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ENTITLEMENT, VALUE AND RATIONALITY¹

Abstract. In this paper I discuss two fundamental challenges concerning Crispin Wright's notion of entitlement of cognitive project: firstly, whether entitlement is an epistemic kind of warrant since, seemingly, it is not underwritten by epistemic reasons, and, secondly, whether, in the absence of such reasons, the kind of rationality associated with entitlement is epistemic in nature. The paper investigates three possible lines of response to these challenges. According to the first line of response, entitlement of cognitive project is underwritten by epistemic reasons – and thus supports epistemic rationality – because, when P is an entitlement, trust in P is a dominant strategy with respect to promotion of epistemic value. The second line of response replaces dominance with maximization of expected utility. I argue that both of these proposals are flawed and develop an alternative line of response.

Keywords: epistemic entitlement, epistemic reasons, epistemic value, epistemic rationality, scepticism, Crispin Wright.

1. Scepticism

Adopting the terminology of Crispin Wright let us say that a proposition is

(COR) “.... *cornerstone* for a given region of thought just in case it would follow from a lack of warrant for it that one could not rationally claim warrant for *any* belief in the region.” (Wright 2004, p. 168)

To give a few examples of cornerstones for our thinking about the empirical world: that I am not a brain in a vat; that I am not now having a lucid, coherent dream; that I am not being deceived by an all-powerful evil demon. These propositions are of great epistemological interest. Each of them has been the target of some sceptical challenge.² The sceptical strategy is to argue that there is no warrant for the target proposition, and hence, given its status as an empirical cornerstone, no warrant to rationally claim warrant for *any* belief concerning the empirical world.

Our ordinary beliefs about the empirical world are acquired on the basis of *evidence*. The above propositions count as cornerstones, because they pertain, in one way or the other, to the suitability of the attendant circumstances under which we acquire our ordinary beliefs – and, in particular, to whether we can rationally claim to have any evidence for such beliefs. To illustrate: suppose that I did not have a warrant for thinking that I am not right now being deceived by an all-powerful, evil demon, and that I set out to investigate some aspect of the world – say, the number of books on set theory on my book shelves. Suppose that I claim to have a warrant for the belief that there are 17 books on set theory on my shelves. Is my claim to warrant rational? Arguably not. For the warrant I claim to possess is meant to be evidential – yet I cannot rationally claim to have any evidence absent a warrant for the relevant cornerstones. Absent a warrant for a cornerstone of a region of thought, then, there can be no rational claim to warrant for belief in ordinary propositions of that region.³

Due to considerations on epistemic circularity, Wright concedes that the sceptic provides a

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2 Sample references: Descartes' *Meditations*; Chapter 3 in Nozick 1981; “Brains in a vat” in Putnam 1981.

3 Note the emphasis on rational *claims* – a certain kind of higher-order cognitive accomplishment – rather than possession of warrant. Wright is keen to stress this. See Wright 2004, p. 169, p. 210.

compelling argument to the effect that the best attempts to acquire an *evidential* warrant for cornerstone propositions are bound to fail.⁴ However, he resists the sceptical conclusion that there can be no cornerstone warrant – and so, no rational claim to belief in any ordinary proposition of the relevant region of thought – by appealing to entitlement of cognitive project.

2. Entitlement of cognitive project

Entitlement of cognitive project is a non-evidential notion of warrant, characterized as follows⁵:

Entitlement of cognitive project: A subject *S* with a given cognitive project is entitled to trust a proposition *P* if

- (i) *P* is a *presupposition* of the project, i.e. if to doubt *P* (in advance) – or weaker: being open-minded about *P* – would rationally commit one to doubting (or being open-minded about) the significance of the project⁶;
- (ii) there is no sufficient reason to believe that *P* is untrue; and
- (iii) the attempt to justify *P* would involve further presuppositions in turn of no more secure a prior standing ... and so on without limit; so that someone pursuing the relevant enquiry who accepted that there is nevertheless an onus to justify *P* would implicitly undertake a commitment to an infinite regress of justificatory projects, each concerned to vindicate the presuppositions of its predecessors.

Cognitive projects are projects whose successful execution can be regarded as a cognitive achievement. For instance, by doing some cardinal arithmetic I might learn that the cardinality of the union of a denumerable set each of whose members itself has denumerably many members is \aleph_0 .

Consider clause (i). Suppose that I want to check the dimensions of my laptop by using a measuring tape. It is a presupposition of this project that my perceptual apparatus is functioning properly. Doubt (open-mindedness) about the proper functioning of my perceptual apparatus would rationally commit me to doubt (open-mindedness) about the project. That *P* is a presupposition of the cognitive project makes it an unavoidable commitment of sorts: to doubt (being open-minded about) *P* would rationally commit one to doubting (being open-minded about) the very significance of the project. The attitude held towards *P* must thus be one that excludes doubt (and open-mindedness), and it will be an unavoidable commitment at least in this sense.

Clause (ii) is a negative clause. The presence of positive evidence is not required for entitlement.

4 Wright 2004, pp. 168-169.

5 Wright 2004, pp. 191-192. Wright uses “justification” to designate evidential species of warrant and “entitlement” for non-evidential ones. The term “warrant” is used disjunctively for either justification or entitlement. Tyler Burge and Christopher Peacocke have developed notions of entitlement that are significantly different from that of Wright (see, e.g., Burge 1993 and 2003 and Peacocke 2003). There are clear similarities between Wittgenstein’s considerations on so-called “hinge-propositions” (cf. Wittgenstein 1969) and Wright’s entitlement proposal.

6 Wright’s own characterization of presupposition is put only in terms of doubt while the one just given is put in terms of doubt and open-mindedness. Doubt is a stronger attitude than open-mindedness. To doubt that *P* amounts to holding a positive attitude towards the negation of *P* whereas open-mindedness – as intended here – involves a positive attitude towards neither *P* nor its negation. At various points, Wright relies implicitly on the slightly modified characterization given here. See, e.g., Wright 2004, p. 193.

Instead what is relevant is the *absence* of sufficient countervailing evidence. Entitlement is the default position: trust in P is entitled unless there is a sufficient reason for thinking P untrue (assuming that clauses (i) and (iii) are met). Clause (ii) makes entitlement a non-evidential species of warrant. It is also a kind of warrant that is not truth-conducive. By this I mean that an entitlement to trust P does not make it probable or likely that P is true. This is a respect in which entitlement contrasts with, e.g., perceptual warrant. If I am warranted in believing P on the basis of perception, the content of the perceptual state(s) through which I acquired the warrant is – all things being equal – a correct representation of the world. Hence, a perceptual warrant to believe P makes it probable that P is true.

The first half of clause (iii) tells us that attempts to justify – i.e. provide an evidential warrant for – an entitlement P will give rise to an infinite regress of justificatory projects which will inevitably involve presuppositions of no more secure a prior standing. That is, presuppositions that are either of a less or equally secure prior standing. The second half of clause (iii) says that, if the onus to provide an evidential warrant for P is granted, we are implicitly committed to a regress of the mentioned kind. In examples given by Wright, the infinite regress, besides involving presuppositions of no more secure a prior standing than P , involves presuppositions of the same general kind.⁷

The beginnings of a response to scepticism starts when it is observed that the sceptic implicitly assumes that all warrant is evidential. While Wright grants that the sceptical challenge shows that there can be no *evidential* warrant for trusting cornerstone propositions, he denies that all warrant is evidential. Wright's contention is that cornerstones *can* be warranted – it is just that they are so non-evidentially.⁸ This idea, of course, needs backing from a suitable notion of non-evidential warrant. This is where entitlement of cognitive project enters the scene. The cornerstone propositions attacked by the sceptic are warranted in the sense of being entitled. If this is right, we have the means to resist the sceptical conclusion that there can be no rational claim to warrant for belief in any proposition of the relevant region of thought.

3. Two challenges: epistemic reasons and rationality

The entitlement proposal provides an interesting response to the sceptic. There are, however, two fundamental challenges which there appears to be no straightforward way for the entitlement proponent to deal with. To formulate the first challenge I will adopt the following principle concerning the relationship between epistemic warrant and epistemic reasons:

(WARRANT AND REASONS)

A subject's being epistemically warranted in Φ -ing that P requires that there is an epistemic reason, or reasons, for Φ -ing that P ,

where “ Φ ” is a place-holder for some propositional attitude like belief or acceptance.

A fundamental question about entitlement is whether it is an epistemic kind of warrant at all.⁹ It is by no means clear that it is. (WARRANT AND REASONS) invites us to reflect on what epistemic reasons are involved in cases of warrant. There is an easy answer for evidential warrant. Whenever we have an evidential warrant for believing P , we can simply take the evidence to be the epistemic reason demanded by (WARRANT AND REASONS). By definition, this answer is not available for non-evidential warrant.

⁷ Wright 2004, p. 189.

⁸ Wright 2004, pp. 174-175.

⁹ A worry of this sort is articulated in Section 3 of Pritchard 2005. Pritchard argues that an entitlement to trust P is supported by pragmatic rather than epistemic considerations.

But what is the answer then?

It is not difficult to give reasons for accepting cornerstones, which, if warranted, we may suppose are warranted as a matter of entitlement. Suppose that someone – wealthy and trustworthy – tells me that I will receive \$1,000,000 if I accept that I am not a brain in a vat. In this situation I certainly have a reason to accept that I am not a brain in a vat. However, it seems uncontroversial to say that it is not an epistemic one. The proponent of entitlement thus faces the following challenge:

(CHALLENGE 1)

Provide a characterization of epistemic reasons and show that, when P is an entitlement, epistemic reasons are present for trusting P , as required by (WARRANT AND REASONS).

It is important for the entitlement proponent to respond to this challenge. If no epistemic reasons can be pointed to, by (WARRANT AND REASONS), entitlement cannot be an epistemic kind of warrant. Entitlement is certainly intended to be epistemic in nature.¹⁰ One reason for wanting it to be so is that it is introduced as a response to scepticism. Scepticism is an attack on our epistemic practice – more specifically, on our right to claim warrant for a wide range of beliefs we hold. If entitlement was not epistemic in character, we would in effect be invoking a non-epistemic notion of warrant to respond to an epistemic challenge. This would, I submit, be somewhat misdirected.¹¹

There is a related challenge concerning rationality. When a subject has an epistemic warrant for Φ -ing that P , the subject is thought to be epistemically rational in Φ -ing that P . The idea is that epistemic rationality flows from the epistemic warrant possessed:

(WARRANT AND RATIONALITY)

When a subject has an epistemic warrant for Φ -ing that P , the subject is epistemically rational in Φ -ing that P because of her epistemic warrant for Φ -ing that P .

Given (WARRANT AND REASONS), (WARRANT AND RATIONALITY) suggests, quite plausibly, that there is a link between epistemic reasons and epistemic rationality. As before, there seems to be no problem in the case of justification (i.e. evidential warrant). When an epistemic subject is justified in believing P , evidence which is strong enough to yield a warrant is present. In light of this evidence it is rational for the subject to believe that P . Again, by definition, this cannot be said in the non-evidential case. The advocate of entitlement thus faces a second challenge:

(CHALLENGE 2)

Provide an account of what the rationality of trusting P consists in when P is warranted as a matter of entitlement.

This challenge is related to the first. A successful response to (CHALLENGE 1) will deliver an answer to (CHALLENGE 2) as well, assuming that there is an intimate relationship between warrant and reasons.

4. Epistemic value, reasons and rationality

I will now explore a potential line of response to the challenges raised above. The core idea is *gestured at*

¹⁰ This is suggested by the name of the session at which Wright 2004 and Davies's response to Wright (Davies 2004) were presented. The name was "On *Epistemic Entitlement*" (emphasis added).

¹¹ I here find myself in agreement with Jenkins 2007.

in the following passage from Wright:

If a cognitive project is indispensable, or anyway sufficiently valuable to us – in particular, if its failure would at least be no worse than the costs of not executing it, and its success would be better ... then we are entitled to – may help ourselves to, take for granted – the original presuppositions without any specific evidence in their favour. (Wright 2004, p. 192)

It should be clear that, by itself, this passage will not do as a response to (CHALLENGE 1) and (CHALLENGE 2). More detail needs to be added. In this section and the next I will offer the entitlement proponent a helping hand by doing so, but, I note, will proceed immediately to a critical discussion of the resulting proposal.

A straightforward way to understand the talk of “worse”, “success”, and “better” is in terms of values, conceived as ends, and means to achieve these. Thus understood the basic idea would be that trusting entitlements is a dominant strategy with respect to bringing about epistemic value, in the sense that it never does worse, but may do better than the alternatives in terms of epistemic value.¹² To develop this proposal further something needs to be said about the relationship between epistemic reasons and epistemic value, and, additionally, it will have to be made explicit what things are of epistemic value.

Let us first turn to the relationship between epistemic reasons and epistemic value. I will adopt a characterization of epistemic reasons offered by Richard Foley:

(REASONS AND VALUE)

If X is an epistemically valuable end and bringing about Z promotes X , then, all else being equal, one has an epistemic reason to bring about Z .¹³

This characterization seems ideal for the purposes of developing the dominance idea as it ties epistemic reasons to epistemic value. I will take Z 's promoting X to include cases where bringing about Z will do no worse with respect to X than not doing Z and may do better. If Z promotes X in this sense, bringing about Z is said to be a *dominant strategy* with respect to X . Dominance is what shall concern us in the next two sections.¹⁴

5. The dominance argument

In formulating the dominance argument, the following three assumptions will be made:

(1) Veritic monism is taken as a working hypothesis. Veritic monism is the view that truth is the only thing of epistemic value. It is a view that is very prominent in the literature.¹⁵ It is not difficult to see why the view has at least some initial pull. Truth, after all, seems to be the main aim of our cognitive

¹² Wright 2004 also spells out a notion of entitlement referred to as “strategic entitlement”, which is cashed out in terms of dominance. The difference is that the dominance idea figures explicitly in the characterization of strategic entitlement, while it figures neither in clause (i) nor in clauses (ii) or (iii) of the characterization of entitlement of cognitive project.

¹³ See Section 1.1 of Foley 1987.

¹⁴ People may have misgivings about the Foley-style characterization of epistemic reasons given in (REASONS AND VALUE). However, from a dialectical point of view, the employment of this characterization should be applauded. For what will transpire in due course is that, *even if the Foley-style characterization of epistemic reasons is granted, it is not clear that the dominance argument goes through*. That is, even if we leave aside worries about the framework that appears to be most natural for developing the dominance idea and grant the entitlement proponent the right to use it, the dominance argument does not go through.

¹⁵ See, e.g., Goldman 2001; David 2001 and 2005.

endeavours, and it may appear to be the *only* aim. For instance, it might be thought that a belief's having been acquired through a *reliable* process is epistemically valuable, but also that this is so entirely because reliably formed beliefs tend to be true.¹⁶

(2) The subject considered is a rational subject, deliberating which strategy is optimal. The subject is aware of what things are of epistemic value and engages in projects only if she is not committed to doubting that they can be successfully executed. The subject will engage in projects whenever she trusts that the presuppositions for their success are met.

(3) The target notion of execution is to be such that it is compatible with the idea that, say, a brain in a vat can execute projects, or more generally, that projects can be executed in cases where the relevant entitlement is false¹⁷.

On to the argument. Let “*P*” refer to an entitlement and let “*T*” abbreviate “true”. Consider now the following table where, vertically, we have the different actions or strategies and, horizontally, we have whether or not *P* is the case, i.e. whether or not the world cooperates¹⁸:

	1. <i>P</i> is the case	2. $\neg P$ is the case
S1. Trust and execute	Many <i>T</i> beliefs <i>T</i> acceptance of <i>P</i>	Few <i>T</i> beliefs
S2. Not trust and not execute	Few <i>T</i> beliefs	Few <i>T</i> beliefs

Which is the optimal strategy – trust or non-trust? The answer is that trust is since it dominates non-trust:

Dominance: trust and execution is the dominant strategy. In column 2 it does no worse than non-trust and non-execution, but in column 1 it does better.

This is good news for the entitlement proponent. It puts her in a position to give the following response to (CHALLENGE 1) and (CHALLENGE 2): when *P* is an entitlement, we have an epistemic reason to trust *P* because doing so promotes epistemic value. It is a dominant strategy. This answers (CHALLENGE 1). As

16 I will eventually suggest that veritic monism is implausible. It is, nonetheless, worthwhile to initially run the dominance argument taking veritic monism as background because it makes for a natural first reading and will serve as good platform from which to launch an investigation of further, perhaps more promising, proposals.

17 In the brain in a vat case, the execution of a project can be taken to amount to a series of states that are qualitatively indistinguishable from the states a non-envatted person is in when engaging in the project.

18 It is assumed that occurrences of “few” pick out the same number, that occurrences of “many” do so as well, and that the number picked out by “few” is smaller than that picked out by “many”. I have allowed myself to leave out an all-else-being-equal parameter although there are many ways in which execution of a project can go wrong. For example, lighting conditions might not be optimal when I try to determine the colour of a jumper. Now, we could include the parameter if we wanted, but it would not make a difference to the dominance argument – and for this reason I have chosen to leave it out. The reason that the inclusion of an all-else-being-equal parameter would not make a difference is that it would have the same impact for every row in a column, and so, would preserve the relative ordering of the outcomes (of the various strategies) within a column. Since the question of which strategy is dominant (if any) is answered by comparing strategies – i.e. rows – within the columns of the table, this means that the parameter under consideration would have no significance with respect to the dominance question, were it to be incorporated.

for (CHALLENGE 2), the response flows directly from the response to (CHALLENGE 1). When we trust P as a matter of entitlement, it is epistemically rational to do so, because we have an epistemic reason to trust P . The reason is that it promotes epistemic value.

6. Does the dominance argument really work?

I have serious misgivings about the dominance argument rehearsed above. The argument misrepresents the relevant epistemic situation by missing out at least one crucial thing of epistemic value, *viz.* avoidance of error. There is a simple reason why error-avoidance should be counted as an epistemic value alongside truth (and possibly others). If truth – and only truth – were epistemically valuable, there would be an easy way to maximize epistemic value – namely, to believe every proposition. But, if one believed every proposition, one would have many false beliefs, and surely, having false beliefs is not epistemically valuable. Quite the opposite: *avoiding* such beliefs is epistemically valuable.¹⁹

Error-avoidance is of epistemic value, but is not taken into consideration in the dominance argument just presented. Doing so, we modify the table accordingly (where “ F ” abbreviates “false”):

	1. P is the case	2. $\neg P$ is the case
S1. Trust and execute	Many T beliefs Few F beliefs T acceptance of P	Few T beliefs Many F beliefs F acceptance of P
S2. Not trust and not execute	Few T beliefs Few F beliefs	Few T beliefs Few F beliefs

Does trust dominate non-trust? No, it does not:

Dominance breakdown: trust and execution has the best outcome in column 1. However, it is by no means clear that trust and execution does no worse than non-trust and non-execution in column 2. Indeed, if it is granted that avoiding a false belief is at least as epistemically valuable as having a true one, then the trust-execution strategy does *worse* than non-trust and non-execution in column 2.²⁰

This suggests that, suitably modified, the dominance argument fails to establish trust and execution as a dominant strategy. The answers to (CHALLENGE 1) and (CHALLENGE 2) given in Section 5 are thus undermined. Gone are epistemic reasons – and, with them, epistemic rationality.

7. Expected utility to the rescue?

¹⁹ Prominent adherents of the view that one is to achieve truth and avoid falsity include William James and William Alston (James 1899 and Alston 1989). Avoiding a false belief cannot be taken to be a case of believing something true in the sense that, if P is false and we avoid believing P , then we believe that P is true. Avoiding a false belief does not imply believing its negation to be true – one could be agnostic.

²⁰ Wayne Riggs has argued that most theories of justification and knowledge contain an implicit, built-in bias towards avoiding falsehoods, i.e. that doing so carries more weight as an epistemic goal than attaining truths does. See Riggs 2003, pp. 347-348.

One reaction to what has been said so far is that something crucial is missing from the framework, *viz.* probability. For isn't probability always something a reflective subject takes into consideration when deliberating what to do or what to believe? Suppose that my friends have told me that they might be at a certain bar tonight, and that now, at night, I am trying to decide whether or not to go to the bar in question. Part of what will make me go one way or the other is the probability I associate with respectively my friends being there and their not being there. If I find it highly improbable that they will be there, that will count against my going, while, on the other hand, if I think that they will almost certainly be there, this will motivate me to go.

The reason why probability may be relevant to the discussion of entitlement is this: if the probability of $\neg P$ is sufficiently low, then so should its significance be with respect to determining whether trusting P does better than not trusting P in terms of promotion of epistemic value. A natural way to accommodate this idea is to switch to talk of *expected utility*²¹. Interestingly, as we shall see in the next section, a certain kind of probability distribution appears to revive the prospects of the dominance strategy in that, relative to this kind of distribution, trust and execution maximizes expected utility.

To spell out the proposal just gestured at, we need a bit of stagesetting. Let $S_1 \dots S_n$ be the possible strategies. Let $O_1 \dots O_k$ be the possible states of the world. Assign each pair of a strategy S_i and state O_j a value $V(S_i, O_j)$ and assign a probability $p(O_j)$ to each possible state O_j .

Let $U(S_i, O_j)$ be the expected value of a strategy S_i and a state O_j . $U(S_i, O_j)$ is calculated as follows:

$$U(S_i, O_j) = p(O_j) \times V(S_i, O_j)$$

The expected utility of S_i – $U(S_i)$ – is calculated by aggregating the expected value of S_i for each possible state, i.e. let $O_1 \dots O_k$ be the possible states, then

$$U(S_i) = \sum_{j \leq k} U(S_i, O_j) = \sum_{j \leq k} (p(O_j) \times V(S_i, O_j))$$

Given strategies $S_1 \dots S_n$, a strategy S_i maximizes expected utility just in case $U(S_i) > U(S_j)$ for all $1 \leq j \leq n$ ($j \neq i$).

The kind of probability in play is *subjective*. When we speak of the probability of P , what is intended is the probability which the subject associates with P . The subjective probability which an agent associates with P is standardly taken to be determined by the evidence available to the agent. This will play a significant role in Section 9.

8. The plunging strategy

Trusting an entitlement P can be shown to maximize expected utility on the assumption that the probability of P is higher than that of $\neg P$. The plunging strategy is to maintain that we can help ourselves to this assumption, that we can “plunge” the probability of the sceptical scenario and thereby reduce its significance. The strategy seems at least initially attractive. After all, sceptical scenarios tend to strike people as far-fetched or highly unlikely.

The assessment of the expected utility approach will depend on what the appropriate probability distribution is. A preliminary observation is that, since P and $\neg P$ are mutually exclusive, $p(P) \cup p(\neg P) =$

21 Recall (REASONS AND VALUE) from Section 4. Earlier we saw that the notion of promotion was intended to be such that Z can promote X by being a dominant strategy with respect to X . The *expected utility approach* starts with the suggestion that we should also include as instances of promotion cases where bringing about Z maximizes expected utility.

1 (where 1 signifies certainty). From this it follows that $p(P) = 1 - p(\neg P)$ and $p(\neg P) = 1 - p(P)$. Therefore, if the probability of P is high, the probability of $\neg P$ is low, and, conversely, if the probability of P is low, the probability of $\neg P$ is high. Without getting too much ahead of ourselves, if the expected utility approach is going to offer any improvement over the dominance approach, it must at least be the case that $p(P) > p(\neg P)$.

Suppose that the plunging strategy works, i.e. suppose that we can assign a probability to the sceptical scenario that is low enough to reduce its significance to such an extent that the expected utility of trust and execution exceeds that of non-trust and non-execution. In that case we can recover a response to each of (CHALLENGE 1) and (CHALLENGE 2). To the former we respond: whenever there is an entitlement to trust P , there is an epistemic reason to do so – namely, that it maximizes expected epistemic utility. To the latter we say: when we trust P as a matter of entitlement, it is epistemically rational to do so, because we have an epistemic reason to trust P , viz. that it maximizes expected epistemic utility.²²

9. Against plunging

Unfortunately for the entitlement proponent, the plunging strategy is bound to fail. The reason is this: a prerequisite for the plunging strategy to work is that $p(P) > p(\neg P)$, but, by the lights of someone who buys into the entitlement story, this cannot be granted.

The argument is simple.²³ First, we need to remind ourselves that the entitlement proponent has granted the sceptic that there can be no evidential warrant for cornerstones – or stronger, that there can be no positive evidence supporting cornerstones. Second, we observe that it is standard to take subjective probability to be regulated by evidence. The subjective probability which one associates with a given proposition should accord with the evidence available.

Consider some entitlement P . By the first point, there can be no positive evidence to support it. Thus, $p(P)$ should not be greater than 0.5. By clause (ii) of the characterization of entitlement, there is no sufficient reason to believe P untrue. So, $p(P)$ should not be less than 0.5. The only way both of these requirements can be accommodated is by $p(P) = 0.5$. However, since $p(P) \cup p(\neg P) = 1$, this means that $p(P) = p(\neg P) = 0.5$. Hence, the probability assignment needed to argue that trust and execution maximizes expected utility is not the probability assignment that should be adopted, because this assignment requires that $p(P) > p(\neg P)$. In other words, by the lights of the entitlement proponent, the probability of the sceptical scenario cannot be plunged, and so, the expected utility approach does not work.²⁴

22 It has been implicitly assumed that $p(P)$ and $p(\neg P)$ are always multiplied with finite values. Now, there *are* arguments in the literature which involve infinite expected utility – perhaps most famously Pascal's Wager. I do not deny that there are cases in which it is appropriate to reason with infinite expected utility. However, the case we are concerned with here is not one of them given the kind of epistemic gains and losses we are in for when engaged in our usual epistemic practices.

23 Here I am indebted to Crispin Wright and Elia Zardini.

24 This is not all. The probability assignment $p(P) = p(\neg P) = 0.5$ makes it the case that a strategy S_i maximizes expected utility if and only if it maximizes value – that is, if and only if it does best if we leave out probability as a parameter. This is reflected by the following equation holding: $V(S_i, O_1)/V(S_i, O_2) = (0.5 \times V(S_i, O_1))/0.5 \times V(S_i, O_2)$. The equation can be verified by routine computation.

10. Saving entitlement: teleological value

Neither the dominance argument nor the plunging strategy stands up to scrutiny. The remainder of the paper is devoted to spelling out another – and, I submit, more promising – line of response to (CHALLENGE 1) and (CHALLENGE 2).

The kind of value at the core of the dominance argument and the plunging strategy is *instrumental* in nature. The success, or failure, of a given strategy was determined by how well it did as a means to certain ends – i.e. truth and/or avoidance of error (with probability playing a role for the plunging strategy). The backbone of the proposal to be presented in this section is an argument to the effect that entitled trust possesses another, non-instrumental kind of value – namely, teleological value. On the basis of this proposal, a response will be given to (CHALLENGE 1) and (CHALLENGE 2).²⁵

10.1 Teleological value and entitlement

Something is of teleological value just in case it has value in virtue of being aimed at something else of value. For instance, my donating money to charity with the intention of helping people in need is teleologically valuable, because it is aimed at helping people in need, i.e. something of value.

Something – let it be X – can be of teleological value although the value of that at which X is aimed is not realized. One might hold that this is so in the sense that the value need not be realized in every possible scenario, but, still, that it must be realized in at least some such scenario in order for X to be of teleological value. Teleological value, thus understood, I will refer to as being *weakly realization-independent*. Alternatively, one might hold that X can possess teleological value although the value at which X is aimed is realized in no possible scenario. Teleological value, thus construed, will be taken to be *strongly realization-independent*. On the weak reading – but not the strong – X 's being teleologically valuable is compatible with its being so in virtue of realizing the value of that at which it is aimed in at least some possible scenario.

Now, return to the example considered earlier and suppose that the charity to which I donate money is a bogus one – an organization run by people who spend the money throwing extravagant parties for themselves and their friends. In that case my action misses its intended aim – my donation does not help people in need. Yet, one can still maintain that it is of teleological value in virtue of being aimed at a good. If we understand teleological value in terms of weak realization-independence, this is to say that, although the action fails to realize its aim, it is valuable because there are other possible cases in which it *does* realize it. Understood in terms of strong realization-independence what is being said is much stronger: my action is valuable even if there is not a single case in which it fulfills its aim.

For reasons to be given in Section 10.3, I will understand teleological value – as applied to entitled trust – in the weaker sense.

What undermined the dominance argument and the plunging strategy was the case in which the candidate entitlement is false, i.e. the sceptical scenario. This was because the combination of non-trust and non-execution does well in terms of error-avoidance in that scenario (while the trust-execution strategy leads to the acquisition of many false beliefs). Teleological value can lend a helping hand to the entitlement proponent here, because whether something possesses teleological value is (weakly) independent of how well it does in terms of realizing the epistemic goods at which it is aimed – i.e. truth and error-avoidance. Trusting an entitlement and executing the projects for which it is a presupposition may fail to realize these goods, but nevertheless be of teleological value, because they are realized in

25 I am indebted to Duncan Prithcard for suggesting that I explore this line of response.

another possible scenario, i.e. the non-sceptical one.

To add a little detail concerning the role played by trust note that something's being of teleological value involves an aspect of intentionality. Whatever is taken to be the bearer of teleological value has to be the kind of thing that can be intentionally aimed, or directed, at something else of value. In the ethical case, the intention – or motive – of the agent is what gives an action its aim. In the example offered above, it is the agent's intention to help people in need that aims the action of donating money to charity towards something of moral value, *viz.* helping someone in need. Trust plays a similar role in the epistemic case. A subject's trusting the cornerstone presuppositions (i.e. entitlements) of her cognitive projects directs, or aims, them towards truth. This is because such trust involves a conviction that the attendant circumstances are suitable for enquiry. Hence, when a subject engages in cognitive projects, these projects are executed against a background conviction to the effect that circumstances are conducive to determining the truth of the matter, so to speak, for the question that the project seeks to answer. In this way trust can be said to direct, or aim, cognitive projects towards truth.

10.2 Responding to (CHALLENGE 1) and (CHALLENGE 2)

Based on the considerations just offered, a new line of response to (CHALLENGE 1) suggests itself:

Response to (CHALLENGE 1): if *S* is entitled to trust that *P*, *S* has an epistemic reason to do so, because such trust possesses teleological value.

The response to (CHALLENGE 2) drops straight out of the response to (CHALLENGE 1):

Response to (CHALLENGE 2): if *S* is entitled to trust that *P*, *S*'s doing so is epistemically rational, because *S* has an epistemic reason to do so – *viz.* that it possesses teleological value.

Thus, contrary to what might have been thought after the dismissal of the dominance argument and the plunging strategy, the entitlement proposal *can* be defended against (CHALLENGE 1) and (CHALLENGE 2). Entitlement does not fail to be an epistemic kind of warrant due to an absence of epistemic reasons underwriting it. Epistemic reasons are present in cases of entitled trust, and, thus, accordingly, the rationality that goes with entitlement is epistemic in nature.

10.3 Entitlement, weak realization-independence and truth

The teleological value possessed by entitled trust was taken to be weakly – rather than strongly – realization-independent. In order for such trust to exhibit teleological value in a given scenario it is not required that it realize the good(s) at which it is aimed in that scenario – merely that it does so in *some* other possible scenario. The relevant goods here are truth and avoidance of error. In the sceptical scenario, entitled trust possesses teleological value although it fails to realize these goods. Ultimately, this is because it succeeds in another possible scenario, *viz.* the non-sceptical one. On the other hand, had the strong notion of realization-independence been used to cash out teleological value, the entitlement proponent would be committed to the view that whether or not the goods at which trust and execution are aimed find their realization is irrelevant to the question whether entitled trust is of teleological value.

From a dialectical point of view, one reason for preferring the weaker notion is that ascribing

teleological value to something against the background of a thesis of strong realization-independence is much more controversial and, thus, more likely to raise objections. It is particularly relevant to observe that understanding teleological value in terms of weak realization-independence is compatible with this kind of value being ultimately grounded in truth – i.e. it is compatible with trust's being of teleological value only because truth is attained in at least one possible scenario (the non-sceptical one). This means that the entitlement proponent need not part ways with those who believe that truth is the cardinal epistemic value, at least not radically. On the other hand, if one were to hold the view that entitled trust is teleologically valuable in a strongly realization-independent way, one would be committed to the view that this kind of value is not in any respect dependent upon truth. I therefore recommend that teleological value be understood as being only weakly realization-independent.

12. Conclusion

I have discussed two fundamental challenges to the entitlement proposal – firstly, whether entitlement is a kind of warrant underwritten by epistemic reasons, and so, whether it is an epistemic kind of warrant at all, and secondly, whether the rationality associated with entitlement is epistemic in nature.

I suggested that Wright can be understood as gesturing at the following response: trusting an entitlement *P* is a dominant strategy with respect to promotion of epistemic value, and this provides an epistemic reason to trust *P*. This, in turn, supports the epistemic rationality of doing so. It was argued that, although the dominance argument works when spelled out against the background of veritic monism – the view that only truth is of epistemic value – the reasoning breaks down once error-avoidance is taken into account. I then discussed whether adding probability as a parameter and switching to an expected utility framework could be of any help to the entitlement proponent. It turned out that it could only if the probability of the sceptical scenario can be plunged. Unfortunately for the entitlement proponent, the probability of the sceptical scenario cannot be plunged – even by her own lights. It was concluded that neither the dominance argument nor the plunging strategy can deliver a response to the two challenges.

However, I proceeded to propose that entitled trust is of teleological epistemic value, and that this delivers what the entitlement proponent needs. Entitled trust is underwritten by epistemic reasons – *viz.* its being of teleological value – and hence, entitlement meets the requirement imposed on epistemic warrant by the principle (WARRANT AND REASONS). That is, entitlement does not fail to be an epistemic notion of warrant due to an absence of epistemic reasons. Entitlement likewise meets the requirement imposed by (WARRANT AND RATIONALITY) – assuming, as I have, that there is an intimate connection between epistemic reasons and epistemic rationality. I conclude that the entitlement proponent can address (CHALLENGE 1) and (CHALLENGE 2), but, crucially, not in the manner gestured at by Wright himself.

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