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Paul L. Simard Smith

University of Connecticut - Storrs

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Pluralism as a Bias Mitigation Strategy

PAUL L. SIMARD SMITH

*Department of Philosophy
University of Connecticut
344 Mansfield Road
Storrs, CT.
paul.simardsmith@gmail.com*

Abstract: An *agnostic pluralist* approaches inquiry with the assumption that it is possible for more than one account of the phenomenon in question to be correct. A *monist* approaches inquiry with the assumption that only one account of the phenomenon in question is correct. The purpose of my paper is to support the claim that agnostic pluralists are less susceptible to a type of bias that I call *dialectical bias* than monists.

Keywords: bias mitigation, monism, pluralism

1. Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to offer some support for the claim that inquirers that adopt an *agnostic pluralists* stance towards some phenomenon X are less prone to certain *dialectical biases* than inquirers that adopt a *monist* stance towards X . In §2 I define and discuss the notion of *dialectical bias*. In §3 I distinguish monist, pluralist and agnostic pluralist approaches to inquiry. In §4 I argue that agents that adopt a monist stance towards a phenomenon X are prone to be *dialectically biased* in argumentative discussions about theories of X . In §5 I argue that an agnostic pluralist approach is less prone to *dialectical biases* than the monist approach. In §6 I conclude by discussing how internalizing a *default agnostic pluralist* approach to inquiry can be employed as a bias mitigation strategy that does not possess some of the problems that other bias mitigation strategies are known to possess.

2. What is dialectical bias?

I define the notion of *dialectical bias* as follows

(Dialectical-Bias). An agent S is *dialectically-biased* with respect to some theory T of some phenomenon X if, and only if, in argumentative discussions for and against T more of S 's cognitive effort is directed towards establishing evidence and arguments that support T rather than the negation of T , or more of S 's cognitive effort is directed towards establishing evidence and arguments that support the negation of T rather than T .

For the purposes in this paper I am going to stipulate that a *theory* is a set of propositions that are presented by some agent or group of agents as explaining some phenomenon or set of phenomena. For example, the theory of evolution is a set of propositions, first presented by Charles Darwin (2008) that explains, among other things, species diversity. John Stewart Mill's (2003) variant of utilitarianism is a set of propositions that was first presented by him to explain moral goodness, and Epistemicism is set of propositions put forward by, among others, Timothy

Williamson (1996) to explain linguistic vagueness.¹ Also note that the definition of dialectical bias employs the notion of *cognitive effort*. Cognitive effort includes thinking, considering, focusing and other sorts of mental activity. What the definition of dialectical bias suggests is that, when one is dialectically biased in an argumentative discussion, one's intellectual energy and capacity is either being disproportionately directed towards establishing the claim as opposed to its negation or to establishing the claim's negation as opposed to the claim. Plausibly giving equal consideration to theories vying for our endorsement is an epistemic virtue. In so far as an agent is dialectically biased they fail to possess this epistemic virtue. Of course after adequate consideration and deliberation it may become clear that reasonable agents should be convinced of T (or convinced of T 's negation). In such circumstances dialectical bias is plausibly warranted. For example, one is warranted in being dialectically biased against the claim that phrenology has an important role in explaining human cognition. Similarly one is warranted in being dialectically biased towards the anthropogenic theory of climate change, or in the theory of evolution.

It is important to recognize that being dialectically biased with respect to a theory T does not imply that one is mistaken about T . It does not imply that one's arguments for T or against T are not cogent or that one's evidence is not sufficient to justify one's position with respect to T . Moreover, it is possible for someone that is not dialectically biased with respect to T to adopt a false position about T and to employ non-cogent arguments to support the false position they adopt. Dialectical bias is primarily a problem in circumstances in which the bias it is not warranted. For example, consider an agent S who is personally invested in the truth of theory T of some phenomenon X . Suppose S encounters a case that appears plausible, given everything that S knows about X , that $\neg T$. In such circumstances the epistemically reasonable response would be to assign equal cognitive effort to the evaluation of $\neg T$ as well as $\neg\neg T$. However, if S is dialectically biased and spends more cognitive effort on the latter, then it is plausible that S is not acting in an epistemically responsible fashion *qua* knower and arguer.

Aside personal investment in a particular account of a phenomenon there are a variety of other factors that cause unwarranted dialectical biases. Other biases, either implicit or explicit, against the race, gender or class of one's interlocutor can lead one to unduly assign less epistemic credibility to one's interlocutor than is warranted (Fricker, 2007; Bondy, 2010). In an exchange of reasons for and against a theory these biases can impact the amount of cognitive effort that some agent puts into affirming or refuting the theory in question. An agent that possesses tendencies to degrade the epistemic credibility of persons with a certain social group identity may reactively put greater emphasis on undercutting opinions put forward by persons with that group identity than on the arguments and evidence that supports these opinions.²

It is both arrogant and deceptive to believe oneself less susceptible to these sorts of biases. It is arrogant because one would conceive of oneself as less susceptible to a common and pervasive tendency of human beings to have implicit biases towards members of certain groups. It is deceptive because it is plausible that even people who would like to be non-prejudiced can have prejudicial responses to persons with certain group identities (Miller, 2006). Individuals can easily come to falsely believe that they have debiased when they have not. Often persons come to believe that they are less biased with respect to an issue if they have deliberately made an effort to eliminate the biases in question. However, as Kenyon and Beaulac (2014) point out, "Telling ourselves that we have debiased, we can come to hold our attitudes and views more

¹ I use the terms 'theory,' 'account,' and 'viewpoint' interchangeably.

² By undercut a claim or theory I mean provide support the claim or theory's negation.

strongly—convinced that they have been vetted for distortion” (p. 347). Therefore, it is worthwhile being explicit that I do not think that the agnostic pluralist is in a position, nor should they believe themselves to be in a position, that is any less likely to be subject to racial, gender, class and similar biases than the monist. Rather the purpose here is to advance a hypothesis that dialectical obligations incurred by adopting a monist’s approach to an inquiry is more likely to lead to certain dialectical biases than an agnostic pluralist’s approach to an inquiry. In circumstances where the agent has adequate evidence to support a monist position about the phenomenon under discussion such dialectical bias is warranted. In circumstances in which monism is not the correct view such dialectical biases is not warranted.

3. The monist and agnostic pluralist approaches to inquiry

What is the difference between agnostic pluralist and monist approaches to inquiry? Consider an agent *S* who believes that

- (1) There is only one correct account of *X*.

Suppose *X* is moral goodness and *S* also believes that

- (2) Deontology is *the* correct account of moral goodness.

These two beliefs entail that

- (3) Deontology is *the only* correct account of moral goodness

Similarly suppose *X* is linguistic vagueness and *S* believed that

- (4) Epistemicism is the correct account of linguistic vagueness.

Beliefs (1) and (4) entail

- (5) Epistemicism is *the only* correct account of vagueness.

An inquirer that adopts (1), at least as an implicit background assumption, about some phenomenon *X* is a *monist* about *X*. For example, someone that holds that classical logic is the only correct theory of logical consequence would be a monist about logical consequence. A *pluralist* about *X* holds, at least as an implicit background assumption, the view that there is more than one correct theory of *X*. For example, someone that held that classical logic, intuitionistic logic, and relevance logic are correct theories of logical consequence is a pluralist about logical consequence.³ I call an *agnostic pluralist* about *X* an inquirer that withholds, *in a certain way*, from (1). An agnostic pluralist neither assumes that there is only one correct account of *X* nor assumes that there is more than one correct account of *X*. More specifically, the agnostic pluralist’s position with respect to some *X* is that (i) it *is possible* for either monism or pluralism to be true with respect to *X* and (ii) they don’t know whether monism or pluralism is

³ For discussions of different versions of logical pluralism see Keefe (2014), Beall and Restall (2006), DeVidi (2011), Shapiro (2014), and Pedersen (2014).

true with respect to X . Holding this position is entirely compatible with coming to know that monism or pluralism holds for some given X . Thus, an agnostic pluralist about some phenomenon X can become a monist about X if they become convinced that there is only one correct account of X . An agnostic pluralist could also become a pluralist about X if they became convinced that there is more than one correct account of X .

Suppose an agent Q is an agnostic pluralist with respect to moral goodness and linguistic vagueness. Suppose such an agnostic pluralist became convinced that the deontological account of moral goodness and the epistemic account of linguistic vagueness are correct accounts of these respective phenomena. The propositions (3) and (5) are not entailed by the agnostic pluralist's beliefs. Of course, rather than (2) and (4) the agnostic pluralist should affirm propositions like

(6) Deontology is *a* correct account of moral goodness.

And

(7) Epistemicism is *a* correct account of vagueness.

In other words the agnostic pluralist should, in these circumstances, employ the indefinite article rather than the definite article.⁴

It is important to note that even though the agnostic pluralist should avoid affirming (2) and (4) it doesn't follow that the agnostic pluralist should deny (2) and (4). From the agnostic pluralist perspective, with respect to a phenomenon X , it is possible that there is more than one correct theory of X . It is also possible that there is only one correct theory of X . Thus, given that, for all they know, there may only be one theory of X , the agnostic pluralist should not deny (2) and (4).⁵

4. The Monist is prone to dialectical bias

Consider a discussion between Buddy and Amber about the correct account of moral goodness. Buddy is a monist and endorses deontology (so believes (1) and endorses (2)). Amber endorses utilitarianism. Suppose that in an argumentative discussion between Amber and Buddy Amber

⁴ Why should Q should affirm (6) and (7) as opposed to (2) and (4)? Q believes that there exists at least one correct theory of moral goodness and that that theory is deontology. However, Q is unsure if there is more than one correct theory of moral goodness or if deontology is the only correct theory of moral goodness. She also believes that it is possible that more than one theory of moral goodness and linguistic vagueness are correct. Given that Q does not know whether there is only one account of moral goodness and linguistic vagueness, she should avoid taking on a commitment to monism about these phenomena. In an argumentative discussion the affirmation of (2) and (4) would produce a commitment for Q to the notion that there is only one correct theory of these respective phenomena. Thus, given that Q should avoid taking on such a commitment she should avoid affirming (2) and (4). However, in using the indefinite article, as in (6) and (7), Q would not thereby commit herself to the view that there are several correct theories of the phenomenon in question. Rather, (6) is compatible with deontology turning out to be the only correct theory of moral goodness. Thus, in order to remain neutral with respect to (1) the agnostic pluralist should employ claims such as (6) and (7) as opposed to (2) and (4).

⁵ It is worthwhile noting that while the phenomenon under investigation may be of philosophical interest (such as moral goodness or linguistic vagueness) they could also be phenomena that are of interest in disciplines aside from philosophy. For example, the phenomenon of interest may be the cause of the great depression, the effect of cognitive-behavioral therapy on anxiety disorders, or the ideal response to human caused climate change.

asserts that utilitarianism is a correct theory of moral goodness and proceeds to present several arguments in support of that claim. These arguments strike Buddy as plausible given everything that he knows about moral goodness. However, Buddy is a monist about moral goodness and has endorsed deontology.

Buddy possesses an obligation, within the context of the argumentative discussion with Amber, to either abandon monism, revise his commitment to deontology, or undercut Amber's case for utilitarianism. Amber's contention that utilitarianism is a correct account of moral goodness cannot be added to the common ground in the discussion between Amber and Buddy without Buddy either abandoning his commitments to (1) or his commitment to (2). Thus, in so far as Buddy maintains his monist commitment and his commitment to deontology he has a dialectical obligation to support the negation of,

(8) Utilitarianism is a correct account of moral goodness.

Suppose Buddy is highly invested in the view that deontology is the correct theory of moral goodness. Perhaps Buddy is known to advocate a deontological approach and has endorsed the view in many conversations. It is even possible that Buddy's professional reputation is importantly impacted by deontology being correct. Perhaps Buddy is an ethicist who has written several articles supporting deontology against various objections. I contend that, in such circumstances, the presence of this *dialectical obligation* results in a form of *dialectical pressure* on Buddy to support the negation of (8) and that this pressure results in more cognitive effort being placed on identifying arguments and evidence for the negation of (8) than on identifying arguments and evidence that support (8).

What reason is there to think that the existence of a dialectical obligation to support a claim or theory puts dialectical pressure on an agent to support the claim or theory? I regard a dialectical obligation to be a responsibility that arguers acquire in the context of an argumentative discussion to either support a claim or theory or a responsibility that arguers acquire to revise their commitment to a claim or theory. If an agent does not satisfy a dialectical obligation to support a claim or to revise their commitment to a claim, then they are not operating as a reasonable participant in the argumentative discussion. For instance, if an agent makes a claim in an argumentative discussion and compelling reasoning is given that undercuts the claim, the agent is responsible for either revising the claim made or for undercutting the reasons given against the claim.⁶ In order for the agent to maintain their status as a reasonable agent they will have to satisfy at least one of those responsibilities. Similarly, if a reasonable agent makes a claim and compelling reasoning is provided that this claim entails another claim, then the agent is responsible, if required, to either support the entailed claim or revise their commitment to the initial claim. I understand dialectical pressure to be an inclination to support or undercut a claim or theory that arises out of commitments adopted and obligations incurred within an argumentative discussion. Plausibly this inclination emerges as a result of a desire to maintain one's reputation as a reasonable discussant, as well as a strong aversion to being

⁶ That is to say the agent is obliged to either revise the claim in question, support the negation of the reasons given to undercut the claim in question, or support the negation of the claim that the premises provide sufficient support for the claim in question. Note that an agent could also reasonably reply by noting that they are presently unaware of exactly how to respond and the issue will require further thought and consideration on their behalf. In the latter case there is a temporary timeout in the argumentation, but the person who takes the time out will, when the argumentation resumes, have to satisfy their dialectical obligations.

regarded as an unreasonable discussant. An agent that desires to maintain their status as a reasonable participant will be strongly inclined to satisfy her dialectical obligations. Thus, commonly, agents who incur dialectical obligations to support a claim will experience dialectical pressure to support the claim.⁷

The case that the monist incurs a dialectical obligation to undercut conflicting views that produces dialectical pressure to support the negation of the conflicting viewpoints does not establish that any agent that adopts a monistic perspective will experience pressure to undercut the plausibility of conflicting viewpoints.⁸ Typically individuals that do feel pressure to undercut the plausibility of conflicting alternative views are individuals that possess a strong desire to be reasonable discussants as well as a strong aversion to being unreasonable discussants. Furthermore, the preceding case does not establish that any monist that experiences dialectical

⁷ By way of example consider a discussion in which an agent has endorsed a theory and is strongly invested in the truth of the theory. Suppose that an alternative theory that conflicts with the theory the agent has endorsed is presented and that, given everything the agent knows about the phenomenon, appears plausible. Further suppose that the agent is operating within a monist framework and possesses the at least implicit assumption that there is one correct theory of the phenomenon in question. If the agent is personally invested in the theory, and is unlikely to abandon the theory, the agent would be dialectically obliged to undercut the alternative theory. In such a circumstance I submit that the agent experiences a palatable sense of dialectical pressure to undercut the alternative theory. While the agent desires to be a reasonable participant in the discussion, if she does not either abandon the view with which she is invested or undercut the alternative view, then her status as a reasonable agent with respect to the issue under discussion is in jeopardy. Plausibly, an agent that did not either revise their endorsement of the theory with which they are invested, adopt the alternative theory, or undercut the alternative theory could be regarded as unreasonable since she would have left unsatisfied dialectical obligations that she incurred in the argumentative discussion. Given that arguers typically desire to be regarded as reasonable and are strongly averse to being regarded as unreasonable it is natural that arguers would experience a sense of pressure to be regarded as reasonable and satisfy their dialectical obligations. Of course, one option to maintain one's status as a reasonable agent would be to simply adopt the alternative theory or abandon the theory in which one is invested. However, there are at least two reasons why arguers would be reluctant to take these options. First, it is not clear that one ought to abandon a preferred theory when only presented with preliminary arguments for the alternative theory's correctness. Second, argumentative discussion is often cast as a competition between opponents or adversaries. If one of the parties in the argumentation successfully changes the mind of the other party, then the one party is regarded as winning the argumentation and the other as having lost the argumentation. Furthermore, comparative assessments of intelligence and competence are often made when one agent wins an argumentation over another agent. Thus, agents will be strongly inclined not to abandon views that they have already committed themselves to for risk of being regarded as less competent with respect to the issue under consideration. Thus, when facing a plausible theory that conflicts with a theory to which an individual is committed, one's desire to be reasonable and one's aversion to being unreasonable typically manifests as a strong inclination to undercut the plausibility of the conflicting theory. One could maintain their status as a reasonable agent by abandoning the theory in whose truth they are invested. However, given the adversarial view of argumentation, adopting such a route could result in the agent being regarded as less competent with respect to the issue under discussion. Commonly the strong inclination to undercut the plausibility of conflicting theories results in more cognitive effort being assigned to supporting the negation of the conflicting theory than to supporting the conflicting theory itself.

⁸ Some individuals may not desire to be regarded as reasonable nor even be concerned with being regarded as unreasonable. Such individuals may have various strategic objectives during an argumentative discussion. For example, consider a politician whose primary objective is to secure votes and get elected. One way that politicians go about acquiring increased popularity is by standing firm on popular views (or even just views popular with those who might consider voting for them) even in the face of reasonable and better alternatives to these popular views. Thus, a politician may not feel any particular pressure to respond to unpopular or unfamiliar views that conflict with the popular views that they advocate. On the contrary, the politician will simply take advantage of the opportunity to reaffirm their commitment to the popular view that they endorse without engaging the alternative view on its rational merits. Individuals that will feel pressure to undercut the plausibility of conflicting alternative views are individuals that have a strong desire to be reasonable participants in an argumentative discussion.

pressure will respond by being dialectically biased. An ideally rational agent, in spite of pressure to undercut a conflicting theory, would assign equal cognitive effort to identifying reasons to support and to undercut the theory under discussion. This ideal would apply just as much to monists as it would to pluralists and agnostic pluralists.

However, it is not clear that there is good reason to believe that arguers in general satisfy this ideal. Typically, in circumstances where one has become invested in the truth of a theory, agents deviate from this ideal and spend increased cognitive effort in undercutting conflicting theories than they do in supporting them. Admittedly this is a pseudo-empirical hypothesis that would have to be verified. However, I believe that honest phenomenological self-reflection should provide some verification of the tendency to respond to the dialectical pressure to undercut conflicting theories by reactively assigning more cognitive effort to undercut conflicting viewpoints than to supporting them. Moreover, it is likely to be highly deceptive to believe of oneself that one is not subject to dialectical bias in the sort of circumstances outlined. Knowing that we do experience a strong pressure to undercut views that conflict with those that we are invested in should give us pause as to whether we are behaving neutrally with respect to our evaluation of conflicting views. Just as believing that we have extracted ourselves from a gender, racial, or class bias can unwittingly cement a biased judgment (Kenyon & Beaulac, 2014), the belief that we are fairly and evenly evaluating a conflicting view could cement existing dialectical bias.

Given these qualifications the preceding case alone will not establish that agents that adopt monism towards a phenomenon will be dialectically biased with respect to their preferred account of that phenomenon. However, agents who subscribe to monism and desire to maintain their status as reasonable agents will experience dialectical pressure to undercut conflicting viewpoints. Moreover, given that in the presence of dialectical pressure it is very plausible that agents deviate from the ideal of giving equal consideration to conflicting viewpoints, dialectical pressure is likely to result in dialectical bias. Therefore, even if some monists avoid dialectical bias, I think it is reasonable to conclude that agents that adopt a monist position with respect to some phenomenon are prone to dialectical bias.

5. Agnostic pluralists are less prone to dialectical bias than monists

The considerations in the previous section raise the question: is the agnostic pluralist, in relevantly similar circumstances, subject to the same dialectical pressure to which the monist is subject? I contend that, at least in circumstances similar to the example discussed above, the agnostic pluralist is not subject to the same dialectical pressure as the monist. The reason for this is that the agnostic pluralist is not forced to decide whether there is only one correct account of the phenomenon in question or whether there are multiple correct accounts. For the agnostic pluralist it is possible that there are multiple correct viewpoints on the issue being considered. Thus, when confronting conflicting plausible viewpoints the agnostic pluralist can be open to the possibility that the conflicting viewpoint is correct in addition to their preferred theory.

Consider again the example discussed above, but now let's suppose that Buddy is an agnostic pluralist about moral goodness rather than a monist. That is to say that Buddy does not know whether there is only one correct account of moral goodness or whether there is more than one correct account, but he believes that it is possible that there is more than one correct account. In the example Buddy was a committed deontologist. In an argumentative discussion Buddy's interlocutor Amber contends that utilitarianism is a correct account of moral goodness and

presents several arguments supporting her claim. Again these arguments strike Buddy as plausible given everything that he knows about moral goodness.

Because Buddy is open to the possibility of there being multiple correct accounts of moral goodness there is no particular reason to think that maintaining his status as a reasonable discussant would require Buddy to either abandon deontology or to undercut the case for utilitarianism. Given that Buddy is an agnostic pluralist it could turn out that both deontology and utilitarianism are correct accounts of moral goodness. In order to determine if utilitarianism is a correct account of moral goodness, presumably Buddy should assign equal cognitive effort to considering the case for and against utilitarianism. In the context of the argumentative discussion with Amber and Buddy we can contend that Amber has presented a plausible case for utilitarianism, but that it need not undermine his support of deontology as a correct account of moral goodness.

6. Default agnostic pluralism as a bias mitigation strategy

What is the upshot of recognizing that agnostic pluralists are less prone to some dialectical bias than monists? One upshot of the preceding considerations is that they raise the prospect that adopting a *default agnostic pluralist attitude* could be used as a strategy to mitigate some dialectical bias. A default agnostic pluralist attitude involves approaching any enquiry with an agnostic pluralist perspective. Approaching enquiry with this perspective entails believing that it is possible for there to be several correct accounts of the phenomenon under investigation without knowing whether there is multiple correct accounts of the phenomenon in question or just one. Regarding this attitude as default means that it is operating as a background assumption when approaching any investigation or enquiry in general.⁹

As noted agnostic pluralists will be subject to dialectical biases for a variety of reasons. For instance, the agnostic pluralist could hold an implicit bias against various gender, racial, ethnic or class groups.¹⁰ I don't claim that adopting a default agnostic pluralist approach to inquiry is particularly helpful at mitigating dialectical bias that is caused by these sorts of implicit biases. Rather the claim is that adopting this view can relieve some dialectical pressure that commonly leads enquirers to become dialectically biased with respect to conflicting views presented in the context of an argumentative discussion. Rather than viewing conflicting

⁹ Of course, there could be compelling reason to abandon the default view and adopt monism or pluralism for the phenomenon under investigation. However, default agnostic pluralism regards agnostic pluralism as the default approach to inquiry about phenomena. Independent of compelling grounds to adopt monism or pluralism about some phenomenon default agnostic pluralism holds that agnostic pluralism is the approach one should take to inquiry about the phenomenon. My impression is that monism is frequently taken to be the correct default approach to inquiry. If one believes that it is a genuine possibility for multiple accounts of some phenomenon to be correct, one needs to argue for that claim. However, typically one does not need to argue for the view that there is only one correct account of a phenomenon. It is often simply assumed that there is only one account of a phenomenon and that different accounts of the phenomenon are rivals. However, for the agnostic pluralist does not make such an assumption. Both monism and pluralism are views that require support.

¹⁰ As already noted in the body of the paper such implicit biases can lead agnostic pluralists just as well as it can monists to assign less credibility than is warranted to members of groups against which they are biased. In an argumentative discussion the agnostic pluralist may in turn assign disproportionate cognitive effort to undercutting the views expressed by a member of a group against which they are biased. Furthermore, agnostic pluralists, like monists, are not ideal agents and frequently make errors. For example, due to lack of attention an agnostic pluralist could come to regard a theory as less plausible than she would have had she been paying more attention. This could lead the agnostic pluralist to spend more time looking for reasons to undercut the view than supporting it.

accounts as incompatible with ones preferred account the agnostic pluralist occupies a rational space within which is it possible for ones view as well as one or more conflicting views to be correct. Thus, rather than being pressed with the choice of either abandoning ones view or undercutting a conflicting view, the agnostic pluralist can comfortably investigate conflicting views without being concerned that their status as a reasonable discussant is in jeopardy.

According to Kenyon and Beaulac (2014), recent literature on the psychology of debiasing

suggests that (for at least a wide class of biases) practically *any* debiasing strategy intended to be learned and subsequently self-deployed by individuals acting alone, at the point of making a judgment, is unlikely to succeed in significantly minimizing bias (p. 343).

One of the advantages of adopting default agnostic pluralism is that it is not a strategy that one would need to adopt and apply at the point of making a judgment. Adopting a default pluralist approach to enquiry does not occur at the time of making a potentially biased judgment in the heat of an argumentative discussion. In applying this bias mitigation strategy one does not aim to avoid dialectical bias by consciously trying to extricate oneself from the bias. Rather the proposal is that this bias mitigation strategy will operate in a more indirect way by neutralizing dialectical pressure that is felt when responding to conflicting theories. One applies this bias mitigation strategy by reaffirming in advance of any particular enquiry a default agnostic pluralist stance. The thought is that once this point of view is internalized an enquirer will have a rational space to evaluate conflicting views on their own merits without concern, at least initially, that they threaten to undercut the inquirer's preferred view.

It is difficult to determine the degree of success such an approach would have to mitigating dialectical bias. As noted, it will not eliminate all causes of dialectical bias. However, I submit that considerations made in this paper suggest that such an approach to inquiry could lead to more frequently adopting a generous and fair-minded assessment of conflicting theories than is found with a background assumption that there is only one correct account of the phenomenon in question.

7. Conclusion

I have argued that an inquirer that possesses an agnostic pluralist stance towards a phenomenon *X* is less prone to dialectical bias than an inquirer that adopts a monist stance towards *X*. The reason for this is that participants in an argumentative discussion generally desire to maintain their status as reasonable discussants and are averse to being regarded as unreasonable discussants. In an argumentative discussion, an agent that has background monistic assumptions about a phenomenon will either have to undercut a conflicting theory or revise their commitment to their preferred theory in order to maintain their status as a reasonable discussant. I contend that this commonly results in dialectical pressure to support the negation of the conflicting theory. In turn dialectical pressure typically results in dialectical bias towards supporting the negation of the conflicting theory. However, when presented with a conflicting theory in an argumentative discussion, the agnostic pluralist can maintain their status as a reasonable agent without abandoning their commitment to a favoured account of some phenomenon or undercutting the conflicting theory. It is possible for the agnostic pluralist to maintain their status

as a reasonable agent in such circumstances because she believes that it is possible for there to be more than one correct account of the phenomenon under investigation. I concluded by suggesting that one upshot of these considerations is that adopting a default agnostic pluralist approach to inquiry could serve to mitigate some dialectical bias. One advantage that such an approach to mitigating dialectical bias has is that it does not require the application of a bias mitigation strategy at the moment of judgment. One would mitigate the bias in a more indirect manner by adopting an approach to inquiry that releases dialectical pressure that commonly produces dialectical bias. Whether or not such an approach is valuable would ultimately turn on empirical study of dialectical bias and different approaches to mitigating this bias. However, I believe that the arguments developed in this paper indicate that considering the adoption of default agnostic pluralism as a bias mitigation strategy is worthwhile.

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