Entitlements, good and bad

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Abstract

Crispin Wright has recently introduced a non-evidential notion of warrant, entitlement of cognitive project, as a promising response to certain sceptical arguments that purport to show that we cannot claim any warrant for a wide range of beliefs that we ordinarily take ourselves to possess a warrant for. The basic idea is that, for a given class of cognitive projects, there are certain basic propositions – entitlements – which one is warranted in trusting provided there is no sufficient reason to think them false. Having presented Wright's notion of entitlement and rehearsed the sceptical arguments he invokes the notion to respond to, we proceed to raise what will be referred to as "the generality problem". The problem raises the question whether entitlements come on the cheap. The good news delivered by entitlement is that it seems to deliver a way of resisting the sceptical conclusion. The bad news, however, is that it also appears to do much more than that by supporting, or providing a foundation for, what we would consider crazy and bizarre cognitive projects.[1]

1. Two kinds of scepticism

Following Wright, let us introduce a piece of terminology:

(COR) A certain proposition – or a specific type of proposition – is a *cornerstone* for a given region of thought just in case the proposition (or type of proposition) is such that, if we had no warrant for it, we could not rationally claim warrant for any belief in a proposition of that region of thought (Wright 2004, p. 168).

1.I have benefited from comments from a number of people. I would like to thank Elizabeth Barnes, Ross Cameron, Philip Ebert, Mikkel Gerken, Patrick Greenough, Eline Busck Gundersen, Lars Gundersen, Jesper Kallestrup, Daniel Nolan, Stig Alstrup Rasmussen, Sven Rosenkranz, Marcus Rossberg, Robbie Williams, Crispin Wright, and Elia Zardini. The paper was written while I held a Ph.D. scholarship for studies abroad from the Danish Research Agency and an Arché studentship in the AHRC-funded project *The Logical and Metaphysical Foundations of Classical Mathematics*. I gratefully acknowledge the financial support of these institutions.

Wright observes that many well-known sceptical challenges fit the following two-step template:

(STEP 1) An argument to the effect that a certain proposition *C* we typically accept is a cornerstone for a given range of thought.

(STEP 2) An argument to the effect that we have no warrant for *C*.

If (STEP 1) and (STEP 2) are found compelling, then – given (COR) – the prospects of a certain kind of higher-order cognitive achievement seem poor:

(CON) We can claim no warrant for *any* belief in the relevant region of thought.

Note that this is compatible with the view that we *have* warrants for non-cornerstone beliefs. What (COR) excludes is the possibility that we have no cornerstone warrant and can *claim* warrant for a non-cornerstone belief. In Wright's words:

> [W]hat is put in doubt by sceptical argument is – of course – not our *possession* of any knowledge or justified belief – not if knowledge-ability, or justification, are conceived as constituted in aspects of the external situation in which we come to a belief. (How indeed could armchair ruminations show anything about that?) What is put in doubt is rather our right to *claim* knowledge and justified belief (Wright 2004, p. 210).

That is, the sceptical arguments put pressure on higher-order cognitive achievement rather than first-order cognitive achievement.[2]

Wright discusses two kinds of sceptical arguments which fit the two-step template, Cartesian and so-called I-II-III arguments.

Cartesian arguments

(STEP 1) of Cartesian arguments is a case for the claim that it is a cornerstone for a wide range of beliefs ordinarily held about the empirical world that we are not victims of cognitive error by having a coherent dream or hallucination, being deceived by an evil demon, or subjected to envatment. This seems

2. However, it should be noted that Wright mentions a kind of sceptical argument, which does seem to concern our *possession* of warrant (and so, knowledge) rather than our claims to warrant (cf. Wright 2004, pp. 190–191).

reasonable enough. If we have no warrant for these cornerstones, we cannot rationally claim to have a warrant for any belief about the empirical world.

Concerning (STEP 2), since the relevant cornerstones ("I am not now dreaming", "I am not a brain in vat", etc.) are empirical, the sceptic maintains that warrant for such cornerstones must be given by appropriate empirical evidence. This empirical evidence has to be collected through execution of an empirical procedure. The sceptic insists that the following principle must be respected:

(PROPER) 'evidence acquired as the result of an empirical procedure cannot rationally be regarded as any stronger than one's independent grounds for supposing that the procedure in question has been executed properly' (Wright 2004, p. 168).

(PROPER) is a minimizing principle. It says that the strength of evidence takes the "minimum value" among the independently acquired reasons to accept the presuppositions of the warrant. The principle is brought to work at (STEP 2) of the sceptical challenge:

Consider the proposition that I am not a brain in a vat, one of the cornerstones targeted by Cartesian scepticism. The sceptic maintains that, since this is an empirical proposition, evidence supporting it has to be collected by executing some empirical procedure. Suppose that I hold that I have a warrant for a belief in the proposition in question in virtue of what I take to be perception of my two hands. By (PROPER), my evidence cannot rationally be regarded as any stronger than the independent grounds for thinking that the procedure has been properly executed – and so, for thinking that the procedure was executed *in the first place*. That is, my warrant for the belief that I am not a brain in a vat cannot rationally be regarded as any stronger than my independent grounds for believing that I perceived – rather than vat-perceived – my two hands. To obtain a warrant for (a belief in) the cornerstone proposition I thus already need a warrant for that very proposition, and so, due to vicious circularity, I can never acquire a warrant for (a belief in) the cornerstone in question (Wright 2004, pp. 168–169).[3]

I-II-III arguments

The other group of arguments which fit the two-step template are what Wright refers to as 'I-II-III arguments'. These arguments differ from Carte-

3. The reasoning is put in terms of a specific cornerstone, but can be straightforwardly modified to apply to other cornerstones.

sian arguments by making no appeal to cognitive error, but focusing instead on *structural* features of attempts to supply cornerstone warrants. The basic point which the I-II-III sceptic makes is that these attempts are constituted by arguments in which the premises and conclusion do not stand in an appropriate relationship to serve the intended purpose. The arguments involve vicious epistemic circularity, and so, fail to transmit warrant from the premises to the (cornerstone) conclusion.

To follow Martin Davies, the relevant transmission principle can be formulated as follows:

(FAILURE) 'Epistemic warrant is not transmitted from the premises of a valid argument to its conclusion if the putative support offered for one of the premises is conditional on its being antecedently and independently reasonable to accept the conclusion' (Davies 2004, p. 221).

The sceptic maintains that attempts to supply a warrant for cornerstone beliefs fail exactly because the warrant for one of the premises is conditional on an antecedent and independent warrant for the conclusion.

The structure of I-II-III arguments is this:

	I	My current evidence is in all respects as if *P*.
So:	II	*P*.
		If *P*, then *C*.
So:	III	*C*.

Here *C* is a cornerstone of a given region of thought, and *P* is an ordinary proposition of that region. The step from I to II is defeasible, and the conditional part of II is supposed to be a piece of philosophical theorizing – a conditional that gets in place due to a conceptual connection between *P* and *C*.

A prominent instance of the I-II-III template is Moore's famous "proof" of the existence of an external world (or at least something reasonably similar to it):

[MOORE]:

	I	My current experience is in all respects as if I have two hands.
So:	II	I have two hands.
		If I have two hands, then there is an external world.
So:	III	There is an external world.

Did Moore succeed? The inference from II to III is certainly valid – it is just an ordinary modus ponens step. However, does the support offered by I for II transmit to III? Not so according to the I-II-III sceptic:[4]

The Type I proposition is thought to constitute maximal – or the best possible – evidence for the Type II proposition. However, the warrant supplied by I for II is still defeasible *and* held hostage to the availability of appropriate information. In particular, in order for the I-II move to be warranted the Type III proposition has to be in the pool of information on which the Type I proposition depends – and it has to be so in a warranted fashion. Here is the reason why: if there is no warrant for the Type III proposition that there is an external world, it hardly seems plausible to claim that any Type I proposition can warrant – by serving as evidence – the corresponding Type II proposition that I have two hands. Because absent a warrant for the proposition that there is an external world, my sensory experience being in all respects *as if* I have two hands does not carry any evidential weight. There is no warrant that my experiences represent anything of the kind they are thought to represent.[5]

But if the Type III proposition has to be in place for the move from I to II to be warranted, how is the Type III proposition warranted? Here the I-II-III sceptic maintains that the only way to acquire a warrant for a Type III proposition is by inference from a Type II proposition. However, now there is a vicious circle: Type II rests on Type I which rests on Type III, which in turn rests on Type II. The putative support offered by I for II cannot reasonably be accepted antecedently and independently of the conclusion. So, by (FAILURE), I-II-III arguments will fail to transmit warrant, and with no warrant for the Type III

4. As Wright notes, the reasoning generalizes to other minds and the past (Wright 2004, p. 171):

		[OTHER MINDS]:	[THE PAST]:
	I	*X*'s behaviour and physical condition are in all respects as if she was in pain.	It seems to me that I remember it being the case that it was sunny yesterday.
So:	II	*X* is in pain. If *X* is in pain, then there are other minds.	It was sunny yesterday. If it was sunny yesterday, then there is a past.
So:	III	There are other minds.	There is a past.

5. The idea is that the warrantability of the move from I to II has as a presupposition that there is indeed the kind of domain which the experiences involved in I are thought to represent, i.e. that it rests on the presupposition that they do not misrepresent (see Wright 2004, p. 172).

proposition higher-order epistemic paralysis follows: we can claim no warrant for any Type II proposition (Wright 2004, p. 172).

2. Entitlement of cognitive project

Wright's response to the sceptical challenge starts with the observation that the arguments supporting scepticism – the ones reviewed in Section 1 – fall short of what is needed to establish (STEP 2). (STEP 2) says that we *have* no warrant for cornerstones. While Wright concedes that the sceptical arguments show that cornerstone warrant cannot be earned in the sense of being evidentially warranted, he denies that this shows that there can be no such thing as cornerstone warrant. The sceptic implicitly assumes that evidential warrant is the only kind of warrant there is. If this assumption is granted and it is granted that the sceptical arguments undermine our best attempts to acquire this kind of warrant, the sceptical arguments *do* establish that we have no cornerstone warrant.

However, Wright rejects the assumption. There can be non-evidential warrant. The notion of entitlement is an attempt to spell out such a kind of warrant. Roughly, the idea is this:

> Suppose there were a type of rational warrant which one does not have to *do any specific evidential work* to earn: better, a type of rational warrant whose possession does not require the existence of evidence – in the broadest sense, encompassing both \emph{a priori} and empirical considerations – for the truth of the warranted proposition. Call it *entitlement*. If I am entitled to accept *P*, then my doing so is beyond rational reproach even though I can point to no cognitive accomplishment in my life, whether empirical or *a priori*, inferential or non-inferential, whose upshot could reasonably be contended to be that I had come to know that *P*, or had succeeded in getting evidence justifying *P* (Wright 2004, pp. 174–175).

The notion of entitlement thus invites a response to the sceptic that takes issue with (STEP 2) of the sceptical argument. While it is conceded that the sceptical arguments put cornerstones beyond evidential warrant, it is denied that this shows that cornerstones cannot be warranted.

In this section, two things will be done. First, Wright's characterization of entitlement of cognitive project will be presented. Second, a brief discussion of entitlement as a response to the sceptical arguments will be provided.

2.1 Characterization of entitlement of cognitive project

Define a *presupposition* of a cognitive project as follows (Wright 2004, p. 191):

(PRE) *P* is a presupposition of a particular cognitive project if to doubt *P* (in advance) would rationally commit one to doubting the significance or competence of the project.

Suppose, for example, that I want to infer the conjunction of *P* and *Q* from *P* and *Q* taken individually. Each of *P* and *Q* is a presupposition of my project. Doubt about either *P* or *Q* would rationally commit me to doubting the competence of the project. Here is another example: 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 about the proper functioning of my perceptual apparatus would rationally commit me to doubt about the project.

To relate this to I-II-III arguments it is clear that Type III propositions will be presuppositions of the corresponding Type II propositions. Likewise the basic propositions – the cornerstones – will be presuppositions of non-basic propositions in the context of Cartesian scepticism.

Let us now introduce the notion of entitlement of cognitive project (Wright 2004, pp. 191–192):

Entitlement of cognitive project:

A presupposition *P* of a cognitive project is an entitlement if

(i) we have no sufficient reason to believe that *P* is untrue,

and

(ii) 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.

That *P* is a presupposition of the cognitive project means that it is an unavoidable commitment of sorts: to doubt *P* would rationally commit one to doubting the very competence of the project. The attitude held towards *P* must thus be one that excludes doubt, and it will be an unavoidable commitment at least in this sense.

Clause (i) can be regarded as a default clause. Provided that proposition *P* is a presupposition of a given cognitive project and satisfies clause (ii), we are entitled to *P* unless there is sufficient reason for thinking it false. What is required for entitlement is not the presence of positive evidence, but rather the *absence* of countervailing evidence. This is why entitlement is a non-evidential species of warrant.

Clause (ii) imposes a "structural" requirement on entitlement. It ensures that entitlements bear a certain relation to other propositions within the relevant region of thought; that there are no propositions of "a more secure prior standing". In particular, it excludes the possibility that Type II propositions qualify as candidate entitlements. It is certainly possible for a Type II proposition to be a presupposition of a given cognitive project and also satisfy clause (i). Consider, e.g., the Type II propositions that there is a computer in my room and that there is a bed in my room, each of which I believe on the basis of perception. Suppose that my project is to believe the conjunction of these two propositions. To doubt either of the two propositions would rationally commit me to doubting the competence of the project, so both propositions are presuppositions of the project. Furthermore, there is no sufficient reason to think either of the propositions false. So, each of them satisfies clause (i). What keeps the propositions – Type II propositions in general – from counting as entitlements is clause (ii). An attempt to justify my belief that there is a computer in my room or my belief that there is a bed in my room would involve presuppositions of a more secure prior standing. There would be no infinite regress of justificatory projects. I would try to justify my beliefs by citing my perceptual experiences as evidence. However, as seen above, in order for my experiences to carry any evidential weight, certain cornerstones need to be in place – and these cornerstones are of a more secure prior standing.[6]

2.2 Entitlement as a response to the sceptic

Recall the sceptical arguments reviewed in Section 1. (STEP 2) of these arguments aimed to show that cornerstone and Type III propositions are not

6. The Cartesian and I-II-III arguments are phrased in terms of circularity. Clause (ii) is put in terms of an infinite regress. Circularity and infinite regress might seem two different things, but for our present purposes they are variations on a theme. Circularity can be thought of as an infinite regress by thinking of the circle being repeated over and over. Each repetition is an attempt to vindicate the presuppositions of the previous repetition, but will involve presuppositions of no more secure a prior standing (*viz.* presuppositions of the same kind). This take on things differs from Wright's own view.

warranted. (Type III propositions satisfy the characterization of a cornerstone relative to Type II propositions, so from now on I will speak just in terms of cornerstones.) Wright is optimistic about employing the notion of entitlement of cognitive project to respond to the kinds of scepticism these arguments are supposed to support. The idea should be clear: cornerstone propositions are warranted in the sense of being entitlements. Thus, the sceptical conclusion that no warrant can be claimed for any belief in the relevant region of thought can be blocked.

Among the presuppositions of any given project will be a range of cornerstone propositions. On any particular occasion these will include:

- the proper functioning of the cognitive capacities needed to pursue the project;
- the suitability of the attendant circumstances for their effective function;
- the integrity or good standing of the concepts involved.

The proper functioning of my perceptual apparatus is a cornerstone when I go about investigating the empirical world on the basis of perception. That I am not a brain in a vat, not dreaming, not hallucinating etc. are cornerstones concerning the suitability of the attendant circumstances for the effective function of my cognitive capacities. When I do arithmetic, the good standing of the concept of natural number is a cornerstone for my arithmetical projects.

The entitlement proposal is this: when engaging in a cognitive project on any particular occasion, we have an entitlement to the cornerstones of the project *absent* sufficient reason for thinking them false. We have a warrant to trust the cornerstones of the project and can discount the sceptical scenarios that are supposed to dislodge them. (On the assumption that trust is an attitude that excludes doubt. More on this below.) Adopting the notion of entitlement thus allows us to resist the sceptical conclusion that we cannot claim warrant for any belief in the region of thought the sceptic is attacking. The sceptical line of reasoning is contested by rejecting (STEP 2). There is such a thing as cornerstone warrant, however – as stressed – it is just that it is not evidential.

Let it be said. The entitlement approach offers a concessive answer to the challenges raised by Cartesian and I-II-III scepticism. It is concessive, because it is granted that the sceptical arguments show that there can be no evidential warrant for cornerstones propositions. There is no flaw in the sceptical line of reasoning as such. Rather what is wrong is the implicit assumption that warrant has to be earned through evidence; that evidential warrant is the only

kind of warrant there is.[7] It should not be found surprising that Wright takes issue with this assumption. If (like Wright) you want to hold that the sceptical argument shows that cornerstones cannot be evidentially warranted, while maintaining that they are nevertheless warranted, you \emph{have} to reject the assumption and spell out a non-evidential kind of warrant which applies to cornerstones.

Clause (i) turns the tables on the sceptic. It takes into account the lesson from the sceptical arguments: there can be no evidential warrant for cornerstones (in the sense of there being positive evidence supporting them). This is not to say that clause (i) makes evidence irrelevant to the question whether or not a given proposition is an entitlement. Evidence can overthrow an entitlement. There might be a sufficient reason to think a candidate entitlement false, and so, clause (i) might turn out not to be satisfied. Entitlements are *defeasible*. However, clause (i) does make the presence of specific positive evidence supporting cornerstones irrelevant (and for good reasons given to us by the sceptic). Instead, as said, what is required is the absence of (sufficient) countervailing evidence.

Above the sceptical notion of warrant was glossed as requiring that cornerstone warrant be *earned*, that possessing a cornerstone warrant should be due to some cognitive achievement. Does the entitlement approach imply that

7. Burge and Peacocke have done extensive and interesting work on epistemic entitlement. See, e.g., Burge (1993) and (2003) and Peacocke (2003). There are differences between them, but for the purposes of this footnote, I shall simplify and talk about the Burge-Peacocke notion of entitlement. While there are definite points of similarity between Wright's notion of entitlement and that of Burge and Peacocke, the two notions should not be conflated. One of the main differences between Wright's notion and the Burge-Peacocke notion of entitlement pertains to the level at which the notion is supposed to work. A good way of appreciating the difference is to consider where the notions can be brought to work in the context of I-II-III arguments. Wright's notion of entitlement of cognitive project works at the level of the Type III proposition; the Type III proposition is supposed to be warranted non-evidentially by being an entitlement. The Burge-Peacocke notion of entitlement kicks in when the perceptual experience is cited in the Type I proposition. Roughly speaking, according to their notion of perceptual entitlement, an epistemic subject has an entitlement to rely on perception (other things equal) so, we are entitled to rely on the perceptual experience referred to in the Type I proposition. Peacocke holds that there is nothing wrong with Moore's proof as such. It *does* supply a warrant for a belief in the existence of an external world. However, Peacocke grants that Moore's proof is dialectically ineffective. This is because the sceptic maintains that the (alleged) proof is a case of transmission failure. As seen, Wright agrees with the sceptic in this respect. As far as I am aware, none of Burge's writings offers a view on I-II-III scepticism. This is why I have not referred to him in this paragraph of the footnote.

cornerstone warrants come on the cheap? Is cornerstone warrant for nothing and foundations for cognitive endeavours for free?[8] Perhaps so in terms of entitlement not requiring anything of the kind demanded by the sceptic (i.e., evidence). However, Wright is keen to stress that entitlement is not for free in the sense of being normatively unconstrained. In particular, Wright seeks to avoid what might be taken to be two would-be consequences of the sceptical arguments: that by undertaking cognitive projects without a warrant for their cornerstones we are somehow irrational *and* epistemically irresponsible. According to Wright, entitlement is warrant to trust rationally (Wright 2004, p. 204, p. 206).

Wright distinguishes between belief and acceptance. They are both kinds of propositional attitudes, belief being a species of acceptance. Trust is also a kind of acceptance, but contrasts with belief by not being evidentially controlled. For the purposes of the entitlement proposal it is crucial that trusting a proposition can be rational though no positive evidence is available to support the proposition.

Though the distinction between belief and acceptance raises several issues in the context of Wright's work on entitlement, the distinction has been discussed so far. While acknowledging its importance, I wish to keep it that way. This is not because the distinction is unimportant, but rather because it would take us too far afield if we were to take the distinction into detailed consideration here. (For a brief discussion of the distinction between belief and acceptance, cf. section II of Wright (2004)).

No attempt will be made to go into details with the nature of trust, but it should be noted that it has to be such that trusting a cornerstone suffices to exclude doubt and agnosticism about it. Here is why: as indicated, cornerstone propositions of a given region of thought are unavoidable presuppositions or commitments of any cognitive project undertaken in that region. They are so in the sense that to doubt a cornerstone of a given project would rationally commit one to doubting the competence of that very project (Wright 2004, p. 193). Suppose that I want to engage in some empirical project – say, checking the number of USB ports of my laptop computer. In that case to doubt that I am not a brain in a vat or that I am not now being deceived by an evil demon would rationally commit me to doubting the competence of my project – because doubt about any of these cornerstones will raise doubt about something

8. The phrases for nothing and for free are taken from the title of Wright's paper: Warrant for Nothing (and Foundations for Free?) (2004).

integral to the investigation, *viz.* that my experience is such as to represent a reality which is, by and large, as I take it to be. Doubt about a cornerstone thus morphs into doubt whether the attendant circumstances are really suitable for the execution of my project, and so, whether it is a competent project to engage in at all.[9]

Hence, if doubt was installed about a cornerstone of a region of thought and yet we engaged in projects within that region, it would be reasonable to say that we were being irrational and epistemically irresponsible in engaging in these projects. It would not amount to a formal inconsistency, but it would sound odd if someone were to say, 'I doubt that I am not a brain in a vat, but I will engage in an investigation of the tree in front of me anyway' – and, through her experiences, come to *believe*, say, that the tree is more than two meters tall. As seen when we considered the I-II-III arguments, doubt that one is not a brain in a vat is exactly the kind of thing that calls into question the evidential weight of one's experiences. If it is granted that a subject's credence in a proposition should match the evidence available for it, it thus seems that having the belief about the tree while doubting the cornerstone would be irrational or epistemically irresponsible in the sense that the subject assigns a higher credence to the proposition about the tree than she should. She believes it – which means, among other things, that she is convinced of its *truth* – while harbouring a doubt that seems to undermine the weight of her evidence.

When engaging in a *cognitive* project, trust in its cornerstones can be regarded as rational by contrast: it would be irrational to doubt – or weaker: to be agnostic about – the cornerstones of the project. It is rational to trust the cornerstones of a project because its exclusion of doubt and agnosticism is what makes it appropriate to regard it as a cognitive project. If one doubted or was agnostic about the cornerstones of a project, then – for the reasons given above – it could reasonably be asked what it is one could hope to learn from the project? A point made above was precisely that doubt (or agnosticism) should call into question that there is anything to be learned. Doubt or agnosticism about a cornerstone of a project removes the project from the sphere of projects that may properly be regarded as cognitive. Trust puts it back in.

9. Note that in order for the sceptical arguments to install doubt about cornerstones we have to assume that the principled lack of cornerstone warrant (which the sceptic takes herself to have established) implies doubt about cornerstones.

3. The generosity problem

Having introduced the notion of entitlement of cognitive project and accounted for how it can be used to provide a (concessive) response to the sceptic, Wright remarks:

> This is a good result [that we are entitled to the cornerstones the sceptic tries to undermine], it goes without saying, only if it is selective – only if the entitlements generated turn out to be cornerstones of our actual ways of thinking about and investigating the world and do not extend all manner of (what we would regard as) bizarre and irrational prejudices (Wright 2004, p. 195).

Let us refer to the issue raised here as "the generosity problem". The basic point is that the notion of entitlement might be too generous to weed out "bad" entitlements, or, to stay more faithful to Wright's wording, what *we would regard* as bad entitlements. As shall become clear in due course, we are dealing with a cluster, or family, of problems rather than a single problem.

3.1 Two reasons for concern

Wright seems to grant that the generosity problem is a genuine problem. Let me give two reasons why one might be moved by it and take it to force a need for an account of what distinguishes good entitlements from bad ones.

The first reason is given by general considerations on the notion of warrant and notions like knowledge, truth, and epistemic value. One might think that, considered as a species of warrant, there are certain features the notion of entitlement should have. In particular, that it should satisfy various "platitudes", e.g. that good entitlements are epistemically more valuable than bad ones. At some point, the question whether or not bad entitlements really are entitlements – whether they really are warrants – must be addressed. I will maintain that they are, and thus, that the notion of entitlement should not be such that, by itself, it weeds out bad entitlements.

The second reason is given by reflection on the particular use Wright makes of the notion of entitlement. It is introduced as a response to certain kinds of scepticism, and, thus considered, the notion is put under considerable pressure by the generosity problem. Dialectically, the entitlement approach would be in an uncomfortable position given a failure to address the problem. Though it might be granted that the cornerstones put under attack by the sceptic are warranted in the sense of being entitled, it would seem very unlike that this would impress any opponent if further reflection rendered the result that the notion of entitlement generalizes to 'all manner of (what we would regard as)

bizarre and irrational prejudices'. The sceptic would be the first to point out that something odd seems to be going on. To use the language of foundations: the entitlement approach can be regarded as an attempt to provide an epistemic foundation (of sorts) for regions of thought attacked by the sceptic. The good news is that it appears to do so. The bad news is that it also appears to do much more than that by supporting, or providing a foundation for, what we would consider crazy and bizarre cognitive projects.

A final word before we proceed to say more about the generosity problem. The view that epistemology is one long response to scepticism is not uncommon. This way of stating the view oversimplifies matters, but there is certainly something about it. No matter what kind of warrant one is working with it is usually expected that something be said about how it fares with respect to standard sceptical challenges. And it is a reasonable expectation, at least if, like most epistemologists, you think that the sceptical challenges teach us something valuable about the concepts of warrant and knowledge. With a view to the issue that shall occupy us here, this is to suggest that even though one might be moved to respond to the generosity problem for the first reason given, one should bear the second reason in mind.

My approach (in Section 4) will be to try to install a distinction between good and bad entitlements on the basis of more or less general considerations on the notion of warrant and cognate notions. For the most part the considerations offered will not evolve around, not even mention, scepticism. However, taking the above point to heart, something will be said about whether or not the proposed distinction affects the potency of entitlement as a response to the sceptic.

3.2 Wright on the generosity problem: dice-rolling and modalizing

Wright talks about 'cornerstones of our actual ways of thinking about and investigating the world' in contrast to things we would consider 'bizarre and irrational prejudices'. What are the candidates for the latter category? Wright considers, and eventually dismisses, the following scenario:

[DICE-ROLLING]:

> [S]uppose that I undertake a project [...] to predict the winners in tomorrow's card at Newmarket by rolling a pair of dice for each runner in the afternoon's races and seeing which get the highest scores. Clearly it is a presupposition of this project that the method in question has some effectiveness. What prevents that presupposition from becoming an entitlement? (Wright 2004, p. 195).

Wright not only rejects the effectiveness of the dice-rolling method as an entitlement; he rejects it even as a *candidate* for being an entitlement.

It is straightforward to collect sufficient countervailing evidence that the method in question is not effective. (Reasonably, past failures of the dice-rolling method as a means of prediction should be regarded as being sufficient to undermine its the effectiveness). So, the effectiveness of the method is not an entitlement as clause (i) is not satisfied. However, more importantly, it was not even a candidate for being an entitlement. What delineates the class of candidate entitlements for a given cognitive project is the requirement that it be a presupposition of the project (in the sense specified earlier) and that it satisfyies clause (ii) of the characterization given. As said, clause (ii) is a "structural" constraint that ensures that entitlements bear a certain relation to other propositions of the relevant region of thought. That is, that no other proposition is of a more secure prior standing. The effectiveness of the dice-rolling method fails to be a candidate for entitlement because it fails to satisfy clause (ii). The two failures are not unrelated. Reflection on the failure to satisfy (i) will make clear why clause (ii) is not satisfied either.

So, consider again what we do in order to establish that clause (i) is not satisfied. We collect countervailing evidence. Wright notes, 'There is no entitlement to trust in the dice-rolling method because it is a method for assessing statements which allow of independent assessment by more basic means' (Wright 2004, p. 196). The point is that the countervailing evidence only has force, because, in collecting it, we rely on methods and propositions of a more secure prior standing than the dice-rolling method (e.g. that our perceptual apparatus is functioning properly when we see with our own eyes that the predictions arrived at on the basis of the method turn out to be false). This suggests that the effectiveness of the method is not to be included in the range of proper entitlement candidates. It is not sufficiently secure and basic.

A crucial feature of the dice-rolling case is that we seem to be able agree on what the facts are through independent, and more secure, means (and that the facts undermine the effectiveness of the method). On the basis of perception, we can agree on the outcomes at the race track. However, what is to be said when this feature is missing – i.e., when we have no independent grip on what the facts are? Wright invites us to consider the following scenario:

[MODALIZING]:

> Suppose I postulate a tract of reality – it might be the realm of non-actual possible worlds as conceived by Lewis – which is spatio-temporally insulated from the domain of our usual empirical knowledge, and a special faculty – as it may be, our non-inferential "modal intuition"

> – whose operation is supposed to allow us to gather knowledge about it (Wright 2004, p. 196).

Now, is the reliability of modal intuition an entitlement for modal projects? (Or, as Wright says, 'our primitive, non-inferential impressions of modal validity and invalidity' (Wright 2004, p. 196).) According to Wright it might very well be:

> After all, I have – in the nature of the case, since I cannot compare its deliverances with the facts, independently ascertained – no reason to believe that it is unreliable (so long as its promptings are consistent); and any attempt to check on its functioning will presumably perforce to involve further modal intuition, of no more secure a prior standing (Wright 2004, p. 196).

The reliability of modal intuition is a presupposition of modalizing, because modal intuition is supposed to be our only means to investigate the realm of possible worlds. So, to doubt its effectiveness would rationally commit one to doubting the significance of any modal project. Also, there is no sufficient reason for thinking that modal intuition is unreliable. So, clause (i) is satisfied. Remember we have no independent grip on the realm of possible worlds, and so, get no other information than what we get through modal intuition. Clause (ii) also appears to be satisfied. Attempts to vindicate the reliability of modal intuition gives rise to an infinite regress of justificatory projects each concerned to vindicate the presuppositions of its predecessors. (Think on the model of I-II-III arguments.[10]) Thus, arguably, the reliability of modal intuition should qualify as an entitlement according to Wright.[11]

10. Attempts to vindicate the reliability can be thought of on the model of I-II-III arguments, perhaps along the following lines:

	I	My modal intuition is in all respects as if *P* is a modal fact.
So:	II	*P* is a modal fact.
		If *P* is a modal fact, then modal intuition is reliable.
So:	III	Modal intuition is reliable.

The charge was that I-II-III arguments involved circularity. This can be thought of as an infinite regress by thinking of the circle being repeated over and over. Each repetition is an attempt to vindicate the presuppositions of the previous repetition, but will involve presuppositions of no more secure a prior standing (*viz*. presuppositions of the same kind).

11. However, what is *not* an entitlement is any specific view about the metaphysical nature of the modal realm (cf. Wright 2004, p. 197).

Generalizing on the case at hand, it seems that we have an instance of entitlement whenever we postulate (i) a tract of reality *R* which does not interact in any way with domains accessible through our usual cognitive capacities and methods, and (ii) a corresponding special faculty or method (the *R*-faculty or *R*-method) by means of which we can access the tract of reality in question. The reliability of the special faculty seems to be an entitlement for cognitive projects pertaining to the postulated tract of reality. It is a presupposition of *R*-projects, as doubt about its reliability will rationally commit one to doubting the competence of any *R*-project. This is because the *R*-faculty is the only way to access *R*. There is no (sufficient) reason for thinking the *R*-faculty unreliable, because there are no *R*-facts that can be independently appreciated, and so, serve as a standard against which the reliability of the *R*-faculty can be measured. That is, clause (i) is satisfied. Attempts to vindicate the reliability of the *R*-faculty will, as in the case of modal intuition, bring on an infinite regress of justificatory projects each of which is concerned to vindicate the presuppositions of its predecessors. (Again think on the model of I-II-III arguments. But, as noted earlier, it should be noted that this take on things differs slightly from Wright's own view.)

Notice that if this is right, it is not just the reliability of the *R*-faculty that will be an entitlement of *R*-projects. The existence of the realm *R* will be an entitlement too.[12] This is a manifestation of a feature of entitlement mentioned earlier, *viz*. that on any particular occasion the entitlements of a cognitive project will include the proper functioning of the faculties (methods, etc.) required to pursue the project and the suitability of the attendant circumstances for their effective function (absent sufficient reason to think otherwise). Thus, in the case of modalizing it is not only the reliability of modal intuition which is an entitlement – it is also the existence of the realm of possible worlds (though, as indicated, there is no entitlement to a specific metaphysics). For empirical projects, the proper functioning of our senses is an entitlement, together with the existence of an external world (which is to be reckoned among the things that make circumstances suitable for the proper functioning of the senses).

Let us return to the entitlement generating template extracted from Wright's modalizing example. Does the template yield only what we would regard as crazy and bizarre entitlements? Arguably, the reliability of modal intuition should not be deemed a crazy and bizarre entitlement from our point of view.

12. Wright does not explicitly say this, but I take him to say things that commit him to this in other passages of Wright (2004).

Modalizing is part of our actual ways of thinking. It is not so obvious that the existence of a realm of possible worlds is part of our actual thinking, even if it is borne in mind that an entitlement to the existence of a realm of possible worlds does not involve any specific view about their metaphysical nature. Applying the template from above, what about the following: Mr. X postulates (i) a tract of reality, Pixie World, which is inhabited by green pixies and completely isolated from domains which we can gain access to by our ordinary faculties and methods, and (ii) a special faculty – the pixie eye – detecting the whereabouts and doings of the green pixies. When investigating Pixie World, does Mr. X have an entitlement to the existence of Pixie World and the reliability of the special faculty in question? Surely, *these* entitlements are not part of our actual ways of thinking and must be deemed crazy or bizarre from our perspective.[13]

It is worth noting that Wright started out by expressing the view that the notion of entitlement should be sufficiently selective and not 'extend to all manner of (what we would regard as) bizarre and irrational prejudices' (Wright 2004, p. 195). That is, he started out by expressing the view that the generosity problem needs to be addressed. Yet he has said surprisingly little to address it. If anything, he has contributed to bringing it to the fore by pointing towards a template that could generate a wealth of entitlements, some of which might qualify as "crazy and bizarre" from our point of view.

3.3 Us and them

When raising the generosity problem, Wright explicitly refers to 'our actual ways of thinking about and investigating the world' (Wright 2004, p. 195). That is, in approaching the generosity problem Wright assumed *our* perspective on the world. The beliefs we typically tend to hold are taken to be relevant

13. There are certain lines of response which should be resisted. In particular, the following response should be resisted: *There is no reason to believe neither in the existence of Pixie World nor the reliability of the pixie eye, because they do not integrate with other theories about the world and increase explanatory power.* This line of response should be resisted, because the position it represents disagrees with the entitlement approach at a very fundamental level. Entitlement is a non-evidential kind of warrant. However, it is part of the outlook of a friend of the suggested response that theses and methods should be assessed by the lights of how well they integrate with other theses, methods, and theories concerning the world and considerations on explanatory power. A high degree of integration of, say, the cornerstone that there is an external world can thus be regarded as positive evidence in its favour. That is to say, an adherent of the position in question should not talk about entitlement in the first place.

background. The faculties, methods, and procedures we regard as reliable are counted as such. The cornerstone propositions we trust are the usual ones: we are not brains in vats, we are not being deceived by an evil demon, we are not hallucinating or caught in a sustained coherent dream.

What if these assumptions are not made? What if we let go of our perspective? Then it seems that we get a class of cases different from the ones considered in the previous (sub)section. The new cases are ones in what is regarded as fact – and thus as potentially relevant evidence – favours entitlements other than ours.[14] In the new cases we do not work on what is regarded as fact by postulating an isolated tract of reality – as in the modalizing scenario – but rather by changing the "epistemic luggage" brought along, i.e., by considering agents who have other beliefs than us, consider other faculties, methods, and procedures as reliable, and, perhaps, have drastically different cornerstones. What is considered to be fact will be different, because what gets counted as such depends on what faculties, methods, and procedures are regarded as reliable, and what cornerstones there are.[15]

Here is a scenario of the kind I have in mind:

[GOOD GOD]: Consider a religious society, the members of which believe that God created the universe and everything in it. They believe that God is omniscient, omnipotent, benevolent, and that certain religious rituals are effective methods for affecting the course of events. Whenever someone confronts them with what might be taken to be evidence against the existence of God, they have an answer ready at hand. (Countervailing evidence: the problem of evil. Answer: even those events that appear bad to us are good – God can see it, but we cannot.) God pervades reality, and His existence is a presupposition of many – or, perhaps, all – cognitive projects the members of the society engage in. The question is: is it an entitlement?

14. It is important to point out that favour should not be taken to indicate that the facts yield positive evidence supporting entitlements, because, again, it has to be borne in mind that entitlement is a non-evidential kind of warrant. Rather favour should be read as saying that the facts offer indirect support by not constituting countervailing evidence for some cornerstones (the entitlements) but do for others the mere entitlement *candidates*.

15. There are points of similarity here with Goldman's discussion of the notions of weak and strong justification within his reliabilist framework (cf. Goldman 1988).

Suppose that a member of the society engages in the project of praying to God to seek guidance on what to believe about a recent rumour that the leader of the society will step down because she has lost her faith.

It is a presupposition of this project that God exists. To doubt the existence of God would rationally commit the person to doubting the competence of the cognitive project in question. (Why talk to someone who you doubt is there?) Clause (i) is satisfied. As said, whenever someone presents a member of the society with what might be taken to be evidence against God's existence, there is an answer forthcoming. Clause (ii) is satisfied as well. God's existence is so fundamental that any attempt to vindicate it would somehow presuppose it. To accept that there is an onus to justify God's existence would bring on a commitment to an infinite regress of justificatory projects aimed to support the presuppositions of their predecessors essentially a repeated cycle of attempts to vindicate God's existence, and so, one would hit on the same basic presupposition time and again, but never anything more basic. So: God's existence is an entitlement of the cognitive project in question (and most others).

The rationality of the trust which a member of the society places in the existence of God is the same kind as the rationality of the trust I place in my not being a brain in a vat. It is the rationality of trusting an unavoidable commitment of a given project. As stressed above, to doubt a cornerstone of a project would rationally commit one to doubting the significance of the project. So, to doubt or be agnostic about a cornerstone of a project and yet engage in it would be *irrational*. It would not amount to a formal inconsistency, but it would sound odd if someone were to say, I doubt that I am not a brain in a vat, but I will engage in an investigation of the tree in front of me anyway.

4. Responding to the generosity problem: truth and falsity

In this section, I will offer a way of distinguishing between good and bad entitlements. One nice feature of the distinction to be offered is that it seems to accommodate a number of independently plausible theses concerning entitlement and cognate notions:

(I) Bad entitlements *are* entitlements; they are warrants, and, as such, represent some kind of epistemic value.

(II) Good entitlements are epistemically more valuable than bad entitlements.

(III) There are false entitlements.

(IV) It is rational to trust a bad entitlement.

4.1 The Simple Suggestion: truth and falsity

The proposal I wish to discuss is very simple to state. Here it is:

[SIMPLE SUGGESTION]: Let *P* be an entitlement (for some project). Then:

- *P* is a *good* entitlement if *P* is true,

and

- *P* is a *bad* entitlement if *P* is false.

Let us note three things:

First, the proposal in terms of truth and falsity is not compatible with an idea tabled in Wright (1985). Here Wright speculates that there might be propositions which lie beyond cognitive achievement in the sense of lying outside the domain of *truth*-evaluability.

Second and this needs to be stressed being a *good* entitlement is not part of the notion of entitlement itself. An entitlement need not be good. There are bad entitlements. If it were part of the notion of entitlement that any entitlement be good in the sense specified above, then, on the present proposal, the notion of entitlement would be factive. From an entitlement to *P* it would follow that *P* is true. However, entitlement is a species of warrant, and, at least according to one (plausible) way of thinking about warrant, warrant should not be factive. The conception of warrant I have in mind is Plantinga's: warrant is whatever renders knowledge when combined with true belief.

On this note, it should also be flagged that good entitlements will count as knowledge. A good entitlement to *P* is a warrant, and since it is good, it is also true. Warrant combined with truth is knowledge, so good entitlements qualify as knowledge. This also suggests that, on the present proposal, the goodness of an entitlement cannot or perhaps more correctly: should not be taken to be a part of the very notion of entitlement. If it were the notions of warrant and knowledge would, in the particular case of entitlement, collapse into one.[16]

Third, note that entitlement has to be a kind of warrant which is epistemically valuable independently of truth. This is not a constraint on warrant as such[17], but a requirement that flows from my desire to respect the theses (I) and (II) stated above. According to (I), someone who has a bad entitlement enjoys a

16. There is an awkward wrinkle here. As seen above, Wright takes the attitude paired with entitlement to be trust, i.e., a kind of acceptance rather than belief. So, good entitlements as characterized here only count as knowledge provided true, warranted acceptances do.

17. Think of Goldman's moderate unitarianism. See Goldman (2001a).

positive epistemic standing or possesses something epistemically valuable. Truth is epistemically valuable. However, since, by assumption, we are not dealing with a good entitlement, truth is not a candidate source of the positive epistemic standing or epistemic value of the entitlement. The source has to be traced to the notion of entitlement itself and to some aspect of the notion which can be considered as epistemically valuable independently of any link it may bear to truth. What is needed is an argument to the effect that entitlement possesses something of intrinsic epistemic value which is *not* truth. This invites an adherence to pluralism about epistemic value.

The move towards pluralism might be thought too quick. Even a warrant to a false proposition can be regarded as being epistemically valuable, because warrant *tends* to lead to truth although it does not always do so. So, false warrants are not incompatible with a monism that takes truth to be the only thing of intrinsic epistemic value and warrant as valuable by courtesy of truth.

However, monism is implausible. There is a very simple consideration that suggests that the most plausible version of monism is not all that plausible. The version of monism I have in mind is that according to which truth is the only thing of epistemic value. Truth is probably the most widely agreed epistemic value, and rightly so. It seems very difficult to deny the centrality or importance of truth in our cognitive endeavours. They seem to be geared towards getting *true* beliefs. This is probably why the particular brand of monism in question appears attractive to many. Or perhaps, someone impressed by the idea of truth being the ultimate goal of cognitive endeavours will not opt for pure monism, but instead instrumental or pseudo-pluralism (or impure monism). That is, the view that there is more than one thing of epistemic value, but only truth is intrinsically valuable. All the other values are values courtesy of truth; i.e. because they promote truth.[18]

This is the most plausible form of monism. Any other version of monism is implausible. Truth is so central that any theory of epistemic value, whether pluralist or monist, which does not count truth as being of epistemic value is

18. Instrumental pluralism or impure monism has been held by Goldman, although he often talks of virtues rather than values. He sometimes refers to his view as moderate virtue unitarianism and describes it as follows: A moderate form of virtue unitarianism would say that all virtues stand in a single relation, for example, a causal relation, to a common goal, or desideratum such as true belief (Goldman 2001a, p. 31). He also considers a weaker form of virtue unitarianism according to which there need not be a single shared end. The weaker form of unitarianism allows for a group of intimately related values, and, additionally, allow for the virtues to stand to these values in a various ways.

too far off the mark to be a viable candidate. It thus seems reasonable to think that, *if* we can get rid of monism cashed out in terms of truth, then we can disregard monism. That is a big if, or is it? Here is a very simple consideration against monism, the one alluded to above[19]:

It seems incontestable that knowledge is epistemically more valuable than mere true belief. In case this is granted, the monist is in trouble. Because if, as she holds, truth is really the only thing of epistemic value, there is no way to accommodate the incontestable thought that knowledge is epistemically more valuable than mere true belief. Both knowledge and true belief involve truth, and so, by the lights of monism, should be on a par with respect to epistemic value. To hold monism one would thus have to reject (what appears to be) an incontestable thought, and that is reason enough to reject monism.[20]

So, let us dismiss monism about epistemic value. However, embracing pluralism is one thing, embracing pluralism *and* accounting for what other than truth is intrinsically valuable another. As said, what is needed to accommodate theses (I) and (II) is an argument to the effect that entitlement possess something which is epistemically valuable independently of truth. At this stage, I openly admit to have no such argument. Fortunately, this is not relevant to [SIMPLE SUGGESTION] as a response to the generality problem.

What about theses (III) and (IV)? Thesis (III) there are false entitlements is obviously accommodated. Thesis (IV) is also accommodated. As said earlier, the rationality of entitlement is (among other things) the rationality of trusting an unavoidable commitment. It is irrational to engage in a project while harbouring doubt or being agnostic about one of its presuppositions. By excluding doubt and agnosticism trust in the cornerstones of a region of thought is what makes projects engaged in within that region *cognitive* projects.

4.2 Back to scepticism

Before presenting the generosity problem, two reasons were stated why one might take the problem to stand in need of being addressed. The second rea-

19. Coming up with good arguments against philosophical views can sometimes be very hard work. So, I am quite delighted that someone already has come up with a compelling argument against the most plausible form of monism just talked about. The argument is well-known and has been advanced by several people, but the piece of work I will cite here is DePaul (2001, pp. 174–175).

20. Others first and foremost passionate monists are likely to insist that properly regarded the reasoning points to a dilemma: either one has to reject the incontestable thought, or one has to reject monism.

son that one natural way to look at entitlement is as a response to scepticism, and, thus regarded, the notion of entitlement might do too much if it turns out being too generous.

One thing that should be made clear is that the proposed distinction between good and bad entitlements can be regarded as a *metaphysical* distinction drawn with realism as a background assumption (at least given what I say below). The distinction is *not* meant to give us an epistemic handle on which entitlements are good, and which ones are bad. It is up to the world to decide which entitlements are good and which ones are bad. In order for an entitlement to be true the world needs to cooperate. Hoping to get an epistemic handle on the distinction, as cashed out above, would be to hope for too much anyway. For to have a reason to regard a given entitlement as good would, on the proposal made, be to have a reason to regard it as true. However, the assumption that there is such a reason would clash with the assumption that we are dealing with an entitlement. Entitlement, it is recalled, is a non-evidential kind of warrant. However, if there were such a thing as a reason supporting the truth of an entitlement, it would seem that it would suddenly be close to being evidentially warranted.[21]

On this note, someone might raise the following point: entitlement is a warrant to trust the *truth* of a specific proposition. So, by the lights of the proposal made, entitlement gives a warrant to trust, or take it for granted, that one's entitlement is a good one.[22] This might be taken to give some kind of epistemic handle on good entitlements. However, of course, the problem – if it is a problem – is that the point will apply to *any* entitlement. Since, as said, entitlement is a warrant to trust the truth of a specific proposition, it is a warrant to trust that one's entitlement is a good one. Indeed so. However, one immediate and important observation is this: a warrant to trust that one's entitlement is good does not imply that it *is* good.

There will be a determinate fact of the matter whether an entitlement is good or bad here the realism comes out in the open although we cannot always tell which. (Sometimes we can tell that an entitlement is bad, though – e.g., if it turns out to be inconsistent.) This is enough to counter the inflation one might fear in the wake of the generosity problem: the notion of entitlement might be generous, but at least it should bring some comfort that not all entitlements

21. The line pushed here on the distinction between good and bad entitlements are in certain respects similar to Timothy Williamson's epistemicism in the vagueness debate.
22.This point was put to me by Sven Rosenkranz.

are good. Note that the distinction deflates the generosity problem at a metaphysical level. At the epistemic level inflation remains. If the sceptic demands that we provide a reason that the cornerstones put under attack by the sceptical challenges should be regarded as good, we can respond that, by her own lights, she is demanding too much. It was her, after all, who convinced us that any attempt to accumulate evidence in favour of cornerstones will misfire as a matter of principle.

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