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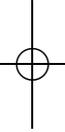
Two Purposes of Arguing and Two Epistemic Projects

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In this chapter, I want to borrow what Frank Jackson says about propounding arguments, a phenomenon in the dialectical domain, and adapt it to the epistemological domain.



In chapter 6 of *Conditionals* (1987),¹ Jackson distinguishes two purposes of arguing—*teasing out* and *convincing*. With respect to the convincing purpose of arguing, he describes a way in which a propounded argument may be ill-suited to its purpose—the argument as propounded may *beg the question*. Jackson’s account of begging the question is quite different from a more familiar account that can be found, for example, in Irving Copi’s textbook, *Introduction to Logic* (1961). Copi’s account is, it seems to me, more closely related to the teasing-out purpose of arguing. So we have two purposes of arguing, the teasing-out purpose and the convincing purpose, and, for each purpose, we have a property of arguments that makes an argument ill-suited to that purpose. Both properties are called ‘begging the question’, and the two accounts of begging the question (Copi’s and Jackson’s) provide principled limitations on the arguments that can properly be used for the respective purposes (teasing out and convincing).



I want to transpose all this to the epistemological domain in order to clarify the notion of transmission of epistemic warrant and, particularly, the idea of failure of warrant transmission (*transmission failure*). In this transposition there will be, corresponding to the two purposes of arguing, two kinds of epistemic project. I shall call them *deciding what to believe* (corresponding to the teasing-out purpose of arguing) and *settling the question* (corresponding to the convincing purpose). For each kind of epistemic project, there will be a property of

¹ Page references are to this chapter unless otherwise indicated.

arguments that makes an argument ill-suited for use in projects of that kind. Each property might be called ‘transmission failure’. The two accounts of transmission failure (one analogous to Copi’s account of begging the question and the other to Jackson’s) provide principled limitations on the arguments that can properly be used in pursuing epistemic projects of the respective kinds (deciding what to believe and settling the question).

1. Background: Epistemic warrant and its transmission

I follow Tyler Burge (1993, 2003a, 2003b) in using ‘epistemic warrant’ (or just ‘warrant’) as a more inclusive term than ‘justification’. Warrant confers positive epistemic status on a proposition and rationally supports the attitude of belief. If a subject has a warrant to believe a proposition P then it is epistemically appropriate for that subject to believe P.²

1.1. Propositional warrant and doxastic warrant

There is a familiar distinction in epistemology between propositional justification and doxastic justification. The notion of warrant that I have just introduced is propositional warrant. Facts about propositional justification or warrant are not, in themselves, facts about actual beliefs or other psychological states. A subject may have a propositional warrant to believe P while not actually believing P and, indeed, while having no inclination to believe P. We might highlight this by speaking of an abstract space of warrants just as we speak of a logical space of entailment relations. Questions about the abstract space of warrants are amongst the most basic questions in epistemology; but they are not the only questions (Pryor, 2000: 521).

² In Burge’s terminology, warrants include both justifications and entitlements. The distinction is this: ‘Justifications... involve reasons that people have and have access to... they must be available in the cognitive repertoire of the subject’ (1993: 459); in contrast, ‘entitlements are epistemic rights or warrants that need not be understood by or even accessible to the subject’ (ibid., 458). Wright (1985, 2004) also allows that warrants include both justifications and entitlements, but he uses the terms ‘justification’ and ‘entitlement’ for a different contrast, between cases of evidential support and cases where it is ‘reasonable to accept a... proposition without reason; that is, without evidence’ (1985: 450). See Davies (2004) for discussion of Burge’s and Wright’s notions of entitlement. Pryor (2000, 2001, 2004, 2005) prefers to use ‘justification’ as the inclusive term and to use ‘warrant’ in Plantinga’s (1993a, 1993b) way for whatever has to be added to true belief to yield knowledge. In Pryor’s terminology, ‘you have a justification to believe P iff you are in a position where it would be epistemically appropriate for you to believe P’ (2005: 181).

If a subject has a propositional warrant *to* believe P—so that it is epistemically appropriate for the subject to believe P—and the subject does believe P then, to that extent, the subject does well doxastically. He thinks the thing that is the thing to think. *Doxastic warrant*, or warranted belief, demands more than this. If a subject's believing P is to be doxastically warranted then there should be the right relation between the propositional warrant to believe P and the subject's own grounds for believing P (what the belief is *based* on).³ Roughly speaking, warranted belief demands, not just that the subject should believe something that happens to be the thing to think, but that the subject should believe something *because* it is the thing to think.⁴

In addition to the notion of warranted belief and the less demanding notion of believing something that one has a propositional warrant *to* believe, there are two other notions of doing well doxastically that can be mentioned briefly. The first is the notion of rational answerability to what one *takes to be* relations of propositional warrant, even though one may be mistaken about those relations. Suppose that a subject is mistakenly convinced that there is a warrant to believe not-P rather than P and, on this basis, believes not-P. The subject does not have a warranted belief but, *modulo* his initial mistaken conviction, the subject arrives at his belief quite *rationally*. Indeed, given that conviction, believing P—the thing that is the thing to think—would seem irrational. The belief would not be rationally based and so would not be warranted.⁵

The second notion of doing well doxastically to be mentioned briefly here is a more refined version of the first. It is a notion of *blamelessness* in believing that takes into account whether the subject is doxastically culpable or epistemically irresponsible in making an error about the structure of the abstract space of warrants. If it is possible for a subject to arrive blamelessly at a belief for which there is no propositional warrant then blameless belief is certainly not sufficient for warranted belief. Indeed, even blamelessly believing something that one *has* a propositional warrant to believe is not sufficient for warranted belief. A subject might have a propositional warrant to believe P and yet believe P on the wrong grounds. Such a belief would not be properly based, and so would not be a warranted belief, even if the subject were to be blameless in making his error.

³ For reviews of work on the basing relation, see Korcz (1997, 2006).

⁴ In at least two respects, this is only a rough formulation of what doxastic warrant requires. First, it may suggest an overly intellectualized account of warranted belief. Second, there may be additional necessary conditions for warranted belief (Pryor, 2005: 182).

⁵ Pryor says (2004: 365): 'Those doubts [in this case, the mistaken conviction] will render your belief in P *irrational* even if they don't affect your justification [warrant] *to* believe it. And if your belief in P is irrational, then it can't be a justified [warranted] or well-founded belief. In this way, then, even unjustified [unwarranted] doubts can affect what justified beliefs you're able to have.'

1.2. *Closure and transmission of epistemic warrant*

In the present context, transmission of epistemic warrant is transmission of warrant from the premisses to the conclusion of a valid argument. Questions about warrant transmission are similar to, but not quite the same as, questions about the closure of warrant or knowledge under known entailment (Dretske, 1970, 2005; Nozick, 1981). Crispin Wright (1985: 438) was the first to draw the distinction explicitly. For the case of arguments with just one premiss, the question whether there are exceptions to *closure* of warrant under known entailment is the question whether it is possible that a subject should have a warranted belief in P and know that P entails Q and yet not be in a position to arrive at a warranted belief in Q. The question whether there are exceptions to *transmission* of warrant across known entailment is the question whether it is possible that a subject should have a warranted belief in P and know that P entails Q and yet not *thereby* be in a position to arrive at a warranted belief in Q.

The difference that the word ‘thereby’ makes is this. Closure requires that the subject has some warrant or other to believe Q and is in a position to ground a belief in Q on that warrant. Transmission requires that, in virtue of recognizing the entailment from P to Q, the subject is in a position to ground a belief in Q on the very warrant that grounds his belief in P. As Wright introduces the distinction, there could be exceptions to transmission that were not exceptions to closure, and there could be exceptions to transmission even if there were no exceptions to closure.

There may, however, be a way of understanding the notion of warrant transmission on which exceptions to transmission are no more possible than exceptions to closure, and perhaps are not possible at all (Silins, 2005). If a subject has a warrant to believe something then it is epistemically appropriate for the subject to believe that thing. Consider a subject who has a warranted belief in P and knows that P entails Q. It is epistemically appropriate for the subject to believe P. Plausibly, it is also epistemically appropriate for the subject to believe Q. Suppose that the subject competently deduces Q from P, drawing on his recognition that P entails Q. Then, ahead of more information about the basing relation, it is at least somewhat plausible that the subject ends up with a properly based and warranted belief in Q. The apparently plausible upshot is that, *by* having a warranted belief in P and knowing that P entails Q, the subject is in a position to arrive at a warranted belief in Q.⁶

⁶ Some principles that are presented in discussions of closure, for knowledge or warranted belief, can be read as transmission principles. See Hawthorne (2005: 29), Pryor (forthcoming).

We can leave it as an open question whether there is an understanding of warrant transmission on which it is exceptionless. If there is such an understanding then we should, of course, assume that Wright's notion of warrant transmission is different—more demanding and so more liable to failure.⁷ A more demanding notion might require, for example, that the proposition Q should not be the very same proposition as P or that the subject's recognition that P entails Q should not be redundant in the subject's arriving at a warranted belief in Q (Wright, 2002: 332).

1.3. *Transmission failure*

Wright (1985) proposes that epistemic warrant is not transmitted from premisses to conclusion in some anti-sceptical arguments such as G. E. Moore's (1939) 'proof' of the existence of the external world. When Moore holds up his hands in front of him, his visual experience as of hands furnishes an epistemic warrant to believe: 'I have hands'. From this premiss there is a valid inference to the conclusion that an external world exists, relying on the a priori knowable conditional premiss, 'If I have hands then an external world exists', and the rule of inference, *modus ponens*. Moore's argument discloses that he is committed to believing that an external world exists if he believes that he has hands. But it does not provide a convincing response to the sceptic.

Wright connects his claim that Moore's argument is an example of transmission failure with a point on which he agrees with the sceptic—a point about the dependence relation amongst warrants. It is only if Moore *already* had an epistemic warrant to believe something tantamount to his conclusion—that there is an external world—that he would have a warrant to believe his premiss, 'I have hands'.⁸

My own interest in transmission failure arose from work in philosophy of mind and cognitive science on *the problem of armchair knowledge* (Davies, 2003a). Each instance of the problem is a palpably valid argument whose premisses can apparently be known to be true from the comfort of the philosopher's armchair yet whose conclusion is a proposition whose truth or falsity cannot, it seems, be settled without rising from the armchair and conducting some empirical investigation. I proposed that Wright's notion of transmission failure could help me

⁷ See Wright (2003: 57): 'A valid argument is one thing. A valid argument with warranted premisses is a second. But a *cogent* argument is yet a third.'

⁸ As we shall shortly see, this point of agreement with the sceptic can be challenged. See Byrne (2004) for the distinction between the game of convince-the-sceptic and the game of expose-the-sceptic.

solve the problem of armchair knowledge.⁹ But the arguments that concerned me did not clearly exemplify the pattern that Wright found in Moore's argument. Consequently, despite the convergence between my work and Wright's, my account of transmission failure came to look rather different from his.

My account did agree with Wright's in classifying Moore's argument as an example of transmission failure. But as against this Wright–Davies view, James Pryor has argued that '[Moore's] justification to believe [that he has hands] *does* transmit to the hypothesis that there's an external world' (2004: 351). So far as Wright's version of the view goes, Pryor's opposition turns on a disagreement about the structure of the dependence relation amongst warrants. For, according to Pryor's (2000) *dogmatist* account of perceptual knowledge as basic knowledge, Moore's warrant to believe his premiss, 'I have hands', *does not depend* on his having an antecedent warrant to believe something tantamount to his conclusion, that there is an external world. Pryor also discusses my version of the view that Moore's argument is an example of transmission failure and says that the property of the argument that I call 'transmission failure' is 'only a dialectical or persuasive failing' (2004: 374, n. 32).¹⁰

Thus, three features make an epistemological landscape including transmission failure difficult to appreciate. First, although Wright and I agree that there are failures of warrant transmission, there are differences of focus and formulation between us. Second, there is an outright disagreement between Wright and Pryor over Moore's argument. Third, there is an apparent disagreement between Pryor and me, and Pryor says that my account of transmission failure is not genuinely epistemological but only dialectical.

Jackson's topic, the two purposes of arguing, definitely belongs in the dialectical domain.¹¹ My aim is to shed some light on warrant transmission and transmission failure by transposing Jackson's distinction to the epistemological domain. In the end, there will be two accounts of transmission failure. I claim that the transposed distinction helps to explain the differences of formulation and the outright disagreements that appear in recent work on transmission failure. I also hope that this paper will help to substantiate the idea that both accounts of transmission failure are genuinely epistemological, though both can be seen as epistemological analogues of accounts of a propounded argument being ill-suited to its dialectical purpose.

⁹ Early versions of my proposal were presented at the Eastern Division Meeting of the American Philosophical Association in December 1994 and at a conference in St Andrews in August 1995.

¹⁰ See also Burge (2003b: 269): 'It seems to me that Davies' reflections bear more directly on understanding dialectic and the rational effectiveness of arguments in particular argumentative contexts, than on the general problem of transmission of warrant.'

¹¹ See *OED*. **Dialectical** or **dialectic** (adj.): Of, pertaining to, or of the nature of logical disputation; argumentative, logical.

PART I: THE DIALECTICAL DOMAIN

2. Two purposes of arguing

With so much by way of epistemological background, I turn to the dialectical domain and to Jackson's distinction between the teasing-out purpose of arguing and the convincing purpose.

2.1 *The teasing-out purpose of arguing*

It may sometimes happen that you wonder about the answer to a question even though your beliefs already commit you to an answer. You wonder, perhaps, whether or not a proposition Q is true even though your beliefs already commit you to the truth of Q . In the simplest kind of case, you may already believe Q but the belief may not be activated or accessed. In such a case, a bald assertion that Q is true may help you to answer your question simply by *reminding* you of your antecedent belief.

In another kind of case, you may have beliefs P_1, \dots, P_n from which Q can be validly derived but you may not yet recognize your commitment to believing Q . This might happen because you have overlooked one of your antecedent beliefs, P_i . So someone's propounding the argument from P_1, \dots, P_n to Q may help you answer your question about Q simply by reminding you of your antecedent belief in a premiss. Alternatively, you might have your premiss beliefs in mind but still fail to recognize your commitment to believing Q because you have failed to follow through the valid argument that leads from those premisses to Q . So someone's propounding the argument may help you, at least in part, by highlighting the relevance of your antecedent beliefs to the issue at hand. Jackson (p. 102) calls this the 'teasing-out' function of propounding an argument.

When someone propounds a valid argument from premisses P_1, \dots, P_n to conclusion Q with the teasing-out purpose, the aim is not to provide the hearer with any new reasons to believe P_1, \dots, P_n . Rather, the propounder's aim is to show the hearer that, to the extent that he believes P_1, \dots, P_n , he is also committed to believing the conclusion Q . Equally, to the extent that he does not believe Q he is committed to reconsidering his beliefs P_1, \dots, P_n .

2.2 *The convincing purpose of arguing*

When an argument is propounded with the purpose of teasing out the consequences of someone's beliefs, there is, in general, no need for the propounder to offer the hearer considerations in support of the premisses.

The propounding does its work by highlighting the entailment relation and so revealing that whatever considerations support the premisses also provide reasons to believe the conclusion. But when an argument is propounded with the purpose of convincing someone of the truth of its conclusion then the propounder usually offers the hearer considerations that support the premisses. The hearer is implicitly invited to borrow these considerations and to be persuaded by them of the truth of the premisses, and thence of the truth of the conclusion.¹²

A hearer who has an antecedent doubt about the truth of the conclusion may, for that very reason, start out by doubting that the conjunction of the premisses is true. But the speaker's propounding the argument provides the hearer with new information. The considerations that are offered for borrowing support the premisses. They go into the scales on the side opposite from the considerations that initially led the hearer to doubt the conclusion. So, by propounding the argument, the speaker may change the balance of considerations and convince the hearer. In short, Jackson says (p. 107):

The utility of valid argumentation (over and above the teasing-out function) in convincing audiences of conclusions lies in the evidence implicitly offered for borrowing by the presentation and selection of premisses.

3. Jackson on begging the question

What is important for the notion of 'begging the question proper' (p. 110) is the particular way in which the considerations offered for borrowing support the premisses of the argument. Following Jackson, I shall initially present the issues in terms of a Bayesian account of the confirmation of hypotheses by

¹² The speaker's choice of premisses may convey important information to the hearer about the nature and structure of the considerations that are being offered for borrowing. Thus consider, for example, the arguments 'P, Q; therefore Q' and 'P, if P then Q; therefore Q'. The conjunction of the premisses of the first argument, 'P & Q', is logically equivalent to the conjunction of the premisses of the second argument, 'P & (if P then Q)'. But, according to Jackson, the speaker's choice of the *modus ponens* argument generates the *argumentative implicature* that there are considerations available that support the conditional premiss, 'if P then Q', and are separate from the considerations that support P: 'The cases for the two premisses do not stand or fall together' (p. 105).

One kind of dialectical misdeed in propounding an argument with the convincing purpose is to choose premisses in a way that generates an implicature to the effect that particular kinds of consideration are being offered for borrowing when, in fact, the available considerations are quite different. Jackson calls this misdeed 'misleading advertising' (*ibid.*). Given the overall aim of this paper I shall not dwell on this misdeed, for it has no obvious analogue in the epistemological domain.

evidence. The standard Bayesian framework will not, however, be adequate to all the epistemological issues that arise in this paper.

3.1 *Evidential support and background assumptions*

Evidence E supports hypothesis H relative to background assumptions B if the probability of H given E plus the background assumptions B , $\Pr(H/(E \& B))$, is greater than the prior probability of H given B alone, $\Pr(H/B)$. It can happen that E supports H relative to one set of background assumptions but not relative to another set. So, in particular, it may happen that E supports H relative to a speaker's background assumptions but not relative to the background assumptions of a hearer.

Suppose, then, that a speaker propounds an argument to a hearer who needs to be convinced of the argument's conclusion Q . Suppose, too, that P is among the argument's premisses. By propounding the argument, the speaker implicitly offers for borrowing evidence of a certain kind for P . We may suppose that this evidence does indeed support P *relative to the speaker's background assumptions*. But it does not follow that the evidence supports P relative to the hearer's background assumptions. In fact, the hearer's doubt about the truth of Q may virtually guarantee that the speaker's offered evidence does *not* support P *relative to the hearer's background assumptions*. In that case, propounding the argument will be ineffectual. The argument as propounded is ill-suited to its purpose. It will not convince the hearer of the truth of the conclusion Q because the evidence offered for borrowing will not provide the hearer with any grounds for accepting the premiss P .¹³

Thus, Jackson says (pp. 111, 112; emphasis added):

[I]t may be that a given argument to a given conclusion is such that anyone—or anyone sane—who doubted the conclusion would have background beliefs relative to which the evidence for the premisses would be no evidence ... Such an argument could be of no use in convincing doubters, and is properly said to *beg the question*.

Consider one very simple kind of case. A speaker propounds an argument with the purpose of convincing a hearer of the truth of Q , which is itself among the speaker's background assumptions B^s . The argument has just one premiss (or just one premiss that stands in need of support), P , and the evidence offered for borrowing supports the premiss relative to the speaker's background assumptions: $\Pr(P/(E \& B^s)) > \Pr(P/B^s)$. The hearer needs to be convinced of the truth of Q and starts out thinking that Q is, in fact, false. Since Q

¹³ Whether a propounded argument is well-suited or ill-suited to the convincing purpose may depend on what particular evidence the speaker offers for borrowing.

is among the speaker's background assumptions, B^s , the hearer must have different background assumptions, B^h . It may happen that, considered against the background of these assumptions, the evidence offered for borrowing does not support premiss P at all: $\Pr(P/(E \& B^h)) \leq \Pr(P/B^h)$.

Cast in these Bayesian terms, Moore's (1939) 'proof' of the existence of the external world appears as a case of this kind. The argument can be set out as follows:

- MOORE(1) I have hands.
 MOORE(2) If I have hands then an external world exists.
 Therefore:
 MOORE(3) An external world exists.

Given Moore's background assumptions, the evidence provided by a visual experience as of one hand and another supports the premiss MOORE(1).¹⁴ The sceptic, who needs to be convinced of the truth of the conclusion MOORE(3), starts from the assumption that there is, in fact, *no* external world as ordinarily conceived. We might suppose that the specific sceptical assumption is this:

- (SA) There is no external world as ordinarily conceived and I am the envatted and handless victim of a powerful but deceptive scientist.

When the evidence that Moore offers for borrowing is considered against the background of (SA) it does nothing to support MOORE(1) but instead supports the incompatible proposition:

- (SP) There is no external world as ordinarily conceived and a powerful scientist is producing a deceptive impression as of my having hands.

So, propounding Moore's argument cannot serve the purpose of convincing the sceptic and, on Jackson's account, it begs the question.

If the sceptic's doubt about the truth of MOORE(3) is total then what Jackson says is literally correct. The sceptic 'would have background beliefs relative to which the evidence for the premiss [MOORE(1)] would be *no evidence*' (p. 111; emphasis added). The situation is more complex if the sceptic's doubt is not total. Suppose that the sceptic divides his credence evenly between the sceptical assumption (SA) and Moore's assumption that there is an external

¹⁴ In the Bayesian framework, the evidence—like a hypothesis, supporting consideration, or background assumption—is a *proposition*. The evidence that is offered in support of Moore's premiss is thus a proposition about Moore's experience. We shall want to allow that the experience itself may support (may provide a warrant to believe) Moore's premiss. This is one of several ways in which we shall depart from the Bayesian framework.

world as ordinarily conceived. Against this background, the evidence provided by a visual experience as of hands does raise the probability of the premiss $MOORE(1)$, which entails $MOORE(3)$; but it also raises the probability of (SP), which entails (SA). Moore's argument is still of no use in convincing the doubting sceptic. The evidence does nothing to support $MOORE(1)$ as against (SP) and it does not change the balance of probabilities between $MOORE(3)$ and (SA).¹⁵ In order to simplify the exposition, I shall henceforth assume that, where there is doubt about a proposition, it is total.

3.2 *A refinement: Directness*

Differences between speakers' and hearers' background assumptions play a crucial role in Jackson's account of begging the question. This may seem to open the account to the objection that too many propounded arguments will be classified as begging the question. Perhaps every obviously valid argument with only one premiss (or only one premiss that stands in need of support) will turn out to be question begging, if the considerations offered for borrowing provide support for the premiss only against the background of a particular set of assumptions.

To see how the worry arises, suppose that you doubt that any birds are black and I intend to convince you that some are. Pointing at a black swan, I say, 'Some swans are black', offering for borrowing the evidence provided by a visual experience as of a black swan. My argument, as propounded, can be set out as follows:

- $BLACK(1)$ Some swans are black.
 $BLACK(2)$ If some swans are black then some birds are black.
 Therefore:
 $BLACK(3)$ Some birds are black.

The argument is clearly valid. The experience as of a black swan supports the premiss $BLACK(1)$. The other premiss, $BLACK(2)$ is (let us agree) an obvious a priori truth that does not stand in need of support in this dialectical context.

Since you antecedently doubt that there are any black birds (and you accept that swans are birds), you are antecedently committed to doubting that there are black swans. When I propound my argument, I provide you with new information and you do not doubt that it *seems* to you that you see a black

¹⁵ Suppose that the sceptic's prior probabilities are not divided evenly but are $2/3$ for $MOORE(3)$ and $1/3$ for (SA). Then the evidence will raise the probability of $MOORE(1)$ more than the probability of (SP). But it will still not shift the balance of probabilities between $MOORE(1)$ and (SP), nor the balance between $MOORE(3)$ and (SA). I am grateful to Timothy Williamson for discussion on this point.

swan. But perhaps you maintain your doubt as to whether there are *really* black swans, and you come to suspect that there is a trick of the light, or that your perceptual apparatus (and mine) is behaving oddly. Perhaps, because of your antecedent doubt about BLACK(3), you come to doubt the assumptions about normal conditions against the background of which the visual experience as of a black swan supports the premiss BLACK(1). In short, it could be that, because you doubt the conclusion of the propounded argument, you doubt its premiss; and because you doubt its premiss, you call into question the background assumptions. But we do not want the BLACK argument as propounded to be classified as begging the question. For intuitively it seems clear that propounding the BLACK argument could be of use in convincing someone who doubted that any birds are black.

In defence of Jackson, it may be said that, even as his account stands, it will not classify the BLACK argument as begging the question. Jackson's criterion is that '*anyone sane* who doubted the conclusion would have background beliefs relative to which the evidence for the premises would be no evidence' (p. 111; emphasis added). But it has not been shown that calling my background assumptions into question is the *only* rational response for a doubting hearer to make. It might be no less rational to accept the perceptual evidence and stop doubting that there are black birds.

However, accounts of begging the question very often face the objection that they classify all valid arguments as question begging, or at least all valid arguments with only one premiss. So it would be strategically useful to block this line of objection by adding a small refinement to what Jackson actually says. The refinement that I propose is this.¹⁶ If an argument is to beg the question, then doubt about the conclusion should have a direct impact on the background assumptions, not merely an impact mediated by doubt about a premiss. Antecedent doubt about the conclusion should *directly* rationally require the adoption of assumptions against the background of which the considerations offered for borrowing would no longer support the premisses. (To the extent that the Bayesian framework does not draw a distinction between direct and mediated rational requirements, we are stepping outside that framework.)

With this refinement in place, the core idea of Jackson's account of begging the question is as follows:

Begging the question: Jackson's account (Basic condition)

For one of the premisses, P, which is supported (according to the speaker) by the consideration or other evidence, C, a hearer who antecedently doubted

¹⁶ I am grateful to Daniel Nolan for insisting on the importance of this refinement.

the conclusion would be directly rationally required to adopt assumptions (B^h , different from the speaker's background assumptions B^s) against the background of which C would not support P .

(Strictly speaking, a supporting consideration is a proposition to which the speaker takes an attitude of belief. The speaker might, however, regard a premiss as being supported by other evidence, such as a perceptual experience, rather than by a belief or opinion.)

Moore's argument is an example of begging the question according to this basic condition. Indeed, it is an example of the simplest structure of begging the question. The sceptic's doubt about Moore's conclusion *directly* rationally requires that the sceptic should not share Moore's background assumptions because Moore's conclusion is *identical* to the assumption against the background of which his first premiss is supported.

4. The textbook account of begging the question

We now turn from Jackson's account of begging the question to a more familiar account in which circularity plays the central role.

4.1 *Circularity and begging the question*

According to Copi's *Introduction to Logic* (1961: 65–6), someone who 'assumes as a premise the very conclusion he intends to prove' commits the fallacy of begging the question. The fallacy is glaringly obvious if the premiss and the conclusion are formulated in exactly the same words. But even when the formulations are very different, the fallacy is still committed if the same proposition occurs both as premiss and as conclusion. Furthermore, the fallacy is committed even if the premiss is separated from the conclusion by several steps of argument. In short, propounding a circular argument is committing the fallacy of begging the question. It is said to be a fallacy because the act of propounding the argument is rendered pointless (1961: 65):

If the proposition is acceptable without argument, no argument is needed to establish it; and if the proposition is not acceptable without argument, then no argument which requires its acceptance as a premise could possibly lead anyone to accept its conclusion.

Now, as Jackson (pp. 100, 110) points out, there is a problem for any account of begging the question as a property of arguments considered in themselves

if the account *both* relies on the idea of including the conclusion among the premisses *and* allows for differences in formulation. For it is difficult to avoid the consequence that every valid argument begs the question. The argument 'Q; therefore Q' is patently circular, and 'P, Q; therefore Q' is no less circular. In that case, the argument 'P & Q; therefore Q' begs the question. But 'P & Q' can be reformulated as 'P & (if P then Q)', so the argument 'P & (if P then Q); therefore Q' begs the question, and so does the *modus ponens* argument 'P, if P then Q; therefore Q'.

The conclusion to be drawn from this problem is that we need to restrict the notion of reformulation. We can make a start on motivating such a restriction if we consider arguments, not in themselves, but *as propounded with the teasing-out purpose*.

4.2 Teasing out and circularity

It is true that, because 'P & Q' and 'P & (if P then Q)' are logically equivalent, any considerations that make the first conjunction probable equally make the second conjunction probable. It is also true that, because the arguments 'P, Q; therefore Q' and 'P, if P then Q; therefore Q' are valid, if the conjunction of the premisses is probable then the conclusion is no less probable. But there is an important difference between the two arguments considered as propounded with the purpose of teasing out the consequences of someone's beliefs.

Someone who propounds the argument 'P, Q; therefore Q' may make salient the considerations that a hearer already regards as supporting P and Q considered separately. But the argument does not provide a route to any new appreciation that these considerations support the conclusion Q. In contrast, propounding the *modus ponens* argument may not only make salient the considerations that the hearer regards as supporting P and 'if P then Q' considered separately, but also allow the hearer to appreciate, perhaps for the first time, that these considerations, taken together, should also be regarded as providing a reason to believe the conclusion Q.

In a pragmatic development of the textbook account, an argument begs the question if *it does not offer the hearer a route to any new appreciation of the support for the conclusion* (or what the hearer is bound to regard as support for the conclusion) that is provided by the considerations that the hearer already regards as supporting the premisses. Propounding a blatantly circular argument is begging the question by this account, although propounding a *modus ponens* argument is not.

An argument begs the question if the following circularity condition is met (Copi, 1961, p. 65):

Begging the question: Copi's account (Circularity condition: premiss)

The conclusion Q is identical to one of the premisses, P.

As Copi himself might say, it is generally pointless to propound a circular argument with the purpose of teasing out a hearer's commitment to believing the conclusion Q. For if the hearer can appreciate his commitment to Q without argument, then no argument is needed but only a reminder. And if the hearer cannot appreciate his commitment to Q without an argument to reveal that Q is entailed by premisses that the hearer already regards as adequately supported, then no argument that includes Q amongst its *premisses* could possibly secure that appreciation. In short, a circular argument is ill-suited to the teasing-out purpose because propounding the argument offers the hearer, not a route to a new appreciation of support for the conclusion but, at best, a gratuitous detour.

4.3 Varieties of circularity: Supporting considerations and background assumptions

Propounding an argument with the teasing-out purpose would also be pointless if the conclusion, though not itself among the premisses, were identical to the consideration that the hearer regarded as supporting one of the premisses. For the hearer would be bound to regard that supporting consideration as already being adequately supported—or perhaps as not standing in need of support—ahead of the propounded argument. A second condition for begging the question encompasses this variety of circularity.

Begging the question: Copi's account (Circularity condition: supporting consideration)

For one of the premisses, P, which is supported (for the hearer) by the consideration C, the conclusion Q is identical to C.

An argument could be ill-suited to the teasing-out purpose in a third way. Suppose that the hearer regarded the premisses of the argument as being supported by various considerations or other evidence and that the conclusion was among neither the premisses nor the supporting considerations. Suppose that the support for one of the premisses depended on a background assumption that was identical to the conclusion of the argument. Then, in regarding the premisses as supported, the hearer would be rationally bound to regard that

background assumption as adequately supported—or perhaps as not standing in need of support—ahead of the propounded argument.

Begging the question: Copi's account (Circularity condition: background assumption)

For one of the premisses, P, which is supported (for the hearer) by the consideration or other evidence, C, acceptance of the premiss as so supported rationally requires the adoption of a background assumption, B, and the conclusion Q is identical to B.

We have already said, on Copi's behalf, that if a hearer cannot appreciate his commitment to Q without an argument to reveal that Q is entailed by premisses that the hearer already regards as adequately supported, then *no argument that includes Q amongst its premisses* could possibly secure that appreciation. Now we may add that *no argument whose premisses depend for their support on Q, either as a supporting consideration or as a background assumption*, could possibly secure that appreciation either.¹⁷

5. Two accounts of begging the question

According to Copi's account of begging the question in virtue of *circularity involving a premiss*, the following blatantly circular variation on Moore's theme begs the question:

CIRCULAR(1) I have hands.
Therefore:
CIRCULAR(2) I have hands.

Propounding this argument with the teasing-out purpose does not offer the hearer a route to any *new* appreciation of the support for the conclusion that is provided by the considerations or other evidence that the hearer regards as supporting the premiss. And the situation is no better if we make the circularity less blatant by inserting a lengthy but needless detour between premiss and conclusion.

¹⁷ These two circularity conditions allow that different hearers might support the same premiss in different ways. Unlike Copi's original condition for begging the question, circularity involving a premiss, these conditions introduce an element of relativity—relativity to the hearer's supporting considerations—just as Jackson's account of begging the question involves an element of relativity to the supporting considerations that the speaker offers for borrowing. (The condition for circularity involving a background assumption is formulated so that it does not introduce any *additional* hearer-relativity.)

The CIRCULAR argument is not, however, an example of begging the question according to Jackson's account. It is true that a blatantly circular argument 'merely marks time' and is 'a waste of breath' (p. 110). It is also true that anyone sane who doubted the conclusion would also doubt the premiss. But it is not the case that anyone sane who doubted the conclusion would have background beliefs relative to which the evidence for the premiss would be no evidence. Doubting that I have hands does not directly rationally require the adoption of assumptions against the background of which my visual experience would provide no support for the proposition that I have hands.¹⁸

It is possible, then, for an argument to beg the question according to Copi's account (if it were propounded with the teasing-out purpose) without begging the question according to Jackson's account (if it were propounded with the convincing purpose). However, if an argument begs the question according to Copi's account in virtue of *circularity involving a background assumption*, then it also begs the question according to Jackson's account. To see this, consider a two-premiss example of circularity involving a background assumption. A valid argument from P_1 and P_2 to Q is propounded with the teasing-out purpose. The hearer regards the premisses, P_1 and P_2 , as supported by considerations C_1 and C_2 , respectively, and acceptance of the premiss P_1 as supported by consideration C_1 rationally requires the adoption of the conclusion, Q , as a background assumption. Then it is clear that propounding this same argument with the convincing purpose, offering considerations C_1 and C_2 for borrowing, would be begging the question according to the basic condition of Jackson's account (Section 3.2). Anyone sane who doubted the conclusion, Q , would be directly rationally required to adopt assumptions (different from Q) against the background of which C_1 would no longer support P_1 .

¹⁸ Sorensen (1991) has argued for a pragmatic account of begging the question and against a syntactic account by considering examples of persuasive arguments of the form 'P; therefore P', including (1991: 249):

Some arguments are composed solely of existential generalizations.

Therefore:

Some arguments are composed solely of existential generalizations.

Such arguments would certainly be reckoned circular if considered in themselves (syntactically or formally), but can be recognized as not begging the question if they are considered as propounded (pragmatically or dialectically). For propounding the argument makes salient the fact that the argument itself exemplifies the very claim that the premiss, and also the conclusion, makes.

Sorensen's example is formally circular and it is plausible that it would be classified as begging the question in Copi's sense if it were considered as propounded with only the teasing-out purpose. But, as Sorensen points out (1991: 248), arguments that are formally circular can be persuasive when propounded, and his example plausibly does not beg the question in Jackson's sense if it is considered as propounded with the convincing purpose.

It is also possible for an argument to beg the question according to Jackson's account *without* begging the question according to Copi's account, formulated in terms of circularity. Consider again a valid argument from P_1 and P_2 to Q , propounded with the teasing-out purpose. But suppose this time that acceptance of the premiss P_1 as supported by consideration C_1 rationally requires the adoption of a background assumption, B , which is *not identical to* Q , although there is a direct entailment from B to Q . This argument is *not* an example of circularity involving a background assumption. In fact, provided that Q is different from the premisses and the supporting considerations, the argument is not an example of any variety of circularity and does not beg the question according to Copi's account.

If the same argument were to be propounded with the convincing purpose it would still beg the question according to the basic condition of Jackson's account. Although B is not identical to Q , there is a direct entailment from B to Q . So, anyone sane who doubted the conclusion, Q , and believed not- Q instead, would be directly rationally required to adopt the assumption, not- B , against the background of which C_1 would no longer support P_1 .

6. Extending Copi's account: Circularity and indirectness

The core idea of the pragmatic development of Copi's account (Section 4) is this. An argument, propounded with the teasing-out purpose, begs the question if it does not offer the hearer a route to any new appreciation of his commitment to believing the conclusion.

6.1 Simple indirectness

Consider again the argument that begs the question according to Jackson's account but not according to Copi's. The argument is not circular. When it is propounded with the teasing-out purpose, it offers the hearer a route to a new appreciation of support for the conclusion, Q . But there is a direct entailment from B to Q that does not go via the premisses P_1 and P_2 . The route to believing Q that the propounded argument offers the hearer is not straightforwardly circular, but it still involves a gratuitous detour. Like a circular argument, it is needlessly indirect.

It may not seem especially natural to extend Copi's notion of begging the question, based on circularity, to cases like this. But, in the interests of

exploring further the relationship between Copi's account and Jackson's, we can say that a propounded argument is question begging* if the following simple indirectness condition is met:

Begging the question*: Copi's account (Simple indirectness condition: background assumption)

For one of the premisses, P, which is supported (for the hearer) by the consideration or other evidence, C, acceptance of the premiss as so supported rationally requires the adoption of a background assumption, B, and there is a direct argument from B to the conclusion Q.

Once we have seen this kind of case, it is straightforward to frame a similar indirectness condition involving a supporting consideration:

Begging the question*: Copi's account (Simple indirectness condition: supporting consideration)

For one of the premisses, P, which is supported (for the hearer) by the consideration C, there is a direct argument from C to the conclusion Q.

It may be that indirectness makes an argument less-than-ideally-suited to the teasing-out purpose, rather than definitely ill-suited. But arguments that beg the question* in virtue of *simple indirectness involving a background assumption* share an important property with arguments that beg the question in virtue of *circularity involving a background assumption*. They also beg the question according to the basic condition of Jackson's account.

To see this, consider an argument, propounded with the teasing-out purpose, that begs the question* in virtue of simple indirectness involving a background assumption. Since there is a direct argument from the background assumption, B, to the conclusion, Q, there is an equally direct argument from not-Q to not-B. Someone who doubted the conclusion, Q, would be directly rationally required to adopt the assumption not-B, against the background of which the consideration, C, would no longer support the premiss, P. So, if the argument were propounded with the convincing purpose, it would beg the question according to Jackson's account.

We might suppose, conversely, that arguments that beg the question according to Jackson's account also beg the question according to Copi's account, now that we have extended it to include indirectness as well as circularity. After all, our example of an argument that begged the question according to Jackson's account but not according to Copi's (Section 5) has become our example of simple indirectness. But the matter is not so straightforward.

6.2 *Moore's argument*

Moore's argument exhibits the simplest structure of begging the question according to Jackson's account. Does it also beg the question according to Copi's account? The argument does not beg the question according to Copi's account in virtue of circularity involving a *premiss*. But, if we consider Moore's argument propounded, with the teasing-out purpose, to a hearer whose belief in MOORE(1) is supported by a visual experience as of hands then it may seem to be an example of circularity involving a *background assumption*.

Considered against the background of the conclusion, MOORE(3), the visual experience supports the premiss MOORE(1); if it were considered against the background of the sceptical assumption (SA), the experience would do nothing to support MOORE(1) but would support an incompatible proposition, (SP), instead. Thus, it seems plausible that *acceptance of Moore's first premiss as supported by his visual experience rationally requires the adoption of Moore's conclusion as a background assumption*. If this is correct then Moore's argument is an example of begging the question according to Copi's account as well as Jackson's.

Suppose, however, that there were a theory of evidential support with the following two features. First, Moore's experience as of hands *would provide no support* for MOORE(1) given the *negation* of MOORE(3) as background assumption but, second, Moore's experience *could provide support* for MOORE(1) even *without* the positive adoption of MOORE(3) as a background assumption. (A theory of this kind would involve some departure from the standard Bayesian requirement that a probability distribution must assign some probability, high or low, to each proposition, including MOORE(3).) Given such a theory of evidential support, Moore's argument would still beg the question according to Jackson's account, but it would not beg the question according to Copi's account.

6.3 *A thesis about background assumptions*

In general, the inference from begging the question according to Jackson's account to begging the question according to our extension of Copi's account depends on a thesis about background assumptions:

(BA) If a putatively supporting consideration or other evidence, C, provides no support for a proposition, P, against the background of the assumption not-B then C supports P only against the background of the assumption B.

Assume, for the moment, that the thesis (BA) is correct and consider an argument, propounded with the convincing purpose, that begs the question according to the basic condition of Jackson's account. The speaker regards the premiss, P, as being supported by a consideration or other evidence, C.

But doubt about the conclusion, Q, would directly rationally require adoption of an assumption, not-B, against the background of which C would not support P.

Consider the same argument propounded with the teasing-out purpose to a hearer who, like the original speaker, regards P as supported by C. According to the thesis (BA), since C provides no support for P against the background of the assumption not-B, the hearer who regards P as supported by C is rationally required to adopt B as a background assumption. Since there is a direct argument from not-Q to not-B, there is an equally direct argument from the background assumption, B, to the conclusion, Q. So, according to our extension of Copi's account, the argument either begs the question or begs the question* (depending on whether or not B is identical to Q) in virtue of circularity or simple indirectness involving a background assumption.

If the thesis (BA) is correct then an argument that begs the question according to the basic condition of Jackson's account also begs the question or begs the question* according to Copi's account. However, if the thesis (BA) is incorrect then it might be that C provides no support for P against the background of the assumption not-B, yet C supports P even without the positive adoption of B as a background assumption. In that case, as the example of Moore's argument shows, an argument might beg the question according to Jackson's account but not according to our extension of Copi's account. The epistemological analogue of this point will be important in what follows.

7. Generalization and summary

The core idea of Jackson's account of begging the question is this. A speaker propounds an argument, offering for borrowing considerations that, by the speaker's lights, support the premisses of the argument. The argument, as propounded, begs the question if a hearer who antecedently doubted the conclusion would be directly rationally required to adopt assumptions against the background of which the putative support for one of the premisses would be no support.

An argument that begs the question 'could be of no use in convincing doubters' (p. 112). But an argument might be of no use in convincing doubters even though it did not meet the basic condition that we just summarized. We need to examine in more detail what is involved in propounding an argument with the convincing purpose.

7.1 *The structure of convincing*

Consider, for example, Bruce and Charlene. Bruce propounds a clearly valid argument with two premisses, P_1 and P_2 , and conclusion Q ; and he offers for borrowing evidence C_1 that supports P_1 and evidence C_2 that supports P_2 . If Bruce is to convince the doubting Charlene of the truth of Q by propounding this argument then he needs to ensure that, despite her antecedent doubt, Charlene can rationally do two things. First, Charlene must be able rationally to accept the evidence, C_1 and C_2 , that Bruce offers for borrowing. But second, Charlene must be able to do more than just accept that evidence *in itself*. She must be able rationally to accept the evidence *as supporting Bruce's premisses*.

Charlene starts out doubting that Q is true. Since Bruce's argument is clearly valid, Charlene regards herself as having reason to doubt—considerations that go against—the conjunction of Bruce's premisses, ' P_1 & P_2 '. But Charlene's antecedent doubt does not by itself mean that Bruce's argument can be of no use in convincing her. Bruce's act of propounding his argument changes Charlene's evidential situation. Once the argument has been propounded, she has evidence to put into the scales on the side opposite from her reasons for originally doubting the truth of Q . Given this new evidence, she may accept P_1 and accept P_2 . So she may come to be convinced of the truth of Q , despite her antecedent doubt.

We can now see that Bruce's argument, as propounded, might be ill-suited to the convincing purpose even without meeting the basic condition for begging the question according to Jackson's account (Section 3.2). Suppose, for example, that Charlene's antecedent doubt about Q , *taken together with her acceptance of the premiss P_2* , would directly rationally require her to adopt an assumption, not- B , against the background of which the putative evidence, C_1 , offered in support of P_1 , would be no evidence. Then, Bruce's argument could be of no use in convincing Charlene of the truth of Q . For Charlene could not rationally regard *both* premisses as being supported by the evidence that Bruce offers for borrowing.

7.2 *Generalizing Jackson's account*

The case just described motivates a first step of generalization in the condition for begging the question:

Begging the question: Jackson's account (Simple two-premiss condition)

Acceptance of the premiss, P_2 , when taken together with antecedent doubt about the conclusion, would directly rationally require the adoption of assumptions against the background of which C_1 would not support P_1 .

We can then motivate a second step of generalization. For the doubting Charlene still could not rationally regard the premisses, P_1 and P_2 , as being supported by the evidence offered for borrowing, if Bruce's argument met only a less demanding condition:

Begging the question: Jackson's account (Generalized two-premiss condition)

Acceptance of the putatively supporting considerations or other evidence, C_1 and C_2 , in themselves and acceptance of the premiss P_2 as supported by C_2 , when taken together with antecedent doubt about the conclusion, would directly rationally require the adoption of assumptions against the background of which C_1 would not support P_1 .

What goes for two premisses goes more generally for n premisses. A propounded argument is of no use in convincing doubters if it meets the following condition:

Begging the question: Jackson's account (Generalized condition)

Acceptance of the putatively supporting considerations or other evidence, C_1, \dots, C_n , in themselves and acceptance of all the premisses save P_i as so supported, when taken together with antecedent doubt about the conclusion, would directly rationally require the adoption of assumptions against the background of which C_i would not support P_i .

7.3 *Generalizing Copi's account*

Suppose that the thesis (BA) about background assumptions is correct. In that case, an argument that begs the question according to the basic condition of Jackson's account also begs the question or begs the question* according to our extension of Copi's account in virtue of circularity or simple indirectness involving a background assumption.

Now consider Bruce's argument, propounded to Charlene with the convincing purpose. It begs the question, *not* according to the basic condition of Jackson's account, but according to the simple two-premiss condition. Acceptance of the premiss, P_2 , when taken together with antecedent doubt about the conclusion, Q , directly rationally requires the adoption of an assumption, not-B, against the background of which C_1 provides no support for P_1 . Suppose that the same argument were to be propounded, with the teasing-out purpose, to a hearer who, like Bruce, regards the premisses, P_1 and P_2 , as supported by C_1 and C_2 , respectively. If the thesis (BA) is correct then the hearer is rationally required to adopt B as a background assumption. Since there is a direct argument from not-Q and P_2 to not-B, there is an equally direct argument from B and P_2 to Q (not going via P_1). Once the background

assumption, B, is in place, the propounded argument from premisses, P₁ and P₂, to the conclusion, Q, is revealed as needlessly indirect.

This indirectness is not captured by the condition for simple indirectness involving a background assumption but it is captured by the following more general condition:

Begging the question*: Copi's account (Indirectness condition: background assumption)

For one of the premisses, P, which is supported (for the hearer) by the consideration or other evidence, C, acceptance of the premiss as so supported rationally requires the adoption of a background assumption, B, and there is a direct argument from B, together with the remaining premisses and the supporting considerations, to the conclusion Q.

The earlier condition for simple indirectness involving a supporting consideration could also be generalized in a similar way.

7.4 Summary

The relationship between this generalized version of Copi's account and the generalized version of Jackson's account is essentially the same as the relationship between our earlier extension of Copi's account and the basic condition of Jackson's account. The comparison can be summarized in four points:

- An argument that begs the question according to Copi's account in virtue of circularity involving a *premiss* need not beg the question according to Jackson's account.
- An argument that begs the question according to Jackson's account need not beg the question according to Copi's unextended account formulated in terms of circularity alone.
- An argument that begs the question or begs the question* according to our extension of Copi's account in virtue of circularity or indirectness involving a *background assumption* also begs the question according to Jackson's account.
- Whether the converse inference holds depends on whether the thesis (BA) about background assumptions is correct.

It is now time to transpose all this from the dialectical domain to the epistemological domain. The main idea is that, within the thinking of an individual subject, there are epistemological analogues of arguing with the teasing-out purpose and arguing with the convincing purpose.

PART II: THE EPISTEMOLOGICAL DOMAIN

8. The epistemic project of deciding what to believe

One aspect of the management of your network of beliefs is teasing out the consequences of your own beliefs. If you review some of your beliefs, P_1, \dots, P_n , and notice a valid argument from those premisses to Q then you should adopt the belief Q or, if other considerations argue against Q , then you should reconsider your beliefs P_1, \dots, P_n . We might say that the epistemic project of deciding what to believe is the analogue of the dialectical phenomenon of propounding an argument with the purpose of teasing out the consequences of a hearer's beliefs.¹⁹

8.1 *Two standards for belief management*

The project of maintaining and revising your network of beliefs seems to be answerable to two rather different standards. Ideally, you should structure your beliefs in accordance with the entailment relations that *really obtain*. Rationally, you are bound to structure your beliefs in accordance with the entailment relations that *you take to obtain*.

Suppose that you fail to appreciate that there is a valid argument from P_1, \dots, P_n to Q . You are convinced that the argument with Q as conclusion is invalid and, in fact, that an argument with not- Q as conclusion is valid instead. Given your beliefs P_1, \dots, P_n , you also believe not- Q . You have failed to measure up to the ideal of conformity to the accessible structure of the logical space of entailments. But you have structured your network of beliefs in accordance with the entailment relation that you take to obtain. *Modulo* your initial mistaken conviction, your beliefs have been formed quite rationally. Although you have fallen short of the first of the two standards to which belief management is answerable, you have met the second. Furthermore, you might be blameless in thinking that there is an error in the argument with Q as conclusion. In that case, there is a sense in which you have not departed from the norms of rationality.

It is also possible to describe cases in which you meet the first standard while falling short of the second. Suppose, this time, that you fail to structure your beliefs in accordance with the entailment relations that you take to obtain. You

¹⁹ When I speak, here, of deciding what to believe, I have in mind the everyday processes of adopting or revising beliefs. In at least some cases, this might be described as 'going forward in judgement', and it might be said that this is a mental act. But I do not commit myself to doxastic voluntarism and I certainly do not envisage that, having decided what to believe, I need to devise a cunning plan in order to bring it about that I do end up believing that thing.

are convinced that the argument with not- Q as conclusion is valid but, while you believe P_1, \dots, P_n , you also believe Q . You depart far from the norms of rationality. Yet you end up with a network of beliefs that is structured, at least in respect of P_1, \dots, P_n and Q , in conformity to the entailment relations that really obtain.

8.2 *Three norms for the project of deciding what to believe*

There is a clear analogy between the standards for managing your network of beliefs and what we said earlier about individual beliefs (Section 1.1). In the case of individual beliefs, *warranted belief* requires more than just believing something that is the thing to think, and arguably more, even, than *blamelessly* believing something that is the thing to think. Roughly speaking, the standard for warranted belief is that you should believe something *because* it is the thing to think. In the case of managing your network of beliefs, there is an epistemic standard that requires more than mere conformity—more, even, than blameless conformity—to the structure of the logical space of entailments or, more generally, to the structure of the abstract space of warrants. I suggest that, in the project of deciding what to believe, the overarching epistemic norm is that the structure of your network of beliefs should conform to the structure of the abstract space of warrants as a result of your rational responsiveness (in a sense that needs to be made clear) to that very structure.²⁰

This overarching norm is demanding and it surely goes beyond the minimum that is required for an epistemological analogue of the dialectical phenomenon of propounding an argument with the teasing-out purpose. Pryor contrasts the ideal of conformity to the structure of the abstract space of warrants with the most minimal requirements of teasing-out (2004: 362–3):

Sometimes reasoning just aims to ‘tease out’ implications of things you already believe, and undertakes no commitment about the epistemic priority of premises and conclusion. . . . But I think often our reasoning aims to do more: it aims to reconstruct *the structure* of our justification. It aims to make explicit the justificatory relationships *by virtue of which* we have justification to believe a conclusion.

While Pryor contrasts two aims or norms for our reasoning, I consider three norms.

In the dialectical domain, a demanding requirement for an argument propounded with the teasing-out purpose is that it should be neither circular nor indirect. It should be neither ill-suited nor even less-than-ideally-suited to

²⁰ In further work to clarify the notion of rational responsiveness to the structure of the abstract space of warrants, it would be important to avoid an overly intellectualized account of what it is to do well in the epistemic project of deciding what to believe.

its purpose. A less demanding but more intuitive requirement is simply that the argument should not be circular; it should not be ill-suited to its purpose. It should offer the hearer a route to a new appreciation of his commitment to believing the conclusion. We can also acknowledge an undemanding requirement that is met by any valid argument even if, because of blatant or subtle circularity, propounding the argument with the teasing-out purpose would be pointless.

In the epistemological domain there are, by analogy, three progressively less demanding norms for the project of deciding what to believe. First, there is the overarching epistemic norm for deciding what to believe. Ideally, you should reason your way to a conclusion by following through a valid argument whose inferential structure articulates the abstract structure of your warrant to believe the conclusion. Second, there is the norm of avoiding epistemic circularity. You should reason your way to a conclusion by following through a valid argument that allows you to arrive at a new appreciation, even a first appreciation, that you have a warrant to believe the conclusion. Third, there is the norm of using valid arguments. By following through a valid argument from premisses that you have warrants to believe, you may end up appreciating—whether or not for the first time—that you have a warrant to believe the conclusion. Even if you do not measure up to the more demanding norms for the project of deciding what to believe, by reasoning competently from premisses that you warrantably believe you may still arrive at a warranted belief in the conclusion (Section 1.2).

8.3 Moore's argument and the project of deciding what to believe

Suppose that, as the sceptic insists and as Wright (1985) allows (Section 1.3), a visual experience as of hands provides a warrant to believe Moore's first premiss only given an antecedent warrant to believe his conclusion. And suppose, implausibly according to the sceptic, that there is such an antecedent warrant—perhaps the kind of warrant that Wright (2004) calls entitlement. Then the direction of inferential dependence in Moore's argument is the opposite of the direction of justificatory dependence in the abstract space of warrants. If you were to reason your way to Moore's conclusion by following through his argument, then you would not measure up to the overarching epistemic norm or ideal for the project of deciding what to believe.²¹

²¹ It may also be that, if you believed MOORE(1) simply on the basis of your visual experience as of hands, then you would be epistemically irresponsible—even if (as Wright, but not the sceptic, maintains) you would believe something that you had a propositional warrant to believe. For, it may be said, the evidence provided by your visual experience would support MOORE(1) only against the

Earlier (Section 6.2), we saw that, if Moore's conclusion is an essential background assumption for support of his first premiss, then Moore's argument is ill-suited to the teasing-out purpose. It does not offer you a route to any new appreciation of your commitment to believing Moore's conclusion. Now we see that, if a perceptual warrant to believe Moore's premiss requires an antecedent warrant to believe his conclusion, then following through Moore's argument would not provide a route to any new appreciation that you have a warrant to believe his conclusion. You would not even measure up to the second norm that governs the project of deciding what to believe, the less demanding norm of avoiding epistemic circularity.

Moore's argument, as Wright conceives it, cannot properly be used in the epistemic project of deciding what to believe. But, while Wright allows the sceptic's claim that a perceptual warrant to believe MOORE(1) requires an antecedent warrant for MOORE(3), Pryor disputes the sceptic's claim (2000: 532):

According to the dogmatist [about perceptual justification], when you have an experience as of p 's being the case, you have a kind of justification for believing p that does not presuppose or rest on any other evidence or justification you may have. [T]o be justified in believing p , you do *not* need to have the antecedent justification the skeptic demands.

If the structure of the space of warrants is as Pryor's dogmatist describes it then there need be no failure to measure up to the overarching epistemic norm if you use Moore's argument in deciding what to believe. A fortiori, there need be no failure to measure up to the norm of avoiding epistemic circularity. On Pryor's view, by following through Moore's argument, you might arrive for the first time at a warranted belief that the conclusion of the argument is true.

9. The epistemic project of settling a question

As the epistemic project of deciding what to believe is the analogue of propounding an argument with the teasing-out purpose, so the epistemic project of settling a question is the analogue of propounding an argument with the purpose of convincing a doubter.

The project of settling the question whether or not Q is true is more complex, and correspondingly more ambitious, than the project of deciding what to believe about Q . In the project of settling a question, I begin by taking

background of MOORE(3) and a properly warranted belief in Moore's premiss would need to be based, in part, on the warranted assumption of Moore's conclusion.

the question to be open *pro tempore*. This does not mean that I take myself to have no view, and no evidence either way, on the question whether or not Q is true. (That would scarcely distinguish the project of settling the question whether or not Q is true from the project of deciding what to believe about Q; see below, Section 10.1.) But nor does it mean that I work myself into a state of really doubting that Q is true. Rather, I *suppose*, for the purposes of the question-settling project, that I have reasons to think that Q is, or may well be, false. This suppositional doubt then governs my conduct of the project.

Suppose that I have a warranted belief P and that my project is to deploy my warrant to believe P, and my appreciation of the valid argument from P to Q, in order to settle the question whether or not Q is true in favour of the positive. My conduct of the question-settling project is governed by suppositional doubt about Q. In some cases, my suppositional doubt about Q may prevent me from rationally availing myself of my warrant to believe P *within the project that is governed by that suppositional doubt*. In such cases, although I do have a warrant to believe P and there is an obviously valid argument from P to Q, I cannot deploy that warrant to settle the question in favour of Q.

Clearly, we need to understand how merely suppositional doubt can limit the rational deployment of epistemic warrants. We shall begin by considering the structure of cases in which real doubt and, specifically, *warranted* real doubt about some proposition can remove the epistemic warrant to believe another proposition.

9.1 *Defeasible warrant and antecedent warrant*

In the dialectical domain, we made use of the idea of an assumption against the background of which a putatively supporting consideration or other evidence provides no support for a proposition. In the epistemological domain, the corresponding notion is that of *defeating*—in the sense of removing, rather than outweighing—a *prima facie* warrant (Pollock, 1974, 1986). Pryor (forthcoming) describes the relevant kind of defeat as *undermining*. My current visual experience provides a perceptual warrant to believe that there is a pencil on the desk in front of me, but the warrant is defeasible. It would be undermined by a warrant to believe—and so, by a warranted belief—that my perceptual apparatus was not working properly.

In the dialectical domain, the idea of a background assumption removing support for a proposition, P, seemed to go hand-in-hand with the idea that the opposite background assumption was needed if P was to be supported. Nevertheless, we mentioned the possibility of separating the two ideas and allowing that the background assumption not-B might remove support for P even though support for P did not depend on any positive assumption of

B. We articulated the connection between the two ideas in a thesis about background assumptions:

(BA) If a putatively supporting consideration or other evidence, C, provides no support for a proposition, P, against the background of the assumption not-B then C supports P only against the background of the assumption B.

And we noted that, if the ideas were separable and the thesis (BA) was incorrect, then an argument might beg the question according to Jackson's account but not according to Copi's account (Section 6.3).

Corresponding points can be made in the epistemological domain. First, the idea that warranted doubt about the proper operation of my perceptual apparatus would defeat a perceptual warrant may seem to go naturally with the idea that my visual experience does not really provide me with a warrant to believe that there is a pencil in front of me unless I have an antecedent warrant to believe the proposition, G (for 'good'), that my perceptual apparatus *is* working properly. Thus, Wright would regard G as a *cornerstone* for my perceptual beliefs (2004: 167–8): 'it would follow from the lack of warrant for [G] that one could not rationally claim warrant for *any* belief in the region [here, the region of perceptual beliefs]'.²²

Second, as against Wright's view, Pryor's dogmatist about the epistemology of perception allows that perceptual warrants are defeasible even though they do not depend on an antecedent warrant to believe any other proposition. Thus, according to Pryor, the proposition G is a *cornerstone-like* proposition (Davies, 2004: 224), in that warranted doubt about G would defeat any perceptual warrant. But a cornerstone-like proposition is not yet a cornerstone. On Pryor's view, a subject may have a perceptual warrant without this depending on any antecedent warrant to believe G. A subject may have a perceptual warrant without taking any attitude at all to the proposition G; indeed, without even grasping that proposition.²²

Third, we can articulate a thesis about antecedent warrant over which Wright and Pryor disagree:

(AW) If warrant to doubt a proposition B (warrant to believe not-B) would defeat the *prima facie* warrant to believe P provided by a putative warranting factor, F, then F can constitute a warrant to believe P only given an antecedent warrant to believe B.

²² See also Burge (1993: 458–9): 'The unsophisticated are entitled to rely on their perceptual beliefs. Philosophers may articulate these entitlements. But being entitled does not require being able to justify reliance on these resources, or even to conceive such a justification.'

The thesis (AW), connecting ideas about defeasible warrant and antecedent warrant, is the analogue in the epistemological domain of the earlier thesis (BA) about background assumptions. Different views about the correctness or incorrectness of thesis (BA) have different consequences for the relationship between two accounts of begging the question. As we shall see, Wright's and Pryor's opposed views about thesis (AW) have different consequences for the relationship between two accounts of transmission failure.

9.2 Varieties of defeat

Our aim is to use the notion of defeating or undermining an epistemic warrant in order to understand how suppositional doubt can limit the rational deployment of warrants.

If warranted doubt would undermine a warrant, W, to believe a proposition, P, then even an unwarranted doubt would make it rationally impossible for me to avail myself of W. For example, if a warranted belief that my perceptual apparatus is not working properly (that not-G is true) would undermine my perceptual warrant to believe that there is a pencil in front of me then even an unwarranted belief that not-G is true would *rationally obstruct* me from believing, on perceptual grounds, that there is a pencil in front of me (Pryor, 2004: 364). In a recent paper, Pryor says (forthcoming):

Suppose you have some warrant W that (categorically but prima facie) supports believing P. This warrant is vulnerable to being undermined by warrant to believe U. Now suppose you *merely do* believe U, without warrant. ... I think mere belief in U can **hypothetically undermine** the warrant W gives you to believe P.²³

We shall say that the belief in U would *R-defeat* the warrant W.

We can then extend this idea from belief to supposition. If a *belief* would rationally obstruct me from availing myself of a warrant then a *supposition* with the same content would rationally obstruct me from availing myself of that warrant *within a project that was governed by that supposition*. For example, within a project that was governed by the supposition that not-G is true, I could not rationally deploy a perceptual warrant to believe that there is a pencil in front of me. Pryor might say that a supposition that U is true would *suppositionally undermine* the warrant W to believe P. We shall say that the supposition would S-defeat the warrant W.

While defeat removes my warrant to believe P, R-defeat leaves my warrant to believe P intact. R-defeat does, however, render my belief P no longer

²³ I have changed Pryor's 'Q' to 'P'. He adds (forthcoming): 'In my 2004, I described this by saying that your belief in U "rationally obstructs you" from believing P on the basis of W.'

warranted if, as seems plausible, a warranted belief must be rationally based on a warrant.²⁴ The consequences of S-defeat are even less severe. It does not remove my warrant *to* believe P and it does not make my belief P any less warranted.

9.3 *Suppositional doubt and the project of settling the question*

Let us return to the situation at the beginning of this section. I have a warranted belief P based on a warrant, W, and there is a valid argument from P to Q. Let us now add that the epistemological structure of the case is analogous to the dialectical structure in the simplest cases of begging the question according to Jackson's account. That is, the proposition not-Q is itself a defeating hypothesis for W. Warranted doubt about Q would defeat W but I have no real doubt about Q, warranted or otherwise.

My project is to deploy my warrant to believe P, along with my appreciation of the valid argument from P to Q, in order to settle the question whether or not Q is true in favour of the positive. I begin by supposing, just for the purposes of the project, that not-Q is true. This merely suppositional doubt about Q does not defeat or even R-defeat my warrant W. I still have my warrant to believe P and my belief P is still warranted. But my suppositional doubt about Q does S-defeat my warrant W. So I am rationally obstructed from availing myself of W *within my question-settling project*, since the project is governed by my suppositional doubt. This is how suppositional doubt limits the rational deployment of warrants in the epistemic project of settling the question.

10. Defeat and doubt in two epistemic projects

Suppose that you, like me, have a warranted belief P based on the warrant W. Can *you* use the valid argument from P to Q more successfully in the project

²⁴ In the definition of a cornerstone, Wright says that from a lack of warrant for a cornerstone it would follow that one *could not rationally claim* a warrant for any belief in the region—not that one *would not have* a warrant. This appears to leave open the possibility of cases in which a subject has a warrant to believe a proposition but cannot rationally *claim* to have a warrant. On Pryor's account, this can happen in cases of hypothetical undermining or R-defeat. Someone with an unwarranted doubt about the proposition G may still *have* an undefeated warrant to believe that he has hands although he cannot rationally combine that doubt with a *claim* to have such a warrant and cannot rationally base a belief on that warrant. But, even if Wright were to allow that one can *have* a perceptual warrant without having a warrant to believe G, Pryor would still disagree with Wright over the question whether a warrant to believe G is required if one is rationally to *claim* to have a perceptual warrant. On Pryor's account (forthcoming), a subject who has no warrant *to* doubt G and also has no actual doubt—warranted or otherwise—about G, may both have, and rationally claim to have, a perceptual warrant.

of *deciding what to believe* about Q than I am able to use it in the project of *settling the question* in favour of Q?

You cannot properly use the argument in the epistemic project of deciding what to believe if it involves circularity—as Moore’s argument involves circularity according to Wright (Section 8.3). Following through a circular argument would not provide a route to any new appreciation that you have a warrant to believe Q. The argument from P to Q does involve circularity if the thesis (AW) is correct. We have stipulated (Section 9.3) that the proposition not-Q is a defeating hypothesis for the warrant W and so it will follow from the thesis (AW) that W—your warrant to believe the premiss, P—depends on an antecedent warrant to believe the conclusion, Q.

Let us assume, for the moment, that the thesis (AW) is *incorrect* and that the argument from P to Q does *not* involve circularity—as Moore’s argument does not involve circularity according to Pryor. Then it is important to recognize that there is *still* a potential problem for the idea that you could use the argument in the project of deciding what to believe about Q. It is also a potential problem for an idea that we have taken as uncontroversial; namely, the idea that, on Pryor’s dogmatist view, you could use Moore’s argument in the project of deciding what to believe about the external world (Section 8.3).

10.1 *Open-mindedness and suppositional doubt*

In the project of settling the question, my antecedent attitude towards the proposition Q was suppositional doubt. In order to simplify the exposition, we assumed that the suppositional doubt was total. But a fuller treatment of the project of settling the question would have to allow for the case where I begin by supposing that *it is as likely as not that Q is false*.

If my *supposing* that it is as likely as not that Q is false would *S-defeat* the warrant W then your *believing* that it is as likely as not that Q is false would *R-defeat* W. And if your warrant to believe P were to be R-defeated then you could not rationally avail yourself of it and the valid argument from P to Q would be of no use to you in deciding what to believe about Q. So the question that is potentially problematic is this: How does your attitude towards the proposition Q *before you have decided what to believe about it* differ from the attitude of believing that Q is as likely to be false as to be true? If we are to substantiate the idea that you could use the argument from P to Q in the epistemic project of deciding what to believe about Q, then we need to say more, first, about your attitudes when you begin the project and, second, about the kind of doubt that R-defeats a warrant.

First, we assume that the thesis (AW) is incorrect and that a dogmatist view of the warrant, W, is correct. Then, although the proposition not-Q is a

defeating hypothesis for *W*, you could have a warranted belief *P* based on the warrant *W* without even grasping the proposition *Q*. You might entertain the proposition *Q* for the first time when you come to appreciate that there is a valid argument from *P* to *Q*. Your taking *Q* to follow from *P* might be your only attitude towards *Q* before you decide to believe *Q*.

Second, a warranted belief that *it is as likely as not that Q is false*, based in part on evidence or other considerations that speak against *Q*, would defeat the warrant *W*. It might happen that a subject wrongly, but intelligibly and perhaps even blamelessly, takes it that evidence or other considerations speak against *Q*. The subject's doubt about *Q* would not genuinely defeat the warrant *W* but it would still R-defeat it. The kind of doubt that R-defeats a warrant, is doubt that the subject takes to be substantiated.²⁵

More work certainly needs to be done to provide a systematic account of the difference between, as Pryor (forthcoming) puts it, '*having no doxastic attitude at all* towards an issue' and adopting an attitude of *agnosticism*. But we already have the outline of an answer to the potentially problematic question about the difference between the open-mindedness with which you begin the project of deciding what to believe about *Q* and the even-handed doubt about *Q* that would R-defeat the warrant *W*.

The suppositional doubt that governs my project of settling the question is the suppositional version of even-handed doubt fallibly based on the balance of reasons for and against *Q*. It is not the suppositional version of the open-mindedness about *Q* with which you begin your project of deciding what to believe. So, we can see how—in the absence of circularity—you might use the valid argument from *P* to *Q* more successfully in the project of deciding what to believe about *Q* than I could use it in the project of settling the question in favour of *Q*.

10.2 Moore's argument and the project of settling the question

We have, in effect, substantiated the idea that, if the thesis (*AW*) is incorrect and Pryor's dogmatist account of perceptual warrant is correct, then you could use Moore's argument in the epistemic project of deciding what to believe about the external world. Imagine now that I undertake the epistemic project of settling the question whether or not there is an external world as ordinarily conceived. The proposition that there is no external world as

²⁵ Unwarranted belief is not to be conceived on the model of pathological belief (see Pryor, 2004: 363), in which a subject believes (or makes as if to believe) a proposition while simultaneously maintaining that nothing at all speaks in favour of that proposition. Similarly, suppositional doubt is not suppositional pathological doubt; it is suppositionally based on some reasons to think that a proposition is, or may well be, false.

ordinarily conceived is a defeating hypothesis for my perceptual warrant to believe that I have hands. But I have no real doubt, warranted or otherwise, that there is an external world.

My project is to deploy the warrants that I have to believe Moore's premisses, along with my appreciation of the validity of Moore's argument, in order to settle the external world question in favour of the positive. I begin by supposing, just for the purposes of the project, that Moore's conclusion is false. This merely suppositional doubt does not defeat or even R-defeat my perceptual warrant to believe that I have hands. My warrant remains intact and my belief remains warranted. But my suppositional doubt does S-defeat my perceptual warrant. Within the question-settling project that is governed by my suppositional doubt, I cannot rationally take my visual experience as a warrant to believe Moore's first premiss. I cannot rationally deploy my undefeated warrants to believe the premisses of Moore's argument in order to settle the question in favour of his conclusion.

We have seen that whether Moore's argument can properly be used in the epistemic project of deciding what to believe about the external world depends on whether Wright or Pryor is correct about the structure of the abstract space of warrants. Now we see that, quite independently of whether Wright or Pryor is correct, Moore's argument cannot properly be used in the more ambitious epistemic project of settling the question whether or not there is an external world as ordinarily conceived.

II. Two accounts of transmission failure

Corresponding to Copi's and Jackson's accounts of begging the question, there are principled limitations on the arguments that can properly be used in the epistemic projects of deciding what to believe and settling the question. Circular arguments cannot properly be used in the epistemic project of deciding what to believe. Arguments with the structure of the simplest cases of begging the question according to Jackson's account cannot properly be used in the epistemic project of settling the question. In the end, there are two accounts of transmission failure, a Copi-like account and a Jackson-like account.

11.1 *The Copi-like account of transmission failure*

Copi's textbook account of begging the question was given a pragmatic development in three stages. It was initially formulated in terms of circularity alone

(Section 4); it was extended to encompass simple indirectness (Section 6.1); and it was further generalized to match the generalization of Jackson's account (Section 7.3). A circular argument is ill-suited, and an indirect argument is less-than-ideally-suited, to the teasing-out purpose of arguing.

Although the textbook account begins with the case of blatant circularity involving a premiss, here in the epistemological domain I shall begin with the analogue of circularity involving a background assumption:

Epistemic circularity (antecedent warrant)

For one of the premisses, P , the warrant, W , to believe P depends on an antecedent warrant to believe the conclusion, Q .

The notion of dependence here is justificatory dependence in the abstract space of warrants but we assume that the structure of the space of warrants to believe has consequences for warranted belief. A properly warranted belief in P would need to be based, in part, on a warranted belief in Q . In a case of epistemic circularity, a putative warranting factor, F , constitutes a warrant to believe P only given an antecedent warrant to believe Q . If *there is* an antecedent warrant to believe Q then F constitutes the warrant, W , to believe P . But you cannot rationally regard F as providing a warrant, and rationally base a belief in P on it, unless you avail yourself of the warrant to believe Q .²⁶

Suppose that an argument exhibits epistemic circularity involving an antecedent warrant when W is the warrant to believe the premiss.²⁷ Then following through the argument, and availing yourself of that warrant to believe the premiss, would not allow you to arrive at a new appreciation that you have a warrant to believe the conclusion, Q . The argument would be ill-suited to the project of deciding what to believe about Q . Thus, we can make explicit an initial Copi-like criterion for transmission failure:

Transmission failure (C1)

The warrant, W , to believe the premiss, P , of a valid argument with conclusion, Q , is not transmitted from premiss to conclusion if W depends on an antecedent warrant to believe Q .

²⁶ It would be potentially misleading to say that the antecedent warrant to believe Q is just an *enabling condition* for F to constitute a warrant to believe P (see Silins, 2005: 77). For that would not capture the point that a warranted belief in P needs to be based, in part, on the antecedent warrant to believe Q .

²⁷ An argument that exhibits epistemic circularity involving an antecedent warrant *when W is the warrant to believe the premiss* might not exhibit epistemic circularity when some other warrant is considered.

Following the same pattern of transposition from the dialectical to the epistemological domain, we can describe an argument that exhibits the epistemological analogue of simple indirectness involving a background assumption:

Simple epistemic indirectness (antecedent warrant)

For one of the premisses, P , the warrant, W , to believe P depends on an antecedent warrant to believe a proposition, B , and there is a direct argument from B to the conclusion, Q .

Following through an argument that exhibits epistemic indirectness involving an antecedent warrant might allow you to arrive at a new appreciation that you have a warrant to believe the conclusion. So the argument would not be definitely ill-suited to the project of deciding what to believe but it would be less-than-ideally-suited to that project. Its use would involve a departure from the overarching norm of conforming the structure of one's network of beliefs to the structure of the abstract space of warrants. Thus, we can make explicit a second Copi-like criterion for transmission failure:

Transmission failure (C2)

The warrant, W , to believe the premiss, P , of a valid argument with conclusion, Q , is not transmitted from premiss to conclusion if W depends on an antecedent warrant to believe B , and there is a direct argument from B to Q .

This second criterion could then be generalized by analogy with the generalization of Copi's account of begging the question in Section 7.3. The Copi-like account of transmission failure would naturally take the second criterion, (C2), as less central than the first criterion, (C1).

11.2 The Jackson-like account of transmission failure

The basic condition for begging the question according to Jackson's account can also be transposed into the epistemological domain:

Basic epistemic unconvincingness

Doubt about the conclusion, Q , would directly rationally require acceptance of a defeating hypothesis, not- B , for the warrant, W , to believe one of the premisses, P .

In the simplest cases of this structure, the negation of the conclusion, not- Q , is itself a defeating hypothesis for the warrant, W .

If the proposition not- B is a defeating hypothesis for the warrant W , then warranted belief that not- B is true would defeat W and any belief that not- B

is true, warranted or not, would R-defeat W; that is, the belief that not-B is true would rationally obstruct me from availing myself of W. Furthermore, the supposition that not-B is true would S-defeat W; that is, it would rationally obstruct me from availing myself of W within a project that was governed by that supposition.

Suppose that an argument with conclusion Q exhibits epistemic unconvincingness when W is the warrant to believe the premiss, P. Since suppositional doubt about Q would directly rationally require the supposition that not-B is true, I could not rationally avail myself of the warrant W within a project that was governed by that suppositional doubt. So, the argument would be ill-suited to the project of settling the question whether or not Q is true.²⁸ Thus, we can make explicit a basic Jackson-like criterion for transmission failure:

Transmission failure (J)

The warrant, W, to believe the premiss, P, of a valid argument with conclusion, Q, is not transmitted from premiss to conclusion if doubt about Q would directly rationally require acceptance of a defeating hypothesis for W.

This Jackson-like criterion could then be generalized by analogy with the generalization of Jackson's account of begging the question in Section 7.2.

We can briefly compare the Jackson-like and Copi-like accounts of transmission failure by transposing the four summary points from Section 7.4. First, while the Copi-like criterion (C1) could be rewritten to include blatantly circular arguments as examples of transmission failure, circular arguments are not *ipso facto* examples of transmission failure according to the Jackson-like account. Second, some arguments that meet the criterion (J) do not meet the criterion (C1). Third, if an argument meets either Copi-like criterion, (C1) or (C2), then it also meets the Jackson-like criterion, (J). Fourth, whether the converse inference holds depends on whether the thesis (AW), connecting ideas about defeasible warrant and antecedent warrant, is correct.

11.3 Wright's notion of transmission failure

It is plausible that Wright accepts the thesis (AW) and does not sharply separate the Copi-like and Jackson-like accounts of transmission failure. He seems to adopt the Copi-like criterion (C1) in the following passage (2003: 57):

²⁸ An argument that exhibits epistemic unconvincingness *when W is the warrant to believe the premiss* might not exhibit epistemic unconvincingness when some other warrant is considered. The term 'unconvincingness' may initially seem to suggest a dialectical, rather than an epistemological, failing. I use it as a reminder of Jackson's account of begging the question, just as 'circularity' and 'indirectness' remind us of (our extension of) Copi's account. As we now see, epistemically unconvincing arguments are ill-suited to the epistemic project of settling the question.

[A *cogent* argument] is an argument, roughly, whereby someone could/should be moved to rational conviction of the truth of its conclusion—a case where it is possible to *learn* of the truth of the conclusion by getting warrant for the premises and then reasoning to it by the steps involved in the argument in question. Thus a valid argument with warranted premises cannot be cogent if the route to warrant for its premises goes—of necessity, or under the particular constraints of a given epistemic context—via a prior warrant for its conclusion. Such arguments, as we like to say, ‘beg the question’.

Say that a particular warrant, *W*, *transmits* across a valid argument just in case the argument is cogent when *W* is the warrant for its premises.

Elsewhere, both (C1) and the Jackson-like criterion (J) seem to be close to the surface (2002: 331):²⁹

[A] cogent argument is one whereby someone could be moved to rational conviction of—or the rational overcoming of doubt about—the truth of its conclusion. So a chain of valid inferences cannot be cogent if only someone who already took themselves to be rationally persuaded of the conclusion could rationally receive whatever grounds purportedly warranted its premises as doing just that.

We can achieve a better grasp on Wright’s notion of transmission failure by examining what he says about cases of epistemic indirectness involving an antecedent warrant. Consider the following argument from Fred Dretske (1970):

- ZEBRA(1) The animal in the pen is a zebra.
- ZEBRA(2) If the animal in the pen is a zebra then it is not a cleverly disguised mule.
- Therefore:
- ZEBRA(3) The animal in the pen is not a cleverly disguised mule.

The warrant, *W*, to believe the first premiss, ZEBRA(1), is constituted by a visual experience of an animal as looking just like a zebra. It is somewhat plausible that this experience constitutes a warrant only given an antecedent warrant to discount various kinds of trickery. Let us assume that this is indeed so. But it is *not* plausible that what is required is an antecedent warrant to believe something as specific as the conclusion, ZEBRA(3) (Silins, 2005: 79; Pryor, forthcoming). So the ZEBRA argument, with warrant *W* to believe the premiss, does not exhibit epistemic circularity and is not an example of transmission failure according to the Copi-like criterion (C1). But Wright says that ‘it should seem obvious’ that warrant is not transmitted (2002: 342).

²⁹ Here, I overlook a complication. Wright says (2002: 332): ‘So there is one immediate and very simple kind of counterexample to transmission... the case where the conclusion of a valid argument features explicitly among its premises.’ The criterion (C1) could be rewritten to include blatantly circular arguments but they do not, in general, meet the criterion (J).

Wright's account of why the ZEBRA argument is an example of transmission failure is along the following lines.³⁰ The proposition, not-B, that in this zoo things are *not* as they appear (one kind of animal may be disguised to look like another kind of animal) is a defeating hypothesis for the warrant, W, to believe ZEBRA(I). So, in accordance with the thesis (AW), the warrant, W, depends on an antecedent warrant to discount that defeating hypothesis and to believe the proposition, B, that in this zoo things *are* as they appear (if an animal looks like a zebra then it is a zebra). But there is a direct argument from B to the conclusion ZEBRA(3), an argument that does not go via the premiss ZEBRA(I). Thus, Wright says (2003: 63):

I must have an appreciable entitlement to affirm Q [the conclusion] already, independently of the recognition of its entailment by [the premises], if I am to claim to be warranted in accepting P [the first premise] in the first place. The inference from P to Q is thus not at the service of addressing an antecedent agnosticism about Q. So my warrant does not transmit.

It is not strictly speaking true that you must have a warranted belief in ZEBRA(3) already, if you are to have a warranted belief in ZEBRA(I). The most that is true is that you must already have a warranted belief in the proposition, B, that things are as they appear. There is a direct argument from B to ZEBRA(3) but you might not follow through *that* argument. So the ZEBRA argument might still provide a route to a new appreciation that you have a warrant to believe its conclusion.

Although the ZEBRA argument is not epistemically circular, it is epistemically indirect. Consequently, it is epistemically unconvincing. Since there is a direct argument from B to ZEBRA(3), doubt about the conclusion would directly rationally require acceptance of the defeating hypothesis, not-B, for the warrant W. As Wright says, the ZEBRA argument is 'not at the service of addressing an antecedent agnosticism'. It meets the Jackson-like criterion (J) and is ill-suited to the project of settling the question.

In summary, it is plausible that Wright accepts the thesis (AW) and does not sharply separate the Copi-like and Jackson-like accounts of transmission failure. The criterion (C2) is arguably not central in the Copi-like account but arguments that meet that criterion may be classified as examples of transmission failure because they also meet the Jackson-like criterion (J). For Wright, transmission failure is captured equally well by the Copi-like criteria (C1) and (C2) or the Jackson-like criterion (J).

³⁰ See Wright (2002: 342–4; 2003: 60–3) on the *disjunctive template*; also see Brown (2004) for discussion. In the quotation from Wright, I have changed his 'A' and 'B' to 'P' and 'Q'.

12. Conclusion: The epistemological landscape

Near the beginning of this chapter, I said that three features make an epistemological landscape including transmission failure difficult to appreciate. We are now in a position to explain those features.

12.1 *Wright and Davies*

Although Wright and I agree that there are failures of warrant transmission, there are differences of focus and formulation between us. Wright was initially concerned with anti-sceptical arguments, such as Moore's argument. I was concerned with arguments in philosophy of mind and cognitive science that generate instances of the problem of armchair knowledge. This difference of focus inevitably led to differences of formulation.

Michael McKinsey (1991) argued that externalism about content is incompatible with authoritative self-knowledge. An instance of the problem of armchair knowledge based on his argument is as follows:³¹

WATER(1) I am thinking that water is wet.

WATER(2) If I am thinking that water is wet then I am (or have been) embedded in an environment that contains samples of water.

Therefore:

WATER(3) I am (or have been) embedded in an environment that contains samples of water.

If I am consciously thinking that water is wet, then it is plausible that I can know WATER(1) from the armchair. If externalism about content is a correct philosophical theory, then it is plausible that I can know WATER(2) from the armchair. The argument from these premisses to the conclusion, WATER(3), is obviously valid. But it is implausible that I can settle the question whether or not I am embedded in an environment that contains samples of water without rising from the armchair to conduct some (admittedly modest) empirical investigation.

In the case of Moore's argument, Wright says that the warrant to believe the first premiss, provided by a visual experience as of hands, depends on an antecedent warrant to believe the conclusion. But, in the case of the WATER argument, it is not plausible that a first-person warrant to believe WATER(1) depends on an antecedent warrant to believe WATER(3). The WATER argument is *not* epistemically circular.

³¹ For the argument that anti-individualism is incompatible with privileged access, see also McKinsey (2002, 2003, 2007). For this instance of the problem of armchair knowledge, see Davies (1998, 2000, 2003a, 2003b); see also Wright (2000, 2003).

Perhaps it is somewhat plausible that the first-person warrant to believe WATER(1) depends on an antecedent warrant to believe the proposition B: There is such a thing for me to think as the first premiss. But still the WATER argument does *not* exhibit *simple* epistemic indirectness since there is no direct argument from B, alone, to WATER(3).

There *is* a direct argument from B, together with the second premiss (or, more accurately, together with the externalist philosophical theory that provides the warrant to believe the second premiss), to WATER(3). So, if the assumption about dependence on an antecedent warrant to believe B is correct, the WATER argument is *epistemically indirect*. But to reveal it as an example of transmission failure according to the Copi-like account, we need to consider a generalization of the already peripheral criterion (C2), analogous to the generalization of Copi's account of begging the question in Section 7.3.

Additional differences of formulation entered because I explicitly developed my account of transmission failure by analogy with Jackson's account of begging the question. Within that framework, the WATER argument does not exhibit *basic* epistemic unconvincingness. The proposition not-B, that there is *no* such thing for me to think as the first premiss, is a defeating hypothesis for the warrant to believe WATER(1). But doubt about the conclusion does not, by itself, directly rationally require acceptance of that proposition. The Jackson-like account of transmission failure that I developed thus employed a generalization of the criterion (J) analogous to the generalization of Jackson's account of begging the question in Section 7.2.

12.2 Wright and Pryor

There is an outright disagreement between Wright and Pryor over Moore's argument. It is plausible that Wright accepts the thesis (AW) and does not sharply separate the Copi- and Jackson-like accounts of transmission failure. On Wright's view, Moore's argument is an example of transmission failure, unsuitable for use in either the project of deciding what to believe or the project of settling the question.

Pryor favours a dogmatist account of perceptual warrant, does not accept the thesis (AW), and does distinguish between the Copi- and Jackson-like accounts of transmission failure. He says (forthcoming):

Wright and Davies alternate between different glosses on what transmission failure consists in. One criterion they give is: Can reasoning through an argument, relying on the indicated warrants for its premisses, add up to (or constitute, or give you) *any* new warrant to believe the argument's conclusion? The other criterion is:

Can reasoning in the indicated way *rationally resolve doubt or agnosticism* about the argument's conclusion?

Here, the first criterion for transmission failure is Copi-like, while the second is Jackson-like. Pryor argues—rightly, given that he does not accept the thesis (AW)—that ‘Moorean reasoning might count as transmission-failing by the second criterion even if it didn’t by the first’ (ibid.). And he points out, in effect, that if transmission failure is supposed to track an argument’s being ill-suited to the project of deciding what to believe, ‘then we should take the first [Copi-like] criterion as definitive, and set the second [Jackson-like criterion] aside’ (ibid.).

Pryor recommends that the notion of transmission failure can be understood in terms of a ‘background warrant model’ (ibid.) that coincides, nearly enough, with our notion of epistemic circularity (perhaps epistemic circularity or indirectness) involving an antecedent warrant. This explains why, given his dogmatist account of perceptual warrant, Pryor says that ‘[Moore’s] justification to believe [that he has hands] *does* transmit to the hypothesis that there’s an external world’ (2004: 351). For, on a dogmatist account, the perceptual warrant to believe Moore’s premiss does not depend on an antecedent warrant to believe any other proposition.

12.3 Pryor and Davies

There is an apparent disagreement between Pryor and me, and Pryor says that my account of transmission failure is not genuinely epistemological but only dialectical.

My early papers on transmission failure were unclear on a number of crucial issues. Although I developed my account of transmission failure by analogy with Jackson’s account of begging the question, I did not distinguish clearly between a Jackson-like account and a Copi-like account. Although I drew a distinction between ‘knowledge that is an *achievement* and assumptions that we are epistemically *entitled* to make’ (Davies, 2003a, p. 28), I did not consider the possibility of a dogmatist epistemology, and I did not explicitly assess the thesis (AW), connecting ideas about defeasible warrant and antecedent warrant.

In his seminal discussion of externalism and self-knowledge, Burge says (1988, p. 653) ‘It is uncontroversial that the conditions for thinking a certain thought must be presupposed in the thinking.’ Appealing to this remark, I suggested (2003b) that the first-person warrant to believe the first premiss of the WATER argument depends on an antecedent, but unearned, warrant—an entitlement, in one use of that term—to believe or assume that the conditions

necessary for me to think that premiss are met and that there is such a thing for me to think as the first premiss. In response, Burge says (2003b: 253):

I do *not* assimilate this notion of presupposition to a notion of assumption by the individual... In order to think that water is wet, an individual need not have the concepts necessary to assume that the relevant conditions for thinking the thought are in place... I did not intend presupposition to be a propositional attitude. It is an impersonal relation between the thinking and actual principles or conditions governing its possibility.

On Burge's view, I simply rely on the requirements for thought being met, rather as I rely on the proper operation of my perceptual apparatus (Burge, 2003a). My warrant to believe WATER(I) does not depend on an antecedent warrant—not even an unearned warrant—to believe or assume any other proposition. But the proposition that the requirements for thought are *not* met is a defeating hypothesis for my warrant to believe WATER(I), just as the proposition that my perceptual apparatus is not working properly is a defeating hypothesis for perceptual warrants.

Burge's and Pryor's critical responses to my early papers on transmission failure have been important in the development of the present Jackson-like account of transmission failure and the distinction between it and the Copi-like account. I can agree with Pryor that Moore's argument is not an example of transmission failure according to the Copi-like account, but still say that it is an example of transmission failure according to the Jackson-like account. And I can say the same about the WATER argument.

Pryor says that transmission failure according to the Jackson-like account—being ill-suited to the project of settling the question—is really 'only a dialectical or persuasive failing' (2004: 374, n. 32). But it seems to me that the project of settling the question is the project of much of normal science and is no less epistemological than the project of deciding what to believe. It is true that the epistemic project of settling the question is analogous to the dialectical project of convincing a doubter. But it is no less true that the epistemic project of deciding what to believe is analogous to the dialectical project of teasing out the consequences of a hearer's beliefs.

Because Moore's argument is ill-suited to the project of settling the question, it is of no use in the 'ambitious anti-skeptical project' (Pryor, 2000: 517) or in the epistemological game of convince-the-sceptic (Byrne, 2004: 301).³²

³² Alston (1986) describes the structure of Moore's argument according to the dogmatist as 'epistemic circularity'. Epistemic circularity, in *this* sense, does not make an argument ill-suited to the epistemic

Because the WATER argument is ill-suited to the project of settling the question, there is the prospect of a solution to at least one instance of the problem of armchair knowledge. We cannot settle the question whether there is water in the environment without engaging in the empirical methods of normal science.*

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project of deciding what to believe, but it does make it ill-suited to the epistemic project of settling the question. Alston says that epistemic circularity stands in the way of our achieving 'full reflective assurance' (1986: 23) with respect to the belief, for example, that sense experience is a reliable source of perceptual beliefs. (Here, as at many other points, I am indebted to Jim Pryor.)

* Parts of this paper have recognizable antecedents in the second and third of the Carl G. Hempel Lectures that I delivered at Princeton University, 22–26 September 2003, under the title *Armchair Knowledge, Begging the Question, and Epistemic Warrant*. A version of the paper was presented as the Seventh Weatherhead Lecture in Philosophy of Language, Tulane University, New Orleans, 11 February 2005. Subsequent versions were presented at an Arché Workshop on Basic Knowledge, University of St Andrews, 24–25 November, 2006, and at a Workshop on Epistemology, Danish Epistemology Network, University of Copenhagen, 8 December, 2006. I am grateful to Jessica Brown, Graeme Forbes, Mark Greenberg, and Jesper Kallestrup for comments and conversations, and especially indebted to Tyler Burge, Frank Jackson, Jim Pryor, and Crispin Wright.

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