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Moderatism, Transmission Failures,  
Closure, and Humean Scepticism\**Annalisa Coliva*

Contemporary discussions of scepticism present a specific and intriguing feature—they connect this problematic with other important and fundamental philosophical issues, such as the nature of perceptual justification and evidence, the cogency of certain argumentative templates, the validity of basic principles of epistemic logic, as well as the nature of knowledge, knowledge-ascriptions, and mental content. In this paper I will discuss some of these fundamental problems and their connections with one particular variety of scepticism—the Humean kind. I will do so by first presenting (Section 12.1) an intermediate position between Jim Pryor’s liberal conception of the architecture of empirical warrants and Crispin Wright’s conservative view, called ‘moderatism’. In Section 12.1 some initial considerations will be provided to motivate the endorsement of moderatism over its rivals; in Section 12.1.1 some of its main tenets will be clarified and in Section 12.2 its consequences with respect to failure of warrant transmission explored. It will be claimed that once properly construed moderatism allows one to countenance a second kind of transmission failure, different from Wright’s original variety of it. In Section 12.2.1 I will show how these two kinds of transmission failure actually apply to different types of argument and are therefore compatible. In Section 12.3 the relationships between these varieties of transmission failure and the failure of the Principle of Closure for warrant will be investigated. I will claim that while Wright’s kind of transmission failure is compatible with the retention of

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Closure, my own variety of it isn't, and show why this doesn't have any of the disastrous consequences often imputed to those positions that forsake Closure. In so doing, I will also explore the consequences of moderatism and of this second kind of transmission failure for the cogency of Moore's proof. In Section 12.4 I will turn to the issue of how best to construe moderatism, in order for it to be able to confront the Humean sceptical challenge. I will argue in favour of a form of 'internal rationalism' capable, in my view, of actually dissolving that challenge by showing that it rests on too narrow and unmotivated a conception of epistemic rationality. In Section 12.5 I will close with a brief comparison between my diagnosis and Wright's, and offer some motivation to prefer mine.

### 12.1. Moderatism: Some Initial Motivations

Moderatism is a thesis about the structure of empirical warrants and, in particular, about perceptual ones, though it may be worth considering whether it could be extended to other kinds of warrant, such as memory-based and testimonial ones. Here I will concentrate only on the perceptual case. Accordingly, moderates maintain that in order to possess a perceptual warrant for ordinary empirical beliefs about material objects in one's surroundings it isn't enough merely to have a certain course of experience, but it is also necessary to *assume* that there is an external world (as well as, possibly, other very general propositions, for example that one's sense organs are generally reliable, that one isn't the victim of a lucid and sustained dream, and so on). It should be stressed that, on the moderate conception of the architecture of perceptual warrants, these two necessary and jointly sufficient conditions are meant to characterize a constitutive claim. Perceptual—of course defeasible—warrants depend for their obtainment on two ingredients: an experience with a given phenomenal and representational content together with the assumption of some very general proposition, such as 'There is an external world', 'My sense organs are generally reliable', 'I am not the victim of a lucid and sustained dream', and possibly other ones. For example, consider an ordinary empirical belief such as 'Here is a hand'. According to moderatism, a perceptual warrant for such a belief consists in having a certain course of experience—let us call it a hand-like experience—together with the assumption that there is an external world, as well as possibly other collateral assumptions, such as that one's sense organs are generally reliable, that one isn't the victim of a lucid and sustained dream, and so on. For ease of exposition and also for the centrality of the case, I will focus from now on just on the assumption that there is an external world (on the understanding that interaction with a world populated by physical objects be the cause of most of our experiences).

The motivation for moderatism (at least in the perceptual case) comes, on the one hand, from discontent with respect to liberalism,<sup>1</sup> and, on the other, from

<sup>1</sup> Pryor 2000, 2004.

dissatisfaction with respect to conservatism.<sup>2</sup> As is familiar, liberalism is the view according to which it is enough in order to have a perceptual warrant for an ordinary empirical proposition that  $p$ —e.g. ‘Here is my hand’—merely to have a certain hand-like experience, while lacking reasons to doubt that there is an external world. The basic worry about liberalism is that that very experience would be compatible with its being produced in non-standard conditions, while its occurrence, on the liberal view, should warrant ‘Here is a hand’ and disprove a proposition incompatible with  $p$ , which, however, entails the same evidence, such as  $p^*$ , ‘I’m dreaming of there being a hand here’. Intuitively, however, in such a case one’s experience, *just by itself*, would be neither here nor there. That is to say, it would neither warrant the former nor the latter proposition. Indeed, if one were allowed to model present intuitions along Bayesian lines, the occurrence of that experience would actually increase the probability of  $p^*$ .<sup>3</sup> If it appears otherwise—that is, if it seems that a hand-like experience doesn’t corroborate  $p^*$ —it is only because there is already an at least implicit presupposition that one’s experience be produced in favorable circumstances, viz. through the interaction with a material world, by means of the reliable operation of one’s sense organs, while awake. Notice, however, that to acknowledge this much doesn’t *ipso facto* commit one to holding that these presuppositions need or should (already) be warranted in their turn—it may just be that the degree of confidence we have in these assumptions, for whatever reason—even inculturation—be such as to guarantee that no matter how much the probability of  $p^*$  went up, it wouldn’t become greater than that of  $p$ . So the previous considerations don’t immediately speak in favour of (some version of) the conservative view.<sup>4</sup>

Be that as it may, two important consequences would follow. First, no warrant for these general presuppositions could be provided by an argument such as Moore’s, which proceeded on the basis of one’s current experience and of one’s specific empirical beliefs like ‘Here is a hand’. For, given the previous considerations about one’s hand-like experience, it seems arbitrary to suppose that it would warrant belief in ‘There is an external world with a hand in it’, which is what Moore’s proof would deliver, rather than, say, ‘I am deceived by an evil demon about having a hand, which in fact I’m just dreaming’. Secondly, the fact that it appears to us that a hand-like experience would be enough to give us a defeasible warrant for the corresponding belief only because we

<sup>2</sup> Wright 1985, 2002, 2004a.

<sup>3</sup> See White 2006, but also Wright 2007.

<sup>4</sup> The qualification is in order because some authors such as Silins 2007 and Wedgwood 2012 have recently tried to maintain the liberal view with respect to the architecture of perceptual warrants, while abandoning Mooreanism along familiar Wrightian lines. In fact they have proposed a blend of liberalism and conservatism. I can’t expound on this attempt at rapprochement here, though my view is that it makes it a non-easily solvable mystery why Mooreanism properly so regarded—i.e. the argument which should provide a first warrant to believe that there is an external world starting from one’s perceptual warrant for ‘Here is a hand’, via the entailment ‘If there is a hand here, there is an external world’—couldn’t go through if liberalism holds. Moreover, it seems to be based on the conflation between propositional and rationally available warrants. I deal extensively with these views in Coliva 2012a, and forthcoming.

are already assuming (among possibly other things) that there is an external world, means that the view that better accounts for the structure of empirical warrants is one which removes the non-committal attitude towards ‘There is an external world’ held by liberalism and allows one’s current hand-like experience to constitute a (of course defeasible) warrant for ‘Here is a hand.’ Moderatism is indeed such a view,<sup>5</sup> although it remains to be clarified (Section 12.1.1) why, phenomenologically, it doesn’t seem to us that collateral assumptions are needed beside having a hand-like experience in order to have warrant for the corresponding belief.

Conservatism, in contrast, is the view according to which, in order to have a perceptual warrant for an ordinary empirical proposition that  $p$ —e.g. ‘Here is my hand’—one needs an appropriate course of experience and *warrantedly* to assume that, for example, there is an external world. Several worries may be raised against such a position, but two seem to me enough at least to give us initial motivation to explore possible alternatives. First, it must be noted that there is room—conceptually—for an intermediate position which makes perceptual warrants conditional upon *merely assuming* very general propositions such as ‘There is an external world’, without requiring their being warranted. Secondly, if it is agreed that there can’t be either perceptual or a priori warrants for propositions such as ‘There is an external world’ and one is worried about the notion of entitlement as developed by Wright, moderatism seems the only feasible alternative about the architecture of perceptual warrants. Here I will not go through the details of this multifaceted objection. Suffice it to say, first, that if liberalism fails, it is very difficult to see how one could ever get a perceptual warrant for a proposition such as ‘There is an external world’. Secondly, it is equally difficult to see what kind of a priori reasoning could assure us of the truth of that presupposition. Ordinary a priori warrants, obtained by reflection on the concepts required at least to entertain it, seem clearly to fall short of such a result. Arguably, moreover, more complex kinds of a priori arguments could at most demonstrate why, given certain assumptions—which may well be contentious—certain *conditionals* would hold a priori. For example, suppose you have a theory of mental content  $T$  whereby you could only have the belief that there is a hand in front of you if you had encountered such a kind of object before, or if such a kind of object has at least existed in the past. What you would then know a priori is merely the conditional ‘If  $T$ , then there must have been/be an external world’. But, once again, that would fall short of giving you a priori warrant to believe the consequent of that conditional and, in any event, it would arguably be compatible with any sceptical argument designed to show that your *current* situation is such that you can’t exclude being in a sceptical scenario.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> And so is conservatism, which we shall address in a moment.

<sup>6</sup> Notice that I’m not denying that you *may* know  $T$  a priori. What I’m saying, rather, is that unless you *do know* it, you can know a priori only the conditional ‘If  $T$ , then there is an external world’. Now, I assume that although the supporters of  $T$  think they do know it, since  $T$  is a philosophical theory, it’s very dubious that they do. They may have reasons to think that  $T$  is true, but this wouldn’t suffice for knowledge. Given the track record of philosophical theories, such a prudent view has much in its favour, I think. Be that as it may,

Finally, if one turned to Wright's entitlements, I think the following problem would arise. Since epistemic warrants are essentially connected with the truth of the proposition they provide justification for, they will have to increase its likely truth (to put it roughly and contentiously). But, as connoisseurs of the literature on the topic will know, Wright's entitlements make only for the rational permissibility of thinking that there is an external world, and do not produce any warrant for it.<sup>7</sup>

Let me stress that the preceding considerations aren't meant as knock-down arguments against either liberalism or conservatism, but they should give us pause and therefore enough motivation to at least explore a possible alternative, viz. moderatism. So, let us recapitulate the positions at play so far, concerning the structure of empirical warrants, each taken in connection with Moore's proof (with  $P$  = 'Here is my hand',  $Q$  = 'There is an external world', and  $W$  = evidential warrant and  $W^*$  = non evidential warrant).<sup>8</sup>

	Liberals	Conservatives	Moderates
Structure of warrant for (I)	Experience (as of $P$ ) + no reason to doubt (III) $Q$ $W$ (I) $P$ $W$ (II) $P \rightarrow Q$ $W$ (III) $Q$	Experience (as of $P$ ) + $W^*$ (III) $Q$ $W$ (I) $P$ $W$ (II) $P \rightarrow Q$ $W^*$ (III) $Q$	Experience (as of $P$ ) + Assumption (III) $Q$ $W$ (I) $P$ $W$ (II) $P \rightarrow Q$ ? (III) $Q$

It is also worth-pointing out that moderatism is a conception of the structure of perceptual warrant that is quite widespread, though never called that way. Arguably, it would comprise also some forms of *naturalism* and *pragmatism*. According to the

for me the important point is that even if one might know  $T$  and hence that one must have been in contact with physical objects in order to have thoughts about them, this doesn't show that one is currently causally interacting with them. This is not the place to consider in detail further arguments designed to show that we can have an a priori warrant for 'There is an external world', such as Wedgwood's (2012). I develop some considerations against it in my 2012a, and forthcoming.

<sup>7</sup> In particular, though by no means exclusively, so-called 'entitlements of substance' which will constitute, on Wright's view, non-evidential warrant for the proposition 'There is an external world' (Wright 2004a: 203). For a critical discussion of this kind of entitlement, see Coliva 2007, 2012a, and forthcoming. See also Wright 2004a: 206 where he actually says: 'In general, it has to be recognised that the unified strategy [viz. his strategy of response to scepticism both of Cartesian and Humean kind by means of the appeal to rational entitlements] 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.' We will come back to Wright's position in more detail in Section 12.5.

<sup>8</sup> Here I am taking into account Pryor's liberal-Moorean view because I actually think it is the only viable one. Cf. n. 4.

former, we assume (III) with no warrant to do so, either because of our psychological constitution, as Hume held,<sup>9</sup> or because of our upbringing within a community that shares that assumption, on Strawson's reading of Wittgenstein's *On Certainty*.<sup>10</sup> According to the latter, in contrast, we assume (III) with no epistemic warrant for it, but because it is practically rational for us to do so—because we have a pragmatic warrant for it—as Thomas Reid was (probably) the first to point out.

However, as a matter of fact, moderatism is also what the *Humean sceptical* challenge,<sup>11</sup> once correctly interpreted, leads us to admit: that our shared practices of production of perceptual (and further empirical) warrant rest upon ungrounded—that is, epistemically unwarranted and unwarrantable—assumptions. So the question is: is moderatism capable of avoiding scepticism? Naturalism and pragmatism, arguably, aren't. For the former simply registers the sceptical point—that there are not, as there can't be, epistemic warrants for our basic assumptions—and does not have anything to say against the *legitimacy* of the sceptical challenge, save that it seems *unnatural* to us.<sup>12</sup> The latter, in contrast, somehow changes the subject for it offers *practical* warrants where the sceptic required epistemic ones. That is to say, it shows why it is useful, convenient or even inescapable for us to make certain assumptions if we are to maintain our conceptual framework or epistemic practices. However, it neither gives us warrants to hold that those assumptions are true, nor does it expose the illegitimacy of the sceptical challenge.

My view is that, in order to be effective against scepticism—at least to some extent—moderatism has to be developed in a rather different way, which I shall call 'internal rationalism'. We will come back to it in due course (Sections 12.4–5). Yet let me anticipate that internal rationalism will not provide epistemic warrants for 'There is an external world'. Rather, it will put pressure on the legitimacy of the sceptical challenge. To put it differently: it will not solve the sceptical challenge, but rather *soothe* it by showing how it is based on a contentious conception of epistemic rationality, which, once rejected, will leave scepticism quite toothless.

Before turning to that task, let me clarify some of the main tenets of moderatism. In particular, the notion of assumption it makes use of and whether it gives rise to what has become known, in the literature on the topic, as 'the leaching problem'.

### 12.1.1.1. *Assumptions and Leaching*

Let us stipulate, following Wright,<sup>13</sup> that assumptions are attitudes of acceptance of a propositional content based on no evidence in favour of that content. They thus differ from rationally held *beliefs*. Yet they may be necessary in order to have warrants for

<sup>9</sup> As Strawson 1985 reminds us.

<sup>10</sup> Strawson 1985. For a critical discussion of Strawson's reading of *On Certainty*, see Coliva 2010a: ch. 4.

<sup>11</sup> The label is Wright's (1985, 2002, 2004a), and derives from an extension of Hume's scepticism about induction to the case of our belief in the existence of an external world.

<sup>12</sup> Strawson 1985, Williams 1991.

<sup>13</sup> See Wright 2004a.

other propositions and hence to form beliefs. While rationally held belief depends on holding  $p$  true on the basis of (defeasible) evidence for  $p$ , so that we may say that beliefs have evidence as input (provided by experiences, memories, testimonies, or other beliefs), an assumption doesn't. Yet, both beliefs and assumptions could have outward behaviour and warranted beliefs as output.

Still, assumptions aren't *hypotheses* with respect to whose truth we aren't committed, and which we just entertain for the sake of argument to see what might follow from them. Rather, we are committed to the contents of our assumptions. That is to say, we hold them true, trust them, take them for granted, and act on their basis. Finally, to assume that  $p$  isn't equivalent to the view that affirms that since  $p$  is *actually true*, such and such would follow. Rather, it means to act on the *commitment* to  $p$ 's truth. Yet,  $p$  might (metaphysically) not be true.

Let us now turn to the issue of the psychological plausibility of the moderate position. A preliminary remark would be apposite, though. I take liberals, conservatives, and moderates to be primarily engaged in providing an account of propositional warrants—of those warrants there are for certain propositions, independently of whether the latter are the contents of one's beliefs and of whether, given one's collateral beliefs, one may appropriate them or not. Hence, as is customary, I take propositional warrants to be contrasted with doxastic and rationally available warrants. Now, if this is what is at issue, considerations pertaining to the psychological plausibility of each of these views would cut no ice.<sup>14, 15</sup> Still, I think it would be interesting to say something about how these abstract considerations would combine with the issue of how real subjects could be granted with the relevant assumptions and enjoy whatever warrants for certain propositions there might be, once these propositions become the contents of their beliefs. I shall presently turn to this issue. Before doing so, let me stress that moderatism is the view that in order to overcome our 'cognitive locality' and hence to be within our rights in taking our sense experience to bear onto a realm of mind-independent objects, we need not only a certain course of experience, but also the collateral assumption that there is an external world, that we aren't victims of lucid and sustained dreams, that our sense organs are mostly reliable, and possibly some other very general ones. Thanks to such an assumption we can therefore form evidentially warranted beliefs about physical objects in our surroundings. We can legitimately do so, as we shall see at length in Section 12.4, because even if these assumptions aren't warrantable *tout court* they are nevertheless (basically) epistemically rational.

So let us address the problem of the psychological reality of assumptions, which moderatism claims are needed, beside having a certain course of experience, in order

<sup>14</sup> In particular I think they would not lend immediate support to the liberal view, contrary to what Silins 2007 and Wedgwood 2012—but interestingly not Pryor 2004—seem to think.

<sup>15</sup> According to such a view, assumptions would be like the axioms of a mathematical theory which allow us to derive warrants for other propositions (i.e. the theory's theorems) and need not be believed by anyone, although, obviously, they can become the object of subject's propositional attitudes in appropriate circumstances, e.g. when one philosophizes.



to have perceptual justification. In my view, assumptions may be construed as very lightweight propositional attitudes. For we need not impose that a subject should be able conceptually to entertain their contents in order to be *granted* with them. Rather, one might hold that it suffices for such a subject to be able to participate in a practice whose rational precondition is (at least partly constituted) by those very assumptions.<sup>16</sup> For instance, a child may be granted with the assumption that there is an external world, even if he doesn't have the concepts necessary to entertain that assumption, provided he talks and acts in ways which make rational sense only on the assumption that objects exist even when they aren't perceived, or that they existed even when neither he nor anyone else were on the surface of the Earth, and so on. Were he to acquire the relevant concepts, and thus become in all pertinent respects similar to most adults, there would be no problem in granting him with such an assumption, which may of course remain most of the times implicit, as it usually is, and become explicit only in specific, perhaps unusual circumstances (or when engaging in philosophical scrutiny). Yet, the fact that assumptions are mostly implicitly held is no bar to their being psychologically real and even operative within a subject's cognitive life. Think, for instance, of the assumption that we are surrounded by other human beings. In the normal run of cases adults have the concepts necessary to entertain it; yet it remains implicit, while shaping much of their behaviour. Given, moreover, that I take experiences with phenomenal and representational content to be possible also for creatures who do not have the concepts necessary to canonically specify them,<sup>17</sup> let alone for creatures who have those concepts, the moderate position turns out to be as psychologically plausible as any of its rivals, but, in particular, as the liberal one, which, as we saw, is often (misleadingly) favoured by appealing to considerations of this kind.<sup>18</sup>

Let us now turn to the so-called 'leaching problem'.<sup>19</sup> The worry is this: if all we need to assume is 'There is an external world', as opposed to a corresponding warranted belief, in order to have a perceptual warrant for 'Here is a hand', upon having a hand-like experience, we will merely have warrant for that belief *conditional upon that assumption*, but we will not have any real epistemic warrant for it. In response, I think it is important to stress—as already mentioned in Section 12.1—that the moderate view

<sup>16</sup> I defend this view in more detail in Coliva 2012 *c* and forthcoming.

<sup>17</sup> Thus I agree with non-conceptual theorists about the content of perception, such as Peacocke 2002. I have defended these views in other works of mine and can't possibly take up the issue in the course of this paper. I do so, in connection with moderatism, in Coliva 2012*a*, and forthcoming.

<sup>18</sup> In response to a worry raised by an anonymous referee, I would say that an idealist may be said to assume, in this sense, that there is an external world, even if he explicitly denied it. For, in the normal run of cases, he would nevertheless act on its basis and therefore implicitly assume it. If, in contrast, he behaved in all respects consistently with his professed idealism, he couldn't be said to assume it. Even if the latter were, rather incredibly, the case, notice that it wouldn't show anything relevant with respect to the structure of *propositional* warrants. There will be more on idealism in n. 34.

<sup>19</sup> The problem originates from a remark made by Stephen Schiffer and discussed in Wright (2004*a*: 177, 208–9). It originally concerned Wright's notion of entitlement. Accordingly the worry was that if one has merely an entitlement for 'There is an external world'—as opposed to evidential warrant for it—on the conservative view of the structure of empirical justification it would turn out that one has merely an entitlement



is, first and foremost, a constitutive thesis about the very nature of perceptual warrants. As we saw, moderatism tells you what it takes to have a perceptual warrant—viz. a certain course of experience together with an assumption about the existence of an external world. Once those ontologically constitutive ingredients are in place, a genuine epistemic warrant for propositions such as ‘Here is a hand’ ensues. So moderatism doesn’t merely tell you what the necessary (and perhaps jointly sufficient) conditions for having perceptual warrant are; nor does it amount to the view that perceptual warrant is simply conditional on an assumption. Rather, it tells you what ingredients constitute a genuine, non-conditional, perceptual warrant, and it is all to be expected that the final product—a perceptual warrant—be something over and above its constitutive components—an experience and a general assumption—pretty much like the colour pink is something over and above its constitutive elements, viz. red and white. It is then a separate issue, which we shall examine in a moment, whether such a warrant can transmit to propositions entailed by the ones one has such a kind of justification for.

## 12.2. Transmission Failures

Let us now turn to the issue of failure of transmission of warrant. I will argue that there are two, non-competing kinds of it, and not just Wright’s original variety of it. They can be defined as follows:

- (1) **Transmission failure 1 (TF<sub>1</sub>)**: An argument fails to transmit warrant from its premises to the conclusion (in way 1) if (and only if) *warrant* for the conclusion is already needed in order to have warrant for its premises in the first place.
- (2) **Transmission failure 2 (TF<sub>2</sub>)**: An argument fails to transmit warrant from its premises to the conclusion (in way 2) if (and only if) this very *conclusion* needs already to be *assumed* in order to have warrant for its premises in the first place.

I think the motivation for TF<sub>1</sub> is clear enough: an argument can’t produce at least a *first* warrant to believe its conclusion if warrant for it is already needed in order to have warrant for its premises in the first place.<sup>20</sup> Take the familiar zebra argument, originally due to Dretske:

ZEBRA

- (I) Here is a zebra.
- (II) If this is a zebra, it isn’t a cleverly disguised mule.

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(III) This isn’t a cleverly disguised mule.

for ‘Here is a hand’ too, rather than an evidential warrant for it. I have therefore slightly modified the objection to make it fit moderatism.

<sup>20</sup> See n. 27 for the rationale behind this qualification.

If it is indeed the case, as Wright, Davies, and Pryor among others think, that one's current sense experience of a zebra-looking animal can be a warrant for (I) only by courtesy of there being a warrant for (III), clearly ZEBRA can't provide a first warrant to believe its conclusion.

However, I think the motivation for TF2 is intuitive as well: how can an argument be used to establish its own presuppositions, when they are in fact needed to have warrant for its premises in the first place? In other writings I have tried to provide an initial motivation for TF2 by considering an analogy with the mathematical case.<sup>21</sup> Here I would like to present another example, which may help make the same point. Consider 'There are other minds.' Now, it seems to me this is clearly a proposition we can't provide ordinary a priori warrants for. I am also sceptical of the possibility of warranting it by means of Wright-style entitlements, pretty much for the same kinds of reason provided at the outset of this paper, which we shall examine in more detail in Section 12.5. If so, we could only try and provide evidential warrants for it. Yet any appropriate kind of evidence we might bring to bear on it would owe its status of warrant for a proposition entailing the existence of other minds to the assumption that there are indeed other minds.<sup>22</sup> Hence, that there are other minds is the assumption on which beliefs such as 'Here is a person in pain' can be warranted by means of the kind of evidence at our disposal, like an observed pain-like behaviour. Thus, an argument such as:

OTHER MINDS

- (I) Here is a person in pain.  
 (II) If this person is in pain, there are other minds.  
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 (III) There are other minds.

can't provide us with a warrant to believe its conclusion, because in order to have warrant for its premises, its conclusion must be assumed. That is to say, in order to have warrant for (I) we need not only the evidence provided by the observation of his behaviour, which could conceivably be exactly the same had we encountered a robot cleverly made to look and behave just like a human being when injured, but also the assumption that there are other minds. Let me stress that this collateral assumption isn't meant to provide us with an infallible warrant for (I), but merely to turn an otherwise neutral kind of evidence into a defeasible warrant for (I)—after all, the person may be lying, but at least we are within our rights in taking his behavior as a (deceitful) sign of *pain*, that is, of a genuine mental state. Yet the conclusion (III) doesn't seem to

<sup>21</sup> See Coliva 2012a and forthcoming.

<sup>22</sup> I take it that testimony would be a non-starter, because in order to take someone's words as pieces of testimony we should already take it for granted that either the informant is an intentional being or that an intentional being is the source from which the piece of testimony derives. Hence, the existence of other minds will have to be presupposed already.

be independently warrantable. I take it, moreover, that it is indisputable that (I) may be warranted, otherwise much of our usual ways of dealing with situations in which we see other people moan and cry while injured would be pointless. So, if the argument is question-begging it can't be due to the fact that antecedent warrant for the conclusion would be needed, in order to have warrant for the premises. Hence, OTHER MINDS would be a case where warrant for (I) exists, yet it depends on assuming (III)—with no warrant for it—and, furthermore, can't be transmitted to it. Thus, it seems a case of TF2.

It will come as no surprise to the reader to find out that I think that TF2 can arise also in the perceptual case, if one tried to provide warrant for 'There is an external world' by means of a Moore-style kind of argument.

MOORE

- (I) Here is a hand.
- (II) If this is a hand, then the external world exists.

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- (III) The external world exists.

Again, on the moderate architecture of the structure of perceptual warrants, the conclusion of that argument—that there is an external world—must already be assumed in order to have a perceptual defeasible warrant for (I)—'Here is a hand'—in the first place. However, if perceptual warrant depends for its existence on assuming (III), then an argument which proceeding from that warrant, aimed at warranting (III) itself, would in fact presuppose the very piece of information it was supposed to provide warrant for. Hence, an argument such as MOORE would exhibit TF2. Accordingly, it could not produce a warrant for its conclusion.

To help clarify this point, consider that if arguments such as OTHER MINDS and MOORE were cogent, they would display a very peculiar form of bootstrapping, as warrants available only thanks to certain assumptions would straightforwardly produce warrants for those very assumptions. But it doesn't seem plausible that these arguments give epistemic support to their conclusions. Of course perceptual warrants speak to the likely truth of propositions such as (I), yet they don't seem capable of changing the epistemic status of those assumptions (III) on which they themselves depend. In particular, they don't seem capable of turning those assumptions into more likely truths. So, it seems to me that moderates had better allow for Transmission-failure 2 and connectedly return a negative verdict on the cogency of arguments such as MOORE and OTHER MINDS.

### 12.2.1. *The Relationship between Transmission-failure 1 and 2*

As anticipated, I don't think TF1 and TF2 are incompatible, for they are instantiated by different kinds of argument. My view is that whenever *no independent warrant for the conclusion of an argument can be provided* and to assume such a conclusion is nevertheless necessary for a certain body of information to warrant its premises, TF2 occurs.

In contrast, if independent warrant for the conclusion can be acquired and to assume it is necessary in order for a certain body of information to warrant the premises, TF1 takes place.<sup>23</sup> The notable consequence of this view is that ZEBRA and MOORE would come apart. That is to say, they would both be considered to be question-begging, but for different reasons.

ZEBRA

- (I) Here's a zebra.
- (II) If this is a zebra, this isn't a cleverly disguised mule.

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- (III) This isn't a cleverly disguised mule.

would thus be an example of TF1, for we can get independent warrant for 'This is not a cleverly disguised mule'—independent, that is, of the kind of sense experience—a zebra-looking one—actually operative in providing warrant for (I) in ZEBRA. For instance, we could run a DNA test which would exclude that the animal in front of us is a mule in disguise, even though it didn't yet tell us whether it is a zebra.<sup>24-25</sup> In contrast, I think we couldn't get an independent warrant for 'There is an external world'. For such a conclusion is much more general than the one in ZEBRA. Hence, it would make no difference to the case if, instead of (I) in MOORE, we had (I\*) 'Here is a foot' (or any other kind of object). So, any kind of perceptual warrant bearing onto a proposition like (I) would be in the same boat as the one for (I) itself. Furthermore, as argued

<sup>23</sup> This may invite a reformulation of both TF1 and TF2, in which the right-hand sides of the biconditionals, which state the conditions for an argument to fail to transmit warrant from the premises to the conclusion, in way 1 and 2 respectively, should read thus:

(TF1 arises iff) the following conjunction obtains: (i) The conclusion must be assumed in order to have a warrant for the premises in the first place and (ii) such a conclusion is (independently) warrantable;  
 (TF2 arises iff) the following conjunction obtains: (i) The conclusion must be assumed in order to have a warrant for the premises in the first place and (ii) such a conclusion isn't (independently) warrantable.  
 These reformulations should dispel the worry that TF1 might entail TF2. But notice that even if TF1 ultimately entailed TF2, this wouldn't be a problem for my overall position, but at most for supporters of TF1 at the expense of TF2.

<sup>24</sup> The suggestion has been made that this example is misleading because no one would have such a warrant when going to the zoo and yet could form a warranted belief in (I). That's right but it is no objection to the view. For what I am saying is that in order to diagnose what kind of transmission failure is at stake in the ZEBRA argument *such as it is*, one should evaluate whether independent warrant for its conclusion *could* be obtained. This doesn't entail at all that on normal goings to a zoo, in order to have perceptual warrant for (I) one should have *that* independent warrant. To put it differently, this doesn't entail at all that ZEBRA correctly represents the structure of one's warrant for (I) on normal zoo visits. In fact, I think that what provides us with a perceptual warrant for (I) on those occasions is simply a zebra-like experience together with the much less specific, inductively supported assumption, that zookeepers don't usually fool visitors by disguising animals.

<sup>25</sup> Of course the story is a little bit more complicated than that for one may hold that the DNA test gives one warrant for (III) (in ZEBRA) only by courtesy of one's experience while reading the results of the test, for instance, and that will introduce further assumptions, which may ultimately involve 'There is an external world'. For present purposes, we may ignore this complication, because even if ultimately the warrant for (III) in ZEBRA may depend on further arguments involving such an assumption, the *specific* argument arranged to provide warrant for it, viz. ZEBRA, wouldn't.

in Section 12.1, I think there is no prospect of getting any other kind of warrant for (III) because that would commit us to implausible positions, in my view—i.e. either a traditional conservative view, according to which there should be a priori warrant for propositions such as ‘There is an external world’; or else, to Wright’s position that countenances non-evidential warrants—entitlements—for such a presupposition.<sup>26</sup>

In general, therefore, what is to be expected is that TF2 will occur whenever putative arguments designed to confer warrant on very general propositions are put forward. That is to say, TF2 affects those arguments which proceed from a premise warranted on the basis of one’s everyday experience, that entails a conclusion about, for instance (beside the existence of an external world), the fact that our sense organs are mostly working reliably, that we aren’t victims of lucid and sustained dreams, that there are other minds, that there is a past, that there are uniformities of nature, and possibly some more. Characteristically, in all these cases the conclusion of the argument must already be assumed in order to have warrant for its premises in the first place. It remains for further investigation whether other kinds of argument could exhibit TF2 beside the ones just mentioned. In other cases, where independent warrant for a conclusion entailed by a logically valid argument (and needed in order to have warrant for the premises in the first place) can be attained, I am happy to grant that the diagnosis of the problem will have to appeal to TF1.

### 12.3. Transmission Failures and Closure

Let us now turn to the relationship between our two kinds of transmission failure and the Principle of Closure under known entailment for epistemic operators, such as warrant. First of all, let me provide a statement of the Principle of Closure for warrant. As is well known, this is a tricky matter. Here I will provide the simplest, most ‘syntactic’ version of it, in order to make the contrast between failure of Closure and transmission failure clearer.

**Closure Principle (for warrant):** If A warrantably believes P and P entails Q, then A warrantably believes Q.

Closure thus understood merely poses a consistency requirement upon the beliefs one may have in P and Q on the basis of having a warranted belief that Q and of the entailment from P to Q. The Closure Principle thus understood doesn’t say anything about the source of the warrant for Q. In particular, it doesn’t say whether or

<sup>26</sup> The suggestion has been put to me that one might have testimonial warrant for ‘There is an external world’. In that case, one’s warrant for it would neither be perceptual, nor a priori or non-evidential in Wright’s sense. I must confess that I find this suggestion odd, at least for the following reason. In order to be warranted in believing ‘S said that P’ or ‘It is written on this piece of paper that P’, where P is ‘There is an external world’, the assumption that P should already be in place. So how could one possibly get a *first* warrant to believe that there is an external world through testimony?

not it derives from one's warrant for P and from the entailment from P to Q. Now consider ZEBRA.

- (I) Here's a zebra.
- (II) If this is a zebra, this isn't a cleverly disguised mule.

-----

(III) This isn't a cleverly disguised mule.

If we take supporters of TF<sub>1</sub> to be saying that that argument cannot provide a first warrant to believe its conclusion because in order to have warrant for (I) (III) must *already* be warranted in the first place, given that (III) *can* be independently warranted, the Closure Principle for warrant *would hold as well* (provided there is such an independent warrant for (III)).

Similarly, for those who are happy with entitlements (or indeed with a priori warrants for (III)), it may be argued that one may have a non-evidential warrant for 'There is an external world' (or an a priori one) and that that suffices—together with hand-like experience—to give one a (defeasible) warrant for (I)—'Here is a hand'. So, Closure for warrant will hold in this case too, provided 'warrant' were understood disjunctively as 'either perceptual or non-perceptual (but either a priori or non-evidential) warrant'.<sup>27</sup>

But what about the relationship between TF<sub>2</sub> and the Closure Principle? On that view, things look worse for Closure. For it is denied that assumptions such as (III)—that there is an external world—are in any way independently warrantable and, moreover, it is a tenet of the moderate position—spelled out along the lines presented so far—that one could not acquire a warrant for them by running a valid argument which proceeds from premises that, once those assumptions are made (and one has a hand-like experience as well), are warranted.

I actually believe that the failure of Closure for warrant is indeed a consequence of embracing TF<sub>2</sub> and a consequence one could live with because of the limited number of cases in which, I think, one should favour the moderate conception of warrant (for independent reasons) and thus allow for TF<sub>2</sub>. Connectedly, we can now see that while ZEBRA exhibits TF<sub>1</sub>, but no failure of Closure, Moore's proof exhibits TF<sub>2</sub> and *therefore* a failure of Closure. So, it appears that we have reached an explanation of why Closure (for warrant) must fail, and must do so only in certain cases. That is, in all and only those cases where the assumption of the conclusion is necessary in order to have warrant for the premises and the conclusion *can't be warranted*, evidentially or otherwise.

<sup>27</sup> It is then an open issue whether, given Closure, one could also acquire a *second*, as it were, ordinary perceptual warrant for (III) via the entailment. Of course this is disputable because it may lead to the 'alchemical' result of producing an ordinary perceptual warrant out of an entitlement. A supporter of entitlements concerned with avoiding 'alchemy' may argue that closure for *warrant*—i.e. for perceptual warrant—fails in Moore's proof case, while it holds for *entitlements*, i.e. for non-evidential warrants (cf. Wright 2004a: 178).

This—I think—is an important result for, as connoisseurs of Dretske’s work will know, it is often unclear why Closure for warrant should fail. Sometimes the motivation offered<sup>28</sup> seems to depend on a conflation between failure of transmission—of kind 1, in fact—and failure of Closure. Wright, however, has long been concerned to show that TF<sub>1</sub> and failure of Closure for epistemic warrant are two different phenomena and that the former doesn’t entail the latter. But we can now see that there may be something to (what might be considered) Dretske’s intuition too. For failure of Closure is indeed entailed by Transmission-failure, but by TF<sub>2</sub>, not 1. In particular, notice the order of explanation: Closure fails, when it does, because of TF<sub>2</sub> (not the other way around). Let me also stress that it is good to have an explanation of why Closure would fail. For otherwise it would be totally mysterious why such a minimal consistency requirement shouldn’t hold. So I take it that acknowledging the existence of TF<sub>2</sub> has some relevant explanatory consequences vis-à-vis the failure of Closure.

Finally, I think this is a result we can actually live with because Closure would fail only in a very limited amount of cases and for principled reasons. So, I take it, it doesn’t have the disastrous consequences, regarding the cogency and epistemic utility of most of our inferences, often denounced by those who have been concerned to defend Closure at all costs.<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, I think it is indeed a consequence of a view about the architecture of empirical warrants, once construed at its best, that seems to me far more plausible than its rivals. We can thus summarize as follows the outcome of our discussion so far (P = ‘Here is my hand’, Q = ‘There is an external world’, W = evidential warrant, W\* = non-evidential warrant):

	<b>Liberals</b>	<b>Conservatives</b>	<b>Moderates</b>
Structure of warrant for (I)	Experience (as of P) + no reason to doubt (III) Q W (I) P W (II) P→Q	Experience (as of P) + W*(III) Q  W (I) P W (II) P→Q	Experience (as of P) + Assumption (III) Q W (I) P W (II) P→Q
NB W/W* whether or not one retains Closure for W/W* (n. 27)	W (III) Q	W/W* (III) Q	(III) Q

<sup>28</sup> e.g. in Dretske 1970, 2005. Notice, however, that Dretske is concerned first and foremost to deny Closure for knowledge.

<sup>29</sup> This is the same conclusion recently reached, in independent ways, by Avnur 2012. I consider this issue in more detail in Coliva 2012a, and *forthcoming*, where I also take up the challenge, first posed by DeRose (1995) (for knowledge), of showing why the denial of Closure shouldn’t lead to ‘abominable conjunctions’ such as ‘I warrantedly believe that I have a hand, but I’m not warranted in believing that there is an external world’. Further arguments in support of TF<sub>2</sub> can be found in Coliva 2012a and *forthcoming*. Its extension to the diagnosis of bootstrapping arguments and easy knowledge can be found in Coliva *forthcoming*.



## 12.4. Moderatism and Scepticism: Internal Rationalism

The Humean sceptical challenge consists in the request of producing epistemic warrants for very general propositions such as ‘There is an external world’. According to a sceptic, epistemic warrants are exhausted by evidential (and possibly a priori) warrants. According to moderates, as well as sceptics, this challenge can’t be met. However, responses to scepticism come in two varieties: direct ones, and indirect (or sceptical) ones. The former aim to meet the sceptical challenge head-on, by trying to provide epistemic warrants for propositions like (III). The latter, in contrast, accept the basic sceptical point that fundamental assumptions such as (III) can’t be evidentially (or a priori) warranted, but somehow argue that the devastating consequences sceptics draw from such a conclusion can in fact be blocked. My ‘internal rationalist’ solution belongs to this second genre of answers to scepticism. As I see it, the crucial consequence of Humean (and Cartesian<sup>30</sup>) scepticism isn’t so much that our *ordinary* empirical propositions wouldn’t be evidentially (perceptually) warranted. If it were, moderatism could easily answer it. For it requires just the assumption that there is an external world, as opposed to its warrantedness, in order for a hand-like experience to warrant a belief like ‘Here is a hand.’ Hence, it allows for the latter to be perceptually justified, despite accepting the basic sceptical point that ‘There is an external world’ can’t be warranted. Rather, the crucial consequence of Humean scepticism is precisely that the general *assumptions* on which ordinary perceptual warrants depend aren’t epistemically grounded. This seems to entail both that our knowledge and justifications, such as they are, don’t rest on secure bases, and that those assumptions may be other than what they actually are—that they may actually be different or may be changed at will, did we so wish or find it convenient to do so. Humean scepticism would thus lead to embracing the idea of *ungrounded, a-rational foundations* and would open the way to *epistemic relativism*.

In this paper I will not discuss the issue of epistemic relativism, which may grow out of Humean scepticism, even though—it should be stressed—it isn’t either identical with it, or a view Humean sceptics themselves would be happy with, since that would reinstate some kind of knowledge and justifiedness within different epistemic systems, with their characteristic, different and incompatible assumptions, sceptics are concerned to deny.<sup>31</sup> In the following I will be content to argue against the Humean sceptic’s idea that since our basic assumptions aren’t warranted this is enough to place them outside epistemic rationality *tout court*. One last word of caution, though, in order to

<sup>30</sup> Cartesian scepticism doesn’t target directly the assumption ‘There is an external world’ but, rather, the presupposition that we aren’t victims of sustained delusions or dreams. Here I’ll focus only on the kind of scepticism whose target is the former assumption—i.e. Humean scepticism—leaving Cartesian scepticism for another occasion. See Coliva *forthcoming*.

<sup>31</sup> I do discuss it, though, in a number of places, such as Coliva 2009, *forthcoming*, and also in connection with Wittgenstein’s position in *On Certainty* in Coliva 2010a, b.

help stay clear of possibly relativistic drifts and to better situate the proposal I shall presently make. It is important to keep in mind that the kind of assumptions I will be talking about are very general and fundamental ones that, as I will claim, are operative in the *basic* epistemic practice of gathering perceptual warrants for ordinary empirical propositions, which is itself constitutive of epistemic rationality. Such a practice, I take it, is at the core of *all* human life, given the kind of creatures we are, for large portions of our knowledge do come, and can only come for us, from experience. Hence, nothing of what I will be saying in the following bears on other kinds of assumptions or on non-basic epistemic practices, which aren't themselves constitutive of epistemic rationality, and that—I think—can actually be proved not to be rational, like forming beliefs on the basis of horoscopes or of casting dice (cf. n. 35).

Thus, in response to the idea that our assumptions aren't rational, or are only pragmatically rational, it should be noted that there are assumptions—I mean propositions that are the contents of assumptions—which are constitutive of what we—and, crucially, even if implicitly, a sceptic<sup>32</sup>—take (empirical) epistemic rationality to be.<sup>33</sup> Let me explain. I take it that the notion of epistemic rationality doesn't hang in the air, but depends on our practices. In particular, it depends on the *basic practice* of producing, assessing and withdrawing from ordinary empirical beliefs, such as 'Here's a hand', 'This wall is red', and so on, *interpreted as being about mind-independent objects*,<sup>34</sup> *on the basis of the deliverances of our senses*.<sup>35</sup> Now, if, as a Humean sceptic shows, that practice rests on assuming—with no warrants—that there is an external world, that our sense organs are mostly working reliably, and that one isn't the victim of a lucid

<sup>32</sup> Here I will be talking of a sceptic, but what I am saying can easily be transposed simply in terms of the notion of epistemic rationality which is usually taken for granted in order to run a Humean sceptical paradox.

<sup>33</sup> Here I will confine myself to considerations pertaining to *empirical* epistemic rationality—viz. the rationality produced by empirical and, as we shall see in a moment, basic epistemic practices such as forming, assessing, and withdrawing from beliefs about objects in our surroundings on the basis of the deliverances of our senses. I will not take into account a priori epistemic rationality (assuming that a priori warrants could actually speak to the truth of what they are meant to provide warrant for). For this reason, and for ease of exposition, in the following I will drop the qualification 'empirical'.

<sup>34</sup> The latter, I take it, is common ground among sceptics and non-sceptics alike, since sceptics are no idealists! So idealists are in fact reverting to a different notion of epistemic rationality. Hence, they aren't being epistemically rational by our lights. Notice, moreover, that I have doubts they are actually behaving in accord with such an allegedly different notion of epistemic rationality (cf. n. 18). Be that as it may, here I am dealing with Humean sceptics only. A treatment of idealism would have to be deferred to another occasion. But see Coliva 2009 and forthcoming.

<sup>35</sup> Notice that I am talking only of *basic* epistemic practices which, in my view, are constitutive of epistemic rationality. (For a similar view about epistemic practices and their unavoidability, though in an epistemically realist framework I would resist, cf. Boghossian 2006.) I am not talking of non-basic epistemic practices such as forming beliefs on the basis of casting dice or of consulting oracles. Arguably, the latter practices wouldn't be basic because they presuppose reliance on one's perception in the first place. The extension of basic epistemic practices can be a matter of discussion. In particular, the practices of forming beliefs on the basis of either memory or testimony will have to be analysed in detail, to see whether they would count as basic or not. This, however, isn't an issue I can take up here. Let me simply register that if they did, then also their respective assumptions, such as 'I haven't come into existence only a few seconds ago endowed with apparent memories' and 'Other people are generally reliable sources of information', would count as constitutive of epistemic rationality.

and sustained dream, then those assumptions are constitutive of epistemic rationality itself. If so, there seems to be no cogent reason to hold that they lie *outside* its scope. Indeed, their being constitutive of epistemic rationality suggests otherwise and, in particular, that they are *part of it*. For they make it possible for us to have empirical warrants for and against ordinary empirical propositions. To reiterate: it's only thanks to assumptions like 'There is an external world' that we can form the justified belief 'Here is a hand', when we have a hand-like experience; or else revise that belief by realizing that it is a papier-mâché object, and so on. Therefore, such assumptions are neither irrational nor a-rational. That is to say, they are neither held against contrary empirical reasons, as there are none, nor in an epistemically irresponsible way, for the whole system of our ordinary empirical beliefs speaks in their favour. Yet, this is no reason to hold them true, once we realize that those very beliefs are themselves justified only thanks to those assumptions. We may put the point by saying that these assumptions are 'basically' epistemically rational, since, while being epistemically unwarrantable, they are constitutive of epistemic rationality itself. Hence, for an internal rationalist, epistemic rationality ought to be defined as follows:

**Epistemic rationality<sub>i</sub>**: it comprises either evidentially warranted propositions or unwarrantable assumptions that make the acquisition of perceptual warrants possible in the first place.

If so, and this is the crucial point, both sceptics and non-sceptics alike are *required* by the lights of epistemic rationality itself to assume that, for example, there is an external world. Hence, they are equally *mandated* by the notion of epistemic rationality they are committed to, in virtue of participating in the basic epistemic practice of forming, assessing and withdrawing from ordinary empirical beliefs on the basis of the deliverances of the senses, to assume it. This, in turn, means that we can't—consistently with a sceptic—provide evidential warrants for it. Yet it does not follow that that assumption lies outside the scope of epistemic rationality either. Hence, a Humean sceptic is guilty of inferring that since our basic assumptions can't evidentially be warranted, they aren't epistemically rational, because—reflectively, though not practically, from my point of view—he upholds *too narrow a notion of epistemic rationality*. Namely:

**Epistemic rationality<sub>sk</sub>**: it comprises only evidentially warranted propositions.

If, in contrast, we appreciate what the notion of epistemic rationality actually entails, we can then see that even though our basic assumptions aren't warranted (indeed warrantable), they are epistemically (basically) rational and required, as they are constitutive of what we take epistemic rationality to be, in virtue of participating in the basic epistemic practice of forming, assessing, and withdrawing from ordinary empirical beliefs on the basis of the deliverances of our senses.

Let me dwell on this point a bit further, by exploiting what I think is a useful analogy. Think of a game and its constitutive rules. Clearly they are part of the game, though no moves within it. So why restrict epistemic rationality to warranted propositions only? It would be like restricting a game only to the moves in it, without considering its rules. Yet, without rules there would be no game and hence no moves within it either. Surely

with epistemic rationality things are a little bit more complicated for its constitutive conditions are, in my view, determined by the practice and don't have a rule-like form (i.e. they neither contain 'oughts', nor come in the (conditional) imperative form '(If C,)  $\phi$ !'). But, even so, we can certainly distinguish between what plays a rule-like *role* with respect to epistemic rationality—viz. the appropriate assumptions—and what, in contrast, plays a move-like role with respect to it, that is, whatever perceptual warrants we in fact possess for specific empirical propositions. Just like rules and moves are both part of a game, so, I contend, both assumptions that allow us to have perceptual warrants and those very warrants are part of epistemic rationality. At any rate, the opposite view, which restricts epistemic rationality to, in fact, epistemic rationality<sub>sk</sub>, is much less obvious, to my mind, than it *prima facie* seems to be.

Notice, furthermore, that the rules that are constitutive of a game aren't mandated *tout court*. Yet, if we changed them, we would be playing a *different* game. Conversely, if we want to play *that* game, then we have to abide by its rules. Similarly in the case of the 'game' of epistemic rationality, that is, the game of forming, assessing, and withdrawing from ordinary empirical beliefs on the basis of perceptual evidence. If, as they are normally portrayed as doing, Humean sceptics want to play it, they have to stick to its constitutive rules, and hence they themselves have to hold on to 'There is an external world'. Recall, moreover, that Humean sceptics aren't epistemic relativists. Hence, they are generally happy to stop themselves well before embracing the view that there are other, equally legitimate notions of epistemic rationality. Rather, as we emphasized at the beginning of this section, they simply claim that our notion of epistemic rationality isn't itself grounded in warranted assumptions and thereby take themselves to have shown that its basic assumptions don't lie within the scope of epistemic rationality itself. But—I claim—this conclusion is based on disregarding the fact that the very notion of epistemic rationality they themselves are committed to, in virtue of participating and allowing for the practice of forming, revising, and withdrawing from ordinary empirical beliefs on the basis of perceptual evidence, actually mandates the assumption of its constitutive rules, such as 'There is an external world'.

Contrary to Wright, moreover, who holds:

**Epistemic rationality<sub>cw</sub>**: it comprises either evidentially warranted propositions or non-evidentially warranted ones,

the diagnosis of the sceptical mistake isn't that it ultimately depends on *too narrow a notion of warrant*, but, simply, on *too narrow a conception of epistemic rationality*. One, that is, which confines epistemic rationality to warranted (warrantable) propositions only, while it extends also to those presuppositions which, though unwarrantable, make the acquisition, assessment, and withdrawal from empirical belief on the basis of the deliverances of our senses possible in the first place, and are therefore mandated by it.

Finally, it is important to stress that we are mandated by epistemic rationality itself to accept that there is an external world. Hence, we don't do so just because we can't

(psychologically or culturally) help it, or because we can't but do so if we are interested in preserving practices which have proved useful to us. The mandate we have for 'There is an external world' doesn't come from our psychological constitution or from practical rationality, but from the very notion of epistemic rationality itself. Of course, in my view, epistemic rationality depends on a practice, but that doesn't make its requirements any more pragmatic or practical than noticing that mathematics depends, at least for humans, on a practice would make its rules and axioms pragmatic in nature. We can thus visualize the positions in play as follows:

(III)	Not rationally epistemically held	Rationally epistemically held	(Basically) rationally epistemically held
Evidentially unwarrantable	Sceptics		
Evidentially warrantable		Liberals	
Evidentially unwarrantable but non-evidentially warrantable		Conservatives	
Unwarrantable evidentially or otherwise			Moderates

This chart makes it apparent that sceptics and liberals share a common view of epistemic rationality, while conservatives and moderates (of an internal rationalist fashion) depart from that view—viz. epistemic rationality<sub>sk</sub>. Sceptics and liberals, however, take opposite stances on its instances. In contrast, sceptics and conservatives share the same *structural* conception of epistemic rationality—it always depends on warrants—but they partially differ on what they take warrants to be. Finally, sceptics and moderates don't share that structural view either. For, according to moderates, propositions that aren't warrantable *tout court*, yet are constitutive of epistemic rationality, are themselves (basically) epistemically rational.

### 12.5. Internal Rationalism vs. Wright's Entitlements and the Humean Sceptical Challenge

Wright advertises his position as 'rationalist'. And I advertise mine as 'rationalist' too.<sup>36</sup> But his rationalism depends on thinking of having discovered *first-order warrants*—albeit non-evidential ones—that attach to those assumptions and make them epistemically rational. My rationalism is different: it depends on being within

<sup>36</sup> In so doing I think we both don't follow Wittgenstein, at least not the letter of *On Certainty*, despite the fact that Wright (2004a: 189; cf. also Wright 2004b) advertises his own views as Wittgensteinian in spirit. In

a practice—whence the qualification ‘internal’—that grounds a notion—that of epistemic rationality—and, from there, see that also the *tout court* unwarranted/able assumptions that make it possible lie within its scope, by being constitutive of, and therefore rationally mandated by our very notion of epistemic rationality. Yet it remains that a rational mandate isn’t anything which can speak to the likely truth of what it in fact mandates. So it is by no means an epistemic warrant. Indeed, it is part and parcel of the moderate position that genuine epistemic warrants are, beside possibly a priori ones, just ordinary evidential ones, generated within a given epistemic practice, resting, in its turn, on unwarrantable assumptions.<sup>37</sup>

Now, for much the same reason it seems to me that Wright’s entitlements can’t be genuine (first-order) warrants for, as we have seen, they aren’t meant to speak to the likely truth of what should be warranted thereby, viz. ‘There is an external world’. If that is right, then, as a matter of fact, *and contrary to his official pronouncements*, Wright would be proposing a *moderate* conception of the architecture of perceptual warrant, whereby rationally mandated assumptions—as opposed to epistemically warranted ones—together with a certain course of experience, would provide warrant for ordinary empirical propositions. It thus seems to me that, once his proposal is interpreted at its best, it turns out to differ from mine only on matters of detail. That is to say, because we place the origin of the rational mandate we have for ‘There is an external world’ in different kinds of consideration.<sup>38</sup> To stress, the two proposals would be similar because on its best construal Wright’s would end up being a form of moderatism and not because mine would in fact be a form of conservatism, where special warrants such as entitlements are provided for ‘There is an external world’.

Let me, however, clarify things a bit more. On my view, it is a brute fact of epistemic rationality, once properly understood, that it mandates certain assumptions, such as ‘There is an external world’. So one should in fact be careful not to think of rational mandates as (epistemic) goods, produced by philosophical investigation, which attach to assumptions, like ‘There is an external world’, and make them rationally held, by speaking to their likely truth. Rather, the philosophical explanation of this brute fact—granting for the sake of argument that it be correct—provides us with a philosophical argument, and therefore with an a priori warrant that speaks to the truth of a different kind of proposition; namely, ‘It is (basically) epistemically rational to assume that there

contrast, I explicitly acknowledge that I am departing from the letter of *On Certainty*, and developing some of its elements in directions which wouldn’t have been endorsed by its author. See Coliva 2010a: Introduction and ch. 3 on this.

<sup>37</sup> So I agree with Pritchard 2005 and Jenkins 2007, who put pressure on Wright’s claim that his entitlements are genuine epistemic warrants, though Wright himself, as reported in n. 7, doesn’t think they speak to the likely truth of what they are supposed to warrant. But I don’t want to pursue this line of criticism here.

<sup>38</sup> He thinks it is mandated by our conceptual scheme which countenances mind-independent objects, whereas I think it is mandated by considerations having to do with our notion of epistemic rationality. For what is worth, Wright himself (2004a: 203) seems to be dubious of the prospects of success of his ‘entitlement of substance’. I critically discuss them in Coliva 2007. Elements of comparison between my proposal and Wright’s can be found also in Coliva 2012a,c and *forthcoming*.

is an external world', which we are therefore within our rights to *believe*. Once in possession of such a warrant we can of course confront a Humean sceptic who claims the opposite; namely, that such an assumption lies outside the scope of epistemic rationality altogether. Yet, to have such a kind of warrant is completely different from having a warrant that speaks to the likely truth of 'There is an external world, thereby making it rational for us to hold it.

It is my hunch, furthermore, that Wright's own entitlements had better be understood along similar lines—not as epistemic goods produced (or discovered) by philosophical reflection that turn a-rational assumptions into rational ones; nor as philosophical arguments which provide one with a priori warrant for the truth of 'There is an external world'.<sup>39</sup> Rather, they had better be thought of as philosophical arguments that, if successful, would provide one with a priori warrant to believe that the assumption that there is an external world, which as such is unwarrantable though mandated by, in Wright's view, our conceptual scheme, falls within the scope of epistemic rationality. Notice, in fact, that if he somehow tried to say that entitlements are ultimately first-order a priori warrants obtained through philosophical reflection for 'There is an external world', this would create a tension. For, in that case, they would have to speak to the likely truth of that assumption, while, officially, Wright has been concerned to deny that entitlements could achieve that much.<sup>40</sup> Yet, if they did provide such a warrant, why should we then *assume* rather than believe that there is an external world?<sup>41</sup> For, after all, we would then have some kind of a priori evidence for its truth.

Let us now conclude by bringing the preceding considerations to bear on the Humean sceptical challenge. In one sense I think a sceptic wins: in my view, we can't produce genuine epistemic warrants for our basic assumptions—neither evidential nor a priori ones. But, in another sense, he doesn't. For it doesn't follow that he can accuse us to hold assumptions which lie *outside* the scope of epistemic rationality, once properly understood. That is why 'internal rationalism' is indeed an *indirect* response to Humean scepticism. To repeat, by appreciating that epistemic rationality extends also to those assumptions which make it possible in the first place, one will block the unwanted consequence that it rests on non- or a-rational assumptions. The latter lie, rather, within the scope of our notion of epistemic rationality and are mandated by it. Hence, they can't be other than what they in fact are, given our notion of epistemic rationality, once properly characterized. This is no proof or evidence of their truth, but, perhaps, the important lesson to be drawn from all this is that

<sup>39</sup> Notice, moreover, that such a proposal would be dangerous because warrants for our most basic presuppositions would be hostage to some philosophical theory or other. Hence, we had better be sure of having the (W)right philosophical theory, for otherwise it would still be doubtful that assumptions such as 'There is an external world' are a priori warranted. However, the track record of philosophical arguments shouldn't make us terribly confident that we have hit on the right account.

<sup>40</sup> See n. 7.

<sup>41</sup> I think a similar point can be found in Volpe (2012).



epistemic rationality, evidence, and truth, at bottom—viz. when basic assumptions are concerned—come apart.

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