

# Replies Part IV: Warrant Transmission and Entitlement

*Zalabardo, Pryor, Coliva, and Williams*

## When Does Warrant Transmit?

Not long ago I think it was widely assumed that recognizably valid reasoning from known, or otherwise epistemically warranted premises, can always be enlisted to *confer* knowledge of, or epistemic warrant upon a conclusion: that a recognized valid deduction from warranted premises always *transmits* their epistemic credentials to the conclusion. It was also widely assumed that this idea is tantamount to the principle of Closure of knowledge, or epistemic warrant, over deduction: roughly, for the case of knowledge, that the knowable consequences of knowable premises are likewise knowable. Both points would nowadays be widely disbelieved. Closure is a weaker principle than Transmission since it says nothing about warrant acquisition—about *how* warrant may be acquired for the knowable consequences of knowable premises in any particular case—while Transmission is generally recognized as open to counterexamples, though individual cases—Moore’s Proof, McKinsey’s paradox, and Putnam’s Proof that we are not Brains-in-a-Vat, for instance—remain controversial.

Much hangs on the correct classification of the controversial cases. The tenability of a Dogmatist conception of perceptual justification is widely regarded as dependent on the transmissiveness of Moore’s Proof; in the case of McKinsey, the issues impinge on the epistemological architecture of intentional self-knowledge and of the *a priori*. But as Jim Pryor’s chapter usefully brings out, the notion of warrant transmission, characterized at the foregoing level of generality, may be thought to gesture at each of a number of (mostly) inequivalent ideas. I’ll illustrate, going a little beyond his discussion, by citing six.

Here is the most immediately plausible proposal. Warrant for the (pool of undischarged) premises,  $[A_1 \dots A_n]$ , of an argument, may be regarded as transmitted to a validly inferred conclusion,  $C$ , under these circumstances:

- i. When the argument, together with the warrant for its premises,<sup>1</sup> provides a potentially *first-time* reason to believe  $C$ —in particular, when a rational subject

<sup>1</sup> There is, of course, a relativity here: arguments are transmissive, or not, relative to a *particular type of ground*, or combination of grounds, for their premises. There isn’t the same issue about the transmissiveness of Dretske’s

who comes to know all of  $[A_1 \dots A_n]$ , could use the argument to *learn* C. Transmissive arguments are those that are at the service of the extension of knowledge by reasoning whenever their premises may be known.

That answer is potentially distinct from this:

- ii. When the warrant for the premises, together with the reasoning, provides for a *new* warrant to believe C—when a rational subject apprised of the warrant for  $[A_1 \dots A_n]$ , could use the argument to *add to the epistemic credentials* of C. Transmissive arguments are those that are at the service of the enhancement of epistemic credentials by reasoning.

The potential for the distinctness of answer (ii) from answer (i) resides in the possibility that an argument might somehow be at the service of providing *additional* warrant for believing its conclusion even though not at the service of providing a *first-time* warrant for that conclusion. There might be some arguments that, in a given evidential context, are essentially apt for warrant enhancement, but not for first-time warrant creation.

The issue is tricky but here is one possible kind of example. Suppose I am trying to count a rather mobile, smallish flock of sheep in a pen. And suppose you tell me that there are fewer than thirty and, on counting as carefully as I can, I get the result twenty-eight. I might reasonably take that result as corroborating what I have been told. But I might also reasonably think that, had I lacked any independent information about the number of the flock, I could not in the circumstances have trusted in the result of the count sufficiently to conclude that their number was fewer than thirty. If that is not an incoherent combination of epistemic attitudes, then the argument

(a) I have counted the sheep as best I could and got the result, 28;

So,

(b) There are 28 sheep in the pen;

Hence

(c) There are fewer than 30 sheep in the pen,

in combination with the empirical warrant for (a), is not at the service of the acquisition of a first-time warrant for (c), though it may rationally be deployed to enhance independent (testimonial) warrant for (c). The thought would be that the count and the testimonial warrant support each other, and thereby strengthen my overall case for (c).

### A Third Answer: C-Lowering

However, even if there are robust cases of this kind, so that answer (ii) is the more fundamental, this should not encourage the general answer that warrant transmits in all and only cases

*Zebras* argument, for example, if the warrant for its premise is not visual but testimonial, or based upon a laboratory analysis of the creatures' DNA. (In fact, the relativity goes deeper. More on this below; see note 4.)

- (iii) When the argument, together with the warrant for its premises, is at the service of *improving one's overall epistemic position* with respect to its conclusion, C

at least, not if “improving one’s epistemic position” is identified with raising one’s prior rational credence. Here I demur from a suggestion that José Zalabardo offers in the final section of his essay. Zalabardo wants to argue that an epistemological externalist is in position to agree that something is seriously amiss with Moore’s proof and similar arguments—that a satisfactory diagnosis need not depend on our accepting what Zalabardo views as objectionably internalist constraints on knowledge, or warrant, whose accreditation might leave one vulnerable to undesirable side-effects (for instance, scepticism!<sup>2</sup>). Zalabardo quite rightly observes that a valid argument to a certain conclusion, C, together with the acquisition of certain grounds that properly enhance one’s confidence in its premises, may nonetheless have the effect of enforcing a *lowering* of one’s prior credence in C. Consider, for example, the argument (BIV) from

- (a) I have two hands

to

- (b) I am not a handless brain-in-a-vat whose visual cortex is being so stimulated as to give me an experience as of seeing my two hands in front of my face.

Presumably the effect of an apparently normal visual experience as of my hands present before my eyes will do nothing to lower, and may in the right context (perhaps after a bloody car accident) raise, my prior credence in (a). But presumably it should lower my prior credence in (b) which, before the occurrence of the experience, will have been close to certainty, since I was then not so much as having the appropriate kind of experience.

The phenomenon—that, in a certain informational context, evidence which raises the joint probability of the premises of a valid argument to C may not raise, indeed may lower, the prior probability of a validly derived conclusion C—is undeniable. Call it *C-lowering*. Does C-lowering, though, provide an externalism-friendly diagnosis either of what failure of transmission of evidential warrant consists in, or of the failings of Moore’s proof?

<sup>2</sup> Many philosophers, familiarly, have been tempted to regard scepticism as a kind of nemesis of internalism. Acknowledging that the contrast between conceptions of knowledge, or epistemic warrant, properly termed ‘internalist’ and ‘externalist’ respectively is not as clear as one might wish, I think there is nevertheless an insight in this, which I’ll come to later in these comments. Let me say, though, that I am not myself convinced that there is any good general debate to be had between internalist and externalist over the proper analysis, or nature, of ‘knowledge’ or ‘justification’. The fact is there are *various* kinds of truth-relevant epistemic good standing that a belief may enjoy, some to do, e.g., with its causal provenance and modal profile, others to do with the awareness and good intellectual conscience of the believer. I think much recent epistemology has suffered under the assumption that there is somewhere in the list of epistemic goods one that underwrites all the rest—much in the way that ethics suffered in pursuit of a single, master account of the nature of the moral good and of right action. But the truth in both cases is that we are dealing with a plurality of values, or modes of good standing of action/belief, some of which may be best construed consequentially/externally and others deontologically/internally.

The questions are separable, but I think that both should get a “No”. Actually, I am not sure I understand what is conceived as particularly externalism-friendly about the proposal, since—as Zalabardo’s own concluding discussion of the Soccer case brings out<sup>3</sup>—the question whether a particular piece of evidence that raises one’s prior probability for some premises raises, lowers, or leaves unaffected one’s prior probability for a validly inferred conclusion C is highly sensitive to background *information*—to what else the subject takes herself to have reason to believe.<sup>4</sup> It is not clear how this point is to be accommodated by any of the usual externalist conceptions of the nature of the warrant concerned.

Be that as it may, Zalabardo provides—as far as I can see—no explanation why, if we replace (b) in (BIV) by the Moorean conclusion,

(m) There is an external material world,

the effect is that one’s prior probability for (m) will be lowered—or anyway unaffected—even in circumstances when one’s prior probability for

(a) I have two hands

is raised. The type of C-lowering illustrated by BIV is highly sensitive to the particular form of the conclusion C in the argument concerned: in effect, there is a rational lowering of the prior credence in C only when C’s negation predicts the evidence for the argument’s premise(s). That is not a feature of Moorean arguments in general; in particular, it is not a feature of Moore’s proof itself.

The point I want most to stress, though, is that C-lowering is not to be identified with transmission failure in any case, since incoming evidence that lowers one’s prior credence in C may yet provide a new—and perhaps still, in context, sufficient—reason for accepting that conclusion. This will be the effect in general when the availability of the relevant grounds for the premises of the argument itself tells against the obtaining of a significant range of possible cases under which C would in any case have held good, and thus adversely affects the latter’s prior probability. Here is a case. Suppose that I deal you twenty-one cards face down from a standard Bridge pack, advising you—this is your evidence, (a)—that exactly three aces—two blacks and a red—are among

<sup>3</sup> This volume, pp. 319–20.

<sup>4</sup> Here is a further example of such sensitivity: Presumably the perfectly zebra-like appearance of the animals in the pen *should* raise your prior credence in the proposition that they are cleverly disguised zebra lookalikes—after all, that was pretty unlikely but now the appearances at least are consistent with it, something you might reasonably have expected would not be so. So Dretske’s argument, naturally understood, exhibits the C-lowering phenomenon. But merely add as background information that, while frauds of this kind have unfortunately occurred not infrequently in this particular zoo, the management would never permit such a thing with any equine species, of which the wealthy owner is particularly fond, and the perfect zebra-like appearance now becomes strong evidence that these are not cleverly disguised mules. In those circumstances, the warrant transmits.

Corollary: warrant-transmission is relative not merely to the argument and evidence-type concerned, but to collateral information. Below I shall suggest that there is a yet further relativity.

the dealt cards, and that exactly sixteen of the dealt cards are black. At my invitation you then pick a card without turning it over. Presumably you can be reasonably fairly confident—in the light of the chances of being wrong: 7 to 1—that you have not selected an ace and very confident—with the chances of being wrong at 21 to 1—that you have not selected a red ace. However, if I now add to your initial evidence the further datum that the card you have selected is in fact red, chances of having selected an ace, and hence—what is equivalent in the new informational context—chances of having selected a red ace, shorten to 5 to 1; yet this is still enough, arguably, to ground something approaching an expectation that the card, when turned over, will not prove to be a red ace. Now, in another context, the grounds for this latter expectation—the information that you have selected a red card, that just five of the cards overall are red, and that they include just one ace—could have been acquired against a setting of antecedent total ignorance about the suits and denominations of the twenty-one dealt out cards. It would then have been intuitively perfectly proper to describe you as having *acquired* a reason to think you had not selected a red ace where before you had none. That reason is *exactly the same* as that which you finally have in the example as developed above. It is just that acquiring it in the original context destroys a previous, stronger reason for the same expectation. So warrant can transmit to the conclusion of an argument even though its acquisition compromises a previously stronger epistemic position with respect to that conclusion.<sup>5</sup> C-lowering is thus a bad diagnosis of transmission failure.

## Transmission Failure and Externalism

My own suspicion, more generally, is that providing a convincing, recognizably externalist diagnostic of what is going wrong in at least a decent cross-section of the usual putative examples of non-transmissive arguments, is none too easy a thing to do. What would it be, for example, for an argument to fail to transmit *knowledge*, understood in any of the familiar externalist ways? Of course, we know to expect failures of closure if knowledge is required to incorporate *sensitivity* of the kind enshrined in the accounts of Dretske and Nozick—if, oversimplifying, one knows that P only if, had P not been the case, one wouldn't have believed it. But these sensitivity-based analyses are now widely disbelieved; and in any case, it is, plausibly, a constraint on the enterprise to provide an explanation of how knowledge-transmission can fail even in an argument where closure is satisfied. But how will matters play on other externalist conceptions of knowledge? Let a knowledge-transmissive argument—prescinding from any further subtleties—be one which is such that a thinker who knows its premises and uses them to validly infer its conclusion, can thereby

<sup>5</sup> There has been confusion about this point in the literature on attempted Bayesian treatments of transmission failure. For an example, see Samir Okasha 2004. Jake Chandler 2010 attempts to improve on Okasha's account. Helpful further contributions on the issues are Moretti 2012/2011 and Pynn forthcoming.

acquire a knowledgeable belief. Then it is very difficult to see how there can be such a thing as transmission failure on a *reliabilist* account of knowledge. For valid deduction from known premises is, par excellence, a reliable way of forming true beliefs.

One might demur that this won't be so if the reliable method whereby the premises came to be known somehow already involves a prior belief in the conclusion of the argument in question, and if the reliability of that method depends on the conclusion's truth.<sup>6</sup> In that case, carrying through the inference to the conclusion will not be any way of *forming* a belief in that conclusion. Maybe. But this kind of play is no help in the crucial range of cases where the belief-forming method that leads to acceptance of the premises consists simply in the exercise of some non-inferential cognitive faculty—say, perception. If the circumstances are such that just looking at animals in zoo pens and cages is indeed a reliable way of forming beliefs about their species, then validly deducing conclusions—*any* conclusions, including those about the absence of clever disguises—from those beliefs will be a reliable way of forming beliefs in *them*. A simple reliabilist conception of knowledge can thus, on the face of it, have no problem with the knowledge-transmissiveness of Dretske's famous inference.

It is similar with *safety*-based conceptions of knowledge.<sup>7</sup> There are various conceptions of safety. But the generic idea of a true belief that holds good in all reasonably close worlds in which it is formed in the way it is actually formed is obviously hereditary across valid inferences leading to beliefs in their conclusions. So again it seems unintelligible, on any view whereby safety, broadly construed, suffices for knowledge, how a valid argument might fail to be knowledge-transmissive.

It cannot of course be flatly excluded that more refined externalist conceptions of knowledge may fare better. But that is not the direction that Zalabardo attempts. His argument that externalist conceptions of knowledge may yet have something interesting to say about Moorean inferences, is not that particular such conceptions can accommodate transmission-failure. It takes a different, and surprising, turn.

Zalabardo formulates Transmission (for the single premise case) as follows:

T1: If P is a proposition that S believes and for which S has warrant (and Q is a proposition for which S doesn't have warrant), then by recognizing the validity of the inference from P to Q, S will acquire warrant for Q.

<sup>6</sup> The reader will easily foresee relevant kinds of case. Suppose, for instance, that I am a less than expert but not totally incompetent bird watcher and that—to adapt an example of Austin's—my method of deciding whether or not a bird is a willow warbler is to judge on the basis of its size, colour, movement and location *provided I already believe it is not a chaff-chaff*. If, on the other hand, I regard that issue as open, then I have no method except to ask an expert. Let the region be such that there are no chaff-chaffs in the local bird population—indeed, no warblers of any kind other than willow warblers. And suppose I believe this. Then my method will be reliable and—some forms of reliabilism will grant—locally knowledge-productive. But the use of this method, plus inference that a bird it identifies as a willow warbler is not a chaff-chaff, is not a reliable way of forming the latter belief, since it is not a way of forming that belief at all.

<sup>7</sup> That is, any view that holds that safety, suitably construed, is sufficient for knowledge.

His argument is that we can actually endorse this principle *without restriction* and still quite coherently refuse to countenance that warrant can be acquired via the arguments that we might be inclined—misguidedly—to classify as failures of transmission, including Dretske's *Zebras* and Moore's 'Proof' itself.

The key to this *prima facie* startling claim is provided by the following formulation of Closure:

If P entails Q, and S has warrant for P and for the proposition that P entails Q, then S has warrant for Q.

Suppose it is possible to have warrant for the proposition that P entails Q without carrying through a deduction of Q from P and recognizing its validity. And suppose someone has such a warrant, and also has warrant for P. Then it won't be possible for her, if she now recognizes the validity of the inference from P to Q, to acquire warrant for Q thereby—since by Closure, formulated as by Zalabardo, she will have such warrant *already*. Not that she will be a *counterexample* to transmission, however; rather, she will fail to satisfy its antecedent, by failing to satisfy the portion in parentheses in T1. For Q will not be a proposition for which, before she recognizes the validity of the inference from P to Q, she lacks warrant.

In sum, given the way Zalabardo has formulated the two principles concerned, and assuming Closure so formulated holds, warrant cannot be transmitted by inference in any case where, in advance of inference, a thinker has warrant for the relevant premises and knows of their entailment of the conclusion in question by some other means.

It's hardly controversial that there are ways—testimony, for instance—of knowing about entailments without articulating them inferentially. Zalabardo's idea about Moorean inferences is to try to exploit the more interesting kind of case where an entailment is, as he puts it, epistemically transparent—that is, where any normal subject who possesses the concepts that feature in the premises and conclusion thereby directly has warrant for the entailment, without any inferential process. It seems correct that there are—and have to be—entailments of this character: entailments which are, as we like to say, immediate, and where just to understand the premises and conclusion is to have warrant for the belief that the latter follows from the former. But granting that there are such arguments, then it will follow—at least on Zalabardo's formulations—not that they are counterexamples to Transmission, but they are cases that do not *fulfil the antecedent* of Transmission, and are thus, Zalabardo wants to conclude, cases where warrant can indeed not be acquired by inference, where Transmission cannot be triggered.

Now, I think there is something right about this. One reaction one may well have, confronting the claim that Moore's Proof, for example, could give one warrant to adopt the belief that there is an external world, is that there is no plausibly thinking oneself into a frame of mind where, taking one's sense experience as defeasible evidence for the presence of one's hand in front of one's face, one then *moves on* to the conclusion that there is an external material world. There is not enough of an intellectual gap, so to speak, between the premise and the conclusion to make space for the possibility of a transition in thought. But I believe Zalabardo mistakes the significance of this. The fact is that this is a

feature of a very wide class of entailments which, subject to appropriate grounding for their premises, are uncontroversially transmissive. It will hold, for example, for all entailments that instantiate a primitively obvious introduction rule.<sup>8</sup> Single steps of disjunction introduction, or existential generalization, for instance, will thus be unsuitable to transmit warrant on Zalabardo's account. But it is evident that such simple inferences can and must be transmissive of warrant in the general run of cases. So Zalabardo's diagnosis over-generalizes and is mistaken.

The problem is with Zalabardo's characterizations of Transmission and Closure. I think there are two things wrong. First, transmission should not, in the first place, be formulated as a principle exclusively about the acquisition of warrant *by inference*. Rather, we want a notion of transmission of warrant that is precisely suitable to apply to cases where an entailment is epistemically transparent, and inference—taken as an active intellectual transition—is, for the kind of reasons that Zalabardo gestures at, not involved. Even in such cases, we still need a distinction between cases where warrant for an entailed proposition can properly rest on the combination of warrants for the premises and warrants for the entailment, both elements of the combination being essential, and cases where it cannot. The latter is, in my view, the right description of *Zebras*, even if it is conceded that the relevant entailment is epistemically transparent:<sup>9</sup> knowledge of the entailment, conferred (if it is) just in virtue of grasp of the concepts involved, does not generate, or enhance, warrant for the conclusion when adjoined to the (perceptual) warrant for the premise.

Second, the understanding of Zalabardo's formulation of Closure that he needs to drive his argument is in any case tendentious. For we have to understand the consequent in such a way that "has warrant" contrasts with "is in position to acquire warrant"—otherwise satisfaction of Closure won't ensure non-satisfaction of the antecedent of T1. But Closure is not believable when understood in that way. Any competitive formulation of the principle has to proceed in terms of the *availability* of warrant; but when "has warrant" is so understood, it doesn't have the significant tense exploited in Zalabardo's formulation of Transmission.

I am inclined to think, then, that the upshot of Zalabardo's interesting discussion is to intensify, rather than alleviate, such doubts as there may be that there are plausible externalism-friendly accounts to be given either of transmission failure or of what else is going on in the arguments that have been canvassed as involving transmission failure. Externalism, as an epistemologically fundamentalist rather than ecumenical position, may be forced to deny the phenomenon. And to the extent that the phenomenon, however best characterized, seems to be intuitively compelling, that is a problem for such epistemological fundamentalism.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>8</sup> I believe I mean "primitively obvious" in the sense of Christopher Peacocke.

<sup>9</sup> Actually, I think it questionable whether the *Zebras* entailment *is* immediate.

<sup>10</sup> But for further discussion of relevant issues, see Smith 2009, Kotzen 2012, and Pynn 2012.



## When Does Warrant Transmit? Three Further Answers

There are at least three other answers to the question, When does warrant transmit?, which are worth considering. Warrant transmits, it may be said,

- (iv) When the argument concerned may be rationally deployed to overcome a prior doubt about its conclusion, C.

This answer, in contrast with the previous three, takes the notion of warrant transmission into the territory of rational belief management. In effect, it introduces a new relativity additional to those noted earlier: it views the transmissiveness of an argument as relative to the background doxastic state of the subject who entertains it. Clearly the strength of any prior doubt about C may be relevant: and here “strength” should be understood to cover both the psychological intensity of the doubt and the strength of the grounds for it.

I think it is clear, though, that this proposal is misconceived. For no matter what argument we consider, it is almost always going to be a possibility that a given subject have in advance a sufficiently strong doubt about its conclusion—in either or both of the above senses of “strong”—to make it rational for them to look askance at the argument, and specifically at the grounds for its premises. This possibility afflicts virtually any argument. So answer (iv) threatens to obliterate the distinction between transmissive and non-transmissive arguments unless some kind of controls are placed on the provenance and strength of the doubt about C. But it is not clear how to go about that.

It would not help to finesse this problem if it were suggested instead that warrant transmits

- (v) When the argument may be rationally deployed to overcome *agnosticism* about C,

—not if agnosticism too is interpreted as a state of mind that allows of degrees of strength. And it *is* so interpreted when it is viewed as itself a *state of belief*: the belief that the question, whether or not C, is something that allows of no settlement (at least by the kinds of considerations deployed in the argument in question). Strength, once again, may admit of both rational and psychological interpretation. In either case, though, a sufficiently strong prior agnosticism may dominate a subject’s response to the details of the argument concerned, and hinder what is in fact a perfectly transmissive argument from inducing any significant degree of belief in C.

We should conclude that if warrant transmission is to be characterized in anything like this kind of way—as residing in the capacity of an argument to rationally overcome a prior lack of commitment to its conclusion—we need to appeal to a version of the latter that, in the nature of the case, does not allow of rational, or psychological, *entrenchment*. The salient suggestion is therefore

- (vi) When the argument may be used to rationally move past an *open-minded* stance towards C.

Open-mindedness, in its nature, does not allow of strength, or entrenchment: it involves a readiness to respond to whatever can be said for or against C. If an argument, together with a set of grounds for its premises, does indeed generate an all-things-considered sufficient case for C, a rational but open-minded subject will be responsive to it.

At this point, the reader will likely be struck by the thought that answers (i) and (vi) in effect converge. For rationally to move past open-mindedness about C in response to a valid argument for it is to acquire a first-time warrant for C. And to acquire, for the first time, a warrant for P is to be in a position when one should relinquish open-mindedness about it. The outstanding issue is whether answer (ii) covers a significant additional class of cases. But I will not here pursue that question further here. The remarks on transmission failure to follow will be directed at the conception of transmissiveness gestured at by answers (i) and (vi).

## Transmission Failure (I)—The Background Warrant Model

So, when and why does warrant fail to transmit? And what are the prospects for developing criteria to identify warrant transmission failures, and so perhaps to rule on controversial cases, like Moore's Proof, McKinsey's paradox, and Putnam's Proof?

In his intricate and illuminating contribution, Jim Pryor proposes what he calls the *Background Warrant* model of transmission failure. To fix ideas consider these two catchy examples:<sup>11</sup>

FBI-1 Men dressed in blue "FBI" jackets are swarming around this intersection, posting signs that say, "No cameras allowed!"

So, apparently:

FBI-2 The FBI has prohibited any filming from taking place here today

So:

FBI-3 What I'm witnessing is not part of the filming of a movie scene

Similarly:

CarTheft-1 I *intend* to walk to Lot 15, where I left my car, and drive away.

So, probably:

CarTheft-2 I will *end up* driving my car away from Lot 15.

So:

CarTheft-3 My car hasn't been stolen or towed away; it will still be in Lot 15 when I get there.

In both cases the impression of transmission failure is powerful. That I see the scene depicted in FBI-1 is good, but defeasible evidence for the existence of the prohibition affirmed in FBI-2; but it is, intuitively, no kind of evidence, unless supplemented, that the scene I witness is not a set-up for a film. That I have the intention, and memory,

<sup>11</sup> They are Pryor's, in correspondence.

described in CarTheft-1 is good, but defeasible evidence that I will do what CarTheft-2 describes; but it is, intuitively, no kind of evidence, unless supplemented, that my car hasn't been stolen.

As I (perhaps wrongly) understand Pryor, what the Background Warrant model says, very simply, is that warrant fails to transmit in these cases because the respective 3-propositions are among a set of background premises that are required if the respective 1-propositions are to warrant acceptance of the respective 2-propositions. The characteristic examples of non-transmissive inference are thus, according to the model, merely enthymematic versions of larger, explicitly circular inferences, and are epistemically futile for the same reason and in the same way as the latter.

Pryor contends that the Background Warrant model is "the most plausible and recognizable form of the phenomenon Wright has in mind", and that "the only models of transmission failure Wright successfully presents us with are [Background Warrant] Models". I think, to the contrary, that at least when understood as just outlined, the Background Warrant model misrepresents the action in a wide class of intuitive examples of transmission failure and I will offer some considerations in favor of that assessment. At the least, it may be useful to note three hurdles that a defence of the model will need to clear. One concerns cases manifesting an intuitive failure of warrant transmission although no background premise seems to be needed to support the argument concerned. The second concerns the strains placed on the notion of a "background premise" if the model is to have the requisite generality, even when there is intuitively a need for additional premises. The third concerns the presence among the characteristic examples of non-transmissive arguments of cases where it seems there is simply no room for background premises.

Let us consider an intuitive case of transmission failure where the Background Warrant model seems exactly right.<sup>12</sup> Suppose:

Testimony-1 I ask Smith the time and, glancing at his watch, he says, "Eight o'clock"

So, probably:

Testimony-2 It's eight o'clock

So:

Testimony-3 Smith is telling the truth on this occasion.

Testimony-1 and Testimony-2 *conjointly* deductively entail Testimony-3. But Testimony-1 and Testimony-3 likewise conjointly deductively entail Testimony-2. And it is plausible enough to suggest that the justifiable conclusion of Testimony-2 from Testimony-1 proceeds via an enthymematic inference that suppresses mention of Testimony-3 as a second premise. However, on that construal of the argument,

<sup>12</sup> Cognoscenti will recognize that the following is the pattern of the crucial sub-proof in Stewart Cohen's original formulation of 'bootstrapping' arguments. Cohen 2002.

there is no question of running it on to acquire, or enhance, epistemic credentials for Testimony-3: the resulting argument is question-begging in the classical sense of (tacitly) assuming its conclusion as a premise.

Now, FBI-3 and CarTheft-3 are not background premises in that sense—premises of which mention is suppressed but which need to be made explicit if the respective arguments are to be *valid*. When they are entered as additional explicit premises, the arguments to the respective 2-propositions are still ampliative and defeasible by additional information. Still, presumably ampliative arguments can also have suppressed premises. When is it reasonable to regard a proposition as a suppressed—a “background”—premise in such an argument, given that its introduction will not make the argument deductively valid?

One suggestion, as a first approximation,<sup>13</sup> would be that something may properly be described as a suppressed premise in any argument, ampliative or otherwise, if it represents information without which the conclusion will be unjustified but with which, together with that represented by the explicit premises, it will be justified—albeit perhaps still defeasibly so. On this suggestion, FBI-3 and CarTheft-3 will count as suppressed premises in their respective arguments just in case in conjunction with their respective 1-propositions they provide adequate, though still defeasible justification for accepting the respective 2-propositions, for which however the respective 1-propositions do not provide adequate justification on their own.

Is that so? Well, obviously enough, the question needs situating in some further assumptions about the informational context. On the one hand, one might very well be justified in believing FBI-2 purely on the basis of FBI-1—in an ordinary everyday context where it was reasonable not to be bothered about possible movie-making. On the other hand, one might very well not be justified in believing FBI-2 even on the basis of FBI-1 and FBI-3—in a context, say, where there was a reasonable concern about the possibility that criminals, posing as FBI agents, were setting up a bank robbery.

That brings out that the Background Warrant model should predict that transmission failure is going to be a highly contextual feature of an argument—specifically, that it will have the effect, in the kind of simplified three-step inferences standardly used as foci in the discussion, that whether or not there is transmission failure will depend on whether or not the context—what is at stake and what is given by way of collateral information—is such as to require the assurance of antecedent justification of the 3-proposition in order for the ampliative inference from the 1-proposition to the 2-proposition to be reasonable. And that may seem to be as it should be.

But actually things do not seem to be as they should be. If the model of transmission failure is to be that of a (suppressed) premise–circular argument, then where the context is (suitably relaxed and therefore) such that a candidate suppressed premise is not

<sup>13</sup> Only a first approximation, because we need to allow for the possibility that something features as a background premise in a *bad* argument. A second approximation might suggest that the notion we need is that of a thinker *taking it that* his conclusion needs, and has, the support of the premise in question, in addition to that of those explicitly cited.

needed, no problem of transmission of warrant to it as a conclusion should be expected. For instance, if the context is such that men dressed in FBI jackets can reasonably be assumed to be FBI agents, about their lawful business, then—on the Background Warrant model—there should be no problem about transmission of warrant from FBI-1 via FBI-2 to FBI-3. But there manifestly *is* a problem: even in a context where it is independently reasonable to take it that what I'm witnessing is not part of the filming of a movie scene, it will be hardly part of my *grounds* for that conviction that men dressed in blue "FBI" jackets are swarming around the intersection, posting signs that say, "No cameras allowed!" Similarly for CarTheft: the context may be such that it is independently reasonable to expect that my car hasn't been stolen, or towed, and hence that I am going to be able to act on my intention to drive my car away from where I left it; but it is hardly part of my evidence that my car is where I left it that I have that particular intention.

In brief: whether an additional premise is needed in a putatively enthymematic, ampliative inference varies as a function of what may reasonably be held to be open to doubt in the context and the stakes—the importance of the inference's leading to truth. But impressions of transmission failure, though information-sensitive in the ways earlier reviewed—sensitive, that is, to the character of the warrant for the premises and one's collateral information (recall the equine-loving zoo-owner of note 4)—do not seem to vary in *this* way. FBI and CarTheft seem, on first take, to be non-transmissive whatever is taken to be doubtful, and whatever the stakes. That is what makes them nice examples.

There is a second problem with the Background Warrant model. Pryor himself notes that the model is not in fact the best of *prima facie* fits for some of the classic putative examples of transmission failure, for instance *Zebras*:

Zebra-1    There's a black-and-white striped, horse-shaped creature in this zoo pen, and the pen is labelled "Zebra"

So, probably:

Zebra-2    That animal is a zebra

So:

Zebra-3    That animal is not a mule cleverly disguised to look like a zebra,

and *Red Wall*:

RedWall-1    That wall looks red

So probably

RedWall-2    That wall is red

So:

RedWall-3    That wall isn't white but lit by tricky red lighting.

Pryor's thought is that Zebra-3 (and, I would imagine, RedWall-3) are somehow too *specific*, that what is wanted by way of a suppressed premise in each of the arguments is something of the level of generality of, respectively,

Zebra-3★ Zoo pens don't often contain animals disguised to look other than they are.

and

Red Wall-3★ Surfaces are not often illuminated by coloured lighting in such a way as to appear other than their actual colour even though the presence of the coloured lighting is otherwise visually unapparent.

Maybe these two premises represent additional information which would—in a given context—be both needed and adequate, in conjunction with Zebra-1 and RedWall-1 respectively, to justify the transitions to Zebra-2 and RedWall-2; and maybe the more specific Zebra-3 and RedWall-3 are not so adequate: after all, it is perfectly consistent with Zebra-3, but in tension with Zebra-3★, that the animal in question be a cleverly disguised Shetland Pony, and perfectly consistent with Red Wall-3, but in tension with Red Wall-3★, that the wall in question be a pale grey wall lit by tricky red lighting. But what in that case is the explanation, according to the Background Warrant model, of the failure of transmission to the original Zebra-3 and RedWall-3? The core idea of the model is, simply, that warrant doesn't transmit to a conclusion that is, in effect, a suppressed premise in an enthymematic argument; such arguments are question-begging. But Zebra-3 and RedWall-3 are not plausible candidates to be the relevant suppressed premises. The plausible candidates are Zebra-3★ and Red Wall-3★. So the letter of the model does not apply. What, to repeat, is the story about the failure of transmission to the *original* conclusions, Zebra-3 and Red Wall-3?

A proponent of the model might try saying that warrant doesn't transmit to a conclusion which is independently supported by a suppressed premise in the argument. But that will not do. Something can be an independent (ampliative) consequence of such a premise and at the same time have its credentials enhanced by the additional information encoded in the explicit premises—so that intuitively an (additional) warrant for it is provided when the argument to it is run from the full premise set. Consider, for example,

Mushroom-1 The white flesh of this mushroom reddens when bruised

So, probably:

Mushroom-2 This mushroom is a specimen of The Blusher (*Amanita Rubescens*)

So:

Mushroom-3 This mushroom belongs to the *Amanita* genus.<sup>14</sup>

As fungi enthusiasts will know, the inference from Mushroom-1 to Mushroom-2 would be pretty chancy without collateral information; there are many white-fleshed

<sup>14</sup> A genus that includes many of the most famous and stereotypical toadstools, including the red and white spotted Fly Agaric, the Death Cap used by Agrippina to poison Claudius, and the brilliant white Destroying Angel.

fungi that display a reddish bruising effect, including *Agaricus Campestris*, the common Field Mushroom. But add the premise

Mushroom-1★ This mushroom has the characteristic appearance of many examples of the Amanita genus, including the bulbous-based stem, and spotty umbrella-shaped cap,

and the inference to Mushroom-2 becomes very strong (though still defeasible: there are other, rarer, blushing Amanitas). And while Mushroom-1★ independently supports Mushroom-3, it is plausible that this support can be strengthened by adding Mushroom-1—as it will be if false Amanita-lookalikes are more common than false Amanita-lookalikes that blush, i.e. false Blushers.<sup>15</sup>

There is thus some doubt whether the Background Warrant model actually has anything to say about *Zebra*, *Red Wall*, and others among the standard examples.

The impression that the Background Warrant model misunderstands the nature of warrant transmission failure is strengthened further by the third of the considerations I advertised: the fact that warrant transmission failure is a feature of arguments where there is simply no room for the idea that additional suppressed premises are at work. All the three-step illustrations that we have so far considered involve a defeasible inferential step from a 1-proposition to a 2-proposition, and the idea that background premises may be involved gets a grip only and purely in virtue of this feature—simply, additional information may be needed to rationalize this defeasible inferential step. So, what if there is no such inferential step? What if we start with the 2-proposition, thought of as grounded not on the basis of ampliative inference from a 1-proposition but as the output of some non-inferentially conceived capacity of cognition—perception, for instance, or memory? After all, it would be philosophically controversial, at best, to represent the epistemology of Zebra-2 as always inferential in the kind of way depicted by representing it as arrived at via something like Zebra-1. Cannot one normally just look and see? When you ask a small child, “And what are those animals, Jenny?”, you are seeing whether she can recognize them by looking, not whether she can construct an adequately supported ampliative inference. But an inference that starts with

Zebra-2 That animal is a zebra,

conceived as non-inferentially warranted by casual observation, and then proceeds to

Zebra-3 That animal is not a mule cleverly disguised to look like a zebra,

is intuitively no more warrant transmissive than the original, and for just the same reason: the subject has no warrant for Zebra-3 based purely on the visual observation of the animal; the relevant possibility of a cleverly disguised mule is precisely that of an animal fashioned to be visually indistinguishable from a zebra. When, however the inference starts with Zebra-2, it is too late (there is no need) for a suppressed premise.

<sup>15</sup> It needs remark that the considerations raised by this kind of example, and by the preceding discussion are effectively noted in section III of Pryor's essay. I am not sure why, in the light of these “tricky details”, he seemingly retains confidence that a successful charge of transmission failure waits upon the applicability of the Background Warrant model.

## Transmission Failure (II)—Authenticity-Conditions

As Pryor notes, I have in previous work<sup>16</sup> proposed two broad ‘templates’ for the characterization and diagnosis of non-transmissive arguments. The first of these, the *information-dependence* template,<sup>17</sup> was designed for the case where the warrant for the premises of an argument is itself grounded in an ampliative inference from a defeasible evidential base. The second, the *disjunctive template*, was an attempt to cope with the kind of apparent transmission failure cases, just remarked, where the premises of the argument are not inferentially grounded at all but conceived as delivered directly by the operation of some appropriate cognitive capacity. The information-dependence template proposed, roughly, that warrant does not transmit to a conclusion which one needs already to know, or justifiably believe, if one is to be justified in regarding one’s evidence for its premises as adequate. The disjunctive template proposed, roughly, that warrant does not transmit to a conclusion a suspicion of whose falsity would rationally require doubt that the conditions are suitable for the effective working of the cognitive faculties relied upon to accomplish warrant for the premises in the first place.<sup>18</sup>

Pryor suggests that the two templates can each be seen as instances of the Background Warrant model. I think he is right that it is desirable—and should be possible—to subsume them under a single account (though not, if the reservations I have lodged against it are sound, under the Background Warrant model). I’ll briefly indicate what I think is the right direction of generalization.

First, let us introduce a very broad notion of a *cognitive project*. A cognitive project is defined by a pair: a question, and a procedure one might competently execute in order to answer it. Thus there is a cognitive project associated with the question “What’s the weather like today?”, which one can execute by looking outside; another cognitive project associated with the same question which one can execute in a windowless room by looking at the forecast in yesterday’s newspaper. There is a cognitive project associated with the question, “Where will you spend July?”, which one can execute by an operation of whatever it is one does to know of one’s intentions. There is a cognitive project associated

<sup>16</sup> Wright 2000, p. 143; Wright 2002, §IV; Wright 2003, p. 59; Wright 2004, p. 171.

<sup>17</sup> Here is the characterization offered at Wright 2002, pp. 335–6:

A body of evidence, *e*, is an *information-dependent* warrant for a particular proposition, *P*, if regarding *e* as warranting *P* rationally requires certain kinds of collateral information, *I*. Some examples of such *e*, *P* and *I* have the feature that elements of the relevant *I* are themselves entailed by *P*, (together perhaps with other warranted premises). In that case, any warrant supplied by *e* for *P* will not be transmissible to those elements of *I*.

Note the play in this formulation with what is required if one is to regard *e* as warranting *P*. Potential contrast: what is required if *e* is to warrant acceptance of *P*. This will become important shortly.

<sup>18</sup> Thus, a suspicion that the animal in question is a cleverly disguised mule would require doubt whether the circumstances are suitable for identifying animal species simply by looking. The first formulation of the disjunctive template is in Wright 2000. That was defective in a way noted by Brian McLaughlin, and remedied in Wright 2003. Subsequent further vicissitudes of the disjunctive template are described in Wright 2011, pp. 88–92. The descendant of it put forward in that discussion was designed to unify its precursors with the information-dependence template. I shall outline its general motivation below, but I will not in this discussion be concerned with its detail.



with the question, “Are there planets associated with that star?”, which one can execute by the operation of a radio telescope and a suitable interpretation of one’s findings.

Next, let an *authenticity-condition*<sup>19</sup> for a given cognitive project be any condition doubt about which would rationally require doubt about the efficacy of the proposed method of executing the project, or about the significance of its result, irrespective of what that result might be.<sup>20</sup> That my visual system is working properly, or that yesterday’s weather forecast is likely to be accurate, are among the conditions for the authenticity of the two mentioned projects for determining the weather; that I am likely to have a normally lucid awareness of my intentions is an authenticity-condition of the project focused on my prospective whereabouts in July; and that my radio telescope is functioning properly, as well as a whole load of theory about electromagnetic radiation, are authenticity-conditions for the project about the distant star.

In general, authenticity-conditions thus include such things as: normal and proper functioning of relevant cognitive faculties, the reliability of instruments utilized, the amenability of the circumstances to the proposed method of investigation, the correctness of relevant theory, the soundness of relevant principles of inference utilized in developing and collating one’s results, the good standing of relevant concepts used in any aspect of the enquiry, and so on. Such conditions are typically things one takes for granted in cognitive projects ranging from the mundane, like glancing at a clock to see if it is time to leave, to the more methodologically self-conscious, like a carefully controlled scientific experiment. But for cognitive projects that involve ampliative inference, authenticity-conditions will also encompass conditions that are necessary if the evidence encoded in the premises of such inferences is to have its intended bearing on the conclusions. It is, for example, rational to take the look of a wall as good evidence for its colour only if one has no reason to doubt that the lighting conditions are such as to allow the real colours of surfaces to be revealed in how they look. Likewise, it is rational to take my intentions as good evidence of what I will end up doing only if I have no reason to doubt that conditions are, in relevant respects, such as not to obstruct my carrying out my intentions. It is this generality in the notion of an authenticity-condition—encompassing both conditions for effective cognitive function and conditions of evidential relevance—that underwrites the kind of unifying generalization of the two templates that I want to canvass.

My basic suggestion about transmission failure, in the most general (somewhat overstated) terms, is this: *that you cannot rationally transmit a claim to warrant for certain*

<sup>19</sup> Elsewhere I have more often used the term, “presupposition”, for this notion. But of course it is a major question whether, or in what sense, the satisfaction of conditions of this kind is indeed in large measure *presupposed* in ordinary cognitive commerce. So the more neutral “authenticity-condition” seems better.

<sup>20</sup> As the attentive reader will have spotted, this qualification is crucial if we are to capture the intended notion. If it were waived, a prior opinion about the matter under investigation might rationally lead one to doubt the competence or significance of the project if that opinion happened to conflict with the upshot; and that would then have the effect that the very proposition which the project found in favor of would rank as an authenticity-condition of the project concerned.

premises across an entailment to anything that is an authenticity-condition for (any among) the very cognitive project(s) which purportedly generate(s) that claim to warrant. There had better be nothing in general amiss with the idea that merely looking at an animal in a zoo enclosure, or looking at a wall, can put one in a position to claim warrant that the animal in question is a zebra, or that the wall is red. But you cannot, merely by looking at the animal, or the wall, get in position rationally to claim that conditions are suitable for the identification of animal species, or surface colours, just on the basis of unaided vision. That conditions are so suitable is a general authenticity-condition for each of the two projects concerned. But so are the more specific consequences of that condition detailed in their respective 3-propositions. Neither the general condition, nor the specific forms of it detailed in the relevant 3-propositions, are open to merely visual confirmation.<sup>21</sup>

Now, the general run of authenticity-conditions for a cognitive project that putatively eventuates in a warrant for a statement S will be logically independent of S. That my eyes are working properly is logically independent of the wall's being red; that I am in a state of normal cognitive lucidity sufficient to enable the identification of my own intentions is logically independent of my being about to drive my car away from Lot 15. But Cohen's bootstrapping manoeuvre illustrates how one particular kind of authenticity-condition—the reliability of a source on a particular occasion—becomes deductively accessible if one pools the truth of S, = the deliverance of the source on that occasion, with the fact that the source delivered it. And the type of case typified by Dretske's examples illustrates a different ploy (Sceptical Hypothesis Negating, or *Skyping*) to the same effect: whatever S may be, it will always be straightforward to construct a specific sceptical hypothesis whose obtaining would falsify an authenticity-condition for the achievement of warrant for S by a particular kind of cognitive project and whose negation, which will thus also qualify as an authenticity-condition for the project concerned,<sup>22</sup> will actually be entailed by S. Where M is the method, or combination of methods, constitutive of the project concerned, we can construct such a sceptical hypothesis merely by formulating something that realizes the rubric: not-S is true in circumstances that render its truth undetectable by M. If the basic suggestion about transmission failure outlined is correct, we will therefore return the same verdict about both kinds of case: bootstrapping arguments, no less than skyping arguments, fall foul of transmission failure.<sup>23</sup>

But how might one *argue* that the basic suggestion is correct? A rigorous demonstration would be possible only within the compass of a developed theory of evidential

<sup>21</sup> So, the basic suggestion I am canvassing comes close to Pryor's Anti-underminer model of transmission failure. See his essay at pp. 298–300. I will react to his counterexamples below.

<sup>22</sup> It follows from the characterization of an authenticity-condition that the negation of any proposition, Q, which is inconsistent with an authenticity-condition, A, for a given project is itself an authenticity-condition for that project. For then to the extent that you doubt not-Q, you must raise your credence in Q, and correspondingly in not-A. So doubt of not-Q must impact upon the good standing of the relevant project to exactly the extent that doubt of A does.

<sup>23</sup> —and do so at the stage of the sub-proof, before the accumulation of any putative 'track-record' of success. Objections to the warrant-generative capacities of bootstrapping reasoning that focus on its inductive aspect are therefore beside the (principal) point.

support and rational belief management whose basics would require, and ultimately admit of no more than, intuitive motivation. So I think we have to settle, *au fond*, for intuitive plausibility. But the tabled suggestion is, I think, very plausible when taken in a certain kind of epistemically reflective setting. Suppose you are about to undertake an investigation, using method M, into a particular question—let's say: determining the capacity of a garden water-tank by measuring its sides and multiplying. One authenticity-condition for the effectiveness of M is the correct calibration of your tape measure. Another is whether it can be depended on to be stable in length through the successive measurements. A third is that the dimensions of the tank be, near enough, regular (that each of its faces is, near enough, rectangular). A fourth is the steadiness of your hand. And so on. You would presumably, if prompted, recognize each of these conditions as germane and would have some significant prior degree of confidence that they are likely to be satisfied if you remained willing to undertake the investigation in the described way. Now, you might run the investigation and, as a result, come rationally to have some increased measure of uncertainty about any of these conditions. Perhaps your results on a single edge of the tank fluctuate. Perhaps your results on corresponding edges diverge. So, running the investigation, you can get into a position when you may justifiably come to increased doubt whether all the conditions that need to be satisfied in order for your project to deliver reliable results are simultaneously met. By contrast, there seems to be no question of running the investigation and, as a result of what you find, rationally taking yourself to have acquired grounds for *increased confidence* about that—increased confidence that *every one* of the various relevant authenticity-conditions, a doubt about which would occasion rational misgivings about the status of the results of the project, is satisfied.

This point needs careful statement. A project may develop in such a way that you *do* get to refurbish your confidence, *en route*, in one of its authenticity-conditions or another. You may get evidence that the tank is indeed regular, for example (and hence that its capacity is determinable by a simple multiplication), by obtaining mutually consonant results for each of its three relevant dimensions, even on a badly calibrated tape measure. But you cannot even do that unless the tape measure is at least stable. You may get evidence that the tape measure is stable—or stable enough—by obtaining a series of mutually consonant results on a single edge. But you cannot do that unless the edge itself is stable in length . . . The authenticity-conditions pop up like Hydra-heads. Even if, in the course of the investigation, things occur that reinforce your confidence in one or another amongst them, you will have to acknowledge that, in taking that to be the correct assessment of the effect, you will be investing in a significant prior degree of confidence in other such conditions about which nothing has occurred that should bolster your confidence. And your prior level of confidence in these conditions will set a limit on how confident you should rationally allow yourself to be about the overall significance of the investigation, and the good standing of the results that it returns. It would be quite irrational, for example, to invest more

confidence in your finding about the stability of the tape measure through the relevant measurements than you have in the stability of the measured edge.

The general point is that any cognitive project will have authenticity-conditions in which nothing that happens in the course of the project should, if one is rational and clear-headed, improve one's prior credence. But now that limit will apply even if there is some trick one can run—like bootstrapping, or skyping—to bring an authenticity-condition within the deductive light-cone, as it were, of the very results of the investigation. In particular, it would be absurd to profess oneself open-minded about some such condition at the outset of the investigation and then to find reassurance in its entailment by results whose good standing in turn one had recognized to depend upon its satisfaction. If you had started out open-minded about whether the condition was met, you should be open-minded about the standing of those results. And in that case, you should be open-minded about whether you have any warrant to transmit to their consequences.

So here again is a rather more cautious statement of the general point. Any cognitive project—any question and method pair,  $P?$  and  $M$ —will be associated with a more or less open-ended set of authenticity-conditions. And some of these—call them *M-inaccessible* authenticity-conditions—will be such that one can recognize in advance that the execution of the project will do nothing, except coincidentally, to rationally raise one's credence that they are satisfied. A proper subset of the latter may be included among the logical consequences of  $P$ . Should the project find in favor of  $P$ , the claim to warrant for  $P$  thereby afforded will not transmit to any among these *M-inaccessible* consequences of it.

I shall not here attempt to make any general proposal about how exactly it may be settled that a particular authenticity-condition is or is not in this situation for given  $P?$  and  $M$ . At the least, it is going to be an information-relative matter. For example, background information may make it possible for the mere visual appearance of Dretske's zebras to contribute towards a warrant that they are indeed not cleverly disguised mules. (See note 4.) The examples of transmission failure standardly canvassed in the literature are all cases where the conclusion of the argument in question would be expectably inaccessible by the method of investigation of the premises understood to be in play, but where suitable additional information might change that. I leave it as an exercise to the reader to devise informational settings that would turn the trick for others of the standard examples.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>24</sup> "Pryor's counter examples to the Anti-Under minor model present the obverse case: examples where, on tacitly understood assumptions of normality, warrant does transmit to an authenticity-condition but where transmission failure can be introduced by tinkering with those assumptions. For example, in the argument (this volume, p. 299):

Rat-1. [Visible experiences of rats]

Rat-2. I see rats in the corner

Rat-3. So there are some visible animals in the pen.

Rat-3 does indeed present an authenticity condition, as characterized earlier, for the evidential relevance of the experience described in Rat-1 to the statement Rat-2. And, as Pryor reports, it does seem that in normal

The reader will have marked the shift over the preceding few paragraphs to a preponderance of talk of the transmission of *claim* to warrant. This is of course fully deliberate, and significant. Pryor opines at one point that there is not “enough in the texts to support reading much in to Wright’s higher-order-ish talk”.<sup>25</sup> I own that there are elements of equivocation in my earlier discussions, but my considered view is that insofar as a diagnosis of transmission failure is rendered intuitive by the basic examples, the intuition is of a failure appreciated at the level of *reflective epistemic responsibility*: thus, you couldn’t sensibly regard, or offer to others, your intention as evidence that conditions obtain that will enable you to carry it out; you couldn’t sensibly regard, or offer to others, the mere look of the stripy equines as evidence that the stripes are not a sham; you couldn’t sensibly regard, or offer to others, the activity of the FBI-jacket wearing men as evidence that they are not part of a scene for a film. The examples that supposedly provide intuitive support for the reality of transmission failure phenomena in the first place are all most naturally interpreted in this kind of way.

Further clarification is wanted, naturally, of what the higher-level notion comes to—what it is to ‘be in position to claim warrant’. As I intend the notion, it demands a potential for reflective awareness that one is warranted and hence, at least if it is allowed that ordinary—first-level—warrant may be conferred by external circumstances beyond reflective awareness, is not the same thing as having warrant for warrant.<sup>26</sup> But I cannot here encroach on the task of trying to provide a more satisfyingly explicit account. Suffice it to say that unless we take the view—which some internalists may but many of externalist sympathies will not—that to be in possession of warrant for accepting a certain proposition always ensures being in a position to lay claim to warrant for accepting that proposition, it is going to be an additional step to argue that the standard examples can serve equally well as examples of warrant transmission failure at first-level.<sup>27</sup>

The matter is of some considerable significance. There is, in particular, a substantial issue whether the debate between so called liberals and conservatives over perceptual justification may not turn on an ambiguity of focus between issues concerning first-level warrant and second-level warrant respectively, with the possible result that Moore’s Proof, for instance, might indeed be serviceable for the provision of warrant to believe in an external world while useless for underwriting *claim* to such warrant, so useless in the context of epistemological debate, because non-transmissive at second-level.

circumstances the argument would transmit justification to Rat-3. But imagine circumstances in which we have reason to suspect that our mule-disguising zookeeper has also installed hallucination-engendering radiation in many of his empty pens, to give the impression of a well- and interestingly stocked zoo (the ‘rats’ are built in for extra plausibility). Then we might want reassurance of Rat-3 enroute to investing in any confidence that the experiences described by Rat-1 provide good evidence for the cognitive accomplishment marked by Rat-2.

<sup>25</sup> This volume, p. 294.

<sup>26</sup> For if warrant is nothing of which one need be capable of being aware, nor is warrant for warrant.

<sup>27</sup> Let the reader beware of confusing issues concerning the transmission of (various form of) higher-order warrant with those raised by Pryor when he introduces consideration of what he calls the Higher-Order Background Warrant Model (this volume, pp. 295–7). The latter is a model that proposes that there are constraints on the transmission of first-order warrant that involves higher-order warrant for certain of the background assumptions. That is an interesting idea, but it is not what I have been talking about in the preceding paragraphs here.

## Liberals and Conservatives

We can characterize an inference as *Moorean* if its conclusion is an authenticity-condition, of one kind or another, for the attainment of warrant in some envisaged way for one of its premises or lemmas. Since the existence of an external material world is an authenticity-condition both for the evidential relevance of one's sensory experience to propositions about the characteristics of local material objects and for the effective function of one's perceptual faculties, Moore's Proof—whether its premise, “Here is one hand”, is taken as defeasibly evidentially grounded or as directly known—is a Moorean inference *par excellence*.

Liberalism and Conservatism are best characterized with respect to quadruples consisting of a target proposition, P; some envisaged form of evidence or cognitive achievement, C; an authenticity-condition, A; and a species of epistemic warrant, E. The Conservative view will be that the accomplishment by means of C of a warrant of type E with respect to P will require as an enabling condition that one be in E (or some other specified warrant state) with respect to A. The Liberal will demur, holding that the attainment of E for P by means of C need rest on no positive form of warrant for A—that it will suffice merely if the agent has no warrant for not-A.

Suppose, for example, that E is knowledge, and the first three elements in the relevant quadruple are those in Moore's Proof, considered as the transition:

Moore-1 (C) My experience is in all respects as if I was holding my hand in front of my face

So probably:

Moore-2 (P) Here is a hand So:

Moore-3 (A) There is an external material world.

Then Liberalism with respect to this particular quadruple says that, in order to accomplish knowledge of the proposition P on the basis of the evidence, C, I do not need to know, or independently have adequate grounds for accepting A, that there is an external material world. It is enough merely that I have no antecedent reason to doubt it. Conservatism, by contrast, will hold that it is only in an epistemic context where I have a specified kind of prior warrant for acceptance that there is a material world that my evidence C has any tendency to support P, that here is a hand.

Obviously there is going to be space for such a clash of attitudes with respect to the quadruple associated with absolutely any Moorean inference. Consider again:

Testimony-1 (C) I ask Smith the time and, glancing at his watch, he says, “Eight o'clock”

So, probably:

Testimony-2 (P) It's eight o'clock

So:

Testimony-3 (A) Smith is telling the truth on this occasion.

Let E again be knowledge. Then in order, the Conservative will say, to achieve knowledge that P on the basis of S's testimony C, I must independently know, or have adequate grounds for accepting A, that S is telling the truth on this occasion. For the Liberal, by contrast, knowledge that P can be achieved, in the best case, purely on the basis of S's testimony; no antecedent knowledge of or other form of warrant for S's truthfulness is needed.

The relativization of the debate to the appropriate kind of quadruples is important. For one thing, it allows that even when C, P, and A are fixed, the merits of a conservative, or liberal stance may vary as a function of E, the kind of epistemic warrant that is involved. Knowledge, for example, may be taken to be more exigent than other forms of epistemic warrant exactly in that it demands warrant for authenticity-conditions in particular cases where they do not. (This is one version of the thought behind 'Russellian Retreat'.) But perhaps more important for my present purpose, it leaves provision for the possibility that one may, with respect to a particular kind of quadruple, be conservative concerning the conditions for higher-level warrant—*claim* to warrant—while liberal about the conditions for the (mere) possession of warrant.

Clearly there can be no general opposition between "the liberals" and "the conservatives". No one is going to be liberal right across the board, for all types of proposition, all kinds of defeasible evidence or cognitive accomplishment that may bear on them, all authenticity-conditions for that particular bearing, and all forms of epistemic warrant. Such a view would condone an open flood of epistemic irresponsibility. The interesting, disputed questions concern for which selections of the four parameters conservatism is appropriate, and why, and for which selections the more relaxed stance of liberalism is perfectly rational.<sup>28</sup>

At the time I write this, it is still true that most liberal-conservative debate has been focused on the nature of the warrant provided by a perceptual experience for beliefs about the local environment. But it is striking that the considerations which, respectively, most powerfully motivate the opposed views do seem to belong at different levels. The most powerful consideration on behalf of *dogmatism*—liberalism about basic perceptual warrant—is that we do not wish to deny the title of warranted belief to opinions that children, and others who are relatively epistemologically innocent, form without considering, let alone marshalling evidence to discount the kind of possibility typified by hallucination or the artful disguise of mules. So it seems we think that the acquisition of perceptual knowledge, or other forms of perceptual warrant, doesn't

<sup>28</sup> Perhaps, indeed, a fifth parameter is called for: that of the context of interests in which the evidence in question is assessed, or the relevant putative cognitive achievement takes place. Certainly, it is quite plausible enough that, under the aegis of a broadly conservative view of the role of a particular authenticity-condition, A, how much, and what quality, of independent evidence for A is required in order for belief in the target proposition to be warranted may very well vary as a function of the interests of the believer (or the attributer, or an assessor...). It is not so clear, though, that such a change of context can transform a case where a liberal view is appropriate, that is, when *no* independent warrant is required for A, to one where conservatism is appropriate and independent warrant is required. But I shall not further consider this kind of complication here.

require the kind of epistemological ‘policing’ of authenticity-conditions that conservatism suggests. But it is different when we adopt a stance in which we undertake to scrutinize our claims to perceptual knowledge, or warrant. Then we seem obliged either to take a positive view of any authenticity-condition that may be entered into the conversation, or to qualify our claim to warrant. Standing before the zoo pen and inclined to claim knowledge that the animals before me are zebras, there is no ducking the question, “So you are taking it that your visual system is functioning satisfactorily today, and that those animals are not artfully disguised members of another species?” And the intuitively needed answer if the claim to warrant is to be sustained will be not that “I have no view about those matters, and am not required to have one. It’s enough that I have no reason to doubt either condition”, but rather, “Of course”. So there does seem to be an undeniable difference between what we want to say about the conditions governing the acquisition of perceptual warrant and what we want to say about the conditions under which such a warrant may rationally be claimed. And the conservatives seem to have the better of the issue when what is in question is the latter: one cannot rationally profess agnosticism about something one acknowledges to be an authenticity-condition for a route to the acquisition of a warrant which one simultaneously enters a claim to have travelled.

However, the difficulty with conservatism, whether at first or second level, is that—unless curtailed at some point—it threatens to set impossible standards for the acquisition of warrant, or the acquisition of the right to claim it. For if a subject is to be required to possess independent warrant for the satisfaction of a relevant authenticity-condition, or for the right to claim that it is satisfied, then that seems to demand the satisfactory completion of a prior independent cognitive project. And that in turn will have its own authenticity-conditions. If a conservative attitude is taken in turn towards them, then do we not launch a regress of which the upshot must inevitably be (first- or second-level) scepticism?

I don’t know if the predicament has often been expressed exactly along the foregoing lines. But there is, in the current epistemological milieu, a widely supported potential response. The response is that of externalism. If being in position to claim warrant is, as I at least intend, a matter to be ascertained by an exercise of reflective epistemic conscience, then provided warrant itself is internally construed—as a condition always apprehensible by, roughly, the exercise of psychological self-knowledge and a priori reflection—a suitably conceptually endowed and reflective subject is going to be able to get into a position to claim warrant just when she has one. And in that case, to the extent that we regard the second-level, conservative intuitions as robust, we will have to regard the first-level intuition—the relative ease with which perceptual knowledge is available to the epistemologically unsophisticated—as misleading, or at best in need of qualification. Children, we might then say, can at best get into perceptual states where, had they the appropriate conceptual resources and were they able to understand and police relevant authenticity-conditions, they *would* possess perceptually warranted, or knowledgeable, beliefs. They can, as the matter is some-



times expressed, accomplish *propositional* warrant. But their perceptually based beliefs would not be *doxastically* warranted. To describe their state as *knowledgeable*, in particular, would be a kind of (parental) indulgence. But the situation changes if perceptual warrant is regarded as an external matter—a question of “situational provenance”, of the nature of the circumstances and capacities drawn on in the formation of the relevant belief. On such a view—perhaps a simple reliabilism, perhaps something more elaborate—the conditions for the acquisition of perceptual warrant can be as liberalism conceives them: there is no need for the policing of authenticity-conditions. It is only when we go to the level of reflection and the vindication of claims that our epistemic consciences demand that policing be reinstated, and the ante be upped. To the extent that we are then persuaded that the demands of conscience are regressive and insatiable, there is nothing for it but to draw the gloomy conclusion that full intellectual conscientiousness—the taking of a thoroughgoing epistemic responsibility for all one’s beliefs—is an unattainable ideal. One must merely hope for the best. Specifically, one must hope that where, in the absence of demonstrated warrant for a recognized authenticity-condition, the right to claim warrant has not been made out, the external situational provenance of one’s belief, or beliefs, that have come under scrutiny is indeed of a relevantly felicitous kind. And at that point there is little left to do but to give the famous Strawsonian shrug.

The “Path of Entitlement”, as I conceive it, tries to do better than a Strawsonian shrug. The basic idea is very straightforward. If an authenticity-condition for a cognitive project, culminating in a particular belief that P, is something which one may *rationally take for granted*—a circumstance which one may implicitly rationally trust to obtain—then there would be a sense in which the belief that P can be warranted by the outcome of the project even for a subject who does not, and perhaps could not, consider the status of the condition in question. At first level, it will be provided for that the subject may proceed to the acquisition of knowledge, or warrant exactly as would be allowed—with no more cognitive work required than—if liberalism was true, without giving any thought to the status of the relevant authenticity-conditions. But at second level, at the level of laying claim to one’s epistemic accomplishments, so to speak, one would have to take ownership of one’s commitment to the satisfaction of the authenticity-condition in question, and that commitment would have to be in good standing. The presupposition of the thought that connected conservatism with scepticism was that this good standing would have to be a product of further enquiry. But of course the point of the notion of entitlement is that that is not so: epistemic entitlements are things that we may rationally trust to obtain *without* enquiry.

To render more vivid the way in which, as I would like to conceive it, the notion of epistemic entitlement works to reconcile the apparently conflicting intuitions at first and second level, it may be useful to make a comparison with the notion of a *moral right*. An agent does not need to know her rights in order to have them. Indeed, she may have no conception of a (particular kind of) right. And when she acts in ways that her rights mandate, her actions are in good standing even if she is unaware that they are so

mandated or, though aware, unable to make out a cogent case that they are. To the extent that they are conceived as having analogues of exactly these features in the sphere of action constituted by the formation and management of belief, entitlements may usefully be thought of as determining *epistemic rights*. In that respect, they contrast with evidential warrants, which seem more naturally conceived as conferring *epistemic obligations*: as determining what you *ought* to think. Thus, if there is indeed a general entitlement to take it that, absent evidence to the contrary, one's sensory faculties are working normally in conditions broadly conducive to their effective operation, then a young child, with no developed conception of sensory abnormality or illusion, who forms beliefs spontaneously in response to the promptings of her sense experience, is acting fully within her rights, and is, in that sense, justified in so doing, exactly as the dogmatist first-level intuition requires. But a mature agent, challenged to produce a warrant for so acting, will have to acknowledge a commitment to the obtaining of whatever circumstances she can recognize as being such that their failure would compromise the abilities that that the child is exercising. And a defence of the claim that her epistemic actions are generating perceptual warrants will require defending these commitments. That is the gist of the conservative second-level intuition. Scepticism threatens when we see no other possibility than evidential justification for these commitments in turn. But the point of the notion of entitlement is precisely that that is not the only possibility.

### A Third Way?

Here is an opportune place to consider Annalisa Coliva's interesting suggestion that liberalism and conservatism do not exhaust the possibilities. Liberalism holds that, for a selected range of propositions, *P*, warrant achieved by a particular method for which *A* is an authenticity-condition requires only that a thinker has no reason to doubt that *A* is met, where "no reason to doubt" embraces the case, in particular, when he has no information bearing on the matter one way or the other. No particular attitude to *A* is needed. He need not consider *A* at all. Conservatism, by contrast, holds that in such a case, the warrantability of the belief that *P* depends in addition on (some form of) independent warrant to take it that *A* is met. Coliva's suggestion is that, as against liberalism, the agent does need to take a stance on *A*: he needs to *assume* that *A* is satisfied. But this assumption is not something for which he requires warrant in turn. In particular, he has no need for a "non-evidential warrant".

I think there is a genuine additional possibility here, but it may be that the interpretation of it that I will consider is not exactly what Coliva has in mind. For one thing, it seems to me that Coliva's suggestion is very much more easily received at second level than at first level. That an unreflective thinker may acquire a perceptual warrant for a particular belief just in virtue of the course of her perceptual experience, without any consideration of authenticity-conditions and defeaters, is common ground both for the dogmatist and for the conservative who regards the satisfaction of relevant authenticity-

conditions as a matter of entitlement. They can agree, in other words, about what the subject *has to do* in order to obtain perceptual justification. Their disagreement is about the supporting architecture of the perceptual justification thereby obtained: the dogmatist holds that the warrant is conferred purely by the occurrence of the relevant perceptual experience; the conservative holds that the perceptual experience confers warrant only in a context in which there is either independent reason to believe that a given authenticity-condition is satisfied, or a right to take it for granted—to act, doxastically, in the manner which its acceptance rationalizes—even if the condition in question is not explicitly considered, even if the thinker concerned is in no position to consider it. In other words: although the entitlement-conservative augments his conception of the justificational architecture of a perceptual belief with the thesis that thinkers are rationally entitled to trust in satisfaction of the relevant authenticity-condition, what he requires of *the thinker* if she is justifiably forms a belief on the basis of her experience is exactly what the dogmatist requires. But on Coliva's proposal, at least on the natural understanding of “assume” as denoting a propositional attitude, something more would seem to be required: the thinker will also have to make some assumptions, whatever exactly ‘assuming’ is taken to consist in. Thus when interpreted at first level, Coliva's proposal can seem *more* demanding of the thinker than either entitlement-conservatism or dogmatism—and consequently open to the children-and-intelligent-animals kind of objection that moves the dogmatist in the first place.

I am not sure if it makes exactly the same point to observe that there seems to be no way of taking the thesis that justification requires that a thinker make certain assumptions as a thesis about *propositional* justification. A constraint that demands that the thinker be in certain actual psychological states can only be a constraint on *doxastic* justification—on the actual justification of actual belief. By contrast, as noted, dogmatism and entitlement-conservatism are, at first level, theses about propositional justificational architecture.<sup>29</sup>

Matters are much more straightforward, though, if Coliva's proposal is interpreted at second level—at the level of claims. And that is how I am going to take it. The key second-level intuition was that in order to stake a claim to warrant for a perceptual belief, a fully reflective, explicit thinker does need to take ownership of anything she recognizes as an authenticity-condition and, if she can muster no evidence on its behalf, to acknowledge that she is taking its satisfaction on trust. I read Coliva as intending to respect this intuition when she speaks of a requirement of “assumption” and accordingly, thus far, as marching in step with the conservative. What sets the ‘third way’ apart is rather, at a first approximation, that—apart of course from the thinker's having the relevant perceptual experiences—that is *all* that needs to be in place. No further

<sup>29</sup> The reader should note, however, that Coliva herself gives sympathetic mention to the children-and-intelligent-animals point. (This volume, p. 325.) This suggests that her requirement that authenticity-conditions be assumed *is* indeed intended to operate as a constraint on propositional justification, and hence that she does not intend ‘assumption’ to denote an actual psychological attitude. But I won't speculate further on this here.

condition has to be met—in particular, there is no call for some kind of further, non-evidential warrant for the assumptions concerned.

Taken just this far, Coliva's third way may be taken to coincide with a view associated with Harman<sup>30</sup> to the effect that all enquiry requires assumptions, and, in the absence of specific evidence pro or anti, there is nothing rationally to choose between one such set of assumptions and any other; so start where you like, as it were, and trust to pragmatic providence to filter out the wheat from the chaff. But I do not think that this is Coliva's proposal, nor do I think it particularly plausible. If a form of enquiry is proposed into some subject matter the credibility of whose results will depend on certain *ad hoc* assumptions about which there is not a jot of evidence, for or against, our intuitive sense in general will be that those results can acquire an at most conditional credibility. If we are to get past this conditionality, the assumptions have to be ones that we consider it *reasonable to make*. The Harmanian idea fails to engage with this point. The essentially *situated*—assumption-dependent—character of all enquiry seems to enjoin that there has to be a kind of reasonableness which is not evidence-dependent if we are ever to achieve an outcome which we may sensibly regard as more than conditional.

So, isn't that a reason to move to the entitlement-conservative conception of the matter, and so to pursue the entitlement project? Coliva's key thought, if I interpret her correctly, is that it is not. It is a reason to accept that there is a distinction between reasonable, or rational, assumption and unreasonable, or irrational, assumption that is not to be drawn in terms of a relatively favorable evidential situation. But that is not to say that the assumptions that it is reasonable to make without evidence on their behalf are assumptions that possess "non-evidential warrant". Rather, she suggests, there are certain assumptions that are *constitutive* of rational empirical enquiry. It is not that making them is sustained by certain special considerations that serve to explain why it is rational so to do. Rather, rational empirical enquiry simply *is* an activity in which these assumptions are made and allowed to govern the enquirer's conception of the evidential significance of various types of occurrence. To ask *why* they are rational—Coliva doesn't say exactly this, but it would seem to be in keeping with what she does say—is to ask a question incorporating a mistake very similar to that made by someone who asks what it is in the nature of Chess that mandates playing it on a board of 64 squares,  $8 \times 8$ , alternating black and white.

Coliva cites a Wittgensteinian inspiration for this suggestion. And there are certainly passages in his later writings, especially on mathematics, that seem to belong on this page. But though the tendency is there, I am doubtful whether it can provide a full, intellectually satisfying response to sceptical paradox. Suppose I ask, in a sceptical moment, why is it rational to expect propensities exhibited in our experience hitherto to be sustained into the future? And the reply comes: "Well, there is certainly no

<sup>30</sup> See e.g. Harman 2003.

evidence you can marshal to justify that conviction without in effect presupposing that inductive practice is rational (Hume's insight). But the truth is that the rationality of inductive inference is primitive, and in part *definitional* of our concept of rational empirical enquiry. There is therefore insufficient distinction between the notion of rational empirical enquiry in general and the notion of an enquiry incorporating inductive methodology to make intelligible space for your question." This is the kind of thought that—returning to her main example—I take Coliva to be advancing with respect to the notion of rational empirical enquiry and interpretation of perceptual experience based on the assumption that there is an external material world.

If this interpretation is broadly correct, then Coliva's third way is, in fact, a fairly familiar line of thought: the so called "paradigm case" response to scepticism that had some currency in the middle of the twentieth century. And if so, then—in the limited space at my disposal here—let me merely flag a couple of considerations which disincline me, for one, to this kind of response.

The first is that if it really were constitutive of our conception of rational empirical enquiry to assume that there is an external material world, then there should be a kind of unintelligibility about a sceptical challenge to the rationality of this assumption which would be at odds with the sense of paradox created by the best sceptical arguments that challenge it. There is, it seems to me, an implicit tension in the very notion that elements which are constitutive of a concept—which belong primitively to its identity and are not sustained by other features of it—should be sufficiently opaque to be controversial and apparently vulnerable to philosophical challenge. If *free* action, to take a parallel example, is, conceptually constitutively, simply action performed with a sense of freedom, for normal human reasons, without external force or duress, why does anyone feel the familiar kind of challenge posed by determinism as any kind of problem? The reply should leap to one's lips: "Well, but you misunderstand what freedom is. Mere antecedent causation of your action, even by events before your birth, is in no sense in tension with its freedom." Of course, some philosophers have said exactly that kind of thing. But the point is that their response is *controversial*; others (including the present author) have found it beside the point. How can a thesis about what is primitively constitutive of a concept be controversial? And how, if it can, might it be recognized to be correct?

In parallel, while a proponent of the third way and an entitlement theorist will agree that what the best sceptical paradoxes show is that our title to these takings-for-granted, trustings, assumptions, and expectations cannot in the end be evidentially earned, shouldn't the sceptic's transition from that acknowledgement to the conclusion that they cannot be rational at all scream out as an obvious non sequitur if their title as 'rational' was *conceptually constitutive* of our notion of rationality—if there were no further good question about what makes them rational? A proponent of the third way needs to explain how features that are constitutive of our concept of rational enquiry can nevertheless be sufficiently opaque to those who have mastered the concept to be *prima facie* coherently questionable.

My second, related reservation has to do with the question of what fixes the *identity* of concepts with the kind of normativity—I take it to be relevantly similar—exhibited both by concepts of epistemic rationality and concepts of morality. It seems to me, as to many, that it is possible in principle for cultures to have enormously divergent moral codes, major discrepancies in the things that they are prepared to classify as good, or obligatory, without raising any significant question whether all are exercising genuine, shared concepts of the *moral good* and the *morally obligatory*. Moral concepts can permit all kinds of divergent and *outré* applications without any questions being raised, necessarily, whether it is indeed concepts of the morally good and obligatory that are being applied. So my suspicion—and without much more argument, that’s all it can be—is that such concepts have, in effect, *no* paradigms, no canonical in-rules, as it were. What unifies morally evaluative concepts across communities whose fundamental moral standards are radically different is rather—very roughly—a common conception of the *consequences* of classifying a type of action as moral.

I want to suggest that the same model applies to epistemic evaluation. And if that is correct, then the sceptical challenge is not to be silenced by the suggestion that the rational can only be what we most fundamentally call ‘rational’. The model does not imply that there will always be a good challenge to explain *why* a particular kind of action in particular circumstances is morally good; or why a particular pattern of belief formation is rational. But the challenge is at any rate not to be stifled by the assertion that it enters primitively into our concepts of the good, or the rational, that they respectively embrace that kind of action, and that pattern of belief-formation.

If this is right, and if concepts of epistemic rationality are similar to moral concepts in this respect, then the basic claim of the third way about the constitution of our concept of epistemic rationality should give way to a thesis about the epistemic value of a trusting reliance on induction, or an uncritical acceptance of the existence of an external material world. The argument should be, not that the rationality of such acceptances is part of what we mean by “rational” but, substantively, that they are an essential part of any form of enquiry that is harnessed to the essential goals of enquiry: truth, knowledge, the avoidance of error, understanding, and the construction of an integrated, systematic and powerfully predictive framework of belief. I’ll say a little more about this at the end.

## Entitlement and Scepticism

Michael Williams’ thoughtful and probing essay displays many points of agreement with the work of mine, primarily Wright 2004, on which he mainly focuses, but some fundamental differences too. We are in broad agreement about the importance of the distinction between those doxastic merits that have to do with intellectual conscience and the attempt to attain reflective epistemic responsibility, and those conferred by “situational provenance”—reliable faculties, working in suitable conditions, for instance—and we agree that the proper focus of the sceptical challenge is on the former.

It is thus a challenge that arises at the level of claims to warrant in my preferred terminology, or at the level of “scepticism about philosophy” in his. We are also agreed that the challenge can be met: no “post-modernist” conclusion is licensed by the best—or worst—sceptical paradoxes. And, while disagreeing about how intuitive the premises are which those arguments exploit, I think we agree that some notion of epistemic entitlement has a key part to play in seeing the paradoxes off.

There are in my judgment just three major points of disagreement. First, Williams doubts that the right to trust, when grounded in the kinds of considerations marshalled in Wright 2004, can avoid being exceedingly permissive, providing *pari passu* not merely for entitlements to theological postulates, but to all manner of eccentric and ‘left-field’ notions. Second, he rightly observes that to address the essentially *a priori* challenge of scepticism, the considerations that ground entitlements must be *a priori* too—and he is doubtful whether I can consistently operate under that constraint. And finally, Williams is suspicious of the static epistemological architecture which, as he views matters, conditions my handling of the entitlement project—the framework of rigid, once-and-for-all distinctions between types of statement, determined by subject-matter, and types of evidence for them. This rigid framework, in his view, is required for the form of scepticism that I called ‘I-II-III’ scepticism, or Humean scepticism, and that he nicely calls *Locality scepticism*. He regards Locality scepticism, with some justification, as part of the pernicious legacy of foundationalism. Maybe nobody any longer believes in the system of our warranted beliefs as a great pyramidal structure, stratified by types of subject-matter, with experiential confirmation flowing in at the bottom and suffusing upwards via deeper and deeper theoretical inference. But in Williams’ view, I have kept too much of the image of this structure, repudiating in effect only the foundationalist conception of the flow of confirmation from experience. In Williams’ view, we have to drop the foundational structure too. And we have to do so not by way of a shift to Coherentism, but by way of a realization of the *radically contextual* character of epistemic projects, and the corresponding contextuality of the status, inferential or non-inferential, of the beliefs that they aim to vindicate or refute.

Williams’ view is that ‘statements about other minds’, ‘statements about material objects’, ‘statements about the past’, ‘statements about the future’, do not form epistemological kinds, and cannot therefore be open to any sceptical problem that presupposes that their justificational architecture can be captured by a fixed template. He has of course famously argued for this claim, and for the associated epistemological contextualism, at length elsewhere,<sup>31</sup> but since he does not go into the details in his present contribution, I should not take up the issue here. However, I actually doubt that a great deal hangs on it in the present context. The significance of the distinction between Cartesian scepticism and Locality scepticism is that they provide for generalized forms of sceptical challenge that respectively apply to the acquisition of

<sup>31</sup> Williams 1991.

non-inferential warrant, in the case of Cartesian scepticism, and of defeasible inferential warrant, in the case of Locality scepticism. As far as I can see, it makes no odds whether inferentiality/non-inferentiality are absolute (subject-matter determined) or contextual properties. The Cartesian and Humean arguments provide schematic recipes for challenging claims to warrant of those respective kinds, whatever settles what kind of warrant a statement is eligible for. It doesn't help to address them if the type of warrant for which a statement is deemed eligible is determined not once-and-for-all, by its subject matter, but by variable elements of epistemic context.<sup>32</sup>

Williams thinks that Humean—Locality—scepticism is in the end untroublesome because he doubts that there is any such thing as cognitive locality in the sense presupposed by standard presentations of the sceptical argument. I reply that contextual locality is enough to generate the problem. If, in a given context, the best evidential grounds we can muster for a certain belief are ampliative-inferential, there will be authenticity-conditions which, under challenge, we will need to endorse in order to accredit the inferential grounds concerned. The question is then going to arise with what right we take those conditions to be satisfied. The response can't always appeal to evidence—we won't always *have* any relevant evidence. And if it is, instead—what, if I interpret Williams correctly, he will want to say—that epistemic contexts come with a ready-made entitlement to take for granted or trust in things that define them, that is not a response to which I am unsympathetic. But it is a response that needs the support of a theory of entitlements that explains their contextual character.<sup>33</sup>

My expectation, though, would be that some of the requisite takings-for-granted—precisely the Moorean or metaphysically 'heavyweight' propositions<sup>34</sup>—are going to have to enjoy an inter-contextual entitlement status, things we may rationally take for granted across a huge sweep of investigative contexts. If Williams agrees that these metaphysical heavyweights are indeed entitlements, and that their status as such needs explanation, I do not see how he can avoid the kind of investigation attempted in the work of mine to which he is principally responding.

<sup>32</sup> Williams has an independent point to make against Cartesian scepticism. The Cartesian arguments proceed from a premise to the effect that we have no warrant for discounting a certain scenario of relevant cognitive disablement. Williams observes that we typically will have *every* reason to discount such a scenario—provided we are allowed to draw on ordinary background empirical knowledge! The much-derided pinch test, for example, can provide good evidence that one is not now dreaming if one is allowed to draw on the background empirical knowledge that pain is never dreamt. Now, this point about *dreams one has been able to identify as such* seems to owe nothing to any contextual conception of the distinction between non-inferentially and only-inferentially warrantable claims. But—as I mean to indicate by the italics—it has only limited force. Switch the disablement scenario to that of the *malin génie*, and it is hard to see how even to formulate a parallel reservation: maybe we have lots of ordinary empirical knowledge about what happens in dreams and in normal waking consciousness, but do we have comparable ordinary empirical knowledge about significant contrasts in the kinds of experience suffered by normally situated folk and genie-victims respectively?

<sup>33</sup> Maybe my own sketchy thoughts about 'entitlement of cognitive project' in Wright 2004 point in a direction that might be helpful for this.

<sup>34</sup> John Hawthorne's term.



I do not know how Williams himself would address the concern he voices about the possible excessive leniency of entitlement—the worrying prospect that anything that could be said to entitle us to matter, other minds, a substantial past, and a broadly nomologically regular world will also give houseroom to gods, fairies, interfering sprits, and mysterious rays. In any case, it seems to me that his contextualism faces an analogous challenge. Either the hypothesis that leprechauns exist is available to frame some, in context, legitimate cognitive project or other, or it is not. One hopes not. But if so, presumably the distinctions, yet to be drawn, that explain why not are going to be common ground.

There are a number of more specific issues raised by Williams' discussion which it would be good to try to take further. But I must defer that for another occasion. Let me conclude by responding to his concern that the constraint that the considerations that underwrite a particular entitlement utilize no non a priori resources, cannot be strictly adhered to. Williams thinks this because he is thinking—with ample justification provided by some elements in my discussions—of the non-evidential warrants that are grounded in entitlements as *pragmatic* warrants, as pragmatic reasons to trust. And pragmatic reasons are, of course, going to be contingent on our desires. So the reasons, if any, issuing from the considerations that are supposed to ground entitlements cannot be resolutely a priori. Where Hume postulated contingent if unalterable psychological propensities and limitations, I—Williams thinks—must postulate contingent human desires. The contingencies concerned may be unquestioned. But the fact will be that empirical information will be being smuggled in to the grounding of entitlements; and there will then be a question, in a context where other minds scepticism, for example, is on the table, why that is not a foul.

It is a good objection, but it needs to be distinguished from another one which has been lodged in the literature<sup>35</sup> and which likewise tries to make out that the entitlement project is spoiled as a response to scepticism by the pragmatic character of the warrants in which it trades. I think it will be useful if, in responding to Williams, I take the opportunity to outline a response to this latter objection first. The objection is in essence that the non-evidential warrants offered up by entitlement theory are in all respects comparable to the kind of reasons for believing in the Christian God highlighted by Pascal's wager. Those are non-evidential reasons par excellence. Their thrust is, not quite that believing is a dominant strategy for one's future utility, but that the utility of the belief, in the event that it's true, sufficiently outweighs the marginal disutility, should it be false, to make it a potentially rational one. Even if we granted that there could be such pressing prudential reason to try to bring it about that one held a certain belief, irrespective of its evidential status, the charge is that it is a point-missing response to a challenge to produce *epistemic* reasons to accept the propositions that have come under sceptical question.

<sup>35</sup> See for instance Jenkins 2007 and Elstein and Jenkins forthcoming; also Pritchard 2005.

There is a sneer associated with the term “pragmatic” in this context. It is good to shift the example so that goes away. So suppose that instead of eternal bliss for myself, what is in prospect, if I successfully undertake Pascal’s wager, is a very considerable alleviation of Third World suffering, poverty, and disease. In that case, I think we would be happy to say that there is a strong *moral* reason—admittedly an unusual one, but no less strong for that—for undertaking the wager and trying to bring it about that I have the appropriate belief. It is still a pragmatic reason. But the shift in the example brings out that pragmatic reasons are not a special genre of reason, to be contrasted with e.g. epistemic, moral, and prudential reasons. The thing about pragmatic reasons is that they are contingent on the goals of the agent—the rational explanation of an action performed in the light of a pragmatic reason will take the form of an ordinary practical syllogism involving belief and desire. There is therefore no good cause to deny certain kinds of pragmatic reason the title “epistemic”. This will be the case where, in the slot in the structure of the reasons for an action that is to be filled by the desires of the agent, the relevant desires are focused on *epistemic* goods and goals. In this sense, to show that certain trustings and unevicenced acceptances further the attainment of epistemic goods—of truth, understanding, and the anticipation of future experience, for example—is to provide *epistemic* reason for those acceptances. There is no point in denying the title.

The question that then immediately comes into focus is whether *evidence*—epistemic reason *proper*, as critics may have it—is different in this respect. It may seem so. If you have good evidence that P, and no defeaters, surely that gives you a reason to believe P that is quite independent of your desires? And surely, conversely, it would be a complete explanation of your actually believing P that you did have that evidence, irrespective of your desires. By contrast, the explanation of a belief held on pragmatic grounds will have to advert to the believer’s goals.

However I wonder if this is quite right. Suppose we replace the desire component by one of *valuing*. One’s values need not be available to one in the way that the having of desire, or the having of a certain goal, normally are. One does not have to appreciate one’s values, in the way one arguably does have to appreciate one’s desires and goals, in coming to rational practical decisions about what to do. Rather, one’s values shine through in one’s natural predispositions of action. Don’t we prize evidence because we consider it more likely that beliefs that are responsive to evidence will be true than otherwise? Isn’t the reason giving force of evidence contingent on our valuing the truth?

The question is in effect whether evidence provides *categorical* reason to believe—reason whose force is unconditional on any aspect of the psychology of the recipient. Certainly, it seems intelligible that someone who—on a particular question at least—has some kind of vested emotional interest in concealing the truth from himself should fail to feel the motive force of good evidence. Of course we would still want to say that he *ought* to feel its force. But is that because its force is categorical, or is it because we think that he ought to value the truth? If the latter is the right account, then part of the response to Williams’ concern about the a priority of entitlements might go like this. Even if entitlement is construed as pragmatic (though still epistemic) reason to trust in

certain propositions, it does not follow that the reasons thereby supplied involve *psychological contingency* in a way that violates the constraint that the considerations which disclose entitlements should be available at a purely *a priori* reflective level of consideration—the level “of philosophy”. For the motivational force of evidence too is conditional on the agent’s possession of those same epistemic values. If, *per impossibile*, someone was to produce, by way of a response to scepticism, a genuinely forceful argument for believing that there is an external material world, it would be bizarre to respond that the force of the argument was qualified by its dependence on the contingencies of our epistemic values. Philosophy is already up to its neck in those values. And nothing can be a forceful *a priori* argument for anything if the values concerned are not taken for granted.

I outline this response because I think it is worth thinking about. But it is not my preferred response. The basic insight behind the entitlement project—Wittgenstein’s insight, I believe—is that all enquiry is essentially situated in acceptances, some general, others specific to the particular context of enquiry, for which we lack evidence. This is not a shortcoming, a lapse which, though unavoidable, is nevertheless regrettable. It is in the *nature* of enquiry that this should be so. The accumulation of evidential reason to believe is possible only within the framework set by these trusting acceptances. Without them, we forfeit, in particular, our detailed conceptions of evidential relevance—of why, for example, perceptual experience bears on how matters are configured around us in the external world. The entitlement project is to characterize the various roles of the acceptances, the specific aspects of our enquiries that they sustain and rationalize. It remains to be seen in what degree of convincing detail the project can be executed. But the basic point is that there is no way things could be otherwise: without trusting, *there is no rational enquiry*.

A critic might say that, even if this is true, it doesn’t change matters: a *rationale* is provided for the relevant trustings only if enquiry is valued. We have the option of dropping out, or dropping dead. But I think that to accept this much contingency in the offered account is quite consistent with it’s being properly philosophical. If I am charged to give you a moral justification for a certain course of action, and proceed to offer considerations which demonstrate, for example, the injustice of the only available alternative, it would be strange to reply, “Well, that only works if you presume that I am concerned about justice.” In the same way, I think we have given a properly epistemic justification of certain aspects of our practices if it is demonstrated that they serve certain epistemic values, or—the contention I have just been stressing—that they are integral to enquiry itself. That demonstration, if it goes through, will be *a priori* and philosophical. And it will be an epistemic justification. Whether we actually have, or must have, the epistemic values to which enquiry is harnessed, or whether we value enquiry itself, is not an issue which *epistemic* justification has to tackle. Nor does a moral justification have somehow to negotiate the contingencies of our valuing the moral goods to which it appeals.

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