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Hales’s Argument for Philosophical Relativism

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Steven Hales is a self-described, if unhappy, relativist about philosophical propositions, holding that true philosophical propositions are true only within a perspective.¹ So the beliefs of the Christian philosopher, the secular analytic philosopher, and the hallucinogenically induced beliefs of some Ecuadorian shamans, although conflicting, are all true. He also claims that philosophy has a foundational structure dependent on what he calls “rational intuition,” which is self-justifying and not any more or less likely to give us knowledge of philosophical propositions than either Christian revelation or the ritual use of hallucinogens. Thus, we must choose amongst nihilism, skepticism, and relativism. Hales opts for the last, since the others are, he believes, untenable. While there are a good many things to be learned from Hales’s account of relativism, the argument he presents for it fails. I summarize aspects of his position and present two criticisms of his defense and one critical observation.

1. The Logic of Relativism

Hales’s relativist logic limits its claims, showing why global relativism is self-refuting while a more limited relativism need not be. To begin, he compares “everything is relative” to “everything is possible.” This is important for although it is false that everything is possible, it is clearly true that

ABSTRACT: Steven Hales defends philosophical relativism by arguing that rational intuition, Christian revelation, and shamanistic use of hallucinogens generate true but conflicting propositions. The alternatives to relativism are naturalistic nihilism and skepticism, both of which he rejects, leaving us with a limited, philosophical relativism. I summarize Hales’s position and undermine its defense by criticizing the handling of skepticism, proposing another way out of the trilemma.

¹ My entire discussion is based on Steven Hales, Relativism and the Foundations of Philosophy (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006). Toward the end of his book, he notes his own disappointment with being left with relativism, a position he is reluctant, but feels required, to hold.
everything true is possibly true. In parallel, while it is false that everything is relative, it is true that everything true is relatively true. Hales writes:

Suppose that everything is possible. That is, for all \( \Phi \), \( \diamond \Phi \). Allow \( \Phi \) to be “it is necessarily not true that everything is possible.” Then the following turns out to be true: possibly, it is necessarily not true that everything is possible. A well-known theorem in modal system S5 tells us that whatever is possibly necessary is necessary. We can thereby conclude that it is necessarily not true that everything is possible. Thus, by reductio, it cannot be the case that everything is possible. So what should we do? Should we abandon all talk of modality, give up possibility and necessity, and purge ourselves of possible worlds? Of course not . . . . Yet everyone is prepared to affirm this thesis: everything true is possibly true [italics his].

This last thesis does not entail that nothing is necessarily true. Possible truth is not mere possibility. Something’s being possibly true does not rule out its being necessarily true. Furthermore, possible truth is not a “cheap” version of real or actual truth.

Hales introduces two operators, \( \text{\&} \) and \( \text{■} \). The former indexes sentences to perspectives so that \( \text{\&}\Phi \) is to be read: “it is relatively true (true in some perspective) that \( \Phi \).” The latter operator is an “absolute” operator so that \( \text{■}\Phi \) is to be read: “it is absolutely true (true in all perspectives) that \( \Phi \).” If we then accept the S5-like theorem that whatever is relatively absolute is absolute (for all \( \Phi \), \( \text{\&}\text{■}\Phi \Rightarrow \text{■}\Phi \)) (he calls this \( P \)) and we take “it is absolutely not true that everything is relative” as a substitution instance of \( \Phi \), we get that it is absolutely not true that everything is relative. This shows global relativism self-refuting.

Hales’s argument rests heavily on the truth of \( P \) and he presents a good case for its truth. Global relativists say relativism is merely relatively true, that is, true in some perspectives and not true in others. But how would this work? Hales first considers that relativism is not true in some perspectives. In that perspective absolutism (not relativism) is true. Absolutism claims that some proposition has the same truth-value in all perspectives. Call this situation \( p \). In \( p \), there is some \( \Phi \) such that \( \text{■}\Phi \). But how could \( p \) contain such a proposition? \( \Phi \) could not be the thesis of absolutism itself, for \( \text{ex hypothesi} \) there are perspectives in which absolutism is not true. On the other hand, \( \Phi \) could not be the thesis of relativism, for \( \text{ex hypothesi} \) there are perspectives in which relativism is not true. Other candidates for \( \Phi \) are in no better shape, since—given the assumption that relativism is true in some perspectives—it must be the case that the truth-value of every proposition \( \Phi \) will vary across perspectives. Thus, no proposition is true in all perspectives. For each proposition is true in some perspectives and not in others. But it follows that relativism is true in all perspectives. This entails that relativism is

not true. Relativism can be neither absolutely nor relatively true so the claim “everything is relative” must be false. Of the argument just described, Hales writes that

we considered the option of relativism being relatively not true. Therefore, in some perspective there was a proposition $\Phi$ that was absolutely true. Formally: $\Diamond \Box \Phi$. Yet it turned out that there could not be such a proposition since the assumption of relativism prevented any proposition from being true in all perspectives. In other words, there could not be a $\Phi$ such that $\boxdot \Phi$. This is why $\Diamond \Box \Phi$ could not be true. The form underlying this argument is modus tollens. The conditional relied on is none other than the S5-like principle $P$: $\Diamond \Box \Phi \Rightarrow \Box \Phi$. The preceding argument does not constitute a formal proof that $P$ is true; rather it is a set of semantical considerations designed to uncover the intuition that $P$. It is a tacit acceptance of $P$ that I suspect undergirds many rejections of “relativism is absolutely false” as being merely true relatively.

Thus, global relativism is false and the self-refutation objection to global relativism is undergirded by $P$.

Is the relativist to give up on relativism? Hales says, no, at least not for that reason. Just as one should not give up on possible world semantics because one rejects “everything is possible,” one should not give up on relativism because “everything is relative” is false. Just as “everything is possible” runs afoul the theorem that $\Diamond \Box \Phi \Rightarrow \Box \Phi$, “everything is relative” runs afoul $P$. But “everything true is possibly true” does not run afoul $\Diamond \Box \Phi \Rightarrow \Box \Phi$, and neither does “everything true is relatively true” run afoul $P$. Hales writes:

There is nothing self-contradictory or paradoxical about the claim that everything true is relatively true, just as there is no puzzle engendered by the claim that whatever is true is possible true. As in the case of alethic modality, it is entirely consistent for the new-and-improved relativist to hold that some propositions are absolutely true, and that perspectival truth is every bit as decent and upstanding as “real” truth. Indeed, “real” truth is just truth in this perspective, just as actual truth is truth in this world. Absolute truth turns out to be truth in all perspectives, just as necessary truth is truth in all worlds. For the relativist it will be nonsense to talk about truth outside of the structure of perspectives . . . . However, this stricture should be no scarier than forbidding talk of truth outside the structure of worlds, once we have accepted possible world semantics.

This limited relativism does not fall prey to self-refutation.

3. Ibid., 101.
4. Ibid., 101, 102
5. Ibid., 102, 103.
Hales notes that some relativists might be loath to accept $P$ for it shows that their view is false. But $P$'s rejection leaves the relativist to answer the self-refutation problem. The relativist ignores the problem at her peril. Furthermore, some relativists might be bothered by the fact that Hales’s view is consistent with all truths being absolutely so, including $P$. But, says Hales, relativists should be pleased that the view is consistent with many propositions being merely relatively true. Finally, Hales notes a further advantage, namely, relativism’s truth does not just fall out of the logic. Relativism needs defense.

2. Philosophical Propositions and Rational Intuition

Hales describes and defends a relativism of “philosophical propositions.” Basically, his position claims that “[p]hilosophical propositions are true in some perspectives and false in others.” Philosophical propositions are typically either necessarily true or impossible. As to what separates philosophical from mathematical propositions, Hales passes over and says that “all that matters is that we can pick out philosophical propositions ostensively.” He lists a number of examples of philosophical propositions including moral claims, knowledge claims, free will claims, and so forth.

Philosophical propositions derive from a “different methodology, namely, through an appeal to common sense, ‘what we would say,’ or a kind of intellectual intuition.” He calls this “rational intuition.” Rational intuition provides philosophers with basic or noninferential propositions known to be true. Hales claims that “on pain of contradiction, we are compelled to accept that ‘the method of intuition justifies some propositions’ is self-justifying. In other words, a form of foundationalism must be true for intuition-driven philosophy to get off the ground.” He rejects the notion that philosophy should be thought of primarily as conceptual analysis and suggests that rational intuition provides philosophers with a means of acquiring beliefs or, more particularly, with a means of evaluating the truth or acceptability of propositions.

It is worth noting that Hales’s is a modest foundationalism, eschewing indubitability for foundational propositions. Reflective equilibrium is also central in reaching knowledge via the method of rational intuition. I will not consider those features but turn to the defense of his modest foundationalism. Hales identifies the “Problem of Intuition” and suggests that its solution

6. Ibid., 1.
7. Ibid., 21.
8. Ibid., 9.
9. Ibid., 3.
10. Ibid., 19.
leads to foundationalism. The Problem of Intuition (PI) is as follows, quoting Hales:

1. If a proposition is epistemically justified, then it is justified either a priori or a posteriori. (Premise)

2. If a proposition is epistemically justified a priori, then its justification depends on the method of intuition justifying some propositions. (Premise)

3. If the proposition “the method of intuition justifies some propositions” is epistemically justified, it is not justified a posteriori. (Premise)

4. “The method of intuition justifies some propositions” is epistemically justified. (Premise)

5. Nothing is self-justifying. (Premise)

6. If “the method of intuition justifies some propositions” is epistemically justified, it is justified a priori. (From 1, 3)

7. If “the method of intuition justifies some propositions” is epistemically justified, then its justification depends on the method of intuition justifying some propositions. (From 2, 6)

8. The justification of “the method of intuition justifies some propositions” depends on the method of intuition justifying some propositions. (From 4, 7)

9. Thus “the method of intuition justifies some propositions” is not epistemically justified. (From 5, 8)

10. “The method of intuition justifies some propositions” is and is not epistemically justified. (From 4, 9)

After considering premises 1–5 in some detail, Hales summarizes his position in this way:

[T]he five premises of PI form an inconsistent set. I have argued that there are only two ways to avoid commitment to the elements of this set: (1) become a radical empiricist/naturalist, give up the a priori, and abandon the use of rational intuition; or (2) accept that a modest foundationalism is true and that “the method of intuition justifies some propositions” is epistemically justified on the basis of nothing other than the method of intuition itself. The only way for a proponent of traditional a priori philosophy to avoid the problem of intuition is to reject premise 5, and by so doing, endorse a modest foundationalism. Here, then, is our choice: either a form of foundationalism is true or philosophy grounded in the use of rational intuition is bunk.11

11. Ibid., 26, 27.
12. Ibid., 33.
Hales rejects radical empiricism/naturalism as unviable. I agree with the majority of his criticism. If Hales is right, that leaves us with rational intuition and modest foundationalism.

According to Hales, however, competitors to analytic philosophy and rational intuition exist, and these competitors also provide justification for the truth of philosophical propositions. Unfortunately, philosophical propositions justified as true by the competitors conflict with those of rational intuition. Since conflicting philosophical propositions are justified as true, relativism must be the case. I very briefly turn to Hales’s account of the competitors.

3. Alternate Sources of Philosophical Propositions and the Challenge to Philosophical Knowledge

Hales argues that both Christian revelation and the ritualistic consumption of hallucinogens are sources of philosophical knowledge. He writes of the main stream traditions in Christian theology and scholarship that

(1) revelation is an epistemic method that yields beliefs about a class of philosophical propositions; (2) the beliefs generated by revelation are foundational ones, upon which reason then operates to produce a more elaborate theology; and (3) revelation and rational intuition are apt to produce inconsistent results—that is, one method might produce the belief that \( p \), whereas the other might produce the belief that \( \neg p \).

Hales develops a long and detailed argument for these claims, an argument we need not enter here. Suffice it to say that he makes a good case that these three claims are true.

Hales then turns to other cultural groups. One of his examples is the Ecuadorian cultural group, the Jivaro. The Jivaro ritually uses hallucinogens to discover religious truths, including philosophical truths. We need not go into details about the use of hallucinogens for spiritual purposes, but it is fair to summarize Hales’s claims by saying that the quotation in the last paragraph applies as well to the use of hallucinogens as to Christianity.

Hales considers four arguments defending rational intuition over the other methods generating philosophical propositions and finds each wanting. I will skip these arguments and instead turn immediately to Hales’s claim that the three epistemic practices are not only sources of knowledge but sources generating conflicting truths. Thus we face a trilemma:

Given an inability to show the relative superiority of rational intuition over the two other methods we have been discussing, there are three possible responses. The first is purely epistemic: skepticism. Since we

13. Ibid., 50.
don’t know which of various competing methods is the best one to use to gain justified beliefs about philosophical propositions, if we pick the best method, it is merely a matter of luck. Therefore we have no knowledge of philosophical propositions. The second two responses are metaphysical: nihilism and relativism. Perhaps our failure to vindicate rational intuition over the competition is evidence that there are no properly philosophical propositions to be known at all. It is our attempts to acquire justified beliefs about the nonexistent that is the problem. The final alternative, relativism, is the idea that there are knowable philosophical propositions, but which ones are true is somehow dependent on method. Given the methodology of the Jivaro, there are nonphysical spiritual souls, but given the methodology of rationalist, analytic philosophy, there aren’t.\(^4\) 

In short, given the epistemic \textit{qua} metaphysical standoff amongst the three methods of reaching knowledge, we have to choose between skepticism, nihilism and relativism. He opts for the last.

Hales rejects “nihilism,” for it suggests that philosophical propositions are either not philosophical or not propositions. The former is correct if naturalism is right, for philosophical propositions are reducible to scientific claims. As already noted, Hales rejects naturalism, and I agree. The latter approach says philosophical sentences are at best akin to poetry or art and should be rejected, an approach that Hales basically ignores, as well he should.

\section*{4. Skepticism and Hales’s Argument for Relativism}

Hales suggests that since all attempts to show the relative superiority of one of the three epistemic methods fail (a point with which I agree), the skeptic might suggest that we simply cannot know them. Hales hazards that "skeptical arguments are generally based on the notion that S doesn’t know P because S’s true belief that P is improperly dependent on good luck."\(^{15}\) In applying this approach to putative knowledge of philosophical propositions, suggests Hales, “we have no defensible reason to prefer one basic method of acquiring beliefs about philosophical propositions over another basic method that gives different results. Any true beliefs we have about philosophical propositions are accidental—it is just good fortune if we pick the right method.”\(^{16}\)

Hales believes the skeptical position is too strong for it defeats itself. He writes that

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textbf{14.} Ibid., 91.
  \item \textbf{15.} Ibid., 90.
  \item \textbf{16.} Ibid., 91.
\end{itemize}
accidentally true belief is not knowledge, and ... some similar idea is behind most familiar skeptical arguments. Yet the proposition that \textit{accidentally true belief is not knowledge} is justifiably believed only on the basis of intuitions about the sort of [Gettier-type] cases discussed [earlier in Hale’s book]. The conclusion of the skeptical argument is that we can’t know any philosophical propositions as the result of rational intuition. If that is correct, then we can’t know that accidentally true belief is not knowledge as the result of intuition.  

Hales schematizes the argument thus:

1. If skepticism about philosophical propositions is true, then we can’t know the truth of any philosophical proposition. (Definition of skepticism)
2. Skepticism is a philosophical proposition. (Premise)
3. Therefore, \( p \): if skepticism about philosophical propositions is true, we can’t know it. (From 1, 2)

Note Hales’s claim that “... it does not matter how we analyze skepticism, whether we understand it to involve accidentally true belief as presented above or in some other way.” I think Hales’s generalization leads him to overlook some problems with his argument.

Hales defines skepticism as follows: “If skepticism about philosophical propositions is true, then we can’t know the truth of any philosophical proposition.” What kind of “can’t” is Hales using here? What is the force of it? Furthermore, is it that we cannot or that we simply do not know any philosophical proposition? Additionally, why does he repeat the phrase “the truth of?” Does he mean to assume that the item in question is true but knowledge of it is not possible (that is, knowledge of it is impossible) or is it that we cannot adjudicate whether we know, since justification (warrant or what have you) never guarantees truth and hence what we think we know may or may not be true? Obviously our thinking we know some \( p \) does not entail that \( p \) is true, or even that \( p \) is known. But these are perhaps quibbles.

The most pressing issue comes out when we take the same approach to skepticism as Hales does to global relativism and global “possibilism.” One of the plausible moves Hales makes is to back off from a global relativism to a more modest one, paralleling what we generally do in backing off from overly ambitious claims about what is possible. Hales claims that “everything is possible” is false and yet that does not lead to a rejection of alethic modal logic. In a parallel manner he claims that “everything is relative” is false and yet that does not lead to a rejection of a limited metaphysical relativism and the logic Hales develops. The two global claims founder because

17. Ibid., 91, 92.
18. Ibid., 92.
19. Ibid.
of self-refutation whereas the less global claims do not. But then it seems natural to ask why the falsity of "everything is unknowable" must lead to a rejection of skepticism. Is there not some parallel means out of the apparent self-refutation of skepticism Hales presents?

While rejecting "everything is possible" and "everything is relative" we can make sense out of "everything true is possibly true" and "everything true is relatively true." If we reject "everything is unknowable" (because it leads to self-refutation) why cannot the skeptic retreat to "everything true is unknowably true?" This is not a path Hales considers, nor should he if he wants his overall argument for modest relativism to work. The reason is not far to seek, for the logics of possibility and relativism are different than the logic of skepticism. The former two can be given account in terms of truth alone whereas skepticism deals not simply with truth but justification (or warrant and so on). When we think of skepticism (about some range of propositions) as simply the claim that some range of propositions is unknowable, we often confuse the unknowability of \( \Phi \) with the fact of \( \Phi \)'s not being known. These, of course, are not the same thing and in fact the former is definable in terms of the latter. Consider first knowability. To claim that \( \Phi \) is knowable is simply to claim that \( \Phi \) is possibly known, that is, \( \Phi \) is known in some possible world. Of course, \( \Phi \)'s being possibly known does not entail \( \Phi \)'s truth (in the actual world) but only its truth in the possible world in which it is known. Now it could turn out that the possible world in which \( \Phi \) is known is also the actual world, but one cannot presume to know that on the basis of what has been described thus far. What then is unknowability? If \( \Phi \) were unknowable then there is no possible world in which \( \Phi \) is known. This account of the unknowability of \( \Phi \) is a very strong sort of skepticism. It is, however, the kind on which Hales's argument depends. We of course hold the truism that \( \Phi \)'s being known is sufficient for \( \Phi \)'s being true and of course reject the contrary, namely, that \( \Phi \)'s being true is sufficient for \( \Phi \)'s being known. Not only is something's being true not sufficient for its being known but by obvious extension, something's being true is not sufficient for its knowability.

Let us take this strong skepticism and ask why "everything is unknowable" (for all \( \Phi \), \( \Phi \) is unknowable) is false. Why is that self-refuting? Let "skepticism is unknowable" be a substitution instance of \( \Phi \). If everything is unknowable, then so is skepticism unknowable. There is no possible world in which skepticism is known. This is more or less the conclusion Hales reaches: "if skepticism about philosophical propositions is true, we can't know it." But what exactly follows from that? Surely not that skepticism is false. Skepticism could be true and we not know it which is of course much weaker than the claim that skepticism could be true and we cannot know it.

Let us now turn to consider the more cautious version of skepticism, parallel to the more cautious versions of possibility and relativism. Consider:

(1) Everything true is unknowably true.
Consider also:

(2) Everything true is knowably true.

While it might seem at first that (2) is true and (1) is false, in fact the opposite holds, for knowledge has to do with more than truth. For (1) to be the case, it would have to turn out that there is no possible world in which a given proposition is true in which it is also known. While this seems perhaps a little wild—surely in some possible world where \( \phi \) is true it is also known—we simply have to remember that something's being true is not the same as its being evidenced, justified, warranted and so forth (so long as one holds a nonepistemic or realistic view of truth, at least). To avoid the potential ambiguity found in (1) I propose that

(3) Everything true is unknowably true (in virtue of its truth alone).

But then similarly, (2) should be clarified by

(4) Everything true is knowably true (in virtue of its truth alone).

Thus we see that (1) is true and (2) is false because (3) is true while (4) is false. These clarifications simply make explicit that to get knowledge, one has to add justification (warrant, and so on) to a proposition’s positive truth status. Here the skeptic has the higher hand, for she never has to claim to know that skepticism is true. Skepticism’s merely being true is enough to entail that we do not have knowledge, even if we do not know that we do not.

Let us briefly apply this reasoning to skepticism about philosophical propositions. According to Hales, the truth of “every philosophical proposition is unknowable” is problematic, for it itself is a philosophical proposition and thus unknowable. But why is this a problem? Its unknowability does not entail its falsehood. There is no self-refutation at this point (unlike with global relativism and “possibilism”). Skepticism about philosophical propositions might be the case and one does not have to claim to know that it is in order for Hales’s argument for relativism to be undermined. Hales’s expectation for knowledge is perhaps too grand a goal for philosophical propositions.

In short, the consequent of Hales’s first premise (which gives Hales’s definition of skepticism) says, “we cannot know the truth of any philosophical proposition.” What if it said simply: “we do not know whether any philosophical proposition is true or false.” Furthermore, let us say this consequent is not known but only rationally surmised or believed. This skepticism is unscathed by Hales’s argument and hence his overall argument for relativism fails.

Hales might reply as follows: It might be the case that skepticism is true but if we can never know it is true then it does not do any positive work against the argument for relativism. 20 In reply, I suggest that this simply misses the point. Hales’s claim is that skepticism is self-refuting and hence is

20. This suggestion comes from an anonymous reviewer.
not true and not a viable alternative to relativism. I have shown that it is not self-refuting and therefore could be true. Since it could be rationally believed (even if not known), it is a viable alternative to relativism.

5. An Alternative to Hales's Move to Relativism

Suppose one is not inclined toward skepticism (which I, in fact, am not). Does philosophical relativism lurk at the door? Fortunately, an alternative response to Hales is possible. Merely discovering apparent alternate ways of knowing does not provide sufficient reason to admit that all apparent ways of knowing are actual ways of knowing.

In William Alston's extended defense of the doxastic practice (DP) of the Christian he considers the challenge of religious diversity and the apparent fact that the Christian mystical practice (CMP) is on an epistemic par with many other religious doxastic practices (for example, the Hindu practice).²¹ He assumes the worst case scenario wherein there are in fact no good reasons to prefer one such practice over the other. Given this embarrassment of riches, what is the Christian to do? Well, Alston certainly does not admit that all the practices give us knowledge and hence truth about ultimate reality. He does not become a relativist about religious (or philosophical) truth. Instead he argues that the Christian is rational in continuing to engage in CMP. While Alston is not speaking directly of knowledge, I think the extension is easy enough to make.

The typical means, Alston says, by which we form beliefs about the world around us is what he calls sensory practice (SP), one of many doxastic practices. SP, he argues, can only be shown rational from the "inside" much in the same way that CMP can only be shown rational from the inside. But what if there were competing sensory practices? He writes:

Suppose that there were a diversity of sense perceptual DP's as diverse as religious experiential DP's are in fact. Suppose that in certain cultures there were a well established "Cartesian" practice of constructing what is visually perceived as an indefinitely extended medium that is more or less concentrated at various points, rather than, as in our "Aristotelian" practice, as made up of more or less discrete objects of various kinds scattered about in space. Let's also suppose that in other cultures a "Whiteheadian" SP is equally socially established; here the visual field is construed as made up of momentary events growing out of each other in a continuous process. Let's further suppose that each of these practices serves its practitioners well in their dealings with the environment. We may even suppose that each group has developed physical science, in its own terms, to about as high a pitch as the others. But suppose further that we are as firmly wedded to our

"Aristotelian" mode of conceptualizing what is visually perceived, as we are in fact. The Cartesian and Whiteheadian auslander seem utterly outlandish to us, and we find it difficult to take seriously the idea that they may be telling it like it is. However, we can find no neutral grounds on which to argue effectively for the greater accuracy of our way of doing it. In such a situation would it be clear that it is irrational for us to continue to form perceptual beliefs in our "Aristotelian" way, given that the practice is proving itself by its fruits? It seems to me that quite the opposite is clear. In the absence of any external reason for supposing that one of the competing practices is more accurate than my own, the only rational course for me to take is to sit tight with the practice of which I am a master and which serves me so well in guiding my activity in the world.22

Alston is here concerned only with whether such a situation shows that engaging in a DP that has (or possibly has) real competitors that generate conflicting beliefs is irrational. Hales is not telling us that it is irrational to engage in rational intuition or the alternatives. Instead, he reaches the much stronger conclusion, namely, that no matter which of the three means of generating philosophical propositions one uses, each gives us truth (relativized to perspectives, of course). So to have Alston's counterfactual suggestions do any work against Hales's claims, we have to say something like this. Existing competitors for the proper way to go about reaching philosophical truths (which give us deeply conflicting results) does not necessarily lead to philosophical relativism. Why not just say that one of the three (at best) gives us truth? We do not know which one. Yet it is rational for me, as someone who engages in rational intuition (or Christian practice or the ritualistic use of hallucinogens) to continue to do so, even knowing there are alternatives. I do not have to accept the competitors' results (nor they mine). I can go on my path, assuming that my way is what I have and that I have no external reason to worry myself about their ways. This is an existentially bothersome position, for not knowing which perspective is the right one leaves us, perhaps, in some philosophical discomfort. Perhaps some day a philosophical genius will show us how to adjudicate amongst the alternative but apparent ways of knowing. Until then, it seems more reasonable to stick with the means of knowing one has than to leap to Hales's philosophical relativism.23


23. An anonymous reviewer proposed that one could simply reject the notion of doxastic practices altogether as incoherent or perhaps provide reasons why they could be bridged. But I am a long-time supporter of Alston's doxastic practice approach, and see no way to bridge the practices nor a good reason to reject them as incoherent.
6. A Final Note on Epistemic Accounts of Truth

Hales spills several bottles of ink showing that relativism is compatible with certain epistemic accounts of truth, noting that such compatibility is not entailment.\textsuperscript{24} He also argues for relativism's compatibility with various nonepistemic accounts of truth. While I think Hales is right on both matters, I think his time is not well spent on those issues. The real question is, does Hales's defense of philosophical relativism entail an epistemic account of truth? The answer, I believe, is yes.

From the point of view of my criticism, Hales's defense of relativism comes down to a choice between relativism and skepticism. He thinks skepticism is not viable and hence we are left with relativism. The relativism is generated out of the fact that there are several knowledge-generating epistemic practices giving us conflicting propositional results. But Hales writes a curious thing:

\begin{quote}
It is truth that is relative to perspectives on the present account, not epistemic properties like justification or warrant. Justification is wholly intraperspective; with respect to philosophical propositions, one gains new beliefs as a result of the methods indigenous to a specific perspective, and does not employ or take seriously basic methods from other perspectives.\textsuperscript{25}
\end{quote}

I find it odd for Hales to claim that justification and warrant are not relative and yet that the competing means of generating philosophical propositions are wholly intraperspective and basic (where basicality includes being no way outside the mechanism to show it superior to the other mechanisms). If the epistemic practices are not interperspective, then one expects justification and warrant not to be interperspective. But if they are not interperspective then they should turn out to be merely intraperspective and hence relative to perspectives. I do not see how warrant or justification will not be deeply shaped by the epistemic practice itself. Thus, it seems that if truth is relative to perspectives and those truths are dependent upon the very means by which competing propositions are generated then Hales's defense of relativism forces his position into an epistemic notion of truth. Whatever perspective I am in, I use the native generation of belief and its native approaches to justification or warrant to know my beliefs. The justification, according to Hales, is strong enough for knowledge, which in turn entails that the beliefs are true. If this does not slouch toward an epistemic account of truth, I do not know what does. Since I reject epistemic accounts of truth, I find Hales's position problematic on the grounds of his implied epistemic alethic theory. But that is a much longer story than can be told here.

\textsuperscript{24} Hales, \textit{Relativism and the Foundations of Philosophy}, 131–42.
\textsuperscript{25} Ibid., 133.