# The Philosophical Beliefs of Humanity: Dogmatism, Relativism, and Skeptical-Dogmatism

## The Philosophical Beliefs of Humanity

Most people have philosophical beliefs. It is hard to find someone who does not have some beliefs about some of these philosophical questions:

1. What is the number and nature of divine beings?
2. How should I live my life?
3. Which form of government (if any) should we live by?
4. Should women be permitted to terminate an unwanted pregnancy?
5. Is the world we experience a virtual world, a material world, or an immaterial world?
6. Should we be vegans, vegetarians, or omnivores?

Often philosophical beliefs are held quite confidently. Many social gatherings have been ruined by this confidence, hence the timeless rule of etiquette, “Never discuss politics or religion in polite company.” One of the “benefits” of social media is we often get to see this tremendous confidence first-hand: proponents of some philosophical view happily point out to the world that their philosophical opponents possess every imaginable moral and intellectual vice.

The notion of ‘philosophical beliefs’ is potentially ambiguous. In one sense, it means beliefs held about some philosophical subject matter. A narrower sense adds the requirement that, for something to count as a ‘philosophical belief’, it must be generated or sustained by some philosophical process, e.g., argumentative reasons in pursuit of the truth, or pursuit of reflective equilibrium. My claim is that most of humanity has philosophical beliefs in the wide sense; I make no claim about to what extent humanity has ‘philosophical beliefs’ in the narrower sense.

The aim here is to address the “attitude question” applied to the philosophical beliefs of humanity: What attitude should we hold with respect to our preferred philosophical views? I will sketch three different answers: Dogmatism, Relativism, and Skeptical-Dogmatism.[[1]](#footnote-2) Some wag once described philosophy as the art of the least bad choice, and, in this spirit, I will argue that Skeptical-Dogmatism is humanity’s least bad answer to the attitude question.

The argument for Skeptical-Dogmatism builds on the following trilemma:

1D. **Dogmatism:** It is permissible to be Dogmatists about our preferred philosophical views in multi-proposition disputes.

2E. **Radical Alethic Inequality:** Radical alethic inequality is implausible in multi-proposition philosophical disputes.

3RF: **Anti-Relativism**: Alethic Relativism is (non-relatively) false.

I’ll explain some of the technical terminology of 1D-3RF below. The three views just mentioned respond to the trilemma as follows:

**Non-Relativistic Dogmatism:** we should accept 1D and 3RF, and reject 2E.

**Relativistic Dogmatism:** we should accept 1D and 2E, and reject 3RF.

**Skeptical-Dogmatism**: we should accept 2E and 3RF, and reject 1D.

Following the ancients, let us think of ‘Dogmatists’ as those who believe or hold as true their philosophical view, or at least believe that their view is more likely than not.[[2]](#footnote-3)

The vast majority of humanity are Dogmatists: they hold Dogmatic beliefs about at least some of questions A-F, so most of humanity is committed to 1D. The commitment to 1D forces a choice between rejecting either 2E or 3RF. That is, the commitment to 1D requires either we hold a vaulting epistemic self-conception, or we accept Alethic Relativism. I argue that both alternatives are implausible, which means that 1D should be rejected. This is the position of Skeptical-Dogmatism: we should believe that our preferred philosophical views are probably false.

A small terminological note: in the stretch of the dialectic we are examining, there are two forms of Dogmatism. Since in this stretch all those who hold to a relativistic conception of truth are Dogmatists, I shall refer to Relativistic Dogmatists simply as ‘Relativists’, and Non-Relativistic Dogmatists simply as ‘Dogmatists’.[[3]](#footnote-4)

## The People’s Big Bet

The following thought experiment will serve to frame some of the pertinent issues:

Always in a bad mood, the Cruel God of Epistemology whisks away four sisters, Welma, Sara, Connie, and Libby, from their everyday lives to appear at the foot of her divine throne to account for their philosophical beliefs. All four are non-philosophers—they have real jobs and did not study philosophy in college. Welma is a committed “welfare liberal”. She believes in a market economy, but she also believes that a strong social safety net should be in place to help the less fortunate. During every election cycle, Welma knocks on her neighbors’ doors in support of the political party that she believes best represents her view. Sara is a committed socialist. Connie is a conservative, and Libby is a libertarian. They too are similarly engaged in rallying their neighbors to vote for candidates that best represent their philosophical views. As you can no doubt imagine, family dinners are a “delight” as the four sisters always loudly argue with each other about the correct political morality.

The Cruel God’s purpose in the abduction is to find out how confident the sisters are in their philosophical views about the just state. They answer that they are “pretty darn confident” (although not certain) about their views. And indeed, unlike so many, they walk the walk: their confidence is evident in the boots-on-the-ground support they have given candidates and parties that align with their views. Annoyed at their hubris, the Cruel God says that they must wager a quarter of the world’s population (about two billion lives) either for or against the truth of their preferred view. The Cruel God offers a little help: she says that the four views are mutually exclusive and jointly exhaustive.[[4]](#footnote-5) If they bet correctly, then two billion will be spared. If they bet incorrectly, two billion will be smote. (The Cruel God also mentions that she is not going to put up with any Pyrrhonian nonsense: If they suspend judgement and fail to make a bet for or against, then this will be taken as equivalent to making an incorrect bet.) The four are isolated and given some peace and quiet to think about how they will bet. Each of the four thinks to herself:

*Of course, I’m not so hubristic to think that there is no chance that my view is false. And perhaps I was a bit rash in saying that I’m pretty “darn confident” about my view. Still, I think that there is a better than 0.5 chance that my view is correct. I must have the courage of my conviction. At minimum, this means thinking that my view is at least more likely right than not. Betting against my view would only increase the odds of billons of people dying; betting for my view is the best way to increase the probability that people are saved. So, I must bet that my view is true.*

Predictably, three of the four lose their bets, which translates into six billion being smote and only two billion being spared.

If we think of ‘epistemic hubris’ as referring to those who overestimate their abilities to ascertain the truth, then at least three of our four protagonists suffer from such hubris.[[5]](#footnote-6) Consider that each of the four estimated that she had a better than 0.5 chance of ascertaining the true position. Collectively this would add up to more than a 2.0 chance of ascertaining the truth. Applying the lesson to humanity, it seems that at least most of humanity is hubristic: most people believe their controversial philosophical views are at least more likely true than false. And most people are wrong about this.[[6]](#footnote-7)

## Dogmatism and Radical Alethic Inequality

This section examines the radical alethic inequality implicit in the sisters’ bets.

Binary disputes are disputes about contradictories. Multi-proposition disputes are disputes where there are three or more contrary views. There are three doxastic attitudes one might take about contrary views in a multi-proposition dispute. As mentioned, ‘Dogmatists’ are those who believe one of the views, or at least believe that it is more likely than not. It is important to note that this conception of ‘Dogmatism’ allows for quite low confidence in a philosophical view, e.g., holding that a view is just slightly more likely than not (say, 0.52 probability) is consistent with this understanding of ‘Dogmatism’.[[7]](#footnote-8) Again, following the ancients, let us think of ‘Skeptics’ as those who neither believe nor disbelieve that any particular view is true, or at least more likely true (or false) than not. Finally, Skeptical-Dogmatism recommends disbelieving each view in a multi-proposition dispute; that is, holding that each view is false, or at least more probably false than true.

According to this taxonomy, then, the People’s Big Bet illustrates a multi-proposition dispute between four Dogmatists. Dogmatists, I hope to show, are committed to the rejection of 2E.

To spell-out the meaning of 2E, suppose Libby takes what seems a very modest Dogmatic position about libertarianism: she believes that there is a (mere) 0.52 probability that Libertarianism is true. This means that she must be committed to a 0.48 probability that one of her sisters is correct (given the Cruel God’s claim that the four views are mutually exclusive and jointly exhaustive). If she divides this probability equally over the three competitor views, then this means that Libby is committed (at least implicitly) to a 0.16 probability that Welma, Sara, or Connie has lighted upon the truth.

This means that Dogmatists in multi-proposition disputes are committed (at least implicitly) to representing themselves as über epistemic superiors (ÜES). ÜES are those who are more likely to have arrived at the truth in a multi-proposition dispute than the combined probability that one of their opponents has arrived at the true view. This is a vaulting conception of one’s epistemic powers in the quest for the truth. It does not merely claim ‘epistemic superior’ status: the claim is that one is better than *each* of one’s opponents in the quest for truth. For example, one way for Libby to conceive of herself as an epistemic superior is to suppose that she is twice as likely to arrive at the truth than each of her opponents. This would translate into a 0.4 probability that Libby is correct, and 0.2 for each of her disagreeing siblings. But thinking that there is a 0.4 probability is not sufficient for Dogmatism in our sense; rather, this would lead to Libby counting among the Skeptical-Dogmatists. To consistently be a Dogmatist, Libby needs to think that she is more likely correct than the combined probability of the set of her opponents. So, Libby’s seemingly modest position (0.52) with respect to Libertarianism means that she is, at least implicitly, committed to representing herself as an ÜES to her disagreeing sisters. Of course, similar reasoning applies to the epistemic self-conception of her disagreeing Dogmatic sisters.

While taking oneself to be an ÜES is sufficient for rejecting 2E, it is worth noting that the denial that one is an ÜES clearly does not entail that one must represent oneself as an epistemic peer—equally likely to have reached the truth. As just intimated, the denial that Libby is an ÜES is consistent with the claim that she is an epistemic superior: more likely to have arrived at the truth than each of her opponents.

Let me emphasize that accepting 2E does not imply that one could never plausibly attribute ÜES to oneself. Parents are often in a position to plausibly attribute ÜES to themselves when they find themselves disagreeing with several children about the appropriate hour for bedtime. Elementary teachers are often in a position of ÜES to their disagreeing students. The designated driver at the bar may well be an ÜES to her drunk and disagreeing friends. Of course, philosophical disagreements are different. Despite the character of some (much?) social media and other public debate, it is typically not appropriate to characterize philosophical disagreements as ones where one or more factions might be described as analogous to “children”, “students”, or “the inebriated” in contradistinction to those with whom they disagree.

## Relativism and the People’s Big Bet

To sum up, Dogmatism in multi-proposition philosophical disputes seems to presuppose a wildly implausible hubristic epistemic self-conception. If we believe some of the marketing materials for Alethic Relativism, then it seems that Relativism offers us a way to accept both 1D and 2E. As Steven Hales notes: “Relativists resolve disagreements by declaring that everyone is a winner.”[[8]](#footnote-9) And it seems that if everyone is a winner, then the charge of hubris is mistaken. That is, given Relativism, it seems we can be Dogmatists about our preferred views, and hold that others are correct in being Dogmatists about their preferred views.

And according to Maria Baghramian and J. Adam Carter,

….one main attraction of relativism is that it offers a way of settling (or explaining away) what appear to be profound disagreements on questions of value, knowledge and ontology and the relativizing parameter often involves people, their beliefs, cultures or languages.[[9]](#footnote-10)

If everyone is a winner, and profound disagreements can be settled or explained away, then the appeal of Relativism is self-evident. However, I hope to show that Relativism struggles in delivering on these claimed benefits.

Let us understand ‘Alethic Relativism’ as the conjunction of two claims:

1. all true propositions are true relative to some “framework” of evaluation or assessment.
2. No framework is privileged with respect to truth.[[10]](#footnote-11)

Candidates for individuating frameworks include cultures, society, philosophical views, languages, individuals, etc. For the most part, and unless otherwise noted, we will use ‘philosophical views’ as the relevant notion of ‘framework’. This assumption should be agreeable to the group of Relativists whom we are interested in: Relativists who hope to provide a relativistic account of philosophical disagreement.

To see to what extent Relativism helps with the problem of rejecting 2E, suppose the sisters take a pill offered by the ghost of Protagoras and become ardent adherents of Alethic Relativism. They four summon the Cruel God and point out that the Big Bet presupposes the falsity of Alethic Relativism. However, since the four are now card-carrying Alethic Relativists, they demand a do-over of the Big Bet on the assumption that Alethic Relativism is true.

The Cruel God’s first impulse is to smite them for their impudence, but she relents as she realizes that she can’t help but admire their chutzpah. The Cruel God allows them to bet again on the assumption that Alethic Relativism is true, and notes that this time they may split their bets if they so choose. As before, they all bet their entire “stake” for their preferred theory, but this time with greater confidence, knowing the glad tidings of Relativism: everyone is an alethic winner. The Cruel God says she is impressed: the four managed to double the lives saved to four billion. Now only four billion will be smote. The four are gob smacked: The Cruel God agreed to accept Alethic Relativism to assess their bets, so no lives should be lost. “How could the payoffs be other than this” they ask, “if Relativists resolve disagreements by declaring that everyone is a winner?”

The Cruel God’s response is that she does not dispute that the bets they placed are correct, but they should, as good relativists, have split their bets. The Cruel God’s divine friends, the Janus brothers, show how one should bet as a good Alethic Relativist. They believe and bet that each of the four political views is true and false. There is no contradiction here since truth and falsity are relativized to a framework. No matter which brother the Cruel God asks about each of the four political moralities, each answers that the view is true and false (relative to different frameworks of course). The Cruel Gods notes that with Relativism, there is a lot more truth and falsity on the table, so split bets must be placed. Naturally, our four protagonists protest that they are correct. They claim that Relativism does not require that one believe and disbelieve each relative position, and add that the Cruel God has confused Relativism with dialetheism.

## Propositional and Doxastic Relativism

To sort out this disagreement, we will need to clarify Relativism further. Notice that the definition of Alethic Relativism provided above is made in terms of propositions—not beliefs. So, to keep things straight, let us emphasize this by stipulating that ‘Propositional Relativism’ is a synonym for ‘Alethic Relativism’. The disagreement between our heroines and the Cruel God is how to translate Propositional Relativism into a recommendation for our doxastic practices. Consider these two competing views where ‘Δ’ refers to some disputed multi-propositional question:

**Parochial Doxastic Relativism**: It is not permissible to form beliefs about some Δ using more than one framework.

**Cosmopolitan Doxastic Relativism**: It is permissible to form beliefs about some Δ using more than one framework.

Let us say a person’s ‘perspective’ on Δ describes a function that assigns truth values to propositions believed by a person. If Parochial Doxastic Relativism is true, then it is not permissible to include in an individual’s perspective more than a single framework. If Cosmopolitanism is true, then an individual’s perspective on Δ may employ more than one framework. The sisters’ claim that their bets, not the Janus brothers’, should be declared correct, presupposes the truth of Parochial Relativism, while the Cruel God’s defense of the Janus brothers’ beliefs presupposes Cosmopolitan Relativism.

## Counterexamples to Parochialism

Let us examine both in more detail starting with Parochialism. Parochialism is not merely the descriptive claim that people often do employ a single framework in forming some beliefs about Δ; rather, Parochialism says that it is not permissible to employ more than one framework. As a normative claim, it faces formidable counterexamples. Just to be clear: in discussing these counterexamples, I shall assume (for the sake of the argument) that they are best analyzed as examples of Propositional Relativism. The residual question is whether Parochialism or Cosmopolitanism is most plausible.

Suppose a group of people decide to play a pick-up game of football. On the first play, a player catches the ball with one foot in bounds and one foot out of bounds. The offense insists that this counts as a catch, while the defense argues that one needs two feet in bounds to count as a catch. As the referee, you must decide. The problem is that the offense is correct if the rules of the game are those of college football, while the defense is correct if the rules of the game are those of the NFL. Here Relativism appears to offer a solution: there is no one true set of football rules. The player’s catch counts as inbounds relative to one framework—a set of rules—but not the other. Given that there was no stipulation as to which framework was being employed, the Cosmopolitan view seems reasonable: one should believe it is an inbounds catch and not an inbounds catch. (King Solemn recommends stipulating one set of rules hereafter and replaying the down.) Parochialism in this case—believing only one side—seems absurd. There is no need to appeal to dialetheism here: one may as a good Relativist both believe (relative to one framework) and disbelieve (relative to another framework) the proposition:

C: It was a legal inbounds catch.

Counterexamples to Parochialism can be multiplied. Alethic Relativists often invoke differences in taste as motivation for Relativism.[[11]](#footnote-12) Consider the proposition:

O: Oysters are tasty.

Anne believes O; Benito believes not-O. It is sometimes alleged that this is an example of a faultless disagreement and that Alethic Relativism (at least in this domain) best explains the faultless nature of the disagreement.[[12]](#footnote-13) Here the framework refers to a person’s sense of taste, so Anne and Benito apply different frameworks in their assessment of O. Agatha has congenital ageusia: she has never been able to taste anything. However, she is friends with Anne and Benito, and accepts their testimony about O. Accordingly, Agatha believes O is both true and not true (relative to different frameworks of course).

Similarly, it seems we may permissibly both believe and disbelieve that burping during a meal is an example of good and bad manners—depending on which framework of etiquette is being applied. One might even believe that a single token of burping is both good and bad manners. For example, suppose you attend a diplomatic dinner held on neutral ground, which is attended by guests of equal numbers who employ different etiquette frameworks. Half the guests believe the burp is a sign of good manners, the other half believe it is a sign of bad manners. As a good Cosmopolitan Relativist, you believe the token burp is both good manners and bad manners.

I can permissibly believe that something is both legal and illegal—relative to different legal frameworks. Driving on an island claimed by countries with equally compelling cases for possession, with different laws about which side to drive on, seems like a case where one might believe it is both legal and not legal to drive on the right side.

Consider now Cosmopolitanism applied to one of our initial philosophical questions: the question about the number and nature of divine beings. Zuri lives half the week with her father in the city where she attends Christian services with him every Sunday. Zuri says she believes in Christianity, and practices as a Christian. The other half of the week, Zuri lives with her mother in a rural area. Zuri says she holds the polytheistic beliefs of her mother’s tribe. Zuri says she happily believes in both religions. She finds no tension in believing both. She rejects non-Relativism as far too austere in its conception of truth. She prefers Relativism, which says there is an embarrassing richness of truth for her to enjoy.

The unifying thought here is that the same mechanism that can be used to explain why Relativism is not committed to dialetheism in interpersonal cases—because truth is relative to a framework—can be used to explain why dialetheism is not required in the intrapersonal case. In both the inter- and intrapersonal cases, different frameworks are used in assessing a proposition. Zuri happily employs to different frameworks.[[13]](#footnote-14)

## Parochialism and Moorean Absurdities

Parochialism requires that Zuri not believe in at least monotheism or polytheism. Similarly, Parochialism requires that our four heroines believe at most one of the four frameworks, and not believe the other three frameworks. One thing to notice is that the Dogmatist and the Parochialist about some view will have the same beliefs about the permissible distribution of beliefs about truth and falsity for any individual believer, while Cosmopolitanism allows more doxastic attitudes. Table 1 illustrates this situation for Connie.

Table 1: Belief Table for Connie

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Philosophical Views** | **Conservatism** | **Libertarianism** | **Socialism** | **Welfarism** |
| Non-relativism | Dogmatism | BT | BF | BF | BF |
| Relativism | Parochialism | BT | BF | BF | BF |
| Cosmopolitanism | BT, BF | BT, BF | BT, BF | BT, BF |

Now consider the austerity question: Why can’t one permissibly believe that some philosophical view is both true and false? The Dogmatist’s answer is straightforward: no proposition can be both true and false (at the same time, in the same respect). So, if someone believes some proposition is both true and false, then we know a priori that one of the beliefs is false. So, the Dogmatist’s answer to the austerity question is explained in terms of the nature of truth (and the rejection of dialethism).

Notice that the same answer does not work for the Parochial Relativist because Propositional Relativism allows that a proposition might be true relative to one framework and false relative to a different framework. According to Propositional Relativism, dialetheism is avoided because of this relativization. And indeed, the Propositional Relativist will insist (let us assume) there are no cases within a single framework where one proposition is both true and false. However, the Parochialist cannot leverage the nature of truth and a rejection of dialetheism to answer the austerity question, since, as just noted, Propositional Relativism is consistent with a proposition being both (relatively) true and false. And answering the austerity question by saying that the nature of truth within a framework is such that a proposition cannot be both true and false does not answer the austerity question, since the austerity question in effect asks why one can’t permissibly form beliefs using more than one framework.

The import of the austerity question can be emphasized by recalling the point made above: there is an embarrassing richness of truth on the Propositional Relativist’s view. Parochialism says that we must leave most of the bounty on the table unbelieved. In other words, Parochialism mandates a certain skepticism about competing views. Consider that even after taking the Propositional Relativism pill from Protagoras, the four still do not believe their siblings’ views. If you thought you should believe all philosophical views that you can easily recognize as true, and Parochialism is true, then you are mistaken. Instead, you should be skeptical about some philosophical views that you can recognize as true.

This skepticism verges on incoherence. To see this, consider an analogy with Moorean Propositions such as:

MP: It is raining, but I don’t believe that it is raining.

Connie the Conservative opting for Parochialism might formulate a Moorean Proposition[[14]](#footnote-15) thus:

CMP: Conservatism, Libertarianism, Socialism, and Welfarism are true (relative to a framework), and I don’t believe Libertarianism, Socialism, and Welfarism.

The first conjunct is assertable given Connie’s commitment to Propositional Relativism, and the second conjunct follows from Parochialism. This shows that the conjunction of Propositional Relativism and Parochialism do not sit well together. A heavy price of adopting Parochialism is that it forces one to countenance such Moorean Propositions.

## Cosmopolitanism, ÜES, and Disappearing Disagreement

Cosmopolitanism fares much better against the Moorean absurdity problem. There is no problem, for example, in one of the Janus brothers asserting the non-Moorean proposition:

NM: Conservatism, Libertarianism, Socialism, and Welfarism are true (relative to different frameworks), and I believe Conservatism, Libertarianism, Socialism, and Welfarism.

However, Cosmopolitanism is not without its share of problems. Consider first that our assumption was that much of the promise of Propositional Relativism is that it is consistent with the rejection of radical epistemic inequality (that is, the acceptance of 2E). However, if Cosmopolitanism is true, then it seems that some will stand as something similar to ÜES to their disagreeing colleagues. Consider the true beliefs of the Janus brothers as compared with the beliefs expressed by our four heroines: the sisters have fewer true beliefs about political morality than the Janus brothers. Those who embrace Cosmopolitanism will have a vaulting alethic advantage as compared with those who don’t.

It may be remarked on behalf of the Cosmopolitan that alethic inequality is simply the result of Cosmopolitanism not being universally embraced. Suppose we think of Relativism as a call for revolution in our epistemic practices. If everyone accepted Cosmopolitanism as a result, and formulated their philosophical beliefs on this basis, then the aforementioned alethic inequality would disappear. So, for example, if our four heroines adopted Cosmopolitanism, then they too could have the same bounty of true beliefs as the Janus brothers, and so the alethic inequality would disappear.

However, if realized, the Cosmopolitan revolution would eliminate one phenomenon many of its proponent seek to explain, namely: faultless disagreement.[[15]](#footnote-16) Indeed, one of the advantages often touted in favor of Relativism is that it provides the most compelling account of faultless disagreement.[[16]](#footnote-17) Yet when the Cosmopolitan revolution is complete, everyone will have the same philosophical beliefs. As just noted, if our four heroines adopt Cosmopolitanism, then they will have the same philosophical views about the nature of political morality as the Janus brothers. So, the phenomenon of disagreement will be eliminated.

## Doxastic Relativism and Moral Disagreements

The aim in this section is to see whether Relativism can make good on the claimed benefit “of settling (or explaining away) what appear to be profound disagreements on questions of value….” It will help to work an example of a profound moral disagreement. Bonnie and Donnie vehemently disagree about Bonnie’s proposal to put their son Pawn into conversion therapy to eradicate Pawn’s homosexual behavior. From Bonnie’s conservative Christian framework, Pawn would benefit from conversion therapy as it is the best hope to save Pawn’s soul from eternal damnation. According to Donnie’s secular liberal framework, homosexual behavior is not something that needs to be “fixed”, and such conversion therapy will very likely severely psychologically harm Pawn.

Suppose Bonnie and Donnie are both non-relativists. We might imagine that they go to extraordinary lengths to make sure that their moral framework prevails in making this decision. Suppose Donnie attempts a legal route to stop Bonnie’s plan to put Pawn into conversion therapy during the six weeks of summer that Pawn is to be under her care according to their custody arrangement. Donnie hires a lawyer to argue that he ought to be given sole custody of Pawn, since Bonnie is hell bent on harming Pawn by enrolling him in conversion therapy. Bonnie gets wind of Donnie’s legal machinations and kidnaps Pawn. She takes him to a country that imposes the death penalty for homosexuality but offers free conversion therapy for those intransient to the truth that homosexuality is a sin before God.

Suppose the Cruel God, interested in seeing just how Relativism can settle or explain away such disagreements, waves her magic wand and sends Bonnie and Donnie back in time to replay their disagreement, but this time as Cosmopolitan Relativists. Once converted, both Bonnie and Donnie believe both frameworks, and believe that there are no non-relative (philosophical) truths. How then might they decide what to do about Pawn? Here it seems they will be faced with a dilemma: if they choose not to put Pawn in conversion therapy, then their conservative Christian framework says that Pawn will be harmed, since his soul will be condemned to eternal damnation. On the other hand, if they put Pawn in Conversion therapy, then their secular liberal framework says they will psychologically harm Pawn for behavior that one should not attempt to alter. Bonnie and Donnie wonder if they should perhaps flip a coin to decide what should be done with Pawn, since there are equally compelling reasons—no framework is superior to the other—for and against conversion therapy. In switching from non-relativism to Cosmopolitan Relativism, Bonnie and Donnie have traded their disagreement for a dilemma.[[17]](#footnote-18) Whichever route they take, they can be sure that there are equally weighty moral reasons against it. And of course, as Cosmopolitans there is no longer any disagreement between them about which framework to believe. So, Cosmopolitanism does not appear to settle or explain away the dispute: it merely trades their moral disagreement for a moral dilemma.[[18]](#footnote-19) And no matter what they do, they can be assured a priori that the proposition, “Our actions inflict great harm on Pawn”, is (relatively) true. (I’ll return to this point about the inevitability of tragic harm in the final section.)

Amused with this result, the Cruel God waves her magic wand again and sends Bonnie and Donnie back in time to replay their disagreement as Parochial Relativists. In terms of their behavior now, Bonnie and Donnie act exactly as they did when they were non-relativists. Both acknowledge that their frameworks are not absolutely true, but only relatively true. Still their beliefs guide their actions. Donnie believes that he should strain with every nerve to stop Bonnie from putting Pawn in conversion therapy, and Bonnie believes she is justified in straining with every nerve to get Pawn into conversion therapy. In attempting to get their views to triumph, as good Parochial Relativists they must acknowledge that their frameworks do not hold any alethic advantage over the other party. If they triumph, it will be because they have more “power” rather than truth on their side. That is, they can’t, on pain of inconsistency, claim the alethic superiority of their moral framework. It is difficult to see in what sense this can plausibly be said to be a compelling way of settling or explaining away their profound moral disagreement.

Appearances to the contrary notwithstanding, Parochialism also must face the problem that it merely trades more disagreements for moral dilemmas. To see why, consider this distinction:

**Propositional Moral Dilemma:** S is morally required to do two different actions, but S cannot do both.

**Doxastic Moral Dilemma:** S believes that S is morally required to do two different actions, but S believes that S cannot do both.

To illustrate the difference, suppose Larry the lifeguard sees two people drowning. He is, let us suppose, morally required to save people from drowning, but he can only save one. Suppose Larry is a racist and he sees that one struggling swimmer is a person of a race that he holds as inferior. Larry’s false belief leads him to believe (and act) as if he has a greater moral duty to save the swimmer whom he considers to be racially superior. This situation is not a doxastic moral dilemma for Larry, but it is a propositional moral dilemma for Larry.

Given Parochialism, Bonnie and Donnie do not face a doxastic moral dilemma with respect to the question of whether to put Pawn into conversion therapy, since they do not believe that they are both morally required to put Pawn in conversion therapy and to keep Pawn from conversion therapy. Still, it is clear that there is a propositional moral dilemma here, since Propositional Relativism says that both moral frameworks are true, and neither is superior to the other.

But this means that the familiar problem of Moorean propositions rears its head once more. For both Bonnie and Donnie seem to be faced with choosing between asserting either:

1. There is a Propositional Moral Dilemma about what to do with Pawn, and I believe there is a Propositional Moral Dilemma.
2. There is a Propositional Moral Dilemma about what to do with Pawn, and I don’t believe there is a Propositional Moral Dilemma.

The problem with (i) of course is that in the typical case, we expect that if someone acknowledges that they face a Propositional Moral Dilemma, then they face a Doxastic Moral Dilemma. The problem with (ii) is of course that it is a form of a Moorean Proposition.

## Skeptical-Dogmatism

Skeptical-Dogmatism is a radical proposal. It recommends a wholesale revision of the doxastic practices of humanity: for many multi-proposition disputes, we should disbelieve each philosophical view, or at least believe that each view is more likely false than true.[[19]](#footnote-20)

As noted, Skeptical-Dogmatists reject 1D, and accept 2E and 3RF of our trilemma. So, the obvious advantage Skeptical-Dogmatism has over Relativism is that it is not saddled with, what I have argued, is an implausible metaphysical conception of truth. The obvious advantage Skeptical-Dogmatism has over Dogmatism is that it is not saddled with an implausible epistemic self-conception, that is, Skeptical-Dogmatists do not need to represent themselves as ÜES.

The more modest epistemic self-conception of the Skeptical-Dogmatist in comparison with the Dogmatist pays a dividend in terms of true belief. For example, suppose the sisters had bet as Skeptical-Dogmatists in the Big Bet. Each would have bet against her preferred view, and then 6 billion lives would have been spared and only 2 billion smote. In terms of true belief, as Dogmatists, only one of the four sisters has a true belief, but as Skeptical-Dogmatists, three of the four have a true belief.[[20]](#footnote-21)

To see what it would be like for humanity to adopt Skeptical-Dogmatism, we should distinguish two species within the genus. The “Pyrrhonian” version of Skeptical-Dogmatism requires that each of the philosophical views about some Δ is equally credible. The “Academic” version of Skeptical-Dogmatism allows that one might find some view or views about Δ more credible than others, but not so credible that it is more likely true than not. If with a wave of her magic wand the Cruel God changed all of humanity into Pyrrhonian Skeptical-Dogmatists, then radical disagreement about the truth of philosophical views should disappear. If the Cruel God waved her magic wand and made humanity Academic Skeptical-Dogmatists, then radical disagreement would be gone but non-radical disagreement would remain. After all, the Academic version is consistent with disagreement on the likely truth of a philosophical view, so long as there is agreement that each view is probably false.

In either case, we should imagine that the nature of disagreement over philosophical matters will change drastically. It is an empirical conjecture, and so open to empirical refutation, but it seems a good bet to think that the public discourse would be much more civil in a world where everyone admitted the radical fallibility—more likely false than true—of their preferred views. Who knows, it may even be the case that in such a world the standards of etiquette might change. In such a world, Ms. Manners[[21]](#footnote-22) might tolerate the discussion of politics and religion in polite company.

It may be wondered how plausible Skeptical-Dogmatism is, given that it faces nearly universal opposition. I concede that it goes against the grain, hence why I have termed it a “radical proposal”. Of course, this in itself does not constitute an argument against Skeptical-Dogmatism any more than the fact that most people do not exercise regularly shows that they couldn’t or shouldn’t. I imagine that health experts who formulate exercise guidelines must realize that their guidelines are “aspirational”: health experts must know that the guidelines won’t be observed by most, but this does not change the fact that most would benefit if they exercised. The recommendation of Skeptical-Dogmatism might be understood as similarly aspirational.[[22]](#footnote-23) Thus, the Skeptical-Dogmatist epistemic health professional’s recommendation to humanity is this: if you would like to have more true beliefs, and fewer false beliefs, then you should be a Skeptical-Dogmatist about your philosophical views in multi-proposition disputes.

It might be thought that it would be impossible to act on our philosophical beliefs if we accept Skeptical-Dogmatism. A related objection, the “apraxia charge”, was laid against Pyrrhonian Skeptics. Their opponents claimed that action is impossible without belief, and since Pyrrhonians suspend judgment (and so lack belief), they are unable to act, that is, without beliefs they would remain “fixed like a vegetable”. An analogous objection might be raised against Skeptical-Dogmatism: if we disbelieve all philosophical views about Δ, then our beliefs can’t inform our actions with respect to Δ, e.g., which religious view (if any) to embrace, or which political party to vote for, etc.

In most general terms, the reply to this objection is that (in general) we make better decisions when our beliefs are more likely to be true, and poorer decisions when are beliefs are probably false. For example, suppose we have to choose between three different physicians to treat us for some ailment. (1) The knowledgeable physician: she knows the nature of the ailment and how to treat it. (2) The acknowledged ignorant physician: she is not knowledgeable about what ails us, but she does not believe she is knowledgeable. (3) The hubristic physician: she thinks she is knowledgeable about what ails us, but she is in fact ignorant about what ails us. I assume everyone agrees that the numbers represent the rankings. That is, it would be best (other things being equal) to see (1) and then (2), and only if we are really desperate, (3). Obviously, the acknowledged ignorant physician can still act in a reasonable fashion: she may inquire further by ordering additional tests, experiment with several treatments, etc.

If the argument here is on track, then in terms of philosophical belief most people think they are analogous to the knowledgeable physician but in fact are more like the hubristic physician, while Skeptical-Dogmatists are more like the acknowledged ignorant physician. And just like the acknowledged ignorant physician, it does not follow that Skeptical-Dogmatists cannot act in a reasonable fashion, simply because they acknowledge their ignorance.

Let me illustrate how this might play out in terms of philosophical belief. Suppose Sara the socialist undergoes a doxastic revolution where she changes from a confident Dogmatist to a Skeptical-Dogmatist about socialism. While Sara now believes that socialism is probably wrong, she is an Academic Skeptical-Dogmatist: she holds that it is the most probable of the views available. Sara sees the possibility of political involvement as analogous to being lost in the woods. It is better to start walking in some direction, even if it is probably not the right direction, than to remain motionless and lost. Similarly, she sees it more important to be politically engaged, even if she supports the wrong view, than to not be engaged at all. So, Sara has reason to work with her socialist colleagues (even if she is no longer as confident about the truth of socialism as so many of her colleagues).

Does this mean that her doxastic revolution leaves Sara’s actions unaffected? Not necessarily.

One behavioral difference we might expect to see from Sara is more openness to dialogue with those with whom she disagrees. Even though Sara believes that socialism is the most probable position, she still believes that the truth of the matter more likely lies elsewhere. So, in addition to any prior moral or prudential reason Sara had for being open to dialogue with those whom she politically disagrees, as a Skeptical-Dogmatist, Sara has more epistemic reason to be open to dialogue: openness to ascertaining the truth.

Similarly, Sara after her conversion to Skeptical-Dogmatism, has more epistemic reason to compromise than when she was a Dogmatist. Suppose that previously Sara was adamantly against a basic income guarantee for all citizens. She reasoned, much as some socialist theorists have,[[23]](#footnote-24) that a basic income would delay or deflect from a socialist victory, even if it would help with the most extreme forms of poverty in the short term. Now that she is less confident that she is right about socialism, she sees more merit in the basic income proposal. It is something that she can compromise on with some of her libertarian, welfarist, and conservative acquaintances.[[24]](#footnote-25) She sees this as a more reasonable alternative than risking not helping the poor for the sake of a socialist revolution that she now has far less confidence in being realized and being correct.

It is also reasonable to predict that conversion to Skeptical-Dogmatism would lead Sara to be more respectful of her disagreeing colleagues. There is evidence to suggest a correlation between how politically partisan people are and how likely they are to see their opponents in terms of negative traits such as: closed-minded, unintelligent, immoral, lazy, and unpatriotic.[[25]](#footnote-26) Skeptical-Dogmatists are less likely to be highly partisan, and if the correlation holds, less likely to see their opponents in such negative terms. Indeed, it is an empirical conjecture, and so open to empirical refutation, but it seems a good bet to think that the public discourse would be much more civil in a world where everyone admitted the radical fallibility—more likely false than true—of their preferred views. Who knows, it may even be the case that in such a world the standards of etiquette might change. In such a world, Ms. Manners might tolerate the discussion of politics and religion in polite company.

## The Counsel of Hope

My impression is that skepticism is often understood as the counsel of despair. This attitude is understandable. For example, if we contrast Hales’ slogan form of Relativism when it comes to our philosophical disagreements, "everyone is a winner”, with the slogan form of Skeptical-Dogmatism “everyone is a loser”, then Skeptical-Dogmatism hardly seems the bearer of glad tidings.[[26]](#footnote-27) However, at least in the case of Skeptical-Dogmatism, I hope to show this “counsel of despair” view is wrong.[[27]](#footnote-28) Skeptical-Dogmatism is the counsel of hope: Skeptical-Dogmatism offers us hope against the harms of hubris, and it offers us hope for the truth as a means to make our lives better.

The “harms of hubris” locution refers to the dangers of acting when we think we have arrived at the truth when we have not. The danger, in other words, is acting on the false philosophical belief. This point is generally recognized. It is often alleged, for instance, that adopting the wrong political philosophy will lead to great harms. Libby, we might imagine, thinks that taxes should be levied only to ensure an adequate legal system and military defense. She maintains that taxes over and above this amount, e.g., taxes to educate children or help the disabled, are nothing less than theft or slavery. So, she at present suffers under a form of slavery. Sara thinks that capitalism in any form destroys the bonds of natural human sociability and that it is the ultimate root of discord in society. Connie thinks that progressive liberal reforms like the legal permissibility of same sex marriage harms the bedrock unit of a good society: heterosexual family life. Welma believes that lowering taxes on the rich results in states failing to fulfill their duties to the less fortunate, and so on.

This is a common pattern for many philosophical beliefs held by humanity: part of the network of beliefs that support the adoption of some philosophical view V1 are claims that adopting competitor views V2, V3, etc., will lead to comparatively greater harm. Many vegans, for example, are more than happy to tell you about the harms of adopting vegetarianism or omnivorism. Omnivores are often more than happy to tell you about the harms of stridently attempting to foist veganism or vegetarianism on others. Monotheists are often happy to admonish against the dangers of adopting atheism or polytheism, and so on. The abortion disagreement puts the harms front and center where each side claims great harms will come if their view is not enshrined in public policy.

Just to be clear, while there may be some epistemic harm in simply holding false views, the concern here is with the practical harms of acting on false belief. For example, if those who believe that abortion should never be permitted are successful in getting policies in place that make it difficult or impossible for women to obtain an abortion, and they are wrong in their claim that harm to fetuses outweighs a women’s right to bodily autonomy, then their false beliefs lead to unjust harm for many women. And of course abortion providers have been gunned down in the street as a result of their assailants’ firm convictions. People have been burned at the stake for their philosophical beliefs. Wars and subjugation of large populations have been waged in the name of religious and political views. Skeptical-Dogmatism offers hope against the Dogmatists’ hubris in claiming and acting on the belief that “We are right and everyone else is wrong.”

The claim that Skeptical-Dogmatism offers hope for the truth as a means to make our lives better is rooted in the non-relativistic conception of truth endorsed by Skeptical-Dogmatism. I indicated some of this above, but I’ll spell it out further here. A non-relativistic conception of truth offers more hope for philosophical beliefs to be action-guiding. As noted above, there appears to be far more moral dilemmas on the supposition that Relativism is true. Similar dilemmas will abound in the political and religious arenas. With so many true views to choose from, and with no framework privileged with the respect to the truth, we will need some non-alethic means to choose, e.g., the aforementioned roll of a die or some other non-alethic means of selecting.

To pick up an earlier thought, if Propositional Relativism is true, then we have a priori knowledge of impending tragedy. This is a result of the fact that if Propositional Relativism is true, we will inevitably inflict great harm in implementing our philosophical views no matter what view we choose. After all, as noted, if all philosophical views are winners, and, as we have noted, philosophical views often make claims about the harms associated with implementing alternate views, then great harm seems inevitable given that often we can implement only a single view. If we tax people for the sake of children’s education, then libertarianism implies a terrible truth: we will unjustly harm taxpayers. If we do not tax for the sake of children’s education, then welfare liberalism implies a terrible truth: we will unjustly harm children, especially the progeny of the poor. As Relativists, we do not need to know how the future will unfold to know a priori that it will be one of great tragedy, since it will be true that terrible harms will be visited. In contrast, a non-relativistic conception of truth does not allow us to know a priori that our future is tragic, since it holds hope that we might implement the correct view, and that the claims of great harm in doing so are false.

Still, it may be remonstrated that Skeptical-Dogmatism is hardly better off on this score, since Skeptical-Dogmatists claim that the truth is beyond our grasp.

Like ancient Skepticism, Skeptical-Dogmatism can be parsed into unmitigated and mitigated versions.[[28]](#footnote-29) A mitigated version of Skeptical-Dogmatism says that we have reason to believe that for many philosophical disagreements we are not in a position to justifiably believe that we have grasped the truth. This is a far cry from saying that we can never grasp the truth. Mitigated Skeptical-Dogmatism takes seriously the etymology of ‘skepticism’ as inquirer. And if the past is any indication, inquiry may pay off.

Consider the multi-proposition dispute about slavery Aristotle canvases in his *Politics*. He claims there are three positions: slavery is justified by nature, slavery is justified by convention, and slavery is not justified. Skeptical-Dogmatists can join the chorus in claiming that there has been moral progress in the abolishment of slavery. On this issue, moderate Skeptical-Dogmatists should be Dogmatists. It seems reasonable to believe that if people in Aristotle’s time had been Skeptical-Dogmatists about the issue of slavery, this abhorrent practice might have ended far earlier. Instead, tragically, the practice was abolished only a few generations ago in the U.S. A moderate Skeptical-Dogmatism is also consistent with being Dogmatists about other recent moral victories, including the extension of franchise rights and advanced educational opportunities to women. Again, it seems reasonable to speculate that these victories may have come sooner if proponents of the subjugation of women had not been so confident that they were right and everyone else wrong.

This is not the place to develop a theory of moderate Skeptical-Dogmatism; rather, I am simply pointing out the possibility of such a theory.[[29]](#footnote-30) Such a theory would aim to strike a balance between a radical Skeptical-Dogmatism, which says that we are never justified in being Dogmatists about some philosophical issues, and the hubris of contemporary Dogmatists. Such a view is consistent with the hope of making philosophical progress and settling in the future some of the controversial issues of today. There have been only about 100 generations since Aristotle—a mere blink of an eye in the grand scheme of things. It seems the height of hubris to think that future generations will not be able to improve on our thinking. The conjecture of moderate Skeptical-Dogmatism is that our best hope for making progress is not the popular error of having the courage of our convictions, but by an attack on our convictions.[[30]](#footnote-31)

There is no expectation here that readers will think that Dogmatism and Relativism have been refuted once and for all. Such an ambition from a single author in a single paper is laughably hubristic. A more reasonable (but still vaulting) ambition is that Skeptical-Dogmatism might be granted a seat at the table when the attitude question is discussed.

# References

Baghramian, Maria, and J. Adam Carter. “Relativism.” In *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2022. <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2022/entries/relativism/>.

Elster, Jon. “Comment on van Der Veen and Van Parijs.” *Theory and Society*, 1986, 709–21.

Hájek, A. “My Philosophical Position Says ‘p’ and I Don’t Believe ‘p.’” In *Moore’s Paradox: New Essays on Belief, Rationality, and the First Person*, Edited by Mitchel Green and John Williams:217–31. Clarendon Press Oxford, 2007.

Hales, Steven. “A Consistent Relativism.” *Mind* 106, no. 421 (1997): 33–52.

Hales, Steven D. “Motivations for Relativism as a Solution to Disagreements.” *Philosophy* 89, no. 1 (2014): 63–82.

———. *Relativism and the Foundations of Philosophy*. MIT Press, 2009.

Hume, David. *A Treatise of Human Nature*. Courier Corporation, 2012.

Kant, Immanuel. *The Critique of Judgment*. Translated by J. H. Bernard. Prometheus Books, 2000.

Kölbel, Max. “III—Faultless Disagreement.” In *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 104:53–73. Oxford University Press Oxford, UK, 2004.

Kusch, Martin, Katherina Kinzel, Johannes Steizinger, and Niels Wildschut. *The Emergence of Relativism: German Thought from the Enlightenment to National Socialism*. Routledge, 2019.

MacFarlane, John. *Assessment Sensitivity: Relative Truth and Its Applications*. OUP Oxford, 2014.

———. “Relativism and Disagreement.” *Philosophical Studies* 132 (2007): 17–31.

Machuca, Diego. “Conciliationism and the Menace of Scepticism.” *Dialogue*, 2015, 469–88.

———. “Pyrrhonian Relativism.” *Elenchos: Rivista Di Studi Sul Pensiero Antico* 36, no. 1 (2015): 89–114.

———. *Pyrrhonism Past and Present: Inquiry, Disagreement, Self-Knowledge, and Rationality*. Cham: Springer, 2022.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. “Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future, Trans.” *Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1966)* 203 (1989).

Ribeiro, Brian C. *Sextus, Montaigne, Hume: Pyrrhonizers*. Brill, 2021.

Sextus Empiricus. “Outlines of Pyrrhonism.” In *The Skeptic Way*, Translated by Benson Mates. New York: Oxford University Press, 1996.

Smith, Plínio Junqueira. *Sextus Empiricus’ Neo-Pyrrhonism: Skepticism as a Rationally Ordered Experience*. Vol. 457. Springer, 2022.

Thorsrud, Harald. “Radical and Mitigated Skepticism in Cicero’s Academica.” *Cicero’s Practical Philosophy*, 2012, 133–51.

Walker, Mark. *Free Money for All: A Basic Income Guarantee Solution for the Twenty-First Century*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016.

———. “Na-Na, Na-Na, Boo-Boo, the Accuracy of Your Philosophical Beliefs Is Doo-Doo.” *Manuscrito* 45, no. 2 (2022): 1–49.

———. *Outlines of Skeptical-Dogmatism*. Lexington Books, Forthcoming.

Westacott, Emrys. “Cognitive Relativism.” In *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, n.d. https://iep.utm.edu/cognitive-relativism-truth/.

1. These three do not exhaust the logical space, e.g., Pyrrhonians Skepticism and Dialetheism are competitor positions, which I do not have space to consider. I discuss Pyrrhonism in Mark Walker, *Outlines of Skeptical-Dogmatism* (Lexington Books, Forthcoming). For a defense of Pyrrhonism as a response to disagreement, see Diego Machuca, *Pyrrhonism Past and Present: Inquiry, Disagreement, Self-Knowledge, and Rationality* (Cham: Springer, 2022). In the text, I shall use the capitalized version, ‘Skepticism’, to refer to Pyrrhonian and Academic Skepticism, and the small case, ‘skepticism’ to include both Skepticism and Skeptical-Dogmatism. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Sextus Empiricus, “Outlines of Pyrrhonism,” in *The Skeptic Way*, translated by Benson Mates (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. In other words, if it weren’t so tiresome, then everywhere in the main text ‘Relativism’ should be spelt out as ‘Dogmatic Relativism’, and ‘Dogmatism’ as ‘non-Relativistic Dogmatism’. One way to underscore the need for specifying ‘Dogmatic Relativism’ is to note that the possibility of a Skeptical form of Relativism. A view explored by Diego Machuca (“Pyrrhonian Relativism,” *Elenchos: Rivista Di Studi Sul Pensiero Antico* 36, no. 1 (2015): 89–114). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. I’ll say more about this assumption below. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. I say ‘at least’ since nothing said precludes the possibility that the winning bet was merely lucky. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. As I have argued elsewhere, this depends on the assumption that there is no majority in favor of one philosophical view: Mark Walker, “Na-Na, Na-Na, Boo-Boo, the Accuracy of Your Philosophical Beliefs Is Doo-Doo,” *Manuscrito* 45, no. 2 (2022): 1–49. I do not know of any comprehensive survey of the philosophical beliefs of humanity, but of our initial examples, [a]-[c] look like promising questions where there is no majority view. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. It is important to emphasize this is a non-pejorative understanding of ‘Dogmatism’. There is no implication that all Dogmatists are stubborn, unreasoning, etc. Note too that this understanding allows probabilistic elements in the content of the belief, hence this allows for a rough translation between belief and credence modeling of confidence. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. Steven D. Hales, “Motivations for Relativism as a Solution to Disagreements,” *Philosophy* 89, no. 1 (2014): 63–82. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. Maria Baghramian and J. Adam Carter, “Relativism,” in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2022, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2022/entries/relativism/>. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. This is a standard way to conceive of Alethic Relativism: Baghramian and Carter. Emrys Westacott, “Cognitive Relativism,” in *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, n.d., https://iep.utm.edu/cognitive-relativism-truth/. Candidates for individuating frameworks include, cultures, society, philosophical views, languages, individuals, etc. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
11. Taste’ has been a favorite example in discussion about disagreement; e.g. Belleri (2010); Cappelen and Huvenes (2018); Egan (2010); Hirvonen (2014); Lasersohn (2005); MacFarlane (2014); Stojanovic (2007). [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
12. Max Kölbel, “III—Faultless Disagreement,” in *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, vol. 104 (Oxford University Press Oxford, UK, 2004), 53–73. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
13. There is a tradition, going back at least to Kant, that says it is permissible to use competing frameworks for different practical purposes. Kant, for example, famously allows us to act as if our world is deterministic (when doing physics) and where we acknowledge non-deterministic action when acting morally. These different “regulative principles” are not in conflict, says Kant, because they are rules of conduct, not to be taken as claims about the nature of things in themselves, which would lead to contradictions. Kant’s most developed discussion of the rationality of using different frameworks for different purposes can be found in Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Judgment*, Translated by J. H. Bernard (Prometheus Books, 2000). This connection between German Idealism and Relativism is well-document (see, for example, Martin Kusch et al., *The Emergence of Relativism: German Thought from the Enlightenment to National Socialism* (Routledge, 2019).). I simply want to draw the reader’s attention to the fact that this tradition also includes the thought of intrapersonal use of multiple frameworks. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
14. Or at least a ‘neo-Moorean Proposition’, depending on how strict one wants to be about how to understand ‘Moorean Propositions’. For some discussion of the strictness point, see A. Hájek, “My Philosophical Position Says ‘p’ and I Don’t Believe ‘p,’” in *Moore’s Paradox: New Essays on Belief, Rationality, and the First Person*, vol. Edited by Mitchel Green and John Williams (Clarendon Press Oxford, 2007), 217–31. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
15. Kölbel defines a faultless disagreement as:

    “(a) *A* believes (judges) that *p* and *B* believes (judges) that

    not-*p*

    (b) Neither *A* nor *B* has made a mistake (is at fault).” Kölbel, “III—Faultless Disagreement.” P. 54. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
16. Kölbel. Hales, “Motivations for Relativism as a Solution to Disagreements.” John MacFarlane, “Relativism and Disagreement,” *Philosophical Studies* 132 (2007): 17–31. John MacFarlane, *Assessment Sensitivity: Relative Truth and Its Applications* (OUP Oxford, 2014). [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
17. I focus on just two possibilities to simplify the discussion. If multi-proposition disputes are at issue, then the same argument shows that such disagreements transform into trilemmas, or tetralemmas, etc. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
18. Perhaps it will be remonstrated that this trade does “explain away” disagreement. Whether this is so will depend on whether ‘explain away’ is heard as suggesting ‘reducing the significance’. Suppose the police say they are able to “explain away” your child’s apparent truancy from college. You might be relieved until you find out the explanation is that your child is dead. Colloquially, it might have been better for the police to use ‘explain’ rather than ‘explain away’. Similarly, one might think that there is some sense in which moral dilemmas are worse than moral disagreements. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
19. Like Relativism, Skeptical-Dogmatism appears to face a self-undermining objection. I attempt to answer this in Walker, *Outlines of Skeptical-Dogmatism*. For a Relativist’s answer, see Steven Hales, “A Consistent Relativism,” *Mind* 106, no. 421 (1997): 33–52. And Steven D. Hales, *Relativism and the Foundations of Philosophy* (MIT Press, 2009). Especially pp. 102-103. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
20. This outcome depends on the claim that the four views are jointly exhaustive. This seems extremely unlikely. If the true view is not among the four considered in the Big Bet, then Skeptical-Dogmatism will save even more truth (and lives). This and related points are explored more in Walker, “Na-Na, Na-Na, Boo-Boo, the Accuracy of Your Philosophical Beliefs Is Doo-Doo.” [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
21. Not to be confused with Miss Manners. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
22. For this exploration of the idea that philosophical views might be conceived as “aspirational”, see Brian C. Ribeiro, *Sextus, Montaigne, Hume: Pyrrhonizers* (Brill, 2021). [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
23. Jon Elster, “Comment on van Der Veen and Van Parijs,” *Theory and Society*, 1986, 709–21. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
24. For the possibility of such a convergence of philosophical views in support of a basic income guarantee, see Mark Walker, *Free Money for All: A Basic Income Guarantee Solution for the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016). [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
25. https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2019/10/10/how-partisans-view-each-other/ [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
26. David Hume famously describes in poetic terms the “melancholy” that affects him when he indulges skeptical thoughts: David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (Courier Corporation, 2012). (1.4.7.1, SBN 263-4). I say “at best” since Skepticism is often described in even less flattering terms (Diego Machuca, “Conciliationism and the Menace of Scepticism,” *Dialogue*, 2015, 469–88. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
27. For more upbeat contemporary defenses of Pyrrhonian Skepticism see, Machuca, *Pyrrhonism Past and Present: Inquiry, Disagreement, Self-Knowledge, and Rationality*. Plínio Junqueira Smith, *Sextus Empiricus’ Neo-Pyrrhonism: Skepticism as a Rationally Ordered Experience*, vol. 457 (Springer, 2022). Ribeiro, *Sextus, Montaigne, Hume*. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
28. For the distinction in ancient Skepticism, see Harald Thorsrud, “Radical and Mitigated Skepticism in Cicero’s Academica,” *Cicero’s Practical Philosophy*, 2012, 133–51. For more on the distinction within Skeptical-Dogmatism, see Walker, *Outlines of Skeptical-Dogmatism*. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
29. Some initial thoughts on formulating a moderate Skeptical-Dogmatism can be found in Walker, *Outlines of Skeptical-Dogmatism*. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
30. This is a paraphrase of an aphorism from Friedrich Nietzsche, “Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future, Trans,” *Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1966)* 203 (1989). P. 36, note 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)