**Frede among the Skeptics**

**Section 1: Introduction**[[1]](#footnote-1)

Sextus Empiricus, in *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, contrasts Skeptic to Dogmatist and Academic schools[[2]](#footnote-2) prominent at the time, taking the Dogmatists as his main foil.[[3]](#footnote-3) Dogmatists claim to have discovered truths about reality through perceiving cataleptic impressions and employing correct reasoning.[[4]](#footnote-4) Skeptics, in contrast, cultivate an ability to suspend judgment over unclear matters of investigation, e.g. putative truths revealed by argumentation and reasoning.[[5]](#footnote-5) In practice, Dogmatist arguments offered in favor of some claim are to be countered by Skeptic arguments for a contrary conclusion resulting in equipollence, or (roughly) equal appearances of persuasiveness.[[6]](#footnote-6) Stable and extended equipollence leads to suspension of judgment,[[7]](#footnote-7) and suspension of judgment to tranquility.[[8]](#footnote-8)

Thus described, the scope of suspension of judgment seems restricted to Dogmatist claims, but this is hardly clear from Sextus’s actual presentation. Indeed, in several places Sextus suggests Skeptics suspend judgment over everything.[[9]](#footnote-9) Such remarks suggest Skeptics lacked any beliefs. At least Sextus’s contemporary objectors seemed to think so, as evidenced by the common apraxia objection levelled against Skepticism.[[10]](#footnote-10) Roughly, if Skeptics lack beliefs they cannot act.[[11]](#footnote-11) Plausibly, for the apraxia objection to be forceful, objectors must have thought Skeptics lacked beliefs.

In the interest of correcting misunderstandings of Skepticism, Sextus addressed whether Skeptics had beliefs.[[12]](#footnote-12) Sextus distinguished two senses of “belief”, the first described as passively assenting to appearances, the second as assenting to unclear matters of investigation. Only the former is available to the Skeptic. As an example of the former, Sextus noted if a Skeptic has an appearance of being heated, the Skeptic will not say “I think I am not heated,” the tentative implication being the Skeptic will be disposed to assent to this appearance by saying “I am heated.” One might think this settles the issue - there are two senses of belief; Skeptics have beliefs in one sense. Disputing this would be, perhaps, anachronistic quibbling over terminology. Putting mere terminological disputes aside, however, it is still not clear whether Sextus, when considering the first sense of belief, means to say Skeptics assent and thus *believe*, or whether Skeptics assent but *do not* thereby *believe*. This is, in fact, a hotly contested question. Three positions have emerged among contemporary scholars: Skeptics lacked any beliefs;[[13]](#footnote-13) Skeptics had beliefs about appearances only;[[14]](#footnote-14) Skeptics had beliefs about appearances and more besides.[[15]](#footnote-15)

We focus in what follows on the last of these three positions. More specifically, in **Section 1** we examine an interpretation of Sextus’s Skepticism offered by Michael Frede in which Skeptics may have beliefs as long as they are not grounded in reasoning or argumentation. Frede’s proposal secures many commonsense beliefs for the Skeptic, offering a powerful response to the apraxia objection. That said, Frede’s interpretation suffers from various problems, which we examine in detail. In **Section 2**, we inspect whether the resources of a particular deflationary theory of truth can mitigate complaints against Frede. Scrutiny, however, reveals such attempted mitigation brings more trouble than it is worth. We end leaving Frede’s proposal little better than when we found it.

**Section 1: Setting the Stage**

In this section, we fix terminology and establish simplifying assumptions for our discussion. We then isolate two theses framing contemporary debates over whether Skeptics had beliefs.

*Fixing Terminology and Assumptions*

We make use of a neutral notion of *content*. A common example of content in contemporary circles is (declarative) *sentence* *content*, e.g. proposition. Relatedly, we assume a distinction between sentences – linguistic items – and content, e.g. “Honey is sweet” is a sentence an agent may be disposed to use to express a proposition p.[[16]](#footnote-16) Though propositions are a common species of content, they do not exhaust the genus. Perceptions too have content, e.g. perceptual content; thoughts more generally have content, e.g. intellectual content. Concerning both, it is harmless to characterize them by appealing to linguistic items as we have with propositions. For example, to characterize John perceives honey is sweet, we say John has perceptual content he might be disposed to describe with the sentence “Honey is sweet.” Similarly, if John finds a particular argument persuasive, we might capture this by saying John has intellectual content he might be disposed to describe with the sentence “That argument is persuasive.” Additionally, since Sextus distinguishes “is” and “appears” sentences, e.g. “Honey is sweet” vs. “Honey appears sweet,”[[17]](#footnote-17) for clarity we treat these as distinct sentences expressing distinct contents, whether propositional, perceptual, or intellectual.[[18]](#footnote-18)

To avoid imposing views on the Skeptics, we remain somewhat neutral over what “belief” and “assent” respectively denote. Still, some restrictions seem permissible, e.g. we put aside both implicit beliefs and degrees of belief. Moreover, belief will be understood as a (mental) state rather than a process.[[19]](#footnote-19) By assent we mean an evaluation of content. Assent often implies evaluating as true. For example, if John assents to p, John is often understood to take p as true. We do not, however, assume this here, since assent thus understood appears to trade on whether it is voluntary or involuntary. Dogmatists treat assent as voluntary.[[20]](#footnote-20) For this school, impressions generate desires, but action depends on assenting to impressions.[[21]](#footnote-21) Plausibly, voluntarily assenting is evaluating as true for Dogmatists.[[22]](#footnote-22) In contrast, Skeptics do not seem to share this dependency of action on voluntary assent.[[23]](#footnote-23) Skeptics may involuntarily assent to appearances, and yet act. But it is not obvious involuntarily assenting to p requires evaluating p as true. For these reasons, we leave open whether one may assent to p without taking p to be true. Additionally, we assume assent is an action, and so a (perhaps short) process.[[24]](#footnote-24)

*Two Theses*

Here, in anticipation of introducing Frede’s proposal, we isolate two theses common among scholars examining whether Skeptics had beliefs, and identify which Frede accepts/rejects. First, consider belief is intuitively truth-directed, i.e. if agent S believes proposition p, then S believes p is true. This may be motivated by noting the infelicity of expressions such as: “It’s not raining but I believe it’s raining.” Such an utterance would suggest the speaker is confused. A plausible way of characterizing the relationship between belief and truth is in terms of constitutive entailment, where x *constitutively entails* y just in case action/state y involves action/state x as a constituent part.[[25]](#footnote-25) In other words, the belief state that p constitutively entails the belief state that p is true.[[26]](#footnote-26) In symbols:[[27]](#footnote-27)

1. S BEL p |- S BEL T(p)

Is it accurate to describe Skeptics as adopting, perhaps implicitly, (1)? Many scholars claim so.[[28]](#footnote-28) As we will see however, Frede is not among them. For Frede, believing p does not constitutively entail believing p is true. We return to this below.

Second, assent intuitively involves belief. Plausibly, if S assents to p then S believes p. This claim is motivated by observing the infelicity of expressions such as: “I assent it’s raining but I don’t believe it’s raining.” As above, such an utterance would suggest confusion on the part of the speaker. This suggests another case of constitutive entailment. In symbols:

1. S AST p |- S BEL p

Is it accurate to describe Skeptics as adopting, perhaps implicitly, (2)? Again, scholars are divided.[[29]](#footnote-29) Frede accepts (2) as an accurate description of the Skeptic. It is worth examining why one might demur. First, *prima facie* the intuition of infelicity motivating (2) is not as strong as that motivating (1). This is perhaps due to the voluntary/involuntary ambiguity noted above. Plausibly, an agent may *involuntarily* assent to p without constitutively entailing belief in p. Second, note that accepting both (1) and (2) commits one to, in symbols:[[30]](#footnote-30)

(\*) S AST p |- S BEL T(p)

But (\*) is a corollary each scholar in the debate wants to avoid. Some avoid (\*) by rejecting (2); Frede avoids (\*) by rejecting (1).[[31]](#footnote-31) It is then open for him to characterize Skeptics with (2), empty of truth-directed consequences. Indeed, for Frede (2) applies whether assent is voluntary or involuntary.[[32]](#footnote-32)

We have acquired a taste of Frede’s proposal by identifying the preceding theses. We turn next to the entrée.

**Section 2: Frede among the Skeptics**

In this section, we present Frede’s interpretation of the Skeptics as having beliefs. We note concerns, which we attempt to address by appealing to a non-standard notion of truth. Ultimately, however, we show such an appeal provides Frede little help.

*Frede among the Skeptics*

Frede takes Sextus’s remarks concerning two senses of belief to indicate Skeptics have beliefs. For Frede claims Skeptic suspension of judgment applied solely to unclear matters of investigation, i.e. conclusions drawn from reason and argumentation.[[33]](#footnote-33) Of course, in the well-known passage cited above[[34]](#footnote-34) Sextus does not explicitly say Skeptics have beliefs. Nevertheless, Sextus does claim Skeptics passively assent to appearances. Since Frede claims (2) applies to the Skeptic, assenting to the content of appearances constitutively entails believing the content of appearances. As noted above, whether the assent in question is voluntary or involuntary is not something Frede finds relevant to whether Skeptics have beliefs; even involuntarily assenting to appearance p, for Frede’s proposal, leads to Skeptics believing p. Aside from the qualification that p cannot be drawn from argumentation or reasoning, the only other caveat is p does not conflict with some other appearance. On Frede’s proposal, if these conditions are met, the Skeptic believes p.

Three points concerning Frede’s proposal are worth emphasizing. First, Frede claims the Skeptic believes not simply that things appear a certain way, but rather, that things are the way they appear. To clarify, consider two propositions an agent might be disposed to express with “Honey is sweet” and “Honey appears sweet,” respectively. Frede claims the Skeptic believes propositions of the former sort, not merely propositions of the latter sort.[[35]](#footnote-35) Second, Frede’s proposal leaves the Skeptic with a wide range of beliefs, e.g. perceptual and reflective beliefs; beliefs about satisfying bodily urges; beliefs about customs and laws; beliefs about expertise. Third, and relatedly, the Skeptic need not worry about the apraxia objection. Frede’s Skeptic, with respect to beliefs, is rather similar to ordinary folks. Since the apraxia objection is not forceful against the latter, it should not be considered forceful against the former.

*Devil among the Details - Frede among the Objections*

Despite the benefits of Frede’s proposal, there are reasons one might protest.[[36]](#footnote-36) While few[[37]](#footnote-37) have balked at Frede’s accepting (2), many have objected to Frede’s rejection of (1).[[38]](#footnote-38) Those taking issue with this feature of Frede’s proposal claim it makes little sense for an agent to believe p without taking p to be true.[[39]](#footnote-39) Some suggest rather than rejecting (1), Frede is simply confusingly advocating the Skeptics employed a doxastic attitude weaker than, but related to, belief, e.g. *acceptance*.[[40]](#footnote-40) If so, then Frede’s Skeptic *accepts* the proposition expressed by “Honey is sweet” rather than believes it, and presumably acceptance does not constitutively entail belief. A worry one might have about reading Frede in this manner is that if acceptance is weaker[[41]](#footnote-41) than belief, it may be inadequate for action, and so inadequate to address the apraxia objection.[[42]](#footnote-42) More worrisome is the fact that equivocating over “belief” is precisely what Frede claims he is *not* doing, as those offering this reading of Frede concede.[[43]](#footnote-43)

Alternatively, it has been suggested Frede’s rejection of (1) indicates he is employing a non-standard notion of *truth*.[[44]](#footnote-44) “Non-standard” need not be understood anachronistically, i.e. with respect to what *we* think of as truth. Rather, Frede may be employing, on behalf of the Skeptic, a notion of truth that differs from the Dogmatist’s, which appears to have been a simple correspondence theory.[[45]](#footnote-45) Frede invites this suggestion by distinguishing “having a view” from “taking a position.”[[46]](#footnote-46) Frede claims Skeptics assent and thereby have a view, but this need not imply they take a position.[[47]](#footnote-47) Both, he continues, are ways to believe, but only the former is open to the Skeptic. We might elaborate.[[48]](#footnote-48) Consider, children are in many cases raised and cared for by parents/guardians. We might understand youths as accepting the guidance of these caretakers by not resisting them in most cases. As children age, some come to dispute the guidance of caretakers. As they continue to age, perhaps after reflecting on the accrued benefits of such guidance, some children may come to openly consent to the guidance. There seems a clear difference between early acceptance of guidance by not objecting, and later acceptance of guidance by expressed consent. Applied to the Skeptic, Frede seems to claim Skeptics believe in the sense of accepting guidance by not objecting, rather than by expressed consent.[[49]](#footnote-49) Plausibly, believing in the sense of having a view or accepting guidance need not entail taking the belief content as to be true. That would, rather, be an accurate characterization of believing in the sense of taking a position, i.e. expressed consent. But if belief is the same attitude in each case as Frede holds, then he is plausibly understood as claiming taking a position amounts to belief associated with, say, a simple correspondence theory, while having a view amounts to belief associated with some other theory of truth.

*Strawson + Frede = Yes*

One way to add substance to Frede’s claim that Skeptics employ a non-standard notion of truth, is by appealing to a deflationary theory.[[50]](#footnote-50) Indeed, Frede’s remarks may suggest such a reading, as he distinguishes propositions such as p, from their “necessarily equivalent”[[51]](#footnote-51) but distinct, correlates of the form: “It is true that p.”[[52]](#footnote-52) It has, moreover, been suggested Frede be understood as accepting a *particular* deflationary theory of truth, namely, the performative theory of truth developed by Peter Strawson.[[53]](#footnote-53) Like other deflationary theories, Strawson claimed it confused to think there was a distinguished ‘truth’ property which applied to propositions. But Strawson did not think truth-talk was entirely redundant. Rather, he held truth-talk was performative, i.e. involved speech acts such as that of endorsement.[[54]](#footnote-54) Strawson took motivation from observing how subtleties involving truth-talk in natural language paralleled redundant endorsement-talk. For example, “Right” [[55]](#footnote-55) may be used to endorse sentences, but one may felicitously use a sentence to express a proposition p without needing to say “Right”. In other words, there is an asymmetric dependence between “Right” and sentences used to express p. Strawson claimed sentences such as “It is true that p” are similarly asymmetrically dependent on those expressing p. Such asymmetric dependence suggested for Strawson the proposition expressed by the former sentence just *is* p. As for the purpose of truth-talk, Strawson claimed this could be revealed by observing that many utterances of “It is true that p” could be analyzed into “p. I endorse p”, where the component “I endorse p” is understood to signify the speech act of endorsement, but is not intended as a description of the act.[[56]](#footnote-56) Similarly, truth-talk that involves reporting what others have said can be analyzed into descriptive and performative parts. For example, if John claims “What the policeman said is true,” this may be analyzed into the descriptive component “The policeman made a statement” and performative component “I endorse it.” Ultimately then, for Strawson, truth-talk is redundant, but intimately involved in speech act performance.

To see how Strawson’s theory of truth adds substance to Frede’s claim concerning the Skeptics, observe that, intuitively, believing in the sense of having a view need not reach the level of an endorsement, though believing in the sense of taking a position does. If John takes the position that cheese is delicious, no doubt John endorses cheese as delicious. On the other hand, if John merely has the view that cheese is delicious, it is not obvious John endorses cheese as delicious. Hence, if believing p does not constitutively entail endorsing p, and if endorsing p is equivalent to believing p is true, then believing p does not constitutively entail believing p is true. We capture this by claiming according to Frede, (1) is to be rejected while (2) and the following are to be accepted:

1. S BEL T(p) |- S END p
2. S END p |- S BEL T(p)

Two points are worth emphasizing. First, the constitutive entailments hold because, on this proposal, believing p is true is identified with endorsing p, and the equivalence is justified by appealing to Strawson’s analysis of truth-talk in terms of endorsement. Second, these observations provide a robust way to distinguish the Skeptic’s and Dogmatist’s respective notions of truth and ways of believing. The Skeptics are characterized by a deflationary theory of truth, and so for the Skeptic only (2) applies. In contrast, Dogmatists are characterized by a more substantial notion of truth, and so for the Dogmatist, (3) and (4) apply.[[57]](#footnote-57) In other words, Skeptic’s beliefs understood as having a view are distinct from Dogmatist’s beliefs understood as taking a position, since they each employ distinct notions of truth, reflected in which theses accurately characterize them.

The picture thus far: Skeptics have an array of ordinary beliefs, but they suspend judgment over conclusions drawn from reasoning and argumentation. The beliefs Skeptics have, understood in the sense of having a view, are acquired through involuntary assent to the contents of appearances.[[58]](#footnote-58) However, assenting to the content of an appearance does not constitutively entail believing the content of the appearance is true, since believing content does not in general constitutively entail believing said content is true. This is because, though truth-talk suggests the contrary, there is no genuine ‘truth’ property one might apply to propositions. Hence, for any given proposition p, Frede’s Skeptics neither endorse p nor believe p to be true, as either would amount to taking a position on p. Nevertheless, they may assent to and thereby believe p, which amounts only to having a view that p.

*Frede + Strawson = Not Hardly*

So far, so good; too bad this proposal does not go so far. The problem with understanding Frede along Strawsonian lines is simple – *pace* Strawson, endorsement is not necessarily equivalent to believing something to be true.[[59]](#footnote-59) This is particularly clear with respect to reports on the claims of others.[[60]](#footnote-60) To see why, suppose David Lewis gave a talk at some time which was attended by John, during which Lewis asserted proposition p. However, unbeknownst to both Lewis and John, p is not true. Suppose later, however, in reporting on the talk, John claimed what Lewis said is true. Moreover, suppose John believed that what Lewis said is true. Intuitively, since p is not true, and John believes what Lewis said was true, it follows that John’s belief is not true.[[61]](#footnote-61) This is not, however, the result Strawson’s analysis provides. According to Strawson’s proposal, John’s belief that what Lewis said is true can be analyzed into a descriptive component “Lewis made a statement” and performative component “I endorse it.”[[62]](#footnote-62) Then what John believes is that Lewis made a statement and that John endorses that statement.[[63]](#footnote-63) But then John believes that Lewis made a statement. By assumption, Lewis did make a statement. Hence, according to Strawson’s analysis, the content of John’s belief is true. Hence, John’s belief is true. We noted above that John’s belief is intuitively not true, though. We have reached an unhappy impasse.

This not uncommon scenario appears to generate the wrong results for Strawson’s analysis. Glibly, given how poorly received Frede’s proposal has been in the literature, it seems ill-advised to saddle it with such unintuitive consequences. More to the point, this scenario strongly suggests believing p is true and endorsing p come apart. Strawson’s analysis was the primary motivation for accepting (3) and (4), but the preceding scenario calls Strawson’s analysis into question. Moreover, even granting it is not the case believing p constitutively entails endorsing p, if (3) and (4) are off the table, this says nothing about the relationship between believing and believing something to be true. In other words, we are faced with a dilemma. Either we add Strawson to Frede and accept the problematic consequences, or we settle with Frede absent a robust way to make sense of the notion of truth he is employing to characterize the Skeptics.

But perhaps the dilemma is not so bad. Granting the counterexample undermines appealing to (3) and (4), why should this be a problem for Frede or the Skeptics? Frede rejects characterizations of Skeptics with (1), but accepts (2). We took this to suggest Frede was attributing a non-standard notion of truth to the Skeptic, while perhaps attributing a standard notion of truth to the Dogmatist. Moreover, we took motivation for this distinction from Frede’s remarks concerning believing as having a view and believing as taking a position. Strawson’s performative theory of truth was then employed to add substance to this distinction. Under scrutiny, however, it was revealed this theory has counterintuitive consequences. Observe, however, issues with Strawson’s analysis do not trouble characterizing the Skeptics as holding a non-standard notion of truth directly. This is because the counterexample touches only the analysis, and so only the justification for (3) and (4). We would perhaps do better to drop Strawson’s analysis, but this need not leave us without a way to make sense of Frede. For we still may maintain Frede as characterizing the Skeptics with a non-standard notion of truth. That is, the second horn of the dilemma is not so bad.

It is of course possible to drop Strawson’s contribution. Indeed, doing so leaves us where we were just prior to introducing Strawson.[[64]](#footnote-64) The problem remaining, however, is that this leaves us unclear as to how believing understood as having a view is distinct from believing understood as taking a position. We can no doubt *say* the latter, but not the former, is truth-directed. But if we intend to maintain each is *belief*, notions of truth must be distinguished. We can no doubt *say* the Skeptics, but not the Dogmatists, hold a non-standard notion of truth. But absent an explanation for what this notion of truth amounts to, making such claims seems to do nothing more than place new names on the metaphors employed to motivate the distinction in the first place.

Nevertheless, there is something to the proposal. Perhaps Strawson’s performative theory of truth was simply not the most appropriate for our purposes. As observed above, Frede’s remarks concerning the “equivalence” of particular propositions still suggests a deflationary notion of truth is appropriate.[[65]](#footnote-65) Putting Strawson aside, there are alternative deflationary notions of truth which may fit better with Frede’s proposal.[[66]](#footnote-66) Unfortunately, we must put such discussions aside for a later time.

**Section 3: Conclusion**

We began with a question: Do the Skeptics have beliefs? We have attempted to make sense of Frede’s obscure proposal which claims Skeptics have beliefs, and quite a lot of them. One perplexing feature of Frede concerns his rejection of belief as truth-directed. A recent proposed explanation suggests Frede’s Skeptics are understood as adopting a Strawsonian performative theory of truth. However, scrutiny revealed such a proposal comes with undesirable costs. This is not to say Frede’s proposal is doomed, however. Arguably, Frede was in fact employing a deflationary theory of truth in his characterization of the Skeptics. It is plausible we simply have not examined his characterization of the Skeptics in light of the right one.

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1. Unless stated otherwise, all references are to the Annas & Barnes translation (Annas & Barnes, 2007) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. When applied to the Skeptic, I intend “school” to be understood in the broad sense of (I.16-17). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. I focus on Dogmatists: (i) as the most frequently discussed by Sextus (though see III.229-231), and (ii) since Sextus on the Academics seems an implausible caricature. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Cataleptic impressions could only be of real objects. Zeno clarified by analogy: sensory impressions were like an open hand, assent a closing hand, cataleptic impressions a fist, and knowledge a hand grasping a closed fist (Baltzly, 2013). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. (I.13; I.16; I.197; I.200; I.208) [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. (I.10; I.128; I.190-I.205) [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Suspension arose from investigative frustration, but abandoning commitments over whether certain claims are true dissipates that frustration (I.28). Oddly, Sextus’s description of the emergence of suspension of judgment suggests it may be reached accidentally. This cannot be correct. If it were, then since tranquility follows suspension of judgment as a shadow follows a body (I.29), any accidental suspension would lead to tranquility. It seems rather that an ability to achieve equipollence led to *stable* suspension (I.8; I.13). Presumably, tranquility follows stable suspension of judgment. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. (I.8; I.10-12; I.13; I.18; I.25; I.215) [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. (I.10; I.12; I.13). (Fine, pg. 100; fn. 63) claims (I.197-198; I.202; I.208) indicate Sextus qualifies “everything” to mean only unclear matters investigated by Dogmatists, but this, like much, is contentious. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. (I.23-24), (Vogt, 2010); see (Grgic, 2017), however, who claims belief has nothing to do with the apraxia objection. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Understood straightforwardly this seems hardly a concern – presumably animals act but lack belief. In truth, there are several versions of the apraxia objection, some stronger than others. (Vogt, 2010) identifies eight distinct versions. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. (I.13), with (I.16) as supplement. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. (Barnes, 1982), (Burnyeat, 1980; 1984). [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. (Fine, 2000), (Perin, 2010). [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. (Frede, 1979; 1984), (Morison, 2011). [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. To see how sentences and propositions come apart, observe if we assume “saccharine” is synonymous with “sweet”, then “Honey is saccharine” is a distinct sentence which may also be used to express p. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. (I.20) [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. This is not to prejudge whether the propositions expressed are equivalent; our assumption is simply for perspicuity. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. E.g. bel*ief* rather than bel*ieving*. Where “believing” in what follows is read as a state, unless noted otherwise. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Putting aside possibilities of cataleptic impressions commanding involuntary assent (M.VII.257). It is unclear whether these passages imply cataleptic impressions command involuntary assent, or whether assent is difficult to withhold. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. (Baltzly, 2013) [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. With obvious parallel qualifications for, e.g. dissenting as evaluating as false, etc. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Assent expresses present feeling for the Skeptic (I.13; I.22; I.193; I.229; II.10). [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. For simplicity I also assume implicit temporal, location, and other contextual parameters, i.e. belief is relativized to a time, place, etc. Similarly for assent, with the qualification that temporal indices are over extended temporal regions. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Concerning actions, x constitutively entails y just in case performance of x involves performance of y. Similarly, states constitutively entail states when having the first state requires having the second. So too for putative constitutive entailments across ontological categories, e.g. state to process or process to state. It is doubtful there are in general, say, state to process constitutive entailments, etc., but pressing such points would take us too far afield. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. A worry – If one believes Sherlock Holmes lives on Baker Street, (1) entails one believes it true that Sherlock Holmes lives on Baker Street. However, this seems implausible. I concede this seems implausible, but do not think (1) is troubled. Presumably, what an agent believing such things in fact believes is that *in a story* Sherlock Holmes lives on Baker Street, and consequently, the content is true in the story. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. “BEL” is a relation holding between an (presumably human) agent and proposition. Implicit are contextual indices, e.g. time, place, etc. “|-“ denotes constitutive entailment; “T(p)” is a proposition to the effect that p is true. Similar remarks apply below to relations “AST” and “END”. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. (Fine, 2000), (Barnes, 1982), (Burnyeat, 1980). [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Frede and Fine accept (2); Barnes and Burnyeat reject (2). [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Since we are assuming constitutive entailment is transitive. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. These theses divide the major positions concerning whether Skeptics had beliefs. (Burnyeat, 1980) accepts (1), rejects (2), and rejects Skeptics have beliefs, claiming “truth” was used in the ancient world solely to describe reality, so while Skeptics assent to appearances, they cannot believe them since appearances are not truth-apt (pgs. 24-26). (Brennan & Roberts, pg. 133) observe Burnyeat provides neither citation nor argument for this claim about truth. (Barnes, 1982) supplements Burnyeat’s picture, claiming Skeptic assent to appearances is best understood as a speech act type lacking truth-conditions, e.g. avowal. Much as children replace crying behavior with linguistic expressions of pain, thereby presenting pain rather than representing it, so too Skeptics present appearances rather than *re*present appearances, e.g. “Honey appears sweet” does not describe the Skeptic’s state, but is a performance of the state. (Fine, 2000) and (Perin, 2010) accept both (1) and (2), and claim Skeptics have beliefs. However, Skeptic beliefs are restricted to appearance. Fine claims Skeptics believe both the contents of appearances and that the content is true. Perin’s proposal is similar. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Frede speaks of “two kinds of assent”, but his discussion suggests a distinction between voluntary and involuntary assent. See (Fine, pgs. 4-8, 2000) for objections, though I take these to strike at rejecting (1) rather than accepting (2). [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. (Frede, pg. 19, 1979) [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. (I.13) [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. This, in part, distinguishes Frede’s proposal from Fine’s and Perin’s. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Perhaps also worth mentioning is how *obscure* and *confusing* Frede’s writing on this topic is. This is partly due to the Sextus’s obscurity. Still, Frede should have been clearer, cp. (Brennan & Roberts, pg. 129). [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. E.g. Barnes and Burnyeat. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. (Vogt, 2012; 2014) rejects Frede proposal on grounds of his rejecting (1); (Burnyeat, 1980) questions whether the distinction is between two kinds of belief, suggesting it is a distinction between two propositional attitudes; etc. (Fine, 2000) and (Perin, 2010) take issue as well. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. One worry with rejecting (1) not raised in the literature is this may blur distinctions between belief and related attitudes, e.g. imagining. Plausibly, agents need not take the contents of their imaginings to be true. If it is also the case that agents need not take the contents of their beliefs to be true, it is unclear how believing and imagining are distinct attitudes for Skeptics. In contrast, Dogmatist’s maintain the distinction as one might expect: believed content is taken to be true; imagined content need not be. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. See (Fine, pg. 86), (Brennan & Roberts, pg. 128) for discussion. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. This is indeed contentious. As a commenter succinctly puts the issue “If acceptance is all you have, is it still insufficient for action?” I sympathize with the worry; Frede offers this line of argument but it is not particularly persuasive. Nevertheless, we ultimately put acceptance aside since Frede explicitly rejects such a reading. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Another worry is whether interpreting the Skeptic as merely accepting the content of appearances undermines Sextus’s distinction between Skeptics and “New Academics” who assent to plausible impressions (III.229-231). Sextus’s remarks suggest the distinction between the schools trades on involuntary/voluntary assent, or on a criterion of action/truth. Whether either sufficiently distinguishes the schools is unclear. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. (Frede, 207-209; Fine, pgs. 86-87). [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. E.g. (Morison, 2014) and (Brennan & Roberts, pg. 130). Morison occupies us below. It is worth noting, Brennan and Roberts suggest Frede’s use of “truth” be understood as “true according to the final theory of reality,” which strikes me as quite plausible. I lack the space, unfortunately, for further discussion here. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Correspondence theories of truth hold (roughly) proposition p is true just in case p corresponds to some fact. That Dogmatists were correspondence theorists is uncontentious, though see (Hankinson, pg. 73, 2003) for rebuttal. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. (Frede, pg. 206) [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. A commenter urged Frede’s distinction here suggests different attitudes, rather than different truth, since “Relating to propositions in fundamentally different ways seems like having different attitudes...” In response note whether this is a worry depends on what ‘fundamentally different ways’ means. Presumably, the idea is that taking p *as true* is fundamentally different from not. However, this does not *in general* signal a difference in attitude. Suppose John knows he is bald. Suppose John at one time imagines he is bald, and another imagines he is not. John may take the former as true but not the latter, yet John imagines in both cases. Of course, this is because taking the content of an imagining to be true or not is incidental to how imagining is individuated as an attitude. Hence, it must be argued *belief* is an attitude where this is a distinction with a difference. And this is precisely what Frede rejects. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. This is inspired by (Frede, pg. 207)’s accepting a ruler by not condemning them vs accepting by expressed consent. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Skeptics are in this respect analogous to children being guided by a chaperon, a metaphor Sextus himself employs to describe living the Skeptic life (I.230). [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. Deflationary theories of truth hold (roughly) claiming p is true is simply claiming p; truth is not a genuine property applied to propositions. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. (Frede, 1983, pg. 133) [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. See (Morison, 2014). NB: Morison writes “logically equivalent” where Frede wrote “necessarily equivalent.” [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. (Strawson, 1949). See (Morison, 2014) for the suggestion. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. This, in fact, distinguished Strawson’s performative theory of truth from deflationist siblings who advocated truth-talk as simply redundant, e.g. Ramsey, Frege, etc. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. Strawson’s favorite example was “Ditto” but we can update. The sense of “Right” intended is that associated with affirming, rather than, say, that associated with giving directions, or describing political affiliations. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. Assume otherwise. Then “I endorse p” is part of the semantic content of “p. I endorse p.” Then “I endorse p” would be, assuming classical logic, true or false. Either option would undermine Strawson’s deflationary attack on truth. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. For completeness, arguably Dogmatists are also accurately characterized with (1) and (2), and *a fortiori*, (\*). In other words, each thesis considered applies, as do their consequences. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. A worry – We have characterized Skeptics with (2), but this thesis is neutral over whether assent is voluntary or involuntary. This apparently leaves open the possibility of Skeptics acquiring beliefs from voluntary assent, i.e. from reasoning and argumentation. In response, note on our characterization for assent to be voluntary in (2) requires accepting (1) as well. One consequence is that since (1) does not apply to Skeptics, they do not voluntarily assent. That, however, seems to be what Sextus has in mind, and to that extent, is desirable. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. Strawson’s performative theory of truth is susceptible to various counterexamples *qua* truth. Given our characterization of Frede as accepting (3) and (4), however, our focus is not truth *per se*, but on both belief and endorsement. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. Strawson’s account seems fine with self-ascribed beliefs, but belief reports make trouble. Motivation for the counterexample here can be found in Strawson’s own discussion of so-called “second-order, existential meta-statements” such as “What the policeman said is true.” (Strawson, 1949, pgs. 92-93). [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. This assumes the rather common view that the propositional attitude belief inherits semantic evaluations based on propositional content, e.g. if John has two hands and John believes he has two hands, then John’s belief is true; if John maintains his belief but as a matter of fact loses his hands, then John’s belief is false. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. (Strawson, 1949, pgs. 92-93). [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. Incidentally, it is plausible that John endorses the statement, and hence, by (4), John believes the statement is true. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. Just before the section titled *Strawson + Frede = Yes*. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. (Frede, 1983, pg. 133) [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. In particular, Horwich’s minimalist theory of truth (Horwich, 1998). On this proposal, roughly, ‘truth’ is no more substantial a property than ‘existence.’ It is simply what a collection of propositions have in common, much like existence is what existing objects have in common. I hope to explore this in future work on the Skeptics. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)