RECENT WORK ON EPISTEMIC
ENTITLEMENT

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ABSTRACT

Tyler Burge and Crispin Wright distinguish between justification and entitlement. For both entitlement is the new notion. For Burge, entitlement is warrant without reasons. Burge’s account of reasons is explained. For Wright, entitlement is a non-evidential right to claim knowledge of authenticity-conditions. Wright’s account is motivated by warrant transmission failure. Burge and Wright mean different things by entitlement; they do not share a common project. Burge’s use connects to mainstream epistemological inquiry into knowledge and warrant. Wright’s use connects to mainstream epistemology inquiry into skepticism and warrant transmission. Recent work from and about both is discussed. Among other results, it is shown that Burge’s distinction is not a version of the internalism vs. externalism distinction. For Burge, both justifications and entitlements are externalist.

As a distinctive notion in epistemology, entitlement is inextricably intertwined with the outlooks of Tyler Burge and Crispin Wright. Burge distinguished entitlement from justification in “Content Preservation” (Burge 1993) and then elaborated in “Perceptual Entitlement” (Burge 2003a). Burge’s Cognition Through Understanding (Burge 2013a) includes three new related essays, and his “Entitlement: The Empirical Basis of Epistemic Warrant” (2020) is a book-length sequel to “Perceptual Entitlement.” Wright distinguished entitlement from justification in “Epistemic Entitlement: Warrant for Nothing (and Foundations for Free?)” (Wright 2004), to which he recently published a sequel: “Epistemic Entitlement II: Welfare-State Epistemology” (Wright 2014). A volume on Wright’s work was published just before, with his replies (Coliva 2012a; Wright 2012).

The mid-century collapse of classical foundationalist approaches to empirical warrant associated with Locke, Hume, Mill, Moore and Russell—among many others—forms the backdrop for the respective projects of Burge and Wright. The classical foundationalist conceived empirical warrant on the model of axiomatic methods in logic and mathematics, especially Euclidean geometry. Basic, self-evident truths formed a foundation that supported theorems through self-evident demonstrative steps involving abstract, general epistemic principles. Since garden-variety perceptual beliefs are far from self-evident, the classical foundationalist saw introspective beliefs about perceptions as the secure starting points instead, for they were (allegedly) self-evident “enough”: infallible, incorrigible, or indefeasible. Empirical beliefs are then warranted from secure reasoning from these secure starting points.

Once dominant, this approach eventually collapsed, for the alleged secure starting points do not exist and the steps are
insufficiently secure. Coherentism emerged first but also soon collapsed, for it too failed to account for empirical warrant. The now dominant position is moderate foundationalism, the view that perceptual representations contribute to an immediate, fallible, defeasible warrant for the perceptual beliefs they normally cause and sustain. Moderate foundationalism can take an externalist-reliabilist or an internalist-evidentialist form. Burge works within the externalist-reliabilist approach. Wright works within the internalist-evidentialist approach. Their introductions of entitlement, however, richly complicates both approaches. Hence the ongoing interest in epistemic entitlement.

We review their projects in light of recent work from and surrounding both philosophers. Our review dispels three misunderstandings. First, Burge and Wright are not involved in a common “entitlement” project. Second, though for both Wright and Burge entitlement is the new notion, “entitlement” is not some altogether third topic not clearly connected to the nature of knowledge or the encounter with skepticism. Third, entitlement vs. justification does not align with the externalism vs. internalism distinction.

1. Burge: Warrant Without Reasons

Burge’s distinction falls within his proper function, reliable competence account of warrant. Warrant consists in meeting natural norms constitutively associated with belief’s representational function, known \textit{a priori}. The function of belief is truth. The function of demonstrative reasoning is to preserve the truth of the premises and support the truth of the conclusion. Belief and reasoning have these functions regardless of the aims or purposes of the subject. These functions determine natural norms. Natural norms need not be represented, endorsed, or serve as guides. Warrant consists in meeting a natural norm associated with belief’s representational function. The natural norm for warrant requires the normal functioning of the belief forming competence, provided the competence is reliable in normal conditions when functioning normally. Warrant thus consists in the normal exercise of reliable competence (Burge 2003a; 2010a; 1999).

When philosophers refer to Burge’s distinction between entitlement and justification, they typically cite (Burge 1993) or (Burge 2003a). Most don’t know that he’s substantially changed his formulation (2013b, pp. 27–28). Interpretations occur in Casullo (2007), Neta (2010), Silins (2012), Wright (2014), Majors (2015) and Graham (in-press b), among others.

Here’s Burge’s first formulation:

\begin{quote}
[E]ntitlements are . . . warrants that need not be understood or even accessible to the subject . . . Justifications . . . involve reasons that people have and have access to (1993, p. 459, emphasis added).
\end{quote}

Justifications \textit{as warrants} are then normal exercises of reliable competencies that involve accessible reasons. Entitlements \textit{as warrants} are then normal exercises that don’t. Was an accessible reason operative? If yes, the warrant is a justification. If no, an entitlement.

How does Burge understand reasons? Burge sees reasons as constitutively associated with the faculty of reason and the activity of reasoning (Burge 2013a, pp. 193, 392). In the first instance, reason is the ability to reason deductively. Reasoning is the exercise of that ability. Paradigm instances of reasons are steps—premises—in deductive reasoning, in arguments for conclusions. He thereby respects a traditional view going back to the Greeks and culminating in Leibniz and Kant.

For Burge, with Leibniz and Kant, reasons are explanatory and justificatory. Reasons provide answers to actual and potential ‘why’ questions: reasons are steps in actual
or potential explanations (2013a, pp. 193, 489–90). But against Leibniz and Kant, reasons are not explanations for truths. Instead, when it comes to reasons for belief, reasons explain the belief-worthiness of a belief for an individual; reasons explain the ground for a conclusion. That’s why they are also justificatory.

As explanatory, reasons are necessarily propositional, and so representational, for only propositions can answer why-questions (2013a, p. 490). This conception of reasons as propositional and representational means reasons are not worldly facts, objects, or events. Worldly facts ground reasons, they cannot be reasons (2013a, pp. 192–3). Non-representational sensations and non-propositional perceptual representations cannot be reasons either. A sensation or a perception is not a reason for belief. That’s the ontology of reasons.

Reason differs from critical reason. Critical reason is a higher-order, reflective ability. It involves the ability to meta-represent representational states; the ability to represent them as reasons; the ability to think epistemic concepts—*truth, reliability, knowledge, warrant, normal conditions, defeating conditions*, and the like; and the ability to think general epistemic principles concerning the conditions for epistemic warrant and knowledge.

Burge claims having reason and reasons does not require having critical reason and critical reasons. Having reason and reasons thus does not require the ability to cite one’s reasons as explanations for the belief-worthiness of the conclusion. The explanation can be in one’s psychology without the individual being able to give the explanation (2013a, pp. 109, 193, 391, 397).

Burge gives two categories of beliefs warranted by reasons: beliefs warranted by self-sufficient premises, and beliefs warranted by other warranted beliefs through reasoning (2013a, p. 367).

The former includes understanding *cogito* thoughts and simple logical and mathematical truths. Our warrant for believing these thoughts resides in understanding them. These beliefs are self-evident; they constitute reasons for themselves (2013b, pp. 14, 48; see Audi 2018). Understanding them suffices to make the reasonability of accepting them self-explanatory.

In warranted reasoning, the warranted premises are the reasons for the conclusion; they combine with a competence with an inference rule to provide rational support for the conclusion. The premises combined with the rule provide some “insight” into the nature of the connection between the premises and the conclusion for the individual (2013b, p. 43).

The course of good reasoning from premises P, Q, R to conclusion C provides an answer to the question: why conclude C? The premises are thereby reasons.

Associative inferences on the other hand—whether innate or learned—do not involve reasoning. The premises—though propositional and representational—are not reasons, for they do not combine with an inference rule so as to function as reasons.

In self-evidence cases, reasons are propositional *understood*. In reasoning cases, reasons are warranted propositional attitudes (premises) that *combine with a competence with an inference rule*. Animals lack understanding of self-evident propositions. But if an animal reasons, it has reasons for some of its beliefs.

On Burge’s original formulation, justifications are warrants involving accessible reasons; entitlements are warrants without accessible reasons. So understood Burge’s distinction is orthogonal to the inferential vs. non-inferential warrant distinction. Some justifications are non-inferential (self-evidence cases—they involve reasons) and some entitlements are inferential (associative inference cases—they do not involve reasons (Burge 2013a, pp. 493–5)), *pace interpretations from*
We’ve just reviewed Burge’s view of reasons. How does he conceive of access?

The strongest grade of access would require the exercise of reflective critical reason—higher-order epistemic access to the epistemic quality of one’s reasons. Animals, small children, and ordinary adults lack accessible reasons in this sense.

An intermediate grade only requires the ability to meta-represent representational states—*I am having a perception as of a brown square, I have the belief that I am older than my sister*—and the ability to use them in arguments. Animals and small children cannot access reasons in this sense for they lack both abilities.

A weak grade only requires the ability to *consciously think* the reason. If a non-human animal can consciously reason—if it can consciously reason deductively about first-order subject-matters—then it can have accessible reasons in this sense. Small children and adults clearly have accessible reasons in this sense.

What grade does Burge have in mind? Casullo (2007, p. 267) read Burge as requiring the strongest grade. Majors (2015) showed this is incorrect. Burge meant the weakest sense. Accessible reasons are consciously retrieval (thinkable) reasons. Animals and small children can access their reasons in this sense (Burge 2003a; 2003b; 2010a; 2010b; 2019, n. 20).

Why believe perceptual warrants are entitlements and not justifications? Burge gives two arguments.

The first we call the ontological argument. It goes as follows. First, reasons for belief are either self-sufficient warrants or warranted steps in reasoning. Justifications are warrants from accessible reasons. Second, perceptual representations are not reasons. Perceptual beliefs are neither self-evident nor the result of reasoning. Hence, perceptual warrants—the basis of empirical warrant—do not involve reasons. Perceptual warrants are entitlements, not justifications.

Contemporary epistemologists—especially contemporary moderate foundationalists within the internalist-evidentialist camp—resist Burge’s claim that perceptions are not reasons. John Pollock was among the first moderate foundationalist to call perceptions reasons even though they are clearly not self-evident nor obviously steps in reasoning (1974; 1986; for recent examples see Comesaña and McGrath 2016; Smithies 2018). Many epistemologists talk this way. Indeed, talking this way is so commonplace that many students learn to use “reason” in epistemology to mean warrants from perceptions, among other states. Many readers must find Burge’s claim that perceptions are not reasons for perceptual belief bizarre.

On Burge’s diagnosis, the urge to call perceptions *reasons* derives from the classical foundationalist project. The classical project saw rational systems—like logic and mathematics—as self-contained; there are no starting-points or inputs to a rational system that are not already within “the space of reasons”—rational systems have no non-rational inputs. Since empirical warrant forms a rational system, the starting points must be reasons. In Burge’s jargon, all empirical warrants were *justifications*.

The contemporary internalist foundationalist agrees that beliefs about perceptions fall short of self-evidence and are not steps in reasoning. But if the belief about the perception is not the reason, so the idea goes, the perception itself must be the reason. For otherwise empirical knowledge cannot form a self-contained, rational system. As Declan Smithies (2018) puts it, “perception is a source of knowledge of the external world only if perception makes it reasonable to form beliefs about the external world” and perceptions do that “only if they are reasons.” Hence, he concludes, perceptions are reasons.
Burge rejects the urge to extend the category of reasons. Perceptual warrant inputs to the space of reasons, for perceptual beliefs serve as premises (and so as reasons) in deductive or inductive reasoning. But perceptions are not reasons. Perception is a resource for reason, not an instance of reason. Not all rational systems are closed systems.7

Burge’s second argument for perceptual entitlement is the hyper-intellectualization argument. It goes as follows. First, higher non-human animals (conceivably) have warranted perceptual beliefs, as well as young children and ordinary adults. Second, animals, young children and ordinary adults do not have reasons (or even the ability to have reasons) for their perceptual beliefs. Hence requiring reasons for warrant for their perceptual beliefs hyper-intellectualizes perceptual warrant.

Many readers have ignored Burge’s ontological argument and have focused on the hyper-intellectualization argument instead. For some, it is the only argument for entitlement.8

Burge does not simply claim that demanding critical reasons hyper-intellectualizes perceptual warrant. Burge’s argument is that demanding any reasons for perceptual belief—not just critical reasons—hyper-intellectualizes perceptual warrant (Burge 2003a, p. 259; 2011, pp. 64–65). John McDowell is clearly aware of this point. Even so he insists that adult perceptual knowledge involves reasons. He first grants (though in a way we do not see as consistent with the rest of his view) that animals and small children have a kind of perceptual knowledge that is “outside” the space of reasons. And so, it seems, he grants to Burge that perceptual warrant for animals and small children involves entitlements, not justifications. But he resists this conclusion for “adult, mature human knowledge.” Adult human perceptual knowledge, he argues, is a different kind—a species of a genus—that stands “inside” the space of reasons. It does not require critical reason, but it requires reasons even so. He then says the reasons adult perceptual warrant requires aren’t hard to acquire. The ability to think I see that such and such is easy enough. Thus, requiring reasons in the adult case does not hyper-intellectual adult perceptual knowledge.

Though Burge agrees that some adults have reasons like these in favor of their perceptual beliefs, he disagrees that animal and childhood perceptual knowledge comprises a different species of perceptual knowledge. Adult perceptual knowledge is no different than childhood perceptual knowledge. And though Burge agrees that some adults have this kind of reason for their perceptual beliefs, he thinks requiring it still hyper-intellectualizes perceptual warrant, for he does not think every adult has such a reason for all of their perceptual beliefs. For to use I see that such and such or I have a perception as of a brown sphere as a reason for a perceptual belief, the adult would have to be able to use it as a premise in an argument (I see that brown sphere, so that is a brown sphere) and also have a capacity that minimally respects defeasibility conditions on those reasons so as to respond or retract in light of objections. This latter capacity implies a “know-how” ability to respond to potential defeaters by accepting or defending against them in particular cases (and not necessarily the ability to think the general concept defeating conditions). Burge then doubts that all adult humans with perceptual knowledge have this “know how” mastery. Some do, some don’t. That’s why he thinks even this move hyper-intellectualizes adult perceptual knowledge (Burge 2011, pp. 64–65).10

Regardless, one can ask what warrants the higher-level belief I see that such and such. It is not self-evident. It is not obviously the result of an inductive or deductive argument. Its warrant does not derive from reasons. Hence its warrant is an entitlement. We’re
now back to where we started: Burge’s ontological argument that given the nature of reasons, not all warrants involve reasons.\textsuperscript{11} The ontological argument seals the deal.

We now turn to the relation between Burge’s distinction and the internalism vs. externalism distinction. In “Content Preservation” Burge didn’t mention internalism or externalism. But in “Perceptual Entitlement” he wrote that:

\ldots entitlement \ldots is epistemically externalist. \ldots [it] contrasts with the internalist form of warrant—justification (Burge 2003a, p. 504, n. 1).

People commonly cite these two papers to show that Burge has established the existence of internalist versus externalist warrant and knowledge. Justification is “access-internalist” while entitlement is not. If there is an orthodox interpretation of the significance of Burge’s distinction, it is this one.

But this interpretation is mistaken. First, when Burge placed an access condition on justification, he meant that the reason must be consciously thinkable. It is unclear this is what your typical internalist means by access. So it is not clear Burge’s original thought was internalist to begin with.

Second, your typical internalist thinks the entire basis for epistemic status must be appropriately internal. But Burge never held that view for justifications in general. Again it is not clear Burge’s original thought was internalist to begin with.

Third, Burge recently repudiated the idea that all justifications require accessible reasons. Justification as such no longer requires access. Here is his recent formulation:

\begin{quote}
A justification is a warrant that consists partly in the operation or possession of a reason \ldots An entitlement is a warrant whose force does not consist, even partly, in the individual’s using or having a reason. Entitlements \ldots derive \textit{purely} from the individual’s psychological system operating well with regard to realizing or fulfilling its representational functions (Burge 2013b, pp. 3–4, emphasis added).
\end{quote}

Entitlements are normal exercises of reliable competence \textit{without} reasons. Justifications are normal exercises of reliable competence \textit{with} reasons. The operative reasons need not be accessible, i.e., \textit{consciously} thinkable. Call this the \textit{Operative Reasons} criterion.\textsuperscript{12}

Burge thereby dropped the access (qua consciously thinkable) criterion on justifications. Why? He imagined the possibility of modular (and so inaccessible to the individual) propositional reasoning, and so the possibility of modular reasons (Burge 2011, p. 64). He then thought, even so, the warrants involving modular reasons would still be justifications (Burge 2013b, pp. 27–8).

His examples include modules for syntactic and semantic interpretation of utterances; they may involve deductive or inductive reasoning, inaccessible to the individual. A module for basic pragmatic processing might be another example. The modular/non-modular and sub-propositional/propositional distinctions then do not coincide. Non-modular but even so contingently inaccessible—think of the Freudian unconscious—might be another example (Gerken 2020).

Entitlements—especially perceptual entitlements—are access-externalist in every sense. They do not require critical reason; they do not require meta-representation of one’s perceptions; they do not even require \textit{conscious} perceptions. Burge argues for the existence of unconscious perceptions (2010a). He then allows for the possibility that a Super-Blindsight would have warranted perceptual beliefs based on irretrievably unconscious perceptions. That’s why entitlements are warrants that “need not be understood or accessible to the subject.”

As we just noted, Burge’s older formulation of justification did not fall squarely within the internalist camp. Given Burge’s new formulation, justifications are clearly not internalist in any sense; they are access-externalist in every sense. They do not
constitutively require critical reason; they do not require meta-representation of one’s reasons; and they no longer require conscious accessibility of the warranting reason. Reasons—especially perceptual reasons for other beliefs—are also warranted by relations—representational, causal, and reliable—to a broader environment. Justification is neither access-internalist nor mentalist-internalist. Burge’s original access conception was a very weak “internalist” conception to begin with. Without the access requirement, Burge drops the link with internalism. Justification is not constitutively internalist in any sense. 13

2. Wright: Warrant for Nothing

We now turn to Wright’s project. In general, Wright does not conceive of “warrant” the way Burge does. Wright’s default use of “warrant” follows traditional “evidentialist-internalist” patterns where justification—evidential warrant—consists in experiences, memories, beliefs, and relations among them, and so on, that provide propositional warrant for the individual to believe various propositions (though, as we’ll see, Wright happily acknowledges externalist, reliabilist warrants, as Burge and others conceive them).

Why does Wright introduce entitlement? What role does it play? Consider three conversations:

“Hey Sue, two hands! Two external objects!”
“Uh, John, why do you think that?”
“Well Sue, it looks to me like I have two hands!”
“So you are taking for granted that sense-perception reveals an external world?”
“Naturally!”

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“Look Hwan, zebras!”
“But Seong-Woo, why do you think those are zebras?”
“They look like zebras. Surely they are zebras!”
“But then aren’t you taking for granted that things are as they seem, that, in fact, those animals are not cleverly disguised mules?”

“Ugh! Yes Hwan, of course I am.”

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“That red wall really stands out.”
“Why do you think it’s red?”
“It looks red.”
“Aren’t you then presupposing that it’s not a white wall, illuminated by red light?”
“Now that you mention it, I guess so. So what?”

In these conversations there’s a question (are those zebras?) and a method (looking from a safe distance). Call any pair of a question and a method for answering a cognitive project (Wright 2012, p. 466; 2014, p. 215). When engaged in a cognitive project, there are conditions that if one doubted them, one would have to rationally doubt that one’s method will answer one’s question (Wright 2012, p. 467; 2014, p. 215). Wright calls these authenticity-conditions. “In general,” Wright says, they “include such things as: normal and proper functioning of relevant cognitive faculties, the reliability of instruments utilized, the amenability of the circumstances to the proposed method of investigation . . . and so on” (Wright 2012, p. 467; 2004, pp. 189, 194; 2014, p. 215).

Furthermore, when “laying claim to one’s epistemic accomplishments” one must “take ownership of one’s commitment to the satisfaction of the authenticity-condition in question, and that commitment would have to be in good standing” (Wright 2012, p. 475). And that’s what we do. When engaged in a cognitive project, we take for granted, assume, presuppose or accept that our method will answer our question, that the method is working normally in proper conditions. When we reflectively claim knowledge, we claim to be in good conditions in good working order.

Cornerstones or hinges are authenticity-conditions that involve wide swaths of inquiry (Wright 2004, p. 190; 2014, pp. 216–17, 221). 14 Examples include:

• There is an external world that sense-experience informs us about.
• Nature is pretty uniform; we learn about nature through induction and abduction.
• Other people have minds we learn about through observing their behavior.

When we form beliefs through perception, induction, observation, and so on, we take for granted, presuppose, assume or accept cornerstone propositions. When we reflectively claim knowledge, we accept cornerstones. Doubt these, and game over.

Wright credits Wittgenstein with several insights about inquiry and authenticity-conditions. First, at the level of “reflective inquiry,” in so far as we are rational and understand the issue, we cannot avoid acknowledging our commitment to authenticity-conditions. Second, to rely on the evidence provided by a method is not to have evidence that their authenticity-conditions obtain. Our methods tell us about their subject-matter, not about themselves. Third, investigating authenticity-conditions of a cognitive project starts a new cognitive-project (a new question/method pair) with its own authenticity-conditions. We hereby reach the fourth point: investigating authenticity-conditions, though possible, invites an infinite regress, if we require investigation in every case.

Putting this altogether, when we claim knowledge, we accept—and often explicitly avow—that our authenticity-conditions obtain. We also take our commitment to be in good order (Wright 2002, p. 342). We do not doubt—absent specific reasons to doubt—our situational provenance.

But our method provides no evidence that our commitments obtain. We thereby make a commitment we take to be in good order, but without any evidence backing our commitment, at least not from the method used. And if we were to seek evidence for its truth, we’d start a snowball rolling that might turn into an avalanche, for once we do, we are starting a new project with new commitments without evidence for them.

We now arrive at Wright’s notion of transmission failure. In some arguments, the warrant for a premise(s) transmits to the conclusion: the warrant for the premise(s) is the warrant for the conclusion. But in other cases, the warrant does not transmit from the premise to the conclusion. That’s when transmission fails. In this latter case, if the conclusion is warranted, then the warrant for the conclusion comes from some other source, not from the warrant for the premise(s) (Wright 2002, pp. 331–332).

When does warrant fail to transmit? When the conclusion is the authenticity-condition(s) for the method used to generate the warrant for the premise:

[I]f the animals are zebras, then it follows that they are not mules painstakingly and skillfully disguised as zebras. Does one’s warrant transmit to the latter claim? There is a strong intuition that it does not. Did one examine the animals closely enough to detect such a fraud? Almost certainly not. The grounds one has for “those animals are zebras”—essentially, the look of the beasts—have no bearing on this possibility (Wright 2002, p. 342).

In such a case, the warrant for one’s premise does not warrant one’s claim that authenticity-conditions obtain. Hence, transmission fails.

[Y]ou cannot, merely by looking at animal, or the wall, get in position to rationally claim that conditions are suitable for the identification of animal species, or surface colours, just on the basis of unaided vision (Wright 2012, p. 468).

This is Wittgenstein’s point: using a method that gives evidence does not give evidence that the method works. That’s why you can’t infer that the method works as a conclusion from the evidence it provides; there’s no evidence that the method works within the evidence that it provides.

My basic suggestion about transmission failure, in the most general (somewhat overstated terms), is this: that you cannot rationally transmit a claim to warrant for certain premises across an entailment to anything that is an
We’ve entered the terrain of epistemic circularity. If we are trying to establish the cornerstone, then we can’t assume they are true when looking for evidence they are true. Even so, Wright insists that we do have warrant—an epistemic right—to claim cornerstones. We have a right to claim our most based methods work. But because of transmission failure, the right to claim cornerstone does not transmit from the evidence that our methods provide.

But if not from the evidence provided by our methods, then where? Classical foundationalists hoped we could come up with independent evidence from a priori understanding, self-knowledge and reasoning to evidentially warrant cornerstones. If Wittgenstein is our guide, that’s impossible. There’s no independent evidential warrant supporting our entire cognitive enterprise. This is the failure of classical foundationalism that matters for Wright.

We have arrived at the skeptical paradox as Wright sees it. When we claim knowledge, we claim cornerstones. We are warranted in so doing. But there’s no evidential warrant to claim cornerstones. So how could we be warranted in so doing? The skeptic concludes we cannot, in good conscience, rationally claim cornerstones. To shake off the skeptic, Wright introduces entitlement.

Take the widely shared idea of evidential warrant—our perceptual experiences, memories, other beliefs, and so on—and call it justification. Justification is evidential epistemic warrant to believe a proposition. Then introduce another kind of epistemic warrant that is non-evidential. Unlike justification, it is not a right to believe a proposition, but rather a right to accept a proposition. Accepting a proposition isn’t believing it. It is rather to act for all purposes as if one believes it (without any evidence for it, but also without any grounds to doubt it). Call this kind entitlement. Justification is evidential epistemic warrant to believe a proposition. Entitlement is non-evidential epistemic warrant to accept a proposition. That’s Wright’s distinction.

Why then do we have an epistemic right to claim cornerstones? Not because we have an evidential right—a justification—to believe cornerstones. It is because we have a non-evidential right—an entitlement—to accept cornerstones. Entitlement is the independent epistemic warrant for cornerstones we were looking for. That’s why we are in rational good order when we claim knowledge and cornerstones. The skeptic wins provided that only justifications can warrant claims to cornerstones. But if entitlement can fill that gap, we retain our right to claim provenance “on the grand scale we customarily assume.” That’s Wright’s idea.

Before we turn to Wright’s reasons for thinking there are entitlements in this sense, we should ask why he doesn’t simply settle for reliabilism. The skeptic’s mistake, according to reliabilism, is to assume that the only way to have knowledge is through arguments that rely only on resources available from the internal point of view. Instead, our knowledge that we have hands—our perceptual knowledge—comes from our situational provenance (Greco 2000). So why not reliabilism?

Wright’s reply is partly concessive. According to textbook skepticism, the skeptic denies knowledge of the external world, the past, the unobserved, other minds, and so on. If the textbook skeptic is right, knowledge in these domains is impossible. But if the externalist-reliabilist is right, then (for creatures like us, suitably situated, contingently so, in good circumstances) knowledge in these domains is actual, hence possible. How could the skeptic, from the armchair, show we’re not in good conditions? The skeptic can’t threaten our situational provenance (Wright 2004,
Wright then agrees with reliabilists that a lack of evidential warrant for cornerstones does not entail lack of knowledge in these domains. Furthermore, Wright thinks externalist-reliabilist warrants transmit from premises to conclusions. So, Wright thinks, on an externalist-reading, we know we have hands, that there is an external world, and we can even know we know these things (2012, pp. 455–456, 458, 471).

But Wright doesn’t think this answers skepticism. Wright distinguishes two tasks for epistemology: examining the situational provenance and truth-conduciveness of our belief-forming mechanisms, on the one hand, and examining considerations of intellectual integrity, on the other. Both tasks are, he says, “indispensable”— neither reduces to or “trumps” the other (2004, p. 210–11).

What intellectual integrity wants, but skepticism threatens, is “good conscience” for the claim that good conditions—circumstantial providence—are realized “on the grand scale we customarily assume” (2004, p. 211). “Sure, if you are in good conditions, then good for you” the skeptic says. “But what reason can you provide—a reason that does not assume that you are in good conditions—for claiming you are in good conditions? Our canons of intellectual integrity require an answer. Since any reason from perception would assume that you are in good conditions, you’ll have to retreat to the internal point of view to find such a reason. But you can’t find one there. When you reflect on the claims for cornerstones ordinary people so readily make, you’ll see they are, in the end, without a rational foundation. Your cornerstones may be true, and maybe even known by reliabilist lights, but even so, you have no right to claim cornerstones. I challenge the epistemic right to claim cornerstones, not our knowledge of cornerstones.”

For Wright, it’s at the “level of claims to warrant”—not the “level of knowledge”— where we find the “most worrying sceptical challenges” (2014, p. 220). For the skeptic’s challenge is to be “understood in terms of—and to be settled by—canons of intellectual integrity. The paradoxes of skepticism are paradoxes for the attempt at a systematic respect of those canons” (2004, p. 211). When we respect those canons we work from the armchair, using “just the resources of a priori reflection, deductive inference, and ordinary self-knowledge . . . of our own beliefs, desires, experiences, appearances, and passion” (2008, p. 507). Appeals to situational provenance occur outside of the armchair. The task of discovering our warrant to claim cornerstones is then a task “for the internalist.” Skepticism is then “the nemesis of internalism” (2014, p. 220) that externalism is “impotent” to address (2004, p. 210). That’s why not reliabilism. Question asked, question answered.

Entitlement so far is a name for a role: armchair non-evidential warrant to claim cornerstones. Why think anything occupies that role? Wright explores four “paths”: strategic entitlement, entitlement to cognitive project, entitlement of rational deliberation, and entitlement of substance.

Strategic entitlement follows Reichenbach’s case for the rationality of relying on induction. Just as it can be rational when living on a deserted island to eat the available fruit without evidence that it is edible—one’s best bet is to eat it, even if it turns out to be inedible—it can be rational to rely on induction. Relying on induction can’t bring about a worse result than other strategies, but in some cases, it brings about a better result. Relying on induction can’t bring about a worse result than other strategies, but in some cases, it brings about a better result. Relying on induction is then the dominant strategy. Similarly, one may not know that perception is reliable, but if any way of finding out about the external world works, perception works. In neither case do we have armchair evidential warrant to believe a cornerstone. Instead we have an armchair case for rationally trusting a cornerstone for it’s the dominant strategy, given epistemic goals (2004, pp. 178–188).
**Entitlement to cognitive project** builds on what we’ve learned from Wittgenstein: taking authenticity-conditions for granted is inescapable in any cognitive project. If we were to investigate those, that would be a new cognitive project, with new authenticity-conditions, and on we go. Epistemic responsibility couldn’t require us to do this forever; we can’t be required to do something we couldn’t ever do. And if not forever, then not at the first step. The alternative is cognitive paralysis. Hence, if (i) we have no sufficient reason to believe a proposition expressing an authenticity-condition is untrue, and (ii) attempting to justify that proposition would lead to justifying new authenticity-conditions without limit, then we have a rational right to trust the authenticity-condition we started with. We’re entitled to claim authenticity-conditions, provided we have no sufficient reason to believe they’re false (2004, pp. 188–197).

A standard objection to this path is that it’s too permissive—too relativist (my crystal ball doesn’t tell me about its authenticity-conditions . . . so I’m entitled to rely on it?). Wright doubts the force of this objection, for we either have plenty of evidence it doesn’t work to begin with, or if we tried justifying its reliability, we’d find independent evidence either for or against. Even so, one can construct permisive cases where Wright’s conditions are met.20

**Entitlement to rational deliberation** says that since we are rational agents who must deliberate about what to do, and since such deliberation depends on nomic regularities, rational deliberators must trust in induction. Since accepting the Uniformity Thesis partly constitutes rational agency—we can’t play the deliberation game without deploying induction—we’re entitled to accept it. (2004, pp. 197–200).

**Entitlement to substance** turns from methods—induction, perception, etc.—to ontology. Following a famous Kantian line of reasoning from Strawson and Evans, if we have a conception of our own experiences and our own cognitive locality, we must have a conception of objective entities in space distinct from ourselves, unobserved. We’re so constituted that we can’t have one without the other. Given the first, we’re then rationally entitled to trust that there are substances distinct from ourselves (2004, pp. 200–203).

In each case, Wright aims to provide an *a priori*, non-evidential but rational basis to accept cornerstones. We can then explain why we have a right to claim cornerstones, despite the absence of evidence for believing they are true.

Entitlements also play a role in Wright’s account of the architecture of propositional warrant. One prominent account is Pryor’s “Dogmatism” (2004; 2012), a version of internalist moderate foundationalism: perceptual experiences provide propositional justification for perceptual beliefs, absent grounds for doubt. Moore’s perceptual experience as of hands provides propositional justification to believe the experience transmits to the conclusion. What about transmission failure? Pryor denies that occurs. Instead the argument is merely dialectically ineffective against a skeptic.22

Wright rejects this view. Perceptual experiences alone do not provide warrant for perceptual beliefs. There must also be a warrant to accept—an entitlement—the cornerstone that there is an external world that sense-perceptual experience reliably reveals. The experience as of hands (an evidential warrant), plus the entitlement (a non-evidential warrant) combine to explain Moore’s propositional warrant to believe that he has hands.23

Perceptual experiences require entitlements as supplements to secure their warranting force. Small children do not have to be able...
to conceive of the cornerstone to have an entitlement to the cornerstone, and so to have propositional warrants for perceptual beliefs. But reflective adults must be able to conceive of the cornerstone (authenticity-conditions), claim the cornerstone when the issue arises, and police their reliance on authenticity-conditions when doubt arises (Wright 2012, pp. 477–478; 2014, pp. 223, 244).

Following labels introduced by Pryor, Pryor’s view is called a “Liberal” view about propositional warrant for perceptual belief, while Wright’s is called a “Conservative” view. Annalisa Coliva offers a “Moderate” view. She agrees with Wright that the Liberal view is incorrect. But she disagrees with Wright that a non-evidential entitlement—a strategic entitlement or an entitlement to a cognitive project—plays the supplemental role. Instead she says that assuming cornerstones is constitutive of epistemic rationality; assuming cornerstones is what rationality consists in (Coliva 2012; 2015; in-press; see Schecther and Enoch 2006; Enoch and Schecter 2008). The supplement is provided by the nature of rationality itself, not further a priori arguments that purport to show or explain the rationality of accepting cornerstones. Given assumed cornerstones, perceptual experiences then provide evidential warrant for perceptual beliefs. Coliva’s approach seems to privilege the third path to entitlement.

Wright replies that if Coliva were correct, “there should be a kind of unintelligibility about” the skeptic’s challenge. He doubts that Coliva’s view provides an “intellectually satisfying” response. The skeptic can agree that forming perceptual beliefs commits us to assuming that there is an external world. But the skeptic can intelligibly ask what independent reason we have for believing that our cornerstones are true (2012, pp. 478–80). Wright’s paths to entitlement are efforts to at least provide independent reasons to accept cornerstones, though his response seems to undermine the third path. This should come as no surprise, for in his (2012) and (2014) he prioritizes the first and second.

Given a Conservative view, two puzzles arise. Suppose someone infers from a perceptual experience that they have hands, and then that there is an external world. Does that experience—an evidential warrant—which depends on the non-evidential warrant for the cornerstone—then provide evidential warrant for the conclusion (a cornerstone)? Have we transmuted a non-evidential warrant into an evidential warrant? This is the “alchemy problem.” Now look at the issue from the other direction. Suppose again someone makes the same inference. How then could the perceptual experience provide an evidential warrant—a warrant that contributes to knowledge—if its “foundation” is but a non-evidential warrant? This is the “leaching problem.” Trying to solve these problems under pressure from McGlynn (2014; see also McGlynn 2017) led Wright to suggest he should reformulate his higher-order formulation of transmission failure (2014, pp. 231–235). We shall not pursue this issue.

We now turn to the standard objection to Wright’s project (in particular to the first two paths): Wright-entitlement only presents pragmatic, consequentialist reasons to accept cornerstones, not epistemic reasons, for only evidential reasons to believe qualify as epistemic reasons. The first path—strategic entitlement—emphasizes maximizing expected epistemic consequences; the second—entitlement to a cognitive project—emphasizes cognitive paralysis. We’ll focus on the first. The objection is that this strategy at best provides a pragmatic reason to bet that cornerstones are true, not an epistemic reason to believe they are true. The Reichenbach strategy is like Pascal’s wager: choose the path with the best shot at good consequences; “maximizing epistemic expected utility” rationalizes cornerstone acceptance. But even if the consequences are true beliefs (or other
“epistemic” goods) the rationality of the bet isn’t an epistemic reason to believe a cornerstone. “Epistemic” entitlement isn’t a kind of epistemic warrant after all.25

Wright replies in three steps. First, instrumental, pragmatic reasons can advance any number of ends, whether self-interested, moral, or epistemic. If a pragmatic reason to accept a cornerstone advances epistemic values—the maximizing of true and useful belief, among other goods—then it is also an epistemic reason. True, evidence motivates belief in a way that a pragmatic reason that advances epistemic ends does not. But that just shows there are two kinds of epistemic reasons. So the real issue is not whether “epistemic” entitlement is a kind of epistemic warrant. The real issue is whether having only an epistemic warrant of the non-evidential kind should be a “cause for dismay” (2014, pp. 239–40).

Wright’s second step is then to isolate this cause for dismay. Wright replies (2014) that the force behind the objection is the idea that Reichenbachian reasoning compromises on our standing epistemic value of believing only on the evidence. Call this the “Evidential Ideal,” “tugged at when we confront skeptical paradoxes.” If the Reichenbachian path provides a reason to take the bet and trust the cornerstone, then that reason would have to overpower this opposing “basic, orthodox reason, supplied by our lack of evidence . . . for not believing it” (2014, p. 241). And that is exactly what the Reichenbachian reason does not do. The skeptic demands evidence for cornerstones. No matter how pragmatically rational trusting cornerstones might be, that rationality doesn’t rest on evidence for believing they are true.

Wright’s third step is to undermine the cause for dismay: this “obstructive thought is exactly what needs to be dislodged.”

The basic insight [of Wittgenstein] . . . is that all enquiry is essentially situated in some ac-
ceptances . . . for which we lack evidence. This is not a shortcoming . . . It is in the nature of enquiry that this should be so. There is . . . no . . . epistemically clean slate . . . no . . . dawn of enquiry . . . The accumulation of evidential reason to believe is possible only within the framework set by trusting acceptances . . . without trusting, there is no rational enquiry . . . There is no such thing as apportioning one’s beliefs to the evidence unless some things are accepted without evidence . . . To lament the fact that reflective enquiry rests upon a repository of trust is thus a bit like lamenting that not everyone can be at the front of the queue . . . . [The] Evidential Ideal is incoherent” (2014, pp. 242–44).26

The force behind the standard objection then rests on an incoherent ideal. Epistemic entitlement, even if pragmatic, reveals the epistemic rationality of accepting cornerstone propositions.

But now that we’ve taken an instrumental route, why not go all the way? Pedersen (2020) proposes a form of epistemic consequentialism to account for epistemic warrant, rationality, and reasons in relation to cornerstone acceptance. However, instead of being of help to the friend of entitlement, Pedersen argues that the success of a consequentialist account of cornerstone acceptance would undermine the need for entitlement. For, if epistemic warrant, rationality, and reasons for cornerstone acceptance are accounted for in consequentialist terms, this just shows that epistemic consequentialism—rather than non-evidential entitlement—does the epistemic work. In contrast to Pedersen, Elstein, and Jenkins (2020) develops a consequentialist framework meant to be friendly to entitlement.27

3. Conclusion

Burge responds to classical foundationalism’s failure to secure starting points. Wright responds to the failure to find secure bridges from the starting points to the external world.
They agree the failure shows the need for entitlement. For Burge, that means warrant without reasons. “Burge-entitlements” are (externalist-reliabilist) warrants without reasons. The rational body of empirical warrant is not a closed system. For Wright, that means non-evidential warrant to accept cornerstones. “Wright-entitlements” are armchair non-evidential (pragmatic but epistemic) reasons to accept cornerstone propositions. From 30,000 feet in the air it may seem they are both using “entitlement” to play the same role. But once we descend just a little closer, it becomes apparent that they use the word in very different ways.

Our review should dispel three errors. First, Burge and Wright are not talking about the same thing. They are not engaged in the same “entitlement” project. Citing them together as if they were is a mistake. Second, when they are talking about entitlement, they are not talking about some entirely new branch of epistemology. Burge is analyzing the structure and kinds of warrant and knowledge. Wright is responding to the skeptic. Third, Burge is routinely cited as showing that there are two kinds of warrant and knowledge, one for the externalist and one for the internalist. This is entirely mistaken. He is not declaring peace between these two sides but rather declaring victory for externalism.

Wright sees room for a peace accord. Recall his concession to reliabilism. Whether we know is “external”; whether we have a right to claim knowledge is “internal.” Maybe we are wrong to think there is just one fundamental epistemic value that underwrites all the rest, and that just one camp in the internalism/externalism wars has got to be right about it. Instead “there are various kinds of truth-relevant epistemic good standing that a belief may enjoy.” Epistemologists are then “dealing with a plurality of values, or modes of good standing of . . . belief, some of which may be best construed . . . externally and others . . . internally” (Wright 2002, n. 2) One camp for knowledge; another for the right to claim knowledge. On this point, Burge is free to agree.

In Wright’s sense justification is internalist, as we noted. But what about entitlement? Since one role entitlement plays is to secure rights to claim to know, rights that can only be secured from the “internal” point of view (from the armchair), one might think entitlement is internalist. But since only the philosopher needs to make the case for the existence of non-evidential warrants to claim cornerstones, it turns out that possessing an entitlement to claim a cornerstone—or for a cornerstone to be a piece in the structure of one’s warrant to believe a proposition—does not require access by the individual. That’s the point of Wright’s title “Welfare-State Epistemology.” That’s why entitlement is warrant for nothing.

We then find a piece of common ground between Wright and Burge to conclude our review. We’ll let Wright have the last word:

The major point of similarity between the Burgean notion and mine remains, of course, the “welfare state” aspect: for both of us, the epistemically entitled subject has no epistemic work to do to benefit from the entitlement—indeed, need have no inkling of his entitlement. It is his epistemic right to believe the propositions to which he is entitled, or which are generated by cognitive capacities on which he is entitled to rely, even if he has no conception of entitlement, or his epistemic rights. (2014, p. 224).

“In this respect,” Wright concludes, Burge and Wright coincide” (2014, p. 224).
NOTES

We are grateful to support from the Yonsei Frontier Lab at Yonsei University, helpful discussion of an earlier draft at a meeting of the Korean Society for Analytic Philosophy in December 2018 at Seoul National University, and comments from the editor.

1. Reliabilist-externalist foundationalists include Goldman (1986), Greco (2000), Burge (2003), Lyons (2009), and (Graham 2012), among many others. Internalist foundationalists include Audi (1993) and Feldman and Conee (2004), among many others.


3. Majors (2015; see Graham in-press b) noted Burge systematically uses ‘entitlement’ in two senses, a general and a specific sense. In the general sense, to say we have an entitlement to rely on a belief-forming competence is to say we do not need a meta-justification of its reliability to enjoy knowledge and warrant through its exercise. Burge’s “general” entitlement is a then negative point about what warrant does not require—a meta-justification of reliability—and a positive point about the source of warrant—it “resides in” or “rests on” reliable competence. Burge’s distinction between justification and entitlement involves the specific sense. Entitlements in the specific sense are kinds of warrant for belief.


5. Burge’s distinction also does not line up with Sosa’s between animal and reflective knowledge. Even animals, for Burge, have reasons; some “animal” warrants are justifications. Furthermore, even in “reflection” warrants for self-knowledge are often entitlements. The “with-reasons” and “without-reasons” distinction cuts across the first-order versus higher-order warrant distinction. For more on inference, reasoning, and the difference between them, see Graham (in-press b), Mercier and Sperber (2017), and Balcerak and Balcerak (2019).

6. Pollock’s (1985) sense of access is even weaker. A mental state is accessible iff it is the input to another cognitive process. In other words, if a cognitive process can “access” it, it is “accessible.” It may be modular, unconscious.

7. Normal exercises of reliable competencies involve many elements, representational as well as non-representational, conscious as well as unconscious, and transitions among those elements. Elements that are not accessible reasons Burge calls contributions to an entitlement. When there are no accessible reasons involved in the formation of a belief, the warrant is an entitlement. When an accessible reason is involved, though there are often also many contributions to an entitlement involved as well, the warrant is a justification. Warrants often involve a “mix” of reasons and contributions to entitlements (Burge 2013a, pp. 42, 196, 275, 492).

On Burge’s view, do perceptual states entitle perceptual beliefs? Are perceptual states entitlements? As Majors pointed out, the answer is no (2015, §2). For Burge, the warrant for a perceptual belief consists in the entire sequence of transitions that constitutes the normal functioning of the perceptual belief- forming competence. Perceptual states are one element in the entire sequence. On their own, they don’t entitle anything. Only the whole sequence can do that. Perceptual states, like every other element and transition in the normal exercise of the competence, contribute to an entitlement.

8. See for example Smithies (2018), who only discusses the hyper-intellectualization argument.

10. Smithies (2018) misses the entirety of Burge’s hyper-intellectualization argument. He takes Burge only to consider requiring critical reason. He misses that Burge is arguing that requiring any reason at all for prima facie, default perceptual warrant, not just critical reasons, hyper-intellectualizes perceptual warrant, for animals and children, and not even all adults, can reason in support of their perceptual beliefs.

11. We should point out that McDowell (2008; 2013; 2018) has a different view of reasons. Burge reads McDowell as agreeing that reasons are necessarily propositional. But McDowell does not agree. He has even abandoned his view from Mind and World that perceptions are propositional and involve all the concepts of the perceptual belief they support (2008). But even so, he says perceptions are reasons. Like the moderate foundationalist, he seems to equate reasons with whatever provides warrant. So, for visual perceptual belief, perceptual reasons for McDowell are non-defective exercises to know that one knows through seeing.

12. Gerken (2019) proposes an alternative to Burge’s Operative Reasons criterion, the Reason criterion. For Gerken, justifications involve the exercise of the faculty of reason, entitlements do not. What is reason, according to Gerken? He seems to have in mind the idea that reason is any individual-level, propositional competence. Justifications then arise from individual-level propositional competence. Entitlements then seem to arise only from sub-individual computations by non-personal sub-systems of the individual. He then draws an internalism vs. externalism distinction along these lines.

13. Burge even claims that some warrants “from the internal point of view”—warrants for self-knowledge—are entitlements, not justifications. “… a judgment that I believe that I am older than my sister is not in any sense a reason for itself… The warrants for these cases of self-knowledge” are entitlements, not justifications (Burge 2013b, p. 18).

On the other hand, Burge allows for “access” constrained sub-species of justification. Gerken, for example, distinguishes discursive justifications as a sub-species of justification, which require not only access but critical reason (Gerken 2012; 2013; 2015; 2019). This notion is closer to the ordinary notion of reasons and justification examined by Mercier and Sperber (2017), where reasoning is connected to explaining and justifying. When Sellarsians talk about the game of giving and asking for reasons, they are working at this higher-level.


16. Wright continues: “Again: one looks at a red wall and sees that it is painted red. So one acquires a warrant for thinking that it is red. But its being red entails that it is not white cleverly illuminated by concealed lighting to look as if it is red. Has one thereby acquired a warrant for thinking that? Again, the strong intuition is no” (2002, p. 342).

17. Wright calls the hands, zebra, red wall, and other arguments of the same form, “I-II-III” arguments: For example: I. It looks like those animals are zebras. II. So they are zebras. III. So they are not cleverly disguised mules. This argument has the following form (Wright 2012, p. 467; 2014, pp. 214–15): I. A kind of evidence for P. II. The proposition P itself. III. An authenticity-condition for the method used to move from I to II. Wright claims it’s intuitive that warrant to claim II from I fails to provide a warrant to claim III. When one claims a warrant for II from I, and then claims a warrant for III, so the idea goes, the warrant for II does not transmit to III. If there is a warrant to claim III, it must come from another source.

18. Beyond what we’ve just said, what does it mean to accept a proposition? Good question. For Wright’s discussion, see Wright (2004, pp. 175–184). Wright’s notion differs from Cohen’s and Bratman’s (related though differing) distinctions between belief and acceptance (Cohen 1989; Bratman 1992). Wright does not allow disbelief in P if you accept that P; for Wright, you can’t rationally accept...
or trust against the evidence—you can only do it without evidence. Furthermore, Wright’s notion of rational trust implies a lack of agnosticism or open-mindedness; rational trust in a cornerstone is a kind of rational confidence (2014, p. 227).


23. Notice the parallel with process-reliabilism. On the reliabilist view, a perceptual representation as such does not confer warrant. The cornerstone (the authenticity-condition for perception) must also be true. In Burge-speak, perceptual representations contribute to an entitlement because the perceptual system is a reliable competence, functioning normally in normal conditions. “Reliabilist-externalist” warrant do not require non-evidential warrants to accept cornerstones. Instead they require the truth of cornerstones; they require situational provenance. The reliabilist then also rejects the “Liberal” “Dogmatist” view. The reliabilist also allows for the intelligibility of the skeptic’s question.

25. See Pritchard (2007) and Jenkins (2007) for early statements of the objection. Pritchard (2016, pp. 80–82) takes the pragmatic character of the case for entitlements and develops a different objection. He says because the warrants are prudential, they are compatible with agnosticism about the truth of the cornerstone. Wright’s answer (2014, pp. 226–227) that if the strategy is defined as trusting the cornerstone—where trust excludes open-mindedness about the cornerstone—then agnosticism is ruled out.


28. Entitlements, for Wright, are internalist in the sense that, if they exist, they must be recognizable “by means of traditional internalist resources” if they are “to be used to respond to seminar-room challenges to philosophical scepticism.” Philosophers explain our right to claims to knowledge (our rational right to accept the authenticity-conditions of our knowledge claims) threatened by skeptical paradox by beating the skeptic in the seminar room. Though it’s the job of philosophers to explain our entitlements—no easy task—it’s no duty that falls on anyone else (Wright 2004, pp. 205, 209–210; 2007, n. 6; 2014, p. 223).

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