

EPISTEMIC RESPONSIBILISM AND MOOREAN DOGMATISM

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ABSTRACT: In this paper, I defend Moorean Dogmatism against a novel objection raised by Adam Leite. Leite locates the defectiveness of the Moorean reasoning explicitly not in the failure of the Moorean argument to transmit warrant from its premises to its conclusion but rather in the failure of an epistemic agent to satisfy certain epistemic responsibilities that arise in the course of conscious and deliberate reasoning. I will first show that there exist cases of Moorean reasoning that are not put into jeopardy by the considerations that Leite presents. Second, I will argue that certain commitments of Leite's concerning the notion of warrant are in tension with his verdict that the Moorean reasoning is defective.

KEYWORDS: Moorean dogmatism, immediate justification, inferential justification, James Pryor, Adam Leite

Introduction

Dogmatists such as Pryor maintain that perceptual experiences warrant us immediately in believing propositions about the external world.¹ Pryor takes this to mean that it is not a precondition that, in order for an epistemic agent to be warranted perceptually in believing a proposition *p*, the agent is in need of antecedent and independent warrant to believe something else. In particular, Pryor has in mind that an agent is not in need of antecedent warrant to believe the denials of skeptical possibilities or hypotheses that are incompatible with the truth of *p*, such as the hypothesis that the agent is a brain-in-a-vat deceived by an evil scientist. The view that perceptual experiences warrant us in believing propositions about the external world without the need of any antecedently warranted attitudes concerning the non-obtaining of certain skeptical possibilities has been called by Pryor 'liberalism.'² The opposing view, entitled 'conservatism,'

¹ See James Pryor, "The Skeptic and the Dogmatist," *Noûs* 34 (2000): 517–49; James Pryor, "What's Wrong With Moore's Argument?" *Philosophical Issues* 14 (2004): 349–78; and James Pryor, "There is Immediate Justification," in *Contemporary Debates in Epistemology*, eds. Matthias Steup and Ernest Sosa (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005), 181–202.

² See James Pryor, "When Warrant Transmits," in *Wittgenstein, Epistemology and Mind: Themes from the Philosophy of Crispin Wright*, ed. Annalisa Coliva (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 269–303; and James Pryor "What's Wrong With Moore's Argument?" *Philosophical Issues* 14 (2004): 349–78.

most notably associated with the writings of Crispin Wright, maintains that an epistemic agent is in need of such antecedent warrant in order to be justified via a perceptual state.³ The dogmatist or liberalist view seems to entail that a certain type of *argument* is suitable for gaining warrant to believe anti-skeptical conclusions. Very roughly, if an agent has (1) the perceptual experience that there is a hand in front of her and she is not in a mental state that defeats the warrant resulting from this experiential state, then the agent is *prima facie* warranted in believing (2) that there is a hand. However, the proposition that the epistemic agent has a hand entails that she is not a brain-in-a-vat deceived by an evil scientist. If one further assumes that warrant is closed under known entailment, the epistemic agent thereby seems to have warrant to believe (3) that she is not a brain-in-a-vat as well. But, according to Pryor, the Moorean argument only entails that an agent has propositional warrant to believe its conclusion. In order to be *doxastically* warranted in believing the conclusion of the Moorean argument (3), further conditions need to be satisfied. For instance, when an agent doubts that (3) obtains, given other beliefs (warranted or not) she might happen to have, then engaging in the deduction might not be a way for her to gain a doxastically warranted belief in the conclusion of the Moorean argument. In this case, the doubts that the agent happens to have rationally obstruct her in adopting a belief in (2) and thereby in the conclusion (3) of the Moorean argument.⁴

A lot of ink has been spilled on whether the Moorean argument itself and the reasoning that this argument seems to license are really epistemically satisfactory.⁵ Adam Leite has suggested in a recent paper that the reasoning the

³ There is space in between these positions. See Annalisa Coliva, "Moore's Proof, Liberals and Conservatives. Is There a Third Wittgensteinian way?" in *Mind, Meaning, and Knowledge: Themes from the Philosophy of Crispin Wright*, 323–351 for a 'Wittgensteinian' alternative.

⁴ Moreover, Pryor and others have pointed out that the Moorean argument should not be confused with other, more ambitious things it might be thought to accomplish. For instance, Pryor maintains in "What's Wrong" that the reasoning from (1) and (2) to (3) should not be understood as being suitable for *convincing someone who doubts its conclusion*. Martin Davies has argued that the Moorean argument should not be conceived of as being able *to settle the question of whether (3) is indeed the case*. See Martin Davies, "Two Purposes of Arguing and two Epistemic Projects," in *Minds, Ethics, and Conditionals: Themes From the Philosophy of Frank Jackson*, ed. Ian Ravenscroft (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 337–383.

⁵ Crispin Wright famously maintains that the Moorean argument suffers from transmission failure. See, for example, Crispin Wright, "Facts and Certainty," *Proceedings of the British Academy* 71 (1985): 429–72; Crispin Wright, "(Anti-)Sceptics Simple and Subtle: G. E. Moore and John McDowell," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 65 (2002): 330–348; Crispin Wright, "Warrant for Nothing (and Foundations for Free?)," *Aristotelian Society Supplementary*

Moorean argument licenses is epistemically unsatisfactory in a novel kind of way.⁶ Leite locates the defectiveness of the Moorean reasoning explicitly not in the failure of the Moorean argument to transmit warrant from its premises to its conclusion, as others have done before, but rather in the failure of an epistemic agent to satisfy certain epistemic responsibilities that arise in the course of conscious and deliberate reasoning.⁷ According to Leite's diagnosis, if an epistemic agent consciously and deliberately reasons from (1) to (2) and from (2) to (3), this reasoning isn't a way for her to gain a doxastically warranted belief in (2) and (3). Leite maintains that the agent doesn't arrive at a doxastically warranted belief in (2) and (3) because the agent lacks properly warranted beliefs concerning the non-obtaining of certain disabling conditions in order for (1) to confer warrant on (2). In particular, in order to arrive in an epistemically satisfactory way at the conclusion of the Moorean argument via a process of conscious reasoning, the agent needs to have a *warranted belief* that (3) does indeed obtain, because the falsity of (3) would rob (1) of its force to warrant (2). But since the agent does not have a warranted belief in (3), Leite concludes that the agent behaves epistemically irresponsibly in performing this deduction.

In this paper, I will assess Leite's diagnosis of the alleged shortcoming of the reasoning that seems to be licensed by the Moorean argument. The upshot of my discussion will be that there exist cases of Moorean-style reasoning that are apt for providing an agent with doxastically warranted beliefs in the conclusion of the Moorean argument and that are not put into jeopardy by the considerations that Leite presents. Thus, I will conclude that Leite hasn't made the case that the Moorean reasoning is defective in a sense that threatens the dogmatist. Moreover, I will show that Leite's verdict that the epistemic agent behaves epistemically irresponsibly if she were to reason from (1) to (3) is in tension with what Leite says about the properties of warranting states.

Volume 78 (2004): 167–212; and Crispin Wright, "The Perils of Dogmatism," in *Themes from G. E. Moore*, eds. Susana Nuccetelli and Gary Seay (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 25–47.

⁶ See Adam Leite, "Immediate Warrant, Epistemic Responsibility, and Moorean Dogmatism," in *Reasons for Belief*, eds. Andrew Reisner and Asbjørn Steglich-Petersen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 158–179.

⁷ See for an overview of the literature on transmission failure Luca Moretti and Tommaso Piazza, "Transmission of Justification and Warrant," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2013), ed. Edward Zalta, <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2013/entries/transmission-justification-warrant> and Chris Tucker, "Transmission and Transmission Failure in Epistemology," in *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <http://iep.utm.edu/transmis/>, July 30, 2015.

My paper is organized as follows. In the first section, I will briefly outline Leite's main commitments concerning the notion of warrant and the conditions that an agent needs to satisfy in order to behave in an epistemically responsible way if she engages in conscious and deliberate reasoning. In the second section, I will recapitulate why Leite maintains that an agent is to be epistemically blamed if she reasons according to the Moorean argument. In the third section, I will present two cases that call into question Leite's verdict that epistemic agents are to be blamed if they reason according to the Moorean argument. Finally, in the fourth section, I will pursue my second line of criticism. As already indicated above, I will make the case that Leite's verdict regarding the Moorean reasoning is inconsistent with what he says about the nature of warranting states.

1. Leite on Warrant and Epistemic Responsibility

Leite assumes that warrants are states that count in favor of believing a given proposition. If warrants are supposed to play this role, they must satisfy certain further conditions. In his paper, Leite introduces the following five characteristics of warranting states.⁸ First, Leite maintains that warrants are states or conditions that an agent can become *aware of*. Second, though this first commitment seems to imply that Leite is committed to a certain form of internalism concerning warrants, he nonetheless maintains that warranting states or conditions are not confined to the psychological states of an epistemic agent or that they should be accessible through introspection alone. Leite claims that mind-independent facts or certain worldly conditions may play the role of warrants as well. Third, warrants are, according to Leite, normative epistemic reasons. This is supposed to mean that, if an agent is warranted in believing *p*, the appropriate doxastic response for the agent, given his warrant, is to believe *p*. Fourth, Leite is of the view that warrants can play the role of normative epistemic reasons since they make it likely that the contents they speak in favor of do indeed obtain. In contrast to Pryor and other participants in the debate concerning Moore's argument, Leite explicitly acknowledges that our ordinary practice suggests that warrants must indeed be conceived of as being reliable. He backs this claim up in the following way:

Suppose that someone is brought up to predict the outcomes of battles by reading tea leaves, a method endorsed by everyone in his community. Neither he nor anyone in his community is in a position to understand the considerations showing that there is no reliable connection between the arrangement of leaves in tea cups and the outcomes of battles. This person performs blamelessly if he

⁸ See Leite, "Immediate Warrant," 161–163.

infers from considerations about tea leaves that a battle will turn out a certain way; he has done everything that can reasonably be demanded of him in order to form a true belief. But at the same time, we feel that there is a shortcoming here. We might say, 'His training and circumstances are unfortunate. He really shouldn't believe on that basis that the battle will turn out a certain way; no one should. Regardless of what he thinks, considerations about tea leaves don't actually provide any reason to believe anything at all about the outcomes of battles.' When we make judgments like this, what seems to be motivating us is the thought that there is not in fact the right sort of connection between arrangements of tea leaves and the outcomes of battles: the one is not a reliable indicator of the other, and as a result the belief about the outcome of battle is not warranted.⁹

However, to come to Leite's fifth major commitment concerning the notion of warrant, he acknowledges that warrants may fail to exert their power to warrant particular propositions or beliefs. In case certain "disabling conditions" obtain, as Leite calls them, believing a particular proposition *p* is not normatively the right thing to do, given the putative warrant in question. Leite provides the following example to illustrate this point. If human physiology were such as that taking ibuprofen would not alleviate pain, then an epistemic agent that remembered that she just recently took an ibuprofen to be relieved of her headache would not be warranted in believing that her pain is going to lessen. Because if human physiology really were such that taking ibuprofen wouldn't relieve pain, remembering taking ibuprofen wouldn't be a reliable indicator for the truth of the proposition that an agent's pain is going to be relieved. Leite takes a disabling condition to be an objective state in the world that calls into question that a given warranting state is a reliable indicator of the truth of its content. If a disabling condition obtains, then it is not appropriate for an epistemic agent in the normative sense to adopt a doxastic attitude toward the content that is warranted by the warranting state. Leite stresses, however, that disabling conditions should not be confused with defeaters. A defeater is, as Leite explains, a condition or state such that it defeats "the *prima facie* or defeasible warrant provided by a particular warranting state or condition."¹⁰ In contrast to a disabling condition, a defeater does not call into question that a given warranting state is a reliable indicator of the truth of a particular content *per se*. A disabling condition, however, would prevent a warranting state or condition from providing *prima facie* warrant in principle.

⁹ Leite, "Immediate Warrant," 162.

¹⁰ Leite, "Immediate Warrant," 163.

Besides these five commitments concerning the nature of warrant, Leite outlines a proposal with respect to the conditions that an agent needs to satisfy in order to obtain *doxastically warranted beliefs* via processes of conscious and deliberate reasoning. He proposes two conditions that an epistemic agent needs to satisfy in order to obtain doxastically warranted beliefs via processes of conscious reasoning. First, Leite maintains that doxastic justification is an epistemic status that should be conceived of as intimately related to epistemically responsible behavior, and that in order to behave epistemically responsibly, an agent must satisfy certain further conditions than just being in possession of a warranting state. Most writers assume that an epistemic agent needs to satisfy some basing requirement if she is to obtain a doxastically warranted belief. However, Leite urges, that, in addition to the basing requirement, the agent needs to have beliefs that a particular warranting state *W* *indeed speaks in favor of the content that is warranted by W*. Leite introduces the following principle with respect to the conditions that an epistemic agent needs to satisfy in order to obtain a doxastically warranted belief via processes of conscious reasoning:

When in the course of explicit, conscious deliberation or reasoning one bases a belief that *p* upon a particular warranting state or condition *W*, that belief will not be formed or held responsibly unless one takes *W* to support (defeasibly tell in favor of) the truth of *p*.¹¹

But Leite remarks that the beliefs that the agent needs to possess concerning the support relation between the warranting state or condition and the respective propositional content only need to be dispositional or implicit. If the beliefs in question were supposed to be occurrent, it would be obvious, as Leite himself acknowledges, that he would be imposing conditions too strong to be satisfied by ordinary epistemic agents.

Second, Leite introduces another principle that is closely associated with the principle just mentioned. It concerns how an epistemic agent needs to be situated vis-à-vis the aforementioned disabling conditions in order to obtain a doxastically warranted belief through processes of conscious reasoning. Let Π stand for such a disabling condition for warrant *W*. Leite says:

Suppose that you base your belief that *p* upon *W*. As I've just argued, this requires you to believe that *W* tells (at least defeasibly) in favor of the truth of *p*. And suppose that you recognize that Π 's obtaining would prevent *W* from even defeasibly telling in favor of the truth of *p*. Then, you are rationally required to believe also that Π does not obtain, at least if you consider the question. For given that you recognize the incompatibility between Π 's obtaining and *W*'s

¹¹ Leite, "Immediate Warrant," 165.

defeasibly telling in favor of the truth of p , requirements of consistency preclude you from endorsing both the claim that Π obtains and that W tells in favor of the truth of p , and they also preclude you from endorsing the claim that W tells in favor of the truth of p while suspending judgment or forming no opinion at all about whether Π obtains. So if you consider the question at all, you are rationally committed to endorsing the claim that Π does not obtain.¹²

According to Leite, if the epistemic agent does not believe that Π does not obtain in case he takes W to speak in favor of believing a particular proposition p and considers the question as to whether Π obtains, then the agent behaves in an epistemically inappropriate way. But, in addition, as Leite urges, an epistemic agent needs to possess a *doxastically warranted belief* to the effect that Π does not obtain. This further requirement is supposed to result from what it means to believe something responsibly. Thus, the principle of Leite's that specifies the constitutive conditions that an agent needs to fulfill in order to obtain warranted beliefs through processes of conscious and deliberate reasoning can be stated as follows:

(DR) In order for S to behave in an epistemically appropriate way when S bases her belief in p upon a particular warranting state W in the course of conscious reasoning, for every disabling condition Π that S *explicitly considers* (and recognizes to be a disabling condition), (i) S needs to believe that Π does not obtain, and (ii) this latter belief needs to be doxastically warranted as well.

Leite qualifies this principle. First, according to him, this requirement only applies to cases in which an agent forms a belief p through *processes of conscious reasoning*. Fulfillment of the conditions laid down in (DR) is not supposed to be a necessary precondition for an epistemic agent to be warranted immediately or non-inferentially via a perceptual state. Leite follows Pryor by claiming that an epistemic agent can be warranted immediately in believing a particular proposition without having any beliefs whatsoever concerning the non-obtaining of certain disabling conditions. Second, this principle is limited to those possibilities that the agent *explicitly considers*. Though Leite is not explicit about it, I take it that explicitly considering a skeptical possibility Π amounts to adopting an occurrent attitude toward this possibility (like believing Π or treating Π as an open question) and acknowledging that Π would disable a particular warranting state W to confer warrant on a given belief p . It seems plausible that possibilities toward which the agent does not have any occurrent attitudes, and very likely also those in whose obtaining the agent places low confidence, are not supposed to be possibilities with respect to which an agent needs to have any warranted attitudes

¹² Leite, "Immediate Warrant," 167.

in order to behave epistemically responsibly. Third, this requirement only concerns *disabling conditions* and not defeaters. It is important to bear these qualifications in mind, because I will argue next that the second of these qualifications creates a problem for Leite's verdict as to why the Moorean reasoning goes wrong.

2. What's Wrong with the Moorean Reasoning According to Leite

How does Leite's position thus far about warrant and epistemically appropriate behavior bear on the reasoning that seems to be licensed by the Moorean argument? Leite himself acknowledges that dogmatists such as Pryor don't conceive of the Moorean argument as providing *doxastic warrant or justification* to believe its conclusion just in virtue of the relation between its propositions (1) through (3). However, Leite claims that if the Moorean argument were to be employed by an epistemic agent to obtain guidance in what to believe about the possibility of whether or not she happens to be a brain-in-a-vat being fed with experiences by an evil scientist, she would behave in an epistemically irresponsible way. Leite maintains that our verdict as to why the agent behaves epistemically irresponsibly stems from the fact that the agent fails to satisfy the conditions as laid down in principle (DR). He says:

For consider how the responsibilist view sketched above would regard this reasoning. That view allowed that a visual experience as of your hands provides immediate warrant for the belief that you have hands. However, being a disembodied spirit deceived by an evil demon would be a disabling condition for that warrant. Suppose, then, that you recognize that this is so (though perhaps not in so many words). You are in the position specified by the dogmatist's thesis. You are deliberating about whether to believe, on the basis of your visual experience, that you have hands. Suppose that you go ahead and form this belief on this basis. According to the responsibilist view, the belief will not be responsibly held, since you do not yet believe that you are not a disembodied spirit under an evil demon's sway. (That latter belief is supposed to be arrived at only in the next stage in the reasoning.) Since the belief that you have hands would not be responsibly held under such circumstances, it also wouldn't be doxastically justified. And if you go on to infer from it that you are not a disembodied spirit under an evil demon's sway, that latter belief will not be doxastically justified either.¹³

As Leite sets it up, when an epistemic agent starts to reason in accordance with the Moorean argument, the agent *explicitly considers* at the beginning of this reasoning the possibility that she might be a brain-in-a-vat deceived by an evil

¹³ Leite, "Immediate Warrant," 171.

scientist. Leite seems to assume that the agent does not merely entertain or just contemplate this possibility but indeed places some confidence in it or treats it as an open question. Moreover, the agent realizes that if this brain-in-a-vat possibility were to obtain, her visual experiences would not count in favor of believing propositions about the external world since the skeptical hypothesis is a disabling condition in order for (1) to confer warrant on (2). However, since the epistemic agent has no belief that this possibility does not obtain (and thereby trivially no *doxastically warranted* belief that it does not obtain), the agent fails to satisfy the clauses (i) and (ii) of the principle (DR). Thus, the agent behaves epistemically irresponsibly if she were to believe (2) on the basis of (1) and go on to infer the conclusion (3) of the Moorean argument.

3. Two Ways in Which an Agent Might Acquire a Doxastically Justified Belief Through Moorean-Style Reasoning

In the introduction to this paper, I briefly described what Pryor thinks regarding when an agent might end up with a doxastically warranted belief in the conclusion of the Moorean argument. Pryor says concerning Stewart Cohen's red wall argument – a different, though structurally identical, argument to Moore's:

A subject can have some justification to believe P, but be unable to rationally believe P on the basis of that justification, because of some (unjustified) beliefs and doubts he also has. Consider again your belief that your color vision is defective. Suppose that this belief is unjustified (but you don't realize it). Because you don't have justification to doubt your color vision, I don't think the justification you get from your color experiences will be undermined. You'll still have justification to believe the wall is red. But your actual doubt will rationally obstruct you from relying on your color experiences. It'll prevent you from rationally accepting that justification. (...). Unjustified beliefs and doubts may have no undermining effect on what propositions you have justification to believe; but for your beliefs to be well-founded, it's not enough that they be beliefs in propositions you have justification to believe. They also have to be based on that justification, and they have to be rational beliefs. Suppose you believe P, on the basis of what are in fact good reasons for believing P. But you also have doubts that rationally oppose P, or rationally obstruct you from believing P for the reasons you do. Those doubts will render your belief in P irrational even if they don't affect your justification to believe it. And if your belief in P is irrational, then it can't be a justified or well-founded belief.¹⁴

Pryor claims in this quote that, in order for an epistemic agent to obtain a doxastically justified or warranted belief in p, the agent needs (i) to satisfy some

¹⁴ Pryor, "When Warrant," 365.

basing requirement and (ii) believing p needs to be rational from the perspective of the agent.¹⁵ To apply these requirements to the Moorean argument, if an agent indeed believes that she is deceived by an evil demon (with or without warrant) and goes on to believe (2) and then infers the conclusion of the Moorean argument, she fails to satisfy condition (ii), since the belief in the skeptical possibility obstructs her from taking her perceptual experience as evidence for beliefs about the external world. So, in this kind of case, the epistemic agent will not end up with doxastically warranted beliefs in (2) or (3). However, Pryor urges that this does not imply that there is anything wrong with the Moorean argument itself. Moreover, though Pryor does not state this explicitly in the quote above, his position might be understood as such that if the agent *did not have the beliefs that she in fact has when she is rationally obstructed in believing p* , she might be in a position to obtain a doxastically warranted belief in the conclusion of the Moorean argument if she were to competently perform the deduction.¹⁶ I will now make the case that this is exactly the sense in which the Moorean reasoning is not invalidated by the considerations that Leite presents.

As shown in the presentation of Leite's criticism of the Moorean reasoning, Leite thinks that when an epistemic agent engages in this reasoning, the agent seems to *explicitly consider* a skeptical possibility Π that is a disabling condition in order for (1) to confer warrant on (2). Like I mentioned above, explicitly considering a skeptical possibility presumably amounts to adopting an occurrent attitude toward this possibility Π (like believing that Π obtains or treating Π as an open question) and acknowledging that Π would disable a particular warranting state W to confer warrant on a given belief in p . Since the agent lacks any doxastically warranted beliefs that Π does not obtain, in case she starts to reason according to the Moorean argument, Leite urges that the agent fails to satisfy the conditions laid down in principle (DR) and thus behaves in an epistemically irresponsible way. But does Leite's verdict equally apply when an epistemic agent *does not consider* this possibility explicitly (i.e., when the agent does not adopt any occurrent attitude toward Π)? In cases like these, the agent should not be considered as behaving in an epistemically irresponsible way in light of Leite's principle (DR). Let's consider one such case.

¹⁵ I assume that condition (ii) is just a requirement that is constitutive for *having* a justified belief that p .

¹⁶ For a defense of the claim that the Moorean argument is suitable for gaining doxastic justification or warrant to believe its conclusion see Tim Willenken, "Moorean Responses to Skepticism: A Defense," *Philosophical Studies* 154 (2011): 1–25.

(Nigel No Disabling) Nigel has (1) the perceptual experience of there being a hand in front of him, and he doesn't envisage or consider the possibility of whether he might be a brain-in-a-vat deceived by an evil scientist. Suppose he bases his belief in (2) that there is indeed a hand in front of him on this experience and goes on to believe that there is a hand in front of him. Now he reasons in the following way. 'If it is indeed the case that I have a hand, then I am not a brain-in-a-vat deceived by an evil scientist. Since I have reason to believe that there is a hand in front of me, I also seem to have thereby reason to believe (3) that I am not a brain-in-a-vat deceived by an evil scientist. Thus, I should indeed believe that I am not a brain-in-a-vat deceived by an evil scientist.' Nigel places no credence in the skeptical hypothesis when he formed his belief in (2) or treats it as an open question. He also has no beliefs that would otherwise rationally obstruct him from believing things about the external world. He then goes on to believe (3) based on his belief that (2) entails (3), his competent deduction of (3) from (2), and his recognition that (1) warrants (2).

In *(Nigel No Disabling)*, Nigel does not consider the possibility that he might be deceived by an evil scientist when he goes on to form a belief in the proposition that there is a hand in front of him. In this case, the conditions that Leite has introduced in his principle (DR) do not need to be fulfilled, since this principle only applies to possibilities that the agent *explicitly considers* when forming a belief on the basis of a warranting state. As I interpret Pryor and as I have already insinuated above, cases like *(Nigel No Disabling)* should be conceived of as cases in which an agent can indeed obtain a doxastically justified belief through a process of reasoning in accordance with the Moorean argument (of course, given that the scenario is as described in *(Nigel No Disabling)*). So *(Nigel No Disabling)* does not seem to be a case that should be classified as a case of epistemically irresponsible behavior, even in light of the conditions laid down in Leite's principle (DR). Thus, Leite cannot claim that an agent who engages in the reasoning under the specified conditions is to be epistemically blamed.

However, might Leite not object that when the agent moves from (2) to (3), that Nigel explicitly considers a disabling condition for (1) to confer warrant on (2) and that believing (2) is retrospectively, so to speak, irresponsible in light of this disabling condition?¹⁷ I don't think that this is a plausible description of the case at hand because, in order to explicitly consider the possibility that he is fed with experiences by an evil scientist when he moves from (2) to (3), Nigel needs to adopt some attitude toward this possibility, i.e., place some confidence in this possibility or treat this possibility as an open question (and, of course, recognize

¹⁷ Thanks to Jim Pryor for pressing me to address this worry.

that it would call into question that (1) warrants (2)). But this does not seem to be the case when Nigel teases out what his justified beliefs entail when he moves from (2) to (3). When he moves from (2) to (3) in the scenario described above, he only ends up with an attitude toward the *negation* of this skeptical possibility. In other words, Nigel believes that he is not a brain-in-vat deceived by an evil scientist because of his recognition that (2) entails (3), his competent deduction of (3) from (2), and his recognition that he has warrant to believe (2). Thus, in light of principle (DR), he is not in need of having any doxastically warranted beliefs that the affirmation of this skeptical possibility does not obtain in order to behave epistemically responsibly.

Consider now still another case in which an epistemic agent has a perceptual experience of a hand but merely entertains the possibility that she might be deceived by an evil scientist *without being confident* that this possibility might obtain or seriously treating this possibility as an open question. Again, the agent might obtain a doxastically warranted belief in the conclusion of the Moorean argument in light of Leite's principle (DR).

(Nigel Merely Entertaining) Nigel has (1) the perceptual experience of there being a hand in front of him, and he contemplates the possibility that he might be deceived by an evil scientist. However, he doesn't take this possibility very seriously and thus places no confidence in it. Suppose he now bases his belief in (2) a hand being in front of him on his perceptual experience. Now he reasons in the following way: 'If it is indeed the case that I have a hand, then I am not a brain-in-a-vat deceived by an evil scientist. I have reason to believe that there is a hand in front of me. Thus, I also seem to have thereby reason to believe (3) that I am not a brain-in-a-vat deceived by an evil scientist. Hence, there exists a reason why I should believe that I am not a brain-in-a-vat deceived by an evil scientist.' Nigel does not have any other beliefs that would obstruct him from forming a belief in (3), and therefore, he goes on to believe (3).

As with the case considered previously, in light of Leite's principle (DR), (Nigel Merely Entertaining) seems to be a case in which the agent arrives in an epistemically satisfactory way at a warranted belief in (3). Though he entertains the possibility of being deceived, he does not place any confidence in it or treats it as an open question. Thus, he does not need to satisfy the conditions (i) and (ii) of Leite's principle (DR). Moreover, he is not obstructed from his own perspective in gaining a warranted belief in the conclusion of the Moorean argument. So, if an epistemic agent reasons according to the Moorean argument under the conditions specified in this case, he might as well end up with a doxastically warranted belief.

If the cases I have presented so far indicate that an agent might arrive at a doxastically warranted belief in the conclusion of the Moorean argument though

she is not to be blamed in light of Leite's principle (DR), this seems to cast doubt on Leite's diagnosis that there is something amiss with the Moorean reasoning. But might Leite not modify his requirement (DR) somehow to encompass the cases presented? First, let us assume that an agent might not only be in need of warranted beliefs concerning the non-obtaining of disabling conditions that she explicitly considers but also of warranted beliefs that she as a fully rational person *should* explicitly consider. It should be obvious that this modification does not entail that the cases (Nigel No Disabling) and (Nigel Merely Entertaining) are ones of epistemically irresponsible behavior. What possibilities a rational person should consider are foremost determined by her own perspective. But in both cases discussed above, the epistemic agent Nigel happens to have no attitudes that rationally force him, on pain of being incoherent, for example, to place some confidence in the brain-in-a-vat possibility. Thus, it is evident that both cases considered above will not be ruled out by this suggested modified version of (DR).

A second proposal might be that *in every case* in which an agent engages in processes of conscious reasoning, the agent needs to have doxastically warranted beliefs to the effect that skeptical possibilities, such as the brain-in-a-vat hypothesis, do not obtain. If this were Leite's modification of (DR), then both cases (Nigel No Disabling) and (Nigel Merely Entertaining) might be classified as instances of epistemically irresponsible behavior, since the epistemic agent does not possess any doxastically warranted beliefs that the disabling condition does not obtain. However, a principle of this sort is clearly too strong, because it seems to entail that one could rarely, or rather never, arrive at a doxastically warranted belief through a process of conscious reasoning.¹⁸ I assume that Leite wishes to avoid that result as well. Hence, this modification is also not available to him.

In sum, both cases I have presented in this section seem to be apt for providing an epistemic agent with doxastically warranted beliefs in the conclusion of the Moorean argument. However, in light of Leite's principle (DR), there is nothing amiss with these cases, and, hence, the agent does not engage in

¹⁸ Note that Leite's principle (DR) in the modified version discussed here differs from the demands that conservatives such as Wright place on the antecedently warranted attitudes. Wright maintains that, in order to be justified via a perceptual state, an epistemic agent is in need of an *entitlement* to *accept* that a skeptical hypothesis does not obtain (see Wright "Warrant for Nothing"). An entitlement is a distinctively externalist type of positive epistemic status that does not require that the agent be in possession of cognitively accessible reasons. Furthermore, the attitude of accepting a particular proposition differs from an occurrent belief in that an acceptance is more akin to attitudes such as *acting on the assumption that p* or *taking it for granted that p* (see Wright, "Warrant for Nothing," 170–73). Thus, the objections presented here against this revised principle of Leite's do not affect Wright's proposal.

epistemically inappropriate behavior. The reason as to why these cases are not ruled out by Leite's principle (DR) is that the epistemic agent doesn't *explicitly* consider the possibility that he might be deceived by an evil demon and is thus not obliged, at least according to (DR), to have a doxastically warranted belief that this possibility does not obtain. Though I've briefly considered how Leite might revise his principle (DR), I believe I have presented a plausible argument that the prospects for revising (DR) to encompass the cases introduced here are dim.

4. Warrant, Epistemic Normativity, and the Moorean Argument

Now, I turn to another line of criticism regarding Leite's proposal. In the first section of this paper, I summarized Leite's main commitments concerning the notion of warrant. Recall that Leite maintains that (i) warrants are states that *make it likely* that the contents they speak in favor of do indeed obtain. A further property of warranting states is, according to Leite, that they are (ii) *normative reasons* to believe particular propositions. Leite takes this to mean that if an agent is indeed warranted in believing that *p*, then believing *p* is, from a normative perspective, the right thing to do for this agent. Finally, Leite acknowledges (iii) that our experiences do provide us with immediate warrant to believe propositions about the external world. Thus, it is in a normative sense correct for an agent to go on to believe what her perceptual warrants tell her to believe, if she is indeed immediately warranted.

But how do these commitments of Leite's relate to the Moorean argument and the reasoning that seems to be licensed by the argument? On closer inspection, it becomes evident that Leite's view of warranting states has, from Leite's own point of view, some unwelcome consequences with respect to the Moorean argument. If we grant that an agent has immediate warrant to believe a particular proposition *p*, if the agent has the perceptual experience that *p* is the case, then believing *p* is normatively the right thing to do (if the experience of *p* is indeed a warranting state). Moreover, given that a particular warranting state makes it, according to Leite, indeed likely that the propositional contents they warrant are true, this seems to entail that skeptical hypotheses, like the brain-in-a-vat hypothesis, are very likely false. Now, if we further assume that warrant is closed under known entailment and that the normative properties of a particular warranting state transmit to the entailments of the warranted propositions as well, it seems to follow that it is, from a normative perspective, appropriate for the

agent to place some confidence in (3), viz. the proposition that the brain-in-a-vat hypothesis is false.¹⁹

So far, the characteristics of warranting states that Leite has introduced actually seem to entail that it would be *normatively correct to believe* (3), if an agent is immediately warranted in believing (2). Moreover, Leite's commitments concerning the properties of warranting states even appear to entail that the agent is entitled to regard disabling conditions such as the brain-in-a-vat hypothesis as misleading. If perceptual warrants are indeed reliable, the likelihood that a disabling condition such as the negation of (3) really obtains seems pretty low. But recall that Leite urges that if the agent were to engage in a process of conscious reasoning, believing (3) is *epistemically irresponsible* in light of principle (DR). Now, this overall verdict concerning the Moorean argument appears puzzling. How can it be that believing (3) is, on the one hand, epistemically irresponsible – if an agent reasons according to the Moorean argument – when it is, on the other hand, normatively correct to believe (3), given that one is immediately warranted in believing (2) and that an agent is even entitled to treat a disabling condition such as the brain-in-a-vat hypothesis as misleading? (Notice that Leite seems to conceive of the reasoning associated with the Moorean argument as being in principle inapt to gain a warranted belief in its conclusion.) Thus, there seems to exist a tension between the commitments of Leite's concerning the nature of warranting states and his explicit verdict that the Moorean reasoning is defective.

But what are we to make of this tension? The cases I have introduced in the previous section might provide a hint as to what kind of overall position concerning Moorean-style reasoning Leite should adopt given his commitments concerning the properties of warranting states. However, this position seems to be one that dogmatists such as Pryor have recommended all along. Recall that the cases I have introduced are cases in which the epistemic agent is rationally unobstructed in engaging in the Moorean reasoning and is, thus, able to end up with a doxastically warranted belief in the conclusion of the Moorean argument. If we consider the cases I have introduced in light of what Leite says about the properties of warranting states, it is apparent that Leite's claim that it is normatively correct to believe (2) and (3) if one is immediately warranted in believing (2) is in line with the view that an agent might acquire a warranted belief in the conclusion of the Moorean argument. Given that an agent is warranted in believing (2) and that he is rationally unobstructed in placing some

¹⁹ Note that Leite does not assume that the Moorean argument suffers from transmission failure or that warrant is not closed under known entailment.

confidence in (2), engaging in the Moorean reasoning and placing some confidence in (3) is what the agent is required to do, given the normative properties of warranting states. Moreover, because Leite's commitments concerning the properties of warranting states further entail that disabling conditions like the brain-in-a-vat hypothesis very likely do not obtain, the agent even seems to be entitled to treat this possibility as misleading. Hence, in cases such as those outlined above, believing (3) is the right thing to do for the agent, given that she is immediately warranted.

However, in case the agent is rationally obstructed in believing (2), such as when she explicitly considers a disabling condition for (1) to warrant (2) and places some confidence in this disabling condition, engaging in the Moorean reasoning is epistemically irresponsible, and the agent is thus not able to acquire a doxastically warranted belief in the conclusion of the Moorean argument. Thus, if we assume that there exist these two ways an agent might be situated vis-à-vis disabling conditions such as the brain-in-a-vat hypothesis, it is evident that the tension between Leite's commitments concerning the notion of warrant and his official verdict with respect to the Moorean argument dissolves. Reasoning according to the Moorean argument is apt for gaining a doxastically warranted belief in its conclusion, as Leite's commitments concerning the notion of warrant seem to entail, only in case the agent is not rationally obstructed in placing any confidence in the contents of the premises of the Moorean argument. By contrast, if an agent is rationally obstructed in placing any confidence in (2) or (3), for example, reasoning according to the Moorean argument is not a way to gain a doxastically warranted belief in (3). In this case, it would be irrational from the perspective of the agent to place any confidence in the conclusion. So I am tempted to think that Leite's own commitments concerning the notion of warrant actually reinforce the claim that there should exist ways an agent might end up with a doxastically warranted belief in the conclusion of the Moorean argument. I take this to be further evidence supporting the claim that the Moorean reasoning is apt for gaining doxastically warranted beliefs in propositions concerning the negation of skeptical possibilities.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have presented two objections to Leite's claim that reasoning according to the Moorean argument is epistemically unsatisfactory. First, I have showed that cases of Moorean reasoning exist that do not satisfy the conditions laid down in Leite's principle (DR) and should thus not be considered instances of epistemically inappropriate behaviour. Second, I have teased out a tension

between Leite's commitments concerning the property of warranting states and his claim that Moorean reasoning is defective. I believe Leite has not made the case that Moorean reasoning is epistemically defective in a sense that threatens the dogmatist.²⁰

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