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Against (neo-Wittgensteinian) entitlements

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In this paper I raise some worries against one specific notion of entitlement defended in the last decade mainly by Crispin Wright (but also, in some ways, by Michael Williams). As first proposed, entitlements should be novel kinds of warrant, hereto unknown to epistemological reflection and capable of solving the old and most challenging problem of epistemology—that is, scepticism of both a Cartesian and of a Humean fashion. Furthermore, the notion of entitlement here under consideration is taken to be of Wittgensteinian descent—or so it is argued by its supporters. It would therefore usefully lend itself to an interpretation of Wittgenstein's ideas in *On Certainty.*

In the first part of the paper, I briefly present Wright's views. In the second, I show why entitlements cannot be appealed to in the course of a fair rendition of Wittgenstein's ideas. In the third, I show why, irrespective of their alleged Wittgensteinian lineage, entitlements are highly problematic in their own right.

1. Wright's neo-Wittgensteinian entitlements

Wright proposes his notion of entitlement in the influential paper "Warrant for nothing? (and foundations for free)" (2004). The set-up of the discussion, however, traces back to his celebrated "Facts and certainty" (1985). The take-home message of the latter paper is that Moore's proof of an external world

MOORE

(I) Here is a hand
(II) If there is a hand here, there is an external world
(III) There is an external world

is unsuccessful because it exhibits a failure of transmission of warrant. According to Wright, one's sense experience can justify one in believing (I) only within a larger informational setting, comprising, in particular, the proposition that there is an external world (III), which needs to be warranted in its turn. Hence, he holds the following thesis

> **Conservative account of perceptual justification**: a belief about specific material objects that P is perceptually justified iff, absent defeaters, one has the appropriate course of experience (typically an experience with content that P) and it is warrantedly assumed that there is an external world (and possibly other general propositions, such as "My sense organs work mostly reliably", "I am not the victim of massive cognitive deception", etc.)

Hence, MOORE cannot provide one with a first warrant to believe its conclusion. More generally, arguments such as MOORE, present a form of epistemic circularity, in Wright's view. For they purport to produce a warrant for their conclusion when in fact such a warrant is already needed in order to have a warrant for their premises. As Wright puts it, these arguments fail to transmit warrant from their premises to their conclusion. For, even if the former are warranted, it is only because the latter are already warranted in their turn.

Three things are worth mentioning at this stage. Firstly, Wright is concerned with propositional warrants. Hence, considerations regarding psychological plausibility and cognitive parsimony are not relevant in order to assess the view under discussion. In particular, the subject himself is not required to entertain the collateral assumption that there is an external world that allows his experience to constitute a warrant for (I); even less to be able to provide a warrant for it. The important point is that such a warrant be available in the abstract space of reasons and be accessible, at least in principle, by us (perhaps only by epistemologists). Secondly, such a warranted assumption is not needed in order to have an indefeasible warrant for (I), but only to be allowed to transcend one's cognitive locality and be epistemically within one's rights in bringing

one's hand-like experience to bear on a realm of mind-independent objects. However, it could still be the case that that is not a human hand, after all, but a papier-mâché one. Still, it would be a physical object.

Finally, (III) must be independently justified. That is to say, that there be a warrant for it which does not stem from the kind of procedure by means of which, in MOORE, one would try to warrant the proposition that there is an external world, i.e. outer observation. The reason why one could not get such a warrant from MOORE is simply that, as we have just seen, in order to have warrant for (I) in the first place, one already needs to have warrant for (III), according to Wright. Hence MOORE cannot produce a (first) warrant to believe its conclusion[1]

Yet, it is not clear that there are other ways of independently warranting (III). In particular, it is difficult to see how a priori arguments based on reflection on the very notion of an external world could provide a warrant to believe that it exists. In very general terms, they would resemble those attempts at proving God's existence by reflecting on the very concept of God.[2] Surely, there can be more refined ways of trying to provide an a priori justification for the existence of an external world,[3] but it is dubious that they would be successful.

Are there any other ways in which we may try to obtain a warrant for "There is an external world", beside MOORE-like arguments and a priori ones? Wright has argued that a Humean skeptic—namely a skeptic who rehearses the line of argument seen so far—thinks there are not and for this very reason ends up being a skeptic about the existence of an external world. Wright has attempted to avoid this result by pointing out a common lacuna in both Cartesian and Humean forms of skepticism. Namely, the idea that warrants for these general assumptions should somehow be earned or acquired by means either of empirical evidence or of a priori reasoning. This conception grounds Cartesian forms of scepticism too, for we could never know if a test used to verify whether we are dreaming right now has actually been executed, or has merely been dreamt of. Lacking a warrant for "I am not the victim of a lucid and sustained dream", and holding the principle of closure for warrant under known entailment, by contraposition, we would lack warrant for any specific empirical belief we might form on the basis of our current sense experience. Similarly, in the case of Humean skepticism, the lack of warrant for the general assumptions needed for a warrant for the premises of Moore-like arguments—that is, "There is an external world", or "My sense organs are generally reliable" —would result in a lack of warrant for them as well.

This observation paves the way to Wright's "unified" solution to both forms of skeptical argument.[4] Wright sees himself developing some of Wittgenstein's ideas in *On Certainty* (§§341-343, 151 in particular, but see also §§56, 82, 318, 628), according to which it would belong to the "logic" and "method" of our inquiry that some propositions be exempt from doubt. Accordingly, he proposes a strategy to claim possession of an *unearned* warrant—an entitlement in his terminology—for those very assumptions. Before proceeding any further, let me point out that, for all we have seen so far, entitlements should be warrants, however special they might be, that structurally operate on the proposition "There is an external world", or any other general assumption which is needed, given the conservative conception of perceptual justification, in order to have a perceptual warrant for specific empirical propositions, such as "Here is my hand".

Now, according to Wright, entitlements are warrants that are not earned either through the collection of empirical evidence, or by means of a priori reflection. According to him, they have always been there independently of us, in the abstract space of reasons, by virtue of the very epistemic structure of our usual inquiries. In this sense, they are "unearned" or "for free". Yet, Wright thinks he can provide arguments to *claim* them, that is, to convince our skeptical opponents and ourselves that we do have them after all. More precisely, Wright thinks we have an entitlement to *accept*, rather than believe, "I am not now dreaming" and "There is an external world". An acceptance differs from a belief, in his account, because while the latter has

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[1] Until his 2014 paper, Wright would have been happy to add that MOORE cannot *reinforce* any previous justification one might have for (III) either. The point is contentious, however. For a discussion, see McGlynn 2014 and Wright 2014 and Coliva 2015, chapter 3.

[2] Vogel 2008 (pp. 539, 541) raises both these objections. However, he takes them to offer *prima facie* motivation to explore his explanationist account of how (III) in MOORE could be justified (cf. also Vogel 1990). I present a critical assessment of explanationsim in Coliva 2015, chapter 2.

[3] For a critical discussion of various attempts at doing so, See Coliva 2015, chapter 2.

[4] Wright 2004, pp. 174-175.

evidence as input and leads to behavior and/or belief as output, the former has the same output but has no evidence as input.
Furthermore, Wright thinks that entitlements are a peculiar kind of warrant, for they do not speak to the (likely) truth of certain "cornerstone" propositions, as Wright calls the general assumptions we have been talking about all along. As he writes:

> In general, it has to be recognised that the unified strategy can at most deliver a *sceptical solution*…Sceptical solutions concede the thrust of the sceptical arguments they respond to…The unified strategy likewise concedes the basic point of the sceptical arguments to which it reacts, namely that we do indeed have no claim to know, in any sense involving possession of evidence for their likely truth, that certain cornerstones of what we take to be procedures yielding knowledge and justified belief hold good. (Wright 2004a, p. 206)

According to Wright though, to claim these entitlements we need two different arguments, which we consider in the order in which he presents them. That is to say, we will consider the argument he offers to vindicate our entitlement for "I am not now dreaming" first, and then move on to the argument he proposes in order to claim our entitlement to "There is an external world".
Let us consider a cognitive project, the failure of which would not be worse than the costs implied by not undertaking it, and whose success would be better. Let P be a presupposition of such a cognitive project if doubting P would imply doubting about the importance, or the possibility of competently carrying out that particular project. Let us additionally suppose that: (i) there is no sufficient reason to believe that P is false; (ii) every attempt to justify P would call for other presuppositions that are no more certain than P, in such a way that if one wished to justify P, one would implicitly commit to an infinite regress of cognitive projects.
Let us assume that P is identical to "I am not dreaming now". Clearly, if P were called into doubt, we would not be able to think that any cognitive project (in particular, an empirical one) could be competently accomplished. Yet, precisely because if we were dreaming we could not know that, we do not even have a reason to believe that P is false. Moreover, any attempt to justify P would imply further presuppositions: for example, that our senses are functioning appropriately and that there is an external world, which is correctly represented in our experience. If, though, we wished to justify these presuppositions, we would have to be in a position to justify P, thus finding ourselves stuck in a regress of cognitive projects.
According to Wright, we have to conclude that "I am not dreaming now" is a presupposition of all our cognitive projects (both of an empirical and of a rational kind), for which we have an entitlement. Therefore, it is rational to believe that one is not dreaming now, even though there is no way to acquire an evidential warrant for this belief.
Although the Cartesian skeptical paradox has been blocked, this does not entail that the Humean one has been too, according to Wright. For, in his view, the previous argument only allows one to vindicate an entitlement for "I am not dreaming now" and, therefore, for our being rationally entitled to use our perceptual and cognitive *faculties*. However, it does not provide an entitlement for our trust that there is a world inhabited by physical objects, which these faculties would allow us to know. A different argument is needed to vindicate what he calls "entitlement of substance".
As Wright himself admits, the following is a much more sketchy argument than the previous one, and it could be summarized thus. In order to have an objective conception of experience, one has to think of it as arising from an interaction with objects that exist independently of it. Since we have an objective conception of experience, we have to conceive of objects that exist independently of our experience. Wright is perfectly aware that this argument does not establish our ontology, but merely makes it admissible. Nevertheless, he maintains that this is the best that can be done in order to vindicate our entitlement for "There is an external world".
It should be noted that this second argument is grounded in a conception of experience, whose objectivity requirement dictates that it is thought of as concerning objects that exist independently of it. However, on the face of it, an idealist could maintain that, for experience to be objective, it is sufficient that it displays uniformities that do not necessarily depend on thinking about objects as existing independently of our experiencing them. For example, instead of regarding my experience of the computer screen in front of me as objective only if it can be considered as brought about by the interaction with an object that exists

independently of its being experienced, one could maintain that it is objective insofar as it displays spatio-temporal uniformities, which may ground certain generalizations. For instance, if I look in this direction, I will have this particular experience of a square-shaped patch, with certain colors and a certain brightness. If I look from a different angle, I will have an experience of a more or less rectangular patch, with certain shades of color and a certain brightness. If tomorrow I look in the same direction as the one in which I am looking right now, I will have the same (or very similar and coherent with past ones) experiences as those of today. I can therefore decide to call this bundle of experiences "computer screen" and not that object whose existence should be independent of them, and which is supposed to cause them. Moreover, an idealist could maintain that presupposing the uniformity and coherence across time of experiences might depend on the fact that some material object is there (a computer), which exists independently of its being perceived, would imply presupposing something which our own experience does not warrant: for all we know, this uniformity could depend on the fact that an evil scientist, or a demon, is triggering those representations in our mind. Let me stress that these considerations are not meant to support idealism, but only to draw attention to the fact that, if we follow Wright, we run the risk of warranting the rational legitimacy of our assuming that there are physical objects by means of a transcendental kind of argument, which rests on controversial premises.

2. Wittgenstein against entitlements

In this section, we consider the two radically dissimilar styles of response that can be evinced from *On Certainty* with respect to Cartesian and Humean skepticism. This shows how Wright's notion of entitlement is totally at odds with Wittgenstein's positions in *On Certainty*.

The linguistic argument against Cartesian skepticism

Wittgenstein's counter to the dreaming argument is meant to show that that argument cannot even be meaningfully formulated. Hence, far from granting its intelligibility and far from providing an epistemic counter to it, as Wright suggests, Wittgenstein aims to dismiss Cartesian skepticism as utterly nonsensical or meaningless.[5]

Suppose I am not really seeing the computer screen I am thinking of seeing in front of me right now, and that I am merely dreaming of it. If I said "This computer screen is on" while, *ex hypothesi*, I am dreaming, if someone heard me, they would not take my words as an assertion. For I cannot possibly have the intention of informing them of something. Nor could they take it to be a description of a state of affairs, even if, by chance, it happened to be true that the computer screen in front of me is on. Similarly, if the words "I am dreaming" were uttered while I am dreaming they could not be taken as an assertion and hence as a description of a state of affairs, which, *ex hypothesi*, is in fact the case. Writes Wittgenstein:

> "But even if in such cases I can't be mistaken, isn't it possible that I am drugged?" If I am and if the drug has taken away my consciousness, then I am not now really talking and thinking. I cannot seriously suppose that I am at this moment dreaming. Someone who, dreaming, says "I am dreaming", even if he speaks audibly in doing so, is no more right than if he said in his dream "it is raining", while it was in fact raining. Even if his dream were actually connected with the noise of the rain. (OC 676)

Hence, from a third person point of view, there being criteria that can determine whether I am asleep—e.g. having closed eyes, being almost immobile, breathing regularly, being insensitive to soft sounds, etc.—prevent any utterance I could make from being considered an assertion. Nobody would verify my alleged assertions, nor would they consider them informative. That is to say, they would not decide on the basis of my *testimony* either to switch off the computer or to take an umbrella before leaving home, even if, of course,

[5] Wright is aware of this linguistic argument, of course. He thinks it is not successful, however, and that entitlements have better prospects. The point, however, is that Wittgenstein thought the linguistic argument was successful and had therefore no reason to revert to anything like entitlements. Furthermore, as we shall see in the following, the passages that Wright takes to suggest the entitlement strategy in *On Certainty* have been misunderstood.

my words could causally prompt them to perform those very actions, after having ascertained on the basis of *their perceptual experience* that the computer is in fact on or that it is actually raining. But that all this could happen just on the basis of the information one takes to have received from another subject is constitutive of making assertions, or of taking certain pronouncements as assertions. Hence, given our actual practice of making assertions and of interpreting other subjects' pronouncements, there is no reason to hold that if a subject said "I am dreaming", while actually being asleep, he would be making an assertion, even if it can happen that he is in fact dreaming.

Let us therefore concede that when one is asleep, one cannot be making assertions. Yet, one may wonder whether, while asleep, one may truly *judge* "I am dreaming". According to Wittgenstein, however, if one were really dreaming one would also be dreaming that the phrase "I am dreaming" has a meaning.

> The argument "I may be dreaming" is senseless for this reason: if I am dreaming, this remark is being dreamed as well—and indeed it is also being dreamed that these words have any meaning. (OC 383. Cf. RPP I, 1057)

This is an extremely strong claim. For it consists in denying that the very words "I may be dreaming", while occurring in the dream, could have any meaning at all. Hence, Wittgenstein is not simply denying that the mental counterpart of the speech-act of making an assertion could not be performed. Rather, he is denying that the alleged act of judgment could have a *content* at all.

To see why Wittgenstein is led to such a strong conclusion it is important to keep in mind that, for him, in order for our words to have a meaning—whether they are actually uttered or merely entertained in one's mind—they must belong to a language game. That is to say, they must occur in specific circumstances where their utterance can serve the recognized aim of the communicative exchange at issue. If they occur out of the blue or out of any attested context of use, they will retain an *appearance* of meaning, but they would not really have one. To think otherwise would mean to fall pray of a conception of meaning as, ultimately, a thing which words would possess independently of their being part of a real language game—independently, that is, of their being actually used. Wittgenstein's point about the impossibility of the assertion/judgment "I am dreaming", while one is in fact asleep and dreaming, therefore, carries over to establish that if those words did occur in one's dream they would just have an appearance of meaning but would not really have one.

To be more precise, they could not mean, within the dream, that one is in fact dreaming—that is, they could not have their "descriptive" meaning. Rather, they could mean what they would normally mean if they were said out loud while awake. For instance, the utterance "I am dreaming" could be used to express one's bewilderment or intense joy. Hence, they could only have their "expressive" meaning.

Alternatively, in one's dream one could be dreaming that certain images or experiences one is having are themselves part of a dream. This, however, would not show that one may be *aware* of being dreaming while in fact dreaming but only that one may be *dreaming* of being dreaming thus-and-so. Hence, the phrase "I am dreaming" in the context of such a dream would have a descriptive meaning, but, notice, it would in fact be applied on the basis of third-personal criteria. In some sense, one would be seeing oneself being dreaming and could thus report on that much in the same way as one could report on someone else's being ostensibly dreaming. Of course, the funny thing about such a dream would be the kind of immediate "knowledge" of its content, which is unparalleled in the third-person case. Yet, it remains that "I am dreaming" cannot be meaningfully used or judged if it were meant as a description of one's occurrent mental state. Descartes' supposition is therefore meaningless, and in this semantic sense, nonsense, contrary appearances notwithstanding.

One final attempt to rescue the meaningfulness of Descartes' supposition could consist in insisting that it is, precisely, a *supposition*, or a *hypothesis*, not a description of a state of affairs or a judgment. The Wittgensteinian counter would predictably run as follows: in order for suppositions or hypotheses to be meaningful, it should be possible for them to be true and for the words used to express them to be employed to make an assertion (or to make a judgment in thought). Failing such a possibility, on the grounds we have explored thus far, also the insistence on the fact that Descartes was merely making a supposition, or entertaining a hypothesis, and was not trying to make any assertions, would lose its bite.

To recap: according to Wittgenstein, the doubt or even the hypothesis "I might be dreaming right now", far from deserving to be taken seriously and to be responded to by invoking non-evidential warrants, is nonsense

because these words (either spoken or entertained silently in one's mind) could never be a move in the language game. If I were dreaming, I would also be dreaming of making an assertion or a judgment, for there could be no intentional connection between those words and the fact they are supposedly describing. That, in turn, would impair the fact that those words could have their "descriptive" meaning, contrary appearances notwithstanding (while they may retain their "expressive" one); or be used other than on the basis of third-personal criteria, to describe the peculiar content of one's dream, viz. that one is dreaming such-and-so. If I am awake, in contrast, my doubt could only be sensibly expressed in the past—e.g. "Did I just dream thus-and-so?"—and could be dissipated by a principle of coherence, viz. by the fact that the content supposedly dreamt and one's current perceptions and memories fit together.

The transcendental argument against Humean skepticism

We have already introduced Humean skepticism via Moore's proof and Wright's analysis of it. Now, while in *On Certainty* there are remarks explicitly addressed to the dreaming hypothesis, what I call the "transcendental argument against Humean skepticism" can only be evinced from the text and, in particular, from those passages where Wittgenstein discusses the fact that our inquiries are all based on presuppositions which cannot be sensibly doubted on pain of annihilating the possibility of raising rational doubts and questions at all; as well as from those passages where he points out that while we can sometimes be mistaken in our empirical judgments or calculations, we cannot always have gone or go astray (cf. in particular, OC 217, 232, 519). These are the passages Wright appeals to too, but, as we shall see, they provide a rather different counter to Humean skepticism from the one Wright thinks they favor.

The most interesting applications of this style of argument have to do with what Fred Dretske calls "heavy-weight assumptions",[6] such as "There is an external world", "I am not currently deceived by my senses" and thus "Our sense organs don't always deceive us", "I am not now dreaming", etc. I am therefore taking the liberty of applying Wittgenstein's considerations to Humean skepticism regarding the reliability of the senses, first, to see how they would fare in this connection. The transcendental argument can in fact be extended also against Cartesian skepticism, thus targeting the assumption "I am not now dreaming", as well as against the Humean kind of skeptical argument already introduced in the previous section, which concerns the assumption of the existence of an external world.[7]

In order to inquire whether it is possible to doubt that our senses ever function properly, we should ask the following question: what could make us have such a doubt? Now, a possible first pass could be this: on occasion, we have found out that our senses had deceived us. Indeed this is how Descartes motivates his skepticism about the senses. Yet, one should then notice that if we have been in a position to realize the occasional unreliability of our sense organs, it is because further *observations* have made that manifest to us. For instance, further observations have made it clear that a given object was not of the color it first appeared to us to have. Alternatively, we have been able to find out that our senses had deceived us because other people *told* us so. In both cases, however, it is the testimony of the senses that certifies *to us* the truth of (or is part of our justification for) "My senses deceived me". Hence, the argument for skepticism about the reliability of the senses which proceeds from noticing that sometimes our senses have in fact deceived us is self-defeating for it presupposes the falsity of its conclusion, or, at the very least, that the negation of the conclusion be taken for granted.

Still, it seems difficult to find any other sensible motivation for general skepticism (beside supposing the existence of an evil genius) about the reliability of the senses. If so, however, such a doubt appears to be totally ungrounded. Yet, for Wittgenstein, a doubt which is not based on any grounds at all—in fact, that, like in this case, *cannot* be supported by any kind of grounds, for the latter would presuppose what the argument tries to call into question—is no real doubt at all. It would just be an illusion of doubt.[8] In particular, it will be *irrational*[9] and in this non linguistic, or semantic sense, *nonsensical*.

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[6] Dretske 2005, even though Wittgenstein thinks that also more specific empirical propositions can, in context, play a similar role. See Coliva 2010, chapters 3-4.

[7] See Coliva 2010, chapter 3.

[8] Cf. also Moyal-Sharrock 2004, ch. 8.

[9] Pritchard 2011 (p. 526) calls it "incoherent".

From such a kind of nonsense Wittgenstein would draw the consequence that that hypothesis is entirely meaningless, as it depends on a violation of the criteria that govern the correct employment of "to doubt". In particular, it would violate the requirement that doubts can meaningfully be raised only where there are reasons or grounds for them, which are in their turn dependent on the fact that doubts be raised within a language game, where certain things must stay put[10]—e.g. that our sense organs do not deceive us now (and hence do not always mislead us—if we are to be able to carry out certain empirical investigations—e.g. to find out that they did deceive us on a previous occasion of their use. These presuppositions are metaphorically taken to be "hinges" (OC 341, 343), which must stay put, in order for the door to be able to turn.

Yet, such a conclusion draws, in its turn, on a specific view of meaning as use and on a certain conception of philosophical doubts and questions as never autonomous from, or independent of the criteria that govern the raising of doubts in "ordinary discourse", which may not be commonly accepted nowadays. It would remain, though, that the skeptical argument just considered goes against the conditions of possibility of raising a sensible doubt because it is somehow self-defeating, for its very formulation depends on the falsity of its conclusion, or at least on taking for granted that things are not as the argument purports to show.[11]

Even so, from a Wittgensteinian perspective, we can neither claim nor have knowledge of the fact that our senses do not always deceive us. For there cannot be a non-circular justification of "My senses are not deceiving me now" from which we could then gain justification for "Our senses do not always deceive us", and, for Wittgenstein, circular justifications are not justifications at all. Hence, both these propositions appear to be the ungrounded presuppositions of all our going about gathering perceptual evidence for or against empirical propositions. If so, however, they cannot be called into question either, for, in order sensibly to do so, they would have to be taken for granted. In a Kantian fashion, we may say that their being taken for granted is a *condition of possibility* of all our perceptual investigations.

In fact, Wittgenstein remarks that it belongs to the *logic* of our investigations (OC 342, cf. 56, 82, 628) and to the *method* of our inquiries (OC 151, 318) that certain propositions be indeed exempt from doubt and not called into question. For that would actually amount to conceiving of the possibility that all our judgments (or calculations) be always wrong, a hypothesis which, in its turn, could—logically—have nothing in its favor—and would thus be irrational and, in this non-linguistic sense, nonsensical. The example of "My sense organs are not deceiving me now" and thus of "Our sense organs do not always deceive us" and of their role with respect to specific perceptual judgments is just one possible illustration of this train of thought. Hence, a Humean skeptic is right to notice that certain heavy-weight assumptions cannot be supported by reasons. Yet, he fails to appreciate that also doubt with respect to them could not be supported by any grounds and would thus be irrational. For rationality requires both claims to knowledge and doubts to be supported by reasons.

A point worth-noticing is that the insistence on the reason-bounded nature of doubt is not an observation just about our practice which may suggest the idea that we do not or even cannot raise doubts about the presuppositions of our epistemic investigations because that would be *pragmatically* impractical, as it would deprive us of those very practices—like forming beliefs on the basis of perceptual and testimonial evidence—which, after all, serve us reasonably well. Wittgenstein is explicit about that, when he writes:

> But it *isn't* (my emphasis) that the situation is like this: we just *can't* investigate everything, and for that reason we are forced to rest content with assumption. If I want the door to turn, the hinges must stay put. (OC 343)

Rather, it is a point about the *logic* of any epistemic inquiry, as we have just seen.[12] Of course, this is suggestive but far from clear, as it is. In order to clarify a bit the sense of this observation one has to keep in mind that whenever the later Wittgenstein talks about logic or, equivalently, of "grammar", he is in fact introducing the idea of a *norm*. Now, according to his later views, norms, even those of evidential significance

[10] I analyse each of these claims in Coliva 2010, chapter 3.

[11] It may be a common view that self-defeating arguments are meaningful yet hopeless—viz. rationally impotent—precisely because they are self-defeating.

[12] Pritchard 2011 (pp. 528-9) stresses the same point.

and not just of meaning, like the heavyweight assumptions we are considering here, depend on the actual features of our language games. As he repeatedly stressed "everything descriptive of a language-game is part of logic" (OC 56, cf. 82, 628). Hence, first of all, if doubts were raised against what makes it possible for us to conduct our epistemic inquiries, this would deprive us of those very practices and, therefore, of all epistemic norms. As a consequence, it would deprive us, and a skeptic, of the very *notion of epistemic rationality*, which constitutively depends on those very practices, for Wittgenstein (OC 65). Secondly, if the notion of epistemic rationality depends on those practices and it is a feature of them that doubts be raised on the basis of reasons, to raise them where there cannot, logically, be grounds for them, far from being the most rational move, would in fact betray our very notion of epistemic rationality. Finally, whenever a proposition appears to be beyond doubt and justification, its status is not empirical but normative, on Wittgenstein's view of the matter.

If so, a Humean skeptic's mistake consists, according to Wittgenstein, in raising doubts about heavy-weight assumptions failing to notice that whenever a judgment is beyond justification and doubt, its nature will not be empirical, but normative. This, in turn, suffices to place it beyond the possibility of being sensibly doubted. For norms cannot be subject to epistemic evaluation—that is, they cannot be assessed in terms of truth or falsity understood in any robust sense, as entailing a correct or incorrect representation of an independent chunk of reality. Hence norms cannot either be justified or doubted. Of course, they might in principle be changed or abandoned. Yet this will not be the result of their being epistemically assessed. Rather, it may be a product of a decision or, simply, of contingent facts which may force us to abandon a given norm and perhaps substitute it with another one.[13]

But, even more radically and, ultimately, independently of viewing heavy-weight assumptions as rules, to raise doubts against propositions when there cannot logically be reasons for such doubts betrays our very *notion of epistemic rationality*. It does so both because it goes against its features which, for Wittgenstein, are dependent on how our epistemic practices are in fact conducted; and because it would deprive us of it, as it would annihilate those practices which, in turn, constitute it. Ironically, then, a Humean skeptic, far from being a champion of epistemic rationality as he is traditionally portrayed to be, would simply go against it, by failing to see that epistemic rationality mandates that whatever plays the role of its condition of possibility be in fact beyond doubt.[14]

Finally, it is a consequence of Wittgenstein's transcendental argument that although the conditions of possibility of our epistemic practices lie equally beyond doubt and justification, it is a fact that *within* those practices we do produce justifications for specific empirical propositions, which, when true, amount to knowledge. Hence, the worrying conclusions reached by Humean skepticism—that we never really have knowledge of ordinary empirical propositions—is blocked. Surely, it is always knowledge *within a system of justification* and therefore by courtesy of some assumptions. Yet, it is knowledge nevertheless. In fact, it shows how knowledge is not boundless or absolute, but always delimited by the kind of epistemic system which gives rise to it. Still, by Wittgensteinian lights, this is simply what our concept of knowledge is like.

To sum up: any reason to call into doubt the presuppositions of perceptual judgments, like "My sense organs are not deceiving me now", or "Our sense organs do not always deceive us", would depend on taking them for granted. Hence, there cannot be reasons to call them into question. However, a doubt that is not motivated by reasons is irrational, as it would go against the characteristic traits of our epistemic practices that are in turn constitutive of our notion of epistemic rationality. It would thus be nonsensical, albeit in a non semantic sense. Its occurrence, moreover, would deprive us of our (perceptual) epistemic practices and, with that, of our very notion of epistemic rationality, which constitutively depends on them. Furthermore, it would be raised against propositions whose failure to be subject both to doubt and justification, makes them normative in nature, and thus beyond the possibility of being epistemically called into question. Humean skepticism, therefore, far from exposing some fundamental feature of our epistemic practices and, thus, the ultimate nature of epistemic rationality, represents its double betrayal. For, to repeat, it would depend on a misconception of the status of "heavy-weight" assumptions and of the self-defeating implications of its doubt, which go against our shared notion of epistemic rationality. Finally, to acknowledge that "heavy-

[13] This, interestingly, was what happened with one of Wittgenstein's favored "hinges", viz. "Nobody has ever been on the Moon". I discuss the issue at length in Coliva 2010, chapter 4.

[14] I develop this line of argument in Coliva 2015, chapter 4.

weight" assumptions are beyond justification (and doubt) is consistent with the fact that within those epistemic practices of which they are the conditions of possibility, justifications be produced for or against specific and genuine empirical propositions, which, when true and justified, will thus amount to knowledge.
Now, Wittgenstein's claim that it belongs to the "logic" of our epistemic inquiries that certain propositions are in fact not doubted is at the heart of Wright's reading of Wittgenstein. However, he interprets the term "logic" in an epistemic, rather than in a normative way, contrary to what I have suggested. That is to say, as eliciting the idea that, after all, for Wittgenstein, the ungrounded presuppositions of our epistemic practices would be somewhat justified, if not even known.[15]
As we have seen, according to Wright, any cognitive inquiry, like forming empirical beliefs on the basis of one's perceptual experience, presents an element of *risk*. That is to say, if we wish to carry out that inquiry we cannot do any better than taking it for granted its presuppositions. This, in turn, gives us a rational entitlement, which is a *non-evidential* kind of *warrant*, according to him, for, in our case, "Our sense organs are not deceiving/do not always deceive us" or even "There is an external world". Hence, according to him, a skeptic is wrong when he claims that we are not *rationally* entitled to assume that much. On the contrary, we are, for we have a non evidential warrant for that presupposition. However, non evidential warrants such as entitlements fall short of grounding belief and, therefore, knowledge, on Wright's view. They only make it rational to *assume* certain propositions that, however, have to stay put if we then want to go on to gather perceptual evidence, which, together with collateral assumptions, such as that our senses do not always deceive us (or that there is an external world, or that we are not victims of sustained and lucid dreams), will give us proper warrant, and in some cases even knowledge, of ordinary empirical propositions such as "Here is my hand", in circumstances broadly analogous to those in which Moore produced his proof. So, while a skeptic is right to insist that we do not have either evidential warrants for, or knowledge of the most basic presuppositions of our cognitive inquiries, he is wrong to conclude that those presuppositions are not rationally held. For a skeptic wrongly takes the category of warrant to be exhausted by evidential warrants, while also rational entitlements should be encompassed. Consequently, he is also wrong to conclude that we can never justifiably believe or know specific empirical propositions, for, given that our assumptions are non-evidentially warranted and we do have a certain course of experience, then we can warrantedly believe or even know that, e.g., here is one hand.
Now, several things are worth noticing, if this is meant to be an interpretation of Wittgenstein's broadly transcendental argument as evinced from *On Certainty*. First of all, the element of risk which, on Wright's view, characterizes our cognitive inquiries is totally absent from Wittgenstein's considerations. On the contrary, Wittgenstein insists on the tranquility of our certainty (OC 174, 278, 357, 425), viz. of our taking for granted, or trusting, what reflectively appear to be the presuppositions of our cognitive inquiries. This, however, is not due to "hastiness", or "superficiality" (OC 358), on Wittgenstein's view. Nor is it something that we do in light of the practical and beneficial consequences of behaving that way (cf. OC 131, 338, 474), e.g. to be able to pursue in our ordinary cognitive activity of forming perceptual beliefs. Finally, it is not something we do simply because of our "animal" nature (OC 358-9, where emphasis should be placed on Wittgenstein's caveat that the "animal" nature of our certainty and our belonging to a "form of life" are not what he thinks can ultimately ground our certainty). Rather, it belongs to the "logic" or "method" of our investigations (OC 342, 151, cf. 56, 82). What this means is that there is *no option* but to take certain things on trust, if we are to pursue our cognitive activities. But if there is no option, then there is simply no room for risk. After all, one runs a risk whenever it is possible to chose among different options, none of which is completely safe. Although it might perhaps be a practical (Oblomovian?) option not to carry out our ordinary cognitive practices, it would never be an epistemically rational one.[16]
After all, as we have seen, the kind of activity we are considering is what paradigmatically contributes to the determination of the notion of epistemic rationality. For that notion crucially depends on the possibility of gathering evidential, perceptual warrants for or against genuinely empirical propositions. So, the real and deeply anti-skeptical point Wittgenstein is making is that skeptics, far from being the champions of epistemic

[15] In Coliva 2010, chapter 3 (and 4) I consider also Michael Williams' position, which is similar to Wright's in that respect, but takes it a step further by claiming that hinges are true in a minimal sense. Since they would be justified by means of entitlements, they would therefore amount to knowledge.
[16] I discuss the Oblomovian challenge in Coliva 2015, chapter 4.

rationality, as they have been traditionally portrayed to be, raise doubts with respect to presuppositions against which justifications cannot logically be gotten and which cannot be doubted on pain of annihilating the very notion of epistemic rationality, which, as said, crucially depends on the possibility of gathering perceptual evidence for and against ordinary empirical propositions.

Thus, on a Wittgensteinian perspective, skeptical doubts are not merely based on too narrow a conception of warrant, which somehow ignores non evidential ones. Rather, they are altogether nonsensical—that is, irrational—, for far from being rational, they *cannot* be based on grounds and actually *undermine* the very notion of epistemic rationality.

Moreover, it is important to note how the very notion of non evidential warrant—of entitlement—is totally at odds with Wittgenstein's views on hinges. It is in fact a characteristic trait of *On Certainty* to hold that *no* epistemic category can be applied to what stands fast for us. For these presuppositions of inquiry are said to be "neither true nor false" (OC 196-206), neither (epistemically) "grounded" nor "ungrounded" (OC 110, 130, 166), neither "rational" nor "irrational" (OC 559). This is so because Wittgenstein shares the skeptical view that warrants, in this area, are just ordinary *perceptual* ones and that epistemic *rationality* requires warrants—that is to say, perceptual justifications. Still, on his view, the presuppositions that make epistemic rationality possible do not lie *outside* the scope of it, but, rather, at its *limit*. That is why they are *neither* epistemically rational—that is perceptually justified—*nor* epistemically irrational—that is, held against perceptual evidence. Like anything which lies at the limit, in the deeply Kantian way in which Wittgenstein has always been concerned with that notion since the *Tractatus*, they are conditions of possibility and therefore make it possible to have perceptual warrants for or against a given empirical proposition and to speak either of a rational or of an irrational belief, depending on whether such a belief is supported by reasons or goes against them all. Hence, these presuppositions belong to the *logic* of our investigations not because they are somewhat specially—non-evidentially—warranted, but because they are its unwarranted and unwarrantable conditions of possibility. This of course may sound oxymoronic to a somewhat empiricist ear. Yet, this is what a transcendental argument would always purport to show: a condition of possibility of thought and inquiry that, as such, cannot be subject to the constraints that arise only *within* thought and inquiry.

Now, there is no denying that all this would is conceptually odd and I think it was one of Wittgenstein's greatest achievements, within the whole history of philosophy, to re-interpret such a notion of "limit" in a conceptually respectable way. It is in fact important to keep in mind that anything which, in a Kantian terminology, would belong to the conditions of possibility of either judgment or inquires, has, in the later Wittgenstein's hands, a *normative* status. Let it be a norm of grammar, hence of language and thought; or else, a norm of evidential significance, like some apparently empirical propositions like "Our sense organs don't always deceive us", "There is an external world", "I am not now dreaming", "The Earth has been existing for a very long time", etc. Being normative in nature, these presuppositions of thought and inquiry are simply not in the business of semantic and epistemic evaluation. Hence, we can thus finally appreciate how the recourse to normativity was Wittgenstein's distinctive way out of the problem of making transcendental moves in philosophy respectable. The normative option was thus mandated, for Wittgenstein, by two equally important philosophical sentiments. First, by his adherence to a broadly Kantian, as opposed to either empiricist or rationalist view of philosophy and, secondly, by his rejection of any form of human transcendent category. On Wright's reading, in contrast, it would appear as a mistake motivated by too hasty an attempt to find an easy way out of skepticism.

3. Against Wright's entitlements

Let us now consider the more general issue of the nature of Wright's entitlements. As we saw in §1, Wright aims to establish that the skeptic wrongly maintains that our basic assumptions are not warranted. Certainly, these assumptions cannot be evidentially (that is, by experience or by a priori reasoning) warranted, but, nonetheless, they are warranted "for free", in his view. These non-evidential warrants for propositions like "There is an external world" have always been there in the abstract space of reasons, as it were, and Wright's arguments are merely meant to allows us to *claim* them.

First, the idea that there are these epistemic goods in the abstract space of reason, which need only be redeemed, is utterly mysterious. The problem is not with the idea of propositional justification, but depends

on the fact that propositional justifications are usually due to some kind of cognitive achievement—perception, memory, testimony, reasoning, etc.—and are meant to speak to the likely truth of what they are supposed to justify. Wright denies that his entitlements enjoy these features but does not give us any positive characterization of them such that one could have an idea of what kind of epistemic creatures they might be. Absent such a positive characterization, it just seems that we have to take their existence on faith.

What Wright actually gives us are two a priori arguments, as we saw in §1, which give us a reason to think that it is not rationally mistaken or unmotivated to rely on assumptions that—as such—are unwarranted and unwarrantable (once it is agreed that entitlements cannot really be taken to be warrants for the relevant heavy-weight assumptions and that there are no other warrants for them). What he provides us with are, in fact, a priori justifications, produced by philosophical reflection, that speak to the truth of "It is rational to assume that there is an external world" and "It is rational to assume that we are not victims of lucid and sustained dreams". Yet, he does not give us any warrant that speaks to the truth of "There is an external world" or "We are not victims of lucid and sustained dreams".

Hence, the allegedly common lacuna in Humean and Cartesian forms of scepticism, which entitlements were meant to fill in, is not actually filled in by Wright's entitlements. For they are either creatures from the dark we have no reason to believe in; or else, are a priori arguments that actually speak to the truth not of the relevant heavy-weight assumptions but of altogether different kinds of propositions, as we have just seen.

Notice, in fact, that if he tried to say that entitlements are ultimately first-order a priori warrants obtained through philosophical reflection for "There is an external world" of "I am not the victim of a lucid and sustained dream", this would create a tension. For, in that case, they would have to speak to the likely truth of those assumptions, while, officially, Wright has been concerned to deny that entitlements could achieve that much.[17] Furthermore, if that were what entitlements were supposed to do, then we would have a priori reasons for the relevant propositions and so we should *believe* them and not merely assume them. For, according to Wright's distinction, assumptions, contrary to beliefs, are a species of acceptance that does not have evidence—a priori or otherwise—as input. However, if entitlements were a priori warrants for "There is an external world" and the like, then we would have a priori evidence to believe them.

At this point, the question arises whether Wright's entitlements at least succeed in the task of telling us why trusting in certain—as such—unwarranted (and unwarrantable) propositions is, after all, *epistemically rational*. Even in this case, however, difficulties are just around the corner. As I have already briefly remarked, the first of Wright's arguments seems to show that, since forming empirical beliefs based on our experiences is an important cognitive project for us—I would say an indispensable one—we must accept that we are not dreaming. This, however, is a clearly pragmatic warrant, whose obtaining owes to the fact that the epistemic method, which has "I am not dreaming now" as its basis, is useful or even necessary for us. The skeptic may—I take it—have no reason to object that it is useful for us, if not indispensable, to assume those propositions. He could therefore insist that, clearly, this does not prove that those propositions are epistemically warranted—that is, that they are likely *true*. Thus, it seems that Wright's anti-skeptic strategy is unsuccessful, even with respect to the task of explaining why assuming certain unwarranted (and unwarrantable) propositions is rational in the light of epistemic rationality, as understood by the skeptic.[18]

The second argument, in contrast, tells us that, in order to have the conception of experience that we actually have, we cannot but assume that there are physical objects. I already pointed out that this is not obvious. To repeat, an idealist could argue that an objective conception of experience may depend on regularities and uniformities among our perceptions, with no need for an assumption regarding the existence of an external world. Nevertheless, one may accept the idea that we actually have a conceptual scheme in which the category of physical object is not empty. One could then argue that it is useful for us to have such a conceptual scheme, and are therefore warranted in assuming that there are physical objects. However, at this point, a

[17] I was pleased to find a similar objection in Avnur 2011. Wright 2014 (p. 214) opens instead with the claim that entitlements are non-evidential "warrant(s) to accept a proposition as true". Then, however, the only reason given to that effect is that trust presupposes trusting in the truth of a certain proposition. This may well be the case but it is not an argument to show that the proposition trusted upon is indeed (likely to be) true.

[18] In Coliva 2015 (esp. chapter 4) I argue that this is the crux of the matter and that the right conception of epistemic rationality should extend to its conditions of possibility, like the heavy-weight assumptions we have been reviewing, even if they cannot be warranted evidentially or otherwise.

skeptic could obviously admit that, in order to have the conceptual scheme we actually have, it is necessary for us to assume that there is an external world, though he could hold that this does not rule out that it is metaphysically possible that the descriptions for which we deploy it are systematically incorrect.

To conclude: it seems that Wright's strategy in terms of entitlements does not ultimately solve the skeptical paradox. It does not offer the kinds of warrant that corroborate the truth of propositions like "I am not dreaming" and "There is an external world". Moreover, on closer inspection, the justifications he provides for the rationality of assuming those propositions are, at most, of a pragmatic kind,[19] and therefore altogether compatible with a skeptical position.

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[19] Several authors (Pritchard 2005, Jenkins 2007, Williams 2012) have pointed out the pragmatic nature of Wright's entitlements which, however, they have taken to be warrants for "There is an external world" or "We are not victims of lucid and sustained dreams".