re at heart a sentimentalist” (65). Rick may or may not be convinced by these comments from the people in Casablanca who make such remarks. His expression when others comment on his cynicism is bemused: he may accept that he appears this way to others without actually committing to the belief himself, which would be consistent with Skepticism. Rick has, however, closed himself off from most deep relationships in order to not feel hurt, and at heart of this period he is the disappointed
sentimentalist that Louis says he is. At this stage, Rick has detached himself from others and this is identified by some of the people around him as cynicism. It is merely his protection method from being hurt again. The Skeptical reading of this would suggest that this is the beginning of Rick’s acceptance of possible oppositions, even in these early stages of his character development. He does not commit to being a cynic. He is open to being interpreted in multiple ways.

Next, when Rick talks to the other café owner in town (Signor Ferrari) who has dropped by to make an offer to buy the Café Americain, Rick suggests to the Signor, “suppose you run your business and let me run mine” (50). This comes following a discussion regarding the trade in Casablanca: when Ferrari informs Rick that buying and selling slaves is the hot commodity, Rick simply expresses his disinterest. Ferrari continues the discussion by asking if he can buy Sam instead, the charming African-American piano man who accompanied Rick from occupied France. Rick gives Sam the option to choose his fate, trusting in Sam’s loyalty but also recognizing that if Sam wants to leave then he has no reason or right to stop him. Sam, of course, remains loyal to Rick and refuses.

Following the interaction with Ferrari, there is a scuffle and arrest at the café. Captain Louis Renault, the police commander of Casablanca, along with his officers storm Rick’s café to arrest Ugarte as they believe he murdered couriers carrying travel visas. Louis warns Rick ahead of time that the arrest will be taking place and directs him not to let Ugarte know that he may be apprehended. Again, Rick displays his disinterest in being involved, declaring “I stick my neck out for nobody” (60). As the police are carrying Ugarte out, an anonymous gentleman remarks to Rick that he hopes Rick would be of more assistance if it was his turn to be carried away. Rick again repeats his sentiments about not
getting involved, regardless of who requires assistance. Rick does not specifically oppose these criminals and their activities, but he certainly makes it clear that he does not condone them either. While this may seem as though Rick is ‘suspending judgement’, his character at this time reads more with being a pessimist. He does not believe in the good in anyone; more that everyone is a bad guy and he has given up caring and hoping for something better to come of it.

Whilst introducing Rick to Major Strasser, the head of the Third Reich in Casablanca, Louis identifies Rick as “completely neutral about everything” (76). Rick silently agrees, but Major Strasser is quick to declare that there was a time when Rick was not so neutral. The reasons for Strasser’s declaration are mostly left open for interpretation at this time, but this alludes to the fact that Rick has been known to take action in the past. There are few parties in Casablanca that are aware of this, and typically it is characters in positions of power who know more.

Strasser makes it clear to Rick that the hero of the underground resistance movement, Victor Laszlo, who is arriving in Casablanca that day, shall not be permitted to leave Casablanca. Rick lets him know, having placed a bet with Louis, that his interest in whether Victor Laszlo stays or leaves has only to do with the wagers they have placed on it (70). Strasser responds by asking, “in this case, you have no sympathy for the fox?” and Rick satisfies him by responding, “not particularly. I understand the point of view of the hound, too” (78). As Rick is unaware of Ilsa being in Casablanca with Victor at this time, there would not be any feelings of jealousy. Rather, this can be viewed as another example of Rick’s own personal removal from things which do not concern him.
When the discussion of Laszlo’s activities begins to get deeper, Rick excuses himself from the discussion. This example is one of the times where we see what could have become active investigation being halted. Had he been a Skeptic at this time, he may have found it opportune to inquire about Victor, about his activities, in order to assess the situation—both of Victor directly and of the resistance movement.

In these scenes, we might want to view Rick as tranquil, if only because he has chosen to completely withdraw himself from everything that is not a necessity to living and running his business. Richard Bett says that “if everything you do is directed, in the end, at your tranquility, then you had better not care about anything too much, because this runs the risk of your tranquility being disrupted: instead, you need to cultivate an attitude of withdrawal” (13). Though this may be similar to epoche, suspending judgement in order to achieve tranquility, it is not the same and also not Skepticism. Sextus would argue that you cannot achieve tranquility with this refusal from Rick to care enough to want to understand the things that are happening. Epoche and investigation are both integral: without suspension, there is no need to pursue investigation. Without investigation, there would be no reason to challenge things that are presented to us. The Skeptic finds tranquility from accepting that we cannot know things for certain and as such must continue to actively investigate. Therefore, at this point in time Rick is not a Skeptic. Dean Sluyter says that “it’s clear that Rick needs engagement with the world as much as the world needs him. He is missing the joy, the juiciness of life, which consequently feels flat and dry, like a desert that stretches hopelessly in all directions forever” (288).

Rick’s character at this time is remarkably similar to the apocryphal stories that are told about Pyrrho. For example, it is told that Pyrrho was so removed from the world
around him that when walking one day, he stepped onto the road and his friends had to pull him off of the road in order that he did not get run over. It was also told that he was so unaffected by others that he was able to walk by a drowning man without any response.

Gisela Striker’s “Ataraxia: Happiness as Tranquillity” says that,

Pyrrho is described by ancient biographers as a living paradigm of ataraxia.

Having concluded from his philosophical inquiries that nothing whatever can be found out about the world, including, of course, whether anything is good or bad in it, he is said to have become completely indifferent to everything that went on around him.

Where Rick and Pyrrho differ, however, has to do with the inquiry. Pyrrho is said to have come to a conclusion that we live in uncertainty, and as such should not be affected, while Rick has been hurt. He decisively removes himself from a world of disappointment, becoming indifferent to everything around him. Pyrrho began as an investigator with an open mind to oppositions (although this remark seems to imply he stopped investigating, which is also not consistent with Sextus’ account of Pyrrhonian Skepticism); Rick did not begin by investigating and being open to oppositions.

Remarkably, right at the end of the discussion about Victor, we find that Victor and Ilsa have arrived in Casablanca. Victor has reserved a seat at the café, and it is shortly after this that they will make Rick’s acquaintance (Ilsa not for the first time, of course). Being reunited with Ilsa is ultimately what sparks the desire to investigate again for Rick. It seems that, when around her, he cannot help but let his curiosity and spirit of inquiry overtake the part of him which has stopped caring enough to ask questions.
Ilsa and Rick are reintroduced. They have a lively discussion in front of Louis and Victor, reminiscing about when they knew each other without going into too much detail. Rick states that he remembers everything from that time, because it was “not an easy day to forget” (Koch 100). After several lines of dialogue, Louis remarks to Rick that “[he’s] becoming quite human” (101). Louis immediately puts together that Ilsa is the one who has precipitated this emotional change in the usually withdrawn Rick.

After Ilsa and Victor leave the café, Rick’s demeanour completely changes. He begins drinking heavily after closing the café for the night, in order to numb his emotions because he is afraid that her reintroduction might lead to him caring again. Sam asks Rick if he is planning on going to bed, and Rick declares that he is not. Sam recognizes how hurt and confused Rick is, and suggests that they “take the car and drive all night”, “get drunk”, and “go fishing” (108), only returning once Ilsa is gone from Casablanca.

During this scene is when we see a hint of Rick’s inquiring mind returning to him. He declares to Sam (while drunken), the famous line: “of all the gin joints in all the towns in all the world, she walks into mine!” (109). Although this is a declaration by Rick, he is incredulous about the coincidence. It is also an implicit question: why are things the way they are? He is returning to inquiry. What Rick really means is some combination of the following myriad of questions: What are the odds she turns up in Casablanca? Why did she have to come to my café? Her appearance in my café is so improbable that it must have meaning—what could that be? Why must I face this pain again? How do I really feel about seeing her again? What will happen now? Ilsa’s arrival has called into question the belief that he would never see her again. Clearly she has shaken his mostly numb Casablanca existence.
Ilsa returns that evening to the café to talk to Rick. After Ilsa refuses to drink with Rick, his first question to her is “why did you have to come to Casablanca? There are other places” (126). Before she turned up in his life again, Rick would not have inquired about another’s actions, deeply removed and generally avoiding any questions. He would not have wondered about anything past his day to day life. Their conversation continues, with Rick asking particularly rude questions given his drunken state. Eventually Ilsa gives up on the conversation and leaves, realizing he may not be the same Rick she once knew.

This encounter of Rick’s after the saloon has closed, and the following one in the marketplace, parallel Sextus’ telling of the story of Apelles, the painter:

They say that [Apelles] was painting a horse and wanted to represent in his picture the lather on the horse’s mouth, but he was so unsuccessful that he gave up, took the sponge on which he had been wiping off the colours from this brush, and flung it at the picture. And when it hit the picture it produces a representation of the horse’s lather. (1.28)

By searching for the oppositions in what appears to be and what is thought of, and being unable to come to any conclusions, the Skeptic has to suspend judgement. Tranquility follows this dejection: the throwing up of the hands in the air and admitting that we do not know enables the letting go that leaves room for peace of the soul, the aim of the Skeptics.

From Perin:

The Skeptic, in turn has a certain objective (tranquility), he is unable to achieve his objective in one way (by discovering the truth), and as a result he does something else by which he does not expect to achieve his objective (suspend judgement) but by which nonetheless he does achieve it. If,
therefore, the Apelles story is supposed to reveal something about the relation between the Skeptic’s suspension of judgement and his tranquility, it is that the Skeptic does not suspend judgement in order to achieve tranquility (just as Apelles did not throw his sponge at the painting in order to produce a representation of the lather on the horse’s mouth). (17)

The Greek term for tranquility that Sextus uses is *ataraxia*. Suspension of judgement is able to lead to tranquility because it frees the Skeptic from the disturbances of belief. As Petr Lom identifies, the pursuit of *ataraxia* is not unique to the Skeptics (44). Indeed, all three of the various Hellenistic schools advocated for tranquility. Epicurus argued that the purpose of life is “to free the soul from disturbance”. Seneca agreed, “what is a happy life? Peacefulness and constant tranquility” (Perin 33). However, in contrast to Stoicism and Epicureanism, only the Skeptics believed that *ataraxia* could be attained by suspending judgement.

It should be noted that, although Sextus tells us that the Skeptic must engage in the search for truth to be able to achieve tranquility, this does not mean that the Skeptic is engaged in investigation *only* to achieve tranquility (15). Were this the case, once tranquility was achieved, the Skeptic would have no further need for investigation—however, we know this to be an essential part of Skepticism.
Chapter 4: Reading Rick: The Skeptic

In the marketplace the following day, Rick approaches Ilsa. She is curt with him, clearly upset with his behaviour from the previous night. Rick apologizes to her, but Ilsa says that she is not interested in hearing what Rick has to say. He persists, and the conversation goes as follows:

Rick: Why did you come back? To tell me why you ran out on me at the railway station?

Ilsa: Yes.

Rick: Well, you can tell me now. I’m reasonably sober.

Ilsa: I don’t think I will, Rick.

Rick: Why not? After all, I got stuck with a railway ticket. I think I’m entitled to know.

Ilsa: Last night I saw what has happened to you. The Rick I knew in Paris, I could tell him. He’d understand. But the one who looked at me with such hatred… well, I’ll be leaving Casablanca soon and we’ll never see each other again… We knew very little about each other when we were in love in Paris. If we leave it that way, maybe we’ll remember those days and not Casablanca, not last night.

Rick: Did you run out on me because you couldn’t take it? Because you knew what it would be like, hiding from the police, running away all the time? (142-3)
With this, Rick the investigator begins to return. Rick must let go of his more dogmatic perceptions about Ilsa in order to move forward. Both Ilsa and Rick are capable of behaving in ways which do not fit with their preconceptions, no matter how difficult that is to accept. With Ilsa, Rick returns to his old habit of asking questions and wants to understand more. He chooses to admit to himself that things may not be the way he believed them to be, and is open to further investigation, as opposed to repressing the feelings he had or rejecting new information altogether. The audience is left with the sense that in caring enough to want to have his questions answered, especially in the case of Ilsa and her actions, Rick is beginning to open up his mind.

Rick continues to follow the investigative path that was opened with Ilsa back at the café by questioning a young woman, Annina, who comes to speak to Rick about Louis. Annina came to Rick to ask him a question, and instead Rick’s side of the dialogue with her is as follows:

- Rick: Who told you to ask me that? (…)
- Rick: Where’s your husband? (…)
- Rick: How long have you been married? (…)
- Rick: Does he know that? (…)
- Rick: You want my advice? (162)

This breaks from Rick’s customary behaviour prior to Ilsa arriving; her influence on him is spreading to other aspects of his life and turning him back into an investigator with other people as well. It is interesting to note that this initial questioning of another—someone outside of Ilsa, as was his custom—shares a very familiar territory with Ilsa, as the first recipient of his questioning is another young woman. This shows that in order to be able to
approach situations with a mind that can receive oppositions, there needs to be steps leading to that open mind. As previously discussed, you cannot simply decide to suspend judgement—instead it is triggered and worked up to (Perin 22). Questioning Annina is familiar territory for Rick to build up his Skepticism.

Prior to Ilsa’s arrival in Casablanca, Rick’s other interaction with a woman is with Yvonne, a patron at his bar with whom Rick seems to be more than friends with. After a night of her own drinking, Yvonne instead is the questioner of Rick, and Rick is dismissive and non-committal in his responses to her questions. For example,

Yvonne: Where were you last night?
Rick: That’s so long ago, I don’t remember.
Yvonne: Will I see you tonight?
Rick: I never make plans that far ahead. (Koch 54-5)

This emphasizes the difference between Rick before Ilsa, and Rick opening up to investigate and questions Ilsa and then Annina.

The first time that we see the scope of Rick’s questioning expanding to include men in Casablanca occurs when Victor arrives at the café after a secret meeting, brought there by Carl and looking for a hiding place. Rick pours Victor a drink, and strikes up a conversation.

Rick: Had a close one, eh?
Victor: Yes, rather.
Rick: Don’t you sometimes wonder if it’s worth all this? I mean what you’re fighting for?
Victor: We might as well question why we breathe. If we stop breathing, we’ll die. If we stop fighting our enemies, the world will die. (...)

Rick: You love [Ilsa] that much?

Victor: Apparently you think of me only as the leader of a cause. Well, I am also a human being. Yes, I love her that much. (198-9)

During this conversation, Victor has some very interesting points—but the questions all come from Rick to learn more about Victor and his intentions. This conversation comes at a point in the film after Rick has already agreed with Ilsa to do the thinking for both of them. Therefore, he knows he is going to have to take action, and it is a matter of deciding what the best action will be.

Pyrrhonian Skeptics were well aware of the primary objection to Skepticism: if someone suspends his beliefs, he cannot act. The Skeptics argued that actions should be guided by what is plausible and convincing from our appearances. The Skeptic compares what conventions dictate and what is plausible, leading an ordinary life by following these appearances. They are able to separate the perception of something and the view formed on the basis of the perception: for example, the skeptic can perceive that there is an open door. He or she may feel the breeze and see other people moving in and out. They do not add the belief “there is an open door”, as it is unnecessary. However, because he or she has perceived that there is a door, it keeps them from walking into walls. The Skeptic then is not suspended in limbo.

Returning to the idea of epoche, this played an important role to Pyrrhonian Skeptics. Skeptics do not say that they do not know anything: instead they suspend belief. One kind of action or one particular kind of life cannot ever been known to be the right
way. Instead of inaction, Skeptics will follow the appearances (their body, their traditions and customs, and their skills) in order to be able to live normal lives as best they can without turmoil. Only by adopting epoche as part of one’s attitude towards knowledge can ataraxia be achieved.

Skeptical investigation leads to suspension of judgement or epoche. Because we cannot know if the things that we perceive are true or false, and because we should not believe one argument to be stronger than another opposing argument, the Skeptic should set aside any opinions in favour of suspension of judgement.

From here, we come to the final scenes of Casablanca. Skeptical Rick has recognized that he cannot fail to act, but that he can choose how to act while being calm about the possibility that what he chooses to do may be the wrong thing. All he can do is make the best decision based on all of the information he has available to him. Ilsa has instructed him that he must do the thinking for both of them, and what she means is not that he should sit around and think and not do anything. Rick cares about her, and if he does not act there is a chance she could be hurt or killed because of her associations with Victor or because of her attachment to Rick.

Therefore, Rick decides on what his course of action will be: to send Ilsa with Victor on the plane and to help them escape, instead of keeping Ilsa for himself and not worrying about Victor at all (or helping him escape while still keeping Ilsa for himself). The action that he takes follows his own past traditions and customs: Rick has shown, by “[running] guns to Ethiopia” and “[fighting] in Spain on the Loyalists’ side” (65) that he is opposed to fascism, an extreme form of dogmatism. In his choice to send Ilsa to help Victor he follows this established habit.
However, Victor is also dogmatic, and since Rick’s Skeptical nature is opposed to dogmatists, his reasoning to Ilia that Victor and the cause are important is a little bit misleading. It is Louis that calls Rick on this quandary. Rick says to Ilia during the final scene: “I’ve got a job to do, too. Where I’m going, you can’t follow. What I’ve got to do, you can’t be any part of” (219). This is an interesting snippet of conversation: it implies that he actually has a plan for the future past her departure, and that perhaps he intends to become a bigger part of the anti-Nazi movement. He may also have plans simply to continue living his life as a Skeptic, and since Ilia cannot think for herself, she will not be able to play a part in his life. However, Louis does say to Rick that Ilia “knows he was lying” (224), so maybe he was also lying about supporting Victor with his decision.

In response to commentary from critics of Skepticism, the point is made by Sextus that to avoid a life of inaction Skeptics must act according to a variety of principles. One of these is acting on established traditions and customs. In addition to socially established traditions, I believe there are personal traditions. Rick has the past tradition of helping the underdog: “isn’t it strange that you always happened to be fighting on the side of the underdog?” Victor says to Rick (173).

This may not be what Sextus had in mind for his tenth mode. Sextus declares the mode to be one “bearing especially on ethics… the one depending on persuasions and customs and laws and belief in myth and dogmatic suppositions” (1.145). He provides general examples of where to look for these particular things in order to determine how to act: for example, laws are written contracts among the people of an area, where those who break the law are punished, and so on. However, Rick finds himself in a very unique situation here. Historically, he has had a commitment to the underdog, but he also has
rediscovered a commitment to Ilsa and ensuring her wellbeing. It is also a social tradition to protect the people you love, one that the audience can empathize with.

So let us take each of these categories into consideration for Rick then. First, Sextus says that a persuasion is the choice of how one decides to live their life, be it as part of a group of people or simply by their own accord. Rick could be part of a number of persuasions: Americans, business or saloon owners, ex-patriots... perhaps even simply the male persuasion give the time period and the setting of Casablanca. However, I do not think his decisions at the end of the film are as influenced by any of these persuasions than by his own political history. Rick has shown that he has a particular way of acting which involves investigation and distance, with involvement when necessary.

Secondly, Sextus says that laws are “written contracts among citizens, transgressors of which are punished” (1.146). This becomes a more interesting scenario. Rick is an American citizen (one set of laws—although it is said that he cannot return to America), residing in Morocco (another set of laws), which is occupied by the Vichy French and potentially citizens who sympathize with the Free French instead (both different laws, directive, and beliefs, although in “Casablanca: The Romance of Propaganda”, Tunc points out that the Free French likely had no influence whatsoever in Morocco), and is being overseen by the Third Reich (yet another set of laws). Acting in accordance with laws would be difficult for anyone in this situation to do, especially as Rick has the additional American background as opposed to being a native Moroccan (or even from Europe or Africa). Based on Rick’s actions, and the untimely death of Major Strasser which comes as part of this series of events, I do not believe that laws play a major part of Rick’s decision to act although moral norms probably do.
Sextus defines a custom as a usage, a common acceptance by a group of people of the way that should be acted. There are not specific laws for these acceptances, and people may or may not be punished (1.146). Punishment, were it to be doled out, would likely come from other people in the form of shunning, leering, and other such public displays. What Sextus does not consider here is whether one person may also have customs, i.e. habits. I believe that this can be the case, similar to persuasions. Persuasions, perhaps, encompass the greater sense of how to live a particular kind of life, whereas customs would seem to dictate how you might act in particular situations. For example, it may be your persuasion to ensure that your family is provided for, but your custom might not be hard work (as it is for most people): instead it may be cheating at Rick’s roulette table. Persuasions and customs, then, can go hand in hand, and Rick has his own particular habits, persuasions, and customs.

Next, Sextus says that “a belief in myth is an acceptance of matters which did not occur and are fictional—examples includes the myths about Cronus, which many people find convincing” (1.147). One of the myths at work throughout the film is patriotism, another is romantic love. The patriotism is highlighted during the scenes at the café where the Germans are singing Die Wacht am Rhein and the French and their supporters drown it out with La Marseillaise (175). Rick and Louis wander into the mist together after Louis declares that Rick is a patriot and himself rejects the authority of Vichy France. There is not enough evidence to classify Louis as a “French Patriot”, meaning a follower of Charles de Gaulle et. al., and there is not enough evidence to classify Rick as an “American Patriot”, given that the story is set prior to America entering the war. But combined, patriotism seems to be an acceptable cover for Louis and Rick’s decision to leave together.
Dogmatic suppositions, according to Sextus, are the acceptances of matters which seem to be supported by proof of some kind (1.147). One such example of this is that there are atomic elements of things. With the other example that Sextus provides for dogmatic suppositions, he seems to be looking at large metaphysical issues for which there may not be any way to establish truth: for example, some say that the soul is immortal while others say that it is mortal. When I first read this, I assumed he meant things that people generally took to be the case even without any kind of direct proof. However, he specifically highlights the opposition and uses examples where the answer is very close to unknowable, as opposed to an example like walking in front of a train would kill you (could be tested).

In Rick’s case, I do not believe he was called to action by any of these grand dogmatic suppositions.

Rick does, however, have some experience based reasons to suppose that if he does not help Ilsa to escape, at best they will live a precarious life in Casablanca or potentially end up dead or in prison camps. Her chances of survival are better, though not certain, if she is able to leave Casablanca. Rick may remain skeptical, however, about the likely outcome of Victor’s resistance movement and whether it will have the effect that Victor hopes for. Rick is therefore able to speak as if supporting the resistance is the best thing to do—while still holding doubts about this—and also believe that urging Ilsa to leave is the most reasonable course of action. This reasoning may ultimately account for his tranquility. We can imagine him to have done this thinking the night before the airport scene—thinking that is consistent with mature Skepticism—having weighed out all the possibilities of Ilsa’s and his life together or apart. Either Ilsa will be captured or killed, or he may be captured or
killed. If she survives, he can continue to love her as long as he lives, even if they are not together.

This brings us back to customs, laws, and persuasions. Laws aside, Sextus’ examples only provide for customs and persuasions (let us call both habits) of groups of people. However, it seems clear to me that an individual person can also have habits. For Rick, the example is brought up several times: he has the habit of siding with the underdog. Unless, and maybe we are missing some of his back story, such as previously being in some unknown peacekeeping organization or being bullied as a kid, there is no specific reason given for his being on the underdog’s side. The makers of the film may also have been appealing to the American tradition of rooting for the underdog and thus this is in line with the habits of the audience. There are at least two specific examples given from Ethiopia and Spain, and also the friendship that he has established with Sam fits in with this picture. When selling the café to Signor Ferrari at the end, knowing he will have to leave Casablanca, Rick tells Ferrari that Sam gets 25% of the profits (Koch 208). He also asks that Ferrari keep Abdul and Carl and Sacha to work at the café: here he is sticking his neck out for people he cares about despite his earlier proclamations.

When Ilsa and Victor arrive at the airport, it is revealed that Rick has planned for Ilsa to accompany Victor out of Casablanca, and not for Ilsa to stay with him. Ilsa is shocked by this revelation, and questions Rick about what they had said to each other the previous night. Rick responds with arguably his most profound lines of the film and certainly the most decisive and actively involved:

Rick: Last night we said a great many things. You said I was to do the thinking for both of us. Well, I’ve done a lot of it since then and it all adds
up to one thing. You’re getting on that plane with Victor where you belong. (...) Now you’ve got to listen to me. Do you have any idea what you’d have to look forward to if you stayed here? Nine chances out of ten, we’d both wind up in a concentration camp. (...) I’m saying this because it’s true. Inside of us we both know you belong with Victor. You’re part of his work, the thing that keeps him going. If that plane leaves the ground and you’re not with him, you’ll regret it. (...) Maybe not today, maybe not tomorrow, but soon, and for the rest of your life. (...) We’ll always have Paris. We didn’t have it, we’d lost it, until you came to Casablanca. We got it back last night. (...) Ilsa, I’m no good at being noble, but it doesn’t take much to see that the problems of three little people don’t amount to a hill of beans in this crazy world. Someday you’ll understand that. Not now. Here’s looking at you, kid. (218-9)

If we return to Sextus, he states that “the aim of the skeptic is tranquility in matters of opinion and moderation of feeling in matters forced upon us” (1.25). Inaction, at this stage of events in Casablanca, is not a realistic scenario for Rick. Once Rick has admitted to himself that he cares about something—namely Ilsa—he recognizes that he can choose to do something or not to do something. Both choices will have consequences. Rick is unable to control the ultimate outcome, but since he cares, shown through his love of Ilsa and his support of the underdog, the most reasonable course of action is the one that based on his observed appearances, seems to have the greatest chance of success. He explains what reasons he has for the choice to send Ilsa with Victor, instead of allowing her to remain in Casablanca. He elects, I think the case can be made, to continue siding with the underdog:
Victor and the underground movement. Rick obviously still has feelings for Ilsa and will be able to continue experiencing the Skeptic’s tranquility when she is gone, as it was her presence that was the inspiration for his commitment to investigation. All Rick needed to embrace Skepticism was to be reminded to feel and accept feelings again, instead of telling himself a dogmatic and pessimistic story about them. Rick is forced to take action, and as such follows his own personal traditions.
Chapter 5: Questioning Skepticism

Some scholars have connected Pyrrhonian Skepticism—in particular, the focus on suspension of judgement to achieve tranquility—with Indian philosophy. In *Cinema Nirvana*, Dean Sluyter makes note of this comparison throughout *Casablanca*, including seeing traces of tranquility in Rick’s character. Sluyter states that everyone, in every moment, wants to be free from suffering and ultimately happy. This desire is so great, that sometimes all we can see is the search for our own happiness. Therefore, “it comes as a big surprise when we learn […] that we’re just little people whose happiness doesn’t amount to a hill of beans in this crazy world. That’s a lonely discovery” (282-3). However, “every time you choose to put Ilsa on the plane, every time you let go of what you wanted, you see more clearly how small is the self’s hill of beans and you release yourself and everyone else further into the freedom of selflessness” (293). Selfishness is a dogmatic trait; you are inherently biased to ensuring the best for yourself.

Rick’s reason for his conversion, the “thinking” he has done for “all of us,” is partly stated at the airport in the familiar wartime cliché he says to Ilsa about the general necessity for personal sacrifices for the sake of the bigger need. It is on a more personal level, however, that Rick articulates why sacrifices are necessary. “We’ll always have Paris,” Rick tells Ilsa. “We didn’t have it. We’d lost it, until you came to Casablanca. We got it back last night” (219). What Rick means is that the hours Ilsa spent with him in his apartment above the Café Americain the night before have put into context his memories with the new information she has given him. He did experience the hurt of being abandoned.
by her in Paris, but with the understanding of what really happened and the reaffirmation of her love for him, he has experienced equipollence in his feelings for her.

Although Sextus wants you to live a life that is tranquil, and he outlines what you need to do it, where he is less convincing for some is in his advice for those who must make moral decisions. He has no answer to what living a good life would be, only what living a peaceful life would be (peaceful internally, and not societally).

When trying to reason out why tranquility was so important to Pyrrho—and thus to Sextus—scholars have not come to an agreement. One theory, which I find particularly plausible, also connects Skepticism with Indian thought. Writings from Diogenes Laertius indicate that Pyrrho accompanied Alexander the Great during his conquest of India (326 BCE), and that while there, Pyrrho associated with many Indian sages. This helped lead him to a life of quietude and suspension (Lom 44). Lom states that “this ancient link to India is acknowledged by some scholars who note there were over sixty variations of Indian skepticism during this period… such commentators also point to the resonance between Hindu, Jainist, Buddhist Indian thought and Greek Skepticism” (44), finding in them both similarities in theory and practice.

After Sextus’ examples in the tenth mode, he summarizes by stating that “since so much anomaly has been shown in objects by their mode too, we shall not be able to say what each existing object is like in its nature, but only how it appears relative to a given persuasion or law or custom and so on” (1.163) and thus, we must suspend judgement, adhering only to these customs and traditions when we must act.
Lom is specifically one of these scholars is dissatisfied with in Sextus’ specific advice on different appearances and customs. He gives a summary of Sextus’ tenth mode, but points out that,

…while Sextus’ arguments are powerful in their rhetorical force, they seem to move too quickly to their conclusions. Some of his examples are clearly apocryphal, such as his remark on Indian public sexual intercourse and his proposition that those with jaundice see all things as yellow. Others are superficial. Rather than proving that courage is not admired everywhere, Sextus simply shows that different countries weight the balance between courage and prudence in different ways: some allow for retreat from battle while others forbid it. (38)

Lom calls for, at the very least, continuing investigation into the history of our traditions and the specific details of moral practices. Simply pointing out differences between examples, such as when Sextus discusses how gladiators are praised when they kill, and yet homicide is wrong, does not begin to determine whether there are any commonalities between the two that would give us an understanding of why this tradition is what it is (38). I believe Lom is wrong here. Sextus argues that there are oppositions. He does not need to prove that one of the opposites is true or false, merely that there are apparent opposites which motivate further inquiry into what such differences could mean.

There are a number of criticisms against Skepticism; however the one that seems to come up the most often is that if you were to live according to Sextus’ principles, you would not be living: you are paralyzed in a life of inaction. The focus on suspending judgement that Sextus advocates seems to mean that you cannot make decisions about
anything, and are therefore trapped in a limbo. Lom describes this criticism as saying “not that Skepticism is internally inconsistent, but that it is psychologically impossible” (39).

In opposition to this, Benson Mates shares another argument: the Pyrrhonian Skeptic believes nothing at all. Mates says that Sextus is quite clear, it would seem, on this point: “over and over again, he presents the Skeptic as living, thinking, and talking *adoxastos*, that is, without believing, free of *doxa*. He never describes the Skeptic as believing anything whatever” (60). Mates discusses how additional commentators have objected that it is not possible to “get along” without having at least some beliefs. Because of this, these critics have claimed that Sextus is either a) mistaken that he and other Skeptics have no beliefs, or b) he is misinterpreted, not meaning what we think it clear that he means (60).

Sextus’ Skepticism also begs the question: how can you know, without doubt, that for every idea which is investigated, there will *always* be an equally opposing one that is convincing? (Lom 34). This process can be tested, although it will be infinite. It can be argued then that this claim for equipollence—the whole purpose of suspension as well—does seem to be an opinion about which Sextus is not Skeptical. Lom identifies the response from Sextus, who has anticipated this concern, namely that there is linguistic ambiguity in the idea and its statement: “to every argument an equal argument is opposed”. This can, instead of meaning precisely what it states, mean instead “let us oppose an equal argument to every argument” (35).

Some critics cite the fact that Sextus uses the Agrippan modes along with other forms of argument to describe Skepticism in its attempt to convince others as to why it is a feasible way of life. However, Perin states that it is obvious that Sextus’ use of these
arguments, including Agrippa’s modes, does not alone commit him to negative dogmatism and thus remains in line with the search for truth (31).

Mates also shares a summary of the challenges of criticizing Sextus’ Skepticism:

“strictly speaking, therefore, there is nothing about Pyrrhonism that one could directly ‘refute’, unless we imagine ourselves to be somehow in a position to take issue with the Pyrrhonist’s reports of the present state of his own mind” (7). Because Sextus makes it clear that what he describes in the *Outlines* is only that which appears to him to be the case, it means that it is impossible for anyone to specifically tell him he is mistaken. The best that anyone can do would be to present an opposing argument, thus confirming the Skeptical approach.

The two categories where most arguments against Skepticism fall are either:

i. The critic claims to have found things that the Pyrrhonist asserts or “has to assert”.

ii. The critic offers a pragmatic objection that the Pyrrhonist could not carry on a normal life.

However, Mates argues that in his opinion, these critics and their arguments have been “singularly unsuccessful in catching Sextus, who is our principal authority on Pyrrhonism and who was a Pyrrhonist himself, making any claims of knowledge or even making any confident assertions that are intended to be more than reports of his own *pathe*” (70). My reading of *Casablanca* therefore agrees with this, suggesting that it is not impossible to imagine living as a mature Skeptic who can make difficult decisions but still act according to the principles of Skepticism. Rick is a fictional character, but he is a conceivable one.
Chapter 6: Questioning *Casablanca*

As with most films of the time, music played an important role in setting the mood for the film. Music gives the audience access to the emotional dimensions of a film. In *Casablanca*, the music helps to develop both characters and the plot, at times emphasizing the wartime setting of the picture. Long before the days of dubbing music throughout an entire motion picture, in *Casablanca* the main songs were sung by cast members, providing them extra meaning and context. Some of the most significant songs in the film are the following:

- Sam singing and playing “Knock on Wood”
- Sam singing and playing the “It Had to be You/Shine” medley
- Corina, the café singer, singing and playing guitar to “Tango Belle Rose”
- the German officers singing “Die Wacht am Rhein”
- the French and other patrons singing “La Marseillaise”
- and of course: Sam singing and playing several time times throughout the film “As Time Goes By”, with and without lyrics

In particular, the repeated singing and playing of “As Time Goes By” as well as the scene with “Die Wacht am Rhein” and “La Marseillaise” are the most pivotal to the storyline of *Casablanca* as well as to Rick’s character development and the situation of the film in wartime. Both of these add to the Skeptical commentary of the film. The “Marseillaise” is heard during the film as well as in the opening and closing credits, while “As Time Goes
By” is played numerous times, and often interrupted by dramatic mood music, including during the final scenes of the movie. I will discuss the “Marseillaise” scene first.

The setting of the scene is simple: Victor and Rick are in Rick’s office discussing exit visas. In the café downstairs, we begin to hear the German troops singing together their anthem, “Die Wacht am Rhein”. Victor is clearly annoyed by this, and heads out to the café to find out what precisely is happening. He heads straight to Rick’s orchestra, demanding that they “play the Marseillaise! Play it!” (Koch 175). The members of the orchestra are unsure how to take this order, and look to Rick on the stairs to see what they should do. Expressionless, Rick nods that they are permitted to follow Victor’s orders. Victor leads the singing of the French anthem and the patrons of the café chime in, drowning out the Germans who eventually give up and sit down. “La Marseillaise” finishes, with the café patrons singing and cheering, shouting “vive la France! Vive la democracie!” (176).

An important point that is often missed by commentators is that they are shouting “vive la France” on African soil (Raskin 113). As the movie was produced in America, most of the storytelling was done to motivate the American audience viewer what relationship the Free French and the Resistance could have to them. “U.S. policy was utterly unaccommodating toward representatives of these organizations” (113). The audience apparently, like US policy, needed to be moved to action. These scenes are meant to provide instruction to the viewers in how “musical unisonance” as performed by groups of politically active people could “wash away fears of retribution and defeat while drowning out the alternative melodies of hostile forces” (Anderson 484). In essence, the film may be read as an attempt to bring together the people of America to show that the banding together of the people could serve to defeat a totalitarian opponent.
One of the film’s functions, then, is to cast a positive light for the Americans on the transition from neutrality to engagement (Raskin 113). This performance of the Free French and other patrons in the café is not about improvisation—rather it is meant to restore some of the identity that had been lost with the presence of the Germans occupation of Europe (Anderson 499).

Rick and Ilse’s ballad “As Time Goes By”, as performed by Sam, is quite the opposite of this rousing political song scene. “As Time Goes By” is sung no less than four times throughout the film, both while Rick and Ilsa are in Paris and after, to bring them back together. The musical theme occurs even more often throughout, heard in the background of many scenes. Anderson states that although the viewers of Casablanca may hear the “Marseillaise” as the music of a patriotic war, it does not shatter the more personal theme expressed by “As Time Goes By” (514). There is clear contrast that is created between “As Time Goes By”, as the romantic theme of the movie where the ‘world will always welcome lovers’ and the “Marseillaise”, the powerful, rousing anthem. Anderson argues that it is particularly this difference which gives Casablanca its dramatic shape, creating the rift for us between Rick’s “private and public desires” (485). “As Time Goes By” also creates some space in the story for Skepticism about being politically dogmatic.

Throughout the film, Sam is the primary musical complement (along with being Rick’s friend and confidante). And yet, when we see the first glimpse of the café when the Germans have begun “Die Wacht am Rhein”, Sam has disappeared from his piano and a German soldier is playing here. This is one of the first times Sam is missing; and the only times we see him somewhere other than his piano are when Rick and Sam are at the train station waiting for Ilsa, and when he enters Rick’s apartment and takes a seat at the piano.
Throughout the scene, including the singing of the “Marseillaise”, Sam is nowhere to be seen.

Perhaps more importantly than this absence of Sam is the fact that Sam must keep playing the same song over and over again for Rick and Ilsa. There are, of course, a couple of occasions when we see Sam playing things other than “As Time Goes By”, but on these occasions he is rarely engaged with Rick and Ilsa. When Rick and Sam are alone in Rick’s apartment, Sam decides to play “something of his own” (Koch 109). Rick, drinking heavily, orders Sam instead to play “As Time Goes By”, refusing to let Sam continue to explore his artistic freedom. There is an interesting argument put forth by Anderson:

[Rick and Ilsa] aren’t really listening to [Sam] at all; he is more a phantom mechanically rigged to exteriorize Rick’s romantic hopes, ideals, and disappointments through music. […] Along these lines, “As Time Goes By” constitutes such a prominent part of Rick and Ilsa’s life together and apart because Sam’s command performances force them to revisit a contested souvenir of their happiest moments. (511-2)

With this in mind, it is interesting to consider the fact that instead of hanging on to Sam as his Pandora’s box of memory, when Rick plans to leave Casablanca at the end of the film he has sold Sam along with the café. Where before, when Sam and Rick came from France to Morocco, Rick would have had the option to continue reliving the relationship he had with Ilsa, now he is leaving Sam behind as well as the opportunity to musically relive the same old song. He is ready to move on, perhaps because he has reached a sufficiently tranquil state.
For Sam, it is also interesting to note that this part of the film hints he has more importance in the world than simply being Rick’s worker and the binding connection between Rick and Ilsa in both the past and present. The fact that he has songs of his own suggests he has the potential to be something more, or something on his own, aside from the two of them, in spite of the necessary reliance that is focal in the film.

Looking more at Sam’s character and his relationship to Rick, there are a few things to note. While I believe that Rick considered Sam a friend, Sam almost exclusively refers to Rick as ‘Boss’ or ‘Sir’, expressing the inequality in their relationship. This said, he is open to treating Rick as a friend, and when Ilsa arrives suggests that he and Rick:

Sam: We’ll take the car and drive all night. We’ll get drunk. We’ll go fishing and stay away until she’s gone.

Rick: Shut up and go home, will you?

Sam: No, Sir. I’m staying right here. (Koch 108)

Sam is willing to ‘stick his neck out for Rick’, so to speak, because he relies on—and possibly values—the relationship which they have. By the end of the film, Rick has developed into his Skeptical self and, unlike in the first parts of the film, will no longer need to rely on Sam in order to do his emotional work for him. In his tranquil state, he is able to handle his emotions on his own and enjoy the company of an equal friend who is also a free thinker—Louis, and not Sam.

Anderson ties this relationship Sam has to Rick and the film back into the historical setting of the time and what was happening globally:

The white hero related to his compromised and opportunistic French colleague as something novel, a co-conspirator and an equal. Moral training
for a world shaped by racial paternalism and segregation—a world spanning the French empire, the U.S. armed forces, and the dream world of Hollywood’s most liberal major studio—made the reciprocal recognition of and true friendship with a social and racial inferior like Sam an impossibility for the white American hero. (514)

At the end of the film, Rick leaves without Sam—without his trustworthy African-American friend—and instead chooses to leave with the less-than-perfect but perhaps more Skeptical Louis.

There are several readings of the lyrics of “As Time Goes By” and how they fit into the film or how they fit on a more global scale of the time period. I have my own particular way of reading the lyrics. It should be noted that the original version of “As Time Goes By” has a lengthy first verse that was not included in Casablanca and in most subsequent recordings of the song. As such, I have only considered the parts that are used in the film.

As Sam sings it, the first couple of lines of “As Time Goes By” are:

You must remember this
A kiss is just a kiss
A sigh is just a sigh

What is often overlooked (as we are seduced by the romanticism of kissing and sighing) is the fact that Sam is insisting—perhaps commanding even—that they “must remember this”. It is a warning not to impart additional meaning and context where there is none. Sam is functioning as a Skeptical Greek chorus here, delivering warnings to the main characters.

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3 For example, see Cripps, Thomas and Scheurer, Timothy E.
Certainly a kiss could be more than a kiss, but both when Sam sung it for them in Paris and when he sings it for them in Casablanca, everything is just what it seems to be and no more.

For those who want to believe that the love Rick and Ilsa shares is more powerful, you may be tempted to believe that for them a kiss is not just a kiss. Kisses signify more: an eternal requited or unrequited love or other such things. And yet, Rick and Ilsa need several reminders from Sam that perhaps their kiss does not mean what they may believe.

This sentiment continues with the line “when two lovers woo, they still say I love you”. Notice that the lyrics here specify “woo”ing: not marriage, not any type of long-term commitment—only “woo”ing. The fact that there is such an indefinite time period attached to these words implies that we believe it necessary to say “I love you” as an expectation, and yet the relationship may not be solidified. The relationship may be as fleeting as love can be.

The other most powerful lines are:

It’s still the same old story,

a fight for love and glory,

A case of do or die.’

This is the big picture. There is a war going on, and there are those who fight for love and those who fight for glory. I believe this is intended to compare Germany’s fight for glory against those who oppose; namely Victor’s movement and the Allies. Those fighters are fighting for love, and yet it is not their own personal love. Rick recognizes this, as does Victor when he tells Rick, “welcome back to the fight. This time I know our side will win” (Koch 223). “No matter what the future brings”, Rick has achieved tranquility and is able to live with the memories and friendships he has.
Altogether, what the song reminds the audience—and perhaps Ilsa and Rick themselves—is to examine all sides of anything. Lovers will say they are lovers, kisses can be just kisses, and no matter what the future brings, there are always oppositions. Love is a pleasant and sometimes painful appearance but it is never a sure thing, as the film acknowledges. The audience is seduced into hoping otherwise.

The release of *Casablanca* was moved up from when it was originally scheduled by about 6 months, from spring 1943 to November 1942. It was also released a year after the United States had entered World War II, but is set prior to the attack on Pearl Harbour while America was still maintaining isolation. This particular fact is very subtle in the film: the first time that Rick appears, we see him signing a slip at the bar that is dated December 2, 1941. Viewers could easily miss this dating on the slip (Sluyter 284). Hollywood was producing many films at the time, including many war pictures—*Casablanca* was just one of approximately 500 wartime films that were released between 1942 and 1945. Although certainly having some intention of being a romantic film, it would be impossible to deny the bigger subject matter of strengthening support for America’s involvement in the war. It was designed to strengthen support for the Allies, and call for America to become involved in and support the war effort. The audience is able to identify with Rick, the archetypal American, who is resisting committing himself to any cause and yet is thrown into making a decision and knows which way he must choose, just as the Americans resisted their involvement in the war.

We have talked little about the fact that in the final scene, Rick ends up shooting (and presumably killing) Major Strasser. Sluyter argues that this shows his commitment to the struggle, and is the symbolic ending to both his own and America’s isolationism (294).
The way that the film is positioned, there is no way to avoid death. Ilsa believes Victor is dead and so cannot commit to Rick. Rick has lost hope and becomes a fatalistic pessimist in the beginning scenes of the film, seeming to accept that the only thing we can know is that we will all die. For various reasons the capture of Ilsa, Victor, and Rick, along with a Nazi victory more generally, are presented as less supportable options than killing Strasser—or even Renault, had this been necessary. This call to arms is echoed in the film’s dialogue when Signor Ferrari says to Rick, “my dear Rick, when will you realize that in this world today isolationism is no longer a practical policy?” (Koch 51).

*Casablanca* is a unique film, full of an international cast of characters and yet it represents very limited numbers of Morocco locals. Rick’s doorman is named Abdul and other locals appear only as part of the scenery, as in the opening quasi-newsreel footage. The actors in *Casablanca* are all European (including British) or American. Richard Raskin, in the commentary “Two Marseillaise Scenes: From *Casablanca* to *West Beirut*” states that “the film defines the city of Casablanca as ‘French soil’ in an unequivocally positive way, meaning that as such, it is—at least in principle—free from German authority” (113). This is one of the positive aspects of the declaration. Raskin argues, however, that this is a wholly American way of viewing what was actually the situation in Casablanca at the time and is not an accurate picture. He concedes that “those who might argue that the wartime situation made it inappropriate even to consider the issue of colonialism in North Africa, would be at odds with the views held by Roosevelt himself at the time *Casablanca* was first shown in movie theatres” (114).

What *Casablanca* did for the American audience is invite them back into the theatre to “screen out their recent past” (Anderson 487), encouraging them to identify with Rick as
he aligns with the white European fight for freedom—both the freedom of others that will hopefully result with Ilsa and Victor’s departure, but also the freedom of himself from turmoil. Presumably this would also free Americans from their indecisiveness about World War II. This also helps to forge the connection with Rick as a Skeptic. Rick does not act because he thinks that to take a position would be to commit himself dogmatically, which he has experienced ending badly on more than one occasion. He needs a motive to act, and the motive comes at the end of the film with the appearance of Ilsa’s loving and lovable vulnerability. During the film, there are a couple of scenes where refugees are represented also as vulnerable, loving peoples, and so the audience can make this connection and be moved by it.

As one might expect, Anderson says that,

Laszlo’s challenge to the American in the pre-Pearl Harbour setting of Casablanca insinuates that the popular current of isolationism in 1941 was not a principled refusal of entangling alliances but a self-destructive display of escapism, an unsuccessful retreat from a destiny ‘for good’. At some level, the allegorical American Everyman knows this, but from time to time he needs to be reminded of, or reawakened to, his destiny. (507-8)

This again comes back to the lines during the film from Ferrari, when speaking to Rick he says: “my dear Rick, when will you realize that in this world today isolationism is no longer a practical policy?” (Koch 51). Rick, the American, is being encouraged to involve himself and not be withdrawn. The answer to his involvement means he must adopt the Skeptical life: being motivated to inquiry and acting when necessary.
This final scene with Rick and Ilsa is beautiful—perhaps one of the most iconic scenes in movie history, with Rick and Ilsa standing together at the airport, fog swirling around them: a small moment of clarity in the great cloud of uncertainty. Sluyter points out something that most will not consider, mostly because they are swept away with the romance and passion: this entire scene is meteorologically impossible (299). He reminds us that there would rarely, if ever, be fog in the desert climate of Casablanca—although further research suggests that this may not be true, as they were on the coast and there have been rare occasions of fog\(^4\). Given this, however, he also hypothesizes the following:

I like to think that what we’re seeing is the absurd fulfillment of Rick’s earlier absurd crack about coming to Casablanca for the waters\(^5\). Now that he has embarked on the path of altruism […] he’s no longer in an emotional and spiritual desert. The air suddenly, miraculously full on all sides with life-giving water. (299)

I disagree with Sluyter’s reading that Rick has become altruistic, and so would offer the following comments on why there may be fog (in addition to the reason that it is romantic and exciting, of course, heightening the mystery of the final scenes). When Rick previously made the crack about coming to Casablanca for the waters, it was an ironic remark. Irony, like Skepticism, recognizes oppositions that exist. This comment was a foreshadowing of Rick’s development as a Skeptic, and now, at the end of the film, as a mature Skeptic, he has access to those waters of Casablanca that he joked about before.

\(^4\) See Bari, Driss, Thierry Bergot, and Mohamed El Khlifi.

\(^5\) Renault: What in heaven’s name brought you to Casablanca?
Rick: My health. I came to Casablanca for the waters.
Renault: The waters? What waters? We’re in the desert.
Rick: I was misinformed.” (Koch 58-9)
It has been noted that *Casablanca* was not made to be the box office and long-term success that it has turned out to be. It was simply another movie of the time, produced quickly and for the least amount of money possible. The script for *Casablanca* was not even finished by the time production had rolled around and, in fact, they were so far behind in the scriptwriting (what with the revisions that Howard Koch was making to the script that the Epstein brothers were writing) that they considered shooting two different endings. The alternate ending was to have, as one might expect, Rick helping Victor escape *Casablanca* but keeping Ilsa there as he had promised her. Certainly this would heighten the romantic relationship for Rick long term, but with this ending it would be hard to argue that Rick would be the same Skeptic at the conclusion of the film.

I think the answer to this lies particularly in one line: “inside of us we both know you belong with Victor. You’re part of his work, the thing that keeps him going” (Koch 218)—Rick speaking to Ilsa. As I have argued, it was essential to Rick becoming a Skeptic that in this time where decision making was necessary, he must follow his personal habits, customs, and norms. Skepticism requires calm action without any dogmatic commitment to beliefs. This tension between what Rick will do and the desire between Ilsa and Rick keeps opposing possibilities alive for audiences viewing the film. Rick seems to have political or ethical norms: his comment as to why he was previously involved in the fight with the underdogs is evidence of this. When asked about his past, Rick comments that he was paid handsomely for it on both occasions. However, Louis helpfully points out that the winning side would have paid more (65). If we take Louis’ testimony into consideration, in spite of Rick’s response, the reason he was involved in those causes was not purely financial. He was not a mere mercenary.
Victor and Rick make a fascinating contrast of characters. They have been referred to as the “official-hero” and the “outlaw-hero” (Ray). Where Rick is Skeptical, Victor is anything but in his convictions. For example, upon the first introduction of Major Strasser and Victor, the conversation goes as such:

Strasser: you were a Czechoslovakian. Now you are a subject of the German Reich!

Laszlo: I’ve never accepted that privilege, and I’m now on French soil.

(Koch 88)

Victor does not agree with Strasser’s opinion and is clear and concise in telling him regardless of any consequences. The conversation continues with Victor telling Strasser that even if he tracked down all of the leaders of the opposition and killed them, “from every corner of Europe, hundreds, thousands, would rise to take our places. Even Nazis can’t kill that fast” (134).

Perhaps some of the most pivotal lines from Victor come when he and Rick are at the café after the late night scuffle of the police breaking up the meeting.

Rick: Don’t you sometimes wonder if it’s worth all this? I mean what you’re fighting for?

Victor: We might as well question why we breathe. If we stop breathing, we’ll die. If we stop fighting our enemies, the world will die.

Rick: What of it? Then it’ll be out of its misery.

Victor: You know how you sound, M’sier Blaine? Like a man who’s trying to convince himself of something he doesn’t believe in his heart. Each of us has a destiny, for good or for evil. (198)
Clearly, Victor is a dogmatist along with being an idealist. There is nothing Skeptical about what he says or how he chooses to act. He has a clear purpose and he believes deeply in his cause. In this sense, he is a very nice opposition to Rick’s Skepticism as it develops.

Perhaps there is something be said for the fact that Ilsa arrived with Victor at the same time, and while I do believe that Ilsa is the reason why Rick is able to care again—and therefore to embrace Skepticism—maybe seeing how regimented Victor’s character is in his belief also contributes to Rick’s dismissal of dogmatic beliefs. He simply has too many questions to be utterly convinced of things in the way that Victor is. While Rick may reject Victor’s dogmatism, he does not dismiss Victor. Rick is moved by Victor as well as by Ilsa, and what moves Rick’s admiration for Victor is Victor’s expressions of care, to Rick, about Ilsa and her survival.

Ilsa, on the other hand, does not believe in anything—and yet she is not a Skeptic. We see both in Paris and in Casablanca that it is difficult for Ilsa to commit to anything outside of the very present. Perhaps she is scared or perhaps she just cannot bear to plan ahead given the time of war that they are in. Of course, this could be in part because she was married to Victor, and then believed that he was killed, and so it has become real to her that life can be fleeting. In Casablanca, she becomes torn by conflicting feelings for Rick and Victor and cannot make a decision about how to act. She asks Rick to do that for her.

It is interesting to note that Victor tells Ilsa all the time how much he loves her. Ilsa, however, does not tell Victor this in return: her responses are always things like “yes, yes, I know” (183) and dismisses him. Her passionate feelings are more evident in “The Marseillaise” scene where she does not sing, can barely breathe even, and is overwhelmed by emotion. The fact that she is so troubled then by Victor’s death and unable to future plan
is perhaps a little strange. By the same token, Ilsa is able to tell Rick that she loves him and does several times throughout the film. Rick, retaining his Skeptical nature, does not tell her the same: instead Rick silences her with kisses or snuggles.

When asked her opinion on Rick by Victor, Ilsa replies with, “oh, I really can’t say [what sort Rick is], though I saw him quite often in Paris” (103). Towards the end of the film, she tells Rick, “I know that I’ll never have the strength to leave you again” (194). Ilsa is the typical damsel in distress, quite weak and needing a man to protect her. We get the sense that she may be jealous of the time that Victor must dedicate to his work, although she would never say it and although he is very clear that he does love her immensely. I think Ilsa believes that she, herself, would be more doted on and protected by Rick and this appeals to her.

Ilsa also makes it clear that she wants to avoid more uncomfortable situations (although one would think that being married to and travelling with Victor would have put her in many of them). When Rick, drunken, asks her why she had to come to Casablanca, her reply is “I wouldn’t have come if I had known that you were here. Believe me, Rick, it’s true. I didn’t know” (126). She is not necessarily afraid of all discomfort; rather she does not want to be put into situations of conflicting feelings and thoughts.

Louis is really the comic relief for the film, and much more: his charming remarks steal the show in what would otherwise be a rather serious romantic wartime film. He has his beliefs, but cooperates when he must with the Nazis, until perhaps at the very end where we do not know who he is working for, just who he is not working for. Until this final scene he is okay with being a corrupt police official, working with other corrupt people, including fascists and criminals, as well as working for a morally corrupt Vichy French
government. He only rejects this to become a “patriot” at the end of the film. He is not a clear believer in either Vichy or Nazi ideology. He is one of the few characters who is able to self-reflect openly and is honest to himself and others about both his positive and negative traits. Contrasted to Victor, we might think of Louis as somewhat of a scumbag, but he has good qualities as well, no matter how much he downplays them. Louis could also be read as a Skeptic, given that he regularly asks questions but not to the point of being incapable to act on them. He also acts calmly within their crazy world.

One of the self-descriptions that is shared with the audience by Louis is:

Louis: My dear Ricky, you overestimate the influence of the Gestapo. I don’t interfere with them and they don’t interfere with me. In Casablanca I am master of my fate. (66)

Unfortunately he is cut off before he can continue his description. I like the idea of Louis as master of his own fate as much as one can be, in spite of the fact that he is very self-serving until the end of the film. He is a gambler who allows gambling to happen so that he can win, and it is alluded to that he forces women to prostitute themselves in order to receive special favours like transit letters. He does, however, recognize that the decisions he makes and the actions he chooses, the beliefs he enforces (especially as Chief of Police) will have consequence on his life, be it good or bad. More than any other character, I think Louis is in tune with his self—and is cheeky about it. For example:

Strasser: You see, Captain, the situation is not as much under control as you believe [in regards to the scuffle between the German and Frenchman over Yvonne].
Louis: My dear Major, we are trying to cooperate with your government, but we cannot regulate the feelings of our people.

Strasser: Captain Renault, are you entirely certain which side you’re on?

Louis: I have no conviction, if that’s what you mean. I blow with the wind, and the prevailing wind happens to be from Vichy.

Strasser: And if it should change?

Louis: Surely the Reich doesn’t admit that possibility? (157-8)

As a final example of Louis’ good spirits and comic relief, we can return to that final scene at the airport, where Rick has Louis held up at gunpoint in order to allow Victor and Ilsa to leave Casablanca together. Rick tells Louis that “this gun’s pointed right at your heart” and Louis replies with his humorous line, “that is my least vulnerable spot” (213). Anderson concludes with his opinion of Louis that, “anything but a steady idealist in the ‘fight for love and glory’, Renault is charming and unsentimental” and “[his] masterful wit steals many scenes” (495).

In addition to having his own Skeptical views and reinforcing Skeptical values, Louis can be read as showcasing the political and propaganda values behind the film. He can choose to act reasonably even in the face of political, moral, legal, and historic uncertainty. In joining the war, America would join as an Ally with the Free French. Americans might wonder if they can trust the French given that some of them were collaborators with the Nazis by way of Vichy France. It is important to acknowledge this issue and yet have the main French character be a likeable one with whom the audience can picture beginning a beautiful friendship. *Casablanca* would be a very different film without Louis.
Chapter 7: Concluding Comments

Rick’s character initially (in Paris) is open; happy and receptive. Although he is inquisitive, it is not in the sense to actively investigate as Skepticism calls for. In Casablanca prior to Ilsa’s arrival, Rick is observed as cynical and does not make any decisions on things that are not directly related to him or his business. He will not go out of his way for anyone and has found this to be the best policy for survival: he prefers to live exactly in the present, as Ilsa had shown him how to do. This Rick seems emotionally empty. He is not tranquil in the Skeptical way, and yet he is generally impassively at rest. The rest is an immobilization or paralysis of himself.

After Ilsa arrives in Casablanca, Rick begins to investigate. At first, his questions prejudge her and Victor. He asks questions more as accusations as opposed to real and open investigation. Rick has still to come to understand that things do not have to have one answer and that there are oppositions to everything. Once he realizes this possibility, he is able to suspend his judgement on matters that he is investigating. Rick’s investigation is a slow process. It does not immediately extend to everyone: it starts with Ilsa, but then it grows to Annina, Victor, and continues to develop.

Thomas Bivins, commenting on Casablanca, says that:

When the tough decisions have to be made, we should not abandon the personal, we should embrace it; for only through an acceptance of who we are and how that affects what we do will we be able to accept our place as a human component of a much larger framework. (148)
There is value to a Skeptical approach of life, as Rick discovers. Those who are not Skeptical do experience the turmoil that comes naturally with oppositions. When you can accept that there will be oppositions, and recognize that this contributes to your place in the world of humans, then you are able to be at peace with this recognition.

Louis is an example of a sort-of Skeptic who can embrace the personal. But during Rick’s middle phase, Casablanca pre-Ilsa, Rick’s personal is repressed and therefore he is unable to be Skeptical. One must have reason to adopt a Skeptical outlook, and Rick does have a reason when Ilsa returns, as the hurt that she put him through along with the feelings all come back to him. His response to the initial hurt was to withdraw, but then once he was able to understand and accept what had really happened, he became open to inquiry again and thus open to suspension, leading to tranquility. This Skepticism allows him both to be in touch with his personal as well as to send Ilsa with Victor for what appears to be the greater good.

It’s difficult to determine if Rick would continue to be a Skeptic. There was an ease to his life before Ilsa arrived that I believe he appreciated—he lived without care, closer to careless than to carefree. At the same time, the secret is out and he intends to leave Casablanca with Louis—Louis always knew he was a sentimentalist and now believes he has “become a patriot” (Koch 226). This patriotism is there as a disguise for leaving together. Once the precedent is established, I do not know that Louis would allow Rick to revert to his previous self, although he did certainly like Rick’s previous self: “if I were a woman, I would be in love with Rick” (88). Louis is able to recognize that Rick, like himself, has become a Skeptic and seems to appreciate this even more, given that he is
willing to give up his customary way of life in Casablanca to try to get Rick and himself somewhere safer.

I like to think that Rick would continue his Skeptical search, acting when necessary and really choosing to investigate matters. I like to believe this will give him the tranquility he found when he sent Ilse with Victor, accepting that this is what appears best for all.

Reading *Casablanca*, and particularly Rick, through a Skeptical lens provides new insights into how Pyrrhonian Skepticism can be perceived in modern film and gives an application for comparing and contrasting classical readings with modern, fictional characters. In spite of the fact that Sextus’ form of Skepticism never gained a large following, we can see through Rick that the application of suspension of judgement in combination with investigation can lead to a better life. Rick is able to achieve tranquility at the end of the film, being freed from uncertainty.
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