

Problems of Wright's entitlement theory

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ABSTRACT

I am concerned with Crispin Wright (2004, 2007, 2012 and 2014)'s entitlement theory, according to which (1) we have non-evidential justification for accepting propositions of a general type, which Wright calls cornerstones, and (2) this non-evidential justification for cornerstones can secure evidential justification for believing many other propositions—those we take to be true on the grounds of ordinary evidence. I initially focus on strategic entitlement, which is one of the types of entitlement that Wright has described in more detail. Wright (2014) argues that strategic entitlement is a form of epistemic justification rather than pragmatic, as some critics have contended. I respond that whether or not strategic entitlement is epistemic, it is implausible that there are cornerstones we are strategically entitled to accept. Thus, it is implausible that that (1) could be successfully defended by appealing to strategic entitlement. After this, I argue that even if (1) were true, (2) would be false, for in many cases non-evidential justification for accepting cornerstones couldn't secure evidential justification for believing ordinary propositions. This criticism is more ambitious than the previous one because it aims to strike all forms of epistemic entitlement introduced by Wright at once. My argument relies on an elementary probabilistic regimentation of the so-called leaching problem.

1. Introduction

I am concerned with Crispin Wright (2004, 2007, 2012 and 2014)'s entitlement theory, according to which (1) we have *non-evidential* justification for accepting propositions of a general type, which Wright calls *cornerstones*, and (2) this non-evidential justification for cornerstones can secure *evidential* justification for believing many other propositions—those we take to be true on the grounds of ordinary evidence. I initially focus on *strategic* entitlement, which is one of the types of entitlement that Wright has described in more detail. Wright (2014) forcefully argues that strategic entitlement is a form of *epistemic* justification rather than *pragmatic*, as some critics have contended. I respond that whether or not strategic entitlement is epistemic, it is implausible that there are cornerstones we are strategically entitled to accept. Thus, it is implausible that (1) could be successfully defended by appealing to strategic entitlement. After this, I argue that even if (1) were

true, (2) would be false, for in many cases *non-evidential* justification for accepting cornerstones couldn't secure *evidential* justification for believing ordinary propositions. This criticism is more ambitious than my first one because it aims to strike all forms of epistemic entitlement introduced by Wright at once (as each of them is supposed to be a type of non-evidential justification). My argument relies on an elementary probabilistic regimentation of the so-called *leaching* problem. My discussion of Wright's entitlement theory will give me the opportunity to review objections raised against it by other epistemologists—in particular, Davies (2004), Pritchard (2005), Jenkins (2007) and Pedersen (2009)—and Wright's responses.

The paper is organized as follows: §2 and its two subsections introduce Wright's view of external world scepticism and Wright's response to the sceptic based on entitlement theory—the emphasis will be on Wright's strategic entitlement. §3 deals with the question whether strategic entitlement is epistemic. §4 argues that it is dubious that there are cornerstones we are strategically entitled to accept. §5 contends that no type of non-evidential entitlement to trust cornerstones can secure evidential justification for believing propositions depending on them. §6 presents my concluding considerations.

2. Wright's entitlement theory as a response to scepticism

Wright (2004, 2007, 2012, 2014) contends that there is a type of epistemic justification for accepting propositions—called by him *epistemic entitlement* or simply *entitlement*—which rational subjects possess by default.¹ Epistemic entitlements are *non-evidential* and *unearned*, in the sense of not being based on any a priori or a posteriori information or cognitive accomplishment of the subject.² Because of this feature, our epistemic entitlements to accept various propositions would enable us to defuse sceptical arguments of an important type that recur in philosophy. I will first

¹ Other epistemologists have defended similar notions of entitlement. For useful discussion see Altschul (2011) and Wright (2014: §11.2).

examine how these sceptical arguments work, and then how our entitlements would enable us to neutralize them.

2.1 Scepticism and cornerstones

Wright says that a proposition is a *cornerstone* for a given region of thought just in case “it would follow from a lack of warrant for it that one could not rationally claim [possession of] warrant for *any* belief in the region.” (2004: 167-8)³ I give examples of cornerstones below. By “warrant” Wright refers to a disjunctive notion of justification that encompasses both evidential/earned justification and non-evidential/unearned justification (cf. 2004: 178 and 209).⁴

Since the word ‘warrant’ has been given quite different meanings in epistemology, in the following I prefer to use the more generic term ‘justification’ to refer to both evidential/earned and non-evidential/unearned justification. Being able to rationally claim justification for a belief *B* means—for Wright—being able to substantiate a claim that one has justification for *B* “in a context of rational discussion and adduction of evidence, commonly recognized—very much as a claim to innocence, or guilt, may be [substantiated] in the forum of a court of law.” (2014: 220)

Lack of justification for a cornerstone *C* would prevent us from rationally claiming justification for any belief *B* in the relevant region of thought because—according to Wright—any doubt about *C* (absent other relevant information) will tend to *undermine the rational force of the*

² Epistemic entitlements are “grounds, or reasons, to accept a proposition that consist neither in the possession of evidence for its truth, nor in the occurrence of any kind of cognitive achievement—or example, being in a perceptual state that represents it to one that *P*, or seeming to recollect that *P*—which would normally be regarded as apt to ground knowledge or justified belief that *P*.” (Wright 2014: 214)

³ In more recent papers, Wright also uses the terms *presuppositions* and *authenticity conditions* to refer to cornerstones and less general propositions with the same epistemic functions.

⁴ As we will see, entitlements are meant to have an *internalist* character. But Wright doesn’t commit to warrant in general having this character.

evidence in favour of *B* (cf. 2004: 174 and 2014: 217-218). Thus, more precisely, for Wright, lack of justification for *C* would prevent us from both *acquiring* and rationally claiming justification for any correlated *B*.⁵

The general type of sceptical argument that our epistemic entitlements would enable us to defuse depends on two premises. The first says that some proposition *C* that we routinely accept as true is in fact a cornerstone for a given region of discourse *D*. The second premise says that we cannot have justification for believing *C*. From these two premises the sceptic concludes that we cannot acquire justification for believing any proposition in *D*, and thus that we cannot rationally claim justification for any of these propositions. Schematically:

(SCEPTICISM)

(A) *C* is a cornerstone for the propositions in *D*.

(B) We cannot have epistemic justification for *C*.

(C) We cannot acquire and so rationally claim epistemic justification for any proposition in *D*.

One might wonder why the sceptical argument should ultimately aim to conclude that we cannot rationally *claim* justification. Wright's response—which I find plausible—is that the most worrying sceptical challenges in philosophy are targeted at the level of claims to justification rather than mere possession of justification (cf. 2004: 210-11 and 2014: 220).

⁵ Some passages in Wright's papers antecedent to his (2014) could be interpreted as if Wright contended that lack of justification for *C* would prevent us from *only* rationally claiming justification for *B* but *not* from acquiring justification for *B*. Wright (2014)'s conception of entitlements as *epistemic rights* (see below) is no longer open to this interpretation, as it is primarily meant to account for *acquisition* of justification rather than claiming justification. For discussion see McGlynn (2016).

Wright (2004) considers two different strategies for supporting (B), which he calls the *Cartesian* and the *Humean* one,⁶ from the names of the first philosophers who arguably used instances of them. The Cartesian sceptic identifies *C* with a proposition stating that we are *not* cognitively detached from reality in a certain way. For instance, *C* could be the proposition that our sensory experiences are normally reliable, or the more fancy proposition that we are not globally hallucinated by a malevolent demon. So interpreted, *C* is a cornerstone for the class *D* of all propositions about perceivable facts. For it is intuitive—or so the sceptic would argue—that if we lacked antecedent justification for *C*, none of our experiences could provide us with justification for believing any proposition in *D*. Thus we couldn't claim justification for them. The Cartesian sceptic argues that we cannot have antecedent justification for *C* because we could only acquire it by performing some *empirical* procedure (e.g. verifying that other people normally experience what we experience), which—nevertheless—could yield justification for *C* only if we were justified in taking the execution of the procedure itself to have happened in the *real* world rather than in our hallucination of it. But this requirement could be satisfied only if we had *already* acquired justification for *C* (cf. 2004: 168-9).

The strategy of the Humean sceptic, on the other hand, doesn't necessarily play with a scenario of cognitive detachment from reality but it makes a case that certain epistemic practices involve vicious circularity. This strategy is exemplified by a possible reconstruction of Hume's inductive scepticism. Suppose *C* says that our world abounds in natural regularities, and *D* is the class of all generalizations in form

All *F*s are *G*s,

⁶ Also called by Wright *I-II-III* argument.

ranging on a potentially infinite number of cases, where F and G refer to distinct and observable natural properties. The best evidence for the truth of any such generalization is presumably a proposition having form

(O) Very many observed F s are G s.

Yet it appears true that the inductive inference from a justified proposition of type O to a generalization in D can produce justification for the generalization only if there is independent justification for accepting C . For inductive inferences can be reliable only if the world does contain natural regularities. Note that C is, in this setting, a cornerstone for the generalizations in D . Hume can be interpreted as contending that we cannot possibly have justification for C because we could acquire justification for believing C only by deductively inferring C from some independently justified generalization in D . But this could happen only if we had *already* acquired justification for C (cf. 2004: 169-70).

The Humean path of reasoning can be used to foster various forms of scepticism—for instance about the existence of a material world, other minds, and the past. Let me just consider the first type of scepticism, which is the most discussed in philosophy. (The reader can easily work out how the Humean strategy articulates for other types of scepticism.) Suppose D is the class of all propositions about perceivable facts, and that C says that there exists a material world. Take any proposition P in D (for instance the Moorean one that this is a hand). Our best evidence for believing P is—according to Wright—a proposition E that we have just an experience as if P . The Humean sceptic argues that the ampliative inference from E to P can give us justification for believing P only if we have independent justification for C . For the inference from E to P is a good one only if our experience is a reliable guide to the external world, which presupposes that there is a material world broadly manifest in our normal sensory experience. The Humean sceptic contends

that we cannot possibly have justification for *C* because we could acquire justification for *C* only by deductively inferring *C* from some independently *justified* proposition in *D*. But this could happen only if we had *already* acquired justification for *C* (cf. 2004: 170-74).

2.2 Entitlement theory and strategic entitlement

Wright acknowledges that (SCEPTICISM) is valid. Furthermore, he maintains that there are actually cornerstones for important areas of discourse—for instance, about perceivable reality, other minds, and the past. Wright thus acknowledges that many instances of premise (A) of (SCEPTICISM) are true. Nevertheless, he rejects the correlated instances of premise (B) as false. He contends that in these cases we do possess justification for *C*, and that neither the Cartesian nor the Humean way to argue can show that the contrary is true.

Wright thinks that the Cartesian and Humean reasoning share the same lacuna. In both cases the sceptic insists that we can have no justification for *C* because we couldn't *acquire* one on the basis of any evidence. In doing so, the sceptic overlooks the possibility that we might have an *unearned* justification for *C*—i.e. an *epistemic entitlement* to accept that *C*—which doesn't depend on any evidence. Since—according to Wright—we do have such an entitlement in many cases, despite what the Cartesian or Humean sceptic claims, (B) is false in many cases, and thus various instances of (SCEPTICISM) are unsound. In all these cases, we have and can rationally claim justification for believing *P*.

Note that an epistemic entitlement to *accept C* cannot be an epistemic entitlement to *believe C*, for it is hard to understand how one could rationally believe a proposition without having evidence for its truth (cf. 2004: 176). Indeed, Wright thinks of acceptance as an attitude more general than belief. Acceptance includes, as sub-cases, belief and cognate notions—for instance,

the notion of *taking for granted* that X is true,⁷ the one of *acting on the assumption* that X is true,⁸ and the one of *trusting* that X is true on reasons that don't bear on the likely truth of X (cf. 2004: 177). When Wright says that we are entitled to accept a cornerstone C , he means that we are entitled to *trust* C in the latter sense. For Wright, “entitlement is rational trust.” (2004: 194)

It is instructive to examine how Wright arrives at selecting just trust. To play the epistemic role that it is supposed to play in the architecture of epistemic justification, the sought notion of acceptance must be—so to speak—a very close surrogate of the notion of belief, in the sense that it should retain or closely replicate as many as possible rational features proper to belief. For instance, a subject S 's accepting C must commit S to accepting C 's consequences in the same way as S 's believing that C commits S to believing C 's consequences. Also, S 's accepting C must be incompatible with S 's *doubting* C —that is to say, with both S 's *disbelieving* C and being *agnostic* about C —in the same way in which S 's believing C is incompatible with doubting C . This second requirement is crucial for Wright's response to the sceptic, for if S *doubted* a cornerstone C when accepting it, S couldn't *rationally* believe any proposition P in the region of thought depending on C even if she had evidence appropriate for P . For S would be rationally committed to *doubting* P as well. (More accurately, since belief is often involuntary, S may come to believe P , but this belief would not be rational or fully rational.⁹) Consider for example the cornerstone C saying that S is not constantly hallucinated by a malevolent demon. The sceptic would argue that since S has no evidence (or no strong evidence) against or in favour of C , S should be agnostic about C . But if S did so, S would become unable to rationally form any belief about her physical environment on the

7 In the same sense in which a judge in a court of law is required to take it for granted that the defendant is innocent until proved guilty.

8 In the same sense in which some say that when one drives a car one should prudently act on the assumption that the other drivers are nothing but dangerous fools.

9 For further discussion on this problem see Wright (2014: 227-228.)

grounds of her experiences (cf. 2004: 192-193). The only notion of accepting a proposition *C* close to the one of believing *C* that satisfies the requirement of being incompatible with doubting *C* is—according to Wright—the notion of trusting *C* (cf. 2004: 194-195).

As said, however, there is an important feature of belief that the notion of trust cannot retain or replicate. Let me stress this again, as it will be crucial in ensuing discussion. If we think of ‘belief’ as referring to a rationally *constrained* and rationally *constraining* mental state—i.e. essentially constrained by evidence and essentially constraining further thought and action—then ‘trust’ will refer to a mental state that share much of the second ingredient with belief, but not the first. For cornerstone propositions are such that—according to Wright—we can rationally trust them *though we have no evidence for their truth*. This contrasts with belief because it appears counterintuitive to say that we can rationally believe a proposition when we have no or very little evidence for its truth (cf. 2002: 181-183 and 194).

Wright (2004) has individuated four ways in which epistemic entitlement could arise, which he has called *strategic entitlement*, *entitlement of cognitive project*, *entitlement of rational deliberation*, and *entitlement of substances*. Only the first two types of entitlement have been described in some details by Wright. In the remainder of this section and in the next two sections, I will concentrate on strategic entitlement. Wright (2014) has refined his notion of strategic entitlement and defended it from various objections. In particular, he has attempted to show that this type of entitlement is a genuine form of *epistemic* justification. To forestall possible confusion, let me stress here that Jenkins (2007) and Pedersen (2009)—which I discuss in the next sections—have nominally directed their arguments against Wright’s entitlement of *cognitive project*. As a matter of a fact, however, both authors interpret entitlement of cognitive project as a form of

strategic entitlement, and they make arguments that essentially target the latter. This is why I will present the objections by these two authors as aiming to strike strategic entitlement.¹⁰

Saying that a strategy *ST* is the *dominant strategy* with respect to a set of alternative strategies and given certain goals or values is saying that, in every possible situation, *ST* does at least as well as its alternatives and, in at least some situation, *ST* does better, in relation to the goals to achieve. Consider for example Robinson Crusoe starving in a desert island. His goal is to survive. For him, eating the fruits that he has found is the dominant strategy with respect to not eating them, for if he eats them, he will survive if the fruits are edible, and he will die if they are poisonous. But if he doesn't eat them, he will die of starvation in any case.

Wright stipulates that a rational thinker *S* is (absolutely)¹¹ strategically entitled to accept a proposition *P* just in case: (i) *S* has no sufficient reason to believe that *P* is true or false, and (ii) independently of *S*'s particular context, to accept *P* is for *S* always a dominant strategy or at least an essential step in a dominant strategy (cf. 2004: 182-184), where to accept *P* specifically means to *trust P* (cf. 2004: 194 and especially 2014: §11.3).

Wright's model of strategic entitlement (cf. 2014: 226) is inspired by a non-orthodox interpretation of Reichenbach's vindication of induction,¹² one that reads Reichenbach's argument as aiming to provide a non-evidential reason for *trusting* the cornerstone that

¹⁰ My view is that interpreting Wright's entitlement of cognitive project as a form of strategic entitlement is misleading, for Wright carefully distinguishes between these two types of entitlement and appears to take them to be independent of one another (see for example Wright 2014: 245). I hasten to say, however, that Jenkins (2007: 28) herself admits that Wright doesn't seem to think of entitlement of cognitive project as a form of strategic entitlement.

¹¹ Wright (2004: 182-183) also characterizes a notion of *contextual* strategic entitlement but he doesn't consider it to be relevant for the justification of cornerstones. I return to this issue in §3.

¹² See especially Reichenbach (1938: §38). For a more faithful reconstruction of Reichenbach's vindication and its criticism see for instance Salmon (1991).

(*CI*) Inductive methods are truth-conducive.

This is my best re-construction of Wright's argument:

(INDUCTION)

(a₁) Independently of the context, it is for us important and valuable to rationally form many true beliefs about the future.¹³

(b₁) Suppose nature is regular. If we trust *CI* and use inductive methods, we will rationally form many true beliefs about the future. Whereas if we don't trust *CI*, we won't rationally form many true beliefs about the future. Suppose nature is not regular. In this case, whether or not we trust *CI*, we won't rationally form many true beliefs about the future.

Therefore:

(c₁) Independently of our context, trusting *CI* is for us an essential step in a dominant strategy.

Furthermore:

(d₁) We have no sufficient reason to believe that *CI* is true or false.

Therefore:

(e₁) We are strategically entitled to trust *CI*. (Cf. 2014: 227)

Wright thinks that a similar strategy can be deployed to respond to other forms of scepticism—for instance, external world scepticism (cf. 2004: 186). Consider the cornerstone:

¹³ If we don't trust *CI*, given our evidential predicament, for Wright we should presumably be agnostic about it.

(C2) We are not constantly hallucinated by a malevolent demon.

Although Wright doesn't explicitly formulate an argument to show that we are strategically entitled to trust C2, he would presumably propose one like this:¹⁴

(ANTI-DEMON)

(a₂) Independently of the context, it is for us important and valuable to rationally form many true beliefs about our environment.¹⁵

(b₂) Suppose our sense organs are normally reliable. If we trust C2 (together with the negations of any other sceptical conjecture) and use perception, we will rationally form many true beliefs about our environment. Whereas if we don't trust C2, we won't rationally form many true beliefs about our environment.¹⁶ Suppose our sense organs aren't normally reliable. In this case, whether or not we trust C2, we won't rationally form many true beliefs about our environment.

Therefore:

¹⁴ Wright (2004: 186) outlines a quite similar argument to show that we are strategically entitled to *accept* that the world is generally opened to our perceptual faculties.

¹⁵ Note that Wright takes (a₂)—as well as (a₁) in (INDUCTION)—to be a *contingent* proposition. According to Wright there is in fact nothing in the human nature or the nature of rationality that entails the truth of (a₂) or (a₁). Wright acknowledges that the effectiveness of his strategic entitlement response to the sceptic is conditional on the truth of contingent premises like (a₂) and (a₁). He insists that this doesn't weaken his response (cf. 2014: 240-241 and 244).

¹⁶ If we don't trust C2, given our evidential predicament, for Wright we should presumably be agnostic about it.

(c₂) Independently of our context, trusting *C2* is for us an essential step in a dominant strategy.

Furthermore:

(d₂) We have no sufficient reason to believe that *C2* is true or false.

Therefore:

(e₂) We are strategically entitled to trust *C2*.

No doubt, (INDUCTION) and (ANTI-DEMON) are open to criticism. I will consider objections in the next sections.¹⁷ Wright's overall conception of the architecture of epistemic justification—

¹⁷ An immediate concern about the cogency of (INDUCTION) stems from doubting the second part of (b1)—the claim that if nature is not regular, whether or not we trust *C1*, we won't rationally form many true beliefs about the future. Consider in fact the apparently possible case in which: (i) nature is not regular, (ii) we don't trust *C1* but (iii) we trust the hypothesis *H1* that a non-inductive method—e.g. crystal glazing—is reliable, and (iv) *H1 happens to be true*. One may contend that in this case—against what (b1) says—we would rationally form many true beliefs about the future if we used the non-inductive method referred to in *H1*. Reichenbach (1938)'s response to objections of this sort is two-fold. First, he contends that in the envisaged situation nature is actually regular because there is a regular connection between what our reliable source of information—e.g. a crystal ball—says and the truth. Second, Reichenbach argues that since our source of information is reliable, we *can use induction* to conclude that whatever our source says is always or mostly true. If Reichenbach is correct, in this case our trusting *C1* and acting accordingly doesn't do any worse than our not trusting it. Thus the conclusion that trusting *C1* is for us an essential step in a context-independent dominant strategy stands unrefuted.

Although Reichenbach's response might dispel doubts concerning (b1) in (INDUCTION), it doesn't seem to me that an analogous response is available if one doubts (b2) in (ANTI-DEMON) for a parallel reason. The second part of (b2) says that if our senses aren't normally reliable, whether or not we trust *C2*, we won't rationally form many true beliefs about our environment. Consider however the logically possible case in which: (i) our senses aren't generally reliable, (ii) we don't trust *C2* but (iii) we trust the hypothesis

involving cornerstones and epistemic entitlements—might appear contrived or distant from actual epistemic practices. But it is not necessarily so. To clarify how epistemic entitlements come into play Wright (2014: 221-222 and 243) draws a comparison with the notion of civil right. An agent need not know or even conceive of her civil rights in order to have them. When she acts in ways that her rights mandate, her actions are in good standing even if she is unaware that they are so mandated. According to Wright, epistemic entitlements determine *epistemic* rights having analogue features in the sphere of action constituted by the formation and management of belief. Suppose for example there is a general entitlement to trust that one's own sensory faculties are normally reliable in absence of evidence to the contrary. Then even those who have no conception of their sensory faculties (e.g. young children), but who forms beliefs spontaneously in response to their sense experience, are acting in accordance with their epistemic rights. Thus they are justified in entertaining those beliefs even if they do not place trust in the relevant cornerstones. Only (mature) agents challenged to produce a justification for their perceptual beliefs will become aware of the need to trust relevant cornerstones and their entitlement to do so.

H2 that the powerful entity that makes our senses unreliable—e.g. a Cartesian demon—always sets out facts and things in our environment in accordance with a given subject *S*'s blind guesses, and (iv) *H2 happens to be true*. One might contend that—against what (b2) says—we would rationally form many true beliefs about our environment, in this case, if we relied on *S*'s blind guesses to form those beliefs. I don't see how a Reichenbachian defensive strategy could apply in this case. Clearly, this is not a situation in which (despite appearances) our senses are reliable. Furthermore, this is not a case in which our trusting *C2* and acting accordingly doesn't do any worse than our not trusting it. I don't want to press on with this criticism of (ANTI-DEMON), however, because conjectures like *H2* appear to me very far-fetched. Nevertheless, I cannot exclude that with a bit of ingenuity a more straightforward objection broadly of this type could be raised against (ANTI-DEMON).

3. Is strategic entitlement epistemic?

Wright's entitlement theory has been criticised by many epistemologists—e.g. Davies (2004), Pritchard (2005), Jenkins (2007), Pedersen (2009), Tucker (2009), Williams (2012 and 2013) and McGlynn (2014). Most of the objections raised by these philosophers have been tackled in Wright (2004, 2012 and 2014). In this section I will focus on what is widely considered to be the central criticism of *strategic* entitlement. Prominently articulated by Pritchard and Jenkins, this criticism essentially says that strategic entitlement to trust cornerstones (assuming that it actually exists) is epistemologically irrelevant because it is not a form of *epistemic* justification. As we will shortly see, Wright (2014) has given this criticism an articulate response that looks promising. In the next section I will show that, in spite of Wright's interesting response, the epistemological relevance of strategic entitlement, if not just its existence, is still very questionable.

Pritchard (2005: §3) contends that Wright's strategic entitlement is a type of *pragmatic* rather than *epistemic* justification. For it essentially depends on *instrumental* (or means-end) rationality rather than *epistemic* rationality. Thus strategic entitlement is not a form of *epistemic* entitlement. This would disarm Wright's response to the sceptic because what the sceptic claims is that we lack *epistemic* justification for accepting cornerstones. The intuition apparently driving Pritchard's criticism is that epistemic rationality is essentially *evidence-constrained* and (more controversially) independent of *instrumental* considerations. So the problem for Wright is that strategic entitlement is essentially evidence-*unconstrained* and *dependent* on instrumental considerations. That is why it doesn't seem able to produce epistemic justification.

In response to this criticism, Wright (2014) emphasizes that if being epistemically rational is defined just as being *categorically* (or non-instrumentally) supported by evidence, having an entitlement to trust *P* is not having an epistemic justification for *P*. However, Wright insists that such a definition would be capriciously narrow. A reason is that some forms of *instrumental*

rationality can legitimately be categorized as forms of *epistemic* rationality (in some contexts of discussion at least) depending on the kind of goals to which they are in service. For example, the type of strategic entitlement apparently licensed by (INDUCTION) and (ANTI-DEMON) marks certainly the presence of pragmatic rationality. Yet since the goals to which this type of entitlement is in service are *epistemic*—namely, rationally entertaining true beliefs of different types—the rationality involved in it also qualifies, in an important sense, as *epistemic* rationality (cf. 2014: 239). Note that this response doesn't commit Wright to embracing controversial views—such as Foley (1987)'s—according to which *all* epistemic rationality is nothing but a species of instrumental rationality. Quite the opposite, Wright can still maintain that some types of epistemic rationality are non-instrumental (cf. Wright 2014: 239, note 39). Wright's response to Pritchard addresses the challenge about instrumental rationality (the contention that epistemic rationality is non-instrumental or categorical) but it says nothing regarding the challenge about evidence (the contention that epistemic rationality is evidential). Therefore, it lays itself open to further criticism, which I now discuss.

Jenkins (2007) argues that as entitlement to trust a cornerstone is for Wright a non-evidential justification, entitlement cannot be epistemic justification. Let's dub (NEEJ) the thesis that we have *non-evidential* justification for trusting cornerstones that qualifies as *epistemic justification*. Jenkins makes a case against (NEEJ) by first observing that the best chance we have to vindicate this thesis rests upon arguments like (INDUCTION) and (ANTI-DEMON), which exploit the game-theoretic notion of a dominant strategy (cf. 2007: 27-31). Jenkins then contends that, under closer scrutiny, these game-theoretic arguments prove actually unable to vindicate (NEEJ). These arguments can at best show—according to her—that we possess some type of non-evidential justification for accepting cornerstones that *doesn't* qualify as epistemic justification (cf. 2007: 31-36). This casts heavy doubts on the truth of (NEEJ), or it shows at very least that Wright hasn't given convincing

reasons in support of (NEEJ), considering that the game-theoretic defence of (NEEJ) is the only one sufficiently developed by Wright.

Some of Jenkins (2007)'s objections to conclude that cases like (INDUCTION) and (ANTI-DEMON) fail to support (NEEJ) presuppose an instrumentalist conception of epistemic rationality called *epistemic consequentialism*.¹⁸ Since Wright doesn't subscribe to this conception (cf. 2014: 239, note 39), it is dubious that these objections can actually strike Wright's entitlement theory. Let me set these objections aside and focus on the only one made by Jenkins that doesn't presuppose—or can be interpreted as not presupposing—a form of epistemic instrumentalism. This is the only objection by Jenkins (2007) that Wright (2014) actually addresses.

As we have seen before, Wright claims that arguments like (INDUCTION) and (ANTI-DEMON) show that *S*'s acceptance of a cornerstone *C* is epistemically rational—and thus epistemically justified—because the goals to which the type of entitlement licensed by these arguments is in service are epistemic. Let's re-formulate Wright's claim by saying that arguments like (INDUCTION) and (ANTI-DEMON) show that *S*'s acceptance of a cornerstone *C* is epistemically rational—and thus epistemically justified—because it entails consequences for *S* that are epistemically valuable.¹⁹ Jenkins (2007: 36-37) anticipates this response by Wright and retorts that even if *S*'s acceptance of *C*, when licensed by arguments like (INDUCTION) and (ANTI-DEMON), has some epistemically valuable consequences, and it is thus itself *in some sense* epistemically valuable, it is intuitive that *S*'s acceptance of *C* is not epistemically *rational* in these

¹⁸ See in particular Jenkins (2007: 37-44). According to epistemic consequentialism, the epistemic rationality of a subject *S*'s propositional attitude is always determined by the epistemic value of the consequences resulting from *S*'s having that attitude compared with the epistemic value of the consequences resulting from *S*'s not having that attitude.

¹⁹ This is not endorsing consequentialism because it is not saying that the epistemic rationality or justification of any proposition can *only* be determined by the epistemically valuable consequences of the proposition.

cases because it is not based on evidence. Thus, game-theoretic arguments can make S 's trust in C epistemically *valuable* but not just epistemically *rational*. If this is correct—since there is an intuitive intimate link between epistemic rationality and epistemic justification—it seems that S 's trust in C licensed by game-theoretic arguments is not epistemically *justified* either.

Jenkins (2007: 37) defends her claim by adducing this thought experiment: imagine that some quirky goddess has so arranged things that if S puts trust in P —a proposition like, say, Goldbach's conjecture, which S has *no evidence to believe to be true or false*—then she will arrange for the rest of S 's life to go so fortunately that all other propositions accepted by S as true will always be actually true (or at least highly probable). However epistemically *valuable* this consequence of S 's trusting P might be, and even if S knew all about the goddess's intentions, it is strongly intuitive that S 's trust in P would not be *epistemically rational* in these circumstances. Jenkins seems to think that we should conclude, by analogy, that in situations like those described in (INDUCTION) and (ANTI-DEMON), S 's trust in a cornerstone C would not be epistemically *rational* either.

I agree with Jenkins that in the scenario in her thought experiment it is intuitive that S 's trust in P wouldn't be epistemically rational. However, one thing is the thought experiment and another the objection by analogy based on it. An important question for the appraisal of the objection is how we should precisely unfold the intuition that S 's trust in P wouldn't be epistemically rational in the above scenario. A straightforward explanation (that doesn't hinge on epistemic consequentialism)²⁰ appears to me to be the following. Consider this familiar methodological principle:

(AGNOSTICISM) If S has no evidence in favour or against P 's truth,²¹ S 's epistemically rational attitude towards P is agnosticism about P .

²⁰ The only explanation that I could find in Jenkins (2007: 37-44) hinges on epistemic consequentialism.

²¹ I assume that P is a factual proposition that S can easily consider and understand.

Since *S* has actually no evidence for *P*'s truth-value in the situation described by Jenkins, the application of (AGNOSTICISM) attests that in this situation *S*'s *epistemically* rational attitude towards *P* is *to be agnostic about P's truth*. Given this, it would be incoherent to maintain that, in these very same circumstances, trusting *P*—in Wright's sense of *accepting that P is true*²²—is *epistemically* rational for *S*.²³

Wright (2014: 241-242) acknowledges that it would be incoherent to claim that *S*'s trusting *P* is epistemically rational in the circumstances specified by Jenkins. Nevertheless, he contends that Jenkins' objection is ineffective because the cases in which *S* is actually epistemically entitled to trust *P* are not analogous to the one considered by Jenkins—in particular, these cases are such that it would *not* be incoherent to claim that in them *S*'s trusting *P* is epistemically rational because of the structure of epistemic rationality itself (cf. 2014: 242). Although Wright is not crystal-clear on this point, the most plausible interpretation is that—according to him—*S* can be epistemically entitled to trust *P* only in those cases in which (AGNOSTICISM) *is not supposed to be applied*.

As expected, according to Wright, the cases in which it would not be incoherent to assert that *S*'s trusting *P* is epistemically rational even if *S* lacked evidence for *P*'s truth-value—that is to say, the special cases in which (AGNOSTICISM) is not supposed to be in use—are or include those in which *P* is a cornerstone. As Wright (2014: 244-245) stresses, if we denied this and insisted that *the epistemic reasons for accepting propositions can only be evidential*, we would have to conclude—along with the sceptic—that whatever non-evidential reasons we might have for accepting a cornerstone, they couldn't be epistemic. Rather than endorsing a 'suicidal' conception

²² Recall that Wright explicitly claims that acceptance in the sense of trust is *incompatible* with agnosticism (see above §2.2).

²³ This seems to me to be the gist of Tucker (2009)'s argument against Wright's epistemic entitlement theory, which Wright (2014) doesn't explicitly consider.

of epistemic rationality of this type—according to Wright—we had better revise the assumption that epistemic reasons for accepting propositions can only be evidential, if we had adopted it initially.

Although Wright's response to Jenkins' criticism should be worked out in more detail,²⁴ one might find his strategy *prima facie* promising.²⁵ Clearly, Wright's response wouldn't persuade the steadfast sceptic who decided to stick to the thesis that epistemic reasons can only be evidential. But this doesn't seem to me to be a major problem for Wright's anti-sceptical project based on entitlement theory. Epistemologists distinguish between two types of anti-sceptical projects (see for instance Pryor 2000 and Vogel 2005). The first is quite ambitious: refuting the sceptic *on her own terms*—that is, showing that we have the knowledge or justification we think we have by using only premises that the sceptic permits us to accept. The chance of success of this project is clearly very slight. The second type of anti-sceptical project is more modest: refuting the sceptic *by our own standards*. In this case the sceptic is thought of as presenting us with arguments from premises that *we* may initially find plausible to the conclusion that we cannot know or justifiably believe anything. The more modest anti-sceptical project consists in defusing these arguments while retaining as many as possible of the premises that we find plausible. Wright's defence of his entitlement theory looks in line with this second, more plausible type of anti-sceptical project.

24 Wright should for instance clarify what makes the case described in Jenkins' thought experiment and the cases concerning cornerstones situations *essentially* different.

25 To forestall possible misunderstandings, note that my claim is a conditional: *if* game-theoretic arguments like those considered here are actually capable of showing that we are strategically entitled to trust cornerstones, *then* Wright may succeed in arguing that this form of justification is epistemic in a proper sense.

4. It is implausible that there are cornerstones we are strategically entitled to trust

Suppose Wright's response to Jenkins turned out to be successful—to the effect that *if* game-theoretic arguments like (INDUCTION) and (ANTI-DEMON) actually licentiate strategic entitlement to trust cornerstones, *then* this type entitlement can properly be said to be epistemic. I will now argue that even if this were the case, it would still be uncertain that there are cornerstones that we are strategically entitled to trust. For (INDUCTION), (ANTI-DEMON) and all game-theoretic arguments of this sort appear to be invalid.

My argument draws from one made in Pedersen (2009). Against the cogency of cases like (INDUCTION) and (ANTI-DEMON), Pedersen adduces an *instrumental* conception of epistemic rationality—defended for instance in James (1889), Foley (1987) and Alston (1989)—according to which all epistemically rational subjects as such aim at *two* general goals: acquiring true beliefs and avoiding false beliefs. On this view, any epistemically rational subject as such aims not only at acquiring true beliefs about, say, the future or the environment, but also at avoiding false beliefs about either. Pedersen shows that, on this view, an epistemically rational subject *S* is not strategically entitled to trust propositions like *C1* or *C2*. For when *both* acquiring true beliefs (about the future or the environment) *and* avoiding false beliefs (about the future or the environment) are taken to be the goals that *S* aims at, it turns out that trusting *C1* or *C2* is no longer an essential step in a dominant strategy for *S* (cf. Pedersen 2009: §6). (I reproduce the gist of Pedersen's reasoning below.) This result sheds doubts on the conclusions of game-theoretic arguments like (INDUCTION) and (ANTI-DEMON), for it appears to entail that we are not strategically entitled—as epistemically rational subjects at least—to trust *C1* or *C2*.

Although Wright hasn't directly answered Pedersen's objection, he has given it an indirect response: that objection relies on an *instrumental* conception of epistemic rationality, but (as emphasized in §3) instrumental conceptions of epistemic rationality are generally controversial and, at any rate, Wright is not compelled to accept any of them. This rejoinder would seem to

defuse Pedersen's criticism. Nevertheless, it appears to me that game-theoretic arguments like (INDUCTION) and (ANTI-DEMON) are still vulnerable to an objection *similar* to Pedersen's but that doesn't require assuming that epistemic rationality is a type of instrumental rationality. Let me now articulate this objection.

According to Wright (2004), a subject S is strategically entitled to trust C just in case S has no evidence for disbelieving C and, independently of S 's context, it is (an essential step in) a dominant strategy for S to trust C . Note that this characterization doesn't appeal to any specific conception of epistemic rationality or an epistemically rational subject—these notions are not even mentioned in this characterization. Nevertheless, Wright intends to make sure that our trust in cornerstones is *permanent* or *stable*, in the sense of securing that “its rationality generalizes across a variety of situations and contexts and, in the limit, across situations and contexts in general.” (2004: 182)²⁶ That is why Wright's characterization of strategic entitlement crucially appeals to the notion of a *context-independent* dominant strategy for S .

It is important to realize that in order to establish whether a strategy ST of S dominates S 's alternative strategies independently of S 's context, we cannot consider just one of S 's various context-independent goals. For these goals of S may push in opposite directions with the result that if ST dominates its alternatives in light of one of S 's context-independent goals, ST may no longer dominate them in light of S 's all context-independent goals considered together. Consequently, claiming that S 's strategy ST dominates its alternatives irrespective of S 's context is claiming that—precisely—*considering S 's all context-independent goals*,²⁷ ST turns out to do at least as well as its alternatives in every possible situation and to do better in at least some situation.

²⁶ Clearly, not just all acceptances are permanent or stable in this sense. Recall for example Robinson Crusoe's example in § 2.2. Crusoe is only *contextually* strategically entitled to accept (in some sense of this term) that the fruits he has found are edible—that is to say, just so long as he needs nutrition and no other possible way of getting it but eating the fruits obtains (cf. Wright 2004: 182).

²⁷ To be more precise we should consider S 's overall *preference ordering*.

This conclusion can be made a bit more precise. As we have seen in §2.2, Wright (2014) refines his original view of strategic entitlement by stressing that this form of entitlement is in service of—specifically—*epistemic* goals.²⁸ Wright would now claim—presumably—that a subject *S* is strategically entitled to trust a proposition *P* just in case *S* has no evidence for disbelieving *P* and, on the grounds of *S*'s context-independent *epistemic* goals, it is (an essential step in) a dominant strategy for *S* to trust *P*. (This conception of strategic entitlement doesn't appeal to any specific conception of epistemic rationality and, in particular, any *instrumental* conception of epistemic rationality.) Call *epistemic* strategy any one that aims at satisfying only epistemic goals. Again, note that in order to determine whether an *epistemic* strategy of *S* dominates its alternatives irrespective of *S*'s context, we cannot consider just one of *S*'s context-independent epistemic goals. For *S*'s context-independent epistemic goals may push in opposite directions to the effect that if a strategy of *S* dominates in light of one of these epistemic goals, it no longer dominates in light of all these epistemic goals considered together. For this reason, if we want to determine whether an epistemic strategy of *S* dominates its alternatives irrespective of *S*'s context, we must consider *S*'s *all* context-independent epistemic goals.

Now take again (INDUCTION). Since premise (a₁) describes just *one* of our context-independent epistemic goals, (c₁) cannot follow logically from (a₁) and (b₁) through the notion of a context-independent dominant epistemic strategy. So (INDUCTION) is invalid. The same holds true of (ANTI-DEMON). Since premise (a₂) describes just one of our context-independent epistemic goals, (c₂) cannot follow logically from (a₂) and (b₂) through the notion of a context-independent dominant epistemic strategy. Thus (ANTI-DEMON) is also invalid.

A complaint might be that I have given no evidence that our context-independent epistemic goals may conflict with one another. Here is some evidence. Take the only context-independent epistemic goal of ours mentioned in (INDUCTION)—i.e. rationally forming many true beliefs

²⁸ This was certainly already implicit in Wright (2004).

about the future. Consider now the goal of *not* rationally forming many beliefs about the future that are *false*. This looks like another context-independent goal of ours. For when we are concerned about the future, we *generally* appear to care about avoiding errors as much as we care about getting things right. Furthermore, it is hard to deny the intuition that this goal is *epistemic* in the quite generic sense of it used by Wright to characterize epistemic rationality. To show that these two epistemic goals conflict, let's replace (a_1) in (INDUCTION) with:

(a_1^*) Independently of the context, it is for us important and valuable (i) to rationally form many true beliefs about the future and (ii) not to rationally form many beliefs about the future that are false.

Remember that a crucial step in (INDUCTION) to infer that trusting *CI* is for us an essential part of a context-independent dominant strategy was the intermediate conclusion that, if nature is not regular, not trusting *CI* does no better than trusting *CI*. If it had turned out that not trusting *CI* does better than trusting *CI*, the conclusion would have been that trusting *CI* is *not* an essential step in a dominant strategy for us. But this is exactly what happens when (a_1) is replaced with (a_1^*) . Suppose nature is not regular. If we trust *CI* and use inductive methods, we will rationally form many false beliefs about the future and, perhaps, only a few true beliefs about the future. So we will satisfy neither (ii) nor (i). But if we don't trust *CI* (neither any non-inductive method to generate beliefs about the future),²⁹ we won't rationally form many beliefs about the future—so neither true beliefs nor *false* beliefs. Thus we will satisfy at least (ii). If nature is not regular, in light of (a_1^*) , *not* trusting *CI* does better than trusting *CI*. Hence, when (a_1) is replaced with (a_1^*) , for us trusting *CI* turns out *not* to be an essential step in a context-independent dominant strategy.

²⁹ Including crazy methods like crystal glazing.

Take now the goal of *not* rationally forming many beliefs about our environment that are *false*. This would seem to be another context-independent goal of ours. For when we are concerned about our environment, we *generally* appear to care about avoiding errors as much as we care about getting things right. Furthermore, it is hard to deny the intuition that this goal is *epistemic* in the generic sense of it used by Wright to characterize epistemic rationality. The reader can easily verify that a result analogous to the above one holds true for (ANTI-DEMON) once (a₂) is replaced by:

(a₂*) Independently of the context, it is for us important and valuable (i) to rationally form many true beliefs about our environment and (ii) not to rationally form many beliefs about our environment that prove false.

After the replacement, for us trusting *C2* turns out *not* to be an essential step in a context-independent dominant strategy.

It seems plausible that the same result would obtain for *most*, if not *all*, cornerstones whenever we attempted to substantiate the claim that we are entitled to trust them through game-theoretic arguments like (INDUCTION) or (ANTI-SCEPTIC). The reason is this: given a cornerstone *C* for a region of discourse *D* such that rationally forming many true *D*-beliefs is a context-independent goal of ours, it is *typically* the case—it seems to me—that *not* rationally forming many *D*-beliefs that are false is also a context-independent goal of ours. Suppose *D* is for example the area of discourse about the past (or other minds). It appear to be true that, quite independently of the context, it is for us important and valuable *both* (i) to rationally form many true beliefs about the past (or other minds) *and* (ii) not to rationally form many beliefs about the past (or other minds) that are false. Perhaps there are *atypical* regions of discourse for which (i) and

(ii)—*mutatis mutandis*—are not true together, but Wright has given us no example of it.

In conclusion, it appears plausible that for at least *most* cornerstones there will be no game-theoretic argument showing that we are strategically entitled to trust them. If we actually possess epistemic justification for trusting cornerstones—as Wright claims—it is quite dubious that it could come from strategic entitlement.

5. Non-evidential justification for trusting cornerstones cannot secure evidential justification for believing other propositions

I will now argue that since any entitlement to trust a cornerstone *C* is supposed to be a *non-evidential* justification for *C*, no entitlement to trust *C* can secure justification for *believing* any proposition *P* dependent on *C* on the grounds of apparent evidence for *P*. I will argue that this is true at least in the important cases in which *P* entails *C* because *C* is the negation of a sceptical alternative to *P*. This criticism is potentially more devastating than my first one because it aims to strike all forms of epistemic entitlement introduced by Wright at once, as each of them is supposed to be a type of non-evidential justification. This objection—if successful—shows that entitlement theory doesn't offer an effective response to the sceptic. For the sceptic claims that we cannot acquire and rationally claim justification for *believing* ordinary propositions *on the grounds of the relevant evidence*.

My objection turns on the so-called problem of *leaching*, discussed for the first time in Wright (2004) and Davies (2004). Suppose *C* is a cornerstone for a proposition *P*. Accordingly, *S* can justifiedly believe *P* only if *S* can justifiedly *accept C*. Recall that 'acceptance' is for Wright a generic label for propositional attitudes that refers to either *belief* or *trust*. Wright endorses the widespread epistemological view—which I find plausible—according to which rational *belief* in a proposition requires *evidence* substantiating its truth. Since the truth of no cornerstones can be substantiated by evidence, Wright concludes that cornerstones can only be rationally trusted but

not believed. This engenders the leaching problem. In short, Wright claims that *S* can rationally *believe P* when *S* possesses relevant evidence for *P* even if *S* can only rationally *trust* but *not believe C*. It appears intuitive, however, that *S*'s rational *belief* in *P* requires *S* to be able to rationally *believe C* too. Or, equivalently, it appears intuitive that *S cannot* rationally believe *P* when *S* possesses what looks like evidence for *P*, if *S* can only rationally trust but not believe *C*. Hence, there seems to be something amiss in Wright's entitlement theory. (Cf. Davies 2004: 222)

The leaching problem becomes more tangible if it is formulated in terms of *epistemic risk*. Wright (2004: 208n 26) attributes this formulation to Sebastiano Moruzzi. In short, if the truth of a cornerstone *C* cannot be substantiated by evidence so that *S* cannot justifiably believe *C*, there is a sense in which *S* runs a risk in accepting *C*—the risk of accepting a proposition as true that is in fact false. This is so even if *S* can trust *C rationally*, for rational trust doesn't rest on evidence. Since this type of risk is intuitively incompatible with *S*'s justifiably believing and knowing that *C*, Wright calls it *epistemic risk*. Imagine now that *E* looks like ordinary evidence for *P* to *S*.³⁰ Given that *P* is epistemically dependent on the cornerstone *C*, the epistemic risk of *S*'s accepting *C* will be inherited by *S*'s accepting *P* on the ground of *E*. This is so because it is intuitively plausible that:

(RISK) If accepting *C* prior to learning *E* is epistemically risky for *S*, then accepting *P* upon learning *E* is also epistemically risky for *S*.

Since the acceptance of *P* based on *E* proves risky for *S*, *S*'s learning *E* cannot justify *S*'s belief that *P* (cf. Wright 2004: 208-209).

In spite of these considerations, Wright (2014) has come to the conclusion that the leaching problem is only apparent, in the sense that it fades away under closer scrutiny. To show this,

³⁰ For example suppose *E* says that *S* has an experience as if *P*.

Wright focuses on the cases in which P entails C —those in which C is the negation of a sceptical scenario incompatible with P . By the expression ‘evidential justification’ he refers to justification depending on evidence sufficient to sustain belief. Drawing from Hawthorne (2004: 39-40) and McGlynn (2014), Wright (2014: 231-233) contends that evidential justification *transmits* from P to C across the entailment, and that this means that there is actually no leaching problem. For since C does receive evidential justification from P , “we no longer have the assumption in place that there can be no evidential [justification] for [C].” (2014: 235). In other words, we no longer have the assumption in place that C is epistemically risky.

In sum, Wright (2014) thinks that though S can have no *direct* evidential justification for any cornerstone C , S can *indirectly* acquire evidential justification for it by learning some evidence E capable of justifying S ’s belief in a proposition P epistemically dependent on C , which entails C . In this picture, prior to learning any evidence E of this sort, S has no evidential justification for C . However, as S learns E , S ’s rational trust in C together with E grant S evidential justification for P , which thereby transmits to C via the entailment.

A first reason of perplexity about this alleged solution to the leaching problem is that it appears incoherent with Wright (2002, 2007, 2011 and 2012)’s well-known contention that epistemic justification cannot transmit from a proposition to any cornerstone entailed by it. Wright (2014: 233) suggests, nevertheless, that once different types of epistemic justification that can or cannot transmit from a proposition to an entailed cornerstone are carefully differentiated, his novel view will appear largely coherent with his earlier one.³¹ A problem is, however, that should this proposed solution succeed, it would work only for the cases in which C is entailed by P . However, not all cornerstones and correlated propositions need to be linked by entailments. For example, the

³¹ Wright (2014) stresses that, in harmony with his former view, he still maintains that no evidential justification transmitted for C could constitute a *first-time* justification for believing C , or could *increase* the degree of justification for C resting on S ’s entitlement to C .

proposition that our sense organs are normally reliable is a cornerstone relevant to perceptual propositions in general. But these propositions don't entail that cornerstone. So even if evidential justification generally transmitted across entailment, this would't be a reason sufficient to conclude that there is evidential justification for *all* cornerstones.

A more crucial problem of Wright's proposed solution is that it appears to put the cart before the horse. Suppose evidential justification *can* transmit from P to C . Evidential justification *does* transmit from P to C only if S has evidential justification for P in the first instance. But Moruzzi's criticism is precisely that S couldn't have this evidential justification. Since S 's entitlement to C cannot remove C 's epistemic risk and this epistemic risk—according to Moruzzi—transfers to P , P must be epistemically risky when S learns E . Thus, S 's justification for P based on E (if any) will be unable to sustain S 's belief that P . Hence, there will be no evidential justification to be transmitted from P to C in the first instance.

Although Wright's response to the leaching criticism is problematic and probably flawed, one might try to dismiss the leaching problem by simply emphasizing that, after all, there is no proof that the epistemic risk of a cornerstone C must be inherited by any correlated proposition P . In other words, one might insist that although (RISK) may appear intuitively plausible, our intuitions are sometimes deceptive, and that this may well be the case with (RISK). Thus, it is questionable that the leaching problem is actually a problem.

To conclude this paper, let me show that the leaching problem is a serious problem of Wright's entitlement theory because key applications of (RISK) can be vindicated by probability calculus. I will show that once an elementary formalization of the ordinary notion of risk is implemented, (RISK) is true in all cases in which P entails C , where C is the logical negation of a sceptical alternative to P .

Suppose for example that evidence E is the description of all *apparent memories* that S has at a given time t , and that P is the conjunction of the *contents* of all these apparent memories.³² A cornerstone for P is the logical negation (C) of the Russellian sceptical conjecture (R) that the world together with S and all her apparent memories have been created just before t . Since P is incompatible with R , P entails C .

Note that E 's truth would be explained (to some extent) by the truth of R . Accordingly, it is intuitive that S 's learning E ³³ should increase—at least a tiny bit—her degree of rational confidence in R , to the effect that $\Pr(R|E) > \Pr(R)$. Here $\Pr(R)$ expresses S 's rational confidence that R is true, and $\Pr(R|E)$ expresses S 's rational confidence that R is true conditional on her learning E . Considering that C is the logical negation of R , it follows from $\Pr(R|E) > \Pr(R)$, through probability theory, that $\Pr(C|E) < \Pr(C)$. Furthermore, since P entails C , it follows through probability theory that $\Pr(P|E) \leq \Pr(C|E)$. The last two inequalities entail by transitivity that

$$(1) \Pr(P|E) < \Pr(C) \text{ (cf. White 2006).}$$

The term 'risk' is customarily taken to refer to *the probability of an unwanted event*, where 'probability' can be interpreted subjectively (cf. Hansson 2018: §§1, 2). Accordingly, the degree of

32 So E states that S remembers that P_1, P_2, \dots, P_n , and P is the conjunction of P_1, P_2, \dots, P_n . (I assume that the conjunction of P_1, P_2, \dots, P_n is logically consistent.)

33 I take S 's evidence to be S 's reflective belief that (E) she has a memory that P , where memories are non-doxastic states similar to experiences. One could question whether S 's belief that E constitutes a reliable model of S 's memory that P in epistemic evaluations. But Wright doesn't distinguish between one's experience and one's reflective belief that one has an experience when discussing scepticism (cf. 2002, 2004, 2007 and 2014). Wright seems to endorse White (2006: 353) and Silins (2007: 120n17)'s thesis that one's experiences and one's reflective beliefs about one's experiences are interchangeable in most epistemic contexts.

C 's epistemic risk for S , expressed by $Rs(C)$, can be identified with $\Pr(\text{Not-}C)$. And the degree of P 's epistemic risk given E for S , expressed by $Rs(P|E)$, can be identified with $\Pr(\text{Not-}P|E)$. Since $Rs(P|E) = \Pr(\text{Not-}P|E)$ and $Rs(C) = \Pr(\text{Not-}C)$, it is easy to prove that (1) $\Pr(P|E) < \Pr(C)$ is equivalent to

$$(2) \text{Rs}(P|E) > \text{Rs}(C).$$

So when P entails C because C is the logical negation of a sceptical alternative to P , (2) is true. In these circumstances (RISK) is also true. In fact, suppose r is a threshold value that, if exceeded, the acceptance of the relevant proposition is epistemically risky for S . (2) entails that if $Rs(C) > r$, then $Rs(P|E) > r$. This means that if accepting C prior to learning E is epistemically risky for S , then accepting P upon learning E is also epistemically risky for S .

6. Conclusions

In this paper I have focused on Wright's entitlement theory, according to which there are different types non-evidential justification—or entitlements—for trusting cornerstones capable of securing evidential justification for believing many other propositions. I have considered Wright's important notion strategic entitlement and shown that whether or not strategic entitlement is genuinely epistemic, it is implausible that there are cornerstones we are strategically entitled to trust. As strategic entitlement is only one of the different types of entitlement described by Wright, this cannot be taken to be a lethal objection to his entitlement theory. Nevertheless, I have also raised a more general objection capable of striking all forms of epistemic entitlement introduced by Wright at once. By relying on elementary probabilistic regimentations of the so-called leaching problem, I have shown that, in important cases, one's possessing non-evidential justification for accepting a cornerstone doesn't enable one to acquire evidential justification for believing the propositions

hinging on it. Although I cannot exclude that Wright might successfully respond to my objections, entitlement theory appears to be in a quite poor shape presently.

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